



The History and Heritage of Dubrovnik

Dubrovnik, a world heritage site brimming with artwork and architecture, is rich with culture influenced by the great renaissance and gothic eras. Once the glory of Europe, the city is enhanced by the magic of its natural and historical surroundings – crystal clear waves around islands dotted with cypress trees, hills, castles and cathedrals.

Today, one can feel the purity of the Mediterranean gem that is Dubrovnik. Looking down from mount Žarkovica, the city's medieval charm opens with its many cafes happily lining its cobblestone streets and the main square. The landmark, baroque Bell Tower oversees the lively festivals that have taken place each summer for the last 50 years, bringing music and art to the heart of the Old Town.

The words “Non bene pro toto libertas venditur auro” or “Freedom is not to be sold, not for all the gold of the world” were inscribed long ago during the times of the Dubrovnik Republic above the gates on Fort Lawrence, an impenetrable fortress. Throughout its turbulent history, many sovereign and maritime powers have come into conflict in this region: Byzantine, Saracen, Croat, Norman, Venetian, small principalities and kingdoms, even the Hungarian–Croat state, followed by the Roman–German empire, and the Ottoman, Habsburg and Napoleon empires. On such a boundary line, the small city of Dubrovnik succeeded in achieving a completely independent form of self-government based on political ingenuity, so that the Dubrovnik Republic remained a neutral, independent state for centuries.

The walls of Dubrovnik girdle a perfectly preserved complex of public and private, sacral and secular buildings representing all periods of the City's history, beginning with its founding in the 7th century.

Particular mention should be made of the city's main street in the old historical centre – Stradun, Rector's Palace, St. Blaise's Church, Cathedral, three large monasteries, Custom's Office and the City Hall. The Republic of Dubrovnik was the centre of a separate political and territorial entity, and was proud of its culture, its achievements in commerce and especially of its freedom, preserved in the course of the stormy centuries.

Dubrovnik – Neretva County

The Dubrovnik–Neretva County is the southernmost county in the Republic of Croatia. It encompasses an area of 1785 km² and has about 127,000 residents. Territorially, it is organized into 22 local self-administration units, divided into 5 cities (Dubrovnik, Korcula, Ploce, Metkovic and Opuzen) and 17 municipalities (Blato, Dubrovnik coastal region, Janjina, Konavle, Kula Norinska, Lastovo, Lumbarda, Mljet, Orebic, Pojezerje, Slivno, Smokvica, Ston, Trpanj, Vela Luka, Zazablje and Zupa Dubrovnik). The centre of the county is the city of Dubrovnik. During its tumultuous history, many nations and maritime forces met and battled in this area: the Byzantines, Saracens, Croats, Normans, Venetians, small princedoms and kingdoms and the Austro–Hungarian state, as well as the Roman–Germanic Empire, Osman, Habsburg and Napoleonic empires. In the midst of these dividing lines, a small city such as Dubrovnik succeeded in using political skill to win a complete form of self-administration, such that it acted as an independent state, the Dubrovnik Republic, for centuries. The specificity of the Dubrovnik–Neretva County is in its narrow and heterogeneous coastline, separated from the interior by a mountain range, and divided at Neum by the state border with Bosnia Herzegovina, while it has a natural connection to the interior and the northern Pannonic part of Croatia in the area of the Lower Neretva Valley. Thus, the territory of the county is comprised of two basic entities: the relatively narrow coastal area with its series of islands near the mainland and in the open sea (the most significant of which are the islands of Korcula, Mljet, Lastovo and those in the Elaphite archipelago), and the Lower Neretva Valley with its coastline.

Several thousand years before Christ, by some estimates 6000 years and 2000–3000 years by others, the area near Dubrovnik was first inhabited. The existence of the city was lost through the cloudy course of history, legends are interwoven with historical facts and there are no preserved documents from those ancient times or there are so few that historians and archaeologists are left with the massive task of bringing these many assumptions on the life near Dubrovnik to light. One thing is certain – Dubrovnik is an old city, standing on its stone cliffs for at least 14 centuries. Before Dubrovnik, there was a much older city, Epidaurum, which developed in the area of where Cavtat is today, 18 kilometres southeast of Dubrovnik. Until the time of its demise in the 7th century, Epidaurum existed for at least 10 and perhaps as many as 12 centuries. Some historians have stated that the Greeks founded the colony as early as the 7th century before Christ.

On the world stage, the powerful Roman Empire dominated, and tailored the history of the world with the laws of its conquering legions. This was the time of Julius Caesar and the Emperor Augustus. The Romans were already the rulers of the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea. In centuries of bloody warfare, they conquered the Illyrian tribes, the native peoples of the Balkan peninsula and these coastal regions. In the area of today's Cavtat, the well known trade city Epidaurum spread along the coast, with its great, beautiful and famous structures. It was second in size on the Adriatic coast only to Salone (which according to some historians was surpassed in size only by Rome). There are claims that Epidaurum may have had up to 40,000 residents. In the first centuries, it was a Roman colony

at the height of its development, wealth and power. For a time, this city at an important crossroads was the seat of the Roman strategists for the Dalmatian province. The great earthquake in the middle of the 4th century destroyed Epidaurum, a part of the city sunk into the sea where it still lies buried under thick layers of sediment. However, the city continued to exist, as it was mentioned later on as the Bishop's seat. Too weak to fend off the attacks by many nations (the Celts, Goths and Vandals), at the end of the 5th century it fell into the hands of the eastern Goths and was liberated in the middle of the 6th century with the help of Byzantium, which later took on the role of ruler and protector. The city was unable to defend itself from the forceful attack by the Avars and its allied Slavic tribes; it was conquered and destroyed in about 614, when it experienced complete ruin.

The fund of cultural wealth in the Dubrovnik–Neretva County is composed of a large number of cultural treasures. Of architectural heritage alone, there are some 168 protected historical cities, city–rural and traditional rural settlements, 10 of which are registered (i.e. Dubrovnik, Ston, Mali Ston, Korcula, Lastovo, Vid, Orebic, Viganj, Kuciste) and 11 are preventively protected (i.e. Cavtat, Cilipi, Selaci, Slano, Banici, Kotezi, Soline, Brsecine, Trstenik). The historical core of the city of Dubrovnik as a whole was listed on the UNESCO World Heritage list in 1978. Furthermore, there are 1436 protected historical buildings, churches, monasteries and other sacral buildings and complexes, old fortifications and city walls, necropolis, studied and yet unstudied archaeological finds, old bridges and summer residences. 314 of these structures are registered and 346 have been preventatively protected. Also to be noted are whole regions of landscapes with historical features as cultural treasures.

Ecology

Ecologically, the entire county is extremely valuable and much attention is given to the conservation of nature and preserving cleanliness. According to the claims made in 1978 by famed explorer Jean–Jacques Cousteau, Dubrovnik and the surrounding areas boast the cleanest sea in the Mediterranean. According to the estimates of the assessment team of the European Foundation for Environmental Education, the environment of the Miho Pracat Marina was awarded a "Blue Flag". The "Blue Flag" symbolizes a preserved, safe and comfortable environment suitable for rest, recreation and sport. For beaches and marinas, flying the blue flag means top quality tourism promotion, which is based on the high quality of service, the cleanliness of the sea and coastline and the facilities and cleanliness at the beaches and sea.