

ASK THE operator

With a wealth of new rail trips available to sell,
India-Jayne Trainor asks operators where to book



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1 FOOD

Two friends are looking for a short rail holiday to somewhere with great food and warm weather. They want to be able to try delicious produce and visit local restaurants, with simple train trips between the destinations.



Kylie Anderson
commercial rail specialist,
Inntavel

The Emilia Romagna region is one of Italy's best for gastronomy. Our seven-day food journey through the area includes the cities of Parma, Modena and Bologna, travelling on local trains.

Modena is the home of balsamic vinegar, and travellers can visit a family that produces it.

Parma is just half an hour away by train and is famous for Parma ham and parmesan cheese – so clients can eat their way around the city.

Less than 25 minutes away is Bologna, one of the country's food capitals, which combines street markets with stunning medieval architecture.

We provide relaxed walking tours of each city, so travellers can go at their own pace, stopping for an espresso when they fancy and really diving into the food scene.

The distance between each city is no more than 40 miles, and travelling by rail means you can enjoy the countryside views and train experience. You can also take a picnic or some local wine onboard, as there are no restrictions like there would be on a flight.

We can also arrange rail travel all the way from London, with a night in Zurich, which offers a beautifully scenic route from Switzerland into Italy.

Book it: Inntavel's seven-day Emilia Romagna: Italy's Food Valley tour starts at £1,149, including six nights' B&B, and visits to Parma ham and cheese producers, or from £2,114 with second-class rail travel from London via Zurich. Prices are based on departures from March to October. inntavel.co.uk

2 HISTORY

A couple are looking for a history-inspired trip lasting about a week in a destination that's easy to reach by train from the UK. They'd like the expertise of a local guide at historic sites and at least a day of city sightseeing.



Rob Carroll
head of product and tour operations,
HF Holidays

Our six-day Walking the Ypres Salient would be perfect. It's so easy to reach the battlefields from the UK via a direct Eurostar train to Lille. The trip uncovers the history of the First World War, walking through the battlefields around Ypres with an expert guide. They will also visit the In Flanders Fields Museum, which offers an educational introduction to the war, and watch the Last Post ceremony at the Menin Gate.

On the third and fourth days, the trip visits the Tyne Cot and Langemark war cemeteries, along with the Hooge Crater Museum, home to well-preserved First World War trenches that can be explored on foot. It's a fascinating and moving few days, bringing to life a period from more than a century ago.

The itinerary also includes a guided walking tour of the beautiful city of Bruges, so the trip takes in a lot of historic sites at a good pace.

This tour's real selling point is the sustainable element and ease of getting there by train in under two hours from London. Everything is taken care of, including an expert battlefield guide.

Book it: HF Holidays' six-day Walking the Ypres Salient costs from £1,099 including rail transport from London St Pancras and half-board accommodation, departing on May 20 or September 23. hfholidays.co.uk

3 NATURE

A solo traveller is looking for a slow travel adventure in a lesser-known destination, where they can enjoy nature and outdoor activities. They have plenty of time, so want to see as much as they can by travelling overland.



Harriet Matthews
product content manager,
Byway

One of our best new rail holidays explores the off-the-beaten-path Lake Saimaa region of Finland on a 21-day self-guided holiday that travels overland from London. The best part is that there are also stops in cities such as Stockholm and Copenhagen on the way.

The first port of call in Finland is the city of Turku, which has the scenic River Aura running through its centre. The train then takes customers to Tampere, Finland's sauna capital, for a chance to experience the country's unique sauna-and-cold-swimming culture.

From there, you're connected to Lappeenranta and Savonlinna by rail, which are in the UNESCO-listed Lake Saimaa area. Saimaa is Finland's largest lake and there are lots of opportunities for swimming and paddleboarding, as well as hiking in the surrounding forest. Saimaa is also the 2024 European Region of Gastronomy, thanks to strong local traditions of foraging and seasonal produce.

The beauty of this trip is that it's year-round, and people have the chance to be immersed in the natural landscape off the usual tourist track.

Although it is a set itinerary, everything is adjustable thanks to using trains; whether travellers want to slow down, re-route or see different things, it can be changed to fit their interests.

Book it: Byway's 21-day Along the Shores of The Saimaa trip starts at £5,784 for a solo traveller, including rail travel and B&B accommodation, departing November 5. byway.travel