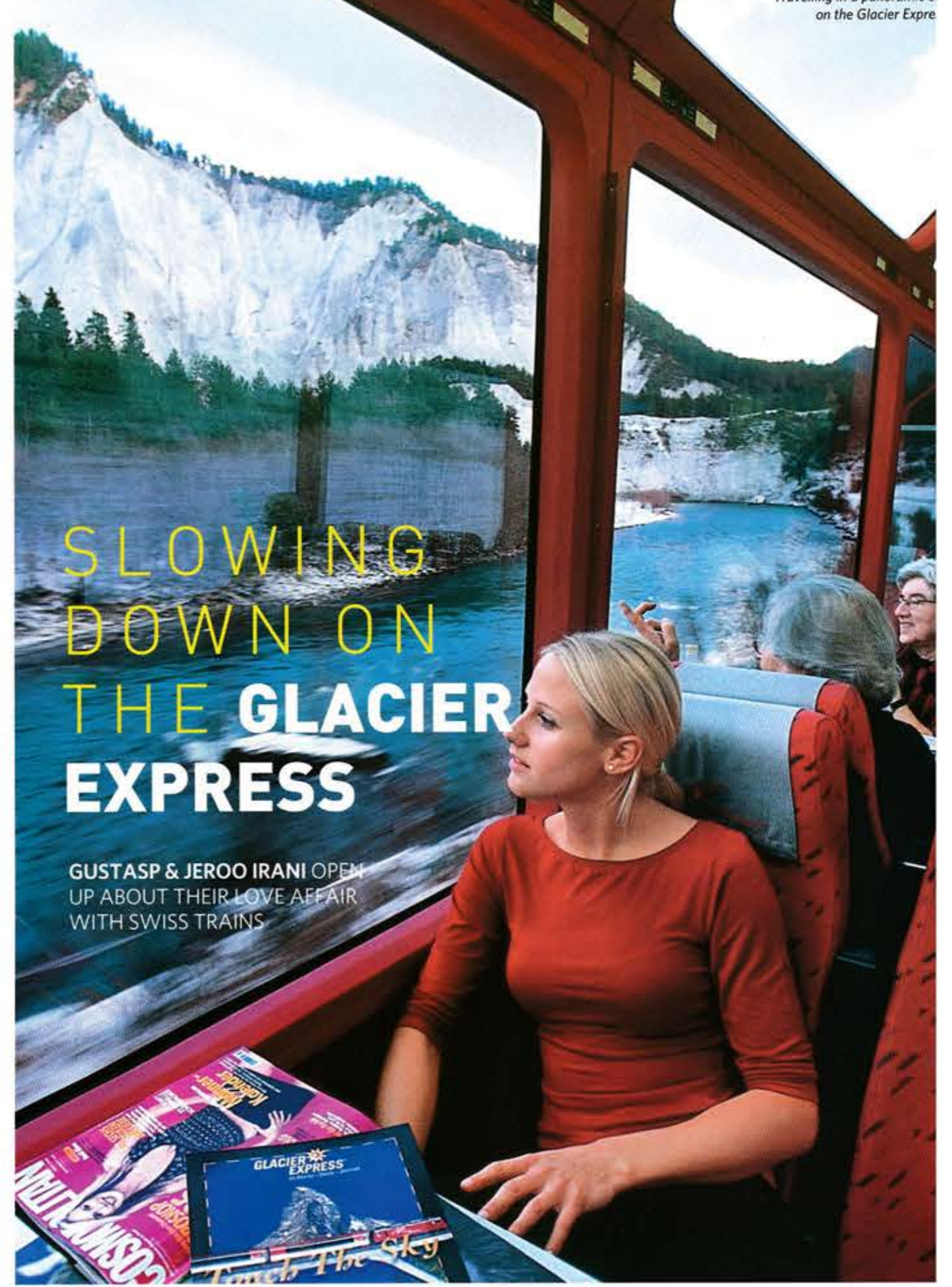


traveller

ALPINE JOURNEYS

OUR FAVOURITE SWISS RAIL JOURNEYS

10 REASONS WHY WE LOVE TRAVELLING IN SWITZERLAND



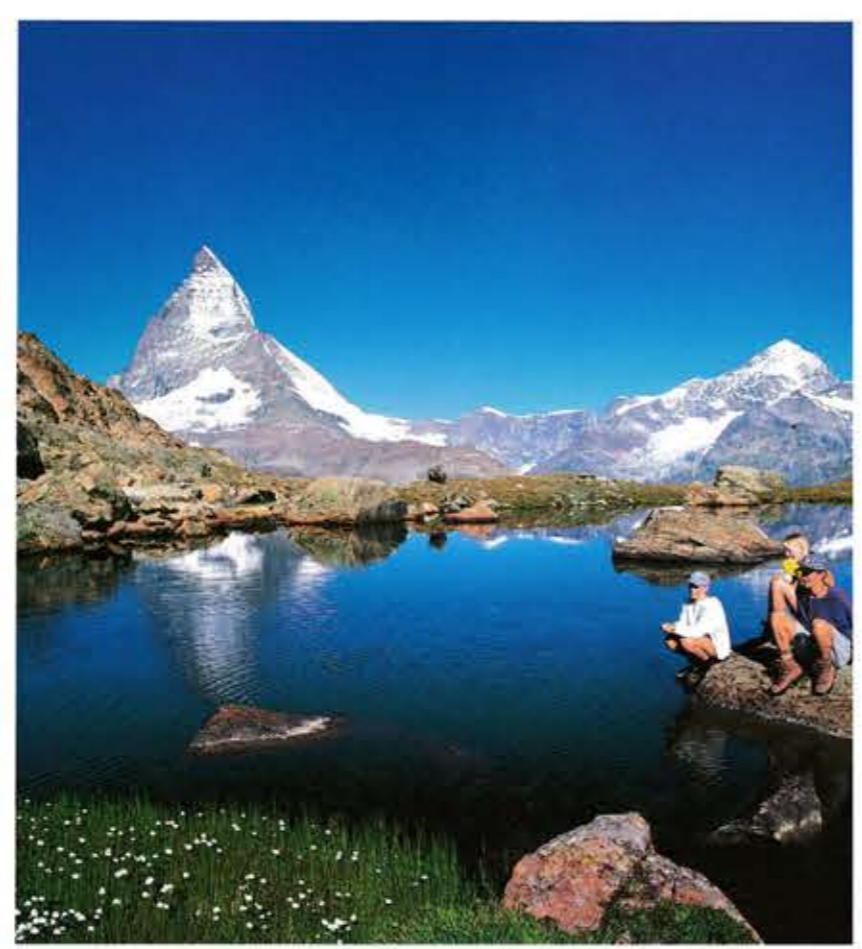
Travelling in a panoramic coach on the Glacier Express

SLOWING DOWN ON THE GLACIER EXPRESS

GUSTASP & JEROO IRANI OPEN UP ABOUT THEIR LOVE AFFAIR WITH SWISS TRAINS



GUSTASP & JEROO IRANI



The evocatively named Glacier Express is probably the slowest express train in the world. But we were not complaining. True, it got us from the idyllic car-free village of Zermatt, over which broods the mighty Matterhorn, to glitzy St Moritz; but thankfully it took its own sweet time doing that. In the course of its 8-hour journey across the Swiss Alps, the train traversed 291 bridges and viaducts, arched through 91 tunnels and scaled the 2,033m high Oberalp Pass.

but happy cows grazing in green pastures... As the train chugged through alpine country, it would come to a sighing stop at charming little stations, some no more than a log hut decked out in flowers. Often we would roll past unhurried hamlets of typical Swiss chalets that seemed to kneel in prayer around churches whose pencil-thin steeples or bulbous onion domes neeled the sky. The landscape outside our window seemed to be spellbound by its own beauty. There were photo opportunities aplenty as the train tooted past sun-drenched meadows dotted with pine trees and dusted with wild flowers; shimmering blue lakes fringed with waterfront settlements... After the Glacier Express had show-cased the soft appealing side

