

**Ismo Porna, Finland**

# **ISMONDIA 1955 – 2021: *A LIFE LONG TRAVEL STORY***

**MAIN TRAVELLING GOAL 1955 - 2011:**

**VISITING ALL THE UN- AND OTHER  
INDEPENDENT COUNTRIES**

**“There are 193 UN-countries  
and 4 others plus 4 former UN ones  
and that’s altogether 201!”**

**ADDITIONAL PART 2012 –2021 :**

**7 NON-SOVEREIGN COUNTRIES  
SOME OTHER SPECIAL REGIONS  
NORDIC DIMENSIONS**

# Ismo Porna, A World Explorer from Finland



My book: "Ismondia 1960-2014: Maailman valtiot ja niissä käynnit"  
(*Ismondia 1960-2014: World countries and visits to them*)  
Books on Demand, Helsinki 2015 (Loppuunmyyty, sold out)

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## **Educational background:**

- Undergraduate from Kerava Gymnasium 1964
- Master of Physical Education, Jyväskylä University 1969

## **Working history:**

- Secretary of Jyväskylä Summer festival 1968
- Executive Manager of the Cultural Centre of the Old Student house, the Student Union of Helsinki University 1969-1971
- Secretary for Cultural Affairs 1972-1975, Finnish People's Democratic Union, Helsinki
- Secretary for Culture and Sports 1975-1982 and Director for Cultural Affairs 1982-1993, The Association of Finnish Cities, Helsinki
- Senior Adviser for Cultural Administration and Art Education 1993-2003, retired 2003, The Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities, Helsinki
- **Senior Producer and owner of Kultismo Production since 2003**

## **Family background:**

- First marriage 1966-1972 with Virpi Tiihonen, daughter Katja born in 1968 with son Onni 1992 and his son Oiva 2019 and his brother 2021, daughter Aino 1994 and daughter Elma 1996
- Second marriage 1976-2002 with Merja Hägg, daughter Mirja 1977 with her daughters Alma 1996 and Iisa 2011; son Ilkka 1979 with his daughter Lilja 2014; son Antti 1981 and daughter Venla 1985
- Now in open marriage with Kaarina since 2012 with a cod daughter Mitchell Bayay in Zimbabwe since 2009

## **Last home towns:**

- Jyväskylä 1944, Helsinki 1945-46, Pori 1946-1951, Hämeenlinna 1951-1954, Kerava 1954-1964, Jyväskylä 1965-1969, Helsinki 1969-1970, Kauniainen 1970-1971, Espoo 1971, Helsinki 1972-1981, Vantaa 1982-2002, Lahti 2003-2006, Helsinki 2006-2013 and Houtskari's Mossala island 2013-2016 in Turku Archipelago in Parainen and 2016 onwards again in Helsinki.

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# MAIN TRAVELLING GOAL 1955 - 2011:

## 1<sup>st</sup> Journey in 1955: *Two domestic trips abroad in Finland*



1944 / 1955



Finnish Mark 1945 and 1955

Europe 1.

*Republic of Finland*

*Population: 5,6 million*

*Independence: 6.12.1917 from Russian Empire*

*Suomen tasavalta in Finnish and Republiken Finland in Swedish*

I was born on 3 September 1944, which was the so called 0-Day between the last day of the continuation war and the first day of the armistice with Soviet Union, in Jyväskylä, where I studied between 1965-1969. My first real journey is called A Domestic Trip Abroad. It happened in 1955 by bus from Helsinki to Jyväskylä, by aeroplane to Kuopio in Savonia, by steam boat to Savonlinna, by train back to Jyväskylä and finally by train to Helsinki. My second trip was a train from Helsinki to Karjaa through the Soviet occupied Porkkala peninsula in the wagons with closed windows.

Visited special island



Åland (Ahvenanmaa) 1987

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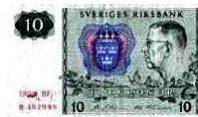
## 2<sup>nd</sup> Journey in 1960:

*A Nordic Sister town journey*

After my not so inspiring 1950s and one year after the death of my awful and violent stepfather, who left too much tax debt to my mother, I was ready as a sixteen years old teenager to start a new life. One step towards that was my first one month working place at a sawmill, where I earned enough money both to give to my mother and to start my first trip abroad. I did not have at that time any ideas of visiting all the independent countries and I did not even know how many they were, but I was sure that I'd like to travel and I am going to do so. I was ready to start to two Nordic countries: Sweden and Denmark! I travelled in Summer by M/S Bore III from Turku to Stockholm and then by bus via Copenhagen to Hjørring in the Jylland peninsula in Denmark and finally after ten days same way back to Finland.



1960



Swedish Crown

Europe 2.

*Kingdom of Sweden*

*Population: 10,1 million*

*Independence: 6.6.1523 from Kalmar Union*

*Konungariket Sverige in Swedish*

My first journey to foreign countries happened in summer 1960 on the way to Denmark via Sweden. The beginning was a dramatic one: I arrived by ship to Stockholm with a wounded ankle and further to the Caroline Institute Hospital. After treatment we continued by bus through Sweden driving on the left towards Helsingborg harbour. We were going to a Nordic sister town meeting in Denmark. (*I was driving from Tromsø to Umeå via Blåa vägen (Blue highway) on the last day of left hand traffic in Sweden and that was Saturday 2nd of September 1967 one day before my 23rd birthday!*)



### 3. DENMARK



Europe 3.

*Kingdom of Denmark*

*Kongeriket Danmark*

*Kongeriket Danmark in Danish*

1960

*Population: 5,8 million*

*Independence: United in the 8<sup>th</sup> century into a kingdom*

*UN Membership 24.10.1945*



Danish Crown

After Sweden we arrived to Helsingör harbour and drove further to Copenhagen. There I visited with my three mates the Nyhavn sailors' area and the famous Tivoli. Then we continued to Jylland peninsula and drove up to the north to the town of Hjørring. I was still wounded but during our youth meeting I was tenderly taken care by three young girls, especially one blonde from Norway. What a nice "Sweet Sixteen"-experience.

Visited special regions or islands



Greenland 2008



Faroe Islands 2015

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Journey in 1961: *A Gymnastics journey to West Germany*

Now I was one-year older teenager and again I went to a one-month summer work and this time to various construction buildings. I earned enough money to give to my mother for her debts and to participate in my second journey and this time even to West Germany in Western Europe again by boat to Sweden, by bus to Copenhagen and further by boat to Germany and then by bus via Hamburg, Frankfurt and Heidelberg to Stuttgart. After the same way back to Finland.

### 4. GERMANY



Europe 4.

*Federal Republic of Germany*

*Bundesrepublik Deutschland (West Deutschland) in German*

1961

*Population: 84,0 million*

*Independence: Federal Republic 23.5.1949*



German Mark

This time I did not hurt myself on the boat. In Copenhagen again a visit to Nyhavn. This second bus trip from Kerava was heading Stuttgart in West Germany. First to Hamburg, where a illegal visit to Reeperbahn. After that via Frankfurt and Heidelberg, where I had my first German famous beers and met first time black people, NATO soldiers from USA. Very nice experience. Our final destination was Stuttgart where we all in the bus participated in the International Gymnastics gymnastic happening. I performed gymnastics on the big stadium together with 10.000 other young and old people.

### 4<sup>th</sup> Journey 1962: *A Royal Scandinavian tour*

Again I was one-year older teenager and I had to work half of my summer vacation to help my mother and to earn something for myself, which meant another travel abroad and now to the third Nordic country: Norway.

### 5. NORWAY



Europe 5.

*Kingdom of Norway*

*Kongeriket Norge in Norwegian "nynorsk"; Kongerike Noreg in Norwegian "bokmål"*

1962

*Population: 5,5 million*

*Independence: 7.6.1905 from the Kingdom of Sweden*



Norwegian Crown

My first private journey together with my friend, whose name I have forgotten. We went first by a Russian boat Maria Uljanova to Copenhagen and there for the third time to Nyhavn! From Copenhagen we went by train to Oslo in Norway via Gothenburg in Sweden. In Oslo we participated for the first time abroad in a youth dancing restaurant but without beer. From Oslo by train to Stockholm and by boat to Finland. We visited all the three royal castles: Danish, Norwegian and Swedish kingdoms, and finally at home in Helsinki also the presidential castle.

#### Visited special regions or islands



**Svalbard 2007**



**Nordkapp 2014**

#### 5<sup>th</sup> Journey 1963:      *Working in England*

It was my last teenage year and I decided to apply the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to go to work in England under the international exchange programme. I got it and before departure I worked one month in a painting factory and earned money for the flight ticket to London.



English Pound

**6. UNITED KINGDOM**   **1963**  
*of Great Britain and Northern Ireland*      *Population: 68,0 million*  
 Europe 5.      *Independence: 1.5.1707 in the unification of England and Scotland*

Before my last year in Gymnasium I spent seven weeks in **England** in the town of Minehead in Somerset by working in the Billy Butlin's Holiday camp. During the day time I was a outdoor cleaner and in the evenings a bar attender and waiter in the various restaurants. On my half day offs I did some hitch hiking trips around southwestern England. During my stay the Great Train Robbery happened on 8 August. I also became very familiar with the Beatles music and bought their first LP record "Pease, please me".

#### Visited special regions or islands



**Wales 1987**



**Scotland 1987**



**Northern Ireland/Ulster 1998**



**Isle of Man 1998**



**South Georgian and Southern Sandwich Islands 2008**



**Gibraltar 2010**



**Jersey 2010**



**Guernsey 2010**



**Anguilla 2014**

#### 6<sup>th</sup> Journey 1963:      *A cultural and adventure travel to Paris from England*

I earned and saved so much English pounds in Billy Butlin's holiday camp that I could travel to the European continent again and this time to France and especially to Paris of which I had already at time dreamed.

## 7. FRANCE



Europe 7.

*Republic of France*

*Republique française in French*

1963



French Franc

*Population: 65,4 million*

*Independence: Kingdom from 843 and republic from 1848*

After heavy working period in England I decided to go to a holiday to Paris. I had saved 60 English pounds, which was quite a lot at that time. I travelled with my colleague Kristian first by boat from Southampton to Le Havre and then by train to Paris. We lived in the Quartier Latin in Hotel Mont Blanc. Visited Lido on Champs Elysée and Caveau du Jazz on our street Rue de la Huchette. There I listened the American blues singer Memphis Slim. I managed to spent nearly all my savings. On last day we tried to go to the Etoile, but the whole area was full of police and closed due to the president's visit on the Veterans' Day. Years later I discovered that I was in the middle of fact and fiction. The English author Frederick Forsyth wrote the book called The Day of the Jackal, which describes the attempted assassination of Charles de Gaulle and that happened in the book on Sunday 25 August 1963, when I was nearby the places. A nice combination of fact and fiction. We returned by train and ferry back to London, where I had to manage two days with three pounds for eating and drinking. I survived!

### Visited special regions or islands



Guadeloupe 2003

Only airport



Martinique 2003

Only airport



Mayotte 2007

Only airport



Reunion 2007

Only airport



Corsica 2010



St. Martin 2014

## 7<sup>th</sup> Journey 1966:

*Honeymoon by Vespa in Central Europe*

In 1964 I under graduated from Kerava Gymnasium and worked two months during the summertime in order to buy a brand new Vespa 125 Popolino scooter. In October I went to do my military service until August 1965. I started to study physical education in Jyväskylä university. No travels or new countries. In 1966 I got married with my gymnasium class mate Virpi and we made a one-month long honeymoon to Central Europe on my Vespa including three new countries: The Netherlands, Belgium and Switzerland, and two old ones: West Germany and France.

## 8. THE NETHERLANDS



1966



Dutch Gulden

Europe 8.

*Kingdom of the Netherlands*

*Population: 17,2 million*

*Independence: 26.7.1581 and 26.3.1815 in Vienna Congress*

*Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in Dutch and Keninkryk fan de Nederlannen in West Frisian dialect*

I was on my honeymoon trip together with my first wife Virpi by my scooter Vespa 125 Popolino. We went first by boat to Germany, stayed in Bremen at the family of Virpi's friend and continued to Amsterdam. We lived in a cheap hotel just near by the famous Red light area, but we did not need their services. We visited the Rijksmuseum and its Vincent van Gogh's exhibition, which made a great influence on us.

### Visited special regions or islands



Curaçao 2002



Sint Maarten 2014



## 9. BELGIUM



Europe 9.

*Kingdom of Belgium*

*Royaume Belgique in French, Koninkrijk Bilgy in Flemish and Königreich Belgien in German*

We continued our honeymoon by Vespa to Brussels, where we stayed again in a cheap but nice Flemish hotel. We visited the eight years old massive Atomium monument and the 350 years old Manneken Pis. From Brussels we continued 300 kilometres in the rain to Paris, where we lived in my familiar Hotel Mont Blanc from 1993 in Quartier Latin. Paris was for the honeymooners a Paradise with all its elements!

1966

*Population: 11,6 million*

*Independence: 4.10.1830*



Belgium Franc

## 10. SWITZERLAND



Europe 10.

*Swiss confederation*

*Schweizerisch Eingesessenschaft in German; Confédération Suisse in French, Confederazione Svizzera in Italian and Confederaziun swizra in Retho-Romain*

We came to our last new country Switzerland via Lyon in France. We stayed in Geneve by the beautiful lake Geneva and stayed for the second time in our tent in the camping area. We visited International Olympic Committee in Lausanne, because I was studying Physical Education in Jyväskylä University. From the French speaking Lausanne we proceeded to the German speaking Basel and after that we drove by my Vespa through the whole West Germany to Travemünde from where we came by boat to Finland. The whole honeymoon trip was 5000 kilometres within a month.

1966

*Population: 8,7 million*

*Independence: Confederation in 1848*



Swiss Franc

## 8<sup>th</sup> Journey 1967: First trip to socialist countries behind "The Iron Curtain"

I was studying in Jyväskylä University and my wife Virpi had moved also to Jyväskylä. We were active in Jyväskylä Student Theatre and this gave us an opportunity to travel to East Europe and its two socialist countries: Soviet Union and Hungary.

## SOVIET UNION (USSR)



1967

Europe

*Union of Soviet Socialist Republics USSR*

*Союз Советских Социалистических Республик in Russian language*



Soviet Rouble

*Independence: 30.12.1922 – 25.12.1991*

Soviet Union was the first socialist country I visited and it was our neighbourhood country. I was with my wife Virpi on the Jyväskylä Student Theatre trip to Debrecen, Hungary. We made the whole trip by train. First from Helsinki to Moscow, where we had a whole day to watch the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary the first of May parade, which was quite a spectacle. From Moscow we continued through the countryside via Kiev railway station to Hungary. And the same way back. (Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 into 15 different countries and thus it became the first former independent UN country in my collection.)

## 11. HUNGARY



1967

Europe 11.

*Hungarian People's Republic (1967) and Hungarian Republic (1989)*

*Magyarország in Hungarian*

*Independence: 16.11.1918*



*Population: 9,6 million* Hungarian Forint 1967 and 1990

I was together with my wife Virpi in the theatre group of Jyväskylä Student Theatre. We visited the sister city Debrecen and performed twice a play by the Finnish-Swedish playwright Valentin Chorell's play The Grass, which is telling about the memories of the World War II and Nazis. My short role was "A crazy man in the train" and it was easy for me to perform it because I had just been in the trains nearly three days and thousands of kilometres, and some of my friends consider me a bit crazy! (*Hungary changed its political system into a western one in 1990s and I visited Budapest again in 2018.*)

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### **9<sup>th</sup> Journey 1969:**     *A political and cultural journey to occupied Czechoslovakia*

My first daughter Katja was born on 5.5.1968 and I was studying and working as half day secretary in Jyväskylä Summer cultural organisation. I graduated from Jyväskylä university as a master of physical education. I was also active within the Student Union and Student Theatre, so there was no time for travelling. In 1969 I got my first full time work at the "Old Student house" in Helsinki and we moved there.



**CZECHOSLOVAKIA**

**1969**



**Czechoslovakian Koruna**

**Europe**

**Socialist Republic of Czechoslovakia     Independence: 28.10.1918 – 31.12.1992**

**Československo in *Czech* and *Slovakian***

I was travelling with my wife Virpi to Prague in a charter flight by a cultural organisation KIILA in order to see what is the situation after the Soviet August invasion of 21.8.1968. Our suitcase was stolen on the first day, but fortunately the socialist country was quite cheap to the western visitors and we could buy new cloths etc. We participated in an underground political seminar, which dealt with the future prospects of the country and the atmosphere was quite pessimist and exited. The most known persons in our group were tv-journalist Reijo Nikkilä and author Pentti Saarikoski. Czechoslovakia split after the collapse of communism in 1993 into two countries and thus it became the second not any more existing independent UN country in my collection. (*I managed to visit Czechoslovakia three times*)

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### **10<sup>th</sup> Journey 1969:**     *An official negotiation trip by Helsinki University Student Union*

This was my first working journey abroad and my first trip alone. I had just graduated from Jyväskylä University with a Master of Physical Education degree, but living of course in Helsinki.



**12. POLAND**

**1969**



**Europe 12.**

**Population: 37,8 million     Polish Zloty 1969 and 1990**

**People's Republic of Poland in 1969 and Republic of Poland from 1989.**

**Independence: 11.11.1918**

**Rzeczpospolita Polska in *Polish***

This was my first trip abroad done alone. I flew to Krakow via Copenhagen and Warsaw, and had to change flights and even airports. I was on an official trip representing the Student Union of Helsinki University. My duty was to negotiate a mutual contract of exchange with the Student Union of Krakow University. There were a historical festival in the old town and it was really a great spectacle. (*I visited the old Poland once and the new one four times*)

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## 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Journeys 1970-1971:     *Filming and family travels to Spain and Morocco, Africa*

These journeys took me for the first time both to Southern Europe, Mediterranean Sea and North Africa. The first one was a filming trip to Franco's totalitarian Spain and the second one was my first trip abroad with my family of wife and three years' young daughter. In summer 1971 my work as the Executive Director ended and I became a freelance journalist for nearly one year.

### 13. SPAIN



Europe 13.

*Kingdom of Spain*

*España in Spanish*

1970

*Population: 46,8 million*

*Independence: 1512*



Spanish Peseta

I was in London in December 1970 on working trip with my working mate Koo-Pee Volanen, who is a film photographer. We went by train to Paris, where we met Reijo Nikkilä, the TV-journalist from Finland. At that time the world media were following the Franco-type trials against Basque nationalists which tried to sentence them to death. There was a great demonstration in Paris, which we were partly filming. We took a train to San Sebastian and managed to get in with our filming equipment. Reijo speaks Spanish and had arranged some interviews with representatives of ETA and some juridical persons. Reijo made a 20 min. long TV-report, which was performed in the Finnish TV-channel 1 in December 1972.

Linked to this I made two consecutive journeys to Spain in May-June 1971. The first was done by a Peugeot 403 car together with three other men in order to make a documentary film about the resistant movement of Franco's dictatorship. We spent two very dangerous week in Basque area, Madrid and Sevilla interviewing various people. I was both the driver and the recorder and also the producer. The director was a TV-journalist Reijo Nikkilä, who spoke fluent Spanish. We returned via Paris, where we interviewed some exile persons. In Copenhagen I met my wife Virpi, who had come there by our VW Kleinbus together with our 3 years old daughter Katja and our cameraman's wife and her sister's seven years old daughter. We drove via Germany, where we had to buy a new engine, to Grenoble, where we had by a new gear box string, and further to Madrid, where we picked up our cameraman J-P and finally to Malaga area, where we stayed in a private house owned by a famous Finnish art collector. We were not alone, because there were already five art students from Finland. We went for three days trip to Tanger in Morocco, North Africa. After two weeks hot and wet holiday we drove back via Paris. All together I was driving during one and a half months 10 000 kilometres.

#### Visited special regions or islands



Basque County 1970



City of Ceuta in Africa 1971



Catalonia 1971



Balearic Islands 2010



Canary Islands 2012

### 14. MOROCCO



Africa 1.

*المملكة المغربية - al-Maghrib Maroc in Arabic*

1971

*Population: 37,3 million*



Moroccoan Dirham

*Independence: 2.3.1956 from France*

We went by my VW Kleinbus from Malaga by ferry to Spanish Ceuta in Africa and further to Tangier, where we stayed three days in a cheap but comfortable hotel. First time in Africa and in a Arab and Muslim country. Very exiting new atmosphere. Same way back to Malaga and Churriana where we lived.

#### Visited special regions or islands



## Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic 2012

A non-sovereign country occupied by Morocco

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### 13<sup>th</sup> Journey 1972:

*A double personal “escape” trip to socialism again*

My wife Virpi decided to leave me and live with our daughter. I did not like it but accepted it. We got divorced in May and in June I started a new job as a Secretary for Cultural Affairs in the People’s Democratic Union.

## GERMAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC 1972

Europe

East Germany, GDR

*Independence: 7.10.1949 – 3.10.1990*

*Deutsche Demokratische Republik DDR in German*

I

was on my way to Prague by my Renault 4 car together with my friend, who was the former MP. We were both just divorced and had to escape for a while. We went by boat to Stockholm and drove through Sweden to the south and again by boat to Sassnitz in GDR. It was early in the morning and we missed the road to East Berlin and suddenly we were in the West Berlin and had used the first part of our double visa. We managed to drive through the famous Checkpoint Charlie to East Berlin, where we stayed two days in the Finnish journalist’s home. From Berlin we proceeded to Prague and on the return trip we could not enter Berlin due to visa problems. GDR collapsed in 1989 and became a part of Federal Republic of Germany. So it became the third not any more existing former UN country in my collection. *(I managed to visit GDR five times)*

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GDR Mark

### 14<sup>th</sup> Journey 1973:

*A holiday journey to Yugoslavian Croatia*

This trip was my first ready-made holiday trip and to the Adriatic Sea in the Mediterranean.

## YUGOSLAVIA



1973

Europe

*Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia*

*Independency: 31.1.193 – 25.6.1990*

*Југославија in Serbo-Croatian and Macedonian and Jugoslavija in Slovenian*



Yugoslavian Dinar

I was on a charter holiday together with my musician mate Tapio Lipponen in Opatija by the Adriatic Sea. We flew first to Venice, from there by charter bus to Opatija. There we spent one week with some other Finns and other nationalities. On 11 September we got news from Chile where the bloody coup was held and president Salvador Allende was murdered. It spoiled a bit our holiday but life had to go on. Yugoslavia was collapsed in 1992 into later seven new countries. It became the fourth and last non existing former UN country.

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### 15<sup>th</sup> Journey 1977:

*A holiday journey to the Rhodes, Greek Dodecanese Islands*

In 1974 and 1975 I was working quite busy in the People’s Democratic Party and in October 1975 I was elected to the first Secretary for Cultural Affairs in The Association of Finnish Cities. In 1976 I was nominated by the Ministry of Education to a Council of Europe’s permanent project group called “Cultural Development Policies” for 1976-1982. This meant quite a lot of travels in Europe but no new countries except Greece.

## 15. GREECE



Europe 14.

*Hellenic Republic, Greece*

*Ελληνική Δημοκρατία, Elliniki Dimokratia in Greek*

1977

*Population: 10,4 million*

*Independence: 1.1.1822*



Greek Drachma

I was on a holiday journey at Rhodes together with my new wife Merja, who was for the first time pregnant, and four friends. We lived in the historic town of Lindos in a private house just underneath the ruins of the Acropolis Temple. It was February and day temperature was about 20 degrees Celsius but the nights were cold because there were no heating system. Very exiting experience of the Greek culture and cuisine. This journey was crucial to my forth coming travelling life. We bet with author Ilkka Kylävaara, who was going to first visit all the independent countries. (*I won it 2011 and Ilkka lost it clearly. RIP 2020.*)

**Visited special regions or islands**



Rhodes / Dodecanese Islands 1977



Corfu / Ionian Islands 2009



Crete 2010



Monastic Republic of Mount Athos 2016



Santorini / Cyclades Islands 2017

## 16<sup>th</sup> Journey 1977: *An official Nordic seminar journey*

My second daughter and my present wife Merja's first was born on 16.5.1977. This journey was my first official visit in the delegation of my employer, the Association of Finnish Cities.

## 16. ICELAND



Europe 15.

*Republic of Iceland*

*Island in Icelandic*

1977

*Population: 343 000*

*Independence: 11.2.1918 together with the Kingdom of Denmark and 17.6.1944 republic*



Icelandic Crown

I was on a Nordic Conference journey together with about 40 local and national politicians and civil servants representing the Association of Finnish Cities, where I worked as a secretary for cultural affairs. We stayed two days in Reykjavik and visited hot springs and geysers. The conference was held in the countryside in Laugarvatn 100 kilometres from the capital. After the conference hours and even during them we played poker with some MP's, mayors and even two political pastors. Really a high quality poker game, where I was one of the winners. Iceland is very exotic European and Nordic country.

## 17<sup>th</sup> Journey 1979: *A meeting journey of Council of Europe*

In 1978 I travelled quite a lot in Europe, but without any new countries. This trip was a combination of meetings and leisure in France, Luxembourg and the Netherlands.

## 17. LUXEMBOURG



Europe 16.

*Grand Duchy of Luxembourg*

*Groussherzogtum Lëtzebuerg in Luxembourgian, Grand-Duché de Luxembourg in French and Großherzogtum Luxemburg in German*

1979

*Population: 634 000*

*Independence: 9.6.1815*



Luxembourgian Franc



I was on a professional journey starting from Council of Europe meeting in Strasbourg and travelling via Paris to Luxemburg, where I met my project colleague at the Ministry for Culture Affairs. From Luxemburg I proceeded by train to Eindhoven, Holland to a Council of Europe project meeting. Exiting working week.

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### **18<sup>th</sup> Journey 1979:**     *A combined conference and family holiday journey to the Black Sea*

My first son and third child was born after this trip on 23.9.1979. This trip was my second family trip with my new family and it was a combination of conference meeting and beach holiday by the Black Sea.



#### **18. ROMANIA**

Europe 17.

*People's Republic of Romania in 1949 and Republic of Romania from 1990*

*România in **Romanian***

**1979**

*Population: 19,1 million    Romanian Lei 1977 and 1990*

*Independ: 9.5.1877 from Ottoman Empire and 14.11.1881 Kingdom*



I was on a combined working and holiday journey with my family of my second wife Merja, who was expecting our second child, and our two years old daughter Mirja, my eleven years old first daughter Katja and my 70 years old aunt Inkeri in Eforia resort town. There I rent a car and drove every morning to Constanza in order to participate in a UN conference on youth unemployment problems, and came back in the afternoon. Actually very convenient way to combine work and leisure, recommended! (*I visited the new Romania in 1998*)

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### **19<sup>th</sup> Journey:**     *A project meeting by Council of Europe*

This was my third working trip to a new country, Portugal. Later on this year my first son and third child was born in 23 September 1979.



#### **19. PORTUGAL**

Europe 18.

*Republic of Portugal*

*República **Portuguesa***

**1979**

*Population: 10,2 million*

*Independence : Kingdom 5.10.1143 and republic 5.10.1910*



**Portuguese Escudo**

I was in a Council of Europe cultural project meeting in Vila Real in Duoro Valley together with three other persons dealing with this project. I belonged to the steering group of that project. I met two very interesting persons, who became later good friends of mine: Richard Pine from Ireland (now living in Corfu) and Bengt Skoog from Sweden (now already past away). Meeting was held only five years after the Carnation Revolution, which liberated the country from the Salazar's dictatorship. You could taste its influence on the air! (*I have visited Portugal six times*)

**Visited special regions or islands**



**Azores 2008**



**Madeira 2018**

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### **20<sup>th</sup> Journey 1980:**     *A country visit on the way to an international meeting in France*

This was a tour de France on a French Renault: Paris Orly – Toulouse – Andorra, the new country – Bordeaux – Champagne – Angoulême - Paris Orly just in order to attend a meeting in Angoulême.

## 20. ANDORRA



Europe 19.

*Principality of Andorra*

*Principat d'Andorra in Catalan*

1980

*Population: 77 300*

*Independence: 1278*



Spanish Peseta



French Franc

I was on my way to a Council of Europe cultural project meeting to Angoulême in France together with the three Finnish project workers. I rent a car from Paris Orly airport and we drove first the Andorra la Vella to get me a new country. There we just eat and drunk well but not bought cheap gold. After two days rest we drove to the work to Angoulême summit.

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### 21<sup>st</sup> Journey 1980:     *A project meeting of European Council for Cultural Co-operation*

This was my first visit to the Green Island and its southern republican part, Republic of Ireland. I fell in love with this island and its people and this was not going to be the last visit.

## 21. IRELAND



Europe 20.

*Republic of Ireland*

*Eire in Irish*

1980

*Population: 5,0 million*

*Independence: 6.12.1921 from Britain as Irish Free State*



Irish Pound

I was again on my way the Council of Europe Cultural Project meeting to Castlebar, Caisleán an Bharraigh in the Irish in the county of Mayo in Northwest part of Ireland together with my three Finnish project workers. We stopped first in Dublin to visit Richard Pine's home and pub. After that we all went to the meeting. After the meeting we stayed two days in Manchester with one of the British representative.

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### 22<sup>nd</sup> Journey 1980:     *A new country visit and a cultural seminar by Council of Europe*

This was my eighth royal country visit, Principality of Liechtenstein in Europe since 1960.

## 22. LIECHTENSTEIN



1980

Europe 21.

*Principality of Liechtenstein*

*Fürsterdum Liechtenstein in German*

*Population: 38 200*

*Independence: 23.1.1719*



Swiss Franc

I was on my way to a Council of Europe cultural seminar in the town of Doubs in France, but I flew first to Zürich in Switzerland and then by train and bus the Principality of Liechtenstein, a nice and small Alpine country. After this two days extra visit I returned to Zürich, where I met my colleague from the Finnish Ministry for Culture and we proceeded to the seminar. (*I have visited Liechtenstein twice*)

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### 23<sup>rd</sup> Journey 1981:     *A new country visit and project meeting in Strasbourg*

My first but not last journey to Italy, which is an extremely interesting, historical and conflicting Southern European country. On 4.3.1981 my fourth child and second son Antti was born.

## 23. ITALY



Europe 22.

*Italian Republic*

*Repubblica italiana in Italian*

**1981**

*Population: 60,4 million*

*Independence: 17.3.1861*



Italian Lira

I was participating in a Council of Europe meeting in Strasbourg and I made a weekend trip by train to Milan in order to visit Italy for the first time. There I just went around and saw the famous La Scala Opera House, AC Milan's football stadium and the famous and luxury shopping arcade without buying anything. On Sunday I had a brilliant buffet lunch together a nice Arab family from Lebanon. After that by night train back to work to the meeting in Strasbourg. *(I have visited Italy nine times)*

**Visited special regions and islands**



Sardinia 2010



Sicily 2011



Lampedusa and Linosa 2018

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## 24<sup>th</sup> Journey 1982:    *A new country visit and project meeting in Switzerland*

This trip was my first visit to an Alpine skiing foreign area, but definitely not the last one. It was also my first visit to a foreign Olympic games venue. Our family now with five persons moved to another city called Vantaa, the neighbour of Helsinki. The neighbourhood of Hakunila and our house was closer to the nature and safer for children with good kindergarten and school services.

## 24. AUSTRIA



Europe 23.

*Republic of Austria*

*Republik Österreich in German*

**1982**

*Population: 9,0 million*

*Independence: Modern Austria 27.7.1955*



Austrian Shilling

I was on my way to a Council of Europe Cultural Project meeting to Winterthur in Switzerland and after that before going back home I took the train to Innsbruck in order to visit for the first time Austria. In my Gasthaus I met a Finnish waitress. I spent one day on the Alpine slopes of the Winter Olympics 1976 and tried to get down the men's downhill slope. It was totally on ice and it took nearly three hours to get down, The Olympic winner Austrian Klaus Klammer used about 2-3 minutes to get down! *(I have visited Austria five times)*

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## 25<sup>th</sup> Journey 1982:    *A new continent and UNESCO World Culture conference plus the Caribbean*

This trip was my first visit to the American continents including two North American new countries, and it was my second official membership of a State delegation at a UN conference *(the first was ten years earlier in 1972 in Eurocult conference in Helsinki)*. This was of course the first visit to USA but definitely not the last.

## 25. USA



North America 1. / Americas 1.

*United States of America*

**1982**

*Population: 333 million*

*Independence: 4.7.1776*



US Dollar

I was on my way To UNESCO Mondiacult conference in Mexico City but I flew with four other members of the official delegation first to New York. My first experience of New York was a huge and overwhelming cultural shock. The skyscrapers made my neck ill and the temperature was 35 degrees Celsius (98 Fahrenheit) and I had my first experience with air conditioning, which meant a little flue with leaking nose. On my return visit from the Caribbean countries in New York I visited the Empire State Building, Museum of Modern Art MOMA and many other interesting places like Soho jazz club and I eat my first America hamburger in Burger King. After the Mondiacult conference in Mexico City I visited also New Orleans before entering the Caribbean islands. I lives in the Frenc Quaerter, wich was too commercial and far away of tis historical reputation.

### Visited special regions and islands



**Puerto Rico 1982**



**American Samoa 2007**



**Guam 2008**



**US Virgin Islands 2014**

## 26. MEXICO



**1982**

**North America 2. / Americas 2.**

**United Mexican States**

**Estados Unidos Mexicanos in *Spanish***

**Population: 130,0 million**

**Independence: 16.9.1810**



**Mexican Peso**

I was a member of the Finnish delegation to the UNESCO Mondiacult conference held for 12 days on Mexico City. We were altogether 10 persons led by the Minister for Cultural Affairs, Mrs Kaarina Suonio. The conference was huge with about one thousand participants from all over the world. It was hard work to sit daily for hours and hours in the meetings, but I survived. During the evenings we had official reception visits to various embassies including of course our own. We had also one excursion in the programme and it took us to the famous ancient Aztec city of Teotihuacan, where I climbed up to both the Sun pyramid and Moon pyramid. I made with three other members a weekend trip to the Pacific coast to Zihuatanejo, which is located quite near to the famous Acapulco beaches, but which was much cheaper and not so crowded. We all stayed in the same big room with five 20-30 cm long Mexican lizards with pink tails. We were told that they are harmless to humans but very useful, because they ate all the mosquitoes.

## 27. JAMAICA



**1982**

**Caribbean 1. / Americas 3.**

**Commonwealth of Jamaica**

**Population: 3,0 million**

**Independence: 6.8.1962 from UK and West Indies Federation**



**Jamaican Dollar**

Jamaica was the first Caribbean island and country on our round trip with my mate Risto, one of the member of the UNESCO delegation. We went to Montego Bay, which was already at that time very popular tourist place especially for the Americans. During the first day we spent a long time on the beach with some slightly serious consequences. The sun was on the zenith, which meant that you couldn't see it and we from the north were not used to it. We burned our heads, noses, shoulders etc., which all were red and afterwards quite painful. Next day we had hats and shirts on. Reggae music was plying all time of course; we were on the island of famous Bob Marley. We met for the first time some American Peace Corps people, who did some voluntary charity, work in Jamaica. For the next international flight, we had to fly over Jamaica from Montego Bay to Kingston by a small local plane. There were two pilots and us on the plane, which started to run for the take off. We wondered why our door was open, but suddenly the co-pilot asked me to close the door. In Kingston we made a short taxi drive to see a bit of the capital, but only quite poor neighbourhoods with very lively life.



## 28. HAITI



Caribbean 2. / Americas 4.

*Republic of Haiti*

*République d'Haiti in French and Epiploic d Ayti in Haitian Creole*

1982

*Population: 11,5 million*

*Independence: 1.1.1804 from France*



**Haitian Goudes**

Haiti was the second Caribbean island for us and very black and chaotic. We lived in a casino hotel but did not play. The counsellor of our Mexican embassy Mr. Henrik Moliis (*who became one of Finns, who had visited all the independent countries*) us visas to Haiti and an appointment with our Honorary Consul Reginald de Matheis. He was of the biggest constructor of the country and the owner of a huge hardware store, which was an amazingly organized ad air conditioned shop. In his office there was a huge whole wall size Photostat of our president Urho Kekkonen. He gave us one of his Range Rovers with a local driver and we were driving around the chaotic (in our mind) capital. He took us to the Dominican Republic embassy to get a visa and it went quickly despite a long queue due to the courtesy letter of Mr. de Matheis. Our tour ended to Barbancourt rum distillery, where we were allowed to taste both some real rums and more than ten different rum punches. As a result of this we became quite drunk and the driver had some difficulties to get us to the hotel. Next day we went on a half day boat cruise to beautiful bay. The captain was French and the young seaman local. There were one Portuguese and one Italian just married couple and a local calypso trio. We went for snorkelling, which was for us the first experience and it was wonderful to get acquainted the underwater world. We had a very amusing international experience. Next day we went to the airport in order to fly to Santo Domingo.

## 29. DOMINICAN REPUBLIC



1982

Caribbean 3. / Americas 5.

*República Dominicana in Spanish*

*Population: 10,9 million*

*Independence 27.4.1844 from the Kingdom of Spain*



**Dominican Republic Dollar**

Dominican Republic was the third Caribbean country on the second Island of our holiday tour. We had become acquainted with a young American socio-anthropologist Mr. Murphy, who had difficulties in Port au Prince customs, because the officers thought he was a famous Cuban spy. After having drunk a bottle of awful Southern Comfort in the aeroplane we arrived in Santo Domingo without any problems in customs. He drove us in his Citroen Duane to our apartment hotel. Next morning, he came to see us and we started the city tour. Santo Domingo is the oldest American city established by Kristoffer Columbus' brother Bartolomea in 1496. It is a beautiful Spanish-Caribbean city full of most beautiful mixed race women. After the tour we proceeded to San Pedro de Maconis, where Murphy had a lecture. It was nice opportunity to see also some part of the country side. The Island of Hispaniola is most interesting with two totally different cultures and races separated by high mountains. On the other side black African and French origin Haiti and on one side black African and Spanish-origin Dominican Republic.

## 30. TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO



1982

Caribbean 4. / Americas 6.

*Republic of Trinidad and Tobago*

*Populat4ion: 1,4 million*

*Independence: 31.8.1962 from UK*



**Trinidad & Tobago Dollar**

Trinidad and Tobago was the last Caribbean country on our round tour. We stayed in a cosy hotel with an outdoor pool in the heart of Port of Spain. We started to walk on the street trying to find the spirit and atmosphere of V.S. Naipaul's novel "A Flag on the Island" (*He got the Nobel prize in 2001*). We manage to find at least something but more we found calypso music and especially the famous local steel band music. Anyway Trinidad is again a quite different island compared to the previous ones. It has two remarkable ethnic groups: the black people, who are decended from the slaves brought from Africa and the foreign labourers from India. We had planned to fly



also to the isle of Tobago, but Risto got such strong diarrhoea, that we had to stay two days in the hotel. Our Noerth American and Caribbean tour ended in New York before flying home.

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### **27<sup>th</sup> Journey 1982:**     *A new continent Asia and a Council of Europe seminar in Greece, Europe*

This trip was again a combined one with a quick visit to Asia and Turkey and first visit to Greece mainland

#### **31. TURKEY**



**1982**

*Population: 85,0 million*  
*Independence: 29.10.1923*



**Turkish Lira**

Asia 1.

*Republic of Turkey*

*Türkiye Cumhuriyeti in Turkish*

I was on my way to a Council of Europe cultural seminar in Delphi, Greece but via Istanbul in order to visit a new country, Turkey. My visit was quite short this time. From the airport I took a taxi and asked the driver to drive to Asia. He got the point and we drove the Bospor Strait to the Asian side of Istanbul, the former Constantinopol and that was my first touch to the Asian continent. From there we came back to the centre of European Istanbul, where I stayed in a nice and cosy hotel near everything like the Grand Bazar.

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### **28<sup>th</sup> Journey 1983:**     *A combined UNESCO seminar trip with five new country visits*

It was my first journey to black Africa and this time alone. My destination was UNESCO meeting in Senegal, but also used my own time and money to combine the trip with a visit to four other new countries like Algeria, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo.

#### **32. ALGERIA**



**1983**

*Population: 44,5 million*

*Independence: 5.7.1962 from France*



**Algerian Dinar**

Africa 2.

*People's Democratic Republic of Algeria*

*al-Jazā'ir in Arabian, Dzayer in Berber, الجزائر El Jazayer and الدزاير Dzayer in Algerian Arabian and Algerian in French*

I was on my way to a UNESCO expert seminar in Dakar, but my first stop was Algeria to visit again a new country. I lived in El Aurassi hotel, where I met three Finnish Nokia cable workers and we had a very nice Algerian-Finnish evening together with familiar and strange food and drinks. Algiers looked much the same as in some of the movies made in Algeria. White houses, narrow streets, veiled women and strong Arab and Berber men. The atmosphere was also still quite French. On my way to Dakar I had a stop over in Niamey airport in the Sahara and we were taken to the airport and I saw that the outside temperature was 50 degrees Celsius! (*I have visited Algeria in 2008 including Sidi Bel Ables, Bauzedjar Plage, Oran, Stidia-0-meridian etc.*)

#### **33. SENEGAL**



**1983**

*Population: 17,2 million*

*Independence: 4.4.1960 from France*



**West African Franc XOF**

Africa 3.

*Republic of Senegal*

*Republique du Sénégal in French, Réewum Senegaal in Wolof and جمهورية السنغال Jumhuriat Alsinighal in Arabic*

Senegal was the first black African country for me. I participated as a lecturer and study maker in the UNESCO expert seminar on "Training of Cultural Personnel". I had made for the seminar a study of 60 pages on Training

system of cultural workers in Nordic countries. My speech was ok and I got good feedback especially from English speaking participants. I had some disagreements with the rapporteur of the seminar, Mr. Raymond Weber from Luxemburg because he had a too strong French emphasis in his report. I managed to get him to include my amendments. Dakar was quite an exiting new experience with its real black African atmosphere and also my first contact with the black Muslims. A visit to Gore Island was a shock, because it was the main port in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries from where millions of slaves were exported to the Americas. *I have visited Dakar twice*)

#### 4. CÔTE D'IVOIRE



**1983**



**West African Franc XOF**

**Africa 4.**

**Republic of Ivory Coast**

**Republique du Côte d'Ivoire in *French***

**Population: 27,0 million**

**Independence: 7.8.1960 from France**

Ivory Coast was the second western and black African country for me. I stayed in a French Hotel Le Meridienne for a weekend. I went out to the park outside the hotel and started to walk to downtown. After 100 meters I was stopped by a civil dressed policeman, who asked me in English where am I going and why. I told him that I'm a tourist and going to downtown. He said no and I said yes and as a result of this he wrested my arm behind and said: No mister, you are going to your hotel, because we cannot guarantee your security. As a result of this I had to stay two days and nights in the hotel, where I found only some French business men, who did not speak English and a lot of local hookers, whom I did not need. So I went to my room and opened my Johnny Walker whisky bottle and switched on the television. There was a John Ford's western with John Wayne, who was speaking French due to dubbing. What a cultural shock to hear French from a real patriotic American icon John Wayne. Quite a nice visit to Côte d'Ivoire with French-American experiences together with three Johns, Ford, Wayne and Walker.

