

# SWITZERLAND BY TRAIN: FOUR OF THE MOST SPECTACULAR RAIL JOURNEYS

Rail journeys are not always just a means of getting from A to B. They can also provide a scenic way to witness and experience a different side to a country and its people, with many routes effortlessly bringing passengers to places they may not have ever discovered otherwise. Proving that there really is no better way to comfortably explore the small but incredibly beautiful country of Switzerland than by train, is the nation's efficient, reliable and expansive rail service.

A panoramic rail trip through Switzerland's vastly differing regions sees ravishing landscapes – from glacier-encrusted mountains to glittering lake shores and ever-green valleys – come into focus. Regional delicacies are served onboard, giving you a taste of numerous cuisines, and enthusiastic multilingual guides tell tales of the legends that once enveloped local areas. From views to culture to history, there is much to be enjoyed on one of Switzerland's epic rail rides. Here we round up the most exciting trips on offer, with details of cultural and natural highlights to look out for along the way.



## THE GLACIER EXPRESS

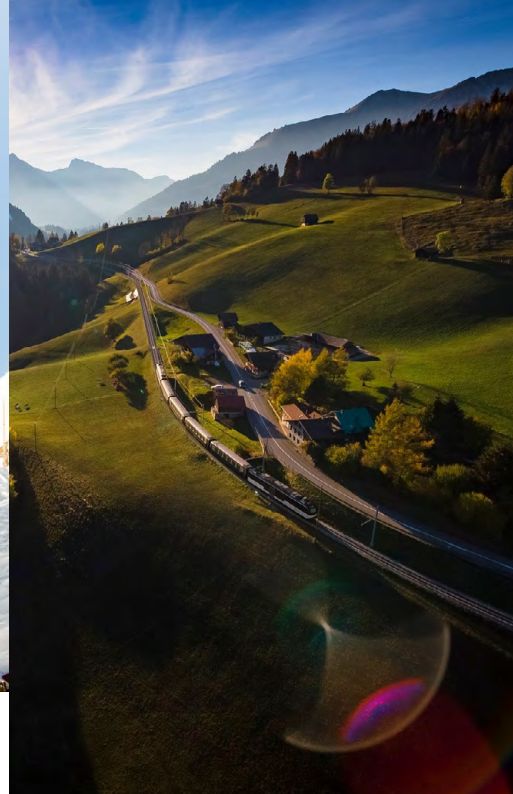
The window to the Alps, the iconic Glacier Express snakes past snow-capped peaks, lush countryside meadows, glistening lakes and chocolate box towns, revealing the scenic splendour of a raw Switzerland. The self-proclaimed 'slowest express train in the world' makes it to the top of bucket lists not only for its leisurely pace, but its unparalleled views, exceptional service quality, and unique amenities.

### THE ROUTE

In the course of its epic 290km journey, the striking crimson-and-white Glacier Express travels through three different cantons of Switzerland – Valais, Uri and Graubünden. Beginning in the mountainous region of Zermatt, at the foot of the mighty Matterhorn, the narrow-gauge train takes a relaxed eight hours to reach its destination of St Moritz – the nation's most glamorous alpine resort. Highlights along the route include the dramatic Rhine Gorge (the Grand Canyon of Switzerland), which gives way to the sweeping wilderness of Oberalp Pass, the goosebump-inducing Landwasser Viaduct, and the grand Stockalper Palace. While the full eight hours is highly recommended, travellers can also enjoy a segment of the breathtaking journey by boarding at Visp, Brig, Andermatt, Disentis or Chur.

### THE TRAIN

The Glacier Express offers passengers three classes of travel to choose from: first class, second class and the all-new Excellence Class boasting the most sought-after seats in Switzerland. While all classes are housed within panoramic coaches purpose-built to offer unobstructed views, the Excellence Class grants access to a special deluxe version, where plush cream leather armchairs and intimate booths of two make for a more personal, luxurious experience. Each seat features a power socket and free Wi-Fi, which guests can use to access the excellent infotainment system, complete with an audio guide and tracker map with a choice of seven languages. Concierge members are additionally on hand to answer personal queries or provide further interesting facts about the scenes unfurling from behind the window. A cocktail bar exclusive to Excellence passengers further stands to one end of the car, offering delightful aperitifs, and travellers are also spoiled with a seasonal five-course meal served with accompanying wines sourced from the cantons of Graubünden and Valais.



## JUNGFRAU RAILWAY

Known as ‘the top of Europe’, the famed Jungfrau Railway is certainly not for the fainthearted. The truly once-in-a-lifetime trip sees passengers ascend a whopping 11,332 feet to the highest railway station in Europe, offering unparalleled views of the UNESCO-listed Aletsch Glacier (the largest ice stream in the Alps) and its surrounding razor-like peaks that are sure to leave you gasping.

