

the coast to Alaska. The ferry terminal at Prince Rupert is a busy cross-road of the west coast. Here you see backpackers, tourists, canoeists, fishermen, and campers all in search of that fresh salt air environment.

Useful items for the Charlottes are tarps,

rain gear, Gortex hiking boots, propane or back packer stove, insect repellent, binoculars, and latest edition of *Guide to the Queen Charlotte Islands*, available in ferry gift shop.

## Cops and Robbers on East Europe's borders

Ray Bell, Yorks

The three newly independent states of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia plus the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad province are only receiving a trickle of tourists at the moment. The area presents some interesting challenges and also dangers to the independent traveller.

Arriving in the Polish port city of Gdansk, my first task was to arrange a Russian visa for the Kaliningrad enclave, cut off from Russia proper by Poland and Lithuania.

I phoned the Russian consulate and was told I could get a visa for US\$30 or DEM55, but that I would have to get a voucher from the tourist office. As I only intended to go for a day trip and I was not overnighing in Kaliningrad, I could not understand why I needed a voucher — a voucher for what?

Anyhow, if the Consul needs a voucher then a voucher he must have. For 10DEM a tour operator gave me a voucher on which he simply wrote the same date twice, for departure and return, and 'for travel by train'. The man told me that this was the first time he had made out a voucher without including some kind of service and he was not sure if it would work. It did. I got my visa.

### Transport to Kaliningrad

There are several ways to go from Poland to Kaliningrad

The quickest and easiest way is to take the two hour hydrofoil trip from Elblag (100km from Gdansk). In May the direct three hour hydrofoil trip from Gdansk to Kaliningrad was not operating for 'technical' reasons.

To travel in style, join the misty-eyed elderly German tourists in Berlin on the Berlin Konigsberg express. This is a new special train service offering a package including sleeper, dinner and breakfast.

A travel operator estimated that 95% of foreign visitors to Kaliningrad are 'nostalgia tourists'. These are elderly Germans who remember the area as East Prussia with Konigsberg as its capital. This probably explains why the Russian tourism promoters have recently started using the old German place names in their travel literature. Politically, this might seem a little unwise.

I didn't meet any tourists, other than Germans, on my trip.

Notice the odd-shaped border line between Poland and the Kaliningrad enclave. It is slightly bent. Poles will tell you that this is because at the 1943 Yalta conference when the Big Three were planning the new political borders in Europe Josef Stalin stabbed his pencil (was he drunk?) across the map of East Prussia dividing this territory roughly half and half between Poland and the Soviet Union.

Fortunately for the Poles, they got the beautiful Mazurian Lake District in their half.

### Frombork

I decided to travel by train from Gdansk to Kaliningrad partly because I wanted to make a stopover at the workplace of the famous Polish astronomer, Copernicus, in the pleasant little town of Frombork (Frauenberg) and visit the interesting Copernicus Museum in the castle. Budget travellers can stay at the friendly Copernicus Youth Hostel (although you may be pestered by Polish schoolkids and their teachers for an English lesson).

Frombork is a nice place to rest up for a couple of days to get rid of any travel fatigue.

Notice the 'Welcome to Frombork' road sign. In the centre there is a large red ball — the sun, with a small blue ball — the earth — revolving around it. This is a very fitting tribute to Frombork to its favourite citizen. Incidentally, I knew that the Pope at that time was very cross when he heard about Copernicus' theory and I wondered when the Vatican officially accepted the theory.

### Mamonovo

Immigration and customs at the Polish border town of Braniewo is quick and easy. After about an hour the train pulls up at the Russian border point. Here the fun starts.

Two double rows of high metal fences with two strips of lightly furrowed soil for footprint observation stretch into the distance on either side of the track. Five Russian soldiers pushed the heavy border barrier to one side and the train pulled into the Russian immigration and customs post of Mamonovo.

I wondered if this isolated border post, the most westerly in the Russian Federation, had

got the news from Moscow about *glasnost* and *perestroika*, and that the Cold War was over. Or could it be that these border officials believed that they were just having a bad dream and that they would soon awaken to the joyful sound of their favourite song, *Back in the USSR*, by the Beatles.

It seemed that absolutely nothing had changed from the old days.

Experienced travellers to the former USSR will be happy to learn that the 'Classical' Currency Declaration form is still being used in the Russian Federation. On this form you write in the tiny space provided all your foreign currency, travellers cheques, gold and precious stones, USSR state bonds and other treasure.

I carefully wrote down the exact amount of foreign currency and travellers cheques I was carrying, so there would be no mistake, and handed the form to a customs officer for the rubber stamp. I knew from trips to the former USSR that Soviet border officials are completely unpredictable.

The officer looked at my declaration form, licked his lips and showed the paper to another officer, who raised an eyebrow. I was told in broken English that I had too much money for this form. Only US\$50 on this form (absolute nonsense). I protested and said that I had been several times to Russia and had always used this form. The officers told me to leave the train and go with them. I feared that I was going to be stripped of everything except 50 dollars.

I was taken to a dingy office where one of the officers pulled his deadly weapon from out of a drawer. It was a book of pink duplicated forms. I put my travellers cheques on the desk and watched them like a hawk.

The officer first took my AMEX DEM cheques and carefully wrote in full the serial numbers of the first two cheques. I