#### 35. GHANA



**1983**



**Ghanan Sedi**

**Africa 5.**

**Republic of Ghana**

**Population: 31,6 million**

**Independence: 6.3.1957**

While arriving in Ghana I did not have a visa, but had a courtesy letter from Dakar from a Ghanan Unesco official. When I came out of the plane there was already a tall black man offering me his services. He did not belong to the airport staff. I gave him my passport and courtesy letter to arrange visa. He did it quickly and cheaply. Then he took me out from the airport building to his cousin's car. I had booked in advance a hotel room for 100 US\$ in Hotel Hilton. He promised me a nice and safe room for 20 US\$. I accepted and we went to the hotel and they followed me to my room and my guide asked some money for the services. We made a deal for a whole day tour and morning transportation back to the airport. I gave some money, but not yet much. Then he said that he could change money on the black market for 30 times better than the official rate. I gave him some money and got quite a lot of local currency, Sedi. Then we made a tour driving in Accra, which was quite muddy and poor looking at that time. I was also taken to the most horrible zoo I've ever seen: why in Africa? There was a demonstration in Accra, but I did not know why, perhaps against the Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings, who had made a coup two years earlier. In the afternoon our driver asked if I was interested in an African divorce trial in the neighbourhood of Mecca. It was held in a barack and in the other barack there was a very loud singing funeral. I did not understand the divorce trial because it was held in pidgen English, but after the heavy quarrels the judge, who was also an Anglican priest came to thank me for my interest. Now it was already quite late and I asked if there is a possibility to get something to eat. I was taken to a coconut bar and took a warm hamburger and a large and warm campari. *(I got from that hamburger very strong salmonella at home and it took six weeks to get rid of it!!!).*

My guys came in the morning to take me to the airport and my guide went to check me in. Suddenly he came back and said that my flight was full due to the Nigerian football team and the next flight is full as well, but if I give some money to the officer I could get a seat. Ok I gave some money and got the ticket. Then I had to go to the customs and I showed my passport and then I was taken out of the queue to a small room with a big fat officer and two assistants. He asked me to show my foreign currency of which I had some left, but not enough, because they had written into my passport all the cash I had shown to the customs when arriving yesterday. I did not have any receipts and I had changed some money on the black market. They said that I had committed to a crime and

they would put me in jail unless I gave some money to the big boss. I started to put Western African francs into his hand, but suddenly I stopped and asked them to call our embassy (Finland did not have an embassy in Accra, but they didn't know that). Finally, I got through and then I calculated how much money I had lost and it was approximately 100 US\$, which actually was the same amount I had been ready to pay to Hotel Hilton. So no harm and I saw quite a lot. When I finally got into my "full" flight I found that it was only half full or half empty!



## 36. TOGO

Africa 6.

**Population:** 8,5 million

**Republique Togolaise in French**

1983

**The Togolese Republic**

**Independence:** 27.5.1960 from France



West African Franc XOF

Togo was the last country in my first West African tour. At Accra airport I met a Swiss businessman, who advised me not to go to the expensive international hotel, I had booked, but instead of that to go to a nice Foyer du Marins (Seeman's Home or Seemans Heim). I had a visa from the French embassy in Helsinki and after easy customs I took a taxi to Foyer du Marins, which was a bungalow type of protected hotel. Again the first people I met there were local hookers, but I was already used to meeting and seeing, not using them already. The first day I spent in downtown police station to get a stamp into my visa. The second day I walked around the beach area, which was actually quite empty, but in the evening I went to a small and cosy restaurant just out of my protected hotel. I had a special offer for a sirloin steak with a quarter of Burboun whisky. It was juicy and I managed to get another quarter for desert. There was a young African singer with a guitar and he sang old western and American songs. I went to blame him for that, because I would have listened to more African songs. He had some and promised to learn more of those. After this I went back to my area and started to drink rum with the local girls, who did not have any customers. Most of them were refugees from Ghana so we could speak English. I offered some drinks to them as well and we had quite fun with singing and dancing. Last thing I remembered was that I managed to fall on a bench with me and some girls and the next was early morning in my chalet with a huge hangover but relaxed feeling, when I found that I had not been robbed or abused! Quite soon after my awakening my door was knocked and I astonished to see one of the Ghanaian girl on the door. She had been guarding my door the whole night, because there was one not so nice girl trying to get into my chalet. It was my last day and I had an evening flight. She asked me if I'm interested in seeing their refugee camp. I checked out and took my luggage and we walked to the nearby camp, which was not so badly organized. I had first an African shower, which a bucket of water poured onto my head. Then I got coffee. My lady had a nice five years old girl. The basic idea to invite me was that she had some 10 000 US\$ saved and she asked if I can arrange for her and her daughter possibility to come to Finland. I told her that I was married with one plus three children and thus it was impossible. She understood. Then we went to local market places and houses and I spent all my money to buy food for them and other refugees. They prepared a huge lunch but it was so spicy that I hardly could eat it. The last thing I remembered from Africa, was a swaying palmtree and the next were the Alps in Geneva next morning.

**29<sup>th</sup> Journey 1983:**     *A combined new tiny country visits and Council of Europe meeting in Italy*



## 37. MONACO

Europe 24.

**Principality of Monaco**

**Principauté de Monaco in French and Principatu de Múnegu in Monegasque**

1983

**Population:** 39 500

**Independence:** 8.1.1297



French Franc

I was on my way to Bari, Italy to a Council of Europe meeting, but via Monaco and Vatican City in order to visit new countries. I had a nice and again cosy hotel in the centre of famous Monte Carlo. First of all, I took a taxi and luckily the driver understood and even spoke nicely in English. I asked him to drive through the F1 circuit, because our driver Keijo "Keke" Rosberg had won the world championships in 1982 and the Monaco Grand Prix in 1983. Actually he knew this and was very happy to see a Finn. In the evening I went to the world famous Monte Carlo Casino and played Black Jack until three o'clock in the next morning. At my best I was winning 400 francs but I lost 200 francs. My joint player was an eager middle age Spanish lady, who partly encouraged

and partly blamed me. Anyway we had quite nice experience even if she lost as well, but I didn't know how much. This was my first experience on casinos and I had started from the top. (*Four years later I went again to the same casino and managed to win within 15 minutes on a roulette table my 200 francs back.*)

### 38. VATICAN CITY



**1983**

Europe 25.

(The Holy See)

Status Ciivitatis Vaticanae in *Latin* and Stato della Città del Vaticano in *Italian*

Population: 800

Independence: 11.2.1929



Italian Lira

I was still on my way to Bari to a Council of Europe meeting but I stopped in Rome, where I met my lady colleague from Finland. She was seventh month pregnant. We walked together to Vatican City and up the stairs of St. Peter's Basilica to the height of 133 meters. Quite a tough lady! After that we went around Saint Peter's Square and visited also the Sistine Chapel to see Michel Angelo's frescos. This was my first country, where I did not sleep, because it was impossible for a normal tourist. (*I have been in Vatican City twice*)

### 30<sup>th</sup> Journey 1984: Farther and his son on holiday in a new country by the Black Sea

This trip was my second trip I travelled alone with one of my children. Now with my 5 years' young son Ilkka to Bulgaria. The first was in 1982 when I took my 14 years old daughter Katja with me to a project meeting in Ghent, Belgium and after that to Paris.

### 39. BULGARIA



**1984**

Europe 26.

People's Republic of Bulgaria in 1984 and Republic of Bulgaria from 1990

Population: 6,9 million

Independence: 3.3.1878 from the empire of Ottomans

Република България, Republika Bălgarija in *Bulgarian*



Bulgarian Lev

I was travelling with my five years young Ilkka for one-week holiday by the Black Sea in the city of Varna. We spent most of our time either on the beach or by the outdoor pool in the hotel area. There was a nice water slide at the pool and I bought ten tickets. We climbed up and slid down together, but when we hit the water Ilkka was released from my hands and I lost my glasses. I did see Ilkka and nearly panicked, but then I found him and we got up to the surface. Someone jumped to the pool and found my glasses. I gave my tickets to him and that was our water sport at that time. The other mishap took place in our room. Ilkka went for his day nap on our bed and I went to the bar. After an hour I went back, but I did not find him. I searched the whole room and even went outside to look. When I came back to our room I heard a tiny voice and then I saw his head. He had slipped under the day cover and that's why I didn't see him. We had a nice laugh again. It was really a huge experience to travel with a five years old son, who was interested in everything possible. (*I have not visited in the EU Bulgaria and Sofia is the only European capital I have not yet visited!*)

### 31<sup>st</sup> Journey 1985: Farther and his daughter on holiday in two new countries

This was my third trip to Northern Africa and this time to Tunisia and my second visit to a European island country, Malta, and my third trip alone with one of my children, my daughter 7 years young Mirja.

### 40. TUNISIA



**1985**

Africa 7.

Republic of Tunisia

Population: 12,0 million

Independence: 20.3.1956 from France



Tunisian Dinar

République tunisienne in *French*, الجمهورية التونسية al-Jumhūriyyah at-Tūniyyah in *Arabian* and ⵜⴰⵎⴻⵔⴰⵏⵜ in *Berber* and



After last year's trip with my son Ilkka to Bulgaria, now I went for a holiday to Tunisia and Malta with my 7 years young daughter Mirja. We were in a popular tourist town Sousse and there were quite lot of Finnish tourists. We got acquainted with a Finnish family from Kuopio, Savo and they had a daughter of Mirja's age. Tunisia was an interesting combination of Arab and Berber culture, Islam and French. We were riding with camels and participated in a local dancing show. Of course swimming and sunshine were most important elements. In between we made with Mirja a joint taxi trip by Peugeot 504 with five locals to the capital, Tunis. We played a card play called Casino and tried to teach it to the Arabs, but no success. From Tunis we flew to Malta and two days later we drove by Peugeot 504 back to Sousse. Exiting to travel with a 7 years young girl!

## 41. MALTA



Europe 27.

*Republic of Malta*

*Repubblika ta' Malta in **Maltese***

**1985**

*Population: 443 000*

*Independence: 21.9.1964 from Great Britain*



**Maltese Lira**

I was on my holiday and country visit trip with my 7 years' young daughter Mirja and now in the island of Malta. In 1977 I was in the island of Rhodes, Greece. We lived in a small and humble but clean hotel just in the centre. We walked quite a lot on the streets of the old town of Valletta and went also to the harbour, where we saw the Forte Saint Angelo fortress, which belongs to **the Order of Malta**, which is a sovereign international organisation, which is an observatory member of United Nations (*It's headquarters are in Rome*). On our last evening, we went to eat in a nice and cosy restaurant with some local dishes, but once we got back to the street I started to vomit and I felt very sick. Luckily I had a nice little "nurse" Mirja with me and she escorted me to the hotel, gave me a pill and put me into bed. Next morning, I was ok and we could start our journey back to Tunis and further to Sousse. Another exciting experience to travel with my young child.

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### **32<sup>nd</sup> Journey 1985:**    *A country visiting and holiday with the whole family*

This was for me the second trip abroad with my present whole family, the first was in Romania in 1979. The main holiday country was Italy, where we went first for a week to Lake Garda. From there we rented a Lancia car and drove to Bibione by the Adriatic Sea and to Venice and finally to San Marino, my new country visit.

## 42. SAN MARINO



Europe 28.

*(Most Serene) Republic of San Marino*

*Serenissima Repubblica di San Marino in **Italian***

**1985**

*Population: 34 000*

*Independence: 3.9.301 from Roman Empire*



**Italian Lira**

We were five persons: me, my wife Merja, 8 years of age Mirja, 6 years of age Ilkka and 4 years of age Antti. We lived in an old castle type "ghost" hotel just near to a deep cleft. The only night was quite exciting because we had a heavy thunder storm with huge lightning show. Next day we went to an Italian shop and suddenly I found that the shop girls were laughing and pointing us saying "tri colori". I realized that they were not used to see three children with different hair colours: Mirja had red, Ilkka brown and Antti blonde hair.

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### **33<sup>rd</sup> Journey 1985:**    *Combined peace work and UNESCO travel to Western Africa*

This was my second round trip to Western Africa: Angola, Congo Republic, Cameroon and Gabon. Angola



### 43. ANGOLA



Africa 8.

*Republic of Angola*

*República de Angola in Portuguese, Republika ya Ngola in Kikongo in Kimbundu and Umbundu*

1985

*Population: 32,8 million*

*Independence: 11.11.1975 from Portugal*



Angolan Kwanza

My trade union branch had decided to support the Angola liberation movement MPLA by donating 80 school desks and chairs and other school material to a new vocational training centre, which was under construction by a Finnish company. I had a possibility to travel to Angola and participate in practical field work with some local students. I had with me 100 pieces of old Finnish wooden double store pencil boxes. The desks and chairs we had sent to Angola by ship. I assembled all the 80 packed desks together with a young boy. I also made some nice meals for the two Finnish and two Angolan construction workers, because I had a possibility to go to Luanda and to a diplomat shop. I made Finnish type of meat balls and a French Coq au Vin. Angola was a very poor country due to the civil war going on between three liberation movements MPLA; FNLA and Unita. The nearest battles were about 10-15 kilometres from our village Viana. I had also a possibility to visit a local MPLA official's wedding, which was held in Luanda with traditional rituals.

### 44. REPUBLIC OF CONGO



1985

Africa 9.

*République du Congo in French*

*Population: 5,5 million*

*Independence: 30.6.1960 from Belgium by name Congo Brazzaville*



Central African Franc

The second part of my second West African roundtrip started from Brazzaville and I was on my private visit with a courtesy letter from the Secretary General of the Finnish National Commission for Unesco. I had made by mail in advance an appointment with the Secretary General of the National Commission for Unesco, Monsieur Julian. He was waiting for me at the airport and he was hosting me carefully for the next four days. Next day we walked in the city centre and I took a photo of the city hall, because I was working in the Association of Finnish Cities. Suddenly a dressed man in civilian clothes came and spoke French to me in a very serious voice. Julian told him, who I was and that I'm interested in major buildings. He did not believe me and took us to his car and drove us to the police station. He believed that I'm some kind of a spy and taking photos of major important official buildings for terrorist purposes. Julian is a civil servant, but this was no help. We spent seven hours at the police station and finally Julian got a permission to call to the Ministry. He spoke with his boss and after 15 minutes the Minister for Culture and Education called to the police station and we were released immediately. I think this was the last working day of the secret policeman, who arrested us. What I lost, was all my photos from Angola, because the policeman took the film out of my camera, 36 photos. Julian took me also to visit his house and to meet his wife and two children in a nice African village outside Brazzaville. This was my first visit in an African home and in a native village. Unforgettable memory! ( *I visited Brazzaville again on my way to Kinshasa*)

### 45. CAMEROON



Africa 10.

*Republic of Cameroon*

*République du Cameroun in French*

1985

*Population: 26,5 million*

*Independence: 1.1.1960 from Great Britain*



Central African Franc

The third new country for this round trip was Cameroon. I never got any reply from the national Unesco commission and in Douala I realized the reason. Douala is a main port of Cameroon but the capital and administration city is Yaoundé, which is deep in the middle of Cameroon and I could understand that they did not come to meet just me. Douala was quite ordinary, even boring looking harbour city and I just had some eating but more beer drinking. Anyway Cameroon is a bilingual country, which meant that I could speak with some local people in English while having my beers. On my way back to Europe after Gabon I stayed in another hotel near the seaside. There was a nice beach restaurant and because it was my last night in Africa during this round trip I ordered a huge nice and bloody sirloin steak and bottle of good French red wine. Everything was

delicious and tasty. But the results were awful. At three o'clock in the morning I woke and exploded myself so that I flew from my bed to the floor a distance of two metres and everything came out of me. I had some kind of food poisoning, because I ate too rare meat. I was totally ill and in a weak condition and I had to be at the airport already at 10 in the morning. The plane was over booked and I was lucky to get a seat from the business class of Aeroflot, but without services, which I could not have used at all. The chair was comfortable and helped me. We had a stopover in Tripoli, Libya at midnight and we were taken to the airport building, where Mr. Gaddafi had one his old revolutionary speeches, which came out from at least 20 tv-screens and very loudly. What a nightmare at midnight! In the morning we landed at Moscow airport and I had to stay in a still very weak condition nearly an hour waiting for a young stony faced Russian passport office to let me through. Finally, I took a taxi to the Finnish Embassy, where my friend the press attaché Marcus Lyra (*who actually became ten years later ambassador to our Moscow Embassy*) was waiting for me and let me have a Finnish sauna. (*I have visited Cameroon twice including Younde, Soa and Ngoulemagon villages in the UNESCO cultural meeting in 1999*).

## 46. GABON



Africa 11.

*République Gabonaise*

*République Gabonaise in French*

1985

*Population: 2,2 million*

*Independence: 17.8.1960 from France*



Central African Franc

Gabon was my last new country on this round tour and I had made a confirmed appointment with the national secretary general for Unesco. When I arrived at Libreville airport there was nobody waiting for me and I was again disappointed and managed to take a taxi to my hotel. I went to shower and suddenly heard the telephone ringing and there was his secretary wondering in English how could I vanish so quickly. I went down and heard that they had just missed me by a few minutes, but no problem. Then we went through my visit programme and it was astonishingly official. Next morning, I met the Minister for Culture and Education, who asked me how many Gabonese students Finland could receive. I told him none, due to language and other reasons, but promised to deliver his message to our authorities. Next meeting, I had with the Mayor of Libreville, a very distinguished gentleman Claude Aristide. I promised to deliver his greeting to the Mayor of Helsinki. And the last meeting was the director of the famous Bantu Institute, whom I had met in a Unesco Dakar expert seminar in 1983. Last evening finally was a relaxing dinner with all the staff of the Unesco committee in an outside restaurant. In the morning the secretary general took me to the airport, which was a chaos, but he managed to get through the shouting crowd and to my aircraft.

## 34<sup>th</sup> Journey 1986:    *A holiday trip with my sons and father in law to a new island country*

On 1 December 1985 my fifth child and third daughter Venla Ilona was born and we decided with my wife Merja, that she's going to be last, but not least. It's great to have five children, but it means a lot of work but pleasure as well. This trip went to the fifth and last European island country Cyprus.

## 47. CYPRUS



Europe 29.

*Republic of Cyprus*

*Κυπριακή Δημοκρατία in Greek and Kıbrıs Cumhuriyeti in Turkish*

1986

*Population: 1,2 million*

*Independence: 16.8.1960 from Great Britain*



Cyprus Lira

I was travelling with farther in law Eero, who is 14 years older than me, and with my two sons, Ilkka seven years and Antti five years. Cyprus was at that time a very popular holiday island among the Finns. We lived in a nice hotel with a quite big outdoor pool and beaches nearby. We rented a Suzuki Ranger and drove to several places in Cyprus, which was then a divided island, because Turkey conquered the northern part in 1974 and established Northern Cyprus Turkish Republic. We didn't go there, not even to Nicosia, which was also divided. (*I visited the northern part of Cyprus and the northern part of Nicosia in 2013.*) Instead of that we drove to Limassol and

the Apollo and Aphrodite temples at Acropolis from the Ancient Greek. We also drove to the Troodos mountains and suddenly it was heavy raining and hailing. Our car roof was down and we got totally wet. We went into a restaurant, which was warm, because it had an open fire place and nice staff. As you know boys are boys at that age and sometimes I was a bit helpless to keep them in peace, but that's life. As a home coming present I brought one of the heaviest bouts of bronchitis I ever had, but I survived. It was nice also to travel with a farther in law, who was from quite different world than me. (*I have visited twice the island of Cyprus*)

## Visited special regions and islands



### Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus 2013

One of the seven non-sovereign countries

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## 35<sup>th</sup> Journey 1988:     *A ready-made charter journey to the closed Albania*

In 1987 I travelled for my work only in Europe and no new countries, but I made a one-week Alpine holiday with three kids (Mirja 11, Ilkka 9 and Antti 7) to Valmorel, France. This year 1988 became a crucial one for me, because I visited the last and 34<sup>th</sup> country, Albania in Europe. So Europe was conquered for the first time! (*only two years later Europe started to collapse and split into several new countries*).

### 48. ALBANIA



1988

Europe 30. (First time 100%)

Population: 2,9 million

Republic of Albania from 1991, before that People's Socialist Republic

Independence: 28.11.1912 from Ottoman Empire

Republika e Shqipërisë in *Albanian*



Albanian Leke

I was on Olympia travel agency's group journey for ten days to the communist and very closed Albania, which was led by Ramiz Alia, who was a bit more liberal than the legendary Enver Hoxha, who had passed away two years earlier. Finnair was the only Western air company, which had permission to fly to Tirana. We travelled by our own bus for ten days around the country and all the time we were followed by secret but quite visible police Lada. The country side was like an open air museum with huge amount of bunkers, around one million, which were built toward any enemy from any cardinal point. In Albania private cars were forbidden. But people were friendly, food and drinks good and hotel comfortable. In the city of Saranda you could see the Isle of Corfu in Greece in the western world. In our hotel one of our waiters was the double of the Italian actor Marcello Mastroianni and spoke very American style fluent English, which he had learned through American movies via Italian television channels. I visited following places: Tirana, Berat, Durres, Leke, Saranda and Gjirokastra. (*I have not yet visited the new Albania*)

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## 36<sup>th</sup> Journey in 1989:

*A holiday trip to first new countries in Near East in Asia*

This trip was my first real visit to the Asian continent and three Near East countries: Jordan, Israel and Syria, plus the occupied Republic of Palestine, the first so called non-sovereign countries but de facto independent. So the 1980s brought me to North America, real Africa and now Asia, altogether 32 new countries.

### 49. JORDAN



1989

Asia 2.

Population: 10,2 million

Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

Independence: 25.5.1946 from Great Britain

الهاشمي I-Mamlakah Al-Urdaniyyah Al-Hashimiyyah in *Arabic*



Jordanian Dinar

I was travelling with Reima Kekäläinen, my school mate from 1953 and now the director of TV2 Theatre. The local guide in Amman was a pastor, but not in that role, and we got very profound information about the history of Palestine and Near East. We visited also the Finnish Embassy, where Mr. Timo Hukka offered us a very substantial dinner. Next day we went by group bus to the ancient site of Petra, which is over 2000 years old, a sand town built by the Nabateans. We rode on horses into the area “à la Indiana Jones”, but before Harrison Ford’s movie! We also made a trip to Palestine west bank, Jerusalem and Israel. On our way back we were floating, not swimming on the Dead Sea, which is 408 metres below the surface. From Amman we made a 24 hours long taxi drive to Damascus, Syria and back.

## 50. PALESTINE 1989

*State of Palestine (West Bank and Gaza) Population 5,1 million*

*Declaration of independence: 15.11.1988, recognized by 135 UN countries, but de facto occupied by Israel*

*دولة فلسطين Dawlat Filasṭīn in Arabic*

I was travelling with my mate Reima. On the boarder the Israeli soldiers asked us to shoot with cameras into the ceiling for safety reasons. We took a taxi and drove first to Jericho, which was an ancient town and I sang there on the ruins the famous negro spiritual “Joshua fought the battle of Jericho”, which was one of my favorites. Then we proceeded to East Jerusalem, which is the capital of the State of Palestine. He had a small hotel booked in advance from Amman. In East Jerusalem there is a mixture of three major religions: Muslims, Palestine Christians and Palestine and Israeli Jewish. We visited Al-Agsa Mosque, the third important mosque of Islam at the Temple Mount, which is the holiest site of Judaism both in the Old town of Jerusalem. At 1800 hours all the three churches started to ring their bells and that was a magnificent cacophonic sound.

## 51. ISRAEL

Asia 4.

*State of Israel*

1989

*Population: 8,6 million*

*Independence: 14.5.1948 from British Mandate for Palestine*

*מְדִינַת יִשְׂרָאֵל Medinas Jisra'el in Hebrew and دولة إسرائيل Daulat Isrā'īl in Arabic*



Israeli Sekel

My visit with Reima to East Jerusalem has been described in Palestine. West Jerusalem was totally different with modern buildings and orthodox Jewish, but also Arabs in their own style costumes. There was tension in the air, because the First Palestinian Intifada had started in 1988 and thus we could see quite a lot of Israeli soldiers on the West Jerusalem streets. We saw one small fight with some Arabs and other people, but it was stopped by Israeli soldiers, who arrested the Arabs. In East Jerusalem we visited the Western Wall or Kotel known as the Place of Weeping.

## 52. SYRIA

Asia 5.

*Syrian Arab Republic*

*الجمهورية العربية السورية al-Jumhūrīyah al-‘Arabīyah as-Sūrīyah in Arabic*

1989

*Population: 17,5 million*

*Independence: 17.4.1946 from France*



Syrian Pound

Our last country in our Near East tour was Syria. We negotiated a return taxi drive to Damascus, where we had an appointment with a Finnish lady, who was married there and did some guiding work. She showed us by walking some of the interesting buildings and shopping areas with magnificent bazars. We came back after midnight and after the border control we stopped on the Jordan side and the driver went out and took off a huge belt full of hidden gold. Our driver was a professional smuggler as well, but never mind.



### **37<sup>th</sup> Journey 1990:**     *Personal and working visit to Montreal, Quebec in Canada*

The first year of the historical decade for new countries started from my travelling point of view quite modestly: only one new country.

**53. CANADA**   
North America 5. / Americas 7.

**1990**  
*Population: 37,7 million*  
*Independence: 1.7.1867*




**Canadian Dollar**

Actually I was in New York travelling with 15 directors or secretaries for cultural affairs from various Finnish cities and municipalities. It was my second visit to New York with Woody Allen's clarinet and Metropolitan Opera's Porgy and Bess. In Montreal I visited the city cultural organisation with Mr. Alex Bell. I learned some new developments especially in the field of information and technology and telematics services. On my leisure hours I took a taxi and asked to drive the Montreal F1 Grand Prix circuit, which had been won a few months earlier by Ayrton Senna. In the evening I went to a famous Biddle's jazz restaurant to eat spicy ribs and to listen to gentle deep blues. On my return flight back to New York the Air Canada's pilot flew two times around Manhattan at the altitude of one thousand metres because the weather was so bright and the scenery magnificent. *(Three years later I visited Canada again, but this time in Niagara Falls from US side.)*

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### **38<sup>th</sup> Journey 1991:**     *A personal working trip to the first new country Estonia of former USSR*

Estonia was the only new country for me in 1991, but it was a pleasant new one, because it had just got its independence for the second time and now as a first country from the collapsed Soviet Union. German Democratic Republic GDR had collapsed already in 1989 and became a part of German Federal Republic.

**54. ESTONIA**   
Europe 31 (+4 former)  
*Republic of Estonia*  
*Eesti vabariik in Estonian*

**1991**  
*Population: 1,3 million*  
*Independence: 22.1920 and again 20.8.1991 after USSR collapse*



**Estonian Crown**

I was travelling with Mr. Frank McDonald, who was an environmental journalist of the Irish Times. Estonia had just one month ago got its second independence, which was close to Frank and me due to similar type of history in our countries. I had been in Easter 1990 in Tallinn following a Matheus passion performance in the Toompea church with more than one thousand people. That was the beginning towards the new independence. Our hosts were Rein Kiis from the new Ministry for education and the secretary for cultural affairs of the City of Tallinn. There was a great mutual understanding between Estonian, Irish and Finnish about independence from a big neighbouring bear!

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### **39<sup>th</sup> Journey 1992:**     *A visit to our new eastern neighbour country*

Finland had got a new eastern neighbour country, Russian Federation after Soviet Union and this was the second of the 15 new former soviet countries to me.

**55. RUSSIAN FEDERATION**   
Europe 32 / Asia  
*Российская Федерация Rossijskaja Federatsijain in Russian*

**1992**  
*Population: 146,0 million* **Russian Rouble 1992 and 2013**  
*Independence: 24.8.1991 after USSR collapse*





I was travelling with my wife Merja and her friend Ritva and her boyfriend Jarmo, who was a broker within Russian markets. He had his car on the boat and thus we could see quite a lot of St. Petersburg, the former Leningrad. There were not so much changes to the former soviet period, but anyway some. Jarmo had some Russian business friends and we visited their homes, which was a nice new experience for me like driving in a Finnish car in Russia. We spent the evening in a brand new jazz club with quite promising music. *(I have visited russian Federation 14 times for example in 2009 by motor boat from Vyborg to Malay Vysotskij (Ravansaari in Finnish) island, which actually still belonged to Finland. In 2013 I was in Kaliningrad by the Baltic Sea and 2015 in Yekaterinburg, where I visited the European-Asian border.)*



**Republic of Karelia 2009**



**Kaliningrad Oblast 2013**



**Sverdlovsk Oblast (Europe/Asia) 2015**



**Chechen Republic 2017**

## **40<sup>th</sup> Journey in 1992:**

*A combined judo-, family- and working trip to two new countries*

This journey continued my visits to new nearby countries and former Soviet republics, now to independent Latvia and Lithuania with my two sons, Ilkka 13 and Antti 11.

### **56. LATVIA**

**Europe 33.**

**Republic of Latvia**

***Latvijas Republika in [Latvian](#)***

**1992**

***Population: 2,0 million***

***Independence: 18.11.1918 and again 6.9.1991 after USSR collapse***



**Latvian Lati**

I had been with my sons Ilkka 13 years and Antti 11 years in a judo training camp in Tartu, Estonia. We went by a night train from Tallinn to Riga with a drunken but friendly Russian passenger in our cabin. In Riga we made a quite long walk in the old town, where I found an Asterix album in the Latvian language. I was already then starting to collect Asterix translations. In the evening we had another night train and now to Vilnius, Lithuania. We went quite late to the station and suddenly Ilkka needed a toilet. It was quite far and there were just a few minutes to the departure. We found it but it was a bigger need. After relaxation we ran to the train, where Antti was waiting with our luggage. Train was already moving, but as sportsmen (even me!) we managed to jump in safely. Now we didn't have any drunken passengers in our cabin except a bit me after the shocking experience.

### **57. LITHUANIA**

**Europe 34.**

**Republic of Lithuania**

***Lietuvos Respublika in [Lithuanian](#)***

**1992**

***Population: 2,7 million***

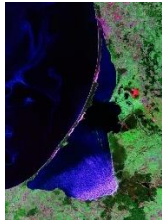
***Independence 12.7.1920 and again 11.3.1990 after USSR collapse***



**Lithuanian Liti**

Lithuania was actually the first new country after USSR collapse which got its independency, even before Russia and for me it was already the fourth. I was travelling with my sons Ilkka and Antti. I had made an appointment with Mr. Anastas Petrauskas, the Director of Cultural Affairs of the City of Vilnius. He was very kind with his staff and they showed us the main places in the old town with nearly 50 churches, one of the oldest universities and its beautiful library, where I found an Asterix album in the Lithuanian language. We also visited the famous TV-tower, where the only armed fightings with killings of some people concerning the collapse of USSR in January 1990 had taken place just before independence. We were taken to an old restaurant to have a nice Lithuanian dinner. For my sons it was facinating to see their father at work! Next day we travelled by day train to Tallinn together with a professor of technics from Tartu university.

## Special region



Coronian Split 2017

### 41<sup>st</sup> Journey 1993:    *A development project trip to Vietnam*

This was the beginning of my development project in Vietnam 1993-1995. I made altogether five project visits to Vietnam by combining every time some new countries.

#### 58. THAILAND



Asia 5.

*Kingdom of Thailand*

ราชอาณาจักรไทย *Ratcha Anachak Thai* in *Thai*

1993

*Population: 70,0 million*

*Independence: Kingdom in 1238*



Thai Bath

I was on my way to Haiphong, Vietnam to start a new development project, but first I stayed two days in Bangkok with my wife Merja's friend Martti, who worked at Nokia. I had to go via Bangkok to get my visa to Vietnam. The Kingdom of Bangkok was my eleventh royal country. My first but not last visit to Thailand was consisting of Thai food and Thai girls in meeting Mara's Thai wife and their little daughter. Mara drove by car and showed how chaotic the traffic can be. On Saturday evening we visited the famous Pat Pong street, but I wasn't interested in their services, but the Sinha beer was good enough for me. I also saw the largest 46-meter reclining Buddha in Wat Po Buddhist Temple and everything over there was again another new and positive cultural shock for me. (*I have visited Bangkok three times*)

#### 59. VIETNAM



Asia 6.

*Socialist Republic of Vietnam*

*Cộng hòa xã hội chủ nghĩa Việt Nam* in *Vietnamese*

1993

*Population: 9 million*

*Independence: 2.9.1945 and again 2.7.1976 within the unification of North and South Vietnam*



Vietnamese Dong

Vietnam was my second Far East country. I went there to start a new three years' development project called "Haiphong Communal Data Project 1993-1995". At Hanoi airport I was met by Mr. Tung and Mr. Ha, my hosts from Haiphong and then we visited the Finnish Embassy with Ms. Seija Honkanen, councillor. Then we drove by car 120 km to Haiphong and that was a huge and quite frightening experience. The road was full of bicycles, light motor bicycles, horses and some old trucks. The last hour was a night mare, because it was already dark and everybody drove nearly without lights. The purpose of my first visit of totally five was to negotiate the contract between Finland and the Local Committee of the Communist Party of Haiphong. Everything went fine and the whole project was successful at the end after three years. As a guest of honour the Vietnamese hosts liked to take me to the famous Archipelago of Halong Bay by an old double store motor boat. It was January and the weather was cold and quite windy. We were a dozen people on the boat and we started our voyage. After an hour's drive when we were on the second deck having lunch I heard the engine stopping and suddenly the boat swung strongly and we found ourselves on the deck among all the food and drinks, but I managed to keep my beer in my hand. The crew of two persons managed to throw only one anchor to the water, but the wind was quite strong and the boat was still swinging heavily. Next problem was the anchor rope, which started to lose its strands. The captain said that it takes about half an hour before it will break. We were in the middle of the open sea without radio or other alarm equipment. There were only a few life belts and the distance to the nearest coast was more than 500 metres. Suddenly we saw a ship near the coast and we started to shout. I was lying on the second desk peacefully

drinking beer and went down and saw the boat and shouted with my quite loud voice: “Perkele”, which is a very common Finnish swear word. Suddenly the ship responded with its chimney and turned toward us. It came just early enough, because once we had managed to move our passengers to the ship the rope broke, but there was already another one. The ship was a Christian coal boat. Before this voyage I had been taken to a Buddhist pagoda and I was allowed to hit the huge bell, which means the Buddhist gods will protect me. Nice combination: Buddhist gods and Christian Vietnamese sailors saved an atheist Finn. (*Later during my second visit I managed to go to the most beautiful Halong Bay*). Next day there was a small news in local newspaper writing about me how brave and helpful guest of honour I was! (*I have visited Vietnam six times, last time in 1999 as a cook and butler in Hotel Hano during the Finnish Cultural week organized by the Finnish Embassy!*)

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## **41<sup>st</sup> b Journey 1993:** *A second project trip to Vietnam with new countries*

This was the second part of my 1993 project trip to Vietnam via Bangkok but return via two new countries: Laos and Cambodia. I was accompanied by my project data expert Jarmo Kurki.

### **60. LAOS**

Asia 7.

*Lao People's Republic*

*ສາທາລະນະລັດ ປະຊາທິປະໄຕ ປະຊາຊົນລາວ Sathalanalat Paxathipatai Paxaxon Lao in **Lao***

I was travelling with my project data expert Mr. Jarmo “the Crane” Kurki from the Association of Finnish Cities, where we worked. He was for the first time in Haiphong and we had started to build up our project. After a successful boat visit to Halong Bay we continued our trip, not directly to Finland but first to a new country Laos. We had got as presents both two Vietnamese oriental mats, which we had to carry as hand luggage. Vientiane was a quite quiet city, where we made a city tour by taxi and the rest of the time by walking on the streets without seeing a single western person, and by drinking beer and eating local delicious food. The most interesting animal we saw was a huge cockroach, which fell down from the ceiling to the wooden floor in our hotel room and woke us with its knocking voice.

**1993**

*Population: 7,3 million*

*Independency: 19.7.1949 from France*



Lao Kip

### **61. CAMBODIA**

Asia 8.

*Kingdom of Cambodia*

*ព្រះរាជាណាចក្រកម្ពុជា Preăh Réachéanachâk Kâmpŭchéa in **Khmer***

**1993**

*Population: 16,7 million*

*Independence: 9.11.1953 from France*



Cambodian Riel

I continued my small Far East round trip the fourth and second new country with Jarmo. We got our visa easily from Bangkok. There was quite a lot tension in Phnom Penh, because of the first democratic elections ever arranged. There were United Nations peace keeping troops UNCTAD'-soldiers. The city was under a curfew, because one day earlier there had been a quite big bomb explosion in the centre. Our guide was a man, who had survived during the Pol Pot terror in 1979. We went with him by car to Killing Fields, outside the city, where 17 000 people were mass-murdered during 1975-1979 by the Red Khmers. We also visited the Genocide museum, which was an awful experience.

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## **42nd Journey:** *Conference trip with two brand new countries*

This was my second visit to brand new countries after the collapse of the communist system and now to Czech Republic and its “brother” Slovakia. I was already in 1969 in the former Czechoslovakia.

## 62. CZECH REPUBLIC 1993

Europe 35

Česká republika in *Czech*



Population: 10,7 million

Independence: 1.1.1993 after the split of Czechoslovakia



Czech Koruna

I participated in a huge Council of Europe conference of 350 participants on Culture in Towns with nine colleagues from Finland. For me it was in a way personally very international. I met there Mr. Brian Goodey from England and he was a project leader 10 years ago in a project, where I was a member of the steering committee. Then I met the deputy director of the City of Tartu, whom I had met in his summer place in Estonia last year. And finally I had a nice dinner with Mrs. Ursula Rellstab from Switzerland, who was the director of the present Unesco World Decade Project "Culture in the Neighbourhood", where I was also a member of the steering committee. Prague had been cleaned entirely since my last visit in 1980. I also found nice jazz and U Fleků pub, which was Švejk's favourite place in the famous book by Jaroslav Hasek. (*I have visited Czech Republic twice*)

## 63. SLOVAKIA



1993

Europe 36

Slovak Republic

Slovenská republika in *Slovak*

Population: 5,5 million

Independence: 1.1.1993 after the split of Czechoslovakia



Slovak Koruna 1993

After the Prague Conference I made a weekend trip to the other brand new country Slovakia and its historical capital Bratislava. I walked the whole Sunday in the old and sunny town area and managed to find an Asterix album in the Slovak language. The main idea was to relax with history, food and good beer. What a beautiful Sunday in a new and old country.

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## 43<sup>rd</sup> Journey 1994: *Third development project trip to Vietnam with two new countries*

After the Haiphong working period I went with my specialist Jarmo for a small holiday to Singapore and Malaysia.

## 64. SINGAPORE



1984

Asia 9.

Republic of Singapore

Republik Singapura in *Malay*, 新加坡共和国 in *Mandarin Chinese* and சிங்கப்பூர் குடியரசு in *Tamil*

Population: 5,9 million

Independence: 9.8.1965 from Malaysia



Singapore Dollar

I had been with my data expert Jarmo in Haiphong for the third time in our development project and after the working period our hosts took us to visit Ho Chi Minh City (former Saigon), which was another interesting experience with a visit to the famous places of Vietnam war, for example the Presidential Palace and the tunnels of the National Liberation Front's soldiers (Viet Cong by western media). Singapore was quite different with clean streets and functioning traffic. We spent two relaxing days by drinking Singapore Slings (Beefeater Gin, Peter Heering, D.O.M, Cointreau, pineapple juice, lime juice and Angostura) eating Chinese food and visiting the lungs of Singapore, the Isle of Sentosa, where we were swimming and flew over the island by a Gondola elevator. From Singapore we continued our short holiday to the Malaysian beaches.

## 65. MALAYSIA



1994

Asia 10.

Kingdom of Malaysia

马来西亚 in *Mandarin Chinese* and *மலேசியா* in *Malay*

Population: 32,4 million

Independence: 31.8.1957 from Great Britain



Malaysian Ringgit



I went together with Jarmo “The Crane” after a quite heavy working session and Saigon visit in Vietnam and a short visit to Singapore first by a 5-hours bus drive from Kuala Lumpur Budu Raja bus station to Central Malaysia and then by boat to Pan Pacific Resort on Pangkor island. Malaysia was the 11<sup>th</sup> Kingdom for me. We were swimming both in the pool and in the sea, where we flew with a boat parachute at an altitude of 40 metres. There was a fascinating Malaysian buffet table and nice drinks. After this two days relaxing heat we went by a hot taxi to Kuala Lumpur airport. Our flights to Helsinki took 20 hours and the temperature there was -20 degrees Celsius.

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#### **44th Journey 1994:**    *A combined working trip with two new countries*

This trip was a combination again, first on a Council of Europe cultural working project in Lithuania and then two new countries: Belarus and Ukraine. First time crossing the border between Lithuania and Belarus by bus. From Minsk I flew to Kiev and same way back.

### **66. BELARUS**



Europe 37

*Republic of Belarus*

*Рэспубліка Беларусь in **Belarussian** and Республіка Беларусь in **Russian***

**1994**

*Population: 9,5 million*

*Independence: 25.8.1991 after USSR collapse*



Belarussian Rouble

I was in Lithuania in a fact finding mission of the Council of Europe and my host was my employer's sister organisation the Association of Lithuanian Cities. I got some contacts from Vilnius to Minsk. After quite heavy working session I drove by bus on Midsummer Eve morning, which is a huge celebration day in Finland as the next day as well. Belarus was the fifth brand new independent country after the USSR collapse. I met in Minsk Mr. Georgi D. Kunevich, who was the chairman of the Lev Shapieha Foundation for democratic changes in the very autocratically led country. There had been the first round of the presidential election on the previous day and there was no doubt of the winner Aleksandr Lukashenka, because there were no other serious candidates. Our meeting was actually allowed if you asked the secret police, but this time I didn't get caught. Next day I continued my travelling and went to the airport. First we were taken to a Russian Antonov 24 aircraft, but they found that it was broken. Then we were taken to another aircraft and met Mr. Martin M. Bogart, who was the director of the International Business Service Airlines from Monaco. Finally, we managed to take off and it was the Finnish Midsummer Day without fires and carnivals like in Finland.

### **67. UKRAINE**



Europe 38

*Republic of Ukraine*

*Україна Ukrajina in **Ukrainian***

**1994**

*Population: 43,7 million*

*Independence: 24.8.1991 after USSR collapse*



Ukrainian Hryvnia

Ukraine was the 6<sup>th</sup> new independent country after the USSR collapse for me. I came there with my new friend Martin M. Bogart from Minsk on our Midsummer Day and we stayed in the same big tourist hotel. Martin went to see his business friend Boris and I went to see a little of this large city. I went to a River Dnieper cruise, where I met a data engineer Peter Maldonado from Bolivia. He had a Russian wife from Uzbekistan and their son 4 years of age Oscar Sergei, whose nick name was Manito, Monkey! It was really a nice international cruise with a warm company. In the evening Martin and Boris took me to some artist music restaurants and night clubs. It was quite a heavy but funny evening, but in the morning no so funny!

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## **45<sup>th</sup> Journey 1994:**    *A combined Vietnam working and my 50-years celebration trip to Oceania.*

This was my first trip to Oceania to two new countries: Papua New Guinea and Australia, which is also a continent. The trip was again combined to my Vietnam project.

### **68. PAPUA NEW GUINEA**



**1994**



**Papuan Kina**

**Oceania 1.**

***Population: 9,0 million***

***Independent State of Papua New Guinea Independence: 6.9.1975***

***Independen Stet bilong Papua Niugini in Tok pisin or Pidgeon English***

I had been on my fourth working trip in Vietnam and from there I flew to Singapore, where I went out shortly to meet my colleague Torsti Kirvelä from my employer outside the airport. He stayed there and came three days later to Port Moresby to join our mutual adventure in the jungle. I flew to Cairns and arrived there at 8 o'clock in the morning. The international hall was 150 meters long and empty and I went to the end of it and started to sleep. I slept about one hour and opened my eyes: I saw more than one thousand Japanese walking and running around. Why one thousand, because two hours later there were three Boeing 747 take offs by Japanese airlines and then the hall was empty again. In the afternoon I flew to Port Moresby and was in my first Oceanian country. Mr. Lila Ravusiro from National Unesco office was waiting for me and took me to my hotel and further to his office. There were political demonstrations all over in the city and it was a bit difficult to drive. I met also the director of the Tourist office, whom I had met in Helsinki at the Travel Fair. I bought from him a weekend journey for two to Mt. Bellamy.

