



## **ITMB PUBLISHING LTD.**

- **INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL MAPS AND BOOKS**
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**AXIS OF EVIL MAPPING NEWSLETTER #6 OF 2017 – June/July – New Titles: see below for details**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The best laid plans of men aft gang astray. So said Robert Burns (I think) and sure enough, our travel plans for our trip to Europe fell afoul of illness. Johnny, our seven-year-old grandson, developed a severe lung infection, and spent several days in hospital. Johnny is fine now, but was supposed to accompany us on a Mediterranean cruise, so plans for a family vacation had to be changed. Lan and I felt that we could take the trip anyway, as the crisis was over, but it created something of a pall over our time in Europe. However, in an article below, we'll recount our adventures in the hope of providing useful information for readers to use in guiding visitors.

### **MSC CRUISE LINE**

This is a disreputable firm that cheats its customers in every way possible, so please do not book a cruise with this Italian firm. First, they refused to tell us where the ship was docked in Marseille, which I find a very peculiar attitude to take. It is a big ship, carrying 2,600 passengers. How many places can it dock? We had to fly to Marseille from Vancouver with no idea how to find where in the port the ship was docked. We eventually found it, but had to drag our luggage for two kilometers through a disused part of the port before stumbling on the ship. The reason for my discontent, however, relates to the ways the cruise line cheated us. First, we had purchased books of drinks coupons in advance, at a cost of E26/\$30 for each of the six of us. As only two of our party boarded, they would only provide two booklets of coupons, and refused to provide the other four or to refund us the hundred Euros we had paid! They then sold the coupons a second time to other passengers. This is theft, plain and simple. We complained, to no avail. We were told it was company policy. Does your company steal from its customers?

Second, the cruise offered a tour of northern Sardinia for E39.90. Lan and I signed up. At the end of the cruise, several days later, we received our parting invoice from the cruise line and noted that we had been over-charged E20. I went to the customer service desk to sort out this error while Lan packed. The excursion office insisted that, although the tour was E39.90, they had charged me E49.90 and I had to pay the higher fee. I know that this is 'only' E20, but over-charging is cheating customers. It isn't right. I demanded to speak to the manager and the staff person left, yelling at me in the process, and refused to come out of an inner office. Nor would the manager address this problem and refund me the overcharge. This is NOT the way to treat customers. We will never deal with this firm again. I've owned ITMB for almost 40 years. Never, in all that time, has a customer complaint been ignored or a customer treated unfairly. For those of us in business, resolving issues to the satisfaction of the customer is paramount. This disreputable firm obviously feels that it can rip off its customers with impunity. Think of that infamous tour. There were three busloads of passengers, each one carrying 50 people who thought that they were being charged an agreed-upon fee. Each of them was cheated of E10 by MSC. That comes to an astounding E1,500 that MSC stole from its passengers.

Third, the cruise line stated that the water on board was not safe to drink, refused outright to supply drinkable water, and forced each passenger to buy bottled water (or preferably, something alcoholic) for each restaurant meal. I've been on several cruises, but have never experienced a situation where I was forced to buy water.

Please, save yourselves the angst of a ruined trip – don't deal with this firm. There are lots of reputable cruise lines offering tours of the western Med and other parts of the world. I read several angry reviews about this line when booking the trip, but figured that they were overly critical. As a businessman myself, I believed that no firm would treat its clients as badly as the reviews indicated. I was wrong. Save yourself from an unpleasant experience; don't book a cruise with MSC.

### **THE WESTERN MEDITERRANEAN**

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Despite the problems we experienced with MSC Cruise Lines, touring places like Palma de Mallorca, Ibiza, Sardinia, Livorno/Florence, and Genoa isn't hard to take. The weather was VERY hot, approaching 40c, but the ports of call entailed pleasant travel experiences. We were particularly impressed by Mallorca, which by the way has been excellently mapped by Marco Polo and by Freytag & Berndt. Sardinia is much more of a tourist destination than we expected and we wished that we could have spent more time exploring the island. Perhaps this will evolve into a future ITMB map! We thoroughly enjoyed exploring Florence (Firenze to Italians), with its treasure trove of medieval buildings and display of statuary. There were hordes of tourists, forcing the cathedral to limit the number of visitors, but we saw the statue of David in the Piazza Signoria, in front of the Vecchio Palace, as well as a mouth-watering display of early Roman statuary located nearby – and all for free! The Ponte Vecchio bridge is a treat to see, and a greater treat to cross, with its many jewelry shops. The Pitti Place was, unfortunately, was closed for the day, but the walk through narrow city streets was memorable. I really think that ITMB should bring back our map of Florence and Tuscany! Our last port of call was Genoa, a city with more palaces than it knows what to do with them. We spent the day in port walking the streets of the inner 'old town' of medieval times. We used the excellent Touring Club Italiano map of the city (ITMB being the North American distributor for TCI). We explored the market streets and discovered several churches to tour, walked the famous Via Garibaldi, and had an ice cream dish at a local café that also had internet access, so we could catch up on emails. My only complaint would be that Italians close down at noon on Saturday, so most shops were closed. Nothing I have said here will surprise Europeans, but the newsletter goes to subscribers all over the world, so the above comments might encourage some readers to visit such cities.

