

FILE: travel

WHO GOES WHERE?

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On previous occasions I have recited to you the adventures and the accomplishments of a number of African, Arctic, and Australian explorers. These were men of courage, daring and ability, and they added immeasurably to our knowledge of the world. Men like Henry Stanley, James Cook, Sir John Franklin, A. W. Greeley, George Washington DeLong, Fridtjof Nansen and others. They were explorers in the true sense of the word - they advanced the knowledge of the geography of the world and its physical characteristics. They went where no man of the western World had gone before. They brought back knowledge of different places and the habits of different people. Most of them lived in the latter years of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

But they were not the first explorers, nor the last. The Phoenicians made their small world at the eastern edge of the Mediterranean Sea aware of the existence of seas and lands beyond what they could see from the shores of their country. So also the Greeks who went to Egypt, the Romans who went from Italy to Britain and beyond, as well as to all the lands they could find. Later came the Portuguese, Dutch, English, Spaniards and French. Not all of them were trying to find new lands just for the sake of extending geographical knowledge. Some were seeking fame =

some were seeking conquest and trade - which then as well as always follows the flag - some were sent by their government.

This pursuit of geographical knowledge or fame or wealth remained the major reason for travel until the middle or latter part of the last century. Then three developments changed all of that. First, James Watt invented the steam engine and changed forever the method of ocean travel. Second, George Pullman developed the Pullman Palace sleeping car. Third, the Wright Brothers proved that men did not need to grow wings in order to fly.

With the coming of steam-driven ocean liners travel to any foreign shores became easy, comfortable, and fast. No longer was it necessary to endure the rigors and horrors of a voyage by sail to visit Europe. One ancestor who had emigrated from Germany to Missouri returned to Germany to find a new wife, gave her three days to pack up her belongings, and returned with her to Missouri - all on slow, dirty, cramped and uncomfortable sailing ships. No wonder he settled about as far from an ocean as possible. But now, with the help of Watts great invention, it has become possible to spend a month or so visiting the capitals of Europe with ease and luxury. Cunard could say with honesty that getting there is half the fun. So Americans could travel with pleasure to all parts of the world -and they soon began to do so.

Not long after, Pullman developed his sleeping car, and it became easy for an easterner to spend the winter in California without going across the Great Plains in a covered wagon. The original sleeping cars may not have been the most comfortable or commodious means of transportation, but they certainly beat the covered wagon and the dubious pleasures of the frontier inns. For the first time people could see and become familiar with the glories of the West without being pioneers.

Then, within the memories of some of us came the airplane, and more particularly the jet planes and the supersonic planes. In the opinion of some of us a 747 is far from meeting the definition of the Cunard Line - getting there is not half the fun. But it is far faster, of course, and it has made it possible for many millions of people to visit parts of the world which otherwise would be entirely impossible within the time constraints of the usual two or three week vacation.

Thus was born the tourist business and the vast proliferation of travel agencies. In Cedar Rapids alone, a city of about 125,000 people, there are no less than 16 agencies ready and anxious to meet the needs of travellers - and this does not include the companies that actually provide the travel such as airlines, bus companies and railroad companies. (Unfortunately this list does not include steamship companies, of which practi-

cally none still carry passengers.) In many large and small cities across the country and the world tourism is a major industry, serving not only those people who must travel for commercial reasons but also those who just want to go somewhere away from home for a day or a week or a month or longer. Consider also such organizations as Elderhostel, which every year sends hundreds of thousands of older people to all parts of the world.

The tourism industry, of course, includes not only those who arrange for or provide the transportation, but also of course those who meet the needs of the traveller once the destination is reached - hotels, motels, vacation resorts, restaurants, tour guides, museums, operators of "attractions" and the vast agglomeration of large and small organizations that feed at this trough. The legions that Julius Caesar sent travelling through Europe and the middle East are as nothing compared to the hordes of travellers now spreading over the globe.

There is no part of this world where once only the most intrepid explorers went that is not now being promoted as a tourist destination - including northern Greenland, the Antarctic, inner and outer Mongolia, central Africa, Tibet, the outback of Australia or even cruises that go nowhere but just sail around for a few days. Or, if that happens to be your great desire you can now take a United Airlines jet and just go around

the world in less than forty hours - probably without even getting off the plane - or even enjoying a good night's sleep or a gourmet meal in pleasant surroundings.

