

**Tour of Croatia, Montenegro & Serbia**  
**(October 23 – Nov 3, 2021 – By Carey Beamesderfer)**

This "outstanding" trip was developed, organized and coordinated by my daughter Audrey, with assistance from my grandson Drew. The primary goal of the trip was to ride trains, explore and sight-see in these three countries. As such, my friend and fellow model train hobbyist, Doug Borrett, was delighted to join us on the tour, as was Audrey's friend Rhiannon Pruit. (So the adventure begins for Audrey, Drew, Rhiannon, Doug and I)

Croatia, Montenegro, and Serbia are three Balkan countries. The Balkans, also known as the Balkan Peninsula, is a geographic area in Southeast Europe with various geographical and historical definitions. The region takes its name from the Balkan Mountains that stretch throughout the whole of Bulgaria. The Balkan Peninsula is bordered by the Adriatic Sea in the northwest, the Ionian Sea in the southwest, the Aegean Sea in the south, the Turkish Straits in the east, and the Black Sea in the northeast. The northern border of the Balkan peninsula is variously defined.



This area is scarred by numerous wars and territorial clashes. The countries we visited were previously part of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia. Led by Josip Broz Tito, the new Communist government sided with the Eastern Bloc at the beginning of the Cold War but pursued a policy of neutrality following the Tito–Stalin split in 1948; it became one of the

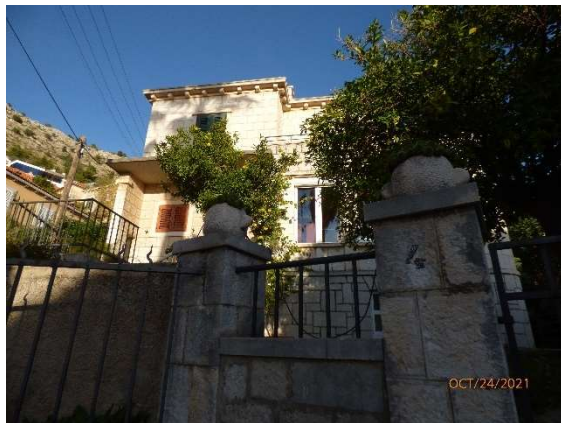
founding members of the Non-Aligned Movement, and transitioned from a command economy to market-based socialism.

Following the death of Tito on May 4, 1980, the Yugoslav economy started to collapse, which increased unemployment and inflation. The economic crisis led to rising ethnic nationalism and political dissidence in the late 1980s and early 1990s. With the Fall of Communism in Eastern Europe, efforts to transition into a confederation also failed; the two wealthiest republics, Croatia and Slovenia, seceded and gained some international recognition in 1991. The federation dissolved along the borders of federated republics, hastened by the start of the Yugoslav Wars, and the federation formally broke up on April 27, 1992. Two republics, Serbia and Montenegro, remained within a reconstituted state known as the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, or FR Yugoslavia, but this state was not recognized internationally as the official successor state to SFR Yugoslavia. Former Yugoslavia is now commonly used retrospectively. ([Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia - Wikipedia](#))

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**Now that we've completed a very brief history and geography lesson lets talk about what we did on this trip.**

Doug and I flew on 'Delta Airlines' from El Paso to Atlanta, then 'Air France' to Paris where we boarded a connecting flight (Croatia Air) to Dubrovnik. After a 30-minute bus ride, we met Audrey & her friend Rhiannon at the bus stop near our Airbnb host site. Audrey arrived a day earlier, and Rhiannon arrived later.

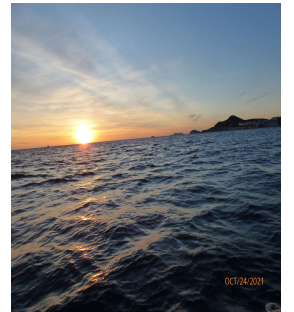


Our Airbnb in Dubrovnik

That afternoon we took a sunset cruise on the Adriatic followed by dinner at Rosinas which “serves tastes of the old Mediterranean in the new Europe.”



