

Premium service 'above the clouds'

SWISS Chief Harry Hohmeister talks about reliability, quality and increasing flights to China

Editor's note: According to the majority of press articles, the golden age of air travel has long since passed. Most coverage is given to industry-wide cost cutting, no-frills rivals enticing passengers away from the traditional full-service flag carriers and travelers bemoaning the loss of quality and individual service.

However SWISS has been making the headlines in 2011 for all the right reasons. The renowned airline — which operates a highly versatile and modern fleet of Airbus long-haul jets — has been making the news with fleet additions, new premium cabins and business travel awards.

The year had a promising start when SWISS earned several Business Traveler Awards. The readers of the German-based business travel magazine named the carrier "Best Airline for North & South America". They also gave SWISS the prestigious "Best Business Class" prize on the same routes, and for the fifth year running named SWISS the "Best Airline for Europe". Now SWISS can aim for similar recognition on its routes to the Far East.

In January SWISS also took delivery of its 10th Airbus A330-300 to complete the first phase in the integration of the advanced long-haul jetliner into its fleet.

Onboard the state-of-the-art aircraft are two-meter-long flat beds in business class cabin and an entire "suite above the clouds" for first-class guests. In the same month SWISS also decided to add to its capacity on its increasingly popular route between Zurich and Beijing in partnership with Edelweiss Air.

By March more praise was in the air when the carrier's investment in environmental responsibility began to

reap rewards. It was announced that SWISS had reduced its fuel consumption per 100 passenger kilometers by over 17 percent since the airline was established in 2002.

Over the next few years two-thirds of all of SWISS's investments will be devoted to technological innovation.

SWISS Chief Executive Officer Harry Hohmeister talked in more depth about these achievements, the future, and looking East.

How do you expect passenger demand between Switzerland and China to evolve over the coming years?

The relationship between our two countries will certainly grow stronger in the future and the demand will increase in both directions.

On the one hand, business traffic has been showing sharp growth over the last few years and the future Free Trade Agreement will of course further increase this.

On the other hand, we have the leisure traffic to take into account. As both countries are important leisure destinations we see strong growth potential for the future.

Because of the strong demand we will operate, together with Edelweiss Air, a seasonal weekly flight between Beijing and Zurich during this summer. Switzerland is one of the most attractive tourism destinations for Chinese travelers who enjoy our nature, our spectacular mountains and also our high-end shopping experience.

We enjoy a close cooperation with Switzerland Tourism in China and I would say it is highly possible that SWISS will further increase its offer and capacity between the two countries.



Swiss A340 flies high above the Alps.



In the context of an eventual FTA and increasing trade volumes between Asia and Switzerland, what are your expectations for the growth of the cargo side of the business on Asian routes?

Swiss WorldCargo is a leader in the transportation of care intensive shipments and it is ideally placed to support trade expansions on Asian

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routes, especially when it comes to vertical industries such as the pharmaceutical sector and niche services.

In fact, due to the cooperation with Edelweiss Air and the summer timetable I previously mentioned, Swiss WorldCargo is launching a direct service between Zurich and Beijing, which is small in volume terms, but offers attractive business opportunities for specialized market segments between Switzerland and China and visa versa.

How much does the quality and delivery of SWISS products and services follow the culture and traditions of Switzerland?

I would say that the most important Swiss attributes are reliability, high quality, and hospitality.

The very personal care by shown by all of our team members throughout the entire service delivery chain reflects these qualities.

We are dedicated to high quality and we are focused on consistently delivering a quality experience on the

ground and in the air.

To ensure delivery of this high quality service to our Chinese passengers we have local Chinese flight attendants on our flights between China and Switzerland.

Being a smaller airline allows us to be flexible and pay attention to each individual passenger.

Another strong point is our efficient hub at Zurich. Located at the heart of Europe, from here you can reach all major cities with Europe's "Airline of the Year".

How important are the premium cabins to passengers on the Chinese routes?

The premium segment is the most important for any full service airline, but it has particular importance for SWISS on these routes.

This is why in April this year we introduced our new business class on the Zurich–Shanghai route with a new state-of-the-art seating concept which can be transformed into a fully flat bed with an aircushion allowing you to adjust the firmness of the seat-bed.

