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Cruising Croatia

Harbors, history—and language barriers—on a family cruise of the Dalmatian Coast

By Sandy Parks

Kenneth Grahame was right when he wrote that there is nothing better than simply messing about in boats, but to that I would add, when not on the boat, sitting at a café just in front of your boat drinking coffee, wine and/or beer for hours at a time makes it just about perfect.

My family had been clamoring for a charter vacation and I wanted to go somewhere outside our normal cruising grounds (U.S. East Coast). Mark Wakeman of Kiriacoulis (www.kiriacoulis.com) suggested we spend a week cruising the coast of Croatia. Thus on a Saturday afternoon in late September, five of us (myself, husband Steve, son Ian, brother-in-law Dana

and niece Emily) found ourselves at Kiriacoulis's base at the Tankerkomerc Marina in Zadar, Croatia.

This was my family's first European charter, and Kiriacoulis's base manager Vjekoslav Marinovic and his crew made it very easy. We arrived at the base to find all our paperwork in order and waiting for us. After about 10 minutes of paying fees and signing papers it was off to board *Popeye*, the Bavaria 39 that would be our home for the coming week. Vjekoslav's staff gave us the typical charter run through of systems on board, including the in-mast furling, roller furling jib, anchor windlass and navigation equipment. A tour of the boat showed how meticulous they were about cleaning. This 2007 boat was spotless.

The marina is conveniently located across from the old medieval city center, and we chose to stay for the night so we could explore Zadar. What struck us that first night and continued to in each place we stopped was how clean everything is. We stopped at cities and small villages and did not see any litter to speak of. We are convinced that the streets in the medieval sections of the cities are washed and scrubbed down each night. We strolled through the city looking at Roman ruins and churches (St. Donatus built in the 9th century), having dinner in an outside café (the theme for the week) and stopping for the ice cream we all fell in love with. People stroll along Zadar's seawall in the evenings, gathering at the blue lights where we were



Clockwise from opposite left: The river from Sibenik to Skradin. Zadar's famed blue lights. *Popeye*, the Bavaria 39. Entrance to medieval section of Zadar. A delicious bakery across the street from the supermarket in Zadar



Photos courtesy Sandy and Steve Parks and Emily Wilson

fortunate enough to be able to watch a local wedding celebration.

We had elected to do our own provisioning so our first encounter with All Things Croatian was at the Konsum supermarket. Not knowing Croatian made for a fairly riotous expedition; fortunately most packaging comes with pictures. We did pretty well staying with local brands, and we found the fresh fruits and vegetables to be quite good. Whether in cities or small towns, bread is bought at the local bakeries and we quickly learned to buy when we saw a shop open, as they usually remained open for just a couple of hours. We all liked the breads and fruits; the fish was good, though we found the meats to be cooked well beyond our preference. We certainly did our fair share of wine tasting and overall were pleased with our choices. We did try to learn some Croatian, but I'd have to say we failed miserably. Fortunately for us, Croatia is a popular cruising area for people from many countries, so English by default has become the main form of communication.

After spending the night in Zadar we left the marina, motoring as there was no wind. Emily and Ian wanted

to go swimming but we decided to first poke our nose into a small village on the island of Iz so we could practice our Med-mooring technique, never having done it before. Thus the town dock at Iz Veli became our learning ground. Practicing backing up the boat gave us confidence for the rest of the week and we did discover that at each town there is always an attendant to help. Depending on the size of the town, there will be someone patrolling the docks, and either by foot, bicycle or moped they will appear to wave you into the spot they want you. Backing up to the sea-wall, with a boat hook you grab the

lazy line they offer, walk it forward to the bow, tie off the stern and you are done.

Meandering narrow streets up and down hills, it's as if you have



A fish market in Sibenik

Berthed in Sali



Emily and Dana at a café in Sali



Ian with a donkey at Mir Lake

stepped back in time. With no common language, you simply nod and smile at people as you stroll, as they are hanging out clothes or working in their yards, which are all planted

with fruit trees of some sort (we saw pears, pomegranates, figs, grapes). There are 1,185 islands in Croatia, and we spent our time amongst the islands in the Zadar archipelago. Croatia's populated history goes back over 1,000 years, so many of these islands have been over used. There used to be goats and sheep on the islands, though now they are mostly scrub brush and stone walls. Some islands are unoccupied, some have a small village or two and some have larger towns.

