

Swiss Trains & the Italian Lake District

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Overview

The Highlights

- Journey across majestic passes on two of the world's most picturesque railways, the Glacier Express and the Bernina Express.
- Take in panoramic views of glaciers and peaks from aboard a narrow-gauge cog railway.
- Hear tales of early Alpinists from a local mountaineer.
- Cruise Italy's Lake Como, and stroll the grand Villa Monastero, and enjoy an Italian cooking lesson with a local chef.

The Tour

Climb aboard Switzerland's legendary trains to experience some of the most spectacular scenery in the Swiss Alps, from the twisted peak of the Matterhorn to the breathtaking vistas of the Bernina Pass.

Soar high above Zermatt in a gondola, and enjoy a choice of hikes, walks, and tram rides through beautiful mountain landscapes. Then cross the Alps into Italy and cap off the trip on the shores of stunning Lake Como.

Itinerary

DAY 1: Zürich, Switzerland/Zermatt

Arrive in Zürich this morning and board a train to the charming Alpine village of Zermatt, off limits to cars. Check into the Hotel National Zermatt or Hotel Schweizerhof and gather for a welcome dinner. (D)

DAY 2: Zermatt/Zmutt Valley

Start the day with a walk through the village of Zermatt. This afternoon, ride the gondola up to Schwarzsee or Furi for a walk through the spectacular Zmutt Glacier valley. Enjoy lunch on your own on a terrace overlooking the peaks, and later return to Zermatt by gondola. Or, ambitious hikers can hike to Zmutt, a hamlet of weathered chalets, and continue to Zermatt on foot. Overnight at the Hotel National Zermatt or Hotel Schweizerhof. (B)

DAY 3: Zermatt/Gorner Glacier

Climb aboard the Gorner cogwheel railway, the highest train in Europe, and ascend to a summit far above Zermatt to experience one of the best viewpoints in the Alps. Admire a breathtaking vista that includes Monte Rosa, the Matterhorn, and the Gorner Glacier. Hike down past Alpine lakes to Riffelberg, where we will catch the train back to Zermatt. Pay a visit to the Matterhorn Museum, where a local mountaineer and Alpine historian will recount stories of early attempts to conquer the Matterhorn and other climbing adventures. Overnight at the Hotel National Zermatt or Hotel Schweizerhof. (B,D)

DAY 4: Glacier Express/St. Moritz

Take your first-class seat on the world-famous Glacier Express and set off on a breathtaking journey across three high-mountain passes and 291 bridges, and through 91 tunnels. Enjoy the elegant amenities of the train as we soak up magnificent vistas of sky-scraping, glacier-glazed peaks on our way to the Upper Engadin Valley. Disembark in St. Moritz and settle into our hotel for the evening. Overnight at Crystal Hotel St. Moritz. (B,L,D)

DAY 5: St. Moritz

This morning, take a funicular to the top of Muottas Muragl to admire breath-taking views of the valley below. After lunch on your own, venture outside the city to Atelier Segantini, a museum dedicated to Alpine artist Giovanni Segantini. Meet with a member of the Segantini family for a tour of the artist's former home and workshop. Back in St. Moritz, visit a local patisserie to sample delectable chocolates during a private tasting. Overnight at the Crystal Hotel St. Moritz. (B)

DAY 6: Bernina Pass/Poschiavo

Today, board the legendary Bernina Express, the highest mountain railway in the Alps, to the heart of Italian-speaking Switzerland. Take in extraordinary views of the Morteratsch Glacier from the train's panoramic windows as we climb to the highest point at Ospizio Bernina, 7,578 feet above sea level. Descend to the picturesque town of Poschiavo, where we meet a local guide for a tour of its historic center. Return to St. Moritz via the Bernina Express late this afternoon. Overnight at the Crystal Hotel St. Moritz. (B, D)

DAY 7: Moltrasio, Italy

A spectacular drive through Alpine valleys brings us into the Italian Lake District today. The countryside is dotted with villas in hues of terra-cotta, pink, ochre, and gold, and strewn with tropical vegetation and lush gardens. Our destination is the lovely village of Cernobbio, perched on the western shore of the vast and beautiful Lake Como. Settle into a historic 19th-century villa overlooking Lake Como. Overnight at the Villa Flori or Palace Hotel. (B,L)

DAY 8: Lake Como

Soak in the beauty of Lake Como's lakeside towns. Visit Villa del Balbianello, first founded in the 13th century as a Cistercian monastery and later owned by Italian explorer and mountaineer Guido Monzino. Continue to the delightful town of Bellagio and explore at leisure. Discover Como's historic center, its sunny piazzas, and the Como Cathedral on a private tour. Overnight at the Villa Flori or Palace Hotel. (B,L)

DAY 9: Lake Como

Spend the day exploring the treasures of Lake Como. Board a private ferry for a picturesque ride across the lake to Varenna. Behold a panorama of colorful waterside villages and elegant estates, fringed by palms and pines and backed by soaring mountains. Learn secrets of Italian cooking during a demonstration by a local chef, followed by lunch washed down with local wine. Later, relax on the hotel's terrace, taking in the view before we gather to celebrate our journey with a farewell dinner in the home of a local family. Overnight at the Villa Flori or Palace Hotel. (B,D)

DAY 10: Milan

After breakfast, transfer to Milan's Malpensa Airport for your flight home. (B)

Dates & Prices

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Important note: Airfare to Zürich and return from Milan is not included in the expedition cost. The tour operator will send recommended flights closer to your departure, so do not book your airfare prior to consulting with IRT.

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What to expect: This trip has an activity rating of light/moderate; travelers should be in good health, comfortable walking or standing for extended periods, and prepared for multiple hours of activity on some days. Excursions include daily walks in the mountains and in alpine towns, over uneven terrain with some steep ascents/descents and stairs without handrails. There will options for longer hikes on some days. For those prone to motion sickness, please note that we will be traveling by train, boat, and gondola and driving on winding mountain roads throughout the expedition. We will travel at altitudes up 10,000 feet above sea level.

Accommodations: Throughout the trip, you'll stay in ideally located, high-end hotels with many amenities.