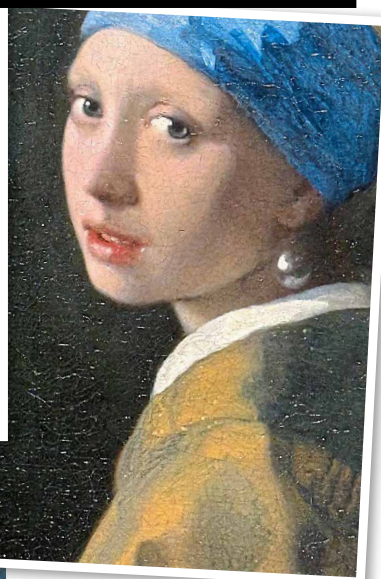
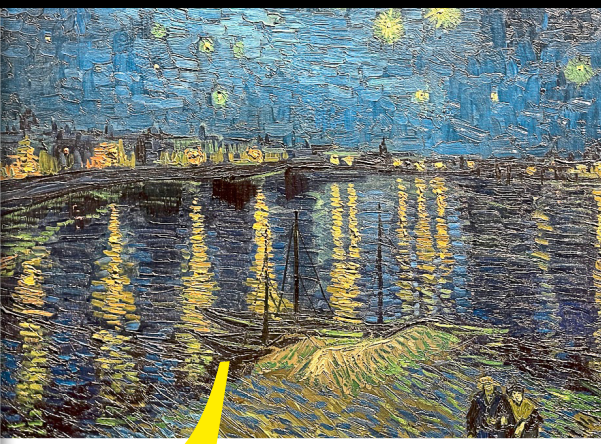
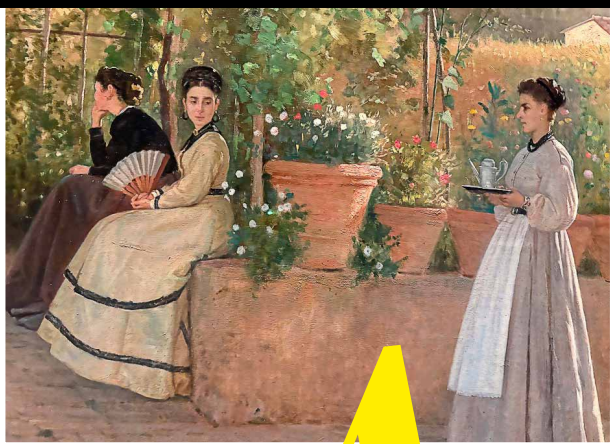
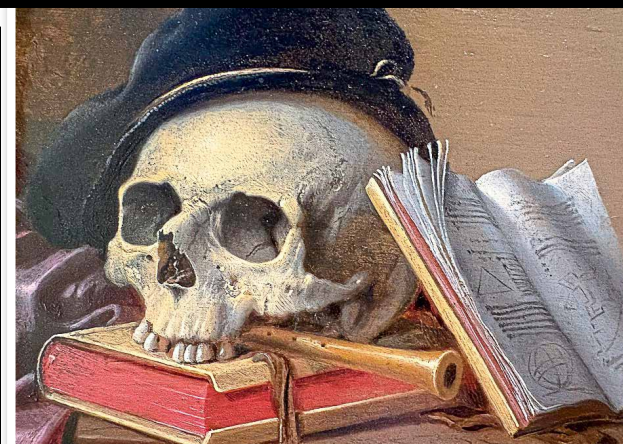




Art odyssey

is right on track

This writer travelled 4,000km through six countries on 24 trains during a gallery-filled fortnight in Europe via Interrail



BY
**OLIVIA
GREENWAY**

Follow your art: Main, the Bernina Express travels through incredible scenery. Top from left, Still Life With Skull, Books, Flute And Pipe; La Pergola; Starry Night Over The Rhone; Maybe; and Girl With A Pearl Earring

mist. It was like nature's own art gallery.

