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CROATIA IN THE EYES

OF ESC VOLUNTEERS



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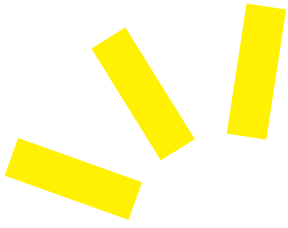
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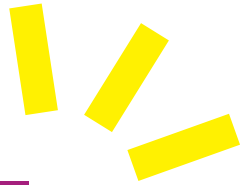


This publication is based on statements from ESC volunteers who have performed or are still performing their voluntary service in organizations in Croatia.

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CROATIA IN THE EYES

OF ESC VOLUNTEERS

Croatia is a small but beautiful country in Southeast Europe, known for its stunning Adriatic coastline, over 1,000 islands, and rich cultural heritage. Its capital, Zagreb, is a lively city with a mix of Austro-Hungarian architecture, modern attractions, and a buzzing nightlife. The country is a member of the European Union and uses the euro as its currency. Croatia has a unique blend of Mediterranean and Slavic influences, reflected in its food, music, and traditions.

Tourism is one of the main industries, with millions visiting famous destinations like Dubrovnik, Split, and Plitvice Lakes. The Dalmatian coast offers crystal-clear waters, historic cities, and a relaxed vibe, making it a dream spot for young travelers. Beyond the coast, Croatia's inland regions offer breathtaking landscapes, from the rolling hills of Zagorje and Moslavina to the vast golden fields of Slavonia and the dense forests and mountains of Gorski Kotar and Lika, each steeped in tradition, history, and natural beauty.

Sports are a big deal here, especially football—Croatia's national team is among the world's best. Music festivals, outdoor adventures, and a friendly atmosphere make Croatia an exciting place to live, study, volunteer or explore!

This publication presents the voices of European Solidarity Corps¹ volunteers who are currently serving or have recently completed their volunteering experience in organizations across Croatia. Through a series of themed questions and answers, volunteers share their insights, experiences, and perspectives on life in Croatia. Their stories offer a fresh and honest look and provide a unique glimpse into the country through the eyes of young people, offering an engaging and authentic overview of what it means to live, work, and grow in Croatia as an ESC volunteer.

¹ The European Solidarity Corps (ESC) is an EU programme that supports young people aged 18-30 in volunteering or being involved in projects that benefit communities across Europe. It offers funded opportunities in various fields, promoting solidarity, cultural exchange, and personal growth while helping tackle social challenges.



During your volunteer service, what did you find out about Croatia – in general?



First of all that is an amazing country. Literally, the landscapes are unique and the people there are lovely. It's a mix of beaches and mountains and you can go swimming even in December in Dalmatia while in the inner part of the country, right after a tunnel on the highway, you need to have gloves and coat and hat and everything you can since the temperature is -10°. And the best part is that these two landscapes match perfectly, we're used to a stark difference but not in Croatia. You literally have the sea which mixes with river in the mountains. Stunning.

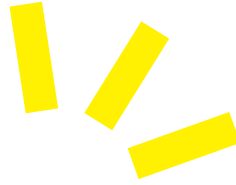
Agnese, Italy | volunteered in Park prirode Vransko jezero

Croatia is a beautiful country with diverse landscapes, all amazing. The wind there (la bura) is quite awful there, because it's very very cold, I didn't expect it to be that cold in Croatia. But at least there's sun when there is bura. I could see incredible places (for example the Krka waterfall absolutely frozen, amazing beaches, islands, etc.) I got to know more about Croatia's policies and way of functioning. We eat quite well, but it can be fatty food (like burek/pita, I miss it so much).

Félicie, France | volunteered in Ekoloska udruga Krka Knin



People love to enjoy life; parks are full of people, small dogs, and hugging elder people, and you can enjoy tasty coffee in a cafe for hours.



Tamar, Georgia | volunteered in Udruga Amazonas

I found that Croatia is a very welcoming and fun place. Even in the countryside, there is always something to do and the people you meet are almost always happy to have a meal together and talk. I was happily surprised by how open and kind the people were and I hope I can make my way back to Croatia sometime soon.

Thomas, USA | volunteered in EKO Centar Latinovac

Its astonishing nature, how hard it is to speak their language, and the big heart of their people.

Juan Salvador, Spain | volunteered in Udruga Argonauta

I was living in Zagreb, and from here I was surprised about the easy and accessible public transport and combinations of buses and trains to go around the country, so I took the opportunity to visit the seaside and some little villages around that really impressed me! I got my eyes full of beautiful landscapes, transparent water of the beaches and green, a lot of green areas that were my favourite part of it.



Paula, Spain | volunteered in Udruga Amazonas



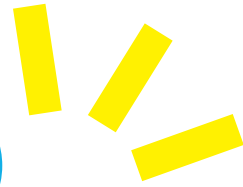
During your volunteer service, what did you find out about Croatian people?

Croatian people are known for their warmth, hospitality, and strong sense of community. With a population of approximately 3.87 million, they value tradition, family, and friendships, while embracing a relaxed Mediterranean lifestyle. Passionate about sports, music, and good food, they enjoy socializing at cafés, festivals, and along the coast. While proud of their history and culture, they are also open to new experiences and welcoming to people from different backgrounds.

Here's what ESC volunteers have to say about their experiences with Croatians.



