

Zeitschrift: Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand
Herausgeber: Swiss Society of New Zealand
Band: 61 (1995)
Heft: [3]

Artikel: Success story of Air Engiadina
Autor: [s.n.]
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-945009>

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Permit No: 5844

(Registered at the G.P.O. Wellington as a Magazine)

Monthly Publication of the Swiss Society of New Zealand (Inc.)

Group New Zealand of the Helvetic Society

SUCCESS STORY OF AIR ENGIADINA

There are not many airlines around which can claim to have carried 40% more passengers last year - and expect to repeat the performance in 1995. One of the rare exceptions is the Swiss regional airline Air Engiadina. Formed only 8 years ago, the company is successfully pursuing a policy of steady expansion at a time when many of the industry's giants are facing crises and cutbacks.

Air Engiadina was not always a success story. The company was founded in 1987 in the Alpine resort of St. Moritz, deriving its name from that scenic Engadine region of Switzerland. It purchased a 16-seater British Aerospace aircraft, operating a charter and air taxi service to Zurich and later from Zurich to Eindhoven in the Netherlands. The ambitious intention was to expand operations to other European cities such as Milan and Munich. But the management's enthusiasm was not matched by its experience. The company ran into regulatory problems with the Swiss aviation authorities, had to suspend services and, by 1990, was near bankruptcy.

The airline made a comeback the same year, when it was taken over by Air Material, a Zurich-based charter and air taxi company headed by Austrian electronics engineer Dietmar Leitgeb.

In 1992 Air Engiadina launched a Berne-Munich service. Last year it inaugurated regular flights from Zurich to Erfurt in former East Germany and to the trade-fair city of Brno in the Czech Republic. As Leitgeb explains: Swiss companies are investing heavily in these regions and the passenger potential is considerable. About 90 Swiss companies are involved in joint ventures in the Brno region alone.

Last winter has seen Air Engiadina launch a daily Berne-Vienna service, providing - unbelievable though it may seem - the first-ever air link between the capitals of Switzerland and Austria.

The company has also become the first airline in the world (ahead of deliveries to the United States, Africa and Asia) to purchase the new Dornier 328 aircraft. At SFR 13 million, this is the largest single investment ever made by the Swiss carrier. The 31-seater plane is the most advanced regional aircraft of its kind, combining high cruising speed and low operating costs with environment-friendly operation and generous passenger comfort.

With the new aircraft, the Berne-Munich flight takes less than an hour and that to Vienna only 90 minutes.

One more destination was added to Air Engiadina's route network recently with the inauguration of a Berne-London service.

But according to Leitgeb, one thing is certain: Air Engiadina wants to remain a small airline with a personal touch.

FOXES LOVE CITY LIFE

Contrary to the general belief that the ever encroaching civilisation kills the local fauna, the fox population is steadily increasing in Switzerland to the point where foxes are now practically living within some villages and small towns. Urdorf, almost at Zurich's doorstep, is a typical case where foxes have actually taken residence inside the village. They show very little fear of humans. They love to scavenge around and rip open rubbish bags left on the pavement overnight, spreading their contents all over the roads. Because foxes are carriers of several dangerous diseases to humans, health authorities are getting very worried.

But foxes are no longer satisfied with country life, they love the city lights too. Some wily foxes made their way right into the heart of Zurich, paying visits to the most venerable street in Switzerland, the sacrosanct Bahnhofstrasse.

One pair even managed to raise their young in a lightshaft of the University Hospital.

So the battle of wits has started. Who will be more cunning: the fox or the people? Knowing the Swiss as we do, we should not underestimate the foxes' chances....



The airline is the first to use the new Dornier 328.