

All Aboard the Caledonian Sleeper: Your Ultimate Guide to Overnight Train Travel

Welcome to the UK Travel Planning Podcast

Tracy: Are you thinking about taking the Caledonian Sleeper? In this episode, we break down everything you need to know how it works, the difference between the Highlander and Lowlander services, our recent experiences and, top tips for a smooth journey. If you're wondering whether this iconic overnight train is the right choice for your trip, tune in to find out.

Tracy: Welcome to the UK Travel Planning Podcast. Your host is the founder of the UK travel planning website, Tracy Collins. In this podcast, Tracey 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 town.

This is episode 141 of the UK Travel Planning Podcast

Tracy: Hi, and welcome to episode 141 of the UK Travel Planning Podcast. This week, Doug and I are both here.

Tracy: Hello.

Tracy: To chat about the Caledonian sleeper train. Now, this is an updated podcast from episode five, which we recorded right at the beginning of our podcast journey. But we felt it was about time that we actually gave you a bit of an update. mainly because we've recently both been on the Caledonian Sleepover together and on two separate solo journeys. So we thought this would be a good chance to talk about it, give you some tips, give you some ideas and thoughts. well, reflect our ideas and thoughts about taking the Caledonian Sleeper.

The Caledonian Sleep is one of two sleeper services running in the UK

So the first thing I think that we should do is, and I'll get Doug to answer this, is to tell us what is the Caledonian Sleeper and why is it such a unique way to travel?

Tracy: Well, the Caledonian Sleep is one of two sleeper services or sleeper train services running in the uk. One is the Night Riviera that runs from London Paddington down to Penzance. this is the one that runs on the west coast main line from London Euston and it runs into Scotland. So you've got two services. You have, of course, the Lowlander and the Highlander services. Lowlander says, Glasgow, Edinburgh and a few more stops. But. And the Highlander is Inverness and Fort William.

Tracy: So, so basically, you can choose to go on the Lowlander service from London Euston to either Edinburgh or Glasgow and obviously back. So you could go from Edinburgh or Glasgow back to London Euston, or you can do the Highlander service, which basically will take you from London Euston to Inverness and. Or Fort William. And obviously you can do the return journey. You could do it back from Inverness or

Fort William back to London.

Tracy: Yeah. To summarise, you've got a northbound and a southbound service. You also got Aberdeen, including in the, Lowlander service.

Doug and I have taken both Lowlander and Highlander sleeper trains recently

Tracy: Okay, so let's kind of recap about what our, recent experiences have been. So in September 2024, Doug and I did a trip, kind of a round trip, which you can actually listen to. We've got a podcast about it where we went from England through Wales to the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, and then across to, Scotland. And, from there, after we stayed in Skye, we actually took the Highlander, train from Inverness down to London. Yeah. So that was a train that we both took, the Caledonian sleep bed together to London. Okay. And then after that you did another journey on the Caledonian sleeper. What was that?

Tracy: I, did the Lowlander southbound service from Edinburgh Waverley Station down to London Euston.

Tracy: And then finally I did the opposite way around, from which we're done in September, is that I caught the Highlander service, Caledonian super Highlander service from London Euston to Inverness in, I, think it was the end of January, beginning of February that I did that trip. So basically we have in the last few months taken both the Lowlander and the Highlander, Caledonian sleeper. So it's a perfect chance to talk to you about those trips.

Let's talk about the different types of accommodation available on Caledonian Stiba

Now let's talk about the different types of accommodation available on the actual Caledonian Stiba, and then we can talk about our experiences of what we took. Because we did slightly different, didn't we?

Tracy: We did indeed, yeah. So, to start with, you have, a chair, basically a seat, which is slightly upgraded from the usual day coaches. You've got more luggage space and you've got more seat comfort, really. But that is just still what it is a seat. A standard coach seat.

Tracy: Yeah.

Tracy: Okay. Then you have the classic rooms, which is the berths only, which is a, single bunk on the bottom and a single bunk on the top that has no en suite facilities. So there's no toilet in that room. And then you have the club room, which is the same beds wise, but you have a little, ah, toilet and a shower within that room. And then you have the double, which is a double bed. but that one gets

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Tracy: booked up very, very fast.

