

One of dictator Hoxha's abandoned concrete bunkers — monuments to paranoiac fears of invasion.



those. In her tiny third-floor walk-up, an ornate Muslim prayer rug hung on the wall, a well-worn New Testament rested on the oak table, and she spent an hour informing me why she believed her ancestry was Jewish.

While we sipped strong black tea out of chipped china, Mihal and his grandmother related the remarkable story of the rescue of Albania's Jews from the occupying Germans during the Holocaust.

Sense of belonging

Walking back to my hotel on this, my last, night in Tirana, I made my way through the lively throng that gathers nightly in and around Skanderbeg Square.

A vibrant hum of conversation and peals of laughter resounded in the summer night as friends hailed each other to banter and exchange news; families and relatives herded together to schmooze and, of course, Tirana boy was there to meet Tirana girl.

Known as the *Xhiro* (promenade), the mass nocturnal gathering flows from the square down Martyrs of the Nation Boulevard and streams back up again. Beer, ice cream and handfuls of sunflower seeds fuel the convivial scene that exudes an intimate feeling of "belonging."

After only a week in Albania, I realized much of this sense of belonging had rubbed off on me.

"I've grown attached to your country," I told the front-desk clerk on checking out next morning. He smiled skeptically.

"I'm sad about leaving. I'll be

back soon," I vowed, and his smile widened considerably.

Postscript

My journeys to Andorra, San Marino and Albania should have wrapped up my "collection" of European countries.

But to the joy of millions — and to my chagrin — a dozen new nations have recently emerged onto the European map. New flags, new

national anthems and, of course, new postage stamps. Maybe I'll go back to collecting *them* again. It might be easier. ITN



On our trip to Germany in fall '95, we discovered that the rate of exchange we received from the Bank of Boston prior to departure was much better than the exchange rate for traveler's checks in a German bank. By changing money in the States, we avoided the DM2.50 (near US\$1.70) fee for each check cashed, regardless of the denomination, typically charged in Germany. — AL & JUNE NASON, Norton, MA



We took an excellent tour of England with Tauck Tours (in Westport, CT, at 800/468-2825) in fall '95. Tauck lived up to its usual fine reputation for an interesting itinerary and excellent accommodations. Excellent seats at the Edinburgh Military Tattoo were part of the trip — that was a thrill! — FRED & JEAN GODWIN, Phoenix, AZ



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