WATCHING THE WORLD GO BY

We spent the week sailing from island to island, stopping at villages

that looked intriguing (we used the *Croatia Cruising Companion* cruising guide, which we found quite helpful) and at inlets that looked welcoming for a swim. Following our first day of med-mooring practice and swimming for the first time in the Med, we sailed to Sali, where we tied up at the town quay in front of a cafe. There we sat for hours watching the world go by. It's as much fun to watch people as they berth as it is to watch people anchor out. We split our nights between berths and anchoring out. Emily enjoyed the berths so she could hop off in the morning for a coffee, though the downside was neighboring boats who enjoyed partying until the early morning hours. In a not-very-scientific study we noticed that Emily and I were in the minority. The vast majority of boats had four or five men on board. I asked back at the base and they did say more men went on charters than did families. We thought we saw an amazing number of boats, though they assured us that July and August were much more crowded.

After a night anchored at Sali, we sailed to the island of Dugi Otok and Telascica Bay, which is home to Lake Mir. We anchored in the bay and walked the trail to this saltwater lake that is supposed to have healing powers. We all swam but unfortunately the prophecy backfired, with Steve ending up with a wicked cold. This area is home to a number of donkeys who wander among the tourists looking for handouts and whose braying echoes around the



Emily and Ian walking the streets of Skradin



Makeshift fender chairs



A delicious fish dinner

harbor. This national park is a very popular cruising ground with plenty of moorings to choose from.

We continued sailing along the 89 islands that are part of the Kornati National Park system, all of which look to be part of a lunar landscape. The water is crystal clear, and there are no obstructions to speak of. The water is deep right up to the islands, which makes for a fairly spectacular passage. Occasionally an inlet will appear with one small building and a spot to berth three or four boats. We stopped at one such spot and had a delightful lunch, then moved on to an anchorage to swim.

When checking out the boat we had asked for recommendations for places to stop. One of the highlights would have to be Kaprije. This small island with a village by the same name was delightful and met all of our requirements. A spot on the quay to watch the world go by, a town to wander with its three or four streets, and a dinner of fresh fish that we'll be talking about for years. After spending the evening here we

sailed back to the mainland to the town of Sibenik. From here we went up the river and through Prokljansko lake to anchor off the town of Skradin. We paid the park entrance fee for a 15-minute boat ride to the Krka National Park, where they have a number of trails to wander, leading to the Skradinski Buk waterfalls where we were able to take advantage of a freshwater swimming hole.

The following morning we made our way back to Sibenik, where we walked the medieval part of town, wandering through the Cathedral of St. James (begun in the 15th century and now on the UNESCO world heritage list), and up to the fortress built in the 12th century. The town had an open-air market filled with fresh fruits and vegetables, as well as a fish market. Dana and Ian had been trying their luck with fishing and after finding a store with lures—since they had lost others overboard—we slowly motored and trolled along our way. Much to their delight Ian caught a fish (“it was this big...”), which pretty much made the

trip for both of them. We passed some beautiful towns along the way but decided to push on to the island of Murter as it was a bit closer to Zadar and we had some miles to go. We anchored in the town of Hrmina and walked over to the town of Betina, which had a beautiful church overlooking the bay and the medieval streets we had come to expect laid below.

WAY TOO FAST

On our last day of sailing we were fortunate to encounter the Bora winds, which are the strong, gusty winds along the Dalmatian coast. Little did any of the other numerous charter boats in these waters know, but with a racing family on board, *Popeye* flew past the other boats, much to the delight of Steve and Ian. One of the Bavaria 39s we passed gave a cheer as we sailed by. It was



Peaceful Telascica Bay. The waterfalls in Krka National Park, left. Leaving Kapejie and headed back to the mainland toward the end of the charter



the perfect ending to a week of sailing that we all felt went way too fast.