By this summer our entire inter-continental fleet will have three classes: Economy which offers best value for money, the new business class with great comforts for the corporate and high-end leisure traveler and of course our very exclusive SWISS first.

How do you plan to capitalize on a promising start to 2011?

The robust demand, the present trends in long-haul travel and recent cargo business developments provide a promising foundation for a sound 2011 performance.

We were one of the few European carriers to show profits in the first quarter of 2011.

The continuing volatility in the industry confirms once again how vitally important it is that we retain our reliability and our quality — those previously mentioned Swiss attributes.

Berne: Advantages for multinationals

Berne is Switzerland's second most populous canton, the country's political center, and the site of the Federal Government and Parliament.

It is also an important economic center, with a number of multinationals and countless small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

In 2010, the annual Mercer Quality of Living Survey ranked Berne among the top 10 cities worldwide for quality of life.

"It is important to note that the Canton of Berne's spectacular setting, its history, and the diverse demographics are major reasons the region has such a wide-ranging and varied economy," said Andreas Rickenbacher, the canton's minister of Economic Affairs.

While Berne is mostly known as Switzerland's political epicenter, it is also a very strong business location, well-positioned in the energy, environmental technology, ICT, medical, precision and watch industries, Rickenbacher added.

"The watch industry started hundreds of years ago in the Canton of Berne, and out of those precision skills came the energy and environmental technology, medical and ICT sectors. Precision know-how is the backbone of the industrial production now in the canton," he explained.

That precision know-how, coupled with the canton's role as the seat of Swiss government, its advanced infrastructure, and a population that is fluent in both German and French are primary reasons for industry giants such as Rolex, Omega, Swatch,



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Ebay, Pepsico, ZTE and Huawei to base their operations here.

Rickenbacher also pointed to the region's universities, which generate new projects that benefit the canton's economy, and also turn out highly skilled graduates.

So, the canton has many distinct advantages for multinationals, and in addition, has the support of the Berne Economic Development Agency to help corporations look-

ing to relocate to Switzerland.

"Huawei Technologies established operations here because they valued the closeness to the federal administration," Rickenbacher said, while indicating the crucial role infrastructure plays.

"Berne has excellent air connections, with its own airport at Berne-Belp, and three others (Geneva, Basel, Zurich) within an hour's ride by road or rail."

Berne is also the founder of Switzerland's "cluster policy". Rickenbacher explained this by saying, "Fifteen years ago, we built clusters of different sectors, which encouraged a lot of SMEs. So, it's no surprise that SMEs now come up with innovative projects, design fruitful networks and work closely together."

Berne's history, its central location, and natural surroundings make it an excellent destination for tourists as well. In fact, the city center was designated a UNESCO World Culture Heritage site in 1983 in recognition of its rich cultural and architectural history.

The city is a mere 20 kilometers from the Swiss Alps, which preside over the region, with their great peaks, the Eiger, Monch and Jungfrau. Europe's highest railway station, on the Jungfrauoch, can be reached from Interlaken via 'Kleine Scheidegg'.

"The canton was present at the 2010 World Exhibition in Shanghai, where we did a very good job in promoting it. We've almost doubled the number of Chinese visitors here since 2010, and believe that we delivered a positive image of the region," Rickenbacher concluded.



The mountains, the vision, the success.

With its wealth of expertise in precision work, a quality of life unmatched worldwide, and a bilingual environment, the Canton of Berne has provided the launch pad for such illustrious brands as Swatch and Rolex.

The Berne Economic Development Agency is there to help your company conquer its global summits, too, particularly in areas such as precision engineering, medical technology, environmental and energy technology, ICT and the services sector.

The Canton of Berne – A Tradition of Success.

Member of:


GREATER GENEVA BERNE area
economic development agency

Contact:
Ms Chunming Liao,
Delegate for China Affairs, Shanghai
Phone +86 21 5442 8880
Mobile +86 1390 1651 845
c.liao@ggba-switzerland.ch


Berne Economic
Development Agency

Münsterplatz 3
CH-3011 Berne
Phone +41 (0)31 633 41 20

www.berneinvest.com

www.ggba-switzerland.ch