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Zadar



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Varoš *Finger Food* in the Smallest Tavern in the World

Taking into consideration the history of Zadar which is three millennia long, the district of Varoš is a relatively new part of the peninsula that obtained the present shape 'only' during the Venetian government period, about 500 years ago. Old Zadar Varoš, that bore its name according to Saint Martin, disappeared with the building of the ramparts sometime in the 16th century, and it was located southeast from the present Varoš, almost outside the peninsula. Not wanting to remain outside of the protective new ramparts, the farmhand families and other members of the new class found their homes in the southwest part of the peninsula. This is the reason why even today Varoš is a symbol of new Zadar,

but also the haven of farmhands and the poor households of the city. We can only imagine today how many Fellini scenes and films could have been shot in this ambience, in the Varoš of once upon a time ...

Varoš starts at one of the main crossroads (pedestrian) of the restricted center of the city, at Four Corners, and the arteries are first of all Varoška Street that leads to Kovačka Street on the left and Stomorica Street on the right. The intertwining of side streets, Dalmatian alleys, hidden courtyards and atriums are a typical Mediterranean urban ambience that is enjoyed by both Zadar and tourists. It is, therefore, not unusual that a great number of coffee bars, taverns, bistros

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and restaurants have found their place in Varoš, and anyone desiring a good authentic gastronomy delight first comes to Varoš.

It is difficult to imagine today that just 30-40 years ago that same part of Zadar was a somewhat dreary, depressive and dark place with a small tavern or restaurant here and there. It was the gathering place of eccentrics: bohemians, poets, card players, but also professors and students from the nearby University, all of whom did not like the crowds and splendor of the main city gathering places, the People's Square, the main city arteries and the Kalelarga promenade, and the open views of the ancient Roman Forum.

Due to one tiny tavern, and it could be called so, Varoš was visited even by those who did not belong to the Varoš 'old setup'. Today it is a cult place and it was called *Kod Tovara*, and however small and unrepresentable that dalmatian version of a tavern was, it attracted many for its excellent specialties – a sandwich with always the best Dalmatian prosciutto. That delicious mouthful can be said to be a clear example of original Dalmatian *fast food*. However, in

this case it was lacking in the main feature - speed. Namely, Mr. Slavko Radak, owner and sole worker of *Tovar*, cut long slices of prosciutto in an incredibly precise manner but just as slow by hand but just as slowly as precisely causing a long line of hungry customers to be created in the miniature tavern.

Kod tovara Tavern was one of the symbols of Varoš at the middle of the past century, and when *šjor Slavko* retired, the Varoš locals, as well as many others in Zadar were truly shocked. Fortunately, at the beginning of the 80s, an identical concept of the small Dalmatian tavern was continued by Zoran Galošić from Zadar who opened *Stomorica*. Prosciutto cut by hand and put in a sandwich was brought back to Varoš, and Galošić expanded his offer onto other Zadar *fast and finger food* specialties: salted sardines and anchovies, *frigade* (fried) small blue fish, some dish on the spoon... *Stomorica* very quickly became popular among the locals for its traditional morsels and brunches, but also for the collective memories of the old locals of this city of the time when Varoš was full of people and life. The summer Varoš Feast organized by Galošić himself

attracted the locals even more as well as numerous tourists. Then coffee bars started opening in Varoš and attracted the inhabitants of Zadar, and in the coming years and the new rise of Zadar tourism and the old Zadar crafts, old Varoš taverns and woodsheds, old shops along the allies and hidden yards ... small and big restaurants started to open.

And what happened to *Stomorica Tavern*? It grew into a bigger restaurant of the same name, father Zoran, after a few decades left the hospitality business to the younger generation, and his assistant and the last head of the legendary small tavern, Srđan Čuklin, known to all in Zadar by the nickname Čuća, decided to take over the baton of an archetypal small Dalmatian tavern in its own space, not far from the place where for more than half a century were located *Kod tovara* and *Stomorica*. Quite memorially, in honor of the long past *Tovar*, he also named his tavern by the same name – *Tovar* (in Croatian meaning donkey) And it was, at the same time, an honor to the beloved animal that was through history a labor force to the Dalmatians, a pet and an obstinate but dear friend.

The Sardine, Provider of the Adriatic

It is a small and inconspicuous fish, looking impressive in a large school of fish of several million examples, but it is however one of the most important and most numerous fish on the Adriatic and the Mediterranean. Many other fish feed on these fish as does man in whose diet the sardine received the well-deserved epithet of superfood. And how not so: the sardine is full of omega-3 fatty acids, several categories of vitamin B, selenium, phosphorous, potassium, iodine, copper and vitamin D. Due to its brief life span, unlike some other sea creatures, the sardine simply does not have time to be filled with heavy metals and accordingly it is a food without flaws. Besides, due to its abundance in the Adriatic Sea and its relatively easily being caught it is not expensive and easily accessible to all.

The sardine from the Adriatic, valued even in the world, the most appreciated among its 15 well-known subspecies. Interestingly, even fishermen from the north seas uses it for its firmness and quality as bait on longlines used to catch cod, and the Croatian fishermen export it to Spain where it is filled in tin cans. Its quality and nutritional properties are explained by the abundance and quality of plankton in the Adriatic, and planktons are its only food. Schools of sardines spend their lives in search of groups of planktons. Fishermen look for it in their big and specialized boats assisted by the nets of purse seiners and the strong lights that keep the found schools together.





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When you arrive in Zadar, you have come to the center of the most fishing region in Croatia. More than half of the Croatian fishing fleet is located in Zadar County, and most of the boats specialize in fishing for small blue fish, sardines and anchovies, and tuna. There are many plants here where in the morning after the night catch during the 'fishing darkness', in the nights without the moon, the freshly caught fish is placed in deep freeze by the so-called shock at very low temperatures. Thus prepared, it is exported to many European countries. But you enjoy the taste and advantages of sardines as a super food right here, at the source, when the hosts prepare them fresh in various dishes.

Due to its ubiquity, sardines have been feeding the population along the Adriatic for centuries, and people have created many ways to easily turn them into a tasty dish. And none of these is the wrong one. In Zadar and its surroundings, we usually fry them, grill them, boil them briefly in a little water with some drops of wine and, always with olive oil or we bread their fillets by removing the bone while leaving the sides whole, like a steak. We also boil them in a light and quick brodetto with tomatoes or bake them in the oven with a little oil, onions, origano or some other fragrant herbs. When it is a question of fresh sardine dishes, the freshly caught ones bought at the city fish market, and only man's imagination is the limit.

But the real challenge of the autochthons of this region was the method of storing the surplus of the caught sardines, those quantities that would remain after the entire locality would be fed with fresh fish or those that would not be sold. Prior to the invention of the freezer, people came up with a series of methods on how to preserve the surplus catch, with other species of fish it was most often drying with a little salt, sun and wind. The sardines would, however, be preserved in a large quantity of sea salt. Salted sardines, just like anchovies, are seasoned with only a little olive oil and today this is a very valued delicacy in Zadar, a frequent appetizer in the menus of Zadar restaurants. It was only in the 20th century that factories for the preservation of sardines in tin cans were established in the Zadar area. And as such - excellent!

Octopus under the Baking Lid

The Austro-Hungarian war ship *Szent Istvan* that was built in Rijeka and finished in Pula in 1914, with its 154 meter in length, powerful weapons and more than one thousand crew members, was the pride of the Austro-Hungarian navy. When, after four years of waiting, it sailed off into its first serious journey and its first battle before dawn on June 10, 1918, it was sunk after being hit by a torpedo from an Italian torpedo boat and actually in the most sensitive part, the machine room, deep into the bowels of the ship.

The *Szent Istvan* was in the group of ships among which one, the *Tegetthoff*, was its twin brother, and that group of ships was accompanying two similar ones that has sailed off from the North Adriatic ports. The task of the entire fleet was to liberate the Gates of Otranto that had blocked the exit of the Austro-Hungarian ships into the Mediterranean Sea. After the *Szent Istvan*, the only one of all these Austro-Hungarian ships belonging to the Hungarian part of the empire, was sunk, the whole fleet returned to their home ports and the battle for the Straits of Otranto never took place. That event was one of those that announced the end of the First World War that ended five months later. The *Szent Istvan* took into the depths of 66 meters 99 crew members among which many were Croats, while 976 were saved.

Due to that event, the 10th of June is today marked as the Day of the Italian War Navy. That war incident, for it was a real sea battle – the crews of two Italian torpedo boats had accidentally

seen the Austro-Hungarian fleet laying anti-submarine mines near the islet of Lutrošnjak, and after the hit they set off for Italy – that happened next to the island of Premuda in the Zadar archipelago. Premuda is, in fact, the westernmost and farthest island from Zadar in this group of offshore islands, and due to the sinking of *Szent Istvan* it entered world historiography. *Szent Istvan* is the biggest and best-known ship lying at the bottom of the Adriatic, and there are many ships that have experienced such destiny through history. Today *Szent Istvan* whose keel lies with the keel upwards and whose highest point is at a depth of 45 meters and it is called the *Adriatic Titanic* or the *Adriatic Mount Everest*.

Although it is a real submarine attraction, diving on the *Szent Istvan* is prohibited except with the permission of the Croatian Ministry of Culture. That same ministry organizes research diving from time to time so that many valuable artefacts have been extracted from the ship, personal objects of crew members and other objects that will be presented to the public as an exceptionally valuable collection.

Divers that in researches searched the *Szent Istvan* witnessed the rich fish life in its bowels. Fish, crabs, shellfish and other marine organisms live in the cabins of crew members and in the common areas. Witnesses say that samples of fish are of enormous size: conger eels are over 20 kilograms in weight, dentex over ten ... This is not peculiar because the wreck of the ship,

no matter how rich the fish habitat, is in an almost impossible position for fishing, as evidenced by the numerous remains of fishing nets and other fishing gear stuck on the wreck. That is why fishermen avoid *Szent Istvan*.

One sea creature enjoys in particular the bowels of this mystic wreck. Lover of hidden sea bottom holes and cracks – the octopus. The biggest Adriatic octopus rarely obtains the marked greatest weight of 20 kilograms, it is most often from three to seven kilograms, and, therefore, the Adriatic octopus is not a mythical Kraken that in sailor's stories sunk ships. Fishermen catch it in the Adriatic coast at night with spears *under the candle*, looking for it under a bright light along the shallows where it comes to search for food. This very intelligent sea creatures turns from hunter into hunted.

The octopus is a tasty and looked-for gastronomic delicacy that in Zadar is prepared in many ways: boiled found in salads with potatoes and onions, boiled and pressed and then frozen to be served thinly sliced and splashed with olive oil. Even today, the custom of drying octopus in the wind and sun has remained in some places, because it makes it even tastier. We cook it in brodettos and dishes eaten with a spoon, and even once boiled we grill it. In any case, due to its hard meat, the octopus must be boiled prior to being used and then left to age in the freezer. It is then softer and tastier.



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Dishes under the Baking Lid

When in 2018 the famous Dutch chef Jeroen Sportel, was in Zadar and cooked in two different restaurants deserving the Michelin stars and travelled half the world to get to know local gastronomy, he was fascinated by the taste of veal with potatoes baked under the baking lid which his was treated with by his hosts. It was the first time he had come across a dish prepared under the baking lid, and he was just one of the numerous guests of Zadar that were delighted with the dishes prepared in that rustical manner of preparing food.

The baking lid (*cripnja*, *čripnja*) is an ancient culinary tool that looks like a bell-shaped lid under which is placed a shallow and wide baking dish with food that needs to be cooked and then put in an appropriate fireplace. The lid needs to be heated in the fireplace in order to obtain

a uniform temperature of the base and lid, optimal for baking food. After the baking lid is placed over the food and live coals and hot ashes are placed over it to cover the edges. There hides one of the most important secrets of why the food prepared under the baking lid is tastier and more fragrant, giving a fuller taste. Accordingly, this prevents outer air to enter the baking area, and the food being at a relatively high temperature in a hermetically closed space, it cooks and bakes in its own steam, flavors and aromas.

This culinary tool and technique can be defined as the oldest furnace, the beginning furnace food processing development. The oldest baking lids made of ceramics were found in the Croatian region in ancient sites that dated 800 years before Christ. The method of baking that preceded the discovery of

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the baking lid was to wrap food, a piece of meat, in a thin layer of clay so that the roll could be pushed into a hole in the ground and covered with embers and hot ashes.

The baking lid was originally made of clay, in molds or by a potter's wheel which was typical of the Zadar archipelago islands. The most famous potters in this area and on the entire Adriatic were those from the island of Iž. Even today in one workshop and souvenir shop on the island which belongs to the Petrović family, clay baking lids are produced along with other traditional ceramic handicrafts.

The second variant of the baking lid, according to tradition, came to this region during the Turkish conquests through Dalmatia. Today the metal baking lid is more often used than the clay one: it is more appropriate for occasional use for it heats up much faster. A ceramics lid heats up more slowly, but in village environments it was the integral part of the fireplace where a fire was always burning and so the baking lid was always warm and ready for use.

The culinary tool was present in the entire Zadar region, and equally on the islands and the hinterland. Various foods are prepared under the baking lid: meat - veal, lamb, whether mutton, young roosters (*pulastar - poultry*), turkey and other poultry; sea food - octopus, squid, cuttlefish, even fish, and once even bread was thus baked it retained its freshness and texture from five to six days after being baked. And the famous cake of this region, *Benkovački pršnac*, made of young cheese, eggs and milk skin, originally baked under the baking lid. Meat and fish foodstuff are usually baked with potatoes, and recently with other vegetables, with relatively little grease, pork lard or olive oil, with the minimal use of spices, just some salt and pepper. In this way, the original taste of the food is retained, which does not need to be changed. There is no need for more culinary knowledge to prepare a dish under the baking lid. However, it is not so. The skills of preparing a suitable fire and grill, the experience of using salt and other rare supplements is crucial for during the baking of the prepared food,

it must be checked once or at most twice. And not all foods are prepared in the same manner, meat dishes need more time, and up to two hours while fish needs less, at more than one hour.

Even today this method of preparing food in Zadar is very popular and favored, and dishes under the baking lid can be obtained in a number of Zadar restaurants. However, in the development of Zadar after the Second World War, at the time of the new settlement of the city in which the population arrived from the immediate vicinity, from the islands and hinterland, the baking lid was briefly forgotten, and for many it was only part of the rural ambience, in no way something appropriate form urban life. However, already in the 70s and 80s of the past century new generations of Zadar inhabitants discovered that dishes under the baking lid were tastier than those prepared in electrical ovens or in another way. The baking lid started being used in new yard fireplaces in the city and in hospitality structures.





The Feathered Ruler of Village Yards and Christmas Dinners

Very soon after arriving in Europe from its ancestral homeland of America, sometime in the 16th century when it arrived with the ships of the first transatlantic seafarers, a large bird from the hen family named turkey landed even in Dalmatia, in particular in the villages around Zadar, in the fertile area called Ravni Kotari. In only a couple of hundred years, the turkey became not only the ruler of village farm and vast fields and pastures where it walked in free flocks in the yards in search of good pasture and proteins from the ground, it was also the ruler of ceremonial feasts, in particular holiday celebrations during the Christmas period.

Thanks to its compact and tasty meat, the Dalmatian turkey is a particularly respected delicacy in Zadar and the surrounding localities and an unavoidable part of the rural ambience of this area. Zadar and its inhabitants have always created their dietary habits and tradition in the unbreakable connection with their entire surroundings and thus turkey (deservingly) entered into the circle of top Zadar gastronomy relishes that cannot be avoided here.

