



Earlier this month, a giant fuchsia-pink jellyfish, *Drymonema dalmatinum*, was spotted in the Adriatic Sea for the first time in 70 years. Also making a rare appearance this summer are British holiday-home hunters, who are starting to swoop in on this spectacular coastal region.

Separating the Italian and Balkan peninsulas, the Adriatic is a 500-mile-long stretch of water that runs from Venice, skirting around the 1,200 islands of Dalmatia and past the heel of Italy, until it hits the north coast of Corfu. The Romans may have given us indoor plumbing, aqueducts and the calendar, but, centuries later, Venice's 400-year rule in the Adriatic has left a legacy of elegant Italianate towns, with plenty of properties for sale.

The eastern seaboard, taking in Slovenia, Croatia, Montenegro and Albania, is a lot more dramatic than the west. It is a natural haven for yachties, who enjoy calm, crystal-clear waters punctuated by ancient fishing villages, secluded bays, uninhabited islands and modern marinas such as Porto Montenegro, the Balkan version of St Tropez. Tourism swings wildly between the chronically embryonic and five-star resorts.

Casting off at the eastern head of the Adriatic, you first encounter the majestic city and cargo port of Trieste. It doesn't draw holiday-homers, however, overshadowed as it is by Venice on one side and the "piccola Venezia" (little Venice) of Piran on the other. The latter is the centrepiece of Slovenia's 27 miles of coastline: a pocket of meandering medieval streets and cobbled squares, perched on a tiny peninsula surrounded by terraced olive groves and cypress trees.

It oozes old-school charm, and pulls in the day trippers in high season, but Piran attracts surprisingly few British buyers, according to Justin Young, owner of Slovenia Estates, based in Ljubljana (sloveniaestates.com). He is selling a two-bedroom period



All hail the Adriatic

Stretching 500 miles from Venice to Corfu, this arm of the Mediterranean borders some of Europe's most spectacular coasts, lined with delightful architecture and affordable holiday homes. **Liz Rowlinson** is your guide

Neil Farrin/Jean-Pierre Lescouret/Getty; Rawdon Wyatt/Robert Harding/Alamy



101 reasons to buy Dalmatian highlights include the old town of Dubrovnik, above, and unspoilt islands such as Sipan, right

flat in Piran, with sea views, for €235,000 (£188,000). Historically, buyers have looked to invest in Alpine property around Lake Bled, but he advises looking to Piran or Portoroz to "get more of a Riviera feel".

Heading south, you soon hit the Croatian region of Istria, often dubbed the "new Tuscany", and with good reason. It's a food-obsessed peninsula of rolling hills and medieval walled hilltop villages such as Motovun, famed for its white truffles.

These days, Istria's film and music festivals draw bohemian types, along with the Slow Food crowd. Yet there are few good-quality villas near the sea and the tourist-magnet towns of Porec and Rovinj, according to Toni Ercegovic, owner of Osmica estate agency (8realestate.eu). "If you are looking for a three-bedroom villa with a pool, it's easier to find inland than on the coast," he says. These properties will set you

back €250,000-€300,000. "A better option is to buy land by the sea, from €150,000, and build your own home."

In Rovinj — another photogenic "little Venice", with ice-cream-coloured townhouses rising out of the sea on a peninsula — a British vendor is selling a one-bedder flat in the heart of the old town for €79,995 (email chrisheath@gmail.com).

As you continue south down the Croatian coast towards the Dalmatian archipelago, you can't miss Krk, the largest, most visited and most accessible Adriatic isle — it's connected to the mainland with a bridge. The Zadar region is also worth a stop, according to Jelena Cvjetkovic, agency network manager at Savills International: "This region is blessed with far more natural beauty than the built-up stretch south of Split."

The prime targets for househunters, however, are the islands further south, especially Brac, Hvar and Korcula. Boat access from the mainland and airport is a key issue. A promised seaplane service from Split to Hvar, set to be launched later this year by European Coastal Airlines, should reduce journey times from half an hour to 10 minutes. "The island is now

fashionable, with a party scene centred on Hvar Town, yet there are plenty of wonderful coves to escape the crowds," Cvjetkovic says.

Tim Coulson, owner of First Property Croatia, agrees that this greenest of isles attracts a younger, wealthier clientele. Prices are high — €4,000-€5,000 a sq metre — thanks to lack of supply. "But you could get a ruin in an inland village, with a sea view, for less than €100,000."

