

USA ABROAD

HELPING INFORM USA CITIZENS ABROAD

Wait for 'hoopla' over East to ebb

By Andrea M. Thompson
USA TODAY

While the incredible political and social changes occurring in communist Eastern Bloc countries have affected U.S. citizens in the States, its impact probably has been greater on U.S. citizens living closer to the "action."

Curiosity about countries that have been closed off for so long seems to be the pervading motivation behind many U.S. citizens traveling to Eastern Europe. But others, especially those who have been there previously, are waiting patiently for the hoopla and celebrations to die down.

Judy Jankowski, who lived in East Berlin 10 years ago, says she wouldn't go back now *because* of the new reforms. A homemaker now living in Belgium, Jankowski and her husband, who is a judge, lived on the East Berlin-Czechoslovakian border. During that time, she developed a special fondness for East Germany. But she's kept away mostly because, "I don't want to rubberneck. I don't want East Germans to feel that they're in a zoo."

Joan Lauback, a Disney marketing representative who lives in London, ventured into East Berlin last month for three days. Her first impressions, she says, were surprising.

"It was much nicer than I thought it would be," says Lauback, who could not go into rural areas of the country because of limitations on her passport. She says the city was lively and bustling, unlike the "exaggerated" reports of the city's demise she was used to seeing on the evening news.

Lauback's trip preceded the historic election of a new East German government in the country's first free elections since World War II. "People were energetic and excited about the future," she says. "There was a nationalistic feeling; a growing confidence." She says stores were stocked and there were no long lines to buy goods. Lauback highly recommends a visit to the "new" East Berlin.