

# Precious pearls of the Adriatic coast

By Robin McKelvie

**F**IRST went to Croatia and Montenegro as a reporter covering the war there in the early 1990s.

Thankfully, visiting today is no longer a turbulent experience. Indeed, the sparkling Adriatic coastline of these neighbours is now one of Europe's hottest tourist destinations.

Their renaissance has been impressive and continues apace all along the coast.

On my visit, it was great to see the hotels and restaurants stepping up a gear and quieter areas getting more attention.

We kicked off in the northern Istria region, which was the focus of sunshine holiday tourism in the old Yugoslavia. Today, the largest resort, Porec, is still great for a package holiday, with its hotels underpinned by the grand legacies of Roman rule.

I prefer the neighbouring resort of Rovinj, which wears its romantic Venetian heritage on its sleeve, its old town peninsula boasting a hilltop church whose vaulting bell tower wouldn't look out of place in Venice.

Rovinj's old town is great to stroll around with lots of cafes and restaurants, and wee shops selling handmade crafts and paintings.

Since the 1990s, the fastest development on the Croatian coast has been further south in Dalmatia and that is, for me, the most dramatic and enjoyable region to visit.

Dalmatia's jewel is the UNESCO World Heritage listed oasis of Dubrovnik, famously eulogised by Lord Byron as The Pearl of the Adriatic.

Dubrovnik truly is thrillingly unique. The perfectly preserved baroque old core is protected by vaulting stone walls and rugged fortifications.

On one flank, the Adriatic shimmers below the ramparts, on the other the walls gaze up towards voluminous limestone cliffs.

It is a breathtaking scene, best appreciated from the restored cable car that sweeps tourists up Mount Srđ.

On this latest trip I decided not to just enjoy Dubrovnik by land, so I headed out with Dubrovnik Boats



▼ Gorgeous beaches, beautiful old buildings and superb restaurants make the area great for a family holiday.



## Croatia and Montenegro's

(dubrovnikboats.com) to view the city from the sea and to explore Dalmatia's islands.

It proved a wise choice as my expert skipper swept me off to some great swimming spots, a sprinkling of craggy sea caves and to a small family-run seafood restaurant right by the water's edge.

Pushing south across the border now we venture out of the EU and into Montenegro.

Compared to Croatia, it's a little rougher around the edges, but there is no doubting the beaches nor the scenery.

I can see why Lord Byron gushed: "At the moment of the creation of our planet, the most beautiful merging of land and sea occurred at the Montenegrin seaside".

The most beautiful merging of all occurs in the Bay of Kotor, the nearest the Mediterranean has to a fjord.

When I first discovered this oasis back in 2003 I was gobsmacked at its crystal clear waters, haunting 1000m high mountains and the little island in the middle topped with its own little church.

It was to that church, Our

## beauty inspired great romantic poet, Lord Byron

Lady of the Rocks, that I headed on arrival this time on a boat trip organised by my hotel, the Regent Porto Montenegro.

After snapping dozens of photos of this impossibly picturesque island, it was

back on the boat to explore Kotor, Montenegro's answer to Dubrovnik.

A tour of its old stone streets brought a flurry of churches before I whiled away a few hours in its pavement cafes.

After a week on the coast I decided for a change to make a foray inland.

I hooked up with Undiscovered Montenegro to explore the area around Lake Skadar, the largest lake in the Balkans, just a few miles inland.

My hosts were the affable and welcoming Ben and Emma Heywood.

They run week-long holidays from their lovely Villa Miela, which reclines in the hills overlooking the lake.

They specialise in "soft adventure" – slower-paced

activities – and took me off for a day kayaking and then another day on a walking safari.

Both of these active experiences opened up another world, one of epic mountains, glass-smooth lakes and rich history that lies just behind one of the world's most spectacular and relaxing coastlines.

Next time, I go back, I will not only be checking out the coast's shining stars but also the treasures that lie inland in Croatia and Montenegro. I recommend you do the same.

# 10

Places to dine, drink and relax



### HOTEL AMARIN

Relaxed family orientated resort in Rovinj with a trio of swimming pools.

### MONTE

One of only three Michelin star restaurants in the whole of Croatia, this Rovinj eatery showcases superb local produce and wine.

### EXCELSIOR

Dubrovnik's most famous hotel sports stunning views of the old town, a lovely stretch of sea and Sensus, a very creative restaurant.

### PROTO

This old-timer in the historic heart of Dubrovnik is one of the best places in Croatia to savour seafood.

### 360

This fine dining Dubrovnik restaurant was recently awarded a Michelin star.

### HILTON IMPERIAL

This grand old dame sports serious history and a great location just by Dubrovnik's Pile Gate.

### REGENT PORTO, MONTENEGRO

Montenegro's finest hotel sits right on the glitzy new marina. Savour a view from your bedroom of the Bay of Kotor.

### UNDISCOVERED MONTENEGRO

Villa Miela is an ideal base for a relaxed active holiday for those looking to break away from the coast.

### CATOVICA MLINI

This delightful little hideaway sits just back from the Bay of Kotor. The seafood is world class and they offer the best Montenegrin wines.

### JEZERO

Run by the biggest wine brand in Montenegro, Plantaze, this waterfront restaurant serves up freshwater fish and seafood, along with great views of Lake Skadar.

## Croatia's Dalmatian Coast

Departs 07 Oct (£799) 2018  
08 May, 15 May (£849) & 09 Jun (£869) 2019

- Flights from Glasgow to Split
- 7 nights in Šibenik, a pretty seaside town on the Dalmatian Coast
- A half day walking tour of Šibenik, including the unique Cathedral of St. Jacob
- A full day boat trip to the nearby islands of Zlarin and Krapanj
- A full day excursion to the historic coastal towns of Split and Trogir



## Discover Dubrovnik

Departs 16 Oct (£699) 2018  
27 Apr (£699), 07 May (£719) & 14 May (£799) 2019

- Flights from Edinburgh to Dubrovnik
- 7 nights in Dubrovnik
- A city tour of Dubrovnik's walled old town, with entrance to the Franciscan Monastery and City Cathedral included
- A full day boat trip to the Elaphite Islands
- A full day excursion to Montenegro, including the village of Perast, a boat trip to the island of Our Lady of the Rock and the UNESCO world heritage site of Kotor

For more information or to book

please call **0131 516 7439**

quoting "Sunday Post - Scotland"

[www.traveldepartment.co.uk](http://www.traveldepartment.co.uk)

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### FACT BOX

easyJet fly from Edinburgh to Dubrovnik with returns from £130.48. See [easyjet.com](http://easyjet.com)  
Holiday Autos can organise cross-border car hire, see their website at [holidayautos.com](http://holidayautos.com)