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Unesco Swiss World Heritage Sites

Rhaetian Railway in the Albula / Bernina Landscapes

UNESCO World Heritage Sites

Over the next months, we will feature the World Heritage sites in Switzerland. UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) encourages the identification, protection and preservation of cultural and natural heritage around the world considered to be of outstanding value to humanity. This is embodied in an international treaty called the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, adopted in 1972.

The Rhaetian Railway

The Rhaetian Railway or the Rhaetische Bahn, as it is known to many of us, brings together two historic railway lines that traverse the Albula and Bernina landscapes through picturesque valleys and mountain passes. The Albula line in the north western part of the railway is 67km long and features 42 tunnels and covered galleries, as well as 144 viaducts and bridges. The 61km Bernina pass line features 13 tunnels and galleries, as well as 52 viaducts and bridges. The Railway is deemed to constitute an outstanding engineering, architectural and environmental achievement in harmony with the landscapes through which it travels.

The Rhaetian Railway between Thusis and Poschiavo is a marvel of railway engineering. Railway enthusiasts assert that the Albula route between Chur and St. Moritz is the most picturesque mountain route in the world and rave about the boldly curved Landwasser viaduct. But that's only the start: on its route, the Bernina Express passes by the gigantic Morteratsch glacier, climbs without the help of cogwheels across Europe's highest railway Alpine pass, the 2253-metre-high Bernina, and winds down to Poschiavo along daring loops. The "Kleine Rote" (small red one) is the heart of the Albula/Bernina UNESCO World Heritage listing, which also includes the surrounding cultural landscape with its pristine villages, ruggedly-romantic landscapes and primordial Alps.

The Rhaetian Railway has been the key to overcoming the extreme isolation of settlements in the Central Alps early in the 20th century, with a major and lasting socio-economic impact on life in the mountains.

The lucky among us who have had the opportunity to experience the railway will not fail to remember the beautiful valleys and mountains, pine forests, flower meadows and snowy landscapes. The even luckier ones have had the chance to walk or take a "gondola" up on the mountains and enjoy both the silence and the views over the vast expanse of the alps.

Sources: www.unesco.org, www.myswitzerland.com, www.flickr.com (Rhaetian Railway)

