

## 9. Spirit Of Adventure

### A race to set records

The great adventure started after 1918. The Americans planned for three Curtiss NC4 flying boats to cross the Atlantic from west to east and, in May 1919, one made it to Lisbon after stopping twice in the Azores.

On 14 June 1919, Captain John Alcock and Lieutenant Arthur Whitten Brown made the first non-stop flight across the Atlantic. They took off from near St Johns in Newfoundland in a twin-engine Vickers Vimy 1V and arrived next day at Clifden in Ireland in 16 hours and 27 minutes, a distance of 1,890 nautical miles. They were presented by Winston Churchill with the Daily Mail prize of £10,000 and a few days after were knighted at Buckingham Palace by King George V.

Six months later Alcock was back in London to present to the nation the Vimy, retrieved from an Irish peat bog. On 18 December he was to deliver a Vickers Viking to Paris. He set out without a navigator. With low cloud, scudding rain and strong winds, the plane came down in a field near Rouen. Alcock was found unconscious and died shortly afterwards.

On 8 May 1927, Charles Nungesser and navigator Francois Coli set out on the reverse flight from Paris to New York, intent on claiming the Ortig prize of \$25,000 for the non-stop flight. They were last spotted over Ireland. Sadly, they never made it but this tragedy did not deter a young man from the American Mid-West of Minnesota, already breaking flight records.

He had a plane built to his own specification and set off from Long Island on 20 May 1927. He had been a mail pilot and a parachute jumper. Only the week before he had flown from San Diego to Long Island, via St Louis, in 21 hours and 20 minutes, a new coast to coast record. For this solo flyer, fair skies were predicted. With no sextant or radio he decided to risk it. No island hopping or stopping for a flight exceeding 3,000 miles. He was aiming for the record and prize of \$25,000 dollars – and going alone. A captivated American public held its breath.

When trying to find Le Bourget "he was struck by a curious broad shaft of diffused fog." Cars had turned their lights on, illuminating the runway in two parallel lines. Parking on the edge of the airfield, after a slightly bumpy landing, the Mid-Westerner slowly stepped out from his Spirit of St Louis. He said simply, "I, am Charles Lindberg." It was a wonderful achievement and an unforgettable moment for those there, and anxious millions tuning into their wireless sets across America. New York gave him a ticker-tape parade.

The Schneider Trophy, a speed trial for light seaplanes, commanded huge respect. Britain won in 1922 at a speed of 122 mph, and again in 1927 by which time the speed had almost doubled. Britain won again in 1929, at a dizzying speed of 328 mph in a plane that became the Supermarine Spitfire. In 1934 a race to Australia was won by a de Havilland Comet that soon became the Mosquito. In third place was Amy Johnson, and husband and fellow pilot, Jim Mollison. Amy, a former shorthand typist from Hull, took flying lessons in 1928 and nine months later gained an A-licence. She then became an aircraft fitter and the first woman to achieve a ground engineer's licence.

Having never crossed the Channel, and with only 90 hours solo flying, Amy took off on 5 May 1930 from Croydon in a second-hand Gypsy Moth, bound for Australia. Despite damage to the undercarriage in Baghdad and Rangoon, she arrived in Darwin after 19 days, three days

outside the record. Amy was to break many records: London to Tokyo in 1931, London to Capetown 1932 and in 1934 London to Karachi.

A month after their marriage, Jim Mollison flew from London to New Brunswick in Canada. He arrived drunk, claiming alcohol helped keep him awake and especially brandy, an antidote to cold, and fear too. The duo became famous for daring exploits, for hair-raising take-offs and landings also on occasions. Flying had become glamorous as well as an adventure.

In 1937 American pilot, Amelia Earhart, attempting to become the first woman to fly around the world, disappeared over the Pacific. On 20 May, she set out from Oakland, California. She flew across the southern states, kept tightly to the north coast of South America, crossed the Atlantic and then made the massive, mainly overland, journey to Darwin – in all 18 stops for refuelling. A reel of 16 mm film shows her Electra aircraft being refuelled on the island of New Guinea. One more fuelling stop on the small island of Howland, well north of Fiji, and then Hawaii and home.

