

Montenegro's Coast - History

Traces of the first settlements have been found around the areas of Risan, Kotor, Budva, Spic and Ulcinj. Throughout antiquity they were known and later mentioned in historical records.

A wide variety of peoples fought for these magnificent shores. There were Illyrians who built their settlements on the charred remnants of the defeated original populations' homes. After them came the Roman Legions, then Slavs, who fought the latter day conquerors for centuries; the Venetians, Byzantines, Turks and African pirates. These coasts were also swept by Spanish adventurers, Napoleon's grenadiers as well as English and Russian seafarers, Austro-Hungarian gendarmes, ending with occupiers from World Wars I and II. People from the Boka and Montenegro fought against them and protected their freedom. Many a monument along the coast memorializes

these historic events ; citadels, ruins and excavations, churches and monasteries abounding in artefacts and historic evidence, rich and expressive museum collections, and romantic and beautiful legends and myths.

The oldest archaeological sites date back to the Neolithic Period; Spila above Perast and the Old town of Budva, with some traces near Ulcinj and Tivat. The most famous Neolithic site is „Mala Gruda " (the „Count's Grave") near Tivat . As for the Roman Era, the most important archaeological sites are located in Risan, Petrovac and Budva. From the emergence of the Slavic state onwards, with certain towns on the coast occasionally belonging to other lands as well, a great cultural heritage has been preserved, particularly in many churches and monasteries. The rural architecture of this area was highly distinctive and preserved today mostly in Pastrovici , the Lustica Peninsula and in Grbalj . The well-preserved and maintained „Old Towns" of Ulcinj, Bar, Budva, Kotor, Perast, Risan and Herceg Novi were restored many a time, after being destroyed by invaders and earthquakes, yet they continue to make up a unique cultural and historical heritage. The coast of Montenegro, the Boka Kotorska Bay and Budva region in particular, was linked to the rest of the Mediterranean and the countries which, at certain periods, dominated the Adriatic for centuries, most notably the Republic of Venice and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The Roman influences of culture, customs and especially the Latin language, remained for a long time. The Statutes of the medieval towns of Kotor, Budva and Bar, and a large proportion of their official documents were written either in Latin or Italian. The economic power of these regions, especially the towns, was particularly pronounced at the time they were part of Doclea and Zeta, when the coastal region was closely connected with the broader hinterlands. After the rule of the native dynasties of Nemanja, Balsic and Crnojevic, of the Boka there was a period of transient rulers.

One by one, after the year 1420, Montenegro's coastal region towns came under the rule of the Republic of Venice. During Venetian rule, high ramparts, towers and sentinels were built around Kotor, affording it centuries of protection from numerous attacks by the Ottoman Turks, who managed to conquer Bar and Ulcinj in 1571.

The famous Bokelian Maritime

(Bokeljska mornarica) holds a long and impressive history. Established at the beginning of the 9th century, its traditions and the memory of its glorious past have been preserved to the present day. For instance, in the second half of the 18th century the Boka boasted of some 300 large vessels and around 3,000 seafarers.

After the fall of the Republic of Venice, the Boka was under various rulers; the Austrian, Russian and French. In 1813 came the union of the Boka and Montenegro. However, by decision and decree of the great powers, the Austro-Hungarian Empire was re-established again from 1814-1918.

The town of Herceg Novi was first established in 1382, and it began developing as an important merchant port. After domestic rulers, the Turks managed to conquer Herceg Novi in 1483 and keep it until 1687. The „Bloody Tower" (Kanli-kula) dates back from that period, and was built above the dungeon between the old and new towns. Today, it has been turned into a beautiful open-air amphitheatre. For a brief period of time, the town was under the rule of Spaniards who built a fortress on the hill overlooking the town, which was later called; „Spanjola". After liberation from the Turks, the town quickly got its Mediterranean appearance, while under the Venetians. At the same time the town itself was built, new ramparts and parts of the town were built on a rock close to the sea and were called, „Forte Mare Citadela" (Sea Fort Fortress). Later, the Turks adapted it to their own defence needs, and the Venetians reconstructed it in the 18th century for defence against firearms, giving it the name „ForteMare".

The Herceg Novi area has a great treasure-trove of cultural heritage in many old churches and monasteries. The Savina Monastery situated in the eastern part of Herceg Novi, in a forest of thick Mediterranean vegetation with a 2-kilometre long promenade, is one of the most significant cultural monuments of the Boka Kotorska. The complex consists of three churches, from different periods, and monastery quarters. The oldest church was built around the year 1030. It is an interesting mixture of Byzantine iconography and gothic artistic expression. This little chapel houses frescoes featuring the rulers of the Nemanjic Dynasty and St. Sava. A much later one, the great Monastery church has a particularly luxurious belfry. The third church, built on a little hill separated from the first two, was dedicated to St. Sava who, in local Orthodoxy is traditionally considered to be the greatest saint and enlightener and, as legend would have it, erected the church. The rich monastery treasury holds, apart from many icons, a crystal cross reinforced in silver that is believed to have belonged to St. Sava, as well as a silver plated hand of the Empress Jelena.

