

# Europe by Rail

The Definitive Guide

Nicky Gardner and Susanne Kries



hidden europe publications

## EUROPE BY RAIL: THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE

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The authors have done their level best to make sure that the information published in this book is accurate. But things can change. A hotel remembered with affection may have turned into a dive, and of course public transport timetables change. Entire rail routes may close. So always check details before setting out, and bear in mind that savvy local advice may be worth much more than what you read in a guidebook. If you feel that we have made a mistake somewhere, please do let us know. But do note that neither the authors nor the publisher can accept any responsibility for loss, damage, injury or inconvenience occasioned by material included, or anything not mentioned, in this book or on any websites maintained by the authors or publisher.

Our front cover image shows a train on the narrow-gauge Jungfrau Railway in the Bernese Alps in Switzerland running down towards Kleine Scheidegg (photo © Janos Gaspar / dreamstime.com).

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## A word of welcome

For two decades, successive editions of *Europe by Rail* have shaped travellers' plans, encouraging readers to be more adventurous when exploring the continent. With **tips on ticketing, fares and accommodation**, *Europe by Rail* has become the definitive guide to exploring Europe by train. This 15th edition of the book includes new routes highlighting the rich and intriguing possibilities that await, whether it be for a handful of short trips or for a more extended tour.

**Rail travel is convivial** in a way that is nowadays rarely encountered on planes and has never been a feature of car travel. We have swapped stories with strangers on trains in Ukraine, we have been on trains marooned in deep midwinter snow in Scandinavia and we have shared meals on night trains that slipped in the dark past silent factories in unnamed towns.

In preparing this new edition, we have criss-crossed Europe by train, from fast journeys on **sleek expresses** (such as TGV and AVE services in France and Spain respectively) to memorably **slow meanderings** on remote branch lines. We have taken slow trains through Belarus and even slower trains through Bohemia.

We've joined comrades following all or part of the **rail route taken by Lenin** as he returned from exile in Switzerland to Russia in 1917 – the October Revolution was 100 years ago this autumn, so we've recast **Route 30**, so that it now extends to St Petersburg. Elsewhere in this new edition, we've improved coverage of the Baltic region and the Balkans, provided updates on Eurostar and French TGV services, and have included many new accommodation options, favouring hotels which are close to railway stations and have a touch of character.

The Bolshevik Revolution split Europe. But rail travel is a great unifier. Trains bring places and people closer. Is it not a matter of wonder that one can board a night train in the Rhineland and alight next morning in the Austrian Tyrol? Or travel from Nice or Paris directly to Russia?

### THE JOURNEY OR THE DESTINATION?

With the development of Europe's first railways, people were suddenly on the move, with the restless English often leading the way. The guidebook market blossomed as travellers packed a **Baedeker** or a **Murray** before embarking on a new journey.

Today's traveller is more likely to turn to the Internet, just before departure hurriedly downloading a few pages on their chosen destination. More people than ever are travelling, but many just dash to their destination – and those destinations have become fewer and fewer.

In travelling by train around Europe, it is possible to rediscover the sheer enjoyment of the journey itself. Trains are fun. So in *Europe by Rail* we

put the journey at the centre. We present **50 rail routes** that between them cover the full gamut of European rail travel. There are routes where trains speed across great plains, routes where slow trains dawdle from one village to another and there are routes where trains traverse harsh tundra and great mountain ranges. In addition to our 50 routes, we offer 26 mini-features (called **Sidetracks**); these are bite-size teasers which invite you to reflect on rail-related themes or venture into regions not covered by our 50 routes.

Travel by train across Europe and you will inevitably be struck by the sheer variety of our continent. Our 50 routes reflect that mix. We include some high-speed hops, where you can cover a lot of ground fast. Wherever we can, we highlight slow trains that follow less-frequented rail routes. It is on such journeys that the **texture and detail of European life** is most easily appreciated, whether it be in the changing landscapes beyond the carriage window, the architecture of villages you pass through along the way or in the faces and accents of folk with whom you share a railway carriage.

The opening of new rail routes has slashed journey times. Today's traveller can take an early morning **Eurostar from London** and by mid-afternoon be standing on the shores of the Mediterranean. A judicious combination of daytime high-speed services and overnight trains allows longer journeys across the continent to be undertaken very comfortably by train. Few experiences compare with opening the blinds of the night sleeper in the morning to find a fragile blanket of morning mist over a foreign landscape. You can read more about **night trains** on pp485–87.

The imaginations of travellers today are unfettered. Classic destinations like the Rhine, Switzerland and the northern shores of the Mediterranean no longer command attention to the exclusion of other parts of Europe. The routes in this book will take you far beyond the Arctic Circle and on mountain railways across the Pyrenees and the Alps. We shall lead you to **great cities** in eastern Europe and from Balkan byways to the Baltic and the Bay of Biscay.

We kick off in **Route 1** with a trip on Eurostar from London to Paris. Well are we aware that Britain deserves more coverage (even in this Brexit era). So for the 16th edition of *Europe by Rail* we are planning a number of new routes to cover Britain and Ireland.

## A WORD OF THANKS

We offer our sincere thanks to the many writers who contributed to earlier editions of the book, so **helping shape a volume** which has evolved over 20 years. Thanks are due to David McCutcheon of DVD maps for producing the colour overview maps which appear on the inside front and back covers of this edition. We also wish to thank Murray Mahon and Chris McLaren of SaltWay Global Ltd for handling the worldwide distribution of *Europe by Rail*. And a special word of thanks to Martyn Chapman of Orca Book Services Ltd for his enthusiasm for the title and for introducing us to SaltWay.

## TAKING TIME

Some readers might try and undertake a dozen or more of these routes within a month. We would just sound a note of caution. That way madness lies. Better to focus a little, and take time to **stop off here and there** along the way. Savvy travellers nowadays realise that the journey is something to be savoured in its own right.

Branch out from main rail routes and choose slower trains on at least some parts of your journey to discover the **joys of slow travel**. You can get some inspiration by reading our *Manifesto for Slow Travel* at [www.slowtraveleurope.eu](http://www.slowtraveleurope.eu). Exploring Europe by rail is a great way to put slow travel principles into practice.