### **THE PYRENEES AND PROVENCE**

We had travel constraints imposed by limited air service between Canada and Marseille, so had only four days to explore all of southern France following our cruise. To Europeans, this starts a shudder that goes from the toes to the top of one's head! How is it possible to see all the glories of Provence in four days?!? Well, it isn't so we picked three night-time destinations and discovered some real treats! Our first night was spent in Livia, a charming Spanish village that is one of those historical anomalies of Europe, a tiny enclave of Spain completely surrounded by France. Livia has a church that was one of the earliest 'hospitals' on the Compostela de St. James route; now, it is a sleepy almost-forgotten backwater, but it is a very pleasant touristic destination, with hiking in the summer and skiing in the winter. Our host, one of the few French persons living in the enclave, showed us around and we enjoyed a traditional Catalan meal in one of the local restaurants.

The next morning, we drove to two of the many walled cities of the mountainous Pyrenees region, Mont Louis (a UNESCO World Heritage site), and Villefranche-de-Confluent, close to the beginning of the climb from coastal Perpignan, about ten kilometers up-stream from Prades, on the N116. Both were enjoyable experiences, including having lunch in the market square, looking at a 12<sup>th</sup> century church. The rest of the day was spent driving slowly northward to Castres, our base for the next two nights. This is located in the heart of Languedoc, which was an independent kingdom until conquered by France (much like Wales) and very proud of its D'Oc linguistic heritage. We visited the fabulous walled city of Carcassonne, which we found to be excessively touristic, and Castelnaudary to its west, driving along the Canal du Midi (another UNESCO site), then north to Albi, the site of the largest cathedral in the world made of bricks (another UNESCO site), whose true glory is that its interior is still completely painted, as all churches used to be in medieval times. This is one of the few examples remaining intact. Visually, it is overwhelming, but a true sight for tired eyes; what a marvel!

Finally, we drove eastward along secondary roads to a small village south of Avignon, visiting such treasures as the great cathedral at Lodeve and the Roman aqueduct (UNESCO site, again) du Nord, the greatest complete monument ever built by the Romans. The day ended in an isolated typically Provence farm in the middle of nowhere, with a side trip to Les Baux, a mountaintop village in the Apilles Natural Park, south of St. Remy. Then, sad to say, we had to rush to the airport and a very long and boring flight home.

### **A FEW MORE CANADIANISMS**

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Sorry, but this is an unusual year for Canada, and I like giving the individuals from this country five minutes in the limelight. Here are a couple more Canadian discoveries. The first is the Hawaiian pizza, a North American staple. Sam Panopoulos came up with the combination of ham and pineapple pizza in Chatham, Ontario, in 1962. Who would have thought, eh? Another staple of modern-day life is the plastic garbage bag. That's the large black bag now used all over the world. It was invented by Henry Wasylyk and Larry Hansen in 1950. Union Carbide produced it and called it Glad Bag. Billions have been sold and used. A bio-degradable version was invented by James Guillet in Toronto in 1961.

### **CANADA'S CONTRIBUTION TO MODERN MUSIC**

I'm too old to know most of today's popular musical groups, but there appears to be a fair number of well-known groups that are from this country. Rush, Drake, Carly Rae Jepsen, and Justin Bieber are just names to me, but they're incredibly talented, with a worldwide audience. I'm more familiar with Paul Anka (Diana), The Diamonds (Little Darlin'), The Crew Cuts (Sh-Boom), and singers such as Steppenwolf, Joni Mitchell, Buffy Sainte-Marie, Gordon Lightfoot, the irreplaceable Anne Murray, Ian and Sylvia, and Stompin' Tom Collins. Then there's the girl from Timmins, Shania Twain, and anything she sings sounds good; Dan Hill (Sometimes When We Touch), Burton Cummings (Stand Tall), and Bryan Adams (Summer of '69). I have a list in front of me of 150 great Canadian songs, and I'm sure that musical fundis could come up with another few hundred without much effort. Are Canadians particularly talented? No; we're just more successful than most in breaking into the American market. Remember Celine Dion and the Titanic theme? It made her an international star!

