

# LUXURY ON WHEELS

Here are five train journeys that pamper you so much, you will not want to disembark. **BY TAN KENG YAO**

A TRAIN ride can be a thrill for the experience of stunning scenery that rolls past your window. But sometimes, it all goes beyond that. It can also be about the unparalleled service and luxuries that present themselves on the journey. Here are some of the world's best luxury train rides that bring to life the romance of the rails.

## Eastern & Oriental Express, Singapore to Thailand

SEE Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand in a different way, through the picture windows of the Eastern & Oriental Express.

This train, which plies a route between Singapore and Bangkok, rolls past rural landscapes, bustling cities and gleaming pagodas. If you're feeling social, you can hang out in the colonial-style, teak-wood Observation Car in the end carriage for sight-seeing by day or a cocktail or two at night.

If not, retreat to your private cabin, which is equipped with a banquette-style sofa that converts into a plush bed come sundown.

The train makes stops for excursions and, depending on which itinerary you opt for, you could be exploring Cameron Highlands tea plantations, going on a cruise after disembarking at the River Kwai Bridge station, or enjoying a seafood lunch barbecue on Hat Wanakon Beach in Thailand. All done in style, of course.

For more info, visit: [www.belmond.com/eastern-and-oriental-express](http://www.belmond.com/eastern-and-oriental-express)

## Blue Train, South Africa

NELSON Mandela, Naomi Campbell and Margaret Thatcher have been guests on the Blue Train, among



Above: The Ghan runs 2,979km from Adelaide to Darwin. Right: Expect nothing less than the full royal treatment at Maharajas' Express. Below: Eastern & Oriental Express stops for excursions, including a cruise after passengers disembark at the River Kwai Bridge station.



PHOTO: MAHARAJAS' EXPRESS



Menus are regularly updated to reflect seasonal ingredients, from Karoo lamb to ostrich and venison to other award-winning Cape cultivars.

And when the sun sets, rinse the dust of the day off yourself in your marble and gold en suite bathroom while your armchair gets converted into a plush bed with goose down duvets and pillows for you to rest your head on. But of course, only luxuries fit for a king.

For more info, visit: [www.bluetrain.co.za](http://www.bluetrain.co.za)

## Seven Stars, Kyushu, Japan

THE Japanese know a thing or two about hospitality.

And a journey on this deluxe cruise train that trundles around Kyushu will allow you to experience what they call *omotenashi*, or service elevated to an art.

When the train service was launched in 2013, for example, its service staff had already undergone a pre-launch training lasting one year.

The suites in the train have been furnished by artisans in a fusion of Western and Japanese aesthetics such as handcrafted woodwork, shoji paper screens, bamboo blinds and showers lined with aromatic hinoki cypress wood.

And most people would agree that the view from Deluxe Suite A at the end car is unparalleled; its panoramic back window allows the scenic highlights of Kyushu, such as Mt Aso, one of the world's largest volcanoes, to be seen in its full glory.

Meals in the train, of course, feature seasonal Kyushu delicacies, and off-train excursions could include trips such as a visit to the town of Arita, famous for its pottery, and walks around the town of YuFuin.

The train has only 14 suites for 14 couples, so make sure you get your tickets early.

For more info, visit: [www.cruisetrain-sevenstars.jp/en](http://www.cruisetrain-sevenstars.jp/en)

## Maharajas' Express, India

FOR a train named after Indian monarchs, you expect nothing less than the full royal treatment. And that is what you get, starting with a choice of cabins that run from the deluxe to the presidential suite, which takes up an entire carriage and comes with two bedrooms, a living and dining room and an attached bathroom with bath tub. Personal butlers attend to your every need while meals can be had in its two restaurants which serve culinary masterpieces in multiple cuisines. For a post-prandial tippie, head for the Safari Bar, which serves drinks in hand-cut crystal glasses.

There are several itineraries to choose from but for the ultimate journey, go for the seven-night-eight-day Heritage of India Tour which plies a route from Mumbai to Delhi, visiting national highlights such as the medieval caves of Ajanta, Ranthambore National Park and the majestic Taj Mahal.

For more info, visit: [www.maharajas-express-india.com](http://www.maharajas-express-india.com)

## The Ghan, Australia

GREAT Southern Rail's The Ghan runs 2,979km from Adelaide in the south of Australia to Darwin in the north, passing by Alice Springs, and taking passengers past a spectacular landscape that segues from pastoral lands to dry red desert to tropical greenery. Shorter itineraries are available too.

On the journey, the train makes stops along the way for excursions which could include a Nitmiluk Gorge boat cruise or optional upgrades of a helicopter flight over Alice Springs.

For your ride, go for the platinum service cabins, which offer not only a spacious private compartment but also additional luxuries such as breakfast in bed. All inclusive in your fare, of course.

For more info, visit: [www.greatsouthernrail.com.au/trains/the-ghan](http://www.greatsouthernrail.com.au/trains/the-ghan)



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