

13 LUZERN-INTERLAKEN EXPRESS

One of the premier lakes-and-mountains scenic train rides running right through the green heart of Switzerland.

Open a rail map of Switzerland and it's not too surprising to see a train line running between Lake Lucerne and the Berner Oberland. They aren't very far apart as the crow flies and it's logical to link these two much-visited regions with a direct service. But look closer at the topography and you'll notice one relatively big hurdle to such a route: the Brünig Pass, the best way through the mountains but at 1008 metres high still a challenge.

Going up through that narrow pass is the high point of this bucolic train trip but not the only highlight. While it may not have the stunning drama of some other mountain lines, and a rather prosaic name, the Luzern-Interlaken Express has a gently bewitching appeal. As you roll through green fields, past glittering lakes and beneath craggy mountains, you'll slowly fall under its spell. It's hard to think of a more satisfyingly Swiss train ride.

FAST FACTS



STARTING POINT
Lucerne



DISTANCE
74km



ALTITUDE DIFFERENCE
566m



TIME NEEDED
1h 49min



NEARBY LINES
Jungfrauoch ⁹ Pilatus ¹⁵
Luzern-Engelberg Express ⁶



ENDING POINT
Interlaken



BEST DIRECTION
Both ways



WHERE TO SIT
On the right towards Interlaken



PASSES
GA & Swiss Travel Pass: free;
Half-fare card: 50% discount





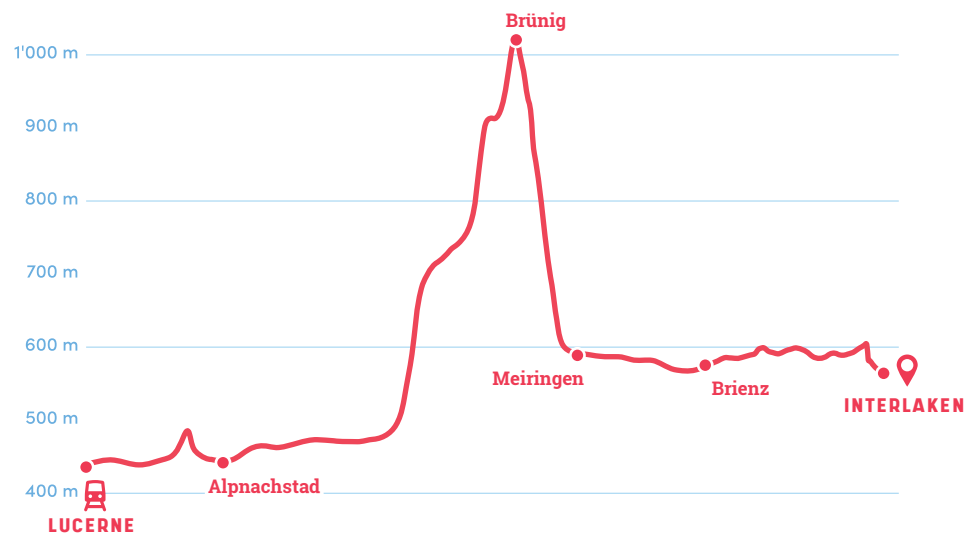
THE ROUTE

As the train leaves Lucerne, the lake is on the left but don't be fooled – the best views are on the right the rest of the way. That's clear at pretty Lake Sarnen with perfect reflections when the water is calm. After that, the railway starts its climb to reach the next lake, Lake Lungern, which was once bigger but then partially drained to create much-needed new farmland.

Now the line rises quite steeply and is single track for most of the way, with places for the downhill train to pass. Lofty peaks, such as Wilerhorn, dominate the green valley while the road twists and turns alongside the railway until both reach the Brünig

Pass. The old station is a popular antique shop, so I often get off to look around before catching the next train one hour later. A slow descent from the pass reveals the wide flat Aare valley framed by high cliffs, ribbon-like waterfalls and a ridge of jagged mountains.

Before going to Lake Brienz, the train diverts to Meiringen, once an essential detour for the line to succeed both politically and economically. Here, we reverse direction but don't move! The same side (now the left) lets you enjoy the opaque turquoise waters of Switzerland's deepest lake all the way to Interlaken Ost.



LAKE BRIENZ

© Die Zentralbahn



THE HISTORY

On 14 June 1888 the Brünig Line opened with great fanfare and six trains a day run by its creators, the Jura-Bern-Luzern railway. Except at the start, it didn't reach either Lucerne or Interlaken but merely the lake beside each town. Passengers had to travel by steamship from Lucerne to Alpnachstad, where could they board the train and then once in Brienz, change to another boat to reach Interlaken. Using the lakes at each end reduced the work needed to build the line but made the original travel time about six hours. You can still take boats at the beginning and end, but using the train between Alpnachstad and Brienz.

The first improvement came with the Lopper Tunnel in 1889, linking Lucerne with Alpnachstad, but the final lakeshore section from Brienz to Interlaken was only completed in August 1916. Finally, this lovely narrow-gauge line could run all the way from start to finish and all year-round – it originally ran only in summer. What had initially been seen as a strategic route to connect Bern with the Gotthard (its one-metre gauge proved unsuitable for cargo trains), the Brünig Line quickly became a railway that was, and still is, sustained by tourism. Today it is operated by the Zentralbahn, an independent subsidiary of SBB.



Brennenstuhl, Meiringen

© Sammlung Joachim Biemann

TRIP TIPS

One year younger than the Brünig Line is the impressively dramatic train line up to the top of Mt Pilatus. Get off at **Alpnachstad** if you want to have the wow factor of travelling on the world's steepest cog railway.

South of Lake Sarnen in Obwalden is the geographical centre of the Switzerland, at a place called **Älggialp**. You can only reach the exact point (46° 48' 4"N, 8° 13' 36"E) on foot though you can drive most of the way from Sachseln.

Meiringen is not only the supposed birthplace of the meringue (hence the name) but also where Sherlock Holmes 'died', at the Reichenbach Falls on the edge of town. Ride the historic funicular up beside the falls to see the precise spot.

