



CHRISTMAS TRAVEL PRICE ANALYSIS:

comparing December ticket prices between Zagreb and 12 European destinations by train and plane.

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GREENPEACE

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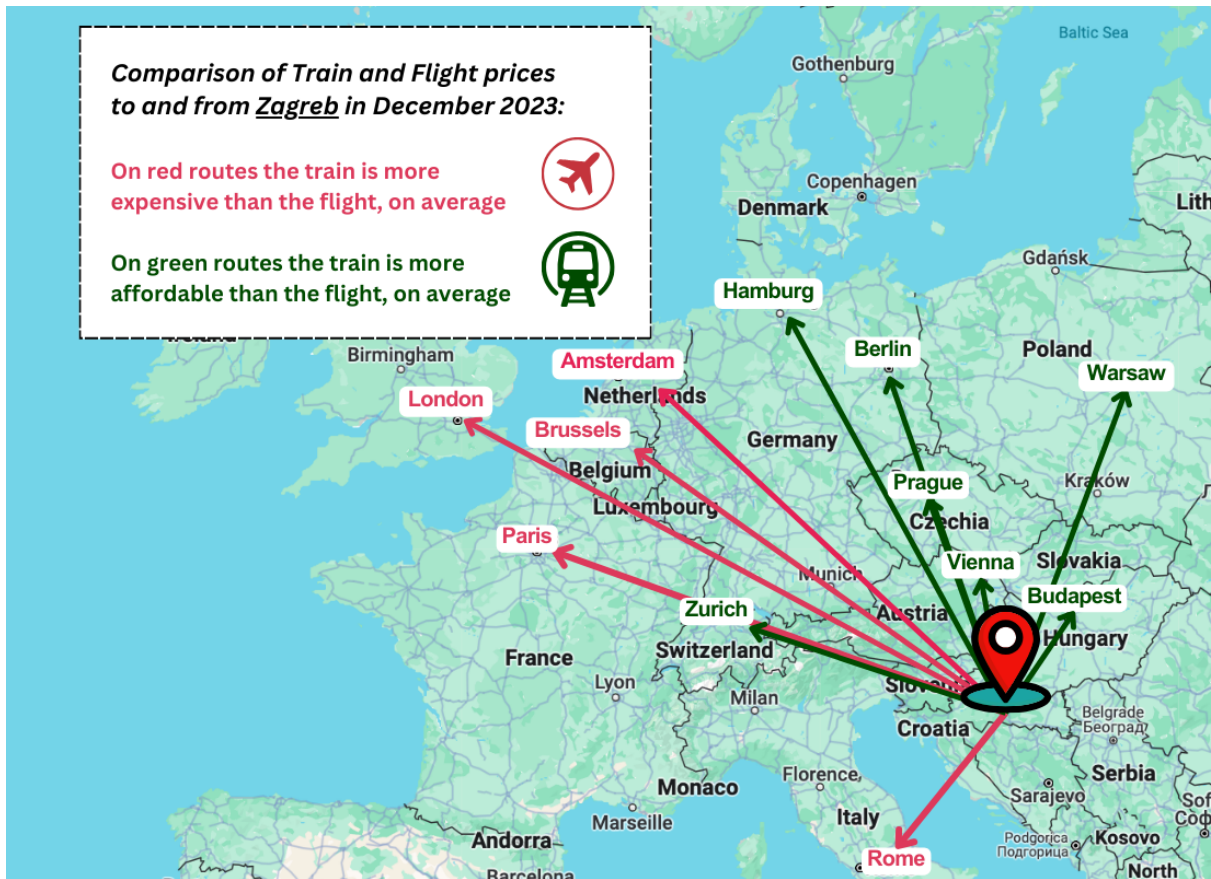
INTRODUCTION

The Christmas and New Year period is one of the busiest and most popular travel times in Europe. Around [250 million Europeans](#) travel at the end of the year. They travel an average of 500 km to visit friends and family or to go on holiday. Around one in five people book their holiday three months in advance, with the majority booking two to one and a half months in advance. When choosing a mode of transport for a trip, price and ease of booking play an important role for consumers.