If the mid-19th century was the heyday of railway development, this second decade of the 21st century is a new **Golden Age for leisure travel** by train. Across much of Europe, the train is back in vogue. Rail travel is often modestly priced, generally very comfortable and appeals to the pieties of a new generation of travellers worried about environmental issues. It was surely not by chance that the very first public Eurostar train to leave London's magnificently refurbished St Pancras International station (ten years ago this autumn in November 2007) was powered by two engines with the names *Tread Lightly* and *Voyage Vert*. The train comes with impeccable green credentials.

## PRACTICALITIES

**Travel light** if you possibly can. Heavy luggage and trains do not make good companions. Take this book along of course, and do not forget to take a print copy of the **European Rail Timetable**, frequently referred to as 'ERT' in this book. This veritable masterpiece of compression is published six times each year (see [www.europeanrailtimetable.eu](http://www.europeanrailtimetable.eu)). An up-to-date copy of that timetable, and the *Rail Map Europe* (also published by European Rail Timetable Ltd), are natural partners to this volume. Guidebook, map, timetable – these three remain the indispensable assets in the traveller's armamentarium.

So are you game to join us on this journey? The best way to get started is to read 'How to use this book' (p10). You will find **useful maps** on the inside front cover and inside back cover showing the routes in this volume (numbered 1 to 50). And you may like to know that we have a website to accompany this book at [www.europebyrail.eu](http://www.europebyrail.eu).

Enjoy the ride.

Nicky Gardner and Susanne Kries  
November 2017

## Overview: The 50 routes

Our 50 journeys include some which are short and sweet. **Route 3** and **35** are both less than 300 kilometres long. Yet they are as different as chalk and cheese: one is a wonderful rail cruise along the Mediterranean coast, the other is a fine transect by train through the Swiss Alps. At the other extreme we have some long-haul adventures. **Route 26, 29, 30** and **49** extend to more than 1,500 kilometres.

Our table (below and opposite) gives a **good overview** of the 50 journeys described in this book. We show the countries covered, the overall travel time and the length of each route. Note that the **travel time** quoted below does not make any allowance for breaking a journey or any overnight stops along the way. It's just an indication of how long you'll spend on trains if you follow the route, as we describe it, from end to end.

No.	From-to	countries	distance in km	travel time
1	London - Paris	United Kingdom, France	492	2h20
2	Paris - Marseille	France	863	9h
3	Marseille - Nice	France	229	3h
4	Paris - Cherbourg	France	434	4h15
5	Paris - Nîmes	France	723	9h
6	Paris - San Sebastián	France, Spain	1,030	16h
7	Paris - Barcelona	France, Spain	1,039	13h
8	Geneva - Barcelona	Switzerland, France, Spain	856	12h
9	Barcelona - Cádiz	Spain	1,324	13h20
10	Barcelona - Málaga	Spain	1,136	6h
11	San Sebastián - Santiago de Compostela	Spain	825	10h30
12	Santiago de Compostela - Lisbon	Spain, Portugal	616	6h
13	Lille - Amsterdam	France, Belgium, Netherlands	368	6h
14	Lille - Cologne	France, Belgium, Germany	357	3h
15	Amsterdam - Lausanne	Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, France, Switzerland	1,020	12h30
16	Cologne - Zurich	Germany, Switzerland	612	7h30
17	Cologne - Berlin	Germany	612	6h
18	Hannover - Magdeburg	Germany	302	9h
19	Berlin - Salzburg	Germany, Austria	943	10h
20	Nuremberg - Prague	Germany, Czech Republic	560	9h30

No.	From-to	countries	distance in km	travel time
21	Nuremberg – Bratislava	Germany, Austria, Slovakia	573	6h
22	Hamburg – Budapest	Germany, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary	1,291	13h45
23	Budapest – Lviv	Hungary, Ukraine	607	14h
24	Venice – Zagreb	Italy, Slovenia, Croatia	430	11h
25	Hamburg – Stockholm	Germany, Denmark, Sweden	997	12h
26	Amsterdam – Oslo	Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, Norway	1,611	24h
27	Copenhagen – Bergen	Denmark, Sweden, Norway	1,192	14h30
28	Oslo – Svolvær	Norway	1,450	20h
29	Stockholm – Svolvær	Sweden, Norway	1,735	21h
30	Boden – St Petersburg	Sweden, Finland, Russia	1,598	18h30
31	Helsinki – Rovaniemi	Finland	913	11h20
32	Vienna – Venice	Austria, Italy	620	7h40
33	Zurich – Vienna	Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Austria	845	9h30
34	Zurich – Milan	Switzerland, Italy	415	8h30
35	St Moritz – Zermatt	Switzerland	290	8h15
36	Zurich – Geneva	Switzerland	338	7h30
37	Munich – Verona	Germany, Austria, Italy	434	6h20
38	Nice – Pisa	France, Monaco, Italy	370	6h
39	Pisa – Rome	Italy	474	8h
40	Verona – Rome	Italy	562	6h45
41	Genoa – Venice	Italy	461	5h30
42	Rome – Siracusa	Italy	858	11h
43	Budapest – Skopje	Hungary, Serbia, Macedonia	811	18h
44	Budapest – Dubrovnik	Hungary, Croatia	1,037	17h30
45	Zagreb – Thessaloniki	Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece	1,166	25h
46	Berlin – Lviv	Germany, Poland, Ukraine	1,207	15h
47	Dresden – Zakopane	Germany, Poland	685	11h30
48	Warsaw – St Petersburg	Poland, Belarus, Russia	1,425	27h
49	Helsinki – Oslo	Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Sweden, Norway	1,592	25h
50	Belgrade – Lviv	Serbia, Romania, Ukraine	1,175	25h



**SKOPJE** This old stone bridge over the River Vardar in Skopje has been the victim of wars and earthquakes. Each time it is damaged, it has been rebuilt. The monument in the foreground recalls anarchists who defied Ottoman rule. Skopje is on **Route 43** (photo © Pepo971).

