

How to choose a ticket plan

Seeing Europe by train

(This is the first of two articles on train travel in Europe.)

By KATIE KERWIN

Watching breath-taking Norwegian waterfalls and mountains slide by the windows. Munching on cheese and crusty French bread washed down with a bottle of rose.

Catching glimpses of the incredibly blue Mediterranean between the hills. Being serenaded by two Spanish youths on the way to Madrid.

Spotting occasional castles and cathedral spires in the distance. Discussing economics and American cars with an elderly Italian in a crowded

corridor between Florence and Rome. Waking up to find oneself halted in the midst of the Swiss Alps on a frosty start to December night.

All of these experiences that made riding European trains for me more than worth the occasional inconvenience or discomfort.

The outstanding advantage of traveling by train in Europe is the opportunity to relax, enjoy the countryside and meet some of the people of the country you are passing through.

Some flexibility in your travel plans is lost, but trains go almost everywhere, at almost all hours.

CAR RENTAL may be preferable for exploration of a particular region

TRAVEL

during a longer stay. But for anyone attempting to criss-cross Europe during a vacation, trains are the answer.

All sorts of rail passes are available to the American traveler and for anyone planning to spend a month or more in Europe, they can offer a considerable savings. For shorter stays, the pass will only save you money if you're going to cover a lot of kilometers in a few weeks.

First-class Eurail passes, allowing unlimited train travel in 15 countries, begin at \$170 for a 15-day pass and run to \$420 for a three-month pass. You can travel with a Eurail pass for 21 days for \$210, one month for \$260 and two months for \$330. You'd have to cover a lot of ground to make the 15- or 21-day passes worthwhile, but a two- or three-month pass can save you several hundred dollars on a prolonged vacation.

The Student Rail pass, good for second-class travel, is by far the best deal. Offered to students under 26 years of age, it permits two months of unlimited travel for \$230. A dedicated traveler can easily triple or quadruple the distance you could get for that amount if you were buying the tickets as you went.

Both Eurail and Student Rail passes

must be bought in the U.S.

THE BRITRAIL pass, also purchased in the States, provides unlimited first- or second-class travel throughout Great Britain for from seven days to one month. Prices range from \$60 for a seven-day second-class pass to \$165 for a first-class pass for one month. Youth passes at a reduced rate also are available.

For the short passes, especially, it's a good idea to check with a travel agent for fares to the places you plan to go and compare with the pass price to see if it's economical.

The Italian and French railroad systems also offer similar passes for tourists who plan to do more traveling within their borders.

The Inter Rail pass, which is purchased at railroad offices in Europe, offers half-fare second-class travel in the country in which it is bought and free passage in all other countries for one month. Price varies from country to country, generally ranging between \$115 and \$150.

It's a good idea to buy it in a country in which you don't intend to travel much to get as much travel for no fare as possible. Smaller countries like Luxembourg sell many Inter Rail passes. Spain and Italy, where the price is lower, are also popular spots for buying the passes.

IN ADDITION, unlike the Eurail pass, the Inter Rail is good for trains in Great Britain, as well as on the Continent.

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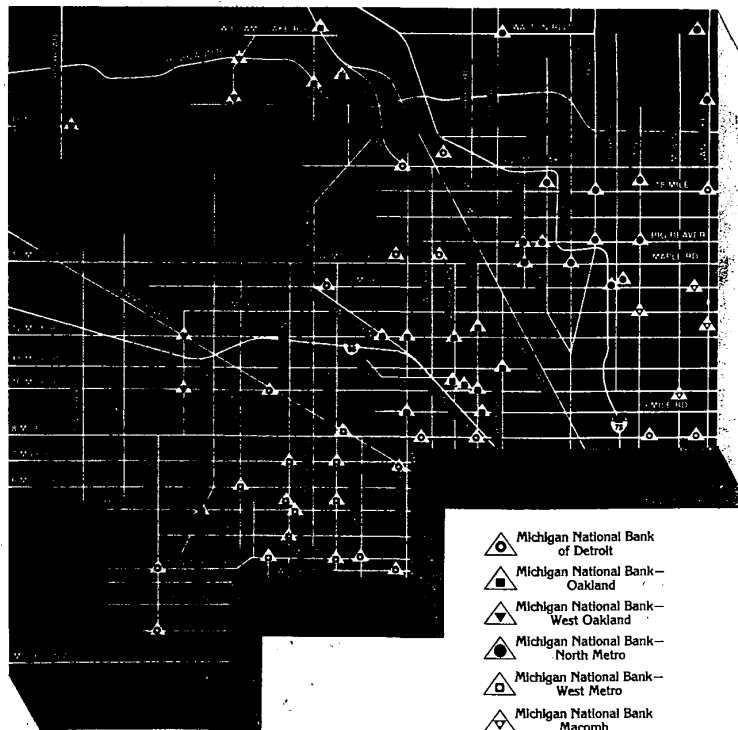
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