

## Ukraine – Fall 2002

This year's International Symposium on Multiparticle Dynamics (ISMD) was in Alushta, Crimea, Ukraine—a good reason to visit a part of the world I had not yet been to. It was to be my first time in a country that was part of the U.S.S.R.

**Friday, Sept. 6.** I awoke with a start at 5 a.m. with the realization that I had left the phone number of the conference organizers in the lab. To be safe I got up earlier than planned and went to the lab. to get it. Of course, it wasn't needed.

The train to Schiphol was on time, not something you can count on these days, and the flight to Kiev, on Ukraine International code-shared with KLM, also.

It took a half hour or so to get through immigration, which was apparently quite lucky, although at the time I didn't think so. The hall was quite empty when we arrived, and there were only two people ahead of me in line. From others at the conference I heard of waits as long as two hours. The processing of each person was so slow not because of anything relevant, but simply because the immigration officers spent most of their time talking to each other instead of doing their job.

I had been worried about the connection with the internal flight I was to catch to Sebastopol, capital of the Crimea. It left from terminal A, while we arrived at terminal B, and I had no idea how far away terminal A would be. After changing a bit of money, and saying no to the many taxi drivers all wanting to take me into Kiev, I asked someone where Terminal A was. He did not speak English but understood, I think, what I meant and motioned that I should go outside and to the right.

Borispol, the newer, further from Kiev and presumably bigger of Kiev's two airports, is a pretty small airport and nicely old-fashioned. Immediately outside is a park and a parking lot. There are benches on which you can sit and several small cafes and snack bars. Walking between them, I soon came to Terminal A, clearly the old terminal. Inside there was little to see. There were some signs and monitors, but everything seemed to be only in Russian or Ukrainian. Anyway, I was too early—check-in was not until 90 minutes before the flight. So I decided to go back and sit on one of the park benches to wait. Soon I saw someone I knew from CERN, Edward Sarkysian, just sitting down on another bench some distance from me. So I went over to him. His wife was with him, and they were waiting for the same plane as I. Edward is an Israeli of Russian origin, so he could read the signs and ask questions. I told him where Terminal A was, and we went to one of the cafes to have something to drink and wait until it was time to check in.

We were about the first to check in, which wasn't too wise, since after check-in you were confined to a particular waiting room. But soon a couple of other physicists we knew, one from Cracow and one from Budapest, showed up. So we could sort of have a pre-conference while waiting. In all there were seven of us on this flight.

The flight was on time and uneventful. With the snack there was a quite drinkable Ukrainian red wine. We were met at the airport in Sebastopol by people from the conference. They took us, except for Edward and his wife—they were going to visit Edward's brother, who lives in Sebastopol, and would come to the conference the next day—to Alushta. Unfortunately it was soon dark. So we could not see much along the way. The conference was being organized by the university in Kiev and by Dubna, which is an international lab. set up by the U.S.S.R. as the Soviet answer to CERN.

The conference took place at Pension Dubna in Alushta. This is the resort and rest home (sanatorium) for employees of the Dubna lab., typical of the Soviet days.

Not much has been done to the hotel buildings in the last 10 or 15 years. The rooms and furnishings were well-worn, but OK for a week. Since we arrived after the restaurant closed, they had stocked the refrigerator in our rooms with a plate with raw vegetables, bread, some slices of sausage and a tea bag. But it was not clear where to get hot water. I prowled around the floor I was on and could not find any. Later I found out that there was hot water for tea at one place in the entire building: at the entrance on the ground floor, and this a 9-story building with maybe 40 rooms per floor. At first I thought it a pleasant surprize to have a refrigerator, but I soon discovered that it made a lot of noise. I unplugged it when I went to bed.

**Saturday, Sept. 7.** We had been given slips of paper when we checked in and told to present them at the restaurant in the morning. Upon doing so we were assigned seats in the dining hall where we were supposed to sit at every meal. This was a system doomed to failure and lasted only 1 day, as people just sat where they wanted to continue conversations with those they were already talking to.

Today was a free day, since I had arrived a day early, which was necessary in order to make the connection in Kiev. It was nice weather, temperature in the mid-20's (°C). In the morning I just looked around the site. There are two hotel buildings, one 9 stories, the other about 4, a restaurant with a lecture room above it, and another building which was apparently administration plus something else. I'm not sure what, but it might be rooms for exercise and treatment. If I understood the booklet in the room, the place is a sort of sanatorium. The grounds are sort of nice, planted with various kinds of flowers, shrubs and trees, most with labels—almost a mini-botanical garden.