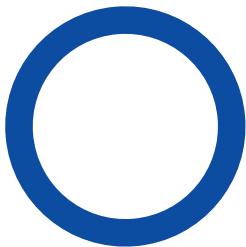
Croats are generally friendly and open to sharing, quite cheerful and love to have fun. Their joy on special occasions is everywhere. Most of the people I met during my year there were very understanding and supportive.



Ayşenur, Turkey | volunteered in Mreža udruga Zagor

They are nice, really polite, they are helpful, and many speak English. Maybe it is difficult to connect at the beginning, but once you connect with them, they have much hospitality, and they are friends you can keep forever, no matter young or old.

Angel, Spain | volunteered in Udruga Amazonas



They are very hospitable people and always offer to give you something or to share.

Eva, Ireland | volunteered in Association Mi Split



People are pretty different, depending on which region they are from. I was lucky to volunteer in Split, so I had a chance to experience a slow, stress-free Dalmatian lifestyle. Coming from a fast-paced background, in Split I learnt "pomalo" attitude - when there's no need to rush or stress out. There's always time for what is truly important - a cup of coffee and sunbathing. That said, people of Split seemed to be very friendly and open to me, they were willing to help and support me in discovering the country, culture and history.

Yuliia, Scotland | volunteered in Sunce

They have great values and a high level of social responsibility. Croatian people are always ready to support.

Ana, Georgia | volunteered in Outward Bound Croatia

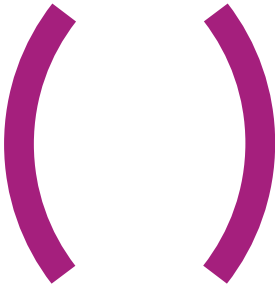
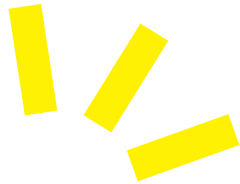
Croatian people were incredibly kind, helpful, and welcoming. They were deeply devoted to their families and communities, showing strong values of hospitality. They made sure to host us in the best possible way. Since I lived in a small town, I was constantly in touch with the local community, which allowed me to have amazing and unforgettable experiences.

Melih, Turkey | volunteered in Eko centar Latinovac



I was really surprised by the Croatian people. The first impression was of cold people. But this was momentary. They want to get to know you and when they give you their trust, they give you their best. Their calm life ('pomalo') and their gratefulness make them special. I remember the Spanish classes with the older women when they told me their stories and always gave me chocolate as a thank you. Honestly, the Croatians made me feel like one of them, comfortable despite the cultural differences.

Maria Isabel, Spain | volunteered in DKolektiv – organizacija za društveni razvoj, Osijek



I learned that Croatia is home to very kind and warm-hearted people with a great sense of humor.

Anastasiia, Ukraine | volunteered in Ocean Znanja

I was in Dalmatia, so I met mainly Dalmatian people, one thing I can say: Pomalo, take your time for everything, never be in a rush. They like to take their time at the coffee break and complain (Balkan people in general?). But they are all really friendly and welcoming. They are warm people. They are also really tall.

Félicie, France | volunteered in Ekoloska udruga Krka Knin



During your volunteer service, what did you find out about Croatian culture?

Croatian culture is a rich blend of Mediterranean, Central European, and Slavic influences. It's known for its vibrant traditions, music, dance, and art, with folk festivals and cultural events taking place throughout the year. Croatia has a deep history in literature, theater, and cinema. Its cuisine, characterized by fresh ingredients and diverse regional specialities, reflects its cultural diversity. The country's UNESCO heritage sites further showcase its cultural and historical importance. Croatian craftsmanship, especially in textile and pottery, has been passed down through generations, adding to the nation's unique cultural tapestry.

After gaining a short insight into Croatian culture, here's what ESC volunteers have to say about it.



Actually, since I am Turkish, I am not a stranger to Balkan culture. There are many similarities, so I did not have much difficulty understanding the culture. However, there is one thing that surprised me and that is their loyalty to their families. When I talk to my other friends in Europe, they usually prefer to live an independent life, but my friends here always talk about their families and visit their elders at least once a week.

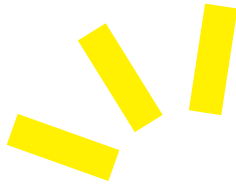
Başak, Turkey | volunteered in Carpe Diem

My host organization was the biggest supporter of me learning a lot of things culturally. I had the opportunity to see, for example, traditional Croatian clothes or patterns in many of the activities they took part in. It was also fun to see how birthdays or special occasions are celebrated and what kind of festivals there are. I also learned a lot of historical things.

Ayşenur, Turkey | volunteered in Mreža udruga Zagor

Firstly, I discovered that many festivities in Croatia are centered around food and alcohol, and I love it. I also learned that family is really important here, and that many people are deeply connected with their traditions

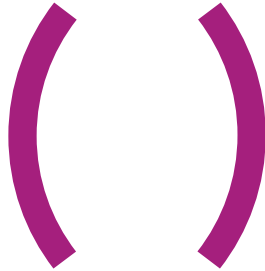
Ana, Spain | volunteered in Udruga Argonauta



The first thing that I discovered is the importance of the coffee break, they like to take time during this break. Another thing is about the lifestyle, they like to take things easy and they are not stressed.

Sara, France | volunteered in Help udruuga

They love coffee on Sunday mornings, they're definitely far away from being vegan or vegetarian and they love sweets.



