

TRAVEL

Where in the world is Kristi Kelly???

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Contributor

Okay, so before getting started, I am going to clarify a few key things. I am in NOT away at the moment... I am home, right here at UPEI. I am a fourth year business student and I was lucky enough to be able to participate in an academic exchange to France last year for a semester. After some careful planning, a budget and a eurail pass - I literally "took on" Europe, getting to experience something like 16 countries and over 35 cities. Pretty cool, eh? I ended up keeping a blog of my travels so that friends and family could keep in touch (and follow me along the way) - and little did I realize that it was going to be such a hit! So now, in an effort to share perhaps the most amazing learning experience of my life... I write these articles. Maybe they will inspire you - maybe they won't. Either way, thank you to everyone who has shown such amazing support, and here's a big shout out to the ladies from our reunion in the Piazza Joe's bathroom on Bar Wars who so graciously "welcomed me home"- thank you, and keep reading! There are tons of travel opportunities here at UPEI in each of the faculties... take advantage while you can! You won't regret it!

"Du-bro-what? Dubrovnik? It's where? Where the hell is Croatia?" - let's just say I wasn't the most geographically informed cookie in the jar. I had never heard of Croatia before, and frankly, once I heard about its history... I didn't really know if it was a place that I wanted to visit. War torn until around a decade ago, this former part of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia is now a country in its own right. Surrounded by Slovenia, Hungary and Bosnia - this country has history and infrastructure that dates as far back as the middle ages and it can be noticeably seen. Though Zagreb, the capital city of this country was quaint and regal... the true thrill of this country lies a tad closer to the Mediterranean Sea - in a place called Dubrovnik.

As our tiny plane began to land... all I could see was mountain. No city, just mountain side. I gripped the arm rest ferociously as we descended and I prayed that this wasn't a



Photo: Kristi Kelly

Croatia



Photo: Kristi Kelly

Kristi enjoying the sights in Croatia

bad idea after all. Really, what did I know about this place?! It was plagued with war for centuries!?! Sure, I read up all about it, even checked the Foreign Affairs Security profiles... and it all seemed fine so why was I so nervous!? I mean, really George Bernard Shaw (the famous writer and playwright) called this place the "Jewel of the Adriatic"! It wasn't long after I first spotted this city's sparkling teal waters that my heart began to beat faster in anticipation. To say this place was beautiful, was an understatement... it was something truly out of a dream! Mountains, villages, lush greenery, an endless coastline and a remarkable sunset... I was afraid that if I blinked I would miss it!

Though limited in hostels, this city had no shortage of luxury hotels and resorts! With the weather dry and hot, I wasted no time getting checked in. Water bottle and sandals in tow, the exploring began. The number one destination in Dubrovnik (other than its spectacular beaches) is what is known as "the old city." Built in the 13th century, this ancient city (with only two entrances amongst its tall, looming fortress-like walls) is like a trip back in time. Virtually unchanged since its creation (besides the fact that its residences all seem to be pricey gift shops and luxury products) the city, no joke, was constructed completely of white marble. Its 100 foot walls allowed for curious tourists, if brave enough, to climb atop, and to walk the entire parameter. Fair warning though, if you decide to wear cute sandals with no grip - be advised that marble

is in fact slippery and WILL cause you to fall flat on your ass - which I so graciously did. Though not an overly large city, it is chocked full of things to see and do. Seeing as it is a marine city there is seafood everywhere! I even managed to try a infamous dish there called "Black Risotto" - which come to find is colored blackish grey because of a special ingredient... squid ink (uummmmm, eeeeeewwww...) - ha, try figuring that out in Croatian!

The beach lover that I am, I did manage to get my chance to swim in the Adriatic! Cold, but unbelievably clear, I was able to swim with beautifully colored fish of all shapes and sizes. By afternoon though, it got unbelievably hot and all you could do was lounge in the shade by the closest bar and wait it out until you wouldn't risk heat stroke! Not that I was complaining though... between Croatian wine, and a good book, I was perfectly content. Croatia impressed me, the people were so proud of their heritage and how far they have come - despite the tragedies that have occurred there in the past. They are re-building and it is that sense of compassion and gratitude in their accomplishments that blatantly apparent in their culture and way of life. Can you imagine growing up in a society where the screeching of emergency warnings were the norm, as was time spent in bomb shelters? For us, as University students, it's a mere vision. However, for university student in Croatia, not all that long ago, it was a reality. Kinda makes you stop and think, eh?