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Autor: [s.n.]
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On Lake Champfer in Graubünden's Upper Engadine valley, time slips quietly by.

Good marks compensate for a very challenging year.

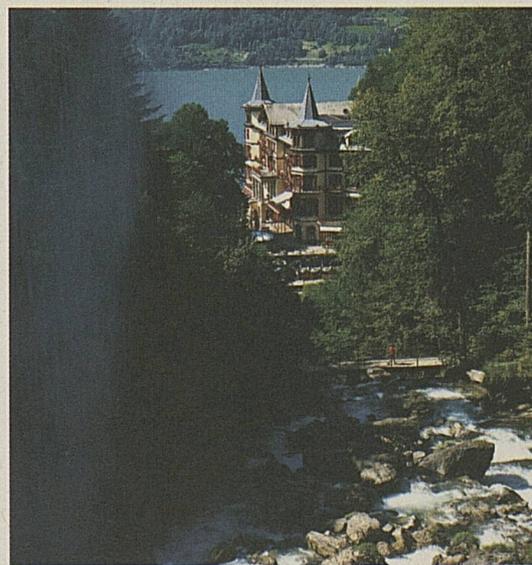
Thanks to a gratifyingly snowy winter and the best summer in decades Swiss tourism was able to take the edge off crisis-induced losses. And it received the top marks in a friendliness survey.

The Swiss machine and clock-making industries were not the only sectors to have a difficult year. Tourism also suffered under what were probably the toughest underlying conditions of recent years. Visitors from the long-haul markets in Asia and the US stayed at home in summer because of the Iraq war and SARS, and the emerging markets in the East and the Middle East began to stagnate. Currency and economic developments also had a dampening effect on travel. And whilst the long-awaited economic upswing became reality in the second half of the year, the initial consumer response was somewhat subdued.

Fortunately, a knight in shining armour arrived in the shape of the weather. Ideal conditions with lots of snow, some beautiful weather in winter and a summer with the highest temperatures since records began encouraged many Swiss to holiday at home, generating above-average numbers of day trips.

The Polyquest friendliness survey of 9453 holidaymakers also delivered some very pleasing results, with Switzerland attracting good marks from both domestic and foreign tourists. Overall the respondents rated their Switzerland holidays better than their last trip abroad.

Yet that's not all. In a major review of service quality in the handling of visitor enquiries in Switzerland and Austria, Swiss destinations occupied the first seven places! This means that Swiss tourism has garnered top marks for hospitality and service in not one but two independent studies. These results tally with those obtained by the DemoSCOPE Institute a year ago, and should serve to place the cliché of the unfriendly Helvetian firmly in the past.



The Grandhotel Giessbach on Lake Brienz, Bernese Oberland, received the Historical Hotel award for 2004.