

# Murter Island Croatia

Diving the Adriatic Sea



Drop-off covered with dense beds of red corals (left); View of the little port of Jezera and Murter Island (above); There are caverns and caves, too (right)

For quite a time, I had been wanting to go back to Croatia to see first hand what this young nation with ancient roots had to offer, both below and above the surface. Back in the 1980s, in the days when Prince and Michael Jackson were the dominant figures in popular music, I went there on a camping trip. It was before my diving days, but the pristine archipelago with its brochure-like, clear, turquoise waters was forever, clearly imprinted in my memory. For many years, the brutal civil war, which ravaged the Balkans and splintered the Yugoslavian federation, made it if not impossible then at least unwise to go there for a revisit. But finally, about a quarter of a century later, I was back, and this time, I brought lots of diving and camera gear.



Text and photos by Peter Symes and Andrey Bizyukin

The Romans called the Mediterranean Sea, *Mare Nostrum*—our sea—which signals some degree of proximity and relative ease of access, at least if you live in Europe. With all the hassles at airports these days, the long waiting lines, intrusive security and still tighter restrictions on lug-

gage allowances just getting worse over time, destinations that I could possibly drive to rather than fly to were starting to look more and more attractive by the day. In this case, I ended up flying anyway, but at least I stayed within the same time zone, so no jet lag.

As I, one late summer day, once again stepped out into Dalmatia—the historic region of Croatia that

makes up the central part of the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea—I was greeted with a landscape that had been baked all summer long by the scorching midday sun. There were lots of browns and yellows, colors of the soil and dried underbrush under the dusty green foliage. Villages nestled between orchards of olive trees covering the rolling hills were generally made up of quaint,





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The promenade in the port of Jezera (above); A school of what we tentatively identify as some species of horse mackerel darting over a reef covered with red coral (left)



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white cottages and villas with red, tiled roofs. In the distance, totally contrasting in colour and texture, I could see the glittering sea. It was the same turquoise colour I so clearly remembered.

**Jezera**

Nautilus dive center is conveniently located in the picturesque, little fishing village of Jezera on the island of Murter from where the stunning archipelago, including the marine reserve of Kornati National Park, is easily reached by a short boat trip.

The village clearly caters to a lot of tourists during the summer but not in an intrusive way; there are no major hotels or resort complexes, just a bustling harbour fringed with restaurants, boutiques, ice cream stalls, and booths selling jewellery and cheap souvenirs. There was a small hotel, but the most common form of accommo-

dation offered to tourists were rooms and small apartments rented by local owners of private villas.

So, we ended up with a local family who offered us a comfortable private apartment with a big balcony overlooking the port and the family's lovely garden full of fig trees hanging heavy with fruit. Booked through the very helpful and friendly staff of the Bisage Travel Agency in the center of town, Apartman Irena ([www.murter-apartmani.net](http://www.murter-apartmani.net)) run by Karlo Klarin and his family, was just a short walk to the marina and Lucica Beach. Karlo was, fortunately for us, also an official tour guide and native of Murter Island, with a wealth of information on the culture, history, attractions and activities of the island and fluent in no less than five languages: English, German, Italian, Czech and Croat.

The dive center is located right on the harbour front, not in a shop but



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The omnipresent lush hard corals are one of the attraction for divers and underwater photographers





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Small, hemispherical hard coral colonies (left) with large corallites of indeterminate species; Great viz (above) along the outer reef of Kornati Island; Typical scenery (top right) at about 25m depth; *Aplysina aerophoba*—a common species in the Mediterranean (below)

**Diving**

The dive boat was huge and very spacious. It was a fishing trawler of sorts, the size of a small Red Sea liveaboard, albeit not very fancy but with a large upper sun deck with benches and tables and room for at least a couple of dozen people. We steamed out towards open sea with a mixed crowd of divers and some of their families. At one of the tables, a couple of kids were totally absorbed playing with their Gameboys, while at another table, a team of divers were meddling with their cameras. There was a soothing, relaxed atmosphere.

Just getting to the dive sites felt

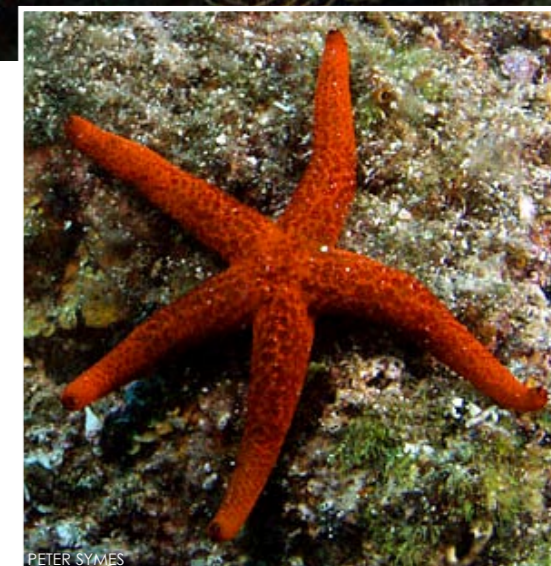


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like a mini-cruise, as the vessel wove in and out of the many islets en route. The blue sea was dotted with leisure crafts, motorboats and sail boats, as we headed out towards the Kornati National Park.

Ranging over

35km, with 140 islands in an area of sea of about 320 squ km, the Kornati is the densest archipelago in the Mediterranean. In 1980, the 89 southernmost islands, islets and reefs of the Kornati archipelago were declared a national park, Nacionalni Park Kornati, protecting the islands and their marine surroundings. Kornat, which by far is the biggest of the islands is connected to the mainland by a drawbridge. There are no



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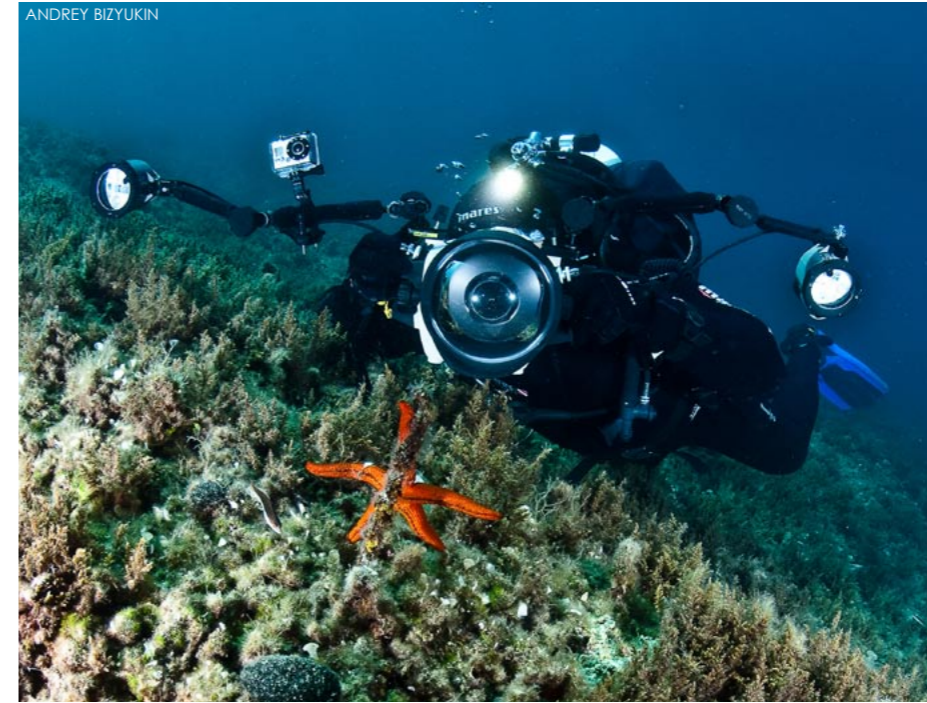
in a building that was probably a converted warehouse of some kind. But no matter, it did the trick. There was ample space for storing kit in there and a sitting area with wi-fi, so you could enjoy a cup of coffee while uploading the day's harvest of images to Facebook.



