



Federal Department of Economic Affairs FDEA

Tourism in a changing environment

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President,
Director,
Cantonal Councillors,
Ladies and gentlemen.

It is particularly in difficult times that we should appreciate the beauty around us - we can still enjoy the wonderful mountain scenery, the peaceful lakes, our cultural and urban landmarks. However, tourism should be more than just getting away from it all. Holidays mean unwinding, recharging our batteries, getting acquainted with new cultures and meeting people. Some people are drawn towards the mountains, others to the sea and yet others to desert sands.

Tourism has long ceased to be a national business, it is very much a global business. For many states tourism is an important sector of the economy that provides many people with a good income.

It is therefore good that professionals the world over can come here to the First World Tourism Forum in Lucerne to network and exchange experiences.

In order to have a prosperous tourism sector we need to find answers to the following questions:

1. How is tourism faring in the current global economic crisis?
2. What is the situation in Switzerland?
3. Are there long- and short-term recipes for sustainable and successful tourism?
4. What is the outlook for the future?

Global tourism is a prime example of a growth sector. Since the second world war, annual worldwide arrivals have risen by 4% per annum from 25 million to 900 million. The demand for tourism doubles every twelve years, and growth has even accelerated in the last three years.

This comes as no surprise - people have had the money to spend and were happy to spend it. I believe that this pattern of growth will not change over the long term - despite the fact that the short-term outlook of world tourism looks somewhat bleak. The economic crisis will cause even tourism to shrink worldwide. Experts are expecting a two per cent downturn this year, and the outlook for 2010 is not overly optimistic.

However, holidays will always be popular, and the desire to travel, discover new places and take time out is set to continue. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) is expecting 1.5 billion arrivals in hotels and other holiday accommodation in 2020

We can afford to rely on the UNWTO - at least their forecasts have always been fairly accurate up to now.

In Switzerland, too, there was a similar picture - 2008 was a record year for us. Hotel overnight stays exceeded the 37 million limit - an all-time high. On the other hand, the global economic crisis will not pass Swiss tourism by. In 2009 we are expecting a fall of around 3% in hotel overnight stays and a further decrease of at least 1% in 2010. Several negative factors that will particularly affect tourist destinations in Europe are converging at the same time:

- The financial crisis has dried out the credit market and brought the economy to a standstill.
- Major exchange rate fluctuations adversely affect tourism.

But there is cause for optimism. Past crises have showed that tourism is more stable than other sectors. Tourism has always bounced back faster from periods of recession than other economic sectors as, for example, in the 1970s with the oil crisis. Switzerland and Swiss tourism are in good shape.

- In addition to our countryside and a pristine environment we have an excellent transport infrastructure (ranked first worldwide) and high safety standards.
- Training and further training opportunities in their sector, in particular the world-famous hotel schools are our trademark and here, too, quality is what makes the difference.
- We are at the heart of Europe and easy to access from anywhere - Paris, London, Berlin or Rome. That's true for holidays and for business and international conferences.

- In the tussle between mass and individual tourism, Switzerland comes down very clearly on the side of individual tourism - small is beautiful.
- We offer solid values rather than the superficial; we offer nature, authenticity and culture instead of glitz and artificial worlds.
- It is not for no reason that - ahead of Austria, Germany and France - we are in first place on the respected Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index.

Thanks to this head start our tourism industry should not come off too badly from the crisis - because we can build on our good reputation.

- Thanks to Jean-Jacques Rousseau it was well known in authoritarian Europe that you could get away with criticising "those at the top" in Swiss restaurants and bars - and that still holds true today.
- Queen Victoria herself was unable to resist a sunset over the Rigi.
- Even Winston Churchill, who was later to say "never do sports", actually climbed up to the Dufourspitze, the highest point in Switzerland.

But nature alone is not enough. We need to get the price-performance ratio - i.e. the quality of service - right. Only then will the drop in the length of stay, currently so feared by tourism professionals, be kept in check.

Know-how, hospitality and "back-to-nature" tourism have to be combined. It is up to the State to optimise basic conditions and ensure that the political situation remains stable, that transport infrastructure operates smoothly, that landscapes are looked after and that attractive cultural monuments are conserved.

