

ISRAEL'S TOURIST INDUSTRY

MAJOR ECONOMIC ASSET • MODERN PILGRIMAGE

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TOURISM is an industry, and like other export industries exchanges its "products" for foreign currency. But while other export industries send their goods to markets abroad, tourism brings the consumer from abroad to the country, and sells the country's products for foreign currency here. All the problems that confront export industries also confront tourism, including the manufacture of the product (hotels, services), transportation (to the country and within it) and marketing (selling trips). In all these respects Israel

is still at the beginning of the road as a tourist country. Only in recent years has the local hotel industry expanded sufficiently to supply the current demand which is progressively increasing. Only now is the servicing of the tourist beginning to approach an adequate degree of efficiency. With its limited means Israel is unable to embark on expensive advertising campaigns in order to capture its due place on the map of international tourism. Nevertheless, the tourist industry of Israel, in spite of its being in the early stages of development, already plays a significant role in the country's economy which increases in importance from year to year. In 1954 tourists exchanged in local banks a sum of \$4,417,559 in addition to approximately \$3,500,000 spent by them for their fare in Israel ships (Zim) or planes (El Al), and about \$1,500,000 which they spent on the purchase of gifts and souvenirs. The country's total earnings from the tourist movement in 1954 can thus be computed at \$9,500,000 in 1954 as compared with \$8,000,000 last year. For the same period Israel's textile exports, for instance, were valued at \$4,604,000; exports of cars (from the Haifa assembly plant) totalled \$6,493,264; all of the food industry exports including citrus by-products brought \$4,352,000. As this comparison shows the tourist industry already tops the list of Israel's export industries.

TOURIST TRAFFIC

Tourist traffic statistics show that under the British Mandatory administration (which preceded the State of Israel), the movement reached its climax in 1935 when 90,936 tourists visited Palestine. Of this number 48,359 were residents of neighbouring Arab countries, and no less than 10,000 according to Jewish Agency estimates, were in reality Jewish immigrants arriving on tourist visas. Thus, excluding visitors from Arab states, the actual number of tourists in Palestine in this record year was about 30,000. This figure was matched and even exceeded after the establishment of the State of Israel and the termination of hostilities, when the number of tourists reached 35,893 in 1951.

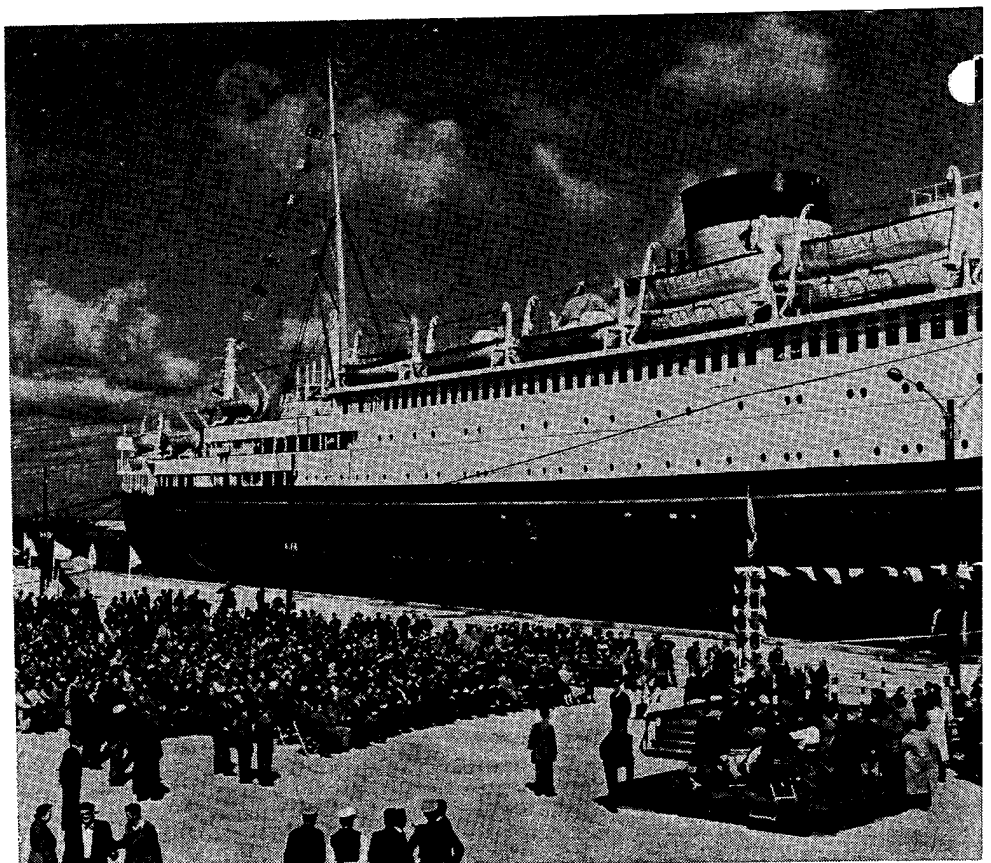
But this was not organised tourism in the usual sense of the term. It consisted almost entirely of individual Jewish visitors from various countries (especially from the U.S.) coming to meet their relatives and to see for themselves the "miracle of our times" — a reborn Jewish State as it emerged from the War of Liberation. This was mainly a spontaneous movement which did not maintain its original momentum for long. In fact, already in 1952 a contraction was registered (by over 8%) and this process of decline in the unorganised family Jewish tourism continues.

