

ISRAEL TOURISM
IN
ECONOMIC TERMS

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In the past, Israel's role in world tourism has not been conspicuous, and it is only gradually that she is beginning to gain a place on the map as a tourist country. However, in the country's economy and in the balancing of the national budget, tourism already plays a leading part, and its importance is steadily growing.

In 1954 the following sums in foreign currency were exchanged by tourists for Israel currency: For living expenses — \$ 4.5 million; for gifts — \$ 1.5 million; for tickets on domestic air- and shipping lines — \$ 3.5 million. That is to say, a total of \$ 9.5 million. According to the estimate of the Tourist Centre, 60% of the overall amount of dollars expended on tickets — remained in the country. In other words, the added value in foreign currency was, in the year 1954, about 4 million dollars.

In the same year of 1954, gross income from the export of textiles amounted to \$ 4.6 million; from the export of automobiles — \$ 6.49 million; and from the food industry, including by-products of citrus fruits — \$ 4.35 million. Since the gross income from tourism was \$ 9.5 million, we see that the tourist trade occupies first place among our industrial exports.

It is true that when our export picture is viewed as a whole, we see that tourism constitutes but 10% of a 47-million-dollar export trade (not taking into account the income from travel tickets). It may be said that the income from the tourist trade in 19 European countries on an average does not exceed 5% of the total exports, but in those countries exports run into billions of dollars (especially in England and Germany). In backward countries — backward from the standpoint of industrial output and exports — tourism assumes a more important place, percentage-wise, than here. In Jordan, for example, the income from tourism comprises 70% of the state's total exports and in Lebanon, 53% of the total exports, while in Egypt, on the other hand, it is only 2.5% of the total exports, because of the scope of Egyptian (cotton) exports, which reach \$ 400 million annually.

The rising trend in the flow of tourists to Israel that has been in evidence during the past two years continues unchecked in 1955. The overall number of tourists in 1954 was 10% greater than in 1953 and 17% greater than in 1952. In the month of January of the year 1955, the number of tourists was 23% greater than in the corresponding month of last year; in February, it was 35.6% greater, in March 26%, in April 18%.

- 2 -

On an average, the number of tourists in the first four months of the year exceeded the number that came last year by 23%.

A year ago, the Tourist Centre set itself the task of increasing the number of tourists, within the next 3 - 4 years, to 100,000 a year. Accordingly, the overall number of tourists in 1955 ought to reach 50,000 — that is, a rise of 25% over last year's figure. And, indeed, all signs point to the number of tourists this year living up to the above estimate. It is to be hoped that a similar rise will take place in the length of their stay, which, in turn, will bring an increase in foreign currency income.

The development of tourism brings with it not only income in foreign currency but likewise a marked extension of the labour market. Since the tourist trade consists mainly of services, it requires considerable manpower. It requires investment in roadbuilding and in the erection of hotels, airports, harbours, souvenir factories, etc. With the extension of services came a corresponding growth in the need for manpower in order to fill the needs and demands of the tourists.

In the countries of Western Europe, notwithstanding their being strictly industrial countries, 5-10% of all workers are employed, directly or indirectly, in tourist services.

Along with the efforts to raise the number of tourists and the length of their stay in the country, an effort should be made to increase the average sum of money spent here by each tourist, from \$ 100-140 to \$ 200.

Potential income in foreign currency from the tourist trade in the coming years may thus be put at tens of millions of dollars per year — and the number of people gaining their livelihood from tourism, at tens of thousands of people. In Switzerland, 180,000 people gain their livelihood directly from the tourist trade.

Serious obstacles hamper the development of the tourist movement to Israel. One is the security situation, which exercises considerable influence on tourism by keeping many potential tourists away from here. A further ~~obstacle~~ is the barrier now existing between Israel and her Arab neighbours, as a result of which the tourist is obliged to undertake two separate journeys in this part of the world — one to the neighbouring countries, and another to Israel — if he wishes to see all the holy places on both sides of the border.

In the countries of Europe, 80-90% of all tourists come from neighbouring lands, and but 10-20% from overseas. Only in England does the number of visitors from across the seas (U.S. and Canada) reach 30%, and this is due to the close ties that have been maintained for generations among the English-speaking countries. Likewise in Lebanon, Egypt, Syria, and the rest of the Middle East countries, more than half of the tourists come from neighbouring countries. In Israel, nearly the entire 100% come from overseas. (Those who enter Israel by way of the Mandelbaum Gate also come from overseas). These tourists, moreover, must content themselves with visiting Israel

whereas in Europe the average overseas tourist visits four countries in the course of his tour.