Amelia Earhart and navigator, Fred Noonan, took off for Howland on 2 July. Whether they ran short of fuel, or the plane developed mechanical problems, has long been disputed. An intriguing theory is they landed on uninhabited Gardner Island, now known as Nikumaroro. If so, we can only speculate on their fate trying to survive as castaways, on an island devoid of fresh water. An aluminium panel was discovered, matching a patch used to repair a damaged plane window – but where precisely? Might it have been washed up?

Commercial flights began in 1919, first within Germany and then a service between Paris and London. Months later the Aircraft and Travel Company Limited was formed with a freight and passenger service to Paris. The one-way fare of £21 received few takers. Imperial Airways was founded in 1924 to serve the British Empire with routes to South Africa, India and Hong Kong, teaming up with Qantas in Australia. In 1939 it was merged into the British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC).

The development of European transport planes was led by Fokker and Junkers of Germany, until challenged in their home markets by the Boeing 247, which first flew in 1933, and then the Douglas DC1. Britain proceeded with caution. Imperial Airways motto was “slow but sure” with Handley Page carrying 40 just passengers at 100 mph. Whilst safe, they were no match for swifter and larger planes.

The adrenalin of speed obsessed those with racing instincts, and money, none more than Sir Henry Seagrave. In 1926 he recorded 152 mph on Southport Sands. The next year, with far higher car specifications, he reached 203 mph at Dayton, Ohio, the first person to exceed 200 mph. He died in 1930. In attempting to beat the record on Lake Windermere, his boat hit a submerged log. His great rival, Donald Campbell, led a vastly more flamboyant lifestyle. At Bonneville Salt Flats in Utah in 1935 he achieved a speed of 301 mph, the first to achieve 300 mph. He set the water speed record four times, his highest speed being nearly 142 mph in Blue Bird, K4 on Coniston Water in 1939.

## **Motoring for the family**

Pre-war, the motorist was a figure of fun, mocked by music hall comedians and lampooned by *Punch* for breaking down every few miles. Amazingly, there were over 400 manufacturers of mostly custom-built vehicles. By 1922 this had whittled down to about 100 and 40 from 1926 given greater competition. Yet, vehicle demand soared. Car ownership in 1924 was 580,000

and by 1937 had more than tripled to almost 1.9 million, giving about 20% of families access to the pleasures and convenience of travel by car.

In 1915 a tariff of 33% on imported vehicles was imposed as Britain lagged behind the USA and Germany in output. The response of Ford was to increase production in Britain. The first mass-produced car was the famous Ford Model A, manufactured at Trafford Park from 1911. By 1913 Ford had cornered 60% of the British market for models under £200 and 30% of all cars. In 1931 production was moved to Dagenham where those in regular employment could earn £4 a week, close to a middle-class income of £5. In 1926 the working week was cut from 48 to 40 hours, without a wage cut. Ford was a good employer and, in return, expected workers to be upright citizens, leading respectable lives. There was pride in working for Ford.

Pioneer, Henry Austin, only just survived the slump of 1920 and 1921, saddled with a debt of £2 million. He had 1,000 cars parked on wasteland at Longbridge and a huge inventory of parts. Rather than sell to a rival, his response was inspirational. Develop a small family car. Austin thought highly of a young designer, Stanley Edge, who was given the task. He came up with what was affectionately known as a 'bath on wheels.' It was the Austin Seven. The car went on show at Olympia in November 1922 and sold for £195. It was now within reach of those reliant on a motorcycle combination, costing a third less, and those who had never considered car ownership before.

William Morris was in financial trouble too. His Morris Cowley was priced at £465 in October 1920 but, given sluggish sales, this was slashed in November 1921 to £225, about 10% below the production cost. He purchased the Hotchkiss engine company, improved manufacturing methods and quadrupled output within two years. Simplifying production, outsourcing parts and economy of scale in manufacturing processes improved efficiency and profit. In 1922 it took 55 employee weeks to produce a car. By 1935 this had reduced to just 9 weeks.

A survey in 1926 attempted to estimate the number of potential motorists. Families on less than £130 a year were excluded, and an assumption made that an annual income of at least £250 was required. Only 20% of households fell into this category. Of 4.7 million families, some 83% were considered financially incapable of ownership but this did not take into full consideration a continuing decrease in car prices, hire purchase agreements and families combining savings to share use. In 1927, some 60% of all sales involved deferred payment.