### THE ROUTE

Departing from Kleine Scheidegg, the historic Jungfrau Railway (built in 1912) runs almost entirely under the mountains of Eiger and Mönch through an exhilarating tunnel to Jungfraujoch – a viewing and adventure platform located between the Bernese Highlands and Valais. The nine-kilometre journey takes just 35 minutes to complete, but that’s more than enough time for it to leave a lasting impression. During the climb, the train makes a stop at Eismeer within the middle of the tunnel, where passengers are given a chance to disembark and gaze out of windows built into the side of the mountain. Once back on board, travellers continue their ascent amidst a world of rock, ice and snow with the dramatic triple act of Eiger (3,970m), Mönch (4,107m) and Jungfrau (4,158m) defining the last leg of the journey.

### THE DESTINATION

The allure of the Jungfrau transcends the very journey itself. Upon completing the heart-pumping trip, passengers can disembark to explore the snowy surrounds, where there’s a whole Snow Fun Park, equipped with first-class attractions, four restaurants and two bars. Visitors of all ages can whizz across the frozen plateau on a lengthy zip line, dash downhill onboard a sled or snow tube, or test the powder with some skiing or boarding (day passes are available). Be sure to visit the Ice Palace, where tunnels of ice polished as smooth as cut glass are adorned in frozen sculptures of bears, eagles and ibexes, as well as the giant snow globe, Alpine Sensation. For those who just can’t get enough of the astounding view, the Sphinx – housing one of the world’s highest astronomical observatories – is sure to impress. Here, an ultrafast lift takes visitors up 108 metres in 25 seconds to an observation deck that offers views stretching as far as the Black Forest in Germany on cloudless days.

## GOLDENPASS PANORAMIC

Switzerland’s first-ever panoramic train was inaugurated on this extraordinary line in 1976, giving rise to decades of innovative travel marked by luxury and unrivalled views. Linking the distinctly differing German-speaking and French-speaking regions of Switzerland, the GoldenPass Panoramic makes it possible to experience the change from one culture to another as a gradual process.

### THE ROUTE

On a journey that comprises just over two hours, the GoldenPass Panoramic moves leisurely from Zweisimmen in the Bernese Oberland towards Montreux, the glamorous city on Lake Geneva. One picturesque view follows the next, with the ever-green countryside making up a large proportion of the serene scenes. Spot cows grazing in lush meadows, traditional wooden chalets, icy lakes, dense forests and jutting peaks. There are additionally ample sightseeing and excursion opportunities along the year-round route. Highlights include the upscale health resort of Gstaad, the skiing and hiking paradise known as Glacier 3000, the hot air balloon obsessed Château-d’Oex, and the UNESCO-protected vineyards of Lavaux.

### THE TRAIN

GoldenPass Panoramic provides both first and second class coaches, all equipped with cosy interiors, air conditioning, access to toilets, low-floor entrances for increased accessibility, expansive windows, as well as a smaller, clerestory window in the ceiling. While there are no designated dining options, groups of 10 or more can request meals to be served at their seats upon arrival, and all guests further can pick up drinks and light snacks at the well-stocked Rail Bar. The Panoramic models additionally boast vista-dome cars, as well as an intimate eight-passenger viewing area located at the front of the train, right above the driver, for the ultimate in ringside seats.



## GOTTHARD PANORAMA EXPRESS

History comes alive on the Gotthard Panorama Express – a unique combination of a train ride and boat cruise on the route between the city of Lugano in southern Switzerland’s Italian-speaking Ticino region and Lucerne in the nation’s centre. A journey that once used to take close to 23 hours now averages five and a half, opening passengers to a world of captivating vistas and significant cultural and historical sites.

### THE ROUTE

This 182-kilometre journey begins in Lugano, a city of Mediterranean flair, weaving its way north towards Bellinzona – where three UNESCO World Heritage castles (Castelgrande, Montebello and Sasso Corbaro) guard the region’s historic centre. Moving through lower Leventina, where climatic conditions strongly favour viticulture, the Gotthard Panorama Express travels a series of loop tunnels before reaching the world’s deepest and longest rail tunnel: Gotthard Base Tunnel. Internationally acclaimed as a pioneering achievement for its time, this 15-kilometre long tunnel was built between 1872-1882. Having sped through its interior, the Gotthard Panorama Express emerges in Wassen. In order to gain height within a very restricted space, the train must make the climb towards its destination in Flüelen in a tight double loop, affording passengers an exceptional view of Wassen and its beautiful Baroque church from three different angles. Having reached Flüelen, passengers must make the switch to the steamboat, staving a leisurely cruise across Lake Uri (believed to be the birthplace of the Swiss nation back in 1291) towards Lucerne. The route can easily be travelled in either direction.

### THE DESTINATION

All SBB trains are characterised by their incredibly wide windows providing passengers with unmatched views. Yet, the Gotthard Panorama Express takes it one step further, offering guests access to the specially designed Photo Coach, where windows can be opened for the ultimate viewing and Instagram-capturing experience. A further defining detail of the famed train is its onboard multilingual travel guides who immerse passengers in historic tales, myths and legends about the various regions and sites passed through. During the section between Bellinzona and Flüelen, the journey is further enriched by a number of stagings and experiences regarding the origins and development of the Gotthard railway. While the Gotthard Panorama Express provides light snacks and drinks served directly to passengers’ seats, lunch can be reserved at the steamboat’s restaurant for those who wish for something a little more filling. Here, seasonally focused meals and Lake Lucerne delicacies are served alongside regional wines and beers.