

Dear President

Dear Members of the Organizing Comitee

Dear Sponsors

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen, dear Guests

My name is Philippe Ritschard, I am Mayor of the city of Interlaken

On behalf of the municipality of Interlaken I welcome you here in our beautiful region. It is a great pleasure for us to host your important venue with all the international participants and I thank the Organizing Comitee for having chosen Interlaken for the Swiss issue of IFAJ Congress this year.

Lucky enough to be here in front of you -thanks to my personnal acquaintance with Astrid Wyss- I will take the opportunity to give you a few informations about our city.

Interlaken, from the Latin *interlacus*, is set between two lakes, but funny enough, none of the two carries the name of Interlaken, they carry the name of the village Brienz and the city Thun on the other end.

Interlaken does have only two very restrained accesses to the two lakes. The waterfront promenades you will see during your stay belong to our neighbour villages Unterseen and Bönigen.

Interlaken counts only approximately 5900 inhabitants, which appears difficult to believe, looking from outside at the extension of the whole settlement. The reason is, that the involved villages are politically independent and have their own administrative structure. On many subjects however, there is a cooperation between us. All villages together between the two lakes count around 22'000 residents.

Initially Interlaken was only a monastery. The residents lived in Unterseen and in Matten, our neighbours. Wealthy people in Europe, mainly British, increased their travel activities towards the end of the 18th century and due to travel reports from famous people -today we would speak of influencers- our region became more and more famous,

Specially the beauty of the impressive scenery with the Jungfrau and her snow covered peak was pointed out again and again.

To meet the increasing demand, guesthouses were built and later big hotels replaced the modest lodgings and of course the village also grew to the actual extention. More is not possible, because we are squeezed between our neighbours on a modest surface of just 4.4 km² or (1100acres).

Regardless of that, Interlaken, with the hotels, shops and restaurants became the center of the region, which attracted the tourists who wanted to take a ride to the hills around and onto the mountains by cable-car or railway, which had all been built around the beginning of the 20th for the entertainment of the leisure community.

You see, our region has a very long tradition in hosting people. And tourism has become by far our main industry -please apologize, there was just no other word coming to my mind.

The rounded 7'500 touristic beds between the two lakes produces approx 1.7 to 2.0 million overnights in a good year. So you may understand that this business plays a very important role in our daily lives.

Since a few years our region has an excellent reputation for adventure activities, such as River Rafting, Canyoning, Base Jumping, Paragliding, to name just the most important.

It is known as the Adventure Capital of Europe and through all types of Social Media and influencers, things are going faster and faster still.

Interlaken developed itself also as a popular destination for congresses, big stakeholder meetings and incentives, because it is easily reachable by car and public transportation and because of all possibilities for side-events.

Obviously you travelled to this congress from different parts of the world to experience a fairly packed and very versatile program with a large choice of additional tours.

Now, I wish you enriching days under nice weather conditions, although it is not included in the event package, at least we can't give any guarantee for a stay without rain, specially with the actually variable meteorological moods.

Take care of you and have, after the congress ending a hopefully safe way back home, carrying excellent impressions and lasting memories in your suitcases.

Enjoy the evening on this boat tour and thank you for your attention.