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# SWITZERLAND'S HOTEL INDUSTRY

The hotel industry — along with the restaurant sector — is the very bedrock of Switzerland's tourist trade. It was born in the nineteenth century when Switzerland first became famous as a holiday country. Once the ancient fear of the Alps had been overcome and railway construction was in full swing, more and more travellers were attracted by the diversity and beauty of our country. The simple inns which for centuries had stood on or at the foot of the major alpine passes or on other well-known routes to meet the needs of passing travellers were no longer able to cope with the demand. More accommodation had to be provided and it also had to be more comfortable than the old, and suitable for longer stays, to meet the needs of the new visitors. And so the hotel was born!

The Swiss hotel industry was largely developed by private interests. The most famous of the hotel pioneers was probably César Ritz, who opened hotels in Switzerland and throughout Europe, becoming known as "the king of hoteliers and the hotelier of kings".

At first everything went according to plan for these men. Between 1880 and 1912 alone the number of hotel beds in Switzerland quadrupled to reach 211,000. That period is known as the golden age of the Swiss hotel industry. But the First World War killed the hotel trade for several years and this naturally weakened the hotel industry. After the war it

recovered comparatively quickly but was soon overshadowed by the world economic crisis at the end of the nineteen-twenties and then suffered another blow when the Second World War broke out.

After the war the Swiss hotel industry enjoyed a boom with a dramatic increase in the number of overnight stays by foreigners. One of the reasons for this was that Switzerland had not been involved in the war. But this boom also had its negative side, for the hotel industry basked in its success and was slow to increase and renew its facilities.

A turning point came with the appearance of mass and "prestige" tourism in the nineteen-sixties. Swiss hotels suddenly found themselves facing tougher foreign competition. This prompted them to tackle rapid and large-scale renewals and modernisation, after which they soon adapted themselves to the major changes in tourist patterns and the increased demands for comfort.

## SWITZERLAND'S HOTEL INDUSTRY TODAY

Every year about 34 million overnight stays are registered — 60 per cent of them by foreigners from all parts of the world — in Switzerland's approximately 8,000 hotels, guest houses, motels and spa establishments, which between them offer a total of more than 270,000 beds.

The great majority of these concerns are medium-sized or small places

run by families — in some cases for generations past. This structure is also the basis for the personal, almost family-like, care and attention and the traditionally high quality of service which guests enjoy in Swiss hotels. Operating on an all-the-year-round basis, the Swiss hotel industry does not go in for oversized projects. And it scores again because of the good public facilities for rest and relaxation and mental and physical activity which are generally found very close to the hotels and which visitors are welcome to use in addition to the hotel's own facilities.

All types of accommodation are represented, from the simple inn to the luxury hotel and the visitor will find this accommodation everywhere — in towns, in the countryside, by lakes and rivers and in the mountains. Enormous store is set on comfort, hygiene and cleanliness and the visitor's personal welfare. Hotel personnel are generally good linguists and are well trained people. Many members of the managerial staff have passed through one of the world-famous Swiss hotel training schools. In the higher price category guests also enjoy every imaginable amenity, such as radio, television, round-the-clock service, indoor swimming pools, keep-fit facilities, bars, restaurants, public rooms and shopping and banking facilities.

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The Swiss hotel industry leaves no stone unturned in its efforts to maintain and strengthen its high standards of quality and its world-wide reputation.

#### CO-OPERATION IN THE HOTEL INDUSTRY – A PRACTICAL EXAMPLE

Eighty independently-owned Swiss hotels decided some years ago to co-operate in joint promotion and sales activities under the name of "Ambassador Service Hotels". The Ambassador group benefits from the fact that there is no nationally-important hotel chain in Switzerland. At present it offers 10,000 beds and is the biggest and most diverse hotel organisation in Switzerland.

The medium and first-class hotels belonging to the group are spread over 60 cities, towns and resorts in Switzerland and between them they are able to meet a very wide range of requirements. The group offers its guests the advantages of a hotel chain (controlled standard of quality, availability in every major locality in the country, free hotel-to-hotel reservation service) and aims to spare them the frequent disadvantages of a chain (uniformity and impersonal atmosphere).

The Ambassador group hotels are mainly family-owned businesses and guarantee their guests a fair return by way of service for what they pay, as well as the traditional and varied Swiss hospitality.

