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CHARLOTTE, July 2, 2012 — The Bernina Express may not be Switzerland's longest, or most famous, train trip, but it is the best classic rail journey in the country.

Not only does the route incorporate some of the more spectacular sections of the famed Glacier Express, it also features alpine lakes at the crest of the world, dynamic glaciers and



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panoramic vistas of rolling countryside before reaching its final destination in Tirano, Italy.

Even *National Geographic* rates the Bernina Express as the second best rail journey in Europe. The first, also in Switzerland, is The Chocolate Train, but it is a commercial enterprise. On the other hand, the Bernina transports commuters across the Alps between Switzerland and Italy on a regular basis on one of the most majestic rail experiences imaginable.

Bernina Express travelers begin from either Davos, St. Moritz or Chur. Each village offers something different, so the starting point is really a matter of personal preference.

Chur, with its delightful old town, is a gateway to the alpine ski resort of Arosa.



Bernina train on the Landwasser Viaduct (Photo: Switzerland Tourism)



A world of viaducts and tunnels (Photo: Switzerland Tourism)

At just over 5,000 feet, Davos has the distinction of being the highest city in Europe, and it is a haven for culture lovers as well as sports enthusiasts.

Jet-setting St. Moritz, with its series of three alpine lakes, has long been a favorite destination for

the internationally rich and famous.

The four-hour, 38-mile rail journey follows a winding mountainous path over 196 bridges and through 55 tunnels over the Bernina Pass which reaches its highest point at more than 7,300 feet. Two railways, the Albula Line and the Bernina Line, combine to form the route. A

unification that led UNESCO to jointly declare them a World Heritage Site in 2008.

Completed in 1904, the Albula Line took six years to build. The Bernina Line followed in 1910, but the railroads operated independently until 1940 when the Rhaetian Railway took over and merged the two.

The brightly colored red coaches feature arches of glass that provide a 360-degree panoramic view of land, water and sky. During summer, some trains even operate with some open-air cars as well as the traditional enclosed rolling stock.

The combination Landwasser Viaduct/Tunnel is a highlight of both the Bernina and Glacier Express excursions. From the viaduct, where five pillars tower more than 200 feet above the Landwasser River, the 446-foot curved track offers passengers a clear view of the train as it enters or departs the tunnel. The 706-foot tunnel completes the architectural masterpiece by boring through seemingly insurpassable rock before it opens on the dramatic gorge and bridge across the river.



The Landwasser Viaduct and tunnel (Photo: Switzerland Tourism)

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Shortly after the viaduct, the train reaches Filisur before continuing through the first of several spiral tunnels. The rails sing as the cherry-colored line of coaches moves through a lush valley en route to a change in elevation of about 1,300-feet in just over 3-miles. Spirals eliminate the need for rack-and-pinion infrastructure and passengers are the beneficiary. The serpentine course twists and turns through towering woodlands past cascading waterfalls and rushing streams while climbing toward mountains of everlasting snow.

Outside [Pontresina](#) the journey heads for the Bernina Pass where the tracks make a dramatic turn beside the [Morteratsch](#) Glacier. Lord Byron once described glaciers as “frozen hurricanes” and, at this place, it’s as though some omnipotent hand designed the terrain purely for rail visitors to observe all of its magnificent splendor. Car travelers also have a photo op with a vantage point at the side of the road. From here you can view the Piz Bernina, the highest summit in the Eastern Alps at nearly 7,000 feet.

In English “piz” means “peak”, which comes from Romansch, the least used of Switzerland’s four languages.

Before long, the Bernina Express discards its forested surroundings by yielding to a moonscape of stark, intolerant terrain. Jagged, barren outcroppings of snow-clad rock hover over three glacial lakes, each distinguished by a different color. Here, at the rooftop of Europe, the watershed divides the flow of rivers toward the North Sea and the Mediterranean.

Once over the Alps, the train descends into another vast carpet of green where rural tableaux nestle between protective mountains that lead toward Brusio and its spiral viaduct. The uniqueness of this rarest of rail travel experiences lies in the fact that the track is completely exposed, allowing passengers to witness the logistical achievement of the design for themselves. The train travels over, around and beneath its own pathway as the coiled ribbon of steel guides the express into Italy. Proof positive that “one good turn deserves another.”

Before terminating in Tirano, rail travelers and motorists discover several places along the route where it almost seems possible to reach out and shake hands with each other, and in a couple of tiny villages, the train has barely enough room to pass between buildings on either side of the road.

At Tirano, the Bernina Express links with Swiss Postal Bus service which journeys along the Italian shores of Lake Como before arriving back in Switzerland at Lugano. For Swiss Rail Pass holders, the only thing required is making a reservation and showing your pass.

While glaciers to palm trees may seem incongruous, the magic of the [Swiss Travel System](#) makes it possible. All you have to do is “train” yourself.

*Peabod is Bob Taylor, owner of Taylored Media Services in Charlotte, NC, founder of The Magellan Travel Club which creates and escorts customized tours to Switzerland, France and Italy for groups of 12 or more. Inquiries for groups can be made at Peabod@aol.com Taylored Media has produced marketing videos for British Rail, Rail Europe, Switzerland Tourism, the Swedish Travel & Tourism Council, the Finnish Tourist Board, the Swiss Travel System and Japan Railways Group among others. As author of The Century Club book, Peabod is now attempting to travel to 100 countries or more during his lifetime. To date he has visited **69 countries**. Suggest someplace new for Bob to visit; if you want to know where he has been, check his [list](#) on Facebook. Bob plans to write a sequel to his book when he reaches his goal of 100 countries.*

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