



Sights in Korčula

Korčula's few sights cluster within a few yards of each other in the Old Town. I've listed them roughly in order from the Great Land Gate (the Old Town's main entry) to the tip of the Old Town peninsula. All museums are officially "closed" November through April, but most will usually open by request (ask the TI to call for you...or just try knocking on the door).

▲▲Moreška Dance

Lazy Korčula snaps to life when locals perform a medieval folk dance called the *Moreška* (moh-REHSH-kah). The plot helps Korčulans remember their hard-fought past: A bad king takes the good king's bride, the dancing forces of good and evil battle, and there's always a happy ending.

Cost and Hours: 100 kn, June-mid-Oct every Thu at 21:00, July-Aug also Mon at 21:00, in outdoor theater next to the Great Land Gate—to the left as you face the gate, or in a nearby congress center in bad weather; buy tickets from travel agency, at your hotel, or at the door.

▲Great Land Gate (Veliki Revelin)

A noble staircase leads up to the main entrance to the Old Town. Like all of the town's towers, it's adorned with the Venetian winged lion and the coats of arms of the doge of Venice (left) and the rector of Korčula (right; the offset coat of arms below was the rector who later renovated the gate). Climb the tower (find the stairs around the left side) to visit a small exhibit with costumes and photos from the *Moreška* dance, then head up to the top level to enjoy panoramic town views.



Cost and Hours: 20 kn, daily 9:00-15:00, until 19:00 or 21:00 in summer, generally closed Nov-May, English descriptions.

Nearby: On the left inside the gate is the 16th-century **Town Hall and Rector's Palace**. The seal of Korčula (over the center arch) symbolizes the town's importance as the southernmost bastion of the Venetian Republic: St. Mark standing below three defensive towers. The little church on the other side of the square is dedicated to **St. Michael** (Crkva Sv. Mihovila). Throughout Croatia, many towns have churches dedicated to St. Michael just inside the town gates, as he is believed to offer saintly protection from enemies. Notice that a passageway connects the church to the building across the street—home to the Brotherhood of St. Michael, one of Korčula's many religious fraternal organizations. (Another

ards) and walk past life-size dioramas of seven scenes from Marco Polo's adventures, including setting sail from Korčula on his 24-year eastern odyssey, crossing the deserts of Asia, coming to the court of Kublai Khan, falling in love with Princess Cocacine, fighting a naval battle—and being captured—off the coast of Korčula, and telling his tales in prison. While pretty low-tech (it feels a bit like a walk-through *Pirates of the Caribbean*, except that the figures don't move), it more than compensates for the otherwise near-total lack of information about this town's favorite son. Although it's a bit pricey, the museum is worthwhile if you're curious to learn more about Marco Polo, or simply as an excuse to get in out of the blazing sun or pouring rain. Ostensibly to foster intercultural understanding, the exhibit is free for Chinese citizens; I'm not sure whether this is a touching gesture, or simply evidence that few Chinese tourists make it to Korčula.

kneeling under Jesus? That's the Brotherhood, who commissioned this painting.

Cost and Hours: 15 kn, hours depend on demand—generally May-Oct Mon-Sat 10:00-14:00 & 17:00-18:30, may be open all day in peak season, closed Sun except in July-Aug, closed Nov-April—but try ringing the bell, on Kaprova ulica at the Old Town's southeast tip—look for *Ikone* sign.

▲Old Town Walls

For several centuries, Korčula held a crucial strategic position as one of the most important southern outposts of the Venetian Republic (the Republic of Dubrovnik started at the Pelješac Peninsula, just across the channel). The original town walls around Korčula date from at least the 13th century, but the fortifications were extended (and new towers built) over several centuries to defend against various foes of Venice—mostly Ottomans and pirates.

The most recent tower dates from the 16th century, when the Ottomans attacked Korčula. The rector and other VIPs fled to the mainland, but a brave priest remained on the island and came up with a plan. All of the women of Korčula dressed up as men, and then everybody in town peeked over the wall—making the Ottomans think they were up against a huge army. The priest prayed for help, and the strong northerly Bora wind blew. Not wanting to take their chances with the many defenders and the weather, the Ottomans sailed away, and Korčula was saved.

