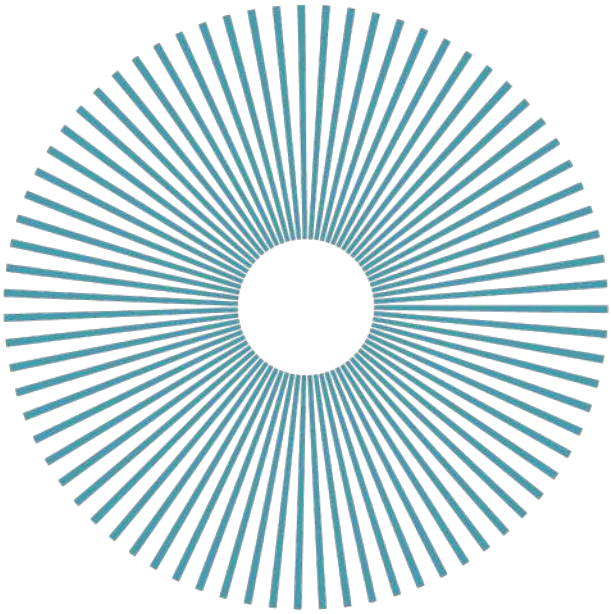


ARSENALE

PRESS COVERAGE

January - June 2026

INDEPENDENT

6 new sleeper train routes coming in 2026

LINK: https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/inspiration/new-sleeper-train-routes-2026-b2907669.html

The Independent's journalism is supported by our readers. When you purchase through links on our site, we may earn commission. Travel Inspiration 6 new sleeper train routes coming in 2026 Roll across Spain, chug between European capitals or travel the Silk Road on trains leaving the station this year Natalie Wilson Monday 26 January 2026 12:56 GMT Bookmark Comments Go to comments Bookmark popover Removed from bookmarks It's all aboard the sleeper train in 2026 (European Sleeper) Sign up to Simon Calder's free travel email for expert advice and money-saving discountsGet Simon Calder's Travel emailGet Simon Calder's Travel email If the rollout of new sleeper train services is any indication, it's all aboard the night carriage in 2026. Anticipated new routes are popping up in several corners of the UK, as well as direct sleeper trains connecting capitals across Europe for some shut-eye as you ride. As railroads forge new paths, travellers looking for a more sustainable option than short-haul flights are going full steam ahead to book both budget and luxury journeys. Scotland's iconic Caledonian Sleeper will now pick up passengers in Birmingham, and another new decadent rail route will spend 22 days traversing the ancient Silk Road. From a roll across Spain to a chug between Amsterdam and Milan, here are some of the most exciting new night routes taking to the tracks this year. Read more: Why the Caledonian Sleeper train is Britain's contender for world's greatest rail journey Best new sleeper train routes for 2026 1. Caledonian Sleeper - London to Scotland via Birmingham The Caledonian Sleeper will now pick up Birmingham passengers en route to the Highlands (Caledonian Sleeper) As of last week (15 January), the Caledonian Sleeper will leave London to pick up passengers in Birmingham en route to the Scottish Highlands. The sleeper train currently runs every night apart from Saturday, with guests being transported from London Euston to some of Scotland's largest cities, including Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Inverness, and more rural locations, such as Fort William. Birmingham International will join the train's 'Highlander' route, the first stop after London, before it heads to Crewe, Preston and then up to the Highlands. The sleeper train intends to bridge the travel gap between the West Midlands and the Scottish Highlands. Read more: Caledonian Sleeper sees 'most significant change to network in three decades' 2. European Sleeper - Amsterdam to Milan via Switzerland A direct connection from Amsterdam and Brussels to Milan will run from 18 June 2026 (European Sleeper) European Sleeper plans to run a direct night train connection from Amsterdam and Brussels to Milan city

La proprietà intellettuale è riconducibile alla fonte specificata in testa alla pagina. Il ritaglio stampa è da intendersi per uso privato

INDEPENDENT

centre from 18 June 2026. Departures from Amsterdam and Brussels will be scheduled for Monday, Thursday and Saturday, with the return service from Milan operational on Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays. Stops on the sleeper service will include Berne, Switzerland and Stresa on Lago Maggiore, and ticket sales will open to travellers in January or February. Read more: The best boutique hotels in Amsterdam, reviewed 3. Venice Simplon-Orient-Express - Paris to Amalfi Coast The Venice Simplon-Orient-Express passes along both the French and Italian Rivieras from May (Belmond) The Belmond-operated Venice Simplon-Orient-Express will wind along both the French and Italian Rivieras on its inaugural four-day journey from Paris on 4 May 2026. While not on the rails, passengers will partake in a scenic boat tour, a private guided visit to Pompeii and cooking classes with local experts. The experience doesn't come cheap. Tickets start from around EUR10,000 (£8,700) per person, including all meals, excursions and transfers. Read more: This luxury sleeper train will launch a new route to the Amalfi Coast 4. Golden Eagle Luxury Trains - Beijing to Tashkent Travel the Silk Road with Golden Eagle Luxury Trains (Golden Eagle Luxury Trains) Golden Eagle Luxury Trains will offer travellers an exclusive itinerary on a brand new luxury train along the 'storied path' of the Silk Road from September 2026. The 22-day 'The Grand Silk Road' journey will feature two private trains with stops in Unesco-listed sites and ancient cities across central Asia from Beijing to Tashkent. The train's luxurious superior cabins and Han Dynasty suites with fine dining and opulent bar cars are on offer from $53,200 (£39,748) on 2027 departure dates. Read more: Mandarin Oriental Qianmen, Beijing hotel review 5. The Luxury Train Company 'Le Grand Tour' - Paris to Puy du Fou Take a six-day rail journey through France (Getty Images) Also on the uber-luxury sleeper scene, The Luxury Train Travel Company's 'Le Grand Tour' is expected to leave the station this year. The 4,000km six-day French rail journey on an 18-cabin 'Belle Époque styled train' promises passengers 'history, culture, architecture, art and magnificent French cuisine' from £6,210 per person. Travellers will depart Paris Gare de l'Est, with stops including Épernay, Reims, Annecy and Saint-Emilion before finishing at the renowned French historical theme park Puy du Fou. Read more: Famous French theme park submits plans for £600m Oxfordshire site 6. Al Andalus - Seville to Madrid The Al Ándalus train service will run a new itinerary for the 2026 season (Renfe/Al Andalus) Spain's luxury Al Ándalus train service has announced a new itinerary for the 2026 season. The opulent 1930s train will now begin and end its journey in the Spanish capital of Madrid, with a new seven-day, six-night voyage available from April to October. As well as travelling on one of the world's most deluxe rail journeys, passengers can look forward to stopping at some of Spain's most magnificent cities and attractions, including Seville, Córdoba and the Royal Palace of Aranjuez, a Unesco World Heritage Site. New destinations on the 2026 tour, which focuses on Spanish heritage, gastronomy and landscapes, include Extremadura, Castilla-La Mancha and Madrid. For a Grand Class room, expect to pay EUR6,600 (£5,700) per person based on two sharing, while a Deluxe Suite costs EUR7,900 (£6,840). Read more: Luxury Spanish train announces new 2026

La proprietà intellettuale è riconducibile alla fonte specificata in testa alla pagina. Il ritaglio stampa è da intendersi per uso privato

INDEPENDENT

itinerary

La proprietà intellettuale è riconducibile alla fonte specificata in testa alla pagina. Il ritaglio stampa è da intendersi per uso privato

Condé Nast Traveler

Total Readership: 3.2M
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 30K

View online

January 28, 2026

TRAIN JOURNEYS

A Guide to the World's Most Iconic Train Journeys

What it's like to ride the most legendary railways around the world—from the Scottish Highlands to the Peruvian Andes.

BY ARATI MENON AND HANNAH TOWEY

January 28, 2026

The best train journeys in the world have an intangible allure about them. Since the dawn of time, the romance of railways has seduced poets, spellbound novelists, and dealt directors the perfect hand for capturing fleeting friendships, illicit affairs, and all manner of crimes and capers. A ticket is not just a permit to ride, it's permission to trespass on the intimacies of other people's lives. Trains bring us up close and personal—both inside and outside the carriage. On board, passengers chat politics in Finnish dining cars, clamber into couchettes above strangers on the Trans-Siberian, and share samosas on India's many raucous mail trains. Outside, the world flashes by, a slideshow of rivers growing into oceans, deserts rising into mountains and cities sprawling then receding into darkness as the train thunders on through the night.

As climate change takes hold and travelers look for slower, more conscious ways to move through the world, trains are returning with renewed vigor. Sleeper trains are seeing a resurgence and the golden oldies are busier than ever. From regular commuter rides to glamorous tourist trains, a number of services have garnered iconic status for the scenery, their role through history, or perhaps their place in popular culture. Türkiye's *Doğu Express*, once a migration train carrying agricultural workers and the military, is now wildly popular with young Turks who traverse the 800-mile route in winter, decorating the compartments with fairy lights and spreading out picnic blankets covered with baklava, börek, and cold cuts. From the glass-dome cars of the *Rocky Mountaineer*, passengers watch as Canada's teal-green lakes shimmer like mirrors, snow-capped peaks looming overhead. The *Eastern & Oriental Express*, a Belmond train, is back after a hiatus, winding through Malaysia's tropical rainforests, while Japan's *Seven Stars Kyushu* grants reservations via a lottery system, so sought-after is the opulent train. Think Americans don't ride Amtrak? Think again, as the *California Zephyr*, the longest route in America crosses through seven states, carving up Colorado's canyons, then passing into Utah where the sun ignites mesas into flaming towers of rock. Sit back and listen to the clack of the Darjeeling toy train as it chugs up the Himalayan foothills, or let the swaying carriage of the Rovos Rail lull you to deep sleep as it takes you deeper into places wild and distant... —*Monisha Rajesh, author of Moonlight Express: Around the World By Night Train*

Total Readership: 3.2M
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 30K

View online

January 28, 2026

La Dolce Vita Orient Express, Italy

"The Orient Express started in 1883, when its maiden trip from Paris to Constantinople flipped the concept of long-distance travel on its head. Fast forward 140 years and, while the guests are still glamorous (and the cocktails very much free flowing), Orient Express has been nudged lovingly into the 21st century with the launch of *La Dolce Vita Orient Express*: a 12-carriage train that will transport 62 guests around Italy on one- and two-night journeys. The train is the first of six (with eight iconic itineraries) in a collaboration between Italian luxury hospitality business Arsenale Group and French hotel giant Accor. I was lucky enough to nab a spot on a two-night journey that would take us on a round trip from Rome to Venice and Portofino." *Read the full story and review by Sarah Allard.*

Elle Decor

diffusione:33616
tiratura:58639

A LOUNGE THAT'S WORTH THE WAIT

it directly impacts the usability of spaces, quality of life, and access to resources... With 'Prison Times,' we addressed a sensitive — and often overlooked — subject through a unique and widely accessible lens: objects. What we presented is a form of design governed by principles of security and punishment, which are fundamentally at odds with conventional design thinking. Following the exhibition, a number of exchanges and new synergies were set in motion, including opportunities to explore these same issues in schools and universities." ∎

pag. 80

A LOUNGE THAT'S WORTH THE WAIT

In Rome's Ostiense neighborhood, a signature lounge designed by Hugo Toro welcomes passengers of the new La Dolce Vita Orient Express. All aboard

words by **Laura Maggi** — photos by **Mr. Tripper**

THE PRELUDE TO A JOURNEY THAT DEFIES TIME, the La Dolce Vita Lounge welcomes passengers "embarking on 'rail cruises' into a space that is more of a threshold than a destination. Sunny, joyful, and cinematic. That's why the ceiling is entirely finished in yellow lacquer: it sets the tone from the very first moment," says architect Hugo Toro, describing his vision for the waiting lounge inside Rome's Ostiense station. From here, the La Dolce Vita Orient Express departs for destinations ranging from Venice to Portofino, Siena to the Sassi di Matera, the vineyards of Montalcino, the truffle trails of Nizza Monferrato, and onward to Sicily with stops in Catania, Palermo, and Taormina. The travel experience begins here, well before departure, within a 600 m2 lounge designed as an elegant reception room, where guests can enjoy local tastings and drinks, relax in convivial seating areas, or browse the in-house boutique, which offers a refined selection of accessories, books, and home decor. Depending on the time of departure, the kitchen led by German chef Heinz Beck serves up lunch or dinner alongside a cocktail bar, while live piano music fills the lounge, creating a relaxed and social atmosphere in the moments before boarding. The experience is completed with exclusive services like private showers and a concierge to handle your luggage — already placed in the cabins ahead of boarding — while guests are presented with traditional paper tickets detailing their itinerary and cabin assignment. "The project required an extremely meticulous and respectful approach, driven by a desire to enhance the station's architectural identity and artistic heritage," notes Marco Girotto, General Manager of La Dolce Vita Orient Express. "Under the creative direction of Hugo Toro, master artisans and artists painstakingly restored the original mosaics by Giulio Rosso and Maria Zaffuto, returning them to their rightful place within the space... Artworks inspired by the spirit of travel — from urban vistas to distant, exotic landscapes — further enrich the experience, transforming the lounge into a space that blends historic grandeur with contemporary refinement, capturing the romance of the Italian journey while remaining fully aligned with the architectural language of Roma Ostiense," explains Girotto. "The lounge fuses the legacy of the iconic train with a bold '70s influence, filtered through a contemporary lens," adds Toro, who also designed the interiors for the Orient Express La Minerva in Rome. "The existing architecture, with its stark travertine structure, provided a powerful backdrop. Rather than soften it, I chose to create a contrast through warmth, color, and rhythm. Unfolding in a carefully choreographed sequence, the space offers atmospheres for solo travelers, couples, and groups alike, creating an environment that feels both intimate and dynamic." Every piece of furniture is custom-designed, from the lighting to the central banquette and the armchairs. "The lounge is conceived as a seamless ensemble, where architecture, furnishings, and lighting converge to create memorable moments," says the architect. Art Deco references — "its geometry, sense of symmetry, and distinct craftsmanship" — were combined to create a nomadic patchwork of inspirations. The goal was not nostalgia, but a modern reinterpretation of a waiting lounge from a bygone era," notes Toro. "Housing the La Dolce Vita Lounge within Roma Ostiense was a conscious decision, tied to the station's strategic role and its significant historical and architectural heritage. We wanted a location that served as the natural gateway to the experience: a welcoming, scenographic space capable of evoking the elegance of the journey from the very first moment, weaving together experiential depth with a cultural narrative," adds Girotto. "With La Dolce Vita Orient Express, we have introduced a new model to the global tourism landscape, leading the emerging trend of 'rail cruises,' which are gaining momentum around the world," concludes Paolo Barletta, CEO of Arsenale Group — a leader in luxury tourism — and of Orient Express. "These trains therefore become a symbol of an Italy that aims to promote its territories, local entrepreneurship, and national railway production, contributing to a more integrated tourism system. It is a vital step in relaunching the Made in Italy brand, particularly within the industrial and tourism sectors." ∎

La proprietà intellettuale è riconducibile alla fonte specificata in testa alla pagina. Il ritaglio stampa è da intendersi per uso privato

Forbes

Total Readership: 68.7M
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 635.8K

View online
February 12, 2026

La Dolce Vita Orient Express Train Offers A Luxurious Way To Experience The Palio In Siena

A train trip that pairs two Italian icons: the Palio, a medieval horse race in Siena, and Italy's newest luxury train, La Dolce Vita Orient Express

Horses and riders approach the turn of "Casato" during the race of the Siena's Palio in Siena, Italy. Siena's Palio is a medieval horse race and pageant, which pits the ancient districts of Siena against each other in competition for the victory bc ... More
GETTY IMAGES

There is probably no event that better epitomizes Italy's glory and history than the Palio di Siena, a colorful, adrenaline-fueled horse race held in the medieval heart of Siena. It's about much more than a horse race; it's an emotional celebration of Sienese culture. Staged twice each summer in the Tuscan city, it surely qualifies as a signature experience in a well-traveled life.

Forbes

Total Readership: 68.7M
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 635.8K

View online
February 12, 2026

Traditional Italian dance of the flag-wavers Sbandieratori doing stunts throwing their colorful flags in the air.
GETTY

Held in the city's historic center on the Piazza del Campo, a well-preserved medieval square and a designated UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Palio is a bareback horse race. There are 10 horses and riders, dressed in medieval costumes, representing 10 of the 17 *contrade*, the city wards. It's a colorful, thrilling, and often dangerous race, and a tradition that dates back to at least the 13th century. Yet this is not the Kentucky Derby. If a rider should fall from the horse during this madcap race, the rules state that the horse can still win if it crosses the finish line first.

The Palio is held every July 2nd in honor of the Madonna di Provenzano and again on August 16th to mark the Assumption. It is immensely popular, to the point of being overcrowded, and finding a good viewing spot for the race is an enormous challenge.

That's why this new three-day journey aboard La Dolce Vita Orient Express, Italy's newest luxury train, is very welcome. Siena & The Palio is a three-day round-trip land voyage from Rome to Siena to witness one of Italy's most legendary spectacles from an exclusive vantage point.

Forbes

Total Readership: 68.7M
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 635.8K

View online
February 12, 2026

Restaurant Car on La Dolce Vita Orient Express
MR. TRIPPER

The trip begins in Rome with a private transfer to the La Dolce Vita lounge at Rome Ostiense Station. The train departs the Eternal City in the evening, with a three-Michelin-starred dinner created by Chef Heinz Beck served in the Restaurant Car. Courses are seasonally inspired and paired with regional wines. After dinner, it's time to adjourn to the Bar Car for a nightcap, with entertainment by a pianist.

Viewing the Palio from the Balcony of a Palazzo

The train arrives in Siena on the morning of the Palio, when breakfast is served, either in the private cabins or in the Restaurant Car. A private transfer brings passengers to Siena and to the Palazzo Chigi Zondadari, a noble residence overlooking the Piazza del Campo. Aperitivos are served in the palace courtyard, and the viewing is from the Palazzo's private balconies, which are about as exclusive a vantage point as anyone might desire for the race. It's also a bird 's-eye view of the famous pageant that precedes the race, with music, flag-wavers, and marchers in medieval costumes.

After the race, there's a celebratory Tuscan dinner in the courtyard of the Palazzo, with a seasonal menu and regional wines. After dinner, guests are brought back to board La Dolce Vita Orient Express, with an after-party in the Bar Car. The next morning, breakfast is served in the cabins or in the Restaurant Car. During the late morning, the train arrives back at Rome Ostiense Station.

Forbes

Total Readership: 68.7M
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 635.8K

View online
February 12, 2026

A cabin onboard La Dolce Vita Orient Express
MR. TRIPPER

La Dolce Vita Orient Express is a partnership between the French hotel group Accor and the Italian luxury hospitality group Arsenale S.P.A., with a railway partnership with Trenitalia (Gruppo Ferrovie dello Stato) and the Fondazione FS Italiane.

The train's design inspiration is La Dolce Vita, "The Sweet Life," the name of the Italian décor, art, and architecture of the 1960s, made famous by Federico Fellini's film of the same name. The 11-carriage train welcomes just 62 guests, in 12 deluxe wood-lined cabins, 18 master suites, and one "La Dolce Vita" suite.

The dates for the Siena & The Palio trips are July 1-3, 2026, and August 15-17, 2026. For details, visit La Dolce Vita Orient Express.

Forbes

Total Readership: 58.7M
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 543.3K

View online

January 28, 2026

The 26 Best Places To Travel In 2026, Chosen By Experts

Looking for the world's best places to travel in 2026? Here, travel experts share their picks for the top destinations to visit right now.

Looking for the best places to travel in 2026? Every December, the global travel industry gathers to discuss that very question (and more) at the International Luxury Travel Marketplace (ILTM) in Cannes, France.

Against the backdrop of the French Riviera, the most recent edition of ILTM brought together more than 9,000 delegates and 2,700 travel brands. Over several days, travel leaders, destination experts, buyers, influencers and tastemakers from around the world compared notes on the places and trends reshaping the global tourism landscape.

To find out which destinations are hot for 2026, I tapped into a group of travel writers and editors who attended ILTM and got them to share the spots they are most excited about. I've also added a few of my own picks.

The selections span the globe, from nature-forward escapes and under-the-radar cities to classic destinations being reimagined in new ways. It's a forward-looking preview of the places travelers will be talking about this year and in the years to come. Case in point: If you go back to lists that I've published in previous years (including 2025, 2024, 2023 and 2022), you'll probably spot places that are on your travel radar.

Now, read on for the best places to travel in 2026. And if you want to see where some of the world's top travel advisors recommend going this year, you can check out their tips for the 26 best trips to take in 2026.

Two railway brands are shaping that revival, according to Saad. There's *Orient Express*, which has re-emerged as a modern luxury brand under Accor and LVMH. The other is *Venice Simplon–Orient-Express*, the enduring icon operated by Belmond.

"Under the joint vision of LVMH and Accor, *Orient Express* has re-emerged as the perfect bridge between eras," says Saad. "The new Italian train developed by Accor with Arsenale has been running since 2025 in restored 1960s carriages redesigned by Dimorestudio, evoking the golden dolce vita era with walnut panels, velvet and satin brass."

In 2026, the *Orient Express*, fully restored to its Art Deco splendor, is due to return to its original Paris–Istanbul route. "It's a clear signal of how nostalgia-driven rail travel has become one of the most relevant luxury movements discussed at ILTM," says Saad.

That same heritage-led philosophy extends beyond the rails to the Orient Express hotels. In Rome, Saad points to Orient Express La Minerva, which opened in 2025 in a 17th-century palazzo beside the Pantheon. In Venice, Orient Express is opening Palazzo Donà Giovannelli in a restored 15th-century palazzo.

YOLO
JOURNAL

Total Readership: 106K
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 1K

View online

January 28, 2026

Our Favorite City Hotel Spas

We don't often book an urban hotel *for* the spa, but an excellent one can be a game-changer—a sanctuary for a lymphatic drainage/sauna/cold plunge to get over jet lag, a facial to help your skin recover from airplane air, a hydrotherapy circuit that rinses off the stress of a conference or the grit of the streets. You don't even need to be staying there—sometimes the best move is booking a treatment and giving yourself a half-day reset, whether on a trip or in your hometown. (We can't wait to do a spa day at the Chelsea Hotel here in NYC, which got a ton of love from our contributors, and no matter where we stay in Hong Kong, we'll be visiting Rosewood's Asaya spa on our next trip.) So we sifted through our Guest Books, reached out to dozens of well-traveled friends (and, as usual, went down our rabbit hole) to compile our favorite urban hotel spas. The list is far from comprehensive, so we'd love to hear your favorites in the comments!

ITALY

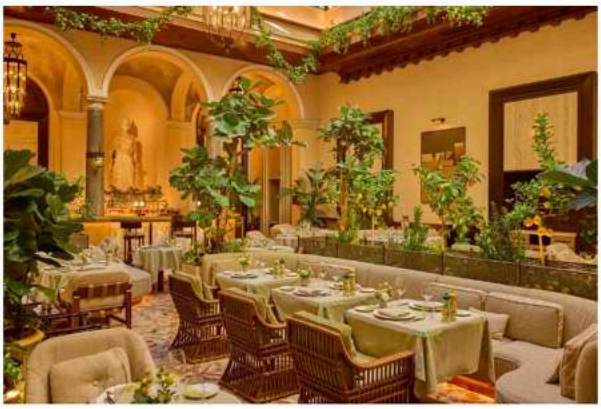
Orient Express La Minerva (spa is opening February 2026) – I've been lucky enough to have a sneak preview of the spa ahead of its opening, where Furtuna Skin (my line) will be offering treatments, and it immediately felt transportive. There's a real sense of ritual and ceremony woven throughout the experience, drawing on ancient purification traditions and Roman heritage. It's deeply immersive and sensorial in a way that feels intentional and luxurious. – *Agatha Relota Luezo, founder & CEO, Furtuna Skin*

TravelDreamsMagazine
What is your version of living the dream?

Total Readership: 10K
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 1K

View online
February 11, 2026

NOW OPEN: Paolino Capri at Orient Express La Minerva



Rome, February 11th 2026 – From now until Sunday, April 26th, 2026, in the heart of the Eternal City, just steps away from the Pantheon, Orient Express La Minerva, will host a special collaboration celebrating Italian hospitality through a new culinary journey.

Paolino Capri x Orient Express La Minerva brings together two Italian icons united by a common vision and values: authentic hospitality, tradition, and experience as a memory to be shared.