Obviously, the situation would change overnight if political conditions permitted the organizing of regional tours from the Pyramids to the Parthenon, via the Land of the Bible — heart of the Jewish People and ancient centre of world culture. But this time has not yet come, and for the time being the Tourist Centre is working on the basis of existing political conditions.

Along with the regular publicity for attracting tourists, the Tourist Centre is stepping up its efforts to encourage organized groups of tourists to come to this country. The number of such groups increased in 1954 by 30%, compared to 1953, and the number of tourists in these groups increased by 35%. More striking still is the rise in the number of days they remained here — 50,000, or 83% more than in the previous year. (These figures do not include tourists who came in the name of the Jewish Agency.) During the first three months of 1955, the number of groups increased, in comparison with the corresponding period last year, by 106% (62 groups instead of 30); and the number of participants increased by 113% (3,330 instead of 1,761). We do not as yet possess figures on the length of stay of these tourists, but it may be safely assumed that this figure will be even greater, proportionally.

The fate of tourism, in the final analysis, depends not on the number of tourists who visit the country in any given year, but rather on the degree of satisfaction with which the tourist leaves Israel, his enthusiasm or ~~commitment~~, and, accordingly, the message he takes back with him. After the War of Liberation, a large number of tourists visited Israel, but at that time many of the services that tourists regard as essential were still missing, and so they went home disappointed, and in their wake came a marked drop in the number of tourists in 1952. We note with satisfaction that since then services and arrangements for tourists have undergone a vast improvement. The tourists who visited Israel in 1954 returned well satisfied, thanks mainly to the improvement that had taken place in the quality of the various services, such as hotels, transportations, guides, entertainment, etc. For these are the things which in the end, determine the attitude of the modern — generally rather spoiled — tourist towards the country he is visiting.

Satisfied tourists not only encourage the larger tourist bureaux abroad (for many of whom the despatching of organized tourist groups to Israel last year was a brand-new experience) to continue including Israel in their touring programmes, but such tourists also serve as ambassadors of Israel tourism — the most important propagandists of them all. For the tourist today is no adventure-seeker; as in the last century, what he wants, first and foremost, is comfort. And so he does not merely read the printed publicity booklets but asks, here and there, details, from his friend who has been there, about conditions in the country — especially when the country in question still lacks a firm, well-established tourist tradition.

In the 19th Century people travelled to collect impressions. Every journey into an unknown land was looked upon as an adventure, besides involving all sorts of difficulties and discomforts, and was therefore limited to the more hardy souls. The development of means of transportation, on the one hand, and the social legislation that calls for regular holidays for workers, on the other hand, as well as the general rise in the standard of living of the populations of the world, particularly of the middle classes, have created a large tourist potential. In 1954 some 100 million tourists visited parts of the world. American tourists alone who visited Europe that year spent about a billion dollars, in addition to the 250 million dollars that were paid out for trips on non-American lines. Twenty million Europeans crossed the borders of their countries this year, in order to visit other European countries as tourists.

Anyone who does not embark on a short air flight nowadays is looked upon as lagging behind the times. It is assumed that as a result of technological improvements and of the rise in the cultural and material level of the world's population, the flow of tourists will increase in geometric progression. The world's tourist potential is estimated at one billion tourists per year.

Most of the tourists of today -- and, to an even greater extent, of tomorrow, are men of moderate means and moderate tastes. What they are looking for, first of all, is not novelty but the personal comforts that will make it possible for them to ride in an airplane as though they had simply taken a hotel room for the night. As soon as they step off the plane, they search for hotels -- hotels that will give them that feeling of home. Naturally, once outside the hotel, the tourist also wants to see the novelties and specialties of the land he is visiting, such as historical places. (Our country is well-blessed with historical sites, these awakening profound associations in the heart of Jew and Christian alike.) He takes special interest in everything that seems to be unique to the country, be it dress or folklore as expressed in dance or song or any other art. He wants to be entertained, and among means of entertainment the language of music is for him the best-understood. It is for this reason that all localities wishing to attract tourists organize musical festivals, on a larger or smaller scale. Finally, the tourist expects a cordial welcome, not as an official gesture, but as a welcome from the heart.

The task of attracting tourists is not an easy one, for it involves a great deal of preparation and organization in various fields. In spite of all the difficulties mentioned above, the Tourist Centre is going ahead with its plans to increase the annual number of visitors to 100,000 in the course of the next 3-4 years. This programme is capable of realization, even under existing political conditions and using the means and instruments currently at our disposal -- that is, the existing hotels and those now under construction. If, however, the Tourist Centre wishes to surpass the goal it has set for itself for the immediate future, or to prepare for the situation that will be created in the event of a change in political conditions, the existing means will not suffice, and we must begin thinking, even now, in terms of a wider, more far-reaching programme.