

Hope waves to imaginary welcome party as he steps from Russian jet (right) at Moscow airport. Deadpan (below), he tries on fur hat at GUM department store.



MOSCOW AND ME

By BOB HOPE

I WON'T KEEP YOU in suspense. We had a very successful trip to Russia. We made it back.

We found only two kinds of hotels in Russia. The prerevolutionary type like the National, and the new hotels, which look exactly like the National. We were assigned to the Ukraine Hotel, which was an exception to the rule. We were amazed at how modern it was. The Ukraine was completed in 1957 and looked like a Japanese copy of the Waldorf-Astoria.

The first five floors are lobby, which may very well have been elegantly furnished. I'll never know. The entire time we were there, most of the furniture was covered by sheets. The people's upholstery is not to be abused. Not even by the people.

When it comes to crowding, the Moscow elevators begin where the New York subways leave off. The elevators belong to the people, and they all try to use the same one at the same time. In the 30-odd trips I made up and down, I don't think my feet ever did touch the floor. It was my first intimate contact with the Russian people. And this much I learned: garlic outsells Arpege.

In trying to describe my suite, I find it difficult to be fair. To a visiting fireman from Pinak, it might seem rather luxurious, but the average American would expect something more from a big new hotel in the capital city. He'd expect and

get more from a motel on Highway 66.

My room was one of the more lavish; it had a piano, singularly out of tune. It also had a 20-inch television set, which was largely responsible for a joke that was widely quoted.

After I finished unpacking, we played the popular Russian tourist game. "Search for the hidden microphone." The tv set with all its wires was a very suspect place, and we searched it thoroughly without finding anything.

Back in the States, a reporter asked if they had television in Russia, and without thinking, I replied, "Yes. But it watches you."

That brings us to a question that I've been asked many, many times. Were we spied on? Were our rooms bugged? Were we tailed?

Truthfully, I don't know. After all the stories you're told and have heard, you expect to be.

Whenever I entered my room, I'd pound on the wall and yell, "Testing! Testing! One! Two! Three! Am I coming in loud and clear?" And whenever we were discussing anything that might in any way be misinterpreted, one of us would look up at the ventilator and holler, "Only kidding, Kru!"

On leaving the room, I'd sign off by facing

the wall and shout, "That concludes our broadcast for this afternoon. We now present an interlude of organ music. Be sure and catch the late, late show, same time, same room." Actually we were half-joking when we did this, but it was a joke only because there was a possibility that the Big Bear was listening.

We were told that the entire 13th floor of the hotel was loaded with tape-recording and monitoring equipment. We had no way of knowing whether this was true or not. Stairway doors were locked, and the elevators had no button for the 13th floor, which is pretty suspicious. On the other hand, neither does the Beverly Hilton, which leads to an obvious conclusion: either the Russians are superstitious, or Conrad Hilton was a mighty interesting record collection.

WE KNEW that all the interpreters were official representatives of the government and presumably high in favor. Naturally, we expected some hard-core zealot who would drown us in a sea of propaganda. Not Larissa. She was a shy, quiet girl, proud of her country and her job.

I don't know whether it was government policy or Larissa's natural reticence, but she showed absolutely no curiosity about the United States. She did ask where we were from, and when we told her California, she said, "I understand the weather is lovely there." Which proves that the

Russians aren't the only ones who've been successful with brainwashing.

No wonder Russia does so well in the Winter Olympics. I've never seen so much snow. The whole country looks like it was painted by Grandma Moses. Of course, I'm not exactly new to the cold—I've been to Alaska, Greenland, Iceland, and several Academy Award presentations.

OUR FIRST STOP was Red Square, the heart of Moscow—if Moscow has one. At the south end of the square is St. Basil's Cathedral with its nine onion-shaped domes, Russia's answer to Disneyland.

To the west, near the Kremlin wall, is one of the most modern-looking buildings in Moscow. When I was there, it was known as Lenin's and Stalin's tomb. That gives you an idea of the housing problem—you even had to share a tomb.

The mausoleum was the biggest show in Russia. The day was bitter cold. A deep breath was like inhaling an ice pick. And yet there was a line of people eight deep and a half-mile long waiting to get into the tomb. And we were told that it was this way every day.

There was a cordon of police marking off a

large area around the tomb. We wanted to move in close and get shots of the people lined up. Not speaking any Russian, we couldn't ask for permission, so we decided to just walk through the line of police with our camera and see what happened. Nothing did. They paid no attention to us. When a few curious Russian civilians tried to follow us through, however, the police stopped them. It was almost as though word had been sent down from above that we were not to be bothered.

We went on a quick tour of the Kremlin, an area that covers some 64 acres. If it had been a golf course, we might all be sleeping better these nights.

As part of the propaganda, all of the treasures of the royal families are now on view for the public. I saw one crown with more than 3,900 large diamonds in it. It would have made a wonderful beany for Zsa Zsa.

Jack Benny asked me to bring back a fur hat with a part in it. So I crossed Red Square to visit the GUM department store. It was built under the Czar in 1893. I think the chocolate bar I bought was part of the original stock. Incidentally, the price for one bar of candy was \$1.60.

I tried to buy one of those fur hats like I'd seen the men wearing. Then I found out those aren't hats. That's the way they cut their hair.

Don't let anyone tell you that the Russians

aren't passionate. At the perfume counter, they displayed such sexy-sounding scents as "Kremlin" and "Our Moscow." I don't know how they missed "Moonlight on the Collective Farm," "Volga Boatman," and "Essence of Tractor."

And if you want to bring a romantic tear to your girl's eye, send her a box of candy. There's a picture of a hydroelectric plant on the cover.

The day we were there, GUM was having a big fashion show. It was not unlike our own American fashion shows. The clothes in the show were the height of fashion; however, you seldom saw a woman on the street wearing anything even approaching this. The women bricklayers and the gals shoveling snow in the streets lean more toward Ma Kettle than Loretta Young.

This was a Sunday, the one big shopping day in Moscow. The stores and streets were jammed with lookers and a few feelers. The high prices stopped the actual buyers.

Everywhere we went we were immediately recognized as foreigners. I was stopped only once by a bright-eyed 11-year-old boy who said, "Hey, American, you got any postal cards of New York?" I whisked the urchin into a side alley and traded him a stick of gum for a little pin

commemorating the 40th anniversary of the Revolution. You wear it on your lapel and it guarantees you free admission to any Congressional investigation.

No Russians appeared to recognize me. I don't know whether it's because my pictures haven't played there—or because they have.

At Sverdlovsk Square I visited the pride and joy of Moscow, one of the underground stations of the subway. These stations are magnificent. The marble walls are lined with beautiful murals, porcelain, and bas-relief. It's like a drive-in movie for trains. Actually, it's a wonderful idea: you can get an art education while you're having your ribs broken.

THE SUBWAY belongs to the people and they keep it spotless. A litterbug is liable to be nudged into the third rail. Two million passengers a day ride the subway, and there isn't a wad of gum in sight. How backward can you get?

When I returned to my hotel room, I found that my suitcase was open and my monologues were spread out on the bed. These were all jokes about Russia. Some I had done on radio; some on television; and some I never would do anywhere. There were more than 500 different kinds of jokes, but these will give you a general idea:

"They have a national lottery in Russia. It's called living."

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Here's what happened when this irrepressible comedian visited the

capital of Soviet Russia, a country not known for its sense of humor