

Real Rail Adventures: *Switzerland*

TRANSCRIPT

Jeff Wilson-On Camera: Hi, I'm Jeff Wilson, and I love trains! I've always been fascinated with figuring out how things work, so to me trains are irresistible—the history, the variety, the technical ingenuity. And if there's one place that's guaranteed to make a rail fan's dreams come true, it has to be Switzerland!

Jeff Voice-Over: Join me as crisscross a nation that seems to love trains as much as I do. Next, on Real Rail Adventures: Switzerland.

Jeff OC: Why do people love trains? Is it the adrenaline rush of big machines, surging against probability up a mountainside?

Jeff VO: Is it the thrill of exploration—the way they can slice through remote areas, giving us up-close views of inaccessible landscapes?

Jeff VO: Maybe it's the nostalgia, the echoes of a time gone by when trains were the lifeblood of everyday people and the station the center of every town.

Jeff OC: Or maybe we love trains because they're just plain fun!

Jeff VO: As an author and host of home improvement TV shows, I've had lots of adventures travelling across the US. Now I'm looking for even more adventure around the world. And I can think of no better way to travel than by train.

Jeff VO: Staking out the center of Europe and chiseled in high relief by the Alp mountain range, Switzerland seems to have it all: sophisticated cities, and welcoming villages; glacial summits, and flower-strewn meadows straight from the pages of Heidi.

Jeff VO: With more than 16,000 miles of track, this country takes pride in a rail system that's the most concentrated in Europe.

Jeff OC: The Swiss ride trains more than any other group of people. Top that off with clean efficient cars that are rarely delayed and you've got a ticket to ride.

Jeff VO: Each year this superbly integrated network carries more than 350 million travelers to work, play, and marvel at Switzerland's infinite natural wonders.

Jeff OC: Modern trains are the mainstay of Swiss transportation, but I'm primed for maximum adventure. I'm going to hunt out a whole range of transport options.....everything from pioneering cogwheels, to death-defying cable cars, to historic train-and-steamboat connections.

Jeff VO: Zurich, Switzerland's largest city makes an excellent launching point for my trip. Teeming with designer boutiques and chocolate shops, Zurich feels prosperous and energetic. Neutral Switzerland avoided the bombing that demolished much Europe in WWII, and Zurich's old town still echoes its medieval days.

Jeff VO: Trams are the heart of the city's transportation system. As far back as the 1890s electrified trolleys started shuttling Zurich's citizens and today trams are still the fastest and most convenient way to get around.

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Jeff OC: The great thing about Swiss trains is they can be combined in so many different ways to create your own custom itinerary. Using several popular scenic train routes as the backbone of my trip, I'll link together several of Switzerland's surprisingly diverse major regions.

Jeff VO: My plan is to start here in German-speaking Switzerland and hook up with some of the country's best scenic trains...I'll head south to Italian-speaking Lugano,...then back up north to beautiful Lucerne. I'll travel west to French-speaking Switzerland...and finish at Zermatt and its crowning glory, the Matterhorn.

Jeff OC: A Swiss Pass is a great option for foreign visitors. It gives you unlimited travel on trains, boats and buses. You can also use it on many city transportation systems and it will give you access to hundreds of museums.

Jeff VO: For a life-long rail fan like me, a train ride has always been the best way to discover new places and to be awed by daunting landscapes mastered by sheer human will.

Jeff OC: You know, when I was kid my dad and I built a model train set in our garage complete with tunnels and bridges, so when I became a builder and remodeler, I came to appreciate the workmanship and the sheer inventiveness of a well-designed railway.

Jeff VO: My first stop is Chur, the oldest town in Switzerland. It's a fusion of meandering streets and historic buildings. The Chur rail station is the terminus of several major national lines and a main stop on the Rhaetian Railway, which operates the country's famous Albula/Bernina line. Several different trains run along the Albula/Bernina line; I'm on what some would consider the most famous: the Glacier Express.

Jeff VO: The full Glacier Express ride traverses 180 miles across Switzerland to Zermatt. But I'm taking just the first leg from Chur to St. Moritz, then I'll catch up with it again later in my trip.

