

# A Trip to America

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*The article was, of course, intended for European consumption—which makes it all the more valuable to our readers as a frank appraisal of certain travel conditions in this country.*

*It contains some favorable and some unfavorable criticism. Some of the unfavorable we know to be well founded, and even that unfavorable criticism with which we may disagree is nevertheless valuable as a frank record of the impressions of a visitor from abroad.*

I have recently returned from a visit to America, by air both ways on AOA, in the course of which I had the pleasure of calling on 64 travel agents in New York, Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago, Washington, and Philadelphia. Comparisons may be odious, but they are inevitable and throughout my tour I drew them. As a result there are lessons to be applied in my own business and some which may be of value to others.

To start with some generalities. I have many American friends (even relatives) and I admire America. If this article finds its way into an American travel bureau (and I found *Travel Topics* in many offices), I crave forgiveness for saying that American efficiency is greatly overrated.

All in all, forgetting the material things, service efficiency in England compares very favourably with America, and the politeness of our policemen, bus drivers, conductors, taxi drivers, waiters and waitresses, liftmen, porters, and hotel personnel is of a vastly higher standard. I said comparisons were odious! Where we may fail to give in material service we more than make up for it in the greater gift of civility. What I mean by material service is the cellophane wrapping around one's tooth glass and lavatory seat to show they have been sterilised; the splendid array of towels and neatly wrapped packets of soap; the plug for one's electric razor in every bathroom, railway train and aircraft; the laundry bag containing one's inevitable travel-stained clothing which one puts through the "servidoor" before 9 a. m. and which is returned beautifully laundered and wrapped by midday; the heated trolley on which one's breakfast is beautifully served in one's bedroom; the radio (and what diabolical programmes) in almost every bedroom; the drug stores (greatest of all American institutions—a purely personal view), at which throughout the 24 hours one can buy any earthly need; the cinemas which close long after the crack of dawn—and so on ad infinitum. If these things are of such vital importance to our visitors, and alike to ourselves, are there any of them beyond our power to put in—with the possible exception of the drug store?

Two final points before leaving hotels. The chambermaid having "done" the room in the morning does not return again to the room until next day. In every hotel I turned down my own bed—no great hardship. Secondly, so far as I could test, I could get a proper meal almost any hour, day or night. At a big London hotel, clients of mine were recently unable to get more than a cup of tea at 7:30 a. m. before making an early start for Stratford—and on returning at 9 p. m. were unable to get a proper meal. This sort of thing can easily and indeed must be rectified. Many of our visitors this summer will wish to rise early and return late and will rightly expect a reasonable meal at a reasonable hour.

Railway stations and railway trains are incomparably finer than ours and the service on both is excellent. I like the idea of porters (redcaps), giving a ticket covering limited insurance for one's luggage during the period of transit from the station entrance to one's carriage (called cars). You pay 15 cents per piece of luggage, plus a tip. The comfort and luxury on the trains in the diners, lounge compartments, and sleepers is of a very high standard indeed, but doubtless before long we shall have as good. Even now our Golden Arrow service takes a lot of beating.

Whilst on the question of transport let it be said that America has nothing to compete in efficiency or comfort with our London bus services or our underground. Both these services, although combined, are second to none in the world.

The skyscrapers of New York and other big cities are a superb sight—truly magnificent both outside and inside and artistically in perfect taste. But it is also a matter of taste whether one prefers the 102-story Empire State Building to St. George's Chapel at Windsor Castle. But this is a very sore point with the American. I feel strongly that his devotion to materialism is his defence against our pride in our antiquity. Personally I think that with a little more imagination we can give the Americans as good as they can give us, and in many aspects—especially personal service and quality—better. Provided we give them rooms of furnace-like temperature in winter and a constant supply of iced drinking water the year round, we shall remain good friends and take many dollars.

I omitted to mention that my entry into America through La Guardia Airport made a great impression on me. With 36 other passengers I was conducted from the aircraft through a long corridor into an overheated, dilapidated, and badly furnished room where I waited 20 minutes. This at the end of a 25-hour journey, 9 hours of which were spent in the no less overheated reception hall at Gander. Here I went through certain paper formalities and then I waited while each American "citizen," some of whom could not speak a word of English or American, were called ahead of any British passengers. Either I was very tired and hot or the American Customs reception at La Guardia was not very pleasant. All I do know is that reception at Heathrow on my return to England was a far more pleasant experience both for myself and my fellow passengers. We were received efficiently and passed through quickly in the order in which our names stood on the passenger list—which was not by nationality.