

BRITISH AIRWAYS

nigh life

DON'T WAIT TO ESCAPE
MAY 2006

A ROUND OF GULF
18 BOAST-WORTHY ADVENTURES
FROM DOHA TO DUBAI

**KING KONG'S GUIDE
TO WELLINGTON**

TRIPOLI FOR WEEKENDERS

SAILING CROATIA

**WHERE TO ISLAND-HOP
ALONG THE
DALMATIAN COAST**

**YOUR MOVIE,
TV AND AUDIO GUIDE**
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CONSPIRACY THEORY TOURS SLACKER SPORTS IN RIGA **ENGLISH WINE**

RED HOT YACHTS

Andrew Bray, editor of *Yachting World*, chooses six top boats – and where to be seen sailing them

MIRABELLA V

The world's largest single-masted yacht, owned by Jo Vittorio of Avis, hit the headlines in 2004 when she ended up on the rocks. Fortunately, she's now repaired. **Where to sail:** Don't Moor it in Cannes for this month's Festival. £170,000 plus crew tip



TALITHA G

This fully restored 80m veteran motor yacht was once owned by Sir Paul Getty and is more of a gentleman's club than a yacht. **Where to sail:** Golfe de St Tropez in September for the classic yacht regatta. £200,000 a week



PELAGIC AUSTRALIS

This 21 m boat spends northern hemisphere summers in the Arctic and southern in the Antarctic. **Where to sail:** Explore Antarctica! Fly to Buenos Aires or Santiago (local flight to Puerto Williams). Join Pelagic Australis and sail to the Antarctic for £2,400 a day



LEANDER

A 75m luxury motor yacht and one of the largest available for charter, it's owned by car-park tycoon Sir Donald Gosling. **Where to sail:** To Valencia this month, and next, to watch the America's Cup. £280,000 a week



VICTORIA OF STRATHEARN

An elegant and graceful 40m ketch with teak and circular decks, built in New Zealand. **Where to sail:** The Newport Bucket in July. Superyachts gather in Newport, Rhode Island, for friendly racing. Charter fee is £43,000 a week



MOORINGS 4700

In the bareboat business, meaning without skipper or crew, catamarans are popular because of stability and space. The boat has four doubles. **Where to sail:** Around the Grenadines in the Caribbean. £4,000 a week



► catch that day. Plump figs with honey follow spear-caught squid, grilled on a woodfire and served with endless yarns and kitchen wisdom.

The protected waters of Vis are rich in Roman and Venetian wrecks and provide a watery grave for ships from the Second World War. Zoran arranges my first ever wreck dive with the local school, the boys snorkel furiously and Sarah lazes on the sundeck. At the Blue Cave, the noonday sun bounces off the seabed, colouring the surface silver and the rocks bright blue. Hold your breath for 30 seconds and you can swim under the cave wall; Sam and Ben do so until their faces flush purple.

On Lastovo, in a concealed bay that once hid pirate galleys, we find a fisherman, Tonci. In perfect Croatian, Ben confides to him: "*Mi smo Engleski gusari!*" Cackling with laughter, he dashes inside his shack, emerges with a fat-cheeked, spiky *skrpina*, or scorpion fish, and promptly invites us to dinner. In Croatia, no sauce masks the flavour of fish, which comes either grilled, boiled or baked. Tonci butterflies the *skrpina*, grills it till crispy and serves it with bread, salad and red wine.

The tiny Lastovaniati islets to the east form a lagoon with great shallows for swimming and boast a lighthouse, which we vow to hire for a second honeymoon – this time without the boys.

Sadly, my camera takes an unscheduled swim here, instantly corroding its digital innards. But Sail Croatia have a solution to this catastrophe. They lend us a replacement camera, promising to send a CD of photos on our return.

Korcula was home to Marco Polo. his original name, *Pilac* (meaning chicken), was italicised to Pollo, but Mark Chicken didn't have quite the same ring. The red-roofed Venetian architecture and narrow streets of the old town are a taster for Dubrovnik. The white campanile that rises mast-like against the azure sky turns out to be more bar than bell tower, and is a spectacular place to drink the robust local Dingac red.

On Mljet, Saint Paul was reputedly shipwrecked on his way to trial in Rome. This was also where Ulysses dallied with Calypso for seven years or so before making his way home to the wife. We could see why. Thick pine forests, made for hiring mountain bikes, embrace two saltwater lakes, the larger with its own Benedictine island monastery; one third of the island is a wilderness national park; and the fish, emboldened by a prohibition on angling, know no fear.

The Elafiti islands mark our return to the world of man. Lopud is landscaped with statues and the abandoned summer palaces of the Dukes of Dubrovnik. Sipan bizarrely claims the world's highest concentration of churches – 35 in its square mile.

Finally into Dubrovnik, whose massive fortifications, defence against raiding pirates, are no match for Sam and Ben, who walk their length. Friday night supper is local oysters and risotto, dyed black with squid ink. The boys squeamishly prefer *cevapcici*, Croatian meatballs, but lap up *rozata* – Dubrovcan *crème brûlée*.

Not once during the course of our trip do we see a sign that says 'tourists are welcome'; yet welcomed we certainly are, in a uniquely personal manner that belongs to an older Mediterranean, before the days of the package holiday.

We also earn our sea legs the easy way with Zoran, and are now experienced seafarers; if not, as Ben insists to the passport controller at Gatwick, fully-qualified pirates. ■

Turn over for our recommendations in Split and Dubrovnik ►

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