

The scenery from the outdoor viewing platform on the Rocky Mountaineer.



ROCKY MOUNTAINEER

BY BARBARA SCHULER  
Special to Newsday

**T**hese days, a journey on the Orient Express, made famous by the renowned Agatha Christie novel, involves minimal mayhem and maximum luxury — think flowing champagne, rich décor and fine dining.

It's the kind of luxury experience travelers expect on one of the world's most iconic train trips. "We were on top of the world . . . it was very elegant," said Jo Ann Katz, who traveled with her husband, Stanley, from Venice to Paris in the early '80s to celebrate her birthday. "It was a once-in-a-lifetime trip," said the North-

## ALL ABOARD! For luxe train excursions

What to know and where to go in Europe, North America

port resident, remembering that the train had just been restored. "They asked us to wear period clothing," she said, so she found a chic suit with a '40s flair. (Today, dinner on the train is a black-tie affair, don't even think about jeans.)

Since 1883, the train has been recognized as a symbol of

all-out luxury in travel. Now officially known as the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express, the train has several routes between the two European cities, along with a variety of one- to five-night trips throughout the continent.

Luxury train rides are bucket list trips for many travelers,

and there's no shortage of journeys to choose from. While this kind of travel has been popular since the 1800s, there's been a renaissance lately, said Eleanor Hardy, president of The Society of International Railway Travelers, an agency in Louisville, Kentucky. Lavishly appointed

trains will take you, well, just about anywhere. An eight-day trip on the Deccan Odyssey in India takes you to New Delhi to shop the bazaars and Agra for the Taj Mahal; in Africa, 12 days on the Rovos Rail Pride of Africa offers a safari in Kruger National Park as well as historic tours of Durban and Knysna.

Several new trains are on the horizon, Hardy said. Belmond, owners of the Venice Simplon, are about to launch the Britannic Explorer, the first luxury sleeper train in England, and an Italian conglomerate just introduced La Dolce Vita Orient Express, a new high-end train that

See TRAIN TRIPS on C14



# All aboard for adventure

## TRAIN TRIPS from C13

travels eight itineraries throughout Italy. In 2026, Golden Eagle's new train the Silk Road Express will offer various journeys in the Far East.

Closer to home, the Rocky Mountaineer offers several trips in western Canada and recently started running from Moab, Utah, to Denver. "Our guests are seeking culturally enriching experiences and soft adventures that allow them to explore new destinations at their own pace," wrote communications manager Dallas Carlson in an email. The train's most popular route, said Carlson, is a two-day trip from Vancouver to Banff. Unlike other high-end trains, no one sleeps on the Rocky Mountaineer. The train travels only during the day so guests don't miss any of the scenery, instead checking into a hotel for the night. "Our guests enjoy it," said Carlson. "It gives them an opportunity to stay in a local community on their journey."

Betty Sprauer, of Northport, did a day trip from Vancouver to Whistler on the Rocky Mountaineer a few years back (it's no longer offered). "You're very comfortable," said Sprauer, "and it's unique. You're seeing scenery you can't see from the road." Breakfast was served on the train, she said, as the train passed waterfalls and rivers with massive floating logs. Travelers had a couple of hours to explore Whistler and have lunch before making the return trip. Sprauer said she loves short train trips. "I'll do them any time I get the chance."

Newcomers to this kind of travel shouldn't start with a 17-day continent-spanning trip, said Rachel Hardy, vice president of The Society of International Railway Travelers. She suggests starting with an overnight journey on a train like the Venice Simplon to get a feel for it, pointing out that because these trains have limited occupancy, it's important to reserve a year or more in advance.

Train travel offers five-star service, gourmet dining and unique sightseeing, said Eleanor Hardy. "But there's also a sense of community, she said. "You get to know your fellow



LUDOVIC BALAY

The observation car lounge on the British Pullman. Trains leave from London to a variety of destinations.



THE SOCIETY OF INTERNATIONAL RAILWAY TRAVELERS

Staff of the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express in Innsbruck, Austria.

travelers." And it's a gentler way to travel, she added. "It's a chance to slow things down and be with your own thoughts."

Intrigued? Here is a sampling of offerings on luxury trains worldwide.

