FINDING RADICAL RESPITE IN RAIL TRAVEL

Travel columnist Carole Edrich gets more than she expects on an Interrail trip through Europe.



The train sings, the world slides by, and I'm in that restful state you get when lulled by the rhythm of a train. The physical distance from London is already helping my perspective. My troubles aren't on the 10.47 train to Ypres. Sadly nor am I.

The interrail app ***(C-E.short.gy/Interrail)*** makes changing tickets easy, so I arrive at Ypres (officially Ieper) with its 13th century cathedral and Cloth Hall without stress. I take so long at the Yper Museum there's not enough time to do the other places justice. My Novotel is an easy 10 minute stroll from the station, conveniently close to Cloth Hall's museums and to the Menin Gate (the Last Post is a must). ***(Carole.short.gy/Ypres)***

Rooftops shift from Belgian stepped gables to gentler Dutch pitches on narrower homes. Utrecht Station – the country's busiest and its geographic heart – runs so smoothly I don't realise its size. The gorgeous Grand Hotel Karel V; ***(C-E.short.gy/GrandKarel)*** 10 minutes from the station, is a converted monastery with elegant rooms, lush gardens, and good restaurants. I stroll along the nearby canal, wishing I had more time.

Here's what nobody tells you about rail travel. When you're managing your energy like currency, proximity to the station can make or break everything. Hotels near the station mean no 40-euro taxis, no GPS battles, and no getting lost. That saved energy becomes rest, fun, or exploration..



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Precise Dutch polders dissolve into industrial sprawl as we approach Düsseldorf. I've wanted to experience German trains since my friend Sonja warned me about them. I watch rolling countryside with medieval field patterns emerge on the way to Nuremberg, where I hope we'll meet. They don't disappoint: trains stop dead, change destination mid-route, skip stops, and appear on station boards but not platforms. After too many beers with her, I'm 90 minutes late to the station.. and catch my train anyway, since it's even later than me!

My Munich taxi driver is miserable because of the roads closing to prepare for Oktoberfest. I am not. Hotel Andaz Schwabinger Tor is everything superlative. Their food is so good that I break my 'only what's needed' rule, and my accessible suite truly delivers with amazing views, and multiple rooms so large that I don't find all the light switches before I go. ***(Carole.short.gy/Andaz)***

The interrail app makes it easy to change plans at the very last minute, and the fun of exploring in three-hour bursts pales, so I decide to push through to each overnight destination. This works fine until I alight by accident in unspoilt Mallnitz-Obervellach, Austria. But the place is beautiful, I have a great walk, watch the Tauern Tunnel car-shuttle trains load, and book the next train.

> "This city works hard at accessibility. The results are impressive."

That gets me to Ljubljana late, which doesn't matter because Eurostars Hotel is close and I'm staying for three days. They're a wonderful whirlwind of local natural wines, meeting interesting people, visiting the castle, and eating far too much. This city works hard at accessibility. The results are impressive. From ground-level free transport to wheelchair lifts in City Hall, they ask, listen, and act on what the locals say. I'm already planning my return. ***(Carole.short.gy/LjubCity)***

In Rome, my friend Melanie's 'typical Roman meal' is all-you-can-eat sushi. ►



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Then through Milan to Lake Garda and a wedding. The less said about one hotel, the better, but when the Italian General Strike delays me, I relocate to La Cipressina. This beautifully kept B&B with amazing balconies, provisions for wheelchair users and the blind, is so restful that I stay put until departure time. ***(Carole.short.gy/Cipressina)***

Back through Milan and Switzerland to Mulhouse, France. I could spend days in its National Automobile Museum, but escape for local Alsatian cuisine. The Berti hotel - 5 minutes from the station - is small, clean, and seemingly women-run, with two wheelchair accessible rooms, ridged guides on the floor for the blind, and the most comfortable mattress of my trip. ***(Carole.short.gy/Berti)***

Ready for home, but I said I'd 'do' Luxembourg. The recommended accessible suites are an expensive 35 minute taxi ride from the station. When the receptionist claims no booking exists, I take another taxi. Back at the station, I eat an egg roll for blood sugar while searching through interrail. I can't face rail replacement buses to Brussels, so book the new Marriott opposite. ***(Carole.short.gy/MarriottLux)***

My room is lovely, accessible, and overlooks the station. Too upset to explore, I watch the people below, grateful I'm not one. A second egg roll in the morning is as good as I remember. Time to go home.

