Croatia charter cruise, May 31st to June 7th 2003

Itinerary
Marina Kremik - Mikavica (Zirje island) – Kaprije village - Skradin - Krka waterfalls - Lavsa (Kornati) - Levrnaka - Striznja - Aba Vela - Telascica (Dugi Otok island) - Katina - Sv Ante (Pasman island) - Kosirina (Murter island) - Primosten – Marina Kremik
Total nautical miles logged in the week: 151.3 nm

Saturday May 31st

We start from Vienna where we have stayed for a couple of days.
At Kremik marina, we meet the staff of our trusted Offshore Boote charter company.
We hear that the Fairline 40 Flybridge yacht which we had booked had developed a generator problem which they were working on. As a free upgrade we are offered a Princess 470, ANTARES, a well-equipped modern 15m Fly-bridge yacht with twin 425 hp Caterpillar diesels. I'm delighted about the treat, a luxury yacht for just the two of us, the largest boat we have been on so far. Jane's first impression is that she is possibly "a bit oversized to be elegant" to her taste … let's see how we get on.
A slight problem with the wireless remote of the passarella gets sorted instantly; we have dinner at the Kremik restaurant, good as usual.
We then settle down for the first quiet night on board, she seems a very comfy boat.

Sunday June 1st

Beautiful day; we are off to the café for breakfast. The market is temporarily closed, so is one of the shower blocks, lots of renovations are going on at Kremik, and new floating pontoons are being built.
Photo – Restaurant Kremik, new pontoons have been installed.

This means we need to take a bus to Primosten to get provisions. By 11am we are back and set off 11:30am for **Zirje**.
Bay **Muna** we find small and a bit dull, occupied by a ferry already. We go on to **Mikavica,** where we find a trip boat and one yacht.
We anchor, at second attempt. Have light lunch and sunbathe, get dinghy down and swim, water is a bit fresh. Even "pink" Jane tries it, but does not stay in for too long.
Photo – Mikavica (Zirje)

At 4:30pm we head for the town on **Kaprije**, a delightful tiny fishing village.
Mooring first time in the small harbour (on anchor, no laid moorings), I am pleased that the boat has got a bow thruster.
Photo - Antares moored at Kaprije pier

No church is in sight, but 4-5 small restaurants, out of which we pick the one simply called "Grill"- which is supposed the first to have started in that bay. Our meal of fresh grilled fish, salad and pots is excellent as is the wine.
We are able to watch an amazing sunset from our table, with the sun making colourful appearances between various clouds and mist on the horizon.
[Distance logged 21.2 nm]



Marina Kremik restaurant. New pontoons have been installed to increase capacity



Anchored at Micavica cove (Zirje)



Antares moored at Kaprije pier

Monday June 2nd

Cooler in the night and a bit of rain - which wipes out the harbour's basic shore electricity supply (water ingress into a connector of an extension cable).
Overcast morning, we take pictures of interesting looking fishing boats with oddly shaped rowlocks and bows (reminding us of prows of ancient Egyptian ships).
Photo – Local fishing boats, Kaprije

Setting off we have a slight issue with the anchor chain jumping off the bow roller and getting stuck. It is unblocked easily and we motor towards the channel to Sibenik, quite an industrial place, and up the river Krka.

We pass a few nice bays and finally reach the large **lake Prokljansko** where we go the NW shore and anchor in the Guduca estuary.
Brilliant bay, and all to ourselves, we lunch, swim and sunbathe.

Further up the Krka river and towards **Skradin,** passing large canyons where a new road bridge is being built.
At Skradin marina, try to moor up on a long pontoon where a guy has been waiting and waving - not easy due to strong cross wind. Straitening up the mooring ropes is too hard for Jane and even the marinaio who comes to assist struggles, so I have to help using the engine. Well, one needs to appreciate that we are only two of us on a boat with substantial windage.

Photo – Skradin marina and village
Photo – Antares on pier at Skradin marina

Drinks on board, and then off to a fabulous fish dinner at BONACO, set slightly above the other restaurants in this small and beautiful town and harbour.
[Distance logged 22.5 nm]



"Egyptian" looking prows on some fishing boats?



