


Slow Travel via Eurail Is the Ideal Way to Travel with Kids

 tinybeans.com/eurail-train-travel-with-kids

December 19, 2024

Kids under age 12 ride free.

By [Kate Loweth](#) December 18, 2024



istock

Traveling with kids overseas can be a daunting undertaking. Not only do you have to get there (usually via a painfully long red-eye), but you need to find a way to get around once you arrive. Rental cars, car seats, and the likelihood of having cranky toddlers or surly teens along for the ride can make the fairytale dream of a European vacation less palatable to parents.

One way to make a trip like this more manageable is to slow it down and do less. I recently spent a week traveling via **Eurail** to the Christmas markets in Germany, Switzerland, and Austria, and it was the ideal way to travel with kids. Compared to my experience traveling via train in the U.S., I was incredibly impressed by how frequently the trains ran and how easy the process was to get from country to country (as long as you pack light!).



How Does the Eurail Pass Work for Families?



istock

Kids under age 12 ride free on Eurail, and teens ride at a discounted rate. This can make a family vacation much less expensive than you'd think. Here's the breakdown of how it works by age:

Kids ages 0-3

No pass is needed. Seats are not guaranteed for this age group, and children may be required to sit on an adult's lap when the trains are crowded.

Kids ages 4-11

Free child passes are available for this age group. A maximum of two free child passes can be ordered for each traveling adult. Having a child pass allows you to reserve a seat (for an additional fee), so if you need a seat for your child under age four, you should also get them a free child pass.

Youths ages 12-27

Discounted rates are available for this age group.

One Country or Many Countries?



Kate Loweth / Eurail

When choosing what Eurail pass to purchase, you'll want to know whether you plan to stay in one country and book the **One Country Pass** or visit multiple countries with the **Global Pass**. From there, you'll decide how many train days you intend to use.

These passes are “flexi-passes,” meaning if you decide that you are going to have five train days, you have a full month to use those five days, and you don't have to use them on sequential days. When I was visiting the Christmas markets, we stayed two nights in Heidelberg before moving on to our next stop in Basel, Switzerland, giving ourselves a day to explore the castle and enjoy all the bratwurst and *glühwein* in this darling German town. Once you decide you are going to use a day on your Eurail pass, you toggle it “on” in the app and mark that day used.

Why Traveling via Eurail Works for Families



Kate Loweth / Eurail

The flexibility of the passes offered by Eurail means you can craft your trip as you go—staying longer in a city you love or detouring to that quaint mountain town you just heard about from the friendly local you met at the coffee shop.

One way to embrace this idea of slow travel is to pick a home base and then take day trips by Eurail to visit neighboring cities. This lets you unpack once and avoid lugging your baggage on the train when you're wrangling kids. I think this would be ideal for those who are planning to stay for several weeks and might want to take advantage of booking an accommodation with a kitchen to keep meal costs down. With the flexibility of the Eurail pass, you can choose when you want to go based on how much sleep you got that night and what mood your kid might be in.



Kate Loweth / Eurail

The other option for travel is what I did on my Christmas markets tour: Start your journey by flying into one city and then return home via a different city. We flew into Frankfurt, took the train to Heidelberg, and visited Basel and Innsbruck before finishing in Vienna and flying home. This type of trip is better suited to families with teens as they can take responsibility for their own luggage on the trains. Ideally, you'd have at least two nights in each city so that you can fully explore before getting back on the train.

What to Know about Reserving Seats



Kate Loweth / Eurail

When purchasing your Eurail passes, you'll have to choose between first and second class. We tried out both classes on Eurail, and I found both comfortable (especially compared to what we are used to in the U.S.). You'll typically get more space to spread out in first class (the seats might be 1-2 configuration instead of 2-2), and there is more space to store luggage in first class.

Eurail passes don't include reserved seats; they must be purchased separately. Some trains, like high-speed and night trains, require you to purchase a seat reservation. If no reservation is required, seat reservations are optional and you just find an available seat in your class section.

It is a good idea to reserve your seat on popular routes or during busy times of the year (like the summer). If you are traveling with kids, I'd recommend reserving seats so you won't be separated. If you have a first-class ticket and didn't reserve a seat, you may find when you board the train that the first-class seats are all reserved. You'll have to sit in second class in this situation.

The Eurail Experience

Riding the Eurail trains is such a better experience when traveling with kids as you can get up and walk around, visit the dining car, use the restroom, and watch the snow-covered mountains pass you by.

Dining on Eurail



Kate Loweth / Eurail

I was surprised to find that not only did the Eurail trains have a dining car serving hot food, snacks, and even alcoholic beverages, but there was a server who came around and took our orders from a menu. Plan for this ordering process to take longer than you expect at mealtimes. I ordered some traditional German food (currywurst and sauerkraut) with a pilsner, which was quite good!

For more information on traveling with Eurail:

Online: eurail.com

Editor's note: This trip was hosted by Eurail but all opinions belong to the writer.