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Focus on the visitor

Promoting a country is all about targeting the visitor. But who is that visitor? And what moves them to choose to discover Switzerland – today and in the future? Thanks to systematic market research, the image of this much-courted subject is becoming ever clearer.

"The visitor is a totally impossible and generally not very consistent being," said director Jürg Schmid when asked in a newspaper interview about the expectations of visitors. They are looking for a complete idyll in a secluded valley but ideally with access to the entire world via high-speed Wi-Fi. The traveller to Switzerland today has countless reasons for visiting this little state in the heart of Europe – and since 2000, when Switzerland Tourism launched systematic market research, our tourism experts have had a clearer view of where travel is heading for this demanding visitor. This is due not least to Tourism Monitor Switzerland, which presents its results every four years. 14,000 tourists staying at least one night, from over 100 source markets, are interviewed in 150 selected representative destinations. What the researchers are interested in is how the guests get their information, what they expect from holidays in Switzerland and what they particularly love about the country, how they book and how satisfied they are with their stay.

Tougher and tougher: the search for loyal visitors

Statistics clearly show that visitors now spend less time at their destination. In the early 1990s the typical winter guest spent an average of three days enjoying the winter paradise that is Switzerland. 20 years later, that guest spends a full day less in the country. This has to do with the worldwide trend for more short breaks. Visitors are deciding today where they want to spend free time tomorrow, keeping an eye on webcams and tempting images on social media. Classic holidays spending several weeks in the same town are less popular. The modern visitor follows trends and recommendations on portals such as TripAdvisor, which open a window on the whole world, including Switzerland.

The findings from the studies are simple and complex at the same time: we need to attract almost twice as many visitors in order to achieve the same number of overnight stays as we once did. This also means that we must spend each marketing franc in an even more targeted way. According to an impact study in 2013, every sixth night in Swiss hotel and non-hotel accommodation can be attributed to Switzerland Tourism. This is equivalent to 11.1 million nights and 1.97 billion francs in turnover. The search for new visitors – be they nature lovers, culture fans or snow sports enthusiasts – will in future be ever more finely tuned. They all love their Switzerland, just for different reasons. That's something worth keeping in mind.

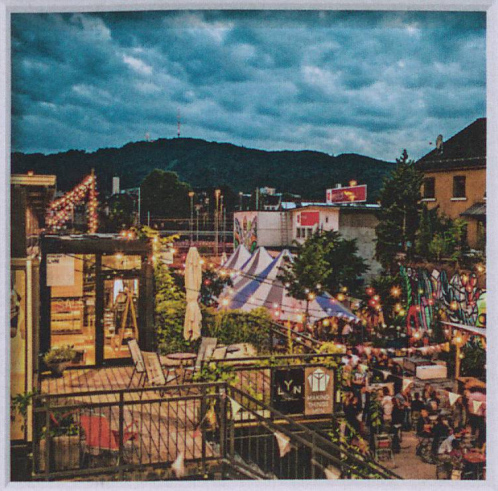
Guests from all over the world

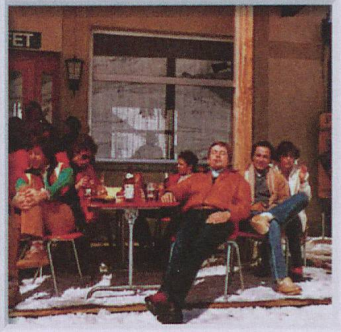
Early on it was young English aristocrats on the educational Grand Tour. Now the whole world visits Switzerland. Of course, over the last century or more ways of travelling have changed, but above all it is the tourists themselves and their needs which have changed. This selection gives an idea of this development and shows the countries in which Switzerland was a trend destination and when.

1950: comparing bookings by nation, Swiss visitors reserved the most overnight stays in Switzerland at 61%.