Bright red and violet soft gorgonians adorn the Croatian reefs (left). OTHER IMAGES THIS PAGE: At very shallow depths, the reefs are a lot less colourful, but there are always some interesting critters to be found, which can entertain divers undertaking lengthy decompression stops



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to almost 100m. As we descended, I was struck with the clarity of the water, the viz was excellent. At first, there was not much marine growth to be seen; the rocks were covered only by some short seaweeds, but the good stuff was down deep. We levelled off at 40m and swam along what was almost a vertical drop-off. The wall was speckled with all sorts of small gorgonia, most of which I deemed to be red coral, *Coralium rubrum*. These corals are quite intolerant to sedimentation, so they grow on the rocky sea bottom in the depths, or on walls, or in dark caverns or crevices. The corals take the shape of small leafless bushes and grow up to a meter in height. They

permanent settlements on the islands but a few simple houses that most likely serve as cabins for leisure.

We moored along the outer edge of Kornati, facing the open sea, at a location called Panitula, which I understood was a popular dive site. The coastline was steep and rugged, but the seas were calm. I was teaming up with my old friend and fellow X-RAY MAG editor Andrey Bizyukin and his buddy Alexander who was in the Russian special forces.

Between two small islands, there was a shallow channel no deeper than 5-10m, which was a perfect staging area before going over the ledge that descended straight down



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THIS PAGE: Many caves and caverns in the area provide yet another underwater activity

insulation for a protracted stay at this depth—not that the gas reserves carried in a commonplace single tank and decompression limits permitted for much more time anyway. But the lesson was learned.

Before going on the trip, Andrey had advised me to bring my drysuit, too. I must admit, I did not quite believe it was necessary. After all, we were going to the Med in late summer. Surely, it had to be warm—and it was, only not at depth.

Looking around, I noticed that everybody else in the group was not only wearing a drysuit but was geared up in a technical fashion as well. Fortunately, I did heed Andrey's advice and brought a drysuit, too. Hav-

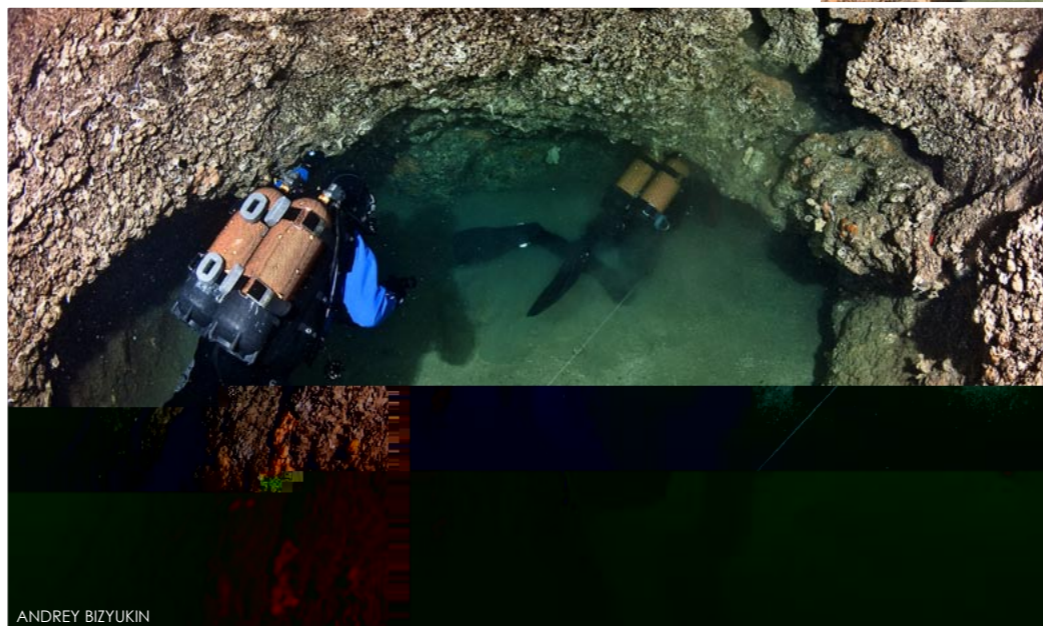


Croatia

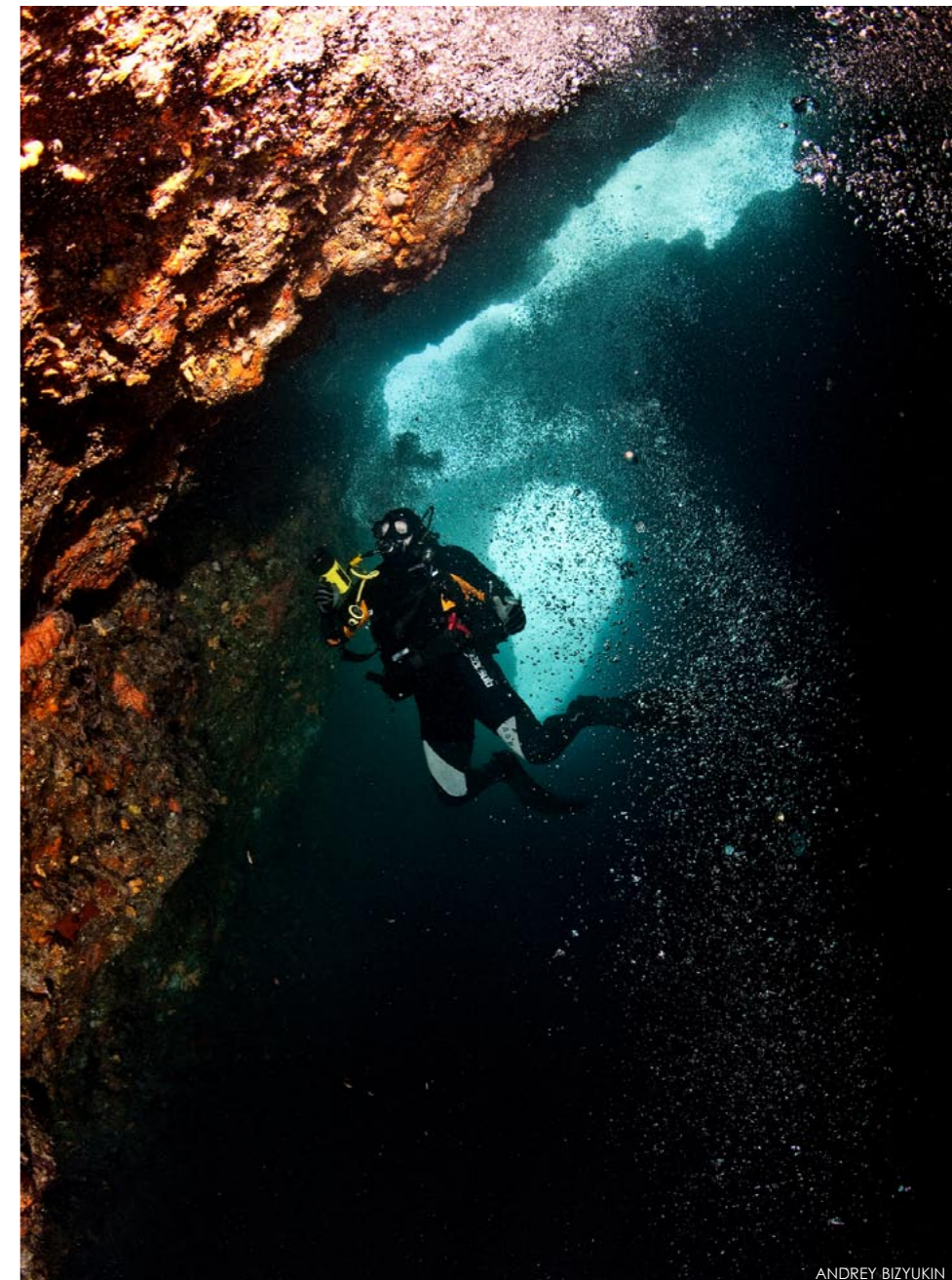
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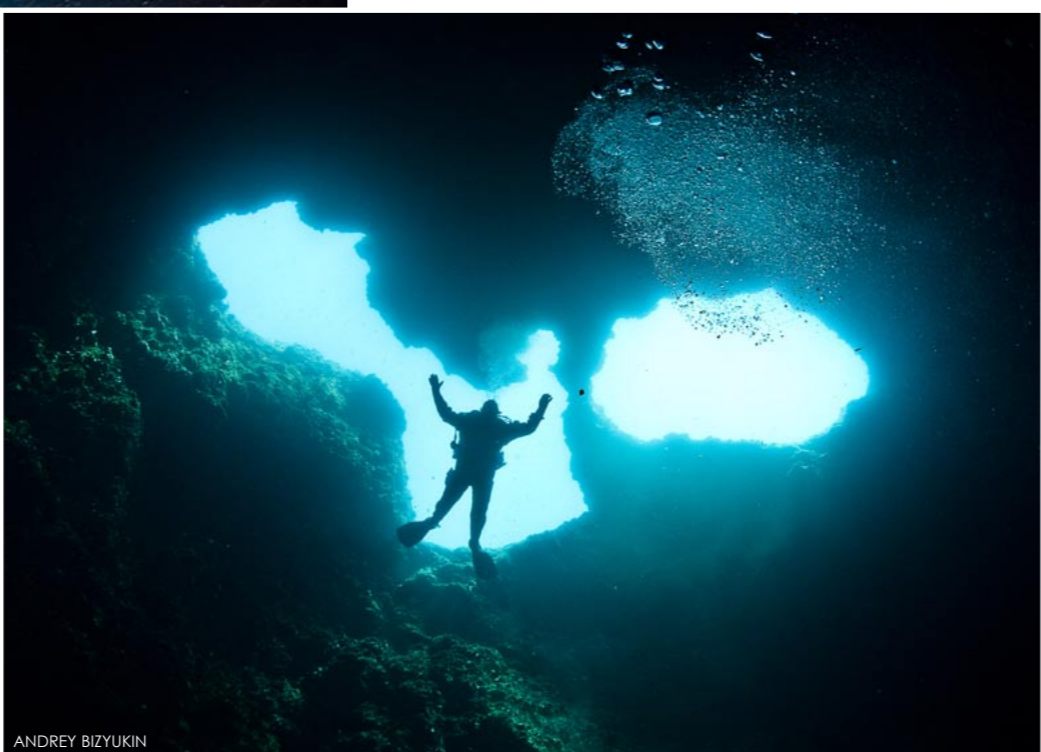
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can be found at depths of ten to 300 meters below sea level, although the shallower habitats have been largely depleted. Owing to its intense and permanent coloration and glossiness, precious coral skeletons have been harvested since antiquity for decorative use in jewellery.

