

Istria



Continental Croatia meets the Adriatic in Istria (Istra to Croats), the heart-shaped 3600-sq-km peninsula just south of Trieste in Italy. While the bucolic interior of rolling hills and fertile plains attracts artsy visitors to its hilltop villages, rural hotels and farmhouse restaurants, the verdant indented coastline is enormously popular with the sun 'n' sea set. Vast hotel complexes line much of the coast and its rocky beaches are not Croatia's best, but the facilities are wide-ranging, the sea is clean and secluded spots still plentiful.

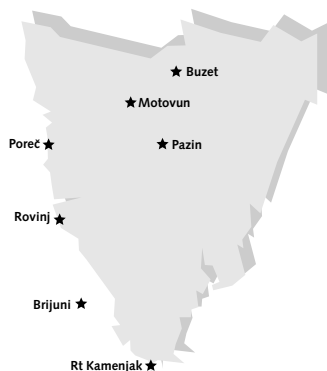
Pazin, in the interior, is the administrative capital of the region, while coastal Pula, with its thriving shipyard and Roman amphitheatre, is the economic and cultural centre. Tourism along the coast centres on the fetching fishing village of Rovinj and the ancient Roman town of Poreč, surrounded by a modern sprawl. Inland, the medieval towns of Motovun, Buzet, Labin and Grožnjan perch on hill crests in atmospheric clusters.

The northern part of the peninsula belongs to Slovenia, while the Ćićarija mountains (an extension of the Dinaric Range) in the northeastern corner separate Istria from the continental mainland. Just across the water is Italy, but the pervasive Italian influence makes it seem even closer. Italian is, in fact, a second language in Istria, while many Istrians have Italian passports, and each town name has an Italian counterpart.

The coast, or 'Blue Istria', as the tourist board calls it, gets flooded by tourists in summer, but you can still feel alone and undisturbed in 'Green Istria', even in the mid-August. Add acclaimed gastronomy (starring fresh seafood, prime truffles, wild asparagus and award-winning wines), sprinkle it with historical charm and you have a little slice of heaven.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Admiring the mosaics at **Euphrasian Basilica** (p171) in Poreč
- Truffle-hunting and feasting in the forests around **Buzet** (p178)
- Taking in Rovinj's fishing history at **Batana House** (p166)
- Walking the trails of the legendary **Pazin Cave** (p177)
- Catching alfresco screenings during the summer film festival of **Motovun** (p181)
- Soaking up communist chic at Tito's playground of **Brijuni** (p163)
- Exploring the wild landscapes of **Rt Kamenjak** (p160) near Pula



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 052

History

Towards the end of the 2nd millennium BC, the Illyrian Histrian tribe settled the region and built fortified villages on top of the coastal and interior hills. The Romans swept into Istria in the 3rd century BC and began building roads and more hill forts as strategic strongholds.

From 539 to 751, Istria was under Byzantine rule, the most impressive remnant of which is the Euphrasian Basilica (p171) in Poreč, with its stunning mosaics. In the period that followed, power switched between Slavic tribes, the Franks and German rulers until an increasingly powerful Venice wrested control of the Istrian coast in the early 13th century. Treaties signed in 1374 and 1466 gave continental Istria to the Habsburgs.

Misery, famine and warfare haunted the peninsula. Bubonic plague first broke out in 1371 and regularly ravaged Istrian cities until the 17th century. Although the Turks never reached Istria, the peninsula lay in the path of the fearsome Uskok pirates from Senj who repeatedly attacked Istrian cities throughout the 16th and 17th centuries.

With the fall of Venice in 1797, Istria came under Austrian rule, followed by the French (1809–13) and the Austrians again. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, most of Istria was little more than a neglected outpost of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

When the empire disintegrated at the end of WWI, Italy moved quickly to secure Istria. Italian troops occupied Pula in November 1918, and, in the 1920 Treaty of Rapallo, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes ceded Istria along with Zadar and several islands to Italy, as a reward for joining the Allied powers in WWI.

A massive population shift followed as 30,000 to 40,000 Italians arrived from Mussolini's Italy and many Croats left, fearing fascism. Their fears were not misplaced as Istria's Italian masters attempted to consolidate their hold by banning Slavic speech, printing, education and cultural activities.

Italy retained the region until its defeat in WWII when Istria became part of Yugoslavia, causing another mass exodus, as Italians and many Croats fled Tito's communists. Trieste and the peninsula's northwestern tip were points of contention between Italy and Yugoslavia until 1954, when the region was finally awarded to Italy. As a result of Tito's

reorganisation of Yugoslavia, the northern part of the peninsula was incorporated into Slovenia, where it has remained.

THE ISTRIAN COAST

At the tip of the Istrian peninsula is Pula, the coast's largest city. The Brijuni Islands, the former playground of Tito, are an easy day trip from here. The east coast of Istria centres on the modern seaside resort of Rabac, just below the ancient hilltop town of Labin. The west coast is the tourist showcase, with Rovinj the most enchanting town and Poreč the easiest – and cheaper – holiday choice, with plenty of lodging and entertainment options.

PULA

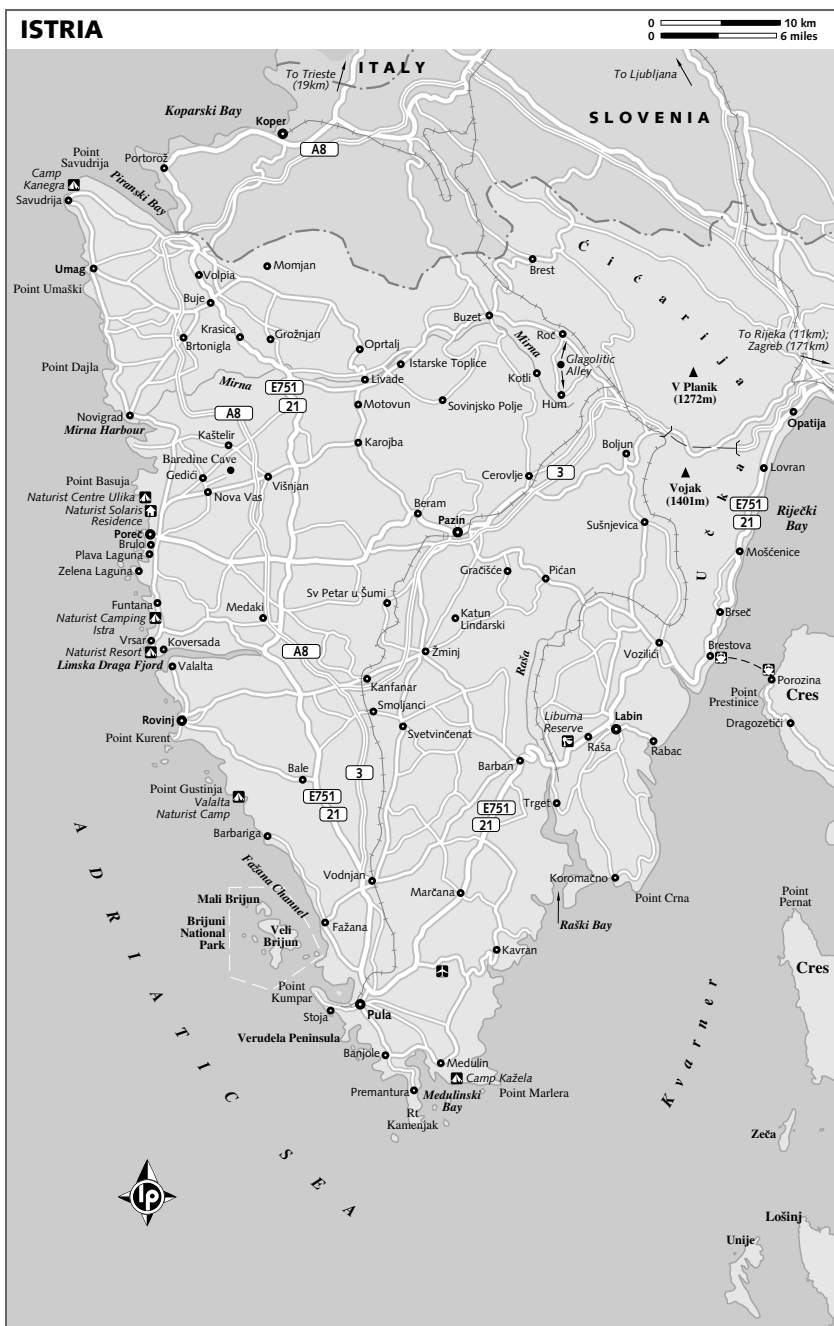
pop 65,000

The wealth of Roman architecture makes otherwise workaday Pula (ancient Polensium) a standout among Croatia's larger cities. The star of the Roman show is the remarkably well-preserved Roman amphitheatre, smack in the heart of the city, which dominates the streetscape and doubles as a venue for summer concerts and performances.

Historical attractions aside, Pula is a busy commercial city on the sea that has managed to retain a friendly small-town appeal. Just a short bus ride away, a series of beaches awaits at the resorts that occupy the Verudela Peninsula to the south. Although marred with residential and holiday developments, the coast is dotted with fragrant pine groves, seaside cafés and a clutch of fantastic restaurants. Further south along the indented shoreline, the Premantura Peninsula hides a spectacular nature park, the protected cape of Kamenjak.

History

In the 1st century BC, the Illyrian Pola (now Pula) was conquered by the Romans and used as their administrative headquarters for the region that stretched from the Limška Draga Fjord to the Raša River. The Romans cleverly exploited Pula's terrain, using Kaštel Hill, which now contains the citadel, as a vantage point to protect the bay. The ancient town developed in concentric circles around the hill, with the amphitheatre placed outside the fortified city centre. Pula joined the powerful Venetian empire in 1150 to protect itself



TAKING IT OFF IN ISTRIA

Naturism in Croatia enjoys a long and venerable history that began on Rab Island around the turn of the 20th century. It quickly became a fad among Austrians influenced by the growing German Freikörperkultur movement, loosely translated as 'free body culture'. Later, Austrian Richard Ehrmann opened the first naturist camp on Paradise Beach in Lopar (on Rab), but the real founders of Adriatic naturism were Edward VIII and Wallis Simpson, who popularised it by going skinny-dipping along the Rab coast in 1936.

The coast of Istria now has many of Croatia's largest and most well-developed naturist resorts. Naturist camping grounds are marked as FKK, an acronym for Freikörperkultur.

Start in the north at **Camp Kanegra** (www.istraturist.com), north of Umag, a relatively small site on a long pebble beach. Continuing south along the coast, you'll come to **Naturist Centre Ulika** (www.plavalaguna.hr) just outside Poreč, with 559 pitches, as well as caravans and mobile homes available for rent. If you prefer to stay in an apartment, **Naturist Solaris Residence** (www.valamar.hr) is the ideal choice. Only 12km north of Poreč on the wooded Lanterna Peninsula, the complex also includes a naturist camping ground. South of Poreč, next to the fishing village Funtana, is the larger **Naturist Camping Istra** (www.valamar.hr), which sleeps up to 3000 people. Continue south past Vrsar and you come to the mother ship of naturist resorts, **Koversada** (www.maistra.hr). In 1961, Koversada islet went totally nude and the colony soon spread to the nearby coast. Now this behemoth can accommodate 6000 people in campsites, villas and apartments. If that seems a little overwhelming, keep going south 7km past Rovinj to **Valalta Naturist Camp** (www.valalta.hr), near the Lim Channel. It has a manageable number of apartments, bungalows, caravans, mobile homes and campsites. If you prefer to be within easy reach of Pula, travel down the coast to Medulin and **Camp Kažela** (www.kampkazela.com), which also has mobile homes for rent, plus campsites right on the sea.

against piracy, but the city suffered badly under Venetian rule.

The fall of Venice in 1797 brought in the Habsburgs as the new rulers. Pula stagnated until the Austro-Hungarian monarchy chose it as the empire's main naval centre in 1853. The construction of the port and the 1886 opening of its large shipyard unleashed a demographic and economic expansion that transformed Pula into a military and industrial powerhouse. The city fell into decline once again under Italian fascist rule, which lasted from 1918 to 1943, when the city was occupied by the Germans. At the end of WWII, Pula was administered by Anglo-American forces until it became part of postwar Yugoslavia in 1947. Pula's industrial base weathered the recent war relatively well and the city remains an important centre for shipbuilding, textiles, metals and glass.

Orientation

The oldest part of the city follows the ancient Roman plan of streets circling the central citadel, while the city's newer portions follow a rectangular grid pattern. Most shops, agencies and businesses are clustered in and around the old town as well as on Giardini, Carrarina, Istarska and Riva, which runs along the har-

bour. With the exception of a few hotels and restaurants in the old town, most others, as well as the beaches, are 4km to the south on the Verudela Peninsula; these can be reached by walking south on Arsenalska, which turns into Tomasinijeva and then Veruda. The bus station is 500m northeast of the town centre; the harbour is west of the bus station. Less than a kilometre north of town, the train station is near the sea along Kolodvorska.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

Cafe-Bar Etna (Sergijevaca 3; per hr 20KN;

☎ 6am-11pm Mon-Fri, 8am-11pm Sat & Sun)

MMC Luka (☎ 224 316; Istarska 30; per hr 20KN;

☎ 8am-midnight Mon-Fri, 8am-3pm Sat)

LAUNDRY

Mika (☎ 210 692; Trinajstićeva 16; ☎ 8am-2pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat)

LEFT LUGGAGE

Garderoba (per hr 2.20KN; ☎ 4am-10.30pm Mon-Sat, 5am-10.30pm Sun) Left-luggage at the bus station.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Hospital (☎ 376 548; Zagrebačka 34)

bus station, you can book accommodation and rent cars and scooters (from 100KN to 180KN per day).

Sights

ROMAN RUINS

Pula's most famous and imposing sight is the 1st-century **Roman amphitheatre** (☎ 219 028; Flavijevska bb; adult/concession 40/20KN; 🕒 8am-9pm summer, 9am-8pm spring & autumn, 9am-5pm winter) overlooking the harbour northeast of the old town. Built entirely from local limestone, the amphitheatre with seating for up to 20,000 spectators was designed to host gladiatorial contests. On the top of the walls is a gutter that collected rainwater and you can still see the slabs used to secure the fabric canopy, which protected spectators from the sun. In the chambers downstairs is a small **museum** with a display of ancient olive oil equipment. Every summer, **Pula Film Festival** is held here, as are pop and classical concerts.

Along Carrarina are **Roman walls**, which mark the eastern boundary of old Pula. Follow these walls south and continue down Giardini to the **Triumphal Arch of Sergius**. This majestic arch was erected in 27 BC to commemorate three members of the Sergius family who achieved distinction in Pula. Until the 19th century, the arch was backed by the city gate and was surrounded by walls that were pulled down to allow the city to expand beyond the old town.

