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THE SWISS INTERNATIONAL PASS

Part 1 – Basel to the Graubünden

Graeme Easton



The southern terminus of the RhB at Tirano is in Italy. A train to St. Moritz leaves the Italian town across the main square. Photo: Graeme Easton

All of us will have our favourite parts of Switzerland and the beauty of the Swiss Pass is that you can just travel where you want, when you want – mountains and lakes, cities and countryside. I like to make full use of my Swiss Pass, and in some cases that means travelling beyond the borders into adjacent countries. This article considers where you can use a Swiss Pass out of Switzerland. It has a border some 1,852 km long split between: Liechtenstein 41km; Austria 164 km; Germany 334km; France 573km; and Italy 740km. With Switzerland now part of the Schengen agreement it is quite easy to cross a border without realising it. Using a Swiss Pass, it is possible to travel by train, tram, ship or PostAuto into France, Germany or Italy, whilst Austria and Lichtenstein can only be reached by PostAuto. It should be noted that although at most of the border crossings highlighted in this article you will not need to show your passport you should carry it at all times, as random checks are now made as the Swiss try to tackle illegal immigration into their country. Remember that most Europeans carry identity cards as a matter of course, so for UK nationals, and visitors from other non-Schengen countries, your passport is the only acceptable form of identification when crossing borders.

Starting our clockwise tour at Basel, although the SBB runs trains into Germany from here, the Swiss Pass isn't valid on these routes. Several BVB (City tram) routes run right up to the German border but terminate before it. The first place one can cross the border on a Swiss Pass is at Waldshut, with

half-hourly trains crossing the Rhein Bridge from Koblenz (AG). After that we reach one of the more interesting border areas. Near Schaffhausen the border with Germany doubles back on itself several times in a tortuous shape. Because of this the main line from Zurich to Schaffhausen travels through Germany and has three stations in it (Lottstetten, Jesttten and Altenburg-Rheinau). This must be the easiest way to cross the border on a Swiss Pass and I suspect many people don't even realise they've done so. Adjacent to Schaffhusen is the German enclave of Büsingen-am-Hochrein, effectively a suburb of the Swiss city and is served by regular buses on its RVSH Line 25. This route, having returned to Switzerland to serve the village of Dörflingen, crosses back into Germany and travels through the community of Randegg before terminating back on Swiss territory at Ramsen. Life gets complex round here! Theoretically the Swiss Pass is not valid to German destinations on this route, but the Editor has used it without any problems and notes that the border is not even signed. At half-fare it is also possible to travel by DB train from Schaffhausen back towards Waldshut as far as Erzingen the first station in Germany. Moving eastwards it is also possible to take the PostAuto from Stein-am-Rhein to Singen, at half-fare once into Germany.

Using a Swiss Pass to travel by ship along the Rhein towards the Bodensee the service crosses and re-crosses the border serving German communities (including Büsingen) en-route to Konstanz, which itself is just across the

border from Kreuzlingen in Switzerland and is served by Swiss trains. In practice, Kreuzlingen and Konstanz are contiguous, and the border runs through the middle of the urban area. The more logical border would be the Rhein but Konstanz itself straddles it. In 1460 after the Swiss Confederacy conquere Thurgau, Konstanz's natural hinterland, the city made an attempt to get admitted to the Swiss Confederacy. However the forest cantons voted against its entry, fearing over-bearing City States, so Konstanz joined the Swabian League instead. As they say, the rest is history. In the twin towns Swiss PostAuto Line 908 crosses the border to gain access to Konstanz Bahnhof to give the usual bus/rail interchange. On the Bodensee the ferry services from Romanshorn or Rorschach to either Friedrichshafen or Lindau are available at half-fare. Leaving the Bodensee we reach the Austrian border, although the Swiss Pass is not valid across it by rail; however, travelling down the Rhein valley you can use the bus from Heerbrug to Dornbrin in Austria. Alternatively you can catch a Liechtenstein PostAuto Line 13 from Buchs into Austria at Feldkirch, in the process taking in some of the Principality. Its whole PostAuto network, based on the capital Vaduz, is available to us, but unfortunately the three stations within Lichtenstein on the line between Buchs and Feldkirch are run by the ÖBB and are not allowed. Moving further south and by paying half-fare, one can also use the Swiss Pass into Austria by picking up the PostAuto from Scuol-Tarasp to Martina and then, at half fare, travel for over an hour through the Tyrol to the ÖBB main line station at Landeck-Zams. The PostAuto from Martina to Nauders is also available at half fare.

