

# Substance

BY VALAMAR

**// Mandarin harvest in the Neretva, Croatia's "golden valley"**  
**// Orange wines: Sunshine in a glass**  
**// The story of snowshoeing in the Austrian Alps**

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LAVENDER FIELDS FOREVER

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# A WARM WELCOME TO OUR WORLD

*From storied coastlines and lush islands  
to snowcapped mountain peaks*

Here we are, welcoming another season of hospitality, another year of receiving guests with open arms. Valamar has been running its operations for a long time, with renewed passion every season. But let's trace hospitality back to its roots. What does the word actually mean? Derived from the Latin word *hospes*, meaning host or visitor, it means offering a home away from home, extending a welcome to guests.

This is our heartfelt aim at Valamar – to make you, our dear guests, feel good in each of our destinations, to delight you with a variety of experiences and insights that will offer not just a sense of home and belonging but also discovery. From local traditions, from food and plants to time-honoured ways of doing things, like building, fishing and harvesting, we present new worlds for you to explore.

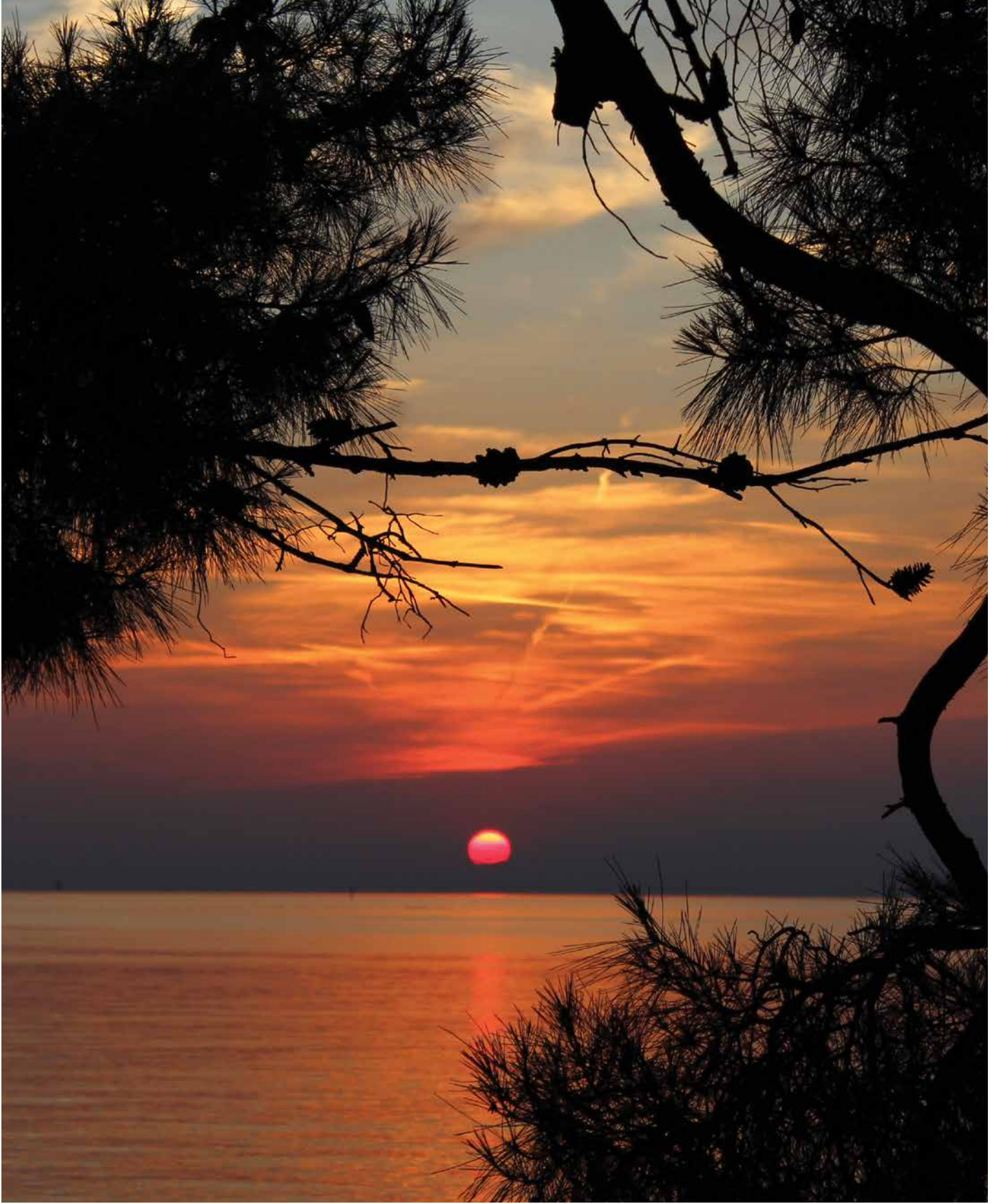
To accompany your discoveries, we bring you an assortment of stories that spotlight places, people and projects we've uncovered. From art traditions of the hilltop town of

Grožnjan to the organic goat cheese farm of Kumparička in the hills of Istria to octopus fishing off the island of Rab, mandarin harvests in the golden valley of Neretva and fragrant gardens on Hvar, there is plenty of inspiration in the following pages.

We take you to Austria as well for some winter delights, to scale the Super 7 of Obertauern, learn about the history of snowshoeing in the Austrian Alps and get the lowdown on tips and tricks to prepare you for the slopes.

There's always a plethora of news at Valamar, too, so we present those with pride and pleasure – from the upcoming Arba Resort on Rab and the exciting Pical Resort in Poreč; the additions to our Sunny brand; the new Croatia Summer Camp platform and the brand-new Bike Center Poreč, to name just a few.

With all that to learn about in the stories that follow, we wish you a feel-good stay with us, filled with new perspectives, our signature warm hospitality and cherished memories to take home with you.



# New & noteworthy



## Unveiling stellar additions to our portfolio, Arba and Pical Resorts

*It's time for a splash of excitement, with two extraordinary new resorts set to redefine the Croatian hospitality landscape. Coming up in 2025 and 2026 is the launch of two spectacular properties: Arba Resort on the island of Rab and Pical Resort in Poreč.*



# A fresh family hotspot on Rab

On the storybook island of Rab, the first phase of Arba Resort sets sail. Under the esteemed Valamar Collection brand, Arba Resort aims to position the island of Rab among the best destinations for family vacations on the Adriatic. It will feature 208 comfortable modern rooms and family suites, all with balconies and spectacular views of either the sea or the forest.

The resort's all-inclusive services will cater to children of all ages. Maro Smart Play and Maro Club ensure endless entertainment for families, while a series of indoor

and outdoor pools serve all summertime tastes. The sandy beach with a bar will also be amplified to cater to families and kids, promising a revamped beach day experience for hotel guests and locals.

Did we mention that Arba Resort is committed to sustainability, too? This idyllic family haven will harness electricity from renewable sources and champion locally sourced cuisine. Its dedication to environmental conservation is matched only by its devotion to providing an unforgettable experience for travellers and Rab residents alike.



Arba Resort, Valamar Collection at Capo Fronte

# Pical Resort, Valamar Collection, your new Poreč paradise



The largest investment in Croatian tourism, Pical Resort emerges as a beacon of luxury and leisure in Poreč, Istria. Opening in 2026, the new Croatian crown jewel is set to dazzle guests with its grandeur, featuring 513 opulent accommodations and a rich array of amenities. The five-star resort will operate year-round with more than 15 themed restaurants and bars, a state-of-the-art wellness centre and a beach club along the well-tended coastline.

For families, Pical Resort is a veritable paradise that caters to their every whim. With Maro World spanning over 1350 square metres and Maro family clubs dotting the landscape with more than 3000 m<sup>2</sup> of indoor family facilities, children are in for a treat. Adventure seekers will revel in a

myriad of activities, including the new Bike Center Poreč, outdoor running tracks, water sports galore and a 25-metre indoor swimming pool. Pical will also showcase one of the top congress centres in Croatia, set to offer a modern multifunctional hall with a capacity of up to 1200 sitting participants.

But the allure of Pical Resort extends beyond its borders. All sports and entertainment facilities, beaches and promenades are open to locals and visitors alike, fostering a sense of community and camaraderie in Poreč.

With these visionary projects, Valamar cements its status as a trailblazer in the Croatian hospitality industry, reshaping the Adriatic coastline with new holiday memories that are bound to last a lifetime.



# Mandarin harvest in the Neretva, Croatia's “golden valley”

words by Anja Mutić





It is the sweetest, juiciest mandarin I've ever tried. Or at least it tastes so. The thin skin peels off easily, the flesh has hardly any seeds inside and the succulent slices come apart smoothly. It may just be that much sweeter because I picked it with my own hands a moment ago, straight off a tree in the endless orchards of the Neretva River valley in the south of Croatia. It's the fruit of my own labour, though this labour feels like a breeze.

"You have to put the clippers really close to the fruit," the jovial farmer shows me as we move through the citrus orchards.

The trick is not to pull the fruit from the stem. "Clip it gently but firmly and make sure you don't nip the top, or it will rot." He is working his way through the branches swiftly, his skill and confidence showing years of experience. Snap, snap, snap. I take my time, inspecting each fruit to make sure it's not still green and then clipping softly – movement meditation among the mandarin trees.

It is a very windy October day in the Neretva as I snip my way through the orchards. Blowing through the valley of Nera Etwa – ancient Illyrian for "God's gift," also known

as the “goddess that flows” – is a strong *jugo*, a southerly that during the Middle Ages used to absolve people of guilt for their crimes and wrongdoings, so heady it is.

The Neretva is one of the longest rivers of the Adriatic basin, among the cleanest in the region and, surprisingly so, one of the coldest in the world. Standing in this almost subtropical climate, that is hard to believe. But the upper Neretva, located in Bosnia and Herzegovina, is fed by three alpine glaciers and in July, measures only 7 degrees Celsius.

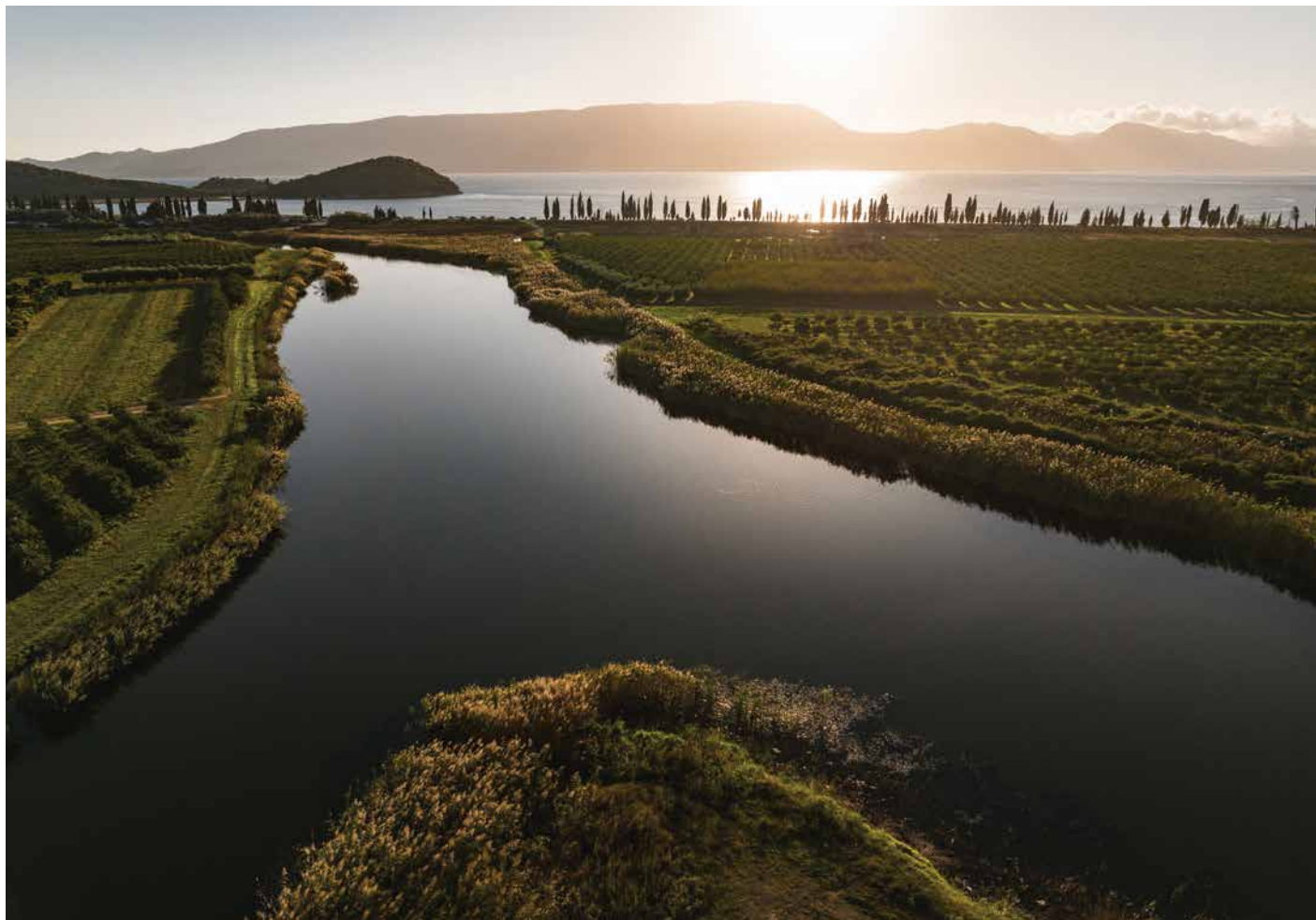
The Neretva flows through two countries, covering 225 kilometres along its course. With its source up in the Jabuka mountain, deep within the Dinaric Alps, the dazzling blue-green river carves its way

through the karst stone of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The last 20 kilometres flow through Croatia, where the river spills out into the Adriatic Sea at its mouth near the town of Ploče, splintering off into numerous courses. With its shallow sandy beaches and favourable winds, the river’s mouth is a paradise for kite surfers.

Nicknamed Croatian California, with hot summers followed by mild winters, the Neretva valley is the perfect home for citrus fruits. Oranges and lemons have been present in the area for hundreds of years, though used mostly as decoration. But it is the mandarin, the smaller and sweeter sister of the orange, that has become the valley’s top crop and its trademark.

Yet things looked quite different before the mandarin boom. The Neretva delta was once a pristine landscape of old Mediterranean wetlands, with a maze of marshes, lagoons and lakes. Then human intervention altered the terrain, specifically the land reclamation works that took place in the 1960s. Today, the delta covers just over 12,000 hectares and has only three river branches, of the original twelve.

While you can still find fragments of the old wetlands, with lagoons, lakes, rivers and hummocks (limestone hills), today’s Neretva valley is known for its cultivated land, featuring many mandarin plantations. Endless orchards of golden-yellow Neretva mandarins – a unique agricultural product protected by the EU – cover what was once a waterlogged swamp.





Come along for  
the mandarin  
harvest in  
Croatia's  
Neretva  
valley



"We're two metres below sea level here," says the farmer as he plucks the mandarins. "My father used to catch frogs and river fish right where we are standing now".

I imagine this very different landscape of yore. On the way south along the road leading toward Dubrovnik, passing through the lower alluvial valley you get hints of phenomenal natural beauty. Sandwiched between the stone and the sea, between the mighty mountains of Herzegovina and the endless blue horizon

of the Adriatic Sea, the Neretva has an almost mythical air to it. For centuries roamed by pirates, rife with legends and mosquito-borne diseases like malaria, these wild swamplands have been home to hardy people who lived in unison with nature, surviving off whatever bounty they managed to source.

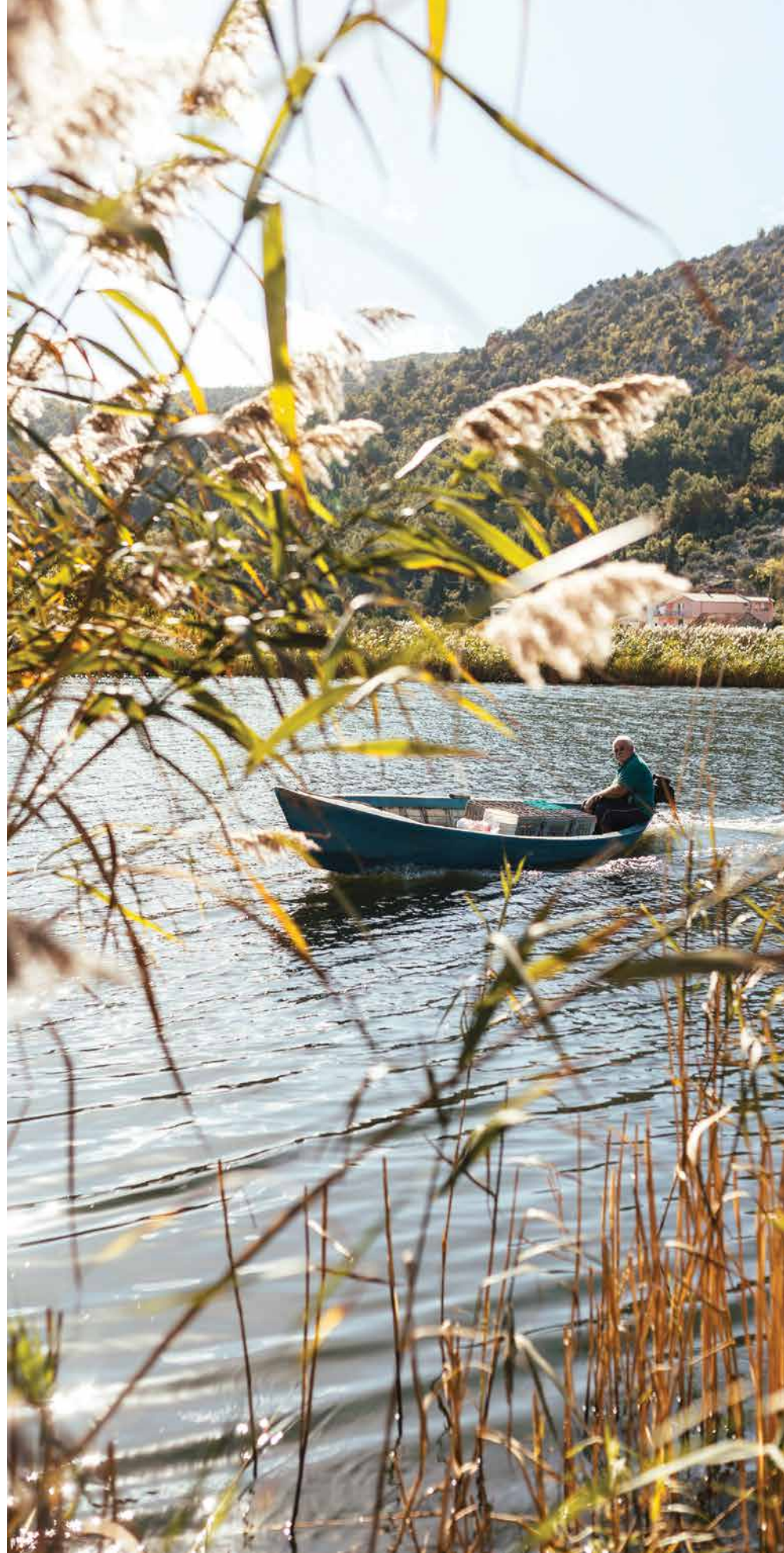
When we approach the old mandarin orchards by a narrow river to harvest more fruit, the *jugo* picks up. As we walk through the vividly green estuary, giant reeds are dancing in the wind. Alder and

willow trees line the riverbanks, like elders overseeing the river's flow. Water lilies and hyacinths float in the brackish water. Some 50 years ago, all this was covered by an intricate web of canals and lagoons. Cows used to swim through these rivers, and people relied on the water for sustenance, catching mullet, sea bass, eels and flounder.

For hundreds of years, much of life in the Neretva happened on the water, and boats were an integral part of life by the river. *Lada*, the area's iconic traditional vessel, could transport up to 35 people or 3.5 tons of goods. It was used for so much more than transport; big milestones, like weddings and funerals, took place on the *lada*. Its smaller cousin, *trupa*, the Neretva's answer to the Venetian gondola, could transport some 200 kg of load. A standing paddler could easily navigate the river in the smaller *trupa*, almost like a hollowed tree trunk (in Croatian, *trup* means trunk). Moving a *lada* upstream was a team effort for up to four paddlers, as sails were rarely employed.

"*Lada* is like a van, while *trupa* is a trailer," explains the farmer when I ask about the difference. The big *lada* boats are nowadays powered by an external engine, much easier for the trip down to the orchards. But what has really changed the mandarin harvest today is road access. While people of the Neretva still have their own *trupa* boats, very few are used for transportation. These days, a ride on a *trupa* is a way to relive the traditional way of life among giant reeds as it once was in the valley.

The turning point for the Neretva happened in 1933, when a shipment of wheat from the region was transported by ship to faraway Japan. The wheat made bread so delicious that the Japanese honorary consul sent more than 350 citrus seedlings back as a thank you note, among them Unshiu mandarins. This gesture led to the forming of citrus nurseries in the area, with more mandarin seedlings ordered from Japan and more mandarin trees planted.





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Fast forward many decades later, and the “golden valley”, as the Neretva is also called, produces over 90 percent of all mandarins in Croatia. More than one million mandarin trees bear over 60,000 tonnes of fruit each year. Careful planning and the introduction of new varieties have ensured the harvest season lasts from autumn through winter. Sorts like Zorica, Ichumara, Chahara, Okitsu, Kawano Wase and Kuno Seto ripen from late September throughout October. Unshiu Owari is usually ready for harvesting in November; the sweet clementines in December; while Havana is among the late bloomers, picked sometimes as late as

January. The land is so rich and fertile that other fruits and veg grow here in abundance as well, like cabbage, watermelon, strawberries and peaches. Yet mandarins remain the star and the symbol of the Neretva valley.

“Remember not to cut off the stem,” comes another reminder from the farmer. Later that day, as I dig into a hearty lunch of Neretvanski brudet, a traditional stew starring eels and frogs – the valley’s signature dish, I recall the taste of the fruit. Nothing quite like the fruit of your own labour, picked in a heavenly valley.



# The legend of Pakleni Islands: a sea god, a nymph and their secret love affair

*When witnessing beauty that seems surreal, we often  
look for stories about divine interventions to explain how  
something so exquisite came to be.*

words by Vesna Čelebić



Sprawled before the town of Hvar like a string of pearls, Pakleni Islands (Pakleni Otoci, in Croatian) bask in some 2700 hours of Mediterranean sunshine per year. A group of 16 wooded islets and rocks, this protected nature area is a terrific place to savour the great outdoors in all its glory. Whether you go kayaking around the archipelago, sunbathing at the pretty naturist beach on Jerolim Island, partying under starlit skies on Marinkovac or exploring the century-old botanical garden and the vivid restaurant scene on Sv. Klement, the archipelago's largest island, Pakleni Islands are bound to have you fall head over heels. And you wouldn't be the first one. Their enchanting beauty has been wooing gods and humans since the beginning of time.

The birth of this gorgeous slice of Earth even has its own juicy legend, recorded by the ancient Greek historian Theopompus. As such legends often do, it features a story of forbidden love, this one between the sea god Poseidon and the nymph called Dahomar.

Brother of Zeus and the god of seas, rivers, earthquakes and horses, Poseidon had a reputation for his love conquests. But

when he seduced Dahomar, the favourite nymph of Olympus' ruler, Poseidon knew better than to stick around. Fearing Zeus' wrath, the besotted lovers escaped on a quest to find a safe place to carry on their romance. They found it, the most idyllic spot, in the bay of Hadria, as the Adriatic was once known. On an isolated rock, covered in soft bedding of rock samphire and caressed by the warm Adriatic sun, they made love for the first time.

As distance was never much of an obstacle to gods, when the enraged Zeus fired his first lightning, it struck straight into the lovers' nest and set it on fire. Probably prompted by their sixth sense, Poseidon and Dahomar had launched into the sea moments before, and continued their ecstatic lovemaking underwater.

The king of gods then fired the second bolt of lightning right at the moment when Poseidon climaxed. Zeus's fire and Poseidon's love juice collided on the surface – and turned into a string of rocks and islets.

Today this heavenly hideaway is known as Pakleni Islands, just the perfect place for pastime and pleasure.

## Did you know?

The name of the archipelago is often mistaken to mean Hell's Islands, as *pakleni* literally means 'infernal' in Croatian. But the name is derived from *paklina*, a term for pine resin that has been used for centuries to coat and patch up wood on ships.

## Visiting Pakleni Islands

The islands are a breeze to reach from Hvar, with boat taxis running all day and late into the night. You can also kayak or enjoy a speed boat tour around the archipelago. Consult your Valamar Experience Concierge, who will craft the daytrip of your dreams.



# GORGEIOUS GROŽNJAN

## Istria's hilltop town of artists

words by Anja Mutić

The weather was breezy and the skies moody as I sipped my macchiato at 289 metres above sea level in the hilltop town of Grožnjan. Sitting on the ramparts of this ancient walled place in Istria, I took in the views. Spreading below was the pretty Mirna valley, verdant hills stretched all around. It was late September.

I've roamed the wobbly cobblestone streets of this tiny town, also known by its Italian name, Grisignana, many times over many years. I've popped in and out of its galleries, gazed at the iconic blue doors and windows of its townhouses, taking in sleeping cats and pretty plants that dot its alleyways. And every single time, there was music, splashes of colour and a whiff of art in the air.

On this autumn day, it was the art that lured me to Grožnjan, the town's trademark since the 1960s. How did art become the symbol of this petite Istrian place perched on a hilltop and, consequently, how did this petite Istrian town

become synonymous with art? I wanted to find out more.

My first stop was the Fonticus City Gallery, right as you pass through the 15th century gate and spot the Renaissance loggia from 1587. Up the stairs, in a former granary that once stored grains and flour, the gallery puts on solo exhibits by Croatian and international contemporary artists and also hosts art colonies. It is open six days a week (except Mondays) during the high season and by appointment the rest of the year.

"We have 24 exhibits per year," said Eugen Borkovsky, a sculptor, art critic and the gallery curator since 1998. There are few people as intimately acquainted with the comings and goings of the Grožnjan art scene. "I have a waiting list of artists who want to show at Fonticus." Inside the gallery space, he regaled me with stories, local lore and a book he wrote for the 50th anniversary of Grožnjan's proclamation as the town of artists.



## Back to the roots

Grožnjan's roots go back to the medieval era. It was first mentioned in written records from 1102 as *Castrum Grisiniana*; centuries later, it formed part of the Venetian Republic. Walking around town today, you can see the rich history reflected in its architecture, a medley of influences featuring the Renaissance loggia, Baroque buildings, Gothic elements and palazzo-style townhouses fusing different styles.

After WWII, most Italians who inhabited the old town had moved away to Italy in the early 1950s and the townhouses were left largely abandoned. Many of the buildings fell into neglect and disrepair, some burned down, some burned down and others stood as derelict ruins. Grožnjan was on its way to becoming a ghost town, a shadow of its former self.



## Art to the rescue

At the initiative of late sculptor Aleksandar Rukavina, the main moving force behind Grožnjan's revival, local authorities invited artists from all over Yugoslavia at the time to start an art colony. In the spring of 1965, Grožnjan was pronounced the "town of artists," who moved into the empty stone houses. And so, its modern-day renaissance began.

Among the first who moved to Grožnjan as part of that original wave was Mirjana Rajković, a ceramic artist now in her 70s, who came with her husband, also an artist. When I visited Rajković in her gallery Jedan Plus (Plus One), she recalled those early days. "When we arrived to the

house, it had no roof and no doors; at night, you could see the sky," she reminisces. "Then we rolled up our sleeves and got to work." Little by little, they rebuilt the house, restored the old furniture they found inside and opened their gallery in 1972. Though her husband passed away, today the gallery is still a family business; her son and daughter-in-law are both artists. Rajković spends most of the year in Grožnjan, except late autumn and winter months when the town gets sleepy. She has a studio inside the gallery, with a kiln where she glazes her gorgeous pottery. The gallery is easily found; look for a plate with a colourful ceramic apple outside.



## The sound of music

Over the following decades, Grožnjan became a magnet for artists and creators of all stripes, from all over what was then Yugoslavia. Music was another big draw since the late 1960s, when International Cultural Centre of Jeunesses Musicales Croatia hosted its first summer music camp here. Today, summertime in Grožnjan is music to the ears. Literally. The sounds of instruments echo from the buildings as you ramble the old town. With music festivals like Jazz is Back! and Ethno Croatia, as well as workshops and performances

throughout the summer, Grožnjan delivers a heady mix of eclectic sounds.