As we slowly propelled ourselves forward with patient measured strokes, keeping our pulse and air consumption as low as possible, I was starting to feel the cold creep through my 5.5mm wetsuit. While the surface and top layers were pleasurablely warm, we did pass through a thermocline under which the water was markedly cooler. With the pressure at depth squeezing my wetsuit, it no longer held sufficient



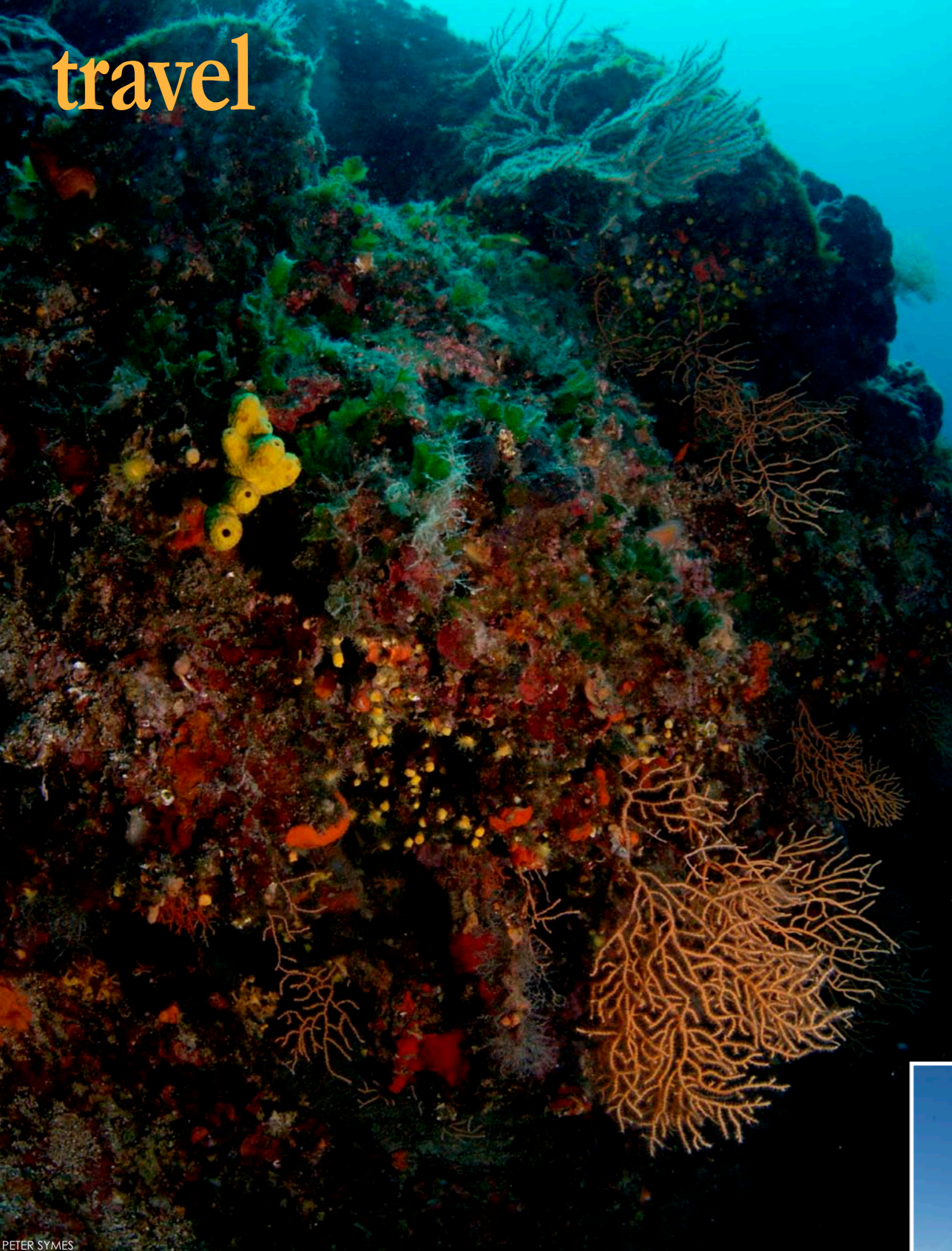
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ing not worn it on this day, however, I was getting chilled, so I began to ascend.

At around 25m, I passed through the thermocline, and it was like stepping into a warm house on a chilly autumn day. Soon, I was all comfy again. Also, I was no longer steering right into a decompression stop obligation for which I wasn't really prepared nor properly equipped. For now, I was more than happy just to trail the group of 'tekkies' below me who had reached a







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shallower level, which, mind you, at 25m (82ft), was still not exactly shallow.

Looking around, the view, thanks to the great viz, was still spectacular. Not so many fishes were to be seen, though. But it was no matter; I was still having a good and most pleasant dive.

### Interval

Lunch! One of the highlights of a good diving day, and I can think of much worse places to enjoy a meal than sitting on a deck with a view over this archipelago. It was quiet out there; aside from the subdued chatter around the ta-



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CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT: Reef scenery with reef covered by a mix of sponges, algae, soft and hard corals; Scenery from the archipelago around Kornati National park; Juvenile rockfish, presumably *Scorpena notata*; Tomisa is a trawler adapted to taking out divers and snorkellers; Lunch served on the dive boat

