

Zeitschrift: The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK

Herausgeber: Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom

Band: - (1981)

Heft: 1776

Artikel: A vital part of the export industry

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-687535>

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A vital part of the export industry

THE fast growth of the Swiss economy in recent years – the gross national product rose from Sfr. 69 billion in 1967 to about Sfr. 157 billion in 1978 – owes much to Swissair.

Swissair earns abroad more than it spends. About 70 per cent of its flight operations revenue comes from sales outside Switzerland, which makes it a vital part of the Swiss export industry. The earnings it remits to Switzerland considerably benefit the country's balance of payments.

About 6 per cent of all Swiss earn their living in tourism. Swiss tourist revenue comes to about Sfr. 840.-- per head of population. Deducting from this some Sfr. 3.73 billion spent by Swiss travellers abroad, the Swiss tourism balance shows a surplus of Sfr. 1.9 billion.

A good proportion of foreign visitors to Switzerland arrive by air, or an estimated 8 per cent of the total. In Zurich, Switzerland's largest tourist city, arrivals by air come to around 40 per cent as against 28 per cent by rail and 31 per cent by road. In the canton of Zurich Swiss visitors account for more than 77 per cent of hotel occupancy. In the first class Zurich hotels the number of guests arriving by air regularly exceeds 40 per cent.

Reliable estimates put the expenditure by foreign air travellers in Geneva at more than Sfr. 200 million annually. Tourist revenue in the canton of Zurich is estimated at more than

Sfr. 400 million a year, or more than Sfr. 1 million a day.

Swiss government estimates put foreign hotel guests' spending in Switzerland at about Sfr. 200.-- a day. Many items of expenditure, such as telephone calls, postcards, tips and taxi-fares cannot be quantified.

Swissair is in the forefront as regards the promotion abroad of Switzerland as a tourist destination. It maintains 170 branch offices abroad with a staff of around 3,300, which together with the Swiss National Tourist Office and other organisations publicise Switzerland's attractions so as to persuade as many people as possible to visit the country.

A considerable proportion of the national airline's advertising budget, amounting to more than Sfr. 25 million, is devoted to this purpose.

To round off the picture, a further aspect, though adverse from the foreign exchange viewpoint, should be mentioned, namely foreign travel by Swiss citizens. Swissair's good connections to countries abroad and its promotional activities naturally also induce the Swiss to travel.

On the other hand, the foreign exchange loss is less

significant if travel abroad takes place on board a Swiss aircraft, because the money spent on the air ticket is not remitted abroad.

For a strongly export oriented country like Switzerland, which exports goods amounting to more than Sfr. 100 million a day, another aspect should not be underrated.

The pressure of worldwide competition calls for quick and decisive action on the part of the Swiss export industries. Export firms' representatives often have to be able to initiate sales actions in distant countries within a few hours to secure an order.

This can only be done if these representatives of large firms can be on the spot in person. Their task is greatly facilitated by Swissair's direct links.

As important as personal contact is often prompt delivery of the goods and especially of urgently needed spare parts by air freight or air mail. Here, too, Swissair's extensive network provides rapid customer service.

It should be added that no other country exports per head of population as much to the developing countries as Switzerland. Some 20 per cent of Swiss export revenue comes from Third World countries, and the proportion is rising annually.

Not only Swiss firms have an interest in good connections with countries abroad. Switzerland also gains in attracting foreign enterprises, for which its air links make it an ideal international centre. Not only banks and insurance companies of world repute have their headquarters in the country, but also many holding companies controlling important foreign interests.

With most firms Switzerland's favourable access situation was without doubt an important factor in the choice of location. These representations not only operate in Switzerland, but also look after the whole of Europe, or even larger areas. For the Swiss economy their presence naturally means in turn increased foreign exchange earnings.

Allowing for payments abroad, several hundred million Swiss francs flow into Switzerland annually as a result of Swissair's activities. These figures indicate Swissair's net contribution to the Swiss balance of payments.

It is not possible to evaluate in cash terms the spending by foreign air travellers and transit passengers at the airports on meals, beverages, souvenirs including watches, telephone calls, telegrams, telex, etc.

Apart from the fact that air transport and its related branches of activity provide employment and livelihood for a considerable proportion of Switzerland's population, they constitute a strong pillar of the national prosperity.

WITH the purchase of the 16-seat twin-engined Curtiss-Condor from the USA in 1934 the need for stewardesses to look after the passengers became too great to ignore.

The first girl in Europe to be trained and employed in this profession was Miss Nelly Diener. Tragically she was killed in an accident in the same year. Nevertheless the tradition had been started and her successors began work on Douglas DC-2s.



● In next month's Swiss Observer Swissair captain Alfred Muser writes about the early days of flying from a pilot's point of view, flying a single-engined airplane alone in a half-open cockpit without radio contact with the ground.