

SWITZERLAND CELEBRATING 150 YEARS OF WINTER TOURISM



Switzerland is celebrating 150 years of winter tourism. What started as a small spa getaway now attracts tourists from all over the world in search of fun and extreme sports. Schweiz Tourismus wants to bring the pioneer spirit from the past to the present.

7400 kilometers of marked skiing tracks, 5500 kilometers of cross country skiing tracks, circa 5150 kilometers of natural hiking trails and 29 skiing stations at 2800 meters above sea level – Switzerland highly values its winter tourism. In celebration of this 150-year long tradition, Schweiz Tourismus, the tourism board, took a look back at its humble beginnings at the recent Zurich’s Winter Media Conference.

It all started with a bet. In 1864, a hotelier from St. Moritz convinced his English summer guests to stay during the winter. He promised them, they would be able to “enjoy the sun in shirts and shorts”. If not, Johannes Badrutt would have refunded his guests’ entire travel expenses.

The guests stayed - and this became the birth of several popular winter sports, such as skiing, bobsledding, curling or ice skating, said the Manager of Schweiz Tourismus, Jürg Schmid. Meanwhile, the first German spa guests arrived in Davos to breathe fresh mountain air for medical reasons.

Richard Kämpf, from SECO company, presented the prognosis for Swiss tourism at the conference. According to him, in 2015 the winter resorts will count 2.2 percent more overnight stays. This tourism year, which ended in October, saw a 0.5 percent increase of overnight stays. Even though the high expectations by the industry were not met, this year demonstrated a great recovery from the recent crisis, according to Kämpf.

Kämpf mentioned the bad weather conditions - winter and summer were equally difficult to handle. Also, the economic recovery had more or less stalled. Still, SECO expects growth rates of 1.2 and 1.3 percent for the years 2016 and 2017.

The tourism industry is constantly challenged by new demands and social changes. For example, nowadays, guests arrive from all over the world, including Brazil and East Asia. “They also get older every year, which coincides with higher demands in terms of quality and comfort,” said Schmid from the Schweiz Tourismus.

Moreover, fewer young tourists than ever come to ski. Older tourists on the other hand need breaks more often for safety and health concerns. This data has been gathered by Tourismus Monitor Schweiz, which also revealed that most people deem skiing too expensive.

However, the study ‘Sport Schweiz 2014’ by the Federal Sports Office showed that skiing is gaining popularity again. **Today more people enjoy the sport than in the last six years combined, making it the participants’ fourth most popular sport.**

These changes present great opportunities for Switzerland, commented Schmid. This is why Schweiz

Tourismus focuses especially on foreign markets, aiming to offer a convenient mix of residences, transparent prices and special offers for younger tourists.

To celebrate the special anniversary, the tourism industry offers a wide range of various nostalgic experiences such as skijoring and curling. These activities are especially authentic in the historic tourism centers of St. Moritz and Davos.

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