

The liberalisation of the international postal market has meant that national postal authorities, rather than having a monopoly, may have several competitors. One significant initiative which has attracted the interest of some well-known researchers into Swiss Philately is the provision of a speedy means for Swiss tourists in Italy and Spain to send postcards home. Since 1996 Swiss Post and Swiss Post International have been involved in providing such a service, initially directly and more recently under the guise of a so-called “postal logistics company” - 'Asendia' (a joint venture with the French Post Office) and later 'Friendpost'.

Charles LaBlonde first drew our attention to this intriguing subject in two short items published in our Newsletter in 1997 (p.81) and in 2011 (p.21). He also published a very informative book 'Swiss Post International Activity in Italy (the Baveno Story)' in 2009. More recently Bob Medland has produced short updates on the subject for our Newsletter: 'Swiss Post International (SPI) – Another Era' in October 2018 and 'Swiss Post International (SPI) and Friendpost – the Latest' in April 2019.

Jean-Louis Emmenegger in Switzerland took up the challenge to ferret out the truth behind this story. He has published a series of articles on the subject including 'Swiss Post Issues New Tourist Stamps' in the American HPS's 'Tell' in 2014, 'New Stamps for Tourists in Italy and Spain' in the SBZ in September 2013 and 'Stamps for Tourists: More New Vignettes' also in the SBZ in December 2013. His latest article is 'A Joint Postal Venture Between France and Switzerland – Asendia: Commercial Vignettes for Tourists' which was published in the French journal 'Timbres Magazine' in October of last year. The text and pictures below are extracted from this article. They provide further insights to Asendia's activities, particularly in Spain. Their publication in our Newsletter is permitted with the copyright of the author Jean-Louis Emmenegger and the chief editor of 'Timbres Magazine'. Thank you.



Fig. 1. Top left: Advertising leaflet distributed by Swiss Post to shops and kiosks in Italy in 2012-2013 for the sale of “tourist stickers”.  
 Fig. 2 Bottom left: Cover of the booklet of tourist “stickers” sold by Swiss Post/Asendia in 2019 in Mallorca (Spain).  
 Fig. 3 Right: Inside of the booklet with the “stickers” sold in Mallorca in 2019 by Swiss Post/Asendia.

The first experience of Swiss Post in the field of postcards sent by tourists on holiday abroad was in the period 1996 to 1998 when it sold "stickers for tourists" in some hotels and shops in cities in Italy.

They were in five different booklets of 8 "tourist stamps" with the words "postcard vignettes" on the front (in French, German and English) and the reference "P.P. / CH-6830 Chiasso 1". Swiss Post collected these postcards, transported them to Locarno (Ticino, Switzerland) where they were postmarked and treated like normal mail to be delivered.

These vignettes are listed in the catalogue "Zumstein Swiss stamps" in the "Carnets for tourists" (Numbers TM1 issued in 1996, and TM2 to TM5 in 1998), with an estimated value for the new book, but none for the postcard actually posted via this Swiss Post network in Italy. These cards with these vignettes actually cancelled and sent are rare to find today.

On the strength of this experience, Swiss Post continued the venture, but this time in Italy from 2012, with its subsidiary "Swiss Post International/SPI". The principle was the same: agreements were made with kiosks, souvenir shops and hotels which sold the vignettes that tourists stuck on postcards purchased at these premises and slipped them into a special mailbox at the place of sale. A truck then came and collected all the postcards from these special mailboxes. The cards were then airlifted from Milan and Rome to Zürich-Mülligen in Switzerland, where Swiss Post treated them as regular mail. These stamps were not cancelled, as they were not postage stamps but "prepaid postage stamps" (vignettes), in fact similar to letters posted in "Port Paid". These cards reached the intended recipients without difficulty within a very short time (a few days): significantly faster in comparison with the processing and dispatch times achieved by the Italian Post (several months!).

But this experience of mail collected by a foreign national post (Swiss Post) in a country which had its own national post (Italian Post) made officials of the Italian Post cringe. Pursuant to a directive from the European Union, diplomatic intervention in high places eventually forced Swiss Post to put an end to this "Swiss mail for tourists to Italy". This occurred despite the fact that there was a European postal directive which provided for the liberalisation of the postal market ... but apparently not for this type of mail! The consequence was that at the end of August 2013, the "Swiss Post International /SPI" subsidiary was discontinued!

