

This first appeared as a Special Report in our sister publication DefenceNet Daily
The eager traveller, disgorging from the London train, boards the (this year) courtesy bus, and is borne to the edge of the 'New World' the bigger and better than ever Farnborough Airshow.
The old hands contrive to be at the front of the bus, and so hit the security perimeter first. A 'fast lane' for exhibitors and media is certainly a welcome feature.

Emerging into the show, the low looming serried ranks of the Russians, overlooking the end of the runway, suggests a certain shyness and remarkably, so far no Russian aircraft has taken part in the display. But over in Hall 1, cheerful Russian girls are said to be folk-dancing in the aisles.
The Empire of Finmeccanica dominates the walk-in, resplendent in its use of corporate red, and with its own enclosure and gates - and proto-private airforce parked out the back.
Inside the halls, islanders eye each other warily across a few metres of carpet which might just as well be the Strait of Hormuz. Occasionally they make forays to each other's territories to exchange beads, pens and visiting cards.
Some seek to garrison and castellate their space permanently BAE Systems World is one such, and Thales have use of a new chateau outside Hall 4.
A walk between the chalet lines (or 'pleasure palaces' as some know them) can be instructive. Many come complete with large gentlemen on the door, wired for sound, who demand extra credentials as a condition of entry to the wonders that lay inside...
The Noble Baroness, Plenipotentiary from The Ministry, was hard put to placate the natives with real contract announcements. Her predecessor announced Team Complex Weapons two years ago, during a power cut. This time, the Minister announced six assessment contracts totalling 74 million. The most noteworthy was for work on a 50Kg munition a sign of the shape of things to come for the manned aircraft enthusiast?
She did, however, support the SBAC's Supply Chain 21 initiative. It's noticeable that the space occupied by the collectives from within the supply chain continues to grow. North West Aerospace Alliance for example now inhabits no fewer than four 'islets' in the Farnborough archipelago. The Minister, running late, was also observed to have dumped a visit to MBDA in favour of visiting the island of Northern Defence Industries....
And so to BAE Systems World. It's a whole different scene down that end; rain or shine, it makes no odds to them. They pointedly show the accidental tourist their internal displays a vast range of armoured vehicles which they seem to be able to sell to all but HMG. They have a great vantage point for the flying display; mind you, some do not indulge at the outside bar for reasons of religion, sensibilities etc.
The "you should have been here yesterday" event was the F-22 Raptor display on Monday still being talked about by those who saw it. It's big. It's noisy. It seems to be able to hover vertically in the air. And it does have the cutest turning circle. But what is the future for this 'dino-bird'? The US Air Force Secretary pointing out that America is fighting two wars to which it has made no contribution is not perhaps an entirely good sign!
And so, our voyage of discovery done, we look to return along the causeway to the mainland. But what is this? Safran's Parisian blonde (Caroline by name) in her golf buggy ferries the weary back to the bus. From there the train, onwards to the parties in London's evening. Galileo's telescope at the British Museum with his fellow countrymen; the Dorchester roof; quails' eggs and Californian champagne at the ex-Woolworth residence with returnees from Out West; the Terrace at the House of Commons. More of those....well, perhaps another time!