

Dalmatia: 23 May-11 June

Early Blog Postings

Monday, May 10, 2010

Starting a New Adventure

Canberra, 10 May 2010

It hardly seems a year ago – in fact, it's longer – that a group of us, entranced by the experience of [Morocco](#), signed up there and then, on the sprawling expanse of *Place Jemaa El Fna* in Marrakech to the just announced [Dalmatia](#) trip in 2010.

It was pretty much the same group that a year previously, overwhelmed by [Turkey](#) and hypnotised by Aya Sophia and the Blue Mosque, had signed up there and then for [Morocco](#) in 2009.

The word contagion comes to mind. But I began to wonder when I discovered my Concise Oxford Dictionary, in each successive meaning of the word, talks about 'disease', 'harmful influence' and 'moral corruption'. I decided contagion fits.

Call it what you will, that [Meanders Abroad](#) time has come around again. And it's accompanied by fodder for another page or two of [Non-Motorcycle Meanders](#).

The end of this week – 15 May 2010 – is the start of a new set of adventures.



First stop will be Rome for four days. I'll resist signing up for the *Da Vinci Code* tour or being waylaid by an enterprising taxi driver wanting to take me around the *Angels and Demons* sites. I'll make my own way around the pinnacles of Rome, ancient, medieval and modern; civil and ecclesiastical.

Then a train to Venice for a three day walk and float around the alleys and canals of this onetime city state. Being at the heart of the Venetian Republic (or, as it was called, the [Most Serene Republic of Venice](#)) becomes a fitting prelude to exploring much of its territory stretching along the Dalmatian coast. But that all came to an end in 1797.

Finally, a bus ride from Venice to Ljubljana, capital of Slovenia, unites our committed group from [Morocco](#) – or was it [Turkey](#)? In fact, I think it was [Rajasthan](#)!

The next three weeks will be spent in and around the cities, mountains, hinterland and coasts of a large part of [The Balkans](#). This is the [Dalmatia Tour](#).

I'll finish the trip by dropping into [Kirtling](#) in Cambridgeshire, UK. Hopefully, there will be a stable government in place by then. Kirtling was the village that my great grandfather, [William Crick](#), hailed from; and his [father and grandfather before](#) him. Census data from the 1800s pinpoints where they lived.

I intend to keep up a blog on this page as the trip unfolds. It might be brief and intermittent. I hope you keep checking and travel with me.

- Robert Crick. 1:34 PM

Wednesday, May 12, 2010

Beware the Bora

Canberra, 12 May 2010

I was recently warned of the Bora by one of our cycle group. David is one of those inveterate long-distance cyclists. Last Northern Hemisphere summer he conquered the Passo di Stelvio on his cycle – ahead of us on motorbikes. He's also ridden the Dalmatian coast, where he encountered first-hand the force and dread of the Bora. So much so that he had to shelter or walk, pushing his bike against its nor'easterly might.



Katabatic occurs frequently in references to the Bora. I'd thought *katabatic* was reserved for the howling fury that sweeps down the Antarctic mountains across the snow plains of the icy continent. But, no. It gets used also to describe the Bora.

Definitions of the Bora alternately describe it a fierce, ferocious, katabatic, mongrel wind that charges with ever-changing speed and power across the Croatian mountains onto the Dalmatian coast and Adriatic. Okay, I didn't actually come across 'mongrel' but if an Aussie site had defined the Bora, I surely would have.

According to Wikipedia:

The area where some of the strongest Bora winds occur is the Velebit mountain range in Croatia. This seaside mountain chain, spanning 145 kilometres, represents a huge weather and climatic divide between the sharp continental climate of the interior, characterized by significant day/night temperature differences throughout the year, and the Adriatic coast, with a Mediterranean climate. Bora occurs because these two divided masses tend to equalize.

Sailing can be extremely dangerous for an inexperienced navigator in the Velebit channel because the wind can start suddenly on a clear and calm day and result in major problems, frequently also affecting road traffic. Near the towns of Senj, Stara Novalja, Karlobaq and the southern portal of the Sv. Rok Tunnel in Croatia, it can reach speeds of up to 220 kilometres per hour. On 15 March 2006 the speed of a gust on the Pag Bridge was measured at 235 kilometres per hour."

That's where we'll be!

After we're lulled into a peaceful malaise of mountains, caves and grand cities, we begin the enticing run up the Dalmatian coast...as if to meet head-on the much anticipated Bora.



Just to ensure we have full potential exposure to its mystery and mischief, we venture off-shore across the **Pag Bridge** and along Pag Island. Then by ferry across the **Velebit channel** to the coastal road running along the bottom of the **Velebit mountain range**.

The deep caverns of the Skocjan Caves might be a welcome retreat for that night.

- Robert Crick. 12:43 PM

Thursday, May 13, 2010

Negativity or Anticipation?

Canberra, 14 May 2010

Email from Mike Ferris:

Hey Robert,

Faw Gawd's sake. They have an expression here which I cannot reproduce precisely because I do not have a cyrillic keyboard, but roughly translated it says, 'Tell me some good news or shut the f*&k up' !

Please, spare us all from this negativity. We don't need to hear of motorbike accidents or winds that are gonna blow us off the planet. Bring some optimism with you to Ljubljana. The sun is shining here and it's a wonderful world.

See you soon. Mike F

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Wow!

And I thought I was providing a bit of charm and excitement to a tour that had grabbed my interest and imagination from the moment it was advertised.

I hadn't actually heard of the Bora until, as I reported, one of our cycle group mentioned it from his personal experience. It caught my imagination.

I had never dreamt that my take on it would be seen as a put-off or "negativity". It was another dimension to what's promising to be a thoroughly enticing tour.

