

from the world for half a century by a xenophobic Communist dictatorship.

"*Mirë Sevini*" ("Welcome"), blazoned a sign, underwritten by the red-and-white logo of Coca-Cola. I was beginning to feel less of a stranger, particularly when, as an American visitor, I needed no visa and glided right through the entry procedures.

Outside the terminal, I spotted my name on a sign held aloft by a smiling young lady who introduced herself as Felicita. She seemed as happy as her name to meet a genuine tourist like me.

"Long live Coca-Cola"

In the taxi to town, Felicita pointed out two landmarks that characterized Albania's recent history. Adjacent to the airport, a gleaming new Coca-Cola bottling plant stretched down the road. Albanian and American flags fluttered outside.

"Marx is dead. Long live Coca-Cola!" remarked Felicita. She said the plant had opened a few months ago and had been built in 85 days



Street fair in Tirana's main square.

— a record for Albania. The country seemed hell-bent for Westernization.

"They used to tell us 'Coke' was a symbol of decadence," Felicita said. "Maybe that's why we drink so much of it now. So many Albanians want to 'Go West.'" She smiled pointedly.

Farther along the road, a long line of low-lying concrete bunkers snaked through the cornfields.

Thousands of these domed pillboxes, Felicita explained, had been erected across the country by the Communist boss, Enver Hoxha, to prepare Albanians for feared invasions by NATO, Russia, China and/or Yugoslavia. To Hoxha, the world was preoccupied with plotting against his tiny nation.

The taxi took us to a dreary looking 3-story hotel on the wide, dusty main boulevard. The lobby was

eerily quiet. Felicita dropped me off hastily, and when I inspected my drab, cell-like room I understood why.

Adding to the austerity, I discovered that running water was available only for one hour, three times a day. The three watering hours were already finished for that day.

Upgrading

Unwashed and thirsty, the next morning I set out for the government tourist office hoping for an upgraded accommodation.

The sympathetic director, probably feeling sorry for one of those "spoiled Americans," managed to squeeze me into Tirana's only better-class hotel not under construction or renovation (**Hotel Dajti**, Boulevard Deshmoret e Kombit, 6, at \$35 single with buffet breakfast).

Still, I had to wait patiently in the corridor until my room's previous occupant zipped up his suitcases and exited, politely holding the door open for me.

Ensnared in the cheerful, sunny room with constant water and fortified by an ample breakfast of cheese, eggs, olives, cakes and tea, my mood soared and I went forth to explore Tirana.

How much, please?

Travelers have differing ideas of "budget," "moderate" and "expensive" prices for hotel rooms, restaurant meals, etc. Please include approximate PRICES when writing to *ITN*. — Editor



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