



Croatia

Introduction

Official Name: Republic of Croatia
Nationality: Croatian
Area: 56,542 square kilometers (21,831 square miles)
Language: Croatian
Currency: kuna (HRK)
Location: Southeastern Europe, bordered by Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary, Serbia, Montenegro, and Slovenia with coastline on the Adriatic Sea

Statistical Information

Population	4.49 million
0-14 years	16 percent
15-64 years	67.1 percent
65+ years	16.9 percent
Birth rate	10 births/1,000
Death rate	12 deaths/1,000
Fertility rate	1.4 children/woman
Pop. growth rate	-0.035 percent
Life expectancy	74.9 years
Literacy	98.1 percent
HIV/AIDS rate	less than 0.1 percent
Below poverty line	11 percent
Ethnic groups	89.6 percent Croat 4.5 percent Serb 5.9 percent other (includes Bosniak, Hungarian, Slovene, Czech, and Roma)
Religion	87.8 percent Roman Catholic 4.4 percent Orthodox 0.4 percent Protestant 1.3 percent Muslim 0.9 percent other 5.2 percent none

Economy

Croatia was once one of the wealthiest Yugoslav republics, but the war from 1991 to 1995 dealt a blow to its economy. Since 2000, Croatia's economy has

seen steady improvement, supported by increased tourism and consumer spending. Inflation remains low and the currency, the kuna, is stable. Continuing problems for Croatia include a high unemployment rate and uneven regional development. The state retains a large role in the Croatian economy.

Government

Capital: Zagreb

Croatia is a presidential and parliamentary democracy. The president is the chief of state and is elected by popular vote to serve a five-year term. The prime minister is the head of government. The leader of the majority party or coalition is usually appointed prime minister by the president. The legislature consists of the unicameral Assembly, or Sabor, whose 153 members are elected from party lists by popular vote to serve four-year terms.

Climate

The climate in the lowlands of Croatia consists of hot, dry summers and cold winters. In the mountains, summers are cool and winters are very cold and snowy. Along the coast, the climate is Mediterranean, with dry summers and mild winters.

Environmental Concerns

Air pollution from metallurgical plants has resulted in some acid rain formation, which damages forests. Industrial and domestic wastes result in the pollution of coastal waters. Croatia is working to reconstruct infrastructure damaged during the 1991-95 war. Many land mines from the conflict have already been removed, but some minefields are still in the process of being de-mined.

History

Part of the Roman province of Pannonia, Croatia was settled in the seventh century A.D. by Croats. The Croats converted to Christianity in the ninth century. By the 10th century, Croatia was a kingdom. It

conquered surrounding districts, including Dalmatia, which it continually contested with Venice. The Croatian kingdom reached its peak in the 11th century, but internal strife facilitated its conquest by King Ladislaus I of Hungary in 1091.

In 1102, a pact between Ladislaus's successor and Croatian rulers established a union of Croatia and Hungary under the Hungarian crown. Although Croatia and Hungary remained linked for eight centuries, Croats were sometimes able to choose their own ruler independently of Budapest. Under the union with Hungary, Croatia retained its own diet and was governed by a viceroy.

Following the battle of Mohács in 1526, most of Croatia came under Turkish control. In 1527, Croatian feudal lords agreed to accept the Hapsburgs as their kings in return for Hapsburg protection against the Turks.

The Hapsburg policies of centralization and assimilation began to weaken the power of the Croatian nobility, which awakened Croatian nationalism. During the 19th century, Hungary imposed Magyarization on Croatia. It also passed a series of laws in 1848 which threatened Croatian autonomy within the Hapsburg empire. The viceroy of Croatia, Joseph Jellachich, had the Croatian diet pass its own revolutionary laws, including the abolition of serfdom. Jellachich's army also fought against Hungarian revolutionaries in the 1848-49 uprising against the Hapsburgs.

When the Austro-Hungarian monarchy was established in 1867, Croatia and Slavonia were part of the kingdom of Hungary, while Dalmatia and Istria were part of the Austrian empire. In 1868, Croatia and Slavonia together became an autonomous Hungarian territory governed by a viceroy responsible to the Croatian diet.

Despite obtaining autonomy over local affairs, Croats remained frustrated with Austria-Hungary's Magyarization policies. Croat and South Slav cultural and political organizations were formed, including the Croatian Peasant party, formed in the early 20th century.

