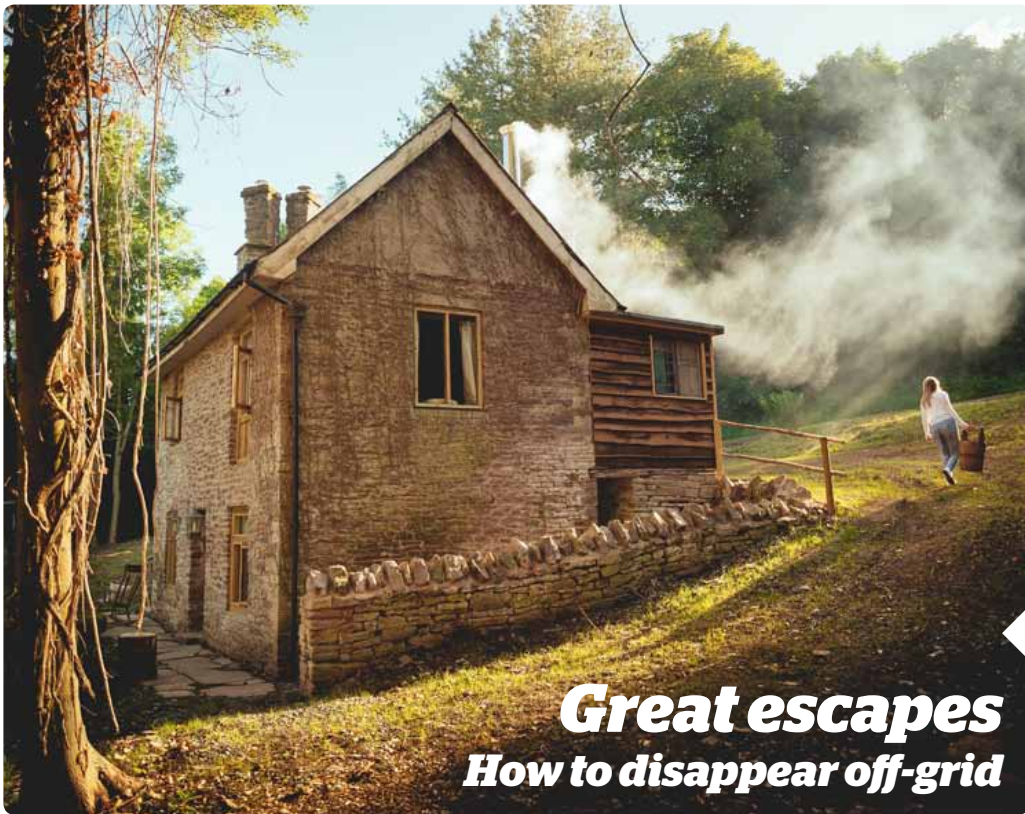


itravel

●● The train timetable farce was more absurd than a panto ●● **Simon Calder, p65**



Great escapes How to disappear off-grid

MOROCCO

Escape the bustle of Marrakech's teeming medina at the aptly named La Pause. A 45-minute drive from the Rose City, this stylish collection of five lodges overlooking the rocky landscape of the Agafay Desert shuns electricity and is illuminated only by candlelight and lanterns, making for a magical overnight desert experience. **Doubles from €150 (£135) full-board, lapause-marrakech.com**



ENGLAND

Log out of the digital world for a few days at out-of-the-way Mrs Higgs Lodge, deep in Herefordshire woodlands. It's almost 200 years old, but despite being off-grid it has been brought up-to-date with a log burner inside and a wood-fired hot tub outside. Wake up to the sound of birdsong rather than the trill of your smartphone, since signal is scant, and there is no charging point or Wi-Fi. **Three nights from £573 for up to four, qualityunearthed.co.uk**

INDIA

Pack your phone away for the duration of your stay at Jalakara, on Havelock Island in the remote Andaman and Nicobar archipelago. Mobile reception is non-existent here and the environmentally conscious hotel, which has just six rooms and one villa, has no Wi-Fi or TVs. That leaves more time for exploring the island's luxuriant vegetation and talcum powder-grade sands, or lounging by the infinity pool that gazes over the jungle. **Doubles from £195 B&B, jalakara.info**



SCOTLAND

The Bothy Project was conceived as a clutch of off-grid creative spaces for artists that hark back to the traditional shelters found all over the Scottish countryside. Simple but visually arresting, Sweeney's Bothy on the Isle of Eigg, and Inshriach Bothy in the Cairngorms National Park, are both available to rent for six months of the year, when the creatives are not in residence. **From £75/£85 per night, both sleep two, thebothyproject.org**



[More off-grid getaways >>](#)



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ITALY
You will be far from the fray at Pension Briol, 1,310m up in the Tyrol's Isarco Valley. Most people arrive on foot via a 60-minute trail from the closest village, Barbiano, or an off-road taxi ride. The Bauhaus-style guesthouse was built in 1929 by the artist Hubert Lanzinger and is still owned by the same family. This is back-to-basics living: no phones, Wi-Fi or intrusions from the modern world, just an icy pool, flower-filled meadows, whispering forests and majestic views of the Dolomites. **From €99 (£90) full-board, briol.it/en/hotel-valle-isarco.htm**



DENMARK
The guests for digital detox at Dragonhill Farm are required to hand over their devices on arrival. What follows at this off-grid, Wi-Fi-free farm just an hour outside of Copenhagen is a three-day break from the intrusions of modern life, with a mixture of meditation, yoga, silent walks through the countryside, massage, relaxation, cooking and inspirational talks. **The next retreat takes place from 4-7 October, from Dkr3,200 pp (£386), dragebjerg.com**