A worldwide and long-standing symbol of the Caprese spirit, Paolino Capri brings to Rome the timeless atmosphere of its iconic lemon grove. At La Minerva Bar, located in the iconic lobby of Orient Express La Minerva, the signature yellow and green hues of the island and the restaurant take center stage transforming the space, decorated for the occasion with evocative lemon trees.

Founded in the 1970s by the De Martino family and now led by the founders' grandchildren Lino, Michela and Arianna, Paolino Capri continues to tell an authentic story rooted in tradition. Today, it remains a place devoted to conviviality, where cuisine and hospitality are genuine gestures expressed with natural elegance.

The result is a gastronomic experience that brings together the flavors, colors and atmosphere of the world's most famous island, Capri, with those of the Eternal City, Rome.

The artistic ceramics featured in the *mise en place* at La Minerva Bar are the result of a shared vision between Lino di Paolino and renowned Capri-based artist and ceramist Sergio Rubino, evoking nature and the joyful Mediterranean aesthetic.

The menu celebrates Caprese and Campanian culinary tradition with iconic dishes from Paolino Capri's cuisine, prepared in strict respect of original recipes and the highest quality ingredients.

Starters include Paolino's grilled mozzarella on lemon leaf and the iconic Bomba Paolino with fresh tomato sauce and basil. First courses range from Caprese ravioli with fresh cherry tomatoes or lemon, to the timeless Paolino Mezzi Paccheri "Chiummenzana", and Lemon fettuccine with Sicilian red prawn carpaccio. Main courses feature great classics such as Old-style squid and potatoes, Lemon-marinated half chicken, and Grilled lamb ribs with Anacapri olive oil.

Desserts pay tribute to Neapolitan tradition with Torta Caprese, Lemon delight with wild strawberries, and Neapolitan Pastiera with Chantilly cream, all accompanied by Paolino's renowned Limoncello.

Enhancing the culinary offering, La Minerva Bar also presents a selection of signature cocktails created to celebrate Paolino Capri x Orient Express La Minerva. Five cocktails evoke the scents, aromas and colors of the island, including *Essenza di Capri*, highlighting the unmistakable notes of limoncello with Altamura Vodka, citrus and cucumber cordial and Italian sparkling wine, and *La Dolce Isola*, an ode to basil with cedar essence, Tanqueray Ten and Venturo Aperitivo Mediterraneo.

DRIFT

Total Readership: 29.7K
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 1K

View online
February 12, 2026

NOW OPEN: Paolino Capri at Orient Express La Minerva

From now until Sunday, April 26th, 2026, in the heart of the Eternal City, just steps away from the Pantheon, Orient Express La Minerva, will host a special collaboration celebrating Italian hospitality through a new culinary journey.

Paolino Capri x Orient Express La Minerva brings together two Italian icons united by a common vision and values: authentic hospitality, tradition, and experience as a memory to be shared.

A worldwide and long-standing symbol of the Caprese spirit, Paolino Capri brings to Rome the timeless atmosphere of its iconic lemon grove. At La Minerva Bar, located in the iconic lobby of Orient Express La Minerva, the signature yellow and green hues of the island and therestaurant take center stage, transforming the space, decorated for the occasion with evocative lemon trees.

Founded in the 1970s by the De Martino family and now led by the founders' grandchildren Lino, Michela and Arianna, Paolino Capri continues to tell an authentic story rooted in tradition. Today, it remains a place devoted to conviviality, where cuisine and hospitality are genuine gestures expressed with natural elegance.

The result is a gastronomic experience that brings together the flavors, colors and atmosphere of the world's most famous island, Capri,with those of the Eternal City, Rome.

The artistic ceramics featured in the mise en place at La Minerva Bar are the result of a shared vision between Lino di Paolino and renowned Capri-based artist and ceramist Sergio Rubino, evoking nature and the joyful Mediterranean aesthetic.

DRIFT

Total Readership: 29.7K
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 1K

View online
February 12, 2026

The menu celebrates Caprese and Campanian culinary traditions with iconic dishes from Paolino Capri's cuisine, prepared in strict respect for original recipes and the highest-quality ingredients.

Starters include Paolino's grilled mozzarella on lemon leaf and the iconic Bomba Paolino with fresh tomato sauce and basil. First courses range from Caprese ravioli with fresh cherry tomatoes or lemon to the timeless Paolino Mezzi Paccheri

"Chiummenzana", and Lemon fettuccine with Sicilian red prawn carpaccio. Main courses feature great classics such as Old-style squid and potatoes, Lemon-marinated half chicken, and Grilledlamb ribs with Anacapri olive oil.

INSIDER TRAVEL REPORT
Where your news comes first

Total Readership: 87.6K
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 1K

View online
February 13, 2026

La Dolce Vita Orient-Express Offers a Train to Siena's Famed Palio

In Siena, twice each year—on July 2 in honor of the Madonna di Provenzano and on Aug. 16 for the Assumption—Piazza del Campo becomes the epicenter of a centuries-old rite: the Palio. At the heart of the historic center, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the medieval square hosts a bareback horse race whose present form extends traditions dating back to the thirteenth century.

La Dolce Vita Orient Express will now offer a three-day journey from Rome to experience this singular event, deeply rooted in Italian culture. The journey begins at Rome Ostiense station in the La Dolce Vita Lounge. At dusk, the train departs Rome. On board, a dinner by three-Michelin-starred chef Heinz Beck accompanies the passage through the Tuscan hills. The evening continues in the Bar Car, where piano music and Italian classics set the tone.

The following day, a private transfer takes guests to Siena. At Palazzo Chigi Zondadari, overlooking Piazza del Campo, an aperitivo precedes access to private balconies. From this exclusive vantage point, the full dramaturgy of the Palio plays out below. After a Tuscan dinner served in the quiet elegance of the palace, guests return to the train. The night extends in the Bar Car, between conversation and music.

The following morning, La Dolce Vita Orient Express arrives back in Rome. The journey concludes, marked by a rite that belongs as much to the present as to history. This journey forms part of La Dolce Vita Orient Express's summer itinerary and will operate on the following dates: July 1 to July 3 (Palio on July 2) and Aug. 15-17 (Palio on Aug. 16). For more information or reservations, visit www.orient-express.com/la-dolce-vita/itinerary/siena-the-palio. For more information, visit www.orient-express.com.

YOLO JOURNAL

Total Readership: 50K
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 1K

View online
February 13, 2026

Our Rome Hotels List

I'm certainly not alone in my love for Rome. I first came when I was 16, as my friend's +1 on her family trip. I don't remember the hotel we stayed in, but it was definitely fancy and near the Spanish Steps. The next time I came, I was about 18 and visiting a friend who lived on the 12th floor of an apartment building that had no elevator. Perhaps that scared me off, because my next memories started some 10 years later. When Clara was a baby, we somehow got a deal at the Hassler, then over the years we have stayed at the Locarno, J.K. Place Roma, G-Rough, the Vilon, the de'Ricci, and more recently, the Bulgari. (Because I was usually writing about these hotels, I was staying in places that were either new, or there was something new to say about them.) And then we fell so in love with the city that we ended up renting an apartment four years ago. Being here so often, I've had a front-row seat (literally, in the case of my soon to open Casa J.K. Place Roma neighbor) to all of the exciting hotel openings in the last few years—small, design-centric boutique hotels to palatial splurgy ones, and the hits just keep coming. I'm also so pleased to include some real gems on this list, many of them discoveries from my morning walks—the old-school places that don't have marketing departments!

We organized this a little differently than we did our hotel lists for London, New York, or Paris. Typically, we arrange them by neighborhood, but since Rome is so small and most people want to stay in the center, we decided to organize this by style/vibe/price. We've also flagged properties that fit into our "Costa Meno" category—in this case, less than 300 euros per night—with a CM, and family-oriented properties with an F. And for those of you who want to live more like locals (and no, we aren't including Airbnb in here) and actually have some space to cook up some of the bounty you see in the market, we have that covered, too. Hope this gives you plenty of inspiration for your next trip, whether you picture yourself in a chic little Roman pied à terre or in grand apartments that once belonged to the Borghese family. –*Yolanda*

La Minerva is the first hotel from Orient Express, which opened last spring in a 17th-century palace near the Pantheon. The interiors are really beautiful and warm, with lots of terracotta, ochre and amber incorporated throughout. Their rooftop bar and restaurant Gigi have the city's best views of the Pantheon.

HOTEL ONLINE
A B2B NEWS SOURCE FROM HFTP

Total Readership: 51.6K
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 1K

View online

February 17, 2026

Taormina Market Pulse 2026 – From the Grand Tour Heritage to a Global Luxury Destination

Introduction

Often referred to as the "Pearl of the Ionian," Taormina has long occupied a distinctive place in the imagination of international travellers. Since the nineteenth century, when it became an essential stop on the Grand Tour, the town has attracted writers, artists, and European aristocracy in search of beauty, inspiration, and refined leisure. Figures such as Oscar Wilde, D. H. Lawrence, and later Elizabeth Taylor and Greta Garbo, found in Taormina a discreet retreat overlooking the Ionian Sea, suspended between Mount Etna and the Mediterranean.

This tradition of elite patronage has continued over time, transforming Taormina into one of Southern Europe's most iconic resort destinations. Perched on a natural terrace between volcano and sea, the town offers a rare combination of dramatic landscapes and classical heritage, which has long appealed to international high society, filmmakers and creative communities.

In recent decades, this historical legacy has evolved into a contemporary luxury proposition, supported by an increasingly sophisticated hospitality, dining, and wellness offering. Landmark properties such as the former monasteries and grand hotels along Corso Umberto and Via Teatro Greco have been reinterpreted to meet modern luxury standards, while preserving their architectural and cultural identity.

More recently, Taormina has strengthened its global visibility through high-profile cultural events, including the Taormina Film Festival, and extensive international media exposure, most notably following the release of the second season of The White Lotus, filmed at the San Domenico Palace. Together, these elements have reinforced the town's status as a glamorous Mediterranean retreat, capable of attracting a high-spending international clientele in search of both authenticity and exclusivity.

This broader shift towards curated, experience-led consumption is also reflected in the growing relevance of high-end travel products. In 2025, Arsenale Group launched the Orient Express La Dolce Vita, including a flagship itinerary branded as "the Grand Tour", connecting Rome, Venice, Matera, Taormina, and Palermo, linking the destination's historic Grand Tour heritage with its current luxury positioning through a contemporary lens.

yahoo!life

Total Readership: 367.2M
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 3.4M

View online

February 25, 2026

Golden Ticket: Luxury Golf And Travel Aboard La Dolce Vita Orient Express In Italy

Luxury golf and travel in Italy on board La Dolce Vita Orient Express. | Credit: La Dolce Vita Orient Express

I love golf, most of the time. I couldn't have done this job for as long as I have without an enduring passion for the game, though Lord knows it can be frustrating.

I also (whisper it softly) have more than a passing interest in trains. Not in a geeky, standing on the platform in an anorak kind of way, but as more of a curious observer.

Disused railways fascinate me and I've walked many a mile on them; on holiday I'll always try to engineer a stop-off at any nearby heritage steam railway; and I still have boxes of model railway stuff in the loft, acquired over the years from charity and junk shops for a project that somehow never quite happened (maybe in retirement).

So, when word of a golf press trip in Italy on La Dolce Vita Orient Express hit my inbox, my eyes lit up. Having only just made my maiden golfing river cruise in Bordeaux, I knew that it wasn't really 'my turn'.

But when other writers had to decline for various reasons, the opportunity was all mine. Well, mine and my wife's as she wasn't about to pass it up once the PR had indicated that 'plus ones' were a possibility.

Forbes

Total Readership: 68.7M
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 635.8K

View online

February 26, 2026

Inside Rome's Newest Luxury Spa At The World's First Orient Express Hotel

Steps from the Pantheon, the stunning new spa at Orient Express La Minerva channels Ottoman-inspired hammam rituals and features beauty treatments by Furtuna Skin.

Facing the Pantheon, a 17th-century Roman palazzo is now home to the Orient Express La Minerva. Marking the legendary rail brand's first hotel and one of the year's most anticipated luxury openings, the property channels the glamour of exotic train travel into a refined Roman setting.

It's 93 rooms, including four lavish signature suites; Stendhal, La Minerva, Obelisco, and Orient Express are individually designed with Rosso Verona marble bathrooms, hand-painted ceilings, and original floors. Many of the rooms, along with the spectacular rooftop, offer iconic views of the Pantheon and the Eternal City.

Artist and architect Hugo Toro has worked his magic throughout the hotel and now unveils his crowning achievement: the Spa. Conceived as a tranquil retreat from another era, it invites guests on a journey of baths and treatments inspired by the romance of historic rail travel.

Forbes

Total Readership: 68.7M
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 635.8K

View online

February 26, 2026

The spa's design is inspired by ancient Roman bathing rituals, but as soon as I walked through the impressive entryway, I felt transported to Istanbul. The guest experience starts in the tepidarium, a warm room that helps the body adjust. Next comes the caldarium, where steam and heated pools relax your muscles and help you breathe more deeply. The experience ends in the frigidarium, where a quick cold plunge leaves you feeling refreshed and energized without being overwhelming.

At the spa, guests move from shared lounges to private treatment rooms, where hand-blown Murano glass lights cast a candle-like glow over brown travertine, veined marble, Roman-style plaster, and stained oak. Hugo Toro uses stone, oak, and polished marble to create a calm, welcoming atmosphere that feels elegant, not showy.

Agatha Rolita Lucas, Fortuna Skin Founder & CEO at the spa (L), Designer Hugo Toro in the hammam at Orient Express La Minerva spa (R)
ORIENT EXPRESS

Forbes

Total Readership: 68.7M
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 635.8K

View online

February 26, 2026

At the center is a marble hammam, inspired by the famous Orient Express route. Curved walls are surrounded by small fountains like those in the hotel's guest rooms. Screened panels soften the light, adding layers of shadow and texture. The hammam ritual has a long history, shaped by Ottoman and Roman traditions, and honors the Orient Express route that once linked Paris and Constantinople.

Two of the longer treatments, Dea Minerva and Stop Constantinople, draw inspiration from these traditions. They begin with rose-scented foot baths, followed by steam, exfoliation with a kessa glove, ghassoul clay wraps, and foaming massages. Each session ends with face and hair treatments. Another option, the Raxul ritual, uses heat and mineral-rich mud to refresh your skin and awaken your senses. These treatments highlight water, warmth, and touch, simple elements that have stood the test of time.

Treatment room at Orient Express La Minerva Spa
ORIENT EXPRESS

The spa partners with Furtuna Skin, the Sicilian botanical skincare house known for harvesting wild-foraged ingredients from its certified organic estate. Founder Agatha Relota Luczo combines ancestral remedies with clinical research, mirroring the spa's blend of ritual and refinement.

Some treatments were created just for this spa, including a facial with manual massage, obsidian Gua Sha tools, and concentrated plant-based ingredients. The focus is not on quick fixes, but on improving circulation, detoxification, and achieving a healthy glow by allowing the body time to reset.

In a city defined by layers of history, The Spa at Orient Express La Minerva does more than offer treatments; it revives bathing as a ceremony. Here, wellness is not rushed and unfolds with the elegance of a grand departure.

Forbes

Total Readership: 58.7M
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 543.3K

View online

February 27, 2026

The Best Spring Break Destinations For Families Ready To Unwind

A spring break vacation is the perfect antidote to a long winter, giving families with school-age kids a quick reprieve from busy schedules before the academic year wraps. The March or April timing means you're traveling off-peak for certain destinations, so you may also be treated to fewer crowds—at least compared to summer-season swells. To curate our guide to the best spring break destinations for families, I consulted travel experts and drew on our editors' extensive firsthand experience.

McLean Robbins, founder of travel advisory firm Lily Pond Luxury, advises families to consider their children's tolerance for time changes and unexpected delays, as well as their overall appetite for travel before zeroing in on a specific destination, especially if making last-minute plans. "It's about what can your children handle based on their age and how comfortable you are as a traveler to navigate the complexities that increasingly can happen," she says. If your youngest children are under age five, she often recommends an easy sun and beach experience. Families with older kids can contemplate Europe even last-minute, she says, because there may be more bookings available than at a popular all-inclusive family resort. Those with teens, well, "the world is your oyster to travel," she says. Below, find our top picks for where to go on spring break with your family, along with standout properties to book.

Where To Stay In The Best Spring Break Destinations For Families

- **Washington, D.C.:** Riggs Washington DC, Salamander Hotel, The Darcy
- **The Florida Keys:** Isla Bella Beach Resort, Hawks Cay Resort, Tranquility Bay Beachfront Resort
- **Montana:** The Ranch at Rock Creek, Paws Up, Montage Big Sky
- **Hawaii:** Mauna Lani, Auberge Collection, Four Seasons Hualalai, Mauna Kea
- **Costa Rica:** Four Seasons Resort Peninsula Papagayo, Ritz-Carlton Reserve, Nekajui, Hacienda AltaGracia, Auberge Resorts Collection
- **Mexico:** Hyatt Ziva Los Cabos, One&Only Palmilla, Grand Velas Los Cabos
- **England:** Brown's Hotel, A Rocco Forte Hotel, One Aldwych, Four Seasons Hampshire, Beaverbrook
- **Italy:** Collegio alla Querce, Auberge Resorts Collection, Hotel Savoy, A Rocco Forte Hotel, Villa Agrippina, A Grand Melià Hotel, Orient Express La Minerva

Forbes

Total Readership: 58.7M
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 543.3K

View online

February 27, 2026

Italy

Italy: Florence And Rome

Who Will Love It: Foodies and cultural enthusiasts
All-Star Attractions: The Colosseum, Vatican, Gladiator school, gelato, Leonardo De Vinci Museum, The Boboli Gardens, The Florence Cathedral
What Not To Miss: A family cooking class
Where To Stay: Collegio alla Querce, Auberge Resorts Collection, Hotel Savoy, A Rocco Forte Hotel, Villa Agrippina, A Grand Melià Hotel, Orient Express La Minerva

For the culturally inclined family looking for a departure from the typical beach spring break trip, Italy offers historic sights around every bend, stunning architecture, world-class museums, all the gelato you can eat, and of course the very best pizza and pasta. Although a trip to Italy is always worth considering, the country is having a bit of a moment after starring in the Winter Olympics, as well as the fifth season of *Emily in Paris*. Robbins recommends Rome and Florence as ideal destinations for spring sightseeing "before peak crowds and heat" of an Italian summer. Venice might be an option to add on if you have a longer break available, too. Little ones can enjoy getting their wiggles out in the many vibrant public squares, or piazzas, in both cities, while older kids will gape over seeing the Colosseum IRL. A family pasta-making class is sure to be a hit with all ages.

Orient Express La Minerva (Rome): This stunning luxury hotel carved out of what was once a 17th century palace is just minutes from the Pantheon, offering an exquisite Roman retreat from busy days. It's elegant and vibrant with exceptional service, a variety of suites and rooms, a rooftop restaurant, just-opened spa and an easy breakfast option to enjoy on your way out to see the sights.

window seat

Total Readership: N/A
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: N/A

View online

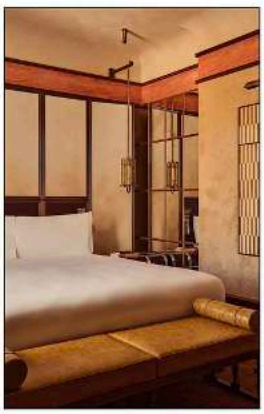
February 27, 2026

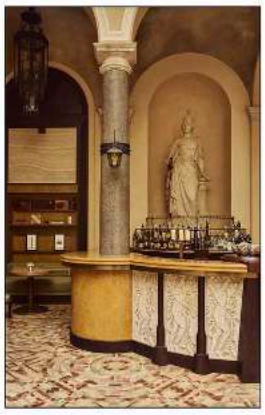
Window shopping #47

Screen-to-stay bookings, a designer collab at sea, and a Rome hotel worth every superlative

This is Window Shopping, a weekly mini-letter from Window Seat—your stylish scroll through what's new and noteworthy in the world of travel. Each issue blends timely headlines, personal favorites, and design-forward hotels to keep your wanderlust well-fed.

Hotel on my radar





Orient Express La Minerva Hotel — *Rome, Italy*

The very first hotel ever launched under the legendary Orient Express brand opened just last year and to say it's a stunner might be the understatement of the century. Tucked steps from the Pantheon in Rome's Piazza della Minerva, the property is a 17th-century palazzo given new life by designer Hugo Toro that features 93 keys, a bar under a dramatic glass skylight, and a rooftop restaurant with jaw-dropping 360° views of the city. Stendhal, Melville, and George Sand once called it home—new guests are in equally good hands.

Kingdom

66 | SPRING 2026

LUXURY | LIFESTYLE | GOLF

the MAJORS *issue*

Featuring Nelly Korda, Ben Griffin & More

Ultimate Golf Getaways

British Columbia

Dominican Republic

nnecock Hills Golf Club

SWINGING
in STYLE

A new luxury train and a recently opened hotel in Rome pair up on a golf journey like no other.

by
SHAUN TOLSON

NIGHT HAD DESCENDED across the Italian countryside as *La Dolce Vita Orient Express*, the French travel company's new 12-carriage, 31-cabin luxury train, sped south toward Naples. The rail liner was heading to Fasano, a small town in Puglia, where the next morning many of its passengers would disembark to play San Domenico Golf Course, a links-like routing tucked between the slopes of the Itria Valley and the Adriatic Sea.

For now, however, the train's golf travelers had adjourned to the 36-seat dining car for a six-course meal that teased the forthcoming coastal destination with dishes like cuttlefish salad and a medley of shellfish and legumes in a spiced consommé. The dinner, curated by the three-Michelin-starred chef Heinz Beck, also reflected the journey's Roman embarkation with a pasta course of cacio e pepe with herb foam. Later, pistachio-crusted veal gave carnivores something to sink their teeth into.

Passengers were just starting on their coffee and dessert—in this case, mandarin ice cream accented by an assemblage of ricotta in various forms—when a singer and a clarinetist entered the dining car to perform a rendition of "Die Moritat von Mackie Messer" (known more familiarly as "Mack the Knife"). The tune was a teaser for their post-dinner performance in the train's bar car, where, joined by the resident pianist, they played timeless Italian pieces and American classics made famous by the likes of Ray Charles, Etta James, Aretha Franklin, and Duke Ellington.

The evening, which was the first of three nights aboard *La Dolce Vita*, certainly got guests into the swing—or the Italian Swing, as Orient Express calls this new golf itinerary. The trip began more than 24 hours earlier, with dinner and an overnight stay at Orient Express's La Minerva, a 93-key luxury hotel situated within a restored 17th-century palace near the Pantheon. Before boarding *La Dolce Vita*, the golfers played a morning round at Rome's famous Marco Simone Golf & Country Club.

San Domenico Golf Course (above). A suite at Orient Express's La Minerva hotel (far left). La Dolce Vita Lounge at Roma Ostiense Station (left).

> "One of the great things that golf and the train do—they connect people."
>
> —MARCO GIROTTO
> General Manager,
> *La Dolce Vita Orient Express*

"The train is not our product," Marco Girotto, *La Dolce Vita*'s general manager, told me during that first night traveling the rails. "The train is a tool for our real product—our journeys, our adventures."

Those adventures, he explained, are inspired by the Orient Express's rich history, a past that can be traced to the first luxury round-trip train journey from Paris to Constantinople, in October 1883. The train's interior aesthetic—the handiwork of Dimorestudio founders Emiliano Salci and Britt Moran—was inspired by a golden era of design in Italy. "It was the best age for Italian creativity and craftsmanship," Girotto said of the 1960s and '70s. "Everything had form and function."

The form of Orient Express's new golf itineraries is to bring travelers to some of Italy's esteemed courses throughout the country—San Domenico in Puglia; Tuscany's Argentario Golf Club and the Club at Castiglion del Bosco; Royal Park I Roveri in Piedmont; and Franciacorta Golf Club in Lombardy. (The last two courses together with Castiglion

del Bosco and Marco Simone make up Orient Express's second golf itinerary, Northern Greens, which also originates in Rome but whisks passengers to Italy's northern realms.)

The function of these trips is to immerse travelers in the country's culture; and while the train is in motion, much of that occurs in the bar car. Listening to the nightly performances—which also included a lively Italian folk songs show on the journey's final night in Pisa—guests experienced the vitality and zest for life that defines the Italian spirit. Every night in the bar car felt like an Italian wedding celebration.

