



Boundary representations are not necessarily authoritative.

BACKGROUND

Land and Climate

Located on the Balkan Peninsula, in southeastern Europe, Montenegro covers 5,333 square miles (13,812 square kilometers) and is just smaller than Connecticut. Montenegro (literally, “black mountain”) has a mostly mountainous terrain. The Dinaric Alps are home to Montenegro's highest peak, Bobotov Kuk (8,274 feet, or 2,522 meters), and Europe's deepest canyon, the Tara River Canyon. Podgorica (called *Titograd* during the communist period) is the administrative capital; the historic capital of Cetinje is the ceremonial seat of the president. Montenegro's climate varies with elevation. Lower coastal regions enjoy a Mediterranean climate, with average temperatures in July of 75°F (24°C) and in January of 46°F (8°C). In central and northern Montenegro, the climate changes to continental. There, temperatures average closer to 79°F (26°C) in July and dip down to 23°F (-5°C) in January.

History

Starting around 3500 BC, several seminomadic groups—most notably the Illyrians—inhabited the area now called Montenegro. Romans took over in AD 9. In 285, the Roman Empire was divided into two portions, and the border between them cut through present-day Montenegro. Since then, the area has been subject to both Western and Eastern influences. With the collapse of the Western Roman Empire in the fifth century, Slavic tribes came to dominate the region. Ancestors of today's Montenegrins, these geographically isolated Slavic

groups fought each other and various invaders throughout the Middle Ages.

Duklja, a dukedom under Byzantine rule and a precursor to a Montenegrin state, gained independence in 1042 and was thereafter called Zeta. Zeta was conquered and incorporated into Raška, the first Serbian state, around 1166 but regained independence in 1356. The Ottoman Empire conquered Serbia in 1459. However, the most mountainous part of Zeta—called Montenegro, a name later extended to a larger area—was the only territory in the region to remain essentially untouched by Ottoman rule, largely due to its difficult terrain and lack of wealth.

Beginning in 1515, Montenegro was governed by a series of prince-bishops before being converted to a secular principality in 1852. Montenegro was formally recognized as an independent country at the Congress of Berlin in 1878. In 1905, Prince Nikola I Petrovič Njegoš established a parliamentary government, assuming the title of king five years later. Montenegro gained more territory in the Balkan Wars against the Ottoman Empire (1912–13) and sided with Serbia and Russia when World War I broke out. Austria-Hungary occupied Montenegro in 1916.

When World War I ended in 1918, Montenegro was integrated into a new nation called the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929. During World War II, Montenegro fought with the Allies, while siding with the communists at home in Yugoslavia's civil war against the monarchists. With the end of the Second World War, Montenegro became one of the six republics in the communist-led Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, under Josip Broz Tito, along with Serbia,

Slovenia, Macedonia, Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Tito's authoritarian rule kept nationalism at a minimum and preserved peace between federation members.

After Tito's death in 1980, ethnic tensions surfaced. In the 1990s, Croatian and Bosnian declarations of independence were met with violence from ethnic Serbs within Croatia and Bosnia and from the Yugoslav (largely Serbian) military. When Yugoslavia dissolved in 1992, Montenegrin citizens voted to remain in federation with Serbia, as the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY). The Dayton Peace Accords ended the fighting in Bosnia in 1995. International sanctions were imposed on the newly formed FRY the same year.

Discontent in Montenegro over Serbia's involvement in the Bosnian and Croatian conflicts and its larger share of power within the federation led to the election of Milo Đukanović as president of Montenegro in 1997. When Yugoslav president Slobodan Milošević then installed the losing candidate as prime minister, the federal government became illegitimate in the eyes of many Montenegrins. Meanwhile, President Đukanović distanced Montenegro from Milošević's bloody crackdown on ethnic Albanians in Kosovo. Montenegro escaped the brunt but not all of the NATO bombings that ensued in 1999. Roughly 70,000 Albanian refugees from Kosovo were given refuge in Montenegro. Milošević was ousted in 2000.

