



# CROATIA THROUGH THE AGES / 1

When you put Balkans and history in the same sentence, things can get messy. After all, this region including Croatia is known for its complex rivalries, overlapping populations, and bloody conflicts. This timeline will help you keep this complicated history straight, from Croatia’s inclusion in empires, kingdoms, and Communist Yugoslavia, to the tragedy of World War II, the Holocaust, and the warfare of the 1990s. But we’ll also highlight some of Croatia’s remarkable achievements and its modern manifestation as an independent, highly educated nation beloved by visitors for its beauty, heritage, and culture.

■ General timeline    ■ Jewish timeline

## EARLY HISTORY

- BCE** — 300 000 Neanderthal presence in the area
- 1000 Indo-European Illyrians migrate into region
- 500 Illyrians dominate while Greeks establish trade on Adriatic coast
- 11 Rome rules most of present-day Croatia. Create network of trade & towns  
*Jews settle in Roman towns, including in Savona (near modern-day Split)*
- CE** — 600 Croats and other Slavic tribes arrive from today’s Ukraine, Poland, and Belarus  
Under threat from Croats, walled city of Split becomes Roman stronghold  
The walled city of Dubrovnik (Ragusa) also established on Adriatic Coast  
*Limited evidence suggests small Jewish communities active, including in Split*
- 800 Croats begin accepting Christianity, strengthening collective identity
- 925 Kingdom of Croatia established but independence and stability fragile  
*Little is known about extent, if any, of Jewish population in this period*

## A CROSSROADS OF EMPIRES, FAITHS, ETHNIC GROUPS

- 1100 Venice and Italian elites control most of southern coast for next 700 years  
Northern Croatia under Hungarian rule. Town of Zagreb grows in importance  
*Jewish communities settle in Zagreb and elsewhere in northern Croatia*
- 1402 *Synagogue built in Dubrovnik (independent city-state on southern coast)*
- 1456 *Jews expelled from Hungarian-controlled northern Croatia*
- 1493 Ottoman Empire conquers Bosnia and Serbia, makes inroads into Croatia
- 1526 Northern Croatia (and Hungary) absorbed into Habsburg (Austrian) Empire



# timeline

C R O A T I A

## CROATIA THROUGH THE AGES / 2

■ General timeline    ■ Jewish timeline

- 1537 **No Jews in north Croatia, Sephardi immigration boosts south coast communities**  
**Sephardi immigrants play important role in southern maritime trade**
- 1600 **Cemetery in Split (one of oldest still used today) established**
- 1683 Much of northern Croatia now under Ottomans  
Turks except around Zagreb  
Serbian Orthodox settlers come to Krajina to help under-siege Habsburgs  
Krajina becomes a key area for the substantial Serbian minority in Croatia
- 1738 Ottomans defeated. Habsburgs regain control of northern Croatia  
Period of stability brings many immigrants from different groups
- 1773 Living conditions on southern coast declining greatly  
**Jews in previously tolerant southern coast (Split, Dubrovnik) confined to ghetto**
- 1773 **25 Jewish families in Austrian-ruled northern Croatia, est. 600 Jews in south**
- 1782 **Austrian Emperor grants religious freedom to Jews**
- 1806 **Jewish immigration (Ashkenazi) increases, main settlement Osijek in northeast**
- NATIONALISM ON THE RISE**
- 1815 Austrian Empire gains control of south coast  
Austrian Empire allows Hungary to rule north Croatia  
Hungary tries to impose language and culture on north Croatian population
- 1848 Croatians fail to overthrow Hungarian control in north and east  
Croatian nationalist efforts strengthen but split into two camps  
Some favor unity with Serbia in autonomous South Slavic entity (Yugoslavia)  
Others favor Croatian independence and oppose alliance with Serbia
- 1857 Croatia pop. 2.1 million and growing. Economy based on agriculture
- 1870 **Population grows. 10,000 Jews in Croatia, mainly merchants and artisans**
- 1900 Croatia remains a poor, overwhelmingly rural, society with low literacy levels  
Extreme poverty on southern coast sparks large-scale migration  
**20,000 Jews in 33 communities. Zagreb is and will remain largest community**  
**Most Jews in north. They are mainly middle-class, urban, Ashkenazi**