The pedestrian street beyond the arch, **Sergijevaca**, winds right around old Pula. Follow it to the ancient **Forum**, the town's central meeting place from antiquity through the Middle Ages. It used to contain temples and public buildings, but today the only visible remnant from the Roman era is the **Temple of Augustus** (☎ 218 603; Forum; adult/concession 10/5KN; 🕒 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat & Sun summer, by appointment other times), erected from 2 BC to AD 14. When the Romans left, the temple became a church and then a grain warehouse. Reconstructed after a bomb hit it in 1944, it now houses a small historical museum with captions in English. Also in the Forum, notice the **old town hall**, which was built in 1296 as the seat of Pula's municipal authorities. With its mixture of architectural styles – from Romanesque to Renaissance – it's still the seat of Pula's mayor.

Just off **Sergijevaca** is a **Roman floor mosaic** dating from the 3rd century. In the midst of remarkably well-preserved geometric motifs is

the central panel, which depicts bad-girl Dirce from Greek mythology being punished for the attempted murder of her cousin.

CHURCHES

Pula's **cathedral** (Katedrala; Kandlerova; 🕒 10am-5pm mid-Jun–mid-Sep, Mass only mid-Sep–mid-Jun) dates back to the 5th century; the main altar is even older, being a Roman sarcophagus with relics of saints from the 3rd century. The floor reveals fragments of 5th- and 6th-century mosaics. The late-Renaissance facade was added in the early 16th century and the 17th-century bell tower was made of stones from the amphitheatre.

The **Chapel of St Mary of Formosa** (Kapela Marije Formoze; Flaciusova) is all that remains of the 6th-century Benedictine abbey that once stood here. This Byzantine structure was adorned with mosaics, which are now in the city's Archaeological Museum. The chapel is only open for occasional art exhibitions in summer or by prior arrangement through the Archaeological Museum.

MUSEUMS

The **Archaeological Museum** (Arheološki Muzej; ☎ 218 603; Carrarina 3; adult/concession 20/10KN; 🕒 9am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun May-Sep, 9am-2pm Mon-Fri Oct-Apr) presents finds from all over Istria. The permanent exhibits cover prehistory to the Middle Ages, but the accent is on the period from the 2nd century BC to the 6th century AD. Even if you don't enter the museum, be sure to visit the large **sculpture garden** around it, and the **Roman theatre** behind. The garden, entered through 2nd-century twin gates, is the site of concerts in summer.

The **Museum of History** (Povijesni Muzej Istre; ☎ 211 566; Gradinski Uspon 6; adult/concession 15/7KN; 🕒 8am-9pm Jun-Sep, 9am-5pm Oct-May) is in a 17th-century Venetian fortress on a hill in the old town's centre. The meagre exhibits deal mostly with the maritime history of Pula, but the views from the citadel walls are worth a stop.

BEACHES

Pula is surrounded by a half-circle of rocky beaches, each one with its own fan club. Like bars or nightclubs, beaches go in and out of style. The most tourist-packed are undoubtedly those surrounding the hotel complex on the **Verudela Peninsula**, although some locals will dare to be seen at the small turquoise-coloured **Hawaii Beach** near the Hotel Park.

For more seclusion, head out to the wild **Rt Kamenjak** (www.kamenjak.hr, in Croatian; pedestrians & cyclists free, per car/scooter 20/10KN; ☹ 7am-10pm) on the Premantura Peninsula, 10km south of town. Istria's southernmost point, this gorgeous, entirely uninhabited cape has hills, wildflowers (including 30 species of orchid), low Mediterranean shrubs, fruit trees and medicinal herbs. With 30km of virgin beaches and coves, it's criss-crossed with a maze of gravel roads and paths, making it easy to get around. The views to the island of Cres and the peaks of Velebit are extraordinary. Leave no footprints – be sure to use the plastic bag you get at the entrance for all your rubbish. Watch out for strong currents if swimming off the southern cape.

Stop by the **visitor centre** (☎ 575 283; ☹ 9am-9pm summer) in the old school building in the centre of Premantura, which has an informative bilingual display about the park's ecosystems. **Windsurf Bar** (☎ 091 512 3646; www.windsurfing.hr; Camping Village Stupice) nearby rents bikes and windsurfing equipment (board and sail from 70KN per hour). It also offers trial windsurfing courses from 190KN per hour.

Kolobarica Beach, on the southern end of the peninsula, is popular with daring young men who dive from the high cliffs and swim through the shallow caves at the water's edge. Just above it is a delightful beach bar, **Safari** (snacks 25-50KN; ☹ Easter-Sep), half-hidden in the bushes near the beach, about 3.5km from the entrance to the park. A shady place with lush alcoves, found objects and a bar that serves tasty snacks, it's a great place to while away an afternoon.

A fun time to be on Rt Kamenjak is in early November, when **Hallowind** – an extreme sports competition featuring windsurfing, free-climbing and mountain biking – takes place.

Getting to Rt Kamenjak by car is the easiest option, but drive slowly so as not to generate too much dust. A more eco-friendly option is taking city bus 26 from Pula to Premantura (15KN), then renting a bike to get inside the park.

Activities & Tours

There are several diving centres around Pula. At **Orca Diving Center** (☎ 224 422; www.orcadiving.hr; Hotel Histria), on the Verudela Peninsula, you can arrange boat, wreck and introductory dives. Alternatively, try **Diving Hippocampus** (www.hip.pocampus.hr) at Camping Stoja (right).

In addition to windsurfing courses, **Windsurf Bar** (☎ 091 512 3646; www.windsurfing.hr; Camping Village Stupice) in Premantura offers biking (250KN) and kayaking (300KN) excursions.

There's an easy 41km **cycling trail** from Pula to Medulin, following the path of Roman gladiators. Check out **Istria Bike** (www.istria-bike.com), a website run by the tourist board, outlining trails, packages and agencies that offer biking trips. **Edo Sport** (☎ 222 207; www.edosport.com; Narodni Trg 9) organises activity-based excursions.

Most agencies listed on p158 offer trips to Brijuni, Limska Draga, Rovinj and inner Istria, but it's often cheaper to book with one of the boats at the harbour. These run regularly and offer fishing picnics (220KN), two-hour 'panorama' excursions to Brijuni (150KN), and a jaunt to Rovinj, Limska Draga and Crveni Otok (250KN). The only ship that goes to Brijuni and actually stops and tours there is **Martinabela** (www.martinabela.hr; tours 250KN); these trips are offered twice daily in summer.

Sleeping

Pula's peak tourist season runs from the second week of July to the end of August. During this period it's wise to make advance reservations. The tip of the Verudela Peninsula, 4km southwest of the city centre, has been turned into a vast tourist complex replete with hotels and apartments. It's not especially attractive, except for the shady pine forests that cover it, but there are beaches, restaurants, tennis courts and water sports. Any travel agency can give you information and book you into one of the hotels, or you can contact **Arena Turist** (☎ 529 400; www.arenaturist.hr; Splitska 1a).

The travel agencies listed on p158 can find you private accommodation, but there is little available in the town centre. Count on paying from 250KN to 490KN for a double room and from 305KN to 535KN for a two-person apartment.

Camping Puntizela (☎ 517 490; www.puntizela.hr; Puntizela; per adult/tent 40/45KN) This lovely camping ground on a bay 7km northwest of central Pula is open all year. There's a diving centre on site.

Camping Stoja (☎ 387 144; www.arenaturist.hr; Stoja 37; per person/tent 52/30KN; ☹ Apr-Oct) The closest camping ground to Pula, 3km southwest of the centre, has lots of space on the shady promontory, with a restaurant, diving centre and swimming possible off the rocks. Take bus 1 to Stoja.

Youth Hostel (☎ 391 133; www.hfhs.hr; Valsaline 4; dm low-high 85-114KN, caravan 103-134KN; 🚻) This hostel overlooks a beach in Valsaline Bay, 3km south of central Pula. There are dorms and caravans split into two tiny four-bed units, each with bathroom and air-con on request (15KN per day). There's bike rental (80KN per day), and campsites (70/15KN per person/tent) are also available. To get here, take bus 2 or 3 to the 'Piramida' stop, walk back towards the city to the first street, then turn left and look for the hostel sign.

Hotel Riviera (☎ 211 166; www.arenaturist.hr; Splitska 1; s low-high 283-354KN, d 464-600KN) There's plenty of old-world elegance at this grand 19th-century building, but the rooms need a thorough overhaul and the carpets a serious scrub. On the plus side, it's in the centre and the front rooms have water views.

Hotel Omir (☎ 218 186; www.hotel-omir.com; Dobrićeva 6; s low-high 324-450KN, d 450-600KN) The best budget option smack in the heart of town, Hotel Omir has modest but clean and quiet rooms. The more expensive units have air-con, and there's a pizzeria downstairs.

Hotel Galija (☎ 383 802; www.hotel-galija-pula.com; Epulonova 3; s low-high 350-498KN, d 500-718KN; 🚻 📺) A stone's throw from the market in the town centre, this recently built hotel has comfortably outfitted rooms with internet access. Facilities include a sauna, restaurant and even massage on request.

our pick Hotel Scaletta (☎ 541 599; www.hotel-scaletta.com; Flavijevska 26; s low-high 398-498KN, d 598-718KN; 📺) There's a friendly family vibe here, the rooms have tasteful decor and a bagful of trimmings (such as minibars), and the restaurant serves good food. Plus it's just a hop from town.

Hotel Histria (☎ 590 000; www.arenaturist.hr; Verudela; s low-high 400-666KN, d 650-1190KN; 📺 🚻 📺) Its concrete behemoth appearance may be off-putting, but the Histria's extensive facilities, balconied rooms and easy beach access make up for the lack of character. There are both indoor and outdoor swimming pools, tennis courts and a casino. It shares facilities with the new, slightly cheaper Hotel Palma (low-high season double 485KN to 935KN) next door.

Eating CITY CENTRE

There's a number of good eating places in the city centre, although most locals head

out of town for better value and fewer tourists. For cheap bites, browse around the central market.

Markat (☎ 223 284; Trg 1 Svibnja 5; mains from 20KN) As far as self-service spots go, this canteen opposite the central market is worth a stop for its decent cheap grub such as pizza and pasta. You pick what you want and pay at the end of the line.

Jupiter (☎ 214 333; Castropola 42; pizzas 21-37KN) The thin-crust pizza here would make any Italian mama proud; the pasta is yummy, too. There's a terrace upstairs and a 20% discount on Wednesdays.

Vodnjanka (☎ 210 655; Vitezića 4; mains from 30KN; 🚻 closed Sat dinner & Sun) Locals swear by the home cooking here. It's cheap, casual, cash-only and has a small menu that concentrates on simple Istrian dishes. To get here, walk south on Radićeva to Vitezića.

Barbara (☎ 213 501; Kandlerova 5; mains from 45KN) Barbara's food is pretty basic but there's something to it, since the place has been running for 40 years. The location near the harbour is good for people-watching. For 50KN, the daily set menu (fish or meat) is good value.

Kantina (☎ 214 054; Flanatička 16; mains 55-125KN; 🚻 closed Sun) The beamed stone cellar of this Habsburg building has been redone in a modern style. It won't help you fit into your bikini, but you'll appreciate the ravioli *Kantina*, stuffed with *skuta* (ricotta) and *pršut* (prosciutto) in a cheese sauce.

SOUTH OF THE CITY

Pula's best dining is, fittingly, in the most upmarket part of town, Pješćana Uvala, which lies just east across the bay from Verudela Peninsula.

our pick Gina (☎ 387 943; Stoja 23; mains from 60KN) Istrian mainstays such as *maneštra* (a thick vegetable-and-bean soup similar to minestrone) and *fritaja* (omelette), often served with seasonal veggies such as wild asparagus, are prepared with care here, while the pastas are handmade and the veggies picked from the garden. This stylish but low-key eatery near the Stoja camping ground draws in a local crowd. Try the *semifreddo* (semifrozen dessert) with a hot sauce of figs, pine nuts and lavender.

Vela Nera (☎ 219 209; www.velanera.hr; Pješćana Uvala bb; mains from 70KN) A few steps down in the marina, this rival restaurant to Valsabbion

has a more subdued decor, an alfresco terrace overlooking the yachts and reliably excellent seafood specialities.

Milan (☎ 300 200; www.milan1967.hr; Stoja 4; mains from 75KN) An exclusive vibe, seasonal specialities, four sommeliers and even an olive oil expert on staff all create one of the city's best dining experiences. The five-course fish menu (195KN) is well worth it. There's also a 12-room hotel in the back (single/double 590/890KN).

Valsabbion (☎ 218 033; www.valsabbion.hr; Pješčana Uvala IX/26; mains 95-175KN) The creative Croatian cuisine conjured up at this award-winning restaurant, one of Croatia's best, is an epicurean delight. The decor is showy but stunning and the menu gimmicky in its descriptions, but the food is tops. Sampling menus range from 395KN to 555KN. It's also a plush 10-room hotel (double 860KN) with a top-floor spa.

Drinking & Entertainment

You should definitely try to catch a concert in the spectacular amphitheatre; the tourist office has schedules and there are posters around Pula advertising live performances. Although most of the nightlife is out of the town centre, in mild weather the cafés on the Forum and along the pedestrian streets Kandlerova, Flanatička and Sergijevaca are lively people-watching spots. To mix with Pula's young crowd, grab some beers and head to the Lungomare coastal strip, where music blasts out of parked cars.

Aruba (☎ 300 535; Šijanska 1a) On the road to the airport, this popular café-bar-disco is a relaxing hang-out during the day and, come night, a hopping venue for live music and parties. The outdoor terrace gets crowded. Wednesday is salsa night.

Rojc (www.rojcnet.hr; Gajeva 3) For the most underground experience, check the program at Rojc, a converted army barracks that now houses a multimedia art centre and art studios with occasional concerts, exhibitions and other events.

our pick Cabahia (Širolina 4) This artsy hide-away in Veruda has a cosy wood-beamed interior, eclectic decor of old objects, dim lighting, South American flair and a great garden terrace out the back. It hosts concerts and gets packed on weekends. If it's too full, try the more laid-back Bass (Širolina 3), just across the street.

E&D (☎ 89 42 015; Verudela 22) Just above Umbrella Beach on Verudela, you can lounge on the lush outdoor terrace with several levels of seating interspersed with small pools and waterfalls. The sunset views are great and weekend nights are spiced with live DJ tunes.

Pietas Julia (☎ 89 42 015; Riva 20) At this trendy bar right on the harbour, things start to get happening late on weekends, when it stays open till 4am.

