

# Planes, Trains or **AUTOMOBILES?**

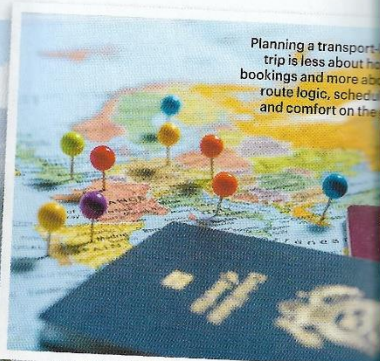
It may be a cliché, but sometimes it really is  
about the journey and not the destination

WORDS: EMMA GREEN

## TYPES OF TRIP



If you're not driving, you're free to take photos, reflect or simply watch the world go by.



Planning a transport trip is less about the bookings and more about route logic, schedule and comfort on the

**I**n a world where most holidays are planned around the 'where', there's something unique about a trip that is built around the 'how'. Transport-led travel flips the traditional travel script. Instead of choosing a destination and then figuring out how to get there, you choose the mode of transport first and let that shape your entire adventure. The vehicle (or the lack thereof) becomes the focal point of the trip. Your days revolve around schedules, routes and the shifting landscape. It's the difference between teleporting and truly travelling.

Transport-focused travel is about embracing slowness, spontaneity and the surroundings. It's great for those who want movement, variety and the chance to explore not just destinations, but everything in between. Many transport-heavy journeys involve long stretches of motion: train rides, boat trips, driving hours. For solo travellers, this can be a gift. These windows of time are perfect for journalling, listening to music, reading, or simply watching the world go by.

Whether you're dreaming of motorcycling through the Balkans, cycling France's Loire Valley, or watching the world roll by from a train window in India, transport-led travel can offer a deeper, more immersive way of experiencing the world.

### WHY TRAVEL THIS WAY?

One major pull factor for solo travellers is the built-in structure and rhythm these kinds of trips can offer. It gives your day a sense of purpose: the next stop, the next view, the next decision. Timetables and routes can give shape to your

day without micromanaging it, and help to avoid feelings of aimlessness that can occasionally strike when travelling alone. And while it might seem counterintuitive, these types of journeys can also offer surprising flexibility. Want to linger an extra night in a town you weren't expecting to love? Many train and bus passes let you hop off and rejoin later. Driving or cycling? You set your own pace entirely. With transport-led travel, you can strike the perfect balance between structure and spontaneity.

Another major attraction of transport-led travel is that it can offer more opportunities for greater immersion within your surroundings. You are forced to notice your environment in a way that you never would with a plane journey. You might pass through villages you'd never find in a guidebook, stop at roadside diners, chat with fellow passengers on a ferry deck or navigate winding mountain roads with awe. This organic sense of discovery makes the overall experience feel more authentic as you encounter the daily rhythms of local life that you might miss on a private tour.

Surprisingly, transport-led travel can prove favourable for connecting with others. Whether you're sharing a train compartment, bonding with fellow motorcyclists or swapping stories on a cruise, journey-based travel creates natural, low-pressure moments to meet other people. This is advantageous for solo travellers who don't want to feel isolated but don't necessarily want to be locked into a tour group.

If this sounds just the ticket, the following is a comprehensive look at the most popular ways

to build a journey around transport – and what to keep in mind with each option.

### THE ROMANCE OF THE RAILS

Forget airports and security lines: trains offer picturesque views, onboard comfort and a sense of timeless adventure, from the Trans-Siberian Railway to Japan's Shinkansen. You're free to walk around, enjoy meals and connect with fellow passengers, and for those who are eco-conscious, it's one of the greenest ways to roam. However, not all countries have well-connected or reliable rail systems. In some places, delays or cancellations can be common and some booking systems can be confusing, especially in Asia or Eastern Europe.

#### Tips:

- Try to book early, especially when it comes to sleeper trains or popular tourist routes. "If you know your route well and have specific days to



Buses and coaches are hard to beat when it comes to value, views and convenience.

## PLANES, TRAINS OR AUTOMOBILES?

Cruises combine transport, accommodation and activity – with a touch of luxury



hit certain places, booking in advance is likely going to be cheaper,” says Rebecca Crowe, travel writer and the voice of travel blog Wandering and Wine.

