

[00:00:01.400] - 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

Hello and welcome to Episode 40 of the UK Travel Planning podcast. This week we are addressing a question asked by many travellers: how to travel from London to Paris by train. So whilst there are various options to complete the journey from London to Paris, including air travel, coach tours, drive and or sea ferries across the English channel, which for many ways was the traditional way to cross the channel, since the tunnel opened for passenger trains in November 1994, the Eurostar train service has been the preferred travel option for millions of people every year, myself and Doug included. In this podcast, Doug and I chat specifically about the Eurostar train service from London to Paris, sharing our experiences, frequent travellers over the years on this service, plus at the end, answering some frequently asked questions, including some which come from members of our UK and London travel planning Facebook community. So if you're planning to travel from London to Paris on the Eurostar, this is definitely going to be the podcast episode for you. So as I was saying, Doug and I have taken this train quite a lot over the years.

[00:01:42.250] - Doug

Certainly have. I took it probably about six months after it first opened, and since that time, the service has got better and better and faster and more efficient.

[00:01:50.420] - Tracy

Excellent. And I know it's something that I've taken over, which was small to Disneyland Paris. And I don't know, so many times I've been over. I've actually lost count, to be honest. So I thought it'd be a really good episode for us to chat about. So Doug, would you like to kick off and give an overview of what the Eurostar service is?

[00:02:10.310] - Doug

Yeah, thanks, Tracy. The Eurostar is basically it's a high speed train service that runs from London to St. Pancras International, that's in North London. The train runs then to Paris, Gare de Nord. The Eurostar train itself leaves North London, travels through the Kent countryside, then passes through the channel tunnel under the English channel. The tunnel itself is about 31 miles long with about 23 and a half miles actually underneath the English channel. The journey time actually underneath the English channel is about 20 minutes. So when you come out of the tunnel in the North of France, the train really speeds up, doesn't it?

[00:02:55.690] - Tracy

Yeah, absolutely.

[00:02:56.760] - Doug

You can feel the speed.

[00:02:57.980] - Tracy

Yeah, it goes really fast.

[00:02:59.810] - Doug

Yeah. The journey time is about two hours, 20 minutes. I think the fastest is two hours, 16 minutes.

[00:03:07.020] - Tracy

So it really is an excellent way to get from London to Paris. So obviously, if you're thinking about taking the Eurostar, it's useful to know what tickets are available to take you over there. So again, there's something I think you can explain probably better than me.

[00:03:21.700] - Doug

Yeah, but basically just like all the trains in the UK, you've got first class and the standard class travel. We no longer use the word second class. It's a standard class travel. So you have standard class and standard premier, and you have a business premier. So basically the three.

[00:03:42.420] - Tracy

And obviously, because there's so much information really about their tickets that I know you've written about them on our Eurostar travel guide. So what I'll do is actually rather than spend 20 minutes of the podcast talking about the various ticket options, we can all put a link to that so you can actually decide if actually going first or standard class is what would suit you.

[00:04:05.560] - Doug

So one thing I would say at that point is I've spent a lot of time looking at trends within the Eurostar prices and there is a lot of fluctuation there. So one very good bit of advice I would say to anybody is, if you're looking to travel, it's worth doing your homework, it's worth having a good look through and looking for trends. But if you see a price that you're happy with, is to book it at that point because I've heard and I've seen it myself, you find a price thing and that's going to get better and the price doesn't actually goes up.

[00:04:40.240] - Tracy

I can imagine us obviously because things that days of the week and month seasons of the sport events, that impacts.

[00:04:45.960] - Doug

Most definitely, yeah. You see that? The rule of thumb is book it as early as you can, but I'm not always convinced that is actually the case. You just got to look for trends.

[00:04:56.080] - Tracy

Yeah, keep looking. Okay, no worries. So imagine so now we've all got tickets, we're going to go across to Paris. So I know we often get asked, so what is the actual procedure? So we'll talk you through that as well, because I think that's useful to be able to listen to what we do or listen to what you have to do when you arrive. So obviously you're going to be going to St. Pancras International. That's the first thing to realise, which is a North London.

[00:05:21.910] - Doug

That's a very good start. Go to the right station because London Kings Cross is right next door to St. Pancras Station. So make sure you get the St. Pancras and then follow the signs to the Eurostar arrivals and departures.

[00:05:33.520] - Tracy

Absolutely. And obviously, the thing that you need to do is make sure you've got all your documents with you. Absolutely. Don't forget your passport.

