

# Episode 2 - Introduction to train travel in the UK

[00:00:00]

[00:00:00] **Tracy Collins:** Hi, I'm joined today on the podcast by my husband and co-author of the guide to UK train travel ebook, Doug Collins. He is going to share his expert knowledge and love of travelling the UK by train, to help you maximise your UK rail experience. While train travel is a passion for both of us and we've explored England, Wales, Scotland, plus many destinations all over the world by train Doug actually worked in the UK rail industry for over 25 years.

[00:00:28] In this episode, Doug not only shares his passion for train travel in the UK, but also practical tips to make your own UK rail adventures smoother and less stressful.

[00:00:39] **Doug Collins:** Hello, good to be here. Yes, I do love the railways. They've always been part of my life, my earliest childhood memories. We used to go on holiday all around the UK and Europe but always by train every year, which is no great surprise.

[00:00:53] My father worked for the rail industry as did my brothers. And so soon as I could, at the age of [00:01:00] 16, I left school and began electrical apprenticeship. And over the next 25 years I did many varied different roles and that included electrical engineering, testing, manufacturing, new trains and old trains.

[00:01:15] And then as a project manager, and then before moving to the operational side of the industry over that time - weekends and holidays, I travelled everywhere in the UK by train sometimes on my own sometimes with friends and I completed every single train line that was available to travel on at that time. It was great fun.

[00:01:36] I loved every single minute.

[00:01:39] **Tracy Collins:** Okay. Yeah. And I know since we've been married for the last, I think has nearly 20 years now, we've spent a lot of time travelling the UK by train and I actually have also developed a love for that, that I didn't know that I had until we met. So if our listeners are considering travelling in the

UK by train, what would [00:02:00] be the key advantages that you identify, for them to do the train travel.

[00:02:07] **Doug Collins:** Well its relaxing. To me it is the most relaxing form of travel. There's the old British slogan says from the seventies or the eighties let the train take the strain really and I think that says it all. You, haven't got the problems that you have with traffic or have to worry about car parking spaces.

[00:02:28] And if you're not used to driving on the left, that could always be also be a problem. And trains generally arrive at stations in the middle of towns and cities, you straight there, straight into it. Along the way you can sit back and you can enjoy the scenery. You can take it easy. You can have food and drink when you want.

[00:02:47] You can go and get it though it is brought to your seat these days. So it's just relaxing. It's just easy, easy mode of transport, where, and the big advantage to me [00:03:00] and I know Tracy you the same is it's easy to socialise. It's great talking to people on trains. We've met some really interesting people on our travels and they've all got different stories to tell and to share and people want to share.

[00:03:15] **Tracy Collins:** Absolutely. Yeah, I can think of a, the last time I took the Caledonian sleeper train from London Euston to Fort William and I met this little old lady and in the train corridor and she was telling me all about the Glencoe massacre and the history behind the Campbell's and the McDonald's.

[00:03:41] And she was telling me that she was a McDonald and she had married a Campbell and not to believe that everybody says that actually, you know that the feud still continued and Campbell's did not marry McDonald's. She was quite interested to know that actually I was a descendant of the Campbell's.

[00:03:57] That was amazing and it stuck in my memory. It was absolutely [00:04:00] fantastic. And definitely, I think that that for me is one of my favourite things about train travel is just the people that you meet along the way.

What about any disadvantages that you can identify to travel in the UK by train?

[00:04:12] **Doug Collins:** I mean, albeit their universal coverage is very good in the UK they certainly don't go everywhere.

And if they don't go everywhere going to need all the modes of transport and that realistically could be costly and time consuming if you go against the, against the clock. Also if you travel with generally with lots of luggage or baggage, you've got to carry everywhere you go.

[00:04:38] You've got to keep it to a minimal, but then some trains are easier than others to store or stow luggage. And I know it can be a bit of a strain for some people, if they can't always see that luggage throughout the journey. So yeah, that can be a disadvantage if you're just totally unable to keep your baggage down to that minimal level.

[00:04:55] **Tracy Collins:** Yeah. Yeah. I definitely agree in it. Something that I've worked on over the years in [00:05:00] terms of the amount of luggage that I take with me. And especially when we're doing train, travel anywhere, actually in the world, but definitely something for, for listeners to consider.

So obviously we've got lots of readers of our website and members of our UK travel planning Facebook community, who they've said that they feel a little daunted and overwhelmed when it comes to planning their UK train travel. So what would be your top tips to reduce that overwhelm and help them, you know, plan the best UK trip and train travel adventure that they can.

[00:05:38] **Doug Collins:** Well, firstly, I would say it's, you've got to allow yourself enough time to comfortably get to the train station in plenty of time to catch the train that can be difficult to find the right platform if you're not familiar with the station.

Secondly they, I would say, [00:06:00] be aware of exactly what station you want to go to. In Birmingham, for example, they have three main line train stations, the Birmingham New Street, Moor Street, and Snow Hill. And if you get the wrong station, it could be not the start to your trip that you actually want.