The Dalmatian turkey has still not been acknowledged as a special breed unlike its relative – the Istrian turkey-cock and the Zagorje turkey-hen. However, scientists have established that the Dalmatian turkey differs from the two mentioned breeds in many features. First of all, due to the fact that it is much smaller and the biggest male example can hardly reach the weight of over seven kilograms, then by the proportion of individual parts of the body, and most of all by the manner of breeding and nutrition. The owners of the Dalmatian turkey feed it only partly with cereals and corn, the rest it compensated by itself – enjoying free breeding and grazing in the outdoor, not far from its habitat. Precisely because of that constant movement, its meat is tastier and firmer than the fattened relative from intensive breeding...

A turkey prepared in the manner we will later explain is the star of the ceremonial dinner for the most well-known holiday – Christmas. The reason is not only due to it being December when turkey meat is tastiest. According to tradition, turkey meat is one that should be eaten for Christmas and thus all the bad during the year is left at its end, as that black bird (though sometimes entirely white or brown) with its rummaging, leaves the searched soil behind. Pork meat is to be enjoyed during the celebration of the New Year for a pig always turns up the ground with snout forward and symbolically opens new paths, new hope.

Spit-roasted Young Lamb

Young Dalmatian lamb - a few months old meat of the old sheep sort called *pramenka* fed on the Dalmatian pastures full of aromatic Mediterranean plants - in the rich and diverse Croatian and Dalmatian gastronomy, and thus in Zadar, has a special, almost cult status. Prepared in a simple manner, roasted on the surely oldest culinary tool- the roasting-spit, on an open fire under control and prior to roasting seasoned with only one spice - salt, is more than a delight to notorious gourmets, meat and roasted meat lovers.

The enticing aroma and specific taste of roasted lamb is not associated with the most beautiful season - spring, when it is the season of young lamb, but also of the biggest Christian holiday - Easter. Young spit-roasted lamb meat is an obligatory main course of an abundant Easter meal. It is the gastronomic sym-

bol of Easter, just like colored boiled eggs and the Easter sweet cake - a sweet cake made of flour and a greater quantity of eggs.

The deep roots of young roasted lamb were not by chance in the gastronomy tradition of Dalmatia and the Zadar region. The first historical data of spit-roasted lamb go back eight thousand years, and the name of Dalmatia dates from the fourth century B.C., during the time when the Illyrians lived here and it derives from the Illyrian word *delma* or *dalma* which is the word for sheep. The Illyrian tribe from this region was called *Delmati* or *Dalmati*. The Croats who started settling in the wider area of Dalmatia at the dawning of the Middle Ages and very quickly later in the Zadar and Šibenik hinterland (From Nin to Knin) created their first state and were cattle-men, more precisely sheep-masters.

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However, the Middle ages remained as a bad memory of the Europe of the time and the Mediterranean, as a period of hunger when privileges such as full tables, mainly with meat and less with vegetables and fish were only for the rare people – the social elite of the time, kings, aristocracy, rich merchants... the common people lived on the edge of hunger, dependent on the capriciousness of weather conditions and harvest, living mainly on porridge cooked from cereals, from the preparation of other modest foods that required obtaining spontaneous new culinary knowledge. Abundant meat meals among the commoners of that time were associated only with rare occasions of the year, primarily religious holidays. And the greatest Christian holiday –

Easter – took place when the meat of young sheep is the tastiest, when it is only a few months old, and when it is separated from breast milk and already feeding from a variety of pastures from the Dalmatian pasture lands.

It is the variety of Mediterranean plants in Dalmatia, the main and only food for sheep, that makes Dalmatian lamb different from the lamb of the continental part of Croatia and the neighboring countries. This is, regardless of the fact that it is of the same breed, the *pramenka*. It has been proved scientifically that due to the specific Mediterranean grazing pastures in Dalmatia, a special variety of the same breed of sheep was formed which differs in aroma, taste and texture of the meat from its relatives from the

mainland that have a far more monotonous diet. The wider area of the Zadar hinterland alone registers 3,500 species of plants of which about seven percent are endemic, autochthonous. That is the main reason why lamb from the coastal parts of Croatia and the island is different and tastier than elsewhere. Even the shape of the sheep is here somewhat different, smaller and thinner. If we add to this sea salt brought to the Dalmatian pastures by the strong bora wind, and salt is a kind of sheep's delicacy, then we have quickly come to the explanation of why the meat of Dalmatian lamb is so different, so valued and why it has become a generally accepted gourmet delight without which weddings and other festive meals cannot take place, as well festivities for religious holidays.

Shepherd's Dish of Kid Meat Banned for Decades

Boiled meat or fish is a word that in the alphabet of traditional and daily gastronomy in Zadar and Dalmatia has a particularly high and privileged status. Due to the simplicity of preparation and the double result in cooking food, meat or fish, in a greater quantity of water but with vegetables, boiled food is a favorite and frequent dish at the table of Zadar families. A double effect is known: with one culinary technique we obtain cooked food, boiled, and soup as well that is to be served prior to the meat or fish of the main dish. Or it is later to be stock for sauce or dishes eaten with "a spoon". Of course, vegetables such as carrots and potatoes are useful in the same pot or as a side dish.

The choice of real, fresh food, be it meat or fish, in the preparation of this simple dish with the right cooking time, is the most important part of its preparation procedure. In Zadar, we eat almost everything that is boiled: fish, from sardines to dory and dentex, and meat – veal, young beef, poultry, lamb ... Boiled food is a favorite brunch to many, just like lunch or supper. Even though we call cooked vegetables boiled food (boiled chard) but the real boiled food is here mainly identified with boiled fish and meat dishes. A nutritionist will say that the preparation of food cooked in such a manner is more healthy than in other methods, but the lady chefs from old times surely did not take that into

account. To place the food in a pot with water and let it all boil does not require too much time so a housewife could always do some other housework at the same time.

Boiled fish and meat are offered by many restaurants and taverns that offer traditional cuisine dishes in their original forms. Therefore, it is unusual that in such a large restaurant offer it is almost impossible to find one particularly esteemed boiled dish that has the status of a gastronomic deity and cult among local gastronomes and gourmands – boiled young kid. A Kid (or young goat) is a baby goat ready to be prepared just after it is a couple of months old. And that is in mid-summer, in July, August and September. That is the time when the adored young lamb enters into its more mature phase – it ends being 'young'. The natural ideal course for enjoying young meat that is full of flavors and aromas of Mediterranean herbs after lamb meat is – young kid.

The Croatian colorful goat we raise on the coast and on the nearby Velebit mountain is a good climber, and is constantly on the move in search of a variety of Mediterranean plants. Therefore, its meat is far less fat compared to, for example, lamb, and, among all the types of meat, it has the least cholesterol. The fact is known that goats do not fall sick with tumor, and its meat and milk are more digestible

than other types of animals whose meat we eat and milk we drink. The goat has been present in this area for thousands of years, and today it is part of our coat of arms (the Istrian one) so that now it sounds quite unbelievable that the breeding of goats in Croatia was completely prohibited from 1954 to 1982. Allegedly for preserving natural wealth.

According to this, and also to the intensive aroma of goat meat, it has lost the popularity it had in history in Dalmatia and Zadar. Only in the last few decades has this type of meat returned to the tables and to the priority lists of serious gastronomes. Kid meat does not have such a peculiar aroma as the one of adult goats being softer and more pliable, slowly but surely comes to our table, though in private festivities, and rarely offered in restaurants.



Mister Pig

Consuming pork is deeply enrooted and frequent with the daily nutrition of the inhabitants of Zadar and Dalmatia, and that food in different forms is present in hundreds of dishes in this area, and wintertime is when that type of meat is often abundantly used. Roast pork is almost an unavoidable part of New Year Eve's dinner, and customs connected to the tradition of pig slaughtering (butchering) are still present today. The custom of preserving for a long period all the parts of the pork so as to have single meat positions salted, smoked and dried has subsisted in specialized curing sheds, ham-smoking plants. This need derived from poverty, being able to keep the meat for later use and the use of every part of the grown pig. This has today left numerous gastronomic delights among which is the Dalmatian prosciutto, salted, smoked and dried pork leg ham is just one of the most valued.

These gastronomic customs have survived even in Zadar regardless of the fact that pig farming was almost extinct. Pig breeding was omnipresent in the entire Zadar surroundings, in the hinterland and the islands as well as in village farms where a few pigs ensured a meat meal throughout the year. Pork lard was the most important fat that was used in cooking (besides olive oil). Juveniles,

piglets, were spit-roasted on special occasions, and the best pieces of precious dried meat were kept for the most esteemed guests.

In Zadar and its area pork meat, even the one for making dry delicacies, is today procured from the interior of Croatia, from its north and east continental parts. Even the Dalmatian prosciutto that bears the brand of protection due to the country of origin, is mainly produced from pork meat of pigs bred in the interior of the country. That may seem strange, but it is not – the specificity and special value of this delicacy is not basically connected to the place of breeding but to the method of production. What makes Dalmatian prosciutto different and valued is the traditional method of its production. Besides the special manner of cutting the ham leg, what is specific is that only one spice is used during the process of drying, smoking and maturing, sea salt, smoke of wood from Mediterranean trees such as spruce gives it its aroma, while drying under the cold and dry Dalmatian wind *bora* ensures safe preservation. Besides prosciutto, other products made of pork meat are valued. These are firstly bacon, flank dried like prosciutto, tenderloin, briefly smoked and dried cutlets, *divenica*, an also smoked and briefly dried sausage for which there are many recipes

but it is basically seasoned only with salt and pepper. Pork head meat and fat, bacon, bones, ribs, pettitoes are dried and often used ... they are all parts that will end up in stews or minestrone with common vetch or only with boiled potatoes as a simple meal. Sausages prepared in the Zadar hinterland method, with pork blood and corn flour are called blood sausages, and they are briefly smoked and a bit salty being a top gastronomic delicacy for connoisseurs in the cooked or roasted variant, and they have their version on the Zadar islands, only that it is quite unusual that sausages there are as sweet as cake and stuffed with raisins.

Some of the mentioned products can be found in the dishes of Zadar restaurants, while some in specialized places, butcher's or small delicatessen shops. In Zadar we have some places called grilled meat stalls. They are small neighborhood meat roasteries where entire pigs-piglets are roasted. The same can be said for lamb, a sample of a Dalmatian sheep *pramenka*, where the skinned animal is put on a long and thick stick, a spit, and is seasoned only with salt and roasted on an open fire for about two hours. After having been roasted, it is cut into smaller pieces and the buyer takes the desired quantity to take home or somewhere else to be consumed.



Food for the Poor that Even the Wealthy can Enjoy

In all of Europe there are about 5,500 plant species, in all of England and Ireland there are 2,000 plants, while on Velebit, the highest mountain in Croatia that looks upon Zadar, all its surroundings and the Adriatic from above, there are more than 1,500 plant species. This entire region of Dalmatia has 2,000 plant species of which 76 are edible, tasty and, above all, healthy. Mirna Milković, from Zadar and a chemist by profession, but also a licensed guide of the Velebit and its plants, addicted to clean and healthy nature wherefore she obtained the nickname of Velebit fairy, has entered into the soul of every member of this large wild group that makes up the richness of the flora of this part of Croatia, and calls this diverse wealth a "treasure of health".

The locals here, and in particular those who were forced by necessity and hunger in the long centuries past, from the long series of shelves of the first "shopping mall" that is called Nature, discovered how that variety of plants could protect health, heal but also serve as food. A mixture of wild edible plants from the intact Dalmatian nature cooked in some kind of cauldron, and just when winter food supplies run out and when the harvest or picking of the first summer vegetables is still distant, meaning in spring when nature flourishes, has become one of the most typical and most recognizable food of the Zadar region, but also of all of Dalmatia. That original, autochthonous, primeval food from the wider Zadar hinterland is called *svakober* (available to all) and on the islands and in Zadar it is most often called mixture.

The secret of the mixture is in knowing nature and its wild plants, and that knowledge pickers, most often village women, have passed it on from generation to generation. Strolling through the nearest landscape, long before the word "recreation" existed, caring wives and mothers with a small knife in their hands would search

"Today, when vegetarianism or at least a healthy, Mediterranean diet have become an 'in' story, ubiquitous trend, the primordial mixture of plants is slowly being brought back to the tables..."







“... on Velebit, the highest mountain in Croatia that looks upon Zadar, all its surroundings and the Adriatic from above, there are more than 1,500 plant species.”

for edible and delicious plants to return home with a basket full of these. The plants in the baskets differed from meadow to meadow, from one micro location to another. There were all kinds: wild chives (*Allium schoenoprasum*), young leaves of wild fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*), dandelion (*Taraxacum*), wild radicchio (*Taraxacum*), lamb's quarters and chickory (*Chenopodium album* and *Cichorium picroides*), wild onion (*Allium ampeloprasum*) and wild leek, black bryony (*Tamus Communis*) and marshmallow (*Malva sylvestris*), (*Helianthus tuberosus*) and burdock (*Arctium lappa*), daisy (*Belliss perennis*), sorrel (*Rumex acetosa*) and young and wild nettle (*Urtica dioica*), arugula (*Eruca sativa*), wild Swiss chard, asparagus (*Asparagus officinalis*)... The list is long, very long.

Sometimes only three or four types of plants were found in the basket, and sometimes even ten to twelve. Each combination of picked plants had a different taste, but the most frequent taste was a blend of bitter, sweet and piquant. Only a few leaves were sufficient as, for example, the strong and aromatic fennel, for the dish to obtain a completely new aroma. And it is the wild fennel that is often the prevalence that discourages or attracts the consumer to the plant mixtures. In the world of gourmands, it is considered as truffle – it has numerous admirers but also those who cannot even come close to it.

The boiling did not last for long, and it depended on the type of picked plants, and if in the house there was some kind of smoked pork, mutton or goat meat (*kaštradina*), meat that boiled would give new aroma to the entire dish and the family would be happier and fuller. The plant mixture without any meat added and seasoned only with some olive oil, was a perfectly healthy and filling vegetarian dish. The fact that vegetarianism was a necessity in the past and not the choice of the poor is another story. That is why they lived longer than the obese wealthy people, insatiable hedonists who enjoyed meat and greasy feasts at the same time.

Today, when vegetarianism or at least a healthy, Mediterranean diet have become an 'in' story, ubiquitous trend, the primordial mixture of plants is slowly being brought back to the tables of Zadar households from which it disappeared in the turbulent times of escaping from the village and rural habits, even from the diet habits. Lovers of this dish do not need any more to go picking by themselves if they lack the time and knowledge: the mixture plants can easily be found in the Zadar marketplace. The plant mixture has hesitantly but surely made its comeback even in the Zadar restaurants.

Wild Asparagus – Princess of Spring

In mid-March already, and sometimes even earlier, wild asparagus (*acutifolius*) sprout in the entire Zadar region, a favorite spring gourmand delicacy of the locals. When the winter temperatures subside and the spring rains soak the soil, thin green and brown self-growing sticks spring out easily, and with a little culinary knowledge, turn into dietary, healthy and above all delicious dishes. They come out at a speed almost visible to the human eye, from the ground, along drywalls, in macchia shrubs, on meadows and forest glades, under island olive trees, in the karst of the rocky part of the Zadar hinterland, at the edges of Zadar, even in some parts of the city itself.

