

## Across Turkey by train: riding the Mesopotamia Express

### Level 2: Intermediate

#### 1 Warmer

a. Choose the correct answers to the questions.

- Where was the first passenger railway in the world?  
a. the USA                      b. the UK
- Where is the highest railway in the world?  
a. China                         b. Bolivia
- Where is the longest train route in the world?  
a. Canada                      b. Russia
- Where is the fastest high-speed train in the world?  
a. Germany                    b. China
- Which country has the world's largest rail network?  
a. India                         b. the USA
- Where is the world's largest railway station?  
a. the USA                      b. France

#### 2 Key words

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

- a verb meaning *introduce a new product or service* \_\_\_\_\_ (paragraph 2)
- a noun meaning *a bed on a train or ship* \_\_\_\_\_ (paragraph 3)
- a noun meaning *one of several layers in a system* \_\_\_\_\_ (paragraph 4)
- a two-word verb meaning *launch* \_\_\_\_\_ (paragraph 4)
- a noun meaning *a place that is fashionable, popular and lively* \_\_\_\_\_ (paragraph 4)
- a noun meaning *a benefit or advantage that you get from a situation* \_\_\_\_\_ (paragraph 6)
- a two-word verb meaning *(of a train) arrive at a station* \_\_\_\_\_ (paragraph 7)
- an adjective meaning *empty, not used and in bad condition* \_\_\_\_\_ (paragraph 7)

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9. an adjective meaning (*of a tower*) *not straight* \_\_\_\_\_ (paragraph 7)
10. a three-word adjectival expression meaning *not having enough time* \_\_\_\_\_ (paragraph 10)

**b. Use some of the key words to complete these sentences.**

1. The ship finally found a \_\_\_\_\_ at the harbour after waiting for hours.
2. The old man's cane is \_\_\_\_\_ after having used it for many years.
3. One \_\_\_\_\_ of working at this company is the free coffee and snacks.
4. The \_\_\_\_\_ building was covered in graffiti and overgrown with weeds.
5. The café became a popular \_\_\_\_\_ for young artists and musicians.

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- 1 It's 11:30 am in Diyarbakır's railway station as the Mesopotamia Express arrives at the platform.
- 2 Running 653 miles (1,051km) between Turkey's capital Ankara and Diyarbakır, near the Syrian and Iraqi borders, the Mesopotamia Express was launched in April, 2024, running once a month in each direction for three months. I'm taking its final service of 2024.
- 3 Making long stops at a few cities and only offering private two-berth cabins, the Mesopotamia Express is a more comfortable, sightseeing-friendly version of the Güney Kurtalan Express, which travels the same route but makes 52 short stops between Ankara and Diyarbakır. I paid 8,000 lira (£194) for my Mesopotamia Express cabin; a seat on the Güney Kurtalan Express costs £8.50.
- 4 This two-tier model was also rolled out in April for the Van Gölü Express between Ankara and Tatvan, a city by Lake Van, Turkey's largest lake. The "touristic" service is part of the Turkish authorities' drive to get more tourists thinking beyond hotspots such as Istanbul and Antalya.
- 5 The Doğu Express, between Ankara and Kars, near the Armenian and Georgian borders, started this trend. After seeing videos of the Doğu Express's mountainously beautiful route, tourists booked tickets before the "official" touristic version was launched in 2019.
- 6 To see if one of these new services is worth the money, I booked the Mesopotamia Express, beginning in Diyarbakır. The air-conditioning in my train cabin is a welcome perk of the premium ticket price. I also get my own sink, door key, a fridge that doesn't work, plus juice and chocolate to put in it. I go to the dining carriage. Here I meet Hayriye and Seher, two women from Ankara who play the violin and guitar and sing a classical Turkish song.
- 7 At 4 pm, we pull into the tiny Yolçatı station for the first of two long stops. A coach drives us to the ancient town of Harput. We see the semi-derelict Harput Castle and visit the Harput Great Mosque. This building, violinist Hayriye explains, was built around 1157 and is famous for its crooked stone tower.
- 8 The coach takes us back to the train, and I join in with passengers singing Turkish pop. Well, I clap and sing "la la la", as apparently, I am the only non-Turk on the trip.
- 9 After a quiet night, we arrive in the city of Kayseri at 9 am. We're supposed to have three hours here, but we got two because the train is late. This stop was planned as a chance to visit Kayseri's Grand Mosque, but there wasn't time.
- 10 So, is the Mesopotamia Express worth the expense? I loved it, mainly when enjoying the music in the dining carriage. With long stops allowing you to visit four cities over two days (on the east-bound route, it's three cities: Ankara, Malatya and Diyarbakır), it's a good option if you're pressed for time – and if the train isn't too late.
- 11 However, if you don't mind uncomfortable open-plan seating, you could take the "standard" Güney Kurtalan Express on the same route as the Mesopotamia Express, spend a few days in the same city stops, and pay for your hotels with the money saved. While the Mesopotamia Express is finished for 2024, the Güney Kurtalan Express runs all year, five times a week in each direction.
- 12 Still, if it is officially "touristic" or not, a bad east Turkey night train option probably doesn't exist. Now I'm thinking of booking Van Gölü Express tickets to complete the set.

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#### 3 Comprehension check

a. Are these statements true (T) or false (F) according to the article? Correct any that are false.

1. The Mesopotamia Express started running in April 2024.
2. The train runs once a week.
3. The Mesopotamia Express stops at more stations than the Güney Kurtalan Express.
4. It is also much cheaper than the Güney Kurtalan Express.
5. Kars is near the border between Turkey and Armenia.
6. The author travelled from Ankara to Diyarbakır.
7. The first long stop was to enable travellers to visit the Harput Great Mosque.
8. The author sang "la la la" because he doesn't speak Turkish.
9. They only stayed in Kayseri for two hours because the train was late.
10. The author didn't enjoy his trip on the Mesopotamia Express.

#### 4 Key language

a. Complete the phrases from the text using prepositions.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Ankara and Diyarbakır.
2. stopping \_\_\_\_\_ a few cities
3. famous \_\_\_\_\_ its tower
4. back \_\_\_\_\_ the train
5. join \_\_\_\_\_ with the singing
6. four cities \_\_\_\_\_ two days

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**b. Match the prepositions in task A to their meanings.**

- a. talk about a specific location
- b. talk about direction
- c. talk about duration
- d. in the space created by two places
- e. the reason why something happens
- f. being part of something

**c. Choose three prepositions from task A and write personalised sentences.**

### 5 Discussion

**a. Discuss these statements.**

- “Train travel is the most ecologically friendly form of travel.”
- “Trains are too slow. Driving a car gives you more freedom.”

### 6 In your own words

- a. Use an internet search engine to find as much information as possible about the Trans-Siberian railway.**
- b. Report your findings to the class.**