

**Jolanta Wojciechowska**  
Łódź University  
Institut of Urban Geography and Tourism  
jolwoj@geo.uni.lodz.pl

## THE TOURIST IMAGE OF ZÜRICH AT CHRISTMAS AND THE NEW YEAR

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of the article is to present some patterns typical for a metropolitan 'tourism space' using the example of the Swiss city of Zürich, with some illustrations of tourist behaviour within this 'space' at Christmas and the New Year.

The research method used to establish these patterns is the experience of sightseeing. TWAIN (1992) treats this as a visual event based on visual perception, when the tourist sees 'with his/ her own eyes' but using common perception models. This tourist review of Zurich will be based on its tourism offer and additional attractions at Christmas and the New Year.

### 2. GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT ZÜRICH

Zürich lies in the eastern part of the Swiss Mountains at the northern end of Lake Zürich (*Zürichsee*), the third largest in Switzerland covering 90.1 km<sup>2</sup> at 409 m a.s.l. It is situated in a valley surrounded by mountains, the highest of which are Zürichberg (539 m a.s.l.) to the east and Uetliberg (830 m a.s.l.) to the west. The city lies on a river, the Limmat, which has its source in the lake. It is the largest city in Switzerland, with 375 000 inhabitants, including 30% foreign (170 different nationalities). German-speaking Protestants constitute 80% of the Swiss living there. The official language is German but *zürich-deutsch* is also common (a Zürich dialect, also used on local TV), as well as English, Italian and French.

The large percentage of foreigners in this city is justified historically because for a long time Zürich was an asylum for religious dissenters. In the early 16<sup>th</sup> c. the city experienced a socio-religious revolution headed by the parish priest of the local cathedral, Ulrich Zwingli. After Luther and Calvin, he was the foremost leader of the Protestant reforma-

tion movement and a key character in the life of the city who introduced new social and economic trends. The immigrants who arrived at that time and in the following centuries added to its development of the city, which nowadays exudes an aura of affluence and is listed as one of the most important cities in the world, alongside New York, Tokyo, London and Paris. For several years it has been placed first globally as regards quality of life, in contrast to Frankfurt which was seventh, Paris – 33<sup>rd</sup>, Tokyo – 35<sup>th</sup>, London – 39<sup>th</sup>, and New York – 48<sup>th</sup> (2007 figures).

The city boasts not only a healthy and clean environment (proved by the condition of water in the Limmat and Lake Zürich), but above all a very strong position in world banking, commerce, share trading, insurance and the textile industry. It is the largest centre of trade in the world, the Zürich stock exchange (opened in 1877) is the fourth most influential in the world, and holds the seats of giant economic organizations.

Zürich is visited by many business people and every year 12.5 million tourists arrive, 85% of which are foreign. So, apart from banking, finance and commerce, tourism is also of great importance for the city, despite the fact that the *canton* itself is not significant as a tourist region. In a number of urban centres, including Zürich, industry has developed mainly in metallurgy and engineering. About four million tourists visit the *canton* annually, three times fewer than the number visiting Zürich itself.

### 3. A OVERVIEW OF THE ZÜRICH TOURISM OFFER

Zürich has over 100 hotels of various standards, mostly 3-star, with 10 000 beds (Table 1). Luxury hotels in Zürich are among the world's hotel 'elite',

with the most prominent being the Dolder Grand, built on the slope of Zürichberg. The other luxury hotels are situated in the city centre, mainly on the banks of the Limmat (e.g. the Zürich Marriott) and on Lake Zürich (e.g. the Ambassador). They are architecturally interesting structures – large, impressive buildings, mainly from the early 20<sup>th</sup> c., but some of them are several centuries old, for instance the Hirschen Hotel is a six-hundred-year old building. Statistics show that in a Zürich hotel a guest spends on average 500 Swiss francs a day (in 2008 – 524 francs, according to *Zürich: the Magazine of Zürich and the Greater Zürich Area*, 2008).