Uliks (☎ 219 158; Trg Portarata 1) James Joyce once taught in this apartment building, where you can now linger over a drink at the ground-floor café, pondering *Ulysses* or Pula's pebble beaches.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Pula Airport (☎ 530 105; www.airport-pula.com) is located 6km northeast of town. There are two daily flights to Zagreb (single/return 220/390KN, 40 minutes), one via Zadar. In summer, there are low-cost and charter flights from major European cities. **Croatia Airlines** (☎ 218 909; www.croatiaairlines.hr; Carrarina 8; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) has an office in the city centre.

BOAT

Jadroagent (☎ 210 431; www.jadroagent.hr; Riva 14; ☎ 7am-3pm Mon-Fri) has schedules and tickets for boats connecting Istria with Italy and the islands. It also represents Jadrolinija. For information on connections to Italy, see p309.

Comodore Travel (☎ 211 631; www.comodore-travel.hr; Riva 14, ☎ 8am-8pm Jun-Sep) sells tickets for a catamaran between Pula and Zadar (100KN, five hours), which runs five times weekly from July through early September and twice weekly in June and the rest of September. It also offers a Wednesday boat service to Venice (370KN, 3½ hours) between June and September.

BUS

From the Pula **bus station** (☎ 500 012; Trg 1 Istarske Brigade bb), there are buses heading to Rijeka (86KN to 91KN, two hours) almost hourly. In summer, reserve a seat a day in advance and be sure to sit on the right-hand side of the bus for a stunning view of the Kvarner Gulf.

Other domestic bus services departing from Pula:

Destination	Fare (KN)	Duration (hr)	Daily services
Dubrovnik	568	10½	1
Labin	38	1	8
Poreč	54-65	1-1½	13
Rovinj	35	¾	15
Split	360-396	10	3
Zadar	249-257	7	3
Zagreb	210	4-5½	18

TRAIN

There are two daily trains to Ljubljana (133KN, two hours), with a change in Buzet, and four to Zagreb (125KN to 148KN, 6½ hours), but you must board a bus for part of the trip, from Lupoglav to Rijeka.

There are four daily trains to Buzet (47KN, two hours).

Getting Around

An airport bus (29KN) departs from the bus station several times weekly; check at the bus station. Taxis cost about 100KN.

The city buses of use to visitors are 1, which runs to Camping Stoja, and 2 and 3 to Verudela. The frequency varies from every 15 minutes to every half hour (from 5am to 11.30pm). Tickets are sold at *tisak* (newsstands) for 6KN, or 10KN from the driver.

BRIJUNI ISLANDS

The Brijuni (Brioni in Italian) archipelago consists of two main pine-covered islands and 12 islets off the coast of Istria, just northwest of Pula across the 3km Fažana Channel. Only the two larger islands, Veli Brijun and Mali Brijun, can be visited. Covered by meadows, parks and oak and laurel forests – and some rare plants such as wild cucumber and marine poppy – the islands were pronounced a national park in 1983.

Even though traces of habitation go back more than 2000 years, the islands really owe their fame to Tito, the extravagant Yugoslav leader who turned them into his private retreat.

Each year from 1947 until just before his death in 1980, Tito spent six months at his Brijuni hideaway. To create a lush comfort zone, he introduced subtropical plant species and created a safari park to house the exotic animals gifted to him by world leaders. The blue antelope you'll see roaming around was a present from the former Indian prime minister Nehru, the Somali sheep came from

Ethiopia, while a Zambian leader gave a gift of waterbuck.

At his summer playground, Tito received 90 heads of state and a bevy of movie stars in lavish style. Bijela Vila on Veli Brijun was Tito's 'White House': the place for issuing edicts and declarations as well as entertaining. The islands are still used for official state visits, but are increasingly a favourite on the international yachting circuit, and a holiday spot of choice for royalty from obscure kingdoms and random billionaires who love its bygone aura of glamour.

Every summer, theatre aficionados make their way across the channel to the Minor Fort on Mali Brijun for performances by **Ulysses Theatre** (www.ulysses.hr, in Croatian).

Sights

As you arrive on Veli Brijun, after a 15-minute boat ride from Fažana, you'll dock in front of the Hotel Istra-Neptun, where Tito's illustrious guests once stayed. A guide and miniature tourist train take you on a three-hour island tour beginning with a visit to the 9-hectare **safari park**. Other stops on the tour include the ruins of a **Roman country house**, dating from the 1st century BC, an **archaeological museum** inside a 16th-century citadel, and **St Germain Church**, now a gallery displaying copies of medieval frescoes in Istrian churches.

Most interesting is the **Tito on Brijuni exhibit** in a building behind Hotel Karmen. A collection of stuffed animals occupies the ground floor. Upstairs are photos of Tito with film stars such as Josephine Baker, Sophia Loren, Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton, and world leaders including Indira Gandhi and Fidel Castro. Outside is a 1953 Cadillac that Tito used to show the island to his eminent guests. These days, you can pay 50KN for a photo op inside or rent it for a measly 3000KN for 30 minutes. Bikes (25KN per three hours) and electric carts (100KN per hour) are a cheaper option, and a great way to explore the island.

Sleeping & Eating

There is no private accommodation on Veli Brijun but there are several luxurious villas available for rent through the national park office. Boat transport to and from the mainland is included in the following hotel prices; both are on Veli Brijun. There are no sleeping options on Mali Brijun, and Veli Brijun's hotel restaurants are the only places to eat.

Hotel Karmen (☎ 525 807; www.brijuni.hr; s low-high 267-666KN, d 333-1087KN) Designers and architects from Zagreb flock to this spot on the harbour for its authentic communist design – it's trashy, real and feels as if it's still in the 1950s. Let's just hope they don't renovate.

Hotel Istra-Neptun (☎ 525 807; www.brijuni.hr; s low-high 297-716KN, d 463-1215KN) This is the ultimate in communist chic. Even though it's spruced up and comfy, rooms retain their plain utilitarian look. Each comes with a balcony, some with forest views, too. You can just imagine Tito's famous guests lounging here.

Getting There & Away

You may only visit Brijuni National Park with a group. From the Pula waterfront, a number of excursion boats leave for the islands. Instead of booking an excursion with one of the travel agencies in Pula, Rovinj or Poreč, you could take public bus 21 from Pula to Fažana (15KN, 8km), then sign up for a tour at the **national park office** (☎ 525 883; www.brijuni.hr; tours 110-190KN) near the wharf. It's best to book in advance, especially in summer, and request an English-speaking tour guide. In summer, picnic and swimming excursions to Mali Brijuni (160KN) are also offered.

Also check along the Pula waterfront for excursion boats to Brijuni. Note that many of the two-hour 'panorama' trips from Pula to Brijuni (150KN) don't actually stop at the islands; *Martinabela* (250KN) does (see p160).

ROVINJ

pop 14,234

Rovinj (Rovigno in Italian) is coastal Istria's star attraction. While it can get overrun with tourists in summer, and residents are developing a sharp eye for maximising profits by upgrading hotels and restaurants to four-star status, it remains one of the last true Mediterranean fishing ports. Fishers haul their catch into the harbour in the early morning, followed by a horde of squawking gulls, and mend their nets before lunch. Prayers for a good catch are sent forth at the massive Church of St Euphemia, with its 60m-high tower punctuating the peninsula. Wooded hills and low-rise hotels surround the old town webbed by steep, cobbled streets and piazzas. The 13 green, offshore islands of the Rovinj archipelago make for a pleasant afternoon away, and you can swim from the rocks in the sparkling water below Hotel Rovinj.

History

Originally an island, Rovinj was settled by Slavs in the 7th century and began to develop a strong fishing and maritime industry. In 1199, Rovinj signed an important pact with Dubrovnik to protect its maritime trade, but in the 13th century the threat of piracy forced it to turn to Venice for protection.

From the 16th to 18th centuries, its population expanded dramatically with an influx of immigrants fleeing Turkish invasions of Bosnia and continental Croatia. The town began to develop outside the walls put up by the Venetians and, in 1763, the islet was connected to the mainland and Rovinj became a peninsula.

Although its maritime industry thrived in the 17th century, Austria's 1719 decision to make Trieste and Rijeka free ports dealt the town a blow. The decline of sailing ships further damaged Rovinj's shipbuilding industry and in the middle of the 19th century it was supplanted by the shipyard in Pula. Like the rest of Istria, Rovinj bounced from Austrian to French to Austrian to Italian rule before finally becoming part of postwar Yugoslavia. There's still a considerable Italian community.

Orientation

The old town of Rovinj is contained within an egg-shaped peninsula, with the bus station just to the southeast. There are two harbours: the northern open harbour and the small, protected harbour to the south. About 1.5km south of the old town is the Punta Corrente Forest Park and the wooded cape of Zlatni Rt (Golden Cape), with its age-old oak and pine trees, and several large hotels. A small archipelago lies just offshore; the most popular islands are Crveni Otok (Red Island), Sveta Katarina and Sveti Andrija.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

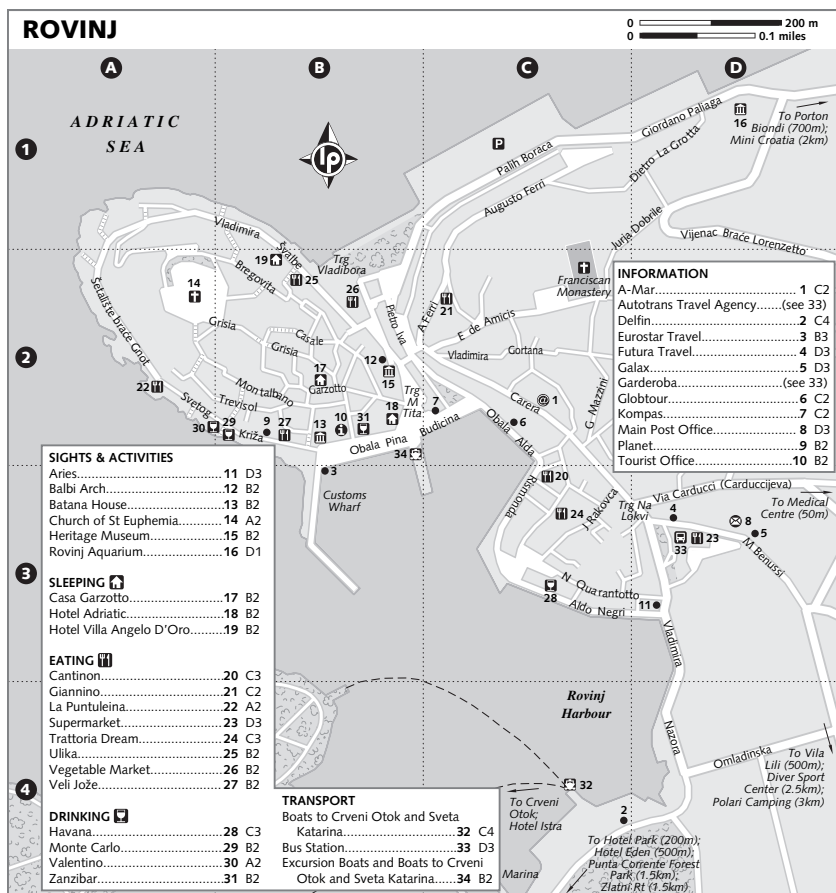
A-mar (☎ 841 211; Carera 26; per 10min 6KN; ☎ 9am-11pm)

LAUNDRY

Galax (☎ 816 130; Istarska bb; per 5kg 70KN; ☎ 7am-8pm)

LEFT LUGGAGE

Garderoba (per hr 1.40KN; ☎ 6.30am-8.15pm Mon-Fri, 7.45am-7.30pm Sat & Sun) At the bus station. Note the three half-hour breaks at 9.15am, 1.30pm and 4.30pm.



MEDICAL SERVICES

Medical Centre (☎ 813 004; Istarska bb)

MONEY

There's an ATM next to the bus station entrance, and banks with ATMs all around town. Most travel agencies will change money.

POST

Main post office (Matteo Benussi 4; ☎ 7am-8pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat) You can make phone calls here.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist office (☎ 811 566; www.tzgrovinj.hr; Pina Budicina 12; ☎ 8am-10pm Jul & Aug, 8am-9pm Jun & Sep) Just off Trg Maršala Tita, it has plenty of brochures and maps.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

Autotrans Travel Agency (☎ 811 218; Trg Na Lokvi 6; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat) Specialises in transfers, excursions and private accommodation. At the bus station.

Eurostar Travel (☎ 813 144; Pina Budicina 1; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm & 5-8pm Sun) Specialises in boat tickets to Venice and Trieste, and books excursions.

Futura Travel (☎ 817 281; www.futura-travel.hr; Matteo Benussi 2; ☎ 8.30am-9pm Mon-Sat, 8.30am-1pm & 5-9pm Sun May-Sep) Private accommodation, money exchange, excursions and transfers.

Globtour (☎ 814 130; www.globtour-turizam.hr; Alda Rismonda 2; ☎ 9am-10pm Jul & Aug, shorter hr rest of year) Excursions, private accommodation and bike rental (60KN per day).

Kompas (☎ 813 211; www.kompas-travel.com; Trg Maršala Tita 5; ☎ 9am–10pm Jul & Aug, shorter hr rest of year) Daily excursions.

Planet (☎ 840 494; Svetog Križa 1; ☎ 9am–10pm Mon–Sat, 9am–1pm & 5–9pm Sun) Doubles as an internet café (6KN per 10 minutes).

Sights

CHURCH OF ST EUPHEMIA

The town's showcase is this imposing **church** (Sveta Eufemija; ☎ 815 615; Petra Stankovića; ☎ 10am–6pm Jul & Aug, 11am–3pm Sep–Jun), dominating the old town from its hilltop location in the middle of the peninsula. Built in 1736, it's the largest baroque building in Istria, reflecting the period during the 18th century when Rovinj was its most populous town.

Inside the church, look for the marble **tomb of St Euphemia** behind the right-hand altar. Rovinj's patron saint was tortured for her Christian faith by Emperor Diocletian before being thrown to the lions in 304. According to legend, the body disappeared one dark and stormy night only to appear off the coast of Rovinj in a spectral boat. The townspeople were unable to budge the heavy sarcophagus until a small boy appeared with two calves and moved it to the top of the hill, where it still stands in the present-day church. On the anniversary of her martyrdom (16 September), devotees congregate here. Modelled on the belfry of St Mark's in Venice, the 60m **bell tower** is topped by a copper statue of St Euphemia, which shows the direction of the wind by turning on a spindle. You can climb it for 10KN.

HERITAGE MUSEUM

This **museum** (☎ 816 720; www.muzej-rovinj.hr; Trg Maršala Tita 11; adult/concession 15/10KN; ☎ 9am–3pm & 7–10pm Tue–Fri, 9am–2pm & 7–10pm Sat & Sun mid–Jun–mid–Sep, 9am–3pm Tue–Sat mid–Sep–mid–Jun) in a baroque palace contains a collection of contemporary art and old masters from Rovinj and other places in Croatia, as well as archaeological finds and a maritime section.

