

Gardens & Landscapes of

Croatia & Slovenia

DAY 1

Upon arrival in Dubrovnik, guests will be met at Dubrovnik airport by an IQOTC English-speaking guide and escorted to a deluxe coach for a transfer to the Grand Villa Argentina for 2 nights bed and breakfast in deluxe sea view rooms - www.gva.hr . After check in and some time to relax, the guide will meet guests in the lobby of the hotel and walk the short distance to the Old City, where he/she will conduct a walking tour, including entrances to the Rector's Palace, Cathedral and the Franciscan Monastery. Return to the Grand Villa Argentina, where there will be time to relax before a cocktail reception followed by a 4 course gourmet welcome dinner.

DAY 2

After breakfast guests will be met in the lobby at and transferred to the Old City port for a short boat trip to the island of *Lokrum*, the greenest Croatian island, which covers an area of 2 hectares and is situated on the southeastern Adriatic Sea. In 1976, it was declared a natural forest reserve. Many types of "true" Mediterranean vegetation (Eumediterranean) are found over a small area. According to research, there are around 400 species of vascular flora on the island. The climate is characterized by dry and hot summers, with mild, rainy winters. The annual average temperature is 16°C and precipitation is 1300 mm. There are 2,584 sunny hours per year. The expert guide will detail certain types of plants and trees as guests enjoy a leisurely tour of the island.” Lunch will also be served on the island. Later guests return to Dubrovnik for an evening at leisure to enjoy the Old City.



DAY 3

After breakfast guests will be met in the lobby by the guide and board a deluxe coach, The destination today is the Garden Island of Hvar and the first stop is the Arboretum in Trsteno. We will arrange for the group to be met by the curator for a welcome talk about the facility.



The Trsteno Arboretum is located just north of Dubrovnik, in the small municipality of Trsteno, and covers an area of 25.5 ha (63 acres). It was established by the end of the 15th century as a park and summer residence of the patrician family Gučetić. It has been the property of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts since 1948, when it was donated.

The Arboretum has a very special place among the old Ragusan, Dalmatian and Mediterranean parks due to its five-century-long continuous development from Gothic-Renaissance, Renaissance-Baroque and Romantic forms to the present. It includes a Gothic-Renaissance park surrounding the 15th century summer residence, which is a monument of garden architecture, and a 19th century neo-Romantic park at Drvarica. Its collection of exotic and decorative trees and shrubs includes over 300 species and cultivars. Once again our expert guide, Mrs. Maja Kovacevic, will detail the history of the arboretum, with many interesting stories about how this important facility has survived. We shall also visit one of these 2 private gardens – either “Sorkocecic” or “Pucic.” Exact one will be determined closer to arrival. Later guests proceed by road, with a stop for an included lunch, to the small harbor at Drvenik and take the short ferry crossing to Sucuraj on the Garden Island of Hvar. Guests will enjoy a spectacular drive along the winding road through this stunning island to the town of Hvar before checking into Hotel Podstine (www.podstine.com), beautifully located on the sea shore a short distance from the old town. 2 nights in superior rooms.

DAY 4

After a buffet breakfast at Podstine, guests will meet a local guide for a full day tour of the Garden Island. The first stop is *Velo Grablje* - once a rich and advanced township of industrious people who, other than production of good wine, olive oil and honey, were known as the greatest lavender oil producers in Europe. Today Grablje is almost abandoned with only a dozen permanent residents since the majority of the population has moved to Hvar over the last years. Guests will also enjoy a visit to Sveta Nedilj, beautifully situated on steep and sunny slopes of the island. It is an excellent spot for growing vines, and we include wine tasting at a local vineyard. Later guests return to Hvar for a guided walking tour of the old town, including entrance to the Cathedral and the Bishop’s palace. The Cathedral is dedicated to St. Stephen, martyr and patron of the dioceses and city of Hvar. Guests will also visit the Franciscan monastery, and also have free time to walk to the Fortica (Španjola) fortress sitting proudly above the town. Later guests return to Podstine to freshen up before an included dinner at Podstine before returning to Hvar for a private concert performed by the Hvar folk theatre – the mystical concert will take place in front of the Cathedral and depict the history of Hvar.



a

DAY 5

After breakfast this morning guests check out, meet the guide and travel to the port of Stari Grad for the ferry to Split. Before arriving at the port, guests will meet Mr. Stjepan Dulcic for a tour of the famous lavender fields in Brusje. Upon arrival in Split, guests will meet a local guide for a private walking tour of the ruins of Diocletian's Palace, built between the late 3rd and the early 4th centuries A.D. Also, time to browse the amazing open air market, filled with flowers, herbs, vegetables, seeds etc...

Later depart Split and travel to Kastela Luksic for a visit to the Botanical School, with more than 1400 different herb species from all over the world. An olive (*Olea Europea*), more than 1500 years old, grows in Kaštel Štafilić, The system of roots occupies a space of more than 100 meters. The span of the tree is 6 meters, the span of the tree top is 22 meters and the height is 10 meters.



