

Dubrovnik's Ancient City Walls

Patti Morrow

September 20, 2015



When I was a child, I would envision images of magical medieval cities as my mother read nighttime stories to me. Walking on top of [Dubrovnik's Ancient City Walls](#) was like stepping back into that enchanted past, and was beyond a doubt the highlight of my visit to that history-filled medieval walled city.

The thick stone walls that surround Dubrovnik's Old Town overlook a vibrant, contrasting panorama of terra cotta tiled rooftops juxtaposed against the Adriatic Sea, as well as palaces, monasteries, and a bell tower.

Our young guide, Marko, was remarkably well-versed in Dubrovnik's history, relating it in such an animated way as to hold the entire group spellbound as we entered through the Pile Gate, and then ascended the steep, narrow alley of steps called "the endless staircase."

"The defensive walls were begun around the 12th century, but not completed until the 17th century," Marko informed us, pointing out the forts, towers and turrets located at strategic points in the 1.25 mile (2 km) expanse. "It is one of the largest, most complex, and most complete in all of Europe."



We stopped at many points along the wall, each time to listen to a different portion of Dubrovnik's (formerly called "Ragusa") history – the Venetian occupation, the negotiation and subsequent expedient political relationship with the Ottoman Empire, and of course, the devastating Yugoslav war of the early 1990's. While the Old Town has been lovingly restored according to UNESCO standards after the heavy shelling of the war, you can still see the different colors in the roof tiles signifying the old and new. The city was spared from the massive destruction that many other cities in the former Yugoslavia suffered, mainly because of the protection offered by the ancient walls. They did their job well, in ancient as well as recent history.



The most recognizable and prominent part of the wall is the round Minceta Tower, which looks like the quintessential medieval castle. We clambered up an even narrower and steeper staircase to get a bird's eye view of the Old Town, and Adriatic port.

We walked along the wall until we came to Fort Bokar which was once used as a prison and is one of the oldest buildings of its kind in Europe. From

this portion of the wall there is a stunning view of fortress of Lovrijenac, separated from Old Town by the Adriatic Sea. The fort stands sentry on a high craggy cliff, protecting Old Town from attack by both sea and land,

"You'll notice that there are homes situated in some places along the wall," Marko pointed out as we passed houses so close, you could almost touch their outer walls. "It's a way of life for these people, living with this lack of privacy. To them, it is worth it to live in such a significant place."

Dubrovnik can be very hot, and the walk around the walls is totally exposed to sun, so an early morning or late afternoon tour is recommended.