BALBI ARCH & BACKSTREETS

Nearby is the elaborate Balbi Arch, built in 1679 on the location of the former town gate. The top of the arch is ornamented with a Turkish head on the outside and a Venetian head on the inside. The cobbled street of **Grisia**, lined with galleries where local artists sell their work, leads uphill from behind the arch to St Euphemia.

The winding narrow backstreets that spread around Grisia are an attraction in themselves. Windows, balconies, portals and squares are a pleasant confusion of styles – Gothic, Renaissance, baroque and neoclassical.

Notice the unique *fumaioli* (exterior chimneys), built during the population boom when entire families lived in a single room with a fireplace.

BATANA HOUSE

On the harbour, **Batana House** (☎ 812 593; www.batana.org; Pina Budicina 2; admission free, with guide 15KN; ☎ 10am–1pm & 7–10pm Tue–Sun May–Sep, 10am–1pm Tue–Sun Oct–Apr) is a museum dedicated to the *batana*, a flat-bottomed fishing boat that stands as a symbol of Rovinj's seafaring and fishing tradition. The multimedia exhibits inside this 17th-century townhouse have interactive displays, excellent captions and audio with *bitinada*, which are typical fisher's songs. Check out the *spacio*, the ground-floor cellar where wine was kept, tasted and sold amid much socialising.

ROVINJ AQUARIUM

Great for children, the **aquarium** (☎ 804 712; Giordano Paliaga 5; adult/child 20/10KN; ☎ 9am–9pm Jul & Aug, 9am–8pm Easter–Jun, Sep & Oct) exhibits a good collection of Adriatic marine life. Founded in 1891, it is part of the local centre for maritime research and provides an enlightening lesson on the local sea fauna.

MINI CROATIA

Two kilometres from the town centre on the road to Pazin, **Mini Croatia** (☎ 830 877; Turina bb; adult/concession 25/10KN; ☎ 9am–9pm Jul & Aug, 10am–6pm Apr–Jun, Sep & Oct) is also popular with kids. It's a theme park with miniature models of Croatia's landmark buildings, monuments, cities and landscapes, and a small zoo with indigenous animals.

PUNTA CORRENTE FOREST PARK

When you've seen enough of the town, follow the waterfront on foot or by bike past Hotel Park to this verdant park, locally known as Zlatni Rt, about 1.5km south. Covered in oak and pine groves and boasting 10 species of cypress, the park was established in 1890 by Baron Hütterott, an Austrian admiral who kept a villa on Crveni Otok. Here you can swim off the rocks or just sit and admire the offshore islands.

Activities

Most people hop aboard a boat for **swimming, snorkelling and sunbathing**. A trip to Crveni Otok or Sveta Katarina is easily arranged (see p169). **Diver Sport Center** (☎ 816 648; www.diver.hr; Villas Rubin) is the largest operation in Rovinj, offering boat dives from 210KN with equipment rental. The main attraction is the **Baron Gautsch wreck**, an Austrian passenger steamer, sunk in 1914 by a sea mine, in 40m of water.

There are also 80 **rock-climbing** routes in a former Venetian stone quarry at Zlatni Rt, many suitable for beginners. Bird-watchers can bike to the **ornithological reserve** at Palud Marsh, 8km southwest of Rovinj.

Biking around Rovinj and the Punta Corrente Forest Park is a superb way to spend an afternoon. See p169 for bike rental options.

Tours

Most travel agencies listed on p165 sell day trips to Venice (450KN to 520KN), Plitvice (580KN) and Brijuni (380KN to 420KN). There are also fish picnics (250KN), panoramic cruises (100KN) and trips to Limska Draga Fjord (150KN; see p169). These can be slightly cheaper if booked through one of the independent operators that line the waterfront; **Delfin** (☎ 813 266) is reliable.

There are more exciting options, such as **4WD safaris** in Istria's interior (330KN to 430KN) and **canoe safaris** to the scenic Gorski Kotar region (510KN). To explore the archipelago in a sea kayak, book a trip through **Aries** (☎ 811 659; Obala Vladimira Nazora bb). These 9km jaunts take in two or three islands and a lighthouse for 270KN, lunch included.

Festivals & Events

The city's annual events include various regattas from late April through August. The **Rovinj Summer Festival** is a series of classical concerts that takes place in the Church of St Euphemia and the Franciscan monastery.

The second Sunday in August sees the town's most renowned event, when narrow Grisia becomes an open-air **art exhibition**. Anyone from children to professional painters display their work in churches, studios and on the street.

Sleeping

Rovinj has become Istria's destination of choice for hordes of summertime tourists,

so reserving in advance is strongly recommended. Prices have been rising steadily and probably will continue to do so, as the city gears up to reach elite status.

If you want to stay in private accommodation, there is little available in the old town, where there's also no parking and accommodation costs are higher. Double rooms start at 180KN in the high season, with a small discount for single occupancy; two-person apartments start at 380KN. Out of season, apartments go for 245KN.

The surcharge for a stay of less than three nights is 50% and guests who stay only one night are punished with a 100% surcharge. Outside summer months, you should be able to bargain the surcharge away. You can book directly from one of the travel agencies listed on p165. Planet has some good bargains.

Except for a few private options, most hotels and camping grounds in the area are managed by **Maistra** (www.maistra.com), which unveiled the new Monte Mulini four-star hotel in summer 2008 and is slated to open the even more luxurious Hotel Lone in summer 2009.

Porton Biondi (☎ 813 557; www.portonbiondi.hr; per person/tent 40/23KN; ☞ Apr-Oct) This camping ground that sleeps 1200 is about 700m from the old town.

Polari Camping (☎ 800 501; www.maistra.com; per person/site 57/80KN; ☞ ☞) Right on 2km of beach, it's about 3km southeast of town and has many facilities, such as swimming pools, a supermarket, restaurants, an internet point and playgrounds.

Hotel Istra (☎ 802 500; www.maistra.com; Otok Sv Andrija; s low-high 328-730KN, d 436-976KN; ☞ ☞ ☞) The renowned wellness centre and spa is the chief asset of this four-star complex, a 10-minute boat ride away on Sveti Andrija Island. There's also a restaurant in an old castle.

Vila Lili (☎ 840 940; www.hotel-vililili.hr; Mohorovičića 16; s low-high 333-385KN, d 505-730KN; ☞ ☞) Bright rooms have all the three-star perks, including air-con and minibars, in a small modern house a short walk out of town. There are also a couple of pricier suites.

Hotel Park (☎ 811 077; www.maistra.com; IM Ronjgova bb; s low-high 343-589KN, d 454-784KN; ☞ ☞ ☞) It's conveniently close to the ferry dock for Crveni Otok and has such crowd-pleasing amenities as two outdoor pools and a sauna.

Hotel Adriatic (☎ 815 088; www.maistra.com; Pina Budicna bb; s low-high 392-589KN, d 522-784KN; ☞ ☞ ☞)

The location right on the harbour is excellent and the rooms spick and span and well equipped, but on the kitschy side. The pricier sea-view rooms have more space.

Our pick Casa Garzotto (☎ 811 884; www.casa-garzotto.com; Via Garzotto 8; s low-high 510-760KN, d 650-1015KN; (P) ♻️ 🚰) Each of the four nicely outfitted studio apartments here have original details, a stylish touch and up-to-the-minute amenities. The historic townhouse couldn't be better placed. Bikes are complimentary.

Hotel Eden (☎ 800 400; www.maistra.com; Luja Adamovića bb; s low-high 533-917KN, d 626-1078KN; (P) ♻️ 🚰 🚿) While it's no quiet hideaway – there are 325 rooms in the complex – the Hotel Eden features sports grounds, a gym, a sauna and indoor and outdoor pools. There's plenty to do in all weather and the wooded location is a plus.

Hotel Villa Angelo D'Oro (☎ 840 502; www.angelodoro.hr; Vladimira Švalbe 38-42; s low-high 619-990KN, d 1005-1762KN; (P) ♻️) In a renovated Venetian townhouse in the town centre, the 24 plush rooms and (pricier) suites of this boutique hotel have lots of antiques plus mod cons aplenty. There's a sauna, a jacuzzi and a lush interior terrace, a great place for a drink amid ancient stone.

Eating

Picnickers can get supplies at the supermarket next to the bus station or at one of the Konzum stores around town. For a cheap bite, pick up a *burek* (greasy pastry stuffed with meat or cheese) from one of the kiosks near the vegetable market.

Most of the restaurants that line the harbour offer the standard fish and meat mainstays at similar prices. For a more gourmet experience, you'll need to bypass the water vistas. Note that many restaurants shut their doors between lunch and dinner.

Cantion (☎ 816 075; Alda Risononda 18; mains 29-74KN) A fishing theme runs through this high-ceilinged canteen that specialises in fresh seafood at low prices. The Batana fish plate for two is great value.

Veli Jože (☎ 816 337; Svetog Križa 3; mains from 35KN) Graze on good Istrian standards, either in the eclectic interior crammed with knick-knacks or at the outdoor tables with water views.

Giannino (☎ 813 402; Augusto Ferri 38; mains from 45KN) Tasty old-school Mediterranean staples are served in the spacious two-level interior or on a small pavement terrace.

Trattoria Dream (☎ 830 613; Joakima Rakovca 18; mains from 75KN) Tucked away in the maze of narrow streets, with its two earthy-coloured outdoor terraces, this stylish trattoria does flavourful dishes, such as salt-baked sea bass, and some global favourites, including chili con carne and chicken curry.

La Puntuleina (☎ 813 186; Svetog Križa 38; mains 100-160KN) Sample creative Med cuisine on three alfresco terraces, from traditional recipes, such as *žgvacet* (a type of stew) of calamari, to revamped ones, including truffle-topped fish fillet. Pasta dishes are more affordable (from 55KN). At night, grab a cushion and sip a cocktail on the rocks below this converted townhouse. Reservations recommended.

Ulika (Vladimira Švalbe 34) For an evening snack of local cheese, cured meats and tasty small bites, head to this place, a tiny tavern a few doors down from Angelo D'Oro. Opening hours vary, but in the high season (July and August) it's usually open from 6pm to 11pm.

Drinking

Havana (Aldo Negri bb) Tropical cocktails, Cuban cigars, straw parasols and the shade of tall pine trees make this open-air cocktail bar a popular spot to chill and watch the ships go by.

Monte Carlo (☎ 830 683; Svetog Križa 21) More quiet and down to earth than its showy neighbour, Valentino, this low-key café-bar has great views of the sea and Sveta Katarina across the way.

Zanzibar (☎ 813 206; Pina Budicina bb) Indonesian wood, palms, wicker lounge chairs and subdued lighting on the huge outdoor terrace of this cocktail bar create a tropical and definitely upmarket vibe.

Valentino (☎ 830 683; Svetog Križa 28) Premium cocktail prices on the terrace of this high-end spot include fantastic sunset views, on the water's edge.

Getting There & Away

There are buses from Rovinj to Pula (35KN, 40 minutes, 13 daily), Dubrovnik (593KN, 16 hours, one daily), Labin (69KN, two hours, two daily), Poreč (37KN, one hour, eight daily), Rijeka (112KN, 3½ hours, four daily), Zagreb (173KN to 255KN, five hours, four daily) and Split (417KN, 11 hours, one daily). For info on connections to Italy, see p309.

The closest train station is at Kanfanar, 20km away on the Pula–Divača line; buses connect Kanfanar and Rovinj.

Getting Around

You can rent bicycles at many agencies around town, including Globtour (p165) for 60KN per day. The cheapest bike rental (5KN per hour) is at the old town entrance, by the Vladibora parking lot and market.

AROUND ROVINJ

A popular day trip from Rovinj is a boat ride to lovely **Crveni Otok** (Red Island). Only 1900m long, the island includes two islets, Sveti Andrija and Maškin, connected by a causeway. In the 19th century, Sveti Andrija became the property of Baron Hütterott who transformed it into a luxuriantly wooded park. The Hotel Istra complex now dominates **Sveti Andrija**, but its small gravel beaches and playground make it popular with families. **Maškin** is quieter, more wooded and with plenty of secluded coves, making it a winner with naturists. Bring a mask for snorkelling around the rocks.

Right across the peninsula is Sveta Katarina, a small island forested by a Polish count in 1905 and now home to **Hotel Katarina** (☎ 804 100; www.maistra.com; Otok Sveta Katarina; s low-high 533-664KN, d 626-943KN; 🚶).

In summer, there are 18 boats daily to Sveta Katarina (return 15KN, five minutes) and on to Crveni Otok (return 15KN, 15 minutes). They leave from just opposite Hotel Adriatic and also from the Delfin ferry dock near Hotel Park.

The **Limska Draga Fjord** (Limski Kanal) is the most dramatic sight in Istria. About 10km long, 600m wide and with steep valley walls that rise to a height of 100m, the inlet was formed when the Istrian coastline sank during the last Ice Age, allowing the sea to rush in and fill the Draga Valley. The deep-green bay has a hillside cave on the southern side where the 11th-century hermit priest Romualdo lived and held ceremonies. Fishing, oyster and mussel farming, and excursion boating are the only activities in the fjord.

At the fjord, you'll find souvenir stands and two waterside restaurants that serve up superbly fresh shells, right from the source. Of the two, **Viking** (☎ 448 223; Limski Kanal 1; mains from 55KN) is the better option, where you can get oysters (9KN per piece), great scallops (22KN per piece) and mussels, or fish priced by the kilo on a terrace overlooking the fjord. There's also a picnic area and a swimming cove behind the other restaurant (named Fjord).

Small excursion boats will take you on a one-hour boat ride for 60KN per person (negotiable); these run frequently in July and August, and sporadically in June and September. To get to the fjord, you can take an excursion from Rovinj, Pula or Poreč or follow the signs to Limski Kanal past the village of Sveti Lovreč.

POREČ

pop 17,000

Poreč (Parenzo in Italian; Parentium in Roman times) and the surrounding region are entirely devoted to summer tourism. The ancient Roman town of Poreč is the centrepiece of a vast system of tourist resorts that stretches north and south along the west coast of Istria. The largest is Zelena Laguna, with a full range of facilities and accommodation.

