

A LITTLE BIT OF HISTORY...

CROATIA : A BANANA RULED BY NOBLE TRADERS

First, Croatia has a surprising shape. The country's form of an arch finds its explanation in special interests that make the richness and diversity of Croatia still today. The land combines a long linear coast and the Pannonian plains. The coast is featured by one of the highest concentrations of islands in the world and has a Mediterranean climate. The continental Pannonian plains are between the Drava river in the north, making the border with Hungary, and the Sava river in the south, making the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina. They are tightly connected to the Austro-Hungarian plains. These two landscapes are limited by the Julian Alps in the north and the Dinaric mountain ranges going down to Greece.



The Pannonian plains have fertile soils and represent one of the biggest nourishing plains in the East of Europe. This opportunity is even more important than the Balkans have rocky mountainous grounds, so it is rare for a country to be able to really feed itself. The capital of Croatia, **Zagreb**, developed as a fair place at the crossroad of routes connecting Central Europe and the Balkans ; the Adriatic Sea and the Pannonian plains.

The other great opportunity is the coast and the islands, that have a characteristic configuration: long, thin, forming rows of islands, so sailing canals. Since the Celts, that appeared on the territory of Austria at about 3000 BC, the Adriatic Sea was an important passage zone between Europe and Minor Asia. This link was not only for trade, but ideas and technologies are also exchanged (about metals forging, mechanical tools...). This trade route has been taken over by the Greeks, that founded colonies as stops for their ships, with no objectives of conquest, that are the origin of most of today's main coastal cities (**Zadar, Split, Trogir, Pula...**). Then the Romans, and finally the Croats took it over when they came together with the other Slavic tribes in the Balkans in the 7th. century AD.

Croats inherited the Greek-roman culture, urban, political, and commercial. They settled, founded cities, which best example is **Šibenik**, founded at the 9th. century AD. While in most parts of the Balkans, in the mountains, the way of life is pastoral, so half-nomad. Even in Greece, except the antic towns, cities are evolving from the 19th. – 20th. centuries on. Took place, and that is the great originality and characteristic about the History of Croatia : a trading nobility. Usually, trade men and noble men are distinct and opposed classes.

Nobody has ever heard about a great kingdom of Croatia in the European History, which is surprising because Croatian cities were very rich. Usually, History praises richness and conquests. There was a kingdom of Croatia, but it lasted only from 925 to 1102, about 175 years, which is very little in European History.

In fact, from the beginning on, the king of Croatia has problems with its noble men. A king always does that his vassals are less powerful than him. Being noble and in a hierarchy defined by titles, the Croatian lords were forced to obey to him. However, as trade men, arbitrary limitations in their personal development were hard to cope with. To show the atmosphere, the first Croatian king, Tomislav who has a votive plate in every town in Croatia, reigned 3 years. Nobody knows how he died, nor where he is buried.



So, at the end of the 11th. century, when the king Zvonimir died with no successor and because his wife was Hungarian, the Croatian lords got the idea to invite the king of Hungary to conquer Croatia. The last Croatian king, Petar, had no support from his lords and had to submit. That was how the kingdom of Croatia-Hungary was founded. But the Croatian lords negotiated their matter well before : Croatia-Hungary was conceived as a federation with the state of the Croatian plains, the state of Dalmatia and the state of Hungary. The Croatian states were ruled by the Sabor, at the origin the assembly of noblemen and today it is the parliament. It is said that the Croatian Sabor works on from 1102 to today without interruption. This illustrates the political tradition of Croatia. The Sabor was represented by a viceroy, called "ban", who accepted the supreme authority of the king of Hungary. This one was far away, so not much implicated in their matters, and therefore their local power was increased. A trade man sells.

Later in time, in the 16th. century, when Croatia-Hungary fell in the hands of the Turks, Croats submitted free willingly to the Austrians, proposing a similar federal system.

The turbulent medieval past can be read in the Venetian influences on the coast with cities as **Split** and **Korčula** and Austrian in the plains like in **Zagreb**. The strategic position and the richness of Croatia raised jealousy. All the happiness and the melancholy of the country finds his expression in the Naive art, very original and typical for the plains or the finesse of the sculpture of the dalmatian stone carvers, that realized real artistic revolutions as the portal of Radovan in **Trogir** or **Šibenik's** cathedral, realized by Georges the Dalmatian.

And in the middle of those comings and goings, the small republic of **Dubrovnik** developed as an extraordinary state-city with typical art and architecture, carefully sheltering its liberty by an outstanding diplomacy.

If you get in mind the shape of Croatia with the topic : coast / trade and plain / agriculture, it explains all the history of the country. That is also why the History of Croatia is unclear, because it was always integrated in the most powerful neighbor systems.

After the First World War, Croatia is integrated in the kingdom of Yugoslavia created by the Allied Forces. Those put the king of Serbia at the head of the system, forcing people with different cultures to life together. Some of them are marked by Minor Asia, while others have always looked towards

Europe. People that never lived together, with different political, economic references had to cooperate from this point on.

Tito inherited Yugoslavia at the end of the Second World War. He conceived it as a federation. He separated it from the East block and from the West block, to develop an original system : the self-governing socialism. This political and economic experience lasted until his death, then began to fall apart and dissolved in the conflict in the years 1990-95. The



separation could have happened according to the constitution and without trouble, pitifully Serbs got the ambition to conquer this system... without success. From these times on, Croatia, as the other people of former Yugoslavia, are sovereign and free to decide on their own fate...

Travelling across Croatia, means discovering a great variety of landscapes, in permanent evolution, keeping original, strong identities, formed by all the influences that marked them. This trip will transport you by discovering pearls of nature as the national parks of Plitvice, Velebit, Kornati or the Krka river... A richness that flatters the palate because it creates an appetizing diversity of culinary specialties. From the maritime perfumes of the Mediterranean to the sweet sounds of the waterfalls... for a total pleasure of the senses !