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Kristin Semmens. *Seeing Hitler's Germany: Tourism in the Third Reich.* Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. xiv + 263 pp. $74.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-4039-3914-2.

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Holiday in Hell

On June 23, 1933, after establishing Dachau, forming the Gestapo, burning books,and passing the sterilization laws, Hitler signed a new law and added another weapon to the Nazi arsenal–leisure travel. If at first you are reminded of Zero Mostel and Gene Wilder's movie, *The Producers*, let me assure you, Kristin Semmens's *Seeing Hitler's Germany: Tourism in the Third Reich*, is a very serious work. It provides (in what may be the most extensive treatment of this area to date) an important perspective on the social, economic, and political phenomenon of the ideological and commercial machinery of a totalitarian state.

The Nazis came to power promising normality after the humiliation of the Treaty of Versailles, the crushing poverty and runaway inflation of the Weimar Republic, and the turmoil of the post-World War I era. The goals of the *Gleichschaltung* (coordination) were manifold: generate revenue for the government and get people to work; get the people in Germany and outside to see that things could be pleasant and peaceful, that Germany was safe, stable, and normal like any other civilized country; get the tribes to travel and know each other and their land so that they would be united and work and fight for their country; and finally, convince the world at large and at home that what the government did, no matter how ghastly, was nothing to get upset about.

By 1943, however, as wounded soldiers were forced to stand on crowded trains while sunburned holiday goers sat in comfort, the plan had begun to unravel. But until the war began to go seriously wrong, the travel industry in the Third Reich was up and running and the story brought to light in this book will do more than simply inform you. It will show you how the Nazis ran the great machine (at the level of the "nuts and bolts"), kept the citizens under control, "covered their tracks," and just generally maintained the facade of normalcy that won them the support of average Germans for so many years.

Semmens begins the book by defining the meaning of tourism, the book's place in historiography, and the work's significance. Tourism in Germany, prior to the Nazis, had become an acceptable occupation and then, as did many industries, it collapsed. She recounts these shifts and the general change in the industry after the tourism law was passed in 1933, offering something of an apology in the strictest sense. The author makes it clear that the topic has been challenged (her work grew out of a dissertation at the University of Cambridge). The meaning and significance should be obvious: the work provides an analysis of the means by which the Nazis organized and managed their brief empire; how they conveyed its purpose and image, upheld the public's morale and harvested its support; and how the Nazis perceived the need to project themselves. It shows how the German people and the world (at least for a brief period from 1933 to 1939) were meant to see Germany and did in fact see it. Some might argue that to this day there are those who see Germany as the Nazis wanted them to see it.

Students of business in general and the tourist industry in particular may find chapters 2 and 7 of special interest as they detail the new era of *Gleichschaltung* of the German economy and how the commercial tourism industry was effectively subordinated and modernized. There is good insight here. It shows that Nazis were not mindless thugs; they did understand basic business, marketing, commercial, and economic issues. And chillingly, that barbarism is not the sole domain of the inept and the bloodthirsty. Another theme, argued forcefully here, is how the Nazis were able to take over and control the

population as well as they did. They did not come to the table empty-handed and the industry was well rewarded by prosperity, stability, standardization, increased public esteem, and a lauded place in the Nazi reality.

In chapter 3, Semmens describes how tourist attractions were politicized, the development and description of politicized tourist literature, and the distinctive Nazi tourist culture (distinguished in chapter 4 from commercial culture). The Nazi tourism culture developed a fantasy world and pandered to the resulting emotional experience enjoyed by German and foreigner alike, constructing and marketing the pseudo-myths of the Third Reich.

Semmens follows this with the mechanics, the structure, and the mode of commercial tourism. Herein lies another key theme of the book, namely the extremes in self-indulgent consumerism that came to be a hallmark of the entire Third Reich. An entire industry within an industry, this division was absent the Nazi icons and regalia; it was designed to assure the public that Germany was normal, a peaceful place to live–for the right people.

The theme of normality is one of the most important. When Hitler came to power he promised that things would get back to normal. A large section of the tourist industry was designed to maintain this Nazi fantasy propaganda. This was also an apparatus to help convince visiting foreigners that Germany was a good and safe place to be. Here was a strategic rationale for the leisure travel weapon: the cult of denial. As Europe burned, the *Volk* blissfully picked flowers, posed for pictures, stuffed themselves immovable with the local cuisine, and got sloppy drunk on their beverage of choice. The Nazis were exterminating millions but everything was normal.

