





# Crown yourself a world traveler

►“**GAME**”  
*Continued from Page M1*

HBO fantasy show — based on the hugely popular series of fantasy novels, “A Song of Ice and Fire,” by George R. R. Martin — and she gives walking tours of the locations, guiding visitors through the storyline and the places used, spicing things up with gossip from the production.

She also tells the stories behind the locations, linking the show’s story, which is set in medieval times, to Dubrovnik’s rich history. This is why I am here: to find out the true stories and history of the locations, the historical myths and legends behind the castles and fortresses and landscapes used in the show.

Dubrovnik was founded in the seventh century and was once one of the richest maritime republics in the Mediterranean. To protect its wealth, the city was surrounded by nearly 1.2 miles of thick walls (up to 20 feet thick and 82 feet high in places) that are still intact, with three fortresses, 16 towers, and six bastions. Walking into the city (which is all pedestrianized) over a bridge that crosses a moat, and then passing the drawbridge, it all feels very medieval.

Just inside the city gate are the steps up to the city walls, from where we can see over red-tiled rooftops, down into the streets of Old Town and the gardens of some of the houses, and out over the blue expanse of the Adriatic Sea and the Elafiti Islands.

After the city walls, next on the “Game of Thrones” tour we climb hundreds of steps up to Fort Lovrijenac (St. Lawrence’s Fort) just outside the city gate. As we look across to the city walls, there are flags flying from the battlements. We can see the circular Fort Bokar, where Joffrey prepared canons for battle. There are still canons on the fort — perhaps to warn off any would-be invaders, although Ivana assures me they are replicas. Farther down is the tall and round Minceta tower, with battlements on the top, where the House of The Undying scenes were set.

In the distance, a replica galleon glides slowly toward the tree-filled island of Lokrum, home of the fictional city of Qarth, and seeing it, I feel like we have stepped back in time. The gardens of the now abandoned Benedictine monastery on the island are where Daenerys Targaryen’s party was held in “Game of Thrones.” She wasn’t too happy there — and in real life, a curse is said to befall anyone who stays on the island overnight, so it is uninhabited except by a few peacocks. However it’s a peaceful place to visit for a day. One can get to the island on a short ferry ride from the city’s harbor and walk among the cypress and pine trees or in the botanical gardens.

All of the locations we visit seem the perfect location for King’s Landing, the fictional capital of the Seven Kingdoms of Westeros and seat of the disputed Iron Throne, but this may be more than a coincidence. An archeologist by profession, Ivana has read Martin’s series and felt the author had a familiarity with the city.

“When I first read the books, the descriptions of King’s Landing seemed so familiar, I was certain Martin must have at least used a postcard for inspiration,” she says. It’s no surprise then that when the “Game of Thrones” producers first saw Dubrovnik, with its city walls, moats, drawbridges, and fortresses, it seemed like King’s Landing was already there — and all the time I was there, it felt like I was in the fictional city.

## NORTHERN IRELAND

Another key location for “Game of Thrones” is Northern Ireland. Indoor scenes are recorded in the Paint Hall Studio in Belfast, and outdoor scenes are filmed in the wild, rugged landscapes and along the jagged coast, carved over eons by glaciers and the Atlantic Ocean.

Here, “Game of Thrones” is filmed on mountain tops, under cliffs, in for-



PHOTOS BY YVONNE GORDON FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

ests and swamps, and on rocky beaches, with the producers admitting that some of the most beautiful locations were the most difficult to get to.

The show’s Belfast locations manager, Naomi Liston, says she loved the challenging terrain and finding the best places — and says there’s a lot more to come from there. “We’re in season four, and we’ve only just scratched the surface.

One of the show’s first outdoor scenes, where Ned beheads a Night Watch deserter, was filmed on the vast green expanse of the Antrim Plateau above Cairncastle near Larne, just north of Belfast. I drive the Causeway Coastal Route, which winds its way through spectacular scenery. On one side are the nine Glens of Antrim, which have forests, rivers, and waterfalls, and on the other are rugged rock formations and cliffs bashed by waves, with views across to Scotland.

The Causeway route takes in parks, castles, and various natural wonders, passing villages such as Cushendun,

where you can walk to the caves where Melisandre of Asshai gave birth to her “shadow baby,” which killed Renly Baratheon. Farther north at Murlough Bay, Theon Greyjoy and his sister Asha rode through on horseback when he returned to the Iron Islands.

I drive along the coast to the main setting for the Iron Islands, the fishing harbor at Ballintoy, where Theon returned home to Pyke after 10 years in Winterfell. Set against a backdrop of steep cliffs, where the rocky outcrops have been sculpted into unusual shapes and caves by the salt water of the Atlantic, the sheltered harbor is full of colorful fishing boats. It’s a peaceful area to walk around; there aren’t many people, just the sounds of crashing waves and the odd cry from a gannet.

Farther east, just past the Giant’s Causeway, the beach at Downhill was used as Dragonstone, where the Seven Idols of Westeros were burned. Standing on the golden sands which stretch for miles, with views over to County Donegal and looking up the cliff to the eye-catching Mussenden Temple, I try to imagine the scene when the gods were destroyed and can almost hear the evil Melisandre chanting how the night is full of terrors.

The next location also has a haunting feel: the eerie Dark Hedges, where Arya Stark traveled on a cart to escape King’s Landing. It’s inland, on the Bregagh road near Stranocum, a pleasant drive along narrow, winding roads between fields dotted with sheep. The gnarled branches of ancient beech trees have twisted together to form an almost supernatural arch leading to a private estate, and the place seems eerily dark, even on a bright day. No surprise that it’s said to be haunted by a

ghost called “The Grey Lady” who appears at dusk.

