



THE BEEMER READER

VOL. 24 • NO. 12 • DECEMBER 2013

Europe trip part one: the Balkans



Route map for the "Beautiful Balkans Adventure"

by Lucy Storms

The first tour "The Beautiful Balkans Adventure" has been so full of adventures, good food and many sights to see and visit. The group of people in the tour are all really nice, five Canadians, six Americans, one Australian and one New Zealander all about the same age except our guide and the van driver. A total of ten bikes plus our leader Dusan. The roads have been very challenging and exciting, the view spectacular.

Arrived at Ljubljana 2:30 pm Tuesday. Neil Taylor was on the same flight with me. Good to have

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Next Breakfast/Brunch

Sunday, December 1



WHERE:

Chequered Flag
2345 Millstream Road
Langford

TIME:

9:30 am



Twisty roads, forests and small villages



Picking up the motorcycles on the first day.

someone to go through the airport with and watch the luggage when I go to the bathroom. Finally after 18 hours of traveling and no sleep for 29 hours I finally hit the bed at 9:30 pm local time, sleeping in until 11:30 am and missing breakfast.

Our first real ride day was somewhat long, to Plitvice Lake in Croatia, the roads twisty and narrow through forests and small villages. Our hotel was in the park and we were early enough to go for a walk through the park for lots of pictures of the many waterfalls. Dinner was our first taste of strictly meat dishes for the meal, no vegetables or starch other than bread.

On to Sarajevo, Bosnia where we saw evidence of the war everywhere going through the northern countryside, many deserted and

destroyed villages. The people have not come back to their homes, leaving only the lonely sheep headers roaming the grassy valley and hill sides. Very little traffic. In

Sarajevo our first rest day, we had a tour of the city which was held under siege for three years. Alya the guide lived through it which made the presentation much more realistic and somewhat upsetting to see the devastation happening not that long ago. Although they have done a lot of restoration they have chosen to leave some buildings in the same destroyed manner to remind them of the Yugoslav war from 1992-1995. Sarajevo does have a real European flavor however. In contrast "old town" has a Turkish flair.

On our way to Mostar we had lunch at the Tekija monastery where the twirling dervish resided, built during the Ottomans rule. Lunch was served with fresh water fish, something else I couldn't eat,



Dubrovnik, Croatia



Small bribes and small offs

but on the up side my riding pants are starting to fit better. The road through the canyon was narrow with buses, difficult to pass and tunnels with very little light. Then after lunch through the Sutjeska nation park we had hot, tight twisties and one of our riders went off the road on a hair pin corner. Sprained her ankle, which we found out later was a hairline fracture, and after that rode pillion behind Dusan our guide, with her bike in the van. Neil got stopped for speeding but after some discussion got away with a bribe equivalent to \$50 CDN. It started out that they were going to take the bike and put him in jail for four day for going 40K over the speed limit. Thank goodness our guide was there. Other adventures just seemed to happen to Neil, maybe because he decided to ride on his own most of the time. We will look forward to the book on "Neil's excellent adventures". Mostar is a beautiful and romantic old town with cobble stone streets and a bridge that was significant in uniting Yugoslavia, destroyed in the war but now rebuilt rock by rock. We left Bosnia for Montenegro,



On the ferry from Dubrovnik to Hvar Island, Croatia

experiencing the most challenging roads so far. Over mountain passes, twisty goat trails really, through unlit tunnels dug out of the mountainside, so black you couldn't see a thing, yet with hairpin turns inside... amazing. We stayed in Zabljak, a ski resort. We went out to dinner at a very nice restaurant and shared two meat dishes again. This time half the group got sick, possibly from a flu virus that many

tourists were coming down with. Thankfully I seemed to avoid it. The sick ones either rode in the van or took the shorter route. They did not miss anything that next day, going through the mountains similar to Rogers Pass. We got our first bad weather, rain so hard it would hurt when it hit your arms. Darn BMW jacket leaked terribly and the rain jacket I wore under did not help much. I got soaked on the way down from the mountains to Petrovac on the ocean. The drivers are crazy. We saw one bike accident and two car accidents, one fatal. The traffic control for the construction is nonexistent. We were directed to drive under half of the arched 20



Seafood after riding, minus the fish

foot rebar being carried by the front end loader. Only the bikes could fit through. This would never happen in Canada. The ones of us left standing walked to dinner in the old town, guarded by a 16th century Venetian fortress. Dinner was great seafood, huge prawns, squid, calamari and some sort of fish I did not recognize. The chef, a real caricature, made me a separate dish of superbly prepared seafood minus the fish.

