



Your staircase to Westeros

TV TOURISM

With the season coming to an end, relive GoT in Croatia

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For Metro Canada

At the War Photo exhibit in Dubrovnik, there's an image that stands out: a sweeping staircase, eerily deserted during shelling that destroyed more than 60 per cent of the medieval walled city after Croatia declared independence from Yugoslavia in 1991.

Two decades on, and this UNESCO heritage site has been restored to its former glory as the jewel of the Adriatic. And that staircase — now packed with tourists taking selfies — is known to millions of people around the world: It's where Cersei Lannister begins her "walk of shame" on Game of Thrones.

The TV series — based on the fantasy novels *A Song of Ice and Fire* and distributed by HBO — is filmed in multiple locations, from Iceland to Ireland, Morocco and Spain. In season one, the fictional fortified port city of King's Landing was filmed in Malta, but has now made its home in Dubrovnik (my GoT guide tells me it's because of significant tax breaks offered in Croatia).

But it's more than that. Sure, there's a lot of CGI in GoT — like dragons, White Walkers and such — but it wasn't hard



This staircase in Dubrovnik's Old Town was used as the starting point for Cersei Lannister's walk of shame on the season five finale of *Game of Thrones*. PHOTOS BY WAVN HIMMELSBACH

to transform Dubrovnik into the stronghold of the Lannister family, which uses the city's existing medieval fortifications, guard towers and narrow streets to double as King's Landing. They're the real deal.

Like this staircase, where Cersei begins her walk of shame in "Mother's Mercy." Just add an angry crowd, a High Sparrow and a naked Cersei — and voilà.

In fact, actress Lena Headey, who was pregnant at the time, used a body double for this scene, though she did multiple takes to act out the facial expressions — and, through the magic of post-production, her head appears on the body double.

Several key scenes were filmed in the Old Town: at the Pile and Ploče gate, on St. Dominika street and along the

city walls. Wander the streets and you might stumble upon Littlefinger's brothel, or walk in Daenerys' footsteps around Minčeta Tower where she disappears into the House of the Undying in Qarth.

Dubrovnik's Fort Lavrijenac was a stand-in for the Red Keep, and a number of scenes were filmed here, including the tournament thrown in honour of



Dubrovnik (above) is a stand-in for King's Landing, while Klis Fortress near Split (left) serves as the road to Meereen.



King Joffrey's name day and the spot where The Hound saves Sansa from being raped.

Not only do you get a stunning view of the Adriatic Sea from atop Fort Lavrijenac, you'll also notice a parking lot on a dramatic rocky outcropping. Sure, it's a cool spot for a parking lot, but it's also where Joffrey's wedding/death scene was shot.

The nearby Island of Lokrum was used for scenes in Qarth. And Arboretum Trsteno — a renaissance garden dating back to the 15th century — doubles as the gardens of King's Landing. They're relatively untouched by CGI; you almost expect Varys to walk around the corner.

Dubrovnik isn't the only Croatian location used in GoT, though. Split, further north on the Dalmatian coast, doubles as Meereen. Within Split's historic Diocletian's Palace, several scenes were filmed: from the dungeon where Tyrion unchains Daenerys' dragons to the spot where Ser Barristan is slain.

Head into the countryside to the ruins of Klis Fortress and you'll easily recognize the road to Meereen, where Daenerys freed the slaves and, later, crucified the masters. The fortress has a history just as interesting as a fictional story: ask your GoT guide about the "sky toilet."

Wandering through Croatia's historic sites, it may feel like you're on the set of GoT (there's even a replica of the iron throne on Lokrum). But while the night may be dark and full of terrors, Croatia is anything but.

TRAVEL NOTES BLUES, VIEWS AND A SHINING LIGHT

Elvis's Hawaii haunt gets a facelift

Work has finally begun on rebuilding the storied resort where Elvis Presley's character got married in the 1961 film *Blue Hawaii*, decades after a major hurricane damaged its buildings. The company redeveloping Coco Palms Resort began demolishing structures this week. It hopes to reopen the hotel in mid-2018. It initially opened in 1953 next to a historic coconut grove and an ancient Hawaiian fishpond. The grounds were once home to Kauai's last queen.



Elvis Presley in *Blue Hawaii*.

HANDOUT

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Penn Station's off-the-rails thriller

Catching a train at New York's crowded Penn Station is no thrill. But a development team has proposed a novel plan to overhaul the station: Build a 1,200-foot thrill ride on top of it and pay for renovations by charging \$35 a ticket. Plans were submitted after Democratic Gov. Andrew Cuomo put out a request in January for proposals to renovate the rail hub, which handles more than 650,000 passengers daily, he called "a blight on the greatest city in the world."



The planned Halo thrill ride.

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Lighting candles on 300th birthday

Boston Light, the first and oldest lighthouse station in the U.S., is marking 300 years of warning mariners as they navigate the tricky waters of Boston Harbor. A summer celebrating the milestone kicks off this weekend with the National Park Service's ranger-led tours resuming Friday for the season. "Not many things are 300 years old in this country," said Coast Guard Lt. Karen Love Kutkiewicz, who is helping to plan the anniversary celebrations. "It's a really big deal."



Boston Light lighthouse.

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