

A

Notes of a Tourist

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South from Panama,
Feb. 19, 1939.

Last Friday at 2 o'clock we docked at Christobal, the Atlantic end of the Panama canal, and walked about a half mile to Colon, where every tourist goes to see the shops, to buy perfumes, to bargain with great brown-eyed Hindus, and to come away with merchandise of various sorts and qualities.

In matching wits with one of these shop keepers the tourist always comes out second best, for if the price is not high enough the vendor will not sell. That the shopkeepers get a kick out of besting the tourists was shown in the case of a Panama merchant, who at the close of the day was asked how business had been. "Oh, I sold one customer \$250 worth of goods, but no fun, he paid the first price I asked." While the profit had been great, the fish had not fought hard enough to make it interesting.

It is hot in Colon, but the sidewalks are arcaded, or curtained to make trading as comfortable as possible. The merchants are interesting. They have clean cut, shapely features, but many of them are darker than most any colored person in Lawrence. Many Negro men and women are employed as salespeople, and in one store the owner, or manager, was a young Negro whose wife assisted him.

The salesmen are greatly interested in trying to get the customer to make an offer. It gives them something to work on. Cuts of from twenty-five to fifty per cent of the first price asked are not uncommon. And the merchandise often looks to be better than it really is. Nearly everyone buys something, and one woman on our boat was so happy over the padded red pajamas she had purchased that she not only wore them on deck of the steamer next morning, but also wore them into the dining room for breakfast.

We are either too old or have too little training to seek the night life that was offered in Colon, but from the decks of the Nieuw Amsterdam the city looked beautiful.

Both the American and Spanish cities are named for Christopher Columbus, the American city with its Spanish name being "Christobal," while the real Spanish city is "Colon," which means Columbus.

Everyone aboard ship was informed they would have to be on deck at 5 o'clock in the morning to see our ship enter the Canal, and it was a fair bet which was the most interesting; our tourists out in night gowns and pajamas, with bare legs and ankles and all sorts of robes, or the big ship being nosed about by two insignificant little tugs, to get it away from the pier, and afterwards to point it into the first lock at Gatun.

When we finally got under way and headed for the locks the buoys on each side seemed to outline a vast lighted highway, thru which the ship held its way toward a bright light far away. After some six or seven miles we began entering the lock as daylight was breaking. The hardest thing to overcome is an irregular wind, and a ship is in more danger of damage while passing thru a series of locks, or at pier, than while sailing across the ocean. The day before several hausers of big new rope had been snapped as we tried to tie up at Colon.

The ride thru the canal was uneventful. Looking keenly for alligators, we espied only two small ones, which were swimming for dear life towards the bank. We also saw an iguana, a large lizard, which is eaten by the natives.

Upon arriving in port in Balboa we were met by our good friend Mrs. Delmore Whitver, who took us for an interesting ride over the causeway to one of the fortified islands. On our return we picked up Mr. Whitver, who took the wheel, and for the rest of the day and half the night we were entertained by our hospitable hosts.

The Whitvers have been at Balboa for about eighteen years, where Mr. Whitver is an expert accountant at the state house. They live in a delightful home with streets trees, vines and flowers in front, with the back yard reaching to the very edge of Ancon bay. To us the home was of much interest. The lower part, or what in ordinary homes in the States would be the first floor, is occupied by garage servants quarters and a large patio, or porch. A concrete stairway leads to adequate living rooms above which are furnished in excellent taste. As the temperature ranges from about sixty at the coldest, to the lower nineties, when it is hot there are no provisions for heating, and the arrangement is largely that of a fine summer home. Our hosts served us a dinner, simple but wonderfully good, with the best coffee we have had on our trip.

Our ride took us half way across the isthmus, thru the jungle, past native towns, beside wayside vendors of bananas or other products and ended at the artificial lake which guards the canal against the possible lack of water to operate the docks. This lake, fed by the Chagres river, also supplies the water for Balboa. We twice crossed LaCrucis Trail, the bloody road over which Morgan, the pirate

carried his booty, making his captives build the road as he went.

The Indians seem indolent, but when you come to analyze the situation, why should they work? It takes little to supply their wants, there is practically no market for their surplus, and no place in which to store it for a time of need. Moisture, ants, other insects and rodents, make storing supplies an impossibility under primitive conditions. Perhaps the Indians are wise, but their wisdom has not led to their advancement, and they are now as they were centuries ago.

Modern buildings in Balboa and Panama are built on solid stone or concrete foundations, but the majority of houses, on the military reservations, in the country and in the city, are built upon concrete piers when possible, and upon wooden piers covered with asphalt or tar, to guard against termites. In driving thru parks or jungle one sees many ant nests, as large as a Kaw Valley watermelon, clinging to the branches of trees.

We went thru the orchid garden begun years ago by an individual and then taken over by the Missouri Botanical Gardens which has recently relinquished control, and hereafter the garden with its thousands of varieties of orchids will be operated by the Canal Zone officials. We saw beautiful orchids in New York, but none to compare with some of the lovely blossoms in this great garden.

We spent a couple of hours in the congested shopping district of Panama where we saw people from the very ends of the earth. It was Saturday night and a Fiesta was to begin the next day, so everyone was out. A pretty costume for the carnival could be bought for \$50 but in addition there should be jewelry and other things, so it is said that the poor save for months in order to be able to buy, and then are broke for a month or two afterwards.

We shouldered our way thru the crowds, and others did the same, but everyone was good natured. We saw all kinds of people from tiny East Indian men and women, scarcely more than four feet tall, showing the destructive influence of child marriage upon the race, to Chinese, Japs, Indians, Spaniards, people from the States and so on thru a long, long list.

We dallied here as long as we could and then over a wide, well-paved road, we went out to Old Panama, the ghost of the city, of twenty or thirty thousand people, sacked by Morgan, who gained knighthood from England for this nefarious work. It is claimed that the Spanish themselves burned the city to prevent Morgan from securing greater loot.

At a turn in the road we saw something that perhaps we shall never see again—the dancing of Pollera—by natives. To music from the tom toms and the clapping of hands, a negro man and a negress would enter the circle made by admiring friends and would dance until crowded aside, by another couple. The first woman we saw dancing looked to be middle aged, and later one of the men appeared to be equally old, but they danced smoothly, gracefully, in a peculiar gliding manner, in which their heads always appeared to move neither up nor down. One of the girls had a wealth of hair hanging over her shoulders. They paid no attention to onlookers, took up no collections, and danced for sheer enjoyment.

Time was passing and the Nieuw Amsterdam sailed at midnight. Hurrying to the pier we had but time to show our friends thru the magnificent new Dutch ship which is making its first cruise around South America. We were all tired, but we were sorry to say good bye. The day had certainly been a high spot in our tour. W.C.S.