## ICELAND

I follow the “Game of Thrones” trail beyond The Wall to the frozen landscapes of Iceland, where Jon Snow entered the land of Wildings and White Walkers. Scenes were filmed at various locations, including the Svinafellsjökull glacier and near Hofdabrekka Heath in the south.

The wildling camps in the third season were filmed at Lake Myvatn in the northeast, which is surrounded by mysterious volcanic lava fields — which are common in much of the country. Iceland is full of geothermal lakes and springs; plumes of steam rise randomly from the landscape as we drive along the road. The cave of Grjótagjá, which has a geothermal spring inside, is where Jon and Ygritte have their first romantic encounter.

I spend a night beside Thingvellir National Park, north-west of Reykjavik, where scenes from season four were filmed. It’s a barren landscape, of muddy, grassy, and sometimes ice-covered volcanic lava fields and low surrounding hills. There’s almost no vegetation, just odd clouds of steam rising from the land. It’s away from any towns, so the perfect place to see the aurora borealis.

Iceland, a land forged by fire and sculpted by ice, is another perfect location for the fantasy series, but as scary as White Walkers and Wildlings can be, Iceland is full of real stories of elves and trolls, ghosts and ghouls, which I hear about regularly on my travels. Everywhere is a story.

*Yvonne Gordon can be reached at*

Clockwise from left: Dubrovnik’s historic city walls and “Blackwater Bay” in “Game of Thrones”; in Northern Ireland, the “Dark Hedges” avenue of beech trees near Ballymoney that show up in “Game”; in Iceland, “Game” filmed for weeks in Thingvellir National Park; and there were key “Game” filming locations along the Causeway Coastal Route on Northern Ireland’s northernmost coast.

## IF YOU GO . . .

### DUBROVNIK

#### Where to stay

##### Villa Orsula

Frana Supila 14  
011-385-20-430-830  
www.adriaticluxuryhotels.com  
Boutique villa hotel with super water-side views over to the Old Town. Doubles from \$496 per night.

##### Hotel Bellevue

Pera Cingrije 7  
011-385-20-430-830  
www.adriaticluxuryhotels.com/en/kings-landing/  
Live like a king with the special “Game of Thrones” package from \$286 per night, including airport transfers

### What to do

#### Viator Game of Thrones

##### Walking Tour

From Pile Square, Old Town  
011-385-1-702-648-5873  
www.viator.com  
A three-hour guided tour of the filming locations in the Old Town. \$70.32 per person.

**Dubrovnik tour** including “Game of Thrones” filming locations  
Gulliver Travel  
Obala Stjepana Radica 25  
011-385-20-410-888  
www.gulliver.hr  
Four-hour walking tour of the city and “Game of Thrones” filming locations including the island of Lokrum. From \$134 per person (minimum of 2).

## NORTHERN IRELAND

### Where to stay

#### The Merchant Hotel

16 Skipper St., Belfast  
011-44-2890-234-888  
www.themerchanthotel.com  
Elegant five-star in a listed Victorian building in the city centre. Double rooms from \$268.

#### The Bushmills Inn

9 Dunluce Road, Bushmills  
County Antrim  
011-44-2820-733-000  
www.bushmillsinn.com  
Cosy inn on the north coast, with peat fires and lots of nooks and crannies. Double rooms from \$214 per night.

### What to do

#### “Game of Thrones” Tour

McCombs Coach Travel, Belfast  
011-44-2890-866-162  
www.minicoachni.co.uk/game-of-thrones-tour.cfm  
Full-day coach tour to some of the main filming locations, by the drivers who transported the extras during filming. \$58.57.

#### “Game of Thrones” Exhibition

Belfast Waterfront, 2 Lanyon Place  
011-44-2890-334-400  
www.discovernorthernireland.com/gotexhibition  
Through June 15, with artifacts, costumes, and props from the show. Free. Register online.

## ICELAND

### Where to stay

#### Hotel Ión

Nesjavollum Vid Thingvallavatn  
801 Selfoss  
011-354-482-3415  
www.ionice.land.is  
Remote location beside Thingvellir National Park. Double rooms from \$331.

#### Hotel Reykjavík Nordica

Sudurlandsbraut 2, Reykjavík  
011-354-444-5000  
www.hiltonreykjavik.com  
City hotel in financial district, where some of the cast stayed for season four filming. Double rooms from \$150.

### What to do

#### “Game of Thrones” — Iceland:

##### Beyond the Wall tour

Iceland Travel  
Skútvogur 13A, Reykjavík  
011-354-585-4300  
www.icelandtravel.is  
Four-night tour to the filming locations, including Lake Mývatn and Thingvellir with a local guide who guided the crew during filming. From \$958 per person.

## OTHER LOCATIONS

### Malta

The Mediterranean island country of Malta was used as a location, with the medieval city of Mdina serving as King’s Landing in season one. Scenes in the Red Keep were shot at the San Anton Palace (the home of Malta’s president), Fort Ricasoli, and Fort St. Angelo, both in Valletta, and St. Dominic Monastery in Rabat.

Daenerys’s memorable wedding scene to the Dothraki warlord Khal Drogo was filmed at the Azure Window, an eye-catching rock formation at Dwerja on the neighboring Maltese island of Gozo, which visitors can explore by foot.

### Scotland and Morocco

Other locations used briefly in the series include Duone Castle in

Stirling, Scotland (Winterfell in the pilot episode) and Morocco — the ancient fortified village of Ait Benhaddou in Ouarzazate represented various cities in Essos, while the historical coastal town of Essaouira was one of the locations used for the city of Astapor, where Daenerys recruits her unsullied army.

YVONNE GORDON