

“No nation is greater than another. The difference is people and the leaders.”

—Benjamin Suulola

Learning in Unlikely Places

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A huge benefit of academia is being able to work hard for less money. No. Did he say that? Of course not. Jeez, that was unhinged. What I MEANT to say is that a huge benefit of academia is being able to make friends and develop colleagues among a large group of national and international radiologists who share your interests and specialty.

My wife and I have been really lucky to travel and see some pretty incredible practices and hospitals and meet some amazingly bright and driven radiologists from all around the world. A recent visit that I feel obligated to talk about is our trip to Tallinn and Tartu, Estonia. (Yes, by all means, consult a map if you need to.)

We visited for two reasons—to lecture at the 2022 Baltic Congress of Radiology meeting, and to lecture to residents and trainees at the University of Tartu Hospital.

In all honesty, we approached this with a fair amount of trepidation: What would we see? What would the lecture halls be like? How advanced would this medical culture be? You know how we ‘muricans can be—hard to imagine that anyone does things as well as we do. The superiority thing is almost always there, and even though we’ve already been to many European countries that do everything we do, only maybe a good bit better, it still lives there in my brain. So, what might Estonia show us?

These are amazing people. They are resilient. Left by the Soviet Union in 1991 (after nearly a half-century of occupation) with not much of

worth, they turned every bit of hard luck and crumbling infrastructure into something magnificent. The hospitals are good—very good. Their equipment may be a little less in number, but absolutely of top quality. Good cars, great roads, well-lit streets, wonderful shops and restaurants.

We saw robots delivering take-out on the street, the wheeled beasts occasionally waiting at a corner for the light to change before charging on down the street to drop off a pizza. The meeting was at a renovated Soviet-era power plant, now chic and elegant with state-of-the-art functionality while maintaining a retro feel. It was populated with artisan shops and work areas.

Wonderful food was everywhere, and most importantly, so were wonderful people. Folks who have seen a little different history than we have and appreciate where they are and know exactly where they are going. And the training staff in radiology are caring, bright, and driven. We enjoyed our time immensely and yes, we would happily go back.

It sure made me reflect on things. Odd times here in the US. Some have decided to revisit some isolationist attitudes that maybe haven’t worked so well before. Polarization levels are high. Getting out and around is a good way to kill those thoughts. We had the opportunity to meet, work with, teach, and learn from some amazing people. I’d like to stay engaged with these folks. I think I learned as much as I could ever teach.

Keep doing that good work. Broaden your horizons. Mahalo.