

# The Telegraph

## The ultimate Swiss ski holiday, by rail and piste

Explore Switzerland's best resorts on the nation's legendary rail network with our expert 10-day itinerary

There are few things more quintessentially Swiss than a dinky red train winding over snow-blanketed meadows, encircled by mighty Alpine peaks. Or, for that matter, a steamship sailing across a lake, its gentle wake breaking the reflection of the snow-capped mountains rising above its shores.

Trains, boats, buses and cog railways define Switzerland, representing at once its history and its present. The average Swiss person travels more than 1,500 miles by train each year, more than any other nation, using one of the world's largest and most sophisticated train networks to get to work (Swiss parliament sessions in Bern are timed in accordance with public transport timetables), do their shopping, access hiking trails and go skiing. The Swiss public transport system includes more than 1,000 cableways, cog railways and funiculars, rendering many of the country's summits, glaciers and natural mountain paradises widely accessible.



Switzerland has always been a transport trailblazer, pioneering mountain railways, cable cars and road tunnels. Its tourism potential was spotted early by Thomas Cook, who brought the first British package tour to Switzerland in 1863, travelling by trains, horse-drawn carriages and mules. Then one of Europe's poorest countries, Switzerland responded to the wide-eyed wonder of those early tourists by building more railways, as well as hotels, inns and shops, and radically changed its fortunes.

Many of the train journeys enjoyed by those early tourists remain global icons today. The Glacier Express (billed the world's slowest express train) has ushered travellers from [Zermatt](#) to [St Moritz](#) since 1930, passing over 291 bridges and through 91 tunnels along its stupendously scenic route. The Bernina Express, Europe's highest-altitude transalpine rail route, whisks passengers from Chur, near [Davos](#), to Tirano in Italy, passing over the Bernina Pass (2,253m) and Brusio spiral viaduct. The earliest iteration of the GoldenPass Line (see below) first linked Montreux and Lucerne in 1916.

The famed punctuality, cleanliness and integration of Switzerland's public transport system makes it a joy to travel on, particularly when using the Swiss Federal Railways (SBB/CFF) app. Travellers can buy one ticket to cover an entire journey, using everything from trains and buses to boats and funiculars. A return ticket from Geneva airport to [Verbier](#), for example, includes the gondola from Le Châble to Verbier (and takes just over two and a half hours).

Foreign visitors can buy a Swiss Travel Pass, which grants unlimited access to all public transport, including services such as the Glacier and Bernina Express, plus up to 50 per cent discounts on mountain trains and lifts including the Jungfraujoch (Wengen-Grindelwald), Titlis (Engelberg) and Gornergrat and Matterhorn Glacier Paradise ([Zermatt](#)). It's a one-ticket wonder that liberates travellers to capitalise on everything this mountainous realm has to offer, hopping on and off trains, indulging in the odd lake cruise, zipping up mountains, exploring castles and nipping into museums (it includes free access to more than 500 castles and museums). Bamboozled by choice? Here's how to achieve the perfect blend of Swiss train travel and skiing this winter.

## **Onboard the GoldenPass Express**

Make an early start for a flight arriving in Geneva for mid/late morning. A 10-minute covered walk from the airport will get you to the railway station, where you can pick up the first of several trains each hour to Montreux (journey time roughly 1hr 15min). Once here, store your luggage at the station in lockers located by the elevators (credit cards are accepted) and take a six-minute walk to the iconic [Montreux Jazz Café](#) for a lake-view lunch (the BB burger is legendary).

Refreshed by your first Swiss meal, return to Montreux station to board the GoldenPass Express to Gstaad. There are only two trains in the morning and two in the afternoon, with the last one currently departing at 2.33pm. The journey takes just over 90 minutes, winding up from the palm-tree-dotted shores of Lake Geneva to pass through manicured vineyards and roll through alpine pastures, dense forests and picturesque villages before pulling into Gstaad. The grand-yet-informal [Le Grand Bellevue Gstaad](#) hotel offers guests complimentary transfers from the railway station, saving your legs for a pre-dinner stroll once you've settled into your room and had a restorative drink at the bar.



## Long pistes and a grand spa

Take time to enjoy the exceptional buffet breakfasts served at Le Grand Bellevue before a day's skiing on Gstaad's 220km of flattering slopes, which are dispersed across five distinct areas.

Warm up first on the gentle slopes of Eggli, which offers sweeping blue trails including Gstaad's longest piste, the No.87, which loops down from the top of the Videmanette gondola into the chic town of Rougemont. Ski back towards Gstaad for lunch at the [Eggli Mountain Restaurant](#) – the views from the sunny terrace are stupendous and you can choose to ski back into town or spare your legs and hop on the Porsche-designed Eggli gondola. Recover with a post-ski massage at the Grand Bellevue's capacious Le Grand Spa (one of Switzerland's largest) followed by a traditional fondue at the hotel's rustic Le Petit Chalet cabin.



Explore the ski area further on your next day, asking the hotel to drop you at the Horneggli lift at Schönried to access the extensive Rinderberg ski area (58km of mostly blue pistes), or head to the Glacier 3000 area, which offers the most snow-sure slopes and far-reaching views.

Save some time in the afternoon to explore Gstaad itself, pottering along the car-free streets to gawp at the swanky Hermès and Cartier boutiques, Maddox and Gagosian art galleries and fur-clad celebrities. Leave your mark on Gstaad by throwing some shapes on the notorious GreenGo dancefloor in the [Gstaad Palace](#) hotel.