The claret-and-grey tones of a Thalys train add a touch of style to Liège-Guillemins railway station in Belgium. The new station, designed by Santiago Calatrava and opened in 2009, is a remarkably bold essay in glass, steel and concrete. Liège is on **Routes 14** and **15** (photo © hidden europe).

**LIÈGE**





## HARZ MOUNTAINS

Steam-hauled trains are still seen every day in the Harz Mountains in eastern Germany. Explore the region by following **Route 18** (photo © hidden europe).

The pattern of railways in the Balkan region is greatly influenced by the great rivers of south-east Europe. Here we see the confluence of two of those rivers, the Sava and the Danube, in Belgrade. The Serbian capital rates high on our list of favourite capitals and is on **Routes 43, 45 and 50** (photo © Nikolai Sorokin).

## BELGRADE



## A TASTE OF FRANCE

### An introduction

How might one best get a taste of France by train? There is, to be sure, a real thrill in being on a high-speed train as it storms out of a rail tunnel for a **first encounter with France**. Perhaps you are emerging from the Channel Tunnel to find the grey skies of Calais. Or possibly you are on a sleek Spanish train which has dived under the Pyrenees through the Perthus Tunnel and dashes out into sharp southern sunshine after a subterranean crossing of the border **from Spain to France**. You might be slipping quietly over the French frontier on a local train through the Jura hills or on one trundling through vineyards on the west side of the Rhine.

Whatever way you arrive in France, and particularly if you arrive by train or boat rather than by plane, there is a **sense of occasion**. To get the most out of your rail travels around France, it is important to cut off the high-speed lines and explore lesser rail routes.

The first French high-speed railway was opened in 1981 – that was between Paris and Lyon. Four decades on, the country has almost 3,000 km of high-speed lines, known in France as *lignes à grande vitesse* (LGV). That's a magnificent achievement, one which has enhanced regional connectivity and reshaped the geography of France. But, let's face it, those **LGV routes** were certainly not designed for sightseeing.

### Life beyond the high-speed routes

Happily, France still has a very extensive web of traditional railways, quite apart from the modern LGV network. **Route 2, 3, 4 and 5** in this book all rely on these non-high-speed lines which criss-cross the country. We have included **some of our favourites**, but there were many potential candidates. Would that there had been space to include the 277-km long *ligne des Causses* from Béziers to Neussargues (ERT 332) or the 'old' line from Paris to Mulhouse via Troyes and Belfort (ERT 380 and 378a). Whenever we have the time, that's still our preferred route for journeys from the French capital to Basel (Bâle) and the northernmost cantons of Switzerland.

Whereas, almost without exception, seats must be reserved in advance for trains using high-speed routes, you can travel with much more spontaneity if you stay off LGV routes. Some, but by no means all, Intercités trains require seat reservations. And the entire **TER network** of regional trains is there for you to roam at will. None of these trains need advance reservation.

When you are planning longer-distance journeys through **rural France**, it is worth bearing in mind that services may be thin. The idea of easily memorised regular-interval departure times, has never quite caught on in France. So check those schedules carefully! ■

## Route 1: A tale of two cities

CITIES: ★★ CULTURE: ★★ HISTORY: ★★ SCENERY: ★

COUNTRIES COVERED: UNITED KINGDOM (UK), FRANCE (FR)

JOURNEY TIME: 2 HRS 20 MINS | DISTANCE: 492 KM

This first journey in *Europe by Rail* is an exquisite piece of theatre. It starts at **London's St Pancras station**, a space which is as inspiring as any cathedral. Great train stations have their own energy. Each has its own shades and shadows. In St Pancras there is a **bluish tinge** to the light which picks up the blue of the soaring ironwork in William Barlow's dramatic train shed.

The chances are that, as a reader of this book, you will have travelled on **Eurostar** so many times that the journey has become routine – almost as prosaic as the morning commute from Woking to Waterloo.

But take another look at Eurostar, and join us at St Pancras for a non-stop run to Paris. The commuter crowds are long gone, and St Pancras has settled into the quiet rhythm of a spring day when all the trains are running perfectly to time. The first corks have been popped at the station's pretentiously long **champagne bar**, and oysters and quail eggs are being served to those who know a *blanc de blancs* from a *blanc de noirs*. The area just north of the station, once a maze of sheds and sidings, coal dumps and grain stores, has been reclaimed, but happily not entirely tamed. **Camley Street Park**, tucked into a strip of land between the railway and Regent's Canal, is a sanctuary just a stone's throw from the platforms at St Pancras. It is a place to listen to reed warblers and watch a lively siskin searching for seeds. There is hazel, willow and silver birch.

On the other side of the railway tracks, headstones are stacked neatly around an **old oak tree**. They were placed there when graves were moved in Victorian times to allow the **Midland Railway** to build its line into St Pancras. A young trainee architect named **Thomas Hardy** helped clear part of the cemetery; he of course changed profession and become a celebrated writer. Just as St Pancras station, after a long period of decline, changed course and reinvented itself as London's gateway to the continent.

## From the Thames to the Seine

"I have little doubt that British Railways will do away with St Pancras altogether," said the poet **John Betjeman** in 1952. "It is too beautiful and too romantic to survive. It is not of this age." But, despite decades of corporate neglect and vandalism, St Pancras has indeed survived and a huge **statue of the poet**, hand on hat, now stands on the station concourse. Passengers who have just arrived from Paris, and others heading off to the Alps or the Mediterranean, stand and gaze in awe at Betjeman. The rejuvenation of St Pancras station and the surrounding area is indeed a wondrous thing.