- Rail passes (like Eurail or Interrail) can save you money and allow flexibility. “Make sure you compare the price of the pass to the cost of the individual journeys, because a lot of the time it can work out cheaper,” says Crowe.
- Consider multi-day or hop-on/off passes. “The passes are good if you don’t want to plan your route in advance too much and want to go with the flow,” says Crowe.
- Remember to bring snacks, entertainment and backup power.

### THE VIEW FROM THE AISLE SEAT

“Personally, I love coach-based travel,” says Crowe. “I’ve been on Greyhound in the US, the bus network in New Zealand, FlixBus across Europe and the National Express in the UK. Here, you can sit back and relax and not worry as much about missing your stop. The pace is slower, but you can soak up the scenery.”

Coaches and hop-on/hop-off buses are a stress-free way to get the lay of the land and reach multiple sights without worrying about maps or metro systems. Many bus systems are designed for flexibility, where you can often book onward legs on the go, and are an affordable way to cover long distances. Buses are most suited for budget travellers and regional exploration. However, they can be slow, and amenities like bathrooms and charging ports can vary widely. Some remote routes run infrequently and travel fatigue from long-haul stretches can also be an issue, especially if you’re unlucky and get an uncomfortable seat.

#### Tips:

- Choose companies with wide networks and clear schedules.
- Look for routes with frequent stops and hop-on/off options.
- Use apps to track timetables and book digitally.
- Travel overnight to save time and money on accommodation.
- Choose window seats for the best scenery.

### JUST CRUISING ALONG

“Cruises are one of the safest ways to travel as a solo traveller,” says Sarah Stephens, a luxury travel concierge and owner of Sarah Stephens Escapes. “You’re in a safe environment with an opportunity to meet like-minded people easily. Plus, there are organised activities and excursions, should you not feel confident enough to explore on land alone.”

With a ‘hotel’ that moves with you, you get to glide through the Norwegian fjords, explore

From route planning to connecting with locals, digital apps are the ideal companion when hitting the road



### TOP TECH FOR TENACIOUS TRAVELLERS

- Websites like Rome2Rio, Google Maps, Booking.com, Skyscanner and TripAdvisor are travel agents for the technological age. They can compare options quickly and provide real-time reviews.
- “Get an up-to-date bus or rail app, like Omio, to keep you organised,” says Crowe. “Another useful app is the FlixBus route map, as you can see all available routes from your departure station or airport. This lets you see potential day trips or routes that you might not have considered.”
- Solo travellers should have access to reliable internet for maps, updates and emergency contacts. Consider a local SIM or an eSIM (like Airalo).

Mediterranean islands or join an Alaskan expedition without needing to constantly repack your bags, plus meals, lodgings and entertainment are all bundled into one fixed price. Cruises are best for those who want stress-free travel, leisurely sightseeing and water-based destinations. However, it is important to note that cruise itineraries can be rigid and there will be limited time for exploring each destination. Seasickness can also be a concern, depending on the water and ship size. There is also the customary single supplement charge to consider too, but Stephens says that some cruise lines do special offers throughout the year that waive the extra fee.

#### Tips:

- Look for cruise lines that cater to solo travellers – solo cabins or low single supplements.
- Some solo travellers may not be suited to cruise culture, but smaller cruises can offer more meaningful social experiences.
- Inland river cruises can offer a gentler, slower style than ocean liners. ➤



## TYPES OF TRIP

### THE JOY OF THE OPEN ROAD

A great road trip isn't just about reaching point B – it's about everything in between. Whether you're crossing the United States via Route 66, winding through Scotland's North Coast 500 or exploring Vietnam by motorbike, road trips allow ultimate freedom and impulsivity. Travelling by car or motorcycle means you get to control the pace, the detours and the playlist; chase sunsets; stop for roadside snacks; and stumble upon places that no tour bus ever will. Driving in an unfamiliar country or terrain, though, can be daunting – especially alone. From navigating road rules and foreign signage to finding parking, driving solo can be tiring, stressful and sometimes lonely. There are also safety concerns to consider, along with local traffic laws.

#### Tips:

- Solo drivers should always plan shorter days to avoid fatigue.
- Make sure you understand local driving laws (and get the correct licence or permits).
- "Remember to have mobile data on hand to keep up to date with any road closures or accidents, especially overseas, where you don't know the alternate routes," says Crowe.
- Use apps like Roadtrippers or Google Maps for scenic stops.

