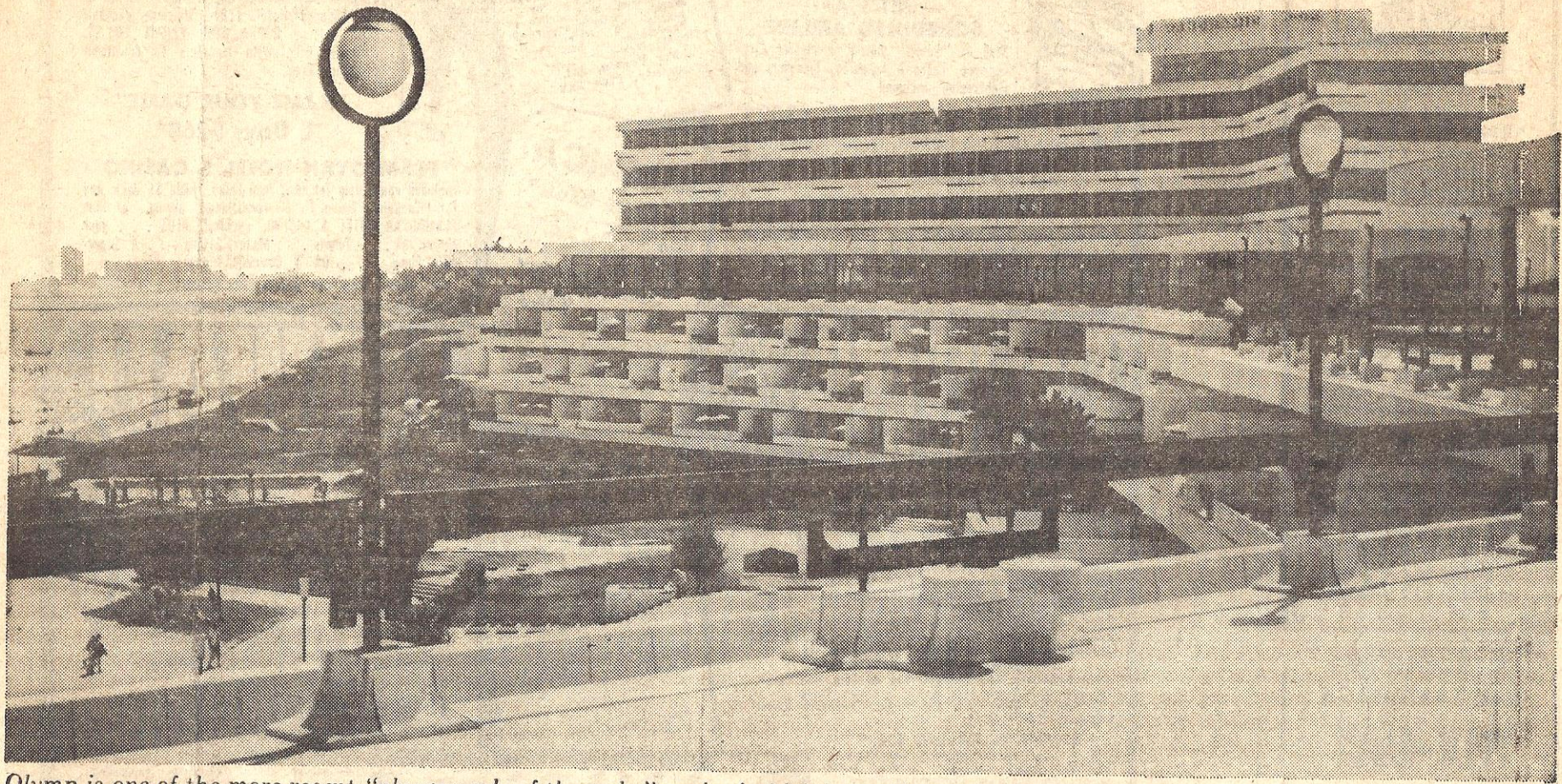


# Riviera, Romanian Style



*Olymp is one of the more recent "playgrounds of the gods," each of which is a self-contained urban center.*

**By Jack Goldfarb**

*Newsday Special Correspondent*

In the main square of Constanta, Romania's maritime town on the sunny shores of the Black Sea, stands a statue of Ovid, the Roman poet. Appropriately bronzed, Ovid wears a wistful look. Here, in what was once the Roman outpost town of Tomis, the noted bard reluctantly spent his last years—in exile.