# timeline

## CROATIA THROUGH THE AGES / 3

■ General timeline ■ Jewish timeline

They are influenced by German and Hungarian culture, Reform movement  
Southern Jews mainly Sephardi. Active in trade, religious, & secular culture

### CROATIA AS PART OF THE KINGDOM OF YUGOSLAVIA

- 1914 Nationalism grows among Croats, Serbs, and Austro-Hungarian Empire  
Serb assassination of Austrian Archduke in Sarajevo, Bosnia sparks World War I
- 1918 Austro-Hungarian Empire collapses following defeat in WWI  
Fearful of Italian and Hungarian intentions, Croats join Kingdom of Yugoslavia  
A diverse, multicultural kingdom of 12 million with all men able to vote  
Serbs (mainly Orthodox Christians) 38% of population  
Croats (mainly Catholic) 24%, Bosnian Muslims 6%. Many other groups  
Kingdom based in Belgrade, Serbia. Heavy Serbian influence in politics, army  
65,000 Jews in Yugoslavia, 100 communities with considerable diversity  
Some Croatian anti-Semitism but Jews generally accepted in Yugoslav kingdom
- 1920 Croatian peasant revolt a sign of wider ideological and national tensions
- 1928 Serbian politician assassinates Croat leaders in Yugoslav parliament  
Fearing civil war, King Alexander declares royal dictatorship  
Ante Pavelic establishes Ustaše, a Croatian separatist, anti-Serb terror group  
Ustaše seek independent, fascist-Catholic Croatia including in all of Bosnia
- 1934 Ustaše and Macedonian nationalists assassinate King Alexander

### A MURDEROUS WORLD WAR II

- 1941 Axis nations (Germany, Hungary, Italy, Bulgaria) occupy and divide Yugoslavia  
Germans establish puppet state of Croatia (includes north Croatia, Bosnia)  
Is ruled by the Ustaše. They decimate political opponents & non-ethnic Croats  
Jasenovac concentration camp system established by the Ustaše  
Ustaše kill 340,000 Croatian Serbs. Roma population of 27,000 devastated  
Ustaše kill most Croat Jews, many at Jasenovac  
Others handed to Germans and deported to Auschwitz



# timeline

## CROATIA THROUGH THE AGES / 4

■ General timeline    ■ Jewish timeline

- 1945 Southern Croatia under Italian rule; only place of protection for Yugoslav Jews  
Communist partisans led by Josip Tito (a Croat) liberate Yugoslavia  
One in eight Yugoslavs (mainly civilians) killed in war, one of highest ratios in Europe  
67,000 Yugoslav Jews (including over 30,000 in Croatia) killed; 14,000 survive

### CROATIA AS PART OF COMMUNIST YUGOSLAVIA

- 1945 Yugoslavia is the only Communist state without direct Soviet control  
One of Europe's poorest, most multi-national states. Mainly rural, religious  
Pop. 15.7 million including 6.5 million ethnic Serbs, 3.8 million ethnic Croats  
Tito launches "ultra-Bolshevik" economic and political program  
Executes opponents, including Croatian fascists and Catholic leaders
- 1946 Federal Yugoslavia has 6 republics including Croatia, Bosnia, and Slovenia  
Serbia largest republic but Tito prevents nationalist conflict & Serb dominance  
Yugoslav Jews (with JDC help) re-establish communities including in Croatia
- 1948 Soviets break with Yugoslavia: Stalin condemns ambitious, independent Tito  
8,000 Yugoslav Jews leave for Israel in next four years. Just 6,500 remain
- 1949 Fearing economic collapse & Soviet invasion, Tito accepts huge US financial help  
He keeps political control but finishes purges & allows more economic flexibility
- 1960 Socio-economic improvements; "repressive but not oppressive" political system
- 1967 Govt. breaks with Israel but local Jews retain communal and religious freedoms
- 1968 Economy boosted by Yugoslav "guest workers" in booming Western Europe
- 1970 Zagreb's population has doubled to 560,000 over last 20 years  
Croatian Spring: Zagreb students demand more liberties and Croatian autonomy
- 1974 Keeping the peace: new constitution gives greater rights to Croatia  
Yugoslavia a land of overlapping minorities. Each republic has multiple groups  
A more secular, integrated Yugoslavia emerging, especially in growing cities  
Both Serbs & Croats speak Serbo-Croat (different alphabets but similar verbally)
- 1975 Croatian-Swiss scientist Vladimir Prelog wins Nobel Prize in Chemistry