Skradin marina and town



Antares moored on the pontoon at Skradin marina

Tuesday June 3nd

Have had a very good sleep and go out 9am for a tour of the Krka falls.
These are approached walking along a variety of streams, some wide others narrow, through a verdant area, until you reach the spectacular falls cascading down through woods and rocks from the top of the valley.
Photo – Krka falls

We walked about 1 hour, and took the short boat trip on the lake above the falls, to the ancient Franciscan Monastery of Visovac. A picturesque place with well-kept gardens with exotic plants, box maze hedges, and even peacocks. It's popular with locals, we shared the boat with (well behaved) school children.
Photo – Visovac monastery in lake Krka.
Photo – Gardens at Visovac monastery

Returned to the boat, had lunch and left by about 3pm, bound W for the Kornati islands.

The first point to steer to is **Opat** island, quite a nice bay just as you enter the string of islands. Virtually a moonscape with little vegetation and no habitation.

Move on and anchor in the sheltered bay of **Lavsa** island, the next to SE of Piskera, find space for us towards its shallower S corner, other yachts, about 10 Sunsail yachts, are dotted around the deeper areas.
Very pleasant bay, we decide to stay for the night, I go for a swim and check of the anchor.
Photo – Evening at anchor in Lavsa cove, Kornati

All is fine, we have our usual drinks and launch the dinghy 7:30pm to get to the simple but inviting restaurant.
These are laid back places built and run by locals, open during the summer season only, and using local produce. The local wine here is simple - reminding us a little of Greek wine/retsina, but drinkable.
We have a lovely mixed fish platter, and later return to our boat, where we enjoy a night cap by candle light on the flybridge, under the quiet starry sky, pure boating idylls!

Very good night, only woken up once: Being my cautious self, I had set up a depth watch alarm which duly went off during the night; no danger at all but the water level had dropped by more than 40cm.
[Distance logged 32.6 nm]



Krka falls



Visovac monastery in lake Krka



Gardens of the Visovac monastery



Anchored in Lavsa bay (Kornati) for the night

Wednesday June 4th
Get up 8ish to a blue sunny morning. After breakfast take the dinghy ashore and walk up to the hilltop with the camera, and enjoy the view. A bit harder climb than anticipated due to rocks and gravel.
Exceptional views towards the open seas, Piskera island and all around.
Photo - View over Lavsa cove towards Piskera.
We climb down avoiding injury from sharp rock edges.

There's evidence of what seems to be an ancient fish farm just off the shore with remaining underwater walls and single entrance. Walls now end about a foot under the surface and you can walk on them.
Photo - Antares anchored well off the underwater walls in Lavsa cove
Photo - "Jane walking on the water".

Have lunch and leave at 2:30pm.
Have a look round the corner to Piskera marina, then move on past sheer cliffs and reddish rock on the South side of the islands of Piskera, Rasip Veli and Mali, and Mana.
Photo - Mana island

Anchor in the bay of **Lojena** on **Levrnaka** island at 8m depth. This bay is open to the SW therefore not for long stays, but fine for a swim.
From here across the Kornati channel towards **Striznja** bay on Kornat island, where we moor alongside a stone jetty of the simple restaurant QUATTRO.
There are two restaurants in this cove, the other is Darko's Striznja.
All in all, there are 6 yachts and 3 motor cruisers moored up, plus a couple of yachts anchored.
Photo - Restaurant Striznja
Photo - On jetty at restaurant Quattro

A wonderful balmy evening, have alfresco dinner with meat balls, sea bream, all delicious. We enjoy watching the cook taking the mussels for our starter straight out of the sea in front of us and cooking them in sea water just with a bit of oil, garlic and wine.
The wine here is good, too, and we are given a taster of some kind of homemade cheese.
Finish with the customary digestive "on the house" and are offset by about £30 for 2 people.

Go to sleep in comfort, aware that the water level would drop about 0.5m in the night, and having adjusted the ropes securely.
[Distance logged 10.1 nm]



View from Lavsa towards Piskera





Jane walking "on the water" (walls)



Passing Mana island



Konoba Strizna



Restaurant Quattro in Strizna cove

Thursday June 5th

Get up 8ish and have breakfast. All boats are still here, having early swims in the bay, a beautiful and calm day.
We slip off and make way to nearby **Levrnaka bay** on the island of the same name. We find some unmarked yellow boys (first time we see them here) and are not sure who they belong to and, whether we can moor on them. Instead, we anchor a distance away and closer to a yacht. Apparently too close, we get shouted at that we may have crossed they anchor chain.
I very much doubt that there is any real "safety concern", but rather feel that those German sailors just want to stay splendidly on their own far away from any motor boat. Anyhow, there is more than enough space, so I do not debate but lift the anchor.
We explore the buoys closer and find they are indeed suitable mooring buoys for us so happily pick one up. Most likely they belong to the small Konoba nearly.
Photo - Konoba Levrnaka
Photo - Antares on buoy in Levrnaka cove

Big fish around the boat, silvery colour and black stripe near the tale. Take dinghy ashore and find some oddly washed out rocks, and shells to collect.

