Croatia, Republic of

Location
Croatia is on the crossroads of central Europe and the Mediterranean. It is both an Adriatic and a central European country. Croatia has a total area of 56,538 sq. km. and the coastal sea area is approximately 31,900 sq. km. It is close to some of the main and most densely populated European countries that are very industrialized.

Geography
Croatia’s inland region is bordered by Hungary in the north, Serbia in the east and Bosnia and Herzegovina in the south. All of these borders are separated by rivers: River Mur in the north, Danube in the east and the Sava River in the south. These rivers serve as important vessels for transportation for Croatia as well as other countries. The inlands are made up of small hills and valleys. Tourist’s resorts are abundant along the coast, while the inland is populated by medieval villages. The medieval influence is a result of Venice and Austria influence. Croatia’s geographic coordinates are 45° 10º N and 15° 30 ºE.

Croatia boasts 1185 islands along the Adriatic Coast and the largest island is Krk. Some other islands are Pag, Cres and Korcula. All of the islands add up for a total coastline of 4,058 km. The Adriatic coast is very dry in the summer and has only a few small streams that wind their way to the coast. The coast is divided into three regions: Istria, Kvarner and Dalmatia. Istria is the largest peninsula.

There are no mountains over 2000 m and most of Croatia is located at about 500m. These lowlands are mostly in the east and the northwest. The longest coastal rivers are the Mirna and Rasa rivers, which are located in Istria. The Karst streams are unique because they can be found running partly underground.
Climate
Croatia is divided into two main climates. The north has a continental climate while the rest of Croatia is predominantly Mediterranean. The Mediterranean climate includes the Adriatic Coast, central region and the mountainous areas. The mountain region can be cold and snowy during the winter, although the temperature rarely drops below freezing. The coast is fit for traveling all year round, but in the spring the coastal roads can be dangerous and are prone to be very slippery when it rains. Summer temperatures are normally around 38 °C.

History
In 1990, the collapse of the communist system in Eastern Europe brought elections and a nationalist government to Yugoslavia. Croatia wanted to be free of Yugoslavia and the constitution was adopted on December 22, 1990 and Croatia gained their independence on June 25, 1991 when it broke away from Yugoslavia. This however, was not a peaceful separation and the war did not end in Croatia until January 1992, when a ceasefire was negotiated by the United Nations.

Important Dates
Some of the important dates in Croatia are: January 1- New Year’s Day, January 6- Epiphany, May 1-International Workers Day, May 30-National Holiday, August 5- Assumption Day and December 25- Christmas. On these holidays the banks and shops are closed.

Population
In 2001, the population was 4,334,142 people and 2,465,000 were females. The culture is a mix of Middle Eastern and Mediterranean. There are many small communities of different descent: Muslim, Hungarian, Czechs, and Arabians. The largest parts of the population however, are Croats. Croatia has a relatively low population density compared to the surrounding countries.
Currency
The official legal currency is Kuna (HRK), which is broken down into smaller units called lipa.

One Kuna is equivalent to 100 lipa. In 2000, one US dollar was equal to nine Kuna. The name Kuna means “marten” which is a result of history when the marten’s fur was the trade unit.

Education
Croatia has a high quality education system and the primary schooling is free and is for eight years. The secondary education allows for some choices: a three-year technical course, apprenticeship, or university education. The university programs meet all the international standards and are excellent in sciences and medicine. There are four main universities, which results in stiff competition to be accepted. The universities are in Zagreb, Osijek, Ryeka and Split. In 1999, there were about 80,000 students enrolled in Croatian universities. Croatia has an excellent literacy rate of 97%.

Language
The official language of Croatia is Croatian and is almost identical to Serbian. Historically, the Croatian language was known as Serbo-Croatian. The alphabet that is common is Latin script.

Religion
In 1991, 76.6% of the population was Roman Catholic. Orthodox made up about 11%, atheist 3.9%, Muslim 1.1% and the remaining 7% are combinations Jewish and Protestant. Croatians are almost completely Roman Catholic and the other religions are a result of immigration.

Agriculture
Agriculture is one of the main economic activities in Croatia as is wood and timber. Some of the main agricultural products are wheat, corn, sugar beets, sunflowers, flax and fruits. There are about 18 fish processing factories which produce about 12,200 tons of fish a year. Mariculture is becoming more
and more popular for agriculture practices and includes fish and shellfish breeding. In 1997, tuna was added to the production line to supply the Japanese market. Ham and cheese are some of the main ingredients in the food industry. Smoked ham is a staple in Croatia. There are about 3.18 million hectares of agricultural land and 63.5% of this land is cultivated. The remainder of the agriculture land is pasture. About 80% of the agricultural land is privately owned.

**Government and Politics**

On December 22, 1990, a parliamentary democracy was established with a strong presidency. A 68-seat legislative branch was developed and 63 of these seats are elected by popular vote. The remaining five seats are appointed by the president. The House of Representatives is made of 127 seats which are filled by popular vote. Both branches have a term of four years. The president is elected by popular vote also and serves a five-year term. A prime minister is appointed by the president. The Supreme Court is the highest judicial authority and each judge serves a term of eight years.

**Trade**

The most important exports in Croatia are timber, petrochemicals and pharmaceuticals. All of Croatia’s exports total $4.3 billion dollars (1999). The chief imports are machinery, fuels and consumer goods and they total $7.8 billion dollars.

**Time**

Croatia follows the Central European time and daylight savings ends in March when the clocks are increased by one hour. In September, the clocks are set back one hour.

Mary Smith