

A JOURNEY UNDER THE SEA



Several years ago, my wife and I came upon an advertisement in a travel magazine for an international exchange programme promising "the chance of a lifetime". Not one to let such an intriguing opportunity pass me by, but a bit hesitant about taking such a leap into the unknown, I did some research and discovered that the programme involved something called house-swapping. After much discussion, my family and I decided to, as they say, go for it.

Consequently, we were soon jetting off for a holiday in the Peak District of England while our exchange partners were settling down for their vacation in our flat back home in Mt Vernon, Washington. The exchange was for a month and the time passed quickly. To end our time away on a high note, we decided to travel to Paris via the engineering marvel known as the Channel Tunnel. Being on a tight budget, we opted for a package deal which included round-trip tickets on the Eurostar passenger train, five nights in a three-star hotel in Paris, Metro passes and unlimited use of the Paris bus system. When the package still hadn't arrived after a week, I began to think that perhaps our trip hadn't been such a good idea after all. Maybe it was a sign that we shouldn't go.

The tickets and vouchers eventually arrived and I scolded myself for having had such silly thoughts. On the day of departure, with plenty of time to spare, my two teenage children, my wife and I stood waiting eagerly on the platform at Waterloo Station. At exactly 7.57 am, we boarded our train and began our journey through the picturesque county of Kent. About an hour into our journey, an announcement, in both English and French, informed us that we were about to enter the Channel Tunnel.

The Eurostar adverts had boasted proudly about the engineering feat that was the 'Chunnel', and the convenience it offered to those travelling between England and the Continent. They had spoken highly of the "lack of rough seas" and to me, a person who gets seasick very easily, this was a major selling point. When all is said and done, however, I must admit that there were moments when I felt quite nervous about travelling 50 metres below the bottom of the English Channel. Inside the tunnel itself, there really wasn't much to grab my attention - no posters or other artwork, so I busied myself studying the occupants of our carriage. Some calmly read novels or newspapers; others quietly looked through business reports and notes. I quickly realised, however, that most of my fellow passengers were like my family in that they looked excited and very happy to be enjoying such a novel travel experience.

Our underwater journey ended as quickly as it had begun. All of a sudden, we left the darkness of the tunnel behind and nosed out into the light of the pleasant French morning. The tracks being well-built, we quickly accelerated to 300 kph, the speed of a Boeing 747 at take-off. We arrived in Paris and its busy city centre a mere 180 minutes after leaving London. That journey, and indeed the whole time that we spent on the exchange programme, have given us all a yearning for new experiences, and many wonderful memories that we will cherish forever.



1. How did the writer first learn about the house-swapping scheme?

- A from his wife
- B purely by chance
- C through a travel agent
- D by doing research

2. The writer uses the phrase 'go for it' (paragraph 2) to express the idea of ...

- A taking a risk.
- B going abroad.
- C flying on a jet.
- D having a choice.

3. Why did the writer choose the package deal?

- A They wanted to travel via the Channel Tunnel.
- B It included a stay in a top-class hotel.
- C It was cheap for what it offered.
- D It allowed them to use the Metro and bus system.

4. The writer 'scolded' himself (paragraph 4) because ...

- A the tickets arrived late.
- B they had to wait a long time on the platform.
- C he was disappointed.
- D he had worried unnecessarily.

5. The writer was most attracted by the fact that the Eurostar train ...

- A travelled so far below sea level.
- B was unaffected by sea conditions.
- C offered a convenient way to travel.
- D used such a well-designed tunnel.

6. What did the writer do during his journey through the tunnel?

- A He studied a business report.
- B He looked at the other passengers.
- C He read a novel about travelling.
- D He wished the journey would end quickly.

7. We learn from the writer that ...

- A the trip from London to Paris took 3 hours.
- B the train accelerates faster than a Boeing 747.
- C the train's top speed is 300 kph.
- D Paris' city centre is busier than London's.

8. How was the writer's attitude changed by his experiences?

- A He began to think more about the past.
- B He saw the value of doing new things.
- C He realised his journey was special.
- D He saw that he needn't have worried so much.