

How Will We Treat Foreign Tourists?



By VOIT GILMORE

Director, U.S. Travel Service

With a little brushing up on our hospitality, says this expert, we can give visitors from abroad the welcome as well as the sights of a lifetime

WHEN I BECAME director of the United States Travel Service 10 months and 80,000 travel miles ago, people warned that trouble lay ahead.

"Foreign tourists won't come to the United States," they predicted gloomily.

I was told about German visitors who had received tickets for jaywalking and French tourists who had been questioned by police for trying to exchange francs for dollars.

It was argued that our customs are too exasperating for foreign visitors. Frenchmen take pains to see that each wine is served at the right temperature; some Americans serve every variety as cold as soda pop. A European desk clerk speaks a half-dozen languages; some of ours struggle even with English. Italians love to relax at the table after a long lunch; we eat and run, sped on our way by a hovering waiter and a management that expects a fast turnover.

But I have learned that this is only part of the story. Despite such differences, the U.S.A. is the place millions of people around the world want most to see. No matter how we may differ from them, they want to taste our excitement and see what makes us tick.

Congress last year took a giant step toward helping the U.S.A. get a larger share of the

booming international travel business by creating the U.S. Travel Service and authorizing it to open travel-promotion offices abroad.

The move is paying off. This year an unprecedented number of foreign tourists are coming to the United States. For instance, 2,000 of them will be here to attend the International Conference of National Machine Accountants; 4,000 for the International College of Surgeons meeting; and 3,000 for a food conference.

ALTHOUGH we Americans may need to polish up our hospitality here and there, we need not apologize for our "tourist plant." It is first-rate. Overseas visitors already have shown their approval of it, by their uninhibited rush for rooms, with free soap and television, which cost no more than ancient Old World accommodations; by driving down superhighways in the world's finest cars using gasoline that costs only half what it does in Europe; by swimming in pools which Old World hotels and motels have yet to exploit widely; by camping in national and state parks that have unsurpassed roominess and scenic wonders; by shopping in supermarkets which anti-American propagandists still say are "nonexistent."

Just as important as these wonders are the 186 million John and Jane Does of the United

States. Many are doing wonderful things:

A New York cabbie picked up a Dutch couple who asked to be taken to Radio City and the United Nations. "You folks sit back and relax," he said as he turned off his meter. "I want to show you a city I'm proud of." He drove them around New York all day without charge!

A Midwest family out for a ride encountered four French college boys. They took them home and entertained them for a week.

A Los Angeles bachelor met three visiting engineers. When he left for his vacation a few days later, he gave them his apartment to use.

A Pennsylvania housewife asked a dozen newspapers in Germany to publish her address so any *hausfrau* touring the Keystone State would be sure to drop in for coffee.

And 48 families in Miami invited a wandering band of 48 high-school students from South America to move in with them for two weeks.

These warmhearted gestures are in the best U.S. tradition. But there is much more.

Our government has discarded the lengthy, embarrassing visa questionnaire which infuriated so many visitors. It has been replaced by a simple form that is smaller than a postal card.

At major ports of entry, the U.S. Immigration Service has stationed receptionists who can greet visitors in from two to five languages.

Bankers are providing airport money-changing facilities at hours when transoceanic planes arrive. Merchants are learning to quote prices in pounds, francs, and lire. And hotel managers are full of plans to hire staff interpreters, equip their front desks with multilingual cards studied with phrases that will help visitors, and provide booklets explaining such Yankee oddities as self-service markets, eating in automat, and drinking tap water (it's safe here!).

FOREIGN TOURISM can be very profitable to a community. The Department of Commerce estimates that the average foreign visitor spends \$500 during his American vacation. By attracting a mere two dozen tourists a day, a city benefits as much as it would by bringing in a new industry with an annual payroll of \$100,000.

Increasing tourism can also improve our foreign relations by correcting the twisted images in the minds of many people abroad.

After a Florida holiday, a Latin American visitor declared, "I'm amazed that the United States isn't gangster-ridden. And to see whites and Negroes living peacefully in the same town was a big surprise. I thought you were always fighting each other."

As he took his reluctant departure, a young Italian architect said, "America is an artist's heaven, vibrantly alive and responsive. It's ahead of us in the arts."

Yes, the tourists are coming. Our price is right. Our attractions are second to none. And if I know Americans, our guests will be met everywhere by a welcoming hand. Friendly Americans will win America friends!

COVER:

Roger Maris, photographed by Ozzie Sweet, was the idol of baseball fans a year ago—a sure winner over Mickey Mantle in any popularity poll. That's not so today. For "The Story Behind the Boos," see page 18.

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