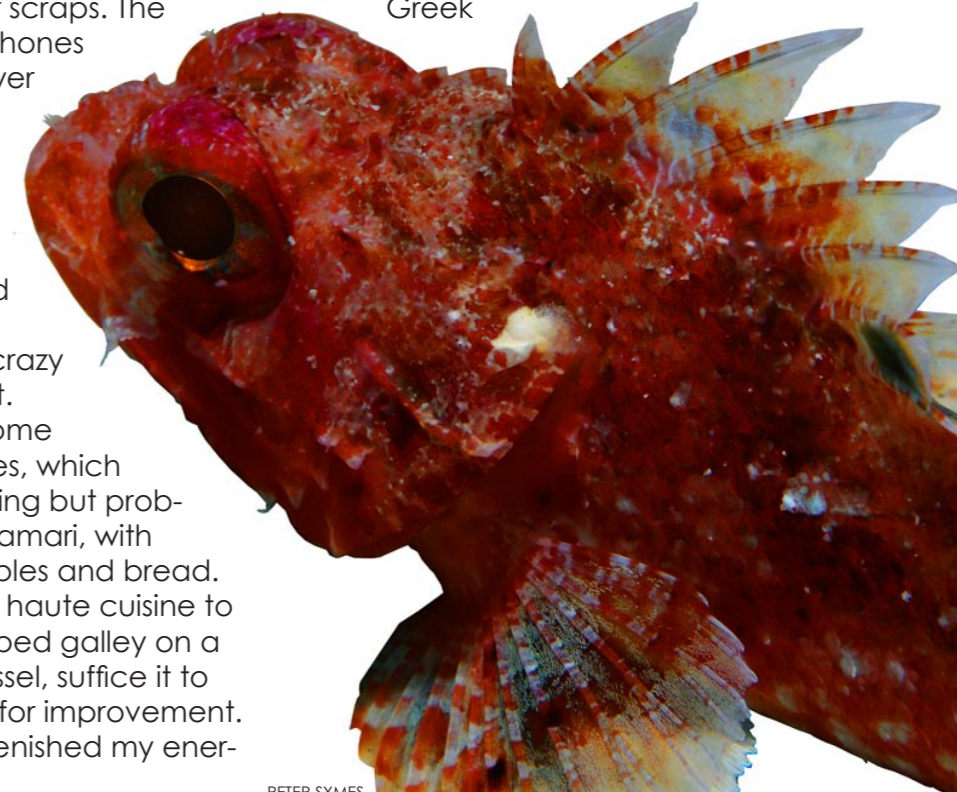
bles, I could only hear a gentle splashing of wavelets breaking against the hull and the occasional screams from seagulls fighting over scraps. The constant ringing of phones and pressure to answer emails was so far out of mind—what bliss.

The meal was typically Eastern European: sturdy and hardy, without much finesse. I wasn't too crazy about it, I must admit. It was grilled fish of some indeterminate species, which reminded me of herring but probably wasn't, and calamari, with some boiled vegetables and bread. While I didn't expect haute cuisine to come out of a cramped galley on a converted fishing vessel, suffice it to say, there was room for improvement. It was okay and replenished my ener-

gies but hardly a selling point. I liked sipping the cool local white wine, though. It had a distinct piney flavour akin to the Greek



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Retsina, the famous resinated white wine. Bearing in mind that I had more dives ahead of me, I restricted myself to one—well, all right—two glasses. We had a long lazy break, so they would wear off in time for the next dip.

**Croatia**

Croatia has such a complex history. Over the millennia, it has been part of numerous empires; from Ancient Rome and onwards, it became independent and then gobbled up again by some larger entity. In modern

THIS PAGE: Scenes from the village of Jezera and Murter Island



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Examples of the hearty cuisine to be enjoyed in the many restaurants on the island (above and right)

times, it was part of Yugoslavia, declaring independence in 1991. The tensions in the already volatile region escalated into the Croatian War of Independence when the Yugoslav National Army and various Serb paramilitaries at-



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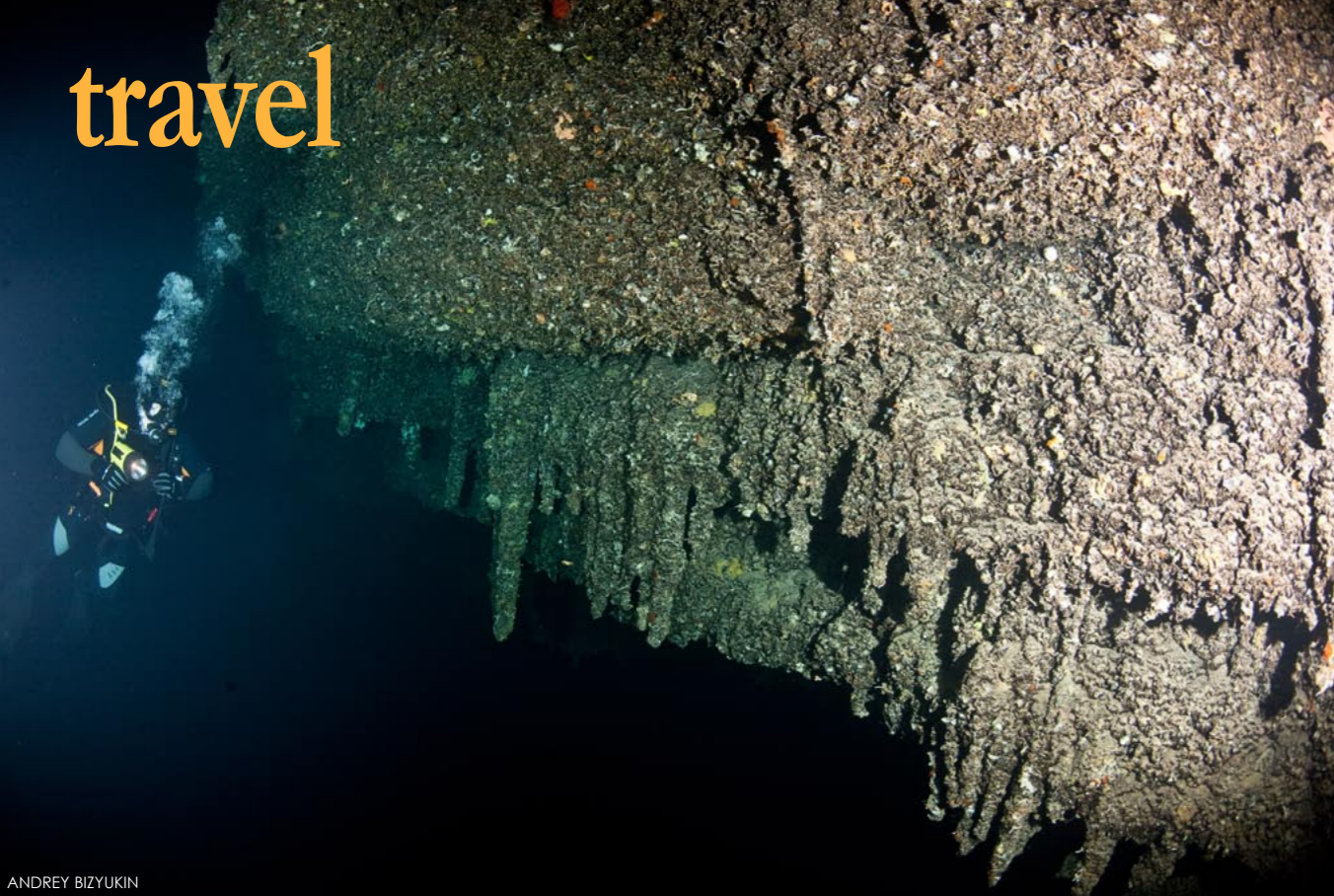
tacked Croatia. The war ended in 1995 with a total Croatian victory, as it achieved the goals it had declared at the beginning of the war: independence and preservation of its borders. However, much of Croatia was devastated and much of its economy was in ruins.

Today, the World Bank classifies Croatia as a high income economy. The

country will become a full member of the European Union in July 2013. It has clearly come a long way in a very short period of time. There are no longer any visible signs of the war, but what the Croatians now refer to as the Homeland War is still clearly a painful memory for many, even in this remote region of the country I was visiting, which saw little of the fighting.

