

A Rookie Guide for Eurail Pass Travel

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If you've never traveled with a Eurail pass in Europe, it can be daunting to get started. There are so many rules and procedures to learn! With this guide you'll be a rail-traveling expert in no time:

Your Eurail Pass

First you need to decide what kind of pass to purchase. There are several different options. The one you choose will depend on how many places you are planning to visit and for how long.

One Country-Pass- Good for train travel throughout one single country, ie Spain or Italy

Regional Pass- Good for train travel through two adjoining countries ie Portugal and Spain

Select Pass- Good for travel through 3,4 or 5 countries that you select- ie Spain, France and Italy or Germany, Poland and Austria

Global Pass- the ultimate option: good for travel throughout 23 different European countries.

For each of these options you can choose between 3-10 travel days depending on the number of stops you think you will make. For the global pass you have more options including unlimited train travel for up to three months.

Your rail pass is “activated” on the date you first use it. You can have the ticket agent activate it for you at the station before you get on your first train. You will fill in each day that you travel in ink directly onto the pass- be careful not to make a mistake!

Reservations 101

Even though your rail pass is valid for free travel on many of Europe's trains, there will still be instances when you need to make reservations ahead of time. This can be done online, through a travel agent, or at the ticket booth, and usually involves a fee.

The 3 kinds of trains that usually require reservations are: overnight trains, high speed trains and certain popular inter-country routes. You can find a list of popular routes require reservations on the Eurail website. There are many ways to avoid the hassle of dealing with reservations, such as taking local trains, avoiding popular routes and traveling during the off-season.

Finding Your Way: Train Stations and Timetables

Figuring out time tables can be confusing at first- but once you practice a bit, it's really not so difficult. It often helps to look up the train schedule before you head to the station. You will receive time table book with your Eurail pass and there is a more detailed version online.

At the station a large departures and arrivals board will usually list the train times and platforms. Keep in mind that the destination listed is usually the last stop and might not match where you're going. Most large stations have an information booth with an English speaking desk clerk who can help you figure out timetables, find your platform and even purchase tickets.

On the Train:

Once you find the correct platform, make sure you are on it at least 10 minutes before the train is supposed to leave. Some station stops are very quick and you will need to move quickly. Most trains are organized by class- with the numbers printed on the side of the car. If you have a reserved seat, look for signs or boards that illustrate which car will be where. Once in the correct car, it should be easy to track down your seat. If you have trouble, ask a train employee for help.

You can store your luggage on the racks either above your head or at the end of each car. It's best to travel as light as possible so that you can easily lift your bag over your head.

Some trains announce the stops and others do not. Keep an eye on the stops to make sure you don't miss yours. When it is your time to get off be ready to depart with your luggage as soon as the train stops.

Safety

In general trains in Europe are quite safe- but train stations are a favorite spot for pick pockets and bag snatchers- particularly larger stations. When you are in the station make sure that you are touching all of your bags at all times and be particularly alert to your valuables.

Make sure you keep your rail pass safe- it can not be replaced if lost or stolen.

Ready Set Go!

Get out there and enjoy train travel in Europe!