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**PEACH SEASON**

Palisade fruit ripe for  
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# All Aboard!

Train travel offers quick, lovely way to explore Europe

BY SUSAN B. BARNES

**A**midst travelers scurrying past trailing luggage, I stand in the train station at the Amsterdam Schiphol Airport gazing nervously upwards at the departure board as destinations, times, train numbers and platforms constantly update, move and eventually disappear. But, finally, minutes before my Thalys high-speed train is scheduled to depart, the platform number magically appears and I join my fellow travelers, scurrying in its direction to begin a whirlwind European tour.

Traveling by train is a way of life in Europe and is a terrific option to quickly, efficiently and affordably experience the continent. It's also a wonderful way to really watch the world go by, passing through villages and wide open spaces, from one country to the next.

Just over three hours after leaving Amsterdam, the train eases into Paris. Though a thriving city filled with energy and vigor, there's just something about the City of Light that entices its guests to slow down and savor its sense of joie de vivre. A very walkable city, it's best seen by foot—set about wandering on your own, inviting the opportunity to get lost in its museums, cafes, cathedrals, parks and side streets. Or, make plans to see the city with a guide who can share history and stories not found in guide books. Either way, it's easy to let Paris happen to you.

From Paris' Gare de Lyon train station, an overnight ride in a private cabin aboard a direct Thello train (the swaying motion on the tracks quickly induces a sound sleep) ends in Venice and its romantic canals. All streets—without cars and a handful of which are so narrow that it's impossible to walk two-abreast—seemingly wind their way to Piazza San Marco, or St. Mark's Square. Within the piazza is the incredibly ornate and stunning St. Mark's Basilica and the Clock Tower, which was completed in 1499. Beyond is the Doge's Palace, and just beyond that, the Bridge of Sighs. There's something to see around every bend in Venice, and it's best to make the time to take it all in.



**TRAVELING BY TRAIN IS A WAY OF LIFE IN EUROPE AND IS A TERRIFIC OPTION TO QUICKLY, EFFICIENTLY AND AFFORDABLY EXPERIENCE THE CONTINENT.**

In stark contrast to Venice's laid-back vibe, bustling Rome is seemingly a world apart, but, in reality, is just less than four hours away via the high-speed Trenitalia train. In a city steeped in nearly 2,800 years of history, a walking tour with someone like Stuart from Rome Personal Tours can easily provide

more insight and knowledge than any guide book or history class ever could. The city's highlights can be easily sought out, but going deeper into the history of the Forum, Colosseum, Arch of Constantine and Pantheon, to name just a very few, can be quite revealing. And then there's the sometimes overlooked

the  
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## DEPARTURES



**WHEN IN ROME** Dining al fresco in front of the Pantheon is a must on any Italian trip.

San Clemente Basilica, an 11<sup>th</sup> century church built upon a fourth century church that itself was built atop two Roman buildings dating back to the first century A.D. A lifetime could be spent immersed in Rome, but there's more of Europe to be seen.

A quick half-hour Frecciabianca train ride from Roma Termini arrives in the port city of Civitavecchia and Grimaldi Lines. An overnight and all-day sail on a ferry that's more like a small cruise ship (opt for an owner's suite for the best accommodations) arrives at the port in the heart of Barcelona, a city pulsing with arts, culture, shopping, dining and nightlife.

A lovely day trip from Barcelona is Montserrat ("serrated mountain"), about an hour and a half outside the city by the Montserrat Express train. Perched atop the mountain range, the Santa Maria de Montserrat abbey and Benedictine monastery, founded in 1025 and home to the Black Madonna, provide ample spaces for exploration; the museum is filled with some of

the best art and artifacts from throughout the world. The abbey's boys' choir, which performs daily, dates back to the 14<sup>th</sup> century and is one of the oldest in Europe. Outside of the abbey and monastery, the nature park offers ample opportunities for hiking and wildlife viewing. **DLM**



### NEED-TO-KNOW INFO

Paris, Venice, Rome and Barcelona offer just a taste of the destinations available through train—and ferry—travel with Eurail Group. Working with 32 partners, the organization offers borderless travel across 28 countries through Eurail and InterRail passes ranging from unlimited travel to travel within one country. New this year, the Attica Pass provides easy Greek Islands hopping. What's more, children between the ages of 4 and 11 travel free with a family member or friend traveling on an adult Eurail pass, and the offer is valid for up to two children per adult. For more information, visit [eurailgroup.org](http://eurailgroup.org).

### CATALONIA COOKING

In Barcelona, take a cooking class at **COOK AND TASTE**. Our instructor created a traditional Catalan dinner menu and walked us through the steps of making each of the five delectable courses.

We started with pain de tomate—who knew smearing fresh tomato drizzled with olive oil and a light sprinkling of salt on thick, crusty bread could be so delicious? Next up, grilled fresh vegetables dipped in a decadent, hummus-like romesco sauce. Coca de espinacas a la Catalana con bacalao confitado (Spinach Catalan-style flatbread with confit cod) was next: flatbread topped with cod simmered in pepper, garlic and rosemary-infused oil, wilted spinach, moscatell-soaked raisins and pine nuts.

Then, cooking with the chef, we made fideuà, a seafood paella made with shrimp, squid and clams with short noodles instead of rice. For dessert, the chef prepared crema Catalana, a dish similar to crème brûlée, which was lightly infused with lemon and sugar—the perfect ending to a perfect traditional Catalan dinner. [cookandtaste.net](http://cookandtaste.net)