

# Heart-to-Heart



**Where-or-where did 2022 run off to? It is already December and most of us are scurrying around to get ready for the holidays.**

If you are in need of a different gift, look no further than the HeartCycle 2023 tour schedule. The gift of travel, bike touring with your favorite club and meeting up with old or new friends is a unique opportunity. We have several tours that are full, but several more with space waiting for you to register.



When I was still working and returned from one of our bike tours, my co workers declared “that is Not a Vacation”. I completely disagree, bike tours are the delight of over two decades of experiencing travel with like minded, friendly comrades and discovering delightful locals, beautiful countrysides, delicious food, foreign cultures or domestic locations I never expected to visit or surprised me with how great it was a place to bike.

**Come with us in 2023 and have some fun!**

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## **Tour Director Musings**

*“The most beautiful things in life are not things. They’re people and places, memories and pictures, they’re feeling and moments, and smile and laughter.” Unknown*

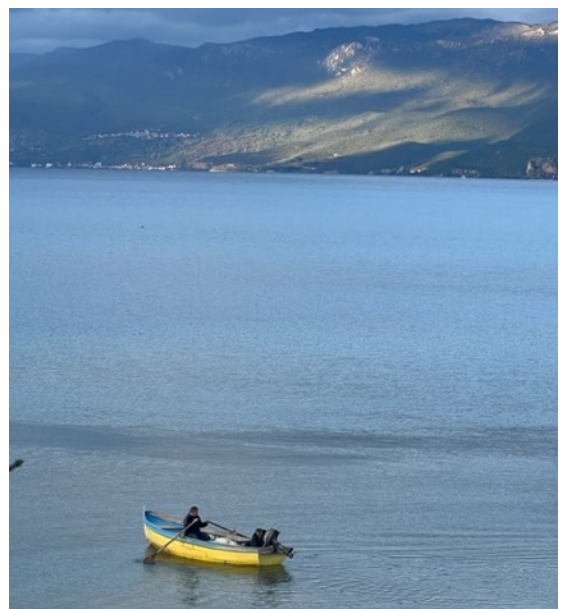
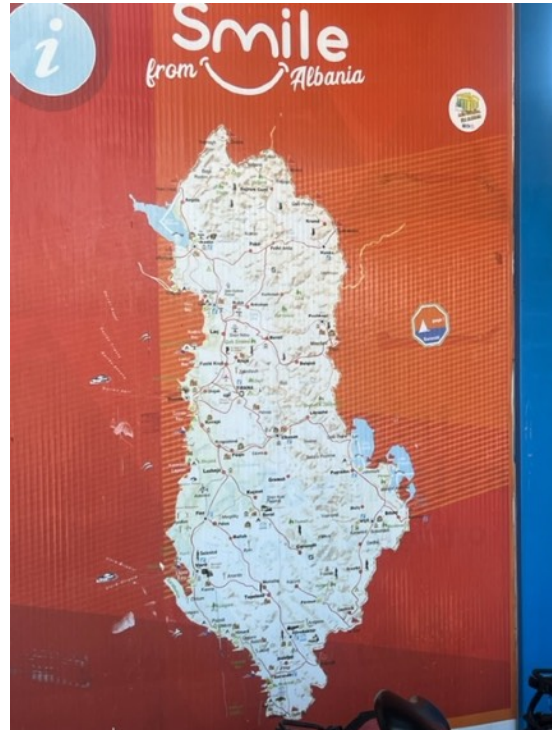
This quote sums up my feelings about HeartCycle club. I remember so many fun cycle tours over the past 20 years and met many of you on these tours. I wish you a happy winter holiday season and hope to see many of you again next year on a 2023 HeartCycle tour, where we can create some new memories and share some laughter.

Judy Siel, Tour Director

## Southern Albania, September 26 to October 6, 2022

### By Mark Hanson

The third time WAS a charm! This trip was canceled two consecutive years due to COVID. Eighteen capable cyclists gathered at the funky Hotel Austria in central Tirana for eleven days with Cycle Albania, a commercial outfitter based in Tirana. Many had met over the years on other bike trips. HeartCycle leader, Lisa Evans, did an excellent job of keeping everyone informed and in line. We were met by our cycling guide, Junid, for dinner the first night, and walked a short distance in pouring rain to an Italian restaurant.





