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TRAVELOGUE

Traveling the World
in a Vision Jet ...
Discovering Eastern
Europe

AMIR AND TAMRA HYSTER

COPA PRESIDENT

TJ SHEMBEKAR

P 702-920-2108

Email: president@cirruspilots.org

EDITOR

KIM BLONIGEN

Email: editor@cirruspilots.org

ADVERTISING DIRECTOR

JENNA REID

P 816-699-8634

Email: jenna.reid@vpdcs.com

ADVERTISING COORDINATOR

BETSY BEAUDOIN

P 800-773-7798

Email: betsy.beaudoin@vpdcs.com

GRAPHIC DESIGNER

BETHANY GULDE

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handled at COPA® headquarters, call

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COVER PHOTO

Flying in formation at C2A Clinic in Fredrick,

Maryland, are: TJ Shembekar (N547TJ), Derek

Rowan (N675AT) and Rob Newman (N2418N).

(Photo credit: Kody Epperson)

TRAVELOGUE

» *Places to Fly and Explore*



AMIR AND TAMRA HYSTER are active aviation travelers, flying themselves throughout the world and writing about their experiences. The Vision Jet is their fifth Cirrus aircraft (they recently upgraded to their second Vision Jet), a progressive move from their previous SR22N, SR22TN and SR22T that they previously flew on their world adventures. Visit their website for more stories and information: www.VisionJetTravel.com



Traveling the World in a Vision Jet ... Discovering Eastern Europe

By Amir and Tamra Hyster

*The Peles Castle near Brasov, Romania
was built between 1873 and 1914.*



Seldom visited and certainly not a hot tourist spot from Western countries, the Eastern block of countries is, in our opinion, the future of Europe.

What do we mean by that? In our experience, people appear to be looking forward to creating a bright future forged with a positive attitude. They face every day with their eyes open to what is happening in the world and will not stand by, ever again, to see their country fall.

Torn over the years from oppressive rule and under political and cultural pressure from surrounding countries to conform, the feeling on the ground is that they are staying true to their culture, strong family ties and traditions, and won't be influenced. The people are staunch, and the youth are smart and intuitive. Having been through the hardest of times, there is very little that can break them from here on.

When we visited these countries, we were amazed at the feeling of "freedom" on the streets. The people are free in their thinking and expression; they will talk about any subject and not shy away from any topic. We are not travel guides, but we have learned a lot from our visit to this wonderful corner of the earth. The following and in next month's issue is our journal of the flights and our sightseeing adventures.



« *Amir and Cirrus representative Rudo Merica flying over Romania in a SR22.*

Batumi, Georgia (UGSB) to Chişinău, Moldova (LUKK)

Continuing with our Round the World (RTW) trip, we pick up the story from Batumi, Georgia, our stop after leaving Tel Aviv, Israel. It is difficult to get basic cleaning maintenance done on the aircraft when traveling RTW as there are very few FBO services in these countries, so when you need a ladder to put oil in the engine, we borrow one from the refuelers. We continually clean and protect the icing boots from bird droppings and insects and try to keep the windows clean, but that is the limit of what can be done on a tarmac with handlers and time slots to meet pressing on your time management.

Due to high terrain, the only departure from Batumi, Georgia, for jets is on RWY31 and with relatively no wind, we departed on the SARPI3A departure straight over the Black Sea. At 3,000 feet ATC saved us some time and fuel by terminating the SID and cleared us for a left turn directly toward Trabzon Airport

VOR, off the coast of Turkey. Then they handed us over to Ankara, who didn't respond to our reports. A pilot from a commercial airline relayed our requests for a shortcut; there seemed to be some confusion on Turkey ATC identifying us. When they returned to confirm, they cleared us direct GOKPA, which was even better as it was a direct route. We were then entirely over the Black Sea, but most of the time within gliding distance from the coast. Still, it was a little unnerving as the Black Sea is a vast body of water covered with low-level clouds!

