

IF THE Yugoslavs are patient, and wait a few million years, they'll find their entire country is made of marble, and they'll all be rich enough to retire. At the moment, though, what they have mostly is old weathered limestone, and the landscape is dry, rocky and severe. A nice place to visit, but you wouldn't want to be a farmer there.

This inhospitable terrain has its advantages for the yachtsman. The coastline is scattered with islands and inlets, offering a varied cruising ground with its own particular beauty, plenty of sheltered water and safe anchorages. Rocky hillsides plunge straight into the sea with no sandbanks or shoals to complicate matters, and the water is crystal clear. The rule is, if you can't see the bottom, there's no point trying to anchor.

The Dalmatian coast, facing Italy across the Adriatic, has always drifted in the ebb and flow of the Mediterranean empires, from the Greeks and Romans onwards. Venice has left the most obvious mark, and all the towns and villages have their beautiful stone houses and churches, with rounded arches, shuttered windows and red tiled roofs. Every little jagged inlet seems to have an antiquated settlement and an old quay, and to moor at some of the fishing ports is to step back through the centuries.

The foreign yachtsman in Yugoslavia is a privileged soul. Recent government efforts to promote tourism have led to a string of new marinas being built in the bigger towns, under the banner of the Adriatic Club of Yugoslavia, which have all the facilities you would expect as well as duty-free shops to allow you to stock up the

Island hopping

The Dalmatian coast of Yugoslavia, with its thousands of islands, sheltered waters and fascinating medieval towns, is fast emerging as a rival to the Aegean. Alan Harper tried a flotilla cruise: under sail, for a change

boat's supply of Glenmorangie and Chanel No 5. Apart from the British-registered flotillas almost all the boats in the ACY marinas are German, Italian or Austrian; the only Yugoslavs you meet are behind the counter.

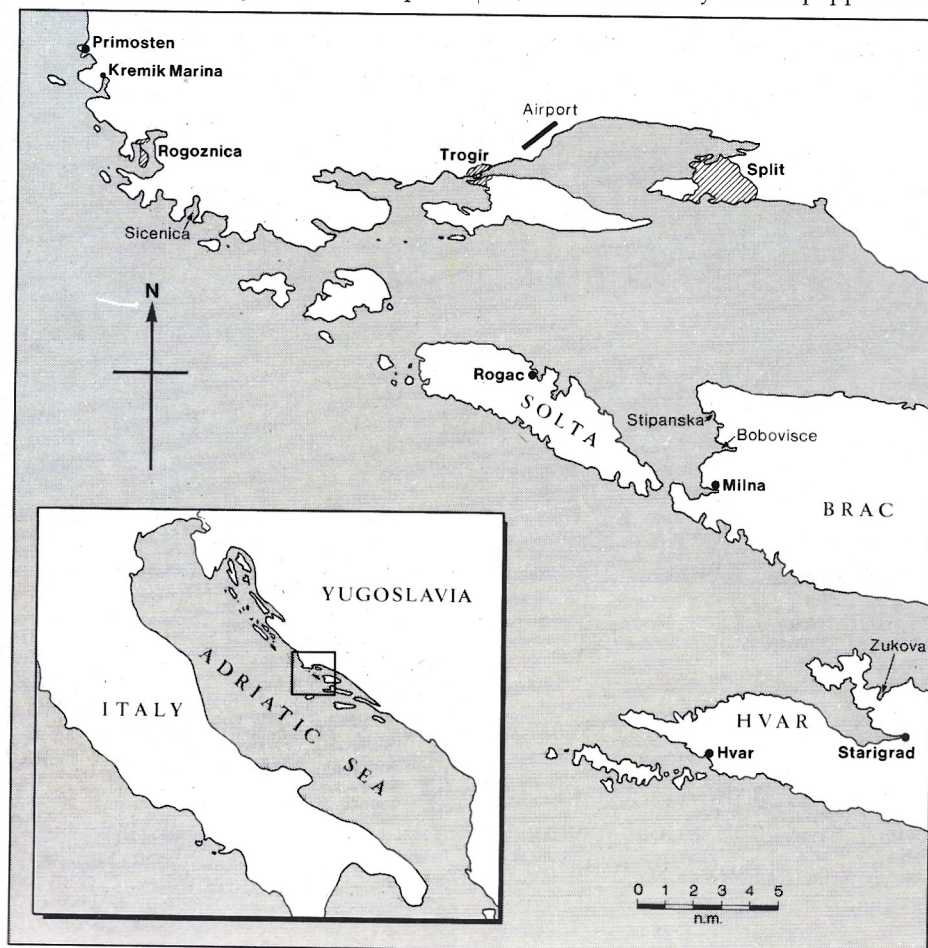
As a flotilla holiday destination the country is comparatively new, with companies that started in Greece and then expanded into Turkey now beginning to establish themselves there. Seven Seas are now in their third year in Dalmatia, and they have a number of flotillas based along the coast, consisting mainly of Swedish-built Maxis of 28 and 32ft. These are very roomy, well-made boats with a safe, though not sparkling, sailing performance. We had a Maxi 84, a 28-footer. They come equipped with

Avon dinghy, VHF radio, roller reefing jib, and a mainsail with one reefing point. "If you find yourself wanting two mainsail reefs in an 84," we were told, "you ought to be back in port". We found it to be a reassuring sea boat, and a delight to sail.

