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TGV TO THE COTE D'AZUR

Ernst Leutwiler reports on the new high-speed links from Switzerland to the south of France

TGV-Lyria 4407 at Marseille along side an SNCF local train.

Photos: Ernst B Leutwiler

TGV-Lyria is a subsidiary of the SBB and SNCF and now offers up to 23 daily train-pairs between French and Swiss destinations. The majority of these link Paris and Swiss cities, but since December 2012 there are now two daily TGV-Lyria operations between Genève and Marseille, one going on to Nice, and a daily train-pair between Genève and Montpellier. The trip to Marseille takes just three-and-a-half hours thanks to the ability of the new, elegant, white TGVs to run at some 320kph on the dedicated sections of LGV line. Taking advantage of advance purchase options the Swiss can travel the route for fares as low as €39, although travelling First Class with at-seat service of meals en-route will obviously cost considerably more!

Earlier this year I sampled the service and travelled to Marseille. After brief stops in Lyon Part-Dieu, TGV Valence, Avignon TGV and Aix-en-Provence TGV we arrived in Marseille St-Charles, the service then continuing on to Nice. In the basement of the station is the Metro station, on one of the two lines of the system. Tickets for this can be purchased in the stations, as well as in hotels and the ubiquitous French 'Tabacs'. Just two stops takes you to the Old Town (and the Old Port with its Fish Market) where there are many hotels restaurants, museums, theatres, plus the Cathedral - the Notre-Dame de la Garde - and the Rue de Canebière there are many different shops. For 2013 Marseille is also the European Capital of Art. However, despite all these attractions, we chose to move on by local train along the Cote Bleue, with its rugged coastlines, small villages and romantic bays to Sausset-les-Pins where on the harbour we enjoyed a fine lunch at "Les 3 Filles". Highly recommended!

To sample the other new TGV-Lyria route required a move on to Montpellier - a location that is itself really on the move. Within 20 years the population of this vibrant University City has risen from 80,000 to a quarter of a million. Various known, and some not-yet-famous architects have been encouraged to realize their design ideas with the new university campus buildings in the urban core and new housing estates that are all served by the four long routes of the new tram network, that also reaches down to the sea. From Montpellier we returned with speed and style to Genève, having enjoyed the new rail links that Switzerland has with France and its splendid Mediterranean coast. When you are next in Genève why not sample a day trip to the Cote d'Azur? For more information contact the following websites: www.rendezvousenfrance.com; www.resamarseille.com; www.resamontpellier.com; www.tgv-lyria.com. 

A tram stop in Marseille.

