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"Switzerland and Singapore also have a lot in common and share many important values, such as reliability, integrity and most importantly honouring one's word."

— Tom Ludescher, chairman of SwissCham in Singapore.

Over 400 Swiss companies doing business in Singapore

The close ties and cultural and economic similarities are reflected in the active Swiss-Singaporean business community in Singapore. **BY NARENDRA AGGARWAL**

SWITZERLAND has a long tradition of doing business in Singapore for almost 200 years, and over 400 Swiss companies are present in Singapore today. Hence, the business ties and friendship between Singapore and Switzerland are extraordinarily strong and everlasting, says Tom Ludescher, chairman of SwissCham in Singapore.

Swiss companies employ approximately 28,000 people in Singapore. Most of them are Singaporeans. The key areas for Swiss companies in Singapore are the banking, transport and logistics, speciality chemicals, biotech, insurance/reinsurance and professional services industries.

Switzerland is among the top five investors in Singapore, which acts as the key hub for many Swiss companies in South-east Asia. Singapore is by far Switzerland's largest trading partner within the Asean region.

"Switzerland and Singapore also have a lot in common and share many important values, such as reliability, integrity and most importantly honouring one's word. The long-term stability, predictability and credibility of both countries give comfort to local talent and industries to commit themselves to their homeland and attract foreign talent and foreign investors," says Dr Ludescher.

As both countries lack a critical size, openness and international business models are crucial to both countries. These close ties and cultural and economic similarities are also reflected in the active Swiss-Singaporean business community in Singapore.

"We have seen a very positive trend and strong track record of successful startups in Switzerland as well as in Singapore lately, and I do see a lot of potential here to collaborate closely in sharing ideas and talent for developing, running and regulating these exciting new industries. Biotechnology, private banking, insurance, reinsurance, professional services or logistics industries – all these sectors are experiencing disruption along multiple dimensions," says Dr Ludescher.

As can be seen from the recent initiatives launched by the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) in the financial technology (fintech) area and the "regulatory sandbox" embracing fintech initiatives in a controlled yet lighter regulated environment, Singapore has become a leader and front runner in creating a regulatory framework which will help to develop a world leading fintech hub, he adds.

Swiss startups are actively expanding their international footprint and often choose Singapore for establishing their first presence in Asia. This is particularly relevant for the fintech and crypto industry, building up on the many similarities between Switzerland and Singapore as the leading private banking and crypto hubs in their regions.

The startup and particularly the tech industry are highly relevant for the traditional services and high-tech industries that Switzerland and Singapore have been predominantly focusing on in recent years. In Switzerland, the tech sector is certainly the most vibrant sector these days, says the head of SwissCham, which promotes Singapore and Switzerland business ties.

Some exciting examples of Swiss tech firms

having recently opened up a presence in Singapore are Additiv, Appway, Netguardians, Squirro or Zuhle Engineering in FinTech and Entsia in InsurTech. These young companies target tech-savvy Singaporeans but often also use Singapore as their regional hub to expand across the South-east Asian markets.

"With their focus on and strong track record in the service and high-tech industries, Switzerland and Singapore can cement their positions as world leading hubs for these sectors. This is by building up on their longstanding history as well as by being early adopters of exponential technologies with disruptive potential, such as artificial intelligence and machine learning, blockchain, big data or the internet of things," says Dr Ludescher.

As the private sector body for promoting Swiss-Singapore business ties, SwissCham offers a range of networking activities and different types of events. The focus of the networking is among the members, with other local firms and professionals and with other chambers of commerce and associations in Singapore.

SwissCham has over 220 members, from startup companies and well-established small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to large multinationals, representing all major industries of the Swiss economy.

"The events we organise fall into three categories. Firstly, our know-how sharing events, address latest developments in science (eg the latest in dengue and zika research), technology (eg water and solar technologies), economy (eg labour laws and regulations) and politics (eg the Swiss-Singapore relationship).

"Secondly, we co-host events with members

offering them a platform to present their organisation and product or service offerings, and to network with other members and guests. Thirdly, we organise several social and cultural events – such as our annual gala dinner – that are very popular among the Singaporean-Swiss business community," says Dr Ludescher.

SwissCham also offers its members a spectrum of services and membership benefits, all with a strong business and talent development focus. This includes, for instance, its annual collaboration with the St Gallen Institute in Asia, offering students from the University of St Gallen (HSG) and the Singapore Management University (SMU) business consulting projects with its members as a part of the students' courses to get a real business insight during their studies.

Dr Ludescher says that the SwissCham's goal is to promote Swiss excellence – as lived by Swiss companies worldwide. The unique combination of talent, paired with three Swiss characteristics – tradition, precision and innovation – is a major factor in the success of Swiss businesses worldwide.

"We believe Swiss and Singaporean companies in Singapore can learn and greatly benefit from the Swiss experience. Firstly, the long-standing Swiss traditions are very important. Try to imagine Swiss watchmaking without passing skills to the next generations – this has been done over centuries. Switzerland and its watches would never have become such strong global brands representing quality, reliability and innovation without this tradition.

"Secondly, it is the precision. Being on time for a meeting is considered a typical Swiss attitude, particularly here in Asia. However, many of us see more than an attitude in this – it is a gesture of mutual respect and appreciation. And thirdly, innovation, the main driver behind the success story of Swiss excellence. The Swiss culture of constant innovation not only lift the Swiss craftsmanship and service culture into its global leading position, it also repeatedly allowed Swiss businesses to master challenges such as the quartz crisis of 40 years ago; or more recently, digitalisation – where Swiss companies are at the forefront of embracing exponential technologies such as artificial intelligence, big data, the Internet of Things (IoT) or blockchain, with facets of cryptocurrencies and initial coin offerings (ICOs) attached."

Thirdly, the chamber advocates for its members' interests with the authorities in Switzerland and in Singapore (primarily through its standing seat in the board of governors of the European Chamber of Commerce in Singapore), and with other business organisations through regular interactions in industry group meetings.

Finally, SwissCham offers a selective range of services and benefits to its members, including an online knowledge centre, on demand support for members with regards to business relevant topics such as access to relevant industry or market data, or regulatory or labour market aspects.

Making business better

Founded in 1988, the Swiss Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Singapore (SwissCham) is a non-profit organisation that advocates Swiss business in Singapore through offering its members a networking platform with a broad range of events as well as selective services and benefits.