As millions of Europeans are planning their winter travels, Greenpeace compared the cost of travelling by train and plane between Zagreb and 12 destinations in the rest of Europe on three dates in December, and the simplicity of the train and plane ticket booking systems¹. The results paint a picture of a transport system that is still heavily skewed in favour of flying (in planes, not sleighs).

On average, travelling abroad or home for the holidays by train from Zagreb to the 12 destinations we analysed costs 28% more than making the same journey by plane. On a positive note, there are also some routes where the train was always cheaper, most of them inside CEE and to Zurich.

¹ The focus of the research to determine ‘simplicity of the booking’ was on whether advance ticket sales were possible and whether through-tickets (the need to buy separate train tickets from more than one railway company) were available.



SCOPE OF THE ANALYSIS

In the autumn of 2023, Greenpeace analysed 12 cross-border routes from and to Zagreb that can be travelled by plane and by train. The analysis focused on price, and secondarily, on the simplicity of the booking systems.

The 12 routes analysed are Amsterdam, Berlin, Brussels, Budapest, Hamburg, London, Paris, Prague, Rome, Vienna, Warsaw and Zurich.

All routes were analysed for three trips in each direction on 21, 23 and 28 December. These are some of the busiest travel days in Europe during the year.

Details of the methodology can be found at the end of this document.

KEY FINDINGS

- On average, for all the trips analysed, the train cost 28% more than the flight.
- On 4 routes, the train was always cheaper than the plane. These routes are Zurich, Vienna, Warsaw and Budapest.
- The most expensive train route is the one from and to London, where the train costs on average 4.5 times as much as the flight. The second most expensive train route is

the one from and to Brussels (1.9 times), followed by Rome and Paris (both 1.7 times).

- The biggest price difference between trains and polluting flights was found for a trip to London on 23 December. The train cost €342.20, which is almost exactly 10 times as much as the polluting Ryanair flight (€34.24).
- The absolute most expensive train tickets were also found on the route from and to London, with an average cost of €314, followed by the route from and to Brussels at €181.
- The absolute cheapest average train prices were found on the route from and to Budapest, where the train always cost only €16.
- On most routes where both day and night trains can be used, the night train option was found to be cheaper than the day train.
- Out of the 12 destinations, only 3 have a direct train connection with Zagreb (Budapest, Vienna and Zurich). There are direct flights to 8 destinations from Zagreb.
- In total, 9 out of the 12 routes can be travelled using night trains.
- While literally all airlines were selling tickets for the winter season more than three months in advance, most railway companies did not start selling tickets or providing timetables until the second half of October, including DB. Some railway companies only started selling tickets for the end of December in mid-November.
- The Croatian railway company is one of the few public railway companies which do not sell international online tickets. International online tickets are only sold at the stations, or customers have to use the online shops of other railway companies, such as ÖBB and DB (Austrian and German railway companies).

KEY DATA PER ROUTE

	Price of train vs. flight (x times as much)	Flight is cheaper on X out of 6 days	Range of price of flight (€) ²	Range of price of train (€)	Direct flight	No of train transfers	Night train included
Zagreb–London	4.5	6	34–173	254–354	Ryanair, British Airways	2	yes
Zagreb–Brussels	1.9	5	33–217	151–218	Ryanair, Croatian	2	yes
Zagreb–Rome	1.7	4	24–117	83–179	Ryanair, Croatian	2 / 1	yes, one direction
Zagreb–Paris	1.7	4	34–229	129–153	Ryanair, Croatian	1	yes

² This refers to the range of prices for the cheapest possible ticket available across the six trips analysed: to and from Brussels on 21, 23 and 28 December.

Zagreb– Amsterdam	1.5	4	55–368	152–198	KLM, Croatian	2	yes
Zagreb– Hamburg	0.98	3	119–225	142–153	none	1	yes
Zagreb– Berlin	0.93	2	110–246	135	none	1	yes
Zagreb– Warsaw	0.86	0	118–172	104–137	LOT	2	yes
Zagreb– Prague	0.56	1	111–192	56–81	none	1	no
Zagreb– Zurich	0.32	0	97–482	45–59	Croatian	0	yes,direct
Zagreb– Vienna	0.29	0	114–196	29–79	Croatian, Austrian	0	no
Zagreb– Budapest	0.15	0	79–203	16	none	0	no

All data including flight and train numbers can be found [here](#).

