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WORLD TOURISM BREAKS NEW RECORDS

Efforts to Attract Foreign Visitors

The lucrative and fast-growing international tourist industry is all set to break new records this year. The bitter winter in Europe and North America has persuaded more people than ever before to escape to the sun and warmth of other lands with the coming of spring and summer. Greater riches for the tourist trade also mean powerful stimulants for the national economies of many countries which would otherwise have a tougher struggle to make ends meet.

Leisure Time

Last year more than £2,000m., a record sum, was spent on holidays abroad by tourists from non-Communist Europe, including Britain, and the United States and Canada, according to estimates based on official figures. This year the figure will probably be at least 10 per cent greater, improving further on the annual rate of growth of the past few years. International tourism has developed phenomenally in the past decade with the rise in the standard of living in most parts of the western world, the general increase in leisure time enjoyed by many millions of people and the breaking down of national barriers through the recession of insular nationalism. But in the rapid growth tourism has also become more "competitive" as more and more nations realize its economic advantages and vie for the holidaymaker's money. For countries like Austria, Italy, Spain, and Switzerland tourism is vital to their national economies.

Tourism is Austria's biggest single foreign currency earner and last year yielded a net £101m., about 30 per cent more than in 1961 and almost completely offsetting the national trade deficit. The number of foreign visitors to Austria last year rose by 14 per cent to 5,600,000. Nearly 80 per cent of them were Germans. Tourism is also Italy's number one "export" and 1962 was another record year, bringing 21,150,000 visitors, a 12 per cent increase over 1961. Holidaymakers enriched the Italian exchequer by about £300m. in foreign currencies, 10 per cent more than in 1961.

Spain received more than nine million foreign tourists last year, almost 2,500,000 more than in 1961. The visitors added £160m. in foreign currencies to the national income, an increase of £20m. compared with the previous year. The expansion of foreign tourist travel to Spain in the past few years — the number of holidaymakers has increased almost tenfold in the past decade — has contributed impressively to the general improvement in the country's economy. Here again tourism is the country's top "export".

Net Loser

Switzerland is also a substantial net earner on tourist account. Earnings from this source are particularly important at present as Switzerland seeks to cover a growing payments deficit which is partly due to the huge foreign labour force, now numbering about 700,000, who send home such a large part of their wages. Spain and Italy are the main beneficiaries. France, Denmark, Ireland, Holland, and Turkey also do well financially out of tourism. In Norway and Sweden the account just about balances.

Britain, a growing tourist centre, is now second only to Italy in Europe as an earner of foreign exchange from tourism though she is a net loser on balance, at least at present. In 1962 overseas visitors spent about £220m. in

Britain as well as an additional £100m. on travel in British planes, trains and ships. The number of foreign tourists rose by 7 per cent to nearly 1,900,000 in the 11 months up to the end of November. On the other side of the account some four million Britons are estimated to have spent their holidays abroad last year. In the first six months of 1962 Britain actually had a credit balance of £8m. on her tourist account but when the final figures for the full year are available they are expected to show a small adverse balance. In 1961 the debit was £22m. Tourism is Britain's fourth largest "export" and her biggest single dollar earner.

Low down in the tourist league as money-makers are the United States, Canada and west Germany, all of which have large adverse balances in their tourist accounts. The United States is now waging a worldwide advertising campaign to attract hundreds of thousands more tourists to her shores to help to reduce the £400m. she has been losing annually in this sector. Larger earnings from tourism would thus also help to reduce her present overall balance of payments deficit. The American campaign has already met with a remarkable response and several European countries, including Britain, have reported notable increases in the number of holidaymakers heading for the United States. American officials are clearly pleased with developments and all signs point to a further growth of this trend. Canada, spurred on by the success of the United States effort, is also promoting a drive to boost tourism. The Canadian Government plans a £50,000 advertising campaign in Britain.

Biggest Money-Spenders

West Germany is relatively the biggest national loser on tourism. Last year German holidaymakers abroad spent about £200m. more than foreign visitors spent in the Federal Republic. In fact, income from tourism was less than half of German tourist spending abroad, which in turn was about 35 per cent higher than in 1961. The present trend is digging deeply into Germany's foreign currency reserves and is reported to be worrying the central bank. The Germans have also supplanted the Americans as the biggest money-spenders in European holiday centres. In 1961, for instance, the Germans spent the equivalent of £290m. and the Americans just under £220m.

Most tourists naturally head for the south and the sun and hence the great popularity of Spain and Italy, with Greece, Turkey, and Yugoslavia not far behind. The last three countries also report a considerable growth in their tourist industries. The Greek National Tourist organization is now preparing to spend a further £2,500,000 to increase tourist facilities, including the building of new hotels. Yugoslavia, as the only "independent" communist country, also plans to raise her investment in more hotels to attract holidaymakers from the west. Last year she earned £14,300,000 from foreign tourists, an increase of 53 per cent compared with 1961.

Best of the Deal

Russia, particularly since the death of Stalin, has seen a big increase in western holidaymakers, and the numbers are bound to grow as long as Mr. Khrushchev pursues his policy of peaceful co-existence. About 800,000 foreign tourists and businessmen from 80 countries visited the Soviet Union last year. They included 19,000 Britons, 17,000 Americans, and 20,000 Frenchmen.

(By courtesy, "The Times", 26th March 1963.)