

~~EUROPE~~

~~LIA BOGOEV~~

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We find that after years of struggle that
we do not take a trip;
a trip takes us.

John Steinbeck

Albania

The bus is the cheapest (but not easiest)
Virtually no signs giving street names
No monastery at the end of that road
Albania no longer feels isolated or scary

No one eats Albanian food here
Not exactly a fulfilling tourist moment
Himare didn't have the best beaches
No sunburned Austrians to ruin the moment
They all had an energy I couldn't dismiss
Pretending nothing was out of the ordinary
Very sweet but not so helpful

There was not a soul in sight
Once you touch it you can't forget it

Andorra

Andorra has never been synonymous with summer
Even when there isn't a snowflake in sight
It may not have the glamour of Gstaad
Not as lofty as St. Moritz
You can't get there from here!

Armenia

Austria

A mountain presents not just an invitation
In mountaineering, there is not only the activity
Didn't expect this kind of vertigo (the good kind)

Mountains were not generally considered beautiful
Mountains are not fair or unfair
Enchanting if you weren't clinging to a hunk of plastic

One doesn't have to splurge on a palace
The local reds aren't very good
That's not to say that it lacks night life

No one will address you as Herr Doktor at Ulrich.

~~Belarus~~

Belgium

No country has more beguinages
No fewer than eight chocolatiers

Kloosterstraat is not just open on Sundays
It's not about a brewery being old or new
We never manipulate our beers
If we don't do it, nobody will.

Most European beer fans won't know what hit them
But they won't kidnap us.
Lifelong celibacy was not required either

The resident black cat, Berry, won't help you choose
That still doesn't fully explain the elaborate desserts
Maybe not so old but are often very, very good

The streets were not yet choked with tourists.
Wharfside pumping station probably doesn't conjure visions of glamour

There was no time for a repeat visit
Revolution won't be far behind

~~Bosnia and Herzegovina~~

You can't avoid the impact of the war

We saw no other hikers at all

Areas that have still not been cleared of land mines

You can't avoid that there was incredible trauma

We didn't want to make the same mistakes

It's not the place of terror and vengeance and blood

Not just the buildings scarred by machine-gun fire

The importance of not forgetting

You never know where you spend your night

I don't know how they can be happy

Bulgaria

It's not the mountain

It's not the snow

There was no light-up trail map

After all, there was nothing to ski on

Hip-deep powder, not mere dust

Not even from these cliffs does the Black Sea look black

This fertile land is limited and usually not very appetizing

If you haven't savored grilled kebapcheta kebabs

We had not heard a note of Bulgarian music

"Traditional Bulgarian folk music" is a threat, not a sales pitch

I learned not to pack my most conservative clothing

Nodding one's head to say no

No Communist holiday was ever marked so intensely

The government had done nothing

Not to mention Lenin

Sprawling but not unsightly government complex

As though no one was in charge

There were no raw, concrete apartment blocks

Nothing to indicate what they might once have been

No particular reason for them to be where they were

There was no money for repairs

Though no one could say why

Sofia is no more a city of whispers

Croatia

A destination for bargain-minded travelers, it is no longer.
The apartment, though nothing special
You can't rent a blanket in Venice

Hvar itself was nothing but a hilly rock
But Zadar is not all "history and stones."
The boats are not in the best of shape.
The keepers have no hot water
No struggling uphill by donkey;

I didn't realize it at the time
You may never truly check out!
Not that there was much to see
Apparently not until August
No matter how much we slowed our pace
In the not-so-amazing race
But not with quite the enthusiasm of his Palagruzan comrades

Czech Republic

We had not gone there to sightsee
Cross the Vltava River no fewer than three times
Town looked like it hadn't changed in two centuries
Not far from the central square of Namesti Republiky
Not deep in the forest where they don't know
Answers a question no one asked
No, politics is not a dirty word.

Prague's cocktail scene is not without a few quirks
They just go together, beef and bourbon, don't they?
It's not quite at the level of Meat Liquor
Whatever it is, it's nothing like goulash.