In 2003, Montenegro—despite a growing desire for independence—renegotiated its status with Serbia. The future of the new, looser union, renamed Serbia and Montenegro, was subject to referendum in 2006. In that referendum, 55.5 percent of Montenegrin voters chose independence, which was declared on 3 June 2006. Montenegro is now working to enact the political and economic reforms necessary for membership in NATO and the European Union while combating poverty, corruption, and organized crime. In December 2009, Montenegro citizens were granted the freedom to travel without visas throughout most of Western Europe and Scandinavia.

THE PEOPLE

Population

Montenegro's population of roughly 667,000 inhabitants is decreasing at a rate of 0.78 percent annually. Nearly one-third of Montenegrins live in Podgorica; another third are spread among other cities, including Nikšić, Bijelo Polje, and Bar. The remainder inhabit rural areas. Roughly 43 percent of people describe themselves as Montenegrin and 32 percent as Serb. These numbers are influenced by attitudes toward Montenegrin independence. Bosniaks (also called Muslims) make up roughly 8 percent of the population and live mainly in the north. Ethnic Albanians (5 percent) are largely concentrated in the towns of Ulcinj, Plav, and Tuzi. Croats, Roma, and others make up the remaining 12 percent of the population.

Relations between ethnic groups are generally good, especially in comparison with those elsewhere in the region. During the Balkan conflicts of the 1990s, Montenegro welcomed tens of thousands of refugees and internally

displaced persons from Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo. Today, many thousands of these refugees continue to live in Montenegro.

Language

When Montenegro was part of Tito's Yugoslavia, Serbo-Croatian was the official language. With the 1992 creation of the FRY, the official language changed to Serbian (of the Ijekavian dialect), written in the Cyrillic or Latin alphabet. Divisions between the languages spoken in Montenegro have more to do with ethnic nationalism and political alignment than with linguistic differences. Over half of the population calls their native language Serbian; less than one-fourth calls it Montenegrin. Albanian, which has legal status in areas where Albanians constitute the majority, Bosnian, and Croatian are also spoken in Montenegro.

Religion

Under communism, religious observation was discouraged. Today, religion tends to be a matter of national identity and cultural tradition rather than a daily practice. About 74 percent of the population is Christian Orthodox. Due to the restoration in 1993 of the Montenegrin Orthodox Church, annexed to the Serbian church in 1920, the Christian Orthodox population is starting to split along ethnic lines. Differences in religious practices are small, however. Both churches are based in Cetinje. The second-largest religion in Montenegro is Islam (18 percent), practiced mainly by Albanians and Bosniaks. Roman Catholics (4 percent) consist primarily of Croats and Albanians.

General Attitudes

Montenegrins value their history and military traditions. They enjoy discussing Balkan politics and regional issues. Communities tend to be close-knit, with most people aware of what others are doing. Hospitality is important. Even when people don't have enough food for themselves, they make it a priority to feed visitors. In general, people are welcoming to foreigners, though this attitude is sometimes tempered along the coast during the height of the tourist season. As a whole, Montenegrin society is patriarchal—men still head the family and dominate public life—though this is changing somewhat in the more Western-leaning capital and coastal region. Youth are expected to show respect to their parents and adults in general.

Personal Appearance

Montenegrins pay close attention to their appearances, and they often spend a disproportionate amount of their salaries on clothing. At least once a year, people travel to Italy to shop for clothes and stay abreast of the latest fashions. Professionals wear suits to work and often stay dressed up to do errands. Casually, women might wear blouses with skirts or pants. Men wear jeans, T-shirts, and nice shoes. People like to have expensive accessories such as sunglasses, watches, and cellular phones. Traditional clothing may still be seen in remote rural areas or at events such as weddings, funerals, and some holidays. Such clothing includes the Montenegrin cap, a circular black hat with a red top that bears the

Montenegrin coat of arms or the wearer's initials. In villages with large Muslim populations, some females wear traditional clothing, including baggy pants called *dimije* or long skirts accompanied by white scarves that cover the hair. Most urban Muslims, however, dress indistinguishably from the rest of the Montenegrin population.

CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

Greetings

Friends and relatives greet each other with an embrace and three kisses on alternating cheeks; youth may exchange just one kiss. More formal greetings include a handshake. As a form of respect, a younger person always greets an older person first by standing or initiating a handshake. Common greetings include *Dobro jutro* (Good morning), *Dobar dan* (Good day), or *Dobro večer* (Good evening). Other greetings include *Zdravo* (Be healthy) or *Dje si* (What's up?). Upon parting, people say *Do vidjenja* (Until we meet again). In urban areas, *Čao* (from the Italian *Ciao*, meaning "Good-bye" or occasionally "Hello") is popular. *Pozdrav* (Greetings) is used upon meeting or parting.

To address someone formally, the family name is preceded by *Gospodine* (Mr.), *Gospodjo* (Mrs.), *Gospodjice* (Miss), or a professional title. The traditional way to present oneself (to an elderly person, for instance) is to offer a clan and tribal name in addition to one's given name. Nicknames are used widely and sometimes exclusively among friends. Females may call each other *draga* (dear), while males use terms like *brate* (brother) or *družer* (pal).

Gestures

Facial expressions and hand movements are common during conversation. Maintaining eye contact while talking to someone is very important. It is impolite to point at objects or people and doing so may be seen as a provocation. Touching one's cheek with the palm of one's hand indicates pride in something accomplished or that a person's conscience is clean. This corresponds with the saying "he has a clean cheek," while saying that someone has a "dirty cheek" indicates guilt or bad behavior. Young girls who are friends may hold hands while walking. Similarly, a boy may put his arm over another boy's shoulder while walking as an expression of strong friendship. People show public approval by applauding and disapproval by whistling or shouting "uaaa."

Visiting

Close connections between family and friends are maintained through frequent visits at home or at habitual spots (such as a café or restaurant). Dinner appointments usually begin around 7 or 8 pm. Guests bring the hosts a gift, such as a bottle of *loza* (a traditional grape brandy), wine, coffee, or homemade baked goods. Children receive separate gifts of sweets or money. The host typically serves *loza* to his guests while the hostess prepares Turkish coffee. Guests are also offered an array of snacks, including homemade cheeses and meats. It is impolite to refuse offers of food and drink. Dinner then

follows. At the end of a visit, hosts may drive guests home or walk them to their car or bus station.

Eating

Working adults and those with school-age children eat breakfast before 8 a.m. Otherwise, breakfast is usually eaten between 8 and 10 a.m. and includes bread, cheese, and ham or other breakfast foods such as cereal or pancakes. Lunch, traditionally eaten between noon and 2 p.m., is now served closer to 4 or 5 p.m. due to later working hours. It is the most important meal of the day and usually consists of soup, a main dish, cheese, and bread.

Meals (especially lunch) are seen as small family reunions, though a faster-paced lifestyle is making gathering more difficult. Dinner is relatively light, a meal of eggs, cheese, and some potatoes or fried meat, for example. When eating out with friends or colleagues, it is considered shameful to pay only for oneself; instead, one person picks up the tab for the entire group. Everyone in the group will eventually take his or her turn paying the bill at subsequent meals.

LIFESTYLE

Family

Montenegro once had a tribal society composed of clans made up of families. Today, people can recognize the tribe and clan they belong to through their family name. Most can trace their ancestry back several generations and know their paternal family history well. Though the importance of tribal identities is fading in urban Montenegro, tribal affiliation may affect one's chances for gaining public office, for example, since candidates coming from larger, stronger clans (which people refer to as a "well-known family") are generally favored over those with less prestigious ancestry.

Families with two children are the norm, though three- or four-children families are not uncommon. Normally, three generations live under one roof. Young couples usually move in with the groom's family upon marriage. Parents feel morally obliged to support their children by providing them money or housing. Older children do the same for younger ones. In turn, children are expected to care for their elderly parents. Fathers or grandfathers have a dominant role in the family. Grandmothers provide childcare for mothers who work.

Housing

Traditional Montenegrin homes were built of stone topped with wooden roofs. Today, brick and wood are more common. Since a devastating earthquake hit Montenegro's coastline in 1979, houses are required to be constructed according to strict earthquake-proof standards. However, it is not uncommon for people to start building a house before obtaining a construction permit. Many of these houses, though inhabited, are left partially unfinished in order for their owners to avoid paying property taxes. Many families build homes on land that has been in their family for several generations. Others take advantage of rising property values by selling family land to purchase apartments in urban

locations or along the coast. Apartments usually have two bedrooms, while houses may have three or more.

