

Route(s)	The Balkans Road Trip
Date(s)	August 18 – 26 <sup>th</sup> 2018
Partner(s)	Kyle Finnegan
Distance (miles)	1150km of driven road!
Starting Point	Dubrovnik, Croatia
Ending Point	Dubrovnik, Croatia

Day 1	Dunblane to Edinburgh to Dubrovnik to Skopje
Date	Saturday August 18 <sup>th</sup> 2018
Drive time	Approx. 11h 45minutes
Daily Distance	Approx. 510km
Starting Location	Dunblane, Scotland to Dubrovnik, Croatia
Ending Location	Skopje, Macedonia
Accommodation	AirBnB – City Center Apartment 1
Tourist Attractions	<i>An airport and a lot of border crossings. We could see some forts from the car too. Hooray!</i>

### The Story

It was an early morning, bordering on still being considered night when the alarm went off around 3.30am in our flat in Dunblane. I hadn't been able to sleep, so by all estimates I got a thirty to forty-five-minute nap before it was time to get up, grab our bags, and head for the airport. Luckily, being such an unreasonable hour, there was no traffic on the road and that made the drive time quick. The one caveat being us trying to find the car park and shuttle company. We were taking some dodgy backroad and I was momentarily concerned that Kyle had programmed in the address wrong. *And we were going to get detoured and robbed in some dodgy back alley.* But, as the fates would have it, he programmed it in correctly and we pulled up right as a shuttle bus was getting prepared to leave, so we were able to hop out, into the dreary wet weather, hand over our car keys, and hop on the full shuttle bus. *I love it when connections line up well.*

We caught the bus over to Edinburgh, disembarked and went into the terminal expecting to get into some heinously long line. But, the fates were shining on us, evidently because we didn't have any bags to check we didn't have to do the pre-gate check in. *Noted! Never take a checked bag, if at all possible.* Since it was so early, the line to get through security wasn't that bad and people seemed to generally be in a good mood. Sadly, I triggered the metal detector. Well, more accurately I think I was the odd number. It appeared that every so many people were redirected to go through the body scanner. I asked them to opt out. The guy standing at the metal detector gave a long suffering sigh and pointed for me to wait at the side for a manager. The manager came over and told me I'd have to wait for two female attendants to be able to come search me. I stated that was fine, I would wait, and was handed an informational



pamphlet on why body scanners are safe. *Great*. As I waited, the guy standing off to my left at the metal detector kept shooting me lines about how they were safer than flying etcetera, etcetera. I tried not to engage much. *What was the point? Were we going to debate this until we agreed?* In fairness, it did not take long for two female attendants to be procured and I was ushered into a privacy room while Kyle waited with our bags. I had to read and sign a consent form. *What the hell, and this is new!* I read over it and had to indicate why I was opting out. Signed and searched, I was sent on my way. Free to roam, we found a spot to set up camp and charge our phones while we waited to board the flight. Once on board the flight I encouraged Kyle to try and sleep since we had a long drive ahead of us. But, the EasyJet flight we were on had tightly packed seats. Kyle tried to lean on my shoulder, but it is a bit low for comfort, and the seats were so close in front of us it was nearly too tight to put one's head on the table to rest. I managed to get a short nap that way, but as Kyle was driving the whole way, manual car, it was more important he get sleep. In general, though, it was a quick and smooth flight.

We arrived in Dubrovnik around 11:00am, quickly found our way out through customs and towards the car hire lot. It was wicked busy at the car hire lot. I was surprised how busy it was, truth be told. It was very near to chaos. Fortunately for us, there were only a couple of people ahead of us in the line for Oryx Car Rentals. We got our car fairly quickly and stripped right there in the corner of the parking lot. *Very nearly no shame*. It was a pleasant temperature when we walked out of the gate, but now it was getting hot and we had a long drive ahead. Once in the car, I started to give in to the desire to want to be away from the madness and told Kyle to essentially just drive! Get away from here! But, that was before we'd figured out navigation or where we were really going. *Oops. Mistake*. We ended up accidentally going towards the taxi lane, and then back around through the arrivals pick-up section before circling back.

We did manage to make it out to the main road, but without the navigation working we turned the wrong way. That may have been my fault. Fortunately, we only made it a few hundred meters before that realization struck, however, we still had to turn around. I told Kyle to just pull over at any layby or road and we'd flip around. So he chose some construction site turn-off. *Not quite what I meant*. It was a rough turn around and once we were back on the road we heard an odd clattering coming from the front left tire. *Oh*



*lord, please tell me we didn't damage the car before we'd even left the airport!* Not another kilometer down the road, this time in the correct direction, we pulled over to investigate the sound. It appeared to be rhythmic so we believed it to be something stuck in the tire. That held true and we pried a rock from the tread of the front tire. *Phw*. Navigation sort of a go, we headed back onto the road. Not too far down the way we hit a long line of traffic. It was the wait to cross from Croatia into Montenegro. *Yikes*. It was a decent wait, and once through the Croatian border check we briefly drove in no-mans-land to

the Montenegrin Customs window, so we could make entry. At each of these we presented our passports (I opted to travel on my US Passport as Kyle was, and I wanted to collect more stamps) and driving documents. This became a theme for the day. And before our heads found our pillows we'd end up going through an inordinate number of Customs checks.

The drive through Montenegro was beautiful. We were slowly getting the hang of the roads, or really, I should say Kyle was. And, we'd gotten Navmii to work to some degree, so we had a general idea of where we were going. We didn't have any data usage here, so we just used the GPS to track our progress. We made one pit stop in Montenegro to pick up some bread, cheese and paprika chips to munch on throughout the day. I asked about a bathroom but the lady indicated there wasn't one in the store. She did not seem best pleased or friendly. Then, it was another long wait to get out of Montenegro and into Albania. It was here that I jumped out of the car to go use the toilet at a restaurant, conveniently placed where cars have to idle, and grabbed an ice-cold drink to bring back to Kyle, who was stuck inching the car forward. He got a 'sour cherry' drink in a soda can. It was actually quite good! I wasn't sure what I was expecting, if anything, but I did enjoy it. *And we made it!* Once into Albania we had a few more hours of driving before we were going to have to cross another border. By early afternoon I was going through waves of being alert and completely checked out. The 'nap' I had to separate my days was catching up with me and I was tired. Kyle tried to encourage me to sleep, but I felt honor bound to stay awake with him and make sure he was doing okay with the driving. That, however, did not hold, because somewhere in Albania I passed out. And when I came to I had no sense of time at all. I really crashed. I thought maybe I'd just been asleep for ten or fifteen minutes, but Kyle told me I'd been out for an hour. *I am a great co-pilot!*



Kyle and I thought we were driving towards the Macedonian border, but, somehow, we ended up on the road to Kosovo, and without a lot of great turnaround options to veer back towards Macedonia, we just kept with the Kosovo route. Basically, we accidentally went to Kosovo. I've heard that 'hope' isn't an acceptable form of planning, but... *Here's to hoping there aren't any border crossing issues, etc.* By the time we reached the Customs border, it was dark, it was getting late, and we were tired. When the Customs agent asked for our paperwork we handed over our passports and the car paperwork, so when he asked about our Kosovo Insurance we weren't entirely sure what he was talking about. He told us we had to pull over just on the other side of the border and then walk back across the border to some stalls and purchase Kosovo Insurance. It sounded vaguely familiar like I'd read about it online, but my brain was also running on minimal sleep, and at the same time it also sounded just dodgy enough I had a few



questions. But, how strenuously does once voice concerns to Customs agents on the Kosovo border? The awake part of my brain said, 'don't' and so we pulled over and walked back across the border and purchased Kosovo Insurance. We were a bit concerned about the price, but it was only €15.00, which was manageable. With insurance in hand, we walked back across the border and went to go show the window agent but were stopped by two other guards who told us purchasing it would show on our record and we didn't have to go back and show the window agent. Again, he told us to come back and show him, so I was a bit on the fence. It'd be easier to get in the car and go like these other two officers were saying. But, on the off chance we did get flagged for something inappropriate, that would be a real nightmare... I suspect. Kyle wanted to get in the car and go, and I didn't want to argue. *Fine. Courting an international incident, it is!*