By the late 1930s, working class trades accounted for nearly 17% of all car purchases, inviting derision about "the sort of chap who goes down to the seaside in his braces with mum, and the kids in the back" and who at Clacton, "covers decent sand with orange peel and cigarette cartons." Journalist Ivor Brown on a literary tour around England in 1935 endorsed this view: "myriads of East-Enders packed seven or eight in an antiquated car, bought for a few pounds and seemingly held together by string and straps."

Between 1924 and 1935 the cost of a car halved. Ownership changed from a privileged few to the aspiration of most. A convenience soon became a necessity, both for families and professionals, "wanting to get on." Hire purchase was downplayed in advertisements, not wishing to affect adversely the symbolic importance of the car and status of buyers. The Morris Minor S.V. priced at £100 was modelled on the Ford 7 and pared to the bone. Buyers ignored it, "not wishing to keep down with Joneses" in a form of social snobbery. Similarly, the Ford Model T was associated with 'Enery and Liz," depicting the car's lowly status in the motoring hierarchy.

Lord Montague founded *Car Illustrated* and was the motoring correspondent for The Times from 1921 to 1929. He insisted, "we need rules for the road as for the sea." He sought a European approach and questioned the wisdom of a right-hand drive vehicle and driving on the left. He had a point as under the Road Traffic Act 1930 the speed limit was abolished on the basis that motorists could be entrusted to drive with due care and attention, especially as there was now a Highway Code.

In 1903 the government responded to popularity of the car by bringing in the Motor Car Act as well as introducing vehicle registration. The Act was most notable for the driving licence. Anyone aged 17 or more applied to their local council for a licence that cost five shillings a year. There was no driving test. The only offences worthy of prosecution were for dangerous or careless driving, with modest fines for other offences. In 1934, of a total of 91 motorists charged with manslaughter, just 15 were convicted. The onus was firmly on pedestrians to take reasonable care with third party driver insurance covering the financial consequences.

The phenomenon of the careful driver was a rarity. During the 1920s, fatal crashes ran at 2,500 a year and non-fatal at 62,000. This rose steadily to 7,000 deaths in 1930 and 150,000 injured. By way of comparison, 3,221 were killed and 31,130 injured in 2004. Driving was a dangerous past-time, especially for passengers and pedestrians. Siegfried Sassoon drove his car as he would a horse, charging at a high fence. On his first solo drive he knocked down a dog-cart; the next day it was a cyclist. He gave no signals, nor admitted guilt and seemed impervious to dangers posed, both to himself and others.

The sole condition required of drivers was a declaration of physical efficiency from a doctor with disqualification only for highly impaired vision, heart problems or a nervous complaint if this meant losing control of the vehicle. The system was a farce, and alarming too given the number of fatalities and serious injuries.

In the mid-1930s, Lord Hoare-Belisha was determined to improve driving standards, with the aim of reducing "mass murder on the roads." Apart from more traffic lights, he introduced the Belisha Beacon, with its orange globe and black and white pole, and zebra crossings with pedestrians supposedly having right of way. He extolled the merits in Camden but in stepping out was almost flattened by a sports car. A similar fate awaited groups of children waiting to cross in Acton. The Gazette and Express reported cars flashing along at very high speeds. "In the course of an hour not one car stopped."

Lord Hoare-Belisha provided more roundabouts, improved signage, revised the Highway Code and introduced a compulsory driving test in 1935. This applied to all those who started to drive on or after 1 April 1934. A speed limit of 30 mph was applied in built up areas but, in spite of his best efforts, road deaths reduced by only 600 a year.

The Automobile Association petitioned for fairer taxes and treatment of the much maligned motorist. Maps were produced showing favoured spots for police speed checks. Uniformed AA patrol officers alerted motorists, simply by not saluting. Both the A.A. and R.A.C. opposed speed limits, driving tests and pedestrian crossings. Fines were erratic such as 5-10 shillings for jumping traffic lights but far more if obstructing the highway. A House of Lords Report in 1937 blamed pedestrians, "heedless of traffic," for two-thirds of all road fatalities.

Driving had magnetic appeal. Agatha Christie greatly appreciated the benefits. "I don't think anything has given me more pleasure, more joy of achievement, than my dear bottle-green Morris Cowley." She was not alone. "The chief end of my car," rejoiced Rudyard Kipling, "is the discovery of England." Whereas in 1901 just 4,000 people visited Stonehenge, by 1929

over 100,000 did so, some by charabanc, seating up to 30 people in reasonable comfort and under cover.

