

THE BEGINNERS GUIDE TO TRAIN TRAVEL

British Railways 2007

For Overseas Visitors to Britain



Exploring Britain by train

There is no better way to explore Britain than by taking the train. Comfortable coaches, a great view and no worries about getting there are just some benefits of rail travel. For overseas visitors the first question you may ask is, 'Why take the train?' The simple answer is that Britain is a small island and domestic air travel for the leisure traveller is unnecessary. One can easily travel from one end of the country to the other in a day's travel time. And since you are here to explore, there is no point in being isolated in an aeroplane seat, viewing nothing but cloud tops. The other alternative, driving, can be expensive -- just from the cost of fuel alone -- and stressful, with busy roads and confusing directions or lack thereof. By far the best way to get about is with the train. There are over 2500 rail stations and a very busy network with even the most rural lines having at least three trains a day in each direction. The busiest routes can have multiple departures each hour.

This leaflet will give you the basics you need to use the UK rail network for your next holiday. Enjoy your trip!

Planning your trip

The first thing to decide is where you want to go. Take some time to put together an itinerary of where you want to go. Once you have the basis of your vacation, start looking up timetables (available online) to find out where places are located. You can then start to look at journeys and how long you wish to spend in each location.



Places of Interest

Taking the train takes you right to the action with many places of interest located close to railway stations. UK cities are compact and often all you need is a short walk from a station to be right at the heart of the action. If an attraction is located farther away, you can be sure that there will be a local bus to take you there.

The UK rail network is not just a collection of intercity services linking the towns and cities. There is still a very good local rail network taking you to the more out of the way places.

Even some of the most rural locations have quiet country branch lines linking up stunning scenery and quaint villages. Many of these are described as scenic rail journeys and you might like to ride some just to enjoy the best British landscapes. More has been written of these journeys on the Britain by Rail web site.

Tickets

Once you've mapped out where you're going, you will want the best ticket to get you there. If your journeys take you throughout the UK, a rail pass is probably the best option. The Britrail pass (more information at www.britrail.net) offers unlimited journeys over a selection of time periods and fantastic value for money for the overseas visitor to Britain. Alternatively, Britrail also offers point-to-point tickets if you are planning making only one journey. These tickets are advantageous as they allow you to be totally flexible with your journey and break your trip at a place of interest if you wish. In contrast, UK rail fares tend to be more expensive and more restrictive. The unrestricted fares are known as 'savers', which can sometimes allow a break of journey and flexibility in what train service you use. Discounted tickets are available but advance purchase is a necessity for these. Additionally you are restricted to particular train times which you must pre book in advance. If you are coming on a long journey from overseas you could lose your rail ticket if your flight is late! Therefore, we would normally recommend you use Britrail tickets. If you are planning travelling first class, Britrail also offers much better value when compared to locally obtainable first class fares which tend to be very expensive.

On-Board Accommodation

British train journeys, being short in nature, rarely travel overnight, and so sleeping accommodations are not usually an issue. Even on routes where overnight trains do run, you usually have the option of travelling during the day, too. Daytime travel makes sense if you are travelling with a rail pass, as all travel is included except sleeping car supplements. So unless time is really an issue or you want the overnight rail experience, you can save money and see more by taking daylight services.

Onboard you can choose from standard or first class. Standard class offers comfortable seating choices: airline-style or around a table. If you choose a table seat you will be asked if you wish to face the direction of travel or with your back to the direction of travel. Airline style seats offer one or two people seats together with a fold down table. Unlike airlines, however, there is more space! Standard class is a comfortable and economical way to travel around Britain.

First class offers more space and a more luxurious environment on long-distance trains. Some commuter routes also offer first class where the advantage is limited to more space on busy services. First class coaches have larger seats, reading lamps and usually complementary refreshments and snacks. Most longer distance services offer First Class; however, some secondary routes and lines in Scotland do not. If you choose to buy a first class rail pass, check that the journeys you intend to use have first class facilities. It is possible to determine this

information from timetables or by making reservations.

Sleeping Car Services

Overnight trains have a choice of standard class seating, which is actually comparable with the first class seats mentioned above for space, or a berth in a cabin. Standard class cabins have two beds. If you are travelling alone you may be required to share with someone of the same

gender. First class cabins have just one bed for sole occupancy.

Seat Reservations

Unlike rail travel in the US and Canada, British trains do not require reservations. This is one of the benefits when travelling with a rail pass -- you can decide when you wish to travel. Services are very frequent and you can usually turn up and go whenever you wish. In fact, many services do not offer reservations.

It's a good idea to reserve seats if you are travelling over a busy period (eg. Christmas, Easter, Bank Holidays, before 0900 am and Fridays) and on longer journeys. We would also suggest that if you are travelling as a small group it is better to reserve so that you are all seated together.

One final instance to reserve is for all overnight sleeping car services as these sell out quickly.

