

# 15 Covid-19 as an opportunity to newly discover Switzerland's nature-based cultural landscapes. Qualitative study among German-speaking Swiss holiday guests in Switzerland.

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## Introduction

Due to the corona pandemic, many Swiss people stayed in Switzerland in the summer of 2020. According to a survey (SRG & sotomo 2020), in May 2020, 49% had planned longer holidays abroad for summer 2020 and were then tending to change to excursions and shorter holidays in Switzerland due to the changed situation. What the forecasts predicted actually came true: a large proportion of the Swiss population, including many who otherwise travel abroad, spent their main holidays in a Swiss holiday region. Many hotels in the mountain cantons recorded an increase in bookings. The biggest losers were the cities and destinations with otherwise many international arrivals (Nau 2020).

This development was seen in many European countries. Covid has brought about major changes in travel behavior due to closed borders and many people have vacationed in their own country. (YouGov 2020).

Due to that, many Swiss might have got to know their country newly in one way or another in summer 2020. The preference for holidays in one's own country suggests the hypothesis that experiences of nature-based and culture-related tourism were given additional importance. Characteristically, this type of holiday experience takes place in natural areas and nature-based cultural landscapes (Siegrist et al. 2019).

As part of a qualitative survey the changes in perception of Switzerland as a holiday destination, due to the altered starting position of domestic guests because of the corona pandemic, were analysed and evaluated. The questions asked were whether new holiday qualities in Switzerland were discovered, changes in attitudes and activities occurred (Pine & Gilmore 2013) or how cultural and natural attractions visited were perceived.

## Methods

Due to the complex topic, a qualitative approach was chosen. Unexpected aspects could be better examined with open questions. The disadvantage of the qualitative investigation is that the results may be less representative.

The online survey was carried out with a selection of residents who had spent their vacation in Switzerland in summer 2020. A total of 98 people were interviewed.

The software from provider Kernwert was used to carry out the qualitative survey, who also programmed the questionnaire. The individual questions were implemented using structured and innovative question tools (such as evaluating images, creating collages, etc.). The respondents were involved through the recruiting partner TestingTime.

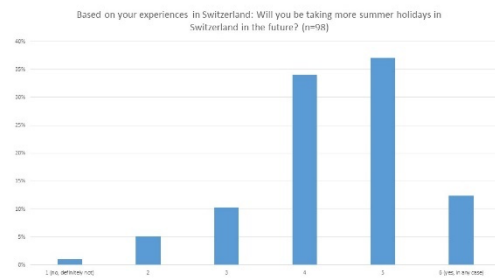
## Results

The allocation to the guest types (multiple answers possible) shows that the guest type "nature lover" receives most mentions with 54%, followed with 47% by the "sporty guest type" and with 45% by the guest type "city lover". 32% of the responses go to the guest type "interested in cultural attractions" and 23% to the guest type "spa and wellness lover". The guest type "traveler with children", "those interested in history and building culture" and "luxury traveler" received less than 10% of the answers. It turns out that the travellers interviewed were particularly interested in nature and sporting activities.

Most of the respondents mentioned that their holidays in Switzerland were very nice, they had discovered new places and activities and were thus partially compensated for the failed trips abroad. The nature and diverse landscapes in Switzerland, which were discovered on hikes, while biking, swimming, picnicking and barbecuing, were particularly valued. It has been mentioned many times that people are now increasingly appreciating

what can be experienced in the immediate vicinity and that many new things have been discovered that they would otherwise not have come across.

On a scale from 1 (no, definitely not) to 6 (yes, in any case), the majority of respondents (34% for level 4 and 37% for level 5) said they were more likely to be on vacation in Switzerland again due to their experiences. However, only 12% will definitely go on holidays in Switzerland again. What possibly influences this decision can be shown with the results, what was missed most during the holidays in Switzerland: 87% of the respondents state that they have missed the sea, sand and beach. Only 8% did not miss this. In second place, 71% state that they have missed a different climate / different flora and fauna. 69% missed encounters with people / other cultures and 54% missed exotic / other food. Also missing were: cultural attractions (49%), air travel (45%), special activities such as safari, trekking, retreats, etc. (36%), visiting family / friends / acquaintances (35%), sports activities such as surfing, diving, etc. (29%) and pristine wilderness (18%). It turns out that certain very missing factors cannot be compensated for even with holidays in Switzerland.



Picture 1: Prospective holiday planning

### Conclusions

Last summer was marked by new, unexpected holiday experiences for a significant part of the Swiss population and nature-based cultural landscapes provided an essential basis. Some tourists who would have spent their holidays abroad under normal circumstances got to know Switzerland and its diverse natural and cultural values from a new perspective. This gave the various aspects of nature-based and cultural tourism an additional meaning, which will possibly be of sustainable duration. Whether more domestic tourists will be holidaying in Switzerland in the coming years and what effects this will have on the environment, economy and society in Switzerland, however, remains an open question.

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