

Getting there for 'Being Here' *... taking the train to Cortijo Romero*

A new lease of life beckons or threatens me as I leave my job after 39 years and head for the unknowns of retirement. What is on offer at Cortijo Romero to help my transition? I decide to book up for the 'Being Here' week that starts immediately after my retirement date... but how to get there? Part of my retirement project is to give up my car, do everything that I can by bike or train and generally think about my carbon footprint. Jetting to the south of Spain didn't quite fit this new resolve, so I decided to try the public transport option and go by train instead.

Booking the train tickets does require quite a lot of determination and I had to be well organised to be sure to get the tickets that I wanted. The best source of help is the wonderful website called 'The Man in Seat Sixty-One...' <http://www.seat61.com/>. I had been warned that some of the seats, especially on the Paris-Madrid overnight sleeper, book up quite quickly and that it is best to buy them as soon as possible after they become available... but advance tickets can be booked at different times in advance:

Eurostar to Paris	120 days
Paris- Madrid	90 days
Madrid-Malaga	60 days

Most of the tickets can be booked through Rail Europe [08708 371 371 or 09705 848 848]. The booking clerks were all excellent and supportive as I made the various phone reservations over the months before my trip. I am confident that there will soon be improved booking systems in place to encourage more seamless European train travel or perhaps a travel agent could have done this job. I guess that I made about 8 phone calls at different times before all my tickets were booked.

You will be asking about the cost of the tickets. In total the return fare cost is just under £300 (see below). There are some minor additional costs on the Metro when changing trains (and railway stations) in Paris and Madrid:

	£
Eurostar to Paris	59
Paris- Madrid	108
Madrid-Malaga	115
Total	£282

Although this is currently a more expensive option than current airline travel, I imagine that airline tickets will become increasingly expensive as the cost of recent fuel increases are passed on to paying passengers and the cost differential will soon disappear.

Carbon Footprint

For me the ecological costs were as important as the financial costs and I have tried to estimate the amount of carbon saved by travelling on the train.

Carbon emissions (return London- Malaga)	
Air flight (213 gCO₂ per passenger km)	788 Kilograms
Train (11 gCO₂ per passenger km)	40 Kilograms

However Eurostar claim to have made their part of the journey carbon neutral http://www.eurostar.com/UK/uk/leisure/about_eurostar/environment/tread_lightly.jsp so the train journey will save even more CO₂ emissions.

The Travel Experience

Well, it is more or less exactly as you would expect. I knew that each journey would take over 24 hours and I told myself that this would be an important part of the holiday and time to relax. I love the new St. Pancras station and the Eurostar booking-in and passport control is really quick and easy, perhaps unlike current airport experiences. The new high-speed rail link has shortened the journey time to Paris and just over two hours later I was having my tea sitting in a lovely boulevard garden just next to Gare d'Austerlitz in Paris. The Metro journey across Paris is simple enough even though I don't think that Parisians are especially friendly and they pretended they couldn't understand my requests (in Franglais) for directions... And so onto the *Elipsos Trenhotel* for the overnight train adventure to Madrid. I had booked into the four berth option and found my little compartment already full of three large-limbed, stone-faced blokes. They all seemed very wide shouldered and each had massive holdall suitcases. None of them spoke to each other or to me for the entire journey. I really didn't mind as I was well into my exciting book by this stage. After a couple of hours the train guard came along and turfed us out into the tiny corridor so that he could magically change the seats into sleeping bunks... so we all clambered back into the compartment and got ready for bed... we looked rather like a Lithuanian mime show, as in complete silence we negotiated round each other until we had undressed and got into our little bunks. I slept quite well and in the morning I got up and went along to the bar for a hot drink. I should have explored this option before. It was a wonderful experience travelling through central Spain with stunning views on either side of the track. The legendary Spanish bulls appeared in the fields right on cue and there were lots of other interesting things to look at while drinking my hot chocolate. We arrived in Madrid in the early morning and I treated myself to a proper breakfast in a pavement café. The Madrid Metro is fairly easy to negotiate although the people pretended not to understand my (Manuel-like Spanish) requests for directions. The final train journey is on the superb new Talgo 200 high-speed train that really does go at 350 km per hour. http://www.tvspain.tv/video_details.php?id=84 It is wonderful with in-journey entertainment and the most superb views. Goodness we are in Malaga already after only just over a day of travel ...

London - Malaga - London

Return Distance = approx. 3689.12 kilometres

Each way train travel time: 25 hrs 26 mins

Leave St. Pancras 14.04 Thursday arrive in Malaga 15.30 Friday