I love my job. Travel exposes me to people, cultures, languages, and ways of being that take me out of my head. Train travel brings no environmental guilt, but this trip gave me something unexpected. The mindfulness of train-travel, plus the preoccupation of getting lost or discovering routes don't exist yet, kept my mind off my problems entirely. Rail travel isn't an escape; it's perspective made physical, distance literal. It's the radical act of being between places, selves, and people. Watching the world slide by while something in me finally rests.

The story ends here, but I have five interrail days left. Where shall I go next?

And Another Thing...

I don't write for The Times or present for the BBC. My phraseology is as conventional as crocodiles are vegetarian. That's fine by me. Back at Chester's Media Gateway, other journos get hotels by the station. Mine's a 20 minute walk in the centre. Oddfellows Hotel is outrageously, gloriously quirky. An Alice in Wonderland tearoom, wild contemporary décor, and my split-level suite is bigger than a louche Londoner's living space with a huge bed, oldey-worldey bathtub, and leafy loggia views.

The Gateway comprises 16 fifteen-minute chats, 14 country reps, 13 attractions. Standard junket stuff. But here's the thing. Oddfellows extends my stay! They chose me over 200 other journos for my offbeat style. Found my work and liked it! I escape the herd, get lost, have fun, and find stories. Sometimes being ADHDifferent pays off. ***(Carole.short.gy/Oddfellows)***

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HOW TO GROW YOUR OWN HYDROPONIC PLANTS

By Joseph at @Alldaysgreen

Green spaces are not always accessible to disabled people. Here's how to bring more greenery into your life.

If you'd like to try something new, you should try growing plants in water! It's easier than you think, and comes along with some surprising upsides when compared to growing them in soil. Like plants, we all have different ways of growing; with a bit of fresh air and sunshine some plants thrive, while others might do better in other environments.

Cultivating plants entirely in water is known as hydroponics, a simple soil-free way to nurture greenery in your own home, and is perfect for the forgetful or the busy plant owners. I've gotten away with leaving the house for the summer and coming home to some *Epipremnum aureum,* which had sprouted some new leaves and grown a network of sprawling roots.

If you'd like to get started, simply take a cutting from a Common Ivy and trim off any leaves on the bottom half, leaving the upper half with leaves. Then place it in a bottle of water and leave it by a window with ample light. All you've got to do is fill it up with water; within a week or two, you'll start to see growth, you'll get to see the sprawling root system develop from *just* water! The perfect thing about using Ivy is that it's abundant and free.

If you'd like to grow another plant, I would recommend any variety of Pothos or inch plants; just keep some of the stem submerged in water, and you'll see roots popping out within a week.

Growing plants in my living space has strengthened my own personal affinity with nature. It's a modest peace brought along by tending to plants. It's enjoyable, going through the steps of routine and care, even if it's just watering them every so often. Keeping a little personal garden plant gives you something amazing for your headspace; it's helping to keep my mental health concordant with nature, grounded, and giving me something to look forward to, as well as taking pride as I grow my collection of hydroponic plants.

What plants can do for us is amazing; you can freely have a rich amount of diversity inside your house. While our day-to-day interactions with the world are often lacking in greenery, the benefits of spending time immersed in nature on our mental wellbeing is needed now more than ever.

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Time will pass regardless. If you are looking for something that might enrich your life just a bit, consider perhaps getting yourself a houseplant. Perhaps you'll find yourself picking up a new hobby. And don't forget, like plants, we all benefit from a bit of morning air or the warmth of sunshine on our face, with all the stress of life. By looking after our leafy friends, they remind us to enjoy nature with our own personal green spaces.