As a tourist, it just seemed so peaceful and well organised. The infrastructure



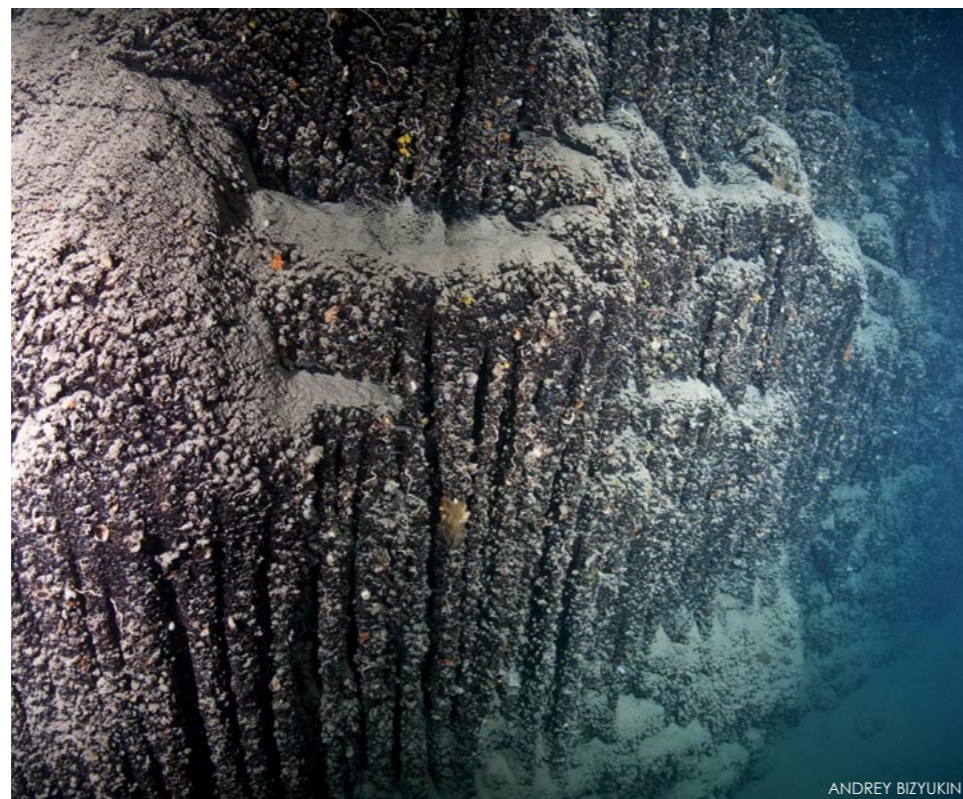


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was good, and the standards seemed as up to date as in any other modern developed economy.

As I looked around, seeing all the olive groves on the islands, I got to thinking about the long and colourful parts of this nation's history predating the recent war, from antiquity when Greek trading colonies were established, its inclusion in the Roman empire, the establishment of a Croatian kingdom in 925 AD, the fight

against the Ottomans and so on. I came to think that it was probably unfair to put all that much focus on these matters. But I suppose it's only human nature, given that most adults today will have some memory of watching the news of



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the war on television.

In other ways, time seemed to stand still here. As I dipped my bread into the olive oil and looked around, I saw row upon row of olive groves, which seemed to have been here forever, and perhaps

Mediterranean region, and it is estimated that the cultivation of olive trees began more than 7,000 years ago, although the place, time and immediate ancestry of the cultivated olive are unknown. But it was already during ancient



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THIS PAGE: Some underwater caves were created and stalactites formed in dry air before the Mediterranean basin was filled by water from the Atlantic via the strait at Gibraltar. It is still possible to find old stalactites underwater; Rockfish (above), possibly *Scorpena plumeri*; Assemblage of sponges and gorgonians (top right) form a colourful bouquet; Mediterrean feather star (right) is an unstalked crinoid, which feeds by filtering small particles of food from sea water with feather like arms. Tube feet covered with a sticky mucus trap any food that floats past

they have.

The olive tree is native to the

times that the Greeks observed that olive trees rarely thrived in a location far from the sea but rather thrived where other crops failed—upon the meager, water-deficient soils of these islands.

### Dive sites

We were now anchored in a shallow, sheltered cove off a little

islet with a lighthouse perched on top. It doesn't seem much bigger than a tennis court, and I understand

the idea was to swim around it.

Once again, we were being told that gorgonians and other corals



Croatia

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The rockfish's camouflage is effective but one can still spot it by swimming slowly and looking closely at the reef; Small colony of golden cup coral, *Astroides calycularis* (below)

and zipped up the suit. Then, off I went.

I followed Alexander straight down the slope. He was once a paratrooper and it showed. I couldn't keep up with him, as he plummeted quickly toward the seabed far below. Once again, we didn't level off until we passed 40m, after which we swam along the wall poking into nooks and crannies looking for critters. I soon went into a shallow ascent along the reef to stay clear of decompression obligations, keeping visual contact with Alexander who just kept steaming full throttle ahead—too fast for me.

I prefer diving solo anyway, minding my own business and going about taking pictures without having particles kicked up into my face by divers with poor buoyancy control or situational awareness. Yet, it was not the same as diving alone. I was always maneuvering so I could retain visual contact with my buddy—if only he would just slow down a bit.

When using open circuit, I al-



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could be found predominantly below 25m where there was a ledge and a small drop-off leading down to a flatter seabed at +40m.

Being all the wiser, I kitted up with my drysuit this time and twin tanks. Not that I was going technical on this dive; I just didn't want to be chilled, nor end up short on air, should I decide to go deeper in

pursuit of some better footage. As I didn't want to overheat before I got into the water—it was a nice warm summer day—I made sure that all the gear was completely rigged and the camera all set, as I donned

# THE NEW W4



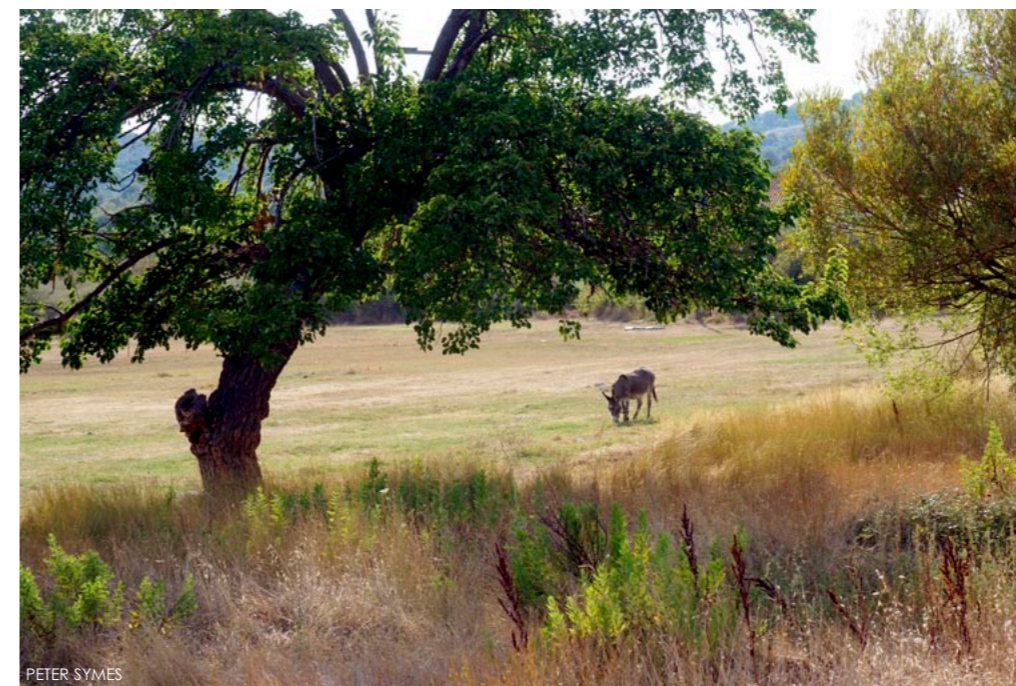
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W4, where modern technology enhances old fashion diving. After 28 years of experience of making wetsuits we have put all our knowledge into this hi-quality suit with an eye-catching silverish retro/futuristic look. The 3D anatomical design, with pre-bent arms and legs with stretch panels and gender specific construction ensures a comfortable fit. Double smooth-skin seals at arms and legs, adjustable neck and a 10mm spinepad with an extra seal at the backzipper keeps the cold water out. All zippers in top class Vislon no10 from YKK. ToughTex panels at elbows and knees, Bonded HiQ Nylon Thread and 100% CR Neoprene in all panels. Quality is in the details. The W4 also features double computer strap anchors with anti slip, comfort front neck zipper, inner plush lining, seat and shoulder antislip reinforcement. The WPAD™ is a soft artfully constructed docking station located on the right thigh for our expandable pocket.