Its core activities are grouped into four main pillars. Firstly, a 360-degree networking platform for members, interested Singaporean companies and professionals, other chambers of commerce and Swiss organisations in Singapore. Secondly, a broad range of attractive events including member presentations, knowledge sharing or cultural and social events to get a better understanding of Singapore, its history and the resulting business and networking culture.

Reward and recognition

An exciting new initiative of SwissCham is the annual Swiss Business Award. Launched last year, the Swiss Business Award rewards and recognises Singapore-based companies for their efforts and initiatives in developing their workforce through "Excellence in People & Skills Development".

"Singapore and Switzerland's most valuable assets are not the deposits kept in the banks or the multi-billion dollar industrial plants. It's the human capital, the local talent. Well educated, multilingual, and with a good work ethic, Singaporeans are a major draw for Swiss companies to set up their regional hubs in Singapore," says Dr Ludescher.

Swiss companies have a longstanding tradition in people and skills development. Switzerland's dual-educational system, under which people choose between university education and an accredited apprenticeship on the job to become a specialist in one particular field, makes for a strong workforce.

"Strong industry training initiatives have substantially contributed to the skills clusters of world reference. This approach is most relevant to Singapore. It is our aim to celebrate those member companies or other Singapore-based companies with a strong leadership and excellence in people and skills development through attracting,

training and developing talent in Singapore," says Dr Ludescher. "This should give recognition and serve as a strong encouragement for companies to not only do good to their staff but also share their successes and lessons learned back with the business community and by doing this, create positive spill-over effects to other members."

The 10 nominations received this year for SwissCham's second Swiss Business Award honouring Excellence in People and Skills Development were evaluated by an independent jury, consisting of high ranking representatives from business and academia in Singapore.

"We were impressed by the variety of companies and different business activities being nominated for this year's Swiss Business Award. This alone underlines the importance and recognition of skills in today's business world. From food to fabrics, from banking services to security issues, from internet to logistics – the entries covered it all," says the SwissCham chief.

Among all the strong nominations received, there was one particularly standing out since the company fully embraced this approach of adapting the Swiss dual education model to the specific requirements and conditions of the gastronomy landscape in Singapore.

This year's winner of the SwissCham Business Award is Marché Mövenpick, a leading international gastronomy player of Swiss origin. It has been honoured for its dedication to the development of the local workforce by its integrative and comprehensive training concept. The Singapore-based company also works with local polytechnics and the Institute of Technical Education (ITE) to provide internship opportunities to students.

"Strong industry training initiatives have substantially contributed to Switzerland's hospitality and gastronomy skills clusters of world reference, an approach which is most relevant to Singapore. Marché Mövenpick Restaurants Singapore is committed to implement Swiss gastronomy and vocational training know-how in Singapore for the benefit of the local workforce. Marché is committed to providing lifelong learning for its 300 staff and in nurturing future talents for the F&B industry," adds Dr Ludescher.

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Fostering stronger ties

Fabrice Filliez, the new Swiss ambassador to Singapore, shares some of the new and exciting activities taking place in the coming months that will further strengthen bilateral relations between both countries. **BY NARENDRA AGGARWAL**

THE new Swiss ambassador, Fabrice Filliez, is a career diplomat. Prior to his appointment as ambassador to Singapore and Brunei, he served in Berne for five years at the Swiss State Secretariat for International Financial Matters with the title of Ambassador in charge of multilateral tax matters.

Narendra Aggarwal: As the new Swiss Ambassador to Singapore, how would you describe the state of bilateral relations in various fields – political, business, education, research and innovation, etc?

Ambassador Fabrice Filliez: Relations between Switzerland and Singapore are excellent at all levels. Just last year, we celebrated 50 years of diplomatic relations – 50 years that were characterised by a progressively growing partnership. We regularly provide many frequent high level visits, both Swiss officials coming to Singapore, as well as Singapore representatives being warmly welcomed in my country.

We also have strong and dense business ties. Nearly half of all Swiss exports to South-east Asia go to Singapore. A similar picture can be drawn for investments. Switzerland is the seventh largest investor in Singapore, and ranks fourth in Europe in terms of destination for Singapore ODI. We have over 400 Swiss firms represented in Singapore, employing more than 25,000 people.

And last but not least, we share a lot of common interests when it comes to education, science and technology. Some of the top Swiss universities are represented in Singapore. For example, ETH Zurich was invited by Singapore's National Research Foundation and has vast research fa-

cilities at the Campus for Research Excellence and Technological Enterprise (CREATE). The University of St Gallen is offering Asian-related academic activities through its own subsidiary, the St Gallen Institute of Management in Asia Pte Ltd (SGI). The Swiss Hospitality School (EHL, Lausanne) one of the best hospitality management schools in the world, is also very active in Singapore.

Narendra Aggarwal: Can you share with us your priorities as the new Swiss Ambassador in the coming months?

Ambassador Fabrice Filliez: I am focusing on getting to know the various stakeholders who are active in the Swiss-Singapore relationship. I am talking about the Swiss community here, the numerous Swiss companies and institutions, as well as the competent Singapore authorities and Singapore business entities. This enables me to grow a better understanding of how we can profit from each other and further strengthen the Swiss-Singapore ties.

As already mentioned, both in political and economic domains the two states enjoy good and sustainable relations. We both face challenges in similar fields such as education, fintech or innovation. I see strong potential in working together on these topics and learning more from each other. In the coming months, I will therefore continue to feel the pulse of the various parties involved to make sure we can profit from synergies and opportunities in my country.

Narendra Aggarwal: I understand that a diplomatic job also addresses some targeted, if you permit me to say, popular activities. What are initiatives of such a kind that will be taking place in the near future, if any?



Swiss ambassador Fabrice Filliez will focus on getting to know the various stakeholders in the Swiss-Singapore relationship.

PHOTO: EMBASSY OF SWITZERLAND IN SINGAPORE

context of the FinTech Festival taking place here. There are also some meaningful contacts within research and innovation, for example the planned visit in late November of the State Secretary for Education, Research and Innovation Mauro Dell'Ambrogio. The above list is, of course, hardly exhaustive.

Narendra Aggarwal: Talking about research and innovation, we have heard about the Cooling Singapore initiative by ETH, the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich. Why in your view is it an exciting thing to look forward to?

Ambassador Fabrice Filliez: We are talking about a project that unites research, technical applications, and citizen participation. Cooling Singapore not only showcases the excellence in research of ETH and other Swiss institutions; it also demonstrates that their know-how combined with remarkable Singapore's ambition can lead to tangible measures to mitigate the effects of climate change and even further improve the island's attraction.

