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The former fishing village of Ascona on Lake Maggiore, lined with palms, attracts many tourists. (Photo: SNTO)

Editorial

Swiss Abroad and Tourism – Pillars upholding the presence of Switzerland overseas



In connection with the 700th Anniversary celebrations of the Swiss Confederation, I have come across a phenomenon which puts us a notch above all other countries. The sun never sets on Switzerland! Our investigations have brought to light 170 'Switzerlands' in 42 different countries in all corners of the world. We shall have a rock donated from each of these 'Switzerlands', and an artist will create a rock garden in front of the Federal Parliament building in Berne, a symbolic meeting place where Switzerland and the world come together.

In the second half of the 18th century Swiss emigrants, homesick for their native country, started to name particularly beautiful areas in their new homeland 'Switzerland'. The Confederation also enjoyed such an excellent reputation as a country of unparalleled beauty that, with the onset of tourism, it was assumed that any region designated with the same name would attract tourists in their multitudes.

In 1990, once more around 10 million tourists from all over the world flocked to Switzerland to spend their holidays. They slept 37 million times in Swiss beds and spent near to 12.4 billion francs in foreign currencies. The Swiss themselves spent 40.4 million nights as 'tourists' in their own country and paid 7.5 billion francs for excursions and holidays. But for Switzerland the significance of tourism – which is after all the third most important export after machinery and chemicals – goes much deeper than just the economy. Tourism helps to save whole valleys from depopulation, directly and indirectly generates tens of thousands of jobs, and provides a suitable vehicle to spread understanding and knowledge about our country and its culture. Surveys confirm that over 90% of foreign guests rate their stay in Switzerland as being 'satisfactory' to 'very satisfactory'. It can also be concluded that these visitors in turn spread a favourable image of Switzerland in their own country, and with it a feeling of understanding, affinity and goodwill towards our nation.

The fact that these and other values exist is largely thanks to the 'Fifth Switzerland'. History shows that the prosperity of Switzerland is largely due to the pioneering spirit, daring and loyalty of Swiss abroad. Through my own professional activities and personal experiences abroad I am myself inclined to take the view that the best Swiss live outside Switzerland...! In any case, tourism and Swiss abroad go hand in hand. They certainly make a major contribution to the prestige which Switzerland enjoys throughout the world.

Walter Leu, Director of the Swiss National Tourist Office

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