

# Relax on an island odyssey

Unspoiled Elaphites in the Adriatic are so close, yet so far from the hustle and bustle on shore

By **SUZANNE MORPHET**  
Special Contributor

**S**IPAN, Croatia — It was a simple but memorable lunch: salty prosciutto, sun-warmed tomatoes and homemade goat cheese. And olive oil drizzled over everything. I was on an olive farm, after all, on the tiny island of Sipan, off Croatia's south coast.

We passed the goats on our walk through the olive orchard to get to No. 1 hilltop farm with expansive views over the Adriatic and some of the other islands in the Elaphite group.

After eating, we stepped inside the shed housing the owners' olive press, where two large millstones have been squeezing out liquid gold for decades, maybe centuries. That old cliché about time standing still could have been coined here.

Croatia's sun-drenched Elaphite Islands are a delightful conundrum. They're only a few miles from touristy Dubrovnik, yet they're largely undeveloped and unspoiled. Only three of the 13 islands are populated, and two of those are car-free. People from Dubrovnik come to escape the summer heat, but fewer people live here year-round than in the 15th and 16th centuries.

Having only a few days, I wanted to see and do as much as possible. Huck Finn Adventure Travel (a Croatian company despite the name) provided the answer: a 44-foot catamaran yacht that would transport me to a different island each day and provide a private

cabin for sleeping each night.

Within half an hour of arriving at Dubrovnik Airport, I'm barefoot on the Huck Finn, cruising through azure blue water. Two kayaks are lashed to the bow and a half a dozen bicycles are mounted on the stern. Snorkeling gear is tucked out of sight.

The sleek white catamaran — she's French-built and just 5 years old — can accommodate 10 guests. On this last trip of the season, there are only two of us, along with company owner Zeljko Kelemen and a couple of guides who are tanned and fit from a summer outdoors.

## Kayaking Kolocep

Launching our kayaks from the bow of the Huck Finn, we paddle into a light breeze, the salty air warm on our faces. Steep off-white limestone cliffs tower above us, topped with vivid green pine trees, and above them, a cloudless blue sky. The trio of saturated colors is stunning.

Kolocep is the smallest of the three populated islands and the closest to Dubrovnik — just a 20-minute boat ride away.

A one-mile paved walking trail connects the island's two small settlements, each situated on a sweeping bay dotted with pleasure boats. Ripe red pomegranates hang from tree branches like baubles at

Christmas. On market days, women sell olive oil, candied oranges and lemons.

## Walking Lopud

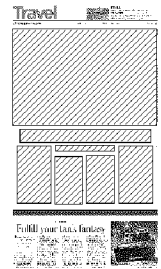
Pushing open a heavy side door of a 15th-century Franciscan monastery, we suddenly find ourselves in the middle of afternoon Mass. A couple dozen parishioners, mostly older women, are reciting a prayer while their white-robed priest slumps against a wall, his lips moving in sync.

We quietly retreat and keep on walking. In its heyday, Lopud boasted more than 30 churches and chapels for its 2,000 inhabitants. Dubrovnik's nobility built white stone villas with red-tiled roofs and filled their gardens with lemon and olive trees. Remnants of Lopud's prosperous past are everywhere.

Fewer than 100 people live here year-round now. Some, like Franka Karamehmedovic, who rents out rooms in her 300-year-old villa, returned after the Balkans conflict. She likes the quiet lifestyle, the sandy beaches and the car-free streets, where her young grandson can wander and play. "Where else could he do this?" she asks when we take a break from sightseeing and join her for coffee on her terrace.

## Cycling Sipan

Pedaling up the narrow winding road that leads out of the main town of Sipanska



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Luka, we pass flowering bougainvilleas, gated gardens — and a sign that warns of boars ahead!

Sipan is the largest of the Elaphite Islands, a charming mix of tangled overgrowth and cultivated orchards. It's here we have lunch at No. 1 hilltop farm and learn that a farmer's dog caught a wild baby pig a few days earlier.

After lunch we stop at a large walled church, one of many slowly decaying under the Mediterranean sun. Inside, paint peels from the high walls that once protected islanders and their oil and grain from marauding pirates.

About 400 people still live on this island. Fortunately for us, half a dozen of them are fishermen. That night we dine on smoked tuna, pasta with fresh shrimp and octopus patties at Kod Marka, an acclaimed restaurant on the waterfront.

According to a book I found on board, chef Marco Prizmic serves only local seafood with vegetables from his own garden. He can prepare Swiss chard 16 ways and knows half a dozen recipes for aubergine (eggplant).

The next morning I chat with his son Dino and learn that the elder Prizmic also makes his own wine vinegar. "The slow way," says Dino, sitting in the sun, smoking. "He could do it in two months but it wouldn't be as good."

## Swim and snorkel

"Want to stop for a swim?" Kelemen asks as we reluctantly head back to Dubrovnik on our last day. Of course we do.

He motors into a small

cove with turquoise water. Spiny black urchins dot the rocky bottom while schools of small fish dart in front of my mask. Even in mid-October the water is a balmy 77 degrees — a parting gift from the islands that time forgot.

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## When you go

Huck Finn Adventure Travel specializes in outdoor activities and looks for opportunities to introduce guests to local people and culture, such as arranging lunch at No.1 hilltop farm on Sipan Island and coffee at Villa Franka. The company offers one-day, multiday and custom trips throughout [Croatia](#). A five-day biking, kayaking, sailing trip through the Elaphite Islands ranges from \$715 to \$945 per person (double rooms), depending on the month. **To learn more:** [huckfinncroatia.com](http://huckfinncroatia.com).



Staff graphic



**Bicyclists beware:** wild pigs ahead.



Suzanne Morphet/Special Contributor

Cyclists love the island of Sipan with its charming waterfront and quiet country roads that go past olive groves, vineyards and centuries-old churches.



Huck Finn Adventure Travel

**The waters** around Kolocep, one of the Elaphite group of islands, appeal to kayakers.



Suzanne Morphet/Special Contributor

**Narrow walkways** take the place of streets on the car-free island of Lopud.



**Monasteries and churches** on the islands date to the 15th and 16th centuries. Some are being restored as others continue to decay.



**A simple, memorable** meal consisted of prosciutto, tomatoes and homemade goat cheese with a drizzle of olive oil.



Photos by Suzanne Morphet/Special Contributor

**The island of Sipan** with its approximately 400 residents is a mix of wild green spaces and cultivated grape and olive orchards.