

COAST *with the* MOST

Dive into Split, the sun-drenched Adriatic city with
a magnificent past and a magnetic present.

WORDS YVONNE GORDON PHOTOGRAPHS AISLING McCOY



“There are lots of theories about the name. The most popular one is that it is called after a dark green shrub, which in Greek is *Aspálathos*, which became *Spalatum* in Latin and *Spalato* in Italian,” says guide Vjeran Mlačić.

How the name of Croatia’s second largest city ended up being Split turns out to be a journey through some of the city’s fascinating history – and in turn the Greek, Latin, Italian and Croatian names the city has had – thanks to Vjeran who is showing me around.

We’re at **Diocletian’s Palace**, at the heart of the city, and have just arrived in the central square. People are relaxing in the heat and sipping coffee on cushions on the steps outside **Café Lvxor**. The sound of traditional Klapa singing wafts through the air while visitors photograph the ancient stone columns and balconies around the courtyard.

From here, steps lead up to the small, octagonal **Cathedral of St Domnius**, originally built in 305AD as the Mausoleum of Diocletian, a Roman emperor. From here, you can climb up the bell tower for panoramic views of the port and over the palace’s red rooftops.

Set on the Dalmatian coast and facing the Adriatic Sea, Split was founded as a Greek colony around the second or third century BC, and was then settled by the Romans before later becoming part of the Republic of Venice, and then the kingdom of Croatia – along the way even being included in the French and Austrian empires, and in Yugoslavia from 1918, before becoming part of the independent Republic of Croatia in 1991.

Diocletian’s Palace was built ✈️



Clockwise from top, secluded beach coves at Marjan Forest Park; María José Díaz from Chile skateboards in Strossmayerov park; a fruit tree in Split; relaxing in the afternoon shade; evening crowds gather at Diocletian’s Palace.



newcastledesign.ie
0404 65000
by appointment only


NEWCASTLE DESIGN
Handcrafted Cabinetry



✈ built for the Emperor to retire in, taking around 10 years to build until the year 305. Stretching along 180 metres of the waterfront, the palace is more than 1,700 years old but, rather than being a ruin, it is very much lived in. Long after Diocletian's time (he died in 312), people moved into the space to set up shop and home, and now its ancient architectural features, including the 3,500-year-old sphinx in the centre, are mixed with modern cafés, retail outlets and apartments, as residents live and work in the palace's warren of tiny streets.

From the Palace's central peristyle, we descend a huge stone staircase into the cooler air of the basement. The substructures under the palace were first excavated in 1956 and the layout gives an idea of how the upper floor used to look. If the halls seem familiar, this is where Daenerys kept her dragons – the area also featured in scenes from Meereen – in *Game of Thrones*.

The southern gate of Diocletian's Palace leads out to the **Riva**, the wide, palm-tree-lined, waterfront promenade overlooking the Adriatic. There's a row of café bars and restaurants with white awnings

to shade from the sun, where locals and visitors mingle, sip coffee and cocktails and, most importantly, people-watch.

Two other hubs of city life are the green market, **Pazar** (Stari Pazar, 8) and the fish market, **Peškarija** (Obrov, 5), at opposite ends of the Riva. A local tells me that if Diocletian's Palace is the heart of the city, then the two markets are the lungs.

At the green market, rows of tables are filled with plump, colourful strawberries, oranges, bananas, lemons, peppers, courgettes, tomatoes and more, under red and blue umbrellas. On one side, a walkway is lined with buckets of flowers. People from the islands and the Dalmatian hinterland come early every morning to sell their produce and it's a popular meeting spot for locals, who do their daily shopping while catching up on all the news.

As a port city, Split's popularity is also thanks to its position as a gateway to the **Dalmatian Islands**. There are all sorts of options for island visits, from day trips to a week or two of island-hopping and each island has its own heritage and traditions, with olive groves,



Above, the view from the top of the Fortica in Hvar. Below, left to right, Doria Klepo takes a pit-stop in the Diocletian's Palace, the spoils from the breakfast buffet on the terrace at the Radisson Blu, climbing to the top of the belfry of the Cathedral of St Domnius.



Top, happy holiday strolls through St Stephen's Square, Hvar; above, cooling off with an evening dive at Bacvice inlet; left, a leisurely promenade along the Riva in sublime sunshine.



wineries, lavender fields and church towers, as well as secluded beaches and charming restaurants to discover.