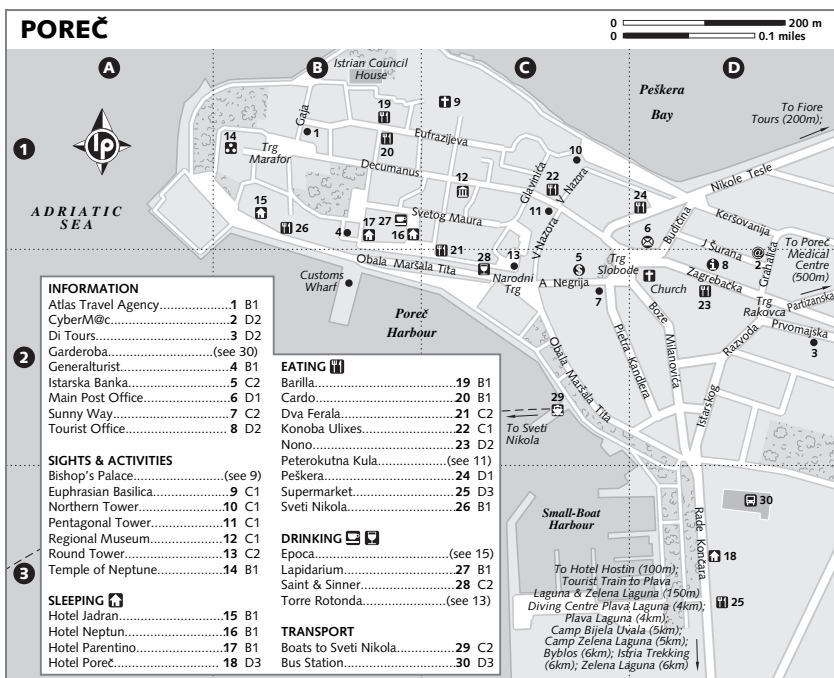
These holiday villages and tourist camps offer a rather industrialised experience, with too much concrete and plastic and too many tour buses for some tastes. The hotels, restaurants, tourist offices and travel agencies, however, are almost universally staffed by friendly, multilingual people who make a real effort to welcome visitors. While this is not the place for a quiet getaway (unless you come out of season), there's a World Heritage-listed basilica, well-developed tourist infrastructure and the pristine Istrian interior within easy reach.

History

The coast of Poreč measures 37km, islands included, but the ancient town is confined to a peninsula 400m long and 200m wide. The Romans conquered the region in the 2nd century BC and made Poreč an important administrative centre from which they were able to control a sweep of land from the Limska Draga Fjord to the Mirna River. Poreč's street plan was laid out by the Romans, who divided the town into rectangular parcels marked by the longitudinal Dekumanus and the latitudinal Cardo.

With the collapse of the Western Roman Empire, Poreč came under Byzantine rule, which lasted from the 6th to 8th centuries. It was during this time that the Euphrasian Basilica, with its magnificent frescoes, was erected. In 1267, Poreč was forced to submit to Venetian rule.

The Istrian plague epidemics hit Poreč particularly hard, with the town's population dropping to about 100 in the 17th century.



With the decline of Venice, the town oscillated between Austrian and French dominance before the Italian occupation that lasted from 1918 to 1943. Upon the capitulation of Italy, Poreč was occupied by the Germans and damaged by Allied bombing in 1944 before becoming part of postwar Yugoslavia and, more recently, Croatia.

Orientation

The compact old town is squeezed onto the peninsula and packed with thousands of shops and agencies. The ancient Roman Decumanus, with its polished stones, is still the main street running through the peninsula's middle. Hotels, travel agencies and excursion boats are on the quayside Obala Maršala Tita, which runs from the small-boat harbour to the tip of the peninsula. The bus station is just outside the old town, behind Rade Končara.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

CyberM@c (☎ 427 075; Mire Grahalića 1; per hr 42KN; ☎ 8am-10pm) A full-service computer centre.

LEFT LUGGAGE

Garderoba (per day 22KN; ☎ 7am-9pm) At the bus station.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Poreč Medical Centre (☎ 451 611; Maura Gioseffija 2)

MONEY

You can exchange currency at any of the many travel agencies or banks, including **Istarska Banka** (Alda Negrija 2). There are ATMs all around town.

POST

Main post office (Trg Slobode 14; ☎ 8am-noon & 6-8pm Mon-Sat) Has a telephone centre.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist office (☎ 451 293; www.to-porec.com; Zagrebačka 9; ☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm & 6-10pm Sun Jul & Aug, 8am-4pm Mon-Sat Sep-Jun)

TRAVEL AGENCIES

Atlas Travel Agency (☎ 434 933; www.atlas-croatia.com; Eufrazijeva 63; ☎ 9am-2pm & 6-9pm) Books excursions.

Di Tours (☎ 432 100; www.di-tours.hr; Prvomajska 2; ☎ 9am–10pm Jul & Aug, to 9pm Jun & Sep) Finds private accommodation.

Fiore Tours (☎ 431 397; www.fioretours.com; Mate Vlašića 6; ☎ 8am–10pm Jul & Aug, to 9pm Jun & Sep) Also handles private accommodation.

Generaltourist (☎ 451 188; www.generaltourist.com; Obala Maršala Tita 19; ☎ 8am–7pm Mon–Fri, to 1pm Sat) Books excursions, transfers and villa accommodation in Istria's interior.

Sunny Way (☎ 452 021; sunnyway@pu.t-com.hr; Alda Negrija 1; ☎ 9am–9pm Jul & Aug) Specialises in boat tickets and excursions to Italy and around Croatia.

Sights

The main reason to visit Poreč is to see the 6th-century **Euphrasian Basilica** (☎ 431 635; Eufrazijeva bb; admission free, to climb belfry 10KN; ☎ 7am–8pm Apr–mid-Oct, or by appointment), a World Heritage – listed site and one of Europe's finest intact examples of Byzantine art. Built on the site of a 4th-century oratory, the sacral complex includes a church, atrium and baptistry. What packs in the crowds are the glittering wall **mosaics** in the apse. These 6th-century masterpieces feature Biblical scenes, archangels and Istrian martyrs. Notice the group to the left, which shows Bishop Euphrasius, who commissioned the basilica, with a model of the church in his hand. The **belfry**, accessed through the octagonal baptistry, affords an invigorating view of the old town.

Also worth a visit is the adjacent **Bishop's Palace** (admission 10KN; ☎ 9am–7pm Apr–mid-Oct, or by appointment), which contains a display of ancient stone sculptures, religious paintings and 4th-century mosaics from the original oratory.

Trg Marafor is where the Roman forum used to stand and public gatherings took place; the original pavement has been preserved along the northern row of houses on the square. West of this rectangular square, inside a small park, are the ruins of the 2nd-century **Temple of Neptune**, dedicated to the god of sea. Northwest of the square are the remains of a large temple from the beginning of the 1st century.

Continue east of Trg Marafor along Decumanus and you'll see a medley of Gothic and Romanesque buildings, as well as the baroque Sinčić Palace. The palace houses the **Regional Museum** (www.muzejporec.hr; Decumanus 9), which is currently under renovation.

There are three 15th-century towers that date from the Venetian rule and once formed the city walls: the gothic **Pentagonal Tower** at

the beginning of Decumanus; the **Round Tower** on Narodni Trg; and the **Northern Tower** on Peškera Bay.

From May to October there are passenger boats (15KN) travelling to **Sveti Nikola**, the small island that lies opposite Poreč harbour. They depart every 30 minutes to an hour from the wharf on Obala Maršala Tita.

Activities

Nearly every activity you might want to enjoy is outside the town in either Plava Laguna or Zelena Laguna. Most of the sports and recreational centres – there are 20 – are affiliated with hotels and have tennis, basketball and volleyball courts, windsurfing, rowing, bungee jumping, paintball, golf, water-skiing, parasailing, boat rentals, go-carting and canoeing. If the weather turns bad, you can always work out in the fitness centre or get a massage at one of the spas. For details, pick up the yearly *Poreč Info* booklet from the tourist office, which lists all the recreational facilities in the area.

The gentle rolling hills of the interior and the well-marked paths make **cycling** and **hiking** a prime way to explore the region. The tourist office issues a free map of roads and trails stemming from Poreč, along with suggested routes. You can rent a bike at many places around town; try the outlet just below the **Hotel Poreč** (☎ 098 335 838) for 70KN per day.

There is also horse riding in Zelena Laguna at **Istra Trekking** (☎ 091 885 8403; www.istratrekking.com; Zelena Laguna bb). It offers hour-long rides (140KN) and weeklong tours around Istria, sleeping in different agritourism places (700KN per person per day).

There is good diving in and around shoals and sandbanks in the area, as well as at the nearby *Coriolanus*, a British Royal Navy warship that sank in 1945. At **Diving Centre Plava Laguna** (☎ 098 367 619; www.plava-laguna-diving.hr), boat dives start at 100KN (more for caves or wrecks) or 220KN for full equipment rental.

Festivals & Events

During July and August there's **Poreč Annale**, one of the oldest Croatian contemporary art exhibitions, curated around a single theme. The **Street Art Festival**, held for a week in August, attracts international artists who perform anything from acrobatics to theatre and music in the old town squares and streets. **Classical music concerts** take place at the basilica

during July and August several times a week at 9pm; tickets (50KN) can be purchased one hour before the concert at the venue. There are **jazz concerts** (www.jazzinlap.com) between late June and early September, held once a week in the courtyard of the regional museum, beside Lapidarium (opposite). Free concerts take place on Trg Slobode as part of **Poreč Summer**. The tourist office publishes a free *Poreč Day by Day* booklet that lists seasonal events.

Sleeping

Accommodation in Poreč is plentiful but gets booked ahead of time, so advance reservations are essential if you come in July or August.

There is a handful of hotels in the old town but most of the camping grounds, hotels, apartment complexes and resorts spread along the coast north and south of Poreč. The major tourist complexes are in Brulo, 2km south of town, Plava Laguna, 4km south of the old town, and Zelena Laguna, 2km further. North of Poreč are the tourist settlements of Borik and Špadići. Some 20 hotels and a dozen apartment complexes are planted in these wooded areas. Most hotels are managed by **Valamar Hotels & Resorts** (☎ 465 100; www.valamar.com) or **Plava Laguna** (☎ 410 101; www.plavalaguna.hr). All hotels are open from May to October; only a few remain open all year. For stays of less than three nights, expect a 20% surcharge during summer.

If you want to find private accommodation, consult the travel agencies listed on p170. Expect to pay between 200KN and 250KN for a double room in the high season or 280KN to 350KN for a two-person apartment, plus a 30% surcharge for stays of less than four nights. There is a limited number of rooms available in the old town, where there's no parking. Look for the *Domus Bonus* certificate of quality in private accommodation.

Camp Zelena Laguna (☎ 410 700; www.plavalaguna.hr; per adult/site 55/75KN; ☞ Apr-Sep) Well equipped for sports, this camping ground 5km from the old town can house up to 2700 people. It has access to many beaches, including a naturist one.

Camp Bijela Uvala (☎ 410 551; www.plavalaguna.hr; per adult/site 55/75KN; ☞ Apr-Sep; ☞) It can be crowded, as it houses up to 6000, but there are two outdoor pools and the facilities of Zelena Laguna are a stone's throw away.

Hotel Poreč (☎/fax 451 811; www.hotelporec.com; Rade Končara 1; s low-high 285-495KN, d 395-730KN; ☞) While the rooms inside this concrete box have

uninspiring views over the bus station and the shopping centre opposite, they're acceptable and an easy walk from the old town. It's open all year and has a small spa.

our pick Hotel Hostin (☎ 408 800; www.hostin.hr; Rade Končara 4; s low-high 300-650KN, d 395-920KN; ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞) Each of the 39 well-equipped rooms comes with balconies at this charming little place in verdant parkland just steps from the bus station. An indoor swimming pool, fitness room, Turkish bath and sauna are nice perks, as is the pebble beach only 70m away.

Hotel Neptun (☎ 400 800; www.valamar.com; Obala Maršala Tita 15; s low-high 370-515KN, d 500-785KN; ☞) While this is the best of the harbour-front hotels, the rooms are unspectacular (and slated for renovation). If you pay extra for sea vistas, you'll also get noise from the promenade below. It has two cheaper annexes further down the waterfront: Hotel Jadran (double low-high 250KN to 670KN) has spacious twins, some with balconies, while Hotel Parentino (265KN to 740KN) has no-frills doubles in a high-ceilinged 19th-century building.

Eating

Peškera (☎ 432 890; Nikole Tesle bb; meals 35-60KN; ☞ 10am-9pm) Seemingly stuck in the socialist era, this self-service canteen serves simple, cheap meals such as fried chicken and grilled calamari. Just outside the northeastern corner of the old city wall, it has a sea-facing terrace.

Nono (☎ 435 088; Zagrebačka 4; pizzas 45-80KN) Nono serves the best pizza in town, with puffy crusts and toppings such as truffles. Other dishes are tasty, too.

Barilla (☎ 452 742; Eufrazijeva 26; mains from 45KN) Comforting Italian concoctions in all shapes and forms – penne, tagliatelle, fusilli, tortellini, gnocchi and so on. There are tables on the square and a quieter patio out the back. Try the spaghetti with shellfish (170KN for two). Across the square is its sister restaurant, Cardo (Carda Maximusa 8; mains from 55KN), which serves up meat, fish and international standards.

our pick Dva Ferala (☎ 433 416; Obala Maršala Tita 13a; mains from 50KN) Savour well-prepared Istrian specialities, such as *istarski tris* for two – a copious trio of homemade pastas (110KN) – on the terrace of this pleasant *konoba* (tavern).

Peterokutna Kula (☎ 451 378; Decumanus 1; mains from 65KN) Inside the medieval Pentagonal Tower, this upmarket restaurant has an alfresco

terrace in a stone vault, where a full spectrum of fish and meat can be yours to taste. The oven-baked sea bass is particularly good.

Konoba Ulives (☎ 451 132; Decumanus 2; mains from 75KN) The fish and shellfish are par excellence at this tavern with a patio just off Decumanus. The Poseidon plate for two (140KN) is good value, or try the pasta with scampi and champagne (100KN).

Sveti Nikola (☎ 423 018; Obala Maršala Tita 23; meals from 80KN) Culinary innovation is part of the deal at this elegant restaurant by the water. You can't go wrong with the set menus for lunch (meat/fish 80/95KN) and dinner (105/120KN). The fish fillet with asparagus and black truffles is a sumptuous experience.

A large supermarket and department store are situated next to Hotel Poreč, near the bus station.

Drinking & Entertainment

Saint & Sinner (☎ 434 390; Obala Maršala Tita 12) A B&W plastic theme runs through this latest opening on the waterfront, where the young ones sip chococinos during the day and strawberry caipiroskas at night.

Epoca (Hotel Jadran, Obala Maršala Tita 24) Kick back and watch the sun go down by the water, grab a quickie espresso or have a leisurely nightcap cocktail at this café-bar.

Torre Rotonda (Narodni Trg 3a) Take the steep stairs to the top of the historic Round Tower and grab a table at the open-air café to watch the action on the quays.

Lapidarium (Svetog Maura 10) Gorgeous bar with a large courtyard in the back of the regional museum and a series of antique-filled inner rooms. Wednesday is jazz night in summer, with alfresco live music.

