

## MY VISIT TO ALBANIA October 2017

This diary is about the visit made by Gill, Sylvia, Viv and myself to Albania. We were met at the Airport by Peter and taken to a small hotel in Tirana, the capital city. Gill and I share a room. There is plenty of space. Grateful to be here.

### Thursday October 19th

A new day in a new country—what will it bring? Gill and I start by reading the Psalm (continuing my readings with Tom) and a prayer on my Kindle. I have brought my small hand-cross and will take it with me everywhere. Breakfast fairly basic; fresh rolls, jam etc. fruit juice and strong coffee.



We are picked up at 8 am by Gazi and Eddy the driver. Gazi's English is excellent. A fabulous drive to Puka in the mountains, 3 hours away. Beautiful scenery, hairpin bends, stop for coffee at the Perla Restaurant on the lakeside. Stunning! The lake was so still, the reflections amazing.



We met Illyrian who is involved in a training programme for young people enabling them to get jobs. His office is bleak at the top of an old Communist building where the roof is collapsing. He is very cheerful and positive. Then on to a training centre where skills of sewing, plumbing, mechanics and electricity are taught. Next a visit to a small business producing fruit juice, run by two young women who are self-employed. Then we drove to a restaurant where young people are trained in cooking skills. Finally we return to Tirana for an evening meal in a pizza place near the hotel. It's been a busy day. Lots to take in. I'm so glad to be here.

### Friday October 20th

Morning at Mary Ward Loreto office. Met Sr. Imelda. She is a peaceful person with a beautiful spirit. I felt very drawn to her. We met the staff—all young people who are very professional. A lovely lunch before a drive to Durres to meet the RC Priest at his church and more young people on another training scheme.

Back to Tirana. Gill and I go to the same pizza restaurant and then take a walk around Skanderberg Square to watch the fountains.



### Saturday October 21<sup>st</sup>

We return to Durres to explore a Human Development Programme designed to give young people confidence. We have a lovely day interacting with them and walking by the sea.

## **Sunday October 22<sup>nd</sup>**

Sunday today and Sr. Imelda took us to the English service at the Catholic Cathedral followed by coffee and chat with other members of the English Community. I met Valbona an amazing women who had grown up in the Communist Regime. She told me about the hardships of that time and the traumas of the civil war. Her message was full of hope. I was so impressed. Her faith was radiant.

She encouraged us to visit 'Bunk'Art'- a museum giving a very graphic history of the terrors of communist oppression. I was deeply moved. It reminded me of my visit to Auschwitz).



## **Monday October 23<sup>rd</sup>**

We were taken to Lushnja to meet more young people who had just starting their training. Then off to Fier to visit workshops lead by Esmeralda, a very capable lady who ran a drop-in centre for women, helping them to share problems and learn skills (not unlike the Women's Centre we helped to set up in Reading in 1997).

## **Tuesday October 24<sup>th</sup>**

We have presentations about their the human development programmes; human anti-trafficking training, communication skills and emotional and mental health. These were delivered by two young women psychologists, Artemesia and Zania. The free afternoon gave us an opportunity to explore Tirana.

## **Wednesday October 25<sup>th</sup>**

We visit the Rrechen and Mirdita area to be with another group of young people. Their



training course was to educate and build up confidence. I met a Roma lad who was keen to start but he had very little education. I was impressed to hear how provision was being made to give him basic education.

This was our last day. We had a celebratory meal on our way back to Tirana.

## **Impressions**

A beautiful country seeking to become a tourist destination. The people have been through so much suffering and want to embrace a new future. The Mary Ward Loreto project has a wonderful young team of professional people who are enthusiastic, committed and caring. They represent a future filled with hope over and against the allure and false promises offered by the traffickers.