Jeff VO: The Albula and Bernina line is considered a tour de force of rail engineering.

Jeff OC: Anyone captivated by trains should experience this ride at least once in a lifetime.

Jeff VO: First opened in 1904, the line took only five years to construct. It triumphs over an abundance of natural obstacles, negotiating nine viaducts and passing through seven tunnels. Steep ravines and gorges are spanned with confidence by impossible-seeming bridges.

Jeff VO: The celebrated Landwasser viaduct was built without scaffolding— its iron underpinnings plunged deep into the earth while cranes set bricks in a robust façade.

Jeff VO: Called by some the most ingenious railway ever built, the Albula and Bernina have been jointly honored as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Jeff VO: In the small town of Bergün, I discover the Bahnmuseum and learn more about the determination that went into the rail construction.

Reto Rostetter, Rhatische Bahn AG, OC: "The Albula was first open in 1904 it took about 4 or 5 years to build the whole line between Chur and Preda.

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Reto OC: “There were a lot of people from Italy coming to build this line. I don’t know how many, but over 2000 worked alone to make the hole for the Albula tunnel.”

Jeff OC: “So it would have been really dangerous work too, wouldn’t it?”

Reto OC: “It was. There were several deaths during the building period. You can imagine it was all handwork, and they had dynamite and water drills and no big engines to build the tunnel, it was really hard work.”

Jeff VO: Back on the train, we head south into the heart of the Engadine valley, a long sweep of plummeting slopes and shimmering lakes, anchored by the area’s star attraction: the town of St. Moritz. Swanky St. Moritz glows with the confidence of a premier resort town. Some call this the birthplace of Swiss tourism. In the 16th century, a German doctor hailed the waters here as the best in all of Europe and from that point on people flocked from around the world to this mountain retreat.

Jeff VO: In the summer, it has a laid back feel as carefree shoppers troll the streets in search of the latest fashions. In the winter it explodes in a frenzy of outdoor sports with everything from skiing to horseback riding to bobsledding.

Jeff VO: In the distance the sound of Alp horns, the favorite instrument of Swiss mountain dwellers, keeps locals grounded in tradition.

Jeff VO: Just outside of St. Moritz, at the foot of Mt. Corvatsch, an aerial cable car levitates my fellow thrill-seekers and me to the zenith of the Engadine Valley.

Jeff VO: Aerial cable cars are a type of lift that uses one or two stationary cables for support, while a third moving cable provides propulsion.

Jeff VO: This fifteen-minute ride takes you to the highest point accessible by cable-car in the valley. At 10,000 feet above sea level, Alpine houses are dwarfed down below. Forests, meadows and villages blanket the surrounding hillsides. And the nearby glacier looks close enough to touch.

Jeff VO: Back at the St. Moritz station, I’m headed for more adventure. To get to Lugano, one option is the Bernina Express, a panoramic train that connects Switzerland’s glacial north to its sunny south. But I’ve heard great things about this country’s scenic bus routes, so I’m opting for another mainstay of Swiss transportation: the PostBus.

Jeff VO: I’m told that these buses trace their roots to the days when stagecoaches carried mail across mountain passes. Today they provide not only commuter service for working folks, but also tourist routes that allow visitors to plan flexible trips to some great off-the-beaten-track destinations. This one, called the Palm Express, takes an especially scenic path to Lugano.

Jeff VO: On the the four-hour trip, we leave behind the glacial lakes of the north and descend terraced hillsides and hair-pin curves on the way to the country’s balmy southern climes.

Jeff VO: Feeling more Mediterranean than alpine, Lugano is the perfect blend of Swiss poise and Italian passion. It seems to exude graceful sophistication. Bathed by a temperate micro-climate, Lugano’s tree-lined boulevards and holiday resorts curve around a crystalline lake capped by dramatic mountain views.

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Jeff OC: One of the best parts of travel is the chance to sample local snacks. And here down south that means gelato. *Uno chocolate per favore?*

Jeff VO: It seems there are train-lovers the world around. In the nearby town of Mendrisio, I visit with fellow rail fan, Marco Nimis. He's president of the San Gottardo Club, a volunteer group that's dedicated to restoring historic trains.