Before waypoint GOKPA, we could see on the Garmin Connect that the forecast squall line of thunderstorms (SQL) was rapidly increasing in size with cloud tops at FL380. The SQL was moving north and 180 nm north of the Turkish forecast and the London-issued prog chart (which is the most accurate weather available). We asked ATC for a diversion which was immediately granted. Our diversion put us on a right-of-track path to get out of the turbulence that was being created by the fast movement

of the SQL. Amir said he wouldn't of liked being in his beloved SR22 trying to cross that.

To make things more interesting, there was huge military activity over the Black Sea by the Turkish Air Force and over Crimea by the Russian Air Force protecting the Russian Naval Base of Sevastopol. We requested a northern deviation to fly over Odesa, Ukraine; it was granted after Amir informed Turkish ATC about the bad weather. This diversion made us fly directly over the Russian Naval base. A short time later we were transferred to Ukrainian FIR, which vectored us to Odesa and kept us above FL255. This is required to fly over Crimea's Dangerous Zone airspace, even though we were flying inside Crimean air space which is under Russian control.

There is a special frequency for us to contact Sevastopol to speak to the Russian ATC, but we elected to use the Ukrainian ATC. The conflict between Russia and Ukraine has been going on for many years, in particular in the

Donbas area but somehow during our flight there in 2021, the two countries liaised well in the airspace over Crimea. Sometimes tragic accidents happened in this part of the world, such as the well-documented Malaysia Airlines MH17 and the less-known Siberia Airlines flight 1812. Little did we know that just a few months after our crossing, the entire Crimea and Ukrainian airspace closed.

Side note: Our flight was before the Ukrainian/Russian conflict which unfortunately closed the airways for any N-registered aircraft. We note that the flight over the Black Sea was most interesting but may not be possible for smaller aircraft to get that close now.

We were soon on our approach to Moldova, a small country that sits between Ukraine and Romania, west of Crimea. Before flying in these developing countries, it is vital to check the runway surface conditions. For example, we were planning to visit Odesa; however, when checking the runway at UKOO, we discovered it had potholes and grooves, allowing only very large planes to land there without serious risk of damage. The runway surface in Moldova was described as "fair." We planned on landing softly; using careful energy management and a little precision flying, coupled with the Vision Jet's well-designed landing gear, we conducted a perfect landing.

Moldova was a surprise. When Amir announced our destination, I had very low expectations; what could there possibly be to see in such a place, not renowned to be a tourist spot ... but how wrong that is. There is plenty to see there, notwithstanding the fascination of seeing a post-Soviet Union society trying to climb out of the grips of such devastation. Aside from that, there are many interesting areas to visit – the following are the ones we experienced.

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« A close-up of the Lenin statue standing guard at the steps of the parliament building in the Transnistria autonomous territory.

The Territory of Transnistria, Cities of Tiraspol and Bender

The Transnistria autonomous territory is in a narrow strip of land between Moldova and Ukraine. The border pass between Moldova and Transnistria is manned with heavy Russian military checkpoints, border police and customs; passport and car registration papers are required. The Dniester Nista territories, also known as Transnistria, are a large agricultural area growing wheat, sunflowers, lavender and vast vineyards. The entire territory is controlled by Sherrif Inc., which has the majority of main businesses and owns the European league football team.

Since 1990, Transnistria has governed itself independently of the Moldovan capital, Chisinau, fortified by a permanent strong Russian military presence and annual financial aid from Moscow.

The republic is a living museum of Soviet iconography, from the impressive statue of Lenin standing guard at the steps of the parliament building to the hammer and sickle Transnistrian flags that flutter all over the territory and the same plaque that adorns the walls of the city's buildings.



« The bottle of Kvint brandy returned by the Russian space crew on display at the on-site museum.