It is both a task force obtaining and exchanging knowledge. But it also aims at developing clear roadmaps to actually coordinate measures to fight the problem. I truly think that this is only the beginning of even more high level collaborations between our two countries. If such an exciting project like Cooling Singapore proves to be successful, this will surely boost enthusiasm for even deeper cooperation in finding responses to the major urbanisation challenges in the future.

Narendra Aggarwal: What can Singapore expect from F10's fintech activity planned for September this year at Singapore Management University (SMU)?

Ambassador Fabrice Filliez: Inspiration.

Ambassador Fabrice Filliez: F10 is a proven expert, ranked multiple times among the 10 best European incubator and accelerators. It is a non-profit organisation that supports and guides start-ups in transforming their ideas into successful companies. Working together with SIX (the Swiss Stock Exchange), Baloise Group, Julius Bär, Generali Group Switzerland, PwC Switzerland, Raiffeisen, Zürcher Kantonalbank, emy Finance and ERI Bancaire, F10 is at the forefront of the new financial paradigm. The association aims to bridge the gap between exciting new ideas and tomorrow's leading products.

F10 is organising a FinTech Hackathon event with the theme "Get access to FinTech trends and young talents" from Sept 21-23 at SMU. This event will be open to the community within the whole region, and is targeted to have a good mix of corporate and non-corporate individuals. Through the 48-hour hackathon, F10 aims to harmonise the Swiss and Asian fintech ecosystems, and to facilitate cooperation between young talents and corporations. Through its partners that are crucial for Switzerland's banking and insurance industry, the participants will also have the opportunity to access the latest global fintech trends and meet like minded people with a common goal, to reshape the global finance world. All in all, the event aims at continuing to write successful stories akin to the ones in Switzerland, forging valuable partnerships and giving birth to new game changing fintech ideas.

Narendra Aggarwal: Ambassador, based on your first impressions, what would you say if you were permitted only a single word reply to the question "What should one come to Singapore for?"

Ambassador Fabrice Filliez: Inspiration.

Marché Restaurants Singapore wins SwissCham award

The company has five restaurants in Singapore, and strongly focuses on training and developing its staff at every level. **BY NARENDRA AGGARWAL**

MARCHÉ Restaurants Singapore, which has Swiss roots, is this year's winner of SwissCham's annual award for Excellence in People and Skills Development, which was launched last year. The company has five restaurants in Singapore, and strongly focuses on training and developing its staff at every level. Marché is committed to providing lifelong learning for its 300 staff here and in nurturing future talents for the food and beverage (F&B) industry.

Highlighting the importance of staff training and development, Roger Nagler, director of operations of the Swiss restaurant chain says that "without that, we wouldn't be able to operate".

Says Manfred Rist, chairman of the SwissCham award selection panel this year: "Marché turned out to be the winner in 2018 due to its outstanding development and career programmes which also focus on an unskilled workforce of young and old in a very difficult industry with quite high turnover in staff. Moreover, Marché submitted an excellent presentation with a strong visibility and components of skills development in Singapore."

Talking about the selection process, Mr Rist says that entries for the award are scrutinised according to their relevance for Singapore. "In this context, applicants have to focus on skills development here. Some of the companies may have an outstanding international reputation for this but the Swiss Business Award, however, is about skills development in the Republic. We, therefore, focus on the impact of these policies and the actions here in Singapore."

Says Mr Nagler: "Winning the pres-

tigious SwissCham award this year is an important milestone for us and a reassurance for our training and development efforts. We are deeply honoured to have won the SwissCham Excellence in People and Skills Development Award. We have always prioritised training in our company, and this award serves as a motivation for us to continue providing better training programmes for our staff."

Mr Nagler thinks that Marché was picked as the winner this year as what makes it stand out from the rest of the competitors could be its structured training programme and various learning opportunities for the staff despite being a small company. In addition, it could also be because of the company's efforts in cultivating aspiring talents in the industry by supporting internships and scholarships for students who want to join this industry.

For the staff recruitment process, the company has a trial day for potential candidates to experience what it is like to work with it. At the same time, the company also assesses the candidate's suitability. This is to ensure that it employs people with the right fit for the job and to reduce staff turnover, time and effort in re-training new employees.

When new employees join the company, they attend an orientation programme to learn more about the company and align the company's goals and values with themselves. It is also an opportunity for them to forge new friendships with their co-workers and establish a support system. They are then attached to a buddy to guide them and help them integrate into the company. Marché believes that it is important that new hires are well orientated into the company so that they become productive members quickly.

As for skills training, every employee has to go through on the job training. The trainers go through training sessions with the new em-

ployees, and there is an assessment at the end of the training. "We have a training passport for each of our employees, and their training progress will be recorded. This not only allows us to keep track of their progress but also allows them to track their own progress and to encourage them to take responsibility for their own learning," says Mr Nagler.

Besides on the job training with us, we also send selected staff to the Marché International School (MIS) in Switzerland.

The participants go to an overseas branch and learn about product knowledge, marketing, sales,

controlling costs, human resource,

leadership, preventive maintenance,

hygiene and quality standards.

It is a stringent education process based on practical experience. The selection process for sending staff to MIS is based on team work challenges."

For education opportunities, Marché supports entry level staff who wish to do further studies. It encourages staff to do their studies at the Singapore Hotel and Tourism Education Centre, where it supports them with a sponsorship agreement.

The company believes that this will help to establish them as a working professional.

"Other than training, we also have various appreciation events and bonding activities. As much as we believe in training our people to be productive, we also value our staff welfare and it is important to keep them happy at work. We have various bonding events to help them develop their soft skills and also to create a happy and comfortable workplace.

Moreover, we also give out appreciation awards to celebrate and motivate staff with achievements," says Mr Nagler.

Asked why in his view excellence and skills training are important for businesses, he is of the opinion that investing in people is an investment for success. "When employees feel inadequate or unsupported, it could



Marché has a structured training programme and various learning opportunities for the staff despite being a small company. PHOTO: MARCHE RESTAURANTS SINGAPORE

lead to unhappiness and eventually lead to unproductivity. Staff engagement is very important for every business. Excellence and skills training improve employee satisfaction, helps them be more consistent and bring improved performance at work which helps in the growth of businesses.

This is especially so because demands are constantly changing and we have to upgrade skills in order to stay relevant," Mr Nagler adds.

On-the-job training is done by Marché's own staff since the company wants to have a self-sufficient training programme.