Audrey, Doug & Rhiannon



**Monday, Oct. 25** – we had breakfast at the Dubravka restaurant in the walled city and toured



Breakfast at Dubravka



Walled City from Harbor



Inside the walled city



Museum/Church Tours



several museums and churches before meeting our guide (a decorated Croatian military officer) for a grand walking tour on the wall. The walls are **1-1/2 miles long with 6 fortresses** (Lovrijenac, Revelin, Minčeta, Bokar, St John and St Lucas). It's an incredible experience to walk the Walls and it's a must-do thing when visiting Dubrovnik. The Walls were one of Dubrovnik **Game Of Thrones** filming locations. **The Old Town**, with the main street Stradun (or Placa), is the most interesting part of Dubrovnik. It's magnificent with all the styles of architecture like Renaissance (Sponza Palace), Gothic (Rector's Palace which is a history museum now) and Baroque (St. Blaise Church).



The Walls of Dubrovnik are a series of defensive stone walls surrounding the city. With numerous additions and modifications throughout their history, they are considered to be the greatest fortification system of the Middle Ages. They were never breached by a hostile army during that time period. In 1979, the old city of Dubrovnik, which includes a substantial portion of the old walls of Dubrovnik, became a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Late afternoon we walked to the Dubrovnik Cable Car for a ride up the mountain to have dinner at the Panoram restaurant.



Entrance to the Cable Car



Panorama Restaurant View



Night Shot of the City after Dinner



Audrey during an evening stroll within Dubrovnik's "Old Town" Walled City

The city comes to life at night. There are shops, bars, ice cream parlors (we found them) and lots of locals and tourists all intermingling with each other. It was a site to behold. It worked out well for us because the time of year and the last vestiges of COVID kept the crowds lower. We found a restaurant/bar that served pina colada's (or what we thought were pina coladas – not exactly the type you would get on a gorgeous beach or a luxury cruise ship) but we made the best of it. It's the experience that counts! So after walking at least 17,000+ steps today we walked back "up the hill" to our Airbnb and crashed for the night.



**Tuesday – Oct 26** – We left Dubrovnik at 9:15am, drove to Zinos restaurant in Cavtat, Croatia for breakfast, on the way to Montenegro. The main stop for today was at the Sokol Grad fortress, the largest fortification in southern Dalmatia. This renovated monument attracts visitors with its location on a 85-foot cliff, a magnificent panorama of the Konavle region and interesting architecture. The fortress also has a museum where we saw exhibits found during archeological digs, an exhibition presenting the lives of former residents, including weapons and jewelry, as well as contemporary works of local craftsmen.



Sokol Grad Fortress for Entrance



Walking the wall



Doug, Audrey, Rhiannon, Drew

We continued our journey to Montenegro in record time, having no trouble at the border (thanks to Drew’s insistence on going to the least traveled border station.) Our first stop in Montenegro was at a restaurant that Audrey referred to as “the secret dinner.” This was a place frequented by regional movie stars and more commonly known as Konoba Catovica Mlini - 20 years ago Lazar Ćatović put a lot of work and love into the mill and the family house that has been in his family for over 200 years and turned them into a world-class tavern.



The “Secret Dinner” at Konoba Catovica Mlini



Looks Good – My Dinner

We arrived in the “old city” of Kotor that night and walked a several blocks from our car parking place to the hotel entrance. Our hotel, the Palazzo Drusko, was the perfect place to visit and view the old town. Wow! - Doug won the lottery and got to stay in a luxury suite (with a fireplace). Oh well – someone had to do it! All kidding aside, all the rooms were exceptional. Located in a 600-year-old stone house formerly owned by Montenegrin nobility, Palazzo Drusko is about 500 feet from St. Tryphon's Cathedral in Kotor. The spacious rooms here are individually decorated in

traditional style with 150-year-old furniture, stone wall and wooden elements combined with ornamental patterns. Each comes with a flat-screen satellite 3D TV and a shared kitchen is at the guests' disposal. Various cafe bars and restaurants can be found within easy walking distance from the guesthouse.



My room at the Palazzo Drusko in the “old city” of Kotor, Montenegro

**Wednesday – Oct 27** - After breakfast at Tarazo’s restaurant we began our walking tour of the walled city of Kotor which became a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2017. Our guide did an excellent job describing the history, culture and legacy of the fortified city. After the tour we decided to find a spot to climb the wall to get the best view of the city.







Since the early 2000s Kotor has seen an increase in tourists, many of them coming by cruise ship. Visitors are attracted by the natural environment of the Gulf of Kotor and by the old town of Kotor.