Tracy: Yeah, we've never managed to be able to book that one, have we?

Tracy: It's never once been available.

Tracy: No. So if you're listening to this episode, Caledonian Sleeper people, we would love to be able to try the double, experience and then we can feed back in a further podcast all about that to our listeners.

On the Highlander you have more time to soak up the old atmosphere

Now let's just talk about when we, when we did that initial, the Highlander experience together from Inverness down to London. We had the classic room.

Tracy: We had the classic room and it was very good. There's nothing wrong with it. But being on the Highlanders, you have a little bit more time in the evening, so it leaves 9ish, depending whichever route that you're doing. So you have a little bit more time to sort of soak up the, the restaurant car and the facilities and the meals and the drinks in the old atmosphere.

Tracy: Right. And that's different from the Lowlander, which you took in.

Tracy: I did, I took that one. But quite honestly, because that one departs around close to midnight, I did go down to the refreshment car and have a look in there, but nobody was eating. Basically people get onto that one and by and large they just head straight into the berth and ready to sleep, really.

Tracy: And you also did the classic, didn't you, on the Lowlander?

Tracy: I did. Just a classic room, yeah.

Tracy: Okay.

So now I treated myself when I went from London, Inverness to Scotland

So now I treated myself when I went from London, Inverness. So I've been in London doing some work for three days and, I wanted. I had to get back up to Scotland and I wanted that entire. The last day, I wanted to have the entire day in London. So it made sense for me to book the Caledonian sleep. So I did treat myself and I booked the club room. Now, the club room. The difference of the club room and classic is that it has an ensuite. So I had a toilet and I had a shower. Now, hands up, I didn't try, didn't use a shower. But I. It was very useful having the toilet, let me put that way. so I didn't eat. We have in the past eaten in the lounge car of the, colour dynasty. But this time m. I didn't. I was on my own and I decided not to.

Tracy: Yeah, I mean the drinks as well as food on there, but it's sort of locally, mainly Scottish, food I've seen on there, really. But there's choices of food on there and. Yeah, it's nice food. It's nice. Well presented. the prices are, not cheapest food you're going to have, but it's a whole atmosphere, it's a whole part of the journey.

Tracy: It's a great experience. And I know when we did the Highlander from Inverness down to London, end of September, we did have a few drinks in, in the, the lounge car.

Tracy: Yeah, and a few snacks, didn't we?

Tracy: Yeah, we did, yeah. So that was nice. Now, one thing as well, when you're on the

club room, is that you do get access to the lounge before you actually board the train. So I did in London Houston, I did sit in the lounge. and there are, there are, there are drinks, complimentary drinks that you can have. There is a menu so you can order yourself some food.

Tracy: And that's the new lounge on platform one at London use.

Tracy: Yeah. And it's really nice actually. Have got some photos and videos of that which I'll put into the show notes.

Tracy: Worth bearing in mind at the different locations of the, Caledonian sleeper and the station stops at. Some have their own Caledonian sleeper lounges, but they also share some lounges like Edinburgh Waverley Station. They share lounge with Iner. so after Iner service is gone, they do take over from the Caledonian sleeper in Inverness. There's one just across the road. Only small place, but it, it is, it is nice to go sit and have a drink and some snacks and things in there as well.

Tracy: Yeah, complimentary drinks, some complimentary snacks and there's a shower that you can use as well. So if you want to freshen up, you can do that. so that's kind of, that's a nice little, addition if you have got the club or double room.

Tracy: Yeah.

We do have an affiliate link where you can book through our website

Tracy: So now I'll just talk a little bit about booking it. I just went through, the, I booked

on the Caledonian sleeper site. We do have an affiliate link. So if you're considering booking it, I will put that in the show notes. And really we'd appreciate that if you, if you are considering book, in the Caledonian siber that you book through our affiliate link, which is of no extra cost to you. But, it does help support us to produce all our resources such as this podcast as well. so, yeah, so I booked, I found it very easy. I just went on and booked my own. Very, very easy to do. And I know you've never had a problem booking.

