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The SBB Saver Day Pass

– Observations by
Robert Foster

The reference in his column (*Swiss Express* March 2019) by Ivan Rodrigues of STC to the Saver Day Pass was the first I have seen in *Swiss Express*. By about a year it preceded the withdrawal of the Swiss Transfer Ticket although I have two of these unused so far, purchased in December 2018 and which are still valid. The Swiss Transfer Ticket (STT) had become expensive, in many cases exceeding the standard return fare, having risen from £27 when I first used one twenty five years ago, to latterly about £120 second class, £185 first class – depending on the exchange rate – moderated marginally by the 5% discount for SRS members.

The Saver Day Pass is not easy to find. Available only on-line – it is usually found on the special offers webpage – the Saver Day Pass being mid-way down the second column. You know you have the right “product” when the picture of two people, riding a pink pig on a rollercoaster, appears on your screen. But the hard work continues. The month option on the SBB site continues to be in the wrong place. Moreover, even if you click on the full-price ticket option, the price shown on the following web page assumes that you have selected the half-fare and second class options. In order to disabuse it you must click on the ‘Discount cards’ drop-down to select ‘No Discount’, reselect ‘First Class’ (if that is what you want) and then Refresh the page before moving to the Checkout. One wrong move and you are back to square one and must restart. Another irritation is that the printed tickets occupy less than an A4 page, with the result that each of the sixteen which I booked is divided onto two pages! So, like the “image”, it is a rollercoaster experience.

The Saver Day Pass goes on sale 60 days prior to date of travel. Unlike the STT, it is non-refundable. However it can give a reasonable saving. On our annual journey in May from North Yorkshire to Bellagio on Lake Como, we have in the past used the

STT within Switzerland, costing about £177 1st class with the SRS discount. This year outbound we “mixed and matched” with a 1st class Saver Day Ticket from Cossonay (Lausanne) via Zürich-Chur-Samedan to Tirano, but 2nd class on the return from Chiasso to Genève via the classic Gotthard route – one of (if not the) Europe’s greatest – to Arth-Goldau, then both sides of the Rigi, and paddlesteamer Vitznau to Luzern.

Saver Day Pass “basic” cost is CHF 52 in 2nd class, CHF 88 in 1st class. So on this year’s journey to and from Lake Como, the combined cost per head was CHF 140, about £107 at £1 = CHF 1.31 at the time of booking so an appreciable reduction against the £177 paid in 2018. However, I booked within 60 days and obtained these base prices, but the closer to date of travel, the higher is the cost or you can be met with “sold out”. Incidentally there are credit cards which do not charge the usual 2.75% exchange surcharge and my Nationwide Visa card falls into this category. One unexpected aspect of the Saver Day Pass is that the half-fare card gives rather less than half fare reduction, for example CHF 29 for a holder of the half-fare card. In some circumstances as prices rise nearer the date of travel, the differential can be narrower.

A major advantage of the Saver Day Pass over the STT is that, in common with the multiple day passes, you can go where you like whereas the STT was border or airport to destination, and back within one month, by the “shortest” route.

The first time I used the Saver Day Pass was in March 2019. The itinerary was Reichenbach (reached comfortably in the day from St. Pancras and overnighting at Hotel Bahnhof)-Lötschberg-Domodossola-Locarno-Luzern-Genève, definitely off route if we had used an STT. However the Centovalli was closed – “kaput” we were told as we reached the underground platform at Domodossola – by a

landslide. So we took the 1017 to Gallarate (0739 Genève-Milano) running 50 minutes late – incompetence on the part of FS on which I shall not dwell – but the Italian ticket inspector accepted our Saver Day Pass in the circumstances without demur. We then wound our way via Varese over the partly new line to Lugano. However we thus missed our scheduled 90 minute lunch break at Bellinzona. So we had lunch on the 1343 ICN to Basel – a pleasant way of occupying the passage through the Gotthard base tunnel – changing at Olten to another ICN via the Jura Sud route to Genève Aéroport.

Two of our party of six had detached at Bellinzona.

They had arranged to take the PostAuto to Thusis, thence via the Albula and the Bernina to their overnight stop at Albergo Stazione at Campocologno, intending to make their way the next day via Arosa to Basel airport. Earlier in the day, when revising their itinerary beyond Bellinzona, from where their planned PostAuto departure was missed, one of our party was using the SBB website, whereas I was using the European Rail Timetable (ERT), to work out which PostAuto instead to take. It transpired that the SBB website was wrong. Conversely although this was road transport, the ERT was correct! 

And finally...

Switzerland comes to the West Somerset Railway – Tony Bagwell

The modern craze of “Yarn Bombing” – knitting or crocheting decorative items and then leaving them for public display – has seen Bishops Lydeard Station on the West Somerset Railway receiving such treatment. The spear fencing along the platform has a display of handiwork representing what the local craftspeople think are representative items of Switzerland – railways, cable cars, cows, cuckoo clocks, penknives, balloons, the Red Cross and even Swiss rolls!!! 



Where's Heidi?

Answer

You need to get an S1 service from Bern Hbf two stops out to Bümpliz Sud – probably not a destination at the top of the list if you're a tourist!! 

