



The Dalmatian Coast, Croatia

TEXT AND ILLUSTRATIONS BY Stephen Harby



Korčula
graphite and
watercolor on paper,
5x8

The town of Korčula is on a peninsula—virtually an island apart from the larger island of Korčula.

A journey along the Dalmatian Coast of the Adriatic Sea takes one on a serendipitous journey of discovery through the former Yugoslavia and allows the artist to unpeel layers of empire and history. Between Dubrovnik, at the southern end of Croatia's coast, and Lake Bled in the mountains of northern Slovenia, one comes in contact with many of Europe's great civilizations. Rome, the Venetian Republic, the Ottoman Empire and the Austro-Hungarian Empire all claimed these lands and left their cultural and artistic traces. A trip through this region affords artists opportunities to paint and sketch dramatic seaside and lakeside views, as well as fascinating architecture and other subjects characteristic of the Balkans.

Such a journey is best done from April through October so as to take advantage of the seaside resorts and to use the network of coastal ferries that regularly ply the waters

from town to town. My journey through this region commenced in Bari, Italy, where my companions and I took an overnight ferry across the Adriatic to Dubrovnik. After two days exploring that compact walled city, we ventured northwest along the coast to the small island of Korčula. We stayed in its medieval walled main town, which is surrounded on three sides by water and whose buildings mass up to a central spire of the cathedral. It's a good destination for travelers, with a variety of small hotels, guest houses and restaurants appealing to a range of tastes and budgets.

From Korčula it was a short ferry hop to another enchanting island, Hvar. The island's principal town, also called Hvar, shows definite influences of the Venetian Republic. The resplendent façade of the Cathedral of St. Stephen is capped by curved pediments resembling those in Venice. Another short ferry ride took us to the larger town of Split, back on the Croatian mainland. Split's walled historical center follows the plan of a palace built by the Roman emperor Diocletian (244–311 A.D.). It is considered among the best-preserved Roman sites, and it offers an excellent example of the kind

St. Stephen's Cathedral, Hvar, Croatia
graphite and
watercolor on paper,
5x8

The Cathedral of St. Stephen's origins date from the 14th century, and the bell tower is from the 17th. The curved gable that surmounts the façade suggests the influence of Venice, where similar work by the architect Mauro Codussi can be found.



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WHERE TO STAY



Choices for accommodations include:

DUBROVNIK

- Pucic Palace Hotel

KORČULA

- Lešić Dimitri Palace and Hotel
- Korčula De La Ville

HVAR

- Adriana Spa Hotel

SPLIT

- Palace Judita Heritage Hotel

LAKE BLEĐ

- Vila Bled Hotel

Fishing Boats in Port, Hvar, Croatia

graphite on paper, 5x8

The town of Hvar wraps around a well-protected harbor lined with jetties and esplanades and paved with smooth marble and travertine.



ABOVE, RIGHT
AND LEFT
Vila Bled

NEAR RIGHT
Statue in Ban
Jelacic Square,
Zagreb, Croatia

FAR RIGHT
Korčula





of palimpsest which results from the continued habitation of grand ancient palaces as they degenerate over the centuries to more prosaic habitations.

From Split, my party took to land and quickly covered considerably more territory, including stops on the Istrian Peninsula at the northern end of Croatia's coast and in Zagreb, the country's art-nouveau-filled capital. From there we traveled by train to Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia. Finally we reached Lake Bled, a picturesque place surrounded by high mountains and redolent of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. There, we luxuriated for a night in the former villa of Josip Broz Tito (1892–1980), Yugoslavia's strongman leader. The villa was designed by the architect Josef Plecnik (1872–1957), whose work significantly helped shape Ljubljana, among other European cities. This residence—home to a man who had a profound impact on this

ABOVE
Assumption of Mary Church on Lake Bled Island, Slovenia

watercolor and graphite on paper, 5x8

The centerpiece of Lake Bled is the Assumption of Mary Church, an island sanctuary that is a popular pilgrimage destination. Guests of the nearby Vila Bled can paddle there in a rowboat from the hotel's fleet.

BELOW
Peristyle of Diocletian's Palace, Split, Croatia

watercolor and graphite on paper, 5x8

Open to the sky and surrounded by Corinthian columns surmounted by arches, the Peristyle court is the heart of the palace.

region during the 20th century—made a fitting place to end to a journey that had taken us through thousands of years of history. ♡

Stephen Harby is an architect, watercolorist, faculty member of the Yale School of Architecture and founder of Stephen Harby Invitational, which organizes travel opportunities for small groups.

