

## People don't want to fly: Covid-19 reawakens Europe's sleeper trains - 27 July, 2020

1. What did you think of the article?
2. Did you find it difficult or easy to understand?
3. How do you feel about flying?
4. Does the environmental impact of flying bother you? If so, do you do anything to offset your carbon footprint?
5. Would you like to take a train trip like this?
6. Have you ever been on a sleeper train?
7. Have you ever taken one of the world's most famous train trips?
8. If you "lead the way", what are you doing?
9. If a service is "upgraded", what has happened to it?
10. What does "quadrupled" mean?
11. What does "to run" mean?
12. If you are "fed up", how do you feel?
13. Final thoughts.

During the last few years, sleeper trains have almost completely disappeared from Europe. They are extremely expensive to operate, and travellers now prefer budget airlines. When the German rail operator, Deutsche Bahn, ended the service connecting Paris to Berlin in 2014, other European routes started closing including almost all of France's network.

But as the coronavirus pandemic continues, there are some signs of a new beginning for sleeper trains because both governments and travellers are worried about the environmental impact of short-haul flights and because people want to avoid airports.

Recently, there have been several announcements and new night-train journeys. The Swedish government has said it will give money for two new routes to connect the cities of Stockholm and Malmö with Hamburg and Brussels. France's transport minister has said an overnight service will restart between Paris and Nice.

The Austrian rail operator, Österreichische Bundesbahnen (ÖBB), has **led the way**. It bought 42 sleeper cars from Deutsche Bahn in 2016 and has restarted half of the night-time routes connecting Hamburg, Berlin, Munich and Düsseldorf to Austria, Switzerland and Italy. A Brussels-Vienna service, which opened in February, offering one-way trips from €29.90, will start again in September.

A new summer night train linking five EU member states – the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia and Croatia – started operating from Prague on 30 June. However, there was so much demand that it was quickly **upgraded** to a daily service.

The Swedish rail company Snälltåget said in June it planned to **quadruple** the number of night trains on its Stockholm-Malmö-Copenhagen-Hamburg-Berlin route. A new night express that began operating between Sylt in northern Germany and Salzburg in Austria was also due **to run** for only two months but will now continue until November.

“On my website, people say two things: they are **fed up** with the airport experience, and they want to reduce their carbon footprint,” said Mark Smith, who runs the award-winning The Man in Seat 61 railway website. “In the short term, people are commenting that they don’t want to fly because of the pandemic. But I think climate change will be the main reason in the long term because hopefully this pandemic will be over at some point.”

A normal high-speed train can take 70 people in a coach and do multiple journeys a day, with a number of stops. A sleeper might hold 20 to 30 beds in a coach, but the majority of its passengers will travel all the way. The trains are used for just one journey in a 24-hour period.

Train services have had to pay track access charges as they cross borders since 2000. New services run by private companies are often just for the summer months, while state operators are receiving huge government payments in order to re-start their overnight routes. Karima Delli, a French MEP who is head of the European Parliament’s transport committee, welcomed government action. “Relaunching night trains is both a necessity and good for the planet,” she said.

Alexander Gomme, from a Belgian campaign group, said, “the European Union should make it easier and cheaper for operators to book track access,” he said. “Night trains do a lot of kilometres and access charges are counted in kilometres.”

Others argue that governments should also stop airlines receiving state aid from operating any short-haul or late-night flights that could be done by train. They hope the pandemic leads to more people travelling by rail.