

# The economic significance of tourism in Switzerland

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## THE ECONOMIC SIGNIFICANCE OF TOURISM IN SWITZERLAND



Tourism is often referred to as the "tourist trade" or "tourist industry". The following article is designed to illustrate that, although such labels may have a negative aura about them, they in fact express the great importance of tourism to the Swiss economy.

### Employment and prosperity

Although fully a quarter of its land is unproductive, Switzerland is one of the most prosperous European nations. The country's otherwise barren ground is put to good use for touristic purposes, without which a good percentage of the population would lack employment and earning power. In this way, tourism serves as an economic balancing factor between the mountainous regions and the highly industrialised midlands. As seen in the 1960 census, some 250,000 people were employed in transportation and the hotel and catering trades, of which naturally only a certain percentage serves tourism directly. An average of 55,000 men and women are employed in Swiss hotels, motels and *pensions*. These figures indicate the importance of the tourist industry as Switzerland's largest single employer.

Total income from the tourist industry in 1965 was about 4.3 billion francs, of which 2.74 billion were spent by foreign tourists and approximately 1.6 billion by Swiss taking their holidays in their own country (the latter figure is not official; it is an estimate). Those 4.3 billion francs represent 8.5% of the total Swiss national income (about 50.5 billion francs in 1965). It is clear to what extent tourism contributes to the Swiss economy and the nation's prosperity.

### Tourism and the deficit trade balance

The fact that Switzerland is a country rich in natural beauty but poor in natural resources, and that its own soil is not sufficient to feed its population, forces the Swiss economy to rely on increasing imports of vital goods from abroad. Although the country possesses important export industries, these are not sufficient to close the export-import gap, which grows wider every year. The following is a list of leading Swiss export figures, in descending order of importance:

1. machinery: 4.221 billion francs;
2. tourism, as an "invisible export": 2.74 billion (income from foreign tourists);
3. chemical and pharmaceutical products: 2.522 billion;
4. watches: 1.799 billion;
5. textiles: 1.229 billion.

While foreign tourists spent 2.74 billion francs in Switzerland in 1965, Swiss tourists spent 1.16 billion francs abroad, which leaves a favourable balance of 1.58 billion francs. In 1965, Switzerland took 466 francs from foreign tourists *per capita* of its population, while Swiss

tourists abroad spent the equivalent of 198 francs *per capita* of the Swiss population.

With total imports of 15.929 billion francs and exports of 12.861 billion francs, Switzerland's 1965 balance of trade showed a deficit of 3.068 billion. As the foremost credit item on the nation's profit-and-loss account, income from tourism can cover up to 51% of that deficit, which is another way of expressing its significance as a balancing factor between imports and exports in the Swiss foreign trade picture.

### Swiss tourism in facts and figures

Although the often-heard statement that Switzerland lives only from its tourist trade is not at all true, the importance of that trade should not be underestimated. Total capital invested in tourist facilities and associated matters is 7 — 8 billion francs.

A glance at the inventory of facilities which serve tourism, including investments which only partly serve the tourist industry, provides some idea of how those enormous investments are distributed.

### Hotel-keeping: the tourist trade par excellence

In 1965 Switzerland had 7,755 hotels, motels and *pensions*, with a total of 234,343 beds. Since 1952, new construction and expansion of old hotels has increased the available bed-space by 66,700 beds, which represents substantial new investments. At present, however, it is estimated that an additional 300-500 million francs in new investments are needed. The modernisation of an existing hotel costs an average of at least 6,000 francs per bed. This figure rises considerably if a large number of baths is installed, and can reach 15,000 francs per bed if the modernisation includes lobbies, lounges and technical facilities. Construction of a new hotel with a sufficient number of private bathrooms costs at least 50-60,000 francs per bed.

The important place which hotel-keeping has in the Swiss economy may be judged from the relation of hotel beds to population. As of 1965, Switzerland had 40 hotel beds per 1,000 inhabitants, second highest figure of all major tourist countries. In first place was Austria, with 49 beds per thousand, while U.S.A. and France showed 28 and 23 beds respectively per 1,000 people.

### Transportation and traffic

A traveller in Switzerland has a highly developed transportation and road system at his disposal. The fully electrified federal and private railway (75 lines in all) have modern rolling stock and about 3,188 miles of track, while the 15 cog railways and 51 funiculars have a total of some 99 miles of track. The Swiss Federal Railways alone carried 241 million passengers in 1965. Total investment

in the nation's railways is 2,973 billion francs, and the cog railways and funiculars represent 109 million francs in investment capital. Much of this can be considered investment in the tourist trade.

Switzerland has direct air connections with all major European cities and all continents. Swissair, the Swiss national airline, has a network covering more than 136,000 kilometres (85,000 miles). In 1965, Swissair carried a total of 2,176,796 passengers and covered 2.436 billion passenger-kilometers. It is impossible to say just how many of the airline's passengers were tourists, and thus difficult to estimate how much of its 360 million francs in capital investments may be deemed an investment in tourism.

