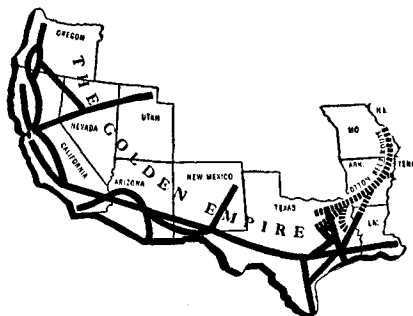


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BOOKED FOR TRAVEL

Tourist in Manhattan

WITH only 180 shopping days left before summer arrives, we find ourselves in receipt of a letter from Royal W. Ryan, executive vice president of the New York Convention and Visitors Bureau who deposes and says, "What is it about New York City that attracts more vacation visitors than any other resort, city, or country in the world? There is no one answer, of course," continues Mr. Ryan, "for New York means different things to different people."

Well, we were about to tell Mr. Ryan, at the end of last summer, just what New York meant to us. We were about to say that now that summer was over we were hoping we would stop being told that "New York Is a Summer Festival," a very catchy slogan fetched up by Mr. Ryan's very astute bureau. But truth to tell New York means far different things to us than it does to the New York Convention and Visitors Bureau. We think New York is a summer shambles. We think it is overpriced, overcrowded, and under-disciplined, and we can't help but wonder if the out-of-towners who coursed its boulevards last summer returned to their homes happy and contented or irate and outraged.

About 85 per cent of all domestic vacations in America are taken in the family car. It puzzles me just what a visitor who comes to New York in his automobile does with the car while he's here. New Yorkers who own automobiles and pay anywhere from \$35 to \$70 a month for garaging it have long known that it is economic suicide, not to mention utterly nerve-shattering, to venture into midtown behind the wheel. In the first place, a day's parking at a midtown garage of moderate price will run at least \$2.50. But that is only until the early evening hours. Anybody parking in the Times Square area long enough to have dinner on a Saturday night will be required to pay anywhere from \$2 to \$2.50 to park his car while he eats. To view a special Sunday performance at a legitimate Broadway theatre the other night this tourist was parted from \$1.75 for the privilege of leaving his vehicle in an open lot from half-past eight until eleven-ten. New York parking-lot prices are at least triple the cost of any city ever visited by this department.

Even in the matter of parking me-

ters New York manages to outdo everyone else. While meters in other municipalities, even neighboring ones, ask for pennies and nickels, New York extracts a dime an hour, sometimes a dime for half an hour. But even trying to get through a street, much less find a place at the curb, is running an obstacle course that would shatter the nerves of a paratrooper. Although there is a statute of recent vintage on the books that makes double parking a \$15 fine, the Police Department seems loathe to enforce it, and we for one would like to hear why. Inching our way through 58th Street the other Saturday night we counted fourteen cars double parked between Sixth and Fifth Avenues, leaving one narrow lane for any tourist trying to travel eastward. If a cab or car stopped to discharge a passenger the entire line came to a halt and gradually backed traffic across Sixth Avenue.

THE New York notion that cars left in the hands of a doorman can be double-parked in the street is one local custom that doesn't attract us at all. We think it's an outright racket. Once, when we lived on 58th Street, we used to watch with some amazement, come Saturday evening, when the doorman of a Latin night club called the Chateau Madrid staked out his claim to much of the public street using signs borrowed from the mortuary next door which read "Funeral Today—No Parking." When the first customer came by automobile the doorman parked it so that it would occupy two spaces, thus keeping the curb space for the paying customers who would soon arrive.

There is another notion hereabouts which Mr. Ryan in his campaign to attract visitors to New York might like to bring to somebody's attention. And that is the peculiar idea that a large black Cadillac double-parked in front of a department store, or the Parke Bernet art galleries on Madison Avenue during a Saturday auction, or in front of such restaurants as The Colony, Quo Vadis, The Stork Club, and Twenty-One does not constitute the same obstruction to the flow of traffic as an old unattended jalopy.

