



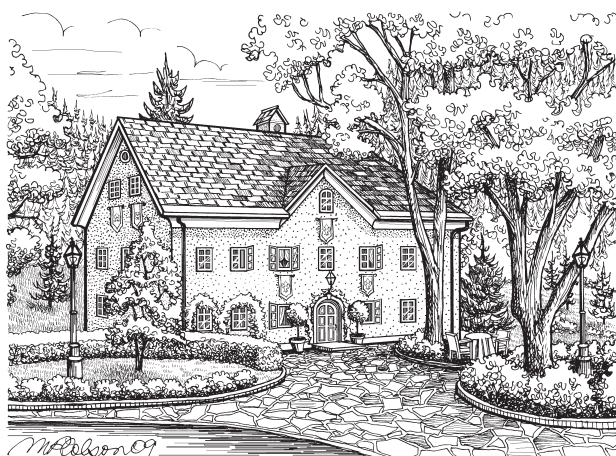
## BALKANS

### Hotel Kendov Dvorec

*Spodnja Idrija, Slovenia*

WITH ITS EXCELLENT ROADS AND MAGNIFICENT mountain scenery — the Julian Alps rise to more than 9,000 feet — Slovenia is a wonderful place for a leisurely journey by car. After a picturesque 40-mile drive heading west from the capital city of Ljubljana, we arrived at the 11-room Kendov Dvorec (Kenda Manor) near the lovely 800-year-old village of Spodnja Idrija. A solid and extremely comfortable old-fashioned country inn, it offers an experience akin to staying with your well-off Slovenian grandmother — if you had one.

Set on a hillside and surrounded by chestnut and linden trees, the pretty hotel overlooks a steep valley carved by a tumbling river, which provides a soothing



sound track of rushing water. Inside, the furniture is a mix of cozy chairs and sofas upholstered in subdued fabrics, and handsome 19th-century antiques. Our large room came with a glossy oak parquet floor, a 1920s oil painting over an art nouveau sleigh bed, and five double-casement windows that we threw open to enjoy the fresh air. Tablecloths, curtains and bed linen were decorated with handmade Idrija lace.

At dinner, the service was charming and the food notably delicious. The waiter explained that the hotel specializes in local cooking, since the cuisine in Slovenia changes every 20 miles or so, and that chef Franci Pivk has undertaken extensive research into local Idrija recipes. We thoroughly enjoyed our savory cabbage soup, followed by smoked lamb with horseradish, polenta with grilled porcini mushrooms, and veal with fried gnocchi. Dessert was *struckli*, or Slovenian streudel, filled with cottage cheese and raisins and served with pear jam.

The Slovenes are proud of their wines, and the hotel's list contains a wide selection from the nearby Vipava Valley, as well as the celebrated winegrowing regions of Goriška Brda, Karst and Koper. *Deluxe Double*, \$\$ [www.kendov-dvorec.com](http://www.kendov-dvorec.com)

### Villa Miločer

*Sveti Stefan, Montenegro*

WE HAVE LONG BEEN EAGER TO VISIT MONTENEGRO, a tiny Balkan state of startling beauty. The only reason to delay our trip has been the lengthy renovation of the legendary hotel on the tiny island of Sveti Stefan, where Yugoslav President Tito once entertained everyone from Sophia Loren to Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor. However, the first phase of the project, the Villa Miločer, opened in December 2008.

A two-story mansion of cream-colored limestone, formerly the summer residence of the Yugoslav royal family, the villa is set in a 70-acre park overlooking the Adriatic Sea. Transformed by Amanresorts, it now has an interior that is contemporary but warm and inviting, with beautiful herringbone oak parquet floors and elegant teak furniture. Our spacious suite had a dressing room with a deep tub, and a large bath with a stall shower. The main room led to a small balcony that offered lovely views of the beach, as well as of the wisteria-covered pergola that runs the length of the villa.

Despite the luxury implied by the Amanresorts name, Villa Miločer is in fact pleasantly low-key. There is no pool, spa or gym, although all three will figure in the renovated Sveti Stefan when it is finally complete. A charming library offers a wide selection of books in several languages, and the living room, with picture windows framing a memorable view of the Adriatic, provides a delightful venue for evening cocktails. The dining room is an intimate seven-table space with a large open fireplace and contemporary furniture complemented by hand-loomed woolen rugs and Italian linens.

Most guests pass languid days on one of the two pink-pebbled beaches, or take day trips to explore the surrounding countryside. (We spent an enchanting morning visiting the walled Venetian city of Kotor, about 40 minutes from the hotel.) Whether Sveti Stefan is eventually finished in 2010 or not, the Villa Miločer is already a delightful hotel, with superb service and a magical setting. *Garden View Suite*, \$\$\$\$; *Sea View Suite*, \$\$\$\$ [www.amanresorts.com](http://www.amanresorts.com)