

# DESPITE ENERGY CRISIS SWISS TOURISM IS OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE WINTER SEASON



Switzerland Tourism (ST) expects a 1 percent increase in hotel overnight stays in mountain destinations compared to the last and full pre-pandemic winter season of 2018/19. This coming winter, the Swiss will take winter sports holidays significantly more than before the pandemic, with a 14 percent increase in hotel nights.

Nevertheless, the great growth in Swiss overnight stays of the last two years seems to have passed its zenith, as Swiss Tourism director Martin Nydegger pointed out last week. In the winter of 2022/2023, **almost 6 percent fewer Swiss will spend their holidays in the mountains than in the previous year.**

On the other hand, hotel overnight stays from local and long-distance markets are expected to increase by 18 percent compared to the previous year.

Despite the drop in domestic guests, Nydegger is pleased with the initial forecasts. "The Swiss winter gives us confidence. The Swiss continue to love it, and foreign guests' desire to travel has reawakened despite difficult circumstances. If the weather plays along, we will even be able to surpass the last winter before the pandemic."

There is similar feedback from abroad. Alexa Chessex and Jörg Peter Krebs, responsible for the French and German markets respectively, see an increasing interest in Switzerland. "The French and the Germans are in the mood to travel again. And Switzerland scores points as a travel destination ideally accessible by train."

This trend is expected to continue in the next calendar year. For 2023, ST expects occupancy in domestic markets to be 91 percent compared to 2019, and 73 percent for long-haul markets. Swiss Tourism expects the sector to fully recover in 2025 for domestic markets and not before 2026 for distant markets.

## Winter with Major Challenges

The positive forecasts are particularly pleasing in view of the number of challenges facing the Swiss tourism industry. The most important of these are the uncertain energy supply with the associated significantly higher energy costs, the economic situation with the strong Swiss franc and the risk of recession in foreign markets, and climate change. At the media conference, Berno Stoffel, Director of Swiss Cableways (SBS), provided information on how the industry will overcome the major challenges of this winter.

The mountain railways started the coming winter with positive omens. The industry is encouraged by the experience gained from the Covid pandemic. The industry coped with this largely unscathed and in the last winter of 2021/2022 was even able to gain 6 percent of the market share in German-speaking Europe. The company is prepared for a possible power shortage in Switzerland. "We are also trying to make our contribution to a sustainable energy strategy," Stoffel said. For example,

individual cableways in Laax and Melchsee-Frutt have already implemented projects for sustainable electricity production (solar, wind and water energy). In addition, the umbrella association provides mountain railways with a catalogue of measures and a simulation tool that can be used individually. The most effective energy-saving measures include shorter operating times, less heat in the interior rooms and a reduction in the operating speed of the cableways. The crisis is also an opportunity in terms of raising awareness among companies and the future energy strategy, says Stoffel.

### **Benefitting from Train Connections**

Moreover, Switzerland can "score points" as a holiday destination that is easily "accessible by train", as the Alpine country is supported by a dense rail network.

Switzerland is banking on trains to bring back foreign tourists for the winter ski season.

For the winter season, **Swiss Tourism intends to appeal in particular to Generation Z (people born between 1996 and 2010) through targeted offers around the train.** "The emphasis is on train travel from European cities", in particular with offers proposing reduced-price ski passes for "those who take the train", says Switzerland Tourism, which is capitalizing on the desire to "get to the slopes in the most sustainable way possible".

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