

Hrvatsko Zagorje



Despite its proximity to Zagreb, the bucolic region of Hrvatsko Zagorje in the country's north receives few tourists even at the height of the summer season. This is especially surprising given that it is blissfully crowd-free (slightly less so on weekends, when day-tripping families from Zagreb storm the area), and delightful villages, medieval castles and thermal springs speckle its green rolling hills. These leafy landscapes with Austrian-influenced food and architecture (and the same prices year-round) present a nice alternative to the busy Mediterranean south and offer a good escape from the summer heat.

The Zagorje region (as it's commonly known) begins north of Mt Medvednica, near Zagreb, and extends west to the Slovenian border, and as far north as Varaždin, the area's largest city. With its surface largely covered with forests – mostly beech, oak, chestnut and fir – this agricultural zone also features endless vineyards, gardens, orchards, and corn and wheat fields.

Whether you want to feast on hearty Zagorje cuisine at rustic restaurants, dip into the hot springs at Varaždinske or Krapinske Toplice, get a taster of village life at Staro Selo Museum in Kumrovec or tour ancient castles, you're in for an offbeat treat.

Many of the region's inhabitants speak a local dialect called Kajkavski, named after their word for 'what?' (*kaj?*). After Croatian or Kajkavski, the second language is likely to be German; few speak English and those who do will mostly be from younger generations. Although the cities and attractions are linked to Zagreb by bus and train, the connections are sporadic so it helps to have your own wheels to fully appreciate the area. Renting a car for a day or two and setting off along its twisting country roads is the best way to take in Zagorje's rustic charms.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Admiring the immaculately preserved baroque architecture of **Varaždin** (opposite)
- Experiencing the life of Croatian nobility at **Trakošćan Castle** (p102)
- Getting an insight into traditional village life at **Staro Selo Museum** (p104) in Kumrovec
- Sampling Croatian culinary specialities at **Vuglec Breg** (p103) near Krapinske Toplice
- Learning about our Neanderthal ancestors at the **Museum of Evolution** (p103) in Krapina
- Catching the international **Tabor Film Festival** (p104) in Veliki Tabor





VARAŽDIN

☎ 042 / pop 49,000

Varaždin, 81km north of Zagreb, is a largely overlooked destination that's often used as a mere transit point on the way to or from Hungary. However, the town is worth a visit in its own right as its centre is a showcase of scrupulously restored baroque architecture and well-tended gardens and parks. It was once Croatia's capital and most prosperous city, which explains the extraordinary refinement of its buildings. Topping off the symphony is the gleaming white, turreted Stari Grad (Old City), which contains a city museum.

History

The town of Garestin (now Varaždin) played an important role in Croatia's history. It first became a local administrative centre in 1181 under King Bela III, and in 1209 it was raised to the status of a free royal borough by King Andrew II, receiving its own seal and coat of arms. The 800-year anniversary of this event will be celebrated in 2009.

When Croatia was under siege by the Turks, Varaždin was the most powerful stronghold

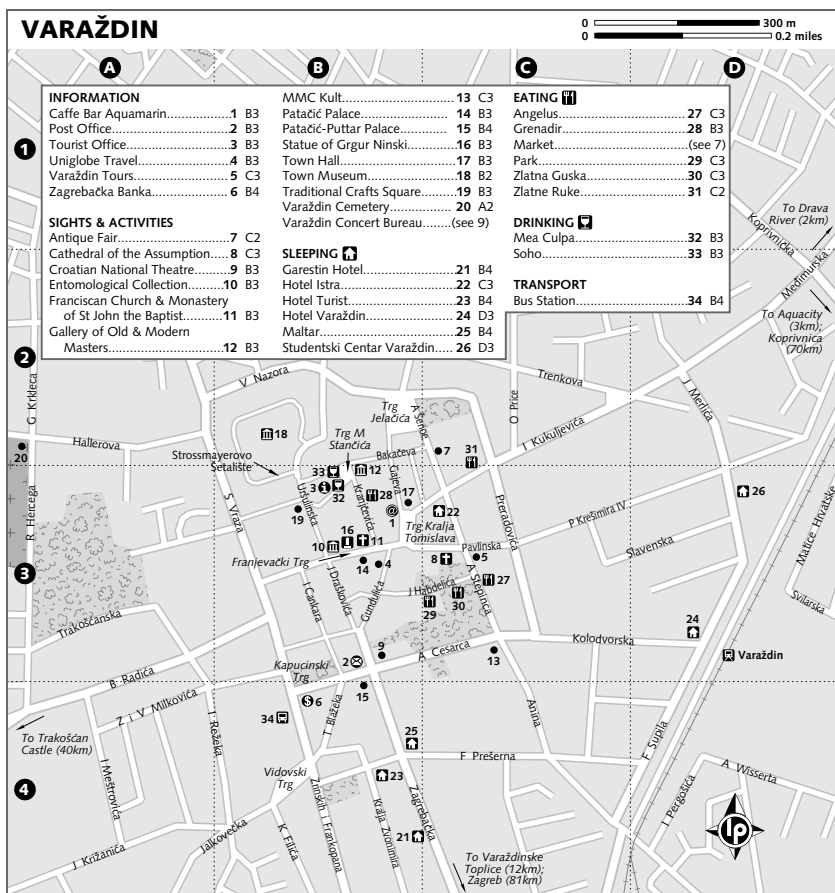
and the residence of choice for generals. Once the Ottoman threat receded, Varaždin prospered as the cultural, political and commercial centre of Croatia. Its proximity to northern Europe facilitated the boom of baroque architecture, which flourished in Europe during this period. Top artisans and builders flocked to Varaždin, designing mansions, churches and public buildings.