I was soon marvelling at the engineering too, crossing a 65m-high viaduct and later twisting around a 360-degree spiral loop. At the top, I saw the Morteratsch Glacier and stopped for pictures at the Alp Grum Station, with sweeping views of the valley.

At journey's end, I hopped on a train to Milan, where my hotel was opposite the station.

Pinacoteca di Brera is sited in a former 16th century Jesuit college and church – basically, it's a fabulous old palace. It was first opened to the public by Napoleon in 1809. Focusing on Italian

masters, there is plenty of work from other artists too.

I liked The Kiss by Francesco Hayez, which I've only ever seen in print, and La Pergola by realist painter Silvestro Lega. There is early work from Giovanni Bellini and Caravaggio as well as Rubens, Van Dyck and Rembrandt. Make time to pop into the 250-year-old library, with books dating back to the 14th century.

Next, I depart for two days in Nice, taking the scenic route along the coast via Genoa, where fields of sunflowers were in full bloom.

Chez Acchiardo in the old town is a traditional, friendly, family-run restaurant – cele-

brating its 100th anniversary next year. It's so popular, there were queues outside the whole time. The house wine, fish and, of course, salad Niçoise was excellent – the latter is unsurprisingly its most ordered dish.

The Maeght Fondation is one of Europe's largest sculpture gardens, the first private art foundation in France and one of the best places to see modern art. The Giacometti family are here in force, Joan Miro has his own garden path, Miro Labyrinth, and you will find Barbara Hepworth, Marc Chagall, Pablo Picasso and Vassily Kandinsky. I enjoyed Walking Man and all Miro's

work, which always makes me smile.

From here, I took a bus to connect with my train back to Nice but missed my stop. Serendipity stepped in and I found a café under some shaded lime trees in the town square at Vance. After an Aperol spritz to cool down, I had a magnificent five variety cheese board with homemade chutney and just-baked crusty bread.

My good luck continued into the evening as I returned to the Old Town and dined al fresco at Lu Fran-Calin. My vegetarian choice was underwhelming but the café gourmand with four delicious homemade

sweets more than made up for it. They told me the kitchen can hardly keep up with the demand for the beef stew.

The next morning, I caught my train to Paris Gare De Lyon. It's a five-hour journey but with comfortable seats and good views, the time passes quickly.

I walked to Musee d'Orsay in a former Beaux-Arts train station and one of the most beautiful buildings displaying art I've ever seen. It holds the world's largest collection of Impressionist masterpieces as well as numerous sculptures.

EDOUARD Manet's controversial Luncheon On The Grass is here, depicting two dressed men and a naked woman, that threw the art world into turmoil. Starry Night Over The Rhone by Van Gogh is wonderful in its simplicity and use of colour. The Little Dancer sculpture by Edgar Degas features fabric and real hair. The original giant clocks remain, one offering photo opportunities and views over Paris.

Crossing the Seine, I walked to Musee de l'Orangerie in the Tuileries Garden, originally built in the 1850s to protect the orange trees, hence its name, but adapted to become the museum it is today. Monet's glorious water lily panels have their own custom designed rooms.

Of the works by Renoir, Cezanne, Modigliani, Matisse and Picasso, I most admired Cezanne's simple Pommes et Biscuits and Matisse's Le Boudoir, the latter for its attention to detail on the dresser.

This is the first time I have indulged my enjoyment of art so comprehensively and seeing the original pieces in their natural homes was simply wonderful. It was a trip to cherish and doing it entirely by train was the cherry on the cake.

TRAVEL FACTS

Ryanair (ryanair.com) and Aer Lingus (aerlingus.com) fly from Dublin to Brussels direct from €42. Interrail Pass 15 days from €415, and includes 20-50 per cent discounts on ferries from Ireland (interrail.com). See also Nice Tourism (explorenicecotedazur.com), Visit Cologne (koeln tourismus.de) and Accor Hotels (accor.com).

INTERRAIL was set up in 1972 as a means for young people to travel inexpensively around Europe. It became so successful, it was extended to all ages.