Cultural immersions also come by way of memorable sips—perhaps of a Tuscan single malt or a Sicilian pot-distilled gin. The train's collection of Italian amaro (from sufficiently bitter and well-layered Venetian examples to bright, fruity offerings from Sicily) offers the greatest

Jacob Sjöman

Beyond the Rails

Whatever the mode of transportation—yacht, private jet, helicopter—there's an over-the-top trip for golfers to discover.

TCS World Travel

Go big or go home. That may as well be the motto of TCS World Travel's 20-day Golf Around the World itinerary, which includes 11 tee times spread out across seven destinations, from an Olympic venue in Japan and a Nepalese course set in the foothills of the Himalayas to an Arnold Palmer design in Kazakhstan and a pair of Robert Trent Jones Jr. creations in Denmark. Along the way, you'll stay at five-star hotels and resorts, and you'll fly everywhere aboard a private Airbus A321.

Kalos Golf

Six countries, 10 courses, UNESCO World Heritage Sites, and pampered stays at top luxury resorts and hotels—that's what golfers have to look forward to on Kalos Golf's 20-day expedition of the Caribbean and South America by private jet.

Bravo Whisky Golf

Play golf on five iconic Scottish courses, including Machrie Golf Links; visit Islay distilleries; stay in a 13th-century castle on the edge of the Hebrides; go fly-fishing on a remote loch; and dine at a Michelin-starred restaurant in the Southern Highlands—all in one week. Bravo Whisky Golf comfortably packages these experiences and more into its seven-day Grand Golfing Tour of Scotland, thanks to helicopter transfers that save almost 30 hours of travel time.

Machrie Golf Links

A deluxe cabin aboard *La Dolce Vita* (above). The train's bar car (below). Marco Simone Golf & Country Club (far left).

discovery potential, even for those who are well versed in the category. Then there are the bar's signature cocktails: five libations that boast different spirit bases and include unique Italian ingredients, from Sicilian orange marmalade and porcini mushrooms to aged balsamic vinegar and extra-virgin olive oil.

Best of all, bar manager Giuseppe Carillo and his team are dedicated to the wishes and whims of the train's passengers. So, while the formal entertainment wraps up at around midnight, the revelry in the bar car endures for as long as guests desire. Such commitment to late-night merriment often comes with a price tag, however, as wake-up calls for morning rounds are likely to come sooner than many of the train's carousers would like.

Although Girotto insists that the journeys aren't meant to hark back to a specific era, it's impossible not to feel transported to a time when plush sleeper cabins, lively bar cars, and elegantly appointed dining cars represented the most luxurious means of continental travel. It's a romantic way to tour the country, one that allows time to slow even as the world rushes by.

A romantic way to tour, one that allows time to slow even as the world rushes by.

Swan Hellenic
For more than 70 years, Swan Hellenic has specialized in expeditions to destinations of cultural and historical interest. In September, the boutique British cruise line is adding a golf-focused package to its Atlantic Horizons itinerary, which sails from Portugal to the Canary Islands. Over those 10 days, golfers will have the opportunity to play five courses, three of which are based in Morocco, while traveling aboard a nine-deck ship that accommodates fewer than 200 guests.

Amadeus River Cruises
Oceanic cruises aren't for everyone, so for those who prefer a smaller vessel and a more scenic route, Amadeus River Cruises offers an eight-day Rhine River journey that embarks from Basel and culminates in Amsterdam. While staying aboard a four-deck ship with fewer than 80 cabins and suites, golf travelers have the opportunity to play five courses across France and Germany, including some that have previously hosted the DP World Tour and other professional events.

Fraser Yachts
For the ultimate boat-based golf trip, charter a yacht. The 154-foot *Acqua Chiara*, available through Fraser Yachts, offers a Sail & Swing experience in which as many as 10 guests are whisked around the Mediterranean, from Sardinia to Saint-Tropez. Golfing guests can play three high-caliber courses and engage in several other pursuits along the way. —S.T.

Acqua Chiara

A deluxe cabin aboard *La Dolce Vita* (top); the train's dining car (above).

"Every time I'm on the train, it feels like I'm entering a parallel dimension," Valentina Silvestri, a manager of events and special projects for Orient Express, told me over dinner on the journey's maiden evening. "You see the world passing by, but you are in this microenvironment with your fellow passengers. It's like there's an underlying bond that is growing. You're sharing something special with these people that you've never met before."

Added Girotto, "One of the great things that golf and the train do—they connect people."

If there's a shortcoming to Orient Express's new golf itineraries, it's their duration. The train itself never bolts down the tracks at breakneck speed, but the journey's three nights seem to fly. "When you step off the train at the end of the journey," Silvestri observed, "it's like you're stepping from a dream back into reality."

Reality came quickly when the train returned to Roma Ostiense station on the fourth evening—even though passengers were escorted to Orient Express's exclusive lounge for a final aperitivo. Three nights aboard *La Dolce Vita* with golf clubs in tow is just that—the sweet life—though the journey is short and sweet, too. I had stepped off the train only moments before, and I was already daydreaming of a return to the rails. That's the way it goes, I learned, after getting a taste of *La Dolce Vita*. ⊛

Travel AND Tour WORLD

Saudi Arabia Joins Spain, Central Asia, and Canada in Unveiling Groundbreaking Luxury Trains in 2026: Dream of the Desert, Al Andalus, Golden Eagle, and Rocky Mountaineer Set to Redefine Travel!

In an exciting move for the future of luxury rail travel, **Saudi Arabia** joins **Spain**, **Central Asia**, and **Canada** in unveiling a series of groundbreaking **luxury trains** in **2026**.

TTW TM
TRAVEL AND TOUR WORLD

Saudi Arabia's Dream of the Desert: Luxury Train Travel Connecting Riyadh, AlUla, and Qurayyat Redefines Tourism in the Kingdom

Published on January 2, 2025

Saudi Arabia is making an ambitious leap towards rebranding its tourism landscape with the unveiling of *Dream of the Desert*, a luxury train service designed to cater to high-end travelers. This innovative project is set to transform the way tourists experience the Kingdom, offering a unique blend of culture, comfort, and scenic beauty. With its sleek interiors and top-tier services, this luxury rail experience promises to be a key pillar in Saudi Arabia's broader Vision 2030 strategy, which aims to bolster the nation's tourism sector while showcasing its rich cultural heritage.

Running on the Kingdom's extensive rail network, *Dream of the Desert* will connect major destinations including **Riyadh**, **AlUla**, and **Qurayyat**, offering an exclusive and immersive journey across Saudi Arabia's northern regions. With only 40 luxury cabins available, each journey will host just 80 to 90 passengers, ensuring a personalized and intimate experience that emphasizes scarcity over volume. This limited capacity is part of the broader business strategy aimed at attracting travelers seeking both comfort and exclusivity, aligning perfectly with Saudi Arabia's efforts to develop a high-value tourism sector.

A Luxury Train for the Discerning Traveler: What to Expect on Board

Dream of the Desert is not your average train journey. Designed to be a mobile luxury hotel, this exclusive train brings world-class comfort directly into the heart of Saudi Arabia's vast desert landscapes. Inspired by traditional Saudi architecture, the interiors feature contemporary designs coupled with bespoke furnishings, creating a warm yet sophisticated atmosphere. The train boasts panoramic windows that allow guests to fully appreciate the stark beauty of the desert scenery as they glide between iconic locations like **Riyadh** and **AlUla**.

Onboard, passengers will enjoy five-star services, including gourmet dining inspired by Saudi cuisine, curated cultural programming, and guided excursions at various stops. One of the highlights of the journey will be the stop in **AlUla**, one of the Kingdom's most significant and rapidly growing tourism hubs, known for its historical significance and awe-inspiring landscapes. The train's design and operations will position Saudi Arabia as a refined and experiential tourism destination.

Tourism Meets Sustainability: The Environmental Benefits of Luxury Rail Travel

In addition to the luxurious elements of the train experience, the *Dream of the Desert* project offers a more sustainable mode of travel compared to air travel. With a smaller carbon footprint per passenger, rail travel is becoming an increasingly popular option for environmentally-conscious travelers looking to reduce their impact on the planet. Given Saudi Arabia's ambition to position itself as a leader in sustainability, this luxury rail service is a strategic move towards eco-friendly tourism that does not sacrifice luxury.

With rising global interest in slow tourism, *Dream of the Desert* taps into this growing demand for relaxed, scenic, and sustainable travel experiences. By offering a more leisurely mode of transport, the train aligns with global trends in eco-conscious and culturally rich tourism.

A Symbol of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030: Redefining Tourism in the Kingdom

The launch of this luxury train is not just about introducing a new mode of transport; it is a symbolic move that reflects Saudi Arabia's larger ambitions for its tourism industry. As part of the *Vision 2030* plan, which aims to diversify the Kingdom's economy and reduce its dependence on oil, tourism is set to play a pivotal role. By introducing a high-end rail experience, Saudi Arabia is positioning itself as a global luxury destination—one that combines history, culture, and modernity.

With an ambitious goal to attract 150 million visitors annually by 2030, Saudi Arabia is working to increase tourism's contribution to its GDP from 3% to 10%. While the *Dream of the Desert* will cater to a relatively small number of tourists, its role in reinforcing Saudi Arabia's reputation as a high-end destination cannot be overstated. It will serve as a prestigious entry point for affluent travelers and provide a glimpse into the future of luxury travel in the Kingdom.

Is Luxury Rail Travel in Saudi Arabia Sustainable?

While the *Dream of the Desert* train aims to make waves in the luxury tourism industry, it has also sparked debates regarding its environmental impact and long-term sustainability. The project relies heavily on Saudi Arabia's existing rail infrastructure, which reduces initial capital expenditure and allows for optimization of assets. However, questions persist about whether the luxury model will succeed in the harsh desert climate. Some analysts have raised concerns about whether enough repeat visitors will flock to the service to justify long-term operating costs.

Furthermore, critics argue that the focus on ultra-luxury tourism in a region where resources like water are scarce may place additional strain on local environments. This has prompted calls for further exploration of how such projects can balance luxury with sustainability, ensuring that they contribute positively to both the local economy and the environment.

The Future of Saudi Arabia's Luxury Train: A Strategic Asset

Looking ahead, *Dream of the Desert* represents more than just an exclusive way to travel across Saudi Arabia. It is a strategic asset that helps to frame the Kingdom's broader ambitions within the global tourism industry. By combining **luxury hospitality**, **cultural storytelling**, and a focus on environmental sustainability, Saudi Arabia's first luxury train aligns with global tourism trends while providing an experience that cannot be found elsewhere.

For travelers, it offers a rare opportunity to experience Saudi Arabia in unparalleled comfort, exploring the Kingdom's vast desert landscapes in a way that is both exclusive and environmentally conscious. As Saudi Arabia continues to enhance its tourism offerings, the *Dream of the Desert* is a key step toward achieving its goal of becoming a leading luxury tourism destination by 2030.

Neom City

Saudi Arabia's luxury train in desert to redefine tourism

Saudi Arabia's luxury train to introduce a new way of exploring the kingdom

Saudi Arabia is taking a bold step toward reshaping its tourism identity with the launch of Dream of the Desert, an ultra-luxury train experience created for discerning travelers. This ambitious initiative introduces a new way to explore the Kingdom—blending heritage, comfort, and dramatic desert scenery. Designed as a cornerstone of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, the project reflects the nation's commitment to expanding tourism while celebrating its cultural legacy through world-class experiences.

Operating along the Kingdom's growing rail network, Dream of the Desert will connect major destinations including Riyadh, AlUla, and Qurayyat, offering an immersive journey through Saudi Arabia's northern regions. With just 40 luxury cabins and a maximum of 80 to 90 guests per journey, the train emphasizes exclusivity and personalization over mass tourism. This carefully curated capacity aligns with Saudi Arabia's strategy to develop a high-value, premium tourism market.

An elevated rail experience: Luxury on the move

Dream of the Desert reimagines rail travel as a moving five-star retreat. Inspired by traditional Saudi architectural elements and refined with contemporary design, the train's interiors combine handcrafted details, bespoke furnishings, and warm, elegant finishes. Expansive panoramic windows frame sweeping desert landscapes, allowing travelers to fully absorb the beauty of Saudi Arabia's natural environment as they travel between iconic destinations.

Onboard services rival those of the world's finest luxury hotels. Guests can expect gourmet dining inspired by Saudi cuisine, immersive cultural programming, and guided excursions at key stops. A highlight of the journey is AlUla, one of the Kingdom's most important and rapidly developing tourism destinations, renowned for its ancient heritage sites and striking rock formations. Through design and service, the train positions Saudi Arabia as a refined, experience-driven destination.

Where luxury meets sustainability

Beyond its opulence, *Dream of the Desert* represents a more environmentally responsible approach to luxury travel. Rail transport produces a lower carbon footprint per passenger than air travel, making it an appealing option for eco-conscious travelers. As Saudi Arabia works to integrate sustainability into its tourism growth, this luxury rail service offers a balance between environmental awareness and premium comfort.

The project also aligns with the global rise of slow tourism, which prioritizes meaningful, scenic, and culturally immersive journeys. By encouraging travelers to experience the landscape at a relaxed pace, *Dream of the Desert* taps into a growing demand for sustainable travel without compromising exclusivity.

A Vision 2030 milestone: Transforming Saudi tourism

The introduction of Dream of the Desert is more than a transportation upgrade—it is a powerful symbol of Saudi Arabia's evolving tourism vision. Under Vision 2030, the Kingdom aims to diversify its economy and significantly reduce its reliance on oil, with tourism playing a central role in that transformation.

Saudi Arabia has set an ambitious target of attracting 150 million visitors annually by 2030, increasing tourism's contribution to GDP from 3% to 10%. While the luxury train will serve a limited number of travelers, its influence extends far beyond passenger numbers. It strengthens Saudi Arabia's global image as a sophisticated, high-end destination and serves as a flagship experience for affluent travelers seeking exclusivity and authenticity.

Balancing luxury and long-term sustainability

Despite its promise, *Dream of the Desert* has sparked discussion about the sustainability of ultra-luxury tourism in a desert environment. While the project leverages existing rail infrastructure—reducing development costs and maximizing efficiency—questions remain about long-term viability, operating expenses, and repeat demand in extreme climate conditions.

Environmental concerns have also been raised regarding resource usage, particularly water consumption, in a region where sustainability is critical. These discussions underscore the importance of balancing luxury development with responsible environmental stewardship to ensure long-term benefits for both the local economy and ecosystems.

Looking ahead: A strategic asset for the kingdom

Dream of the Desert stands as a strategic tourism asset that reflects Saudi Arabia's broader ambitions on the global stage. By combining luxury hospitality, cultural storytelling, and sustainability-focused travel, the Kingdom's first luxury train aligns seamlessly with global tourism trends while offering an experience unique to Saudi Arabia.

BUSINESS TRAVELLER

Going Places: 26 Extraordinary Experiences to Try in 2026

CREDIT: ETIHAD RAIL

8. Travel by rail

Etihad Rail is set to enter its passenger era in 2026. The 900km network connecting all seven emirates will begin carrying passengers from the Saudi border to Fujairah, initially linking 11 cities across the country, operated by Keolis International (which also runs Dubai Metro).

Saudi Arabia's first ultra-luxury train, Dream of the Desert, will also launch in 2026. Designed by Arsenale Group – the force behind the Orient Express revival – the train will operate five curated routes across the kingdom, complete with fine dining.

fact.

On The Move In 2026

OF ROADS AND RAILWAYS

According to Hilton's 2026 Trends Report, more of us will be taking to the highways in 2026 – it's no surprise that the hashtag #RoadTrip has racked up more than 5.9 million tags globally!

And explore.co.uk says more travellers are choosing epic rail journeys over short-haul flights – making the journey part of the holiday – in fact, the company has seen a 25% increase in rail bookings over the last year.

While Hilton's report finds some travellers are taking to the roads to save cash, others are seeking out the more luxe option with specialist companies turning the road trip into a curated journey built around Michelin-starred dining and one-off experiences.

In rail too there are dual purpose journeys. The appetite for slow, scenic travel is on the rise but rail with its student and multi-journey perks can also prove a cost-effective option. While luxury rail travel too is experiencing an upsurge with the likes of Saudi Arabia's soon to be launched ultraluxe train, Dream of the Desert, due to offer various routes reminiscent of the golden age of rail travel.

GLOBETRENDER®

Slow travel: Saudi Arabia unveils 'Dream of the Desert' sleeper train

January 14, 2026

Saudi Arabia is preparing to launch its first ultra-luxury train, Dream of the Desert, designed to showcase the country's landscapes and heritage through slow travel experiences on rail. Jenny Eloi-Chan reports.

Saudi Arabia has revealed plans for its first ultra-luxury sleeper train, Dream of the Desert, a new rail experience slated to take 2026 that has been developed by Italy-based Arsenale Group, in partnership with Saudi Arabia Railways and national tourism bodies.

Dream of the Desert is designed to carry just 66 passengers across a 1,300km network through Saudi Arabia. The train consists of 14 carriages, including 33 suite cabins, two restaurant cars and a majlis-inspired lounge. Prices start from SAR 30,000 (about £6,000) per cabin per night.

The project marks a significant step in the Kingdom's efforts to expand high-end tourism beyond hotels and resorts, and into experiential travel. It has been conceived as a "slow travel" experience, with journeys that place as much emphasis on time spent onboard as on guided excursions off the train.

The interiors of Dream of the Desert have been designed by architect and interior designer Abir Anmar Al Mansour, founder of Cultivate Architecture. The carriages are Italian-built but have been refitted rather than replaced, a decision that reflects a focus on reuse and long-term value.

Materials and design references draw on Saudi traditions, including carved wood, woven textiles and colour palettes inspired by desert landscapes and oasis greenery.

Aamar d'Amerian says: "Slow travel is about re-rendering to the received. My aim is to imbue this feeling by transitioning it into a tactile and visual language velvety textiles that invite touch, warm woods that entail traditional craft, sculptural lighting that entailed intimacy.

"The desert's palette of earthy tones, and sandy browns are balanced with a zest of lavender, oasis green and burnt oranges, infusing each space with a sense of culture and serenity. From the reception lounge to the restaurant, the interiors become a continuous meditation on presence that place in motion."

Dining plays a central role in the experience. The two restaurant cars will serve rotating menus created by local and international chefs. One focuses on Najdi flavours and regional produce, while the other blends Italian techniques with global influences. Meals are included as part of the journey, alongside curated on-board programming and guided off-train experiences.

Paolo Dalletta, chief executive of Arsenale Group, says Dream of the Desert builds on the company's experience in luxury rail, following the launch of La Dolce Vita Orient Express in Italy. He also views the Riyadh project as the company's first overseas luxury train and a foundation for further expansion in the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia.

Pre-reservations for Dream of the Desert are now open, with pricing varying by itinerary and including accommodation, meals and experiences. A refundable pre-booking fee of SAR 2,500 per suite (about £580) provides priority access once full reservations open, as well as an invitation to the inaugural launch event.

Menus created by local and international chefs. One focuses on Najdi flavours and regional produce, while the other blends Italian techniques with global influences. Meals are included as part of the journey, alongside curated on-board programming and guided off-train experiences.

Five itineraries have been announced, each running between October and May, except for two seasonal routes. These range from a two-day return journey from Riyadh to Jubbah, centred on prehistoric rock-art sites, to longer routes that continue north to Al Jouf and AlUla.

One itinerary, 'Ramadan Nights', operates during February and March and includes overnight travel with suhoor and iftar served onboard, alongside a stargazing stop in Qassim. Another, 'Summer Mirage', is designed for warmer months and takes place entirely onboard, departing from and returning to Riyadh.

Pre-reservations for Dream of the Desert are now open, with pricing varying by itinerary and including accommodation, meals and experiences. A refundable pre-booking fee of SAR 2,500 per suite (about £580) provides priority access once full reservations open, as well as an invitation to the inaugural launch event.

The introduction of Dream of the Desert reflects a broader shift in Saudi Arabia's tourism strategy towards immersive, place-led experiences that encourage longer stays and deeper engagement with the country's culture and geography. For the luxury travel sector, it signals growing demand for rail-based journeys that combine comfort, storytelling and low-paced exploration.

Each itinerary combines rail travel with cultural and natural experiences such as visits to Diriyah, desert camps, guided heritage tours and themed meals in outdoor settings. Accommodation off the train is included on selected routes, particularly those ending in AlUla.

The project has been developed in collaboration with Saudi Arabia Railways, the Ministry of Culture, the Saudi Tourism Authority and the Tourism Development Fund. Saudi Arabia Railways operates a 5,600km network across the country and plays a central role in the Kingdom's Vision 2030 strategy to improve connectivity and diversify the economy through tourism and logistics.

TTW TM
TRAVEL AND TOUR WORLD

The Dream of the Desert Sleeper Train: A Luxury Tour Through Saudi Arabia's Breathtaking Scenery

Published on January 16, 2026

In a groundbreaking move for luxury travel, Saudi Arabia has announced the debut of its Dream of the Desert sleeper train, set to launch in late 2026. Developed in collaboration with the Italy-based Arsenale Group, Saudi Arabia Railways, and national tourism authorities, this ultra-luxury train experience promises to offer travelers a unique way to explore the kingdom's vast landscapes, rich heritage, and cultural sites.

The Dream of the Desert sleeper train is designed for those seeking a truly exclusive and immersive travel experience. With a 1,300km rail network running through some of the country's most iconic and scenic regions, this innovative rail journey will cater to just 66 passengers at a time, ensuring an intimate and personalized experience. The announcement has generated excitement among those interested in exploring Saudi Arabia's natural beauty and heritage in style and comfort.

Luxury and Comfort on Rails

The Dream of the Desert train is built to be a mobile luxury hotel, consisting of 14 carriages that include 33 suite cabins, two restaurant cars, and a majlis-inspired lounge. Passengers will have the opportunity to relax and enjoy the picturesque views from their private suite, or socialize in the lounge area, designed with elements of traditional Saudi culture.

Each suite will offer a level of comfort typically found in five-star hotels, providing an unmatched level of privacy and relaxation for passengers. The train's design reflects a fusion of traditional Arabic architecture with modern amenities, ensuring that the journey is both culturally enriching and incredibly luxurious.

For those with an appetite for fine dining, the two restaurant cars aboard the Dream of the Desert will serve gourmet meals, showcasing Saudi Arabia's rich culinary traditions and local ingredients. Guests can expect a curated menu that highlights the diversity of Saudi cuisine, from traditional Middle Eastern dishes to contemporary interpretations of regional flavors.

Exploring Saudi Arabia's Landscapes and Heritage

The Dream of the Desert is not just a journey; it is an immersive experience that brings travelers face-to-face with Saudi Arabia's stunning and diverse landscapes. The route is designed to take passengers through the country's vast deserts, mountain ranges, and historic sites, offering a rare opportunity to witness the beauty of Saudi Arabia from the comfort of a luxurious train.

Key highlights of the journey will include views of Saudi Arabia's rugged Red Sea coastline, the mystical Empty Quarter Desert, and the ancient city of Al-Ula, known for its rock formations and Nabatean tombs. The train will also pass through regions that are home to UNESCO World Heritage Sites, such as Diriyah, the historical heart of Riyadh, and Madain Saleh, one of the kingdom's most famous archaeological sites.

In addition to the breathtaking landscapes, passengers will also have the chance to experience Saudi Arabia's cultural heritage through on-board activities, including traditional music performances, storytelling sessions, and guided tours of the destinations visited during the journey. These experiences aim to offer passengers a deeper understanding of the history and culture of the region.

Luxury and Comfort on Rails

The Dream of the Desert train is built to be a mobile luxury hotel, consisting of 14 carriages that include 33 suite cabins, two restaurant cars, and a majlis-inspired lounge. Passengers will have the opportunity to relax and enjoy the picturesque views from their private suite, or socialize in the lounge area, designed with elements of traditional Saudi culture.

Each suite will offer a level of comfort typically found in five-star hotels, providing an unmatched level of privacy and relaxation for passengers. The train's design reflects a fusion of traditional Arabic architecture with modern amenities, ensuring that the journey is both culturally enriching and incredibly luxurious.

For those with an appetite for fine dining, the two restaurant cars aboard the Dream of the Desert will serve gourmet meals, showcasing Saudi Arabia's rich culinary traditions and local ingredients. Guests can expect a curated menu that highlights the diversity of Saudi cuisine, from traditional Middle Eastern dishes to contemporary interpretations of regional flavors.

Exploring Saudi Arabia's Landscapes and Heritage

The Dream of the Desert is not just a journey; it is an immersive experience that brings travelers face-to-face with Saudi Arabia's stunning and diverse landscapes. The route is designed to take passengers through the country's vast deserts, mountain ranges, and historic sites, offering a rare opportunity to witness the beauty of Saudi Arabia from the comfort of a luxurious train.

