



reading

BOOKS ABOUT CROATIA / 1

Many of these histories and memoirs, detective stories, and gripping novels revolve around the terrible toll that the violence of the 20th century took on the country of Croatia and its people. But as you'll find out when you visit Croatia and read about it, it's also a place of warmth and beauty, with diverse cultures and exciting new voices. Enjoy!

Fiction

Aminatta Forna, *The Hired Man* (2013)

An English family moves to a beautiful Croatian town where they strike up a relationship with a local man, Duro. Over time, the chilling story of what happened to Duro and to the town during the Croatian War of Independence in the 1990s is uncovered. Critics described this as a gorgeous, triumphant, but mournful novel.

Philip Kerr, *The Lady From Zagreb* (2015)

A detective story and historical thriller. Private investigator Bernie Gunther is sent to Croatia during World War II. The tenth of the Bernie Gunther books, it combines chilling historical matter and dark humor with an extraordinary likeable, if flawed, hero.

Miroslav Krleža, *On the Edge of Reason* (1938)

Written by the man widely considered Croatia's most important novelist, this political satire about the dangers of conformity features a middle-aged lawyer whose life of respectability is turned upside down by a single moment of honesty. Susan Sontag considered it one of the great European novels of the first half of the 20th century.

Sara Novic, *Girl at War* (2015)

The New York Times called this a "brutal novel, but a beautiful one." Shifting between war-torn Zagreb in the 1990s and the US ten years later, it tells the story of a girl whose parents are murdered during the Yugoslav wars. She then becomes a child-soldier. The book, said one reviewer, "performs the miracle of making the stories of broken lives in a distant country feel as large and universal as myth."

Olja Savičević, *Farewell, Cowboy* (2015)

Dada, a twenty-something at a loose end, returns to her hometown of Split, where she tries to understand how her brother, a fan of cowboy movies, died. It has been lauded as "a dazzling, funny, but deadly serious" story that introduces a remarkable new talent in European literature.



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Nonfiction

Cody McClaine Brown, *Chasing a Croatian Girl: A Survivor's Tale* (2014)

If you're looking for something light-hearted, you might enjoy this fish-out-of-water memoir about an American who falls in love with a woman from Split. After moving to her hometown, Brown must deal with endless sessions of coffee-drinking, a dominant, if loving, mother-in-law, and the locals' strange phobia about drafts.

Slavenka Drakulić, *Café Europa: Life After Communism* (1997)

One way of understanding how much Croatia has changed in recent years is to compare the sights that you see today with this portrait of the country just after the fall of Communism. These insightful, impassioned essays cover subjects large and small, including the difficulties of buying a vacuum cleaner in Croatia in the 1990s and a piece on what the "terrible teeth" of locals at this time revealed about the country's young democracy.

Ivo and Slavko Goldstein, *The Holocaust in Croatia* (2016)

This is the most comprehensive discussion of the devastation of Croatia's Jewish community between 1941 and 1945. It emphasizes the upsurge in anti-Semitism in the country from 1936 and the malevolent role of Croatia's fascist leader Ante Pavelic. Slavo Goldstein is a historian, survivor, and a leader of Zagreb's Jewish community. His son Ivo is a prominent Croatian historian.

Catherine Kapphahn, *Immigrant Daughter: Stories You Never Told Me* (2019)

In this memoir, the American-born Kapphahn searches for clues about her late mother's past in Croatia during World War II and under the communist regime. According to one recommendation, the book reveals "how traumatic historical events can enter a family's bloodstream."

Mark Mazower, *The Balkans: A Short History* (2000)

A concise but nuanced portrait of Croatia and its surrounds from the age of Romans to the modern day. Mazower dispels the stereotypical view of the Balkans as a region of primitive bloodshed and ancient ethnic hatred.

Marcus Tanner, *Croatia: A Nation Forged in War* (1997)

A lucid depiction of Croatia from medieval times to the developing democracy of the 21st century. Particularly vivid is Tanner's eyewitness account of Yugoslavia's coming apart in the 1990s and the modern nation of Croatia being born.

Rebecca West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* (1941)

This 1941 guide to Croatia and Yugoslavia is long but legendary. It has been called a metaphysical Lonely Planet, a portrait of the author's soul and of Europe on the brink of war, and "one of the few truly great travel books" ever written.