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"Wisdom Of Dubrovnik"

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Tranquil Adriatic Reflects Wisdom Of Dubrovnik

By MICHAEL GREHL

Urban planners could do worse than discard their buzz words and demographic studies in favor of a trip to the old walled city of Dubrovnik on Yugoslavia's Adriatic coast. It would be a bit humbling and greatly inspiring.

For vacationers it is sheer delight. The area is of the sort that makes writers of travel brochures legitimately rhapsodic.

Any visitor will find that much of today's new wisdom isn't all that new.

No vehicles are allowed in the old city.

In the 13th Century a rule was introduced, and still exists, that each new building must conform to the master plan. Changes of any sort require prior approval.

THE EFFECT is a pleasing business district with no advertising signs, each building having the same appearance, the same limited modest window space. Lanterns are the only source of outdoor lighting and are equally apportioned along the Placa and other commercial streets.

The total use of stone and the stark uniformity create a feeling of serenity rather than severity.

The walled city has but 5,000 or so residents and even an aging tourist may walk the enormous walls built and expanded from the 12th to the 17th centuries that surround the city. The walls are so formidable no invader attempted to breach them.

They offer enough crenelated towers, forts, bastions and tunnels to satisfy the most romantic tourist.

Within them is a manageable number of monasteries, fountains, museums and government buildings of modest splendor and great charm.

On the practical side, refreshing potables of all kinds are available and Yugoslavian wine is excellent. So is the food which includes a surprising number of ground beef dishes.

Eggplant and zucchini squash do not seem popular, which is welcome respite for the traveler who has just come from Greece.

All this is provided by a people who are courteous, friendly, eager to please but, like the Swiss, by no means subservient. The city prides itself on its centuries of independence and its residents reflect that.

ALTHOUGH IT'S not apparent to the traveler along Adriatic resorts, Yugoslavia is of course run by an authoritarian government and vacationers should keep that well in mind.

The city is well served by air, although the national airline YAT does not seem overly concerned about schedules. On a recent trip our flights in and out were more than an hour late and on one day all YAT flights were canceled without explanation.

Hotels are abundant and luxurious. There also are plain and economical rooms for rent. All are outside the old city, as is the new commercial district, but many are just a few minutes walk from the Placa.

The national currency is the dinar, made up of 100 paras, and is now rated about 17.82 to the dollar. Prices are less staggering than in most popular West European vacation spots. Service is included in bills, although President Tito's brand of communism does not prevent acceptance of a little something extra. English is widely spoken and well that it is. The native tongues do something with the letter "c" that defies understanding or translation.

Customs and passport formalities are just that. A visa is required.

Dubrovnik is laid right against the blue-green Adriatic. The gentle surf and warm temperatures make it ideal for swimming or boating or snoozing.



—Staff Photo

A Typical Narrow Residential Street In Dubrovnik

Cruises to other resorts are worth taking, particularly the all-day excursion to the Bay of Kotor. The landscape is rocky and harsh, punctuated with old fortresses from old wars.

Guides swear they no longer are in use, but at Herceg-Novi one had to wonder why an abandoned fortification had all those radar installations, men dressed alike in khaki and long black tubes sticking out of old casements.

IN JULY and August Dubrovnik holds its summer festival. This, too, offers a lesson. Music, drama and folklore are offered on every fort, in every square, in the tiny parks and in monastery courtyards. Artists such as Van Cliburn perform in the small atrium of the Rector's Palace, once the seat of government.

In Fort Lovrijenac, which looms with proper menace over the harbor approach, Shakespeare is offered. The setting was made for Othello and Macbeth.

In other months there are still some nightclubs. There also is the nightly mating game along the main street that takes the form of an elaborately careless promenade of young people. And there is sitting out of doors nodding back at the fishing boats bobbing in the harbor, sipping whatever pleases you and listening to a more-than-adequate dance band working over Strauss or American oldies but goodies.

Dubrovnik may be the most agreeable blend of climate, geography, people with an intimate, living bit of history the vacationer can find. The view from the ground, the sea or the mountains is strictly calendar art.

Any city that has preserved entrances over real drawbridges has to have a lot going for it.

(Michael Grehl, editor of *The Commercial Appeal*, has just returned from his fourth trip to Europe.)

(Cf. "The Dark Connection" - editorial, p. 46!)