

Style

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Perfectly
SUITED

FEATURES



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Perfectly suited

If it's March, then swimsuit season is just around the corner, and it's time to start looking at this year's latest styles. While designers continue to get more and more creative with their one-piece suits, it is bikinis that are this year's stars on the fashion runway. By Terry McKee. Photography by Barbara Banks.



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Dock and dine

While most people travel by car when dining out, here on the Gulf Coast, traveling by boat is an equally popular option. Indeed, docking and dining is a great way to have a casual evening out that includes all the joys of being on the water and some terrific food, too. By Kristine Nickel. Photography by Mark Sickles.



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Native memories

There is no doubt that the Gulf Coast has changed dramatically over the years. Three native Floridians, Christine Johnson, Tom Tryon and I share our experiences growing up right here on the Gulf Coast. By Gayle Guynup. Photography by Mark Sickles.

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Crystal-blue persuasion

MONTENEGRO



Every switchback on the old Lovćen Road offers a more spectacular view of the crystal-clear, indigo waters, orange-roofed villages and precipitous rugged mountains of Kotor Bay.

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY
ROBERT JOHNSON AND
PAMELA BENNETT

I now believe in love at first sight.

I've been sharing stories about fascinating destinations with Style readers for a decade. But this time, I'm torn, not sure I want to let anyone in on the secret: This tiny, little-known treasure, clinging to the western coast of the Balkan

peninsula between Croatia and Albania, is one of the most majestic, captivating, unspoiled destinations on Earth.

Fly into Dubrovnik, Croatia and rent a car. Montenegro is only a 15-minute drive south. Be prepared for a bit of Cold War theater at the border crossing, where sluggish, disinterested guards labor at the passport control station. Eventually, they'll apathetically stamp your ticket to paradise, slowly raise the black-and-

white striped boom gate, and you'll be in.

Boka Kotorska (Kotor Bay)

Beautiful Boka Kotorska (67 miles of winding shoreline) consists of several smaller, elongated bays appearing to have been gouged right out of massive, Norwegian-like limestone massifs that encase its chilly, translucent waters. Thus, the bay is often mistakenly called Europe's southernmost fjord. In reality, it's a vast inlet formed



On the tiny island of Gospa od Skrpjela, just offshore in Perast, you'll find the baby blue-domed Church of Our Lady of the Rocks.

by the partial submergence of an antediluvian river valley.

Kotor Bay's "exceptional cultural and natural features, and highly characteristic and authentically preserved coastal villages creatively adapted to and integrated in the natural landscape," earn it a coveted spot on UNESCO's World Heritage List.

Get an early start out of Dubrovnik. Roll your windows down. Catch cool sea breezes and spend the day driving along the narrow sea-hugging road that circles the bay, stopping for short

sojourns in the bay's most beguiling little towns.

Herceg Novi

At the foot of craggy Mount Orjen, near the entrance to Kotor Bay, we motor into Herceg Novi. Only 630 years old, this "baby" of the bay's seaside towns has been home to, at one time or another, Bosnians, Ottoman Turks, Venetians and finally Montenegrins. The town's diverse cultural and architectural elements warrant at least a few hours of exploration.

From the main two-lane "highway" we hustle

down pedestrian-only Njegoseva Street to Herceg Novi's Stari Grad (Old Town). The marble pavement in Trg (square) Nikole Durkovića shimmers in the morning sun. The square blooms with the canary-colored umbrellas of surrounding cafes. Locals and tourists sip strong coffee and converse beneath the ancient crenulated clock tower (1667) that once served as the town's main gate.

It's fun strolling along cobbled streets and stairways, checking out rustic old churches and 19th-century stone buildings housing edgy art



Your first gorgeous view of the Kotor Bay, from the verdant hills of Herceg Novi.



Massive medieval walls and bastions protect Kotor's UNESCO-honored Old Town.

galleries, boutiques and souvenir shops.