It also has a particular way of pulling at your heart strings. I heard the melody of a violin as I ambled along the charmingly uneven cobblestones to visit Lipa, another gallery with a long lineage. Today Lipa is helmed by Simon Pavlinc, whose parents moved to Grožnjan from Isola in Slovenia in the early 1980s, when Pavlinc was ten. He learned ceramics alongside his parents, who opened the gallery in

1986. "The 1980s were the golden era of Grožnjan," pondered Pavlinc. Today he continues the tradition his parents started. For his striking pottery featuring motifs of flowers and plants, he uses a rare technique he learned from his parents, majolica, also known as Faenza glazed, from the Italian city of the same name. Pavlinc recently opened another gallery space right in the town centre, where he offers hands-on ceramic workshops and presentations; visitors get to paint their own cups and glaze them in the kiln.



## On a treasure hunt for art

With more than 40 galleries and studios strewn all around Grožnjan's labyrinthine alleys, looking for art is a fun treasure hunt. Today, about 40 people live in town year-round; the number goes up to over 200 during the summer. Daytime is the busiest in Grožnjan, with visitors flowing in on day trips from the surrounding towns in Istria. They pop into the souvenir shops and artsy boutiques that sell a hodgepodge of random trinkets, artsy objects and food products typical for Istria (truffles, anyone?). There's an

unwritten rule though, everything sold as art in Grožnjan needs to be handmade. Though the advent of mass tourism has changed the landscape, the art lineage is taken seriously in this hilltop haven for creatives.

Among the original guard who hold the fort are Rok and Lea Zelenko, a couple from Slovenia who run the Porton gallery they opened back in 1982. Rok, a painter, comes from a family of artists that spans a couple of generations; Lea is a ceram-

icist and retired teacher who taught art at the high school in nearby Buje. They passed on the creative streak to their sons, who are both artists themselves. We drank strong black coffee in small cups and ate Izabela grapes from their leafy courtyard, talking about art and the way it has changed Grožnjan.

# Creativity abuzz

SUBSTANCE BY VALAMAR //26//

The summer of my visit, a new gallery had just opened in town, by Bruno Paladin, a painter, graphic artist, ceramicist, sculptor, illustrator, scenographer and designer from Rijeka. Paladin has been working as an artist and visiting Grožnjan since the mid-1970s. "I'm one of those free spirits who play their entire life," said Paladin as he showed me around the new gallery space. On the ground floor of a townhouse that sat empty for 30 years, you can see the playful nature in his vibrant collection, from lovely watercolours and oil paintings to collages with styrofoam and wood drawings. Paladin's work is also part of the Grožnjan Art Fund, which has about 900 works by 346 artists, from Croatia and about 20 countries around the world, spanning the period from 1950s till the present day. All of these artists either lived, worked or visited Grožnjan.

Paladin is also an avid art collector, who amassed an incredible collection over the years, comprised of gifts, exchanges and art work that he purchased. On the day I visited, assorted pieces from the "Bruno Paladin Collection" were on display at Fonticus City Gallery.

As I was leaving Grožnjan that late September afternoon, the streets were almost empty. In a few days' time, it would become abuzz with activity for Ex Tempore. This annual three-day event taking place the last week of September attracts artists from all over the world.

They work on site on a given theme, using a stamped blank canvas, and then hand it over to the judges for final selection and prizes. I wished I could be there, to see all this creativity unleashed and art made in situ. Yet Ex Tempore or without, art is in the air in Grožnjan.





# Scale the Super 7

The summits of  
Austria's Tauern  
mountains

*Adrenaline seekers, you're in for a treat. Obertauern is so much more than the snowiest town in Austria. Winter enthusiasts already know that this uber-snowy ski resort packs a punch with fresh powder from the end of November until the beginning of May, serving skiers all winter long.*

*But these legendary slopes take things up a notch for true skiing aficionados. One such electrifying challenge comes with seven layers for the most advanced skiers to tackle. Yes, the famed Super 7.*



Scale the  
Super 7  
summits of  
Obertauern

An aerial photograph of a vast, snow-covered mountain slope. A chairlift line runs vertically down the left side of the frame, with several chairs visible. The snow is marked with numerous tracks and lines, indicating a well-used ski area. A few small figures of skiers can be seen on the slope. The lighting is bright, creating soft shadows and highlighting the texture of the snow.

# Introducing the Super 7

Obertauern's seven summits are a force to be reckoned with, each starring a special challenge thanks to the long, steep and difficult runs that should be traversed by skiers with the most experience. As for the reward for facing the challenge, each summit treats you to unparalleled views of the rugged Tauern mountains, softening the blow of each thrilling slope.

Signs and flags marked with 'S7' point skiers in the direction of Obertauern's extensive ski circuit, including Seekareck (2162 m), Panorama (2208 m), Hundskogel (2136 m), Plattenkar (2051 m), Schaidberg (1970 m), Zehnerkar (2196 m) and Gamsleiten II (2313 m). Each summit has a dedicated chair lift that takes you up to its peak before you make your sweet descent on two skis. Conquering all the seven summits is an outstanding feat.



## Gear up for Gamsleiten II

Now, you may be wondering how Obertauern's Super 7 stack up to some of the world's sharpest slopes. Well, these seven summits include one of the steepest slopes in Europe and the second steepest in Austria – the legendary Gamsleiten II (or G2, as the locals call it). Appropriately named after alpine chamois (Gams) and a steep grassy slope (Leiten), this summit cautions all skiers and snowboarders and is revered for single-handedly rivalling

its famous counterparts. One thing is certain: only the most advanced should take a stab at this extra-arduous ride.

Those brave enough to face the thrill of one of Europe's steepest hills are dropped at the highest point in Obertauern's ski area, a whopping 2313 metres above sea level with an altitude difference of over 360 metres. But Gamsleiten II isn't just strenuous thanks to its demanding

descent with sections featuring a 100% downhill gradient. This piste adds the bells and whistles of bumps for skiers to negotiate, flashing by on a running length of about 1.2 kilometres. While the choppiness of this piste certainly ramps up the difficulty, Gamsleiten II represents the pinnacle of skill tests for the most daring of skiers. And finding the finish line is a dream come true for enthusiasts of this snow sport.

# A ski run that hides a lot of fun

Those of you feeling the rush of this run may need to hold your horses, as Gamsleiten II isn't exactly always open for business. Good weather conditions and low winds must be in your favour to get a chairlift to the top of this 2300 m peak; the doors also shut on G2 during bad weather due to the risk of avalanches.

But there's a bright side to this potentially bad news. If you're planning to visit Obertauern in April, consider yourself lucky, especially if you happen to cross paths with the Gamsleiten Kriterium. Once a year, Gamsleiten II raises the ante by hosting Austria's largest treasure hunt. Skiers and snowboarders are tasked with gliding down this daring slope to hunt for hidden treasure chests buried at the bottom. And the grand prize is enough motivation to give the G2 a chance... because who doesn't want to win a luxury car?

The Super 7 is also a sight to behold if you're in Obertauern during the summer, with stellar hiking or trail running around these slopes thanks to an extensive trail network. And if you've read all this and still think the Super 7 is way out of your league? Check out the Tauernrunde instead, for a much less demanding but equally scenic exploration of Obertauern's slopes.

The Tauernrunde offers skiers supreme views, shorter distances, uncomplicated ski connections and high alpine landscapes, making it satisfying for both beginners and pros. Skiers tackling Tauernrunde get to choose between two circuits. The green circuit is decked out with seven lifts and runs counter-clockwise around the town, while the red circuit runs clockwise and takes it up a notch with nine lifts. There's even the Bobbyrunde, for the smallest skiers on the Obertauern slopes.





# Dazzling sea shells of the Adriatic

*She sells sea shells on the sea shore...*

Looking for shells has forever been a thing of pleasure, but also a quest for something valuable. In the past, bivalves were not only a source of nourishment, but of luxury items like pearls or sea silk as well. Their pretty shells have been used as a material for jewellery and ornaments, but also as a form of payment.

The shells of bivalves are the easiest way to tell them apart. A natural shield made of calcium carbonate and protein, the shells grow together with the organism. Strong muscles and a mechanism known as the 'lock' keep nosy sea creatures at bay from the meaty part.

Over 10,000 species of bivalves exist today in the world's seas and freshwaters. In the Adriatic, there are around 250 of them. Here are our favourites, whose shells you might come across on a lovely seaside stroll.

## **The Malacological Museum in Makarska**

If you are staying in Makarska, don't miss the Malacological Museum at the Franciscan Monastery. It started out as a labour of love by a seaman's son, friar Jure Radić back in 1959. He collected not only a valuable assortment of shellfish from the Adriatic and the entire world, but also a worthy herbarium of Biokovo mountain plants and fossils. Over time, and with much help from local contributions, the collection grew to now count over 3000 shells of mollusks and samples from all around the globe, as far as the Caribbean, Australia, Madagascar and Tanzania.

## European flat oyster

(*kamenica* in Croatian,  
lat. *Ostrea edulis*)

Known as the 'queen of the Adriatic,' the oyster is the region's most famous bivalve and a delicacy that graces many foodies a bucket list. Commonly farmed in the Adriatic, these flat bivalves are very high-maintenance.

They prefer seawater with lower salinity (so farms are typically close to underground water sources) and like it calm, with no strong winds or strong currents; yet they need some current to bring in plankton for nourishment. Their two habitats in Croatia include the Lim Channel in Istria and the bay of Mali Ston near Dubrovnik, where oyster farms thrive in protected habitats. Farming oysters is arduous labour; it takes about 2-2.5 years until each oyster grows to market size; during that period, it will have been handled at least five times.

## Mussels

(*mušule/dagnje* in Croatian,  
lat. *Mytilus galloprovincialis*)

Mussels are so easy-going they will attach to just about anything, from sandbanks to underwater cliffs to the bottoms of boats. In Croatia, they are found in the waters by Šibenik, Novigrad and Pula, the Lim channel and the bay of Mali Ston, where they grow in the wild but are also farmed.

Their black triangular shells are symmetrical and a common find on beaches across Croatia. On the inside mussels can be orange or white creamy in colour, and – that's how you tell their gender; the orange ones are females and the white ones are male. Among their superpowers, mussels can filter up to 20 litres of sea water per day.

## Date mussels

(*prstaci* in Croatian,  
lat. *Lithophaga lithophaga*)

The elongated mahogany-brown shell of date mussels comes adorned with elliptical lines. Those attest to the shell's age; date mussels normally live long (50-60 years) and grow very slowly (up to 9 centimetres in those 5-6 decades).

Date mussels drill out their home; they extract an acid that helps them carve out tunnels in the rock, each about 1.5 times their size. Known as a delicacy since the Roman times, they are now strictly protected and their harvest is prohibited both in Croatia and the entire EU. That's because to collect them requires demolishing entire surrounding rocks.

## Noble pen shells


(*plemenita periska* in Croatian,  
lat. *Pinna nobilis*)

The Adriatic's largest bivalve, noble pen shells can reach up to 120 centimetres in size and live up to 50 years of age. They make the best of it: they filter the sea water, as well as serve as a home for up to 35 sea organisms at once. Their majestic shells are a sight to behold, not only because of their size but also because they stand vertically to the bottom, like majestic towers on the seabed.

Their glands produce a byssus that the shell uses to anchor; these filaments are also known as sea silk. Fishermen have been using it for centuries to treat wounds, while ancient Babylonians, Assyrians, Greeks and Romans used them to weave threads finer and more revered than silk; a pair of gloves made of sea silk could be folded into a walnut shell. Due to their proneness to disease, noble pen shells are now rare and have been protected since 1970.

## Mediterranean scallops

(*Jakobova kapica* in Croatian,  
lat. *Pecten jacobaeus*)



**THEIR CROATIAN NAME - JAKOBOVE KAPICE - COMES FROM ST. JACOB, THE PATRON SAINT OF SEAFARERS.**

The fan-shaped shells of Mediterranean scallops are perhaps most often seen beyond the beach. Growing up to 15 centimetres in size, with one side concave and the other completely flat and decorated with 14-16 radial ribs, they are not only pretty, but also a convenient platter for restaurant servings of fish paté.

Unlike oysters or mussels, scallops do not attach themselves to a surface, but rather swim by using their two valves to push water quickly. They are not farmed – and because they like to hide in sand and mud, they're not an easy find either. Endemic to the Mediterranean, these are most common in Croatia's Adriatic in the waters around Novigrad and Zadar, and the Hvar and Velebit channels.

# In harmony with nature on Kumparička, Istria's organic goat farm

words by Anja Mutić





It's early September morning in the pastoral hills of eastern Istria, not far from the coast near Pula. The Maremmano-Abruzzese shepherd dogs are resting after a run in the fields and the goats of Stancija Kumparička farm have just returned from pasture. While they digest their feast of clean grass and wild aromatic herbs, we sit down for one of our own, courtesy of the goats' raw milk, a delicious essence of green Istria.

And an exquisite feast it is – healthy, handcrafted, natural and spread out in front of us on wooden boards. We dig into the yummy goodness: labneh with za'atar, romps pesto and grape jam; a delectably spiced fresh cheese; squash caramelised with honey and mint served with feta cheese. All produced right on the farm, these artisan cheeses are renowned for their top quality, beloved by foodies and lauded by connoisseurs from all over

Croatia. Organic, seasonal and local, each cheese is different, showcasing its own distinct personality. There are as many semi-hard cheeses as there are days in the year; goat milk is never the same.

Goats weren't the end goal when Aleš Winkler and his family bought the abandoned 14th-century *stancija* (family farm estate) back in 2008 and moved to Istria from Ljubljana, Slovenia for a change of lifestyle closer to nature. Nobody had lived at Kumparička for at least two decades, and the task of clearing up 60 hectares of overgrown terrain was quite a feat. Then a suggestion came to get a pack of 20 goats to run wild and eat their way through the grasses and weeds. It was a win-win – the goats enjoyed the all-you-can-eat buffet and the Winkler family got the land all nicely cleared up. Fittingly, goat also happens to be the symbol of Istria and features on the county flag.

Now, they also had goats they had to take care of, so they decided to try their hand at making cheese. At first the cheese wasn't very good, but with time, trial and error, the Winkler family dove deeper into the craft of artisan cheese making, renovated the main house and built the cheese production facility in the former stables.

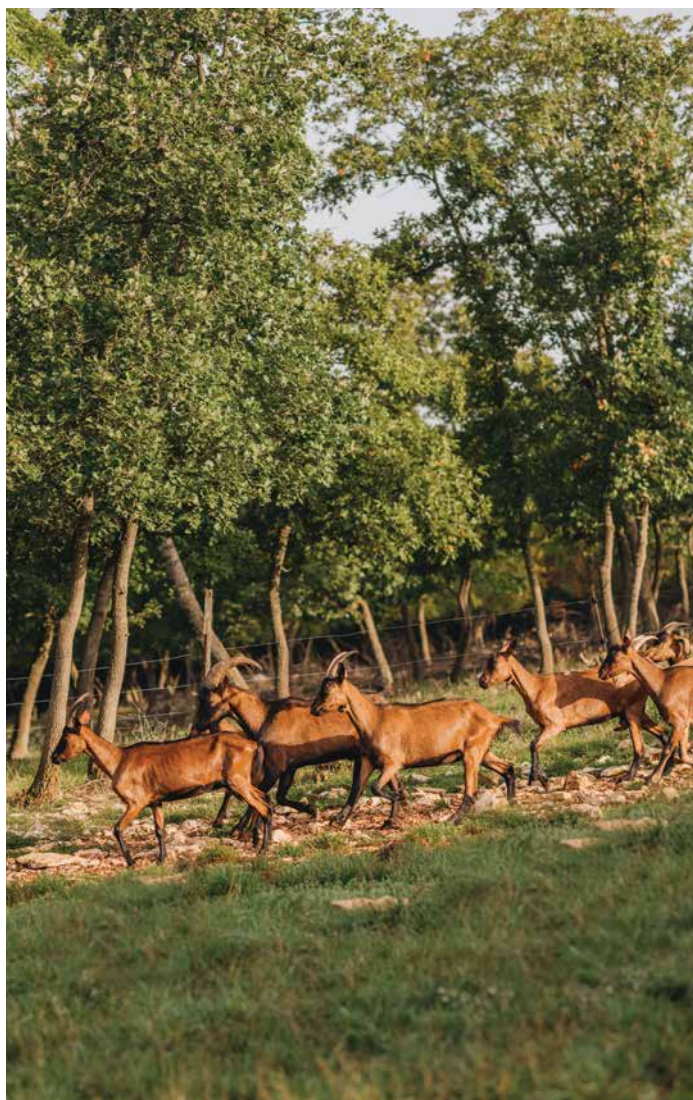
15 years later, their artisan cheeses are a treasured choice by chefs from across Croatia, including Valamar's own Goran Hrastovčak of Spinnaker in Poreč. On his seasonally changing menus, he has used the Kumparička cheeses in a variety of creative dishes, such as a starter featuring a cream made of melted goat cheese,

dried meat and brioche; a beet risotto with labneh goat cheese; croque madame with pork loin & semi-hard cheese; and sorbetto with goat whey.

Today, the 300 goats of Kumparička are the star of the show and the reason people trek up to the farm. There are a number of ways to experience the delight of Kumparička. You can join a guided farm tour, which includes a cuddle with baby goats, a visit to the cheese production facility and a short tasting. To get to know the goats a little better, you can even become a shepherd for an afternoon and join a herd for pasture, accompanied by a guide and the shepherd dogs. After the

grazing, you get to visit the farm and the cheese production facility, followed by a tasting.

You don't need to hang out with the goats to get a taste of Kumparička; you can skip the farm part and go straight to the food. The cheese tastings are a treat, a journey through the senses that lets you experience the farm's entire range of product, from fresh cheese and ricotta to the aged semi-hard cheeses. It's all served with various inspired toppings, handcrafted bread and local wine. You also get to pop into the facility where these beauties are made and see the process from the glassed-in gallery.







The production is a well-oiled machine at Kumparička. Every morning and afternoon, 250 goats are milked for fresh raw milk, which gets put into the main cauldron, together with the cultures and bacteria. Some of the cheeses stay fresh, some turn into luscious yogurt, while others are sent to the maturation room, where they remain for at least 40 days. Here they mature on tall shelves; some-one needs to actually climb up a ladder and manually move them, so they don't lose the shape. The older, the sharper; the oldest cheese has been in the maturation room for six years. This artisanal process of cheese making results in a variety of aromas and flavours, from moldy to matured, sharp and young, to cheeses with striking wrinkly rinds.

It's these unexpected adventures in taste that have been drawing curious foodies to Kumparička Table, their farm-to-table dinners, served daily during summer (except Mondays). Seating up to 20 people on a long communal table outside, perfect for mingling and taking in the gorgeous sunset views, these dinners are a creative venture of Tita Winkler, who moved to the farm with her parents when she was 12 and now runs the hospitality segment. "I put together the day's menu depending on my inspiration and whatever is available," says Tita, who graduated philosophy and wrote her thesis on gastronomy, looking at food and taste from a variety of unusual perspectives.

"We take what we have and build on from there, using simple but prime ingredients," explains Tita. Somebody may give her a jar of anchovies one day, which then translates into a dish served at dinner later that evening - blanched skinless tomatoes with labneh, anchovies, garlic and dehydrated egg yolk. The concept is based on seasonality and sharing of small plates - at least 12 varied dishes come out on big platters and you get to pick what you want to eat from what's right in front of you. The combination of flavours is a highlight, lots of Middle Eastern spices, deliciously crusty oven-roasted meat and local dishes like chicken *šugo* (Istrian stew)



with *pljukanci* (a type of handrolled pasta). Most of the ingredients are right from the farm, including meat, eggs, vegetables, and of course the cheeses, served right from pasture to plate. There's also the deliciously creamy and thick goat milk caramel to sweeten things up. No goats, no glory, as the Kumparička slogan goes.

The pastures are huge inspiration for the Winklers. At Kumparička they don't cut the grass, as they believe in non-invasive practices and living in harmony with nature and accordance with the natural cycles. That means the fields abound with aromatic medicinal plants, many of which are edible. Tita Winkler has been researching those, often featuring them on the daily menus, like wild chicory, wild fennel, cheeses (an okra-like plant) and common purslane, a super-healthy weed that she pickles. A plate at Kumparička Table may

include a mix of these wild edibles, with some fresh cheese over it, a dash of honey and a sprinkling of pink pepper.

As the Kumparička website says, "We live and work according to the principles of clean, good and fair food and production." By the time of our late September visit, the swallows have left for southern skies and flies have moved in. Each season at Kumparička brings its boons and challenges. We roam the gardens and Tita points out a vibrant flower. "It's desert hibiscus. No idea how it got here," she says, "The swallows may have brought it from somewhere far south. It's so beautiful." Two horses, Garp and Vito, are grazing peacefully; cats are lounging in the shadows. Lava, Edo and Mimi, the family dogs, are resting. The farm is falling back into its late morning rhythm as we leave, goats resting before the afternoon graze.





SUBSTANCIA ILLIUM (40)

photo by: Sanjin Ilic

MRGARI,  
THE STONE FLOWERS  
OF BAŠKA ON  
KRK ISLAND

When  
the ordinary  
becomes  
art

words by Vesna Čelebić

In the northernmost corner of the Adriatic Sea lies Croatia's largest island and the cradle of its culture, the island of Krk. Graced with a mild climate, diverse landscapes and an average of 2500 sunny hours per year, Krk has housed people, griffon vultures and 1400 plant species for thousands of years.

The belly of the island is covered in forests, Mediterranean gardens, vineyards and olive groves; its shores remain wind-shaven plains of rocks and pastures. The story of Krk is one of many islands; in this microcosmos of limited land, people had to make do with what was bestowed upon them. The island community engaged in everything from agriculture, honey-making and fishing to sheep herding.

On the southeastern tip of Krk, along the bay of Baščanska Draga, lies the idyllic Baška valley with the namesake seaside village. Today it is famed for the serene Mediterranean ambiance and a spectacular pebbly beach, but also as home to the first trace of Croatian literacy, the Baška Tablet from 1100AD.

Wedged between two commanding plains, this green and lively patch of land sits towered by rugged moonscapes that rise at 400–500 metres of altitude. People have nicknamed this area 'the Tibet of Krk,' for the low-lying herbs and shrubs that swing with the breeze, offering, like on a platter, majestic views of Kvarner Bay and the uninhabited island of Prvić. This vast pasture is dotted with imposing structures,

five on each plain. Called *mrgari*, they are built of singular drywalls and shaped like flowers. Used as multicellular sheepfolds, *mrgari* are a beautiful and fragile sample of vernacular architecture.

Around the world, flower-shaped *mrgari* are a rarity. In Croatia, in addition to the ten in the valley of Baška, five more are found on the neighbouring Prvić and one each on the islands of Cres, Lošinj and Rab. Around the world, one such structure is known to exist in Belalp in Switzerland, several in Wales and a few in Iceland, where they are made of wood and called *réttts*. These ones in Baška are unique on Krk though; not even in the next-door village will you find them in such a remarkably graceful flower-like shape.

Typically, shepherds tend to their own band of sheep, so the structures they built were simple, one- or two-room pens. But in Baška, shepherds from one of the three villages, Baška, Jurandvor or Batomalj, had hundreds, even thousands of their sheep grazing together on communal pastures known as *komunade*.

Four times a year, the sheep had to be rounded up, for sheering, inspection or to be moved to winter pastures. But among a thousand woolly sheep, how could a shepherd tell theirs apart? That's where *mrgari* came in.

On the day of the round-up, shepherds joined forces in the arduous endeavor of herding sheep from wide and far (sometimes kilometres away) in to the central space of *mrgari*, the large hall called *sala*. The largest *sala* on the Baška plains could hold up to 1500 sheep!

As soon as the sheep were gathered inside, the small gate was closed and the shepherds started working on their own, separating their sheep. To this day, livestock is always branded; on Krk, mainly by painting on the wool as well as by ear markings. The symbols on wool help spot your sheep in a crowd, but they can be reworked or just cut, making it easy to steal the sheep. So it is actually the ear markings that are considered court-valid proof of sheep ownership.

After spotting their sheep, the shepherds held them by the back legs to double-check the ear tattoos. Then, when certain, they send off their sheep into

their *mrgarić*, a smaller pen that branches out from the *sala*, architecturally forming what looks like a petal of the flower.


The construction of *mrgari* was an ordeal greatly similar to herding. The building of the large central hall was a common effort and the shepherds left an estimated number of door-like openings in its main wall. Next, each shepherd proceeded to build their own *mrgarić*, designed and sized to their current needs. Drywalls were easy to rework, so these structures were repaired, downsized or enlarged as called for and in line with changes in the individual's band numbers.

The stunning floral shape of *mrgari* arose entirely from their function. Many today refer to them as land art, but their original intention had much more to do with livelihood than with artistic expression. In fact, historic documents hold very few references about these structures. The shepherds, understandably so, didn't consider them art. Apparently, neither did the chroniclers.

Nowadays there is a new appreciation of these beautiful and fragile samples of vernacular architecture from a bygone era. With some still occasionally in use and some renovated, the ten *mrgari* of Baška are a sight to behold as you hike or bike around the island.

Today, when the old ways of life come scented with nostalgia, *mrgari* remain a standing tribute to how the passage of time can make something once commonplace into a work of art.





# The story of snowshoeing in the Austrian Alps

words by Anja Mutić

Crunch, crunch, squeak... These are the only sounds I hear on this gloriously sunny mid-December morning in Obertauern. Observing the near silence, I think about how snow tends to muffle all other sounds. For a split second, I almost forget about the bizarre shoes I'm wearing as I slog through deep powder.

Around me is a postcard-perfect 360 of a winter idyll. The alpine air is enchantingly fresh. My guide David tells me about longer treks you can do on snowshoes, which makes me want to go higher and

deeper into the mountains. I look at the imposing peaks all around and think about how people once travelled through this terrain, before we had snowmobiles, skis, snowboards and all modern contraptions and technology that make moving through snow a breeze today.

Back then, in the frosty embrace of winter, humans were met with the challenge of traversing deep, powdery snow without sinking into it. One age-old solution transformed snow from an obstacle into a playground: snowshoeing.



# Older than Ötzi the Iceman

The history of snowshoeing is as fascinating as a snowflake's journey from the sky to the ground. It all began with our resourceful ancestors, who ingeniously crafted the first snowshoes once they were faced with the frigid realities of winter.

While it's hard to be 100% sure, especially because ancient materials were perishable way back when, the snowshoe was likely created around 4000 BC. The oldest known snowshoe was in fact discovered by hikers

in the Tyrolean Alps in 2016; it dates back to around 3800 BC. This makes the snowshoe older than Ötzi the Iceman, Europe's oldest known natural human mummy.

This snowshoe was made entirely of birch wood. It flaunted a 1.5-metre-long branch twisted to a round-oval frame and several stretched strands inside. The people of the Neolithic era made sure they were well-equipped to plough through any type of powder.

## Tracing the tracks of winters past

The snowshoe was independently developed by indigenous peoples in North America, Europe and Asia, who used this inventive footwear when out hunting, gathering and trading. And it's no surprise as to why. The skilful snowshoe design allowed them to roam deep powder with ease so they could expand their territories in frosty landscapes.

Each civilisation had its spin on snowshoes, whether fashioned from wooden frames and leather thongs to more rugged approaches crafted from animal bones and rawhide. It didn't take long before snowshoeing evolved into a practical means of transportation across snowy terrains. As winter became less of a barrier and more of an opportunity, snowshoeing found its place in history.



Have  
heaps of  
snowshoe  
fun in  
Obertauern



# Obertauern's snowshoeing odyssey

Here in the heart of the Austrian Alps, snowshoeing isn't just a sport; it is a tradition woven into the winter fabric of the region. Austrians embrace snowshoeing as a way to connect with nature and each other during the winter months. And in Obertauern, this is one cherished activity. Locals and visitors alike don on their snowshoes to venture into the wilderness, forging trails that lead to delightful vistas and treasures beneath the snow-blanketed landscape.

This popular après-ski alternative attracts enthusiasts from all walks of life. Many embark on magical winter hikes and thrilling snowshoe tours from the Gnadental to the Südwienertur or the Hundsfeld slope to the World Cup slope. There are even a range of competitions around snowshoeing, adding a competitive flair to the age-old practice.

