

## GO HERE, NOT THERE



ALAMY STOCK PHOTOS

## Medieval beauty, without the hordes, in Montenegro

BY ERIN E. WILLIAMS

Offering alternatives to overcrowded destinations.

Blessed with a Mediterranean climate and a dramatic location between the Dinaric Alps and the sea, Dubrovnik has a well-deserved reputation as the “pearl of the Adriatic.” The Croatian city’s walled Old Town has been a UNESCO World Heritage site since 1979 — but in recent years, it has become an increasingly over-touristed destination.

Last year, a record 4.2 million tourists stayed overnight in Dubrovnik. Each day, especially during the high season in summer, cruise ship passengers flood Old Town, the centuries-old city center. “Game of Thrones” tours and souvenir shops capitalize on the city’s star-making role as King’s Landing, the capital of the series’ seven kingdoms. UNESCO has expressed concerns about sustainability, and the city is working to curb the influx; one measure limits the number of cruise ship passengers to 5,000 per day.

To avoid hordes that dwarf GOT’s Dothraki army, kayak or take a 15-minute ferry to Lokrum Island for spectacular views of the city (and the less attractive massive cruise ship skyline), monastery ruins, rocky shorelines, botanical gardens and olive trees. On your return, paddle alongside Dubrovnik’s ancient defensive walls that protrude from the sea.



TOP: Perast on Montenegro’s Bay of Kotor has baroque architecture and a scenic waterfront. ABOVE: Last year, 4.2 million tourists stayed overnight in Dubrovnik, Croatia, and visited sites such as the centuries-old city center.

Old Town is much quieter before the ships arrive or after they depart. Take a two-hour early-morning stroll atop the walls that stretch for 1.2 miles around tiled rooftops. Then wander the alleyways after sunset. Both perspectives offer centuries of still-relevant history more fascinating than fiction.

**Location:** Southern Croatia, on the Adriatic Sea.

A 1.5-hour drive from Dubrovnik to the Bay of Kotor, in neighboring Montenegro, can extend into several days of exploring the bay’s historical and natural beauty.

The mountain-ringed, winding

bay extends inland from the Adriatic and is often mistaken for a fjord. It is actually a flooded river valley made up of four connected bays with 67 miles of shoreline. The road around the bay is dotted with medieval villages, family-friendly beaches and swimming platforms. Venetian-influenced Perast boasts baroque architecture, as well as a scenic waterfront facing two tiny islets: St. George, where a 12th-century monastery stands, and man-made Our Lady of the Rocks, which is accessible by water taxi and has a church and a museum.

Though the UNESCO-listed Kotor region was once an off-the-radar destination, parts of it, espe-

cially the well-preserved Old Town, suffer from uncontrolled development and overtourism similar to Dubrovnik. Stay in its quieter neighbor, palace-studded Dobrota, and stroll along the bayside boardwalk to Kotor (give cruise ship crowds wide berth by visiting in the morning or evening). Climb its mountain-scaling walls that glow at night like a ring of fire. Inside the fortifications, churches such as the 12th-century St. Tryphon Cathedral jostle for space alongside museums, restaurants and souvenir shops.

The wilder Luštica Peninsula at the entrance of the bay is home to Blue Flag beaches accredited for their safety, sustainability and accessibility. Seaside cliffs and vibrant green headlands create the perfect backdrop for sampling Montenegro’s hiking trails.

At the peninsula’s tip, you can cannonball into the Adriatic from swimming platforms in Rose, the region’s oldest settlement and a former fishing village. Once an Austrian fortress, Forte Rose Resort offers attractions including bay views, beaches, scuba diving and boat tours that reflect the area’s compelling past, on and above the sea.

**Location:** Kotor’s Old Town is about a two-hour drive from Dubrovnik. Buses run regularly between the cities.

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## Driving in Ireland is not for the faint of heart

On Mondays at 2 p.m., the Travel section staff hosts Talk About Travel, an online forum for reader questions and comments. The following is an edited excerpt from a recent discussion.