Tracy: No, I haven't. It's worth noting that the Caledonian sleepy does not run on the Saturday night, but it's six nights a week. But not Saturdays.

Tracy: Yeah. The one thing I will say that I didn't book a huge amount of time in advance in January. But it is January. It was January. I should say it was. You know, it's quite quiet season. But if you are planning to travel during, busy times, year is worth.

Tracy: Or you want the double room or.

Tracy: You want the double, which we've never managed to be able to book. Honestly, it doesn't matter how far ahead we. That always seems to be booked up so we've never managed to get that.

We took Caledonia Sleepy from Inverness to London in September

so let's talk about what it was like on board. So let's talk about the Inverness to London trip that we both took in September. So, again, really comfortable. We were in the. We went in the lounge car. Now, in terms of the actual classic, room itself, what did we get

in there? Because you get a little amenity pack.

Tracy: Yeah, you get a little pack that's got a mask and you've got some earplugs in there. And, you got a bottle of water.

Tracy: Yeah.

Tracy: And then you can fill a menu card in, stick it on your door. But in the classic room, that's not included in the

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Tracy: price. But it is in the club room. And the double.

Tracy: Yeah, in the club room. You fill that in as soon as you get on board. So you choose what you want for breakfast and what time that you want that delivered. So that was brought to your room in the morning before you depart the train. I think, actually, from what I remember, it was only a few months ago, or even that probably six weeks ago. We. When I. We actually got into Inverness slightly earlier than expected. but I was up early because the views are spectacular.

Tracy: Well, we'll come to the views in a moment. But when I took the lowlander when we arrived into Houston, probably close to an hour before scheduled, time arrival, so it caught a few people unawares. I'd arranged my breakfast, about 40 minutes before, arrived into Houston. So I ended up having my breakfast at the. At the station. Sitting, looking at the station. So what, on the train? Yeah, on the. On the train. So some people were ready to get off and got there early if they got business. Because that's the beauty

of a sleeper, is you arriving in a different place. So you can save a lot of time on your plans for that following day.

Tracy: I was just gonna. Just. I'm thinking about it. If, you know, if you're listening to this episode and you have never taken Caledonia Sleepy before, you do get, obviously a, a number. Birth number key. I actually got key tap card to get in. and there are people there that wait to kind of.

Tracy: Yes. When you. When you arrive at the station, you are met by a carriage attendant, a birth attendant for each coach or each carriage. And they will direct you to your room. They'll check with your name and make sure you know what time your arrival is. Make sure you can know what to do to order your breakfast. where the lounge car is. They basically answer all your questions. But the single little Key card is very straightforward. You just tap it and you walk into, into your room and hold on to that. And when you actually check out, because I saw a few people asking, well, what do I do with the key when I'm leaving the room? You leave it on your birth. On the bed as you leave.

Tracy: Yeah, absolutely.

Now, another question that we get asked all the time is how did we sleep

Now, another question that we get asked all the time is, how did we sleep? Because, you know, is it comfortable? Smooth. so now I'm going to be really upfront that I've had different experiences on the Caledonian sleep bed. So am I. I slept very well on the trip

down from Inverness, down to London that we took in September. I struggled to sleep on the London to Inverness, sleeper train that I took at the end of January, beginning of February. It was a little bit noisy. I don't find so much the rocking of the carriage, a problem, but, it was a bit noisy. So they do give you earplugs. And I, I found once I put the earplugs in, I went to sleep. No problem whatsoever.

Tracy: Yes, I, as a rule, do sleep quite well on those. not last up time before I had sort of patchy sleep. But I think it makes a difference. If you're on the bunk beds. I think the top bunk use can sway a little bit more than you can on the bottom bunk.

Tracy: Right. Yeah.

Tracy: So if you are prone to motion sickness, which, truthfully, I am, but very rarely on a train, but other modes of transport. Yes, I am. I do sleep better on the bottom than I do on the top.

