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# TATLER

## TRAVEL

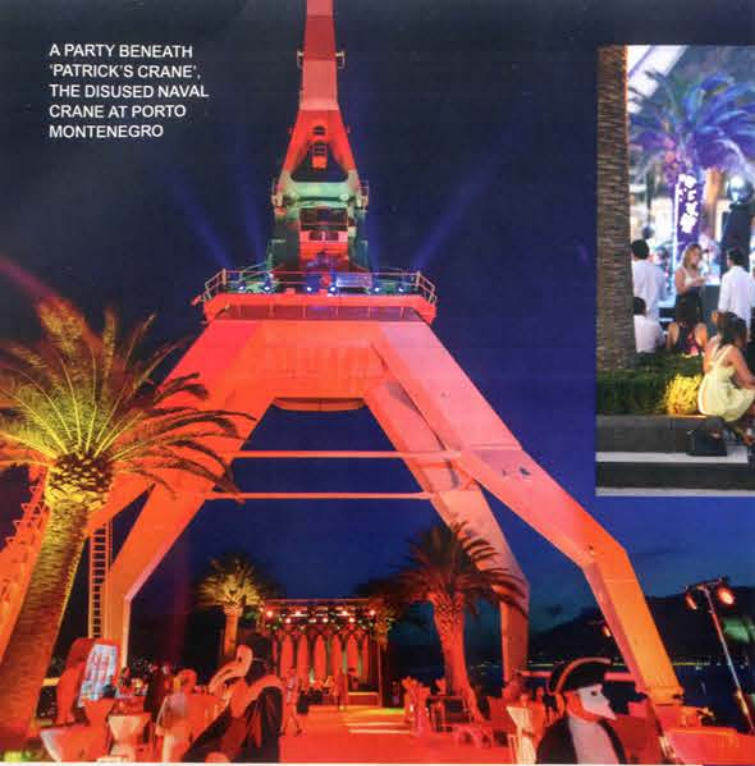
Edited by FRANCISCA KELLETT



## PARTY PARADISE

*Ten years ago, there were just a few lonely submarines bobbing around in Montenegro's breathtaking bay, but today the turquoise sea is heaving with superyachts, billionaires and funsters. Matthew Bell dives in*