Denmark

No phantoms materialized
If not Danish, then at least Scandinavian
Boats never sail out of sight

The Danish way of life, not the other way around
Ban not only nudity, but also the touching of ruins
Denmark's traditional egalitarianism don't always apply

Get in to Schønnemann, which isn't easy
No one should miss the tiny island

The only dish that didn't thrill me
Incredibly good, or not so
There's no point in ranking dishes
You will not need dinner
Not everything is so wonderful
No one knew how to mix a martini
But Skagen never betrays

This is not Denmark like it is today

Estonia

These are not places you simply stumble upon

Not everything, though, was pristine

And the water has not frozen

The water was not chilly

Bald patches that have still not healed

An ostrich farm, did not spark our interest

There's really not much do to here

Whatever you do, don't skip dessert.

Finland

In no other country would a composer rank so high
Not only is Sibelius an icon
An arty but not snooty air

There is no dominant style any more
We don't rush after every trend
Minimalism has never taken hold in Finland.
Certainly not through any fault of their own.
Say nothing of those nifty orange-handled scissors

No matter what the brochures say
It's not espresso
And it's not really very good
But nothing like the proverbial

Attractive though not especially striking
Finns have a not wholly undeserved reputation
Not that the rest of Europe has entirely caught on

Don't try Helsinki in the off season
You don't want to end up talking to yourself
Sleep came quickly but not for long

France

Not far from the château

Not much more than a collection of small buildings

Not literally, but pretty close

A place in France that doesn't cater to tourists

Small towns in France aren't authentic anymore

The groomed slopes no longer held interest

If no wind, the skiing is no good

It looked not only a hundred years behind code

But after three days of almost nothing

This was not enough to pay for a bed

The host is not due to appear for hours

We wanted nothing so much as a bit of privacy

The rooms aren't fancy but

Saw nothing but fields of yellow gentians

Heard nothing but birdsong

I can remember nothing else

Germany

Ignored an ominous warning sign I couldn't translate
No visitors allowed from outside
If you go, you won't want to be

They are not places that draw world travelers
Towns that did not meet my personal criteria
Fairy tales do not take place
No matter how loose the connection

I couldn't help but wonder
You didn't cross an ocean to eat Whoppers

No one on Usedom seemed to be thinking about rockets
None of the people enjoying the fine spring day
It wasn't clear if it was the blue skies

Cientele who look like they haven't had much fun
It may not be a honeymoon suite
Nothing more exciting than a night on the hay
(No sheets to change)
Never mind that there is a herd of smelly cows
Don't expect small bottles of shampoo

We did not view Germans as people that day

Greece

Nothing beats grabbing a bag of locally grown pistachio
While Hydra has no cars
We can't change Monemvasia
Not traded tradition for modernization

How real it is, you cannot forget it
Yannis Ritsos also never forgot Monemvasia
Not a single one is dead.
They never found the last one.

Street numbers and names simply don't exist
Revelers who don't retire

Short of swimming, Paros was not going to happen
But it's not all cleavage and Jell-O shots

Hungary

I had literally no idea what I would find
I knew what was *not* there
My looks don't attract attention

Three languages, none of which I speak
A Slavic language I did not recognize
They did not speak English.
I certainly don't speak their Finno-Ugric tongue

I couldn't believe my luck
Istvan didn't distill the palinka himself

Sweet and refreshing, and thankfully not too heavy
Disoriented, perhaps, but certainly not disappointed.
The fusion here is not just culinary

"The chardonnay is not my favorite," she said.
Anything not related to the grape
Not quite as striking as the foie gras

There's no wait for foreigners
On a busy street, is not promising
Whatever the cause, it clearly didn't happen recently

In November this isn't a very nice place
So much fog you can't see anything
Only to discover no one is there

Iceland

Never-ending light frees up remote, foreboding places
I hadn't expected to be swimming in the river
A lot of rivers but never one quite like this
There was no trail to the beach
Driving in Iceland is not for the efficient
We can't seem to leave.

The sky surrounding us never darkens
But not until the nearest weekend.
Nothing like the bacchanalia we were expecting.