Byblos (www.byblos.hr; Zelena Laguna bb) On Fridays, celeb guest DJs such as David Morales and Eric Morillo crank out house tunes at this humongous open-air club, one of Croatia's hottest places to party. Boogie to a mixed bag of dance music on Saturday nights.

Getting There & Away

For information on boat connections to Italy, inquire at Sunny Way travel agency (p171) and see p310. Sunny Way sells tickets for the fast catamaran to Venice, which runs daily in season (single/return 430/520KN), as well as to Trieste with **Ustica Lines** (www.usticalines.it), which runs daily except Monday (single/return 150/280KN, two hours).

There are daily buses from the **bus station** (☎ 432 153; Rade Končara 1) to Rovinj (38KN, 40 minutes, seven), Zagreb (217KN, five hours, seven), Rijeka (81KN, two hours, 11) and Pula (50KN, one to 1½ hours, 11). Between Poreč and Rovinj the bus runs along the Limska Draga Fjord. To see it clearly, sit on the right-hand side if you're southbound, or the left if you're northbound.

The nearest train station is at Pazin, 37km to the east. There are about 10 buses daily from Poreč (34KN, 30 minutes).

Getting Around

From March to early October, a tourist train operates regularly from Šetalište Antuna Štifanića by the marina to Plava Laguna (10KN) and Zelena Laguna (15KN). There's a passenger boat (25KN) that makes the same run from the ferry landing every hour from 8.30am till midnight. The frequent buses to Vrsar stop at Plava Laguna, Zelena Laguna and the other resorts south of the city.

THE ISTRIAN INTERIOR

Head inland from the Istrian coast and you'll notice that crowds dissipate, hotel complexes disappear and what emerges is an unspoiled countryside of medieval hilltop towns, pine forests, fertile valleys and vineyard-dotted hills. The pace of daily life slows down considerably, defined less by the needs of tourists and more by the demands of harvesting grapes, hunting for truffles, picking wild asparagus and cultivating olive groves. Farmhouses are opening their doors to visitors looking for an authentic holiday experience, rustic taverns in the middle of nowhere serve up slow-food delights, and Croatia's top winemakers provide tastings in their cellars. Remote hilltop villages that once seemed doomed to ruin are attracting colonies of artists and artisans as well as well-heeled foreigners. While many compare the region to Tuscany and the Italian influence can't be denied, it's a world all its own – unique, magnetic and wholesome.

You'll need a car to explore this area, as the bus and train connections are very sporadic. Good news – you're never far from the sea!

LABIN pop 9000

Perched on a hilltop just above the coast, Labin is the undisputed highlight of eastern Istria,

ISTRIA'S OTHER HIGHLIGHTS

A single chapter of a guidebook doesn't fit Istria's many highlights, so here's a rundown of what else awaits you should you wish to explore more.

Novigrad is an attractive old town crammed onto a peninsula, only 20 minutes north of Poreč. It has one of Istria's best restaurants, **Damir i Ornella** (☎ 758 134; Zidine 5), famous for its raw fish specialities. The fishing village of **Savudrija** is Croatia's westernmost point and home to Istria's oldest lighthouse, built in 1818. The **lighthouse** (www.lighthouses-croatia.com) is now available for weekly rentals. **Vrsar**, located roughly between Rovinj and Poreč, is a delightful fishing town rising on a hilltop in a jumble of medieval buildings. It's quieter than its neighbours and has an outdoor sculpture park of renowned Croatian sculptor Dušan Džamonja.

In the interior, art aficionados should head to **Beram**, near Pazin, to take in the amazing 15th-century frescoes in the Church of Saint Mary of Škriljine; the Pazin tourist office (p177) has details. Within easy reach of Poreč is the **Baredine Cave** (www.baredine.com), with subterranean chambers replete with stalagmites and stalactites; various agencies offer excursions. Near Labin is Istria's youngest town, **Raša**, a showcase of modernist functionalist architecture that sprang up under Mussolini's rule in the 1930s. While here, check out the **Liburna Reserve** (www.rezervatliburna.hr) a few kilometres out, which aims to preserve indigenous breeds of donkeys and has an ethnographic museum.

The ancient stone town of **Bale** in the southwest is one of Istria's hidden gems. Here the artsy bar and restaurant **Kamene Priče** (www.kameneprice.com) draws in a bohemian crowd for its jazz fest in early August, delicious food and various offbeat events. On a hilltop north of Motovun is **Oprtalj**, less developed than its neighbour, with cypress trees and fantastic views of the surrounding scenery. Here you'll find the rustic shop-resto **Loggia** (www.loggia.hr), the place to sample Istrian snacks such as *ombolo* (boneless pork loin), pancetta and sheep's cheese. Don't miss the abandoned ancient village of **Kotli**, located 1.5km from the main road between Hum and Roč on the Mirna River. This protected rural complex has preserved courtyards, outer staircases, arched passages and picturesque chimneys.

and its historical and administrative centre. The showcase here is the old town, a beguiling potpourri of steep streets, cobblestone alleys and pastel houses festooned with stone ornamentation. What surrounds it below is a grubby new town that has sprouted as a result of the coal mining industry. Labin was the mining capital of Istria until the 1970s, its hill mined so extensively that the town began to collapse. Mining stopped in 1999, the necessary repairs were undertaken and the town surfaced with a new sense of itself as a tourist destination.

It has plenty to offer for a day-long visit. The labyrinth of its old town hides an unusual museum in a loggia, a wealth of Venetian-inspired churches and palaces, and a sprinkling of craft shops. The coastal resort of Rabac, 5km southwest of Labin, is overdeveloped with tightly packed holiday houses, hotels and apartment blocks, but its beaches are decent and it can be a nice way to spend an afternoon.

Orientation

Labin is divided into two parts: the hilltop old town with most of the sights and

attractions; and Podlabin, a much newer section below the hill, with most of the town's shops, restaurants and services. Buses stop at Trg 2 Marta in Podlabin, from where you can catch a local bus to the old town. This bus continues on to Rabac in the peak season.

Information

Health service (☎ 855 333; Kature Nove bb)

Main tourist office (☎ /fax 855 560; www.rabac-labin.com; Aldo Negri 20; ☎ 7am-3pm Mon-Fri) The main tourist office is just below the old town.

Post office (Titov Trg bb; ☎ 7am-8pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat) In the old town.

Privredna Banka (Trg 2 Marta bb) At the bus stop; has an ATM.

Tourist office annexe (☎ /fax 852 399; Titov Trg 10; ☎ 8am-9pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm & 6-9pm Sun Jun-Sep, 8am-3pm Mon-Fri Oct-May) At the entrance to the old town.

Veritas (☎ 852 758; www.istra-veritas.hr; Ulica Sv Katarine 4; ☎ 8am-3pm & 5-8pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-1pm & 5-8pm Sat, 9am-noon & 5-8pm Sun) The only travel agency in the old town; specialises in private accommodation.

Sights

Wandering the streets of Labin is the highlight. The **Town Museum** (Gradski Muzej; ☎ 852 477; 1 Maja 6; adult/concession 15/10KN; ☎ 10am-1pm & 6-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun Jul-Sep, 7am-3pm Mon-Fri Oct-Jun) is housed in the baroque 18th-century Battiala-Lazzarini Palace. The ground floor is devoted to archaeological finds, upstairs is a collection of musical instruments with some fun interactive features, while the top floor has a contemporary art gallery. The museum is over a coal pit that has been turned into a realistic re-creation of an actual coal mine. As you make your way through the claustrophobic tunnels, you'll understand why miners preferred other employment.

Take a look at the **Church of the Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary** (Ulica 1 Maja; ☎ Mass only), a mixture of Venetian Gothic and Renaissance styles featuring a finely carved Venetian lion over the portal. To the right, notice the 15th-century Renaissance **Scampicchio Palace**, with its inner courtyard, and the 1550 **loggia** (Titov Trg), which served as the community centre of Labin in the 16th century. News and court verdicts were announced here, fairs were held and waywards were punished on the pillar of shame.

The highest point in Labin is the **fortress** (*fortica*) at the western edge of town. You can walk along Ulica 1 Maja or take the long way around by following Šetalište San Marco along the town walls. What unfolds below you is a sweeping view of the coast, the Učka mountain range and Cres Island.

Festivals & Events

Labin Art Republic (Labin Art Republika; <http://unitedfestival.com>) takes over this artsy town – there are over 30 artists living and working here – every July and August. During the festival, the town comes alive with street theatre, concerts, plays, clown performances and open studios. Also worth catching is **Rabac Summer Festival** (www.rabacsummerfestival.com), which pulls in house and techno music fans for its roster of internationally known DJs; performances are held at Park Dubrova, 2km from Labin, and at Girandella Beach in Rabac.

Sleeping

There are no hotels in Labin itself but if you want to stay, choices abound just below in Rabac. Most of the lodging is of the large hotel-resort kind, with a few smaller properties. **Valamar** (www.valamar.com) manages eight hotels here, includ-

ing two deluxe options (Valamar Sanfior Hotel and Valamar Bellevue Hotel & Residence), five three-star properties, three apartment complexes and a camping ground. Peak season (read August) prices range greatly, from 860KN in a double room at a four-star hotel (half-board), to 615KN at a two-star hotel. There are two-person studios available from 385KN and four-person villas from 725KN. A 20% surcharge is applied for stays under three nights.

Another hotel chain is **Maslinica** (☎ 884 150; www.maslinicarabac.com), which has three midrange properties in Maslinica Bay: Hotel Narciso, Hotel Hedera and Hotel Mimosa. Doubles start at 775KN for half-board; singles go for 500KN. It also manages **Camping Oliva** (☎ 872 258; Rabac bb; per site 75KN), right on Rabac beach in front of the big hotels.

The two independent hotels with more character are **Hotel Amfora** (☎ 872 222; www.hotel-amfora.com; Rabac bb; s/low-high 195-510KN, d 290-740KN), in town, and the posh **Villa Annette** (☎ 884 222; www.villaannette.hr; Raška 24; d low-high 668-1268KN; ☎), up on a hill slope; the latter has an outdoor pool overlooking the bay. For stays under four nights at Villa Annette, add a daily half-board supplement of 225KN per person.

Veritas travel agency (opposite) finds double rooms/apartments for 180/285KN in the old town of Labin.

Eating

Labin is known for its truffles cooked with pasta or eggs, which are generally priced well. Rabac has plenty of restaurants serving sea-food standards, but most cater to the unfussy tourist crowds.

Gostiona Kvarner (☎ 852 336; Šetalište San Marco bb; mains from 35KN) Just steps from Titov Trg, this restaurant has a terrace overlooking the sea, good food and a loyal following of locals. The *fuzi* (hand-rolled pasta) with truffles is a measly 80KN, which is a bargain considering the expense of truffle-hunting.

Getting There & Away

Labin is well connected with Pula (38KN, one hour, 15 daily) by bus. In summer, the bus to Rabac (7KN), via the old town, leaves every hour between 6am and midnight.

VODNجان

pop 3700

Connoisseurs of the macabre can't miss Vodnjan (Dignano in Italian), located 10km

north of Pula. Lying inside a sober church in this sleepy town are the **'mummies'** that constitute Vodnjan's primary tourist attraction. These desiccated remains of centuries-old saints, whose bodies mysteriously failed to decompose, are considered to have magical powers.

There's not much going on in the rest of the town, which has Istria's largest Roma population. The centre is Narodni Trg, composed of several neo-Gothic palaces in varying stages of decay and restoration. It contains the **tourist office** (☎ 511 700; tz-vodnjan-dignano@pu.t-com.hr; Narodni Trg 3; ☎ 8am-2pm & 7-9pm summer, 8am-2pm Mon-Fri rest of year).

The mummies' resting place is just a few steps away from Narodni Trg in **St Blaise's Church** (Crkva Svetog Blaža; ☎ 511 420; Župni Trg; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 2-6pm Sun Jun-Sep, sporadic hr Oct-May). This handsome, neobaroque church was built at the turn of the 19th century when Venice was the style-setter for the Istrian coast. With its 63m-high **bell tower** as high as St Mark's in Venice, it's the largest parish church in Istria and is worth a visit for its magnificent altars alone.

The mummies are in a curtained-off area behind the **main altar** (28KN). In the dim lighting, the complete bodies of Nikolosa Bursa, Giovanni Olini and Leon Bembo resemble wooden dolls in their glass cases. Assorted body parts of three other saints complete the display. As you examine the skin, hair and fingernails of these long-dead people, a tape in English narrates their life stories. Considered to be Europe's best-preserved mummy, the body of St Nikolosa is said to emit a 32m bio-energy circle that has caused 50 miraculous healings.

If the mummies have whetted your appetite for saintly relics, head to the **Collection of Sacral Art** (Zbirka Sakralne Umjetnosti; admission incl mummies 45KN) in the sacristy. Here there are hundreds of relics belonging to 150 different saints, including the casket with St Mary of Egypt's tongue. Less grisly exhibits include a masterful 14th-century polyptych of St Leon Bembo by Paolo Veneziano.

Vodnjan's other attraction is **Vodnjanka** (☎ 511 435; Istarska bb; mains from 50KN; ☎ closed Sun lunch), an excellent regional restaurant with several rustic rooms, lots of style and personal service. The specialities include *fuzi* topped with truffles, *maneštra*, various kinds of *fritaja* and prosciutto. For dessert, try *kroštule* (fried

dough with sugar). The terrace has pretty views of the old town rooftops and church spire.

Vodnjan is well connected with Pula by bus (20KN, 20 minutes, 18 to 20 daily).

SVETVINČENAT

pop 300

Lying halfway between Pazin and Pula in southern Istria, Svetvinčenat (also known as Savičenta) is an endearing little town. First settled by Benedictines, it centres on the Renaissance town square. With its surrounding tall cypress trees, harmoniously positioned buildings and laid-back ambience, it's a delightful place for a wander.

The north part of the square is occupied by the 13th-century **Grimani Castle**, a beautifully preserved palace that had a Venetian makeover in the 16th century, with the addition of towers that served as a residence and prison. The site held feasts, parades, fairs and witch burnings (Marija Radoslović was allegedly tortured and burnt at the stake here on charges of sorcery, but was in fact killed for having an improper love affair with one of the Grimanis). The east side of the square has the parish **Church of Mary's Annunciation**, with a trefoil Renaissance facade made of local cut stone, and five elaborate Venetian marble altars in the interior.

The time to be in Svetvinčenat is mid-July, during the annual **Dance Festival & Nonverbal Theater Festival** (www.svetvincenatfestival.com). The festival features contemporary dance pieces, street theatre, circus and mime acts, and various other nonverbal forms of expression. This international event hosts performers from Croatia and Europe, its acts ranging from Finnish hip hop to Brazilian capoeira.

The seasonal **tourist office** (☎ 560 349; www.svetvincenat.hr; Svetvinčenat 20; ☎ 9am-2pm & 7-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun Jun-Oct) on the main square has information about private accommodation in and around town.