It has its own Train the Trainer programme where staff are trained to become trainers who in turn train the new hires. This is to give the staff a sense of responsibility and take up leadership roles.

As for soft skills, Marché has its own staff to train its other staff in skills such as upselling and customer service.

The company believes that by sharing their expertise and experience, the staff will be better able to understand and improve.

"A crucial part of our development programme is to educate specialty trainers. Usually, these are employees who have been with us for at least one year and very firm in their job. They will share the passion in their daily work and help to train new staff," says Mr Nagler.

"Every team leader needs to be trained in every station. For the food department, we have 10 different stations. In order to become a team leader, you need to be able to become a trainer. So, it is really up to the person, if he or she wants to upgrade," says Mr Nagler.

"Most of our staff are hungry for education. They like to learn new things and they like to be professional," he adds.

Marché believes that there are many benefits to its staff and also the company in general from its focus on skills training. "First of all, we believe that providing training opportunities helps our employees in their career and personal growth and keeps them motivated. It also helps to retain our talents and increase employee engagement rate. In addition, the food and beverage industry is a dynamic industry, and customer demands and preferences are constantly changing, so for us to continue to meet customer demands, we have to always seek improvements and ensure that our team possess the relevant skills," says Mr Nagler.

"Emphasising skills training also keeps the workforce productive; and through training, our employees will be able to gain new perspectives and

provide new insights for the company's development, leading to greater success of the company."

Mr Nagler himself started almost 10 years ago with Marché Restaurants Singapore and went through a detailed training process. "At that time, I already had 30 years of hospitality background beginning with coffee shops to working in Michelin Star restaurants and deluxe hotel operations," he says.

"The reason I came to Marché was the way they operate. Everything is prepared fresh on a daily basis, in front of the guest. At this business volume, it is very unusual. It was a must for me to learn every detail in order to be successful and run one of the newly opened branches."

He adds: "Today, we have five restaurants in Singapore, and we focus on training and developing our staff in every level. Without that we wouldn't be able to operate."

While Marché's five restaurants in Singapore are very busy, at the same time Singapore is the regional base for franchise development in Asia. At the moment, the company is focusing on a stronger presence in China, where it has just opened a store in Shenzhen. In Jakarta, Indonesia, it is in talks to open the third franchised outlet.

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Scenic Switzerland drawing more Singaporean visitors

Switzerland is increasingly becoming a favourite travel destination for Singaporeans. Ivan Breiter, director, South-east Asia, Switzerland Tourism, who is based in the Embassy of Switzerland in Singapore, shares some of the many attractions that his country has to offer. **BY NARENDRA AGGARWAL**

The Business Times: What are some of the new Swiss tourism offerings that would be of interest to *Business Times* readers?

Ivan Breiter: The Swiss way of travel is by Switzerland's excellent public transport system, the Swiss Travel System.

With one single ticket, the Swiss Travel Pass, you can use the services of more than 400 transport companies in Switzerland, travel by train, bus, and boat.

So hop onto the lake steamer, take a scenic panorama train and go by tram or bus to the open-air concert or to the cute chalet restaurant on top of the hill to admire the sunset.

Now, it is even possible to transport your luggage from hotel to hotel. So you just leave your luggage at any hotel in Switzerland before 9 am and you will have your luggage by 6 pm waiting for you in the room at your next hotel.

This is an offer that is useful for leisure and business travellers alike. This is what I call hassle free travel.

Or have you ever wanted to make your own Swiss watch, Swiss cheese or Swiss chocolate?

We have put more than 700 guided tours in Switzerland together for you on [MySwitzerland.com](#) ranging from wildlife encounters to culinary tours with locals in our cities.

Learn about the healing effects of our native herbs or conquer a 4,000 metre high peak with crampons, ice axe and a certified Swiss mountain guide.

The Business Times: Why should Singaporeans consider Switzerland for their next holiday destination?

Ivan Breiter: A vacation in Switzerland means quality time in all aspects and for all ages – from the awe-inspiring landscapes that will be engraved in your memory for a life time, to the world-famous Swiss hospitality and the top quality hotels, transport companies, excursions and adventures.

Even our rivers and lakes have drinking-water quality – so you may discover our cities by swimming in or around them.

Swiss food is not only chocolate and cheese – did you know that we have one of the densest network of Michelin Star restaurants in the world and that every canton/region has its own food specialities.

And where else can you have some quality shopping time in the middle of an Unesco World Heritage site?

The Business Times: Which are the top five tourist attractions in Switzerland?

Ivan Breiter: Famous landmarks such as the Chapel Bridge in Lucerne, the Jet d'eau in Geneva or the Abbey Library in St Gallen.

For mountain excursions, go up to the eternal snow on Mount Titlis, to the Jungfrau-Joch or to Glacier 3000.

Indulge in outdoor activities such as downhill biking and hiking as well as river rafting and paragliding.

Scenic train excursions include the Glacier Express, the Golden Pass Line, Bernina Express or the Goldenpass Line.

Shop at the famous Bahnhofstrasse in Zurich, under the Arcades in the old town of Berne or at the famous outlet shopping malls such as Foxtown or the Landquart Fashion Outlet.

The Business Times: How many people from Singapore go to Switzerland every year for holidays? Is the number going up in recent years? What is their average length of stay? And how much do they spend per person? What are their preferred places of visit in your country?

Ivan Breiter: Since we opened our regional office in Singapore in 2012, the annual overnights from Singaporeans in Switzerland grew from 110,000 overnights to 150,000 overnights last year. This year, we are having an incredible year so far with a double-digit growth in numbers.

Previously, guests from Singapore used to go only to a few famous places in Switzerland but we see in the last few years that Singaporeans now venture to some of our lesser known gems such as the Ticino, the Valais or to Eastern Switzerland.

This has a direct effect on the aver-



age length of stay that rose over proportionally. The average stay is about four to five days now, but we see more and more travel itineraries that are going for two full weeks to Switzerland.

The average spending is above S\$400 per day per person. This includes the shopping expenses – of-

ten, Singaporeans combine the purchasing of their dream watch with a luxury holiday in my beautiful home country.

The Business Times: Is Switzerland a great holiday destination in the autumn or winter? And if so, why?

Ivan Breiter: Autumn – it is probably my favourite travel season. The air is crystal clear and allows for views from the mountain tops that are just incredible. The leaves in the forest change from green to fire red, the vineyards become golden – and this is the time when we bring down the cows, nicely decorated, from the

Alps, share the cheese and indulge in seasonal specialities such as fresh mushrooms, venison and of course seasonal deserts with prunes, pears and apples.