Many spoke of a golden age in motoring with roads free of traffic, enabling middle classes to explore the highways and byways of Britain, but this exclusivity was waning. Car ownership changed the social, cultural and economic fabric of Britain forever with greater access to jobs, new professions, family days out and visits to distant relatives. The car improved the quality of life for millions with a greater sense of personal freedom too. The car was here to stay.

### **Where the spirit takes you**

The message of Vogue in 1920 was wanderlust, seeking out strange lands unaffected by war. Vogue urged, "Find new worlds to conquer. If returning to familiar haunts, such as Lisbon or Biarritz, do so in novel and unfamiliar ways."

"In Scandinavia, that country full of romance and legend, an unbelievable quiet reigns. There, one might be stirred by the silence of primeval forests, by the low moaning and giant fir trees and wizardry of the midnight sun, looming low and fiery on the horizon." The Lesser Antilles in the Caribbean was an option, "a narrow, fascinating little half-circle of islands," or Trinidad further south or British Guiana, not to mention "the beckoning lure of South Africa with its colour, opulence and dazzle."

In the early 1920 the emphasis was exotic, extravagant destinations from Mardi Gras in New Orleans, rosebuds in Southern California and relaxation in Hawaii to cherry blossom in Japan, or maybe all four for the adventurous traveller with time and money. But this omitted most of North and South America and "the younger continent" of Australia. By 1924 the escapist rage had largely exhausted itself.

July 1924 saw the first of three articles entitled "Travel Zones of France," featured in a series of pictorial maps. France had a magnetic lure, enticed by being a "sightseer, sportsman and epicure" and attracted by a favourable exchange rate and convenient closeness for ease of motoring. "No longer was foreign travel the preserve of the old and infirm, or those escaping the inclement weather of winter." We might add the very wealthy too.

The old favourite, Deauville was now the smartest summer resort in France with its season centring on races in early August when "all Paris, all London, all New York, all Madrid and all Buenos Aires gather, amid polo, golf, riding, motoring and gambling." In the evenings the casino was a magnet with a "brilliant pageant of gorgeously gowned women." A little further along the coast Le Touquet was a must, famed for its golf and tennis tournaments, whilst on the Riviera there was always the opening of a Russian ballet. Whether arriving by train, or more adventurously by car, "to be on the Riviera without a car is a condition we do not wish to imagine." Cannes was a mecca for the smart-set with its own tennis tournaments, golf and sailing, and leisurely Mah-jong soirees.

Switzerland was gaining in popularity. St Moritz was a paradise from the end of November to the end of March. "The fine ice-rinks are crowded with skaters, curlers, bandy and hockey players; the runs are ideal for bobsleigh and Luge and tobogganists may try their prowess at the world famous Cresta Run. Everybody skis – and even the most unskilful can soon learn." Summer was an allure too. Whilst taking in the picture-postcard scenery, "there is nothing so glorious in the whole scheme of motor-owning as motor mountaineering."

In the autumn, the Bernese Oberland or Italian Lakes were sublime. In October, Morocco and Tunisia invited those seeking yet more sunshine, already burned to a cinder in the resorts of southern France. Noel Coward observed "How the blazing sun brings out the worst traits of character in all the visitors. Friends spend hours squabbling viciously, whilst brushing flakes of their own sun-scorched flesh from the table." Cap d'Antibes was singled out. Nut-browned bodies flung themselves into the sea from a terrace of rocks, each with a nook and umbrella, under which "one has cocktails and gin fizzes, in a scene to rival the Lido."

Vogue soon had its own motoring column, "Round About The Car," full of practical advice on maintenance and possible destinations with illustrations on the latest models that included the Bentley and Daimler drop-head coupé, Lanchester Saloon, BSA Sports Saloon, Humber Snipe and Austin Ruby Saloon. North Africa, Palestine and Spain were listed and even Sumatra but the age of cruising and air travel would eclipse continental motoring.

In the last year of the decade, "as bodies blistered on the Riviera," Robert Byron, reflecting on the twenties, observed that "the most ingenious brain must find it hard to contrive a novelty," but of course he had not yet experienced travel in the 1930s.