- In remote areas, carry fuel, plenty of water and a physical map.
- "Plot roadside attractions along the way to break up the journey," advises Crowe.

### PEDALS AND PATHWAYS

Whether you're tackling mountain passes or pedalling through coastal villages, travelling on two wheels connects you to the landscape like nothing else. Cycling allows you to fully immerse yourself in the landscape and rhythm of daily life. It's budget-friendly and great for meeting people in villages, campsites and guesthouses. This kind of travel is most suited to those who are fitness-minded, eco-conscious and who enjoy deep local interaction. Nevertheless, weather, terrain and fatigue can derail travel plans, and remote areas may lack services. It is also crucial that solo cyclists prioritise safe routes and visibility.

#### Tips:

- Use cycling-specific GPS apps like Komoot or Ride with GPS.
- Stay in bike-friendly accommodations (these are often listed on cycling forums).
- Train beforehand – long rides with luggage are harder than they look.
- Invest in a quality touring bike or rent locally.
- Travel light with panniers or a bikepacking setup.



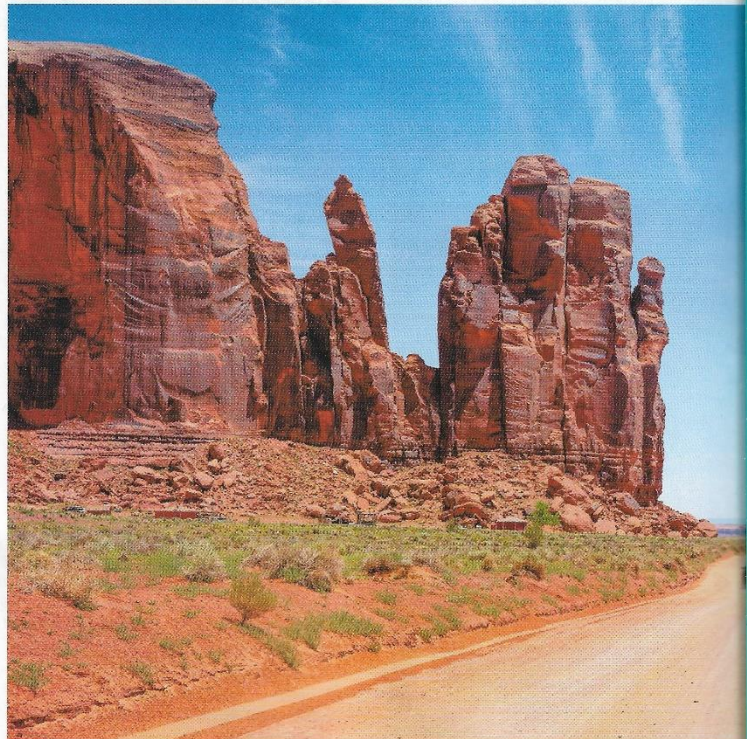
Hitchhiking can offer free transport, chance encounters and real local insight

### HITCHIN' A RIDE

Hitchhiking – the practice of getting free rides from passing vehicles – has long carried an aura of adventure, excitement and a touch of danger. From the beatniks of the 1950s to the backpackers of today, countless travellers have stuck out their thumbs in pursuit of destinations unknown. You get to go where the road takes you, meeting people you otherwise never would have. This style of travelling is common in parts of Europe, South America, New Zealand and Central

