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Gotthard Tunnel Experience in Erstfeld

"At 57 km, the Gotthard Base Tunnel is the longest railway tunnel in the world. A window in the tunnel gives you a direct view of the passing trains. Learn from your guide and in the exciting exhibition about the spectacular construction of this work of the century."

We did this two-hour guided tour in July this year and for the cost of CHF 23 was great value for money. Groups meet in Erstfeld and then get driven with vans into part of the tunnel. Everyone needs to wear closed shoes, are given High-vis vests and hard hats. The guide we had was excellent and provided us with both the history of building the tunnel as well as information on the daily upkeep and maintenance – see box. This tunnel cuts the journey from Lucerne to Bellinzona by 45 minutes. The maximum speed is 250 km/hr with the operational speed at 200 km/hr for passenger trains and 100 km/hr for freight trains. The travel time for passenger trains is 20 minutes. There are between 130-160 trains per day. March 2019 marked the 100,000th transit with about 2/3 passenger trains and 1/3 freight trains, both national and international.

During our two-hour visit we had a chance to watch the trains come speeding through whilst standing behind a thick glass wall. Already fifteen minutes before the train passes this

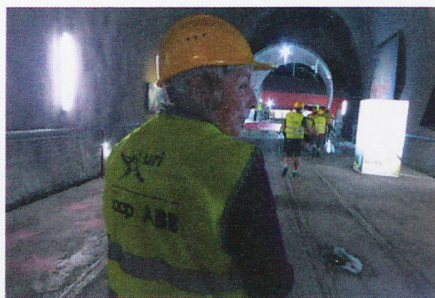
point you can hear the train enter the tunnel and gradually increase in noise. The guide could even tell if it was going to be a goods train or a passenger train. This is a tour well worth doing and the surrounding area is spectacular.

We ended our outing with a night up the near-by Eggberge staying in a typical mountain chalet with dorm-style accommodation and meals included. We had a spectacular view down to the Urnersee, 1000 metres below and across to the Gotthard mountains. The following day we did a two-hour hike up to a small lake and then headed back down taking two small self-driven gondolas. This is a very popular hiking and mountain-biking region and has several small mountain restaurants dotted along the way. The alpine flowers were a treat as well as lovely vistas of mountain farmers carrying out their haymaking on a beautiful summer's day. For more information check out www.tunnel-erlebnis.ch

Photos : Walter Zuber / article compiled by Anita Zuber

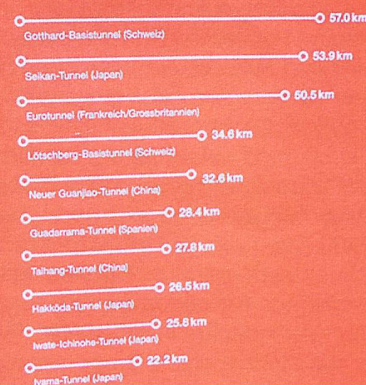


Restaurant Seeblick on Eggberge



Hiking trails from Eggberge to Altdorf

Die längsten Eisenbahntunnel der Welt:



Maintenance: a big challenge

The size and complexity of the Gotthard Base Tunnel (GBT) pose particular challenges in terms of maintenance.

Two 57-kilometre-long single-track tunnels and 13 kilometres of newly built over-ground lines make 308 kilometres of tracks, 153 kilometres of catenary, 7,200 lights, 500 kilometres of drainpipes and 2,200 electrical cabinets. These are just a few of the figures that indicate the size and complexity of the GBT and its facilities.

Maintaining the longest railway tunnel in the world is a major challenge. The 57-kilometre-long tunnel tubes are only accessible via two entrances. A tunnel tube is closed for three nights each time maintenance work is carried out. During this time, up to eleven workplaces are transferred from the new maintenance and intervention centres (MIC) in Biasca and Erstfeld to the GBT, where they are set up, put into operation and then vacated and transferred back again.

SBB requires special vehicles for tunnel maintenance, which consist of various partial trains that divide into smaller units after entering the tunnel and are distributed to the different workplaces.

Cleaning is carried out Saturday and Sunday nights when the tunnel is closed for eight hours. Drainage systems, tunnel ventilation, cross-passage doors, tracks, contact-lines and safety systems are checked.

www.company.sbb/gotthard-base-tunnel