It was a full board tour, with everything included except drinks at lunch and dinner. Meals were served family style, in portions of great quality and quantity. And (I'm not making this up) we had cucumbers and tomatoes for every meal: breakfast, lunch and dinner. Also lots of eggplant and kind of soggy French fries. But the food was uniformly good to great. Junid also fronted us the payment for the drinks, and we all settled up with him on the last day.





The first day in Tirana we took a walking tour, hitting the national museum, looking at various government buildings, the usual tour stuff. Lots of aggressively imaginative architecture in Tirana, including a Disney-worthy Grand Mosque under construction. Junid gave snippets of Albanian history along the way.





Short version of Albania: a complicated, often tragic history. Greeks, Romans, Roman Christians, Greek Orthodox, Muslim, even King Zog. An Albanian diaspora. Then a complicated minimal participation in the World Wars. Then communist rule from after WWII to 1992. A declaration in 1966 that Albania was the world's first officially atheist country. A revolution caused by government participation in pyramid schemes came in 1997. The country is now prosperous and peaceful. Wikipedia has a great article of this history.





Back to bikes. About half the riders chose eBikes, the other half were provided with very capable Giant Roam hybrids, both with front shocks. Junid and partner Julien had mastered a battery charging system which ensured power the entire trip. The shocks were necessary, as the first several days of riding featured rough road surface, broken concrete, some long gravel stretches.





The cycling was challenging, but doable, and ultimately enjoyable. The interior of the country is very rural, routinely mountainous, with long climbs followed (of course) by long downhills. Strong legs going up, strong hands for the brakes going down.

We stayed in nice, tourist-class hotels. The hotel in Pogradec was on the beach of Lake Ohrid, a Tahoe-esque clear water mountain lake. A couple of nights way out in the boonies required the single supplement people to team up for the night. But it all worked out. The Albanian Riviera hotels were very nice.





The segments were between 35 and 45 miles per day, with lots of climbing. The last day featured a legs, heart, lung busting elevation gain of 3000 feet in about 9 miles, but that was after initial climbs that morning of 2400 feet! A quick rest at the top of the pass, then a long, often curvy descent back to sea level and the Albanian Riviera. Very satisfying. Smile provoking both up and down.





Some highlights, in no particular order: Learning that the natives call their country Shqipëri; Hearing Lisa ponder “Where’s Dave?”; dodging sheep and shepherds and goats and goatherds; watching a field corn be harvested by hand; horse and donkey carts sharing the roads with very old Mercedes, which all seemed to have four people in them; an astonishing number of roadside car washes; a service station chain called “Kastrati” (ouch!); watching a couple power their TANDEM BROUGHT FROM OREGON up and down the mountains; visiting a monastery in North Macedonia (who knew there is a North Macedonia?!); the Greek then Roman then Venetian ruins of Butrint; the UNESCO site old town of Gjirokaster; a smoking 10-mile downhill on perfect pavement with almost no traffic other than a herd of goats; Stan and Sylvia’s 55th wedding anniversary; the colorful jerseys of events and tours from around the globe; realizing that Albania is very inexpensive; pedaling for miles in minimum traffic along the wild, undammed River Vjosa; pedaling for several days along the largely undeveloped Ionian Sea, with views of Corfu, Greece; staying in a hotel that shut off its power, at about 9 pm, because their electrical system would have blown up in the storm that hit that night; the absence of personal injury lawyers’ billboards (an opportunity for the Strong Arm?!); the concrete dome bunkers along the road (Wikipedia says there are almost 200,000, Junid said 700,000) ordered by Ever Hoxha, whom Junid never mentioned by name, but just labeled him “The Dictator”; the “refreshing” thermal pools; “Gunther, the German Guy” whom we encountered periodically on the tour; the UK fundraising organized ride along the same route; eating a largely organic diet for almost two weeks; summiting Llogara Pass after nine switchbacks; watching Mike ride with Cathy to the top of the pass; villages with small mosques with one minaret; hearing the call to prayer in the villages; being around health conscious, fit, like-minded, adventurous, well-traveled people.

