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Cheaper holidays in Switzerland

by Les Heath

When I mention to other people that I go to Switzerland for my holidays the first comment is usually it's too expensive and I can't afford to go there. I have been going to Switzerland since the age of nine when I was forced to go by my parents. My friends were going to Bognor or Yarmouth and I wanted to go there as well.

But I was bitten from about the age of fifteen by the scenery and the many strange looking electric locomotives as well as the many mountain railways we travelled on all those years ago.

When I started work and had to fund my own trips to Switzerland I had to look at more reasonably priced holidays. I had a car and purchased a small tent. The adventures then began. The cost of the ferry was reasonably priced, but the French roads, especially through the villages where many of the cobblestones were missing, did the suspension no favours at all. It took two long days to get to Switzerland with an overnight stop en route. Later, a small touring caravan was purchased. The camp site facilities in Switzerland have always been superb but have improved even more over the years. I sold my caravan three years ago, only because we had taken the plunge the year before to purchase a small apartment in Switzerland.

The purpose of the preamble is to perhaps give some confidence to some of you who own cars and drive many thousands of miles in Britain but have not thought of venturing abroad.

The greatest part of the holiday cost, especially if you have a family, is the airfare per person. It seems good until you multiply the price by the number of seats needed. Staying in hotels has become better with the exchange rates altering in our favour. Taking your car and camping, caravanning or self catering can reduce this amount drastically. You can take your own food, etc. to save on some of the costs.

The Channel tunnel provides the perfect way to cross, no sea sickness, only thirty-five minutes to cross (under) the channel and you are at the start of the French motorway system. I still travel regularly by car. The roads are marvellous nowadays, there are service and picnic areas every 25 miles or so on the motorways.

The volume of traffic on French roads is very light, nothing like southern England. If you can drive in or around the major towns or cities of the UK you will not have any problems in Europe. The route signs are clear and well placed with all major towns named.

The journey is between four hundred and seventy and five hundred miles from Calais to Switzerland and you have basically two choices.

If you are going to the French side of Switzerland I would suggest the route via Reims, Langres, Besancon, Pontarlier, crossing the frontier at Vallorbe and on to your destination. You can use the Peage (toll roads) or the normal 'A' roads.

For the German side of Switzerland I would suggest Brussels, Luxembourg, Metz, Mulhouse, crossing the frontier at Basel to your destination.

If you are not used to long distance driving I would strongly recommend an overnight stop in France. We have on many occasions gone via Reims to the Montreux area, but, returned home by the 'long' route via Basel, Koln, Brussels to Calais, stopping at a small hotel along the Rhine valley.

If you have never tried camping before or have only camped in the UK why not try a tent or caravan on a site with all modern facilities. There are also self catering apartments. Why not stay at a small hotel in one of the mountain villages, or take advantage of a luxury hotel out of season when the prices can be lower than you think.

You will have the benefit of your car to get to those places you have never visited before because the timetable didn't quite connect.

Details of the Shuttle, camping holidays, self catering apartments and hotels are available from Switzerland Tourism in London (address inside front cover) or Tourist Offices in the area you would like to visit will also provide details.

Just because you take a car to Switzerland it doesn't stop you riding on the trains, it just makes it cheaper to get there! There is only one disadvantage in taking my car, my wife thinks it should always be full to the roof!

If you want more details or route suggestions please give me a ring. It's a lot easier than you would think.