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A rare snowstorm blanketed Dubrovnik last winter. Tourists overwhelm the city's Old Town in summer but visitors are sparse in winter. JAKE LITTLEFIELD AND DANNIE GAO



TRAVEL

Dubrovnik: A Winter Escape to a Beloved Summer Town

In Dubrovnik, Croatia's magnetic medieval city, a newly expanded winter festival turns the 'off-season' into the most wonderful time of year















By David Farley

Dec. 12, 2017 12:00 p.m. ET

SOMETHING WAS missing in Dubrovnik. I stood atop the thick, imposing walls of this Croatian medieval city looking out at the rickety red-tiled roofs, the shimmering, wintry Adriatic Sea just beyond. Then I turned my gaze to Stradun, the wide, limestone-clad pedestrian street that cuts through the walled town and the city's main public promenade since the 13th century. Some people milled about chatting; others slowly paraded down the lane.

The missing element? A throng of tourists. What a difference a season makes in Dubrovnik. Where was the miasma of humanity pushing each other through the city's narrow streets? The mustached restaurant barkers trying to lure visitors into their eateries? The gargantuan cruise ships lurking in the distance?

On my umpteenth visit to this stunning Croatian city, situated on the southern Dalmatian Coast, I decided to come during the off season. Friends here often warned me to avoid the city in winter, saying that it's depressing in its emptiness. The walled, car-free Old Town streets are spartan. Shops and restaurants are boarded up for the season. And few hotels stay open.

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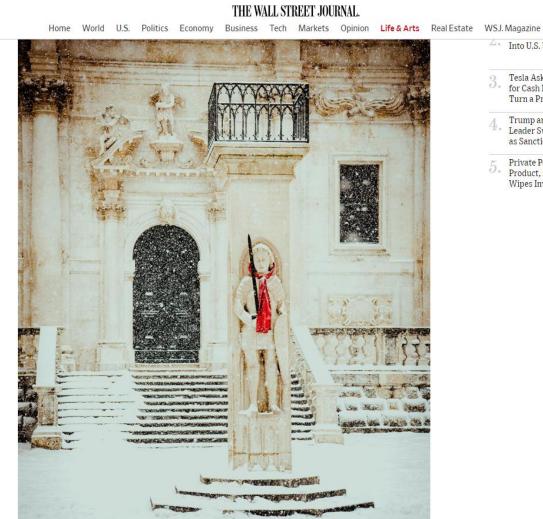
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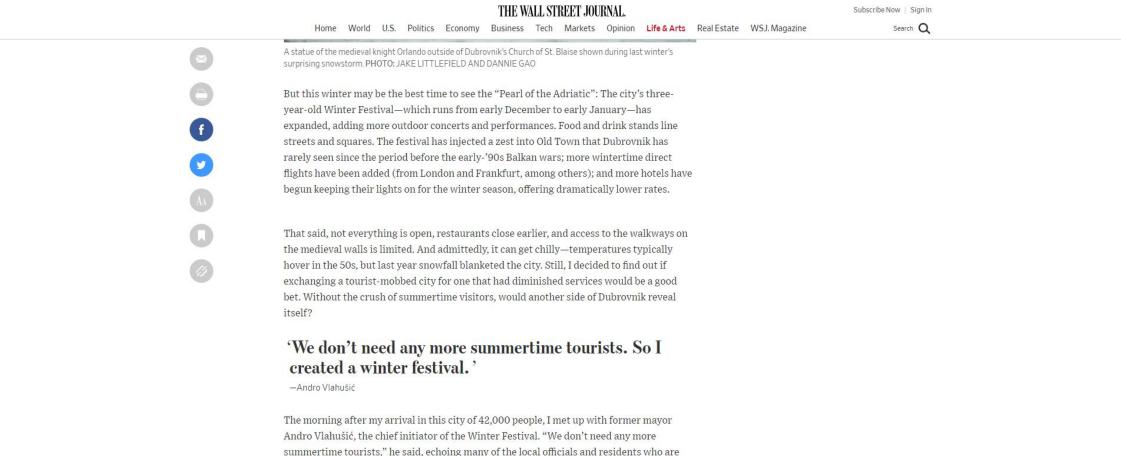
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working to impose a limit to high-season visitors. "So I helped to create a festival in

