

# The unique croatian coffee culture

[Food & Diet](#), [Coffee](#)



When in Rome, do as the Romans do. When in Split, enjoy drinking coffee as the Splitians (citizens of Split) do.

Croatia's second largest city, Split is a beautiful ancient town on the Adriatic coast built around an old Roman palace. Although the beginnings of Split are traditionally associated with the construction of Diocletian's Palace in 305 CE, the city was founded as the Greek colony in fourth century BCE. Life has been thriving to this day within the palace walls and spread far beyond.

This essay is about the unique Croatian coffee culture. In Croatia and Split particularly, drinking coffee means a lot more than the drink itself. It is an important aspect of our life; the ritual of leisurely socialising that people associate with coffee (in Croatian, kava).

Our way of drinking coffee has nothing to do with wearing big cups on the way to work as in the United States, or with quick drinking espresso as in Italy.

Here, there is no such thing as drinking coffee in rush. Coffee time is for socialising, and it can take a couple of hours, literally.

It is best to start a story about coffee, my hometown Split and its people from Riva, the large seafront promenade in the front of the Diocletian's Palace walls.

Riva is like pedestrian heaven and a favourite gathering place filled with cafés and its terraces, palms, benches and flowers. Many historical events happened here. Various manifestations, concerts and social events take place daily.

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According to some calculations, Riva can fit 40, 000 people. Bellow are unforgettable pictures of Riva where people welcomed Goran Ivanišević home to Split after winning the 2001 Wimbledon title. A crowd estimated at more than 100, 000 people thronged Riva waiting the new champion entered the port by boat, accompanied by a flotilla of various vessels. It was a welcome Split had never seen before.

No matter what time of year or day of the week, Riva is always crowded. People either walk or drink coffee at one of the many cafés and bars with outdoor seating areas lined along the promenade. On a sunny day, people in lines walk up and down while waiting to catch a seat for a coffee preferably with a sea view. To drink a cup of coffee on Riva is a ritual and an attraction in itself especially on Saturday morning when Riva turns into a stage full of beautiful women look like they were dressing for the catwalk.

Even on workdays, terraces are packed with people of all ages sitting table to table: pensioners, students, business people, mothers with little children playing with milk foam in small cups. Everyone wants to be part of the coffee ritual.

Riva is like a living room of locals who sit in cafés and watch the world walk by for hours, enjoying every sip and commenting.

You can enjoy your coffee in a less crowded surrounding sitting on the charming narrow balcony with a beautiful view of the promenade and the port.

If someone asks you to go out for coffee, it usually means an invitation to talk which does not necessarily involve drinking coffee. It has actually become a synonym for socialising. Whether it is about a business meeting, meeting with friends, love date, taking a break from work, or reading newspapers, everything happens at cafés and mostly over a cup of coffee. Coffee is a means of getting to know someone or discuss business and closing deals.

Everyone has their favourite place: at the beautiful squares and narrow alleys inside the historical core of Split, at the favourite town beaches Bačvice and Firule, at the new West Coast Riva with a magnificent view of the city harbour and Diocletian's Palace, or simply, at one of the coffee bars in the neighbourhood. Places are countless for cafés are almost at every corner.

To start the café tour, you can walk up Marjan hill covered in dense pine forests that are the lungs of Split. Here is a café with the best panoramic view of the city. It is the perfect place for photo taking and sipping coffee or a drink while enjoying the beautiful scenery.

You can have your coffee on one of many romantic and architecturally diverse squares. Peristyle is the central square of the Diocletian's Palace, a more than 1, 700 years old historical and archaeological Roman ruin protected by UNESCO. The palace has always been and still is the heart of the city.

Lvxor Café is one of the most frequently visited spots in Split located at Peristil Square. You can drink coffee sitting on the stairs in front of the café, glancing over the unique beauty of ancient architecture and a 3500 old and perfectly preserved granite sphinx that Emperor Diocletian brought from Egypt.

So far, 12 sphinxes have been found, scattered across numerous locations within the palace. The most famous and only one with the head is on Peristyle.

The Republic Square, otherwise known as Prokurative, is a large open square, surrounded on three sides by neo-Renaissance buildings and open on the south side providing a beautiful view of the harbour and Riva. The square is relatively empty during the colder months, but as soon as the sun shines, the café chairs get occupied by many Splitians. In the summer, Prokurative turns into an open-air stage for concerts and cultural events.