Of course, there are a multitude of signs that prohibit parking in New York. They allocate unobstructed, car-free curb space to church and temple entrances, to schools (other-

wise children might dart out from behind parked cars), to bus stops (almost half a block in most cases). There are signs that say one may not park on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from eleven until two, and others across the street which prohibit it on alternate days (for street cleaning). Some places are designated "tow-away zones" and some are hack stands, and other insist that there is to be "No Standing" during business hours. The city has spent enough on signs to put up another low-cost housing development, and yet it adds to the markers every day. A new one has appeared, "No Parking—Construction." The other day on 51st Street, under the shadow of such signs, and all around the local police station, cars were parked oblivious of the law. Were they owned by citizens who are beyond it?

All this is not to say that the police are not doing their duty. Why, only a few months ago the constabulary was making a concerted drive against all-night parkers in Stuyvesant Town, a development a good twenty-five blocks away from the congested midtown area. Just to see they weren't playing favorites, the law awarded four tickets, returnable at \$15 each, to a paraplegic who parked his car near his home in Stuyvesant Town. The tickets were tied to the windshield wiper just under the official dispensation which allegedly gives this unfortunate person the right to park anywhere.

The truth of it all seems to be that parking tickets, which come in two colors in New York (beige: \$5 and green: \$15) are not being used for their rightful intention: traffic enforcement. They are a system of taxation and they are a taxation on a body of citizens who are already paying gas taxes, sales taxes on gas, sales taxes on cars and spare parts, auto use taxes, and bridge, tunnel, and highway tolls. The fact that these taxes are themselves frequently appropriated to meet other civic and state liabilities may, to car owners, prove the source of a separate outrage. The automobilist on his way to spend a happy time in New York had better know that he runs the risk of coming a cropper in a system that uses technicalities in the parking laws as a means of taxation, and at the same time ties traffic in knots by allowing the most telling violations to go unpunished. And the state of near-anarchy that exists on the streets drives tourist and resident alike to the pirates of the parking lots who must have a license but are not required to possess a conscience.

Of course, not every tourist who comes to New York in Summer looking for a Festival arrives by car. Some



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come by plane. Lately, the Port of New York Authority with great fanfare has thrown open its new arrivals building at Idlewild International Airport, and at last visitors from abroad will not derive their initial impression of the United States from the shanties with which the largest city in the world has been receiving its air travelers since the air age swamped it shortly after the end of the war. Of course, the departure buildings will still be the same for some time to come.

Thus, in a way, we are making an effort at more comfortable airport arrivals for large airplanes and for overseas aircraft. Asked why we are so late in this venture, far behind such lesser cities as San Juan, Mexico City, Zurich, Pittsburgh, San Francisco, and St. Louis, to mention merely a few that spring immediately to mind, a Port of New York Authority spokesman was saying the other day that every time the planners got a set of plans drawn the air age, growing so fast, had rendered them obsolete. Why other cities did not suffer from myopic foresight wasn't explained.

Of course, this airport advancement in New York hardly helps the tourist coming here from the rest of the United States. Most domestic travelers land at La Guardia Airport, which wasn't exactly adequate ten years ago. A couple of months ago the civic dreamers got together and announced—it occurred to us that the announcement was a little tardy—that they were about to overhaul La Guardia. The whole thing will be in grand shape, we have been assured, in five years' time.

Only the railroads who are habitually accused of a marked lack of imagination were visionary enough to provide, years ago, facilities which are still adequate today. Visitors arriving by train may flinch at our porter costs—twenty-five cents a bag might run up a dandy bill for a man with a family in tow—but in New York that's the way the nickel trickles.