Tourism professionals, for their part, must gear themselves more to the wishes of their customers:

- Each tourist must be treated like royalty.
- Money should be invested in education; vocational training and hotel schools are the basis for the continued success of the hotel industry - and not only in Switzerland.
- Protectionist reflexes should be avoided: tourism must continue to go both ways!
- Climate change issues should also be tackled head on by tourism - for example in the shape of activities that respect the environment.

As far as climate change is concerned, tourism is both the injuring and the injured party. It is the injuring party because it causes some five per cent of all harmful emissions due to rising mobility, with aviation the main culprit. It is difficult to rein in air travel and people's desire to fly. But the aircraft industry should invest in technology, and air passengers, indeed all of us, should at least make up for our CO2 emissions.

Tourism is also the injured party because island states like the Maldives are threatened by rising sea levels, and mountain areas are adversely affected by the shrinking glaciers. Tangible results from the Copenhagen process this year are vital for tourism in the post-Kyoto regime after 2012. All states must be involved in this process.

Tourism has ways of reducing its share in climate pollution.

- The fuel economy of Boeing's new B787 Dreamliner is 20% better than the aircraft of the 1990s.
- Badrutts Palace Hotel in St. Moritz, which used to have oil heating, is now heated by heat exchangers using 4-degree water from the St. Moritz lake, thereby producing fewer CO2 emissions.
- Arosa has made climate neutrality its goal - by using electric cars.
- Swiss youth hostels have agreed to pay around CHF 200,000 a year in compensation to "myclimate".

We, too, have the opportunity to make a sizeable contribution to the ambitious Towards Zero Emissions goal. Whether in Thailand, South Africa or Brazil, we can all do our bit.

The relationship between tourism and mobility, however, is not only increasingly problematic on account of climate pollution. Constant streams of visitors can upset and even alter the balance of a society. If tourists come in droves, you can be sure that traffic jams, queuing, stress and environmental problems are not far behind. Local residents will become less likely to tolerate visitors. The modern 'mass tourism' phenomenon is not compatible with the ideals of tourism, which is why there are constant references to the self-destruction of tourism. There is talk of a rebellion on the part of people living in tourist spots.

Discerning tourism professionals have been calling for years for people to stay at home and take their holidays on their balconies! As we know, people were not overly keen on the idea.

This doesn't mean that we must simply accept tourism in all its forms. Holidaymakers can be made aware of the problems of mobility. They can help to settle the problem by looking after the environment and by respecting different cultures - air conditioning systems are often quite unnecessary or are set too low; bath towels can easily be used for two days. The tourism and transport sector is set to tackle the task of keeping the flood of visitors within bounds. There are limits to people's tolerance thresholds. We should not let it get to the point where cultural centres have to turn away visitors. That is no solution.

It is therefore important that tourist attractions, particularly in environmentally sensitive areas, are professionally managed. Lucerne University of Applied Sciences is a pioneer in this area.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we are faced with major challenges as the desire to travel shows no sign of flagging, and world tourism will grow again.

Today we still make a distinction between tourist and other countries. This will all change as a result of globalisation. Tomorrow the world will be a tourist destination with no gaps. Each region has its attractions, which it will market competitively. This entails mobility, and mobility causes problems for people, their environment and the world at large. In the long term, we must ensure that, parallel to growth in tourism, the environment - and particularly the climate - are not harmed to the same extent as before. Tourism should grow, but not at the expense of the environment.

We can approach this in different ways:

We can convince tourists to arrange sustainable holidays by switching to public transport or driving a hybrid car.

We can put pressure on aircraft, car, air conditioning and rail manufacturers to work even harder at producing resource- and energy-saving engines and materials.

We can urge the hotel sector to start using new green technologies for more efficient cooling, cooking, insulation and heating.

And the State and industry, for instance through the WTO, could use incentives to promote green appliances and methods.

The global recession will speed up structural change in tourism. It is an opportunity to invest appropriately and sustainably, and thereby shape a better world. Let us modernise structures intelligently, increase productivity by lowering costs, and improve cooperation and training - across the board.

I wish you all the best in this venture.

Check against delivery !

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