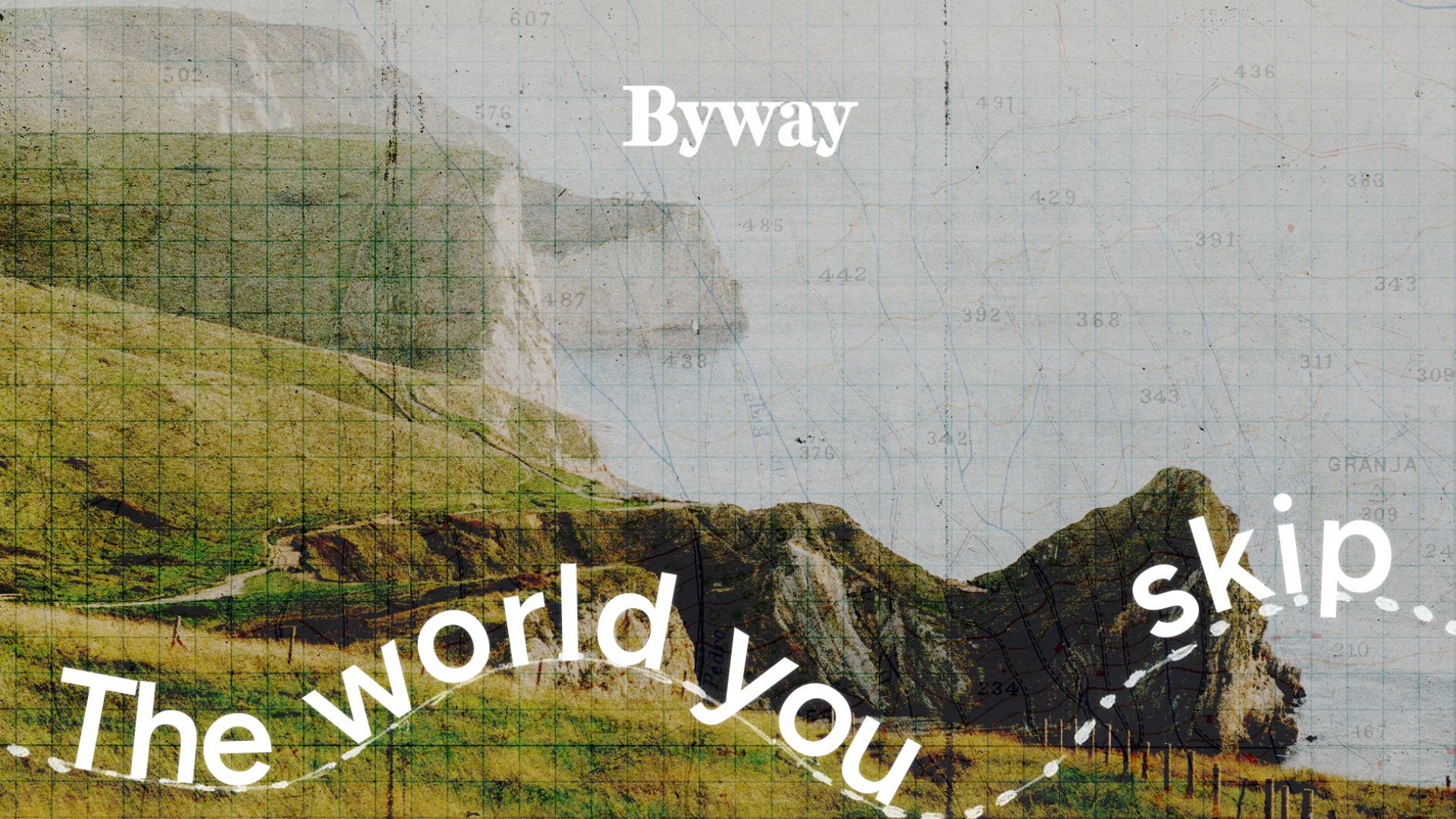




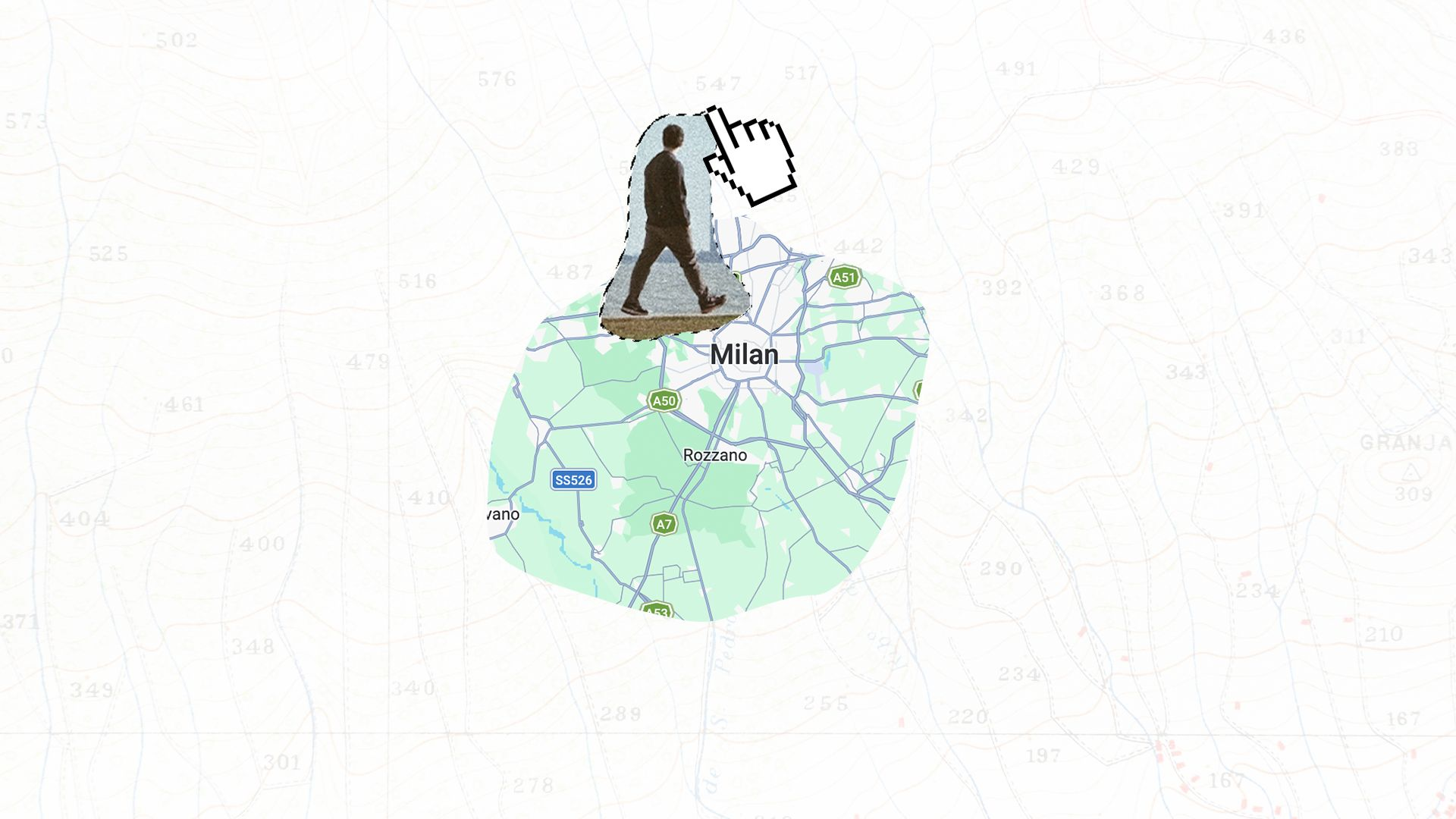
Byway

The world you skip

Travel has become disconnected

Flying drops us in a new location but means we skip places worthy of our attention. Instead of understanding their context, places start to feel commodified and isolated. New research has revealed that the way we travel impacts our geographical knowledge and cultural connection.