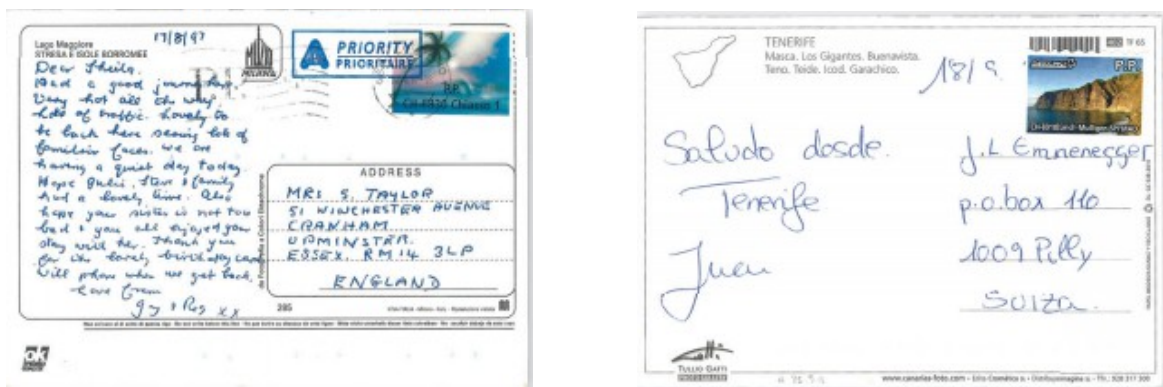


Fig. 4 Examples of postcards franked with "tourist stickers" sold by Swiss Post / Asendia in Italy (1996-1998), and in Italy & Spain in 2013.

Swiss Post and a subsidiary of 'La Poste' (the French Post Office) called "La Poste Global Mail" set up the "postal logistics company" Asendia for tourists to send postcards home from Italy in 2012. Operating under the brand "Swiss Post", Asendia set up a similar sales operation of vignettes for tourists in Spain in 2013. The principle was the same as in Italy: the vignettes were available in some hotels and campsites, kiosks, small shops, souvenir shops, etc. At each point of sale a special "letter box" was provided in which cards could be swiped, once the vignette was purchased and applied to the card. In principle, the tourist could also drop off letters, but the service was mainly designed for sending illustrated tourist postcards. n.b. The letter box, which was made of simple cardboard (!) in Italy in 2012, was made of solid metal in 2020, but was still yellow in colour (as was the case in Italy).

**Tourist regions**

It is on the basis of an agreement concluded with the Spanish Post that Asendia - whose services in the field of the sale of vignettes and the processing of postcards are carried out under the SWISS POST brand for tourist mail - was able to continue its "post" activities in the main tourist areas of Spain from 2013 to 2020. Asendia has provided a list of tourist areas in which it operates in 2020: the Canary Islands (Tenerife, Gran Canaria, Fuerteventura, Lanzarote, La Palma), the Balearic Islands (Mallorca, Menorca, Ibiza), Catalonia (Girona), Andalusia (Málaga, Sevilla, Jaén, Granada, Córdoba, Cádiz) and Gibraltar. But in 2020, covid-19 hit Spain, and the number of foreign tourists (including potential vignette buyers) fell sharply. Cards with the vignettes sold in 2020 or 2021 should be rarer to find (as long as a curious collector finds some somewhere!).





Fig. 5 Left Swiss Post/Asendia letterbox installed in a supermarket in the Canary Islands, Spain (2019).

Fig.6 Centre Series of 10 vignettes sold in Mallorca (Spain) in 2013 Fig.7 Right Set of 10 vignettes sold in the Canary Islands (Spain) 2013.

### Separate mailboxes

The yellow boxes installed in the above-mentioned Spanish regions, clearly display "SWISS POST", amid the slogan "Share Your Memories" (in 3 languages), the words "Operated by Swiss Post" (in English) and, where appropriate, the instruction "Buy your stamps at reception". As in previous experiences, the postcards are transported via the logistical systems of the independent Swiss Post/Asendia from the various Spanish locations to Madrid and on directly to Switzerland (Zurich-Mülligen), where they are received, processed and delivered to all the countries of the world according to the addresses of the recipients. A point to note: the colour of the mailboxes of the Spanish National post (CORREOS) is also ... yellow! and it would seem that you should avoid using the wrong letterbox, because the CORREOS does not forward postcards with Asendia stamps to the Swiss Post/Asendia in Spain for processing!



Fig. 8 Left – Block of 4 stickers sold in Rome in 2013.

Fig. 9 Below Two postage labels marked "ASENDIA" used for sending journals and magazines "Postage Paid".

Fig. 10 E-commerce postal item posted in the United States to Switzerland, with the words "ASENDIA" printed directly on the CN22 customs label.