By the late 19th century, Korčula was an unimportant Habsburg beach town, and the walls had no strategic value. The town decided to quarry the top half of its old walls to build new homes (and to improve air circulation inside the city). Though today's walls are half as high as they used to be, the town has restored many of the towers, giving Korčula its fortified feel. Each one has a winged lion—a symbol of Venice—and the seal of the rector of Korčula when the tower was built.

• *Back out near the main gate of town, you'll find Korčula's final—and newest—sight.*

▲Marco Polo Museum

While not quite a serious "museum," this exhibit offers an engaging interpretation of the life story of the (supposedly) Korčula-born explorer. Considering that this attraction is basically a publicity stunt for the local chain of Marco Polo gift shops, it's far better than it could be.

Cost and Hours: 60 kn, discounted if you purchase something at one of the town's Marco Polo gift shops, daily mid-June-late Sept 9:00-24:00, until 21:00 in shoulder season, closed Nov-April, Plokata 33, mobile 098-970-5334.

Visiting the Museum: You'll borrow a long-winded but evocative audioguide (or, if you're impatient, just read the posted plac-

such organization, located farther down this street, hosts the Icon Museum, described later.)

• *Now begin walking up the...*

Street of the Korčulan Statute of 1214

(Ulica Korčulanskog Statuta 1214)

This street is Korčula's backbone, in more ways than one: While most medieval towns slowly evolved with twisty, mazelike lanes, Korčula was carefully planned to resemble a fish skeleton. The streets to the west (left) of this one are straight, to allow the refreshing northwesterly Maestral winds into town. To the east (right), they're curved (notice you can't see the sea) to keep out the bad-vibe southeasterly Jugo winds. As in Croatia's other seafaring towns, the various winds—and weather in general—are highly important to locals. For more on this phenomenon, see the sidebar on page 192.

The street's complicated name honors a 1214 statute—the oldest known written law in Central Europe—with regulations about everyday life and instructions on maintaining the city walls, protecting nature, keeping animals, building a house, and so on. As you head up the street, look up to notice some interesting decorations on the houses' upper floors—artifacts from an earlier time, when residents were proud and wealthy citizens of the Republic of Venice.

• *Speaking of Venice, if you continue up the street, you'll reach St. Mark's Square (Trg Sv. Marka). From here, you're a few steps from the next four sights.*

▲St. Mark's Cathedral (Katedrala Sv. Marka)

Korčula became a bishopric in the 14th century. In the 19th century—36 bishops later—the Habsburgs decided to centralize ecclesiastical power in their empire, and they removed Korčula's bishop. The town still has this beautiful "cathedral"—but no bishop. On the ornately decorated tympanum above the main door (outside), you'll see another Venetian statue of St. Mark (flanked by Adam and Eve). Inside, above the main altar, is an original Tintoretto painting. At the altar to the left, find the statue of St. Rok (better known by his Italian name, San Rocco) pointing to a wound in his leg. This French saint is very popular in Croatia; it's believed he helps cure disease. As you leave, notice the weapons on the wall near the door; these were used in pivotal battles near strategically situated Korčula.

Cost and Hours: Free except in Aug, when you'll pay 4 kn; open May-Oct daily 9:00-14:00 & 17:00-19:00, may be open all day long in peak season, closed during church services, generally



closed Nov–April but may be open Mon–Fri 9:00–12:00 after Easter. You can pay 20 kn to climb the bell tower.

▲Church Museum (Opatska Riznica)

This small museum has an eclectic and fascinating collection. Go on a scavenger hunt for the following items: a ceremonial necklace from Mother Teresa (who came from Macedonia, not far from here—she gave this necklace to a friend from Korčula), some 12th-century hymnals, a coin collection (including a 2,400-year-old Greek coin minted here in Korčula), some Croatian modern paintings, three amphora jugs, and two framed reliquaries with dozens of minuscule relics.

Cost and Hours: 25 kn, 25-kn guidebook covers both museum and cathedral; May–Oct Mon–Sat 9:00–14:00 & 17:00–19:00, sometimes open Sun morning; generally closed Nov–April but may be open Mon–Fri 9:00–12:00 after Easter.

