

5 Vital Truths After Seeing a Bridge Alight with 222 Flames

A night on the sea under millions of stars & 222 torches to celebrate Croatia's Victory and Homeland Thanksgiving Day



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Hi & Bok from (R-L) Landon, Grayson, & me! Thanks for being here with us!

Before I jump into the post, I wanted to say THANK YOU to all of you for being here: those reading, those commenting, & those sharing

meaningful insights—I love & appreciate every drop of it so much. Thank you so much for being here. I hope you keep having fun on this adventure with me.

Also, a special congratulations & kudos to Rich Kagan for reaching the Top 20 in Travel Writers! He was #19 when I heard the news, & as of writing this, he's at #17, & it's so well-deserved. He, his husband, & his daughter are expats now living in southern France, & when I say that his work is abundant with great advice & funny stories, I mean it. Congrats & Čestitam, Rich!

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Monday night, I found myself on an impromptu boat ride, leaving behind the tourists-filled riva for the quiet waters overlooking Otok Krk's bridge that connects it to the mainland, only to watch it get set on fire.

Okay, not quite. Yes, I *was* on a boat ride (thank you & hvala to Bratzo & Aquavision!), & yes, it was *very* impromptu (at least for hyper-chronic-planner-me), & we *did* sail all the way from Malinska's riva to the quiet bay on the opposite side of Krk Bridge.

Shortly before 7PM on Monday, my husband, three kiddos, and I boarded the Aquavision catamaran & immediately split up: Landon went below deck to the glass-bottom viewing deck (it's seriously so cool, & he loves to see the pools of teeny tiny fish that are common in the riva while the catamaran is idling), Dragan & Cadence went into the main deck room, where people were already celebrating & drinking (everyone was so nice & having such a great time; it was *awesome*); & I followed Grayson upstairs to the rooftop viewing deck where we sat down,

looked around the marina, & Grayson tried to guess which ice cream flavors people were ordering on the riva just off the docking area.

When we set sail, I simply reveled in the breeze, arm loose over the side of the boat, sea air running through my fingers, mist dusting my fingertips when we picked up speed. I'd been on a 30-minute ride before from Malinska's riva to the most popular beach & riva one city over at Njivice, but I just settled in, knowing that this would be a much longer ride, passing several marinas, docking areas for large cargo & cruise ships, & open, stunningly deep sea with the sunlight shocking the surface as it eased toward sunset.



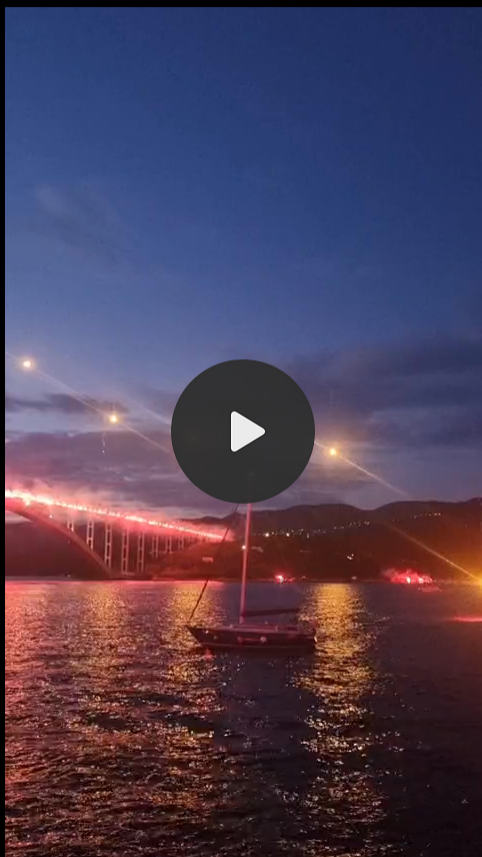
Taking a photo of my daughter, Cadence, taking a photo of the sunset, Photo by McKenzie Lynn Tozan

I posted about being rained in on August 5th last year (& it technically rained this year, too!), which is Croatia's "Victory and Homeland

Thanksgiving Day and the Day of Croatian Defenders” (also known as “The Final Storm”), meaning its independence after the former-Yugoslav War & memorializing of the fallen soldiers.

Every year, Malinska honors the 222 soldiers drafted from the Primorje-Gorski Kotar region & who lost their lives in battle. To put this number in perspective, Malinska’s local population in the present day is only about 600. This year, a special tribute was paid on the Krk Bridge that connects Otok Krk to the mainland. Traffic was paused, & 222 torches were lit across the 1.4 km (0.86 mile)-wide bridge, setting the night ablaze with red flame. On the sea across the bay, cruisers, charters, & tourism boats watched the spectacle, lighting flares of their own into the night sky & loudly singing every Thompson son known to man.

Here’s the video I took of the falling of celebratory flares & the 222 torches lit along the entire length of the Krk Bridge (Video by McKenzie Lynn Tozan):





Malinska's memorial for Malinska residents lost in the war,
located on the riva, with cat, Photo by McKenzie Lynn
Tozan

It was truly such a beautiful, liberating, & euphoric experience to settle in the middle of this bay, surrounded by fellow ships, music, & celebratory lights, residents singing praises into the night sky.

Not to be over-the-top, but I feel like something *clicked* this week & that I learned something about myself & my place in Croatia—and I thought I'd share it with you, because I think this could apply to wherever you live (though perhaps especially if you want to visit here!). So . . .

