

EPIC DRIVES: THE MONTENEGRIN LOOP

APPROX 6 HOURS

175 miles/280 km (without Dubrovnik and Bosnia)

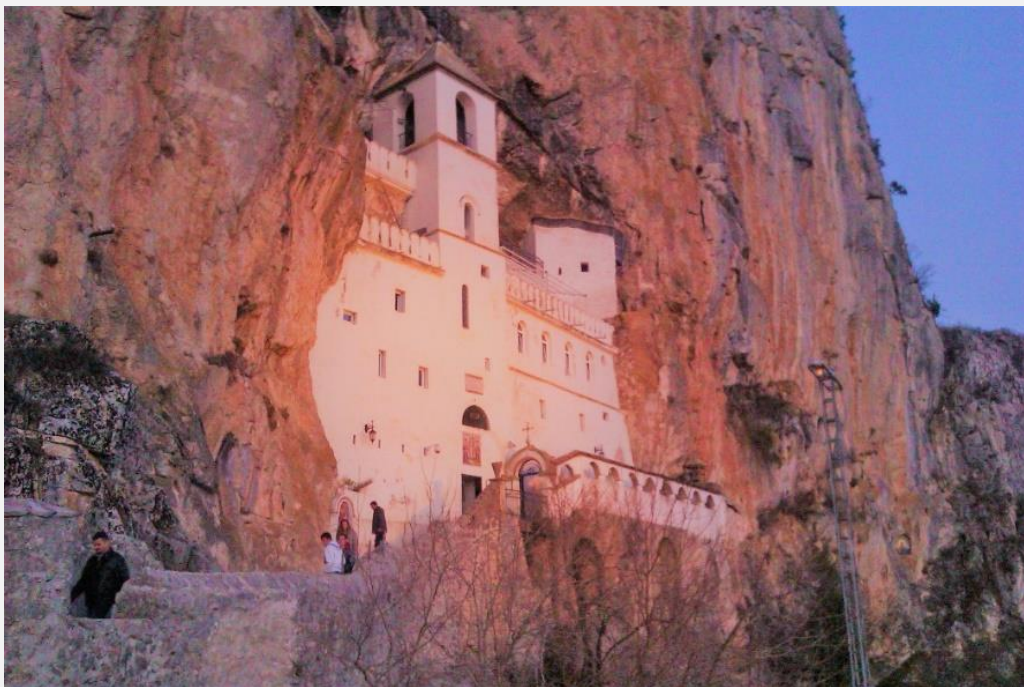
205 miles/330 km (with Dubrovnik and Bosnia)



For a small country of merely 600,000 people, Montenegro packs quite a punch: Podgorica, was heavily damaged by an earthquake in 1979, and the re-building of the country's capital has not been considered by many as an unqualified success, but nightlife, food and drink can't get much cheaper. Driving north towards Nikšić you will enter a sparsely populated, mountainous and rugged area offering a proper end-of-the-world feel before descending towards Kotor with an atmospheric, walled old town, located at the end of Kotor Bay, Europe's southernmost fjord and a truly jaw-dropping sight towered over by steep and brooding mountains (hence the country's name which translates as black mountain). Your final stop is Budva, the main seaside resort, with attractive beaches, a beautiful old town and plenty of casinos (should you have any travel money left to spend). On the way back to Podgorica, you might want to consider a side excursion to Lake Skadar.



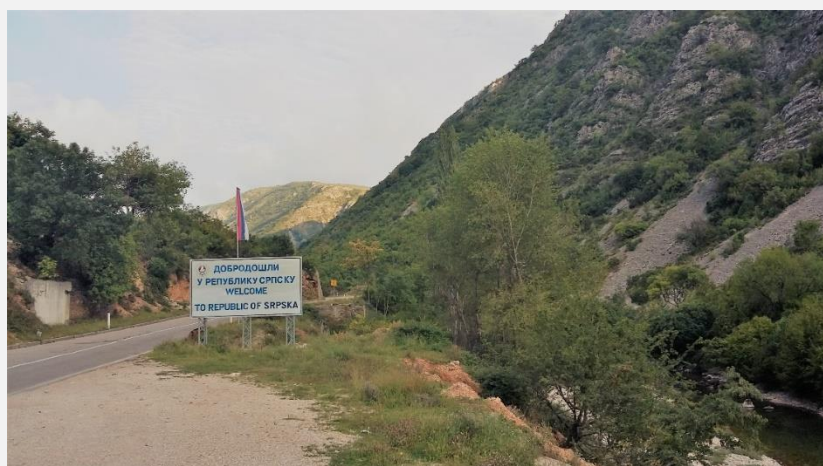
A stunning bay, lovely mountains, gorgeous beaches, low prices: Where's the catch? It's the country's (young and male) drivers. Ralf Schumacher, brother of the more famous Michael, and also an accomplished formula one driver, has bought a property on the Luštica peninsula and must have been a very bad influence on the local adolescent population. I have driven in many metropolises, but what I witnessed in Montenegro I usually only ever encounter in action movies. Fast and furious truly encapsulates the nation's attitude in this regard. So please drive carefully and above all slowly. This explains the time frame of at least 6 hours for what might seem a rather short tour of around 200 miles. Take your time, enjoy the views, and let the local lads pass you by at frantic speed. You will catch up with them once you pass the next ambulance (which indeed happened to me on two occasions).



I strongly recommend extending the trip slightly to take in Dubrovnik in Croatia, and a small section of Bosnia & Herzegovina. Once you have left Nikšić on the M-6 continue down that road and do not turn into the R-11 toward Risan. You will soon enter the Serbian part of Bosnia-Herzegovina (the so-called Republika Srpska). You thought parts of Texas were isolated? Try this area. It's deserted and rather spooky in a Chain Saw Massacre kind of way, so make sure to fill up your tank before crossing the border. Not long after, you will enter the other of Bosnia & Herzegovina's two entities: the Federation of B&H, where a more usual degree of civilisation gradually establishes itself, in particular once you cross the border into Croatia, before finally arriving in the 'Adriatic Pearl' that is Dubrovnik. From there, continue along the road towards Herzeg Novi in Montenegro, located at the entrance to Kotor Bay, before driving along the north shore to Kotor and then on to Budva.



Podgorica, with some international flight links is a decent departure point, both for the shorter Montenegrin loop, as well as the 3 Country loop. But Dubrovnik with its more advanced infrastructure might be more preferable. You could even enter the shorter Montenegrin loop from there as the town is just a relatively short drive of two hours away from Kotor.



As to overnight stops, any of the big highlights – Dubrovnik, Kotor, Budva - work well. But instead of Dubrovnik, you might want to consider the nearby resort of Cavtat, which is just a 10 drive from the airport. The place is much less crowded (and cheaper), and also has a very handy 30-minute ferry service to its glitzy neighbour. You might also want to consider staying in the mountains just south of Nikšić, near the mesmerising Ostrog Monastery (try Hotel Sokoline which is listed on www.booking.com)



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