

# Anchoring Croatia style



Patriarche says Croatia is one of the most beautiful countries he has ever explored.



# Families sail the Adriatic

Getting a quick look at Croatia and the beautiful, ancient city of Dubrovnik after disembarking from a large cruise ship, David Patriarche knew that he liked what he saw and vowed to one day return to the country again.

That day came recently when he and his wife, Joanne, and one of the couple's two boys and another couple and their children chartered a sailboat for a week near Split, located just up the coast from Dubrovnik -- an old city on the Adriatic coast that in 1979 was named as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

"This is one of the places that you know that you have to do," the sailor and frequent charter enthusiast says about Croatia. The Whitby-based sailor, who jointly owns a Hunter 34 with a friend, has chartered sailboats in many parts of the world, including Turkey, Thailand, Greece, many Caribbean countries and elsewhere in the world.


Patriarche says they were looking forward to the trip to Croatia, having caught some of the country during the previous brief visit on the large cruise ship.

"I loved Dubrovnik. I said "Wow, this

is a really cool place." I said "Here is one place that I would like to come back to."

Croatia has for the most part been patched up and repaired following the Croatian War of Independence from 1991 to 1995, which pitted Serb and Croat forces fighting over the future of the former Yugoslavia. After the war, the country was broken up.

There are still signs that remain from the war, like abandoned forts, mortar areas built into the sides of hills and buildings with holes where mortars



These waterfalls at Plitvice Lakes National Park are a must-see in Croatia. The park is one of the oldest national parks in Southeast Europe and is a UNESCO World Heritage site.



passed through walls. Those who visit the country can explore these aging military sites.

Croatia today has a long coastline washed by the pristine waters of the Adriatic. The coast is dotted with many islands both large and small. The islands offer shelter for skippers and safe, line-of-sight navigation. It's really a sailor's paradise.

"This is one of the most beautiful places I have ever been to in my life," says Patriarche, who did the charter with four adults and four children.

They arrived in Croatia some days ahead of time and wandered around ancient cities like Split, home to the Roman palace of Emperor Diocletian. The sprawling palace served as his summer place. There are Roman ruins found throughout this downtown area.

Restaurants and small cafes hug the walls of the ancient city, surrounded by beautiful Roman columns and ruins. There are small shops lining narrow pedestrian walkways made of marble that now shines after being weathered and trodden on over the centuries.

While touring around, the group also took in the picturesque waterfalls that make up the Plitvice Lakes National Park, located in a mountainous area near the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina. It's very popular, with more than 1 million visiting yearly.

"We all went to see the waterfalls. I've never seen anything like it," Patriarche says.

Then it was onto the yacht for a trip down the coast of Croatia and around some islands. They had brought a few life jackets with them and bought others there at a chandlery that was as well stocked as those found in Canada. They ended up donating some of the jackets after their charter was over, and flew back to Canada.

The two couples and the kids had booked a 47 ft. yacht for the charter but were moved to a 55 ft. Jeanneau when their boat wasn't ready in time for their departure.

"We had a ton of room -- that was a great boat," says Patriarche. He says he wasn't bothered by the size of the yacht while sailing around but noticed a difference when



From left is the Patriarche family of Mitchell, Joanne and Dave, Evan Symington, Sherry Pickett and the other Symington's, Owen, John Michael and Kathleen.

docking, with the extra size and weight getting into tight spots.

He says the heavier yacht didn't react as much to winds during manoeuvres, like the nose blowing off when trying to back up onto a dock from a busy channel.

Common in the area is what's called Mediterranean mooring, in which a yacht is backed in or docked stern-to, although mooring balls and anchorages are plentiful and at most times in the season not as crowded, compared to other charter spots like the Caribbean.

The sailing in Croatia is easy, and anchorages offer deep water almost right up to the shoreline, says Patriarche. "It's clean, safe and easy to get around and the people are friendly and the food is amazing," he says.

Patriarche, who works in the insurance industry, is planning a charter this summer on the smaller canals in France with some other couples. There will be three boats in total.

He often charts with friends who he met through one of his son's karate classes. Patriarche introduced the couple to sailing during a charter in Greece, which was complete with some harrowing docking in windy conditions of up to 30 knots.

After they docked, the wife bent down and kissed the ground and went silent, Patriarche recalls. On the bus ride back to a hotel, they asked if they could have a talk with him, and he says he feared the friendship might have been strained.