The town was made the capital of Croatia in 1756, a position it held until a disastrous fire in 1776, when the Croatian *ban* (viceroy) packed up and moved his administration to Zagreb. The still-thriving town was quickly rebuilt in the baroque style, which is still visible today.

The pleasant town is a centre for textiles, shoes, furniture and agricultural products. It's also an increasingly popular day-trip destination – its historic core is currently being spruced up, with plans to complete the renovations by 2010.

Orientation

The bus station lies just to the southwest of the town centre, while the train station is to the east, at the opposite end of town. About 1km apart,



the stations are linked by a minibus (5KN) that serves the town and nearby villages. The pedestrian zone of attractive 18th-century buildings centres on Trg Kralja Tomislava, with the old streets radiating from this square. One of these is the main commercial street, Ivana Gundulića.

Information

Caffe Bar Aquamarin (☎ 311 868; Gajeva 1; per hr 15KN; ☎ 7am-midnight Mon-Thu, to 1am Fri-Sun) Popular student hangout with internet terminals.

Garderoba bus station (per bag 7KN; ☎ 5am-8.30pm); train station (per day 15KN; ☎ 24hr) Left luggage.

Post office (Trg Slobode 9; ☎ 7am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat) The usual gamut of postal services.

Tourist office (☎ 210 987; www.tourism-varazdin.hr, in Croatian; Ivana Padovca 3; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-

1pm Sat Apr-Oct, 8am-4pm Mon-Fri Nov-Mar) Plenty of colourful brochures and a wealth of information available.

Uniglobe Travel (☎ 210 989; Ivana Gundulića 2; ☎ 8.30am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 12.30pm Sat) Offers package tours around Croatia, and has a small souvenir shop.

Varaždin Tours (☎ 320 400; www.varazdintours.com; Alojzija Stepinca 1; ☎ 8am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat) Books domestic and international bus tickets.

Zagrebačka Banka (Kapucinski Trg 5) Diagonally opposite the bus station; there's also an ATM in the bus station.

Sights

Varaždin offers a fine ensemble of baroque buildings in the town centre, a number of which have been turned into museums. Many of its aristocratic mansions and

elegant churches are being restored as part of the town's bid to be included in Unesco's list of World Heritage sites. Conveniently, most buildings have plaques with architectural and historical explanations in English.

The **Town Museum** (Gradski Muzej; ☎ 658 754; www.gmv.hr; Strossmayerovo Šetalište 7; adult/student 20/12KN; 🕒 10am-6pm Tue-Sun May-Sep, 10am-5pm Tue-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat & Sun Oct-Apr) is housed inside the Stari Grad (Old City), a gem of medieval defensive architecture surrounded by a lovingly manicured park. Construction of this whitewashed fortress began in the 14th century and shaped up into the present Gothic-Renaissance structure by the 16th century, when it was the regional fortification against the encroaching Turks. In private hands until 1925, today it's a museum that houses furniture, paintings, decorative objects, insignia and weapons amassed over centuries and now divided into 10 exhibition rooms. Far more interesting than the historic collections is the architecture: enter via a drawbridge and wander around archways, courtyards, chapels and towers of this sprawling castle-fortress.

A 10-minute stroll west takes you to the serene **Varaždin Cemetery** (Hallerova Aleja; ☎ 7am-9pm May-Sep, to 5pm Oct-Apr), a horticultural masterpiece designed in 1905 by Viennese architect Hermann Helmer. A meander amid tombstones, avenues, promenades and over 7000 trees, including magnolia, beech and birch, reveals some superb landscaping.

Just south of Stari Grad is the **Gallery of Old & Modern Masters** (Galerija Starih i Novih Majstora; ☎ 214 172; Trg Miljenka Stančića 3; adult/student 20/12KN; 🕒 10am-6pm Tue-Sun May-Sep, 10am-5pm Tue-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat & Sun Oct-Apr), housed in the Rococo-style Sermage Palace built in 1759. Note the carved medallions on the facade and then pay a quick visit to the museum, with a display of portraits and landscapes from Croatian, Italian, Dutch, German and Flemish schools. Note that the permanent exhibition occasionally shuts down in favour of temporary shows.

