



 [click to print](#)

 [close window](#)



Traveling Within Europe? Try the Eurail Solution

By: [Susan MacCallum-Whitcomb](#) ([View Profile](#))

Call me a convert. On past European trips, I always connected the dots on my continental itinerary by either renting a car or catching a flight. These days I'm riding the rails. I'd like to say my decision to switch to trains was rooted in environmental awareness. Gore-quoting friends tell me trains are the green way to go. By hopping one, I could minimize carbon emissions and prove, in the process, I was a more evolved human being.

Truth be told, I merely took a closer look at highways and flyways, added up the current cons, and knew it was a time for a change ...

Con-gestion

Driving in Europe has never been easy. Over the years, I've braved Grand Prix-worthy speeds on German autobahns, skidded through volcanic ash in Italy, dodged demonstrators in France, and idled endlessly at sheep crossings in Spain. Overall, I've negotiated more hairpin turns and hair-raising inclines than I can count. But I was happy to do so, not only because a rental car gave me flexibility, but because it was affordable.

It is hard, however, to make that claim now that gas prices have moved from the "expensive" category into the "exorbitant" one. After record-breaking increases in June, unleaded gas hovers at the \$6/gallon mark in many Western European countries. Factor in parking, plus area-specific extras—like a £10 (\$20) daily congestion charge in London or €11 (\$64) road tolls between Milan and Naples—and driving becomes a pricey proposition.

Con-air

Clearly taking an intercontinental plane ride comes with caveats, too. Fuel charges, baggage fees, assigned seat surcharges ... the add-ons just keep adding up. Of course, when doing the math, I also have to remember to tack on the cost of ground transportation. (It doesn't help that carriers are increasingly operating from out-of-the-way airports. Popular Stansted, for instance, is almost forty miles outside central London.)

Then there's the grief involved. On some previous occasions, I could ignore the expense of European air travel and convince myself it was worth paying a premium to fly because it was quick and convenient. That's no longer a given. Simply negotiating those ever-lengthening security lines can eat up hours, while all the regulations regarding what I can and cannot carry on board make the airplane option today seem anything but easy.

Get on the Right Track

With train travel, it's a different story. The traditional advantage remains—namely that trains let you actually savor the scenery as you roll along. Yet I've discovered other benefits as well. For starters, trains trump planes in that the check-in procedure is so much more relaxed (meaning, among other things, that I can forgo those metal detectors and carry liquids at my leisure—no Ziplocs required!).

Surprisingly, trains compare favorably to cars in terms of flexibility too. After all, despite poetic paeans to the open road, there are places where you *can't* take a rented car. My latest trip to Austria, Slovenia, and Croatia offers a case in point. Driving a rental from the first of those countries into the second and from the second into the third is prohibited. So as a driver, I would have been repeatedly required to do that tedious drop-off/pick-up dance.

Take a Pass

On the train, I breezed across borders before disembarking at centrally located stations. The kicker is trains are still reasonably priced. Point-to-point tickets give good value on short trips, whereas passes are a budget-wise alternative for long hauls like my Eastern European junket. The granddaddy of the latter is [Eurail](#), which is famous for the twenty-country [Global Pass](#), now starting at \$795 for fifteen days of first class travel.

Eurail also sells passes covering single countries or up to five connecting ones. With any of them, you're more likely to find added benefits rather than added fees. (Greece-Italy Passes, for example, includes free ferry crossings.) The trick, economically speaking, is to pick the one that best matches your needs. For me it was an [Austria-Slovenia/Croatia Regional Pass](#). Just \$345 bought me five days of first class travel within a two-month period.


Hmmm ... hop scotching around three "must see" countries on trains that are affordable, efficient, and easy on the planet. What's not to love?

First published June 2008

Find this article at:

<http://www.divinecaroline.com/article/22240/51426-traveling-europe--try-eurail-solution>

 [click to print](#)

 [close window](#)