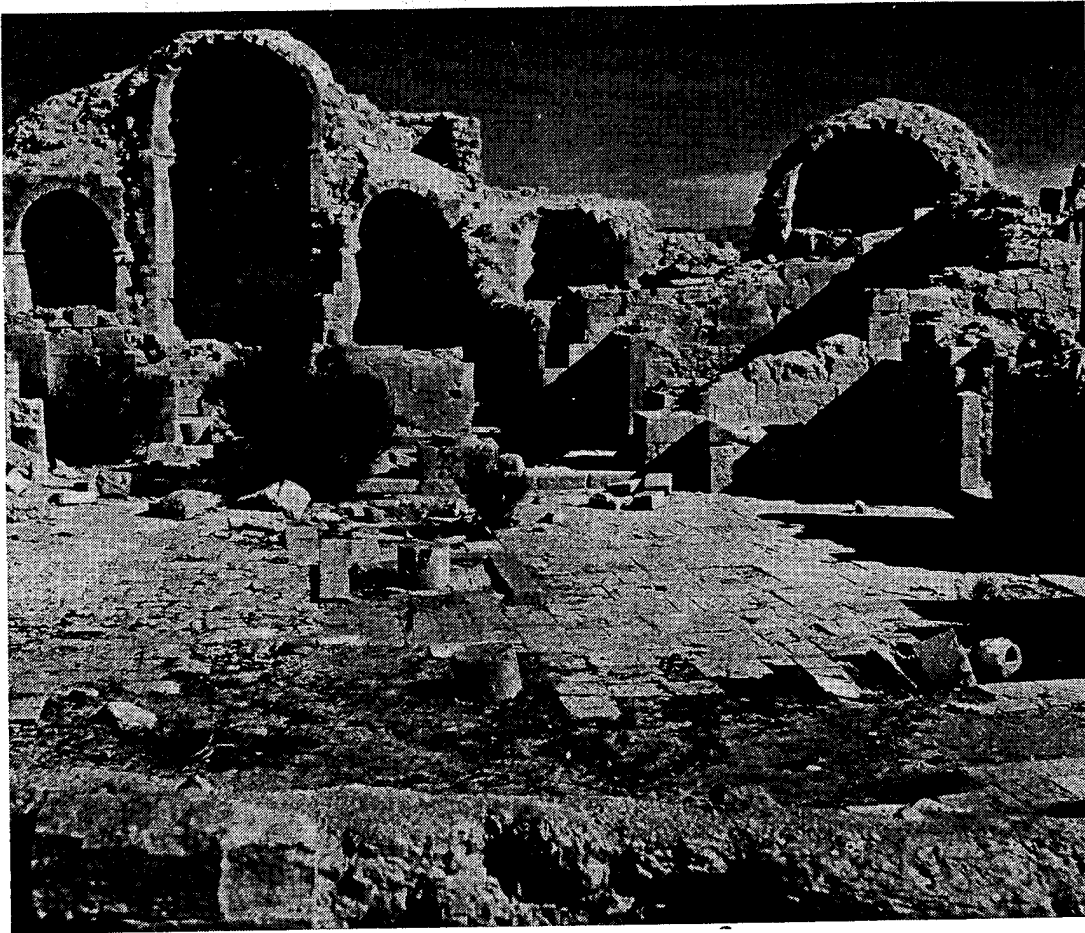
RISE OF ORGANISED TOURISM

But this decrease has been counterbalanced by the growth of organised tourism as a result of a systematic effort of tourist promotion and organisation. It is interesting to point out that in 1954, 274 tourist groups visited Israel as compared with 198 last year (a rise of 38%). The number of tourists arriving in these groups reached 8,200 and the length of their stay increased by 83% as compared with last year (50,088 days as against 27,283). If we add to this the youth groups visiting Israel under the auspices of the Jewish Agency we obtain a total of 307 groups with 9,265 tourists and 103,675 days of stay. There was a notable increase in the number of pilgrims coming in organised groups of 10 or more, who now constitute almost 61% of the total; in all 4,769 pilgrims came during this period, as compared with 3,343 last year or an increase of 42%. The total number of tourists of all categories visiting Israel in 1954 was 38,661, a rise of 10%.

Israel is perhaps the only tourist country in the world which attracts tourists from overseas but has no visitors from neighbouring countries. In the European countries overseas tourists account for no more than 15—20% of the total number of tourists and

Tourist luxury liner welcomed at Haifa Port at inauguration of new quay. (Photo: Inform. Serv.)





REMAINS OF ANCIENT NABATEAN TOWN OF S'BEITA. Ruins of Byzantine church at S'beita, one of ancient Negev towns testifying to the existence of an advanced civilization in the deserts of to-day. (Photo: Inform. Serv.)

the proportion of American visitors does not exceed 10%. In Israel all the tourists come from overseas and 40% of them are from America. The average time of a tourist's stay in Israel is about 60 days but if we do not take into account tourists remaining for unusually long periods such as a year or more, we find that the average is less than 21 days. The average sum spent by a tourist in Israel is about \$100—\$200, a small sum compared with the average expenditure of overseas tourists in European countries (\$300—\$400).

IMPROVED HOTEL AMENITIES

Excellent hotel accommodation is now available to visitors in Israel. As part of its policy of tourist promotion, the Government has in recent years extended many facilities for the construction of new hotels, including loans, allocation of import quotas, customs duty reductions, etc. As a result, a number of first-class new hotels have been constructed in recent years, which together with the previously existing high grade hotels, are capable of catering to a most exacting clientele. Altogether, Israel now has 110 high-class hotels with 3,100 rooms and 5,000 beds. (The total number of hotels in the country is 570 with 6,800 rooms and 12,000 beds). The existing hotels and those under construction should be able to meet the requirements