On Wednesday I flew by Air Niugini to the city of Goroka in the middle of the country. I got acquainted with a local coffee producer, who arranged for me a round trip in the city and its neighbourhood and gave me ten packets of local coffee. I saw a very nice performance in Asaro village by Mudmen with magnificent masks. Next day I returned to Port Moresby, where Torsti was already waiting for me. On Friday morning we were taken to the airport and we went in a small aircraft with five people, two guides, pilot and us. We were supposed to fly up to Mt. Bellamy, 2500 meters high for two days and make short trekking there in the jungle. The weather was not good and due to very heavy turbulence, we had to return back. We tried the same next morning on Saturday 3 September which was my 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Again the turbulence was so strong that our plane dropped twice at least 50-100 metres. Finally, the pilot asked if we would like to go back or land at the lower airport, which we did. The airport is actually a grassy hillside for small planes. We went out and suddenly I realized that we have to climb up to the top of Mt. Bellamy. The distance there was 7-8 hours and the altitude difference one thousand metres from 1500 meters to 2500 meters. We had one back bag with a bottle of Champagne and Cognac plus some water bottles. After one and half hours we stopped and I was already exhausted. We ate some sugar cane and Torsti took the bag. He was in better condition. Then we climbed up in the jungle about five and a half hours and got up. It was quite an effort for me, but I survived! At the top we had to cross over a swamp area on a wooden pavement. Half way I dropped into the swamp up to my neck, but I was taken safely up and I was muddy and wet. Then we went on and finally we were at our destination. The first sight I saw was a tall white dressed and white European from Holland who smiled and shouted: How are you guys. I got mad and tried to attack him, but Torsti took me to the bushes to calm down. I was really quite exhausted. I calmed down and we had nice evening with this Dutch man and his friend an Australian photographer. We also drank our bottles and celebrated my 50 years' anniversary under the Southern Cross. I was really proud of myself, what I'd done. Next morning, we went down and it took again about eighth hours, but now down on a slippery path, where the technique was totally different. The night we spent in a hut on pillars and the temperature was about 5 degrees Celsius and we had no blankets or mattresses. I have never slept so close to a man. The whole night a huge wild boar tried to knock down our hut, but fortunately without success. Next morning, we waited more than two hours for our plane and my schedule to Sydney started to become tricky, but finally it came and I stayed at the airport and Torsti stayed another night in Port Moresby. Quite an exiting anniversary trip, which you never forget!

*In late November 2019 a non-binding referendum was held to decide whether Bougainville should be a sovereign state independent from Papua New Guinea. The result was overwhelmingly in favour of sovereignty for the island, with 98% of the votes supporting secession, but nothing has happened so far...*



Bougainville **Not yet visited**

## 69. AUSTRALIA



Oceania 2.

*Commonwealth of Australia*

**1994**

*Population: 24,5 million*

*Independence: 1.1.1901 from Great Britain and 11.12.1932 full independency*



Australian Pound

First time in the Australian continent and country. I fell in love with Sydney, which was at least for me a harmonic combination of skyscrapers, nature and ocean with millions of people. I lived in Hotel Manhattan! I jumped for the first time on a hop-on/hop-off circulating tourist bus and there was a funny driver who spoke with a real “Oostrailian” accent. I visited the famous Opera House drawn by a Danish architect and listened to the Sydney Philharmonic Orchestra playing among others Jean Sibelius, the most famous Finnish composer. The director was from England and when I went to thank him and told that I am from Finland, he said that he’s just an amateur compared with the Finnish directors, he knew for example Okko Kamu. The return flight from Sydney to Helsinki took only 36 hours plus nine hours’ time difference. *(On 2011 I visited Australia on my way to the last three Oceanian countries. From Melbourne I drow 1300 around New South Wales)*

**Visited special regions and islands:**



Tasmania 2011

## 46<sup>th</sup> Journey in 1994:

*A UNESCO meeting journey with two new Balkan countries*

This was again a combination of a meeting of UNESCO in Unna, Germany and meetings with UNESCO national officials in Slovenia and Croatia, both former Yugoslavian republics, now independent.

## 70. SLOVENIA



Europe 39

*Republic of Slovenia*

*Republika Slovenija in Slovenian*

**1994**

*Population: 2,1 million*

*Independence: 25.6.1991 after collapse of Yugoslavia*



Slovenian Tokarjev 1994

I had been in a Unesco cultural decade meeting of the Culture in the Neighbourhood –project and after it I continued to visit two brand new Balkan countries, first to Slovenia. First day I just walked around in the centre and then went by train to Zagreb, from where I returned on Friday. Then I had an appointment with the General Secretary of Slovenian national commission for Unesco Mrs. Zofija Klemen-Klerk. She had been a member of the last Yugoslavian Parliament, which had locked itself into the Parliament House in 1990 and that was the beginning of the final collapse of the former Yugoslavia. We had a nice lunch in the old town and she told all the main aspects of the collapse and ongoing wars. Slovenia was the first former Yugoslavian independent country for me.

## 71. CROATIA



Europe 40

*Republic of Croatia*

*Republika Hrvatska in Croatian*

1994

*Population: 4,1 million*

*Independence: 25.6.1991 after collapse of Yugoslavia*



Croatian Kuna

Croatia was the second new Balkan country after the collapse of the former Yugoslavia. Actually I had visited the former Croatian socialist republic of Yugoslavia already in 1973 on Opatija by the Adriatic Sea. The new independent Croatia had a war with the Yugoslavian People's Army and various Serb paramilitary groups who attacked Croatia in 1991, but Croatia won this struggle. My host in Zagreb was the very tall Mr. Dino Milinowicz and a much shorter professor of Museums. We walked around in Zagreb centre and the old town visiting various historical and important buildings. We visited also the Croatian-Finnish association, where I met the Honorary Consul of Finland and he took me to lunch in the Parliament House. (*I visited Croatia during the Socialist Yugoslavian time in 1973.*)

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### 47<sup>th</sup> Journey 1995:    *A combined working trip to Vietnam and one new country*

This trip was again a combination one to visit one new Asian country after Vietnam and now it was a little bit difficult Myanmar, former Burma.

## 72. MYANMAR



Asia 11.

*Republic of Union of Myanmar*

*(Burma still in certain countries)*

1995

*Population: 54,4 million*

*Independence: 4.1.1948 from UK until 1989 by name Burma and until 2010 by name Union of Myanmar*



Myanmar Kyat

ပြည်ထောင်စု သမ္မတ မြန်မာနိုင်ငံတော်

*Pyi-daung-zu Myan-ma Naing-ngan-daw in Burmese*

I had been for the fifth and last time in my project in Vietnam and now alone to conclude the project, which was quite successful. Before going home, I went to Bangkok to get my Myanmar visa and then to one more new Far East country. Myanmar was quite closed at that time due to the governing military junta. I had ordered and paid my hotel nights and airport transfers in advance, but before entering the country I had to exchange 300 US dollars into local kyats. There was no transfer at the airport, but I took a taxi and the driver was a very nice guy, who was earlier a ship radio operator, but unemployed. Charlie promised to take care of me and show as much as we had time for very reasonable price. My kyat amount was so big in the country that I really felt myself very rich, because everything was so cheap. Charlie had some cousins, who guarded me all the time even during the night near my hotel. There had been some problems with tourists and junta soldiers. We drove around the city, which is absolutely nice and exotic. We passed also the house of Aung San Suu Kyi, the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize winner, who spent more than 15 years in house arrest from 1989. Charlie forbade me to take a photo of her house, because we were followed by the secret police at that time. We made also half a day trip to the countryside to look at a famous pagoda, which was located in a small island. The road was very muddy after the heavy rainy season and we were quite near to sticking in the mud. In the evening I invited Charlie and his several cousins for dinner in a fine restaurant and we ate and drank very much. On my last night Charlie invited me to his home to eat with his family of wife and little son. Before that we went to the super market and I bought so much food for them, that it would be enough for a month. Finally, after having bought present for me and my children I found that I had still half of my kyats left and I gave them to Charlie, because I couldn't exchange them back to dollars.

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### 48<sup>th</sup> Journey 1996:    *A combined Unesco meeting trip and two new Balkan countries.*

This trip was again a combination of international work and visiting new countries: Serbia and Macedonia, which were the third and fourth new ones after the breakup of the former Socialist Federation of Yugoslavia.

## 73. SERBIA



Europe 41

*Republic of Serbia*

*After the breakup of Socialist Federation of Yugoslavia from 1992 Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, from 2003 Serbia and Montenegro confederation and from 2006 Serbia*

*Република Србија in **Serbian** and Republika Srbija in **Serbo-Croatian** language*

1996

*Population: 8,7 million*

*Independence: 5.6.2006 by name Republic of Serbia*



Serbian Dinar

I was actually going to Strasbourg to the Culture in the Neighbourhood -project meeting by Unesco, but I decided to combine to the trip to two new former Yugoslavian countries. The first was Serbia or at that time by name Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which meant Serbia with Kosovo and Montenegro. Macedonia, Croatia, Slovenia and Bosnia & Herzegovina had already got their independence. The breakup led to several wars of which the cruellest and bitterest was between Serbia and Bosnia & Herzegovina 1992-1995. I was only one day and night in Belgrade International, which meant that I didn't see any signs of that war physically, but mentally it was in the air. I lived in the centre in Hotel Belgrade International. On the final morning I went to buy a night train ticket to Skopje, but I got for the same price a ticket to Athens.

## 74. NORTH MACEDONIA



1996

Europe 42

*Republic of Macedonia*

*Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia FYROM until 2018 and Since 2019 Republic of North Macedonia*

*Independence: 8.9.1991 after the Breakup of former Yugoslavia*

*Република Северна Македонија in **Macedonian**, Republika e Maqedonisë së Veriut in **Albanian***

*Република Србија in **Serbian** and Republika Srbija in **Serbo-Croatian***



North Macedonian Denar

Macedonia was the fourth new former Yugoslavian independent republic for me. My host in Skopje was the General Secretary of the National Unesco Commission Mrs Ljudica Miljkovic, who showed me her city and told me about their recent history and offered also a nice and substantial lunch. Suddenly I saw a poster, which announced that the American soul singer James Brown has a concert in the evening at the Skopje stadium. I managed to buy a ticket and when I went to the stadium I saw three Finnish peace keepers of UNPREDEP. They had Finnish vodka called "Koskenkorva or more familiar Kossu" and I bought black coffee and then we drunk a mixture of coffee and vodka, which is called "Plörö" in Finnish-Swedish context. Anyway we had a nice James Brown concert with a lot of fun and pleasure. Next morning, I went by bus to South-Macedonia to the town of Ohrid, its churches are in the Unesco Cultural Heritage list. Ohrid is a beautiful old town by Lake Ohrid. I met again three Finns, but now normal tourists. I went back by bus to Skopje and by night train to Belgrade, from where I flew to Frankfurt and further by bus to Strasbourg.

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## 49<sup>th</sup> Journey 1996:     *A project trip to Japan and to another new country in Far East*

This trip was the first of my six project travels to Japan and now with an extra visit to South Korea. Japan was the 11<sup>th</sup> Island country for me.

## 75. JAPAN



Asia 12.

*日本国 Nippon-koku in **Japanese***

1996

*Population: 127,0 million*

*Independence: National Foundation Day 11.2.660 BC  
(The oldest country of the world)*



Japanese Yen

Japan was the second remarkable project for me in the Far East after Vietnam 1993-1995. I was travelling with Mr. Markku Valkonen, Director of the Art Exhibition Exchange Centre FRAME. We were preparing a new project together with Frame and my organisation the Association of Finnish Cities. The name of the project was



“Art and Food Culture Business in Finnish-Japanese Relationships”, which would consist of a Finnish Art Exhibition, Food Culture demonstrations and Finnish City visits. We did altogether three preparatory journeys in 1996 and 1997, and three implementation journeys in 1997 and 1998 to Kitakyushu, Osaka and Sapporo. We started from the City of Kitakyushu, which had invited us there and paid our journey to Japan. There was at the same time an International Chamber Music Festival directed by Seppo Kimanen, the leader of Kuhmo Festival in Finland. His wife is the Japanese violinist Yoshiko Arai. The most famous group was Bartok-quartet from Hungary, whose autographs I have on their cd-record. Markku negotiated with the Art Museum and I spoke with the city representatives and with the Rihga Hotel chain. Results were promising and actually led to the implementation in 1997. We arranged also together a small reception with reindeer meat, cheese and smoked salmon and Primalco small vodka bottles, all of which we had brought from Finland. In our reception there were also our Ambassador Mr. Pekka Lintu. From Kitakyushu we proceeded to Osaka and Sapporo, where we had similar negotiations with positive results and the implementations took place in 1998. Only in Nagano we did not manage, because the Winter Olympic Games would have been at the same time. After Nagano I went to Tokyo for two days to visit the “Mecca of Judo”, Kodokan. I had already a blue belt in judo at that time. On my last evening, I went to a German type of restaurant near the main railway station. It was very surprising to see young Japanese women eating German sausages “Wurst” and drinking big pints of German beer. What a nice cultural combination! (*I have visited Japan seven times including*)

## 76. SOUTH KOREA 1996

Asia 13.

*Republic of Korea*

대한민국大韓民國 *Daehanminguk in Korean*

*Population: 51,5 million*

*Independence: 15.8.1948 after Japanese occupation*



South Korean Won

I was travelling with Mr. Markku Valkonen from Frame and we made a week end trip to another new country of South Korea from our Japan project. I had a short meeting in Hotel Intercontinental with the secretary of the President Yong Sung Park of IJF, International Judo Federation about a new ranking system. We had an exotic and first Eastern street kitchen dinner with three young civil servants, who spoke a little English. We ate and drunk much Korean delicious food and spirits with beer which resulted in three quite drunken but happy Koreans. Next morning back to work to Japan.

## 50<sup>th</sup> Journey 1997: *A trip to two island countries in Indian Ocean*

This trip was a double combination. First of all, I participated in a meeting of Les Rencontres in Paris and then the 33<sup>rd</sup> Congress of IULA (International Association of Local Authorities), but paid by a new Unesco project. Secondly it was a country visit trip with two new African island countries in Indian Ocean: Mauritius 14<sup>th</sup> and Seychelles 15<sup>th</sup>.

## 77. MAURITIUS 1997

Africa 12.

*Republic of Mauritius*

*Republik Moris in Mauritius Creole*

*Population: 1,3 million*

*Independence: 12.3.1968 from Great Britain*



Mauritius Rupee

I started my round trip from Paris by attending the meeting of Les Rencontres, which is a European organisation for local elected politicians. After that I flew to Port Louis, Mauritius in order to attend the 33<sup>rd</sup> Congress of IULA (International Union of Local Authorities as lecturer sent and paid by a new Unesco project called “Culture in the Neighbourhood II – An Afro-European interaction”. At the same time, I was also a member representing my employer, The Association of Finnish Cities, which participated in the congress with a distinguished delegation. I had a prepared speech in a panel with the deputy mayor of Helsinki Mr. Pekka Sauri and the Mayor of Johannesburg Mr. Mosage. I lived apart from our delegation in a smaller town by the coast called Flick-en-flack, where I was companied by a young chief of the hotel restaurant from Zimbabwe. We played pool billiard in the



evenings and I lost our international competition by 2-3! On my last evening, I participated in the final reception hosted by the President of Mauritius Mr. Cassam Uteem. Next morning, I continued alone to Seychelles.

## 78. SEYCHELLES 1997



Seychelles Rupee

Africa 13.

Population: 98 300

Republic of Seychelles

Independence: 19.6.1976 From Great Britain

Repiblik Sesel in *Seychelles Creole* and République de Seychelles in *French*

After the Mauritius IULA congress I had a two days' stopover in Seychelles. I had met in the Congress Mr. Patrick Nanty, who was the Chief Officer in the Ministry for Local Affairs and Youth Policy. He came to my hotel and drove me around the island and also the capital of the country Victoria. He took me also to his home to eat. The only sad thing was that his farther had died a day before, but it seemed that life was meant to go on. Seychelles is as beautiful as it's described. I just can imagine how is it to have a honeymoon there.

## 51<sup>st</sup> Journey 1997: Second project trip to Japan with two Chinese

This trip was again a combination of international project work: Japan, and visiting or gathering new countries: Taiwan (Chinese Taipei) and People's Republic of China.

## 79. TAIWAN 1997



Taiwn Dollar

Asia 14.

Population: 23,8 million

Republic of China (Taiwan or Chinese Taipei)

One of the four non-UN countries

Independence: 1.1.1912 and present constitution 25.12.1947 and out of People's Republic of China 1949

中華民國 Zhōnghuá Mínguó in *Mandarin Chinese*

I was travelling again with Markku Valkonen from Frame and Taipei was our first stopover on our way to Kitakyushu. Before arriving we had a stopover at Hong Kong Airport, which still belonged to the United Kingdom. (*China took Hong Kong 1.1.1998*). It was the First of May, the international day of workers and students. We had with us Finnish speciality called "Kalakukko (Fish-Rooster), bear salami and a special students' publication ÄPY-cooler. We ate and read with two bottles of sparkling wine in our hotel room, but we did not participate in the workers' demonstration march. Next day Markku took us to the beautiful Taipei Fine Arts Museum. Taiwan was the 16<sup>th</sup> Island country for me.

## 80. CHINA 1997



Chinese Yuan

Asia 15.

Population: 1,4 billion

People's Republic of China

Independence: 221 BCE The First Unification of Imperial China under Qin Gynasty. 1.1.1912 Republic of China and 1.10.1949 People's Republic of China

中华人民共和国 Zhōnghuá Rénmín Gònghéguó in *Mandarine Chinese*

After the second project trip to Japan we continued on our return journey to China, which was the 15<sup>th</sup> Asian country for me. We visited the Tiananmen square, which has still the sad history from 1989. We managed just to enter to the Forbidden City, but we did not have time to see nearly anything. (*I visited it properly in 2014 with my third lady, see later Tibet*) I took a tourist bus trip to the Great Wall and Ming Dynasty Thumb City. In the bus I got useful information about safe taxis in Johannesburg, because I was going to travel there within a month on my way to a new Unesco project in Namibia. World is small!

## Visited special region and islands:



Hong Kong 2006



Macau 2007



Tibet 2014

## 52<sup>nd</sup> journey 1997:    *The first new Unesco project journey to Namibia with three other new countries*

It was the beginning of a new four years' Unesco project in Africa and this first so called fact finding trip took me to my target country, Namibia but also to South Africa, Lesotho and Mozambique, which was another target country for the Austrians.

### 81. NAMIBIA



Africa 14.

*Republic of Namibia*

*Republiek van Namibië in Afrikaans*

1997

*Population: 2,5 million*

*Independence: 21.3.1990 from South Africa*



Namibian Dollar

I was travelling with Mr. Janos Karacz, a landscape architect from Vienna, Austria. Our duty was to find a co-operation organisation for the City of Vantaa, Finland from Windhoek and a similar one for Austria from Mozambique. It was question of a new Unesco cultural project "Culture in the Neighbourhood II – An Afro-European Interaction 1998-2001", which was originally initiated by me to the Unesco secretary in Paris. Our host in Windhoek was Ms. Hannetjie van Rooen, General Secretary of the Association of Namibian Local Organisation, whom I had met in IULA Congress in Mauritius. We found Ms. Annaleen Eins. the Director of Windhoek Art Museum and its Art school. We visited also the neighbourhood, where our project would be implemented with the assistance of Finnish visual and film artists. The place was Katutura, which means a place, where I do not want to go. It is a poor neighbourhood for black people. We met also the General Secretary of the National Commission for Unesco Ms. Trudi Amulungu and of course the Finnish ambassador Kari Karanko. It was easy to negotiate in Namibia, because Finland was very well known due to Mr. Martti Ahtisaari, who was a key person on behalf of UN in the independence process in 1989-1990. He was in 1997 the President of Finland. During this first trip I got my first small contacts to African animals in a small German safari park, where we saw among others half-wild leopard. I visited Namibia altogether six times. *(I have visited Namibia six times in nearly 20 places including Etosha Park, Otjiworongo, Twyfel Fontaine, Swakopmund, Grootfontaine, Katako-valley and Bushamanland among others.)*

### 82. SOUTH AFRICA



Africa 15.

*Republic of South Africa RSA*

*Republiek van Suid-Afrika in Afrikaans*

1997

*Population: 59,3 million*

*Independence: 31.5.1910 Union of South Africa and Republic  
31.5.1961*



South African Rand

I was travelling with Janos, from Austria and we had two stopovers in Johannesburg and in between we visited Lesotho. South Africa was the 15<sup>th</sup> country for me in Africa. First we went to Gauteng Association of Local Authorities, my sister organisation. One secretary Sonja Bates took us with her boyfriend to a fine fish restaurant full of only white people although there was no longer any official apartheid one could still sense that it continued in practice. After the Lesotho visit we were taken back to reality. Three black workers Robert, Chris and Sam from GALA took us by car to the famous Soweto black neighbourhood. It was the memorial anniversary of Soweteo Uprising 16.6.1976 when police started to shoot in the demonstration and killed 23 people. We visited a club with a rock band from Lesotho and South Africa. After that we went to Orlando stadium, where we met Winnie Mandela, President Nelson Mandela's present wife and I met the Mayor of Johannesburg, whom I had met in the same discussion panel in IULA Congress in Mauritius in April. One of my greatest moments in my life so far!

## 83. LESOTHO



Africa 16.

*Kingdom of Lesotho*

*Muso oa Lesotho in Sesotho*

1997

*Population: 2,1 million*

*Independence: 4.10.1966 from Great Britain*



Lesotho Aloti

I made with Janos a quick visit to Lesotho, the 16<sup>th</sup> royal country for me. We stayed at Hotel Sun on a small hill near the city centre, which was divided into two parts: the rich and the poor, and it was easy to notice. When flying to Maseru, we found that Janos wasn't on the list of passengers, which meant that he came like an alien to the country, and when we left we found that he had not got any stamp to his passport, which meant that he had been officially illegally in the country. Never mind, the customs officers let us leave the country without any extra payments. Flexible behaviour!

## 84. MOZAMBIQUE



Africa 17.

*Republic of Mozambique*

*República de Mocambique in Portuguese*

1997

*Population: 31,3 million*

*Independence: 25.6.1975 from Portugal after Carnation Revolution*



Mozambican Metical

I was still travelling with my Austrian friend Janos and Mozambique was our last country on our Southern African tour. Mozambique was Janos' target country in this Unesco fact finding trip. We lived in a private apartment on the 11<sup>th</sup> floor in the heart of the city. It belonged to an Austrian radio journalist, who was on holiday. We even had our own servant, but we didn't bother her too much. Our programme was very hectic with negotiations in the Ministry and in various associations and organisations. We visited many cultural houses but also poorer barrios or neighbourhoods. We were invited to the visual artist Noel Lang's home and also to the quite famous artist Malangatana's home. This visit was also successful and led to concrete solutions between Austria and Mozambique.

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### 53<sup>rd</sup> Journey 1997:    *Third project journey to Japan via another new Asian country*

This was the third preparation trip in the Japan project and on the way to Japan there was a stopover with one new country: Philippines.

## 85. PHILIPPINES



Asia 16.

*Republic of the Philippines*

*Independence: 12.6.1898 from Spain and 4.4.1946 from USA*

*República ng Pilipinas in Filipino*

1997

*Population: 110,0 million*



Filipino Piso

I was travelling for the third time with Markku Valkonen from Frame and we made a stopover on my request at Manila to get me another new country, which was the 17<sup>th</sup> Island country. We lived in a cosy Hotel Galleria Sweet in the centre, but we did not walk outside too much due to quite heavy and violent political demonstrations. Once the situation started to be quite threatening with huge amount of police forces with tear-gas and water guns. We thought it would be better to return to our hotel and drink beer. At the airport on our way to Japan we got acquainted with the sales manager of famous Shangri-La hotel Ms. Tomoe Adachi. (*I met her next year while returning again from Japan and had another stopover in Manila.*)

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## **54<sup>th</sup> Journey 1997:**     *A combined Unesco meeting journey with new countries in Africa*

This journey was going to Burkina Faso via Mali to a UNESCO meeting, which was the end of the first European project called Culture in the Neighbourhood and the beginning of the second one called Culture in the Neighbourhood – An Afro-European Interaction 1998-2001.

### **86. MALI**



Africa 18.

*Republic of Mali*

*République du Mali in French and Mali ka Fasojamana in Bambara*

**1997**

*Population: 20,3 million*

*Independence: 22.9.1960 from France*



Central African Franc CFA

I was travelling with two ladies: Liisa-Päivikki Ailio from the City of Vantaa, Finland and Aili Aadelaide-Tart, Estonia to the Unesco meeting in Ouagadougou, but we had on my request a stopover in Mali to visit a new country, which was 17<sup>th</sup> Inland country (country with no sea coast). We rented a Range Rover with driver and drove around Bamako and went also outside to see dunes and African villages. We had a nice and wet French type of a lunch in a nice oasis.

### **87. BURKINA FASO**



**1997**

Africa 19.

*Burkina Faso in French and English languages*

*Independence: 5.8.1960 from France by name Upper Volta and 6.8.1984 Burkina Faso*



Central African Franc CFA

I was travelling with two ladies: Liisa-Päivikki from Finland and Aili from Estonia to the Unesco meeting on Culture in the Neighbourhood. It was both the closing meeting of the current project in Europe 1987-1997. and the starting meeting of a new project called Culture in the Neighbourhood II – An Afro-European interaction 1998-2001, which actually was initiated by me in 1996 in Unesco headquarters in Paris. The director of both projects was Ursula Rellstab from Switzerland. I showed in the meeting a video done by my friend Anssi Vuohelainen from the City of Vantaa, Finland called “Creative Children in the Neighbourhood”. Burkina Faso is one the poorest countries in the world but the street unofficial but not grey economy was wide and lively. In the middle of the meeting I got some strange disease, which confined me to my bed for two whole days and nights. I had a bit of a fever and I was so powerless that I could not get up from the bed. Luckily I survived and could return home healthy. (*I have visited Burkina Faso twice including Dori O<sup>o</sup>-Meridiane, Garam Garam, Menegou, Gongoolen gold mine, Ban san mosque, Tugur dam and Kaga.*)

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## **55<sup>th</sup> Journey 1998:**     *A combined project journey with two new Asian countries*

This was my fourth project journey to Japan and on return trip I had two stopovers in India and Nepal before going home to Helsinki.

### **88. INDIA**



Asia 17.

*Republic of India*

*Bharat Ganarajya in Hindi*

**1998**

*Population: 1,38 billion*

*Independence: 15.8.1947 From Great Britain*



Indian Rupee

After the fourth and first implementation visit in Kitakyushu, Japan I had a possibility to have a stopover in New Delhi and India, which was the 17<sup>th</sup> Asian country. I took a private sightseeing with a driver and guide to main attractions for example the Bollywood Cinema Centre, and it ended of course to an Indian shop, where the owner managed in their way to sell to me much more than I had thought. I stayed at the Marco Polo Business hotel, but did not do any trade. (*I visited Kolkata in 2006 on my way from Bangladesh to Bhutan.*)



## 89. NEPAL



Asia 18.

1998

Population: 29,1 million

*Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal (Kingdom of Nepal in 1998)*

सङ्घीय लोकतान्त्रिक गणतन्त्र नेपाल *anghiya Loktāntrik Ganatantra Nepal in Nepalese*

*Independence: 15.9.1768 Kingdom, 1923 out of Britain and 28.5.2008 republic*



Nepalese Rupee

I was now travelling now alone and Nepal was the 19<sup>th</sup> so called Inland country. I lived in Kathmandu in the Hotel Yak and Yeti. I walked around the fascinating and colourful city with rich, poor and ordinary people mixed with tourists like me. I saw on the river a Nepalese cremation, some five dollar gurus and a few old hippies. I made an extra flight adventure with a 20-seat plane by Buddha Air to see as close as possible Mount Everest at an altitude of 6000 meters. The Sky was clear and the vision breath taking. Next day I made a trip with a driver and guide to the countryside and Nagargot uplands to see Annapura (8091 m) and next morning the Himalayan sunrise. I stayed at in Club Himalayan. Wonderful experience!

### 56<sup>th</sup> Journey 1998:     *Second project journey to Namibia with three new countries*

This journey was the opening journey to my new UNESCO-project in Namibia, but also an adventure trip to three Southern African countries: Zimbabwe and Zambia linked to the Victoria Falls and Botswana. This trip included my second nearby accident, this time with a car (the first was in Vietnam 1993), but again I survived!

## 90. ZIMBABWE



1998

Africa 20.

*Republic of Zimbabwe*

Population: 14,9 million

*Independence: 11.11.1965 by name Rhodesia declared one-sided from Britain and 18.4.1980 Zimbabwe*



Zimbabwe Dollar in 1998

100 trillion Dollar note 2009

I was in Windhoek to start our new Unesco-project with one artist, one video director and the local director Ismo Airinen all from the City of Vantaa. After having started the project in Windhoek's Katutura it was an idea that two Ismos will make a 4000 kilometres round trip to Zimbabwe, Zambia and Botswana by car, but we were all four in a car accident in Windhoek and we were quite near even to death, but we survived!

Ismo A. hurt his head so seriously that the doctor did not give him a permission to go for so long car driving. Instead of driving we took a flight to Victoria Falls, where we lived in a row house type of hotel near to the forest. Even if we lived in a town, the animals were very nearby. One elephant family came to eat from a tree nearby and next morning we found a huge elephant dung from our backyard just in front of the door. And suddenly came a boar family with five animals to our backyard. These actually were to the first wild animals I'd seen in Africa. Then we went to see the mighty Zambesi river's falls from the Zimbabwe side and next day we went to the Zambian side. When we went back to the airport we saw our aircraft and we couldn't believe our eyes. It was an old DC6, which was restored and which had belonged first to Josip Broz Tito of former Yugoslavia in the 1970s and then to Zambia's president Kenneth Kaunda in the 1980s.

*I went again to Zimbabwe in 2009 with my friend, video director Anssi Vuohelainen to make a video film about the Aids-orphanage in the neighbourhood of Dzikwa in Harare. The Aids-orphan project had been run by a Finnish couple for several years and is still working. I adopted two godchildren, whose school attending we started to support with my new lady mate, Kaarina. We continued only with the girl Mitcelle, who is now university graduated.*



## 91. ZAMBIA



Africa 21.

*Republic of Zambia*

*Independence: 24.10.1964 from Great Britain's North-Rhodesia*

1998

*Population: 18,4 million*



Zambian Kwacha

The visit to Zambia was the second shortest country visit after Vatican City, only half a day, but it was worth doing. We rented a Delair helicopter with pilot for half an hour and flew over the Zambesi river and Victoria Falls. It was the first time for me to be in a helicopter and the view was fantastic, because we could fly quite close to the falls and see it from different angles. We also flew over the river very low and we could see even some hippos and crocodiles.

## 92. BOTSWANA



Africa 22.

*Republic of Botswana*

*Lefatshe la Botswana in Tswana*

1998

*Population: 2,4 million*

*Independence: 30.9.1966 from Britain*



Botswanan Pula

Botswana was the third new country during this round trip. We went in a small group by an open lorry to Chobe River, where we took an open and quite small boat with outboard motor. We saw quite a lot crocodiles and hippos. We drove to a small bay and went quite close to a hippo family. The driver stopped the engine and suddenly the farther hippo opened its huge mouth and gave an angry roar and started to swim very fast against our boat. The driver tried to start the engine, but it took time. Finally, he managed to start and it happened at the last moment, because the hippo farther was only about five meters from our boat. We managed to escape safely, but we were quite angry with the driver, who apologized and asked not to tell the owner. At least the Ismos did not do that. On our way back we stopped in the border town Kasane and had a Radical beer in an Art hut.

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**57<sup>th</sup> Journey 1998:** *Sixth and the last project journey to Japan with two new Asian countries.*

My Japan project had come to its end in Sapporo and after that I returned home via two new countries: Brunei and Pakistan with a luxury stopover in Manila.

## 93. BRUNEI



Asia 19.

*Nation of Brunei Darussalam, the Adobe of Peace*

*Negara Brunei Darussalam in Malay , نڬارا بروني دارالسلام in Mandarin Chinese and 文莱达鲁萨兰国 in Jawi*

*Independence: 1.1.1984 from Britain*

1998

*Population: 438 000*



Brunei Dollar (Ringgit)

Brunei was the 18<sup>th</sup> Asian country for me and the first totally alcoholically absolute country. I took a car with driver and we drove around the city and its harbours. I really would have done a trip to the jungle of this famous Borneo island, which is divided by Brunei, Malaysia and Indonesia, but I did not have time. Next day I looked at television and was happy when the Finnish driver Mika Häkkinen won the Monaco F1 Grand Prix.

## 94. PAKISTAN



Asia 20.

*Islamic Republic of Pakistan*

*پاکستان جمہوریہ اسلامی Islāmī Jumhūriyah Pākistān in Urdu*

1998

*Population: 221,0 million*

*Independence: 14.8.1948 from Britain together with India*



Pakistani Rupee

Pakistan was the second new country on my last Japan-project trip. At Karachi airport a customs officer came to me and asked very strictly: Do you have any alcohol with you? I said no and after x-ray he came to me and asked gladly: Do you want some alcohol? I bought one half a bottle of Scotch whisky. No problem! When I drove in the taxi looking at the city, the driver told me about the current nuclear tests, which had aroused anxiety and irritability in the world. I had not read for few days any newspaper or seen tv-news. I also made a nice and relaxing boat trip with a local captain and his ten years' old son to the harbour area. When I went back to the airport the police found that I did not have any incoming stamp in my passport, which meant that I'd been illegally in the country. The police were quite angry and it looked not so good, but finally a nice higher female officer came to us and solved gently the whole case and did not accept my fiscal offer!

## **58<sup>th</sup> Journey 1998:**     *A combined judo and meeting journey with two new European countries*

This was the last journey in 1998 and the main target was the Judo Junior Championships in Bucharest, Romania and my son Ilkka was in the Finnish team. On return I flew both to Moldova and Bosnia and Herzegovina in order to get two new European countries. After this my own journey I continued to Strasbourg, France to a Unesco meeting. I was actually half away to my target 98 countries of 196. (*The real half a way was two countries later, which I didn't know at that time.*)

### **95. MOLDOVA**



**1998**

Europe 43.

Republic of Moldova

Republica Moldova in *Moldavian/Romanian*

*Population: 4,0 million*

*Independence: 27.8.1991 after the collapse of Soviet Union*



Moldavian Lei

Moldova was the 7<sup>th</sup> and last European new former Soviet republic. The language was the same as in Bucharest, where I was with the Finnish judo team participating in the Junior Championships. My son Ilkka fought under 73 kilos, but did not have success, but experience. I stayed at Chisinau one night in a huge Russian style Hotel National and I actually did not see much. My room telephone rang at two o'clock am and someone said that my massage, which I had ordered, was now ready. I did not take it, because had not ordered it. In the morning I was taken very early to the airport, where I had to wait in a pretty chilly hall for three hours for my flight to Budapest. When I arrived to Vienna, I missed my next Sarajevo flight due to the airport officers arrogant and stupid behaviour. I had to take another route to Zagreb, where I had to wait four hours before my flight to Sarajevo. The journey from Chisinau to Sarajevo took 16 hours and I was in Central Europe! (*Later in 2013 on my way to Transnistria I stayed again in Chisinau and saw quite a lot more, but everything had changed.*)

**Special “frozen” and non-sovereign region or country:**



Transnistria 2013

### **96. BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA**



**1998**

Europe 44 (+4 former) 100% second time

*Population: 3,3 million*

Bosnian convertible Mark

*Independence: 5.4.1992 after Yugoslavian collapse*

*Bosna i Hercegovina in *Bosnian and Croatian* and Босна и Херцеговина in *Serbian**



Bosnia and Herzegovina was for the second time the last European country for me, the former was Albania in 1988. Sarajevo was a sad looking city full of destroyed buildings and buildings full of bullet and grenade holes reminding of the cruel war 1992-1995 against the Serbians. I remembered Sarajevo through television in 1984, when it hosted the Winter Olympic Games. I stayed at a cosy and friendly hotel right in the old town. The

atmosphere was quite optimistic. Next day I went to Sarajevo National Opera, where they performed in quite poor circumstances brilliantly some parts of Bizet's Carmen and Ravel's Bolero. Very encouraging experience and modern performance. (*I visited Sarajevo again in January 2016 and the city was beautiful. I also went to Jahorina mountains in the Republic of Sprska, which was the venue of 1984 Winter Olympics alpine skiing.*)

### Special area:



Republic of Sprska 2016

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### **59<sup>th</sup> Journey 1999:**     *The third project trip to Namibia with two new African countries*

This trip was a typical combination for me like I did in my Asian projects and the same in Africa: Swaziland (later in 2108 renamed Eswatini) and Malawi.

#### **97. ESWATINI (SWAZILAND)**



**1999**

Africa 23.

*Kingdom of Eswatini*

*Umbuso weSwatini in **Swazi***



Swazi Lilangeni

*Population: 1,2 million*

*Independence: 6.9.1968 from Britain*

I was travelling with my friend Anssi Vuohelainen and Sakari Manninen to Windhoek to make a video film linked to my Unesco project. There was actually not so much to see or do except eat and drink beer, but close to local people. Last evening in a local pub we had a bit of a disagreements with three local man and it started to become dangerous, but diplomatic behaviour solved the situation and everybody calmed down.

#### **98. MALAWI**



**1998**

Africa 24.

*Republic of Malawi*

*Dziko la Malawî in **Chicheva***



Malawian Kwacha

*Population: 19,2 million*

*Independence: 6.6.1964 from Britain*

After project work in Windhoek and holiday visits to the Tryfel Fontaine petrified area and outdoor sleeping place and the Swakopmund "German city" by the Atlantic Ocean and the rounding dynes by 4x4 Land Rover with our driver and guide Stephan, I continued our round trip with Anssi and Sakari to my second new country, Malawi. We went first to Blantyre, from where we took a guided car and boat trip to Shire River to see animals, but we saw only hippos. From Blantyre we proceeded by Air Malawi to Lilongwe, the capital of Malawi and stayed there in a nice cosy bungalow outside the centre. During this visit we did not see any other white people, whom we actually did not even want to see!

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### **60<sup>th</sup> Journey 2002:**     *A project trip to Cameroon via a new country Nigeria*

This trip was my last trip of the ending millennium for the new countries and the result was over 103 (including the four former countries), not so bad!

## 99. NIGERIA



1999



Nigerian Nair

Africa 25.

Population: 206,1 million

Federal Republic of Nigeria

Independence: 1.10.1960 from Britain

Jamhuriyar Taraiyar Nijeriyain *Hausa*, *Ọ̀hàńjíkọ̀ Ọ̀hàńéẸ̀ Nàìjíríyà* in *Igbo* and *Orílẹ̀-èdè Olómìnira* in *Yoruba*

I was travelling with my friend and project expert Anssi to Yaoundé, Cameroon to the Culture in The Neighbourhood -project's meeting, but we made a stopover in Nigeria due to my request for another new country, I had been already in Cameroon in 1985. Lagos was at that time the capital, *which was later changed to Abuja*, and it was quite chaotic. I had informed our embassy in advance that we would attend a Unesco meeting and that's how the ambassador Eero Saarikoski invited us to Finnish sauna and dinner. We had brought from Finland sauna sausages and mustard, which we ate after sauna with the secretary Juha and technician Jarkko. Later on we had a nice warm dinner with the ambassador, who told us openly interesting thing about the diplomatic world. Next morning the driver from the embassy took us to the Eleko beach, which was nice, but a bit dirty and totally empty. On our way back we stopped to take some photos of a Mosque construction site and suddenly three men were running to us, one with a pistol in his hand. He hit first the driver and pointed with the gun at me and asked me to give my camera. Anssi had a video camera in his hand, but managed to keep it hidden. It was quite a threatening situation and I gave my camera, but still the gunman was very furious. Finally, his fellow mate managed to calm him down and they let us go. The driver hurt his nose, which was bleeding. We told in the embassy what had happened and the secretary Juha jumped to the car and came back two hours later with my camera. It had been a serious attack against a diplomatic car and Juha was so tough a guy to get those people frightened.

### 61st Journey 2000: A combined project journey to Namibia with three new African countries.

The first journey of the new decade, century and millennium was my fourth Unesco-project journey to Namibia and this time I went there via Ethiopia, Djibouti and Kenya, because the flight ticket price was nearly the same as flying via Johannesburg.

## 100. ETHIOPIA



2000



Ethiopian Birr

Africa 26.

Population: 115,0 million

Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Independence: 1896 as the second independent African country

*የኢትዮጵያ ፌዴራላዊ ዴሞክራሲያዊ ሪፐብሊክ*, *ye'Ītiyop̣̣ya Fēdēralawī Dēmokirasīyawī Rīpebilīk* in *Amharic*

So Ethiopia started the new Millennium. I booked an English speaking driver, who drove around the city and took me to the National Museum, where I went to see the skeleton of Lucy, who was found in 1974 and who is the oldest human being ever found. Lucy is three million years old and she is only 142 cm tall. I saw also the Emperor Haile Selassie's throne. After the museum we went to the best café and coffee shop, where you could taste coffees from all over the world. Actually coffee was invented originally in Ethiopia. I was shocked to see that there was no coffee from Finland even if we are the top coffee drinkers of the world per capita. I saw Swedish coffee! I told my concern to the ladies and they promised to correct this terrible failure. *I was seven years later in Addis on my way to Somaliland and with an Ethiopian man called Negussicin, who lived in Vantaa, Finland. We went to the same coffee shop and now I found Finnish coffee for sale.* In the afternoon I went early enough to the airport and found that my flight ticket to Djibouti was cancelled, because I had not reconfirmed it, which was impossible to do. I chained myself to the desk with my belt and fought three hours and got the ticket and flew safely to Djibouti.



## 101. DJIBOUTI



Africa 27.

*Republic of Djibouti*

*Independence: 27.7.1977 from France*

*République de Djibouti in French, جيبوتي جمهورية Jumhuriyat Jibuti in Arabic, Gabuutih Ummuuno in Afar and Jamhuuriyadda Jabuuti in Somali*

2000

*Population: 988 000*



Djiboutian Franc

I was still on my way to Windhoek, Namibia but I wanted another new country. In Djibouti, which is the name of the capital and country, I stayed in Hotel Sheraton and went just walking on some street nearby and visited the biggest shopping centre without buying anything. I am perhaps a too unproductive tourist. In hotel I spent a lazy and relaxing weekend by the nice pool drinking and eating. On my way to Nairobi I had again some ticket problems at Addis airport, but I have become a professional traveller to solve these kind of problems.

## 102. KENYA



Africa 28.

*Republic of Kenya*

*Jamhuri ya Kenya in Swahili*

2000

*Population: 53,8 million*

*Independence: 12.12.1963 from Britain*



Kenyan Shilling

Kenya was my last new country on my way to Namibia and unfortunately my visit was absolutely too short. I hoped that one day I could return to this important African country again, *but I haven't done it so far*. I came in the evening and brought such heavy rain with me that the owner of my hotel gave to the rain my name Ismo and offered me free dinner with several beers. They had been waiting for the rain many weeks. Next morning it was still raining and I took a taxi and did two hours' sight seeing in Nairobi centre, but the driver refused to drive to the slum area.

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## 62<sup>nd</sup> Journey 2001: *My first and this time personal journey to South America*

I have started a new part-time pension period in my work, which meant more free time. I got permission from my family to celebrate this with a round trip to South America, which was a new and the sixth continent with five new countries: Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, Argentina and Chile. I had so much frequent flyer bonus on my SAS card, that I had a free flight by Varig from Helsinki to Rio de Janeiro and back from Sao Paulo. I manage to find a very cheap Mercosur-round ticket in South Africa and it cost me on 500 US dollars with six flights. I also used the assistance of Ecotours, whose director had been married with a lady from Ecuador.

## 103. BRAZIL



South America 1 / Americas 8.

