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■ The cable car over Dubrovnik offers some stunning sights.

By Robin McKelvie  
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**T**HE first time I ventured to Croatia in the early 1990s, it was to report on the brutal war that accompanied the country's independence from Yugoslavia.

This summer I returned to what for me is one of the finest coastlines in the world – an old haunt of Marco Polo and the Venetians – to see how it shapes up for a family holiday.

My connections with Croatia go back over 20 years. In the post-war period I wrote some of the first English language guidebooks to a destination that wasn't really on the tourist map yet.

This time I flew into Split direct from Glasgow with my young family, something that has only become possible this summer as direct connections from Scotland are ramped up.

I'd recommend doing what we did and hiring a car to really get a feel for the Dalmatian coastline, the country's most spectacular.

Our party of six (my mother and father-in-law came along too) needed space and we managed to snare a minibus with budget car-hire site Car Rentals ([carrentals.co.uk](http://carrentals.co.uk)).

It cost £300 for 10 days, which handily included someone meeting us off the flight.

Our first base was Dubrovnik, a UNESCO World Heritage-listed gem Lord Byron once eulogised as the Pearl of the Adriatic.

It is much busier than when I first came in the 1990s, but I still agree with his lofty praise of a city now starring in the Game of Thrones series.

This chocolate box gem rests within a hulk of old stone walls with rugged limestone crags to the rear and the Adriatic – the cleanest part of the Med – on the other flank.

Our apartment, Hedera A19 ([homeaway.com/vacation-rental/p895879](http://homeaway.com/vacation-rental/p895879)), was perfectly located just outside the old town with views back to the ramparts.

Handily for our kids, the city's main beach lay just in front. This historic old building only opened as an apartment this summer and its location, acres of space and a terrace hot tub, made it a firm winner with our party.

Of course you could stay in a hotel instead. Almost all of Dubrovnik's hotels have been impressively refurbished since the war. You can still snare a room from around £60 a night at one of my favourites, the family-friendly Hotel Palace ([adriaticluxuryhotels.com](http://adriaticluxuryhotels.com)).

We spent a couple of



# Croatia's coast is a tranquil paradise



nights at the Hotel Palace and the kids loved the child-friendly pools and restaurants.

Eating out is one of Dubrovnik's real pleasures. You can just grab a slice of delicious thin crust pizza or something simple in one of the numerous cafes.

One of the best of the inexpensive places serving Dalmatian classics like seafood risotto is newcomer Kapun, which hides away from the busiest streets in a quieter square next to the city's Jesuit Church.

There are also now some seriously classy places to dine.

We splashed out a couple of nights, first at the Pucic Palace's superb Defne, with its shady old town terrace. Then it was on to brand new Victoria, with its sweeping views back to the floodlit old ramparts.

My wife and I enjoyed a romantic

dinner with a wee digestif afterwards in their lounge bar.

There are so many ways to discover Dubrovnik. We spent hours just pounding the old marble streets.

I also kayaked beneath the old walls and around the uninhabited island of Lokrum. And I took the kids up in the slick new cable car that zips tourists up for an unforgettable view of Dubrovnik.

Reluctantly we left Dubrovnik and drove north for sleepy Ston, a wee village famous for its seafood.

We savoured a lazy lunch at one of its flurry of seafood restaurants. Oysters in Ston cost less than £1 each, plucked straight from the water!

After lunch we pushed on along the Peljesac Peninsula, one of Croatia's prime wine-growing regions.

Our next base was the island of Korcula just across from Peljesac.

The legendary explorer Marco Polo is said to have been born in Korcula Town and it's easy to see why he eventually could not resist returning.

This spectacular mini-Dubrovnik is a relaxed wee cobweb of stone streets huddled around a gaggle of churches that rises up on a promontory above the sparkling Adriatic.

Our last port of call was Croatia's largest port of Split, which we travelled to on a seriously scenic ferry ride – Croatia boasts even more islands than Scotland.

I'm a massive fan of Split, which is now getting the recognition it deserves.

At its heart is the remarkable Diocletian's Palace, a 1,700-year-old Roman emperor's retirement home!



■ Relax on Dubrovnik's blissful beaches.



This is no mere museum piece, instead it is alive with little bars, boutique shops and characterful restaurants.

We spent our last night promenading along Split's glamorous waterfront. The kids enjoyed their by now nightly sladdled (ice cream) as we surveyed a scene alive with tourists.

I've watched Croatia emerge from a war-ravaged fledgling nation into one of Europe's most attractive destinations.

I'd now thoroughly recommend it for a family break.

My young family definitely would too!

**FACTFILE**  
 ■ Croatia Tourist Office - [croatia.hr](http://croatia.hr)  
 ■ easyJet ([easyjet.com](http://easyjet.com)) and Jet2 ([jet2.com](http://jet2.com)) fly direct to Croatia from Scotland