Photo by Amelia Le Brun





Flying and
bucket-list
travel is
harming our
understanding
of the world
without us
realising it

We overestimate our geographic knowledge

Perception ¹

70%

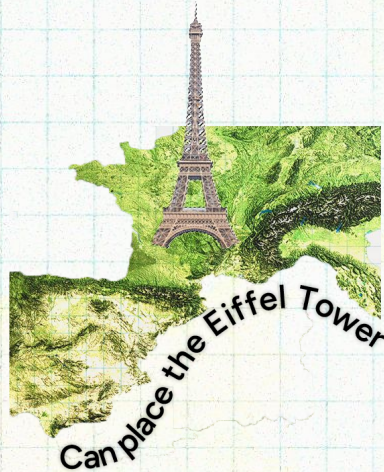
Of British adults say that they know Europe well geographically

Reality ²

36%

was their average score when surveyed for European literacy

We can't locate places outside of tourist spots ³



76% of adults correctly placed the Acropolis in Greece, **70%** correctly placed Bologna in Italy but only **9%** correctly identified the Ggantija Temples as being in Malta, only **16%** correctly placed Pena Palace in Portugal and just **18%** placed Skaftafell in Iceland. There are similar knowledge gaps among children: only **12%** could place Ljubljana.

We're out of touch with natural wonders

Adults

69%

Children

76%

were unable to correctly place
major European natural features ⁴





At the same time, more of us are craving the journey

62%

of British adults say the journey
itself is part of the holiday⁵

And journeys change our perception of the world



Rail travellers⁶ have a higher geographic literacy⁶

Frequent travellers were asked
whether they felt able to
correctly place specific
European countries on a map

