

Basel: Perfect for cross-border trade

The Swiss city and canton (state) of Basel sits in the heart of Europe and has long been known as a center of international business and industry.

It is ideally located for cross-border commerce and, thanks to the Rhine River, has easy access to the sea, making it the only port in an otherwise landlocked country.

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HEAD OF MARKETING OF THE CANTON OF BASEL CITY



Sabine Horvath, head of marketing for the Canton of Basel City

When coupled with its EuroAirport (which serves three nations), the port and infrastructure guarantee Basel's status as an important crossroads for national and international commerce.

The city-state's strong economy, tied to the life sciences, has seen a positive GDP in recent years, at a time when that of many European economies was contracting. It is home to a number of large multinationals in the pharmaceutical and chemical industries, and in the financial sector. It is also home to a host of small and medium-sized enterprises (SME).

Its quality of life is enriched by the depth and diversity of the

canton's culture. Because it is a gateway to the European Union, it has been the recipient of an array of cultural influences and is widely recognized for the quality of its fine arts scene.

It is also home to more than three-dozen institutions with public and private collections of fine art – a remarkably high number for a city of its size. But that is hardly surprising for a city that, for hundreds of years, has served as a cultural and artistic gathering point for many European countries.

This rich history has not kept the city from turning its attention to the future: while its fine arts are revered and the banks of the Rhine in the canton are adorned with historic buildings, it also has a reputation as a regional and international leader in the life sciences.

Part of that international influence can be seen in the canton's connection with the Far East, where it found that it had much in common with another very important cultural and industrial port – the Chinese city of Shanghai.

In spite of their obvious differences in size, Basel and Shanghai are quite similar in at least one important way – they are both economic and cultural focal points for their respective coun-

tries. And, after making contact, the two signed an agreement in 2007 to create a partnership.

In recent years, after Basel saw an influx of skilled Chinese workers in its cutting-edge industrial sectors, it also saw an opportunity to create an environment that would encourage cultural exchanges and promote economic cooperation, especially between SMEs.

To support its growing Chinese population and its partnership with Shanghai, Basel has brought together “different networks” as part of its economic and cultural agenda, explained Sabine Horvath, head of external affairs and marketing for the Canton of Basel-City's Presidential Affairs Department.

“We know we already have almost 1,000 Chinese here in the region. And Basel has the potential for an even larger Chinese community. We aim to become the Chinatown of Switzerland. That is our agenda,” Horvath said.

In 2010, Basel and Shanghai renewed their partnership, and in September of that year, the city, for the first time, celebrated the Chinese New Moon Festival at City Hall. The festival will also be celebrated here in September 2011, and in following years.

The canton itself was also featured at the 2010 World Expo in China (in Shanghai), further



PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

In high summer, the city plays host to the big Rhine River Swimming Event and thousands of participants.

increasing the cultural and economic flow between the two cities.

Meanwhile, they are actively seeking other ways to improve communications – such as direct flights and cultural centers.

“This September there will be a Chinatown exhibition and Beijing Opera in Basel. This is all being organized in connection with the Chinese community here to make them feel welcome,” Horvath went on to say.

“We'd like them to be ambassadors for Basel, in China, when they return.”

The Basel-Shanghai partnership is not just about culture, Horvath pointed out, “We have a strong alliance in the sciences and logistics because we have a shipping cluster here and an international cargo airport. We're working with Chinese organizations in Shanghai and inviting Shanghai companies to come to Basel.”

In addition to its business interests, the partnership has also resulted in a Manager Exchange Program, in which young managers from Shanghai go to Basel, and vice versa, to learn about the best practices and share knowledge.

The two cities are clearly recognized internationally as centers of excellence in the life sciences and have much to offer each other, and the world, as partners in health care.

Their university hospitals and medical schools immediately saw the advantage of the partnership and began establishing work and academic exchange programs between the two cities, as well as symposiums designed to promote cultural and scientific exchanges.

Participating institutions include University Hospital Basel, University Children's Hospital of Basel, and the Medical Faculty at University of Basel, all of which cooperate with faculties from Shanghai's Fudan, Jiaotong and Tongji universities.

Continued cooperation and prosperity are on the horizon for these partner cities, and Horvath said she sees a bright future for the Chinese community in Basel.

“We'd like them to explain to their friends back home that Basel is Switzerland's Chinatown. That's really our goal. We'd really like to attract people from China who want to live and work here in Basel.”

