I

Ly's and the Riva is already busy. It seems a little early for tourists to be in the cafes lining the Riva, a long promenade that runs along the southern edge of the city of Split, Croatia, but it turns out to be locals getting their morning fix – coffee. As in many towns in Dalmatia, there’s a tradition of having a coffee before work or during a break and it’s not just about caffeine: people gather to meet, gossip or people-watch at all times of day. Chalking over a coffee is a big part of the daily social scene.

Equipped with coffee, I set off to explore Diocletian’s Palace – Split’s main attraction and a UNESCO World site. Around the year 200, the Roman emperor Diocletian chose this site on the Adriatic Sea for his magnificent retirement home. He spent 11 years building it, with 16 towers (three per side), 3,800 rooms and more than 300 apartments. Lined with pillars, it was once guarded by 12 granite sphinxes, which Diocletian brought from Egypt, and just one remains. The interior has changed over the centuries, as it moved from being a palace to a town and today, in the warren of tiny streets within the walls, homes, shops and restaurants are mixed in with the historical site and ancient architectural features. A good plan to start exploring is to enter from the Riva through the Southern Gate, which leads down into the palace cellars – a network of more than 1,000 rooms, and four entrance gates, plus a large archway, which is said to be the only entrance gate in the world that still has its original Roman archway. Climbing the bell tower gives a lovely view of the town and the port.

Next day, it’s time to explore some of the tiny medieval streets and squares within the palace walls – the peristyle, formerly the palace’s central courtyard and a popular meeting spot. From here, I follow the sounds of klapa alka, the local folk music, to Trg Brace Radic, known as Fruit Square). In this square, the church has a paint-

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WHAT TO PACK

Bring flat shoes for exploring the palace, as it can be uneven and slippery; water shoes with a sole to protect from sea urchins for sea swimming and dancing shoes for night time.

SPLIT WEEKEND MAGAZINE 6 May 2017

WHERE TO STAY

Double rooms at the Hotel Park Calvados Club (€80) organises tours of Split, its countryside and the Dalmatian Islands, including private transfers and accommodation.

GETTING THERE

Aer Lingus (aerlingus.com) begins twice-weekly direct flights from Dublin to Split from May 27, with prices from €78.39 one way. Calvados Club (calvadosclub.com) organise tours of Split, its countryside and the Dalmatian Islands, including private transfers and accommodation.

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