

The Country of The Soviet Union

# Jim and Emmy's Travel Journal

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We arrived in Frankfurt, Germany on March 10, visited France, Luxembourg, Switzerland, Italy including Sicily, then in Greece we boarded a cruise ship through Istanbul, and to the Black Sea.

The ride across the Black Sea (of course it isn't, by the way!) was uneventful, and we arrived in Odessa about mid-afternoon. Since the ship is late, they cancelled the visit to the Odessa ballet and the dinner tour, so everyone is taking what is left, the city tour. In the USSR we do not have a choice, no one is permitted to leave the ship unless on a tour conducted by Intourist, the USSR tourist office. We do not have to obtain a regular Visa to visit in this manner, but they take our passports and give us a special passport with a red cover, good for this time period only.

Our guide is named Gallime, and although she promised to write to us after reading the "book" we gave her, haven't heard yet. The weather is depressing, and the town is not much better. We drove past building after building that just seemed dull, no pizzazz in the town at all. Of course it's neither ancient, nor new, and it looks like it. We remember seeing one church with fancy "onion" domes. We passed at high speed, and didn't get to visit, and the guide made no comment.

The population is about 1,100,000, and there are 140 high schools in the city. Looking through a window in one Odessa school, we see a US Flag. Wonder what it's doing there? Some ladies wore mini-skirts, and there are boys on skateboards riding here and there, trying to do all those things kids do on a skateboard. The skateboards look just like they do at home.

Most of the buildings can stand maintenance, or painting at least, and one high rise (maybe 20 stories) apartment building had just unpainted boards as the railing on all the balconies. Both the boards and the building look many years old, it isn't still under construction. The Opera is a very impressive building from the outside, but since the ship arrived at the wrong time, we couldn't attend the function scheduled there.

There are plenty of sidewalk cafes, and several drink vendors. The sidewalk cafes in Odessa had unusual umbrellas, shaped like a large bell, and drinks were offered from what must have been a 500 gallon tank, mounted on a large two wheel trailer. There is a wide, several story-high staircase built by, or at least

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dedicated to Pushkin, who was a poet and author. We stopped at an Intourist Hotel to use the restrooms. They were not very nice, and really old fashioned. At one place we saw a sign on a post, in English it said "Camping."

Jim used his Visa card to buy a telescope at the Intourist Store. The bus took us here and there, and while we walked for a couple of blocks as a group, we really saw nothing of much interest. The whole time we were given a strong dose of propaganda about all they did in the war. It didn't seem anyone else was involved on the winning side.

At one place, after a strong speech, the bus parked and the guide was to take us all down a long sloped walkway to visit the "Tomb of the Unknown Sailor." School children compete for the honor to act as guard for a day or week or something. Only a couple of people from our bus were interested in going with her, so when she returned, Jim could tell Gallime was very unhappy. The bus just sat there while she, over and over, told the story of the heroic Soviet military to the bus load of hostages! We never got the chance to see much of interest in Odessa, and the ship left for Yalta in late afternoon.

### **SS Odysseus, May 29, Mon Between Odessa and Yalta**

As we approach Yalta, both the weather and the view are much different from what we saw in Odessa.

This is a health and summer resort, and in the sun, it looks like it. There are miles of large nice-looking hotel buildings lining the hillside, and the downtown had a few distinctive buildings, including at least one onion-topped church.

Again we had to take the tour, and had to exchange our passports for their red visa. As we left the ship, Jim's backpack was examined by a dour-faced Soviet soldier. When he found a copy of our "book" he started to leaf through it, wondering what it might be about. When Jim pointed to our picture on the back cover, he gave us a very big smile, and waved us on.

The bus tour took us to Livadiya Palace, built in 1910, to show us the room where the famous "Yalta Conference" took place near the end of WW II. The building was somewhat interesting, and the grounds are well kept. After hearing all the good things decided here during the meeting, and how proud they were of what happened at the conference, Jim told her the Americans were unhappy that Roosevelt gave away Eastern Europe at the Yalta Conference. Jim asked her when they would be freed from Soviet domination. Somehow she didn't see much problem with things staying like they are now. There were too many people in the tour to have time to talk to her much, and she didn't seem interested in talking anyway. (Wonder what her story is like now that Eastern Europe is not controlled by the Soviets.)

We now rode another 15 miles or so to Aludka Palace, built by Count Vorontsoy in about 1830. Jim objected to spending our time seeing only palaces. The Soviets are still not happy about the people who built such things. Jim told the guide there should be two tours, one like this, and another for people to walk around in Yalta to see how people really lived. By the way, these Soviet palaces wouldn't match the servant quarters in a "real" castle in France or Germany.

Yalta has a population of 98,000, with 180,000 in the general area. There are trolley buses, and the people on the streets were nicely dressed. We were given

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about 30 minutes to walk around in the general area where the ship was docked. Saw the same kind of sidewalk cafes, and the vending of drinks from 500 gallon trailers, like those we saw yesterday. In Yalta one lady was selling a huge pile of bar-b-qued chicken, but didn't want Jim to take a picture of her goods. The chickens had just been dumped onto a table, there was no effort (or need?) to display them in an attractive manner.

In one rather nice store in Yalta, right next to the cash register was a large abacus (we saw several), but when Jim started to take a picture of it, the cashier immediately put it under the counter, and didn't want a picture taken. There is a kiddy-land with many rides in operation, and teenagers are playing video games in one store. They are very old fashioned compared to the ones in our country, but it was still a surprise. Jim was tempted to try and make a long distance call from one of the phone booths, but there wasn't much time, and didn't know how to do it anyhow.

At drink vending machines in Yalta (about the same size as ones in the US), there were one or two glass tumblers for all to use. We saw no way to rinse or clean the glass, but with a government medical system, maybe sanitation is not important! Have no idea what kind of drink they were vending. There are many palm trees in Yalta, but we believe the weather is generally cooler than in southern California.

We stopped at the Intourist Store, but could find nothing of interest to buy. The jewelry counter had lines of people, but still nothing we wanted, although it would have been nice to buy something in this city. Emmy still had a few Disneyland pencils and US flags, so we gave them to some young boys we met on the street in Yalta.

Our ship returned to Istanbul, then on to Athens. We visited more in Greece, Yugoslavia, Austria, France, Germany, and returned to the US on July 2.