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84th Congress of the Swiss Abroad: A congress with a cultural influence

Between 18 and 20 August, the Congress Centre Basle will host the 84th Congress of the Swiss Abroad. Since Basle enjoys a long tradition of close links between culture and business, the OSA has chosen the following enduring theme for this year's congress: Partnership between business and culture.

"Look, then talk" is the motto for this year's congress which is largely dedicated to the discovery of those locations to which Basle owes its international fame: its museums and its industry. The two have always been inextricably linked on the banks of the Rhine. The major pharmaceutical companies, thanks to which Basle's industry is thriving, soon recognized that their prestige also depended on support of the numerous institutions in this stronghold of European culture. Private funding led to the estab-

lishment of such renowned institutions we know today as the Museum of Art, the Tinguely Museum, the Beyeler Foundation Art Museum and the Schaulager, where artists can exhibit their works in buildings designed by star architects like Herzog & De Meuron or Renzo Piano. Not only does Basle have the greatest concentration of museums for a city of its size, but also the highest number of multinationals. Business and culture share a long tradition of partnership in Basle which will be illustrated through enriching museum visits and interesting speakers.

The Congress for the Swiss Abroad kicks off on Friday 18 August, with the meeting of the Council for the Swiss Abroad in the town hall between 9 a.m. and noon. The session will continue after lunch until 5 p.m. The evening will then be dedicated to the official opening of the congress in the Congress Centre, with the performance of the musical tale "Mountains Don't Move." Federal Councillor Christoph Blocher will speak to

the Swiss Abroad attending Saturday morning's plenary meeting. In the afternoon a choice of locations such as the Schaulager, the Beyeler Foundation Art Museum, the Museum of Culture, the Museum of Art and the Museum of Antiquities is on the agenda. The evening will be reserved entirely for the banquet at the Messe Basle banquet hall. In keeping with the theme of this congress, Sunday will be given over to museum visits. You can find more information about the 84th Congress for the Swiss Abroad at www.aso.ch.

Wanted: Host families

Over the past 14 years more than a thousand Swiss Abroad have had the opportunity to enjoy the hospitality of a Swiss family. Host families and visitors were sought, placed and cared for by Swiss Ping Pong. At the end of 2006, the Swiss Ping Pong exchange project will come to an end. The OSA thanks all those involved and aims to continue the project in a new format.

This project was initially launched on the occasion of the 700th anniversary of the Swiss Confederation in 1991. The idea was to invite as many Swiss Abroad as possible to participate in the event's festivities. Women's organisations were persuaded to implement the idea, which would simultaneously enable encounters between Swiss nationals at home and abroad. These ladies were willing to take Swiss Abroad into their own homes with room and board provided by the hosts.

This one-time event sparked off an exciting project. Even after the big anniversary, Swiss Abroad continued to take advantage of this opportunity to visit Switzerland and get to know Swiss citizens on a personal level. Thus Swiss Ping Pong was born. The Stapferhaus Lenzburg provided a home for this project as

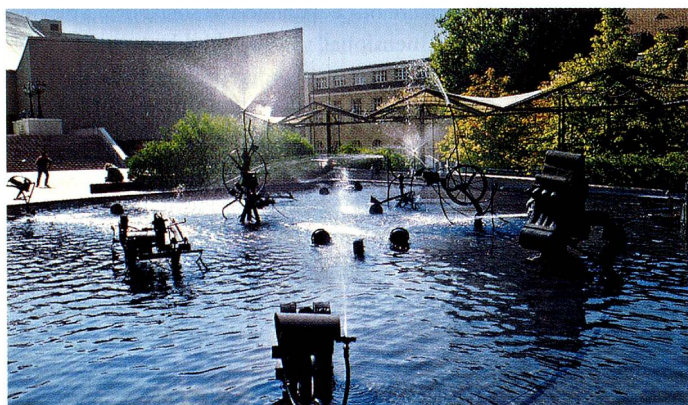
well as competent, experienced management. For 14 years Brigitte Fuchs, Project Leader at the Stapferhaus, looked for families in Switzerland who were willing to accommodate guests. Her work matching up hosts and suitable guests from all over the world has resulted in the formation of some long-term friendships.

Swiss Ping Pong has also had to cope with a new surge of visitors since the introduction of study opportunities for young Swiss Abroad. These young people attend a language course, get a taste of university life or take part in a seminar.

For the past six years they have also been placed with Swiss families and, while the number of young people taking advantage of these offers and looking for accommodation continues to grow, they appreciate the opportunity to gain an insight into Swiss family life, and the host families thoroughly enjoy the breath of fresh air their foreign visitor brings into their homes.

The Stapferhaus Lenzburg has made a strategic decision to discontinue the Swiss Ping Pong project. As a cultural institution whose activities are focused on the organisation of exhibitions both in Switzerland and abroad as well as educational services in the fields of cultural promotion and management and socio-culture, the Stapferhaus Lenzburg feels that Swiss Ping Pong no longer fits its concept.

The OSA is ready to take over the baton and, from October 2006 onward, assume responsibility for the youth-related activities of Swiss Ping Pong. Moreover, we are aiming to extend the project's offers for young people to the French-speaking part of Switzerland. With this in mind, we are seeking partners and host families in that region. The OSA hopes that, of the enormous network built up over the years, it can keep as many friends of Swiss Ping Pong as possible on its files.



