

Aboard the Orient Express

Appropriately enough for a train steeped in romance, the principal routes of the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express link three of Europe's most beguiling cities, London, Paris and Venice. The chocolate-and-cream British Pullman train departs from London Victoria and glides through Kent on the way to the Channel. In France the royal-blue train with brass insignia, lined by uniformed and white-gloved attendants, is waiting to take you to the capital, while a four-course dinner is served. The dinner is made unforgettable by the sumptuous surroundings of the Lalique glass and wood-panelled dining cars as well as the quality of the food, a miracle of skill conjured up in the tiny galley kitchen.

In Paris the train uses the same station, Gare de l'Est, from which the first Orient Express departed on October 4 1883. The sense of dinner-jacketed style is enhanced by the contrast with passengers milling about on the platforms, the bar car's piano and period tunes a world away from the iPods of today's Parisian commuters.

It is likely to be dark by the time the train weaves through the hills growing the grapes that produce the Champagne served on board. Passengers slumber through eastern France and northern Switzerland, usually waking somewhere east of Zurich. Raising the blind to reveal the waters of Zurichsee or the majestic peaks lining the northern shore of Walensee is

part of the pleasure of overnight train travel – that sense of being somewhere so different from the landscapes and architecture of the previous evening.



The snow-capped peaks of tiny Liechtenstein are a prelude to the Austrian Alps, as a continental breakfast is delivered to your compartment. A pause at the Tyrolean capital of Innsbruck is an opportunity to stretch one's legs before the train reverses to head south through the Brenner Pass, its crags periodically topped by stone fortresses controlling valleys through the Dolomites. Lunch is served as the train drops down from the summit on the border with Italy, conifer-clad slopes giving way to huddled villages surrounded by vineyards and orchards.

The architectural style of the pale stone castle and palaces forming Buonconsiglio Castle in Trento emphasises the transition from central European to Mediterranean culture. With the Adige River for company, the train makes for Verona, forever associated with the doomed love of Romeo and Juliet.

Afternoon tea is served as the train crosses the fertile landscape of the countryside around Vicenza. The last major city before journey's end is Padua, where Galileo once taught mathematics at the university, founded in 1222. The causeway linking Venice Mestre and the island is the perfect approach to the city and its towers and domes rising above the tiled roofs. Then, when the train arrives and you walk out of Santa Lucia terminus, you find yourself on the bank of the Grand Canal.

TASKS

1. Read through the text carefully, highlighting any words or phrases that you do not understand. Use a dictionary to check their meanings.
2. Write a single sentence summary for each paragraph.
3. Create 5 questions to test your understanding of the extract. Write them down with their answer.