A PARTY BENEATH 'PATRICK'S CRANE', THE DISUSED NAVAL CRANE AT PORTO MONTENEGRO



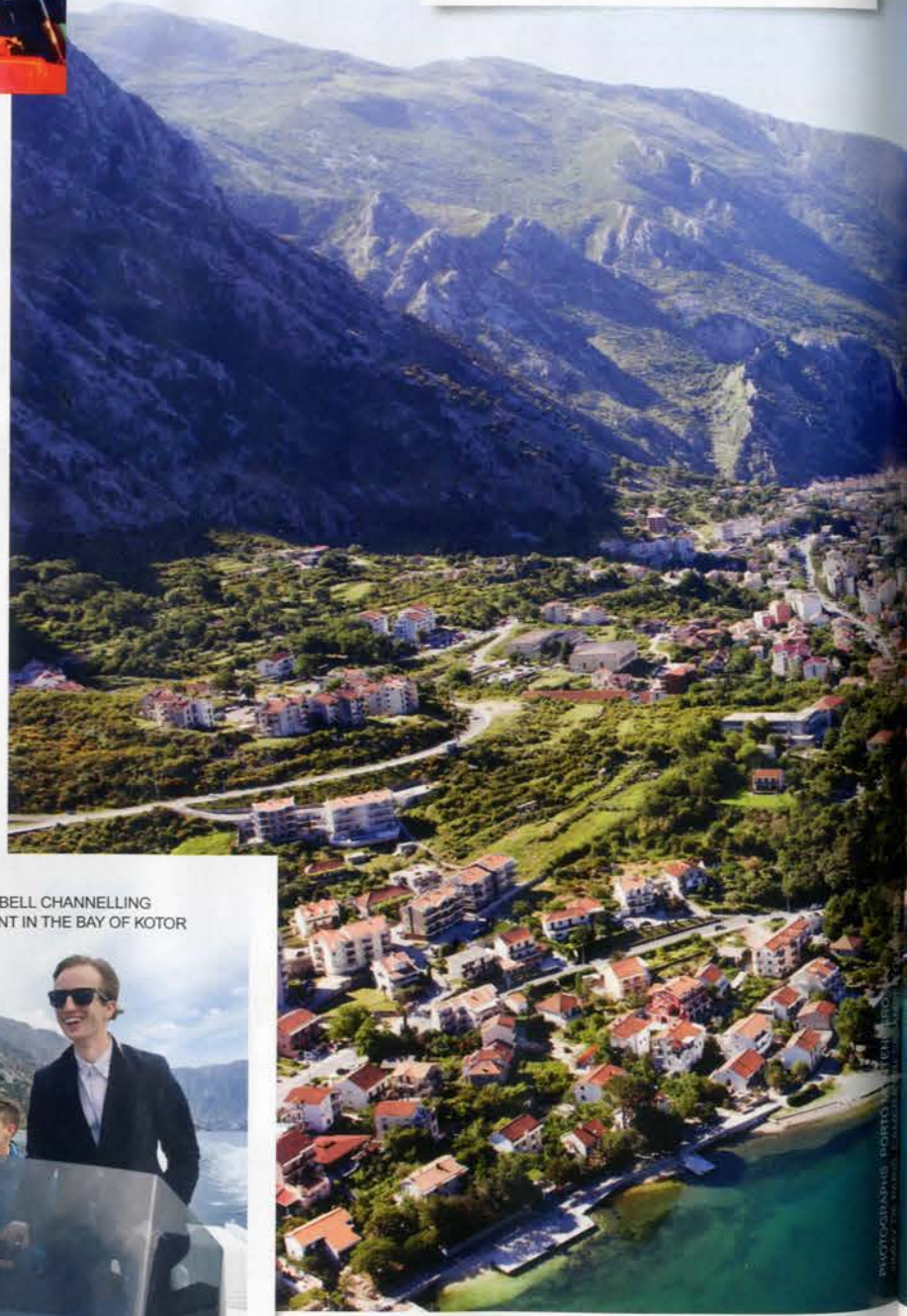
LEFT, PARTY TIME IN PORTO MONTENEGRO. RIGHT, THE QUEEN VISITING YUGOSLAVIA, 1972



ABOVE, PORTO MONTENEGRO. BELOW, THE BAY OF KOTOR



PETER MUNK, OLEG DERIPASKA, NAT ROTHSCHILD, KING LERUO MOLOTLEGI & HANNAH ROTHSCHILD AT NAT'S 40TH BIRTHDAY PARTY IN PORTO MONTENEGRO, 2011



MATTHEW BELL CHANNELLING CARY GRANT IN THE BAY OF KOTOR

The scene is a crag on the Adriatic coast where the tiny church of Our Lady of the Angels overlooks the water. Five suntanned partyheads stand on a rock, at the dawn of another perfect summer day. They have been out all night, flitting from restaurant to bar, bar to club, club to superyacht, ending up tumbling into a speedboat and zooming out into the bay. One by one, they dive 20 feet into the water. The last to jump, a 29-year-old Swiss-Briton nicknamed 'the Playboy of Porto', tugs off his boxers just in time for a vast cruise ship to nose into view, a few yards away. 'Welcome to Montenegrooooo!' he yells, hurling himself naked into the water. 'Thank you!' echoes the reply.