As snow cascades down in this corner of Austria, I breathe in the crisp mountain air echoing all the generations past who strapped on their snowshoes to wander these winter wonderlands. Whether you're a seasoned snowshoer or a novice eager to leave your tracks in Obertauern, remember that with each step, you're treading on the footsteps of history. What a perfect spot to try snowshoeing for the first time.

**Guided snowshoeing is a complimentary activity offered at our Obertauern hotels several times per week; inquire with the Snow Experience Concierge.**

## From ancient necessity to mountain adventure

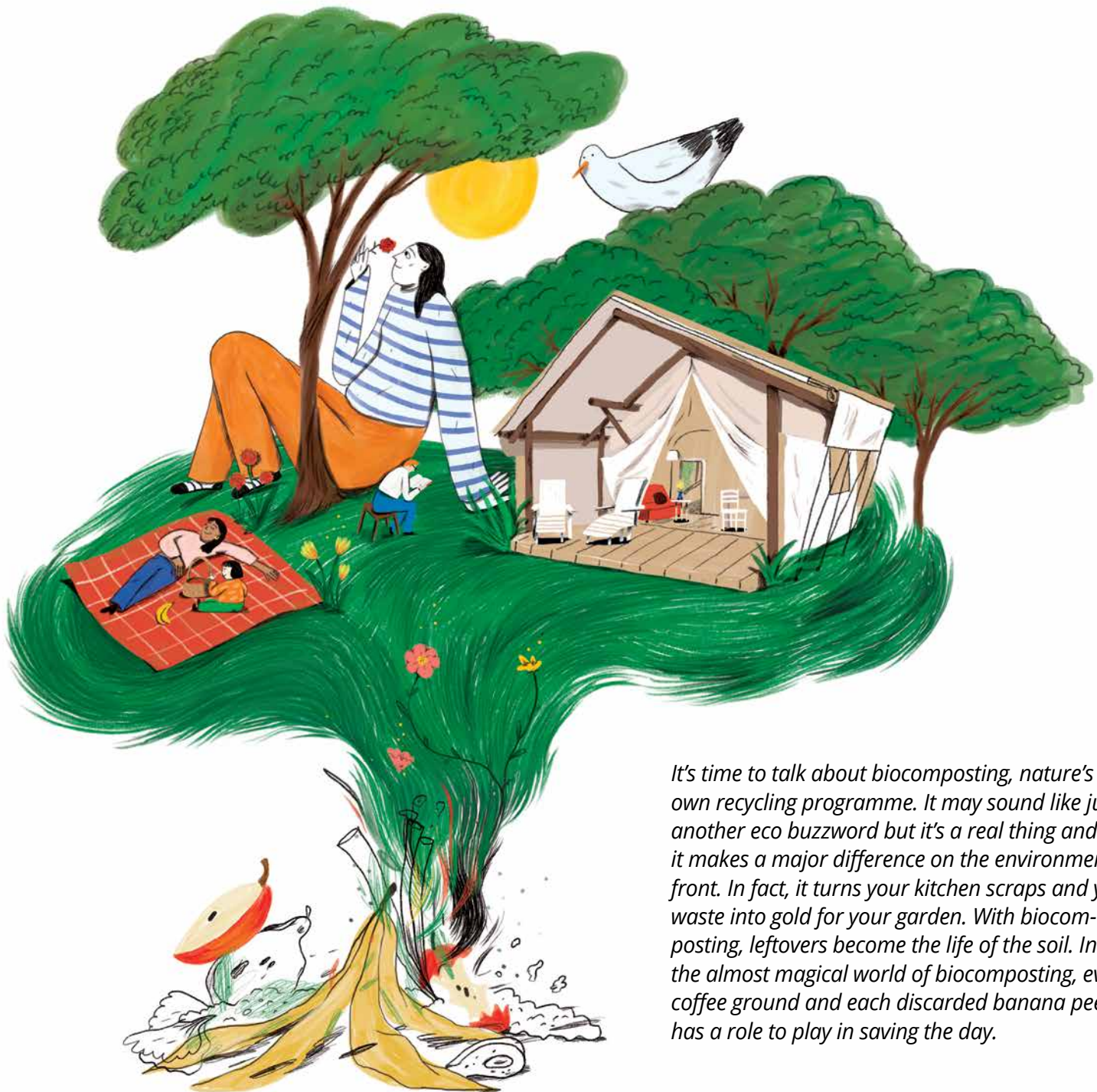
Still, the basics of the snowshoe have not changed much after all these... well, thousands of years, and innovations only really hit in the 1950s. Replacing the leather and wood of yore are ultra-lightweight materials, while the weight and size have been reasonably adapted to make snowshoes more compact, durable and effective.

Fast forward to today, modern snowshoes are usually manufactured from foam, metal,

plastic and other synthetic materials. The ones I have strapped to my feet on the mid-December morning in Obertauern seem as high-tech as they get. These much sportier models are used recreationally, for climbing mountains, hiking and best of all, exercise and running. Fun fact: snowshoeing is one of the highest calorie-burning activities you can do. Half an hour of trudging through deep snow - and my elaborate breakfast calories are surely all gone.

# THE CIRCLE OF GREEN

How Valamar is closing the loop with biocomposting



*It's time to talk about biocomposting, nature's very own recycling programme. It may sound like just another eco buzzword but it's a real thing and it makes a major difference on the environment front. In fact, it turns your kitchen scraps and yard waste into gold for your garden. With biocomposting, leftovers become the life of the soil. In the almost magical world of biocomposting, every coffee ground and each discarded banana peel has a role to play in saving the day.*

## FROM WASTE TO WONDER

In the circular economy of hospitality, this whimsical concept transforms waste into wonder. It's a merry-go-round of resourcefulness, where everything from towels to shampoo bottles embark on a journey of reuse, recycle and repurpose.

Rather than a linear path to the landfill, items are reincarnated into new forms of value, from upcycled decor to compost for lush gardens. It's a harmonious dance where sustainability and holidays meet, creating an ecosystem where waste is merely a pitstop on the road to innovation.

## EMBRACING THE ROT

So, how exactly does biocomposting take centre stage in hospitality? Imagine those breakfast leftovers – the ones that usually meet a sad fate. They now set off on a grand adventure, heading straight to the compost heap where they transform into nutrient-rich soil. This soil isn't just any soil; it's the secret sauce for growing gardens that adorn the hotel grounds, creating landscapes straight out of a fairytale.

Biocomposting works its magic on ecosystems, too. The cycle continues as these gardens become home to buzzing bees and fluttering butterflies. In turn, these boost

soil fertility, reduce erosion and mitigate the impacts of climate change. And when those flowers eventually bid farewell, they return to the compost heap, beautifully completing the circle of life.

Today's products are tomorrow's raw materials. As organic matter returns to the earth, the loop closes, promising a more sustainable and resilient ecosystem. The benefits of biocomposting are manifold, too.

## SAVING THE PLANET, ONE PILE AT A TIME

First, let's talk about waste reduction – the ultimate superhero of the hospitality world. With biocomposting in action, those mountains of food scraps and leftover napkins are no match for the power of decomposition. Instead of ending up in overflowing landfills, they become nutrient-rich compost, ready to nourish the hotel's grounds.

And let's not forget the cherry on top – the green credentials that come with embracing biocomposting. With guests increasingly conscious of their environmental footprint, hotels that prioritise sustainability become magnets for conscious travellers seeking guilt-free getaways.

## CLOSING THE LOOP AT VALAMAR

Biocomposting is one of the sustainability moves at Valamar – and the company proudly reduces mixed municipal waste every day. In the past year, the share of selective waste amounted to 53% – but there is always room for improvement.

So, what's the goal? To increase that percentage every year. But it takes more than being committed to raising awareness about proper waste disposal and recycling. It's about investing in devices and projects to achieve that goal.

For starters, Valamar joined the pilot project "Reduce food waste, cook for your guests" led by the Environmental Protection and Energy Efficiency Fund. Through it, a myriad of composting devices were tested across Valamar's hotels and campings. The selected collection of biowaste from guests was then handed over to an authorised collector to be adequately disposed of and recovered. And that's just one way Valamar closes the loop.

Valamar's biocomposting journey continues to take shape. In the past year, 347 tonnes of biowaste were composted at Valamar. Your trash was turned into Valamar's treasure, using it as food to feed and fuel the landscapes of its resorts, hotels and campings. Suddenly, every coffee ground and banana peel become a valuable asset on the way to a greener, healthier world.

## Valamar's wholehearted commitment

In 2023 we invested 13.5 million euros in projects that directly contribute to the development of destinations and the quality of life of the local communities where we operate. We're committed to making a difference.

**Powering a green future:** 100% of the electricity used by Valamar came from renewable sources. We reduced carbon emissions per occupied accommodation unit by 72% compared to the base year of 2015.

**Savouring local flavours:** 78% of the food and beverages at Valamar come from local producers. We partnered with the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) to procure sustainable seafood and protect the Adriatic Sea and biodiversity, marking the

first such collaboration in the hotel sector in Croatia.

**Growing green initiatives:** We composted 347 tons of organic waste and, along with our guests, planted over 9000 new trees as part of the Easy as One, Two, Tree donation campaign.

**Investing in our people:** The Roof Over Your Head and Live the Destination programmes measure provide rental allowances and financial incentives to permanent, fixed-term and long-term seasonal employees who live or relocate to the place where they work, promoting year-round work and local employment.

**Nurturing young minds:** We support local schools and kindergartens by securing additional spaces for the little ones and

providing healthy food for their snacks. We also support the Poreč summer camp and aid local artists through a painting colony.

**Brightening children's futures:** We've maintained the longstanding humanitarian programme 1000 Days on the Adriatic, which has hosted more than 4000 children without parental care, from low-income families as well as children with special needs and health issues.

**Leading with sustainability:** We joined the Science Based Targets initiative and became a member of the UN Global Compact. We were rated highest in sustainability in Croatia by Bloomberg Adria and received multiple national and international awards for our sustainability initiatives.

# Regeneration as a mindset: going beyond just local

*"If I were to write an alphabet for the regenerative approach, 'm' would stand for mindset; that's the main difference between sustainability and regeneration," says Irena Ateljević, Ph.D., expert and keynote speaker with a signature address headlined "Regeneration: When Sustainability Is No Longer Sustainable."*

*We're there, it seems.*

words by Vesna Čelebić

Sustainability has been the prefix of 'development' for decades now. As a concept, 'sustainable development' was introduced in the UN-sponsored Brundtland Report that defined it as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." That was back in 1987.

Since, we've had many checkpoints on the state of affairs, with countries and transnational bodies coming together to consult on climate matters, biological diversity and sustainable development. In 1992, 170 countries participated at the Rio Earth Summit; in 1997, 192 countries signed the Kyoto Protocol; and 196 signed the Paris Agreement at the 2015 UN Climate Change Conference.

The discussions and the issues grew more serious each time around; in the light of climate data, it eventually became obvious that 'sustainability' was taking the backseat to 'development', instead of being its equal. Finally, during the pandemic, the daunting realisation dawned on us: we could lower the carbon levels to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement only if we stopped everything we were doing.

"We should refrain from cataclysmic thinking," says Irena Ateljević. "In the words of Rob Hopkins, one of my favourite authors, we paralyse people with it. As he pointed out, Martin Luther King didn't start his world-altering speech with the words: 'I have a nightmare!'; he said: 'I have a dream!'".



In this context, the dream is the regenerative approach. It is not a novelty but it does require that we question our current paradigm and make a conscious upgrade to the idea of sustainability. Rather than seeing development as an isolated process, the idea is to take on a holistic view, see the connection in everything we are and do, and understand that all those things are an equal part of the planet's ecosystem, not superior to it or isolated from it.

Rather than simply continuing what we have been doing and borrowing too much from our children, the regenerative approach suggests we should start to heal and improve ourselves and our environment through reconnecting with what really matters.

A passionate advocate for regeneration with a Ph.D. in Human Geography, Irena Ateljević has deep academic and professional experience that spans two decades of teaching at universities in New Zealand and the Netherlands, as well as doing advisory work for governments, NGOs and communities. Yet at the peak of her international career, she decided to return to Croatia. "I was living in the asphalted centre of Amsterdam, giving keynotes anywhere from Brazil to Finland and talking a lot," say Ateljević, "but I didn't know how to plant a tomato. So I decided to come back to my native land and try to walk the talk."

Ateljević sold her apartment and purchased land in an abandoned village in

the hinterland of Šibenik, an area that has been left to its own demise after the Croatian Homeland War. With the help of local artisans and last remaining villagers who provided in-depth knowledge about local ways of life, little by little she revitalised the stone houses on the property, restored the land and established Terra Meera (meaning 'the land of peace'), a Centre for Regeneration and Human Potential. She also founded the burgeoning Regenerate Europe platform and annual conference for changemakers.

Those who come to Terra Meera on holidays can stay in one of the two houses on the premises, enjoy homegrown food and bountiful insights into the local culture. Ateljević's plans for the land include



building a geodesic dome and eco-friendly accommodations, all the while growing Terra Meera into a place where visionaries and forward-thinkers come together to plot a better future for our planet and those of us on it.

“When leaving Terra Meera, my guests always leave the place just as beautiful as they found it, often even better. That’s because they can see there is a lot of love here. They see that we compost and recycle, so they do it, too. When we love our place, we take care of it; our guests see that and in turn, they care for it, too,” says Ateljević. “After all, what is hospitality? Etymologically, it means to hospice, to heal.”

One of the ongoing initiatives at Terra Meera is a tree planting action, to revitalise the soil further. As its founding stone, the regenerative approach calls

for healing of the land to encourage local food production. “We need to regenerate the top soil, as that is like the Earth’s skin,” explains Ateljević, “and we’ve literally burnt it with the use of pesticides. Which is why we feel so vulnerable collectively. As in the human body, the skin is designed to protect us.”

Following WWII, many chemical weapon factories were simply repurposed for the making of pesticides that were then used to foster industrial production of monocultures. At the same time, they killed all the living organisms in the top soil, the ones that could absorb the CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere and bring it back into the life cycle through photosynthesis. Regenerative agriculture employs various techniques to recover from this, from the use of manure to permaculture, agroforestry and diversified planting. “It’s not enough to just have local food,

it needs to be produced with this way of thinking,” clarifies Irena.

Around Croatia you’ll find many wonderful examples of small producers whose regenerative-minded production is thriving. Mato Goravica on the island of Šipan grows carobs; at Valamar, we source his excellent carob flour. The Križ winery on the Pelješac peninsula insists on a completely regenerative approach in their vineyards; their wines are divine. Šinjinorina Smokva produces jams with only one ingredient – organic fruit.

There’s another stellar example right “at home”: Valfresco Direkt, Valamar’s direct food delivery service. Valfresco is the perfect answer to a question frequently posed when discussing regeneration, the one of scalability. If regeneration depends largely on the individual change in mindset, what can “the big guys” do?



In addition to integrating responsible practices in our own backyard, such as planting trees and supporting local communities, large corporations like Valamar provide a platform for small producers. Valfresco Direkt is just that: a pathway that enables small local producers of original products to find their way to guests directly, who otherwise may not have the chance to find them and try their products. The benefits go both ways; they reward the local community but also our guests visiting Croatia on holidays.

Tourism as an industry has great power, for it is multisectoral and global more than any other industry. From furniture and fixtures, to buildings and infrastructure, to boats and planes, to prints and apps, to people and experiences, tourism is perhaps one of the most complex and comprehensive systems in the world. "Regenerative tourism is local in every way," says Ateljević.

As a traveller, you may be asking what can you do to be more regenerative. Many things. You can fly direct whenever possible. Bike more, even if just on holidays. Grow a flower in springtime to feed the bees. Buy locally produced souvenirs and groceries. But most importantly, you can nurture the mindset.

"We need to bring our presence into everything we do," Ateljević concludes. "When eating a delicious meal, think about how many things had come together in order for that dish to arrive to your plate; from the wind and the sun and the rain, to the farmer and his tools, to the supermarket and the person doing the cooking... While eating, see if you can remember this whole process happened just for you to savour that single finger-licking bite."

Gratitude. It seems like such an easy place to start on our road to regeneration.

## THE DELIGHTS OF ISLAND LIVING ON HVAR

# A visit to Fjori Fôra garden



Atop a windswept plateau on the eastern side of Hvar island's heartland, an expanse of endless views unfolds before us. The autumn sun casts a golden hue over the sea, a scene that feels both ethereal and timeless. We're standing on the viewing platform of Fjori Fôra botanical garden, near the inland village of Gdinj. Fjori Fôra, meaning "the flowers of Hvar," is home to around 80 species of indigenous plants strewn over 2500 m<sup>2</sup> and representing Hvar in miniature, as its creators like to say.

The rolling hills all around are a vibrant green; rocky landscapes cascade towards the coastline. Whispers of early October wind carry a heady mix of Mediterranean herbs, like wild oregano, rosemary, sage, myrtle, lavender, pine and the sweet-smelling immortelle. Far beyond the glitz and glamour of Hvar's summertime seaside scene, Fjori Fôra is an opportunity to experience the island's essence.



Hvar is home to nearly 1200 plant species, 44 of which are unique to the island. Dubbed “the lavender island,” it has a long history of lavender cultivation. The plant even inspired its very own superhero, the legendary Lavender Man, cruising around on a white Vespa clad in a purple leotard.

This richness of plant life is what inspired Fjori Fôra. The brainchild of Kristina Lazaneo, an agronomist and landscape designer, the garden brings to life a vision of the local Ćurin family, who have been growing lavender since 1955, harvesting the herbs by hand and producing top-quality essential oils. It took three years to grow and unveil their love letter to Hvar’s biodiversity. Today, this fragrant heaven of island bliss is a vibrant hub for learning about plants and ecology and a meeting place for locals and visitors to the island. The garden hosts educational and community events, including nature and art workshops, poetry evenings, DJ nights, wine tastings and even senior dance parties.

On a mild October day, we join Kristina for a tour of the garden, to catch a glimpse of life on the island at the tail end of another tourist season. Fjori Fôra sits on what was once a vineyard, lavender and rosemary fields, all reclaimed from overgrowth, then filled with seeds, cuttings and mature wild plants from across the island. Arranged into six plots, it showcases medicinal flora, edibles, plants used for cosmetics and textile-dyeing, honey plants and poisonous varieties, useful as insect repellents and natural pesticides. Its circular design is inviting and organic, showcasing a series of paths lined with plant beds, with a few round tables for workshops and mingling.

Through the garden you can glimpse a slower pace of life and appreciate the profusion of plant life that makes year-round island living both appealing and sustainable. Hvar is roughly the size of Malta (around 300m<sup>2</sup>), which has a population of around half a million. Hvar has

barely 10,000 permanent inhabitants. Away from the main towns, there are large swathes of land covered with evergreens, where nature has been left undisturbed or mindfully tended by the islanders. Deeply connected to this land, they know its secrets; for example, cutting wild plants correctly helps their growth, potency and resilience. There is a delicate symbiosis between the island’s people and its flora.

On our wander through the garden, we’re enchanted by the scents and sights of myriad plants, from the well-known Mediterranean species such as aloe, marigold, camomile, sage and bay leaf to the more mysterious hottentot fig, absinthe wormwood and the intriguingly named exploding cucumber. Kristina blends scientific insights with local folklore, revealing the remarkable richness and diversity of Hvar’s flora. We learn that not all is what it seems. What is poisonous can be healing and



what is edible can also be poisonous, so you really need to know your plants. We discover just how abundant the island is in edible “weeds” that can proudly grace any a Michelin-starred chef’s table.

In the garden, every detail tells a story: of the splendour of island flora and the resourcefulness of its people, of times past and of their harmonious coexistence with nature. Fjori Fôra, its design both informative and playful, is filled with quirky objects – an antique apothecary cabinet here, an old bath filled with aromatic herbs there. You can snap a photo in a flower-painted vintage car or don a bee-keeper’s attire. It’s a place where you can return to time and again to witness the beauty of seasons changing and reconnect with the soul of the island. With the

largest number of sunny days in Croatia and mild winters with plentiful rainfall, Hvar provides everything for a life intricately bound with nature.

Abundant seafood, fresh vegetables and wild plants are available throughout the year, complemented by heavenly figs, pomegranates, honey and hefty doses of delicious local olive oil. The timeless tradition of food exchange remains integral to island culture, weaving close-knit communities. Fishermen share their catch with neighbours, who reciprocate with olive oil or wine from their own harvests. These age-old features of island life, from the healthy Mediterranean diet to the elegant bartering system, still provide the essential glue that binds the islanders together.

With the island pulsating to the rhythm of two main seasons, a delicate balance is struck. Summers bring a lively tapestry of colours and increased activity, along with tourism income, while winters offer a backdrop for introspection and a rekindling of connections with nature and community. For those attuned to the island’s natural cycles, life on Hvar offers a more deliberate, mindful way of living – an antidote to the frenetic pace of today’s world.

A stroll through Fjori Fôra comes as a gentle nudge to pause, take a breath and smell the flowers. It’s an invitation to a slower, calmer and more fragrant existence in harmony with nature. As we wrap our visit with a sip of local cherry *rakija*, a giant praying mantis sits calmly, perched on a laurel bush. Unhurriedly, it seems to nod in agreement.



# BOŠKARIN

## Istria's own breed of cattle

*For Istrians, boškarin is an ode to the past and a symbol of deep connection with the land. They see this indigenous breed of cattle as a living monument to the labour of love that has sustained the peninsula's people over the centuries. For visitors, boškarin is a delicacy unique to the region that can't be savoured elsewhere, which makes it a must-try when in Istria.*



## A gift that keeps on giving

Romans roamed Istria for centuries. Across the peninsula, there are mosaics and villas, temples and arches, and the world-praised Pula Amphitheatre to attest to those times. While historians claim these material traces are the greatest testaments to the Roman legacy in the region, local folk beg to differ.

As the records have it, the Romans were the first to use the huge brawny Istrian oxen, *boškarin*, to do their heavy lifting, like pulling carts or ploughs. Centuries later, Venetians had *boškarin*-dragged wagons of Istrian stone and oak shipped over to build Venice. Time passed, legions marched, rulers changed; the Romans left, the Serenissima disappeared but *boškarin* stuck around.

## The harmony between men and oxen

Istrian cattle is today considered a sort that is indigenous to Istria. *Boškarin* was an ox's first name but it has over time become colloquially synonymous with the breed of cattle.

Its huge curved horns are definitely the most recognisable feature but *boškarin*'s mighty presence is a sight to behold. Coated with a plain white-grey hair, oxen typically weigh around 1300 kilograms (the largest ever, called Serožin, weighs a tonne and a half). Bulls are slightly smaller at 900 kilograms, while cows range around 650 kilograms.

Over their many shared centuries, these gentle bovine giants became indispensable to the Istrian peasants. Living a field-work-heavy lifestyle, the Istrians relied on *boškarins*' endurance and strength for anything from pulling cargo, like tree trunks from forests for construction to ploughing fields and tending to vineyards and olive groves that today mark the scenery of Terra Magica, as Istria is also known. Needless to say, cattle was also a source of meat and dairy products.

Crucial to livelihood, *boškarin* became the treasure of each Istrian family. This is why the local folk in Istria see *boškarin* as the greatest gift the Romans had bestowed upon their native lands.

## The need for conservation

When the 20th century rolled around with its industrialisation and machinery, tractors slowly started taking over arduous tasks typically done by *boškarins*. And so its role steadily diminished over time. With machines doing the work and new better-yielding cattle sorts, the math was simply not there for breeders. The downfall was swift; from some 10,000 animals in the 1970s, about a hundred remained in the 1990s.

The first conservation efforts were made in the 1990s with the formation of the Association of the Istrian Cattle Breeders. With the new millennia came the need for an improved coordination between the public and private sectors, and the Agency for Rural Development of Istria (known as AZRRI) was established in 2003. Its efforts to institute initiatives and breeding programmes had praise-worthy results. Today, the Istrian cattle numbers are over 2000, and some are even bred in other parts of Croatia.

## What's a label worth?

In 2023, the meat of Istrian cattle *boškarin* was entered in the EU register of protected designations of origin. Such labels are important for quality and production controls as well as limiting the black market. They are also key to branding unique delicacies like this one.

Thanks to the oxen's modest diet (which you might find hard to believe given its size), the meat of *boškarin* is quite lean. The animals graze in the open on wild herbs and grasses, making their meat rich with mineral salts, so it's easy to prepare and soften, and also easier to digest.

Traditionally, *boškarin* stars in stews with various vegetables and beans, like *maneštra*, or in *šugo*, a goulash-like sauce that tops homemade gnocchi or handmade *fuži* pasta. Sausages made of its meat are another local delight, sometime blended with another Istrian treat – truffles.

On your travels in Istria, make sure to taste a delight, or a few, made of *boškarin* meat. As you feast, don't forget to toast to the Romans and their bountiful bequest.

## At Valamar, we treasure *boškarin*

In Valamar restaurants, *boškarin* is celebrated and showcased in all its splendour. At the elegant Spinnaker restaurant in Poreč, it stars in the signature dish, *Boškarin & Teran*, which is part of the tasting menu called 'Istrian Fables'. Inspired by the local legend of Veli Jože, a kind-hearted big-footed giant from the forests of Motovun, the dish pairs the mighty *boškarin* with the wild taste of teran wine, resulting in a sophisticated rhapsody of local flavours.

At Konoba Bokoon in Istria Premium Camping Resort, *boškarin* shines prepared as a traditional goulash served with homemade *fuži* pasta, but also as carpaccio. In the authentic ambience of an Istrian konoba where fire crackles in an open hearth, feel deep respect of the Istrian way of living come alive on the plate and in warm hospitality.

## An ox with its own park

To learn more about *boškarin*, visit the thematic Istrian Ox Park in Kanfanar, located on the grounds of an old cattle trading venue. Among other fun exhibits, you can see how this amazing animal grows from a small calf of 30 kilograms to a mighty ox of one tonne. And if your timing is right, you can watch the selection of the best *boškarin*, staged each year on St. Jacob's Day, July 25.



# It's Piazza time!

Get together  
while on holiday

*Imagine this: you're surrounded by dazzling views of the Adriatic, the warm sun is kissing your skin and an irresistible sense of joy fills the air.*

*The intoxicating fragrance of summer seeps deep into your pores – you're on that camping holiday you've been dreaming about all year!*

*But there's one secret ingredient taking your holiday mood to the next level: the simple pleasure of getting together with others. And one spot at your camping resort does this best.*



## Because everything is better together

There's something magical about meeting new people and connecting with those you already know well while camping. Whether you're bonding over a game, sharing a laugh during a meal or letting loose with a spontaneous dance party, the bliss of being together is incomparable. You're building a bridge of holiday memories that will last a lifetime, after all.

It's in those moments of camaraderie that you truly experience the essence of your destination. Through the stories, laughter and shared experiences, you dive into the heart and soul of the place you're visiting. It's no longer just a spot on the map, but your holiday home of connection and belonging. And all of the magic happens – at the Piazza!

## La dolce vita vibes

Italians coined the term long ago to name open squares or public places in a city or town. Today, piazzas can be found around the world. But here's the thing – piazzas have since transformed from architectural marvels into vibrant meeting places where cultures collide, conversations flow and connections thrive.

These bustling spaces attract all walks of life and foster a sense of community, whether you're savouring a cup of coffee at a cafe, watching live performers or chit-chatting while you shop for fresh produce. They remind us of the power of human connection, making destinations livelier, more inclusive and brimming with life. And because every town has a piazza or two, it only makes sense that all five of Valamar's premium camping resorts have theirs as well.

## Where people meet, have fun and eat

The central square at Valamar's premium camping resorts is a hub where you get to discover the flavours and aromas of the destination, from the region of Istria to the islands of Rab and Krk. These Piazzas are decked out with bakeries, cafes and dessert spots. A carefully curated selection of fresh produce, local products and drink shops keep you stocked all holiday long. At some of our Piazzas, you'll even find clothing stores and beauty salons.

The restaurant and bar scene on the Piazza offers the perfect warm-up for lively entertainment programmes, concerts and events in the evenings. It really doesn't matter how you choose to enjoy your time, because each Piazza reflects the image of the camping resort and destination, creating an animated platform where people meet, have fun and eat.





## Your perfect Piazza day

Start your Piazza morning with a warm coffee paired with a sweet treat. Get to the bakery in time to pick up a piping hot loaf of bread or fresh pastries to bring back for a beachside brunch. While you're at it, the green market is stocked with the freshest fruits and veggies or you can shop for cured meats, wine and a range of local products.

