

## Holiday Switzerland

July 2009

This year we didn't make our own selection of places we wanted to visit, but we booked a RailAway trip to Switzerland. We got all the train tickets and vouchers for hotels, so the only thing we had to do was take the train and enjoy our holiday.



Monday, 13 July

Utrecht – Basel – Luzern

Sunny, 25 degrees Celsius

The ICE train to Basel departed from the train station in Utrecht, so we didn't have to travel to another place; our trip could start right away. The train took us in six hours to Basel. Tjeerd got three times a sms from T-Mobile: Welcome in Germany (with the tariffs for using his mobile phone from there), Welcome in France (very strange, because we didn't travel through France) and Welcome in Switzerland. Six hours later, T-Mobile found out that I was in Switzerland too, so I got a Welcome-sms too.

When we arrived in Basel, we had to change trains to Luzern. I always like to hear another language when we are on holiday, but here in Switzerland they use four languages to communicate. Three languages they speak in their country (German, French and Italian) and for the tourists who don't speak one of those languages, they use English as well. So in the train to Luzern we heard the announcement for the next train station in four languages!

In one hour we arrived in Luzern and we found our hotel very quick, because it's just around the corner of the train station. The hotel, Waldstätterhof, looks very nice. When we booked this trip we could choose between three-star hotels or four-star hotels. Because we are used to youth hostels we chose for three-star hotels, and that's great already.

We checked in and went to our room to freshen up a bit, because it turned out to be around 25 degrees Celsius. (During the train trip we had no idea about the outside temperature, because of the very good air conditioning.) We went to the city center (well, the hotel is actually right in the middle of the city center, so we just went outside) and we walked along the lake and over the very old wooden bridge.

We looked for an ATM because we didn't bring Swiss Francs, only Euros.

When we took money out of the ATM, we felt kind of stupid, because we didn't know the value of the Swiss Francs (normally, I wouldn't leave without knowing everything about the country we were going to, but because of a whole weekend working, I didn't have the time to prepare very well for this trip). Fortunately, we saw the exchange rate in a small souvenir shop.

Luzern has many very nice restaurants with terraces right next to the water and we found a great place to have dinner.

After dinner we walked through the city center for a



while. We walked through some beautiful small streets, visited a church and the cemetery and sat at the lake side, watching the amazing view of mountains.

Tuesday, 14 July

Luzern

Cloudy, 22 degrees Celsius/ Sunny, 28 degrees Celsius

We woke up in the small hotel bed and we heard the rain. Around eight o'clock the weather became better. We had breakfast downstairs in the hotel restaurant, with a waiter who looked like Mr. Bean.



After breakfast we looked at the weather channel on the television, and it didn't look good. But when we went outside, the rain was gone and it was perfect weather. We walked along the river to the Musegg Wall and we climbed in the second tower of the wall. We had a beautiful view at the city and the lake and the mountains all around. We walked along the rest of the wall and we returned to the lake with the many swans. We sat in a park behind the gigantic culture and congress center to have lunch.

After lunch we bought some postcards and we went back to our hotel for a siesta. Our hotel room is located on the backside of the hotel, so we don't hear the street noise. Unfortunately, there's still noise, because of a constructor who's working on a house.

Around four o'clock we walked to the lake, to cool down and get some fresh air. We sat there for a couple of hours (yes, really – I've never sat such a long time just watching a lake, boats, mountains and other people). We bought a take-out dinner, so we could eat it outside at the lake.

#### About the hotel in Luzern

Hotel Waltstätterhof \*\*\* is located in Zentralstrasse, right next to the station, where trains, busses and boats arrive. The city center is just around the corner, with shops, restaurants and sightseeing. The hotel has its own restaurant, which is open during the afternoon and evening. Our hotel room was not that big, but it had everything: TV, coffee and tea facilities, a modern and clean bathroom with a nice shower. Breakfast is good enough, although it took us some time to chew the bread.

