CROATIA (Hrvatska)

Present day Croatia occupies the largest stretch of coastline on the east shore of the Adriatic Sea, with over 1000 islands and a Mediterranean climate. Croatia traces its political roots back to 925 and the first Kingdom of the Croats ruled by Tomislav. Subsequent union with Hungary in light of impending Ottoman conquest lasted until World War I and the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. During World War II a puppet fascist government ruled Croatia, a legacy that continues to spark controversy today. For a majority of the 20th century, Croatia was a part of a greater union of socialist states known as Yugoslavia. The capital city of Zagreb is situated further inland in the more mountainous portion of the country. Contemporary Croatian independence came in 1991.

QUICK FACTS
Population: 4,313,707 (2016)
Area: 56,594 sq. km. (smaller than West Virginia)
Capital: Zagreb (790,097 pop.)
Languages: Croatian (official)

EDUCATION
Education in Croatia is divided into four years of elementary and four years of secondary, all of which are compulsory. Literacy rates are nearly universal, a part of the Socialist legacy of Yugoslavia. The educational system is primarily state run and free to the public. Low teacher wages make the supply of quality teaching problematic and oftentimes those who do teach are overworked. Secondary education, (after 8 years) is still voluntary, but there are attempts to make it compulsory.

RELIGION
Ethnic Croats primarily identify as Roman Catholic and, along with Poland, is the most religiously active Slavic country. As recently as 2009, a large majority of the country has replied yes to the question “Is religion an important part of your daily life?” The second most common denomination is Eastern Orthodox, making up about 4% of the population and mostly representing the Serbian minority. Freedom of religion and the separation of church and state are mandated by the Croatian constitution.

ETHNICITY
Croatia is the most ethnically homogenous of the former Yugoslav republics with 90% Croat population. This is in part due to the results of the Croatian War of Independence, which saw the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Serbs and Bosniaks as well as Croats. The result of the conflicts of the 1990s was an increased homogenization for all of the involved countries. Croatian ethnicity is largely maintained through the two pillars of religious heritage (Catholic) and language (Croatian).

FAMILY, RELATIONSHIPS & CUSTOMS
Croatia, like most nations of Eastern Europe and the Balkans, has a very low fertility rate. Its population is shrinking, although it has a fairly substantial immigrant population. Culturally, Croatia has a rich heritage of Roman, Venetian, Byzantine, and Ottoman legacies, manifest in historic cities like Dubrovnik and Split. International Necktie Day is celebrated in Croatia on October 17, as the modern necktie can be traced back to those worn by Croat soldiers in the 17th century. Croatia is home to some of the most competitive water polo in the world.
CONTEMPORARY CROATIA
After gaining independence in 1991, Croatia spent most of the 1990s under the authoritarian leadership of president Franjo Tudjman. Members of his government have been widely condemned for war crimes and corrupt practices. The first four years post-independence were consumed by the Croatian Independence War, which sparked significant amounts of forced migration and ultimately the general homogenization of the Croatian territory. Since 2000, Croatia has made significant efforts to integrate itself into the European Union and has ultimately been successful at gaining entry into the various organizations, the WTO and the NATO that signal “European” status. This has come with significant delay, due to outstanding border conflicts with slightly senior EU member, Slovenia, which were temporarily put to rest after a Slovenian referendum in 2010. Croatia’s ascension to membership in the EU was held up additionally, by the freedom of war criminal General Ante Gotovina, who was ultimately convicted in 2011 for the displacement of 90,000 Serbs and the murder of over 300. Croatia elected their first female president, Kolinda Grabar-Kiratovic, in January 2015.

Tourism is a growing industry in Croatia, with its historic coastal cities such as Dubrovnik and Split bringing in large numbers of foreign visitors every summer. The tourist industry was hit hard during the recent recession. However, it seems to be on the upswing again in the last two years. Nevertheless, Croatia’s largest export is refined petroleum (10%) and its primary export partner is Italy, across the Adriatic Sea.

NAMES
Croatian names usually include a given name followed by a family name. Traditionally, Croatian names are of Slavic origin. Names often times have Christian origins. Common names are Ivan, Marko, Josip, Marija, Ana, and Ivana.

FAMOUS CROATS
Famous Croatian Americans include actors John Malkovich and Judah Friedlander, major sports league coaches, Gregg Popovich and Bill Belichick. Josip Tito, famous dictator and leader of the Non-Aligned Movement during the Cold War was of Croat and Slovene descent. Vladimir Prelog was a Croat organic chemist who won the Nobel Prize in 1975.

CROATIAN WORDS
Hi ........................................... Bok
Bye ........................................... Zbogom
Good morning .................... Dobro jutro
Yes ........................................... Da
No ............................................. Ne
Please/You're welcome ........... Molim
Thank you ............................... Hvala
How are you? ......................... Kako si?
I do not understand .............. Ne razumijem
I understand ....................... Razumijem
What is your name? ............. Kak se zovete?
My name is ........................... Zovem se...
Where are you from? .......... Odakle si?

CROATS IN THE USA
As of 2012, over 400,000 people in the United States claim some form of Croatian heritage. Heritage is often identified through a synthesis of Slavic and Catholic backgrounds. The Croatian diaspora community in the United States can be found in many major cities, but most prominently in Pittsburgh, where there are nearly 50,000 residents of Croatian descent.

USEFUL LINKS
http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-17212572
http://www.24sata.hr/