### Beautifully illustrated vignettes

The vignettes are printed and sold as a booklet of 10, each with 10 different typical tourist views of the area in question. Each region has its own stickers. For example those sold in the Canary Islands have the statement "Gran Canaria" and on those sold in Mallorca we find the word "Mallorca".

All vignettes have "SWISS POST" at the top, and at the bottom "CH-8010 Zürich-Mülligen SPI MAD". There is also the message: "Swiss Post Paid Label For Use Sending Letters And Postcards Through Distribution Network Swiss Post", and the same indication in Spanish. Plus an important note: "Deposit correspondence, letters and cards, only in Swiss Post postal boxes. Post is not valid for the post office boxes of Correos" (Correos = the Spanish National Post). No sales figures for these vignettes have been communicated to us. What is certain is that not all the versions of the Spanish Asendia vignettes have yet been identified. Further information from their fans would be welcome!

### Another activity: B2B mailings

"ASENDIA" is a trademark of B2B (business to business) which is not used as such for private customers and tourists (to them it appears as "Swiss Post"). However, it appears on their commercial couriers for the sending of all goods and the international distribution of journals, magazines, periodicals, sales catalogues, advertising mailings, newspapers and commercial mails, not to mention the small parcels generated by the 'e-commerce'. This area of their services has experienced strong growth in recent years, and especially in 2020 during the pandemic because people have purchased many garments and other objects through the websites. Asendia can take care of all the logistics for online shopping, including import, customs clearance and final delivery. Asendia then prints complete labels, with the addresses of the sender and recipient, and the mandatory information for customs (label CN22). Their growth strategy for the years 2020 to 2023 will mainly focus on e-commerce from and to Asia, Europe and the USA. The strategy is ambitious and Asendia's motto is: "The world is your address".

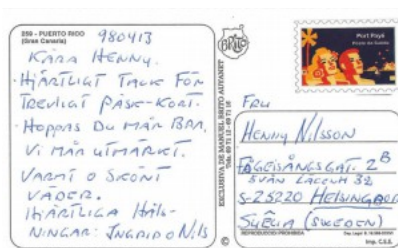
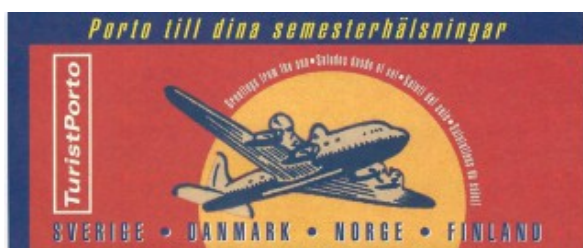


Fig. 11 Cover of one of the booklets of postal vignettes for tourists from the Nordic countries sold from 1995 to 1998.  
Fig. 12 Postcard from a tourist sent in 1998 from the Canary Islands to Sweden with one of the vignettes.

**Postscript:** For collectors interested in contemporary postal history, the liberalisation of the postal market has opened up entirely new avenues for research. For example, in Argentina there are several private operators that process and route mail in large cities, which is free with each operator having their own vignettes. Even DHL has done it! Also in Italy we find the company "GPS / Global Postal Service" (and its labels) which manages the private mail entrusted to it in Rome and Milan.

The Nordic Posts (Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Finland) were the first to launch "tourist stickers" in 1994 under the name "TuristPorto". They were sold in the Canary Islands in the form of a booklet of 2 x 6 "stickers", with two different designs. Then other notebooks (with new designs) were sold in 1995, 1996, 1997 and 1998. The text on the "sticker" reads "Port Paid/Post of Sweden". The cards were flown to Sweden for delivery, but they were not cancelled. At the end of 1998, this "experiment" was put to an end following strong protests from Spain.



Some of Asendia's Italian vignettes heading for Switzerland

## **ASENDIA IN BRIEF**

Created: 6<sup>th</sup> July 2012

Main office: Paris

Logo: "ASENDIA By La Poste & Swiss Post"

Legal form: joint venture of Swiss Post (40%) and French Post / LA POSTE (60%); originally: 50%/50%

Managing Director: Marc Pontet (France)

Chairman of the board: Ulrich Hurni (Switzerland)

Employees: 1,500 at 25 sites in 17 countries, including 10 in Europe. Presence: Europe, North America, Asia, Australia and New Zealand. Activities: international shipping solutions for commercial customers (e-commerce).

Ref. The Asendia blog from 3.9.2020 (e-commerce) [www.asendia.com](http://www.asendia.com)