

Vacations during the Nazi Period (mid-1930s)

Abstract

This clip features footage from official Nazi propaganda films about vacation opportunities sponsored by the regime for its citizens. The films were made during vacations organized and sponsored by the “Strength through Joy” (“Kraft durch Freude,” or KdF) program, which the Nazi party established as a means of providing people of all income groups, but especially workers, the opportunity to enjoy travel once available only to the bourgeoisie. The goal of this state-run program was to break down class barriers and help solidify the allegiance of the populace to the state. At discount prices, travelers could take local daytrips or cruises to islands in the Baltic and North Sea, as well as to Spain and elsewhere. Even ski vacations, previously only affordable for well-to-do vacationers, were now available to working-class tourists. The KdF trips were also designed to be a boon to the local and national tourist economies, as travelers visited Germany’s spas, mountain resorts, and beaches.

Source

/In lofty words, Robert Ley proclaimed: “We want to give people the joy of life back, of their homeland and of their fatherland, so that they can approach their daily work fresh and healthy with newly strengthened nerves. This in the knowledge that joyful people are also people of faith and that faith and hope, the fanatical affirmation of life alone, enables a people to overcome the trials of life.”

/Organized excursions were accompanied by guides who were politically and ideologically trained and educated in folklore and local history. From the very beginning, agents of the Gestapo mingled with the vacationers, whose task was to observe and report any supposedly subversive activities.

/Travel savings stamps worth 50 pfennigs could be withheld from wages in the factories or purchased in the branches of travel savings banks. In this way, workers saved for their travels throughout the year. The costs were low: 9 days in the Ore Mountains cost 25 Reichsmark (RM), 11 days in the Franconian Forest cost 22 RM. In contrast, the coastal resorts in East Prussia were inexpensive: 9 days for only 15 Reichsmark. That was affordable for people whose incomes were between 100 and 150 Reichsmark. Traditional spa and bathing resorts were spared from mass tourism – KdF [Strength through Joy] vacationers would have disrupted the quiet atmosphere of these places. The island of Rügen was also initially spared from mass tourism.

/Winter vacations became more and more popular. Winter vacation was considered twice as effective. 140 trains and 70 omnibuses brought vacationers to the most beautiful ski resorts – outside the times when these areas were overcrowded anyway, however. Sports instructors belonging to the KdF organization taught ski courses, ski huts were rented, and winter events were held. These vacations were healthy and they required courage. They were in line with Hitler’s instructions: “I want the worker to be granted a sufficient vacation and that everything is done to make this vacation, as well as the rest of his free time, a true recreation. I want this because I want a people with strong nerves. For only with a people that keeps its nerves can one make truly great politics.”

/Only few people at that time had any idea that Hitler understood “great politics” to mean war.

Source: CHRONOS-MEDIA archive

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