

The Exmoor Extroverts travelled to Switzerland on a Travel Editions Group Travel bespoke tour for 8 days in September 2019.

This holiday promised heritage railways but gave much more in the way of transport. We travelled on 5 heritage trains as well as 'normal' trains, large and small, buses including post buses, a ferry, a paddle steamer and a cable car - all using our magic train passes.



On the afternoon of 25th September 26 of us were collected by coach to overnight near Bristol airport. This was to avoid getting up in the middle of the night for the early check-in. We were joined in Bristol by Serge Bertini who was to be our tour manager. He proved to be an excellent guide with a wealth of historical knowledge, a great sense of humour, and always friendly and helpful. This enabled Sue to have a 'semi-rest' from the day to day organization of the holiday.



Happily, our morning flight from Bristol was on time and in Geneva airport we were soon through the formalities and on a train for our first hotel in Lausanne. An hour or so later we found the Hotel du Lac located in the centre of town on the shore of Lake Geneva. The weather was fine: blue sky and warmer than I had expected, perfect shirt sleeves temperature in fact.

Breakfast was what one should expect of a European hotel, cereals, fruit, cheeses and cold meat and, for us Brits, eggs and bacon. Then it was out smartly for an all day trip to the Blonay-Chamby rack railway and their very interesting museum. Swiss railways are fantastic; frequent, comfortable trains with wide windows at every seat. Some are heritage steam operated and some modern electric rack railways, smooth fast and steep, and they run, always, on time.



The next day we were to transfer to a hotel in Wengen, high in the Alps, which proved to be car free but was reached by a modern rack railway. To get there involved a full day's travel through some of the best scenery I have seen. The steam hauled Furka rack railway climbed up mountain sides and through tunnels to give us magnificent views of the mountains above and lakes below and reached a height of 2,160m. After returning via the modern railway tunnel we then took a bright yellow post-bus, a very exciting ride over the pass then down to a main-line railway to make our way by train to Wengen via Interlaken.



The Hotel Sun Star at Wengen was my personal favourite – a traditional Swiss wooden structure with fine views mostly towards the Jungfrau, and excellent food and staff. There followed expeditions to the Brienz Rothornbahn railway (as steep as Porlock Hill but much, much longer) and quite chilly at the top, which was 2,244m. The decrease in oxygen could certainly be felt. Then, next day, to the Schynige Platte. This is a grassy highland above the tree line on which cattle and sheep graze in summer. It has a splendid selection of indigenous alpine flowers, some of which are in a protected Alpine Garden near the railhead. The time spent in the mountains was very special where we were surrounded by stunning views of snow-capped peaks, including the Eiger and the Jungfrau with their glaciers and large lakes in view all the time. We returned to Wengen that evening by an off programme but remarkable route by post-bus, which on diversion took an amazing winding narrow lane with seemingly endless U-bends, to a cable car which carried us from the top of the mountain behind Wengen to the middle of the town very near our hotel.



We left Wengen for Interlaken to cruise by a lake ferry to Thun where we re-boarded a main line train to Bern, Switzerland's capital. We toured the city by vintage tram, sadly street works had cut the line and the tram was unable to travel through the city centre. Then it was back to the station to take the train to Lucerne and the Hotel Walden Mann. This is a fine old building in the very centre of Lucerne. Everyone I spoke to seemed to have a unique and charming room. Ours looked out from the first floor to a café and fountain in a small square.

Lucerne is a very compact city on its lake and with the River Reuss feeding eventually into the Rhine. We enjoyed an hour walking tour with a great guide before setting out by paddle steamer along Lake Lucerne for the starting point of the Rigi railway. This vintage electric rack line took us to the top of Mount Rigi, 1,800m above sea level with an extraordinary view of the Eiger, Jung-Frau and mount Monch and their glaciers. Rather surprisingly we had a close fly-past by a de Havilland Venom and Hawker Hunter from the top! The next day we took our final train to Basle where we had another guided tour of this interesting city with a knowledgeable local guide before driving to the airport for our flight home again.



This visit to Switzerland was a tour de force and very much enjoyed by everyone who went. It was a wonderful way to see Switzerland. I hope, for all the other Extroverts who didn't come on this first expedition, that it is offered again!

Peter & Sheila Sutton
Exmoor Extroverts

