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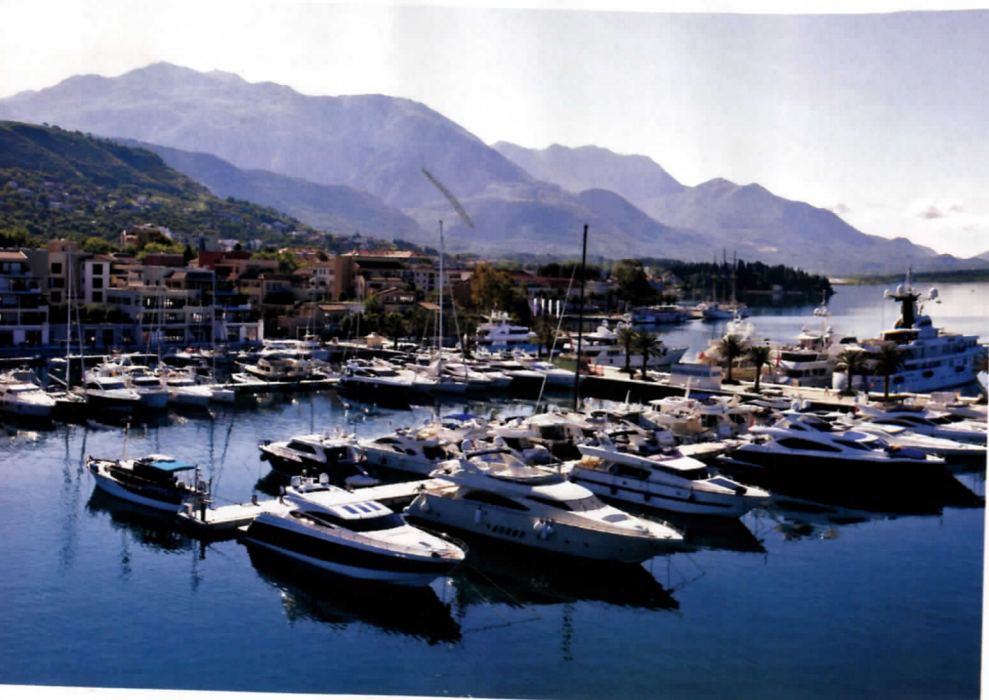
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Drop anchor

Montenegro has left its past behind to become a luxury bolthole for the yachting crowd, says Jenny Southan



Above: Porto Montenegro marina

Right: *Eight Possibilities* sculpture by Jaume Plensa at Lido Mar

Some call it the Monte Carlo of Montenegro. Set on the shores of Boka Bay, a deep inlet that meets with the Adriatic Sea, Porto Montenegro is establishing itself as a luxury destination for both tourists and part-time expats. It has its own superyacht marina, a glitzy public lido, a five-star hotel, waterfront residences, trendy bars, boutiques and contemporary art galleries. Times have certainly changed since the country was part of the socialist state of Yugoslavia, broken up in the early 1990s during the bloody Yugoslav Wars.

The 24-hectare Porto Montenegro site was bought by Canadian businessman Peter Munk in 2006 – the same year the country was annexed from neighbouring Serbia – with investors such as Nathaniel and Jacob Rothschild joining the fray soon after. It officially opened in 2009 with 85 berths – by summer 2014, it had more than 250, along with the Regent hotel, unveiled in August with 86 rooms and suites.

The palm-lined promenade provides close-ups of gleaming million-dollar vessels, each one shinier than the next – in fact, it's all so polished and idyllic it could be a movie set. The second stage of the project will double harbour capacity over the next six months. When complete, it will be able to accommodate 850 vessels, including 120 superyachts.

Before development of this small piece of Italianate coastline (it was part of the Republic of Venice in the Middle Ages), Tivat, as the surrounding town continues to be known, relied on its naval base and shipyard. It was, until recently, a major employer and there are signs of its presence still evident – hulking cranes, derelict piers and two decommissioned submarines, the largest of which is open to the public. "Some locals are against

[Porto Montenegro]," one young employee tells me. "My mother and father are still nostalgic about the arsenal, but people my age love it. This is better – there are more jobs."

One evening, I climb aboard the P821 submarine with Deni, a young woman from the Naval Heritage Collection museum opposite – her uncle once worked on the vessel before it was taken out of action ten years ago. Built in the late 1960s, the imposing black *Heroj* stretches 50 metres long and would once have been home to 28 men, who would spend up to 31 days at a time beneath the waves. Once inside, you realise how confined it is – there are only ▶





From left: Aman Sveti Stefan on its own private island; dinner at the Aman; Kotor old town



16 narrow bunks, one toilet and no showers. To make matters worse, temperatures would have remained at a constant 30°C, so the crew tended to work in underpants only, taking it in turns to rest, while rationing the two litres of water a day they each had.

The interiors of the sub remain exactly as they were – you can even see one of the frightening-looking orange emergency suits the men would have had to wear, and put your head into the torpedo tubes, which they would have been fired out of in an evacuation (the last man went down with the ship).