Leave bay 1pm to get to another one for lunch; pass Silo Velo and anchor in a wide bay, NE of small **Aba Vela** Island. Very beautiful setting, azure seas and a donkey grazing off the shrubs. Feed a gull with bread, but it was very shy.
Photo – Anchored at Aba Vela, looking N towards Telascica

After salad lunch we continue the tour through Proversa Vela, round **Katina island**, back through the dredged Proversa Mala, and into **Telascica** bay on **Dugi Otok**.
We pass Mir cove and go to the N tip of the Telascica, which is the busiest part. There we anchor in the W most cove at 8m for a swim.
Notice a lot of new buoys in Telascica, obviously to cope with higher numbers of boats expected in high season. At present lots of them are free.

We decide to go back to **Proversa Mala**, where there are buoys near the passage which belong to AQUARIUS on Katina, one of the small Kornati restaurants.
Photo - Proversa Mala passage and the Aquarius restaurant.

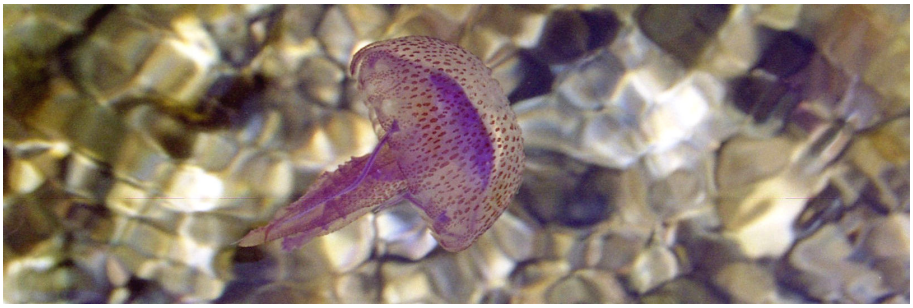
Nice dinner, slightly more economical by taking a smaller fish. We watch fishing boats and yachts going through the cut; a perfect setting in a warm, starry quiet night.
[Distance logged 17.9 nm]



Konoba Levrnaka



Antares moored on a buoy in Levrnaka cove



a mauve stinger jelly fish



Anchored at Aba Vela, looking N towards Telascica



Konoba Aquarius at the "cut" i.e. the Vela Proversa passage

Friday June 6th

Wake up to the most idyllic setting between little islands, not too barren but not overly forested either, so no insects(!), clearest and calmest of seas, where you can see right down to the bottom at 9m, inviting for a swim.
Photo - breakfast on buoy at Aquarius, Katina
Photo - buoys at Aquarius
Photo - View over Proversa Mala passage to NE towards Pasman
Photo - Anchorage viewed from above the restaurant

For lunch we go to Pasman: On the way we pass the island of Zut, view Zut Marina, Uvala Hiljaca and then across Sitski canal to Pasman. Anchor in **Sveti Ante** Bay on **Pasman** island, (near Soline), a nice bay, and there would be more to explore nearby.

We make our way between small islands towards **Murter** and anchor in **Kosirina cove**. There are many tourists, there is a camp site and popular beach nearby, the place is easy to reach by car from the mainland via Tisno bridge.

