

TRAVEL TALK

BOW SCHOOL LIBRARY RETIREE TO SERVE IN ALBANIA

BY CHASE BINDER

TIRANA INTERNATIONAL



Jeanette with Bow Times

Letters from Albania -- My Arrival

Why do it? That's what everyone asked when I announced that I was taking a two-year position at a school in Albania. After all, Albania isn't Italy or France. It's not a place Americans dream about retiring to—or, frankly, even visiting. It's a Balkan country on the Adriatic and Ionian Seas with a long history of political isolation and angst. It's bordered by Greece to the south, Montenegro to the north and Serbia and Macedonia to the east. Actually, my trip to Albania is a Bucket List thing. My husband, Jeff, and I always talked about living and working abroad. Our kids are grown now. I was able to retire from Bow High School. It occurred to us...if not now, when? I contacted International School Services (iss.edu) out of Princeton, NJ,

which matches candidates from all over the world with job postings in over 150 different countries. Soon I was offered a position setting up the library in a brand-new school in Tirana, Albania's capital. I thought...why not? Now, I'm a member of a team of 30 educators from many different countries—all with one goal, to make the new Albanian College Tirana (actirana.edu.al) the best it can be.



Albania's coastal plains provide the perfect climate for lush palms and lovely public gardens and parks

I flew from Boston to Albania via Istanbul on Turkish Airways. Colleagues met me at Tirana's Mother Teresa International Airport (yes, Mother Teresa was an Albanian!) and I spent the first few days meeting and dining with more colleagues, learning how to get around the city and getting settled in my new home,

a lovely flat in a quiet neighborhood. Like most homes, it is surrounded by a tall gated wall, but inside has a beautiful garden full of trees.

While it is more hot and humid than I expected (I can't wait for cooler weather), the city and surrounding neighborhoods are also much more beautiful and interesting than I expected. Streets are winding and often so narrow two cars can't pass.



Outdoor cafes are a standard feature

There are many palm trees and my home is surrounded by even more exotic (to me anyway!) trees—olives, lemons and limes, pomegranates, plums and peaches. My neighbors have ducks in their own man-made pond, covered with grape arbors. Tomatoes and vegetables are everywhere too. People take so much pride in their gardens!

Homes and businesses are painted bright colors and much of city life happens outside. My home is walking distance to a local promenade called Fusha Aviacionit. There are lots of cafes, bars and restaurants—all with outdoor seating where you can watch people of all types just taking in the air. There are street vendors selling gelato, grilled corn on the cob and other goodies as well as vendors with their wares spread on the sidewalks. Over everything you can hear music playing and watch children running and riding (cont. on p. 9)

FACTS ABOUT THE REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA

Total area: 11,100 sq. mi. (about size of Massachusetts)

Ethnic groups: 95% Albanian, 3% Greek, 2% Vlach, Gypsy, Serb and Bulgarian

Languages: Albanian, Greek, Romani, Slavic dialects

Religions: 70% Muslim, 20% Albanian Orthodox, 10% Roman Catholic

G.D.P.: \$6,300 per capita

Population: 3,659,616 (about the same as Connecticut)

Chase Binder

Bow resident Jeanette Lizotte of Woodhill Hooksett Road is familiar with building school libraries from the ground up. Almost twenty years ago, Lizotte planned the library for the much-anticipated new Bow High School. Every fall since then, she's been right at her desk greeting fresh new faces as Bow High's Library Media Specialist.

This fall it's much the same thing, but Lizotte is in Tirana, Albania, doing a two-year stint at the brand-new Albanian College Tirana—a private international school covering the primary years through grade 10. First day of school is September 15, but Lizotte has been in-country helping get the new library set up since early August. Her husband, Jeff, and their two dogs (a Yorkie and a Golden Retriever) will arrive soon.

For years Albania, North Korea and Cuba were on the not allowed list for Americans.

The Bow Times will be publishing Lizotte's thoughts and impressions of life in Albania in the occasional series "Letters from Albania." If students or others have questions for Jeanette email them to me at kenokids@comcast.net.