Our impression of Kosovo was very interesting! Once we left the rural part and made it into a more populated area, it seemed that it might be in better repair than most other areas we'd driven through, and then shocker of shockers, we saw a KFC! Kyle received a message from the AirBnB hosts in Skopje inquiring when we would arrive. We'd tried to avoid using data because it was £6.00 per phone per country that didn't have 'roam free'. But, I thought we should let them know. We were exhausted, and it wouldn't be good if they weren't expecting us, and, for whatever reason, became unavailable to show us the room. I went to use the phone, bracing to incur the fees when I got a message that said Kosovo was a roam free country and I had 4G! *WHAT?! I sent a message to the hosts saying we were in Kosovo and gave an estimated ETA. At this point I was dreaming of a bed, and in accordance with that very great desire to sleep, I told Kyle that the first road sign that we saw that had Skopje on it we should cheer. Not long after he excitedly yelled 'Skopje' and pointed to a sign. Believing him I started clapping and cheering only to get closer to the sign and see he had completely misread it. The closest that can be said about it is that one town name did start with an S. Lord, I hope that isn't an indication of how tired he is and more a reflection of his over enthusiasm!* When we did eventually see a sign for Skopje, it was a slightly more subdued celebratory cheer. It was late enough, or remote enough, or both that the border crossing into Macedonia wasn't as long as all the others had been. From there, it wasn't too long until we reached Skopje; around 10.45pm. We followed the GPS to where we thought we were supposed to be, but we couldn't find flat numbers, so I told Kyle I'd hop out of the car and pop off down the street to see if I could find which direction we were supposed to be going. I couldn't find any numbers and so after a short way, I turned around and headed back to where I'd left Kyle. Except he was gone. *Oh, for serious? This is happening, right now?* For one minute I felt very exposed. I didn't have my wallet, my passport, my phone, or any money, and I was in a foreign country and didn't speak the language. It wasn't strictly a bad feeling of exposure, but more of the realization that if something were to happen I would be entirely reliant on myself to figure it out. That being said, I had faith Kyle would come back to where he last saw me, so I just waited on the corner. And fortunately for myself, and maybe Kyle, that trust was not misplaced. After a few minutes he came wandering around a corner on foot. *Curious. Where is the car?* My hopeful reaction was that he'd found the apartment. But, the fates must have

been worn out looking after us today, because that was not the case. Instead, he had moved so other cars could pass him and pulled around the corner to park the car and try to figure out where to go. Turns out the host had to give us more specific instructions. Glad we had turned data on one phone, because I'm not sure if we would have found the place without their assistance.

They helped navigate us to the entrance of the flat. We were able to park right in front of the door. Fortunately, they met us there, showed us how to open the door, gave us a car parking pass, and showed us up to the room. When the woman told us the number to open the box I said it a couple of times, and then turned my bleary eyes to Kyle and told him not to forget this number and said it over to him; hoping that one of us would be able to remember. And seeing as he had to tell me the flat number four times since we entered the city, I figured odds was it was going to be him. Turns out, it was me! The woman's lovely German husband showed us upstairs via elevator, and then into the flat. I was barely aware of what was going on and just kept nodding while trying to keep up with the conversation and interject appropriate pleasantries. Once he left, Kyle and I quickly rinsed off, and by quickly, I mean practically splashed water all over myself before changing into pajamas and just passing out. I barely remember laying down next to Kyle before Morpheus welcomed me into his embrace. It was a long day on an almost non-existent amount of sleep.

Day 2	Skopje
Date	Sunday August 19 <sup>th</sup> 2018
Drive time	N/A
Daily Distance	N/A
Starting Location	Skopje, Macedonia
Ending Location	Skopje, Macedonia
Accommodation	AirBnB – City Center Apartment 1
Tourist Attractions	Museum of Macedonia, Skopje Fortress, Old Bazaar, Museum of Macedonian Struggle and general poking around the city
The Story	

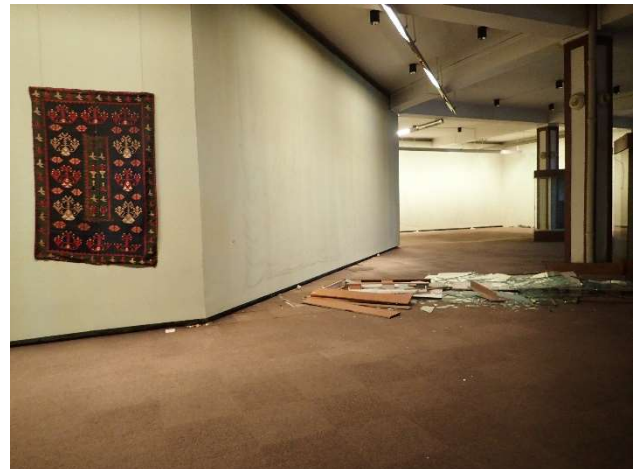
We barely moved in the night and didn't want to wake up in the morning. I kept justifying it in my head as, 'We are already in the city,' and 'Nothing will open early'. *If it means sleeping, I can keep the excuses coming!* With all those excuses it is little wonder we stayed in bed until 11am. We weren't even hungry enough to get going early. Instead, we nibbled on the crackers, snacks and cheese we had left over from yesterday. We finally did get going after googling which sites were open and made our way to the **Museum of Macedonia** first because that appeared to close the earliest. It took us about twenty five minutes of walking to find the place. It was tucked out of the ways a bit. And when we did walk in there was no one else in the entry and it had a vaguely abandoned feel to it. A gent was sitting at the first desk, looked at the time and then told us that we only had half an hour before it was closing time. We stated that we understood but would still like to purchase tickets for entry. With that completed we were shown where the first room started. Just from the initial lay of the land, I thought that this would be a one room type of show. And with that in mind, we really moseyed around. Once we headed back towards the desk the docent came forward and said he'd lead us to the next room. *Surprise!!* He then proceeded to take us out of the building and across a mostly abandoned stone courtyard. He unlocked a far door, showed us in, and headed up a flight of stairs. He indicated the space available and then left.



This first floor was absolutely full of glass cases of costumes. We were the only ones in there and it had an odd feeling to it. It's hard to describe the space and convey the sentiments. It had an abandoned or forgotten feel to it. It was odd to be alone in a building, a museum, so completely alone, that we felt like no one else would be coming this way at all. The walls had stains from leaks, some of the lights on the display were flickering, and other displays were full of dead flies. And yet, the display of Macedonian costumes was incredible. Such a contradiction! We walked around and took in the different costumes before heading up another small flight of stairs and looking at old farm and living tools. Most of the light in the building was filtering in through windows and sky lights, so it had a sort of dark feel to it as we made our way around. We ran out of time and had to make our way to the front a little quicker towards the end, but as we did we came across a display case that has been shattered and was

just laying on the floor. Oddly, I was happy to have experienced it as it was at that moment. It felt forgotten. True to itself. It wasn't over stated for tourists; it was simply itself. Authentic and unvarnished.

As we were heading out of the building Kyle said he had to use the bathroom, he'd avoided using one in the other building because it didn't have toilet paper, so I pulled out a thing of tissues and told him I'm a great wife before handing them over. Right as he came out and we left the building, an older gent came over to lock it. From there we headed back the way we came towards the fortress. As we left the stone courtyard and passed over a bridge that acted like a pseudo mote around part of the buildings, we noticed a cat and a few kittens below. They were absolutely tiny and wobbling around. They didn't look very healthy. It appeared as though someone had left a dish or two down there before, but it didn't look drinkable or edible at this point. There wasn't an obvious way down and we didn't really have food to offer. Still it was a bit heartbreaking. Kyle said he didn't like to leave like that, and I agreed.



As we worked our way back up to the Fortress we came across a mosque. We poked our heads in, but a service was going on and it appeared that perhaps it was for men only. With that in mind, we just took pictures around the outside before passing back towards the road. A car we'd passed on our way in, that had a broken window, appeared to have garnered another broken window in the hour since we'd walked past. *That is not a good sign... I hope our car is okay...* The day was starting to really heat up at this point, and the **Skopje Fortress** is on an outcropping that overlooks the city. We were sweating by the time we made it to the entrance. There were a couple of little tables and a cubicle that looked like, at one point, maybe, it was a ticket booth, but now the gate was wide open, and people were just

walking in and out. *Sweet! Free entrance!* Skopje Fortress also had a sort of abandoned feel to it. There were signs that it had once been spruced up for tourists, but it had since fallen into disrepair. There were old metal planters and chains that delineated walkways, but they were overgrown and rusted. *How odd.* To have put the time, money and effort in and then let it go. There was access to the wall from one spot, and you could essentially go out and back to a far point on the wall. And although there were places where it looked like at one point there were stairs etc., they were since blocked off or overgrown. Some places had barbed wire and others just had make shift bars etc. We walked to the far side taking pictures and generally enjoying the view, but the day was getting hotter and hotter, and we really hadn't had breakfast, so a little bit of hunger and a lot more thirst were driving us to go. It was hot enough that every time we found a little corner of shade somewhere we'd sigh and stand in it hoping for a little breeze as well. So, we retreated off the wall and back towards the Old Bazaar.



