

A Moving Experience: PediCURE in Sarajevo



by C.Flisi

By the time I landed in Sarajevo, I was a nervous wreck. Not because I was worried about being in a land of conflict and bloodshed (if you travel, you realize that EVERY country has had its share of strife), but because of all the Murphy's Law machinations on our final day in Italy.

First, we locked the door of the BnB on our way to the airport at 6 am, and put the key in the lockbox, as we had been instructed. Then we realized that a backpack was still inside. We called the proprietor, rousing him from sleep, to ask for the code to his lockbox so we could get that bag.

We drove to Malpensa, looking for a 24-hour gas station to fill up the car before dropping it off at the airport. We found one nearby and were about to fill up when I read a small note on the dashboard identifying our car as a DIESEL. No one had told us this when we

picked it up a week earlier. Thank goodness we caught *that* detail in time.

Still shaky, we arrived at Malpensa and looked for our flight indications. At this point, we discovered that my husband's flight took off from Linate, a different Milan airport an hour away. We rushed to the Lufthansa counter to see if he could change his flight. The attendant shrugged. "Your ticket is issued by United. You have to call them."

United didn't have a counter at the airport and it was too early to call, so my husband decided to take a taxi. The line was long and taxis were few; that wasn't going to work either. He called a friend who lived nearby. Said friend was fast asleep but sprang out of bed, drove to Malpensa, picked up my husband, and zoomed at illegal speeds to Linate in time to enable hubby to make his flight.

I was experiencing this through constant communication with my spouse while traveling to Sarajevo via Vienna. High anxiety, although both my flights were on time, smooth, connections perfectly timed, planes packed but orderly. A few minutes of angst when my checked bag was among the last to appear on the belt, but eventually it emerged. And there was my driver, waiting for me with a big sign as I emerged from customs.

Still, I was a basket case by the time we arrived at my hotel in the center of Sarajevo. My day had started before 5 am (nerves as well as necessity), so something was needed to unknot my stomach before I was ready to collapse into bed. Massage? No, I didn't want to deal with a massage just then. Manicure? No, my nails were stubs from nervousness; there was nothing to manicure. Maybe a pedicure would do the trick?

"Is there any place near here that does pedicures?" I asked the hotel clerk, who spoke excellent English. Yes, there was, just up the street, and they had availability in an hour. SOLD.

"How do I ask for a pedicure?"

"Don't worry," replied the clerk. "They will know who you are."

Belma was two blocks up and across the street. It looked like beauty parlors anywhere, with three chairs for hair styling, a table for manicures, and two padded seats for pedicures, one of which had a basin with warm water ready and waiting. The major differences were the samovar-shaped glass container with lemon water and tea cups for thirsty clients, and the heavy, ornate gold-colored mirrors and grandfather clock.

My appointed pedicurist, Lia, let me understand that she spoke only five words of English. About the extent of my fluency in Bosnian, I assured her. Let's say there was not a rapid-fire exchange of views as she set about her work. The equipment seemed sanitized, she seemed thorough, she used some modern gadgets, her scrubbing and peeling and polishing were all similar to counterparts in Italy, France, and the US. She asked if I wanted tea or *caffé*, and brought me a tray with tea, milk, and local biscuits (cookies) on proper china.



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The only differences I noted were that she did not use an undercoat before applying the color, she did not apply an overcoat after polishing, and the salon did not provide a nail dryer to speed the drying of my nails. This last really surprised me because drying can be 20 minutes or more, and she pronounced my polish bone-dry in 12 minutes. Frankly, I have no expectations of a long-lasting pedicure. But then, I paid half of what I would have paid in my home town in Italy, which in turn is half of the going rate for a pedicure in my town in Virginia. If this one lasts a few weeks, I will still have gotten my money's worth.

As I was waiting to pay (i.e., scrutinizing the convertible marka, or KM, in my wallet to sort out what was due), I noticed the hairdresser in the shop fussing over a young woman with wavy brown hair. He was doing balayage, which I knew to be expensive in the States. As I paid, I asked the proprietor, a woman wearing a headscarf, how much such a treatment would be. Before she could answer, the balayage recipient replied to me in flawless American English, “Whatever Assam charges, it is worth every penny.”

“How do you speak such absolutely perfect English?” I was gobsmacked.

“I have been living in San Francisco for seven years. I am back home on a visit and I always plan to get my hair done by Assam when I am here. He is so good. And yes, it is a lot less expensive than in the States.”

I nodded in concurrence. “I was just in Italy and had my hair cut by the guy who had been doing it for ages when I lived there. It’s not a question of cost, although Italian salons ARE less expensive. It’s feeling comfortable with someone who knows your hair and how to handle it.”

The same is not true of pedicures. My toes have never established a personal relationship with the beauticians who have trimmed their nails. They don’t have to; properly applied polish and the relaxation of a warm-water foot scrub are good enough. And Sarajevo delivered the comfort I needed for a good night’s sleep.

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