*Federal Republic of Brazil*

*República Federativa do Brazil in Portuguese*

2001

*Population: 212,5 million*

*Independence: 7.9.1822 from Portugal*



Brazilian Real

So Brazil was my first new South American country and Rio de Janeiro my first City. Rio is to my mind one of the most beautiful and impressive big cities of the world after New York and Sydney. I stayed in the Hotel Castro Malves just three hundred metres from the famous Copacabana beach. Next day I participated in a sight seeing tour, which was excellent with a cabin lift drive to the top of Sugar Loaf Mountain (Pão de Açúcar). The view from there was incredible and breath taking. Next day I participated in a whole day bus and boat trip to the Southern Island of Rio (Itacucura and Ihla de Juguanum). In our group there was a Norwegian oil researcher and we had quite fun together even so that he managed to make me burst out laughing. Suddenly I heard a lady saying loudly: Mister, you can laugh! She was a Brazilian electricity engineer from the north with a small company. I might have looked serious, which I'm usually not, but now everything looked promising. Next day Ruth Holz

helped me to find an Asterix album in Brazilian Portuguese and we managed. She also offered me a nice lunch and invited me to an outdoor dinner at Copacabana, which I certainly accepted. Our company of five persons was quite special: Ruth and me, an Italian textile machinery salesman Massimiliano and an American Jew Dennis with his Brazilian boyfriend. We had an unforgettable dinner on the beach. After that the others went to a night club, but I went to my hotel, because I had a very early flight to Sao Paolo. I visited Brazil again a few days later, when I arrived by a really comfortable night bus with a bed to Iguazu Falls. I had to walk over a bridge over the Parana river from Paraguay to Brazil. The I joined to an international group to see the falls. (*Now I had visited all the three big falls: Niagara in 1993, Victoria Falls in 1998 and now Iguazu Falls in 2001*). My return trip by bus was during a huge South American lightning and thunder storm show. I had never seen such a wonderful natural spectacle.

## 104. PARAGUAY



2001

South America 2 / Americas 9.

*Republic of Paraguay*

*Republica del Paraguay in Spanish and Tetã Paraguái in Guaraní*

*Population: 7,1 million*

*Independency: 14.5.1811 from Spain*



Paraguayan Guaraní

Paraguay was the second new South American country on my tour. I had booked a hotel and a guide in advance by Ecotours. My guide Nelson was an elderly gentleman, who spoke excellent English. We walked the streets of Asuncion and there were some occasional very heavy rain showers, which meant a lot of water on the street. One very special place was the Embassy of the Order of Malta (Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of St. John of Jerusalem of Rhodes and of Malta, it has an observer status in UN.) Nelson took me to eat in an ordinary people's restaurant, where the food and beer was cheap and very tasty and substantial. At midnight I took the sleeping bus to Iguazu falls and came next day back by bus and continued my trip by flying to Montevideo.

## 105. URUGUAY



2001

South America 3 / Americas 10.

*Eastern Republic of Uruguay*

*Republica Oriental del Uruguay in Spanish*

*Population: 3,5 million*

*Independence: 25.8.1825 from Brazil*



Uruguayan Peso

Uruguay was the third country on my tour. Montevideo, the capital means "I see the mountain", which actually is only 150 metres high hill. But when I went there by travel agency Jetman's car, there was a beautiful view over the city as far as Rio del Plata, which is the broadest river in the world, at its broadest 220 kilometres. I lived in a cosy Hotel Embajador and ate in the restaurant nearby a substantial Pasifico buffet with numerous se food and fish. I was searching for an Asterix album in Argentinean Spanish and first it looked promising, but unfortunately all I found were in Castilian, the Spanish Spanish. But searching means a lot of walking in a new city with nice pubs and cafes with interesting people. It was difficult to find English speaking, but there were enough for me.

## 106. ARGENTINE



2001

South America 4 / Americas 11.

*Argentine Republic*

*República Argelia in Spanish*

*Population: 45,2 million*

*Independency: 19.7.1816 from Spain*



Argentinean Peso

Now it was the fourth new South American country for me and of course its famous capital Buenos Aires. First day continued my searching for Asterix albums, which started already from Montevideo. I visited at least ten antiquarian book or comic shops but no result. Finally, in the last shop they told that on Saturday there will be huge market place for old books outside the city. I went there by metro on Saturday morning and after one hour I managed to find a nice discovery with an Argentinian Spanish translation and some other rare publisher's book. After having returned I took a city tour guided in English. We went to see the old tango neighbourhood, but was quite humble and very commercial. I was very disappointed and our guide saw it. He asked me to go in the

evening to the best tango restaurant to see and hear good old tango. I went in the evening to Tango Bar Sur, which was something. One professional lady dancer came to ask me to dance and I went and took her into my arms and started to dance. She looked at me surprised and said: Mister, you can tango! Of course I can, I'm coming from another tango country, Finland. I understood her when I looked around and saw some American guys standing on the floor and doing nearly nothing with their dancers. Finally, on Sunday I made a half a day boat trip to El Tigre Delta and that was really nice to see beautiful houses close to nature. *I came to Buenos Aires seven years later with my new lady friend Kaarina on our way to Tierra del Fuego and Antarctica. Tango was much better then and on our way back had a nice New Year's Eve in our Hotel Panamericano.*



## 107. CHILE

South America 5 / Americas 12.

*Republic of Chile*

*Répública de Chile in Spanish*

**2001**

*Population: 19,1 million*

*Independence: 18.9.1810 from Spain*



Chilean Peso

Chile was the fifth and last new country on my tour. My host was Arturo Navarro, the director of Estacio Mapucho cultural centre, which is a former railway station. I had met him in 2000 in Barcelona in an Ibero-American cultural conference. At my very personal request Arturo took me to Estacio de Chile, which was a huge prison camp in 1973 when General Augusto Pinochet made a bloody and cruel coup d'état by killing president Salvadore Allende and arresting thousands of his supporters and gathering them to the stadium. Among them was a famous singer Victor Jara, whom I had met in Helsinki 1969 during an International Vietnam Meeting. I remember him as a good singer and human personality. The soldiers killed him cruelly in the stadium. I also visited the statue of Allende in front of his palace, where he was shot. After that we came to reality and I visited the Ministry of Education and Culture and the very interesting Pablo Neruda Museum. The day ended with a Chilean-French theatre-circus performance in a big tent. It was a spectacle of the revolutionary history of South America. One of highlights was when Che Guevara died on trapeze while there came the last speech by Salvadore Allende. Quite an impressive and symbolic end to my first South American round trip, which ended next day by flying again to the other side of the continent, Sao Paulo and further by "smile ticket" Varig flights via London and Copenhagen to the cold but warm homeland.

### **63<sup>rd</sup> Journey 2001:**    *A new development project journey to Central America*

This was the second round trip to the Americas and this time to North and Central America. It was my third development project financed by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Finland. I was on my second part-time pension break of six weeks of which I used four weeks to this trip. My duty was to make the first fact finding trip to four Central American countries: Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica, in order to search possibilities to start a new development project in each of the countries. The project idea concerned new art education activities for ordinary children living in poor neighbourhoods or barrios. I travelled with Ms. Anneli Ollikainen, who was a theatre director and spoke fluent Spanish. My personal additional countries on the round trip were Belize in the beginning and Panama at the end.



## 108. BELIZE

North America 4 / Americas 13.

*Belize*

**2001**

*Population: 398 000*

*Independency: 21.9.1981 from Britain (Former British Honduras)*



Belizean Dollar

Before starting my new and third development project in Central America, I stayed for the first time one night on Miami Beach in the Suez Ocean Front Resort just hanging around in nearby bar like a "barfly" eating and drinking beer. Next day I flew to my first new country Belize. In the Taca flight I sat with a Belizean lady Joan, who was going to a big family party. Joan was working in Northern-Ireland and her two sisters in the plane were from Scotland and England, and the fourth sister had to stay in Wales. What a real collection of Great Britain and Commonwealth! I lived in a colonial type of Hotel Cotton House. Later on when I was walking on the peaceful

Streets I heard someone shouting “Ismo!” and I saw Joan and her sisters sitting on their balcony. They invited me to visit and I ran first to the nearest shop and bought two bottles of red wine and then we spent a cheerful afternoon on that balcony in the warm weather. Next day in the morning I took a 100 US dollar taxi for a sightseeing trip before going to the airport. First we went to the local zoo, where I saw two very rare animals: Spider Monkey and Yellow Frog. After that we drove to the countryside on a very bad road to the ancient ruins of Maya Indians Altun Ha, which was a really interesting place. And then he drove me to the airport and my project part of this round trip could start.

## 109. GUATEMALA



2001

North America 5 / Americas 14.

*Republic of Guatemala*

*República Guatemala in Spanish*



Guatemalan Quetzal

*Population: 17,9 million*

*Independence: 15.9.1821 from Spain*

Guatemala was the first of the four Central American countries on my fact finding mission financed by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. My boss in the ministry was ambassador Inger Hirvelä, whom I knew already from the 1970s and who accepted my initiative for this new project. I met my translator and colleague Anneli in our hotel. She was married to a Nicaraguan development official. Our target city was the beautiful Antigua located quite near and it was a Unesco cultural heritage city. Our contact person was the director of a private cultural centre Proyetto Cultural el Sition, Mr. Enrico Matheu, whom I had met in 2000 in Barcelona in an Ibero-American conference, where I was asked just before leaving it, what can I do to help Central or South Americans. I replied quickly: I'll organize a project for children in Central American barrios. Now it was time to make this promise true! We met several artists, local authorities and visited the Minister for Culture Ms. Otilia Lux de Coti, who belongs to the indigenous Mayas. Our possible target barrios will be the towns of Santa Lucia Milpas Altas, Supango and Santa Maria de Jesús. This was the first fact finding visit.

## 110. HONDURAS



2001

North America 6 / Americas 15.

*Republic of Honduras*

*República de Honduras in Spanish*



Honduras Lempira

*Population: 9,9 million*

*Independence: 5.11.1838 from Spain*

Honduras was the second country on my new project. The first nice surprise was, that I got a huge presidential suite with three rooms, kitchen and balcony in our hotel for the same price. We got a new member to our team, Ms. Sylvie Duran from Costa Rica, where she was the director of a Central American cooperation organisation InCorpore. We had several meetings with local authorities, representatives of artist, and we met also the Minister for Cultural Affairs Mr. German Alan Padget, who promised state support to the project. We chose the town of Santa Rosa de Copan as our target town. It is located in the western part of Honduras and has 42 000 inhabitants. In 2002 we visited in the town and chose three different barrios: Colonia Osario (1300 inh.), Santa Rosa & Loma Linda (2500 inh.) and San Martin. At the same time, we visited the famous Maya ruins of Copan Ruinas, where I saw the first ancient ruins of a barrio.

## 111. NICARAGUA



2001

North America 7 / Americas 16.

*Republic of Nicaragua*

*República de Nicaragua in Spanish*



Nicaraguan Cordoba

*Population: 6,0 million*

*Independence: 15.9.1821 from Spain and Mexico*

Nicaragua was the third project country on my round trip. Before working Anneli's husband, who worked in Managua development project, drove us to the rough countryside and mountains. In Managua we met several artists and organisations and visited the Minister for Cultural Affairs Mr. Clement Guido, who couldn't promise at that time any financial support, because there would be elections in the near future. Our target town was Granada about 50 kilometres from Managua. It is a colonial type of beautiful town. Our cooperative organisation



was Casa de Los Tres Mundos (The House of Three Worlds) and its German origin director Dieter Stadler. They had very nice art education and performing groups, whose performances we could see. *We chose three barrios in our project in 2002, when we visited again: Bartolome 1 & 2 near to the centre and Malacatoya's brand new settlement Los Angeles 20m kilometres outside.*

## 112. COSTA RICA



North America 8 / Americas 17.

*Republic of Costa Rica*

*República de Costa Rica in Spanish*

2001

*Population: 5,1 million*

*Independence: 15.9.1821 from Spain and Mexico*



Costa Rican Colon

Costa Rica was our fourth and last project country. My contact person in San Jose was the dancer Alejandro, whom I had met in 2000 in Barcelona in the Ibero-American conference. With him and Sylvie Duran we had quite a lot contact with various artists and organisations. We met also the Deputy Minister for Culture Ms. Patricia Carreras. We chose two barrios in our project: Sagrada Familia and Cuba, where there was a very active socio-cultural organisation Vecinos and its eager director Ms. Anna Leon. These barrios were quite poor and there were a lot of Nicaraguan migrant workers, and you could find some tension in the air between the locals and strangers. After the meetings I made alone a one-day visit to the rain forest area nearby, which felt real with forest walking and magnificent aerial rope way over the high trees. *We visited Costa Rica also in 2002, when we made a six weeks long round trip again in Central America.*

## 113. PANAMA



North America 9 / 18.

*Republic of Panama*

*República de Panama in Spanish*

2001

*Population: 4,3 million*

*Independence: 3.11.1903 from Colombia*



US Dollar (Balboa)

Panama was the sixth and last new country on my Central American tour. I visited it alone. Alejandro had made for me an appointment with two endogenous Indians, who showed me some ancient and historical places and told about their not so good history. On Saturday I made of course a day trip to Panama Canal, where I saw a video performance about its history. The canal separates North America from South America and connects the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. Panama is one of the three countries, which have territories in two continents (after Russia and Turkey). On Sunday I made a whole day trip to El Valle de Anton, which is a valley near the forest and jungle area.

## 64<sup>th</sup> Journey 2002:     *The second project trip to Central America with two new Caribbean countries*

The year 2002 was crucial for me: my wife Merja wanted to divorce after 25 years' marriage and I was offered retirement five years earlier than legally with good conditions in 2003. I had to accept both offers. I was still working on a part-time pension and I used my first six weeks' free time for my second development project in the four Central American countries, and I added to my trip the last Central American one, El Salvador and two Caribbean ones: The Bahamas and Cuba. This year brought one new country to the world: East Timor

## 114. THE BAHAMAS



Caribbean 5 / Americas 19.

*Commonwealth of the Bahamas*

2002

*Population: 393 000*

*Independency: 3.10.1973 from Britain*



Bahamian Dollar

I was on my way for the second time to four Central American countries to continue the preparations of our development project, but I started my round trip from the Caribbean island of the Bahamas on my own. I stayed in Nassau in the Hotel Towne, which was nice and cosy and near to many big luxury hotels. I participated in the

South Ocean Bay snorkelling boat trip with too many Americans. I rent the mask and swimming flippers. This was the second time for me to go snorkelling, the first was in Haiti in 1982. Before we went to the water the crew threw some vegetables into the water to entice the sharks to come closer. When the American saw the over two metres long sharks they refused to go into the water even though the crew said that they are vegetarian shark. I went and enjoyed some corals and colourful little fish having all the time one or two sharks just beside me. In the evening I did not eat shark meat but delicious mussels with excellent Californian white wine. On my last day I made a long walk to a Paradise Island, because at least once in a life time you have to see that kind of a place, which did not look so special. I saw also the regional headquarters of the OAS, Organisation of American States.

## 115. EL SALVADOR

2002



El Salvador Colon (Old money) US Dollar in 2002

*North America 10 / 10 / Americas 20.*

*Republic of El Salvador*

*República de El Salvador in Spanish*

*Population: 6,5 million*

*Independence: 15.9.1821 from Spain*

After the Bahamas I had been with Anneli Ollikainen first in Granada, Nicaragua to deepen our development project and finalize the proposal for a contract, which went perfectly. Then we proceeded to San Jose, Costa Rica to negotiate with Anna León of Vecinos and everything went again fine. El Salvador was the last North American country for me (the 10<sup>th</sup>). We stayed at the Hotel Comfort Aeropuerto and took a taxi to the down town of El Salvador and ate and drunk a delicious supper in the picturesque Zona Rosa area, which was not the area of Red Lights. After this weekend relaxation we proceeded back to work in Honduras.

## 116. CUBA

*Caribbean 6 / Americas 21.*

*Republic of Cuba*

*Republic of Cuba in Spanish*

2002



Cuban Peso

*Population: 11,3 million*

*Independence: 20.5.1902 from Spain and USA*

Cuba was my last country on my round trip in Central America and the Caribbean. After El Salvador we worked successfully first in Santa Rosa de Copan and then in Antigua, Guatemala. The whole fact finding and preparatory work for the development project had been done successfully and we were ready to present our report to the Ministry in Finland. Anneli went back to Nicaragua to her husband and I proceeded alone to Havana. Enrico in Antigua arranged me a private apartment in the centre of Havana owned by Jose Enrique. I offered to him and his girlfriend Maribel a substantial supper and drinks. They did not speak English and I only understood a bit of Spanish, but we had a lively discussion and a lot of fun during the whole evening. I took a city tour, which was absolutely nice, because the old Havana is fascinating with the colonial buildings and old American cars from the 1950s and even from the 1930s. The tour ended at a mojito bar, where I in fact had my first several mojitos. On my last day I went on a countryside tour, where I saw huge rock paintings of Che Guevara and nice scenery. In Cuba I could have spent longer, but it was time to go back to my normal work and start the last year in it!

## 65<sup>th</sup> Journey 2002: *Judo tournament in Astana, the new capital of Kazakhstan*

This was my first visit to the former Soviet Republic on the Asian side to a new country, Kazakhstan.

## 117. KAZAKHSTAN

*Asia 20.*

*Republic of Kazakhstan*

*Қазақстан Республикасы Qazaqstan Respublikası in Kazakh and Республика Казахстан Respublika Kazakhstan in Russian*

2002



Kazakhstanian Teng

*Population: 18,8 million*

*Independence: 16.12.1991 after USSR collapse*

I was travelling with three judokas from Finland in order to participate in an international Judo Tournament in Astana. One of the judokas was my son Ilkka. Before flying to Astana we stayed on a whole day in Moscow and hosted my Sergei Tabakov, who was the head coach of the Russian judo team and director of the Judo Department of Moscow Sports Academy. The boys could have training, eating and resting before our night life. The tournament was in the new and quickly built capital Astana in the middle of nowhere in a desert area. Kazakhstan was the eighth and the first new Asian country from the collapsed Soviet Union. Jouni Ranta from my Judo Club won the under 81 kg category and my son Ilkka got the bronze medal. I was personally invited to the tournament, because I was for the second year the Director of the Judo Finnish Open Tournament in the City of Vantaa. I was treated like a guest of honour. After the competition we made a sightseeing tour in this brand new and quite sterile looking, but prosperous city. In the evening there was a big official reception with a huge buffet dinner. The boys stayed for a three days' training camp, but I had to return home to my work.

## **66<sup>th</sup> Journey 2002:**     *Second South American round trip to seven new countries*

I was now officially divorced and also moved to the city of Lahti, 100 km from Helsinki and was still working the last few months before long holidays and retirement. This round trip was the second and last to South America, because after this I had visited all the 12 countries. Now I visited in Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Venezuela, Suriname and Guyana.

### **118. BOLIVIA**



**South America 6 / Americas 22.**

**Plurinational State of Bolivia**

**Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia in *Spanish*, Bulivya Mamallaqta in *Quetsua* and Wuliwya Suyu in *Aimara***

**2002**

**Population: 11,7 million**

**Independence: 6.8.1815 from Spain**



**Bolivian Boliviano**

I was flying again with SAS frequent flyer's "Smile ticket" free of charge with Varig return flights to South America. Bolivia was my first stopover. La Paz airport is the highest normal airport in the world at an altitude of 4000 metres. I went by bus down to La Paz, which is the highest capital. I met a German tourist Andreas in the bus and we decided to go around the city together. It was the 85<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Finland's independency and we celebrated with beers and nice Bolivian life. Unfortunately, we made everything too quickly and we forgot how high we were. As a result of this hectic first day I woke up at 2 a.m. and nearly couldn't breathe at all. It took two hours to breath normally and meanwhile I really thought that this is the end of my life. This time I was happy to be wrong. Next day I did not rush or drunk beer but ate coca leaves and drank coca tea. I joined a group bus to Chacaltaya mountain, where there was the highest alpine station of the world (5200 metres). From there we still climbed up to 5421 metres, which was and will be the highest place I've ever been. The last 200 metres took nearly two hours to walk. On the top I made a speech to my fellow tourists and congratulated ourselves. The air was really very thin. After having returned to La Paz I took another group bus to the lower area of La Paz called Valle del Luna, Moon Valley, which was full of old ruins and chalk mines. On Sunday I continued my round trip first by bus to Lake Titicaca, one of the highest alpine lakes (3800 metres). Then I took a ship, which went across the lake with a stopover in Isla del Sol and ending at the port of Copacabana, from where I took a bus to Pomata in Peru. Lake Titicaca was a wonderful experience with marvellous views to the Andean mountains surrounding the lake.

### **119. PERU**



**South America 7 / Americas 23.**

**Republic of Peru**

**República del Peru in *Spanish*, Piruw Republika in *Quechua* and Piruw Suyu in *Aymara***

**2002**

**Population: 33,0 million**

**Independence: 28.7.1821 from Spain**



**Peru Nuevo Sol**

My second new country on this round trip was Peru. I stayed overnight in Puno and next day by an international bus through the countryside via Bukara, Felix Viaje (4335 m), Raqchi Inka ruins and Andahuaylillas Inka village to Cusco, the ancient capital of the Inca empire. There I stayed in Hotel Marini owned by a Dutch couple. Next day I took a train towards Macchu Picchu. First the carriage was quite empty but in the next station there came 50 Americans from Texas. For the next two hours they were jumping, running and shouting so terribly that I was

totally exhausted when we arrived at Aguas Calientes, from where I took a bus up to Macchu Picchu. I joined a group of 15 persons and I was still shivering from the train trip and its American cacophony. The Inca female guide saw how down I was and took my arms and started to save me. All the time she held my hand and while speaking looked at me. After two hours walking I became a human again and nearly fell in love with the endogenous Inca lady. Macchu Picchu is as great and magnificent as it has been described in tourist books and even better. I've never seen similar views in my life. After this I returned back to Cusco by train but now without any American or other troubles. From Cusco I flew with Trans Peru flight to Lima, the capital of Peru, where I stayed one night I met in my hotel Vicky from New Zealand, who was on her way to Galapagos island to dive. We walked around Lima and had quite fun together. Next day I flew together to Quito in Ecuador.

## 120. ECUADOR



2002



US Dollar

South America 8 / Americas 24.

Population: 17,6 million

Republic of Ecuador Independence: 24.5.1822 from Spain and 14.5.1830 from Great-Colombia

República del Ecuador in Spanish

Ecuador was the third new country on this round trip. I came there with Vicky from New Zealand and she continued to the Galapagos Island to teach scuba diving, which I have never tried. Before she left we made sightseeing with a car with my host Nancy, who was the ex-wife of Vesa, the director of the Finnish travel agency Ecotours. The old town is great and well restored and it belongs to Unesco cultural heritage sites. Vicky went on and I had the most substantial dinner in a local restaurant in the old town with Nancy and some other people. The evening ended with a Christmas spiced wine called Glögi and a Finnish sauna at the Equator! Next day Nancy took me to the statue of Mitad del Mundo, Middle of the world, which is the official land mark in Ecuador. We continued to Pululahua's craters and the day ended with a fine and human lunch with Nancy with whom I could have fallen in love, but I did not! In the afternoon I flew to Bogota and she stayed in Quito. That's life!

## 121. COLOMBIA



2002



Colombian Peso

South America 9 / Americas 25.

Population: 50,9 million

Republic of Colombia

Independence: 20.7.1810 from Spain

República de Colombia in Spanish

Colombia was the fourth new country on my second South American tour. I booked from my hotel a city tour with a car and guide and we visited among others the famous Gold Museum. Next day I booked a trip to the huge Zipaguira Salt Cathedral, which was located deep in the former salt mine, and after that I went to the airport and flew to Caracas.

## 122. VENEZUELA



2002



Venezuelan Bolivar

South America 10 / Americas 26.

Population: 28,4 million

Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

Independence: 5.7.1811 from Spain by Simon Bolivar

República Bolivariana de Venezuela in Spanish

Venezuela was the fifth new South American country for me during this round trip. I stayed in Sabana Grande area, which is a bit outside from the centre. There were huge demonstrations against the president Hugo Chavez in the centre and I had to cancel my city tour. On Monday I just walked around in my neighbourhood and met in the hotel a young American couple Cesar and Sharon from Texas. Now I found nice Americans, not like in the Peruvian train. We decided to fly together next morning by Transaven small aircraft to Los Roques island in the Caribbean Sea. It was my only beach day during my whole tour and it was warm, nice with good local food and drinks. We were snorkling and enjoying. In the evening we flew back by Chapi Air flight to Caracas, where the demonstration took place also in our neighbourhood. Next morning, I flew via Curacao to Suriname.



## 123. SURINAME



South America 11 / Americas 27.

*Republic of Suriname*

*Republiek van Suriname in Dutch*

**2002**

*Population: 587 000*

*Independence: 25.11.1975 from the Netherlands*



Suriname Guilder

Suriname was the sixth new country on my tour this time. This wasn't a visit I'm proud of because due to my too tight schedule I did not have enough time to find out what kind of a country it is. I came quite late in the evening to my Eco-hotel, ate local sausages and drank some beers. Next day I took a taxi with a good driver, who showed me nearly the whole town, which consisted mainly of wooden houses. The rain forests and even trips to the Amazon river were very easy to arrange, but unfortunately I had no time for that.

## 124. GUYANA



South America 12 / 12 / Americas 28.

*Co-operative Republic of Guyana*

**2002**

*Population: 787 000*

*Independence 25.6.1966 from Britain*



Guyanese Dollar

Guyana was the seventh and last new country on my roundtrip in South America and now I had visited all 12 countries. I arrived in the evening just perfectly timing to participate in Hotel Arianzee's jazz session in their restaurant. The evening was swinging and relaxing with a couple of Christmas songs in a Caribbean style. Next day I took a car drive with Wilderness Explorer's young Paul. I regretted the lack of time to drive to the rain forest or even to the Amazon, same as in Suriname. But anyway we had a nice half a day drive in Georgetown, which had been built already in 19<sup>th</sup> century. During the high tide the town is lower than the sea level. I also regretted that I couldn't visit the French Guyana, but you cannot get everything, can you! On my return I had to stay one extra night in Port of Spain in Trinidad, where I had been 20 years ago. I booked a night trip to seek local steel bands and invited an English couple, Paul and Barbara to join me. Our guide and driver Ms. Gudrun did her best but we didn't find any rehearsal places. Instead of that we went at midnight to an open restaurant, where we listened to a steel band of 30 musicians playing both jazz and classical music, for example Jean Sibelius' Finlandia hymn. Great feeling! So my two and a half weeks long roundtrip in South America and a drop of Caribbean had come to its end. I arrived to my new home in Lahti one day before Christmas Eve!

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## 67<sup>th</sup> Journey 2003:     *An Eastern Caribbean round trip to visit seven new countries.*

I was already retired and had moved permanently alone to Lahti. This Eastern Caribbean tour was the only journey with new countries, but it was sufficient. During this three weeks' round trip I visited seven new Caribbean countries: St. Kitts and Nevis, Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Grenada and Barbados. I had a very discounted return ticket with Diners Club bonus coupons for 200 euros to Antigua and then I had bought a LIAT special price round ticket of 12 flights for 500 US dollars. After the journey I had visited all the American 35 countries of which 10 in North America, 12 in South America and 13 in the Caribbean.

## 125. ST. KITTS AND NEVIS



Caribbean 7. / Americas 29.

*Federation of Saint Christopher and Nevis*

**2003**

*Population: 53 000*

*Independence: 19.19.1983 from Britain*



Eastern Caribbean Dollar

St. Kitts and Nevis was the first new country of my fourth visit to the Caribbean. I came in the evening and stayed in Glimbaro Guest House. First thing I saw in my room, was a big cockroach and managed to change into another room with a balcony to the street. In the morning I saw that there was a company for destroying cockroaches and other vermin. I told to the director about my cockroach problem and he was so kind to offer me free lunch with drinks. I went to walk to down town and managed to jump onto a van for the island tour for only 20 dollars. The

driver praised the island as the most beautiful in the Caribbean. I accepted that, because every island is the best! Opposite to my balcony there was a banderol, which praised Kim Collins, who had been a world champion in 100 metres in 1999. He had become a national hero. I sat the whole evening on my balcony in warm weather and had a cold dinner with local delicate and white wine. Next day I made a boat trip to Nevis Island and celebrated the US Thanksgiving day by eating a huge turkey sandwich with white wine again. Next morning, I returned to Antigua.

## 126. ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA



2003

Caribbean 8 / Americas 30

Population: 98 000

Independence: 1.11.1981 from Britain



Eastern Caribbean Dollar

This another double island country was the second on my present Caribbean tour. This time I stayed in a lodge at Runaway Beach even if I'm not any kind of a beach boy. Anyway it was relaxing especially because this beach was very quiet. I waked to the next Dickenson Beach, which was perhaps the most popular beach and so it looked. It was quite crowded and thus very noisy with mainly British families and other tourists. The best thing was that I could go back to my own peace, where I found a group of twenty German tourists in front of my lodge. They started to ask me questions about everything and I tried to be polite and answered both in English and German, which I can speak a little. Quite soon they got bored and went on their way I made one taxi trip to the capital St. John's, which is quite nice looking with old and colourful low buildings. I had a nice meal and a few beers at Hemingway's café, which was the most well-known place in the town. On my last morning, I had to get up at 4 o'clock in the morning to go by taxi to the airport and I did not feel well and I suffered the whole journey of few hours to my next island Dominica. *I visited Antigua with my third wife (although we were not married) in 2014 for two weeks on our Caribbean tour. Now we stayed in land near St. John's in the nice and friendly Connie's Comfort Suites, which was cheap and located in a local village. This time I saw the whole island by rental car. We made also a catamaran boat trip to the Isle of Barbuda, where we went by smaller motor boat to see the huge community of Frigate Birds and to eat lobster on the beach.*

## 127. DOMINICA



2003

Caribbean 9 / Americas 31.

Commonwealth of Dominica

Population: 72 000

Independence: 3.11.1978 from Britain



Eastern Caribbean Dollar

Dominica was the third new country on my tour. I had booked through internet my accommodation at Ma Bass Guest House according to Lonely Planet's recommendation. It was really as good or even better than it had been described. When I came there I was the only guest and was treated like a Royal visitor. Next day I went on a catamaran voyage to see whaled, but unfortunately we saw only dolphins. We stopped at the Champagne Reef to snorkel. This time I had some difficulties with the equipment and a bit too heavy waves. I swallowed quite a lot of sea water and I panicked and got a little hydrophobia. Luckily an English couple were so kind and helped me and I managed to snorkel enough to see some of the magnificent and colourful corals. The rest of the time on the boat I drank Champagne on Champagne Reef. Next night in Ma Bass Guest House was terrible due to the barking stray dogs in the house next to our house. Ma Bass said that it was an elderly lady who kept an illegal kennel in her house and it disturbs her accommodation business. I went in the morning to the National Tourist Office and police to make a complaint about the dogs. They took me seriously and next night all the dogs were gone away from the house and the night was silent and nice. Ma Bass was so grateful and asked her son Mike to drive me around this beautiful and ecological island free of charge. I saw beautiful rainforest cascades, rowing in a canoe on Indian River and visited the neighbourhood of endogenous Caribbean Indians in Atkinson and Bruce villages. Most interesting painting was a picture of the black Indian Virgin Maria in a nice Catholic Church. My last evening buffet at Ma Bass' was substantial and delicious and I ate it with two young English girls. Dominica was quite ecological and I fell in love with this simpatico island. But next morning I had to continue and fly via Martinique Airport to St. Lucia.

## 128. ST. LUCIA



Caribbean 10 / Americas 32.

*Saint Lucia*

**2003**

*Population: 184 000*

*Independence: 22.2.1979 from Britain*



Eastern Caribbean Dollar

St. Lucia was my fourth new country. If Lonely Planet recommendation of hotels was fine, here it did not work, because the recommended hotel was closed and waiting for demolition. I drove with my taxi about one hour before we found a motel near the Airport and beside a gas station. Never mind it was ok inside and it had a restaurant. I found a beach just nearby but it was only for lonely just married couple and I felt myself a bit of a stranger as a twice divorced single man. Next day I participated in an island tour by a ten-person van driven and guided by a nice young local man. On this tour I got again an American night mare (the former was on my way to Macchu Picchu in last year). In that van there were an American woman with her mother. When we started our tour she begun to ask tens of questions but did not listen to the answers. She started to tell the guide what she had read about the island. When we stopped I said to the guide to ask the woman to listen what he was going to say, but he dared not. During the next drive she started to shout to her mother what she had looked at the television last night and how she had moved her images from camera and binocular to her computer. Then I got enough courage and asked her loudly, what were the colours of her computer wires. She looked at me angrily but luckily shut her mouth and fell asleep. The rest of the tour went ok and I did not complain to the company. The most interesting place was a volcanic crater with sulphur ponds and with a strong smell. Next morning, I flew to St. Vincent.

## 129. ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES



**2003**

Caribbean 11 / Americas 33.

*Saint Vincent and the Grenadines*

*Population: 111 000*

*Independence: 27.10.1979 from Britain*



Eastern Caribbean Dollar

St. Vincent and the Grenadines was the fifth new country and the third double island one on my tour. I stayed in the Hotel Montrose, from where there was a magnificent view over the city to the sea. It was a tropical warm rainy day, but I went walking, got wet and dry, but that's the tropic. On Saturday 6 December it was the 86<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of our independency. I took a St. Vincent and Grenadines Air flight to Union Island to the Archipelago of the Grenadines. From there I joined a cruise by Captain Yannis' catamaran boat to three different island. On the boat there was only a young and happy just married couple from Heidelberg, Germany and a crew of three men. The cruise was an all inclusive one and we ate and drank as much as we could. We all had a few toast to the independence of Finland. I sang our national anthem and two folk songs with great success! We stopped on Mayeau, Tobacco Cay and Palm Island, where I did a bit of snorkelling, took some sunshine and slept in a hammock. The weather was like a Pearl of the Caribbean, beautiful and hot. In the evening I flew back with SVG Air flight to Kingstown and continued in the morning to Grenada.

## 130. GRENADA



Caribbean 12 / Americas 34.

*Grenada*

**2003**

*Population: 113 000*

*Independence: 7.2.1974 from Britain*



Eastern Caribbean Dollar

Grenada was the sixth new island country on tour. I stayed in the Tropicana Inn, recommended by Lonely Planet and it was nice and cosy. It was Sunday and quite peaceful even if one American Caribbean cruise boats had come in the morning and there were at one thousand passengers hanging around the street. On Monday I joined a tourist van of ten English tourists on an island tour. Now the group behaved civilized, not like the American woman in St. Lucia. We visited Concorde cascades and a spice farm. Lunch was served in a 100 years old stone manor in a nice atmosphere. Next we stopped on Carib Leap Land's End, where the original Caribbean people jumped to the sea instead of French slavery. We passed also the abandoned airfield, where the US Marines landed in 1983 and attacked Grenada in order to force the leftist president and government from power in 1983 and succeeded in this unnecessary coup d'état, because Grenada could never be a threat to the mighty USA! Anyway

this tour was the best on my Caribbean tour. On my last night I had a nice and active rum punch evening before my morning flight to the last Caribbean and American country, Barbados.

## 131. BARBADOS



2003



Barbados Dollar

Caribbean 13/13 / Americas 35/35 (100%)

*Barbados*

*Population: 290 000*

*Independence: 30.11.1966 from Britain*

Barbados was the seventh and last new country on my Eastern Caribbean tour, and it was also the last Caribbean and American country, the 35<sup>th</sup>. Now the Americas have been conquered! I stayed in the small town of Rockney just beside Georgetown in Abbeyville, which was the cheapest hotel on my tour. I had a small hangover from my St. George rum punch evening and took my first day easily by walking on the streets of this little town. Actually I had been in Georgetown Airport already in 1982 on my way to Trinidad. Next morning, I was ready for a new and last adventure at this time and participated in a six hours Pirate Cruise on an old four floor MV Harbour Masterilla to Carlisle Bay. It was again an all included cruise with a huge buffet and drinks. It was nearly Christmas time and there was a nice American type of Christmas show and this time it was inspiring and amusing. Before eating and drinking we had a possibility for snorkelling, but the water was so unclear that I skipped it this time. After the cruise I was walking in Bridgetown and went to swim both in the Caribbean Sea and in an outdoor pool of an International hotel. I enjoyed my last supper and Caribbean rums in a nice little restaurant near to my hotel and felt relaxed and satisfied at the end of this three-weeks tourney in the last country of the Americas:

## 68<sup>th</sup> Journey:

*A cruising voyage to Gabon and Cape Verde in Atlantic Ocean*

Year 2004, which is my 60<sup>th</sup> started with cruise in Western Africa and Atlantic Ocean with a Finnish quite small but cosy M/S Regina in January including two new countries: The Gambia and Cape Verde.

## 132. THE GAMBIA



2004



Gambian Dalasi

Africa 29.

*Republic of The Gambia*

*Population: 2,4 million*

*Independence: 18.2.1965 from Britain*

I had managed to purchase this cruise very cheaply by using Diner Club's bonus coupons so that the whole package in a windowless cabin cost me 200 Euros instead of 1400 €! I flew first on Monday 12 January 2004 to Dakar in Senegal, where I had been in 1983. The first night I spent on the boat and next day I had time to walk around Dakar, which had changed quite a lot and in a better direction. In the evening we started the cruise and arrived at the port of Banjul on Tuesday morning. I had met on the boat my old friend, an actress Liisa Palteisto, who was well known among the crew, because she and her husband Jouni Lompola, a well-known Finnish causerie writer "Origo", who was due to his serious illness on the boat at that time. We joined together and quite soon we found four other people with the same attitude and we stated to have fun. In Banjul we had a city tour with a bus and after that we drove in land and further by river boats to Makasutu village. There we were offered an exotic lunch made of local ingredients and skill. We also saw local African dances. The visit to the worm-like country, which is the smallest African country by area, was short but very interesting. In the evening we started a one and a half days sailing on the calm and sunny Atlantic Ocean towards our next country Cape Verde.

## 133. CAPE VERDE



2004



Cape Verdean Escudo

Africa 30.

*Republic of Cape Verde*

*República de Cabo Verde in Portuguese*

*Population: 556 000*

*Independence: 5.7.1975 from Portugal after carnation revolution*



We had cruised two nights and one full day on the beautiful and calm Atlantic Ocean enjoying eating, drinking, dancing and singing. Our “sextet” created already on the Gambia was quite noisy and lively in a good way. The first island was the capital Praia, which means beach both in Portuguese and Cabo Verdean Creole. There we walked in the old town of Cidade de Velha without any rush or special program. In the evening we proceeded to the island of Maio, where we arrived next morning. There we drove around the island by busses and in the evening again to the sea towards the island of Mindelo. There we didn’t have any arranged program and our Sextet organized a Finnish-Cape Verdean beach party. We bought beer and sausages from the local shop, set the fire and started to grill, drink, sing and dance. We had a couple of hours very fun, but then we found it a bit strange that other people were approaching us and we decided to stop the party and return to the ship before the situation could have become more problematic. We stayed the night in the harbour and in the morning we flew by Cape Verde Airlines flights to the island of Sal, where we visited by bus the town of St. Maria, where we had our last lunch with local music. Then finally we went to Finnair aeroplane and flew back to the Finnish cold winter.

## **69<sup>th</sup> Journey 2004:**     *A combined Judo tournament with three new Asian countries*

This was my second journey for new countries. I took three judokas from Finland to an international tournament and training camp in Tbilisi, Georgia and after the competition I continued to two other Caucasian countries: Armenia and Azerbaijan.

### **134. GEORGIA**

Asia 21.

*Georgia*

*საქართველო, Sakartvelo in Georgian*

**2004**

*Population: 4,0 million*

*Independence: 9.4.1991 after USSR collapse*



Georgian Lari

I was travelling with three judokas: Janne Romppanen from Joensuu and Timo Peltola and my son Ilkka Porna from my judo club in Vantaa. First we flew on Wednesday 31 March 2004 to Moscow, where we stayed in a visa free airport hotel Sojuz. Next morning, we flew to Tbilisi, where we were accommodated in Hotel Marriot. On Friday I did the registration of my judokas and in the afternoon they had a possibility for training and warming up. During the weekend the European Judo Union A-tournament took place in Tbilisi Sports Hall. My competitors fought on Sunday, but unfortunately they did not succeed. On Sunday evening we were all invited to a big banquet full of delicious Georgian and European food. On Monday my judokas went to the international training camp and I booked a half a day City tour with a driver and guide Teona. We also drove out of the city to a small town of Mtsketa. The boys stayed for two more days for training camp and returned by themselves back to Finland. I continued on Tuesday my round trip towards Armenia.

**Special “frozen” regions, which have declared indepeny:**



Abkhazia 2014



South Ossetia 2017

### **135. ARMENIA**

Asia 22.

*Republic of Armenia*

*Հայաստանի Հանրապետություն Hayastani Hanrapetut’yun in Armenian*



**2004**

*Population: 3,0 million*

*Independency: 21.9.1991 after USSR collapse*



Armenian Dram

Armenia was the 10<sup>th</sup> former USSR republics for me. I stayed on a hill in the heart of Yerevan in the Hotel Arra. I had a marvelous view to the two Ararat mountains, which are located in Turkey. I made a walking tour in the centre by myself and I found Yerevan a very attractive and nice city. Next day I booked Levontravels tour to the

countryside with driver David and a Russian guide Irina. We stopped among other places at Granai Temple and Geghard Monastery, both very old cultural monuments. Irina was a very lively and warm person and she told me quite a lot about the history, people and life of Armenia. After this human tour it was difficult to say goodbye to Irina, but that's life! In the evening in the hotel I had a very exceptional evening. I went to supper and I was actually the only male customer. Suddenly there came 16 charming ladies of different ages into the restaurant. They were celebrating some important but funny thing. There was a local band and once they had started to play the first of the ladies came to ask me for dancing. Actually I had to dance with nearly everyone of them. Suddenly I remembered a well known phrase of a 1950s rock-musician Bill Haley's song: "There were sixteen women and only one man in town!". I was quite tired but satisfied after my dancing duties and pleasures. Next morning, I returned back to Tbilisi and spoke a lot with a Danish-Georgian couple. I had to stay overnight in the same hotel, but my judokas had already left. (*I have visited Armenia twice.*)

## 136. AZERBAIJAN



2004

Asia 23.

*Republic of Azerbaijan*

*Azərbaycan Respublikası in Azerbaijani*

*Population: 10,1 million*

*Independence: 30.8.1991 after USSR collapse*



Azerbaijani Manat

Azerbaijan was the last Caucasian and 11<sup>th</sup> former USSR republic for me. I stayed in a Soviet style Hotel Old Intourist. I was hosted by the Azerbaijan Judo Union and its interpreter Elchin, a judoka came to my hotel and drove me to meet my hosts. They drove around Baku and showed me the main places and of course the Main Dojo of the national team, which was training there. Azerbaijan is quite a good country in judo. In the evening we had an official but relaxed dinner with the main persons of the Union. It went like in old Soviet time with many vodka toasts and speeches. Really warm and funny evening. Next morning, I went on a whole day drive with my professional guide Ms. Ramiza and her driver deep to the countryside. Ramiza did not allow me to buy beer before we had visited the local Mosque even if I'm a pagan, but it was a question of respect, which I of course accepted. The landscape and historical building were marvellous and we stopped in a very remote village of Samanxa to have a local lunch with a family. Unfortunately, I had in the evening quite strong diarrhoea. Next morning Ramiza took me to the pharmacy and bought me some medicine and also helped me to find a local string instrument Tar, which I bought for my daughter Mirja's husband, who is a professional guitarist. In the afternoon I flew to Moscow Sheremetjovo Airport, where I again had to stay overnight in the visa free Sojuz hotel. I spent the whole Monday in the hotel and at the airport before I flew in the evening by Aeroflot flight to Helsinki. (*I have visited Azerbaijan for the second time in 2104 in Nagorno-Karabakh.*)

**Special "frozen" and non-sovereign country:**



Nagorno-Karabakh 2014

## 70<sup>th</sup> Journey:

*My 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary journey to North Korea and Mongolia*

My third journey for new countries this year was a special one due to my 60<sup>th</sup> birth day 3 September 2004 in Pyongyang, North Korea. Before and after that I stayed in Beijing with judo people and went to another new country Mongolia as guests of judo people again. It's good to have useful contacts in the world!

