

World Tourism Forum Lucerne 2015
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Innovation and cooperation – the keys to future success

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Check against delivery

Her Majesty the Queen Mother of
Bhutan

Mister Secretary-General of the
World Tourism Organization

Excellencies

Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Swiss government, it
gives me great pleasure to welcome
you to the 4th World Tourism Forum
in Lucerne.

And I am particularly pleased to extend a warm welcome to Azerbaijan as Guest Country at this year's event.

It is an honour for us that you are convening in the heart of Central Switzerland today.

Your visit marks a new page in Lucerne's guestbook, one which was first opened by the Englishman Thomas Cook over 150 years ago.

Back in 1863 the famous travel pioneer organised the "First conducted Tour of Switzerland" – which also stopped off in Lucerne.

The city has since been a must on any tour of Europe, just as Graubünden is a must for winter sports enthusiasts and the Alps in Bern and the Valais, with their famous peaks the Eiger, Mönch, Jungfrau and Matterhorn, are musts for mountaineering fans.

Incidentally, the Matterhorn is also celebrating this year as the first ascent of this mythical peak took place exactly 150 years ago.

The history of tourism in Switzerland is a success story.

But also a story of major challenges.

A story that is only successful because our top tourist destinations have always been able to adapt to changing circumstances.

And because it never lost sight of the ultimate goal of tourism.

I'm talking about the goal of welcoming people in an open and hospitable manner and making sure their stay in Switzerland is both relaxing and enriching.

According to the WEF's 2013 Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index, Switzerland is currently the world's most competitive country for tourism. We are immensely proud of this.

As you might expect, tourism is also extremely important to Switzerland.

Not only from an economic perspective, as it contributes around 3 per cent to the country's GDP. But far more important in my view is the large number of jobs created by tourism in less industrialised areas.

And another point that should definitely not be underestimated, although it can't be quantified in francs and centimes, is the contribution of tourism to Switzerland's excellent reputation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

More people are travelling than ever before:
in 2014 there were 1.1 billion tourists.

This poses challenges for both traditional tourist destinations and for new ones.

But these challenges can take different forms.

For our tourism industry here in Switzerland, the strong Swiss franc is currently the biggest test.

From the point of view of world tourism, I see two kinds of challenges.

If the traditional tourist destinations want to survive, it is vital they improve and develop existing offerings.

New holiday destinations, meanwhile, face the task of developing structures for tourism that strike the right balance between touristic needs, respecting the local population and conserving nature.

There are many different ways of responding to these challenges:

The first way involves exchanging ideas and information, which is why platforms like today's conference are extremely important.

We must share ideas and learn from one another.

Learn to develop a kind of tourism that ensures we leave behind a world to our children they too will want to visit.

The second way of responding to these challenges lies in education.

Tourism's strength relies on the quality of its employees.

It is therefore crucial that we invest in promoting talented young people.

This means we need a practical education and training system, like the one we have here in Switzerland.

And if outstanding performance is recognised with an innovation award, that's an extra motivating factor.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This brings me to the third way of responding to these challenges.

The key to success is innovation – including in tourism!

Demands are growing, particularly in countries where tourism already has a strong tradition.

This is clear in the process of booking and organising a holiday.

The traditional travel agent now has stiff competition in the shape of the internet.

The World Wide Web makes it possible to find information faster, more effectively and in a completely personalised way.

So you can more or less plan your next trip from the comfort of your sofa.

But the internet is not only changing the way we organise holidays.

It is creating completely new and innovative services.

I'm thinking, for example, of the virtual accommodation platform "airbnb", which has long since ceased to be a service only for budget travellers.

"airbnb" affects the hotel industry because hotels simply can't keep up with the cheaper prices offered by private individuals.

I'm aware that politicians are starting to respond to this trend in several places, for example in New York.

But I do not believe that regulation is necessarily the right approach here.

The way to respond to innovation is with innovation.

Developing new business models that go beyond the narrow framework of traditional tourism.

Swiss tourism is doing this, for example with the aid of the government funding instrument INNOTOUR, which promotes collaboration.

This brings me to the fourth way we can respond to these challenges: cooperation.

Cooperation between individual destinations but also with other sectors.

The keywords here are health tourism, shopping tourism and scientific, congress and cultural tourism.

Or ideally a combination of all of these.

Just like here in Lucerne:
the city's Culture and Convention
Centre is an outstanding conference
facility, which also hosts the Lucerne
Festival, a world renowned classical
music event.

The building by top French architect
Jean Nouvel is a real draw for
architecture enthusiasts from across
the world.

Lucerne is also one of the world's
most important watchmaking cities.

All of this, together with the unique
landscape, make Lucerne a place
that modern tourists want to visit.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Switzerland has always been an open
country, not only with regard to
tourism, and I hope you'll notice that
during your stay here.

And for the Swiss government, too, the multilateral aspect of international collaboration is an important element of its economic and foreign policy.

A key issue in international cooperation is visa policy.

Individuals should be able to enjoy the greatest possible freedom to travel, always taking into account the relevant safety and immigration policy issues.

Like the UNWTO, Switzerland advocates borders being as open as possible.

For this and for the valuable work of the UNWTO, I would like to thank my esteemed colleague, Secretary General Mr Taleb Rifai.

I would also like to thank the organisers of this conference who have successfully managed to bring together representatives from over 60 countries.

I hope the next two days will be filled with fruitful discussions and that you will have a successful time at the World Tourism Forum Lucerne.

And I hope you'll be able to take some time out to enjoy the charm of this stunning conference venue.

It's certainly worth it.