The only negative point about the room is the small bed with for each person one gigantic pillow, which you cannot sleep on. So it's a challenge to have a good night of sleep.

Wednesday, 15 July

Luzern – Flüelen – Bellinzona – Lugano

Rainy and cloudy, 20 degrees Celsius/ Partly cloudy, partly sunny, 30 degrees Celsius

We woke up with the sound of rain and thunder. Wow, that's the perfect setting to make a boat trip... After breakfast – where Tjeerd ordered tea, but Mr. Bean gave us coffee – the thunder was gone and the rain was almost over. We checked out of the hotel and ran to the



other side of the street, into the train station. We looked at the train schedule to find out if we could take a train to Flüelen. And yes there was, but Tjeerd really wanted to make the boat trip, so we went on board of the boat. It really looked like an elderly boat trip. Maybe it was because of the early hour (nine o'clock).



Every time when I am on a boat, which I don't like, the weather is awful. So it wasn't a surprise when I heard the rain and felt the wind. Fortunately, this boat trip was on a lake in stead of a sea, so there were no high waves. But still, I didn't like the fact that we had to be on that boat for almost three hours.

We had the option to have an early lunch (for free) on the boat, but as I don't eat on boats, we passed.

We arrived in Flüelen, which I think is a very beautiful name for a place. But unfortunately the Swiss pronounce it like 'Flullen' – and that doesn't sound beautiful.

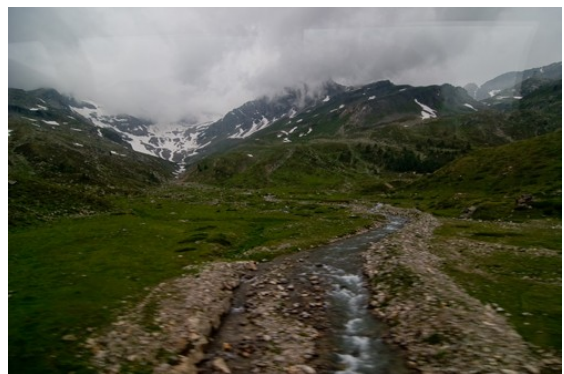
We took the Wilhelm Tell Express train to Bellinzona. The train had one first class panorama wagon, and we had reservations for two seats in that wagon. Of course, something went wrong with the reservations and there were already people sitting in our seats. So we took the first two available seats we saw. After a while we heard from other people that six people where booked in the same two seats on the other side of the wagon. So the reservation system isn't working very well.

The panorama wagon is very nice to be in, because the windows are huge and you can see a lot. But there are also many tunnels, so sometimes it takes some patience before you can watch the great views again.

In Bellinzona we changed trains to Lugano. It was a normal train, but we were surprised when we saw the space around the seats. I think we will never travel second class again.

When we arrived in Lugano, it was still cloudy, but it turned out to be 28 degrees. We walked to the hotel and checked in. Our room wasn't ready yet, so we went outside and sat in the garden (a small park) of the hotel. It didn't take long before I felt a mosquito sting me. And then it stung Tjeerd too. The good thing was that the hotel cat came to greet us.

In the afternoon we walked down the hill, to the city center. It was quite a walk, in 30 degrees Celsius. We sat at the lake side for a while (yes, almost every Swiss town has a lake), but there was no place near where you could go into the lake. So we walked to one of the many fountains and sat there for a while. The water was ice cold, so perfectly refreshing. We had dinner in the center and I ordered the food in my best Italian. The waiter didn't like us or had another reason why he didn't want to look at us directly. After dinner we went to a supermarket (air conditioning!) to buy some fruit, yogurt and bread. We got help from a friendly elderly lady when we didn't know how to price the bananas we wanted to buy.



We didn't feel like walking all the way uphill again, so we were very happy when we found a very

small and strange train. It's specially made to bring people from the train station (uphill) to the city center (downhill) and back. It took maybe one minute, and we were uphill! A great invention. Because it was still very warm outside, we went to the swimming pool of the hotel, in the park garden. It was very nice to cool down and relax in the evening sun.