The fascinating **Entomological Collection** (Entomološka Zbirka; ☎ 658 760; Franjevački Trg 6; adult/student 20/12KN; 🕒 10am-6pm Tue-Sun May-Sep, 10am-5pm Tue-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat & Sun Oct-Apr), housed in the classicist Heczer Palace, comprises nearly 4500 exhibits of the bug world, including 1000 different insect species. The examples of insect nests, habitats and reproductive habits are informative and well displayed, with interactive stations and free audio guides.

Built in 1650 in baroque style on the site of an earlier structure, the **Franciscan Church & Monastery of St John the Baptist** (Crkva Svetog Ivana Krstitelja; ☎ 213 166; Franjevački Trg 8; 🕒 6.30am-noon & 5.30-7.30pm) contains the town's tallest tower (at 54.5m). It also houses an ancient pharmacy ornamented with 18th-century ceiling frescoes depicting the continents and natural elements. Next to the church is a copy of the bronze **statue of Grgur Ninski** that Ivan Meštrović created for Split. If you're needing a little extra luck, touch the statue's big toe and good luck will come you way...or so the story goes.

One of the town's most striking buildings is the **Town Hall** (Gradska Vijećnica; Trg Kralja Tomislava 1), a handsome Romanesque-Gothic structure that has had this civic function since the 16th century. Notice the town's coat of arms at the foot of the tower and the carved portal dating from 1792. There's a guard-changing ceremony every Saturday from 11am to noon.

The town's newest attraction is the **Traditional Crafts Square** (Trg Tradicijskih Obrta; 🕒 10am-6pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct). Here, the town blacksmith forges 'Varaždin Medallions' and there are demonstrations of pottery, weaving and hat-making to recreate the olden times.

Just to the south of Trg Kralja Tomislava is the **Cathedral of the Assumption** (Katedrala Uznesenja Marijina; ☎ 210 688; Pavlinska 5; 🕒 7am-noon & 4-7.30pm), formerly a Jesuit church built in 1646. The facade is distinguished by an early baroque portal bearing the coat of arms of the noble Drašković family. Occupying the central nave is the altar with elaborate engravings, marble columns and the gilded painting of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. Famous for its great acoustics, it's the site of concerts during the Baroque Evenings (see p100).

Other highlights in Varaždin (to be admired from the outside) include the **Patačić Palace** (Palača Patačić; Franjevački Trg 4), an exquisitely restored rococo palace dating from 1764 with a finely carved stone portal, and the **Patačić-Puttar Palace** (Palača Patačić-Puttar; Zagrebačka 2), an eye-catching mixture of baroque and classical styles with a richly decorated stone portal featuring the coat of arms of the Patačić family. The **Croatian National Theatre** (Hrvatsko Narodno Kazalište; ☎ 214 688; Augusta Cesarca 1) was built in 1873 in neo-Renaissance style, following the designs of Hermann Helmer.

A 15-minute walk northeast of the town centre takes you to the verdant **Drava River waterfront**. This wide, tranquil river is bordered

by footpaths and several outdoor cafés in which to kick back. For some water fun, head 3km out of town to **Aquacity** (☎ 350 555; Motičnjak bb, Trnovec Bartolomečki), Varaždin's version of a city beach on the road to Koprivnica, with a lake, tennis courts and a restaurant.

Festivals & Events

Varaždin is famous for its baroque music festival, **Varaždin Baroque Evenings** (www.vbv.hr), which takes place over two to three weeks each September. Local and international orchestras play in the cathedral, churches and theatres around town. Tickets range from 75KN to 150KN, depending on the event, and become available one hour before the concert at travel agencies or the **Varaždin Concert Bureau** (☎ /fax 212 907; Croatian National Theatre, Augusta Cesarca 1).

In late August, the eclectic **Špancirfest** (www.spancirfest.com) enlivens the town's parks and squares with world music (from Afro-Cuban to tango), acrobats, theatre, traditional crafts and illusionists.

A more offbeat event is the annual **Trash Film Fest** (☎ /fax 390 925; www.trash.hr; MMC Kult, Anina 2), an extravaganza of low-budget action flicks that takes place in MMC Kult over a few days in mid-September.

Between April and October, the town market is transformed into an **antique fair** (☎ 9am-noon) the second Saturday of every month.

Sleeping

Generally less expensive than in Zagreb, most hotels in Varaždin are clean, well maintained and offer decent value for money. The clientele consists mostly of visiting businesspeople from Zagreb and neighbouring countries – this means hotels are likely to be busy on weekdays and empty on weekends.

If you're looking for private accommodation, turn to the tourist office, which has listings of single/double rooms from about 150/250KN. There is generally no supplement for a single night's stay and prices remain the same year-round.