'That summer was sick,' recalls Ben Caruso, one of the gang, who is now speeding us through the bay on his £100,000 launch. Ben, 27, is the go-to man if you're looking for a boat around here. Last year he set up Max Yachting with his business partner Max Bulley, and his visible success – preppy clothes, expensive shades, perfect tan – tell you that Montenegro is booming. 'This place has got it all,' he sighs. 'Beautiful



'Welcome to Montenegrooooo!' the 'Playboy of Porto' yells, hurling himself naked into the water

women, big boats and cheap drinks.' The world according to Ben is full of optimism and fun – 'I have a tattoo on my back that says "yes" – which makes him a good fit for the new Montenegro. This teeny-tiny country, smaller than Yorkshire, is undergoing the most epic reinvention. Ten years ago, boat life on the Adriatic was all about Upper Dalmatia: Split, Dubrovnik, and Croatia's hundreds of rocky islands. Now the party has headed south, where the landscape is even more dramatic.

Lord Byron called it 'the most beautiful encounter between land and sea', and all around us vast mountains plunge straight down into the water. Until recently, though, nobody came here as a tourist. When Peter Munk, the Canadian billionaire and founder of the world's largest gold-mining company, was invited to take a helicopter out over Montenegro in 2004, he didn't even know where it was. 'I thought it was in Italy,' he later admitted. But he took the ride, invited by Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic to inspect its 180-mile coast. And he liked what he saw.

Because what he saw was an opportunity. Here was a country of extraordinary beauty with one of the biggest natural harbours in Europe. The Bay of Kotor, a mushroom-shaped inlet off the Adriatic, had for years been known in naval circles as a good place to park your submarine. It is sheltered, calm and dead convenient. Munk realised it would make the perfect base for the world's growing superyacht fraternity. So he snapped up a 60-acre naval facility at Tivat for £17m and set about creating Porto Montenegro.

Nat and Jacob Rothschild, whose villa on Corfu is just a short yacht-chug away, came aboard as co-investors, as did Bernard Arnault, chairman and CEO of the luxury-goods conglomerate LVMH. In 2007, they commissioned British architects Reardon Smith (full disclosure: partner Patrick Reardon is the father of *Tatler* editor Kate) to build a shiny new town along the water, featuring shops, restaurants, apartments and a spiffy marina with berths for up to 850 yachts. The jewel at its heart is a five-star hotel, the Regent, known as 'the biggest yacht in the marina'. The hotel had to be the last word in glamour, so they hired Tino Zervudachi to do the interiors and the artist Lindy Guinness to paint a picture for each room. Garrett Moore, London's ▷



THE 15TH-CENTURY CHURCH OF NOTRE DAME DU ROCHER IN THE BAY OF KOTOR

◁ impeccably connected, cool consultant from 5 Hertford Street, was brought in to create a Loulou's-style nightclub, Scaramanga.

So far, £260m has been poured into Porto Montenegro, and the project isn't even finished. Building on a whole new block of residences will begin this winter, and the 200-foot infinity-pool complex, where Nat Rothschild held his 40th-birthday party, is currently being completely rebuilt. Across the water, negotiations are under way to buy up a working shipyard so that yacht owners can leave their boats here over the winter for maintenance and repairs. What's extraordinary is how Munk's vision has prompted almost every other forward-looking millionaire to pile in too. They can't hose money into Montenegro fast enough. Sol Kerzner, the South African mega-financier, was bowled over by Montenegro when he visited, and decided to launch Europe's first One&Only property here. Although he's no longer involved, the hotel will open in 2017 on a promontory near the Croatian border, funded by the State Oil Company of the Azerbaijan Republic, which has pledged to invest £185m. And there's Lustica Bay, a project featuring seven hotels, 500 villas and 1,000 apartments, funded with a £724m investment from Egyptian mobile-phone firm Orascom. Already up and running is Sveti Stefan, an Aman resort occupying a former royal villa and an entire island village, and across the bay is Dukley Gardens, a Russian-oriented resort that has plans to triple in size by 2017. There are rumours that the Four Seasons group is also looking for a site.

