

TOP 5 UNDISCOVERED TRAIN TRIPS AROUND EUROPE



All rail travel fans are surely well aware of the beauty of the Orient Express or even the long Trans Siberian Railway. However, there are a few more rather unique train trips that offer an unforgettable experience with their rich history, stunning natural views, as well as unique trains. Tourism Review presents the top five less known train trips in Europe.

The Alps from the Bernina Express

From Coira (Switzerland) to Tirano (Italy)

Enjoy the panoramic views out of the windows of the Bernina Express, from mountain ranges covered by glaciers to ravines adorned by waterfalls and endless spruce forests. The 156-kilometer, 4-hour train trip from Coira (in the Swiss canton of Grisons) to Tirano (in the northern region of Italy) is an engineering spectacle of the early twentieth century found in the stretch known as the Albula Railway and part of the Rhaetian Railway (RhB), which was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. The train, a red-colored Hornby for narrow gauge with outstanding maintenance, speeds along elevated railroads and through steep slopes of more than 7%.

Travel tips: Daily departures and tickets can be booked in advance. You can get the best views from the right side of the train (heading south), and between July and the end of October, the Bernina Express adds open panoramic cars (windowless cars) between Davos Platz and Tirano, with views in all directions, fresh air, and great opportunities to take pictures. Another alternative is boarding the regular trains of the SBB since they cover the same route but without panoramic windows; yes, that means more schedules, no need for reservation and cheaper tickets.

The Unknown Bergensbanen

From Oslo to Bergen (Norway)

A wonder of the nineteenth century that overcame endless difficulties to link the cities of Oslo and Bergen through mountains and fjords, lakes, valleys and glaciers (not to mention the immense mountain plateau of Hardangervidda, covered with snow the entire year). Despite its breathtaking scenery, the Bergensbanen (or Bergen Railway) is practically unknown outside of Norway. In just 6 hours and over 490 kilometers, it allows you to discover all the natural and scenic splendor of the Nordic country by crossing canyons, rivers, hillsides and pristine expanses of ice. The works began in December 1875 and were not finished until 1909 which proves the complexity of the railway. When the first train arrived at the Oslo Central Station, King Haakon VII described it as the masterpiece of his generation. More than a century later, the Bergensbanen continues to run like a clockwork, now with both tourists and commuters on board.

Travel tips: The Bergen Railway is a regular, but comfortable train. It has spacious and comfortable

seats, large windows, free Wi-Fi and a well-stocked bar. The Comfort class offers larger seats, power outlets, and free coffee and tea. There are playgrounds for children in the family car, and the night trains have sleeping cars. There are up to four daily departures between Oslo and Bergen (with round trips) and you can book a train ticket in advance, prices may vary depending on demand.

The Welsh Narrow-gauge Railways

On the Ffestiniog and Welsh Highland railways (Wales)

The Ffestiniog and Welsh Highland are railways crossed by tiny steam locomotives that stop at all small stations, crossing the 63-kilometer roads that cover the imposing mountains in North Wales and only in 4 hours. This route, which combines the oldest surviving railway company in the world, the Ffestiniog Railway, and the longest heritage railway in the United Kingdom, the Welsh Highland Railway, can be done in one day. As they pass by slate quarries and abandoned mines, travelers can see how the Industrial Revolution changed the Welsh landscape forever and, at the same time, see British nature in its entire splendor thanks to the dark forests, river valleys and the windy peaks of Snowdonia.

Although it is now treasured for its signature fleet of steam locomotives, the fact is that the Ffestiniog Railway was opened without a single locomotive since it was never intended for passenger transport. It was built in 1833 to move slate from the quarries of Blaenau Ffestiniog, to the ships waiting in the Irish Sea, downhill. These wagons were run by gravity and then horses hauled back the empty cars until the steam locomotives took over in the middle of the 19th century.

Travel tips: Almost all passengers board standard third-class carriages. You can also pay extra for the first-class travel in exquisite Pullman carriages with plush fabrics, comfortable seats and - best of all - large windows with breathtaking views of the mountains. In both railways, there is also a bar that serves hot and cold meals, and some services include afternoon tea. There are special routes throughout the year, from Victorian weekends to Christmas activities. The trains on both railways have seasonal schedules: the Ffestiniog has up to eight daily departures in the middle of the summer (July and August), while the Welsh Highland has three daily departures at peak times. Both are closed for extended periods in winter (from November to February). Keep in mind that the route has the best views in summer when the Welsh weather is more pleasant.

The Inlandsbanan - Slow Travel Through Forests

From Mora to Gällivare (Sweden)

On how many railways in the world can the driver, if the occasion arises, stop the train for passengers to go out and pick berries? Or to take a dip in a nearby lake? Or to watch a moose walking through a forest clearing? While it all sounds like a dream, these are common scenarios on the Inlandsbanan (or Inland Line), which runs through the pristine forests of the central parts of Sweden in two days, crossing about 1,288 kilometers. Inexplicably slow yet well-aware of its eccentric nature, the Inlandsbanan offers one of the friendliest train trips in Europe. This red train with a single wagon (which only works in summer) passes, once a day, through dreamlike stations. Designed at the beginning of the 20th century as access to the northeast of Sweden, it was about to close in the 1990s due to the small number of passengers. However, in recent years, it experienced a

recovery thanks to its many and varied eccentricities which turned it into a successful tourist attraction, such as having long conversations with the driver in the cabin while watching bears crossing the tracks just ahead. But above all, this route invites travelers to a journey into a mysterious land: the unknown interior of Sweden.

Travel tips: The Inlandsbanan usually has one or two wagons and does not have sleeping cars, so all passengers must spend the night in Östersund. It usually works from the beginning of June to mid-August, with daily departures in the northern and southern sections of the railway (Mora-Östersund and Östersund-Gällivare).

Through the Heart of the Balkans

From Belgrade (Serbia) to Bar (Montenegro)

Despite the rich and otherworldly landscape this train crosses, it hasn't been acknowledged by most tourist maps. From Belgrade, the Serbian capital, to Bar, on the Adriatic coast of Montenegro, this fascinating 476-kilometer journey takes 12 hours by crossing the Dinaric Alps, canyons and bridges next to river gorges, and an old tectonic lake. When construction began in 1951, the then Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was still an unstable state union located west of the Balkan Peninsula. When the railway opened in 1976 with 254 tunnels and 234 bridges across the Pannonian Basin and the Adriatic Sea, the country was a geopolitical power and a link between the West and the Soviet Union. Despite the subsequent (and tragic) collapse of the former Yugoslavia, the railway survived and still connects Serbia and Montenegro, offering a privileged view to the Balkan landscape in its purest form, first through places once inhabited by Greeks and Illyrians, and later, by the Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires.

Travel tips: There are two daily departures (round trips available) in old but comfortable wagons, with a night train that allows you to choose between compartments of 2 or 3 beds, or 4 or 6 berths (couchette).

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