Studentski Centar Varaždin (☎ 332 910, 332 911; hostel@scvz.hr; Julija Merlića bb; s low-high 180-225KN, d 310KN; ☑) This student hall/hostel has 12 newly renovated single rooms available for rent year-round, each with TV, cable internet and fridge. Doubles can be booked in summer only, when students leave. There's laundry service for 23KN.

Maltar (☎ 311 100; www.maltar.hr; F Prešena 1; s/d 220/405KN; ☑ ☎) Good value for money can be had at this cheerful little family-run *pen-sion* (guest house) near the centre. Rooms are well kept and complete with satellite TV and air-con. Four suites (two/three people 465/595KN) have kitchenettes.

Garestin Hotel (☎ /fax 214 314; Zagrebačka 34; s/d 308/341KN; ☑) Locals frequent the popular restaurant of this establishment a stone's throw from the centre, while visitors kick back in comfy rooms upstairs, each outfitted with a minibar and other standard trimmings.

Hotel Turist (☎ 395 395; www.hotel-turist.hr; Kralja Zvonimira 1; s/d from 353/546KN; ☑ ☎ ☑) A lack of character at this six-storey hotel is balanced by 35 years of service, solid facilities and functional rooms. The hotel has a freshly painted facade and is a stroll away from the centre. The pricier and slightly larger 'business class' rooms come with minibars.

our pick Hotel Varaždin (☎ 290 720; www.hotel.varazdin.com; Kolodvorska 19; s/d from 388/576KN; ☑ ☎ ☑) Sparkling contemporary rooms at the city's newest hotel, opposite the train station, are jam-packed with amenities such as internet and minibars. On the premises is a restaurant with a bar and terrace.

Hotel Istra (☎ 659 659; www.istra-hotel.hr; Ivana Kukuljevića 6; s/d from 570/860KN; ☑ ☎ ☑) The unbeatable location in the heart of town hardly justifies the hefty room costs at Varaždin's only four-star property. The expected facilities and in-room perks are all in place, but wowed you won't be.

Eating & Drinking

While it doesn't stand out as a gourmet destination, Varaždin offers plentiful opportunities to try Croatia's continental cuisine, for various budgets. There is a daily **market** (Augusta Šenoa 12), open until 2pm. Many bakeries sell Varaždin's savoury finger-shaped bread, *klipić*.

Angelus (☎ 303 868; Alojzija Stepinca 3; pizzas/mains from 25/45KN) Housed in a vaulted basement, this cosy pizzeria-trattoria churns out excellent pizza, pasta (from gnocchi to tagliatelle), risottos and meat mainstays.

Grenadir (☎ 211 131; Kranjčevića 12; mains from 32KN) No-frills but great-value *gableci* (cheap filling lunches) are popular with locals at this traditional town centre eatery.

Park (☎ 211 499; Jurja Habelića 6; mains from 35KN) The grilled meats and salad buffets are pretty standard here; what's special are the terrace

with leafy views, the old-school vibe and cheap lunches.

Zlatne Ruke (☎ 320 650; Ivana Kukuljevića 13; mains 57-116KN) The latest outpost by the owners of Zlatna Guska, this subterranean spot is the town's most design-conscious choice, with white-stone walls and creative dishes, such as deer tartare steak and goose liver with peaches.

ourpick Zlatna Guska (☎ 213 393; Jurja Habeldica 4; mains 57-119KN) A medieval theme runs through this basement restaurant, which evokes a knights' dining hall with plenty of armour. Portions are copious and the dishes are well prepared and imaginatively named, including 'the last meal of the inquisitions victims' (a hearty bread-and-sausage soup).

Mea Culpa (☎ 300 868; Ivana Padovca 1) Get your caffeine or cocktail fix at this swanky lounge-bar with two floors inside and, on sunny days, tables extending out on Trg Miljenka Staničića.

Soho (Trg Miljenka Staničića 1) Just like Mea Culpa, this café-bar has tables on the square but the interior is more intimate and toned down.

Getting There & Away

Varaždin is a major transport hub in north Croatia, with bus and train lines running in all directions. For information on long-haul buses to Germany and northern Europe, see p309. Remember that northbound buses originate in Zagreb, stop at Varaždin and cost the same whether you buy the ticket in Zagreb or Varaždin.

There's a daily bus to Vienna, Austria (210KN, six hours) and two daily buses to Munich, Germany (345KN, eight hours). There's a twice weekly bus to Berlin (773KN, 15 hours) and to Zurich, Switzerland (509KN, 13 hours). Most buses to the coast go through Zagreb. There are also weekday buses to Trakošćan Castle (25KN, four to six daily), Varaždinske Toplice (15KN, 30 minutes, 18 daily) and Zagreb (69KN, 1¼ hours, hourly). Note that service is greatly reduced on weekends to Trakošćan and Varaždinske Toplice (only one bus on Saturday, none on Sunday).

