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Successful tourist development depends on the existence of hotels where the guest can feel at home. The secret of his comfort lies not just in optimal architectural provisions but also in reliable service, good management and excellent quality in the culinary field. It is just these qualities which have ensured Switzerland's own success in tourism – and created a worldwide demand for Swiss expertise in hotel-keeping. A good example is Egypt.

Swiss expertise satisfies Egyptian demand

SWITZERLAND, the cradle of tourism, saw pioneering achievements in the field of hotel-keeping during the nineteenth century – new comforts and styles of architecture transformed travel from horror into a luxury.

Towards the end of the century adventurous Swiss hotel-keepers like César Ritz – founder of the world-famous Ritz hotels in Paris, London and New York – or Alphons and Hans Pfyster – builders of the Excelsior Hotels in Rome and Naples – began spreading Swiss traditions of excellence in hotellerie to the rest of Europe.

Their ventures – while striking into new fields – were based on solid planning and calculations of the risks they were taking. And they founded the Swiss reputation for hospitality and personal service which still lives on today.

A young Swiss hotel-keeper from the Bernese Oberland, Charles Baehler, had his sights set on further shores. In 1889 – just 10 years before the opening of

the Hôtel Ritz in Paris – he set sail for Egypt.

In the Land of the Pharaohs tourism was yet young and was still confined to the better-off. The biggest luxury hotel was Shepheard's in Cairo. Baehler soon took on the task of reorganising and modernising the hotel's finances. He then took over its management and renovated it within the amazingly short period of six months.

It was the beginning of a long tradition of Swiss hotel-keeping in Egypt. Until 1952 Shepheard's was under Swiss management, hosting such famous guests as Kipling and Churchill.

Numerous hotel-keepers received their training in Egypt. Further hotels under Swiss management included four in Upper Egypt – in Luxor and Aswan – and seven in Cairo and Alexandria.

The character of tourism has changed dramatically in the last hundred years, and equally big changes can be expected over the

next few years. Yet Swiss hotel-keeping is still playing a pioneering role in the development of Egypt's tourist industry. And Swiss high standards of service and emphasis on personnel training are making an important contribution to the quality of hotel facilities in Egypt.

Since 1975 the number of visitors travelling to the Land of the Pharaohs has increased by an amazing 12 per cent a year. From 800,000 tourists in 1975 the number has leapt to over double that figure in 1983.

Tourism now counts – together with income from petroleum, from the Suez canal and from Egyptian workers abroad – as one of Egypt's most important foreign exchange earners.

And the potential for further development of tourism is vast. After all, the fascination of Egypt for the visitor does not have to end with its historical treasures.

With the exploitation of the country's sun, its beaches, its opportunities for adventure and

for medical tourism, as well as holidays for sports enthusiasts, anglers and divers, tourism could easily move to the number one position as foreign exchange earner.

In this way it would compensate for the uncertainties of petroleum revenue and the limitations placed on Suez Canal income by the capacity of the canal.

However more recreational tourism means new concepts in Egyptian hotel design and management – a departure from the high-rise hotel of the seventies and more concentration on spacious tourist villages with bungalow-style accommodation, sports facilities and entertainment.

It was a Swiss firm, Mövenpick, which in 1976 took the pioneering step of opening a bungalow-style hotel – in Cairo. The then Governor of Qena was so impressed by the new hotel concept, as well as by Mövenpick's rapid completion of the project, that he urged the Swiss firm to build a second bungalow hotel. Its location:


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Luxor – the Thebes of the ancient world – site of the famous temples of Luxor and Karnak, just across the Nile from the Valley of the Kings.

Situated on a peaceful island in the Nile, the holiday village would help to lengthen stays in Luxor from a one-or-two-day fleeting tour of the monuments to a relaxed week or more.

The Governor's dream came true in autumn 1983, when 16 Egyptian ministers attended the official opening ceremony of the Jolie Ville tourist village on Crocodile Island, just four kilometres south of Luxor. Thanks to Mövenpick's meticulous planning, construction of the hotel had been completed in a phenomenal 18 months.

Three hundred and twenty rooms in 20 bungalows, central reception and restaurant areas, a sunset arena overlooking the Nile, as well as tennis courts, a

swimming pool and a jogging track, had arisen from the fertile ground of the Nile island in record time.

Further attractions of the tourist village are sailing excursions, camel rides and an Arab village for traditional entertainment.

The scale of this achievement can only be appreciated when considering some of the hurdles that had to be overcome. First, a 180-metre bridge had to be built to the island and four kilometres of electric cable had to be laid, part of it under the Nile.

Snakes and insects had to be cleared from the island and the whole area planted with tropical plants and flowers grown in the hotel greenhouse.

Mövenpick's valuable experience in its Cairo hotel had stood it in extremely good stead for its planning – but Swiss achievement did not end there. Kitchen equipment, the

restaurant furniture and hotel room fittings were all supplied from Switzerland.

And when the French general contractor left the site three months before the opening of the hotel, the hotel director and his team took over the management of the camp of 300 Egyptian workers. Friendly Swiss firms sent over specialist staff to help in the completion of the work.

The hotel runs its own pump station and sewerage treatment plant, has its own reservoir, as well as laundry and bakery. Deep-freezer vans transport fresh fish from the coast as well as food processed in the Mövenpick hotel in Cairo.

The Luxor venture is a true Egyptian-Swiss partnership with 51 per cent of its shareholders Egyptian and 49 per cent Swiss. The operating company is 50 per cent Egyptian and 50 per cent owned by Mövenpick, while

Mövenpick holds the management contract.

Swiss services in the field of hotel-keeping today are not just confined to the building or management of hotels.

Swiss firms are also very active in the consultative field – detailed operation concepts, technical consulting for owners, architects, interior decorators, engineers, specification checks for furniture, fixtures and equipment, personnel training or marketing.

A further Swiss strength lies in supplying hotels all over the world. From artificial ice rinks and air conditioning to ski lifts and sweepers, the Swiss can supply it! A rather special service is that offered by a firm based in Zurich – it organises weekly flights of fresh gourmet food and flowers from the markets of Paris, Amsterdam and London for the Middle East market.

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