Catering

Longer distance services will either offer a trolley service of hot and cold drinks and snacks or have a buffet car. On-train catering is good quality and prices are reasonable, if not inexpensive. Buffet cars offer a much better selection with hot and cold food and light meals. Some intercity services will also offer restaurant cars. However these are expensive, although the food is freshly prepared onboard and of very good quality.

Luggage

In contrast to the US, British trains with their frequent services and many stops do not offer checked baggage services. Some long distance services do have a luggage van at the front or rear of the train where you may be able to store luggage and cycles. Otherwise, space is provided above seats on racks, between seats, and at the end of coaches.

In general, take only as much luggage as you are comfortable managing yourself. Bags with wheels can be useful and there are usually luggage trolleys at stations. Handling luggage on and off trains is easy as all platforms are at the same height as the train. Taxis are usually available at stations for transfers to hotels. If you are intending to do some intensive touring you could also consider leaving some of your luggage at your hotel for your return or at luggage storage locations in stations (these can be expensive!).

Stations

Railway stations vary from huge terminals with every possible amenity to tiny halts with just a waiting shelter and everything in between. The largest city stations will always have a booking office / information desk, toilets (sometimes showers), an enclosed waiting area, shops, places to eat, luggage offices and connections to other transport. Smaller stations usually also have a staffed booking office, enclosed waiting area and normally toilet facilities. Small stations will have a waiting shelter, train information and usually a telephone link to speak with staff for information. At small unstaffed stations you can buy your ticket (if you don't already have one) on the train and usually obtain information on how your train is running from a free phone line.

Many stations have taxi pick up points outside, where taxis will wait for rail users. You don't have to book in advance, simply walk up to the first taxi on the stand. Remember only to use licensed taxis. You can tell if a taxi is licensed as it will display a registration plate, usually yellow on the rear of the vehicle. and are close to bus stations for local

transport.



Safety

Be safe on the railway. Never step off a platform onto the tracks -- there are fines imposed for anyone trespassing on the railway. Always use the footbridge to cross from one platform to another. This is quite different to some overseas countries. Keep an eye on your belongings when travelling, and always hold on when moving about the train.

Thankfully, crime is minimal on the rail network, but if you do see anything suspicious, always report it to a member of staff or the British Transport Police.

Rail Passes

Overseas visitors can benefit from a rail pass. These are only available to people from overseas and must be purchased prior to entry to the UK. You can find out more and buy passes from www.britrail.net. All prices are quoted in US Dollars. The pass can be purchased in many currencies. Using a pass avoids the need to buy tickets in local currency and can offer substantial savings, especially as they allow unlimited travel over the network.

Britrail passes and discounts are detailed on this and the following page.

Britrail Flexipass

All Scotland, England and Wales. Travel a select number of days of your choice in a 2 month period

Validity	Adult First	Adult Standard
4 days in 2 months	\$409	\$275
8 days in 2 months	\$598	\$399
15 days in 2 months	\$901	\$604

Britrail Consecutive Pass

All Scotland, England and Wales. Travel a select number of consecutive days. If you have a set itinerary this is the ideal pass.

Validity	Adult First	Adult Standard
4 days	\$327	\$218
8 days	\$469	\$311
15 days	\$702	\$469
22 days	\$891	\$592
1 month	\$1054	\$702

Britrail England Flexipass

All England. Travel a select number days within 2 months. Allows unlimited travel as you wish.

Validity	Adult First	Adult Standard
4 days in 2 months	\$327	\$220
8 days in 2 months	\$479	\$319
15 days in 2 months	\$721	\$483

Britrail England Consecutive Pass

All Scotland, England and Wales. Travel a select number of consecutive days. If you have a set itinerary this is the ideal pass.

Validity	Adult First	Adult Standard
4 days	\$262	\$174
8 days	\$375	\$249
15 days	\$561	\$375
22 days	\$713	\$474
1 month	\$844	\$561

Britrail Scottish Pass

All Scottish rail services. Also ferries to most islands and bus services to remote areas. Travel a select number days within 8 or 15 days.

Validity	Adult Standard
4 days within 8 days	\$201
8 days within 15 days	\$270

This pass is not available as a first class option and is not valid for travel before 0915 am Monday to Friday

Discounts

Britrail Party Discount

Small groups travelling together can receive 50% off the 3rd to 9th passengers. This is only available with passes of the same type and duration. The group must travel together at all times and the pass can be either first or standard class.

UK Heritage Railways

Claim a discount of up to 20% when visiting many Heritage Railways with your Britrail Pass. Heritage Railways are private railways operating mostly steam trains through scenic countryside.

Family Discount

When an adult buys a Britrail pass a child of 5 - 15 years can receive a free pass of the same type and duration. For additional children 50% discount of the adult fare is applied.

Off Peak Discount

If you travel off peak (November 1st 2006 - 28th February 2007) you can get 25% off passes. This can be used in conjunction with other discounts.

Youth Discount

Young people aged 16 - 25 can claim 25% off the cost of an adult first or standard class pass.

Senior Discount

Seniors over the age of 60 can claim a 15% discount of first class passes only.