Key highlights of the journey will include views of Saudi Arabia's rugged Red Sea coastline, the mystical Empty Quarter Desert, and the ancient city of Al-Ula, known for its rock formations and Nabatean tombs. The train will also pass through regions that are home to UNESCO World Heritage Sites, such as Diriyah, the historical heart of Riyadh, and Madain Saleh, one of the kingdom's most famous archaeological sites.

In addition to the breathtaking landscapes, passengers will also have the chance to experience Saudi Arabia's cultural heritage through on-board activities, including traditional music performances, storytelling sessions, and guided tours of the destinations visited during the journey. These experiences aim to offer passengers a deeper understanding of the history and culture of the region.

Pricing and Accessibility

The Dream of the Desert train is positioned as an exclusive luxury offering, with prices starting from SAR 30,000 (approximately £6,000) per cabin per night. This high-end pricing reflects the elite nature of the experience, with the train catering to affluent travelers seeking a distinctive way to explore Saudi Arabia. Given the exclusivity of the service, bookings will likely be limited, adding to the train's appeal as a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

While the price may seem steep for some, it includes all onboard services, from luxurious accommodations and gourmet meals to exclusive excursions and entertainment, ensuring that passengers receive exceptional value for their investment.

The introduction of the Dream of the Desert sleeper train is a direct response to the growing demand for high-end travel experiences in Saudi Arabia. As the country continues to position itself as a global tourism destination, with ambitious plans under the Saudi Vision 2030 initiative, the launch of this ultra-luxury train is part of a broader effort to diversify the kingdom's tourism offerings and attract international visitors.

The Future of Travel in Saudi Arabia

The Dream of the Desert train marks the beginning of a new chapter in Saudi Arabia's tourism development, highlighting the kingdom's commitment to combining modern infrastructure with traditional hospitality. With the continued investment in tourism infrastructure and unique travel experiences like this, Saudi Arabia is positioning itself as a destination that offers something truly special for discerning travelers.

In the future, the train could serve as a model for other luxury rail experiences in the Middle East, providing a new way to explore the region's rich history, diverse landscapes, and cultural heritage. As interest in slow travel continues to rise globally, the Dream of the Desert is set to become a leading example of how luxury trains can offer unforgettable journeys that prioritize comfort, culture, and adventure.

Conclusion: A Journey Like No Other

Set to launch in late 2026, the Dream of the Desert sleeper train offers a transformative way to explore the wonders of Saudi Arabia. With its unparalleled luxury, cultural immersion, and scenic views, this rail experience promises to attract travelers looking to experience Saudi Arabia in a way few ever have. Whether you're a history buff, a nature enthusiast, or someone seeking a unique travel experience, the Dream of the Desert offers a journey that's sure to leave lasting memories.

Condé Nast Traveler

26 Reasons Our Editors Are Excited to Travel in 2026

From faces to watch and books to read, to must-see destinations and events, here are 26 things we're excited about in 2026.

Dream of the Desert will bring ultra luxury train travel to Saudi Arabia. Stephan Julliard

Well trained

The United Arab Emirates's first passenger train services are on track to launch in 2026. Once complete, the Etihad Rail network will run over 900 kilometers, connecting 11 cities across all seven emirates, traversing desert and mountains, and connecting coasts. Then, in late 2026, the new *Dream of the Desert* will bring ultra luxury train travel to Saudi Arabia, with 33 suites, and majlis and dining cars in 14 redesigned vintage Italian carriages. Interiors by Lebanese architect and interior designer Aline Asmar d'Amman take inspiration from Saudi's craft heritage, traditional motifs and the beauty of the kingdom's deserts. One- and two-night journeys will begin in Riyadh and travel to destinations such as Al Jouf and Jubbah. —*Nicola Chilton*

AD MIDDLE EAST

6 Luxury Train-Sleepers and Yachts To Book in 2026

Why fly when you can board Saudi's Dream of the Desert in a gown and wake up to desert canyons, crisp white sheets and a butler on hand?

Photo: Stephan Julliard

Luxury train travel is having its moment. We're here to give you six of the best luxury train sleepers and yachts for a trip that oozes 1930s glamour.

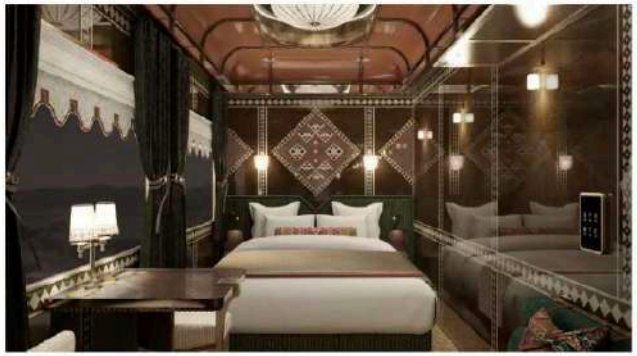
Flying is not what it used to be. Somewhere along the way, the romance of the journey began to fade away; in place of experience, modern air travel began to promise efficiency above all else. Pair that with a growing consciousness of our environmental footprint, and a shift feels inevitable. Switching from a domestic flight to rail can cut carbon emissions by as much as 86 per cent, according to analysis by Our World in Data on travel's carbon footprint, and since the term was coined in 2018, "flight shame" has slowly evolved from niche Scandinavian slogan to widespread cultural sentiment.

Slow is the operative word. It is slower travel, by rail and increasingly by sea, that is rising in its place. Specialist operators such as Railbookers, who curate independent rail holidays across Europe and North America, report a noticeable surge in travellers choosing panoramic windows over departure gates, trading the so-called efficiency of a middle seat for a journey that feels like part of the holiday. And while ships are hardly without environmental scrutiny, their impact on oceans and emissions is the subject of growing debate, a new generation of smaller-scale, design-led vessels is positioning the voyage itself as something more considered and intentional.

It harkens to a time gone by. In the 1930s, the world marvelled at the Blue Train and the Orient Express, at ocean liners where a crossing could unfold as both social theatre and cinematic spectacle. Nostalgia for that "golden age" has never completely vanished; what's new in 2026 is the reasoning behind its revival. A recent trend report by design studio JPA Design calls it "The Golden Age Reimagined", a return to rail, sea and slow travel driven not only by retro glamour, but by a desire for immersion, narrative and more mindful movement. This shift is already visible in how travel is being captured online. On social media, the appetite for slower, more intentional journeys has become unmistakable: content tagged #slowtravel on TikTok grew nearly 330 per cent in 2025, while #wellnesstravel surged 150 per cent.

The message is clear: a second golden age of travel is taking shape, and the industry is designing for it. Hotel groups, rail operators and luxury hospitality brands are expanding beyond static destinations, investing in long-form journeys shaped around narrative, craftsmanship and immersion. From Saudi Arabia's Dream of the Desert to Italy's cinematic La Dolce Vita, from the Britannic Explorer to a new wave of hotel-branded yachts, the following projects are redefining the art of the journey.

Dream of the Desert



Saudi Arabia's Dream of the Desert is more than the region's first luxury sleeper train. Running from Riyadh through 1,300 kilometres of shifting terrain, the 14-carriage experience carries just 66 guests at a time, making it intimate in scale as well as in design. The project, developed by Italy's Arsenale Group in partnership with Saudi Arabia Railways and designed by Aline Asmar d'Amman, layers Saudi craft traditions onto refurbished Italian carriages. Carved wood panels, woven textiles and brass detailing nod to regional heritage without slipping into pastiche, while a palette drawn from sand, sage and burnt terracotta feels instinctively grounded.

Light filters through geometric screens; lounges echo the convivial rhythm of a majlis. It's plush but composed, perhaps even a touch less ostentatious than expected, which somehow makes it all the more powerful. The interiors are luxurious, but more so is the quality of time: the unhurried hours spent watching desert light shift from amber to indigo. It arrives at a moment when the Kingdom is shifting toward experiential tourism.

Hospitalitynews MIDDLE EAST

Aline Asmar d'Amman on designing meaningful journeys

January 23,2026 Rita Ghantous

Aline Asmar d'Amman is renowned for crafting spaces where heritage, culture and contemporary design meet with purpose. From palaces to trains, her work explores luxury rooted in emotion, context and timeless cultural relevance worldwide.

You have worked on iconic projects worldwide. How do you balance heritage and modernity when redesigning historically rich spaces?

My work is rooted in transmitting heritage through dialogue between past and future, therefore guided by stories of cultural connection. For me, craftsmanship and artistry represent ultimate luxury, honoring millennial gestures while capturing the spirit of our times today. This philosophy fuels every project, as I constantly seek purpose, emotional intelligence and cultural relevance through meaningful architectural narratives. Although designing a train interior was a first, the philosophy mirrors my work on patrimonial hospitality landmarks worldwide. Furthermore, projects like Hôtel de Crillon or Orient Express Venezia begin with context, stories and poetic materiality while resolving construction constraints carefully. Moreover, for Dream of the Desert, I studied Saudi architecture, crafts, textiles, wood carvings and nomadic elements through a contemporary lens. Ultimately, capturing spirit of place and time remains artistry at its finest, where culture and craft build meaningful futures.

As an architect inspired by history, what essential architectural lessons should contemporary cities learn from the past?

Design must tell virtuous stories that elevate the soul, therefore inducing joy, wonderment and purpose through thoughtful material choices. Therefore, every material carries memory and authenticity, so architecture should respect cultural narratives while creating spaces built to endure. Consequently, I strive for balance, connecting raw and precious past and future, while grounding every project in its local culture.

You founded Culture in Architecture to foster dialogue. How do you see this initiative shaping future global design collaboration?

Culture in Architecture thrives on abundance of ideas, layering stories across architecture, interiors, décor, art and curated objects. Thus, in a fast-moving world, creativity rooted in emotional intelligence and truthful narratives will always remain deeply valued. Moreover, this freedom to invent allows modernity to emerge from tradition, creating what I call the concrete poetry of architects.

What has been your most meaningful project so far, and what made it especially significant personally?

Choosing a favorite project is impossible, because every creative journey carries its own purpose, place and emotional responsibility. At Hôtel de Crillon, I imagined Marie Antoinette awakening today, designing a contemporary stage balancing heritage and bold modernity. Working alongside Karl Lagerfeld was a lifelong gift, as his erudition, generosity and humor deeply shaped my creative vision. Renovating Le Jules Verne within the Eiffel Tower united engineering audacity, gastronomy and symbolism into a powerful architectural narrative. Dream of the Desert was envisioned as an emotional passage, where each space becomes a poetic chapter rooted in Saudi heritage.

Which architectural or design direction are you most excited to explore in your upcoming work?

My work stands beyond trends, instead pursuing timeless elegance that bridges past and future with sustainable relevance. Architecture holds a moral duty to seek contextual truth, beauty and responsible material use through lasting meaningful projects. From buildings to objects and trains to boats, diverse scales inspire me, while poetic materiality and storytelling remain constant.

Construction Week
MIDDLE EAST

Luxury, in motion: Discover the design story behind Dream of the Desert

In this exclusive Q&A, Aline Asmar d'Amman unpacks the design philosophy behind the Dream of the Desert project.

By Prerani Yekula

January 29, 2026

Save

Highlights by Leverid.ai

Unlock AI insights - Subscribe

As travellers increasingly seek depth over speed, slow travel is redefining luxury, shifting the focus from constant documentation to meaningful immersion in culture. Rail journeys, in particular, are emerging as a new frontier for this movement.

Dream of the Desert is one such journey. Much like the rhythm of the train itself, interior architect Aline Asmar d'Amman translates Saudi Arabia's Najdi architecture's language into a contemporary, ultra-luxury hospitality experience, seamlessly blended with Italian savoir-faire. In this Q&A, she unpacks the design philosophy behind the project, the nuances of designing for movement, and how heritage and modernity coexist on board.

How did the overall interior concept for the Dream of the Desert take shape?

My vision for Dream of the Desert emerged as a cinematic reverie, an immersive journey unfolding like a poem across the vast Saudi landscape. From the outset, I wanted the interiors to feel in motion, as though composed at shifting scenes, textures and colours infused with the mystique of the desert.

Saudi heritage has been familiar to me since early childhood. Growing up in Lebanon, I was exposed to this layered and refined culture through rough journeys, homes in Beirut and dear friends' houses in Riyadh. Along side this, the writings of Arabian poets – from Rumi to Ibn Arabi – deeply shaped my imagination. Ibn Arabi's belief that "a desert must be dry, but it is rich in spirit" became my guiding principle: the idea that apparent emptiness allows beauty and meaning to unfold.

Aline Asmar d'Amman

I studied the proportions and architectural language of Saudi landmarks, from Al Ula and Madain Saleh to Hail, drawing from Najdi and Hijazi details. These references were translated subtly, through craftsmanship rather than literal application: sculpted wood panels, earthy tones, luxurious textiles and a sense of quiet monumentality.

Each space was conceived as part of a continuous narrative, bridging past and future. Close collaboration with the Saudi Ministry of Culture, its Fashion Department, and the Ministry of Tourism enriched the project with deep insight into regional crafts and traditions. Ultimately, Dream of the Desert became a dialogue between Italian craftsmanship and Saudi heritage – a design rooted in cultural relevance, comfort and emotional resonance.

How do you define luxury in the context of this project?

Luxury, in this project, is defined by intention rather than excess. It lies in transformation, craftsmanship and meaning. Working with existing Italian wagons, we embraced upcycling as an act of creative reinvention – layering them with Saudi soul rather than starting anew.

For me, this approach reflects the future of ultra-luxury: respectful of history, sustainable, and emotionally intelligent. Rather than erasing what existed, we chose to elevate it. Italian savoir-faire meets Saudi artistry through a careful balance of materials, techniques and cultural references. This cross-cultural dialogue, developed in collaboration with Arsenale and the Saudi Ministry of Culture, became a defining element of the project.

Luxury is also expressed through time. Dream of the Desert is about slow travel, surrendering to the rhythm of the journey. That philosophy informed every design choice: velvety textiles that invite touch, warm woods reminiscent of traditional dwellings, and sculptural lighting that creates intimacy rather than spectacle.

The palette draws directly from the desert: sand, earthy browns, lavender hues and subtle greens – establishing a sense of grounded serenity. Each space, from the reception lounge to the restaurant, encourages presence and contemplation. Here, luxury is not loud; it is tactile, cultural and deeply considered.

What considerations shaped the interior experience for passengers spending time onboard?

Design, to me, is a form of storytelling – a way of conveying humanistic values through materials and space. When conceiving interiors for dedicated journeys, comfort alone is not enough; emotional rhythm becomes essential. I wanted passengers to feel a sense of belonging and suspension, where time slows, and the experience unfolds gradually.

Rather than recreating tradition as pastiche, the interiors reimagine Saudi heritage in a contemporary, respectful manner. Each space acts as a chapter in a continuous narrative: the welcoming majlis-inspired lounge, the contemplative private suites, and the refined restaurant. Together, they form a journey not only through landscape, but through atmosphere and emotion.

Material choices play a crucial role in sustaining comfort over time. Soft textiles, warm surfaces and carefully modulated lighting reduce sensory fatigue, while subtle variations in colour and texture maintain visual interest throughout the day. Movement is embraced rather than resisted – the gentle rhythm of the train becomes part of the experience.

Passengers are invited to inhabit the train as they would a living space, not a transient one. Spaces encourage both social interaction and solitude, allowing individuals to choose their own pace. Ultimately, the design seeks to create a sensorial crescendo – where culture, comfort and beauty coexist effortlessly.

What aspects of train design required a completely different way of thinking compared to homes or hotels?

While this is the first time I work on the design of a train interior, the philosophy remains the same as with working on large-scale hospitality projects I designed in palaces/villas/Bridge Eiffel Palazzo Dove Giovanna III, the Orient-Express Hotel to come in Venice or Hotel de Crillon, a Rosewood Paris, place de la Concorde). The creative journey starts with context and stories – talking us to unexpected yet fertile horizons. I like to think that challenges make the best projects. Dream of the Desert is therefore not only about luxury travel but on rails and slow travel, but also a remarkable opportunity to pay homage to a highly sought-after nature – one with so much to share with the world.

My architectural work is rooted in the transmission of past to future, elevated by cultural connection stories. For me, craftsmanship is the ultimate bridge between past and present, a form of luxury passed down through generations, from one skilled hand to another. I spent hours studying the details of a Saudi architecture – the intricate lattice windows, delicate wood carvings, and oil lamps that cast a cinematic glow – translating these elements through a refined contemporary lens, thoughtfully adapted to the unique spatial and technical constraints of a train.

The future I imagine is one of thoughtful modernity, where innovation honours memory, and where cultural dialogue becomes the true definition of luxury.

How does the project design respond to its Saudi Arabian context?

In my recent realization for the Dream of the Desert train interiors, I passionately studied the details of Saudi architecture and artisanal traditions – from the monolithic, sensuous al-Hadeer Sadeem villages, to the intricate lattice weavings of regional artisans, the wood carvings on Jeddah's facades with their distinctive green colour, and the nomadic oil lamps that cast a cinematic glow in the desert, translating these elements through a refined contemporary lens with the gesture of today's artisans. Capturing the spirit of place and time is certainly at its finest. Everywhere, spaces capture the shades and textures of the desert: pale sandy hues and darker tones of the rock formations, while deep sea green and burnt orange complete the wonder palette.

I drew inspiration from the profound love and symbolism of the royal colour adopted since 2021 by Saudi Arabia as the Kingdom's royal colour. Inspired by the purple-pink flowers that bloom across the Saudi deserts in spring, mainly in the Asir region, the specific hue of the renowned *"Abeed el Sid"* that bloom in unexpected and truly magnificent ways punctuates discreet elements of design, in unusual noble touches. Such as delicate stitching of pink thread on camel tooled leather in the restrained banquettes, a nod to the equestrian saddler language.

Dream of the Desert's elegant reception lounges are inspired by traditional majlis settings, adorned with intricately hand-carved wooden elements, patterns and woven textiles that embody the distinctive signature and warmth of Saudi hospitality. The glass texture of Murano handmade luminaires evoke drops of water on the sand, while others reminisce the Arabian lanterns we call *'Fanous'*. The glass shimmering taps are born from sand dust that recalls rock textures. Inspired by the delicate trimmings that adorn abayas and traditional garments, the fabric lampshades seem to have dressed up well in Dream of the Desert's elegant reception lounges are inspired by traditional majlis settings, adorned with intricately hand-carved wooden elements, patterns and woven textiles that embody the distinctive signature and warmth of Saudi hospitality. The glass texture of Murano handmade luminaires evoke drops of water on the sand, while others reminisce the Arabian lanterns we call *'Fanous'*. The glass shimmering taps are born from sand dust that recalls rock textures. Inspired by the delicate trimmings that adorn abayas and traditional garments, the fabric lampshades seem to have dressed up well in

How did durability, movement, and environmental conditions influence material choices?

Durability and movement were fundamental considerations. Every material had to withstand vibration, temperature variations and continuous use, while maintaining refinement. Italian engineering excellence provided a robust foundation, onto which Saudi-inspired artistry could be layered.

Bespoke metal panels, finished and patinated, were developed to ensure stability while creating intensity in the lounge spaces. These elements are deeply anchored, balancing technical performance with aesthetic depth. In the restaurant car, areas are ceiling and bespoke Murano glass sconces introduce lightness without compromising structural integrity.

Textiles and finishes were selected not only for beauty, but for longevity and ease of maintenance. Many details conceal complex engineering, allowing craftsmanship to remain visible while functions remain seamless.

This fusion of performance and poetry is essential to the project. Materials are not decorative; they are vessels of memory, culture and purpose – designed to endure both physically and culturally.

What did the planning process look like with physical constraints of a train in mind?

From the earliest stages, the planning process was shaped by the reality that a train is not a static architecture, but a moving body. This required a fundamental shift in perspective. Every decision had to anticipate motion, vibration, weight distribution and technical limitations, while preserving the emotional and narrative depth of the project.

The work began with an intensive dialogue between concept and construct. Volumes were studied meticulously, circulation refined to avoid rigidity, and proportions adjusted to ensure comfort without excess. The challenge was to create a sense of openness by within fierce dimensions – spaces that feel expansive and serene, even when physically compact.

Materials, too, were considered early in the planning process. Their thickness, anchoring systems and resistance to movement informed the design language. Nothing could be purely decorative; every element had to serve both a poetic and a functional role.

Rather than perceiving these constraints as limitations, I embraced them as a creative framework. They encouraged clarity, precision and restraint. The train became a disciplined canvas – one that demanded coherence and intention. In many ways, this rigour sharpened the project's identity, allowing the interiors to feel composed, fluid and deeply considered.

What lessons from this project might inform your approach to future transport or hospitality design?

Dream of the Desert reaffirmed a belief that has long guided my work: that the most meaningful projects emerge from listening – to context, to culture, and to constraint. Designing for movement sharpened my understanding of rhythm, sequencing and emotional pacing within space.

The project reinforced the importance of restraint. When space is limited and conditions are demanding, every gesture must be intentional. This discipline enhances clarity and strengthens narrative coherence – principles that are equally relevant in hospitality, residential, and transport design.

Another key lesson lies in the power of cultural immersion. True luxury today is rooted in relevance and respect. Engaging deeply with local heritage, craftsmanship and symbolism allows design to transcend aesthetics and become an experience of belonging.

Finally, the project highlighted the value of collaboration across disciplines. When design, engineering and craftsmanship evolve together, the result is not a compromise but an evolution. These lessons will continue to inform my approach, creating spaces that are emotionally generous, culturally resonant and designed to endure – both materially and more tightly.

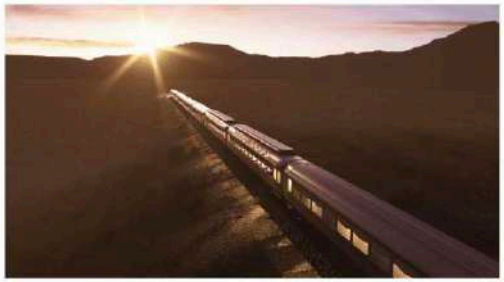
Leaders

Year-End Review: The Leaders-Mena Website's most-read Stories of 2025

11 – Riyadh Metro, Desert Dream Train Emerge among Most Anticipated Projects in 2025

The Riyadh Metro Project and the Dream of the Desert Train have emerged among the world's highly-anticipated transportation projects in 2025, according to CNN. These two projects have gained global prominence owing to their unique designs and outstanding nature.

Read more..



Riyadh Metro, Desert Dream Train Emerge among Most Anticipated Projects in 2025

The Riyadh Metro Project and the Dream of the Desert Train have emerged among the world's highly-anticipated transportation projects in 2025, according to CNN. These two projects have gained global prominence owing to their unique designs and outstanding nature. The two projects are part of Saudi Arabia's developmental infrastructure projects, further underscoring the Kingdom's commitment ... Continue reading

Leaders 0

MEN'S JOURNAL

Total Readership: 15.1M
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 139.5K

View online

March 2, 2026

TRAVEL

I Took a Luxury Golf Trip on La Dolce Vita Orient Express. Here's What It's Really Like

Inside Italy's most exclusive golf tour.

On the first tee at San Domenico Golf Club in Fasano, gazing at the Adriatic Sea, I feel like I'm gently swaying back and forth. The movement of the overnight train ride that rocked me to bed last night has tweaked my equilibrium a bit. A small price to pay for the best travel sleep I've had in years.

Imagine a luxurious boutique hotel that transports you from one destination to the next while you dream. That's the conceit of La Dolce Vita Orient Express' Italian Swing—a four-day, three-night itinerary tailored for passionate golfers who want to travel in the absolute pinnacle of style. Tracing courses from Rome to Puglia, onward to Tuscany, the Tyrrhenian coast, and back to the eternal city, the journey is chalked full of bespoke opulence, impeccable service, and some of the best golf in continental Europe.

Inside La Dolce Vita Orient Express

La Dolce Vita Orient Express is assembled from a dozen vintage Z1 Italian cars that have been rebuilt and refurbished to transport passengers not just along the rails but back in time to the '50s and '60s and the golden age of Italian romance. Designed by the Milan's Dimorestudio and owned by French hospitality brand Accor, the vibe is so spot on that you almost expect to see Marcello Mastroianni and Catherine Deneuve sipping Negronis in the bar car.

On arrival at the platform, guests are greeted by their car's conductor and shown to the compartment they will call home for the next few days.

