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Autor: [s.n.]
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A teetotaler transforms Swiss tourism

Visitors to Switzerland notched 37 million over-night stays in the past year, but the roots of mass tourism go back 200 years to the birth of an English teetotaler.

Many an hotelier and restaurateur could raise a glass to travel pioneer Thomas Cook who transformed Switzerland's tourist industry by introducing package tours to the country.

Born in Derbyshire on November 22, 1808, Cook started his business by organising local transport for members of the Temperance Society - a movement that viewed alcohol as the root cause of social evils.



Cook's package tours opened up Switzerland to thousands of British professionals (Centre d'iconographie genevoise)

The success of this enterprise convinced Cook to branch out into arranging holidays with the new concept of all-inclusive package tours. The first foreign tours went to Paris, via Germany and Belgium, but in 1863 Cook conducted his first organised visit of Switzerland.

They travelled on foot with mules and local guides because areas like Chamonix, Sion and the Bernese Oberland were poor and had no train links or cable cars. The Swiss could not understand why these strangers were travelling through rough mountains.

The first contacts between tourists and locals were also interesting, as documented by one traveller, Jemima Morrell. Dozens of people were waiting for the tourists at the pier, insisting that they bought their food or guiding services. They fought amongst themselves and the descriptions are similar to travelling through third world countries today. In the end the police had to intervene and the state had to make rules that locals were forbidden to get close to clients on steam boats.

Despite the odd discomfort, the visit to the "playground of Europe" was deemed a great success

and was followed up by larger package tours later in 1863 and in the following years as the venture took off.

Travelling to Switzerland used to be the exclusive reserve of the rich, but Cook's package tours opened up the country to thousands of British professionals - and later to anyone.

The new source of income revitalised the economies of struggling rural cantons and led to improvements in infrastructure.

From 1863 it became economically feasible to construct hotels, build more railway routes and increase post carriages with better timetables. Cook also helped to professionalise the Swiss tourist industry that now has an enormous economic impact. It also made Swiss people themselves start to realise the beauty of their own country and they started to take vacations themselves.

Thomas Cook

Thomas Cook was born in 1808 into a strict Baptist family. He started work as a cabinet maker and joined the anti-alcohol Temperance Society before becoming a Baptist minister.

His first venture into travel occurred in 1841 when he arranged the transport by train of 570 temperance campaigners to a rally. After transporting 150,000 people from the north of England to the 1851 Great Exhibition in London, Cook embarked on his first European trip - to the International Exhibition in Paris four years later.

The 1863 Swiss tour was followed by trips to Italy, the Middle East, Egypt, the United States and finally a Round-the-World tour. Cook also developed hotel coupons, holiday brochures and the earliest system of travellers cheques. The Thomas Cook business is today one of the world's largest international tour operators.

from swissinfo

Meine liebe Mutter du

*Meine liebe Mutter du,
ich will dir Blumen schenken.
Was ich dir sagen will dazu,
das kannst du dir schon denken.*

*Ich wünsch dir Glück und Fröhlichkeit,
die Sonne soll dir lachen!
So gut ich kann und allezeit
Will ich dir Freude machen.*

*Denn Muttertage, das ist wahr,
die sind an allen Tagen.
Ich habe dich lieb das ganze Jahr,
das wollte ich dir sagen.*

Ursula Wölfel