Montenegro has a population of 620,000, which is less than half that of Hampshire. Its topography is so up-and-down that if you ironed it out, it would, it has been said, be the size of Russia. This is probably not true, but it does look a bit like Norway, all fjords and icy peaks. People say it's the new Monte Carlo, and one can imagine that the Côte d'Azur must have been a bit like this in the Fifties, before mass tourism took off; there's glamour and money, but also old-school charm – little local restaurants serving delicious fish and wine. 'It's actually even more elitist than the South of France,' says Garrett Moore.

We spend a day zipping about the bay on Ben's launch, and the sense of freedom is tremendous. He lets me take the wheel, and for a moment I'm Cary Grant in *To Catch a Thief*. The glamour is irresistible. 'It's a lifestyle you would pay for if you were super-rich,' says Ben as we sip chardonnay at Stari Mlini, a waterfront restaurant where they breed their own trout. 'People say it's the new Monaco but it's not really, because it still feels a bit Eastern European and a bit different, and that's how it should stay. People come to Montenegro because they want to have a good time. It's got that Ibiza/Mykonos no-consequences vibe, where anything can happen, and what you do will stay in Montenegro.'



LEFT, CLOCKWISE FROM NEAR RIGHT, YUGOSLAVIA'S PRESIDENT TITO, SOPHIA LOREN, LOREN'S HUSBAND CARLO PONTI & TITO'S WIFE JOVANKA, 1969. RIGHT, PADDLEBOARDING IN THE BAY OF KOTOR



RICHARD BURTON & ELIZABETH TAYLOR WITH PRESIDENT TITO AT SVETI STEFAN, 1971

**THE THEN CROWD**

- Sophia Loren
- Claudia Schiffer
- The Queen
- Princess Margaret
- The Princess Royal
- Elizabeth Taylor
- Yuri Gagarin
- Kirk Douglas
- Sidney Poitier
- Jeremy Irons
- Sylvester Stallone
- Michael Douglas & Catherine Zeta-Jones

**THE NOW CROWD**

- Nat Rothschild
- Jacob Rothschild
- Peter Munk
- Bernard Arnault
- The Marchioness of Dufferin and Ava, aka
- Lindy Guinness
- Garrett Moore
- Sol Kerzner
- Novak & Jelena Djokovic
- Oleg Deripaska
- Prince Khaled bin Sultan of Saudi Arabia
- Tom Daniel
- Oliver & Pia Corlette

One of the attractions for the yachting community is that there is no tax on fuel. So it's worth coming here just to fill up your boat. 'When they first opened the marina, they offered seriously competitive rates,' says Ben, 'so everyone who kept their yachts in Corfu, which is only 100 miles away, was, like, "Sweet!", and came over.' Novak Djokovic anchors his yacht here, and Prince Khaled bin Sultan of Saudi Arabia signed a lease to dock his Golden Fleet of three mega-yachts here for 30 years. For some, like Russian billionaire Oleg Deripaska, it's not enough to keep your boat here – he has built a villa on a hillside overlooking the water. Others buy a residence in the Regent itself and park the boat outside. This summer, the annual Superyacht Rendezvous meets in Montenegro – the first time it has been held outside Monaco.

If it all sounds a bit billionaire-centric, that's because it is. This is a tiny Balkan state that has had a playground for the ultra-high-net-worth crowd grafted onto it. Peter Munk says he doesn't want to encourage mass tourism, as he believes Montenegro doesn't have the infrastructure. He's right in a way: the roads are all single-carriageway,

and, because of the mountainous terrain, are not exactly fast. To get here at the moment is not particularly easy unless you have a private jet or a yacht. There are direct flights twice a week with Ryanair to Tivat, and British Airways flies daily to Dubrovnik, a 90-minute drive away. But none of this matters once you're out on a boat, diving into crisp blue water or stopping to explore a church or island fortress.

