

TEN THINGS TO DO IN DUBROVNIK

- 1** Tour the city ramparts and enjoy unmatched vistas of the old town and surrounding sea (p. 39).
- 2** See the Rector's Palace, from where the ruling oligarchy governed the Republic for almost 500 years (p. 57).
- 3** Dine on today's catch, freshly grilled, with a view of the old port at Lokanda Peskarija (p. 176).
- 4** Meet the mariners and see the ships that made Dubrovnik great at the Maritime Museum (p. 100).
- 5** Bask on the sandy beach of Šunj on Lopud, the most beautiful of the Elaphite Islands (p. 158).
- 6** Find inner peace at the Franciscan friary, in Croatia's most beautiful mediaeval cloister (p. 70).
- 7** See two treasures of late mediaeval Ragusan art at the seaside nunnery of Danče (p. 146).
- 8** Stroll in Trsteno's sylvan glades, where Tasso, Titian and Byron all found inspiration (p. 167).
- 9** Drink chilled *prošek* on the terrace of the Gradska Kavana, overlooking the church of Dubrovnik's patron saint (p. 181).
- 10** Take a boat trip to Cavtat, site of the Graeco-Ilyrian Epidaurum (p. 170).

DUBROVNIK OR RAGUSA?

Though the Slav name Dubrovnik was first recorded in 1189, the Latin derivation Ragusa was how the city was internationally known until the 20th century. In this book the two names are used interchangeably, though when referring to events that came after the fall of the Ragusan Republic in 1808, the name Dubrovnik is always used.

THE STORY OF ST BLAISE

Almost everywhere you go in Dubrovnik you are overlooked by the kindly figure of St Blaise: Sveti Vlaho. It was thanks to him, or so the legend goes, that Dubrovnik managed to defend herself against a Venetian attack in the 10th century. The Venetians' tactics were sly: they landed in Dubrovnik on the pretext of being en route for the Levant, and requested fresh water and supplies. But unbeknown to the Ragusans, they had left a sizeable fleet of gunships hidden half at Gruž and half at Lokrum. Just in time a Dubrovnik priest by the name of Stoico had a vision in which St Blaise appeared to him, warning that the Venetians were planning to mobilise their warships under cover of darkness. Stoico told the city authorities, who took the warning seriously, with the result that the citizens were armed and ready to repel the attack when it came.

So much for the legend. The historical Blaise was a bishop from 3rd-century Armenia, who was persecuted and martyred under the Roman governor Agricola. His relics came to Dubrovnik in 972, after which he was adopted as the patron saint of the city. The manner of Blaise's martyrdom is not certain, but some accounts say that he was flayed to death with iron combs, which is why a comb is often used as his emblem, and he has become the patron saint of woolcombers. He is also one of the Fourteen Holy Helpers, ancillary saints believed to be efficacious at curing human ailments. Blaise's ailment is sore throats, because his legend claims that he once saved a child from choking to death on a fish bone. There are people still living who remember placing their necks in the cleft between two crossed candles and praying to St Blaise to relieve their streptococcal infections. St Blaise's Day is celebrated on February 3rd (see p. 186). The day before that is Candlemas, when the candles are blessed.

Blaise is the symbol of the Dubrovnik Republic, his image appearing on the state flag, on Ragusan coins, over the gateways into the city, and impressed upon all the cannons that once bristled along the city walls.



FORT BOKAR: This is another design by Michelozzo, who is famed for his ability to combine massy strength with a pleasing elegance of line. It was completed in 1570, having taken almost 100 years to build. Cannons were fired from it in times of peace to test their range. During the 19th

century, when Austria controlled Dalmatia, Fort Bokar was used as a prison. One of its inmates was Arthur Evans, the British archaeologist who later went on to fame for uncovering the ruins of Knossos on Crete. In 1882 he was working for the *Manchester Guardian*, writing on