Agnese, Italy | volunteered in Park prirode Vransko jezero

Coming from a very atheist country and family, I was at first surprised by the importance of a celebration like Easter in Croatia and the popularity of a religious ceremony. I also mentioned before the more underground culture gathering I witnessed that was even more showcased during the times I went to Zagreb. I would also like to add that I still wait for the Croatian meso burek to be exported to France because the taste of sheer fat is becoming a mere souvenir in my mind, and sometimes in the middle of the night, after partying and drinking (reasonably of course), I find myself really wishing to get one.

Bastien, France | volunteered in IKS Petrinja



During your volunteer service, what did you find out about Croatian history?

Croatia has a fascinating history, shaped by its location at the crossroads of Europe. It was part of the Roman Empire and later became the Kingdom of Croatia, which entered a personal union with Hungary in the 12th century. Over the centuries, Croatia faced numerous foreign invasions and shifts in political power, including rule by the Ottoman Empire and the Habsburg Monarchy. In the 19th century, Croatian national identity grew stronger, culminating in the creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (later Yugoslavia). Croatia became a republic in 1991 after gaining independence from Yugoslavia. The country has a proud heritage of resistance, cultural development, and regional influence. Throughout its history, Croatia has faced challenges but has emerged with a strong sense of identity and a commitment to preserving its heritage.

Having learned about Croatia's history, ESC volunteers share their thoughts on it.



I found out about the history of Zagreb while visiting the city museum. Also, it was interesting to learn about the very complex history of Croatia due to many occupations and the different influences of other countries.

Rieka, Germany | volunteered in Scouts Croatia

The war is really recent and is still quite omnipresent in people's minds, in the cities, on the walls, etc. I got to know more about recent Croatian history (so, during the war of the 90's), more than the previous history.

Félicie, France | volunteered in Ekološka udruga Krka Knin

Exploring the country's history through its stunning architecture, from ancient Roman ruins to medieval castles, deepened my appreciation for Croatia's diverse heritage. There are a lot of festivals and cultural events, filled with traditional music and dance.

Theresa, Germany | volunteered in Udruga Argonauta

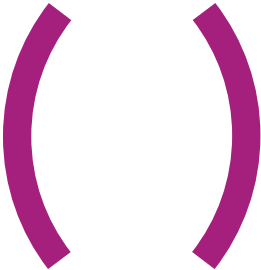


Croatia has a rich and complex history shaped by different empires and periods. Vukovar, in particular, is a poignant reminder of the recent past, with its role in the Homeland War. The resilience of its people and their dedication to peacebuilding left a lasting impression on me.

Ana, Georgia | volunteered in Youth Peace Group Danube YPGD Vukovar

Croatia has a huge history with its ups and downs which is fascinating.

Sophio, Georgia | volunteered in Maritima Educare



I knew Croatia was formerly a part of Yugoslavia, but I did not know it had also been a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It was interesting to learn about what the country was like during that time and to also see the influence of the Austro-Hungarian Empire reflected in some of the architecture I saw.

Thomas, USA | volunteered in EKO Centar Latinovac




Croatia has historically belonged to one empire or another, so it is a very young country to speak of in an emancipated way. I think its history of resistance and the people's struggle to maintain their identity and independence is very interesting and really admirable.



Sofia, Spain | volunteered in Centar za odgoj i obrazovanje Slave Raškaj Zagreb

Since I arrived in Croatia, I wished to understand the country better by asking and reading about the history of Croatia. I am amazed at the mix of cultures in Croatia. In particular, Osijek where you can see in its buildings traces of the Ottoman Empire, the Astro-Hungarian Empire and the Balkans. As well as in its food. To be honest, I didn't think that the history of Croatia was based on wars and the comings and goings of different populations.



Maria Isabel, Spain | volunteered in DKolektiv – organizacija za društveni razvoj Osijek



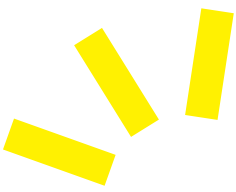
During your volunteer service, what did you find out about Croatian language?

Croatian is a South Slavic language, part of the larger Indo-European family. It is the official language of Croatia and is written in the Latin alphabet. Croatian has many regional dialects, which reflect the country's rich cultural and historical diversity. It shares similarities with Serbian, Bosnian, and Montenegrin, though it has unique vocabulary and pronunciation. Croatian is a key part of the nation's identity and plays an important role in its cultural and social life.

After being introduced to the Croatian language, ESC volunteers share their views on it.



I realized how different Croatian is from the languages I know (French, English and Spanish), and it was challenging to understand at first. I learned a few words, but the language felt completely unfamiliar. However, I appreciated how patient and welcoming the locals were when I tried.




Oihana, France | volunteered in
Savez izviđača Hrvatske

I was trying my best to learn and at some point, I could even understand way more than I was expecting! Such a hard language but with a bit of time and some study I could manage to order, and say the basic vocabulary and day-to-day life sentences.

Paula, Spain | volunteered in
Udruga Amazonas

It's a very difficult and different language to learn because they have different grammar.

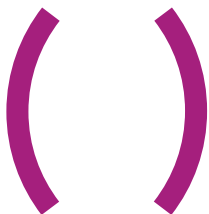


Clara, Portugal | volunteered
in MI Association Split



Kako si?

Luka, Georgia | volunteered in
Outward Bound Croatia - OBC



Croatian is a beautiful yet challenging language. It has a fascinating structure with many dialects. Learning some basic phrases, like "Hvala" (thank you) and "Dobar dan" (good day), made it easier to connect with locals.