**Q:** I would like to go to Ireland, mostly to areas that are not widely popular, on a genealogical trip of about 10 days. I am very apprehensive about driving there — any tips on hiring a driver for the bulk of my trip to follow my unusual itinerary?

**A:** I was also apprehensive, but we got the hang of it fairly quickly. We did minimize the risks by taking the train from Dublin to Cork and renting a car there. This way, we didn’t have to manage a major city while still in the throes of jet lag. But it’s not for the meek. When you’re driving in the Irish countryside, there’s often no room for error, with stone walls on one side and oncoming traffic on the other, all on a very narrow roadway. My initial inclination was to drive slowly, which didn’t always go over well with cars behind me. So in the beginning, I’d pull out every once in a while to let the locals pass. Hiring a driver is very common in Ireland, but it’s not cheap. Many tour companies that specialize in Ireland, such as CIE Tours and Isle Inn Tours, will also set up a private driver, but it will likely be cheaper hiring directly. — *Carol Sottili*

**Q:** I’m thinking about quitting my



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**Hiring a driver in Ireland is very common, but it’s not cheap. Booking privately rather than through a tour company should help.**

job and doing some long-term travel. I’ve done long-term travel before, but I was on leave from my job, so there were different considerations. I know I need to think about medical insurance and getting prescription medications. But what else? Any resources would be much appreciated.

**A:** I’m a long-term traveler myself — I spend about a month at a time in different destinations. I’ve been nomadic since 2017, although I traveled a lot before then. Apart from a few marginally useful travel blogs, there are no resources I can recommend for everyone who aspires to the nomadic lifestyle. You can get a lot of good ideas about overseas travel from a

magazine like International Living. The State Department also has a list of resources for expatriates. But each long-term traveler has such specific needs that it’s difficult to generalize. — *Chris Elliott*

**Q:** My wife and I plan to visit New York during the first week of November. Where can I find hotel promotions and deals?

**A:** I would check Nycgo.com, the website of NYC’s tourism office, and Travelzoo.com. They often list deals and packages. If you plan to return in January, take advantage of Hotel Week NYC (Hotelweeknyc.com), which offers discounted rates. Also check hotel websites or call to see

if they have any specials: They might cut you a deal if they have a lot of empty rooms close to your arrival date. If you don’t mind a bit of a mystery, try Hotwire.com. You find out the name of the hotel after booking. — *Andrea Sachs*

**Q:** My mom and I have tried to take quick trips to visit states we haven’t been to before. Unfortunately, the overlap in our lists is divergent as we approach the end of the 50 states. Any ideas for a quick trip over the coming six months to either Kentucky, North Dakota or — if we want to do something new — Iceland?

**A:** If you want quick, a nonstop flight is best. There are nonstop flights from our region to both Louisville and Lexington in Kentucky. I’d opt for Louisville — it’s a compact city with nice restaurants, shopping and historical sites. North Dakota is a bit more complicated, as there are no nonstop flights. Iceland is an easy long weekend trip. Icelandair offers cheap tours that include nonstop flights from Dulles and hotel, although food and incidentals are expensive. — *C.S.*

**Q:** Does the Global Entry card by itself meet Real ID requirements for domestic air travel?

**A:** According to the TSA, the answer is yes. But I would still bring your driver’s license or passport, just in case. TSA agents will not argue when you show a passport. — *C.E.*

## Agent? Adviser? In travel, terms are changing.



**The Navigator**  
CHRISTOPHER ELLIOTT

who recently contacted me for help finding a “reputable” travel agency in the Chicago area, the answer should have been pretty straightforward.

“I’m planning a trip to Europe and I need someone with experience in booking rail trips,” said Corcos, a retired university administrator from River Forest, Ill.

A quick visit to what was then the American Society of Travel Agents’ website to find a specialist in European travel would have yielded a few usable leads.