Thirdly I would consider the amount of luggage which I've already alluded to that before it's considered the amount of luggage you take with you and keep it to a minimum and you want a manageable size and weight and be able to lift it above your head if required to do so.

[00:06:35] **Tracy Collins:** Can I also just interject there as well to consider that you may purchase things during your trip. I know that's something that I, I tend to do. So the, the amount of stuff that's actually going in the luggage will increase and weight will increase.

So do keep that in mind as well. If you're going to plan to buy souvenirs along the way that is, that is going to increase the amount of luggage that you have.  
[00:07:00]

[00:07:03] **Doug Collins:** It seems obvious, but take your own snacks and drinks with you and not count on services on the train. Occasionally the refreshment car can be closed particularly at weekend.. So if you take your own stock, you're not going to going to go too short with it.

Finally a good one is be aware of your rail itinerary for the day or for your trips and be aware of the estimated time of arrival, particularly relevant if you catch a multiple trains, so you need to know how you're progressing on your journey. So it's always good to be aware. And if that is the case it was taught to you that the train crews incredibly helpful and knowledgeable and fairly willing to help.

[00:07:42] **Tracy Collins:** Yes I think those are all really good points. Excellent tips for anybody who's planning, train, travel and certainly make it less stressful. If you could keep take note of all of those. If I had to ask you what your favorite train journey was in the UK. I know that's a really difficult [00:08:00] question to ask, but I'm going to ask it anyway. So what is, what would you say is your favorite?

[00:08:05] **Doug Collins:** That's a tricky one. I would say as an easy way out my favorite is always the last one I've done, but that is a bit of a cop-out of an answer. Generally speaking, I do enjoy the East Coast main line and the West Coast main line.

So the East Coast main line runs from Kings Cross in north London and that one runs up to Edinburgh with stops in places like York and Durham, which are fantastic places to visit. The West Coast mainline runs from London Euston to Glasgow Central.

But a particular favourite, because of where I'm from in the middle of England, is what is called the cross country line and runs from Birmingham up to Edinburgh. That runs through towns and cities and industrial areas but mostly countryside. It stops at a lot of the stations and it isn't the fastest way to get to the north of England and [00:09:00] Scotland. But to me, it's one of the most enjoyable ways as it is where I am from in the middle of England.

[00:09:09] **Tracy Collins:** What future UK train travel plans do you have, which is kind of, I kind of know the answer to this question, but I think it would

be useful too, because we've been doing a lot of planning for a future trip that we have.

[00:09:21] I know we have some really exciting change travel plans in the offing. So would you like to share

[00:09:27] **Doug Collins:** those? Well, there's always so many more things I want to do. There's always something new and trains and new places I want to go.

Really one that we're planning to do this year is finally for me to experience the Jacobite Express. That one is in the North of Scotland on the Highland Line from Fort William to Mallaig and it's a steam train but I've never yet done it.

[00:09:54] So thoroughly looking forward to doing that one and we've already booked that one. [00:10:00] Also what I want to do, as I say, I've already done all the train lines but currently there are new lines opening up or the reopening old closed lines and opening new stations so I need to experience those. I need to try these new lines, not to mention there's lots of preservation of vintage lines.

[00:10:18] I want to go and see how, how much time we have to do those. Particularly one down in Dartmouth in Devon I've always wanted to do so. But it's very exciting times in the UK. There are so many new trains on order and some delivered.

[00:10:37] **Tracy Collins:** It's going to be really exciting.

[00:10:40] And I'm going to throw in one of my favorite train trips in the UK, which is a Caledonian sleeper, which I absolutely love taking. The first time I ever took that, you know, we up in, in Scotland and the views was just amazing. Certainly memories to last a lifetime.

So I've taken that to [00:11:00] Inverness and we've done that up to Fort William, and we're hoping actually to do that the opposite way around from Edinburgh down to London this coming June.

[00:11:07] So really looking forward to that - the Caledonian Sleeper is definitely one of those brilliant experiences. I know it's one of your favourites as well, but I did put you on the spot about trying to choose. If I could bring them all the mind I would tell you a dozen more.

[00:11:23] Well, thanks for kind of talking us through some of those, those tips, which will be really useful for listeners and also considering the advantages and disadvantages of travelling in the UK by train.

Obviously Doug we'll be back and future podcast episodes to share more of his knowledge and expertise of the UK train travel. I know we are planning definitely to talk about the Caledonian Sleeper again with some information and tips for readers about if you're considering booking in that service.

As I say it is one of our favourite trips. And if you're planning to add a trip to Scotland into your itinerary it's a wonderful [00:12:00] way to get up there.

[00:12:01] For now I would like to I'd say thanks for joining us in today's podcast.

[00:12:06] You will find a summary of Doug's train tips plus links to our relevant train travel articles in the show notes for today's episode @uktravelplanning.com forward slash episode two.

I will also include a link to our guide to UK train travel e-book, which includes more tips, resources, and 12 done for you UK rail itineraries.

[00:12:27] Until next time. Bye. For now.