[00:05:39.770] - Doug

Don't forget your passport. Yeah, that's right. So you arrive at the station and it's very straightforward. You scan in your barcode that's on your ticket. But before that, actually, backtrack, it's important you allow yourself so much more time to get to this station because I don't think it's the best signposted to the Eurostar part of it.

[00:06:03.300] - Tracy

I think we'll put some pictures on with the show notes, basically. But I think the key thing is really is depending on the class of the ticket that you really need to check what your latest check in time and do give yourself plenty of time to be there. Really can't stress that enough.

[00:06:18.870] - Doug

That's true, because the business premiere is considerably less than the standard premiere.

[00:06:24.830] - Tracy

But the thing to think about is when you arrive at St. Pancras International, look for the Eurostar departure. So it's not a separate station. It's actually located within St. Pancras International itself. So you need to think about that. So you've arrived at St. Pancras International. I was going to give this as a tip, but I'll mention this now as well, is that it's worth stocking up on a few snacks for the trip as well. There's plenty of shops that you can go. There's cafes as well. So if you want to have a meal before you get on the train, you can do that. But there is a cafe, Metropole, which is on the train itself. But yeah, you can stack up with those, the Marks & Spencers, Simply Food, which I always head to for sandwiches and snacks and things like that. So basically, you arrive at the ticket gate and all the passengers is going to do the same thing, don't they?

[00:07:14.460] - Doug

They have. Now we are because I've been waiting for you because I've been standing there with my pass ready to scan this in and you've gone back to some food and drink. Right. So every passenger, you've got a scanning your barcode with the barcode reader. It's very, very easy. It's just like a normal ticket barrier and there's a little screen and you just hold your barcode against the screen and they'll tell you if you're okay and green light.

[00:07:43.350] - Tracy

And the gates open. Yeah, they're gates open. I mean, if they don't anyway, there are always Eurostar staff members there that can help you out. Once you get through there, basically that's the point where you go through security. You've got to imagine it's basically like an airport. Your luggage is scanned and you get checked. Just think of it as that. We're going to talk about luggage in a second, but just the whole time you have your luggage with you, just imagine that you're taking hand luggage on an aeroplane. This is basically what it's your luggage. You have the luggage with you at all points. You don't actually check it in anywhere. So that's important to say. So you go through security, get everything checked, your bags checked and everything. Then you go through UK passport control because effectively you are leaving UK soil at this point. You're going to be passing over to the French passport control. So you go through the UK passport control and then the next stop is your passport control into France. So effectively I would imagine then in that little part of St. Pancras International, that's maybe a little bit of France because you've passed through the passport control. I'm not so sure about that, but I guess it is because you're stamped in. You're stamped if they do that. Then you're going to be into the departure lounge, which can get very busy. I think that's worth saying as well. It can get very busy, especially there's a few trains going out because just to remember as well that the trains from London, St. Pancras and Eurostar also head to Brussels and they also go to Amsterdam. So you can get them. There could be a few trains leaving that morning so it can get busy. So let's talk about the departure lounge. So you go there, you've still got your luggage with you, you find a seat, sit yourself down. And then what do you do?

[00:09:24.930] - Doug

I'd have a look at the screens because there's so many screens there around the whole lounge area and look for your train on there. It usually has a train ID number. I think it's four digits at 9025, for example. Then you look for the year of departure time and see if it's on time and it's with any other train thing. And then you just sit back and relax. And when it gets towards your departure time, again, there's no rush. You'll see people starting to stand up and queue for a long time. There's no need to. There really is no need to.

[00:09:58.390] - Tracy

No, when they announce it. So obviously, you'll get an idea because you'll probably be there when another train may leave. So you'll see the process when they get up and then they go and queue up. And then you have to get your numbers with you on the travelator and all that to take it up to take the Eurostar train itself.

[00:10:20.860] - Doug

There's no steps there. It's a moving walkway.

[00:10:24.650] - Tracy

Yeah. So you go up on the walkway. So believe me, you will know because it will be called out. So at this point, you just follow everybody else because they're all good and they're going to... Well, two of us are the same train as you're going on. You'll be all good on the same train, but your ticket will get checked, so don't worry. So once you get up there, then basically you're going to look for your whichever coach.

[00:10:48.720] - Doug

Your coach number, yeah. And each coach or one or two coaches, they'll have an attendant and they'll check you off and guide you to the right area. And worth remembering, the Eurostar training are long training. So they're not one or two coaches long. They are pretty long. Just for anybody out there who's a bit of a training enthusiast like me, this is a good opportunity to go and get some photos of the training if you want one like I did.

