

Spirit of adventure leads to the USSR

Part 4-Yalta

By ROCHELLE REAGAN

What I could see of Yalta in the twilight was a quaint resort village, one long curving main street lined with shops and restaurants on one side and the Black Sea on the other; and a placid harbor where at anchor lay fishing boats of every size, shape, and description.

At 7 p.m. on this Saturday evening, the three-story Hotel Oreanda resembled a medieval castle ablaze with lights, people armed with suitcases running in all directions, and a traffic jam in the hotel parking lot.

The Oreanda is a gracious old hotel direct from the pages of "War and Peace," with royal red carpeting throughout, high ceilings, heavy red velvet draperies, and polished brass fixtures. The Oreanda had obviously undergone extensive modernization and restoration since its erection in 1896. My room on the second floor looked out on the Crimean Mountains in the distance and a homey outdoor cafe in the foreground.

I felt rather shabby walking into such an elegant edifice clothed in faded jeans shuffling into the crystal-chandeliered dining room to a spread of pot roast, potatoes, tomatoes, and smoked fish. A dessert of cookies and the most scrumptious green grapes imaginable became a permanent fixture on the dinner table all during my stay.

The quality and quantity of all the food while in the Soviet Union was first class and very American. As I travelled further south into the agricultural areas of the USSR, more local fresh fruits and vegetables appeared on the culinary scene. However, tourists should be informed that all Americans do not have the appetites of elephants; so much of the edibles set before me had been wasted due simply to my satiation.

DINNER OVER, it was out into the



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street for me and a walk along the Black Sea since the street follows the shore line. Yalta by night is a gorgeous spectacle, the sea breeze blowing in to rustle the palm trees, the sound of timid waves lapping on the beach, flowers, gardens, statues everywhere, and various nationalities of people taking a leisurely midnight stroll.

Sunday morning after a breakfast of porridge, Swiss cheese, toast, and strawberry jam, it was off to Livadia, formerly the Russian tsar's summer home. Livadia, located three kilometers outside Yalta was the site of the 1945 Yalta Conference. The Great Hall is now a tourist attraction while the remainder of the Livadian Palace is the Crimea's largest sanatorium for treating general medical and cardiac conditions.

So as not to damage the flawless parquet floors of the Great Hall, all tourists must don cloth slippers over their shoes.

Today must be "palace day," I teased our local guide, Ludmila, for we hit another one of the monuments, the Alupka Palace in Alupka, another nearby resort town on the Black Sea. The Alupka Palace, which once belonged to Count Vorontsov, one of Russia's biggest landowners in the 18th century, is now a museum and tourist attraction. It was on with the bedroom slippers again as Count Vorontsov had demanded parquet floors in his house. I have never in my entire life witnessed such luxury—gold samovars, initial table-topped dining tables at least 15 feet long, and my first glimpse of laplani, an azure blue opaque semi-precious stone.

I SPENT THE afternoon swimming in the Black Sea and searching for sea shells in vain along the beach; not a sandy bit, a stony, almost rocky beach. It was painful to walk barefooted. For mid-September the Black Sea was a comfortable 65 degrees.

Another free evening prompted me to splurge on a movie—a Russian movie with the English dubbed in—dealing with three Russian POW's trying to make their way back into Russia from behind the Nazi front during World War II. It had an American-type ending: all three Russians were killed. Movies in the USSR seem to be quite popular and many of them are filmed on location in the Yalta area. On the beach about 25 yards from the Hotel Oreanda I noticed a replica of the Hispanola which was constructed for a movie set and then left as a permanent monument.

On my own time until 2 p.m. the following day, my curious feet left no square inch of the Yalta pavement untrodden. The 20-foot statue of Lenin in Lenin Square, the farmer's market, the local bakery and deli, and several bookstores, highlighted my morning. Totally by accident I walked into a



NIKITSKY BOTANICAL GARDENS

very up-to-date self-serve supermarket, complete with checkout counters, cashiers, and cash registers similar to back home. The only difficulty in shopping here was trying to decipher the labels on canned goods, which were written in Russian.

While travelling through the shady avenues interrupted by parks, gardens, and flower beds, I met three bilingual tourists from the German Democratic Republic. We nonchalantly exchanged shopping hints and discussed the pros and cons of flying Interflug versus Aeroflot.

THE THING THAT really impressed me here and also in Kiev, Moscow, and Leningrad was the cleanliness and neatness of the city streets. Not a speck of trash, not even a cigarette butt could be found in the gutters. Henceforth I stamped out my

cigarette and carried the butt in my pocket until I located a trash receptacle. It was fortunate for me that I hadn't. Ludmila, would undoubtedly have thrown me out of the Nikitsky Botanical Garden that afternoon due to my sloppiness.