After lunch I walked down to the sea—the pension is on a hill about 200 m above sea level. The Black Sea is black, and warm (people said the water temperature was 24°C). The beach, pebbles not sand, is about 30 m wide. Then there is a road. The beach seems to be completely divided into private parcels (Pension Dubna has its own) and extends for kilometers. The road is lined with restaurants, souvenir stands, and stands selling snacks and drinks.

It was 2 or 3 km to Alushta itself, Pension Dubna being on the edge of town, and the beaches and various sorts of stands persisted all the way—it got sort of boring. It was, I guess, the end of the season; the beaches were fairly busy, but not packed, with bodies in various shades of red and brown.

Alushta is not much—besides the beaches and hotels there was little else of note besides a rather run-down park. Apparently there was a church up on a hill which I missed. Some farmers were trying to sell some produce: fruit, vegetables and wine. Bottles must be expensive—one person was selling wine in the weirdest assortment of bottles: Coca Cola and other soft drink bottles, as well as some unidentifiable ones, ranging from half to two liters.

The food was not very good, although the organizers managed to get it improved as the week progressed. Each meal had meat or fish in some form, not always recognizable, and in small portions. Also at every meal were raw or pickled vegetables. It was strange having, *e.g.*, a meatball with instant mashed potatoes and raw tomato, paprika and carrot for breakfast.

**Tuesday, Sept. 10.** After  $2\frac{1}{2}$  days of meeting it was time for the excursion. After lunch we all boarded buses for an excursion to the Livadia Palace just outside of Yalta. It looked like rain, but it didn't. The palace was built in 1911 for Tsar Nicolas II, and was his favorite, the one he asked to be able to keep when the Bolsheviks took over. It is also where the American delegation stayed during the Yalta conference, and out of deference for Roosevelt's disability where the meetings were held, the British delegation being housed in another palace and the Russians somewhere else still. The grounds and location are lovely: on a hill overlooking Yalta and the sea.

One could only visit the palace on a guided tour. Everything the guide said was translated for us by a translator from Dubna, who was assigned to the conference. It was mostly about Nicolas and his family—reminded me of visiting the family home of Jacky Kennedy on the excursion when the conference was at Brown University a few years ago.

**Thursday, Sept. 12.** The “banquet” was this evening—better food than usual plus wine, vodka, imitation cognac. I would have preferred more wine and less of the hard stuff. But the Russians had, I think, the opposite preference. There was a youth group in traditional costume. They played (and sang) folk dances and songs. After they were finished and left and the food was all eaten, it got down to serious drinking. Various groups of physicists, especially the Russians, went up to the microphone to sing songs. It kept getting worse as they got drunker and drunker. I left before they were done, as did most people.

**Friday, Sept. 13.** Those of us who were staying an extra day got the organizers to organize an extra excursion for us, for which we of course had to pay extra. We went to the Massandra Palace, which is also near Yalta, but to the east whereas Livadia is to the west. This palace was built for Tsar Alexander III. Its architectural style more resembles some châteaux of the Loire, not accidentally. I found it much more charming than Livadia.

After the palace, we went back to Alushta, stopping at the Alushta winery. It is one of several wineries making wine from grapes grown in the Massandra area. This winery specializes in the sweeter types of wines. We tasted 14, of which only the first two were dry, proceeding from driest to sweetest. On the way were Crimean versions of sherry, white port and red port. Half of them were really dessert wines. The most interesting was the Cahors—same grapes as the French wine from Cahors, but here a dessert wine. The local vinologue told about the wines, including the alcohol and sugar levels as well as recounting the prizes won at various international competitions. It was all translated by our guide. One relieving piece of information was that daily alcohol consumption up to 1 ml of alcohol per kg of body weight is medically no problem, at least in the former Soviet Union. Roughly, 1 ml of alcohol is 1 cl of wine. Since I weigh nearly 75 kg, that means I can drink a bottle a day.

**Saturday, Sept. 14.** The conference organized a bus to take us to the airport, getting us there with plenty of time to spare. The policeman wrote name and passport number on a sheet of paper at the security check (for a domestic flight!) We took off and arrived in Kiev on time. There was a special shuttle bus waiting when we got off the plane to take transit passengers directly to the international terminal. Those

with checked baggage could get it as it came off the plane and take it with them in the shuttle bus. That was a nice service.

I changed the money I had left and went to check in for the KLM flight to Amsterdam. First through customs to say I wasn't taking out any forbidden items (like antiques or other cultural heritage) or too much Ukrainian currency. Then security to scan the baggage. Then a long line for passport control, which moved at a snail's pace. Then another security scan of the baggage. Finally into the waiting area with about 15 minutes left to spend in the business class lounge, which had no Ukrainian wine, only French in little bottles.