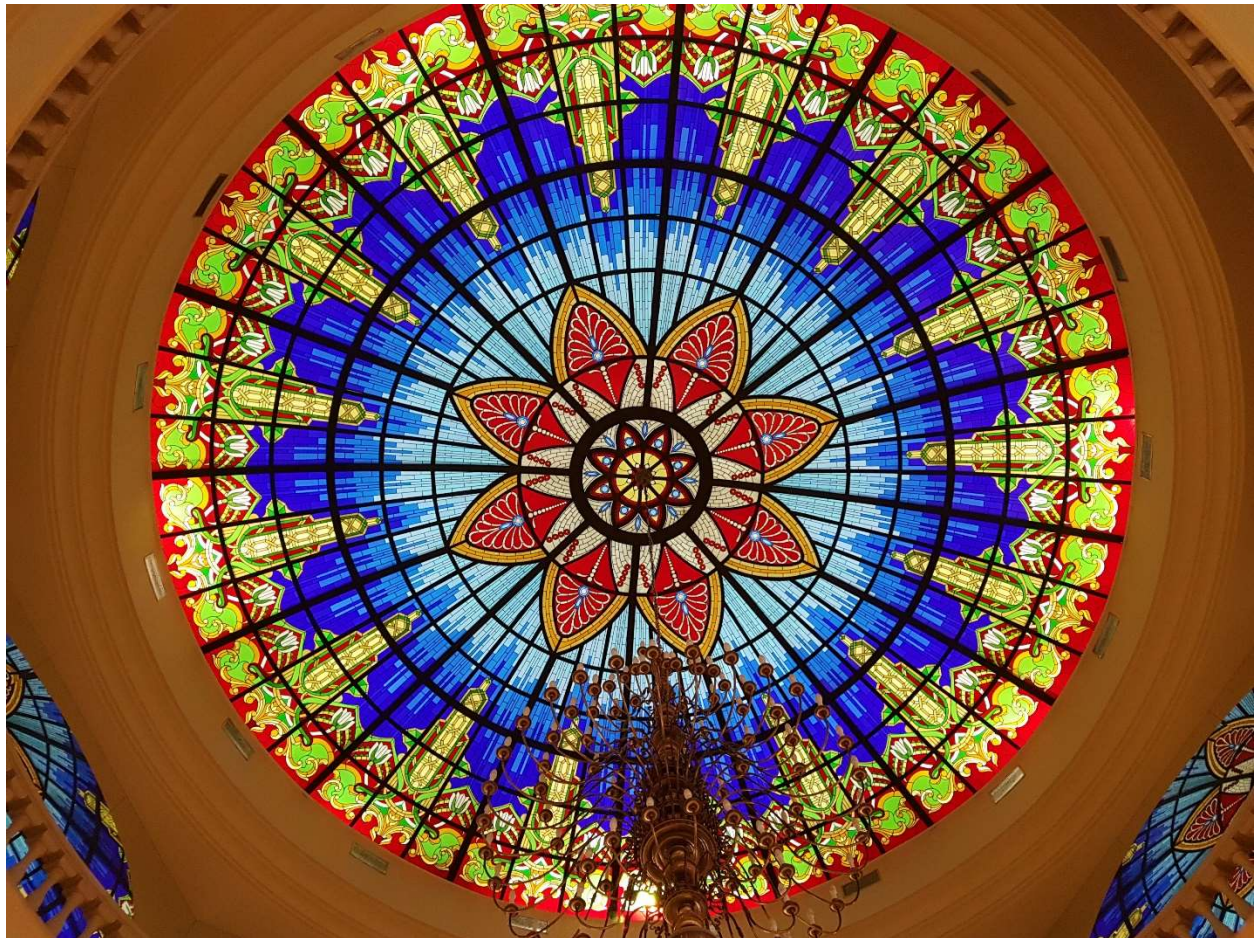
Before we made it all the way back, we dipped into an old church. I'd forgotten my scarf back at the apartment. I typically try to cover my head in religious sites in areas that might find that the socio-cultural norm. I view it as a sign of respect, as I would think practicing individuals request and view it as such. But alas. A whole tour group had just gone in and they did not appear to be taking extra precautions. In the interest of time, since we were here, and out of general curiosity, we followed them in. We took a quick poke around, but again thirst drove us onwards. We walked back towards the Old



Bazaar and found a restaurant we stopped at. We figured we could find something light to snack on or at least get some drinks. We didn't quite understand all of the items on the menu and we hadn't paid for data usage on the phones today. *Because we were having an adventure!* So, we ordered what sounded like a vegetarian thing – a pide! It was like a warm non-risen bread that had cheese and vegetables in it. It was delicious. Sharing that and an iced coffee as well as a couple glasses of water set us to rights! The restaurant had a pleasant misting machine on the edges of the outdoor canopy that occasional blew back and hit us. Except where I was sitting...it was just dripping on me!

After paying we just moseyed around the Old Bazaar. It was mostly closed up, as evidently Sundays were one of the days the market isn't open. But, we weren't looking to buy a lot and so looking in windows suited us just as well. We did walk

by a really nice-looking antique shop. I think if you had the time to wade through the piles of helmets, scarves, books etc. you could find some real treasures. We walked by some of the other churches listed and then made our way to **The Museum of Macedonian Struggle**. *Hey... it was open!* We paid for our tickets and were shown to the first exhibits door. Immediately, the differences between this museum and the first we'd gone to were striking. This was in a happening part of town, the entrance was all stone with a large circular atrium and massive stained glass dome ceiling. There were more people milling about and the first exhibit made it clear that it was generally well maintained. One of the first rooms we walked into had a table set up with a whole bunch of life-sized human figures sat and standing around it, posed. I walked in and at first thought it was real people and then was slightly freaked out by it! *Way too many life-sized human figures in this museum!*



As we walked around it became clear, there were a lot of struggles. From all the information we gathered, this small country was a theoretical idea, a hope that was carved from other nations and forged its own path despite fighting opponents on literally all sides. And, once it seemed to have a semblance of establishment it had to deal with all sorts of other World Wars, Communism etc. It is a tumultuous history to say the least, and some of the exhibits were disturbing. Deliberately so, I'm certain. But, one that sticks out is the cradle with a baby wrapped in a blanket covered in blood. After a couple of floors and numerous rooms, Kyle and I noticed a pattern. There was an inordinate number of assassinations! And so many of them were staged with the life-sized human figures. There were bombings, stabbings, beatings, hangings and torture all depicted. Got it!! Lots of struggles! Towards the

end I was struggling to hold it though, I had to go to the bathroom, so we walked back to the main atrium and then followed the stairs down a flight into the basement where they had a nice set of toilets. Interestingly, instead of TP there appeared to be rolls of kitchen wipes. At least that is how they looked. *Hunh.* We scuttled back upstairs and finished off the museum exhibits and just as we were descending we saw the partying breaking up to one side of the atrium. It was a wedding party!



We spent the next couple of hours just walking around by the river and taking pictures. I was a nice day and it felt good to just walk around. We eventually turned our feet back towards the flat with the intention of stopping at a supermarket on the way back so we could get some drinks and snacks to have around. And we did just that! Except, we also picked up a small bag of cat food and dog treats for the strays! It couldn't be helped!! With all of that settled, we walked back to the flat, rinsed our sweaty selves off and used the internet to search for a fun restaurant for dinner. Kyle found one called **Skopski Merak** which had good reviews and sounded fun, so we got dressed and headed off in that direction. We used a bit of phone navigation to find our way and at one point found ourselves in some really dark backlit alley. I was seriously beginning to wonder where Kyle was taking us! But, hold on faith, because we did actually make it! We were sat at a lovely table outside under the stars and had a leisurely meal. I can't quite describe how magical it felt. It felt like what I imagine other European cities felt like before they became too touristy. Don't get me wrong, this area had a lot of tourists as well. But, it still felt so natural. It was quiet with softer street lighting and old buildings around. We were sat near a tree, but we could almost see the stars. There was live music spilling out from different venues and it was perfectly warm out. In a word, it was enchanting.

We slowly walked back to the apartment that night just taking it all in. With a couple of pit stops to pull cat food out of my purse and leave it for various strays! *Haha! At least it was dry kibble. Far easier to manage and doesn't smell as much.* Needless to say, by the end of this day we crashed once more!

Day 3	Skopje to St. Naum's to Ohrid
Date	Monday August 20 <sup>th</sup> 2018
Drive time	Approx. 4.5 hours
Daily Distance	Approx. 230 km
Starting Location	Skopje, Macedonia
Ending Location	Ohrid, Macedonia
Accommodation	AirBnB – Apartments Centre Ohrid
Tourist Attractions	St. Naum's Monastery and Lake Ohrid, Ohrid Old Town and Gates
The Story	

We woke up, yet again, without a breakfast plan or great desire to go find some, which was probably good because we did get up a bit on the late side, again. Instead, we foraged with the snacks we had and enjoyed an orange and some various bits. We debated which way to go and which sites to aim for.



