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An exhilarating museum for young and old

The Swiss Museum of Transport in Lucerne will celebrate its 50th birthday next year. But there is no sign of a midlife crisis at Switzerland's most popular museum. In fact, the museum is developing as dynamically as its main areas of interest – transport and communication. By Heinz Eckert

The Swiss Museum of Transport in its magnificent setting on the banks of Lake Lucerne continues to attract both young and old and is still Switzerland's most visited museum. It is one of the best museums of its kind in the world and was visited by around 900,000 people in 2007. This figure is expected to rise to a million in 2010.

The museum presents the development of transport and mobility in general in the past, present and future using an interesting, hands-on and varied approach. It encompasses road, rail and water transport as well as aviation and space travel, while also showing how different communication technologies work. More than 3,000 exhibits in some 20,000 square metres of exhibition space illustrate the eventful history of transport and communication.

It also contains attractions that are unique in Switzerland, such as the IMAX cinema, where films about nature and wildlife as well as documentaries from foreign countries and cultures can be enjoyed in a whole new dimension, and the planetarium, which is one of the most modern in the

world enabling digital travel through the universe. It is almost as though the starlit sky has been brought down to earth, allowing strolls through outer space from the comfort of an armchair. The Swissarena gives visitors to the museum a unique view of Switzerland normally only seen by astronauts. This almost 200 square metre aerial photograph, the world's first "walk-in" one of an entire country, gives visitors the chance to explore Switzerland for themselves.

The finest classic cars and aircraft are on display at the Swiss Museum of Transport in Lucerne as well as a remarkable collection of old racing cars. One particularly unforgettable experience for everyone is certain to be the trips in the Formula 1 and flight simulators. There is also the opportunity for visitors to present their own news programme in the television studio and experience what it is genuinely like to work as a radio presenter in a modern radio studio. The Swiss Museum of Transport has something extraordinary to offer everyone.

The first attempts to establish a Swiss Museum of Transport were made back in 1897 when the Swiss railway system celebrated its 50th anniversary. Though the idea did not begin to properly take shape until the national exhibition of 1914 where various original exhibits were displayed on the history of the railway. Four years later, the Swiss Federal Railways (SBB) opened the Swiss Railway Museum in Zurich with the assembled collection. Against the historical and professional background of the national exhibition of 1939, the idea of a museum covering all types of transport was picked up again, resulting in the foundation of the Swiss Museum of Transport Association in 1942 which still runs the museum today, although it was based in Zurich back then.

When no suitable site could be found in Zurich for the proposed Museum of Transport, the city of Lucerne offered the association the 40,000 square metre Lido grounds by Lake Lucerne. At the time, the Swiss Museum of Transport Association counted among its members not just the SBB and PTT (the former national post, telephone and telegraph group), but also private railways, transport organisations and large companies from the trade, industry and tourism sectors. The Museum of Transport's themes therefore reflect the communications objectives of its founding partners. The project also received financial support from the federal government and the city and canton of Lucerne.



A Mecca for railway enthusiasts.

One of the most famous Swiss, Alfred Waldis, "Mr. Museum of Transport", was a key figure in the establishment of the museum. In 1957, when working for the SBB, Waldis met Paul Kopp, the former president of the city of Lucerne on a train journey to Berne. Kopp told him about a museum project for Lucerne, for which he was travelling to Berne to attend a meeting. Waldis asked for further details and said that he was extremely interested in the Swiss Museum of Transport project. In the evening, on the homeward journey, the 37-year-old Waldis met Kopp again and was stunned when Kopp offered him the chance to manage the proposed museum on the spot.

Alfred Waldis accepted the offer immediately and wholeheartedly threw himself into the project and the creation of the Museum of Transport, which became Switzerland's most popular museum shortly after opening in 1959 and a model for similar institutions around the world.

One of the objectives of the Swiss Museum of Transport is to explain the technology and importance of all means of transport, communication, tourism and space travel in a modern and easily accessible way. Beyond this initial aim, the opening of the planetarium (1969), the aviation and space travel hall (1972) attended by John Glenn, the first American in space and Neil Armstrong, the first man on the moon, the Hans Erni Museum (1979), the second railway hall (1982) and the hall of navigation, cableways and tourism with the Swisssorama (1984) helped to further the ambitions Waldis had for the Museum of Transport, which involved collecting and preserving valuable artefacts of cultural life, promoting education and fundamental research and helping understand the history and development of technology and its impact on the environment.

Alfred Waldis also described the opening of the IMAX cinema as a personal highlight. While taking part in the opening of the National Air and Space Museum in Washington on 1 July 1976 on the 200th anniversary of the United States of America, he first saw the IMAX film "To Fly". He was so impressed that he immediately decided that the Swiss Museum of Transport also needed a similar cinema with a 500 square metre screen. The possibility of building an IMAX cinema was first examined at the beginning of the 1980s in connection with the hall of navigation, cableways and tourism, but the space was not

SWISS ABROAD AT THE MUSEUM OF TRANSPORT

The 87th Congress of the Swiss Abroad will take place in the new congress hall at the Swiss Museum of Transport in Lucerne from 7 to 9 August 2009. The large conference centre has state-of-the-art facilities, a conference hall for up to 530 people, various seminar rooms and a foyer with natural light and a panoramic view.

available. In 1989, objections from local residents prevented the construction of an IMAX cinema. It was another seven years before the museum's cinema could be unveiled.

In 1979, Alfred Waldis retired at the age of 61. He has since remained honorary president of the Swiss Museum of Transport, which will remain forever linked with his name.

However, the Swiss Museum of Transport is continuing to develop under its current director Daniel Suter. The new "Future Com" entrance building, containing a state-of-the-art conference centre, restaurant, interactive "Media Factory" communications world and museum shop, opened on 3 November this year as the first phase of a redevelopment scheme. The new road transport hall and a multipurpose open air arena for special exhibitions will open in the museum by mid 2009.

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Switzerland – an overview.



The history of aviation.



The starlit sky in the planetarium.