

## Hiking tour of Croatia: hiking in Risnjak National Park and surroundings

The Risnjak National Park is a protected nature reserve of over 6,000 hectares in western Croatia. If you want to spend your vacation on the Adriatic coast (of the former Yugoslavia), chances are you will more or less drive past it; for example, on your way to the port city of Rijeka. Many tourists drive past it quickly, on their way to the beckoning azure sea. After all, from here it's only an hour's drive to the coast. A shame, but it has one big advantage: as a result, the Park and its surroundings are still beautiful places to walk in a tourist-free and peaceful landscape.



In the Park is the source of the Kupa (or Kolpa) River. This 295-kilometer-long water stream runs from Croatia to Slovenia and also partly forms the border between the two countries. After hiking in the Park, we continued our multi-day hike a few stages along this river.

### **The National Park**

Most of the Park, more than half, is covered with a mixed forest of beech and spruce. Because the area was inaccessible to humans for many years, logging rarely occurred here. And therefore there are substantial forest giants to admire. Fauna lovers can look for the bear, lynx, wolf and dozens of bird species (114 species have been counted) in the Park.

Under a 100-meter-high vertical rock, in the north of the Park, is a lake from which the Kupa River (which literally means "the cup") flows. You can visit this source of the river, a karst phenomenon, on foot from the nearby villages of Razloge or Hrvatsko.

## **Improvising in Lokve**

After driving through Germany, Austria, Slovenia and Croatia, we arrived in the village of Lokve, the starting point of our hike, in the evening. Looking for a hotel, which turned out not to be there. An elderly man walking his dog knew that a certain Kovačić family sometimes rented rooms, in the past. He would inquire. And came back saying, "No problem."



### **Hospitality**

And so you walk in with six men at strange Lokverdians and hear that Mrs. Kovačić is already busy getting the wood-fired boiler running. "Would we like a drink already?". The homemade plum gin tasted excellent. The rumbling upstairs meant that - we understood - the bedrooms were being emptied and supplied with extra beds. After a delicious and short shower (for six people!) and the effect of the illegally distilled drink, preparation for the first stage could begin: sleep.

### **Visitor Center**

After arranging reservations for our last night, again in Lokve, we began the trek to the Park's visitor center at Crni Lug. Here is also a guesthouse, an accommodation with five double rooms. And blueberry pancakes!

We chose to continue hiking north, more or less along the Kupa River. But from the guesthouse there are plenty of possibilities for hiking trails in the Park itself. For example, you can walk to the two peaks of the Park: the Veliki Risnjak (1,528 m.) and Snjeznik (1,506 m.). Between these two peaks you will walk through a floristic fairytale landscape. Or you can opt, as already mentioned, for a trek to the source of the Kupa. But then from the south. In doing so, do buy hiking maps at the visitor center first. They have the best ones there.

You can arrange the stage to the visitor center so that you pass by the reservoir at Homer. Around here there are several frog (butt) farms. We stuck to a blueberry pancake anyway.





### **The Kupa River**

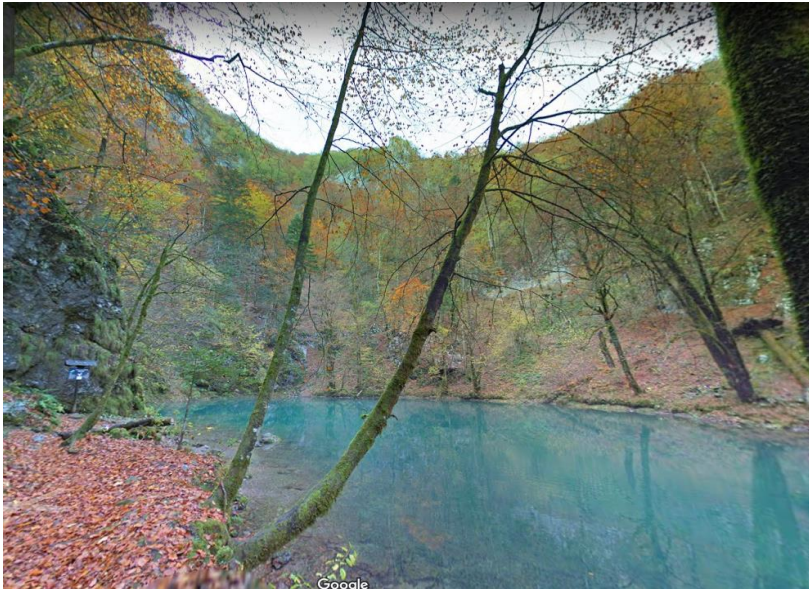
Before the river flows into the Sava - and then into the Danube - almost 300 km away, hikers can marvel at its fascinating landscapes. The crystal clear blue-green water runs through a bed of limestone, with several little beaches, rocks and waterfalls. This offers a special spectacle. Finding a good hiking trail still posed some problems, but then there are always the locals happy to help you along the way.