In the end we decided to aim for St. Naum's Monastery on Lake Ohrid. It was the furthest south we were going to go, and it'd get a larger part of driving done, so we didn't have to head south the day after. Kyle programed the destination into Navmii, so we could use it without data. Evidently, at some point he was offered a toll or no toll route. He decided to take the 'no toll' route. *Oops!* I don't know if we would have gone the same way or not, but the way we went was crazy! Before we left the wi-fi at the flat, I downloaded a few Mysterious Universe (MU) podcasts to help keep us entertained and going when we

didn't feel like talking to each other. At least today there would be no border crossings. But, as it turns out, that might be the least of the crazy we could have anticipated.

Driving in The Balkans generally takes longer. We had stretches of good motorway, but I'd say a large part of the roads were smaller, twisty roads that just took longer to travel on. Well the route today had us driving through serious back roads. At one point we were trapped in a rural sheep market. I freaked out when I saw a handful of guys grab a live sheep, flip it upside down, and toss it into the back of a car trunk. It was seriously disturbing. I don't like to see anything in pain or fear. Kyle, hearing my noises and twisty body motions turned and looked at me and said "There's nothing I can do about it. We're trapped. So, you're just going to have to close your eyes!". *Truly sympathetic! But... alas true.* With that advice, I did just that! Once through that mess we ended up going through a small city where the roundabouts were madness, and cars were double parked on the main streets, so it was hard to pass. Basically, we concluded no traffic rules existed, except Go! While we were stuck in all this mess we noticed that pedestrians were just as bad, or perhaps worse. We think that part of the reason we were going so slow in some of these cities was because people kept darting out in front of cars. We did manage to make it out of some of the bigger cities and at least pick up the speed a little bit, but to combat the extreme restlessness that was overcoming me, I put on an episode of Mysterious Universe to keep our minds distracted. However, the episode we were listening to was pretty creepy. There were more than a few instances when Kyle and I would look at each other and make "Ooooo" sounds!

We arrived at the **St. Naum's Monastery** on Lake Ohrid in the early afternoon. After parking, we paid to use the toilets and then moseyed towards the monastery which is set back on a small hill. We walked by a number of stands selling small touristy trinkets and then past several restaurants. The food smelled so good and was a very sentient reminder that we hadn't really eaten so far that day. *I think Kyle was over the crackers I kept pushing at him!* We walked up to the monastery and found that the church part was inside the walled compound of sorts. The surrounding buildings, which must have been the living and working buildings for the religious order, had been turned into a hotel. I hadn't known that before, but it looked like it'd be a really fun place to stay. It looked quite upscale! I covered my head with my large shawl and we paid to enter into St. Naum's Monastery, which was quite small, and poked around. We said a little prayer in one of the side rooms, because that's what people seemed to be doing. On our way out, we purchased two small candles and lit them to place in the outside candle holders. It's tradition.

We briefly poked around the gardens surrounding the buildings and then walked back down the hill and towards the food. We stopped at a restaurant on the water and were fortunate enough to find a seat right on the water. We had front row seats to Lake Ohrid, so we took turns walking in the water right out in front of our table. It was just so pleasant. We debated on whether we should stay and lay in the sun or try to head back north towards Ohrid city. Heading to Ohrid won out. We hopped back in the car and Kyle drove us to Ohrid.



The real fun happened when we got there though. The AirBnB we were staying at was in part of the 'walking district' so we had to park a little bit outside and the navigation wasn't being very helpful. We called Vladimir, the host, and he asked where we were, but all the signs were in Cyrillic and we had no idea how to say any of the names. *Haha, there is a sense of helplessness when you are not even being able to tell someone where you are!* Vladimir was a real gem though and came out to find us. He then hopped in the car and showed us where to park before walking us to the flat. He gave us a quick tour and explained that the shower door had been broken by a previous guest, but that we could just use the curtain that was there. *Fine, fine.* We dropped our bags and decided that it was still light enough out, so we would walk up towards the old city gate and check out the amphitheater. We wanted to see some of the music performed, but it wasn't going to start until 9pm and it was only 7pm and we weren't sure we were game for waiting. Instead, we followed a road downhill towards the water. Along the way we came across a few cute puppies and an adorable little kitten so we stopped to pull out a handful of food and some dog biscuits. While Kyle was handing out the loot, I was loitering a little too long in the road for someone trying to make their way up the windy hill, and so instead of honking or rolling down their window to say something they used the car to nudge up against me. *Technically, I got hit by a car!* Another woman in the street saw it and made a strong sound of protest and gestured wildly at the car and then me. I understood without words she was just as surprised, and possibly even more upset, than me! I couldn't bother to get too worked up about it though. *Perhaps I was going native!* On our descent back towards the harbour we stopped to poke around the outside of a church and an antique shop that carried Macedonian costumes. The costumes were gorgeous but everything was scattered around the store and it seemed like it'd be hard to piece together a full outfit, and likely pricey!



Something at this point wasn't sitting well in the stomach though, and I was getting a little concerned and thought maybe we should start heading back towards the flat. As we were making our way back, the sun was setting, and dusk was settling in, but the crowds weren't really thinning. In fact, it seemed there was some sort of street fair or activity going on. It was fun, but I was on a mission now! *Get back to the flat!* As we were walking back I could hear the prayers starting up from the mosque nearby. And something struck me. Some women who looked

bedraggled on the side of the road, possibly begging, I wasn't sure, appeared to be praying and some tourists appeared to be laughing at them and maybe taking pictures. It was such a crude imagine in my mind and very upsetting. In every way these women should be receiving compassion and understanding, and instead, it almost appeared they were being ridiculed. *Disappointing.*

As I spent a minute in the flat, Kyle went out and found a pizza to bring back for dinner. We must have been tired because we barely finished the pizza before we both crashed. I woke up in the night and briefly thought, "these sheets are scratchy" before completely crashing again! In the morning I told Kyle about the random thought I had in the night, and he laughingly told me he'd woken up and thought the same thing. *Guess who is spoiled?!*

Day 4	Ohrid and then that drive to Budva
Date	Tuesday August 21 <sup>st</sup> 2018
Drive time	Approx. 7 hours
Daily Distance	Approx. 310 km
Starting Location	Ohrid, Macedonia
Ending Location	Pržno, Budva, Montenegro
Accommodation	AirBnB-Budget Sea View Room
Tourist Attractions	Samuels Fortress, Church of St. Panteleimon, Church of St. John the Theologian
The Story	

We woke to another exciting breakfast of biscuits. Although Kyle somehow had some leftover soda from the night before he offered to share. *It felt like some sort of middle school slumber party. Blearily scrounging around for leftover food in the morning. Except, we had less food.* Fortunately, the heat meant that we hadn't been as hungry, so we weren't starving. And if we were, there were always the hard biscuits I brought from the UK! We once again packed up our bags, locked up the flat and then headed towards the car. We were going to load up our bags and then walk around the town, before driving to Budva later in the afternoon. As we approached the car, I made Kyle hustle a bit because the street was empty, and I wanted to load our bags in the trunk before anyone could see us putting bags into the trunk and then leaving. *The official term is probably approaching paranoid.* But, I'd read a bit about people with rental cars having concerns or issues, and with the extremely hefty safety deposit the car agency was holding, I didn't want to risk having the car broken into. Or having anything of ours stolen. Although, I kept just about everything of importance in my purse. *Including the pet food.* It was starting to get a bit heavy. And that was particularly noticeable on the hike uphill. It was still fairly early but it was already getting warm.



When we rolled up to **Samuel's Fortress** and walked to the ticket booth the young man said it was cash only and he couldn't break our large note. We did have some smaller change, but not quite enough. Eventually he relented and broke our large note, gave us tickets, and kind of gave us this exasperated shoo-in. I felt a bit bad as I don't want to take away funds that might help go to preserving historic sites like this, so we gave him the little remaining change we had to help offset the little bit. The young man seemed really confused, so perhaps we made it worse. It was good that we got there early though, as we were able to walk up onto the wall and explore before some of the massive groups arrived and started crazy clogging up the narrow walkways. It is a gorgeous location and the views are stellar. I can easily comprehend why a fortress was built there. About half of the fortress is blocked off and you cannot go down into the lower walled section. It looked like, at some point, there was an effort to do some archeology or preservation, but it didn't look like it was ongoing at the moment. I told Kyle it'd be an amazing opportunity for an archeological group to volunteer their time to help excavate the site. I'd be shocked if there wasn't a whole lot of history left to find here! It isn't a very large site, and with no signs and no knowledge we didn't spend too long at the fortress. Instead, we headed out and followed a treed path down the hill, away from the fortress, and to **Church of St. Panteleimon**. It's a beautiful old church with that Byzantium stone and brick work, set around trees and with the lake in the background. It's lovely. As we approached we noticed they were doing construction, literally, over some of the ruins and it was for a university. But it looked like they'd elevated the building so that it was nearly on stantions and the ground was fully accessible. Another cool piece was that part of the design of the new building matched the old arches of the church. It was a well-done past infusion to a modern building. They complimented each other. Immediately after we paid to enter, I noticed a dog and tried to discretely give it a treat, but it didn't want it. I started laughing and told Kyle of course the one I try to feed isn't interested. It did

eventually take the treat and wander off, but I was worried about A) looking like a crazy person and B) leaving a dog treat visible on the path.

