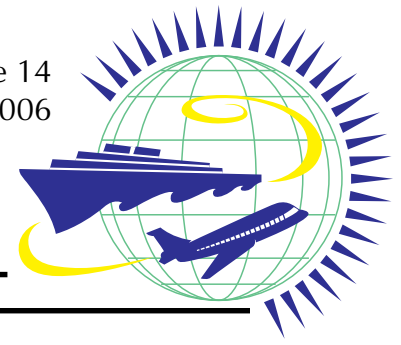


# Routon's **ROUSING** Reports

Volume 4, Issue 14  
November, 2006



A Routon's Romantic Reservations Publication – not for resale

Again this year, we've been mostly at home resulting in such a dearth of news for RRR that I skipped the mid-year report. However, we'll catch up here and now! We did get away for a winter trip to avoid the cold, and a summer trip to Romania to attend a wedding. Also, we enjoyed having guests at the Chez Routon; Maybe we'd have more guests if we stayed home for awhile?

Thanks to friends Sam and Joy Campbell, we started our winter trip at "Florida's Friendliest Hometown", according to the promotional brochure at least. It is a fascinating real estate operation with a web site and free phone numbers in both the US and UK. At the time of our visit, they were selling 450 new homes *every month!* And they are not near the coast, but are located in north central Florida! One of the keys to their success is the structure of "The Villages" as they are called. The original developer – and it is still a family operation – developed the community with a structure that builds from a small group with its central core, to a regional village, and these, in turn, are grouped into a main village.

The core group has a "local" pool and limited recreational facilities like maybe some shuffleboard courts. The regional has a large club house with rooms for classes, parties, lectures, etc. One room is similar to a hotel banquet hall which can be partitioned or opened to accommodate several hundred people. The regional center also has a staff, a gym, tennis courts, large pool, and other sports facilities including "pickle ball courts". There is also at least one "executive" golf course. The main village – four of them are planned – has a "downtown" with shops, restaurants, churches, and a movie theater grouped around a village center square. Overall, there are several championship golf clubs and courses with delightful places for lunch in a country club atmosphere. In the winter, the population is about 30,000 per village, including the winter visitors from up north.



The sales brochure makes *liberal* use of the word "free" and many things are "free" to residents who are paying the monthly dues and fees. For example, for no additional charge you can attempt to kill yourself playing pickle ball when you forget you can't move that way or that fast anymore! But there are many little charges like a fee to drive your golf cart on the golf course pathways, club fees, modest admission fees to various entertainments, and not so modest greens fees for the championship courses. After careful evaluation, I think our hosts, Sam and Joy, were wisest in just renting a place for a couple winter months and letting the owner pay much of the costs. If you expect to be in the area, though, you should go to the website ([www.TheVillages.com](http://www.TheVillages.com)) or call the 800 number to get a videotape. It's worth a stop and we thank the Campbells for inviting us to stop by.

While with Helen's son Mark in Ft. Lauderdale, we did go on a cruise – the cruise from hell! I had always been told

that you could get a very inexpensive, last minute cruise from Florida. so I found this "5 star" ship from the Costa Lines (owned by Carnival as is Cunard) and booked. The ship was definitely not five star and about 2,000 of the 3,000 passengers were one star, fun loving Italians on a very cheap holiday from Italy. The "big show" one night was an audience sing-a-long, The food in the dining room was poor but the service was worse. They did have excellent listening music in the bars, had a great duo for dancing, and the food and "service" in the self service restaurant was pretty good so we could have enjoyed ourselves. But they also had some bad food on board. Yep, they got both of us, and bad. The best news was that the cruise was only for seven days!!! No more inexpensive, last minute cruises from Florida for us!

We had two other memorable stops on our winter trip: one was attending 5 year old, Elizabeth Grace's birthday party at Chuck E Cheese in Tyler, Texas. If you are not familiar with Chuck E Cheese,

I'll say only one thing. The pizza *is* better than the box it comes in, despite the warnings I had received. The other stop was in Nashville to see a performance at the famous Grand Ol' Opry. The show itself was interesting – they were actually taping a series of radio broadcasts at the same time – but the really memorable place was the Gaylord Opryland Resort and Convention Center next door, claimed to be the largest convention hotel under one roof in the world.