Naturalists have registered 300 species of asparagus of which only 20 are edible, and most of the world knows the tame asparagus, a seasonal vegetable that is cultivated in the open or in greenhouses, but, in any case, assisted by the human hand. It is, of course, the asparagus we buy in shopping malls and use it in many dishes. Its ancestor and distant relative, the wild asparagus,

is a typical Mediterranean plant, and in our case, a plant from Dalmatia and the Zadar region. These two species differ in appearance and taste: the tame one is thicker and of milder taste, while the wild one is more elegant and of much more bitter taste. Real lovers of wild, self-grown asparagus, and there are many of them, look with suspicion at its cultivated relative. And especially that there is not a household in Zadar that does not prepare a dish with asparagus at least a couple of times in spring, the season of wild asparagus. This is not only due to its specific and unique bitter taste, but to the fact that it is an exceptionally healthy nutrient found in intact nature with a multitude of health-promoting ingredients. It has a beneficial effect on heart disease, and is an excellent diuretic, strengthens bones, reduces cholesterol and high blood pressure, cleans the body and concerning its aphrodisiac properties, the best proof is to check for oneself ... It is full of vitamins A, B, C and D, and also minerals such as iron, zinc, magnesium, potassium ... all these healing properties combined with

its extraordinary taste make the asparagus a superfood, once again a part of the rich treasury of a healthy and varied Mediterranean diet. In spring, asparagus are in abundant offer in the markets of Zadar and Dalmatia. However, we prefer, if possible, to pick by ourselves these spring princesses. It is a good custom for a couple of hours walking outdoors in intact nature which is of double benefit: an abundant, tasty and healthy supper and a relaxed and oxygen filled body.

Until a decade ago, asparagus was mainly consumed at home, in two or three usual methods, most often briefly boiled and then salted and seasoned with olive oil with a supplement of hard-boiled eggs to become a delightful salad. Over time, Zadar restaurants have included asparagus in their menus, and started to prepare different dishes from these self-grown plants – from soup to dessert. It was quite the right way: at a time when restaurant guests, tourists, often fled from the uniform 'international' dishes and searched for local food, asparagus was the infallible seasonal choice.



Broad Bean – the King of Legumes

Somewhere towards the end of April or the beginning of May, in the Zadar small gardens of household backyards and on the stands of Zadar markets, the legumes that the local gourmets, probably all winter, impatiently look forward to - young broad beans start becoming green. At that early stage, broad beans are sold here, and somewhere even consumed in strings, uncleaned with their outer shell and the membrane around the kidney-shaped grain that is removed mainly in mature beans.

Unlike its close relative, the pea, whose first ancient traces were found in the colder regions of Europe, such as southern Russia and Switzerland, and which prefers a cold and humid climate, the broad bean is a typical Mediterranean plant, which spread throughout the Mediterranean already in antiquity, embarking on its campaign from North Africa or the Middle East. The pea that expanded across Europe in the early Middle Ages, is sown somewhat less frequently in small Mediterranean gardens, we will find it

in larger fields, while the broad bean is an older relative on the Mediterranean, and no one knows why in Dalmatian and even in Zadar the "little ball" became even more popular than the antique broad bean. Therefore, in this region the broad bean has an exclusive status with real gourmants. Anyway, broad beans and peas, are a real spring attraction in their early stage, even more popular than beans that settled here more than a millennium later, after having arrived from the American continent.

Somehow at the same time as they arrived, the first spring beans and then peas, young Dalmatian lamb was already getting into a somewhat more fragrant and serious phase, after the lambs had had their full of freshly sprouted aromatic Mediterranean herbs. Then all three foodstuffs were joined in the pot and that is how the specific Dalmatian stew came to be – lamb with broad beans and peas. It is also questionable whether the name stew is appropriate for this dish is prepared somewhat differently than

the regular stew – pieces of young lamb are first browned in oil, removed and then (red) onions are braised and the remaining ingredients and spices are gradually added.. in some places in Dalmatia this dish is called *žgvacet*, but that is a name usually used in Istria for a similar dish – but with chicken meat.

Most people prepare that Dalmatian stew with peas which is taking the easy way out – real cooks will always cook spring potatoes, broad beans and peas, and spring garlic with lamb ... All typical spring foodstuff is impossible to procure in other periods of the year (except frozen food).



Artichoke - the Divine Bud

The holy and divine bud – these adjectives used by poets and writers, but also by chefs and gourmets of the world to call the artichoke – the tastiest bud created by Nature. These dedications to the product that sprouts from a bush with long and green leaves derives back from Greek mythology, from the time when the ruler of Olympus, Zeus, tried to violate the virgin Cynara, and when she, fighting back, bit him bloodily on the neck forcing the oppressor revenge and to turn her into a thorny but tasty artichoke. Respecting the unfortunate fate of the virgin, the Greeks never allowed the buds of the first artichokes, cultivated from a type of wild burdock, to open but turned them into delicious food.

The artichoke, which is supposed to derive from Egypt, and for which it is reliably known to thrive only in warm regions with a moderate climate such as the Mediterranean and then Dalmatia, was taken from Greek mythology and popularized by the ancient Romans in the period of their greatest power. They used it in salads and sauces, and it is believed that the dish exists from that time which is presently very popular in Zadar and Dalmatia, a dish that is one of the present general gastronomy heritages – artichokes cooked with peas, broad beans and spring potatoes.

We can only imagine how the first seeds or seedlings of artichokes arrived in Liburnian Zadar from Rome. They probably arrived through the monumental portal, at the time the main entrance into the city, that was the most important city on this side of the Adriatic, along with other innovations that were trendily spreading from the imperial metropolis. This colossal gate was located on present day Petar Zoranić Square, in the southeastern part of the old Zadar nucleus, the peninsula. On that

”... and in that longstanding history it has remained as an indispensable decoration of Zadar gardens and the ultimate spring delicacy with a particular and almost divine status with the locals.”





same site, archeologists discovered other historical layers from later periods, and even some construction parts dating before Christ, were reconstructed. Under the glass fragments of the square surface, Roman and medieval archeological findings can be seen. Along with the adjacent Square of the Five Wells dating from the 16th cent. as the most important water reservoir of the time, then the Captain's Tower from the 13th cent., the only remaining tower of the city ramparts that protected Zadar from the invasion of the Turks, Queen Helen's (Jelena Madijevka) Park, the first Zadar public park built at the beginning of the 19th cent., Petar Zoranić Square, create the framework of the historically most important part of Zadar. Two thousand years have elapsed through this area where different civilizations, city inhabitants, customs and habits, historical opportunities and inconveniences have alternated ...

And on Petar Zoranić Square itself we have found restaurants that regularly includes in its menu dishes with artichokes, the prickly but holy bud arrived in Zadar many years ago from the Greek and Roman tables, and in that longstanding history it has remained as an indispensable decoration of Zadar gardens and the ultimate spring delicacy with a particular and almost divine status with the locals. Furthermore, the healing properties of this plant are well known, especially in the treatment of the liver, so its popularity in this area should not be surprising.

Believe it or not, the remains of the magnificent main city portal of the Roman period are visible in both restaurants for they are situated in the buildings built on its wide walls.

‘On a Spoon’ Dishes or ‘Real Food’

A large group of dishes from the so-called homemade gastronomy of Zadar and Dalmatia has been domesticated in the last few decades in the local restaurant offer. The mutual name of such a group of dishes is ‘on a spoon’ and difficult to explain to those who are not of Mediterranean roots. It becomes clearer when it is explained that such a group actually has countless members for it includes all the dishes that are, first of all, served warm and all the ingredients are cooked in one pot and are served in one plate as a complete meal and are eaten with one utensil – a spoon.

The mentioned large culinary company also includes rich and dense broths, mostly stews and *minestrone*, a type of brodetto with potatoes, but also meat stew-soups, bread-soups and *lešade* (boiled meat or fish)... The dishes on a spoon are cooked here combined with hundreds of ingredients, mainly green vegetables, cereals, legumes, mainly tare, pasta, fresh or dried meat, and even offal, *eledone moschata* and fish, a bit of everything, in our case all offered from land and sea from the variety of



”... because the first thing that comes to the mind of a hungry inhabitant of Zadar in the critical moments of late morning or early afternoon is - “let’s eat something on a spoon”.

the Zadar region. It is similar to the group of dishes that in Italy they call *camangiare* or in France, in Provence, *estouffat*. In our region 'spoon-fed' (it would be more correct to say 'with a spoon' but the charming and ingrained expression we have is a 'wrong expression') dishes are a more serious story for they imply 'real food', the one that fills a person be it in winter when we need more calories or in summer when we eat lighter and refreshing garden *minestrone*.

In contemporary gastronomy terminology, all these dishes could be called *comfort food*, because the first thing that comes to the mind of a hungry inhabitant of Zadar in the critical moments of late morning or early afternoon is - “let’s eat something on a spoon”. His palate and nose, in a moment of hunger, first remembered the smells and tastes coming from his mother’s or grandmother’s kitchen and that pot in which something irresistibly attractive was simmering. Another thing, unfortunately, is that many due to their obligations and rhythm of life, look for an unhealthy snack in the nearest bakery as a completely inappropriate substitute for 'real food'.

Here is another interesting example of a typical dish 'on a spoon' which due to some changes has obtained another look. Dry beans with pasta and a piece of dry meat is a typical 'on a spoon' dish in this part of the Mediterranean and we call it *pašta-fažol* (*pasta-beans*). A dish to which the famous Massimo Bottura of the restaurant *Osteria Francescana* in Modena created a derivative from this traditional dish. But in Zadar we often cook dry beans without pasta so that the expression *pasta-beans* loses its meaning. But when we add sauerkraut to those same beans, a favorite and healthy winter food, we get a new dish of different taste called - *jota*.



How Garage Vintners Entered the World of Premium Wines

Until the mid of the past century, the boundaries of the city of Zadar were not bigger than the present old center of the city – the peninsula. On the wider space of that urban center fields, vegetable gardens and, in particular, vineyards were lined up. Their owners cultivated them, the locals of the suburban area, still a rural center at the time - Diklo, Bokanjac, Stanovi, Crno, Arbanasi, and also, which is very interesting, the inhabitants of some localities on Ugljan, the island closest to Zadar. The islanders were owners of cultivated area in Puntamika and Borik, today the most attractive tourist districts of Zadar.

70 years ago, Zadar spread intensively over those former fields and vineyards where new city districts arose. The once suburban villages of Zadar became a part of Zadar. One part of the inhabitants still deals in agriculture, and in viticulture in particular, but only for their own needs. Regardless of the fact that the city had "driven away" the vineyards, the culture of wine continued – wine as food, passion, solace and hedonism.

However, more serious viticulture and the production of wine withdrew to the Zadar hinterland, the Ravno Kotari. It is there that some twenty years ago started the revival of the culture of agriculture, olive growing and, in particular, viticulture. New vineyards were planted, wine-makers and vintners adopted new knowledge, and premium wines were produced from the vineyards next to the Zadar surroundings and thus arrived in the city of Zadar. This is why in Zadar alone, the cult of wine production crept in as a hobby activity and only for one's own needs.

"It is an interesting fact that French sorts of wines such as Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah grow successfully in the Zadar hinterland."





The founders of Zadar *boutique* wineries set off into the world with humble ambitions that started from a modest and discreet garage production of quality to rise today above the standard of amateur vintners with the production and presentation of their wines.

One of the best-known wineries that started from a garage is *Degarra* of Mate Pestić and Dane Šulentić in the Zadar district of Bokanjac, established in 2012. The name of the winery was taken from the French expression *vin de garage* that is a synonym for small passionate producers of the best French and world wines. Its development was marked by the fact that wines from its cellar started with initial modest quantities due to top quality, and quickly became demanded on the market, in Zadar and abroad, so their annual production has presently reached tens of thousands of bottles a year. Besides the cellar, the *Degarra Winery* has a charming and pleasant presentation and sales area, a wine shop and a tasting corner where the story of each one of the wines is told with great detail and much passion.

It is an interesting fact that French sorts of wines such as *Merlot*, *Cabernet Sauvignon* and *Syrah* grow successfully in the Zadar hinterland. Therefore, the *Degarra cuvée* made from these sorts is called *Bontera* and is at the top of the list of best Croatian red wines and the most demanded product that always goes well with some serious gastronomy specialty. After long decanting, the wine reveals the aroma of pine needles but retains its freshness.

Pestić and Šulentić, and his wife Dragana Šuletnić, an enologist, have their own vineyards but one part of the raw material they procure from other vintners and so they decided to make wines and sparkling wines as well as rose from the Croatian sort Plavac, while *Degarra Pošip* has been rewarded at many competitions of white wines. That is one of the best-known Dalmatian sort of grape that is more present in the vineyards of southern Croatia, but it is also found in this region now, in northern Dalmatia, in the *Degarra* bottles where it acquired a new and different value. It is an elegant wine of distinctive freshness whose aroma has an emphasis of fruit. The *Degarra Winery* produces premium sparkling wine from its *Pošip*, and it is the first in the Zadar region area due to which it obtained the name *Primo*. *Primo* was later joined by sparkling rosé made from a Dalmatian sort of Plavina called *Perla*.

Champion Maraština of Urban Vintners

Grape harvests have been going on in the vineyards of the Zadar region since mid-August. The grapes are processed into hundreds of liters of premium and quality sorts and *cuvée* wines. Each grape sort has the best time for harvesting which winegrowers and vintners attentively expect, following daily the progress of their vineyards in order to evaluate correctly that *best moment*.

Maraština is an old and autochthonous sort of grape in the spacious region of the Zadar hinterland, in Ravni Kotari, and has long been accepted as one of the basic domestic sorts for the production of wine, even though it is identical to the Italian sort *malvasia lunga*. The end of September is the best time for harvesting these sorts of grapes, sweet for instant tasting but of small berries. In the past century, wine growers had almost given up on Maraština for it is exceptionally sensitive for production in vineyards and cellars. The smallest mistake or slight inattentiveness and the entire annual yield can fail.

Two decades back, Maraština was again planted in the Dalmatian vineyards, and good winegrowers and vintners that had adopted new knowledge on the production of wine and used new technology and equipment, restored once again the old reputation of Maraština. Maraština is found in many coupage and the Zadar region and

Dalmatia vintners have produced an excellent autochthonous wine brand sort from it.

It is precisely the Maraština sort that was given special attention to by brothers Mario and Dario Fiočić, the founders and owners of *Zadar Fiočić Winery*. Wines from that sort of grape are their most important trump card among the seven wine labels they have on offer. The Fiočić produce two versions of Maraština: fresh and *sur lie*, in other words, a version aging in two barrels on lees that give the wine a completely different value. Dario Fiočić is particularly proud of his wines from Maraština, and he says that they have decided on that sort because it is an old and once not present sort, but with the potential of becoming a premium wine. The *Fiočić Winery* Maraština has obtained high marks and championship awards at many wine competitions. Thus in 2021, at the Review of Northern and Central Dalmatia Wines *Vinfest 2021* held in Benkovci, Maraština *sur lie* Fiočić 2019 was proclaimed champion of the competition among the competing 64 wines.

Fiočić Winery has a cooperation relationship with Antom Marić vintner from the locality of Vukšić in Ravni Kotari. Maraština from Marić vineyards is located in a vast Vukšić Field, and from there the grapes are immediately transferred to Zadar and processed into sweet stum from which great wine is

obtained to be consumed the following year in the fresh variant or in two years in the famous *sur lie* variant.

The Fiočić brothers do not have their own vineyards but they have four of them in multi-year lease. Besides in Vukšić, those vineyards are in Stankovci, Tinj and Nadin, in locations of best quality for vineyards in the Zadar hinterland. They have an excellent cooperation with the vintners to whom they guarantee a secure repurchase, and jointly participate during the year in adopting important decisions in vineyards. And when the grapes are in production, that is, in the cellar, an educated enologist enters into the scene.