Ana, Georgia | volunteered in Youth
Peace Group Danube YPGD Vukovar

It is quite hard. But in some way, it is possible to adapt and say some basic stuff. I had a very funny anecdote about numbers and how to order salami in the supermarket. DVAdeset deka and DEVETdeset deka was the confusion...you can imagine. Or you can also ask in Murter about this.



Juan Salvador, Spain | volunteered
in Udruga Argonauta



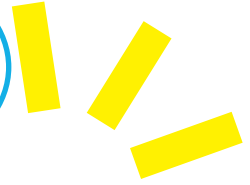
During your volunteer service, what did you find out about Croatian literature?

Croatian literature has a long and vibrant history, dating back to the Middle Ages. It includes works in Latin, Old Church Slavonic, and Croatian, reflecting the country's cultural influences. Renowned authors such as Marko Marulić, often called the "father of Croatian literature," paved the way for later writers like Miroslav Krleža and August Šenoa. Croatian literature spans poetry, prose, and drama, often exploring national identity, history, and human experience, and has significantly shaped the country's cultural heritage.

Below ESC volunteers reflect on Croatian literature and share their perspectives on it.



I didn't spend too much time learning about Croatian literature first-hand during my volunteer work, but I did learn that Croatia has a very strong literary tradition. Croatia is especially well-known for its poetry.



Thomas, USA | volunteered in
EKO Centar Latinovac

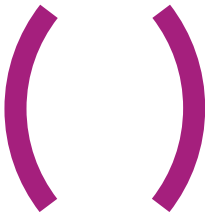
I think they have a rich and interesting literary heritage and they have great Croatian writers.

Sofía, Spain | volunteered in Centar za odgoj i obrazovanje Slave Raškaj Zagreb

I haven't had the opportunity to read much Croatian literature because I haven't found any English versions. But I have read Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić and her "Croatian Tales of Long Ago". I really enjoyed reading about Slavic mythology but I would have liked to read more, as I am passionate about literature.



Maria Isabel, Spain | volunteered in DKolektiv – organizacija za društveni razvoj Osijek



To be honest, this is one of the areas I haven't researched yet. But today, I'll take a look at this aspect of Croatian culture. Thank you for the idea!

Ana, Spain | volunteered in
Udruga Argonauta



During your volunteer service, what did you find out about Croatian music?

Croatian music is diverse, with roots in both folk and classical traditions. Folk music, including the famous klapa singing, is an important part of Croatian culture, especially in coastal regions. Typical traditional Croatian instruments include the tambura (a string instrument), the ljerica (a bowed string instrument) and the diple (a type of bagpipe), each with regional variations. Classical music has produced renowned composers like Ivan Zajc and Jakov Gotovac. Croatia also has a strong contemporary music scene, with popular artists in various genres, from rock to pop and electronic. Music festivals, such as Ultra Europe in Split or INmusic festival in Zagreb, draw international attention especially young audiences, showcasing the country's vibrant music culture.

Here you can read how ESC volunteers express their thoughts on Croatian music and its cultural significance.



Croatian music is wonderfully diverse, ranging from traditional klapa singing to modern pop and rock. I loved listening to tamburica music, which is especially popular in Slavonia.

Ana, Georgia | volunteered in Youth Peace Group Danube YPGD Vukovar

I worked at the shipyard, and the people there would often listen to Croatian music while working. We even had the chance to work with that music playing in the background. It was a unique experience, really immersing you in the atmosphere and making the work feel more connected to the culture.

Manan, Armenia | volunteered in Maritima Educare

I noticed that Croatian music has a big significance in Croatian culture. The majority of people know the lyrics of certain popular songs and know the dances, so whenever they have festivities they sing and dance together and it creates a sense of community.

Theresa, Germany | volunteered in Udruga Argonauta

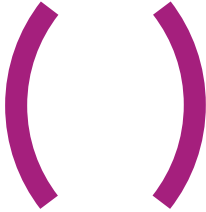
I love it. Still listen to it when I am nostalgic.

Sophio, Armenia | volunteered in Maritima Educare



I had the opportunity to see different concerts that took place in the evenings at the Christmas markets. It was a great experience!

Oihana, France | volunteered in Savez izviđača Hrvatske



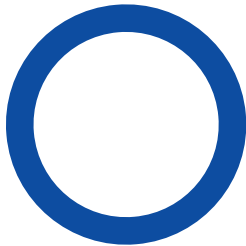
I was introduced to traditional folk Dalmatian music as well as some modern artists.

Yuliia, Scotland | volunteered in Udruga Sunce

There was a song that I was constantly singing. Well, I was just singing the two main words of the title of the song: Kiša će, from Dalmatino. I listened to it the first days of my volunteering and it is still stuck in my mind. Kišaa čeee!...

Juan Salvador, Spain | volunteered in Udruga Argonauta

Music is something I care a lot about, and in Croatia, I was satisfied in many ways. It allowed me to meet musicians like Severina, Vesna Pisarović, Denis & Denis, Colonia. At the same time, I saw that it is a country with a good music culture and talent in general. And I almost forget, yeah, Croatian Trash Music!!!



Love Rozga and Oliver!

Ayşenur, Turkey | volunteered in Mreža udruga Zagor

Sergej, North Macedonia | volunteered in Udruga Sunce



During your volunteer service, what did you find out about Croatian movies?