Dating and Marriage

Typical dating activities include dancing at a club, going for a walk downtown, or enjoying a drink and conversation at a café or bar. Several decades ago, women married in their early 20s, but due to growing economic opportunities most now wait until their mid-20s, with men usually marrying in their late 20s. Though marriages are not arranged, the family background of a potential spouse is taken into close consideration before a couple marries. Parents will readily support and encourage marriage to someone of a well-known clan or tribe. All weddings include a civil ceremony at the town hall, but many couples today also opt for a religious ceremony (Orthodox, Muslim, or Catholic).

Life Cycle

Traditionally, the birth of a male child was celebrated by firing several shots from a gun. Today, such shooting is illegal; however, people might still fire one shot or set off fireworks. Soon after a birth, family and friends gather for a *čestitka* (congratulations visit), when they place money under the new baby's pillow.

Showing respect to the dead is considered a moral obligation. Usually, the deceased is buried within one day. However, some families still follow traditions that call for the deceased to be kept at home for two nights in order for relatives and friends to pay their last respects. According to Orthodox tradition, remembrance gatherings are held on the fortieth day after a loved one dies.

Diet

Dietary staples include bread, smoked meat (ham, bacon, sausage), fish, and milk products such as *kajmak* (a fatty, salty cheese) and *skorup* (a cheese made from skimmed milk). Common dishes include *kačamak and proja* (a cornmeal dish with cheese), *musaka* (ground beef with potatoes), *sarma* (ground beef rolled in cabbage), and *pasulj sa mesom* (beans with meat). *Pršut* (a variety of smoked ham) is served on special occasions, except among Muslim families who do not eat pork. A wide variety of seafood is eaten along the coast, where Italian and Croatian influences can be tasted in the cuisine. Montenegrins enjoy Turkish dishes such as *baklava*, *tulumba*, and others.

Recreation

Montenegrins highly respect accomplished athletes. In addition to earning high grades, young people are expected to be good at sports. The country's most popular sport is soccer, and small weekly soccer tournaments between friends are common. Women mostly play volleyball, handball, and basketball. In very rural areas, men may play the ancient game of *bacanje kamena sa ramena* (throwing stones from the shoulder), in which they see who can throw a large stone furthest. This and other traditional games are played most often during annual tribal gatherings.

After work, people like to play card games, such as rummy, with friends. Many neighborhoods have a *boćanje*

(“bowls,” a kind of lawn-bowling) team. Montenegrins also enjoy watching lottery games such as *tombolas* and *loto* on television. Many city dwellers spend the weekend in their native villages at family-owned cottages. People vacation during the month of August.

The Arts

Virtually every Montenegrin knows by heart at least a portion of 19th century bishop-poet Petar II Petrovic Njegoš's masterpiece, the epic poem *Gorski Vijenac (The Mountain Wreath)*, and may use verses from the poem in everyday conversation. Milovan Djilas, writer and dissident in the former Yugoslavia, is well known for his series of memoirs. Montenegro is also home to many notable 20th century painters, including Milo Milunović, Petar Lubarda, Vojo Stanić, Dimitrije Popović, and Dado Djuric. Balkan *turbofolk*, a mixture of folk influences and globalized pop music, is widespread. Musician Rambo Amadeus is famous for his *turbofolk* music and his satiric lyrics. The national instrument is the *gusle*, which is wooden, one-stringed, and played with a bow. Traditionally, it accompanies a popular folk dance called the *Oro*, meant to imitate the flight of an eagle.

Holidays

Official holidays include New Year's Day (1 Jan.); Labor Day (1 May); and Statehood Day (13 July), commemorating both the first recognition of statehood, in 1878, and an anti-fascist uprising during WWII. Major Christian holidays include Catholic Christmas (25–26 December), Orthodox Christmas (5–7 January), and Easter. Orthodox Christians burn logs in front of their churches on Christmas Eve (6 Jan.) to bring good fortune and ward off evil spirits.