There are 11 to 14 daily trains to Zagreb (53KN, 2½ hours); connect in Zagreb for trains to the coast. One direct train runs daily to Budapest, Hungary (205KN, six hours).

VARAŽDINSKE TOPLICE

☎ 042 / pop 6973

Sulphurous thermal springs at a steaming temperature of 58°C have been attracting weary visitors to Varaždinske Toplice since the Romans first established a health settlement here in the 1st century AD. Gentle, wooded hills surround this appealing spa town with an assortment of churches and historic buildings, including the baroque castle of **Stari Grad** (Trg Slobode 16). Behind its neo-Gothic facade hides the **tourist office** (☎ 633 133; www.toplice-vz.hr, in Croatian; ☎ 7.30am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm & 4-7pm Sat & Sun Jul & Aug, 7.30am-3.30pm Mon-Fri Sep-Jun), which distributes brochures and info about relaxing health therapies and can help you find private accommodation.

Adjacent is the **city museum** (☎ 633 339), which showcases a sculpture of Minerva from the 3rd century AD; the museum was closed for renovations at the time of research, but should reopen soon. History buffs should stroll around **Aqua lasae**, the remains of the Roman spa built between the 1st and 4th centuries AD, located just a quick stroll up from Stari Grad.

Hotel Minerva (☎ 630 831; www.minerva.hr; Trg Slobode 1; s/d 340/520KN; **P** **☎**) is built around the thermal pools, which are said to have curative powers, especially for rheumatic ailments. The unsightly concrete building features rooms with balconies, an indoor and outdoor pool, an aqua park and a fitness room. Guests have free access to the pools, while day visitors pay 40/45KN on weekdays/weekends. There is also a sauna (45KN per hour), massages (120KN per 40 minutes) and various antistress programs.

An infinitely more pleasant overnight option is the family-run guest house **Ozis** (☎ 250 130; Zagrebačka 7; s/d 180/300KN; **P**), at the town entrance. It has 10 spick-and-span rooms and three suites, plus a lovely courtyard. Breakfast is additional and there's a 10% surcharge for stays under three nights.

If you have your own wheels, stop for lunch at **Zlatne Gorice** (☎ 666 054; www.zlatne-gorice.com; Banjšćina 104, Gornji Knežinec; mains from 36KN), 3km from Toplice along the old road to Varaždin. This sparkingly restored mansion among vineyards serves Central European fare (think schnitzels, stews and veal medallions) in the four interior salons or on a terrace with pastoral views. There's a wine trail, a garden labyrinth, wine tastings (45KN with cheese, fruit and bread) and three cosy doubles (300KN) upstairs.

EN ROUTE TO HUNGARY: MEĐIMURJE

The undulating landscapes of Međimurje stretch northeast of Varaždin towards the borders with Hungary and Slovenia. Fertile, scenic and packed with vineyards, orchards, wheat fields and gardens, this area sees few tourists. That is slowly changing, however, as its attractions, such as up-and-coming wine cellars and the spa village of Sveti Martin, become uncovered.

To sample the region's top wines in an authentic family environment, head to **Lovrec vineyard** (☎ 040-830 171; www.hotel.hr/vino-lovrec; Sveti Urban 133, Štrigova; 📍 by appointment) in the village of Sveti Urban, 20km northwest of Čakovec, the region's capital. The guided tour (available in English, French and German) of this country estate tells you about the boutique wine production and its fascinating history, which spans six generations of winemakers. You'll peek into the 300-year-old wine cellar with ancient wine presses and barrels, rest in the shade of two towering plane trees once used as air-conditioning for the cellar, take in the vistas of the 6-hectare vineyards, and top it off with tasting about 10 wine varieties, from chardonnay and pinot gris to local *graševina*. The whole experience lasts up to two hours and costs 80KN (20KN extra for tasty cheese, salami and bread snacks), with a bottle of wine to take home. You're encouraged to buy another bottle.

A few kilometres away along verdant hilly roads, the pleasant village of Sveti Martin Na Muri showcases a recently renovated spa resort, **Toplice Sveti Martin** (☎ 040-371 111; www.toplicesveti.martin.hr; Grkavešćak bb; s/d 428/656KN). It has a series of outdoor, indoor and thermal pools, a water park, tennis courts, forest trails, shops, restaurants and a golf course in the works. Accommodation consists of swanky apartment-style units, each with a living room, kitchen and balcony. For nonguests, day tickets to the pools start at 50KN (60KN on weekends); the price drops by 10KN after 1pm. Other facilities include a fitness room (25KN per day), sauna (60KN per day) and various body therapies, including mud wraps (160KN per 30 minutes) and chocolate massages (300KN for 45 minutes).