We took quite a few photos around this church just because it was so photogenic. *Especially the sign right in front of the church that said it was a Free Wi-fi Zone.* We proceeded to go in and noticed in the entry they provided scarves etc. for women to use to cover themselves. I pulled out my scarf and draped it around my head



before we went in. It was lovely and we got a few nice photos while poking about, lit a candle and then proceeded back outside into the glorious sunshine. Once outside though, the need to find something to ingest became strong. I wanted food, but I knew if I drank something it'd sit on the stomach and my brain would confuse it with food and it'd buy us some time. So, the mission was food, or if all else fails, a drink. Turns out, the local little café really just had drinks. So Kyle got a Turkish coffee and I got a bottled ice tea. It worked. And, since we had stopped, we grabbed a few postcards as well. I love mailing postcards!

The descent continued, and we backtracked slightly before following a cobblestoned street down to **St. John the Theologian's Church**, which sits on a rocky corner right on the lake. We came across another cat and discretely left a pile of food for the sweet ginger kitty. *I was feeling a bit like an illicit pied piper!* We walked around, poked in the church where I was made to put on a cotton wrap to cover my legs (I was wearing shorts). I wasn't keen on putting it on, but out of respect I guess you must. I felt stifled under a scarf and with a wrap around my legs, so once we stepped out of the tiny little church, the heat of the day even felt pleasant. From St. John's you can take a water taxi back to the harbor, but we were on a budget, so we opted to just walk back up the hill.



We walked past the old amphitheater and then wandered to another high point to check out some more old churches, which we did not go in this time, before wandering back to the high gate and halfway down the far side, to where we'd left the car. We hopped in, plugged in our phones and set the GPS for Budva before heading out. *Today was going to be a two border crossing kind of day and we needed to be prepared! Haha.* I quite enjoyed the drive from Ohrid to the border, as we drove through a hilly treed section of road up to the border. It was lovely. Plus, there wasn't a really long wait at the border, which might have colored my opinion. Once through, we drove to a junction where a woman was trying to get us to stop. She had the car in front of us stop and was trying to get them to sign a form or do something. We didn't feel like stopping, and we don't speak the language, so we kept driving. And when nothing bad happened I turned to Kyle and said, "No one is chasing us, so I don't think it was an official

stop!” We put on Mysterious Universe again and listened to some creepy stories as we drove through Albania. We had a few bites of cookies Kyle had bought the night before. *Dessert for the pizza, and to complement our slumber-party theme.* I had trouble sitting still in the crowded cities and in traffic, but we eventually made it to the border. We were getting so close! But the Montenegrin border wait was brutally long and hot. It was nice to have MU to listen to, but I did feel bad for Kyle having to drive so much and stay behind the wheel. We watched as people got out of their cars, as a woman with her cows walked past. The sun was beating down, and we turned the car off for long stretches. I think it took us about an hour to an hour and a half to get through the line. But, then, blissfully, we were through!!! To Budva!

This last stretch felt like it lasted longer than it should have. But, so many of the roads felt this way. As we were on the last few kilometers into Budva, I noticed the sky had a haze. My first thought was it had that ‘forest fire’ look to it. But, I didn’t have any reason to suspect that was the case... until we turned a corner in the bend and we could see actual brush fires on the hillside. And, they seemed to be moving downhill. *Hmm.*



*Action!* As we made our way to Pržno, which was just outside of Budva, we had to meander down these narrow roads. The AirBnB hosts said that there would be parking, but it didn’t seem possible to get down to the waterfront easily, so Kyle stopped the car one road up from the water and I got out to look for the house number. I followed the numbers towards the water but didn’t get far enough to find the exact building. I then backtracked up the road and followed it in the opposite direction, away from the water, since Kyle had been gesticulating that I should take that road. I can read house numbers, but I’ll give him a chance. I followed it uphill, but I didn’t see any indication that it would be that way. I wandered back to the car and we agreed to try to find a parking spot and then head down to the water with our bags. We got very lucky to be able to find a parking spot right as another group was leaving, because it was a busy, happening place! With our bags in hand, we wandered down to the waterfront and looked for house 20.

Our path seemed to take us along the waterfront and through a few restaurants. We rocked up to the spot of number twenty and there was a middle-aged gent sitting there. He didn’t appear to speak a lot of English, but we were able to get across who we were, and he took us up to our room. *Oh boy!* It was a bit disappointing. Just a bit run down etc. We briefly looked to see if we could find another place in the area, but everything was really expensive, which was frustrating, and we were a bit too tired to play around too much. Instead, we went to get some dinner and I ordered two shots of vodka to start the meal. I immediately downed the first shot. Kyle said he was impressed. He didn’t know I could shoot vodka without flinching. *Little does he know...* At first, I didn’t think it had hit at all, and then, all the sudden, the giggles started. And then, I realized we hadn’t really eaten all day and we were still waiting for our food. I waited to have a little dinner before taking the last shot. Now, suddenly the room didn’t seem so bad! I wouldn’t normally steer in this direction, but it was highly effective! And honestly, I think it helped me sleep better that night! *Finlandia for the win!*



Day 5	Beach day in Pržno
Date	Wednesday August 22 <sup>nd</sup> 2018
Drive time	N/A
Daily Distance	N/A
Starting Location	Pržno, Montenegro
Ending Location	Pržno, Montenegro
Accommodation	AirBnB-Budget Sea View Room
Tourist Attractions	Just the beach!
The Story	

Well, we made it through the night, and fairly comfortably, so I'm sure we'll manage a second night fine. Today is our quiet and beach day! A little R and R. We slept in late and then put our suits on and grabbed our bags to go lay on the public beach. We'd occasionally go dip in the water and then lay back down on our towels to take in the sun. It was a beautifully lazy morning. We escaped back inside just after lunch to have a small snack and then take a nap. After that we woke up, way later than we thought, and then scurried back outside to take in some more sun. Kyle was really keen to swim out to a small rock island not far from the shore and take a look at an old stone building perched on it. With Teva sandals firmly affixed to our feet and goggles on our face we went swimming out towards the little island. We scrambled up onto it and poked around. It took a bit of scrambling around to find the entrance to the shell of a building, and the rock was quite sharp, but we eventually poked our head in to see an old chicken coop and remnants of a dog house. We then hopped off the rock, back into the

water, and swam around the rock and along the rocky coastline away from the general public swimming. It was pleasant, but I was a bit jittery being out away from the designated spot and watching the water turn dark under me. At one point I could half see a pipe under me disappearing into the water. *Yiiikes! I do not like seeing the outlines of things!* Afterwards, I laid on the little rocky beach for a little bit while Kyle walked around.