Within a wider area of Herceg Novi there are many more well-known churches, dating back to the 10th century and earlier. „Holy Ascension" church in Topla, built from 1709-1713, has exquisite architecture and well-preserved icons, valuable sacred relics (i.e. gold-plated testaments and a large gold-plated cross), as well as some objects of great artistically cultural and historic value (i.e. the „Minej" religious book that was printed in our private printing house in Venice in 1538). Montenegro's young genius ruler Petar Petrovic Njegos II spent some time in this church. The church St. Petka in the village of Mrkovi, located in the central part of the Lustica Peninsula, is

particularly interesting since there are records that it used to have two altars back in 1664, one Orthodox and the other Roman Catholic. The Parish church in the village of Podi, to the north of Herceg Novi, is one of the most architecturally beautiful monuments on the coast of Montenegro. Herceg Novi's Museum and Archives contain a large number of centuries-old artefacts and interesting displays of the rich local cultural heritage.

In Herceg Novi, as in other parts of the Boka, there are still some popular legends of many beautiful and moving stories originating from this area. Such as, in the town itself on Srbina Street, there is a spring of water that used to be called „Mila" (Darling) - now it's called „Nemila" (Nonrdarling). Its name was changed after two boys who unfortunately fell in love with the same girl, killed each other at that spot. After the tragedy, the people changed its name to „Nemila".

Eastwards is the important Boka

port of Zelenika, then Kumbor (also called Rt), where the Turks built the Vrbanj \ Fortress in the 17th century To the east of Kumbor is Denovici, where in ancient times i the Greeks built a settlement called Stoli. Further east is the coastal hamlet of Baosici, where there is „The Old Captain" Museum, once the palace Captain Stumberger, known for its wealth of old model ships and other exhibits from maritime history.

As for the cultural heritage of the Tivat area, there is a 16th century fortified summerhouse of the Buca family from Kotor. All the nearby islands and villages hold numerous churches built from the 14th to 18th centuries. In 1346, the Monastery on the Prevlaka peninsula was established as the seat of the Orthodox Metropolitan of Zeta. There the „Collection of Church Rules" was compiled in 1262, which is also known as; Jlovacka krmcija". The mediaeval town of Kotor had a well developed public utilities system and an urbanised population structure of - nobility, burgesses, artisans and clergy. From 1355 to 1420 Kotor was independent. This town's long and tumultuous history left many physical and written monuments. Kotor is the largest old urban settlement in Montenegro. The town's ramparts, many narrow winding streets, stone stairs leading up to fortresses, 12 public squares, over 400 famous buildings of Roman, Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque styles, make Kotor a typical Mediterranean town.

There are 12 churches in the town as well. First and foremost is the St. Tryphon Cathedral, built originally as a smaller church and dedicated to the protector of the town in the year 809. The large cathedral with two belfries, built on the site of a smaller church, was completed in 1166, and got its final appearance by the end of 17th century, after the earthquake in 1667. It is known for the wealth of both its spiritual and secular works of art. The church owns extremely valuable pieces of furniture and works of arts kept at the treasury - the reliquary. The 4 marble altars were made in Venice in the 18th century. Apart from the silver & gold-plated pale, considered by many as a masterpiece of Kotor medieval jewellery, and the „Holy Head" of St. Tryphon, other numerous relics and objects are kept at the cathedral; works of Kotor jewellers, and gifts from seafarers and other donors.

Kotor abounds in magnificent palaces inspiring admiration even today, especially considering the time in which they were built: Providur's Palace and the Tower Clock at the Square of Arms; Pima Palace at Liberation Square; Drago Palace at the Square of the Sailors' Uprising; Grgurin Palace, today's Maritime Museum, Buca Palace at the Small Square, once called „Square of Flour" and others. There are many other interesting buildings with decoratively made portals, coats-of-arms, balconies, windows and staircases in Kotor.

The glorious maritime history of the Boka depended on proper training and schooling for its seafarers. The Maritime Museum should be singled out among many institutions in Kotor, with its rich collections of historic documents, works of art and its maritime and technical collection. The Maritime Museum is located within a palace built in the early 18th century, with the building itself of museum quality.