Reaching the long Italian border you can use your Swiss Pass on the PostAuto from Zernez over the Ofenpass, through Sta. Maria Val Müstair and on to Malles / Mals in the semi-autonomous Italian region of the South Tyrol. Here you

could forgo your Swiss Pass and take a local train to Merano / Meran. Whilst at Sta. Maria Val Müstair (1375m high), one of the most remote communities in Switzerland, there is the



TOP: A Trenitalia' unit approaches the Italian station at Tirano. The Swiss Pass is valid to the RhB station across the road and also the PostAuto from here to Lugano.

Photo: Graeme Easton


BOTTOM: An ÖBB train waits at St. Margrethen before returning to Feldkirch. This is not valid on a Swiss Pass, but Feldkirch can be reached via PostAuto from Buchs.

Photo: Graeme Easton



A Schaffhausen bus in Busingen, Germany, in April 2012.
 Photo: Malcolm Bulpitt

opportunity in high summer to travel at half-fare on a twice-daily PostAuto through the Swiss border at the Umbrail Pass, to its Italian terminus on the Pso dello Stelvio at 2757m high. Also from Zernez the Swiss Pass is valid on the PostAuto to Livigno in Italy, where in the summer you can connect with a PostAuto to Ospizio Bernina and down to Pontresina. Now to what is probably my favourite border crossing, as the southern terminus of the RhB's Bernina line at Tirano is in

Italy, with the border having been crossed just south of Campocologno. Who can fail to enjoy the entry to Tirano down the street and across the square? Once at Tirano, the Italian main line station across the road is off limits for our Swiss Pass, but the summer-only once a day PostAuto to Lugano is valid (seat reservations are compulsory at CHF12) and this runs parallel with the railway for much of the route. At 120km, all but 7km of which are in Italy, this 3 hour journey provides about half of the non-Swiss distance available on a Swiss Pass. Once from Lugano, my daughter and I took this PostAuto as part of a long day, travelling Lugano – Tirano – St. Moritz – Landquart (via the Vereinatunnel) – Zurich – Lugano. We left Lugano in T-shirts and shorts as it was 30c. The train up from Tirano had open wagons attached at Poschiavo, so of course we jumped in. As we went above the snow line at the Bernina pass we decided too late that bringing a jumper might have been a good idea! Whilst still in the Engadine there are regular PostAutos from St. Moritz across the border to Chiavenna, that once a day in summer run onwards to Lugano. 

The *Swiss Express* Editorial Team and I have taken all reasonable precautions to ensure that the cross-border routes listed in the article are available to Swiss Pass holders. Local circumstances and rules change so it is always wise to check that your ticket is valid before you travel.

SOUTHEAST FROM ZERNEZ

Michael Donovan takes to PostAutos to explore the isolated Val Müstair



A PostAuto waits at Müstair, Clostra Son Jon stop.

All Photos in June 2012: Michael Donovan

Val Müstair is surrounded on three sides by Italy and Austria and geographically it is part of the Adige Basin that drains into the Adriatic. It is only connected directly to Switzerland by the road over the Ofenpass/Pass dal Fuorn from Zernez on the Rhätisch Bahn Engadin line. The route is served by a PostAuto service (the only public transport that enters the Swiss National Park) to Mals/Malles, in the South Tyrol area of Italy. If the road is blocked, the alternative

route is through Italy and Austria, re-entering the Engadin via Nauders. In this isolated, Romansch-speaking area of Switzerland, the PostAutos perform the same function as the railway network does in the rest of the country. Riding the routes, as the buses stop in all the scattered communities to pick-up and set-down mail and parcels, as well as conveying passengers, brings the tourist closer to the lives and economy of this part of the Confederation.