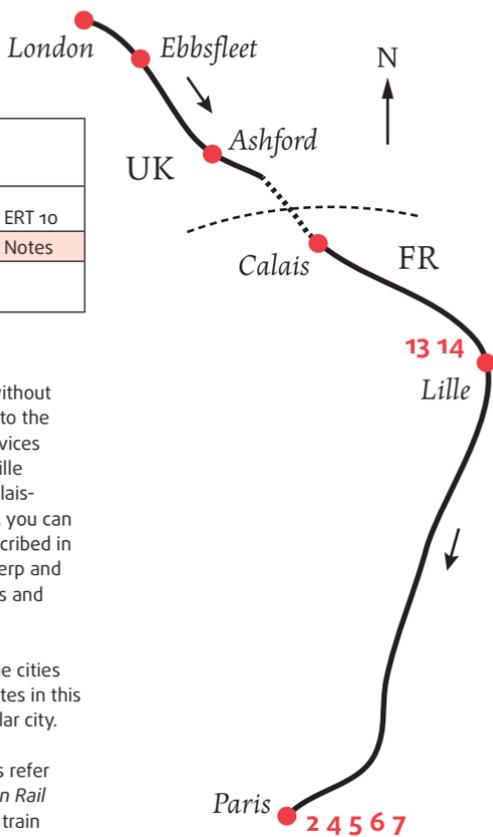
Route details		
London St Pancras to Paris Nord		ERT 10
Frequency	Journey time	Notes
1-2 per hr	2 hrs 15 mins – 2 hrs 40 mins	

## Notes

Eurostar trains bound for Paris run without any scheduled stops from the coast to the French capital. It is only Eurostar services heading for Brussels which stop at Lille Europe and in some cases also at Calais-Fr ethun. By changing at Lille Europe, you can connect into two other journeys described in this book: **Route 13** to Bruges, Antwerp and Amsterdam and **Route 14** to Brussels and Cologne.

The **numbers in red** adjacent to some cities on our route maps refer to other routes in this book which also include that particular city.

The ERT numbers in our route details refer to the table numbers in the *European Rail Timetable* (ERT) where you will find train schedules for that particular section of the route. Do note that ERT table numbers may change occasionally with successive editions of the timetable.



Let's **climb on board** the 11.31 to Paris. It could be any Paris-bound Eurostar, but we like the 11.31. It departs at a civilised time. While others slip into communion with their laptops and smartphones, we watch. The train glides gently out of St Pancras. As the track curves to the east, eyes right for a view back over the station, an extraordinary piece of high Victoriana.

The journey on Eurostar from London to Paris is one of many moods and **changing landscapes**. Within a minute or two of departure, London is eclipsed by darkness. Watch for tantalising shadows at Stratford, then a burst of sunshine as our train, picking up speed now, storms out of the London tunnels onto the **Thames marshes**. This is a busy, fractured world of overhead pylons, silt lagoons and container parks: the melancholic edge-lands where the capital blurs with Essex.

Only those who crane their necks skyward glimpse the QEII road bridge spanning the Thames at **Dartford**. The train cuts below the northern approach to the bridge. Eurostar dives under the river, emerging in moments into industrial north Kent, which quickly transforms into a green and pleasant land. The **Medway Viaduct** is a gem, one that sadly goes unnoticed and unremarked by most travellers. Eurostar speeds over the river where once the Dutch tried to attack the English fleet. The view up the Medway Valley (to the right of the train) is one of delicate beauty.

The rail route dances with the **ancient Pilgrim's Way**, our train coasting past orchards and oast houses, and within half an hour of leaving London we are approaching the **Channel Tunnel**. It has all been so breathless, such a kaleidoscope of landscapes, that the tunnel comes as a welcome break. The dark beyond the window is suddenly a blessing.

The first glimpses of France at **Calais** do the country no favours. But industry quickly gives way to an expansive rural landscape. Brick villages sit squat in **Flanders fields**. We slow, for no evident reason, and there's a chance to see the forêt de Guînes – hardly a forest at all, but a mere wisp of a wood where silver glades of birch grade into mixed stands of oak, beech and hornbeam. It was into this woodland that two balloonists decanted from the sky one afternoon in 1785. **Jean Blanchard and John Jeffries** were the first men to cross the English Channel without a boat.

Speeding south-east towards Lille, the town of **Cassel** stands bold and clear on a rare hill away to the left. Just beyond **Lille**, our Paris-bound train

## FRENCH CONNECTIONS

Rail travellers from London bound for provincial cities in France sometimes assume that all itineraries route through Paris. But that's not the case. In **Lille Europe**, there are seamless connections to high-speed trains to destinations across France. Whether you are heading for Bordeaux vineyards or the beaches of Provence, there will probably be a good option via Lille, thus obviating the need to change stations in Paris.

In similar vein, changing trains at **Calais-Fréthun** sometimes makes perfect sense. The station is minimalist, but the occasional Eurostar trains which stop at Calais offer good onward connections to Boulogne and Amiens, a very scenic line which just south of Calais cuts through the chalk hills which are an extension of the North Downs in Kent. It is still very easy to travel all the way from the French coast to Paris via this old main line through Boulogne and Amiens which was once used by the boat trains which ran from **Calais to Paris**. Among them was the *La Flèche d'Or* (*Golden Arrow*) which was reserved for passengers arriving at Calais on the steamer from England.

Fifty years ago, long before the advent of Eurostar and cheap flights, the preferred route from London to Paris relied on **cross-Channel ferries**. Those who could afford the premium *Golden Arrow* service via Dover and Calais could reach Paris in seven hours. First-class sleeping cars were available from Calais for passengers travelling from London to the **French Riviera**. In Paris these sleeping cars were attached to *Le Train Bleu* (*The Blue Train*) for the journey south to Provence. Those with the means could thus travel in style from London to Nice or even Sanremo in under 24 hours.

turns sharply to the right, now heading decisively south towards **Picardy**. We dash through a landscape once full of sandbags and barbed wire, now scattered with **war cemeteries** that burst with poppies. The ashen face of death, drenched by hopeless rain and shrapnel scarred, has been replaced by a quiet beauty, broken only by the whoosh of the fast trains that speed by on their way to Paris.

This is territory defined by its rivers. We cross the Scarpe, the Somme and the Oise. The latter is bridged just at the spot where **Æthelwulf**, King of Wessex, married his bride Judith of Flanders in the year 856. Æthelwulf, the father of Alfred the Great, was on his way back from Rome, a journey which took many months. Today it is possible to leave London by train early in the morning and be in the Eternal City by late evening.

The first clear hint of approaching Paris is the line of planes away to our left descending into Charles de Gaulle airport. Suddenly, to the right, there is a tantalising glimpse of the **River Seine**. We are nearing the end of a 136-minute performance that is Eurostar. And what other piece of theatre opens in London and ends in Paris?

