

Hello Family and Friends,

Why would Croatia fly their flag with the US flag and the US Freedom 250 banner in their ports of call? After hearing from 10 different Croatian guides, two Slovenian guides and a host of Grecian and Italian guides, it became evident. The Croat guides made it clear they are proud for their country to stand with the beacon of light in the free world, the USA. The people in all these countries expressed desire for the freedom and liberties the USA was founded upon.

Did you know the Greeks celebrate October 28, the date they officially entered WWII, instead of the end of WWII when everyone else in the world celebrates the end of the war? It's because that was the day they declared their freedom from Italian rule and went to war to fight for it. As I write this commentary on October 28, I am hearing the bells of Ohi Day, the day they declared their freedom from Italy, tolling in the distance. The city of Athens and the entire country have closed to celebrate its country's freedom. There are parades in the streets and celebrations everywhere in the country. What a great day to be here!

In a similar fashion, the Croat guides all made it very clear in their excursions how important it was for them to get their freedom in the 90's from the Socialist regime under dictator, Josip Tito. The tone and story didn't vary from one guide to the next. Here's what was said. "Socialism seemed good at first. Then it wasn't. It became violent and oppressive. It stole our freedoms and liberties. It trapped our families and friends. It destroyed our institutions. We had to go to war to get our freedoms and liberties returned to us. We are depending on the USA to continue to lead the free world and set the example for the rest of the world. Please reverse the moral decay of Socialism that is eating away at the USA. Please do not make the mistakes and go down the path of Socialism we have had to endure."

The guides' comments and experiences we are having in these countries make us think about the state of our country and where we're headed. There is lots of talk by our current administration about this period of time being the Golden Age of America. Are we in it? Is it coming? Or is Socialism pitting us against each other and tearing down the very foundation our country was built upon? We only need to look back about 150 years to see the degree of deterioration of our founding principles and the decay in our society due to the creeping influence of Socialism. Just look at the Socialistic changes over the past 150+ years. There was no inflation from 1870-1900. There was actually deflation of 1.47% per year, 35.9% over three decades. $100 of groceries cost only $64.12 at the end of that 30-year span. These gains were due to rapid expansion in agriculture, industrialization, technology and an environment where there were not stifling regulations.

Imagine this. There was no income tax or IRS, no Social Security, no Medicare, no Medicaid, no Obamacare, no welfare, no mandatory charity, no national-security state, no Pentagon, no CIA, no NSA, no FBI, no gun control, no drug laws, no government-managed economy, no minimum-wage laws, no paper money, no Federal Reserve, no foreign interventionism, no state-sponsored assassinations, no coups, no sanctions, no embargoes and virtually no controls on immigration, especially from Europe. Bottom line is there was virtually no statism, certainly nothing like we see in our country today. Statism brings nothing but death, illness, poverty, misery and suffering to most everyone but the elite. During that thirty-year period of time before all these Socialist programs were created, our ancestors pointed the way to tremendous increases in people's standard of living especially for those at the bottom of the economic ladder. We reaped the benefits of a society based entirely on family values and voluntary charity.

Today we live under a totally different system - one based on an oppressive welfare-warfare state, an income tax and a tyrannical IRS, a dysfunctional government-regulated economy, debased paper money, a Federal Reserve, a vicious drug war, horrific foreign wars, a deadly immigration police state and a $39 trillion federal debt that is destroying our country.

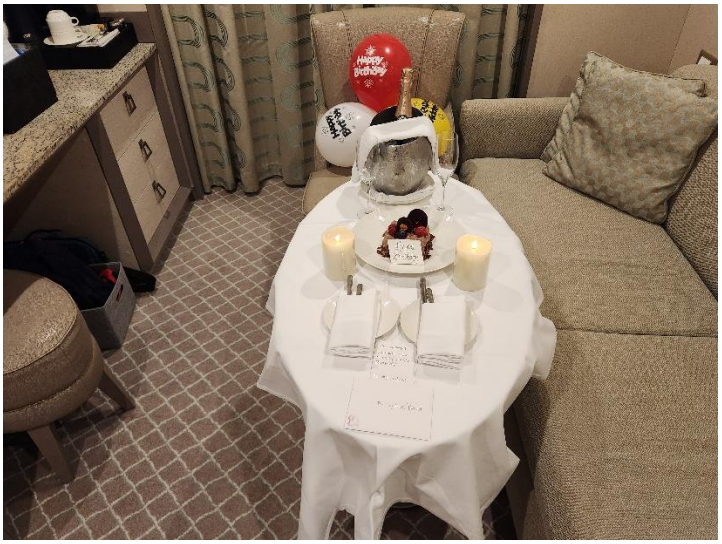
Can we reverse the trend and lead the world in freedom and liberty as these other countries look for us to do? We believe we can.