## 137. NORTH KOREA



2004

Asia 24.

*People's Democratic Republic of Korea*

*democratic Republic of Korea 조선민주주의인민공화국 Chosŏn Minjujuŭi Inmin Konghwaguk in Korean*



North Korean won

*Population: 25,8 million*

*Independence: 15.8.1945 from Japan and 9.9.1948 People'*

This 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary journey of my birthday was one of my most exiting trips so far. The outward trip via Beijing to North Korea and the return trip again via Beijing to Mongolia was something you cannot forget. I had found a small travel agency from Stockholm run by a Russian origin Julia Lambard, who was authorized in selling individual tourist packets to North Korea. First I flew to Beijing, where I picked up my visa, air tickets and voucher from the North Korean consulate. When I arrived in Pyongyang I was met by two guides, 30 years old Mr. Jong and his assistant 20 years old Ms Sowie with a driver. I was taken to the huge 20 floor tourist hotel and the view over the capital and its Taedong river was magnificent. Then the programme started by visiting the memorial park of the Great Leader Kim Il-sung and a city tour. There were quite few people on the streets even if we were in the capital. I asked to stop and visit a local and ordinary restaurant or bar, where I could taste local beer, and it was ok, the lager beer was good and the atmosphere friendly. Next day I was driven out of the city towards the south and first to Kensong City and then Pammujon on 38<sup>th</sup> latitude, which was the demilitarize zone between the North and South. I was taken to the room, where the peace negotiations took place in 1953. An army officer told me the North Korean vision about the history and I knew already the South and US versions. I thought the truth lies somewhere in between. We could look down over the border and see the quite relaxed and a bit provocatively behaving South Korean soldier, but that was reality. On Thursday we had another city tour in Pyongyang including a visit to a small spying boat El Pueblo, which was captured in 1968. That was a bit humiliating for the Americans, who had to confess under the pressure of the international community, that the boat was really spying on North Korea. Then I was taken to the 30 metres high statue of Kim Il-sung and they asked if I'd like to put flowers. I did not like, but I put, because it was the custom.

On Friday 3.9.2004 it was finally my 60<sup>th</sup> birthday. Early in the morning we started to drive to the north. We drove one and a half hours on a cement covered four-lane highway and during that drive I did not see not a single car, human being or animal. We went to Myohyang mountains and we settled into a pyramid shape official state hotel. The hotel management led by an elegant lady leader and her female staff were waiting for me and we were drinking together morning beers in a very warm atmosphere. I was officially congratulated by the North Korean representatives. I was not given any gift but instead of that I was taken first to a three floor building, which was full of domestic and especially international gifts to the Great Leader Kim I-sung. There were at that time 217 616 gifts. I even found some gifts from Finland. The most valuable gift was a German Mercedes car donated by Leonid Brezhnev in the 1970s. After that we went to another gift building for Kim Jong-Il, the present President and Dear Leader. He had only 156 314 gifts in his building at that time. Then we drove back to the capital and again 150 kilometres of empty road and dead highway. When we arrived at my hotel, I thought that was it and tried to go to my room. They asked me to come to the restaurant and have a small summing up chat. Ok, we went and I got my beer. There were no other people at that time. Suddenly the lights went off and the doors to the kitchen opened and six beautiful ladies came out blowing with fanfare horns and carrying a birthday cake baked especially for me. Then the doors to other customers were opened and the orchestra started to play and the BBQ-buffet dinner could start. I had never celebrated my birthday so majestically and I felt myself like an honoured state guest! I was at that time fully aware of the terrible problems of North Korea with great hunger among the people and I did not admire the political system nor the dictatorship, but I went there as a tourist, not journalist and I'd like to behave as an interested tourist and respect their honest concern of me and my pleasure.

## 138. MONGOLIA



2004

Asia 25.

*Republic of Mongolia*

*Population: 3,3 million*



Mongolian Tögrög

*Монгол Улс in Cyrillic alphabet*  *in Mongolian alphabet, Mongyol ulus in Mongolian.*

*Independence: 29.12.1911 from the Chinese Empire, Mongolia was created originally already in 1206*

Before proceeding to Mongolia I stayed for one day in Beijing and I was hosted by the Chinese Judo Association, whose vice-president Mr. Song and his assistants offered me a huge Chinese lunch with all sort of drinks and it took three hours. It was nice and enjoyable, but also useful. I got promises for a 20 persons' judo team to participate in my Judo Finnish Open in November 2004. They came and it was actually the first time they came to Europe and started their preparations for 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. In Ulaanbaatar my host was again from judo and this time Mr. Temuujin, whom I had met earlier this year in Tbilisi, Georgia. He had booked for me a room at Hotel Bayangol and drove me around the city and showed me the main attractions. I also visited

the distinguished leaders of the Mongolian Judo Associations and had a beautiful Mongolian lunch with them. In the afternoon I was taken by a driver to the countryside for two days' excursion. He left me at the Guru Ger Camp, where I stayed in a real yurt, which smelled of sheep wool and shit, but was comfortable. I ate local Mongolian lamb foot and warm milk flavoured with local spirits. Next I was taken to Terelje natural park, where I had a possibility to ride together with an Australian just married couple with a Mongolian horse. We rode to a magnificent rock called Turtle Rock, because its shape reminded one of a turtle. At the end I got permission to ride alone back to our Ger Camp and I galloped quite fast and I felt safe, because the Mongolian horse is quite low. Wonderful feeling! After having returned back to Ulaanbaatar we visited a nice temple of Tibetan Buddhism and in the evening a national dance performance.

Next morning, I started my return journey towards Moscow and further to Helsinki. It became very interesting. Half way over Siberia the captain informed us that we had to land at Novosibirsk airport due to lack of kerosene. We had to go out of the plane to the airport building, where we even were allowed to go outside and walk on the surface of Russian Siberia. It took such a long time that we arrived in Moscow Shemetyevo airport so late that I missed my Aeroflot evening flight to Helsinki. I went to arrange the visa free airport hotel. I was joined by a young Mongolian guy from the same flight and also a young medical student from India. Unfortunately, the airport lady officer missed everything and we did not get any rooms, just a few coupons for eating. We did not have boarding passes, but we managed to buy a small bottle of whisky, which I drank with the Mongolian guy, who was on his way to Helsinki to buy used cars. The girl was going home for vacation. We were all from very different cultures and backgrounds, but with a common language of English we had a great and human international cocktail night at the airport.

## **71<sup>st</sup> Journey 2004:**     *The second journey to Near East just for new countries*

This journey was the fourth journey and third to Asia just for new countries. This time my second visit to Near East (the first was in 1989) and now to Lebanon and Iran.

### **139. LEBANON**



Asia 26.

*Republic of Lebanon*

الْجُمْهُورِيَّةُ الْلُبْنَانِيَّةُ *al-Jumhūrīyah al-Lubnānīyah* in **Arabic**

**2004**

*Population: 6,8 million*

*Independence: 22.11.1944 from France occupation*



**Lebanese Pound**

Lebanon was the first of this second two-countrys' tour to the Near East. It had just recovered from a too long civil war and Beirut even looked much better than in the images a few years ago. I stayed in a small but cosy Hotel Concorde near Beirut American University. I had booked in advance a one-and-a-half-day excursion with private car and guiding driver. First we drove around Beirut and especially its coast line with rocks and beaches. On Tuesday we made a whole day drive deep into the countryside to the Bekaa valley, where we visited the famous Xsara wine yard and cellars, where I could quite freely taste their excellent wines with cheese. After that we visited the ancient Roman ruins of Baalbek, which is a Unesco cultural heritage site. Then back to Beirut. On Wednesday I left with my new driver Richard towards the mountains of Les Cèdres in order to taste some Alpine skiing, which is possible to do in the altitude of over 2000 metres. Unfortunately, the weather up there was so foggy that all the two lifts and slopes were closed. So instead of skiing I had to participate in after skiing in the nice hut restaurant up there. The table was full of drinks and mezes and I soon swallowed my disappointment and started to enjoy the Lebanese winter. On our way down we passed the town of Tripoli and stopped on the coast in a little fishermen's village to see the local association's voting. Finally, before returning back to Beirut Richard took me to his home to eat with his wife and two kids. Nice Christian home even with a Christmas tree. My last day Thursday I spent on my own by walking the streets and visiting the area of the American University. On Friday morning I flew to Tehran via Dubai, where I couldn't go in, which meant another time in the future.



## 140. IRAN



2004

Population: 84,0 million



Iranian Rial

Asia 27.

*Islamic Republic of Iran*

ایران اسلامی جمهوری *Jomhuri-ye Eslāmi-ye Irān in Persian (Farsi)*

*Independence: In the name of Persia in 1921, in 1935 Iran and 1.4.1979 Islamic Republic*

Iran was the second and last new country on my Near East tour at this time. I stayed in a quite luxurious but reasonable price Hotel Mashad. On Saturday my guide was 55-year-old former fighter plane mechanic from Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s. He was trained in the 1970s in Dallas, Texas. When he heard that I had been three months ago in North Korea he burst out laughing and said: Mister, you could have bought it cheaper from her! I didn't get it but then I realized that he meant by buying nuclear bomb! Walking in Tehran centre was safe and quite free, even women looked more western than expected, of course with certain discipline. I didn't see a single other western visitor during my stay. We drove up to the hill just above the city and the view from there was magnificent over the city of millions of people. Taking photos on the street was forbidden. On Sunday I flew by Iran Airways to the city of Eshafan in the middle of the country. It is a beautiful historical town and its Nagsh-e Jashin Square is considered as the largest city square in the world. It was a harmonic combination of Persian and Islamic architecture with palaces and mosques. It belongs to Unesco cultural heritage sites. In the evening I flew back to Tehran and further by Aeroflot night flight to Moscow and then to Helsinki.

## 72<sup>nd</sup> Journey 2005:    *A visiting journey to a North African new country*

I was still living in my new home town Lahti and running a flexible and interesting visual art project financed by European Union and national resources. In 2005 I did four journeys and all for new countries, which I got altogether nine: two in Africa and seven in Asia.

## 141. LIBYA



2005



2016

2005



Libyan Dinar

Africa 31.

*Republic of Libya*

ليبيا *Lībiyā in Arabic and ⵍⵢⵢⵓ in Berber*

*Independence: 10.2.1947 from Italy, 24.12.1951 kingdom, in 1977 Great Socialist People's Arab Yamahiriya and 2011 republic*

I arrived in Tripoli very early in the morning. I had booked all the arrangements for five days' programme including a tourist visa by Internet from Libra Libyan Tours. I had a small bottle of whisky in my pocket, but the x-ray revealed it and the customs took it away, because in 2005 Libya was a strictly absolute country regarding alcohol. My driver was waiting for me and we started our trip of 300 kilometres to Ghamades. The driver drove very fast and had difficulties to keep awake. After having nearly driven out of the road I had to ask him to stop and reproach him. He woke up and everything went fine. We visited a special Mojazel Salt Lake in Sahara Desert and the ruins of Rasal Ghol-Citadel. In the afternoon we spent few hours in the labyrinth of the old Berber town of Ghamades and that was really a fascinating experience. This town surrounded by walls is a Unesco Cultural Heritage Site. For the evening and for the night, we drove with a local guide to the Ramlat Elkaase dunes, where we had dinner by the open fire and where I spent my first night on dunes. During the night there was quite heavy sand storm and I had difficulties in getting out of my tent due to the sand wall in front of my tent. Our guide was sleeping outside and he was entirely covered by sand, only the nose was outside. I think he was used to do so! Next day we went to the local museum and then drove to a place which was located in the corner of three countries: Libya, Algeria and Tunisia. We spent overnight in a camping site hut and had a nice open fire BBQ-buffet with some other travellers. In the morning we started to drive back to Tripoli via several old Berber ruins and villages. We stopped half way in Gahr el Haji in Hotel El Nabat. On Sunday morning we continued to Tripoli and now the driver was awake but still driving like a madman, sometimes over 150 km/h. We drove to the ancient town of Sabatha by the Mediterranean Sea. It is a combination of ancient Greek, Roman and Byzantine ruins. Sabatha had been a very important cross roads and I found nice road sign to Timbuktu, Mali. I met also the

director of Libra Tours and expressed my satisfaction. When I told about my lost whisky bottle, he blamed that I did not tell him in advance that I need it, he could have arranged it!

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### **73<sup>rd</sup> Journey 2005:**    *A round trip to three Central Asian countries.*

The second trip in 2005 went to Central Asia to three new countries: Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. I had managed to arrange all the flights, guided programmes with full board by myself through Internet and everything fit perfectly. This round trip was one of my best journeys even if the illnesses!

#### **142. UZBEKISTAN** **2004**

Asia 29.

*Republic of Uzbekistan*

*O'zbekiston Respublikasi in **Uzbek** and Ўзбекистон Республикаси in **Russian***

*Population: 33,5 million*

*Independence: 1.9.1991 after USSR collapse*



Uzbekistanian Som

Uzbekistan was my first new country on my Central Asian tour and it was also the 12<sup>th</sup> former Soviet republic. I came by Aeroflot night flight from Moscow and my driver was waiting for me at the Tashkent Airport. We drove 350 kilometres and now safely (not like in Libya!) to the famous Silk Route town of Samarkand. We had an overnight in Hotel Mulika and we drove around this ancient and very beautiful town. Next day we drove another 300 kilometres to another Silk Route town of Bukhara. There I stayed in the 500 years old hotel, where I met in its court yard a nice couple of Brian and Merylinn Crean from New Zealand. They were on their round the world trip. (*I visited their home in New Zealand in 2007!*) On Friday we drove and walked around Bukhara with a local guide and I learned very closely a lot about the ancient Silk Route. In the evening I flew by Uzbekistan Airlines flight to Tashkent, where I stayed one night in Hotel Elena. I did not have possibilities to see the city actually at all, because my flight to Bishkek started quite early on Saturday morning. It was the Midsummer Eve in Finland, but a lonesome traveller a long way from it! But before my flight I met the head coach of Uzbekistan Judo Association in order to invite a team to this year's Judo Finnish Open (*unfortunately no team arrived!*)

#### **143. KYRGYZSTAN** **2005**

Asia 30.

*Republic of Kyrgyzstan*

*Кыргыз Республикасы, Kyrgyz Respublikasy in **Kyrgyz** and Кыргызская Республика, yrgyzskaya Respublika in **Russian***

*Population: 6,5 million*

*Independence: 21.8.1995 after USSR collapse*



Kyrgyzstanian Som

Kyrgyzstan was the second on my tour and 13<sup>th</sup> former Soviet republic. I was met by my guide 25-years old Polina Zivert and her driver Sergei. Polina was very nice and brilliant guide, whose grandmother is originally German and her husband Russian. We drove around the second largest Alpine lake in the world, Issyk-Kul (the largest is Lake Titicaca in South America). We saw also fine cascades, caves and mountain views. In the town of Tamga we participated in a rock concert organized by some Kyrgyz democratic organisations sponsored by the US Embassy. On our last drive towards Bishkek my stomach went ill and I had to rush to the bushes. I did not have any toilet paper, but we stopped by a small mountain creek, where I took all my cloths of and went to the water to wash my places. The water was about five degrees. It was my most fascinating natural bide! In Bishkek I visited the Kyrgyz Judo Association and met its leaders and coaches. From Bishkek we made one more trip to a small graveyard of air pilots on a hill. While climbing up and coming down I felt that my left foot became step by step more and more ill. I manage to walk to our car, but when I stepped out in Bishkek, I fell immediately to the pavement and couldn't walk with it at all. Sergei's wife was working in the special hospital of the Ministry of Interior Affairs and he managed to get me in. I was examined by two female special doctors who diagnosed as a gout attack in my left big toe. I got a medicine injection into my ass and some pills. Alcohol, especially red wine and beer drinking during the medicine cure was absolutely forbidden. Actually I did not know the world gout, but Polina printed an article from Internet for me, which described it to me and I found that I had Kihti in Finnish! Anyway Polina's travel agency offered me a nice dinner but this time without beer of wine. Next morning when I continued my trip to Tajikistan, I already felt much better and could even walk quite well. I was

really treated in an expert way and it cost me nothing. (Actually later on I met Polina in Finland, Switzerland and Portugal during 2006-2009 and now she is in USA in voluntary human work!)

## 144. TAJIKISTAN 2005

Asia 31.

*Republic of Tajikistan*

تاجیکستان in Persian, *Ҷумҳурии Тоҷикистон* in *Tajik* and *Республика Таджикистан* in *Russian*

*Population: 9,5 million*

*Independence: 9.9.1991 after USSR collapse*



Tajik Somoni

Tajikistan was the third and last of my Central Asian new countries and the 14<sup>th</sup> former Soviet republic (*one more to go, Turkmenistan*). I still had difficulties walking due to my gout attack in Bishkek, but I decided to survive. Again there was a car with a driver and guide waiting for me and we started our trip towards the north over the mountains. Our first stop was Lake Iskandarkul, which was famous, because it was the furthestmost place in the east where Alexander the Great visited. Beautiful mountain lake. The place was an abandoned holiday resort and now without any other services but beds. We drove to the nearest town and its supermarket and we bought some ingredients for a fish soup and Finnish type of pancakes, but without any beer due to my gout! There was a deserted hut for the forest guards with fire and cooking place and some equipment. I cooked a combined Finnish-Central Asian fish soup and pancakes for us and for two local guards. Not so terribly bad! Next morning, we drove a real rock and roll road up and down over two or three mountains. The road was literally full of rolling stones. We drove up to the town of Istarasfan, where we were accommodated with a local Tajik family. We had a substantial and real Tajik dinner together with the big family and some relatives. The return drive was again another rock and roll drive. Half way we stopped to eat some chicken and quite soon I found my stomach very ill and once we got back to Dushanbe I had very heavy diarrhoea, which raised for me quite heavy fever. I had a lot of pain the whole night and very early flight to Moscow. Again I decided to survive and I succeeded!

## 74<sup>th</sup> Journey 2005: *A combined judo and visit trip to two continents: Asia and Africa*

The second journey in 2005 was an interesting one. My main target was Cairo in Egypt, because I was nominated as the leader of the Finnish judo team to Judo World Championships. Before that I went first to Yemen in the Arabian Peninsula in Asia and from Sana'a I flew to Cairo and joined my judo team.

## 145. YEMEN

2005

Asia 32.

*Republic of Yemen*

اليَمَن *al-Yaman* in *Arabic*

*Population: 29,8 million*



Yemeni Rial

*Independence: 1918 Yemen kingdom. Yemen Arab Republic, North Yemen and Yemen Democratic Republic, South Yemen were established in 1962 and united into Republic of Yemen 22.5.1990.*

I was on my two-continent round trip to the Judo World Championships in Cairo, Egypt and Africa via Yemen in the Arabian Peninsula and Asia. Yemen, which was now united, was in the 1980s two countries, North and South Yemen and was not so happy when I heard that they had united, because I could have visited them, if I had known what's going to happen. So I missed two former countries like in Vietnam. But never mind, gone is gone! Again I had arranged my hotel and some programme through Internet and a car and driver was waiting for me at the airport and took me to my Hotel Hill Town. Saturday 3.9. was my 61<sup>st</sup> birthday and the owner of my travel agency Mr Ibrahim and his assistant Mr. Abdoullah offered me a nice lunch but without beer, because we were in a Muslim country. Then we made a nice city tour and especially to the old town, which is extraordinary on account of its architecture. It is a neighbourhood of 300 000 inhabitants and all the buildings are like gingersnap houses, which we make during our Christmas time. All the women had veils on their face and most beautiful eyes and the men were eating chat leaves and had a small scimitar under their belt. Because it was my birthday I asked is there any possibilities to get at least some beers. They replied by driving us to a remote neighbourhood and asked how many bottles I need and I said two six packs and gave them money. Abdullah vanished and came back after five minutes with a plastic bag full of Heineken beers. In my language we call this a bag beer "pussikalja".

I knew that I committed a crime but under extenuating circumstances! Next morning with a little head ache we drove out of town to the mountainous area of 3000 metres, places like Wadi Dharar, Al-Tawile, Jawaan, Kawkaban, Shibani and Thula. On Tuesday morning I continued to my main target town Cairo for Judo World Championships.

## 146. EGYPT



Africa 32.

*Arab Republic of Egypt*

العربية مصر جمهورية *Jumhūrīyat Miṣr al-‘Arabīyah* in *Arabic* and *Gomhoreyyet Maṣr el-‘Arabeyya* in *Egyptian Arabic*

2005

*Population: 102,3 million*

*Independence: 28.2.1922 from Britain*



Egyptian Pound

Egypt was my second and last new country on my Asian-African tour. My role in Cairo was the president of the Finnish National Judo Team in the Judo World Championships and I stayed in Hotel President on a little island on the River Nile. Before the competitions I met the President of Finnish Judo Association, Mr. Tapio Mäki and went by taxi to Giza and Memphis pyramids and even crawled into the Giza, which was a bit of a claustrophobic experience. On the other free day, I rented a car with a driver and we drove first into a tunnel under Suez Canal on the lower side to Sinai desert in Asia. There I visited Moses Oyuna Musa, which has something to do with the stories of the Old Testament. After that we drove back to Africa over quite new Hosni Mubarak Japanese sponsored bridge over the Canal. We stopped in the middle of the bridge and I took some photos, but when we arrived to the African side we were stopped and I had to delete my photos. Then we drove up to the Mediterranean Sea to Port Said and took a ferry and went on the Canal again to Asian side to Port Foab, had a beer and came back. So I had shuttled between Africa and Asia by going under, over and on Suez Canal. Of course because I was on my Asian-African Tour! The next four days I spent all the time in the competition venue. It was on the other side of the huge Cairo. It took one and a half hours by taxi from my hotel to Cairo stadium in the hectic traffic of Cairo and in the evening another 90 minutes or so back. The Finnish team consisted of four men and three male judokas, but unfortunately none of them succeeded. My son did not this time qualify for this team. Anyway it was for me quite an experience to be so close to everything as the President of our team. I still was the director of the big international judo tournament Finnish Open. Last day in Cairo I visited the famous Egyptological Museum.

## 75<sup>th</sup> Journey 2005:    *The third visit for new countries in Near East*

This was my third country visit round trip to the Near East (1989 and 2004) and now three new countries: Qatar, UAE and Oman. This was also the last journey in 2005 and less than 50 countries to go!

## 147. QATAR



Asia 33.

*State of Qatar*

قطر دولة *Dawlat Qatar* in *Arabic*

2005

*Population: 2,9 million*

*Independence: 3.9.1971 from Britain*



Qatari Rial

So Qatar was the 150<sup>th</sup> new country for me and about 50 to go, looks promising! I arrived to Dubai airport very early in the morning and I had to wait three hours for the Qatar Airways flight to Doha, but I met a Finnish businessman and time flew by discussing and drinking morning beers. In Doha I slept in the Regency Hotel, where my room price had risen from 90 UD\$ to 150 US\$ due to the Asian Games. I booked from the hotel a half a day desert safari to the dunes and Lake Khor al-Adaid. It was very rock and roll type of driving together with a German IT-engineer. Very speedy but relaxing drive and surprising, because my German friend paid also for me! In the afternoon I made a short walk in the city centre and became hungry. There were only a few places, where you could drink beer in this country and my hotel's restaurant on the 12<sup>th</sup> floor. Very nice view over the city lights and I found a funny German-Kazak group of beer drinkers. I felt a bit dizzy in the morning but I was such a good tourist, that I walked to the National Museum, but unfortunately it was closed.



## 148. UNITED ARAB EMIRATES



2004



UAE Dirham

Asia 34.

*Population: 9.8 million*

*United Arab Emirates UAE*

*Independence: 2.11.1971 in the unification of the Emirates.*

المتحدة العربية الإمارات *Dawlat al-Imārāt al-'Arabīyah al-Muttaḥidah in Arabic*

UAE was the second new country on my third Near East tour and Dubai the first of the Emirates. I was staying in Hotel Oriental Palace, which actually was not a palace, just a cosy place to sleep. In front of my hotel there was Hotel Claridge and you could eat and drink beer in the evening on the first floor. Next morning the temperature was round 40 C, but it did not prevent me from walking in the city centre and the harbour, which were about 2-3 kilometres from my hotel. In the harbour I made a one-hour boat trip. After it I walked in the heat back to Hotel Claridge to have a nice cool beer on its ground floor. But the waiter said that they don't have beer and referred to the previous evening, but he said that now they had only Tea. I ordered a jug of tea and I was more than surprised to see how the tea was foaming and tasting of beer. I have never drunk so much tea at the same time. To get alcohol in Dubai is restricted but not impossible. Next day I made again a four hours walking tour around the city centre and it was still hot. Again I returned back thirsty to Hotel Claridge and ordered a jug of tea, but this time I got real tea and I asked why and the waiter pointed to a man going upstairs and said: Inspector! On the third day in the morning I went by taxi through Sharjah and Ras Al Khaiman Emirates to the border of Oman, where the Oman travel agency car was waiting for me.

## 149. OMAN



2005



Omani Rial

Asia 35.

*Population: 5,1 million*

*Sultanate of Oman*

*Independence: Imamate established 751, 1741 from Portugal and again 1971*

المتحدة العربية الإمارات دولة *Dawlat al-Imārāt al-'Arabīyah al-Muttaḥidah in Arabic*

Oman was the third and last new country on my tour. I visited the Musandam peninsula, which is an exclave surrounded by UAE, the Strait of Hormuz and the Gulf of Oman. The peninsula is strategically very important due to heavy transportation of Arab oil through the Strait of Hormuz. I stayed in the little town of Tibat in an apartment hotel, where I cooked my own meal one day and bought all the ingredients from a big super market nearby. My guiding driver took me to Jebel Harim mountains, which was actually for military reasons a closed area, but he seemed to have some relations with the authorities. The area is 150 million years old and we could see petrified shells and other relics from the sea at the altitude of 1500 metres. I found shells also on the road. Then we went to the town of Khabat by sea, it is very important for active smuggling between Oman and Iran. Next day I made a whole day cruise to the Musandam fjords, which reminded me to the Norwegian ones except that the mountains did not have trees at all, only rock. We visited historically important Telegraph Island, which at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a significant intermediate stage while building the cable connection between London and Karachi, Pakistan. On my last day I spent time in the only local people's restaurant, where you could drink beer and have small talk with local men and only men. Next morning, I went back by taxi and now through the Emirates of Ajman and Umm Al Qaiwan to Dubai, where I spent one more night before closing my tour by flying home.

## 76<sup>th</sup> Journey in 2006:

*A country visiting trip to Indian Ocean with two new ones.*

In 2006 there became one new independent country: Montenegro after the split of former Serbia and Montenegro. I made six journeys and visited altogether nine new countries. This year became very crucial for the rest of my Odyssey: I manage to sell my apartment in Lahti at a good price and moved back to Helsinki and rented an apartment. This guaranteed my still remaining 50 countries to go! So this trip was my second to the Indian Ocean (first in 1997 to Mauritius and Seychelles )and two more of its island countries: Sri Lanka and Maldives.

## 150. SRI LANKA



2006



Sri Lankan Rupee

Asia 36.

*Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka*

*Population: 21,5*

*Independency: 4.2.1948 from Britain*

*ශ්‍රී ලංකා ප්‍රජාතාන්ත්‍රික සමාජවාදී ජනරජය Sri Lanka Prajathantrika Samajavadi Janarajaya in Sinhala and இலங்கை சனநாயக சமத்துவ குடியரசு Ilangai Jananayaka Socialisa Kudiarasu in Tamil*

This was my start to 2006 after having just moved from Lahti to Helsinki in Finland. Sri Lanka, which I remember from my youth by name Ceylon, was my first of the two Indian Ocean Island countries and it was the 29<sup>th</sup> island country for me. I had booked through Internet a six days' package from the local Exotic Tours, which meant again a car waiting for me at the airport and taking me to my hotel in Colombo after a night flight. In the afternoon I had a nice city tour with my friendly and good guide Mr. Vighee and my driver Mr. Niasan. In the evening I ate the best lobster ever tasted and actually it was my first time! There had been a bomb explosion in Colombo just one day before my arrival, but now everything seemed to be quite peaceful. On Wednesday we started our tour to the Sri Lankan interior and our first stop was Pinawela Elephant Camp, which was mainly for the orphan elephant babies. Poaching of elephants is a serious problem in Sri Lanka, too. I greeted the male elephant Raja, because it had been born in 1944 like me! We went on to the middle of the country to the town of Kandy, where we stayed in Topaz Hotel on the high hill in the middle of the town with a great view over the town and its surrounding jungle. Both Hinduism and Buddhism are strong in Sri Lanka and we visited their magnificent temples. In Dambulla Cave Temple I saw the second highest Buddha statue in the world. Next two nights we were in Sigiriya resort hotel and from there I climbed up 1200 steps to Rock Fortres and was quite exhausted but happy. In the evening I had my first real tropical rain, which came down so suddenly and with such a huge amount of water and I got immediately wet and tried to run to safety but I slipped and fell and hit my head to the pavement. I got a quick first aid from the hotel personnel, but next morning I found a lot of small insect under my plaster and I had some problems with my wound also later on. My last remarkable experience was a one and a half hours' elephant ride in the jungle and river area. My female elephant's name was Surathaly and she was 37 years of age.

## 151. MALDIVES



2006



Maldivian Rufiyya

Asia 37.

*Republic of Maldives*

*Population: 540 000*

*Independence: 26.7.1965 from Britain*

*ދިވެހިރާއްޖޭގެ ޖުމްހޫރިއްޔާ Dhivehi Raa'jeyge Jumhooriyya in Maldivian (Dhivehi)*

Maldives was the second and last new country on my Indian Ocean little tour and the 30<sup>th</sup> island country for me. I went by motor boat from the airport to the Isle of Bandos, which was a typical honeymoon place for young and middle age couples. I was nearly the only single male tourist on the island. My only full day started with a heavy tropical rain but in the afternoon I could enjoy the beach life even if I don't feel like a beach boy! In the evening I enjoyed very substantial wine and food buffet and looked at couples falling in love or looking like it. In the morning back to the airport by motor boat and long flights via Frankfurt to the Isle of Katajanokka in Helsinki, where I just had moved in.

## 77<sup>th</sup> Journey in 2006:

*A new country visiting to Turkmenistan in Central Asia*

This trip was for only one new country, but it was the 15<sup>th</sup> and last of the former USSR socialist republics.

## 152. TURKMENISTAN



2006



Turkmen Manat

Asia 38.

*Turkmenistan*

*Türkmenistan in Turkmen*

*Population: 6,0 million*

*Independence: 27.10.1991 after USSR collapse*

I still missed the last former Soviet republic and I had to go there sooner or later and I decided sooner. I came to my Hotel Nissa in Ashgabat in the evening and after dinner I looked at the tv to see Spain beat Ukraine 4-0 in the football World Cup in Germany. Next day my guide Artem came and we drove around the city to see for example the huge statue of the sitting autocrat president Niyazov, who actually died in 2006. Next day I flew by Turkmenistan Airlines to the city of Mary, which is a place on the ancient Silk Route. I ate there a very tasty goat meat kebab and after that I flew back to Ashgabat. For the weekend I made with Artem and his driver a mountain safari up to 3000 metres, where the temperature was still over 30 C, which means hot due to the thin air. We spent one night in Candybil Turbasan resort hotel and the second night camping with tents. Our driver was Russian and he made a beautiful and tasty shaslik on an open fire, which was eaten with Russian vodka of course. There was also a steep cascade under which I could take a special mountain shower, which was warm (not like in 2005 the mountain creek bidet in Kyrgyzstan, which was freezing). On Sunday we returned back to Ashgabat, where the official temperature was 55 degrees Celsius. I saw the figures on the wall. Now my personal temperature difference was 100 degrees, because I had been in Finnish Lapland in -45 C. I flew in the evening by Lufthansa night flight to Frankfurt via Baku and next morning further to Helsinki.

## **78<sup>th</sup> Journey in 2006:**

*A country visiting to the youngest country of the world so far*

This was the second one new country journey, but a very crucial one. Serbia and Montenegro split into independent Montenegro and Serbia became finally Serbia by its name. This was already the third time I had conquered Europe (Albania 1988 and Bosnia & Herzegovina 1998).

### **153. MONTENEGRO**



**2006**

**Europe 45/45 (Third time 100%)**

**Republic of Montenegro**

**Црна Гора Crna Gora in *Montenegrin***



**Euro (not Euro-country)**

**Population: 628 000**

**Independence: 3.6.2006 from Serbia and Montenegro**

Montenegro, the Black Mountain was only about a one-month- young newly independent country, when I visited there. I found from my Podgorica hotel a private taxi driver Miro, who actually looked like young actor Robert de Niro, and he knew it. I made a four days' deal with him and his 20 years old Mercedes. On Saturday we drove around the capital and its surroundings, especially to Zablak Cmojevica mountain and to its small and cosy village 50 kilometres out of Podgorica. The weather was so clear that you could see even to Albania. We visited also Miro's parents and had a nice cool beer with small local eating. On our way back we stopped in Mala Venezia village and I had another cool beer. On Sunday we drove to the south to the Adriatic Sea and to a well-known port and tourist town Budva. From there we drove up to the north to a very famous old town of Kotor, which belongs to UNESCO cultural heritage sites. I checked into my nice little hotel and then in the afternoon we sat in an outdoor café and watched F1 Magny Court competition on a huge wall television. The winner was Michael Schumacher and Kimi Räikkönen was fifth. Miro drove back to Podgorica and I stayed in Kotor for the next two days enjoying nice weather and Italian food and wine. Of course I met a nice Finnish couple and a noisy group of Finns, whom I did not go to meet. On Tuesday Miro came back and we continued our Montenegro tour. We drove to a beautiful fjord and visited a very expensive casino hotel, where the James Bond film Casino Royale was partly filmed. I did not play, but I introduced myself to the bar attender: My name is Porna, Ismo Porna from Finland! I got a complimentary beer, but not vodka martini shaken! From there we went back first by a ferry over the fjord and then to Podgorica and I flew in the evening back to Helsinki via Vienna.

## **79<sup>th</sup> Journey 2006:**

*The third one country trip this year and this time to Near East again*

This was just a weekend trip to one new country and Bahrain was the 31<sup>st</sup> Island country for me.

### **154. BAHRAIN**



**2006**

**Asia 39.**

**Kingdom of Bahrain**

**البحرين مملكة Mamlakat al-Baḥrayn in *Arabic***



**Bahrain Dinar**

**Population: 1,3 million**

**Independence: 15.8.1971 from Britain**

Bahrain was the 31<sup>st</sup> Island country and 22<sup>nd</sup> Monarchy. The air was very hot, temperature was 45 C. This was a long weekend trip to get one more new country into my collection. I stayed in the Hotel Atlas and I booked there a whole day car tour to the island. We spent the whole Sunday by driving around the deserted and sandy island. visiting fortresses and temples and oil fields. We drove also on the King Fahd's causeway to the border of Saudi Arabia. I went up to the viewing tower and you could see far to Saudi area, which was so close but so difficult to get in. After this we drove to the F1 Circuit and were allowed to walk in and look around, but not to drive, unfortunately (*I had done Monaco and Montreal circuits by taxi. In 2006 the Grand Prix was won by Fernando Alonso and Kimi Räikkönen was third.*). Finally, we visited the Al-Wad's Tree of Life, which was a vital tree growing up from the sand and staying in the middle of the sand desert. In the evening I watched the Budapest Grand Prix on television, which was won by Jenson Button..

## **80<sup>th</sup> Journey 2006:**    *My friend's 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary journey to Bangladesh, India and Bhutan*

This journey was a tribute to my friend Torsti Kirvelä, my earlier co-worker, who had accompanied me in 1994 to Papua New Guinea on my 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary trip. Now it was Torsti's 60<sup>th</sup>. For me Bangladesh and Bhutan were new Asian countries and in India Kolkata was a new fascinating big city.

### **155. BANGLADESH**



**2006**



**Bangladesh Taka**

**Asia 40.**

**Population: 165, 0 million**

**People's Republic of Bangladesh**

**Independence: 26.3. 1971 from Pakistan**

**গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ** *Gônoprojatontri Bangladesh in Bengali*

We started our Asian birthday tour from Dhaka in Bangladesh. There we made a whole day taxi drive in this huge and chaotic city and stopped for a little shopping and walking in the quieter areas. We stayed in the Hotel Washington. Next day we went to the old town and walked around there and in the evening we started our 26 hours long river and delta boat trip by M/S Rocket to the town of Kulna. Our cabin was in the middle of the ship just beside the dining room. I had to intervene in a quarrel between a local farther and his son, because it became violent. The reason was that the son spoke with his girlfriend on telephone and she represented the wrong religion. I asked the crew to stop it and then we let the son finish speaking with Torsti's mobile. Everything settled down, but the farther did not like me, but never mind. In the evening next day, we arrived at Kulna and we took a riksha to Hotel Western Inn. Next day we made a car and boat trip the famous natural area Sundarbaan delta and archipelago. The most modern sight was a Buddhist monk speaking in the jungle on his mobile telephone. Next day we flew back to Dhaka by local Biman Airlines and when we tried to enter the international lounge, we found that we had been illegally in the country. The incoming officer had not stamped the visas into our passports. We had paid for the visas, but... The passport officers believed us and let us go and so we flew to our next place, Kolkata (former Calcutta) in India. I had been in 1998 in Delhi, but Kolkata was a new big and chaotic city for me. One of the toughest things we saw was a man with leprosy! We visited by taxi some places like Dakshiners Hindi temple. Next morning, we continued our round trip to mysterious Bhutan.

### **156. BHUTAN**



**2006**



**Asia 41.**

**Population: 772 000    Bhutanese Ngultrum    Indian Rupee**

**Kingdom of Bhutan**

**Independence: 8.8.1949 from Britain**

**འབྲུག་རྒྱལ་ཁབ་** *'Brug Rgyal-khab in Dzongkha and भूटान, Bhūṭān in Devanagari*

Bhutan was the last country to visit during our Asian tour. It was the 23<sup>rd</sup> Monarchy for me and its located just closet of the Himalajas. In order to go there you must buy a package trip, which includes return flights by Druk Air form Kolkata, hotel with full board and the guide with a car. In 2006 it cost 1000 euros. The amount of tourists was restricted to 10 000 persons per year and I think we were two of the last. Bhutan is the only Buddhist country in the world. Bhutan had just changed the king, but the son of the present king will be crowned in 2008, because it is a better year in their calendar and because there will be great changes in state policy toward a more democratic



and parliamentary system. Our guide was a living encyclopedia of Buddhism and we learned quite a lot maybe too much of it. The traditional values are very strongly respected and preserved in Bhutan. All the male civil servants including our guide were dressed with a traditional skirt type of a dress and most of the buildings were traditional architecture. We went by car up to 4000 metres and the view of the capital was fantastic, but the air was thin and cold and we were dressed for hot sunshine. We saw also a traditional archery competition. Bhutan is absolutely one of the most special and still very isolated and really interesting countries. That was my birthday present to my mate, 60 years old Torsti!

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## **81<sup>st</sup> Journey 2006:**     *A round trip to Indonesia and East Timor*

This journey was the fifth to Asia this year. I made a round trip to two big islands of Indonesia and to East Timor, the second youngest country in the world after Montenegro, which I visited this year as well.

### **157. INDONESIA**



**2006**

Asia 42.

*Republic of Indonesia*

*Republik Indonesia in Bahasa Indonesian*

*Population: 273,5 million*

*Independence: 17.8.1945 from the Netherlands*



**Indonesian Rupee**

Indonesia was the 32<sup>nd</sup> Island country for me and I started it from the Island of Bali, which belongs to the Lesser Sunda Archipelago. I stayed in the middle of the island in Uhub in an exotic and huge traditional temple type of a building of Hotel Gayatri recommended by a Finnish female friend of mine. The owners knew the Finnish lady and that's why I was treated even better than the others. They gave me a car and guiding driver and we drove two different days around the island. There were a lot of temples, volcanic mountains, lakes and one a heavy tropical rain shower and storm, which felled trees on our road and made them muddy and difficult to drive. After the rain we went to bath in the hot outside springs and enjoy a frosty local beer. The next day of driving ended with a lovely whole body massage. On Monday my mouth inflamed and I had to go to the dentist to get an antibiotic cure. From Bali I flew by Garuda Indonesia flight to Yogyakarta, where I was met by Yohannes Sugianto, whom I knew through Internet, because he was collecting Asterix translations like me. I had with me four Finnish dialect translations and four Bibles of different language, which he collects as well. Yohannes had a book shop called Sari, which means The Core of Knowledge. He drove me to Brambaha and Borbudo ancient temple ruins and in the evening we went to the theatre to see a dance performance of the Indonesian national epos Ramayana Story. On Thursday 6 December 2006 was the 89<sup>th</sup> Day of Finnish Independence and I visited Yohannes' home and met his nice wife and daughter. After a few drinks we went to celebrate the independency at a fine Indonesian restaurant with really excellent food. Next day I continued my round trip with Yohannes to Denpasar, where we stayed in a nice indoor pool Hotel Kuta.

### **158. EAST TIMOR**



**2006**

Asia 43.

*Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste*

*Repúblika Demokrátika Timór-Leste in Tetum and República Democrática de Timor-Leste in Portuguese*

*Population: 1,3 million*

*Independence: 17.8.1945 from the Netherlands*



**US Dollar**

East Timor was the second new country on this trip and the 33<sup>rd</sup> Island country for me. It was only four years old and the political situation was still unstable and next year there would be presidential elections. There were UN police forces under UNPFD from New Zealand and Australia. I spoke with the "Kiwi"-policemen and told them that in January 2007 I'm going to travel to their country. There had been a bomb explosion just two days ago quite near our Hotel Turismo. Yohannes had a religious friend in Dili and he took me to his female friend to her house, where there were nine children and a lot of relatives. In the evening we ate in a Catholic Nunnery with the nuns, which I had never ever done. They accepted me as a guest of honour even when I told them that I had left my church 50 years ago and I have no god in my life. Next day we made a half a day car tour with driver to Railako, Er Mere and Aliehu villages and saw the rough countryside and hard life. We had to leave the country already on Sunday, one day earlier, due to the changes of the flight schedule. Yohannes continued to Yogyakarta and I had to stay one more night in Bali in a nice Hotel Karthi and I had one of the best spaghetti carbonara I ever

tasted in Denpasar Hard Rock Café. Next morning, I flew to Hong Kong, which now belonged to China and spent on night in Kowloon neighbourhood and participated in a nice city tour, which went up the hill, from where there was a magnificent view over Hong Kong and its lively bay and port.

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**82<sup>nd</sup> Journey 2007:**     *The second journey to six new Oceanian countries: New Zealand, Fiji, Solomon Islands, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu*

The year 2007 was the busiest travel year in my Odyssey, 17 new countries from three continents: Six from Oceania, eight from Africa and three from Asia. Four of them were in a war: Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia and Sudan. I spent more than three months abroad and I went also to the northernmost place in the world for normal tourists: Spitzbergen, Norway and Russia on the Arctic Sea. This trip was my second to Oceania and now a one month round trip of six new countries, one of my most exotic journeys!

## 159. NEW ZEALAND



**2007**



New Zealand Dollar

Oceania 3.