Before heading out for a pre-lunch swim, browse the beach shop and swing by the kiosk to grab a magazine to read. Kids will love visiting the Sweet&Petite shop for a post-swim treat, and at some camping resorts there's even a spot for your hair and beauty needs.

As the evening rolls around, the Piazza amps up those heady summer vibes. Treat yourself to pizza or a street food snack and feel the square come alive with entertainment, whether it's a concert or event. And if you ever hit a holiday roadblock?

The Istra, Lanterna, Krk, Padova and Ježevac Premium Camping Resorts each feature a destination-worthy Piazza, making it easy to embrace the joy of getting together while on holiday.

Meet at the Piazza?



# The man, the sea and octopus

## *Sušeni štokalj,* a tradition that kept an island fed

words by Anja Mutić

There are some tastes that remain with you. And often, it's not about the flavour itself but the story that goes with it. On Rab in Croatia's Kvarner Gulf, an island known for its 30 magnificent beaches and the catchy nickname of "happy island," this story features *štokalj*, as Rab islanders call octopus. Wind-dried and unique in taste, this dish – most often served with a *fritaja*, an egg omelette – has been a staple of island cuisine for generations. Today, a number of restaurants on Rab serve *sušeni štokalj*, dried octopus, a nod

to a tradition that has kept the island fed throughout history.

Dried octopus was once poor people's food, as prime-quality fish that fishermen used to catch got sold off; octopus was widespread, easy to get, packed with flavour and nutritious. A great source of lean protein, this shellfish is rich in many vitamins and minerals essential for good health, including omega-3 fatty acids, vitamin B12 and selenium. In other words, perfect sustenance.



I went out to Rab on a windy October day to find out more about this almost forgotten food that's having a revival and catching the attention of visitors who flock to the island from all around the globe. My mission was twofold: to learn more about how octopus hunting is done and also how this sea bounty became the star of the traditional island dish.

I caught up with a couple of local fishermen and our chats revealed a whole range of small discoveries about octopus, the way it is caught and why it's best dried when the bura wind blows. Before the trip, I had no idea that octopus on Rab was called *štokalj*; in Croatian, the official word is *hobotnica*. But Rab islanders have their own name for the tentacled creature, though it's also sometimes used on other islands of the region, including Pag, Lošinj and Cres.

I learned that octopus hunting is typically done by *batana*, a small boat with glass at the bottom of its prow. This particular type of boat is also called *samica*; "*sam*" means "alone" in Croatian, and octopus hunting is mostly done as a solo endeavour. Octopus can be challenging to spot, which is why the fisherman lies face down and observes the sea bottom through the glass, lighting up the sea floor by a *feral*, a strong fishing light.

"Fishing is a solitary job. Sometimes we're out at sea for 13 hours at a time," said Marin Fafija, one of the islanders I spoke to, who is the fifth down a long generational line of fishermen in his family.

Talking to Fafija, I learned about the best conditions for catching octopus. Nighttime is prime, especially closer to the morning, ideally half an hour before sunrise. Currents are important, too – flow tide, when the sea is rising, is much better than ebb tide. The full moon is a particularly fruitful time for octopus hunting. "You need to have a very good eye for octopus," explained Fafija. "It's just so good at hiding."

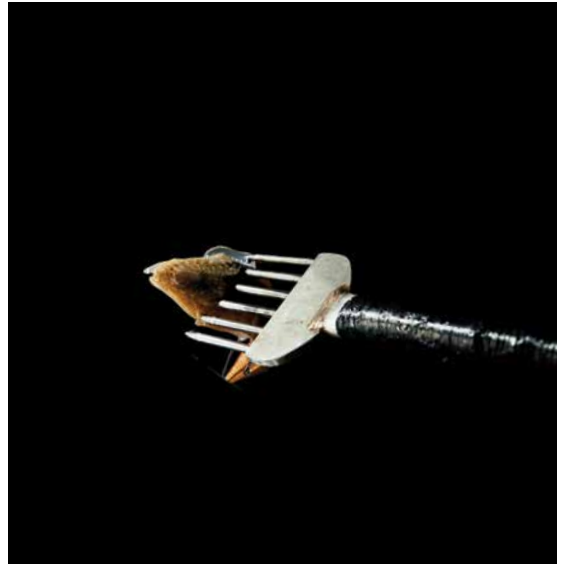


So much has been said in recent years about the incredible intelligence of these cephalopods – plus the octopus is just so adorable – that I couldn't help but ask Marin: "You don't feel at least a little bad about catching it?"

"It's as if you were to ask a winemaker if he feels bad picking the grapes in his vineyard," he responded. "These creatures have been our life and livelihood for generations. And to be honest, we're happy when there are still octopus to catch."

The biggest octopus he caught in his career weighed 13kg and the most he caught in one night was nine bucketsful of octopus, which together weighed about 180kg. But with climate change, even sea life isn't as it used to be. These days, octopus is harder to find and the weather patterns aren't as predictable as they used to be. This past winter, the three *marčane bure*, the *bura* storms of March that traditionally mark the shift from winter to spring, didn't even happen.





It's the *bura* winds that are used for drying octopus tentacles for *sušeni štokalj*. *Bura* is a cold northeasterly that feels chilling to the bone even when the sun is out. Though unpleasant while blowing, it's also known to clear up hazy skies and bring clean, crisp air that's perfect for drying food. That's why when *bura* blows, you'll often see octopus stretched out on pieces on wood hung up on terraces and verandahs where there's the best air circulation. You'll spot it either whole, its eight

tentacles nailed down, or just individual tentacles. Once out in the *bura* wind, it takes at least three days of a blow-dry to give it that required taste and texture.

When dried and sea-salted, the traditional delicacy is ready for cooking up. A hint: never use frozen octopus for this dish; the key is to use fresh air-dried octopus. To prepare it, the tentacles are typically cut up into slices, which are then sautéed in a pan with a bit of olive oil, some onions and then eggs poured

on top. No added salt is necessary, as octopus itself gets so salty that you'll likely get all the sodium you need.

The octopus dish you get, *sušeni štokalj*, is a feast of flavours. It's also Rab encapsulated and served on a plate. It captures beautifully not just the taste of the Adriatic Sea but also life on the island as it has been for generations.

# Barefoot fun at Maro World

words by Vesna Čelebić,  
*echoing her children Sven (aged 11) and Marlena (aged 5)*

"Is that a slide? Inside?" my thoughts pound as excitement floods my body. We are standing at the doorstep of Maro World in Dubrovnik, my little sister, mum and I.

While mum is chatting away with the receptionist, my little sister and I, charged with energy, grow giraffe-like necks trying to see what is inside. We slide out of our shoes off right there and shower our mum with the prettiest-big-eyed nudges to let us delve in right away. Before her nod is complete, we're half way up the stairs.

There, within a cage-like structure, awaits the object of my suspenseful affection, a huge metallic tube that winds downhill.

We climb into the cage and make our way through a series of padded boxes with obstacles, all soft and cushy. When we finally advance to the gaping entrance into the tube, I feel over the moon to have my suspicions turn out correct: this place has an indoor slide!

We go down rumbling like an avalanche and dive into a pool of colourful balls at the bottom end. It's so much fun splashing about while balls burst into the air, and also throwing them at my little sister.

Mental note to self: I want an indoor slide for Christmas and a pool with colourful balls.



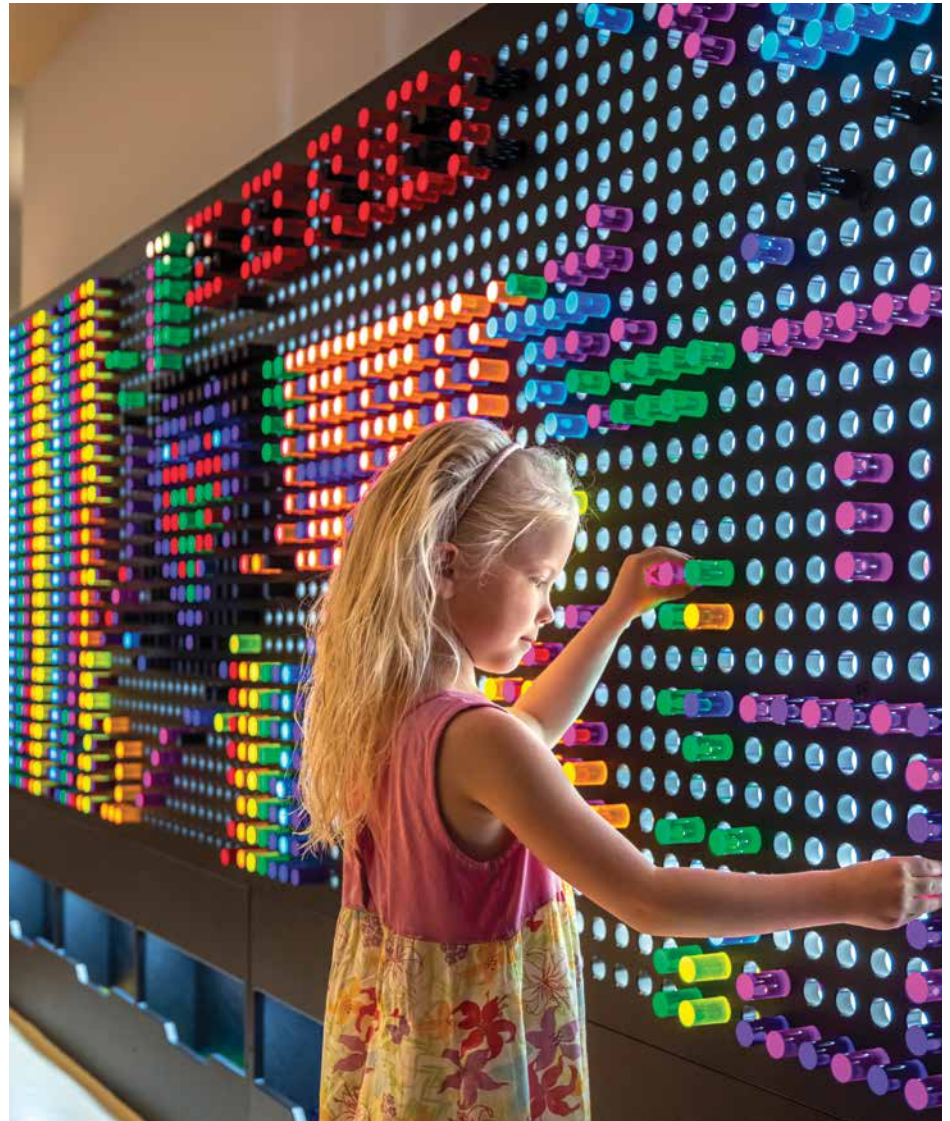


When we finally wiggle out, a vast space opens up before us, a maze that is to be explored immediately. The first room is dubbed the Smart Play area; this is where we exercise our brains. There's a Lego playground with massive tables and more Legos than I have ever seen. Then a humongous pile of large blue squishy pieces, pipes, arches, nuts and bolts that I can connect into roads, crossroads and bridges, or something so evolved that it doesn't have a name yet.

My sister is giggling away at the Litezilla display, where every time she moves a pin into a hole, the hole lights up in a different

colour. Meanwhile, I get busy at the Busy Board. It's a wooden wall that's dotted with equally spaced holes and there are many wooden pins, levers, planks, nuts and bolts for me to use. Somebody before me wrote out 'Dubrovnik' using different coloured pins but I go for a multilevel sloping trail with obstacles, hoping to ultimately send a ball down without it falling off.

We could have stayed at it all day, but some kids were laughing next door, so we just had to go see what that was all about. As we enter the room, I spot soft balls scattered on the floor so I shoot one into the goal projected on the wall.



And the goalie jumps! He jumps - in the wrong corner! OMG, not only am I in the lead but you can play soccer here even if it's raining outside.

You can also chase space ships, colour dinosaurs with your hands and watch figures on the wall mimic your dance moves in real time. Instead, I opt to follow the sound of 1980s music down a long hallway. At its end is every gamers' daydream, a large lounge with dimmed lights, oversized beanie bags and screens larger than, well... even myself. The latest in PlayStation, Nintendo, even the racing wheel for Gran Turismo... I am crying tears of joy.

My dream-coming-true runs into a small hindrance when I discover that I can't play games over my age grade without my mum's sign-off. These people are in cahoots with parents. Since I am clueless about where my shoes might be, I decide to skip finding mum and instead just chill and play for a while.

Later I go and find my sister in artistic heaven. She has spent that entire time colouring cute sea creatures like fish and squid and sea horses, and then scanning them to see them come up all wiggly in a virtual aquarium displayed on the wall.

When she smacks her palm on a treasure chest at the bottom of the virtual sea, food for her pets comes floating out. The little ones are so easily entertained!

She's also barefoot, so we strategise to look for our shoes before we look for mum. We decide to retrace our steps and go back to the slide, but we spot something colourful outside the floor-to-ceiling lounge windows. Is that really a terrace-sized trampoline? Oh yes, it is! With a basketball hoop, tower with screens in the centre and something that looks like a Ninja course.



With no shoes on, we are as ready as can be. I head straight to the tower, where I jump and try to smack bouncing light balls that pop up on the screen. Each one that I hit, I get a point. It takes a while, but I prance with pride when I set a new record on my screen. My sister, who is on the Ninja course, is embodying Mowgli and swinging on a gigantic wrecking ball. People who made this were so smart to put a separate trampoline area for babies and little kids so we don't have to trample over them.

Back inside, we discover yet another space, but behind closed doors, which means we must see what that's all about. Called 'The Maro Club,' it has a Mini area for little ones, with a mini-kitchen, mini-tools and mini-games, and then a Maxi area, for big kids like myself who like board games, science stuff and foosball. This is where we'd hang out if our parents wanted to leave to do boring adult stuff like drink coffee, stroll by the sea or go for a massage.

In that case, we'd have to have our Maro World passports made, detailing what our parents were down with and what they are not so thrilled about, and other important things like allergies or food restrictions (that's because there's free ice cream and sodas!). We'd also get bracelets; a green one if we were old enough to go back to the hotel on our own and red ones if we had to wait for our parents to pick us up. Since our mum didn't want to leave Maro World, we got nothing. Bummer.



## Maro World

- 1800 m<sup>2</sup>
- 13 play areas
- daily entertainment programmes
- suitable for ages 1–99
- open all day
- free for Valamar guests



Mum spent the whole time reading a book in the lounge, but that's now over as a horde of eager five- and six-year-olds flocks for the evening dance programme. Suddenly, Baby Shark is blasting through the room and kids are dancing away to the choreography by a lively animator. Maro the Crab arrives in person to dance with them and high-five everyone. By the end of the dance party, the kids go into a total craze.

When our time to leave arrives, we take

photos with the huge plush Maro mascot by the reception desk. The receptionist giggles at our feet. Oooooops, we forgot about the shoes again! Grinning, she hands us the shoes from behind the counter where she has kept them safe this entire time.

As we put our shoes back on, I tell mum that we have to come back to Maro World, where you don't have to worry about anything other than fun and play.





# The rise of lifestyle hotels and the boom of our own PLACES

The realm of travel is constantly undergoing a remarkable shift, to keep up with today's trends that lead to pushing the 'BOOK NOW' button. As travel evolves and new temptations lurk, hotels are endlessly tasked with redefining the art of hospitality. And so, it was only a matter of time before they found a way to cater to comfort and curated experiences, community, destination exploration and hip modern aesthetics - for a wholly immersive hotel stay.

Enter the recent rockstars of hospitality: lifestyle hotels. These aren't your cookie-cutter accommodations. Instead, they're the cool kids on the block and the ultimate trendsetters on the travel scene. They're not just about fluffing pillows and turning down beds. They're all about crafting an entire vibe, a lifestyle and an experience that is as unique as you are.

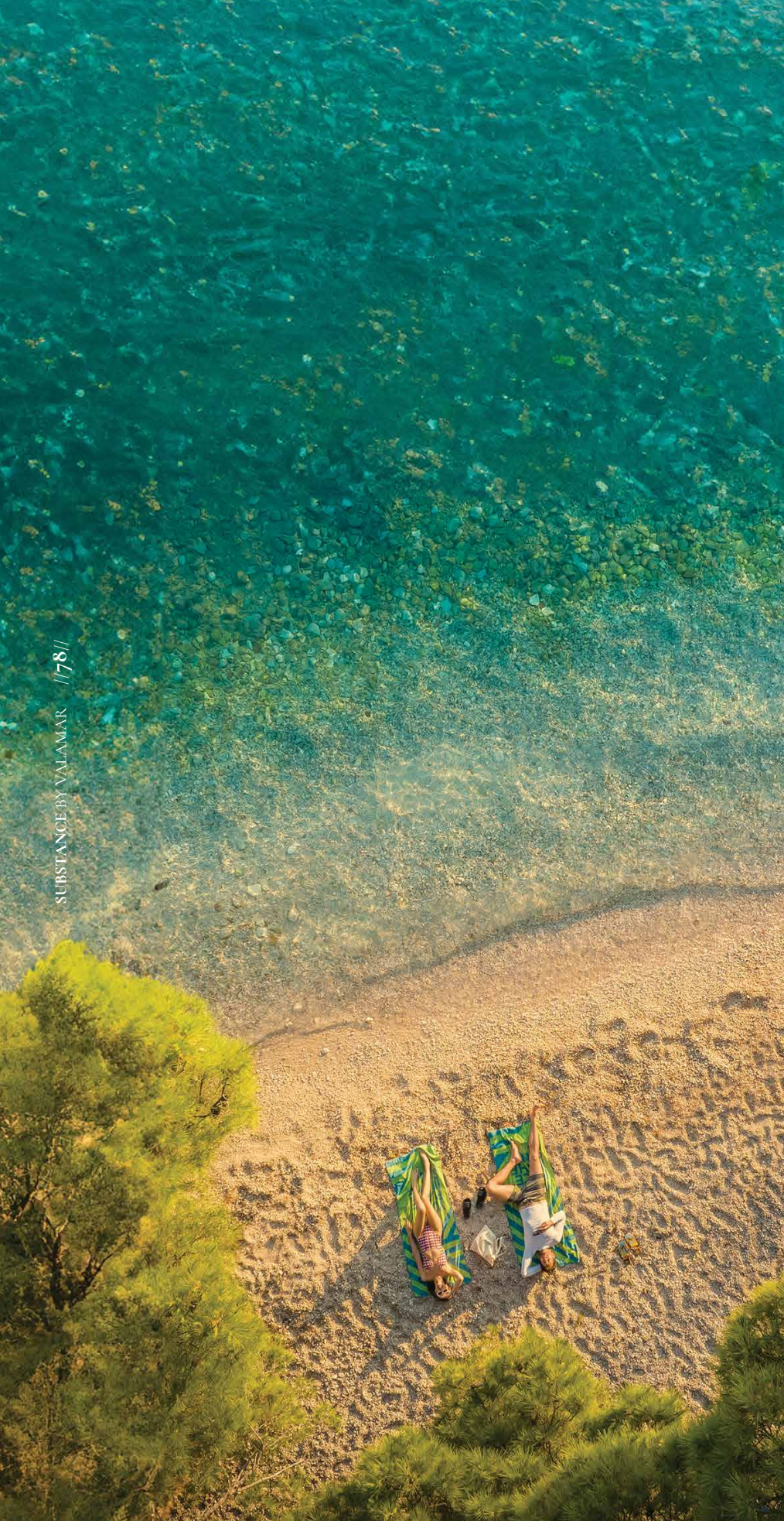
## So, how did we get here?

The lifestyle hotel concept emerged in the 1980s and quickly gained momentum. Boutique hotels were among the early pioneers, introducing a more personalised and tailored approach compared to the standardised offerings of traditional hotel chains.

Some might say this hospitality trend began thanks to disco-fabulous Studio 54 players Ian Schrager and Steve Rubell, who opened the Morgans Hotel in New York in 1984 as the world's first boutique hotel. Embodying a fresh idea with style, design and a unique guest experience at the helm, this hotel set the stage for the lifestyle hotel trend, marking a significant shift on the hospitality scene.

The rise of other influential players continued in the late 1990s and early 2000s, with major hotel chains switching their focus to a more lifestyle-oriented experience. These hotels began prioritising a particular ambience and demographic rather than just providing your run-of-the-mill hotel lodging.

Now, this concept has evolved even further, and branched into various niches, including wellness-focused hotels, art-centric spaces and properties tailored to specific interests or communities. Many hotels are redefining and innovating the guest experience to cater to more modern and millennial travellers. It's safe to say that this trend is here to stay, with lifestyle hotels expected to make up 23% of the hotel development pipeline worldwide by 2025.



## What's the lifestyle hotel experience all about?

What is it that makes these properties really stand out from the rest? Lifestyle hotels embrace a more tailored, experiential approach, and in turn create engaging stays beyond your typical rooms and suites. These up-to-the-minute establishments craft narratives through design, amenities and services, appealing to guests who seek more than your traditional lodging.

Unlike chain hotels, lifestyle hotels curate environments that reflect specific themes. Essentially, this is what makes them ace their knack for turning a regular stay into a rollercoaster of awesome experiences. Their design often merges art, technology and local culture to resonate with guests on a deeper level. Whether through vibrant communal areas, innovative room layouts or art installations, these hotels prioritise aesthetic appeal and guest individuality.



## Where themes, community and sustainability reign supreme

From wellness retreats giving off an instant dose of zen to artsy digs and places inspired by local cultures and traditions, these establishments are all about setting the right mood. Common spaces are designed to encourage mingling, networking and collaboration, fostering a sense of community among guests. This is often amplified by activities, workshops or live entertainment, creating a playground for guests who crave diverse and distinct experiences. Think sunrise rooftop yoga, cocktail-making classes, edgy art installations and pop-up markets where you can snag local treasures.

Staying at these hotels is like being part of an exclusive club where fellow guests are more than just strangers; they're potential friends, adventure buddies

or people you'll swap stories with over breakfast. They offer a stage for scenes where memories are made and stories begin. And all this without leaving the cosy cocoon of your hotel.

Lifestyle hotels are also changing the game in how we experience travel. Mundane check-ins are a thing of the past; instead, a digital wonderland awaits guests, with apps that let you book local experiences, order room service and even chat with fellow travellers. These cashless havens also make you forget that paper money ever existed. Plus you can do away with formalities here, as it's all about high-five service that honours your freedom while on holiday and gives you flexibility to go about your day as you please.

And let's not forget about sustainability. Lifestyle hotels incorporate many ways to really walk the talk. From solar panels and elaborate recycling programs to locally sourced everything, you name it, they're doing it. Because why not save the planet while sipping a latte in the lobby cafe?

Think about a holiday that's more than just a snooze fest. A holiday that steps into a different world where the décor is a feast for the eyes, the vibes are catchy and there's always something cool happening around the corner. A holiday where the hotel is your sidekick in uncovering the local lifestyle and most exclusive experiences, turning your stay into a one-of-a-kind memory-making spree. No wonder Valamar jumped into the lifestyle hotel game, an exciting new arena of hospitality.



## Enter [PLACES] HOTELS

**[PLACES]** HOTELS by Valamar was launched as one of the five brands in our diverse and extensive portfolio of hotels, resorts and camping resorts. It all kicked off with an idea to offer experiences designed for curious modern travellers looking for more than just another place to check off their bucket lists. It was envisioned as a brand for guests looking for freedom of choice, modern design and a local destination experience.

**[PLACES]** by Valamar was born to unlock specific lifestyle values, paying special attention to an all-encompassing experience with environmental sustainability, organically grown ingredients and local traditions at the

forefront of this contemporary philosophy. All this, in turn, allows guests to uncover the destination in a new way.

It was HVAR **[PLACES]** HOTEL & VILLAS that pioneered this new travel trend in Croatia, showcasing to travellers a vibrant Mediterranean holiday by the sea where they can get to know local secrets and the lifestyle on Hvar island genuinely and spontaneously.

The next one in Croatia to follow suit was DALMACIJA **[PLACES]** HOTEL, a hideaway jam-packed with fun times and offering a deep dive into this coastal destination.

It provides guests with an ideal chillout by the Adriatic, with prime access to active explorations of the central Dalmatia region.

Moving away from the sea to the Austrian Alps, OBERTAUERN **[PLACES]** HOTEL is the newest kid on the lifestyle hotel block, created as a haven for travellers on the lookout for alpine holidays fuelled with jolly good times. The first hotel of its kind in the Alps was designed for free spirits and mountain lovers wanting more than somewhere to unwind after a day on the slopes. This wintry hideaway brings the snowy alpine experience to new heights.

## What's the vibe of [PLACES] HOTELS?

It's all about eclectic charm, whether that means minimalist beach-chic design with chill tunes and top-notch cocktails or cosy rooms and suites showcasing alpine décor and après-ski vibes.

No matter which **[PLACES]** hotel you choose, the rooms flaunt extra-comfy beds, top-quality mattresses, smart TVs, super-fast Wi-Fi and all the perks contempo travellers may need. Flexibility and freedom are offered with cashless payments using a wristband and contactless check-in, ensuring privacy and comfort at all times of the day. There's also the **[PLACESAPP]** to elevate the entire experience, as well as the passionate and clued-in **[PLACESPEOPLE]** to win guests over with insider information even Google is hard-pressed to find.

**[PLACESFLEXI]** gives guests the ultimate freedom when wining and dining, with a buffet breakfast and a daily credit for food or booze at the restaurant and bars, which if you don't use can be rolled over to the next day. Options for fun abound, from pools, beaches, rooftop bars and lounges to spas offering signature wellness treatments. A world of possibilities is on deck so you can stay active or simply hang out. As the pillar on which it all stands, **[PLACESNATURE]** highlights the brand's deep respect for and love of nature through the sustainable way the hotels are run.

If you're all about experiences, good vibes and hotels that are more than just a roof over your head, jump on the **[PLACES]** bandwagon. They're not just changing the game; they are the ultimate party hosts of the hospitality world, turning your holiday into a memory-making adventure you'll want to relive, again and again.



# ORANGE WINES

# Sunshine in a glass

words by Morana Zibar

Is orange the new black? When it comes down to wine, that is. If you ask wine aficionados, it might be. The main divide will always be red and white, but the palette of possibilities is actually wider. Just as pink rosé wines a couple of decades ago, orange wines are a new force to be reckoned with. But let's backtrack and get down to basics. What makes a wine orange and how did this emerging trend start?

There is nothing new or revolutionary about producing orange wines. The method is simple and dates back thousands of years, to the very beginnings of winemaking. In short, orange wines are made from white grapes processed as red. Everything that makes red wines distinct – the colour, tannins, rich aromas and flavours – comes from the grape skins and seeds, left in contact with the juice. In the case of orange wine, white grapes

undergo the same procedure: skins are left to ferment with the juice, delivering their added value. This is why orange wines are sometimes called skin-contact wines. The fermentation, usually spontaneous, can last a few days or even over a year. The result is an orange-hued, even amber, complex and intense wine. Deeply flavoured, it lies somewhere in between reds and whites.

Orange wines are not necessarily organic or biodynamic, but their production usually follows the philosophy of minimal human intervention, leaving the process as natural as it can be. That's why there is a thin line between an offbeat, almost oxidised wine and elegant nectar. Good orange wines require healthy, top-quality grapes and a knowledgeable winemaker. When everything aligns just right, you are left with a bottle that can age well and be enjoyed

either on its own, as a contemplative wine, or stand as a perfect match for a dish.

The modern renaissance of orange wines began in northern Italy and Slovenia some 20 years ago. Gradually, the movement has spread all over Europe and it didn't take long for Croatia to jump on the orange train. The pioneer, and still the most dynamic area in exploring this style, is the tiny Plešivica region near Zagreb, Croatia's capital. The first big orange wine that grabbed attention and opened the door for others was Amfora Riesling by the Tomac family. It was kept on skins for six months in amphorae buried in the ground and then aged in oak casks for a year. For such an extreme procedure, the product is impressively fine structured. The aromas range from fresh fruits to deep tertiary notes. This wine truly reflects its terroir and the passion of its makers.



