Water taxi is the only way to get around Venice, albeit at a price.

Log

Day 1:	Grado – Pula	*59.8nm 8 hours*
Day 2:	Pula – Mali Losinj	*41nm 6 hours*
Day 3:	Mali Losinj – Opat	*72nm 9 hours*
Day 4:	Opat – Bozava	*41nm 6 hours*
Day 5:	Bozava – Rovinj	*82nm 12 hours*
Day 6:	Rovinj – Grado	*40nm 8 hours*

Making the Grado

The Gulf of Trieste isn't the most obvious starting point for a charter holiday, but as **Ross Farncombe** discovered, it proved to be the gateway to a mouthwatering cruising ground with many varied ports of call to whet the appetite.

Ross Farncombe and crew found that the Bavaria 47 they chartered was very much to their taste.

The last time I heard the phrase 'General Strike' was probably during an O-Level History lesson some considerable number of years ago. However, in terms of the impact that these words had on me personally, I can assure you that the UK's General Strike of 1926 paled into insignificance compared to the Italian General Strike of 2010.

The Kiriacoulis office in Grado had very kindly agreed to let us have our boat, a spanking new Bavaria 47, a day early, so we had booked to fly from Gatwick to Venice with BA early on the Friday morning. When the email pinged up on my screen late on the Thursday afternoon cancelling the flight the air was blue with my 'dissing'(I think it is junior speak for disrespecting), all BA cabin crew, their parentage, their children, children's children etc, etc. Then, having calmed sufficiently to be able to read the next line of the email, it was revealed that the cancellation was solely due to an Italian General Strike to take place just for the one day, the one Friday that we happened to be wanting to travel to Italy.

High blood pressure

Blood pressure restored to near normal levels after a phone call to BA rebooked the flight for the Saturday lunchtime. The only alternative was to fly to Trieste, which was going to take 11½ hours, complete with two hour long stopovers in Milan and Rome; no thank you.

The BA flight was problem free and completely stress free, compared to some of the less pleasurable flights we have had with some of the budget airlines, and at £142.50 return, it was money well spent. I had prearranged with the Grado office to have us collected at Venice by a minibus, which was dutifully waiting to whisk us off. Normally we would have enjoyed the prospect of a train and bus trip to the Grado base, but having already lost a day of our holiday and having had some previous experience of Italian weekend train services, we went for this more direct, though pricier option.

The Grado marina is based just out of the town adjacent to a huge campsite. It has excellent facilities and this proved to be greatly advantageous to us, because, just when we were wondering how to get into town to victual the boat, we were informed of there being a very reasonable supermarket in the middle of the campsite.

I found that these campsites are very 'together' and offer very good facilities all round, not least the restaurant where we ate on the Saturday evening, which proved itself to be an absolute revelation.

€25 at steak

Great pasta, great steaks and a very drinkable house red for around €25 a head. We probably shouldn't have discovered the very pleasant bar after dinner, which introduced us to the drink of the holiday, a very fine Mojito or three, or was it four, I can't remember for some strange reason.

We set off early on the Sunday morning; after all it was to be a momentous day. This was to be the day that England was going to thrash Germany at football once again. My crew were keen that we should be tucked up in front of a big screen in Pula for the big game. It was a lovely start to the holiday. The wind picked up along with the sunshine. We soon had the sails set on a beam reach, heading south for Pula.

Of course that perfect wind never seems to last for long, but it saw us on our way and we got to Pula just after lunch, in perfect time to avoid a crew mutiny. Straight back into our berth, guided by the marina staff, who, upon my touching *terra firma*, immediately demanded our papers. No problem as I went to retrieve our passports and the ship's papers that I had been shown back in the Grado office. I was now alone in a foreign country, deserted by my crew who had already taken their »

Plenty of lounging room on passage on the Bavaria 47.

Travel information
Ross's trip with Kiriacoulis was booked through Tenrag Charters who are the UK's premier yacht charter agency and have over 25 years of experience. Flights were booked with BA to Venice from Gatwick for about £140 return. Trieste is a lot closer to Grado and one can fly there from Heathrow with Lufthansa and from both Stanstead and Birmingham with Ryanair. Prices vary but all seem to be in the region of around £120 - £160 return including all taxes.

Transfer to Venice
Taxi arranged by Charter Office, approx €160. Alternatively, get from Marco Polo airport to Venice's Mestre station by either taxi or bus, then catch a train to Cervignano (about 70 mins). The remaining 16km to Grado can be done by bus or taxi (approx €40).

Contacts
Kiriacoulis Mediterranean:
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www.tenrag.com

WEATHER

The Croatian coast abounds with different types of winds that come and go with the seasons, usually in a fairly predictable manner. Major differences in weather and climate on the Croatian Adriatic coast are mainly caused by geographical differences between northern and southern parts of the coast – hence different types of winds, temperature, number of foggy days, amount of precipitation etc. Summer Mediterranean climate season generally starts in May. This means it starts getting warmer around the end of June and beginning of July with temperatures peaking in August.