But in the fast-changing world of travel, is anything that simple? Maybe not. Airline, car rental and hotel sites enable you to act as your own travel agent. If you need a little hand-holding, you can visit an online travel agency and avoid some fees. And now, to add to the confusion, some travel agents aren’t even calling themselves agents anymore.

That’s right, those agents are now advisers. Last year, the American Society of Travel Agents changed its name to the American Society of Travel Advisors.

Paul Metselaar says it’s an important shift. Travel agents are no longer “order takers,” or intermediaries between the traveler and a company, he says. People now think of them as professionals, like lawyers or accountants. As the CEO of Ovation Travel Group, a New York-based agency, he was among the first to discard the “agent” label in favor of “adviser.”

“As travel advisers, we’ve built a significant level of trust with each of our customers on a highly personalized level,” he says.

In the face of fierce competition from online agencies, travel agents are also upping their game, says Dave Hershberger, ASTA’s chairman and owner of a Travel Leaders agency in Cincinnati. “That’s the biggest change,” he says.

Instead of offering a broad range of services, many agents now specialize in niche products such as honeymoons or cruises.

If agents — or advisers — don’t see themselves as intermediaries anymore, are there some trips you should book yourself? Yes. For a simple weekend trip, self-booking might be easier. Plus, you can avoid an adviser’s consulting fee, which averages about \$100 per trip. But for a complicated rail adventure through Europe, like the one Corcos is planning, you’ll probably want to hire an adviser.

So how to find one in this topsy-turvy world of travel?

You’ll still want to look for certifications and association memberships. For example, the Travel Institute’s Certified Travel Associate (CTA) and Certified Travel Counselor (CTC) designations mean an agent has taken the time to study and understand travel. In 2017, ASTA created a Verified Travel Advisor program, which indicates an adviser has met “a higher level of verifiable professional knowledge.”

Of course, membership in ASTA or in the Association of Retail Travel Agents is also a sign that your travel adviser means business.

Some of the best travel agents, or advisers, are affiliated with well-known franchises, such as American Express or Carlson Wagonlit Travel, or with an agency network like Travel Leaders, Signature or Virtuoso. These affiliations offer peace of mind and, sometimes, lower prices.

For example, membership in Travel Leaders or a similar network means that the agent is properly trained and insured and that there’s an 800 number you can call 24/7. “It ensures that you have someone to help you if your trip is disrupted or you need advice once you arrive in your destination,” says Roger Block, president of the Travel Leaders Network.

There’s more, says Matthew Upchurch, the CEO of Virtuoso, a network of luxury travel advisers. “Reputation, experience and professionalism certainly come into play,” he says. “But then you have to count on the X-factor, which really comes down to chemistry.”

Virtuoso’s directory of advisers includes detailed biographical information, such as years of experience, languages spoken, verified reviews and recommendations from clients, travel specialties, and destinations personally visited.

“A great travel adviser will be happy to provide references — not just online testimonials, which can be posted by anyone,” says Christine Hardenberger, owner of Modern Travel Professionals, a full-service travel agency in Virginia Beach. “People are less likely to lie when contacted directly.”

Above all, stay flexible as the industry changes. Behind the scenes, the economics of being a travel adviser are still shifting, says Jack Ezon, the founder of Embark, a new platform for travel agencies. “The next generation of travel advisers will turn the entire model upside down to be more customer-centric.”

That would be good — for everyone.

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## SIGN LANGUAGE



EILEEN FOLEY

Spotted by Eileen Foley of Reston, Va., in Santorini, Greece, in September.

**Have you seen an amusing sign in your travels? Read on.** Photos may be color or black-and-white and should be no more than a year old. Send high-resolution JPEG image to [travel@washpost.com](mailto:travel@washpost.com) with “Sign Language” in the subject line. Be sure to include your name, contact information and a proposed caption. You can also submit prints or photo-quality printouts to Travel Section Sign Contest, 1301 K St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20071. (Write your name, caption and contact information on the back.) Photos become property of The Washington Post, which may edit, publish, distribute or republish them in any form. No purchase necessary.

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