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These extraordinary journeys are unlike any train trip you've ever taken

This country boasts one of the best public transport systems in the world – and if you're a tourist, the best way to discover it is by train.

Riley Heathfield 5 comments

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Video Image



Take a journey on the Kuranda Scenic Railway, a world famous 35 kilometre train trip from Cairns to the Tablelands rainforest town of Kuranda. VIDEO: Brendan Radke – Cairns Post.

A small mountainous country in the heart of Europe, Switzerland is usually associated with chocolate, banking, knives and watches. This is a place for the organised, the efficient, and the finer things in life.

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Yet when I arrive, it's something entirely different that strikes me.

From the fertile valleys of the north across the Alps to the Mediterranean south, the spectacular scenery really is something special.

And there's no better way to explore than by rail. Imagine sitting back with a glass of wine, informative commentary on the headset and uninterrupted views as you glide through villages and valleys over mountain passes and blue lakes. Trust me, it's even better than it sounds.

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There are few better ways to discover Switzerland than by rail. Picture: Flight Centre Source:Supplied



Rail journeys unlock the country's charming towns and villages. Picture: Flight Centre Source:Supplied

Switzerland is geographically small – at just 41,000sq km, it could fit inside Australia 188 times. Yet, situated between France, Italy, Germany and Austria, it's home to Swiss German, French and Italian native speakers, distinct cultures and some of the tallest mountains in Europe.

You would be forgiven for thinking this might mean navigating the country is difficult, when in fact Switzerland has one of the best public transport systems in the world. Despite more than 250 individual transport companies, the dense network of ferries, buses and trains connect seamlessly.



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Generous windows provide plenty of opportunities to enjoy the view. Picture: Flight Centre Source:Supplied

Then there is Excellence Class on the Glacier Express. A spacious carriage with just one seat on either side of the aisle, a fully stocked cocktail bar inside the carriage and a seven-course menu with paired wines make this the luxurious apex of train travel.

Both the Glacier Express and Bernina Express travel along the famous Landwasser Viaduct, and the Albula line, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This section of the journey includes six towering viaducts and three spiral tunnels with a 400m height difference. Seeing the train climb the mountains is mesmerising and my inner train nerd emerges as I learn how the trains change from regular tracks to cogwheels to navigate the steep climbs.



The journeys offer a variety of landscapes to enjoy. Picture: Flight Centre Source:Supplied

The Bernina Express is the highest railway across the Alps, with inclines of up to 70 degrees. It's difficult to choose a favourite part of the journey, but I think this has to be it.

Once we pass over the mountains the train descends through picturesque valleys and right through the heart of historic villages, even travelling along the main street in a couple of places. The red train really contrasts against the historic stone houses and fertile valleys.

There is just so much to see, it's hard to know where to focus my attention.



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The Matterhorn, an iconic sight. Picture: Flight Centre Source:Supplied

One of the best things about travelling Switzerland by rail is the destinations you can reach.

Contemporary cities such as Zurich and Lucerne are home to beautiful medieval city centres filled with intriguing museums and bustling waterfronts surrounded by mountains. Lugano, in the south, has a distinct Mediterranean feel with cobblestone streets, alfresco restaurants and passionate, Italian-speaking locals.

Then there's Zermatt, a vastly different ski village at the base of the famous Matterhorn mountain, which has ski runs operating right through summer. What strikes me most here though, is the car-free city centre. Cobbled streets are lined with dark timbered houses

– balconies bursting with flowers and chocolate shops galore.



A Swiss Travel Pass is a must in Switzerland. Picture: Flight Centre Source:Supplied

For such a compact country, Switzerland has so much to offer that I never expected. There

are contemporary cities and views that are truly awe-inspiring, locals who are only too happy

to help and the highest quality food and wine.

After crisscrossing the country by rail for six days, I find myself back in Zurich's bustling Old Town as the sun is setting. And I wonder, is Switzerland the perfect holiday destination?

Expert tip: You can organise a door-to-door luggage service with your Swiss Travel Pass, so you can explore freely without the hassle of bags.

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Every train seems to have jaw-dropping views, but there are four trains in particular that are especially scenic: Bernina Express, Glacier Express, Gotthard Panorama and the Golden Pass line.



The Glacier Express train. Picture: Flight Centre Source:Supplied

Described as the slowest express train in the world, the Glacier Express travels between St Moritz and Zermatt. The eight-hour journey seems to fly by because I'm glued to the window as the morning fog lifts and the alpine landscape changes.

The service is excellent, too. The train hosts constantly ensure we are enjoying the journey, have enough food and drinks, and share information about the places we are travelling through.

There are First and Second Class carriages, where you can bring your own food and drinks on board, or order from the a la carte menu. Almost all of the refreshments available come from regions along the routes, so it really is a full Swiss experience from the sights and sounds of the passing views to the aromas and flavours inside the train.

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