

Croatia in Six Weeks

This summer, I was one of seven American students who participated in the Kansas University sponsored summer language immersion experience hosted by Zagreb University at *Centar za Strane Jezike, Vodnikova* (Center for Foreign Languages). Students from the University of Wisconsin, UC Berkeley, University of Kansas, Columbia University, and the University of Maryland participated in this year's program. The director of the program, Stephen M. Dickey, who teaches the Croatian, Bosnian and Serbian languages and linguistics at Kansas University, also accompanied us.

Daily classes lasting three hours began in Zagreb on July 12. Our group was divided into two levels: a fellow Columbia University student from Teacher's College and I in one group, and the other five advanced students (who had taken at least two years of Croatian language study prior to the program) in the other. The first two weeks concentrated on the review of cases, vocabulary building, and the practical application of material focusing on our personal interests ranging from conflict-resolution to acting. Grammar was also a focus, including past and future tense review, interrogatives, verb conjugation, and perfect/imperfect verb pairings. From the beginning, only Croatian was spoken in class.

In addition to the academic schedule, we also participated in a variety of cultural excursions, including a walking tour of Zagreb (in Croatian), an excursion northwest of Zagreb including Varaždin and Trakošćan, where we saw the Veliki Tabor Castle and ate at the famous restaurant nearby, a trip to the City Museum of Zagreb and a lecture given by the new yet well-known Croatian author, Miro Gavran (*Kako smo lomili noge*).

Accommodations at the Zagreb

University student dorms were minimal, yet typical of student residences elsewhere. The dorms were about a thirty-minute walk from the classrooms at the Center for Foreign Languages, or a ten-minute tram ride depending on morning traffic. Three meal tickets per day at the university cafeteria were also included.



American students in Varaždin

A short weekend excursion to Split broke up the travel time from Zagreb to Dubrovnik. In Split, we took a tour of Diocletian's Palace and two surrounding towns, Solin (Solona) and Trogir. Also included was a quick stop at the Meštrović Museum.

Classes started July 26 in Dubrovnik at the University, about a two-minute walk from our accommodations with the nuns at *Učinički dom*, located a stone's throw

from *Stari Grad* (the Old City). Set back from the main street, the dorms were surprisingly quiet, and kept very clean by the nuns, who were especially friendly and accommodating. The nuns also provided breakfast every morning, and they arranged for us to eat at a self-service express cafeteria located in the heart of the

Old City. For evening meals, we were left to fend for ourselves.

Cultural excursions in and around Dubrovnik included a guided tour of *Stari Grad*, two day trips to the islands of Mljet and Lopud and a lecture by Professor Kate Bagoje on the history and culture of Dubrovnik. I also attended some optional Dubrovnik Summer Festival events, including a Classical Indian Odessi Dance, a performance by the Dubrovnik Symphony

Orchestra, and a folklore ensemble, *Pjesme i Plesovi Hrvatske* (*Songs and Dances of Croatia*).

Classes in Dubrovnik were divided into four levels instead of two, due to the fact that a host of other students from various countries and backgrounds merged into the program. I was placed in the third level (advanced) one level below the fourth group, which hosted heritage speakers. Among us was a French man working in the French Embassy in Belgrade, a Norwegian who worked with the Norwegian Ministry of Defense in Bosnia, a Swiss woman working in Intercultural Relations, two Austrian students, a German psychologist who counsels refugees in Sweden, and a retired British Consul who worked in cultural relations and education.

Our textbook, *Učimo Hrvatski 3*, was used by both teachers we had in the four-week portion of the program in Dubrovnik, although many additional worksheets and handouts were also used. The professors were linguists from Zagreb University with years of experience teaching people from different countries, as well as multi-lingual. My colleague from Columbia and I had three different professors in six weeks, which exposed us to a variety of different teaching styles and material.

The Kansas University/*Centar za Strane Jezike* summer language program was a challenging and rewarding study abroad experience. I would highly recommend this program to students currently attending accredited universities who are interested in improving their Croatian language skills and learning more about Croatian culture.

For more information, visit: <http://www.ku.edu/~slavic/zg-dbk.shtml>

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