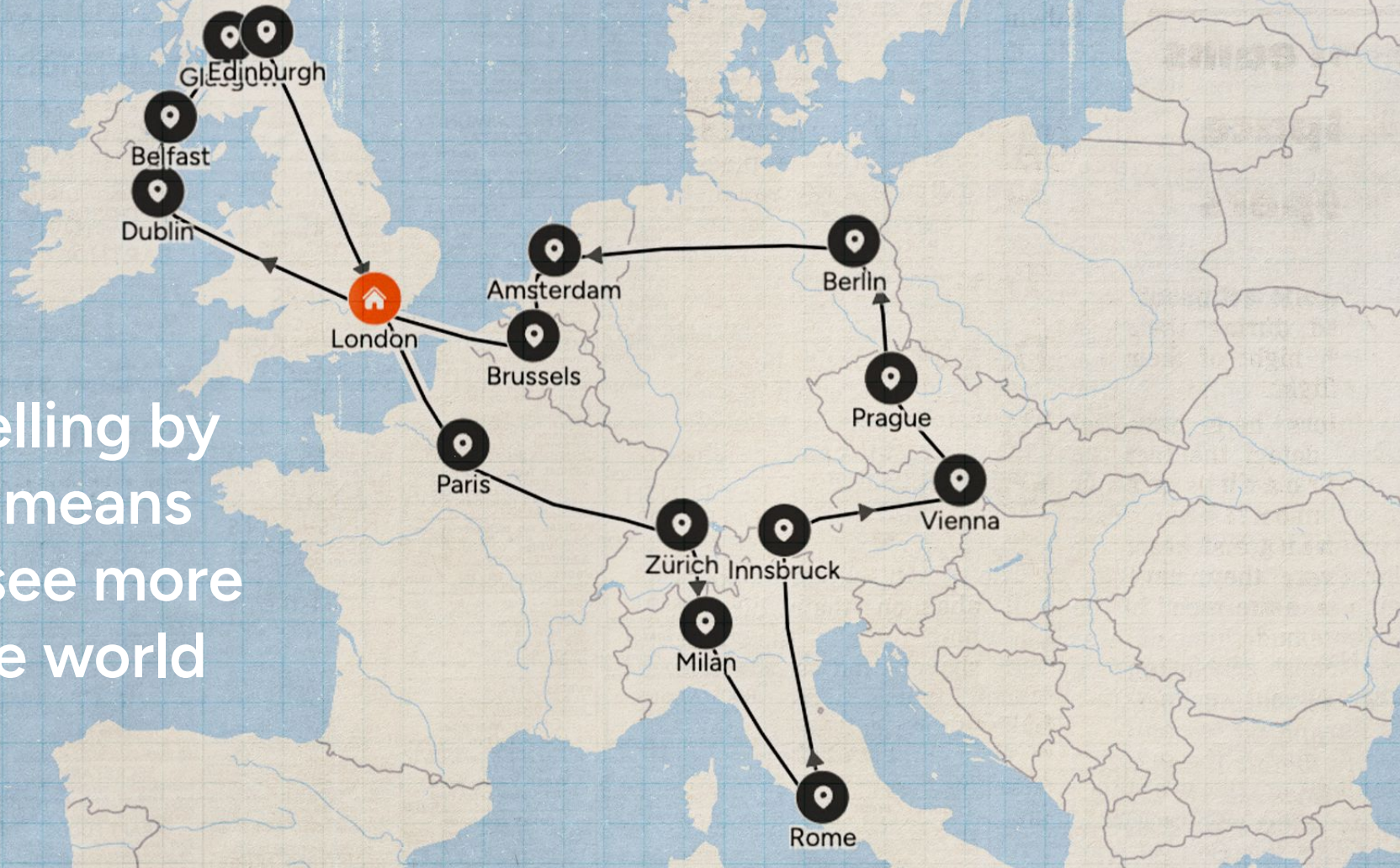
Flyers

39%

Rail travellers

53%

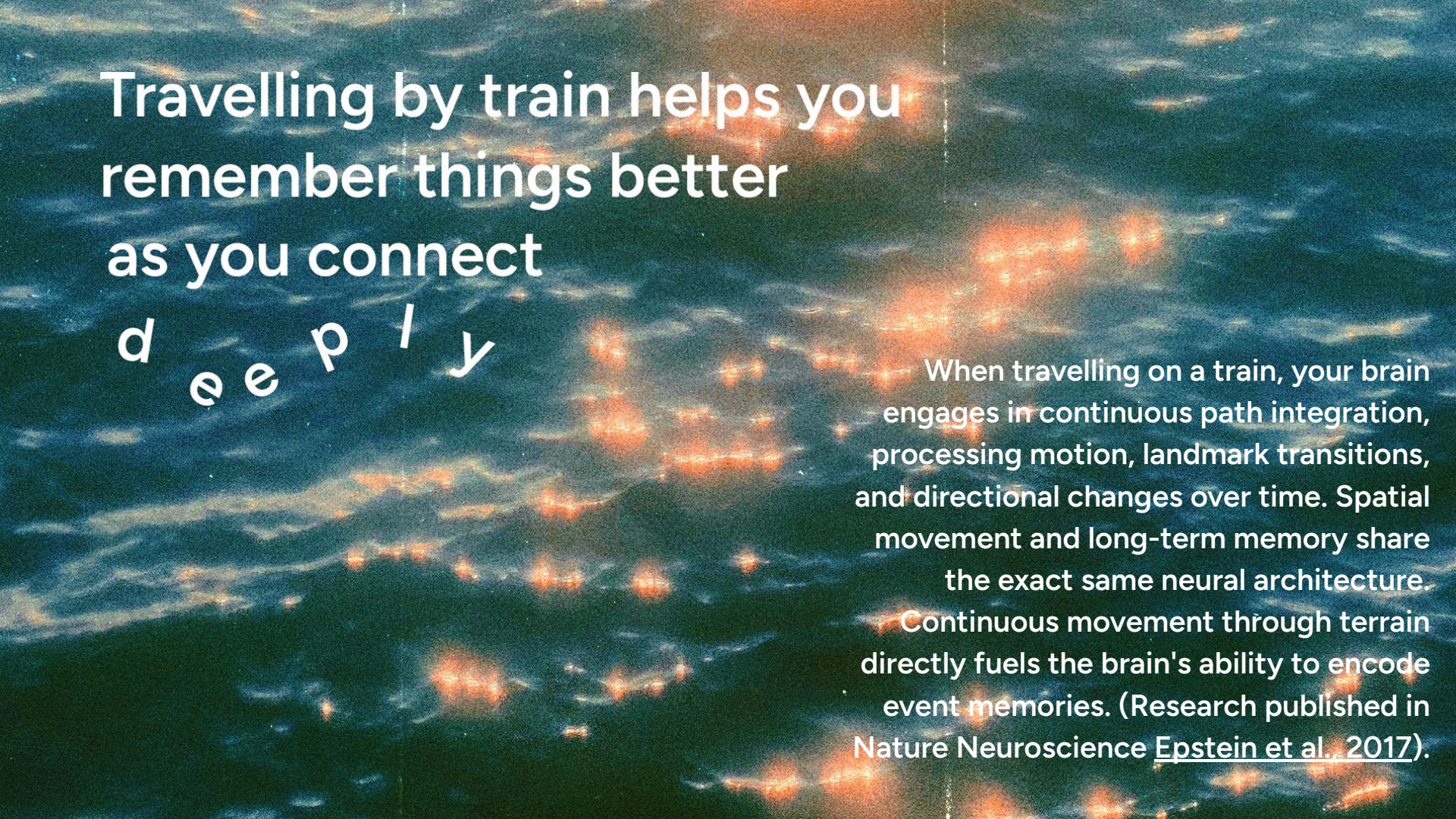
Travelling by
train means
you see more
of the world





"For sixteen years I've travelled the world by rail, watching the skies crack open at dawn, mountains rise and recede, and people flitting in and out of compartments like shadows. Trains open up the world in a way that no other transport can, carving up the land, igniting conversation, and making friends of strangers. As the climate crisis ravages our earth, trains can only be our future, now that we've learnt from the past."

