



30 years around the world

Skies

by Alexis

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30 years of travelling

I always travelled. When I was one year old my parents moved from Greece to the USA. Today it appears exotic, but at that time (1960) it was usual to cross the Atlantic aboard liners (some of them really beautiful ...). It took us 14 days to go from Piraeus to New York after calling to Messina, Lisbon and Halifax (CA). It took always 14 days to cross the Atlantic back 3 years later when my parents decided to come back to Greece. I have no memories of these early travels. My mother used to describe colourfully this adventure mostly as far as going was concerned: she was alone with two children (my brother of 5 and myself just 1; my father having moved already some months before). It can be however, that this early travelling already gave me some initial taste ...

My travelling memories start around the mid-60s, when my parents used to travel around Greece using a Peugeot 403 (bought in the USA). They were brave in beating off the track locations and eventually we slept all together in this car: a rudimentary camping car (compared with what circulates today) with which we discovered large part of the remote Greek countryside and many secluded locations. Later on, the arrival of my sister obliged my parents to go for more comfort buying a caravan with which we continued travelling around the country: these was times where a Greek family travelling with a caravan was something completely unknown and I suppose even difficult to understand. Now if I am talking about these early experiences is not just to register my childhood memories. I suppose that having been used since very young in travelling (potentially in an unconventional way) and having like it (actually my brother transformed this pleasure in job: www.trekking.gr), this might have been one of the reasons for which I practically never stopped and this explains “30 years around the world”.

I jump ahead in the time. At the late-70s I moved myself in Italy in order to continue studying. While there I met a beautiful girl, Emanuela. There are (I suppose) several reasons for which we still live together, but certainly one has been our common passion for travelling. When in 1981 we decided to get married (surprising parents and friends) we were so poor that we did our honey moon hitchhiking. But we did it. This is a crucial point. Travelling is a social activity. Sharing your travelling experience with somebody is important. I also extensively travelled alone (mainly for professional reasons), but the most exciting travelling experiences occurred while we travelled together. These 30 years around the world are our 30 years around the world although seen through my photos.

As a student I have continued travelling (hitchhiking in Italy, Greece and around Europe). However, when I graduated in 1983 we decided for the first time to head outside Europe. It was August of 1983 and we were at the Greek island of Lesbos when we decided to cross to Ayvalik and then continue to Izmir, Kayseri and then Kapadochia (at that time virtually tourist free ... it is unbelievable today) before turning to Istanbul and then back to Greece. Wow!! We discovered such a new, different fascinating world just around the corner, populated by nice and friendly people. What a shock for a Greek!! The ones which, for my education, were expected to be the “enemies” were polite, well educated, friendly, with that innate sense of hospitality we only have in that part of the world; they were so similar, so similar to me

for so many aspects of cultural identity. The “enemies” were the nearest cultural brothers I have met until that time (and not surprising they remain such after 30 years ...). This first travel, besides leading us in some of the most beautiful places around the planet has been an extraordinary mind opening experience.

I have no photos of that first travel. But that experience excited us. Some months later, in December 1983 we caught an opportunity and flew to Cairo and then travelled around the country down under the Sudanese border and up to the just opened (after the Camp David agreements) Sinai region. I still remember the astonished greek monks at the St. Katherine monastery receiving a greek-italian couple of visitors after some tens of years of almost complete isolation. Second unforgettable experience helping to build a solid conviction: travelling is beautiful!

That was happening more than 30 years ago ... The summary of our travels can be seen in Table 1. Some of them consisted in visiting a country, but most of them have been travels crossing a region of the world for some given purpose or opportunity. It has been the case when in 1997 we travelled from Dar-Es-Salaam to Cape Town using the TAZARA railway (until Zambia) and the existing network down to the Cape. The same when in 1999 we crossed the Siberia going to Mongolia and China using the Tran-Siberian railway and the Chinese network. It has also been the case when we crossed the Sahara desert in the late-80s, when we did a round the world trip in 2003 (which took several months) or when we did a round the East-Mediterranean travel in 2010.

