

# Last Stop in Europe

I pulled into Istanbul by the Orient Express on Sunday, September 27, completely exhausted by the trip. I was glad that I had the promise of free, upscale accommodations and didn't have to immediately search out a hotel. As my new American friend had predicted, the couple who taught at the American University welcomed me warmly. They seemed pleased to have a resident hippy for a couple days; we all went to a party, and they introduced me to all their international set of friends.

They invited me to stay longer, but I was feeling fully recovered from my ordeal on the Orient Express and ready to move out on my own. I moved to a clean hotel, the Sultanahmet, near the Blue Mosque. For the next few days, I did some of the usual tourist activities. My hotel was close to some of the major attractions. The Topkapi Palace was dazzling in its beauty and filled with priceless treasures. I wandered through the huge covered bazaars. I spent time in the great Blue Mosque.

By far the highlight of my visit to Istanbul was Hagia Sophia, the Church of the Holy Wisdom, built between AD 532 and 537 as the greatest cathedral of the Eastern Orthodox Church. As a Christian place of worship, it was decorated with stunning frescoes and mosaics. When the city fell to the Ottoman Empire in 1453, the structure became a mosque and all the Christian imagery was either destroyed or covered over with plaster. During the era of the Turkish Republic, the mosque became a museum and the remaining Christian art was exposed to view until July 24, 2020 when it reverted to being a mosque and the artwork was hidden from view.



During this period I also began to research buses from Istanbul, Turkey to Tehran, Iran. Honestly, I was not looking forward to this leg of the journey, a four-day trip of 1,500 miles as the lone Westerner on a bus traveling across the entire width of Turkey and nearly half the width of Iran. Up until now, I was fairly confident of finding someone who spoke

either English or German. I knew that would not be the case going forward.

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# The Orient Express

**“The Orient Express really is murder.” – travel writer Paul Theroux**

I spent a week in Munich taking in most of the tourist attractions. I tried to sample as many German dishes as I could. I toyed with the idea of attempting the arduous journey by land from Munich to Istanbul but abandoned that plan in favor of taking the Orient Express. a three-day journey costing \$40 (about \$250 in 2020 dollars) traveling in a six person compartment, which could be converted for sleeping at night.

What images come to mind when you hear the words The Orient Express? For many of you, it is likely images from one of the film versions of Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express*. These are scenes of the height of opulence in travel – luxurious private compartments, plush lounge cars, and world class dining with linen, crystal, fine china, and silver place settings. The Orient Express in 1970 had fallen a long way from this pinnacle of opulence.

This is the grim reality as described in a travel guide of the time. “From the 1960s onwards the Orient Express gradually

lost its shine. In 1977, nearly 100 years after the first journey, the last direct train left Paris for Istanbul. This spartan Direct-Orient mainly carried hippies and migrants. There was no dining car anymore; passengers had to bring their own supplies for several days." "The Orient Express really is murder," complained travel writer Paul Theroux of the frugal surroundings. "The contrast to the sophisticated 1930s Simplon Orient Express could not have been greater."

This was an apt description of my experience. I was the only Westerner in a compartment with five migrant workers from Yugoslavia. My travel companions and I all spoke a little German, so we were able to navigate simple conversation. For food, they carried a variety of pungent-smelling items, whose aromas filled the compartment for our entire trip. The assertive food smells helped to mask other odors on the train, especially those emanating from the bathrooms. The men's bathroom in our carriage had about an inch of standing urine on the floor.





I enjoyed the scenery as we passed through Western Europe and on to Eastern Europe. The sleeping accommodations were just boards that flopped down from the walls. I was most grateful for my air mattress and sleeping bag. The most unsettling aspect of the trip was passing through nations still under the yoke of oppressive Communist regimes. The Yugoslavia border crossing was not bad since it was daylight. It was unnerving, however, when we woke in the middle of the night with the train stopped and Bulgarian police going compartment by compartment for passport checks. The Bulgarian regime at the time was brutal and slavishly loyal to the Soviet Union.



*Visas*



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I met a friendly African American on the train who had formerly served with the Peace Corps in Turkey. He was going to be staying with friends who taught at the American University in Istanbul. He invited me to join him, certain that they would be happy to have me. More about that in my next post.

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# The Adventure Begins

“It’s a dangerous business, Frodo, going out your door. You step onto the road, and if you don’t keep your feet, there’s no knowing where you might be swept off to.”