T a b l e 1. Hotels in Zürich in 2008

Hotel type	No of hotels	Examples
1. 5-star	9	Dolder Grand, Zürich Marriott
2. 4-star	27	Ambassador, Schweizerhof, Zum Storch
3. 3-star	41	Kindli, Adler, Altstadt, Astor, Neufeld, St. Josef
4. 2-star	11	Arlette, Rothaus, Limmathof, Leonhard
5. 1-star	5	Easy Hotel Zürich

S o u r c e: *Zürich: the Magazine of Zürich and the Greater Zürich Area*, 2008 and tourist guides.

Cheaper accommodation includes *Fremdenpensionen* and *Appartemenhotels*, as well as youth hostels. It is very difficult to find a vacancy in Zürich without prior reservation. The cheaper places are often taken by students, 50 000 of whom study there (e.g. at the University of Zürich or *ETH – Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule – Federal Institute of Technology*) and who are in need of cheap accommodation (in October 2008 the local media reported that 38 000 students could not find lodgings).

The gastronomy system is varied and well developed. Some tourist guides quote 1300 restaurants, apart from a multitude of bars and – in summer – street snack outlets. In the city centre there is a wide choice of restaurants serving dishes from all over the world (Table 2). Among the 48 in the Old Town one can choose from fourteen different cuisines including Italian, French and Chinese, and five offer vegetarian dishes. Large shopping centres run self-service restaurants and there are several cheap places, called *Stadtküche*, sponsored by the state.

Zürich holds the title as the capital of culture and entertainment in Switzerland with most clubs, discotheques and pubs being found in the Old Town. In tourist guides advertisements for 32 night clubs can be found in the centre alone. The cultural offer is rich. There are over 100 art galleries, 40 cinemas, eleven theatres, an opera house and a concert hall.

You can visit over 50 museums, large, small or very small (with just 1-2 exhibition rooms) and six groupings of exhibits can be identified (Table 3) – most are cultural-historical (15), followed by art (8) and natural history (7). Apart from the zoo, Zurich has six places where you can find living botanical collections.

T a b l e 2. Restaurants in the centre of Zürich in 2008

Cuisine	No of restaurants
French	6
Italian	8
Spanish	3
Greek	1
Oriental	2
Kosher	2
Russian	1
Mexican	2
Chinese	4
Japanese	3
Korean	1
Taiwan	3
Vietnamese	1
Indian	3
Swiss	8

S o u r c e: Tourist guides: Zürich – Guide 2008.

T a b l e 3. Zürich museums according to exhibits in 2008

Museum exhibits	No of museums	Examples
Cultural-historical	15	Swiss National Museum ( <i>Schweizerisches Landesmuseum</i> ), Museum of the History of Housing, Toy Museum ( <i>Spielzugmuseum</i> ), Tourism Museum, <i>Johann Jacobs Museum</i>
Art	8	Museum of Art ( <i>Kunsthaus</i> ), Bührle art collection
Architecture and technology	6	Zurich Museum of Architecture, Museum of Technology
Non-European cultures	3	Museum Rietberg, <i>Nordamerika Native Museum (NONAM)</i>
Natural history	7	Museum of Anthropology, <i>Völkerkundemuseum der Universität Zürich</i> History of Medicine Museum
Botanical collections	6	Zürich University Botanical Garden ( <i>Botanischer Garten der Universität Zürich</i> ), Collection of Succulents

S o u r c e: Tourist guides: Zürich – Guide 2008.

The institution which provides professional information on accommodation, gastronomy and sightseeing

attractions is the Tourist Information Office, at the main railway station (*Hauptbahnhof*). It offers a wide range of leaflets and brochures, not only about Zürich but also many other destinations in Switzerland, as well as all *cantons*. The working hours are adjusted to tourist needs. Between 1<sup>st</sup> April and 31<sup>st</sup> October it is open 8.30-21.30, and on Sunday until 20.30. In the other months it works until 19.30. Here you can book a variety of sightseeing tours of the city – on foot, by car, by historical tram, by bus or by ship on the river and lake, during the day or by night. The itinerary can be of course agreed on at the office.