Writing for Vogue in 1937, Lesley Blanch was much impressed with modern travel, "my theme is the triumph of speed over space" in a "spirit of acceleration." The world is your oyster, or as Ralph Hodgson put it, "last week in Babylon, last night in Rome."

Air travel revolutionised holidays and provided a stimulus too for shipping and rail companies that had to compete somehow. "By taking wings over Europe and Asia we can take tiffin with Memsahibs on India's coral strand in less than a week. We can range tropic or Arctic zones with equal ease, adventure the lush tropical swamps of the Amazon, explore the foothills of the Atlas mountains, and onto Shanghai, and home by the Trans-Siberian Railway. The list of enticing destinations went on in similar vein.

A pleasurable alternative was cruising for those not prepared to fly, or who couldn't afford it. "Formerly the Vanderbilt millions could not bridge the Atlantic in less than seven days. Now we can do it in four, for £20. We can reach the Arctic Circle in five days for £12, or North Africa in about three days for £5, travelling cheaply of course but by no means uncomfortably. Vogue was not slow to point out the benefits of some discomfort at times. "The craven who travels with one eye on the drain, and the other on the local fauna (and selects to stay only in those places that have installed the first and removed the second), must abandon all hope of seeing many of the loveliest places left in this fast-changing world."

Two distinct types of traveller emerged as the decade progressed: "those who rush furiously to a chosen spot, and then relax, or those who relax on route, only invariably not to reach it." Cecil Beaton was in the former category. Not for him "jungle encounters with warlike tribes," only sun and familiar faces. This drew a sharp riposte from author Elinor Mordaunt. "Travel is a wonderful thing, but it must by no means be the mere shifting of one's body from one place to another, where we meet the sort of people we know and eat the same sort of food."

No wonder Vogue travel articles in the 1930s ranged from remote Kurdistan to fishing villages like St Tropez for idyllic relaxation. Editorial judgement was reserved. "The important thing was to get up and go, no matter how, no matter where.

De rigueur was the Vuitton 'Butterfly' trunk. Lying flat it opened in a straight line, so making everything more accessible, insisted the advert. Indispensable for the miscellany of guides, maps and history books was the diminutive library trunk with a writing compartment too that

opened into a desk. Travelling back from Egypt, warmer clothes were recommended "with a change into something sleek, black and Parisian at tea-time." Traveller, John McMullin, took this endless list of travel essentials to heart. He arrived in Bombay with two companions and more than fifty pieces of luggage.

When it came to travel tips almost matronly warnings were given. "In Kashmir, an eyeshade with a white band at the back simply gets dirty, and a white straw hat is useless in the sun and travels badly." Dress material came in for much stern advice with a propensity to split, or tarnish if embellished with gold and silver and then there was the effect of salt water and the oppressive heat. For those about to embark on a cruise came the precautionary advice: "No need to worry about sea-sickness. If you feel apprehensive, wear a tight belt or corset. The support will prevent that weak sensation in one's middle!"

The gourmet was well catered for with "the best lobster in the world in Chile, the best crabs and mayonnaise in Colon, Panama, the best meat in the world roasted over live coals in the Grill Room of the Plaza Hotel in Buenos Aires," not to mention "mackerel singed over a fire of broken twigs, served at your table" at the Restaurant Verdun in Marseilles. Sports enthusiasts were given helpful advice too. The club-house at the Ginga golf course in Uganda displayed large warning signs. "Any Ball Falling in the Footprint of a Hippopotamus May Be Moved."

Guidance was dispensed on how to shed pounds, not weight but money, citing Java as best for batik, Singapore for kimonos, Madras for silver bracelets, Ceylon for sapphires, rubies, moonstones and zircons and Zanzibar for amber and ivory. Most of these items appeared in *Vogue's Travelog*. Introduced in 1936 it featured travel articles; "new places, new people, new ways of doing everyday things."

With concerns increasing in the late 1930s distant destinations were advised, ideally the South Seas or Australia. By Easter 1939 home destinations appeared from Worcestershire orchards and Warwickshire towns to the Peaks, the Lakes, Yorkshire Moors and Scottish Highlands. The determined were still able to plan an early summer holiday in Europe in those places "where the shadow of the Berlin-Rome Axis does not fall and Europe's troubled politics seem blissfully remote." Time was running out. So were places to visit.