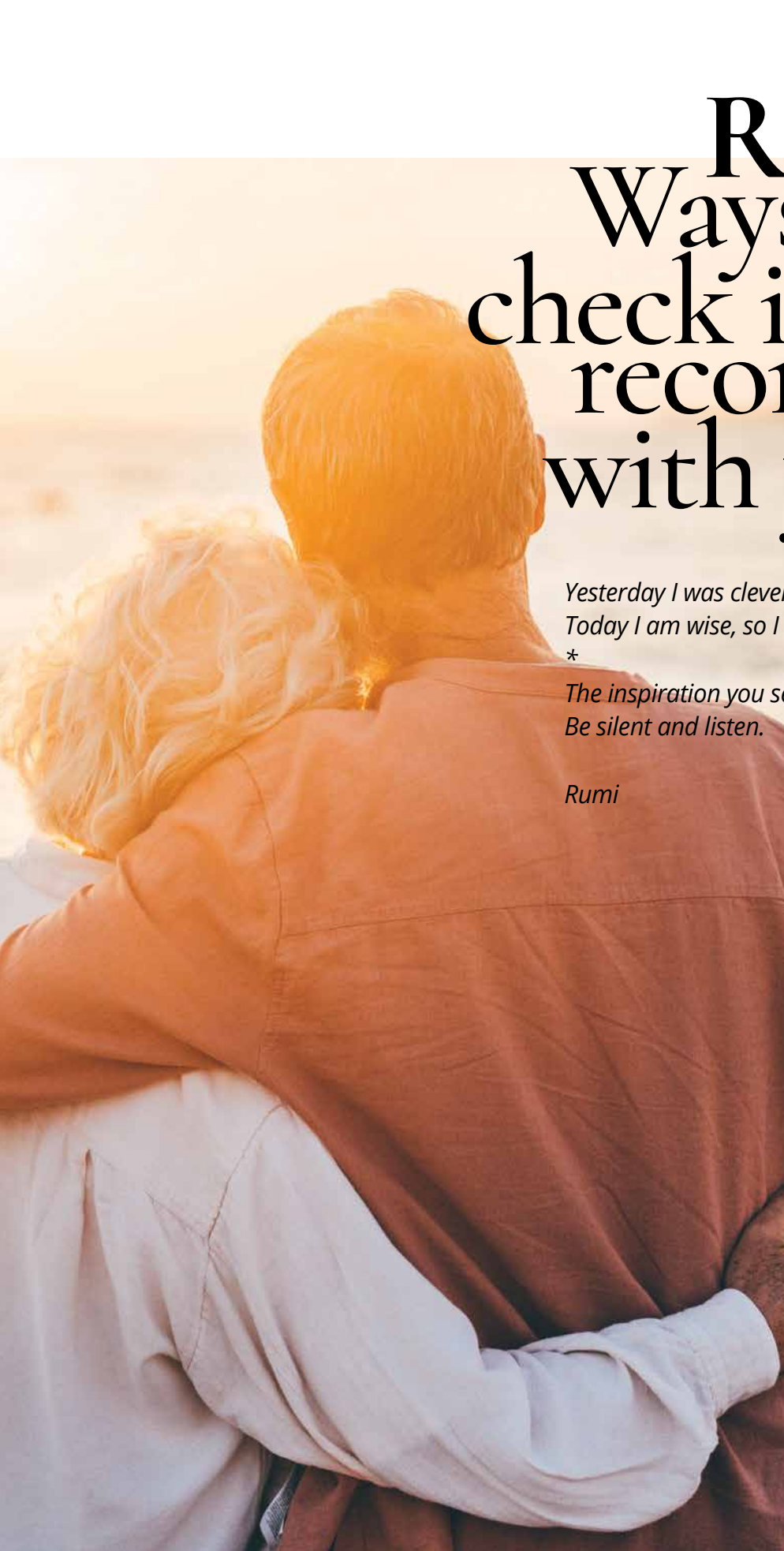


Istria, one of the leading wine regions in Croatia, has readily embraced the orange option as well. Simfonija, a blend of Malvasia and Chardonnay produced by the Dobravac winery, has a cult status among wine lovers. Full-bodied and complex yet well-balanced, it is a very enjoyable and excellent introduction into the world of skin-contact wines. The Ipša family is famous for their superb olive oils, but when they started making wine, orange was the path they took. Their Pinot Gris, a variety not so often found in Istria, is a real treat. The typical characteristics of this globally popular grape are all here, enhanced with spicy notes due to long spontaneous fermentation.

Some winemakers are keen to present their orange version of the Istrian Malvasia, the native grape of the peninsula. Two fine examples are Roxanich Lara and

Cossetto Malvazija Rustica. The Roxanich winery has always been into organic production and unique, unconventional wines. Named after the owner's daughter, the next generation in the winemaking business, Lara is a full-bodied amber wine that ages almost ten years before reaching the market. The Cossetto family uses shorter skin-contact and aging period for their orange wine, but it's made from grapes dried on the vine, only in good years. Their Malvazija Rustica is an intense and robust wine bursting with Mediterranean aromas.

Today, Croatia has a small but lively orange scene, a niche that offers great potential and diversity. To appreciate orange wines, you don't have to be a pro-level connoisseur. It definitely is a whole new world, and it's out there for everyone to discover and taste, to broaden the palate and open up horizons.

A photograph of a man and a woman embracing from behind, looking out at a sunset over a beach. The man is wearing a brown shirt and the woman is wearing a white shirt. The background is a warm, golden glow from the setting sun.

# RESET

## Ways to check in and reconnect with yourself

*Yesterday I was clever, so I wanted to change the world  
Today I am wise, so I am changing myself.*

\*

*The inspiration you seek is already within you.  
Be silent and listen.*

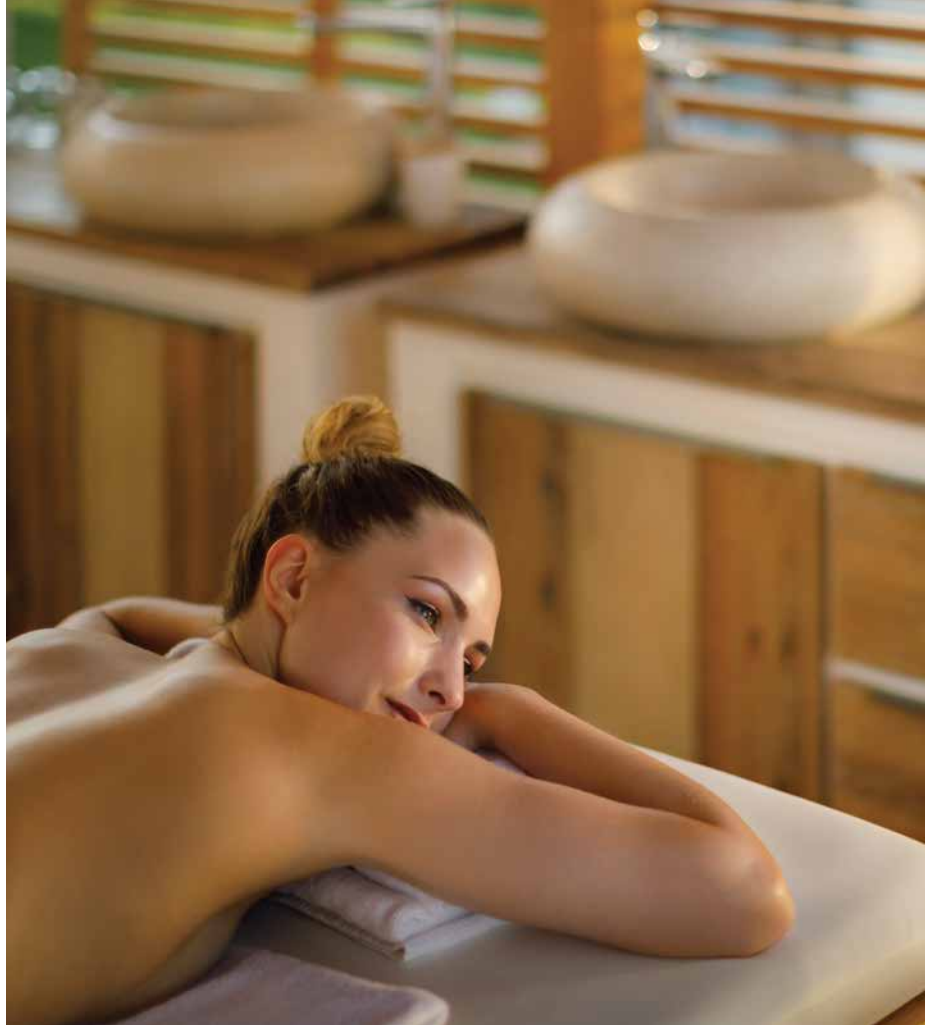
*Rumi*

Modern lives are fast. Between jobs, people, traffic and errands, we are constantly on the move, always in the 'doing' mode. The widespread availability of technology and Wi-Fi has now enabled us to be present in multiple universes at the same time. You can be at work in your office but also half-way across the world at a stock market or on an influencer's honeymoon – or in all these places at the same time.

The minds and souls of modern humans rarely rest. While it's sometimes fun to be busy, in the long run, constant busyness can leave us depleted of that essential vital energy, the joy of living.

While holidays can't make up for the virtue of discipline, they can provide a platform and – more importantly – time for us to try and reconnect with that inner child of ours, the one who abounds with joy and is happy with just being.

So, where to start?



## PUT YOUR PHONE DOWN

'Digital detox' has become such a popular method of getting back to yourself that you can now book holidays where you have to hand over all your gadgets. While some people may be ready for such radical action, others may want to try easing into it. A simple hour per day should not be too long, yet it will free up time to try something else. Spend this time wisely.

## CONNECT WITH THE EARTH

The simple yet profound practice of grounding (aka Earthing) requires nothing from you, except taking off your shoes. As easy as barefoot walking in direct contact with the ground, grounding is a way to reconnect with the Earth's healing energy and to enjoy an electrical discharge in pretty much the same way our appliances do.

Studies that used thermal imaging showed that grounding provides an instant relief from chronic inflammation. By boosting the bioelectrical function of the body, it helps reduce pain and stress, and has shown to improve blood circulation, sleep and overall vitality. It costs nothing, so take off your shoes and feel that mighty ground you stand upon.

## TAKE A WALK

You may already walk a lot in your busy life. After all, going anywhere, even at home, requires us to do some steps, which we diligently count to make it to that magical 10,000 number. There's even a name for it: "secondary purpose walking". This is not that kind of walking.

Find a path near the resort where you're staying; maybe it's a lungomare, a seaside promenade, or an easy forest hike in the mountains. Choose to be present: name

things that you are seeing, stop to check out the details. Soak up the views, smell the flowers and herbs, listen to the sound of waves and tree branches stirring in the wind. Take your feet for a walk but your senses on a journey of discovery.

## TRY YOGA

Many people stay away from yoga because they think they're not bendy enough. But yoga isn't about touching the ground when you bend forward. It's about unifying your movement with the breath so that your inner power carries you through the practice. Contemporary yoga will typically include asanas (body poses), dhyana (meditation) and pranayama (breathing practice), all geared toward calming your mind and relaxing your body.

## GAZE AT THE SUNSET

When was the last time you marvelled at one of the day's greatest events? While on holidays, take the time to delight in the unrushed descent of the gigantic fireball and its magnificent turn of colours. Such simple immersion in the day's moments can help slow down our mind, and even our perception of time. Enjoy a coffee or a glass of wine as you gaze, but make sure to put your phone down – or you'll miss the majesty of the moment.

## PRACTICE SELF-CARE

Self-care is perhaps the most important part of self-love. An easy way to practice it is to treat your body with a massage or a unique treatment. At our Balance Mediterranean Spa, make an afternoon of it. Start with a cold cryosauna, salt and Finnish sauna, then sip on a nourishing smoothie before you indulge in one of our signature treatments inspired by the Mediterranean nature. At our Sun & Spa wellness, enjoy an outdoor massage, breathing in fresh sea-scented air as your body and your mind move from doing to simply being, blissfully.

EARTHBOUND  
NATURAL SNEAKERS

# Good for the planet - and your feet

*Leave nothing but footsteps, an old saying goes. Designed and made in Europe, Earthbound sneakers are a step closer to making that lofty dream a reality.*

words by Vesna Čelebić



## A big footprint

Sneakers are a gargantuan business. Once a simple sports apparel item, they have evolved to become an everyday shoe, a fashion statement, even a collectible. Just over the last decade, the sneaker market doubled in value, growing from \$45 billion in 2014 to \$86 billion in 2023. For comparison, Croatia's GDP is \$71 billion.

But this growth comes at a cost – and we're not talking shoe prices here. Fabricated largely from synthetic and petrol-derived materials, a pair of running shoes generates nearly 14 kilograms of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. The sneaker industry is blamed for 1.4% of overall global emissions; air travel is at 2.5%. In a rush to satisfy the high demand and fast-chang-

ing fashion trends, quality and durability often take a back seat in the production process. This results in billions of sneakers buried in landfills each year, where they take decades, even centuries to decompose.

Sit with that image for a second. It is daunting but likely not enough motivation for consumers to suddenly choose not wearing sneakers or buying fewer of these fashion darlings. Yet this, coupled with all the other environmental threats, can serve as inspiration to choose better and buy responsible products. Fortunately, these are on the rise around the world. Among them are Earthbound, ecological sneakers made in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

## A revolution footed in frustration

Brothers Domagoj and Hrvoje Boljar started their company Roosvai back in 2009. With an expertise forged in a renowned shoe manufacturing business owned by their father, they rapidly rose to success and soon had French and Dutch luxury brands as their clients.

Things were going well for the duo, but the two environmentally hyper-tuned entrepreneurs couldn't help but notice the industry's many downfalls, as well as a general lack of awareness of its ecological impact. "We saw problems across the board, from manufacturing and processing, like the tanning of leather, to the use

of chemicals and waste disposal," says Domagoj Boljar, CEO at Earthbound. "We witnessed factories incinerating harmful waste and then boasting they were waste-free. But what bothered us the most was the 'this is how it's always been done' mindset" that persisted."

Their growing dislike of the industry they were part of led to an epiphany: they may as well cross over to the bright side and use their powers for good. And so, their dream of a 'radically ecological sneaker' was born. "We had to keep our day jobs to pursue the dream, so in those early days we poured 1% of our time, 1% of

money and 99% of our frustration into the development of natural sneakers," adds Boljar. "That is how Miret came to life, recently rebranded as Earthbound". When the first Miret sneakers saw daylight in 2018, the brothers' main business collapsed due to a drop in demand; they feared that may put an end to their dream. But next year, Miret won the Climate-KIC Accelerator, a global contest for startups that provide innovative climate solutions. "That made us realize that other stakeholders in ecology and environmental protection saw great potential in what we had been doing and creating behind the curtain for years," recalls Boljar.





## Unapologetically natural

Today, Earthbound proudly claims their sneakers are 97% natural and 97% plastic-free. With a hip design and earthy colours, they pack ultra-cool looks, comfort and durability into a guilt-free fashion statement. "Our sneakers are radically ecological, which means that we replaced polyester, plastic-based materials and tanned leather with natural alternatives". Hemp, cotton, rubber, cork, eucalyptus and wool (sourced from New Zealand,

Norway and Great Britain) are some of the materials used for Earthbound sneakers. All these have minimal environmental impact in all stages of production. Thanks to the lanolin in wool and an extra layer of bio-based coating, Earthbound are resistant to water and stains. The inside is made of highly breathable hemp, the soles of natural latex and the foot bed of a light cork base dressed in wool felt, ensuring a comfortable fit and a solid grip.

## A few more steps to go

Clear, honest and precise communication about the environmental impact of their products is very important at Earthbound. "Words like 'natural', 'ecological' and 'sustainable' are used way too arbitrarily in advertising today. That's why we proceeded with independent certification of our product."

In 2022, Earthbound became the first footwear in the world that had each component endorsed with the Oeko-tex® certificate confirming it contains no chemicals harmful to human health. In 2023, they entered the prestigious circle of 7000 companies in the world that were awarded the B Corp

certificate for their overall social and environmental impact.

But Boljar brothers are nowhere near finished. Designing a 100% natural sneaker is a mighty task, as shoes have to satisfy other criteria besides being natural. "Shoes have to be comfortable, durable and affordable. And they have to be beautiful. We still have a long way to go but every day we're getting closer to the 100% natural sneaker."

Step by step, threading lightly towards a sneaker that will leave nothing but footprints.

\*\*\* Earthbound sneakers can be purchased exclusively via their webshop at [www.earthbound-sneakers.com](http://www.earthbound-sneakers.com)



\*\*\* Our staff at Valamar Amicor Green Resort wore Miret sneakers during the opening season.





# At Miramare, a splendid meal with a view

You're seated outdoors at a table adorned with crisp white linens. The gentle breeze caresses your skin as you take in the mesmerising sea views that stretch beyond. Your senses are tantalised by the salty scent filling the air, mingling harmoniously with the aromas wafting from the kitchen nearby.

As you sip on a chilled cocktail or a glass of refreshing white wine, your gaze drifts across the azure waters, where the sun dances playfully on the surface, painting a

masterpiece of shimmering reflections. With each bite, you feel closer to the culinary heritage of the region, the bounty of the land and the sea celebrated in every dish.

When dining out, it's not always about the food; it's about the ambience and that elated feeling inspired by your surroundings, delighting your palate with every peek. Dining with a view isn't just a meal; it's an experience that transports you to a realm of bliss, elevating every moment into a sweet memory.



## Look at the view

Enter Miramare by Fratelli Cerea, where it's as much about the view as it is the menu. Tucked onto the coast of the storybook Sveti Nikola island, just five minutes by boat from the picturesque old town of Poreč, Miramare by Fratelli Cerea embellishes the Adriatic seascape as part of the five-star Isabella Valamar Collection Island Resort.

With no car traffic on these island shores, the immersive dining experience hugs you into the heart of nature, enveloped

by thriving Mediterranean greenery, verdant pine forest and landscaped gardens. Spectacular sea panoramas and an expansive infinity pool next to the terrace enchant the eyes, where a spectrum of blue hues stretch endlessly before you, like a liquid sapphire under the sun's warm embrace. All of this is wrapped into the name, 'miramare', inviting guests to 'look at the sea' in wonder. It's an ethereal edible experience that's as much a feast for the eyes as it is for your taste buds.

## Beyond the blue

But what if we told you the view continued beyond the blue? The backdrop to your meal is equally as bewitching, wholly bolstered by the facade of a 19th-century castle, once the summer residence of one of Istria's most prominent noble families during the Venetian Republic - the Polesini family.

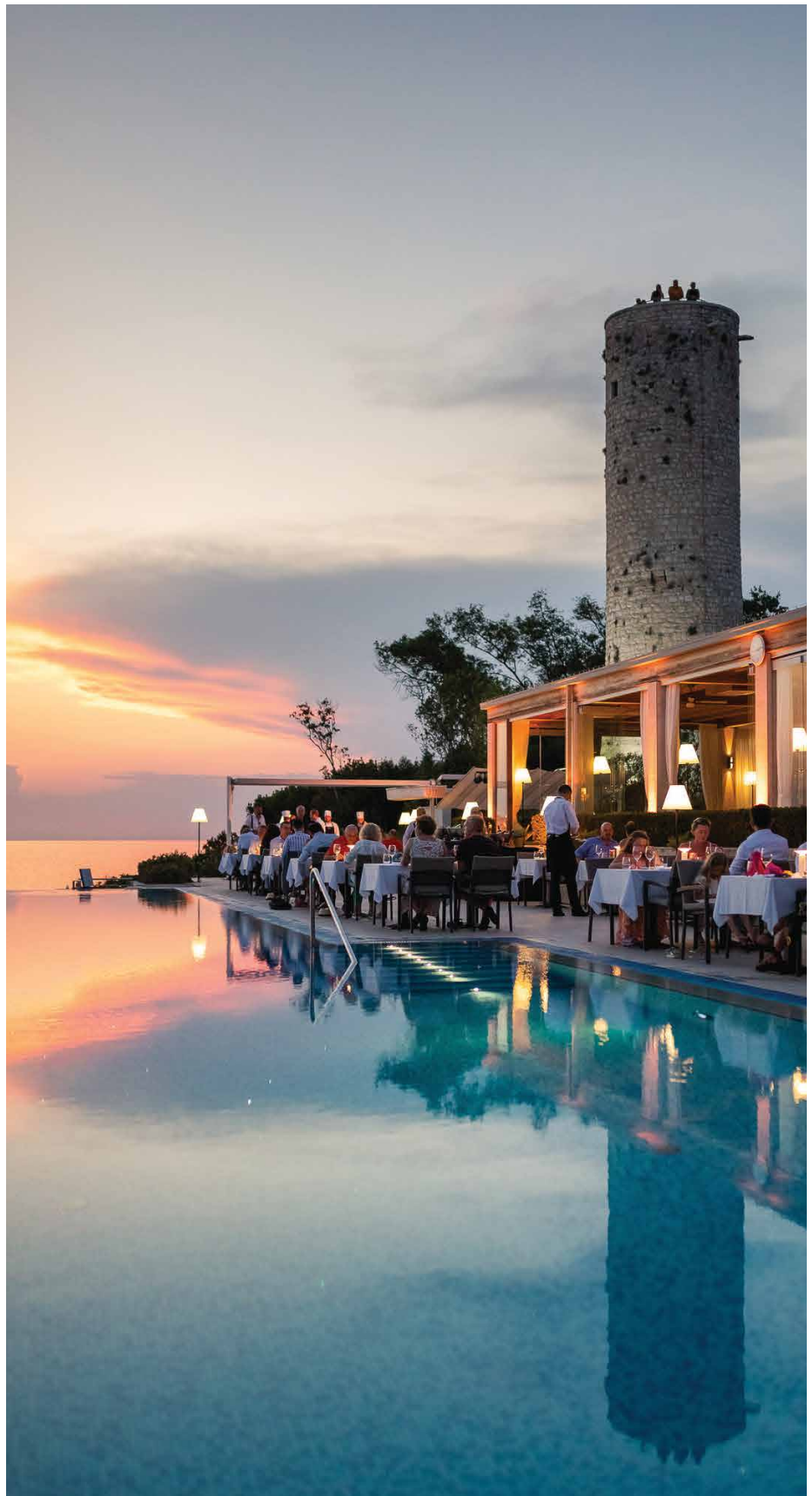
No matter if you're dining by day to watch the sun waltz across the waves or indulging at night to catch the twinkle of the restaurant lights in your eyes, the view enhances the food — which is a sight to behold, too.

## World-class flavours, fine dining flair

Helmed by the Cerea family from Italy, most notably known for their three-Michelin star restaurant Da Vittorio near Bergamo, Miramare by Fratelli Cerea is the first restaurant in Croatia built on the Cerea family's Michelin legacy.

You get to savour dishes designed using the finest Italian products and the highest-quality Istrian ingredients, always seasonal and for the most part local, from prime meats to the Adriatic's top fresh catch. The menu showcases modern Mediterranean plates and Italian classics, with seafood as the showpiece of this seaside dining experience.

Whether you spoil yourself with the six-course tasting menu and signature dishes, choose the handcrafted wood-fired Italian pizza selection, give in to temptation with the tableside Paccheri alla Vittorio or tickle your taste buds with tiramisù, every bite pairs perfectly with the remarkable sea view.



ANJA MUTIĆ AND  
STORYLINE STUDIO

# Where voices travel to find the right words

words by Vesna Čelebić

*For globetrotters and couch travelers alike, the writing of Anja Mutić has been the weave of dreams and the stitching of itineraries for decades. Today, her expertise is the driving force behind Storyline Studio, a creative agency that helps tourism and hospitality brands find their voice and articulate a message that speaks beyond words.*

“Each single word is loaded with energy and intention, so the older I get, the more mindful I become of the way I use them,” says Anja Mutić, the founder of Storyline Studio. “The real beauty, and something I aspire to, lies in stripping off all unnecessary words and staying only with those that really matter and that convey the message clearly.”

Focused on ‘strategic storytelling for travel, tourism & hospitality brands,’ Storyline Studio is perhaps the only creative content agency in Croatia with a clearly defined niche in travel and tourism. With extensive experience as a travel writer, editor, consultant and writing instructor that spans over 20 years, Mutić has deep insider insights, a comprehensive overview of the big picture and also a unique ability to never lose sight of detail.

It is precisely those qualities that inscribed her byline on the pages of major international publications, from The New York Times, BBC Travel and The Washington Post to Condé Nast Traveler and National Geographic Traveler. Her writing has taken readers to far-flung corners of the world, from the starry skies of the Atacama Desert and the mountain peaks of Italy’s Apuan Alps, to the heart of the intangible emotion of saudade in Portugal and the soulful music of Cape Verde, the island nation off the coast of west Africa.

Anja has authored over 25 guidebooks, for the likes of Rough Guides, Fodor’s and Lonely Planet; the latest 2024 edition of Lonely Planet Croatia abounds with her valuable insights for those visiting her home country. Anja’s writing has received multiple awards, from the coveted Lowell Thomas by the Society of American Travel Writers to multiple NATJA (North American Travel Journalists Association) awards.

“In a way, Storyline Studio feels like a natural extension of everything I’ve done so far, but instead of pitching stories to editors, I now work with travel and hospitality brands,” Mutić explains. Her trusty



network of industry friends around the globe has enabled her to grow the business organically by word-of-mouth only, but also to put together diverse top-of-the-line teams of creatives able to tackle assignments of any magnitude. “Each project I take on is very particular. When I have a new brand that I’m working with, the challenge is to figure out who they are; it’s like getting to know a person. Once I get their goals, desires and personality, it’s about finding the flow of communication and the best channels for putting their message out there. This strategic storytelling is what I get really excited about,” she adds.

One of Storyline Studio’s pet projects is Substance, the magazine you are reading; Mutić has been on the editorial helm for four annual editions to date. The process of this magazine’s creation spans a year’s worth between editions. It starts with a

list of story ideas collated by the team at Valamar, which Mutić then revises, brainstorming possible additions and details into story angles and briefs. Finding the right way to present a topic is often the biggest challenge, given the quickly changing trends and circumstances that can’t always be foreseen at the start. With a finalised content list, Mutić moves to assigning the headlines to her trusty team of writers; she also reports several stories per issue.

After the writing and production of all the articles is completed, she top-line edits everything to make sure that the voice and style are consistent across the magazine. “I think we’ve created a brand hotel magazine that stands out with the themes it covers, the quality of the writing and a conversational approach that educates the reader. The stories are relevant, in-depth, well-researched – and substantial,” she laughs, “no pun intended”.



Anchored in Zagreb but with global clients, Storyline Studio also marks a huge shift in Anja's lifestyle. "For the longest time, my base was New York, but it was really just a base. I would often come back for a night to repack my suitcase, going from Bora Bora to Israel, Mexico to China, Australia to Brazil, or wherever. I was having once-in-a-lifetime experiences on a regular basis," she explains. "That changed when I had my son ten years ago, and decided I didn't want to live in half-times on two continents."

Her curiosity about other cultures came from her parents, who saw travel as an educational tool and a way of opening up to the world. Her father, Boris Mutić, a renowned sports journalist, often travelled for work and brought the family along whenever possible. When Anja was 15, the Mutić family travelled to the USA, visiting California and Colorado. "I remember visiting Venice Beach and seeing all those people, each one so different and totally

free to be themselves. I fell in love with that kaleidoscope of humanity. For months later, I would sit in my room, listen to California Dreaming and daydream about the USA." Little did she know, dreams do come true when you're willing to put in the work and pivot when necessary.

After high school, Anja left Croatia for an au pair gig in the UK and subsequently enrolled at the University of Kent in Canterbury, where she got a degree in philosophy and comparative literature. During her studies, she got a coveted internship at Routledge in London, a cutting-edge publisher of academic books, which turned out to be life-altering. It was while working at Routledge as an editorial assistant that Anja realised she wanted to become an editor herself.

After a transatlantic move, first to Boston and then on to New York, she continued working in publishing, doing a variety of editorial jobs, but it soon became clear

that it was writing and travelling she was truly passionate about. "At the time, I was regularly scanning classifieds in The Sunday New York Times," she recalls. "Finally, one Sunday, there it was: a job posting for an online editor position at Rough Guides, the British publisher of travel guidebooks".

She got the job and then for two years worked in a corner office in downtown Manhattan that she shared with two other editors, commissioning and editing travel articles from writers on the road who were doing different guidebooks around the world. But the fluorescent lights of her 9-to-5 desk job soon spotlighted that she actually wanted to be on the other end of the deal.

That required some out-of-the-box thinking, so she approached her boss with an unorthodox request; to put her desk job on hold, take a sabbatical and go research a guidebook somewhere in



the world. After many different considerations, talks and approvals, within a few weeks she was en route to Bolivia for a six-week trip, to research the Bolivia chapter for The Rough Guide to South America. “The experience was super-adventurous, with loads of hard-core travelling – and I loved every minute of it. It revealed a whole new world, and the many possibilities of the open road.”