# timeline

## CROATIA THROUGH THE AGES / 5

■ General timeline ■ Jewish timeline

- 1980 Tito dies. Presidency rotated among leaders of 6 republics to maintain balance  
Northern republics of Slovenia and Croatia wealthier than others  
They are concerned by federal govt. economic policies and its massive debts  
**5,500 Jews in Yugoslavia (2,000 in Croatia), increasingly secular communities**
- 1989 Communist control weakening like in much of Eastern Europe  
Croatia worried by Serbian nationalist leaders including Slobodan Milošević
- 1990 Yugoslav inflation (1240% per year) another factor in Croatian separatism  
Croatian republic elect anti-Serbian nationalist Franjo Tudjman  
This in turn alarms the 560,000 Serbs living in Croatia, 12% of total population  
**Tudjman also makes anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim remarks**

### WAR & ETHNIC CLEANSING RETURN TO EUROPE

- 1991 Both Croatia & Slovenia declare independence from Yugoslavia  
Germany & European community quickly recognize these new sovereign states  
Serb-dominated Yugoslav army launches attacks on these "rebel republics"  
Over next 8 years, there will be 5 main Yugoslav wars. Three involve Croatia  
New Croatian state at war with its Serb minority (backed by Serbia-Yugoslavia)  
Massacres, ethnic cleansing, many Croats displaced by Serbian forces  
**Jewish community buildings in Zagreb and Dubrovnik damaged in bombings**
- 1992 Fragile ceasefire declared in Croatia. Serbs hold part of Croatia (Krajina)  
Bosnia (led by local Muslims & Croats) declares independence from Yugoslavia  
War in Bosnia. Bosnian Serbs versus local Muslims & Croats (backed by Zagreb)
- 1993 Bosnian Croats seek to establish own state (Herzegovina) & link it to Croatia  
Croatia & Bosnian Croats now at war with Bosnian Muslims & Bosnian Serbs  
War in Croatia breaks out again. Croatia eventually recaptures Serb-held Krajina  
Estimated 200,000 ethnic Serbs flee or are expelled from Croatia
- 1995 Croatia wins its war of independence. Dayton agreement ends Bosnian conflict.
- 1999 Last Yugoslav war (in Serbian province of Kosovo) ends after NATO bomb Serbs



# timeline

## CROATIA THROUGH THE AGES / 6

■ General timeline ■ Jewish timeline

In all of former Yugoslavia, estimated 140,000 dead (20,000 killed in Croatia)  
Over 2 million refugees & displaced people after widespread ethnic cleansing  
Worst European violence since WWII. Multinational communities destroyed

### A NEW NATION. A NEW BEGINNING?

- 2000 New, more moderate leadership: Tudjman dies, Milošević overthrown in Serbia  
Increased democracy in Croatia & a fast-growing economy  
**Estimated 1,700 Jews in Croatia, mainly Zagreb**
- 2005 Tourism boom: Lonely Planet calls Croatia world's best spot to visit
- 2007 Income has doubled in Croatia since end of war
- 2008 Global financial crisis hits Croatia hard. Public spending slashed
- 2012 Croatia education system voted 22nd in world (equal with Austria)
- 2013 Croatia joins EU. Economy recovering somewhat but 17% unemployment  
Most Serb refugees do not return. Croatia now 90% Croat, just 4% Serb
- 2015 Over 700,000 refugees from Syria and elsewhere pass through Croatia  
**Croatian President visits Israel; condemns Ustaše's role in Holocaust**  
**However, Croatian Jewish leaders condemn increasing Holocaust revisionism**
- 2018 A small nation, a soccer giant. Croatia reaches final of World Cup
- 2019 Population of Croatia: 4.1 million  
**Jewish population: 1,700**