# Lugano - Città con tre Funicolari

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# Lugano - Città con tre Funicolari
## David and Elizabeth Carpenter



San Salvatore funi interchange station.

*All photos:* David and Elizabeth Carpenter

Lugano, the largest city in the Canton Ticino (and the ninth largest in Switzerland), is home to three, once four, funiculars. The shortest, the Lugano Città, provides a vital transport link, whilst the other two are tourist attractions, providing access to views over Lago di Lugano from Monte Bré and Monte San Salvatore.



### Lugano Città Funicular

This 220m long funicular forms the essential link between the railway station and the city centre 53 metres below. Although the shortest of the three it is the busiest funicular in all Switzerland, carrying in excess of 2.5 million passengers annually - and rising. First opened in 1886, and originally water powered, it was electrified in 1955. A recent major reconstruction took place between 2014 and 2016 with the re-opening on the 11th December 2016 coinciding with the opening of the Gotthard Base Tunnel. This was described in *Swiss Express 129*, March 2017. It is a conventional single track funicular, with two sleek 100-person cars and utilising a central passing loop. There is a request halt on the north side of the passing loop to serve the Cathedral. The journey time is just 2 minutes, normally at a 5 minute headway from 05.00 to 24.00, although in late evening the frequency can be less, probably depending on the traffic on offer. Like modern Metro systems the platforms are equipped with sliding doors and it is, of course, fully accessible for the mobility impaired.

### Monte Bré Funicular

The Monte Bré funicular opened in two stages in 1908 and 1912. It was originally intended to provide access to a resort where the residents of Lugano could relax in cooler conditions and enjoy the views. Much of the former resort is derelict now with several buildings boarded up, but there are still a couple of places to get refreshments with terraces where you can enjoy the view. This funicular starts from Casserate, some 2km east of the city centre, which is served by frequent TPL buses. Lake ships run by SNL make occasional calls at the nearby pier, but check the schedules.

Monte Bré funi - lower section.

Monte Bré funi - upper section.


San Salvatore funi - top station.

This funicular is in two separate sections, separated by a road, which passengers have to cross to get from one to another. The lower section is much shorter at 208m, with a rise of 102m. The journey takes 4 minutes. Despite the short length, it is a conventional single track funicular with two cars and a passing loop. The cars on this section date from 1959. The lower section is effectively a free ride, as tickets are sold at the lower station of the upper section. A turnstile, that allows 42 people through then locks to prevent overcrowding, controls entry. This causes problems when families and groups are separated, as there is no indication of how many more people the turnstile will let through.

The upper section is longer at 1,413 metres, with a rise of 522 metres. The journey takes 13 minutes. Again it is a conventional single track funicular, with two cars and a passing loop. The 70-person cars on this section date from a 1984 refurbishment, although they have been built with a 'retro' look. There are three request stops, which can mean the other car stops mid-section for no apparent reason. To inform passengers of this, signs saying 'Service Stop' are provided. The timetable allows 6 minutes to cross the road bet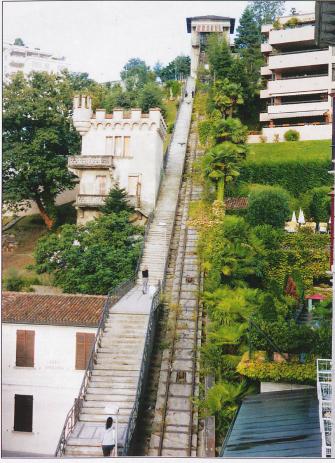ween the two sections and to buy tickets at the booth at the lower station. This is staffed only when a car is at the station, with the ticket seller travelling with the car. Delays can occur at busy times when several people need to buy tickets, causing some late running on the upper section. Services run every 30 minutes normally between 09.00 and 18.00, but operate later in the summer.

**Monte San Salvatore Funicular**

The San Salvatore funicular originally opened in 1890. In its original incarnation although rope-hauled, it relied on a central Abt rack for its braking. Rebuilt as a conventional funicular in 1926, it has been extensively modernised over the years, latterly in 2001 when the 1957-built cars were rebuilt with new equipment and modern 60-seat bodies. It provides access


Città funi - passing loop.

bus services. Also nearby is SBB/FFS Paradiso station, that is served by trains every 30 minutes from Lugano's main station. The funicular crosses the main line here on a spindly viaduct.

This funicular is also in two sections. However it is unusual as there is only one car on each of the single-track sections. The sections are both 815m long and the cars counterbalance each other, meeting at the middle island platform of Pazzallo to allow passengers to interchange between them. The lower section rises 248m, the upper 353m, with a combined journey time of some 10 minutes. Services run every 30 minutes from 09.00 to 17.00, again later in the summer. Of the two tourist funiculars this is the one we would recommend. All visitors to the city will probably use the one from the main station.

**A fourth Funicular**

Until 1986 Lugano had a fourth funicular. This was the Funicolare degli Angioli. This started near the lakeside by the church of Santa Maria degli Angioli and ran up past the side of the Hotel International au Lac to the Hotel Bristol at the top. The Hotel Bristol closed in 1981, and the funicular followed 5 years later. It was a single line throughout, operated with a single car, being just 142m long and rising 53m. The track is still in existence, with the rails in position and also the rollers for the cable. The top station, which is part of a tower, still exists but nothing remains of the lower station. Listed as a 'Cultural property of regional significance' it is unlikely to be demolished. It was fully described in a recent edition of *Swiss Express*. ✛



TOP: San Salvatore funi lower section - Paradiso station.
ABOVE: Abandoned funi.

to the views from the 912m high Monte San Salvatore. The views and facilities here are better than those at Monte Bré, with a full 360º panorama possible. There is a restaurant with semi-open terrace providing good views southwards towards Melide and Italy. The funicular starts from Lugano's Paradiso district, some 1.5km south of the city centre. The SNL lake ships make far more frequent calls at the pier, which is about 5 minutes' walk away, and again there are frequent

## Where's Heidi?

**Question.** If confronted with this watery scene, where would you be? *Answer on page 46.* ✛