of even an increased tourist traffic. Indeed, at present the accommodation potential of high-class hotels for tourists is utilized even at the height of the season only to the extent of less than 50%. This is in keeping with the experience of luxury hotels in Europe where tourists account for a similar percentage. But there this is supplemented by the considerable number of hotel guests from among local residents, which is not the case in Israel where local guests form only a small percentage (at most 10%) of the hotel clientele.

Whilst Israel's luxury hotels now offer ample accommodation, there is need for the extension and improvement of medium class hotels. This is of importance both for the general expansion and democratization of the tourist traffic and in particular for the

increase in the number of visitors from Europe who do not enjoy the same advantages of high rates of exchange as tourists from the U.S. and Great Britain. To promote the improvement of medium class hotels, the Government has this year allocated loans totalling IL. 100,000.

In addition to hotels, 7 youth hostels with 356 beds are open in Israel to students, teachers and members of various youth movements. Eight more hostels with 350 beds are at present under construction. Under an arrangement with the Tourist Centre, the Hostel Association has agreed to place half of the beds in every hostel at the disposal of visitors from abroad. It may be mentioned in conclusion that excellent guest houses and convalescent homes are maintained in some of the communal settlements.

HISTORIC SITES

Israel's attraction as a tourist country lies in the significance of her past, the inspiration of its spiritual values, the beauty of its landscape and the achievements of its modern reconstruction, all of which combine into an entity of unique interest and appeal. The country's exceptional tourist potential however, can only come to fruition if a planned programme of tourism development and promotion is effectively applied. An important part of this programme is the preservation and protection of the sites of religious, historic and archaeological interests which are so numerous in the country and which have been so neglected in the past. The improvement of historic sites is now to be undertaken under a general plan which covers over 100 important historic sites, including such famous remains as the Rambam tomb, Herod's tomb, the ancient synagogue of Bet Alpha. The plan provides for repairs, construction of approach roads, laying out of gardens and the provision of various other amenities for tourists, involving an outlay of IL. 1,000,000. In the present financial year, IL. 300,000 will be allocated for work on 14 selected sites from a Joint Fund established by the Tourist Centre in cooperation with the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Labour. In addition to the