### VENICE SIMPLON-ORIENT-EXPRESS

You will be treated like royalty on this iconic train

(and you'll need the royal coffers to pay for it). Meals are served in an elegantly appointed dining car; there's also a bar car that offers evening entertainment. Even the most basic compartments, which can be tiny, offer opulent furnishings, though you will have upper and lower bunks and need to share a bathroom; the top suites have double beds, separate bath



THE SOCIETY OF INTERNATIONAL RAILWAY TRAVELERS

The Rovos Rail Pride of Africa offers safaris and historic tours.

sitting rooms and butler service. Note that the ride can get bumpy at times. Jo Ann Katz said she got little sleep the night she spent on the train.

The train offers a variety of one- to three-night trips all over Europe (Paris to Florence, Geneva to Venice, Paris to Budapest) the longest journey is a five-night trip from Paris to Istanbul.

Trip suggestion: The overnight journey between Venice and Paris is probably the most popular itinerary. Leaving from Paris in the afternoon, there's time to relax in your cabin before heading to the dining car — remember, it's formal attire. The next day, breakfast is served by your steward in your room, for lunch it's back to the dining car. Prices start





ROCKY MOUNTAINEER

Guests enjoy the scenery from GoldLeaf dome on the Rocky Mountaineer.

at just over \$5,000 a person (belmond.com).

#### ROCKY MOUNTAINEER

Travel is decidedly less formal on this train, with a variety of routes in western Canada and several others in the American Southwest (stopping in places like Moab, Salt Lake City and Denver). You can book a one-way journey, say Vancouver to Jasper, which allows time for exploring the region on your own. Or you can reserve a circle trip — the 13-day Grand Adventure Circle goes from Vancouver with stops including Jasper, Lake Louise and Banff before returning to Vancouver.

The Rocky Mountaineer offers two levels of service: SilverLeaf passengers ride in glass-domed coaches, with meals and beverages offered in your seats. The more luxurious GoldLeaf service has bi-level glass coaches, with meals offered at tables on the lower level, which also has an outdoor viewing platform. Reminder: This is not a sleeper train. Overnight hotels are included in the fare and are booked depending on the class of service.

Trip suggestion: The most popular trip is the two-day First Passage to the West from Vancouver to Banff, with an overnight in Kamloops, a charming town in British Columbia known for its arts scene. (Several optional excursions are offered at additional cost.) The trip crosses the Continental Divide, with expansive views of the rivers and mountains along the way. Prices start at about \$2,000 a person (rockymountaineer.com).

#### LA DOLCE VITA ORIENT EXPRESS

This shiny, new train just started running in April, and early guests (Eleanor Hardy among them) say it exceeds expectations. "It's gorgeous," she said. "The interiors are very slick," she said, with colors (lots of terra cotta) that reflect the Italian countryside. Itineraries showcase the scenery of the country, said Hardy, who took a two-night round trip from Rome, stopping in Palermo. Other trips highlight the vine-

yards in Tuscany or the sights of Sicily or Portofino. The train has 12 deluxe cabins and 18 suites with a separate sitting area; all have private bathrooms.

Chef Heinz Beck (three Michelin stars) developed the menus for the dining car, focusing on the regions visited — yes, there will be truffles. There's also a bar car with evening entertainment. During the day, a curated selection of excursions lets passengers explore sights like the ancient cave dwellings of Matera or the Greek theater in Taormina. A highlight of the Rome-to-Sicily journey is watching the train get loaded onto a ferry to cross the Strait of Messina.

Trip suggestion: Tastes of Tuscany Vineyards is a one-night journey, starting and ending in Rome. In Montalcino, passengers can explore the town or visit a local winery for a Brunello tasting. Prices start at about \$5,500 a person (orient-express.com).

#### BRITISH PULLMAN

A day trip on the British Pullman, another Belmond train, is slightly easier on the budget. Restored to their art deco splendor, trains leave from London to a variety of destinations. During the journey to the quaint town of Bath, you can explore the Roman baths or visit a museum devoted to Jane Austen and Mary Shelley. Or travel to Blenheim Palace, a World Heritage site that is the birthplace of Winston Churchill. There's even a trip to nowhere, as a troupe of actors perform a murder mystery along the way (just can't escape Agatha Christie). Depending on the trip, a light breakfast is usually served, followed by a multi-course brunch or lunch. Some journeys include dinner on the return trip.

Trip suggestion: Historic Oxford takes travelers to the famed school, where students included everyone from Oscar Wilde to Stephen Hawking. Other places to explore include a botanic garden, and a market offering food and crafts. A trip in November starts at about \$750 a person (belmond.com).

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