Jeff OC: "This looks like an enormous amount of work."

Marco Nemis, President, San Gottardo Club, OC: "The problem is with these machines you cannot go to a shop and buy a replacement piece, so everything you take out you have to do it again with factory you have to do every piece new."

Jeff OC: "Make it yourself."

Marco OC: "Yes make it yourself."

Jeff VO: Marco explains why he's so dedicated to this work.

Marco OC: "It's history. How can you say, so that people see how it was at the beginning of the century, how they worked, how solutions they had to solve some problems and I can tell you they are very very good sometimes. Sometimes you say 'Wow, that was a good idea.'"

Jeff OC: I know it looks complex, but I know it's a fairly simple system right. You burn coal to create steam.

Marco OC: "You heat them up; it's like a coffee machine."

Jeff OC: "Then it's trapped so it has to go somewhere."

Marco OC: "It goes up there, all the steam goes up there, then the valve takes and comes down to the cylinders."

Jeff OC: Well, first of all where's the steering wheel? I'm kidding I know there's no steering wheel on a train. But you have pressure gauges right?

Marco OC: "On this side is the guy who guides the machine, is the J: Poor man shoveling the coal, you."

Jeff OC: "Not only was the railway complex to build, but the machines that came across a hundred, a hundred thirty years ago and opened up the region were elegantly engineered."

Marco OC: "Absolutely, and this one here it's a machine made for a very short range, if you look at the big ones they are a little bit more complicated than this one, then you need everything more, everything bigger, but the principles are always the same, fire, water, steam and pressure, then it works."

Jeff OC: "That's beautiful."

Jeff VO: A half hour north of Lugano, the castle town of Bellinzona contrasts a lush hillside setting with stark medieval battlements. Local history buffs tell me that early prehistoric forts were bulked up into these massive defensive structures in the 15th century.

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Jeff OC: This town stood on a major north-south trade route plied by medieval merchants. The powerful Dukes of Milan wanted to clamp control over the area so they could impose taxes and prevent invasions from the north. They strung a series of defensive forts across the entire valley.

Jeff VO: The town's "Three Castles" have been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2000. Castelgrande, high on a terraced hilltop, lords over the valley. Connected to it by ramparts is the Montebello Castle. And the stalwart Sasso Corbaro, built in 1479, sits alone on an outcropping facing other two.

Jeff VO: Not far from Bellinzona, the Ritom cable car pulls me up a dizzying track whose maximum incline is the steepest in Europe and one of the steepest in the world. The track is long— about the length of 14 football fields.

Jeff VO: The cable car was originally built about a hundred years ago to help in the construction of a pipeline that carries water down from Lake Ritom, which sits on the mountainside high above the valley floor.

Jeff OC: Lake Ritom is not only picturesque but provides a vital service: it generates hydro-electric power for Swiss railways. Most trains use ultra-clean hydroelectricity and some even produce their own electricity when traveling downhill.

Jeff OC: "How much of the railway's power is renewable energy?"

Roberta Trevisan, SSB Railway, OC: "At the moment in this year it's 83% renewable energy and our project for the Swiss Railways will be till the 2025 so in thirteen years will be a hundred percent of the energy will be renewable energy."

Jeff OC: "So it will really be a green and ecofriendly way of traveling, I mean it is already but it will be even more so."

Robert OC: "Yes, more than today."

Jeff VO: Switzerland has earned the world's respect with its forward-thinking policies on the environment. The Swiss work doggedly on strategies to counteract global warming and slow the melting of glaciers, which are so critical to life on the continent.

Jeff VO: Back in Bellinzona, it's time to board the William Tell Express, a train and boat connection that carries visitors between two of Switzerland's most scenic areas: the warm Italianate south and the Germanic central region.

Jeff VO: The train portion of the journey is less than two hours, and is a portal to some great historic sites. Panoramic cars framed by expansive windows give everyone a ringside seat to the passing vistas.

