

Zeitschrift: Annual Report / Switzerland Tourism
Herausgeber: Switzerland Tourism
Band: - (1997)

Vorwort: We're setting course for the future
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We're setting course for the future.



Marco Hartmann and Dick F. Marty.

The most important point first: in 1997, after six years in which business was relatively slack, the tide has turned. The bright spots on the tourism horizon which were cautiously predicted at the beginning of the year have turned into a welcome area of high pressure. Tourism in Switzerland has been able to change the trend.

The success of the tourism sector is by no means a matter of course. Only a few sectors of the Swiss economy can point to even a modest improvement in 1997. And the general conditions for the Swiss tourism sector have once again become more difficult in recent months. In many countries, the economic prospects are not encouraging. Overcapacity in the sector is intensifying the pressure on prices. Cheap holiday destinations are offering discounts as incentives, and the pressure of competition is growing. We are operating in an increasingly dynamic and global tourism market.

Together with our partners in the tourism sector, Switzerland Tourism has designed and successfully executed a number of easily bookable marketing programmes in 1997, geared to stimulating demand. The range has included both traditional and innovative offers: «Family Holidays», the «One Night Free» promotion, «Switzerland: 32 x fun in the snow», 150 years of Swiss railways, the Best of Switzerland, conferences/incentives, wellness, festivals and biking.

Maximum quality is demanded of all products. We must promote quality actively together, rather than defending it passively now and then. In November 1997, the «Quality Label for Swiss Tourism» was launched at the International Catering, Hotel and Restaurant Fair in Basel. This unique project was developed in exemplary collaboration with the major tourism organizations in Switzerland.

The upturn of 1997 must be consolidated in the years ahead. 1998 is a year in which Switzerland will be marketed as a country for cycling, and in which as many businesses as possible must be brought into the «Quality Label for Swiss Tourism» campaign. The development of the Switzerland Destination Management SDM company, a central information and reservation point for the entire Swiss tourism sector, will give our country a worldwide competitive advantage. The adjustment of our rolling three-year plan to the changing needs of our visitors is resulting in a repositioning of Switzerland as a holiday brand. «Holidays equals Switzerland» is the core message. This implies an abandonment of mass tourism, and positions Switzerland as a quality destination.

Tourism needs to be active in the political arena. Some initial, albeit mod-

est successes were achieved in 1997 with the temporary special rate of VAT and the federal funding to support innovation. There are major tasks ahead of us: the Europe question, the Schengen Agreement and the general funding arrangements for Switzerland Tourism for the years 2000 to 2004. We must improve the political, economic and public awareness of the general growth potential of the tourism sector, its economic importance and the opportunities for Switzerland.

The course has been set in 1997. We all know that our common aims can only be achieved through dialogue and cooperation. Switzerland Tourism supports a broad programme for the renewal of Swiss tourism, which will mean a decisive improvement in competitiveness. To solve the structural problems which can be found in the hotel sector or the cable-car operators, there is a need for a substantial commitment of resources and, above all, new strategic approaches. We need structures which will help us in terms of policy, marketing and products, as well as financially to take up our challenges flexibly, forcefully, and in a way that meets our customers' demands.

The Switzerland Tourism team is open to new and unconventional ideas. We want to be successful worldwide, to be innovative and bold, while not forgetting one thing in our everyday work: to focus our attention on the market, on our customers, who come from all over the world to visit the uniquely beautiful travel and holiday destination that is Switzerland.

Dick F. Marty

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Chairman
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