

With a little help. Part 2, Swiss railways for the under tens

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GILES BAKER - WITH A LITTLE HELP SWISS RAILWAYS FOR THE UNDER TENS - PART TWO!!

Following on from my first article, here are some more tips for those wanting to combine a passion for Switzerland, or for Swiss railways, with a family holiday.

KIDS HOTELS

This is an association of 20 hotels that specialise in facilities for families. Those at Lenk, Kandersteg, Bissone and Wiesen have a crèche on site. They have a website at www.kidshotels.ch. We have not stayed at any of them but Jared, Emma and Peadar have used the crèches at Hotel Krone in Lenk, Kinder Hotel Muchetta in Wiesen, and Hotel Lago di Lugano in Bissone. The latter is, in the summer, only available for people staying in the hotel.

REKA

The excellent facilities for children found at the Reka holiday village in Lenk are to be found in other locations, and we can speak highly of their villages in Bergün and Albonago (above Lugano). Do book very early- ideally six to nine months early if you are going at a busy time.

Albonago is the biggest site with 43 villas rather than apartments. If the kids like beach type holidays then Albonago is the nearest thing. There is an outdoor swimming pool with plenty of other things for the kids to play with whilst Mum and Dad sit in the sun. So you can easily put a day or two of this style of activity in a sightseeing holiday.

Transport from Albonago to Lugano is not very easy; the only

The proof of the pudding. Jared and Emma Baker make it clear that they approve of Daddy's choice of holiday. Of course they aren't teenagers like mine.



frequent way is by cable car then bus, with no evening service. The area is very steep - get off at the stop above and walk down! A visit here needs particularly good planning. Stay in an apartment near the pool and avoid the 200 steps from the pool to some apartments! Despite all this it will be the kids first choice because of its facilities.

Reka Bergün is quite close to the village centre with none of these difficulties. It has an indoor swimming pool.

Reka's website is www.reka.ch

GETTING AROUND

In the UK, the improvements in accessibility for disabled people have greatly benefited the not yet able. Switzerland lags some way behind. Driverless funiculars have led to some very pushchair unfriendly turnstiles.

On the other hand most bus services, particularly in urban areas, have excellent facilities for loading and unloading pushchairs. Fly Gepäck is excellent with children and lots of luggage, with conveyance from UK airport to Swiss station or vice versa.

MOUNTAIN TOP RESTAURANTS

So many of them have kids play areas. You can sit and have a meal, enjoying the view, whilst the kids play!

CONCLUSION

Some of the above points may sound somewhat negative, but the moral of the story remains plan well. If you do this you can have just as much fun as your trips before the children came along. Check out kids' facilities

where you are staying, and how close you will be to the stations and bus routes, and whether the walk is a vertical, pushchair unfriendly one. A call to the local tourist office before you go can ensure you have an enjoyable trip.

Happy Travelling!

David Adams

THE PAPER CHASE

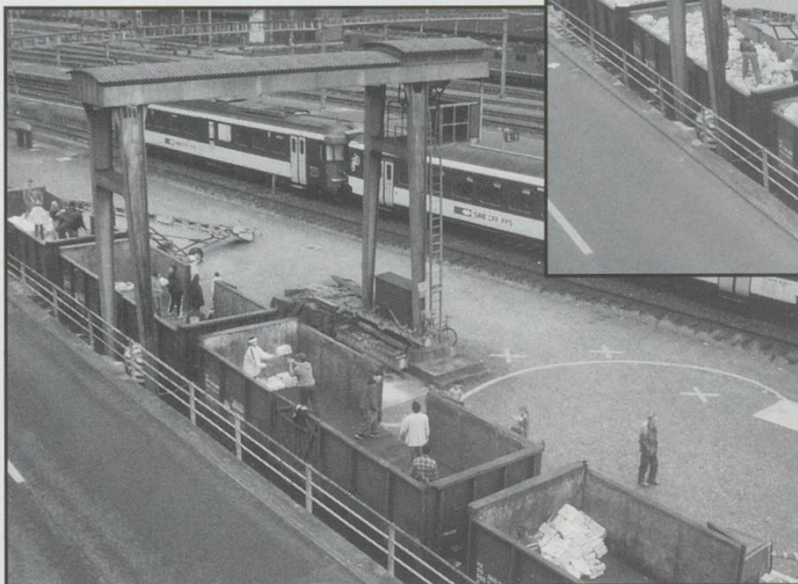
I was staying in Erstfeld in September 2001 and was intrigued by a local initiative that took place on Wednesday 12th September.

After about 07.30 increasing numbers of school children appeared in the streets, some pulling empty two-wheeled hand carts. Half an hour later they started to reappear from all directions, the handcarts now loaded with bundled newspapers. In the station goods yard five open wagons had been positioned and the children, with adult supervision, started loading the newspapers into the wagons. There was only one conveyor belt available so much of the work was done manually, chain gang style.

I left Erstfeld at 08.30 and returned about 14.00 to find four of the five wagons already well filled but loading was still going on and the children certainly appeared to be enjoying themselves. When I returned again in the evening four wagons had been sheeted over and they had been moved down the yard a little way to free the turning area used by the Erstfeld - Flüelen bus.

Apparently this operation takes place twice a year when the children collect bundled newspapers from all over the village for onward transport by rail. The phrase "work experience" obviously has a more realistic meaning to the Swiss and I did ponder on just how much "red tape" would have to be cut to allow a similar exercise to take place in the UK. Four wagons full at least would be my guess!

BELOW: Taken from the Hotel Frohsinn at 08.00, 12/09/2001 as the paper chase was starting.



ABOVE: Taken once again from the Frohsinn but this time at 14.00 as the paper chase was well under way.