Just a fun time. Thanks again to Lisa and all the participants!





## 2023 Tour Teasers

**The following HeartCycle tours have space available for you!**

### **Our Nation's Capitol-Washington DC & Northern VA**

**April 14-22** What an amazing experience this will be! First of all, let me introduce you to our host, Alexandria Old Town. Picture yourselves as young Martha and George Washington in this bustling trading town at the mouth of the Potomac in the 18th century. Our hotel, Hampton Inn Old Town King St, for the next four nights will present you with a multitude of opportunities of evening nourishment along with two fine bike shops nearby. We will have our group dinner - orientation at 7pm at nearby Theismann's, with pigskin decor.

### **The Beautiful Berkshires**

**May 19-27** Come join Rich, Patty, Kathleen and Mayoma on this new Heartcycle tour traveling through four Northeastern states. Serene mountain vistas, lush forests, and clear mountain lakes define the idyllic landscape of the Berkshires. This mountain range is located in western Massachusetts and northwestern Connecticut. The area is home to many small villages and towns, and it is known for its cultural attractions. Our tour starts and ends in Albany, NY.

### **Sardinia, Italy**

**June 10-20** Rich Crocker will be coordinating this amazing tour that is returning due to rave reviews from 2018. Sardinia is like heaven to any keen cyclist: the roads are perfectly paved with minimal traffic. this beautiful trip will put you in the heart of the most ancient land in Europe. Among mountains sculpted by wind and sun, with its deep canyons, white sand beaches, and unspoiled forests, we discover nature, archaeological remains with are unique in the world, gastronomic treats, and traditions. this is an advanced tour, but not all about the riding, the east day with have a boat tour of beaches.

### **Million Dollar Views in the San Juan Mountains, CO**

**June 24-30** Arguably the most beautiful part of Colorado, the San Juan Mountains along U.S. Highway 550 (the Million Dollar Highway) offer stunning views in every direction that are best enjoyed by bicycle. Late June is the perfect time of year to ride in southwestern Colorado; monsoons don't start until July. The weather is sunny with average lows in the 50s and average highs in the 70s. Join us for spectacular scenery, unforgettable riding, good food, and fun. Both Silverton and Ouray are historic towns- enjoy their charm & maybe a hike or hot springs!

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### **Cycling Through History in the Finger Lakes Region**

**August 13-19** Sign up for the cycling and scenery; stay for the social history and suffrage. As you probably know, the Finger Lakes has great wine, but did you know it is the reputed birthplace of the struggle for women's right to vote? This Easy/Intermediate tour begins in New York's "Flour City" (Rochester) and continues east to "History's Hometown" (Auburn). It is designed to offer riders routes on quiet roads through rolling, fertile valleys to destinations of historic and cultural interest, as well as natural and scenic beauty. This area of New York State is unique in its glacier carved lakes and its man-made wonders including the Erie and other canals. The canals are credited with bringing people, goods and ideas to western New York and beyond. This is one explanation for the region becoming a "hotbed" of social reform. Come along on the tour and let us know your theory!

### **Grand Valley Ramble, Colorado**

**September 17-22** Join us for 5 scenic days exploring the Grand Valley in western Colorado. This is a fixed base tour staying in the heart of downtown Grand Junction at the Hampton Inn for five nights. Riding up and across the Colorado National Monument with its spectacular scenery on 2 different days should be on your bucket list of rides to do in 2023. The spectacular lunar-looking landscape is accentuated with majestic spires of red rock and panoramic canyons. We will also explore Fruita farmland and cycle the Palisade fruit and wine loop with a visit to an alpaca farm and ride past numerous wineries where wine tastings are optional, and have a remote start at the quiet crossroads of Glade Park for a ride to the Utah state line and back. Most of the roads we will be riding do not have shoulders, but very low traffic. Join us in western Colorado for a great fall ride.

**Check the HeartCycle website for the full tour descriptions and Tour**

**Leaders contact information if you have more questions.**

**We hope you will join us in 2023**