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way up. The small fields were all boxed in with ancient stone borders, and our path upwards wove in and out of small plots with different crops such as grapes for making wine, figs, olives, vegetables, orchards of fruit trees or just meadows of grass for grazing livestock. As we made our way towards the summit, we were accompanied by a ferocious concert of cicadas trying to outperform

believe that these sponges were *Aplysina aerophoba*—a common species in the Mediterranean. I haven't been able to ascertain that they have any use, which is probably

deco, or a safety stop, can comfortably be conducted (i.e. simply by sitting on the bottom) that Alexander finally noticed me and looked at me with an expression I did not know what to make of in that instant. Only afterwards did I learn that he thought he lost me early on and couldn't find me, making him nervous. Yet, I was always within visual range and never lost sight of him. I just could not keep up with him while carrying a big camera, which wasn't very streamlined and could not be pushed through water very quickly.

### Topside activities

That afternoon, I went for a walk with Andrey and his kids into the hills behind the village. There was a sweet and pleasant scent of herbs, pine, hay and wild flowers in the air.

The highest point on the island was Raduč hills. At 128m above sea level, it was not so rigorous a hike as to be restricted to fitness fanatics, but it was a vigorous walk that gave a decent workout and burned off that opulent but yummy ice cream cone topped with blueberries, nuts and whipped grin I had on the

dom and calm, which always translates into greater enjoyment—knowing that I always have a complete, redundant life-support system, should I have a technical malfunction of some kind.

With the sort of diving I was doing here, it was very much a case in point. I was not embarking on any technical diving in this location, only enjoying a wider latitude, such as not having to watch a clock frantically counting down the minutes to the end of my dive. I had time to look around because the double 12's on my back gave me a plentiful supply of air to muck about with for a time.

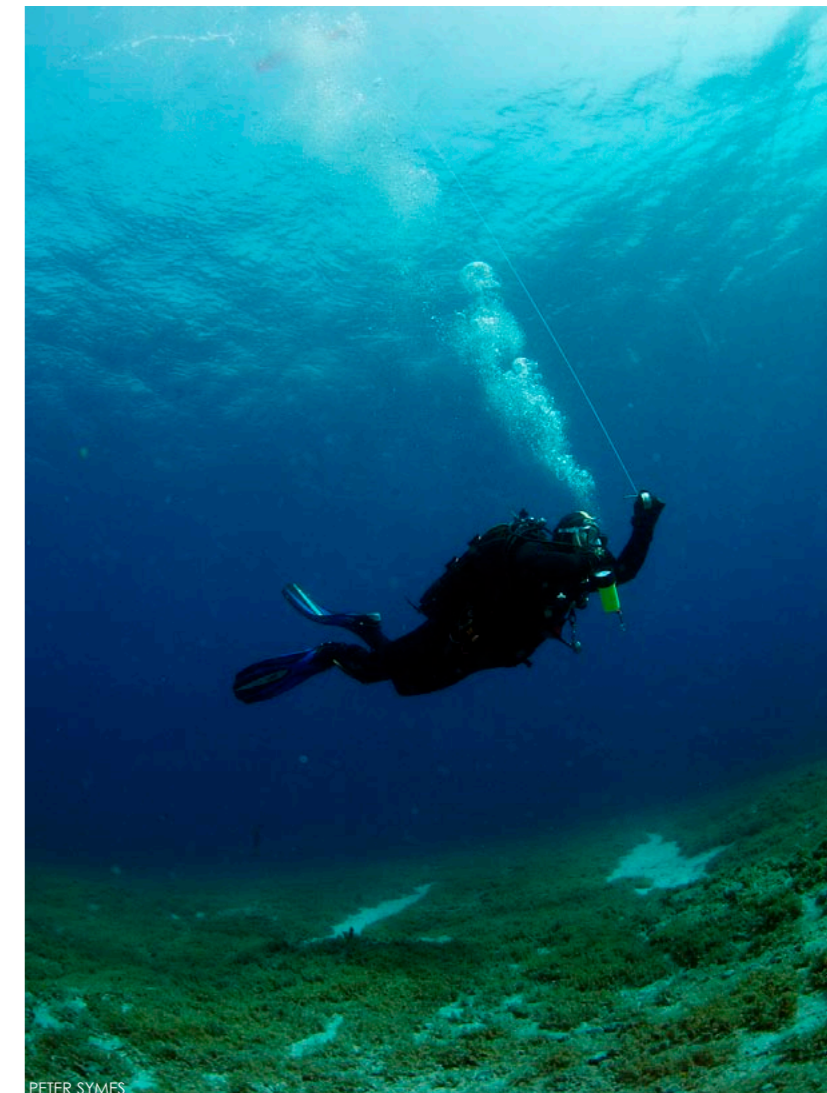
I slowed down, gliding slowly over a bed of marine grasses. Soon, I could pick out some critters—first, a purple *Flabellina nudibranch*, then an octopus contorting itself into an incredibly narrow crevice, then a pipefish. Among the grasses were small clusters of bright yellow marine sponges.

Sponges are not my forte, but consulting with guidebooks later led me to

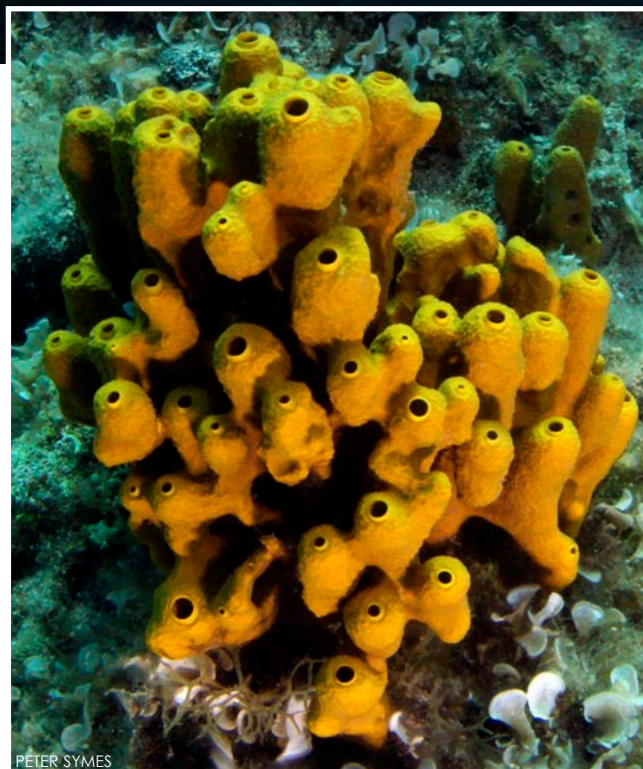
why they are so prevalent in the shallower parts, but they are very decorative.

In one of the scientific descriptions I found online, these sponges were described as: "Bright yellow in life, turning characteristically dark greenish blue-black when taken out of the water, discolouring one's fingers. In alcohol, the black colour extends into the alcohol and also blackens labels to the point of becoming illegible." So, there you have it. There is always something new to learn about the sea. It's one of the things that makes diving such a great pastime.

During my whole dive, I had kept our Russian paratrooper fixed in the corner of my eye, but now I saw him swimming somewhat frantically back and forth along the reef, as if he was searching for something. I gradually closed the gap until I finally flew to his side like a wingman for the remainder of the dive, which at this point was heading towards the shallows and the boat. It was only when we reached a plateau at around 5m where



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Sponge cluster of *Aplysina aerophoba*—a common species in the Mediterranean; The archipelago also offers ample opportunity for great snorkelling; Idyllic view of donkey grazing in a field; Diver practising SMB deployment skills near the dive boat



ways dive twins—a double tank with two regulators—where available, even in the shallow end of the recreational range. I've never felt like it was overkill; it's always provided me with a sense of free-





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# Croatia

THIS PAGE: Views of Jezera from the hillsides surrounding the village. Walking through the winding narrow streets and pathways, there are things to discover around every corner



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## WATERFALLS OF KRKA NATIONAL PARK

Krka National Park which is only a short drive from Murter Island, encompasses an area of 109 square kilometers along the Krka River after which it is named and

which it encloses. It is characterised by exceptionally rich and varied flora and fauna, with more than 860 species and subspecies of plants that have been identified here. One of the most attractive parts of the park is *Skradinski buk*, which is a massive, clear, natural pool with high waterfalls at one end and cascades at the other. ■



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sounds up to 120 decibels, which is among the loudest of all insect-produced sounds. Species have different mating songs to ensure they attract the appropriate mate. It is often difficult to make out the direction from which cicada song is coming because the low pitch carries well and because it may, in fact, be coming from many directions at once, as cicadas in various trees spur others to make noise in unison.