Hvar is one of the best-known islands and the town's Medieval **Španjol Fortress**, which dates from 1552, enjoys an elevated position, overlooking the **Pakleni islands** that are popular for day trips and swimming. Options for getting to Hvar range from taking the ferry to sailing there in a yacht – or, for a touch of luxury, arrange a day trip by private boat with a company such as **Calvados Club** (+385 21 494949; calvadosclub.com) and visit one or two islands.

Brač Island is famous for beaches such as Zlatni Rat (Golden

Cape) while **Vis**, the furthest out from the mainland, is an excellent getaway if you have a few days, with its slow pace of island life and quiet beaches and coves.

Back at Split, after a day of exploring, take a sunset stroll through Veli Varoš up to the **Marjan Peninsula**, which overlooks the city and port. The area's forests, paths, sea views and small beaches provide a nice escape (or even a day trip) from the city buzz and you can enjoy the relaxing views from **Teraca Vidilica** (Prilaz Vladimira Nazora 1; +385 95 871 8792). Overlooking the city, waterfront and palace, it's easy to appreciate why an emperor chose to retire here. 🍀

Clockwise from top, a view from the marina to St Stephen's Cathedral, Hvar; fresh grilled seabass at Konoba Trs restaurant, Trogir; pretty as a picture, a flowering tree in Ciovo; Captain Joseph Burazin and friends relax on the Riva.

AERCLUB

- ✓ Boost your Avios points on hotel stays by booking through our partner hotels, so wherever you stay, you can collect Avios points in your sleep.

SPLIT ESSENTIALS

SLEEP



LUXURY An elegant five-star just above Bačvice Beach, **Hotel Park** is ten minutes' walk from the Old Town. It has a quiet terrace and garden plus a small outdoor pool. Foodies should book the restaurant's personalised Chef's Table dinner experience, above. B&B from HRK 2,190 (€296). (Hatzeev Perivoj 3, +385 21 406 400; hotelpark-split.hr)

HISTORIC Although right at the heart of Diocletian's Palace, the boutique **Palace Judita Heritage Hotel** on the Pjaca (aka Narodni trg) offers a quiet escape from the city buzz, with two small courtyards, plus a cosy interior filled

with books and antiques. Rooms from HRK 2,215 (€299). (Narodni trg 4, +385 21 420 220; juditapalace.com)

SEASIDE An upscale resort in its own grounds three kilometres from the Old Town, **Radisson Blu Resort** has stunning sea views, a spa, fitness centre, indoor and outdoor pool and access to the beach. Rooms from HRK 2,148 (€290). (Put Trstenika 19, +385 21 303 030; radissonblu.com)

LOVELY Divota's charming rooms and apartments are spread out in various stone Dalmatian houses, in the narrow alleyways of Veli Varoš, in the Old Town. This is within walking distance of the Palace and the Riva. Rooms from HRK 1,370 (€185). (Central office is at Plinarska 75, +385 21 782 700; divota.hr)

EAT

CLASSY A large, airy building with two levels, **Bokeria Kitchen and Wine** is set in a former hardware store and buzzing with atmosphere. Food is Mediterranean style with starters such as lamb croquettes and mains might include anything from oxtail and chateaubriand risotto to sea bass with sundried tomato chimichurri sauce. (Domaldova 8, +385 21 355 577)

TRADITIONAL You'll find a few traditional taverns with chequered tablecloths in the Veli Varoš area and **Konoba Marjan** is one of the best, with all types of Adriatic seafood on the

menu, including octopus stew and fish stew, plus traditional meat dishes. (Senjska 1, +385 98 934 6848)

SEA VIEWS **Caffe-restaurant Dvor** has an outdoor terrace with super sea views and is about 20 minutes' walk from town. Specials include wood-grilled meats, such as rib-eye steak, and fish like sea bass and bream. (Put Firula 14, +385 21 571 513)



SMART TIPS

To get from the airport, rent a car, take a taxi – which will cost around 250-300kn/€30-€40 – or catch the **airport shuttle bus** to the main bus terminal at Split harbour. The bus journey takes around 30 minutes and costs 30-35kn/€4-€5.

If you're planning to visit lots of museums, save money with a three-day **Split City Card**, which also includes free bus transport plus discounts for certain restaurants, excursions and tours. splitcitycard.com

SMART FLIERS

- ✓ **AER LINGUS** flies from Dublin to SPLIT twice weekly.