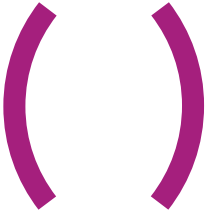
Croatian cinema has a long and influential legacy, with strong traditions in both documentary and feature films. Famous names include Branko Lustig, a two-time Oscar winner, and the Zagreb School of Animated Film, with artist Dušan Vukotić, who won an Oscar for *Surogat* (Substitute). Since Croatia's independence, directors like Dalibor Matanić and Vinko Brešan gained global recognition. Croatian films explore history, identity, and social issues, with *The Man Who Couldn't Remain Silent* being the first Oscar-nominated film in the post-independence period. The country also hosts several film festivals, including the Pula Film Festival, which remains a key event in showcasing national cinema.

In the following, ESC volunteers share their perspectives on Croatian cinema and its role in the culture.



I don't know if I really learned about movies from Croatia except for the movie "Blokada" which I saw in a homemade movie projection in Sisak, it was very interesting for me to understand more about the social issues and the mindset of the youth during that time. Still, I had the chance to meet some movie enthusiasts and to exchange views on cinema with them, some of these conversations were amongst the most interesting I had during that time.

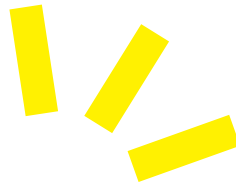
Bastien, Spain | volunteered in Udruga IKS



I don't know much about movies, but I saw a series, Black and white world, recorded in Zagreb, it was nice.

Samuel, Spain | volunteered in Udruga IKS

Nothing, I'm not that much into movies so I don't really know anything about them. But I'm glad that Tuškanac exists, there's always some good documentary movies and topic-related cinema that is different from traditional pop movies.



Nadia, Italy | volunteered in Udruga Amazonas



I asked for some recommendations, and a friend told me to watch Metastaze. It was a tough movie, but it was really interesting, and I could recognize where some of the scenes were filmed in Zagreb. When talking about the Croatian film industry, someone mentioned that many plots often focus on the war and its consequences, such as PTSD.

Ana, Spain | volunteered in Udruga Argonauta

Some Croatian movies are nominated for academy awards and they have interesting directors.



Ana, Georgia | volunteered in Outward Bound Croatia

Alysa, Netherlands | volunteered in Ocean Zania

I went to see the movies outside like at a festival and it was amazing.

I learned that in the cinemas there is no synchronization.

Rieka, Germany | volunteered in Scouts Croatia



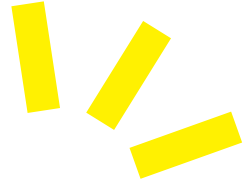
During your volunteer service, what did you find out about Croatian sport?

Sport is a big part of Croatian culture, with football being the most popular. The national team, led by stars like Luka Modrić, has gained global recognition. Croatia also excels in basketball, handball, water polo, tennis and skiing, with legends like Goran Ivanišević and Janica Kostelić. The country has a strong tradition in martial arts and sailing, and its athletes frequently achieve success in international competitions. Croatia has also produced top athletes in athletics and rowing, like Sandra Elkasević and Sinković brothers, with numerous Olympic and world championship medals, bringing pride and unity to the nation.

ESC volunteers provide their thoughts on Croatian sports and its influence on the community in the following.



I could see that football plays a huge role in Croatia, with people passionately supporting their local and national teams.



Oihana, France | volunteered in Savez izviđača Hrvatske

Ana, Georgia | volunteered in Youth Peace Group Danube YPGD Vukovar

Sports are a source of great national pride in Croatia. Football is almost a religion here, and the success of the national team in international tournaments is celebrated everywhere. Handball and water polo are also very popular. During my project, I had a chance to support the local Vukovar water polo team.

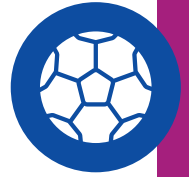


I have loved the Croatian football team since Šuker.

Juan Salvador, Spain | volunteered in Udruga Argonauta

Luka, Georgia | volunteered in Outward Bound Croatia

They have one of the strongest football national teams in Europe, so there is a huge football culture in their people. I learnt that Šibenik is very popular because of the basketballer Dražen Petrović. And in Murter I discovered an ancient tradition with the Regatas, Latinsko Idro is an important event for their citizens every September.



Football... they love football!

I noticed how many kids actually play football. It's very popular, all kids play football, but in Croatia I saw a lot of kids living with that discipline to become serious players.

In our village, I also noticed that the older folks play a game similar to bowling, but I can't quite remember the name of it. It's such a fun tradition, and you can see how it brings everyone together.

Theresa, Germany
| volunteered in
Udruga Argonauta

Manan, Armenia | volunteered in
Maritima Educare

I found out that football is essential in Croatian culture, especially the rivalry between the most popular Croatian football clubs Dinamo Zagreb and Hajduk Split.

María Isabel, Spain | volunteered in
DKolektiv – organizacija za
društveni razvoj OSIJEK

I was not aware of how much the Croatians loved football. I was surprised how everything came to a stop when the national team was playing. It was unbelievable how everyone wore their jerseys on the day of the match and classes were cancelled just to watch the football match.

Fabio, Italy | volunteered in Center
for education Slava Raškaj

I've found out about the Kostelić
siblings and about Dinamo
Zagreb.



During your volunteer service, what did you find out about Croatian food?