Winter starts with the Advent – the pre-Christmastime, with the famous Christmas markets, the millions of lights that decorate the medieval

towns, with the wafting smells of cinnamon, ginger bread and candle wax.

In the mountains, the snow is towering up and you can do horse sledge riding through fairytale landscape, go down an ice channel with a bob sledge, try a day of skiing with one of our ski instructors or just go out with the kids and make your own family snowman.

(Anticlockwise from above) Cool off in the refreshing waters of Swiss lakes in the summer; try a day of skiing in the winter; train travel can be made easy with a single ticket, using the Swiss Travel Pass; take part in a watchmaking workshop.

PHOTOS: REUTERS, SWITZERLAND TOURISM

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Swiss Re: Pushing the Asia Agenda via Singapore

Two small countries: one in the middle of Europe, one in the middle of Southeast Asia that share a common world view and similar views on being pro-business, rules-based, and attracting a large pool of talent. That's the story of the Switzerland-Singapore relationship, and among the reasons why reinsurance giant Swiss Re decided to set up its Asian headquarters here.

Swiss Re's gross premiums written worldwide amounted to USD 34.78 billion in 2017, with Asia contributing to much of its growth. The 155-year old company also decided to set up its Asian headquarters in Singapore earlier this year as part of its regional pivot.

"If you were to draw a circle around China, India and Indonesia, and if Indonesia were a representation of the larger ASEAN community, that today is 4 billion out of 7 billion ... that's opportunity," said Swiss Re Asia Limited chairman Lim Siong Guan. "If you talk about Swiss Re in Asia, we happen to be in a good part of the world."

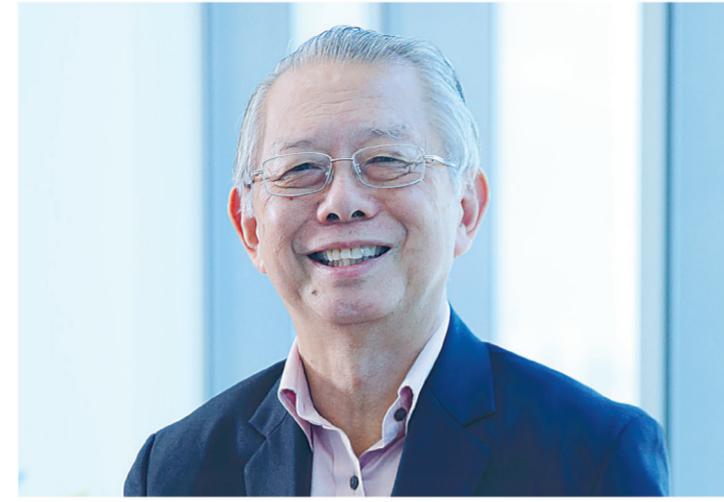
"The middle class have things that they need to protect themselves against, and have the wherewithal to pay for the protection. And where is the middle class rising? Everything is about China, India and Asean."

Swiss Re houses around 300 staff at its Asia headquarters in Singapore, where its Asia management team began to be fully accountable to a regional board of directors, headed by Mr. Lim, this year. In Asia since 1913, Swiss Re has nearly 2,000 employees in the region in 10 cities, including Singapore, Hong Kong, Sydney, Tokyo, Bangalore and Beijing.

While the company may not be that public about its day-to-day operations or as well-known as primary insurers, Swiss Re Asia CEO Jayne Plunkett told the Business Times earlier this year that the company helped with insurance payouts and recovery costs in some of the most recent headline-grabbing events in Asia.

Among them, the Fukushima, Japan earthquake and its ensuing tsunami in 2011 and the Tianjin, China explosions in 2015. In 2013, when Super Typhoon Haiyan swept across the Philippines, Vietnam and parts of China causing widespread destruction and loss of life, Swiss Re also helped in the rebuilding efforts in a number of ways, including covering infrastructure repair costs.

"The attitude of the government and the regulatory bodies ... that they recognise that businesses need to be profitable in order to continue to exist and to offer their products to their customers," added Mr. Lim.



Lim Siong Guan, Chairman, Swiss Re Asia Limited

Singapore, Mr. Lim said, makes it easier for any multinational to do this.

Earlier in July, Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) managing director Ravi Menon mentioned Swiss Re in his annual report, indicating that its decision to place its Asian headquarters here as proof that Singapore's strategic direction on financial institutions was working.

MAS' decision to focus on technology, including setting up a separate unit to allow companies to sandbox innovation, was working well, Mr. Menon said, who also mentioned one of Swiss Re's partners, Lumen Lab, for its innovative work surrounding diabetes insurance and tracking.

"Tech allows you to be ahead of the game, to set you apart from others. When it comes to mass application of technology, China is even ahead of the United States."

said Mr. Lim. "When you talk in terms of where the largest groups are, where the expertise is, that's between India and China."

The Asia story for Swiss Re isn't just about claims or payouts. Dozens of innovators, technology specialists, data scientists and scenario modelers work on the future of the insurance business specific to regional needs. The company's think-tank, Swiss Re Institute, also pushes out white papers and studies specific to Asia and its future.

Among them:

- Parametric-based diabetes checks on sugar levels for better tracking and easier payouts
- Natural catastrophe modelers track weather patterns, climates and historical records in an attempt to better predict when the next natural catastrophe may hit
- Weather scientists learning where to best place sensors that could help in automatic payouts
- Scientists working with motor vehicle companies on autonomous vehicles and how it may change the insurance game
- Public-private partnerships that are helping reshape urbanisation and its effects on the economy, population and the environment
- Sports scientists studying the effects of certain sports on long-term health effects

"No multinational comes to Singapore for the Singapore economy," said Mr. Lim. "You come to Singapore because you are able to connect with the rest of Asia: from Japan to New Zealand; from the Middle East all the way to the Western Pacific."

The protection gap – defined as the amount of beneficial insurance coverage as to what is actually purchased – in Asia itself is huge. In 2017, 57% (around USD197 billion) of total natural catastrophe losses (USD331 billion) were uninsured, according to Swiss Re figures. In Asia, that figure rose to 84% in 2017.

One of the ways Swiss Re is working on bridging the protection gap is through working with governments on educating citizens on the perceptions of risk, and the frequency they occur.

Mr. Lim added: "For Swiss Re in relation to Singapore, we are in a good place geographically. We are in a good place of being so small, we also recognise we need to have friendly relationships with everyone and you have to be in many ways the price-taker, not the price-setter. So you go out and you make yourself as relevant and useful to as many people as possible."

