

ADVENTURE & TRAVEL



Easy on the Isles

How to choose a hideaway among Croatia's thousand-plus islands? We zero in on four options that are a simple ferry ride, stroll across a bridge—or dash on a private speedboat—from the mainland



By ANJA MUTIĆ

PLACING SECOND in Sunday's World Cup, the national soccer team of Croatia had a tumultuous week, as have its legions of fans. But with a thousand islands scattered along their country's jade-green Adriatic coast, from deserted flyspecks to hipster outposts, there's no shortage of places to lick one's wounds—or bask in silver-medal glory. The international jet set has long crowded about Hvar, where the main town features a postcard-perfect harbor and raucous nightlife, while more budget-minded beachgoers and water sports enthusiasts gravitate to Brac. History buffs tend to seek out Losinj, a favorite retreat in the days of the Habsburg Empire, and little-known Ciovo is starting to catch on with trendsetters. As proof that Croatia's tourism draw isn't letting up, stylish seaside hotels keep springing up. For a guide to island hideouts, read on.

To Hvar and Hvar Not

If you want to get your groove on in Croatia, drop anchor in the town of Hvar on the namesake island. Come summer, sailboats and yachts swarm the medieval town renowned for its round-the-clock revelry. But beyond Hvar Town's beach parties and full-moon shindigs, the islands sprawls across some 115 square miles and encompasses a clutch of quiet hamlets, pine-backed pebble beaches and fields of lavender.

Staying There Little Green Bay hotel, just 3 miles outside the hubbub of Hvar Town, hugs a small bucolic cove. It opened in 2016, the passion project of a French interior designer and her brother who previously owned and ran restaurants in Paris; they restored an old farmhouse and turned it into a 15-room, earth-toned retreat. All rooms come with a balcony or terrace overlooking Lozna Bay, and you can loll water-side on giant beanbags or rattan lounge chairs. If you're feeling antsy, the hotel's speedboat will ferry you to nearby Pakleni archipelago to swim, kayak or tuck into a beachfront lunch on one of the tiny islands or zip you over to Hvar Town to mingle with the party people. *From about \$450 a night, littlegreenbay.com*

Getting There Fly into Split airport and take a ferryboat (roughly two hours) or catamaran (one hour) to Hvar island; check the boat schedules at www.jadrolinija.hr. Alternatively, arrange for the hotel's boat to pick you up from Split.

Get Sporty on Brac

Among the largest of the Dalmatian islands and closest to the mainland, Brac is home to Zlatni Rat, one of Croatia's rare sandy beaches. Popular with windsurfers, Zlatni Rat also accommodates all manner of beach toys, from water skis to banana boats. The beach anchors one of the island's biggest towns, Bol, home to a number of medieval sites and art-filled churches, as well as unexceptional hotels.

Staying There Hotel Lemongarden, which

opened two summers ago, perked up the sleepy fishing village of Sutivan, on the other side of the island from Bol. Guests stay in one of a trio of 300-year-old stone buildings, including a 16th-century Renaissance mansion, that surround a garden draped in bougainvillea. All 35 rooms of the hotel are decked out with handcrafted wood furnishings, Brac marble floors and designer touches like Murano chandeliers. The property's restaurant takes a rather formal approach to local fare, with dishes like rack of lamb coated in Dalmatian spices and grilled Adriatic tuna with onion marmalade. There's a wellness pavilion (for massages or a shvitz in a cedar sauna), a swimming pool and, farther afield, a private beach, accessible by one of the hotel's complimentary bikes or the golf cart shuttle service. Guests in the mood for a field trip can hike up Vidova Gora, the tallest peak of Brac, affording panoramic vistas of neighboring islands. *From about \$340 a night, lemongardenhotel.com*

Getting There A 50-minute ferry ride from the Split harbor will deliver you to the town of Supetar. From there, you can arrange for a private transfer to Hotel Lemongarden. Or book a direct transfer from Split via the hotel's speedboat.

Long-Lost Losinj

Largely off the radar these days, 29-square-mile Losinj sits on the northern stretch of Croatia's coastline in the Kvarner Gulf. Long ago, the Austro-Hungarian elite frequented the island, drawn by its agreeable microclimate and a profusion of exotic plants brought over in the 19th century by sea captains from their world-wide travels.

Staying There Opened in 2015, Boutique Hotel Alhambra has brought a whiff of the Habsburg heyday back to the island. Overlooking the seaside promenade of Cikat Bay and a forest of ancient Aleppo

EMPHATICALLY ADRIATIC
The Croatian town of Hvar on the namesake island is becoming one of Europe's biggest summer draws.

pinetrees, two turn-of-the-century villas connect via a sleek new structure with a facade of travertine limestone mosaic and glass. Guests tend to spend most of their time at the hotel's private beach deck or visiting the swanky spa, with its indoor seawater pool and various treatments, from a steam bath with island herbs to a collagen face mask. *From about \$360 a night, losinj-hotels.com*

Getting There New daily flights (through late September) operate from Zagreb, Split and Pula in Croatia as well as Lugano in Switzerland to Losinj airport, a 20-minute drive from the hotel. Alternatively, take a ferryboat or catamaran from the coastal cities of Rijeka, Zadar or Pula; check www.jadrolinija.hr for schedules.

Newly Cool Ciovo

A leper colony in medieval times, tiny Ciovo island wasn't much of a tourist destination until recently. It sits just across the narrow channel from Trogir, whose ancient town center, a Unesco World Heritage site, is a maze of alleyways and a collection of remarkably preserved Romanesque, Renaissance and baroque buildings. Today, Ciovo, connected to Trogir by a small bridge, functions as that larger town's seaside suburb and heaves with nondescript holiday homes. Most of the mainland's attractions are easily accessible by car rental or taxi.

Staying There A spirited resort by Tel Aviv-based Brown Hotels, the 42-room Brown Beach House Croatia opened in 2016 in a former tobacco-shipment station. With its fancy seafood-focused restaurant, small spa and glamorous, unabashedly vintage-style décor by Amsterdam-based designer Saar Zafrir—mahogany floors, large potted palm trees and black-and-white-tiled swimming pool—the hotel is bringing an atypical cool to this often overlooked island. Across the street is the hotel's beach club and bar. Word to the wise: Book a room overlooking the old town of Trogir or risk getting a bland view of the mainland across the channel. *From about \$295 a night, brownhotels.com/croatia*

Getting There Hire a taxi or rent a car at Split airport, 3 miles away.



CHAISE AWAY Little Green Bay, a small hotel on Hvar's Lozna Bay.



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Sonequa Martin-Green,
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CHECK IT OUT The two-year-old Brown Beach House Croatia on the tiny island of Ciovo.