

Pearl of the Adriatic

Yugoslavia's colorful past lives on in a city that has charmed visitors for centuries.

Edward I. Placidi

Yugoslavia? Dubrovnik? If these names conjure up images of gray, dull destinations under the rigid yoke of an East European communist system, then you are in for a surprise.

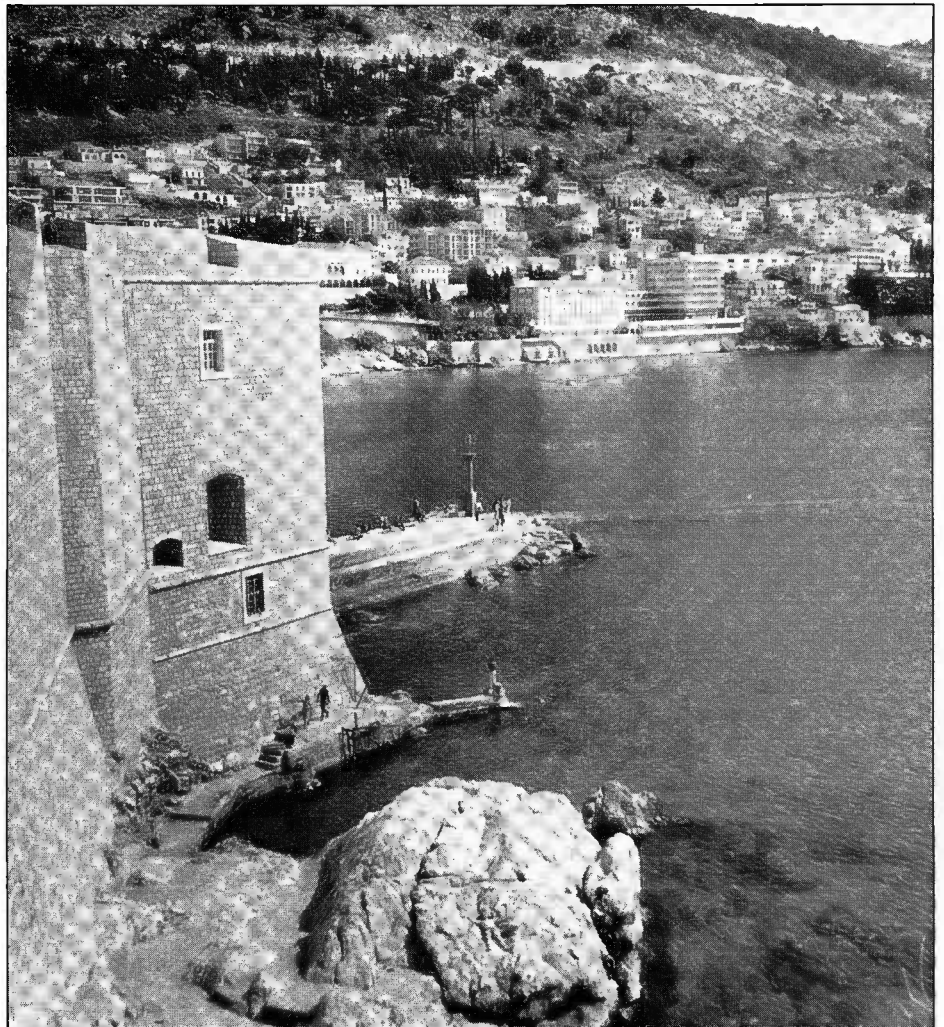
Yugoslavia—which is officially non-aligned and considers itself more socialist than communist—renounced allegiance to Moscow and was expelled from the Soviet bloc in 1948. The country has long maintained cordial diplomatic and economic relations with the West, and has become one of Europe's most popular seaside resorts.

Yugoslavia boasts hundreds of miles of some of Europe's most beautiful coastline, washed by the blue-green Adriatic Sea and studded with resorts, with the medieval city of Dubrovnik its undisputed queen.

Historic atmosphere

Located on a rocky islet jutting into the Adriatic, 1,400-year-old Dubrovnik for centuries was a powerful, independent city-state that found safety from the Turks and Venetians behind massive city walls. Remnants of this colorful past are still in evidence—visitors enter through the city's walls by crossing an old wooden drawbridge over a moat where orange trees now blossom. Just by walking the streets, visitors receive a crash course in Gothic, Renaissance, and Baroque architecture in a setting unmarred by neon signs and cars, which are prohibited.

According to Marvin Perley, marketing services manager for L'Oreal, a cosmetics and body-care products company which took its 300 incentive achievers to Dubrovnik in 1982, "Dubrovnik is one of the highlights of Europe. We walked away with a completely favorable reaction." In giving Dubrovnik such a positive review, Per-



Dubrovnik's location on the beautiful Dalmatian coast makes it one of Europe's leading resorts.

ley points out that he has been participating in L'Oreal programs since the company began running incentives in 1968, taking in major destinations across the globe from Paris to Tokyo, year after year.

"The scenery is what our people talked about most," he adds. "The countryside, the ancient walled city, everyplace they went, there was something that caught the eye."

Last year, L'Oreal was one of about a dozen IT groups from the United States that went to Yugoslavia (double the figure for 1981). According to Dejan Zivojinovic, director of the Yugoslav National Tourist Office (YNTO), they chose Dubrovnik because it "can offer prices that cannot be matched by other major European cities. Dubrovnik also offers an unusual atmosphere, that of a historic

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city by the sea. As an excursion starting point, Dubrovnik is fantastic."

