

Bay of Kotor



Coming from Herceg Novi, the Boka Kotorska (Bay of Kotor) starts simply enough, but as you progress through fold upon fold of the bay and the surrounding mountains get steeper and steeper, the beauty meter gets close to bursting.

It's often described as southern Europe's most spectacular fjord and even though the geological label is not strictly correct, the sentiment certainly is. The combination of rugged mountains plummeting to an opalescent sea, lush Mediterranean vegetation, historic towns and cute-as-a-button villages is pretty hard to beat. Lord Byron, the English Romantic poet, certainly thought so, describing it in 1872 as 'the most beautiful encounter between the land and the sea'.

It's not just the visual sense that's stimulated here. More fragrant than the ground floor of a department store, the Boka is subtly infused with the scent of wild herbs, perfumed flowers and aromatic trees. Local restaurants don't rest on their sublime surroundings but tantalise the taste buds with delicious seafood concoctions. Auditory pleasure can be as gentle as the lapping of the waves, or if your tastes stretch to ear-bleeding techno, that's catered for too.

The bay's compact size means that you can find yourself a base and put down roots for a week or two, spending your days exploring its hidden nooks. Active types can try their hand at kayaking, diving, mountain biking or hiking. Culture vultures can search out interesting art in the museums and numerous churches. History buffs can soak in the ambience of the remnants of the various empires that have passed through. Whatever your angle, there's no escaping the romance of this breathtaking bay.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Randomly roaming the atmospheric laneways of **Kotor's Old Town** (p84)
- Winding your way to dizzying views on the **Kotor-Lovćen back road** (p88)
- Marinating in the baroque beauty of historic **Perast** (p82)
- Cooling off in the shade with an icy beverage on Herceg Novi's **Belavista Sq** (p76)
- Hiking up to peaceful views and heartbreaking ruins in **Gornji Stoliv** (p89)
- Losing yourself within the olive groves of the remote reaches of the **Luštica Peninsula** (p93)
- Paddling your way to paradise on a **kayaking day tour** (p78)



History

While they overlap at times, this geographically compact area's history stands at a slight remove from the rest of Montenegro. Like most of the eastern Adriatic, the Boka was populated by the Illyrian tribes. Their famous Queen Teuta retreated to Risan, the Boka's oldest town, in the course of her war with the Romans in 228 BC. Teuta was the Balkan equivalent of Britain's Boudica (Boadicea) and popular tradition has it that she committed suicide by leaping to her death rather than falling into the hands of the conquerors.

The bay subsequently became part of the Roman province of Dalmatia and before long lavish Roman villas sprang up along Risan's waterfront. When the empire was split into western and eastern sections over 500 years later, the Boka found itself near the fault line, on the very edge of the Western Roman Empire. By the end of the 5th century, with the empire crumbling under barbarian incursions from the north, the Bay of Kotor briefly fell into the hands of the Ostrogoths and then the Slavic tribes.

The Slavic clans of the Boka lived in virtual city states, maintaining allegiances to both the west (Rome) and east (Byzantium). Kotor was eventually incorporated into the principality of Duklja (later Zeta), considered a forerunner of modern Montenegro. At the time of the momentous split between the western (Catholic) and eastern (Orthodox) churches in 1054, Duklja was politically tied to Rome, but by 1190 Raška (soon to be known as Serbia) had annexed Duklja (which was by now known as Zeta) and an Orthodox bishopric was established on the Island of Flowers. Kotor and Perast, however, continued to have a largely Catholic population and to exercise a degree of autonomy.

Attacks from the Ottoman Turks weakened Serbia, and in 1379 Bosnian King Tvrtko assailed the Bay of Kotor. Kotor resisted by aligning itself with Venice but the Bosnians took large parts of the bay and in 1382 founded the port town of Sveti Stefan (later called Novi, meaning 'new') and then Herceg Novi). By 1463 Bosnia, together with its territory in the Boka, had fallen to the Ottomans, while Venice retained control of Kotor.

Kotor survived a siege by the Ottomans in 1538 with the assistance of supplies from Montenegro (now established in the mountains behind it). Risan wasn't so lucky, falling

the following year. In 1570 the bubonic plague hit, killing upwards of 3500 people in Kotor, but the hardy citizens were still able to resist another Ottoman attack in 1572, once again with the help of Venice and Montenegro. The Ottomans tried again in 1657, this time with 10,000 men, but were forced to abandon the siege after only 22 days. The people of Kotor had a brief respite, but 10 years later they were hit by the worst earthquake in the town's history, destroying many buildings and killing scores of people throughout the Boka.

It took a *hajduk* (outlaw) chieftain, Bajo Pivljanin, to put an end to 145 years of Ottoman occupation of Risan. Pivljanin lost his life in 1685 while leading a Venetian contingent to assist Montenegro during an Ottoman assault on Cetinje. Shortly after, the Ottomans were completely pushed out of the Boka, with the control of the entire bay passing into the hands of the Venetians where it remained until Napoleon's dismantling of the republic in 1797. Austria stepped into the vacuum until they too were defeated by the French eight years later.

Unhappy with the prospect of falling under French rule, in 1813 the people of the Boka joined for the first time with Montenegro and their allies Russia. This only lasted a year until Russia agreed to hand the Boka back to the French. A few years later Montenegro, with the aid of Britain this time, succeeded in wresting the Boka off them but again Russia intervened, this time passing the control back to Austria.

Throughout the period of Venetian and Austrian rule the Boka was considered part of Dalmatia, as it was in Roman times. Before the advent of nationalism in the 19th century, the people of the bay were more likely to be described as 'Bokelj' than by terms such as Serb or Croat. Religion gradually became the defining factor of ethnicity, with Orthodox Christians identifying as Serbs and the Catholics looking towards Croatia. The Boka had always accommodated a mixed population – some churches even had dual Catholic and Orthodox altars – so the emerging pan-Slavic movement found fertile ground and the post-WWI formation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (later Yugoslavia) was generally welcomed by the locals.

It wasn't until after WWII that the Boka became part of the Republic of Montenegro, one of the six that constituted the Socialist