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10 great, epic train journeys

From coast-to-coast mega journeys to short hops across a country, here are 10 of the best train journeys in the world

By Fiona Harper 13 June, 2011

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For most of us, a train journey means a sleepy-eyed commute to work. For trainiacs, they're another notch in the little black book.

But for a lucky few, a rail journey is an expedition through cultures and across lands, providing an experience that's equaled by no other means of transport.

Here are 10 of the best.

1. Eastern and Oriental Express

Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore





Champagne, music, velvet couch -- wouldn't you be laughing too?

Sure, you could fly between Bangkok and Singapore in a couple of hours, but you'd miss this Agatha Christie-like journey with an Oriental twist through the heart of the Malay Peninsular.

Sister train to Europe's Venice Simplon Orient Express, an open-air observation car allows heady aromas of the Orient to waft onboard. Accompanied by the tinkle of ivory, the Piano Bar is the social hub where tall Singapore Slings garnished with fresh fruit are de rigueur.

Upper and lower berths and en suite bathrooms complete the picture in three cabin configurations: Pullman, State and Presidential cabins.

Boarding: Singapore or Bangkok.

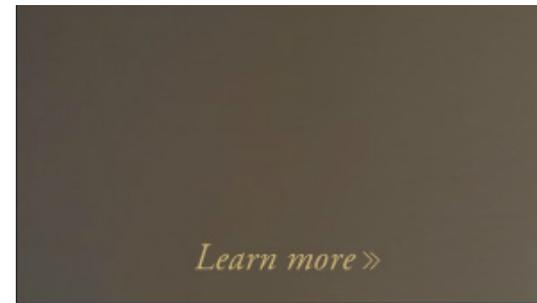
Cost: Pullman Cabin US\$3,070; Presidential Suite US\$6,130.

www.orient-express.com

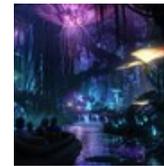
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2. Hiram Bingham

Peru



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Hacking your way through jungle with a machete is so 1880s.

Hiram Bingham was an American historian credited with bringing the ancient Inca site of Machu Pichu to world attention.

Ascending almost 2,500 meters above sea level to the ancient Peruvian ruins, the train that bears his name is one of the shortest luxury trains in the world. Heavily geared towards gastronomy during the four hours it takes to climb heavenwards through the spectacular Andes mountains, this is the easy way to tackle the Inca Trail.

Don't forget to take your party frock for the cocktail party on the return evening journey.

Boarding: Poroy or Machu Pichu.

Cost: US\$588 round-trip.

www.orient-express.com

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3. Southern Spirit

Australia



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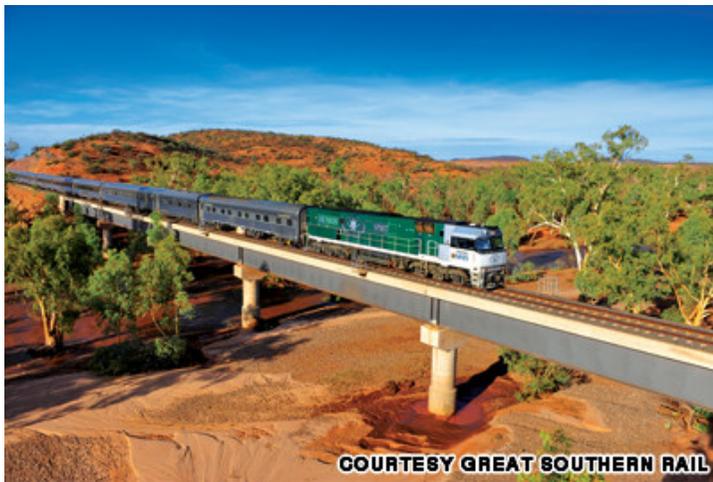
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Possibly the best way to see southern Australia.

With just a handful of journeys scheduled each summer, The Southern Spirit traverses four states through southeastern Australia's outback.

More a rail cruise than a point-to-point journey, daily whistle-stop tours set the schedule, allowing passengers to explore regional Australia. Highlights include Byron Bay, the Hunter Valley vineyards along with free-range Taronga Western Plains Zoo at Dubbo.