**Osilnica**



Soon after the Park, the Kupa becomes the border river with Slovenia. When we walked there, a plank across the river formed the Schengen border crossing. Accommodation can be found in Osilnica (Slovenia). From this village you have a beautiful view of the limestone white peaks of the Park.



**Source of the Kupa river**

### **Hiking along the border of Slovenia and Croatia**

The stage we walked and made up now heads southeast, mostly along the river. You can walk along either the Slovenian side or the Croatian side. In both cases you trek through the river valley. Rather biased, we can say that the Slovenian side is more romantic and lovely than the harsh and austere Croatian side. In both cases you end up at the bridge of Brod na Kupa (freely translated: ford in the river). The village has a (sober) castle and a hotel(-little).

### **Skrad**

From Brod na Kupa continue your hike more or less parallel to the Reijeka Kupica River. Call it "the spoon." Indeed: a tributary of the Kupa.



**Near Skrad**

On the way to the town of Skrad you walk mostly through a protected nature reserve. No spectacle, but with beautiful views, including the Kupa Valley, the mountains of the Park and also a lot of forest. A good map is definitely necessary for this stage.

Near Iševnica you walk towards Zakrajc Brodski and the mountain hut of Zeleni to, then discover the emerald green source of the river. You are then in the region (rightly praised by Skrad municipality) with waterfalls, fast-flowing streams and gorges. And if all that is not enough, here you also have passages that you can only take by ladder, rocks with mosses in beautiful colors, a few caves with stalactites and stalagmites ... and also a Devil's pass. By the way, this pass is just as devilish as its namesake in [Scotland's West Highland Way](#). Hiking trails of this caliber can also be found in Slovakia: for example, in [Slovak Paradise](#).

The trail eventually arrives at the Skrad train station, where lodging is plentiful.

### **Lokve again**

Arriving again at the Kovačić family's house, the water heater was already warm and the bottle of home-brewed plum gin was on the table with glasses. Mrs. Kovačić did not show herself until we entered. With hefty portions of roasted wild boar from the wild. She had no use for frogs' legs. "Far too little meat." The meal after an Asterix and Obelix adventure stood out meagerly, we think.

## **Živjeli! Uživajte!**

### **General route tips**

- Map recommendation: Hiking Guide Walks and treks in Croatia - Croatia | Cicerone (9781852847692)
- Mountain trails and national parks, including Velebit, Dinara and Plitvice, Travel Bookstore de Zwerver.
- Croatia is not known as a train country. On the last hiking day we were able to catch a train in Skrad halfway to Lokve. How trains are now we do not know exactly.
- The distance between Skrad and Lokve is 30 kilometers. So still the bus?
- The currency in Croatia is the kuna. 1 Croatian kuna equals 0.13 Euro.
- Change on the spot. A request to pay with euros is mostly unfavorable, for the buyer
- Croatia is a member of EU.
- If there are any controls on wild camping - which is not allowed - it is in the National Parks. And rightly so, it seems to us.
- The entrance fee to Risnjak National Park is 45 Kuna per person.





Risnjak NP



border near Osilnica, NP background