The evidence of Montenegro's complex past is all around. Because the Bay of Kotor, which is 12 miles long and naturally protected on all sides, is such a perfect harbour, it has been fought over quite a lot. The old town of Kotor huddles against a mountain enclosed by some impressively defensive walls. The architecture in the town of Perast is Venetian – the country was ruled by Venice from the early 15th century until 1797. Venetian rule then gave way to the Austro-Hungarians, who established Kotor as their naval base until it was ceded to the French in 1805. The British came next, then the Russians – and just about everyone has parked their subs here at some point. Today, there's a charming naval heritage museum, with an actual submarine that you can walk around.

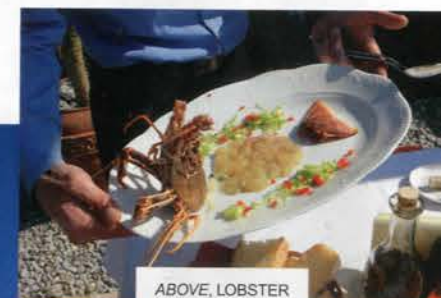
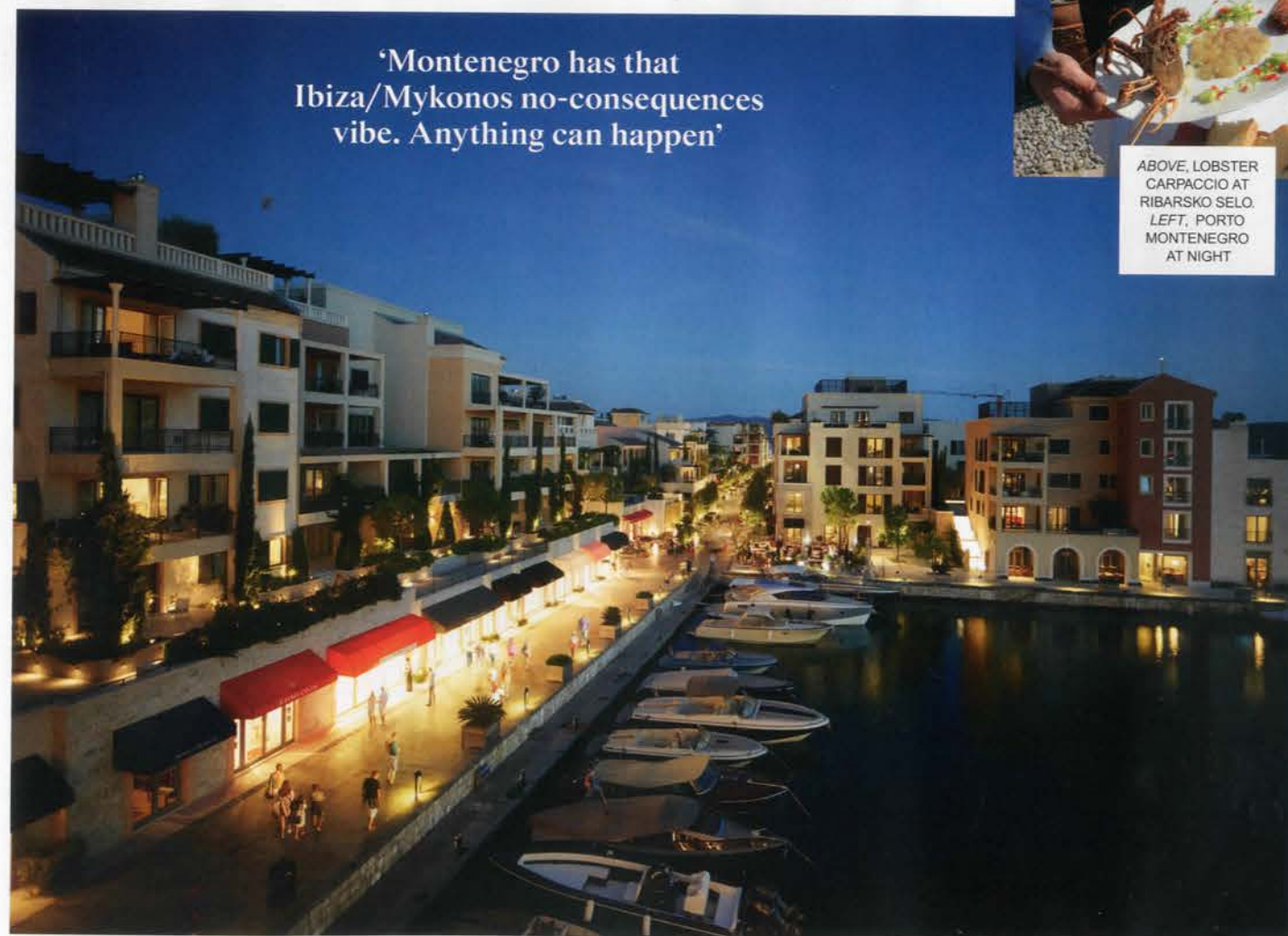
Cut deep into the hillside all around the bay are submarine pens, where subs used to lurk to avoid air attack, which you can zoom in and out of in your