Catholic and Orthodox Christians follow the Gregorian and Julian calendars, respectively. Muslims follow the lunar calendar and observe *Ramazanski Bajram* (feast at the end of the month of fasting) and *Kurban Bajram* (Feast of the Sacrifice) among other holidays. Each extended Montenegrin family, sometimes an entire tribe, celebrates the day of their patron saint, called a *slava* (celebration). A *slava* is celebrated with a special bread blessed by a priest, *žito* (sweetened, cooked wheat or corn marked with a cross), and a candle symbolizing the year ahead.

SOCIETY

Government

Montenegro is a parliamentary republic. The president (currently Filip Vujanović) is head of state and is elected to a five-year term with a two-term limit. The president appoints the prime minister (currently Igor Lukšić), who is head of government. Parliament consists of 81 members, who serve 4-year terms. The voting age is 18. A 2007 constitution replaced the draft adopted in 1992.

Economy

During the Balkan conflicts of the 1990s, the Montenegrin economy suffered from hyperinflation, high unemployment, an influx of refugees, and international sanctions. In recent

years, widespread privatization has attracted foreign investment (mainly Russian) to Montenegro, especially in the rapidly growing tourism sector. Foreign investors have also been drawn to Montenegro's cheap but quickly rising real estate market. The government, with the help of foreign donors, is working to improve national infrastructure and further develop agriculture in the central and northern regions. However, the value of foreign investments is expected to decrease, causing the economy as a whole to slow, as a result of the 2008 global financial crisis. Major crops include tobacco, potatoes, olives, kiwi, citrus fruits, and grapes. Shepherding and commercial fishing are also important to Montenegro's economy. The country's largest export is aluminum, but Montenegro also produces iron, lumber, beer, wine, and cheese. The currency is the euro (EUR).

Transportation and Communications

Driving is the preferred form of transportation, though low quality roads, mountainous terrain, and unsafe older cars result in frequent accidents. From Bar, regular ferries provide transportation to Italy, Greece, and Albania. Trains and buses are functional but in need of renovation. In recent years, the government, with the help of foreign aid, has enlarged existing roads and remodeled airports. Nearly 98 percent of the population has a cell phone—some people even have two. The number of internet users is growing quickly. Since the 1990s, an independent media has rapidly developed and now includes six private television stations, which broadcast nationally, two public service stations, several local channels, and four daily newspapers. There is a functioning, but slow, postal system.

Education

Beginning at age six, students must attend nine years of basic education. After that, secondary schooling, which is not mandatory, lasts either three years (for a technical education) or four (for a general education). English is taught from an early age, followed by Italian, German, French, and Russian. Primary and secondary schools are free for all citizens. There is one public university—the University of Montenegro—and several private institutions. Roughly one-fourth of those accepted to the public university attend for free (depending on their grades and exam scores), while the other three-fourths must pay a nominal rate. Montenegrins highly value education, and in the past some parents sold their land and house to send their children to college in other parts of the former Yugoslavia.

Health

A national system, funded by income taxes, provides health care to all at several regional hospitals and health centers. Care is of reasonably good quality; however, waits for non-critical procedures can be extremely long and some medicines are in short supply. Those who can afford to do so pay to see private doctors and, if seriously ill, may travel to Western Europe for treatment. The most modern healthcare facilities are found in Podgorica. Patients requiring specialized care are routinely sent abroad, usually to

Belgrade, Serbia. The primary health problems Montenegrins face are cardiovascular diseases and cancers.

AT A GLANCE

Contact Information

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POPULATION & AREA

Population	666,730 (rank=164)
Area, sq. mi.	5,333 (rank=159)
Area, sq. km.	13,812

DEVELOPMENT DATA

Human Dev. Index* rank	49 of 182 countries
Gender inequality rank	NA
Real GDP per capita	\$9,800
Adult literacy rate	99% (male); 94% (female)
Infant mortality rate	NA
Life expectancy	72 (male); 77 (female)

*UN Development Programme, Human Development Report 2010 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).