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## The Gotthard Base Tunnel

There are several tunnels underneath the Gotthard Pass connecting the canton to northern Switzerland: the first to be opened was the 15 km long Gotthard Rail Tunnel in 1882, replacing the pass road, connecting Airolo with Göschenen in the Canton of Uri. A 17km motorway tunnel, the Gotthard Road Tunnel, opened in 1980. A second rail tunnel through the pass, the Gotthard Base Tunnel, is currently under construction.



Breakthrough in the west tunnel between Erstfeld and Amsteg

With a planned length of 57km and a total of 151.84km of tunnels, shafts and passages planned, it will be the longest tunnel of all railway and road tunnels in the world, ahead of the

current record holder, the Seikan Tunnel, connecting the Japanese islands of Honshū and Hokkaidō.

Traffic has increased more than tenfold since 1980, and the existing road and rail tunnels are at their limits. In order to provide a faster and flatter passage through the Swiss Alps, the Swiss voters decided to build this tunnel cutting through the Gotthard massif at nearly ground level, 600m below the existing railway tunnel.

On the current track only trains up to 1,400 t are able to pass through the narrow mountain valleys and through spiral tunnels climbing up to the portals of the old tunnel at a height of 1,100 m above sea level. Once the new tunnel is completed, standard freight trains of up to 4,000 t will be able to pass this natural barrier as easily as if the Alps did not exist. Because of the ever increasing international truck traffic, the Swiss voted for a shift in transportation policy. The goal is to transport trucks, trailers and freight containers from southern Germany to northern Italy and vice versa by train to relieve the overused roads.

Passenger trains will be able to travel as fast as 250 km/h - although it is questionable how easy it will be for high-speed trains to achieve this speed if they have to share the tunnels with slower freight traffic.

A tunnel system with two single track tunnels is being built. The two rail tunnels are joined approximately every 325 m by connecting galleries.

Final break-through for all tunnels is expected in Spring 2011. The first final break-through is currently expected on 15 October 2010.

The Gotthard Base Tunnel is expected to reduce the time between Zürich and Lugano to 1 hour 40 minutes.

*from the internet*

## Italian? not quite!

The official language in Ticino, and the one used for most written communication, is Swiss Italian, spoken by about 500,000 Swiss in the canton of Ticino and in the southern part of Graubünden. Despite being very similar to standard Italian, Swiss Italian presents some differences to the Italian spoken in Italy due to the presence of French and German from which it assimilates words.

A clear example would be the driving licence. In standard Italian it is called "patente di guida" while in Swiss Italian it becomes "Licenza di condurre", from the French "Permis de conduire". Another example is the interurban bus. In standard Italian it would be "autobus" or "corriera" while in Swiss Italian it is the "Autopostale".

Furthermore, Insubric dialects, Ticinese, are still spoken, especially in the valleys, but they are not used for official purposes.

Dialects often predominate in older generations and in rural areas. Unlike in parts of Italy there is no social stigma attached to them. There is a certain amount of popular literature (poems, comedies, etc.) in Ticinese, and the national radio and sometimes televisions transmit programs in Ticinese, mainly comedies.

The Ticinese dialects have adopted many terms from the French, Swiss German and Rumantsch regions of Switzerland and often bear Swiss German spelling. Many Italian native speakers of non-Ticino origin often find themselves ostracized at social events as they cannot understand Ticinese. Furthermore, Ticinese (very much like Swiss German dialects) is not spoken the same way by everyone speaking dialect; it is not a single common dialect, but a multitude of dialects, and there are significant differences of pronunciation and vocabulary from village to village within Ticino and the 'Italian' speaking part of Grisons.

Some examples of Ticinese:

English	Ticinese	Italian
Good Morning/	Bon Di	Buon giorno
Afternoon	Bon Di	Buon giorno
to be (verb)	vèss	essere
to have	vegh	avere
chair	cadrega	sedia
pencil	lapis	matita
cell phone	natel	telefonino
strawberry	magiosc'tra	fragola
today	inchöö	oggi
ceiling	plafon	soffitto
nothing	nagot	niente
to be naive	beev l'acqua del cudee	credere a tutto ed a tutti

*from the internet*