There are a total of 30 cabins in two configurations—18 suites with double beds (118 sq ft) and 12 deluxe rooms with pullout sofa beds (75 sq ft). Both cabin types offer a private bathroom, a small table with seating, and a closet with enough for your carry-on plus its contents.

MEN'S JOURNAL

Total Readership: 15.1M
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 139.5K

View online

March 2, 2026

The bar car inside La Dolce Vita Orient Express.
La Dolce Vita Orient Express

Day 1: Golfing at Marco Simone Golf & Country Club

After an overnight stay at La Dolce Vita's opulent, 93-room La Minerva Hotel, a flip wedge shot away from the Roman Pantheon, the golf begins at Marco Simone Golf & Country Club just to the northeast of the city.

Owned by fashion magnate Lavinia Biagiotti Cigna, the course is named for the 1,000-year-old castle she and her family call home. Originally designed by Jim Fazio in the 1990s, Marco Simone was re-imagined by European Golf Design with the help of Tom Fazio II and remodeled between 2018 and 2021 ahead of the 2023 Ryder Cup.

The team understood the assignment. The 7,299-yard championship track is near match-play perfection. Set among gorgeous views of the *Laziale* countryside, the course plays up and down rolling meadows. To score well, players need to navigate substantial elevation changes, deep native grasses, expertly placed bunkers, as well as a few ponds and streams.

MEN'S JOURNAL

Total Readership: 15.1M
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 139.5K

View online

March 2, 2026

Marco Simone's par-fours tend to either be short, risk-reward opportunities, or lengthy holes with ample opportunities for mistakes. While not all are reachable, the par-fives all present good scoring opportunities. Beware the par-threes. They may look benign from the tee, but they are well protected with insidious bunkers, run-off areas and undulations that can throw shots into precarious situations.

The exterior of La Dolce Vita Orient Express
La Dolce Vita Orient Express

Day 2: Golfing at the San Domenico Golf Club

"Good morning passengers, we are now arriving in Puglia and your transfer to San Domenico Golf Club is waiting," the conductor dulcetly announces over the intercom. Sandwiched between the popular Italian beach communities of Monopoli and Ostuni, the club overlooks the enticing waters of the Adriatic.

The course was created in 2003 by European Golf Design and features long stunning vistas dotted with olive trees and ancient stone walls. As it's a seaside course, the topography is relatively flat with gently undulated fairways. San Domenico is mainly defended by smart bunkering and...wind. When the breeze is up, the 6,890 yards play much, much longer.

The test opens with a rather intimidating tee shot—water snakes along the entirety of the right side. But like most holes on the course, the danger and strategy are evident. The fairways are generally spacious but there is ample opportunity for recovery for players who are spraying it off the tee (like I did,) though they may need to shape a clever shot around a cactus-encrusted waste area to do so.

MEN'S JOURNAL

Total Readership: 15.1M
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 139.5K

View online

March 2, 2026

Day 3: Golfing at The Club at Castiglion del Bosco

Unfortunately, there's not a train station near The Club at Castiglion del Bosco, but the experience is well worth the hour-long transfer. Set in the Tuscan hills to the south of Sienna, known as the Val d'Orcia (a UNESCO world heritage site,) a ride on La Dolce Vita Orient Express offers a rare treat to play the private course. Otherwise, Castiglion del Bosco is only open to members and guests of the resort, which was created by Massimo Ferragamo (the youngest son of Salvatore Ferragamo,) and now owned by Rosewood Hotels.

Sadly, we missed out on the famed Tuscan sun and caught a rather dismal day with intense wind and pounding rain. But even in tough conditions the course was marvelous. Designed by Tom Weiskopf, Castiglion del Bosco weaves up and down hilltops and valleys, adding elevation to the challenge players must navigate, along with stunning cypress trees and natural water hazards. Every hole is a visual delight, with vistas of vineyards and villas. The 684-yard par-five 13th plays down a valley, which makes it much shorter than the number but not quite reachable in two. Three smart shots are required for a birdie opportunity. The next hole is one of Castiglion del Bosco's impeccable par-threes, but players who leave themselves short sided will do well to mark a four on the card. At 325 from the back there's the par-four 15th, which is drivable for big hitters but well guarded by a creek on the left and a well-placed bunker to the right of the green.

The Club at Castiglion del Bosco
La Dolce Vita Orient Express

MEN'S JOURNAL

Total Readership: 15.1M
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 139.5K

View online

March 2, 2026

Day 4: Golfing at Argentario Golf Club

After a short overnight train ride, we arrive at Argentario Golf Club on the Tuscan coast near Grosseto. The 6,800 championship course hosted the 2025 Italian Open (Open D'Italia) and is more than challenging enough to test golfers of all skill levels. Set on Monte Argentario, the course weaves through natural Mediterranean vegetation and ancient olive trees. Due to the protected nature of the environment, Argentario is "Agri Cert" certified and uses only natural maintenance products that are bio and eco-compatible.

Designed by architect David Mezzacane and professional golfer Baldovino Dassù, Argentario offers players picturesque views of the sea, Orbetello Lagoon, cork tree-hewn fairways and well-guarded greens. But as gorgeous as it is, the course can be a beast, challenging golfers with strong doglegs, varied shot requirements and small, sloped greens. There is ample opportunity to score well, but only if you keep your ball in play off the tee and hitting your approach targets.

A suite inside La Dolce Vita Orient Express.
La Dolce Vita Orient Express

MEN'S JOURNAL

Total Readership: 15.1M
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 139.5K

View online

March 2, 2026

Dinner Is Served

While on board, passengers enjoy decadent menus created by chef Heinz Beck of the three-Michelin-star Roman institution La Pergola. Artfully prepared dishes like shellfish with legumes in a spiced consommé, ditto gnocchetti "cado e pepe" style with herb foam, veal stuffed with dried fruit in a pistachio crust, lobster with pumpkin cream, and orecchiette with broccoli clams and candied lemon, dazzle the palate as well as the eyes. Needless to say, each course is masterfully paired with the perfect wine. But save some room.

The Party Rolls On

After each night's feast, guests are invited to the lounge car for digestifs and a bit of entertainment. The bartenders can make nearly any tipple you'd like and even help you create your own signature cocktail. As you sip it, the band, which rotates in and out over the journey, belts out classic mid-century hits *a la* "Volare," "Tu Vuo Fa L'Americano," and "La Mer" well into the night.

La Dolce Vita Orient Express stops at a station.
La Dolce Vita Orient Express

Another Round

Beyond the Italian Swing, La Dolce Vita offers a tour called Northern Greens, taking players to Marco Simone Golf & Country Club, Franciacorta Golf Club, Royal Park I Roveri, and Argentario Golf Club.

For non-golfers, La Dolce Vita Orient Express offers more than two dozen itineraries that explore some of the most incredible experiences *la bel paese* has to offer, like routes exploring Italian wine, beach hopping in Sicily, the Sienna famed Palio horse race, or the epic journey from Rome to Istanbul.

MEN'S JOURNAL

Total Readership: 15.1M
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 139.5K

View online

March 2, 2026

Final Verdict

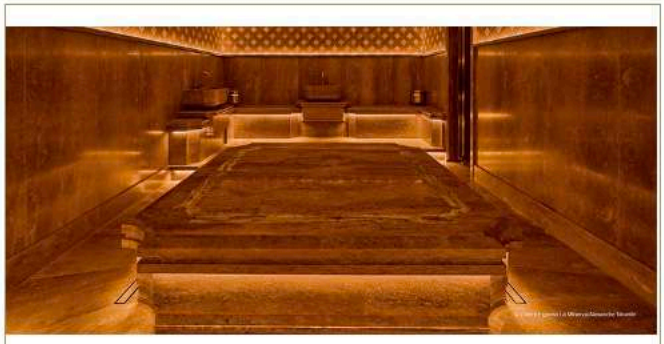
Any trip on La Dolce Vita Orient express is expensive—the Golf Swing itinerary starts at around $14,000 per person. But the exceptional service, gorgeous environment, unforgettable meals, and fantastic courses make it a golf journey of a lifetime.

GLOBETRENDER®

Total Readership: 88.9K
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 1K

View online

March 4, 2026



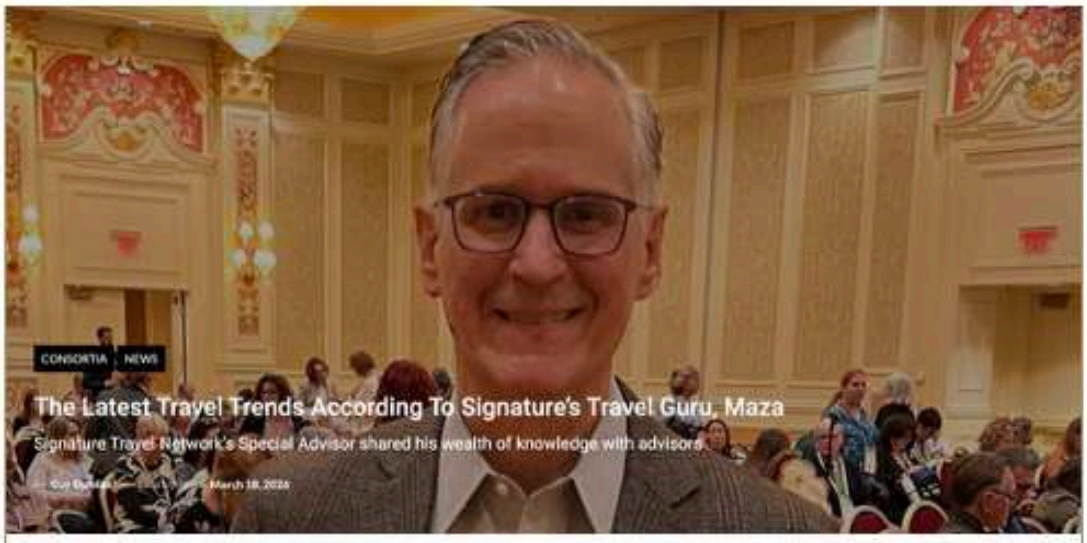
Orient Express La Minerva hotel creates Ottoman-inspired spa

LATTE

Total Readership: 28.8K
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 1K

View online

March 18, 2026



In Sydney last week for the first time in around a decade, **Ignacio Maza** met with a group of **Signature Travel Network**'s members at a gathering at the InterContinental Sydney. The 70-year-old has been in the travelsphere for nearly 50 years, working across brands including American Express Travel, Virtuoso and, for the past 20 years, with Signature Travel Network.

At Signature Travel Network, Maza established the consortia's highly-regarded (and highly sought-after) Hotels & Resorts Program, which now numbers 1,300 properties globally, and the network's Destination Specialist Program. He travels the world annually more frequently than most in the industry, and his insight on what's happening is a highlight session for advisors at Signature's annual Conference.

Maza also highlighted *La Dolce Vita* ***Orient Express***, which launched last year, operating out or Rome. The joint partnership between Accor, LVMH and Arsenale Group will deliver two new trains in 2026 and 2027.

View online
March 29, 2026

8 Extraordinary Foodie Luxury Travel Experiences Worth Planning a Trip Around

For the seasoned traveler who has seen and done it all, what level of luxury does it take to up the ante — and cater to those who have everything? If you're already traveling private (whether it's by jet or yacht), some of the most discerning brands in the luxury realm have designed experiences that'll have you quickly be trading in your own mode of transport and clamoring to book theirs — which come complete with MICHELIN-worthy dining and private tours of everything from Machu Picchu to Easter Island's synonymous statues.

From an around-the-world tour in 24 days to week-long barge and yacht cruises through Burgundy and the Mediterranean (respectively) and a safari so stylish, you'll want to shop specifically for the occasion, these eight luxurious travel experiences are some of the most swoonworthy on the globe.

1. Ride on a Retro-Style Rail Journey Through Tuscany

The golden age of travel evokes images of monogrammed, stackable Louis Vuitton trunks and ensembles practically plucked off the runway. The revival of vintage-style rail journeys caters to the growing desire for slow travel, where the journey is as much part of the experience as the destinations you're rolling through. On board La Dolce Vita Orient Express, peer out your suite window as you venture from Rome to Tuscany's hilltop town of Montalcino, where you'll sip local wines before taking part in another favorite Italian pastime, aperitivo, back on board. The evening is just getting started — the highlight is an elegant meal in the dining car designed by chef Heinz Beck, of Three-MICHELIN-Star La Pergola — which, of course, you'll have to dine at when you pull back into Rome.

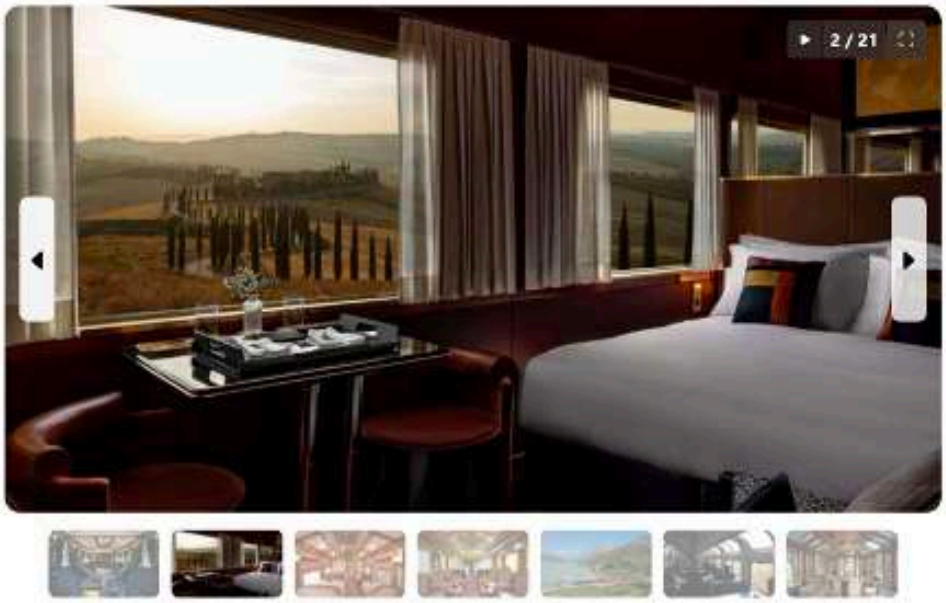
Another spot to add to your Rome itinerary: Il Ristorante – Niko Romito, from the Italian chef who claims three coveted MICHELIN Stars at flagship Reale in Abruzzo. Sprawling across the fifth floor of Three-Key Bvlgari Hotel Roma, the pared-back dining room opens to an expansive terrace overlooking the world's largest circular tomb, the Mausoleum of Augustus, whose scene-stealing views are topped only by chef Romito's spaghetti al pomodoro.

Total Readership: 85.7M
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 922.7K

View online

March 15, 2026

Trains that represent luxury and engineering combined



#1: La Dolce Vita Orient Express — Italian Revival (2018)

©Reddit

La Dolce Vita Orient Express, launched in 2018, revives Italian rail glamour with contemporary design innovation. Interiors blend vintage elegance with modern luxury amenities, including suites, panoramic observation cars, and fine dining. Routes connect Italian cultural hubs such as Milan, Rome, and Venice. Advanced engineering ensures comfort, stability, and energy efficiency. Culinary experiences and curated excursions immerse passengers in Italy's heritage.

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

TRAVEL

Everything you need to know about rail travel in 2026

Train services are seeing a renaissance the world over, with fresh routes, new luxury lines and tour operators increasingly focusing on rail journeys. Here's the latest for travellers looking to ride the rails in 2026.

In light of climate change, *flygskam* (Swedish for flight shame) and the ease of arriving at a city-centre train station instead of the hassle of a far-flung airport, the world is all aboard for train travel. Adventuring by rail is starting to feel a lot less like a nostalgic throwback and more like stepping into a new era of travel. No matter where in the world your 2026 trips take you, trains are ready to whisk you between capital cities and unforgettably scenic landscapes — here's everything you should know about rail travel in the year ahead.

Europe gets a slew of new sleeper services

Sleeper trains in Europe are also going luxe. **La Dolce Vita Orient Express** started high-end trips around Italy in 2025 in vintage refurbished carriages. Spain's **Al Andalus** is marking its 40th anniversary in 2026 with a new itinerary that travels beyond Andalucia to take in more of the country, now starting or ending in Madrid. The **Britannic Explorer** is England's first luxury sleeper train, which launched in 2025. This service from luxury operator Belmond takes in the scenery of Cornwall, Wales and the Lake District with departures from London.

OpenJaw News & Views for Travel Pros

Total Readership: 33.7K
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 1K

View online

February 17, 2026

Railbookers Offers $600 Off per Couple During Luxury Rail Week

Railbookers, the global leader in independent rail vacations, is celebrating Luxury Rail Week, running February 15–22, 2026. The week highlights some of the world's most iconic and sought-after train experiences, all brought together through Railbookers' collection of expertly-crafted luxury rail vacations.

"Luxury Rail Week is a celebration of what makes rail travel so special - the journey itself," said Frank Marini, President & CEO of Railbookers Group. "Today's luxury travellers want unforgettable experiences, personalized planning, and the confidence that everything is handled. With demand for high-end rail journeys continuing to grow, our team makes it easy for travel advisors and guests to enjoy seamless, tailor-made vacations that go far beyond the train."

To mark the occasion, Railbookers is offering exclusive Luxury Rail Week savings, including an additional $600 per couple on select luxury train journeys, which may be combined with other available offers. These limited-time offers give travellers the chance to experience legendary rail routes around the world, with added value and the expertise of Railbookers behind every detail.

The following luxury train journeys are eligible for Luxury Rail Week savings:

- *Al Andalus*
- *Andean Explorer*
- *Belmond Brittanic Explorer*
- *Belmond Hiram Bingham*
- *Belmond Royal Scotsman*
- *Eastern and Oriental Express*
- *El Expreso de La Robla*
- *El Transcantábrico Gran Lujo*
- *Glacier Express – Excellence Class*
- *Golden Eagle Danube Express*
- *Golden Eagle Silk Road*
- *La Dolce Vita Orient Express*
- *Maharajas' Express*
- *Rocky Mountaineer*
- *Rovos Rail*
- *Venice Simplon-Orient-Express*
- *VIA Rail Prestige Class*

pressreader
Total Readership: 3.8M
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 34.8K

View online

March 3, 2026

FROM RAILWAY TO FAIRWAY

An Italian odyssey — with added golf clubs — aboard Accor's newly launched La Dolce Vita Orient Express train.

It's hard to imagine a name more redolent of glamour and good times than La Dolce Vita Orient Express. An evocative blend of Italian beauty and Art Deco styling, the train was launched by Accor late last year, and operates across a rapidly growing network of routes within Italy (international trips to Paris, Istanbul, and Split are slated for later this year). Two of its itineraries, Italian Swing and Northern Greens, are specifically designed for golfers, and Elite Traveler joined the inaugural outing of the former, a fourday, three-night loop with visits to courses in Lazio, Puglia, and Tuscany.

The journey begins and ends at the Orient Express La Minerva Rome. The hotel reopened at the same time as La Dolce Vita took to the rails and its grand 17th-century bones have been fleshed out with Art Deco, Mid-century Modern, and contemporary elements, reminiscent of a mode of travel that has become unfamiliar.

And so to the Marco Simone Golf & Country Club, an island of green in Rome's dusty suburbs and the venue for the 2023 Ryder Cup — the first time Italy had hosted the tournament. The event succeeded in putting a country little known for golf firmly on the sporting map.

That evening we finally boarded the train. The liveried conductors and the glossy 1960s-inspired design — most dazzlingly showcased in the bar car, with its curved banquettes, harlequin patterns, and Gio Ponti objets — made a powerful impression. As did dinner. We feasted, as we would do every night, on a menu curated by German chef Heinz Beck, of Rome's three-Michelin-starred La Pergola.

pressreader
Total Readership: 3.8M
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 34.8K

View online

March 3, 2026

The pattern for the remainder of the trip had been set. It was repeated in Puglia at the San Domenico course, with its Baja California vibe, adjacent to the feted Borgo Egnazia hotel, where I squeezed in a sublime spa treatment; and then in Tuscany, at the equally celebrated Rosewood Castiglion del Bosco, an idyll of undulating vineyards and cypress trees.

At that point, biblical-level rain meant Plan A, a round of golf, was no longer attractive. Plan B, a walking tour of Montalcino, was off. Plan C, truffle hunting in the woods, ditto. Most of us opted for Plan D, a tasting of the Brunello wines for which Castiglion del Bosco is renowned. Should you encounter similar conditions, go for Plan D.

A personal highlight came on our final day, at the Argentario course, near Porto Ercole. During some rainy one-to-one coaching with resident expert, Edoardo Schiavella, I sank a 29-ft putt across a vast and sodden green with a treacherous double break. Though I'd only played three holes, I called it a day then and there.

During our final hours en route back to Rome, reflecting on the day's triumph, I surmised that while other railbuffs will likely agree that Belmond's Venice-Simplon Orient Express remains the benchmark, La Dolce Vita strikes a different note — it is younger, more relaxed, less conspicuously nostalgic. One quibble is a logistical one: I wish we'd spent less time in cars and more on the train itself. We piled into vehicles early each morning and only got back on board after sunset, but to my eye, La Dolce Vita's interiors are at their sparkling best in natural light. Because Italy, like most places, is rarely viewed at its best from the back row of a people carrier. Give me a train window with a cocktail in hand any day.

Robb Report

Total Readership: 3.4M
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 31.5K

View online
February 12, 2026

Italy's First Luxury Train Takes You to the Medieval City of Sienna

The 12-carriage La Dolce Vita will take you to the Palio, the world's oldest horse race, in style this summer.

What better way to head to the world's oldest horse race than in Italy's first luxury train?

La Dolce Vita Orient Express is offering two new trips to Siena, Italy, to see the Palio. Taking place this summer, the three-day adventures give travelers a chance to soak in the Italian countryside before experiencing the centuries-old equestrian competition.

Dating back to the 13th century, the Palio is steeped in tradition. Taking place twice a year in the historic medieval city of Siena, the bareback horse race sees 10 of the 17 distinct neighborhoods (or *contrade*) compete. The horses and jockeys make three laps around a square known as the Piazza del Campo, with each race typically lasting less than 90 seconds. The thrilling event is the centerpiece of the new itinerary, but it is not the only incredible experience you can expect.

Robb Report

Total Readership: 3.4M
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 31.5K

View online
February 12, 2026

The Palio horse race in Sienna.
Xinhua News Agency/Getty

The journey begins at Rome Ostiense station in the plush La Dolce Vita Lounge, where you can enjoy a tipple before boarding the train. At dusk, the train will depart the Eternal City for Tuscany. While winding through the scenic hills, you will be served a dinner by three-Michelin-starred chef Heinz Beck. The evening continues in the Bar Car, with cocktails and live piano music.

> The next day, you'll take a private transfer to the Palazzo Chigi Zondadari in Siena. The 18th-century Baroque palace overlooks the Piazza del Campo, making it the perfect place to watch the race. You'll enjoy an aperitivo before heading to the private balconies to see all the antics play out on the square. After that, a Tuscan dinner will be served up in the palace courtyard. The afterparty continues back in the train's Bar Car. The following morning, the train will take you back to Rome.

The dining car.

Robb Report

Total Readership: 3.4M
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 31.5K

View online
February 12, 2026

You will live the good life across the three days, too. Labeled "Italy's first luxury train," La Dolce Vita pairs old-world Italian glamour with the finest modern amenities. The 12 carriages host no more than 62 passengers at a time, creating a truly intimate travel experience. Accommodation includes 12 deluxe cabins, 18 suites, and one suitably flashy La Dolce Vita Suite.

One of the 18 suites.
La Dolce Vita Orient Express/Mr Tripper

This journey will be offered twice during the summer, from July 1 to 3 and August 15 to 17. The Palio in July is held in honor of the Madonna di Provenzano, while the race in August is a tribute to the Assumption of Mary.

Robb Report
TRAVEL

Total Readership: N/A
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: N/A

View online

February 17, 2026

Robb Report
TRAVEL

Italy's First Luxury Train Takes You to the Medieval City of Siena

READ MORE

The A-List of Travel ®
LUXURY TRAVEL
MAGAZINE

Total Readership: 24.2K
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 1K

View online

February 24, 2026

Orient Express La Minerva Unveils The Spa - A Transformative Wellness Space in the Heart of Rome

Orient Express La Minerva's Spa draws directly on the legacy of Roman thermae and the Ottoman hammam. Designed by Artist-Architect Hugo Toro and conceived as a place of transformation, The Spa offers a journey through baths and treatments in which time slows, and each stage prepares the next. This approach echoes the spirit of the Orient Express journey, understood as a passage, a crossing, and a fully immersive sensory experience.

