



Hidden gems of Croatia



QUIET HIKE THROUGH PLITVICE LAKES NATIONAL PARK

It was raining when our taxi made its way into the Plitvice Lakes National Park, Croatia, in spring. I had fallen asleep on the journey, as always, and remember waking up every now and then to a misty grey sky outside.

Many will say that the true beauty of Plitvice comes out in summer, when the forest turns green and the weather is sunny. I cannot argue with them, as I haven't seen Plitvice in its summer splendour, but I will say this — it was the mist from the rain that transformed the park into a fairy tale kingdom the day we arrived.

Now there are two ways to hike Plitvice — the day trip from Zagreb, or the slow overnight stay in the Park. We opted for the latter. After checking into the lovely Hotel Plitvice, and having a quick lunch, we set off on our hike. The hiking trail in Plitvice Lakes National Park is divided into two parts — the upper lakes and the lower lakes.

We started with the upper one. After buying our tickets, a free shuttle bus took us to the top from where we would begin our descent by foot. A narrow wooden walkway through a lake was the start.

Because it was late in the afternoon, many of the hikers were gone, and for most of the time, it felt as if we were the only ones there as we made our way through the lakes and forests, interrupted by numerous waterfalls, ducks, and the occasional lizard. Sometimes, we would meet some fellow hikers, with whom we would share the path for a short while, before parting ways, as each group took different routes through the park. The day's hike ended at a lake, where we waited for a boat to take us back.

The next day, we hiked the lower lakes. Here, we found the emerald blue waterfalls that took Instagram by storm. Since it was morning, we were joined by large groups of day trippers and every now and then, there would be traffic on the narrow walkways as people stopped to take pictures. This kind of traffic, I've heard, is much more common during peak tourist season in summer, which is why some, like us, visit during the spring, or fall, instead.

Our hiking trip ended the way all trips should end — with a feast, where we had grilled fish, fresh Croatian cheese with warm dinner rolls, and a delicious local side dish of spinach and potatoes.

THE MUSEUM OF BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS: CROATIA

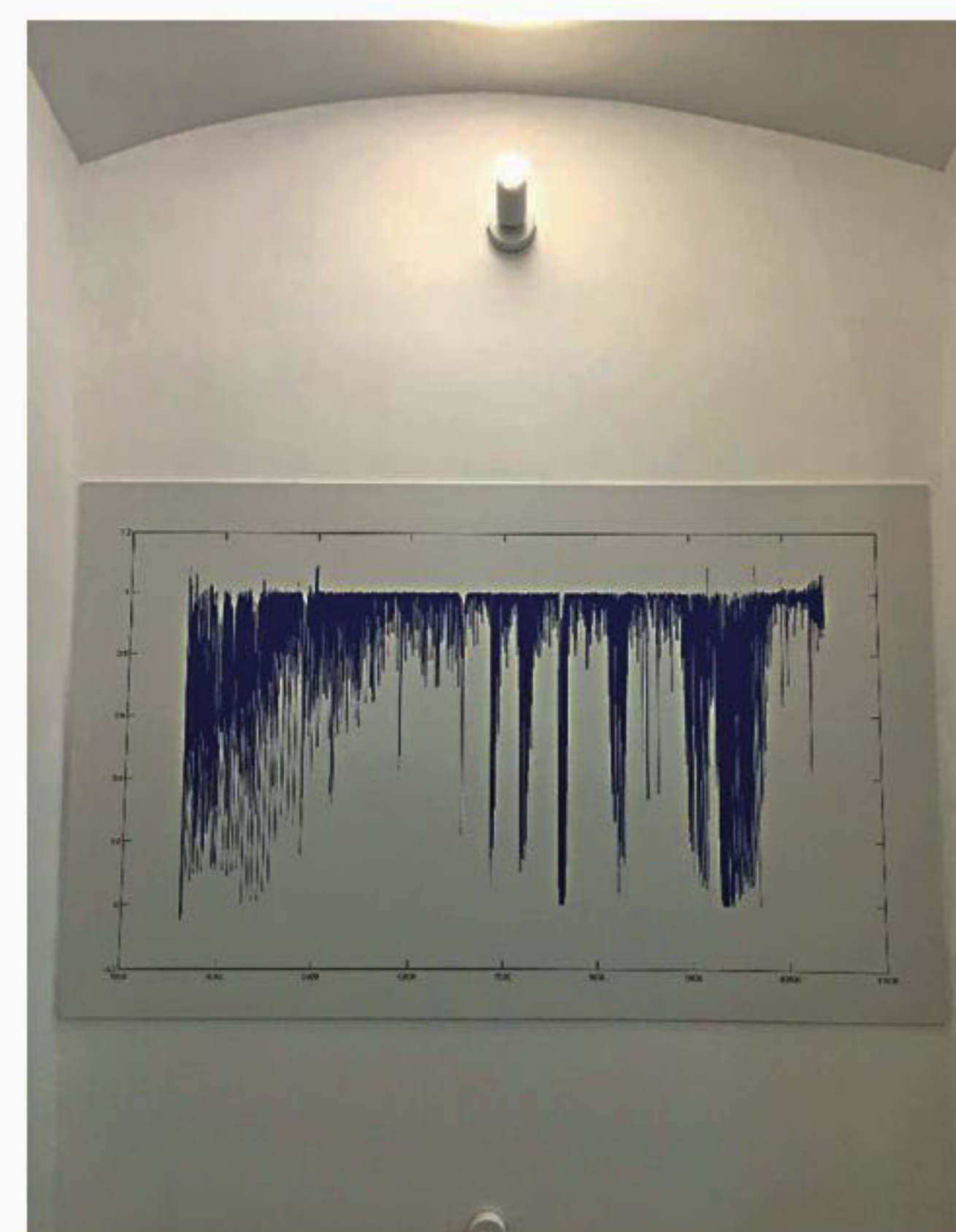
In the heart of Zagreb, the capital city of Croatia, sits quietly a small museum of broken relationships. Most museums focus on the grand and extraordinary; dinosaur bones, jewels belonging to kings and queens, artworks, etc. Therefore, one might wonder, how does one curate heartbreaks? The answer lies in The Museum of Broken Relationships — a bit of humour, some pettiness, a lot of sadness, and even hope.