But the ease of getting there and the speed with which it is done is not always equated with pleasure or comfort. The luxury of the QE 2 is in no way to be compared with the spartan efficiency of a 747, even though that is a great improvement over the 707 or the older propeller planes. If you are enjoying the voyage and getting there is really half the fun, then you are unquestionably not travelling on a transoceanic jet.

. No window to look out of, and nothing to see if you do happen to have a window seat, constantly trying to find a semi-comfortable place to put your legs, trying to juggle all the plates and cups of what is sometimes a moderately decent meal on a table that is far too small to hold them - all of these and similar delights are simply a test that must be passed to achieve the Nirvana of a visit to some totally foreign country where the food is probably strange, the people don't understand what you are saying so clearly, (although most of them claim they do) and reply in what they consider to be perfectly intelligible English and whose feelings are hurt when you misunderstand what they are saying so clearly.

But how else do you achieve the opportunity of seeing the

wonders of the Pyramids or Abu Simbel, or the engineering talents of the Romans in their construction of aqueducts or amphitheatres (the ancient drive-in movie) or Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, or the Taj Mahal in Agra or the somewhat more modern charms of Florence? To say nothing of course of getting a glimpse of how people in other parts of the world live.

After seeing the marvels of the pyramids or the Sphinx or Abu Simbel one cannot help but admire the knowledge and the abilities of the ancient Egyptians. If they could build those structures there is no doubt in my mind that they could also build the Sears Tower - assuming they wished to do so. Or consider all those large and beautiful buildings erected by the Greeks and Romans or the soaring cathedrals of medieval Europe - all built of huge stones so carefully cut and fitted that no mortar was used. Perhaps, one wonders, we in this country at this time are not quite as brilliant or talented or unusual as we would like to think.

When you finally get off that 747 and arrive at your hotel, the shower in the bathroom may not have a curtain, there may be no soap, the toilet could be just a hole in the floor, the water is dubious at best, the bartender does not know the difference between bourbon and scotch and never heard of a martini. But strangely enough there are convenient trains, even though the station restaurant serves bread baked the day the station was

built and the coffee was made from a French recipe. I presume the French like it that way.

But then you remember that you left home to have some different experiences, to see new and exciting things, and to observe how other people live. Perhaps, you reason, the natives of this land prefer it the way it is, and just perhaps in some respects their way of doing things might be as suitable under the circumstances as your own.

Once on a trip through central Africa we stopped at the border of one country to get our exit permits, which of course meant that all the passports of a busload of tourists had to be examined and stamped. Fine, one expects this. But this was just before noon, and the officer in charge announced that it was lunch time and the office would be closed for an hour. So one waits, finally gets the O.K., and drives on a few yards to the entry post of the next country. But that office is having its afternoon siesta. However, the countryside is interesting, there are people carrying unbelievable loads on their heads (the women, that is), men are sitting at the roadside playing some sort of a game, and the life of central Africa is going on around you. Henry Stanley could appear at any moment.

You must, of course, be ready for anything, even the best of things., such as three delightful days spent at Srinagar in

the Kashmir. A beautiful hotel, lovely rooms, meals under a huge tree on the lawn - there are rewards, and there are penalties. One reward was that the plane onward - from Delhi to Paris was delayed, giving us three extra days (courtesy of the airline) in Delhi. But the penalty was that we spent those three days recuperating somewhat from a very severe case of the tourist disease.

Why is it that when a plane is cancelled the next one is always full not only of the normal travellers but also of a host of mothers travelling with small children that are airsick or hungry or in need of a diaper change or are out of sorts and howling all the time? One has sympathy for the poor mothers who are doing their best to cope with a horrible situation, but that doesn't add to the pleasures of the trip. And where are the fathers of all these children? Going first class? They never travel with the kids. (A lesson American men might wish to learn.) And the only thing the children will eat is bananas. Yes, they are easy to carry, fairly cheap, nutritious, and filling, but an airplane full of stale banana skins and dirty diapers soon develops a distinct aroma. Perhaps the life of an airplane stewardess (or cabin attendant, as they are now called) is not so glamorous after all.

