Many visitors to the NAC travel by train and often express their concern over the cost of tickets. There are some ways that you can reduce costs, simply and quickly.

Does it work?
I travel to the NAC about 8 times a year and I have had a railcard for 4 years. In that time I have saved hundreds of pounds in rail fares, some for leisure as well as medical journeys. On one memorable day I travelled first class to Euston and ate a full breakfast all for £12. I had bought the ticket early splitting the journey.

Summary
- Buy Advance tickets if you can
- Buy early when tickets are cheaper
- Do your sums and work out if a railcard is going to save you money
- Use a train operator's website to buy tickets (they don't charge a fee)
- Print your own tickets or collect them at a ticket machine at a station
- Split your journey
- Use a slower route if practical
- What types of tickets are there?

Basically there are three ticket types:

1. **Anytime**

   Anytime fares are simple. They are valid any time, on any day of the week, on all trains, operated by any train company. They are also expensive. For example, a ticket from London-Manchester costs over £180 one-way or over £360 return.

2. **Off Peak**

   Off Peak fares are valid on any train except in the Monday-Friday peaks times (06:30-09:30 and 15:30-18:30). They are much cheaper.

   The timing of peak hours varies so you should check using one of the many journey planners that are available (more on this later).

   A few companies might still offer “Super Off Peak” tickets (these were known as Super Savers). They have the same restrictions.

   **If you buy a ticket at the station you will probably be sold either an Anytime or an Off Peak ticket.**

   In the case of Anytime and Off Peak tickets you can get a refund if the ticket is not used, but an administration fee of around £20 will be charged.
3. Advance

Advance fares are only valid on the specific train you've booked, no refunds are available. They are the cheapest option. For example, London-Manchester from £15 each way.

Numbers of tickets are limited and the price increases as the departure date gets nearer. They must be booked before 18:00 on the day prior to travel. Tickets have an automatic seat reservation. No break in the journey is allowed and you cannot leave the train before the final destination is reached. If you do you can be charged the full fare!

Advance tickets are always one way so you can pick and mix out-bound and return ticket options to get the best deal.

Railcards

These might help if you travel regularly since having a railcard will give you a 34% discount on ticket prices.

There are a number of types of railcard:

- **16-25 Railcards** are for anyone aged 16-25 and a full time student. They can be bought on line at www.16-26railcard.co.uk. There are some restrictions on times of use.

- **Senior Railcards** are for anyone over 60. Buy online at www.senior-railcard.co.uk, and get 34% off almost all rail fares. The only restriction is that you can't use the card for journeys in London morning rush hour on Mondays-Fridays.

- **Family & Friends Railcards** are for small groups of up to 4 adults and 4 children. You don't need to be related, as long as the party includes at least one child and all travel together. The card gives 34% off all adult fares in the group and 60% off all child fares in the group. They can be bought online at www.family-railcard.co.uk.

- **Disabled Person's Railcard.** You will need to look at the conditions at www.disabledpersons-railcard.co.uk to see if you qualify. Anyone in a wheelchair or registered blind automatically qualifies for a 34% reduction on Anytime fares (the expensive peak fares) even without a railcard, and so does one companion. This isn't widely advertised! See www.nationalrail.co.uk/stations destinations/44965.aspx.

- **Two Together Railcard.** This gives 1/3 off most Advance, Off Peak & Anytime fares nationwide, standard class & first class, if two named individuals travel together. The named individuals must have their photos on the railcard, and be over 16. You do not need to be related. These can be bought at www.twotogether-railcard.co.uk.

Railcards can take up to 2 weeks to be delivered so you will need to buy them well in advance.

**What does a railcard cost?** A railcard costs £30 and it can soon pay for itself. There are also 3 year railcards available for £70.

**So how do I get the cheapest ticket?**

Understanding the types of ticket, and having a railcard (if you qualify and travel enough to recover the cost) will obviously help, but there are other things that can be done:

- **Book early!** The earlier you book the more likely you are to find a cheap fare. Some companies charge a fee but Virgin Trains do not charge and they will sell you tickets for any route in Britain online at www.virgintrains.co.uk. The Trainline (www.trainline.com) is an alternative but fees are charged. Online buying is the easiest and simplest. Print your tickets at home or collect them from a ticket machine rather than paying postage to have them delivered.
• You can buy Advance fares up to 12 weeks ahead, though this might be reduced to 9 weeks.
This will almost certainly give you significant savings but the on line tools don't normally give you other options.

Are there cheaper routes?
Journey planners find the fastest route and the cheapest fare for that route. Sometimes there is a slower route run by another train company with cheaper fares. For example, the journey from The Midlands using Chiltern Railways to Marylebone can cost half of the mainline fare offered by Virgin (when I worked in London I often used this rather than the mainline as the journey was much more pleasant and I was able to park at a local station). To check what might be available run a normal search on www.virgintrains.co.uk, and note the prices. At the bottom of the search you will see:

“The results above show single ticket prices, based on the fastest available journey, to offer more flexibility to our customers. If you are making a return journey, there may be a cheaper fare available, particularly if you are travelling with a train operator other than Virgin Trains. Please click here to check if these are available for your journey.”

This will usually show other fares, starting with the cheapest. Click the button against each price, to see what is on offer, working your way down the list.

Split the journey
Two tickets covering different sections of the journey can be cheaper than one if you use the site www.raileasy.com and select 'split ticketing' at the top. Buying a ticket from Station A to Station B and a second from Station B to Station C is often cheaper than a ticket from A to C. As long as the train stops at 'B', you're entitled to use a combination of tickets. It's perfectly legal and there is absolutely no need to get off the train. In testing savings of 9%-10% can be found on routes for Off Peak tickets. In some cases savings can be larger. Raileasy charges a fee for bookings they make, but you could buy the tickets from Virgin or another train operator to avoid fees.

Beware! There are many cases where it's cheaper to buy a ticket from Station A to Station C and you might try to get off in the middle of the journey at Station B. Legally you cannot break your journey with an Advance fare, or an Off Peak return. If you do this you could be made to pay the full fare!