## **Let's go to Russia**

This travel journal from Denise Emile-Schreiber, reproduced from *Travel in Vogue*, illustrates the attractions of Russia as a tourist destination in the 1930s with a fascination for the Soviet model. Propaganda posters depicted a rose-tinted, cosmopolitan and exotic destination. In 1929 Joseph Stalin formed the Russian State travel service Intourist, keen to lure travellers and showcase what some saw as a social experiment and antidote to economic depression.

"Our luggage, once stamped and closed, inspection is made of our pocket-books filled with dollars, the currency most appreciated by the Soviets. We go into the Exchange Office and receive two roubles for a dollar, at stabilised exchange. Not wishing to look like capitalists, we prepare to carry our own luggage but porters appear and relieve us of it. Russian trains are comfortable and clean. The food served in dining cars is not remarkable for its excellence but, after all, one could hardly expect to find French chefs in Russia.

Here we are then on Soviet soil, on the road to Moscow. Everything until now seems to have worked out well. The train startles us with a bellow, but we shall get used to this noise, for instead of a whistle, Russian trains have a muffled siren, both profound and impressive. We pass a comfortable night and, as the sun rises, we see a country of great immensity with the

horizon pushed back beyond its normal limits. No roads exist, only sandy paths on which curious horse-drawn wagons come and go.

On arriving at the huge station under construction in Moscow, two charming young women, neatly dressed, await us on the platform. They are the interpreters that 'Intourist' delegated to receive us. Far from being treated as strangers, we are welcomed as guests of Intourist – the Soviet Travel Agency – which aims to make our stay agreeable and to ensure our leaving the country satisfied that we have had an opportunity to see everything in which we were interested.

Leaving the station, we make our first contact with the Russian crowd. It is not at all what we expected. We pictured rags and bare feet; and here and there people dressed much as any crowd of workers emerging from a factory. All in the crowd are workers, all are cheaply and plainly dressed, but their feet are in shoes which, while neither fashionable nor of particularly good quality, are nevertheless shoes.

Moscow, famous for its many fine hotels before the Revolution, now has only four or five first-class ones. Only the biggest and most modern have been preserved for foreigners. We stop at the Grand Hotel and are given, my husband and myself, an immense bedroom with a salon of equal size. The bathroom is impressive, except that the hot-water tap is broken and all the enamel chipped off the bath. Furniture, overladen with gilded bronze, appears to be rarely cleaned, but the beds are all right, and there are fresh towels at the wash-basin.

Our young guides allow us little time for getting settled. It is half-past ten, breakfast hour, and we must go down to the dining room. There isn't much to say about the gastronomic pleasures of Russia. Rarely fresh, the food is prepared in too rudimentary a fashion for the palate of a French gourmand. The service is slow and clumsy but during our entire trip we shall have plenty to eat. Only one drink is possible – tea. Beer and wine are undrinkable and outrageously expensive.

We begin our survey of Moscow in a comfortable sightseeing bus. There are very few motors and all are in Government service. We go through miserable streets lined with houses from which the plaster is falling, when suddenly there arises before our eyes a group of workers' houses of handsome modern architecture. These contradictory first impressions are repeated during the entire trip. The Soviets preserve and repair nothing. Whatever building they do is from the ground up, but the task of restoring this immense territory is not yet completed.

Our days are passed in visiting factories, workmen's clubs and organizations for the protection of children. By observation and questioning, we begin to get a trend of Soviet life; we begin to understand what is taking place in this fabulous social laboratory.

The Russian woman works like a man. She can have the highest position and play a great role in the immense machine that the Soviets are trying to put in motion but which still creaks a great deal. I visited some marvellous maternity homes where the women are kept six days and where no visit to the young mothers is allowed; great posters in the hall give families whatever news they have.

No distinction is made between legitimate and illegitimate offspring; all have the same rights, the fathers the same responsibilities. I saw a great number of day nurseries. All are clean and intelligently arranged. They play a great role in Russian life; the women, since they are all working, leave their children in nurseries in the morning and reclaim them in the evening.



Large parks for sports, tennis and football are installed near all settlements. On coming out of the factory, the Russian workman – who is in general badly lodged, resorts to the clubs where he may indulge in sports, read books or simply dream in restful armchairs. Life might be most agreeable if it were not for the obligation to stand in a queue for hours, before the State Co-operative stores, in order to buy all the things indispensable to life. The Russian worker nearly always takes his meals in immense co-operative restaurants where he is fairly well nourished for a very small sum.

