

Understand Montenegro

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Montenegro Today

When Montenegro chose to part ways from Serbia in 2006, it was a brave move – especially given its tiny population. But toughing it out is something these gutsy people have had plenty of experience with. Montenegro's national identity was built around resisting the Ottoman Empire for hundreds of years in a mountainous enclave much smaller than the nation's current borders. Determined to hold on to its regained independence, Montenegro has set a course towards the European Union.

Best on Film

Casino Royale (2006) James Bond plays poker in a casino in Montenegro; suspend your disbelief, as the Montenegro scenes were actually filmed in Italy and the Czech Republic.

The Battle of Neretva (1969) Featuring a stellar cast including Yul Brynner and Orson Welles, this movie garnered an Academy Award nomination. It's set and filmed across the border in Bosnia, but director Veljko Bulajić was born in (what is now) Montenegro.

Best in Print

The Son (Andrej Nikolaidis; 2011) Set in Ulcinj over the course of a single night, this novel won a European Union Prize for Literature.

Realm of the Black Mountain (Elizabeth Roberts; 2007) An interesting and detailed dissection of Montenegro's convoluted history.

Montenegro: A Novel (Starling Lawrence; 1997) An entertaining tale of politics, bloodshed and romance set at the dawn of the 20th century.

Black Lamb and Grey Falcon (Rebecca West; 1941) One of the classics of travel literature.

The Never-Changing Government

In the 2012 general election, the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) fell two seats short of ruling in their own right but quickly formed a coalition with ethnic Bosniak (South-Slav Muslim), Albanian and Croat parties to form a government (ethnicity still plays a large role in political affiliation here). What's extraordinary about this is that the DPS has won every single vote since multiparty elections were established in 1990, marking the end of communism in Yugoslavia.

It's even more extraordinary if you consider that the DPS was born out of Montenegro's Communist Party – so you could argue that it's been in power continuously since 1945 in one form or other. However, today's DPS is a long way from communist, having embarked on an enthusiastic and often controversial campaign of privatisations since the demise of Yugoslavia.

One factor in the DPS's success is the charismatic figure of returning Prime Minister Milo Đukanović. As a tall (198cm), handsome 26-year-old he was part of the 'anti-bureaucratic revolution' that took control of the Community Party in 1989. At the age of 29 he became the first prime minister of post-Communist Montenegro and apart from a few years of 'retirement' he has been prime minister or president ever since. However, Đukanović remains a controversial figure. While still president he was investigated by an Italian anti-mafia unit and charged for his alleged role in a billion dollar cigarette-smuggling operation; the charges were dropped in 2009.

Part of the DPS's continued popularity is the role it played in gaining Montenegro its independence. Several of the main opposition parties, especially the Serb-aligned parties, were strongly opposed to the break with Serbia, and although most have publicly dropped their anti-independence stance, many voters remain wary