

[00:00:35.670] - Intro

Welcome to the UK Travel Planning Podcast. Your host is the founder of The UK Travel Planning website, Tracy Collins. In this podcast, Tracy shares destination guides, travel tips, and itinerary ideas, as well as interviews with a variety of guests who share their knowledge and experience of UK travel to help you plan your perfect UK vacation. Join us as we explore the UK from cosmopolitan cities, to quaint villages, from historic castles to beautiful islands and from the picturesque countryside to seaside towns.

[00:00:37.620] - Tracy

Hi and welcome to Episode 43 of the UK Travel Planning podcast. In this week's episode, I'm talking again to Doug and this week we're going to be talking about UK train travel and in particular, we're going to be answering 15 of the most frequently asked questions about train travel in the UK. So we do have quite a lot of podcasts already about train travel in the UK, and I will mention those as we go along. And also, we'll just mention at this point is that we have got a Guide to UK Train Travel eBook, which Doug and I wrote and is available to purchase via the website. I will put link in the show notes. But I thought I will just mention that if you've got further questions after this episode, it's probably worth popping over and having a look at the eBook. And also we have a Facebook group as well, UK Train Travel Tips, that is worth joining. But anyway, without further ado, let's welcome Doug back to the podcast. Hi, Doug. Hello there. It's great for you to come back and talk about train travel because I know you would happily talk about train travel forever. And we obviously enjoy train travel. With your expert knowledge, I thought this would be a really good episode to do because we get so many questions in the Facebook group and so many emails about train travel in the UK. So these are the 15 most commonly asked questions in the Facebook group and via email. So we're going to start with the first question, which is, how do I get from Heathrow Airport by train to Kings Cross Railway Station?

[00:02:10.570] - Doug

Okay, you have several options. Firstly, the tube, that's the London underground. You can take the Piccadilly line, it starts at Heathrow and it will take you all the way to Kings Cross. That's the easy one. The cheapest option, there's other ones. There's the Elizabeth line, which is pretty new. That will take you from one side of London to the other. So from Heathrow and you have to change trains on Tottenham Court Road for that one and catch the Northern line, tube line, and that takes you to Kings Cross. And the third option, train option, is the Heathrow Express, the train which takes you from Heathrow to London Paddington train station. And then you've got a couple of tube changes before you get to Kings Cross.

[00:02:57.570] - Tracy

Okay, so obviously the most direct route to take is from Heathrow is the Piccadilly line.

[00:03:01.800] - Doug

It is the Piccadilly line, yes.

[00:03:03.520] - Tracy

So that's worth following that away for any of you who are going to arrive at Heathrow and will be heading over to Kings Cross Station. The next question, which relates to this as well, is how much time do I need to allow from landing at Heathrow Airport to booking a train from Kings Cross to Edinburgh? Now, before Doug jumps in to answer this question, I am just going to say that we are recording a dedicated podcast specifically to answer the question, how to get from Heathrow to Edinburgh, because we get asked that so often. Although Doug's going to answer this question now in terms of how much time you need to allow from landing to catching a train at Kings Cross, we will have a dedicated episode and a few episodes to talk about that. So how much time do I need then?

[00:03:49.440] - Doug

I forgot the question. It depends on the individual, really, with this one, because it depends on your mobility and how fast you move, whether you're checking in baggage as well. Obviously, you have to wait for that one. But assuming you're reasonably able and you have checked in baggage, I would not be looking to book a train out of Kings Cross before two and a half to three hours.

[00:04:13.630] - Tracy

All right. Okay. So it doesn't matter which way you cross London, I guess, to get to Kings Cross with those options?

[00:04:20.210] - Doug

No, you can choose whichever option you want. But you'd still give yourself that amount of time. You've got to tell me. If you just arrived and you're a bit tired from the plane, I'd give yourself as much time as possible. You don't want to be stressed about crossing London.