If the experience of riding an overnight train in a so-

called couchette has not come your way, you have missed a real adventure. A couchette is a cabin about six feet square, with two long bench seats against the front and back walls. This gives reasonably comfortable sitting space for six people - all of whom will spend the night in that cabin. Some time during the evening the porter comes in and makes up the bunks. The back of each seat folds up and is fastened to the wall to make a bunk, and above that another bunk somehow folds out from the wall. This, therefore makes six bunks, each of which, as usual, is short of six feet long and about eighteen inches wide, has a rather thin mattress, no sheets but a linen bag into which one inserts oneself, and a thin blanket. Incidentally, why is it that train builders the world over are midgets? We shared this with two Spanish girls, a Spanish boy and a girl from California, none of whom knew each other before boarding the train. I expected to spend the night tossing and turning, but strangely enough slept soundly. This is not in the category of deluxe travel, but at least it is frequent and affordable transportation, which is something we no longer have in this country.

In contrast, we took a night train from Cairo to Aswan. An Egyptian friend was appalled, saying that this train would be at least four hours late, would shake all night long, and the meals would be abominable. But actually it was a smooth and pleasant ride, and the dinner and breakfast, served in our cabin, were better than anything served on an airplane, with good china and

real -not plastic - silverware.

Water. In few countries of the world is the tap water safe for a spoiled American to drink - or, in many cases even to use for brushing the teeth. So the mark of a travelling American in many parts of the world is the bottle of Evian water being carried from the dining room.

One soon becomes accustomed to whatever substitute is locally available. In many places this is beer, or Coca Cola. In China it is canned orange juice, or tea -the world-wide substitute. In many places it is wine, and a very good substitute it is, for it does wet the whistle, often takes the edge off whatever solid food is being served, tastes good, can be used to brush the teeth, and often helps make for a good nights sleep. The coffee, of course, is different everywhere, occasionally even somewhat resembling coffee as made in the U.S. In the middle East, particularly in Turkey, it is thick, strong and black, and is normally drunk (or chewed) with lots of sugar and hot milk. One does wonder, however, how the natives get away with drinking the water, particularly if they are Moslems and drink only water or Coca Cola. Perhaps generations of training have made them immune - or perhaps they always know where the nearest bathroom is.

Water, of course, is a problem in most parts of the world,

and most Americans have no realization of how precious a commodity it is, although there are indications that we may soon be forced to learn. In Morocco, for instance, even the better tourist hotels turn off the water from soon after breakfast until six in the evening. The Moroccans get along by going without or with a very bare minimum, as they have from time immemorial. Perhaps we are too profligate in its use and might learn from them. Possibly, also, we are cleaner than we need to be, and our noses too aware of the natural aroma of human beings. Nansen and his companion on his eighteen-month hike across the polar sea did not have a chance for a single bath, except when he fell in the ocean. When he found the situation unbearable he simply turned his shirt inside out, and when it really got too bad he scraped off the accumulated dirt and walrus fat with a piece of walrus bone. Two unwashed shirts lasted him for a year and a half.

The natives in Morocco may be thirsty and in need of a bath, but they showed us the extent to which people in those lands will go out of their way to help each other or the strangers in their midst. Emerging from our hotel one morning ready to resume our journey, we found that one of the tires on our rented car was flat. The jack provided by Hertz did not fit the car, and there was no lug wrench. Of course, there was a group of interested bystanders, all very anxious to see how we would handle this situation. Soon, one of them stepped forward and offered to help. The water truck had just pulled up, so he borrowed a wrench

from the driver and corralled several of his friends. Together, they lifted up the car, propped it on some rocks, installed the spare, gave the flat tire to the truck driver to be taken to the nearby town to be repaired - and refused any compensation. Their refusal was somewhat less than adamant, but the fee which they thought was outrageously generous was a small fraction of what any service station might charge. At what Holiday Inn in this country would this happen to you?

An outstanding example of friendliness and hospitality occurred two years ago on a trip to Finland. Eight cousins planned a trip which it was hoped would include an excursion to St. Petersburg. One of the cousins had a business connection with a man in Stockholm who offered to make arrangements for us, including a visit to Tallinn - the capital of Estonia. He would provide a bus to meet us at the ferry from Helsinki, escort us around the city, introduce us to some of the officials of Estonia, put us up at the Palace, , drive us to St. Petersburg and then take us to the Russian-Finnish border where we could take a train to our destination in eastern Finland.

