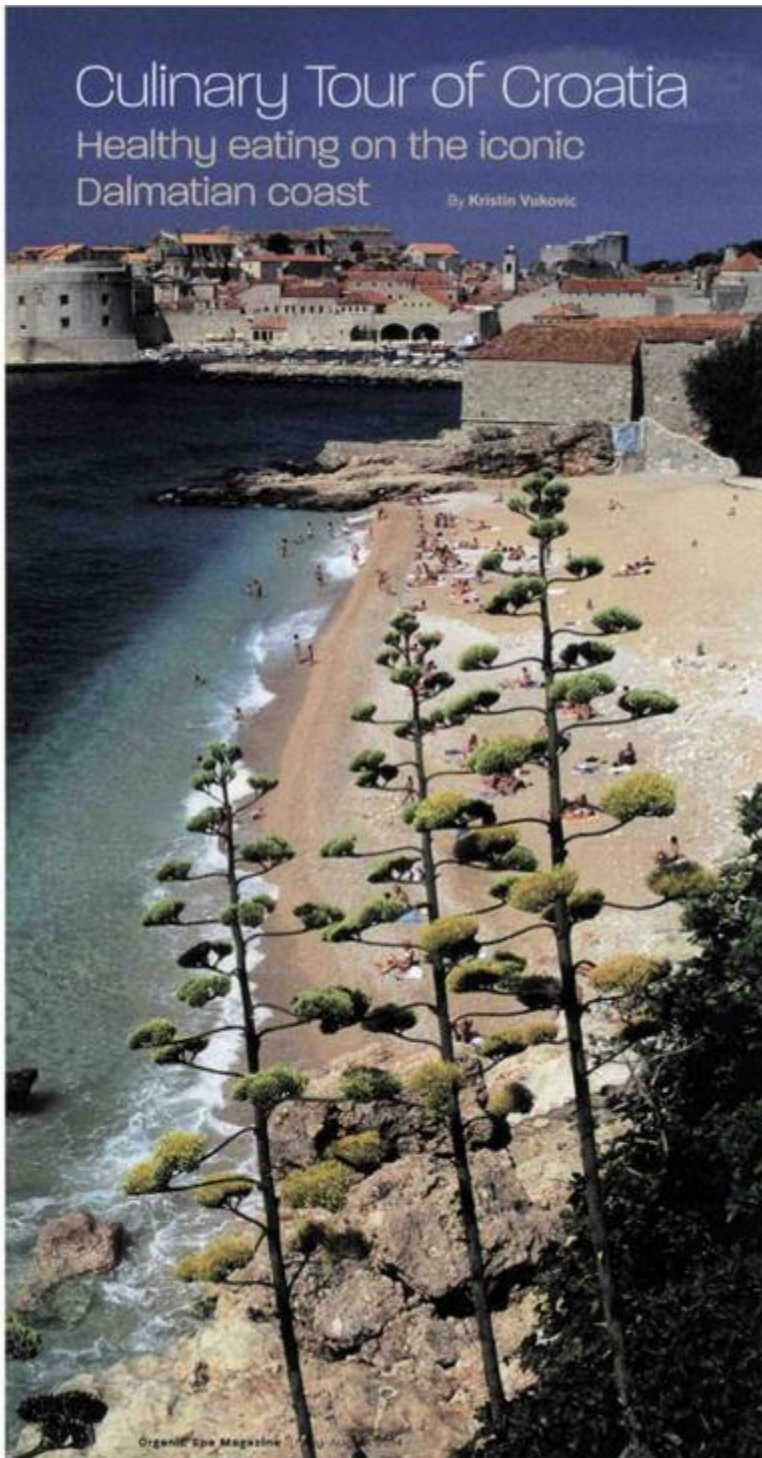


Culinary Tour of Croatia

Healthy eating on the iconic Dalmatian coast

By Kristin Vukovic



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The Mediterranean diet has long been extolled as the answer to a healthy, balanced life—and research has shown that it reduces the risk of heart disease and cancer. While you can incorporate the basics at home, including a dash of extra virgin olive oil for a dose of MUFAs (monounsaturated fatty acids) and a glass of red wine for the antioxidant boost, there's nothing like a trip to the Mediterranean region to experience its benefits.

