

# News in brief

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**Swiss tourist industry booming**

In 2006, Switzerland welcomed more tourists than at any time in the last two decades, recording 34.7 million overnight stays. The country's cities were particularly popular, primarily Basel, which drew 19.8% more visitors than the year before.

**Ammann flies to glory**

Ski jumper Simon Ammann from St. Gallen picked up the gold medal on the large hill and the silver on the normal hill at the World Ski Championships in Sapporo, Japan. Ammann finished the season in third place in the World Cup ranking.

**Warmest winter ever**

According to MeteoSchweiz, the Swiss meteorological office, last winter was the mildest since records began in 1864. Temperatures were an average 3–4 degrees Celsius higher than the long-term average.

**Economy up, unemployment down**

Figures released by the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs show that the Swiss economy grew by 2.7% last year. That's the highest growth in six years. In March, unemployment was at its lowest level since October 2002, at 2.8%.

**Excellent airport**

It's official: Zurich is Europe's best airport. At a ceremony in Dubai, Zurich was presented with the Airport Service Quality Award (see also pages 12–13).

**Samuel Schmid's Friday the 13th**

The plane carrying Federal Councillor Schmid on his return from an official trip to the United States was forced to make an emergency landing in

Washington. Having jettisoned fuel and aborted his first attempt at landing, the captain finally touched the aircraft down safely after circling Washington for one-and-a-half hours.

**Death of César Keiser**

Satirist César Keiser from Basel died in February at the age of 82. Keiser attracted huge audiences to the Cabaret Fédéral in the 1950s, and his limericks were also extremely popular.

**Tunnel under Gibraltar**

Eighty-year-old engineer Giovanni Lombardi from Ticino has been commissioned to build a 40-kilometre railway tunnel under the Straits of Gibraltar. Lombardi is no stranger to tunnels. To date, the projects he has headed or participated in, including the Gotthard tunnel, run a combined length of more than a hundred kilometres!

**Ideal cities**

According to the annual survey by American consultants Mercer HRC, Zurich and Geneva offer the best quality of life of all cities in the world. A total of 39 criteria were used to assess 215 cities around the globe.

**Switzerland online**

A study by the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs has found that 91% of people working in companies with 10 or more employees have Internet access at their workplace. Nearly two-thirds of respondents said they used the Internet every day.

**Air pollution**

Although a number of cantons have declared war on cigarettes and banned smoking in enclosed public spaces, another airborne pollutant is now causing concern: fine dust particles. Last

year, the levels of particulate matter in Switzerland exceeded the statutory maximum on no fewer than 66 days.

**President takes to the road**

In April, Federal President Micheline Calmy-Rey visited Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. She discussed fiscal policies and the distribution of the "cohesion billion" with her hosts. Mrs Calmy-Rey also stressed that cantonal corporate taxation policies in no way breached the 1972 Free Trade Agreement with the European Union.

**EU embassy opened**

In April, Federal President Micheline Calmy-Rey and Benita Ferrero-Waldner, the European Commissioner for External Relations, officially opened

the EU's embassy in Berne. Ambassador Michael Reiterer has been in office since the start of the year and has already begun forging contacts within the confederation.

**Ammo to stay in arsenals**

The Security Commission of the Swiss Council of States wants to stop soldiers being issued ammunition to take home. The proposed change would apply to all soldiers with the exception of about a thousand military policemen. Members of the armed forces would, however, continue to keep their service weapons at home. Commission Chairman Hermann Bürgi (SVP/TG) denies that recent shootings involving service firearms had any bearing on the recommendation.

ALAIN WEY

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## Vote SVP, Vote for Switzerland!

Dear fellow citizens living abroad,

On 21 October, 2007, elections will be held. We, the Swiss citizens living abroad can also exert our influence on Switzerland's future; personally, I will support the Swiss People's Party's electoral list of citizens abroad, since:

- **The SVP is committed to Switzerland's freedom and independence.**
- **The SVP defends traditional Swiss values.**
- **The SVP wants Switzerland to remain an attractive destination to live, work and do business.**
- **The SVP represents the interests of Swiss citizens living abroad.**

Therefore, choose the SVP's electoral list of citizens abroad and speak out for the interests of Switzerland and its citizens living abroad!

With warmest regards

**Rolf Schudel**, Johannesburg (SA)  
President SVP International

  
www.svp-international.ch