Jeff OC: You gotta admit, trains have a lot of advantages over cars. You can walk around and stretch your legs. You can relax, read or even nap. But with scenery like this, you won't want to sleep.

Jeff VO: Right now we're headed toward the Gotthard Pass, a perilous route through the Alps that's been both a thoroughfare and a conundrum for more than 700 years.

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Jeff OC: Over the centuries humans have tried many different ways to cross the intractable barrier of the Alps. Roads, tunnels, even a “bedeviled” bridge...

Jeff VO: In the 13th century, locals strung a wooden bridge over the surging Reuss River, a task so difficult they had to make a pact with the Devil to complete it. Satan’s price was ownership of the first soul who crossed it.

Jeff OC: But the villagers tricked him by sending a goat for the inaugural crossing. Ever since, any accidents here have been attributed to Old Nick seeking his revenge.

Jeff VO: This train churns through the nine and half-mile-long Gotthard tunnel, drilling deep into the murkiness of the mountainside. First opened in 1882, this tunnel exacted a steep toll: the lives of around 200 workers were lost.

Jeff VO: The train drops me in Flüelen, a pretty hamlet on the southern tip of Lake Lucerne. This town has always been a crucial stop on the trade route from south to north, affording water access to Switzerland’s larger cities.

Jeff VO: Today it’s the boarding point for a historic paddle-wheel steamer, the boat portion of the William Tell Express.

Jeff VO: Though Lake Lucerne reaches long sinuous arms for miles in every direction, the sheltering mountains and spire-lined shores give it the feel of a small storybook lake.

Jeff VO: Five paddle steamers, restored to their early glory, troll these waters. A common highlight on Swiss steam boats is an open engine where you can see the whirling, plunging machinery in action.

Jeff VO: We’re travelling through a region that’s considered the birthplace of Swiss democracy. In Rütli Meadow, on the shore of Lake Lucerne, a fateful meeting took place—an event that’s considered the turning point in Swiss democracy. It was here that three cantons first joined together to make a commitment to freedom and swear to mutually support one another against French and Hapsburg rule. Those turbulent times spawned a tale you’ve no doubt heard: the story William Tell.

Jeff OC: William Tell was an early folk hero in the Swiss movement for independence. According to legend, Tell refused to remove his hat in tribute to a Habsburg officer. Striking back, the officer tried to impugn Tell’s reputation as expert marksman by forcing him to shoot an apple off of his own son’s head. Fortunately Tell split the apple and not the head.

Jeff VO: Lunch on board is a leisurely affair, featuring hardy local specialties such as Swiss macaroni and cheese, topped with caramelized onions and applesauce.

Jeff VO: Our boat makes a stop in Vitznau, a thousand-year-old town hugging the shore of Lake Lucerne, and home to a bit of rail history.

Jeff OC: 150 years ago, a Swiss engineer named Nikalaus Riggenbach foresaw the potential of scenic railways above Lake Lucerne. He patented a special cogwheel system that would allow cars to ascend steep inclines.

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Jeff VO: A cogwheel railway, also known as a rack-and-pinion, uses toothed wheels that interlock with rails that pull the cars up the mountainside.

Jeff VO: The Vitznau-Rigi line was the first cogwheel railway in Europe built on a mountain, and only the second in the world, after one on Mount Washington in New Hampshire.

Jeff VO: Lucerne. The name alone evokes a certain sense of old world elegance. It's the most populous city in central Switzerland and the nexus of transportation for the region.

Jeff OC: A few hundred years ago, when it was the custom for well-to-do British travelers to take a “Grand Tour” of Europe, Lucerne became one of the newly discovered hotspots.

Jeff VO: Writers and painters such as Lord Byron, Percy Shelly and Joseph Turner raved about the area's natural beauty and what they described as its “simple authenticity.” Lucerne soon became a must-see on the tour circuit.

Jeff VO: Visitors ambled Chapel Bridge past the tower that surges staunchly from the waterfront. This timeworn wooden crossway was first built in 1333 to link the old town on one side of the river to the newer town on the other. It's the oldest truss bridge of its kind in the world, though sadly, a fire raged here in 1993 forcing extensive renovations.

