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Born in the Bundeshaus

In 1917 the founders of the Swiss National Tourist Office (SNTO) gathered in no less prestigious a place than under the dome of the federal parliament building. The symbolism of this location has great power, as national advertising is still directed by the Swiss parliament today.

The world was in the midst of war when, at 11 a.m. on 28 November 1917, a group of men met in the National Council chamber in Bern. The occasion was the inaugural general meeting of the "National Association for the Promotion of Tourism". One fiery spokesperson for tourism as an economic driver was Felix Calonder, representative of the Graubünden region, the first Romansh speaker in the Swiss Federal Council.

Valais promoter triumphant

That day, the launching point for an entire economic sector, was a source of particular satisfaction for

Valais hotelier and National Council member Alexander Seiler. The founder of a family business in Zermatt, it was he who had set the ball rolling with a motion in 1911 to bring together all the disparate agencies to form one organisation supported by federal government, the cantons, regional tourist associations and the hotel and catering trade. The Swiss National Tourist Office was born.

Today, our basic task is more important than ever. Switzerland must now compete for potential visitors with holiday destinations around the globe. It is vital that we collaborate closely with the industry to bring into sharper focus the identity of Switzerland as a holiday, travel and conference destination. To set ourselves apart from the competition we must use an effective and creative mix of communications media, opening up new markets by dismantling barriers such as visa restrictions. What form this promotion of our nation should take, and how much it should cost, is the subject of constant debate with tourism service providers.



A famous bet by Engadin hotelier Johannes Badrutt marks the beginning of winter tourism in Switzerland. For the first time English visitors spend their winter holidays in the Alps. They are captivated!

Foundation of the "National Association for the Promotion of Tourism" in Bern, later the Swiss National Tourist Office – today Switzerland Tourism.

1863

The start of package tours through Europe. One of English entrepreneur Thomas Cook's first tours took him to Geneva; following this he also organised group and company trips to Switzerland. Package arrangements took the pressure off travellers and made tours accessible to broader sectors of society.

1864



1901

Nobel Prize for Henry Dunant and his lifetime achievement. As the Swiss founder of the International Committee of the Red Cross he contributed to the positive image of Switzerland around the world.

1917

“Tourism plays an important part in our national identity.”

As chairman of the Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research, **Federal Council member Johann N. Schneider-Ammann** is responsible for tourism, an industry that cuts across many sectors. We talked to him about the importance of tourism – and about his perfect Swiss holiday.



How important is tourism for the Swiss economy?

Tourism is one of the pillars of the Swiss economy. It contributes around three percent to Swiss economic output, and over four percent of all jobs are in tourism. In wide swathes of the Alpine regions it is vital: without tourism the economic outlook of many valleys would be bleak. But tourism is far more than that. It's also a calling card for Switzerland – by which I mean it plays an important part in defining the nation's identity.

Where do you see particular potential for development in Swiss tourism?

Tourism is developing very dynamically. Visitors' expectations are changing rapidly. In order to remain competitive we must constantly be developing what we are able to offer. Switzerland Tourism is doing outstanding work here and is keeping right up to date. I see particular potential for development in partnerships and cooperation. If stakeholders can

manage to work together even more successfully, each individual stakeholder will be able to benefit all the more from that cooperation. I also see big opportunities for tourism in digitisation.

Where do you see the biggest long-term challenges for Switzerland's tourism industry?

Tourism has faced many different challenges over the last three decades and more, such as changing demand and digitisation. Structural development also brings with it great opportunities for tourism which are already being exploited – in the cities, for example. The key to success in tourism, as in any industry, is the capacity for innovation – for instance, in the form of new, market-oriented products.

Which national advertising campaign or promotion has particularly stuck in your mind and why?

Campaigns for Swiss tourism over the last few years have been utterly convincing, time after

time – I'm thinking in particular of the grizzled mountain men Sebi & Paul, and the Muota Valley weathermen. These campaigns successfully used traditional Swiss values to evoke sympathy and awaken a desire to travel to our country. And then of course the “In Love” campaign of 2015, in which I also participated. I thought the idea with the video messages was very successful. I'm sure that this campaign was well received by our visitors.

What does the ideal Swiss holiday look like for you?

Switzerland has everything you need for the perfect holiday. I prefer to spend my free time in my native Bernese Oberland, or in the Engadin. I enjoy walking in the stunning mountain scenery or simply relaxing on a sunny terrace reading a good book.