The next time Anja found herself behind a desk back in New York, it was as editor-in-chief of ShermansTravel. But as soon as the opportunity presented itself, she swapped her higher-ranking full-time position for one of a freelance newsletter writer. This move created the time and space to travel and write without a desk job to hold her back; it was back in 2004.

Mutić has since worked on all the continents except Antarctica and travelled to 64 countries, even though she admits to counting them only for the purpose

of this interview. “I’ve had the luck and privilege to see a lot of the world through my work. In the process, I’ve grown very conscious of my travels and my carbon footprint. After the pandemic, I didn’t fly for 2.5 years; I now prefer to take trains whenever possible. For me, travel has become a very intentional experience. At this point, I want my travels to be transformative, really connecting with the places and the people I am visiting.”

Before we part, I ask Anja if she can pick one favourite word. After a pensive pause, she says: “The first one that comes to mind, for the word but also what lies behind it, is ‘wind’. I love wind as an element, but also, when you say it, it’s almost like you can feel the moving.”

It’s lovely, I think, how she doesn’t even know that her chosen word truly embodies who she is, a force of moving forward. And it conveys the message, stripped of the unnecessary.



# CREATIVE SIGNATURE COCKTAILS FOR ALL SEASONS

They're great early in the day with brunch, fabulous as a beachside drink in hand, fantastic for après-ski warm-up, a perfect opener for dinners and a stellar night cap. You know it, we're talking about cocktails here.

Mixology, the art of creating cocktails, has really taken off in the recent decade, growing from simple (but fab) concoctions like a screwdriver (vodka & orange juice)

to statement drinks that draw inspiration from a place, a story and all things local.

Such are the unique signature cocktails at Valamar [PLACES] HOTELS. Masterminded by our mixology professionals, each tells a tale - one that is unique to the place you are staying at and that pairs perfectly with the ambiance.



# Winter in a glass

For many of us, thoughts of winter conjure up images of snow-covered mountain tops, wood crackling in a fireplace and those winter scents and flavours, like cinnamon, caramel and cloves, infusing spaces like our grandmothers' kitchens. Packing the idyll of winter into a glass, our cocktails owe their silky texture to a dash of goat milk, and their warming tang to the pairing of bold spirits with delicate fruity notes and pleasing spices.

## **Marietta Punch**

(rum, brandy, lemon juice, pineapple juice, homemade Austrian raspberry jam, a dash of goat milk)

Honouring the hotel's first owner and renowned Viennese chanteuse Marietta Mackh, this fabulous drink aspires to live up to her vibrant legacy. Bringing a dash of the Caribbean to the Alps, it blends rum and brandy with freshly squeezed pineapple juice and sweet Austrian raspberry jam.

## **The Five O'Clock**

(dark rum, Earl Grey tea, Ruby port, maple syrup, lemon juice, allspice, goat milk)

People around the world have their tea at five o'clock so why shouldn't you? Earl Grey is the base here, which – paired with rum and port – becomes an energising après-ski drink. With some maple syrup and a zing of lemon juice, this cold tea is a perfect pick-me-up and a great tea time treat.

## **Gorgeous G**

(premium gin, cherry liqueur, fresh lemon juice, sugar syrup, goat milk)

Who doesn't like a little sugar, spice and everything nice... If you ever wondered whether gin could get any better, Gorgeous G is the answer. Paired with the sweetness of cherries and the tanginess of lemon, this concoction shows gin in its best light and delights the whole palate with every sip.

## **OBERFashioned**

(hazelnut liqueur, oleo saccharum, fresh lemon juice, maple syrup, goat milk)

Inspired by two favourite classics, Whiskey Sour and Old Fashioned, OBERFashioned oozes caramel notes, accentuated by the oleo saccharum made from citrus peels covered in sugar to extract its finest oils. A dash of maple syrup and lemon juice promise to make this your new favourite cocktail.

# Summer, shaken or stirred

Summers are all about seaside daydreams, sunshine, sunsets and good mood all around. It is the time for adventures and discovering new things about ourselves. In that vein, our cocktails invite you to leave your comfort zone and embark on an exciting quest for new favourites.

Inspired by long sunny days in the Mediterranean, divine fragrances and everything local, from old stories to living traditions, our signature drinks look and taste wonderful, whether enjoyed by the pool or on the beach.

## **Double O G&T**

(premium gin, homemade bitter orange jam, premium tonic)

Gin and tonic tops the charts of summer favourites around the world – and this one enriches the classic G&T with a dash of local. Honouring the first citrus fruit grown in Dalmatia, the drink is prepared with homemade bitter orange jam (Double O stands for 'Organic Orange') and a secret blend of spices that bring out the best in this beloved classic.

## **Pharmacy Fizz**

(premium gin, freshly squeezed lemon juice, homemade rosemary & honey syrup, soda infused with tea)

The legacy of apothecary practice goes a long way back on the Dalmatian coast, from the 1317 Franciscan pharmacy in Dubrovnik to individuals like Petar Jerolim Gaugian, Croatia's first trained apothecary. A testament to the tradition, Pharmacy Fizz pairs gin with the sweetness of honey, earthiness of rosemary and the freshness of jasmine tea soda into a cool fizzy drink that will help with afternoon heat.

## **Fresh Negroni**

(premium gin, Amaro Rossi, Ramazzotti Aperitivo Rosato, Vermouth Rosso, Vermouth Bianco)

The dash of Mediterranean herbs adds something tangy and different – and a note of freshness – to the timeless classic, the Negroni. Now dressed in summer lightness, it showers your palate with gentle flavours that ooze those lovely summer vibes.



# COVERED IN FAIRY DUST

## The legend of Pula's amphitheatre

words by Isabel Putinja



Set on a sea-facing embankment in Istria's southernmost city, Pula's marvellous amphitheatre is an iconic landmark built of limestone. Constructed sometime between 27 BCE and 68 CE during the reign of Emperor Augustus, it's the handiwork by Roman stonemasons and craftsmen. Or at least we can assume so, though a popular local legend claims it was built by fairies.

If you look at the peninsula of Istria, it does appear like fairy land – a place of rolling hills blanketed with ethereal mist, sublime landscapes strewn with limestone boulders and dense forests hiding mystical waterfalls and meandering streams. Could this pastoral scenery have been inhabited once upon a time by supernatural creatures with magical powers, such as the ability to build amphitheatres?

Local myths and lore say that Istria and its hills and valleys were indeed once the home of celestial fairies. These earthly beauties with golden hair drank from springs and took shelter in shady forests or the many caves carved out of Istria's limestone bedrock. They spent their nights playing and dancing in flower-filled meadows while the village and townsfolk slept. These supernatural creatures also happened to be master builders.

According to the popular folk legend, one night the winged fairies collected huge stones from the 1400-metre-high Učka mountain, Istria's natural boundary to the northeast. Working swiftly under the light of the moon, they effortlessly carried the stones southwards to seaside Pula, arranging them in a circular shape. When a cock crowed at daybreak, the fairies quickly retreated to the forests and caves before they were discovered. On

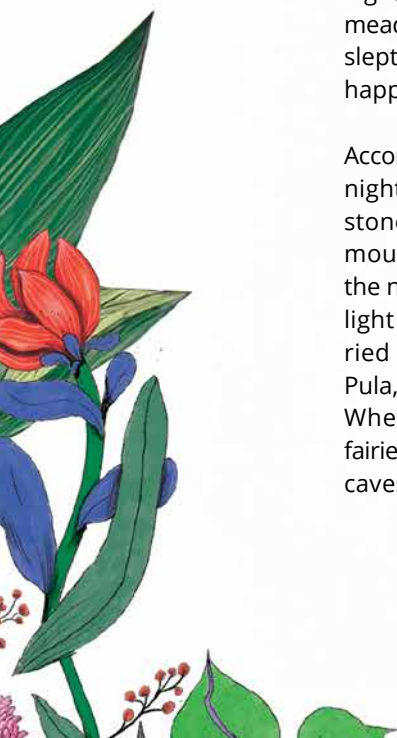
their way, they hastily dropped the giant boulders they were carrying, scattering them across the peninsula.

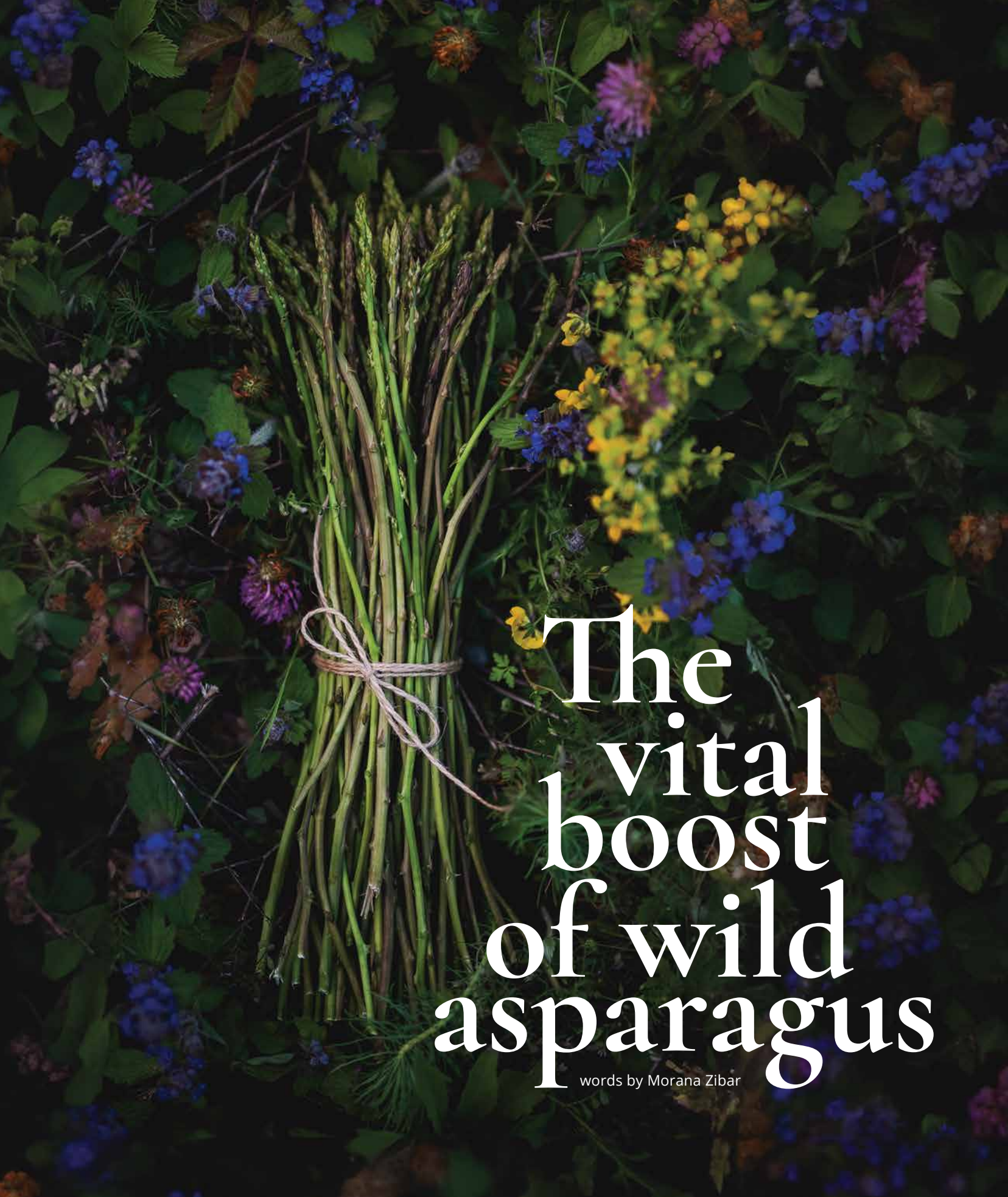
By the time the day's first rays of sunlight reached the earth, they were nowhere to be seen. But in their wake, they left behind an extraordinary amphitheatre of 30-metre-high walls made of carefully stacked stones and embellished with 72 elegant arches. The structure, however, did not have a roof... dawn had come too quickly and it was left incomplete. The townspeople awoke to the amazing sight of this majestic building, naming it Divićgrad or 'town of miracles'.

Today it's known as the Arena to locals and is believed to be the world's sixth largest and best-preserved Roman amphitheatre. Back in Roman times, it was the stage for bloody combats fought by gladiators and cheered on by crowds of up to 23,000 spectators. Today the beloved Arena hosts entertainment of a more serene kind: it is the atmospheric venue of the annual Pula Film Festival and big-ticket summer concerts, seating up to 5000 people under the star-filled sky. This is the best way to experience its otherworldly atmosphere.

Visit during the day to explore its numerous underground chambers where gladiators and vicious animals once roamed its passageways. Here you'll find a permanent exhibition showcasing the tradition of wine- and olive oil-making in Istria since the Roman era, and stacks of terracotta amphorae which once held these precious liquids while they were transported by ship across the empire.

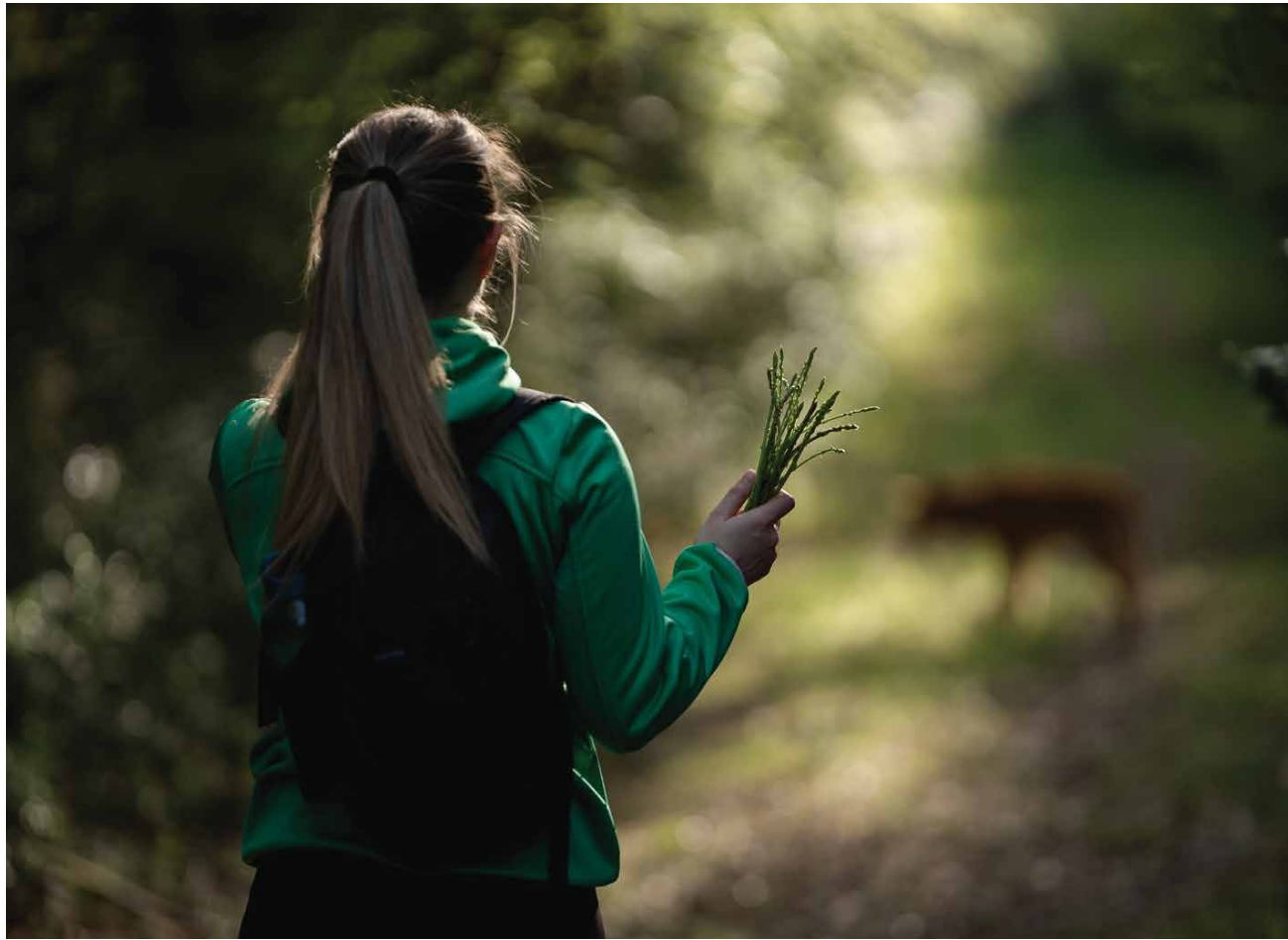
As for the golden-haired fairies, you may just spot them dancing among the Arena's giant stones while the city is asleep.





The  
vital  
boost  
of wild  
asparagus

words by Morana Zibar



Of all the heralds of spring, the most highly anticipated and arguably the tastiest is wild asparagus. When young shoots start popping up in early March, locals go out into nature eagerly scouring the ground in search of this edible treat. The hunt for asparagus becomes a beloved outdoor activity each spring season, suitable for all ages – and heaps of fun to boot.

The prized bounty, precious asparagus is a plant typical for the Mediterranean region. In Croatia, it thrives in the undergrowth and near the edges of forests along the coasts of Istria and Dalmatia. Though the season is short and sweet, lasting only a couple of months, luckily there is plenty of wild asparagus for everyone. One thing to keep in mind: the real-deal freshly picked asparagus is only available at farmers' markets; what you see for sale in supermarkets likely isn't

wild nor local. By far the best option is to join the foraging fun – no asparagus will be as tasty as the one you pick yourself.

Compared to its widely accessible cultivated relatives, wild asparagus is thinner, with a dark-green colour palette and a slightly bitter, more intense flavour. It's also by far the healthiest, praised for its medicinal value since ancient times. Packed in a bunch of wild asparagus you'll find nutrients such as vitamin C, K and B-complex, potassium calcium, magnesium, iron, phosphorus and dietary fibres. It's so high on health benefits yet delightfully low on calories. With antioxidant powers and diuretic effect, asparagus does well for your digestive system, heart, bones, kidneys and nerves. It may not be love at first bite – its strong flavour isn't to everyone's liking – but for many people it is pure delight.



During the short period when it is available, wild asparagus is the main star of most seasonal menus across Istria. Due to its short shelf life, it is best used as fresh as possible – and without the tough woody end (simply trim it off). A versatile player in the kitchen, wild asparagus can be steamed, sautéed, grilled, baked and boiled. The simplest and most iconic local dish you'll come upon in springtime is *fritaja* – scrambled eggs with wild asparagus, and maybe just a bit of homemade pancetta or Istrian prosciutto thrown in. Another beloved combo features hard-boiled eggs and wild asparagus, seasoned only with salt, pepper, vinegar and good-quality olive oil. Asparagus can also be used in more elaborate culinary creations, such as creamy soups, refreshing risottos and pasta dishes. The main rule is to keep things simple – less is more when it comes to wild asparagus.

No other ingredient should overpower it, just stand aside as a subtle complement and let the star shine.

The ode to spring wouldn't be complete without a little fine wine. Paired with wild asparagus, a resourceful and versatile partner, it opens up a whole universe of flavourful adventures. Asparagus goes nicely with crisp young whites fresh on the market, ushering in warm sunny days. Lighter dishes call for Sauvignon Blanc as the perfect match, as well as native flagship whites such as Istarska Malvazija, Graševina from Slavonia or Pošip from Dalmatia. More complex or heavier dishes will enjoy the company of an aged Malvazija, Pinot Gris, even a rosé. The qualities you want to be looking for are medium body, good acidity, grassy notes and citrus hints. Or simply, go for a wine that screams spring.

There's also an (welcome) imposter in the world of asparagus. In coastal areas of Croatia, you may come across something called sea asparagus, a wild plant from the genus *Salicornia*, also known as glasswort, picklegrass or marsh samphire, among other common names. The only thing it shares with real asparagus is appearance; it is similar looking but otherwise totally different. Crispy, succulent and salty, sea asparagus can be eaten raw or cooked. Chefs in fine dining restaurants have been using it as an exotic addition to seafood dishes or as seasoning for salads. You may even find it in stores pickled in a jar, a more recent phenomenon.

Both wild and sea asparagus have lessons to teach us. Sometimes life serves us the finest delicacies in unexpected places, as nature's gifts just waiting to be picked and enjoyed.



CROATIA SUMMER CAMP

# A new way to holiday for families

@ [www.croatiasummerncamp.com](http://www.croatiasummerncamp.com)



The equation of successful family holidays is a simple one, every parent knows. Happy children equal happy parents equal happy times. And the recipe for happy kids is also simple: let them play, learn and shine as they grow greater.

Parents know that happy family holidays don't just happen. They require loads of action to wear out the offspring, for their bountiful energy is a wonderful thing when used smartly and in its entirety. And let's face it: the entirety of kids' energy often exceeds the entirety of adults' supplies.

What if there was a way for the children to enjoy quality time their way, while you enjoy quality time your way, like lounging by the pool or exploring the history of the place you're visiting? What if you could actually relax on holidays while the kids deepen their interests, master a skill, practice their favourite sport and engage in play with other kids under the watchful eyes of professionals? Now, there is a way. Our newest initiative at Valamar just paved the way for you to savour even better family holidays in Croatia.

Called Croatia Summer Camp, our new web platform strives to connect you with local providers of high-quality experiences for children and young adults. At [www.croatiasummercamp.com](http://www.croatiasummercamp.com), you can discover kids' camps and activities in your destination and connect directly with the providers for more information or booking. The camps vary in theme, duration and enrolment requirements; some camps are for young kids aged 6 to 14, while other camps cater to young adults aged 14 to 18. Kids can engage in arts, music, sports, education or crafts, depending on their interests.

Led by renowned ambassadors, Pro camps offer a wholesome experience that provides children with a unique environment of learning and growth; some include overnight stays on premises. Cro-

atia is really big on football, and a great place to upgrade footwork at the Juventus Football Academy Camp. Your kid loves handball? Then the 8-day camp in Poreč, spearheaded by Croatia's national team star Luka Cindrić is a great place to train among the like-minded handball enthusiasts. Basketball is the sport of choice? Join Andrej Tesla, known for mentoring stars like Dario Šarić and Mario Hezonja, for a Basketball Adventure 2024 Camp at Lanterna Premium Camping Resort, with training sessions in Novigrad. Music and art lovers can attend a number of Pro camps in the nest of artists, the hilltop town of Grožnjan; from dance, percussion and oboe to the international school of architecture, options abound.

Fun camps include morning or afternoon sessions that are designed as an 'add-on to your family vacation'. In Rabac and in Poreč, the Hannes Zischka Tennis Camp is perfect for young tennis enthusiasts – both beginners and intermediate players – to elevate their game. Off the coast of Labin, teenagers can explore the underwater world by enrolling in the Kids Diving Holiday by Scuba Center Sv. Marina. Across the country, Tinker Lab programs engage kids in STEM, creative problem solving and mental development.

These are only examples; Croatia Summer Camp remains open to new partnerships throughout the season and the platform is continuously updated with new and exciting options as they appear in our destinations. There is no middleman; you can contact the providers directly on the website and get all the necessary information first-hand.

For locals, Croatia Summer Camp is an easy way to showcase their excellent work and invite visitors to participate in the wonderful activities they organise in their towns. For us at Valamar, it gives us great satisfaction to bring you and local communities even closer, for an even more immersive experience. For your

children, any Croatia Summer Camp is a great chance to make the best of their holidays and to meet like-minded kids. And for you as parents, it is perhaps the easiest way to cook up that good old recipe: happy children equal happy parents equal happy times.



# Never basta with all that pasta

words by Vesna Čelebić



Where was pasta born? The lively debate on its origins offers as many different answers as there are pastas. What we know for sure is that pasta-like dishes made of flour and water have been consumed by humans since some 4000 years ago, in the earliest civilisations like the ancient Mesopotamia and China.

When did pasta first arrive to Europe? This topic is also a subject of heated discussions. Many sources attribute the pasta arrival to the famous world traveller Marco Polo. The story goes that on his great journey via the Silk Road, from 1271 through 1295, Marco Polo tasted noodles in China. He then wrote about them in his book *Il Milione*, now known as *The Travels of Marco Polo*, which many believe inspired Europeans to try the delight themselves. But in his writings, language experts claim that Marco Polo

compared noodles to 'vermicelli' (a type of pasta), which would suggest that pasta was something he was already familiar with before visiting China. And all of Italy today would agree.

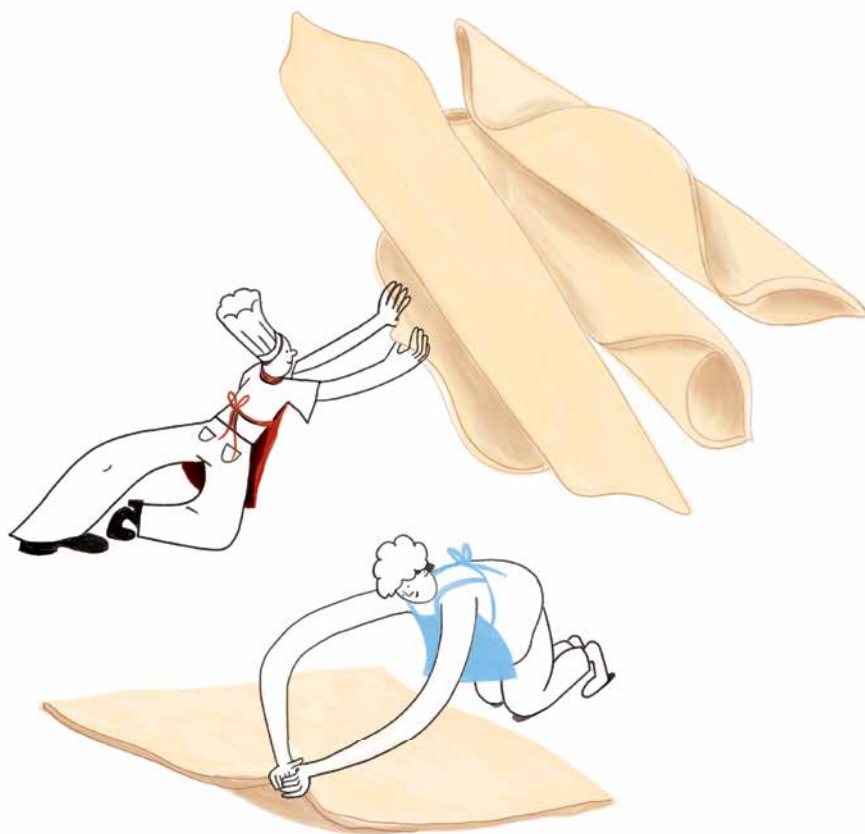
Something similar to lasagne, known as *lagane*, was known to Etruscans and Romans as early as the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. At the time, they were baked rather than boiled like today, but nevertheless made of wheat and water. When the Arabs conquered the Italian south in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, durum wheat, typically used for Italian pasta, quickly spread around the boot-shaped peninsula, becoming a staple. So, by the 13<sup>th</sup> century when Marco Polo headed on his journey, dried pasta was already known in Italy.

Despite the time-consuming and laborious process of its making, pasta quickly

rose among favourites for several reasons. Easy to keep and with a long shelf life, it was a sure winner during these times before electricity and refrigeration. Other ingredients, like meat or diverse vegetables, were scarce, while pasta filled the belly and made for a good source of energy. Finally, it was easy to prepare and paired with just about anything, a trait that has kept it on the favourites list until today.

There are some 350 different pasta types known around the world today. Over time, many places have come up with their own versions, so when travelling it is always fun to taste some local kinds of pasta and recipes. Our destinations are no exception so we bring you a few different varieties worth trying when on holidays in Croatia or in Austria.





Rubbing shoulders with Italy, Istria is known for its foodie delights, so it's no surprise that homemade pasta is the trademark of many dishes. The two best known are *fuži* and *pljukanci*.

Perhaps the more famous of the two, *fuži* are certainly fancier, as their recipe calls for eggs, in addition to the standard durum wheat, vegetable oil, salt and water. After the dough is prepared, it should be rolled out and cut into squares with sides that are 4 to 5 centimetres long. Each piece is then folded and the opposing corners are pressed to stick together, creating little tubes of rolled pasta.

*Fuži* are traditionally served with homemade sauces known as *žgvaceti* or with thick goulashes, made of veal or *boškarin* beef. The dish not to miss is definitely *fuži* with truffles, as it packs the authentic flavours of Istria into each bite.

