

# Successful tourist industry : where would Switzerland be without tourism?

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Successful tourist industry

# Where would Switzerland be without tourism?

*Two men of the eighteenth century provided the vital impulses for Switzerland's rapid development into a tourist 'world power'. They were scientist Johann Jakob Scheuchzer and Albrecht von Haller with his poem on the Alps published in 1732. Tourism is now Switzerland's third biggest export industry, earning some Sfr. 33,000 million in 1989.*

The British discovered Alpinism and Switzerland – the 'playground of Europe' – in the mid eighteenth century. They revealed to the world the joys of winter sports, with the first winter guests being lodged in St Moritz in 1864, and in Davos in 1865. Until 1914 foreign tourists were clearly in the majority, accounting for some 80 percent of all visitors. From a very early stage Germany and Great Britain were two of the most important sources of visitors. After the Second World War they were joined by France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Italy, the Netherlands, and, increasingly, the USA. During the past few years the number of visitors from countries with weaker currencies has fallen, largely as a result of the strength of the Swiss franc.

### Up and down on the world economic seesaw

The growth of the hotel and restaurant industry during the 20th century more or less reflects the political and economic ups and downs of this eventful era. In the past the hotel industry was part of the luxury sector, and as such was extremely susceptible to depressive economic conditions. Yet as the economy went into recession in the mid seventies people were amazed at the relative stability of the hotel industry. The industry expanded anew at the beginning of the eighties, achieving record results in 1981. Thereafter figures stagnated up to the end of the decade. In the most recent past the Gulf War has affected business and congress tourism to Switzerland in particular.

### Constant renewal

Over the last fifty years the actual number of beds offered by Swiss hotels has changed little. In qualitative terms, however, accommodation has largely adapted to changes in tourist requirements. Between 1974 and 1989 alone, the Swiss Association for Hotel Loans approved loans and pledges for an amount totalling Sfr. 505.4 million. This money was spent on hotel reconstruction, new hotels, hotel purchases, replacement buildings and health resort equipment. This money gave rise to a total investment volume of Sfr. 3530 million in the same period.



*The relaxation value of our countryside cannot be measured in figures. Our picture shows the village of La Basse in the Jura region, 960 m above sea level. (Photo: SNT0)*

### Growth in demand for accommodation in Switzerland (overnight stays in thousands)

Year	Hotels	Other accommodation
1950	18,635	
1960	28,195	
1965	31,356	
1968	32,464	23,137
1970	35,656	25,774
1975	33,579	34,652
1980	35,716	39,566
1985	35,994	38,729
1990	37,548	40,097

Over the past 20 years visitors have switched increasingly from hotel accommodation to other forms of accommodation, such as vacation apartments.

Year	Hotels	Other accommodation
1970	58%	42%
1975	49%	51%
1980	47%	53%
1985	48%	52%
1990	48%	52%



**The main tourist organisations**

The *Swiss National Tourist Office* (SNTO) operates in Switzerland and abroad, providing information and placing advertisements for Switzerland as a vacation land. Head office is located in Zurich and the SNTO also runs 24 offices in foreign centres. In legal terms, it is a public law entity, and its funds consists largely of federal contributions as well as contributions made by the tourist industry.

The counterpart to the Swiss National Tourist Office at national level is the *Swiss Tourist Association* whose activities may be described as follows: representing tourist industry interests in national politics, coordinating the activities of all groupings interested in tourism, providing information and promoting applied tourist research. It takes the form of an association under private law, and is mainly funded by member contributions.

**Tourist-intensive industrial country**

Foreign visitors to Switzerland spent Sfr. 11,500 million in 1989. This means that tourism is the third biggest industry, after the machine and the chemical industries; on the list of the top five Swiss exporting industries. If we add in day and business tourism, expenditure on sports equipment and private motoring, on holiday homes used by the owners themselves and on construction or installations prompted by tourism, we obtain a total tourist demand in Switzerland of Sfr. 32,000–34,000 million.

If we compare these figures to those for other European countries we see that Switzerland is one of the most 'tourist-intensive' countries, even if it accounts for 'only' some four percent of total overnight stays recorded in Europe. In 1989 Switzerland recorded 5.4 overnight stays by foreigners per head of its own population. If we calculate foreign exchange receipts resulting from tourism on a per capita basis, we see that Switzerland is number two behind Austria, with Sfr. 1737 being spent per head of population.

**Tourism focuses on mountain and border areas**

Some 290,000 people are directly or indirectly employed in tourism. This industry is Switzerland's most important employer after the metal and machine industry. In 1989, 6.4% of GDP was attributable to tourist consumption (expenditure by foreign and Swiss tourists in Switzerland).

More than two-thirds of all Swiss tourism is accounted for by the pre-alpine and alpine regions, areas whose economy is otherwise not strong. Tourism means work and income for

*The Matterhorn (in the background) is free advertising for our country. (Photo: SNTO)*



numerous mountain valleys, and helps to prevent migration from the land. Mountain farming may be typical for Switzerland, but its yield is poor. In many places this prime tourist attraction can only be maintained because tourism brings farmers additional income.

The future of tourism and the fate of mountain farming will be even more closely linked as Europe moves closer together.

*Elisabeth Kaufmann,  
Swiss Tourist Association*

The Swiss National Tourist Office abroad

**Switzerland on Display**

*There are 230 'ambassadors' at the Swiss National Tourist Office representing Switzerland, the 'country for travel and holiday'. Of these, 70 are based at the headquarters in Zurich while the remaining 160 are spread throughout 25 representations in 17 different countries. Their task is to put into action the commission entrusted to the SNTO by the Federal Government to provide tourist information and organise promotional activities both at home and abroad.*

The origins of Swiss tourist promotion abroad are attributed to the activities of the railways, or to be more precise, to the Gotthard and the Jura–Simplon lines. The opening of the new alpine routes was also brought to the attention of people beyond the Swiss border, and contributed to the first major upswing in tourism in this country at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. After the private railways were nationalised in 1902, the publicity department of the Swiss Federal Railways gradually built up a network of agencies abroad, which were later taken over and further developed by the SNTO. Although the tourist industry agreed about the necessity of a national publicity bureau al-

ready at the beginning of this century, they did not see eye to eye on matters concerning the financing of such an office. Only when the government, faced with the catastrophic effects of the First World War on the tourist trade, relented into providing financial support, did tourist promotion begin to take shape on a national scale. The 'National Association for the Promotion of Tourism', founded in 1917 under private law, was followed in 1939 by the 'Swiss Office for Tourist Publicity', which was formed as a public corporation. The name was changed to the Swiss National Tourist Office in 1955 and today comprises 450 members.