

My Travel Diary (Mein Reisetagebuch)

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Sunday

Dear Diary,

today I am writing to you from the travel centre of Deutsche Bahn, the German equivalent of British Rail, Network Rail or whichever of the 27 franchises it has become nowadays.

I have plenty of time to write because I want to buy a ticket for travel. Around 500 other people want to do the same thing, so to give me something to do while queuing I have brought some reading material along: Harry Potter books 1 to 7.

The Deutsche Bahn has created yet another new pricing system, so, for example, if I book three days in advance of travel it is cheaper. That is why I have been here since the day before yesterday. I still haven't been able to buy a ticket yet, but on the plus side I have got to know most of the other people in the queue. I have formed very close friendships with some of them. Sometimes I even invite them over to my tent and knock up something tasty on my camping stove. It's great – they come to us, we go to them. I just hope my provisions last until Tuesday, because that's when my train leaves.

Next Tuesday, early in the morning

Dear Diary,

it looks like I might get served - they've opened a second counter. I might not be able to get my bargain super-saver early-booker ticket any more, but I may just be able to get something better - my train.

Tuesday, early afternoon

Dear Diary,

the friendly employee at the service counter sold me my ticket at the bargain super-saver price, because my train is expected to be delayed by three days. Which is lucky because I need to spend the money I saved, on stocking up on provisions.

Friday

Dear Diary,

as I boarded the train, just a few seconds ago, everyone waved me goodbye from the platform. It was a bittersweet moment. I am sad to leave them, but I can take comfort in the knowledge they will almost all still be there on my return

in two weeks time. I have donated my tent to a businessman. The poor chap had been trying to buy his ticket from one of the self-service machines.

The train I'm on is very full, but I have managed to get a place standing by the toilet, where I can lean quite comfortably against the door. I only have to move occasionally when the door is opened, but the five people who are in there don't come out very often, unless someone has to go to the loo, that is.

Saturday

Dear Diary,

because of the poor state of the tracks the train is moving far slower than it could do.

But that doesn't matter. This way we can all enjoy the beautiful landscape. The weather is perfect and there are lots of cyclists out and about. Many of them wave to us happily while they cycle past and overtake us.

Before arriving at each station the train manager announces all of the delayed connections from the last few months, most of which we can still catch. He wishes all the passengers who are getting off the train a pleasant onward journey and thanks them for travelling with Deutsche Bahn. But hardly anyone can actually get out, because the only able to are those who are standing right next to the door – and they are mostly the people who have only just got on.

The train manager then finishes off by repeating the whole thing in English. After all, Deutsche Bahn is the „official transport partner“ for the football World Cup 2006. And, as it happens, there are still a few fans who came on board after the final in Berlin. Some of them are English, but they still can't understand a word the train manager says, things like „szänk ju foa trävelling wis Deutsche Bahn“ or „Wie wisch ju ä pläsent Johnny.“

One of the English guys standing next to me is called Johnny, and even though he doesn't understand the rest of the announcement he is always delighted at the personal greeting. It is not like this in England, he tells me. He is getting to like Germany more and more. He can even imagine emigrating here, which is a good thing, because at this rate, it is looking pretty uncertain whether he will ever see his homeland again.

The train manager is making another announcement, this time to tell us that the buffet car stocks a wide range of refreshing and delicious snacks and drinks, and to

make a few recommendations from the menu, which the friendly gastro-team could take out the freezer and whack in the microwave for us, for example, a croissant with butter and honey for only 7€, about £6. That does sound inviting, but, unfortunately, most of the passengers have still only got Deutschmarks. But never mind, the aisles are so full of bodies and suitcases, it's almost impossible to get to the buffet car anyway.

And it's the same for the conductor, so we make his work easier by checking each other's tickets. But doesn't mean we don't need him, oh no, sometimes he has to sell a new ticket, to those who were born in between stations.

Monday

Dear Diary,

in the middle of the night the train stopped in the middle of nowhere, again. The train manager has just informed us that the cause of this short delay is, surprisingly, not a strike by, or shortage of drivers, but the wrong kind of leaves on the line. And since the air conditioning is also now stuck on full the train service-team are offering to provide passengers with chilled soft drinks, free of charge. Sadly, the only soft drink they have left is coffee. But, still, it's the gesture that counts.

An electrical fault means the lights have just gone out. But I can just see enough by the moonlight to be able to write these last words:

Dear Diary, I am so glad I didn't take the car. Otherwise I would never have met so many lovely people. In this busy modern life it is rare to find time for yourself and your fellow travellers. So it's nice that in this day and age there is still something as special as the Deutsche Bahn.