## The Gare du Nord

Our journey on Eurostar ends at the Gare du Nord. Each of the principal railway stations in Paris has its own character. Saint-Lazare is for artists (think Manet and Monet) while the Gare de Lyon has the lure of the sunny south of France. The Gare de l'Est is the place where there are meetings and greetings as the train from Russia arrives. But the Gare du Nord is a **place apart**, a station where the routine comings and goings are unexceptional. It is in a part of Paris full of moral and sexual hazards – hardly changed from the days of *L'Assommoir* except that the downtrodden working-class French residents of **Émile Zola's day** have been replaced by migrants from across the world.

The Gare du Nord has always had its English connections. Indeed it's always made space for **English railwaymen**. In *Nana* (1880), Zola mentions an Englishman who is employed to grease the wheels of trains at the Gare du Nord. The man's daughter, Lucy Stewart, is blessed with the face of a horse – “une tête de cheval, mais adorable” in Zola's words.

If, like us, you need to pause after such a fast train journey – taking time perhaps to allow your soul to catch up with you – then make for the courtyard of **Lariboisière Hospital**, as close to the Gare du Nord as the canalside wilderness at Camley Street is to St Pancras. No wilderness or warblers here, but an elegant and quiet space surrounded by **neoclassical colonnades**. It's a good spot to ponder your onward journey, for Paris is just the beginning, as the French capital is the starting point for five journeys described in this book.

## Paris

Paris has always held great allure – it’s been a byword for **style, glamour and romance** since railway tourism began and the English started to go there for weekends in the 19th century. **Baron Haussmann** transformed the city for Napoleon III, sweeping away many of its crowded slum quarters and replacing them with tree-lined boulevards too wide to barricade. Today, these stately avenues of elegantly matching, shuttered buildings and imposing monuments form the framework of much of modern Paris.

Paris is now very much a city for young people. Students traditionally hang out in the **Latin Quarter** on the Left Bank, so-called because studies at the Sorbonne were originally in Latin. The once seedy area around the Bastille has shaken off its revolutionary past to become one of the city’s trendiest nightspots with a multitude of bars and restaurants. Older quarters such as **Le Marais** and **Montmartre** remain warrens of picturesque old streets. Parisian night views (from a riverboat, the top of the Eiffel Tower or the steps in front of Sacré-Cœur) are part of the experience too. In the peak holiday month of August, Parisians desert their city en masse, leaving it strangely quiet.

Rail history buffs might be interested in the fact that the home of one of Paris’ most famous museums – **Musée d’Orsay** – is a grand structure that was built as a train station for the World’s Fair in 1900.

### ARRIVAL, INFORMATION, ACCOMMODATION

➤ There are seven main rail stations in Paris, each has its own métro stop; all except Montparnasse and Gare de l’Est are also served by express RER trains. ➤ **Roissy-Charles de Gaulle** (CDG) is 27 km north-east of the city, linked by RER line B to Gare du Nord and on to Châtelet-Les Halles, 04.50–00.05, every 10 or 20 mins, taking about 30 mins to/from Châtelet-Les Halles. ➤ **Orly** is 14 km south; the automated métro links the airport with Antony, where you can join RER line B for the city centre. Take advantage of the efficient and well coordinated public transport system, made up of the métro and buses of RATP (Régie Autonome des Transports Parisiens) and RER (Réseau Express Régional) trains. RER trains run about 06.00–00.30, consisting of five rail lines (A, B, C, D and E), which are basically express services between the city and the suburbs.

📄 Tourist office: 25 rue des pyramides ([www.parisinfo.com](http://www.parisinfo.com)) and at Gare du Nord, and Gare de l’Est. The **Batobus** ([www.batobus.com](http://www.batobus.com)), is a water-bus (without commentary) and a good way of seeing Paris from the Seine. The Batobus stops at the Eiffel Tower, Musée d’Orsay, St-Germain-des-Prés, Notre-Dame, Jardin des Plantes, Hôtel de Ville, the Louvre, Champs-Élysées and Beaugrenelle.

📄 Cheaper accommodation is getting harder to find anywhere near the city centre, and if you’re on a tight budget, you may have to stay out of the centre. We can very much recommend the comfortable **Hôtel du Jeu de Paume**, 54 r. Saint-Louis-en-l’île, ☎ 01 43 26 14 18 ([www.jeudepaumehotel.com](http://www.jeudepaumehotel.com)), which is on the Île Saint-Louis in the middle of the Seine, just a few minutes’ walk away from Notre-Dame. The location could not be better – but it has its price. The **Hôtel Langlois**, 63 r. St-Lazare, ☎ 01 48 74 78 24 ([www.hotel-langlois.com](http://www.hotel-langlois.com)), is a lovely place full of character and well worth the price-tag. A good option in Montmartre in a quiet street is the boutique **Hôtel des Arts**, 5 r. Tholoze, ☎ 01 46 06 30 52 ([www.arts-hotel-paris.com](http://www.arts-hotel-paris.com)).

## SIDETRACKS: THE ALPS BY BUS

The area where Switzerland, Austria and Italy conjoin is one of the most beautiful areas of the Alps. Several railways penetrate this region, but they do not connect in a manner which allows **cross-border train journeys**. So travellers must perforce resort to buses – which is just what we did when exploring this mountainous area in July 2017.

**Bolzano** (on **Route 37** in this book) is a good starting point for rural cross-border adventures. First take the train to Merano (ERT 597), a graceful German-speaking spa town in the Adige Valley, which is worth a stop. From Merano, take the **Vinschgaubahn** (ERT 598), a local railway which happily reopened in 2005, to Malles (Venosta). German is very much the *lingua franca* here, and the town is shown on many maps and in timetables by its German name: Mals im Vinschgau.

There are some very tempting local bus routes which start outside the station in **Malles**. Swiss post bus (route number 811) runs hourly from Malles to Zernez via beautiful **Val Müstair** and the Ofen Pass (every two hours in winter). You may want to stop off at the UNESCO-listed Benedictine monastery in Val Müstair (closed Sundays and on major Catholic feast days). Most people in the Müstair Valley speak Romansh. The principal village of **Santa Maria**, just west of the monastery, is well worth a wander. The bus from Malles to Zernez in Switzerland takes 95 minutes. In **Zernez**, you are on the Rhaetian Railway network (and on **Route 34** in this book). See ERT 545 for train times.