Planners can choose from several daytrips, reports Perley. The trip to Sveti Stefan, a fishing village on a rock extending into the sea, included a drive along the Dalmatian coast (as this section of the Adriatic coast is known), a stop at the ancient market town of Perast, Risan with its second-century multicolored Roman mosaics, and the Renaissance palaces and Lapidarium of walled Kotor. The trip to Mostar, a bastion of Islamic art and architecture in Yugoslavia, takes travelers through picturesque river valleys and the old Turkish fortress town of Pocitelj.

IT groups can visit villages where traditional costumes are still worn, attend folkloric shows, take a romantic sunset cruise along the coast, or travel into the mountains to dine and dance with villagers in their homes.

Zivojinovic also notes another option for IT groups. "Dubrovnik is just a one-hour flight from Rome, Athens, Vienna, Budapest, and Istanbul. Many groups use one-day excursions to one of these destinations for sight-seeing, shopping, and dinner, then return to Dubrovnik."

In addition to daytrips, Dubrovnik offers excellent local restaurants for dine-arounds, inexpensive shopping for crystal, rugs, and jewelry, and many venues for banquets or cocktail functions with Yugoslavian entertainment. Tours of the monasteries, cathedrals, and palaces can also be arranged. A cable-car ride to the top of Srd Mountain offers a panoramic view of the city, the coastline, and many islands just offshore.

L'Oreal held a farewell medieval banquet, with costumed participants and local entertainers, inside the walls of Revilon Fortress. Perley says he "would compare the event more than favorably with farewell banquets we've had in major cities around the world. Our people enjoyed every minute of it."

A perfect afternoon

L'Oreal also took a smaller group of special achievers to a restaurant over-



Dubrovnik is an enchanting mix of Gothic, Renaissance, and Baroque architecture.

looking a waterfall in the nearby mountains for a "meal and an afternoon done to perfection," says Charles Petersen, L'Oreal's national sales manager.

Perley adds, "What made it so extraordinary was that it represented the country itself—the waitresses in Yugoslavian costumes, the greeting by the owner, the friendliness, the food, and the service—you felt you were in a very special part of the world."

While L'Oreal ran a full and active program, the participants found the Dubrovnik trip to be more relaxed than others they had experienced in previous years. A key factor was that the group was not shuffled around to several hotels. A single property (Hotel Dubrovnik President) was used, serving as a base for local activities and a takeoff point for excursions. The Dubrovnik President, with its private sandy beach and rooms with flower-filled terraces overlooking the water, is one of a number of incentive-quality hotels built in Dubrovnik in the 1970s and offering recreational

and group facilities at moderate prices.

Zivojinovic notes that one of Dubrovnik's many advantages is the low land costs as compared with those in Western Europe. However, Captain Mato Stanovic of Atlas Ambassador of Yugoslavia, a ground operator handling incentives to Dubrovnik, notes that air transportation to Yugoslavia is higher than to other destinations in Western Europe. "But not much more," he says, "so for only \$1,000 per person you can have a complete six-night/seven-day incentive package to Dubrovnik that includes air transportation."

IT groups also receive special routing service from JAT Yugoslav Airlines. Explains Captain Stanovic, "If an IT group has 160 or more people, JAT flies them directly from New York or Chicago to Dubrovnik, then the plane proceeds to Belgrade and Zagreb. Dubrovnik is normally the last stop."

Atlas Ambassador handled L'Oreal's program, and receiving high marks from Petersen. "Hats off to the agency that coordinated it all because the buses were beautiful, the guides were very good, and the facilities were excellent."

Yugoslavia's center for incentive travel

Dubrovnik has garnered much experience in handling groups. On the heels of the hotel boom of the 1970s, Dubrovnik hosted a number of large IT groups involving as many as 5,000 participants in back-to-back groups of 250 each. The city is also one of only a few major meeting centers in Yugoslavia, and many cruise ships call there. Says Zivojinovic, "The ground operators and hotel personnel in Dubrovnik are the best trained and most experienced in incentive and group travel in Yugoslavia."

The best times to visit are April to June and late September to early November, and the ideal group size is about 250, "big enough to do many activities but still a size you can control," notes Captain Stanovic. The L'Oreal group went in March and found the temperature was a pleasant

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65° to 70°.

Perley recalls, "Many in our group were leery at first about visiting a communist country, and this was a negative aspect in promoting the trip." But after the L'Oreal winners arrived in Dubrovnik, an entirely different perspective emerged. They found the facilities and the handling of their group top-notch. Says Petersen, "The people were absolutely the friendliest and most hospitable I've ever encountered."

"For our budget," sums up Perley, "we were able to accomplish what we wanted to accomplish: to provide our customers with a wonderful seven-day holiday and to keep them stimulated to the point where they wanted to start working toward our next program. For upcoming programs we're definitely considering another trip to Yugoslavia."

Travel planning for Yugoslavia

The YNTD (630 Fifth Ave, New York, NY 10111, [212] 757-2801) assists planners by arranging inspection trips and providing information kits, slides, audiovisual or film presentations, and shell kits.

Atlas Ambassador (60 E 42nd St, New York, NY 10165, [212] 697-6767) also organizes inspection trips, provides slide and film presentations, and works with planners to create tailor-made incentive packages.

Additional information on travel to Yugoslavia can be obtained from Kompas Tours, 630 Fifth Ave, New York, NY 10111, (212) 265-8210; Yugotours, 350 Fifth Ave, New York, NY 10118, (212) 563-2400; and Love Holidays, 5530 Corbin Ave, Tarzana, CA 91356, (800) 382-3358, or (800) 423-5458 (Calif).

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