At **Goričanec farm** (☎ 040-868 288; Dunajska 26), about 4km from the village, you can try horse riding, fishing or hunting. **Potrți Kotač** (☎ 040-868 318; Jurovčak 79; mains from 35KN), 1km uphill from the spa, serves good local food and has double rooms for rent (250KN).

The spa is 12km southeast of Varaždin and 69km northeast of Zagreb. There are numerous buses from Varaždin (see p101).

TRAKOŠĆAN CASTLE

☎ 042

Among continental Croatia's most impressive castles, **Trakošćan Castle** (☎ 796 281; www.trakoscan.hr; adult/student 30/15KN; 🕒 9am-6pm Apr-Oct, to 4pm Nov-Mar), 80km northwest of Zagreb, is worth a visit for its well-presented museum and attractive grounds. The exact origin of its construction is unknown but the first official mention dates to 1334. Not many of its original Romanesque features were retained when the castle was restored in neo-Gothic style in the mid-19th century and the 215-acre castle grounds landscaped into a romantic English-style park with exotic trees and an artificial lake.

Occupied by the aristocratic Drašković family until 1944, the castle features three floors of exhibits that display the family's original furniture and a plethora of portraits. The series of rooms ranges in style from neo-Renaissance to Gothic and baroque. There's also an arma-

ments collection of swords and firearms, and a period kitchen in the basement. After soaking up the history, wander along the verdant paths down to the wooden jetty at the lake, where you can rent a two-person paddleboat (50KN per hour) in warm weather.

No buses operate between Zagreb and Trakošćan but there are weekday connections from Varaždin, making a day trip possible (see p101).

KRAPINA

☎ 049 / pop 4647

The main reason to visit Krapina, a busy provincial town at the heart of a pretty rural region, is one of Europe's largest Neanderthal excavation sites, which is now a museum. In 1899, an archaeological dig on the Hušnjakovo hill unearthed findings of human and animal bones from a Neanderthal tribe that lived in the cave from 100,000 BC to 35,000 BC. Alongside stone tools and weapons from the Palaeolithic Age, 876 human remains were found, including 196 single teeth belonging to several dozen individuals.

Once you've connected to our long-gone ancestors and briefly meandered around town, Krapina offers little to keep you entertained.

Orientation & Information

The main road that runs through town is Zagrebačka Ulica, which becomes Ljudevita Gaja in the centre and Magistratska at the northern end. The town centre is Trg Stjepana Radića between Zagrebačka and Ljudevita Gaja. The train station is about 300m to the south; the new bus terminal is another 600m away along the same street, at Frana Galovića 15.

The **tourist office** (☎ 371 330; tgz-krapina@kr.htnet.hr; Magistratska 11; ☎ 8am-3pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat) keeps sporadic hours and offers scant information.

Sights

Krapina's highlight is the **Museum of Evolution** (☎ 371 491; www.krapina.com; Šetalište Vilibalda Sluge bb; adult/student 20/10KN; ☎ 9am-5pm May-Oct, 9am-3pm Tue-Sun Nov-Apr), just west of the centre. The current museum has a limited display while the newly built 1200-sq-metre exhibition space gears up to open (by the end of 2009), with prehistoric artefacts and interactive exhibits tracing the history and geology of the region. The nearby park remains unchanged, with sculpted life-sized models of Neanderthals engaged in everyday activities such as wielding clubs and throwing stones.

Worth peeking at in the otherwise unremarkable town of Krapina is the baroque **Franciscan monastery**, which once housed a philosophy and theology school, and the adjoining **St Catherine church**, with evocative frescoes by Pauline monk Ivan Ranger in the sacristy. The **City Art Gallery** (☎ 370 810; Magistratska 25; admission free; ☎ 10am-1pm Mon, Fri & Sat, 10am-1pm & 5-7pm Tue-Thu) has rotating exhibits of Croatian artists.

Festivals & Events

At the beginning of September, the annual **Festival of Kajkavian Songs** (Festival Kajkavske Popevke) features folkloric performances, poetry readings and traditional Zagorje food.

Sleeping & Eating

There's no private accommodation, but **Pod Starim Krovovima** (☎ 370 536; Trg Ljudevita Gaja 15;

s/d 210/340KN), the one pleasant *pension* in the town centre, has eight plain but clean units, each with a bathroom. Cheap and tasty *gablec* (lunch) – for 23KN – can be had at the restaurant downstairs. For a coffee break in the sun, grab an outside table at loungey **Ilir** (☎ 371 444; Trg Ljudevita Gaja 3), or soak up the old-fashioned vibe inside.

Getting There & Away

There are four weekday buses daily from Zagreb to Krapina (39KN, one hour) but only two on Saturday and one on Sunday. There are up to 13 trains on weekdays from Zagreb (33KN, 1½ hours), changing at Zabok; trains run less frequently on weekends.

