



Clockwise from opposite page top left, fashion designers Martina Vrdoljak Ranilovic and Nataša Mihaljčin; blogger Iva Silla; music festival director Zoran Maric; museum founders Olinka Vištasca and Dražen Grubišić; chef Jeffrey Vella; café owner Nik Orosi

THE NEW FACES OF ZAGREB

MEET THE TASTEMAKERS WHO ARE TURNING THE CROATIAN CAPITAL INTO A TRUE CITY OF CULTURE

◆ KIMBERLEY LOVATO ◆ TIM WHITE



MORE EUROPEAN than Balkan, and now healed from the punctures of socialist Yugoslavian claws, Croatia has emerged as a top tourist destination, with millions of sun seekers crowding the thousand kilometres of island-speckled Adriatic coastline each year. Yet its capital, Zagreb, remains an enigma: just a pass-through point en route to elsewhere for many travellers. Fact is, they're sorely missing out.

With Croatia on deck for accession to the EU next year, the city is more abuzz than it has ever been and you'll now find year-round cultural events, fashion-forward designers, convivial nightlife and a growing food scene taking place amidst the classic Austro-Hungarian facades.

And who better to give us the inside track on where to go than the passionate trendsetters who are putting Zagreb's best foot forward? Eager to reveal the city's secrets, they're standing (metaphorically speaking) wide-armed to welcome visitors to Europe's next must-see destination. Question is: are you ready for a tour? ▶

THE STYLE SET

NATAŠA MIHALJČIŠIN AND MARTINA 'TINA' VRDOLJAK RANILOVIĆ FASHION DESIGNERS

High fashion may be the norm in Milan and Paris, but in Zagreb? Absolutely, according to Martina Vrdoljak Ranilovic and Nataša Mihaljčičin, two local designers hoping to bring Croatian fashion to the world.

Indeed, you just need spend a Saturday night out in the city centre to see that well-heeled women are as ubiquitous as the outdoor terraces along Tkalciceva Street. "Women here like to dress up," says Ranilovic. "It's something we carry with us from our past – a cultural heritage of sorts. Yet Croatian people are still somewhat insecure when it comes to domestic goods and are more willing to buy foreign fashion."

After graduating from Zagreb's Faculty of Textile Technology, the design duo opened a boutique and workshop in 1997 called I-GLE, a play on words that means both "needles" and "have a look". It has become the capital's go-to address for edgy fashionistas.

"We take a classic everyday piece of clothing and turn it into something that will make a woman feel gentle, seductive and self-confident – and certainly special."

I-GLE, 4 Dežmanova; tel: +385 (0)484 6508, i-gle.com

CITY PICKS

SHOP Naturally, I-GLE, but also Prostor (5 Mesnicka; tel: +385 (0)1484 6016), where you can find interesting clothes and accessories from young Croatian designers.

EAT A lovely little tavern called Lari & Penati (42A Petrinjska; tel: +385 (0)1465 5776) for a simple bite to eat and a glass of fine wine.

"Women here like to dress up. It's a cultural heritage"



THE FOOD HERO

JEFFREY VELLA EXECUTIVE CHEF, REGENT ESPLANADE ZAGREB HOTEL

The Regent Esplanade Zagreb is a symbol of the city's traditional past and a beacon for local foodies, who come for award-winning chef Jeffrey Vella's modern cuisine.

"The hotel was opened in the art deco era, one of the most daring and iconoclastic design periods," says Vella. "It's always been at the forefront of the progressive movement here and I like to think the food we're presenting is contributing to that image."

Expect seasonal local produce, such as wild asparagus and white truffles, as well as flavour combinations and tasting menus that offer creativity and intrigue, while refining traditional dishes, like regional specialty *štruklji* (filled dough).

"We are slowly changing mindsets and there are some real foodies around who want to celebrate innovation," says Vella. "And maybe, just maybe, we can convince those nice people at Michelin that there is a border to cross."

1 Mihanoviceva; tel: +385 (0)1456 6000, regenthotels.com

CITY PICKS

EAT Besides the Esplanade, a spicy beef sandwich at Pingvin (7 Teslina; open 24/7) is unmissable.

OUTDOORS Just north of the city is the Medvednica Nature Park (*Forestry Bliznec; tel +385 (0)1458 6317, pp-medvednica.hr*), where you can hike to the 1,030m summit of Sljeme. ▶



THE CULTURAL CURATORS

OLINKA VIŠTASCA AND DRAŽEN GRUBIŠIĆ CO-FOUNDERS, MUSEUM OF BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS

Every city has museums, but none can boast anything as fun, innovative or poignant as the Museum of Broken Relationships, which exhibits relics from failed relationships, donated from around the world.

“We wanted to do something nice and positive for the city, and revive the Upper Town,” says Grubišić, Zagreb native and co-founder of the museum. “There is a lot to discover here.”

Vištasca and Grubišić are themselves a former couple, who first had the idea after splitting their own possessions in the aftermath of their own breakup.

