



TRANS EUROPEAN TRAIL

CROATIA

By Travis Gill viajarmoto.com



I REMEMBER COMING ACROSS THE WARNING ON THE CROATIA PAGE OF THE TRANS EURO TRAIL

"Wherever you see a MINE sign on the side of the road, it is STRICTLY forbidden (not to say very, very foolish) to venture from the road. Croatia was, unfortunately, part of the wars of the '90s. MINE signs along the white roads, in the woods, open fields, wood clearings etc. NEED to be taken very seriously. There have been reports of people riding in fields where there are known to be mines and we, as a part of the TET project, advise strongly against such risky and stupid behavior."

Am I reading this right? MINES? That's crazy. The Croatian War of Independence ended in 1995! Where there still mines left in the country 25 years later?

THE CROATIA WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

The Homeland War (Croatian: Domovinski Rat) of 1991-1995 was fought between Croat forces loyal to the government of Croatia and forces of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Serb-controlled Yugoslav People's Army, and other local Serb forces. During this five year period, over 20,000 lives were lost and nearly half a million people became refugees.

Although 25 years have passed since the war, there are haunting reminders of its past in Croatia and neighboring countries: destroyed buildings, bullet ridden walls, and the leftover remains of nearly 30 thousand mines. Efforts have been ongoing to find and eliminate these mines, however this is an expensive and time consuming process. Fortunately, the location of the mine fields have been effectively marked and the chances of coming across a mine are remote as long as you respect the warning signs and stay on designated trails.



TRANS EURO TRAIL

The Trans Euro Trail (TET) is a system of off-road oriented trails that travel through 33 European countries and total over 31,700 miles (51,000 km). "Linesmen" from each country are designated to provide updates to the trail and the GPX route which can be downloaded for free at the website www.transeurotrail.org. This year, the TET celebrated three years of operations and now has over 47,000 Facebook members.

The Croatian portion of the TET winds through the center of the country covering 220 miles (354 kilometers) of trails and pavement that connect to Slovenia to the north and Bosnia and Herzegovina to the east.

RIDING THE CROATIAN TET

We chose to start our ride from the northern border town of Brod Na Kupa, Croatia where there is a small border checkpoint to the neighboring country of Slovenia. At the time of our visit, in September, Americans could not enter Slovenia due to COVID-19, so we turned around and headed back to the south to begin our four-day journey.

The TET provides a nice variety of pavement, dirt roads, and some short sections of single track. We experienced twisty mountain pavement, gravel logging roads, dirt ridges that opened up to provide incredible views of the Adriatic Sea, farm roads through remote villages, and fertile valleys.







There were two sections that were somewhat difficult for our heavily weighted "mules." Our G650GSs weigh a moderate 420 pounds, but when loaded with another 100 pounds of gear, the steep rocky hills and narrow switchbacks are a bit more challenging. Fortunately, these sections were not longer than a couple miles. We took it slow to ensure we didn't damage the mules or ourselves.

Halfway through the TET we enjoyed a side trip where we rode 24 miles (39 kilometers) to the abandoned Željava Air Base, situated on the border between Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. This airbase, code named Objekat 505, has an extensive network of underground facilities and aircraft bunkers built underneath the mountain. 100-ton pressurized blast doors ensured the underground portions could survive a direct hit from a 20-kiloton nuclear bomb!

A few miles from the airbase is an often photographed landmark of a wrecked Douglas C-47 "Dakota" with Yugoslav Air Force markings. Over the years, the exterior engine cowling and cockpit areas have been covered with stickers. We made sure to add a few [viajarMOTO.com](#) and [UPSHIFT](#) stickers to the mix before continuing back to the nearby town of Željava.

The most visited national park in Croatia is Plitvice Lakes National Park, and for good reason. This UNESCO World Heritage Site is stunningly beautiful with its chain of 16 terraced lakes joined by waterfalls that are accessible via wooden walkways that extend across the crystal clear waters. During our visit we got to experience the stunning autumn colors and exceptional beauty of this national treasure.



If you enjoy the idea of remote riding and camping then you'll find Croatia to be a great country to get away and do some social distancing. Perhaps it was due to the shoulder season (May-June, September-October) and the travel restrictions of other European countries, but we didn't come across a single rider while on the trail. There were large sections of dirt road where we wouldn't see another vehicle or person for nearly the entire stretch of road. We also found it easy to discover remote camping spots where we could park the mules and set up our tent and sleeping bags for the evening.

After four days of full-time traveling and camping each night, we reached the border of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This country was open to Americans, however it required a negative COVID test within 48 hours of entry. Since we wanted to see a lot more of Croatia, we turned around at the border and made our way west to the coastal city of Zadar. Bosnia and Herzegovina will have to wait for another day.

For the adventure motorcycle rider who wants to experience some of the most beautiful remote country in Eastern Europe, Croatia has it in spades. There are many reasons to recommend this European Union country: the weather, especially along the coast, is sunny and warm during the shoulder months of summer; the people are equally as warm with most speaking very good English; prices for accommodations are generally much less expensive than in Western Europe; finally, and perhaps the biggest reason, is that they are one of the few European countries that have graciously allowed Americans to come and experience their wonderful country during the current COVID-19 pandemic.







CROATIAN TET LINESMAN

A week after riding the TET, we headed back north to explore the less visited northeast portion of Croatia. It was in the capital city of Zagreb that we got to visit with the Croatian linesman, Dubravko “Dooby” Primorac. We sat down with him, over some coffee, and discussed the TET.

viajarMOTO: Thank you for your help in working with local agencies to create and share an enjoyable route through your beautiful country. We really enjoyed our four days experiencing the various terrains of forests, mountains, farmland, meadows, and seaside views. There really is a lot of diversity packed into the 220 miles of trails you selected.

Why should readers consider riding the Croatian TET and other Balkan countries?

Dooby: Wilderness and heritage – there is so much heritage spread over such a small area. During your ride you will experience ancient ruins, castles, fortresses, and fortified cities. When traveling in remote regions, you will experience the Balkan warm hospitality and will be treated to local foods - often for free.

viajarMOTO: What type of motorcycle would you recommend for riding the TET through Croatia?

Dooby: The route was recently revised and is less technical than before so you can ride it with larger motorcycles like the BMW R1250GS, Honda African Twin, and KTM 1290, without too many problems as long as you're a confident rider.

viajarMOTO: How about wild camping along the route?

Dooby: Wild camping is officially not allowed, but you can pitch a tent in a remote area without problems. Wild animals are not a problem, but you may see bears, boars, deer, and sometimes a wolf, if you're lucky.

viajarMOTO: Is there a quintessential meal that you would suggest visitors eat when visiting Croatia?

Dooby: Peka is the meal you must try when riding through the mountainous area. Peka is made by baking meat, typically lamb, with potatoes and vegetables under a bell-like dome (ispod Ćripnje). It takes 3-4 hours to cook so ensure you give the restaurant plenty of notice before your arrival. If you enjoy seafood, then try brudet – a fish stew served with vegetables and home-made bread.

viajarMOTO: What other places in Croatia would you recommend for motorcycle touring?

Dooby: The Islands of the Adriatic in the shoulder season are a must! There are empty roads, loads of gravel to ride, great views, and an abundance of local food and wine to taste. Also, the northeastern part of the country is where you will see a completely different part of Croatia where the people are really friendly, and you have a mix of mountain, plains, swamps, and national parks.