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MAY 5-11, 2013

# ALL Aboard!

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STOCK PHOTO



# All Aboard!

**FACING FLOOR-TO-CEILING WINDOWS** aboard the California Zephyr passenger train, Don Nelson peers outside at steep rock canyon walls in the Colorado Rockies and recalls traveling by train as a youngster to visit his grandmother in North Dakota.

"It was an adventure!" recalls Nelson, 69, of Indianapolis, Ind. "Hearing a train whistle still evokes that sense of adventure—that the train is going off somewhere exciting. Even now when I look at train tracks, I think about where the train is going and what lies ahead."

Now retired with more time to enjoy the ride, Nelson prefers journeying by train over other modes of transportation.



// Don Nelson

"Driving is way too long. Flying is rush-rush and you have to go through all the security [checks]," Nelson explains while sitting comfortably in the Zephyr's lounge car. "I can take water and food. You relax, look at the scenery and meet all kinds of interesting people."

Nearly 144 years after a symbolic golden rail spike was driven in Utah Territory to mark completion of America's first transcontinental railroad, travelers are

rediscovering the benefits of seeing the nation at eye level.

Last year, Amtrak trains transported more than 31.2 million passengers, the highest total since 1971 and the ninth annual ridership record during the last decade. The resurgence is the latest chapter in America's rail saga.

"People are interested in the onboard experience, not just the destination," says Sylvia Blishak, 75, co-owner of a travel agency in Klamath Falls, Ore., that specializes in train excursions. "They like the sociability and the relaxation of being onboard."

## Connecting the nation

Only four years after the Civil War ended, railroads linked the Atlantic and Pacific coasts, allowing Americans to explore the vast expanses in between. The railroad changed the nation's landscape and

accelerated statehood by creating towns and spawning business, trade and prosperity.

"Railroads built the country," says Jim Loomis, 75, author of *All Aboard: The Complete North American Train Travel Guide*. "A person or letter going from the East to California [before 1869] would take months; once the railroad was up and running, it took seven days."

The Golden Age of Railroad spanning from 1870 to 1920, when the advent of cars and buses began to offer transportation alternatives and took the steam out of rail expansion.

"Trains were very prevalent through the 1950s, but [passenger travel] fell off in the 1960s and multiple trains were effectively stopped [due to financial constraints] with the creation of Amtrak in 1971," says George Hoffer, 70, a transportation economist at the University of Richmond in Burgess, Va.





# Train travel offers eye-level sights, sounds and service

// BY AUDREY T. HINGLEY

Today, the federally chartered corporation that oversees Amtrak's passenger rail service operates in 46 states and serves more than 500 destinations. About 72 percent of Amtrak's 21,000 route-miles employ tracks owned by other railroad companies that primarily move freight.

Essentially two Amtrak systems exist: busy Northeast Corridor (NEC) trains serve passengers in Washington, D.C., Boston and points in between; remaining rail routes traverse most of the other contiguous states.

"Northeast Corridor trains are a viable substitute for air travel," Hoffer says. "They are fast, frequent and much less hassle than [using] airlines or driving."

*(Continued on page 10)*



COURTESY OF THE U.S. NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

**May 10 is National Train Day**, the 144th anniversary of the creation of the nation's first transcontinental railroad. On May 10, 1869, in Promontory Summit, Utah Territory, a golden spike was driven into the final wooden tie that joined 1,776 miles of the Central Pacific and Union Pacific railroads, forever transforming the face and character of America.



Visit [americanprofile.com/traintrips](https://americanprofile.com/traintrips) to learn about 10 long-distance train rides in America.







COURTESY OF AMTRAK

(Continued from page 9)

Double-decker trains are cross-country land cruisers and the best, most leisurely way to see the country.”

## A comfortable ride

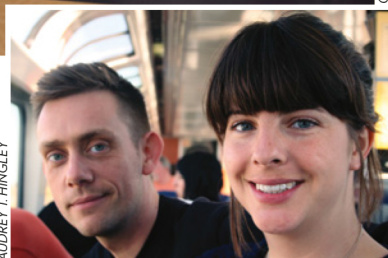
Some passengers choose rail travel to avoid airline security delays or congested highways. On Northeast Corridor routes, businesspeople can maximize their commute by working on laptop computers, cellular phones or other devices. For cross-country travel, many passengers like the relaxing pace that allows them to see the countryside. Others like the sociability of train travel, especially in the dining car where passengers are seated together.

“If you travel solo as I do most of the time,” Loomis says, “suddenly it’s an hour later and you’re chatting [with strangers] like old friends. You could find yourself having dinner with a nuclear physicist or a 300-pound biker in a tank top.”

Tom Johnson, 55, of Lincoln, Neb., says his trip last fall aboard the Zephyr—from Lincoln to Chicago and back with a side trip to Milwaukee—presented opportunities to talk with interesting people from interesting places.

“I met a wonderful Japanese couple at breakfast,” he says. “My other tablemate was an 80-year-old Marine with all kinds of stories about Korea and plenty of political opinions.”

Watching the scenery along the Colorado River from a lounge car window, British tourist Rebecca



AUDREY T. HINGLEY

Top: A young family enjoys the ride while (above) British tourists Jay Barnett and Rebecca Barnicoat see America from aboard the California Zephyr.

Barnicoat, 31, was enchanted by her travel experience aboard the Zephyr, which runs daily between Chicago and San Francisco on a 2,438-mile journey through eight states.

“It’s like watching a film of America, but the film is the whole of America and you’re watching the landscape change,” she says. “It’s endlessly fascinating.”

Retirees June and Joe Hoppe of Saginaw, Mich., were traveling on the Zephyr for at least their sixth train trip. “We talk to lots of people who have never traveled by train and we keep trying to convince them to do it,” says Joe, 74. “You see things in areas you could never get to with a car.”

And if you purchase tickets for the train’s private sleeper car rather than riding coach, “all your meals are included,” June adds.

Bill and Rose Mary Frost, of Redding, Calif., fell in love with train travel after their first trip to Seattle aboard the Coast Starlight in 2002 to celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary.

“I tell people to enjoy it, meet people, enjoy the scenery,” says Bill, 81. “The world goes by more slowly on the train.” ★