Their egg-free relative, *pljukanci*, kept many Istrian families afloat in times of scarcity and hardship. Made of durum flour, salt, a bit of (olive) oil and hot water, small pieces of dough are chopped off and rolled between the palms to create long spindle-like bits, thinner at the edges and thicker in the middle. The secret to their fantastic flavour? Human touch.

*Pljukanci* are now a staple of Istrian restaurant menus, served with asparagus, mushrooms, shells in *buzara* white wine sauce as well as game. They are often served along the coast, most often paired with stews of top-quality fish, like monkfish, and other seafood.





Across the Kvarner bay from the peninsula of Istria, the island of Krk has its own version of handmade pasta, called *šurlice*. The name comes from the Croatian word for an elephant's trunk, *surla*, because the pasta is wrapped around small wooden sticks or knitting needles to create thin tubes.

Back in the day, *šurlice* were a festive dish, served with lamb stew at great celebrations. Today you can also find them with seafood and at their simplest (and very delightful), with sheep cheese. Whichever sauce you decide on, make sure to sip on *vrbnicka žlahtina* with your meal; a glass of this indigenous white wine completes the epicurean experience of Krk.

Similar to *šurlice* in that they're also wrapped around a needle are Dubrovnik's *makaruli*, first mentioned in a 16th-century play, *Skup* by Dubrovnik writer Marin Držić, when they were prepared by nuns.

Made with seven eggs to a kilogram of flour, with a bit of oil and water, the best *makaruli* don't contain salt in the dough, so not to draw humidity. Instead, the water they're boiled in should be salted generously.

The dish to try in Dubrovnik is called *šporki makaruli*, served with a slow-cooked hearty meat sauce. In the past, when meat was scarce, the sauce was placed on top of pasta, so it looked rich at first sight. But once you ate all of the sauce, you'd be left with 'dirty macaroni,' which is the literal meaning of the dish name.

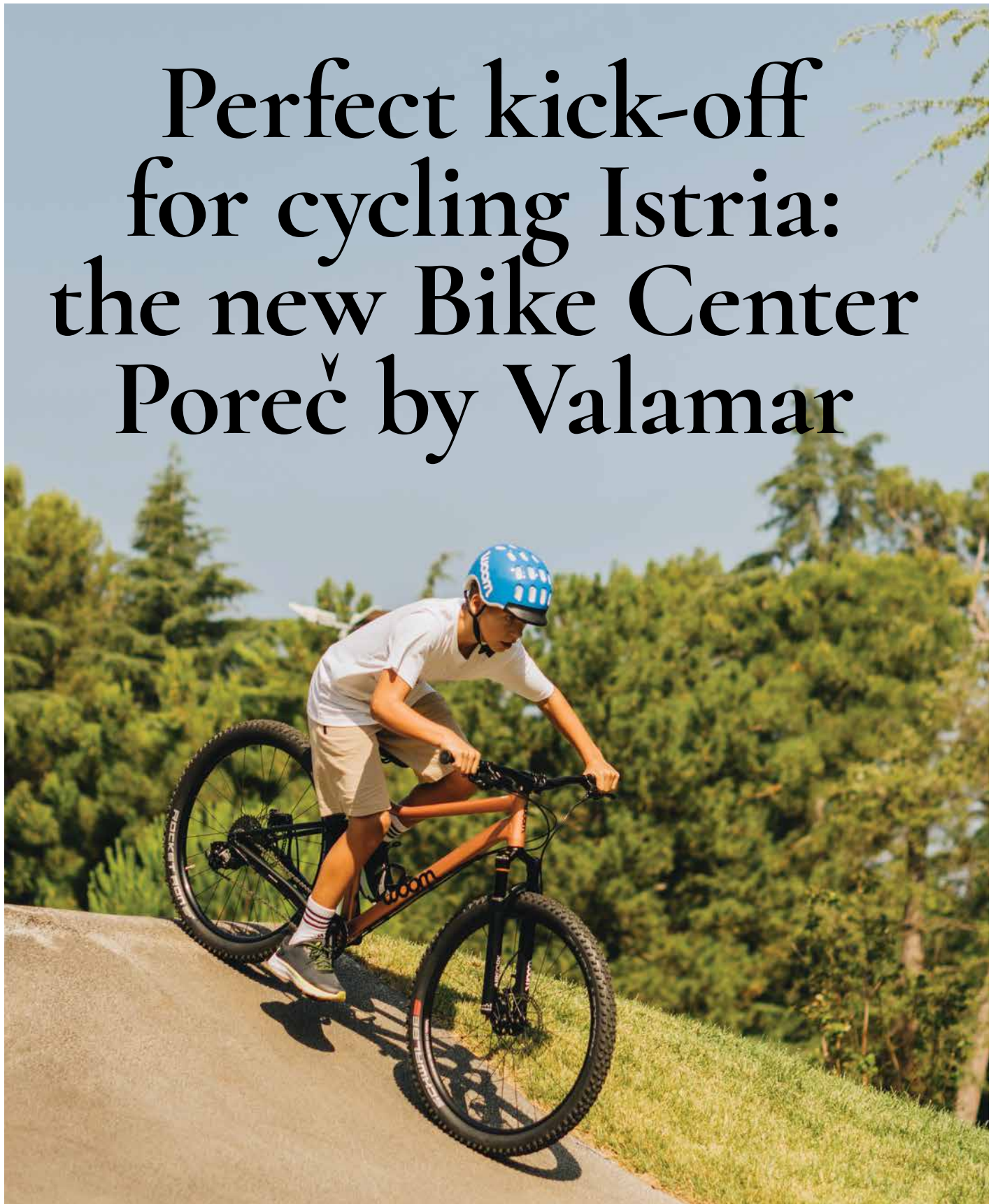


Widely regarded as a Swabian specialty, *spätzle* is loved far beyond the borders of this region in the southwest of Germany. In Austria, this hearty pasta, translated as 'the little sparrow,' makes for a perfect comfort dish after enjoying alpine air. Unlike Italian pasta which is made of durum, *spätzle* is made of bread wheat; in the

past it was also made of spelt. The flour is combined with eggs and salt, and then mixed together. Water is added carefully, spoon by spoon, because the dough should drip into hot boiling water, but not be too runny. Once made by spoon or by hand, today *spätzle* is made with strainers, food mills or coarse graters.

There's nothing better after hitting the slopes than a bowl of *Käsespätzle*, the Austrian version of mac and cheese, served with browned onion and chopped chives.

# Perfect kick-off for cycling Istria: the new Bike Center Poreč by Valamar





Nestled at the eastern shore of the triangle-shaped Istrian peninsula, Poreč stands out a stellar holiday spot for cyclists of all aptitudes. Professionals might know it as one of the stages on the 2004 Giro d'Italia or, more recently, as the starting point of the up-and-coming Istria 300 race. Those who cycle for fun will quickly learn that Poreč is a delightful town to explore on two wheels, with marvels like the 6th-century Euphrasian Basilica and bars that serve chilled Malvazija wine as perfect stops en route.

Poreč is also a prelude to discovering the gorgeous scenery of Istria. Among

the peninsula's drawcards is the cycling and hiking trail known as the Parenzana. Recently prepped up, the former narrow-gauge railway connects Poreč to Trieste along 123 kilometres, via 33 towns and three countries (Croatia, Slovenia and Italy).

A terrific starting point for any cycling escapade, professional or recreational, is our brand-new Bike Center Poreč. Modelled after the well-established Bike Center Rabac, it is designed as a one-stop shop for cyclists of all ages and all preferences to fully prop up for fun and safe active holidays.



You'll find everything you may need here, from bike rentals and safety equipment to information about trails and organised tours. Also available are services like bike repairs, transport, maintenance and bike washing (super-convenient if you're looking to do some fab dirt biking).


The bikes on offer are the latest-generation mechanical and electrical road, gravel and MTB bikes. That means – no trail in Istria is off bounds. Equipment includes all the safety gear for adults, but also a variety of kids' gear, from bike chairs to children's helmets, so that families can get all they need in one go. The wide range of cycling tours highlights both de-



manding mountain biking trails as well as lovely and easy family outings that will build the love for cycling together.

Even if you and your crew are not really into major exploits, the Bike Center makes for a fun place to experience. Spend an afternoon practicing tricks at a circular course and a large pump track. Meanwhile, your little ones can build up their skill on the kids' track or learn to pedal in the bike-riding school on site.

Whether you're visiting Poreč to cycle or you're cycling to make the best of your visit to Poreč, Bike Center Poreč is an excellent place to start the ride.



Business improvement of Imperial Riviera d.d. through digital and green transformation of Hotel Parentino 4\* and the development of BIKE CENTER POREČ" (NPOO. C1.6.R1-I2.01-V1.0044)

# ISTRIA300 LADIES

# Drawing women to cycling adventures in Istria



The natural beauties of Istria have been sung about wide and far. The heart-shaped peninsula on the northwest end of Croatia's Adriatic captivates with its bucolic landscapes. In this scenic land, medieval towns crown olive grove and vineyard-laden hillslopes and dense shady forests hide delicious truffles. Nothing short of spectacular, Istria is a bucket-list item for lovers of the great outdoors. Thanks to the intentional and steady development of quality infrastructure, it has been luring cyclists and mountain bikers in particular.

Gorgeous trails crisscross the peninsula, with the impressive Parenzana between Poreč and Trieste hogging the spotlight. New bike centres with the latest-generation equipment are supporting professionals

and enthusiasts, like the well-established Bike Centre by Valamar in Rabac and the new one in Poreč, opening in 2024.

Perhaps the most thrilling addition in recent years has been the Istria300, pioneered in 2021. With three courses of different lengths, Istria155, Istria235 and Istria300, this is not only a fab chance to 'ride your limits' as echoed in the event slogan, but to explore the timeless beauty of Istria on two wheels. Starting and finishing in Poreč, the route allows the riders to decide along the way whether they want to complete the shortest, the medium or the longest track.

The interest and the number of participants have both been rising steadily over the years but the bulk of applications came in

from male cyclists. Seeing that relatively few women took part in these events despite women showing an increased interest in cycling in general, in its third year Istria300 launched a special programme to attract more female cyclists.

Called Istria300 Ladies, the initiative is a "set of measures that were developed specifically for women, to reduce barriers and to offer them a unique experience," explains Valerie Rupitsch, the project manager and an ambassador for Liv, the cycling brand dedicated to women.

All the participants, female and male, start at the same time in Poreč, and there are no differences regarding the course. But in 2023, you could spot the women by the violet colour of their bib numbers, goodie bags



and jerseys. “We chose violet because it is said to embody passion. To finish Istria300, you absolutely need to have passion.”

Facilities along the way were supplied with Ladies Dixie toiletries and Istria’s famed white Malvazija wine from Vina Pilato was added to the traditional choice of Heineken beer at the finish line. Registrations for women were kept open even after the event closed at 2500 participants.

Along with these symbolic and practical measures, the pack contained some true treats for avid cyclists, such as the meet-and-greet with the amateur cycling icon Catherine Rossmann, who was the face of the initiative and the captain of the Istria300 Ladies Squad. Rossmann rode with the honorary number 300, taking second place among the ten women who completed the 300-kilometre course.

Other gems included a basic training plan from the former professional cyclist Mia Radotić, as well as tips and tricks for mental strength from the Olympic snowboarding champion and Istria300 testimonial Nicola Thost. “The feedback from the women who took advantage of these services was overwhelming. They were thrilled that these women-specific issues were being given attention. There was a woman, for example, who had doubts about whether she could do the 155 ride. She got tips and tricks for

mental strength and after the event she came to me and said that she wanted to tackle the 230 next year,” Rupitsch recalls.

Ladies-specific programmes of this kind are not yet the standard in cycling races. “We are the ‘first-movers’ with such an initiative. It is our goal to support women in cycling and to encourage women to participate in cycling events. We want to make women cyclists visible and support them to build a network together.”

Last year, 470 of 2821 participants were women. That’s nearly 17%, compared to 9% in the first year. Rupitsch and the Istria300 team are very happy with the results: “The quota of female cyclists is significantly higher compared to road bike events. However, we believe that the effects of the Istria300 Ladies programme will be even more visible next year, given that participants come from over 40 nations and travel from far away.”

There are reasons aplenty to add Istria300 to the bucket list, for both men and women cyclists. Rupitsch, who took the first place in Istria235, says: “The best thing about this race is people coming together with their friends and having a great time. They can enjoy riding on closed-to-traffic roads while soaking up the scenery of Istria. And of course, there’s the delicious truffle pasta that awaits at the finish line.”



# Small bites big on local flavour

words and recipes by Željka Klemenčić

Finger foods are the perfect choice for gatherings. Appetising, informal and fun, these bite-sized treats allow you to choose whether you want to nibble while mingling or you prefer to sit down, savouring the flavours, wine and conversation slowly.

The Spanish have perfected the ritual of tapas, those small, typically savoury bites that are served in bars alongside wine or beer. Tapas can be a snack, a small appetiser or a whole-night feast made up of many different treats. Another great advantage is that they can be consumed by hand. Dirty dishes and silverware can quickly fill up tables, so the food is then quickly removed to reinstate order and good looks.

Almost decorative, tapas are normally kept out all night long, so that people snack bit by bit. In the Croatian version, finger foods also illustrate the two strong and converging influences on local cuisine, one from the Mediterranean and the other from the Middle East.

From the Middle East came the tradition of mezze (also mezzeh), small delicacies that are enjoyed slowly and for a long time, anywhere from Bosnia to Turkey, and from Greece all the way to Armenia and Egypt. The Croatian take on Mediterranean finger foods serves the best of the Adriatic: oily fish, delicious tomatoes and summer aromas of sage, basil and oregano. The base can be a crispy polenta, flaky dough, but also baked old bread as in Italian bruschetta.

It would seem everyone around here knows the immense importance of these practical small bites. Food is first and foremost a chance for gatherings and as such should fit in seamlessly, offering the most pleasure at minimal effort.



# Baked polenta with salsa and marinated sardines

## For the polenta:

- 1 cup of corn flour
- 2 cups of water
- 1 cup of vegetable stock
- 1/2 cup of grated Parmesan
- 1 teaspoon of salt
- 1-2 teaspoons of butter

In a pot, bring water, stock and corn flour to a boil. Lower the heat, add salt and cook at low heat stirring frequently for at least half an hour, until the polenta thickens. Towards the end, add the cheese and butter. Spice to your liking. Pour the polenta into a greased pan and let it cool completely, best overnight. Before serving, cut the polenta into desired shapes and bake on a grill pan.

## For the salsa:

- 1 red onion
- 800 g of fresh ripe tomatoes (or a can of peeled tomatoes)
- 3-4 garlic cloves
- salt
- brown sugar
- fresh thyme and basil
- ½ dl olive oil

Sauté the onions on olive oil until golden. Add a peeled ripe tomato (or canned when out of season), salt, sugar and thinly chopped garlic. Simmer slowly until it reduces and the sauce becomes thick and sticky. Before the end, spice with fresh thyme and basil.

## For the marinated sardines:

- 1 kg of sardines
- 50 g of fresh (cake) flour
- 2 onions
- 200 ml vinegar
- 2 rosemary branches
- a few bay leaves
- 1 tablespoon of salt
- 50 ml of water
- 300 ml of olive oil

Coat the sardines in flour, then fry in olive oil. In the same oil (add more if necessary), braise sliced onions, pour over with vinegar, then add water, pepper, salt, bay leaves and rosemary. Simmer shortly. Then let the marinade cool off a bit and pour over fried sardines. Let the whole dish sit in a cool place, ideally overnight.

Top a grilled slice of polenta with some salsa and a marinated sardine. If you like them, add a few capers, too.



# Tuna tartare on patties

## For the patties:

- 70 g buckwheat flour
- 70 g wheat flour
- ½ teaspoon of baking powder
- ½ teaspoon of dry yeast
- 2 dl of warm milk
- 1 egg (separate whites and yolk)
- 125 g of butter
- a bit of salt

Combine flour, baking powder and yeast. Add butter chopped into cubes, yolks and a bit of salt. Pour over with warm milk and mix. Beat the whites with a bit of salt until firm. Add the beaten whites to the mix slowly and leave the whole mix to sit at room temperature for an hour. On a pan lightly coated with butter pan-fry a spoon of the mix. Serve immediately with tuna tartare.

## For the tartare:

- 500 g of the best fresh tuna, the least fatty bits
- juice of one lime (or a few cumquats)
- 2–3 spoons of soy sauce
- olive oil
- fresh chives
- toasted black sesame

Chop tuna into small cubes. Add lime juice, soy sauce, olive oil and chives. Sprinkle with sesame. Serve cold on warm patties.





# Frittata of *mišancije* with fried sage

- 600 g of *mišancije*, a mix of foraged wild herbs
- 6 eggs
- 2 slices of old bread
- 2 dl of milk
- 3 cloves of garlic
- salt and pepper
- 150 g of Parmesan cheese
- 1 dl of olive oil


Blanch *mišancija* and garlic in salted water for five minutes. Strain and chop with a knife. Crumble the bread into milk and let it soak for half an hour. Mix six eggs with salt and pepper, add bread pulp, chopped garlic and cheese. Pour in a sheet coated with baking paper, drizzle with olive oil. Bake for some half an hour in an oven preheated to 230 degrees, until it gets a nice golden crust. Cut into shapes. Serve hot or cold.

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#### For fried sage:

- 20 leaves of fresh sage
- a cup of buttermilk
- ½ cup of sharp (cake) flour

Dip each sage leaf in buttermilk, followed by flour, and then fry over low heat until crisp on both sides. Top a slice of frittata with a spoon of Greek yogurt and some sage.



# Tart à la *komiška pogača*, a traditional savoury pie from *Āomiza* on Vis island

## For the filling:

- 2 onions
- 2 cans of peeled tomatoes
- 1 dl of olive oil
- 1 spoon of capers
- salted anchovies
- garlic
- fresh oregano and basil

## For the crust:

- 300 g of sharp (cake) flour
- 125 g of butter
- 5–6 spoons of cold water
- a bit of salt

Sauté sliced onions in olive oil until yellow. Add canned tomatoes, chopped capers, ten salted anchovies and two cloves of garlic. Cook until it becomes compact. Spice to your liking.

After combining the crust ingredients, knead into a flaky dough. Refrigerate for two hours. Spread the dough around one larger or three smaller tart pans. Place the pans with the dough into the freezer. Blind-bake frozen, without the filling, for some 25 minutes at 180 degrees. Let it cool off completely.

Fill the dough with the tomato and onion sauce. Add a few more salted anchovies. Bake shortly. Add fresh herbs before serving.

# Something like 'hib', an ancient delicacy from Vis

- 15 dried figs
- 2 dl of red wine
- 100 g of toasted almonds
- one spoon of fennel seeds
- juice and zest of one orange (unsprayed)
- ½ teaspoon of salt
- one teaspoon of chia seeds
- ripe sheep cheese and orange marmalade for serving

Soften the figs by boiling them shortly in wine. In a mortar, crush the fennel seeds with a bit of salt. Strain the wine, then put figs in a blender. Add the orange juice and zest, toasted almonds, salt and fennel and blend together. Remove from blender, then mix in chia seeds by hand. Refrigerate for an hour, so that the flavours blend together. Shape into small balls or disks (approximately 20 pieces). Top with a bit of sheep cheese and a bit of orange marmalade and decorate with rosemary flowers.



The simplicity of  
sun-kissed holidays  
at Sunny by  
Valamar hotels



SUNNY

by VALAMAR



Imagine stepping into a world where the stress of everyday life slowly melts away into the sea. In this world, every adventure includes watching the sun dance on the Adriatic with your friends and family. Here, the beach is your playground and laid-back leisure is the name of the game.

Step into Sunny by Valamar, where simple holidays meet the Croatian seaside for the ultimate casual getaway. Embark on a dream escape where summer fun is fuelled by the sun, sea and simplicity, no matter if you choose to chill by the pool or explore the shores.

At Sunny by Valamar hotels and resorts, carefree vacations are the golden rule, guaranteeing guests a getaway that's all about easy holiday living and unbeatable beach vibes. Are you ready to come along for the ride?

## Your ideal holiday is Sunny's summer reality

At Sunny by Valamar, the sun and sea aren't just elements of nature but the architects of relaxation. Let the sun's warm embrace and the sea's tranquil whispers gift you with moments of sweet rejuvenation. Whether you're seeking a zen-like escape or a burst of Adriatic adventures, all of your holiday moods are covered at Sunny.

Sunny by Valamar is all about keeping your holiday by the sea simple yet spectacular. These hotels and resorts aren't just places to crash; they're summer havens where you can find everything you need without breaking the bank. Because your slice of paradise doesn't have to cost an arm and a flip-flop.

Speaking of paradise, what does your perfect Sunny day look like? The reality is, you can write your own holiday story at Sunny by Valamar. Want to soak up the sun by the Sunny Pool terrace? Go for it. Crave some fun in the Chill & Play zone? Get crazy. And when hunger strikes? Dive into a selection of flavourful and fresh Mediterranean dishes whenever your heart desires – because dining on your schedule is all part of this carefree lifestyle.

But hold onto your beach hats because here's the best part: the squad of ValamArtists. They're not just hotel staff; they are the magicians behind making your holiday wishes come true. From recommending the best spots in each destination to making sure you're having the time of your life no matter the hour, ValamArtists are your trusty travel sidekicks in this seaside adventure who have your best interests at heart. And they're always on call when you need a dose of insider expertise and endless enthusiasm.



## Pack your sunglasses for even brighter days ahead

Now, imagine this exact beachside holiday taken to the next level, where every detail spells out a holiday you'll never forget. It's time to step into the revamped Sunny by Valamar resorts that wow with impressive news in 2024.

Explore the refreshing new Makarska Sunny Resort where a wave of exciting

changes has transformed every nook into a haven of pure holiday bliss. This complete hotel makeover redefines the meaning of a beachside escape, with all 250 rooms renovated and 171 rooms flaunting a brand-new design that's all about seaside comfort. Family fun is taken to new heights with Softplay and Smart Play Zones, a Game Lounge, outdoor playgrounds and trampoline zones that'll make every kid (and kid at heart) squeal with joy. The Sunny Restaurant also got a dazzling redesign, where Sunny Breakfast & Brunch and Dinner vibes keep your smiles flowing from morning to night. And when the time comes to

have a bite? Dive into Valfresco Grab&Go 24/7 food and beverage display; you're never far from delicious grab 'n go eats. The revamped Sunny bar is the cherry on top, offering a terrace and a Play zone that's all about unwinding in style.

Rabac Sunny Hotel & Residence got a refresh as well, turning the hotel into a vibrant pocket of casual good times. Imagine stepping into one of the 300 rooms adorned with that signature Sunny design, blending comfort with a splash of coastal charm that relives the beach even within the walls of your hotel room. Rooms have merged from the former ho-



tel into this vibrant mix, ensuring every stay feels like the breezy beach escape you've always imagined. And for our guests, a makeover of rooms promises you're transported into a cosy home by the sea. Also new is the Sunny Full Board option, so instead of just breakfast and brunch, you can enjoy three meals a day during your stay.

But a holiday isn't just about where you lay your head; it's also all about the experiences. That's why the restaurant and public spaces have been upgraded to elevate every moment of your stay. Families have reason to rejoice, too, as

fun for all ages unfolds with Smart Play, Softplay zone, a Game Lounge and an active zone with trampolines to ensure smiles all around.

The overhaul continues at Krk Sunny Hotel with 194 rooms transformed into summer sanctuaries, showcasing that signature Sunny design that's all about comfy coastal vibes. The service game has been upgraded, serving up Sunny Breakfast & Brunch and Sunny Dinner to treat your taste buds to Mediterranean delights whenever you need to recharge. The excitement is dialled up for families thanks to Smart Play for the little ones, a

Game Lounge for some friendly competition and a Family Play Lounge, keeping in mind that every moment is a holiday highlight waiting to happen.

It's time to pack your flip-flops, your favourite beach reads, some sunscreen and your carefree spirit because Sunny by Valamar is bringing you the best of beach life in 2024. Craft your next Croatian vacation at your own pace and get ready for an Adriatic adventure that's simple, sunny and filled with sweet memories.



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## THE TRAIL OF SEVEN WATERFALLS

# A dreamy walk through northern Istria

words by Isabel Putinja

*This popular hiking trail takes walkers along a challenging rocky course that reveals babbling brooks and gushing waterfalls emptying into magical turquoise ponds hidden in dense forests.*

It's a crisp and sunny spring day as I descend towards the Mirna river at Sveti Ivan near Buzet. A long row of parked cars greets me, revealing that this scenic walk, which sees up to 2000 hikers a day during the warm summer months, is popular year-round.

The trail starts off following the Mirna's north bank for a kilometre before its green and blue markings point towards a clutch of forested limestone cliffs. Glancing up, I spot rock climbers perch-

ing from the 40-metre-high cliff-face, its pock-marked surface providing natural grips and wedges for their hands and feet.

Istria's typical limestone or karst landscape is made up of rocky caverns and craggy outcrops, with rivers running through deep canyons and along waterfalls, spilling into a collection of ponds and subterranean pools. Invisible beneath the rocky limestone surface are many sinkholes and even vast underground lakes.



The Mirna's source springs not far from this trail, somewhere in this labyrinth of limestone canyons and caverns. This is Istria's longest river, ebbing and flowing along a 53 kilometre-long course westwards towards the Adriatic Sea. Growing and retracting with the seasons, it slows down to a trickle in the summer when rainfall can be scarce.

On this early spring day, it rushes with invigorated energy thanks to melting snow from the nearby Učka and Čičarija mountains. With each step, the roar of tumbling water and rushing currents grows stronger. I quickly arrive at the first waterfall named Zagon, cascading five metres down rocky steps into a 24-metre-wide square-shaped pond of surprisingly turquoise waters.

Then only 200 metres further rumbles the second, Bačva, slightly higher at 8 metres and splashing into an almost perfectly circular pool about 12 metres wide. A rickety suspension bridge that once spanned it is no longer here and overhead wires reveal that a zipline once connected the two pools. Measures were recently taken by the municipality to secure what is known as a difficult and potentially dangerous trail after a tragic mishap.

Next comes a steep and challenging upwards climb along a ragged cliff. Strategically placed ropes and foot grips along this difficult stretch help with the task of clambering 100 metres up to reach the tallest waterfall. At Vela Peć, the reward is the natural spectacle of a roaring stream of water tumbling noisily 26.5 metres below. After another steep ascent to the trail's highest point, a scenic view

of hilltop Buzet in the distance awaits, framed by the Čičarija mountains.

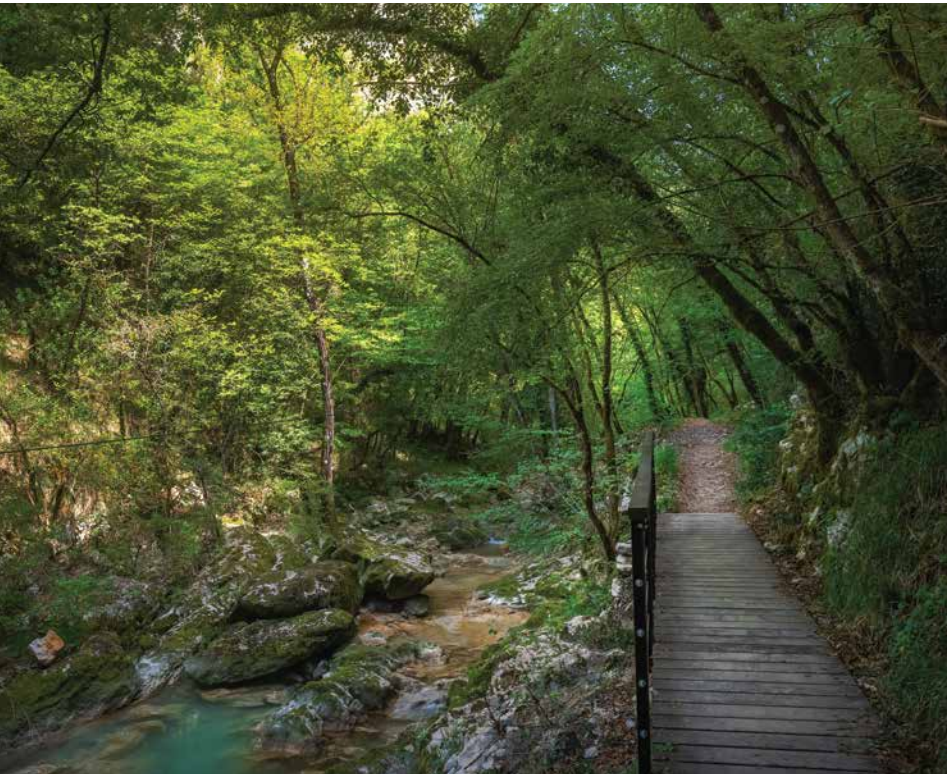
After the most demanding section of the trail, a leaf-littered forest path loops off on a detour along a babbling stream all the way to Mala Peć waterfall. This is one of the most picturesque spots on the trail. Falling from a height of four metres, this waterfall is one of the smallest but the atmospheric pool it empties into is simply magic. Finding myself completely alone here, I stop for a few moments of blissful contemplation.

