

## The Tourist Boom

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pg. 194

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Neither crime, nor porn, nor dirty streets, nor gloom of fiscal crisis shall keep the tourists from New York—and if you don't believe it, the New York Convention and Visitors Bureau has the facts and figures. Last year was one of the best ever for the tourist business in New York with hotel occupancy up to 73 percent from 66 percent the year before, surpassing a record set in 1969. There were more conventions and convention delegates than in any year except the World's Fair peaks of 1964-65. Which makes us wonder, what would it be like if New York had a convention center to match the modern facilities that other cities seem to pull out of their municipal hats with the greatest of ease?

According to the Visitors Bureau, conventions booked for 1977 promise to continue the good news and will at least equal 1976—even without the Democratic Convention and the Bicentennial. And with the city's new five-year economic plan, New York's usual off-hand promotional efforts will be stepped up to a respectable professional level with an increase in funds and staff and a more purposeful message. "Come here at your own peril" has hardly been a satisfactory selling slogan.

If the business community, and other New Yorkers, would examine these facts and figures, they might learn something the rest of the country evidently knows. Tourists don't come to play Russian roulette with the muggers; they flock to New York's infinite variety of entertainment and cultural attractions. Next to broke, Gotham is still an infinitely rich experience. Museum attendance has hit an all-time high. However barren the municipal books, the streets and shops still offer the treasures of the world.

If tourists flock, should investment be far behind? Boosterism won't build the Portman Times Square hotel, but visitor figures at this continuing boom-rate make a point. Surveys show that 16.5 million visitors in 1976 put as much as \$1.5 billion into the city's economy; conventions accounted for \$545 million of that amount.

The case for New York's Convention Center is strong. Sixteen and one-half million people aren't coming to see a dying city. Now that we will have Westway, let us put the Convention Center package together, and proceed with the Times Square and Commodore Hotels. New York has much to sell, and above all itself.