

Aeolian Islands

At this stage of the cruise, we sailed in good weather, temperatures in the high 20's, and with hot sunshine from wall to wall! Our photographs will show you that T shirts and shorts were now worn, and Owain even bought a new pair of sandals at our last port of call.

We sailed past some of the Aeolian Islands, on a slightly misty day, and as we



we were working, we did not see all of the islands en route. As we travelled over the Mediterranean Sea, heading for the Adriatic sea, our journey's course took us past the north coast of Sicily, close to an area we have previously visited - the magnificent sight of Mount Etna. Its upper slopes were covered in snow, even though the volcano it holds still issues forth hot gasses into the sky. This natural state is slightly uncanny!



Durres, Albania

This cruise itinerary includes some familiar place names, notable in recent times as being places where trouble and strife has prevailed. Now, in calmer times we have been pleased to visit the next port of call in Albania. The town we visited looked a bit of a mess really, with a mixture of buildings inherited from the old communist days, and recently constructed blocks of flats, and modern shopping and commercial buildings, brightly coloured and covered in bright lights.

The main street our bus driver had to negotiate was a nightmare - mainly as they were still building the road as the traffic squeezed its way through the construction workers. Manual labour was the order of the day - you need to dig a hole - then use a pick and shovel! You want to move materials around - then use manpower and not machines.



Our bus found its way first to an amphitheatre, recently excavated and opened to the public. Next stop in Durres was the museum, where the guide talked us through the many artefacts and exhibits, complete with Uncle Sam accent!



Our next destination was the ancient town of Kruja, way up in the hills, with roads and bends which were never designed for a modern Volvo coach. On our way we noticed, and photographed, workers in the fields - many turning the cut hay by hand, and others tending animals grazing. Only hand tools used, with no signs of mechanisation, and all in very hot conditions. The out of town

roads did not improve, so together with the appalling driving standards encountered, the journey was not a smooth one!

High up in the hills we arrived at Kruja, seemingly untouched for centuries, and literally in a world of its own. After climbing a steep path, made more dangerous by its stones being polished smooth over the years, we were relieved to arrive at a museum, where the guide gave an interesting commentary. Actually, it was an excellent museum, containing a wealth of local history information, both with displays of exhibits, and wall murals etc.



Alongside the museum building we were taken to see the largest house in the area, a la 17th century. It was amazing to see as it was practically in its original condition, with all rooms frozen in time, and with every minute detail of Muslim life at that time preserved. Our house guide was an elderly man, enthusiastically explaining life in those bygone times, and with a good command of the English language.

From this interesting house we walked through a bazaar, a narrow street devoted to souvenir gift shops, where we ignored the shopkeepers requests to enter their establishments, stopping only to buy a small item from outside on the pavement. Lunch awaited us at a local hostelry, a "hard to describe" soup which tasted OK, followed by a dish containing a lamb joint, sitting in a thick cheesy sauce, accompanied by a fine mixed salad. Final course was a cold, and sweet, dessert - we ignored our diet!

The journey back to the port, and the ship, was carried out in record time, as we had over-run our time. Sometimes it was better not to look at the road ahead, as the bus driver played his advantage - he was bigger than anyone else!

One matter that has not been addressed in this country is that of litter and waste. Everywhere we found rubbish piled up, mainly because there was nothing else to do with it - definite room for improvement here!

Maybe you will think that we have painted a somewhat tainted picture of Albania, but let us tell you that we would love to return there for a two week holiday, as the country and its peoples have much to offer, and in a unique way!

Split, Croatia

When we arrive in the Croatian town of Split at 8 am, it is already 20°C and the sun is shining in a pure blue sky. This is the 2nd largest town in Croatia and also



one of the oldest, so we are looking forward to visiting it with our friends Tony and Sheila. When we disembark, the Captain of the Black Prince is on the quayside and we persuade him to pose for some photos.

Our first stop is at an internet cafe where we deal with our e-mails (over 500 since we last went online!) and the cost

at €3 is very good indeed. After a cup of espresso coffee sitting outside the internet cafe, we wander up into the town with its many old buildings. We find 2 old cars which we photograph, before heading into the large market area, where we can see the many stalls selling fruit, vegetables, fish and clothing. Some of the stalls are situated alongside the old walls of the town and there are ruins and facades of a number of large stone buildings. Many of the buildings have red pan tiled roofs, carved stone walls and colourful wooden shutters.



The streets now become narrower and narrower until we can touch the walls on both sides and we notice that the town is kept immaculately clean by curious small electric vehicles that can manage to squeeze down the narrow alleyways.

Suddenly we walk into a lovely square with an impressive cathedral, 14th century houses, a palace, pavement cafes, and smart shops and decide to while away the hottest part of the day in the shade. Our choice of cafe was a good one and we all enjoyed a typically Croatian meal.



On our way back to the Black Prince we are surrounded by several groups of tourists making towards a variety of foreign coaches, some from Germany and some from France. When we get home we will have to look at our maps and see how far these folks had to travel!

We have thoroughly enjoyed our day in Split and would love to come back here in the future for a longer holiday.