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Keeping our cool

A leading Swiss technical institute is leading the Cooling Singapore project which aims to reduce the impact of heat on the environment here.

BY NARENDRA AGGARWAL

AS URBAN centres like Singapore become more densely populated and business activity increases, more and more heat is produced in the process. A leading Swiss technical institute is working on a pioneering project with the aim of reducing the impact of heat on the environment in Singapore. Called the Cooling Singapore project, its progress could have far reaching implications for other densely populated urban centres around the world.

"The Cooling Singapore project aims to mitigate the urban heat island (UHI) effect in Singapore and to improve outdoor thermal comfort (OTC) and liveability. The overarching goal of the Cooling Singapore initiative to remove heat from the urban system is also closely aligned with Singapore's pledge to reduce emission intensity by 36 per cent from 2005 levels by 2030," says Remo Burkhard, managing director of the Singapore-ETH Centre (SEC), which has been set up by the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich (ETH).

The idea for the project was seeded by our SEC director Gerhard Schmitt in the Future Cities Laboratory, the first research programme at the Singapore-ETH Centre. The urban heat island effect can raise temperatures in parts of Singapore by up to seven degrees Celsius, with far-reaching effects on health, liveability, productivity and the economy. Based here in tropical Singapore, our researchers saw the need for more scientific and coordinated efforts to tackle UHI in Singapore and beyond."

The Cooling Singapore project was made possible in 2017 when Singapore's National Research Foundation provided the team with a grant under



Dr Burkhard moved to Singapore in 2010, and his role has been to build up the Singapore-ETH Centre in Singapore.
PHOTO: SINGAPORE-ETH CENTRE

its CREATE programme. Led by the Singapore-ETH Centre, the project brings together professors and researchers from the National University of Singapore (NUS), SMART (Singapore-MIT Alliance for Research and Technology), and TUMCREATE (established by Technical University of Munich).

Cooling Singapore, lead by Prof Schmitt, is an ambitious project, first and foremost, in raising awareness and interest in UHI and OTC, but more importantly, in building actionable knowledge and bringing key stakeholders together to work towards UHI mitigation and enhancing OTC.

"Working towards a cooler Singapore cannot be the remit of a single institution or government agency, since it has wide ranging implications for economic development, urban planning, building and construction, and transportation. In practice, it will involve close collaboration between scientists, agencies, industry, and policymakers," says Dr Burkhard.

Singapore is the second most densely populated country in the world. Its small size and high density bring considerable challenges in mitigating UHI and improving OTC. While the UHI is a problem for Singapore, it also presents opportunities.

In the tropics and sub-tropics, many cities are facing the same problems.

"Through good urban climate designs based upon scientific evidence, developed in close collaboration with the relevant government agencies, the Cooling Singapore team believes that these challenges can be overcome. Looking ahead, Singapore can become a knowledge hub for urban climate design and technology, with solutions developed here being applied in other cities in the region," says Dr Burkhard.

One of the key tasks of the Cooling Singapore project is to establish an inter-agency task force to actively engage the relevant government agencies and institutions. The task force, which is an integral part of the Cooling Singapore project, makes it possible to exchange knowledge among key stakeholders through a series of workshops, he adds.

The task force comprises members from the Agency for Science, Technology and Research (A*Star), Building and Construction Authority (BCA), Centre for Liveable Cities, Housing and Development Board (HDB), JTC Corporation, Land Transport Authority (LTA), Meteorological Service Singapore, Nanyang Technological University (NTU), National Climate Change Secretariat, National Environment Agency (NEA), National Parks Board (NParks), Singapore Land Authority (SLA), Singapore University of Technology and Design (SUTD), and the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA).

"The Cooling Singapore team has also applied a microscale climate model to three case studies: Jurong Lake District, the Central Business District, and the Punggol neighbourhood. These have allowed researchers to understand how OTC varies over time and space, and to study the effects of different urban designs on mitigating UHI. Initial results of the studies point to the need for more scientific research into UHI mitigation. Such a scientific approach will improve efficiency and cost effectiveness in the planning and implementation of strategies," says Dr Burkhard.

He moved to Singapore in 2010, and his role has been to build up the Singapore-ETH Centre in Singapore. "One of my main motivations is to achieve the highest quality of research with direct impact while making everything as easy as possible for our employees and partners. It is a fascinating job and an honour to work for the ultimate benefit of society," he says.

Beyond what policymakers and planning agencies can do to mitigate urban heating, businesses and the man on the street have a role to play too. Two of the main causes of Singapore's UHI are solar energy trapped and stored in roads and buildings being released as heat; and energy consumed in industry, transportation and buildings, says Dr Burkhard.

The Cooling Singapore team has reviewed, sector by sector, how heat can be removed from the system, and produced a catalogue of 86 possible measures. Businesses in the property development sectors should be more informed about how the choice of building materials may trap or reflect heat, how the orientation of buildings may provide more shade, or how the clustering of buildings may facilitate or hinder wind flow, for instance.

The Singapore-ETH Centre is also working on the Digital Underground project with the Singapore Land Authority of Singapore, in collaboration with the Geomatics Division of the City of Zurich.

"We bring together complementary expertise to develop methods for the accurate 3D digital mapping of underground utility networks and other components. As Singapore continues to explore the use of underground spaces due to the limited land mass, planners will be better equipped to plan underground spaces with an improved understanding of what already exists underground," says Dr Burkhard.

"In the first phase of the Future Cities Laboratory, we brought technology developed at ETH Zurich for energy and space efficient heating systems to the tropics. Obviously, in Singapore, we do not require heating. Instead, this suite of technologies was adapted to cool buildings in the tropics. This is an important development, since air-conditioning takes up more than 50 per cent of energy consumption of buildings and occupies valuable space.

"With the potential to bring down energy consumption by up to 60 per cent, increasing lettable floor space by up to 2 per cent and reducing vertical space consumption by up to 100 cm per floor, the 3for2 Beyond Efficiency project has gained a lot of interest from stakeholders in the building industry. The project has since been implemented at the United World College Southeast Asia, Dover campus as a pilot project; and preliminary results show that energy consumption is more than 40 per cent lower than the 90 per cent quantile of office spaces in Singapore, making it

Campus for Research Excellence and Technological Enterprise (CREATE).

The centre aims to tackle some of the most pressing challenges in cities in close collaboration with Singaporean and other universities, government agencies, industry and the wider community, to ensure the relevance of its research to the needs of society.