The distillery of Kvint has been there since 1897, initially only producing vodka and during the prohibition years, non-alcoholic fruit drinks until many people died of alcohol poisoning brewing their own at home. That prompted the government to end prohibition and they started making vodka and wine again. The production of brandy began in 1938 and is now world-famous, having won over 430 medals and prestigious prizes. The Russian astronauts took quite a few bottles to space in 1998 and only one bottle returned which is closely guarded and on display in the on-site museum. We were honored to hold that bottle – the first item we held that traveled to outer space. The factory was closed to public tours but after looking at our website and seeing all of our adventures and the COPA magazine stories, they gave us an incredible personal tour with the lovely marketing executive Anna, who told us they make the “nectar of the gods” from wine and age it in both new and ancient barrels. They make 20 million bottles of every product a year in that facility, which is exported to 29 countries. It is the oldest commercial enterprise in the autonomous region still operating. The cognac is meticulously blended, beautifully mature, complex and rich, and is one of the best we have ever tasted.

Back in the region of Moldova, we visited:

Cricova Wine tunnels – This was fascinating, a city of underground tunnels carved out of a limestone mountain since the 15th century. Half of the underground road tunnels store over 1.3 million bottles of rare wine and massive storage barrels. We descended 330 feet underground to their cinema to sip Rosé sparkling wine and hear the story of the maze of tunnels that cover over 75 miles!

“ ... people appear to be looking forward to creating a bright future ... They face every day with their eyes open ... and will not stand by, ever again, to see their country fall.”

Orheiul Vechi – This city lies in a limestone eroded valley containing ancient caves used as orthodox churches. In olden times the citizens would hideout from the Ottomans; now it is a tourist attraction with many eco-friendly hotels in basic traditional houses with plots of land full of beautiful vegetable gardens and fruit and nut trees. Their water supply is still being hauled up from an ancient water well outside each property, which is very quaint and nice alongside the river.

In Chişinău, we found an outstanding restaurant called Pegas, full of locals and serving fine dining food of the highest quality: Russian traditional borscht soup, steak and modern creative cuisine. We enjoyed eating in this part of the world as much as flying through it!

Chişinău, Moldova (LUKK) to Bucharest, Romania (LRBS)

Handler: RAS-Romanian Airport Services

It was a slow climb to FL200 in 30°C heat after a nice, no hassle departure from RWY 26 at LUUK. Every square inch of Moldova is covered in perfect agricultural fields, all very green and lush. Our flight was only 45 minutes, and we were almost immediately handed over to Romanian ATC for ILS RWY 25

at Baneasa Airport (LRBS) in Bucharest. It is an amazing general aviation airport with excellent handling services and facilities. It is in the heart of the city and most private flights prefer to land there.

Rudo Merica, the Cirrus agent for Romania and Russia, hosted us at a popular Romanian grill. What do pilots do when they get together? Fly the SR22 over Romania, of course!

Mud Volcanoes of Buzau National Park – Just a short day trip from Bucharest, visitors are able to see Europe’s largest mud ponds and volcanoes. A unique geological phenomenon of small new volcanoes appear while others disappear.

Brasov – A lovely city in the Transylvania region and formally known as Stalin City, Brasov is full of history, great mountain air, coffee culture, and modern bars at night in the backdrop of an old cultural city. We loved it.

Bran (Dracula) Castle – The castle was built for the fortification and protection of German colonists in Transylvania. To revive the tourist trade in this town, they made up the story that the castle inspired the Bram Stoker’s Dracula novel. It was just a gimmick, and they have a very nice display and theme of the original movie inside. The castle is not pompous and opulent, just simple and practical with many small nooks and crannies making it most interesting.



The Bran (Dracula) Castle was actually built for the fortification and protection of German colonists in Transylvania.