Tracy: Yeah, I think. I mean, we've taken the Caledonia suit quite a few times now. Now, what about. I know I've done the Highlander and I've not done the Lowlander yet. You have done the Lowlander. I think my concern or worry would be the Lowlander is that leaves quite late from Edinburgh Waverley's train station. So you have to stay up quite late.

Tracy: Yeah.

Tracy: so you either have to occupy yourself or I guess you can go in the lounge for the last hour or so before.

Tracy: Yeah. Most people I saw close to, you know, waiting to board the train, they were in the lounge as well. Not all, obviously, because not everybody has those, those tickets. But I did notice as I was boarding the train, a few people in front of me, they were going straight into their berths and presumably more or less straight into bed. Yeah. because you really, even if you get straight into bed, you're not going to get more than sort of six or seven hours before you really need to be getting off.

Tracy: Yeah.

Tracy: So to me that was one of the drawbacks of the Lowlander service. You. The actual journey time is quite short, but bear in mind you can board up to an hour more or less before the train departs.

Tracy: So you can board or get into your berth, you know, quite a bit of time before that sort of train departs. But as you said, you know, there's voices and the doors banging. So it depends how much of a light sleeper you are or not.

Tracy: Now, I mean we have had a lot of people who have booked the Kalanoon and Sleeper because we, we enjoy it, we've enjoyed doing it.

Taking the Lowlander from Edinburgh, Glasgow down to London is an option

But I think one thing we did want to say in this podcast was really to, I mean, our favourite way of doing it, and I think this is what we're trying to get across in this podcast as well is that it may work for you. Taking the Lowlander,

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from Edinburgh, Glasgow down to London. That is an option. but like Doug says, it does leave quite late. It's not as long a journey. you're leaving Scotland, arriving back to London. Now we did a previous podcast with a couple who did this because they didn't. They want this. They actually went up to Edinburgh for the day. So they went on the Sunday, I think, and then the Sunday night they travelled back down to London. So it meant that they could do Edinburgh basically in a day. So that's one way where you could do it. I have to say that for me and I know for Doug, Doug's probably going to reflect this in a second that our, ah, favourite way to take the Caledonian Sleeper and, and to save your time as well, if you want to do it this way is we've taken it numerous times from London, Houston up to either Fort William or Inverness. And that is what we love, the fact that you wake up, you leave London and then you wake up with the beautiful scenery in Scotland.

Tracy: Yeah, definitely. So, and what we generally do, we, when we arrive into Fort, William or Inverness, we've got up earlyish and then we've gone and had breakfast in the, in the dining car, haven't we?

Tracy: Yeah.

Tracy: So. And that's something we thoroughly enjoy doing. So if we had to sort of express a preference, we probably would say the Highlander northbound.

Tracy: Oh, 100 would say for me it's 100. It's not even. I mean it was very useful for us doing Inverness to London when we did it in September. That worked out very well for us because it meant we had a, we could drive from the Isle sky to Inverness. We had

some time in Inverness and then it meant we were. We got into London, Houston, fairly early the next morning and we were actually taking a tour that next day, so it worked out really well. Now, obviously, if you sleep, it makes things a lot easier. If you don't sleep, you're going to be tired, so you do need to consider that. So we don't want you to kind of go into this and think, oh, Tracy Duncan said it's the most amazing thing ever, and then take the train and then be so tired that you don't have a fantastic day. So you need to think about how to prepare for that.

Doug recommends taking sleeper train from Edinburgh to London rather than flying

So what would you recommend, Doug?

Tracy: Choose the journey that best suits you and what suits your itinerary? it depends what sort of traveller you are. If you embrace the journey as part of your holiday experience, you're probably going to go with it and enjoy it. But if you are prone to motion sickness, you're prone to not sleeping unless it's very, very quiet. Maybe the journey is not the most ideal for you.

Tracy: yeah, I agree. Now, there are other ways that you can get from London, Scotland, and vice versa. So I know we have got a podcast about taking, the East Coast Main Line. There's obviously, there's a number of ways of getting down from Edinburgh to London, but the east coast mainland's the fastest route.