The hotels are in three clearly-defined categories: Standard, First Class and Superior First Class, which means that they suit a variety of pockets and tastes. Ambassador works with other partners in the Swiss tourist trade, notably with Swissair, Avis car hire and Mövenpick, whose Carte Gourmet is accepted in Ambassador Service Hotels.

For the travel trade (organisers, agents, airlines, etc.) the Ambassador secretariat is an important efficiency factor, since they have to deal with only one organisation instead of with 80 different hoteliers. Sales documents in the form needed by travel agents and the Ambassador Sales Manager ensure up-to-date information and personal contact.

Of special interest to guests are the group's price policy and internal reservation system. Most of the hotels offer fixed prices, as shown in the joint brochure (up-to-date road map with full list of hotels taking part in the scheme and all important information).

At the guests's request any of the 80 hotels in the group will make a reservation at any other Ambassador Service Hotel by telephone free of charge and will issue him with a confirmation which states the room category required, the price and how long he is staying. This simple and reliable reservation system is extremely popular with guests and makes travel in Switzerland a lot easier.

#### HIGH-ALTITUDE TOP HOTELS

The average standard of service in small hotels and guest-houses in many countries, including Switzerland, deserves tribute, but the top hotels are still the yard-stick in international quality comparisons. In Switzerland these hotels are linked in a group called The Leading Hotels of Switzerland. The joint symbol of the 37 member hotels is a big letter "H" – standing for hospitality – with five golden stars. The group's secretariat is in Lausanne (CH-1000 Lausanne 22, P.O.B. 238) and it issues a free illustrated hotel guide.

This alliance of Switzerland's top-class hotels has existed since 1935 as an "amicale" – an organisation representing common interests and has been officially registered as an association since 1972. Each member hotel has to fulfil certain minimum requirements laid down in the collective regulations. These prescribe, for instance, that floor service for all meals must be available from 7 am to midnight. For drinks, a round-the-clock service has to be provided. There are special regulations about the interior decoration and appointments of bedroom and public rooms. In addition, the standard of a hotel is checked each time there is a change of management.

These five-star hotels are not confined to the cities of Basel, Berne, Geneva, Lausanne, Lucerne and Zürich. The highest-altitude member hotels are in the Engadine (5,905 ft. above sea level, six five-star hotels), Arosa (5,954 ft., one five-star hotel) and Zermatt (5,315 ft.,

one five-star hotel). More than half of the member hotels were already playing a major part in the industry in the nineteenth century. But these, too, have been brought up to date at great expense. In the last ten years alone, 272 million Swiss francs have been invested in member hotels. And finally, there is one aspect of this hotel category that must be unparalleled anywhere in the world: 18 of 37 five-star hotels are entirely family concerns which are still run personally by their owners.

#### ARE YOU A YOUNG SWISS?

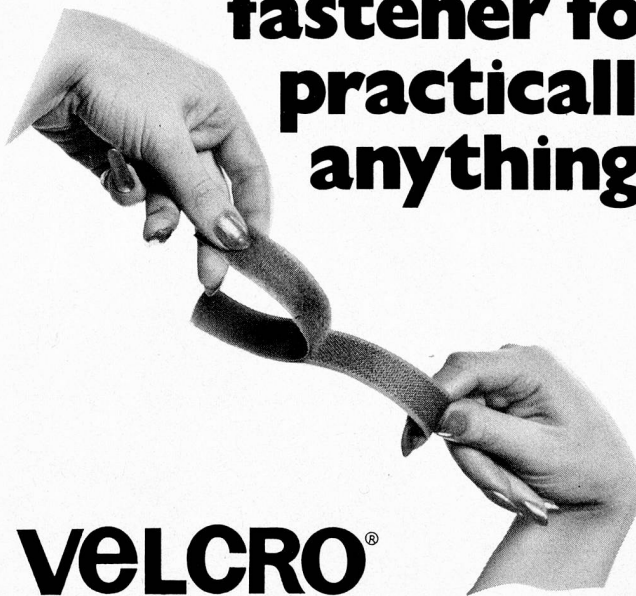
Do you know the biggest Swiss happening in town? The SWISS YOUTH CLUB, 48 GREAT PETER STREET, LONDON S.W. 1.

Every Sunday from 4 p.m. onwards the Swiss Youth Club under the auspices of the Swiss Churches in London is staging a "get-together" with a variety of happenings. From 4 p.m. to 6.30 p.m. "do-it-yourself" entertainment followed by an ecumenical Church service for those who wish to participate.

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