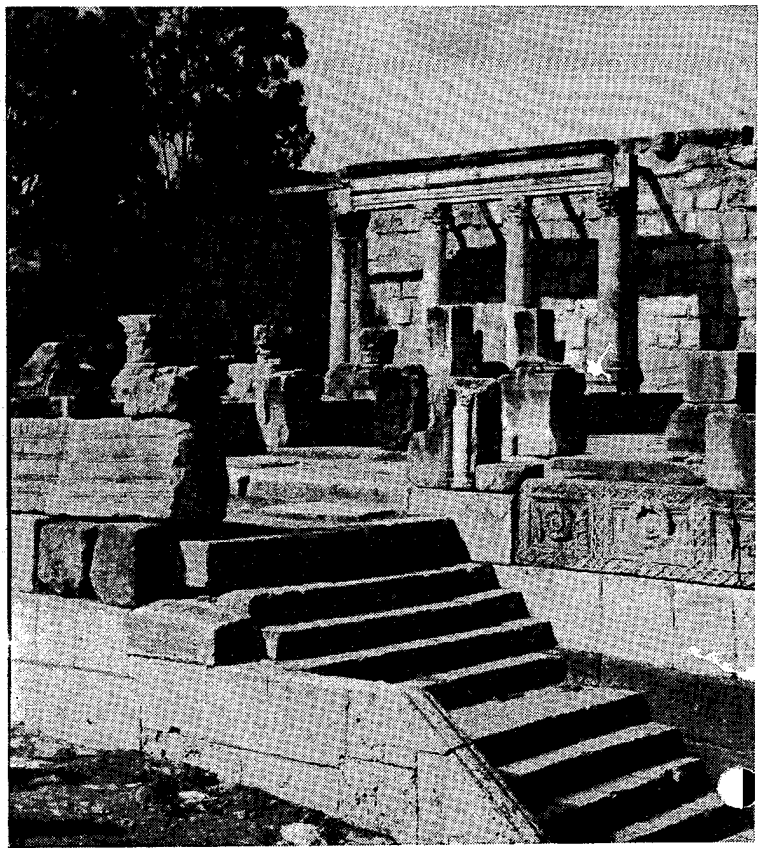
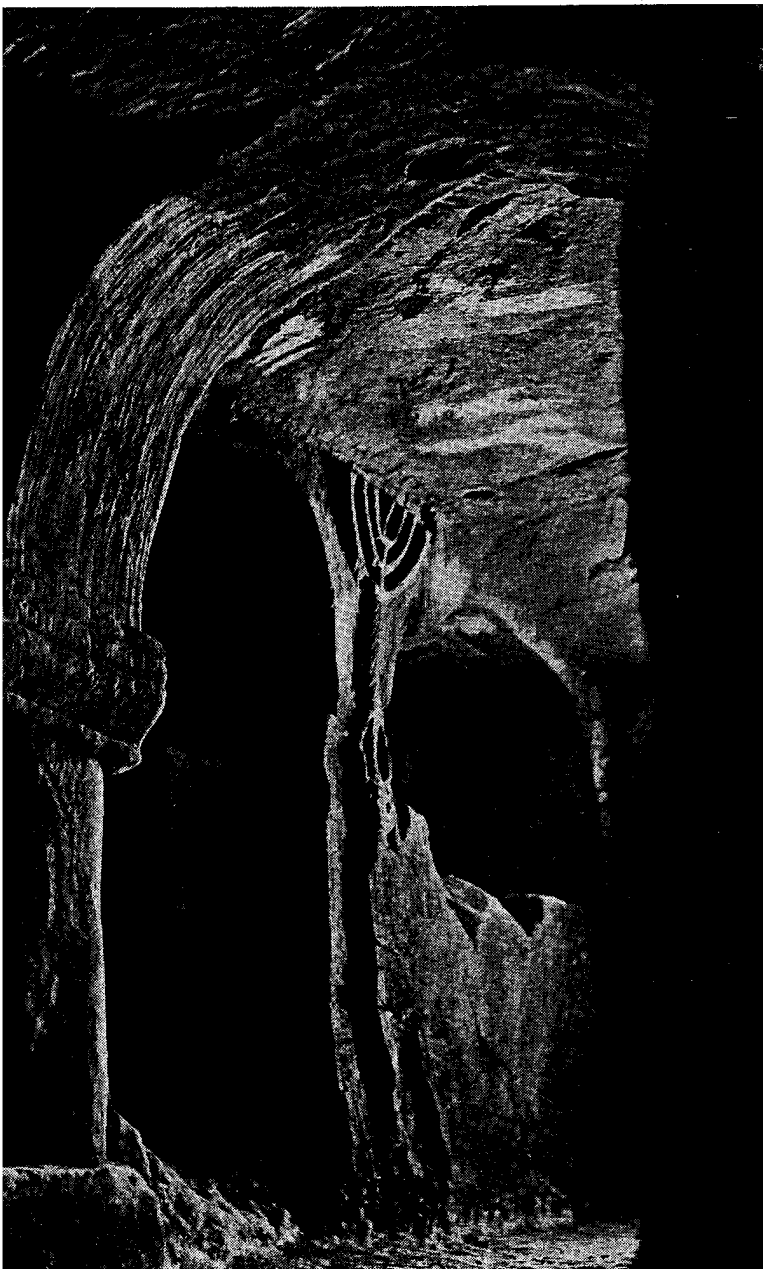
protection of sites, a general scheme has been prepared for the marking of important sites and remains connected with the nation's traditions or prominent in the country's annals. The future tourist to Israel will thus easily be able to follow, so to speak, in the footsteps of history, by referring to memorial tablets explaining the significance of the places he visits.