Then As the economic miracle took hold, Switzerland had the second-highest density of motorised transport in Europe. People took their car on holiday. They enjoyed visiting nearby countries, but Mr and Mrs Switzerland enjoyed spending their holidays at home even more. Ticino was particularly popular, as people sought a mix of familiarity and southern European style.

Now The most significant market with the most loyal visitors continues to be Switzerland itself. Domestic tourists divide themselves between many different destinations, but the mountains, winter sports and health spas are particularly popular – and everything has to be as easy as possible to reach.





1980: comparing bookings by nation, German visitors reserved the most overnight stays in Switzerland at 22%.

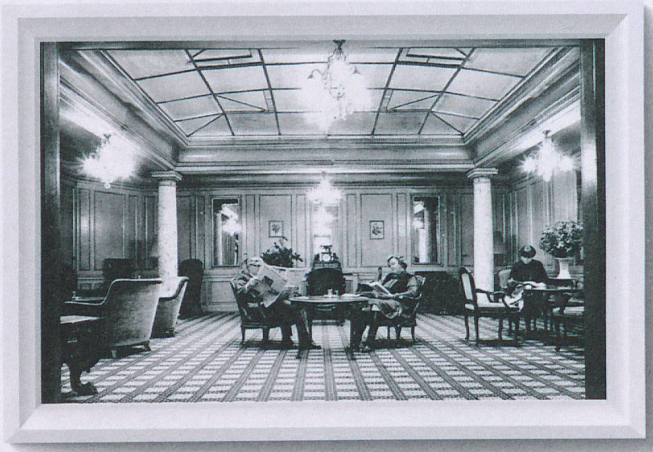
Then German visitors valued Switzerland's beautiful countryside, landscapes, mountains and of course the country's quality, punctuality and security. The Glacier Express was particularly popular. German tourists spent an average of 1,000 Deutsche Marks on foreign travel each year. Destination Switzerland was in sixth place in the popularity rankings.

Now Germany continues to be the largest foreign market. Graubünden is very popular with German visitors looking for relaxation in the mountains, surrounded by nature. City breaks in Basel and Zurich are also popular with our northern neighbours.

1995: comparing bookings by nation, US visitors reserved the most overnight stays in Switzerland with 10%.

Then US visitors liked spending money. They were fond of traditional old hotels with quirky, nostalgic decor, and liked to switch on the TV even in the mornings, as soon as they woke up.

Now US visitors consider Destination Switzerland "lovely and beautiful". For adventure, cultural experiences and hip vacations, US travellers love to visit the country at the centre of Europe – and thanks to numerous direct flights this is simple and comfortable to do.



1938: comparing bookings by nation, British visitors reserved the most overnight stays in Switzerland with 15%.

Then British visitors were conservative when it came to food, enjoying a big breakfast and simply prepared vegetables. They didn't like thick duvets and were sensitive when it came to additional costs. Swissair offered a London–Basel–Zurich route as early as 1935.

Now Brits, and Londoners in particular, are loyal Switzerland fans. They want to experience something interesting, they rely on public transport and they love the Swiss mountains. This makes the UK the strongest-growing foreign market in Europe.

2015: comparing bookings by nation, Chinese visitors reserved the most overnight stays in Switzerland with 4%.

Then Chinese visitors tended to travel in tour groups through Switzerland – as well as through six to ten other European countries. Four is an unlucky number: they avoided taking rooms on the fourth floor. There had to be a kettle in every room as they enjoyed drinking hot tea or hot water at all times of the day.

Now Young urbanites from Beijing and Shanghai are discovering Switzerland on their own these days. Their main interests, in winter as well as in summer, are outdoor activities such as cycling or running – but art, architecture and design are also on the rise.

The guest of tomorrow

Well-informed women from Asia and experienced, older and thus more sophisticated tourists from Europe – they will all be taking their holidays in Switzerland in the future. Itineraries include contact with local people, the authentic experience of nature and enjoying local, healthy speciality foods. And all of this with first-class infrastructure, personal guides and perfect digital networking.