Here are 5 Vital Truths I Learned This Week (after Seeing the Krk Bridge Alight with 222 Flames)

1. Never Show Up Empty-Handed.

I think it's nice anywhere you might go to show up with something, like a baked good or a bouquet of flowers, but it's an expectation

to thank someone at their front door when you visit their home. Common gifts are cookies or cakes, coffee, or candles. My family has a special relationship with Aquavision, so we treat it more like a home than a business & never show up empty-handed. *That said*, I got a little nervous & wasn't sure what to expect when my husband stocked up on beer & whiskey before going to the boat, as I'd expected this to be a viewing (it was) rather than a party (which it also was!).



Aquavision at night after we've re-docked. Hvala, Bratzo! Photo by McKenzie Lynn Tozan

2. If You Need Quiet, Find the Quiet Wherever You Go—Don't Let It Keep You Inside.

I'm *very* introverted & value my quiet time & spaces, & sometimes that's hard to navigate in Europe! But I realized aboard Aquavision, up on the viewing deck, it was possible to bask in the sunlight, in the people around me singing & drinking, & the grounding calm I drew from the wake coming away from the boat, all at the same time. It's so easy for me to stay indoors & never let myself out; it's so easy for me to worry myself out of opportunities, phone calls, & events; but really, maybe what I need to do more of is looking for

the quiet corners in these spaces—find the balance, the grounding, in the pleasure of chaos & celebration.

3. **Understand the Weight of History on Your Town.**

This is a big one. History should be important in any country you live in or visit, but the weight & importance of history feels much heavier in Croatia than it did in the United States (keep in mind, I moved in 2020 mid-pandemic & understand the political climate is much different now than it was then . . . unfortunately, heart-breakingly). This weight inserts itself at every café, in every TV show, & *obviously*, through music. To & from the lighting on Krk Bridge, passengers were loudly, passionately, unapologetically, *cathartically* singing Thompson (Marko Perković Thompson) song after Thompson song, & the passion & importance is utterly enthralling—because I love Thompson’s music, I’ve translated most of his songs so I understand them, & I’ve studied the historical importance of his music. If I’d just listened & *vibed*, that catamaran trip would have been much different (not to mention, culturally unaware).



Our ride home, passing under the Krk Bridge, Photo by
McKenzie Lynn Tozan

4. Be Honest about What You Need, But Also Know What You Can Give.

This sea excursion & the lighting of the torches on Krk Bridge took place on Monday night, August 4th, with the actual holiday occurring the next day. Tuesday was quiet as it was a national holiday, & only restaurants were open. I went with my little family of five to meet one of my husband's friends (a family of three), & the eight of us hung out for the afternoon, grilling, talking, & swimming. The home they're staying in for part of the summer is beautifully secluded with plantlife surrounding them, & it made for the perfect environment for fun (& honest) conversation.

My husband's friend asked me the typical question that everyone asks me (Do you like Croatia? What do you think of Croatia? Which is better—the United States or Croatia; it's Croatia, right?), but he took it to a new place by asking me what I *need* or would *love to have* while being here—and honestly, I love it here, but I know I'll love it here so much more when I don't feel like I'm sticking out so much, especially with my poor Croatian skills. He nodded slowly & admitted that he only knew as much English as he did because his work required it & they provided resources to help him learn faster. I appreciated his admission so much, & it also felt really good to admit that the one thing holding me back is something I can control, which is empowering.

5. Learn How You Can Serve Your Community—& Your Environment.

From floor- & cage-cleaning at cat show halls, to serving in food kitchens, to organizing & supervising Christmas parties for toddler-to-teen orphans, to highway cleanup, I've enjoyed volunteering since I was about the age of eight. While learning the language & local dialect is still a hurdle for me, this is a key part of me that I don't want to lose. I've always loved to be involved in activities that can immediately change someone's life or the environment around them at least a little better.

I was looking around on the bay as people set off flares & couldn't help but think about the flare casings or the beer & soda cans or bottles that might have ended up in the sea that night, & I imagined

organizing something to ensure an efficient cleanup & easy disposal options. (I suspect most people to leave stuff on their respective boats & for the captain & crew to clean after the event, but I was thinking about this for the possible exceptions.)

6. (A Bonus) Never Be Afraid to Look at Something from a New Perspective

I grew up *painfully* afraid of bridges. & escalators. & heights in general. But since moving to Otok Krk, I've always loved this bridge. Getting to sail under it to really experience its height & to rest in the bay, just observing it was such a cool experience. To then see it under the night sky, bridge & highway lights flickering on, & the lighting of the torches across its length, was such a unique experience I feel honored to have had.

Last night, I was on a writers' call led by Emily Pereira & Suzanne Kingsbury, & while talking about her writing process, Emily described memoir writing as "shedding the history of living & being able to fly into a new landscape & find new stories." This struck me as a snapshot into my life or the life that I want to live—shedding the old life I lived, allowing myself to fly into a new space, a new country (literally . . . by plane), finding new stories, sharing some of them here, & allowing others to fuse into other areas of my writing. It was such an illuminating statement, & it connected so well with my experiences early this week, saying yes to myself to going out & saying yes to letting myself be present.

This was a long one, so thank you so much to those of you who stuck around to the end of it! I hope you're having an incredible week & that you'll do something that leaves you awe-inspired.



Krk Bridge, mainland side, Photo by McKenzie Lynn Tozan



Krk Bridge, Otok Krk side, Photo by McKenzie Lynn Tozan

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