Even though the Fiočić brothers have been dealing in winery since 2003 when, little by little, they started being interested in homemade wine that their father *Stjepan* produced for his own needs in the family cellar of the most tourist part of Zadar, the serious exit of their wines on the Croatian wine stage happened only in 2016 when they established a company for the production of wine and liqueurs.



A Gift from the Croatian King to Zadar Benedictines Poured into Wine

The history of the Royal vineyards, an impressive plantation with 300,000 vines, one of the biggest in Croatia, is an interesting story of almost nine centuries. It starts in the middle of the 11th century with a grant from the Croatian King Petar Krešimir IV whereby the Benedictine convent of Saint Mary in Zadar was granted, among other things, a large piece of land on the flanks overlooking the locality of Petrčane near Zadar. The convent was founded by Abbess Čika (*Chicca*), a distinctive, significant and influential figure of the time in Zadar and further. After the death of her husband Andrija, she decided to be

ordained, and on the foundations of an old and small church she built her convent. Since she was of noble birth and from an influential family, even of royal blood, she had a friendly relationship with the king of the Croats of the time who addressed her as *my sister (soror mea)*, moreover, he supported her intentions and projects granting her with fertile land where vineyards were raised and cultivated for centuries later.

The Zadar Benedictines, keepers of the priceless Gold and Silver of Zadar, zealously took care of their vineyards until the middle of the last century when their government,

“The first line of premium wines is called Punta Skala after the nearby cape west from Petrčane. That line consists of three sorts of the main star of the Royal Vineyards...”





implementing the so-called Agrarian Reform, took the property ways from them. It was returned to them only from the Republic of Croatia twenty years ago, when they decided to rent the vineyards to interested parties for a long period of time. It is interesting that these Zadar nuns are working hard on their property in the locality of Smilčić not far from Zadar, where they produce, among other goods, quality wine, olive oil, liqueurs and jams...

The director of the Royal Vineyards, Zoran Pantalon, showed an interest in the 23 hectares in Petrčane and in 2010, with his partners, he started planting new vineyards on the site of the old ones. Heavy mechanization crushed all the stone on the ground, so the young

vines were literally planted in gravel, in a deep stone base. This later showed to be a brilliant move: on such a base, in the specific *terroir*, on a gently laid and constantly sunny base, today the vines give less grapes, but top quality, and wines with a distinct freshness, minerality and fruitiness. According to the historical facts that the vineyards were planted after the grant from one of the most important Croatian historical rulers, the new complex obtained the present name – Royal Vineyards.

Director Pantalon and his partners decided to plant well-known, autochthonous Dalmatian sorts - *Pošip*, *Plavac* and *Crljenak* (*Zinfandel*) that make 80 percent of the assortment. In a smaller part, they also planted

introduced varieties, red - *Cabernet Sauvignon*, *Syrah*, *Merlot*, *Plavina*, and among the white ones *Chardonnay*, *Žilavka*, *Sauvignon* and yellow *Muškat*. Today, two branded lines are squeezed from the grapes of the Royal Vineyards. The first line of premium wines is called *Punta Skala* after the nearby cape west from Petrčane. That line consists of three sorts of the main star of the Royal Vineyards: *Pošip*, then rosé, *Crljenak* and *Plavac Mali*, and *Muškat*, and since 2021 the *žilavka* sort joined the line as well as *Chardonnay*. The other line of branded quality wines under the name *Grgur Vinski* (the name is derived from the name of the bishop Grgur Ninski) and it consists of three types of wine: *Pošip*, *Plavac* and rosé of *Plavac* and *Crljenak*.



Top Natural Liqueurs and Brandies: *Maraschino, Pelinkovac, Vlahovac and PT*

Maraschino is a liqueur based on the sour cherry marasca whose original recipe, production and world fame are inextricably linked to Zadar, and the Maraska factory where it is being produced even today. That liqueur was a posh drink of the European and world elite, so it is known that the legendary lover Casanova enjoyed the taste of this famous cherry liqueur, the French czar and commander-in-chief Napoleon Bonaparte, writer Honoré de Balzac, Hollywood director Alfred Hitchcock and the Russian czar Nicholas I. Pavlovič. The British King George IV falls among *maraschino* fans and he sent his war ships for crates of the Zadar liqueur.

The recipe of the authentic Zadar liqueur was made and written in the 16th century in the Dominican monastery in Zadar. The liqueur was actually prepared in the pharmacy of the Zadar monastery under the name *Rosolj* (deriving from the word *ros solis* - sun-rose). Zadar had several distilleries for the production of *maraschino* liqueur already in the 17th century. A young merchant named Francesco Drioli came from Istria to Zadar and founded a liqueur factory. He dedicated himself to raising production to the level of industrial production by purchasing machinery and equipment, which enabled the distillation of cherry marasca to be brought to perfect purity and aroma. At that time the recipe of the Zadar *maraschino* was defined.

When Zadar started developing the industry of producing liqueur already

in the 18th century, *maraschino* set off into the world and sailed the seas to all the most important European ports and metropolises. Very soon it was accepted and loved in all the European courts (Viennese, Berlin, Bavarian, English, Italian, Belgian, Danish...) to further expand even to the USA, Canada, Australia, South America, the Union of South Africa, and was drunk on the first and last voyages of the mythical Titanic.

Maraschino is surely the Zadar *Maraska* factory's most well-known alcohol drink in the world, an authentic Zadar brand whose secret has been preserved since the beginning of the 16th century, but in the five century long history of this factory generations of herbalists, pharmacists and contemporary technologists invented and produced a wide palette of alcoholic drinks (but nonalcoholic also) basing their knowledge on folk tradition and the richness and diversity of the flora of the Zadar region and Dalmatia. The scents and tastes of this part of the Mediterranean are literally poured into great liqueurs and high-quality brandies that should be enjoyed, but not exaggerated. Everyone who comes to Zadar for the first or hundredth time, must know that he has arrived in a city where some of the best alcoholic drinks in the world are produced.

The raw material Maraska uses for its *maraschino*, the autochthonous sour cherry marasca "the sweetest sour cherry in the world", is obtained from their own big plantation in the Zadar hinterland. Some other liqueurs are pro-

duced from the same sour cherry, Cherry brandy and Chericca where alcohol and the aroma of sour cherries is joined through a special technology and used as digestives, accompanying desserts or used in numerous *cocktail* combinations. Maraska has produced from the marasca fruit a new line of nonalcoholic drinks, juices, syrups, nectars, even jams named Amarena where only the best and healthiest fruits of sour cherries are used.

However, in the long history of Maraska brandies and liqueurs appeared whose basis is not the sour cherry marasca as in the case of the phenomenally bitter Vlahovac, several types of aromatic herbs and grasses from nature. In only twenty years, the liqueur Vlahovac has spread throughout the world and it can be purchased at pharmacies and liquor stores in England, Russia, Spain, the United States of America, China, India, Turkey, Japan, Persia and Egypt.

Interestingly, by far the most popular liqueur in Zadar is Pelinkovac, whose aroma and sweet-bitter taste is obtained by the medicinal Mediterranean plant wormwood. It is in Zadar, spontaneously in the city bars, that the simple *cocktail* made of Pelinkovac and tonic came to be and was named – PT (Pe-Te). That mixture is almost never served in bars of other Croatian cities while in Zadar it holds a cult status. PT is served with ice cubes and a slice of lemon and refreshes young and old, and women and men drink it with equal passion.

Sophisticated Traditional Production of Brandy

In its hundred-year-old history, Maraska, the Zadar liqueur factory, has grown into a great and powerful house. The tradition of producing brandy (whose basis is wine pomace) and liqueur, for the most part from marasca and green nuts (Orahovac), has been retained even as homemade, with hobbyists who produce these alcoholic beverages exclusively for their own needs. Large jars in which small cherries ferment in sugar and in the sun are a natural part of the ambience of backyards or balconies in Zadar. However, smaller producers of liqueur and brandy have fortunately joined forces in the rich Zadar tradition using new knowledge and technology to produce extraordinary alcohol products.

Only seven years ago, two friends, Edvin Šare and Šime Peša, otherwise entrepreneurs in other industries, started their specific path in the production of traditional Dalmatian brandies, out of enthusiasm and hobbies. They designed and realized a project named *Mashtel*, a *boutique* distillery for the production of brandy. They procured a modern distiller that is the integral part of the tasting room in Zaton, a small locality not far from Zadar. In this distillery, they set out in a difficult but right path: they obtained their distillates in a long production process and ageing with the use of 15 types of different and natural herbs. That is how the top brandies of *Mashtel* were created. They are made of apples, plums, sour cherry marasca, quinces, melons, tangerines, carobs, gins, wine must, nuts, and even according to an old recipe – from honey.

Šime had some vacant place on his property in Zaton, right next to the road leading to Zaton Tourist Village, Nin, Privlaka and Vir – many tourists travel on that road and thus they calculated that they could sell some of their brandy products but the first thing that came to their mind then was satisfaction and entertainment. The matter became more serious with their first investment. They bought a powerful, copper, computerized, probably the best distillation boiler on the market, the German giant Arnold Holstein that in 2015 was paid directly to the factory for the amount of 30,000 euro. They opened a family farm in the name of Šime's wife Franka, and set off on their first production.

- We make brandy just like our ancestors did, just a bit more sophisticated and at a technologically much higher level. We add sugar in the production, use fruit only from ecological production, and, believe me, our brandies are better and healthier than the cheap and usually bad brandies, Edvin Šare told us. He and his friend Šime Peša manage a serious *craft* distillery of brandy in Zadar County, and much further, *Mashtel* in Zaton, a tourist locality between Zadar and Nin.

The production of brandy starts with the cutting and mixing of fruit that with the help of yeast and enzymes in barrels ferments for 28 days. Baking, on the other hand, begins when 300 liters of water are boiled in a cauldron, above which fruit is placed in another vessel and then, according to a computer in the cauldron, heats

“The special pride of *Mashtel* is the last product in the line – the first Croatian real *gin*.”

for two hours obtaining a distillate with 70 to 80 percent alcohol. It is to age in barrels for at least two months to then be mixed with demineralized water whereby the alcohol is reduced to the desired 40 percent. New aging follows which lasts for several months for brandy is actually better when older, and, after being filtered, the liquid can be bottled.

The special pride of *Mashtel* is the last product in the line – the first Croatian real *gin*. This drink, known to everyone, is here produced from wine distillate and pine berries(spruce), with the addition of as many as nine aromatic plants that give this superior gin a special aroma and taste. This is the reason why *Mashtel gin* bears on its label the message that it is inspired by Dalmatia. Šare explained to us that, according to him, the queen of all brandies is the one made from quince, even though he considers carob to be the real king of fruits for it consists of healthy fruit sugar more than any other. Carob is procured from the island of Vis, and ground into powder to be distilled.



"It is unknown why the orange, besides the abundance of other fruits that grow here, acquired the honor of being the main ingredient connected to the Zadar adjective."





The History of Zadar Revived in Cakes

The Zadar Cake, also known as the orange and chocolate cake, is the only dessert that has travelled through history and has been preserved in our offer to the present day whereby in such a process it has kept the toponymic feature of the city of its origin. On one hand, this is testimony of the longstanding presence of such a sweet and juicy citrus (whose ancestral home is southeast Asia) in Zadar. On the other hand, this is somewhat unfair to many other fruits and ingredients from which cakes have been made throughout history in Zadar, either in the modest kitchens of Zadar housewives, or in old Zadar confectioneries, which, unfortunately, almost disappeared from Zadar for some time..

It is the Zadar region that is known for growing numerous types such as the sour cherry (marasca) which is the best known and it grows successfully in the Zadar hinterland, the fertile Ravni Kotari, and was made known to the world through the old Zadar liqueur *maraschino*. However, the landscape of this part of the Mediterranean and Dalmatia abounds in other fruit trees: the delicious cherry, fig with its thousand faces, peach and especially the almond with its particularly hard shell but also special aromatic and sweet core. A legume has entered this society of abundant fruit, and nutritionist consider it the healthiest Mediterranean plant – the carob. The carob shrub or tree were once a mandatory decoration and summer shade in the Zadar gardens, the island gardens in particular. The reason why this splendid plant whose fruits were full of healthy fruit sugar and were a worthy replacement for chocolate and coco and whose seeds served to invent carats, unit measures for the purity of gold, disappeared from the gardens of Zadar and its surroundings.

Basically, sweets were kneaded, cooked and baked from all these gifts of nature in Zadar. It was not difficult here to make an excellent cheese cake – the best sheep cheese and the unique curd are made here, not far from Zadar, on the island of Pag. It was once easy to find them on the island nearer to Zadar or in its hinterland.

It is unknown why the orange, besides the abundance of other fruits that grow here, acquired the honor of being the main ingredient connected to the Zadar adjective.

Why did the Carob Acquire the Title of Mediterranean Chocolate

It was called the sweetest plant of the Mediterranean. And why not, for the carob (Arab *kharrub*) is a real sugar bomb. About 60 percent of the composition of this sweet, hard legume is made up of sugars in almost all forms. Surprisingly, when consuming carob fruit, and this is recommended only for those with strong and healthy teeth, this amount of sugar is not felt that much, the taste is actually closer to cocoa or - chocolate. Therefore, it is not unusual that with the many names and adjectives given to carob through its long history, it has also obtained the 'title' of Mediterranean chocolate.

The long tradition of using carob, which has been maintained to the present day in Zadar and its region, is in its ground form or in powder, and mostly on the islands of the Zadar archipelago, which testifies that this plant was once ubiquitous in gardens and even in the fields and forests around the villages. Today it is not so. The carob has almost disappeared from Zadar and its region. It is not clear why for it a highly appreciated food of healthy and high quality. Besides being acknowledged in gastronomy, mainly in confectionery, its fruits are also used in many ways in the food and pharmaceutical industry. Its healing properties are always pointed out and known to those who first cultivated and used it: the Arabs, Hellenes and the ancient Romans.

Fortunately, the gem of the Mediterranean flora has made its come back in full glory in the Zadar region: the Zadar Bio Svijet Company has raised a plantation of over 4,000 carob

trees in the locality of Bibinje, just a few kilometers from Zadar.

A gastronomic rarity with the carob holding the main role in its original and rustic form can be found even today on Molat, and island of the City of Zadar. It this concerns the Molat cake, which suggests, of course, that the cake originated from that place since bearing its name, and being proof that once on the island of Molat there were many more carob trees, that were probably neglected through the years when the inhabitants started leaving the island. Fortunately, the Molat cake is living proof that this valuable plant was once far more present on this island. The women of the island farmhands, who through long centuries were mainly serfs of the Zadar landowners, made sweets and desserts as well as all other dishes, only from what was easily accessible. And, obviously, it was the carob.

It is difficult today to find carob trees, shrubs to be exact, on Molat. They are hidden in the thickets and woods of this green island, green with holm oak, strawberry-tree, pine tree and other Mediterranean trees and shrubs that create a thick and, in many places, impenetrable macchia. Throughout the long and difficult history of Molat and its population that has been living on the island since the Stone Age, it was the quality wood for building ships and houses or just for firewood and agricultural products that Molat farmhands came to in several rich island fields, making it their treasure, and due to which the islands were plundered by pirates, and exploited by rich land-

owners, the Zadar nobility. Fortunately, the sea around the island was and still is rich with fish, and the inhabitants of Molat were excellent fishermen. Life was hard on this island, proved by the fact that serfdom was abolished on Molat in the first half of the 20th century when the inhabitants finally became the owners of their lands.