Not so reluctant are the travelers flocking to Romania's Black Sea resorts in increasingly large numbers. The figure is well over 2,000,000

Belatedly recognizing the advantages of the area's long, broad beaches, more congenial climate and forested cliffs providing a scenic background to the sea, the Romanians proceeded to build a chain of six seaside resorts separated by wide belts of greenery. Mindful of their Roman past and their tourism-oriented present, they named the galaxy of brand-new vacation towns after ancient gods and Space Age luminaries—Neptun, Jupiter, Venus, Saturn, Aurora and Olymp.

They were constructed as self-contained urban centers, complete with hotels and

The Romanian talent for making you feel welcome, however, is not contagious enough to affect the mass of Socialist-bloc visitors, who compromise over half of the holidaymakers here. The Easterners arrive in tightly organized groups and tend to remain with their fellow-travelers.

For Westerners, the attraction of the Black Sea Riviera focuses greatly on its being inexpensive. It's 25 per cent cheaper than places like Majorca or Nice. Hordes of West Germans, Britons and Frenchmen find it pays to cross the Continent to



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Not so reluctant are the travelers flocking to Romania's Black Sea resorts in increasingly large numbers. The figure is well over 3,000,000 a year now.

From East Europe come the Comrades to enjoy the high-life in a cosmopolitan atmosphere. From the West come hard-currency spenders to benefit from favorable exchange rates. From Northern Europe come sun-hungry Scandinavians to tan under the surplus of summer sun. And from all over Romania come vacationers on their annual fling, and xenophiles who love to meet foreigners.

Below the sprawling Danube Delta, where the gray river spills out into the sea, stretches a 30-mile coastal strip of silvery beaches and aquamarine lakes known as the Romanian Riviera.

Less than a decade ago, this coastline south of Constanta was a bleak, deserted shore with a few scattered fishing villages and an occasional villa.

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They were constructed as self-contained urban centers, complete with hotels and bungalows (over 50,000 beds), restaurants, parks, cafes, and a surfeit of entertainment and sport facilities. All the installations were planned to be convenient to each other and to public transport. In their few years' existence, these "playgrounds of the gods" have already surpassed in capacity and popularity the older, more prestigious Romanian haunts of Mamaia and Eforie father up the coast.

Facing east, with the cliffs behind low enough not to block the afternoon sun, the southern half of the Romanian littoral boasts what few European beaches can—12-hour days of sunshine with little wind or rain throughout the season, which lasts from mid-May to the beginning of October. The Black Sea waters, though a little cooler but not as saline as the Mediterranean, are ideal for swimming from early June until a week or so before the resorts close in early October.

Both the temperatures and the tourist influx peak in August, the traditional vacation month for Europeans, certainly not an easy time for finding hotel rooms. But the summer climate is comfortable. Gentle breezes mingle the dry air of the Dobrudjan plateau with the bracing air of the Black Sea, tempering the seasonal heat. The spacious beaches, seldom crowded and delightfully clean, are situated on the edge of a wide shelf of satiny sand that extends out to a hundred yards offshore, gradually sloping to a six-foot depth in the rockless, tideless sea. (The World Health Organization's chief environmental health engineer, Dr. Renato Pavenello, reported recently that the Romanian Riviera had the cleanest beaches in Europe in terms of pollution.)

The atmosphere here is unexpectedly lively for East Europe—gayer, more open and dynamic than what you find in the resorts of Poland's Baltic coast, Russia's Crimean beaches or Bulgaria's own Black Sea shores.

"Hotel and service staff, for the most part, are more responsive to foreigners—especially Westerners," said one frequent British visitor.

