

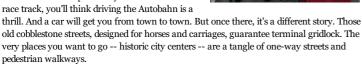
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"I don't drive," said my cousin Bert Noglik, blushing with embarrassment. A music critic and jazz festival impressario, he met our train from Berlin and was waiting on the platform in the Leipzig Bahnhof (train station) wearing a broad smile and a sporty winter jacket. Bert, who was born in Leipzig, lives in the house he inherited from his parents. When I asked how we were getting there, he apologized, as if a proper host would surely have a car waiting at curbside. "I don't even own a car," he said, taking my suitcase. "The street car runs ten minutes from my house, and for meetings in Berlin or Frankfurt, I take the train. If I'm going to London or Madrid, I fly."

If I lived in Leipzig I wouldn't have a car either. And as a tourist, I've found it both a 24-7 nuisance and an frivolous expense. If you were weaned on a race track, you'll think driving the Autobahn is a



Just where do Germany's trains -- Deutsche Bahn -- go? Everywhere. The Deutsche Bahn system has 76,473 kilometers of track and stations in every town. Nor will you be stranded if you're staying at an suburban hotel or rural inn. Unless your destination is a mountain top, you'll find street cars, buses and taxis ready to take you those last few blocks. I keep a map and my hotel address in hand and never hesitate to ask a local resident for directions.

If your itinerary involves a long train ride, say from Berlin to Leipzig, and then to Stuttgart, you'll have to change trains, which may mean taking an indirect route. To avoid too many long rides (and to save on train fares), look at a map of railway routes and prices (see www.raileurope.com/europe-trains/deutsche-bahn/) and plan a route that that minimizes backtracking. That will leave more time to explore towns like Weimar, and to spend a rollicking evening in Dresden's Sophienkeller restaurant.



As for buying train tickets -- for first or second class, local or express, adult or youth, day or night -- you can buy them at any station without a reservation. For express trains between cities, and for most trains, you don't need a specific seat reservation. But there are exceptions. If the trains aren't busy, getting a seat is easy. But on holidays or in peak seasons (summer) trains will be very full. Many travelers prefer using a Eurail Pass, which is priced for your specific travel dates; buy it online before you leave home, at www.eurail.com. But first, sort through all of Germany's many routes, departure times, restrictions and prices, available at www.raileurope.com/europe-trains/deutshe-bahn and at www.germanrailpasses.com/planning/timetables . BAHN VOYAGE!

Between train trips, writer Anne Z. Cooke gets her kicks touring her cousin's model railroad layout.