New Zealand

Aotearoa in *Māori*

*Population: 4,8 million*

*Independence: 26.9.1907 from Britain*

The first trip to Oceania took one month and started from New Zealand. Last time I was in Oceania was 1994, when I had my 50<sup>th</sup> birthday in Papua New Guinea and after that I went to Australia. In Auckland my friend Brian Crean, whom I had met in 2005 in Uzbekistan, was waiting for me in the morning at the airport. After a morning local beer and a foggy sightseeing, he took me to Heineken Auckland Open tennis ATP-tournament in tennis. The obly Finnish high level player Jarkko Nieminen played there against Olivier Rochus from Belgium. Jarkko had won this tournament last year and was very popular. Unfortunately, he lost the game, but I had quite fun in the stadium. Actually it was my first time to watch an international tennis match live. It was a hot and sunny day and I managed to persuade two charming local ladies to support Jarkko, and suddenly a man in front of me spoke Finnish language to me and joined to our small but noisy fan club of Jarkko. But this two hours sitting had bad consequences, because the sun shone from the zenith and I forgot that there was an ozone hole over New Zealand and I burned my head and face so badly that Brian took me to a pharmacy to buy proper medicine. Then we drove to the North-East coast of the island to a small and cosy town of Tauranga, which was located in the Bay of Plenty, where James Cook stopped on his first Oceanian voyage of discovery in 1769. I lived in Brian's and Merilynn's big house. Next evening we went for eating and drinking with Brian and his friend and I really had difficulties in understanding their very strong New Zealand English accent. On Wednesday Brian's son Shane drove me to the middle part of the Northern Island. First we visited Wi-O-tapu huge volcanic park with geysers and sulphur bonds. Then we continued through a forest area, which strongly reminded me Finland, but it was a bit hillier. We went to Rotorua, where we drove with a gondola lift up and came down with summer luge few times and the speed was quite fast. Never done before. After that we had a nice local lunch with beer in a pub called Pig and Whistle, which was a former police station. After the lunch we drove back via Lake Tarawa and the Blue and Green Lakes. I was so grateful for this courtesy that I went to the super market and bought ingredients for a lamb meat balls and creamy potatoes, both new tastes for Brian, Merilynn and Shane. Brian had a beautiful old Jaguar racing car and he took me for a drive, I had never been before in a car like that. On my last day on Sunday Merilynn managed to get me a ticket to a big outdoor festivity called Blues, Brews & Bar-B-Ques BBB, where you could enjoy local small breweries' beers and all sort of local snacks and other food. The weather and feeling was nice and relaxing. In the evening Brian drove me to the nearest airport and I was a bit dizzy to fly by Air New Zealand to Auckland and further by Air Pacific flight to Suva, the capital of Fiji.

### Special overseas areas:



Cook Islands



Niue



Tokelau

All in South Pacific Ocean and **not yet visited!**

## 160. FIJI



Oceania 4.

*Republic of Fiji*

*Matanitu Tugalala o Viti in **Fijian**, रिपब्लिक ऑफ फीजी Ripablik āph Phījī in **Fijian Hindi***

**2007**

*Population: 896 000*

*Independence: 10.10.1790*



Fijian Dollar

Fiji was the second island on my tour. I met at the Auckland airport a Fijian pastor who took me to the South Sea Private Hotel, which was a backpack travellers' favourite and actually my first such. I managed to get the only room with own toilet and shower. I went to walk to the centre, which was quite near, and bought some items for cold eating and drinking by myself in the lounge of the hotel. I had just started my cold dinner, when a German backpacker Heike Schoene came and met me. I invited her to share my dinner and wine and she accepted. She was also on her round trip in Oceania. We both had booked room for three nights and decided to spend the time in Suva together. She was from Weimar, former GDR area. On Saturday we went by taxi to the entrance of Coku-I-Suva Forest Park, where we walked around in the forest looking at some children swimming in small forest ponds or lakes. After that we started to hitch hike down to the city and managed get a lift to the local brewery's restaurant. There we both tasted six different and very high quality beers and ate a potato pizza, which also was great. Suddenly we were accompanied by an English advertisement writer, who had a Swedish girlfriend. He took us by his car back to the hill to the best hotel in Suva. There we continued beer drinking and met the director of the hotel. In the evening we got a lift to our hotel and we were a bit dizzy, but happy with all what happened. On Sunday morning we went for walking quite early and saw an open catholic church, where the mass was just about to begin. We went in to this catholic mass and enjoyed it to the end even if neither of us belonged to any religion or church. But the atmosphere was great and people so friendly. The pastor spoke about how Jesus made wine from water and that fit us perfectly. After the mass we went and had a nice local lunch with Australian quality red wine. In the afternoon Heike went by local bus to Nadi and I stayed for one more night. Before that I went to the National Museum and afterwards I spent my lonesome evening in the Bad Dog Drinking Guys restaurant. On Monday morning I flew with an Air Fiji in small plane with a female pilot to the island of Levuka. There was nothing on the airport and had to wait five hours before someone came and drove me to the town, where I did not have much time to spend before returning back to Suva. I managed to climb over 300 steps up to the hill and after that to drink two beers and take a taxi to the airport and fly again alone with the pilot to Suva. On the same evening I flew to Nadi, which is famous tourist town and spent one night in Bay Hotel Resort, which was full of noisy young but nice Americans. My room was just above the restaurant and bar area, but I survived! Next morning, I flew to Solomon Islands. (I visited Nadi again ten days later, when I flew from Tonga back before going to Vanuatu. *(I have visited Fiji twice.)*)

## 161. SOLOMON ISLANDS



**2007**

Oceania 5.

*Solomon Islands*

*Population: 687 000*

*Independence: 7.7.1978 from Britain*



Solomon Islands Dollar

Solomon Islands was the third country on my tour and the 36<sup>th</sup> Island country. I lived in the best hotel of the country, Hotel King Solomon. I ate a great Melanesian buffet dinner and after that became inspired by dancing with some of the female guests and it seemed that I had taken some drinks too much. I woke in the morning and found that I had lost all my local dollars, but I let it be, because I wasn't sure what exactly had happened. Anyway I went on with my original schedule and went on a boat trip with my guide to the Tulagi island to look at the Iron Bay, which was full of wrecked and destroyed vessels from World War II. It is very popular for scuba divers, which I unfortunately had never tried or learnt. On Wednesday I flew by Solomon Airlines Solomon Airlines (134.) in a small aeroplane to Laulasi & Busu Islands, Malka province and Auki village, where I was accommodated into a nice Auki Motel. The local guide Marata Man took me to the very deep Riba cave and to the very local village of Dukwasi. Next day we made a boat trip to Langa Langa Lagoon and visited two interesting small islands with traditional rituals and skull grave yard. On Saturday morning I flew back to Honiara and further by Solomon Airlines via Espitu Santo to Naji and again further by Pacific Airlines to Samoa.

## 162. SAMOA



Oceania 6.

*Independent State of Samoa*

2007

*Population: 200 000*

*Independence: 1.1.1962 New Zealand by name Western Samoa and in 1977 Samoa*

*Malo Sa'oloto Tuto'atasi o Sāmoa in [Samoan](#)*



Samoan Tala

So I left Naji on Saturday evening and arrived to Apia in Samoa on Saturday morning after a night flight and having crossed the International Date Line, which meant that I had lost one day. I lived in Paseka Inn and went to eat one pizza recommended by Lonely Planet travel book, and listened to cd-blues in Cocktail On the Rocks Bar. On Sunday I went with a car and driver to drive around the whole island of Upolu. The most remarkable thing was the amount of 400 churches on the island, which might be the world record related to the amount of people. We walked to two different cascades and one beach. The best thing was the lunch with a local family with a really substantial local buffet. Next morning on Monday I started my Air Pacific flight to Tonga and made a stop in Pago Pago, American Samoa. There we were informed that the weather was so bad in the South Pacific and the forecast promised even worse, which meant that we had to return to Apia. I was listening to the news and an elderly Japanese gentleman came and asked help and I told him not in Japanese but with my easy English and he asked to accompany me. He was 70 years old and by name Sachio Asano. We flew back and I was worried about my schedule in the future and the same was with Mr. Asano. I asked about the next flight and they said it will be in Thursday, which could have meant a lot of troubles. The Air Pacific ladies said that they are not responsible to make any refund, because it was force majeure. I fought two hours and finally got free accommodation and meals in a hotel for two nights, because on Wednesday there would be an Air New Zealand flight to Tonga. They purchased our tickets and with that money I managed to buy us new tickets to that plane. Mr. Asano was following me all the time and was very grateful as the Japanese can be. We spent two nights and one day by eating and drinking beer and listening to live music. On Wednesday we flew to Tonga, but we got there on Thursday because we crossed again the International Date Line and now we got the lost day back.

## 163. TONGA



Oceania 7.

*Kingdom of Tonga*

*Pule'anga Fakatu'i 'o Tonga in [Tongan](#)*

2007

*Population: 106 000*

*Independence: 4.6.1970 from Britain*



Tongan Pa'anga

Tonga was the fifth new country on my tour. I came together with Sachio Asano, who went to his hotel owned by a Japanese lady and I went to Heilala Holiday Resort owned by a German couple in the city of Nuku'afon. Sasano was a rugby coach and he was on a recruiting trip for big players to Japan. He had been here earlier. (*I met Sachio Asano next year in Japan on my way to Northern Pacific countries.*) In the first evening I went with some other clients of my hotel to a local cultural centre, where they arranged a dancing and music performance for foreign tourists. I was chosen by the foreign audience to be a Noble person, who had to participate on the stage in the rituals and to have a speech of appreciation. I felt myself noble. Next day I went by boat to the nearby Pangaimotu Island, where I met a Canadian couple from Vancouver Island. We spent the whole day on the beach and that day was my only beach day during my entire round trip. On my last day I participated with two business men in an island tour on Tongatapu island. I saw volcanic holes, which blew smoke out of the rock. Finally, we visited Holomba village on Hufangalupe bay, where Captain Cook had been on his second South Pacific voyage in 1773. After the tour I took a taxi and went to get Sasano to the airport. At the airport a white man came to ask me what is the English accent I speak and I said that it is Finnish English. Then he introduced himself in clear Finnish language: Good afternoon, I'm Mr. Grönqvist from Finland. He had just arrived from Kiribati. The world is too small for the Finns! We flew together with Sasano to Nadi in Fiji and Sasano had a car waiting and Wille as well. I met Wille later in the evening and we had a nice dinner in a Mexican restaurant. *I had read earlier the Tongan newspaper and found that the state was seeking candidates for the Minister of Education Culture and Tongan nationality was not needed. I thought for a moment to send my application, but I did not do it!*



## 164. VANUATU



2007

Oceania 8.

Population: 307 000

Republic of Vanuatu

Independence: 30.7.1980 from Britain and France (Former New Hebrides)

Ripablik blong Vanuatu in *Bislama* and République du Vanuatu in *French*



Vanuatu Vatu

I stayed in Port Vila in Hotel Room with a View, which was true. In the morning I walked slowly in the city centre and managed to buy a package trip to the volcanic Isle of Tanna for next day. In the afternoon I participate in a trip to Melen village, where there was a botanic garden and quite nice cascades. On Tuesday I flew Air Vanuatu in a small aircraft to the Isle of Tanna, where I went with an Aussi-Kiwi couple and a young English woman deep to the jungle to the Yasur Tribe Bungalow Resort. We saw there a nice hunting and dancing show in the forest. In the afternoon we went to Mt. Yasur, which is an active volcano and where one can go very close to see it acting. We could see it bursting burning lava up to 200 hundred metres and we were only about 50 metres close to it. The ground was trembling with a sound and little holes under our feet were bursting hot steam to the air. Unfortunately, my camera battery stopped working and I couldn't take any photos. Eugene from New Zealand promised to send me some by email, but he never did it, bloody tourist! In the evening we had a nice supper in the jungle resort with some mud wine, which really tasted of mud. Next morning, I had to wake up at four o'clock and go to the airport and fly by Vanair to Port Vila and further by Air Vanuatu to Sydney for the second time (first time was in 1994). From Sydney I made a day trip to the famous Blue Mountains, but unfortunately it was so foggy weather, that I missed nearly all the magnificent views. And then on Thursday I had a Cathay night flight to Hong Kong, where I took a ferry to Macao not for gambling but only visiting, because it is a special region, which now belonged to China like Hong Kong. And finally another Cathay night flight to London and further to Helsinki. So my one month long Oceanian round trip was finally over and I was really satisfied but also happy to come back to terribly cold Finland.

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### 83<sup>rd</sup> Journey 2007:    *A weekend visit to another new Near East country*

This weekend trip was my second new country visit trip this year and my fifth visit to the Near East and this time the Kingdom of Kuwait.

## 165. KUWAIT



2007

Asia 44.

Population: 4,3 million

State of Kuwait

Independence: 19.6.1961 from Britain

دولة الكويت *Dawlat al-Kuwait* in *Arabic*



Kuwaiti Dinar

This was again just a one new country weekend visit, which became a bit even shorter, because I had to stay in Frankfurt Sheraton Airport Hotel one night due to the cancellation of the Etihad flight. On Saturday morning I flew by Lufthansa. I spoke with an Indian origin Kuwaiti businessman Mr. Mushtaqi, who promised to drive me around on Sunday. I stayed the little town of Al Riggae just outside Kuwait City, where I walked on Saturday seeking cold beer, but without success. I visited the Tower from where I had a nice view over the city and to the sea. On Sunday, which was free for the workers of Johnson&Johnson where Mr. Mushataqi worked, he drove me around the city and he took me to Taraq Rajab Calligraphic Museum, which was amazing and the first of that kind for me. Finally, he took me to the airport and bought me a huge fast food portion, but I wasn't hungry and I gave it a begging poor woman with child. She was so happy that I got several blessings from Allah and felt satisfied. When I got through the passport control, I finally got a cold beer.

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### 84<sup>th</sup> Journey 2007:    *A new country trip to a civil war country, Iraq and its Kurdistan*

This was my third journey this year and to Iraq, but not Bagdad but Kurdistan, where life was more peaceful than in the rest of the country.

## 166. IRAQ



2007



Iraqi Dinar

Asia 45.

Iraq

Iraqi Kurdistan

Population 40,2 million

Independence: 3.10.1932 from Britain

Republic of Iraq

العراق جمهورية *Jumhūrīyat al-‘Irāq in Arabic*

عراق کۆمارى *Komar-i ‘Êraq in Central Kurdish*

*Iraqi Kurdistan autonomous region (Southern Kurdistan)*

کوردستان هەریمی *Herêmi Kurdistan in Kurdish and إقليم العراق Iqlīm Kurdistān Al-‘Irāq in Arabic*

I was travelling with Mr. Wille Grönqvist, whom I met in late January this year at the airport of Tongatapu in the Kingdom of Tonga in Oceania. He is also collecting countries, but quite far behind from me, but the all time proceeding. It was easy to fly by Austrian Airlines to Erbil in Iraqi Kurdistan. I dared not to go to Bagdad at that time due to dangerous war circumstances. The Region of Kurdistan is officially part of the Republic of Iraq, but has quite strong autonomy with its own flag, army and parliament. Iraqi Kurdistan is one of the four Kurd areas (Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Syria). Kurds are the biggest ethnic nation without their own country. We stayed in Hotel Arbil Tower, which was safe and quite old. We walked safely there and made a taxi tour around the city. In our hotel we saw a war lord, who was also a Member of the Parliament and who represented the small special religious minority called Yazidis. He and his body guards were fully armed and looked very threatening, but no harm. The Yazidis are some kind of mixture between God and Satan worship. (*Two week later the Iraqi, not Kurdistan, soldiers killed over 200 Yazidis in a massacre in Kurdistan region!*) On Sunday we made a whole day tour by a car and guiding driver to the countryside. We were checked ten times during our trip, but no problem. We visited a nice water park, cascades and some historical places, and stopped of course to a local Efes beer pub by the road. The most interesting and amazing thing happened in the mountain of Galy Ali Berg. Our driver stopped the car on a slope of the road, extinguished the engine and put the gear on free position. What happened? Instead of starting to roll down it rolled upwards. What the hell, we asked? He did it again and the same happened. We did not find any tricks. Finally, we realized that the car was on an exceptionally strong magnetic field and it drew the metal car upwards. Amazing experience! The rest of the trip had no new surprises except check points.

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## 85<sup>th</sup> Journey 2007: A long weekend trip to another new country in war. Afghanistan

This was the fourth journey to new countries this year and the second country in a war situation: Afghanistan. Actually was the last of the seven so called -stan countries. *The suffix -stan is Persian and Urdu for "place of," or "where one stands."*

## 167. AFGHANISTAN



2007



Afghanistan Afghani

Asia 46.

Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

Population: 38,9 million

Independence: 19.8.1919 from Britain

افغانستان اسلامي جمهوریت *Da Afġānistān Islāmī Jumhoryat in Pashto and جمهوری افغانستان Jomhūrī-ye Eslāmī-ye Afġānestān in Persian (Farsi)*

I was within three days again in a war country after Iraq. I had arrived in Helsinki on Monday and arrived in Kabul on Thursday. I was on private judo journey in order to get familiar with IJF Judo in Peace project run in Kabul by the Norwegian Judo Association. I had a personal invitation from Afghan Judo to participate in an international seminar and make easier to get the visa, which was just a piece of cake and did not cost anything at the airport. The international seminar was me and the Afghans! I stayed in the centre in a quite safe Naween Quest House, which was protected by surrounding walls. My hosts were the Afghan Judo and its very high civil servant Mr. Formuli, who was the President of the State Peace Committee. Wherever we went by car I had three judokas around me and if it was Mr. Formuli's car there were two armed soldiers in the car. I visited the quite small dojo, where I met younger and older judokas training. I also visited the Afghan Olympic Committee. I met also some representatives of an international Aschiana organisation, who were helping street children and trying to get them back to school instead of selling small items on the street. I became interested in the project and developed some idea to organize a new development project, but I found myself perhaps too old for that.

Friday is the Islamic Sunday and I was taken to Karghan artificial lake nearby for a picnic. It was beautiful weather and the place was full of local families and other people. The feeling was very relaxing and even encouraging. We ate very tasty shaslik meal with good local beers while military choppers were flying over us. On Saturday it was the anniversary day of the Islamic revolution and there was a partial prohibition for free movement, which meant for me staying inside my hotel's walls. We got news that on Thursday the soldiers had managed to stop a lorry full of explosives and it was meant to destroy the big national meeting of local tribe chiefs, which was hosted by the President Karzai. The amount of explosives was so big, that it could have destroyed a huge part of the city. On Thursday I had visited the Finnish Embassy and informed them about my existence in the city. On Saturday I managed to make a deal with a street boy to buy me some beers, because the hotel did not sell any. We were both satisfied, the boy and me, because I paid well to the boy for his delivery. Everything went fine but everything bad was also very close.

## **86<sup>th</sup> Journey 2007:**     *A one month round trip to Central and Eastern Africa's six new countries*

This was the fifth journey this year and the second longest one. I managed to visit six Central and Eastern African countries including two Island countries: Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania, Comoros and Madagascar. I travelled to four first countries with my good friend Anssi Vuohelainen, my former development art worker in Namibia 1998-2000. Two weeks after Madagascar I went to the Northernmost tourist place in the world: Spitzbergen, Norway and Russia.

### **168. UGANDA**



**Africa 33.**

**Republic of Uganda**

**Jumhuri ya Uganda in *Swahili***

**2007**

**Population: 45.7 million**

**Independence: 9.10.1962 from Britain**



**Ugandan Shilling**

Uganda was the first of the six new Central and Eastern African countries for me. I was travelling with my mate Anssi and our beginning was not too promising, because we had to stay an extra night at Schiphol Airport hotel due to the cancellation of KLM's night flight. Next morning, we were allowed to travel in business class with our own TV monitor and free champagne. At Entebbe airport Ms. Margaret and her driver were waiting for us. She was a friend of one Finnish friend of mine. They drove us to Kampala, the capital of Uganda to our Hotel Tourist. We had a drink with Margaret and then we just walked in the city centre. It was Saturday and a national cleaning day. Everywhere were a lot of people cleaning and Kampala city centre was astonishingly clean to be an African city. We also went to a huge market full of people. I had booked in advance through Internet from Travel Hemisphere Agency a three days' safari package and we met our nice guide Ronnie. We drove a few hours to Murchinson National Park to the South-West part of Uganda. We stayed in Red Chili Resort Camp and made by our 4x4 vehicle day safaris to see wild animals. We made also a short boat trip on Lake Victoria, which is the source of the White Nile river. We saw the following wild animals living in Murchinson Game Park: Elephant, giraffe, buffalo, lion, boar, various antelopes, gnu, Nile crocodile, hippo and various monkeys. On our return we visited Lake Albert and Budongo Forest, where we saw quite rare big chimpanzees jumping high on the trees and sitting on us. In Kampala Ronnie took us to his home to see his family and have some beers. In the evening we met once again Ms. Margaret, whose driver took us to Entebbe airport and we flew to Kigali.

### **169. RWANDA**



**Africa 34.**

**Republic of Rwanda**

**Repubulika y'u Rwanda in *Kinyarwand* and République Rwandaise in *French***

**2007**

**Population: 13,0 million**

**Independence: 1.7.1962 from Belgium**



**Rwandan Franc**

Rwanda was the second new country on my round trip, which I continued with my friend Anssi. I had read that it's easy to get a visa at the airport, but this was not the case. We had to wait more than an hour to find high enough officer to admit the visa. We got it but the price was quite high and we got serious warning, but he let us enter the country. The second problem was the hotel, which I had booked in advance. They did not find any reservation and the hotel was full and it was quite late in the evening. They advised us to go to Hotel Imbis, where

we got a room after quite a long discussion and not a small bit of extra money. Next morning, we met our guide Patrick from Travel Hemisphere, the same company as in Uganda. We went with him to the city centre, where the traffic was as chaotic as in Kampala, but it was astonishingly clean, too. In the evening we went to a super market and bought ingredients with drinks for our own cold buffet in our hotel room, where we had also a small balcony. On Wednesday morning we started with Patrick and the driver on our trip towards Ruhengeri Park National des Volcanos to meet the mountain gorillas. The Rwandan country side and roads were really clean. We lost one tyre and we were helped by half men of a little village. We were accommodated in Kinigi Lodge Resort, which was very nice place. Then we went and enrolled us for the next day's mountain gorilla safari. I had already paid in advance the 500 US\$ fee per person. Next morning, we started in a group of eight tourists, guide and two armed soldiers. We climbed up Mt. Karisimbi one and half hours and we started to wait for the mountain gorillas. After 15 minutes there came a group of ten gorillas led by a 800 kilogramme so called Silverback gorilla. The youngest one was about two months young. We were allowed to look at them only one hour and stay exactly where we were. The gorillas are some kind of semi-wild, because they had become used to us. There are also fully wild gorillas in that region, but somewhere else. The problem has been heavy poaching, which nearly killed the gorillas into extinction, but now the situation was much better and the amount of gorillas has increased significantly. We were in the same region as in the famous movie Gorillas in the Mist: The Story of Dian Fossey from 1988. After this successful mountain gorilla safari, we went to see the Research and Protection Centre for the Mountain Gorillas. The young Italian female worker did not like gorilla tourists much and tried to blame us. We had to remind her that with our 500 UD dollars per tourist we financed a great part of their work and every dollar is for the gorillas. We had a nice evening with good beer and food and Anssi's excellent digital photos. Next morning, we continued our trip by visiting the region and due to clear weather we could see all the five mountains. We drove also to Lake Bulera meeting local fishermen and to the border with the Congo Democratic Republic. We couldn't cross the border and thus that's why I had to leave that country for the future. After this we drove back to Kigali and on Saturday before our flight to Burundi we visited the 1994 Genocide Museum, which was a shocking experience. Rwanda had amazingly well recovered from that. I had seen the same kind of museum in 1993 in Phnom Penh in Cambodia.

## 170. BURUNDI



Africa 35.

*Republic of Burundi*

*Republika y'u Burundi in **Kirundi** and *Republique du Burundi* in **French***

**2007**

*Population: 11,9 million*

*Independence: 1.7.1962 from Belgium*



**Burundi Franc**

French speaking Burundi was the third country on my tour and I was still travelling with Anssi. We stayed in a French Novotel Hotel just in the heart of Bujumbura. The first day we just walked around the city without any special musts, but I was a bit tired and managed to raise a quarrel between us but Anssi as the younger gentleman solved it peacefully. But suddenly we were surrounded by a group of young black boys asking some financial support. We said politely no, but then they started to blame us for racism and the situation started to be threatening. But by two generations of Finnish guts and diplomacy we managed to solve the problem peacefully without any hard feelings from both sides. On Sunday we made a taxi trip to Lake Tanganyika, which is Africa's largest lake. We went for a short swim and after that we enjoyed our beers and snacks under a hot sunshine in an open beach restaurant. In the afternoon we made another taxi drive to the memorial of Livingstone and Stanley saying that they had met here, but honestly the famous words by Mr. Stanley: Dr. Livingstone I presume? had been said in Tanzania. Maybe they were said in Burundi as well, who knows? In the afternoon we ate in a Chinese restaurant and next morning we flew to Dar es Salaam in Tanzania.

## 171. TANZANIA



Africa 36.

*The United Republic of Tanzania*

*Amhara ya Muungano wa Tanzania in **Swahili***

**2007**

*Population: 59,7 million*

*Independence: 26.4.1964 from Britain*



**Tanzanian Shilling**



Tanzania was the fourth new country form and the last for Anssi. We stayed in Dar es Salaam in Econo Lodge in the Indian neighbourhood. Our luggage did not follow us and disappeared somewhere, but we got them next day. I had not booked any programme and thus we spent nearly the whole day by seeking for a travel agency to arrange us a safari and other programme. We were assisted by a young and eager taxi driver. Finally, we found Utalii Travel, which sold us a four days' package to Selous National Park, which is the largest by square kilometres in the world. We went there by car for four hours via the town of Kibiti to Selous Ndolu Game Camp, where we lived in tents covered by wooden roofs. First we had a boat trip on Rufisi river and during the weekend we made several safaris by car and by walking with an armed guard to the several parts of Selous Game Park: Mtemere Gate and Reserve, Lake Mzizima, Siwanda and Nezerakera and Impala Camp, where we stopped for eating and drinking beer. During our trips we saw at least following wild animals: Hippo, crocodile, elephant, leopard, giraffe, water buffalo, monkeys, boar, impala, zebra, gnu, lizard etc. We met five wakening lions only a few metres distance on the roof of our vehicle.

On Monday 16 June 2007 we flew from Selous airport by Costal Aviation flight to Zanzibar, where we stayed in Hotel Chavda in the historical and Unesco Cultural Heritage site of Stone Town in Zanzibar City. *Zanzibar had been for a very short period independent in 1964 before it united together with Tanganyika into The United Republic of Tanzania on December 1964.* We just walked around and had some beers and relaxed. On Wednesday we met at our hotel three Finnish ladies: Asta and Eeva from Nairobi, Kenya and Riitta from Dar es Salaam. We booked a big car with driver and drove to the other side of the island to Paje beach, for swimming and drinking. We came back in the evening and then had a marvellous outside dinner in the open food market of Stone Town. Next day we went by boat to the Prison Island and I felt quite ill and I had to go back to the hotel earlier for a rest. Anyway I recovered and on Friday it was Midsummer Eve in Finland but not in Africa and we said goodbye to the ladies and flew back to Dar es Salaam. Anssi started his return to Finland and I continued my round trip to Comoros.

### Special visited area:



**Zanzibar in Indian Ocean 2007**

## 172. COMOROS



**Africa 37.**

**Union of the Comoros**

**Union des Comores in French, Udzima wa Komori in Comorian and Al-Qamut-Ittihād al-Qumur**  
**القمر الاتحاد in Arabic .**

**2007**

**Population: 870 000**

**Independence: 6.7.1975 from France**



**Comoros Franc**

It was Midsummer Eve in Finland when I arrived in my fifth new country on my round trip and the 40<sup>th</sup> Island country. I stayed in a nice Villa Jessica owned by Michael and Jessica both originally from France. In the evening I had a super supper made by Michael together with some French guests. They discussed very lively and I participated in it by listening due to my lousy skills of speaking French. Moroni is on Ngazidja Island on Grande Comoros and the two other autonomous islands are Mohali and Anjouan, but the government considers the Isle of Mayotte as its forth island, but France disagrees with it. On Saturday Michael took me to the food market and he knew nearly everyone there and was very popular. Villa Jessica is located just under Karthala volcanic mountain and Michael's driver drove me in the afternoonto the local villages of Moundzaza mboouani and Rouani. In the evening the super supper was excellent again. On Sunday there were regional presidential elections with noisy cars and crowded streets. I was accompanied by Mr. Hadzi from Zanzibar and he started to guide me and showed me some interesting buildings and took me to his home to meet his wife and little son. I had some beers and paid him for the guidance. After that I had a pizza in a local restaurant. On Monday I went with Michael's driver on a long tour around the island and I had a feeling that I was the only European tourist, because all the beaches like Chomoni Beach and the large Les Trois Plages and other sightseeing places were empty, but I could understand it, because it was winter time over there. In the evening I had extra super fish steaks at Villa Jessica and on Tuesday I flew first to Mayotte and from there via Reunion to Antananarivo in Madagascar.

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## 173. MADAGASCAR



2007

Africa 38.

Population: 27,7 million

*Republic of Madagascar*

*Repoblikan'i Madagasikara in **Malagasy** and *République de Madagascar* in French*

*Independence: 26.6.1960 from France, during 1975-1993 The Democratic Republic of Madagascar*



Malagasy Ariary

Madagascar was the sixth and the last of the new countries on this African round trip. Madagascar is the largest of the African islands and its fauna is very extraordinary. I arrived very late in the evening to Antananarivo and it was the Day of Independence, but the festivities seemed to be over and I went directly to my Hotel Radaman. My room was very chilly but I survived with extra blankets. In the morning the weather was very cold, about 5 C and people were using fur coats and hats like in Finland. Sometime it's hard to understand that it was winter over here on the 20<sup>th</sup> Latitude. My hotel was on one of the seven hills of the capital and the view over the city was amazing. A very interesting detail on the streets was, that all the taxis were old Citroen 2CV or Renault 4 cars. I made a city tour on Citroen 2 CV (*I had had two of such cars in the 1960s*) with taxi driver Richard, who spoke English. In the evening I had a nice buffet dinner with music at my hotel. I had booked in advance a two days' tour to the countryside and my driver's name was Mami! We drove first to a famous historical bohimanga Queen Palace, which was built in 19<sup>th</sup> century by King Rianampoinimerinandriantssimitoviaminandriampanjaka, which is the longest royal name of the world. From here we drove to Perieras Natural Centre, where they had a fine glass house full of different lizards and chameleons and they all were entirely new to me. Our next place was Andasibe-Mandalat National Park, where we spent over night in a chilly bungalow. On the next and last morning, we went within a small tourist group and local guide to the rain forest to see special semi-monkeys called lemurs, who are living only in Madagascar. I saw four different kinds of them: Brown lemur, Indri lemur, Bamboo lemur and Woolly lemur. Once we were standing and trying to see the animals, some got drops and other stuff from above and the guide said that we were standing in their toilet! On our return drive to the airport Mami took me first to the town of Ivito, just beside the airport and I had a nice possibility to sit in a neighbourhood bar with local people and have my last African lager beers and meat kebabs. As a home-coming present I brought a very strong bronchitis and it took two weeks to get rid of it and this happened in the Northernmost tourist place in the world *Norway's Spitzbergen!*

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## 87<sup>th</sup> Journey 2007:     *Another visit to a new country in war: Somalia's Somaliland*

This journey was my fifth new country finding trip and third to a country in war: Somalia's Somaliland. In 2007 it was almost impossible to travel to Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia due to the very dangerous situation, but instead it was quite safe to travel to one of its very autonomous regions Somaliland, which actually has declared its independency already in 1992 but no country has recognized it.

## 174. SOMALIA



2007

Africa 39.

Population: 15,9 million

*Federal Republic of Somalia*

*Independence: Somalia 1.7.1960 from Britain and Italy*

*Jamhuuriyadda Federaalka Soomaaliya in **Somali** and جمهورية الصومال الفدرالية *Jumhūrīyat aṣ-Ṣūmāl al-Fidirālīyah* in **Arabic***



Somalian Shilling

## Republic of Somaliland



2007

(1/7 non-sovereign countries)

*Jamhuuriyadda Soomaaliland in **Somali** and صوماليلاند جمهورية *Jumhūrīyat Ṣūmālilānd* in **Arabic***

*Declaration of independency unofficially in 1992 from Somalia without any recognition.*



Somaliland Shilling

Somaliland is officially one of the 18 regions of The Federal Republic of Somalia, but it is also a self-declared unrecognized sovereign state. It is the second of such states for me after Palestine, altogether there are eight such states. Before entering Hargeisa, I spent one day and night in Istanbul and visited the famous Topkapi palace. On my Turkish Airlines flight to Addis Ababa via Khartoum I met for the second time an Ethiopian man Mr. Gegussic, who lives in Finland and he took me to his sister's house in the town of Debreziet. We went there and next day back by local bus. Finally, on Monday I flew to Hargeisa. I had booked in advance a room at Hotel Ambassador, which had arranged visa for me. There were UN development workers in the hotel and they played football outside and asked me to be referee. There were players from Sweden, Spain, USA Alaska Ghana, Kenya and Somaliland. The result was 2-1 for the better team! I had a very important voluntary duty for UN. For the next day I booked a full day excursion to the countryside and to the Gulf of Aden. In our group there were two obligatory armed soldiers, driver and guide, and they all went to the Land Rover and filled it. I asked politely: Can I join you, please? Ok there was a narrow place for me as well. We drove through very dry and rough savannah to an open cave complex, which was famous for its 5000 years old paintings. These painting were found only five years earlier by some French archeologists. These paintings showed that Sahara had been a green area with such animals, that you don't find any more like elephants, giraffes and long horn cows. We continued to the seaside to the town of Berbera by the Gulf of Aden. We went to the empty beach, where I was served a nice picnic meal with cold beer. Our soldiers were Muslims and it was Ramada time, so they just prayed. The only activity on the beach was helping to dig a car out of sand. Then we drove back to Hotel Ambassador. Next day I took a taxi to the centre of Hargeisa, which had been destroyed totally during the civil war in 1990, but now it looked better. Here were over one million people living in the city in quite chaotic circumstances.

### Special areas:



Puntland State of Somalia (not visited)

## 88th Journey 2007:

*A new country trip to the fourth country in war, Sudan*

The travel year of 2007 had come to its end and the result was my best so far: 17 new countries and about three months altogether on the road. I started from New Zealand, Oceania and ended it with Sudan, Africa. I visited 8 African, 6 Oceanian and 3 Asian new countries. Well done!

## 175. SUDAN



Africa 40.

*Republic of Sudan*

السودان جمهورية *Jumhūrīyat as-Sūdān in Arabic*

**2007**

*Population: 43,8 million*

*Independency: 1.1.1956 from Britain and Egypt*



Sudanese Pound

Sudan was the last and 17<sup>th</sup> new country I visited in 2007 and it was the fourth one in war. I visited the capital of Khartoum and its northern surrounding both quite far from South Sudan or Darfur. I stayed at the Bougainville lodge owned by a Norwegian-Danish couple. My first day was very bureaucratic, because it took more than three hours to get an official stamp into my passport even though I was assisted by a local taxi driver. Next day I went with a driver who spoke only Arabic, to the north direction to see a lot of dunes but finally also ancient mini pyramids and on our way back the mighty River Nile, which is coming from two sources: White Nile from Uganda, where I had been and the other Blue Nile from Ethiopia. They unite in Khartoum and I visited that area. Sudan is one of the absolute Muslim countries concerning alcohol like Libya and Brunei, which I have experienced and Saudi Arabia, where I had not yet visited. But I had a possibility, thanks to the Norwegian-Danish couple, to get an invitation on Thursday 6 December 2007, which was the 90<sup>th</sup> Day Independence of Finland, to a reception offered by the Military attaché Juho Sirkiä of UN. It was a very international and military reception with a group of Finnish civil police, who had just arrived for training purposes in Darfur for one year. I was among only a few civilian persons and I felt myself safe. Because it was a closed reception there were quite

a lot of drinks and snacks and I enjoyed them quite a lot. I had my personal taxi driver waiting for me outside and after the reception he took me safely to my hotel. Next morning, I had a bit of head-ache and an early flight to Istanbul and further to Helsinki.

### Special areas:



Flag of Darfur Liberation Front  
Darfur or Realm of the Fur (not visited)

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## **89<sup>th</sup> Journey 2008:**     *A round trip to three new countries in the Northern Pacific*

Year 2008 was not such a busy travel year as the previous one, but important as all the years. Of course on reason is the decreasing amount of lacking countries. I was only on three significant journeys, but they all were crucial. February I went far and this time to the Northern Pacific: Palau, Micronesia and Marshall Islands. The second journey took me to the youngest new country and even in Europe: **Kosovo**, which is a problematic one, but fits into my collection of independent countries. And the last but not least journey took me not to a new country but to a new and the seventh continent: **Antarctica**, where I travelled with my new elderly lady friend Kaarina, who was actually my next-door neighbour.

### **176. PALAU**



Oceania 9.

*Republic of Palau*

*Beluu er a Belau in **Palauan***

**2008**

*Population: 18 000*

*Independence: 1.10.1994 from the Compact of Free Association with USA*



US Dollar

Before going to Palau I stayed a weekend in the town of Ichinoya near the city of Nagoya, where I flew by Finnair direct night flight and where Mr. Sachio Asano, my Japanese friend from Samoa last year, was waiting for me. He had booked and paid for me a small hotel in his home town. He took me to his home, which is not very usual in Japan, to meet his wife. After that we went together and with his son and grandson to see the Toyota car museum and in the evening we had a beautiful supper with more relatives in a Japanese restaurant. Next morning, I started by Continental Airlines special round ticket my round trip to the Northern Pacific by flying first to Guam, which is a big US Navy base, where we arrived quite much late, but my next flight was waiting and I arrived in Koror. There I stayed in the Penthouse Hotel, where the Philippine Juliet helped me organize my programme. Palau was the first and for me altogether 42<sup>nd</sup> Island country on my round trip. First day I just walked around the small town and did not find much to see but enough good beer to taste. On Wednesday I participated in a snorkelling boat trip. First we went to Rock Island, where my snorkelling nearly failed due to too rocking sea, but after a little help with our diving guide I managed to see some of the fantastic corals and colourful fishes. After that we proceeded to another island, where we first walked through a rain forest area to Jellyfish Maritime Lake, which a salty lake. There I snorkelled assisted by our charming and strong guide together with millions of jellyfish. It was a fascinating and unbelievable experience, which you can have only here. On the return trip I managed to drop my camera into the water and it broke of course, but I managed to save the digital photos in a camera shop at the harbour. On Thursday on Valentine's Day I went on a car tour with a guiding driver to the northern island, where we visited two cascades and the special very small town of Melekeok, which is the capital and administrative centre of Palau in the middle of a quite empty area. Finally, on Friday I continued my round trip by flying via Micronesian Yap Island to Guam and further via Micronesian Chuuk Island to Pohnpei Island of Micronesia.



## 177. MICRONESIA



2008

Oceania 10.

*Federal States of Micronesia*

*Population: 549 000*

*Independence: 3.11.1986 from USA*



US Dollar

Micronesia, which consists of four islands: Yap, Chuuk, Pohnpei and Kosrae, was the second and 43<sup>rd</sup> Island country on my tour. I stayed in Pohnpei in the Ocean View Plaza with a nice ocean view over the bay. Again I was assisted nicely by a hotel lady and now Ms Lillian to buy a new camera. I had booked programme in advance for the next days and it started in the morning. I was sitting in the restaurant and bar quite late admiring how late my driver worked in the bar. Anyway we started quite early in the morning and it happened as I had been afraid of. My driver had difficulties to keep awake and suddenly he was driving directly out of the road, but I managed to turn the wheel quickly and get the car back to the road, but we were winding on the road few hundred metres. Luckily there was no other traffic. (*Last time this kind of driving happened to me was in Libya 2005!*). I took a while to calm the driver down and the rest of the driving went perfectly. We drove around the whole island up to the old ruins of Bau Madal, which belonged to the ancient capital in 17<sup>th</sup> century. This place is interesting: It is the title of a famous Finnish jazz drummer Edward Vesala's album in 1974, and it would be mentioned in a well-known novel called Medusa by Clive Cussler in 2009. We visited also Kepiroh cascades and the little capital called Palakir to see the Presidential House. On Sunday we made a boat trip to the isle of Lailai, where I met a British canoeing group. After that I was taken to see the retired Governor of Pohnpei John P. David at his home, which was quite a distinction for me. Johnny had nine children 46 grandchildren and 18 great grandchildren, and he wasn't too old yet! Sunday evening, I spent in my hotel bar discussing and drinking with two Croatian sailors and listened their stories from world seas and telling my stories from world countries.

## 178. MARSHALL ISLANDS



2008

Oceania 11.

*Republic of the Marshall Islands*

*Population: 59 000*

*Independence: 21.10.1986 from USA*



US Dollar

Marshall Islands was the most remote, last and 44<sup>th</sup> Island country on my Northern Pacific round trip. Afterwards I had regretted that I did not include Northern Mariana Islands of the USA in my itinerary, but you cannot get everything, can you? Before landing at Majuro, we had a stopover on Kwajalei atoll, where the US Navy has a big base. Marshall Islands like Micronesia have quite strong military and foreign policy agreement with USA. Majuro atoll is only 10 km<sup>2</sup> and very narrow and only few kilometres from end to end. I stayed in a backpackers favourite Hotel Free Bag Island, which was located in the same building with a favourite local pub. I planned to make a boat trip to another atoll, but bad weather conditions prevented it. So my three days' visit became very peaceful and lazy. Nearby my hotel there was a second hand book shop and I bought a detective story novel by Charlotte Yarborough, which happened to be set in Southern Australia. One interesting building was Bikini Atoll Town Hall, which reminded me of the sad and dangerous nuclear tests by USA during the cold war in the 1950s. In my hotel pub the atmosphere was sometimes quite high and I had to tell quite a lot about Finland and the Northern people to get some complimentary beers. That was really fun! On my way back I stopped for one night in the town of Hagåtña at Guam, where I came late in the dark. I found my hotel but then it took time to find a place to eat and finally I found a South Korean restaurant, where I was the only customer, but I ate and drank substantially in order to continue next morning my return to cold Finland.

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## 90<sup>th</sup> Journey 2008:    *A visit to the youngest country of the world and again the last in Europe: Kosovo*

Kosovo was the last new independent country for me this year, but it was the newest one. 108 UN members had recognized its sovereignty including Finland, and thus I consider it as an independent as I have done with Taiwan. Serbia has not accepted it neither has the Russian Federation and thus it cannot become a UN member. After this trip I made two special ones: first to Greenland, which is a very strong autonomous island of Denmark and finally at the end of this year to Antarctica, the last and seventh continent!

## 179. KOSOVO



Europe 46/46 (+4) 50/50 Fourth time 100%

*Republic of Kosovo*

*Republika e Kosovës in Albanian and Република Косово in Serbo-Croatian*

2008

Population: 1,8 million Euro (non-Euro nor EU country)

*Independence 17.2.2008 from Serbia*



So Kosovo was a brand new independent country, when I came there. It was already the fourth time I had conquered Europe (Albania 1988, Bosnia & Herzegovina 1998, Montenegro 2006 and Kosovo 2008). I am used to tell that there are 46 countries in Europe and I have visited 50 of them (including the four former ones)! I stayed in the old part of Pristina in Begolli Hotel, whose restaurant menu consisted of the fast food kiosk on the other side of the street. Anyway it was eatable and especially when a bottle of good Lager beer cost one euro! Saturday was in my statistics the 2000<sup>th</sup> foreign travel day of my entire life. I spent it by walking round the city centre avoiding UN and NATO vehicles, policemen and soldiers. I made the mistake of taking photos of the KFOR headquarter building and I was arrested and demanded to delete them but no penalty. On Sunday I went by car with Mr. Hassan to the Rugova mountains in Western Kosovo, where you could see small glaciers on the top of the mountains. We visited the UN Serbian part of Kosovo the orthodox Decani Monastery, which belongs to UNESCO cultural heritage sites, and which was destroyed nearly totally during the Kosovo war and now fully restored. On Monday morning Hassan took me to a beautiful German Park and to its very old Fische Railway Station. In the afternoon I flew back to Helsinki by Austrian flights via Vienna.