Cicadas are benign to humans and do not bite or sting. At the top, we had a spectacular view of the whole island and its four main villages—Tisno, Jezera, Betina and Murter—with their stone-vaulted streets and ivy-covered walls. Murter Island is only 18.6 sq km (7.2 sq miles) and yet, there exist different dialects in each village as well as a rivalry—a friendly one, I hope—between these villages, which are mere hiking distances apart, about which dialect is the proper or right way to speak. We are told that the oldest stone-built sites of cultural heritage on the island of Murter date back to the time of the Illyrians who built the hill fort of Gradina, which now lies between Murter and Betina, as well as the ruins that can easily be seen on top of the hill where a giant cross stands today. Near near Tisno, in Makirina



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Bay stands the Romanesque church of St. Martin, which dates back to the end of the 11th century. In the same locality lie the remains of Roman villas, medieval tombs and a basilica. In a way, this little island embodies all I find attractive about going diving in the Mediterranean. The underwater scenery and marine life may not compete

well against the splendours of Raja Ampat, Fiji and the like, but what does? Considering that the whole package also includes history and culture enough to fill a year's worth of episodes on the Discovery Channel, good and healthy food, no less than eight national parks, cities with roots in antiquity or the Middle Ages within range of a day trip, hospitable people and a



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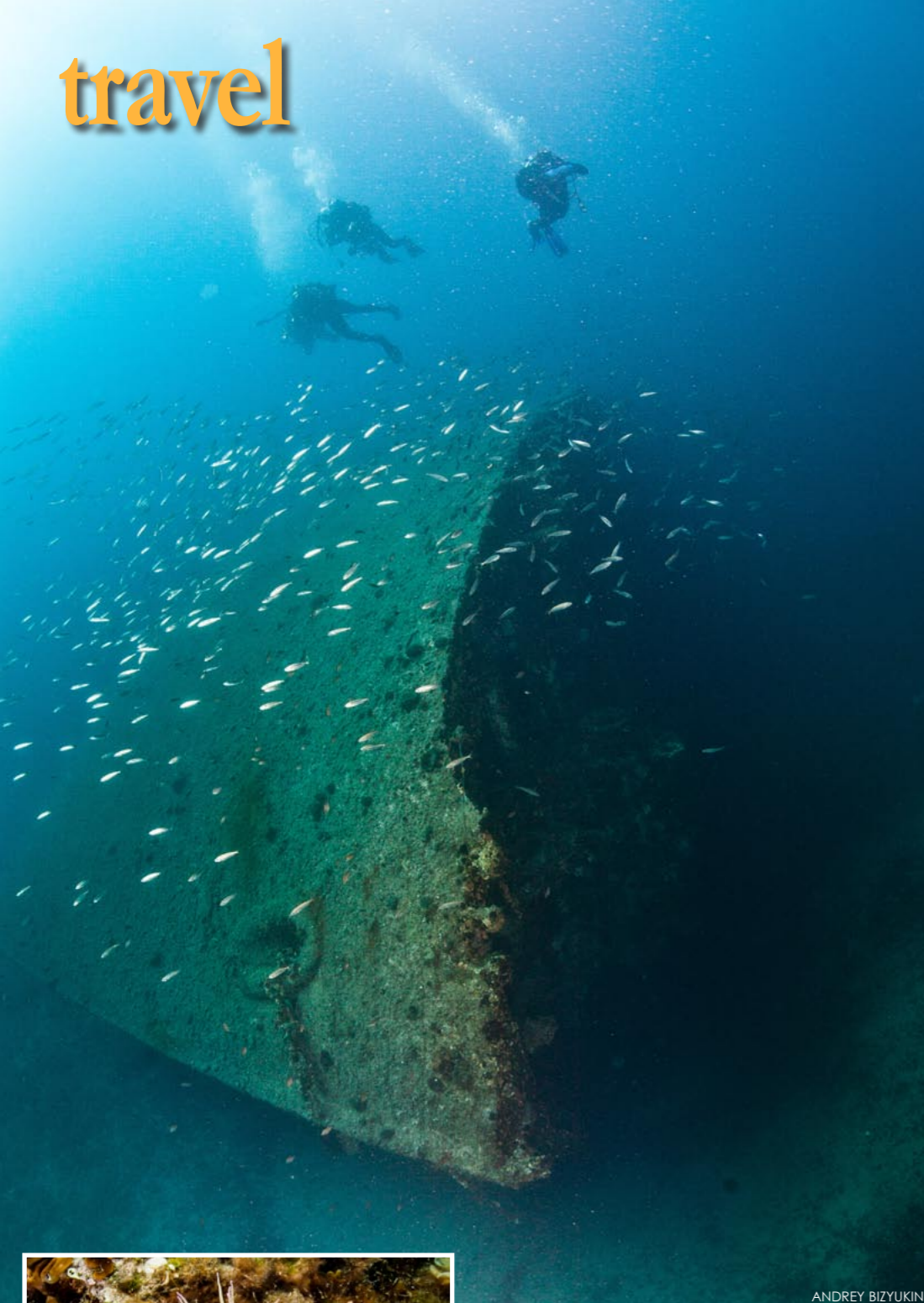
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one another. It was only the males that sang, and they do their most spirited singing during the hotter hours of a summer day. Some cicadas produce





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seems littered with wrecks and archaeological artefacts from ancient Greek and Roman amphorae, to the many wrecks from the World Wars and some more modern ones. For passionate treasure hunters or wreck detectives, there are plentiful options to explore wrecks and artefacts at different depths, although a number of wrecks rests too deep for recreational divers.

While we did dive on a number of wrecks, one of the more attractive was the *Francesca di Rimini*—a cargo vessel that was sunk during WWII in circumstances which are not entirely clear. According to the most reliable sources, it was transporting ammunition for the German forces in North Africa and was anchored off the island of Kaprije, experiencing engine

problems when it came under attack by British aircraft and exploded.

The wreck now rests almost upright on a flat seabed at 50m, with a large

## Croatia

part of the midship torn completely open by the explosion, which must have been massive. Due to the depth of this wreck—the deck starts at 40m—it is clearly not a dive for the inexperienced, as some decompression is virtually unavoidable. That aside, it is an uncomplicated wreck to dive, provided the sea is flat and the viz is decent. A downline mounted from a permanently moored buoy takes divers straight down to where they want to be. The superstructure is gone and so is the propeller. It is not known who salvaged it. Since the wreck still holds ammunition, including substantial amounts of artillery grenades, it has in places been covered with a steel net.

We descended through crystal clear blue water along the anchor line and passed through two thermoclines or marked temperature



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THIS PAGE: Views from the wreck sites found around Murter Island

vast array of activities to indulge in, it is a pretty good deal overall. There is something for everybody, and it is easy, accessible and affordable to bring the whole family, whether you prefer to spend your time on the beaches or go visit monuments.