We left Kotor, by car, in the afternoon, looking for a medical facility where we could get a COVID test to allow us to get into Serbia. We found one which charged us \$44 Euros (about \$52 US Dollars) (Note that there were different currencies in each country we visited. Croatia uses Kuna, Montenegro Euros, and Serbia Dinars.) We kept current using ATM's as we found them.



Our COVID Testing site



Audrey racing with the train

<- Audrey did all the driving. In this case she was racing against the first train we saw, so we could get a picture of the locomotive. She was successful, at over 100 kph. No problem.

We dropped the car off at our hotel – the Hilton in Podgorica. We had a nice dinner then Doug, Drew and I hiked (at night) to the train station hoping to acquire our tickets for the next days journey. We got to the ticket office just before closing and were informed that we could only



buy tickets on the day we planned to board the train. (Flexibility is the key to successful travel)  
We walked back to the hotel and went to bed.

**Thursday – Oct 28** – we woke up and left the hotel at 5:00am, took a taxi to the train station, bought our tickets, and rode the train to Bijelo Polje. Leaving Podgorica the descent into the breathtaking Montenegrin mountains begins. Shortly after that you cross the highest railway bridge in Europe, Mala Rijeka Most, and a little later you see the view from the bridge down into the deep canyon. Spectacular views, highlighted by the beautiful fall (autumn) colors.



Our train ride – Did Audrey find a new “best friend ??”



On both sides of the train we saw tumultuous mountains soaring into the sky, with rivers winding through the valleys and roads intercepting the ridges. The whole countryside is a mountainous terrain that gives it a rugged landscape.

After arriving at the train station in Bijelo Polje we caught a cab to the Dominus – our “day hotel,” where we took a brief nap before going to our “free breakfast” at the Centar .We did a walking tour of the city,

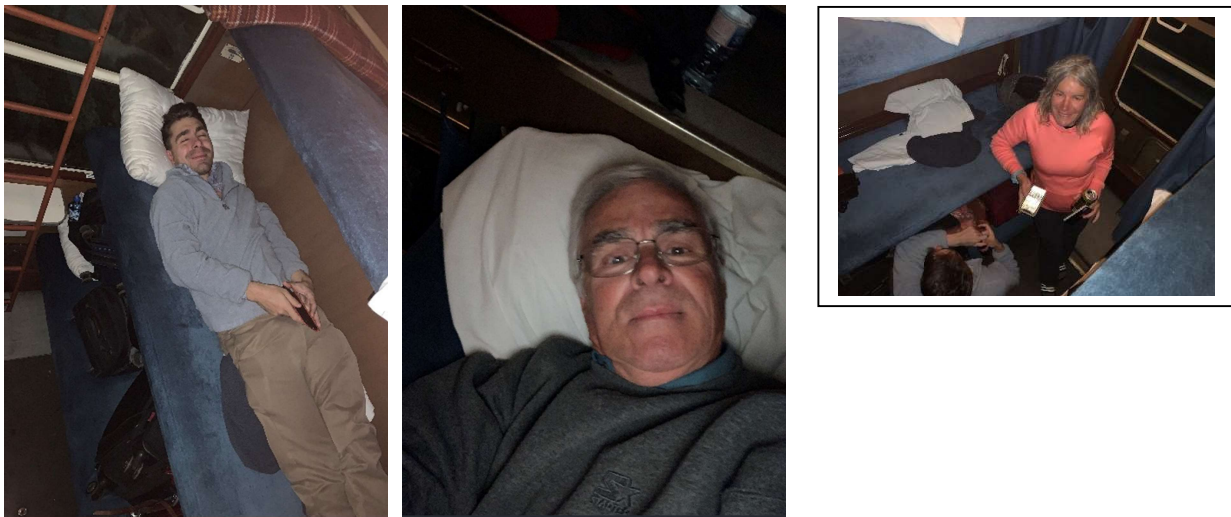




then had a late lunch/dinner at the Casa del Caffè before going back to our room to rest so we could make it to the train station by 10:30pm (That's right – PM) to get to Uzice. Upon arrival at the train station we happen to come upon a group of men (locals) who were celebrating (wildly) a birthday party for one of them. They were singing (very loud) and dancing – hugging each other – having a great time. We took a few pictures while Audrey joined in one of the dances and we all stood there – stunned in disbelief at what we were hearing and watching. It was a riot (funny)!! They were definitely having a good time.