FOOD.

The crew were well fed throughout the trip and all at a very reasonable price. With such a great availability of locally caught fresh fish at not unreasonable prices. Restaurants will generally take Euros if pushed and expect a good three course meal with wine to be no more than £30 per head unless you are really pushing the proverbial boat out.

The sun sets behind the town of Rovinj. Below: Plenty to chew over in the restaurant Sidro.

From top: Fun and games aboard with a tense game of backgammon. A tasty fish ripe for the pot.

places in front of the nearest big screen. Having been escorted to the marina office it was explained to me that we hadn't been through immigration. Ah, I was beginning to realise that this probably wasn't going to be an easy process. I then walked alone around the harbour to the Harbourmaster's office to be sent on to the police station who kindly showed me the immigration office. Unfortunately the immigration officer was not for bribing. I then had to walk back around the harbour, wrench the crew from their front row seats in the bar where the football was well under way and return to the boat, slip our mooring, motor 400m across the harbour to the immigration post. Once there, I took passports and ship's papers, as before, to the immigration officer who kindly stamped them, having not once even left his desk to look at the boat herself. I then returned to the Harbourmaster's office, where she thanked me kindly for our new papers and then advised me of a new 300 Kn 'tourist tax' that was being imposed on visiting yachts. She pointed out that she was merely advising me of its existence and that maybe I would like to go away and think about it and should I remember later in the week, then I might pay, but should I forget, ho hum.

I returned to the immigration jetty to collect both boat and crew to motor the 400m back to our original berth. They then returned to the big screen, but it was too late, even the seats at the back of the bar seemed to be too public for the humiliation that we were suffering at the feet of Germany.

Pula is a big, bustling town with over 3000 years of history centering on its Roman amphitheatre. Everywhere you look is a landmark of one description or another. From the Triumphal Arch of the Sergi, from the 1st century BC, to the Temple of Augustus.

We ventured in to the town that night in search of a good meal, prior to venturing into Croatia, and dined heartily that evening in the town square, where every restaurant seems to have at least one person on the door endeavouring to gain your custom.

A typical Venetian scene. Tranquil canals and towering historical buildings.

Above top: The beautiful view from across the harbour to the marina at Mali Losinj.
Above left: Succulent, juicy fish at the restaurant at Opat. These delicious morsels of fresh fish had to be savoured.
Left: Narrow streets, winding waterways. A flying visit to Venice proved to be the ideal way to round off the trip.

Land of a Thousand Islands

Monday morning and we victualled from a local supermarket after having got some Croatian money from one of the many cashpoints by the marina. Time to head further south from the end of the Istrian peninsula into the 'Land of a Thousand Islands'.

It was going to be the same for most of the week, bursts of cracking sailing interspersed with periods of motoring, but then it really is the sort of weather that I would expect in that part of the world, at that time of year. Fortunately our Bavaria 47 was just so easy to rig with her in-mast reefing that hauling sails in or out was never a chore.

We got down to Mali Losinj, a day run of 41nm, in the afternoon, having dropped anchor in a lovely bay just inside the main entrance to the harbour. My God, the water was fresh to say the least. I think we were all expecting it to be a little warmer than the chattering teeth betrayed. At least though it is good clear water with an abundance of fish to be seen swimming about. A refreshing sight in this day and age of oceans stripped bare.

Mali Losinj is a busy tourist town with a lovely harbour to walk around and take in the sights and restaurants. Again, we were asked for our papers, but this time, no problem, all was in order. It was a gorgeous evening and we sat out at a harbourside bar for a beer before dining at the Bistro Maritime, a moderately cheap and cheerful establishment where the food was fine and only a reasonable £20 a head.

The next morning we left to head further south, stopping though at the fuel point just a few hundred metres outside of the marina complex. The islands are a vast sailing area, but are not equipped with too many fuel stations, so it paid to top up now. We had somewhere to go. We were aiming to get »

THE BOAT

Ross chartered a shiny Bavaria 47 and was particularly taken with the upright fridge.
Specifications:
Length: 14.7m
Breadth: 4.45m
Draught: 2m
Berths: 8-10
Fridge: Upright

MARINAS

The state owned marinas are very well appointed with excellent facilities.

Expect to pay more between July and September with Summer rates being implemented. Our Bavaria 47 was around £40-50 per night in June.