Making our way back up the steep incline to the car park, we're drawn to hulking Kanli Kula and Spanjola fortresses, where we're treated to marvelous views of the Stari Grad, and our first sighting of the sparkling waters of Kotor Bay, framed by the backdrop of hulking Lovćen mountain. Each turn in the snaking road ahead presents a new panorama of prodigious mountains, rolling green hills, centuries-old villages and the bay's glassy smooth waters.

Risan

Risan (3rd century B.C.E.) is the bay's oldest settlement.

On a steep hill overlooking the water, archaeologists uncovered the remains of a Roman villa from the 2nd century C.E.

Radiating from a central atrium, the floors of the villa's seven rooms are sheathed in remarkably preserved mosaics consisting of floral patterns, geometric shapes, sea fauna and sun symbols. The star of the show is the bedroom, or dormitorium, with its fascinating multi-colored depiction of the Greek God of dreams, Hypnos, here presented in the shape of a young winged boy reclining on a fluffy pillow.

Just across the street, soaring above a tree-shrouded park, we encounter the graceful Orthodox Church of Saints Peter and Paul. Taking a seat in the shade of the church's clock tower, we imagine what life was like for the Romans who called the Villa of Hypnos home.

Perast

A few minutes' drive from Risan brings us to perky Perast. During the period of Venetian domination (15th to 18th centuries), Perast, along with nearby Kotor, operated as a southern Adriatic bridgehead for the Italian powerhouse. The village is like a Nike swoosh-shaped piece of Italy wedged into a bend in Kotor Bay.

Sea-facing St. Elijah's Hill is ornamented with the old baroque stone palazzos of rich boat captains and ship owners (the Bocchesi). Many of these aristocratic trophies were ravaged during a devastating earthquake in 1979. Some achieved second life as boutique hotels, others are being tastefully refurbished by the likes of Michael Douglas and Catherine Zeta-Jones. Still others await your investment and creative flair.

Our car doors are ceremoniously opened by Danko and Mica, local entrepreneurs who shuttle visitors to Perast's two treasured offshore islets.

"We have paid your parking," Danko brags, "and will take you right away to Sveti Dorde and Gospa od Skrpjela!"

Visiting Gospa's baby blue-domed Church of Our Lady of the Rocks (1632) and motoring around the cypress-shielded Benedictine monastery on Sveti Dorde (St. George) top our to-do list anyhow, so we hire the boys for ten Euros.

It's called Our Lady of the Rocks because a Madonna and Child icon was found on what at the time (1452) was only a single chunk of rock. Every July 22 since, at sunset during the fašinated festival, local people ceremoniously haul rocks in their



All around Kotor Bay, sun worshippers lounge on ancient stone jetties and swim in the chilly Adriatic.

boats and deposit them here, forever increasing the size of the artificial islet.

The boys give us 45 minutes to explore Gospa, then shuttle us (stopping is forbidden) around St. George's monastery before dropping us quayside and pummeling us with suggestions for our visit.

Perast, with only one main avenue along the water and a few lanes up the hillside, still showcases more than a dozen churches and nearly 20 once-grand palazzos.

Ensnconed on a flower-festooned jetty at one of Armonia Restaurant's seaside tables, we order \$8 tuna salads and are shocked when they arrive, each topped with two 6-ounce perfectly

grilled tuna steaks. You can dine like royalty on next to nothing around Kotor Bay.

From our table, we've got a view of the three-story, multi-terraced Bujovic Palazzo (1694), expertly converted into a museum celebrating Perast's seafaring genealogy.

Perast is one of the most charming little places (400 residents) on the planet, and we spend hours luxuriating in its idyllic old-world ambience.

Dobrota

Ten minutes from Perast, we pull into the elegantly restored Palazzo Radomiri, lodgings for our long weekend in Kotor Bay.



When fleeing invaders, Kotor's citizens escaped through this arch and climbed the serpentine defensive walls to the safety of St. John's Fortress.

With only the outer walls intact after the 1979 earthquake, this remarkable, 18th-century stone sentinel has been painstakingly resurrected from the rubble, fashioned into a luxuriously low-key sanctuary.

