

A Change of Scene

# The Glacier Express

All aboard **Switzerland's** most iconic train for an immersive journey that's as kind to its passengers as it is the planet

Words by  
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Think of an express train. What do you picture? A race from A to B? Snatches of scenery blurred through the window? The Glacier Express proves that travel isn't simply a means to an end. Aboard Switzerland's most fabled train – and indeed, the slowest in the world – “express” doesn't mean speed but “special delivery”.

Winding between the snow-sports havens of Zermatt and St Moritz, this eight-hour, Unesco-protected Alpine route is a destination in itself – and not merely considered so among binocular-toting railway enthusiasts. Some might say you don't “do” the Glacier Express, but experience it. Take a panoramic pew in Excellence Class where floor-to-ceiling windows frame mountains scored by ribbon-like streams and a clued-up concierge will keep you entertained with expert insights into the rip-roaring valleys beyond.

For more than 90 years, the Glacier Express has invited guests to glide through Valais, Uri and Graubünden, skimming over 291 bridges and needling through 91 tunnels as they go. Bookended by the Matterhorn and Piz Bernina, it passes through world-class scenery: the Rhône Glacier, the vertiginous Oberalp Pass, the curvaceous Landwasser Viaduct and the Rhine Gorge – the “Grand Canyon of Switzerland”.

Of course, the Alps taste as good as they look. As a guest in Excellence Class, expect a culinary journey in itself – one speckled with flutes of champagne and fragrant cocktails. As you soar through the icy diorama, you'll indulge in five courses of crag-to-carriage bounty conjured from the foothills while

clinking glasses of wine from some of Europe's most exclusive vineyards. Meals on wheels? If you say so.

It's only right that time spent discovering the Alps by train should be flanked by days skiing across those perfectly powdered pistes. St Moritz and Zermatt might draw a coterie of A-listers, but they aren't merely refuges for winter-sports lovers. Spiked with gabled chalet hotels, these are destinations for gastronomes with a local-first mentality.

Before hitting the hills, we're acclimatising at design-led hotels in Zurich and Geneva, two squeaky-clean cities where crystalline lakes lap against the thrum of busy urban life and the promise of Alpine adventure hovers tantalisingly in the near distance.

The best way to get from city to mountain and back again? Snag one of the Switzerland Travel Centre's all-in-one Swiss Travel Passes and take your pick of any bus, boat or train. It's what the locals do.

This is A to B, with a whole lot of see. ►►

## THE LOWDOWN

For more on the Glacier Express, visit [glacierexpress.ch](http://glacierexpress.ch).

Information about the “all-in-one” Swiss Travel Pass can be found at [switzerlandtravelcentre.com](http://switzerlandtravelcentre.com).

Discover Switzerland's Snow Sports, Design and Lifestyle Hotels, as well as Swiss Deluxe Hotels at [myswitzerland.com](http://myswitzerland.com).





EXCELLENCE CLASS, GLACIER EXPRESS // PHOTO BY LESLEY LAU



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# Zurich

Powered by clean energy and lassoed by cycling paths, Zurich shows that the finer things in life needn't come at the expense of green credentials. One day in the city? No problem. Grab oven-fresh pastries from John Baker, spot Pavillon Le Corbusier in the Seefeld quarter and book dinner at vegetarian pioneers, Hiltl. Later, explore the alternative District Five as the city's mountainous backdrop fades to indigo. Sleep in style by checking into one of the following design hotels – architectural accomplishments in form and function.



MARKTGASSE HOTEL



ZURICH

## MARKTGASSE HOTEL

MARKTGASSE 17, 8001 ZÜRICH

SWITZERLAND

[marktgassehôtel.ch](http://marktgassehôtel.ch)

Rooms from £165

With 39 rooms decked in designer furnishings, a less-is-more lobby made for remote working and Cabaret Voltaire – the birthplace of Dadaism – on its doorstep, this hotel is a sanctuary for aesthetes with a penchant for modernist design.

## WIDDER HOTEL

RENNWEG 7, 8001 ZÜRICH

SWITZERLAND

[widderhotel.com](http://widderhotel.com)

Rooms from £495

Behind the timber facade of these 15th-century townhouses, an architectural prism of glass and chrome lays the foundations for 49 individually designed rooms, dotted with art by the likes of legends such as Andy Warhol and Max Bill.

## 25HOURS HOTEL ZURICH LANGSTRASSE

LANGSTRASSE 150, 8004 ZÜRICH

SWITZERLAND

[25hours-hotels.com](http://25hours-hotels.com)

Rooms from £155

What could be better than an in-house “atelier” displaying local artwork, free bike hire and achingly chic retro paraphernalia? How about a steamy rooftop sauna with views that stretch right out over Zurich's artful tangle of train networks?

# Geneva

This mountain-cradled luxury haven whispers its coolness. Before delving into Carouge – Geneva's “Greenwich Village” – start the day with breakfast at Maison des Arts du Grütli; its café is at the vanguard of sustainable agriculture. Between lunch at Chez Grégoire and dinner on the waterside at La Belotte, you'll have enough time for an impromptu walking tour, taking in Geneva's watch-making heritage; this city has been composing delicate timepieces since the 16th century. For a night to remember, bed down at one of Geneva's feted design hotels. ▶▶



GENEVA

## HOTEL BRISTOL

RUDE DU MONT-BLANC 10, 1201 GENEVA

SWITZERLAND

[bristol.ch](http://bristol.ch)

Rooms from £185

Picture a grand-dame hotel and reframe it with sculptural furniture and arty flourishes; there you have the Hotel Bristol. This illustrious townhouse comes with a Gault-Millau restaurant and a women-only floor. It's modern-traditional, in the best way.

