

Away to Avignon

By Jim Walker

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2004 marks the 10th anniversary of the opening of the Channel Tunnel and the introduction of Eurostar trains from the centre of London to the centres of Paris and Brussels.

Since 1994 Railfuture has organised 14 continental visits for members, using Eurostar. We started with day trips but soon expanded to 4-7 days, based in such cities as Strasbourg, Cologne, Grenoble, Utrecht, Hannover or Berlin.

These visits have enabled members to sample high-speed rail on the continent, to meet transport professionals and to have discussions with local organisations similar to our own.

In 2004 I will be leading our main continental visit to Avignon, leaving on Monday 19 April and returning on Sunday 25 April.

This historic city in the South of France lies on the river Rhone, 40 miles from the sea.

Following this year's southward extension of the TGV system Avignon is now less than 5 hours from Lille, which itself is less than two hours from London.

There is easy interchange between Eurostar and TGV at Lille Europe station so it is not necessary to cross Paris. We can arrange to break the homeward journey with a night in Paris if

enough members wish to do so. Avignon is famous for its cathedral, the mediaeval Palace of the Popes and the bridge that goes half way across the river. Dancing on the bridge is not compulsory.

Within easy reach there are monuments left by the Romans who colonised Provence, such as the impressive amphitheatres of Orange, Arles and Nimes, and the spectacular aqueduct known as the Pont du Gard.

The famous port city of Marseilles with its Metro is one hour 20 minutes away by conventional train (35 minutes by TGV) and other historic towns such as Aix-en-Provence and Montpellier are within easy reach.

Other possibilities include a trip along the Riviera to Nice and a journey on the narrow gauge Chemin de Fer de la Provence through the mountains to Digne. Alternatively you may prefer to stay closer to Avignon and explore rural Provence and the Camargue by bus and soak up the atmosphere.

The price of the trip covers rail travel from London Waterloo to Avignon and back plus all hotels on a bed-and-breakfast basis. There will be two or three organised pay-as-you-go side trips but of course you don't have to do them. Full details of the trip will be sent out immediately after

Christmas. If you are interested please send an SAE to Trevor Garrod, 15 Clapham Road, Lowestoft NR32 1RQ.

Rail future

Railfuture has submitted a paper to the House of Commons transport committee's latest inquiry entitled: *The Future of the Railway*. Railfuture representatives were also planning to attend a one-day conference to "make the case for rail". It was organised by the Strategic Rail Authority on 25 September to discuss how it can make a compelling case to the Treasury as part of the Spending Review 2004.

Don't forget

The railway now costs two or three times more to run - according to whose figures you believe - than it did when it was nationalised. After six years in power the Labour Government is hinting that cuts may be coming and that branch railways cost too much. Over the years of course, the real money has been wasted and is still being wasted on road building, with no acceptance of the enormous social and economic cost of the policy. Amazingly the discredited "experts" who gave us rail privatisation feel they can now emerge from the shadows to pontificate in public. They should be hanging their heads in shame.

All hot air

The long hot summer took several train operators by surprise with air conditioning units in many trains breaking down on a regular basis. Both Virgin and First Great Western were badly affected although Anglia claims to have coped well. On just one day in August Midland Mainline gave away 6,000 free cups of tea to its passengers. In London, the Capital Transport campaign is calling for action over unbearably hot buses after earlier raising the problems of Tube passengers during the heatwave.

Timetable sale

A big sale of outdated international rail timetables at very cheap prices, together with timetable reprints, rail maps, rail guides, rail literature and rail journals is being staged at www.timetables.ch.sammiler.htm

Loyola in the dock

Transport campaigners in Brussels complain that European Transport Commissioner Loyola de Palacio is riding roughshod over agreed European policy and is trying to steer policy in a direction that bears no resemblance to sustainability.

Railwatch

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Other local authorities and companies £35. Families £2 extra per member, after £17.50.

New members and

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Railfuture

Group Travel

Spring visit to South of France

19-25 April 2004

by Eurostar and TGV

Six nights in Avignon

Full details: Send an SAE to

Trevor Garrod, 15 Clapham Road, Lowestoft

NR32 1RQ

Full details will be sent out immediately
after Christmas