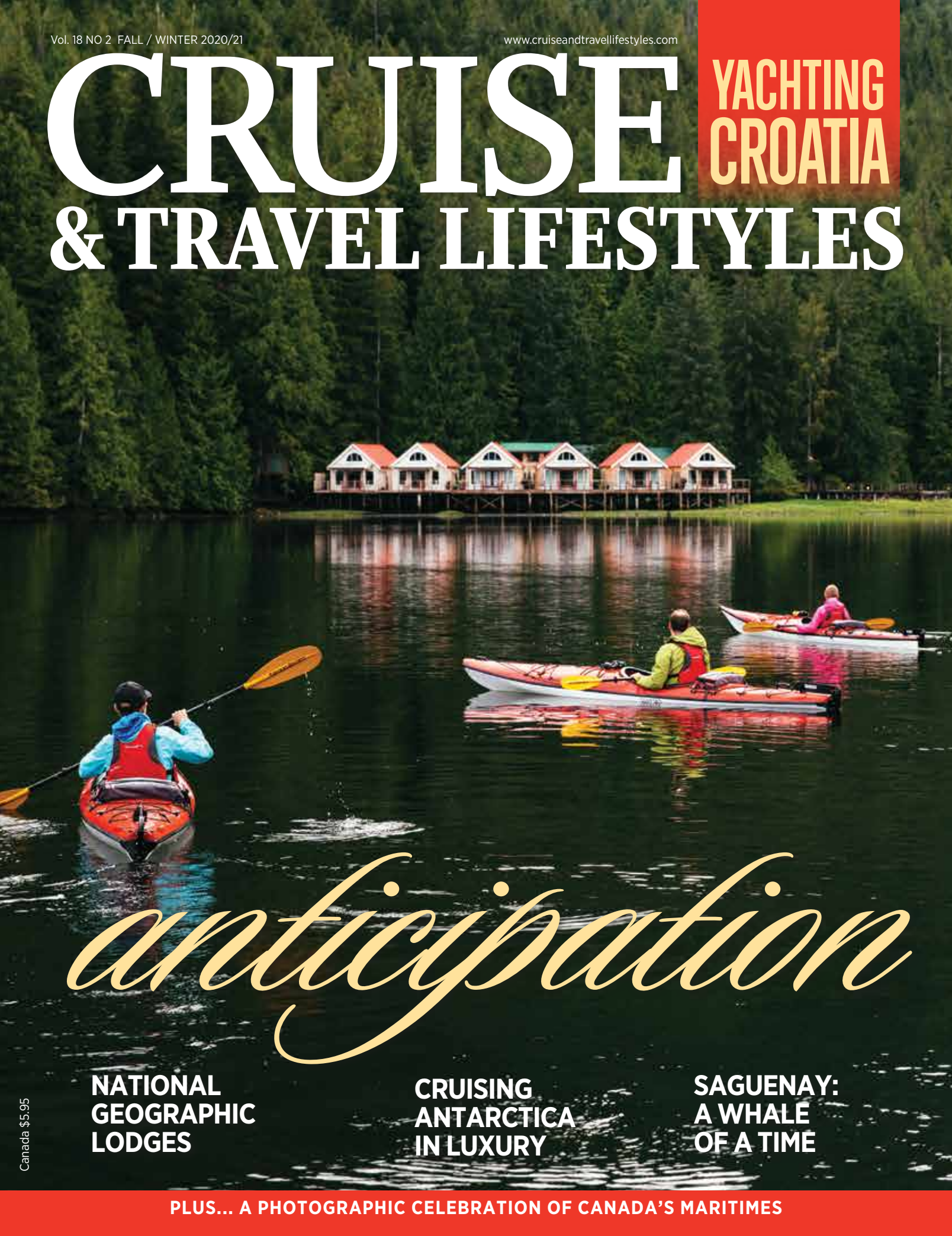


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CRUISE & TRAVEL LIFESTYLES

**YACHTING
CROATIA**



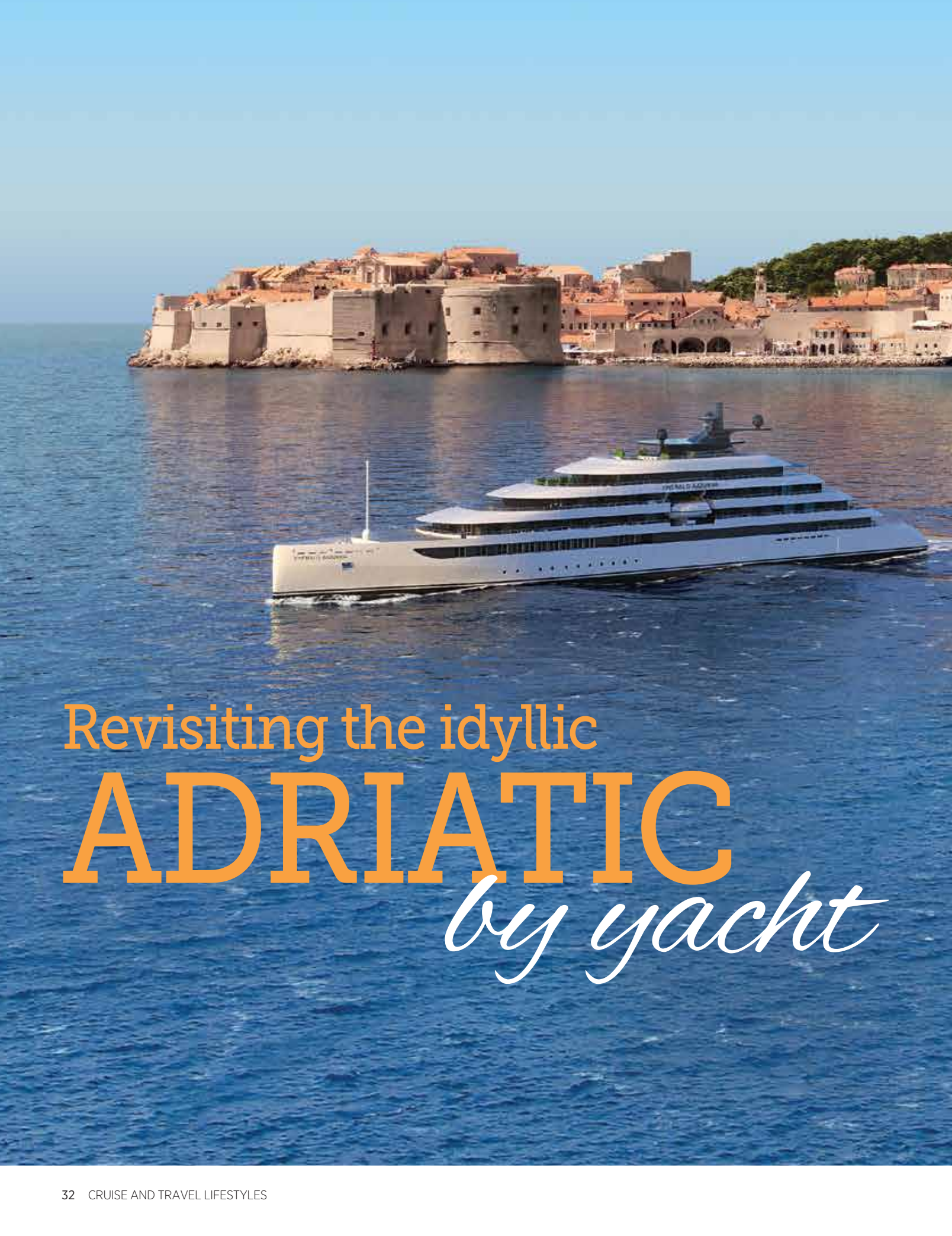
anticipation

**NATIONAL
GEOGRAPHIC
LODGES**

**CRUISING
ANTARCTICA
IN LUXURY**

**SAGUENAY:
A WHALE
OF A TIME**

PLUS... A PHOTOGRAPHIC CELEBRATION OF CANADA'S MARITIMES



Revisiting the idyllic

ADRIATIC

by yacht



We sailed along this glorious coastline in 2019, on a different small ship. Now, the thought of spending eight days on the spanking new yacht *Azzurra*, with its 68 friendly crew members to look after us, while revisiting Croatia's old-world treasures is nothing short of tantalizing.

ANNA HOBBS

A

NTICIPATION IS running at full throttle for the day that I can return to cruising. Not just because of a fabulous super yacht being custom designed to sail the warm waters of the Adriatic, the Red and Mediterranean Seas. Not just because this vessel, the *Emerald Azzurra*, will offer an intimate, upscale experience. Not just because it promises to exceed yacht-lovers expectations. But also, because, when the world returns to cruising, we will be eager to take the trip of a lifetime. And *Azzurra's* Adriatic cruise promises to be just that.

Emerald Waterways has pointed its award-winning reputation for river cruising at travellers eager to sail beyond Europe's rivers and who dream of doing that in a yacht-sized vessel. Under the new Emerald Yacht Cruises brand, the company is diving into ocean waters with this 100 guest, 360-foot yacht.

The Adriatic in Depth, *Azzurra's* eight-day cruise along the Dalmatian Coast from Venice to Dubrovnik will call at six islands – Krk, Zadar, Sibenik, Hvar, Split and Korcula.