[00:11:14.760] - Tracy

Well, if you've got time because they say it's quite a lot. They are long training. So one thing to think about, it's really important because I usually you do this wrong so it's good to know is that the coaches are clearly marked. So you make sure you've got the correct one and the seat ranges are also clear at the door of the coach. So check that your seat number and board the coach from the correct end. Otherwise, you're going to be walking all the way through the coach to find your seat with your luggage. So obviously.

[00:11:41.940] - Doug

They're all the same time.

[00:11:43.050] - Tracy

The people trying to get the same. Yeah. So it can get a bit, it can get a bit. So just make sure that you get on at the right end of the coach so that you're near your seat. Again, you have your luggage with you. So you're getting on the train with your luggage. And at the end of each of the train, there are places where you can store your luggage. There's plenty of space.

[00:12:00.290] - Doug

There is. There's lots of storage spaces on these trains. And the rule of thumb is keep your bags light as you possibly can. You need to be able to lift it really yourself.

[00:12:11.530] - Tracy

Yes, it can. And then above the seats as well, the rack so you can put smaller bits of luggage up there.

[00:12:17.900] - Doug

As well. Which isn't if you've got a rigid suitcase, they don't fit particularly.

[00:12:23.830] - Tracy

Well there. That's more for backpacks.

[00:12:26.810] - Doug

Or backpacks. Or the back of the seats as well. There's a few spaces.

[00:12:29.580] - Tracy

There is space then. In terms of configuration, because I know we're asked about this, there are tables of four and there also are two seats next to each other.

[00:12:39.150] - Doug

Airline seats drop down table.

[00:12:40.980] - Tracy

Yes, I have a drop down table. So basically, also at the end of when you get on, you'll see that as you get on the train, you'll see at the end of the carriages, there are newspapers and magazines. I still

think they're there.

[00:12:52.610] - Doug  
Yeah, I think so.

[00:12:54.470] - Tracy  
So they're usually free. Well, they are free, so you can help yourself if there's something you want to read. Quite often they're in French, though, so you want to practise your French.

[00:13:02.750] - Doug  
And the Financial Times, which...

[00:13:04.470] - Tracy  
Yeah well, some people. Obviously, though, if you do need some assistance, you can arrange it in advance with the Eurostar. So just contact the help centre for any specific requirements that you may have. So we've talked about... So you're on the train, but I think we'll just talk a little bit more about the luggage because I know this is probably one of the most... We get asked this a lot about what can you take on? What happens with the luggage? I say again, just stressing that you keep it with you at all times. It's like you would catch any train if you're in the UK, that the luggage is either behind your seat or it goes at the end of the carriage, or it goes, if it's small enough, it can go behind the and the rack above your head. So that's basically it for luggage. But you are expected, you will have to put it on the train. You will have to take it off the train at the other end.

[00:13:54.110] - Doug  
And the official line from your side is for standard class and standard premium, you can have two lots of luggage with you. Maximum 85 centimetres long in business premier, you can take three.

[00:14:06.410] - Tracy  
That's true. And also just thinking about seats as well. Again, when you book seats, you can request if you want to sit in the two airline seats or if you want to sit with the table. Again, they're very popular. Families obviously book those.

[00:14:20.910] - Doug  
Or if you want to face the direction of travel.

[00:14:23.710] - Tracy  
Yes. I think that's important because I know you always like to do that.

[00:14:26.680] - Doug  
I have a preference for facing direction of travel. Sometimes going backwards leaves me a little bit nauseous at the time. So I'd rather go forwards if I can.

[00:14:36.790] - Tracy  
And then basically, once you're on there, just settle yourself down. There's free WiFi, so you get access to WiFi on the Eurostar. There's also this socket that you can charge, charge things up. So I'm trying to think what else do I do? I mean, the journey goes really fast. Because I get a bit claustrophobic and I know somebody was like, because I get a bit claustrophobic, and I know somebody was that they're a little bit worried about going under the channel tunnel or through the channel tunnel for those 20 minutes where you know that you're underneath the tunnel. And I say, Obviously, I get a little bit myself and a bit claustrophobic, but I'm actually fine on the Eurostar. I think the fact that it's 20 minutes and I can distract myself and not really think about it, obviously, it's light because the lights are on in a carriage. So to be honest, it's pretty quick. But I understand if people can get a little bit concerned about that. But I found that I'm totally fine with that. So obviously, after a couple of hours you arrive, you go off to go through the French countryside very fast. Unfortunately, it's not the prettiest part of France. I was here, yes. Going into Paris. But you arrive in at the Gare du Nord train station. It's very easy when you arrive at the garden or you literally get off the train, walk to the platform and that's it. There's no passport control because you've been through that when you got

