

David's guide to booking train tickets...

Here are a few tips that may help you find cheaper tickets for rail journeys in the UK.

NB: These are **not** hard-and-fast rules, and you should always **THINK** when applying them*.

1) Book early – 3-4 weeks (or more) in advance often means you can get a much better deal (but it's worth checking even a couple of days before you travel – some train companies offer advance tickets up until the day before).

2) Be flexible - if you can travel after 10am then tickets can be MUCH cheaper, and some companies seem to offer one train with advance tickets every couple of hours or so...

The screenshot shows the National Rail Enquiries website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links like 'Home', 'Train times & tickets', 'About your journey', 'Changes to train times', and 'Hotels'. Below this is a search bar and a 'Search' button. The main heading is 'Ticket availability & prices'. The search criteria are 'Outward' and 'Fri 02 Jul'. The route is 'Cambridge [CBG] to Shrewsbury [SHR]'. A 'View and buy' button is visible. The search results are displayed in a table under the heading 'Earlier trains'. A note indicates 'First Class fares are available from £132.00'. The table has columns for 'Leaving', 'From', 'To', 'Arriving', 'Duration', 'Changes', 'Details', and 'Single fares based on 1 adult'. The 11:15 train is circled in red, showing a fare of £15.00. Other trains shown include 10:26 (£74.80), 11:00 (£55.90), 11:45 (£74.80), and 12:00 (£55.90). A 'Later trains' section is also visible at the bottom of the results.

Leaving	From	To	Arriving	Duration	Changes	Details	Single fares based on 1 adult
10:26	Cambridge [CBG]	Shrewsbury [SHR]	14:38	4:12	3	Details	£74.80 Off-Peak More fares
11:00	Cambridge [CBG]	Shrewsbury [SHR]	15:15	4:15	1	Details	£55.90 Off-Peak More fares
11:15	Cambridge [CBG]	Shrewsbury [SHR]	15:19	4:04	3	Details	£15.00 Advance More fares
11:45	Cambridge [CBG]	Shrewsbury [SHR]	15:38	3:53	3	Details	£74.80 Off-Peak More fares
12:00	Cambridge [CBG]	Shrewsbury [SHR]	16:15	4:15	1	Details	£55.90 Off-Peak More fares

3) Shop around - some train company websites are better at showing you cheap tickets than others (and this varies between routes).

Some useful websites are:

<http://www.nationalrail.co.uk/>
<http://www.virgintrains.co.uk/>
<http://www.firstgreatwestern.co.uk/>

<http://www.crosscountrytrains.co.uk/>
<http://www.eastcoast.co.uk/>
<http://www.megabus.com> (not just for buses)

– and there are lots more.

(NB: you can buy tickets for any journey from any train operating company – you don't need to buy them from the company you will be travelling with).

4) Rail cards: If you have them, use them – they cost ~£26, save you 1/3 on most rail fares, and are valid for 12 months – you can find more information at <http://www.16-25railcard.co.uk/>.

In some cases, CHaOS may be willing to subsidise part of the cost of a rail card (generally where it will save us money!) – more information can be found in our travel guidelines, which are available at <http://www.srcf.ucam.org/chaos/policy>.

5) **Break your journey** - it can be cheaper to get two tickets for separate legs of your journey than one straight through.

e.g. Same journey...

National Rail Enquiries

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Ticket availability & prices

Outward **Mon 05 Jul** [Print](#) [Save journey](#)

Oxford [OXF] to Chelmsford [CHM] [View and buy](#)

Earlier trains **1st** > First Class fares are available from **£65.60**

Leaving	From	To	Arriving	Duration	Changes	Details	Single fares based on 1 adult	
11:31	Oxford [OXF]	Chelmsford [CHM]	14:01	2:30	2	Details	○ £33.40	Off-Peak More fares
12:01	Oxford [OXF]	Chelmsford [CHM]	14:42	2:41	2	Details	○ £33.40	Off-Peak More fares
12:07	Oxford [OXF]	Chelmsford [CHM]	14:50	2:43	3	Details	○ £33.40	Off-Peak More fares
12:31	Oxford [OXF]	Chelmsford [CHM]	15:01	2:30	2	Details	○ £33.40	Off-Peak More fares
12:43	Oxford [OXF]	Chelmsford [CHM]	15:23	2:40	3	Details	○ £33.40	Off-Peak More fares

Later trains

VS.

National Rail Enquiries

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Ticket availability & prices

Outward **Mon 05 Jul** [Print](#) [Save journey](#)

Oxford [OXF] to London Liverpool Street [LST] [View and buy](#)

Earlier trains **1st** > First Class fares are available from **£47.50**

Leaving	From	To	Arriving	Duration	Changes	Details	Single fares based on 1 adult	
11:31	Oxford [OXF]	London Liverpool Street [LST]	13:09	1:38	1	Details	○ £7.00	Advance More fares
11:43	Oxford [OXF]	London Liverpool Street [LST]	13:37	1:54	2	Details	○ £22.90	Off-Peak More fares
12:01	Oxford [OXF]	London Liverpool Street [LST]	13:40	1:39	1	Details	○ £7.00	Advance More fares
12:07	Oxford [OXF]	London Liverpool Street [LST]	13:54	1:47	2	Details	○ £9.50	Advance More fares
12:31	Oxford [OXF]	London Liverpool Street [LST]	14:09	1:38	1	Details	○ £7.00	Advance More fares

Later trains

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Outward **Mon 05 Jul** [Print](#) [Save journey](#)

London Liverpool Street [LST] to Chelmsford [CHM] [View and buy](#)

Earlier trains **1st** > First Class fares are available from **£19.50**

Leaving	From	To	Arriving	Duration	Changes	Details	Single fares based on 1 adult	
13:30	London Liverpool Street [LST]	Chelmsford [CHM]	14:01	0:31	0	Details	○ £12.20	Anytime More fares
13:38	London Liverpool Street [LST]	Chelmsford [CHM]	14:11	0:33	0	Details	○ £12.20	Anytime More fares
13:48	London Liverpool Street [LST]	Chelmsford [CHM]	14:23	0:35	0	Details	○ £12.20	Anytime More fares
14:08	London Liverpool Street [LST]	Chelmsford [CHM]	14:42	0:34	0	Details	○ £12.20	Anytime More fares
14:18	London Liverpool Street [LST]	Chelmsford [CHM]	14:50	0:32	0	Details	○ £12.20	Anytime More fares

Later trains

...different price.

BUT: make sure you can get a later train on the second leg, just in case the first train ends up running late – some companies argue that it is your responsibility to get to the station you are travelling from according to your ticket, and refuse to change a timed ticket (even if it's their fault you're running late). My approach is to try to get a cheap off peak or anytime ticket (which should be flexible, so you can get a later train if you need to, as in the example above), or failing that leave a lot of time for any changes [~1hr].

*This document is distributed in the hope that it will be useful, but WITHOUT ANY WARRANTY; without even the implied warranty of MERCHANTABILITY or FITNESS FOR A PARTICULAR PURPOSE. - ESSENTIALLY: THINK! :P