Luxuriously styled, guests need only decide the level of elegance required, in either Gold or Platinum Class cabins. Private carriages also available for charter.

Boarding: Adelaide or Brisbane.

Cost: Depends on route, but an example: US\$4,455 for Gold Class Adelaide-Brisbane.

www.thesouthernspirit.com.au

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4. Venice Simplon Orient-Express

Europe



World's greatest economy class?

Recommended by 



Why read Agatha Christie when you can live it?

Wood burning stoves and etched glass panels onboard evoke a time of Parisian art deco sophistication from the Roaring 1920s.

No shrinking violet, once author Agatha Christie's detective Hercule Poirot stepped aboard through her pages, the Orient Express' fame was assured. Shared bathroom facilities take the gloss off an otherwise glamorous train whose inaugural journey deposited travelers in what was once Europe's wealthiest city, known then as Constantinople.

Today, Istanbul is one of many destinations on varied elegant itineraries throughout Europe.

Boarding: Various cities throughout Europe.

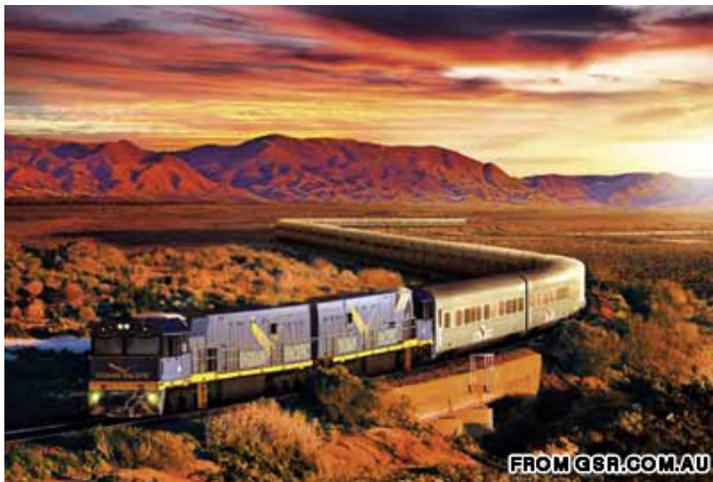
Cost: Varies. Between US\$1,230 (one night, Paris-London) and US\$12,070 (five nights, Paris-Istanbul).

www.orient-express.com

Also on CNNGo: [Tokyo finally gets a high-speed airport train](#)

5. Indian Pacific

Australia



Priceless views for discounted prices.

From coast to coast across some of Australia's most remote and uninhabited countryside, the Indian Pacific is named after the two oceans bookending the journey.

One of the few great train journeys catering to all budgets, comfort level varies according to the depth of your pockets, from airline-type seats (though with significantly more leg and shoulder room) through to sumptuous Gold cabins. Kangaroo-spotting trackside at dawn and dusk followed by blazing burnt orange sunsets keep passengers entertained over almost 4,500 kilometers of virtually non-stop travel.

Boarding: Sydney or Perth.

Cost: Daynighter Seat US\$810; Gold Service Cabin US\$2,240 (YHA discounts available).

www.gsr.com.au

Also on CNNGo: [8 spectacular driving adventures](#)

6. The Canadian

Canada



Awesome views and polite wildlife.

With such civilized amenities as free onboard Wi-Fi, VIA Rail knows how to entertain its customers when they tire of the dramatic landscape outside.

Over the Rocky Mountains, down onto the prairies and into water sodden lakes district over four days, The Canadian offers wild landscapes and wildlife aplenty. Keep an eye out through double glazed windows for bears and beavers trackside.

Economy Seating and Sleeper Touring Berths or Cabins all have shared shower facilities, with Sleeper Cabins the only option if you don't want to share a toilet too.

Boarding: Vancouver or Toronto.

Cost: Economy Seating US\$830; Sleeper Berth US\$1,435; Sleeper Cabin US\$2,160.

www.viarail.ca

Also on CNNGo: [The 5 people you meet in hell/an overnight train](#)

7. Trans-Siberian Railway

Russia



Mucky, rusty and unforgettable.