Perast, a town at the foot of Ilino hill, opposite the Verige Strait, is some 12 kilometres from Kotor and 3 kilometres from Risan. In old Kotor books, Perast is mentioned as early as the 13th century. The noblemen of Perast were mentioned in various documents from the time local dynastic rule. The Perast shipyard was mentioned for the first time in 1367. When the Turks conquered this part of the coast, the Perast people led many battles to liberation. The rise and importance of Perast is well seen in its architecture, since Perast is the most well-preserved baroque urban area along the Montenegrin coast. At the central square there is St. Nicola's Church with a 55-metre high belfry, completed in 1655. The following buildings stand out with their unique architectural style: the belfry of the church of Our Lady of Rosaria; Bujovic Palace from 1694; and the museum building, which houses among other things, authentic uniforms of the members of Bokelian Marines. Then there is the Zmajevic Palace of 1670, the family of famous seafarers - one of whom was a Russian Baltic Fleet Admiral, who was decorated with

the Alexander Nevski Medal for his great merits, by Czar Petar the Great. This palace is also known as the „Bishop's Palace", and there are two other palaces that date back to the 18th century.

Not far from ancient Perast is the place called Stoliv, with rural coastal houses built in the form of an amphitheatre on the slopes of a hill, and with a pyramidal belfry church, rising high up in the midst of the woods.

A special feature and decoration of the whole Boka Bay are the two magical little church-topped islands that look like anchored ships in front of Perast. The island church of Our Lady of the Rock was built by piling stones around a rock that stood out of the sea. Legend has it that some fishermen found the icon of the Virgin Mary with Christ on this rock; thus, in the 15th century a small church was built there, which was enlarged as the island was enlarged. The Our Lady of the Rock icon adorns the main marble altar of the church, while the inside of the church is covered with 67 oil paintings, ordered by Perast nobility and painted by one of our greatest baroque painters, Tripo Kokolja. There is also an embroidered picture, done by a Perast woman that took over two decades and is one of the famous articles inside the church, as well as gifts from seafarers and other donors, there are also over 2,000 silver votive plaques featuring Perast ships.

St. George is the other island guarding Perast, with a church of the same name, monastery buildings and an old graveyard. The church, a Benedictine abbey, is mentioned for the first time in 1166. One of several legends and true stories connected with this island is one of love lost. As legend would have it, one French soldier who fired a cannon at

the Perast fortress, hit the house of his beloved and killed her

Because of that he left the army, became a monk and stayed in Perast until his death, to be buried beside his beloved.

On the hill above the source of the Spila River, there are Illyrian ruins, remnants of the town of Teuta, named after an Illyrian queen, where Risan was her seat. By far the most important preserved site is a large building, „Villa Rustica“, in the middle of which there is a large atrium decorated with mosaics and surrounded by rooms. The mosaics in five rooms are preserved, the most famous of them being the one of Hypos, the god of sleep and the only known mosaic of this demigod in the world. Apart from the mentioned monuments, there is also the Church of Sts. Peter and Paul in the centre of the town, with a large three-nave building - the only Orthodox Church in the Boka with such a layout. Built in 1601, it houses valuable gifts from 18th and 19th century Russia that were awarded to many people from Risan who distinguished themselves in the Russian Navy. Along the Risan road is also the Banja Monastery.

Then there is Prcanj sheltered at the foot of the rocks, stretching for some 4 kilometres along the coast. There is Our Lady's Temple, where many works of art from different periods are kept and where at one spot you can follow the history of artistic creation to the present time. The temple is actually a sort of gallery where, together with the works of the masters of the Byzantine and Italian schools, the works of Montenegrin artists may also be seen. Preserved frescoes, a collection of ritual objects, richly embroidered liturgy attire, a library holding church and spiritual books, make the Our Lady's Temple an authentic mixture of religious and secular culture and history of this area.

In Prcanj there is also the Buca family palace from the 15th century, which is the only preserved gothic style palace outside Kotor. The palace is also known by its popular name; „The Three Sisters“, which was given that name in memory of three sisters, who once fell in love with the same boy. However, devotedly bonded by sisterly love, they decided to renounce this forlorn love and build a home in which they lived together the rest of their lives. Thus, the palace originally consisted of three identical houses, linked together by the thought of a deep abiding love.