The coffeehouses had a prominent role in the social life of the city, especially the first and most famous coffeehouse that was opened in the late 18th century on the Pjaca square. From the beginning, it was the centre of the social, political and cultural life of Split. The first cinema screening took place there, as well as many exhibitions, concerts, performances. Unfortunately, it lost its purpose and meaning when turned into the snack bar.

The second famous is the Bellevue coffeehouse with the large terrace in front. It was opened in 1875 on the ground floor of the Bellevue Hotel and

still exists at the same place at Prokurative. It still retained the charm of the old days.

The Bajamonti Café is an elegant café with the 1920's stylish decor but taking into account the preservation of the heritage of the building. It also sits at the impressive Prokurative and was named after the 19th century Split mayor Antonio Bajamonti. Here you can enjoy your coffee and excellent cake selection while a pianist plays soothing tunes in the background.

There are many tucked away places in the historic centre ideal for those like myself who prefer less crowded surrounding. One of them is the courtyard inside the 16th-century Pavlovic Palace, a heritage building located at the Pjaca square (People's Square) which is one of the most vivid spaces filled with numerous cafés, bars, restaurants and shops. Pjaca sits just outside the walls of Diocletian's Palace.

The Romanesque clock tower on the east side of Pjaca is one of the very few in the world counting 24 digits.

Outside the city centre, there are some of my favourites cafés with terraces overlooking the sandy beaches. Great places to spend some time chatting with friends. A sea view and the sound of waves always relaxes me. I live my whole life in Split, and one of the things I could never live without is the sea.

Popular cafe with small detached terrace right on the most beloved city beach Bačvice with an amazing view over the Adriatic and the island of Brač.

I am not much a coffee drinker, but meeting with friends in cafés is a must-have activity while discussing world affairs, sports or just chatting and a bit gossiping. Instead of coffee, I order lemonade, hot chocolate during cold days and espresso with ice cream in the summer. Despite my busy schedule, I still manage to squeeze in going for coffee once a week.

Even those with a low income, small pensions or unemployed don't want to give up on going to the café. There is always a way to get a cup of coffee and spend a couple of hours with friends enjoying this simple pleasure.

For many Westerners obsessed with productivity, it looks like we're wasting our time sitting in cafés without getting anything done. We don't bring our laptops with headphones to catch up on work as can be seen in the Starbucks coffee shops (although we became obsessed with our mobiles). Yet, everything gets done, in spite of and because of coffee.

There is the whole philosophy behind coffee as a powerful factor of the social life not only in cafés but also in our homes where we usually brew Turkish coffee as a morning fix or when inviting our friends and relatives. Being invited for coffee is considered a symbol of friendship and hospitality. The most popular Croatian coffee is Franck coffee, vacuum-packed in a brick-like package.

All coffee is based on espresso shot mixed with varying amounts of milk. Coffee is always served unsweetened with a couple of sugar packets on the side and occasionally with a small biscuit. When you order a coffee, you also get a glass of tap water with no charge. Tap water is safe to drink in Croatia.

Spending time in cafés is actually about slowing life down, emptying the mind of daily chaos, enjoying the company of another and listen. It's not unusual to see people having coffee on their own. My husband prefers to drink coffee alone in the local coffee bar while reading newspapers, but sitting alone at the table also includes chatting with the waiter we know for more than 15 years and discussing news with the acquaintances at the neighbouring table.

It may be an exaggeration to say that the foundation of society is coffee, but coffee culture is deeply rooted in our society. It is an eclectic mixture of three cultures: Turkish, Austro Hungarian and Italian, intertwined with modern trends that are in many ways contradictory but all together makes a great blend. Just like the art of blending coffee beans to get the perfect cup of coffee.

The coffee-drinking ritual is an essential component of our social life.

To fully understand the lifestyle of local people, one phenomenon should be also mentioned. It is " fjaka" - a slang term for a relaxed state of mind in which a human strives to do nothing. It is the unique part of our character and an elusive concept that people living in Dalmatia experience in different ways.

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Fjaka is like a faint unconsciousness, a state beyond the self or - if you will - deeply inside the self, a special kind of general immobility, drowsiness and numbness, a weariness and indifference towards all important and ancillary needs, a lethargic stupor and general passivity on the journey to overall nothingness. The sense of time becomes lost, and its very inertness and languor give the impression of a lightweight instant.

This art of doing nothing does not mean being lazy. It is the ability to savour the moment and the pleasure of being in the state of idle.

To have such a mindset of allowing yourself to slow down and not thinking about what to do next, besides long conversing with friends over a cup of coffee is a way of life in Split.