From Murter we meander via islands of the Sibenik archipelago to get to **Primosten** where we go to the town quay for our last night's stay, close to our base where we need to be in the morning.
Photo – On quay at Primosten

Primosten is an attractive and busy tourist town, we try again restaurant Stari Selo. This time we are a bit disappointed and decide to try another one next time; there are new small restaurants south of the port, nearer the beach.
Finally have coffee, ice cream and chilled amaro and walk around town.
[Distance logged 44 nm]



Breakfast with a view, on buoy between Katina (left) and Dugi Otok (right)



Aquarius' buoys for guests



View from Katina over Mala Proversa passage to Northeast



Bouy field viewed from above the restaurant





On quay at Primosten

Sat June 7th

Rise early, have breakfast and set off for Kremik marina. Jane insists on having a shower en-route (on an epic trip of 2.5nm) Finally arrived at the base, we have to queue for half an hour at the fuel station.
All gets settled and the friendly Offshore Boote guy helps us checking out of the boat.
[Distance logged 3 nm]

For the first time we enjoyed 8 days of practically uninterrupted good weather, with little wind and calm seas, and it had been very warm for the time of year - people say it had been more like July. Our charter yacht, a Princess 470 in cabin version, has been a very comfortable and spacious home for us for one week, easy to navigate, and she performed flawlessly.

Red wine Plavac we find recommendable, so the white Zlatin.
The tourists we encountered are 50% Austrian, 30% German, 20% RoW.

Comments to the log added 2020

The above report of an excellent holiday trip to the Kornati islands in early season, June 2003, was written at the time. Reading it is a reminder who many things in Croatia's nautical tourism have changed since.

In 2003 there were no crowds wherever we went. Anchoring space was plentiful, often you had a cove to yourself, in some places individual buoys were available. Full fields of them run by mercenary concessionaires were unheard of. Anchoring in bays was free everywhere.

Spaces on town quays, including popular places like Primosten, were available without notice, fees were very reasonable. The same was true for marinas, e.g. ACI marina Skradin and several others in the previous year, you just turned up and were directed to a suitable berth.

With the exception of few celebrated restaurants in high season, e.g. Ante at Vrulje, there was no need to make reservations, you chose one and navigated there. They were unhurried down to earth places run by locals (from Sibenik).

Fresh fish was never cheap, but no way near as prohibitively expensive as it has become lately. Most importantly, you knew that all fish that got on our plate was freshly locally caught, not cooled and brought in from somewhere or harvested from one of the nasty fish farms as it happens nowadays for standard fish dishes.

There where no Kornati National Park nor Telescica entry fee. They were untouched nature you enjoyed and respected, not tourist attractions and destination of a thousand day trippers. Of course, there were no sheriffs.

Anyhow, the most important change is not about money and inconveniences.

In my log 2003, I repeatedly mentioned lovely peaceful evenings and quiet nights**;** there was not a single occasion where we were inconvenienced or disrupted by other holiday makers, wherever we stayed. There were yachts around us, with sailors from central and western Europe, who, like us, understood how to enjoy yachting and cruising under the sun in a civilized way, and explored what the region has got to offer. We did not notice unmannered drunken revellers anywhere; the idea of a "party flotilla" would seem absurd.

In one sentence: The quality of your stay depends on the quality of the people around you.

The sheer quantity of tourists, land based and on the water, and their deteriorating quality have changed the experience of Croatia cruising since 2003 beyond belief. Overcrowing with more and more new people arriving mainly from the economically grown Central Eastern Europe region has changed the face and feeling of being the country.

In the early 2000s yacht tourists were mainly Germans, Austrians, Italians in high summer, and some visiting from France, Holland and England. Those were usually experienced yachties, their number has not increased, but newcomers have made numbers multiply. Many come for a party holiday in the sun, attracted by tourism propaganda, aggressive marketing and discounted charter rates - some have no background in yachting and their interest in a boat is whether there are enough bottles of hard drinks for all on board.

Entrepreneurial greed and authorities agree to rake every penny out of nautical tourism, we see uncontrolled growth of charter fleets driving out owner operated yachts.

Today Croatia has a far too high number of charter yachts relative to its popular cruising areas putting huge pressure on the limited nautical facilities. There is fighting over spaces, and corruption is never far away in this country.

Wanting to go to a harbour or marina you have to worry today whether you will get in at all, and, if you do, whether you will get wedged in between hooligan charter crews - who are here to have roucous drinking parties till late - it will ruin your experience. Similarly on anchor or a buoy in a nice bay; once an escape to get a quiet time, there is nowadays a buoy field packed with charter yachts, some crewed by the same inconsiderate fun seekers with loud cockpit speakers who you hoped to avoid.

After having relevant experience, the Kornati islands - despite their unique features - are an area we are unlikely to visit again.