US
A stay at the Len Foote Hike Inn in the depths of the forest of north Georgia's Amicalola Falls State Park offers a complete disconnect. Close to the world's longest hiking route, the Appalachian Trail, the only way to get here is a five-mile hike from the park's visitor center. Mobile phones, laptops – indeed, any devices – are not welcome at this rustic solar-powered inn. Walk the paths through the forest, gaze out over the Appalachian Mountains and witness the unmissable sunrise, best viewed from an Adirondack chair on the deck. **Doubles from \$207 (£160) half-board, hike-inn.com, exploregeorgia.com**



ARGENTINA
Patagonia is one of the world's great wildernesses. Free yourself from modern life at the sprawling cattle ranch Estancia Huechuhue in an isolated setting at the foot of the Andes close to the border with Chile. There are eight bedrooms in the main house and two chalets. Fishing and riding are on offer in a majestic landscape. The ranch is virtually self-sufficient, with a water-generated power supply, and almost all of the food served comes from the farm. **One night from £350 full-board with activities, huechuhue.com**

SRI LANKA
High Tea Country is an enchanting scene of regimented terraces, lush vegetation, colonial bungalows and mountains cloaked by wispy fingers of mist. Madukelle Tea & Eco Lodges is a cluster of 18 canvas tents set high in the countryside about an hour-and-a-half outside Kandy. A colonial-style planter's bungalow forms the focus for activities. There are trips to Kandy and tea plantations, yoga and, if you really want to get lost in the wilderness (with expert guidance), overnights comprising safaris. **Three nights from £550pp B&B, yonderco.lk**



NAMIBIA
Digital liberation beckons on a self-drive holiday exploring the Damaraland, roughly the size of the UK and Germany put together. Mobile signal is almost non-existent outside of the main towns, and most lodges are off-grid. The solar-powered Etendeka Mountain Camp on the edge of the rocky Namib Desert is one of three lodges on this self-drive itinerary. The only glowing lights you'll see at nightfall are the stars twinkling above your head. **Seven nights from £1,750pp including flights, accommodation, car hire and some meals, aardwarkseafaris.co.uk**



IRELAND
Delphi Lodge's setting – by the brooding majesty of Fin Lough in the heart of Connemara National Park, in the shadow of the Mweelrea Mountains – plays a part in its feeling of otherworldliness. There is no mobile signal at the lodge, which has been taking in travellers since 1830. Hole up in one of its gracious, country-style guestrooms. There's no TV, so you'll have to look to the outdoors for entertainment. **Doubles from €180 (£163) B&B, delphilodge.ie**



Compiled by Aoife O'Riordain

SWEDEN
If you really want to get away from it all while being safe in the knowledge that a good meal and hot shower are a cycle ride away, there are two hermits' huts with no electricity or running water at Fabrikken Furillen. Set on the island of Gotland off eastern Sweden, the site is on a former limestone quarry. A disused concrete factory has been repurposed as a hotel and the huts are kitted out with Hästens beds and designer stoves. Hand over your mobile and have it locked in a box until you check out. **Five-nights from Skr5,555 (£475) B&B, furillen.com**

SIMON CALDER – THE MAN WHO PAYS HIS WAY

Rail bosses knew there would be a fiasco – but didn't care



So that you didn't have to, I spent Thursday reading the Glaister report into the summer timetable fiasco on Northern Rail and Thameslink. And the deeper I delved, the more dependent I became about Britain's railways.

The headline conclusion of the inquiry by Professor Stephen Glaister, chairman of the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) was that "nobody took charge", disrupting the lives of millions of commuters.

But closer inspection reveals a storyline absurd even by pantomime standards. Where's the next train to Luton? "Behind you!" For while hundreds of timetable trains were cancelled each day, extra services would sometimes appear – without waiting passengers being told. "Trains were run without prior notice, information about intermediate stations or [the] platform they would be going from," notes the report. Not surprisingly, many of these ghost trains ran half-empty.



Passengers enjoying their vertical commute on a Thameslink service this summer PA

Both GTR – the company that runs Thameslink – and the Transport Secretary, Chris Grayling, feigned shock that the schedules should unravel. Yet both parties knew weeks in advance that the new timetables would prove horrible for commuters. On 2 May, the train operator met Mr Grayling.

At this meeting, GTR stated that the scale of likely cancellations was 80 to 100 per day. "That will make life very difficult for tens of thousands of passengers every day, so surely we should warn them?", said absolutely nobody at that meeting.

At times of severe disruption, "mutual ticket acceptance" is frequently deployed to help the passenger. It means, for example, that if you have an LNER ticket from York to Newcastle but that train operator has problems on the day, you can travel on CrossCountry or TransPennine Express services instead.

Yet it was weeks before one component of GTR, Gatwick Express, agreed to

carry stranded passengers between Brighton and London for another component of GTR, Thameslink. The ORR calls this delay "unhelpful".

Were you left standing on the platform at Brighton or forced to pay a penalty fare for catching the wrong kind of GTR train, you might choose a different adjective.

But please don't blame the poor bloody infantry who work on the railway. The one positive aspect of the Glaister report is how well the staff performed – even though they were kept as much in the dark as the passengers.

One railway worker said: "People were coming up literally crying because trains had been that delayed, they were going to be late at work, they were going to get the sack." Passengers certainly didn't deserve to lose their jobs. I'm not so sure about the rail bosses and the Transport Secretary. **THE INDEPENDENT**

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