Since its founding, the Singapore-ETH Centre has become a vibrant hub for research with some 200 researchers of diverse disciplines under its two programmes: Future Cities Laboratory and Future Resilient Systems. Future Cities Laboratory (FCL) was set up in 2010 with the aim of making cities more sustainable and liveable, based on insights from science and design. Future Resilient Systems (FRS), established in 2014, aims to make infrastructure systems more robust and resilient.

ETH Zurich says that it is the place where the future begins as it focuses on freedom and individual responsibility, entrepreneurial spirit and open mindedness. It stands on a bedrock of true Swiss values. The university with a focus on science and technology dates back to the year 1855, when the founders of modern day Switzerland created it as a centre of innovation and knowledge.

At ETH Zurich, students discover an ideal environment for independent thinking and researchers have a climate which inspires top performance. Situated in the heart of Europe, yet forging connections all over the world, ETH Zurich is pioneering effective solutions to the global challenges of today and tomorrow.

"A good university doesn't just teach knowledge but the ability to think," says Lino Guzzella, president of ETH Zurich.

"Working towards a cooler Singapore cannot be the remit of a single institution or government agency, since it has wide ranging implications for economic development, urban planning, building and construction, and transportation. In practice, it will involve close collaboration between scientists, agencies, industry, and policymakers."

Remo Burkhard, managing director of the Singapore-ETH Centre (SEC)

one of the most energy efficient office spaces in the country."

Meanwhile, the Future Resilient Systems programme at the Singapore-ETH Centre, together with the ETH Risk Centre, organised the inaugural Infrastructure Resilience Conference in Zurich this year. The conference saw a meeting of minds of over 200 participants from academia, agencies, and industry to exchange knowledge to make infrastructure systems more resilient.

The next event, the World Congress on Resilience, Reliability and Asset Management, will take place in Singapore in July 2019. The congress is being organised in collaboration with Beihang University, International Society of Engineering Asset Management (ISEAM), Singapore Chapter of the System Safety Society, and the Temasek Defence Systems Institute (TDSI) at the National University of Singapore (NUS).

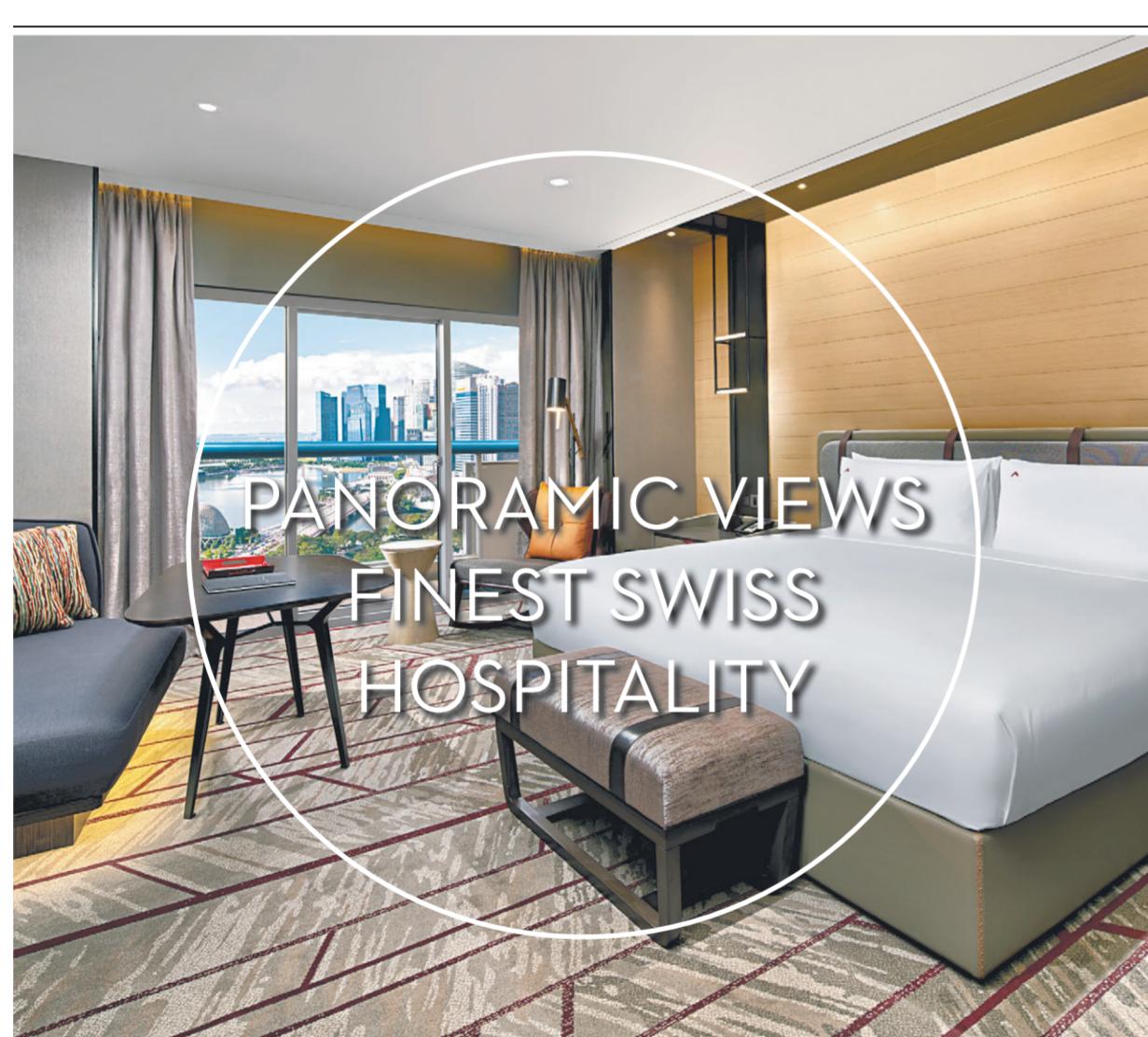
The Singapore-ETH Centre is the first and only research centre established by ETH Zurich, the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich, outside Switzerland. The Singapore centre was established in 2010 in partnership with the National Research Foundation of Singapore, as part of its

Some 530 professors teach around 20,500 students – including 4,100 doctoral students – from over 120 countries at ETH Zurich. Their collective research embraces many disciplines: natural sciences and engineering sciences, architecture, mathematics, system oriented natural sciences, as well as management and social sciences.