Thus it happened that the bus met us, and we were immediately taken to the office of the President of Estonia, where we had an hour's visit with him and several of his advisors and officials. That evening we again were entertained at a reception, and for three days were escorted around the city by one of these officials - a man who had for ten years been the

Estonian representative at the Politburo in Moscow. It seems that all of these Estonians were under the misapprehension that we were a group of rich American investors who were looking for opportunities for business connections in Estonia. As soon as this became obvious to us, we of course did our best to disabuse them. But it made no difference - we were still treated like visiting royalty - even though the Palace where we had anticipated staying turned out to be not a royal residence but the best hotel in town. It is, in fact, the only good hotel in Tallinn. At the bar the first evening we also happened to meet a man who ran the English language newspaper in Tallinn. He had visited the U.S. a year previously, had met one of our party in Atlanta, and immediately invited all of us to have lunch at his parents home outside of the city. Thus we were able to see not only the city but also the countryside and the home of an Estonian family and to become somewhat more familiar with the situation in that country as it affected some ordinary citizens, and to get a slight glimpse of the problems confronting them.

The Estonians are very insistent that all the Russian soldiers must leave - there are about 150,000 of them in the country. But there is no place for them to go in Russia, so Estonia built apartment buildings for the returning soldiers in Moscow at Estnian expense. The Russian soldiers like it in

Estonia, but the problems are obvious: a large part of the population is Russian, although only the Estonian language is commonly spoken. Democratic government in Estonia has not solved all the problems. The parents of one of our guides - a very intelligent, well-educated woman who was fluent in several languages, and who has a good job as official interpreter for the president of the country - must rely on their daughter for all of their food because their social security pension is big enough only for rent, and won't buy any groceries.

We tend to think that a democratic government is the best answer - and so it is. But this does not mean that we know the answer to all governmental problems - and our current debates in Congress bear that out. On a recent trip to Turkey our bus was stopped by the police in a small town, and we all had to get out. It seems that this was "Census Day" in Turkey and everybody had to stay at home until the census takers had done their thing. Tourists, of course, were exempt, but we had to show our passports and be officially recorded. This may have been a nuisance to many people, but it undoubtedly resulted in a far more accurate count than we seem to have been able to accomplish with our high-tech computerized method. Our belief that democratic government is the best answer, is, in theory, shared around the world, although the definition of "democratic" might be different,

In Estonia as well as in Hungary where, we also had a

chance to visit some people in their homes, we found that there is a general agreement that their new form of government is better than the former communist form. But at the same time there is a certain doubt. Many people are somewhat uncertain about the advantages of surrendering the security of a communist government for the freedom of democracy.

It is fascinating to see the different ways in which grocery shopping is accomplished. There are no supermarkets, and buying the groceries is a daily task. Partly, of course, this is due to the relative scarcity of refrigeration, and an almost total lack of the deepfreeze which graces almost every American kitchen. So a child of the family is sent out to the baker before breakfast for the morning roll, and the housewife later makes a daily excursion to the butcher, the green grocer and other shops for her daily needs. Mostly these are separate and independent stores. She carries with her the ubiquitous string bag, for the stores do not provide paper or plastic bags for the groceries. Since there are very few automobiles for the housewife this means a large number of small specialized shops in each neighborhood, more people making a living as storekeepers, and many more people on the streets.

The Greeks, the Romans, and the Europeans of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries went all over the world to conquer it, to bring home trade, and to impose their theories of government.

The tourist of the present day goes around the world just to see it, to find out how it operates, hopefully to understand it, and perhaps to tolerate it. Travelling does make the world smaller. Travel on a 747 may not be the equivalent of QE2, but it also might make the world a better place to live.

Beyond all the pleasures and knowledge and strange adventures and great sights, touring brings an increasing awareness that we live in a world which is daily shrinking. We can no longer live as though we were the only people on the planet. Knowledge flows both ways, and while we may think that other people in the world should learn from us, we should not forget that there may be lessons to be learned from abroad and from the experiences of other nations.