There are presently three inhabited localities on Molat and they are Molat, Brgulje and Zapuntel, connected by an asphalted road. The old nuclei of all three localities are located further from the coast, but in the last decades, coastal settlements have spread with coastal homes for the permanent inhabitants, summer homes for those who have moved from the island to bigger cities and villas with apartments for tourists desiring island peace. In the last decades the island has become "the promised land" for tourist boatmen, a real nautical paradise. The Molat coastline is 52 kilometers long, and nature and the sea have 'designed' a series of almost 40 magnificent small and larger coves, and just as many natural, often hidden beaches. The biggest and safest cove, a favorite safe port for boatmen with around 90 buoys for safe berths and peaceful slumber is the large Brguljski Bay with the locality of Brgulje where, among others, the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban enjoys its peace almost every summer. Navigators can find safety and a good gastronomic offer in the cove of Zapuntel locality northwest of the island, as well as in the Lučina port in Molat locality on the southeast side of the island.



“The long tradition of using carob, which has been maintained to the present day in Zadar and its region, is in its ground form or in powder, and mostly on the islands of the Zadar archipelago...”

Honey in Zadar is Hidden in the *Medovka*

Scientists declared bees to be the most important creatures on Earth, a key factor of maintaining the ecosystem of this planet. Without them life on earth would quickly be extinguished. Honey, the main product of those tiny and hard-working factories, one of the most useful and completely natural herbal preparation that nature gave man, maybe unworthily. It is the first sweetener used by man in his diet, super food that feeds the consumer with much needed energy. Even today it is a part of numerous dishes in the cuisine of intelligent and creative chefs.

During the good years, around two hundred beekeepers in the Zadar region produce discreetly and worthily several hundred tons of honey of the best quality.

A good or bad year depends on the whimsical weather conditions – not too much rain nor months without it do not favor bees and their production. No matter how much honey bees produce and beekeepers separate it from the honeycomb, the honey of the Zadar region is always top class. The reason for this is, even in this case, in the quality and variety of the Zadar region herbs, the rich bee pastures enabled by the beekeepers by moving their bee hives to the nearby islands, spacious Zadar hinterland plains, the Ravni Kotari and onto the Velebit, a powerful mountain that hides thousands of types of herbs among which a great number is endemic.



“During the good years, around two hundred beekeepers in the Zadar region produce discreetly and worthily several hundred tons of honey of the best quality.”

The splendor of the Mediterranean and Dalmatian flora, their scents and aromas thus flow into thick streams of honey.

At the beginning of spring, beekeepers and their bees already search for sage nectar on the famous island of Kornat, and in summer they move onto land to pollinate bramble, Christ's thorn, while their journeys end at the end of summer on Velebit, where bees feed on heather nectar and honeydew maple. Depending on the plant species plants, bees give us varietal honey of different taste and healthy properties. They visit flowers of many other plants such as marjoram, white horehound, thyme, fennel, sycamore, almond, laurel... and thus create unique blends that do not lag behind in the quality varieties of honey.

The best honey to procure in Zadar is with verified beekeepers with declared honey and in herbal pharmacies. It is best to be sceptic concerning other types of honey sold in shopping malls and marketplaces, but if that is the only remaining choice, then it is best to believe that the quality is ensured by the price.

Of course, in such a selection of powerful and healthy superfoods even honey had to find its place. It concealed itself among the other sweets as in a rustic cake of our grandmothers, the *Medovka*. The cake has rustic origins, but it is not strange that its recipe arrived even in Dalmatia – honey is a global value and used in all parts of the world. *Medovka* was reconstructed and is being continually prepared by the main confectioner of C&C, Kristina Jurešić Hedi. *Medovka* is a simple cake that can be prepared quickly. Kristina first baked the cake crust where honey is the basis. She mixed it with butter, eggs and in the end some flour, and then she stretched the mixture into slightly thicker pancakes and baked them. The dressing is also extremely simple – it is a mixture of cream and sugar. *Medovka* is, therefore, light and refreshing, and its taste is dictated by the honey. All the other ingredients are mild, silent in the mouth and the long *after taste* is originally honied. It will surely be enjoyed even by those who find the original taste of raw honey heavy and who do not even want to taste it in such a form... It is, though, their great mistake for *Medovka* is an excellent way to correct such a mistake..



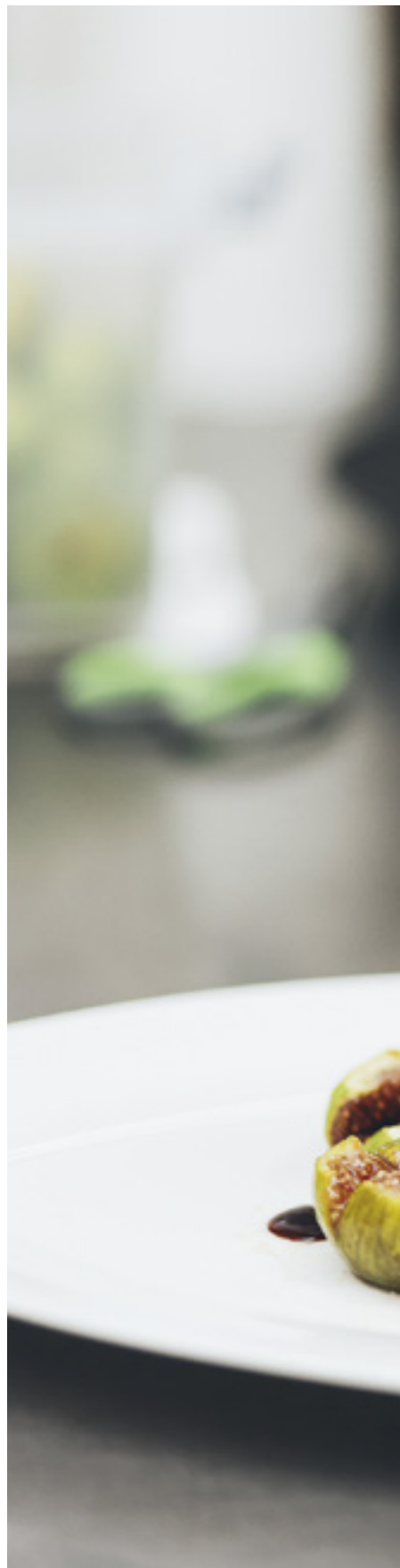
The Fig – Mythical Fruit and Sweet Sin

It is a mythical and biblical fruit, the symbol of abundance, fertility and sexuality, but also the strength of the summer and summer heat. It is a calorie, vitamin and mineral bomb, extract of health that nature who knows how many millennia ago, and maybe undeservedly gifted man with. In its almost 900 varietal faces, it has spread in all the warm parts of the planet, but still - the fig is a symbol of the Mediterranean, along with the olive, its most popular trademark. The Mediterranean is where the fig is and vice versa.

The fig is omnipresent in Zadar and its region. The sumptuous trees with large leaves grow along our backyards and gardens offering a saving summer shade, in the fields and along the roads, they spring out of Dalmatian thickets and intertwined shrubs, finding their place along the seacoast and deep into the interior of Dalmatia. According to the tradition of this region, the first summer ritual is a breakfast of two or three figs accompanied by a small drink of homemade brandy (grappa) just enough to give energy and motive to the beginning of the day. That first morning gastronomic relish is completely original: to open the delicate green membrane of a fig and reveal its juicy and sweet interior also carries a unique eroticism that explains the motivating side of this simple Dalmatian ritual.

In order to preserve figs for the long autumn and winter days, the diligent women would dry Dalmatian figs under the strong summer sun to make them lose the surplus of liquid and retain all the other values. They made jam and marmalade from figs, long lasting cakes such as the *smokvenjak*. This fruit in its fresh and dry form is found in recipes of many confectioners, while the fig marmalade is a worthy substitute for honey as well as a spice for strong meat dishes such as those of venison.

But however popular and omnipresent in all the regions, the fig was not given much attention to by field workers. Fig orchards were rare, and the culinary specialty was just homemade and products for the needs of the family.



A close-up photograph of a chef's hand holding a spoon, drizzling a thick, dark, glossy sauce over a plated dish. The dish consists of a round, yellow, textured base topped with a layer of dark red jam or sauce. Two slices of rustic bread, cut diagonally to reveal a pinkish-red interior, are stacked on top. Several halved figs, showing their green skin and dark red flesh, are arranged around the base. The background is a blurred kitchen setting.

“In order to preserve figs for the long autumn and winter days, the diligent women would dry Dalmatian figs under the strong summer sun to make them lose the surplus of liquid and retain all the other values.”



Yes, the Tastiest Tuna in the World is bred near Zadar

In 1995, two Croatian emigrants from Australia, Toni Šantić from the island of Lastovo and Dragan Vidov from the locality of Kali on the island of Ugljan right across from Zadar, decided to establish a company in their homeland through which they would realize a completely new fishing idea - breeding tuna in cages. It was actually Croatian fishermen who at the far south of the Australian continent who several years earlier were the first in the world to come up with the idea of breeding or supplemental feeding of tuna in big cages made of remade purse sein fishing nets. The fishermen and fish merchants who were part of that group, had already obtained wealth in trading with tuna in the most potent fish market, in Japan, and it is not quite clear why they decided to transfer their business from Australia to the Croatian part of the Adriatic and thus here, on the Mediterranean, become pioneers in breeding tuna in cages.

There could have been three reasons: their desire to return to their homeland, the fact that the Adriatic is calmer and safer than the dangerous Pacific along the Australian coast, or that the Atlantic bluefin tuna caught on the Adriatic and further on the Mediterranean was the best quality tuna in general, due to the quality and meat fat, it was the most appropriate for top *sushi* and *sashimi*. Howsoever, Vidov and Šantić established Kali tuna, the first Croatian company for breeding tuna, and from the cages on the island of Iž, already at the end of 1966 they acquired their first 34 tons of bred tuna and sold it to Japan at such a high price that was unthinkable at the time in Croatia. Tuna in Dal-

matia, especially in Zadar, was popular and valued, occasional catches of fishing vessels when small whitefish nets were replaced by those fishing for tuna were more than enough for the needs of the local market, as well as the factories for tuna canning. At the time, canned tuna was very popular here, almost as equally as fresh tuna steaks grilled or tuna umi-do (tuna cooked in tomato sauce, actually a particular version of brodetto).

The popularity of Adriatic tuna, the demand for it, and the prices on the Japanese market where it was sold by bidding on the famous Tokyo fish market Tsukiji, initiated the establishment of several other breeding companies, supplemental feeding of tuna, and today, besides Kali tuna that is owned by the Japanese manager, Jiro Kambe, there is a total of four companies of which three are in the Zadar region. It is quite correct when we state that the best quality tuna is actually here, in Zadar.

The arrival in Kali in 2018 of the famous Nobu Matsuhise, owner of the most famous world chain of *sushi* and *sashimi* restaurants and bars, and partner of the even more famous Robert de Niro, to personally arrange the delivery of Adriatic tuna to his restaurants around the world is only confirmation of the top quality of the product. Bred tuna is today one of the most successful Croatian export products.

The one-month harvest of tuna in purse sein nets starts at the end of May. The Atlantic bluefin tuna is always present in the Adriatic due to its continuous movement in search of food, but also in the cleanest sea for during its journeys it uses extreme amounts of oxygen. It

does not spawn in the Adriatic but it comes to enjoy in the abundance of sardines and anchovies. Fishermen harvest schools of cage bred samples weighing up to 12 kilograms. International agreements limit the catch of tuna and thus in 2021, the limit was 950 tons of tuna in the Croatian part of the Adriatic of which the most part was from cage breeding - 883 tons. Their supplemental feeding in cages lasts for about one year and a half whereby each sample grows from five to six times and even more. The tuna in cages is fed firstly with the catch of fresh blue fish, those same sardines and anchovies for which they came to the Adriatic and for which their meat is of such top quality, greasy and desirable.

An interesting fact is how tuna became a media for the rapprochement of Japan and Croatia, and Zadar in particular. In 2014, gastronomy and tuna launched an exclusive multi-day touristic and gastronomic event - *Tuna, Sushi & Wine Festival*, initiated by the Croatian-Japanese Friendship Society, and organized by the Zadar City Tourist Office and supported by many local and government institutions, and particularly by the Japanese Embassy in the Republic of Croatia. Through the years, the festival became more than a tourist attraction and gastronomy event where the inhabitants of Zadar learned new methods of preparing and consuming tuna, and also found reasons why it is so appreciated in the world. Even though we in Zadar will never renounce to grilled tuna or the one prepared in sauce, many of us liked the dishes of Japanese gastronomy, new tastes and new preparation methods.

The Dalmatian Sandwich of "Sea Prosciutto"

One or two salted anchovies on a slice of bread, bathed in good olive oil – that is the oldest and best known first Dalmatian sandwich. It served as the first and sweetest morning breakfast or a quick brunch, a delicious, cheap and affordable snack, a favorite first *finger food* in Zadar.

Nothing is unusual in the fact that salted small blue fish, the basic fish of the Adriatic, the sardine and her relative in appearance, the anchovy, have become the gastronomy icon of the coastal, Mediterranean part of Croatia. Salted fish has been on the Adriatic since there has been fish for the rich remains of the catch full of proteins as well as other valuable nutritional ingredients needed to be preserved for hungry days without fish or fishing. Salting was the most expanded manner of preserving fish, salted fish was one of the more important merchandise, and there was almost

no household and tavern in Zadar and Dalmatia that did not keep a barrel full of salted fish in some corner. Even today salted sardines are a usual delicacy of the coastal inhabitants, even though too salted food is avoided in contemporary gastronomy. Salted anchovies which are of more delicate taste than sardines I acquired international popularity and are one of the most important and esteemed export products of today's fishing industry. In the restaurants in Zadar, waiters offer salted sardines and anchovies as first course, the delicate sea prosciutto.

Few people who enjoy the flavors of salted fish think that they are actually eating fermented foods. In the long process of fish preservation with the help of salt and brine, salt dilution in water, fish goes through the process of fermentation – eliminating the effect of spoilage bacteria and long food maturity, after which it

does not need any additional processing. Fermented food is the common part of our daily nutrition, but we connect that process more to vegetables or cereal dishes. Bread from sour dough is tastier and more digestible than the usual one. Pizzas whose basis is fermented, standing dough, such as the famous *napolitana*, rises in quality compared to those baked with regular, quick bread.

After having learned and acknowledged all the advantages of fermented food, Zadar *chef* Saša Began decided to dedicate himself to 'mature food'. He first experimented, and later in the fish restaurant *Foša* where he is *chef*, he created new dishes from fermented food, not from salty fish but from the one that goes through a long process, the so-called dry fermentation in a chamber for aging (*dry ager*). That is the process that the best pieces of aged meat go through.



White-fleshed Grilled Adriatic Fish

The *grill*, a Dalmatian and Mediterranean barbecue, actually a simple wire grid placed on hellishly hot embers of wood such as the Mediterranean *holm oak*, Dalmatian oak, is the most simple but oldest cooking tool where different foods, fish and other sea food, meat, vegetables, mushrooms are grilled in this region... in its different variants dispersed all around the world, but probably nowhere else does it have such a ritual significance and generally accepted respect as in these parts. And Adriatic fish that trickles, sizzles and savors on the grill is a typical and most frequent postcard of Zadar and its region.