What started as a small exhibition in 2006 blossomed into a travelling sensation that has caused a stir across Europe. A permanent site was opened in October 2010 and, less than a year later, it won the prestigious Kenneth Hudson Award for most innovative museum in Europe.

“There is a vibrant, independent creative scene in Zagreb, but it needs support and a clear strategy to survive,” says Vištasca. “We have a great opportunity to reinvent our identity, and the museum is proof that culture can generate income and tourism.”

2 *Cirilometodska*; tel: +385 (0)1485 1021, brokenships.com

CITY PICKS

EAT *Prasac* (6 *Vranicanijeva*, tel: +385 (0)1485 1411, prasac.hr) for chef Dino Galvagno's fresh and inventive food.

MUSIC *Culture Factory* (2 *Šubicjeva*; tel: +385 (0)1562 1078, tvornicakulture.com), a multipurpose space with a wide range of contemporary live music.



“We wanted to do something positive for the city”



THE CAFÉ KING

**NIK OROSI BARISTA AND OWNER
ELI'S CAFFÉ**

Coffee houses first percolated in Zagreb in the 18th century and they have been the preferred gathering spot for caffeine-addicted Croats ever since. Though most grand Austro-Hungarian cafés have faded from view, Eli's Caffé blends a contemporary caffeine scene with the old-world, linger-awhile appeal of yore. Most importantly, Nik Orosi

knows coffee: a hobby that started as a dream (literally) and turned into a passion he hopes is contagious.

“I want it to feel open and welcome here, and for people to talk about coffee as they do about wine,” says Orosi. “Specialty coffee in Croatia is a new thing, and the seasonal coffees that I offer are rare in cafés and restaurants.”

As the only person in Zagreb roasting his own beans, Orosi takes his skills seriously, swirling and sniffing each cup like a sommelier. His title of Croatian National Barista Champion three years in a row, 2006-08, earns him the right to brag, but he doesn't.

And just what's so great about his coffee? “After two glasses of Champagne, you'll do something wrong. After two cups of my coffee, everything's all right,” laughs Orosi.

63 *Ilica*; tel: +385 (0)91 455 5608, eliscaffé.com

CITY PICKS

DRINK *Art Café Cica Bar* (18 *Thalcičeva*; tel: +385 (0)95860 9899) is a great place to taste a variety of local *rakija* (fruit brandy) and listen to music.

OUTDOORS Centrally located *Maksimir Park* (park-maksimir.hr) for the greenery and the zoo (zg200.com). ▶



THE MUSIC MAESTRO

ZORAN MARIĆ FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR INMUSIC FESTIVAL

Zagreb has a rich events calendar that sees locals pack into dozens of museums, exhibits and festivals that celebrate film, comics, modern dance, art and much in between. But in Zagreb's home-grown INmusic Festival the city can boast Croatia's biggest international open-air event, welcoming nearly 50,000 revellers each June to discover the music-centric city.

"It's pure fun and leisure, with multiple stages, a variety of artists and friendly locals," says festival creator and director, Zoran Maric. "We promote quality young bands, and music and culture from all over the world."

Maric started it up in 2006, when multi-day, open-air festivals were virtually unheard of in Croatia. The debut was held on a small stage in the city centre, with Morrissey as a headliner. Rapid popularity means the event has moved to an island on Lake Jarun, in the southwest of the city,



where visitors now camp out, as well as listen to bands and dance to DJ-spun tunes until 4am (29-30 June, this year).

"We're used to good music and have always had a good cultural connection to other European capitals, but we were cut off in the 90s because of the war and it took a lot of time to recover," says Maric. "Now there are others trying to do the same thing as us. This tells me

that we were right on when we started." inmusicfestival.com

CITY PICKS

EAT Korcula, for seafood and Mediterranean flavours (17 *Teslina*; tel: +385 (0)1487 2159, restoran-korcula.hr).

FIRST TIMER Book a local guide at the tourist office (5 *Kaptol*; tel: +385 (0)1489 8555, zagreb-touristinfo.hr).



THE LOCAL EXPERT

IVA SILLA RESIDENT, BLOGGER AND MOTHER OF TWO

These days, it seems the internet has usurped traditional travel guides as the prime source for local tips and advice. And Zagreb native Iva Silla is tapping into this cyber phenomenon with her blog, Secret Zagreb, in hopes of attracting curious voyagers to her city.

"When I travel, it's hard to find information on topics of my interest, such as local lore and insights," she says. "I'm hoping my blog grows into a sort of off-road information source for Zagreb."

Coming from a family rooted firmly in the capital, Silla is inspired by her love of Zagreb. She has a following on

Twitter and visits to her blog are slowly rising. This year she's adding a Facebook fan page and will be offering guided walks.

"I think Zagreb has a side for everyone to enjoy and based on responses, it seems my point of view is inspiring some to think of Zagreb as a stand-alone destination."

secret-zagreb.com

CITY PICKS

COFFEE Destino Café (34 *Radiceva*; tel: +385 (0)1481 3891) or Eli's Caffè, on Ilica Street (see *previous page*).

SOUVENIR The colorful Dolac Market (by *Ban Jelačić Square*) is good for handmade wooden pieces.

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