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## Taking it easy is the rail way to travel

**European train odyssey proves that the journey is just as interesting as the destinations**

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SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Vienna—Ah, the joys of riding the rails. Some people like slow food. I like slow travel.



CAROL PEREHUDOFF PHOTO

Salzburg Station is the starting point for a week-long trip to leisurely savour the sights of destinations.

Budget airlines may offer cheap prices for Euro-hopping, but if you believe it's as much about the journey as the destination, you can't beat the train.

Unfortunately, there is a dark side to travelling with a rail pass, and that is the conviction you must fit in as many countries as possible and cram in every site along the way. Every town becomes a gateway to two others, a funhouse of endlessly unfolding doors. Train journeys are meant to be leisurely but as one slightly wild-eyed Global Pass holder put it, "It's more like the *Amazing Race*."

I won't fall into that trap. On a week-long journey through Austria, Slovenia and Croatia, I intend to take it easy, concentrating on one or two sights in each destination. A tasting menu, rather than an all-you-can-eat buffet.

Vienna to Salzburg:

2 1/2 hours

The train whips by green hills, sun-kissed fields and trim villages with picturesque church steeples. Austria, essentially, looks fake. At some point I want to hop off the train and start pinching strangers to see if they're real or scenic backdrop.

In Salzburg, I focus on Mozart. But not stodgy Mozart. Groovy Mozart. Museums are getting hipper. Salzburg's Mozart Geburtshaus, the house he was born in in 1756, was revamped by American designer Robert Wilson in 2006. Now, it's a full-bodied Mozart experience; at least that's my conclusion upon seeing baby Mozart with a neon halo overhead and disembodied white dresses that, a guide tells me, represent the women in his life.

In the evening, I get more old-fashioned with a Mozart Dinner Concert in the Baroque Hall of St. Peter's Abbey. Combining capon and cream soup with *Don Giovanni* seems a superb way of saving time so that I can get up early for my morning train to Ljubljana.

Salzburg to Ljubljana: 5 hours

Slovenia's capital city reminds me of a frothy prom dress, especially Preseren Square with its pink Franciscan Church and unique Triple Bridge, its teardrop-shaped balustrades crossing the river like patterned trim. From the gorgeous Slovenians crowding the outdoor cafes, I would say that dressing chic and posing are two major local pastimes. Holing up at the Movia Wine Bar, I sample a legendary pairing: red Teran wine and prosciutto from Kras.

Ljubljana to Zagreb:

2 1/2 hours plus 3 hour delay

After a daytrip to the mountain resort town of Bled, I move on to Croatia. At least I try to. Our train sits stationery for hours. Oddly, no one seems upset. Perhaps, like me, they're just happy to rest their feet.

Zagreb, Croatia's capital, feels edgier than Ljubljana. In the cobblestone lanes of the Upper Town (*Gornji Grad*), high-heeled fashion plates mix with Goth girls in torn fishnets.

It's in the Lower Town (*Donji Grad*) with its Viennese-like spaciousness and neoclassical architecture, that I lose sight of my aim to see less and relax more. My mistake is to actually start going into art museums instead of admiring them from afar. Suddenly, I'm compelled to take in every old master in the Mimara Museum, every Biedermeier chair in the Museum of Arts and Crafts and every famous Croatian painter in the Gallery of Modern Art. The next day, on a side trip to the tranquil town of Samobor, I even squeeze in a visit to the Marton Museum to view a Bourbon-lily-patterned cup owned by Marie Antoinette.

Zagreb to Split: 5 1/2 hours

I'm back on track with an early train to my final stop, the coastal town of Split. At least here I won't be tempted to travel onward, as the train tracks can hardly run into the Adriatic Sea. And I won't get carried away with sightseeing either, because there is only one main sight, the Roman palace built by Emperor Diocletian between 295 and 305 AD. The twist is that the entire town centre is the palace, a faded white ruin overgrown with later Gothic-Renaissance architecture and tempting outdoor cafes.

After soaking up 17 centuries of history, I stroll down the seafront promenade. For a moment I'm content, thinking I've successfully toured Eastern Europe. In front of the ferry terminal I stop in despair, signs for Dubrovnik and Trieste beckoning like sirens at sea. Split may be the gateway to the Dalmatian coast and beyond, but it's the end of the line for me.

*Carol Perehudoff is a Toronto-based freelance writer. Her trip was subsidized by Eurail Group.*