The Swiss midlands, the Jura and the Pre-Alps are covered by a dense network of primary and secondary roads, and the nation's 22 Alpine highways are an attraction which draws hundreds of thousands of foreign automobiles each summer. Since 1952, Switzerland has spent more than 6 billion francs on highway construction and maintenance. Since 1960, work has been in progress on a 1,125-mile network of highways to serve transit traffic of which more than 850 miles will be motorways. Of that total, about 193 miles have already been opened for use. The Federal Government's total expenditure on this National Road System since its inception have been 2.9 billion francs.

The ships which ply the Swiss lakes are almost exclusively pleasure craft. Thus, in contrast to the nation's roads and railways, they may be regarded as a purely touristic investment. There are 26 steamships with a total capacity of 24,250 passengers, and 88 diesel ships with a capacity of 32,348 passengers. Total value of Swiss lake navigation in 1963 was 27.3 million francs.

### Resorts and schools

There are, of course, extensive touristic investments in every resort. To mention just a few: outdoor facilities (parks, walking paths); Switzerland's 89 spa hotels and high altitude sanatoria (6,870 beds); ice rinks; casino and music pavilions; in the high mountains: 526 ski lifts, 44 chair lifts, 29 combination ski- and chair-lifts, 168 cable-cars, nine elevators, sledge-lifts and other devices, all of which have a combined peak capacity of 311,712 passengers per hour.

Last but not least on the inventory of Switzerland's touristic investments are the approximately 1,100 private educational institutions of all kinds, located on the shores of many Swiss lakes and in mountain districts. Like the hotels, they represent an important factor in the national economy. During the winter of 1964/65, there were about 9,000 foreign students registered at Switzerland's 10 universities.

In addition to those enumerated above, there is of course a wide range of subsidiary businesses and services which are involved in the touristic industry to a substantial degree: travel agencies, souvenir shops, news stalls at railway terminals, points of interest, art collections, museums, etc.

All these examples adequately demonstrate that the touristic industry is not a narrow branch of the economy limited to hotels and restaurants. It is closely related to such diverse branches as railways, airlines, roads textiles and watches, spas and rest homes, schools, sport facilities — nearly every aspect of Swiss economy. To quote an American slogan: "Tourism is not one industry, it is all industries".  
Swiss National Tourist Office.

## PARLIAMENTARY SESSION

The first week of the parliamentary winter session brought the surprise of Federal Councillor Chaudet's resignation. The main business were debates concerning the financial state of the Confederation, especially with regard to the 1967 budget which predicts a deficit of 432m. francs. (*A special report will be published in one of the next issues.*)

The second week, too, was partly devoted to financial matters, to the new law on administrative procedure and the revision of postal rates. The latter was accepted in the National Council, including the cancellation of postage privileges (*Portofreiheit*). In the Council of States, the President had to give the casting vote in this matter, which he did in favour of dropping the privileges, and with this, there will be no more free postage for authorities.

The National Council approved the report by the Government, on the increase in duty on imported oils and fats, which had been made on 1st November in accordance with the new agricultural law. The majority in the National Council agreed with the Council of States, which had approved, in their last session, the distribution of the 106.8m. profit of the Alcohol Administration, i.e. 48.6m. each to Confederation and Cantons and 9m. to the equalisation fund of the *Alkoholverwaltung*. It was in the last week, too, that the results of the plebiscite of 16th October regarding the special Constitutional Article for the Swiss Abroad were confirmed.

The United Federal Assembly (National Council and Council of States together) met on 14th December to elect a new Federal Councillor.

Immediately after Federal Councillor Chaudet's resignation, the powers that be got busy. The Canton of Ticino wanted a member in the Government. Vaud insisted on the traditional claim of always being represented. Geneva, too, wanted to have a member in the Federal Council again. Various names were mentioned: Councillor of States Bolla (Ticino), the two Ticinesi National Councillors Galli and Celio, the *Syndic* of Lausanne Chevallaz, the Liberal Glasson from Fribourg and the Genevese Radical Schmitt. Up to the last moment, National Councillor Nello Celio had hesitated to stand for election, but when he did, he was chosen in the first vote by 136 (117 absolute majority). Thus the privilege of the so-called *Bundesratskantone*, Zurich, Vaud and Berne, has finally been broken.

Federal Councillor Roger Bonvin was elected President of the Confederation for 1967, the first Valaisan member of the Government since the Constitution came into force in 1848. He received 190 out of 236 votes. Surprisingly low was the number of votes in favour of the Vice-President, Federal Councillor Dr. Willy Spuehler who had only 124 out of 229 votes; 70 voting slips were returned blank, a sure sign of disapproval.

The twenty-five members of the Federal Tribunal were re-affirmed for the next two years, and as President for 1967/8, Dr. André Panchaud was elected; Dr. S. Giovanoli is the new Vice-President. The new Federal Judge, in succession to Dr. C. Pometta, is Dr. Fulvio Antognini.

(By courtesy of A.T.S., "Echo" and "Schweizerisches Kaufmännisches Zentralblatt".)