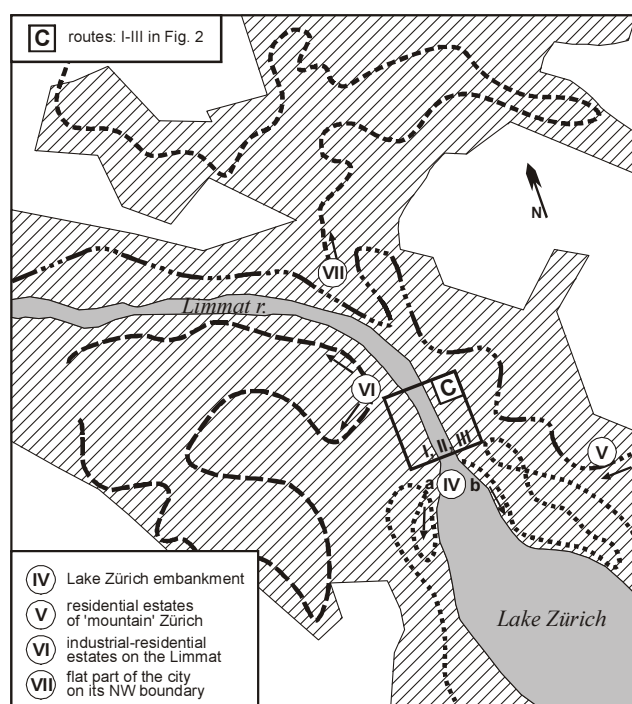


Fig. 1. Tourist trails in Zürich  
(source: Zürich. *Stadtführer für Züricher und Nichtzüricher* 2000)

The most important tourist trails around the city are interestingly presented in the guide entitled *Zürich. Stadtführer für Züricher und Nichtzüricher* (2000) which shows seven of them (Fig. 1). The first one takes the tourist to the historical buildings of the Old Town, along the right and left banks of the Limmat (Fig. 2). The second leads between baroque buildings and the third to those of the 19<sup>th</sup> c. Other trails take you outside the city centre, to both left and right sides of the lake (route IV), the residential estates in the 'mountain' part of Zürich (V), the industrial-residential estates west of the Limmat (VI), and the flat part of the city on its north-western boundary (route VII). The first route is most often chosen by one-day domestic and foreign tourists while those staying for a few days may be interested

in routes II, III and the northern section of route IV. The remaining routes are mostly for domestic tourists.

The city attracts tourists with its interesting history and its picturesque Old Town districts divided into a maze of charming, winding and narrow streets for pedestrians. At the same time the city radiates a strange mixture of affluence and beauty which questions the truth of the statement that 'faced with an attraction, all visitors become equal' (WIECZOR-KIEWICZ 2008).

#### 4. ATTRACTIONS AT CHRISTMAS AND THE NEW YEAR

A forerunner of December's attractions is the festival of itinerant music bands which starts on 11<sup>th</sup> November at 11.11 precisely. Different bands parade along the main streets, playing, singing and dancing, thus opening a series of smaller parades organized until the end of February when the final festival takes place (Zürich Carnival – 27<sup>th</sup> February). At Christmas, at different places in the city, performances given by buskers, street bands or choirs singing Christmas carols can be seen.

At the end of November and at the beginning of December the city becomes increasingly decorated and the streets in the Old Town on both banks of the Limmat are filled with thousands of lights. Every year the media advertise the decoration of the city's main street – Bahnhofstrasse – which runs along the western river bank from the railway station to the lake embankment, and every year the city surprises everyone with a new idea for its decoration. In 2008 it was a chain of gigantic lanterns in the shape of fireworks hung along the middle of the street which caused mixed feelings because the lights were considered not bright enough.

