



## Sailing the Dalmatian Coast

From Split to Dubrovnik

**29 April–8 May 2027 (MN 345)**

10 days

Lecturer: Dr Zoë Opačić

**7–16 October 2027 (MN 505)**

10 days

Lecturer: Dr Mark Thompson

Exclusive charter of a small ship for just 30 participants to explore the string of beautiful, unspoilt historic towns.

One of the most spectacular of Mediterranean coastlines with crystal water and innumerable islands and inlets.

Begin in Split – with 2 nights in the Old Town – and end in Dubrovnik, the enchanting UNESCO world heritage site.

Rugged cliffs plunge into turquoise seas, and rolling hills are terraced with vines, olives and fruit trees. Towns with terracotta roofs and white belfries fringe the shore. This is Dalmatia, a historic region of stone and water, Romance and Slavic cultures, 'West' and 'East'.

This unique coastline, fractured into countless islands and natural harbours, has attracted states and settlers from all points of the compass. Dalmatia has been a Roman province, a Byzantine *thema*, a Croatian kingdom, a Napoleonic province and an Austrian crownland. Over two millennia, it was home for Greek colonists, Venetian merchants, Habsburg administrators, Italians and many other communities.

In the Middle Ages, Croats established coastal city-states that oscillated between independence and foreign rule, initially by Hungary, later – and more lastingly – by Venice. After a revolutionary decade in French 'Illyria', Dalmatia was absorbed into the Habsburg empire. Across the 20th century, it belonged to Austria-Hungary, the kingdom of Yugoslavia, two Axis powers, socialist Croatia in Tito's federal Yugoslavia, and finally – after war brought destruction to Dalmatia – the republic of Croatia.

Through every shift, Dalmatia retained its distinct maritime character, hybrid culture, and rich artistic heritage.

Our journey begins in the ancient city of Split, which presents the extraordinary phenomenon of a functioning and vibrant city centre accommodated in the remains of a vast Roman palace. The emperor Diocletian's



*Split, watercolour by Walter Tyndale publ.1925*

mausoleum is now a cathedral, and its colonnaded court a café terrace; fortified gates still control the flow of life.

From Split, we embark on a private cruise of the Croatian coast on a ship chartered solely for our small group. We sail between lush islands and moor in a host of captivating small towns. Strolling from the ship through medieval and Renaissance centres is a particular pleasure.

We end in Dubrovnik, George Bernard Shaw's "paradise on Earth". This perfectly preserved Renaissance city is bound by its famous walls, more than a mile in length, and one of the most enchanting sights that Europe has to offer.

*Our spring and autumn departures of this tour are led by two lecturers, who bring long experience yet diverse expertise to this journey. Please see their biographies for further information.*

### Itinerary

**Day 1: Split.** *April 2027:* Fly late morning from London Heathrow to Split (British Airways). *October 2027:* Fly mid-morning from London Heathrow to Split via Munich (Lufthansa). Transfer to our hotel in the Old Town for the first of two nights.

**Day 2: Split, Salona.** The core of Split consists of the vast quadrangular palace built by Emperor Diocletian (AD 295–305) for his retirement. Particularly well preserved are the colonnaded central court, Temple of Jupiter, Diocletian's mausoleum (the cathedral) and

the halls of the palace's substructure. The once great Roman city of Salona (now Solin) gives a unique insight into the last stages of urban life, its walls now encircling a complete ecclesiastical quarter.

**Day 3: Split, Trogir.** Visit the home and studio of Ivan Meštrović, the great Croatian sculptor (1883–1962), and the Archaeological Museum, with excellent Roman antiquities. Trogir is a delightful little island city and its Romanesque cathedral contains exceptionally fine sculpture. The 15th-century clock tower and loggia, with its large Meštrović bas-relief, complete the square. Board the *MS Prestige* and remain moored overnight in Trogir.

**Day 4: Šibenik.** Sail in the early morning northwest to Šibenik. Afternoon walk in this attractive medieval town, with its Gothic-Renaissance cathedral. Drive out to the waterfalls in the Krka National Park. Moor overnight in Šibenik.

**Day 5: Hvar.** Morning sail to the island of Hvar mooring in its eponymous capital. Visit the walled old town, its narrow streets lined with Gothic palaces, the 15th-century Franciscan monastery and 17th-century arsenal. Overnight here.