[00:04:33.080] - Tracy

Absolutely. And I will just say, for those of you wondering about getting around London itself, we do have podcast episode 24 where we discuss the different options around getting around London by giving an introduction to the different public transport options. So that's worth a listen. So I'm going to be traveling around the UK by train. That's what I've decided. And so how soon in advance do I need to buy train tickets?

[00:04:56.730] - Doug

Well, you can buy train tickets up until the train leaves. And you can actually buy some of them on board the train, but you will be paying full price. The same 90 days out is when you're going to start getting the good deals for the advanced tickets, which we'll cover later. But up to 90 days away from travel, you can start looking at ticket prices. But you need to do your homework on those.

[00:05:20.800] - Tracy

We often get asked what the difference is between an advanced train ticket and an anytime train ticket. Could you explain that, please?

[00:05:30.290] - Doug

The advanced ticket is the one you buy for the best deal. This is the one that becomes available from around 90 days before you travel. But when you have the advanced ticket, you are restricted to catch that one particular train on that train on that day, that one time is mentioned for that train, and that's the one you have to catch. The anytime one is to catch any train on that day on that particular route. But with so many other things, the more flexible you want your ticket, the more you have to pay.

[00:06:04.500] - Tracy

Okay, so if I'm going to buy myself a train ticket or some train tickets for travel, what websites are the best to buy the train tickets on?

[00:06:11.770] - Doug

Well, you have several options. You've got the National Rail Enquiries, you've got the Omio, you've got Trainline, which are generic ticket sales. And then you have train operating companies and the open access companies' specific websites. So for the train operating companies, you're looking at Avante, Northern Rail, Southern, LNER. Then for the open access ones, you've got Lumo and the Grand Central.

[00:06:38.980] - Tracy

If I buy a train ticket, but I change my mind or something happens, is the train ticket, would they be refundable?

[00:06:47.720] - Doug

If it's you that's cancelled the train ticket, unlikely but possible, depends on the terms and conditions of that ticket sale. And there is slight differences between different companies. So you would need to check the small print or fine print of those companies. If the train has been cancelled through no fault of your own, through weather strikes, engineering works, if they're unable to put on a bus replacement service that you may well be offered a refund if you want to.

[00:07:17.320] - Tracy

Okay. Question eight, I guess, is one of those questions that comes up... Sorry, question seven, comes up really, really often in the Facebook group where people think that train tickets sell out. So I'm going to ask you that question. I know the answer to this one, but I'm going to ask, do train tickets sell out? And why, when I look at train site, does it say there are no tickets for sale, no advanced tickets for sale, or sold out?

[00:07:43.050] - Doug

Okay, well, firstly, they do not sell out. If anybody's used training in the UK and we'll find out that the train is absolutely packed with people and there's far more people on there than seats. So the answer to the question, no, they do not sell out the tickets. The second part of the question, when you're looking at ticket sites and it'll say no tickets available or sold out, may possibly be because not all tickets have yet been released for sale. So depending on the company, one company may have already sold out to their allocation, another company, another site may not have done. Same with the train companies. So it pays to look across multiple sites. And if there's more than one trained operator on the site, have a look at those as well. If you don't know what the train companies are, have a look at one of the more generic sites like the National Rail Enquiries between two different stations where you want to leave from and that will give a list of the train companies that run on that line.

[00:08:43.080] - Tracy

Okay. So if I am going to book a ticket and then do I need to have a seat reservation or can I just turn up for a train? So is it a compulsory thing to have a seat reservation? And also, I guess another question that comes up about seat reservations is that can I reserve specific seats on a train? So if I don't like, or for example, you don't like traveling backwards on a train. So first of all, I guess that questions in a few parts is, do I need the seat reservation? Can I just turn up? And if I do or can make a treaty seat reservation, can I reserve specific seats?

[00:09:17.060] - Doug

Firstly, you do not need a seat reservation. It's only the middle of the sleeper services which they say you have to have a seat reserved for the seating part of the sleeper service. So no, you as long as you've got a valid train ticket, you can just turn up your train. You do not need a seat reservation. And if you do want to make a seat reservation, you can send a staffed office or do some of the train sites. You can have a look at the seat layout of the train and you can select your specific seats. You're right. I do prefer to go forwards because I want to see where I'm going.