The Big Kahuna of rail journeys for the sheer scale of distance traveled, it's possible to do the entire route -- some 9,000 kilometers -- between the Pacific Ocean and St. Petersburg in around 10 days.

Though why would you rush it when journeying through far-flung Russia? Winter travelers would do well to watch the original "Doctor Zhivago" movie (with Omar Sharif) before departure, as this service travels through much of the majestic landscape depicted in the movie. Disembark for a few days to explore the Russian Arctic, the Silk Road or Moscow.

This journey is all about the experience rather than the elegance, so leave the dinner suit at home.

Boarding: Moscow or Vladivostok.

Cost: 1st Class two-berth US\$1720; 2nd Class US\$875; 3rd Class US\$405

www.realrussia.co.uk

Also on CNNGo: [Police crack down on Tokyo train gropers](#)

8. Glacier Express

Switzerland



The only 'express' journey you'll wish lasted forever.

Somewhat mis-named given that it takes up to eight hours to travel 270 kilometers, it's rather convenient that the Glacier Express takes so long, as the Alpine scenery is breathtaking.

Some 291 bridges are slung across gorges and valleys between towering mountains. Throw in almost 100 tunnels and you've got a jaw dropping journey between some of Switzerland's uber luxe health resorts.

Ascending a heady 2,033 meters above sea level, the peak of the mighty Matterhorn competes with other such mammoth mountains that rise over 4,000 meters. Cinderella-type glass roofed carriages help prevent neck strain from all that landscape ogling.

Boarding: Zermatt or St Moritz (Switzerland).

Cost: First Class US\$230; Second Class US\$140.

www.glacierexpress.ch

Also on CNNGo: [10 of the world's most dangerous roads](#)

9. Maharajas' Express

India



When India goes extravagant, it goes super extravagant.

Hailed as the most luxurious train in all of India, which admittedly is coming from a low base, the Maharajas' Express has all the charm of an opulent Indian palace on wheels.

Classical Indian rail itineraries take travelers deep into India's mystique, allowing one to retreat to private rail opulence when overwhelmed by India's in-your-face pace.

Onboard LCD TV's and Wi-Fi clash rather starkly (pleasingly, for technophobes) with the alluring beauty of historic architecture like the Taj Mahal beyond the train.

Boarding: Delhi.

Cost: Seven-night Classic India Tour from US\$6,265 for Deluxe Cabin; US\$17,500 for Presidential Suite.

www.the-maharajas.com

Also on CNNGo: [Maharajas' Express: Super luxury train voyage, celebrity included](#)

10. Pride of Africa

Africa



The world's most deluxe safari.

Spacious suites (rather than cabins) with their own stocked bar fridge define the accommodation aboard Rovos Rail's Pride of Africa service.

Double beds and modern en suite bathrooms complete with hair dryers ensure grooming standards don't slip while slipping through some of Africa's wild landscapes. It's all rather glamorous in an understated manner for just 72 guests.

Windows that open send rail buffs into delirium on the odd occasion when a steam locomotive takes the lead position. For the time-rich with deep pockets, the 14-day Dar Es Salaam to Cape Town service is the ultimate African adventure.

Boarding: Cape Town (South Africa) or Dar Es Salaam (Tanzania).

Cost: Pullman Suite US\$8,900; Royal Suite US\$15,950.

www.rovos.com

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Phil Jones · 2 years ago

It depends on the season. In winter, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore is the most significant recommended by CNN. In summer, Moscow-Beijing trip is one of the best places to go

2 ^ | ▾ Reply Share ›



E K Kadiddlehopper · 2 years ago

India's Palace on Wheels should have been on the list. An absolutely fantastic journey, days and worth every moment.

3 ^ | ▾ Reply Share ›



lara dunston · 2 years ago

Travelled on both The Ghan and The Indian Pacific in Australia in Platinum Class and loved the great train journeys and an ideal way to travel across such vast distances in Australia

2 ^ | ▾ Reply Share ›



Peter Hewlett · 2 years ago

I would never take a "luxury" train journey in Australia again after travelling 1st class for The sleeping berths are arranged lengthways and the train never ceases rolling from side to side. It is marginally more comfortable than being water-boarded. My aged father received a surly reception mentioning sugar when asked, upon boarding the train prior to departing, whether he wanted breakfast the following morning.