**Day 6: Vis.** Short cruise to Vis, Croatia's most remote inhabited island and its oldest recorded settlement. Visit the Archaeological Museum with its famous 4th-century BC bronze head of a Greek goddess. *As Vis is the least sheltered island in the Adriatic, it can be difficult to moor*

## Sailing the Dalmatian Coast continued

*in bad weather and this stop may be removed from the programme at short notice.* From here continue to the island of Korčula, whose history stretches back to the Neolithic era. Moor overnight in Korčula.

**Day 7: Korčula, Slano, Ston.** Walk through the old town of Korčula to see the magnificent Gothic-Renaissance Cathedral of St Mark with an altarpiece by Tintoretto. Sail at lunchtime to Slano, sheltered by its exquisite bay. By coach to Ston, which is surrounded by a series of remarkably well-preserved 14th-century walls, built to protect the northern boundary of the Republic of Ragusa (now Dubrovnik) and the town's valuable salt pans, among the oldest in the Mediterranean. Moor overnight in Slano.

**Day 8: Dubrovnik.** In the morning, drive to the Trsteno Arboretum, a Renaissance landscaped garden, sown with seeds brought back by Dubrovnik's sea captains. Sail from Slano to Dubrovnik, arriving in time to begin to explore. The cathedral is a delightful exercise in Venetian Baroque, and possesses an altarpiece by Titian. Moor overnight in Dubrovnik.

**Day 9: Dubrovnik.** Walk along the fortifications which are among the most complete and handsome city walls of any in Europe with views across the rooftops and out to sea. The Dominican convent has an excellent collection of Croatian and Italian Renaissance paintings. The afternoon is free for you to explore further. Moor overnight in Dubrovnik.

**Day 10. Disembark and drive to the airport.** The flight from Dubrovnik arrives at London Heathrow mid-afternoon.

*Please note that weather conditions can be unpredictable and the itinerary is dependent on them. Changes to moorings may need to be made at short notice.*

## Lecturers

**Dr Zoë Opačić** (April departure). Reader in the History and Theory of Architecture at Birkbeck College, specialising in medieval art, architecture and urbanism. She received her BA, MA and PhD at the Courtauld Institute of Art. A Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, she edited the *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* (2015–18) and has authored and edited a number of publications in English, German, Czech and Italian, including recent contributions to the *Oxford Handbook of Medieval Central Europe* and the *Brill*

*Companion to Medieval Vienna*. Zoe has longstanding family connections in Dalmatia and is a regular lecturer on MRT tours to Dalmatia, Italy and the Czech Republic.

**Dr Mark Thompson** (October departure). Reader in Modern History, University of East Anglia. He received his BA and PhD at the University of Cambridge. He first visited the eastern Adriatic when Croatia was part of Yugoslavia, and he returns every year. He lived in Slano and Dubrovnik while working as a peacekeeper for the United Nations. He also lived in Zagreb, as spokesman (on behalf of the Foreign Office) for the Croatia mission of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. A *Paper House*, his 'brilliant account of collapsing Yugoslavia' (*London Review of Books*), appeared in 1992. A study of Italy and the Habsburg Empire in the First World War (*The White War*) won the Hessel-Tiltman Prize. His history of Italy in the 1940s, *Like a Dragon's Back*, will be published in 2026. He has also translated fiction by Croatian and Italian writers.

## Practicalities

### The ship

The MS Prestige is a first-rate, 19-cabin vessel, launched in 2012 and fully refurbished in 2025. Public areas are generous with an air-conditioned dining room and bar which opens onto a covered terrace. The sun-deck has ample seating with a shaded area. Cabins and bathrooms are finished to a high standard.

### The cabins:

**Lower deck cabins**, 16m<sup>2</sup> with small porthole windows (these don't open). Twin or double beds.

**Main deck cabins**, 13m<sup>2</sup> with fully opening windows and door direct to the deck. Most are double beds, two are twin.

**Main deck cabins**, 16m<sup>2</sup> with fully opening windows. Double bed only.

**Included:** travel by private coach; hotel accommodation for 2 nights in Split followed by 7 on the ship; breakfasts; 6 lunches (on board) and 6 dinners (of which 4 are in restaurants ashore) with wine, water, coffee; all admissions and donations; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer, tour manager, ship manager and local guides.

**Accommodation in Split:** Hotel Cornaro

cornarohotel.com. A centrally-located 5-star hotel with modern décor.

**How strenuous?** Although by definition a cruise is more relaxing, the days in Split and the daily shore excursions require a good level of fitness and agility. There is a lot of walking in historic centres where paving is uneven and there are steps to climb, and over the rough ground of archaeological sites.

**Group size:** between 20 and 31 participants.