#### Thursday, 16 July

Lugano

Sunny, 30 degrees Celsius

We had breakfast and the waitress spoke German, so that was easy to understand. We really don't understand which language we have to talk in this part of Switzerland. It's like they talk whatever language they want to use, but the next day they can use a totally different one (or a combination of some languages).

After breakfast we went with the mini train to the city center to buy some postcards. Because it was already pretty warm, we went back to the hotel and went to the swimming pool.

We stayed there all day and because we chose the right spot we had shadow until two o'clock. After lunch more people came to swim, but it was still not that crowded.

At the end of the day the shadow was gone, so we went back to our hotel room to freshen up. We took the mini train to the city center again to buy dinner. We do totally understand why there's a small fountain on every street corner. If not, people will faint. I loved to put my hands and arms in the water to cool down a little, because it felt like 35 degrees Celsius outside – and that's not a temperature I like.

The weather forecast says it's going to rain the next two days, so that's great news. No more very hot weather.

#### About the hotel in Lugano

Hotel Continental Park \*\*\* is located near the train and bus station in Lugano. Most rooms have a balcony with two seats, but unfortunately we didn't have a balcony. The city center is quite a walk, but when you take the special mini train downhill, it's no problem going to the shops and the lake. Very nice is the swimming pool in the park garden of the hotel. In the park garden are many seats and tables for guests to sit and relax.



Our hotel room was small, the bathroom very small.

And the room had nothing hanging on the walls, so it felt kind of empty. The room has a TV (small, but it's working) and air conditioning! Plus a very nice view at the Lago di Lugano. Unfortunately, the hotel is very noisy. You can hear everything your neighbours say and do in their room, and that's really not necessary.

#### Friday, 17 July

Lugano – Milano – Tirano – St. Moritz

Rainy, 18 degrees Celsius/ Sunny, 22 degrees Celsius/ Rainy, 18 degrees Celsius

When we woke up we heard the rain and the thunder. Unfortunately, it didn't stop before we had to go to the train station and we didn't have an umbrella. So we had to run (it wasn't that far) and we made it without getting all wet. We took the train from Lugano to Milano, which is just a one-hour ride. We made a reservation for this train, but it was very quiet.

In Milano we had thirty minutes to change trains and we had to buy a train ticket to Tirano. All the 'fast ticket points' with automates that should accept your bankcard and that should print tickets didn't work.



So we had to go to the ticket desk, but there were many people standing in line and we were afraid we would miss our train if we stood in that line too. We looked around and we saw some automates that accepted only cash and no bankcards. And since we were in a Euro-country, we could easily use the money we still had in our wallets. So we bought our ticket and had to walk fast to the train to Tirano.

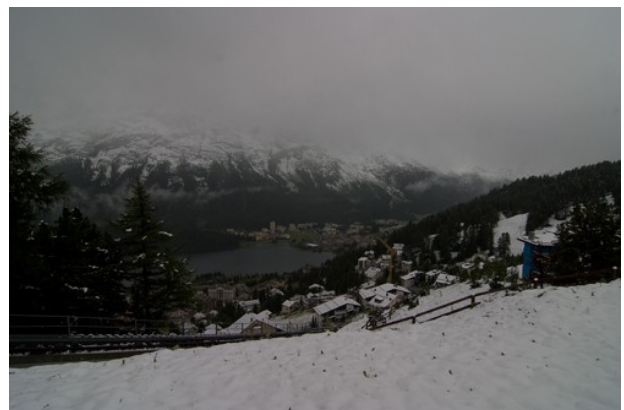
The Italian trains are old and dirty. It's a big change if you're used to clean and modern trains like the ones in Switzerland. We had to sit in this train for 2,5 hours and then we arrived in Tirano, an Italian village, but it looked like Switzerland. We had two hours to spare before our next train left, so we went to a restaurant with a very nice terrace and had lunch in the sun. There were many tourists on the terrace, so there was enough to see and hear. All tourists had a limited time before they had to take the bus or train again, and one German man was very nervous whether they got the bill from the waiter in time. It was a nice show to look at.

