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beauty
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THE
RETURN
OF THE
LADY

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ESCAPE

Edited by SASHA SLATER

WHERE THE
FASHION PEOPLE GO

From the wilds of Rajasthan to Montenegro's gilded coast,
visit our favourite escapes; plus, the best hotels for show season

COOL WATERS

ANNA MURPHY explores Montenegro,
celebrity playground and land of make-believe

The fantastical landscape of Montenegro is the stuff of a children's book. The question is, which one? It's as if the Alpine mountains of Johanna Spyri's *Heidi* have suddenly stumbled over – and into – the sapphire waters of Gerald Durrell's *My Family and Other Animals.* Montenegro's 200-mile Adriatic coastline, which lies just south of Dubrovnik, is one of the most beautiful imaginable. Which is why, come summertime, this very small country plays host to some very large boats indeed.

Superyacht playground number one is Porto Montenegro, a harbour complex tastefully conceived along the lines of Sardinia's Costa Smeralda, where you can shop 'til you drop (Dolce & Gabbana, Ralph Lauren and Dries Van Noten have their own stores), and eat extremely well: the five-star Regent Porto Montenegro offers the best high-end dining on the coast.

But the star attraction is the watery wonderland at large. The oligarchs head out to the pine-fringed rocky coves and pink, pebbly beaches nearby, and so should you. Particularly stunning is Boka Bay, a vast winding inlet surrounded by such dramatic peaks that it was for a long time thought to be a fjord. Necklacing the water is a series of stunning mediaeval towns that formed part of the Venetian empire from the 15th to 18th centuries. The most famous of them is Kotor, a Unesco World Heritage Site, which has city walls that

Montenegro's 200-mile Adriatic coastline is one of the most beautiful imaginable

unravel up the mountainside, and is a route that should only be walked by those who are as steely thighed as they are determined. But even the smaller towns – pretty Perast, for example – offer, alongside low-key rustic charm, the elaborate architectural flourishes of long-ago doges (here a pair of baroque busts on top of a doll-sized church, there a giant wedding cake of a palazzo).

After a few nights spent soaking up the luxurious atmosphere of the Regent, it was on to the illustrious Aman Sveti Stefan resort, a pinch-yourself kind of place that's just too idyllic to seem real. Once upon a time, this tiny island, attached to the mainland by its own causeway, was home to a village of fishermen. Only their traditional stone houses, now turned into 50 rooms, remain, together with their four – yes, four – Lilliputian churches, the village square and a labyrinth of flowery lanes that are, luckily, charming to get lost in.

Sveti Stefan was a legendary hotel in the 1960s, a haunt of Sophia Loren, Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton. Aman has brought it up to date with three swimming pools and a spa that's as spectacular as it is huge. Even here, though, the natural charms of the country are the scene-stealers: in this case, the picture-perfect horseshoe cove just beyond the spa's water gardens – Queen's Beach is said to be the country's loveliest. I plan to return to Montenegro to seek further corroboration…

A seven-night package to Montenegro for two people costs from £3,222, including three nights at Aman Sveti Stefan, two nights at Regent Porto Montenegro and two nights at Forze Mare, international flights and transfers, with Original Travel (020 3582 4990; www.original travel.co.uk).