In 1990 our son Sirio was born. Since 1998 and for almost 10 years he travelled with us to all destinations. Despite what many people think about travelling with kids it has been (and can be) a great experience, provided some basic precautions are kept: visit malaria free areas, include in the travel places and situations where kids can have their fun, travel (at least partially) with people who also have kids. Sirio seems he has appreciated. He is now travelling alone (with his friends). I hope he got the right travelling tastes ...

Of course we extensively travelled in Europe, certainly in Italy and Greece (obviously ...), but also in Spain, Portugal, Switzerland, Austria, France, Belgium, the Netherlands ... the most exciting place perhaps being Iceland (but being there primarily for professional reasons I did not take any pictures ... what a shame ...). I also extensively travelled for professional reasons. Most of the times such travels are difficult to distinguish one from another. Hong Kong, Singapore, New York, Boston, Nice, Brussels, Johannesburg, Tokyo, Seoul, Dakar, Moscow, Warsaw, Madrid, just to mention some of the cities I visited in these years for professional reasons, can look very similar when somebody flies in the morning and leaves the day after (or two days after), considering that most Hotels, Universities and Companies headquarters are nowadays so similar ... However, it happened I had the time to spend visiting (in Japan, in Israel, in Russia, in Madagascar, in Burkina Faso, in Senegal ...). I rarely took photos during these visits (you are not really thinking about it and more over I never carry my photo equipment with me in such occasions). I carry however, the images and the experiences of these travels as from the other ones, mostly because of the people I had the opportunity to meet.

Interestingly enough in these 30 years (and more) I never had real negative

experiences. We travelled with buses, trains, cars, ships, boats, donkeys, horses and camels, by feet, by public transport, hitchhiking, using our own means ... I flew with almost any type of flying equipment, I boarded almost any type of vessel and I met any type of people. I met humble peasants and rich landlords, poor students and wealthy businessmen, illiterate fishermen and fine intellectuals under any conceivable circumstance from sharing a boat crossing a river to official dinners. My overall experience is that most of the people are kind, polite, friendly and fundamentally easy to approach. And this experience crosses the education level, the type of profession, the geographic origin, sex and culture of the people we met. It also falsifies the usual reputations we construct (or we are induced to construct): despite taxi-drivers worldwide hold one of the worst reputations, one of the kindest person we ever met is a taxi-driver at Amman, Jordan, who stopped his taxi in the middle of nowhere to give us two just baked forms of bread, having noted in the middle of the night the bakery working: “you might be hungry after crossing the desert” he told us!!

In these 30 years I have only once been stolen a camera (in Taj Mahal, India) and nothing else, which is an amazing low rate considering the opportunities we offered to International Thieves Co. In these 30 years we met men and women who made us richer and better, discussing, eating, travelling, drinking, bargaining, sharing and exchanging ... It has been the most exciting part of these 30 years of travelling.

As one can imagine during these years I shot thousands of photos. In the early years, when films were necessary I was shooting with parsimony (professional films were not available in most places and you cannot carry unlimited stock within limited space). This parsimonious attitude persists until today, although digital shooting is practically “unlimited”. Despite that my files contain thousands of photos. When I decided to make this book I had to choose. With the help of Emanuela I chose a “representative sample” of this 30 years long material. That makes approximately 600 photos ... These needed to be organized. There exist several ways to do it, but finally I opted for identifying one common element independent from the location and the time when the photo was shot. This is of course an ex-post rationalization (I shot what I liked as most amateurs do, without any project in mind); the result are the six sections in which the photos have been divided: details, locations, nature, people, skies and water.

“*Details*” contains photos capturing details of objects, people, situations which I felt had a stand-alone meaning; it is the detail itself which explains the photo.

“*Locations*” is characterised by the place where the photo was shot. Saying it in other terms it is the location that inspired me in realising the image.

“*Nature*” obviously narrates the nature in its multiple forms and situations. Natures as I saw it in its complexity and impressive generosity of colours and shapes.

“*People*” collects the images of the people who shared their time with us. Those with whom we travelled, laughed, ate, discussed or even shared a smile. Most of these photos have been shot asking the permission of the interested. To them go my heartiest acknowledgements for all they offered to us.

