

Reading

6 Read the text. Are the sentences true (T) or false (F)?

		T / F
1	The Orient Express stopped running in 1977.	
2	The route of the Orient Express always ended in Vienna.	
3	The writer first went to the USA in 2013.	
4	It takes more than a day to travel The Coast Starlight route.	
5	The Coast Starlight goes to Canada.	
6	This was the writer's first experience of an American night train.	
7	The dining car becomes a viewing car between meals.	
8	The writer got off the train in Tacoma by mistake.	
9	The Puget Sound is a river.	
10	The writer hasn't travelled from Seattle to Los Angeles yet.	

GETTING AWAY FROM IT ALL BY... TRAIN

There are many famous long distance train journeys. The Orient Express from Paris to Istanbul was the most elegant and perhaps the saddest as it slowly got shorter – Paris to Vienna from 1977, Strasbourg to Vienna from 2007 and, from 2009, nothing at all. However, my personal favourite is the Coast Starlight.

I took this train in 2013 when I was on holiday in the USA for two months, my first ever visit to the country. It travels a total of over 2,200 km in almost 35 hours from Los Angeles in southern California to Seattle in the far north-west of the USA, almost on the Canadian border. There are several reasons why I loved it.

Firstly, there is the usual high standard of American service. I'm sure all their night trains are as good, although I haven't travelled on any others. The ticket includes meals and they are excellent too. Between meals, you can leave the dining car and go to the viewing car. This is higher than the rest of the train with bigger windows, so you get a great view of the beautiful landscapes of the western USA.

The train left Los Angeles at 10 a.m. and, for the first twelve hours, it followed the coast. I looked at the Pacific Ocean until night fell. I missed the fruit farms of northern California but, when I woke up, we were coming to Tacoma with the 4,392 metre high volcano, Mount Rainier towering over the city. I jumped out onto the platform to take some photos but jumped back on quickly. I didn't want to be left behind by mistake.

Now, we were next to the Puget Sound, a 161 km long, 16 km wide area of water where several rivers meet the Pacific Ocean. There were forests, islands, boats, birds and, for a few minutes, a group of whales swimming in the icy water.

The train arrived exactly on time at 8.37 p.m. and, as I got off, I turned round to look at the train. I wanted to jump back on for the return journey to Los Angeles. One day I will.

7 Read the extract from a novel. Choose the answer, A, B, C or D.

1 In the morning, the writer

- A** went to the volunteer office with three people from his hostel.
- B** woke up before anyone else in his room.
- C** ate a small breakfast in the hostel.
- D** met some friends at the volunteer office.

2 Which sentence is true?

- A** All of the people at the office found work.
- B** The Australians and New Zealanders knew each other before getting work.
- C** The writer couldn't travel on the same bus as the other volunteers.
- D** The volunteers had to pay for their own transport to the farm.

3 The writer says that the landscape was

- A** different.
- B** attractive.
- C** uninteresting.
- D** unchanging.

4 The writer was surprised when he found out

- A** he was in the same house as everyone else.
- B** he and Josie had to share a room.
- C** how nice the room was.
- D** who Gavin was working with.

5 In the last paragraph, the writer says that Kostas

- A** works very hard.
- B** finds it hard to make decisions.
- C** treats men and women differently.
- D** doesn't want Josie to work for him.

A VOLUNTEER ABROAD

It was eight o'clock in the morning and I was wide awake. The other people in the hostel room were all asleep and I got dressed quietly because I didn't want to wake them up. I don't know why. I would never see them again. Half an hour later, after a quick coffee and roll in a baker's near the hostel, I was at the volunteer worker office with three other hopeful volunteers. We sat there, silently, looking at each other, knowing we were in competition for the same jobs.

My turn for an interview came and I answered a few questions. The three interviewers looked carefully at my clothes and hair to see what kind of worker I might be. Back outside, I waited while more backpackers arrived. Finally, three hours later, they called five of us back in to the room. They told us we could start work on a farm immediately. They gave us some maps and instructions for a bus, although not tickets, and we left. The other four were two couples, one from Australia and the other from New Zealand. They soon got to know each other and talked together like old friends while I stood alone. On the bus, there were four seats together for them and one for me six rows behind them. I sat next to a local returning from a day's shopping.

I sat and watched the landscape through the window. There were green fields and fruit trees at first but, as we travelled south, the land grew drier. It wasn't very pretty, with brown hills, no trees and rubbish by the side of the road, but I loved it. It was fascinating because it was nothing like the landscape back home.

It was dark when we arrived on the farm. A group of farmers welcomed us and decided who should work with whom. A man called Kostas took the Australian girl, Josie, and me. He spoke almost no English but we understood that we should follow him to our volunteer home. We entered a small, white house and Kostas opened the first door on the right. It was empty except for two small mattresses on the floor, each with a thin sheet and blanket. Josie went in and I waited outside ready to see if my room was any better. Impatiently, Kostas, indicated that this was also my room. Josie and I looked at each other in shock. A room together? I knew what she was thinking. Her partner, Gavin, was somewhere else in the village sharing a similar room with another, unknown volunteer.

With more sign language and broken English, Kostas told us that work would begin at 5 a.m. the next day. He told me to drive his tractor to the fields. He didn't ask if we had driving licences. I was a man and, in his opinion, I could drive. Driving was the man's job and, we guessed, there would be similar differences in duties to come.

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