

Covid-19 reawakens Europe's sleeper trains

Level 2 • Upper intermediate

1 Warmer

What do you know about railways? Choose the correct answers.

1. The world's first passenger railway was in **the UK / the USA**.
2. Railways in **China / Japan** carry more passengers than any other country in the world.
3. The longest train journey in one country is in **Canada / Russia**.
4. The first underground railway was built in **Budapest / London**.
5. The busiest railway station in the world is in **Beijing / Tokyo**.

2 Key words

Fill the gaps in the sentences using these key words from the text. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

short-haul
rolling stock

quadruple
impact

recommence
upgraded

necessity
inaugural

access
demand

1. _____ is the effect that something has. (para 2)
2. A _____ flight doesn't travel very far. (para 2)
3. An _____ event is the first of a series. (para 3)
4. If things _____, they start again. (para 5)
5. _____ is the amount of a product or service that people want or the fact that they want it. (para 6)
6. If a service is _____, it is improved. (para 6)
7. If things _____, they become four times bigger than they were before. (para 7)
8. _____ consists of the engines, coaches and other parts of trains used on a railway. (para 9)
9. An _____ charge is the money you have to pay to use something. (para 10)
10. A _____ is something that is needed in a particular situation. (para 11)

3 Find the information

Find the following information in the text as quickly as possible.

1. When did the German rail operator, Deutsche Bahn, end the sleeper service from Paris to Berlin?
2. In which country is ÖBB the rail operator?
3. When did the night train from the Czech Republic to Croatia begin operating?
4. What is The Man in Seat 61?
5. How many people can a normal high-speed train accommodate in one coach?
6. How many beds are there on a sleeper coach?

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'People don't want to fly': Covid-19 reawakens Europe's sleeper trains

Daniel Boffey

27 July, 2020

- 1 Until recently, Europe's sleeper trains had almost reached the end of the line. They are extremely expensive to operate, and travellers now prefer budget airlines. So when the German rail operator, Deutsche Bahn, ended the service connecting Paris to Berlin in 2014, routes starting closing across the continent including almost all of France's network.
- 2 But as Europe continues to grapple with the coronavirus pandemic, there are some signs of a new dawn for sleeper trains, as both governments and travellers worry about the environmental impact of short-haul flights and people try to avoid airport departure lounges and security queues.
- 3 Recently, there have been several announcements and inaugural journeys. The Swedish government has said it will provide funds for two new routes to connect the cities of Stockholm and Malmö with Hamburg and Brussels. France's transport minister has said an overnight service will restart between Paris and Nice.
- 4 The Austrian operator, Österreichische Bundesbahnen (ÖBB), has led the way. It bought 42 sleeper cars from Deutsche Bahn in 2016 and has resumed half of the night-time routes connecting Hamburg, Berlin, Munich and Düsseldorf to Austria, Switzerland and Italy.
- 5 Despite a recent rise in the number of coronavirus infections in Belgium, a Brussels-Vienna service, which opened in February, offering one-way trips from €29.90, will recommence in September. Along with government action, there is evidence of renewed enthusiasm among the paying public, too, as people think about how they travel amid the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 6 A new summer night train linking five EU member states – the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia and Croatia – started operating from Prague on 30 June. However, there was so much demand from holidaymakers that it was quickly upgraded to a daily service.
- 7 The Swedish rail company Snälltåget said in June it planned to quadruple the number of night trains on its Stockholm-Malmö-Copenhagen-Hamburg-Berlin route. A new Alpine-Sylt night express that began operating between Sylt in northern Germany and Salzburg in Austria was also due to run for only two months but will now continue until November.
- 8 "People using my site say two things: they are fed up with the airport experience, and they want to cut their carbon footprint," said Mark Smith, who runs the award-winning The Man in Seat 61 railway website. "In the short term, I am getting people commenting that they don't want to fly because of the pandemic. But I think climate change will be the bigger one in the long term because hopefully this pandemic will be over at some point."
- 9 A normal high-speed train can accommodate 70 people in a coach and take multiple journeys a day, offering a number of stops. A sleeper might hold 20 to 30 beds in a coach, but the majority of its passengers will travel end-to-end. The rolling stock is used for just one journey over a 24-hour period.
- 10 Train services have had to pay track-access charges as they cross borders since 2000. New services run by private companies are often just for the summer months, while state operators are taking huge government handouts in order to re-establish their overnight routes. As a result, some of the most romantic night-train journeys that were still running when the pandemic struck may still be discontinued, including the Paris-Venice night-train service and the service between Lisbon and Madrid.
- 11 Karima Delli, a French MEP who chairs the European Parliament's transport committee, welcomed government action. "Relaunching night trains is both a necessity and an ecological solution for the planet," she said.
- 12 But Alexander Gomme, from a Belgian campaign group, said there needed to be a wider rethink of the costs to allow private operators to take advantage of the new mentality. "More state' is a possibility but another is that the European Union makes it easier and cheaper for operators to book track access," he said. "Night trains do a lot of kilometres, and access charges are counted in kilometres."

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- 13 Others argue that governments should also prohibit airlines receiving state aid from operating any short-haul or late-night flights that could be done by train. They hope the pandemic leads to more people travelling by rail.

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First published in *The Guardian*, 27/07/20

4 Comprehension check

Are these statements true (T) or false (F) according to the text?

1. Rail companies started closing sleeper train routes because they were expensive to operate and most people preferred to fly.
2. The Austrian train operator, ÖBB, has resumed all its former night-time routes.
3. Private train operating companies receive money from governments to re-establish night trains but state operators don't.
4. Mark Smith believes that climate change will be a bigger factor than the pandemic in the long term.
5. Sleeper trains make multiple journeys each night.
6. Access charges are higher for night trains because they do a lot of kilometres.

5 Find the word

Find the following words and phrases in the text. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

1. a five-word phrase meaning *the moment when something has to stop because it cannot succeed or improve* (para 1)
2. a two-word phrasal verb meaning *try hard to solve a difficult problem* (para 2)
3. a two-word phrase meaning *the time when something such as a new period in history begins* (para 2)
4. a three-word verb phrase meaning *be the first to do something, especially to achieve success and to show others how to do it* (para 4)
5. a verb meaning *start again after stopping temporarily* (para 4)
6. a three-word phrase meaning *annoyed or bored with something that you feel you have accepted for too long* (para 8)
7. a three-word phrase meaning *at an unknown time in the future* (para 8)
8. a verb meaning *start something again and hope that it will be more successful than before* (para 11)

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6 Two-word phrases

Match the words in the left-hand column with those in the right-hand column to make expressions from the text.

- | | |
|--------------|--------------|
| 1. sleeper | a. group |
| 2. departure | b. aid |
| 3. security | c. lounge |
| 4. carbon | d. train |
| 5. campaign | e. footprint |
| 6. state | f. queue |

7 Word-building

Use these prefixes to complete the words from the text.

re

up

dis

re

re

over

- _____new
- _____night
- _____establish
- _____continue
- _____grade
- _____think

8 Discussion

Discuss the statements.

- Night trains are slow, uncomfortable and noisy.
- Train travel is better for the environment.