Another equally appealing option is bus 273 which runs north from Malles along the east side of the **Lago di Resia** and on over Reschen Pass to Nauders in Austria. From there the bus drops down steeply into the Inn Valley, and terminates at Martina in Switzerland. Buses on this route run hourly all year round (less frequently on Sundays in winter). On the run north alongside the lake, you'll see an **extraordinary spectacle**: an eerily beautiful campanile projecting from the waters of the reservoir. It is a reminder of the fate of the Italian village of Graun which was flooded in 1950, when the valley was dammed to enlarge a pre-existing natural lake – curiously to provide water for Switzerland. The scene at Graun is so striking that you may want to alight from the bus and take a look around.

The journey from Malles to **Nauders** takes 37 minutes; from Malles to Martina takes 48 minutes. This bus route is operated by Servizi Autobus Dolomiti (times in ERT 954). In **Martina**, bus 273 connects with an hourly Swiss post bus which runs 17 kilometres down the Inn Valley to the Engadine railhead at **Scuol-Tarasp**, from where the Rhaetian Railway has two trains an hour (ERT 545) for your onward journey through Switzerland.

If you want to move north into the **Austrian Tyrol**, there are Austrian post bus services from both Nauders and Martina (times for both in ERT 954) on to Landeck – on the Arlberg rail route (ERT 951) – which is featured in **Route 33** of this book.

Our experience is that bus to bus, bus to train and train to bus connections in this region generally work perfectly. Only in severe winter weather, when snow may close even major roads, is there any serious risk of disruption.

## BALKAN JOURNEYS

### An introduction

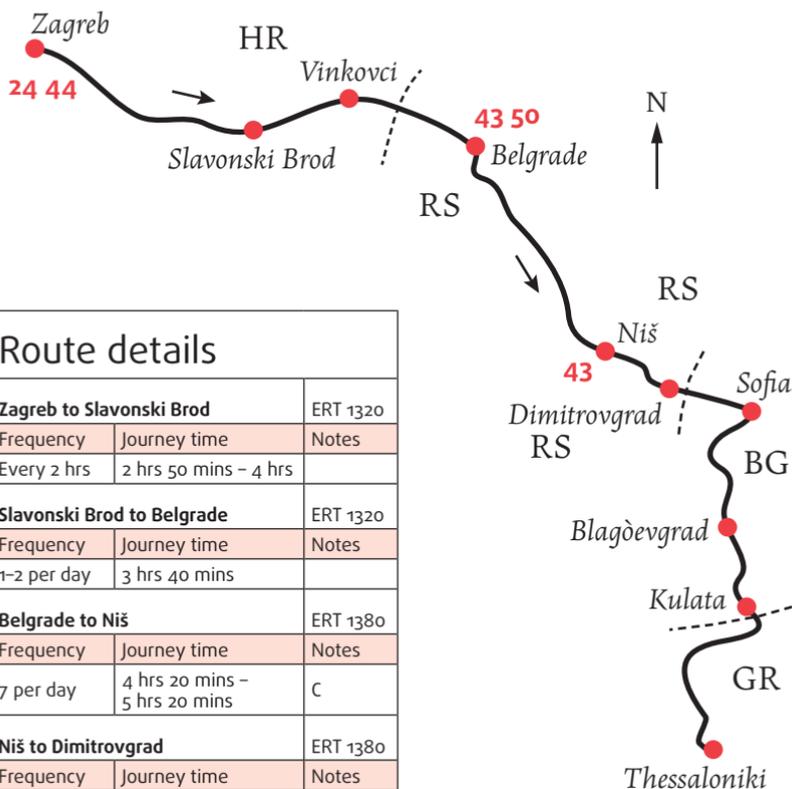
The Balkan region is for many rail travellers a **taste of a more exotic Europe**. But rail travel in this region has been sorely hit by troubled public finances, lack of investment and sometimes even downright bad management. So many **journeys require careful planning** and, with timetables liable to change at short notice, it's essential to double check your itinerary just before travelling. There have been times when we might have found ourselves stranded on Balkan journeys were it not for the fact that the region is generally well served by buses.

**Rail fares are so cheap** throughout much of south-east Europe that it's unwise to use a flexi rail pass. Those valuable pass days are best reserved for journeys in parts of Europe where train fares are more expensive. In many areas, there may be no first-class seating on trains and, even where there is a designated first-class carriage, it may be no more comfortable and just as crowded as second class. But there are always the exceptions which prove the rule. There are comfortable **Spanish-built Talgo trains** which trundle through Bosnia with improbably luxurious seating in first class. There are some nicely retro first-class Romanian carriages where you can sink into plush red seats and enjoy watching the hills slip by beyond the window.

### Lack of connectivity

Easily the most frustrating element of rail travel in the region is the propensity of operators to just cancel entire routes without any consultation or advance notice. In August 2017, the cross-border trains from Vršac to Timișoara were axed, so severing the last direct passenger train service between **Serbia and Romania**. A pretty poor show, all the more so when one considers that there were once eight separate railways crossing the border between the two countries.