Didn't I say that several of us were so enthused by our Rajasthan trip that we signed up for Turkey the following year; then to Morocco the next year; then to Dalmatia the year on from that?

Where's the negativity?

I've been chuffed at the compliments and gratitude I've received from so many for my personal enthusiasm for tours by preparing *cut and paste* guides, including for Dalmatia.

I would have thought my commitment to sharing preparations through maps highlighting our destinations and describing the key attractions was anything but negativity.

Least of all, warranting being told to "shut the f*&k up".

But I'm not one for being deterred from the anticipation I have built up over the past year. I have every reason to expect a great trip. I always have.

As to [my regular blog](#), the latest contribution to which were some personal

thoughts flowing from a local horrific tragedy last weekend, I feel I need say no more than every motorcycle death affects me very deeply. I find it all the more disturbing and depressing when there's evidence that the motorcyclist had abdicated power enough to have avoided the tragedy. An encouragement to motorcyclists not to abdicate that power, I would have thought, was a cogent positive message. One that's beneficial to us all and one that should be espoused by all.

However, I feel humbled that there are other views out there and I respect that others may feel they're justified.

- Robert Crick. 9:05 PM

Sunday, May 23, 2010

Looking towards Dalmatia

Venice, 23 May 2010

The 23rd of May has been a date in the front of my mind for some months. That would be the day I ventured into a whole new world – places I had never visited and never really contemplated visiting until a year ago when the Dalmatia tour started to take shape. And, now, here it is. The day I would cross into the Balkan States, beginning with Slovenia.

It should have been pure excitement and expectation. Each of the previous three Meanders Abroad have been. There undoubtedly was excitement and expectation; and looking forward to meeting up with friends from past trips, all armed with their duty free purchases.

But there was also a slight feeling of unease.

This is the fourth trip I'll have done with Ferris Wheels. I'll certainly be expecting – and have no doubts about receiving – the same high level of service delivered in the past. But this one is different. Mike Ferris took exception to the publication of my website not giving due credit to Ferris Wheels in the context of my meanders abroad. It was a fair point and one I readily accepted and rectified. But I could not succeed in getting him to accept that the querulous and confronting nature of his [email](#) to me was neither warranted nor appropriate. That remained an unresolved issue for me.

Then, my endeavours to paint a more exciting picture of the approaching Dalmatian adventure drew an unexpected burst of unpleasantness, to put it far more charitably than it deserves. I have previously alluded to this in the Dalmatia

Blog (see entry below published on 13 May 2010). I would have thought this email even more inappropriate than the first – not just as a manner of dealing with a paying client but with any person. So, I'm wondering, as I prepare to make my way to the boat stop of San Zaccaria in the St Mark Basin, how Mike will balance the delivery of his normally high level of professional services with such a contrasting set of communications.

- Robert Crick. 11:25 PM

Monday, May 24, 2010

Ljubljana at Last

Ljubljana (Slovenia), 23 May 2010

Today I crossed from Italy into its Eastern neighbour of Slovenia. Not that you would have easily noticed. The only indicator was the scattered clump of old border buildings of a look that was reminiscent of the former Soviet-style world. But there was no stopping. Just straight through on the motorway. The terrain didn't change. The towns from a distance looked the same. The only obvious difference were the snow capped mountains that came into view as we pushed further into Slovenia.

Slovenia had never been a comfortable fit in the old Yugoslavia, although you might say that about most of its former component parts. Its culture and history had been closer to Austria, so it would feel that it had regained its heritage by being part of the European Union rather than the old Soviet bloc. Lots to discover about it in coming days.

Getting here had its moments. First, I encountered a boat stoppage in Venice for a period. However, I had allowed myself ample time so it wasn't a problem. It was fortunate that I chose to wait the 35 minutes in the queue until the first boat as the queue kept growing over the 35 minutes and only a few of us at the top of the queue managed to get on. That got me to the bus station on the tip of the island at the causeway. Then a bus into Venice's other station, Mestre (on the mainland) from where I would catch my Ljubljana 'bus' (more a people mover). I hadn't counted on the Tour of Italy cycling through town, right past the railway station. There was no vehicular access to anywhere close to the station so I got dropped out in the



Mestre suburbs. I had no idea where I was. No signs. No buses. No taxis. And road blocks. Time seemed to race by as I tried to investigate options, such as a local train, but only expresses seem to be going through the tiny station I found. With about ten minutes to departure time, I resorted to flagging down cars. Nobody was stopping. I had one prospect as a captive at the closed railway crossing but he wasn't obliging. Then a 4x4 stopped. Once he discovered I was Australian, he couldn't be more helpful. He tried a few routes towards Mestre to see if there was a way around the road blocks. Finally, having got as close as he could, he talked his way through a police block with much gesturing and obviously emotional references to my sorry plight. It worked. He delivered me right to the station at 11.30 – right on departure time. Not that anything was leaving for a while. I had to walk only twenty metres to spot the greatly relieving scene of the small people mover with the insignia DRD on the side, the tell-tale sign that this was my 'bus'. Then, almost as a consolation for my stress, the peloton came seeping down the street and around the corner where I was admiring the DRD bus. Its passing took only a fraction of the time it took for the following entourage to pass by. At least, I can add seeing the Tour of Italy to my souvenirs.

Thanks to my Italian 4x4 enthusiast, whose name I didn't even get. There would have been no way of making the bus without his help. I hope you might be reading this. If so, make sure you send me an email.



I arrived in Ljubljana mid afternoon and took a taxi to the hotel. Some of the group were already there. Others arrived later.

- Robert Crick. 3:49 PM