

# Eastern Europe opens up to travellers



**Vince Egan**  
Travel

Adventure travel is no longer confined to backpacking, cycling and sleeping under canvas. For some 1990 travellers, the adventure lies in taking advantage of new opportunities to visit formerly "closed" countries, which until now could be seen only with difficulty, if at all.

A year ago, who could have foreseen the breath-taking political changes that have taken place in Eastern Europe - the breaching of the Berlin Wall, free elections in Romania and other Soviet satellites, the first stir of liberalization in Albania?

True, it had been possible for outsiders to travel to most of the Communist-ruled dictatorships, although entry was granted selectively and, it seemed, grudgingly.

Now, the process is generally much simpler - about as simple, in most cases, as travelling to that Caribbean Communist stronghold, Cuba.

If you are thinking about an Eastern European travel adventure, bear in mind that the chief reward will probably be the chance to satisfy your curiosity about life in countries that were long under the hammer and sickle. Generally speaking, you may find the accommodation spartan, the food so-so, the service slow and seldom friendly.

## EASTERN EUROPE

One of the most comprehensive package tours of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union is a 24-day itinerary being offered by Toronto-based Globus Gateway (416-787-1281), departing every Thursday until Oct. 11.

The tour begins and ends in Vienna, the handsome capital of Austria. Its stops include Prague, the Czechoslovakian capital; Warsaw, the Polish capital, with side-trips to two other Polish sites - the Jasno Gora monastery and the Nazi death camp at Auschwitz; and the Hungarian capital of Budapest, where the yoke of the Communist system was lighter than anywhere else behind the now tattered Iron Curtain.

Within the Soviet Union, participants will visit the three Baltic republics (Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia), Russia and the Ukraine. Highlights of this 13-day segment

include visits to Leningrad's vast Hermitage museum and art gallery and to the former St. Isaac's cathedral, which, under Stalin, was turned into a museum extolling atheism. The tour also includes an overnight stay in the still-attractive Ukrainian capital of Kiev, with its famed Golden Gate.

Tour price is about \$2,770, with accommodation in first-class hotels - which, Globus Gateway warns, "may not be of the same standard as those in Western Europe and North America."

## INTO ALBANIA

Albania, after wartime invasions by Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, became the most rigid of Stalinist dictatorships after the Second World War. Over the years since then, the regime has banned all but a tiny trickle of foreign travellers, to insulate the population from outside influences.

Long-time Albanian dictator, the tyrannical Enver Hoxha, died in 1985. Some slight easing of the tourist ban has occurred over the past five years. In 1990, package tours of Albania, a country of 3.3 million inhabitants, are being offered by at least two Toronto-based travel wholesalers.

Canadian Travel Abroad (CTA), 416-364-2738, has a 10-day itinerary departing from Toronto every Thursday from June 14 to Sept. 27. Two days are spent in Albania, between tours of southern Yugoslavia. (Albania is bordered by southern Yugoslavia, by northern Greece and by the Adriatic Sea.)

Package price is \$1,999, or lower at the beginning and end of the season. That includes transportation by KLM Royal Dutch Airlines.

Exotik Tours, 416-736-9669, is also including Albania in its 1990 program, with some trips in combination with destinations in Yugoslavia.

It is also possible, for those making their own way to England, to contact a British travel agency and sign up for London-based tours organized by the Albania state tourist board.

## TRAVEL NOTEBOOK

Here are notes on news of current interest to travellers:

Air Canada has reduced fares between Toronto and Calgary by up to 66 per cent this summer. The discounts, on which some restrictions apply, are in force between May 31 and Sept. 7.

Tours of six private homes and public buildings in eastern Ontario's Prince Edward County will be held June 2 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. In Port Hope, a walking tour taking in several of its many historical homes will take place Sept. 29, organized by the local

branch of the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario.

Observances of the 150th anniversary of the birth of English novelist and poet Thomas Hardy begin June 2 with a Victorian street fair in Dorchester, about 200 km southwest of London. During the following three months, many other activities are scheduled throughout the county of Dorset, otherwise known as Hardy country.

- Thomson News Service.

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