Republic of Ireland

Built in the middle of nowhere, only to become ghosts

This is not the twee Ireland.

Not wholly transformed

But never mind the weather and the sights.

One place that poses no threat at all

A place that never really lets you go.

Not without checking off another name on my list

Fierce local pride is not uncommon

Poverty and backwardness, not pride.

Drink and not be seen.

And certainly not alone.

A desire to be nowhere else

Nobody stays much more than an hour or two

Nobody leaves quite like the Irish

And nobody remembers quite as powerfully

No lights, no sign of life

And no wonder!

My radio has no reception.

Italy

There might not be very famous must-see sights here
The ones that are known aren't always exhibited
Sulmona—not Rome—was the poet's land

There is no need to worry about becoming lost
My Italian wasn't good enough

But riding a Vespa is not like riding a bike;
Rotate the handlebar backward, not forward!

Vineyards scattered through the hills and not much traffic
There's no sign outside the Gravner winery
People go to him begging for a bottle, but he never has any left

Not nice to look at, but delicious to eat.
Before that meal, I'd never really thought of pecorino
Not realizing how substantial lunch would be
My palate had not yet adapted
I wasn't entirely ready to keep eating

There's just nowhere like it
Not just local but hyperlocal
Never before have I been so warmly embraced

Latvia

Shouldn't a restaurant turn into a disco at night?

Crowded not with clubgoers, but with the stalls of countrywomen

No, not mayonnaise and baloney sandwiches

They absolutely cannot believe it.

That's not such welcome news.

Liechtenstein

Lithuania

Communist leaders are no longer the main attraction,
You're not going to be short of options
One element that hasn't changed throughout history
It is not difficult to get lost among the crazy-quilt streets
You don't want to walk up the hill.
You can't leave Vilnius without trying a zeppelin
Poor students did not go hungry.

Luxembourg

No subway or bad neighborhoods or street food
Single lane wide, no room for parking
There are no quad-straining, lung-burning climbs
"City" didn't seem quite the right word
We hadn't thought about suburbs
Enough Luxembourgish to not be rude.

It does not supply saddlebags, so bring your own
The deer doesn't stick to any boundaries
What should be (but aren't) called Luxemburgers.
No specific plan to return.

No rainbow, alas.

~~Republic of Macedonia~~

We're modest and not good at marketing

A country that has not been overrun by crowds

80 percent of the lost city has not been unearthed

Perhaps no one is doing more

No matter.

Malta

Malta is not well known to Americans
I'd had no idea that the Knights of Malta still existed
The order no longer wages war

Not to be outdone by this gift from the Turkish
The Inquisition did not use torture indiscriminately
Who we are is our geography, not our colonizers.

Nothing gives a better sense
Knights never married or had children
People here have no sense of personal responsibility
No one bothers you very much
The sort of place where no one raises an eyebrow

Moldova

Monaco

It is not your typical speedway race
It does not attract your average geared
Who didn't come to ogle the shiny Rolls-Royces
A country with no shortage of them
Driving is not the best way
No ear plugs were necessary.

Not too far up the congested slope
Spotless sidewalks and no public debt.
The rich of Monaco, who pay no taxes
Pay no attention to the sign in French
Monaco can't wear the same dress twice
Not Versailles, but still impressive.
No candles to light or Masses
No organ, no incense, no flowers
Garish and not what I expected

Don't need a prince's ransom to live like kings

Montenegro

It's not difficult to work up an appetite in Kotor
Drove south until we could drive no more,
South to the Albanian border isn't the best road
Parts of the city are not much to look at
Looking no less formidable,
There would be no real roughing it.
Even the Pinzgauer could not penetrate.
Not yet 10 a.m. but already muggy
Not much has changed over the course of two wars
Empty-bellied and barefooted but have never kowtowed to anybody!
The losers that day weren't Montenegrins.