Loved by locals and visitors alike: The Tinguely Fountain in Basle

84TH CONGRESS OF THE SWISS ABROAD, BASLE

Please send me the information package for the 84th Congress of the Swiss Abroad (please use block capitals)

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Please return the completed coupon to the following address by 30 May 2006: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad, Congress, Alpenstrasse 26, P.O. Box, CH-3006 Berne, e-mail: congress@aso.ch. Since this year's deadlines have been shortened for organisational reasons, the end of June will mark the deadline for Congress of the Swiss Abroad registrations. The registration form is included in the congress information package which can be ordered using the above coupon. You can also order the congress information package electronically at: congress@aso.ch. Please do not forget to include your full postal address.

Young Swiss Abroad meet in Switzerland

This summer, the OSA's Youth Service once again offers a wide range of recreational and educational holidays in Switzerland. We want to establish ties: Ties to our country, ties to Swiss people living in Switzerland and ties to those living all over the world.

This summer the Youth Service is expecting around 160 young Swiss Abroad to attend the two summer camps alone. We organise unforgettable, action-packed holidays with participants from over 40 countries. We offer them the opportunity to learn new sports and get to know the breathtaking mountains of the Bernese Oberland. And since not everybody feels the same urge to get out into the open air, our camps offer alternative workshops where kids can join in on artistic, electronic or musical activities. Our goal is to have fun with others of the same age.

Dates:

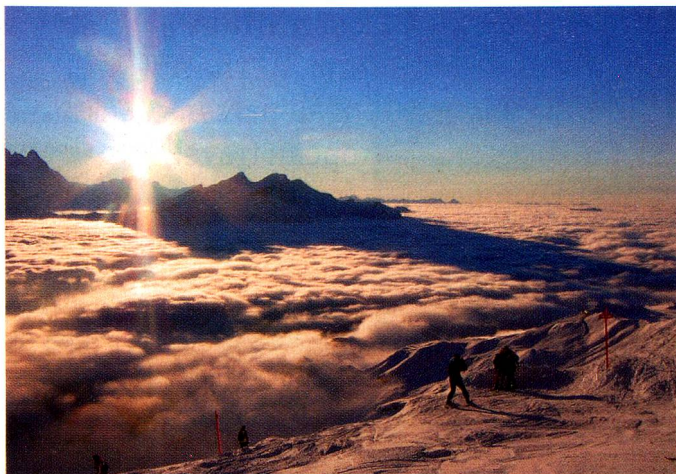
Summer camp 1 in Kandersteg:
16 – 28 July 2006
Summer camp 2 in Kandersteg:
30 July – 11 August 2006
Mobile in Switzerland – up in
the mountains of the Valais:
21 – 27 August 2006

Plan your future during the holidays?

Our "Training in Switzerland" program is geared toward young people who are interested in obtaining an education in Switzerland or who would simply like to take a peek at a Swiss university or training opportunities in some branch of the Swiss industry. We offer you one-on-one counselling and give you tips on educational opportunities in Switzerland.

Take an educational holiday

Swiss Abroad can learn German or French in two-week language courses. Our workshop will ad-



Fantastic weather at the New Year's camp on the Hasliberg

dress the relationship between business and culture using Basle as an example. You will also attend the Federal Youth Session where you can experience Switzerland's direct democracy first hand. Our open-minded host families are eagerly awaiting you and will let you join in on everyday Swiss life.

As always, information on these offers can be requested at: *Organisation for the Swiss Abroad, Youth Service, Alpenstr. 26, 3006 Berne, Tel.: ++41 (0)31 356 61 00 Fax.: ++41 (0)31 356 61 01 youth@aso.ch, www.aso.ch*

Have you ever seen snow?

On day two of our winter camp in Hasliberg (27 Dec. – 5 Jan. 2006) I picked up a twelve-year-old Bolivian boy from Zurich Kloten airport who had missed his connecting flight in Miami and, despite the 24-hour delay, still wanted to make it to camp to join the other forty-seven campers. As soon as I had liberated him from the UM (unaccompanied minor) counter, we tackled the challenging task of weaving our way through the airport's teeming masses with his luggage to reach our train's departure platform. Once we had emerged from the artificially lit underworld of the airport's train station, my Bolivian companion discovered the thin dusting of white snow that covered everything. He practically

burst with excitement. "Is this snow?" he asked me without taking his eyes off that fascinating sight. When you watch a child's very first experience with snow, it's something you'll never forget. You could tell from his wide eyes that he could barely believe what he was seeing and the same was true with the plentiful graffiti so colourfully covering nearly every conceivable surface near the tracks.

The train took us farther and farther into Switzerland's winter wonderland. The closer we came to our destination in Hasliberg, the more snow cov-

ered the countryside and the more impressed my young guest became. While it may not have been very noticeable in the well-heated double-decker train from Zurich Airport to Lucerne, as soon as we were sitting in the small Brünig-Hasliberg train it was obvious that I was travelling with a boy from warmer climes. Shivering from head to toe, he and I pulled out gloves and a scarf from the huge suitcase we had parked in the entry area of the train. He didn't really seem to know what to do with these odd pieces of (hand-knitted) clothing so I helped him get them on. A good two and a half hours later we finally arrived at the camp's deserted main building. Everybody had already hit the slopes.

It didn't take him long to get settled in and then take his first twenty spills in the snow while trying to master the art of controlling two very uncooperative boards strapped to his feet. His big eyes with their dark lashes and the way they sparkled when they spied snow are something I'll remember for a long time to come.

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Swiss Franchise Opportunities

With 11 centres already open since 1986, we are ready to develop Zurich, Basel, Bern, Luzern and Wallis from September 2006. An existing centre in the Swiss French region is also available. Interested parties should contact nickgaltos@wallst.ch