Croatian cuisine is diverse, blending Mediterranean, Central European, and Balkan influences. Coastal regions feature fresh seafood, olive oil, and dishes like black risotto, while inland areas are known for hearty meals like roast lamb, štrukli, and kulen. Each region has its own specialties, from Istrian fuži with truffles, Dalmatian pašticada, Zagorje turkeys with mlinci pasta to Slavonian shepherd stew čobanac. Traditional food is often enjoyed with local wines, showcasing the country's rich flavors, regional diversity, and deep-rooted culinary traditions.

Here ESC volunteers share their experiences with Croatian cuisine and its culinary traditions.

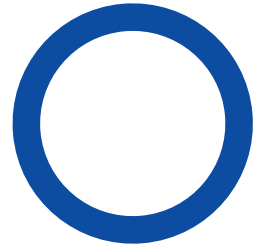


I love štrukli, typical from Zagorje and Zagreb (I am volunteering in Zabok). And I tried a lot of dishes like sarma, čvarci, burek, orahnjača, makovnjača, bučnica, and ćevapi. Special mention also to hren and pumpkin seed oil.

Agnese, Italy | volunteered in
Park prirode Vransko jezero

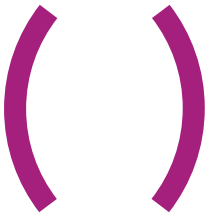
Carmen, Spain | volunteered in
Mreža udruga Zagor

Ćevapi, ajvar, sausage and beans are the most iconic food of Croatia, but also baklava and Turkish coffee are very famous. They do not eat a lot of vegetables...



Rieka, Germany | volunteered in
Scouts Croatia

I got a very good overview of Croatian food, I learned about the drinks, and the high consumption of meat therefore as a vegetarian I could not try all the significant dishes. I tried a lot of sweets like cream pie or knedle and of course some local beers. The people at the organisation tried to show us a lot of foods and traditional drinks which was very interesting. Also, I drank a lot of good coffee!!!

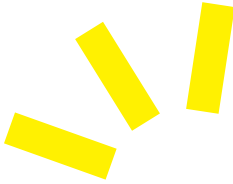


Burek, of course, meso. There was this one time my French culture was put to the test of mixing red wine with Cola to make "bambus", but it turned out quite OK in the end. When I traveled a bit more near the sea coast I tasted some delicacies like fried fish and other more Mediterranean food that was very delicious as well.

Bastien, France |
volunteered in IKS Petrinja



Ana, Georgia | volunteered in Youth Peace Group Danube YPGD Vukovar

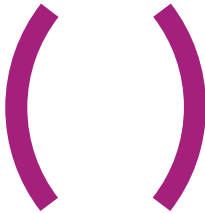


Croatian cuisine is delicious and varies by region. In Slavonia, I enjoyed hearty dishes like kulen and čobanac, while along the coast, fresh seafood is a must-try. Their desserts, especially kremšnita, are amazing!

Delicious cuisine which lasts in your memory for a long time!



Sophio, Georgia | volunteered in Maritima Educare



Thomas, USA | volunteered in EKO Centar Latinovac

Croatians like to make hearty meals with cabbage, potatoes and chicken. They like to use lots of spices and they are fans of soup and stews from what I can tell.



I fell in love with ćevapi. I know it might not be a Croatian thing, but I discovered it there and... ajme bože! It is delicious, with ajvar, kapula and lepinja. And how to forget about its olive oil, and rakija, and wine from Korčula... It is another thing! I started to love rakija and I still have it at home. Every time I travel to Croatia I bring bottles, honey, Kraš chocolate, etc. In Murter, there was a lot of fish tradition. But also a strong Italian influence with pizza places.

Juan Salvador, Spain | volunteered in Udruga Argonauta

Anna, Croatia | volunteered in Ocean Znanja

Croatian food is incredible, very tasty. If you want to know more about this country - get acquainted with the food. This is the golden rule of staying and living in Croatia.

The Italian, Hungarian and Austrian influences on the cuisine as well as Balkan dishes I didn't know. Making štrukli is one of the best experiences of the year.

Maria Isabel, Spain | volunteered in DKolektiv – organizacija za društveni razvoj OSIJEK

Adrián, Spain | volunteered in Mreža udruga Zagor

People here love chocolate. Everybody gives chocolate or kolace as a gift. But what stands out most in gastronomy is cevapi or burek. Although it is more Bosnian, it is considered a typical Croatian food. In the region of Slavonia, there is a lot of pork, so the most important is 'kulen' or 'slanina'. Also in summer, I used to love to eat corn on the cob. It is something very typical of summer, which is not done in my country. It is worth mentioning the drink par excellence, 'rakija'.



During your volunteer service, what did you find out about everyday life and habits in Croatia?

Croatian daily life balances work, family, and leisure. People enjoy socializing over coffee, often spending hours in cafés. Fresh, home-cooked meals are valued, with lunch being the main meal of the day. Weekends are for family gatherings, nature trips, or sports. Many Croatians love outdoor activities, from hiking to seaside walks. Tradition and hospitality are important, and despite a relaxed Mediterranean vibe, Croatians take pride in hard work, strong community ties, and maintaining close relationships.

In the text below, ESC volunteers provide insights into the everyday life and habits in Croatia.



People are very calm, they are not in a hurry for anything. What surprises me the most is that people who have birthdays do something for their birthdays. While in Turkey we buy cakes and gifts for the birthday person, here the birthday person orders pizza for other people. People love enjoying their life.