“*Skies*” contains what I have seen above my head ... You will note a certain attraction by the clouds. I have been fascinated by them since ever. And I still get lost behind them.

“*Water*” shows my personal vision of the natural element which most attracted me until today. An irresistible attraction; only Emanuela has been able to beat it ...

To those passionate of technical details, the photos have been taken using three (in time) equipment. The first one was a Nikkormat FN300 (to be honest I started taking photos with a Zenith in the late 70s, but this is another story ...) equipped with fix length lenses (28, 52, 105 Nikkor and a Vivitar 300). Then in the early 2000 I moved to a Nikon F75 equipped with a 28-200 lens. These were times when we need to use film, which most of the time (let's say 80% of the times) has been Ektachrome professional at 100 ASA, occasionally used at 400 ASA (however, the reader may distinguish some few photos in Kodakchrome 25 ASA). In 2008 I finally decided to go digital (although I really suffered doing so) and got a Nikon D40 equipped with two lenses: a 18-55 and a 55 - 200. All recent photos are done with this camera.

Is there a one single place which we loved more than others? No. Certainly there have been places which impressed us more than others, but the big experience has been the travelling itself. Is there a photo that can summarise this experience? Yes! It is the photo of the young boy swimming in the Niger river near the canoe within which we were travelling. The movement of the water amplifies the smile of the boy and I like to think to this "smile" as the essence of our travelling: having received the smiles and the kindness of all the people we met. We hope we have been able to smile to them as they did to us. To all these people this book is dedicated!

Athens, July 2014

Main travels out of Europe not for professional reasons

- 1983 Turkey, Egypt
- 1985 Tunisia, India (partly in 1986)
- 1986 Sahara (Algeria)
- 1987 Sahara (Algeria)
- 1988 Sahara (Mali, Niger), Togo, Ghana
- 1993 Morocco
- 1994 Jordan
- 1997 Zanzibar, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Russia
- 1998 USA
- 1999 Russia (Siberia), Mongolia, Cina
- 2000 Mexico
- 2001 Cuba
- 2003 USA, Canada, Chile (Easter Island), Polynesia, Cook Islands, Fiji Islands, New Zealand, Australia
- 2006 Nicaragua
- 2007 South Africa
- 2008 Turkey (Kurdistan), New Zealand (partly in 2009)
- 2009 Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Turkey (partly in 2010)
- 2010 Tunisia, Sahara (Libya, partly in 2011)
- 2011 Turkey, Georgia, Armenia, Venezuela
- 2013 Argentina, Chile (Terra del Fuego, Patagonia)

Professional travels outside Europe besides the above

Algeria, Burkina Faso, Canada, Chile, China, Japan, Israel, Kenya, Madagascar, Mali, Morocco, Niger, Russia, Senegal, Singapore, South Africa, Tanzania, Tunisia, Turkey, USA.

Visited several times (for private and professional reasons) almost any country in Europe, but still missing Bosnia, Malta, Moldavia, Montenegro, Romania and Ukraine.





Rapanoui, 2003
previous page: same location
next page: same location





French Polynesia, Rangiroa, 2003
Previous page: Fiji Islands, Mana island, 2003
Next double page: French Polynesia, Rangiroa, 2003









This and previous page: USA, Arches National Park, 1998
Next double page: Australia, Fraser island, 2003









This page and the next two: Russia, Moscow, 1997
Previous page: USA, Ellis island, 1998































This page and the next: Mongolia, steppe, 1999
Previous double page: Mexico, Chihuahua-Mazatlan train, 2000





Mongolia, Steppe, 1999

Next page: up: Russia, Irkutsk, 1999; down: Algeria, Sahara desert, 1986







South Africa, Wild Coast, 2007
Previous page: South Africa, Cape Peninsula, 2007
Next double page: Nicaragua, Corn island, 2006