– J.R.R. Tolkien, [The Lord of the Rings](#)



The day had finally arrived! On September 15, I boarded an Icelandic Airlines DC-8 for the flight to Luxembourg by way of



Reykjavik, Iceland. Up to this point in my life, my only experience of international travel was to Canada. And yet, as a brash 25-year-old, I recall that my predominant feeling was exhilaration with hardly any tinge of trepidation. I was taking off on the greatest adventure yet of my young life.



I took a bus from Luxembourg to Frankfurt, Germany. I took in the sights in Frankfurt and then hitchhiked to Munich on the following day. I got as far as Nuremberg the first day. I met

up with a couple from Australia who were headed to Munich. We ended up in a nice campground on the Dachauerstrasse, the street that leads to the Dachau concentration camp. My high school German came back to me fairly quickly.

I've got a funny story to tell concerning this Australian couple. We arrived in Munich when Oktoberfest was in full swing, I rode to the venue with my new Australian friends. The Oktoberfest venue is huge; each of the major breweries has a massive pavilion, each with its own oompa band. We sat at a table with some Bavarian men who were very rude to us. John, the husband of the Australian couple felt compelled to match the Bavarians beer-for-beer. After many liters of beer, he excused himself to go to the bathroom.

His wife and I waited 5, 10, 15 minutes for him to return to the pavilion. When he didn't return, I went combing through large event grounds. I could find no trace of John. I was concerned, knowing that he spoke no German. When more time went by and John still didn't return, his wife decided to take their car and return to the camp ground. A taxi pulled in about 3am, and John stumbled into his tent. My curiosity was killing me.

I heard his story when he woke somewhat sober the following morning. He had passed out cold somewhere on the Oktoberfest grounds. Coming to, he found a taxi and tried to tell the taxi driver the address of the campground. All he could get out was "Dachau." So, in the wee hours of the morning, the driver took him to the entrance of the Dachau concentration camp memorial! Following his shock, he finally was able to get across to the driver that he wanted to go to a camping place.



I spent a couple more days in Munich. A few days later I was planning to board the Orient Express for Istanbul.

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## Last Minute Tasks

In the second week of September 1970, I boarded a Greyhound bus for New York City. I had a few last minute tasks before boarding my Icelandic Airlines flight. I knew that I would be crossing a number of international borders traveling from Luxembourg to India. If I hoped for a relatively smooth journey, I would need as many visas as I could obtain before leaving the US. So I dutifully made the rounds of the various consulates in NYC.

For my efforts, I ended up with tourist visas for Yugoslavia (for some reason I didn't need a visa for travel through Bulgaria), Iran, Afghanistan, India, and Nepal. I don't think that Turkey required a visa for US citizens in 1970. I was surprised by how easy the process was at most embassies, although I remember the staff of the Afghan consulate seeming a bit scattered. I always wondered if they had received something other than documents in their diplomatic pouches from Afghanistan. Afghanistan was notable at that time for its high quality hashish.

All that was left for me to do was to hop on the "Hippie Express" and begin my Indian Odyssey.



Visas

ENTERED PAKISTAN  
 Via Torkham Kyber  
 S. No. 3815  
 Dated 27-X-76.

LEFT PAKISTAN  
 Via Ganda Singh Wala  
 Date 28-9-76

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Visas



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 OF YUGOSLAVIA  
 485 MADISON AVENUE  
 NEW YORK, N.Y. 10022  
 (212) 638-2300

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 VIZA za ulazak - neograničeni  
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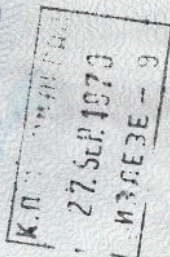
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لیست در کارهای ویزا



تذکره گاه در این مقام ۱۵۰ دلار بزرگ ایران بپردازد  
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MULTIPLE ENTRY VISA روادید کثیر المصافره