Especially interesting are exotic trees like firmiana (*Firmiana simplex* Bois.) from the cocoa-tree family, scented callicantus and other trees. The southern garden is

the richest part of the school botanical garden, due to its size and micro-climate. There are groups of autochthonous and exotic trees, bushes and flowers such as camphor tree, eucalyptus, avocado, acacia, sequoia, cedar of Lebanon, cedar of the Himalayas, jasmine and bougainvillea. Worth noting are the groups of aromatic and medicinal plants, plants of rocky terrains, and a field with plants of humid habitats.

In the late afternoon, guests will travel north to the National Park at Plitvice and check in for an overnight in lake view rooms at Hotel Jezero www.np-plitvicka-jezera.hr. Dinner is included tonight in the hotel restaurant.

DAY 6

After breakfast we include entrance tickets to the Plitvice Lakes National Park. Your guide will conduct an extensive walking tour through the park and we will arrange a special welcome by the director of the park, who will detail some of the most interesting species found in Plitvice – a total of 1146 species classified in 109 families of plants. In the afternoon guests will depart for a drive northwest to the Opatija Riviera and overnight in sea view rooms at Grand Hotel 4, situated overlooking the Kvarner Bay. Dinner is included tonight. www.ugohoteli.hr

DAY 7

After breakfast guests are met by an expert local guide for a sightseeing tour of Opatija's parks and gardens, including Park Angiolina and *St. Jacob's Park* - the central park of Opatija, a horticultural monument of 3.64 hectares. It is divided into 60 sections with 150 plant species. Many of them originated in far away countries, are not typical for this climate, but seem to thrive here. Guests will also see Park Margarita, established immediately after 1900 and covers an area of 3.5 hectares. Later guests will also visit the Učka Nature Park, characterised by an exceptional variety of features in a comparatively small area. Učka is probably the only place in the world where one can take a photograph of the endemic bell-flower Učkarski zvončić (*Campanula tommasiniana*) and one of the last European locations where patient bird watchers will be rewarded with impressive glimpses of the griffon vulture (*Gyps fulvus*) or golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*). Later there will be free time to enjoy the town. Dinner is again included at the hotel.

DAY 8

After breakfast guests meet the local guide and depart Opatija for a tour of the Istrian Peninsula, including the mediaeval hill top city of Hum, recognized in the Guinness Book of Records as the smallest city in the world. We will include a meeting with the city's mayor, Alexander Merlak, and possibly others of the official 17 inhabitants!, and lunch in this amazing place. After some truffle tasting in Restaurant "Zigante" in Livade, a visit to Zlatni rt Forest Park, the most important park on the Croatian side of the Adriatic. Apart from thousands of indigenous and domesticated plants, such as the groves of holm oaks and alpine pines, the deep shade in this age-old park is also created by many foreign plants, such as the cedar, the pine and some ten species of cypress, which all contribute to the park's distinctly Mediterranean atmosphere. Later travel to Brtinogla and check in for overnight accommodation at the delightful Hotel San Rocco – www.san-rocco.hr. Dinner is included this evening.

DAY 9

Today after breakfast guests depart Croatia and travel the short distance to the border with Slovenia. The first stop is a visit to the spectacular caves at Postojna, where guests will enjoy a guided tour of the extensive caves and also see "the human fish" – also known as the proteus or olm –, a tailed amphibian the colour of human skin which grows to a length of 30 centimetres.



After the visit guests will visit the nearby Predjama Castle, the most unique fortification in Slovenia. From there we proceed to Bled, an idyllic lake resort and check in for 2 nights in lake view rooms at the Hotel Lovce – www.lovechotel.com. Dinner is included tonight.

DAY 10

After breakfast today guest join the guide for a full day of sightseeing in the region including a visit to Bled Castle, a boat trip out to the pilgrimage island in the lake, and a drive into the Triglav National Park. The expert local guide will give details about the flora and fauna of the National Park including wildflowers such as edelweiss, bellflowers, orchids, and gentians. Lunch is included within the park and later a thrilling cable car ride to the top of Mt. Vogel will be included. Later guests return to Bled for an evening at leisure.

DAY 11



After breakfast today guests meet the guide and depart Bled for a stunning drive to Logarska Dolina and en route a visit to the Botanical Garden at Mozirski, a 7-hectare park of stunning and rare flowers and trees. Later guests will travel to the capital of Slovenia, Ljubljana, where we include a very special lunch in a traditional restaurant in the Old City. Entertainment will be provided by

local folk singers and musicians. We have also arranged for a local vineyard to provide wine for tasting. After lunch a local guide will meet the group and conduct a walking tour of the old part of the city and there will be free time to shop, relax and soak up the wonderful atmosphere of the city before checking into the centrally located Grand Hotel Union (www.gh-union.si) for overnight. The evening is free for you to relax and prepare for the journey home.

DAY 12

After breakfast a departure transfer is included to Ljubljana Airport for your return flight home.