

OCEAN JEWEL

Overlooking the Adriatic, Dubrovnik is one of the world's most impressive walled cities, offering up world heritage culture alongside up-market style. A perfect cocktail for honeymooners, suggests Yvonne Gordon.

With its rich history and culture, Mediterranean setting and luxurious resorts, Dubrovnik in Croatia has to be one of the most romantic destinations for a honeymoon. Set on the Adriatic Sea, the medieval fortified city is surrounded by nearly 2 kilometres of stone walls, with fortresses, battlements and towers, as well as drawbridges at the main gates, all creating a magical atmosphere from the start.

Dating back to the 7th century, the former maritime republic has a rich culture of art, architecture and music. By day, spend a few hours exploring the palaces, churches, art galleries and museums, many of which were built during the city's wealthy Golden Age in the 16th and 17th centuries. They are set around a warren of stone backstreets, full of taverns, souvenir shops and pretty stone residences with colourful flower balconies.



Mario Romulić and Dražen Stojić courtesy The Croatian Tourist Board. Jazz: visitdubrovnik.hr

Lokrum: visitdubrovnik.hr

At night, visit the Old Town for a romantic alfresco meal or an open-air performance in one of the palaces, or at Fort Lovrijenac which is set high up on a rock just outside the main city gate and famed for performances of Shakespeare's Hamlet.

Those in need of some rest and relaxation after their wedding should book into one of the romantic resort hotels outside the Old Town, which have lush gardens, stone waterside terraces and beaches, large pools and lots of privacy. Croatia enjoys a warm Mediterranean climate with average summer temperatures of 25°C and warm sea temperatures, so you can soak up the lots of sun and laze by the sea or pool for a few days. Dubrovnik's westerly orientation also means spectacular sunsets.

One of the best ways to start exploring the Old Town is to walk around the city walls, one of the best preserved



fortification systems in Europe, with five forts and 15 towers and bastions. From the 25 metre-high walls, there are super views over the red rooftops, spires and little streets of the Old Town and lots of places to stop for photos. The sea side of the walls has beautiful views over the Adriatic and the Elaphiti islands and of boats of all shapes and sizes zipping up and down the coast; the land side over to the wooded hills forming a backdrop to the city.

At the colourful morning Green market at Gundulić Square (6am till noon), locals stock up on fresh produce – fruit, vegetables, cheeses and dried fruits as well as lavender and aromatic oils. After the market, the terrace at nearby Caffe Gradska Kavana (Pred Dvorum 1) is a great people-watching spot.

For history, at the end of main street Stradun, the Gothic-Renaissance style Sponza Palace, which is home of the state archive, and the nearby Rector's Palace, are worth a visit. The museum in the Rector's Palace has old coins, silverware and costumes, all giving an insight into the city's era as a wealthy maritime power.

On the other end of Stradun, the Franciscan Monastery has a tree-filled courtyard, a museum with crafts, gold and silver and sculptures, and a pharmacy which has been open since 1317. New brides will be interested in the traditional wedding jewellery – during the Golden Age, a girl from a noble family would get up to 10 engagement rings – for 'financial and symbolic' security.





Alfresco dining at Restaurant Nautika

By day, Dubrovnik Old Town can be busy but at night, when the cruise ship tourists have gone home, the city takes on a more magical and romantic atmosphere. People dress up to eat outdoors in one of the old squares or a cosy tavern, or to enjoy an outdoor music or theatre performance.

From the harbour in the Old Town, there are regular ferries over to the tree-filled island of Lokrum for a peaceful walk in the botanical gardens or around the old Benedictine monastery – accompanied only by birdsong and the odd curious peacock. There are also some secluded rocky swimming coves and the island is a nature reserve so an ideal romantic escape.

Whether you fall for the charm and atmosphere of the medieval walled town, the Adriatic's crystal clear waters, rocky coves and warm climate, or the luxury of one of the beautiful hotels, a honeymoon in Dubrovnik will be full of magic and romance.



Escapism at Dubrovnik Palace Hotel

**ENJOY WATERSIDE TERRACES
BEACHES, POOLS
AND LOTS OF PRIVACY.**

Your honeymoon planner

- * **Hip hotels** Set on the secluded Lapad peninsula, the five-star Hotel Dubrovnik Palace has a beach terrace, four pools, tennis courts, a diving school, a spa, walking trails and beautiful Adriatic views. Closer to the Old Town, set on the water is the luxury Hotel Excelsior, which has welcomed guests like Queen Elizabeth II, Elizabeth Taylor and Roger Moore. A sunset cocktail on the terrace is a must-do. With its own private beach, the cliffside Hotel Bellevue also makes a great honeymoon base. For something really special, book into a romantic Mediterranean villa such as Villa Orsula for one night (from €360 per night, see alh.hr). The villa has cascading waterside gardens and super sea views from private stone balconies.
- * **Romantic restaurants** Restaurant Nautika (nautika-restaurant.com) has a beautiful setting overlooking the city walls, the sea and Fort Lovrijenac and specialises in traditional Dalmatian cuisine with a modern twist. Restaurant Victoria (victoria-restaurant.com) has al-fresco dining in terraced gardens, with beautiful views of the water and the Old Town.
- * **Getting there** Aer Lingus flies from Dublin to Dubrovnik from €69.99 one way, see aerlingus.com. 7 nights B&B at the five-star Hotel Dubrovnik Palace costs from €1,170 per person including flights and transfers in a sea view balcony room (two weeks from €2,034). 7 nights at the five-star Hotel Excelsior from €1,270pps (two weeks from €2,174) including flights and transfers. Seven nights at the five-star resort Rixos Libertas in a sea view balcony room starts from €1,250 (two weeks €2,364). For information or to book, call 01 775 9300 or visit concordetravel.ie. Rooms at Hotel Bellevue start from €102 per night, see alh.hr.
- * **Tell me more** See visitdubrovnik.hr, croatia.hr or drop into the tourist information centre just outside Pile Gate. ■