on in St. Pancras International. So you've done all that to get off the train and you walk and that's it. You're actually in the Gare du Nord so you have the options if you're traveling on to your hotel. So we've tried different ways in the past, haven't we? Because generally, we'll catch... Because we generally stay in the same hotel, which is opposite the Louve in Paris, which is in Premier arrondissement, because we really like it. So usually, we can get there by the Paris metro, which is fairly straightforward. And we've done that quite a few times. We've also taken the RER, which is another train system in Paris, which takes you mainly up to the suburbs.

[00:16:41.320] - Doug  
An express.

[00:16:42.380] - Tracy  
Yeah, an express train. But generally, if you're going to be staying in the centre of Paris, you'll take the Paris metro. If you are going to be changing trains and going on to another one of the other major train stations in Paris, you need to just check which is the best route.

[00:16:58.090] - Doug  
And there's a lot of walking. There's a lot of walking on the metro between.

[00:17:01.640] - Tracy  
Yes, there is. That's when you're actually in Paris. But also I think it does work to have a plan B because the last time we went over, we arrived and there was a strike, so there was no transportation to it. So we ended up walking. So you do have to be careful around the Gare du Nord it's not the nicest area of Paris, I would say. So you do have to be careful around that area. But the other option really is you can get a taxi. I have taken a taxi before and not had a problem with that. So there are options to get to the hotel. I would suggest, as I would with anything, is if you haven't been to Paris before, this is the first trip that you actually plan ahead and you know what you are doing when you get there. So obviously, you said a Paris metro, you go to the end of the platform and then you'll see on your left, you'll see the signs for the actual Paris metro to go down for that. And you can do that. So that's fairly straightforward, really. And you can always ask for buying tickets.

[00:18:02.230] - Doug  
Yeah. So one thing I would say with Paris is obviously there could be a potential language barrier there. So what Tracy said, just reinforce it and have that plan and know exactly what you're going to do when you get off the train.

[00:18:16.140] - Tracy  
Yeah, I think that's really important. So next we're going to just go through some of the questions that we had from our UK and London travel planning Facebook group community. So because we did ask, so we're going to answer those questions in the next section. One of the questions that we have been asked is, and I think this is quite a common question, quite a few people are interested in that, is if they want to go to Paris, or if you want to go to Paris for a day, is it worth it or is it worth considering booking a tour or doing that independently? Again, this is quite an interesting question because it is a very big day trip to do. There are quite a lot of day tours from London that have been organised which include the train, and they will escort you and take you around Paris. Actually, I've taken the challenge, so I'm going to be doing that in June this year. I'm going to take one of those and I'm going to report about that. So there will be a podcast coming about my experience doing that. I am also going to go over to Paris back in the day and see how much I can get done.

[00:19:21.730] - Tracy  
Obviously, Paris isn't new to me, so therefore, I'm going to go and go with it with their first time visitors eyes on to think about doing the main things. Doug's down to tell you this, but you popped over to see me in Paris once, didn't you?

[00:19:34.970] - Doug  
I did. I was surprised in Paris on the way back from Switzerland. And on a last minute decision, I came down on the Eurostar and had a cup of coffee because I couldn't find a cup of tea. And so I just had a

drink and came straight back.

[00:19:50.320] - Tracy

Yeah, you did. So you popped over. You did pop over the date. So we know it is possible, obviously, to get the Eurostar from London to Paris and back again. I guess the question is, how much can you actually get done in a day and how much? So that's the thing. Obviously, again, depends on time of year. You've got to think about things like daylight, if you want to have the hours of daylight and time differences. But I will be back to report on that to see exactly if it is possible, and then basically can make your own judgement about whether it is worth it for you. I hope that answers that question. But obviously, that's something that comes up a lot. I know if you have the opportunity, maybe it's one of those things that you want to do. So we've been asked as well about getting to St Pancras International in the morning. If you've got an early train, we tend to stay near St Pancras. We just find it really easy to stay in one of the hotels opposite the train station. I'd love to actually stay in the St Pancras International Hotel at some point. That would be a real bucket list. But yes, that's what we do, don't we? We do.

