

Press release, 28 February 2023

Swiss Youth Hostels Start New Year and Century with a Boom

After two difficult years due to the COVID pandemic, the Swiss Youth Hostels concluded 2022 with accommodation numbers above the pre-crisis level, starting the new year off with strong booking numbers. There are various new things coming to the hostel network in 2023 as well, plus both the Swiss Youth Hostels and the Swiss Foundation for Social Tourism are heading towards their 100th and 50th year anniversaries, respectively. Numerous anniversary activities are on the agenda, starting with the Switzerland-wide «Youth Challenge», based on the values of the non-profit organisations.

After the Swiss Youth Hostels (SYH) recorded around 736,000 overnight stays in 2019, the accommodation numbers took a big hit starting in March 2020 due to the COVID pandemic. Even the increase in the amount of Swiss guests from 70.2 percent in 2019 to 86.1 percent in 2020 and 87.8 percent in 2021 was unable to offset the loss of schools and groups as well as international guests. Ultimately, the Swiss Youth Hostels ended the first year of the pandemic with around 485,000 overnight stays (-34% compared with 2019). Despite a slight increase to around 565,000 overnight stays in the following year (+16.5 percent), the accommodation numbers at the end of 2021 were still 23.2 percent lower than in 2019. In 2022, the return of schools and groups as well as international guests both helped increase accommodation numbers, which have been above the values of 2019 almost without exception ever since April 2022. Overall, the SYH registered around 752,000 overnight stays in 2022 and therefore 2.1 percent more than before the pandemic.

The positive level of bookings is also reflected in the 2022 operating revenue of around CHF 54 million. This corresponds to an increase of approximately CHF 7 million compared with the year 2019 (around CHF 47 million) and can be attributed particularly to the youth hostels in Burgdorf, Laax and Schaan, which opened since. The Swiss Youth Hostels also eliminated their negative equity at the end of 2022 and can therefore once again show positive organisational capital. The year 2023 started like 2022 ended. «Booking levels of the first consistently «normal» winter season to date since 2018/19 are promising,» says SYH CEO Janine Bunte.

Product development and reduced carbon footprint in the area of catering

Despite the difficult years, the Swiss Youth Hostels continued to invest in their product during the pandemic. «For us, grinding to a halt wasn't an option, despite the unbelievably challenging conditions,» says Janine Bunte in a nutshell. The SYH have increased their social commitment to barrier-free holidays as part of the OK:GO project, expanded their cooperation with «KulturLegi», lowered the prices for youths in their parents' room and offer affordable prices for public primary schools and grammar schools. They've also expanded their food offerings with new three-course menus that significantly reduce the carbon emissions in the area of catering by around 40 percent and introduced self-kiosks.

Network development continues to make progress

Besides the changes to the product, the SYH also managed to develop its network according to plan during the pandemic. In this time, several new hostels were opened, such as Burgdorf Castle Youth Hostel, the wellness hostels in Laax and St-Luc, the new building in Schaan-Vaduz and Saignelégier Youth Hostel. The Rapperswil, Brienz and Lucerne Youth Hostels also underwent extensive renovations. This pace is set to continue: In the beginning of March 2023, a new member will become part of the SYH family in Scudellate, southern Ticino, and Montreux Youth Hostel is celebrating its reopening in May 2023 following renovations. In Martigny-Bourg, the «Bâtiment de l'Horloge», built in 1654, will join the network in 2024 and Geneva will once again boast a youth hostel starting in 2025. In Pontresina, the project competition for a new replacement building is

starting. Planning is also ongoing for the relocation of the Lucerne Youth Hostel to the Swiss Museum of Transport as well as for comprehensive renovations of the Lausanne Youth Hostel.

SYH start journey to the next century with the «Youth Challenge»

There are two major anniversaries to celebrate within a year. In May 2023, the Swiss Foundation for Social Tourism (SFST) is turning 50, and in April 2024, the Swiss Youth Hostels are celebrating their 100th anniversary. To reach their civil society objectives, the two non-profit organisations focus on enabling young people to actively experience the world, to get to know other people, cultures and nature and to expand their own horizons. In light of this, the SYH has initiated the Switzerland-wide «Youth Challenge». The idea: Young people between the ages of 16 and 25 form teams of 4-6 friends and put together a week-long itinerary in Switzerland, including accommodation at youth hostels. In a brief video, the group presents its itinerary as well as the activities they intend to take part in locally. After a panel of judges has selected the four most exciting projects, the groups take their week-long trips in June and July and report on their experiences on social media. A public vote will determine the winning team of the «Youth Challenge». The champions will win a voucher for a Euro trip by train with accommodations in the Hostelling International network valued at a total of CHF 10,000. «With the «Youth Challenge», we want to give young people the opportunity to experience life's genuine moments, make new acquaintances and let their travel fantasy run wild,» says Katrina Bollinger, Project Manager at the SYH in charge of the anniversary and the «Youth Challenge».

With the «Youth Challenge», the Swiss Youth Hostels are heading towards their 100-year anniversary, offering numerous exciting anniversary activities in the months to come. You will find more information on the Swiss Youth Hostels and the Swiss Foundation for Social Tourism as well as their anniversaries at www.youthhostel.ch/anniversary.

About the Swiss Youth Hostels

The Swiss Youth Hostels Association's network comprises 42 own hostels and 7 franchise properties, ranging from romantic castles to urban design locations and wellness hostels. The non-profit organisation consists of nearly 70,000 members and generates approximately 750,000 overnight stays annually while focusing on quality-conscious, sustainable and affordable youth and family tourism. www.youthhostel.ch

About the Swiss Foundation for Social Tourism

The Swiss Foundation for Social Tourism SFST was founded in 1973. As the owner of the majority of youth hostels in Switzerland, it is responsible for facility management, from construction to maintenance, of the properties run by the Swiss Youth Hostels Association.

For more information:

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