Jeff VO: Touring a lively city like Lucerne can really work up an appetite.

Jeff OC: “Hey, what's good? I'll take a bratwurst...”

Jeff VO: Sausage vendors—the Swiss version of hotdog stands—are especially popular here in the German-speaking part of the country.

Jeff VO: Seductive Alpine peaks that ring Lake Lucerne beckon with world-class mountain rail and cable car rides.

Jeff VO: Carving a craggy silhouette against the sky, Mount Pilatus has always been a force to be reckoned with.

Jeff OC: Perplexing engineers and inspiring wild legends, it makes a great side trip from Lucerne.

Jeff VO: Another cogwheel train—this one the steepest in the world—shoulders adventurous souls up the slopes of this nearly 7000 foot summit. The mountain has spawned multiple legends, including one claiming it was named Pilatus because it was the burial site of Pontius Pilate. In fact, up until the 1600s locals were forbidden to climb the mountain for fear the old Roman's restless ghost would retaliate for the intrusion by conjuring thunderstorms.

Jeff OC: Another tradition holds that dragons once roamed these mountain caves. In 1619 one witness (who was considered quite reliable at the time) reported this:

Jeff VO: “As I was contemplating the serene sky by night, I saw a very bright dragon with flapping wings.....Its head was that of a serpent with teeth, and when it was flying, sparks were coming out of it like the embers thrown by an incandescent iron when struck by smiths on an anvil.”

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Jeff VO: The original funicular that ferried riders up nearby Mount Stanserhorn was built in 1893. A funicular is a type of cable rail in which the car that's going up is counterbalanced by the one coming down. Today, this vintage car is just half the fun.

Jeff OC: A ride that propels us back into the 21st century is the new “Cabrio.” This is the world’s first cable car with a roofless upper deck.

Jeff VO: That means a head-spinning 360-degree perspective for riders approaching the 6200 foot crest of the Stanserhorn—more than four times the height of the Empire State Building.

Jeff OC: Relying on what’s considered the latest in cable car design, the Cabrio slides along two side-mounted support cables.

Jeff VO: If the ride isn’t reward enough, a gravity-defying platform on the mountain top supplies far-flung views reaching more than 60 miles over the Swiss Alps.

Jeff OC: A rail journey through Switzerland wouldn’t be complete without a stop by the Transportation Museum.

Jeff VO: This great tribute to transport is the most visited museum in Switzerland. The Swiss are justifiably proud of their phenomenal success in integrating human invention into the glacial contours of their Alpine homeland.

Jeff VO: The earliest railways, built in the 19th century, were a revolution in transportation that opened Switzerland’s previously inaccessible landscapes to scores of travelers. The Swiss soon found themselves playing host to visitors from around the globe. This collection of more than 3000 objects, including countless interactive displays and simulators, is Europe’s largest exhibit celebrating mobility and transportation.

Jeff VO: Stoked for more adventure, I’m leaving Lucerne in style on another of the country’s great panoramic rails: the Golden Pass. Cutting a swathe through central Switzerland, the Golden Pass takes me first to the Bernese Oberland region and the resort haven of Interlaken, then on to Montreux and the shores of Lake Geneva

Jeff OC: While it’s impossible to pick a favorite among the country’s scenic rails, this one would have to be high on my list.

Jeff VO: It’s a sampling of Swiss rural life with View Master-like moments captured in time. Sit back and enjoy the ride. There are spans of farmland specked with roaming cows; then a rush of forest streaked by fast-flowing streams; finally the ascent to the daunting Brünig Pass.

Jeff OC: Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was both appalled and inspired by the palpable danger of this particular Alpine hurdle. It was near here, at Reichenbach Falls, he decided to kill off his beloved character Sherlock Holmes.

Jeff VO: Most scenic trains offer formal multicourse dining cars like this one, as well as more casual options.

Jeff OC: There’s something so stylish about dining on a train. What could be better than a fine meal served against a backdrop of Swiss countryside?

