



China's world-famous wall may be unmatched for length, but most of it only dates from the 15th century. Croatia's Walls of Ston, meanwhile, were begun in 1358 – and you can still walk most of the original construction.

the alternative to the Great Wall of China, China

WALLS OF STON

Croatia

Tying up the northeastern edge of Croatia's Pelješac peninsula like an unbreakable bow, the stunning Walls of Ston – known colloquially as "Europe's Great Wall" – are the second-longest defensive barrier in the world. The first-longest (yes, China's) may hog the limelight, but the Walls of Ston have just as many headline-grabbing hallmarks, not least the fact that a looped walk only takes three hours – compare that to countless months spent trekking the Great Wall of China – without breaking a sweat.

Stretching strategically from coast to coast, Croatia's defensive ramparts were built to protect the area's valuable salt pans from invaders and pillagers.



Naturally, the job was entrusted to some of Europe's finest Renaissance minds, including the famed Florentine architect Michelozzo. There were a total of 40 towers and five fortresses situated all along the 7-km (4.5-mile) span, and the wall was top-and-tailed by two fortified towns, Ston and Mali Ston, built to house the border guards and salt-pan workers.

Today, almost all of the original wall survives, along with around half the towers. Ston marks the starting point for a unique wall-top walk, where the fortification gracefully arcs up the hillside, beckoning you to clamber aboard and follow its path. The view expands with every step, unveiling a spectacular landscape of lush green forests overlooking the quaint orange roofs and shimmering salt pans of Ston. When you breach the brow of the hill, the chevron-shaped Kiruna Fortress

Walking along the cobbled defence wall past lush greenery towards one of the remaining towers



The rising sun hitting the long, zig-zagging Walls of Ston and the surrounding verdant hills

silently guards the northern section of wall. Venture down to Mali Ston to sample its fresh oysters, or stop to soak up the views of the ancient structure surrounding you. After all, it's not every day you find yourself standing on Europe's Great Wall.

Still going to the Great Wall of China?

The world's most famous fortification attracts around 10 million tourists each year, and most of them head for the best-preserved sections near Beijing. For a more serene stroll, venture a little further to the seaside Shanhai Pass – the eastern edge of the Ming dynasty Great Wall.

Getting There Buses run from the city of Dubrovnik to Ston three times a day and take 75 minutes.

www.ston.hr



Ancient fortified palaces built by uneasy monarchs crown both Sigiriya and Masada, but only the latter was the site of a valiant but doomed last stand against the Roman Empire.

the alternative to Sigiriya, Sri Lanka

MASADA

Israel

Sigiriya might have the looks, sitting atop a giant gneiss rock surrounded by lush forest, but Masada has the stories (its location above the Dead Sea isn't too shabby, either).

Fortified in the 1st or 2nd century BC, Masada was enlarged into a palace complex by Herod the Great, King of Judea. The Romans took Masada when Herod died, but in AD 66 it was captured by Jewish rebels during the First Revolt. Judea's last Jewish rebel stronghold, Masada was under Roman siege for over two years until the walls were breached in AD 73. As defeat loomed, the rebels chose mass suicide over submission to Rome. Discover traces of this remarkable event here today, including excavated remains of a synagogue and Roman military camps.

Still want to see Sigiriya?

It's not all about reaching the top: spend some time away from the crowds ogling the reservoirs and gardens at the base.

Getting There Ben-Gurion International Airport, near Tel Aviv, is about two hours by car from Masada. A bus also runs from Jerusalem.

www.parks.org.il