Successive editions of this book have been bedevilled by the sheer perversity of national rail administrations in the Balkans whose vision rarely extends beyond national borders. **Croatia** scrapped a swathe of services, so putting an end to *inter alia* the Belgrade-Sarajevo and Budapest-Sarajevo trains which both briefly traversed Croatian territory. In December 2016, the **Bosnian authorities** axed the last international train service from Sarajevo, namely the daily train to Zagreb. Things are no better in **Albania**, which has no rail link crossing its borders. International services to and from **Greece** are patchy, while as of October 2017 there is just one train each day from **Kosovo**; it runs from Prishtinë/Prishtina to Macedonia. But it's not all doom and gloom. In **Hungary** and Romania, you'll find extensive rail networks with some of the finest rural rail experiences in Europe. ■



Route details		
<b>Zagreb to Slavonski Brod</b>		ERT 1320
Frequency	Journey time	Notes
Every 2 hrs	2 hrs 50 mins - 4 hrs	
<b>Slavonski Brod to Belgrade</b>		ERT 1320
Frequency	Journey time	Notes
1-2 per day	3 hrs 40 mins	
<b>Belgrade to Niš</b>		ERT 1380
Frequency	Journey time	Notes
7 per day	4 hrs 20 mins - 5 hrs 20 mins	C
<b>Niš to Dimitrovgrad</b>		ERT 1380
Frequency	Journey time	Notes
4-5 per day	2 hrs 45 mins - 3 hrs 30 mins	
<b>Dimitrovgrad to Sofia</b>		ERT 1380
Frequency	Journey time	Notes
1 per day	2 hrs	X
<b>Sofia to Blagòevgrad</b>		ERT 1560
Frequency	Journey time	Notes
7 per day	2 hrs 10 mins - 3 hrs 20 mins	
<b>Blagòevgrad to Kulata</b>		ERT 1560
Frequency	Journey time	Notes
6 per day	1 hr 20 mins - 2 hrs	Y
<b>Kulata to Thessaloniki</b>		ERT 1560
Frequency	Journey time	Notes
1 per day	3 hrs 15 mins	Z

## Notes

**C** - Note that while most trains on this route depart from the main station in Belgrade, occasional services leave from Beograd Centar which, despite its name, is not at all central. It lies well south of the city centre.

**X** - Remember that clocks advance by one hour as trains cross the Bulgarian border just after leaving Dimitrovgrad.

**Y** - All trains on this route stop at Sandanski. Some journeys from Blagòevgrad to Kulata require a change of train at General Todorov.

**Z** - Passengers may be conveyed by bus from Kulata (Bulgaria) across the border to Strimon in Greece. The bus leg is about 15 km long.

## SIDETRACKS: CARRIAGE DESIGN

Rail travel is generally very safe. But that was not the perception of Parisians in 1861 after poor **Monsieur Poinot** was found dead in a railway carriage compartment at the Gare de l'Est. By the time Poinot's mutilated body was discovered, the murderer had long fled, presumably having alighted at one of the stations where the train from Mulhouse had stopped on its journey to Paris.

The fate of Monsieur Poinot made French travellers think twice about buying a train ticket. Before long, Gallic panic over the **dangers of train travel** spread to England, when a particularly gruesome compartment murder took place in London. English trains were designed on the same lines as those in France, with first-class accommodation being in separate compartments, each accessed by a door directly from the railway platform. There was in those days no connection at all between adjacent compartments.

This design was the norm across Europe for first class, in contrast to North America where the open-plan saloon car was more common. **Wolfgang Schivelbusch**, in his marvellous book *The Railway Journey*, suggests that on European trains well-to-do travellers enjoyed the privacy and style associated with travel in a horse-drawn coach on a highway. The first-class **railway compartment in Europe** imitated the coach, but Schivelbusch notes that the design of the American railroad car was inspired by the open saloons on the riverboats which plied the young nation's waterways.

"That only two cases of murder," writes Schivelbusch, "were able to trigger a collective psychosis tells us as much about the compartment's significance for the nineteenth century European psyche as does the fact that it took so long to become conscious of the compartment's dysfunctionality."

That **dysfunctionality** lay not merely in the compartment's appeal for assassins. There were surely many instances of lavatorial distress; no surprise perhaps that, when a train arrived at an intermediate station after a particularly long non-stop leg, there was often a communal rush for the station toilets.

The victim in the London murder was an unfortunate Mr Briggs; his assailant was a German villain named Franz Müller. The railways responded by introducing a small glazed peephole between compartments. These peepholes were called **Müller Lights**. Many a courting couple surely bemoaned the resulting loss of privacy. Before long, railway companies installed communication cords which passengers in distress could pull to alert the train crew to an emergency. But a German railway engineer, Edmund Heusinger von Waldegg, devised a more radical approach to mitigating the dangers of travel in compartments. He suggested an **internal corridor** down one side of each carriage, allowing passengers and train staff to move from compartment to compartment. It did not entirely erode the intimacy of the small compartment but now afforded a new sense of safety and security. It also paved the way for the introduction of on-board facilities such as toilets and restaurant cars.

European carriage design has moved on, with the open-plan saloon now much preferred by most travellers. Trains with individual compartments linked by a connecting corridor are now increasingly rare. Read more on carriage design in **Sidetracks Y** (on communal carriages in Russia) on p399.

# Gazetteer

## Countries from A to Z

Albania **Andorra** Austria **Belarus** Belgium  
**Bosnia and Herzegovina** Bulgaria **Croatia**  
Cyprus **Czech Republic** Denmark **Estonia**  
Faroe Islands **Finland** France **Germany**  
Greece **Hungary** Iceland **Ireland** Italy  
**Kosovo** Latvia **Liechtenstein** Lithuania  
**Luxembourg** Macedonia **Malta** Moldova  
Monaco **Montenegro** Netherlands **Norway**  
Poland **Portugal** Romania **Russia**  
San Marino **Serbia** Slovakia **Slovenia** Spain  
**Sweden** Switzerland **Turkey** Ukraine  
**United Kingdom** Vatican City

## Interrail: a retrospect

Feedback from readers of earlier editions of *Europe by Rail* often prompts us to reflect on **how rail travel is changing**. A common thought among older readers of previous editions was: “Interrail isn’t the same as in the early days.” Several correspondents have contacted us with stories of how Interrail and Eurail have lost their gloss.

“Too many supplements nowadays,” moaned a Danish reader, who explained how she will take the plane this summer for the journey from Copenhagen to Cornwall rather than having to pay “all sorts of extras on top of the cost of a rail pass.”

“It’s not like it was forty years ago,” said another reader, “when you could just hop on any train and travel where you wanted.”

### MYTHS OF LONG-LOST HALYCON DAYS

So it’s time to put the record straight. There never was a time, not even back in the **early days of Interrail**, when travellers with a pass could just hop on any train without having to bother with reservations. It has become part of the mythology of Interrail that there was a great moment in history when the pass cost hardly anything and one could travel across Europe without having to worry about reservations and supplements. Memories of holidays in our youth invariably become rose-tinted with the passage of time.