I tend to put sailors into two groups: those who love the act/art of sailing (this would be my husband, a racer) and those who love sailing and the destinations it can take them to (this would be me). A week spent sailing the Adriatic Sea allowed us to combine both aspects of sailing. Getting to Croatia was relatively straightforward and we found it to be much more affordable by flying through Dublin on Aer Lingus (from Boston) and then taking Ryanair to Zadar. This saved us hundreds of dollars per person versus flying directly from the U.S. to Croatia. The prices in Croatia (the kuna is the national currency, with about five kuna to the dollar) were reasonable. Fuel, as in all of Europe, is about what you'd expect. We spent about \$1,400 total for five people, not including the price of the boat or airfare. This did include the transit taxes, fuel, boat insurance, outboard, all food, dockage and sightseeing expenses. One task you need to take care of before going to Croatia is to obtain the International Proficiency Certificate—through US Sailing (ussailing.org). Give them a call and they will walk you through the procedure. After leaving, Steve, Ian and I then flew to Scotland to drop Ian off at his university. Steve and I spent the next three days driving around Scotland and probably spent close to the same amount for just the two of us. ≈

Charter Tech Talk

by Steve Parks

Navigation Equipment

- Netbook laptop
- By adding a GPS antenna, a full-featured navigation program and a convenient means of connecting 12-volt power, the Netbook becomes a compact and powerful chartplotter.

Hardware and Software Details:

I used an Asus Eee 1005HAB PC with two gigabytes of memory, Jeppesen Marine's Nobeltec Admiral Max Pro navigation software along with C-Map MAX Pro vector charts for the Central Mediterranean Sea, an Advanced Technology TI-FA 12V to 19V Netbook car charger and a waterproof GlobalSat BU-353 USB GPS receiver. I chose this computer because it was inexpensive, immediately available at the local retailer and rated highly in numerous on-line reviews. It has about three to three and a half hours of battery life and a 10-inch screen. The battery lasts longer than many full-sized laptops, but there are other models with up to 10-hour batteries that I would consider if I did this again. Both the GPS receiver and the charger were the most compact and cost effective units I could find. Both are designed for automotive installations. The GPS had a magnetic base.

How did it work?

The setup worked quite well. When I booted up in Croatia the GPS had a cold fix within five minutes, and the software immediately opened to the correct chart. Subsequent startups were instantaneous. I really enjoyed manipulating the charts with a touchpad and



a full selection of on-screen commands were similar to the chartplotter where you are always working your way up and down various menu trees. Waypoints and routes were intuitive, quick and easy, and the charts were displayed with great detail on the high resolution screen. But anyone who has used a laptop has experienced this. The good news is the Netbook worked just as well.

The Netbook stayed mostly on the chart table plugged into the 12-volt outlet with the GPS antenna either near it inside the cabin, or just outside an adjacent port. The receiver is based on the SiRFstar III 20 channel chipset known for its high sensitivity and fast fix time, and it worked reliably. It did not lose its fix at any time during the trip, and on a number of occasions found satellites when the installed dedicated chartplotter did not.

The DC-DC car charger is the only way to go. I've used inverters and they are inefficient, noisy, and often stop working at fairly high DC source voltages. There are also all the

extra cables and connectors to contend with.

There were some start-up pains. Netbook processors are less powerful than most laptops and I had to be careful to close all other applications and keep only one chart window open at a time. Otherwise the machine would slow to a crawl when I zoomed the charts in and out. One minor annoyance: Nobeltec requires a USB dongle installed at all times. It is vulnerable as it protrudes over an inch from the side of the computer and more than once I had to reinsert it after it became dislodged. A lower profile design [or none at all] would be preferred.

The Netbook will not replace chartplotters. It is not waterproof and is difficult to read in bright sunlight, even with the special screen formats designed for this purpose. But on this trip not only did we use the Netbook to navigate, but we enjoyed digital photos downloaded from our cameras, made Skype calls to friends and family, wrote notes and entertained ourselves on the web in harbors and airport lounges. What chartplotter can do that?