How to avoid getting stuck when your international rail trip in Europe is disrupted

This diagram is intended to help people plan cross border rail trips, and also to present the current complexity of the systems in a systematic way - in order to push for better and more simple solutions to these problems in the European Union

The diagram is designed for accuracy - that is for example why bahn.de is suggested as a timetable tool - it is the best. This does not imply that an organisation like Deutsche Bahn ought to necessarily be the only such tool, and the diagram makes no recommendation about *how* to book international tickets

Diagram is for information purposes only - use it at your own risk!

Version 1.0.0 - 16.1.2023
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Diagram will be updated based on feedback - make sure you have the latest version! All versions, and high resolution PDF and PNG files, and draw.io XML, always at: https://jonworth.eu/railpassengerrights

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START HERE
I want to book a train ticket between two EU countries, Norway, Switzerland or Liechtenstein

I want to know what happens if something goes wrong en route

Diagram assumes you know your preferred route, and what type of trains this entails - check bahn.de to work this out if you haven't yet

How many trains do you need to take for this trip?

One

More than one

This is about how many **tickets** you are issued, not how many **transactions** you make - it is common for one transaction to result in multiple tickets issued

When booking a ticket for this route, do you get issued **one ticket**, or **more than one ticket**?

One ticket
(e.g. Berlin 🇩🇪 - Gent 🇧🇪)

More than one ticket
(e.g. Bruxelles 🇫🇷 - Dijon 🇫🇷)

What?
How do I even know?

You are only going to know for sure when you book - and get issued with one PDF Ticket or multiple PDFs, but here are some rules of thumb

Does your connection involve a **domestic long distance train in France, Spain, Italy or Norway**, in addition to the train you used to cross the border, or does your connection involve a **Thalys** anywhere, or a long distance train operated by a **private firm** (RegioJet, Iryo, Westbahn, Italo, LeoExpress, MTR, Snälltåget)?

Yes

No

When you try to get a price for your ticket at bahn.de, do you get redirected to international-bahn.de instead?

No
It gives a price on bahn.de

Yes
It redirects me to international-bahn.de

I cannot even get these sites to show me a price

If your trip is going somewhere in central Europe, try the same on oebb.at

If you can't work it out, ask the rail nerds on Mastodon, or assume you have multiple tickets to be on the safe side

All is good
You have full passenger rights, so you're covered in the case of disruption

You might have some rights in the case of missed connections
But it could get very messy!

You have rights to **compensation for delays accumulatively for your entire trip** and - importantly - if you are left stranded and need a night in a hotel you can (within some limits) claim these costs back

These rights: https://bit.ly/EURailRights

If you have **missed a connecting train** and need to get to your destination, simply get on the next train run by the same rail company as the one you missed - if this train **do not** have compulsory seat reservations

If the train **does** have compulsory reservations (shown with a R in a box symbol on bahn.de), or is run by a different company, ask a member of staff what to do (you might have to go to a ticket office)

If there is no way by train the same day to your destination then the rail company must cover a hotel stay, or can offer a bus or taxi to your destination

You have rights to **compensation only for the delay to individual trains**, not accumulatively for your entire journey

If you get stuck somewhere and have to stay overnight you might have to foot the costs yourself

The main responsibility of the railway company is **to get you to your destination**, and even that is not always guaranteed

Is the train you missed **run by the same company as the one that was delayed or cancelled** (that caused the initial problem)?

No

Are all of the trains you were due to take **high speed daytime trains** run by DB, SNCF, ÖBB, SBB, Eurostar or Thalys - partners in the so called Railteam Alliance (railteam.eu)?

Yes

Same operators, but not high speed trains

Strictly not covered by the Railteam Alliance but it sometimes works, so try it

No

This results in an asymmetry in the Railteam system.

If the first train is compulsory reservation, and the second is not - you are fine.

If the first train is not compulsory reservation, and the second train is, then things can get very messy.

Is the train you now need to take as a result of the earlier disruption **compulsory reservation**?

Yes

No

Do you have **time to go to the ticket office** at the station where you planned to change train?