Gytheion, Greece is the gateway port to Sparta and Mystras. 2nd only to Constantinople in importance to the Byzantine Empire, Mystras sits atop a 600-foot hill above an abandoned 13th-century town. We walked cobblestone stairways to the Pantanassa Monastery and two churches where we viewed 600-year-old frescoes and finally to the once-invincible palace complex. Typical homes in this town were three levels. The bottom level housed the animals. The second level housed the fires to heat the home and cook the food. The top level was the sleeping quarters. We also went on a boat ride into a complex of caves that was over a mile long.





We visited Souda Bay (Crete), Greece on my birthday where we shopped the narrow streets. Silversea surprised me with an expensive bottle of champagne and the most delicious chocolate birthday cake complete with balloons, candlelight, fine china and a tablecloth when we returned to the ship.





Piraeus (Athens) turned in to a special day when we hiked into town to watch the Ohi parade. "Ohi" means "no" which is what the Greeks told the Italians when the Italians told the Greeks to join them in WWII. The war between the two countries began the next day, the start of the Greeks' path to freedom. The streets of the parade were lined 10 people deep as we heard the bands, listened to the proud commentator over the loud speakers and watched the parade go by for two hours.





We went on a "foodie" tour in Mykonos, Greece next. This was a tasting of five different restaurants. We tried pork and chicken souvlaki, loukoumi, a range of Greek appetizers, ouzo, mastika and a sweet, sticky, vanilla dessert. Even though guests eat so much food on the ship, these "foodie" excursions are very popular because guests love not only eating but also the variety of local flavors.

Volos, Greece is the gateway port to the small, mountaintop town of Makrinitsa. Although we were in a drizzle today, guests loved touring this small town with its 16th century Greek Orthodox Chapel and museum. Myth has it that when Jason and his band of Argonauts set sail in search of the enlightening and all-powerful Golden Fleece, it was the port of Volos from where they departed. This mythical story is so important in Greek mythology. It was magical being in the area. Hot chocolate tasted so good on this cold, rainy day.









We both escorted excursions in Thessaloniki on foot through the city. A Roman forum, Byzantine ruins and Greek mosaics largely intact, exist in and around the city center. This is Greece's second largest city. A large, 15th century watch tower stands on guard between the city and the bay. We enjoyed baklava and cheese pie in a narrow, two-story French restaurant.





On our sea day sailing from Thessaloniki to Istanbul, we sailed under the longest suspension bridge in the world spanning the sea in the Dardanelles Strait. We spent two days in Istanbul. Our first morning was a tour of historic sites including the Hagia Sophia museum and mosque where we viewed centuries-old frescoes followed by a visit to the world-famous Grand Bazaar, which is locally known as Kapalicarsi. This name translates into “Covered Market” or “Grand Market.” The market is nearly overwhelming with over 4,400 shops spread across 61 streets all under one roof. The markets spill out into the surrounding streets where vendors sell their wares and restaurants flourish.





We returned to the ship for our afternoon duplicate bridge game then returned to the Grand Bazaar for the rest of the afternoon and evening. We bought gifts for family and friends including some items for ourselves. The evening ended with a traditional Turkish beef doner kebap wrap. Our second day in Istanbul was spent watching local people fish off the bridge catching mackerel and mullet followed by a walk through the historic Pera neighborhood. One of the best things to happen during the entire voyage happened this day when we stumbled upon a leather tailor in a tiny shop down a narrow street. He had been in business in the same location for 40 years with his brother. They used to have 10 employees and shipped leather goods all over the world until Covid and high inflation destroyed his business. Now it’s just the two of them. We showed interest in his belts. He custom made three belts for us; high quality and excellent price. The encounter ended with us sharing an extraordinary Turkish tea. With the brothers speaking no English and us speaking no Turkish, it was an interesting experience of gestures and sounds that led to a wonderful encounter.









Rhodes, Greece was a beautiful, small town and is the gateway port to the town of Lindos. The Rhodes excursion included the Grand Masters Palace, a stroll through the city and an exquisite brunch at an outdoor café. The Lindos excursion was to the clifftop acropolis with its gorgeous views of the Aegean sea, 4th-century Doric Temple of Athena Lindia and the 14th-century Castle of the Knights of St. John.









Unfortunately, the voyage ended on a sour note when Santorini, Greece, a port so many guests were looking forward to, was canceled due to 15-40 mph winds making our tender operation too dangerous.

We depart on our 28’ trip home early tomorrow morning. We’re looking forward to seeing all of you and getting back to our Sun Lakes life.

Love and hugs from the Aegean, Ionian, Marmara and Mediterranean Seas.

David (Dave/Dad) and Dianne