The immaculate Nikitsky Botanical Garden (its beginnings date back to 1812) today contains some 1,125 species of plants, a school of winemaking, a tobacco growing experimental station, and the world's largest rose garden which has some 1,600 Russian and foreign varieties.

Not being a connoisseur of wines, I had never heard of Russia's famous Massandra wine from the Crimean region. I became fundamentally versed in Massandra wines after an elegant wine-tasting party supervised by Lud-

mila that evening. Apparently the abundance of sunshine and the diversity of soils account for the rich gamut of fragrance and flavor of Crimean wines.

TUESDAY WAS mainly a travel day, traversing the European USSR from south to north getting from Yalta to Leningrad. Having been packed and ready since 7 a.m., I had three hours for my final look at Yalta. Even though an addition to my already ponderous baggage, I couldn't resist purchasing a lovely balalaika for six rubles, feeling that this instrument would assimilate me into the Soviet culture even though I had no idea how to play it. Actually the reverse was true—it branded me as an ostentatious Yankee tourist.

Along the Promenade which is open to pedestrian traffic only, the side streets held many private automobiles, small cracker-box-type cars, the make not familiar to me. This was a contrast from Moscow where most vehicles on the street belonged to the military or were of the mass transit type. Perhaps more Soviet citizens than I had estimated owned an automobile and had motored down to Yalta for their holiday.

Now for a word about the other phenomenon—the bathing beauties of the Russian Riviera. I could not determine their nationality but no matter, their bikinis revealed muscular, sun-tanned bodies, definitely stockier than American bodies, but certainly neither flabby nor fat.

Having relaxed and settled myself comfortably for the two-hour bus trip back to Simferopol, the road was more winding, narrow, and treacherous than I had remembered, the driver appeared oblivious to the hazards.

Besides vineyards and orchards, I noticed small, fenced plots of land fronting on the road and accommodating those square, one-story gingerbread houses I had previously spotted outside Moscow. The road wound through several small villages each composed of what looked like a food store and a petrol station. Once into the Crimean Mountains the luxuriant green country was replaced by one monotonous cliff after another.

A LUNCH OF roast beef and fried potatoes was waiting for me at the Simferopol Airport. This time Aeroflot was late, so rather than drink myself into a stupor in a cocktail lounge was existent within the airport terminal. I followed the example set by so many of the Soviet people I found a

quiet corner and read for two hours. The Soviets must be the most literate people in the world. Everywhere I looked while travelling in the USSR, in parks, in shops, on boats, in buses, even on street curbs, I saw people happily perusing their printed matter.

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Community Calendar

SATURDAY SKI BUS

Saturday, Jan. 3: Bus leaves the Farmington Community Center at 8:30 a.m. for Mt. Brighton every Saturday through Feb. 28 if skiing conditions are favorable. Registration and details available at the center.

REGISTRATION

Monday, Jan. 5: Registration begins for all class offerings by John Wesley College's off-campus Center for Continuing Education, 2700 Farmington Road. Brochures available by addressing requests in care of Nancy Bates at the center.

ANIMAL FARE

Monday, Jan. 5: Three animal films shown for pre-schoolers only in Farmington Community Library, 2277 12 Mile, 2 p.m. No charge. Pre-registration is not necessary.

PUPPETRY

Friday, Jan. 9: Puppetry shows and productions in Farmington Community Library, 2277 12 Mile, at 10:30 a.m. for pre-schoolers only. No charge. Pre-registration is not necessary.

PUSS 'N' BOOTS

Saturday and Sunday, Jan. 10-11: "Puss 'N' Boots" staged by the Southfield Repertory Theatre in the Southfield Civic Center, Evergreen and 18th Mile, at 1 and 3 p.m. on Saturday and 1 p.m. on Sunday. Admission asked at the door.

ANIMAL CARE

Saturday, Jan. 10: Representative from the Humane Society talks about animal care at 2 p.m. in Farmington Community Library, 2277 12 Mile, for school-aged children only. No charge, but pre-registration is necessary.

LIBRARY REGISTRATION

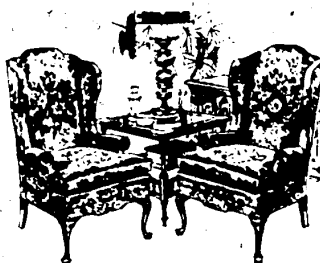
Monday, Jan. 12: All classes offered for children by the Farmington Community Library, 2277 12 Mile, which require registration will be taken this date in person or by telephone on a first-come-first-served basis. Programs offered for pre-school through fourth grade.

WINTER TERM REGISTRATION

Wednesday and Thursday, Jan. 7-8: Registration for all class offerings in the Farmington Community Center's winter term, in the center, all day each day. Samples of arts and crafts, which will be taught in the center, will be on display and staff members will be available to answer questions.

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