As the sun started lowering and the salt started crusting onto me, we headed back inside to rinse off and grab a bite to eat. I changed into a nice light long dress and we went out. After dinner we decided, since we were in Montenegro and we were near a really posh hotel, we'd head over to check out their casino! Wearing a dress, I figured I looked well enough, so we walked over and when we did finally find our way to the casino check-in, the young woman at the desk gave us a once over and then told us we weren't dressed well enough to get in. I had mixed feelings about this as



we could see other people in the casino who were dressed way more casually. *So, were we being profiled or what?* The woman told us we'd have to change and then come back and register. *What to do, what to do!* Because we had the time, and it was only a few minutes' walk back to where we were staying, we went back, changed into our nicer outfits and then headed back to the casino. It took a while to get us registered, because apparently we needed casino cards. While we were getting registered another gent came up and wanted to go in (he was dressed pretty darn casually too) and the woman told him he'd have to wait as she was helping us, and he started to get really huffy. *Really? What type of privileged life does this guy lead? But, then again, the hotel was some exorbitant fee per night.* Finally registered, we entered the casino and it just felt awkward. All of the games seemed to be digitalized. I guess gone are the days of just pulling the lever and seeing if you got matching images. It took us a while to figure out how to get one of the games going! I made Kyle stay near me and help me figure it out. I was scared I was going to do something wrong and then just drain the money I put in quickly. As it turns out I managed to start with ten euros and won enough to 'cash out' at twenty-six euros. The machine printed a ticket and I had to take it back to get it cashed out. I then split it with Kyle and we each played another tenner. But, the games just didn't seem quite as fun when they were digital. And it just felt like an antithesis to who I am in general. We honestly didn't stay too long and opted to mosey back to our room, change back into our comfy nice clothes and then grab dessert on the water. Some baklava and milk cake treats made it a rounded out and relaxing evening. Except that our bathroom was a bit flooded and smelled a bit off. *But we just left shoes at the bathroom door and ignored the rest.*

Day 6	Pržno to Perast to Dubrovnik
Date	Thursday August 23 <sup>rd</sup> 2018
Drive time	Approx. 3 hours (not including customs wait – add 1 hour 45 minutes!!)
Daily Distance	Approx. 100km
Starting Location	Pržno, Montenegro
Ending Location	Dubrovnik, Croatia
Accommodation	Hotel Vis
Tourist Attractions	Our Lady of the Rocks, Perast Bell Tower, Kotor Roman Mosaics, Random church

## The Story

We woke on Thursday ready to get going. *Well, at least that is what I thought as I told Kyle to get up and go get some breakfast! Ha!* Just after he'd left, and I was up moving around in my pajama's, there was a knock at the door and the older woman who lived on the first floor indicated that we had to leave in thirty or forty minutes. It was an awkward series of mimes and hand gestures that got me to that conclusion; made a little bit more awkward by my really skimpy attire. *Sigh.* Just embrace it, and at least it was the cute old lady! Kyle came back and I told him we had to get a move on. Poor Kyle. A lot of bossing around was happening! But we were able to pack our bags quickly and head out. We loaded up the car and plugged in the coordinates

for Perast, where we were hoping to catch a little boat out to a small man-made island that had a church. We enjoyed the car ride, and started to recognize areas we'd drove past previously. As we neared Perast we started looking for places to park on the side of the road. We found a place on a hill and started walking down, when we realized that there was one last place a little closer, so Kyle ran back and moved the car. *Bless his heart!* It was getting hot and walking back up that hill later would be

sweltering! Plus, there was no sidewalk, and with how people drive and all the memorials on the roadsides here, I was happy to forgo that experience later. While he was doing that I told him I'd walk onto the waterfront and see where the boats take off from etc. Since our phones wouldn't work, I told him I'd meet him right near a gate on the waterfront. I tried to make that very clear! I didn't need him ferreting off like in Skopje!



It seemed to work like a charm because I found the boat launch and he moved the car and we found each other again easily enough. It was a few euros each to be boated across the short distance to the island. Shame we weren't able to swim to it. It wasn't that far, and I'm absolutely certain I could have made it. But, apparently that bit of sea is littered with shipwrecks... and if I saw one of those from my goggles I might freak out. I really enjoyed the little zodiac ride. We got off and the guy said he'd come back in half an hour for us. *Uh... okay?* I wasn't in the mood to get too worried about it. Seemed like one of those things that'd work out. We paid to go inside the Church of **Our Lady of the Rocks** and walked around a little bit. The island that the church is built on is supposedly man-made over years of people tossing rocks back into the sea in this area after successfully and safely returning from the sea. And two brothers, in thanks for a miracle, decided to build a church on the spot. Now, once a year the locals



purportedly all go out and throw rocks in and around the site. *How cool?!* The island is rather small so after poking around we went to wait on the side of the island where the boat dropped us off. Kyle managed to find a slightly shady spot to wait, as the heat of the day was definitely picking up. A different guy ended up taking us back, but he seemed to recognize us from the other shore... so, we just went with him. Once unleashed on the shore, Kyle and I decided that with our free parking and the day open we'd explore Perast a bit more, so we followed the shoreline into the old town area. It really is a quaint village. I really enjoyed just poking around. Most of the sites were fairly inexpensive, but you did have to pay to enter just about everything. And, I was desperately thirsty, so first order of business was to find a drink... except we kept getting distracted. We found a little store, bought some not as cold as we wanted drinks, and then moseyed around.

Kyle had expressed an interest in climbing the **Bell Tower**. I was on the fence but since we were there... sure. *Why not? YOLO?* It was a euro each, and we were warned by the attendant, watching videos, to mind our heads in certain places. *Uh okay.* We began the climb up the stairs, and after a flight or two of stairs that looked like they were definitely not maintained, I was feeling a little less than confident. I told Kyle it was only a matter of time before this place collapsed... the question was would it be when we were there. *I think we might have just paid to play Russian roulette with our lives!* Per usual, he brushed off my warning and skipped off up the stairs while I gingerly kept hold of the rusty handrail like that was going to save me if it all came tumbling down. It was a warm climb and the stairs kept going up and up. I

was actually shocked. It felt like some sort of optical illusion. It didn't seem this high from the outside. Of course, right at the most inopportune time I turned around to look back and start talking to Kyle, and that was right where the stairs went through, basically, a hole in the ceiling, and you had to crouch to continue working upwards. So, instead, I crashed into it and released one or two expletives. *Rotten luck!* It made me think of a line from Down Periscope "The only thing holding her together is the bird droppings". It probably wasn't that bad... but it was worrisome! *And there were a lot of bird droppings!* Despite wondering to the contrary, we did eventually make it to the top. And, with some unaccountable and perverse sense of mischief, Kyle immediately went over to touch the old rusted bell and looked like he was going to ring it. I loudly told him to stop and read the sign which explicitly said, 'don't ring the bell'. He told me, all affronted, that he hadn't intended to ring it. He'll have to forgive me if all my experiences, up to this point in our lives, had not led me to that same conclusion! I crept around scared to stop anywhere and fall through the floor! *I have a way too vivid imagination!* After taking pictures and appreciating the views, we decided to head down. None too soon, as we could hear other people ascending, and I didn't think this floor should have additional weight on it! We had to scoot to far walls and shuffle around people to make it work, but we eventually made it down the stairs. I honestly felt like we'd rolled the dice and come out unscathed, and that probably required a prayer or a celebratory dance or something.

We continued along through town admiring the cats, the buildings and stopping briefly for me to write a few postcards, as we'd come across a post office in town. By that time, we figured we should grab a small bite, use the toilet, and head out. So, we settled on a little café on the water and ordered a Caprese salad to share. It was delicious and refreshing. I think the waiter didn't know what to make of us sharing a salad. Even the kids at the surrounding tables had big platters of meat. But, it was just too hot for so much heavy food. Once finished with lunch, we started walking back towards the car. I wanted to get in the water and swim, but Kyle was a bit red from sunbathing the other day and didn't want to risk getting too much more sun! *Travelling with a vampire really cramps my style!* So, back to the car we went. From this point on we figured we'd head towards the airport and stop if we saw something that interested us.



First random point of interest was a sign purporting to have roman mosaics off the Bay of Kotor. *Sure! Why not!?* We whipped in and found ourselves in a one room type of exhibit. It wasn't much, but it was interesting. Evidently this area had a long history of settlements, and the Romans were just one of many, but some of the mosaics that were left were incredibly beautiful. Plus, bonus, an apparent street cat had snuck in and was sleeping in a shady corner on the mosaics. He was so cute! Dollars to donuts if we went back a couple thousand years ago, to the time of the Romans, there was a cat doing exactly the same thing. *Some things never change!* And, it's these universal and unending threads that make me feel so connected to the past, present, and future. More to connect than differ. That being said, it was



hot, and I was thirsty again, so I didn't ruminate overly long. We were travelling with water, but something cool sounded delightful, and there was an IDEA supermarket right next door, so I hopped over to grab us some drinks while Kyle went to grab the bag of cat food from the car and leave some for a few of the street cats sitting outside of the store. I got in what had to be one of the slowest moving grocery lines in the country, because it took an absolute age to get my two ice teas! But once back in the car we once again steered towards the border!

