

Pass St-Bernard

Suffering from lack of funding the St-Bernard region had closed one of its ski resorts in 2010: « Super St-Bernard ». In order to survive, the remaining resorts; la Fouly, Champex-Lac, Vichères-Bavon and Bourg St-Pierre decided in 2016 to regroup under a single pass: “Pass St-Bernard”.

Having as an objective to attract more people all year round in the St-Bernard region they are presenting a very varied offer. The Pass is valid from May to April and gives access to local public transports, the four ski resorts, the ice rink, the swimming pool and the artillery fort at Champex. It also includes many coupons to diverse indoor and outdoor activities, such as expositions, different swimming and wellness centres, ski resorts (also in France and Italy), paragliding, cinemas and many others...

The promotion of this Pass started at the end of April 2016 with Daniel Yule as the main representative and the famous St-Bernard Dog as a mascot. They also launched a sticker based advertisement that could be mostly seen on cars. The price of the Pass was of CHF 99.- instead of 199.- if you spend at least one night in the region and pay the tourist tax. There are also multiple pack offers from hotels allowing you for instance to spend one night and have the annual Pass for CHF 129.-. When owner of a Pass you may invite a friend, who will benefit from the half price as well. After last year’s success they have launched two new passes: the summer daily pass and the season pass.

The Pass does not only attract people to the region for financial advantages. All these coupons and offers actually get promotion through the Pass too. Be it the small unknown familial ski lifts or the varied activities, the pass has allowed people to discover the diversity of the region.

Although it seems more profitable to small resorts, there are now many who have come to a point where making a pass is beneficial to their evolution. Saas-Fee resorts have also done it last year, but without gathering multiple small instances. Their objective was simply to boost the number of visitors on their ski tracks. The last newcomer is the MagicPass, which includes a surprisingly high number of major ski resorts. St-Bernard Pass however distinguishes itself by being the only one pushing also towards yearly income and stand out by their will to support the smaller companies.

Finding it very difficult to get data in such a short notice, we decided to do some field work and discuss with a couple different stores involved. Obtained in this manner the data could not be quantitative and is just in the form of general feedback.

Our interviews were done in the following locations:

- The Champex-lac lift
- A local bakery
- A local sports-shop
- A restaurant and pedalo boat rental
- A hotel
- The Orsières train station

The general observations cite a significant increase in the number of summer visitors, the Pass had also saved the Christmas holidays as there was no snow but the tourists enjoyed skating and just going to the top of the lift for the view. The Pass is so cheap that people seem willing to spend more money during their stay.

Indeed, it would seem their budget does not change and they make expenses on other distractions instead. A lot of visitors enjoy the combined transport and activity tickets which makes a big difference in the amount of traffic in the town.

The Pass has mostly affected people from Wallis or even Val d'Entremont, the locals we have talked to enjoyed that. As the swiss clientele have a similar culture, it is easier for them to relate. We do not know if the Pass intends to attract more tourists from outside Switzerland but we heard that the regular foreigners appreciate the offer.

We chose to talk about the St-Bernard Pass because it was interesting to see the development of a smaller community. As opposed to the Saas-Fee Pass or the MagicPass, St-Bernard wants to stay independent and their idea to increase the touristic income outside the winter season is innovative. It has the advantage to reduce the number of cold beds and does not only benefit the ski resorts but also the whole regional economy.