We took the Bernina Express from Tirano to St. Moritz (pronunciation: Sankt Mohrietzz). The train had to climb up the mountains, so we didn't go very fast, but the view was amazing. It's a panorama train, so the windows were gigantic and you could see everything around. The coffee cart that came by looked like a Steinbock, because that's the animal that lives here in the mountains.

After a two-hour ride we arrived in St. Moritz, a chic and famous place in Switzerland where the weather is great 322 days a year. Of course, when we arrived it rained, so we don't believe in the 322-days-a-year-great-weather slogan. We didn't want to buy a 'chic' (read: expensive) umbrella, so we looked for a bus and a map with the different bus lines. The bus didn't drive very often, so we looked for an ATM to take out money, so we could take a cab to the hotel. The ATM didn't work, so no money.

The positive thing about us wondering around the train station is that it almost stopped raining. So we walked to the hotel. The train station is at a low level, near the lake, but the village and our hotel is uphill. We followed the signs with 'dorf' and we found an escalator! And not one, but three very long ones that took us uphill. We walked through the village and we found our hotel quickly.

We were very happy with the room we got in this hotel. It has its own television area, an area with a desk and a sleeping area, and of course a bathroom (with bath tub). So we have enough space and we found out that the hotel has free wireless Internet access, so that's a nice bonus.



In the evening we ate in a restaurant that's just around the corner. All the restaurants are open from seven o'clock, so we were extra hungry when dinner was served.



Saturday, 18 July

St. Moritz

Snow and rain, 2 degrees Celsius

We read something about a 'wetter alarm' so we were joking about snow in July. But when we opened the curtains this morning, it was actually snowing! It looked very nice, but our second thought was: what do we put on when we go outside? We only brought summer clothes, not even a jacket or a raincoat. And I only brought one pair of pants that are only  $\frac{3}{4}$ , so that meant I had to go outside with my legs partly bare. We both put on all the shirts we brought, so I was walking around with six shirts on, plus my sweater. It wasn't very comfortable in the snow, so we walked very fast to the shops, to find a shop that sells a raincoat or a fleece jacket for a normal price.

The shops in the village of St. Moritz are very chic, like Versace, Gucci, Ralph Lauren and Prada. But we found a shop with a corner in the back with 'ausverkauf', so I ran to that corner. I found a fleece jacket for me, and a warm sweater for Tjeerd. We didn't have enough cash, so I tried my bankcard and it worked. So we were warm and happy.

After lunch we got two cards from the reception desk in the hotel for free public transport in the region. Even though it was snowing and raining we wanted to go outside. So we walked to a station and took a very small train that brought us up to 2005 meters above sea level. From Chanterella we took another small train to go up to 2486 meters, to Corviglia. When we came out of the station, all we saw was snow and clouds. It was all white, wherever we looked. There were very little people up there, because the weather wasn't very good. We looked around and made some pictures, and then we took the small trains down to the village (1856 meters) again.

We went to the lake to enjoy the view from there, and then we took the escalators back up to the dorf and we walked to the hotel.

I also wrote some postcards, but the mailbox won't be emptied until Monday.

#### About the hotel in St. Moritz

Hotel Soldanella \*\*\* is located in the village of St. Moritz. You can take a bus from the train station or you can just walk up here, using the escalators of course. The hotel has a winter-look: warm, red and cozy. The rooms have much space and there's free wireless Internet access available.

The only thing we missed during our stay were the coffee and tea facilities in the room.



If you stay for more than one night in the hotel, you will get a card so you can use the public transport for free. From the breakfast and dining room there's a wonderful view on the lake (although, that's what they told us, we only saw clouds).

