

Press release

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Switzerland, the land of banks

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Worldwide, Switzerland is synonymous with banks, security and financial stability. But how did a small Alpine country become one of the world's leading financial centres? The new exhibition 'Switzerland, the land of banks' explores this question and highlights how closely Swiss banking is tied up with the country's history and identity.

The exhibition traces the history of finance from the first money transactions in antiquity to today's digital financial world. Well before the advent of modern banks, money exchange, lending and wealth management played an important role. Coin hoards from Roman times, historical money-changer's scales and medieval records reveal how people protected their assets and traded. Jewish moneylenders, Lombardy merchants and early private bankers laid the foundation for Switzerland's subsequent banking system.

As industrialisation took hold in the 19th century, Switzerland increasingly shifted to a monetary economy. Savings banks and cantonal banks opened up the possibility of secure saving for broad sections of the population for the first time. Meanwhile, large banks such as the 'Schweizerische Kreditanstalt' (which later became Credit Suisse) emerged to finance railway construction and industrial development. Historical banknotes, piggy banks and counter objects from bank branches bring this period of economic momentum to life.

A central theme of the exhibition is trust – the cornerstone of any banking business. To this day, banks in Switzerland represent discretion, security and stability. At the same time, the exhibition shows that trust has repeatedly been undermined: by banking crises, debates around bank secrecy, and recent events, such as the takeover of Credit Suisse by UBS. This illustrates that Switzerland as a land of banks is more than a success story; it is also a mirror of societal and political developments.

Besides historical objects, the exhibition shines a light on the shift in everyday banking. From bank counters and money-counting machines to e-banking and cryptocurrency, it highlights how technical innovations have changed our

relationship with money. Interactive media stations, surveys and playful elements for children invite visitors to think about their own relationship with money, saving and trust.

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