



A New Sustainable Era in Switzerland

Switzerland is famous for many things, from political neutrality to pristine lakes, mountains, and forests, to high-end watches, to globally exported cheese and chocolate. Lately, the country has also become increasingly known for its stance on sustainable development and preserving the environment. A few years back, it was even named one of the top five countries achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals the fastest. Today, it's taking a few steps further and launching a new sustainable strategy aptly named Swisstainable, which has been developed by Switzerland Tourism, the national tourism board.

Words by Remi Deve

Sustainability has been shaping Switzerland for decades. This has been evident in the high environmental awareness of the Swiss people and the early and comprehensive expansion of public transport. An eco-friendly country, Switzerland has also long been playing a leading role in environmentally sound technologies. The federal republic was among the first industrialized nations worldwide, with water power technologies being developed in various parts of the country, helping to set up industrial hubs. Today Switzerland's cleantech cluster is very strong, boasting an outstanding record in a variety of fields – just like Swiss startups are at the forefront of green tech.

STRENGTHENED ATTITUDE

Despite this awe-inspiring performance – the Swiss Federal Council has even committed to a climate-neutral Switzerland by 2050 – there is a need to strengthen this attitude and convey this commitment to conference organizers and delegates alike. Consequently, a new sustainable development strategy has been launched by Switzerland Tourism. Called Swisstainable, the comprehensive programme provides a wide scope of certifications, tools and support services that formalize the Swiss route towards a tourism sector that is grounded in social, economic and environmental best practice.

Of course, there are already numerous tourism providers who are committed to sustainable development. However, it is difficult for visitors to determine the sustainability of the different offers available. This is precisely this gap that Swisstainable aims to address. Together with tourism industry associations, it's a real movement that has been set in motion, in order for service providers to commit to a more sustainable development of Switzerland as a convention destination.

In this regard, Switzerland Tourism has formalized an agreement with the GDS-Movement to rollout the GDS-Index to measure, improve and communicate annually on the sustainable performance of Swiss destinations across social, environmental, supplier and destination management categories. If Geneva, Zurich, Lausanne and Montreux have been long standing members of the GDS-Index, further destinations such as Lugano, Lucerne, Basel, Interlaken and Saint Gallen-Bodensee, through the Switzerland Tourism initiative, will now also start benchmarking performance improvement actions from 2021 forward.

EXAMPLES APLENTY

Examples of Swiss destinations that are at the forefront of sustainability abound. Zurich, Switzerland's business and financial capital, Lausanne, a city famous for its world-class education and innovations, Lucerne, nestled between a pretty lake and spectacular mountains, and Basel have all been awarded the European Energy Award® Gold. Recognizing an advanced commitment to sustainable energy policy, this outstanding certification means they have

implemented at least 75% of their commitment plan. Likewise, Interlaken and Montreux have been labeled as an 'Energy City' which promotes the use of renewable energy sources, supportable environmental mobility and sustainable resource management.

Meanwhile, Geneva, Switzerland's major hub for green and social finance, is home to numerous international organizations in the field of environmental and sustainable development. It is even the first Swiss canton to implement Agenda 21 locally, a United Nations action plan related to sustainable development. Geneva is also the 5th city in the world for green area per capita and an active member of the Global Destination Sustainability Index. A clear indicator of the quality of life, the lake's clean water is perfect for swimming and the drinking water is pure as well. The city also features the second largest solar power plant in Switzerland.

In Basel, efficient transport connections and an environmentally conscious congress centre have made the destination a must for conference goers. With an ambitious energy strategy, Basel has become a certified "city on its way to the 2,000-Watt Society." In this context, Congress Center Basel earned itself a Minergie standard label BS-054 – the Swiss standard for low-energy buildings – as all heating, air conditioning and cooling systems operate needs-based, and most of the waste heat is utilized.

MORE SUSTAINABLE TOGETHER

All these sustainable efforts are not done in isolation. In fact, on its Swisstainable journey, Switzerland Tourism can count on the expertise and the network of important international partners, in addition to the GDS Index. In collaboration with the Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA) for instance, Switzerland Tourism has committed to a two-year multi-project project with the goal to introduce and establish Switzerland as one of the world's most sustainable destinations.

Similarly, the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), which establishes and manages global standards for sustainable travel and tourism, known as the GSTC Criteria, has accompanied the Swiss strategy. "To develop a fruitful sustainability strategy, a multi-stakeholder approach is key. The regular exchange with GSTC has significantly helped us to strengthen our approach and to learn from the best practices," believes Samuel Wille, interim Head of Business Development at Switzerland Tourism.

Echoing the comment, Martin Nydegger CEO Switzerland Tourism concludes: "With Swisstainable, we are taking another big step towards securing the long-term success of Switzerland as a travel destination and making it the world's most sustainable destination."

More info on Switzerland as a convention destination:

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