### **CURRENT PROJECTS AND OUT OF STOCK ITEMS**

Albania is running low on inventory (16 copies left). A new edition is in preparation.

Amazon Basin is down to 30 copies and is being re-formatted into a new map; no ETA.

Brasil is at the end of its print run; 17 copies left.

Canada is out of copies. A new edition is in preparation.

Delhi is out of copies. A new edition is being prepared; no ETA.

Edinburgh is temporarily out of stock. The printer sent an advance shipment of 200 copies, which have all sold. Following consultations with our printer, it appears that the rest of the shipment was lost in transit. This has never happened to us before, but the reality of life is that it has happened. The printer has agreed to reprint the map and send us a fresh print run of the map as we presented it to him, but unfortunately, this will take time. We apologize to our customers trying to order this title. In almost 40 years in business, this has never happened before! We are doing our best to get this title back into availability as quickly as possible. Please be patient.

Iran/Tehran is effectively out of copies and is being updated; no ETA.

Kuala Lumpur is almost out of copies (3 left). A newly updated map is being prepared.

Lesotho is now out of print. We are considering a new version, combining Lesotho and South Africa Southern into a double-sided map; no ETA.

Los Angeles has suddenly depleted more than expected; a new edition is being prepared; no ETA.

Mexico South is now out of stock. A new edition is being prepared; no ETA.

Mongolia is low on inventory (78 copies). A new edition is being prepared.

Nova Scotia is out of copies. A new edition is at press and expected in August.

Puerto Rico is getting low (98 copies). A new edition is being prepared; no ETA.

Saint Lucia is out of stock. A new edition is being prepared; no ETA.

Sao Paulo is running out of copies (34 left). A new edition is being prepared; no ETA.

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Stockholm is low on inventory (87 copies). A new title combining the city with southern Sweden is underway; no ETA.

Surinam/French Guiana is running low on copies (74 left). Preliminary updating is underway.

USA as a country map is out of stock. A new edition is at press; no ETA.

Uzbekistan is now down to 6 copies and is being updated; no ETA.

### NEW TITLES EXPECTED IN JULY, 2017

**Bhutan and Northeast India Travel Reference Map 5<sup>th</sup> Ed. 2016 1:300,000/1:1,300,000 ISBN 9781771290845 UPC 81771290845 \$12.95cdn/us E9.50 8.95GBP** – Bhutan is a lovely country, but limits the number of visitors allowed to enter the country each year. Their reasoning seems to be that they only want 'high end' tourists who are willing to spend a minimum of \$250 per day for the privilege of seeing the country. Regardless, it is an interesting country, and popular enough that monetary constraints notwithstanding, is fully booked. As with past versions of our map, one side is dedicated to Bhutan itself, with inset maps of the Thimpu area (the capital) and the Paro area further to the west. The map is in considerable detail. The other side of the map sheet is equally useful, in that it covers that portion of India from Kolkata north to Sikkim and east to the actual border with China (not the 'fake' border shown on maps printed in China, which show all of northern India as being part of China). This is an important part of India, but not one well-travelled. Framed by the great Brahmaputra River, one can explore exotic Assam and Nagaland, or follow the Burmese border to Imphal and little-visited Aizawl. The map has a new ISBN, as we gradually switch over to our new prefix, but has the same cover picture and price as previously, so there will be easy to integrate on store shelves. **AVAILABLE**

**Tanzania Travel Reference Map 6<sup>th</sup> Ed. 2017 on waterproof paper 1:1,300,000 ISBN 9781553414438 UPC 815534144386 \$12.95cdn/us E9.50 8.95GBP** – Tanzania is one of the marvels of Africa – an enormous land mass administered reasonably sanely, with great touristic appeal. The map is double-sided, essentially divided into northern and southern portions. Most of the developed touristic attractions are on the northern side – Serengeti, Mount Kilimanjaro, Zanzibar, and Lake Victoria. The reverse side shows Selous, Dar es Salaam, Mafia Island, and Lake Malawi. Insets include Dar, Arusha, and Stone City. **AVAILABLE**

### EXPECTED IN EARLY AUGUST

**Jamaica and Cayman Islands Travel Reference Map 6<sup>th</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. 1:250,000/1:37,500 ISBN 9781553411604 UPC 815534116093 \$12.95cdn/us E9.50 8.95GBP**

**USA Pacific Coast Travel Reference Map 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. 2017 ISBN 9781553412465 (same as currently) UPC 815534124654 \$9.95cdn/us E9.50 8.95GBP -**

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