PHOTOS COURTESY EMERALD WATERWAYS



Infinity pool



Reflections restaurant

Welcome aboard Emerald's yacht *Azzurra*

YACHT CRUISING HAS A BUZZ all its own because it is not typical ocean cruising. With *Azzurra*, Emerald Waterways has responded to guests' requests for small ship cruising, embracing it as a secure, comfortable and relaxing way to see the world. At the same time, the designers have not only created abundant space throughout all areas of the ship, they have relied on expansive glass and mirrors to add to the feeling of spaciousness.

Reflections Restaurant offers breakfast and lunch buffets and fine à la carte dining at dinner. Guests can expect Mediterranean-inspired and locally sourced dishes accompanied by sommelier-paired wine, and beer.

In keeping with the brand's largely inclusive price structure, wines, beer and soft drinks are complimentary with lunch and dinner. So are on board gratuities, transfers to and from the airport, port charges and taxes.

Of the 50 staterooms and suites available in various sizes, forty come with private balconies. All are designed on sleek, cool, modern lines, with soothing beige, blue and grey colour schemes. Among the upscale amenities that frequent travellers have come to expect are luxurious toiletries, bathrobes and slippers, a mini bar, flat screen HDTV and infotainment system and complimentary Wi-Fi.

There's a wellness center complete with gym, a spa, and a small infinity pool right up against the stern of the ship. In super-yacht style, *Azzurra* has all the features guests look forward to when cruising warm waters. Features such as a marina platform equipped with water toys, paddle boards and snorkelling gear for guests to enjoy and two staff-driven Zodiacs.



Terrace suite



Wellness Centre

PHOTOS COURTESY EMERALD WATERWAYS



Hvar, Croatia

Island hopping along these crystalline waters gave us an up close and personal panorama of the country's unspoiled landscapes, an opportunity to tour some of Europe's most historic and exciting ports and then, at select stops, the occasion to jump, dive or cannon-ball right into the exceptionally friendly Dalmatian waters.

The distance between these islands is short. Sailing for a few hours each day, was an opportunity to kick back and indulge in the lazy pleasure of gliding by the quiet coves and sandy beaches that dot the coastline. We stepped ashore at centuries old fishing villages and cities for small group tours, then with time to explore individually. *Azzurra* is sized to allow access to these harbours that only small craft can reach.

In the city of Šibenik, on the island of the same name, we toured

the oldest native town in Croatia. With origins traced back to 1066, wandering the little stone-covered streets of the beautifully preserved Old Town, we inhaled history at every turn.

The crowning architectural glory of the Dalmatian Coast is the UNESCO World Heritage Site of the Cathedral of St. James, which doubled as The Iron Bank in the Game of Thrones. Then a few meters away we marvelled at the Four Wells, the water supply system built in the 15th century.

Lively, fun-loving Hvar, the capital of Hvar Island is dubbed the Saint-Tropez of Croatia. And, for good reason. This is one drop-dead glamorous summer party town, with glorious beaches, 13th Century walls and a hilltop fortress, and Europe's oldest municipal theatre is here.





Korkula, Croatia

When the world returns to cruising, we will be eager to take the trip of a lifetime. *Azzurra's* Adriatic cruise promises to be just that.

So is a Benedictine convent where a small group of cloistered nuns create the most exquisite lace I have ever seen. Like snowflakes, each piece is different. Made, not from the usual linen, or silk, or gold but from leaves of the agave plant, they are for sale at the convent's mini boutique. This, the sunniest island in the Mediterranean is home to acres of lavender fields and cultivated vineyards, earning its reputation as the most beautiful of the spectacular islands that we saw strung along the coast.

Famous for its dense pine forests, Korcula, with a walled medieval town of the same name, is one of the larger islands, jutting out into the clear blue waters of the Adriatic like a mini Dubrovnik. Without the crowds. Legend has it that Marco Polo was born here. Feeling in need of retail therapy, the shops lining the narrow, cobblestone streets and alleys provided us with souvenirs, olive oil,



Dalmatian coast

lavender and gorgeous coral jewelry. With serious shopping accomplished, there was time left for tasting unfamiliar indigenous wines before returning to the ship. Pošip, arguably the best Croatian white wine grape was surprisingly good.

In Dubrovnik, aka the Pearl of the Adriatic, we filled two days, walking the two-km wall atop the medieval fortress, hopping on the cable car, soaring 441 metres up Mount

Srdj, getting a different perspective of the city, visiting museums and strolling ancient streets within the legendary golden stone walls. We ate at outdoor cafés late into the evening, marvelling at the layer upon layer of civilizations that have made, not only Dubrovnik, but the entire Dalmatian coast worth revisiting.

Our Emerald Azzurra cruise will be our reward for a long wait and I could not feel more excited. ■