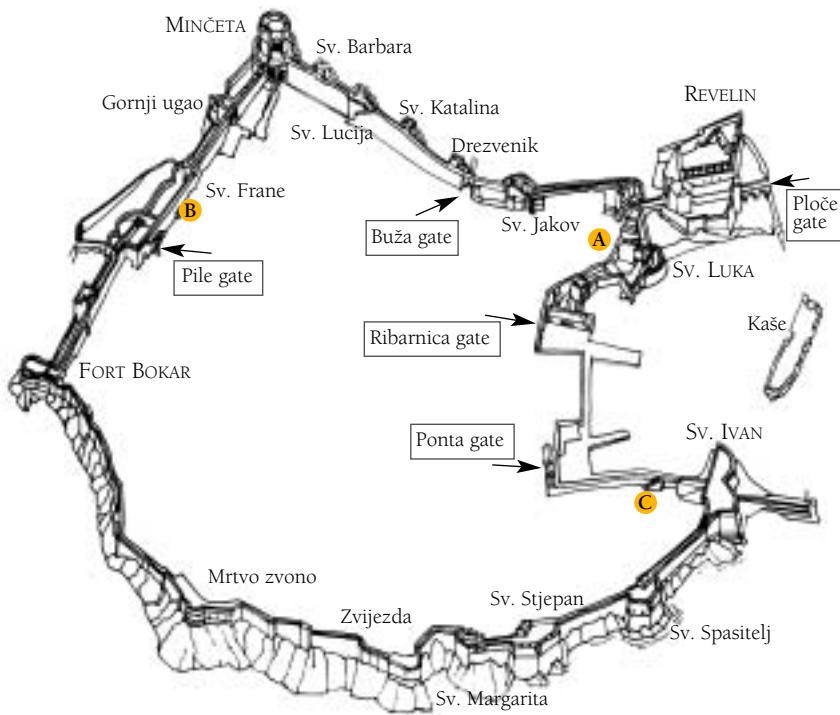
THE FORTS, GATES & BASTIONS

ACCESS TO THE WALLS:

A On Sv. Dominika, next to St Luke's chapel;

B Just inside the Pile gate;

C On Od Pustijerne: follow signs to the Maritime Museum.



Fort Lovrijenac rises impregnably above the tiny harbour of Brsalje, protecting approaches to the city from the south-west.

Balkan affairs, and making forays into Herzegovina that led the Austrian government to arrest him on charges of espionage. He was released after six weeks, but banished from Austria and her dominions.

PILE GATE: The outer gate with its Renaissance archway dates from 1537. It boasts the city's oldest effigy of St Blaise. The drawbridge is by the municipal engineer Miličević. The Gothic inner gate is almost a century earlier. This time the effigy of St Blaise is the city's most recent, the work of the sculptor Ivan Meštrović (see p. 99).

PLOČE GATE & REVELIN: The Ploče gate is similar in design to the Pile gate, with outer and inner gates and a drawbridge. The Revelin fortress, whose main function was to protect the city against landward Turkish attack, is incorporated into the outer gate. When it was being built, all Ragusan citizens resident outside the old town had to contribute a stone.

FORT ST JOHN (Sv. IVAN): Today's fort dates from 1557, a joining together of two earlier fortresses according to plans by Miličević. It is now home to the Maritime Museum (see p. 100).