The complex rises from the sea up a steep hillside. Buildings are richly decorated with local antiques, and each room is uniquely designed. The décor of our refuge, room Il Vigoro, is nautical, perfectly reminiscent of a ship captain's quarters.

Just beyond the Radomiri's latticed gates, the private jetties of Dobrota's romantic restaurants are lined with tables. You'll enjoy fresh locally caught seafood and breathtaking bay views. We



The tall twin towers of Kotor's St. Tryphon's Cathedral dominate Kotor's Tripuna Square.

walk lazily along the seaside promenade, and totally covet the lovely, quake-wounded palazzos being snapped up by savvy investors.

Kotor

Dobrota lies just five minutes from the end of Boka Kotorska, and its biggest draw, the triangular-shaped, medieval, walled town of Kotor.

A sculpted, winged lion of St. Mark, symbol of the Venetian Republic, reclines on the thick stone wall near the Sea Gate entrance to Kotor's Stari Grad (Old Town), heralding Venice's centuries-long impact.

Italy's influence is undeniable. We step into Trg od Oruzja (Arms Square) and are greeted by an avalanche of Renaissance, Romanesque and Baroque churches, civic buildings and magnificent palazzos, all snuggled tightly in the embrace of the stout, defensive walls. It's a mini-Venice without the canals.

Kotor's labyrinth of narrow, pedestrian-only lanes, paved in a patchwork of smooth, mauve-splashed marble tiles, was designed to confuse invaders and give citizens time to reach the rear of the city and the escape routes leading up to its mountaintop fortress.

Early morning aromas of dark roast coffee and freshly baked, cherry-stuffed strudel (a surprising regional specialty) seduce visitors down diminutive side streets. Funky al fresco bars, cafes and restaurants line every lane and square.

People like to say it's fun to just get lost in the maze, but that's impossible. A two-minute walk in any direction and you'll encounter a main square (Salata, Brasna or Mlijeka) or landmark Orthodox or Catholic church (St. Luke's, St. Tryphon's or St. Mary's).

We spend an entire day meandering, nursing gelatos, bargaining with local artisans, sipping dark Niksicko beers, snacking on grilled octopus and squid and relaxing. Tomorrow we assault the walls!



Perast's sea-facing St. Elijah's Hill is ornamented with the old baroque stone palazzos of rich boat captains and ship owners.



The village of Risan's graceful Orthodox Church of Saints Peter and Paul.

St. John's Hill

Like a small-scale Great Wall of China, Kotor's stone defensive walls zigzag up St. John Hill's vertiginous incline. We begin our 1,355-step ascent early, to reach the top before the elevating sun obliterates the shade cast by distant Lovćen mountain.

It can be done in 45 minutes, but we linger, stopping frequently to enjoy dramatic views of Kotor and the sweeping bay beyond.

Lounging topside on the ramparts of the sprawling Castle of San Giovanni, we celebrate our ascent with sweet, juicy cherries, local cheese, prosciutto and fruity rakija purchased at the daily local Green Market just outside Sea Gate.

Behind us, jagged peaks on Mt. Lovcen, looking like the chiseled faces of cyclopean giants, beckon.

The Lovćen Road

We do a quick cost/benefit analysis: This is a one-lane, two-way, serpentine, often guardrail-less road with 28 precarious switchbacks, climbing thousands of feet from Kotor up the mountain to the ancient Montenegrin capital of Cetinje.

Conde Nast calls it "one of the world's top five drives," while others herald it among the most dangerous ribbons of asphalt anywhere.

We took out full insurance on our rental; so we're all in!

I'm not going to lie, my knuckles are white, I forget to breathe and my eyes are wide, anticipating oncoming traffic and negotiating dizzying turns.

The payoff is priceless. Every switchback offers a more mind-blowing view of the crystal-clear, indigo waters, huddled villages with orange-tiled roofs and precipitous rugged mountains surrounding Kotor Bay.

The greatest danger we face is a burgeoning desire to sell everything and emigrate immediately.

Lord Byron visited and wrote: "The most beautiful contact between the Earth and sea took place at the Montenegrin littoral."

And we've just scratched the surface.

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