In Dobrota, apart from the old baroque churches of St. Eustace and St. Mary, richly gifted with war trophies and famous Dobrota lace, there are also many palaces designed by some of the most famous Italian architects. There is also the building where the unification of the Boka Kotorska and Montenegro was proclaimed in 1813-

The Old town of Budva is encircled by 15th century walls. Dense stone one or two-storey houses, with renaissance or baroque style decorations, winding stone streets and intimate squares suddenly opening in front of curious eyes of visitors offer and preserve the Mediterranean character of Budva. Separated from the old walls is the town fortress - Citadela. Today after extensive conservation and restoration work, the Citadela is used for summer performances organised within the traditional „City Theatre“ event. Other cultural and historic sights, among the beautiful landscapes of Budva, are many prominent fortresses from the Republic of Venice period and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In 1841 the Austro-Hungarians built a large fortress called Kosmac, on the hill overlooking Budva, which commands a wonderful view and satisfies all expectations of its visitors. There are also many churches and monasteries within the Budva area. St John's Church was a Bishopric seat over a long period of time. The church's foundation dates back to the 7th century and it is richly decorated with old icons and a tall belfry that oversees the town. The Church of St. Mary in Punta dates back from the year 840. In the Holy Trinity Church, apart from luxuriously decorated iconostasis, there is the tomb of Stefan Mitrov Ljubisa, our great writer whose authentic works preserve the best and noblest traditions of this area and the character of its people. Apart from these, there are several monasteries in the Budva area that played an important role in the cultural and political history of Montenegro. The most famous ones are; Podlastva, Podostrug. Stanjevic and Podmaine, and Rezevic. Petrovac developed around a beautiful sandy bay overlooked by the old fortress „Kastelo“, which is today a restaurant. This is a very famous old settlement, inhabited even in Roman times. At the Mirista site there is a late 6th century antique mosaic. The capes in the vicinity offer magnificent views. One of them is called Skocidjevojka, after the story when a poor helpless girl jumped from the rock, to try escaping from abductors in faithfulness to her fiancée. The fortress and church of St. Stefan, after which the whole island was named, was built in the 15th century from the loot that Pastrovici won in battles against the Turks, by taking their ships.

During its history, Bar always played the role of an important cultural centre. In the 12th century, our first literary work came into being; „Chronicle of the Priest of Doclea“. It was translated from Slavic into Latin, and still bears extraordinary historic importance as a testimony of the history of medieval rulers of our state. The tumultuous history of Old Bar left a visible trace on its appearance. The beginnings of building are linked with the Illyrians (the Citadela), and the town was further built during the period of Doclea and Zeta (a characteristic Slavic gate), in the period of the dominance of Venice and the Turks. Within the walls there were 240 buildings, many streets, squares, stairs and wells, reservoirs of different shapes and styles, and remnants of aqueducts. The town was mostly destroyed by two ammunition explosions, and by earthquakes. A great part was reconstructed and restored, so today Old Bar is almost linked to the new town, and with its 19th century beachfront Jopolica" Palace Museum and busy port and ferry lines, conveniently surrounded by lovely cafes, Bar is one of the most interesting towns for tourists.

To the northeast of Sutomore there is the fortress called Nehaj, built on a highly inaccessible hill. It was mentioned for the first time in 1542, and it is encircled by a wall on all sides, with many towers, numerous loop-holes, and many buildings for life under siege. In the wider region of Sutomore, called Spic, there are churches specific by the fact that they were built with two altars, for both its Roman Catholic and Orthodox believers. In the area of Bar, an extremely important monument is the Monastery of the Virgin Mary of Ratac, founded in the 11th century on the cape between Sutomore and Bar, it has been looted and burnt down on several occasions. In Bar itself there are the remains of a church called „Bar trikonhos" (Topolica), built in 6th century. In the upper part of Old Bar is the Mosque of Omerbasic, built in late 17th century. The complex of royal summer palaces along the beach Topolica, was built by Montenegro's last King Nikola Petrovich. It consists of the Large Palace, the Small Palace, sentry houses, a chapel, a lovely Victorian botanical winter garden and a park. The Large Palace was built in the immediate vicinity of the sea and is surrounded by a wall with a gate and sentry houses. Today this impressive palace houses a Museum, and the wider space of the complex is used as a venue for a variety of events held within the „Bar Chronicle" festival. Regarding the cultural and historic heritage of Ulcinj, apart from the Citadela. the walls of the old town and the three-story Balsic-Tower, we should also mention the church-mosque located in the immediate vicinity of the Balsic-Tower. The church was built in 1510, and in 1693 it was turned into a mosque, being greatly changed in the process. In the vicinity it is still possible to see the traces of frescoes under mortar covered by the Turks. Many exhibits from a rich cultural history of this town and area are kept at the Archaeological Museum located in the old town. Above Nova varos (New Town) there is the Clock Tower built in 1754, which is visible from almost any point within the town, and many more mosques. Near Ulcinj, at the shores of Sasko Lake there are the ruins of the old town called Sas (Svac). The remains of some buildings are still visible, as well as that of a three-storey renaissance period fortress, with a colonnade and a tower. There used to be many churches in the town, of which the best preserved are St. John the Baptist's Church within the town walls, and St. Mary's Franciscan Church, outside the town walls.