What may be the best known aspect of the Nazi propaganda effort, Strength through Joy (*Kraft durch Freude*), is described in chapter 5. All World War II documentaries seem to find space for gratuitous pictures of beaming frauleins and lederhosen blithely traipsing through the edelweiss in alpine fields. The Nazis worked hard to convince Germans to travel, that they had a right and a duty to do so. And the obliging public did until it became positively surreal. Ironically, as the war continued, the soldiers occupying conquered lands seemed to get the most out of the Wehrmacht-sponsored KdF program that promoted rest and respite for soldiers in the German countryside. The Wehrmacht seemed to take over the regular tourist industry and establish the German soldier as tourist.

At this point the mechanics of the tourism administration led to political infighting. The entire industry was a major money-maker and travel agents–less than wholehearted true believers–served pecuniary rather than political goals. Their conflict continued well into the war years, and as things began to go badly, this conflict got rather bizarre.

Chapter 6 provides a glimpse into the very brief period wherein international tourists (1933 to 1939) were a significant part of the industry's income and an important focus of the Nazi propaganda effort. Until the war began, Germans were encouraged to travel outside of Germany as well, and the chapter provides a description of this effort and its political ramifications. Later, as the empire expanded, the domestic destination began to increase once more to include occupied lands and chapter 7 picks up where chapter 6 leaves off. It all came down to a primary political weapon that may even have backfired. The tourism bug was not to be denied as the war began to drain resources and manpower.

This chapter more than others, conveys the objective of the Nazi leisure travel arsenal since it describes what actually happened when the Nazis truly needed the support of the German populace. They propagandized so well that tourists crowded trains while wounded soldiers returning from the front had to stand on the trip home and endure rude civilians on holiday with no regard for their suffering–something that angered even the Gestapo. But as Goebbels said, "the entire Reich and Party Leadership were on vacation" (p. 176). The Nazis had done their job well. Consumerism rather than patriotism was a hallmark of Germany under Hitler and the right to travel, even with refugees streaming over the border, was not going to stop the leisure class from taking a nice holiday.

In the last few years (the watershed of 1942/43) Germany saw a major aspect of the industry taken over by touring soldiers, later by children sent to safety, and then wounded soldiers followed by refugees fleeing bombed out cities. The commercial tourism sector begrudged every iota of help given non-paying guests while their country fell apart around them.

Perhaps the surprise of the book comes at its closing–that the German tourism industry, created by the Nazis to promote its *Gleichschaltung*, never died; though it might have become desolate, the spirit survived. Even as Germany lay in ruins, as soldiers streamed home without their weapons and the sickle and hammer symbol was raised over the eastern half, the Germans had become so enamored of traveling, they could be found among

the rubble of the fallen empire sitting in cafes and sipping mysterious steaming brown liquid writing postcards home. By 1950 the entire industry had virtually rebuilt itself. By 1953, their clients were logging more nights away from home than at any time during the Third Reich.

Most interestingly, the new industry was rebuilt by the old guard who had come to power with Hitler, and they were rewriting the history from 1933 to postwar Germany with no mention of Hitler, the NSDAP, or the whole nightmare. No mention of Nazi ideology and no racial purges (the Jews were pushed out in 1933, and that competition was eliminated much to the joy of the folks who were writing the new histories). The postwar theme of touring in Germany was the same as it had been under Hitler–presenting the laundered version of Germany to the world outside. There was nothing about how the industry bought into the unification ideology to line its pockets and turn a blind eye to the horror. No mention about how tourism literature from 1933 to 1943 embraced and exalted the Third Reich and erased the Weimar Republic, highlighted Nazi relics and intensely marketed the Nazi mythos, made the violence decorative and transformed all of it into a commodity for sale (p. 190). And there is as yet no acknowledgement of any of this in the industry to this day.

Semmens's book is well researched (17 pages of bibliography and 45 pages of endnotes), using multiple primary sources. The only major drawback is the index, which is wholly inadequate. Still, the author provides names of people we know and what they did and how they went about their business. The book is very readable while still using German liberally, so a German dictionary is a good idea if you are not a fluent German speaker.

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