Tracy: That's right.

Tracy: so we have got a podcast about that. We also have an article about, travelling on that route down from Edinburgh, London. So that takes around four hours.

Tracy: Yeah, the fastest time is about four hours. But consider there is other routes down as well. Yeah, with the new timetable changes, there's going to be additional services put on as well. So you do have choices there.

Tracy: And we'd always say take the train rather than take the plane. because by the time you get yourself to Heathrow Airport or Gatwick Airport or whichever airport, flying up to Edinburgh and then you've got to get into Edinburgh itself, that's already quite a lot of time when you could have actually got yourself to King's Cross and got a direct train straight up the Caledonian sleeper is about having a different experience. For me, it's about having a different experience. It's about trying to sleep a train. If you live in a country that doesn't have sleeper trains or you haven't had a chance to experience it, well, this is a great thing to do. And, I know we've done previous podcast episodes with, families who've taken the Caledonian sleep, but just for the kids to have that experience and they've.

Tracy: Been really excited about it, same as I do. I become a kid every single time I step on a train, especially the sleeper. it's a great opportunity to meet people as well. You know, we found, particularly when we're taking the Highland, you've got more time in the dining room, dining car that people do engage.

Tracy: Yeah, definitely.

Tracy: The journey I took on the Lowlander, I know it was late but I was found myself talking to people and it was fascinating.

Tracy: People take the videos, you walk down the corridors.

Tracy: Oh yes, yes, yes, yes.

Tracy: So we'll share those.

Tracy: But it is, it's all about the whole experience because, it's, it's different. The sleeper service is unique in the fact that it is so different to taking a day service.

Tracy: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. And I think for me the favourite thing, the reason I enjoy doing it, I find it really relaxing. once you're on the train it's, you know, you get yourself settled down. But for me it's, it's the ability to wake up and just see the scenery in Scotland, which I absolutely love. Whether that's going to Fort William or that's going to Inverness. for me, in terms of that, it's just the, just the sheer difference of leaving the capital London and then arriving in the Scottish Highlands. It's just fantastic.

Tracy: It is. And we've helped how many people took, when we've done the itinerary consults, they haven't even considered it. And so we've sort of sown the seed and they go, oh, we didn't know anything about that. So

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Tracy: you know, thank you for raising our awareness. And it gives them, you say additional time. Whichever way they're doing, they've given them more time to fit in other activities.

Tracy: Yeah, that's it. And I mean like that's what worked for me. It'd been in London and

getting up to Edinburgh at the end of January because I meant I have an entire day in London. I didn't have to worry about hopping on a train so it gave me the full day.

Now let's think about some key tips for first time travellers considering Caledonian sleeper

Now let's think about some key tips for if you're a first time traveller considering travelling on the Caledonian sleeper. So packing wise.

Tracy: Yeah, there's not a lot of room in the, in the berths, in the, in the Classic and the club. So you are pushed for space. So ideally you've got to travel as light as you possibly can. So but if you have multiple bags, multiple Suitcases. It's better to try, if possible, is to only have the things you need for one night, in one bag. We have found that, haven't we?

Tracy: Yes, absolutely.

Tracy: It saves you trying to open up multiple bags when you haven't got the space. So everything you need for that one night is in one bag. And small bags fit better into the berths because you can fit them underneath the bottom bunk. There's a bit of all the spaces as well. But it needs to be almost a military operation than the fact that you've got to plan exactly what you're taking with you, what you'd be taking out the bags.

Tracy: M. I think that's true because you don't want to be just opening a suitcase and taking things out. Just be crazy, really. things that you do get included in the room. You get water. there's also sockets, so you can charge your, electronic devices.

Tracy: Usb, sockets mainly on there. But we've got an adapter for the. The Cs, which makes it easier. you've got temperature control, you've got, obviously lights on, operations on both the upper and lower, bed. So. But everything's sort of small and in miniature, you know, if you're in a. In a classic room, just bearing in mind you might need to go out your berth down to the. Down to the toilets. So just bear in mind what you want. Your feet, if you, you know, something to easy to put on yourself, to wear, just make life a little bit easier.

