



RIJEKA - CROATIA



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THE CITY THAT FLOWS

Rijeka, Italian Fiume, city, is Croatia's principal port and industrial, commercial, and cultural center of western Croatia.



108,622 people live in Rijeka according to the data from 2021. Rijeka is located on the Kvarner (a gulf of the Adriatic Sea), but it's surrounded by mountains from three sides, and also lies at the mouth of the river Rječina. The name Rijeka is translated as "river".

Apart from Croatian and Italian, linguistically the city is home to its own unique dialect of the Venetian language, Fiuman, with an estimated 20,000 speakers among the autochthonous Italians, Croats, and other minorities. Historically Fiuman served as the main lingua franca among the many ethnicities inhabiting the multi-ethnic port city.



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The name, dating from the 13th century, refers to the river Rječina which empties into the Kvarner. The Rječina was one of the reasons why this area was settled before Roman times – both providing water for life and shelter for the ships of the Liburnians, an Illyrian tribe famous for their skills as sailors.



Over the centuries that followed, the city changed rulers many times over centuries: the Austrians, French, Italians, Hungarians, and Venetians, and each left its mark.

One of the most influential for the development of the city was the Austrian period. Much of the architecture of the city is reminiscent of Central Europe since it was built by the same people. Under the Hapsburgs, Rijeka was connected to Vienna and Budapest by road and rail and prospered. These transport links contributed massively to the development of Rijeka as an industrial city since the second half of the 18th century. Because of Rijeka's strategic position, the Austro-Hungarians founded one of the Empire's busiest ports in Rijeka which is today the third largest city in Croatia. Its economy largely depends on shipbuilding and maritime transport.



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All was well until Italian troops seized Rijeka in 1918 and named it Fiume. It was awarded independence under the 1920 Treaty of Rapallo but it only lasted until 1924. The Treaty of Rome split Rijeka, giving the area west of the river to Italy and the rest to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. After liberation by Tito's Partizans in 1942, the city became part of postwar Yugoslavia. There is still a sizeable Italian minority.



The coat of arms of Rijeka is a double-headed eagle standing on a rock with one foot, and on a vessel from which water springs with the other. The “INDEFICIENTER” motto is also written below, which means “inexhaustible”.

CULTURE - THE CITY OF PUNK & ROCK

Due to its tangled history, Rijeka is an open, tolerant, and diverse city. Although Rijeka has long identified itself through shipbuilding, tobacco, and paper industries, it's also one of the most culturally diverse cities in Croatia with strong alternative culture and was proclaimed the European Capital of Culture in 2020.



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Fun fact about Rijeka - it served as the birthplace of Croatian punk! Actually, during socialist Yugoslavia, when the country was founded on a one-party system that wasn't very eager to import punk and similar Western trends, and just a few months after Sex Pistols' release of "Anarchy in the UK", a band from Rijeka named Parafi held one of the first official punk concerts in communist-ruled Europe. The city went on to spawn many post-punk, electro-pop, rock, and indie bands.

ARCHITECTURAL BUILDINGS OF RIJEKA

Once a key port for the Austro-Hungarian empire, Rijeka's architectural heritage has been well preserved. Now the stately Austrian buildings are also housing galleries, cafes, and trendy restaurants with more to come. Aging port facilities and crumbling factories are slated to become centers for art and culture.



Ploech Palace



Governor's Palace



Croatian National Theatre
Ivan pl. Zajc



The Modello Palace



FOOD - FLAVOURS OF RIJEKA

The main city market is also an architectural treasure and one of the most popular locations in the city of Rijeka, where the locals do their shopping. You can buy fresh fruits and vegetables, meat and fish, locally produced oils and honey, and home-grown flowers. The market is split into indoor and outdoor areas. Inside you will find a huge selection of meat, fish, and seafood. Rijeka Fish Market is one of the most beautiful fish markets decorated with maritime flora and fauna themes. The famous Venice sculptor Urbano Bottasso designed the stone decorations and impressive building with fountains inside the fish market, tables for selling fish made of warm grey Istrian stone, with capitals and rich ornaments on the facade depicting fish and crabs.