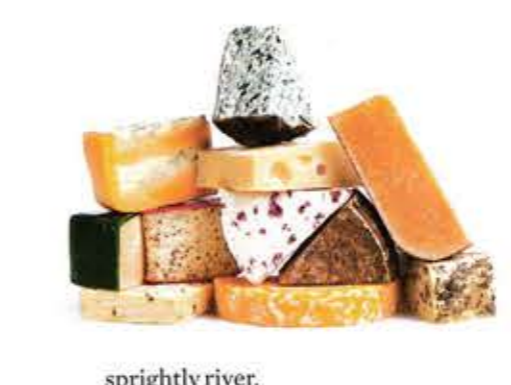
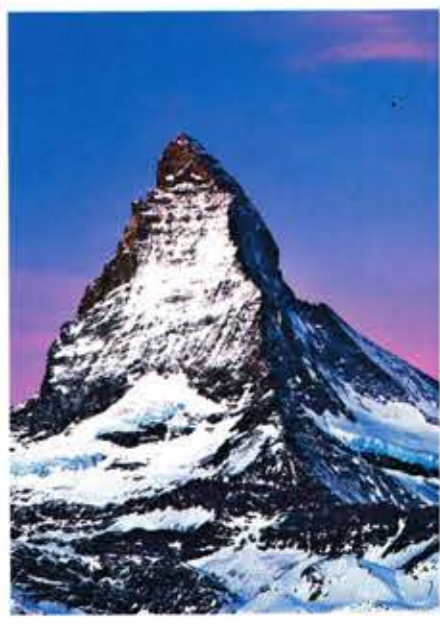


GUSTASP & JEROO IRANI

of the country, it gave us a glimpse of her more forbidding visage—steep limestone cliffs that seemed to bear down on us and a valley gouged out by a gushing river. That was the awe-inspiring Rhine Gorge. Yes, the change of mood and scene was as swift as the



FACT FILE
The Glacier Express leaves Zermatt at 08.52 hours and arrives in St Moritz at 17.03. On the reverse run, it leaves St Moritz at 08.57 hours and reaches Zermatt at 17.10 hours. On board features of the train include a panoramic snack and beverages bar as well as freshly cooked meals served at your seat. For more information on the train, see www.swisstravelsystem.com/en/glacier-express-st-moritz-zermatt.html.



sprightly river. Our cameras were forever poised to capture moments and more so as we approached what is probably the most photographed attraction on the line—the Landwasser Viaduct. 130m long and 65m high. The viaduct stands on five soaring bricked pillars and curves at a 100m radius straight into the Landwasser tunnel. We were nearing the end of our journey but there was more in store:

the wild and romantic countryside of the upper Albula valley. More leaping viaducts, three spiral and two loop tunnels that bridged an altitude difference of 400m. Once through the 5,865-m long Albula Tunnel, we chugged into St Moritz—an enchanting year-round resort and playground of the rich and famous that the everyday tourist is welcome to share. What we loved about the Glacier Express was that it had been more than just a journey; it was a romantic interlude which kept us awake right through the performance. Anxiety gnawed at us that if we nodded off, we might miss something spectacular.



GUSTASP AND JEROO IRANI ARE VETERAN TRAVEL WRITERS WHO HAVE A VERY SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THOSE PUNCTUAL SWISS TRAINS

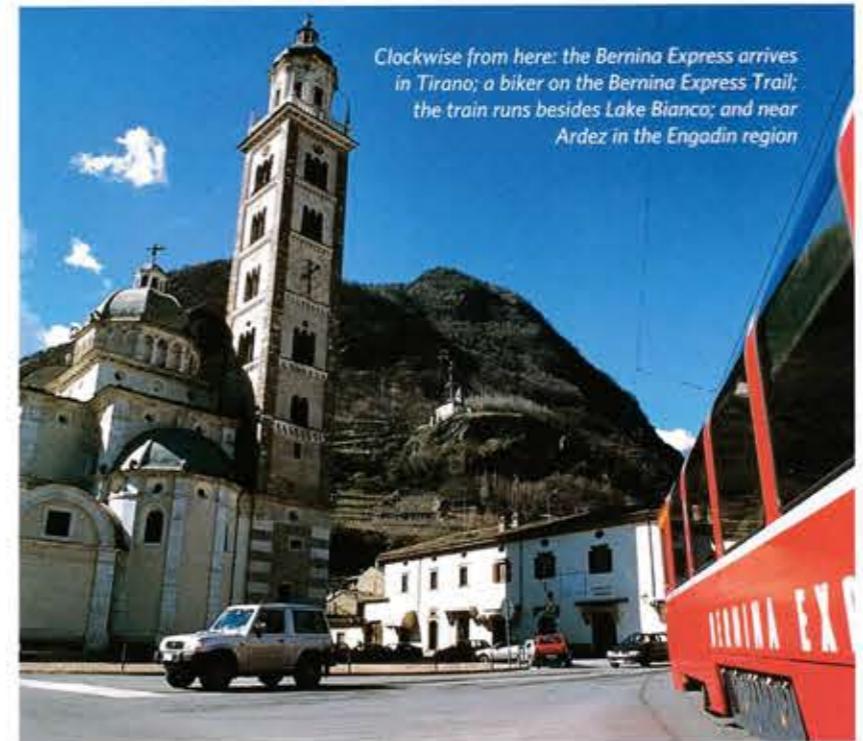
Top, left to right: sculpture on a platform; traffic-free Zermatt; the Landwasser viaduct; and the mighty Matterhorn



