Challenges of hospitality in the High Alps

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The origin of alpinism
The Swiss Alpine Club SAC

- Founded in 1863
- 111 sections
- 5000 volunteer officials
- 142,000 members
- 26 full-time jobs at central office
- Budget of CHF 13 million
The origin of mountain huts
Grünhorn Hut, 1863
Grünhorn Hut, 2013
The SAC huts today

- 152 huts and bivouacs
- 9200 sleeping places
- 322,000 overnight stays in 2013
- Accommodation revenue 2013: CHF 6.5 million
- Food and beverage revenue 2013: CHF 19.5 million
- Around 1 million day visitors
Types of huts today
Kesch Hut (2000)
The purpose of mountain huts today

- Protection and emergency shelter for mountaineers
- Starting point for tours
The purpose of mountain huts today

- Excursion and overnight destinations
- One-of-a-kind offer in Swiss tourism
- Cultural assets
Cristallina Hut (2003)
Mountain huts are not hotels!
They remain simple mountain accommodation!
Stringent state requirements
What mountain huts expect of their guests
Tracuit Hut (2013)
USPs of mountain huts

- Nature experience in stunning locations
- Slow pace of life far away from the daily grind
- Fantastic views and a clear and starry night sky
- Exemplary forms of sustainable tourism
- Tradition and modern spirit united
Monte Rosa Hut (2009)
The mountain hut of today

- Contemporary architecture
- State-of-the-art technology
- Renewable energy sources
- Regionally sourced food
Hut guests of today

- 70% are between 31 and 60 years old
- 60% are members of an alpine club
- 60% are mountain hikers
- 50% book less than three days in advance
- 75% spend one night at a hut
- 60% would be prepared to pay higher prices for more comfort (e.g. smaller rooms)
Changing guest requirements

Past

• Water supply close to hut
• Own cooking
• Separate ladies’ bedrooms
• Large dormitories
• Woollen blankets

Present

• Showers
• Half board
• Separate toilets
• Small bedrooms
• Duvets
Challenges of building huts

- Compliance with legislation
- Meeting increasing demands on convenience
- Adapting to the changing climate
- Ensuring a certain degree of profitability
Challenges of running huts

• Adaptation to increasing guest expectations
• Dealing with the consequences of climate change
• Sufficient profitability for hut wardens
Marketing challenges

• Decline in overnight stays in the 1990s
• Decline in classical forms of alpinism
• Emergence of new outdoor activities
• Renaissance in hiking/nature-based activities
• New guest groups with changed requirements
• Heightened guest awareness regarding service and quality
Overnight stays 1992 – 2013
Marketing goals until 2020

- Maintain overnight stay and revenue figures
- Improve occupancy during off-season and weekdays
- Improve service quality and environmental awareness
- Strengthen the brand “SAC Hut”
Marketing strategy

• Approach new guest groups
• Clearly position huts in relation to target groups
• Promote huts as tour and hiking destinations
• Moderate adaptations to infrastructure, new communication technology
• Partner cooperations (tourism organisations, sponsors)
• Acquisition of funds through professional fundraising
I look for the soul in a hut, not convenience

Paolo Rumiz, Italian travel writer
Thank you for your attention!