The Spa's essence is structured around steam and a sequenced spatial progression inspired by the three stages of the ancient thermal ritual: the tepidarium, a temperate space of gradual acclimatisation; the calidarium, a warm environment combining pools and steam; and the frigidarium, the final invigorating cold bath.

Spaces alternate between shared relaxation areas, and single and double treatment rooms. Hand-blown Murano glass fixtures cast a soft, candle-like glow, heightening the tactile atmosphere. Brown travertine, red and veined marble, Roman-style plaster and stained oak create a powerful dialogue of textures. The contrast of stone, wood and richly woven textiles, including the canopy beds in the relaxation area, anchors the space in a distinctly earthy, elemental sensibility.

A finely crafted marble hammam rises as the heart of The Spa, surrounded by delicate fountains resembling Triton basins, echoing those found in the hotel's guest rooms. Contemporary moucharabieh screens filter sightlines, deepening the exploration of light and texture. The hammam, an ancient Ottoman purification ritual, integrates Roman influences, establishing a dialogue between East and West, recalling the historic route of the Orient Express linking Paris to Constantinople.

Among the treatments offered, the signature rituals Dea Minerva and Stop Constantinople invite guests on a complete sensory journey: rose-infused foot baths, aromatic steam, kassa exfoliation, ghassoul clay wraps, foaming massages, and face and hair treatments. Rasul rituals leave guests feeling refreshed, with their senses awakened and skin radiant. Passed down from Byzantium to Istanbul, these experiences celebrate the regenerative power of water, heat, and touch.

Furtuna Skin, the Italian luxury skincare house rooted in regenerative agriculture and clinically proven performance, is the exclusive skincare partner of The SPA at Orient Express La Minerva. Formulated using ingredients cultivated on the brand's 800-acre organic estate in Sicily, La Furtuna Estate, its products harness extra-virgin olive oil, wild-foraged botanicals, and medicinal herbs grown in accordance with biodiversity-led restoration practices. Deeply aligned with the Spa's reverence for ancient ritual and elemental healing, Furtuna Skin's approach bridges heritage and high-performance — pairing time-honored agricultural wisdom with modern extraction science to deliver visibly transformative results.

"At Furtuna Skin, our philosophy has always been rooted in the idea that true beauty is born from ritual, heritage, and a deep respect for the land. Partnering with The Spa at Orient Express La Minerva felt like a natural extension of that belief. The Spa's reverence for ancient purification traditions, historic elegance, and holistic restoration aligns with our own commitment to time-honored botanicals and transformative wellness. Together, we are crafting immersive rituals that nurture the skin, restore the spirit, and invite a sense of renewal befitting one of Rome's most storied destinations. - **Agatha Relota Luczo, Furtuna Skin Founder & CEO**

The A-List of Travel ®
LUXURY TRAVEL
MAGAZINE

Total Readership: 24.2K
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 1K

View online

February 24, 2026

Obsidian treatments, including the signature Furtuna Skin x La Minerva Exclusive Vibrancy Facial, have been developed for The Spa, combining manual techniques, beauty tools such as an obsidian Gua Sha, and natural active ingredients. The treatments signed by Furtuna Skin designed nature's most potent skin-reviving ingredients, and awaken the senses with unique combinations of circulatory stimulation and detoxifying techniques.

Simone Giorgi, General Manager of Orient Express La Minerva states: "Collaborating with Furtuna Skin represents a meaningful addition to Orient Express La Minerva. Together, we have created an experience that elevates our wellness offering through a shared Italian heritage, and exceptional know-how and craftsmanship. Our spa offer our guests an exclusive journey inspired by Ottoman rituals, while remaining deeply connected to the vibrant heart of Rome and land-driven innovation."

Accessible at all hours, The Gym and The Kinesis Room complete the experience. Equipped with Technogym Artis and dedicated functional training tools, each session may be guided by a personal trainer upon request, with programmes in fitness, yoga or Pilates tailored to your individual goals.

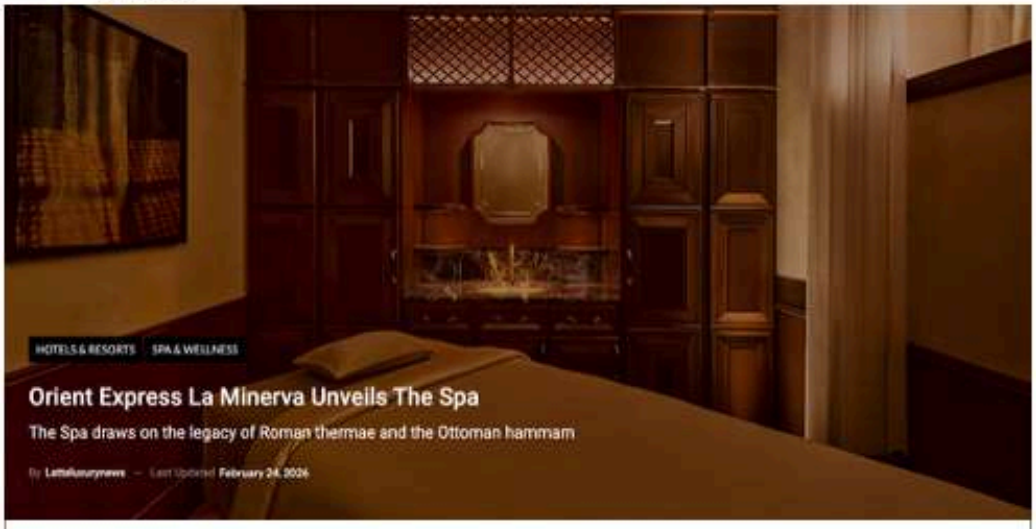
The Spa at Orient Express La Minerva is a coherent architectural ensemble, where space, ritual, and movement converge in a holistic path to regeneration. Inspired by the ancient healing traditions of the East, its treatments transport guests on a sensorial journey that evokes distant cultures and timeless rituals, offering an immersive experience of wellness in the heart of the Eternal City.

LATTE

Total Readership: 28.8K
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 1K

View online

February 24, 2026



Orient Express La Minerva's has debuted its spa, drawing on the legacy of Roman thermae and the Ottoman hammam. Designed by artist-architect Hugo Toro, The Spa offers a journey through baths and treatments.

The Spa's essence is structured around steam and a sequenced spatial progression inspired by the three stages of the ancient thermal ritual: the *tepidarium*, a temperate space of gradual acclimatization; the *calidarium*, a warm environment combining pools and steam; and the *frigidarium*, the final invigorating cold bath. As such, spaces alternate between shared relaxation areas, and single and double treatment rooms.

At the heart of The Spa is a marble hammam, surrounded by fountains resembling Triton basins, echoing those found in the hotel's guestrooms. The hammam, an ancient Ottoman ritual, integrates Roman influences, combining East and West, recalling the historic route of the Orient Express linking Paris to Constantinople.

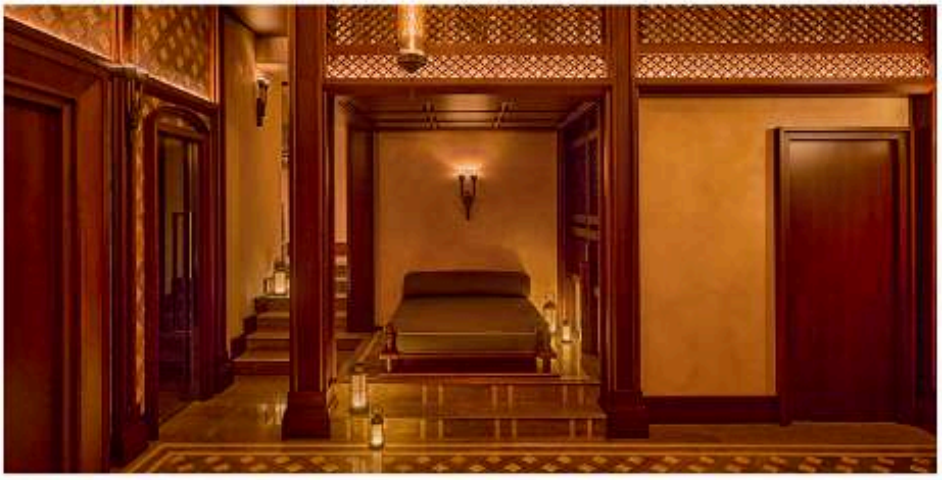
Among the treatments offered, the signature rituals "Dea Minerva" and "Stop Constantinople" comprise rose-infused foot baths, aromatic steam, a kassa exfoliation, ghassoul clay wraps, foaming massages, and face and hair treatments. Furtuna Skin, the Italian luxury skincare house rooted in regenerative agriculture and clinically proven performance, is the exclusive skincare partner of The Spa at Orient Express La Minerva.

LATTE

Total Readership: 28.8K
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 1K

View online

February 24, 2026



Obsidian treatments, including the signature "Furtuna Skin x La Minerva Exclusive Vibrancy Facial," have been developed for The Spa, combining manual techniques, beauty tools such as an obsidian Gua Sha, and natural active ingredients.

Accessible at all hours, The Gym and The Kinesis Room complete the well-being experience. Equipped with Technogym Artis and dedicated functional training tools, each session may be guided by a personal trainer upon request, with programs in fitness, yoga or Pilates tailored to individual goals.

THE WED

Total Readership: 132.3K
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 1.2K

View online

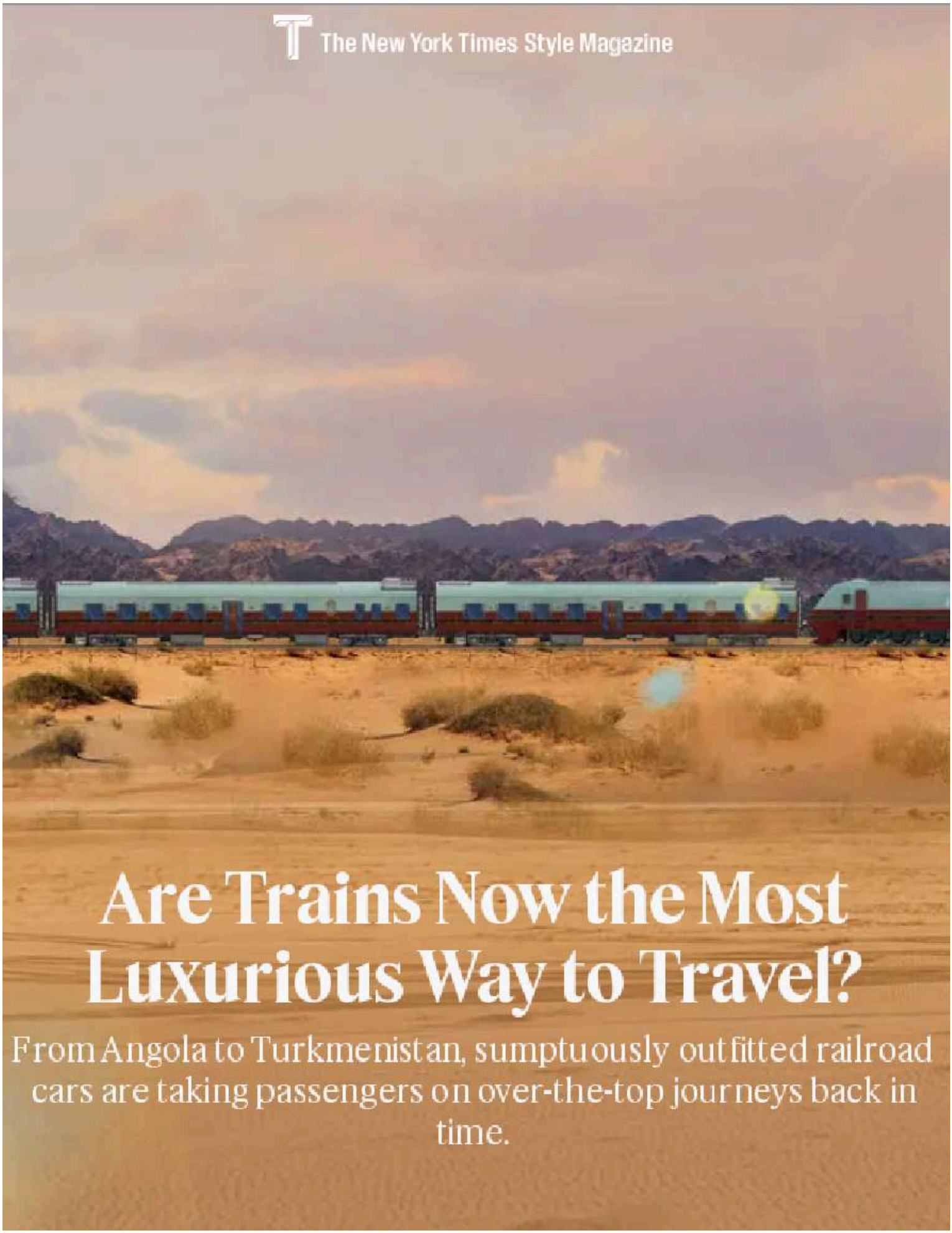
February 27, 2026

16 Romantic Restaurants for Date Night in Rome

Gigi

Gigi Roma sits on the rooftop of the Orient Express La Minerva, and the setting is as stunning as you'd expect. You're dining with panoramic views of the city, including a direct sightline to the Pantheon, so yeah, it's VERY romantic. The restaurant is polished and chic without feeling overly formal, with a contemporary edge that keeps things from feeling too traditional. The menu celebrates Roman culinary traditions but with a modern twist, and everything feels thoughtfully executed. It's inside a hotel, but it doesn't have that generic hotel-restaurant energy. This is a place where the setting, the service, and the food all work together to create something special. Whether you're celebrating something or just want an impressive dinner with a view, Gigi delivers.

The New York Times Style Magazine



Are Trains Now the Most Luxurious Way to Travel?

From Angola to Turkmenistan, sumptuously outfitted railroad cars are taking passengers on over-the-top journeys back in time.

From the mid-1970s until the early 2000s, when it was flying between the United States and Europe in under four hours, the Concorde was often likened to a time machine: traveling westward aboard the supersonic jet, you'd arrive earlier than you'd departed. Luxury train travel, while similarly champagne-soaked, bends time in a different way. "You picture Agatha Christie and the Hapsburgs," says Joan Roca, 49, the founder of Essentialist, a travel firm based in Palma de Mallorca, Spain. In other words, you feel transported back to a slower, more genteel era — one that more and more travelers seem eager to revisit. Railbookers, a Boston-based agency that specializes in train travel, saw revenue from luxury rail bookings grow 135 percent over the past three years, with a 41 percent jump occurring in just the last year.

Though nostalgia colors nearly every aspect of luxury train travel, however, the industry is also forward-looking, and new trains, routes and amenities are being added at a rapid clip. Onboard spas — like the new Dior-branded one on Belmond's Royal Scotsman — are a growing trend. "It really is a blast to have a full-body massage on a rolling train," says Eleanor Flagler Hardy, 73, the president and a co-founder of the Louisville-based International Society of Railway Travelers. Another shift is that cabins are getting larger. Venice Simplon-Orient-Express's new L'Observatoire suite, designed by the contemporary French artist JR, takes up the whole of a 75-foot-long carriage.

Offerings are only going to get more gilded, too. Orient Express is in the process of rehabilitating a collection of its original 1920s and '30s carriages, which were discovered in a rail yard near the Poland-Belarus border. The Parisian architect Maxime d'Angeac has been overseeing the process, enlisting craftspeople and design firms — some, like the French glassmaker Lalique, have historical associations with the brand — to create glamorous, vintage-inspired interiors. Though the cars won't return to service until 2027, prospective passengers can see full-scale models of some of them at Paris's Musée des Arts Décoratifs, where they're on display through April. In the meantime, these five railways are offering ultra-luxe trips all over the map.

The bar car on La Dolce Vita Orient Express features curvilinear banquettes and a harlequin wall motif inspired by a midcentury Gio Ponti design. Mr.Tripper

La Dolce Vita Orient Express

While most luxury trains look to the Victorian and Art Deco eras for design inspiration, the new La Dolce Vita Orient Express evokes the glamour of Italy in the 1960s and ’70s. One wall of the bar car, for instance, is covered with a harlequin motif that nods to the logo of the Arlecchino train, designed by the Modernist Gio Ponti to mark the 1960 Olympic Games in Rome. La Dolce Vita’s 12 cabins have sofas that fold out into double beds and mirrored back walls to add to the sense of space, while its 18 suites sport glossy lacquered ceilings in burnt sienna and both sofas and beds, with jewel-toned finishes throughout. Dining is overseen by Heinz Beck, the chef of La Pergola, Rome’s only three-Michelin-starred restaurant. Day trips between Rome and Venice are available, as are multiday voyages like the Truffle Route, which runs through the hills of Piemonte, and a Rome-to-Sicily option, during which the train is loaded onto a ferry to cross the Strait of Messina. *From about $10,207 per person, based on double occupancy, for the three-day Truffle Route, https://www.orient-express.com/la-dolce-vita.*

TRAVEL+ LEISURE

Total Readership: 954K
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 8.8K

March 2026

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT
Rome's Piazza della Minerva, outside the Orient Express La Minerva hotel; a seating area in one of the hotel's suites; musicians perform outside the Dolce Vita Orient Express train at the station in Salzburg; breakfast on board.

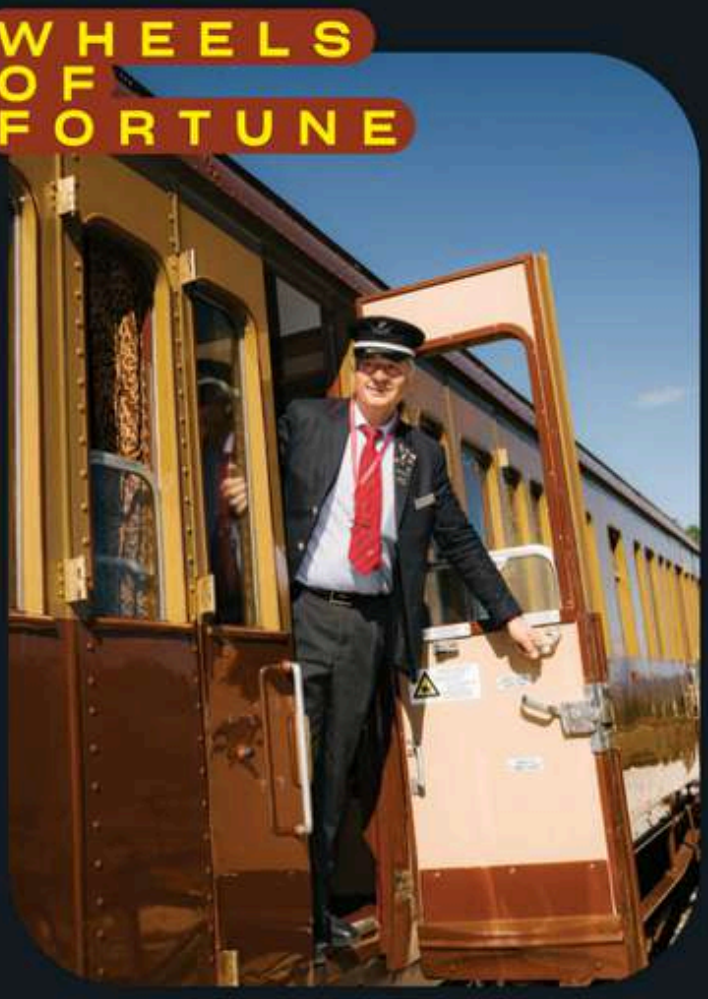
OPPOSITE
Conductor Marcello D'Amico on the "little Trans-Siberian" train, which passengers ride as part of the Orient Express itinerary.

TRAVEL+ LEISURE

Total Readership: 954K
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 8.8K

March 2026

WHEELS OF FORTUNE



It's no mystery why the Orient Express continues to capture our imaginations. Journeying through Italy on the newly relaunched train, **Adam Erace** *learns that its appeal goes far beyond nostalgia.*

Photographs by Federico Ciamei

TRAVEL+ LEISURE

Total Readership: 954K
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 8.8K

March 2026

The shower was red marble, moodily lit. How long I spent there, scrubbing away airplane grime and jet lag with a bar of Guerlain soap, I have no idea. By the time I'd arrived in Rome and checked in to my suite at the Orient Express La Minerva, the magnificent flagship of the brand's new hotel portfolio, time had melted like a Dalí clock.

It usually takes about nine hours to fly from Washington, D.C., to Rome. On this trip last spring, it had taken me 32, thanks to a perfect storm of maintenance problems, crew time-outs, and actual storms. Around two in the morning, a sympathetic pilot (our second of the evening) had finally leveled with us over the loudspeaker: "I don't know what they're going to tell you at the gate, but there is no way this plane is going to Rome tonight."

When everything goes according to schedule, flying is bearable, even pleasant—if you're in the right seat. But the past year has underscored what a short road it is from bearable, even pleasant, to complete nightmare. Is it at all surprising that dignified, low-stress train travel is having such a revival?

I'd come to Italy to experience *La Dolce Vita Orient Express*, the first of three trains under the fabled and recently revived Orient Express brand. By 2027, its luxury carriages will crisscross Europe, but Italy was chosen as the location for its relaunch. *La Dolce Vita* and the Minerva, which occupies the erstwhile palazzo of 17th-century aristocrats, debuted last April.

My shower was halfway resurrecting. A frothy cappuccino on the sun-warmed terrace of La Minerva's rooftop restaurant, Gigi Rigolatto, did the rest. Seven stories above the city, it smelled like citrus and jasmine, the fragrance carried on a breeze that raced over the terra-cotta roofs and rustled the tassels on the sun umbrellas. I ordered another coffee. I ordered *spaghetti alle vongole*. The fury of getting to Rome faded into the glory of being in Rome.

I wished I had more time, but my journey on *La Dolce Vita* was departing that night: a loop from the Eternal City to Puglia and then Abruzzo, the region from which my paternal grandfather's parents emigrated in the early 1900s. Getting between these locations normally takes about 12 hours; *La Dolce Vita* stretches the trip into two days and two overnights of tuxedoed singers, Campari cocktails, breakfasts in bed, and stunning landscapes rolling by your cabin window. The new platinum era of train travel is slow, but unlike air travel, it's that way on purpose.

1: Rome

Ostiense Station announces itself with a massive bas-relief of Pegasus and his handler, the Greek demigod Bellerophon. The all-black Mercedes from La Minerva moved as swiftly as the winged horse, delivering me to the far end of the late-1930s landmark. Where once there was a supermarket there is now *La Dolce Vita*'s swanky departure lounge, guarded by potted birds-of-paradise

TRAVEL+ LEISURE

Total Readership: 954K
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 8.8K

March 2026

and staffers in navy suits with tangerine lapels.

Within minutes, the staff had me checked in and mingling with my 39 fellow passengers. Moving throughout the suited and sequined group was Paolo Barletta, the charismatic 39-year-old founder and CEO of the Arsenale Group, the Italian luxury firm behind *La Dolce Vita*. "Over the next 50 years, this will be the third leg of tourism," he said after finding me on a sofa, where I was chasing olives with an Americano cocktail. "You have hotels, you have cruises, and now you have train cruises."

Barletta calls *La Dolce Vita* and its future siblings "train cruises" because they stop "in port," just as a cruise ship would. Passengers go out for the day and return in time for pre-dinner drinks. Under Barletta's direction, Arsenale started developing the concept five years ago, custom-manufacturing the carriages for *La Dolce Vita* with the Milanese design firm Dimorestudio. To help manage the project, he selected Accor, which owns the Orient Express brand. "They had this incredible asset that deserved to be reborn," he said.

Indeed, *Orient Express* is perhaps the most mythic name in the travel world. From 1883 to 1977, opulent trains operated under this banner throughout Europe, the Middle East, and Asia, inspiring Agatha Christie's titular 1934 mystery, along with legions of bucket-list-keepers for whom the trains represent the ne plus ultra of glamorous, old-school travel.

FROM FAR LEFT
Live music aboard La Dolce Vita; the train's lounge; appetizers served on a model of traditional cave dwellings at the Vitantonio Lombardo restaurant, in Matera.

Accor acquired the brand in 2022 and partnered with LVMH, which runs its own luxury trains through Belmond, including the *Venice Simplon-Orient-Express*. That the two companies use the Orient Express name is a source of confusion Barletta has aimed to untangle through his train cruising model. (Aboard the *VSOE*, which I traveled on in 2023, passengers typically remain on the train for the entire trip.) I'll admit, I was still a little fuzzy on the concept. "You'll see tomorrow in Matera," Barletta smiled, his blue eyes crinkling at the corners, before dashing off.