FACTS AND FIGURES

- The canton-city of Basel lies on the Upper Rhine River, in a triangle formed by France to the west and Germany to the north.
- Basel is the main city of Switzerland's northwestern region and is a bridgehead for German-speaking Switzerland to the European Union.
- Basel has the lowest altitude of all Swiss cities north of the Alps. The Dreiländereck (the Switzerland, France, Germany triangle) is 244 meters above sea level.
- The city covers a 37-square-kilometer area on both sides of the Rhine, embedded between the Swiss Jura, Germany's Black Forest, and France's Vosges mountains.
- The city has almost 200,000 inhabitants, but more than half a million people in the greater Basel region, which is a traditional traffic junction. The city is at the crossroads of the north-south, east-west rail systems and its EuroAirport Basel-Mulhouse-Freiburg provides connections to the rest of Europe, and the international airline network.

Lucerne's allure: Tourism and tax breaks for firms

Popular tourist site is now a growing business hub

Most cantons in Switzerland enjoy similar advantages when it comes to enticing inward investment or tourism.

Sometimes, however, there is

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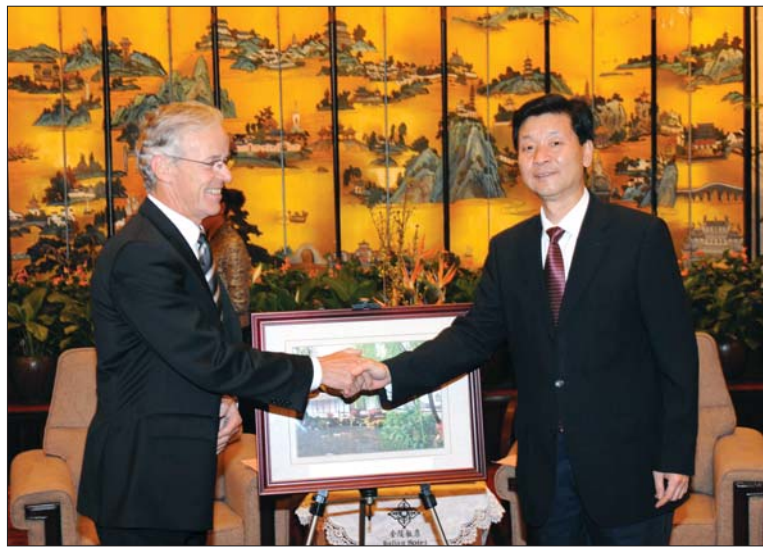
ADELBERT BÜTLER
PRESIDENT OF LUCERNE TOURISM

one that offers just that little bit more — and Lucerne could be that one.

Not only is the canton planning cuts in corporate tax that will give it the edge over its neighbors, but the city was also voted the fifth-most popular tourism destination in the world in 2010 by TripAdvisor.

According to Max Pfister, the cantonal governor and minister of economy, Lucerne has “everything you would want to find in Switzerland”.

Nothing is far away in Lucerne — Zurich's international airport is less than an hour away, it is on the main north-south highway, and as ever in Switzerland, the rail



Lucerne Governor, Economy Minister Max Pfister and Jiangsu province's Vice-Governor Zhang Weiguo seal agreement in April.

system connects you to where you need to go quickly and efficiently.

The minister agreed that Lucerne enjoys a reputation as an excellent tourism destination, but he added that “while tourism is an important part of the economy, it is important to note that we also house the European headquarters of a number of global companies and we are providing incentives to attract others to our region”.

With its tax cutting policies Lucerne will be on its way to being Switzerland's most business friendly canton.

The next 50 percent cut is due in January 2012, when Lucerne will offer Switzerland's lowest corporation tax at the cantonal level.

Increased connections with China are also on the agenda.

An agreement signed between Lucerne and Jiangsu province and with the Suzhou Industrial Park is helping Lucerne companies establish a foothold in China and Chinese companies that are looking for the ideal hub at the heart of Europe.

Lucerne is also establishing a Tao Chinese Center where Chinese companies can settle and exhibit.

From the Medieval history of the 14th century Chapel Bridge to the living history of Swiss watch making, guides and sales clerks are learning Chinese.

“The Chinese will like the tourist side of Lucerne as much as we like having them here and we make them feel very welcome,” said Adelbert Bütlér, the president of Lucerne Tourism.

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