A couple of minutes' walk from the submarine is the stunning new Lido Mar (open June-September), with its adjoining Scaramanga nightclub and rooftop restaurant. Frequented by moneyed Russians and Western Europeans in Vilebrequin swim shorts and tiny bikinis, it has a 64-metre infinity pool flanked with day beds and cabanas (for members only but you can use it if you're staying at the Regent). Cocktail in hand, it's a poser's paradise.

At the other end of the promenade is the grand, five-storey Regent hotel. Its rooms, most of which have sea views, start from 40 sqm and have a nautical theme, with blue and white-striped upholstery, compass tables and sail-like drapery. Diners can choose to sit among olive trees in the Italian garden or in the main dining room, which offers a Mediterranean menu, while drinks can be taken in the gentleman's club-style Library bar. There is a gym and spa, as well as indoor and outdoor pools.

One of the most memorable experiences is being whisked by speedboat to the hotel's secret beach,

30 minutes away. Inaccessible by land, Dobrec offers a modest strip of shingle in its own secluded inlet. Staff from the Regent are on hand to provide loungers and towels, while there's a terrace decorated with the desiccated husks of big-toothed fish, and a rustic hut serving watermelon martinis, seafood platters and swordfish steaks. Listen to the conversations and you'll hear the laid-back exchanges of lawyers, bankers and plastic surgeons. For shade and solace, you can retreat beneath an umbrella made of sagging palm fronds.

On summer evenings, Porto Montenegro buzzes with people meandering along the seafront and up and down the high street. I stop in at the Mead Carney gallery, a pop-up branch of the one in London. Its "Shock of the New" exhibition displays pop art by the likes of Marc Quinn, Damien Hirst, Gerhard Richter and Russell Young – the last of whom has created screen prints coated in diamond dust that are selling for €25,000.

There are also a handful of posh boutiques, yacht charters and eateries – Al Posto Giusto for Italian, Mitsu for sushi and One for Cristal champagne brunches. I like the low-key Clubhouse bar, which is popular among sun-kissed deckhands.

With the first five residential buildings sold in spring 2013, a sixth (Ksenija) will be ready to move into by the summer, with flats priced from €350,000 to €2.2 million. But Porto Montenegro isn't the only place being transformed in the tiny Balkan state. Along the coast, in less picturesque Budva, developers are putting the finishing touches to

high-end residential complex Dukley Gardens (dukley.com). Along with 202 homes, two private beaches and a lounge bar, there will also be a boutique hotel, which is due to open in 2016. So far, about half of the apartments have been sold (two to Steven Seagal, who I am told is opening a martial arts school in the region), with prices ranging from €5,000 to €8,000 per sqm.

About 30km away, more property is being planned for Lustica Bay (lusticabay.com). There is nothing much to see at the moment, but over the coming years its 690 hectares of verdant hillsides will be dotted with hundreds of villas and townhouses. The blueprint also includes the country's first 18-hole championship golf course, designed by Gary Player, for 2017, plus a 176-slip marina, a conference centre, a spa and seven hotels.

In the meantime, Montenegro has some captivating historic sites to discover. Sail from Porto Montenegro to the Bay of Kotor and you'll find yourself in Europe's most southerly fjord – look out for the man-made Our Lady of the Rocks island, with a small church on it. The water here is silky smooth and deep enough to accommodate the hulking cruise ships that steam in to dock outside the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Kotor old town.

Part of the Venetian empire for about 400 years and an Austro-Hungarian naval base in the First World War, Kotor remains highly fortified, with stone walls surrounding its pretty streets and extending high up and around the craggy cliffs behind it. If you're feeling fit, you could hike to San Giovanni castle

at the top. The boutique, four-star Hippocampus (hotelhippocampus.com) is charming, and a drive along the coast will bring you to the hamlet of Perast.

About 40 minutes south of Porto Montenegro, not far from Budva, is the Aman Sveti Stefan, which is located on a private island of dark, jagged rocks, connected to the mainland by a causeway. Once a simple fishing village, its old stone cottages were first turned into a resort during the 1960s, when Hollywood's rich and famous would cavort at its casino (no longer in existence) and party the nights away among fig and pomegranate trees.

Closed in 2005, it was reopened in 2011 by luxury Asian brand Aman, turning it into an expensive hideaway with 50 chic, minimalist suites (plus eight in the nearby Villa Milocer). There's also an antipasti bar, a library, three pools, a taverna that serves stone-baked pizzas to eat in the village square, and a fine-dining restaurant with a terrace overlooking the sea. (Non-hotel guests must book.)

Leave the island, and you can follow a scenic coastal pathway through a pine forest to the Aman's renovated spa villa, which has a 24-metre indoor pool. If you hadn't considered holidaying in Montenegro before, perhaps you will now.

■ Dubrovnik airport, 70km from Porto Montenegro, is served by British Airways (from Gatwick) and Easyjet (from Gatwick and Stansted, April-September).

Montenegro Airlines flies from Gatwick to Tivat, 5km away, from the end of April to mid-October.

■ portomontenegro.com, regenthotels.com, amanresorts.com