### Wrecks

There is diving for all qualification levels from shallow reefs to caves and wrecks. The Croatian coast just

CROATIA

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WRECKS



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- FUN DIVING
- TECHNICAL DIVING
- EXCURSIONS
- ACCOMMODATION
- TRANSFER



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CROATIA, JEZERA  
MURTER ISLAND







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gradients at 5 and 21 meters depth. In the blue haze beneath, I started to make out the contours of what was once a proud ship. From the top of the bow, we went to the stern along the starboard side, reaching the maximum permitted depth. We entered the open doorway of the hold. It was dark inside, but in the

distance we could see a blue spot of light, which was the second hatch of the hold. The plan was to spend 15 minutes reaching the maximum depth (MOD) and pass through the hold by going in one entrance and out the other. Inside, we turned on our lights and went

on taking pictures inside the hold, as we went towards the front of the ship. The hold was full of sharp metal structures,

the port side of the ship. We carefully made our way past it, took some more pictures and went up to the port side of

the stern. From there, we started our swim back to the bow of the ship. We threw a last sad look at the sunken giant and began our ascent. We still had a long decompression ahead of us even when we accelerated it by breathing pure oxygen at a depth of 6m before we could once again pop up into the strong Croatian sunlight, warm wind and good friends awaiting us top side. ■



Croatia

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THIS PAGE: Divers explore the wreck of cargo vessel *Francesca di Rimini* sunk in WWII



# fact file



## Croatia



SOURCES: U.S. CIA WORLD FACT BOOK, VISIT-FSM.ORG

**History** Until the end of World War I, the region that now makes up Croatia was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. A kingdom was formed in 1918 by the Croats, Serbs and Slovenes which was called Yugoslavia after 1929. Under the heavy hand of Marshal Tito, Yugoslavia became a federal independent Communist state after World War II. In 1991, Croatia declared its independence from Yugoslavia, but it took four years of fighting before the occupying Serb forces were for the most part cleared from Croatian lands, as well as a majority of the ethnic Serb population in the country. In 1998, the last Serb-held enclave in eastern Slavonia was returned to Croatia, with the supervision of the United Nations. Croatia joined NATO in 2009, and in 2011, joined the European Union, with ratification in 2013. Government: presidential/parliamentary democracy. Capital: Zagreb

**Geography** Croatia is located in Southeastern Europe. It borders the Adriatic Sea and lies between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Slovenia. There is diverse geography in the terrain, with flat plains along the Hungarian border and low mountains and highlands near the Adriatic coast and islands. Coastline: 5,835km (mainland 1,777km, islands 4,058km).

Lowest point: Adriatic Sea 0m.  
Highest point: Dinara 1,831m.  
Note: Croatia is in control of most of the land routes from Western Europe to the Aegean Sea and the Turkish Straits; A majority of the Adriatic Sea islands are located off the coast of Croatia. There are round 1,200 islands, islets, rocks and ridges.

**Climate** Along the coast, Croatia has Mediterranean climate with mild winters and dry summers, while the interior has continental climate with hot summers and cold winters.

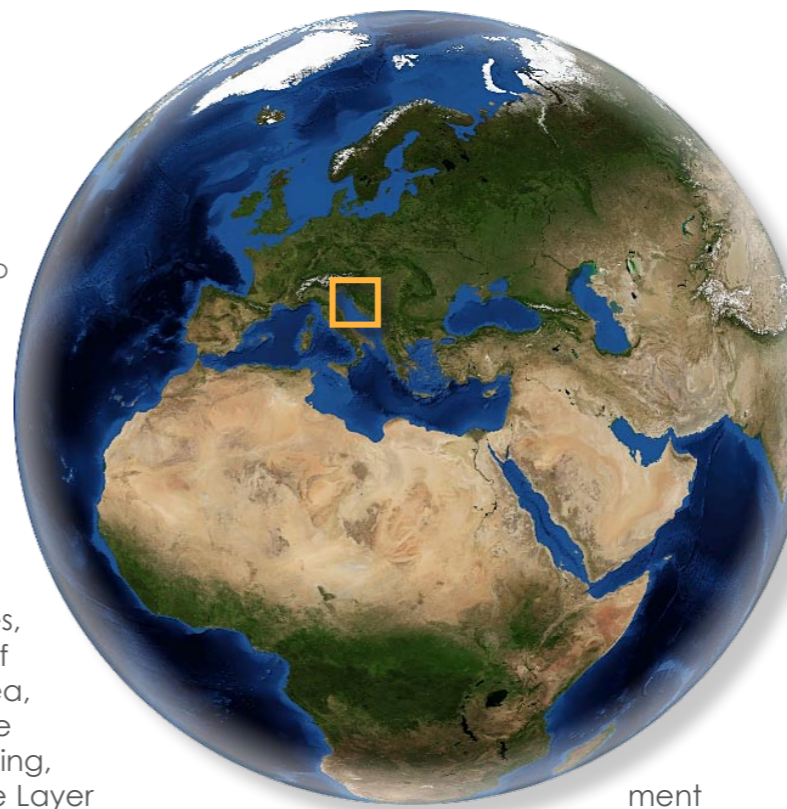
**Environmental issues** The country struggles with air pollution from metallurgical plants, which results in acid rain that is damaging the forests. There is also coastal pollution from domestic and industrial waste. Landmine removal



al continues as well as reconstruction of the nation's infrastructure after the civil strife in 1992-95. The nation is party to: Air Pollution, Air Pollution-Nitrogen Oxides, Air Pollution-Persistent Organic Pollutants, Air Pollution-Sulfur 94, Air Pollution-Volatile Organic Compounds, Biodiversity, Climate Change, Climate Change-Kyoto Protocol, Desertification, Endangered Species, Hazardous

RIGHT: Global map with location of Croatia

BELOW: Location of Murter Island on map of Croatia



Wastes, Law of the Sea, Marine Dumping, Ozone Layer Protection, Ship Pollution, Wetlands, Whaling

**Economy** While Croatia is still one of the richest of the former Yugoslav republics, its economy took a big hit during the war in 1991-95. During that time, the country's output collapsed, and it missed out on early investment in Central and Eastern Europe after the Berlin Wall fell. However, Croatia's economic outlook began to improve slowly between 2000 and 2007, with moderate but steady growth in GDP which was spurred by a rebound in tourism and consumer spending fostered by credit incentives. The worldwide economic crunch has affected Croatia since 2008, with the country's economy still struggling to recover. Challenges facing the nation include a high unemployment rate, an increasing trade deficit, a difficult invest-

ment climate and uneven regional development.

**Population** 4,480,043 (July 2012 est.) Ethnic groups: Croat 89.6%, Serb 4.5%, other ethnic groups including Bosniak, Hungarian, Slovene, Czech and Roma 5.9% (2001 census) Internet users: 2.234 million (2009)

**Currency** Ukuna (HRK) Exchange rates: 1EUR=7.58HRK; 1USD=5.68HRK; 1GBP=9.02HRK; 1AUD=6HRK; 1SGD=4.63HRK

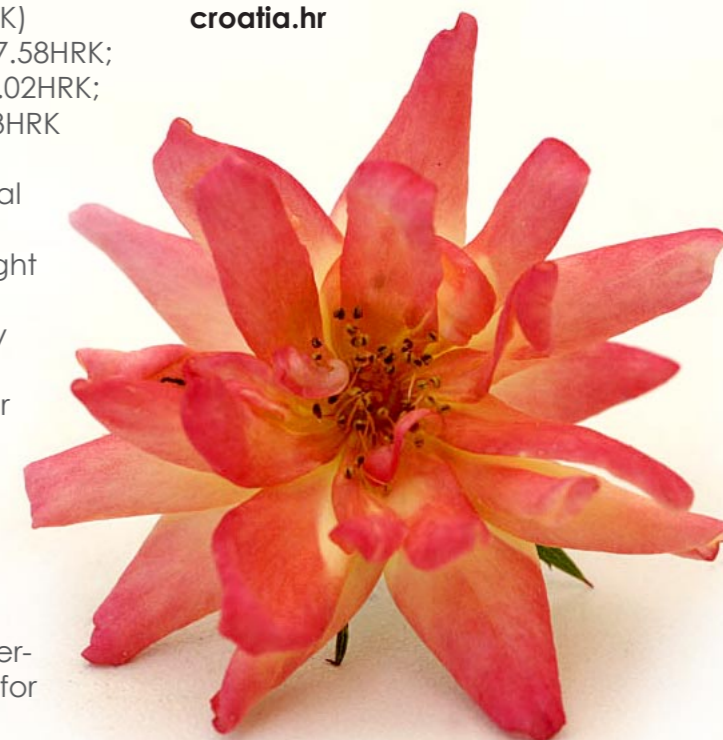
**Language** The official language is Croatian 96.1% but English is taught in elementary schools and is widely spoken by younger staff in tourist areas, Serbian 1%, other languages including Italian, Hungarian, Czech, Slovak and German 2.9% (2001 census)

**Health** There is an intermediate degree of risk for

food or waterborne diseases, such as bacterial diarrhea, and vector-borne diseases such as tickborne encephalitis. There have been cases of highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza in this country, but it poses a very small risk with very rare cases possible among those who are in close contact with birds (2009)

**Decompression chamber** The Split Hyperbaric Decompression Chamber - IPM HRM Šoltanska 1, 21 000 Split Tel: + 385 (0)21 354 511

**Web sites** Croatia Tourism [croatia.hr](http://croatia.hr)



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