

Across Turkey by train: riding the Mesopotamia Express

Level 1: Elementary / Pre-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. Fill the gaps in the sentences using these key words from the text.

berth

border

cabin

hotspot

runs

- _____ is another word for *travels*.
- A _____ is a line between two countries.
- A _____ is a bed on a train or a ship.
- A _____ is a private room on a train or ship for one or two passengers.
- A _____ is a place that is fashionable, popular and lively.

derelict

expense

option

route

tiny

- A(n) _____ is the way that trains, buses, ships or planes travel regularly.
- If something is _____, it is very small.
- If a building is _____, it is empty, not used and in bad condition.

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9. A(n) _____ is the amount of money that you pay in order to buy or do something.
10. A(n) _____ is something that you can choose in a particular situation.

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 _____ building was covered in graffiti and overgrown with weeds.
3. The café became a popular _____ for young artists and musicians.
4. American Airlines announced a new _____ from Los Angeles to London.
5. The _____ dog slept on the big dog's bed... it was really cute!

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- 1 At 11:30 am, the Mesopotamia Express arrived at the station in Diyarbakır. The express train runs for 653 miles (1,051km) between Turkey's capital, Ankara, and Diyarbakır, near the Syrian and Iraqi borders.
- 2 The Mesopotamia Express makes long stops at a few cities and only has private two-berth cabins. It is a more comfortable 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.
- 3 In April 2024, the Van Gölü Express started to run between Ankara and Tatvan, a city by Lake Van, Turkey's largest lake. The tourist service is part of the Turkish authorities' plan to encourage more tourists to travel outside hotspots such as Istanbul and Antalya.
- 4 The Doğu Express, running between Ankara and Kars, near the Armenian and Georgian borders, was the first train of this type. After seeing videos of the Doğu Express's beautiful mountainous route, tourists booked tickets before the train started running in 2019.
- 5 I wanted to find out if one of these new services was worth the money, so I booked the Mesopotamia Express, beginning in Diyarbakır. I had air-conditioning in my train cabin. I also got my sink, door key, fridge that didn't work, and juice and chocolate to put in.
- 6 At 4 pm, we arrived at tiny Yolçatı station for the first of two long stops. A coach drove us to the ancient town of Harput. We saw the derelict Harput Castle and visited the Harput Great Mosque. The coach took us back to the train, and I enjoyed singing Turkish pop songs with the other passengers in the dining car.
- 7 After a quiet night, we arrived in Kayseri at 9 am. We should have three hours here, but we got just two because the train was late. This stop was a chance to visit Kayseri's Grand Mosque, but there wasn't time.
- 8 So, is the Mesopotamia Express worth the expense? I loved it, mainly when enjoying the music in the dining carriage. The long stops allow you to visit four cities over two days (on the eastbound route, it's three cities: Ankara, Malatya and Diyarbakır). It's a good option if you don't have much time – and if the train isn't too late.

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3 Comprehension check

a. Answer these questions about the text.

1. Where did the author's journey begin?
2. How often does the Güney Kurtalan Express stop?
3. How much did the author pay for his ticket?
4. Where is the city of Kars?
5. When did the Doğu Express start running?
6. What did the author have in his cabin?
7. What did he visit in the town of Harput?
8. Why did he only spend two hours in Kayseri?
9. What did the author enjoy most about the train journey?
10. How many cities can you visit if the train travels east?

4 Key language

a. Complete the table with the nationalities that match the countries.

1. Turkey _____
2. Armenia _____
3. Syria _____
4. Iraq _____
5. Georgia _____

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b. Complete the following sentences with the correct nationalities from task A.

1. She learned a traditional _____ dance called Kartuli.
2. My _____ friend taught me how to make baklava, a delicious dessert.
3. We visited a _____ restaurant and enjoyed a traditional dish called kibbeh.
4. The _____ family next door invited us to celebrate Vardavar, a traditional water festival.
5. The Iraqi student shared stories about the ancient city of Babylon.

5 Discussion

a. Answer this question.

- Do you like travelling by train? Why (not)?

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.**