**- Monisha Rajesh,
Author of Moonlight Express
and Around the World in 80 Trains**



Travelling by train helps you
remember things better
as you connect

d e e p l y

When travelling on a train, your brain engages in continuous path integration, processing motion, landmark transitions, and directional changes over time. Spatial movement and long-term memory share the exact same neural architecture. Continuous movement through terrain directly fuels the brain's ability to encode event memories. (Research published in Nature Neuroscience Epstein et al., 2017).



"Air travel creates a geographical fiction: it suggests that places are isolated points floating in a vacuum, rather than nodes in a continuous web of landscape, language, and culture."

- Off the Map, by Alastair Bonnett



Taking more flights does not hugely
increase your geographic literacy,
but taking more trains does ⁷

"There's a whole world you skip when you fly over it. By travelling through, not over, you can find the joy in the journey and make personal discoveries away from algorithms and trends, creating memories across a connected landscape"

- Cat Jones,
Founder and CEO of Byway



502

525

388

343

30

INJA

19

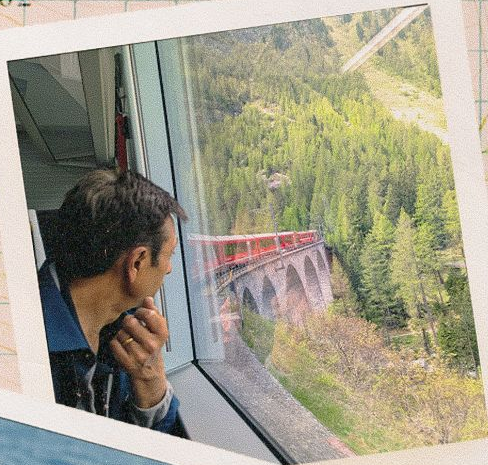
2

40

32

278

107



A scenic photograph of a mountain valley with a hiker on a trail, overlaid with a white abstract line drawing. The hiker is seen from behind, walking along a dirt path that winds through a lush green valley. The valley is filled with vibrant green grass and scattered yellow wildflowers. In the distance, steep, rocky mountain slopes rise up, partially covered in green vegetation. The sky is not visible, as the mountains fill the upper portion of the frame. A prominent white abstract line drawing, consisting of several thick, flowing, interconnected loops, is superimposed over the entire scene, framing the central image of the hiker and the valley. The lines are hand-drawn in style, with some visible texture and slight variations in thickness. The overall composition suggests a theme of exploration, nature, and reconnecting with the world.

It's time to travel in a way
that reconnects us to the
world around us and
enables us to discover the

**world we've
been skipping**

Photo by Amelia Le Brun

Methodology

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 GB children (aged 6 to 15). The survey's data analysis and interpretation, which forms the European Literacy Report, were conducted by the Byway team.

Methodology footnotes

- 1 YouGov Plc. surveyed by 2,063 adults on behalf of Byway and asked how well they felt they knew Europe geographically.
- 2 Respondents were asked if they could "definitely find" a list of six countries on a map of Europe.
- 3 Survey respondents were asked to name the countries where you'd find a selection of six cities, landmarks and natural attractions.
- 4 Participants were asked to write the country that they thought six major European natural features were in. These included the Black Forest, Picos de Europa and Giant's Causeway. Adults and children had slightly different lists to allow for age-related knowledge.
- 5 Adults were asked to pinpoint which statement "best describes you". This figure shows those that agreed "the journey is part of the holiday".
- 6 The average self-assessed correct responses from respondents with 4+ European trips on their ability to "definitely find" six major European cities on a map.
- 7 Among those who travel by train, 19% of respondents who had taken 1-3 train trips across Europe thought they could definitely locate Estonia vs. 12% for those that had taken 1-3 plane trips. At 8+ trips across both, this climbs to 33% (+14pp) for train and 21% (+9pp) for plane.