

GLACIER EXPRESS: THE ULTIMATE SWISS PANORAMA TRAIN

“The world’s slowest fast train – star on federal tracks – panorama journey through Switzerland’s high Alps – Swiss ‘Orient Express’ resplendent in new glory...” The Glacier Express has given rise to several rhapsodic headlines in the course of time. But what is the secret behind the continued popularity of this 75-year-old rail link between St. Moritz and Zermatt? Or, put differently, what has the Glacier Express got that other trains lack? Currently the Albula Line, a section of the Glacier Express route, is even being considered for entry in the UNESCO “tentative list” – if accepted, this would no doubt further boost the success of the train.

Even when the Glacier Express was first introduced in 1930 its joint operators, the Rhaetian Railway (RhB), Furka Oberalp Railway (FO) and Brig-Visp-Zermatt Railway (BVZ), considered how best to market the tourist rail link. One year after the Glacier Express got underway the following was recorded in the annual report of the Rhaetian Railway: “The new train has absolutely lived up to the high expectations placed on it. And today the Glacier Express is a hit in terms of promoting Switzerland as a whole as well...” Marketing, 1930s style. Outside Switzerland, the Glacier Express today is among the five best-known Swiss tourist brands.

Two railways, two world-famous health resorts, lots of USPs – one train service!

There are many reasons for the continued fascination with the Glacier Express and the USPs in its favour are equally plentiful. The partner railways operating the Glacier Express quickly realised how this particular train could be made to stand out among the wealth of trains on Switzerland’s railway scene – and understood how vital this was for its success. All Swiss trains – including the Glacier Express – claim to be safe, punctual and clean. This alone is not enough. Passengers today expect a tourist-oriented train service to come up with a neatly-bundled experience package including a visit to the glamorous resort of St.

Moritz, the journey through and over the Alps all the way to the equally famous and charming destination of Zermatt – or vice versa. Peppered with exciting highlights, this surprising journey truly is the destination; the ride is everything.

Achieving this success was made easier by the fact that the tourist organisations of the Grisons and Valais recognised the great potential of the Glacier Express and worked hand-in-hand. First and foremost Hanspeter Danuser, Managing Director of the St. Moritz Tourist Office, who even managed to attract TV-attention by giving a performance on his alpenhorn on the Empire State Building in New York to promote the Glacier Express. Gestures like this cannot be taken for granted in an industry usually characterised by an every-man-for-himself attitude.

The journey is the destination

The true jewel in the crown of the Glacier Express is its route through unique mountain scenery. The seven-and-a-half-hour journey offers unsurpassed delights for people with all sorts of interests: railway fans and people interested in technology will be fascinated by the ingenious route layout with its confusing helical tunnels and breathtaking viaducts between Preda and Bergün, marvel at the world-famous Landwasser Viaduct, which is regarded as the landmark of the Albula Valley, or the cogwheel technology which enables the train to climb up to the 2,033-metre-high Oberalp Pass, the highest point of the journey. People who love the countryside will be thrilled by the ever-changing scenery: from charming valleys to craggy rock faces, through ‘Switzerland’s Grand Canyon’ to the high Alpine lake on the Oberalp Pass, and finally through dreamy villages in the Goms all the way to the crowning finale: the view of the ubiquitous Matterhorn in Zermatt! The large panorama windows provide unrestricted views of all the sights as you go.

To Zermatt on board the Orient Express of the Alps

The Alpine Classic Pullman Express – ACPE – is simply an enhanced version of the Glacier Express experience: “The route is the same, but the carriages date from the twenties – in fact people like Louis Armstrong and Field Marshal

Montgomery already enjoyed the pleasures of travel on board these very Pullman cars. Since 2000, the RhB and MG Railway have been offering exclusive trips in the ‘Orient Express of the Alps’, from St. Moritz to Zermatt – or, alternatively, from Zermatt to St. Moritz – during the summer season.

Slanting glasses and an exercise in accuracy

The Glacier Express tops the visual impressions with treats for eyes and palate. The railway companies and elvetino, the operator of the Glacier Express dining car, are particularly proud of the culinary delights on offer on board the train. Meals are prepared from scratch during the journey in the small kitchen and served in the impressive setting of the historic Gourmino dining car or the aptly-named Jumbo, the world’s longest dining car. And the ambience, naturally, is classy: white tablecloths, fresh flowers and porcelain dishes.

The intriguing slanting wine glasses are more than simply a gag: when positioned correctly, they prevent precious drops of Merlot from swashing out of the glass during extremely steep parts of the journey. As a highlight we suggest passengers have waiting staff pour them a grappa or cognac. The precious drink is poured into the tiny opening of the schnapps glass from a distance of a metre with absolute precision – it’s a sight well worth snapping! According to unconfirmed reports this acrobatic feat is part of the entrance test for Glacier Express waiting staff...

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