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Inhaltsverzeichnis

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Switzerland in 48 hours

5 Mailbag

6 Focus

Tourism is booming; top Swiss destinations are becoming crowded

10 Politics

Patience is needed: the path to the EU framework agreement remains rocky

12 Images

An exhibition examines the moon's power to fascinate

14 Society

The Léman Express will open Geneva up to its surroundings

16 Literature series

How the writings of Albert Bächtold led to Russians speaking Klettgau dialect

News from your region

17 Politics / Elections 2019

Parties under the microscope: the big election survey

22 Economy

Switzerland: the El Dorado of blockchain technology

24 OSA news

Congress of the Swiss Abroad in Montreux

28 news.admin.ch

The latest on e-voting

30 Books / Sounds

31 Top pick / News



Anyone visiting Switzerland this year cannot have failed to notice that the scrum around key tourist destinations has become thicker than ever. Lucerne, for example, is at its limits, groaning under the weight of tourist groups numbering in the thousands. Interlaken is also bursting at the seams. On some days, many of its local mountain railways are as packed as any metropolitan rush-hour underground.

As the Focus article in this edition of the “Review” shows, the impression is accurate. Switzerland is beginning to know the meaning of “overtourism”. In other words, beautiful towns and cities are learning how it feels for their role in history to be overlooked as they become nothing more than a backdrop to a hectic, parallel tourist world. One of the drivers of this is the sense of hurry. If the ever-growing groups of guests from the Far East are only able to afford “Europe in five days”, then they have at most 48 hours to enjoy Zurich, Lucerne, Bern, Interlaken, the Jungfrauoch and Geneva, not to mention any experience of everyday life here.

This pace is increasing the pressure on our tourism highlights. More and more guests are targeting the same places for the same experiences, and are taking the same photos. If you have not taken a selfie at the Rhine Falls, in front of Lucerne’s Kappellbrücke (Chapel Bridge), or up on the famous Jungfrauoch, you were not there. Experts refer to this type of behaviour as “signalling”.

This is by no means meant as a moral judgement as Swiss people experience the world in a similar way, too – whether it is the Eiffel Tower, the Taj Mahal, the Statue of Liberty, or Uluru, taking a photo in front of a well-known landmark gives a point of reference – and confirmation. Journeying the road less travelled is more challenging, as it is harder to share what fewer people know. Travelling without collecting visual trophies is something that has to be learned probably.

What’s more, a tourist destination like Switzerland has a huge amount to offer apart from just the hotspots. I tested this for myself, packed a rucksack, and went hiking for a few days through the alpine foothills, camped at farms and bathed my tired feet in beautiful rivers. There was no sign whatsoever of “overtourism”.

The last paragraph of this editorial is devoted to the coming elections. The “Fifth Switzerland” is being bombarded by advertising from all the political parties. At the same time, the political rights of the Swiss Abroad are coming under pressure. There could not be more at stake. We put the parties under the microscope, which produced some fascinating insights.

MARC LETTAU, EDITOR IN CHIEF

Cover photo: Chinese tourists on the top of Titlis.
Photo: Keystone

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