

Lighthouses of Croatia

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Lighting the Adriatic...

SINCE man first began to conquer the open seas, the lighthouse, which rises from earth to sky, has soothed the sailor and captured his solitary imagination. The story of these unwavering sea guards is closely related to the history of navigation itself. From the first fire-towers of antiquity and the extraordinary lighthouse of Alexandria, to the high-tech and remotely controlled lighthouses of today, these steady sentinels have cast their sharp and shining eye over the horizon.

Croatia, with its more than one thousand islands and nearly six thousand kilometres of coastline, has always been open to the sea. Encompassing three quarters of the Adriatic littoral, Croatia is a country rich in maritime tradition.

Legend tells us that the mythical sailor Odysseus, who fell in love with the nymph Calypso, was held captive by her on the Dalmatian island of Mljet. In antiquity, the nearby island of Hvar was called Pharos, the Greek word for lighthouse. It is said that the navigator Marco Polo was born on the neighbouring island of Korula. The Adriatic's most skilful mariners are reputed to have come from the Elaphite Islands, off Dubrovnik, whose merchant fleet vied in the Mediterranean with the Venetian Republic's armada. In 1604, a Croatian sailor took part in the first European expedition to North America. In 1827, Joseph Ressel invented the ship propeller in the Istrian town of Motovun.

Built between 1818 and 1899, the lighthouses of Croatia bear witness to an exciting maritime epic and adventurous human experience, shaped not only by sailors, but also by architects and construction workers. As vanishing coastal monuments, lighthouses are a cultural inheritance – a patrimony that we must guard for future generations. Each lighthouse has its unique history, form and wonder.

A dozen restored lighthouses in Croatia can already host tourists seeking serenity, adventure or new experiences. This renewal gives new life to these stationary sailors, at a time when the last lighthouses are nearly all automated in the Adriatic, like elsewhere in Europe.

The photographs in "Lighthouses of Croatia" are much more than an invitation to discover the 48 sentinels which mark and illuminate one of the most indented coastlines of our continent, along with a myriad of islands, scattered across the Adriatic, certainly the clearest sea in the Mediterranean. They are truly a tour down the Croatian littoral, through the impassioned eyes of 34 photographers who have so aptly captured the innumerable lights, tones and landscapes of Croatia's - and Europe's - Adriatic.

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