For the novice the company runs a scheme which allows you to live ashore for the first week, going out sailing every day with an instructor. After that you are given a boat and spend the second week cruising with a flotilla. Inevitably, Seven Seas call this a 'villa-flotilla' holiday.

The flotillas each have their lead boat, with a skipper, hostess and engineer. The idea is that for the first couple of days you rendezvous with them at night in what-

continued overleaf



Above: whistling along under reefed main and full jib. Above right: Hvar harbour from an abandoned 14th Century monastery up the hill. We're moored bows to the quay. Right: returning from a foraging trip.



Charter: Yugoslavia

Island hopping

continued

ever port or bay they've suggested, and then they let you off for a few days of free sailing on your own. In practice, we found that once you'd demonstrated reasonable competence you were free almost from the start, your only obligation being to keep in touch over the VHF. Some boats opted to cruise around on their own for most of the fortnight, and some preferred to stay with the lead crew; we did a bit of both.

Our flotilla base was Kremik Marina, near Primosten, and our cruise itinerary was to take us down the coast as far as Hvar. It being fairly late in the season — September — there were only seven boats in our group, including the leader, although there can be as many as 12. Numbers would probably make little difference to the customer, but a lot of boats would mean a lot of work for the lead crew. Seven boats meant about 25 people; 12 could mean 50.

The briefing on the first day from Huck, lead skipper, went something like this: "Here are your charts. They're Yugo-

slavian charts, and not as good as Admiralty ones; you'll find the occasional rock sticking out of the sea which isn't marked. We're here" — he went round and marked an X on everyone's chart — "and tonight we're going to Sicenica for a barbecue" — another X — "so when you go past these islands" — a circle was pencilled in — "don't go too close, because they're military and secret, and you might get arrested".

He also told us about the winds and which VHF channels had weather forecasts in English, and went over the deck layout so we wouldn't drop the boom on our heads when trying to unfurl the jib. We'd already been shown over the Volvo diesel and the plumbing by Sam, the engineer, and Emma, our hostess, had introduced herself. "Any questions? Right. See you later." And we were off.

Slowly. It has often been said that the ideal craft in the Med is a motor boat, because you either get too much wind or too little. Certainly if you're in a hurry to get somewhere in a yacht you'll often be glad of the engine.

When the winds do blow, they have names: this is, after all, the Mediterranean. The main one in summer is the mistral, which blows roughly west to northwesterly, gets up to force four or five in the afternoon and dies off in the evening. In

spring and autumn you may get the yugo, coming from approximately south-east and occasionally reaching gale force, though mainly in the southern Adriatic. And there is the bora, the one people tell stories about. This is a cold, dry wind from the north-east caused by continental air coming over the mountains and dropping down onto the sea. It is mainly a winter phenomenon, but it can happen all year round, reaching force nine or ten and gusting stronger, sometimes lasting days.

In September we found that a promising breeze mid-morning could either die off completely by lunchtime and never reappear, or develop into an excellent blow, making us shorten sail and hammer along like a train. Or we could motor out of harbour after breakfast and put the sails up, in the hope of tempting some wind out of the deathly still air, see dark water ahead, wait a few minutes . . . and then be creaming along at six or seven knots, looking for someone to have a race with.

The weather forecasts were only of use as a rough guide, because in both speed and direction the winds could be very localised. Crossing to Split from Bobovisce on the third day the exhilarating 25-knot north-easterly suddenly died in mid-channel, leaving us bouncing around on

Tied up at Zukova. We didn't know it, but we had an uncomfortable night ahead.



five-foot waves, empty sails flogging. A mile further on it picked up again, allowing us a quick race with a larger German yacht — winning convincingly, we reckon — and it carried on blowing all night, howling among the masts in Split marina.

We got our bora, too. Looking for a night of solitude we selected the inlet of Zukova on the chart, moored bows to the rocks in the late afternoon, inflated the dinghy and rigged the sailboard. The water was flat, and the air still.

Having supper in the cockpit we were slightly concerned by the magnificent, cloud-flecked sunset — it was the first time we'd seen a cloud for some time — and we put out another stern anchor, just in case. By eight in the evening the wind had picked up and waves were bending round the corner of the bay and knocking us about, reaching a peak in the early hours and preventing anyone from getting much sleep. In the morning, bleary-eyed but glad to see we hadn't moved, we rowed ashore and walked round the corner. All the haze had been blown away, and as we squinted into the gale the steep, rocky sides of Brac, three miles away, looked close enough to touch. The channel was a furious, boiling white: more like the North Sea in winter than the balmy Med. But it was all over by midday.

Nights at anchor were usually more peaceful, and Stipanska in particular stays in the memory, its ruined house lending an air of haunted tranquillity.