Tracy: Yeah. So I'd say, like, putting a little bag together is really useful.

Tracy: Yeah. You find that you'll maximise your experience if you plan, plan for that.

Would we take the Caledonian Sleeper again? Always

Tracy: So now would we take the Caledonian Sleeper again?

Tracy: Always. In fact, to be truthful, every single time we visit the uk, we look to try and fit it in if possible. Don't always succeed. But we do look where possible, don't we?

Tracy: We. We do. And I have to say, it's. It worked particularly well this last trip, but I say we did three journeys, one trip together and two solo trips on the Caledonia. Steve worked really well for us.

What would be the one tip that would share with someone planning

the Caledonian Sleeper

so always end the podcast with the same question. What would be the one tip that would share with someone planning the Caledonian Sleeper for the first time? Now, my tip, my tip is going to be. Before Doug gives his tip, my tip is going to be really, if you're going to do it, consider taking the Highlander and taking yourself from London up to Inverness or Fort William. That would be my tip to really maximise Your experience of the Caledonian Sleeper, that's the journey that I would take. Doug, what would be your one tip?

Tracy: Oh, obviously I'm going to follow on from that. I would definitely recommend, if possible, is, yes, the northbound Highlander sleeper, but also try and have your breakfast in the dining car because you've got more obviously space. You can see both sides of the train and you've got lovely, beautiful scenery there. particularly sort of summer months when it's light, in the light of the morning when you get there and you'll have the most wonderful breakfast with the most fantastic scenery. So, yes, you can have your breakfast in your room, but get yourself up all ready and get down to that dining car and have your breakfast there. Then come back when the train arrives, you can grab your bags and go.

Tracy: Perfect.

Doug: I would definitely consider doing this, but one little tip

Well, I think that covers most of what we want to say about the Caledonian Sleeper for

this episode. Is there anything else you can think of, Doug?

Tracy: I would definitely consider doing this, but one little tip I would also recommend is if you're planning on, taking the sleeper, Caledonian sleeper and you are flying out the following day, do it the day before, just on the off chance that the train does not make it.

Tracy: Yeah, we've had that. Quite often people plan to do it the day they fly out and we would highly recommend that you don't. And just one thing that I've thought about, is about if you have a brick rail pass or is the Caledonian sleeper included in the brick rail pass? Well, just what I think about that question.

Tracy: That's a very good question. That does come up often. Your brick rail pass does cover the seat option only on the Caledonia sleeper, but you have to book that in advance. Dentures turn up, you've got to book that in advance. And if you wish to have a birth, whether

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Tracy: the Classic Club or the double, you need to pay a supplement. So pretty clear on the Caledonian Sleeper website, you just click on there supplement only.

Tracy: Perfect.

Doug is putting together a YouTube video showing the Caledonian Sleeper

Okay, so now this is definitely the end of this episode. So I just want to say that we will put a link if you want to book Caledonia Sleeper in the show notes, which are, uktravelplanner.com episode 141. and also as I said, there'll be our fully link in there, but there's also some photographs that we have taken when we've taken some, some of these journeys with the Caledonian sleeper. And Doug is putting together a YouTube video. So hopefully by the time this episode is out, we will have at least one YouTube video. Showing the Caledonian Sleeper, so you can go and check that out again. I'll put that in the show notes. but I think that's it for this week, Doug.

Tracy: I think so, yeah.

We end episode with our saying Happy UK Travel Planning

Tracy: So, as usual, we end episode with our saying Happy UK Travel Planning. Thank you for tuning in to this week's episode of the UK Travel Planning Podcast. As always, show notes can be found [@uktravelplanning.com](mailto:uktravelplanning.com) if you've enjoyed the show, why not leave us feedback via text or a review on your favourite podcast app? We love to hear from you. And you never know, you may receive a shout out in a few future episode, but as always, that just leaves me to say, until next week, Happy UK Travel Planning.

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