Netherlands

At street crossings, with no traffic in sight
Not out of rudeness but out of provincial insecurity
Boutiques that wouldn't seem out of place
Not with books but with big cylinders of yellow cheese
It looks like nothing more
Spring visitors can't miss the bright fields
I can't call Eindhoven boring anymore

Nothing but sky and water before us
Water hiking is not as popular these days
You can't make this walk without someone
It's so gloomy I can't discern

Norway

"We don't do the lazy skiing"
I hadn't expected such candor
And besides, I hadn't brought my oranges
Nothing like it is in the Alps

Not working up much of a sweat
But not here, where the day soldiers on

We could see no farther than 10 feet ahead
One should never look out on a fjord

Isolated communities no bigger than a few wooden houses
No matter how idyllic to me
There was suddenly no one
We do not call them fjords

Poland

There is no excuse for missing
Dark Polish winter, is no small thing
Problems are nothing new
It felt impossible to not be in everyone's way
I'm not sure exactly why that is

Doing nothing but sitting in one spot
I'm no expert in architecture,
And it was just too tempting not to try.

Couldn't get a few years
Still can't
Someone walked by and didn't put money in his jar
Not all good considering it was a gift

But we didn't actually expect it to be this different

Portugal

Nothing quite prepares you for your dramatic arrival
There is no shortage of historic sites in Alto Alentejo

Aveiro isn't the provincial town it once was
Sweet wine does not a modern city make
Encircling not only Marvão's ancient castle
Not to mention a whole riverfront of lively bars

Longing that has no adequate translation
Conversation will not strain the vocal chords

No bouncers, no cover, no attitude
Things are winding down, not up.

You do not want to visit the nervous little pigs
A good nibble that is not too filling
As long as you're not in a Hummer
There was no danger of that
This is not food for city folk

Tradition that has not yet been lost
Unsung but not for long

Romania

I don't just think Bucharest

You can get in Bucharest for almost nothing

Perhaps no place in Bucharest

Pretend that nothing existed in Bucharest

NO to Isolation

People started not to care

Other European cities, but not nonstop

It was never truly completed

He never got to enjoy

Trees gave no clue of the treasure they hid

This trove is not easy

Frescoes, not as well preserved

And those who didn't survive the climb.

I found that no labels do justice to the images

I could not help but be stirred by the stark contrast

My heart did not beat faster

Russia

Adamant about not acknowledging its Romanov link,
Not everything is so reverent.

Speaking some Slavic language and no one's acting
And there is no decaf
Coke does not come with a diet option
Russians don't drink Diet Coke

No signs in Russian
And absolutely no signs in English
More convenient, but not nearly as much fun.
You know this isn't the Copa.

Apologizing for the fact that it hadn't rained
There wouldn't be many mushrooms

One does not feel smothered.

San Marino

Borgo Maggiore had no tourist shops and no tourists

Lived not far away on the Adriatic coast

The third tower, Montale, is not open to the public

A neighborhood pizzeria would not be impossible

No one in the country he founded sleeps in caves

I'm not even sure it's real.

Serbia

Belgrade may not win a beauty contest
It was not a poetic exaggeration,
There is no such chapter.
Thudding sound system, not bombs
"Not Belgrade."

Taxi drivers may or may not speak English
You didn't spend your dinars in two hours
In some places where you can't find them.

We can do things in Belgrade that we can't do anywhere else

The outer situation can't deter you,
No travel information on the city,
Such omissions, alas, are nothing new.

Slovakia

Slovakia's reputation – not entirely unfounded

A place for the unemployed, not tourists

Not exactly what a first-time visitor expected to find

There are no real courtyards.

No natural areas for people to gather, or even pause

Humanity that couldn't afford to complain

You can't even cross the streets of the old town

There is no hipster irony in panelak living

You didn't go out because there was nowhere to go

There used to be no life here.

The transformation was no accident.

Sobriety is not exactly illegal

A clean, cocktail-style lounge not far

Panelaks of Bratislava endure with no less determination

Slovenia

Slovenes don't even think of their country
This tiny little bubble that didn't really fit completely
Hear the churning of a creek, and nothing else

The life of a Slovenian farmer is not easy
No sane visitor would want any part
It's not a good idea to drive
Two horses and bikes for no extra charge
Nobody believed that we would succeed.