میر کسولگری شامشاهی  
 The Consulate General of Iran New York  
 آقای Paul R. Haffin  
 جلیو  
 همراهم  
 مدت اعتبار روادید one year  
 مدت اقامت در ایران stay in Iran  
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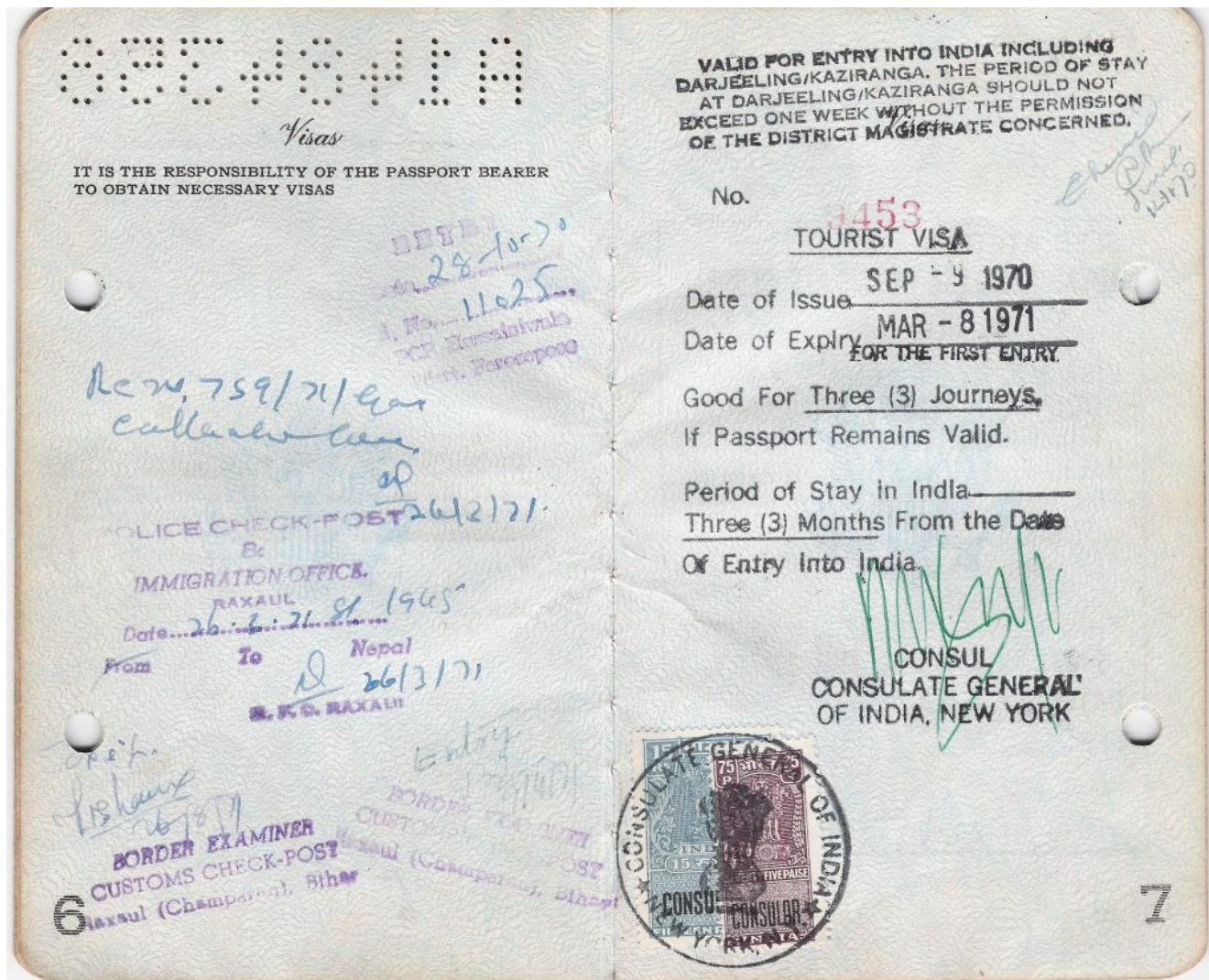
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Royal Afghan Consulate NEW YORK

THIS TOURIST VISA IS GOOD  
FOR A SINGLE JOURNEY TO  
AFGHANISTAN WITHIN (6)  
MONTHS FROM (SEP 8 1971)







## Next Steps

Throughout the summer months I planned (without the aid of the Internet) how I might make it from NY to India. I had already concluded that I could not afford to fly any farther than Europe on the cheapest airline available, which, at the time, was Icelandic Airlines (referred to by many as the "Hippie Express"). That meant that I needed to plan how to travel overland from Luxembourg to India. Beyond that, my plans were fairly nebulous. I would have to make decisions on the fly.

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Many of the hippies who were making the same journey made a virtue of shedding as many vestiges of affluent Western culture as possible when setting out for their Indian odyssey. Not this guy. I was going to take enough of Western culture with me to be comfortable while searching for enlightenment. I bought a huge red backpack from REI. I had a sleeping bag, air mattress, 3-legged folding leather stool, portable stove, cook kit, carved walking stick, and other items to pave my way to Nirvana.

Here's a picture of me with my entire kit on the early morning in early September 1970 when I headed off for New York and the



start of my journey. That's my mom with her game face on.