What is so attractive about grilled fish is actually its simplicity: besides salt, fish prepared in such a manner hardly suffers any other spice but good olive oil, and with the help of a sprig of rosemary to smear the fish while being grilled and then pour some

oil over it once grilled. What is most important for grilled fish is that it is to be grilled as soon as possible, freshly caught from its habitat to be transferred to red-hot grills. The second thing is that no matter how simple this manner of food preparation may seem to be, good knowledge of grilling fish is needed. Control of the fire, the embers, careful hand when salting the fish, the skill of cutting the bigger pieces in the right place for the fish to be grilled evenly, the time of grilling, skill and experience ... all these are the characteristics of a good grill master, nuances that distinguish those who know how to grill fish from those who will - 'ruin' it.

There are almost no fish, crabs or shellfish in the Adriatic Sea that we do not grill. Blue fish such as sardines, mackerel and tuna are most tasty when grilled regardless of all other existing recipes according to which

we prepare the fish. The aroma and taste of fresh grilled scampi from the Velebit Channel or mussels and Noah's ark that need less than a minute to open are gourmet experiences intoxicating on glowing grills because, in essence, they retain the original flavors of the sea in the food.

However, what we grill evokes the greatest respect and watery mouths even to a full belly is white-fleshed fish, fish from rocks at the bottom of the sea. Dentex, gilthead, and sea bass are in at the top of best quality Adriatic fish, and followed closely by such as two-banded bream, bleak, striped bream, sea bream, black sea bream and black umber. Only two fish belong to the royal and most prized category: dory and grouper. Even if these are adored grilled, in Zadar we prefer to prepare them in other ways, just boiled in brodetto or gregada (stew).

**“A typical
Dalmatian
gastronomy
postcard.”**



Zadar is the Cradle of White-Fleshed Fish Farming

It was an almost unnoticed event that did not suggest that it would turn into an epochal discovery of global proportions for human consumption: sometime in the second half of the 70s, a small cage appeared in the sea in Maestral Cove in Zadar inhabited by several specimens of sea bass. A small group of Zadar experts in sea biology had placed the lonely hunter and king of the sea shallows into a cage in their experimental attempts of breeding sea bass in controlled conditions and do so from the spawn of a mother caught around the Kornati Islands. Their experiments showed to be successful and then the first sea bass was bred in Zadar, in the first breeding cage in the world.

The mentioned researchers earlier realized that seas and oceans, however they seemed to be large and deep, were of limited capacity and man with overfishing would simply devastate or impoverish the marine resources used in his diet. On the Mediterranean and in Dalmatia, and thus in Zadar, the most respectable sea products are examples of white-fleshed fish. Yes, they are the magnificent examples of dentex, gilthead, sea bass, dory, grouper, two-banded bream... that grilled and in many other dishes, are remembered in the usual photographs of Dalmatia, the sea, islands and the Adriatic. Of course, the delicate flavors of white-fleshed fish, which usually only salt and olive oil can complement their natural value and taste, remain permanently on the palate and provoke a new fish meal.

However, it was the value of that Adriatic white-fleshed fish that lead to its overfishing in the second half of the past century and thus the researches and successes of the Zadar experts in mariculture showed to be globally important. If it had not been for that, it would have been difficult for us to enjoy healthy and tasty fish meals today, at least not in the quantities we are used to. Besides, more than 15,000 years ago man had tamed wild cattle in order to breed them and not only to hunt them and thus was saved of hunger. Why should it not be so with fish?!

Somehow at the same time as the Zadar experts, French scientists performed the same researches and somewhat later even the Italian ones found ways to breed fish juvenile, but it was in Zadar that in 1979 that the first company for fish breeding, Cenmar, was established and was the first in the world to place cages for the commercial breeding of sea bass. It was the year 1979, and in the decades that followed Cenmar expanded its production so that gilthead was also bred in cages and the company built its own fish hatchery.

Due to series of circumstances, at the beginning of the millennium, Cenmar subsided but fortunately in 2008 the powerful Croatian company Adris group bought it and connected several small Croatian companies dealing in fish breeding and created the Cromaris company, today one of the biggest world companies for the breeding of white-fleshed fish of the best quality with a production of over 10,00 tons a year of top quality

fish of which 85 percent of the produced quantity is delivered to the European market and further, mostly to Italy whilst the rest remains on the Croatian market.

Cromaris has to this day perfected the fish production so that the taste of fish from cages does not differ from those living freely in the sea. In the new hatchery for the production of juvenile fish, the company also produces food for the juvenile, and for each individual specimen of fish it is easy to establish their parents. Zadar Cromaris breeds fish in six large farms with groups of spacious cages, and as many as five of them are located in the Zadar archipelago. The assortment is expanded from sea bass and giltheads to other species of quality white-fleshed fish of the Adriatic: Kornati brown maigier, dentex and greater amberjack. The fish in cages is fed according to the perfect formula shaped in granules and thus the perfection of taste is achieved. However, the Cromaris business philosophy is summed up in an old Dalmatian postulate according to which only fresh fish is the best, no matter what the species. Cromaris, namely, delivers to the market fish directly caught from the sea, and, as a rule, delivered to the most distant export countries within less than 24 hours.

The most significant world acknowledgement for the quality of food products, the *Superior Taste Award*, which Cromaris was rewarded for all four of the products that entered the competition: gilthead, sea bass, brown maigier, greater amberjack are testimony of the top quality of Adriatic farmed fish.



Mussel – the Black Queen of the Novigrad Sea

What sardines are among fish in the Adriatic Sea is what mussels are among shellfish: they are almost ubiquitous, at an affordable price for everyone, nutritionally extremely valuable, tasty and therefore almost everyone's favorite, but pliable for various culinary performances. The summer is their season, June, July, August and September – mussels are then most tasty. They prepare themselves for the autumn spawning and pump sea as if connected to electricity: in only one hour a mussel filters liters and liters of sea and gathers large quantities of planktons that it lives on and which make it so tasty. Mussels contain selenium, iron, folic acid, vitamins A and B, iodine and zinc. Among all shellfish, mussels have the highest level of omega 3 fatty acid. Folic acid and vitamin B12 will remove fatigue, confusion and prevent nerve damage.

The Novigrad Sea, as small but precious bay, under the slopes of Velebit and only 30 km distant from Zadar, due to its wealth of planktons and chlorophyll is ideal for the growth, and, in the past decades for the breeding of mussels. Not only according to tradition but also according to research conducted by scientists from the University of Zadar, this shellfish is the most valuable in the Novigrad Sea in terms of its composition, the fullest in meat, and the most pleasant in taste in the entire





“The Novigrad Sea, as small but precious bay, under the slopes of Velebit and only 30 km distant from Zadar, due to its wealth of planktons and chlorophyll is ideal for the growth, and, in the past decades for the breeding of mussels.”

Adriatic.. And with its taste and composition, it surely surpasses mussels bred on ocean coasts... This is the reason why in 2019 the Novigrad mussels received the transitional protection called “Novigrad mussels - protected designation of origin”. The protection procedure continued in front of the bodies of the European Commission and in the near future mussels are expected to obtain the European protected designation of origin. The secret value and the particularly rich taste of the meat of these mussels is, simply said, in their great quantity of food that arrives in the Novigrad Sea from the mainland. Namely, the mouth of the Zrmanja River is located here and it extends for 70 kilometers from Lika, and a great unknown number of unseen sources of fresh water that feed this sea with minerals from the mainland and lower its salinity. Ideal for mussels!

The locals of Novigrad, a picturesque fisherman's locality after which the sea obtained its name, whether from necessity or pleasure, lived with and from mussels for centuries. They were fed with their meat, prepared them in the present rare dishes but also sold them mainly in nearby Zadar.

Today the inhabitants of Zadar do not collect mussels from the sea as they once used to in the past decades, but mussels are now bred in a number of mussel farms from which they are delivered to markets throughout Croatia. It is precisely such mussels grown in their environment in a dozen small farms that are enjoyed by the inhabitants of Zadar as well as the numerous tourists that arrive in the city. The black shellfish full of meat with an untouched taste of a completely clean sea has long been one of the most prominent signs of recognition of Zadar gastronomy. It is almost unthinkable of staying in Zadar and not enjoying some of the dishes prepared with mussels. True connoisseurs will not miss the opportunity to taste fresh, just opened, mussels with a few drops of lemon.

All Squids are Tasty but only the Adriatic one is the Real and Best Squid

A muzzle from the Adriatic Sea enjoys a special status in the gastronomy of Zadar and Dalmatia. It is a favorite delicacy for those who live in the sea and on the sea, likewise for continental people, and in particular tourists who come to these parts from all over the world. It is a regular offer of almost all restaurants in Zadar.

The subject is squid.

Even though it lives in practically all the seas and oceans of the world, and is known on all continents and even in Zadar squid from far seas can be found but the Adriatic Sea squid is particularly valued for its quality, fullness of taste and thick squid lining, and it outstands from its relatives in other seas. The richness and quality of small fish, in particular the blue fish from the

Adriatic Sea which is the main prey of the squid, is most probably the reason for this. All squid are tasty, but the only true one is from the Adriatic Sea, simply different and the best is what anyone from Zadar will confirm.

Squid live in different sea depths, and in autumn and winter, during their spawning, they move to shallow waters and then starts the most intensive catch of the exquisite muzzles. It can be caught using various types of nets but the most popular and most accessible way of catching squid is by using various artificial baits. Professional fishermen catch squid as well as recreational anglers. In winter, before dusk, groups of boats floating in front of coastal cities and localities can be seen, and be sure that their crews are catching squid.

We prepare squid in various ways. It is usual to deep fry them in small rings. It is exquisite even grilled or roasted in the oven with potatoes, cooked and seasoned in salad or in a tasty brodetto. Fishermen especially love to cook 'whole' freshly caught squid and slightly salted, meaning without being cleaned and then seasoned in good olive oil. In the Zadar region and its surroundings no food from the sea is to be served without olive oil, squid in particular.

One of the advantages of squid as well as other muzzles such as octopus and cuttlefish, is that it tolerates well being stored in the freezer. Unlike fish that is always best when fresh, squid and other muzzles after a short stay in the freezer are much softer, more pliant.





Black Risotto

"In mid-March cuttlefish and gilthead in the dish" is an old saying of Dalmatian fishermen which undoubtedly bespeaks which fishing catch approaches shallow waters in the first spring months. It is the period when the catch of squid eases on the Adriatic, and its relative, the cuttlefish cephalopod, becomes a common prey in fishing nets, fish pots and artificial lures used by sport fishermen.

Cuttlefish is a real sea chameleon that adapts its appearance to the environment where it is located whether as prey or searching for prey. However, in defense and attack its most important weapon is its black ink, a pigment in which, among other ingredients such as protein, melanin is the most important, the same substance that determines human skin color. The cuttlefish is brave in attack and defense for it confuses and intoxicates the attacker with its black ink, some sea predator to whom it is a tasty food and its prey, little crabs and little fish that it catches with its long and sharp tentacles. Now, we can attribute its courage to the fact that a cuttlefish has as many as three hearts, which is probably why it has a special feeling of love and affection for its partner – fishermen are well aware that if they catch one cuttlefish, a quick and hunger female, her male partner will very soon be hooked onto the artificial bait because he does not move away from the place where his female disappeared.

But what here attracts our interest more is the cuttlefish on the plate, in gastronomy. Although the flesh of its body is sweet, tasty and rich, it is especially interesting in the culinary sense for it has the highest amount of ink of all its mollusk relatives, and man has learned to use this color over time, first as an ink for writing, and then in

"... the cuttlefish is a first-class gourmet delicacy, and in Zadar it is prepared in numerous ways: in stew with chickpeas or broad beans, baked under the baking lid or in the oven, in salads with potatoes, in sauces with pasta."





a number of dishes. Presently many traditional dishes have appeared in Dalmatia and Zadar from this black ink, daily ones as well as those for special occasions and feasts. That is why it sounds strange today that just until a few decades ago cuttlefish was not an appraised catch for during the days when nets were full of other fish, fishermen would throw cuttlefish back into the sea so the black ink would not dirty their boats. It often ended in the plates of the poorest families and had a low price in the Zadar fish market, actually half the price of squid.

It is not so any more for the cuttlefish is a first-class gourmet delicacy, and in Zadar it is prepared in numerous ways: in stew with chickpeas or broad beans, baked under the baking lid or in the oven, in salads with potatoes, in sauces with pasta. Almost always the cuttlefish black ink is used in preparing dishes, the most interesting ingredient, a thick ink that inventive chefs mix into pasta dough or sandwich rolls... However, the most well-known and popular dish in Zadar and all of Dalmatia is definitely black risotto with cuttlefish which in Zadar is used as an appetizer, especially at wedding feasts and as the main dish in a daily diet.

Cuttlefish are widespread in almost all the world's seas, and it is not uncommon for fishermen or their wives to find ways to exploit the black ink of this cephalopod and thus similar dishes to our Dalmatian black risotto have appeared throughout the Mediterranean. Similar but not the same. The Spanish, for example, use the cuttlefish black ink and meat in an unusual black version of *paella*, while in Italy, in the very south of the country, chefs prepare cuttlefish and black ink sauce with pasta. No surprise for the Italians. Legend says that Dalmatian fishermen discovered dishes with cuttlefish and its black ink while searching for blue fish on the Mediterranean. Whether it was first in Sicily or somewhere in Spain – remains unknown.



**“The custom of
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Shark, Dried: A Delicacy of the Island of Ist Emerging from Necessity

Until the discovery of the freezer, to be more exact, until that household appliance did not come into wide use, the fishermen of the world came up with different ways of preserving the surplus of their catch. In order to store such surplus for later use, it was salted, smoked, dried in the wind and cold, while roasted and fried fish could be kept for a few days in marinade or the *savura*.

The custom of conserving fish in such a manner was usual on the islands and thus on those in the Zadar archipelago. Buyers and the market were far for the islanders in the times without motor boats, and besides that, in the sparse island conditions the hungry mouths of many family members had to be fed and everything caught in the sea or harvested in the field had to be carefully disposed of. The inhabitants of the Zadar islands preserved their rich harvest of sardines and anchovies and thus salted them, but the most frequent way of preservation of fish was drying in the wind, in the cold Dalmatian bora. The islanders dried many species: octopus and squid, and the so-called sea venison such as the Adriatic species of shark and dog-fish, while the ray was particularly valued and sometimes even tiny picarel (*spicara smaris*). Numerous dishes were created from such canned, dried fish ingredients, which then entered the rich opus of the island, Zadar and Dalmatian gastronomic traditions as specialties.

One of the typical, small and presently sparsely populated islands of the Zadar archipelago is Ist. This island is only at a distance of 20 nautical miles from Zadar. On the island, there is only one locality bearing the same name with a long and turbulent past full of intriguing legends, and of an interesting shape with two dominating coves, Široka on the south side and Kosirača on the northwest side. The peaceful locality of Ist spreads between the two coves, and half a century ago the locality and the entire island were a paradise for seamen, their safe port. All those desiring a peaceful and relaxing vacation, clean sea and sandy beaches, as well as local dishes, mainly fresh fish will find this on Ist.

Ist is, namely, surrounded by low small islets and cliffs, and even those that do not surface. The inhabitants of the island have been fishermen for centuries, providing for their families with catch from the abundant fishing locations, and had to know well the techniques of preservation, drying and salting the catch surplus. Even the today's professional fishermen, as well as those who fish as a hobby, are well aware that the fishing spots around Ist and provide a great variety of fish catch.

