

Day 3 - 11th September

TGV to Switzerland

We were surprised to be given a breakfast snack on the TGV to Lausanne with a choice of a savoury snack or a sultana twist pastry along with tea. 1st class seating is very comfortable as you can recline or sit up in the roomy seats, with your own light, and we are in seats with a table between us so we can both see the wonderful views from the windows, and spot birds of prey taking the uplift from the train.



As we left Burgundy for Switzerland I spotted a hot tub in a garden – no skinny dipping in that one by the train! We climb into the Alps through wooded hills to get good views back to France, until we are on a single track scenic ride high on a ridge looking down at small villages. The train goes through conifer forests and tunnels as we sway from side to side past Lake St Point to reach Vallorbe station. We can see new road bridges and a white rocky cliff above Vallorbe and are treated to some Swiss chocolate biscuits. We feel we are riding on top of the world looking across to mountains on both sides, and down past vineyards to Lausanne.

Lausanne

We have 3 hours in Lausanne, so we put our luggage in the store, and set off to explore the old medieval quarter, and climb up stairs and steps to visit St Francois Church. Climbing up through cobbled streets full of expensive looking jewellery shops (the shops were shut thankfully as it was a Sunday!) Finally up lots more steps to Place de la Palud with its 16th century fountain of Justice, and up wooden stairs to the Cathedral of Lausanne and the best viewpoint out over the roofs to Lake Geneva, a great spot for a picnic. An exhibition in the Cathedral looked at the fantastic animals within the Gothic masterpiece. The Cathedral had a rose window, and the most amazing wooden carved 16th century Gothic stalls in the Chapelle St Maurice.

In the Museum of Beaux Arts in the Palais de Rumine we managed to combine art and food in an exhibition called Achrome on the artist Piero Manzoni. In 1962 he had used Milanese bread rolls called michette and coated them with kaolin to solidify them, but keeping the lumpy surface and irregular shapes! The work still looked great and certainly different all in white! Piero Manzoni died at age 30 of a heart attack in his Milan studio, and specialised in using imprints of objects.



Lake Geneva Paddle Steamer

Onwards by train to Italy

We left Lausanne on the most spectacular train journey through Switzerland, past Lake Geneva, watching the paddle steamer and children bathing, and climbed up through the Alps past apple trees, vineyards to snow patched mountains. The last stop was Stresa at Lake Maggiore and when we come back this way again on the train, we will stop and explore as the islands on the Lake looked fantastic in the glorious sunlight.

We arrive in Italy which has an enormous wealth of art and architecture in palaces, museums and churches, all easily accessible, and hope to see some of it in Milan, the economic capital of Italy. The station of Milan is enormous and very impressive, having had a facelift after a fire in 1983. We enjoyed a delicious, made to order "Sicilian" sandwich, comprising rustic bread, grilled aubergine, courgette, Italian cheese and fresh herbs from the Panino Giusto outlet in the station entrance area, plus a warm apple and ice cream pudding. The station has carvings of a car, a train, a ship and signs of the Zodiac in its entrance. We check in at the very comfortable Best Western Plus Hotel Galles and enjoy the use of their spa that evening.

We think of past travellers who were mainly gentry on the Grand Tour, who ventured out through Switzerland to Italy to learn about art, and to collect masterpieces for their grand homes in Britain. They could be on the Grand Tour for years exploring and learning – what a treat!