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There's lots of food that is characteristic of Rijeka and the islands of the Kvarner region, such as:

- Excellent lamb and cheese from Cres and Pag
- Home-made pasta šurlice from the island of Krk, a type of pasta made by wrapping the dough around a knitting needle
- Wild asparagus - a brilliant treat picked in the wild, has a stronger and slightly bitter taste, traditionally put into frittatas, risottos, and soups
- Large, sweet cherries (trešnje) and excellent-quality chestnuts (maruni) from Lovran
- Kvarner scampi - large scampi which are quite expensive, but a real delight

Local truffles and an indigenous type of cattle called boškarin in Istria, a region very similar to Tuscany and Provence



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TRADITIONS - CARNIVAL

The locals say that Rijeka has five seasons - spring, summer, autumn, winter, and CARNIVAL! The Carnival (held each year before Lent) is more than just a day of celebration - it's a cheerful and colorful period that lasts from New Year to Ash Wednesday. It's a great mix of color, tradition, loud music, confetti, costumes, dancing, cheerful people, laughter, parties, parades, delicious food, and lots of fun. It is filled with ancient and beloved traditions that chase away evil spirits and prepares the city for a brighter future. It is the time of year when you can let loose and become whoever you wish to be.



Rijeka Carnival is one of the most acknowledged and largest carnivals in Europe and is said to be one of the top ten events in Europe. Sunday Times even listed Rijeka Carnival as one of the 24 most exotic events in the world! It was established in 1982 with only three groups attending ("Lako ćemo", "Pehinarski feštari" and "Halubajski zvončari") and since then it has become the biggest carnival in Croatia with between 100 and 140 groups and 150,000 visitors.



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Before the carnival, the mayor of Rijeka hands the symbolic key of the city over to Meštar Toni, who becomes “the mayor” of the city during the carnival season. The same day, a carnival queen is elected. The main carnival march is held on the last Sunday before Ash Wednesday throughout the day. Halubajski zvončari are a group of men covered in sheep skins who ring the bells tied around their waists to chase away evil spirits. Their impressive performance and masks represent a first-class tourist attraction, and together with other zvončari groups from the Kastav area, were included in the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2009.

After the carnival, but on the same evening, there is an event called the burning of the Pust. Pust is a puppet, usually called after some politician, and the puppet is blamed for all the bad things that happened in the year before. A spokesman reads all his sins in Rijeka harbor and the puppet is taken to the sea and burned there.



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CURIOUS FACTS ABOUT RIJEKA

Cradle of the torpedo

The world's first modern torpedo was developed right in Rijeka, by English engineer Robert Whitehead and Austro-Hungarian naval officer Giovanni Lupis, in the 1860s.



A playboy's state

After WW1, an Italian poet, playboy, and ultra-nationalist Gabriele D'Annunzio occupied the Governor's Palace with just 300 volunteers. D'Annunzio invaded Rijeka and simply claimed it for his own until 17 months later, the Italian navy bombarded the city to force D'Annunzio out.

Leaning Tower

Everyone knows of the leaning tower of Pisa, but there is a smaller, but similar one in Rijeka - the Church of the Assumption, built around the same time in the 1300s, may not be as spectacular but leans some 40cm from its base. You'll find it just in the center of the city.

Fairytale of New York

The longest-serving mayor of New York City, Fiorello La Guardia, considered one of the greatest to hold office, spent part of his formative years as an administrator in Rijeka. His parents had met and married in Trieste. In the early 1900s, as a young man, he worked in Budapest, Trieste, and Rijeka.



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The Legend of the Titanic

Everyone knows the tragic story of the Titanic and the famous ship Carpathia that rescued hundreds of victims that night. Carpathia sailed from Rijeka to New York and carried out its heroic duty and transported the freezing survivors on to New York, and then returned to Croatia. On board was 18-year-old waiter Josip Car from Crikvenica, who had helped in the rescue and had kept one of the lifejackets as a souvenir. Years later, he donated it to the City. Today it is on display at the Maritime & History Museum of the Croatian Littoral in the Governor's Palace, one of only five confirmed original lifejackets from the Titanic and the only one on permanent display

Professor Balthazar

The animated character of Professor Balthazar is one of the most widely recognized movie characters made in Croatia - it's loved by children from all around the world. But it's not that widely known that in the creation of this cult cartoon, Rijeka served as an inspiration for the set.



Šta da?

People from Rijeka are usually easily recognized across Croatia, mainly thanks to two catchphrases that locals use: Šta da? (meaning “You don’t say!”) and Bo! (meaning “Whatever”).



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RESOURCES

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<https://www.timeout.com/croatia/things-to-do/rijeka-overview>

<https://www.croatiatraveller.com/Kvarner/Rijeka.htm>

<https://www.timeout.com/croatia/travel/rijeka-today-a-cultural-guide> https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rijeka_Carnival

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