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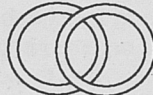
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Eastern Europe Travel Guide

Kenneth L. Nalibow

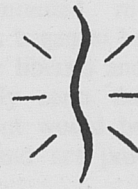
This year we spent May 10 to June 10 in Eastern Europe, the same period that I spent last year during the elections in Poland and Czechoslovakia. Since last year much has changed.

With time split between Hungary and Czechoslovakia, there was ample opportunity to observe life firsthand. Since 1990, both Hungary and Czechoslovakia have endured a 40% inflation rate. Although the selection of food and goods is increasing, inflation and increasing unemployment due to modernization have caused concern and suffering among locals. With the exception of Prague, tourists will not suffer. The dollar is so strong that it earns twice what it did last year against the Czech *Korun*. First-class, three-star Czech hotels (except in Prague where prices are triple) ran as low as \$23 for double occupancy. An excellent dinner for two with a bottle of wine was less than \$10 in the Sary Smokovec (High Tatras Mountains of Czechoslovakia). Crystal prices in Kosice at the *Bohemia* Store (no credit cards) or at a private kiosk at in the Hotel Bellvue at Sary Smokovec are shockingly cheap (but are triple for the same items in Prague). For in-country bookings, seek out the increasing number of private travel agencies such as *T-Ski* in Sary Smokovec. They won't lie to you and offer excellent service compared to the State-owned *Cedok* chain.

The gay/lesbian scene has changed since last year and is regularly reported in publications such as *The Advocate* (USSR - March, Eastern Europe - June). And although Hungarians and Czechs are still discreet or in the closet, the number of openly displayed gay/lesbian publications has increased. In Budapest and Prague, newspaper stands and magazine kiosks openly display increasing (albeit small) numbers of informational and erotic gay/lesbian magazines.

However, there is an increasing street presence of neo-Nazi and punk groups. Graffiti such as "Skinheads are not dead" have appeared even in the pristine mountain communities of Czechoslovakia. Assessing the threat wrought by these changes is impossible at this juncture. Such change is, however, disturbing. ▼

Professor Nalibow is Director, Russia/East Europe Program, UVM



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