On the coast, now leaving Petrovac crossing into Croatia, our days destination Dubrovnik. Although traveling the coast had beautiful views and great warm weather it turned out to be a difficult day for me. Visiting the mausoleum monument for Peter II on a



The Fields of Montenegro



The other side of Debrovnik

mountain top, the road up from the coast was a series of serpentine curves and hairpins - 32 at least going up that many or more on the way down again, the hairpins more like spiral stairs. For some reason I was having trouble with the right turn, so much so Dusan our guide made me ride right behind him to follow his line through the turn. By about the 50th hairpin I think I was finally getting it. To top it off, at the top of the mountain there was 491 stairs to climb in our riding gear and boots just to get to the monument, but from there you could see 360 degrees from the ocean to the mountains of Montenegro we came through yesterday. Once in Debrovnik, a

rest day thankfully. Our hotel on the water, the weather a little cool, rain off and on. Some walked to the walled city inscribed on the list of world heritage sites by UNESCO for its unique political and cultural history. Although for me a good day to do laundry in the room. We had drinks and dinner in the cave bar down by the water, some swam in the sea before dinner.

The next day we crossed two borders on the way from Dubrovnik to Hvar island in Croatia, passing through the small arm of Bosnia, 14 km accessing the ocean then on to a ferry to the island. With everyone now feeling much better we took a boat back up the coast to a small beautiful family



Coastal winding roads to Pag Island



Waiting for the ferry from Pag Island to Split

owned romantic garden restaurant for an unbelievable seafood dinner - the best ever. The family live and work on the land and all the wine, oil and herbs used are grown right there on their property. A huge fish, about 5 feet long, was cooked over an open fire in a outdoor oven. A rest day in Hvar in, I think, the best hotel on the beach with a great swimming area out front. The weather cooperated for us 30+, everyone finally up and around again. We all took a swim in the ocean, which was about 20c. We walked into town along their seawall with a full moon, balmy weather for a dinner that touched all the senses. My favorite place so far.

A two hour ferry ride leaving Hvar Island, landing at Split on the coast of main land Croatia. We enjoyed

a picnic lunch and a nap. On the way to Pag Island we have another opportunity for coastal winding roads like Big Sur with very little traffic. Pag island, with its rocky ground, you can smell the aromatic sage and immortelle among other herb cover that make the fodder for the sheep and goats that give a special flavor to the well known cheese of Pag. Staying in a winery back in the country side, rooms with huge big soaker tubs, a place that deserved more time to enjoy, however we arrived late. The wine was superb, which went well with Neil's guitar jazz played before and after

dinner. That is when we got the idea that Shari and I should do the next motorcycle trip with Dusan and Yaca in Italy. I phoned Shari and before I could even tell her all about the tour she was saying... ok.... I'm in.

With just two days of riding left it seemed anti-climactic, people starting to think and talk about arrangements for going home or on to the next stage for some. Our last day in Croatia the roads were a mix of highway and twisties, up and around the hills by the ocean. We all rode a little slower, maybe tired or maybe wanting to extend the ride somewhat. The hotel in Rovinj was large full of European bus tourists. Thankfully we walked to dinner in the small medieval photographic town with narrow streets, three story buildings with window shutters. My camera battery has worn out. Hopefully I can get pictures of this town from



Navigating the narrow village streets



Balkan tour ends in Ljubljana



A perfect rest day while on Hvar Island

the others.

Our last day of riding from Rovinj to Ljubljana. We have just one more stop in Croatia. This time the driver Yaca was our leader and Dusan rushed back to Ljubljana in the van. Wound our way up a hill side to a fortress at the top, the place where Mario Andretti was born. Yaca grew up in the area that was once part of Italy, so you hear Italian as well as Slovenian. Then across the border for lunch of truffle stuffed ravioli in alfredo sauce with yet

more truffles shaved over it. Loved it but could not eat much as I got a reaction, likely due to the truffles being a type of mold. Champagne when we returned the bikes, a sad time for us all. The only thing left was our farewell dinner and lots of hugs with promises to keep in touch. We will see if we do, but at least I hope we share pictures.

One extra day in Ljubljana to make arrangements for the next tour and visit the city. I found a record shop that had a jazz trio play in

the afternoon. It was very pleasant. Took a bus to Venice to meet up with Shari and begin our bike tour, but not before spending a couple days in Venice. My first time there. Wonderful sightseeing on the booze water (water bus), wandering the labyrinth of streets and getting lost only to find cool cafes. We also took in an opera in a small old church. I think we covered it all in the short three days - with all that, a gondola ride plus a walking tour.

On to the next adventure The "Tuscany Sardinia Corsica Tour"!

Club Event Schedule

| Date | Event | Location | Comments |
|------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------|-----------|
| Sun, Dec 1 | Monthly Gathering | Chequered Flag | Breakfast |
| Wed, Jan 1, 2014 | TROC | Island View Beach, Bob's House | Party |
| Sun, Jan 4, 2014 | Monthly Gathering | Log House Pub | Breakfast |