The Romanian talent for making you feel welcome, however, is not contagious enough to affect the mass of Socialist-bloc visitors, who compromise over half of the holidaymakers here. The Easterners arrive in tightly organized groups and tend to remain with their fellow-travelers.

For Westerners, the attraction of the Black Sea Riviera focuses greatly on its being inexpensive. It's 25 per cent cheaper than places like Majorca or Nice. Hordes of West Germans, Britons and Frenchmen find it pays to cross the Continent to get here. All-inclusive tours, arranged by British operators out of London, for example, provide air fare, transfers and a week's full-board in a first-class hotel at the height of the season for about \$130. The low rates are helped by the fact that a 200 per cent currency exchange bonus is given to tourists.

The scene is not as slick or sophisticated as in many Western vacation spots, but it's far less frenetic and more relaxing. There is also that extra fascination that comes from observing a social system and way of life much different from our own.

Neptun was completed seven years ago as the first of these new resorts in the historic region of Dobrudja. Situated astride two picturesque lakes, Neptun has a choice of accommodations in over 40 first-class hotels and in a colony of rustic cottages. The first of Neptun's hotels were modeled after the "early Miami Beach" style of sedate Mamaia. But the later ones, thanks to a changed political climate, were fashioned by architects given a freer rein. Those and the other subsequently built resorts reveal many striking examples of daring, futuristic architecture.

In Neptun's domain, as expected, aquatic activities are plentiful: snorkeling, surfing, water skiing, sailing and sturgeon fishing. Nor is there a shortage of amusements on dry land; summer theaters, open-air cinemas, music halls, nightclubs and sports of all sorts. One of the better-attended entertainments at Neptun is a nightly "Country Feast" around a campfire. Copious platters of peppery *mititei* and spicy sausages are devoured, followed by mounds of barbecued mutton. *Tsuica* (plum brandy), the national drink, flows freely, and Murfatlar wine gushes from barrels. Through it all, folk-costumed *Perinita* dancers are wheeling, a snappy band is splicing and the guests are happily reeling.

Jupiter, a few miles south of Neptun, is a contrasting complex of towering seafront hotels and a secluded Zodiac Village. The latter is no astrologers' commune, but a camping ground mainly frequented by young people. The village is divided

### Romanian Riviera at a Glance

**WEATHER:** Average daily temp. range 63-79 in July and August, 57-72 in September.

**AIR FARE:** New York to Bucharest via London, round-trip economy \$1,008; 14-21 day excursion \$586. Flight (or train) to Constanta \$6 extra each way.

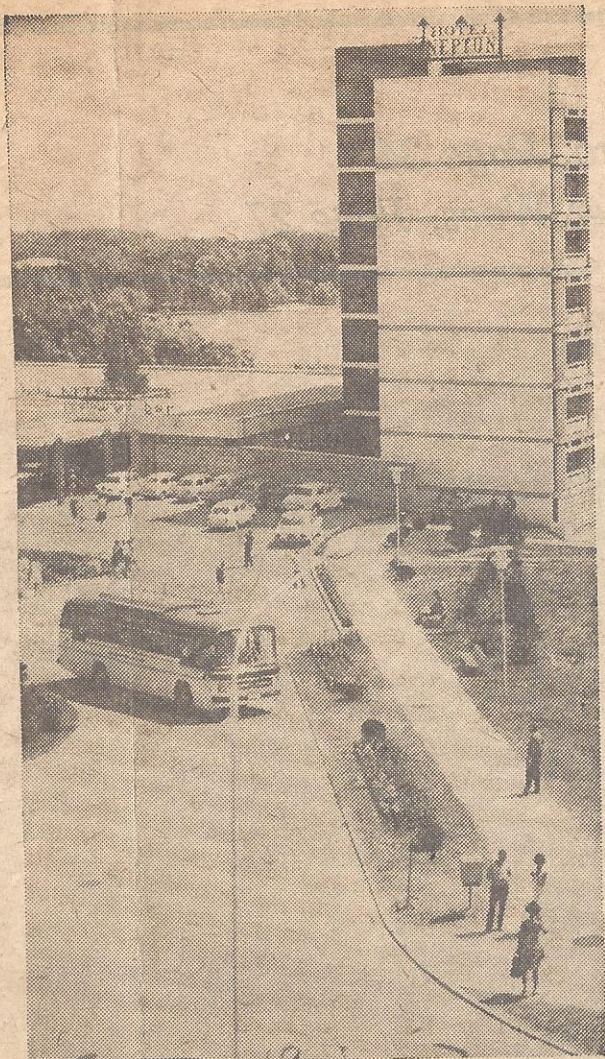
**ACCOMMODATIONS:** All Romanian hotel rates are fixed by the government. "First Class A" category is about \$7-\$9 a day per person double, breakfast included. "First Class B" is about \$6-\$8. Second Class hotels, available only