In the USSR there is no private commerce. Everything is State Co-operative, even a Torgsin, or tourist store where all purchases must be in dollars. There I bought, at a very reasonable price, astrakhan skins which I could never have found anywhere else for the same sum. As well as furs, there are also jewels and antique art objects, some of which are very beautiful, formerly belonging to noble families.

Needing a manicure, I was greatly surprised to learn that there were several beauty shops in Moscow. All over Russia, it appears, there are many women with manicured nails who visit the coiffeur. But I have the impression that I should not care to put my hair in the hands of the coiffeurs that I saw.

The Russian women are not pretty; but they are strong, healthy types. They wear very short skirts, almost to the knee, and in the summer months many wear socks instead of stockings. Handkerchiefs tied round the head are the usual form of head-dress.

There is not a club, a theatre, a museum, a nursery, not even a street where one does not see large red banners, bearing in gigantic letters flattering inscriptions on the Revolution or on the Five-Year plan; not a single work of art is turned out that has not propaganda as its aim; not a book is allowed to be published if it is not in favour of the formidable enterprise which is carried on according to the most modern methods of this immense country.

I came back much impressed by this extraordinary and perfectly easy trip. It was possible for me to see clearly and at first hand this remarkable experiment – in which the advantages and the faults are of equal importance, so that one could, according to own tendencies, describe either one or other. It explains why the reports of a trip to the USSR are so contradictory.”

## **A journey to Prague**

Lesley Blanch, Features Editor of Vogue, contributed her own travel account of a journey to Prague. Driving en route via Germany, the appearance of storm-troopers and rather beefy frauleins in black bodices raised no alarm, nor the Nazi salute, almost amusing, if not slightly eccentric; something they did in Germany.

“An early start was made by all except the engine which resulted in our crossing on the mid-day boat from Dover, reaching Ostend in time for an alcoholic tea. Our route lay through Bruges and Ghent, cities of indestructible calm beauty, to Brussels where, unrestrained, we indulged in Belgian patisseries and particularly a Gallic music hall and the Musée Wiertz.

Heading for the Ardennes we went through Namur and Dinant to Château d’Ardennes, a perfect hotel, in perfect surroundings, high among the wooded mountainous gorges of the Ardennes where placid rivers wind through the rocks, and pink and yellow villages offer omelettes and trout.

Next, we headed for Strasbourg, the City of the Stork, full of quaveringly old red-gabled houses, an exquisite pink Gothic Cathedral, bi-lingual Franco-Prussian inhabitants, pâté de fois

gras, market squares and glimpses of storks, nesting above the chimney-pots in the best German fairy-tale manner. All next day was spent wandering through the unspoilt villages of Alsace-Lorraine, sampling local pastry, such as Quiche Lorraine and other Alsatian delicacies – tarts with a custard base which include cheese, walnuts and onions in their ingredients.

So, over the frontier to Germany, and on through the abundant groves of the Black Forest, to a small inn full of platinum blond storm-troopers, and rather beefy madchen in uniform black velvet bodices and puffed muslin sleeves. Augsburg's medieval enchantment was too strong to be withstood. We lingered there at the expense of Munich, whose treasures we were forced to gulp with true tourist dispatch. The marionette theatres and the superb bookshops linger in my memory; also our earnest rehearsals of the fashionable Nazi salute, in front of a triple mirror.

We spent one day at Nymphenburg, though a lifetime would be too short for the paradisiacal palace I feel. Then on, through Landshut, a strange unspoiled little town, to the frontier of Czechoslovakia which was crossed rather cosily rather than officially. A pleasing absence of formality was de-rigueur here. The douane was crowded with toothpicks, last week's calendar, flowers, amiable officials and an over-fed chocolate-coloured dog. We drove on through lovely rolling open country, stretching away to the High Tatra mountains - over fine roads, past pink-washed villages, white oxen, and huge sunflowers tied up in bandanas to catch the seeds which are used for oil, and are the local equivalent of chewing gum.

