



Cityscape of Zagreb with Zagreb Cathedral.

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Zagreb under the radar

Don't miss the Croatian capital on your next stop in Eastern Europe.

By Frances Aguilar, Dec. 20, 2014



Overshadowed by **beach destinations of the south**, Zagreb, Croatia's inland capital, should not be missed.

Like several other European capitals, Zagreb is a blend of nature, culture and the characteristic pace of Europeans. What sets the city apart: prices are attractive for the budget-conscious, and food is varied for the health-conscious.



Trg Josipa Jelačića: get your bearings here to see Zagreb.

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Getting around

Zagreb is fairly easy to navigate after orienting oneself at Trg Josipa Jelačića. This is Zagreb's main square, enclosed by a tram line running parallel to colorful buildings housing cafes and other eateries. You can simply grab a gelato or pastry and head towards a shopping area that I felt was just enough of a distraction from what Zagreb really has to offer.

In the opposite direction it's a short walk to architectural sights such as Lotrščak tower, religious representations such as St. Mark's Church, and lively Dolac market.

Must-do's

While Zagreb does have several museum choices, a must-visit is the [Museum of Broken Relationships](#). It is an eerie delight to read the corresponding stories behind the mementos of relationships gone awry.



St George and the Dragon Statue, Zagreb.

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As if respecting the solemnity of heartbreak, there are a couple of quiet cafes surrounding the museum to relax in the sun with a coffee. Alternatively, whether if it is preferred to salute to having an intact relationship or be grateful for being single and drama-free, head to hipster [Tkalčićeva Street](#) for drinks, such as the Croatian grappa called *rakija*.

To take a break from Zagreb's tame "wildlife," there are ample opportunities reachable from Jelačića main square. Maksimir Park is several minutes via tram or 30 minutes by foot trailing those tram tracks from Jelačića. The lush landscape lightly echoes of children's laughter, chirping birds, the breeze blowing through 100-year-old oak trees, and the crunching of pebbles while walking amongst the park's trails.

If you're up for a longer walk and sporty activities, Jarun Lake is in the outskirts of Zagreb. Known as "The Sea of Zagreb," this location is the place for rowing, swimming, horseback riding, biking and running.

All the museum or botanical garden exploring can work up quite an appetite. While holiday in Europe calls for indulging, my southern Californian health-conscious food craving could not be eliminated. Luckily, Zagreb had delightful healthy choices that cater to vegetarian, gluten-free, vegan, raw food and macrobiotic diets.

During my stay, multiple visits to [Nishta Restaurant](#) took place. Tucked away in a short alley, freshness permeates with each dish creatively served to satisfy gluten-free, raw, vegan or vegetarian preferences. The helpful English-speaking servers were an added bonus.

Outside the city

Although the green respites make it seem unnecessary for a city break, Zagreb is close to UNESCO Pivice lakes and medieval towns. An excellent example of Italian-influence within Croatia is a trip to nearby Istria referred to as the “new Tuscany.” Istria’s landscape and delicious food justify the nickname.

Alternatively, Zagreb’s main train station – situated among yet more green spaces – is a nice starting point to visit nearby countries. Try the lesser-visited [Slovenia](#) or ever-popular Italy nearby.

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