KRAPINSKE TOPLICE

☎ 049 / pop 1265

This spa town, about 17km southwest of Krapina, is located amid the rolling hills of the Zagorje countryside. The showpieces are the four thermal springs, rich in magnesium and calcium and never below 39°C. The town itself isn't particularly attractive and nor is its atmosphere upbeat, as the visitor pool mainly consists of ageing patients in various rehabilitation programs. That may change with the unveiling of the new spa centre currently under construction, which will feature indoor pools, saunas and various other fitness and wellness facilities.

The bus station is in the centre of town, a stone's throw from most facilities, as is the **tourist office** (☎/fax 232 106; tzo-krapinske-toplice@kr.t-com.hr; Zagrebačka 4; ☎ 8am-3pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat), which gives out brochures and information.

The smallest rooms at **Hotel Aqueae Vivae** (☎ 202 202; www.aquae-vivae.hr; Antuna Mihanovića 2; s/d 320/500KN; ☎) have outdated decor, so it's worth paying 30KN or 60KN extra for a superior version with a newer bathroom. Request a room that overlooks the verdant backyard. Rates include the use of outdoor and indoor swimming pools and the fitness centre.

A far more scenic option is **Vuglec Breg** (☎ 345 015; www.vuglec-breg.hr; Škarićevo 151; s/d 405/540KN; ☎), a delightful rural hotel in the village of Škarićevo, 4km from Krapinske Toplice. The four traditional cottages (with seven renovated rooms and three suites) sit amid hills, vineyards and forests, while the restaurant (mains 70KN to 140KN) serves fantastic Zagorje specialities such as *purica s mlincima* (slow-roasted turkey with baked

noodles) on a terrace with panoramic vistas. The grounds feature tennis courts, hiking trails, a wine cellar, and a playground and pony riding to keep the little ones busy. Vuglec Breg is best reached with your own wheels. Drive through town in the direction of Krapina following the signs to Vuglec Breg; at hilltop Hršak Breg, take a left and continue to the end of the road.

Located 46km northwest of Zagreb, the spa is well connected to the capital by bus (36KN, 1¼ hours, seven to 12 daily), making it an easy day trip option.

VELIKI TABOR CASTLE

☎ 049

As you approach the hilltop castle of Veliki Tabor, 57km northwest of Zagreb, what unfolds is a pleasing panorama of hills, corn fields, vineyards and forests. The rural vistas alone make a visit worthwhile, as does good traditional dining nearby.

The Croatian aristocracy began building fortified castles in the region to stave off the Turkish threat at the end of the 16th century. The pentagonal **Veliki Tabor Castle** (☎ 343 963; Košnički Hum 1, Desinić; adult/student 20/10KN; ☞ 9am-5pm) was built on the grounds of an earlier medieval structure in the early 16th century, with the four semicircular towers added later. Strategically perched on top of a hill, the golden-yellow castle-fortress has everything a medieval master could want – towers, turrets and holes in the walls for pouring tar and hot oil on the enemy.

Recently renovated, it now features three levels of galleries around the central courtyard, with a collection of medieval weaponry, period furniture and miscellaneous objects showcased in glass cabinets. Bilingual explanations illuminate the display, but far more interesting than the exhibits is wandering around the castle with its towers, staircases and the 1st-floor chapel that houses the skull of Veronika Desinić. According to local lore, this poor village girl was punished for her romance with the castle owner's son and bricked up in the walls; what's on display is a woman's skull found in the walls during the renovations in the 1980s.

Consider timing your castle visit around two annual events: the **Tabor Film Festival** (www.taborfilmfestival.com) in July, an extravaganza of international short films with screenings in the atrium, and a **medieval fair** in September,

which is a one-day celebration featuring sword battles, falcon-hunting tournaments and Renaissance dancing.

To admire the castle from a distance, grab an alfresco table at **Grešna Gorica** (☎ 343 001; www.gresna-gorica.com; Taborgradska Klet 3, Desinić; mains from 42KN), a rustic eatery often stomped over on weekends by day-tripping families from Zagreb. The place is a tad gimmicky but great for kids, with farm animals roaming around, a playground and lots of open space. Adults will appreciate the countryside views and well-prepared Zagorje staples, such as *štrukle* (dough rolls with cottage cheese) and *srneći gulaš* (venison goulash). The restaurant can be found about 2km east of Veliki Tabor; a marked trail leads from the back of the castle to the restaurant (40 minutes on foot).

There are eight daily buses from Zagreb to Desinić (52KN, 1½ hours) from Monday to Saturday and four on Sunday, but you will have to walk 3km northwest to Veliki Tabor.