## LES ARMURES HOTEL

RUE OTTO BARBAN, 1204 GENEVA

SWITZERLAND

[lesarmures.ch](http://lesarmures.ch)

Rooms from £245

While its restaurant is a riot of rusticity – dressed in gingham tablecloths and stacked with wooden skis – elsewhere it's all muted greys, glowy back-lighting and modish glass lanterns in this intimate, 17th-century building in Geneva's honey-hued Old Town.

## BEAU-RIVAGE HOTEL

QUAI DU MONT-BLANC 13, 1201 GENEVA

SWITZERLAND

[beau-rivage.ch](http://beau-rivage.ch)

Rooms from £445

From the gilded bedside tables to the panoramic lakeside views framed by crunchy satin drapes, it's easy to see why some of history's most prolific style icons (Grace Kelly and Elizabeth Taylor, to name two) fell for this classic hotel's charms.

# Zermatt

## MONT CERVIN PALACE

BAHNHOFSTRASSE 31, 3920 ZERMATT  
SWITZERLAND

[montcervinpalace.ch](http://montcervinpalace.ch)

Rooms from £525

This self-styled “palace” is vast, but oh-so-intimate. Between the hotel’s natural-toned rooms, its architecturally magnificent spa and nine restaurants which cater to every vibe and palate, choosing exactly how to wind down will be your greatest challenge.

## RIFFELALP RESORT 2222M

3920 ZERMATT  
SWITZERLAND

[riffelalp.com](http://riffelalp.com)

Rooms from £235

Never been snowshoeing? Heli-skiing? Allow Riffelalp’s in-house mountain guide to show you. This is a hotel for the actively curious. Take gulps of pine-scented air while bathing at their outdoor pool (Europe’s highest) with the pointy Matterhorn loitering above.

## RIFFELHAUS 1853

RIFFELBERG 2500 M, 3920 ZERMATT  
SWITZERLAND

[riffelhaus.ch](http://riffelhaus.ch)

Rooms from £295

Riffelhaus 1853’s heritage is felt through its restaurant – famous for its rosti – the spa (inspired by the Matterhorn’s African geology) and its inviting, timber-clad rooms. Plus, the hotel’s proximity to the slopes makes it a must-stay for gregarious skiers.

Zermatt’s reputation ricochets around the Alps for a reason. Its slick-as-whip lift system zips from 2,923m to 3,821m in nine minutes (one of the highest ascents in the world); it’s home to more than 360km of pistes of all difficulties; and, whether it’s snowing or not, these slopes are the kind that don’t go a single day without a thick blast of fresh powder. Zermatt is a destination of extremes.

Peppered among the slopes are a flurry of high-performance Snow Sports Hotels where you can toast boot-beleaguered toes by the fire after a tough day on the mountain. With your all-in-one travel ticket in hand, navigating the town’s network of electric buses is a breeze. Take après on the terrace at Cervo, followed by dinner at the deceptively quaint but fiercely gourmet Findlerhof, before calling it quits and bedding down in your ski-in, ski-out, Alpine retreat.



FINDELN ABOVE ZERMATT

# St Moritz

Few places have hosted the Winter Olympic Games twice, but St Moritz is one of them. Naturally, these pistes, which spill out from villages and hamlets in the Engadin Valley, are not only first-rate, but officially Freeski World Cup quality. St Moritz is far more than a ski destination. Looking for a fresh jolt of adrenaline? Join the skaters, curlers and jockeys who vie for attention on the frozen lake at the resort’s heart.

St Moritz strikes the piste-play balance perfectly. As the birthplace of winter Alpine tourism, the town is home to first-rate Snow Sports Hotels. Not only are these mansions equipped with all of the facilities required to help boost your skills on the piste, but guests can also pick up a daily lift pass for a discounted price. Safe to say, these cosy-chic shelters are also time-honoured masters when it comes to helping tired snow bunnies decompress in an evening.



ENGADIN LAKE PLATEAU

## RANDOLINS

VIA CURTINS 2, 7500 ST. MORITZ  
SWITZERLAND

[randolins.ch](http://randolins.ch)

Rooms from £295

Purity splices through this whitewashed, chalet-meets-urban-spa hotel which comprises five homely guest houses. An infrared cabin, Finnish sauna and misty outdoor whirlpool comprise just some of Randolins’ wellness offerings.

## NIRA ALPINA

VIA DAL CORVATSCH 76, 7513 SILVAPLANA  
SWITZERLAND

[niraalpina.com](http://niraalpina.com)

Rooms from £225

With the Corvatsch cable car opposite, pistes on its doorstep and access to the Olympia Bob Run, Nira Alpina’s sports offering is inimitable. A meal at Stars Restaurant, where locally sourced food is served with immersive vistas, will be one to remember.

## HOTEL CHESA ROSATSCH

VIA S. GIAN 7, 7505 CELERINA/SCHLARIGNA  
SWITZERLAND

[rosatsch.ch](http://rosatsch.ch)

Rooms from £215

This cushty spot in unassuming Celerina is a must-visit for laid-back skiers who treat every meal with reverence. Slung with cable lighting and contemporary furniture, the restaurant here is both a site of culinary experimentation and a hive of local activity.