Sleeping & Eating

Stancija 1904 (☎ 560 022; www.stancija.com; Smoljanci 2-3; s 480KN, d/ste 645/720KN) In the village of Smoljanci, just 3km from Svetvinčenat on the road to Bale, this rural hotel is one of Istria's best. Sophisticated, surrounded by fragrant herb gardens and shaded by tall old-growth trees, a traditional stone Istrian house has been stylishly converted by a Swiss-Croatian family. They offer excellent meals (150KN for a three-course dinner), elaborate

breakfasts (100KN) served till noon, and cooking courses.

Kod Kaštela (☎ 560 012; Savičenta 53; mains from 45KN) Right at the heart of town, with great views of the castle and square, this regional restaurant serves homemade pastas and tasty *pršut*. There are private rooms to rent above; inquire at the restaurant.

PAZIN

pop 5200

Most famous for the gaping chasm that inspired Jules Verne and for its medieval castle, Pazin is a workaday provincial town in central Istria. It deserves a stop mainly for the chasm and castle, but part of the appeal is its small-town feel and the lack of fashionable foreigners stomping its streets. Most of the town centre is given over to pedestrian-only areas, while rolling Istrian countryside surrounds the slightly unsightly outskirts.

Lying at the geographic heart of Istria, Pazin is the county's administrative seat and excellently connected by road and rail to virtually every other destination in the region. The hotel and restaurant pickings in town are skimpy, so you're better off visiting on a day trip since you're within an hour of most other Istrian towns. However, the countryside around Pazin offers plentiful activities, such as hiking, free climbing, biking and visiting local honey makers.

Orientation & Information

The town is relatively compact, stretching little more than a kilometre from the train

station on the eastern end to the Kaštel on the western end, which is at the edge of Pazin Cave. The bus station is 200m west of the train station and the old part of town comprises the 200m leading up to the Kaštel.

The best source of information about Pazin is the **tourist office** (☎ 622 460; www.tzpazin.hr; Franje i Jurine 14; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Jul & Aug, 8am-3pm Mon-Fri Sep-Jun), which also manages the entire central Istrian region. It distributes a map of hiking trails and honey spots (you can visit bee-keepers and taste their delicious acacia honey), and a brochure about wine cellars around Pazin. Another useful stop is **Futura Travel** (☎ /fax 621 045; www.futura-travel.hr; 25 Rujna 42; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat), which changes money, books excursions and provides regional information.

Sights

Pazin's most renowned site is undoubtedly the **Pazin Chasm** (☎ 622 220; www.pazinska-jama.com; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun mid-May-mid-Oct, 10am-3pm Tue-Thu, noon-5pm Fri, 11am-5pm Sat & Sun mid-Oct-mid-May), a deep abyss of about 100m through which the Pazinčica River sinks into subterranean passages forming three underground lakes. Its shadowy depths inspired the imagination of Jules Verne (see boxed text, below), as well as numerous Croatian writers. Visitors can walk the 1200m path inside the abyss; there are two entrances, one by Hotel Lovac and one by the footbridge that spans the abyss 100m from the castle. Between October and May, entrance to the cave is free but there are no staff on site, so walking the trail is at your own risk; at other

MATHIAS SANDORF & THE PAZIN CHASM

The writer best known for going around the world in 80 days, into the centre of the earth and 20,000 leagues under the sea found inspiration in the centre of Istria. The French futurist-fantast Jules Verne (1828-1905) set *Mathias Sandorf* (1885), one of his 27 books in the series *Voyages Extraordinaires*, in the castle and chasm of Pazin.

In the novel, later made into a movie, Count Mathias Sandorf and two cohorts are arrested by Austrian police for revolutionary activity and imprisoned in Pazin's castle. Sandorf escapes by climbing down a lightning rod but, struck by lightning, he tumbles down into the roaring Pazinčica River. He's carried along into the murky depths of the chasm, but our plucky hero holds on fast to a tree trunk and (phew!) six hours later the churning river deposits him at the tranquil entrance to the Limska Draga Fjord. He walks to Rovinj and is last seen jumping from a cliff into the sea amid a hail of bullets.

Verne never actually visited Pazin – he spun Sandorf's adventure from photos and travellers' accounts – but that hasn't stopped Pazin from celebrating it at every opportunity. There's a street named after Jules Verne, special Jules Verne days and a website for the Pazin-based **Jules Verne Club** (www.ice.hr/davors/jvclub.htm).

times of the year, admission costs 30/15KN per adult/concession. You can enter the cave with an expert speleologist (100KN), if arranged in advance through the tourist office. If the trip into the abyss doesn't appeal, there's a **viewing point** just outside the castle.

Looming over the chasm, Pazin's **Kaštel** (Trg Istarskog Razvoda 1) is the largest and best-preserved medieval structure in all Istria. First mentioned in 983, it is a medley of Romanesque, Gothic and Renaissance architecture. Within the castle, there are two museums. The **town museum** (☎ 622 220; adult/concession 15/8KN; 🕒 10am-6pm Tue-Sun mid-Apr-mid-Oct, 10am-3pm Tue-Thu, noon-5pm Fri, 11am-5pm Sat & Sun mid-Oct-mid-Apr) has a collection of medieval Istrian church bells, an exhibition about slave revolts and torture instruments in the dungeon. The **Ethnographic Museum** (☎ 622 220; www.emi.hr; adult/concession 15/8KN; 🕒 10am-6pm Tue-Sun mid-Apr-mid-Oct, 10am-3pm Tue-Thu, noon-5pm Fri, 11am-5pm Sat & Sun mid-Oct-mid-Apr) has about 4200 artefacts portraying traditional Istrian village life, including garments, tools and pottery.

Festivals & Events

The first Tuesday of the month is **Pazin Fair**, featuring products from all over Istria. The **Days of Jules Verne** in the last week of June is Pazin's way of honouring the writer that put Pazin on the cultural map. There are races, re-enactments from his novel, and journeys retracing the footsteps of Verne's hero Mathias Sandorf.

Sleeping & Eating

The tourist office helps arrange private accommodation, which is generally reasonably priced. Count on spending from about 100KN per person for a room.

Hotel Lovac (☎/fax 624 324; tisadoo@inet.hr; Šime Kurelića 4; s/d 240/420KN; 📍) The late-1960s architecture of Pazin's only hotel, on the western edge of town, could be a hit, if only the rooms were done up right. Request a room with a valley view. The hotel restaurant serves acceptable food – especially as there are no notable restaurants in Pazin itself.

Getting There & Away

From the **bus station** (☎ 624 364; Šetalište Pazinske Gimnazije), there are services to Motovun (27KN, 40 minutes, two each weekday, none on weekends), Poreč (34KN, 45 minutes, seven daily), Pula (41KN, one hour, six daily), Rijeka

(53KN, one hour, nine daily), Rovinj (37KN, one to 1½ hours, five daily) and Zagreb (170KN to 195KN, three to four hours, 10 daily). Services are reduced on weekends. There's also a daily bus to Trieste (60KN to 70KN, two hours), except on Sundays.

Pazin **train station** (☎ 624 310; Od Starih Kostanji 3b) has services to Buzet (20KN, 50 minutes, three daily), Ljubljana (107KN, 3½ to 4½ hours, two daily), with a transfer in Buzet or Divača, Pula (30KN, one hour, nine daily) and Zagreb (111KN to 127KN, five to eight hours, three daily). The Zagreb journey has a bus portion from Lupoglav to Rijeka. Services are reduced on weekends.

AROUND PAZIN Gračišće

Gračišće is a sleepy medieval town and one of Istria's best-kept secrets, just 7km southeast of Pazin. Surrounded by rolling hills, its collection of ancient buildings includes the Venetian-Gothic **Salamon Palace** from the 15th century, the Romanesque **Church of St Euphemia**, and the **Church of St Mary** from 1425.

Most of these buildings are unrestored (although some work is being done) and the town is tiny. You won't need more than 30 minutes to circle it, but the ambience is truly lovely and you won't be treading on many people's trails. If you're feeling active, there's an 11.5km **hiking trail** that leads from here, which is well marked with signs.

Another reason to visit are the homemade Istrian specialties at **Konoba Marino** (☎ 687 081; mains from 35KN; 🕒 closed Wed). It dishes out copious portions of *fuzi* with game, *ombolo* (boneless pork loin) with cabbage, and a variety of truffle dishes in a cosy tavern. The same friendly owners run **Poli Luce** (☎ 687 081; www.konoba-marino-gracisce.hr; r per person 125KN, breakfast 25KN; 📍), a lovingly restored townhouse with charming rustic rooms.

BUZET pop 500

It may not be the most fascinating town around, but in sleepy Buzet you get a whiff of the timeless grace of old Istria. Lying 39km northeast of Poreč over the Mirna River and first settled by the Romans, Buzet achieved real prominence under the Venetians who endowed it with walls, gates and several churches. With its grey-stone buildings in various stages of decay and renovation,

MAGIC MUSHROOMS?

The truffle trade is less like a business than a highly profitable cult. It revolves around an expensive, malodorous, subterranean fungus allegedly endowed with semimagical powers, which is picked in dark woods and then sent across borders to be sold for a small fortune. Devotees claim that once you've tasted this small, nut-shaped delicacy, all other flavours seem insipid.

There are 70 sorts of truffles in the world, of which 34 come from Europe. The traditional truffle-producing countries are Italy, France and Spain, but Istrian forests boast three sorts of black truffles as well as the big white truffle – one of the most prized in the world, at 34,000KN per kilo. Croatia's largest exporter of Istrian truffles is Zigante Tartufi, whose share of the overall Croatian export market is about 90%. In 1999 the company's owner Giancarlo Zigante, along with his dog Diana, found the world's largest truffle in Istria, weighing 1.31kg and making it into the *Guinness Book of World Records*.

The Istrian truffle business is relatively young. In 1932, when Istria was occupied by Italy, an Italian soldier from the truffle capital of Alba allegedly noticed vegetational similarities between his region and Istria. He returned after his military service with specially trained dogs who, after enough sniffing and digging, eventually uncovered the precious commodity.

Because no sign of the truffle appears above ground, no human can spot it, so dogs (or, traditionally, pigs) are the key to a successful truffle hunt. Istrian truffle-hunting dogs (*breks*) may be mongrels, but they are highly trained. Puppies begin their training at two months, but only about 20% of them go on to have fully fledged careers as truffle trackers.

The truffle-hunting season starts in October and continues for three months, during which time at least 3000 people and 9000 to 12,000 dogs wander around the damp Motovun forests. The epicentre of the truffle-growing region is the town of Buzet (opposite).

Some people believe truffles are an aphrodisiac, though scientific research has failed to prove this. Conduct your own experiment: have a truffle feast, dim the lights, put on some nice music and see what happens.

and the cobblestone streets nearly deserted (most of Buzet's residents resettled at the foot of the hill in the unbecoming new part of town long ago), the old town is a quiet but atmospheric place.

In addition to a quick wander around the maze of Buzet's narrow streets and squares, the other reason to come here is the glorious truffle. Self-dubbed the city of truffles, Buzet takes its title seriously. Lying at the epicentre of the truffle-growing region, it offers a variety of ways to celebrate the smelly fungus, from sampling it at the old town's excellent restaurant to various truffle-related activities. The best event is the **Festival of Subotina** on the second Saturday in September. Marking the start of the white truffle season (which lasts through November), the pinnacle of this event is the preparation of a giant truffle omelette (with over 2000 eggs and 10kg of truffles!) in a 1000kg pan.

Orientation & Information

Most commerce is in the new Fontana section of town at the foot of the hilltop old town. Trg Fontana is the small central square, with a few

cafés and shops. If you have wheels, you must park your car by the cemetery on the hill and make the 10-minute walk up to the old town.

The **tourist office** (☎/fax 662 343; www.tz-buzet.hr; Trg Fontana 7/1; ☎ 8am-3pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat) has info about accommodation, plentiful maps and brochures about wine, olive oil and truffle roads throughout the region, and information on various activities such as hiking and biking. There's an ATM at **Erste Banka** (Trg Fontana 8).

Sights & Activities

The main sight in Buzet is the **Regional Museum** (Zavičajni Muzej Buzet; ☎ 662 792; Ulica Rašporskih Kapetana 5; adult/child 10/5KN; ☎ 11am-3pm Mon-Fri, by appointment Sat & Sun), housed inside a 17th-century palace. The museum displays a collection of prehistoric and Roman artefacts as well as some ethnological items such as field tools and folk costumes.

On a square a few metres north of the museum is an exquisite **baroque well**, which was restored in 1789 and sports a Venetian lion relief. Other sights to check out, all well marked with English plaques, are the **man-neristic portal** from the 17th century and the

parish **Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary** at the town's entrance.

Stock up on truffles in various shapes and forms – whole, hand-sliced, puréed, with olives or mushrooms – at the **Zigante Tartufi** (☎ 663 340; www.zigantetartufi.com; 🕒 9am–9pm Jun–Aug) shop on Trg Fontana.

If you want to experience truffle-hunting, contact the friendly **Karlič family** (☎ 667 304; Paladini 14), who can arrange such a trip; request a tour in English ahead of time. The tour includes a story about truffles, cheese and truffle tasting, and then a hunt in the forest that lasts up to two hours (150KN per person).

Sleeping & Eating

A number of farmhouses have rooms and apartments to rent surround Buzet. The tourist office has details and contact information; prices start at 100KN per person. There is only one hotel in town.

Hotel Fontana (☎ 662 615; www.hotelfontanabuzet.com; Trg Fontana 1; s/d 280/400KN; 📍) Housed in a 1970s concrete box of a building, the carpeted rooms here call for some serious love and care. At least all (but three) have balconies and the red-and-white decor cheers things up a bit.

Stara Oštarija (☎ 694 003; Petra Flega 5; mains from 55KN; 🕒 closed Tue) This is the place to try truffles in the old town, with truffle dishes starting at 130KN. For a splurge, order a slow-food truffle menu of six courses (645KN for two). It even has ice cream with olive oil and truffles! The classy place has views of the valley below.

Getting There & Away

Buzet is connected by bus with Poreč (41KN to 69KN, 1½ hours, two daily), Rijeka (48KN, one hour, five daily) and Pula (60KN, two hours, two daily). There is no bus station in town, but buses stop by the first streetlight in Fontana, on Riječka; the tourist office has schedules.

The **train station** (☎ 662 899) is 6km east of the town centre, but there's no public transport so you'll have to find your own way on foot or by taxi. There is a train to Pula (47KN, two hours, six daily) and Ljubljana (88KN, 2½ to three hours, two daily). All services are reduced on weekends.

