

Zeitschrift: Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand
Herausgeber: Swiss Society of New Zealand
Band: 61 (1995)
Heft: [8]

Nachruf: Death of Walter Morath
Autor: [s.n.]

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The scenic Jungfrau region symbolises the attraction of Switzerland as a dream destination.

Visitors to Switzerland like the product - but not the price.

When it comes to competitiveness, Switzerland faces a tough time selling itself as a tourist destination. Few potential visitors question the quality - the real problem is the price.

The strength of the franc and the lure of low-cost countries are hitting the Swiss tourism industry hard. Hotel bookings fell to an all time low and overnight stays have so far slumped by over one million.

During the past decade, the US Dollar, Italian Lira and British Pound have all lost between 40 and 55 percent of their value against the Swiss currency. Over the same period, Switzerland has fallen from seventh to tenth place in Europe in terms of visitor arrivals.

Statistics show that the average tourist to Switzerland stays 3.8 nights and spends NZ\$800.00, while the average visitor to Spain stays 12.7 nights and spends NZ\$700.00 - in other words more than three times longer while paying a lower price.

As an example, Swiss tour operators have been offering budget-priced holidays in Majorca (return flights and

hotel with bed and breakfast included) for as low as SFR 290.

Tourism expenditure abroad by the well-to-do Swiss soared to an all-time high while spending by foreign visitors to Switzerland fell for the second successive year.

Switzerland has become an expensive destination for a great many tourists... mainly because of the lowering of their currencies' exchange rates against the Swiss franc. Moreover, raw materials (foodstuffs, for example) and labour are considerably more expensive in Switzerland than in the surrounding countries. In addition, the recent introduction of VAT in Switzerland has clearly not helped to lower prices in the tourist market.

But their is cause for some optimism in the industry. The Swiss Travel Mart, a venue which is staged every two years, was attended by over 300 operators from nearly 40 countries, including not only the major markets of Europe, the United States and Japan, but also the Middle East and South America.

Most foreign tour operators agreed that while Switzerland remains a dream



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destination, many of their clients have been lured away on holidays to less costly countries. To counter this the Swiss National Tourist Office is calling on the tourism industry itself to show more flexibility in its pricing policies. One suggestion is that hotel groups and vacation resorts should offer holiday programmes and packages in the currency of the country where they are being marketed. Another possibility is for contracts with foreign travel companies to be concluded in Swiss francs at a fixed rate of exchange.

The message the Swiss tourism industry gave to the assembled foreign tour operators was that Switzerland is not a mass tourism destination and never will be. Tourists come to Switzerland for quality - and the Swiss tourist industry will pursue this policy of offering the discerning vacation visitor top value for money.

DEATH OF WALTER MORATH

The actor Walter Morath, famous for his cabaret acts with his long time partner Volli Gailer has died at the age of 77 years. For years, Walter Morath and Volli Gailer were the best known Swiss cabaretists, presenting on stage, radio and TV their unique brand of humour so loved by the public.

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