A particular complement to the city's decoration is the night of the floating lights (*Lichterschwimmen*) on 18<sup>th</sup> December. In the evening the city is filled with hundreds of lights coming from decorative candles carried by the inhabitants in an atmosphere of song and fanfares, coming from all parts of the city to the river. There, at 18.00, the lights start to float on the water. The festival includes a symbolic snack provided by the Zürich Tourist Office.

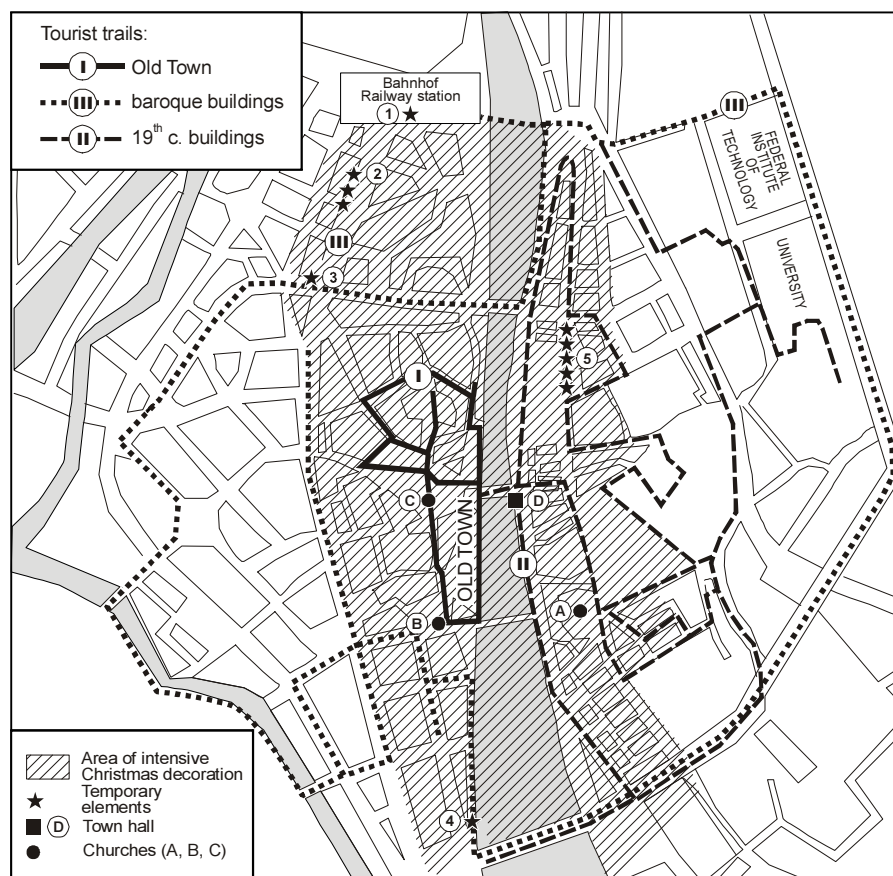
At the end of November, Christmas stalls are set out in Niederdorfstrasse, one of the oldest streets on the eastern side of the Limmat (Fig. 2), and on 28<sup>th</sup> November one of the largest Christmas markets is ceremonially opened in the main railway station, *Hauptbahnhof* with over 160 stalls in the main hall to inspire crowds of passers-by to buy gifts. The market is considered to be one of the most beautiful in Switzerland, alongside Bern and Winterthur. In 2008

a success of the Zürich market was the enormous Christmas tree in the middle of the hall, decorated with 5000 diamond pieces from Swarovski (a Swarovski shop can be found opposite the station). The tree was very popular and continually photographed. The choice of place for the market to be organized is splendid as every hour fast trains from all over Switzerland and the larger European cities (except Poland, unfortunately) arrive throughout the day. Transit passengers and those who intentionally visit the market make an extraordinary crowd until 24<sup>th</sup> December. On Christmas Day the stalls (also in the Old Town and in Niederdorfstrasse) are dismantled, with only a few remaining in Bahnhofstrasse, and the tree removed.

