

SWISS TOURISM EXPERTS EXPECT A VERY GOOD SUMMER



Despite the beach holiday boom, tourism businesses in Switzerland are very satisfied with the summer. According to a survey of several tourist regions by the AWP news agency, booking figures are not far from the absolute peak years. The flight chaos is discouraging some people from traveling.

Strong demand from Swiss customers

The good results for the first quarter of this year are due to the strong demand from Swiss guests, who accounted for 2.47 million overnight stays. Visitors from abroad accounted for 0.83 million overnight stays in holiday accommodation, which is double the figure for the same period in 2021.

In the past two years, various mountain regions have benefited from the fact that the Swiss spent their vacations at home and therefore achieved super results. Now, however, many Swiss want to go back to the sea. The major tour operators are experiencing a booking boom for beach vacations. The most popular destinations are Greece and Spain.

Spontaneous bookings due to flight chaos

Nevertheless, the Swiss continue to come in large numbers to their home destinations, point experts. This is despite the ongoing uncertainties caused by flight cancellations.

Chaos has increased at several European airports in recent weeks. Due to staff shortages, the industry is unable to cope with the huge travel demand. Hours of waiting, missed flights, lost suitcases, and canceled flights are the result.

Some Swiss regions were able to benefit from this. Certain spontaneous bookings from Swiss travelers who wanted to avoid the flight chaos were noticed.

Nevertheless, the proportion of domestic visitors is declining somewhat. However, this is compensated for by increasing numbers of tourists from abroad, according to several regions. More often than in previous years, English and Americans travel to Switzerland. Occasionally, tourists from the Persian Gulf and Southeast Asia also came again. The Russians and Chinese, on the other hand, have entirely disappeared.

Bookings by Russians have plummeted since the war in Ukraine, while the Chinese are not traveling because of Corona restrictions imposed by the government in Beijing.

More group tours

Not all regions are geared to the same foreign tourist groups: For the Engelberg-Titlis region, for example, the important guests from India are coming in greater numbers again. Week after week, bookings are increasing. Group tours are also taking place again. However, there are still nowhere near as many flights from Asia to Switzerland as before the pandemic. The recovery is likely to take even longer for the Chinese, who were in fifth place in the ranking before Corona.

The Rigi region could compensate for the loss of Swiss flying to the Mediterranean with more European and American guests, says Frédéric Füssenich of Rigi-Bahnen. In addition, many Swiss companies would make excursions again.

More international guests, such as Germans or English, are also coming to Zermatt, says the hotelier president of the Valais resort, Sebastian Metry. In addition, foreigners are staying longer: while the Swiss book one to two nights, foreigners more often spend a whole week in Zermatt. "We have fewer reservations but about the same turnover," says Metry, who runs the Hotel National and the Chalet Hotel Schöneegg.

Group and school trips take place again

The Swiss Youth Hostels are also very optimistic about the return of school trips and groups. Bookings for July and August would each be four percent above the 2019 level, following double-digit growth in the months before.

2020 had been a disaster year for the youth hostels. 2021 already showed recovery, but it still remained far below the level of 2019. Despite government aid, the youth hostels suffered massive losses that they will have to chew on for at least another ten years; as the head of the Swiss Youth Hostels, Janine Bunte, says: "The Corona hole has not yet been plugged."

Price increases threaten

The galloping inflation is worrying Swiss tourism businesses. Prices are yet to rise across the board, but this is likely to come, say all the tourism representatives asked in unison. Not only are hotel prices likely to rise, but restaurants will also become more expensive.

The mountain railroads are concerned about the massive increase in electricity and energy prices. This is likely to have a major impact in winter when the slopes are prepared, say experts.

Another area of concern is staff shortages: Individual establishments have had to restrict their offerings, as mentioned by several representatives. For example, there are restaurants that have introduced an additional off day or hotels that will not accept out-of-town guests for meals to be able to offer their own hotel guests full service.

Nevertheless, confidence prevailed among all respondents because the booking figures for the fall looked very good, they said in unison. Moreover, winter bookings are also starting to come in.

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