In 1774, the Venetian travel writer Abbe Alberto Fortis penned *Travels into Dalmatia*, where he wrote about products indigenous to the Dalmatian islands including sea salt, sage, sheep's milk cheeses and honey. Fortis was acquainted with other Mediterranean staples such as seafood, olive oil and wine from his native Italy. Croatia's neighbor across the Adriatic Sea. What he didn't know was that his diet inherently kept him healthy.

According to the Mayo Clinic, MUFAs found in olive oil may lower your total cholesterol levels, and research shows that they may also benefit insulin levels and blood sugar control, which can be especially helpful if you have type 2 diabetes. Doctors agree that the resveratrol in red wine appears to help your heart; reducing bad cholesterol and preventing blood clots. Sea salt, used in many Mediterranean dishes, aids digestion and helps build a strong immune system—with the added benefit of being great for your skin.

The Dalmatian coast is undergoing a food renaissance, with a focus on returning to its roots and using fresh, local products. Dubrovnik, the southernmost city, is on the culinary cutting edge. During "Healthy Eating Weekend" in October, many Dubrovnik restaurants offer healthy menus using organic produce at special prices.



Here are five not-to-be missed places in the Dubrovnik area:

Bota Šare This new restaurant in Dubrovnik's Old Town serves "Adriatic sushi" made with local tuna, amberjack and Adriatic shrimp. Much of Croatia's tuna supply is exported to Japan, where it fetches higher prices, but here you can experience local fish with a Japanese twist. bota-sare.hr

Kopun Enjoy classic Croatian dishes, including some from Dubrovnik, at this new restaurant; try

capon in porcini mushroom sauce, or honey and orange sauce and sporki makaruli (dirty pasta). Legend has it that in old times, nobles consumed the majority of the meat sauce, and only "dirty pasta" was left for the others. restaurantikopun.com

D'Vino Wine Bar Sample local wines from the nearby Pelješac peninsula, where the famous Plavac Mali (little Plavac), a descendent of Zinfandel, grows. The steep vineyards, many perched at treacherous 45-degree angles, produce rich and robust red wines. dvino.net

Vila Koruna Drive an hour north from Dubrovnik's Old Town to Ston and Mali Ston on the Pelješac peninsula, and sample the oysters that put them on the culinary map. Ston also boasts the oldest salt factory in Europe. If you're adventurous, try a "sea egg," which is healthy and high in iodine—its grassy, metallic taste is completely unique. vila-koruna.hr

Korčula The island of Korčula can be reached from the town of Orebić on the tip of Pelješac peninsula by a 15-minute ferry ride. Grapes for some of the most revered white wines from Dalmatia, including Pošip, are grown here. Korčula is also famous for its olive oil, which many consider to be the best in the region. visitkorcula.eu



Earthy Spa Delight

One of the world's top truffle regions is the Istrian peninsula of northern Croatia.