Sunday, 19 July

St. Moritz – Zermatt

Sunny, 15 degrees Celsius

Today, the weather was great. We would gladly have this weather yesterday, but today it's perfect too. We walked through the village to the lake to make some pictures with sun in stead of clouds, and then



we walked further to the train station. The Glacier Express was already waiting for us, so we made a quick picture and went inside the train. We had great seats in a panorama wagon, so we were looking forward to the trip with this train.

It's an eight-hour journey from St. Moritz to Zermatt, but the train takes you through a beautiful landscape, over 291 bridges and through 91 tunnels. So there's a lot to see (okay, not when you're in a tunnel, but besides those tunnels there is) and you won't get bored.

The most popular spot during the journey is the Landwasser viaduct. Unfortunately, when you are in the train you can't see the viaduct very well, so we didn't really understand why the Glacier Express people think this is the emblem of the railway route. We even got a special brochure about this viaduct, so all the passengers where very excited. But when we went over this viaduct, everybody was disappointed ('This was it?' – 'No, that can't be it!').

The most beautiful part of the journey is the part from the Oberalppass to Zermatt, so that's about 150 of the 291 kms. In this part the mountains are very high and there are many impressive gorges.

During the trip we got a three-courses lunch served, so that took some time (for the personnel, because they had to run back and forth with everything: a list of passengers who wanted a lunch, placemats, knives and forks, glasses, plates, first course, clean up the first course, new plates, second course, clean up the second course, asking the passengers which dessert they wanted, bring out the desserts, clean up everything). The whole lunch took about 2,5 hours.

A journey with the Glacier Express is well-organized, because you'll get different brochures, one with two maps of the whole route, everybody gets his own set of headphones, so you can listen to the travel information (about everything: landscape, mountains, gorges, houses, villages, people) during the trip, there are two waiters serving you any time you want, and there's a train manager if you have any questions or complains.

After six hours I thought it was time the journey came to an end, but then we had (again) a very nice view, so the eight hours kind of flew by.



When we arrived in Zermatt, the train manager told us that cars are not allowed in the village. In the station there's an information point where you can ring your hotel for free to get an electric car pick you up. But since the hotel was only a five-minute walk from the train station, and we sat all day during the trip, we just walked to our hotel. It was very nice to see only some electric cars driving around. You don't hear them while they drive (but they drive very gently) and it's very environmental friendly. That's something they should do in the Netherlands.

We found our hotel easily and we checked in. We have our room at the fifth floor, and there are no other rooms on this floor, so it's ours. Our room has an amazing view on the village and on the mountain Matterhorn (4478 meters).

Monday, 20 July

Zermatt

Sunny, 23 degrees Celsius

After we had breakfast we took the Gornergrat Bahne, a small train that climbs up the mountain to Gornergrat. The train is the most expensive train we ever took: 79 CHF (about 48 Euros) for two persons to go to the top of the mountain (3089 meters). And we already got a discount (50% off), because we had a Swiss card. The train started in Zermatt at 1600 meters and needed thirty minutes for the ride.



When we arrived at Gornergrat we had the most amazing view on all the mountains around. At 3100 meters you can see a lot! Even the Matterhorn mountain wasn't that far away anymore. The weather was great, so we made many pictures. And even though it was 5 degrees Celsius at Gornergrat, it didn't feel very cold (of course we wore our St. Moritz clothes, so this time we were prepared).

There were a lot of Japanese people on the mountain too (and everywhere else in Switzerland during our trip) and we think these people are very nice. We made a picture of a Japanese couple and they offered to make a picture of us too. When they saw the Canon camera I handed them, they said: 'Oh, Canon! Japanese! Thank you!' And when we took an elevator to the top of the mountain we were standing there with about ten Japanese people. They looked at the Canon cameras Tjeerd and I were holding, and they all said: 'Ohhh! Thank you, thank you, thank you!' So now we think that all Japanese people work at Canon...