in Jupiter, about \$5 a day. Villas charge about the same as hotels, while double-bedded bungalows rent for \$4 a day. Tents at camping sites are less than \$3 a day.

**INFORMATION:** Romanian National Tourist Office, 500 Fifth Ave., New York, N.Y. 10036 (212) 524-6951).





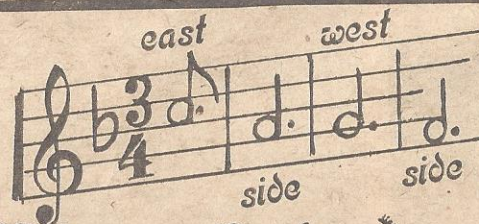
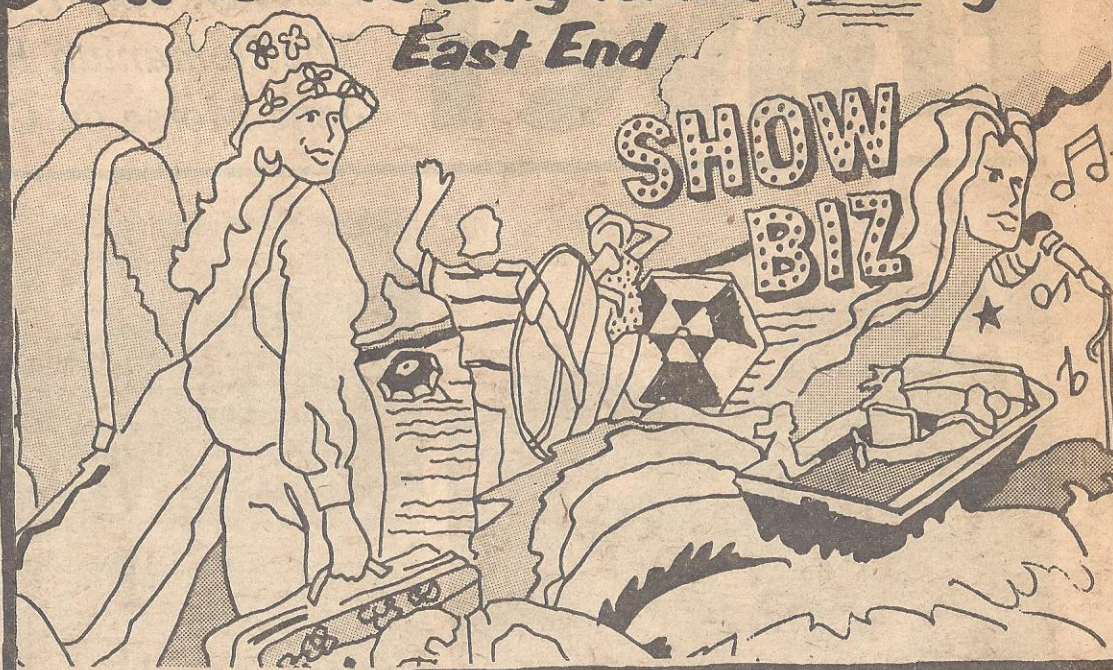
*Neptun was the first of the new resorts.*

into 12 zodiacal sections. Visitors stay in charming little chalets, or in vividly colored tents nearby. City comforts are not too far away, however. Within easy reach are supermarkets, cafe-bars, folklore restaurants, duty-free shops, art exhibitions and musical programs from opera to gypsy.