In writing to us Mr. Ryan says he is working on plans for the 1958 Summer Festival in New York. Says he, "While millions of people have discovered the pleasures of vacationing in New York City, many millions more have never had . . . the thrill of being in a city where something new is happening every day." We commend to the New York Convention and Visitors Bureau last year's tourist figures for the city of Paris which has lately gained a reputation for soaking and insulting the tourist. For 1958 they showed a loss of over 20 per cent. —HORACE SUTTON.

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TV AND RADIO

"Don't Forget This Tomorrow"

THE final item on the two-hour show with which General Motors celebrated its fiftieth anniversary was the touching scene from "Our Town" in which the young woman, untimely dead, returns to her birthday party of years ago and can be seen by her parents only as she was. As she leaves them she wonders whether people "ever realize life while they live it, every minute." The camera left the scene and picked up Kirk Douglas, the M.C., who seemed to be so held by what we had been seeing that he had to force himself to turn away. Then he said, "Don't forget this tomorrow," and the program was over. Credits and a brief commercial were still to come, but with that one simple sentence, without a trace of the grandiose, asking us to remember a theme and not a sponsor, an extraordinarily fine program came to an impressive end.

One of the great pleasures in saluting this achievement is that in doing so I am with everyone else, with every critic and, I trust, with the public. (I haven't seen the ratings yet, but if the audiences didn't flock to and stay with this program something drastic will have to be done—to the public.) Without exception the reviews have been enthusiastic, and without exception they have centered on the right element: Miss Helen Deutsch, the writer.

There is, of course, no merit in keeping one's hands off a bad script, although usually the tampering results in several kinds of badness instead of one. In this case, we had a central idea agreed upon *before* production started, before staff and stars were engaged, and the production scheme was to embody and show forth the idea, getting those people to work who would do this, and not to alter the concept to suit their capacities. This is the major point: a clear concept was preserved, a unity of theme.

Within that unity, much latitude was given to Miss Deutsch. Called "The Pursuit of Happiness," the theme really came from the words in "Our Town" I have quoted. Miss Deutsch not only showed us moments we often fail to enjoy to the full; she showed us, wily and satirically, how the effort to get enjoyment can backfire. She had Eddie Bracken buying twenty books on enjoyment and showed him also in a slapstick version of "togetherness" trying to read

"Hiawatha" to his rebellious family. She had a romantic scene between young lovers, and a moment later played it again as it really was. She had a scene of distracted and noisy family life, and another which was really about middle-age in which Claudette Colbert was, as she always is, true to the inner meaning of her material.

The freshness of approach was marked, for me, by a long sequence of film shots called "Symphony of the Senses"—shots of flowers or of buildings or rivers or riveters (I cannot remember them exactly, but I remember the effect). Whatever our senses could be reminded of through the eye (and wonderful color film it was) came through—just a flow of pictures with a minimum of comment. The program declared itself in this segment—it was going to say something and if, at moments, the something was not going to apply a hotfoot to your nerves, it was still going to be shown. (The film was made by an old master in the genre, Willard Van Dyke.)

THE goodness of this program comes after a number of pretentious failures to make good. There have been shows with more stars and some with more talented stars, too. What are the elements which made this one so superior? It is not that the writer had control of the material. It is that the material—wherever it came from—dominated the show. And, after that, intelligence which showed itself particularly in the variations of mood, in allowing humor and sentiment, beauty and hilarity, all to have their place. The whole thing was perhaps twenty minutes too long, and my choice of the soft spots for cutting would not coincide with the judgment of the producers, I am sure. But a program that encompassed so much is entitled to its tiny aberrations. I hope that those who need to benefit by the lesson of the G.M. show will not be misled.

In a very small way (two minutes vs. G.M.'s two hours) Steve Allen recently had a refreshing bit of production on his show: a quartet sang against a backdrop of surrealist film—unreal and delectable shapes floating about them. I recognized the work of Mary Jane Bute—a pioneer in this sort of thing whose talents should be more often used. —GILBERT SELDES.

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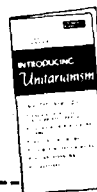
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