



The stunning harbour and town of Kotor

Cruising to the Bay of Kotor, Montenegro

We first visited the Eastern Adriatic coast back in 2004 when we sailed to Croatia in our Dehler 43, 'Trampus 111'.

It was such an enjoyable experience that we have frequently talked of revisiting the area.

The mountainous coastline, the many small islands and the great climate of the Dalmatian Riviera made it an experience that we were keen to repeat if we could.



'Trampus 111' is jointly owned by two close friends and myself.

Each year we endeavour to undertake an extended cruise from our base in Malta to somewhere different, usually, in the eastern Mediterranean.

We had heard from friends on the marina that the small state of Montenegro was well worth a visit and, with memories of our Croatian trip in mind, decided that it should be our target for 2010.

Setting sail from Malta

In mid-September we set sail from Malta and headed across the foot of Italy for the southern Adriatic.

Stopping off in the small Italian port of Santa Maria di Leuca for a couple of days to refuel and re-provision, we then set off for the port of Bar in Montenegro.

As usual in this part of the world the conditions conspired against us. The South Westerly wind that we expected to give us a fast 'reach' across turned in to a Northerly wind on the nose and we were forced to motor more than we wished. However, 27 hours later we entered Bar as planned.



Santa Maria di Leuca, Italy

The old city of Bar, Montenegro

Montenegro occupies a key strategic position on the Adriatic coast nestling between Croatia and Albania. Because of this it is essential to comply with the port of entry conditions.

Framed against a spectacular background of mountains and rugged hillsides, Bar is the main commercial port and one of only 4 ports of entry.

Moving through the police passport control and completing a detailed crew list we were unceremoniously dismissed.

In the absence of any contrary advice in English we assumed, wrongly as it subsequently turned out, that this meant that we were free to continue. Moving on to a berth on the marina we then set out to explore the area.

One of the first things that struck us about the town was how relatively peaceful it was. Even allowing for the fact that we were travelling outside of the summer high season, there were few cars and crowds in evidence.

The second thing that struck us was that this seems to be a land of giants; the men all seem to be well over six feet tall and the young ladies have the longest, slimmest legs. Extraordinary!

With its wide tree-lined and, noticeably, litter free streets combined with a wide range of cafes, restaurants and bars, the town provided us with the perfect introduction to this striking country.

In common with all the Balkan states, Montenegro has had a turbulent history.



The harbour at Bar, Montenegro

Frequent changes of conquerors and rulers have left a lasting imprint and Bar alone boasts of having over 30 cultural monuments. We decided to visit the most famous, the Old Town, 'Stari Bar', which dates back over 2,500 years.

Although suffering damage in the 1979 earthquake the site has been extensively restored and provides an interesting cultural diversion for visitors. It was a pretty cheap trip too as the taxi fare was only 5 euros!



Larry and friends enjoy a good dinner.

That evening we returned to the Old Town for a meal in a restaurant that had caught our eye. Menus here are heavy on meat and fish so vegetarians should beware! The food is very good, however, and an enjoyable meal can be had for 15 euros a head including wine and service.

We stayed at Bar for a few days longer than planned as a severe low pressure area swept across the central Mediterranean and Adriatic regions.

Despite a couple of days of high winds and rain we made the most of our stay by sampling a number of the bars and cafes that exist in the town.

Budva

As soon as the weather eased we decided to move further up the coast to our next port of call, Budva. This is a short coastline and despite having to motor sail through some heavy seas we nosed into the marina at Budva after a couple of hours of travel.

Budva is a very attractive coastal town steeped in Balkan history.

Ancient documents and archaeological evidence indicate that Budva was founded on a small rocky island as a Greek trading centre in the 4th Century B.C

As a fortified Roman town, it is mentioned by Pliny the Younger.



The beautiful town of Budva

Its more recent claim to fame however is that it is the location for the 5 Star 'Hotel Splendide' which was featured as the venue for the famous poker game in the Bond film 'Casino Royale'.

A claim to fame that is actively emblazoned on the side of most of the taxis!

This is a splendid place to spend time relaxing. The marina is close to the historic old town and is surrounded by a wide range of attractive cafes, restaurants and bars.

At night it is a lively place, attracting tourists and locals from the surrounding areas, so it is best not to think about sleep until things are starting to quieten down around midnight.

One of the highlights for me, being a late age biker, was eating in a restaurant owned by the President of the local Harley Davidson owners group and being given a personal tour of his bike collection.

By such small things is the success of a holiday to be judged!

The Bay of Kotor

After a couple of days we motored up the remaining 13 miles of coast and entered our ultimate destination, the extraordinary Bay of Kotor.

Sharing its coastline with Montenegro and Croatia, the bay extends deep inland for 29 kilometres. In many ways resembling a Scandinavian Fjord, the impact of sailing into the bay leaves the first time visitor breathless.