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Jeff VO: The passing tableaux are hypnotic, like scenes from a movie. Movie goers have long had a particular fascination with trains. Legend holds that when the French film makers the Lumiere brothers put the first train on film, the audience was so overcome by the image of a life-sized train coming at them that they screamed and ran to the back of the auditorium.

Jeff OC: But movies set on trains caught on. Classic films such as “Murder on the Orient Express,” “The Lady Vanishes,” and “Strangers on a Train” piqued audience imaginations and train travel became forever linked with mystery, romance, and intrigue.

Jeff VO: Adventure capital of Switzerland, Interlaken is a place of superlatives. On the doorstep of the highest mountains in Europe and reigning over crystal-blue lakes, Interlaken is a magnet for adventure seekers from around the world.

Jeff OC: Along with an embarrassment of scenic riches, Interlaken’s central location makes it the perfect base point for exploring nearly any corner of Switzerland. Outdoor activities abound, in every flavor and fitness level.

Jeff VO: In winter, there’s skiing, snowboarding and sledding against a backdrop of iconic mountains. In summer you’ll find everything from hiking to sailing...or for the more adventurous, bungee jumping, paragliding and hang gliding. And there’s no better place in the world for it! Viewed from above, it’s easy to see how Interlaken, which means “between two lakes,” got its name.

Jeff OC: Larger Lake Thun is to the West, Brienz is to the east, and Interlaken is right in the middle.

Jeff VO: And with these two handy and inviting lakes, it would be a crime not get out on the water.

Jeff VO: The Lötschberg, a century-old steam boat, patrols Lake Brienz with aged dignity. When it was built in 1914, the ship was intended primarily for tourism, but also contributed its fair share of labor, hauling workers and merchandise from shore to shore. Today it’s been painstakingly restored to bring back the feel of those early days. The ship docks in the village of Brienz, a place that, two centuries ago, found a creative way to put itself on the map.

Jeff VO: Back then, villagers struggled to scratch out the humblest of livings. But when wealthy tourists began flocking to the area for the scenery, residents found they could sell souvenirs carved from local forest wood. A new industry was born.

Jeff VO: The Brienz Rothorn Railway, built in 1892, is Switzerland’s oldest steam cog train. Even after most Swiss trains were electrified, this little engine hung on to its old-school ways. It was the city of Bern that sponsored this rail pioneer. Back in the day, the people of Bern saw the success Lucerne was having bringing in tourists and they wanted to pull some of that action further west. With its spectacular vistas of the Bernese Oberland, this became one of the most popular destinations for 19th century travelers.

Jeff VO: Across the lake, surrounded by massive rock faces, the Lauterbrunnen Valley is one of the steepest in Switzerland. The dozens of cascading waterfalls inspired the name Lauterbrunnen, which means “many fountains.” Originating in the high Alps, these streams spout so abruptly from the rocky precipices that they often dissolve into near mist before reaching the valley floor.

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Jeff VO: My next stop would have to be a high point on any traveler's list: the great Jungfrau Mountain.

Jeff VO: From Lauterbrunnen you can catch a cogwheel train to the station at Kleine Scheidegg. From there you board the Jungfrau Railway—the highest train in Europe.

Jeff VO: The train climbs over 4500 feet as it chugs more than six miles up the mountain. Much of the ride is through a tunnel, bored into solid Alpine rock.

Jeff OC: **Completing this tunnel was no small task back at the turn of the 20th century. Hundreds of laborers worked round the clock and several men died on the job. In one notorious accident, 30 tons of dynamite went off in an explosion that was heard all the way to Germany.**

Jeff VO: Plagued by technical challenges and financial stress, the rail was finally completed sixteen years after its start. Once at the top, all hardships are forgotten as one of the most amazing views in Europe opens out before you.

Jeff OC: **The Aletsch Glacier is the largest in the Alps and a critical source of water for European rivers and the people of the continent. Sadly, like other Swiss glaciers, the Aletsch is shrinking due to global warming**

Jeff VO: Paying homage to the Jungfrau-Aletsch area and its unique ecosystem, UNESCO recognized it as the first World Natural Heritage Site in the entire Alpine region.

