

THE ART OF TRAVEL

First Class Journeys On The Orient Express



In an age of frictionless travel and vanishing boundaries, there remains one experience that invites slowness, ceremony, and grace. The Venice Simplon-Orient-Express does not rush toward a destination, but creates the time in between.

More than a train, this is a curated theatre of movement, nostalgia, and beauty, where every detail, from the weight of the silverware to the scent of polished wood, has been preserved with exquisite intent. It beckons travellers not merely to journey across landscapes, but to traverse eras, stepping into a world where elegance and ritual reign supreme.

Operated by Belmond, the Orient Express revives the glamour of 1920s and 1930s travel. Its deep-blue lacquered carriages, art deco interiors, and white-gloved stewards recall an era when the journey itself was a form of art. Here we explore some of the most captivating routes, journeys where landscape and luxury intertwine.

Venice to Paris: The Signature Soirée

There is something quietly cinematic about departing from Venice as twilight falls. The Orient Express waits at Santa Lucia station, gleaming beneath the Venetian sun, its navy carriages perfectly mirrored in the Grand Canal below.

Boarding here is like stepping into a living painting where time slows, and the outside world seems momentarily suspended. The faint murmur of gondoliers and the distant church bells dissolve behind the closing doors.

The train glides through the Venetian lagoon, soon leaving behind waterways for the rolling hills and vineyards of northern Italy. As night deepens, it climbs into the Dolomites, where snow-capped peaks emerge beneath a starlit sky. In the glow of the dining cars, a sense of anticipation builds. The rhythmic clatter of the rails underfoot becomes hypnotic, punctuated only by the soft clink of crystal and the low murmur of conversation.

Morning reveals the French countryside unfolding gently beyond the windows. Burgundy's soft green hills roll by, vineyards basking in the early light. The journey concludes at Gare de Lyon in Paris, but the lingering sensation is less about arrival and more about having inhabited a beautifully uninterrupted world.

Paris to Istanbul: A Rail Borne Epic

The Paris to Istanbul route is the Orient Express's great epic; a sprawling six-night odyssey through five countries, tracing much of the original 1883 journey that cemented the train's legend. This is travel as storytelling, where each stop brings fresh layers of history and culture. From bustling urban centres to remote mountain passes, the route unfolds like a richly woven tapestry.

Departing from Paris's Gare de l'Est, the train moves eastward across France's rural heart, threading the foothills of the Alps. The landscapes shift, the languages change, and the feeling of crossing time grows palpable. After two days on the rails, the train pauses in Budapest where passengers may disembark to

explore the grandeur of the Danube. Whether cruising past neo-Gothic Parliament buildings or wandering historic Buda Castle, this city is a chapter in itself, poised between East and West.

Beyond Budapest, the train threads through Romania's Carpathian Mountains. Stops include Sinaia, where a visit to Peleş Castle offers a taste of royal life. Further on, Bucharest reveals its Belle Époque heritage amid bustling boulevards. The final leg traverses the Bulgarian plains toward the Turkish border. Here the city's minarets and domes rise against the horizon like a visual crescendo. Istanbul marks more than an endpoint; it is the place where continents meet and histories converge.

Vienna to Paris: Imperial Shadows and Bohemian Light

There's something quite theatrical about departing Vienna on the Orient Express. Beneath the soaring roof of Wien Hauptbahnhof, the train gleams against a backdrop of imperial history. The carriages, midnight blue and gold-trimmed, feel like a deliberate contrast to the modern station.

The train rolls westward, tracing a path once followed by composers, couriers, and crowned heads. Outside, the landscape softens: forests blur into farmland, then deepen again as the train approaches Bohemia.

By nightfall, the train slips into Prague. It lingers here long enough to tempt guests into dining in the city or wandering through its hushed Gothic lanes. Even in brief moments, the city impresses: spires silhouetted against the Vltava, the stone hush of the Old Town Square and the romantic ache of bridges in twilight.

Reboarding, the night deepens. Guests return to their suites turned down, lights dimmed, a quiet turndown note on the pillow. The train begins its final stretch toward France. In the dining car, a last glass of Sauternes is poured; in the bar car, the piano plays something genteel.

By morning, the train is gliding through Champagne. Breakfast arrives just as the outskirts of Paris come into view: a tray of pastries, preserves, and perfect coffee.

Singapore to Butterworth: A Journey Through the Tropics

There is something quietly cinematic about departing from Singapore aboard the Eastern & Oriental Express. Beneath the lush equatorial sun, the train gleams in green and gold, its vintage carriages a promise of slower rhythms ahead.

Boarding is a step back in time, where wood-paneled cabins and white-gloved stewards recall the colonial elegance of Southeast Asia's golden era.

As the train glides northward, the city falls away, replaced by rice paddies, palm groves, and kampongs tucked along the tracks. Inside, rattan screens filter the light, casting soft shadows on teak tables set for afternoon tea. The atmosphere is unhurried, each moment wrapped in subtle rituals, from the clink of bone china to the murmur of distant gongs as villages pass like dreams.

Dinner is served as dusk descends: a procession of refined courses - spiced sea bass, tamarind duck, tropical fruit delicately plated, and paired with fine wines and quiet conversation. By morning, the mist lifts to reveal limestone hills and the glint of Penang's straits. Butterworth arrives not as a destination, but as a gentle hint to a world where past and present meet, and where movement slows just long enough to be remembered.

Geneva Roundtrip: The Alpine Circle

The Geneva roundtrip offers a distinctive experience; a circular journey beginning and ending in the same place, but revealing new perspectives with every turn of the rails. It's a meditation on travel itself, free from the impulse of point-to-point urgency. The train moves through the heart of the Alps, rolling past snow-



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capped peaks, frozen lakes, and dense pine forests dusted with white. The scenery is as much a part of the experience as the interiors, creating a dialogue between nature and design.

Passengers enjoy uninterrupted views from spacious suites, while the bar car becomes a quiet retreat, ideal for reflection or intimate conversation. By the time the train returns to Geneva, the world feels subtly altered. It is the travel itself, not the destination, that has left its mark.

The Sensory Symphony of the Journey

Beyond the visual splendour and historical allure, the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express enchants through its rich sensory tapestry. Dining aboard is an event in itself, where culinary excellence meets theatrical presentation.

Menus celebrate regional specialties reflecting the changing lands outside the window, crafted with care to mirror the journey's sophistication. Courses arrive in succession, plated with artistry, paired expertly with fine wines from cellars that rival those of renowned châteaux. Each meal is a curated moment of pleasure, heightening the train's timeless elegance.

The human element, too, breathes life into the experience. The stewards, impeccably dressed in white gloves and tailored uniforms, move with practiced grace, anticipating needs without intruding. Their knowledge of the train's history and routes adds depth to every interaction, offering stories and anecdotes that make the journey feel personal and unique.

A Journey Beyond Travel

Aboard the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express, first-class is not simply a category of service, but a state of being. The

meticulous preservation of detail, from gleaming brass fittings to hand-stitched upholstery, creates a space where history and modern comfort coexist. Guests inhabit suites that recall the glamour of a bygone era. The Historic Cabins offer cosy elegance, while the Grand Suites provide a private world of marble baths, polished wood, and silk fabrics.

Travel on the Orient Express is a rare invitation to inhabit time differently. Each route is a narrative, a carefully composed symphony of place, history, and human connection. The train is both vessel and stage, carrying passengers through landscapes that defy haste. Disembarking, the physical journey ends, but the impression will remain. The train's pace, its details, and its atmosphere linger as a timeless reminder that sometimes the richest journeys are those measured not by miles, but by treasured moments.