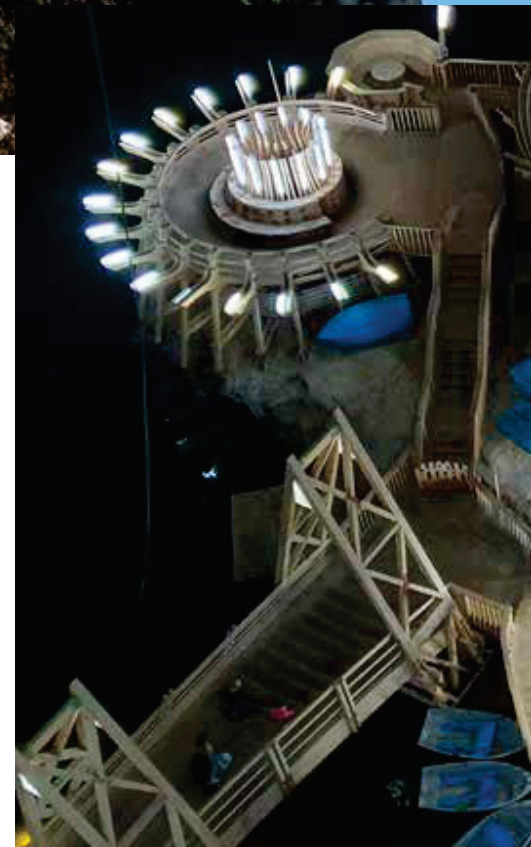
Turda Salt Mine – Salt was mined here for 200 years, between 1690 to 1880! The huge cone-shaped pits still contain the equipment used to mine and transport the salt to the surface. One of the huge pits in the Theresa mine was renovated in the 1900s at around 6 million euros and opened to the public. The entire mine walls are still lined with solid salt and the groundwater dripping through. Salt coats everything, so it is scary when we traversed down 262 feet to the bottom of the pit in an elevator. We hoped that the maintenance was up-to-date.

Showcasing incredible engineering for such times, the whole tour was

mind-blowing! Today there is a complete amusement park including a huge Ferris wheel in the main mine shaft and rowing boats in the water at the bottom shaft.

The roads in Romania are in poor condition, something we take for granted in a sophisticated society but very lacking in a developing economic country with no highway infrastructure. A road journey takes hours and slow-moving trucks make it perilous, causing people to take huge risks between farming traffic and the occasional horse and cart.

After a quick tour of Cluj-Napoca, the second biggest city in Romania, we decided to travel back to the beautiful city of Brasov. We stayed a few nights



at a swanky apartment (with a washing machine!) near the historical Black Church, named because of its smoke-blackened walls resulting from a 1689 fire. Hello clean clothes – a true luxury when traveling!

The drive outside of the city of Bucharest and the countryside is full of quaint old towns. Decrepit old houses line the main roads, each within their plot of land where they grow all their own produce. Colorfully painted, rustic cottage charm comes to mind, with cobblestone pathways and cities displaying grand churches and architectural glamour of the olden, more aristocratic times.

Peles Castle – A short drive from Brasov is this Neo-Renaissance castle in the Carpathian Mountains near Sinaia in Prahova County. It was built between 1873 and 1914 by King Carol I and is still owned by the Royal Romanian family. This was probably the most magnificent castle we have ever seen; it left us speechless.

Bucharest is one of the most beautiful cities in Europe. We stayed at the Hilton during the Euro 2020 (soccer) football championship having been delayed by a year. The French team stayed in the same hotel which caused all sorts of security problems. We had a taste of how it is to be surrounded by “fans” and paparazzi. Unfortunately, we don’t know anything about (soccer) football teams but were told we were amongst the most valuable players in Europe! Amir was sitting in the executive lounge and spoke to one of the French players, asking them how they are doing in football. He answered, “We are the world champions.” A pity later that day, they lost their game to Switzerland and were eliminated from the Euro 2020 competition.

Next, we’re flying to Bulgaria and also will visit Albania, Hungary and Slavakia. ☺



An overview look at the bottom of the Turda Salt Mine, 262 feet below ground.




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