[00:20:52.840] - Doug

It makes life so much easier because it's literally across the road from the station the moment you need to catch. You catch the first train, which is a minute past six at the moment.

[00:21:01.240] - Tracy

Yeah, so we've done that. So again, it makes it you've got the full day when you get over to Paris. So that's one option, or obviously again, booking yourself a taxi or a black cab to get yourself to St Pancras international in time.

[00:21:14.120] - Doug

And then at the end of the day, on the way back, because you've got a long day, you will be pretty tired, is maybe consider booking a hotel for that night as well. Again, that's a good try. Yeah, again. At five, same reason. Yeah.

[00:21:24.900] - Tracy

So that you're close to that. Though I think it's less of an issue on the way back because obviously you get yourself across London if necessary. And a little good advantage.

[00:21:32.310] - Doug

The advantage of that would be if you book the night before and the night after, you haven't got to take everything with you to Paris, you could leave stuff in London for the day.

[00:21:40.680] - Tracy

Yeah, absolutely. So that's a good thing. So I know we've had a few questions again about luggage. So hopefully we've answered most of those questions that people have asked specifically about where you put luggage. And again, large pieces of luggage, if you've got large suitcases, they can go at the end of the actual carriage.

[00:21:58.520] - Doug

That's right. Yeah, there's plenty of their luggage storage area. I think one of the things we said about people who actually get on trains, I think that part of it is so they can be the first to put the luggage and store it away, because otherwise you're going to have to lift it onto top of all the luggage that's already stored there. Yeah.

[00:22:16.520] - Tracy

And then the next question we got is just about food options. So yes, there are food options on the train. This is the Café Métropole. You can go... We've got photos of that. We'll put that on the insurance as well. So you can get food on the train or if you prefer to set this, plenty of places at St. Pancras International to buy things before you get on train.

[00:22:34.930] - Doug

Yes. I noticed when we looked in the cafe on the way back from Paris to London, they actually sold the visitor oyster card as well.

[00:22:43.980] - Tracy

Yeah. Okay, that's good to know. So yes, you can buy food, beverage. You can take, at the moment, bottles of alcohol unopened in your luggage. I don't think that's an issue. But again, just double check that if you want to be 100 % sure. But I don't think it's a problem if you bought some alcohol and you want to take it over to France with you. I know I've bought alcohol before at the duty free or used to be duty free in the Paris Gare du Nord or before getting on the train. So it's never been a problem. So I think that's answered quite a lot of questions, but we were going to share with you, our last thing we're going to do is we're going to share with you our top tips for those of you catching the Eurostar. So to summarise, here are our top tips for anybody taking the Eurostar from London to Paris. So number one, arrive early and to arrive at the station with plenty of time to check in and go through security. Number two, bring your passport. You will need a valid passport to travel on the Eurostar.

[00:23:40.520] - Doug

Pack light. You need to carry your own luggage on and off the train. Nobody there to help you. So make sure you pack accordingly.

[00:23:48.620] - Tracy

So use the luggage storage. So if you've got larger items of luggage that won't fit in the overhead racks, use the luggage storage area at the end of each carriage and make sure the luggage is secure. Bring snacks and drink. While there is food and drink available on the Eurostar, it is a little bit pricey and the range is a bit limited. So if you bring your own, you can save money and ensure that you've got something to eat and drink during the journey.

[00:24:12.620] - Doug

And don't forget to bring your travel adapter. If you plan to charge any electronic devices on the Eurostar, make sure you bring a travel adapter that's suitable for France. And also be aware of the time difference. France is one hour ahead of the UK, so make sure you just your watch and plan accordingly.

[00:24:31.810] - Tracy

And also don't forget to research your onward travel once you arrive in Paris. So consider booking a taxi or prearranged in transfer if you need it. Just make sure that you're aware of public transportation options in advance so you're not caught off guard because obviously if it's a new city you've not been before, it's good to be prepared. So that's really it for this episode. I just want to say thanks for tuning in again and listening. We really love all your support and we're enjoy reading the reviews. You can find links to all the information we talked about in today's episode in the show notes at [uktravelplanning.com/episode-40](http://uktravelplanning.com/episode-40). You can also find lots of travel tips and information for visiting Paris on my worldwide travel website, [Tracystravelsintime.com](http://Tracystravelsintime.com), which I will also put links to those different articles in the show notes. But that just leaves us to stay until next week, doesn't it? Yeah. Happy UK Travel Planning.