We did get waylaid one more time when a sign said something about an old church, so we followed it a mile or so off the main road and stopped in to take a peak. It was basically deserted. We only saw a few other people and one was an orthodox dressed man who appeared to work in the church; possibly a priest. As we walked in I noticed the basket or women to grab the wrap around skirts to cover up. *Sigh. I hate to be childish, but Kyle didn't have to wear one! How comes guys get off so easy?* But, respect won out over petulance! I covered up and wrapped my scarf around my head for good measure. We poked around the church and then around the gardens. We followed the signs for the toilets through the graveyard... and when we got there, they were so open aired I just knew there were going to be spiders, and since no one was around, I made Kyle stand guard really, really close. As we walked back towards the main building, we noticed they had a gift shop of sorts and went in. I wasn't set on any religious artifacts, per se, but I did like that there were some handmade blankets or rugs for sale in the entry. Alas, they were quite pricey. Handmade, so that is understandable, but we were in the Balkans on a budget! The day was getting along though, and we still needed to cross the border, our last border, so we hopped back in the car and headed north! We hit an insanely long line of traffic and it was a crazy wait to get across the border. *Ugh! This was all a good idea until I remembered how annoying borders can be! Haha!* We had to embrace the heat once again as we turned off the car and listened to some MU. It was a freaky episode! But, it did help pass the time as we slowly inched closer to the border. And then, finally, we made it through one, and then the other check point and were back in Croatia! To the airport! And actually, the airport snuck up on us a lot quicker than we had realized. We nearly passed it

before we knew what was happening and had to pull over to get some gas; fill up the tank and all that. Once refueled, we headed to the car drop off center, handed in the keys, snapped a few pictures of Kyle with the car that carried us everywhere and headed across the parking lot to the terminal where we could catch a bus to the city center. Lucky for us, we were able to pay and get on a bus that was essentially leaving right at that time. We just caught it! Hooray for serendipitous timing. It was essentially full, but we managed to nab two seats near the back and enjoy the ride in. Kyle, in particular, because he was feeling the strain from driving the manual all week. Once in town, I walked over to the information desk, which was near the bus stop, and asked about our bus number and then purchased the tickets. The woman reluctantly waved us in the correct direction to find our bus stop. It was about an eight-minute wait, and then we were on a pretty full bus heading north, out of town. We weren't entirely sure which stop to get off at, so I turned on my GPS and followed along on the map as it navigated us to our hotel! I figured we'd get off once the bus got on the same street. *Nifty little trick! Nice to be back in the roam-free realm.*



We got off, missed the hotels sloping entrance, and accidentally went down to the beach before working our way back up to the lobby. We got checked in and found our room. As it turned out, room 103 was going to be our first room before we changed each night after! We got in, and instantly started making ourselves comfortable. I was excited to have a nicer shower and more amenities. At first, we couldn't find the bathroom, but that was because it was behind a curtain that looked like it was hiding the window. For one moment I panicked and thought it was going to be some weird 'shared floor bathroom' situation. *But, phew!* We found the door. After a long, hot and sweaty day, it took me zero time flat to get my clothes off and get in the shower, which promptly flooded the whole bathroom. Kyle had the audacity to suggest it was something I had done! But, there was a good amount of standing water in the bathroom that hadn't gone away by the time we went to bed, so I just threw a pair of flip flops near the door and figured we could put those on to wade to the toilet if we needed to at night. Haha, I just couldn't get too worked up about it. We were both munchy, so we headed off to a local supermarket and picked up some bread, meat, cheese and cookies before heading back to the hotel. *The staples.* And then, it was time to crawl in bed and lights out on this long day!

Day 7	Dubrovnik
Date	Friday August 24 <sup>th</sup> 2018
Drive time	N/A
Daily Distance	N/A
Starting Location	Dubrovnik, Croatia
Ending Location	Dubrovnik, Croatia
Accommodation	Hotel Vis
Tourist Attractions	Lovrijenac, City Wall, Tvrdava Minceta, Onofrio Fountain
The Story	

I was awoken at some unholy hour because people were getting up and leaving the hotel and their chatter was echoing around the first floor. Then, a maid was cleaning noisily for what seemed like ages. It was clear she was dragging something solid and heavy that made a kind of clacking sound. *It was a creepy, horror film like soundtrack.* And, to top it all off, someone near us had their tv on loud enough to wake the dead and we could hear it in our room. Per usual, Kyle slept through this cacophony of sound, but I couldn't get back to sleep. As we headed out the door for the day, we asked if we could change rooms because it was noisy, and the bathroom was still slightly flooded. The front desk told us to just leave our bags packed and they'd move them to our new room later. We informed them we had wet clothes drying in the bathroom, and to be sure to grab those too because we couldn't pack them. They indicated they understood and away we went into town. The hotel was right near a bus stop, so it was easy getting back on and following it back into the city center. We didn't have much of a plan for the day, aside from "see what we can see". As we got off at the bus stop, we headed towards the information center and post office to check to see if we could exchange some of our pounds for euros. As it turns out the hotel couldn't exchange the money because they didn't take 'Scottish' pounds. *What the hell?* We explained that they were just pounds, these were just issued by the bank in Scotland. But we were told that the bank wouldn't accept them. The woman at the post office didn't seem to care



that much and let us exchange the money. Thank goodness. But seriously? *Haha! I felt discriminated against!* Now that we had some more money on our persons, we aimed for the castle like structure on the rocky outcropping. Also referred to as, **Lovrijenac**. It's a 16<sup>th</sup> century fortress that also happens to be where they've filmed parts of Game of Thrones. It was still early enough in the day that the fortress wasn't that busy and we were able to enjoy the open spaces. I have to say, I was quite taken with the setting and simple beauty of the place. I can understand how it was easy to transform for use in cinematography. From there, we wound our way back towards the city and **Pile Gate**, the main entrance into the 'Old Town'. It was here that the crowds really started getting intense. It was a bit of an odd sensation being in a crowd that was bordering on 'mob,' as people filed into the city. Most of the other

places we'd been had been off the beaten track enough that people weren't overwhelming, but here, all of the sudden, I felt the massively popular tourist vibe. Given how insanely crowded it felt and how warm it was getting, we decided to head for the wall around Dubrovnik. It was likely just to get hotter and more crowded. So, that is what we did. We bought our tickets, which I thought were pricey, and then got in line to walk up the tight and narrow steps near the gate. There was a cute little calico passed out next to the man collecting tickets.



As we mounted the steps up towards the **City Wall**, we learned that everyone was supposed to go left and make a circular loop around the city that way. It was busy and warm, so we got our hustle on and followed the walk around the city. It was incredibly picturesque. The views were gorgeous on either side. It was either blue and green ocean or terracotta roofs interspaced with historic buildings. We were jokingly panting and trying to find shady spots as we worked our way around. For those requiring a little respite, there were a couple little stops where drinks and snacks could be purchased, but we forged ahead. There were a couple Red Cross stations set up along the way. *Jaheez. I hope those aren't that necessary! But I like the preparedness.* The last station was inside the **Tvrđava Minceta**. A tower on the northeast corner of the old city center. It was a bit of an uphill climb on the wall to get there. I was getting so thirsty and ready to get off this wall!! I was enjoying it, but still, a bit over it! After the Minceta tower, it was just a short walk and then a staircase down. Once back into the old city, we walked over to the **Onofrio Fountain** where we scooped water out and splashed it all over our legs and arms. It was so cool, and it felt delightful. I got a big scoop and managed to drench Kyle's legs and left him gasping at the sensation! *So good!* Now that we'd cooled down a little, it was time to find a cool drink. We wandered around and eventually found a little store where we could buy drinks. They were, tragically, not that cold. But, beggars cannot be choosers, especially when I was so thirsty! I remember grabbing a drink and then getting frustrated that Kyle was taking forever to decide on what he wanted! *It's liquid refreshment! Life giving aqua! Just grab something! Geez!*

After that, we poked around the city center, walking around the side streets and poking into a few stores. We walked by a few museums, but they were quite pricey, and they didn't entice us per se. So, we continued walking through a market, into a couple churches and past some 'Game of Thrones' filming sites that Kyle pointed out. We passed a few cats and dogs along the way, so we stopped and tried to discretely leave piles of kibble or dog treats. We were able to finally finish off the small bag of cat food that I'd been carrying around in my purse for the better part of a week! I managed to find a few

postcards in town, and as we walked back towards the main gate we stopped for a final look at this fun jewelry store where I had found a few pieces I really liked. Alas, as we were on a bit of a budget, it was not meant to be on those, and it was getting quite warm and crowded, so we decided to head back to the hotel and take advantage of the waterfront real estate and go lay down by the water a little. *Some R and R!* So, we worked our way back to the main bus stop and hopped on the next one back to the hotel.



It didn't take long for us to get back and from there we headed up to our room to change. It was when we were in the room that I noticed there were some ants on the floor. Initially, I wasn't overly concerned because ants happen in warmer destinations, and it didn't look to be outrageous. Then I looked a little closer and realized they were coming in and out of the space between the floor and floor boards, and that in fact the trail of them went almost entirely around the perimeter of our room. Okay. That actually is a problem. We called down to the lobby to report the issue and were told that it was getting too late in the evening to do anything and that the best they could do would be to bring up a bottle or chemical spray, but if they sprayed it we'd likely have to absent ourselves from the room for a time while the smell etc. dissipated. *F\*ck!* I don't do well with chemicals, it was already 9:00pm, and they weren't going to change us rooms. Not that I particularly wanted to move again, but the more we looked the more we could see there were ants all over! So that night we ended up pulling the bed out from the wall a little way and sleeping with our heads away from the wall. It wasn't particularly comfortable..., but certainly memorable!