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## ANTARCTICA PENINSULA

2008

**The seventh and last continent after Europe 1944/1955, Africa 1971, North America 1982, Asia 1989, Oceania 1994 and South America 2001.**

*I came to Antarctica waters on Wednesday on Christmas Eve 24 December 2008 from Ushuaia (Terra de Fuego) across the Drake Passage between the Atlantic and South Pacific Oceans by M7S Fram of Hurtigruten from Norway First we went to South Shetland Island and Half Moon Island of UK and after few other visits to the glaciers. Finally, we sailed to Antarctica Peninsula and to the continent itself to Almirante Brown's old research station of Argentine on Boxing Day Friday 26 December 2008. Back to Ushuaia on Tuesday 30 December 2008.*

I was travelling with my new lady friend Kaarina and our journey to Antarctica was some kind of feeling of gratitude from Kaarina to me, because I saved her life in April this year by acting quickly after I found that she had fallen at home during the night and said that her neck was very ill and strange. I took her to the emergency station and the doctors found that her neck was broken. She had to wear a special equipment on her head for three months and I took care of her. As a gratitude for this she invited me to this Antarctica cruising package. We flew first via Madrid to Buenos Aires, Argentina, where we stayed two nights and after that by Lan Argentina (152.) to Ushuaia, from where our one-week long cruise started and ended. After the very calm Drake Passage we entered South Shetland Island and then Half Moon Island, both belonging to UK. We went ashore with small rubber boats altogether six times, because we were lucky with the weather conditions. The Southernmost place was Peterman Island 65 degrees 10 minutes of Southern latitude. We made our first steps on the Antarctica continent in Almirante Brown on the Antarctica Peninsula. We saw a lot of penguins and some big seals. We visited also the temporary Port Lockroy post station of UK and sent postcards with Antarctica stamp. In the last place on shore Neko Harbour I swam in the South Sea waters of only 2 degrees Celsius, but I was used to it, because I come from Finland.

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### **91st Journey 2009:** *A trip to one more African island country: São Tome and Principe*

The year 2009 brought me on only two country visit journeys and four new African countries. This first trip took me to the Island of São Tome and Principe, which was the 45<sup>th</sup> of 49 Island countries.

## 180. SÃO TOME AND PRINCIPE



2009



Dobrasi

Africa 41.

*Democratic Republic of São Tome and Principe*

*República Democrática de São Tomé e Príncipe in Portuguese*

Population: 219 000

Independence: 21.7.1975 from Portugal

I was travelling together with my new lady friend and next-door neighbour Kaarina Kruskopf and this was the first time for her to visit black Africa. She had been earlier in Egypt. In São Tome Island we lived in Apartamento Novetur, where we had two rooms and good kitchen and also cleaning service every day. Downstairs we had a nice food and wine shop so that I could make our breakfast and dinners buy myself. Of course we ate outside as well and went to the market square and super market to by local ingredients. Our original plan was to stay three weeks on our trip so that we could fly in between for a few days to the island of Equatorial Guinea. Our travel agency Navetur had promised us the visa to the country. For the first we went to Navetur and after some linguistic difficulties we filled in our visa applications and booked an island tour and a boat tour round the island. On Saturday we went on the island tour by 4x4 car with driver and guide. First we drove to Rio do Oro (Golden River), where people were not washing gold but clothes. Next stop was the ranch of former freedom fighter and national hero Agostino Neto. The island was fresh, mountainous and beautiful. For the next few days we just relaxed and tried to get used to the local African life by eating, drinking good mainly Portuguese red wine and going around the city. There were occasionally quite heavy rains, which made you wet but the hot sun afterwards dried you also quickly. We had a balcony to the main street and it was nice to follow people in their daily life. When we arrived there was a lorry with a brass band playing. On Wednesday we went on a motor boat trip round the island with two local boys. The highlight was the Ilheu das Rohas island in the south, where you stand on the African map painted on the ground so that your one foot was in the Northern hemisphere and the other in the Southern. (*Same thing I did in 2002 in Quito in Ecuador!*) On Thursday we went to Navetur to ask about our visas and we heard it was not possible to get them without a Letter of Invitation from the country and Navetur couldn't make. We decided to change our schedule and cancel our last two weeks' accommodation and change our flight tickets. These were ok, but they did not have enough cash to refund us and the boss was in Lisbon for the next week. Then we asked about a possibility to go to the Isle of Principe, but unfortunately we did not have time enough to do it. Navetur owed us 1000 euros and unfortunately it took nearly half a year to get it and I had to ask help from an international collection company. Next day on Friday we had to leave the country and fly back to the cold!

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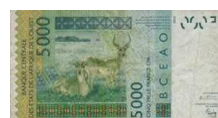
### 92<sup>nd</sup> Journey 2009:    *A round trip to three Sahel countries*

If the first trip to Africa this year happened early in the year, this happened quite late. This was a bit special trip to three countries quite close to each other. First I flew normally to Niger via Paris, went by car to Benin, but to go to the neighbouring country Chad I had to fly there via Paris again!

## 181. NIGER



2009



West African CFA Franc

Africa 42.

*Republic of Niger*

*République du Niger in French and Jamhuriyar Nijar in Hausa*

Population: 24,2 million

Independence: 3.8.1960 from France

So I was on my Southern Saharan round trip and the French speaking Niger was the first of these Sahel area countries as they also called. Before coming to Niamey, the capital I stayed one afternoon and night in Paris and visited a very fine Asterix exhibition, because I am a great Asterix album collector, in for me so nostalgic Quartier Latin and I stayed in Hotel du Mont Blanc, where I stayed for the first time 46 years ago in 1963! In Niamey I stayed in Grande Hotel du Niger, where I met first three Danish journalists and we had a quite speedy and wet Nordic evening! On Saturday morning I went to walk to the town and found the National Museum very close to the hotel. There I paid for Monsieur Mohammad to guide me in the Museum and especially the skeletons of dinosaurs. After that he introduced me to Monsieur Halodou and we had some beers and from whom I bought a sightseeing by motor cycle and a national doll for a bit high price, but every new doll is worth its price in my

collection. Then we drove to some Mosques and palaces and I had some beers together with local people in a café. Monsieur Halodou told me that they will have on Sunday the Islamic Babetéme (Christening Party) and I bought him 15 kilos of rice as a gift and got an invitation to the party, which was very rare and exceptional for a white and non-Muslim person. On Sunday morning I was taken from the hotel now by car to outside the town to Kirgissove to the Babetéme of Monsieur Mohammad Mallalidow's seventh daughter Mariam. I met there both his wives and six children plus several relatives and friends. We were sitting outside in a community park and women and children were inside preparing food, which was served by them to us in the park. That's Muslim custom. Very warm and unforgettable experience. I even kept Mariam on my arms and felt myself as an occasional Godfather! On Monday I paid the Museum Mohammad to take me by boat to River Niger, where we stopped on one island and walked to the local villages and markets. On Tuesday morning I managed to find a taxi driver with a quite good Mercedes to drive me to Benin and back. We started immediately and came back in the evening just early enough to get me to my night flight to Paris again.

## 182. BENIN 2009



West African CFA Franc

Africa 43.

Population: 12,1 million

Republic of Benin

Independence: 1.8.1960 from France by name Dahomey and from 1975 Benin

République du Benin in French

Benin was the second new country on my tour and one of the shortest visits and one of the five countries, where I had not stayed overnight (Vatican City, Zambia, Botswana, Syria and now Benin). I drove with my Mercedes taxi driver to the border and I walked over the River Niger to the passport control, bought the transit visa and went back to the taxi and we drove to the Northernmost town of Malinville. We drove around the town without any special places to see and had a nice lunch in a local corner bar with excellent beers. Then we went to find me a national doll, but the only thing we found on the market place was a seamstress, who promised to make me a dress of typical cloth for my souvenir doll, which I got after two hours. (*I had to ask the Finnish seamstress to make the black torso into the dress and she made it!*) After this operation we had to start driving back another 300 kilometres to reach my flight to Paris. This visit was short but worth doing.

## 183. CHAD 2009



Central African Franc

Africa 44.

Population: 16,4 million

Republic of Chad

Independence: 11.8.1960 from France

République du Tchad in French and جمهورية تشاد Ġumhūriyyat Tšād in Arabic

Chad was the third and last new country on my Sahel tour and this year. Only 13 to go! I spent first the night in a Chinese Hotel Shanghai. On Friday morning I had long negotiations with Mr. Maina the director of Chad Voyages and finally we got a reasonable but a bit expensive agreement about a five days' safari to the Sahel of Chad. We started with a Land Cruiser car with the driver and cook Monsieur Mustafa and his assistant Monsieur Momo. They spoke together Chad Arabic and to me French and I to them English. I had my French dictionary and we managed enough in our communication. We lived every night in the tent or on the ground under the stars, Dormir á la belle Etoile in French. Musatafa cooked our meals twice every day on an open fire by first digging a hole into the ground and then some wood into it and after that putting an iron net on it. The ingredients and illegal beer we bought from the village, for example living chicken, vegetables, potatoes, meat and even once fish. Once we drove two cackling chicken in the car, which were later killed and fried, quite a fresh meal! There was actually no wild game on the savanna, just a bit of cattle, but the feeling of total emptiness and silence was relaxing. The nights were bright with plenty of stars. Great Bear was not in the zenith like in Finland but in 20 degrees over the horizon. Very nice to sleep outside in the warm night and without any scorpions or snakes! We stopped once close to the Hajis Elephant of Mammoth Mountain and had our overnight near a local village, where we were invited to a dinner with the Chief and his family and other village people. On the last day we made a half a day boat trip on Lac Chad, which is the second largest lake in Africa after Lake Tanganyika (*I was there in 2007 from Burundi*). We drove altogether 1300 kilometres. It was absolutely worth its a bit high price. In N'Djamena. Monsieur Momo showed me the city by car and finally took me to Quartier du Biere, which was full of various kinds of beer houses, I had never seen such a complex before! After that with few beers I could got to Monsieur



Maina's home and have a shower and a dinner with his family. Before my night flight to Paris I sat in the garden and was eaten by local hungry mosquitos.

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## **93<sup>rd</sup> Journey 2010:**    *A trekking trip to Mauritanian Sahara*

In 2010 I made altogether four journeys to eight new African countries. The most dangerous thing happened to me: I got from Sierra Leone a very strong Malaria, which almost killed me, but luckily I survived. This was my third obvious case for me of near-death: First in a boat accident in Vietnam 1993, second in a car accident in Namibia in 1998 and now this Malaria.

### **184. MAURITANIA**



**2008**

**Africa 45.**

**Islamic Republic of Mauritania**

الجمهورية الإسلامية الموريتانية

**Population: 4,7 million**

**Independency: 28.11.1960 from France**

*al-Ġumhūriyyah al-'Islāmiyyah al-Mūrītāniyyah in Arabic*

*République Islamique de Mauritanie in French and Republik bu Lislamu bu Gànnar in Wolof*



Mauritanian Ouguiya

I had booked a trip to Mauritius and Atar already in 2008 but then four French tourists were killed by Muslim terrorists and all the trips and flights from France were cancelled. The new journeys started just in January 2010 and I was in one of the first of them. Before entering Atar, I stayed one day and night with my old friend and journalist Ms. Tuulikki Muller and I had managed to persuade her to travel with me for two reasons: she is a nice lady and good company and secondly she speaks fluently French, which I don't. I had booked for us a one week trekking trip to Sahara Desert including two UNESCO cultural heritage sites: Ouadane desert town from where we started our walking and Cinquetti sand town, where we ended it. We were in a small group of French people: a family of four from Marseilles, a 30 years old woman from Bretagne, a Berber guide Mohammad, three camel drivers of whom one was our chef and three camels. We walked in the sand for five days about 5-7 hours per day plus a one-hour lunch and rest time, and altogether we walked 30 hours and about 120 kilometres. We spent our nights either in the tents or outside under the bright stars or "dormir á la belle Etoile" (like I did last year in Chad's Sahel area and once in Namibia 1999). One night we spent in Tanousnert oasis in a bungalow. The camels carried all our food ingredients, water and camping equipment. They were used also to carry tired or wounded walkers and quite many of them had to use them, but not me and the farther from Marseilles. On the last part before Cinquetti Tuulikki and I used the camels and rode to the town and searched immediately for a bar with beer. We managed to get one cold beer and two warm beers before the rest of our group arrived. We spent overnight in a motel and ate inside. I had managed to keep my feet well until at the end of the trip, when I found some blisters on my feet. I have to be careful for open wounds in my feet, because I have a Diabetes II, and once I arrived on Monday to Helsinki, I went directly from the airport to a private doctor station and got my feet treated. I also had found that I couldn't hear anything with my right ear, because it was full of sand, and the nurse cleaned it thoroughly. Before that on Sunday we flew together to Paris and I offered to Tuulikki a nice French dinner with four courses and wine and calvados.

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## **94<sup>th</sup> Journey 2010:**    *The second West African round trip with four countries and judo element*

This was my second trip to Africa and this time to four West African countries: Sierra Leone, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau and Liberia. Last time I was on a round trip in West Africa was in 1983. This was very crucial trip to me, because I got Malaria fever from Sierra Leone due to the ash clouds from the Icelandic volcanic explosions, which caused me 10 extra days' delay.

*I came to Lungi airport of Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone on Sunday 4 April 2010 by British Midland International BMI flight from London and on Wednesday 7 April 2010 by taxi broussé to Conakry, the capital of Guinea and I came back on Tuesday 13 April 2010 by taxi broussé from Guinea Bissau. Next day I flew by Elysian Airlines to Monrovia, the capital of Liberia and back on Thursday 15 April 2010. I flew back to London on Monday 26 April 2010 by BMI and further by Finnair to Helsinki.*

## 185. SIERRA LEONE



2010



Leone

**Africa 46.**

***Republic of Sierra Leone***

**Population: 8,0 million**

***Independence: 27.4.1961 From Britain***

Sierra Leone was the first new country on my second West African round trip. I was met at Lungi Airport by Mr. Idrissa, the President of Sierra Leone Judo and Karate Association, about 35 years old security man. We went by his motorcycle to my first hotel Franjija Guest House quite in the centre of Freetown, which is actually located seven hills, like Rome and Antananarivo. It was Easter time and we were driving around the city on Easter Monday by Idrissa motorcycle. We saw quite many Easter carnival groups and marches. In the afternoon we went to the Guinean Embassy to leave my visa application. On Tuesday morning we went to the Liberian Embassy to leave my visa application and there I helped a Japanese tourist to change his dollars into Leones, because the visa fee had to be paid in local currency. In the afternoon we visited the Ministry for Youth and Sports and there I met the deputy minister and General Secretary of National Olympic committee. After that we went see the judo dojo, where there were training session going on. On Wednesday morning Idrissa took me to the bus station, where he fought for me a place in a Bush Taxi or Taxi Brousset in French toward Conakry, the capital of Guinea. For my surprise the lady director of hotel was in the same taxi.

I returned back to Freetown after one week on Tuesday 13 April 2010 after a 36 hours long Bush Taxi drive from Guinea-Bissau via Conakry. Before entering Conakry early in the morning we had to stay two hours outside the city for security reasons and I slept that waiting time on the pavement. Then we drove to the bus station, where I paid a ticket for another Bush Taxi to Freetown, where I stayed in a very cheap Sierra International Hotel just in the heart of the centre. Next day I went by taxi to the airport and flew with Elysian Airlines to Monrovia, the capital of Liberia. From there I returned next day in the evening to Luigi Airport and after the ferry I started to wait for Idrissa, who came two hours late. A local policeman was worried about me and took me to the local pub and asked the guys to take care of me. Ok, Idrissa came and took me to my hotel to prepare myself for the next day's BMI flight to London.

Idrissa came in the morning and told me that all the flights to Europe had been cancelled due to a huge volcanic explosion in Iceland and its enormous ash cloud spreading all over Europe. We went to the BMI office and tried to change my reservation to the next flight, but they said that they were fully booked, but not with passengers from the cancelled flight. After a heavy discussion we managed to get a reservation for a flight on Sunday 25 April 2010, ten days later! I accommodated to a better Hotel Barnoi in a more prosperous area and with swimming pool and fine restaurant. I thought that my insurance would cover it. I phoned to my insurance company and they told that they pay me only 50 euros per day and nothing else. Next morning, I moved back to down town to Sweet Mothers' Guest House, which was much cheaper cosier and full of nice wall paintings. Before going there, I saw on television Manchester United beat Manchester City 1-0 in the annual Derby and I liked it!

On Sunday morning we went with Idrissa first by Bush Taxi to the town of Mile 91 and further by bus to Bo Town, which is the second largest city in Sierra Leone. Idrissa was building his own house over there few kilometres outside the centre near to the bushes and forest. The first night I stayed in a nice Hotel Sahara with outside pool and terrace and after that in Countryside hotel and finally in a very humble Manjan hotel, which was without electricity and all services, because there was a big conference in Bo and all the better hotels were fully booked. We spent quite a lot time at Idrissa's construction site and I also participated in the working process with two other men. In between we were sitting in the bush and drinking local mud wine. This became fatal for me, because I was bitten by a Malaria fly there, which I found three days later in Freetown. On Thursday we travelled back to Freetown by bus and I went to Sierra International hotel. Next day I found that I was not feeling well and I also had to go to the medical centre to get help with the wound on my leg, which I had got on my way from Guinea to Guinea Bissau by a motorcycle. I had burnt it on the hot exhaust pipe and it was suppurating. I asked Idriss to take me to the Luigi island for the last evening, because I really felt bad. We found a very humble hotel and I had a very high fever with hot and cold vibrations. On Saturday morning one boy escorted me to the airport and I had to wait 12 hours for my night flight just sitting under a fan and drinking water. Finally, I started my night flight to London and further to Helsinki, where I arrived on Sunday afternoon. The flights went better and I could even eat something and drink some wines. But at home my fever started again and was over 40 degrees Celsius. On Monday morning my lady friend Kaarina came to meet me at 7 o'clock and found me naked on the floor and I told her that I'm on my way to the medical centre. She called immediately to a doctor, who came to see me and ordered an ambulance. I was taken to the main hospital in Helsinki and quite soon diagnosed to have a serious Malaria. My blood was changed and I was in dialysis and half of the doctors said that I won't survive, but I did it. I spent three weeks in that hospital and I am still living strong!

## 186. GUINEA



Africa 47.

*Republic of Guinea*

*República de Guinée in French*

2010

**Population: 13,1 million**

**Independence: 2.10.1958 from France**



Guinean Guinee

French speaking Guinea was the second new country on my round trip. The travel by a bush taxi took 10 hours mainly due to our driver's too many personal business stops. He was also a Muslim and played nearly all the way loudly a record where someone read Koran in Arabic. We had several other stopovers with police and customs, and every time you had to pay something, not much, to the officials in order to proceed. My Freetown hotel's owner Vicky was also in the taxi and she finally managed to put pressure on our driver to get to Conakry not too late. We arrived in the dark but I found my Hotel du Golf and got my room, meal and drinks and the day was finally happily at its end. Next morning, I went out for a walk and to find the Guinea-Bissau embassy, which I did quite easily, because it was located just a few blocks from my hotel. I left there my passport and visa application. Then I went to meet Idrissa's friend Mr. Manama at the Sierra Leone consulate. He promised to come on Saturday to help me to find the right taxi-brousse for my Guinea-Bissau trip. Then I went to get my visa, which was a surprisingly piece of cake to get it! Next day I made a two hours' taxi drive around the city and in the afternoon I watched two street football matches played by young boys. The first was Manchester United vs. Barcelona and the second was Real Madrid vs. Chelsea. ManU and Real Madrid teams won. I took photos and part of the audience liked it and the other not. I decided to withdraw into my hotel peacefully. On Saturday Mr. Manama came to my hotel and took me to the taxi-brousse station and started my trip to the town of Boke, from where there should be transportation to Guinea-Bissau. The drive took four hours and in Boke I was told that the only bus to the border was full and the only possibility was to go by light motorcycle with a driver. That was ok and sounded like a real adventure. The trip took six hours and the road was like a motocross track, where it was possible to drive only by motorcycle or land cruiser bus with extra big wheels. I burnt my leg on the exhaust pipe, but no problem. Then we lost our tyre and it took nearly two hours to prepare it in a small village, where nearly everyone came to help or watch. When we arrived at the border it was already dark, but without any problems we entered the small town of Kuntaban in Guinea-Bissau, where I got another motorbike lift to a hotel.

## 187. GUINEA-BISSAU



Africa 48.

*Republic of Guinea-Bissau*

*República du Guiné-Bissau in Portuguese*

2010

**Population: 2,0 million**

**Independency: 24.9.1973 from Portugal**



West African Franc

Guinea-Bissau was my third new country on my round trip in West Africa. I came in the evening in the dark and I did not have any idea where to stay and I did not speak Portuguese. After a short while I found an English speaking boy, who organized for me a motorbike lift to Hotel Pourada do Solfinho, which was a resort type hotel. I got a nice room and went to the restaurant to eat and drink. There was only a small group of Portuguese hunters having a lot of fun. I ate a nice and juicy steak and a nice bottle of Portuguese reds wine. Next morning, I was advised to go to the main road and wait for a minibus, which came after two hours and went to a small town of Gabu, where I found a nice Hotel Vision with a very friendly service. I went to the nearest super market and bought some cold food and wine and enjoyed my life somewhere in the middle of nowhere for me. One young woman washed my dirty clothes, which were dry next morning, when I again went to find a taxi-brousse to Conakry. I found it and managed to get to Conakry, where I changed into another one to Freetown. It took nearly 40 hours from Guinea-Bissau via Guinea to Sierra Leone.

## 188. LIBERIA



Africa 49.

*Republic of Liberia*

2010

**Population: 5,0 million**

**Independence: 26.7.1847 The first independent country in Africa**



Liberian Dollar

Liberia, the first independent African country and never colonized, was my fourth and last new country on my round trip. When I was walking after the ferry to find transportation to Luigi Airport the director of Elysian recognized me and gave me a lift and called to his colleague at Monrovia Springfield Airport and asked him to help me to find a hotel and other things. When I arrived I was met and advised about a nice hotel and ordered a taxi for me with whom I made a deal for half a day city tour. Monrovia was just recovering from the cruel civil war and there were signs of optimism and revival. In the evening I ate once again a delicious spaghetti Bolognese with beer and red wine. My visit was short but friendly. Next morning, I flew once again back to Freetown in order to become a prisoner of the Icelandic volcanic ash cloud and to get Malaria, and see more in Sierra Leone. In West Africa I still had one country to visit: Equatorial Guinea, which I left for the next year.

## **95<sup>th</sup> Journey 2010:**     *A visit to one new and last North African country*

This was my third journey to Africa this year and now to Eritrea in North Africa. Actually I had planned to go in July for two weeks' Congo River cruise, but my doctor did not give me permission due to the recovering process from my very difficult Malaria. But this trip was some kind of squaring up to Africa and Malaria.

### **189. ERITREA**



Africa 50.

*State of Eritrea*

**ሃገረ ኤርትራ** *Hagärä Ertra* in *Tigrinja* and **إرتريا دولة** *Dawlat Iritriya* in *Arabic*

**2010**

**Population: 3,5 million**

**Independence: 24.5.1993 from Ethiopia**



Eritrean Nakfa

This trip was just a trip to visit a new country and luckily these kinds of trips are getting less, because there were not so many countries left! Now there was no fear of Malaria, because Eritrea is located on a very dry upland and the coast was by the desert. Asmara was a nice combination of Italian colonial type of architecture, functionalism and Northern Africa. I was staying in a nice and friendly Crystal Hotel very close to the centre. The first evening and night was enjoyable - full moon and great feeling! The next two days I walked hours and hours trying to find interesting buildings and places. The most surprising and interesting was the statue of the Russian poet Alexander Pushkin, whose poems I have read. Pushkin had his roots in Africa. I visited also the Catholic church and its kindergarten and the former Fiat car shop building from the 1930s. On Sunday I went by bus over the mountains to the Red Sea coast to the town of Massawa. It took four hours with huge scenery and landscape. In Massawa I managed to find the "King" of local taxi drivers and I made a two days' deal with him for sightseeing and other programme. First we went to an old Soviet Antonov aircraft, which was restored as a café and bar. I drank with the lady owner a Triple Beer, which was three frozen bottles together. Massawa had suffered quite a lot during the Ethiopian civil war, but in the old town you could find nice old buildings and the neighbourhood was peaceful. We also visited the beach area. On Monday morning I went back to Asmara by bus and then to the airport for my return flight to Helsinki. I had a stopover in Jeddah airport in Saudi Arabia, which was one of my still missing countries, where I couldn't again enter (*last time I saw the border to Saudi from Bahrain in 2006*).

## **96<sup>th</sup> Journey 2010:**     *A trip to Central Africa and to Congo River*

This was my fourth and last trip this year to Africa and this time to two Central African new countries: Central African Republic and Democratic Republic of Congo with a special visit to the mighty Congo River. As a result of this year I visited eight new African countries, not so bad. The final of my Odyssey of 55 years are getting closer, only few countries left for the next year!

### **190. CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC**



**2010**

Africa 51.

*République centrafricaine* in *French* and *Ködörösêse tî Bêafrîka* in *Sango*

**Independence: 13.8.1960 from France**



Central African Franc

**Population: 4,8 million**



Central African Republic was the seventh new African country for me. I used for this round trip Air France frequent flyer's bonus points and bought so called "Smile Ticket". I had booked in advance a hotel called JM-Residence nr. 3 and the taxi driver had difficulties to find it in the dark and finally after an hour searching we found it. It was just close to the city centre but near the forest in a very peaceful area. Next morning, I went with my guide Assan, who spoke English to change money, and which finally after two bank visits happened on the street for quite a good rate of exchange. Then we went by car to drive around the city and also to the border river Ubangi and Congo Democratic Republic on the other side. In the evening I found a nice restaurant-bar Mobaleke, where I ate snacks and drank some local lager beers in a nice and peaceful atmosphere. Next day I just walked slowly in the centre and spent some hours in my favourite bar Mobaleke listening to a local lady's poem performance and drinking Mocaf Sombre beers. During my stay in Bangui I didn't see a single other white person, not even French, and I felt myself unique! I managed to make a hotel reservation to Brazzaville with the hotel's assistance. In the evening I flew with TAAG flight to Brazzaville, where I had to wait for two hours to get a transit visa. The passport officer gave me a lift and helped me to find my hotel, which was a bit difficult, because the address given to me was wrong. Luckily the telephone number was right and we found it. Next morning, I took a taxi to the harbour in order to cross the Congo River by motor boat to Kinshasa.

## 191. DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO



2010



DRCfranc

Africa 52.

Population: 90,0 million

*République démocratique du Congo in French*

*Independence: 15.8.1960 from Belgium*

Congo Democratic Republic or Kinshasa Congo was the eighth and the last new African country this year. In 1985 I had been in Brazzaville Congo looking at Kinshasa and now I finally visited it. Entering was easy and I got a very friendly female taxi driver to my Invest Hotel du Presse. There was a nice garden restaurant with swimming pool in the hotel area and there I met Mr. Italeli, who was the Speaker of Tuvalu Parliament. He was very surprised and pleased to hear that I was coming in January 2011 to Tuvalu. He was attending an International Environmental Conference in Kinshasa. We had a very nice evening by discussing and drinking very good local beers. He promised to meet me at the airport in Tuvalu, when I'll arrive. On Monday it was the 93<sup>rd</sup> Day of Independence of Finland. I walked alone in the neighbourhood and sopped for few beers in the local bars. Everything was peaceful and people were friendly despite the language differences. I celebrated alone in the garden restaurant having toasts to my country and remembering my children, my new lady friend and those few friends I still had. On Tuesday started my main programme, which I had booked from Michel of Go Congo travel agency. My original plan in July this year was to participate in two weeks' Congo River cruise and I had paid the advance fee already, but due to my Malaria from Sierra Leone I had to cancel it. With the advance fee I had paid my three days' programme including a guided city tour, a visit to the Lolo ya Bonono Park with semi-wild bono monkeys, which are very rare and menaced plus of course a two days' boat trip to the Congo River. My English speaking guide was Terrence Mwanza. On Wednesday we drove first to the town of Kinkole, from where we started our boat trip to the Congo River. We had also the driver Alain and the lady cook Ms. Haguette with us. First we drove on the mighty Congo River to Magengenge island and village, where Ms. Haguette made a nice and tasty lunch and dinner with substantial amount of beers for all of us. We slept in tents and spent the evening together with the village people, who were very friendly and curious about me. Next day on our return cruise we stopped at Ile Dilolo, which was built on poles, because the island was partly under the water and when you walked there you walked in the water of half a metre. I was taken to the island school and there I met the headmaster and the chief of the village. I promised to purchase for the school some equipment for 150 US dollars and Terrence delivered them later to the village. Before leaving the island we went to the local outdoor bar where I offered some drinks to half of the village men and women, who called me El Lobo! So my original two weeks' cruise with a group of international tourists had changed into a two days' individual cruise and I think the change was actually not so bad, maybe even better, who knows! In Kinshasa before going to the airport we visited the old stadium, where Muhammad Ali and George Foreman had the heavy weight world championship boxing fight in 1974 won by Ali, the former Cassius Clay. Unfortunately, we had a serious quarrel with the guards for taking photos and we had to escape quite quickly before more serious fighting.

## **97<sup>th</sup> Journey 2011:**     *My third round trip in Oceania*

The year 2011 was the final year for my main goal of my World Odyssey: to visit all the independent countries. In the beginning of this year I had five left but in July the world got a new country, South Sudan, which got its independence after 50 years' civil war in Sudan and I visited it in October. Before that I made my third round trip to three Oceanian countries: Tuvalu, Kiribati and Nauru.

### **192. TUVALU**



**Oceania 12.**

**Independence: 1.10.1978 from Britain**

**2011**

**Population: 11 800**



**Australian Dollar**

On my third Oceanian tour (First in 1994 and second in 2007) I went to Melbourne, State of Victoria and Tasmania with my lady friend Kaarina. We rented a car and drove around the State of Victoria about 1200 kilometres, flew to Hobart and drove in Tasmania before flying via Fiji to Tuvalu, the first new country on my last Oceanian round trip. When we arrived in Funafuti, Mr Isaia Itaeli Taeia, whom I had met in Kinshasa last year, was waiting for us and took us to Filamona Lodge, which was located just by the airport. Unfortunately, he had to travel to his home island of Nui and I did not see him anymore. He was at that time a Minister for Natural resources. His brother was the Governor-General of Queen Elizabeth, because Tuvalu was a member of the Commonwealth Realm. (*Isaia Italeli died half a year later in strange circumstances at the age of 48 years in his hotel room in Apia, the capital of Samoa, but there was no evidence of crime*). So we stayed in the relaxing and cosy Filamona Lodge and we had two rooms and a kitchen apartment on the first floor. We were in Funafuti Atoll, Fongafale Island and Vaikuku Town of Tuvalu. We rented a light motorbike and drove on the island about 100 kilometres. The island was only four kilometres from end to end. We cooked our meals consisting mainly of canned goods, rice, pasta and some fruits. There was actually nothing special to see or to do on the island but driving, drinking and eating. We met Danish and Swedish travellers and then we had quite a lot in common, especially drinking beer. Anyway quite a relaxing start to the island tour!

### **193. KIRIBATI**



**Oceania 13.**

**Republic of Kiribati**

**Ribaberiki Kiribati in *Gilbertese***

**2011**

**Population: 120 000**

**Independence: 12.7.1979 from Britain**



**Australian Dollar**

Before going to Kiribati we spent one night in Nadi Hotel Tanoa International. In Tarawa we had a surprise: there was no one waiting for us from Lagoon Breeze Lodge, where I had booked our own apartment for us. We went by taxi and another surprise: no hotel reservation found. There were no vacant apartments, but we got two separate rooms and there was a common kitchen and dining room available. On Thursday we made a half a day sightseeing with the hotel driver to North and South Tarawa, where we found quite a lot of ruins and military vehicles, tanks guns etc. from World War II. South Tarawa is the administrative centre of Kiribati. We also visited the highest place in Kiribati and climbed up to three metres! Kiribati and its islands are in danger if the surface of sea level gets higher. The next two days we just relaxed in our hotel, because there was no gasoline nor chicken which was promised us for dinner. Then we heard from an Australian lady about a nice and very remote island, where we could stay for few days. We booked a small cottage for us for three days and the owner Michel Savings took us there by car and by motor boat, which could drive there during the high tide. There were no other visitors, only a local family, which took care of us by cooking and cleaning. There was a very strong tide difference: on low tide you could walk on the bottom with nearly dry feet and on high tide there was water nearly two metres and the stream was so strong, that we had to hold tightly otherwise the stream could have taken you toward the sea. It was a fabulous place with beaches, forest and sunny quietness except just a few laughing and swimming kids quite far from us. On Tuesday evening we got a message that our Wednesday flight will depart four hours earlier, which meant that we had to leave our island at four o'clock in the morning during the high tide. Michel had got this information just by accident. If had missed our flight, we had missed also Nauru. Sometimes travelling needs luck and this time we had it!

## 194. NAURU



Oceania 14/14 100%

Republic of Nauru

Ripublikee Naoero in *Nauruan*

2011

Population: 10 800

Independence: 31.1.1968 from Australia



Australian Dollar

Nauru was the 14<sup>th</sup> and last Oceanian country and second last, 48<sup>th</sup> Island country. It was also the last place on my third Oceanian tour. Nauru is actually a Finnish word meaning laugh! The passport formalities were quick, but we had to leave our passports for visa stamping. Next day we got a negative surprise: the visa fee was 100 Australian dollars per passport and we were informed that it should be free. The problem was that the payment was only in cash and there were no ATMs on the island and we did not have cash enough. After nice understandable discussions with Mr. Stephen, the head of the visa and passport department, who was mentioned in Lonely Planet's travel book, we got our passports back free of charge. Thank You Stephen! There were no buses or taxis on the island and we got a lift from the airport to our accommodation place, which was on the upper floor in the biggest super market, Capelle & Partner. We rented for two days a Toyota Carina of 1996. The island was only 17 kilometres around, but we managed to drive 170 kilometres on the island. In the middle of the island there had been earlier a very productive sulphite mine, which had destroyed the great part of the island's nature. That spoiled area looked like the moon surface even if I never have been on it! There were no proper beaches and the only entertainment except own cooking and drinking, was to look to the open field from our balcony and follow a local baseball match or Sunday picnic party of the local families. I managed to get two serious looking insect bites in to my right ankle and I had to visit both the local Medical Centre and Hospital to get help, because the bites were infected, which might be dangerous for me due to my Diabetes II (*same kind of a problem in Guinea and Sierra Leone in 2010!*). Actually I still needed a doctor in Finland to be cured. We were not ready to conclude our Oceanian round trip, but Our Airlines arranged is another negative surprise: our Monday morning flight had been postponed until Tuesday! This meant troubles for our connecting flights from Fiji to Sydney and further on. I had to call to my travel agency in Finland and they managed to change all our four flights for only a small extra fees. We had to stay an extra night in our lodge and we had just enough cash. The air company refused to refund anything. The extra day Monday 31 January was the 43<sup>rd</sup> Day of Independence in Nauru, but you couldn't see it anywhere. Unfortunately, we were not invited to the governments reception even though we were very distinguished visitors from the remote North! On our delayed return we had a one-night stopover in Nadi in Fiji and we made a short taxi drive in some interesting neighbourhoods and ate a pizza meal in Smuggler's Inn on the black beach with live music and some young quite noisy but harmless American tourists. Because we had to change our flight schedule we missed the visit to Sydney and that was unpleasant for Kaarina, because she had never been there (*I had been in 1994 and in 2007*). During our Qantas flights from Sydney to London we had a four hours' stopover in Bangkok at midnight. Due to Kaarina's walking stick we got extra service and taken to the business lounge, where we could enjoy our last champagnes (actually the first!) and nice snacks. So we arrived home one day later but never mind, everything was fine! Only two countries (*actually three!*) left of my Odyssey!

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## 98<sup>th</sup> Journey 2011:    *A combined working and last country visiting trip to Asia.*

This trip was a very special one, because Saudi Arabia was the most difficult country for a normal traveller to get a visa, even a transit visa. My very good friend was a director of a big removal company NIEMI Oy and they had some plans for more international activities. He arranged for me a business visa to meet Move One Removal Company in Riyadh. He was one salvager of my Odyssey! So I knew already that South Sudan would declare its independency in July, which meant that two more journeys and countries were left, both again to Africa.

## 195. SAUDI ARABIA



2011

Asia 47/47 100%

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

المملكة العربية السعودية *al-Mamlakah al-‘Arabīyah as-Su‘ūdīyah* in *Arabic*

Population: 34,8 million

Independence: 23.9.1932 after the unification into kingdom



Saudi Arabian Riyal

Well, Saudi Arabia was the last Asian country and the most difficult. I went there with my business visa arranged by a famous Finnish removal company and I was their consultant but paying the trip myself. Saudi had even stopped giving transit visas to the western traveller. My original idea was to fly to Dubai and go by bus through the whole Saudi to Amman, but it wasn't anymore possible in 2011. Anyway there was a car waiting for me and drove me to Hotel Coral Suleimaniah, but it cost me not so little. On Saturday, which is in Saudi a working day I met Move One's country director Mohammad Habdaoui, Macedonian Borce Proshev and Syrian origin Hasan Abduwahed. I had sent in advance a questionnaire and we went through it with their replies during a two hours' meeting and after that they offered me lunch. After that I was taken to their huge ware house and that's it, my consultancy work was completed!

The rest was my own time. On Saturday afternoon I saw on television the women's final of the French Tennis Open won by Chinese Li for her first time. In the evening I ate quite a good hamburger with a non-alcoholic beer, which should be drunk with a straw! On Sunday I arrange a sightseeing drive with a guide from the hotel and after driving around the city we went up to Riyadh Kingdom Tower's 99<sup>th</sup> floor, where there was a 360-degree panorama over the whole city. Unfortunately, the weather was very foggy due to pollution and humidity, but clear enough to see. In the evening I ate spaghetti Bolognese with café latte but without a straw. On Monday my flight to Frankfurt was three hours late and I met at the airport two Finnish sister, who arranged access for me to the business class lounge, which meant nothing extra except a nice chair. So that was the end of Asia and only two more African countries to go!

## **99<sup>th</sup> Journey 2011:**     *A trip to the second last new country in Africa and in the World.*

This trip was another nightmare for visa reasons. Equatorial Guinea is the second difficult country with its visa policy after Saudi Arabia. You need a Letter of Invitation LOI from the country and if don't know anybody it's nearly impossible to get it. I was staying with my lady friend Kaarina in London for three weeks in August and that made the impossible possible. I went to the Equatorial Guinea Embassy and found that the reception officer Ms. Carmen had her own small travel agency on the first floor and she was authorised to get the LOI. For the visa application I needed also a HIV certificate, which I had, copy of my criminal register, which I got through Internet and my personal CV, which I made myself. Then my application was ready and I left it at the embassy and got the visa in Helsinki three weeks later. This wasn't my last journey and country, which I had thought last year, because South Sudan became independent in July. One more to go!

<p><b>196. EQUATORIAL GUINEA</b>  <b>Africa 53.</b>  <i>Republic of Equatorial Guinea</i>  <i>República de Guinea Ecuatorial in <b>Spanish</b>, République de Guinée équatoriale in <b>French</b> and República da Guiné Equatorial in <b>Portuguese</b></i></p>		<p><b>2011</b>  <b>Population: 1,4 million</b>  <b>Independence: 12.10.1968 from Spain</b></p>		<p><b>Central African Franc</b></p>
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Once I returned home from London I booked my flight ticket to Malabo and hotel and started to wait for my passport. I was lucky that I had for certain reason two passports, which gave me a possibility to leave England, because it is not in the Schengen area. My departure was on 23 September so I had nearly three weeks for waiting. One week before my departure I started to be worried and managed to trace the delivery from London and found that my passport was going not to Finland but Poland! Then I started to sweat and finally I got my passport with visa on Friday morning at 10 by DHL delivery and I had to be at the airport at noon! Ops, better late than never!! Ok, I arrived safely at Malabo and entered the country. Just in case Ms. Carmen had asked a person to come to the airport to help me if needed, but fortunately he was not needed. He drove me to my hotel Uolu y Hnos, where I stayed three nights. On Sunday Ms. Carmen's farther Lauren came to meet me and we made a deal for some programme. He was an entrepreneur doing all sort of business. He asked me to join a minibus drive to the inner part of Bioko island. It was a public bus and he was the driver. I met all sort of local people: bar attendants, policemen, village chiefs and other of Lauren's friends. For the return trip we got two young beauties going to a big party in Malabo. After this trip Lauren took me to his big family dynasty of four wives and 16 children and numerous other relatives. A fascinating man with fascinating people around him.

Next morning, I flew by Ceiba (168.) flight to the African continent to Bata, where I had a guy with his car waiting for me and driving me around the area. (*Bata is a fictive country called Zangaro in Frederick Forsyte's*



novel *Dog of War* from 1974. It is another Forsyth's fiction, which I have faced in reality, the first was the *Day of the Jackal in Paris* 1963!) In the evening I flew back to Malabo and next day on Tuesday I flew via Addis back to Helsinki. And now finally, the 100<sup>th</sup> Journey and 200<sup>th</sup> country were waiting for me and I already had booked my tickets to Juba, the capital of the new South Sudan for the beginning of October 2011!

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### **100<sup>th</sup> Journey 2011:**    *The last trip to the newest and last independent country of the world!*

This journey is one of the best and most important ones, because it meant finally the end of my 56 years Odyssey around the world. Now I had visited 200 independent countries. At the same time, it was the last African country as well. Now the main goal has been reached, but the travelling doesn't end..

## **197. SOUTH SUDAN 2011**



South Sudanese Pound

**Africa 54/54 100% and Mondia 197/197 (+4 former)=201!**

**Population 11,2 million**

***Republic of South Sudan***

***Independence: 9.7.2011 from Sudan***

*I came to Juba, the capital of South Sudan on Wednesday 5 October 2011 by Turkish Airlines flights on Tuesday 4 October via Istanbul to Cairo and from there by Egypt Air flight. I went back on Saturday 8 October 2011 by Egypt Air to Cairo, spent a night there and continued by Turkish Airlines flights via Istanbul to Helsinki, where I arrived on Sunday 9 October exactly three months after the independence of South Sudan, the youngest country of the world, so far!*

Finally, it was time for victory ceremonies for my Odyssey, which started in 1955 from my first real journey, the domestic trip abroad in Finland (*or actually everything started 3 September 1944 when I was born*). I stayed in Olympic Hotel and felt myself as Olympic winner of a long term travelling contest. It was humble but cosy with friendly people. At the airport I made a deal of 100 US dollars with my personal chaffer for the next two days. There was not so much to see in Juba but I found the atmosphere optimistic and inspiring. The first evening I had my own cold dinner with beers in my room and in the garden. The hotel was more or less in Muslim hands and did not sell beer, but allowed its drinking. On Thursday we went driving and found an artist's centre, where one artist Julius promised to prepare me a tourist doll with a local dress, which I fetched on Friday. After that we went to the Business Symposium and Trade Fair held in Nyakuron Cultural Centre, where there were nice sculptures and paintings, art and crafts and other small products including products of the local White Bull Brewery. I introduced myself in the White Bull tent and told why I was in their respected new country and they were so pleased to offer me the fine Nile and White Bull beers with some nice snacks. This was very symbolic, because the readers of my travel story may have noticed that beer has been in a key role in every country I have visited (*Except Finland 1955, Brunei 1998, Libya 2005 and Saudi Arabia 2011*). In the evening I had a nice dinner in an open restaurant just in the heart of Juba. On Friday afternoon my chauffeur drove me to the airport and I said goodbye to him and to the country, but it seemed that it is difficult to get rid of me. We waited three hours for the Egypt Air flight and finally we were informed the flight was cancelled due to weather conditions. We were taken back to Juba and accommodated in Hotel Resort Sahara and we were given dinner with even five beers on behalf of Egypt Air. Finally, a good air company. On Saturday we flew to Cairo, where I heard the real reason for the delay: the strike of air control personnel. Because we were one day late I had to go to change my Turkish Airlines' tickets. Then I got troubles, because they refused to do it, but after a two hours fight I finally managed to make and could continue my return flights from the new world via old Istanbul to my home city Helsinki.