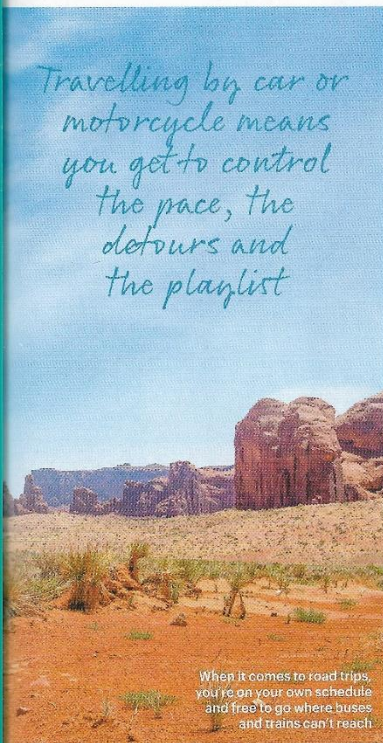
## TRAVEL ESSENTIALS TO TAKE

- **Maps & navigation:** Offline apps like Maps.me or Komoot can be lifesavers.
- **Documents:** Keep physical and digital copies of IDs, tickets and insurance in your bag. Not all stations or routes have strong Wi-Fi or mobile signal, so be sure to print key tickets and maps. "Ensure a trusted friend or relative has a copy of your passport," says Sarah Stephens, "and that you have an emergency credit card."
- **Charging:** Portable battery packs are a must for long travel days.
- **Entertainment:** Podcasts, music, audiobooks and journals help to pass the time.
- **Health:** A basic first-aid kit and motion sickness tablets can make all the difference on a trip.





Cycling is perfect for eco-conscious travellers



*Travelling by car or motorcycle means you get to control the pace, the detours and the playlist*

When it comes to road trips, you're on your own schedule and free to go where buses and trains can't reach

Asia, and is most suited to lovers of spontaneous travel and adventurous minimalists. Safety is the biggest concern, as you have no idea whose vehicle you're climbing into, and you should always trust your instincts. There can also be long waits and limited success in urban areas, and some countries have legal or cultural barriers to hitchhiking.

**Tips:**

- Research safety norms – some regions welcome hitchhikers, others don't.
- Carry a visible, clear sign that shows your desired destination.
- Consider using ride-sharing apps instead as a safer alternative (e.g. BlaBlaCar in Europe).
- Always let someone know your route.
- Avoid hitching at night or in remote areas alone.

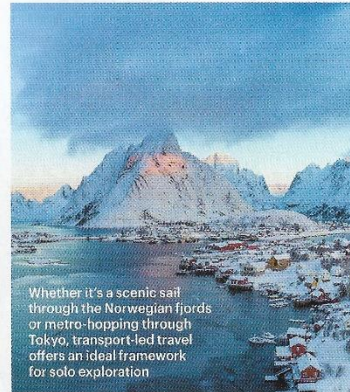
**WHEN TRANSPORT-LED TRAVEL ISN'T THE BEST FIT**

While this style of travel can be romantic and often unforgettable, it does have its pitfalls.

"The flip side is that it takes more time, which is a luxury for most people who have limited holiday," says Crowe.

A slow cruise or train journey can eat up too much of your travel time, whereas flights are often a faster, more efficient option.

There is also the logistical complexity of having to plan a multi-leg route across borders, currencies and time zones, as well as coordinating routes, accommodation and, often, visas. Transport-led travel requires more forethought and mental energy and some people may prefer to opt for



Whether it's a scenic sail through the Norwegian fjords or metro-hopping through Tokyo, transport-led travel offers an ideal framework for solo exploration

**BEST SCENIC ROUTES AROUND THE WORLD**

Whether you're behind the wheel, on a bike or just gazing out the window, these iconic journeys are all about the views:

- **Pacific Coast Highway, USA:** Drive along California's stunning coastline from San Francisco to Los Angeles.
- **The Glacier Express, Switzerland:** An eight-hour rail journey through the Swiss Alps with endless stunning, snowcapped panoramas.
- **The Great Ocean Road, Australia:** A coastal road trip featuring cliffs, wildlife and the Twelve Apostles.
- **La Route des Grandes Alpes, France:** For an unforgettable trip, cycle or drive across 17 Alpine passes from Lake Geneva to the Mediterranean.
- **Norwegian fjords by cruise:** Sail past dramatic landscapes, waterfalls and quaint fishing villages.

a package tour or single-city break if they are time-poor or want to avoid stress.

While road trips and hitchhiking can be cheap, not all transport is budget-friendly. Cruises and motorcycle touring can be expensive, and hidden costs like fuel, tolls and equipment rentals can add up fast. Some types of travel, like cycling, can be physically demanding and require a certain level of stamina to avoid your adventure turning into a complete slog.

Although it's not always the most efficient or easiest mode of exploration, for the solo traveller seeking something a little different, transport-led travel can be an ideal alternative to going straight to a resort and lying by the pool. Sometimes the road, the river and the rail are not just taking you somewhere – they are the reason to go. 🌍