We're not under the same constraints
Didn't toe the Socialist party line

No one asks you where you'll die.

Spain

Not so long ago, travelers might have stopped
On a sunny but not overly humid day
People who come here don't always appreciate it
But this wasn't one of them

Ibiza wasn't about living in its hectic rhythm
A place to go to, not just through
Bilbao has no shortage of good restaurants
Unhappy in the country, where there was nothing
The population did not suffer under a dictator

Some things change, some things don't
It's the little sister who did not get invited to the dance.

No evening in Spain is complete without a nightcap.
This is no country for those in a hurry

Sweden

No one can agree on how many islands there are
I don't think the next generation will even know it

No one fished the lake,
And no one built houses around it.
We had to close because there were no workers
You can't be a very good farmer if you're allergic to cows.
You don't feel the nature

Industrial no man's land under a bridge
Through woods of pine and spruce is no hardship
It was like nothing else I'd ever experienced

A kind of challenge not just to be captivated
Total harmony that I'd never found on Gotland before
You don't need to go to Stockholm anymore
It's not a fairy tale anymore.

Switzerland

It almost doesn't feel like you're in Switzerland.

Not a whiff of Alpine kitsch

No matter: the meal was still a triumph

There was no rope.

No safety line.

There is no apparent ski patrol here

There were not many freeriders at all

Unfortunately, not every run would be so tasty

Even though the skiing wasn't grand

We weren't headed that way

Isn't this what we're really after

When in Switzerland, why not do as the Swiss do?

Turkey

Not only good dining but lord-of-creation views

HOW could we not visit Troy

Troy is not in Greece

One of only three places that did not freeze

The water had a not unpleasant chilly edge

We had no time to linger

I didn't notice until the second day

We didn't linger

Do not expect to eyeball the actual spot

Troy was nothing less than the storied destination

Ukraine

It was not hard to locate Ukrainian specialties
Much – if not everything – goes in this seaside boomtown
Thronged beaches and bars that never close.
Look for the umbrella-covered tables, and don't be too choosy
It is beautiful, isn't it?

Odd roadside scenes aren't the only intriguing things
It was not so much that the road had potholes
Large power plants with no workers.
A rusted Soviet star pointing to nowhere,
Towns no one can come back to.
There's nothing infernal here.

Is it dangerous? We won't stay long.
They never returned.

~~United Kingdom~~

No matter what your age
No wonder there has been a long tradition

This was not long after
Julian, though, would not have recognized
Household name, was not better known
But at least it's not raining.
Fields and hills not only speak of the severity of life
Not to mention having been a violent colonial machine.
If you're not careful though
And if not for the gray skies
I'm not sure if I'm going to find anything

Maybe we didn't get quite the thrill.

I wonder why I haven't moved

Vatican City

You cannot understand the Vatican

Not to put barriers between the faithful and the pope

Not to live in the papal apartment

May not be able to change the Vatican

In a Ford Focus, not the usual Mercedes

Who never so much as flinched

Popes never give news conferences

Under a hot sun for eons and then not getting in

About

When ending a relationship, one perhaps does not think of what was, but what was not. Things that lack, things that are not there, that never existed, these are the reasons to end a relationship.

The act of living in a place is also a relationship. Visiting or experiencing a country, however briefly, forms some kind of bond. What if we think of leaving a country as the end of a relationship, and instead of thinking about what was, think about what was not? Then, when you think about what something isn't, it then opens up a world of possibilities about what it could be. It could be Albania, but what's to say it isn't Albany?

The definitive list of countries was compiled from Wikipedia's "List of sovereign states and dependent territories in Europe". It only included countries whose entire geography is encompassed by the boundaries of Europe, except Russia and Turkey, which seemed to necessitate inclusion based on their culture. The poems themselves were constructed of appropriated statements pulled from New York Times Travel articles and narratives, *Europe* explores the ways in which what was not tells us what is.

Written to fulfill final project requirement of MIT's 21W.750 Experimental Writing class.