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# ADDITIONAL PART 2012 – 2017

In these years I continued the second and additional part of my Odyssey journeys in order to visit all the so called Non Sovereign countries. They are countries which have declared their own independence one-sidedly without any or non-significant recognition among other countries. At this moment there are seven such countries: **Somaliland** in Somalia which I visited in 2007, **Sahrawi Democratic Arab Republic** e.g. occupied Western Sahara in Morocco in 2012, **Northern Cyprus Turkish Republic** in Cyprus in 2013, **Transnistria** in Moldova in 2013, **Abkhazia** in Georgia in 2014, **Nagorno-Karabakh** in Azerbaijan in 2014 and **South Ossetia** in Georgia in 2016.

I have added some special autonomous or self-governing regions to this part as well. I visited **Tibet** in China in 2013. De facto it had been the unrecognized state between 1912 and 1950, but People's Republic of China occupied it in 1951 and now it is an autonomous region of China. In Greece there is the **Autonomous Monastic State of Holy Mountain Athos**, which I visited in September 2016 and which is allowed for men only. And finally I have added to my travel story an international organisation, **Order of Malta**, which has an observe status in United Nations like Vatican City and Palestine. I have visited its main places in Rhodes 1977, Rome in 1983 and Malta 1985.

Additional to these two categories I have listed separately the Nordic special regions. These are **Åland** (visited in 1986), the autonomous archipelago region of Finland; **Svalbard Archipelago** (in 2007), the northernmost tourist region of Norway with **Barentsburg**, a special settlement of Russia, **Greenland** (in 2008), the autonomous state of Danish Kingdom and **Faroe Islands** (in 2015), autonomous state of Denmark. These three are also associated members of the Nordic Council. To this Nordic dimension I have added my 70<sup>th</sup> birthday journey in 2014 to the Finnish **Sami land** and municipalities in Lapland and Norwegian Sami land in Finnmark county and by Artic Sea. *Actually I had visited both the Finnish and Norwegian Sami Land and Arctic Sea already in 1967 on my Citroen 2CV car with my first wife.*

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## 1./7 REPUBLIC OF SOMALILAND 2007

*Jamhuuriyadda Soomaaliland in Somali and جمهورية صوماليلاند Jumhūrīyat Šūmālīlānd in Arabic*

**Declaration of independency unofficially in 1992 from Somalia without any recognition.**

**Republic of Somaliland**



**Somaliland**

**2007**



**Somalia**



**Somaliland Shilling**

Somaliland is officially one of the 18 regions of The Federal Republic of Somalia, but it is also a self-declared unrecognized sovereign state. It is the first of such states for me, altogether there are seven such states. Before entering Hargeisa, I spent one day and night in Istanbul and visited the famous Topkapi palace. On my Turkish Airlines flight to Addis Ababa via Khartoum I met for the second time an Ethiopian man Mr. Gegussic, who lives in Finland and he took me to his sister's house in the town of Debreziet. We went there and next day back by local bus. Finally, on Monday I flew to Hargeisa. I had booked in advance a room at Hotel Ambassador, which had arranged visa for me. There were UN development workers in the hotel and they played football outside and asked me to be referee. There were players from Sweden, Spain, USA Alaska Ghana, Kenya and Somaliland. The result was 2-1 for the better team! I had a very important voluntary duty for UN. For the next day I booked a full day excursion to the countryside and to the Gulf of Aden. In our group there were two obligatory armed soldiers, driver and guide, and they all went to the Land Rover and filled it. I asked politely: Can I join you, please? Ok there was a narrow place for me as well. We drove through very dry and rough savannah to an open cave complex, which was famous for its 5000 years old paintings. These painting were found only five years earlier by some French archeologists. These paintings showed that Sahara had been a green area with such animals, that you don't find any more like elephants, giraffes and long horn cows. We continued to the seaside

to the town of Berbera by the Gulf of Aden. We went to the empty beach, where I was served a nice picnic meal with cold beer. Our soldiers were Muslims and it was Ramada time, so they just prayed. The only activity on the beach was helping to dig a car out of sand. Then we drove back to Hotel Ambassador. Next day I took a taxi to the centre of Hargeisa, which had been destroyed totally during the civil war in 1990, but now it looked better. Here were over one million people living in the city in quite chaotic circumstances.

## 2./7 SAHRAWI ARAB DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC SADR 2012

الديمقراطية الصحراوية العربية الجمهورية *al-Jumhūrīyah al-‘Arabīyah aṣ-Ṣaḥrāwīyah ad-Dīmuqrāṭīyah* in *Arabic*  
*República Árabe Saharaui Democrática* in *Spanish*

### WESTERN SAHARA (Morocco)

الغربية الصحراء *Aṣ-Ṣaḥrā’ al-Ġarbiyya* in *Arabic* and *Sahara Occidental* in *Spanish*

**Declaration of Independence: 27.2.1976. Recognized by 85 countries in 2015. Occupied by Morocco since 1975 against UN resolution.**



Flag of SADR



Flag of Morocco



Moroccan Dirham

*I came to Laayounne, the capital of Western Sahara province and SADR on Tuesday 6 November 2012 by Binter Canaris flight from Las Palmas, Gran Canary and went back on Sunday 11 November 2012.*

This was my first journey after October 2011, when I finished my Ismondia Odyssey of all independent countries, and this was also the beginning of the additional part of visiting the non-sovereign countries and some special regions or others. I was travelling with my lady mate Kaarina, who had her 75<sup>th</sup> birthday just on 6 November, when we arrived in Western Sahara. In the morning in the airport hotel in Las Palmas the butler of the breakfast restaurant ordered for us champagne on the house to celebrate Kaarina's birthday. I had booked through internet for us a five days' package from Camp Bedouin 40 kilometres from Laayouin and run by a Belgian guy Luc Tromme and his Berber wife and four years old son Hissan. We stayed in a humble but cosy room for the first three nights. In the evening we had in a big Bedouin tent our birthday dinner of camel meat in an Orange sauce and with Moroccan red wine. Originally we had an idea to eat lobster by the Atlantic Ocean, but I think the Desert camel was more exotic and tasty! On Wednesday I remembered my Sahara trekking two years ago in Mauritania by walking over three hours over the dried Salt Lake to a wet Salt Lake and back. Nice memories but now with two blisters, which dried quite quickly. On Thursday we went with Luc by his Land Rover for our first six hours' tour to salt mines, savannah, sea coast and sand dunes. On Friday we went for a two days' safari to the desert with Luc and his family. The first night we spent in a tent in sand dunes, which was for Kaarina a totally new experience with a nice open fire bbq dinner with wine and "dormir á la belle Etoile", sleeping under the stars. Saturday was an endless driving on an endless savannah and which seemed never ending. But there was the End. Our plan was to spend another night on savannah by a great canyon, but the desert wind became a heavy storm and it was too dangerous to camp and we drove back to the Bedouin Camp, where we slept the last night in an original Bedouin tent. The Moroccan government took care of the people by showing with numerous Moroccan flags. No SADR flag anywhere. We went to see the wall or fence, which isolates the area ruled by Polisario or SADR from the area ruled by the Morocco government. The SADR government is on the exile in Algeria. The wall is nearly 3 000 kilometres long. We couldn't drive further because of the police and army guards. Anyway the atmosphere in Western Sahara was peaceful and with no real tension. On Sunday we flew from the hot and dry desert climate back to more humid but also hot Gran Canary, where we drove up to 2000 metres to a very thick fog, which really was far from the desert climate.

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### 3./7 TURKISH REPUBLIC OF NORTHERN CYPRUS (Cyprus) 2013

*Kuzey Kıbrıs Türk Cumhuriyeti in [Turkish](#)*

**Declaration of Independency: 15.11.1983 from Cyprus. Recognized only by Turkey and also partly occupied by Turkish Army.**



Flag of Northern Cyprus



Flag of Cyprus



Turkish Lira

*I came to Ecan Airport, Northern Cyprus on Thursday 10 October 2013 by Pegasus Airlines flight from Antalya, Turkey and went back same day evening.*

I had just one week earlier moved with my unmarried wife Kaarina Kruskopf permanently to Houtskari's Mossala Island in the City of Parainen in Turku Archipelago, South-West part of Finland. I had Finnair frequent flyer's bonus points for so called "smile tickets" to Antalya in Turkey and I liked to combine this non-sovereign country visiting to the same journey. At Ecan Airport we managed after some difficulties to rent a small car and we drove altogether over 300 kilometres on the island. In Cyprus and also in Northern Cyprus there is a left hand traffic. Northern Cyprus is mountainous and very rough compared to the territory of Republic of Cyprus. There was not so much to see except two historical coast towns of Girne or Kyrenia and Gazimagusa or Famagusta. We tried also to drive to Nicosia to the Cyprus side, but from Lefkosa or Northern Nicosia to Nicosia there were no signs at all and it was heavy rush hour, which meant that we didn't find the way to the border. We had to return to Ecan Airport, leave the car and fly back to Antalya.

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### 4./7 TRANSNISTRIA (Moldova) 2013

*Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic*

*Republica Moldovenească Nistreană in [Romanian \(Moldavian\)](#)*

*Приднестровская Молдавская Республика Pridnestrovskaya Moldavskaya Respublika in [Russian](#)*

*Придністровська Молдавська Республіка Prydnistrovska Moldavska Respublika in [Ukrainian](#)*

**Declared Independency: 2.9.1990 from Georgia and war 1992, Recognized only by 3 non-sovereign countries.**



Flag of Transnistria



Flag of Moldova



Moldovan Rouble

*I came to Tiraspol, the capital of Transnistria on Sunday 24 November 2013 by bus from Kishinev, the capital of Moldova and went back by taxi next day.*

Before going to Transnistria I had to fly on Saturday 23 November 2013 first to Chisinau, the capital on Moldova. I had been there in 1998 and it looked much better. I stayed in a nice and cosy family Hotel Manhattan The young director Eugene, who had studied in USA, arranged for me a sightseeing with his Mercedes to see the city and the city of Orhein and its fine vineyard to taste Moldovan wines and listen to old jazz played by old guys. In Chisinau there was an anti-EU demonstration by communists. Next day I went by bus to Transnistria and at the border we had to wait an hour before I got a stamp to my passport and proceed to this non-country. I stayed in City Club Hotel, which was nearly empty. I walked around in the centre with quite a few people even though it was Sunday, but I found a very nice restaurant, where I had good lunch with good beer and wine. In the morning I took a taxi to the bus station, but the driver managed to persuade me to drive directly to Chisinau for 35 US\$. At the border the crossing took now two minutes!

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## 5./7 ABKHASIA

2014

*Republic of Abkhazia*

*Аҧсны Аҳәынҭқарра Apsny Aḥwynthkharra in Abkhaz language*

*აფხაზეთის დე ფაქტო რესპუბლიკა Apkhazetis de facto Resp'ublika in Georgian*

*Республика Абхазия Respublika Abkhaziya in Russian*

**Declaration of Independence: 23.7.1992 from Georgia during the war 1992-1993. Recognized by Russian Federation and 4 other UN-countries and 2 non-sovereign countries.**



Flag of Abkhazia



Flag of Georgia



Russian Rouble

*I came on Monday 31 March 2014 by taxi from Sochi to Psou River and I walked over the river and through the passport control to Abkhazian side and further again by taxi to Sukhumi, the capital and came back next day 1 April 2014 the same way to the border from where I went by taxi to Adler-Sochi airport and flew to Yerevan, Armenia.*

I was on my second Caucasian tour, the first was ten years ago in 2004, and to two non-sovereign counties of which Abkhazia was the first. Legally it is a region of Georgia, but *de facto* it is so called “frozen country”. Russian Federation recognized Abkhazia in 2008 and at that time there were military conflicts between Russia and Georgia. Now the situation has settled down or politically frozen. You need a travel permission in the Russian language and I got it in advance from the Abkhazian Ministry for Foreign Affairs. My first plan was to go there from Georgia, but then I found that it is easier to go from Sochi and I applied for another travel permission. Before going to Abkhazia I stayed one night in Sochi and managed to arrange taxis to the border and another to Sukhumi, the capital for a very reasonable price. The first Russian taxi drove me on the main road and we passed some of the indoor venues of the Olympic Games earlier this year. At the border I had to walk over Psou River to the passport control and I got into troubles. Actually in my travel permission the crossing point still was at the Georgian border. I don't speak Russian and the Captain didn't speak English.

After a while he made a call to the Ministry and I spoke to them and convinced them, who I was and what I had done. I got permission to walk further to the Abkhazian side. My taxi wasn't there, because I had come half an hour earlier and I went to a very small bar and had one beer and one very strong local spirit. Then my Iranian driver came and we drove through quite rough countryside one and a half hours to Sukhumi to an old and quite monumental Hotel Ritsa just near to the Black Sea (*this was a third time for me by the Black Sea: first in 1977 in Romania and 1984 in Bulgaria*). The first thing I had to do was to go to the Ministry and get my visa. The hotel person ordered a taxi and we drove to a big building. I went in and wondered how many people there were. Then I found a lady, who spoke English and I said that I need a visa and she said that it takes five days to get it. I said to her that I was promised it at once, but she said that it is not possible, Then I asked the lady, what is this building and she said that it is the Russian Consulate. My hotel had not understood anything, but I got a new taxi and went to the Ministry, where they had just started a one-hour lunch break. I found again a small café, where I had two beers, after them I went to the Ministry and got my visa within five minutes and the officer was very friendly and asked why had come to Abkhazia from so far and I told about my Ismondia Odyssey. Sukhumi is a very old town and there has been human dwelling already 2550 BC. During the Soviet time it was a very popular holiday town with long piers and beaches and seaside boulevards. Now it looked quite abandoned with quite few people, mainly retired old men playing chess. In the evening I found a nice restaurant just beside my hotel and the food and wine were good. The atmosphere was relaxing and I felt myself quite safe. Next morning, I went back to the border by taxi and crossed it without any problems and took another taxi to Adler-Sochi airport and flew to Yerevan in Armenia.

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## 6./7 NAGORNO-KARABAKH (Azerbaijan) 2014

*Nagorno-Karabakh Republic or Kartsak Republik*

*Լեռնային Ղարաբաղի Հանրապետություն Lernayin Gharabaghi Hanrapetut'yun*  
*or Արցախի Հանրապետություն Arts'akhi Hanrapetut'yun in Armenian language.*

**Declaration of Independence: 2.9.1991 from Azerbaijan and again after the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan in 1994. Recognized only by three non-sovereign countries.**

**UN considers it as a part of Azerbaijan.**



Flag of Nagorno-Karabakh



Flag of Azerbaijan



Armenian Dram

*I came to Stepanakert, the capital of Nagorno-Karabakh on Wednesday 2 April 2014 by a rent car from Yerevan, Armenia and drove back same way next day and flew by Aeroflot flight to Moscow and further by Tolstoy train to Helsinki, where I arrived on Friday 4 April 2014.*

I was for the second time in Yerevan (*First time in 2004*) on my way to Stepanakert. I rent a Kia car from Car & Van and finally I was told that there are no problems with visa, which you can get from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Stepanakert. I was escorted out of the city to the Eastern highway. For the first I passed quite closely the Ararat Mountains, which are located in on Turkish side. Then after a while the road climbed up to 2000 metres with snow and glaciers. Then down again and I saw the border station, but no one came out and so I drove without stopping to Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan or non-sovereign republic. But half an hour later I was stopped by a police car. The policeman called to the Ministry and I spoke with one civil servant, who advised me to drive immediately to the Ministry to get the visa. It took five and a half hours to drive from Yerevan even if the distance was only 320 kilometres, but it was mountainous with rock and roll. I lived in magnificent Hotel Armenia, which was in the same block with the Parliament. I walked to the Ministry and got my visa. After that I just walked around the city and had some beers. By the same square where my hotel was, there was also an ugly Presidential palace and I tried to go to see it, but I was turned very strongly away by the police. One little curiosity was the I had with me last Saturday's newspaper of the South-West Finland Åbo Underrättelser, which is in \_Swedish language. They had written that I'll be in Nagorno-Karabakh on 2 April. One week earlier the newspaper had written a four pages' article of my world Odyssey Ismondia, because I lived in Åbo Archipelago! In the evening I had a nice dinner in my hotel with good Armenian wine and brandy. Next morning, I drove again nearly six hours to Yerevan airport.

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## 7./7 SOUTH OSSETIA (Georgia) 2017

*Republic of South Ossetia*

*Республика Хуссар Ирыстон Respublikæ Khussar Iryston in Ossetian language*

*Республика Южная Осетия Respublika Yuzhnaya Osetiya in Russian language*

*ცხინვალის რეგიონი Tskhinvalis regioni in Georgian language*

**Declaration of Independency: 29.11.1991 from Georgian Soviet Republic and again on 26.8.2008 after Russian-Georgian war. Georgia considers still South Ossetia as Tskhinvali Region. It has been recognized only by Russian Federation and three other UN-countries and three non-sovereign countries.**



Flag of South Ossetia



Flag of Georgia



Russian Rouble

*I tried to get a visa to South Ossetia in April and July 2014 but it was not possible. I got a message via Internet: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of South Ossetia asks you to postpone your trip for later term. I contacted them again in April 2016 and got a promise to get a travel permit, but it takes one and a half months to get it, because it will be handled in Moscow.*

Finally I managed to visit South Ossetia in Autumn 2017 together with Mr. Kimmo Puikkonen, one of the all countries visited colleague and Mr. Jari Aula, who spoke fluent Russian. We flew first to Vladikavkaz in North Ossetia in Russia and from there we had bought a travel parcel to by car and guiding driver to Tskhinvali in South Ossetia. There we were waited by the representatives of the travel agency and the City. We made an interesting excursion and heard an interesting explanation about the situation and the role of South Ossetia in relationships both to Georgia and Russian Federation. After the whole day excursions we had a warm and wet late lunch offered by our hosts. We had so much fun that we decided to stay longer. We were taken to the best and popular restaurant to eat and drink more. Suddenly all the light went off and I jumped up and sung and played by my mouth horn Gershwin's Summertime. I got huge applauses, but the audience didn't know to whom they expressed their satisfaction! After the extra night in a sport hotel we returned next morning back to North Ossetia next day on Thursday 31 August. After that we had a guided tour to the town of Beslan, where we visited the memorial house of the Beslan school siege of 1-3 September 2004. A shocking experience! Next day we went by taxi to Grozny the capital of the Republic of Chechenia, which was amazingly recovered from the wars.

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## SOVEREIGN MILITARY ORDER OF MALTA 1981 and 1985

*Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of St. John of Jerusalem of Rhodes and of Malta*

*Sovrano Militare Ordine Ospedaliero di San Giovanni di Gerusalemme di Rodi e di Malta in [Italian](#) and  
Supremus Ordo Militaris Hospitalis Sancti Ioannis Hierosolymitani Rhodius et Melitensis in [Latin](#)*

**Sovereign Military Order of Malta SMOM** is a sovereign and international community acting like a state but without its own territory. **It has been officially established in 1113 with a pontifical sovereignty. The entity retains sovereignty under international law, including United Nations permanent observer status (like Vatican City and Palestine),** issuing its own passports, currency and postage stamps with the Maltese cross insignia. The order's military corps, three brigades, are stationed throughout Italy, liaised with the Italian Armed Forces. SMOM has formal diplomatic relations with 106 countries and official relations with another six countries and with the European Union. Finland and other Nordic countries do not have diplomatic relations with SMOM. The order, with 13,500 Knights, Dames and auxiliary members, employs about 25,000 doctors, nurses, auxiliaries and paramedics assisted by 80,000 volunteers in more than 120 countries, assisting children, homeless, handicapped, refugees, elders, terminally ill and lepers around the world without distinction of ethnicity or religion. Through its worldwide relief corps, Malteser International, the order aids victims of natural disasters, epidemics and war. Its two headquarters in Rome – the Palazzo Malta in Via dei Condotti 68, where the Grand Master resides and Government Bodies meet, and the Villa del Priorato di Malta on the Aventine, which hosts the Grand Priory of Rome – Fort St. Angelo on the island of Malta, the Embassy of the Order to Holy See and the Embassy of the Order to Italy have all been granted extraterritoriality.



Flag of SMOM



Cote of Arms of SMOM

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## TIBET (China) 2013

*The unrecognized state between 1912-1950*

*Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) of People's Republic of China Population: 3,2 million*

*Xizang Autonomous Region 西藏自治区 in [Mandarin Chinese](#) and [ཁ་སྐད་བོད་སྐད་ཀྱི་ཁུངས་ཀྱི་ཁོངས་སྡེ་ལྷན་ཁག་](#) in Tibetan*

Between 1912 and 1950 Tibet was acting like a sovereign country but without any international recognition. In 1950 the People's Liberation Army of China defeated the Tibetan Army and in 1951 the Tibetan representatives signed an agreement with the Chinese Central People's Government affirming China's sovereignty over Tibet. The Dalai Lama stayed as leader of the autonomous region until 1959, when he fled to India and established the

Government in Exile, which is still existing. Tibet Autonomous Region was established in 1965, thus making Tibet an administrative division on the same legal footing as a Chinese province.



**Flag of Tibet**



**Flag of China**

*I came to Lhasa, the capital of Tibet on Saturday 6 April 2013 by train from Xining and continued my journey on Wednesday 10 April 2013 by Air China flight to Chengdu, China.*

I was travelling with my lady mate Kaarina on our two weeks' round trip in China. First we spent two days in Beijing, the capital of China visiting the Forbidden City and the Finnish Embassy, where I met the ambassador Lars Backström, who was one of the few Finnish travellers, who have visited all the independent countries, in a way my colleague! Then we flew to Xining, where we bought food and drinks for 24 hours's train trip to Lhasa over the mountains of more than 5000 metres. Our travel agency had arranged us a travel permit, which was for five different persons from Finland. We never met these three non-existing Finns! Mr. Trtavel had bought us the whole cabin of four persons and again we had now two non-existing Chinese fellow travellers. During the 24 hours' train trip we stopped at Tsung Ku La, which was located over 5000 metres high. We had passed the second highest Alpine Tsona Lake in the altitude of 4500 metres. The highest is at 4760, but we didn't see it. When we arrived in Lhasa railway station there was a military reception, because on our train there had been about 300 young soldiers commanded to safeguard Tibet. We were met by our Tibetan guide Tenx and the driver Tsorgi. The rendezvous was warm and we were given holy neck cloths of silk. We were accommodated in Tibet Gorga Hotel, which was a very decorated courtyard hotel. In the evening we had dinner in our hotel and Kaarina's chicken was mainly bones without flesh. Next day we were recommended not to eat chicken at all due to the bird influenza epidemic. Our sightseeing started from Potala Palace, which is the historical and religious symbol of Lhasa and holy place of Tibetan Buddhism. There were so many stairs to the top that Kaarina had to stay downstairs due to her operated leg. It was even for me a hard walk to climb up, but I survived. The original palace was built already in 600 and the additional parts on 17<sup>th</sup> century. After a delicious Chinese lunch, we visited the Jokhang temple. In the evening we had some cold food from the local supermarket and a small bottle of 56 percent rice wine! Next day we visited the Summer Palace and Sera Monastery, where we had a possibility to follow the debate of the Buddhist monks. For the lunch I had a Yak steak and Kaarina Yak burger! On our last day we visited the very rare Buddhist nun monastery drinking tea with yak milk and eating yak snacks. After that we drove 70 kilometres to the airport following the 3000 kilometres long Brahmaputra river, which flows to Ganges river in Bangladesh. We flew next to Chengdu in Sichuan, where we saw a lot of Pandas and after that to Shanghai, where we attended the Formula one car racing for the first time and so far last time. The Finnish former world champion Kimi Räikkönen was very popular among the Chinese girls and he was third on that race!

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## **MOUNT ATHOS (Greece)**

*Autonomous Monastic State of Holy Mountain*

*Αὐτόνομη Μοναστική Πολιτεία Ἁγίου Ὄρους in Greek*

**2016**

***Population: 1800***

*I flew by Turkish Airlines from Helsinki to Istanbul and further to Thessaloniki, Greek Macedonia on Monday 31 October 2016. Next day I took a bus to Ouranopolis, from where I took an Express boat to Dafni on 2 November. From Dafni to Kayres, the capital of Mount Athos State I went by bus and came back later on the same day and again by Express boat to Ouranopolis. Back to Thessaloniki by bus and finally back to Helsinki by Turkish Airlines via Istanbul on Friday 4 November 2016.*



**Flag of Mount Athos**



**Greece**



I had applied in advance an entry permit, which I had to buy from the pilgrim office of Mount Athos in the port of Ouranoupolis. Then I took the express boat to Dafni and further by bus up to Kayres the capital of the State of Mount Athos. From there I walked to the monastery of Koutloumousiou, where I was guided by a monk, who while showing me the skull of St Andrew from 1100<sup>th</sup> century recognized that I am not an orthodox and I confirmed that I have no god or religion. Never mind, everything was very fascinating. Mount Athos is allowed only for men, no women aloud to visit the state. There was no local transportation back tyo the port of Dafni and I had to take and pay alone the whole private minibus. I did not have enough time or strength to walk down.

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## REGIONS HAVING REFERENDUM FOR INDEPENCENCY SINCE 1990

### QUEBEC (CANADA) 1995

**Quebec** is a province in Canada and it's French speking and Chatolic. On October 30, 1995, with the Parti Québécois back in power since 1994, a second referendum on sovereignty took place. This time, it was rejected by a slim majority (50.6 percent NO to 49.4 percent YES). The difference was onlu 54 288 votes!



Flag of Quebec



Canada

### TOKELAU (NEW ZEALAND) 2007

**Tokelau** is an external territory of New Zealand using its flag and anthem, but is administrated by three elders (one from each atoll). Tokelau had a referendum on self-determination in October 2007 and the result was: Against 246 votes and for 446 votes, which was only 64,4% and only 16 more for-votes would have guaranteed 2/3 majority for independence!



Flag of Tokelau



Flag of New Zealand

### SCOTLAND (UK) 2014



Flag of Scotland



Union Jack of United Kingdom

**In Scotland** a referendum took place on Thursday 18 September 2014 on Scottish independence from the United Kingdom. The referendum question was, "Should Scotland be an independent country?", which voters answered with "Yes" or "No". The "No" side won with 2,001,926 (55.3%) voting against independence and 1,617,989 (44.7%) voting in favour.

### CATALONIA (SPAIN) 2017



Flag of Catalonia



Spain

The **Catalan independence referendum of 2017**, also known by the numeronym **1-O** (for "1 October") in Spanish media, was an independence referendum held on 1 October 2017 in the Spanish autonomous

community of Catalonia, passed by the Parliament of Catalonia as the Law on the Referendum on Self-determination of Catalonia and called by the Generalitat de Catalunya. The referendum question, which voters answered with "Yes" or "No", was "Do you want Catalonia to become an independent state in the form of a republic?". The "Yes" side won, with 2,044,038 (92.01%) voting for independence and 177,547 (7.99%) voting against, on a turnout of 43.03%. The Spanish government and Supreme Court did not accept the independency.

## **BOUGAINVILLE (PAPUA NEW GUINEA) 2019**



**Bougainville**



**Papua New Guinea**

A non-binding independence referendum was held in Bougainville, an autonomous region of Papua New Guinea, between 23 November and 7 December 2019. The referendum question was a choice between greater autonomy within Papua New Guinea and full independence; voters voted overwhelmingly (98.31%) for independence. Nothing has happened since the referendum.

## **NEW CALEDONIA (FRANCE) 2020**



**Unofficial flag of New Caledonia**



**France**

An independence referendum was held in **New Caledonia** on 4 October 2020. Independence was rejected, with 53.26 percent of voters opposing such a change, a slight drop from the 2018 result in which 56.7 percent voted "no". Turnout was 85.69 percent. The Nouméa Accord permits one further referendum to be held, should the Congress of New Caledonia vote for it. The third referendum must be held by 2022.

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# SOME NORDIC SPECIAL DIMENSIONS

## ÅLAND ISLANDS (Finland)

*Autonomous Region of Åland Islands*

*Landskapet Åland in Swedish language*

*Ahvenanmaan maakunta in Finnish language*

*Declared Autonomy of Finland: 7.5.1920, Associated Member of Nordic Council since 1970.*

*Åland Islands consists of 16 self-governing municipalities*

**1986**

*Population: 29 000*



Flag of Åland



Flag of Finland



Finnish Mark in 1987



Euro since 2002

*I came to Mariehamn, the capital of Åland Islands on Friday 5 September 1986 by ferry boat from Turku and went back the next day.*

I was participating in a seminar on culture and history of construction and old building in Mariehamn and in Eckerö. Åland Islands is a special archipelago of Finland. It has quite a strong autonomous tradition based on special legislation and Swedish is its official language. It has 16 self-governing municipalities. Visiting Åland Islands is like being abroad, because you are out of the main land and the culture differs from main Finland and the official language is Swedish.

*In 1993 I rented a summer house from the Municipality of Föglö Island for my family of six persons and for my eldest daughter's family of three persons of which the youngest was my first grandson Onni, 1½ years of age. In 2009 I went by boat to the special light house place called **Märket Reef**, where Åland Islands and Sweden have a short common border. In 2016 in May I went with my lady mate Kaarina by ferry boat from Korppoo in Turku Archipelago to the southernmost municipality of Åland, Kökar.*



Åland Islands between Finland and Sweden



Märket Reef Lighthouse



Border on Märket Reef

## SVALBARD ARCHIPELAGO (Norway)

2007

*Svalbard in Norwegian language*

*Population: 2700*

*Spitsbergen is the largest and only permanently populated island of Svalbard Archipelago*

*Barentsburg Баренцбург in Russian language, is a Russian settlement on Spitsbergen island*

*Svalbard Islands is a Norwegian Archipelago in the Arctic Ocean situated about midway between the main land of Norway and North Pole.*

*Administratively, the archipelago is not part of any Norwegian county, but forms an unincorporated area administered by a governor appointed by the Norwegian government. Since 2002, Svalbard's main settlement, Longyearbyen in the largest island of Spitsbergen, has had an elected local government, somewhat similar to mainland municipalities. Svalbard is the northernmost settlement in the world with a permanent civilian population and the northernmost normal tourist place in the world.*

*Although Svalbard is under Norwegian sovereignty, the unique Svalbard Treaty of 1920 allows citizens of signatory countries equal rights to exploit natural resources. Russian Federation, along with Norway (via the Sveagruva mine and Mine 7), maintain mining operations on Svalbard as a result. Russia maintains a consulate in Barentsburg, the northernmost diplomatic mission of any kind in the world. Barentsburg still has a Norwegian mail address and Norwegian phone numbers.*



Flag of Norway



Coat of Arms of Svalbard



Russian flag

*I came to Longyearbyen, the capital of Svalbard in Spitsbergen on Friday 13 July 2007 by SAS flights via Copenhagen to Oslo and Braatens flight and went back on Tuesday 17 July 2007 by SAS flights via Tromsø and Oslo to Helsinki.*

I had two weeks ago returned from my one-month Eastern African tour with from Madagascar a strong pneumonia, which still was disturbing me. Flying to the northernmost tourist island of the world to the night less night, its clear and pure Arctic climate cured me immediately. I stayed in Ann's Polarrigg Hotel, where I met the first Finnish person, the bar attendant Terhi. The first day in Longyearbyen I just walked around visiting a fine Art Gallery and Supermarket. On Sunday I went on a whole day cruise with M/S Polargirl to Esmarkbeen glacier or ice berg, where we didn't see ice bears but several big seals. On the boat I met a Frenchman Xavier who spoke quite good Finnish and Swedish. We had a nice lunch with whale steaks and beer. After that we went to the Barentsburg settlement, which belongs to Russia and has a Russian consulate. It was like a copy from a 1970s Soviet Union village with a statue of Lenin, cheap vodka in Intoursit hotel, old Russian type buildings with huge wall paintings and a small Orthodox church. Our Russian guide spoke fluent Finnish and Swedish. Next day I went on a half a day kayak trip and the kayak was for two and of course my partner was Mika from Finland. He had done kayaking earlier and was a strong man, so I just pretended to paddle. We went over Advendfjord twice and had a nice outdoor lunch in Moskuslugget. After this adventure I met two other Finns in a bar. The last night I spent in our bar with a Greek lady Yuma, who suffered from the bright night and whose flight was very early in the morning. We had very nice discussions about travelling and life in general. Next morning, I met again two Finnish plumbers, who were working there, so I felt like home with so many Finns. Actually there were around 20 Finns living in Longyearbyen. In the afternoon I flew back with Mika, my paddler via Tromsø and Oslo to Helsinki. In Oslo I manage to invite him to the Diner's Club Lounge at Oslo airport.

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## **GREENLAND (Denmark)**

*The self-governing state of the Danish Realm*

*Kalaalit Nunaat in Greenlandic ((Kalaallisut) language*

**Home rule 1979 and further autonomy and self rule 2009**

**Associated Member of Nordic Council 1984. Not within European Union like Denmark.**

**Head of State in 2008 Queen Margaret II and High Commissioner Søren Hald Møller and Prime Minister Hans Enoksen, Social Democratic Party**

**2008**

*Population: 58 000*



Flag of Greenland



Flag of Denmark

*I came to Kangerlussuag Airport on Friday 11 July 2008 by SAS flights via Copenhagen and went back same way on Monday 14 July 2008.*

I counted Greenland to my priority list, because it is an Associated Member of the Nordic Council like Åland in Finland and Faroe Islands, Denmark). I stayed near the Kangerlussuag Airport in Old Camp Hotel, where I got acquainted with a Chinese student Sai Hong Li, who was on a short holiday with his Danish boy friend from Copenhagen. The first evening we went together to the airport to buy some beer in the night less night and had very interesting discussion about communist China and the Western world. I met at the hotel a Danish couple, who were Buddhist and the man knew a lot of jokes about a Finnish man called Matti. On Saturday I participated in a seven hours' guided trekking on the tundra to Takako, Garnet Rock and Lake Ferguson. On Sunday I went with a small group to the Russel Gletscher (Glacier), where I climbed up and felt quite cold. On return we had a nice open air bar-b-que meal with beers.

## **FAROE ISLANDS (Denmark)**

*Self-governing Region of the Danish Realm*

*Føroyar in Faroese and Færøerne in Danish language*

**Gained home rule 1948 and further autonomy 2005**

**Associates member of Nordic Council 1970. Within European Union like Denmark.**

**Head of State Queen Margharethe II, her High Comissioner Dan Michael Knudsen and Prime Minister Axel V. Johannesen, Socialdemocratic Party.**

**2015**

*Population: 50 000*



Flag of Faroe Islands



Flag of Denmark

*I came to Vagár Airport, Faroe Islands on Tuesday 4 August 2015 by Finnair flight to Copenhagen and Atlantic Airways flight and went back same way to Helsinki on 6 August 2015.*

Faroe Islands was the last member of Nordic Council. I arrived to the airport quite late and took a taxi and it took nearly an hour to drive 50 kilometres to another island through a quite long underwater tunnel to Torshavn, the capital. I stayed in a humble but nice Guesthouse Marknagil about 10 kilometres from the city centre. The buses are free of charge and well scheduled. I walked in the centre four hours following a tourist map and visiting 12 different marked places of interest. It was not easy, because Torshavn was built on several hills. After this effort I went back to the Guesthouse to rest and have a beer. In the afternoon I went back to the centre and even further to the Nordic House, which was beautiful in its architecture and art exhibitions. In the evening after a nice dinner and beers I met two American travellers, who had visited with their rental car altogether 16 islands. The other one was actually originally Danish, but now American. In the morning I got a lift to the airport and we flew together to Copenhagen.

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***The 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday journey in September 2014 from Baltic Sea to Arctic Sea***

*The Sami people (also Sámi or Saami, traditionally known in English as Lapps or Laplanders) are an indigenous Finno-Ugric people inhabiting the Arctic Sea area of Sámi, which today encompasses parts of far northern Norway, Sweden, Finland, the Kola Peninsula of Russia.*



**Sami flag**



**Finland**



**Norway**



**Sweden**



**Russia**

*I came to Ivalo, the capital of Inari Municipality in Finland on Monday 15 September 2014 by night train from Helsinki to Rovaniemi, the capital of Finnish Lapland and then by car and proceeded further to the Municipality of Utsjoki on Wednesday 17 September 2014 and further to the north to the County of Finnmark, Norway up to Nordkapp by the Arctic Sea, and then downwards via Alta to Kilpisjärvi of the Enontekiö Municipality and finally back through Lapland again to Rovaniemi and by night train to Helsinki, where I arrived on Friday 26 September 2014.*

As a pre-journey we started with my lady mate Kaarina my 70<sup>th</sup> birthday trip by going by boat from Korppoo to the nearly uninhabited island of Jurmo, where we celebrated on Wednesday 3 September 2014 my 70<sup>th</sup> birthday. We came back to Houtskär Mossala on Friday 5 September 2014. These islands are in the Åboland's Archipelago in the Baltic Sea. On Saturday 13 September 2014 we went by our car to Helsinki, where I celebrated my birthday with all my children and grandchildren of 11 persons in Restaurant Perho of the Helsinki Culinary School. On Sunday we visited Didrichsen Art Museum in Helsinki to see the retrospective exhibition of the famous Norwegian artist Edward Munch.

On Monday morning we started our long drive from Rovaniemi by driving over 300 kilometres to Ivalo to buy wine and beer, and then another 100 kilometres to Inari's Solo Lake, where we spent two days in a dead pine cottage. We swam in a cold stream of arctic fjeld and made a boat trip to famous cold mine and national park of Lemmenjoki (River of Love). In the turning point of the boat before going back we made a two hours trekking in a quite rough terrain and Kaarina's feet were not in the best condition but she had a lot of guts! After Inari we drove first to the village of Karigasniemi on the Norwegian border to buy again wine and beer from the special shop of Alko. Then we drove by Teno River, which is the border river up to Utsjoki, the capital of the municipality. There we stayed two days just on the banks of Teno River. The nature in Lapland is at its best in September with the most colourful trees and grounds. From Utsjoki we drove to Nuorgam, which is the northernmost village of European Union. After Nuorgam we proceeded over the border on Friday to the Finnmark County of Norway, the largest Sámi region in the North. We drove again over 300 kilometres to the Arctic Sea to a little town of Kjöllefjord at the end of a big fjord of Laksefjord. We stayed in an old and restored fish factory, where we were the only travellers. Next day we drove even further to the north up to the town of Mehamn, which was only 23 kilometres from the geographically northernmost place of the continental Europe called Kinnarrodden (71°08'02") but it was too difficult for us to trek over there. Instead of that we visited the centre of Gamvik commune, which is the northernmost place of continental Europe, where you can go by car. On Monday morning, we waited between 2 and 4 for MS Kong Harald to take us over the fjord, but nothing happened until it came more than one hour late. We managed to cross the Porsange Fjord to the town of Honningsvåg on Magery Island. We arrived at 6 o'clock am and it had snowed and the ground and the road were covered by snow. We had summer tires but pretty new and I had to drive carefully to Nordkapp, which is the northernmost island linked to the main land of Europe (71°10'21"). Only Svalbard is further to the north. (*I had been in Hammerfest, which is not far, already in 1967 with my first wife Virpi by my Citroen 2CV 1959 model!!*) While taking photos I noticed that there were arising dark clouds which meant more snow. We went quickly to our car and managed to start just before the snow downwards to the city of Alta. We drove more than 300 kilometres and nearly all the time on snowy uncleared road. Luckily there was quite a little traffic. Malagoya island is connected to the main land with an underwater tunnel of 6870 metres. We arrived in the afternoon to Alta or exactly Alattiio, which is the

most populated town in Finnmark county. We stayed in the Alta River Camping area, which was owned by a Finnish couple. We continued next day by driving on E8 main road now in a dry weather to Skibotten, from where we turned to the left and started to approach Finnish Lapland and Kilpisjärvi. We were stopped by an old Sami man, who spoke Finnish and smelled strongly of old booze. He asked if we had some beer, but unfortunately we didn't. He asked for a lift to Kilpisjärvi, but we managed to change Anders Blom to another car, whose driver knew him. In Kilpisjärvi, which is the centre of Finland's left arm located just beside the famous Saana mountain, we stayed two nights in an excellent log cabin. We were planning to go by boat of the lake and walk to the boundary mark of three realms, Finland, Sweden and Norway, but unfortunately the driver of the boat was not available. From Kilpisjärvi, which belongs to the third Sami municipality Enontekiö, we drove again on a quite thick snowy road about 100 kilometres and there you had to be very careful. We managed and went on driving another 300 kilometres via Muonio and Levi to the village of Kaukonen, where we stopped to visit an art gallery of a famous Finnish painter from Lapland, Mr. Reidar Särestöniemi. Finally, we arrived to Rovaniemi railway station and had for dinner fried venison and fried reindeer. We came back again by night train and continued from Helsinki to Houtskär Mossala where we lived. Our journey was altogether 2850 kilometres long from Baltic Sea to Arctic Sea via Finland's Lapland and Norway's Finnmark of Sami Lands, and back.

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## A ROAD TRIP AROUND FINLAND 2021

### VISITING THE MOST EASTERN (OF EU), NORTHERN (OF EU), WESTERN AND SOUTHERN PLACES OF FINLAND BY CAR



**Finland**



**Russian border**



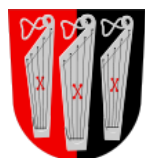
**Samiland**



**Norwegian border**



**Swedish border**



**Ilomantsi**

**Möhkö willage**

**Easternmost place of EU**



**Utsjoki**

**Nuorgam willage**

**Northernmost place of EU**



**Korsholm/Mustasaari**

**Raippaluoto willage**

**Westernmost place**



**Hanko**

**Tulliniemi peninsula**

**Southernmost place**

*Because it was not so recommended to travel abroad due to Covid 19 virus pandemic I decided to make a special round trip in Finland together with my lady mate Kaarina Kruskopf. We had both been twice vaccinated already in the mid May. We made the round trip by Volvo 40 S Classic 2003 (old red wine colour) started on Saturday 19 June 2021 and ended on Sunday 4 July 2021. All together 4050 km!*

We drove first to the municipality of Ilomantsi, where is the easternmost place of EU by the Russian border and spent there two nights. After that we drove via Kuusamo (two nights) and Savukoski (in south Lapland one night) to the village of Nuorgam, which is in the municipality of Utsjoki in north Lapland. It is the northernmost place of EU and located by the Norwegian border, in between is the Teno river. After three nights under the mid-night sun we drove via Inari to the west side of Lapland to the municipality of Pello, which is located by the Swedish border on the other side of Torneå river. After one night we drove to the island of Hailuoto, which is the third biggest Finnish island in the Baltic Sea. There you have to go by ferry. After two nights we continued to the island of Raippaluoto (actually Björkö island), which is the westernmost place where you can drive by car. (The westernmost boarder between Finland and Sweden is located in the island of Märket in the Åland archipelago, where I visited 2014). And finally after two nights we drove to the city of Hanko where the southernmost place of Finland's main land, Tulliniemi peninsula is located. Unfortunately we could not drive to it by car and walking distance of 8 kms was too long for us. After one night visit we finally returned to Helsinki after having driven 4050 kilometres in 17 days! Not so bad.

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