^ | ▾ Reply Share ›



Cdausa → Peter Hewlett · 2 years ago

at the end of the day...it is still a train.....and these are articles written to encourage

^ | ▾ Reply Share ›

Avatar **neien** · 2 years ago

What about taking the world's longest iron ore train (2.3km) from Nouadhibou to Choum trains in the DRC (where time, not distance, are the qualifying parameter) - neither are e certainly say epic! and they're really cheap too! and great fun if you're willing to put up w
2 ^ | v Reply Share ›

Avatar **MichaelSalch** · 2 years ago

I am very content with a scenic AmTrak ride from Portland to Seattle and back for a wee
2 ^ | v Reply Share ›

Benjamin Tang → MichaelSalch · 2 years ago

The Pacific Northwest is indeed beautiful. But paraphrasing St. Augustine: The like a book, and those who are content to ride just one line read only a page.
1 ^ | v Reply Share ›

Avatar **D. UK** · 2 years ago

I would dare to add the London-Paris Eurostar also. Not much of a scenery but being for English channel and just doing what so many important people (Napoleon, Hitler) drea
6 ^ | v Reply Share ›

Avatar **Benjamin Tang** · 2 years ago

I would add the Beijing - Lhasa railway. Regardless of politics, this highest railway in the
8 ^ | v Reply Share ›

Avatar **Nostromo45** · 2 years ago

Maybe not very epic, it's only about 300 kms, but surely there can be nothing better than train (the engine bears on its side "Glasgow 1843") that runs from Siliguri to Darjeeling, Monastery at around 4,000 metres. Astounding train ride, incomparable. The afternoon t up to Kursheong, and you continue the next day.
4 ^ | v Reply Share ›

Avatar **Nostromo45** · 2 years ago

7. Trans-Siberian Railway
You say: "

Winter travelers would do well to watch the original "Doctor Zhivago" movie (with Omar : this service travels through much of the majestic landscape depicted in the movieNo pa in Russia, but in Finland and the province of Soria, Spain, more specifically in the Valle c Station. {see IMDb}
5 ^ | v Reply Share ›



Paola · 2 years ago

What about the Amtrak route from New York to Los Angeles? I am planning that for late will be magic!

5 ^ | v Reply Share ›



Matthew MacPherson → Paola · 2 years ago

If that involves the Zephyr line then it will be great. It's a shame no North America: Boston to Portland (via Chicago) is also a gorgeous trip.

3 ^ | v Reply Share ›



Paola → Matthew MacPherson · 2 years ago

Yes, it will involve the Zephyr and part of the Southwest Chief. I am checking. Thank you!

^ | v Reply Share ›



William Cameron → Matthew MacPherson · 2 years ago

The Canadian is a North America route. However I agree that some that I have seen in routes in the NorthWest were not included. Also there are other routes in good that have easily been added.

2 ^ | v Reply Share ›



Y2kscotty · 2 years ago

Not as expensive is the West Highland Line out of Glasgow and over to Oban or up to M

2 ^ | v Reply Share ›



William Cameron → Y2kscotty · 2 years ago

I have been on this line to Mallaig. Amazing.

^ | v Reply Share ›



Nostromo45 → Y2kscotty · 2 years ago

Yeah, Scotty - I was going to say something about that line. Lovely views. Did it v is still the same.

^ | v Reply Share ›



Inca · 2 years ago

>"Ascending almost 2,500 meters above sea level to the ancient Peruvian ruins" ...

Well, technically, it's *descending* on its way to Machu Picchu (from 3,400 m (11,200 f) to Aguas Calientes terminal...

5 ^ | v Reply Share >



Ru4real60555 · 2 years ago

what about the train from Moscow to Beijing?

^ | v Reply Share >



Niepijany · 2 years ago

Form Wladywostok to Moscow takes 7 days + 12 hours Moscow - St. Petersburg and it

1 ^ | v Reply Share >



gado gado · 2 years ago

When I win a lottery...

I wish you had reserved some mentions for broke backpackers.

12 ^ | v Reply Share >



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