

## People

## Stepping back in time

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"To travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive" wrote Robert Louis Stevenson in a rewrite of the Taoist saying "The journey is the reward". Could he have been visiting Dubrovnik on the Adriatic coast? I suspect not by Jet2 – the north of England's response to flydubai and Jazeera Airways.

I was travelling hopefully when I set off in the early morning drizzle for Leeds Airport and found myself deposited at Jet2's do-it-yourself check-in desk. Everything at Jet2 is cut price – and you just know you are going to get what you paid for.

"Good bordig, ladies add gedlebed. This is your captaid speakig," announced an adenoidal voice through the plane's loudspeaker.

We had booked an in-flight meal as one of the optional extras. And boy, could the big boys learn from Jet2. For a start it was actually edible; quite scrummy in fact. Sure, the pot of yoghurt looked somewhat 'ripe' and you just knew it would explode the moment it was opened. (It did, bazooka-style... but I was ready!) The coffee cup warned that the contents might be hot (I jolly well hoped so) and also that it had a 'Rainbow Alliance Certification', although when I asked the trolley dolly if this applied to the coffee or the cardboard cup she told me she didn't know.

We arrived at Dubrovnik airport 45 minutes early. A strong tailwind, apparently. Then we were herded through immigration and out to enjoy the warm welcome of Hrvatska Republika – or Croatia to us mere mortals.

The last time I had been here was 35 years ago. And despite the brochures tagging it with the marketing line 'The Mediterranean as it used to be', I was delighted to find that, apart from a few shelled buildings and walls riddled with bullet holes from the civil war of 15 years ago, the marketers had got it right. No Starbucks, no McDonalds, not even speed cameras on the roads. Just a bunch of smiling people glad to have the tourists coming back to their country and going out of their way to make them feel welcome.

They also go out of their way to make it clear who were the goodies and who were the bad guys during the civil war. 'Sveti Vlaho' (the patron saint of Dubrovnik) reads a sign stuck onto the side of a mini-battleship parked on the pavement by the new harbour. The 'symbol and pride of resistance against Serbo-Montenegrin aggression on our town', it reads, just in case we're in any doubt.

We settle down in a café for a bit of light refreshment. I am intrigued by one of the menu items – blubbery juice. Blubbery Juice? I have to order some, all too aware that there are precious few whales to be found in this part of the Adriatic. But it's just a typo and the blueberry is extremely tasty.

The next day we're off on a one-day package tour to Montenegro – or Republika Crna Gora as it is known locally. There is a preponderance of male couples on the trip and I get to wonder if Crna Gora is the pink capital of Europe. Russian guys, Swedish guys, Polish guys ... have we come to the wrong place?

But it's too late to worry about things like that as the forests of Cyprus trees give way to the signs for Carina-Douane. We're at the border with the old enemy and the long queues of cars are testament to the fact that though the two republics are now at peace, there is still a strong feeling of distrust between them.

No use here for the Croatian Kuna; euros are the order of the day -more of an accident than anything else. During the two years of the 'new Yugoslav Republic' formed by Serbia and Montenegro it was decided that the German mark would be the official currency; but come the demise of the Deutsche Mark they had no choice but to adopt the euro. Still, it doesn't seem to have done them any harm.

The Dalmatian coast was really lovely and the week passed all too quickly. But thinking positively, I at least had the pleasure of not having to wait too much longer for my return flight on Jet2. No exploding yoghurt, this time though. Instead we enjoyed exploding apple crumble – but that is a story which, as they say, must keep for another time.

by **Brain Salter**

*Editor's note: The views expressed in the monthly column 'Speaking Out' are from our contributors and not associated with those of TTN.*