**CHAPTER TRAVEL FORUM NOTES**

**By Dan Sockle and Terry Babin**

Notes from the July 21, 2022, Travel Forum

The following trip summaries and tips were provided by several Forum participants:

* Jon Frederic: Bus tour of the Canadian Rockies.
* Allan Jeska:
  + Central Atlanta coast tour
  + Space A update
* Lee Golden: Northern California road trip
* Roy Korkola: National Parks
* Jim Morse: More on Northern California
* Terry Babin: Touring central Europe and cruising the eastern Mediterranean

Canadian Rockies:

* Oregon West 6-day and 5-night bus tour:
  + Depart Salem-Portland area by bus with return air transportation from Calgary to Portland.
  + First class lodging and most meals included in the tour package.
* June the best time with some snow on the mountains, but pleasant weather.
* Opportunity to see lots of wildlife.

Central Atlantic States:

* Visiting U.S. Army bases at Ft. Lee (Logistics) and Ft. Eustis (Transportation) and their museums is very interesting.
* Include a visit to the Battlefield of the siege of Petersburg.
* The new Afro-American Museum in Washington, D.C. is highly recommended.
* Pocanos (Mountains) of Northeast Pennsylvania also recommended as an area to visit.

Northern California:

* 17-Mile Pebble Beach drive and Big Sur still beautiful sightseeing.
* Lodging:
  + Visitor Quarters at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey a beautiful/comfortable place to stay.
  + Also recommended were the guest quarters at the Defense Language School in Monterey.
* The Taroko Asian Bar & Grill in Grants Pass OR and also Redding CA were recommended having excellent food—specializing in seafood.

Space A:

* Philippines currently closed to Space A.
* Mid-September and later a good time to take advantage of the twice-weekly Charter flights from Travis to Okinawa and the McCord to Ramstein flight.

National Parks:

* Check before you travel since some National Parks were requiring passes/reservations for entry (e.g., Glacier and Yosemite)
* North and northeast gates to Yellowstone remain closed due to road washouts from June rains.
* You may possibly be able to enter Glacier N.P. without a pass if you use the Sun Highway entry point before 6:00 AM.

Central Europe (Bavarian Germany, Czech Republic, Austria, and Hungary):

* No COVID test requirements, only proof of being fully vaccinated, for Icelandair flight to Munich via Keflavik and entry from Germany to Czech Republic, Austria, and Hungary.
* Italy dropped their requirement for entry COVID testing in mid-June.
* People everywhere were friendly and helpful—obviously happy to have the tourist dollars and euros flowing again—with unusually good service.
* Weather was pleasant in late May and early June.
* COSMOS tour’s bus and hotel accommodations were excellent, but most hotels were away from the central part of the cities although always near public transportation options.
* This tour was designed for people who like to “do their own thing;” however, each stop included about a 2-hour orientation tour at the beginning of the stop/layover which was exceptionally helpful.
* Vienna, Prague, and Budapest all had major renovation projects ongoing in the historical areas which sometimes limited access.
* The cities were to the point of overflowing with tourists, and there were often no vacancies or long waits if no reservation.

12-Day Eastern Mediterranean Cruise on Holland America:

* Venice closed it port to cruise ships because the city could not handle the large influx of tourists.
* Both Celebrity and Holland America cruise lines arranged bus transportation to the new ports of embarkation for passengers who already had reservations to stay in Venice prior to sailing (or after the cruise).
* Holland America only booked 2/3rds capacity as part of their COVID safety protocols.
* A COVID antigen test was required within 72 hours of embarkation.
* Masking was recommended aboard ship—only about 10% did so.
* Masks were required when using public transportation, but usually not required during outside shore excursions.
* Port stops included Greek mainland and islands (including Crete), Croatia, and Turkey (including a 2-day overnight in Istanbul)
* Many of the key tourist sites, like the major mosques, had restoration projects ongoing which limited access.

Other information, tips, and comments:

* Almost no social distancing and masking by tourists and locals during the June European trip except on public transportation and while in Italy.
* International airports usually offered COVID testing, but reservations advised.
* International health and safety/security issues made it necessary for Roy Korkola to delay his Costa Rica and Russian tours.
* There was some discussion on use of cell phones during international travel—hope to explore this further in future Forums.
* VA cards—stating service disability—can entitle you to free parking for up to 14 days in the long term (Red & Blue) lots at Portland International Airport.
* TSA checkpoints at SEATAC are still excruciatingly slow.
* Expect air and rail travel delays and disruptions because bookings have outpaced airline and railway staffing, station/terminal services, and overall capacity
* Allow more time than usual for checking in, clearing security and passport control points, claiming baggage, and unexpected problems to transfer to connecting flights.
* Be prepared to be rerouted or experience missed flights and trains requiring an additional unplanned overnight.
* If you use a CPAP, make sure you have an outlet converter when traveling.
* Many tour companies and cruise lines are offering amenities, paid gratuities, and dining and beverage packages as “inclusive” in the price to rebuild business.

**Next Forum Zoom meeting is Thursday, September 15th at 7:00 PM.**