In places, sheer mountainsides meet the water and small communities seem to be hanging on to existence by their fingertips!

On first entering the bay we stayed for the night moored up to the quay at the town of Herceg Novi which is located about 3 miles in from the mouth of the bay.



The breath taking Bay of Kotor

The small harbour is surrounded by pretty pastel coloured houses and villas and overlooked by a fortified old town.

Stretching away on either side along the coast are a considerable number of holiday hotels and beaches and it is a favourite summer holiday location for locals.



Old monastery in the Bay of Kotor

After a relaxing two night stay we motor sailed further into the bay and headed for the furthest location of Kotor. There is no marina here but it is safe to moor stern to on the main quay. It is also on the cruise ship trail and we were joined by a different one for each of the three nights of our stay.

Apart from the old town with its churches, palaces and pleasant squares, one of the highlights of Kotor is the fortress of St. John.

Constructed in the 14th and 15th centuries, the curtain walls of the fortress meander steeply up the mountainous hillsides that surround the town.

For the modest fee of 2 euros one can have some rigorous exercise and climb up to the summit of the fortress where the views of the town and bay make the effort more than worthwhile.

Eating out in the old town was generally a pleasure as there are a wide range of restaurants and bars to choose from. However, prices can vary considerably probably as a result of the regular influx of cruise ship passengers with full wallets! One of the gastronomic highlights for us however was finding a butcher who was spit roasting chickens for 5 euros. Consuming it on board provided a pleasant change to the stock menu.

Onto Tivat

Leaving Kotor after 3 nights, we then motor-sailed back towards the mouth of the bay and our final stop at the town of Tivat. Our pilot book intimated that a new marina was planned for the town and that it would be able to accommodate Superyachts. On reaching Tivat we found

that things were indeed progressing very fast on the new development.

Although only partially completed, 'Porto Montenegro' as the new marina is called, is a very impressive project indeed.

Utilising the area of a now abandoned Naval base the privately funded and multinational initiative aims to provide state of the art marina facilities linked to an extremely upmarket waterside residential development.



Porto Montenegro

Fully fitted 1 – 3 bedroom luxury apartments are being sold off-plan at prices ranging from 5 to 10 thousand euros per square metre.

The development is being promoted heavily on a worldwide basis and it is planned to be a major focus for the prosperity of Montenegro in future years.

The current levels of uptake suggest that they have potential winner on their hands. Whilst being only a small town, Tivat does offer visitors a great waterside environment which includes one of the best restaurants that we ate in during the whole trip. Shaped like a boat, it offered diners a sophisticated menu served by friendly and extremely attentive staff. Needless to say, we were happy patrons on more than one occasion!

Beware entry procedures

The management and staff at the marina are extremely professional and helpful, as we found to our great relief on the day that we planned to leave. Porto Montenegro has only just been granted port of entry status so we decided to clear from there at the end of our trip.

On presenting our passports and other documentation to the port officials we discovered that our entry at Bar had not been properly completed and that we should have paid for and been issued with a cruising permit for our stay. The fact that the need for a permit had not been raised with us at Bar cut no ice with harbour authorities at Tivat who wanted to levy a 500 euro fine on us.

Mentioning this to the Porto Montenegro marina staff, they immediately set out to assist us, with the marina's general manager and legal adviser representing our case to the harbour authorities.

Whilst they failed to get the fine lifted they did take the extremely generous decision to pay the fine on our behalf as they thought that we had been unfairly treated by the port authority at Bar. In their view, the older ports are still staffed, in part, with people retaining some of the old communist mentality and they are keen to see this change.

As an instance of 'customer care' this takes some beating and we find it hard to speak more highly of the Porto Montenegro team.

To anyone wishing to cruise these waters we would recommend that they use Porto Montenegro as their port of entry at all times, weather conditions permitting of course. They in turn will be using our case to press the Montenegrain government to ensure that such problems do not happen in future.

After an extremely interesting and highly enjoyable cruise we set sail from Montenegro having been more than a little impressed with our experience. The hospitality and friendliness of the people, the cleanliness of the towns and the wonderful and abundant scenery ensured that it would remain high on our list for a return visit.

About the author.

Now aged 63 and living in mid Wales with his wife June, Larry Freeman was brought up on the Thames estuary at Leigh-on-Sea where he where he learned to sail as a member of the Essex Yacht Club. 10 years ago he and two friends purchased 'Trampus III', a Dehler 43 CWS. In 2002 they sailed it from Brighton to Malta where it is now based.

From Malta, Larry and his co-owners have sailed Trampus to various locations including Sardinia, Corsica, Greece, the Bay of Naples, Croatia, Sicily and now Montenegro.