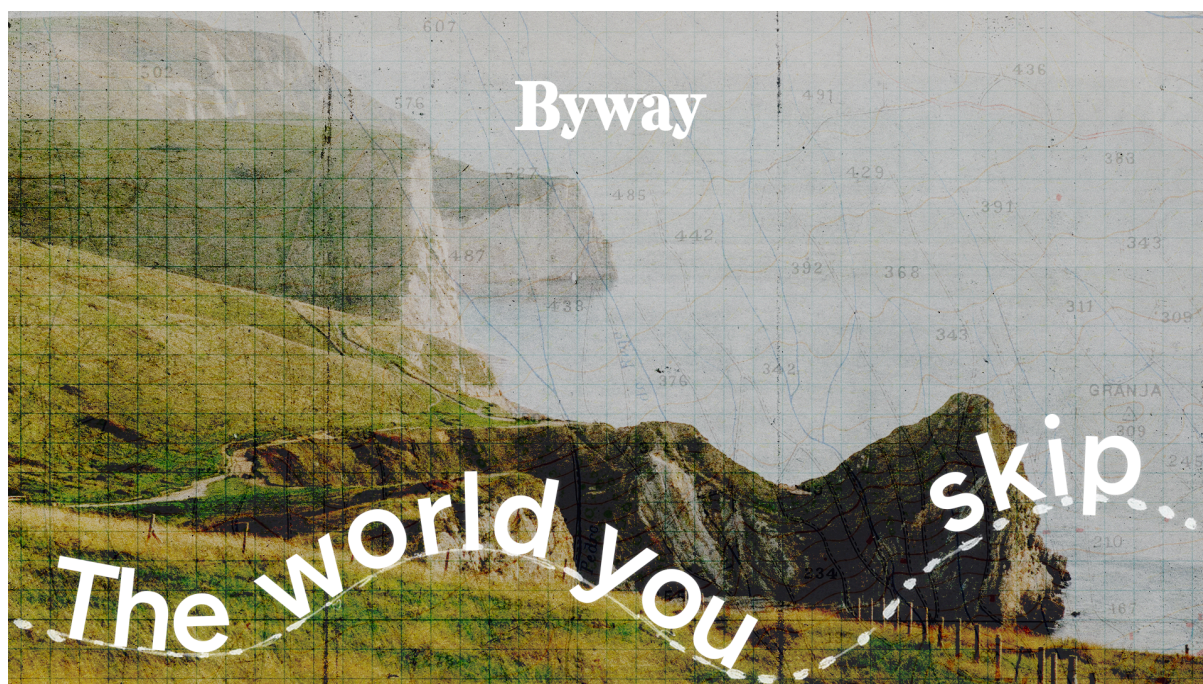


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Shocking survey reveals that while we are travelling across Europe more, we know it less

Throughout the summer holidays, millions of Britons will have travelled to Europe chasing scenery, culture, city breaks and sunshine. However, according to new research released today in Byway's European Literacy Report, despite increasing levels of summer travel to the continent¹, most UK adults (and even more children) cannot identify the countries, cities and landmarks that sit just a few hours from home.

The study set out to test what Britons think they know about European culture and geography against what they actually know, and found a striking gap between perception and reality.

We think we know a lot more than we do

While 70% of adults and 47% of children believe they have a solid grasp of European geography, the reality tells a different story. When tested, the average score across all respondents was just 37%, with adults scoring 36% accuracy on average and children 37%.

¹ According to ABTA's [Holiday Habits Report 2025-2026](#)

More strikingly, 71% of adults and 69% of children scored below a 50% baseline, getting eight or fewer of eighteen European geography questions correct.

Cultural knowledge tells a similarly humbling story: only 31% of adults and just 20% of children rate their understanding of European culture (language, food, heritage and history) as “fairly well” or “very well” known.

Where the knowledge gaps lie

The research uncovered specific gaps across three categories: cities, landmarks and natural features.

- **Cities:** 57% of adults and 53% of children could not correctly match major European cities to their countries.
- **Landmarks:** 60% of adults and 47% of children failed to correctly identify the countries of major European landmarks.
- **Natural features:** This was the weakest category overall, with 69% of adults and 76% of children unable to place major European natural features. The vast national park of Plitvice Lakes in Croatia proved especially elusive (missed by 80% of adults and 89% of children) while, closer to home, the Giant’s Causeway in Northern Ireland was misidentified by 77% of adults and 89% of children.

The difference a train window makes

Perhaps the most compelling finding is what happens when people travel through rather than flying over. The research compared frequent rail travellers (four or more trips) with frequent flyers, and found that those who travel overland consistently know Europe better, both culturally and geographically.

- 86% of frequent rail travellers feel culturally confident about Europe, compared to 66% of frequent flyers
- 90% of frequent rail travellers feel geographically confident, versus 76% of frequent flyers

Their confidence is backed up by accuracy. Frequent rail travellers were significantly more likely to correctly locate a range of European countries on a map than frequent flyers:

Country	Frequent (4+) rail travellers	Frequent (4+) flyers	Difference
Belgium	73%	58%	+15pp

Austria	61%	46%	+15pp
Croatia	47%	33%	+14pp
Estonia	35%	22%	+13pp
Norway	71%	58%	+13pp
Slovenia	28%	18%	+10pp

The effect deepens the more people travel by rail. For Estonia, the proportion of people who say they “definitely couldn’t find it” on a map fell from 18% among non-train travellers to just 5% among those with eight or more train trips.

The research also points to a difference in mindset. 71% of frequent rail travellers who had taken 4-7 trips describe themselves as having a “journey-centric” approach to travel, viewing the journey as being as much a part of the holiday as the ultimate destination, compared to 62% of flyers.

This report suggests that overland travel builds a more grounded, lasting understanding of Europe than air travel does. Cat Jones, Founder and CEO of Byway, which commissioned the survey, reflects on its findings.

“My family and I have always experienced travelling by train, bringing us a far deeper connection to the places we visit than dropping into them by air, and I’ve loved seeing the data-backed facts in this research supporting our experience. Even so, I was surprised to see such a lack of knowledge and understanding of our closest geographical neighbours reflected in the report.

For me, this highlights the value of slow, land-based trips, where you travel through Europe rather than skipping over it. Moving through shifting landscapes as languages and dialects change around you, stopping off in lesser-visited towns and cities along the way - it all helps immerse us more in the geography and culture of a place. I’m delighted to be taking my children on journeys that are as educational as they are enjoyable!”

ENDS

Editors' Notes

About the research

Byway commissioned this survey from YouGov Plc. with a total sample size of 2,063 adults and 519 children. The fieldwork was undertaken between 4th and 11th August 2026, and the survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults and children (aged 6 to 15). The survey's data analysis and interpretation, which forms the European Literacy Report, were conducted by the Byway team. See more of the report's findings [here](#). The full report is available on request.

About Byway

Byway is on a mission to help more people discover Europe and beyond by travelling through, not flying over. All self-guided itineraries include overland transport and accommodation, package protection, disruption replanning and 24/7 in-trip support from our no-fly travel experts. Whether you design your trip from scratch, travel our favourite routes or enlist personalised planning help from our team, the result is a seamless slow travel adventure through landscapes, cultures and the places in between.

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