THE BERNINA LINE

SUCH A SCENIC JOURNEY!

GUSTASP & JEROO IRANI



Clockwise from here: the Bernina Express arrives in Tirano; a biker on the Bernina Express Trail; the train runs besides Lake Bianco; and near Ardez in the Engadin region



There is something doughty about Swiss trains. Small and compact, they snake and puff self-importantly through wind-swept mountain passes, scythe through scenic valleys, past fairy-tale villages snoozing beside rivers to glide to a stop at charming lake-shore towns. All this with a nonchalant air of having been there and done that! One of our favourite journeys has



FACT FILE
One can travel on the Bernina Express (or on regular trains that run on the route) from Chur to Tirano or the reverse. Each season offers spectacular views. In winter, there is just one Bernina Express train per day and the leg from Tirano to Lugano (in Switzerland) by Bernina Express Bus does not operate. In summer, there is a Bernina Express from Davos and St Moritz as well which also crosses the Bernina Pass and ends in Tirano. For more information, visit www.swisstravelsystem.com/berninaexpress.

been on the Bernina Line where the views were so unrelentingly vivid that after a point we wanted to cry out: "Stop, stop... we can't take it anymore!" As it was winter, there was just one panoramic Bernina Express train of the Rhaetian Bahn, direct from Chur in Switzerland to Tirano in Italy and back in 8 hours. So we travelled by regular train on the Bernina Line, a route which has UNESCO World Heritage status and links northern and southern Europe. The only difference was that we had to switch trains a couple of times and ours did not have panoramic windows all the way to the roof (as does the Bernina Express) but was nevertheless very comfortable with large picture windows. The journey served up a Swiss symphony for the senses—crisp air, hushed landscapes that unravelled like an ancient scroll and an aura of quiet luxury; all of it orchestrated by that ultimate conductor—Nature. We started in Chur and as the train puffed south towards Thusis it entered a valley studded with grim silent castles where Dracula may well have lurked. The train then seemed to pirouette across the Landwasser viaduct, heaving past Filisur into higher realms. Forests of dark green pines groaned under their weight of snow, resembling totem poles raised in homage to a primeval God.

After Filisur, it delved into the 5,865-m long Albula tunnel, hewn into an ancient rock face, and a while later, began its ponderous ascent over the Bernina Pass! Rugged Alpine terrain heaved into view, camera shutters clicked urgently as passengers virtually fell over each other to capture the eye-engorging vistas. The small flower-bedecked station of Ospizio Bernina hid a big secret—it's the highest point of the route at 2,253m above sea level after which the train started to descend towards snow-swaddled Alp Grum (2,091m). We stayed a couple of nights in a charming 1920s hotel, located in the station itself. We would stand at the window of our room and watch the red Rhaetian Bahn train snake its way to Tirano, creating Instagram-popping moments as it contrasted vividly with the snow-clad expanses. The next morning, we started off on the train again to complete our journey to palm-lined Tirano, located at 429m, to inhale lungfuls of its laidback Mediterranean air! We were enchanted by the fact that our cheery red train had run along 122km of track, burrowed through 55 tunnels, crossed 196 bridges and viaducts, and manoeuvred giddy mountain passes with an air of triumph and stately style!