speedboat. A party of dolphins pops up to say hello. We stop off on Mamula, a deserted island fortress – a more poetic version of Alcatraz – that was once a prison and is now dominated by chattering seagulls that swoop down to peck at your ears. It would make an awesome hotel or Soho House if anyone could persuade the government to let them have it. It's handily located a short hop from Ribarsko Selo, the best fish restaurant on the coast, where you can't leave before sampling the lobster carpaccio with grated truffle or the black tagliatelle with mussels and clams.

Three bottles of wine later, at 5pm, we roll back into the speedboat and crank up the stereo. It's the perfect cure for a hangover. The previous night we had ended up dancing on tables at Pantagana, a little cave of a restaurant that is so tiny there are as many musicians in the band as there are diners. Over grilled red octopus and giant slabs of steak, we heard how Oliver Corlette, an Australian Harvard graduate who runs Porto Montenegro, wants to make this a year-round destination. 'At the moment, it's very seasonal,' he said 'But there's no reason why the season can't grow.'

Corlette and his wife Pia live here and plan to send ▷

'Montenegro has that Ibiza/Mykonos no-consequences vibe. Anything can happen'

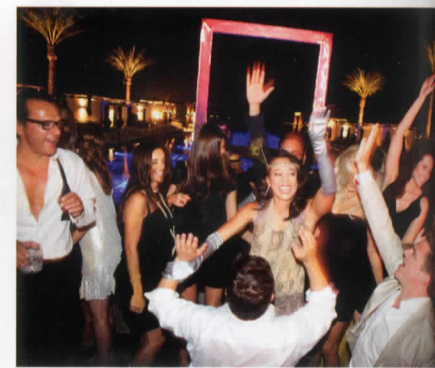


ABOVE, LOBSTER CARPACCIO AT RIBARSKO SELO. LEFT, PORTO MONTENEGRO AT NIGHT

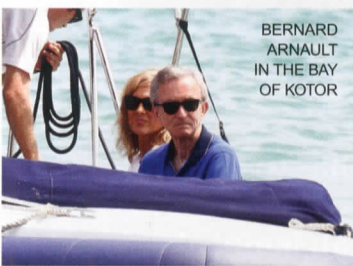
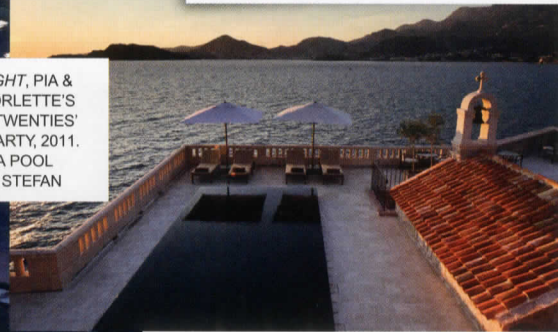
PHOTOGRAPHY: BETTMANN/GETTY IMAGES; PORTO MONTENEGRO