When Austria-Hungary collapsed in 1918, at the end of World War I, Croatia became part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, which was later renamed Yugoslavia. Serbs dominated the new government and promoted centralization, ignoring Croat desires for a federal government.

Continuing tensions and agitation led to the assassination of Stepan Radić, head of the Croatian Peasant party, in 1928. His successor, Vladimir Maček, made a deal with Fascist Italy to form a separate Croatian state. In 1939, Yugoslavia allowed the formation of an autonomous *banovina* consisting of Croatia, Dalmatia, and parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Despite partial autonomy, many Croats, especially members of the Ustachi fascist organization, continued to press for complete independence.

In 1941, the Germans invaded Yugoslavia. The Ustachi seized power and declared Croatia an independent country under Ante Pavelić. During World War II, Croatia was under first Italian then German military control. The Ustachi dictatorship was brutal and repressive; it established concentration camps such as the Jasenovac camp, where an estimated 200,000 Serbs, Jews, Gypsies, and members of Croat opposition parties were killed. Many Croats joined the anti-Fascist Yugoslav forces led by Josip Broz Tito, a native Croatian.

Following Germany's defeat in 1945, Pavelić fled Croatia, and Croatia became one of six republics in the reorganized Yugoslavia. The new federal government was Communist, and Croatian nationalism continued to grow. Yugoslavia's decentralization reforms in the early 1970s were intended to help satisfy Croat demands for autonomy and calm secessionist sentiments, but Tito's death in 1980 weakened the Yugoslavian government and increased Croatia's desire for independence.

In 1990, Croatia elected a non-Communist government and demanded greater autonomy. On June 25, 1991, Croatia declared its independence from Yugoslavia, with Franjo Tuđman as its president. Fighting erupted almost immediately between Croatian forces and federal troops, who were mostly Serbian, along with Serbs from Serb-dominated areas of Croatia. The Serbs created the Republic of Serbian Krajina in central and northeastern Croatia.

Following the failure of European Community-brokered cease-fires, the United Nations mediated a fairly stable truce in 1992. In February, the U.N. sent peacekeeping troops. The truce froze land boundaries where they were, leaving 30 percent of Croatia in Serbian hands. It also left many Croats as refugees who had been driven from Serb-held lands due to ethnic cleansing.

Croatia was recognized as an independent nation by the European Community (the predecessor to the European Union) in 1993 and was accepted into the United Nations. In 1993, Croatian forces launched attacks against Serb rebels, and during 1995, the Croatian army recaptured most Serb-held territory, with the exception of East Slavonia, causing around 300,000 Serbs to flee to Bosnia and Yugoslavia.

Croatia had supported Bosnian Croats when fighting erupted in Bosnia in 1992, and it was a player in Bosnian peace negotiations. Croatia, Bosnia, and Serbia signed the Bosnian peace treaty in 1995. Another agreement, which called for East Slavonia to be returned to Croatian control, took effect in 1998.

Croatia's current president, Stipe Mesić, was reelected in January 2005, and in October 2005, the European Union opened membership talks with Croatia. In April 2008, Croatia was accepted as a member of NATO.

Ethnic Groups

Ethnic Croats, who comprise nearly 90 percent of Croatia's population, are a South Slavic people group. Their native tongue is Croatian, which has the longest written tradition of all South Slavic languages. There are three main dialects of Croatian, but modern standard Croatian is based on the *shtokavian* dialect. Croatian is mutually intelligible with both Serbian and Bosnian. Croats are predominantly Roman Catholic, and Catholicism has played a large role in the development of Croatian culture.

Croatia is home to around 20 ethnic minorities. Serbs, at 4.5 percent of the population, are the largest minority, though there were many more Serbs in Croatia before the war. There are also populations of Bosniaks, Hungarians, Slovenes, Czechs, and Roma, along with smaller numbers of other ethnicities.

Religion

Croatians are overwhelmingly Roman Catholic; around 87.7 percent of the population identifies with the Roman Catholic Church. The majority of Roman Catholics in Croatia are ethnic Croats.

The Orthodox Christian population in Croatia is comprised mainly of Serbs.

Around 0.4 percent of Croatians identify with one of four Protestant denominations: the Reformed Christian Church in Croatia, the Lutheran Church in Croatia, the Croatian Baptist Union, or the

Evangelical Church in Croatia. Around 1.3 percent of Croatians are Sunni Muslims.

