BOOKING A TRAIN TICKET

M1: Next!

M2: Yes, I've got to go to Sunderland next Tuesday, and I'm wondering what the best and cheapest way of getting there is.

M1: Is that single or return?

M2: Return. I'd want to go reasonably early on the Tuesday and come back early evening on the Friday.

M1: I see. Er, well, there's the East Coast Express. That goes to Sunderland every hour, quarter hour, or half hour. But you have to go to Newcastle first and then change to the metro – that's the local rail service – to get back to Sunderland.

M2: Uh huh.

M1: The cost of a return on those dates would be ... (*typing*) ah, £301 – not including the metro fare. That's for a regular off-peak return.

M2: Three hundred pounds! For one ticket?

M1: For one *person*. Yes, sir. Standard class.

M2: Good lord! Is there nothing cheaper?

M1: Well, er, there's a separate Eastern Arrow service. That's run by a different company. That also goes from London King's Cross but the trains are not so frequent. It does go direct to Sunderland, though, and that costs, er, ... (*typing*) let's see, er, ... oh, £117 for a super off-peak return. That means you have to travel before 7am, or after 7 in the evening. Or you could go for an anytime off-peak train returning within one month, and that would cost you ... (*typing*) er, ... ah – £129.

M2: But that means I can go direct to Sunderland for £129, or go via Newcastle, which I don't want to do, and pay £300 for the extra inconvenience!

M1: That's about right, sir. Confusing, isn't it?

M2: You're telling me! So, what restrictions are there on this anytime off-peak return ticket? Do I have to leave after 10 in the evening or something?

M1: Er ... (*typing*) er ... no, sir! On the Tuesday, you can leave at 8:15, 9:25, 10:05, ...

M2: Nine twenty-five sounds perfect.

M1: And the open return is for any time at all within the next calendar month.

M2: For £129?

M1: Yep.

M2: I see! How long does it take?

M1: They're all around 3 hours 45 or 4 hours, sir, give or take a quarter of an hour.

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Contributed by

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