

editorial

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Night trains, we find, have a very special appeal. As we retired to our cabins for bed last evening, we caught a glimpse over a canal of a giant factory. Wolfsburg for sure! Lots of Volkswagens. And then, as we had our first coffee of the day just after dawn this morning, we were close to the Swiss border. Novelists, filmmakers and poets have all done their bit to romanticise the night train. We are inclined to agree with Agatha Christie, WH Auden and Martin Amis on the appeal of the night train.

Take TS Eliot's adventures with his feline dominatrix, Skimbleshanks: "There's a whisper down the line at 11.39, when the Night Mail's ready to depart." We'll pause there, because too much of Skimbleshanks and that incessant rhythmic metre of Eliot's poem will still be haunting you come Easter. Just as our minds still gently rock to the motion of *CityNightLine's* overnight service from Berlin to Zürich — even though we disembarked here in the city of gnomes some hours ago. There is something engaging, a subtle blend of the exotic and the sinister, in overnight train travel. And in this issue of *hidden europe* we explore some of Europe's most remarkable overnight trains.

The exotic and sinister pop up elsewhere in *hidden europe* 12, as we unravel the tale of a few streets in Potsdam in Germany. An elegant Potsdam suburb hides a curious past as a forbidden zone. It was a place where the KGB held sway.

We break new territory in this issue, making our first serious forays to the Low Countries, visiting *béguinages* in Belgium and *hofjes* in Holland. For the latter we are indebted to Richard Tulloch. He is a first time writer for *hidden europe*, as is Peter Wortsman, who contributes a fine piece on Piemonte food. We thank both Peter and Richard most warmly for writing for us.

With two new countries joining the European Union on 1 January, we cannot omit mention of Bulgaria and Romania. Both feature in this issue. Elsewhere you will find accounts of arrivals in Venice and Istanbul, a report from the Polish port of Frombork on the Baltic coast close by the Russian border, and the answer to a curious puzzle. Why is it that the Faroe Islands are shown on the map that is depicted on the reverse side of all euro banknotes, but Malta is not? As we leave you to ponder that conundrum, we wish you a very happy new year. С НОВЫМ ГОДОМ!

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EDITORS

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front cover: boats in Frombork Harbour

left (from top to bottom): Frombork Cathedral, Poland; Piemonte produce, Italy

(photo by Peter Wortsman); Russian Orthodox church in Potsdam, Germany

above right: Glienicke bridge, Germany (photo © Bernd Kröger)

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