The results and innovations produced by ETH researchers are channelled into some of Switzerland's most high-tech sectors: from computer science to micro and nanotechnology and cutting edge medicine.

Every year, ETH registers around 90 patents and 200 inventions on average. Since 1996, the university has produced a total of 380 commercial spin-offs. ETH says that it also has an excellent reputation in scientific circles: 21 Nobel laureates have studied, taught or researched at the university; and in the international league tables, ETH Zurich regularly ranks as one of the world's top universities.

With a view to serving society, ETH Zurich says that it performs many services for the federal government and uses its expertise to make important contributions to public debate.



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A home for all nationalities

The Swiss Club's international membership also includes German, French and British nationals as well as Singaporeans. **BY NARENDRA AGGARWAL**

AUNIQUELY Swiss institution in Singapore is the Swiss Club, which is located in the prime Bukit Timah area. The Swiss Club was established in 1871 and is one of the oldest and most historic clubs in Singapore. Located on Bukit Tinggi, it is an elegant and family friendly retreat surrounded by lush greenery, offering a fabulous setting in the middle of the jungle. The club says that it is proud of its wonderful atmosphere and ambience.

The best way to describe the Swiss Club in just one word would be "unique", says Carsten Kjeldmann, the general manager of the club. "The Swiss Club's rich history and heritage is wonderful, something that needs to be experienced first-hand. The drive up to the club, from Swiss Club Road is amazing. With its lush greenery, grounds and jungle-like surroundings, you get the feeling of travelling back in time."

The main clubhouse, built in "chalet style", was completed in 1927. Its red and white features provides tranquility and stimulates the imagination of the colonial days, where dinner jackets and long dresses were required before cocktails were served at the lawn.

"Today, the Club is a family-friendly retreat for members and their guests, embracing Swiss traditions and providing a strong sense of community, a rich heritage and an active social life. The membership today consists of more than 40 different nationalities. In my opinion, that is special and makes the Swiss Club a very unique place," says Mr Kjeldmann.

The Swiss Club has a chequered history. It was founded in 1871 by Otto Alder and his friends. At that time, it was known as the Swiss Rifle Shooting Club of Singapore and was located in the forest area off Balestier Road. Members would gather with their rifles for shooting practice and other social activities.

"The club later relocated to its present location at Bukit Tinggi hill, and from 1902 the club maintained a 300 metre shooting range right up until the 80s. People did not only come here to shoot, the club was also a 'home away from home' for a lot of people – and many friendships were formed then, and this tradition continues up till now," says Mr Kjeldmann.

The Swiss Club's land today spans a total of 174,000 sq m. It provides a home not only for the Swiss Club, but also the Swiss, the German, the Dutch and the Korean Schools, the British Club and the Institute of Engineers. In addition, the entire Swiss Embassy compound is situated on Swiss Club land.

The Club boasts a rich cultural heritage and active social life and has members from all over the world. It provides a wide spectrum of activities. It keeps its members updated on events and other things new through its in-house magazine called *Relax*, e-newsletters and the club website.

"Our excellent restaurants include the semi-enclosed Arbenz restaurant which serves traditional Swiss and modern European fare with a touch of Asian finesse; and the lively poolside Pergola Café where raclette, fondue, schnitzel and wurst are crowd pleasers," says Mr Kjeldmann. International favourites, weekly specials and healthy choices are also on offer at the various Swiss Club F&B facilities.

The Club's sports facilities are second to none, and include five tennis courts, a nine a side FIFA certified Astro turf football field, Singapore's only padel court and a well-equipped gym, spa, hair salon and a charming 13-room boutique guesthouse.

"Movie nights for kids are a big hit at the moment, and obviously the upcoming Swiss National Day celebration on Aug 4, from 6 pm onwards, in partnership with the Swiss Embassy here. We are expecting about 550 happy participants, making this an event not to be missed," says Mr Kjeldmann.

The Swiss Club's management committee is elected annually by the club's members at the annual general meeting. The committee thereafter holds the authority to exercise and execute such objectives and responsibilities deemed to be in the best interest of the club. The general manager is appointed by the committee to conduct and fulfil all responsibilities related to the daily management of the Club. The committee and the general manager meet at least once a month to re-

view the management of the Club and its activities.

The Swiss Club is, in fact, a club for all nationalities and is truly international. The demographics are predominantly Caucasian, accounting for approximately 80 per cent of its membership – of which 25 per cent are Swiss, 20 per cent are German, followed by the French and British nationals. The remaining 20 per cent are Asians of which 15 per cent are Singaporean and the remaining 5 per cent are a mix of various Asian nationalities.

"We brand ourselves as 'the Home for all Nationalities' and trust this is the right strategy, yet are aware that there are Swiss in Singapore whom may be unaware of the Swiss Club and its unique offerings. I therefore encourage anyone who has not yet had a chance to celebrate the Swiss National Day here to join us for an evening of music, food and social interaction," says Mr Kjeldmann.

Interestingly, the Swiss Club does not have a particular food or drink concept as one would expect in a dedicated restaurant. "We pay attention to our members' needs, and our chefs design menus with this in mind. Aside from the lovely traditional Swiss dishes we serve, the key for preparing good food is to pay attention to the produce," says Mr Kjeldmann.

"We have made a big shift and commitment over the past three years to reduce or eliminate frozen and semi-processed food, and focus on cooking fresh ingredients the right way. This naturally requires dedication, skills and training. We have to be flexible as we cater to all ages, dietary needs and budgets. We take a professional and personal interest in all areas of the club, ensuring our members and guests receive the high quality service and hospitality expected from us," he adds.

Mr Kjeldmann, who is a Dane and

not Swiss, has worked in the hospitality industry for 30 years. "Although it is a challenging profession with anti-social hours it provides a fantastic career – if you want it. Educated as a chef many years back, my career has taken me through hotels in Hong Kong, restaurants in Japan and resorts in Indonesia.

"I arrived in Singapore in 2004, and got introduced to the club industry here working for the Tanglin Club, British Club and LeVeL33 respectively. For the past three years now, I have been general manager of the lovely Swiss Club; and greatly enjoy my present job," says Mr Kjeldmann.

"At 50, happily married to a Japanese lady, I am the proud father of a new-born son – and the life journey has taken yet another exiting turn. Hope to meet you during the Swiss National Day celebration at the Swiss Club!"



The main clubhouse, built in "chalet style", was completed in 1927. Its red and white features provides tranquility and stimulates the imagination of the colonial days. PHOTO: THE SWISS CLUB

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