AROUND BUZET

The rolling hills, woods, pastures and vineyards southeast of Buzet make for a memorably scenic drive. Off the main road lie two villages worth a visit. Small and sleepy **Roč**,

8km southeast of Buzet, is snug within its 15th-century walls. A meander will reveal the Romanesque **Church of St Anthony** (Crkva Svetog Antuna), a 15th-century **Renaissance house** in the square next to the church, and a **tourist lapidarium** within the town gate. The **tourist office** (🕒 10am–5pm Sat & Sun Easter–Jun, 10am–7pm Tue–Sun Jul–Sep) has keys to all the town's churches, if you want to see the interiors.

Roč summons most of the year, roused only by the annual **Accordion Festival** on the second weekend in May, which gathers accordion players from Croatia, Italy and Slovenia.

One of the town's stone buildings houses a regional restaurant, **Ročka Konoba** (☎ 666 451; mains from 35KN; 🕒 closed Mon). With an interior fireplace and outdoor tables overlooking a wooded valley, you can discover Istrian specialities such as *fuži*, homemade sausages and *maneštra*.

Outside Roč is **Glagolitic Alley**, a series of 11 outdoor sculptures placed along the road commemorating the area's importance as a centre of the Glagolitic alphabet. Running for 7km to the southwest, the lane ends in **Hum**, a beautifully preserved place that bills itself as the world's smallest town, with a permanent population of 17. Legend has it that the giants who built Istria had only a few stones left over and they used them to build Hum.

In summer, this tiny and adorable town gets a steady stream of visitors who come to meander around the narrow lanes and to visit the **Town Museum** (Gradski Muzej; ☎ 660 054; admission free; 🕒 11am–7pm Jun–Sep, sporadic hr Oct–May), which displays some old village tools but serves more as a souvenir shop. It takes just 30 minutes to see the town on a self-guided tour, as each church and building is marked with informative multilingual plaques. If the town gates happen to be closed, just push them to get in. Don't miss the 12th-century frescoes in the Romanesque **Chapel of St Jerome** (Crkva Svetog Jerolima), which depict the life of Jesus with unusually vivid colours. The chapel, by the cemetery outside the town gates, is locked, but you can get the key at the town inn, Humska Konoba.

That very inn is reason enough to come to Hum. **Humska Konoba** (☎ 660 005; Hum 2; mains 25–38KN; 🕒 closed Mon Nov–Mar) not only serves first-rate Istrian mainstays, but also has a lovely outdoor terrace offering panoramic views. Start with a shot of sweet *biska* (white mistletoe grappa made according to an ancient Celtic recipe), then go on to *maneštra od bobičica* (bean and fresh maize soup) and continue with

truffle-topped *fuži* (70KN). Then have another shot of *biska*, and if you like the stuff, stock up at the Imela shop run by the restaurant owners; it lies where the village ends.

Outpick Toklarija (☎ 663 031; Sovinjsko Polje 11; 6-course meal 500KN; ☹ closed Tue) Foodies shouldn't miss a slow-food meal here. It's in the hamlet of Sovinjsko Polje, up in the hills off the road from Buzet to Istarske Toplice (follow the signs for about 4km). At this beautifully converted 600-year-old olive mill, owner Nevio Sirotić serves delectable, homemade Istrian fare. A meal can take up to four hours in a well-timed string of delicate courses; the menu changes daily and features dried Istrian ham, porcini mushrooms, asparagus salad, truffles and juicy meats. Even the bread and pasta are homemade, and it's all paired with local wines such as *teran* and *malvazija*. Eat under the shade of cedar trees outside or ask for the cosy private room by the fireplace. And definitely reserve at least a few days ahead.

You really need your own wheels to explore this region. Roč is on the Pula–Buzet rail line, but the train station is 1500m east of the village. Hum is on the same line, but its train station is 5km away.

MOTOVUN

pop 590

Motovun is a captivating little town perched on a 277m-high hill in the Mirna River Valley, about 25km northeast of Poreč. It was the Venetians who decided to fortify the town in the 14th century, building two sets of thick walls. Within the walls, an atmospheric cluster of Romanesque and Gothic buildings now houses a smattering of artists studios. Newer houses have sprung up on the slopes leading to the old town, but you won't even notice, especially if you come for the popular film festival that takes place in Motovun every summer.

A Venetian lion scowls down from the outer gate, after which sprawls a terrace with a baroque loggia and a café's outside tables, perfect for watching the sun go down below the valley. A cheerier lion adorns the inner gate, which holds a long-running restaurant. Beyond the inner gate is a tree-shaded square with the town's only hotel, an old well and the Church of St Stephen.

Orientation & Information

If you come by car, there are three parking spots. The first one is at the foot of the village,

from where it's a steep 1km hike up to the city gates. Another parking area is 300m below the old town. The last one is for residents and hotel guests. Unless you're staying at the hotel, there's a 15KN charge per day from June to September at the other two parking lots.

The hotel's **tourist agency** (☎ 681 607; Trg Andrea Antico 8; ☹ 7.30am–3.30pm Mon–Fri) acts as the source of information about Motovun, since there is no official tourist office. There's an ATM just after the town entrance on the right.

Montana Tours (☎ 681 970; www.montanatours.com; Kanal 10; ☹ 4–7pm) is another great source of info; it can help with accommodation in central Istria, rural stays and private apartments.

Sights & Activities

The town highlight is the Renaissance **Church of St Stephen** (Svetog Stjepana; Trg Andrea Antico). Designed by Venetian artist Andrea Palladio, it's currently under long-term renovation. Along the inner wall that encloses the old town rises a 16th-century **bell tower** (admission 5KN; ☹ 10am–5pm), which you can climb for a magnificent view.

Be sure to walk on the outer walls of the ramparts for memorable vistas over vineyards, fields and oak woods below. There are a number of galleries and shops before you enter the old town and between the town gates, including a wine-tasting shop and another Zigante food store.

The nearby **Motovun Ranch** (☎ 098 411 404; www.motovun-ranch.com) offers horse-riding lessons (125KN per 50 minutes), two-hour rides along the Mirna River (100KN) and longer excursions through Istria's interior.

Festivals & Events

The **Motovun Film Festival** (www.motovunfilmfestival.com) presents a roster of independent and avant-garde films in late July/early August. Over the 10 years since its inception, this small event has grown pretty popular and now attracts quite a crowd, with nonstop outdoor and indoor screenings, concerts and parties.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Kaštel (☎ 681 607; www.hotel-kastel-motovun.hr; Trg Andrea Antico 7; s low-high 308–352KN, d 506–594KN; ☹) The town's only hotel is in a restored stone building with 28 simply furnished rooms. For 100KN more, get room 202 with a balcony overlooking the leafy square. There's a good restaurant offering truffles and Istrian wines, and a wellness centre is being built.

ISTRIA'S TOP RURAL RETREATS

Agrotourism is an increasingly popular accommodation option in Istria's interior. Some of these residences are actual farms engaged in producing wine, vegetables and poultry, some are upmarket country houses with rustic rooms to let, while others are plush modern villas with swimming pools. Whatever you choose, the highlights are wholesome food, and hiking and biking opportunities.

The Istrian tourist office has issued a brochure with photos and information about rural holidays throughout Istria; you can also consult www.istra.com/agroturizam. For most of these lodgings, you'll need your own car, as many are located in the middle of nowhere. There's often a supplement for stays under three nights.

At **Agroturizam Ograde** (☎ 693 035; www.agroturizam-ograde.hr; Katun Lindarski 60; per person 140KN), in the village of Katun Lindarski, 10km south of Pazin, you'll hang out with horses, sheep, chickens, ducks and donkeys. Accommodation is simple, with shared bathrooms, and the food a real-deal affair in a dark and cool *konoba* with veggies from the garden, home-cured meats and wine from the cellar. There's a newer building out the back, with two apartments and a pool.

Agroturizam San Mauro (☎ 779 033; Sv Mauro 157; per person 165KN), near the hilltop town of Momjan, 5km from Buje, specialises in tastings of its award-winning wines (40KN), truffle dishes (the sweet *tartufone* cake is a delight!) and homemade jams, honeys and juices that you get to sample for breakfast. Some of the rooms have sea vistas and terraces. The two pigs that roam around, Jack and Gigi, are truffle-hunting retirees.

At the higher end of the scale sits **San Rocco** (☎ 725 000; www.san-rocco.hr; Srednja Ulica 2; d low-high 860-1000KN; P ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎), a top boutique hotel in the village of Brtonigla near Buje. This beautifully designed rural hideaway has 12 stylish rooms – no two are alike, but all are equipped with modern conveniences and graced with original detail. There's an outdoor swimming pool, a top-rated restaurant and a small spa.

Casa Romantica Parenzana (☎ 777 460; www.parenzana.com.hr; Volpia 3; s low-high 270-307KN, d 468-540KN; P ☎) is another notable rural hotel, 3km from Buje in the village of Volpia. It features 16 rooms with rustic wood and stone decor, and a *konoba* (closed Tuesday), popular for its Istrian food such as *čriprnja* (roast meat or fish cooked with potatoes in a cast-iron pot over an open fire). There's wireless internet, bike rental (70KN per day) and tours on request.

Stancija 1904, near Svetvinčenat, also fits the bill as a top rural retreat; see p176.

Mondo (☎ 681 791; Barbacan 1; mains from 55KN; ☎ closed Tue) Just before the outer town gate, this little tavern had a loyal following in its former guise as Barbacan. It's since lost some of its allure, but the Istrian mainstays are still decent quality. Try the polenta with cheese and truffles.

Pod Voltom (☎ 681 923; Trg Josefa Resselca 6; mains from 55KN; ☎ closed Wed) In a vaulted space within the town gates, just below the hotel, this wood-beamed place serves simple down-home Istrian cuisine and pricier truffle dishes. Try the steak carpaccio with fresh truffles.

Restaurant Zigante (☎ 664 302; www.zigantetartufi.com; Livade 7, Livade; mains from 160KN) Gourmets from afar come to this destination restaurant, repeatedly named one of Croatia's top 10, a few kilometres below Motovun in the village of Livade. Expect five-star fancy dining, with truffles as the showcase – celery and black truffles cappuccino, pigeon with black truffles, even tiramisu with black truffles... Set menus range from 440KN

to 715KN. The complex also has a few luxury rooms to rent, and a shop next door.

Getting There & Away

It's not easy to visit Motovun without your own car, but there are bus connections, on weekdays only, from Pazin (27KN, 40 minutes, two daily) and Poreč (29KN, 45 minutes, one daily).

ISTARSKE TOPLICE

Dating from the Roman era, **Istarske Toplice** (www.istarske-toplice.hr) is one of Croatia's oldest and most scenic thermal spas. Beneath an 85m-high cliff and surrounded by greenery, the complex features a concrete-box-style hotel and a new wellness centre. The rotten-egg smell is due to the large outdoor pool with a high sulphur content, where temperatures reach 34°C. The thermal waters are said to help rheumatism, skin diseases and respiratory tract disorders. Stressed-out folks can take advantage of

acupuncture (125KN), saunas (60KN), various massages – from aromatherapy (300KN per hour) to hydro-massage (150KN per 30 minutes) – and beauty treatments (from 40KN), or just paddle around in the pool (25KN).

Hotel Terme Mirna (☎ 603 000; www.istarske-toplice.hr; Svetog Stjepana 60; s/d 290/500KN; P) doesn't boast much character in its spruced-up rooms, but it does offer a variety of good-value, all-inclusive packages. There are also hiking, biking and climbing opportunities in the surrounding forest and various excursions to nearby villages.

There's no public transport, but the spa is easily accessible by road, only 10km north of Motovun and 11km south of Buzet on the main road that connects the two towns.

GROŽNJAN

pop 193

Until the mid-1960s, Grožnjan, 27km north-east of Poreč, was slipping towards oblivion. First mentioned in 1102, this hilltop town was a strategically important fortress for the 14th-century Venetians. They created a system of ramparts and gates, and built a loggia, a granary and several fine churches. With the collapse of the Venetian empire in the 18th century, Grožnjan suffered a decline in its importance and population.

In 1965 sculptor Aleksandar Rukavina and a small group of other artists 'discovered' the crumbling medieval appeal of Grožnjan and began setting up studios in the abandoned buildings. As the town crawled back to life, it attracted the attention of Jeunesses Musicales International, an international training program for young musicians. In 1969 a summer school for musicians, Jeunesses Musicales Croatia, was established in Grožnjan and it has been going strong ever since. Each year there are music, orchestra and ballet courses and recitals. Throughout the entire summer, concerts and musical events are held almost daily, and you can overhear the musicians practising while you browse the many craft shops and galleries.

Orientation & Information

The tiny town is a jumble of crooked lanes and leafy squares. Near the centre is the **tourist office** (☎ 776 349; www.tz-groznjan.hr; Umberta Gorjana 3; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri), which provides a list of private accommodation options in and around town and a small map with a list of galleries.

Sights & Activities

The Renaissance **loggia** is immediately to the right of the town gate by the tourist office. Keep going and on your right you'll see the baroque Spinotti Morteani Palace, its patio taken over by the outdoor tables of the **Zigante Tartufi** (☎ 721 998; www.zigantetartufi.com; Umberta Gorjana 5) shop and its adjacent wine bar. Next on the right comes the **Kaštel**, where many concerts are held. The town is dominated by the yellow sandstone bell tower of the **Church of St Vitus, St Modest & St Crescentia**, which was built in the 14th century and renovated in baroque style in 1770.

There are over 30 galleries and studios scattered around town; most are open daily from May to September. **City Gallery Fonticus** (Gradska Galerija Fonticus; ☎ 776 349; www.gallery-fonticus-groznjan.net; Trg Lođe 3; ☎ 10am-1pm & 5-8pm Tue-Sun) promotes recent work of Croatian and some international artists. It also has a small display of heraldic paraphernalia that includes helmets, insignia and escutcheon.

Festivals & Events

Summer music concerts are organised by the **International Cultural Centre of Jeunesses Musicales Croatia** (☎ 776 223; www.hgm.hr, in Croatian). The concerts are free and no reservations are necessary. They are usually held in the church, main square, loggia or Kaštel.

Sleeping & Eating

There are no hotels in Grožnjan, but the tourist office can put you in touch with private room owners. Count on spending about 100KN per person.

Bastia (☎ 776 370; 1 Svibnja 1; mains from 45KN) The town's oldest restaurant sits on the verdant main square. The decor is bright and cheerful; the menu extensive and heavy on truffles.

Café Vero (Trg Comerca 3) This café-bar at the end of the village has a terrace with wooden tables offering marvellous valley views below.

Getting There & Away

Buses to Grožnjan only coincide with school terms, so there aren't any direct buses from late June to early September when most kids are on school holidays. If you're driving from Motovun, do not take the first marked turn-off for Grožnjan as it's unpaved and takes a lot longer. Continue along the road for another kilometre or so until you get to another sign for Grožnjan – this is a far better approach.

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