I recently took my first foray into Interrailing on an art gallery tour and I must admit, I'm now hooked.

Transactions are digital, with train tickets reserved through the app. It's super easy, even for non-techies – all you need to do is to make sure your phone is charged.

One of its biggest advantages is that most major train stations are found in city centres, making them more convenient than airports. In most cases, my hotel was an easy walk from the station – where I left my bags if the room was not ready – otherwise, it was a short direct bus ride.

Rail travel is also eco-friendly compared to flying – my usual default – and it has a myriad opportunities as more than 33 countries may be discovered by Interrail.

My first stop was Brussels and the Rene Magritte museum, holding the largest collection of surrealist work in the world. Set in a beautiful neoclassical building, one can view a version of Empire Of Light here, that depicts a dark night scene but also a blue, sunny sky.

The 1954 version sold at Christie's New York in 2024 for \$121million, the most expensive surrealist artwork ever sold. There are also some pieces from Magritte's Vache period, during which he poked fun at the Impressionists.

The next day brought a day trip to The Hague, my target being Mauritshuis, which houses important works from the Dutch Golden Age. It's a grand building, built in the 17th century as a private residence for the governor of Dutch Brazil.

I was lucky to see Vermeer's Girl With A Pearl Earring, as she is off to Japan soon for an exhibition. I also loved The Goldfinch by Carel Fabritius with its delicate brushwork.

Fabritius had a short and tragic life. A student of Rembrandt, he was killed in a gunpowder explosion, along with his assistant, and many of his artworks were lost.

There are also some Frans Hals on display and several Rembrandt self-portraits as well as his famous – and controversial – The Night Watch.

I zipped to Cologne in the morning on the Intercity Express and checked into the central Marriott Courtyard for two nights. Cologne itself is walkable – the impos-

ing Dom (cathedral) landmark is right in the centre, near the river. I took an hour-long boat trip (with English commentary) on an 'art-free' day, which gave a better feel for the city from the water.

The Ludwig gallery was conceived when chocolate tycoons the Ludwigs donated 350 pieces of modern art to the city in 1986. Here I saw Andy Warhol's Brillo Boxes, Roy Lichtenstein's playful Maybe and David Hockney's faintly erotic 1966 Sunbather. There is plenty of Picasso, some Rothko and Salvador Dali. The art is given plenty of space and numerous black leather benches for quiet contemplation.

The train to Basel had glimpses of the River Rhine as I travelled south to Switzerland. Kunstmuseum Basel houses the oldest public art collection in the world, first on public view in 1671.

It contains the world's largest Holbein collection, as well as Picasso, Van Gogh and Cezanne.

Ernst Ludwig Kircher's winter scene Davos In Snow, with his striking use of primary colours, and Woman In A Garden by Pierre-August Renoir caught my eye.

Still in Switzerland, my next trip was to Chur. One of my reasons for visiting here was that it's the starting point for the famous Bernina Express – a four-hour ride of incredible views traversing nearly 200 bridges and viaducts and rising to a height of 2,253m.

THE other reason was the Kunstmuseum. Here there are works by the famous Giacometti family, father Giovanni and sons Alberto and Bruno. I liked Alberto's Blooming Azalea – I could almost smell the blossoms. Harmen Steenwyck's still life vanitas, such as Still Life With Skull, Books, Flute And Pipe are striking.

You can also spot Paul Klee, Wassily Kandinsky, Angelika Kauffman and Earnest Ludwig Kirchener.

Ibis has its flagship hotel in Chur, just a short free bus ride from the station. On check-in, I was given a free Basel travel card, given to all hotel guests, which allows free travel and attractions discounts.

I made my way to the station for the Bernina Express experience to Tirano, having booked a panoramic carriage. Leaving bang on time, from my seat I could see a riot of colour – pine trees in every shade of green, impossibly turquoise lakes, white cow parsley, yellow dandelions and pink rosebay willow-herb, all framed by towering dark peaks shrouded in