NIGHT TRAINS

There are only two night trains leaving from Zagreb: one to Stuttgart and one to Zurich, both operated by the Croatian railway company.

The night train to Stuttgart can also be used for the routes from and to Amsterdam, Paris, London, Berlin, Brussels and Hamburg.

For the route from and to Warsaw, the night train between Vienna and Warsaw is the best train option.

The trip to Rome can be reasonably done by taking the ÖBB night train from Villach to Rome, but the night train from Rome to Villach is not a reasonable option as you have to unboard the night train before 4 a.m.

DAY TRAINS

Croatia has poor rail links with neighbouring countries:

To Austria: There is only one direct train a day between Vienna and Zagreb, and the night train running to Villach and Salzburg.

To Slovenia: Including the night train, there are only three direct train pairs between Ljubljana and Zagreb – ridiculously few for two European capitals just two hours apart. All other train connections between the two cities require a 2km walk (!) across the border between the Harmica and Dobova border stations.

To Italy: There is no direct train to Italy.

To Hungary: There is only one direct train a day from Zagreb to Budapest.

To Serbia: There is no train connection with Serbia.

Greenpeace recommendations for more cross-border train connections

Priority 1: Ljubljana–Zagreb

Urgently introduce more direct trains, or at least a direct change at one of the border stations, without forcing passengers to cross the border.

Priority 2: Italy

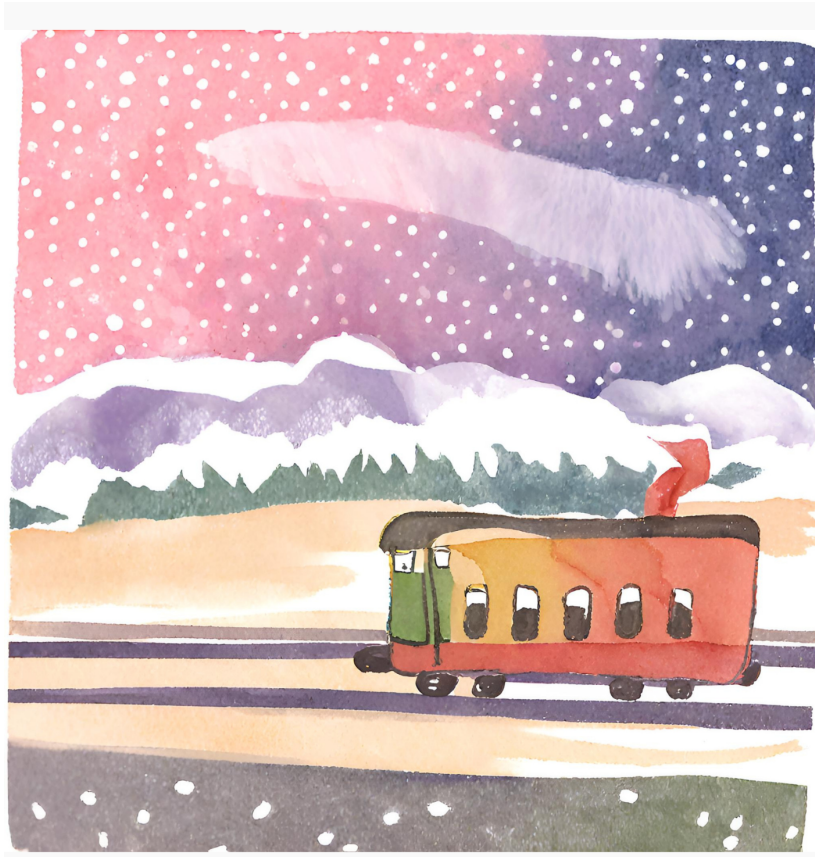
Introduce cross-border trains, and at least a direct connection to Venice. A night train to Rome would also be needed.

Priority 3: Austria

Increase the frequency between Zagreb and Graz and Vienna

Priority 4: Germany

Introduce direct day trains to Germany, at least to Munich, better to Frankfurt. This could be done by extending the EC trains between Frankfurt/Munich and Villach.