Brac, an easy 45 minutes from Split by ferry, offers a wider choice of properties. Coulson suggests looking at pretty fishing villages such as Milna, Sutivan and Postira, "where a small house in need of renovation will cost about €250,000".

Don't miss the kitesurfers' paradise of Zlatni Rat, a V-shaped sand spit ringed by turquoise waters that is regularly voted one of the world's top beaches. If privacy is a priority, First Property Croatia is selling a six-bedroom seafront home tucked away in an ancient pine forest for €690,000 (firstpropertycroatia.com).

To address the shortage of new-builds in Croatia, Pin & Pin is developing high-end properties on the most popular islands and on the



coast north of Dubrovnik (pinandpin.hr). "This shortage has been holding back the market, because there is certainly the demand internationally," says Adam Pinion, the firm's co-founder. We've been buying land and building waterfront properties to order, at between €2m and €3m for 400 to 500 square metres. They come with moorings, as most of our buyers are yachties."

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€235,000

PIRAN, SLOVENIA

Once owned by a Slovenian impressionist painter, this two-bedroom flat is in an attractive 1880s building on a hill above the medieval town of Piran. Renovated three years ago, it has parquet flooring, a large living room and balcony with sea views, and plenty of natural light.

00 386 051 622444, sloveniaestates.com



€2.5m

PELJESAC PENINSULA, CROATIA

This 18th-century seafront captain's house in the port town of Orebic was renovated seven years ago, with antique stone floors and bright reception rooms. The four-storey home has five bedrooms, a summer kitchen and views across the sea to Korcula from its large gardens and terraces.

020 7016 3740, sav-croatia.com

Four centuries of Venetian rule have left a legacy of elegant Italianate towns along the coast, with plenty of properties for sale



Pinion says there are some great locations on Korcula, including the beautiful fortified Korcula Town, with its herringbone street pattern.

Although many tourists head to car-free Lopud, it is Sipan — an olive-tree-carpeted isle where the Dubrovnik cognoscenti have summered since the Renaissance — that has the most magic. "With an exotic and wild interior, this wonderfully

undeveloped island has two main settlements, steeped in history — Sipanska Luka, with shuttered waterfront buildings giving it a Riviera flavour, and Sudurad, a quiet fishing village dominated by two grand Renaissance villas," says James Fforde, 53, an entrepreneur based near Guildford who has written books about Croatia.

Fforde is selling his six-bedroom property (with

a chapel) in Dubrovnik's old town for €1.3m (savills.com). He's clearly a big fan of the place: "Nothing can ever match the mind-blowing architecture — there's something so calming about it, so rich for the soul."

At €5,000 a sq metre, Dubrovnik doesn't come cheap, but your money goes further in the beautiful villages nearby, according to Cvjetkovic: "North of the city, are Orasac, Trsteno, Brsecine and Ston. To the south are Mlini, Plat, Cavtat and the fertile Konavle Valley — pristine little hamlets of stone houses in cypress woods."

The harbourfront town of Cavtat is especially lovely; prices start at €235,000. In Orasac, turnkey one-bedders at the integrated resort of Dubrovnik Sun Gardens can be had for €260,000 (dubrovniksungardens.com).

Across the border in Montenegro, looser planning laws — and a campaign to attract luxury tourism — have provided a greater choice of resort properties over the past five years, mostly around the breathtaking Bay of Kotor, with its Italianate towns and pine-clad mountains mirrored in the fjord.

While you can snap up a flat to renovate for less than

Drink in the view A beach bar below Dubrovnik's city walls. Main picture, Korcula Town



€100,000, many foreign buyers prefer to take the easy option: a new-build in a managed resort. If the Russian-heavy bling of Porto Montenegro is not your style, try peaceful Lustica Bay, on its own peninsula, where prices start at €180,000 (lusicabay.com), or Dukley Gardens, in the party resort of Budva. The latter is not far from the iconic little island resort of Sveti Stefan, where Novak Djokovic recently got married; two-bedroom flats are available from €650,000 (dukley.com).

"Budva is emerging from a two-star destination into something better," says Colin Kingsmill, Dukley's head of sales and marketing. At the same time, he admits that Montenegro is still an emerging destination, with a "a lot that needs to be fixed" in terms of infrastructure and accessibility.

The same can definitely be said of neighbouring Albania, but that's the thing about buying in the Balkans — you need to take the long-term, if rather beautiful, view.

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