Let’s take a closer look. **Interrail has certainly changed** a bit over the 44 years since it was launched, and in our view it is a better value and more flexible product today than it was back in 1972. We have researched how the cost of the classic global youth pass has increased in price over the years and it is clear that incomes have increased far more rapidly than have **pass prices**. Today’s Interrail pass allows completely free travel in more countries and on many more trains than did the earliest Interrail passes. In 2016, the **rules for the global pass** were even amended to allow two journeys in the holder’s home country. This is a considerable bonus.

True, there have been some big **changes in the night train market**, and some overnight services have been withdrawn. Day trains have sped up so much that there is simply less need to travel overnight. The night trains that remain, generally on longer-distance routes, have moved upmarket with sleeping cars and couchette coaches replacing long rakes of carriages with regular seated accommodation. Travellers today evidently like their creature comforts, and superior accommodation requires a supplement – just as it did in the earliest days of Interrail.

### NO-GO ZONES FOR THE PIONEERS OF INTERRAIL

Turn to the day train market, and Interrail always came laced with all sorts of restrictions. The entire *Trans-Europe Express* (TEE) network was simply

out-of-bounds to pass holders. This was not a question of having to pay a supplement. **TEE was a complete no-go area** for Interrail travellers. Prime-time morning departures from Zurich to Munich (on the *Bavaria* train), Hamburg (the *Helvetia*) and Paris (*L'Arbalète*) were barred to pass holders. The same applied to sensibly timed morning trains from Milan to Geneva (the *Lemano*), Nice (the *Ligure*), Lyon (the *Mont Cenis*) and Munich (the *Mediolanum*).

**France** was very difficult for the Interrail pioneers. The fastest trains on key routes from Paris to the provinces (eg. on the lines to Toulouse and Clermont-Ferrand as well as on services to Alsace and the Rhône Valley) were all first-class only and thus not available to Interrail pass holders. Even more annoyingly, Interrail was **barred on some regional services** where alternatives were slow or circuitous. For example on the only Rapide of the day from Nantes and Tours to Lyon Interrail was not valid. Perversely, or so it seemed to pass holders, SNCF would not accept Interrail on the sole daily direct train from Bordeaux to Grenoble.

Many trains on **prime routes to the Adriatic resorts** of what was then Yugoslavia were barred to holders of Interrail passes. This meant that pass holders could not use the *Marjan Express* from Zagreb to Split, the *Arena* from Zagreb to Pula or the fastest trains from Zagreb to Rijeka. Similarly, the *Sarajevo Express* from Belgrade to Sarajevo was a no-go zone for holders of an Interrail pass.

## THE SECRET OF INTERRAIL SUCCESS: TAKING THE SLOW TRAIN

The early users of Interrail passes worked around the **complicated web of restrictions**. They eschewed the premium services and took slower options. And they did not complain. Free was free and they rejoiced at being able to travel from northern Norway to the toe of Italy without having to pay a cent beyond that initial outlay for an Interrail pass.

That is still perfectly possible today. Nothing has changed except the horizons of a new generation of travellers that values high-speed and long-distance as virtues in their own right. Very few early Interrail pass holders set off to conquer huge swathes of Europe in a single trip. How times have changed. Today folk set out with the notion that Poland and Portugal must be clocked within the compass of a fortnight.

Those who have used Interrail a few times know **the secret of success**. Less is more. Slower trains offer a far better perspective on European landscapes. And the **local service** allows a better engagement with the communities through which you pass.

Nowadays, **supplement-free slower trains** criss-crossing Europe are generally very much faster than they were in the 1970s. The fastest daytime service on the Barcelona-Zaragoza-Madrid route in the early 1970s took 13 hours for the 680-km journey. To use that premium service, holders of

Interrail passes had to pay a *sobretasa de velocidad* – a special high-speed supplement. Yes, there was a time when fifty kilometres per hour counted as high speed.

Today the slow train dashes from Barcelona to Madrid in less than nine hours. No supplement. **No need to book.** Just hop on and ride. Of course, if you are in a rush, you can pay a supplement to ride the fast AVE train.

### ALTERNATIVES TO TGV SPEED

Slow trains have become very much faster over the years, and in our view they are the **best way to use Interrail**. If you want to speed across France on a TGV, the option is there, but you'll need to book a seat and pay a supplement. That means committing yourself to a particular itinerary. So easy is it nowadays to buy cheap tickets on premium trains across Europe, that Interrail hardly makes sense on those fastest trains. If you must make haste on certain legs of your itinerary, book high-speed services well in advance and you may well find that point-to-point tickets work out cheaper than a rail pass.

Where the pass really comes into its own is on **slower journeys and rural routes** where there are few cheap deals on offer. Dynamic pricing means great offers on busy routes, but shift to lesser routes and you may well find that old-style distance-based tariffs are the only option. Interrail is superb for such slower journeys. It **preserves total flexibility**, you can stop off on a whim, and you can savour the serendipitous delays and diversions that come with slow travel. One of our favourite writers, an early exponent of slow travel, is **Théophile Gautier**. “What charm can there be in a journey when one is always sure to arrive,” queried Gautier in 1843.

### SLOWNESS AS A PRIVILEGE OF WEALTH

Interrail allows us to escape the rush of modernity and to rediscover a slower Europe. True, you might well still move faster than the snail's pace that characterised the itineraries of the Interrail pioneers.

How often have we heard the mantra: “But I need to cover a lot of distance and stick to fast trains. If I don't I'll not be getting the best value out of my Interrail pass.” This tragic chorus has become a convention. Travellers opt for a global pass and become enslaved to speed.

But **best value** does not mean trying to beat distance records. It might be measured by the level of spontaneity that surrounds a journey. It may be judged by the level of engagement with local communities that your journey affords. And if you really want to bring it down to euros and cents, best value is certainly a journey that uses slow trains to the utmost. Tickets for slow trains rarely have the discounts available for faster services. Odd, is it not, how slowness is nowadays a privilege reserved only for the most wealthy – and for those who appreciate the **real value of an Interrail pass**.