▲Town Museum (Gradski Muzej)

Housed in an old mansion, this museum does a fine job of bringing together Korčula's various claims to fame.

Cost and Hours: 20 kn, good posted English information but free smartphone audiotour available for download on their Wi-Fi network; June–Sept Mon–Sat 10:00–21:00, closed Sun; Oct–May Mon–Fri 10:00–14:00, closed Sat–Sun; tel. 020/711-420. If it's locked, try knocking.

Visiting the Museum: It's arranged like a traditional Dalmatian home: shop on the ground floor, living quarters in the middle floors, kitchen on top. Notice that some of the walls near the entry have holes in them. Archaeologists are continually doing “digs” into these walls to learn how medieval houses here were built. On the ground floor is a lapidarium, featuring fragments of Korčula's stone past (see the first-century Roman amphora jugs).

Upstairs is a display on Korčula's long-standing shipbuilding industry, including models of two modern steel ships built here (the town still builds ship parts today). There's also a furnished living room and, in the attic, a kitchen. This was a smart place for the kitchen—if it caught fire, it was less likely to destroy the whole building. Notice the little WC in the corner. A network of pipes took kitchen and other waste through town and out to sea.

Marco Polo's House (Kuća Marka Pola)

Actually a more recent building on the site of what may or may not have been the property of the adventurer's family, “Marco Polo's House” has a stubby tower you can climb for an uninspiring view... and nothing else. There's little reason to pay admission here. In the future, the town hopes to turn the complex into a world-class museum about the explorer, with exhibits about Polo himself, Korčula in the 13th century, the big 1298 naval battle during which Polo was taken prisoner, and the Silk Road trading route. Progress has

Marco Polo

Korčula's favorite son is the great 13th-century explorer Marco Polo. Though Polo sailed under the auspices of the Venetian Republic, and technically was a Venetian (since the Republic controlled this region), Korčulans proudly claim him as their own. Marco Polo was the first Westerner to sail to China, bringing back amazing stories and exotic goods (like silk) that Europeans had never seen before. After his trip, Marco Polo fought in an important naval battle against the Genoese near Korčula. He was captured, taken to Genoa, and imprisoned. He told his story to a cellmate, who wrote it down, published it, and made the explorer a world-class and much-in-demand celebrity. To this day, kids in swimming pools around the world try to find him with their eyes closed.

been slow on an official museum, but in the meantime, a local entrepreneur has opened an engaging exhibition about the explorer's life—see “Marco Polo Museum,” later.

Cost and Hours: 20 kn, daily mid-June–Aug 9:00–21:00, Easter–mid-June and Sept–Oct 9:00–15:00, closed Nov–Easter, just north of cathedral on—where else?—ulica Depolo.

Nearby: Across the street from the house's entrance, you'll find a clever **Marco Polo gift shop** selling various items related to the explorer—herbs, brandies, honey, and so on. Each one comes with a little tag telling a legend about M.P.—for example, how the word “million” was based on his middle name, Emilio (because no existing word was superlative enough for his discoveries). This is one of five such shops, which you'll see all over town (daily mid-June–late Sept 9:00–24:00, until 21:00 in shoulder season, closed Nov–April, ulica Depolo 1A, mobile 091-189-8048).

▲Icon Museum (Zbirka Ikona)

Korčula is known for its many brotherhoods—centuries-old fraternal organizations that have sprung up around churches. The Brotherhood of All Saints has been meeting every Sunday after Mass since the 14th century, and they run a small but interesting museum of icons. Maja, who lives upstairs, speaks no English but will point out what's worth seeing. These golden religious images were brought back from Greece in the 17th century by Korčulans who fought the Ottomans on a Venetian warship.

Brotherhoods' meeting halls are often connected to their church by a second-story walkway. Use this one to step in to the Venetian-style **All Saints' Church** (Crkva Svih Svetih). Under the loft in the back of the church, notice the models of boats and tools—donated by Korčula's shipbuilders. Look closely at the painting to the right of the altar. See the guys in the white robes