

The Balkan Express



The first person I saw as soon as I returned from my holidays was my grandfather. He opened the front door for me and stood there, looking me up and down in amazement.

'Whatever's the matter with you?' he asked.

I went straight into the living-room and sank exhausted into an armchair. I was hard put to explain my appearance. I was pale, unshaven, dirty and tired out after my journey.

'I've been travelling on the Balkan Express,' I mumbled weakly, 'and I haven't eaten a thing for over eighteen hours. As I didn't get a seat, I spent most of my time in the corridor where I was nearly trampled to death.'

'The Balkan Express!' my grandfather exclaimed. 'When I was a young man, that was a wonderful train. There was a permanent dining-car and you could get some of the best food and wines in Europe. I can even remember a time when a gypsy orchestra was employed to play to the passengers during meal-times.' He looked me up and down again, then added with a sigh, 'You couldn't beat the old Balkan Express for comfort.'

'Times have changed, grandfather,' I said sadly.

'Judging from your appearance, my boy,' he answered, 'they've changed for the worse. Now you go and have a nice hot bath, and I'll get you something warm to drink.'

Source: Alexander, L.G., *Question and Answer*, Longman, 1977



Answer these questions

- A. 1 Who was the first person you saw when you returned from your holidays?
- 2 Was your grandfather surprised when he saw you?
- 3 Why was he surprised?
- 4 Did you go into the living-room?
- 5 Weren't you exhausted?
- 6 Why did you feel so tired?
- 7 What did you tell your grandfather?
- 8 How long had you been travelling on the Balkan Express?
- 9 You didn't have a comfortable journey, did you?
- 10 What was your grandfather's opinion of the Balkan Express?
- 11 Had your grandfather travelled on the Balkan Express when he was a young man?
- 12 Was the food on the train good in the old days?
- 13 Could your grandfather remember the train well?
- 14 Were the passengers provided with any entertainment on the old Balkan Express?
- 15 What sort of entertainment did they have?
- 16 Has the train service improved since then, or has it got worse?
- 17 What did your grandfather tell you to do?
- 18 What did he offer to get you?

B. Ask these questions

- Ask me
- 1 who I first saw when I returned from my holidays.
 - 2 whether I had been on holiday.
 - 3 whether my grandfather opened the door for me.
 - 4 why my grandfather was so surprised.
 - 5 what I looked like.
 - 6 whether I wasn't tired after my journey.
 - 7 where I had been.
 - 8 how long I went without food.
 - 9 why I didn't get a seat.
 - 10 whether I had to stand.
 - 11 what the Balkan Express was like in my grandfather's time.
 - 12 what my grandfather told me to do.

C. Explain why (according to the passage) the Balkan Express has changed for the worse. (50 - 60 words)

D. What about you? do you prefer to travel by train or by plane?
Write a short essay on the advantages and disadvantages of these two means of transport.
(150-180 words)