Like the people working at Gornergrat don't earn enough already, they have another way to make money. They put four St. Bernard dogs on top of the mountain and they will make a picture of you with one or two dogs. Of course, many tourists would like to make a picture themselves, but you're not allowed to. The Gornergrat people want to make the picture, so they can ask a lot for money for it. It was nice to see real St. Bernard dogs, even though these ones were sitting there for the tourists.

We had an early lunch on top of the mountain and afterwards we made a walk downhill, to the next train station of the Gornergrat Bahne. It was pretty steep, and sometimes the snow, or the melting snow, made it even harder to walk further down. But it was a nice walk and we are happy we paid the unbelievable amount of money to go up there.

After our mountain trip it was time for a siesta (Italy is not that far away, so we were allowed to do that). And when we got new energy we walked through the village of Zermatt.



It is a real touristic place with many souvenir shops and more hotels than houses. Some tourists walk in brand-new outdoor clothes, mountain shoes and Nordic (or Mid-Europe) walking poles. Maybe they plan to have more holidays like this one, but some tourists do like they don't feel good in their new outfit and they don't know how to behave.



While we were walking along the main street and making pictures, we suddenly heard bells ring. And when we turned around a group of thirty mountain goats ran through the street. Of course it's a tourist attraction, but I liked it.

We had dinner on a terrace in the shadow, because it was too warm in the sun. Next to the terrace grew some plants, and we saw some people making a picture of one particular flower. We were wondering why, but after a while other tourists with cameras came by to photograph the same

flower. That's when we thought about a specific Swiss flower (we couldn't remember the name). And after dinner we saw the same flower in many souvenir shops on different items. We bought some souvenirs (you can't ignore those shops), not with the Swiss flower, but with the usual red and white colours.

#### About the hotel in Zermatt

Hotel Excelsior \*\*\* is located in the center of Zermatt. The train station, shops and activities are all just a couple of walking minutes away. The village only allows electric cars, so it's very quiet on the streets. At night you only hear the water flow from the Vispa river.

Our hotel room has a sitting area (with a couch and two seats), a desk with a TV, a comfortable bed and two closets. The bathroom has a shower. It's clean and working okay. The elevator goes up to the fourth floor, so we have to walk the stairs to the fifth floor, but that's no problem of course. The view from our room is amazing: old houses in the village, very high mountains and the Matterhorn mountain.

#### Tuesday, 21 July

Zermatt – Visp – Basel – Utrecht  
Sunny, 32 degrees Celsius

Our last holiday day, so we had to travel back home again. In the breakfast room we saw the other two Dutch couples we met several times during our trip. Both elderly couples. But who knows, maybe we will still do this kind of trips in about forty years too.

In Zermatt we bought some food for our journey and we waited for the train to Visp, together with many Japanese people. The train ride to Visp was beautiful, and a good way to end this holiday. In Visp we had to change to the intercity train to Basel. This intercity was



very comfortable with big chairs and a lot of space. In Basel we had to wait for a while before the ICE train arrived, so we walked around in the station and spent our last Swiss money. It was 32 degrees outside, so we were happy when the ICE train arrived. We went inside, even though it didn't leave for another thirty minutes, but we really liked the air conditioning.

During the 6,5 hours trip with the ICE train we watched the changing landscape and we listened to some music via the headphones we still had from the trip with the Glacier Express. I walked to the board bistro and I had to walk through four other wagons. Some of them were very warm and crowded, so we were lucky with our seats.



We found out that the back of the train (which became the front of the train from Cologne to Utrecht) was empty and that you can watch the train driver. So from Cologne we changed our seats to the very front seats, right behind the train driver. Tjeerd loved to see the ICE ride from these seats, and I liked it too.

Around 21h30 the ICE train arrived in Utrecht and we walked home from the train station. I am sure we will visit Switzerland again in the future, because we have seen a lot of places, but there is still a lot to discover, like Bern and Geneva.

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