Jeff VO: Stifle your fear of heights and climb this steep stairway for a unique view at the glacier. The Jungfrau zip line will hurl you at breath-stealing speeds straight out over the massive river of ice. This is one form of transportation that's sure to get your heart pounding and give you an entirely new perspective on life.

Jeff VO: Deep within the heart of the glacier, otherworldly tunnels of the "Ice Palace" offer a venue for a local art form: ice sculpting. Life-like animals glow in blue stillness.

Jeff VO: Back in Lauterbrunnen, the stage is set for more adventure as I board the aerial cableway that glides 9700 feet up the megalith known as the Schilthorn.

Jeff OC: **This cable ride is the most technically challenging ever built. It moves in four stages.**

Jeff VO: Each pulls riders ever higher over precipitous slopes that, in the winter, offer the highest ski runs in the region. At the top is a pulse-quickening panorama that stretches as far France, Germany and Italy. It's easy to see why the Schilthorn was chosen as the setting for dramatic scenes in the classic James Bond film, "On Her Majesty's Secret Service."

Jeff VO: Inside the visitor center, a newly updated Bond exhibit uses virtual and interactive technology to immerse visitors into key parts of the movie. The helicopter simulator lets you try to navigate landing on a high mountain ridge. Or you can duck and weave as Bond did, hurtling down one of Switzerland's notoriously dangerous bob-sleigh runs.

Jeff OC: **This is a bit faster than the Swiss train system.**

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Jeff VO: Nearby, the famous revolving restaurant entertains visitors with Bond-themed menu offerings. This restaurant, relying on solar-powered platforms, makes a 360-degree rotation in just under an hour.

Jeff VO: Leaving Interlaken, the Golden Pass delivers me to my next destination: Lake Geneva and the city of Montreux.

Jeff VO: Home of the famed jazz festival, Montreux curves gently around a rippling waterfront.

Jeff OC: Here's where you get a feel for French Switzerland—in the architecture, street signs and sidewalk cafes.

Jeff VO: Neighborhood bakeries serve up a decadent array of cookies, rolls, and pastries.

Jeff OC: Bon jour...this all looks very good, do you speak English? ...

Jeff VO: The region's main resort area, Montreux made its mark as a hip hideaway for artists, writers, expatriates and musicians. It became a second home to Freddy Mercury who wrote and recorded his last songs here.

Jeff VO: The Chateau Chillon, Montreux's most prominent landmark, was once the headquarters of French counts who controlled the area in the middle ages. Lord Byron, moved by the legend of young local imprisoned here, penned his famous poem "The Prisoner of Chillon."

Jeff OC: What would Switzerland be without chocolate? And what's even better than chocolate? A chocolate train!

Jeff VO: The train that travels from Montreux to the town of Gruyeres isn't actually *made* of chocolate, but it does take you to some pretty tasty places. The elegant first-class carriage, complete with fresh croissants and coffee, harkens back to the days when travel was a gracious, leisurely affair.

Jeff VO: The village of Gruyeres seems like page torn from the middle ages. Cobbled streets and flower boxes frame a storybook setting. A powerhouse of a castle presides over town, built 800 years ago by a local Count of Gruyere who hoped to dominate the valley below. But beneath the surface, Gruyeres is actually a complex, eclectic mix of cultural influences. The Christian chapel of St. Joseph has been adapted into the "Tibet Museum" featuring a collection of Buddhist art from the Himalayas – a stunning blend of East and West. The town's also gained an international reputation as a magnet for contemporary artists, such as surrealist H.R. Giger.

Jeff VO: But it's no surprise that the real specialty here is cheese. At the "House of Gruyere," you can delve into the intricacies of gourmet cheese making. And watch as enormous kettles holding thousands of gallons of milk are eventually transformed into endless racks of cheese wheels.

Jeff OC: "So Guillaume, we've come to the birthplace, the home of true Gruyere cheese, tell us what makes Gruyere so special."

Guillaume Schneuwly, La Gruyère Tourisme, OC: "Gruyere is a very old tradition here in the region, cheese making is very old tradition, and we make it since a very long time, more than a thousand years ago. But we have the Gruyere name since the 17th century."

