

The economic survey

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Objekttyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK**

Band (Jahr): **- (1951)**

Heft 1156

PDF erstellt am: **02.05.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-691463>

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THE ECONOMIC SURVEY.

By MAX NEF.

After a longish period of slackness the number of foreign visitors to Switzerland increased again this winter. The figures for the year for nights spent in hotels and boarding houses, however, speak a very clear and definite language, and only go to prove that it is too early yet to talk of better times.

The number of hotel nights dropped between 1947 and 1950 from 19 million to 17.8, then to 16 and eventually to 15 million. If we look at this development in terms of percentage, then we arrive at the following figures: in 1947, 45% of available hotel beds were taken up, then 41, and 39, and finally last year only 35.5%. Even if the winter season, which is just coming to an end, was a little better than the last winter, then this is partly due to the self-aid measures taken by the hotel industry itself which aimed at making holidays in Switzerland cheaper, and the subsidies from public funds for ski schools, which resulted in cheaper rates.

If we divide the total number of nights among the visitors to the hotels according to their nationality then we see that a little over a third is accounted for by foreigners, and a little less than two-thirds by the Swiss themselves. Among the foreigners the British again took the first place last year, and this despite a considerable drop in the number of visitors from Great Britain. The second place was taken by France and by Belgium-Luxembourg. The fourth to seventh places were taken by the north Americans, the Germans, the Italians and the Dutch. About a third of the hotel visitors were made up by our neighbour countries, while about 4/5 of all foreign visitors to Switzerland come from Europe.

The number of hotel nights taken up by the Swiss has gone back a little more than that of foreigners. If, however, we look at the number of arrivals in hotels, that is to say the number of guests, then this figure shows a slight increase. If therefore, the number of nights spent at hotels has dropped, this only goes to show that the average stay of visitors has become shorter. In the case of foreigners the average is less than four nights per head which, of course, is not a healthy development from the economic point of view. The shorter period of stay was due, last year, partly to the holy year, when many foreigners passed through Switzerland on their way to Italy, or else only paid this country a very short visit. Apart from this there are again more holiday visitors who come to Switzerland in their own cars, and who do not stay very long in any one place. Thus 726,000 motorists came to this country for short visits, almost a third more than in the preceeding year.

Though more visitors have come from Gt. Britain and France owing to the liberalisation of currency restrictions, and there was also a pleasing improvement in the case of visitors from Western Germany, yet latest economic developments in Germany give rise to the fear that tourists from that country may experience a worsening once again.

Traffic from East European countries, particularly from Hungary and Czechoslovakia has also dropped off considerably. On the other hand, the number of visitors from overseas countries shows, if anything, a rising tendency, though the final figures in this category are not very considerable. Apart from the

general political situation during the past few years, the main reason for this drop is probably due to increased foreign competition. On the one hand, foreign visitors did not like to venture to Switzerland, on the other, they were inclined to shorten their stay. And as regards the Swiss themselves, many have gone for their holidays abroad, partly because of the many years of seclusion when they were forced to spend all their holidays in the country. Above all Germany and Austria are endeavouring to regain their former reputation as holiday countries. Partly with the aid of Marshall aid it was possible there to build modern hotels, which have an advantage over the Swiss hotels and boarding houses which have not been able to regain, during and since the war years, the desired degree of modernisation. It is likely, however, that the pull abroad, which has taken many Swiss visitors to far-away places, has now past its peak, because in recent times prices abroad have risen more sharply than in Switzerland, and there is not only no advantage to be gained — as far as prices are concerned — by going abroad, but in many cases Switzerland is even cheaper than other countries. Thus, though prospects for the future can by no means be described as rosy, there are reasons for a more optimistic attitude than we had last autumn.

FUND FOR AVALANCHE VICTIMS IN SWITZERLAND.

The collection made in the Swiss Colony in Great Britain for the above mentioned Fund, had reached on April, 6th, 1951, the total of £3,160.0.0

The list will be closed on April 30th; those who still wish to subscribe to this Fund, should send their donations to the Swiss Bank Corporation, 99, Gresham Street, London, E.C.2. (Cheques or P.O.'s are to be made payable to the Swiss Bank Corporation and crossed "Avalanche Fund". The Bank will acknowledge the receipt of each contribution. A letter of appreciation will reach the donor from the Swiss Legation.)

The Fund which has been opened in Berne, by the Swiss Red Cross, has reached, according to latest figures supplied, Swiss francs, 12,062,554.28.



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