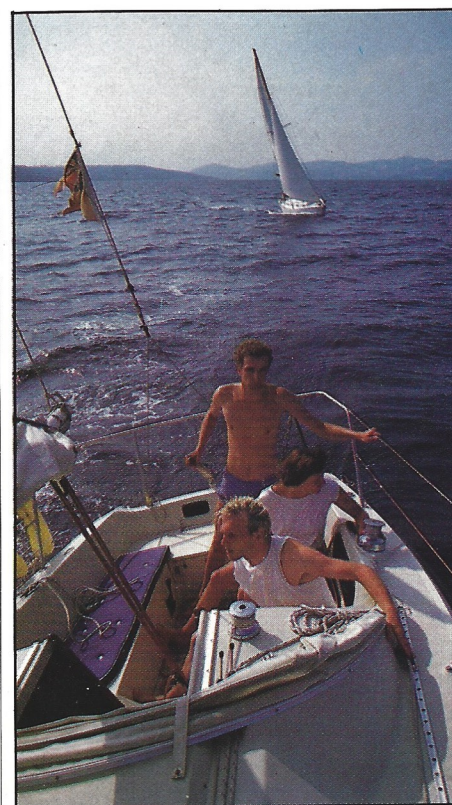
The towns, however, made most impression. Split's centre is dominated by the magnificent 3rd Century palace of the Roman emperor Diocletian. Part villa and part fortress, it has been gradually taken over by the town over the centuries and now exists as a warren of little streets and market squares, a confused amalgam of houses and shops in a thousand years of architectural styles, and an endless adventure to explore.

Hvar, its heights watched over by a medieval castle — now, oddly, a discotheque — has a sheltered harbour lined on three sides by elegant palms and shuttered townhouses. We moored bow to the old stone quay, next to an enormous Southampton-registered motor yacht, and stayed two days. Starigrad, first visited by hired motorcycle from Hvar, is also an ancient town, once the Greek colony of Pharos. It runs along the southern shore of a deep inlet, with a modern supermarket, but also an open-air vegetable market and a maze of cobbled backstreets. You don't have to walk far before you come across Mario's, which does the best pizza in the eastern Mediterranean.

In Trogir, you can climb the cathedral campanile and see over the rooftops how the town is built on two islands linked by a bridge and a causeway, and guarded by two forts. In the distance is the marina, and beyond that the shipyard, with Russian merchant vessels and the square-rigger *Tovarich* in for a coat of paint.

Top: in Diocletian's palace, Split; the eastern gate, now surrounded by market stalls.

Centre: paying the harbourmaster, Hvar. Prices were reasonable. **Right:** an impromptu race. We won.



Costs vary for staying in these places, but Yugoslavia is not expensive when sterling is as strong as it was this summer. Mooring at the town quay at Hvar, for example, was 1700 dinar for a night (about £4), and to fill our water tanks was 25p. The government-owned ACY marinas could charge as much as 2600 dinar (about £6.50) a night, as they did at Milna, but the facilities at these places are generally clean and modern, with a bar and restaurant attached for the tired or unadventurous.

Eating out is not very exciting, with many restaurants having a superb menu which takes about ten minutes to read through, but only about two dishes actually available. Fish is good, but expensive; mixed grills with chips are what we often ended up with. And of course there is always the chance of finding a place like Mario's. A meal will come to around £5 a head, including some pretty reasonable local wine or lager. For stocking up the boat, supermarkets and grocery shops in the medium-size towns can supply cheeses, bread and salami, as well as a reasonable selection of tinned food. Look out for Dalmatian smoked ham: expensive but delicious. Vegetable markets tended to have plenty of salad ingredients, but otherwise not much variety. The duty-free shops in the marinas gave very good value on German lagers and all the well-known spirits: at Milna we stocked up with two cases of beer and a bottle of 12-year-old malt for £20, such is the thirst for foreign cash. They would take dollar travellers' cheques, but sterling only in cash; and the receipts are made out in Deutschmarks.

Our reception ashore was invariably friendly; the coastal people are getting used to flotillas by now, and in some of the smaller villages the currency must be an essential part of the economy. The larger towns are quite sophisticated, with smart-looking local tourists mingling with the smart-looking Germans and Italians. As you step ashore from your yacht and wander along the promenade you could easily imagine you were in the South of France before it got commercialised and spoilt. But what on earth would be the point of that? □

Charter facts

The 28ft Maxi 84 sleeps five, but from the point of view of deck and cockpit space four is a more sensible number. The 32ft Maxi 100 is fine for up to six people. Low season prices for next year, including flights and based on a complement of four per boat, will be £285 per person for a fortnight on a Maxi 84, and £300 on a Maxi 100. In the high season the prices go up to £495 each on the Maxi 84 and £545 on the 100, again for a fortnight. Deposits required are £75 per person, and insurance of about £12 each. To hire a sailboard for the fortnight for your own use will be £50 for the fortnight, though there will be two boards on the flotilla for general use. The boats come with fuel, a 'starter pack' of food, binoculars, and basic navigation instruments.

Seven Seas Sailing are at Northney Marina, Hayling Island, Hants. Tel: 0705 468922.