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Jeff VO: Guillaume says it's the healthy lifestyle of their cows, feasting on fresh grass and mountain flowers. That's the secret to their trademark cheese.

Guillaume OC: *"Our cows are really like cared, they all the time outside, then most of the summer they are fed in the mountains, so they almost always eat the natural grass, the natural stuff, so they not feed with other ingredients and they makes something important because we get a very good milk quality with this process of milking."*

Jeff OC: So Gruyere is aged in different ways. So there's a young cheese like a 6 month here, this is an 8 month cheese, and this is a 10 month cheese. And the flavors get more complex as they age. So the 6 month cheese is a bit milder, you can taste all that grass and those flowers. Then the 8 month is a slightly deeper creamier texture. Then the 10 month, it's a little bit drier, a very deep more complex flavor. Excellent cheese! I'm going to keep this for myself.

Jeff VO: The best way to warm up on a rainy afternoon is with a lunch of authentic fondue. This Swiss tradition, which involves dipping bread into a communal pot of simmering cheese and wine, comes from the French word for "melt" and has been a favorite indulgence here for at least 300 years.

Jeff VO: Next stop on the culinary train trip is Broc, home to the Cailler-Nestle chocolate factory. Enticing aromas drift from the depths of the factory, a great temple to the cocoa bean. Here you learn how simple ingredients are refined by expert chocolatiers and shaped into the sweet delicacies most of us can't resist. The Swiss have always prided themselves on the quality of their chocolate and the tasting room here is like a childhood dream come true.

Jeff VO: Back in Montreux, a cogwheel train departs for the hour-long trip to an imposing rocky outlook called Roche-des-Nayes. It charges up the steep slopes, crossing a gauntlet of alpine woodland and jagged cliffs. We're afforded sweeping views of Lake Geneva and a splendid panorama of the Alps.

Jeff VO: For the final leg of my journey, I change trains in the town of Visp to rejoin the Glacier Express. From there I travel to Zermatt and on to the Matterhorn. The Glacier Express started out as a summer-only train but grew so popular it began operating year round. If you were to take the entire trip from St. Moritz to Zermatt, it would take about seven and a half hours, navigating dozens of tunnels, hundreds of bridges and some of the most beautiful landscape in Europe.

Jeff VO: The town of Zermatt went from obscure mountain village to prime tourist base camp when the Matterhorn was discovered by sightseers a century and a half ago. It's welcoming and walker-friendly since, like a number Swiss towns, it's car free.

Jeff VO: Leaving Zermatt, the Gornergrat railway is an ascent into the stratosphere. After the Jungfrau, this is the second highest railway in Europe and the highest that is open-air. Work started on this cogwheel rail back in 1896 and took just two years to complete. As the cars scale the stony incline, civilization seems to drop away and you get closer and closer to that icon of the Alps, the Matterhorn.

Jeff VO: Pinnacle among pinnacles, the Matterhorn stands like specter against the sky. A million years ago, this was a rounded mountain, sculpted slowly by glacial erosion to its distinctive pyramid shape. One of the deadliest peaks in the range, this was the last major Alp to

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be summited by climbers. The first ascent ended in tragedy when four members of the party fell to their deaths coming down. Today, the four sheer faces of mountain, continue to taunt and tempt climbers, and bedazzle all who stand below.

Jeff OC: If trains could talk, what stories would they tell? Here in Switzerland, they'd have no shortage of narratives.

Jeff VO: They'd spin tales of historic figures battling for democracy... and clever engineers constructing world-class rail systems. They'd tell of glaciers that move mountains... and mountains that move spectators with emotion; of luminous lakes; and hushed alpine fields. And they'd tell stories of friendly locals who welcome strangers into their way of life.

Jeff OC: Didn't a wise person once say that life should be about the journey? Maybe that's what makes train travel so satisfying. There's nothing like a train trip through an astonishing country like Switzerland to immerse you in new experiences, give you time to ponder the larger world around you, and ultimately to savor the ride.

Jeff OC: I'm Jeff Wilson. Thanks for joining me.