**Friday – Oct 29** – We boarded the train at 10:30pm, and came to realize that the 5 of us were all assigned to the same cabin on the train, 3 bunks / side, an experience that none of us will ever forget. Doug had the bunk at the bottom, which made it easy for everyone to step on his bunk (or him) to get to the higher bunk. Audrey and I each had a top bunk (we had to climb the ladder to get to it – which made it interesting to get to the bathroom when nature called. )



Drew on Bunk - Level 2

Carey on Bunk - Level 3

While on the train we crossed the border into Serbia. The border agent stamped our passports but never asked us about our COVID test. We disembarked the train, quickly, at 3:30am (Yes – AM) and managed to find a taxi to take us to our hotel where we slept until 9:00am. Audrey,

Doug and I went to breakfast at the Venera Caffe then toured the Uzice museum and underground tunnels. (See photos on the next page.)



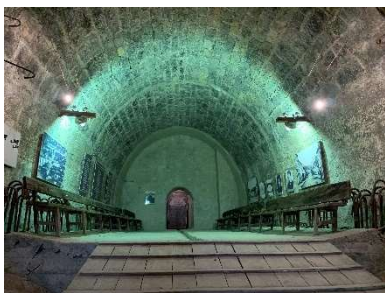
Our train from Bijelo Polje to Uzice



Getting off at 3:30am



Breakfast at Venera Caffe in Uzice



Underground tunnels at the Uzice museum - Behind the museum in underground tunnels was an ex-ammunition factory. This factory was producing bullets for Partisans during the period of "Uzicka Republika" the first liberated area in World War 2. Tunnels were originally made to keep the national gold when the war started.

Around 1:30pm we took a taxi (actually 2 taxis) for a 40-minute drive to Mokra Gora where we checked into our hotel before boarding the Mokra Gora Sargan Eight narrow gauge train. Mokra Gora, meaning the Wet Mountain in English, is a village located near the city of Užice, in southwestern Serbia. It is situated on the northern slopes of mountain Zlatibor. Mokra Gora has become popular after a reconstruction of the narrow-gauge railway called Sargan Eight which is unique in the world. Its route viewed from the sky, looks like the number 8 and it is running from the village of Mokra Gora to **Šargan Vitasi** station and back again.



After the train ride we had dinner at the hotel, then took a long walk to the train museum and came back and played cards (3-13 & golf) for a couple hours before bedtime.



**Saturday – Oct 30** – Our first tour of the area began at 9:00am when Marko, our tour guide, (we think that’s what his name was) picked us up in his car. At this point we all said goodbye to Rhiannon who left the group for London on her way back to her home in Portugal. Our first stop was Marko’s mountain home where he served us his special brew of tea and a shot of vodka (or some version of it which none of us were familiar with). His “vacation” home was in a quiet, beautiful mountain setting. We sat and talked for a while then went to visit the maker of the tea we drank.



Marko’s Mountain Retreat

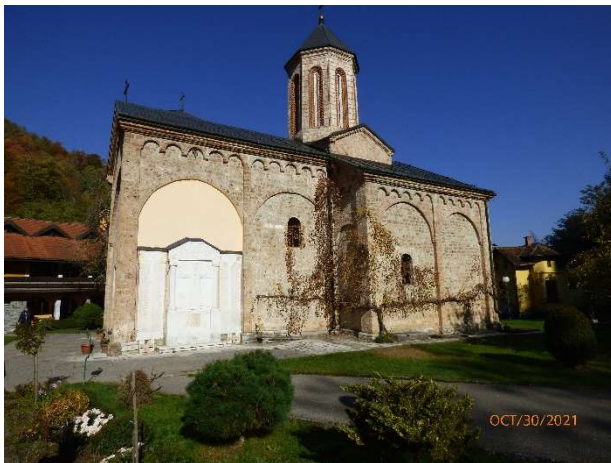


Our Special Tea & Vodka



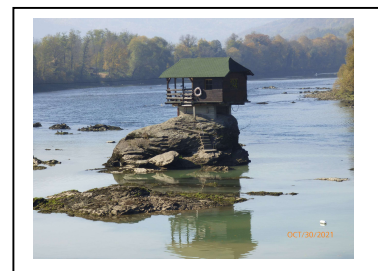
The Tea-maker’s Tea Storage

Our next stop was the Raca Monastery, then to several viewing points in Tara National Park.