Day 8	Dubrovnik... but mostly just the beach
Date	Saturday August 25 <sup>th</sup> 2018
Drive time	N/A
Daily Distance	N/A
Starting Location	Dubrovnik, Croatia
Ending Location	Dubrovnik, Croatia
Accommodation	Hotel Vis
Tourist Attractions	Beach and Skar Winery Dubrovnik
The Story	

We woke up with the ant problem still an issue! We immediately contacted the front desk, again, and ended up in a massive fray with Expedia's complaint helpline and the hotel (being exceedingly unhelpful). I lost it a little when I found ants crawling in my clothing bag! Negative! So, we spent the morning in debate with them. I'll be honest that I was trying to see the humorous side, but I was pretty

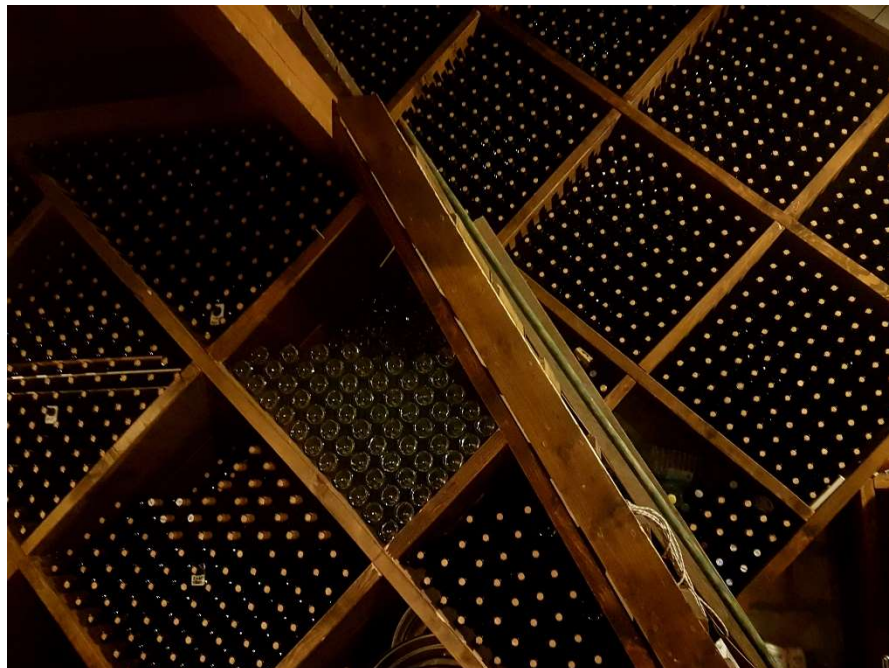
irritated at the same time. The hotel was clearly done with us as well. We eventually came to the 'resolution' that they'd move us rooms, again, and send out all our clothing to be washed and put us in a 'lesser room' because that'd make up the difference for the washing, somehow. We had repeatedly explained to them that we could not fly back to the UK with ants in our bags. Seemingly 'solved' we brought all of our laundry to the front desk and were told to leave it to be cleaned. Since we had minimal clothes and no room now we just went and laid out on the beach and swam in the



salty sea! I mean really salty! Our towels started to get a white crust layer forming on them as we went and dunked in the water repeatedly. Kyle took a quick break to see if our new room was ready and we could get the keys. Not unexpectedly the room wasn't ready and to add some flavor, they hadn't taken our laundry yet as it apparently needed to be packed into green bags before they could get it laundered. *Really?!!* Kyle quickly repacked the laundry into the big green bags and then headed back to the beach. When we did eventually go back to the lobby to check on getting room keys, we found our green bags of laundry just sitting out still. *Great...* We had plans to go out for a nice wine evening later and I needed a dress to wear. So, we had to root through the bags to pull out a few items that I'd hand wash in our room. I hand washed my purse, a shirt for Kyle, a dress for me and a whole bunch of other little miscellaneous things. We were running out of space to try and hang things to dry in this new room. Oh yah, the room with two twin beds! *Romantic!* Also, a few ants somehow managed to come with us because I set my purse down and ants ended up on the bed. *Yucky!!!*

Once most of our stuff was hanging in some way or another, we had a snack and headed back down to the beach. We took a few items with us that were taking longer to dry so we could put them out in direct sunlight. But, oh did the sun feel good. It's August, but I still felt like I hadn't seen the sun in Scotland in ages. Just laying out and soaking up the rays felt ooooh so delicious. My Mediterranean heritage was immensely satisfied. Kyle's pasty heritage was at risk of getting burned though! Poor chap! In fairness though, I did get a little bit pink, but it was just enough that I knew it'd fade easily without issue and likely add to the sun-kissed look. A quick shower, dressed in our slightly damp but hopefully ant free clothing, we headed out to this winery for our tasting! There wasn't a direct bus, so we opted to walk to save some money and stretch our legs. Lord have mercy though if we weren't sweating through our clothes after the slightly uphill stretch. *Figures. We were going to arrive to the posh wine tasting looking like completely ragamuffins.* When we arrived the store front it was still closed. We were the first to arrive. Go team! It didn't take long for others to start arriving though. And, after being off the beaten path for a while it was odd to hear other Americans arrive.

Kyle and I were seated at a table by ourselves, and were immediately served up a platter of small nibbles; meats, cheeses, crackers etc. It was a small location. It was explained to us by the owner and



gentleman giving the tour that it had formerly been his grandfather's boat building business, and he'd turned it into his location for sharing wine. The grapes were harvested further afield in Croatia and then they bring them into the store and stomp and bottle them. He then showed us their storage and processing room. In general, the place was really hip. He'd done an excellent job renovating it and making it inviting yet chic. After the talk we were invited to go back to our

seats and were served four glasses of wine and sample of the liqueurs. And these were large samplings! I was getting tipsy at this point and we had to walk back. But, I was really enjoying that perfectly sweet spot of being buzzed, giggly, and happy, and I didn't want to walk it off. But alas. Time eventually came for us to go, so Kyle and I walked back to the hotel.

Poor Kyle though! My happy buzz left me completely sleepy by the time we got back to the hotel and I passed out on my bed and he ended up having to pack all of our stuff!! And that is how this romantic trip and evening ended. With a wife passed out on her twin bed while her husband packed up their hopefully de-ant-ed clothes!

Day 9	Dubrovnik... and home to Dunblane
Date	Sunday August 26 <sup>th</sup> 2018
Drive time	N/A
Daily Distance	N/A
Starting Location	Dubrovnik, Croatia
Ending Location	Dunblane, Scotland
Accommodation	Home fires!
Tourist Attractions	N/A
The Story	

We casually woke up this morning, grabbed our bags and headed to the airport. First, we took a bus into town, then we split up while Kyle went to go buy our tickets for the airport shuttle bus, and I took our remaining currency and went into the old town to try and find a post office to mail my postcards. Turns out, I only had enough money to mail two of my six postcards! Yikes! I then sent Kyle a message and he told me I had to walk uphill towards the base of the gondola because that was where the bus picked up. Fortunately, it wasn't too hot, yet, so I trucked myself uphill, and as I got to within a block and a half I

saw the bus go by and I really got my hustle on! I made it just as they were loading up, so Kyle and I were able to get right on a bus and head out. We could have caught another, as they appear to run every half an hour or so. Once at the airport, we went through Customs and by that time I was hungry, so we grabbed a snack, sat down, plugged in our phones and waited a short time for our flight to get ready to board. It honestly didn't feel like that long before we were getting ready to board, headed to our gate, bussed out on the tarmac and boarded the plane. Kyle and I were sat on opposite sides of the aisle from each other.

Partway through the flight I started up a conversation with the man sat next to me. We appeared to be of a similar age, turns out he was a year or two younger. We briefly chatted to each other about our respective trips and experiences. At one point we were talking about hotels and Air BnBs, and he asked if we'd stayed at the Hilton International or Four Seasons-something in Dubrovnik. *What?! Who would jump to such a high-end hotel and just think that someone was staying there? Haha! Uhh... no.* We were at the ant infested hotel down the way! That cracked me up. I had a hard time not smiling like a cheeky devil for the rest of the flight. Otherwise, it was relatively uneventful. We landed and managed to get through Customs quickly and were back home in time for dinner! All in all, I wish we'd had more time. I truly enjoyed this part of the world! *Amen and Hallelujah.*