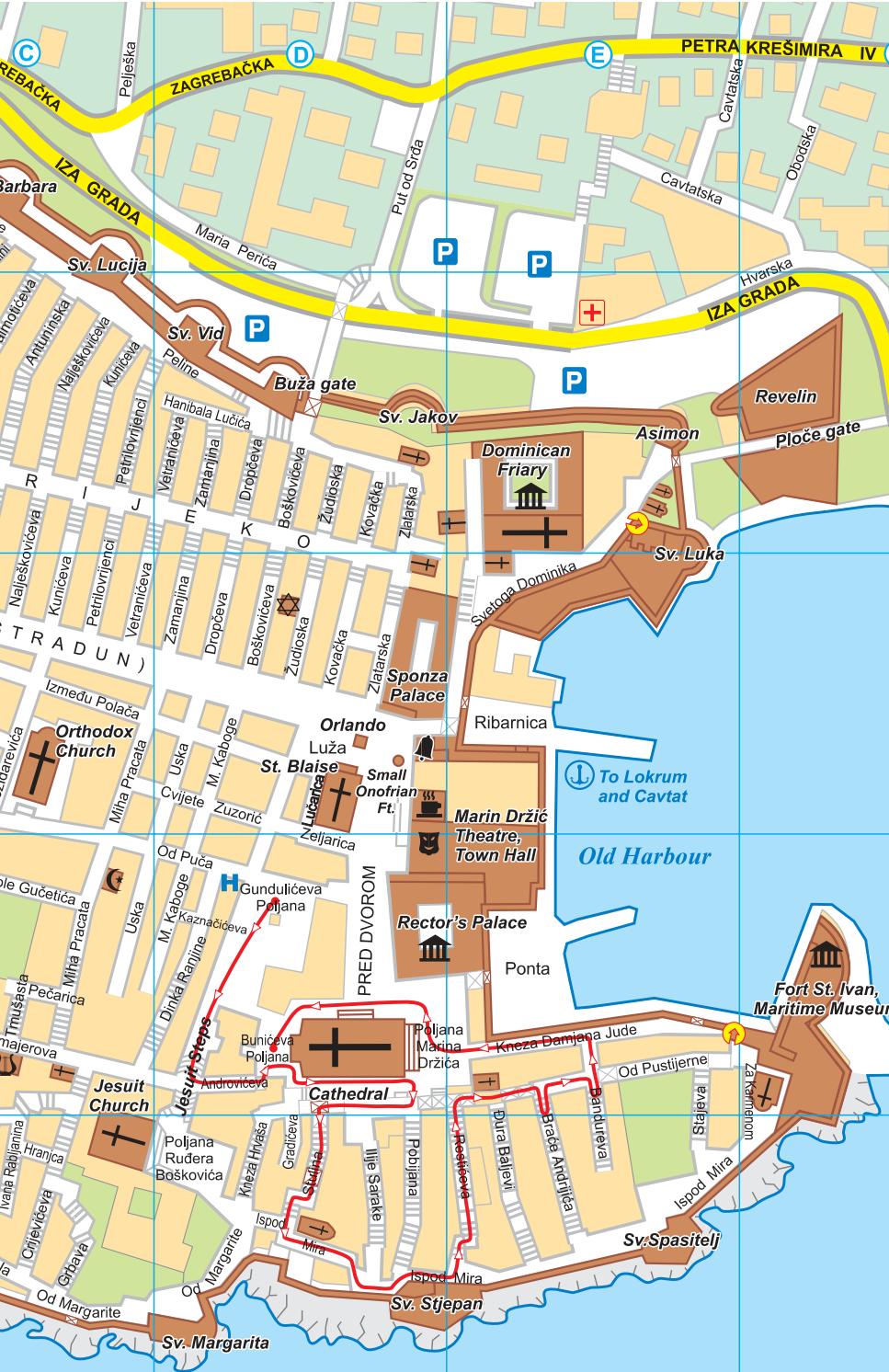


AROUND OD PUSTIJE

The street name *Od Pustijerne* is a corruption of the Latin *post terra*, meaning an area outside the main settlement. This ancient former suburb was popular with wealthy 16th-century Ragusans as the site for their town palaces.

This walk begins in the centre of **Gundulićeva poljana**, a broad, sunny square dominated by the 19th-century **statue of Ivan Gundulić** (see p. 132), not only the greatest poet of Dubrovnik, but also

Market stalls on Gundulićeva poljana.



LITERARY RAGUSANS

At the beginning of the 19th century the Croatian romantic writer Ljudevit Gaj issued a cry of ‘cultural patriotism’, calling for the history and literature of his fatherland to be ‘lifted out of the miserable Magyar darkness’. He came up against a great stumbling block though: language. In what language was the great new canon of national literature to be written? The Dalmatian aristocrats spoke Italian. The educated classes in Slavonia used Latin for official business and often spoke German or Hungarian at home. The various forms of Croatian were largely vernacular dialects spoken by the peasantry—except perhaps the Štokaski dialect, the language of the great Gundulić (*see below*), and the language of Dubrovnik. Dubrovnik at that time had something of a cult status in Croatia as a bastion of native Slav culture, a symbol of liberty and independence from Turkish, Hungarian and Austrian domination. 16th-century Ragusan plays were all the rage in the literary salons of Zagreb—and the fashion endured until the end of the 19th century.

IVAN GUNDULIĆ (1589–1638):

The poet Gundulić is Dubrovnik's greatest writer and a symbol of Croatian national identity.



When the new Croatian National Theatre was built in Zagreb in the late 19th century, its stage curtain was adorned with an image of Gundulić enthroned, entitled ‘Croatian Renaissance’, and painted by the Dubrovnik artist Vlaho Bukovac (*see p. 98*). While the language of Gundulić was adopted as the language of Croatia as a whole, his passionate lyrics extolling freedom were raised to anthem status. Born into a prominent noble family, Gundulić was twice elected Rector of Konavle, widely seen as a sort of rector-in-waiting post for Dubrovnik itself, though he died too young ever to hold that august position (Dubrovnik rectors had to be at least fifty). One of the only famous Ragusans to have a monument erected in his memory, his periwigged statue dominates Gudulićeva poljana, and the statue's plinth is decorated with scenes from his most famous poem, *Osman*, which tells of the defeat of the

Turkish Sultan by the Polish army, and which contains his famous description of Dubrovnik as the ‘white city’.

MARIN DRŽIĆ (1508–1567): Many of the 16th-century plays performed in the fashionable Zagreb salons were probably the work of Držić. His comedies are still performed today—and though he is often compared to Molière because of certain similarities in his plots and characters, he in fact predates Molière by more than a century. Although Držić maintained a stance that was antagonistic to the ruling elite, his work was so popular that he came to no harm. We do not know if any of the nobles saw the funny side in constantly being portrayed as a class of blithering inbred idiots deservedly outwitted by their canny, streetwise servants; but even if they didn't, Držić was never clapped in irons, not even when he began actively plotting to overthrow the Ragusan government system. No success ever crowned his revolutionary intrigues, and in later life he left Dubrovnik for Venice, where he died in poverty. The house where Držić lived is now a museum. *Dom Marina Držića, Široka 7. Open 9am–2pm. Map p. 198, C4.*

The solitary church of Sv. Jakov Višnjica.

WALK FOUR