Peasants appeared, literally in the pink, wearing bunchy crimson skirts, scarlet stockings, pink shawls, riding red tasselled bicycles. (I suppose this is the Czech version of the Neapolitan horse tassels, to ward off the evil eye). The language problem was solved by my having a smattering of Russian, helped by my companion's German. We regretted not brushing up on Czech, for we wished to talk and laugh with these childishly gay and beautiful peasants.

Through Pilzen, or Pilsen of lager fame, to Prague. It is a sort of Polyglopolis, part Paris, part Rome and Russia, an architectural mixture of Renaissance, Baroque, and L'école de Corbusier. A medieval German geographer in his *Cosmographia*, described Europe as a noble lady, with Spain as her head, Italy and Jutland as her arms, and Prague her heart. So, today. "Zlatà Praha," Golden Prague, is a paradise for the historically inquisitive visitor. More than any other place I have known, I would call Prague a vintage city. It is so mellow, so subtle; all of the wine merchant's adjectives apply to its warmth and richness.

Dark, sinister, "Student of Prague" – ish arcaded streets, narrow ways, full of drama, such as the famous "Street of the Necromancers:" wide, brilliantly lit boulevards, all cafes, shops and chic: lovely open-air restaurants and swimming pools on the islands of the Vltava, looking across to the castle of Hradčrany, the monasteries and palaces on the heights. The streets are full of good-looking people, with their perfect teeth and dark, slanting Tatar eyes of the South Russians. Many of the women, beautiful and soignée, have the habit of carrying bunches of carnations in their hands, which is more effective than any boutonnière.

The men, wearing long, fluffy overcoats, drive high-powered cars at high speed, and play cards with packs of such decorative beauty and traditional quaintness that, as a mere beholder, I longed to "cut-in." At the street corners, top-booted old peasant women were selling peculiar knobs of varnished mahogany which turned out to be treacly cheese.

Far on the outskirts of the city lies the little home of Betramka, in which Mozart wrote *Don Giovanni*. Now a dilapidated and pathetic museum, its broken shutters flap dismally in the wind which rustles through the tangled overgrown garden. Inside the villa, with its tarnished

gilding and faded panelling, the salon where Mozart worked is left much as it was during his visit.

That night, we went to the "Theatre of the Estates" in the centre of the city. The theatre is still in the exquisite original pink, gold and crystal frivolity of eighteenth century taste. It was here that *Don Giovanni* was first performed, but alas! On the occasion of our visit, there was a bedroom farce called, I think, *Darling*.

Prague is justly proud of its Opera House, its singers and their repertoire. It is true that we noticed a preponderance of *Bartered Brides* on the season's programmes, not too unexpected since Smetana was a local product.

We also saw beautiful productions of *L'Espoir*, and classic *Brothers Karamazov*, performed by Tairov and his company from the Karmeny Theatre, Moscow. They were playing to packed houses whilst obscure music halls proved as entertaining in central Europe as in central London. The museum-minded, amongst whom I personally rank, should not fail to visit the National Museum which stands at the top of Wenceslas Boulevard, the principal street, and named after that Good King.

Once inside the Museum, forsake all, and make for the medieval apothecary shops which have been saved from demolition; the reconstruction is a miracle of accuracy, full of retorts, and burners, stuffed crocodiles and astronomic globes, old herbals, occult books, and many reminders of demonology and witchcraft.

Go also to the fabulous jewels and gold plate at the Loreta Monastery, where, in the cloisters, you will find a chapel containing the curious figure of a bearded lady in panniered skirts - crucified. She was a saint. Her legend will be told you by the monks who relish its ghoulish mixture of cruelty, naivety and piety. See the famous little smiling Infant Jesus, "Miraculous Jesus of Prague," a tiny doll-like waxen figure, covered in pearls and laces, tassels and brocades, worldly, yet strangely beautiful. In short, go to Prague, and stay there as long as you can."

These were prophetic words. This Vogue magazine article was written in the mid-1930s, a couple of years or so before Hitler's invasion of the Sudetenland in 1938 and then the whole of Czechoslovakia. Formed in 1918, from the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Czechoslovakia encompassed the historical lands of Bohemia, Moravia and Slovakia. Apart from Czechs and Slovaks, over one fifth of the population was German with smaller Hungarian minorities and Ruthenians from the east, including Russia, adding to a diverse mix. Beneath the surface, Czechoslovakia was a powder keg.