Back on the main trail, a sign points in the direction of Napoleon's bridge, an arched stone structure dating back to the early 19th century and one of the route's best-known landmarks. And yet it's easy to miss. When I spot the river running below me, I realise I'm walking over the bridge. Somehow the vegetation has fused with the stone of bridge, camouflaging it. I leave the path briefly to descend towards the water and admire the bridge's perfectly formed stone arch.

The track continues under canopies of age-old holm oaks to Kuhari, a tiny hamlet made up of a handful of stone houses. From here it then snakes downwards to Kotli, while the sound of rushing water gets louder and louder.

In Kotli, the impressive terraced waterfalls stretch seven metres wide and the limestone riverbed is pock-marked with curious depressions. These falls once powered a mill whose wooden remains stand perched on the edge of the riverbank. The rushing rapids cascade downwards into two large blue-green pools of impossibly clear waters.





This sleepy village is now uninhabited but was once home to over 100 residents. Its rustic riverside tavern is still shuttered for the season, while a row of renovated stone houses with timber porches which welcome tourists in the summer months look equally deserted.

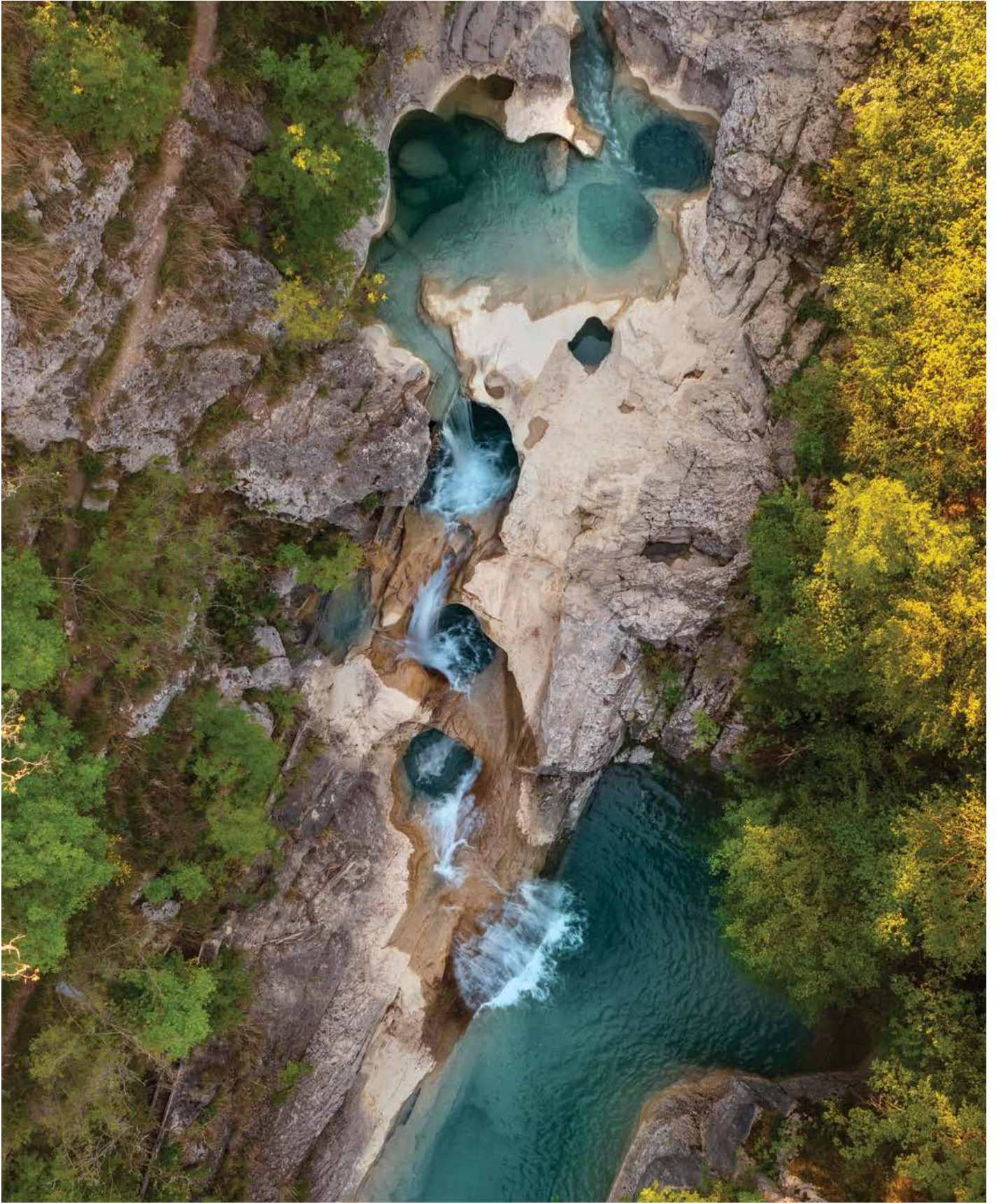
Leaving Kotli behind, the signposted route leads down along another forest path sandwiched by more holm oaks, their lobed leaves littering the ground. These age-old paths were once the walkways tread by villagers when the only way to get around was on foot. These merged and diverged in the dense forests, creating a network of trails connecting each hamlet.

Two more waterfalls await. Zelenščak is a rushing torrent falling eight metres down a series of steps before emptying into a large circular pond that beckons invitingly. And then just over a kilometre further, rushes Grjok, the very last of the seven waterfalls, which fills a wide magical pond surrounded by trees.

As I approach the last stretch of the trail, the Mirna, my constant companion, cheers me on with the sound of its rippling current. The trail markings direct me across its zigzagging course three times. I traipse gingerly from one stepping stone to the next, successfully reaching the other side each time without getting my feet wet.

Close to five hours after setting out, I'm back at the soaring cliff-face, now glowing with the soft light of the setting sun. The rock climbers have descended from the wall of stone and are winding up their ropes. Emerging from the forest path, the track continues along Mirna's southern bank and back to my starting point.

I had walked along close to 14 kilometres of enchanting forest paths, encountering seven waterfalls along the way. I make a mental note to return in the summer for the chance to swim in the ethereal lagoons of turquoise waters.



# Prepare for the slopes

## TIPS & TRICKS BY OUR SKI INSTRUCTOR



*Tucked into the heart of the Austrian Alps is a skiing hotspot with a history tracing back to the early 20th century. This once-hushed village with a handful of trails is now a world-class skiing destination inviting thrill seekers from across the globe. Naturally, this can only be Obertauern.*

*Thanks to its high-altitude slopes and super-reliable snowfall, Obertauern has über-unique topography – and that creates the perfect canvas for skiers of all levels. Whether you're a first-timer or a seasoned pro, mastering the art of skiing is one exhilarating journey in this snow-laden landscape. So, it's time to carve through the snow like a boss with pro tips and tricks by Alen Greblo, our trusty ski instructor.*

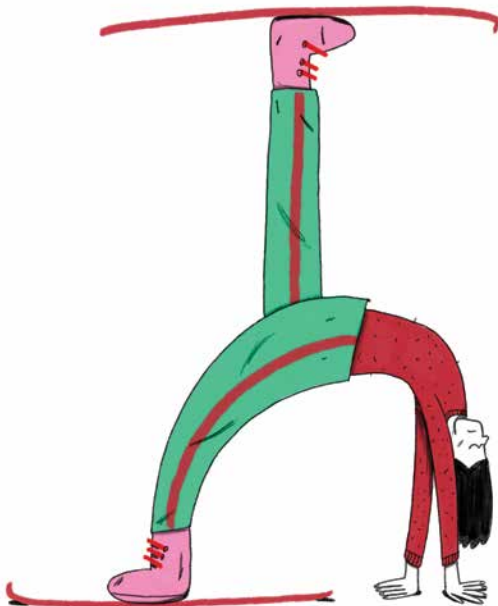
Discover  
tips &  
tricks  
for the  
slopes





## GEAR UP LIKE A PRO

For starters, having the right equipment is crucial. And it's not just about looking cool in your ski gear. Make sure your boots fit snugly, your bindings are adjusted correctly and your skis are in top-notch condition. They say a well-prepared skier is a happy skier – and your boots should be made for skiing (not walking).



## WARM UP THOSE MUSCLES

Skiing is a full-body workout, so it's smart to warm up your muscles before hitting the slopes. A few dynamic stretches and squats will get your blood flowing and reduce the risk of injuries. Remember, no one can ski with muscle cramps.

## MASTER THE ART OF PIZZA AND FRENCH FRIES

No, we're not talking about your lunch. But perfecting your ski stance is just as satisfying. The pizza slice (or snow-plough) is perfect for slowing down, while the French fries position is your go-to for speeding up. Knowing these basics will give you control and confidence on the slopes. Once you've mastered them both, you can take yourself out for an après-ski meal.

## KEEP YOUR EYES ON THE PRIZE

Always keep your eyes on the path ahead and not on your skis. Look where you want to go and your body will follow suit. It's all about anticipating the terrain and staying one step ahead. Trust your instincts and let your ski skills shine.



## DON'T FEAR THE FALL

We've all been there, and there is no reason to be ashamed. A tumble here and there is all part of the skiing experience. Embrace every fall and get back up with a smile. It's not the fall that defines you; it's how you conquer the next slope.

## EMBRACE THE BOLD WITH FAT SKIS

Fat skis aren't just for the pros – they're a beginner's best friend and your secret weapon to shredding on the slopes. These fat and fun skis are a game-changer thanks to wider bases and groovier designs that offer more stability, control and floatation on the snow so you can carve through powder like a pro.

## FIND YOUR RHYTHM

Skiing is like dancing down the mountain, so it's important to find your groove. Shift your weight smoothly from one ski to the other, allowing your body to flow with the natural terrain. With a bit of rhythm, you'll be slicing through the powder in no time.



## KNOW YOUR SNOW

The snow is your canvas. Learn the difference between powder, groomers and moguls and adapt your technique accordingly. Each type of snow offers a challenge and an opportunity to show off. Become a snow connoisseur and let the mountain be your muse.

## POWDER DAY PLAYTIME

When the snow gods grace you with a powder day, it's time to play. Embrace the fluffy goodness and enjoy the freedom that fresh snow offers. Lean back, let your skis do the work and relish the sensation of floating on a sea of snow.



# Edible flowers, decorative & delicious


words and recipes by Željka Klemenčić

Enjoying food is a complex process that involves and engages all of our senses. Even from a distance, the smell of food can seem appealing or appalling, which was immensely important in the times before food safety was standardised; it was the nature's way of informing us about the expiration date. An appealing scent signals to the body that the food is good and safe to eat, while a repulsive smell keeps us safe from poisoning.

We react to food even before we taste it, the strongest signals coming from our eyes. Sight is our dominant sense that we largely use to judge whether we like or dislike something. Just think of children, who frown at the very sight of greens on their plate, and decide that since it doesn't look good, they will pass on it.

On the other hand, when food looks appetising, it evokes a craving and the glands in our mouth start to produce saliva that contains digestive enzymes which help break down food and make use of its precious nutrients. But let's not demystify the whole process.

We also eat with our eyes. The food that looks nice is exciting and improves our mood and appetite. For this reason, edible flowers have had their place on the plate for centuries, from the ancient Rome to China. A colourful decoration on the plate, a spice, and a way to enrich the texture and taste of a dish, edible flowers are also a chance to heal with food.



This is especially the case in the spring. After the winter hibernation and the lack of fresh produce, after several months of heavy winter foods, preserves and cured meats, the first spring flowers and their gentle blooms bring a promise of freshness. Precisely at this time, edible flowers find their natural place in the kitchen, as part of light spring desserts and salads, together with the first asparagus and freshly foraged wild herbs.

The early risers include primroses and violets, most often consumed candied or raw. Then come the ubiquitous dandelions, a stellar example of healing plants. From the root to the flower, every part of a dandelion is edible, and thanks to the bitter taste and restorative effects on the liver, it is the symbol of a spring detox. In this area, dandelions have been eaten since forever, fresh, as part of a summer salad, or quickly blanched, as in the Zagorje potato salad with dandelion. Along with dandelions, when on spring meadows, you can also munch on daisies.

In gardens, calendulas and marigolds attract both humans and butterflies, and later in the season, its nasturtiums, and also starflowers, which are perfect in summer salads because of their mild flavour that resembles cucumbers. The list is endless, and includes flowers of spice plants, which showcase the same flavour in a milder variant. Chive flowers are the star, but so are sage, mint, thyme...

The spring bloom of fruit trees is especially captivating; in Japan, thousands of pages of poetry have been written to honour the cherry blossoms. The fruit flower's petals are very gentle, and the flowers are short-lasting, which makes them even more precious. Apple, peach and pear flowers are the perfect decoration for spring cakes and tarts. Of course, you have to make sure that the flowers come from a tree that hasn't been sprayed with chemicals. The same rule applies to all other edible flowers; eat only the ones from known sources, picked in

pristine nature or grown with the intention of being served as food, as is the case with pansies in all different shades, perhaps the most frequent edible flower to be found on restaurant plates.

Most flowers have a mild and gentle flavour, and especially praised are those with a hint of sweetness, like violets that can be kept in honey, or lilacs – one should look for the old sort with small, pale-violet flowers.

Exceptions to the rule do exist. For example, the large and voluptuous magnolia flowers are also edible. While there are many different types and many different flavours, all magnolia flowers are among those with the most distinct taste. With their strong and peppery kick, an aroma of cardamom, and a spicy tang, they remind of ginger. In Asian cuisine, the magnolia flowers are pickled and used as a substitute for pickled ginger. A general rule for picking magnolia flowers says that the darker-purple shade the flower, the more kick and pepper to its taste. So the ideal buds for pickling are the light-pink ones, or the ones that are pink on the outside and white on the inside.

Keep one thing in mind; the flowers should be used as an accent, to highlight the beauty of the food and awaken our sense of gratitude for the beauty that the nature gifts us. They should not be consumed in large quantities. And when picking, always do it with moderation, leaving the most for the bees.

At Valamar, we like to plant seeds – of inspiration, new ideas and memories to carry with you. The bookmark you'll find attached has seeds of edible flowers, so you can plant your memories, too. Try out one of the recipes above or simply remember your holidays with us each time you open up the book you're reading.



# Wild garlic risotto with a fillet of sea bream

## For pesto:

- one bundle of wild garlic leaves
- one bundle of parsley
- olive oil
- coarse salt

Chop up the wild garlic, then blend all the ingredients shortly. Add oil and salt to your liking. Because wild garlic has a very intense flavour, this recipe mellows it out with parsley that adds freshness.


## For the risotto:

- one cup of Arborio rice
- a bit of olive oil
- one smaller leek
- 2 litres of fish or vegetable stock
- 1 dl dry white wine
- a few spoons of wild garlic pesto (to your liking)
- one spoon of butter
- a sea bream fillet

## For decoration:

- flowers of wild garlic and lilac

Pan-fry the leeks on some olive oil until yellow, then sauté a bit longer. Add rice and glaze quickly, then add wine. After the wine evaporates, start adding the hot stock, ladle by ladle as the rice soaks it up; stir constantly. Continue until the rice is cooked. Remove from fire and add butter and a few spoons of pesto. Taste and adjust to your liking. Pan-fry the fillet of sea bream, skin-side first, then briefly on the other side. Place the fish on top of the risotto and decorate with flowers.



## Potato salad with beluga lentils and dandelions

### For vinegar:

- 20-30 dandelion flowers
- 2 dl apple cider


Fill up a jar with freshly picked dandelion flowers, add cider vinegar and cover. Keep at room temperature for two weeks at least. Strain before using.

### For lentils:

- 1 cup of beluga lentils
  - 2 cups of meat stock
  - 4 garlic cloves
  - 2 bay leaves
  - half a teaspoon of salt
  - 500 g purple potatoes
  - 2 spoons of butter
- 
- 100 g ricotta cheese
  - a few dandelion flowers

Add one teaspoon of salt to 4 cups of warm water and soak lentils in it for at least one hour. Strain. Heat the oven to 160 degrees. In a pot that fits into the oven, mix lentils, stock, bay leaves, salt and garlic. Bake for some 40 minutes, so that the lentils are not fully cooked. Meanwhile, cook the potatoes with peels. Peel them, chop and briefly pan-fry on butter. Mix in with lentils, add dandelion flowers and spice with olive oil and dandelion vinegar.

Cut dandelion flowers from the stem so that the petals separate. Shape ricotta with a spoon and coat in dandelion petals. Add to the salad.



## Warm-cold barley and chicken salad with pickled magnolia flowers

### For pickled magnolia flowers:

- 10-15 magnolia flowers
- 1/2 cup of apple cider vinegar
- 1/2 cup of water
- one baby teaspoon of sugar
- 1/2 baby teaspoon of salt

Place the flowers in a jar so that they remain whole. Bring to heat a mix of water and vinegar, until the salt and sugar melt. Let the brining cool, then pour over flowers. Refrigerate overnight, best for a few days.

### For chicken:

- 1 deboned chicken breast, cut into finger-size pieces
- 2 spoons of soy sauce
- 2 fennels
- 2-3 spoons of olive oil
- 1 cup of barley
- 1/2 pomegranate
- beetroot baby leaves

Start cooking the barley. Marinate the chicken in soy sauce for at least 30 minutes. Cut the fennel into eights, add salt and oil to your liking and bake for 20 minutes at 180 degrees. Prepare the chicken in a wok or grill pan. Mix with barley, fennel, beetroot leaves and pomegranate seeds. Slice the pickled magnolia flowers thinly and add to the salad. Drizzle with olive oil and the vinegar of pickled flowers.

# Grilled asparagus with goat feta cheese, celery and red orange

- a bundle of wild asparagus
- 1 dl of olive oil
- 100g of feta cheese
- a few sticks of leafy celery
- one red orange
- baby salad leaves
- juice of one lemon
- green pea sprouts and edible flower mix (clovers, apple flowers)

Grill the asparagus in a lightly oiled pan. Mix it in with all other ingredients. Crumble feta cheese. Add olive oil and lemon juice, then decorate with edible flowers.





## Spring nests

- a bundle of wild asparagus
- 100 g of freshly foraged herbs
- 200 g of brassica shoots
- a teaspoon of soy sauce
- olive oil
- balsamic vinegar
- one egg (per person)
- ½ litre of stock
- pork scratching crumbs

Cook brassica shoots shortly in stock. Before removing from heat, add the asparagus (cleaned of the hard bits), also just to soften them. Strain, then spice it with a bit of soy sauce. On the plate, shape the brassica shoots into a nest and frame with asparagus and freshly foraged greens like the leaves of dandelions, yarrow and wild garlic leaves. Drizzle with olive oil and thick balsamic vinegar. Add a poached or a soft-boiled egg onto the nest. Decorate with wild pansies or other edible flowers. Sprinkle with pork scratching crumbs.

# Floating islands



- 5 eggs at room temperature
- 1 litre of whole milk
- bourbon vanilla on a tip of a knife
- 90 g of sugar plus one spoon of sugar
- a pinch of salt

Decoration:  
violet, daisy or primrose flowers

Separate egg whites and yolks. Over low heat, bring the vanilla milk to boil. Add a pinch of salt and a spoon of sugar to egg whites, then beat into a firm snow. When the milk comes to a boil, take the snow spoon by spoon and place each 'island' on the surface of the milk. Flip each one and remove from the milk onto a plate with a hollow ladle.

Remove the milk from heat. Mix the yolks with the rest of sugar until it becomes lighter in colour. Add a bit of hot milk to dilute the yolks, mix well, then pour all yolks into the milk. Cook on low heat until the cream thickens, making sure it doesn't go to boil. Chill completely before serving. Decorate with edible flowers.

# Raspberry cheese tart with a flower of peach



## **For the crust:**

- 300 g of all-purpose flour
- 125 g of butter
- a pinch of salt
- 5–6 spoons of cold water

## **For the filling:**

- 400 g of cream cheese
- 2 dl of sweet cream
- 3 eggs
- 4 spoons of honey
- 300 g of raspberries (frozen is ok)
- 3 spoons of brown sugar

Knead the crust ingredients into a dough; cover with tin foil and let sit for two hours. Roll it out thin, then lay over a cake pan. Rest the dough for at least two more hours in the freezer. Preheat the oven to 180 degrees. Place a sheet of baking paper over the dough and add rice or beans on top of it, to prevent the dough from puffing up during baking. After 30 minutes, remove the paper and 'weights,' then return the dough into the oven for five more minutes, for the crust to blush slightly. Let it cool completely before adding the filling.

Mix sugar and raspberries in a deeper dish, and cook for 5 to 10 minutes, until they blend together. Strain the puree through a thick strainer. Mix cheese, eggs, cream and honey together. Pour one half into the dough and add raspberries to the other half. Stir before pouring over the other layer. Bake for 40 minutes at 180 degrees. Chill before serving. Add a peach or apple flower for decoration.

# Kombucha & yeast

## For kombucha:

- 1,5 litres of green mint tea
- 5 spoons of sugar
- kombucha mushroom or scoby (a symbiotic culture of bacteria and yeast)
- a teaspoon of spirulina powder
- dried lavender flowers

Boil the tea and when it cools off a bit, add sugar. Cool completely, then pour over the kombucha mushroom. Leave for 2 to 4 days, until the mushroom has absorbed the sugar and the drink becomes slightly acidic and sparkly. Then strain, add spirulina and lavender flowers and let it ferment for another day in the fridge. Add pansies, lavender or other edible flowers into an ice tray. Cover with water and freeze. Serve kombucha with flower ice cubes.

## For yeast:

- 2 pieces of old sourdough bread
- one spoon sourdough starter
- 1.5 litres of water
- 5 spoons of sugar
- 1-2 beetroots
- violets & pansies

Chop the bread into cubes and bake at 200 degrees until golden. In a large jar, combine bread, water, sugar, cubed beets and fresh starter (you could do without it, but it would take longer). Stir, cover with a lid and let it ferment at room temperature for 2 to 4 days. Strain and cool before serving with flower ice cubes.



A CELEBRATION  
TO REMEMBER

# Krk Fair marks 500 years



Pack your bags, grab your shades and embark on an unforgettable escapade to the island of Krk. This Adriatic playground of sun, sea and endless adventure offers postcard-worthy moments waiting to happen at every corner. But there's more to the island than diving into the sparkling Adriatic waters for a refreshing swim. Thanks to one medieval and Renaissance festival in August, Krk's splendour is amplified to new heights. It's time to get ready for Lovrečeva!

## Celebrating 500 years of a unique island tradition

Also known as the Krk Fair, the longest-running town event has a remarkable legacy dating back to the Middle Ages. This great annual fair harks back to 1524 when the town of Krk was under the rule of the Venetian Republic. It has been organised over the feast of St. Lawrence ever since.

From August 8th to 10th, you get to step back in time and celebrate five centuries of tradition on this spectacular island. This year is extra special, too, as the Krk Fair is marking its monumental 500th anniversary. An exceptional experience steeped in history, culture and entertainment awaits all visitors.

## A journey through medieval marvels

From its humble origins as a marketplace for goods like foodstuffs, livestock and handicrafts, the fair has evolved into a cherished tradition that unites communities across the island and beyond. At Kamplin square, under the walls of the Frankopan Castle in the heart of Krk Town, the fair transports visitors to a bygone era, showcasing the glory of Krk during this aristocratic period.

Across three days of festivities, you can immerse yourself in a whirlwind of activities and attractions. Explore stalls brimming with traditional items presented by local producers and small family farms from all corners of Croatia. Marvel at exhibitions of medieval knightly equipment, witness thrilling knight tournaments and participate in hands-on workshops showcasing ancient skills and crafts.

Captivating performances bring Krk's history to life, featuring reenactors embodying the legendary Frankopan counts

of Krk to a variety of mesmerising shows and plays. There's no shortage of entertainment to delight visitors of all ages, illuminating locations from the town's squares to the waterfront.

## A star-studded finale

As the sun sets, the festivities continue with evening musical performances showcasing top artists, adding an extra

layer of magic to the atmosphere. They're pulling out all the stops for this milestone 500th edition, with headlining acts including the legendary Croatian band Parni Valjak, Croatian singer Petar Grašo and the iconic Gipsy Kings by André Reyes. It will all make for a grand finale to the Feast of St. Lawrence celebrations.

Mark your calendars, gather your friends and family and get ready for a once-in-a-lifetime spectacle on the enchanting island of Krk. This historic extravaganza is not to be missed.



# LAVENDER FIELDS FOREVER

A timeless love affair with  
the purple bloom

words by Daniela Boban

With its irresistible fragrance, gorgeous purple flowers and a staggering number of uses, lavender is beloved worldwide. You can eat it, drink it in teas and cocktails, take a whiff to calm frayed nerves, infuse in balms for happy skin, use it to invite bees and butterflies to your garden – the list goes on. From helping people sleep well and smell even better to repelling insects and warding off illness, lavender is like a trusty friend who's always got your back.

Part of the wider mint family, lavender has over 45 recognised species and 450 varieties. While the purple shade is the most familiar, you'll also find white, yellow and pink sorts, adding to the colourful mix.

Enchanting lavender has been wooing people for thousands of years. Mentions of lavender pop up in the Bible, with Adam and Eve said to have taken it when leaving

the Garden of Eden. Ancient Egyptians used it to make their mummies smell sweet, the great Tutankhamun himself included. It was ancient Arabia that pioneered lavender cultivation and distilling it into oil, while the Romans, who named it after "lavare" (to bathe) added bundles to their bathwater – and so lavender spread throughout the bathhouses of Europe. Records show that European royalty, including Elisabeth I, Louis XIV and Queen Victoria, were all practically obsessed with the purple delight.

Lavender enjoys a reputation as "the herb of love". Cleopatra is said to have wooed her lovers with its heady fragrance, while Tudor girls used it to encourage their suitors to pop the big question. Beyond aiding romance and warding off the evil eye, its quirkier uses included attracting fairies, boosting powers of clairvoyance and granting the ability to see ghosts.



Lavender isn't just a pretty plant with a sweet scent. Its health perks for the body and mind have been prized for eons. Ancient Romans knew about its antibacterial properties and used it to treat battlefield wounds, as did doctors in both World Wars. During the Great Plague of 1665, the plant was believed to ward off the dreaded disease. In the 1930s, French chemist René-Maurice Gattefossé accidentally burned his hand, applied lavender oil on the burn and was so impressed by the rapid healing that he wrote a book, coining the term "aromatherapy".

Scientific research confirms what the ancients knew all along: lavender is a superstar of the medicinal plant world. Today, you'll find lavender in everything from creams, bath bombs and massage oils to room fragrances, scented candles and cleaning products. We use lavender to relax, reduce stress and anxiety, im-

prove sleep quality, boost moods and memory, relieve pain, heal skin and much more. Its culinary uses, known since antiquity, are having a revival as well, with top chefs using it to pep up sweet and savoury dishes. Add flair to your cakes with it, sprinkle it on ice cream or in a glass of bubbly, uplift your sugar bowl with a flowery touch or simply enjoy a nice cup of aromatic tea.

Visually, the flowering herb is a treat, too. Lavender fields in full bloom are a sight to behold, from the show-stopping meadows of Provence to the unexpected locations like England, Japan and Australia. In Croatia, the island of Hvar, affectionately known as "the lavender island," was once a global player, contributing a remarkable 8% of the world's yield. While production has waned in recent years, Hvar's timeless landscapes still captivate with waves of violet flowers against the

azure sea. The island celebrates its agricultural heritage with a lavender festival each summer. Along with an array of local lavender-infused goodies, there are lavender hiking tours, harvests with locals at dawn or witnessing lavender oil distillation from freshly picked blooms.

From ancient tombs to modern labs, from bathrooms to kitchen tables and gardens to swanky spas, lavender is the ultimate multitasker – and a gift that keeps on giving.

Follow the scent  
of the purple  
bloom





VALAMAR