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HOME AFFAIRS.

by MAX NEF.

As can be seen from the recently published statistics on Tourist Traffic in Switzerland during 1955, last year brought with it new record figures in respect of this important branch of our national economy. The annual average showed that 46% of the available beds in the hotels, pensions, sanatoria and health resorts were occupied, this being a figure that had never been attained before. In this connection it may be observed that the share of Swiss visitors in the hotel frequency has only increased to a relatively small extent, whereas that of the foreign visitors shows a considerable upward trend. This circumstance is especially satisfactory in that the foreign visitors generally stay in those hotels which belong to the higher price categories. It is estimated that these tourists spent nearly 900 million francs in Switzerland. And, even if one deducts those sums which the Swiss paid out during their holidays abroad, there still remains more than half of the money expended by the foreign visitors in our country.

It is only natural that the number of people who visit our tourist resorts varies with the special characteristics of these resorts and with the seasons of the year. Thus, for example, the sanatoria and the health resorts, which are included in the statistics for Tourist Traffic, had fewer patients last year, than was the case in 1954. Viewed as a whole, however, these losses were more than compensated for by the greater number of visitors who stayed in hotels and pensions.

When classified in accordance with their countries of origin our foreign visitors ranked in the same order as they have done since the end of the war. Out of every hundred of tourists, eighty-four came from Europe, twelve from the two Americas, and only four from Africa, Asia or Australia. At the head of all the countries, comes Germany once more, with approximately one-fifth of all the foreign visitors' with Great Britain and Ireland in the second place, and France in the third. These are followed, at a considerable distance, however, by the United States, and then the other countries.

Little change has occurred during the last few years in regard to the average length of stay of the tourists. This amounts, in respect of both Swiss and foreign visitors, usually to three succeeding nights. Formerly, people used to stay for ten or more nights, but that was at a time when motoring and the modern urge to travel had not yet attained those dimensions which are so typical of the present generation. Viewed from the economic standpoint, this rapid change of localities constitutes a disadvantage for the hotel trade, although other branches of trade derive benefit from it.

Not all the various localities in Switzerland participate to the same extent in the rise in the number of visitors. On an average the greatest number of visitors went to the resorts in the neighbourhood of the Lake of Geneva, and to the five big cities in our country, this being due partly to the various conferences and meetings of every kind, which took place there. The highest figures for tourist traffic are to be found in respect of Southern Switzerland and of the well-known health resorts which have been patronised for many years by the foreign visitors.

From the business point of view, the hotel industry is distinguished by the fact that it has to count with very high fixed costs, costs which can amount to 90% of the total cost of running the concern. As these can only be covered by a specified frequency figure, or to put it more simply if the number of visitors who stay in the hotel exceeds a specified figure, the possibilities for profits are closely interwoven with the fluctuations that occur in the number of tourists visiting the country. The development of this frequency figure, however, depends, in its turn, on a great many factors, which cannot be influenced to any great extent, and often, not at all. Nevertheless, with the record figures for visitors in 1955, the Swiss hotel trade has done some good business, and will be able to make up, even if only partially, for the losses incurred during some of the former years.

SWISSAIR'S TRAFFIC GROWS.

Continuing last year's uptrend, Swissair's operations again showed a strong expansion in the first quarter of 1956. The number of point-to-point passengers carried rose to 134,879 from 106,041 in the same period last year, an increase of 27 per cent.

The volume of freight carried increased by 33 per cent to 2,253.7 metric tons from 1,700 tons. Overall load factor on the scheduled services improved to 63.1 per cent from 56.7 per cent.

Traffic across the North Atlantic showed a particularly marked increase, notably in March when the overall load factor on this route rose to 75.2 per cent, compared with 58.7 per cent in March, 1955.

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