GREENPEACE DEMANDS

With the exception of a certain sleigh pulled by reindeer, travelling by train is the most climate-friendly mode of transport in Europe. Rail travel produces 80% less carbon pollution per person per kilometre than flying. Yet the EU continues to give climate-damaging air travel competitive tax advantages over rail, for example by requiring rail operators to pay taxes on the energy they use and self-produce, while airlines do not.

Transport is the only sector in the EU where climate-damaging carbon [emissions are on the rise](#). In order to bring emissions down, governments must urgently put the priority on funding and improving railways over polluting planes, by slashing tax benefits for aviation, expanding and improving railway connections across Europe, streamlining train ticket booking systems, financing accessible climate tickets for all European residents, and bolstering green transportation infrastructure to enable seamless cross-border rail travel.

Demands for a fair pricing of flights and trains

- Introduce national, simple and affordable climate tickets including the domestic section of cross-border train connection (as this is already the case with the Austrian climate ticket)
- In countries which have implemented climate tickets, mutually recognise and integrate systems together so one can access public transport with a simple and single ticket across borders.
- Introduce a European wide ticket valid for all means of public transport, more affordable and simpler than the Interrail pass, rail subscription/monthly ticket modelled on the highly successful national climate tickets in Germany, Austria, Hungary, Slovenia, etc.
- Phase out the VAT exemptions on flight tickets and the kerosene tax exemption
- Make rail more affordable, starting with reducing/skipping VAT on train tickets, and introducing (more) family fares and social fares for low income travellers
- Reduce or skip track access charges for trains
- Improve workers' rights (employment forms, contractual arrangements, union relations, collective bargaining, work-life balance, etc.) and prevent tax optimisation, especially by low cost airlines
- End any subsidies for airports and airlines
- Introduce flight ticket taxes to cover the climate and environmental impact of air travel
- Investigations of the national competent authorities with regard to unfair commercial practices and predatory pricing practised in passenger air transport.

Other demands helping a shift from air to rail

- Ban of all airlines' advertisements.
- Ban of short-haul flights with a reasonable train alternative

Demands for the improvement of rail

- Croatian railways should start selling international online tickets (at the same prices as e.g ÖBB).
- Selling tickets for long-distance trains a longer period in advance (four months is the absolute minimum needed).
- Accepting online tickets in all countries and by all railways companies
- Same prices/offers for the same trip in all operators' ticket shops

- Introduce an integrated EU-wide ticketing and payment system to make it easier for passengers to book a train journey involving different operators and make it mandatory for rail companies to sell through tickets to protect passenger rights.
- Unified train timetable information system



ANNEX: METHODOLOGY

- All routes analysed are below 1,500 km air distance (short-haul flights).
- The analysis was carried out between 6 November and 6 December 2023.
- The trips can be done either with trains & flights arriving on the same day (not later than 1 a.m. of the following day), or with night trains including needed connection trains, not exceeding a total travel time of 24 hours (and without boarding or changing between 1 and 4.30 a.m.). Train connections under these definitions were described as “reasonable”.
- Prices were taken only from official airline & railway operator websites. If one ticket for a route operated by more than one railway operator can be bought, the price is usually taken from the website of the railway operator from the departure country, or from the railway operator who is able to sell the ticket. When the price appeared unreasonably high, the price was also checked from the other involved railway

operators. It was not possible to always check all railway operators selling tickets for the route.

- Greenpeace always chose the cheapest available ticket option (2nd class, economy class, no extra reservations, no luggage fees, non-refundable tickets, etc.). Discount cards, individual subscriptions and long-term tickets were not taken into consideration. For longer trips, the night train was the first choice for this analysis.
- Only flights were considered, which included at the maximum one transfer with a maximum waiting time of seven hours at the transfer airport (except if there is no other travel option available). Also train routes were limited to a maximum of one more change than needed. (If there is a direct train, only 1 transfer was considered, if there is one transfer required, 2 transfers were considered at the most.
- Transfer flights were only researched if the direct flight cost €80 or more. Generally, transfer connections were only considered if they were at least 10% cheaper than the direct one.
- For flights, all airports “belonging to one city” were considered (e.g. all four London airports).
- The prices for flights and trains were researched on the same day for a route. The days of the research are included in the public datasheet.



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