Monkfish – a Monster in the Sea, a Beauty in the Plate

It is a monster in the sea, so ugly that at close encounter even the most courageous would be frightened. However, only a few divers will meet this fish in its natural habitat, because the insatiable ones live at the very bottom, lurking in the mud or sand for their prey. It has no interest for man as food nor does one need to be afraid. That grotesque sea figure with a large head and likewise large mouth full of tiny and sharp teeth is called the frog fish. Its looks have chosen its name: it comes from the word *grd* meaning ugly and in Dalmatia it is also called devil, rogue, frog...

The monkfish is widespread in all seas, and the forkbeard has found its habitat in the Adriatic. It is a fish of dark brown skin actually with a camouflaged and slimy armor, the only inedible

part that must be stripped. Incredible is the fact that it can grow up to two meters in length and 60 kilograms in weight. If anyone ever met the monkfish in such a shape, it would be more than sufficient inspiration for fairytales of ugly and dangerous sea monsters.

However ugly and dangerous it is in its natural environment, it is tasty on the plate, and in numerous dishes it turns into a real gastronomic beauty, a culinary pearl. It is of compact and soft, pliant meat (the body and tail) and, what is most important for children and those who are skillful to clean it by themselves on the plate, without any dangerous "bones".

In Zadar, the monkfish is prepared in many ways and in many dishes. It is excellent grilled, fried and breaded,

baked in the oven and cooked in brodettos that are as numerous in Dalmatia as chefs. It blends best with conger eel, the one that improves the final flavor of the dish and whose steak is offered to favorite guests. Good traditional cooks know how to use its interiors, fill it with different tasty ingredients and turn it into an exquisite dish.

It is most often boiled, just plain and accompanied by a perfect fish soup or *gregada* stew, a traditional Dalmatian dish made of pieces of various types of fish, crab and shellfish and vegetables. It is best served in the pot and cooked to come to the table in its original shape, with all the ingredients in the soup to which it contributed its flavors. The monkfish is a must in the *gregada* stew.



The Adriatic Scampi Tastier than its Scottish Relative

In the season menu of the famous Ducasse main restaurant in the Parisian luxury hotel *Plaza Athenee* from 2016, the most expensive dish was made up of scampi and caviar and it cost 195 euro. Scampi was thus launched to the top of the list of most expensive food in the world in general. That orange-pinkish crab of tender tail meat and sweetish and salty taste only confirmed its privileged, kingly status in the world of good food from the sea. Scampi dishes will regularly be among the first, if not the first choice for true gourmards, no matter how they are prepared.

It is generally known in the world that the most expensive scampi was caught in the sea around Scotland, but only those who have eaten

freshly caught scampi in the Adriatic Sea in Croatia know that, whatever the Scots thought of it, the Adriatic one surpasses its Scottish relative in taste and fragrance, and for that at least by the length of one mustache. We are lucky in Zadar for fresh scampi of all sizes are an almost regular article at the local fish market and other shops with fresh scampi, and actually all year round, even though the main harvesting season of this charming and lively crab starts in March. The Velebit Channel and the nearby closed Novigrad Sea are located deep into the Zadar hinterland where there is plenty of seafood and these micro locations are among the rare ones on the Adriatic that are quite abundant in large groups of scampi. Until about 40 years ago,

the Zadar Channel was abundant in scampi but, unfortunately, due to over-fishing they are almost extinct here.

However, scampi dishes are usual in Zadar, especially in fish restaurants. Whatever dish with scampi chosen, it is always important to make sure the scampi is completely fresh, of lively color, without traces of brown or green spots around the head, but it is best when it comes to the kitchen still alive, which is easily achieved in Zadar.



Fish and Crab Brodetto with the Taste of the Historical Fame of Ceramics from Iž

The island of Iž, a piece of land that is so close but yet so far from the closest city, Zadar, for besides its "two seas", it is divided from the city by the long island of Ugljan, a typical island of the Zadar archipelago. Inhabited from the time of prehistory, its inhabitants were always affronted with isolation, and thus directed towards their natural resources on the island: a small patch of fertile land for agriculture or livestock, olive growing and the sea as an important source of food ... Anchored in the trail of many merchant ships sailing the Adriatic,

Iž has given generations of capable seafarers. But in one activity the inhabitants of the island of Iž were quite special and recognizable.

Pottery, the making of useful objects from clay, which in the case of the island of Iž has long been branded as Iž ceramics, and was the skill by which the Iž inhabitants throughout history were known all over the Adriatic, its islands, coast, and even deep into the mainland... The first records on Iž ceramics date back to 1530. The Iž *lopižari* (pottery makers), who were once called pottery makers from the island of Iž

and thus by *lopiž*, a ceramics vessel for cooking food, just one of the numerous objects that were made for daily use, made these objects for their own use from the clay they found on their island, but also for sale or exchange for some other valuables. The arduous work of extracting clay and mixing it with slate stone and then created object by hand on a wheel to finally burn the manufactured objects on large bonfires would be crowned with the sale of valuables and thus increase the modest household budget.





The *lopiži* pots where food was cooked on an open fire, baking lids (*čripnje*) for baking bread, meat or fish dishes, big vessels for the preservation of olive oil and salting sardines, small cooking vessels made of ceramics with live embers that would be carried by fishermen for preparing a snack on a boat, even vessels in which fire was smoldering to warm the frozen hand of olive growers ... were just some of the objects that were produced for everyday use by the inhabitants of Iž.

Some of those objects, made a long time ago, are preserved in the Museum collection in the locality of Veli Iž.

Even though once there were 30, 50 even 70 pottery makers, today, unfortunately, no one is continuing with this craft even though traditional pottery of the island of Iž was declared as intangible cultural heritage of the Republic of Croatia in 2009. The same national value is held by another dish: Iž *lopiž*, a stew made of lamb meat, peas and broad beans. The name *Iški lopiž* thus has a double meaning – being a vessel and a dish at the same time. Regardless of the respect shown to this traditional and special, valuable craft that became even art, some other social circumstances, such as migration from the island, led to its extinction.

The last Iž pottery maker, Predrag Petrović Pepi, died in 2015. He spent most of the year in his small souvenir workshop with numerous ceramics objects and he thus kept alive the fame of Iž ceramics. Luckily, the *lopiž on Iž* did not completely disappear with Pepi. His daughter Nika Petrović Grilc had already in childhood learnt from her father the technique of traditional Iž pottery making and thus became the first woman in history engaged in this activity.

Cod – the Star of Christmas Eve

The tradition of preparing dishes with cod has survived in many cuisines around the world, that fish from the cold seas that lives in two oceans and around Greenland is of great economic importance in numerous countries, but it is unusual for cod, the one dried in Norway in the first place, to have acquired a status of gastronomic cult on the east coast of the Adriatic Sea, in Dalmatia and in Zadar. Therefore, with all the richness of the fauna of the Adriatic Sea and the fishing tradition and knowledge of the inhabitants of the Croatian coast, cod, not found in our sea, is a food from which many local dishes are made..

An explanation to this paradox is known and connected to the name of a 15th century Venetian seafarer and merchant, Piera Querini. In 1431, after having crossed *La Manche*, Querini experienced a shipwreck on his way to Belgium, and on a rescue boat he ended up on the

Lofoten Islands in Norway where the locals fed him with what they had in abundance – cod and with its presently most prized subspecies, which inhabits the Norwegian Sea, *Gadus morhua*.

Upon returning home, Querini took with him a certain amount of dried cod and was already then aware of its advantage: besides being a tasty and valuable food, in such a form it was light to transport for upon being dried, cod loses even 80 percent of its weight. And that same weight is brought back by rehydration and soaking. Rice arrived on the Mediterranean and Europe for the same reason already in the 4th century B.C. with the army of Aleksander the Great that upon returning from their conquest campaign in Asia were fed by this useful cereal. The Portuguese fisherman had acknowledged the advantages of dried cod somewhat at the same time as Querini, and they supplied the ships

“Today cod is prepared in many restaurants throughout the year regardless of the fact that its consumption is connected to Christmas Eve.”





of their seafarers on increasingly long ocean voyages with this food precisely because of its minimum weight and maximum nutrition. This is the reason why Portugal today is one of the biggest consumers of cod in the world (even though Croatia imports more than 250 tons a year) but that is for another story.

In Querini's 15th century, Dalmatia was already a part of the Venetian Republic with Zadar as its most important and capital city. While the remaining of Dalmatia often changed borders under Venetian rule due to constant attacks from the army of the Turkish empire, Zadar, enclosed in its ramparts, resisted to these attacks and retained its status of capital city of Dalmatia, a city with growing squares and crafts and a developed urban life for that time which included high gastronomy standards, at least among the wealthy citizens and the nobility.

When the intensive cod trade began in Venice in the 16th century, spurred on by the great famine of the lower classes of the European population, this fish reached Zadar and arrived also in other

parts of Dalmatia. The local population knew of the technique of drying Adriatic fish and its consumption, but only some species were suitable for it and not of the highest quality, primarily the so-called marine game and cephalopods. Fresh fish was consumed by the wealthy, dry fish by the poor and thus the introduction of cod into the gastronomy of Zadar was through the side door, and out of pure necessity.

In later centuries, cod attained its high status in the local eating habits due to one more reason: regardless of a fisherman's luck and bad weather, cod was always available for a pre-holiday one-day Christian fast that forbade only the consumption of the meat of warm-blooded animals (*no meat day*). This has made cod the star of the Christmas Eve meal even today.

The morning of Christmas Eve is particular and lively in Zadar. The old part of Zadar, all the coffee bars and restaurants, allies and squares are full of local people, the aroma of cooked cod is overwhelming and many caterers treat their guests with cod dishes.

Today cod is prepared in many restaurants throughout the year regardless of the fact that its consumption is connected to Christmas Eve. Even though many Zadar chefs, amateur or professional, have created dozens of dishes of dried or fresh cod, two old dishes have remained particular favorites. One is cod *in bianco* and cod brodetto. It is important to remember here that all dishes with dried cod need the soaking of cod for at least 24 hours, then it is boiled in salted water with laurel, and before starting the preparation of any dish the meat is separated from unnecessary bones and skin. And the cooked stock is to be retained.

Cod *in bianco* is a simple dish that requires more strength than culinary skill. It is necessary to join the boiled cod and potatoes in one pot, season with salt, pepper, olive oil, parsley and garlic and then cover the pot with a lid and shake it strongly and for long until the ingredients blend and the dish attains a creamy structure.

The Zadar Noble Truffle

Mid December is the time of the year when the now well-known truffle hunter in Zadar Ivica Matak takes his four dogs of *Lagotto Romagnolo* breed, that he named Rea, Rafi, Ram and Rubi, somewhere deep into the hinterland of Zadar or even Lika so that they may find with their refined sense of smell the winter black truffle. The winter, in other words noble black truffle (*Tuber melanosporum*), and the one around Zadar has specific properties Matak proved together with the cooperation of Zadar University, and their Italian colleagues. It is similar but not identical to the famous truffle from the French province of Périgord. That is the reason why Matak named this species of expensive underground mushroom the Dalmatian truffle.

During his long walks, Matak found other species of truffles such as the summer black which is very rare, the expensive white and other mushrooms and today his family has an offer of 40

different delicatessen products based on truffles. Besides whole truffles on the market – in specialized shops and restaurants – the Matak brand is present in olive oil with the fragrance of truffles, spreads and creams, truffles blended with other mushrooms such as boletus, in the hospitality popular *tartufata* produced according to their own recipe, even with dry sausages made of venison meat with the aroma of truffles and an exclusive drink –sour cherry marasca liqueur with the aroma of truffles named *Uzorita*. For liqueur lovers, but for all others well, this drink is an extraordinary new experience.

Truffles grew discreetly in the Zadar area, of course, even before Ivica Matak returned to his native city after having lived in Pula for several years due to work, and in Istria he gained his first knowledge about truffles and the search for them... In several centuries old archive records there are

testimonies on the search for truffles in this part of Croatia, and in 1999 the daily newspaper *Jutarnji list* informed on the discovery of black truffle in the locality of Maslenica in the proximity of Zadar. The accidental finder only later confirmed that it was the expensive mushroom. And it sounds as an anecdote that truffles were found by goats in Bukovica, a rocky part of the Zadar hinterland, but their shepherd did not know for a long time why his young female goats were rummaging through the soil which otherwise was not in their nature.

It is, of course, not known whether in the new days there were secret, unknown trackers of this black gastronomic gold. In general, Ivica Matak is the first to register his activity and create the brand of Dalmatian truffle and today he provides the Zadar restaurants with this product as well as other products.



Pag Cheese - the Most Famous Croatian Food Product in the World

“The cheese production thus has had a long tradition but nowhere has it been maintained in such measure and quality as on the island of Pag.”

Cheese from sheep's milk from the island of Pag, known as Pag cheese, is one of the best known if not the most famous Croatian food product in the world, a gastronomy brand that captures lovers of good food wherever served, whether as a brunch, appetizer or a nibble after lunch, the one enjoyed with a conversation and a glass of good wine. Throughout history, sheep breeding has been one of the most important activities of the entire Zadar region, on land and the islands. The cheese production thus has had a long tradition but nowhere has it been maintained in such measure and quality as on the island of Pag.





The landscape and climatic characteristics of this island, the immediate vicinity of Velebit, the largest Croatian mountain from which the strongest bora, a northern cold and dry wind, arrives on Pag, and being encircled by the sea from which large amounts of salt arrive with the help of the wind, have defined on this interesting island of impressive history specific and selected aromatic Mediterranean flora which has been the main food for hundreds of flocks of sheep, of which the inhabitants of Pag acquire top quality milk. According to a traditional recipe, they make top quality cheese from the milk.

Pag cheese is of grainy texture and of full, strong and piquant taste. Depending on its phase of maturity, this unique product slowly changes taste, aroma and texture. Pag cheese can be consumed already at an early phase, after having aged for three months, and then in its mature phase having aged from 6 to 12 months, even later when removed from the shelves of the storage room only after two years. The mature cheese literally melts in the mouth and its *after taste* is strong and lasts for long. Young cheese prefers light and aromatic wines, while the mature one prefers strong red wines.

Interesting is the fact that the island of Pag has three products that bear the trademark of originality: Pag salt, Pag lamb and Pag cheese. If we here add that the unique handicraft of Pag women, Pag lace, is on the UNESCO list of World Intangible Cultural Heritage and only on this island, among all the islands on the Adriatic, coal was dug in the 18th century in open coal mines, which obviously makes Pag a special island in every way, full of interesting, authentic gastronomy and cultural experiences. And it is quite close to Zadar, only at a half-hour ride by car.

Coal was once dug in the locality of Kolan. That activity disappeared, but the locality has maintained a strong production of top quality Pag cheese with small family producers who make it for their own need but also in two large cheese dairies.

“Interesting is the fact that the island of Pag has three products that bear the trademark of originality: Pag salt, Pag lamb and Pag cheese.”

Pašticada, with Gnocchi

“There are almost no guests from this area, provided, of course, that they prefer meat snacks, who will not fall in love with those great soft beef steak...”

When in Zadar and other parts of Dalmatia, a host wishes to prepare a special and particular meal for his guest, when he wants to present the best of the region cuisine and an example of the long and traditional gastronomy of the region, then the guest finds on his table – the *pašticada*. There are almost no guests from this area, provided, of course, that they prefer meat snacks, who will not fall in love with those great soft beef steaks (more often baby beef) stuffed with bacon, carrots and garlic, and long and carefully cooked in a sour-sweet salty and creamy sauce. And served with gnocchi (never say croquette in Zadar) made with potatoes, flour and eggs.