The hotel has 47 acres under that roof with over 7,000 acres in atrium gardens. (That's 19 and 3 hectares respectively for our metric friends.) They claim 30 acres of carpeting with 4½ acres being replaced each year. Replacing 4½ acres of English wool carpeting every year is bad enough, but how would you like to *vacuum* 30 acres *every day!*

The hotel was built in four phases, the first in 1977 with 600 rooms and the fourth was completed in 1996 providing a total of almost 2,900 rooms and suites. I don't know how many people were actually staying in the hotel, but there were lots and lots of lookers like Helen and me. There were cameras everywhere as we all strolled through the "parks", drank and ate at the "outdoor" bars and restaurants, looked at the gardens with 44,000 plants (maintained by 100 full time gardeners), took the boat ride on the quarter mile "river", etc. How about "outdoor" dining with no bugs in a controlled temperature of 71 degrees F! And under 3,500 "stars" (little lights all over the atrium sky).

Naturally, there are shops and restaurants at every corner including a freestanding mansion that was already there; they just

built the hotel around and over it. We had drinks at a revolving lounge and then moved to "outside" dining at the Café Volare – everything seemingly outdoors but comfortably tucked within the 47 acres of roof. They have two outdoor wedding chapels. Or, for a really big wedding, you could use the convention center that seats 12,000 for the wedding but only 5,000 for the sit down dinner afterwards!

Christmas is supposed to be really something. Per the literature, they have to start the decorating in June. Over two million lights, 10 miles of ribbon, 15 miles of garland, over 35,000 poinsettias, 40 foot Christmas trees, 12 trees in one lobby with over 10,000 lights each, are some of the statistics. (I wonder if just one of the 10,000 tree lights goes out will they all go dark until you find the bad bulb. Ever had lights like that? I have.) In any event, this sounds like something we have to see, so we plan to do just that this December on our way to Texas for Christmas. I'll try to get some pictures and give you an update next year. In the meantime, if you are in the Nashville area, you can skip the Opry but do not miss the hotel.

Another place you shouldn't miss is Romania. Three years ago, Helen and I went to see the sights and beauty of the country and to see people, Helen's cousins and their families. We had a great time (for the details see RRR for November 2003



*Levica introduces Erica to her "alarm clock".*

on the web at routon.net). This year we went to see people and to be a part of a traditional Romanian wedding celebration. We saw and felt changes for the better as the Romanians continue their long, slow, but certain recovery from the disasters of the past 65 years, but fortunately many things were the same – wonderful! The homemade bread from the wood-fired stone oven, tomatoes that taste like tomatoes, really tasty ham and cheese for breakfast, delicious homemade Romanian dishes for dinner, and the "just right" local beer were all as we remembered. But best of all was the unchanged and genuine warmth and hospitality of the people, so sincere and freely given. We must go back.

This year we took Erica, Helen's 15 year old granddaughter, with us. She was great. She had a lot of new experiences and fun and we all enjoyed her company. Our hostess, Levica, teaches science in

*First, cocktails at the revolving garden lounge.*



*Then, dinner "outdoors" at the Café Volare.*





*Negotiations are complete, and the gate is opened for the groom.*

the local school and knows all of the teenagers. Early on, she introduced Erica to Andre and through him to a whole group of the local teenagers. They all speak at least some English and Erica had a wonderful time “hanging out” Romanian style. Later, one of the cousins gave her the story of her mother’s visit in 1970 – and the “boyfriends” she had then versus Erica on this trip. This brought on much teasing and good natured fun in two languages. She also found out first hand about having a live rooster alarm clock, and in the farming village of Talpos, she saw the cows come home, each turning into their own home without any human direction. Helen’s cousin’s cow had a tender leg so Erica didn’t get a chance to try her hand – literally – at milking.

The wedding and its celebration were different, interesting, solemn at times, and full of joyous fun at other times but always full of the warmth and kindness of the people. We arrived about 5 PM at the home of the bride’s parents to join the bride’s party – close to 50 people – inside the family compound. The bride is the granddaughter of Helen’s cousin Anna whose tragic story is in the November 2003 newsletter.

