

# Trackstor

A rail journey is a great way to admire Switzerland's beauty, says Aby Dunsby

@AbraDunsby

**A**t almost every turn, Switzerland is blessed with something incredibly pretty to look at, whether it's mirror-like lakes, sparkling, snowy mountains or quaint, chocolate-box towns.

When the view is this good, clients will want plenty of opportunities to soak it all in, and a rail journey offers a charming and unique way to appreciate the alpine scenery or travel through the country's very different regions.

"We have found an increasing demand for worldwide touring holidays that include a rail journey because customers can experience and see far more of a country or region from a train," say Keesia Samuels, Cosmos Tours & Cruises' product and commercial manager. "Of course, Switzerland, with its breathtaking and spectacular lakeland and mountain landscapes, particularly lends itself to a scenic rail journey."

Boasting several rail routes

that continue to make it onto the world's best rail journeys, travelling by train in Switzerland is nothing like your average commute. Clients can expect typical Swiss efficiency and high standards on board, making rail travel a straightforward and pleasant option that's appealing for groups as well as single travellers.

It's also a relatively cheap way of getting around, thanks to the Swiss Travel Pass, which offers unlimited travel in the country

by public transport, plus entry to nearly 500 museums. Prices start from as little as £29 for three consecutive days' travel, with passes available through Switzerland Tourism.

Clients needn't be put off by the thought of spending their entire holiday on the train, either: various operators, including Leger Holidays and Kuoni, offer rail journeys as part of a broader holiday, with accommodation at numerous stop-offs along the way.



PIC TURES: SWITZERLAND TOURISM/MARCUS GYGER/ELGE KENNEDY/BERPE RASO/RAHEI/SHEBAH/OST VON ALLMEN



LEFT:  
Glacier  
Express



RIGHT:  
Golden  
Pass

**BEST FOR... EPIC SCENERY**

If clients want jaw-dropping cinematic vistas, they really are spoilt for choice in Switzerland, with several routes that meander past precipitous glaciers, emerald fields and bubbling mountain streams. The Glacier Express is Switzerland's best-known train, famed for its panoramic views and for being the slowest express in Europe, travelling an average of 24mph over seven-and-a-half hours.

When the view is this impressive, though, clients will be glad to relish every second of the journey, which begins in Zermatt, glides northwards from under the shadow of the Matterhorn and climbs 2,253 metres over the

Albula Pass to St Moritz, crossing 291 bridges and chugging across some head-spinning chasms in the process.

There's no danger of bagging a bad seat and missing out on the view, either: all carriages are kitted out with glass roofs, and in summer months there's air conditioning to keep things comfortable.

Alex Roberts, group marketing and sales director at Great Rail Journeys, says: "While the Glacier Express is known for being a winter holiday, it is becoming increasingly popular to take this trip in other seasons - which makes it into a completely different experience - though still offering the spectacular views Switzerland is known for."



LEFT:  
Lucerne



**If clients want jaw-dropping cinematic vistas, they really are spoilt for choice in Switzerland**

**BEST FOR... TWIN CENTRES**

Equally impressive and boasting another glass roof is the Bernina Express, on a narrow-gauge scenic railway that runs from Chur and St Moritz in eastern Switzerland across the Italian border to the northern town of Tirano, making it perfect for those who want to tick off more than one destination on a trip.

The journey traverses 55 tunnels and offers a spectacular way of crossing the Alps, past waterfalls, glaciers and deep ravines, and with a journey time of four hours, it's a sensible option for those with no time to spare who want stunning views.

The engineering skills that weave the track through perilous terrain are so impressive that the Bernina Express has also become a Unesco World Heritage Site.

Riviera Travel combines trips to St Moritz and Lake Como with a scenic train journey on the Bernina Express from £849 for eight nights.

**BEST FOR... OLD-WORLD GLAMOUR**

For clients seeking a nostalgic rail experience, suggest the Golden Pass Classic, with its vintage, Orient Express-style carriages adding an element of romance to the journey, making it perfect for weddings, anniversaries or other special occasions.

The famed route connects the historic central Swiss town of Lucerne with the green valleys of resort town Montreux, on the eastern end of Lake Geneva. Clients can toast the spectacular views that creep past their window with a glass of red from the train's wine-tasting cellar coach.

**BEST FOR... FOODIES**

It's the eternally divisive dessert quandary: chocolate or cheese? Hungry clients can throw caution to the wind and have both after a journey aboard The Chocolate Train, which departs from the lakeside town of Montreux, ascends to Gruyères, home of the eponymous cheese, and continues to the municipality of Broc, where the Nestlé/Cailler chocolate factory stands.

Various itineraries give guests the chance to visit the cheese factory in Gruyère before moving on to sample chocolate treats in Broc. Railbookers has one such trip, which also tags on a night in historic Dijon, from £929 per person for four nights.

## ➔ BEST FOR... CULTURE

For clients who want as much beauty and culture as possible, there's the Grand Tour, which Switzerland Tourism recommends is taken by both car and train, and which covers such iconic sights as the Matterhorn, the Swiss National Park, Lake Lucerne and towns including Geneva and Basel.

Inntravel's self-guided Grand Tour of Switzerland allows clients to get under the skin of some of the most special regions, and suits those who like to explore independently and flexibly.

Clients will spend three nights in the towns of Zouz, Zermatt, Wengen and Lucerne, and can tag on day trips. Options include rides on the Gornergrat Railway and a trip to Europe's highest train station, the Jungfrauoch.



**In winter, the soaring peaks are covered in dense white powder, making landscapes impossibly photogenic**

to play on, so clients can tag on a few days of skiing to the start or end of their rail trip.

Inghams offers clients the opportunity of a rail transfer to their resort for a ski break after a flight into Zurich airport. Destinations include Wengen, from which clients can reach

the Jungfrauoch by train. Product manager Katherine Page says: "The Swiss rail system is efficient, simple and makes for a relaxing journey to a resort. It's a great way to see the country and the perfect start to a ski holiday."

For an all-inclusive rail option, Rail Discoveries offers its Jungfrau Express in Winter holiday from £1,195 for eight days.

## ➔ BEST FOR... SUMMER

Though its famed frosty summits and icy glaciers conjure up stereotypes of Switzerland as a divine winter playground, it's just as beautiful in summer too: between July and August temperatures can reach 28C, and the landscape transforms to one of lush hills and verdant valleys.

Those with energy to burn can tie a rail journey onto an active break, with activities such as rock climbing, mountain biking and hiking all popular in summer.

Specialist operator Vacations by Rail, which has a new Best of Switzerland by Rail trip for 2017, receives most of its bookings to Switzerland in the spring and summer. The season lends itself to a trip on the Wilhelm Tell Express, which combines rail travel with a journey by paddle steamer that will take clients on a panoramic tour of the birthplace of the Swiss nation, learning about the country's history on the way past landmarks such as Tell's Chapel and the Schiller memorial stone. Inghams' Undiscovered Switzerland includes a trip on the William Tell Express from £849 for seven nights. 



**Travelsphere** offers an eight-day Deluxe Swiss Railways holiday from £1,699 including half-board accommodation, flights, all transfers and transportation and first-class rail travel on trains including the Bernina Express, Glacier Express and the Golden Pass. [travelsphere.co.uk](http://travelsphere.co.uk)

**Great Rail Journeys** offers its Interlaken & The Jungfrau Express at Christmas holiday from £1,575 including seven nights' accommodation with breakfast, six dinners, and excursions on the Jungfrau Railway and the Bernese Oberland Railway. [greatrail.com](http://greatrail.com)



TOP: Hiking towards the Eiger

LEFT: Bernina Express