It is not by chance, except that with this delightful and filling dish of *pašticada* full of Mediterranean aromas and odors, the gastronomic history of our region arrived on a plate. That culinary gem travelled long through time to reach our table today, and, in addition, it testifies to the historical connection of the peoples with the Adriatic, the Italians on one side and the Croats and their Illyrian ancestors on the other side of this sea. Zadar and Dalmatia were under the Venetian Republic for four centuries, and after that tumultuous history full of good and evil, as testimony of the times, some dishes and, along with other cultural treasures, gastronomic customs identical on both sides of the Adriatic Sea remained.





Namely, as in Zadar, the capital of Venetian Dalmatia for centuries, the *paštica* was a specialty even in Italy, in the region of Veneto to be more precise, in Verona and Venice. Unlike Dalmatian *paštica*, which is always made with beef, the Venetian version is made from horse meat (*pastissada de caval*). That fact reveals the point in history when the dish appeared. It was at the end of the 5th century, during the fall of the Roman Empire and the beginning of the Middle Ages. The leader of the barbaric Herulian tribe Odoacer, who had previously overthrown the last Western Roman emperor Romulus Augustulus, was killed by a sword at a reconciliation dinner in Ravenna by the mighty Ostrogothic king Theodoric the Great. Several years earlier their armies had lead difficult battles around Soča (Isonzo), Milan, and in the end in Ravenna, where the battlefields, besides being full with killed soldiers, were also full of killed horses. With the permission of

Theodoric, the hungry population started to use the meat that was already on the verge of perishability, and they kept pieces of meat in wine for a long time with a mixture of laurel, rosemary, onions and other vegetables. Since horse meat is not greasy, lean, the *paštica* recipe included pork meat, lard and bacon in the shape of sticks that were inserted into the meat and cooked for long with a lot of vegetables and fruit and adding some water and red wine.

It is obvious that *paštica* survived the Middle Ages and its recipe improved and thus through Venice it came to Dalmatia and Zadar. Horse meat is not used here but beef and the hardest and least greasy part – frikando, the dried part of beef aitchbone. According to its characteristics, *frikando* is most similar to horse meat. All the other supplements as well as the basic recipe for *paštica* (even though there are numerous similar versions) are the same even today in north Italy and Dalmatia.

The most competent connoisseur and researcher of Dalmatian gastronomy, a man who wrote the most beautiful expressions on food in Dalmatia, Veljko Barbieri, once said: "The *paštica* has continued through history and there is no Dalmatian or coastal locality that is not proud of saying that the real recipe for preparing *paštica* is just their recipe. As follows, every locality has its own *paštica* and every family has their own recipe. At the same time, food is the history of ourselves and it is, therefore, natural that each one of us defends the cuisine we grew up with. For all its solemn significance, that old beef stewer in wine, prosecco, vinegar, spices and vegetables, has surpassed the exclusively hedonistic framework and has dug out the old source of permanent gastronomic disputes of Dalmatian gourmands, equally connected to the ways of preparing *paštica* as well as its original tastes and descent."

Hare (Wild Rabbit) in the Hunter's Method

“Just as hunting in the Zadar area has survived, so have venison dishes remained on our tables, according to centuries-old recipes.”

Hunting is one of the oldest activities of man. It started in the Old Stone Age, and survived in all periods of human civilization, even when the search for wild animals and their hunting was not necessary for food and survival. Of course, the gastronomic delights provided by venison dishes were crucial in the long duration of this activity. Hunting became a privilege of the rich in some parts of Europe, including Zadar and its region, and even today we identify venison dishes with noble and rich feasts. In reality today this is no longer the case because hunters and their associations are more concerned with the

conservation of nature, in their case hunting grounds, and autochthonous, transient and imported game.

The Zadar County region is almost entirely divided into hunting grounds which are taken care of by hunting societies, associations and companies, and in Zadar there is one of the oldest hunting societies in Croatia, the Diana Hunting Society that has been active for 114 years. One of the interesting things about the work of this society is that *Diana* hunters are among the first in Croatia to launch hunting tourism, and back in the 70s of the past century when Italian hunt-





ers started training their bird dogs and hound dogs, of course under the organization and assistance of local hunters. Even today that type of tourism has been discreetly but seriously lasting, and in the direct proximity of Zadar hunting dog competitions take place. Hunters are always welcome guests in Zadar, and here they join their hobby, hunting, with tourist excursions and the offer of the region during the cold and unattractive part of the year to most tourists.

Just as hunting in the Zadar area has survived, so have venison dishes remained on our tables, according to centuries-old recipes. Even the young and creative chefs do not dare indulge in some contemporary performance of dishes with those ingredients for the inherited recipes are simply brilliant. Although today many types of high-quality venison from hunting grounds in the interior of Croatia can be procured, only one type of such meat takes a special and particular place so that dishes from other types of game are prepared in the method we cook in Dalmatia this most favorite food from nature. It is the wild rabbit or hare.

Although the wild rabbit that roams freely in many habitats in Dalmatia and the Zadar hinterland, and even in the meadows in the suburbs, the same European wild rabbit that has spread throughout the continent, gastronomically speaking the meat of our Dalmatian is tastier, more pliable, softer.. The reason is simple – its nutrition. The wild rabbit is herbivorous, and feeds on plants accessible in a relatively narrow habitat in which it lives (in not more than two square kilometers). The abundance, variety and fragrance of dalmatian plants. And the fact that the wild rabbit gladly licks the salt from the grass, and there is salt in this region due to the sea surroundings and the strong winds such as the bora that are not lacking in the Zadar hinterland, make the hare meat tastier in Dalmatia than anywhere else.

After all, the wild rabbit obtained a champion status in the local gastronomy and because this long-eared ruler of Dalmatian pastures is the most important game of this region. Other autochthonous hunting catch are birds such as quail, partridge, snipe and wild pigeon (which all needs to be tasted

if the occasion occurs), and imported pheasant that has been living here for some time, and there are also moufflon and fallow deer that have settled in the region of Zadar islands hunting grounds some decades back. The wild boar is not rare in these parts, but groups of those mammals came here, as is supposed, due to the climatic changes in the 80s of the past century.

The most frequent and according to many the best method of preparing wild rabbit is the Dalmatian method of wild rabbit or in the hunter's method. It is a type of stew that takes long to prepare for it includes long ageing of the meat in a specially prepared marinade. What gives this dish made of pieces of meat a specific value is the full sweet-sour taste and the blend of the most important gastronomic symbols of Dalmatia and Mediterranean cookery in general: olive oil, red wine, and Mediterranean aromatic plants, rosemary and laurel. Shrubs of these aromatic plants are a usual part of the Zadar house plot.

Pulastar (Poultry) under the Baking Lid

There almost is no clearer, more striking and more familiar scene of rural life than the one when the eye catches a wide view of a nondescript and shanty cabin with a chimney emitting smoke all year long around a spacious and seemingly untidy yard where a big rooster with a lush crest is perking around. The feathery, loud and proud alpha male, chief of the village yard, with his hen company pecking around him – a real harem that already in the morning gives a basketful of warm eggs.

But few roosters in the yards of the Zadar hinterland villages have the luck of running around the yard with their own flock of hens. Destiny, nature and man have set things for cockerels to end up as adored and relished delicacies before maturity, just when they reach late puberty and are close to sexual maturity. These cockerels that, not for their own fault, instead of reaching for their first partners, they end up on the table and plate and here we call them *pulastri*.

Pulastar (from the French word *Poulet*; lat. *pullum*) is an adult chicken, mainly male for hens are kept as laying hens, but it is not the one that one finds packed on the shelves of shopping centers. It is a sin to call such a chicken *pulastar*. Not even the capon (French *chapon*) can be a *pulastar* for the owner castrated it so that in only half a year he could get several kilograms of top quality meat from it. *Pulastar* does not have to go through that torment to become a real delicacy. In order to earn his honorary title, the chicken has to spend his short life walking freely about the yard and further on in the nearby fields to find food, proteins from worms, grains of cereals and who knows what else can be found on his menu... the owner will only at times feed it with a bunch of corn grains or some cereals. And when he reaches the weight of at most 1.80 kg, he is cleaned and ready to become a dish.

Due to the fact that the *pulastar* is in constant movement while in search of

food, he has a firm and compact meat without surplus of fat. Good Dalmatian cooks have long discovered that such quality meat does not need complicated recipes to become excellent food.

It is sufficient to preserve the originality of the taste which is preserved only by adding a little salt, oil (or pork fat). Grown roosters and older hens in the pot demand longer treatment and more supplements to soften the meat and to make it tastier. Older hens usually make a great soup after long cooking, and their meat, as well as the meat of the old rooster, is ideal for everyone's favorite chicken stew in Dalmatia – *tingul*. The *pulastar* often ends up in the pot and it is served cooked with a few potatoes accompanying while being cooked, and some seasonal salad, but the most popular and most frequent manner of preparing *pulastar* in these Dalmatian regions is – baked under the baking lid with potatoes.



Veneziano Liver – a Delicious Testimony of the Common History of Zadar and Venice

Liver *veneziano*, (liver in sour preparation) is one of the most popular traditional dishes in Zadar and Dalmatia which is more of a brunch with the locals in Zadar and Dalmatia, the first serious meal of the day eaten with relish during work breaks late in the morning or early in the afternoon. This old dish that gastronomy and culinary historians place in ancient times, and even though it is simple but hearty and tasty, in at least two ways testifies to the long history of these areas and the eating habits that have persisted over time to this day.

Liver *veneziano* is a typical dish of poor tables that appeared due to the necessity of using all parts of the domestic animal that would be prepared for a meal, more precisely for more meals and for families that once, as a rule, had many members. Simply put, no part of the raw meat was wasted, but the best pieces of meat were intended for the nobility and the wealthy, heads of families and strong able-bodied members of the tribe and family, and they were dried or preserved for festive occasions. But the innards also had to be used and thus many of today's esteemed dishes were created in all parts of the world. Some hard-working housewife, we can only imagine, thought of how to use veal, beef innards or lamb liver which was popular in Dalmatia due to the rich tradition of sheep breeding, to make great dishes so that she added to the fried liver a few drops of wine, red

onions and the most accessible herbs, laurel and rosemary. Due to the necessity of using innards, another dish was created, the *dolce garbo*, where other innards were used such as the heart, lungs, kidneys ... all that could be used.

The second testimony that the liver *veneziano* carries through the centuries is that of the long connection of Zadar and Dalmatia with Venice, the most important city on the west coast of the Adriatic at the time. The Venetian Republic was an important superpower since the fall of the Roman Empire, but Zadar, which in the Middle Ages was part of Byzantium with a high level of autonomy, did not fit into the Venetian pretensions to take full control of the Adriatic and maritime routes. Zadar, as the most important city and the capital of Dalmatia at the time, had control over the Adriatic from the Kvarner islands do Kaštel Bay. This was the reason for the frequent wars between Zadar and Venice throughout the Middle Ages, for three centuries, the 13th, 14th and 15th century. In the end, the Venetian Republic got hold of this important city for "a handful of ducats" by buying it from the weary Ladislav of Naples whose rule Zadar acknowledged. The Venetians took over other Dalmatian cities likewise, but the highly developed Zadar was its most significant gain. It was from 1409 that the rule over Zadar lasted for four centuries. In the beginning, the inhabitants of Zadar gave resistance to

the Venetians, but that resistance went awry due to a new danger – the Turkish invasion from the east. Under Venetian government and continuous dangers, Zadar became a city – fortification where life thrived. Trade was intensive, crafts, the health system, art and education developed as well as social life and, logically, there was an exchange of all kinds of goods, even cultural ones with Venice, the capital city of the Republic. True enough, there were bad periods for Zadar in those four centuries, but many positive achievements remained even after 1796, when Venice lost control of the city forever.

In such a historical context and exchange of cultural acquisitions many dishes from Venice, old and new, arrived in Zadar and these came from the newly discovered continent, America. But liver prepared in sour, a dish typical for the Veneto region, whose recipe came to Zadar (even though it somewhat changed here) has a much longer history than the dish prepared in Zadar, as, for example, with tomatoes and potatoes until the discovery of this food unknown on the Mediterranean. Indeed, the custom of serving liver *veneziano* with polenta, a porridge made of corn grits, has lasted for a longtime, but it derived from America. That dish is a type of hybrid that has gone through the old, middle, and new age awaiting us on our tables as a recognizable Dalmatian cuisine dish.



How the Olive Oil from Zadar Conquered New York

Olive oil is one of the basic foods for the healthiest diet in the world, the Mediterranean one, and thus the oil from the olive fruit is an unavoidable part of Dalmatian gastronomy. And more than that. Olive growing in Croatia exists only in its coastal and island areas, in Istria and in Dalmatia in particular. It is in those areas that the olive, the olive tree, its leaves and fruit, its oil are more than just agriculture, more than just regular grease, more than food. It is the basic icon of Dalmatian life for, along with the grapevines and figs, it is the holy trinity of Dalmatian graces, indescribably important, loved and adored.

It has been so, of course, in Zadar and its entire region, from the pertaining islands, long coastal line and spacious flat area of the hinterland. The olive tree is part of the local ambience. Namely, it is easy to find olive trees in Zadar city, even in its completely urban areas gardens are decorated with olive trees that make a perfect natural shade. Smaller and bigger olive trees can be seen growing at the edges of the city, planted for hobby or recreation, and when we dive more deeply into the rural areas of the Zadar region, we discover greater olive groves, even real olive plantations.

The olive came to these parts during antiquity, several centuries before Christ, and has been ever present since then, and man has behaved variably towards this important culture, depending on the social circumstances and events, and, at time, with less or more respect and attention. In the 20th century, and especially in the second part, due to the different social circumstances, firstly for the sudden planned settlement of cities at the expense of villages and agriculture, interest in olive growing in the Zadar area declined. The love for that tree in those critical decades lingered for the most part on the islands of the Zadar





“The Zadar region, its olive growers and oil producers, are today again proud of their top-quality olive oil, first of all the best, extra virgin oil.”

archipelago, on the coast but least of all in the fertile Zadar hinterland.

Fortunately, at the very end of the past century and the beginning of the millennium, there was a revival of olive growing in the entire Zadar region, and many old olive groves were renewed and hundreds of thousands of new olive trees were planted. The olive tree, just like the saying says that the olive tree is a demanding mistress, and the olive mother asks for nothing, but is always loving, joyfully awaited this new attention.

The Zadar region, its olive growers and oil producers, are today again proud of their top-quality olive oil, first of all the best, extra virgin oil. In the past 15 years, almost 40 small and big oil mills have been built in the Zadar region. All the harvested olives can be processed immediately in these oil mills after harvest in order to squeeze olive juice and acquire top quality oil.

This indeed being the case has been proven by local olive growers and oil producers, where, in addition to the market, they have regularly won gold and championship awards at numerous re-

gional and international competitions after chemical and organoleptic testing by certified judges. But the real boom happened in 2021 with oils produced in year 2020: at the world's most relevant olive oil festival, the *New York International Olive Oil Competition*, where 1,171 samples of oil from 28 countries of the world were rated, and Croatian oils won 66 gold and 20 silver medals, whereby Croatia found itself in fourth place according to the number of acknowledgements, right after Spain, Italy, and Greece. Taking into consideration the size of the mentioned countries and Croatia, the olive growing parts of those countries and the number of planted olive trees respectively, it can be said that such a success was even greater than the silver won by Croatia at the World Football Championship in Russia in 2018.

Of all the golden oils, the Dalmatian ones won as many as 36 gold and 10 silver medals, and among them the olive growers of the Zadar region won as many as 12 gold and two silver medals. It is difficult to prove more clearly in the world of olive oils that the highest quality olive oils are from this area.



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