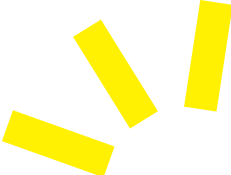
Federico, Italy | volunteered in Border:none

Başak, Turkey | volunteered in Carpe Diem

They like to enjoy the free time, going around the city, mostly during Saturday morning. The "Spica" thing caught my attention on the first day.



I observed that Croatians enjoy an active lifestyle, often spending their weekends in the mountains or hiking in nature. I also noticed their love for socializing over coffee.



Oihana, France | volunteered in Savez izviđača Hrvatske

I learned about the very "hand-made" stuff that is quite uncommon in France. The fact that to find the good cheese or the good honey you need to know the guy or girl that is making it in their home is a nice and more local way to get your grocery. Also, I learned how to properly cut wood with an axe and make a fire for the heating system. I would say everyday life is more meaningful in Croatia because it really feels like working to get things and therefore you appreciate it more.

Bastien, France | volunteered in IKS Petrinja



I've discovered that I really enjoy the rhythms of daily life and the importance of small moments, like the coffee break.

Ana, Spain | volunteered in Udruga Argonauta

Pomalo! At least in Dalmatia.



Milijana, North Macedonia | volunteered in Udruga Sunce

You can feel really safe, especially for girls. This place is one of the safest places I have ever been.

Tamar, Georgia | volunteered in Udruga Amazonas

In general, it is very happy due to the big amount of sunny days, warm climate and beautiful nature.

Yuliia, Scotland | volunteered in Udruga Sunce

Women do more heavy work in Croatia than in my country.



Anna, Ukraine | volunteered in Adra



They are similar to Spanish ones, but more respectful. Hardworkers, but they try to enjoy life.

Angel, Spain | volunteered in Udruga Amazonas

Iris, France | volunteered in Help udruga

Big difference between men and women. Women are always dressed up, they take a lot of care of their appearance (nails, hair etc.) while men are often dressed simply.



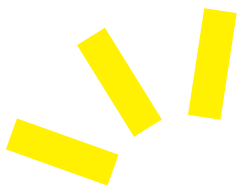
I have adopted two important habits: 1) If you go for coffee with friends, you go for coffee and should spend a lot of time on a pleasant conversation without a phone. 2) If you do not delve into the "polako" and "uživaj" and do not become a part of them, your entire stay in Croatia will be annoying and useless.

Anna, Ukraine | volunteered in Ocean Znanja

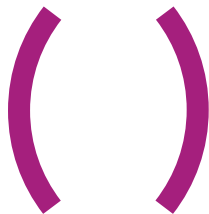


POMALO. That quiet way of life in which Croatians go about their day, sometimes a little too quietly. Also, the coffee culture in which people spend hours and hours talking while drinking coffee.

Maria Isabel, Spain | volunteered in DKolektiv – organizacija za društveni razvoj, Osijek



Tamar, Georgia | volunteered in Udruga Amazonas



I think one of the most important is chilling with coffee or beer, with friends, family members, or just by themselves.

Sunday morning coffee, the bill to pay in the bars, they never share the bill but pay alternatively, we do the same in Italy (in the south more than in the northern part) and I think it's lovely.

Agnese, Italy | volunteered in Park prirode Vransko jezero



During your volunteer service, what did you find out about places to visit in Croatia?

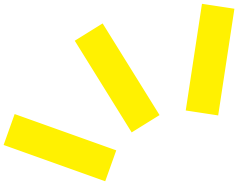
Croatia offers a variety of must-visit destinations. The historic city of Dubrovnik, known for its medieval walls, is a UNESCO World Heritage site. Split boasts the ancient Diocletian's Palace, while Plitvice Lakes National Park is famous for its stunning waterfalls. The Istrian Peninsula offers charming towns like Rovinj, and the island of Hvar is perfect for beaches and energetic nightlife. Zadar, with its Roman ruins and sea organ, and the capital, Zagreb, offer a mix of history, culture, and modern attractions. For a unique experience, visit the charming regions of Zagorje and Slavonia, known for their castles, traditional villages, and rich history. The thermal spas in Tuhelj or Varaždin region also provide a relaxing escape in the heart of the country.

Below ESC volunteers share their insights on the top destinations in Croatia and what makes them special.



I really like the variety of landscapes and the differences between the north and Dalmatia. Plitvice Lakes and Krka National Park are on my must-visit list, but we're waiting for the weather to improve a bit. One thing I really appreciate about Croatia is how many countries you can easily visit by bus or car.

Ana, Spain | volunteered in Udruga Argonauta



Gospić is the best place for me.

Luka, Georgia | volunteered in Outward Bound Croatia



Fabio, Italy | volunteered in Center for education Slava Raškaj

Yuliia, Scotland | volunteered in Udruga Sunce

Croatia is full of wonderful places to visit. There are so many national parks, islands to visit.

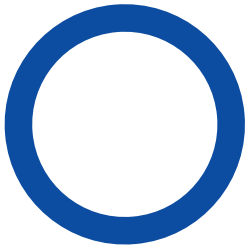
I've found out about Rijeka, Dubrovnik, and the coast in general; and about Samobor and Vukovar.



I found out that there are, of course, the beautiful Dalmatian islands and the impressive coastline. Apart from that, I was surprised by the beauty of the Croatian National Parks and inland, as well as the diverse cities.

Theresa, Germany | volunteered in Udruga Argonauta

Ana, Georgia | volunteered in Outward Bound Croatia



I knew Croatia was beautiful, but I was amazed more than I thought.