After an hour in the lounge, the staff began escorting us to the train. A cabin steward led me along the wood-grain-detailed, sapphire-painted carriages and into my suite. Before I knew it, *La Dolce Vita* had left the station, and I had to get to dinner. The dining car was all white cloths and branded china and Gio Ponti–inspired salt-and-pepper shakers that have a habit, I was informed, of mysteriously going missing. (Better than murder, I suppose.) 'Nduja-crusted lobster followed scorpion-fish spaghetti, with the flickers of spice reflecting the cuisine of the Mezzogiorno, the southern half of Italy to which the train was heading.

Somewhere near the Gulf of Gaeta, my fellow passengers and I adjourned to the lounge car, which

TRAVEL+ LEISURE

Total Readership: 954K
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 8.8K

March 2026

the talented Coky Ricciolino filled with athletic renditions of songs like "Mambo Italiano" and "Tu Vuò Fà l'Americano." "Fly me to the moon," he crooned, "Let me play among the stars." All dressed up and a little wobbly from the wine and the locomotion, it felt like I was already there.

II: Matera

Puglia, the heel of Italy's boot, kicked me awake.

I was wrapped like a caterpillar in white sheets by Rivolta Carmignani, the same brand used on the original Orient Express lines. My 118-square-foot suite, one of 30-en suite accommodations aboard, came slowly into focus. The *VSOE* owns the Art Deco look. *LDV,* wisely, went another way. Opposite the double bed was a love seat and two barrel chairs tucked under a dining table set with fresh flowers. Sunlight seeped in from the edges of the two big windows, revealing details in apricot suede, camel leather, and vermilion lacquer. In my suite and throughout the carriages, reflective surfaces and frisky curves channeled the midcentury aesthetic of the train's namesake, Federico Fellini's 1960 film *La Dolce Vita.*

A knock at the door. I threw on a robe to find my cabin steward bearing the breakfast I'd ordered the night before: soft cheeses, blush-pink folds of *prosciutto cotto,* fresh-squeezed orange juice, finely cut fruit, pastries, a perfect cappuccino with a barista-drawn heart, and a second cappuccino because one wasn't going to be nearly enough. She arranged them on the dining table, and I pushed open the curtains. The Adriatic Sea flashed between vineyards.

The 40,000-foot views from an airplane never fail to inspire, but what you see from a train is so much more intimate. I ate breakfast and watched the scenery change. Fresh mower lines on a soccer field. Cactus paddles beaded with young prickly pears. Tablecloths draped over the balconies of mid-rise apartments with sun-bleached peach and coral exteriors.

The train coasted into Bari, the capital of Puglia, to the exuberant horns and drums of a welcome band. The commuters at the station looked both confused and delighted, filming on their phones as we disembarked and the local guides wrangled their groups for the day's experiences. My small group hopped in a black SUV and headed out of the city. It had rained all the previous week, leaving the countryside neon green. As we crossed the border into Basilicata, we stopped at Casal Dragone, a family-owned winery and *agriturismo* now in the hands of a third generation, to visit what Angela Dragone calls "the Sistine Chapel of southern Italy."

We made our way a mile from Dragone's farmhouse, along a dusty road above the Gravina River, which cuts a deep ravine through fields of wheat and lavender. We then followed a staircase carved into the limestone to a cavelike opening. Inside, early-medieval frescoes covered the walls. Royal blue, oxblood, and gold paint illuminated the creation of Adam and the temptation of Eve—the couple who give the place its name, the Crypt of the Original Sin—along with various apostles and archangels. Mary, in queenlike robes, gathered baby Jesus in her arms. The chapel, a voice-over recording explained, was likely founded by monks in the early ninth century before the

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT
Capturing the view in Matera; risotto with truffle and salted caramel at Vitantonio Lombardo; a lace maker at work in Pescocostanzo

Arab conquest in 859 AD, and was used by shepherds to shelter their flocks until it was rediscovered in 1963. The artist is unknown but has been colloquially named the Flower Painter of Matera for the red poppy-like blooms threaded through the frescoes.

The same flowers rouged the edges of the road, where the resident Labrador mixes, Lulu and Mocio, led us back to the *agriturismo*'s bodega. There, Dragone uncorked a bottle of the estate's refreshing Malvasia Greco di Basilicata and filled my glass. She teared up while talking about her father, who donated the crypt to a nonprofit foundation so others could share its treasures. "This is very emotional for me," she said, then, in typical Italian-mom style, smothered the table with meats and cheeses.

From Dragone we drove 15 minutes into Matera for a guided walk through the city's jumble of limestone *sassi,* the rudimentary cave dwellings my guide said were considered "the embarrassment of Italy" when the government evicted all the residents in the 1950s. Now this stone honeycomb is hot real estate. While some *sassi* have been preserved as museums, others are now inhabited by gelaterias, pottery shops, boutique hotels, and restaurants like Vitantonio Lombardo, where the Orient Express passengers convened for a long lunch. The oven-crisped zitoni pasta stuffed with braised-forever ragù felt like a long-lost relative of my grandmother's Sunday gravy.

ILLUSTRATION BY RAPHEL LOMBARDI

TRAVEL+ LEISURE

Total Readership: 954K
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 8.8K

March 2026

We didn't get back on the train until an hour or so before dinner—just in time for a flute of Franciacorta in the lounge. The wine fizzed over the rim; I fizzed over the art and hospitality at Casal Dragone. There, in the cool, stone-walled tasting room, *La Dolce Vita* had curated a genuine moment of discovery and connection, something that, in the Italy of *The White Lotus* and billionaire Venetian weddings, is harder and harder to do.

III: Abruzzo

Despite being only 110 miles east of Rome, the high plateaus, forests, and mountains of Abruzzo give the region a wild, remote flavor. Not a place you want to be abandoned in a blizzard, and definitely not in 1987, as Marcello D'Amico was on his first day working on the Italian "little Trans-Siberian," the Sulmona-Carpinone train route nicknamed by a journalist in 1980 for the isolated, at times snowy wilderness it traverses.

"It was Christmas Eve," he recounted, pausing for dramatic effect, "and the snow came out of nowhere." He'd bunkered down in a trackside shack near the Campo di Giove station with a cot, a camping stove, and no way to get in touch with his family. Nobody came to get him until December 26.

In its heyday, the Sulmona-Carpinone was an engineering marvel providing vital connections between far-flung mountain villages, passing through Abruzzo's 180,000-acre Maiella National Park. But buses had made it obsolete by 2011, when the line shut down. D'Amico and his coterie of historic-train enthusiasts revived it as a tourist attraction

TRAVEL+ LEISURE

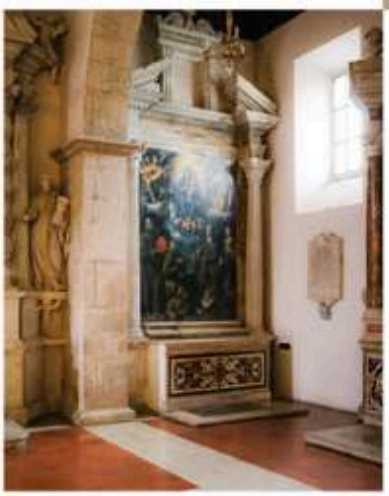
Total Readership: 954K
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 8.8K

March 2026

in 2014, with D'Amico returning as conductor. The antique cars of polished woodwork and burgundy velvet now carry about 30,000 people annually, including all the passengers on my trip. Unlike in Bari, where guests had excursion choices, everybody got off in Sulmona, our second stop, and boarded the "Trans-Siberian." Our destination for the day trip was Pescocostanzo, a member of Italy's *borghi più belli* association of small towns and villages with distinct historic, cultural, and artistic heritage.

My ears popped as we climbed 35 feet per mile, scooting through narrow tunnels and around villages nestled in the valleys of the Maiella mountains. The slopes shed their bright emerald foliage as we ascended the switchbacks, revealing bald limestone creases and peaks with snow dripping down the sides, like icing on a Bundt cake. At 4,160 feet above sea level, the train came to a stop at Rivisondoli-Pescocostanzo station, the highest on the Italian standard-gauge network after the Brenner Pass linking Italy and Austria.

During the Renaissance, a reputation for fine craftsmanship enriched Pescocostanzo, and walking its streets in a small group, I could see it still had a bit of Florentine swagger. There's a hardy, mountain humility to the architecture, but the noble families, wealthy merchants, and artists who rebuilt the village after a 1456 earthquake took a flaunt-it-if-you-got-it approach to the details, like pairing a Cartier watch with Carhartt overalls. Carved-wood dragons watch from palazzo eaves, and an ornate wrought-iron



cage encases double bells atop the city hall's clock tower. A two-tone cobblestoned street connects Pescocostanzo's civic hub to its spiritual center, the hilltop Basilica of Santa Maria del Colle, where a circular window peers down at the city hall like a cyclops. Inside the church, gold-dipped ceiling coffers, chiseled marble, and metal angels and demons create a Baroque fever dream. I could have spent the whole afternoon there, but a parishioner shooed us out for an incoming funeral procession. An aging population and declining birth rate are existential issues in Italy, but emigration further stretches the ratio in rural areas like this. Fortunately, D'Amico and his countrymen are delightfully obstinate in maintaining their traditions.

I met Alba Di Geronimo at the Bobbin Lace School & Museum, aged 88 and still working the prized Pescocostanzo handicraft of *merlette a tombolo* lace. "It's a way of remaining young," she said while juggling 10 wooden bobbins wound with thread. Her hands were smooth and sturdy, her fingernails like garden spades. She created an intricate lace border on an angled *tombolo* pillow with the effortless dexterity of a spider.

"The new generation doesn't always want to learn the traditions," 58-year-old Carmela Sette, Di Geronimo's weaving partner, chimed in. "But in Pescocostanzo, they do." Classes given by the museum's school ensure the craft's preservation.

TRAVEL+ LEISURE

Total Readership: 954K
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 8.8K

March 2026

There was one more traditional Abruzzese craft to experience. After a lunch of tender gnocchi in pea purée at La Corniola, a *ristorante* with rustic terra-cotta floors and wooden sideboards filled with delicate glassware, we traveled back to Sulmona on the "Trans-Siberian." (D'Amico chatted the whole ride, showing me photos of deer and wolves along last winter's snow-packed tracks and telling me about the time he traveled to Rome with a white goat, a gift for the late Pope Francis.) Back on *La Dolce Vita*, I found a square gift box in my cabin. Inside were candied almonds and hazelnuts in coatings the colors of raspberries and coffee, basil and lemons. *Confetti di Sulmona*. These small, multicolored confections, crafted by Abruzzese candymakers since the 14th century, are where we get the English meaning of confetti. Instead of throwing them in the air, I threw them into my mouth.

IV. Rome

On a luxury train like *La Dolce Vita*, the other passengers begin as characters: Ambassador Tweed, Madame Enormous Diamond. Some identities get revealed over cocktails and chitchat, others through Instagram snooping, which was how I learned a former secretary of state of Australia (she of the enormous diamond) was on board, along with the founder of luxury train competitor *Golden Eagle*, which, several months after my trip, Arsenale announced it had bought. Other guests remain cloaked in mystery, which suited the experience fine.

Over drinks in the bar car, representatives of the train mentioned Sarah Hebblethwaite. Would I mind if she joined my table for dinner? She's traveling alone.

Interesting. Which character, I wondered, had I pegged her as? She was a retired English teacher, I would later learn, which probably explained why she arrived at the table first. Sensible silver haircut. Periwinkle cardigan. I hadn't seen her in Matera or Abruzzo. I hadn't seen her on board. In a mystery, she'd have made an excellent spy.

The staff served saffron risotto and Abruzzese wine as Hebblethwaite, a trilingual diplomat's daughter, served her backstory. British by birth and Parisian by residence, she would turn 81 the following week and had loved trains for nearly as many years. Growing up, her family would travel from London to their second home in Italy, disembarking in Dover and boarding the ferry for the Channel crossing. "The Orient Express carriages would already be on the boat," she remembered. "The idea of actually being on that train... it was a childhood dream."

Her husband should have been there. A few weeks before the trip and their 60th (Continued on page 111)

FROM TOP LEFT
The Basilica Santa Maria del Colle, in Pescocostanzo; La Dolce Vita's head chef, Rigels Tepshi, alongside the train in Rome; the Maiella massif as seen from the "Little Trans-Siberian."

TRAVEL+ LEISURE

Total Readership: 954K
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 8.8K

March 2026

(Italy, continued from page 101)

anniversary, he died unexpectedly. But his passing did not determine whether Hebblethwaite, a woman who had waited seven decades to punch an Orient Express ticket, would cancel or travel. Her chemo schedule did. "I have a scan on Monday morning, so you know, back to reality." Her tone was wry, but her voice hung there just for a moment before finding its footing. "It's been lovely, being able to use my three languages, meeting people, and seeing a bit of Italy that I'd never seen."

And that's the X factor of *La Dolce Vita*. It's about the train, the back-of-your-neck tingle that anything—a murder, an affair, a jewel (or at least salt-and-pepper-shaker) heist—could transpire in this liminal space where we might become more exciting versions of ourselves. But it's equally about Italy.

"You'll see in Matera," Barletta had told me. And now I did. Hebblethwaite did, too. We finished dessert and said goodbye as we approached Rome. We were travelers of different generations, from different continents, who'd come for a train ride but would disembark with memories of a more meaningful adventure through Italy. It was a plot twist befitting a Victorian whodunit, one neither of us saw coming.

Two-night "Eternal Stones of Matera" itinerary on ***La Dolce Vita Orient Express*** *from $4,850. Doubles at* ***Orient Express La Minerva Rome*** *from $1,400.*

(Finland, continued from page 108)

six-year-old boy who understood little, I understood that.

In the backseat, my six-year-old was still dreaming of the spa at the Waldorf. She had outfitted a doll with a robe fashioned from one of my T-shirts, and fitted green cucumber circles over her eyes. I remembered what my acquaintance in Helsinki had said about contentment and safety.

We had one final stop in our mission to learn Nordic skating: Lake Saimaa, the biggest in Finland. This portion bordered a national park, a setting so remote that I felt as if we were setting off on an Arctic expedition a century earlier. Our guide, Meri Koponen, a national bronze medalist in kick-sledding, had swaddled Agnes in reindeer furs. The ice was opaque, which happens when snow becomes trapped between layers of ice—and creaked ominously as we skated under a sky as white as the snow. If a skating rink is a zoo, natural ice is the bush: wild, mysterious, and scary. "The ice is alive," Koponen said. As we skated, she pointed out lynx and wolverine tracks.

Her family has lived in the area for 500 years. As we took a campfire-and-hot-chocolate rest stop on a patch of wooded ground, snowflakes the size of nickels settled on my gloves. I had the comic realization that they actually looked like, well, snowflakes—perfect hexagons that I'd only seen in Agnes's book version of *Frozen*.

"This is why Finns are the happiest people in the world," Koponen said. "Fire and ice and nature. It's our therapy."

Our last lodging in Finland had nowhere to skate, though it had a buffet worthy of a Russian noble. That was the reason I wanted to stop there. Its original owner had traded with Russia, eventually constructing a pink country manor in 1800 in the style of a Russian nobleman's home: endless double doors, parlors, and grand drawing rooms. "It's not a very easy house to live in," Matti Pylkkänen, whose family has owned the property since the late 19th century, said. There are many such manors in eastern Finland, but Tertti Manor, a regional institution, is rare in that it opens its doors to lodgers.

Tertti is a fantasy of rural Nordic self-sufficiency. Our morning porridge, served with lingonberry sugar, came from estate-grown barley cooked in a massive hearth oven in the dining room. The staff had bored holes in the nearby ice to set nets for whitefish and turbot. Pylkkänen, who hunts for pheasant, roe deer, and much else, served me grouse carpaccio with wild rowan berries. Even at 4 degrees below zero, waxwings flitted outside our room, which had a sauna large enough to be its own hotel room.

On our final morning at Tertti, the crust of ice that had formed overnight was nearly blue. The sun-blitzed morning was silent and still, the cold head-crackingly pure. The snow under my feet squeaked with a sound I had last heard as a boy. Agnes shielded her eyes and laughed at the obscene majesty of it all. I did, too. Like a winter seawater swim, the vision made me ecstatic. We could have been in a Pushkin short story; we could have heard sleigh bells. My homeland had gone astray, but its beauty was not only its own. Beauty will always be free.

Travel + Leisure (ISSN 0041-0357) March 2026, Vol. 56, No. 3. is published monthly, except for a combined issue in December/January, by FT Inc. Affluent Media Group, a subsidiary of Meredith Operations Corporation. Principal Office: 225 Liberty St., New York, NY 10281-1008, under license from Travel + Leisure Holdco, LLC. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and additional mailing offices. **POSTMASTER** Send all UAA to CFS. (See DMM 507.1.5.2.) non-Postal and Military Facilities: Send address corrections to Travel + Leisure, PO Box 37508, Boone, IA 50037-0508. Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement #40068203. BN #128480586RT. Copyright ©2026 Travel + Leisure Holdco, LLC. All Rights Reserved. Printed in the U.S.A. **Customer Service and Subscriptions** For 24/7 service, please use our website: www.travelandleisure.com/myaccount. You can also call 800-888-8728 or write to Travel + Leisure, PO Box 37508, Boone, IA 50037-0508. Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission is strictly prohibited. Your name may provide updates to the card information we have on file. You may opt out of this service at any time. Member of the Alliance for Audited Media. **Mailing List** We may make a portion of our mailing list available to reputable firms. If you prefer we not include your name, please call or write us at the customer service information above. The magazine assumes no responsibility for the safekeeping or return of unsolicited manuscripts, photographs, artwork, or other material. To order back issues, call 800-270-3650. To order article reprints of 500 or more, call 212-221-9595. If the Post Office alerts us that your magazine is undeliverable, we have no further obligation unless corrected delivery information is received within two years.

Alliance for Audited Media

spa business

Total Readership: 22.1K
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 1K

View online

March 4, 2026

Orient Express La Minerva reveals spa inspired by ancient healing traditions

There are two hammam rituals called Dea Minerva and Stop Constantinople Credit: Alexandre Tabaste

- **Artist-architect Hugo Toro designed the spa to reflect the Orient Express journey**
- **The spa's therapies draw on Ottoman rituals and Roman thermae healing practices**
- **Starpool worked on the thermal facilities for the spa**
- **Furtuna Skin is the exclusive skincare partner for the spa treatments**

Credit: Valentine Monin-Duchêne

> "The spa's reverence for ancient purification traditions, historic elegance and holistic restoration aligns with our own commitment to time-honoured botanicals and transformative wellness"
> – Agatha Relota Luczo, founder and CEO of Furtuna Skin

The Spa at Orient Express La Minerva in Rome, Italy, has launched, offering treatments and bathing facilities that are inspired by Roman thermae and Ottoman hammam rituals.

Designed by artist-architect Hugo Toro, the spa echoes the journey one might make on the iconic Orient Express train. It offers a progressive sensory experience inspired by the three stages of ancient thermal rituals.

The tepidarium provides gradual acclimatisation, the calidarium is a warm environment with pools and steam and the frigidarium houses a final invigorating cold bath.

The spa has single and double treatment rooms as well as shared relaxation rooms.

There is also a marble hammam, surrounded by fountains and moucharabieh (wooden latticework screens) that filter the light.

Starpool provided the thermal facilities, rasul and hammam suite.

A gym has the latest Technogym Artis equipment and a Kinesis room for functional training.

spa business

Total Readership: 22.1K
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 1K

View online

March 4, 2026

Treatments

Treatments also incorporate the Orient Express' heritage, with two hammam rituals called Dea Minerva and Stop Constantinople. The therapies include rose-infused foot baths, aromatic steam, kassa exfoliation, ghassoul clay wraps, rasul rituals, foaming massages and face and hair treatments.

C.O.D.E. by AKT Group has provided a custom Theia treatment bed for therapies.

The spa has exclusively partnered with Italian skincare brand Furtuna Skin. Furtuna Skin's products use ingredients that are cultivated on the brand's 800-acre regenerative organic estate in Sicily. These include extra virgin olive oil, wild-foraged botanicals and medicinal herbs.

Agatha Relota Luczo, founder and CEO of Furtuna Skin, said: "The spa's reverence for ancient purification traditions, historic elegance, and holistic restoration aligns with our own commitment to time-honoured botanicals and transformative wellness. Together, we are crafting immersive rituals that nurture the skin, restore the spirit, and invite a sense of renewal befitting one of Rome's most storied destinations."

The Furtuna Skin x La Minerva Exclusive Vibrancy Facial lasts 60 minutes and costs €210 (US$229, £179). This facial stimulates circulation and detoxifies the skin, in combination with the brand's Obsidian Gua Sha. Inspired by the rich heritage of Roman thermal water healing, the treatment combines warming and cooling sensations for the face, lips and décolletage.

Simone Giorgi, general manager of Orient Express La Minerva, said: "Our spa offers our guests an exclusive journey inspired by Ottoman rituals, while remaining deeply connected to the vibrant heart of Rome and land-driven innovation."

Orient Express

The Orient Express train began operating in 1883.

Accor purchased a 50 per cent stake in the Orient Express brand from French rail operator SNCF in 2017 in order to develop a series of luxury hotels. The train experience, La Dolce Vita Orient Express, relaunched last year.

There are now two hotels in operation. The 93-room and 36-suite Orient Express La Minerva opened in a Roman 17th-century palazzo in April of last year.

A new hotel, Orient Express Venezia will open in Venice, Italy, later this year.

The brand is currently taking bookings for the first sailings on its new ship, which it claims will be the world's largest sailing yacht when it launches later this year. The *Orient Express Corinthian* will be joined in 2027 by a sister sailing yacht called the *Orient Express Olympian*.

Many top hospitality brands are developing luxury yachts, including Aman, Ritz-Carlton and Four Seasons.

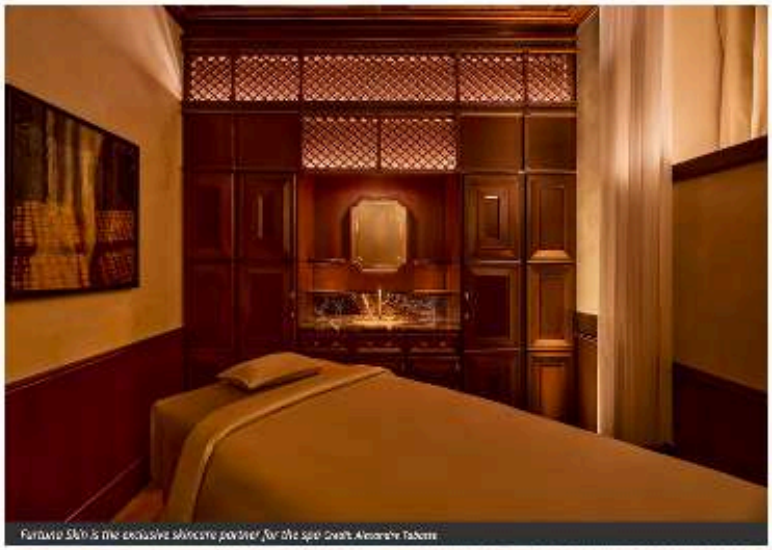
- Sign up here to get your choice of the Spa Business and Spa Business Insider weekly ezines, breaking news alerts and every issue of Spa Business and Spa Business Insider magazines FREE on digital.

spa business

Total Readership: 22.1K
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 1K

View online

March 4, 2026



Furtuna Skin is the exclusive skincare partner for the spa Credit: Alexandre Taboas

The interiors echo the journey made possible on the Orient Express train Credit: Alexandre Taboas

The spa was designed by by artist-architect Hugo Toro Credit: Alexandre Taboas

View online

March 4, 2026

There are various shared relaxation spaces throughout the spa Credit: Alexandre Taborin

Simone Giorgi is general manager of Orient Express La Minerva Credit: Valentino Monti-Bachtine

hospitality design

Total Readership: 37.1K
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 1K

View online

March 18, 2026

2026 Development Update: Italy

Italy's storied past powers its most ambitious chapter yet

As travelers seek authentic experiences, Italy offers something increasingly rare: depth, beauty, and an enviable way of life that is anchored in timeless history. From café-lined piazzas to vineyard-dotted hillsides and storied coastlines, the country delivers culture that embodies La Dolce Vita, which continues to captivate audiences from all over the globe.