"They were talking and one of them turned around and said 'we have to talk.' 'They asked: 'Were you comfortable out there because you looked comfortable?' Well, we were not comfortable. We were scared."

They asked if he could teach them to sail. And a few months later, the two couples were on a charter in the Caribbean, with Patriarche giving sailing lessons. He now jointly owns a Hunter 34 with this other couple.

They have worked out a calendar of times they each share use the boat, and split the costs for maintenance and docking. Patriarche says they now sail together sometimes with the other couple across Lake Ontario, and charter together in places around the world.

On the Croatia trip with a different couple, Patriarche chose Sunsail, a company that he does some sailing for sometimes, and they left from Agana Marina.

He says he found it a little disconcerting that all of the charters at this company's base in Croatia are booked Saturday to Saturday, so many of the boats pull away from the dock together and arrive back together at the end of the week.

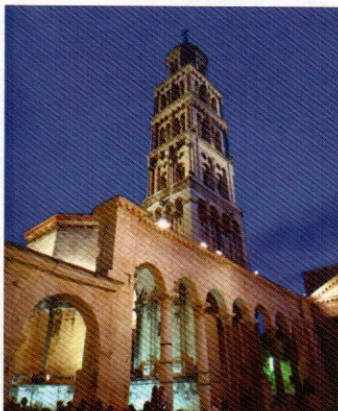
Many of the skippers gather at the same nearby anchorage or marina the night before they need to return the yacht, which also makes for a crowded situation, says Patriarche.

They arrived early in a spot on the last night, and within hours a crowd of other charter boats and their crews had gathered. He also said it's funny to watch the crowd on the first Saturday trying and get away from the docks on a strange sailboat, as skippers try hard not to sideswipe another yacht or

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This is the city of Split from above, showing its brightly coloured red roofs.



Many historic churches and buildings are spread throughout Croatia.



Joanne Patriarche with her son Mitchell at Plitvice Lakes National Park.



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lose a layer of gelcoat from the rented yacht.

"It was controlled chaos for an hour. You just sit there and watch people."

Croatia is located directly across the Adriatic from Italy -- 120 nm. as the crow flies -- and the sailing is just as good and half the price, Patriarche adds.

The area is so safe that they allowed the kids to take the dinghy and go ashore to a small market to buy some croissants for breakfast. "I never felt so comfortable, anywhere."

Their charter was in August, 2014, at the height of the tourist season, and there were many yachts coming and going along the coastline, including some boats with young people and loud blaring music. "It was like Daytona Beach but on the water," he says.

At other times of the year, like early in the season in June, the crowds have not arrived from Italy and elsewhere in Europe and North America, and anchorages are not as crowded compared to the busy summer months of July and August.

They visited popular places like Hvar Town on the island of Hvar and the islands of Solta, Brac and Vis, and the city of Trogir.



This town of Bobovisce is a safe and friendly place to explore, like most villages along the way.

Hvar Town is beautiful but is known for its culture and night life, so they anchored a short distance away in a quiet bay, and took a taxi into the city to explore the sites, like an old fort.

Once they had anchored in the quiet, nearby bay of Milna, they were within cell phone range and called over to the owner of a restaurant called Konoba Kontin to tell the owner they were coming for dinner.

The restaurant owner said to sit tight and he sent a boat for them instead of having the crew dinghy to shore in a couple of shifts.

While at the restaurant, they drank lots of

wine and the restaurant owner didn't want to charge them, later arranging a cab so that they could get to nearby Hvar Town. On the way back, the restaurant owner asked if they enjoyed the wine, and explained that he made it since he owned a vineyard not far away.

Patriarche said he did enjoy the wine but only had the red during dinner. The restaurant owner then grabbed three large plastic water bottles and filled them up with white wine and told the visiting Canadians there was no charge since they had visited with him at his restaurant and that meant that they were now friends.

While anchored in the quiet bay, near shore and in 28 ft. of water, they were visited by another sailboat that sailed into the bay, most likely a local sailor by the way the man handled the boat and anchored, says Patriarche.

"We were kind of settled in and in comes this little sailboat," he recalls. The skipper backs in, dives into the water and ties a line to the shore, swims back to the boat while it's still moving and is met by his wife.

She was just coming up the companionway to present him with a cold beer. Now, that's anchoring, Croatia style.



The shoreline of Croatia is dotted with many tiny coastal villages and islands that offer a safe haven for anchoring.