I had spent a good part of the day wandering the streets of the old town, dodging souvenir shops, and buying strawberries at the Sunday market. After

museum had piqued my interest.

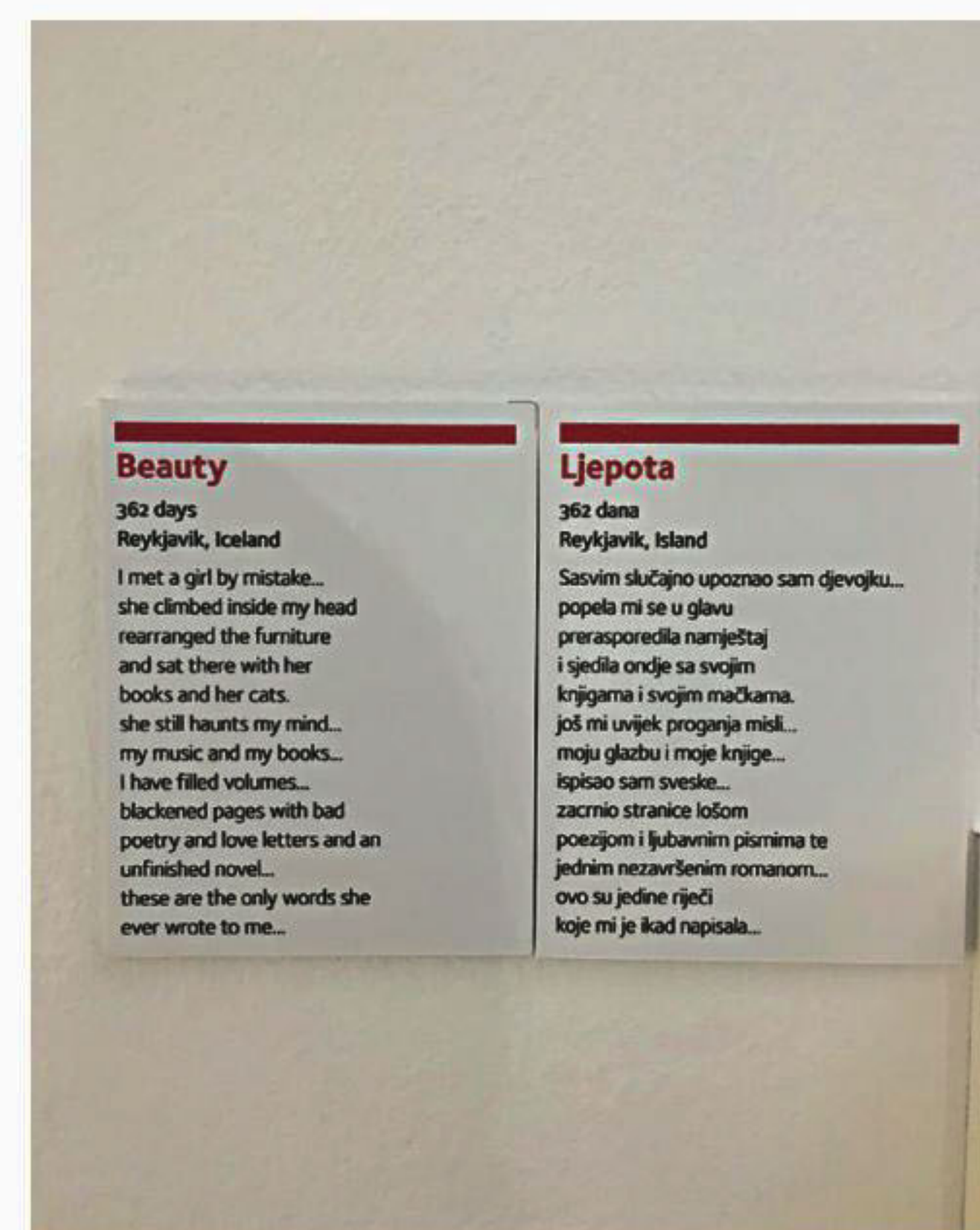
After overcoming a mountain of stairs on foot, I reached the museum. A ticket granted me entry to a curious collection — postcards, miniature furniture, clothing — all that remains of past relationships, collected from once lovers scattered all over the world.

Beside them were small notes from their owners explaining the stories behind them. Some were funny, like the woman who ended her love affair with pizza. Most, however, were sad, to the point that I had to excuse myself from the exhibition rooms a few times so that no one would see me getting teary eyed.



a late lunch of some excellent grilled Adriatic fish at the town square, I decided to escape the coming rain by visiting a museum.

The lady at the tourist centre handed me a giant paper map (I usually travel Internet free), with the directions to the museum clearly marked. There were other places of interest, but the strange name of the



I'm sure I wasn't the only visitor who had to do this. The museum café, with its laid back atmosphere, funny Wi-Fi password, and homemade cake and tea cheered me up. One enters the museum for a glimpse into the past of strangers, and leave remembering one's own.

Photo: Sheema Hossain