

5 THINGS TO CONSIDER BEFORE CHOOSING RAIL HOLIDAYS



Deliberating between a chocolate éclair and a Russian slice in the bakery this morning, it occurred to me that choosing a rail holiday is a bit like choosing a cake, only a lot less sticky and a bit more expensive.

In both cases the tempting choices are wide ranging and packed full of varying ingredients, each option with its own distinct texture and flavour. Tough choices must be made, and there's nothing worse than taking your first bite of something adventurous and wishing you'd gone with your usual scone.

To help you along in your choice of rail holidays, I have put together a list of things to consider.

- **Buy one in or bake your own:** There are now loads of rail holidays which fall under the heading of 'escorted tours'. If you choose one of these, then the rail journey will effectively be planned out for you, including destinations, excursions, hotel bookings and start to finish travel. These tours are taken with a set group and a tour manager who will travel with you throughout. If you prefer to add your own ingredients to the itinerary and make individual bookings for travel and lodgings this may not be for you.
- **Croissant or Twinkie:** Rail holidays are now abundant throughout the world. The question is, do you want to go for something European or a far off adventure? North America, Australia and Asia all have long established route for rail holidays. There are also some fabulous routes through the UK, France and Europe if you would prefer something closer to home.
- **Scone or surprise:** Do you want to go for a classic rail holiday which is long established and traditional or something with more of a contemporary twist, like combined rail and cruise, for example? The western US route which takes in the Grand Canyon is a classic favourite, harking back to the historic romance of rail travel in its golden age.
- **Choice of frosting:** Scenic or city is the question here. Do you want your rail holiday to lead you out into the wilderness or would you prefer to take in some major cities too? Tours through national parks and areas of beauty like the Rocky Mountains are tailored to the enjoyment of the stunning natural scenery, whereas some tours include stop-overs in cities, incorporating these elements heavily into the itinerary. Of course, you can have your cake and eat it, with extended tours like a USA coast to coast including both.
- **Hot or cold:** The time of year can greatly influence what you will experience on your rail holiday. Taking a tour through New England in autumn, for example, you will witness the astounding sight created by the 'fall foliage', which ignites the region at that time of year. Railing through North America's national parks in winter exchanges lush greenery for snow-capped peaks. Alaska's rail holiday appeal lies largely in its majestic glaciers and wildlife.

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