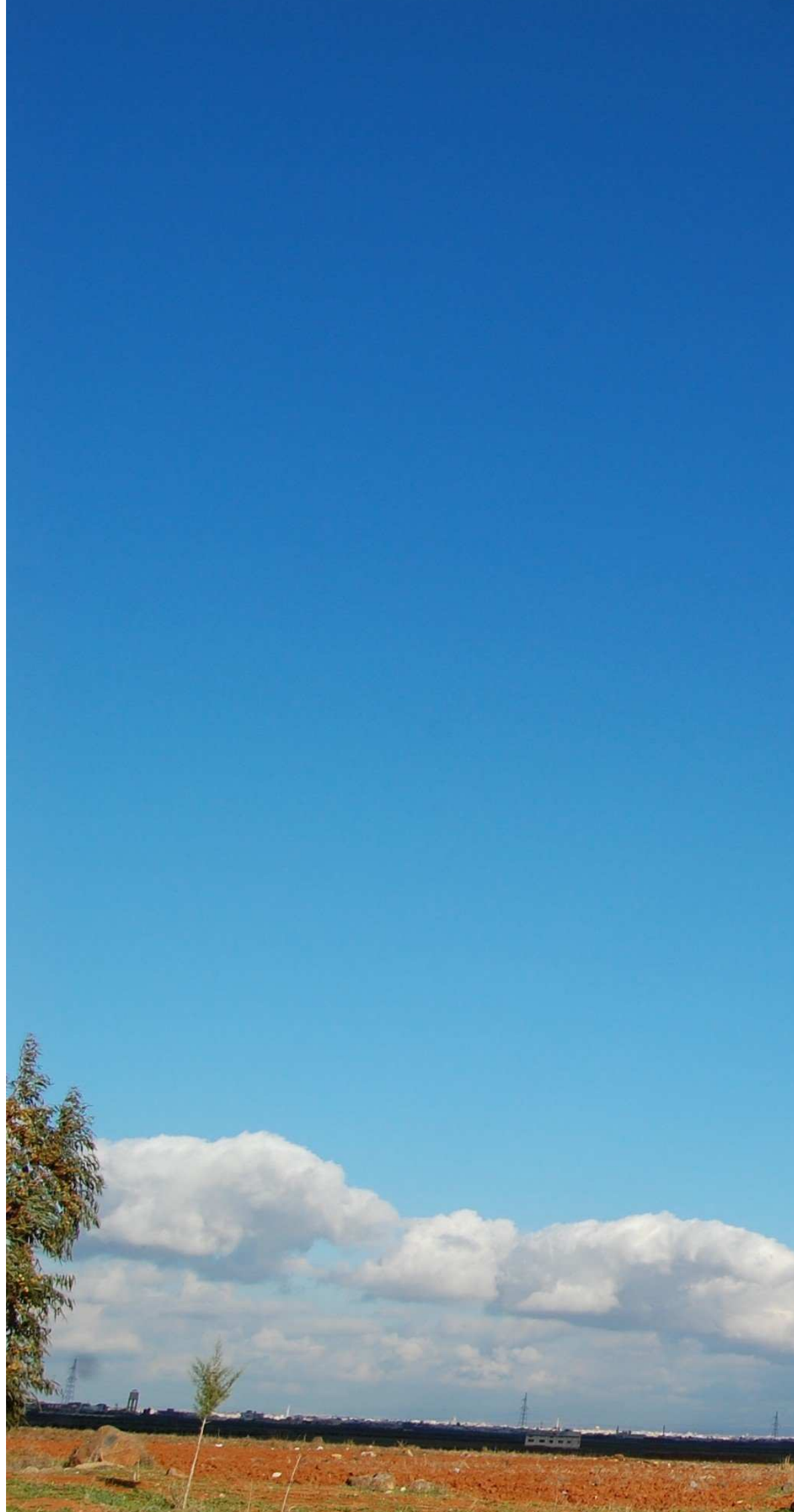






Up and down: Egypt,
Libyan border, 2009
Previous page: Nicaragua,
Corn island, 2006
Next double page: Sirya,
Jordan border











This and next double page: Libya, Sahara desert, 2011
Previous page: up: Libya, Sahara desert, 2011; down: Sirya, Euphrates river, 2010







Libya, Sahara desert, 2011
Next page: up: Greece, Agrafa, 2010; down: Greece, Lake Plastira, 2010









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Up and down:
New Zealand,
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New Zealand, Hawke's bay, 2008
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