KUMROVEC

☎ 049 / pop 304

The Zagorje region was the birthplace of several celebrated Croats, most notably Tito, who was born as Josip Broz in Kumrovec. Nestled in the Sutla River valley near the Slovenian border, this pretty village has been thoughtfully transformed into an open-air ethnographic museum. A re-creation of a 19th-century village, the **Staro Selo Museum** (☎ 225 830; www.md.hr/kumrovec; Kumrovec bb; adult/student 20/10KN; ☞ 9am-7pm Apr-Sep, to 4pm Oct-Mar) features 40 restored houses and barns made of pressed earth and wood. These *hiže* (Zagorje huts) are now filled with furniture, mannequins, toys, wine presses and baker's tools (all accompanied by English captions) in order to evoke the region's traditional arts, crafts and customs.

With a stream bubbling through the idyllic setting, the museum presents a vivid glimpse of peasant traditions and village life. Note the life-sized bronze sculpture of Marshal Tito outside his humble place of birth, with the original furniture, letters from foreign leaders and random memorabilia inside. On weekends from April to September, the museum hosts demonstrations of black-smithing, candle-making, pottery-making and flax-weaving.

There are four daily buses between Zagreb and Kumrovec (39KN, 1¼ hours) on weekdays,

CROATIAN NAÏVE ART

Croatia is the birthplace of its own version of naïve art, a distinct style of 20th-century painting that features fantastical and colourful depictions of rural life.

It was the painter Krsto Hegedušić (1901–75) who founded the Hlebine School in the village of the same name in Podravina region, 13km east of the provincial centre of Koprivnica. Upon his return from studying in Paris in the 1930s, he gathered a pocket of self-taught artists with no formal art education and gave them a chance to shine. This first generation of Croatian naïve painters included Ivan Generalić (1914–92), now the most internationally acclaimed, Franjo Mraz (1910–81) and Mirko Virius (1889–1943). All were amateur artists portraying vibrantly coloured and vividly narrated scenes of village life.

Today, a clutch of painters and sculptors still works in Hlebine. Their work can be seen on display in **Hlebine Gallery** (☎ 048-836 075; Trg Ivana Generalića 15, Hlebine; adult/student 10/5KN; 🕒 10am–4pm Mon–Fri, to 2pm Sat). Also in Hlebine is **Galerija Josip Generalić** (☎ 048-836 071; Gajeva 75-83; adult/student 10/5KN; 🕒 by appointment), named after the son of the famous Ivan, also a renowned painter, in the Generalić family home.

Other places to see naïve art in Croatia are the Croatian Museum of Naïve Art (p78) in Zagreb and the **Koprivnica Gallery** (☎ 048-622 564; Zrinski Trg 9; 🕒 10am–1pm & 5–8pm Tue–Fri, 10am–1pm Sat & Sun).

one on Saturday and none on Sunday. There are six daily trains (30KN, 1½ to two hours) from Monday to Saturday (five on Sunday), with a change in Sutla.

KLANJEC

☎ 049 / pop 562

Apart from Tito, another notable Croat from Zagorje was sculptor Antun Augustinčić (1900–79), who created the *Monument to Peace* in front of the UN building in New York. Klanjec, his pleasant home town, has a **gallery** (☎ 550 343; www.mdc.hr/augustinic; Trg Antuna Mihanovića 10; adult/student 20/10KN; 🕒 9am–5pm Apr–Sep, to 3pm Tue–Sun Oct–Mar) devoted to his opus, plus lots of headless bronze torsos and a huge replica of the *Peace* statue. There's a small sculpture garden outside and the sculptor's memorial to fallen Partisans nearby.

Once you've seen the gallery, you'll be strapped for more sightseeing, but do stroll around the charming town to see the 17th-century **baroque church** and the **Franciscan monastery** opposite the gallery, and to take in the views of surrounding hills.

The four daily buses running from Zagreb to Kumrovec stop in Klanjec (36KN, one hour).

MARIJA BISTRICA

☎ 049 / pop 1107

Croatia's largest pilgrimage centre is in Zagorje at Marija Bistrica, a village 37km north of Zagreb on the slopes of Mt Medvednica. What steals the show here is the **Marija Bistrica Church** (Hodočasnička Crkva Marije Bistričke), which contains a wooden Gothic statue of the Black Madonna created in the 15th century. The statue's alleged miraculous power dates back to the 16th-century Turkish invasions when it was saved from destruction; it was further proven when a disastrous 1880 fire destroyed everything but the statue. Behind the church is the **Way of the Cross**, a path leading up Calvary Hill, with 14 stations marked with works by Croatian sculptors and paired with excellent vistas. The church attracts 600,000 pilgrims a year, but there were even more in 1998 when Pope John Paul II arrived to beatify Cardinal Alojzije Stepinac. To witness a display of serious religious devotion, visit on 15 August for the most popular pilgrimage of Velika Gospa (Assumption of the Virgin Mary).

There are up to 20 buses a day from Zagreb to Marija Bistrica (30KN to 45KN, 40 minutes to one hour) on weekdays, less on weekends.

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