There's so much to explore! The flora and fauna differ between the North and South Islands, both stunning in their own right and definitely worth a spot on any traveler's list. The capital city is also a must-visit, especially with gems like the Museum of Nikola Tesla and the Museum of Broken Relationships, which we particularly enjoyed. Of course, Dubrovnik needs no introduction—its fame speaks for itself!



Manan, Armenia | volunteered in Maritima Educare



During your volunteer service, what did you find out about Croatian transportation?

Croatia has a well-developed transportation system. Buses and trains are popular for domestic travel, with reliable connections between cities and towns. Ferries connect the mainland to numerous islands, making coastal travel easy. In larger cities like Zagreb, Split, Rijeka and Osijek, public transportation includes trams, buses, and taxis. Croatia's road network is extensive, and car rentals are widely available for exploring more remote areas. The country also has a modern airport system, with international flights to major cities.

In the following, ESC volunteers provide their perspectives on transportation in Croatia and how convenient it is to travel around.



During my volunteer service, I found that Croatia is well-connected, and it was quite simple to travel between cities by bus. However, in Zagreb, while there were plenty of buses and trams, the schedules weren't always reliable, which could sometimes make planning a bit tricky.

Oihana, France | volunteered in Savez izviđača Hrvatske

Başak, Turkey | volunteered in Carpe Diem

In summer, transportation is really fluid and there are many buses to travel all around Croatia.

This is one of my favorite things. There is generally no public transportation in the city I live in, everywhere is within walking distance.

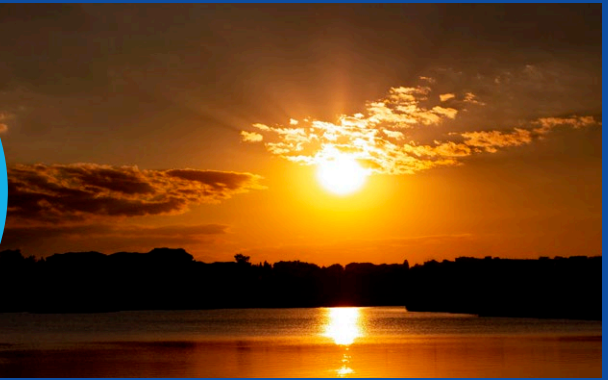
Carmen, France | volunteered in Udruga IKS

I had my bike with me so that's great, but I got to use more often trams and buses. I love the old trams that are however being discontinued, and I love that often in public transport you find someone you know - Zagreb is just a big village. Much like in Italy, transport is not always reliable, but good enough.

Very easy to travel everywhere and to go where you want easily.

Nadia, Italy | volunteered in Udruga Amazonas


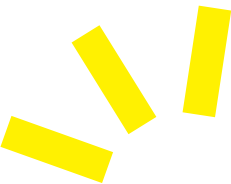
Alysa, Netherlands | volunteered in Ocean Zania



What was your best moment in Croatia?

Is the best moment in Croatia spending your summer along the Adriatic coast? Can you imagine hanging out with friends by crystal-clear waters, exploring stunning islands, and enjoying lively beach parties? What about watching the sunset in places like Hvar or Split? With local festivals adding to the excitement, Croatia offers endless fun. Whether exploring historic sites, enjoying delicious food, hiking, diving into the lively nightlife or just chilling at the beach, Croatia promises unforgettable experiences that will make every moment memorable.

Now, let's read about the best moments in Croatia from the perspective of ESC volunteers.



I have plenty of amazing memories from my experience there. One memory would be having dinner with my Croatian friends at one of their homes in the village.

Carmen, France | volunteered in Udruga IKS

Angel, Spain | volunteered in Udruga Amazonas

The best moment for now is a weekend that I spent in Šibenik with friends that we have met during the arrival training. It was nice to see how people who a week ago didn't know each other, can make plans together and spend an amazing weekend.

Ainona, Spain | volunteered in Carpe Diem

A day watching in Zagreb city center the sunset with a Burek with good company in a lovely place.

Oihana, France | volunteered in Savez izviđača Hrvatske

The best moment in Croatia was visiting Plitvice Lakes covered in snow.

Chilling in the mountains.

My birthday, celebrated with different people from all over the world.

Nikola, Hungary | volunteered in Savez izviđača Hrvatske

Federica, Italy | volunteered in Border:none



Most of my unforgettable moments are connected with my organization, so they became my second family. I will never forget the surprises we arranged for each other on holidays, cultural evenings and dinners. And the time spent together on holidays and important events as is customary in the family. I am grateful to them for every shared moment that gave me happiness.

Anna, Ukraine | volunteered in Ocean Znanja

Sophio, Georgia | volunteered in Maritima Educare

Aya, Czech Republic | volunteered in Eko Centar Latinovac

I had a spot I liked at the beach and there weren't people to disturb the silence. I would listen to music and look at the waves almost every day. Would love to go back to that for a moment.

Bonfire, chilling in Latinovac beautiful village with nice people.

I had a lot of beautiful moments in Croatia, but if I had to choose, I would say the best moment was when I first saw the sunset on top of a Dalmatian island.

Theresa, Germany | volunteered in Udruga Argonauta

My favorite moment in Croatia was volunteering at a cooking festival called Iššijada in Ruševo. At the festival, we got to listen to and dance to some Croatian music, play games with the kids, and talk with almost everyone in the town. It was awesome to have fun with the community and the food was great.



Thomas, USA | volunteered in EKO Centar Latinovac



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