On the day after Christmas (a holiday) an intensive advertising campaign for great sales begins in shop windows. On the following day the 'spectacular character' of Christmas turns into a shopping craze which can be seen as another 'tourist ritual'

permanently inscribed in western culture<sup>1</sup>. This ritual is especially interesting in the 'street of shop windows' – Bahnhofstrasse – the main shopping artery of the city or even of Switzerland. Here world famous shops can be found with top quality clothes for men and women, shoes, jewellery, watches, perfumes, as well as chocolate and toys. From the railway station up to the street's midway point, alongside exclusive boutiques there are also department stores, and therefore this part of the street is full of those interested in the sales. In the other part of the street, with brand-name shops such as Prada, Armani, Dior or Zegna, the crowds are not so big, and these shops have only single customers.

In speaking of shops, it is worth noticing that they are more varied in the Old Town where there are many small ones situated in centuries-old buildings. On entering them their original doors, ceilings, floors, and, in places, floorboards and beams wider than 0.5 m can be found. Christmas decorations are



A – Great Zurich Cathedral, B – Fraumunster Cathedral, C – St Peter's Church,  
ETH – Federal Institute of Technology, UNI – University  
Area of intensive Christmas decoration, temporary elements: 1 – market at the railway station, 2 – stalls in Bahnhofstrasse, 3 – decorated Christmas tree, 4 – circus, 5 – market in Niederdorfstrasse

Fig. 2. The centre of Zürich at Christmas and the New Year  
(source: Zürich. Stadtführer für Züricher und Nichtzüricher 2000)

ingeniously integrated into this décor. The assortment of goods is breathtaking. In between 'kingdoms' of sweets prepared especially for Christmas, there are 'kingdoms' of toys, knives and penknives, shaving accessories, 'special clinics' for dolls and teddy bears, old furniture, books, and a lot of flea markets. To visit them all is a real challenge for the tourist.

Another attraction in the city is the wide offer of the cultural institutions. Moreover, in many churches concerts are performed, especially in the Grossmünster Cathedral, the Fraumünster Cathedral and St Peter's Kirche. At this time a circus stops in Zürich for nearly a month with their holiday season programme, a tradition kept up for half a century. The circus tent is put up on an island in the Limmat and decorated.

New Year in Zürich is welcomed with a spectacle of fireworks organized in several places, the most popular of which is the upper section of the Limmat and on the lake embankment.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

The example of Zürich shows the changes taking place at Christmas within the city space. The changes are only temporary, not permanent, and mainly concern the appearance with decorations and lights. Above all, the old districts, rich in historical monuments, as well as the shopping districts, are decorated. The remaining parts, especially the outskirts, are largely ignored in this respect. The decorated spaces include temporary elements, such as Christmas stalls, enormous Christmas trees and the circus. Both open-air and indoor social and cultural events are organized.

The 'space' created determines tourist behaviour. They are encouraged to look at the stalls and shops, and take part in the street events, but less to visit

historical monuments. The tourist in this period yields to the omnipresent atmosphere and tries to divide time between historical monuments and different events. The changes in the city space are spectacle-like by nature, culture-based, with a distant religious underpinning, and affect tourist behaviour.

This review of tourism attractions in Zurich shows that it is a historically variable category, appropriate to a given period and its characteristic models of perception, social practices or existing relations. The image of Zürich at Christmas and the New Year reflects the 'spectacular character' of modern society. RZEWUSKI (2008) remarks that modern societies, and more precisely 'the cities of the satiated West', are continuously and increasingly acquiring flickering and noisy gadgets, and un-fortunately becoming increasingly bored with them.

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> The 'spectacular character' of a society was described by Debord (2006) when referring to certain forms of social life and the way of thinking about the world, and stressing dependence on entertainment.

*Translated by Ewa Mossakowska*

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