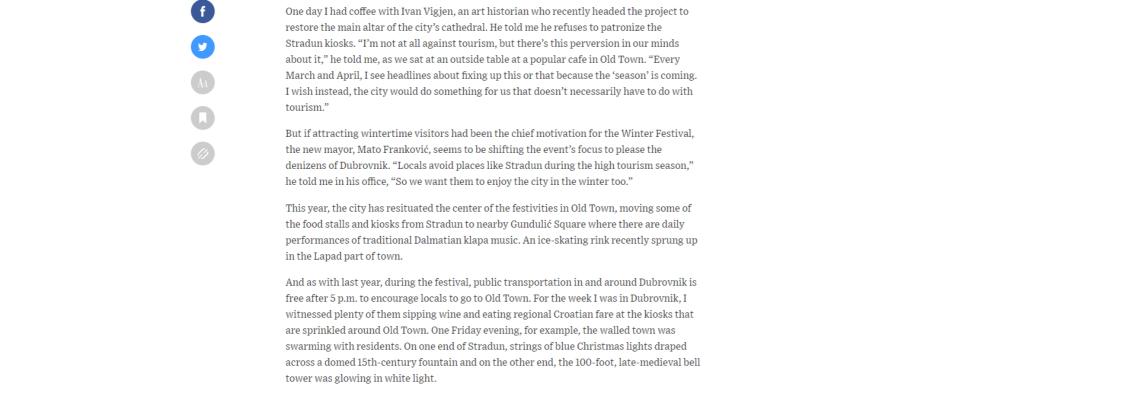
Not that everyone is in favor of it. When the food and drink kiosks popped up on the 1,000-

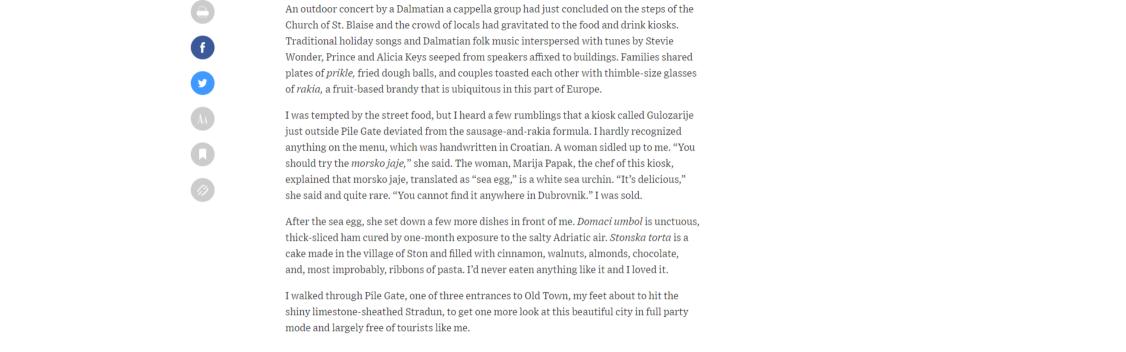
winter."





FAIR WAY The historic Stradun street during this year's Winter Festival. PHOTO: DUBRAVKO LENERT























THE LOWDOWN // Wintering in Dubrovnik



ILLUSTRATION: JASON LEE

Getting There: You can't fly direct to Dubrovnik from the U.S., even in summer. The best bet is to fly through London Gatwick Airport with British Airways or through Frankfurt with Croatia Airlines or Lufthansa.

Staving There: Floven botals remain open in

Staying There: Eleven hotels remain open in Dubrovnik during the winter. The iconic Excelsior Hotel, which reopened in May after an extensive renovation, is a 10-minute walk from Old Town (from about \$165 per night, adriaticluxuryhotels.com). The modern and sleek Hotel Kompas, located in a quiet cove in the leafy Lapad district of Dubrovnik, is a 10-minute bus ride to Old Town (from about \$90 per night, adriaticluxuryhotels.com). And Karmen Apartments, located in Old Town, offers

comfortable flats (from about \$65 a night, karmendu.com).

Eating There: Many restaurants shut down in winter but a few great spots remain open. In the Gruz neighborhood, home of the city's cruise ship port, Amfora does high-quality southern Dalmatian fare, such as sesame-encrusted tuna and cod mixed with creamy potatoes and chard. (Obala S. Radica 26, amforadubrovnik.com). The best food stand during Winter Festival is Gulozarije located just outside Pile Gate (Brsalje Ul.) and the popup seafood restaurant Ludo More at Cvijete Zuzorič (in Old Town), both of which are only open for the festival.