[00:09:54.770] - Tracy

Yeah. Okay. So then obviously, there are a few train passes available in the UK. So you've got Brit Rail passes or Global Eurail train passes. Do you feel that they're worth it? And if I do decide to buy a pass, because I know there's quite a few different types, particularly Brit Rail passes, how do I reserve seats if I have a pass?

[00:10:15.330] - Doug

Okay, so the first part of that question is they are expensive.

[00:10:19.490] - Tracy

Yes.

[00:10:20.040] - Doug

They are. There's no misunderstanding there. The Brit Rail and the Global Eurail can save you money, but it depends on how long the train journeys you are wishing to take and how flexible because they have flexible variants of those we were looking at before. You get the M pass, you got mobile passes, and they can work out well for you. But it's about doing that cost comparison for all the journeys you're planning on doing to get an approximate cost of what your train tickets would be if you're buying them point to point or with a pass. Because if you're only doing very short train journeys, the likelihood is it's not going to be worth getting the pass. But they do give you massive amounts of flexibility.

[00:11:01.670] - Tracy

Yeah, that's what I was going to say. I was just thinking that. I mean, the advantage of that is you can hop on and hop off that day without having to think about it.

[00:11:08.640] - Doug

That's right. So it's about what you want from the train journey. Is the train just to get from A to B, or is it integral to your holiday, your vacation? So it's about a personal preference, really. And as regards reserving seats for the passes, they do not come with many free reservations.

[00:11:30.760] - Tracy

Yeah. There's one, isn't it?

[00:11:32.500] - Doug

Yeah, there's going to be one, which I do recommend you use for your first journey. Right. Okay. If you want to reserve any future seats in the UK, best to turn up at any staffed train station with a list of trains you'd like to catch along with your pass, obviously, and just choose your seats because they are then free.

[00:11:53.030] - Tracy

I was going to say that's.

[00:11:53.820] - Doug

Not going to cost you anything. Yeah, you don't need to be paying unless you really have to.

[00:11:57.680] - Tracy

I know we've mentioned that to quite a few people and in an itinerary consult and have done that and found that just so much easier and also saves your money.

[00:12:04.970] - Doug

And what certain train journeys when we suggested to sit on this side of the train or that side of the train for the best view. And if you can choose your seats, all the better.

[00:12:15.630] - Tracy

Absolutely. So another question we get asked is what are split train tickets?

[00:12:20.580] - Doug

Split train tickets are, using the example, Kings Cross to Edinburgh Waverley in Scotland, they've got the beautiful city of York on route on that one. So you may get X price for train ticket from London to Edinburgh, but potentially it can be cheaper for you to buy a single ticket from London to York and then a further ticket for an ongoing journey. Right, from York to Edinburgh. And it can potentially work out. You also don't have to change trains. You can stay on that same train.

[00:12:56.970] - Tracy

All right. Okay, that's good to know. And I know when I've looked on the train line, that comes up as an option as well.

[00:13:01.940] - Doug

It's all about doing your ticket homework because you've got to look at all these different options. Time spent could save you quite a bit of money.

[00:13:10.540] - Tracy

Yeah, and everybody's looking to save money, obviously, because it's pretty expensive to travel the UK by train. Which brings me actually to the next question that we get asked about a lot, which is what are the national rail cards?

[00:13:22.760] - Doug

That's another one because the national rail cards are cards issued by UK Railways, which you never

used to be able to get if you're overseas visitors, but you can now. For example, there's two together rail card, which we've recommended for quite a few people. There's senior citizens, there's students, there's 16 to 25, young persons, rail time cards, all lots of different options available. And what they will do is you pay one fee and then you can get 30% off your train tickets.

[00:13:56.400] - Tracy

Okay, that's good. Are there restrictions with that, though?

[00:13:59.680] - Doug

Yes, certain ones you have to check. Again, it's more put down because some of them you can't travel during peak hours. So it's off peak travel only.