Museums are everywhere a valuable and attractive tourist asset. Israel too offers to visitors a number of museums of considerable interest such as the museums and art galleries of Jerusalem (Bezalel), Tel Aviv and Haifa. But Israel is distinctive in that its museums are found not only in the big cities but also in some of the rural settlements. These local museums, usually in the vicinity of historic sites, bring within easy reach of tourists archaeological collections providing a proper background to the impressions of their visit on the spot. Thus, for instance, tourists, after seeing the remains of the ancient Port of Caesaria can find an interesting collection of relevant antiquities in the nearby communal settlement of Sdot Yam. Similar museums containing valuable collections exist in Shaar Hagolan, Bet Shean, and other places. The improvement of these local museums representing a valuable cultural asset is encouraged by the Tourist Centre.

PAGEANTS AND FESTIVALS

Pageants and artistic festivals form an important element of the tourist attraction of many countries. In Israel too an interesting programme of popular celebrations and entertainments is now being offered to visitors. Independence Day festivities and parades

CATACOMBS AT BEIT SHEARIM (2nd Century).



SYNAGOGUE AT CAPERNAUM. One of Israel's famous Biblical sites on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. (Photo: Kluger)

already attract tourists from all over the world. The revived Purim Carnival in Tel Aviv may prove another popular feature. The Tourist Centre cooperates in the tourist arrangements for these and other artistic events or historic celebrations including the Passover Music Festival at the Ein Geb settlement, Samson Festivities at Ashkelon, David Festivities in Jerusalem.

This local programme is to be reinforced and diversified by the inauguration of the international "Mediterranean Festivals" in 1956. The Israel Tourist Centre took the initiative of planning these festivals. The Commissioner for Tourism visited Italy in this connection and reached an agreement in principle with the management of the Florentine Festival about the arrangement of these Mediterranean Festivals, which are to be held simultaneously in Israel, Italy and if possible Greece. The Festivals have been planned as a joint Mediterranean venture as far as organisation, publicity, visa facilities, arrangements with travel agencies, etc., are concerned. At the same time each country will retain full responsibility and autonomy in the arrangement of its own programme of events.

UNIQUE EXPERIENCE

There is no room in this brief article for a fuller consideration of the many other aspects and problems of the tourist movement or for a discussion of travel programmes and of services and amenities now available to visitors to this country. The Tourist Centre in Israel and its branch offices in New York, London, Paris and Rome as well as every Israel Consulate abroad will gladly provide information and advice on these and related matters to every prospective tourist. Whatever his interests he may be certain that he will find a visit to Israel a unique and inspiring experience. Whether for recreation or study, entertainment or pilgrimage, communion with the past or with history in the making, nothing can match a visit to Israel, the oldest of ancient lands and the youngest of modern states.