The Raca monastery was built by Stefan Dragutin (1276-1282). The monastery became a place where Serbian rulers, nobles, and church dignitaries were buried. The monks translated texts from Ancient Greek, wrote histories, and copied manuscripts (the most famous scriptorium was in Rača, known as the School of Rača, which flourished from the sixteenth- to the eighteenth-century); they translated and copied not only liturgical but scientific and literary works of the period.

Our tour continued to the famous “Serbian River House.” This amazing, isolated house is located on the Drina River in Serbia. The tiny wooden house has been standing on an exposed rock in the middle of the Drina River for more than 40 years, it was built by a group of young boys back in 1968 that used the rock to sunbathe. Every time there is a flood the house is destroyed, but it is built again from ground up.



In the afternoon we were driven to the base of two trails where we hiked to several viewing points within Tara National Park. The view at the top was spectacular. The Park is part of the Dinaric Alps and stands at 3,280 to 5,220 ft above sea level. The mountain's slopes are clad in dense forests with numerous high-elevation clearings and meadows, steep cliffs, deep ravines carved by the nearby Drina River, and many karst caves. The mountain is a popular tourist center. Tara National Park encompasses a large part of the mountain. The highest peak is Zborište, at 5,066 ft.



From there we were dropped off at the Drvengrad “wooden village.” Set between Mt. Tara and Mt. Zlatibor, Drvengrad is an enchanting ethno village made by Emir Kusturica for the purposes of filming “Life is a miracle” and the home of the world famous Kustendorf Film Festival. I

In this gorgeous oasis just beside Mokra Gora, you can stay in *authentic log cabins* and enjoy *traditional Serbian cuisine*. But there’s more – Drvengrad has *an art gallery, a library, a cinema called “Underground”, a church dedicated to St. Sava, a cake and souvenir shop*, and an *ambiance you’ll never forget*. We walked around the village, had dinner and walked back to the hotel. (Unfortunately, we took a wrong turn and got lost in the dark, but we made it back without incident.)



Drvengrad Wooden Village



St. Sava Church



**Sunday – Oct 31** – Breakfast at 8:00am then another tour. This time Marko took us to a remote, abandoned mineral water resort, Stopica cave, the Open-Air Museum Old Village and finally to a famous Serbian waterfalls. It was a full day.



We crossed a rickety, crumbling wooden bridge to get to the abandoned building which was formerly aluxury home and retreat for one very rich Serbian citizen. I don't remember the name of the person or the building but it was not your typical tourist destination. We had a fantastic time exploring these ruins (and getting a drink of mineral water which continues to run through the structure and pristine pools on the property.)

Stopica Cave is a river cave with the Trnavski stream flowing through it. The cave has an impressive entrance hole from the right side of the Prištavica River. The entrance is 2,300 ft. above sea level; it is 115 ft. wide and 60 ft. high. The limestone layer in the cave dates from the Triassic period and is over 325 ft. thick. The climate in the cave is cold in winter and hot in summer.



Entrance to Stopica Cave



Inside the Cave



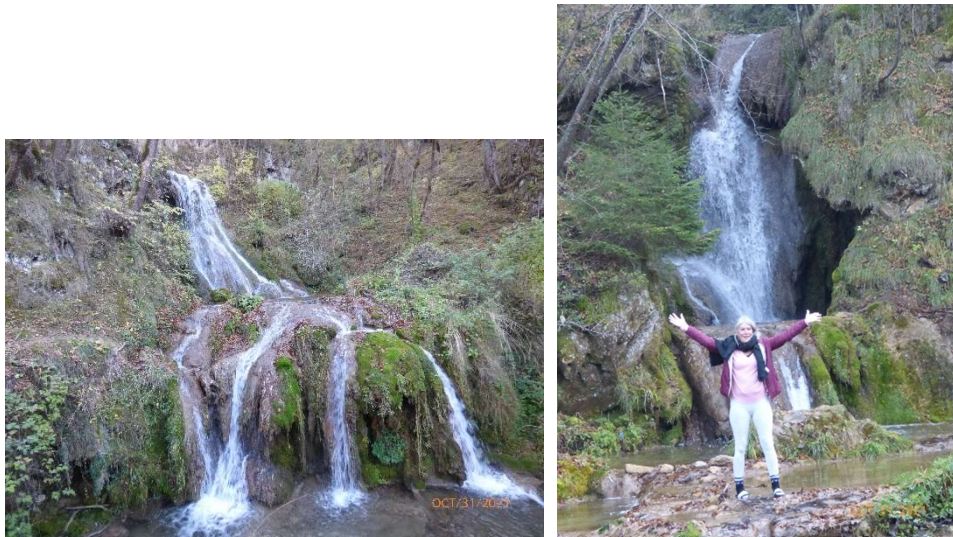
The dramatic colors of the limestone

There are five units of Stopića cave: the bright hall, the dark hall, the great hall with baths, the canal with baths and the river canal. The tourist part of the cave has some attractive elements like: spacious entrance, "dugure"-the openings on the ceiling, sipar arch "Dog's cemetery", "The source of life" waterfall and a number of "siga" tubs. The cave got its name after the settlement Stopići that belongs to the village Rožanstvo.

