

European Trains and City Transport

George Marten

This summer I have embarked on two legs of inter-railing. On the morning I planned to begin, Sunday 2nd July, I rushed to purchase my pass and expected to walk straight onto a Eurostar to Brussels from St. Pancras International smoothly. Of course, it is not that simple; finally, the next day, I found a train and showed up (in a timely fashion) to walk on as trains always work. This was not possible either, and so I began my inter-railing on a 8 hour coach ride to Brussels, which was nicely dragged out to 9 hours by the entire coach being swept up in some Visa/Brexit related shenanigans. This, of course, only made me more determined to ride trains for all 10 days within the two months my pass allowed.

In the following words I briefly summarise my experience of each nations' longer distance trains and their capital cities' public transport. I leave out mention of train companies and ownership to ensure a focus on user experience. Since this is almost entirely anecdotal evidence, bar Belgium where I had very kind hosts, probably you can dismiss most of it immediately if you want to be really rigorous about it.

Belgium

Anywhere is reachable for €7.10 by train before 26 years of age, which I found quite nice. The air conditioning worked, the carriages are spacious, and their new double deckers are some of the finest trains I've travelled upon.



Inside a Brussels Train

Brussels

The most interconnected of all networks of all cities I visited, changes between one mode to the next are fluid and the stations are exceptionally clean, spacious and have some quite interesting music playing usually.

The trams in Brussels are beautiful, modern, and reach far into the smaller streets where one would never expect them to.

The metro is spacious and very efficient (there is not a whole load of wasted energy in screeching corners and strained eardrums).

The buses are alright, my friends say sometimes maybe keep an eye out for who else joins you on these - but when doesn't a little vigilance help?



Brussels Tram

The Netherlands

Limited within nation transport experience, and that which I did experience was curtailed, multiple times over, by the wild combination of double decker trains and a very windy storm. Ended up mostly using Uber and sharing with a kind expatriate.

Amsterdam

Surely you just hire, or better still buy, a bike? Literally everybody is on one here. I am so impressed by being able to see thousands of bikes per hour here that I never even looked for public transport. I'm sure it exists in many forms and saw the trams rolling about sometimes but was too busy looking at bikes.



A bike hired in Amsterdam

Germany

Really some very fine trains. Main criticism here is I experienced, and only here, something a little bit reminiscent of home... delays and cancellations! Home sweet home.

Berlin

Pretty good stuff. Always found it quite easy to get around Berlin on the various forms of trains and trams. Much like Brussels, these tend to be efficient and clean. I am continually impressed here, as in Brussels, by the spaciousness of the metro stations relative to that of the London Underground or, even more pokey still, Glasgow's precious Subway!



A Graffiti covered Berlin Train

France

I have to say that I really admire the French high speed trains. They are incredibly fast and truly never failed me, apart from some issues leaving Strasbourg, but that was truly down to my own impatience with the booking website. I was very pleased to see the (regularly cleaned) little removable head cushions on these trains - I failed to mention but almost all of the intercity trains in the above nations also have these wonderful little bit of passenger accommodation in second class - first class is really very similar but quieter!



A tiny bus in Bruges

Strasbourg

Walked everywhere as city was pretty small, but seemed to have buses and trams for sure at the minimum.

Paris

I cannot fathom why anyone would decide making a Metro ticket so tiny - I absolutely love it. Also a very peculiar ticket system: as far as I can tell, everyone must regularly join a decent queue to get their latest paper tickets - there are no contactless systems on barriers here.

Austria

Pretty good stuff on the limited trains I experienced. Couldn't really distinguish between theirs and those of Czech or Slovakia.

Vienna

I really didn't leave the main station here due to timing issues.



The compartment section in Czech Republic/ Slovakia

Czech Republic and Slovakia

Both nations provided quite an exciting opportunity: there were really old style carriage layouts, despite being quite modern trains, with the space split into compartments of six large and very comfortable seats, with very good

rack space above. I am told that the trains vary between this and something similar to much of the other European trains.

Prague

A very cool metro runs here. There are three lines which all intersect once in their middles. This means when you walk into almost any (bar the most central 'Muzeum' station) you simply have a choice of direction - somewhat reminds me of the beautifully simple Glasgow inner and outer loop design.



Prague Metro Line A

Bratislava

Once you get sufficiently Eastern in Europe, you can get a quite consistent variation in terms of the tram situation: these could be literally soviet era all the way to very modern and fancy.