Just about everything you need (and a lot of things you don't) is for hire in Jupiter: cars, bikes, fishing gear, crockery, grills, chess sets, messengers and help-sitters.

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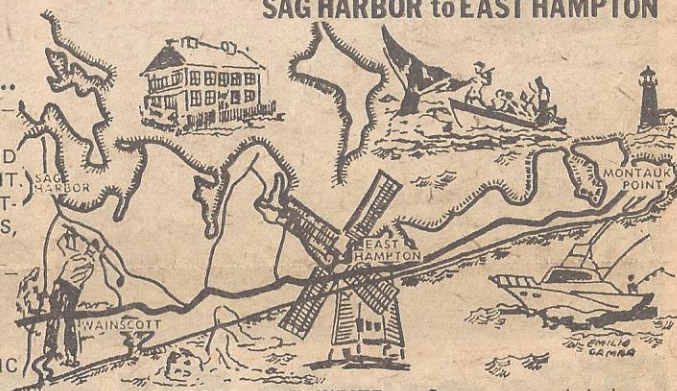
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Neptun was the first of the new resorts.

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Just about everything you need (and a lot of things you don't) is for hire in Jupiter: cars, bikes, fishing gear, crockery, grills, chess sets, messengers and baby-sitters.

Apropos of baby-sitters and children, approximately 40 per cent of the visitors to these six resorts are under 12 years of age. Besides the safe, inclining foreshore, there are children's pools at many hotels. Play areas are scattered along the beaches in open view of parents. And at Neptun, the kids cavort in their own giant Prichindel Amusement Park, where adults are permitted only if accompanied by a child.

Venus is probably the most beautiful of the resorts. Located on the rim of a small bay, its milk-white buildings are a spectacular fusion of futurism and traditional Dobrudjan style. Hotels and villas resemble inverted bowls, igloos, tumuli and enormous concrete IBM cards with key punch windows. But the fussily manicured landscaping, strewn with jasmine and petunias, softens the Venus environment with a lovely green mantle.

Saturn, Aurora, and Olymp, all built in the last three years (more are planned), have continued the idea of each town stressing its individuality by varying its architectural style and its recreational facilities.

But the headlong rush to house and service the swelling waves of Black Sea-bound visitors has produced some less-than-favorable results. The rooms in many hotels are inclined to be small and the plain furnishings might even be called austere by those accustomed to posh American hostelry. Installed in every room is that quaint ablutionary apparatus, the Romanian hand shower, which usually shares a bantam-sized bathroom with a washbasin and toilet.

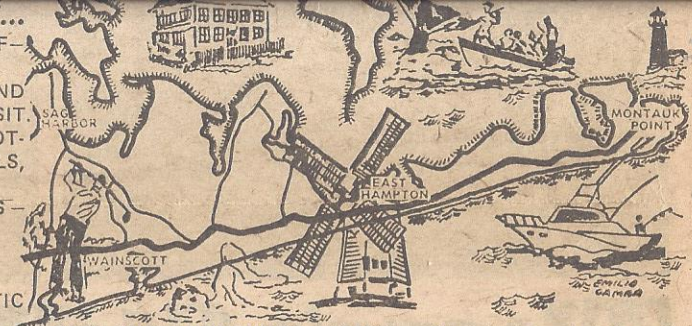
The service in hotel dining rooms, though well meaning, is frequently painfully slow. Impatient, hungry diners are better off complaining in French or German, languages widely used on the Romanian Riviera. As to the food in the mass-feeding hotels, the cooking is generally below the standard of excellence for which Romanian cuisine is famous.

Of course there are always specialty restaurants nearby to rekindle your appetite. And besides, whoever heard of complaining about food at the "resort of the gods." □

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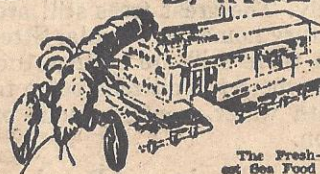
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