



lika & Gorski kotar

WHILE TOURISTS SWOON over the islands and coast of Croatia, its mountainous regions, located southwest of the capital city, Zagreb, remain blissfully off the radar. In Lika and Gorski Kotar, travelers can hike beside Plitvice Lakes and visit no fewer than four of the country's eight national parks, and spot ancient yew trees and native flowers such as Carniolan lilies.

Drawn by the remote wilderness and my own roots—my mother hails from a now-abandoned hamlet in Lika—I've been spending time in the area during the last several years. There, I found Jelena Pirc of Lynx & Fox, who guides day hikes into Gorski Kotar's rugged sylvan landscapes frequented by bears, wolves, and the endangered Eurasian lynx. Pirc recommends visiting Stara Sušica's new Large Carnivores Visitor Center, which opened in July.

Farther south in the mighty Velebit Mountains, where old-growth beech forests hide rare western capercaillie birds, the conservation nonprofit Rewilding Europe is reintroducing wild horses and bovines to the Lika Plains and building wildlife-

Though travelers best know the country for its picturesque beaches, Croatia's wild interiors are also worth a special trip. *by Anja Mutić*

watching hide structures to support nature-focused tourism. Accommodations range from cozy chalets and rustic lodges to the higher-end Linden Tree Retreat & Ranch, located inside the UNESCO Velebit Mountain Biosphere Reserve—even more reasons to detour inland from the Croatian coast. **A**

Born in Croatia and based in New York City, Anja Mutić has worked in travel since 2000.

GETTING THERE

39 miles **84 miles**

From Rijeka International Airport to Gorski Kotar

From Rijeka International Airport to Lika

POPULATION

85 percent of Gorski Kotar's surface is forested, with a population density of 50 people per square mile.

DID YOU KNOW?

Lika is the birthplace of the legendary inventor Nikola Tesla. Travelers can visit his memorial center and museum in the village of Smiljan.



Lika's Plitvice Lakes National Park is famous for its turquoise waters.