[00:14:09.290] - Tracy

And obviously, someone like the two together, you have to be together.

[00:14:12.030] - Doug

Yes, you do have to stay together. You have to stay together for those. And then on transfer, we can't give it to somebody else.

[00:14:18.080] - Tracy

Right. Okay. What age does a child fare become an adult fare for train travel in the UK?

[00:14:24.510] - Doug

That's a short answer. Sixteen.

[00:14:25.790] - Tracy

Okay. So age 16 at that point, it becomes an adult fair. Okay. And then another question that we are asked often is, and I know we've put photographs in the Facebook group, is how much luggage can I take on a train?

[00:14:38.990] - Doug

Okay. Well, luggage, you need to be able to lift it yourself. That's because you've got to lift it from the platform to the train. But the guidelines say up to three pieces of luggage. And amazingly, no one dimension of that luggage can exceed one metre which is quite a bit of luggage. I'm not sure how you'd carry three pieces of your luggage, just under a metre.

[00:15:02.690] - Tracy

That's quite a lot.

[00:15:03.830] - Doug

Yeah, and I'm not sure where you're going to store them on board some trains.

[00:15:08.000] - Tracy

Okay. But if you obviously just want regular luggage when you take it off, you've got options.

[00:15:12.730] - Doug

You have and you've got the options on board with behind seats, luggage racks, and stacked and overhead.

[00:15:18.590] - Tracy

Okay, cool. Next question. We do get asked this and it's about any recommended UK rail itineraries that we can share. And I can answer this one because I guess I'm in charge of the website is that, yes, we do have the best of Britain by rail two week itinerary. You can make it longer if you wish. And we actually have had a number of people in the Facebook group who have actually done our two weeks best of Britain by rail itinerary. And we've actually just added to that recently with a best of Scotland rail itinerary. So you can take that, which Doug wrote, you can take the best of Britain itinerary. And then Edinburgh, then you can pick up the best of Scotland by rail itinerary, which takes you back to

Edinburgh, which again, then you can pick up the best of Britain rail itinerary, which will take you back down to London. So yes, we've got that. And also in our Guide to UK train travel eBook, there are also 10 rail itineraries, which Doug wrote with maps and each of the destinations along the routes with links to all the travel guides for each of those places and recommended places to stay and more information. So actually, you can build your real itinerary using those in the eBook and also the information we have on the website. Question 15 is, do you have information about the Eurostar and Caledonian Sleeper? So yeah, we have articles. We have articles about the Eurostar and we have an article about the Caledonian Sleeper. And we also have two podcasts. Episode 40 is all about the Eurostar and Episode 5 is about the Caledonian Sleeper. So if those are two trained services that you are considering taking when you're over in the UK, I'd highly recommend that you take a look at those articles and listen to the podcast.

[00:17:10.020] - Doug

Okay. There's also the Riviera Sleeper as well, which should be an upcoming article about the sleeper service from London Paddington down to Penzance.

[00:17:19.390] - Tracy

Yeah, but I haven't done that one yet.

[00:17:21.120] - Doug

No, that's one for the future part. It's a great Western railway service.

[00:17:23.850] - Tracy

Yeah, so we're doing that. I hope that's answered, let's say, 15 of the most commonly asked questions we're asked about UK train travel. I have mentioned, obviously, there are other podcasts to listen to. Episode 2 is the tips for travel in the UK by train, episode that Doug did. We've got episode 11, which is how to get around the UK, which we'll talk about different transport options, including train travel. And then episode 26 is how to get from London to Edinburgh by train. As I say, we will be in a future episode doing the how to get from Heathrow to Edinburgh by train, which we'll link up to that podcast episode too. So really for this week, I just want to say thanks for listening, and you can, as always, find links to all of the different podcast episodes and the articles we talked about and the eBook. And we have a lot of information on the website about UK train travel. You can find all of that in the show notes, which you'll find at [uktravelplanning.com/episode-43](http://uktravelplanning.com/episode-43). But for that, this week, I think that just leaves us both to say, Happy UK Travel planning.