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Croatia's Off-Season Food Festivals

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In the spring and fall, Croatia celebrates seasonal harvests, from white and black truffles to frog legs and oysters

By: [Skye Mayring](#)

Europe



If your clients have been to Croatia before, chances are they went in the summer to soak up the sun and laze around its award-winning beaches. However, there's more to do in the "country of a thousand islands" besides work on your tan. Those who travel in the off season, rather than during peak summer months, will be rewarded with a robust roster of food festivals and events that are sure to make any visitor hungry for more.



In the off-season months, Croatia's traditional food and fresh ingredients take center stage. // © 2014 Croatian National Tourism Board/Damir Fabijanic

Feature image (above): In March, the Dubrovnik Oyster Festival charms foodies with delectable local oysters. // © 2014 Croatian National Tourism Board/Damir Fabijanic

The Details

Croatian National Tourist Board
www.croatia.hr

Oyster Season in March

The Dubrovnik Oyster Festival coincides with the Feast of St. Joseph on March 19. This four-day gastronomic event is the place to enjoy oyster fritters, roasted oysters and fried oysters with traditional Dalmatian music, as well as free-flowing wine. Keep an eye out for the men's choir of Dalmatia performing "klapa," the region's traditional form of a capella singing.

The spirited food festival takes place along the Stradun, Dubrovnik's main street, as well as in Ston, a small town about 40 miles from Dubrovnik. Ston is best known for its salt production, defensive walls and, most of all, its delectable oysters. Mali Ston Bay has a vibrant, long tradition of oyster farming, and the high season for Mali Ston oysters is March, when the oysters are at their best.

Asparagus Festival in April

If you love asparagus, you will find a friend in Lovran, Croatia. Lovran celebrates its favorite vegetable with its annual Asparagus Festival — and one gigantic asparagus frittata. Each year, the townspeople use a special 6.5-foot wide pan to accommodate 66 pounds of wild asparagus and 1,000 eggs. The end result, a massive frittata, is presented each year in the

town square to mark the first day of celebrations.

During the Asparagus Festival, many restaurants and taverns offer meals featuring wild asparagus grown on the slopes of Ucka Mountain in the Kvarner region, as well as in the neighboring Istria region. While farmed asparagus can be found year round, real foodies will be on the lookout for seasonal wild asparagus. Its high season is in the spring, and the coveted vegetable is usually paired with ingredients that balance its natural bitterness, including pasta and prosciutto.

Lokve Frog-Catchers' Night in April

In the town of Lokve, locals aren't afraid to hop to it. Nestled below the Risnjak Mountain National Park in the Kvarner region in Croatia, Lokve is best known for its frog-catching tradition and local dishes starring — you guessed it — frog legs. Every year during the last weekend in April, residents and visitors celebrate the local delicacy with Frog-Catchers' Night.

Revelers enjoy an evening of frog-jumping competitions, frog dishes and entertainment. Families, too, will love Lokve's Frog Museum, which offers a vivarium with live frogs that croak and hop in various environments.

Fall Means Truffle Time in Istria

White and black truffles abound in the Istrian truffle triangle between Pazin, Buje and Buzet — especially in the Mirna River Valley and in the Motovun Forest. The high season for Istrian white truffles is October, but truffle festivals, themed events and activities take place every weekend, from September through November.

Visitors can savor the king of mushrooms in numerous traditional dishes including "fuzz" (typical Istrian pasta), "pljukanci" (hand-rolled pasta), gnocchi and various meat combinations.