A bit later, the groom and his party arrived as a group and knocked on the gate. At this point, a representative for the bride’s parents went out and started negotiations for the “sale price” of the bride with the negotiator for the groom. Unfortunately for some of us, this was, of course, all in Romanian, but it was a “heated” negotiation, loud and lengthy, and, based on the crowd’s reaction, quite funny. Finally, a price was set. BUT the

sneaky bride side sent out a girl of about 10 dressed as a bride. “OH NO you don’t!” (or the equivalent) came from the groom’s negotiator, so more negotiations. Finally, an agreement was reached (I think the price was a bottle of wine), the gates were thrown open, and the groom claimed his bride and joined the whole crowd with drinks and light food.

Next, was the trip to the town hall for the required civil ceremony. It was too far for a walking procession so we had the US style, horn honking auto procession before the wedding. Downtown, the walking procession was formed starting with the bride’s negotiator and including all of the invited guests. Into the town hall and up the stairs to what looked like a large council chamber we went. Surprising to me, the civil ceremony was not a cold and official thing but much more like a religious ceremony in the US, full of meaningful symbolism – very impressive. I particularly liked the symbolic lighting of the marriage



*Simona and Ovidiu light the marriage candle.*



*All the guests join the procession across town to the church.*



*Once crowned, the couple parade as coins are tossed at their feet.*

candle where each of the parties had a lit candle, jointly lit the marriage candle, and then blew out the individual candles.

After they signed the large and official-looking registry book ending the civil ceremony, the bride’s negotiator (there must be a name for this position but I didn’t get it) re-formed the procession



*Proud Grandmother Anna shares a moment with Simona — a bride and soon to be doctor of electrical engineering.*



*Simona and Ovidiu lead the celebration all night.*

and led it out of the town hall and across the center of town to the Romanian Orthodox church. This took some time because they stopped the procession for the “official” wedding pictures and then some! Everyone who wanted to be in a picture with the bride and groom got their wish – and it seemed *everyone* did. Actually this worked well as everyone had a chance for a picture, and it eliminated the long delay after the wedding so typical in the US. Once in the church, the mass took about 50 minutes and, as expected, it was full of meaning and symbolism including the crowning of the bridal couple preceding their processional around the “alter table” three times as the guests threw coins at their feet. I did not understand much of the service and none of the language, but it was most interesting. Unlike the US, there was no restriction on photography and there was much freedom of movement during the ceremony.

From there it was on to the reception which became an all night party. Eat a little, drink a little, dance a little, talk a little, then eat, drink, dance, etc. Somewhere near midnight, “they” stole the bride and there was more negotiation with the groom. I think they finally settled on three bottles of beer as a ransom, too little if you ask me. About 3AM many came to the bride and groom with their gifts – traditionally gifts of money – and left. We had the cabbage rolls to eat shortly after three, but had to give up about 4AM. We left the hardier guests to continue the party. What a wonderful experience!

We flew into and out of Budapest and stopped over for a couple nights on our

way back. Our host, Marcel, crossed the border and drove 200 miles each way to meet us and take us to Romania. He then insisted on taking us back – another example of their hospitality. We were delighted when he and Livica were able to join us for the night in Budapest as our guests. And if you are going to Budapest, you *must* have dinner at the Rezkakas restaurant – gypsy music in a truly elegant atmosphere with impeccable service. It was truly five star all the way.

So what is next? Well, many of you have been asking about our cruising plans for 2007. I now have an answer. We have purchased our cruise(r) for 2007. For more details, see the photo. Warning – with this cruiser we might even be coming your way!!! Seriously, other than our usual family visits, we have no specific plans for 2007. We even expect to be home this winter for the first time in seven years. (And I am planning gifts of long underwear for Helen for Christmas!).

We do have friends wanting us to come to Australia for an extended tour, other friends who have graciously offered us their place in Hawaii, and we have a \$500 coupon for Cunard that must be redeemed by a reservation made before the end of June. So if the stock market has a

great winter and God grants us good health, who knows.

Since the holiday season is already upon us, please let Helen and me again use this medium to send our very best wishes to each of you and yours for a truly Merry Christmas, Happy Hannukkah, and a wonderful 2007 full of good health, happiness, and peace. May there be peace in the world, but if not there, may it be within each of you. We look for your notes, letters, emails and 'til next time, *may a kind and loving God walk with us and with each of you.*

*Amen.*

*My 2007 Cruise(r) — a Toyota Avalon Limited.*

