



# THE ISLAND OF VITALITY

**LOŠINJ IS OFTEN OVERLOOKED IN THE RUSH TO DUBROVNIK AND SPLIT, YET THIS BEAUTIFUL CROATIAN ISLAND HAS PICTURESQUE FISHING VILLAGES, A PLETHORA OF NATURAL HARBOURS AND TURQUOISE WATER. GISELLE WHITEAKER EXPLORES THE ISLAND OF WELLNESS AND VITALITY.**



Three red lamps glow like giant flowers against the darkening sky, and a rainbow of pink and orange fades to inky blue along the horizon within Čikat Bay. An acoustic guitarist strums gently, hidden around the corner from where my boyfriend Elio and I are seated, on the restaurant terrace at Boutique Hotel Alhambra. Restaurant Alfred Keller has plated up a delectable first course of veal tartare with basil sauce and a parmesan crisp and we still have four courses to come. The island of Lošinj has certainly rolled out the red carpet for our arrival.

We flew in this afternoon on a private transfer from Pula Airport. I'd been a little bit nervous climbing up over the wing into the four-seater airplane, with a baby-faced pilot who reassured me that he'd been flying for some time. His experience showed in the way he handled the plane on quite a windy day. It was a smooth ride, and the views of the island from the air were breathtaking. Private planes aren't the only way to get there, though – the island's principal luxury hotel group, Lošinj Hotels & Villas, announced new scheduled flights last year, instantly making the island more accessible. I'm glad we're visiting now before the word gets out.

Lošinj is on Croatia's north Adriatic coast. It's been known to wealthy Europeans for centuries, with visitors coming to escape the hard, cold winters. It's said the island has health benefits courtesy of the fresh air, the sea salt and an abundance of pine trees. That may be so, but the Cube Spa at Boutique Hotel Alhambra is all we need for rejuvenation. The indulgent full body massage leaves us as revitalised as a summer in the sun.

The hotel builds on that effect, too. It is comprised of two villas – Alhambra and Augusta – conjoined by a modern addition. Alhambra was designed in 1912 by prominent architect Alfred Keller, who was inspired by Spanish architecture, while Augusta was built in 1908 in Secession style, but the structures have been cleverly united. Nestled within a leafy backdrop, the buildings stand out with their fetching terracotta and ochre colouring.

The interiors are equally as appealing. Our room is spacious, with a generously proportioned marble bathroom, and double doors leading to an outdoor terrace, from which we can spy the 'beach' and the glittering sea. This is not a patch of sand or pebbles, but rather, a structure built into the side of the bay, set up with sun loungers and a food and beverage service.

Beyond the hotel, there is much to do. A trail follows the coast in both directions, perfect for a morning run or afternoon stroll. The hotel can arrange boat trips further afield, too. We cruise the beautiful bays along the coast, anchoring at a local waterside restaurant for a fresh seafood feast that is simply delicious.

There are two picture-perfect baroque Italianate fishing villages to explore on the island: Veli Lošinj and Mali Lošinj. Veli Lošinj is the smaller of the two – despite the name, with *veli* meaning large – and it's our starting point. It's a picturesque town with colourful buildings wrapped around the harbour, which is packed with bobbing boats.



Clockwise on opposite page, from bottom left: Boutique Hotel Alhambra sits on the edge of Čikat Bay; an aerial view of Lošinj; lighting at sunset by the bay. Top to bottom on this page: a room at Boutique Hotel Alhambra, opening onto a private terrace; the beach; a boat on Čikat Bay.





Above: Veli Lošinj.  
Below: The statue of Apoxyomenos.

The highlight of Mali Lošinj, the largest town on the island, is the Museum of Apoxyomenos, which is entirely dedicated to only one exhibit – the bronze statue of an athlete, the Apoxyomenos.



A characteristic feature of Lošinj is its abundance of herbs; some 1,200 therapeutic and aromatic varieties thrive on the island, with over 250 species of wild aromatic herbs represented at the Garden of Fine Scents, a convenient stopping point between Veli Lošinj and Mali Lošinj. It's the ideal place to pick up scented gifts and try a shot of myrtle berry liqueur.

The highlight of Mali Lošinj, the largest town on the island, is the Museum of Apoxyomenos, which is entirely dedicated to only one exhibit – the bronze statue of an athlete, the Apoxyomenos. The statue was discovered by a Belgian tourist in 1997 at the bottom of the ocean, where it had spent nearly two millennia. In 1999, it was returned to dry land and painstakingly restored. The museum tells the fascinating story of this artwork, as well as containing Apoxyomenos himself. Mali Lošinj is a pretty town, wrapped around a natural harbour, with a broad promenade designed for strolling. There are numerous restaurants around the harbour, but Restaurant Alfred Keller has set the bar high, so we find ourselves dining at Boutique Hotel Alhambra more than once. The restaurant's superb cuisine and daily-changing tasting menu provide variety to keep our palates entertained. We sample Istrian pork, locally caught fish and, somewhat unusually, donkey gravlax, which, despite my trepidation, is surprisingly tasty. Fig and rhubarb desserts precede petits fours that melt in the mouth.

One night, we amble along the bay to Hotel Bellevue, framed by a spectacular sunset. A blaze of pink, purple and orange greets our passage and we stroll past a lone fisherman on



Confit duck leg and thigh sautéed in miso butter at Matsunoki.



Mussels at Matsunoki.

the pier. Hotel Bellevue is another venture by Lošinj Hotels & Villas and the facilities here are available for guests staying at Boutique Hotel Alhambra. We've decided to sample the cuisine on offer at Restaurant Matsunoki.

Matsunoki fuses Japanese and Croatian food to delightful effect. The dishes range from sashimi served on a block of ice to sushi, with the delectable inclusion of foie gras maki, mussels in a light broth and confit duck leg and thigh sautéed in miso butter. Dessert merges pear, chestnuts and ice cream.

Returning along the promenade, we breathe in the salt-tinged evening air. The claims regarding the health benefits of the island may or may not be true, but there's no doubt that time in this unspoiled Croatian hideaway is good for the soul. ■

#### INFO

Stays at Boutique Hotel Alhambra, Lošinj start from EUR 318 per night, based on two adults sharing a Deluxe Room, including breakfast.

For further information and bookings, visit: [www.losinj-hotels.com/en/hotels-and-villas/hotel-alhambra-and-villa-augusta/](http://www.losinj-hotels.com/en/hotels-and-villas/hotel-alhambra-and-villa-augusta/), email: [alhambra@losinj-hotels.com](mailto:alhambra@losinj-hotels.com) or call: +385 51 661 101.



Left: Walking paths follow the coast.  
Top right: Restaurant Alfred Keller.  
Bottom right: The terrace at Restaurant Alfred Keller.



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Dentex fish fillet with cockles and broccoli puree at Restaurant Alfred Keller.



Pear and chestnut dessert at Matsunoki.



Rhubarb and fig at Restaurant Alfred Keller.



Petits fours at Restaurant Alfred Keller.