

The Greek prime minister, Antonis Samaras, issued an unusual appeal on Tuesday, asking his compatriots to put on their best face as the debt-choked country prepares to accept 17 million tourists – an all-time record.

Although mired in its worst economic crisis in modern times, Greece is braced for a surge in arrivals with visitors from Russia, Germany and Britain leading the revival of an industry that only last year appeared on its knees.

"We will have at least 17 million tourists this year. This development is a vote of confidence in our country. It [means] liquidity, money for the market and new, healthy places of work," said Samaras, who has headed a conservative-dominated, three-party coalition since June.

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