CHARTS AND PILOTS
You can get the Croatian Hydrographic Office charts from **Imray**. **Charts** 690 and 691 are both small chart sets covering the entire coastline.
Admiralty Charts 1471, 1574 and 1426.
Adriatic Pilot (5th Edition) by T & D Thompson
Cost £32.50
Croatia, Slovenia and Montenegro 777 Harbours and Anchorages by Karl Bestrandig. English version
Cost £28.50

BOOK OFFER
15% off for *ST* readers who quote this article when ordering the *Adriatic Pilot* from **Imray** on **01480 462114**
www.imray.com

Main: What there is to see of the Bridge of Sighs.
From top: The Roman amphitheatre in Pula. Still lots of delicious fish in the Adriatic. Rovinj, ramshackle and rambling, but beautiful.

right to the southern end of the Kornati National Park, to a place called Opat.

Opat was the furthest north that we had gone some years ago on a previous visit to Croatia. It is a fabulous spot with an absolutely wonderful, if expensive, restaurant. This is forgivable though when one is aware of the fact that simply everything has to be brought in to this island, even the firewood, and then all of the waste has to be taken away for disposal, all by boat. It was very interesting this time to approach Opat from the west, as opposed to the south, because whereas before we had thought that we were in very isolated spot, this time a different approach revealed the existence of several more bays with yachts moored close to small buildings, suggesting the presence of more restaurants.

It is this barren rocky landscape that can really confuse the eye. It would appear that one is heading straight into a solid wall of rock, to the point of leaping below to check the plotter, then by nature of having moved no more than a couple of hundred metres suddenly some depth to the wall is revealed, suddenly the entrance to an inlet is exposed, an island separates from the mainland. I am not sure that it is an area that I would like to be navigating at night, without the use of a plotter. The visuals are just so confusing. It was worth the trip though.

Mrs F's fruitcake

A long day of some 72 miles sustained by the ubiquitous Mrs F's fruitcake we knew it would be worth it. The restaurant did not disappoint and although the most expensive meal of the trip at £55 per head it was still worth every penny with an absolutely gorgeous Carpaccio of fish to start followed with a beautifully oven cooked John Dory for the five of us to devour with some relish.

Having missed that first day, our week was already flying by and it was time to start heading north again. We took the inshore route this time meandering up between the many, many islands and found our way to a lovely little fishing harbour at Bozava. Berthing against the stone harbour wall had us meeting the harbourmaster, who wasn't remotely interested in our papers, but proceeded to chat to Kevin in French about where and what to eat that night. The facilities in Bozava amounted to an open air shower on the jetty, but it served its purpose well. The supermarket had everything we needed and was open until 8pm. Even without shore power, the fridge freezer on the Bavaria ran right through the night on batteries and always provided us with a copious supply of ice when required. What a joy that fridge was. No scooping out the soggy remnants of something indescribable from the bottom of the bottomless icebox at the end of the week, a real proper fridge. Heaven.

A feast of fish, a gutful of Grappa

The Thursday was going to be a long sector, because we had to do some miles to make up for our lost day. We slipped out of Bozava at day break to motor over an absolutely flat calm expanse of water. It was as beautiful as it was calm, but as the morning got under way, the temperature just rose and rose. By the time we had passed Pula, this time to starboard, and we got into the marina at Rovinj it must have been mid to high thirties, a steaming hot afternoon. Rovinj is a big tourist centre within easy walking distance of the marina. There must be at least 50 restaurants to choose from, but our eventual choice, the Sidro, as selected by Pete, well, it was his birthday and it was a fine choice. We were presented with yet another fantastic seafood meal. Wonderful fresh fish, good house wine and far too much Grappa as a digestif, compliments of our gracious host.

At least the long haul on Thursday had only left us with around 40nm for the return to Grado. A leisurely cruise up the very northern Croatian coastline, somewhat flatter than the rocks of the islands. We dropped anchor for a swim and lunch just shy of the border with Slovenia. I couldn't face the thought of any more paperwork. Then we motored back across the Bay of Trieste and into the marked channel for the marina, only to run aground on the first turn; 3.8m suddenly became 1.3m. "Don't worry about it," I was assured back in the office. "We are always dredging, but the sand just keeps coming back." I liked his laid back approach. It was too hot for anything else. Our final night in the campsite was pretty much a repeat of the first and just as good.

Pizza in the Piazza

We broke our journey home with a whistlestop tour of Venice. St Mark's Square, the Bridge of Sighs, a Bellini in Harry's Bar and pizza in front of the Rialto Bridge in under two hours.

Many are deterred by the prospect of hordes of tourists, but as soon as you are a couple of streets off the beaten track, there is plenty of room to wander around and sample the many back alley shops and tempting eateries.

We finished off our trip in grand style with a water taxi ride back to the airport. What a great way to finish a superb week. A full throttle blast across the lagoon in my quickest water taxi ride ever was utterly exhilarating.

I love Italy and I love Croatia; they both offer great cruising and the beauty of the trip was that the two countries offered quite different cruising grounds. This charter gave us the ideal opportunity to be able to enjoy both.