

## **MONTENEGRO – Advice from Fulbright Alumni**

**The following are extracts from Fulbright Grantee Reports and are not meant to reflect the views of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA), its cooperating agencies, or the U.S. Embassy.**

**Please provide any information on the aspects of local culture that could help future Fulbright grantees working in your host country or institution(s).**

Although I am native from this region (former Yugoslavia, Belgrade, Serbia) after 30 years of being away I became foreigner. So, my experience in Montenegro would not be much different than anyone else's. Colleges in Montenegro do not have "visiting professor culture" (especially for foreign professors). They do not have administrative arrangements in place that may assist visiting professors. Usual excuse is: the instruction is not in English, therefore visiting professors are excluded from contact with their students. However, that is not entirely true because the colleges would not academically accommodate even a professor who has a native command of the local language (my case). The solution was to have me co-teach a course with two other colleagues. That is only in the case of Traditional Fulbright Grant recipient, but not in case of Fulbright Grant for English Language Teachers. English Language Fulbright Teachers are given chance to independently teach a class and the mechanism for helping them in educational environment is in place and is relatively well developed.

Some random observations: Social life in Podgorica centers mostly around cafes, and the pace of life is more relaxed than in the US. Families are very close; young people mostly live with their parents until (or frequently after) they marry. Most people are highly critical of the government but not hopeful about positive change. They seem to experience a high degree of financial stress. The university culture is of course what I know best. Students and faculty come to classes (or don't) and leave. There is little sense of collegiality, but it is possible to make friends. Teachers are very busy, sometimes teaching in several places. They also put a lot of energy into organizing and attending conferences. Some students do not attend classes; they just show up for exams, which they have three chances to pass. However, many students are always in class and work hard. They may be taking seven or eight courses, so the work load of a class is significantly less than we would expect in the US. Most of their classes are lectures, but students will enthusiastically adapt to an interactive classroom.

**Please provide any recommendations related to logistics (e.g., travel, money, housing) that could help future Fulbright grantees working in your host country or institution(s).**

I have relatively unique travel experience that I'd like to share. Since Montenegro is a small state in the South of Balkans and does not have quite developed system of public transportation I have decided to ship my old car from Oklahoma. That was not outrageously expensive, \$1,150 from Galveston, Texas to Belgium. Drive to Montenegro would take a day or two but once in Montenegro, I did not have to depend on local bus schedules and even my international travel was very easy: 35 miles to Croatia; 250 miles to Serbia; from Montenegrin port Bar overnight car ferry sails daily to Italian port of Bari. From Dubrovnik there are daily (6 hours) car-ferries to Bari, Venice, Ancona etc.). Unfortunately, the US triple A does not have agreement with Euro zone and one needs to purchase local insurance (it could be purchased for a week, two weeks, month, six months etc.). In addition, you can purchase insurance only for the days of your travel and while car is parked you don't need to have it. I found traffic police to be quite kind and friendly and never had any problems. I was stopped few times for speeding or minor traffic violations and police was very friendly, especially when they realized that I came from

Oklahoma?! I was always let go with a smile and a friendly warning. Certainly, Euro-driving style is a bit different and it may be a bit challenging but one can get used to it easily. If you have received 9 month grant you may seriously consider shipping your car. Purchasing cars in Europe is costly and may be legally complicated. Longer term car-renting may be quite pricey. At the end of your stay you may consider selling your car. I found this to be an extraordinary experience that saved me time and the money. In addition, I have many nice stories to tell and luckily not one incident. On the other hand this is entirely different story. It is not easy to find a good, inexpensive and comfortable housing in Montenegro. Please beware, everybody will try to take advantage of you. My advice is, find a dependable native language speaker and buy a weekly classifieds magazine. it covers all of Montenegro rentals. It may take a while, but if you are patient and research this thoroughly I am sure you will find nice and affordable accommodation. However, you need someone who will read the ads, make calls and negotiate price for you. There are a number of flashy websites but they all were quite unrealistic, unreliable and overpriced. Unfortunately, there is this old European "Robin Hood mentality" prejudice against people from the US. All Americans are rich and landlords will most likely all suffer from that mentality. The best way to guard against it is to do good location and price research. My major recommendation is to talk with Fulbrights who are or have been in Montenegro. Certain apartments have been "passed down" from one Fulbright to another. This can be very helpful.

**Please provide any information on web sites or other resources you found helpful that could help future Fulbright grantees working in your host country or institution(s).**

There are many books that are helpful in beginning to understand the complexities of Montenegro and the Balkans. Books by journalist Misha Glenny are very good, as is Elizabeth Roberts' *Realm of the Black Mountain*. Nobel Prize winner Ivo Andric's *Bridge on the Drina* provides insight into the history of the region, and I highly recommend two recent and highly-praised novels, *The Tiger's Wife* by Tea Obreht and *How the Soldier Repairs the Gramophone* by Sasha Stanic.