The wedge-shaped Adriatic peninsula known as Istria has a rich and dramatic history. It was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, then ruled by Italy, later incorporated into Yugoslavia and is today governed by Croatia. Ninety percent of Istria is in Croatia, with the remainder in neighboring Slovenia and Italy. Remnants of a distant Roman past, Venetian Empire architecture, picturesque hilltop villages, panoramic sea views, year-round festivals, inspired cuisine and fantastic wines are all reasons to put Istria on your bucket list of wine regions to visit.

— Mike DeSimone and Jeff Jenssen
WHERE TO DINE
Said to have the largest wine list in the country, with 550 labels, Chef Tom Gretch’s Wine Vault Restaurant at the Hotel Monte Mulini in Rovinj serves French-inspired cuisine in an airy dining room with views of the sea. At the delightful outdoor La Cuxina in Pula, Chef/owner Doris Cerin elevates everyday Italian-style Istrian cuisine to the next level. The focus at Restaurant Bodulka at Hotel Velanera in Šišan is on fresh pasta, fresher seafood and expert pairings from the extensive Croatian wine list.

WHERE TO STAY
Surrounded by olive groves and vineyards, Villa Meneghetti in Bale boasts just four rooms, each decorated with rustic charm. The villa also has an award-winning restaurant and extensive wine cellar. The Hotel Melia Coral, in Umag, is Croatia’s first adults-only hotel. Situated just feet from the beautiful Adriatic Sea, there are 244 rooms and six luxuriously appointed suites. The Hotel San Rocco in Brtonigla is a converted family estate with 14 neo-rustic rooms, a spa and restaurant that features excellent wines from across the region.

OTHER ACTIVITIES
Stroll the ancient streets, stop for a steamy espresso and people watch, just like the locals. Visit the caves in Pazin—they’re said to have inspired several of Jules Verne’s stories—or jump on a Park and Ride Umag bike, a local bicycle-share program, one of the best ways to get around the immediate area.

BUDGET TIP
Pack a picnic lunch and visit the fully intact Arena of Pula. It was built in the 1st century, housed gladiator fights and is the sixth-largest ancient amphitheater in the world.

WHEN TO GO
The best time to visit is April through October. Festivals held throughout the tourist season draw stylish crowds from across Europe.

WHERE TO TASTE
Marino Marketić ages some of his wine in terra cotta amphorae buried under lavender plants in the beautiful garden at Kabola in Momjan. There’s also a small museum and wine shop. Vina Geržinč makes excellent wine and delicious olive oil. At Vina Matošević in Krnčići, Winemaker Ivica Matošević is one of the first to experiment with aging Malvasia in acacia rather than oak. There’s a loft-like space above the tasting room for art openings and live music. Bold graphics cover the walls and even bolder wines fill the bottles at Tropan’s Wine Station. At Kozlović Vina in Momjan, owners Gianfranco and Antonella Kozlović have created a stunning winery that blends right into the surrounding countryside. Roxanich, a small winery in Nova Vas, specializes in “orange” wines, which get their color from long skin contact and deep oxidized flavors from aging in barrel for three years or more.

PROMINENT WINES
First-timers in Istria are always astonished by the high quality of the local wine, particularly Malvasia Istriana, a white wine made in a fresh, crisp version and oak- or acacia-aged styles. Chardonnay is also grown across the peninsula and is bottled either oaked or unoaked. Red varieties include the indigenous Teran, which is grown in different soil types. It produces a potent red wine, often with feral characteristics, but skilled Istrian winemakers can tame it. Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah and Merlot are some of the other reds grown and are often blended together, with or without Teran.
91 Carabella 2012 Estate Pinot Noir (Chehalem Mountains). This estate-grown Pinot Noir artfully blends seven different clones, capturing the nuances of each, and melding them into a fascinating wine. Dig in—you’ll find plenty of black cherry and cassis fruit, streaked with iron, espresso and licorice. The texture and length add more subtlety, with a delicate hint of sandalwood at the very end. —P.G.
A/BV: 14.2%
Price: $45

91 Chehalem 2012 Ridgecrest Vineyards Reserve Pinot Noir (Ribbon Ridge). Dark, tart, laced with licorice, earth and tar; this is a standout among the winery’s 2012 Pinots. Black cherry and cassis fruit anchors a substantial, mouthfilling, and quite tannic wine, with medium-term aging potential. Drink now through 2020. —P.G.
A/BV: 14%
Price: $60

91 Domaine Serene 2011 Côte Sud Vineyard Pinot Noir (Dundee Hills). This comes from the oldest estate vineyard, now reaching full maturity. Tart citrus flavors underscore pretty strawberry, drifting into a hint of well-ripened preserves. There’s a light touch with the new oak, keeping the wine in perfect balance. Drink now through 2020. —P.G.
A/BV: 13.2%
Price: $95

91 Domaine Serene 2011 Evenstad Reserve Pinot Noir (Willamette Valley). Light and elegantly crafted, this iconic release is the textbook example of well-made cool-vintage Oregon Pinot Noir. It’s aromatic, floral and silky. The tangy berry fruit is clean and ripe, though definitely on the lighter side. Pretty berry and cherry flavors are set against tart acids, with just a touch of milk chocolate from barrel aging. —P.G.
A/BV: 13.1%
Price: $65

91 Domaine Serene 2011 Winery Hill Vineyard Pinot Noir (Dundee Hills). Forward and nicely rounded off, this brings spicy cherry and cranberry fruit front and center. There are well-integrated streaks of herb, a dash of stem, and a dusting of white pepper. Give it an hour or two to breathe, or better yet, decant before drinking. —P.G.
A/BV: 13.1%
Price: $85

91 Ponzi 2012 Pinot Noir (Willamette Valley). For full review see page 89.
A/BV: 13.3%
Price: $40

91 Roots 2012 Racine Pinot Noir (Yamhill-Carlton District). The winery’s reserve bottling, this is named for the Wisconsin town from which the owners migrated. Coincidently, Racine also translates to roots in French. Cherry, mocha and toast scents and rich complementary flavors explode from the glass. This is by far the richest and deepest wine from among the winery’s 2012 Pinots. Lovely
A/BV: 13.9%
Price: $55

ASTOR CENTER, 399 Lafayette St. (at East 4th St.) | New York
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2015

MASTERCLASS SEMINARS
11:00 am - 1:15 pm

“Meet Croatia” (11:00 am - 11:45 am) - Discover the country and terroir, learn about leading grape varieties and taste selected wines presenting the characteristic style and flavors of Croatian wines.

“American winemakers who fell in love with blue Adriatic” (12:30 pm - 1:15 pm) - Meet the successful Americans who invested in the Croatian wine business and are standing behind the Grgic, Korta Katarina and Benmosche wineries. Listen to their story and taste their wines.

WALK AROUND TASTING
11:00 am - 4:30 pm

Come and discover the latest innovations in Croatian wine at the 3rd ever Vina Croatia Grand Tasting. The tasting will feature over 100 wines from 30 of Croatia’s leading producers, light appetizers and a masterclass seminar highlighting some of the country’s most talented winemakers.

Registration is complimentary and exclusive to members of the wine trade and press only.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: vinacroatia@colangelopr.com

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