ABOVE, SVETI STEFAN. BELOW, PRINCESS MARGARET AT SVETI STEFAN, 1976



ABOVE RIGHT, PIA & OLIVER CORLETTE'S 'ROARING TWENTIES' SUMMER PARTY, 2011. RIGHT, A POOL AT SVETI STEFAN



BERNARD ARNAULT IN THE BAY OF KOTOR

## Novak Djokovic keeps his yacht here, and Prince Khaled bin Sultan of Saudi Arabia signed a lease to anchor his 'Golden Fleet' here for 30 years

◁ their daughter to the international school that will be opening shortly in Porto Montenegro. They got married in a super-lavish ceremony at Sveti Stefan, the first luxury resort to open here – and the story of how that happened tells you a bit about how fast things are changing here. 'When we were told we had a wedding here in three months, I thought that would be impossible,' says the hotel's assistant manager, Igor Barba. 'We had one loo, and no chairs or cutlery.' After years of slumber, the Montenegrin way of doing things was not quite ready for an international wedding. But it happened, and it was a huge success. Novak Djokovic chose Sveti Stefan for his wedding too.

It is, indeed, a magical place, covering two separate locations. One, on the mainland, is a two-storey villa built in the Thirties as a summer palace for King Alexander I of Yugoslavia. He never set foot there, having been assassinated before it was ready, but his widow, Queen Marie, used it until war broke out. Standing in the middle of its own private bay, it is the perfect holiday villa and, some say, has the best beach anywhere on the Adriatic. A 10-minute walk along the coast is the other half of the resort, a fortified island rock



### HIT THE HIGH SEAS

Montenegro is best viewed from the water, so do the sensible thing and charter the 56m *Panthalassa*, above. Designed by Foster + Partners, she sleeps 12 and has the perfect prow to swan-dive from. One-week charter, from £180,000, through Y.CO (y.co).

joined to the beach by a short causeway and topped by a village of 40-odd fishermen's cottages.

After the war, there were plans to turn Sveti Stefan into an artists' commune, but the then-communist government thought it would make more sense as a hotel. It did rather well, attracting many of the most glamorous yachters of the period: Sophia Loren, Elizabeth Taylor, Sidney Poitier and even the Queen and Princess Margaret. It was named one of the top 10 hotels in the world by *Paris Match* in 1968. Fast-forward to 2007, when it was bought by Aman Resorts, which has spent the past eight years carrying out a painstaking reconstruction. The main villa, previously comprising 26 bedrooms, now has just eight suites, each with its own vast bathroom and a typically Aman minimalist vibe. In the next bay, the most extraordinary spa has been built overlooking its own private beach and featuring indoor and outdoor pools that you can swim between.

The most exclusive place to stay in all of Montenegro is Sveti Stefan island, which has been cleverly converted into a series of 50 apartments. From the beach, it looks as though it should be open to the public, like St Michael's Mount, but actually it can only be visited by residents, which gives it an air of super-exclusivity. There are three churches on the island, several swimming pools (some shared, some private), two restaurants, a piazza and a library and, everywhere, magnificent views of the blue-green Adriatic. Rooms start at over £740 a night, not including breakfast, and the strategy is, in Basil Fawley terms, to keep the riff-raff out. It's almost impossible to book a room here in the peak summer season: one family rents the biggest suite, at £3,100 a night, for three weeks every summer, plus two more for the children and the nanny. It would be nice to pretend you don't have to be a billionaire to enjoy the best of Montenegro, but the truth is, it helps. □

**BOOK IT** Double at Aman Sveti Stefan, from £465 (amanresorts.com); double at Regent Porto Montenegro, from £145 (regenthotels.com). British Airways (ba.com) flies from Gatwick to Dubrovnik, from £62 one-way.