



...and Then There are the Trains...



By Eleanor Rodgerson, MD

THERE'S WALKING, THERE'S BUSSING, there's flying, there's cruising, and then there are the trains, one of the close-to-earth means of vacationing, especially for the middle-aged and elderly.

The American Orient Express is an attempt to see the country in comfort, to be able to appreciate scenery, what nature has wrought, how it has developed. The train's cars, sleepers and restaurants, have been renovated to please the tourists, showers added, special food offered, personal service from the past century renewed.

We met our train in Albuquerque and were handed aboard by a cheerful, white-gloved porter. Our luggage was waiting and we settled in, soon to learn to move about with handholds at the ready.

The group on this trip was mixed, from all across the United States. Meals provided the introductory times to meet other adventurers and to listen to their stories of past travels. The cast of characters were the usual among groups of tourists: amusing, irritating, informative.

There were a number of cane-carriers. (I brought one, but couldn't find it. Anyway, I might have tripped on it.)

One woman wore a big pink rose on her hat and turned out to be the domineering person we quickly learned to avoid. We feared for the health of a "puffer" and "panter" who never missed a climb or a walk but survived. Dress was casual, even for dinner, space for luggage and extra clothing limited.

As we moved north, we added sweaters, the air clear and fresh. We transferred to buses to visit Cedar Breaks, Utah, at 10,000 feet altitude. We stopped at the Grand Canyon and took a side trip to Kobar Canyon, Zion, an awesome formation of bright red colors and variations in rocks, impossible to describe adequately. The Tetons reached 13,000 feet and there, at Jackson Lake Lodge, we enjoyed a stable night's sleep.

Along the way, we had visited exceptional museums that presented Indian artifacts and stories of adventurous trappers. These buildings were mostly new, commemorating what should be remembered before progress obliterated the beginnings of it all.

Traveling by this train was rougher than expected and we wobbled a little for a few days after leaving the train. There seems to be a delay in the improvement of the train's tracks. I'm told, as long as they support freight, they are satisfactory.

One engineer was heard reprimanding another because he had driven at a freight's 90 mile/hour speed instead of the 60 mile/hour for passengers. A certain stretch was extra rough, but we didn't know why. Nevertheless, the restaurant cars were smooth.

We remembered that trains in other countries are less bumpy. Japan is noted for smooth speed. Europe also, and there was little jostling in Russia, even when the cars were lifted

to change the wheels from wide to narrow gauges and back again at the entry and exit of the country.

All in all, though, the 10-day trip was enjoyable and successful and is recommended as an easy way to see the natural wonders of our country.

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