The Staro Selo Open-Air Museum is a complex in the Serbian village of Sirogojno that was declared a national cultural heritage site in 1980. It contains 55 buildings, 32 of which are in the permanent museum exhibition, all built in the traditional style. It is one of the most popular destination in the Zlatibor Mountain and all of western Serbia because it represents the lifestyle of local residents that lasted for several centuries. Every building is authentically furnished, and there are historic photographs, as well as many tools and other objects used for everyday living. Besides museum buildings, the complex contains a church, inn, and a local bistro known as a kafana. We had dinner there, a serving of authentic Serbian food and drink (Zlatibor soft drink).



The Vodopad Veliki Buk (waterfalls) or Lisine waterfall has long been considered the highest waterfall in the country, with a height of 82 ft. The waterfall is located on the river Vrelo, a right tributary of the river Resava. A shallow pond was formed at the foot, surrounded by larger rocks. Together with the source of the river Vrelo, it is under the protection of the state, as a natural monument "Lisine Waterfall" and as a geoheritage object of Serbia.



A great place to visit. Going to the bottom of the falls in the canyon was easy. Walking back up took some time. Having completed our tours of the Mokra Gora area we asked Marko to take us to the train station tomorrow to catch the train to Belgrade.



**Monday – Nov 1** – We boarded the 10:30am train to Belgrade, a 3-1/2 hour ride, then caught a taxi to our hotel – Moskva in the heart of the city.



We unpacked and decided to walk the streets for about an hour before having dinner at the Aurelio Café near the main square. After dinner Audrey, Doug & I went to the spa for an hour or so to soak our tired bones before we went to bed. It's been a great trip so far, and we only had one day left to complete the plan.

**Tuesday – Nov 2** - Before returning to the US we had to have another COVID test, so we found a facility to administer the test, but they could not process the paperwork because the Internet was down. We had a city tour scheduled for 10:30am so we decided to come back after the tour to get the results. Our guide was very knowledgeable and gave us a great tour culminating in a visit to the Belgrade Fortress which is situated on the hill, overlooking the confluence of the river Sava into the Danube. It started as a Roman military camp in the early 1st century AD, growing into a simple fortification, and over the time into a true and powerful fortress. Until present day it remained within the boundaries of the old town and city's center.



We did eventually get the results of our COVID tests – all negative. In the afternoon we walked to the Serbian Railroad Museum hoping to find a way to get to see Tito’s train. Unfortunately, only privileged VIP’s who have the appropriate permit are able to do that. We didn’t qualify, so we chose to explore the museum for about 2 hours. A perfect ending to our train trip adventure.



On our way back to the hotel we stopped at a Bohemian restaurant for dinner, then packed our bags, said good-bye to Audrey & Drew and went to sleep for a couple hours.

**Wednesday – Nov 3** – Doug & I left the hotel at 3:15am to board our flight from Belgrade to Amsterdam at 6:00am. From there we barely made our flight to Atlanta due to a short connection in Amsterdam (35 minutes, including going through customs). Once we got to Atlanta we waited 5 hours in the airport to catch our connecting flight to El Paso. We made it home by 10:00pm and heard from Audrey that her & Drew made it home safely as well.

In conclusion – this was an incredible adventure, beyond our wildest expectations. Audrey did an amazing job to plan and make all this happen. Drew, Doug and Rhiannon help make the trip exciting and I got to visit my 98<sup>th</sup> & 99<sup>th</sup> countries. The 5 of us got along very well and we all enjoyed the culture, history and fun we had exploring countries that may seem scary to some. Especially since COVID still looms in the minds of many. However, as I’ve always said – traveling is the best education you can get, so we all jumped at the opportunity to go and had an incredible experience.

“The world is a book, and those who do not travel read only the first page.” – St. Augustine