No

Yes

Find a member of staff on the compulsory reservation train (e.g. Thalys or TGV) you want to board **before you get on** and ask them what to do - if you try this it is really hit and miss, and depends a lot on the staff member you encounter.

There is no obligation to let you on. They might only let you on if you buy a new ticket - ask about this!

Do not simply get on without asking someone

Go to the ticket office at the station where you were due to change, and **ask for Railteam "Hop on next available train" (HOTNAT) document or stamp**

Then go to the train, and find the train manager when boarding - even with the HOTNAT paper **there is no obligation to let you on**, even with the paper - but chances are higher with it than without.

Train manager **doesn't let you on** the compulsory reservation service

Train manager **lets you on** the compulsory reservation service

You can **keep trying this** for later trains throughout the day, or even switch onto slower non-compulsory reservation regional trains instead

But if it's late in the day you might either have to pay up, or get stuck

Yes

Is the later train from the same company **compulsory reservation**?

Out of experience this is a particularly pernicious problem in **France**, **Spain**, and with **Thalys**. Other countries like **Sweden** and **Italy** have compulsory reservation trains, but there are often alternatives without it. In **Germany**, **Austria**, **Switzerland** (except TGV), **Benelux** (except Thalys) you will not encounter this problem

No

Yes

Speak to a member of staff from the railway company - either on board or at a ticket office - **as soon as you can**, and ask to be rebooked on the later train

You get rebooked

You don't get rebooked same day
Probably because there were no seats left

There is no later train

What happens here is **not at all clear**, not least as some railway companies (e.g. SNCF, Trenitalia) offer multiple tickets in one transaction

Ask at a ticket office, explain the situation, and hope the railway company shows leniency

Is the train you missed due to the earlier disruption run by:
BLS 🇨🇭, ČD 🇨🇿, CFL 🇱🇺, DB 🇩🇪, DSB 🇩🇰, NS 🇳🇱, ÖBB 🇦🇹, Renfe 🇪🇸, SJ 🇸🇪, SBB 🇨🇭, SNCB 🇧🇪, SNCF 🇫🇷, SŽ 🇸🇮, Trenitalia 🇮🇹 or ŽSSK 🇸🇰,
or by Eurostar or Thalys?

These are signatories to Agreement on Journey Continuation (AJC) or apply it - more here: https://bit.ly/AJCbackground

Officially Eurostar and Thalys are not AJC signatories, but these companies have stated they apply it, so are included here

Yes

Get a **proof of the delay to the train that caused the disruption**, and **get this on paper** - this can be issued by onboard staff, or at ticket offices

Failing that take **screenshots of apps**, or **pictures of station screens** - but no guarantee these work

Is the next available train **run by the same operator as the one you missed**?

Yes, and **is not compulsory reservation**

No

Yes, but **is compulsory reservation**

Simply go and get on the later train - but if it's busy you might end up standing

Or ask a member of staff of that company to make an **optional seat reservation** for you

It might take you a while because of the disruption, **but you will get to your destination eventually without incurring extra costs**

You pay for a new ticket to get to your destination

If the rail companies involved are all in Railteam then you can try claiming the extra costs back from the issuer of the original ticket - no guarantee of success

You're left stranded for at least one night - and you will have to pay the accommodation costs

The original railway company will - capacity permitting - try to convey you the following day

You will be entitled to either little or no compensation, but you will get to your destination on the same day as you intended

It is **not at all clear what happens here** - if you have multiple tickets, and multiple operators, how your onward journey is going to be handled is going to be at the discretion of staff

Generally, if trains are **not compulsory reservation** just get on the next available train run by the same operator as the train you missed

If trains **are compulsory reservation**, or are **run by a different operator** than the one you booked with, speak to a member of staff - and better at a ticket office if you have time

You **could be entitled to have a night in a hotel room covered by the railway company**, or **bus or taxi to your destination**, if they themselves acknowledge their error

You will reach your destination eventually

In 2023 new rules on so-called "**Force Majeure**" start. This means that in the case of - for example - a storm that wipes out railway lines, railway companies will not pay compensation. They still have a responsibility to convey you to your destination though.