

N.Z. WANTS TOURISTS . . .

But What Do We Give Them When They're Here?

BECAUSE, 'way back in the gold rush days, the saloons on the West Coast were pretty wild and woolly places with lots of drinking and frequented by ladies of questionable virtue, the modern New Zealand hotel of to-day is forbidden to allow its guests to dance or bring their friends to dance! Incredible as it may seem, the legislation passed in those far-off days is still law and the hotels in our cities are still hedged in by restrictions that were placed on them in the days when New Zealand had a mere handful of population and was a place of straggling villages and cart-tracks instead of roads.

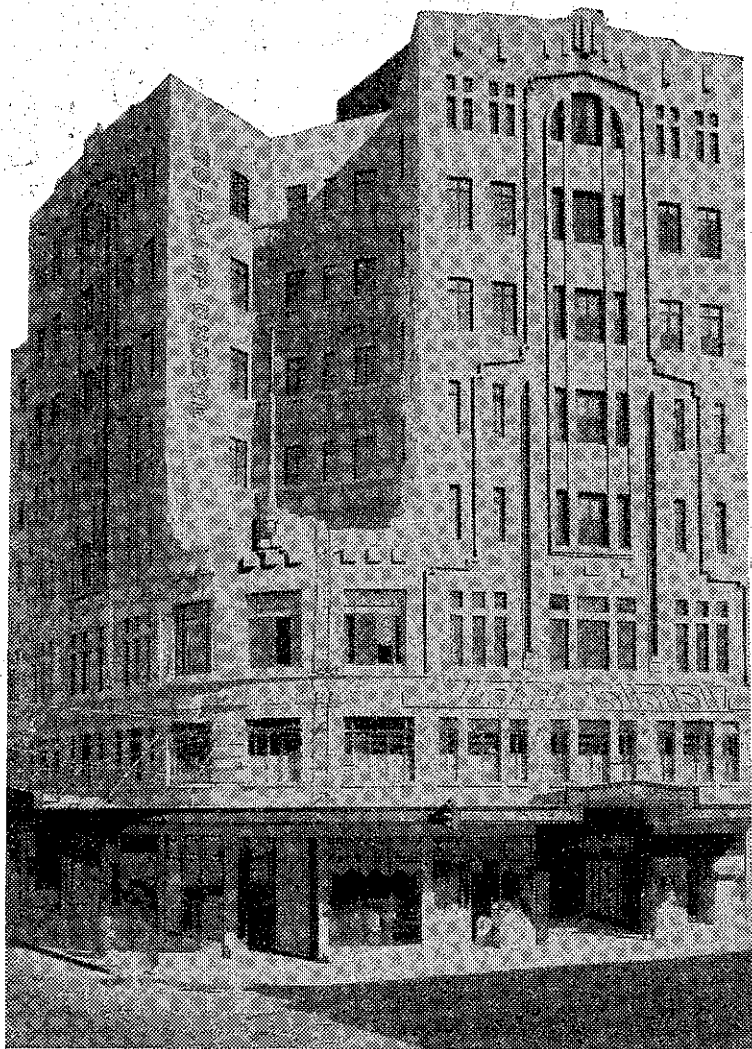
New Zealand is now on the eve of what promises to be the biggest tourist season the country has known. Americans will be pouring across the Pacific, Australians will be coming across the Tasman, Europeans will be boarding luxury liners that will cruise along our coast—they will look at our thermal wonders, climb our alps, view sea and native bush, watch the Maoris at work and at play; but, on the other hand, they will not be able to buy a packet of cigarettes after an early hour in the evening, they will not be able to dance at their hotels, they will not be able to offer their dinner guests a drink after eight o'clock!

Our Tourist Department is rapidly acquiring the reputation of being the liveliest in the world—films are being sent to cinemas in all corners of the globe, publicity adorns buses in the Strand and railway stations in Hong-Kong, booklets are being sent into the Middle West of America and the homes of the Swiss, lecturers are telling the residents of Delhi and the citizens of Copenhagen of the beauties of New Zealand. And people are beginning to take notice. Bookings on tourist liners are excellent this year. But the Government is doing little or nothing to help the very department that it created. The Tourist Department is having to labour along in face of restrictions that make Victorianism look like a cocktail party. If the Tourist Department is going to see its work come to full fruition, it should be assisted by the abolition of the regulations that make the tourist say, "Well, New Zealand's all right—but too darned full of rules and regulations."

"This is probably the only country in the world where supper dances are not allowed at hotels," said the manager of a big city hotel to a "Radio Record" representative. "American tourists have a wonderful time on the trip across the Pacific—balls, parties, games and so on—but when they get here it's an anti-climax. They go out sight-seeing in the daytime—and they admit that our scenery is wonderful—but in the evening there's nothing for them to do. A few picture shows, perhaps, showing films they saw months before in America, no stage shows, except once in a blue moon, scarcely even a decent place to dance and sup. So all they do is sit round the hotel lounge, which is often a pretty fair imitation of a city morgue, have a few drinks, read the evening paper and go to bed.

"And that's how New Zealand tries to attract tourists! "My idea of giving tourists a good time would be to run supper dances, say, twice or three times a week—a good band, a cabaret act or two, a decent supper and drinks if they want them served at the tables round the room. On Sundays we could have what are known in London as 'floor shows'—a big orchestra playing special music, acts by chosen artists, some new songs, perhaps, and rounded off with a well served supper.

"Why, if a guest is giving a dinner party that is likely to continue after eight o'clock he cannot offer his guests a drink after that hour unless he obtains a special permit from the police! As it is now, we cannot even offer guests a cabaret turn in the dining-room without committing a breach of the law."



Because of licensing laws framed in the West Coast gold-rush days of more than half-a-century ago, modern New Zealand hotels (such as the one pictured above) are hedged in by restrictions which tourists find savouring strongly of Mother Grundy-ism.

The manager of a big Wellington hotel said that one of the Vanderbilts—one of the most important families in New York—came through New Zealand on a luxury liner last year. "I asked her what she thought of New Zealand hotels," he said, "and she replied that, while she considered them very comfortable, they could not compare with American and European hotels for brightness and life. This means that we are not catering for the new generation of travellers—the younger people who don't want comfort so much as gaiety and music and colour. And until we get rid of some of our ridiculous restrictions we are not going to be able to cater for them.

"London has dear old DORA—the Defence of the Realm Act, in other words—which lays restrictions on London's night life; but they are nothing to ours. The principal restriction is that liquor may not be served in a cabaret or restaurant after midnight. In New Zealand liquor may not be served in a cabaret or restaurant at any hour! For instance, there is to be a reception at this hotel next week, at which no liquor will be served, but, before I can allow any of the guests to cross the doorstep I have to secure a permit from the police for the holding of the reception.

"New Zealand must have some sort of night life—if only for the tourists. The Matson line has 22,000 agents in America, and all of them have full information on New Zealand's scenic attractions.

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