Culture

Food—In northern and inland Croatia, the cuisine has strong Austrian and Hungarian influences. A typical Croatian lunch includes chicken or beef soup, meat (pork is common), potatoes, and bread. In the spring and summer, greens with vinegar and oil are popular. Along the coast, Croatians eat fish with pasta, risotto, or polenta. Lamb is a common dish in the Dalmatian highland region. Breakfast often consists of bread and jam with strong coffee, and dinner is usually leftovers from lunch, cold meats, and bread with cheese.

Restaurants are often formal and more expensive, and eating out is not common, although many Croatians have coffee in cafés regularly.

Marriage—Croatian couples arrange their own marriages. Many meet in school, through friends, or at work, and the relationship is often serious by the time they meet each other's family. Young people tend to marry someone of similar ethnicity, religion, social status, and educational level as themselves.

Education—Kindergartens are free and accept children ages one through six. Children begin formal education at age seven. Croatians value higher education, and there are five large universities in Croatia. Those who do not attend university usually attend a secondary school to prepare for work.

Etiquette—Greetings are very important in Croatia; failure to greet someone in a context that requires a greeting may be seen as a snub. Those who do not know each other well use formal greetings, while family members or close friends greet each other more informally, often with a kiss on the cheek.

Dress

Croatians dress in the same types of clothing as Americans and Canadians. Clothing is very contemporary, and is often influenced by Italian fashion, as Italy is a near neighbor of Croatia. U.S. urban styles, such as tennis shoes, are also common.

Travel/Transportation

Croatian roads are generally well-maintained. Drivers may encounter delays due to ongoing road construction projects. Some stretches of highway are two-lane roads. Travelers may find that highway tolls are higher than in North America.

Coastal roads can be narrow and congested, especially during rush hour and during the high-traffic summer months. Rock slides are possible in some areas. Major roads, especially in urban areas, experience heavy traffic on weekends and during rush hours. Drivers should be prepared to slow down significantly when approaching a tunnel due to traffic.

Right turns on red lights are prohibited by Croatian law, except in the case of a green arrow. Seat belts are mandatory, and children under the age of 12 may not sit in the front seat of a vehicle. Cell-phone use while driving is allowed only if the driver is using a hands-free device. Headlights must be used at all times of the day.

Illness/Injury

Hospitals and clinics in Croatia are very good, with well-trained staff, but tend to be under severe budget constraints. As a result, some medicines may be in short supply. There are many private medical and dental practitioners, and private pharmacies stock a wide variety of medications.

Croatian hospitals and clinics may expect immediate cash payment for their services, and do not generally accept credit cards.

Crime

Croatia has a low rate of crime, and violent crime is rare. Criminals do not target foreigners. As in other countries, outward displays of wealth may increase a traveler's risk of being targeted by thieves.

Safety and Security

Croatia has not experienced terrorist threats or activity. Hostilities from the war ended in 1995.

De-mining in areas of former conflict is not complete. It is estimated that de-mining operations will continue at least until 2010. Areas which have not been cleared of mines are clearly marked in Croatian using the international symbol for mines. Areas that may be affected include Eastern Slavonija, Brodsko-Posavska county, Karlovac county, areas around Zodor, and remote areas of Plitvice Lakes National Park.

Entry/Exit Requirements

A valid passport is required to enter Croatia. U.S. and Canadian citizens do not need a visa for tourist or business trips of 90 days or less. Foreigners already in Croatia who wish to remain for more than 90 days must apply for a temporary residence permit.

For more information on visas or entry and exit requirements, contact the Embassy of Croatia at 2343 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20008.

Immunizations

There are no required vaccines for travelers to Croatia. Consult a travel health professional; some travelers may wish to consider hepatitis A or hepatitis B vaccines.

Special Circumstances

As credit cards are more widely accepted in Croatia, travelers checks are accepted less frequently. ATMs are readily available in Croatia.

Electricity

Croatia uses 230V/50Hz power, so a power converter will be required to use most American appliances in Croatia. Many recently made cell-phone chargers and laptop computers are manufactured to work with different types of power, so they will not require a converter. Croatia uses plug types C and F, so a set of plug adapters will be necessary to adapt American types A and B plugs to fit in Croatian outlets.