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Swiss Rail Tips

A train holiday in Switzerland – no training required.

When I set about to write this article about train journeys in Switzerland, I had in mind to develop one or two interesting routes that one could follow if ever in Switzerland and deciding to 'train' (I notice young people using the verb 'to bus' to describe a journey on the bus so I decided to apply the same principle to the noun 'train'. However, I realize now that making a verb out of 'train' becomes slightly confusing. Imagine telling your friend that you're gonna 'train home' but really you're just taking the train home, no weight-lifting included? That would be very misleading, wouldn't it?). Anyway, going on the SBB homepage to find out what people can do when planning a holiday on a train in Switzerland (that sounds more accurate now) taught me differently: there is already a substantial number of journeys ready to be followed and certainly no need for me to re-invent the wheel. What follows here is a well-packaged summary of everything you can find on <http://www.sbb.ch/en/business-travel/travel/gaeste-ausland.html> and <http://www.swisstravelsystem.com/en/home/highlights-en/panorama-journeys.html>

First of all, you need to decide what you want to do on a train in Switzerland. Visit friends? Visit new places? Do a special trip? For the first two objectives, you do good by obtaining a 'Swiss Travel Pass'. This can be done quickly and easily from home (i.e. before going overseas) with a mouse click or two on your computer. The Swiss Travel Pass covers transport by rail, road, and waterway. For those of you familiar with the Swiss travelcards, this pass is the international's equivalent of a GA – it gives you unlimited access to all public transport in Switzerland. The international guest can purchase the Pass for different times periods: 3, 4, 8, or 15

days. Now there are two options as to how you want to validate those days: with the 'Swiss Pass Flexi' you can travel the 3, 4 or however many days you purchased on a flexible basis per 1 month. The default 'Swiss Travel Pass', on the other hand, requires you to travel for 3, 4 or however many days in a row. Both Passes offer additional benefits, such as free entry to a large number of museums or discounts to a whole lot of other things (especially related to transport in more secluded areas).

In terms of finances, a Swiss Travel Pass will mean the following for adults (go to the website to find out more about family deals and travel discounts for people up to 26 years):

Swiss Travel Pass	2nd class	1st class
3 days	210.–	336.–
4 days	251.–	402.–
8 days	363.–	581.–
15 days	440.–	704.–

The **Travel Pass Flexi** is roughly 30 Swiss Francs more expensive per category (2nd class).

Another option to consider regarding a general transport ticket is the '**Swiss Half Fare Card**' (120.–). This card allows you, as the name suggests, to travel through Switzerland for half the price of any given ticket during the period of 1 month.

Now I suspect that the purchase of the above mentioned Travel Passes and Half Fare Card is perfect for anybody interested in seeing as much as possible of Switzerland without ever using a car. I am thinking Kiwis who are off to Switzerland

for the first time and/or Swiss visitors who are busy going back and forth between cities to match their tight schedule of saying hi to relatives, kindergarten friends and somebody's new-born baby. Having said that, I must admit that I am not entirely sure as to who counts as an 'international guest' (us 'Auslandschweizer' too?) according to SBB criteria and who doesn't. Anyway, if you are looking to do a train trip in Switzerland for the sake of the trip, rather than the friends who live along the way, there are different and very enticing options to choose from. There are the classical 'Panorama Tours' with premium panorama trains (including the 'Glacier Express', the 'Bernina Express', the 'Golden Pass Line', the 'Jungfrau Top of Europe', the 'Wilhelm Tell Express' and a few more), beautiful 'Scenic Routes' with standard trains (e.g. 'Jungfrau round trip', 'Gornergrat Railway', 'Rigi round trip' etc.) or themed routes with retro carriages such as the 'Swiss Chocolate Train', the 'Cheese Train' or the 'Kambly Roundtrip' (somehow I feel strangely attracted to these last options although I always imagined myself going on an elegant Panorama Tour and playing Jass). The ultimate train experience is probably achieved with 'The Grand Tour of Switzerland' which covers 8 routes totalling 1280 kilometres and can be done on a hop on hop off basis.

Of course, these special trips are not included in a Swiss Travel Pass or cost half the price with the Swiss Half Fare Card, but you can get some discounts on these rather pricy tours.

I would say it's now time for you to find out more and plan your next Switzerland trip 'training' a lot more than you might have in the past! Toot toot! Luzia Sauer