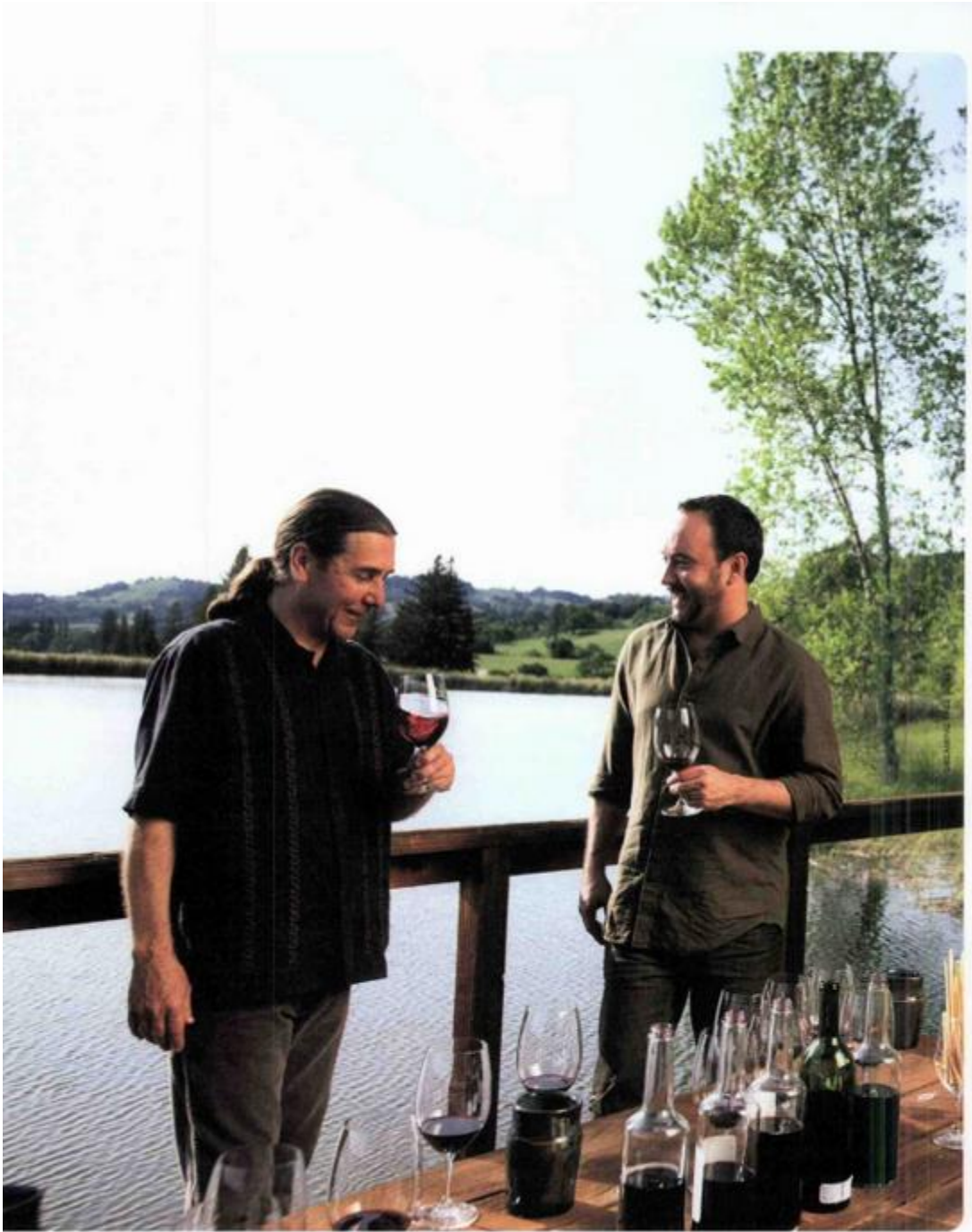
By Susan Moynihan

I headed to Rovinj, a medieval stone-walled city surrounded on three sides by the Adriatic Sea. My home base was Hotel Monte Mulini, a chic, 113-room hotel within easy walking distance of the historic old city. It offers a host of comforts, from balconied suites overlooking the ocean to elegant tasting menus at Restaurant Mediterraneo, featuring traditional Croatian ingredients: cuttlefish, Malvasija wine, local olive oil and, yes, truffles.

But I was here for truffles of a different kind. The spa at Monte Mulini is intimate, with four treatment rooms, a sauna and a float room. (A hallway connects to the larger spa at neighboring Hotel Lone, which offers a fitness center, Olympic-size indoor pool and juice bar. Guests of Monte Mulini are welcome to use both.)

My truffle facial came via Istria-based Easens Mediterana, an all-natural line focused on regional ingredients. Truffles are used as a skin brightener, and appeared midway through my treatment as a mask. The facial was light and delicate, like the effect of a shaved truffle melting onto a plate of warm pasta. An hour later, my skin glowed with the results.

The next day, we went truffle hunting, following our guide as his two trained hounds scampered off-leash along a forest trail, digging happily when they found a scent at the base of a tree. We soon unearthed a large black spore, pungent despite the layer of dirt covering it. While my friends eagerly discussed recipes, I smiled, knowing it had other secrets to share. montemulinihotel.com



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