That pull is translating into strong performance as well. According to Cushman & Wakefield, hotel activity across Italy—and Europe at large—is on the rise, with overnight stays expected to grow by 5.6 percent this year. Urban hubs and resort destinations are benefiting from renewed international travel and a growing appetite for places that promise a sense of place alongside comfort.

Orient Express La Minerva

Original frescoes, golden coatings, deep walnut wood, and Rossa Verona marble compose the ornate Orient Express La Minerva in Rome

hospitality design

Total Readership: 37.1K
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 1K

View online

March 18, 2026

The iconic Orient Express brand continues its foray into the hotels, aiming for 10 locations by 2030. Its debut, the Orient Express La Minerva, opened in a 17th-century Rome palazzo in early 2025 and distinguished itself with luxury rooted in both Roman history and the modern spirit of the Eternal City. (The brand's second property, the Palazzo Donà Giovannelli, is set to open in Venice this April, with a design from Paris-based Aline Asmar d'Amman.)

Led by Paris-based artist and architect Hugo Toro, the project is rooted in its location. "We worked with the identity of the city, the neighborhood, and the surroundings, just steps away from the Pantheon," he syas.

Original frescoes, golden coatings, walnut, and Rossa Verona marble compose an ornate backdrop for custom fabrics, artwork, and cabinets of curiosities. Neighboring churches also inspired a juxtaposition with raw and polished elements expressed through an interplay of velvets, precious wood, and ceramics handpainted with bespoke motifs. Rose-hued headboards reminiscent of Roman sunsets imbue an elevated, artful sense of place in guestrooms. "Rather than freezing it in time, we treated the project as a ricochet with the past: respectful, but alive," Toro adds. "It's not a hotel that imitates history—it continues it."

TRAVEL+ LEISURE

Total Readership: 9.6M
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 88.4K

View online
March 29, 2026

9 Train Travel Mistakes Every Tourist Makes in Europe, According to Experts

With the recent launch of new luxury and sleeper trains like La Dolce Vita Orient Express and Espresso Cadore, surging train ridership records, and the growing slow travel trend, traveling by rail is clearly having a moment—but it has long been one of the best ways to get around Europe. Ever since the first steam locomotive was invented in the United Kingdom in the early 1800s, Europeans have embraced railways as a powerful and efficient mode of transportation. While the golden age of train travel generally lasted from the 1880s until the 1920s, a century later, we might just be entering a renaissance.

There are many advantages to traveling around Europe by rail, even on normal state-operated lines. Unlike airports, train stations are usually located right in the city center, making it easy to reach your hotel upon arrival. There are also a lot more train stations than airports—small cities and little villages that may not have an airport typically still have a rail station, for example. And, because there tend to be fewer security protocols at train stations than airports, you likely only have to show up 20 or 30 minutes prior to boarding instead of two or three hours ahead of your departure. In addition to being more convenient than air travel in these ways, train rides can be more comfortable, with more legroom and bigger seats, and they sometimes have free Wi-Fi.

As a Rome-based journalist, I take Italian trains all the time and have ridden the rails in France, Spain, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the U.K., so I'm intimately familiar with traveling around Europe by train, and I've experienced both the advantages and the pitfalls. To round out my personal experience, I talked to travel experts about what tourists should know when riding the rails in Europe. Here are the nine train mistakes you want to avoid making.

TravelDreamsMagazine
What is your version of living the dream?

Total Readership: 10K
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 1K

View online
February 12, 2026

La Dolce Vita Orient Express Launches New Itinerary: Siena & The Palio

In Siena, twice each year – on July 2nd in honour of the Madonna di Provenzano and on August 16th for the Assumption – Piazza del Campo becomes the epicentre of a centuries-old rite: the Palio.

At the heart of the historic centre, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the medieval square hosts a bareback horse race whose present form extends traditions dating back to the thirteenth century.

La Dolce Vita Orient Express offers a three-day journey from Rome to experience this singular event, deeply rooted inItalian culture.

The journey begins at Rome Ostiense station in the La Dolce Vita Lounge. At dusk, the train departs the Eternal City. On board, a dinner by three-Michelin-starred chef Heinz Beck accompanies the passage through the Tuscan hills. The evening continues in the Bar Car, where piano music and Italian classics set the tone.

The following day, a private transfer brings guests to Siena. At Palazzo Chigi Zondadari, overlooking Piazza del Campo, anaperitivo precedes access to private balconies. From this exclusive vantage point, the full dramaturgy of the Palio plays out below. After a Tuscan dinner served in the quiet elegance of the palace, guests return to the train. The night extends in the Bar Car, between conversation and music.

TravelDreamsMagazine
What is your version of living the dream?

Total Readership: 10K
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 1K

View online
February 12, 2026

The following morning, La Dolce Vita Orient Express arrives back in Rome. The journey concludes, marked by a rite that belongs as much to the present as to history.

This journey forms part of La Dolce Vita Orient Express's summer itinerary and will operate on the following dates:

- July 1 to July 3 (Palio on July 2)
- August 15 to August 17 (Palio on August 16)

TRAVEL WEEKLY
BY NORTHSTAR

Total Readership: 581K
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 5.4K

View online
February 15, 2026

Accor ushers in a new era for ultraluxe brand Orient Express

NEW YORK -- Accor is betting big on Orient Express, leaning on the luxury brand's storied heritage to differentiate its hotel, train and yacht products.

Orient Express' revival has been years in the making. In 2017, Accor acquired a 50% stake in the brand from France's national rail company, SNCF; it took full ownership of Orient Express in 2022. Two years later, Accor forged a strategic partnership with luxury conglomerate LVMH to accelerate its development. (LVMH's Venice Simplon-Orient-Express train, operated by Belmond, remains a separate entity.)

Following the LVMH deal, the brand has picked up speed. Orient Express debuted its La Dolce Vita Orient Express train, with itineraries primarily through Italy, and the Orient Express La Minerva hotel in Rome last spring. The brand's first sailing yacht, the Orient Express Corinthian, launches this summer in the Mediterranean.

Speaking at a media roundtable in New York in early February, Orient Express CEO Gilda Perez-Alvarado said the group's current focus is on "ensuring that the public understands culturally how significant and consequential this brand is."

Key to that cultural positioning is a focus on historical elements, with the brand employing a full-time historian as part of those efforts.

"A requirement for an asset to join Orient Express is it needs to celebrate a time period, and not just any time period, but a time period that was significant either for travel or for the arts and culture," said Perez-Alvarado, citing the Orient Express La Minerva's celebration of its 17th-century palazzo origins and La Dolce Vita Orient Express' homage to Italy of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s.

TRAVEL WEEKLY
BY NORTHSTAR

Total Readership: 581K
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 5.4K

View online
February 15, 2026

The facade of the Orient Express La Minerva in Rome. Photo Credit: Alexandre Tabaste

A second hotel, the Orient Express Palazzo Dona Giovannelli in Venice, is under development. So is a second train that will feature restored Orient Express train carriages from the 1920s. Using Google Maps and imagery, the brand's historian, Arthur Mettetal, is credited with locating these carriages, found abandoned along the Poland-Belarus border.

A second sailing yacht, the Orient Express Olympian, is scheduled to debut in 2027.

Perez-Alvarado said Orient Express fans and history buffs are one of three key customer segments. The others are ultra-affluent travelers seeking something new and travelers in search of a bucket-list experience or milestone celebration.

The brand also hopes to differentiate itself through the ability for clients to reserve the entire yacht, hotel or train.

"All of them can be privatized because they're not big," said Perez-Alvarado.

"La Minerva is 93 rooms. La Dolce Vita, we can privatize it for a charter for anywhere between 60 to 80 guests. Then you have the Palazzo in Venice with 47 suites. You have the yachts each with 54 suites."

TRAVEL WEEKLY
BY NORTHSTAR

Total Readership: 581K
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 5.4K

View online
February 15, 2026

Orient Express faces stiff competition in ultraluxury cruising in particular, with major hospitality brands like Four Seasons, Aman and Ritz-Carlton making forays into the segment.

According to Perez-Alvarado, there's strength in numbers.

"We're all creating a new category," Perez-Alvarado said. "It was a big gamble for everybody, [so] it's good that there are four very powerful names behind the launch of this new type of product and experience."

What a bathroom will look like on the Orient Express Corinthian yacht. Photo Credit: Orient Express

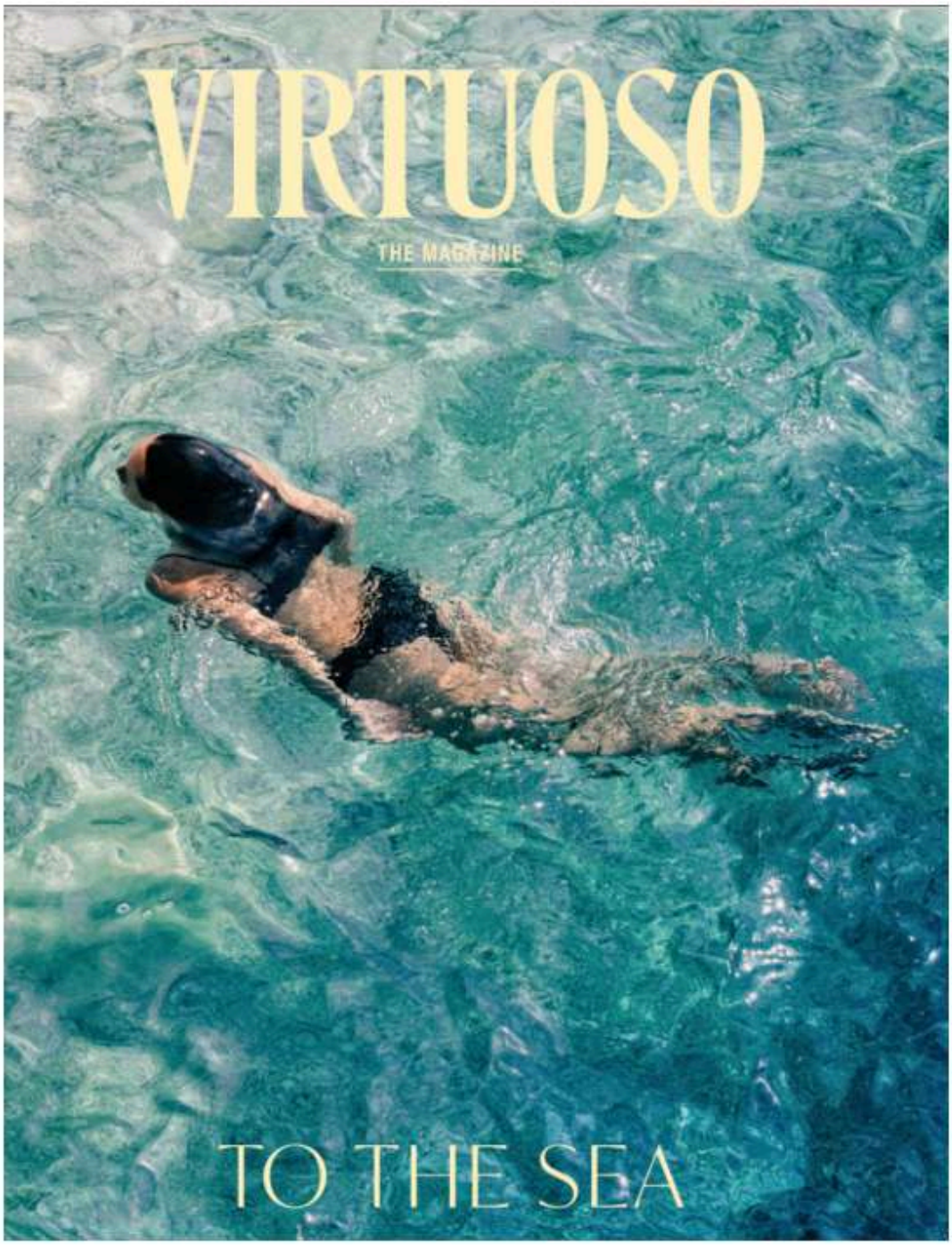
Perhaps the brand's most significant differentiator, however, will be its ability to offer trips that span all three platforms. Perez-Alvarado said guests are already asking about itineraries combining stays in Rome, train journeys on La Dolce Vita and Mediterranean yacht cruises.

"It is not just a hospitality brand, it's a travel brand," she said.

VIRTUOSO

Total Readership: 180K
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 1.7K

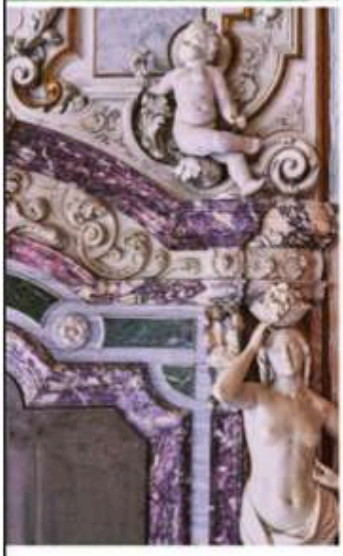
March 2026

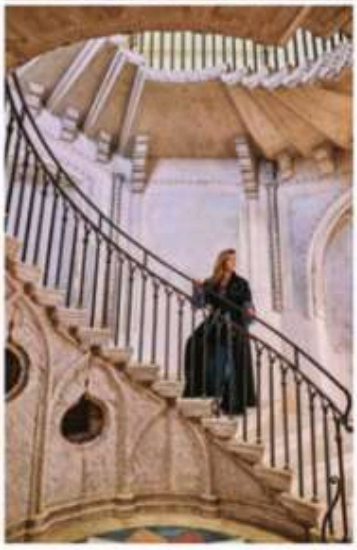


VIRTUOSO

Total Readership: 180K
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 1.7K

March 2026





Unfaded Glory

With the April opening of **Orient Express Venezia**, two emblems of cross-cultural contact – the fabled sleeper train and the floating city – finally meet. The 47-room hotel's home is Palazzo Donà Giovannelli, a fifteenth-century noble residence built under the supervision of Filippo Calendario (mastermind of the Doge's Palace), and gently ushered into the twenty-first century by Aline Asmar d'Amman, the designer behind the Eiffel Tower's restaurant. Original details, such as the nineteenth-century octagonal staircase and the baroque Vittoria ballroom, created for the 1548 wedding of Princess Vittoria Farnese, sit comfortably next to modern-yet-retro touches such as the rail-inspired Wagon Bar and the all-day dining spot overlooking a secret garden. Just don't expect an ordinary entrance: Guests arriving by private boat will pass under a dramatic Gothic portal on the canal. *Virtuoso travelers receive breakfast daily and a $100 hotel credit.* – *Mary Gray*

Clockwise from top left: The hotel's facade, its library, designer Aline Asmar d'Amman, and a luscious fireplace.

VOGUE

Total Readership: 9.5M
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 87.9K

View online

January 28, 2026

TRAVEL

A New Orient Express Train Is Whisking Travelers Across Italy in '60s Dolce Vita Style

BY LIAM HESS
January 28, 2026

It's a balmy but breezy morning on the Ligurian coastline, and I'm gazing out of the window as I sip a freshly brewed Italian coffee. Through the glass, I can hear the muffled squall of seagulls. If I strain my ear hard enough, the hollow clacking sound of thousands of smooth stones rolling over one another as the waves advance and recede. From my perch directly overlooking the sea, I see striped umbrellas on a beach in the near distance, the first sunbathers of the day beginning to cluster underneath them and tentatively dip their toes in the turquoise waters. Then, my bed judders forward, and I hear the gentle screech of metal and metal. No, it isn't an earthquake; and no, my bedroom isn't about to tumble down into the Tyrrhenian Sea. It's 8 a.m. on the La Dolce Vita Orient Express train, and we have less than two hours to reach Santa Margherita Ligure station. So, as the Italians would say: *andiamo.*

To rewind a little: Ever since developing an obsession with Agatha Christie as a teenager, I've always been fascinated by the glamour and mystique of a fancy sleeper train. And over the past few years, the options for spending a night on the rails in the lap of luxury have grown more varied (though, admittedly, pricey) than ever—from Peru to Penang, and Cornwall to Cape Town, the possibilities are endless. Which is why, when Orient Express returned to the scene last year (the rights to the name were purchased by Accor in 2017, and work on the new fleet of trains has been underway for nearly a decade), the goal was to do things a little differently. Sure, the brand is still tapping into the nostalgia factor—but instead of harking back to the 1920s and '30s heyday of high-end rail travel, they're instead looking to another, equally fabulous, chapter in Italian history: la dolce vita. (The clue's in the name, I guess.)

VOGUE

Total Readership: 9.5M
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 87.9K

View online

January 28, 2026

They're also thinking bigger than just trains. My journey began, in fact, with two nights at Orient Express La Minerva, a ravishing new Roman hotel quite literally steps from the Pantheon, directly in front of Bernini's iconic elephant and obelisk statue in the Piazza della Minerva. Set inside a 17th-century former noble residence, the building has been a hotel since 1811—a grand, if slightly dusty, fixture of the Roman hospitality circuit—before having the cobwebs blown off courtesy of a four-year renovation overseen by the French-Mexican architect and designer Hugo Toro.

Photo: Mr Tripper

Photo: Alexandre Tabaste

The results, I'm relieved to say, are spectacular. After being greeted by the liveried doorman and collecting my keys from the sleek Art Deco reception area—all brass and marble and gleaming walnut surfaces—it was through to the winter garden-style courtyard at the center of the building, which lays serious claim to being the most gorgeous hotel lobby in all of Rome: under a conservatory-style glass ceiling, enormous potted palms frame a scalloped bar carved from travertine marble sitting directly in front of a classical statue of Minerva, the goddess of wisdom, justice, law, and victory. (Not a bad lineup.) Then, I was whisked up to one of the hotel's signature suites: the Stendhal, named after the legendary French writer who was a regular at the hotel all the way back in the early 19th century.

VOGUE

Total Readership: 9.5M
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 87.9K

View online

January 28, 2026

Where many of the other luxury hotel brands putting down roots in Rome over the past few years have brought their identikit design styles to bear on the properties they've taken over, Orient Express has taken an entirely different tack, fostering a vibe that is sympathetic to the building it's occupying and that communicates a profound sense of place. And it is, for my money, the most stylish hotel in all of Rome. (Also one of the buzziest, too, thanks to the rooftop restaurant Gigi Rigolatto, where you can feast on lobster linguine and cotoletta alla Milanese while watching the sun dip behind the cupola of the Pantheon next door, as I did on my final night in the city.)

Photo: Alexandre Tabaste

Which leads us to the main event: the train. The journey began at Roma Ostiense station—a rationalist architectural marvel from the Mussolini era, with all of the dubious history that entails—where Orient Express has taken over a wing of the station and artfully refurbished it to serve as an aesthetic portal between the world of La Minerva and the world of La Dolce Vita train: as silver trays of bellinis and *stuzzichini* were passed around, and a lively jazz band struck up beneath the shiny Aperol orange ceiling, guests—mostly couples on a romantic getaway—arrived to settle on the plush red velvet banquettes or mingle by the floor-to-ceiling walnut bookshelves. (A train journey like this also means you get the joy of scoping out your fellow travelers for the next few days and guessing their backstories, like an episode of *The White Lotus* without the murders.)

VOGUE

Total Readership: 9.5M
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 87.9K

View online

January 28, 2026

Photo: Courtesy of Orient Express

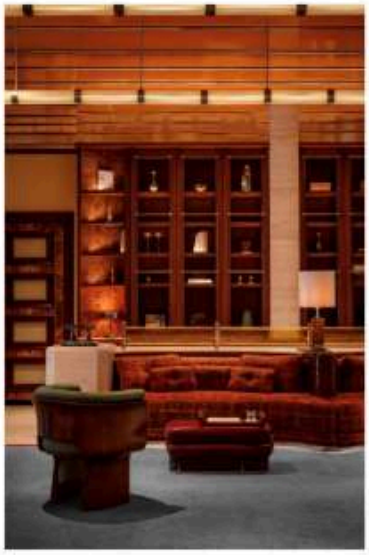


Photo: Mr Tripper

Then, it was off to settle into our cabins and begin our odyssey: our first day would see us snake along the coastline of the west of Italy, then zip across the thigh of Italy's boot to Venice, before zipping *back* across overnight to Portofino, then returning to Rome on the morning of the third day. The jewel box of a cabin was, as you might have guessed by now, a wunderkammer of fabulous design details: overseen by the cult-favorite design firm Dimorestudio, it's like stepping into a miniature version of a mid-century Milanese apartment, with lacquered terracotta ceilings, velvety Alcantara walls, and groovy retro prints.

Photo: Mr Tripper

VOGUE

Total Readership: 9.5M
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 87.9K

View online

January 28, 2026

Photo: Courtesy of Orient Express

Photo: Mr Tripper

Then, it was off to settle into our cabins and begin our odyssey: our first day would see us snake along the coastline of the west of Italy, then zip across the thigh of Italy's boot to Venice, before zipping *back* across overnight to Portofino, then returning to Rome on the morning of the third day. The jewel box of a cabin was, as you might have guessed by now, a wunderkammer of fabulous design details: overseen by the cult-favorite design firm Dimorestudio, it's like stepping into a miniature version of a mid-century Milanese apartment, with lacquered terracotta ceilings, velvety Alcantara walls, and groovy retro prints.

Photo: Mr Tripper

VOGUE

Total Readership: 9.5M
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 87.9K

View online

January 28, 2026

Behind a wall of mirrored smoked glass lies the bathroom, which, despite its modest proportions, is surprisingly spacious—and once again, very stylishly appointed, with sinks surrounded by a prosciutto-y marble and an impressively forceful water pressure in the showers. As I sank onto my bed and watched the low, undulating hills of Emilia Romagna glide past my window, it all began to feel very *la dolce vita* indeed.

Photo: Mr Tripper

But before I knew it, it was 6 p.m., and we were pulling into Venice's Santa Lucia station (another slice of terrific 1940s design—the Italians really do a train station well). Stepping out into the chaos of the platform, myself and a handful of other guests were swiftly guided to a jetty and onto a water taxi for a whistle-stop tour of the city: aperitivo at Caffé Florian among the pigeons of St. Mark's Square, a feast of a dinner (squid ink spaghetti, carpaccio di manzo, the works) at Harry's Bar, and then on for a truly magical private tour of Palazzo Fortuny. (The former home of Mario Fortuny, this treasure trove of stage sets, murals, antique books, and pleated fashions is one of Venice's most fascinating and often overlooked museums.)

VOGUE

Total Readership: 9.5M
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 87.9K

View online

January 28, 2026

Photo: Fabio Demitri

By the time we'd hopped in a water taxi and weaved our way back to the station, I was frankly too exhausted to join the festivities that were kicking off in the bar car with its harlequin-patterned walls and zig-zag sofas—but I did make sure to pop my head in to take in the scene, where the majority of the train's patrons were clinking chilled Champagne flutes in suits and gowns (one of the choose-your-own-adventure options for the evening out in Venice was a lavish dinner in a private palazzo) and beginning to shimmy to a live piano player plinking out renditions of "Volare" and "Tu vuò fa' l'americano." However jolly it appeared, it was time for bed.

Photo: Mr Tripper

VOGUE

Total Readership: 9.5M
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 87.9K

View online

January 28, 2026

After all, I was to have an early start: after a hearty breakfast of flaky *cornetti* with Amalfi lemon marmalade, a perfectly pulled espresso, and poached eggs (I skipped the shavings of black truffle on top, but that was an option), we were arriving at Santa Margherita Ligure, and it was time to whizz around the shores of Portofino and Camogli on a speedboat. Bundling off the train with the same gang as my Venice outing and down to the harbor, we first stopped for a dip in the gin-clear waters of a grotto before making a beeline for San Fruttuoso, the picture-postcard bay accessible only by the water with a 10th-century Benedictine monastery overlooking a slice of pebbled beach. On the third-floor terrace of the Da Giovanni restaurant, over plates of homemade lasagna sheets slathered with fresh pesto and a heaving platter of *fritto misto,* we watched families and groups of young Italians spill out from the water buses from Camogli and splash around in the shallow waves, with the general consensus being: it really doesn't get much better than this.

Photo: Getty Images

Once back on the train a few hours later, it began to dawn on me that it was, in a heartbreaking turn of events, the final night of my journey. After slipping into my suit (top tip: hang your evening outfit in the bathroom while taking a pre-dinner shower to steam out the creases), it was off to the dining cart for a typically decadent meal of tuna carpaccio, silky spaghetti with scorpionfish, and an olive-crusted lamb chop. Overseen by Chef Jean Imbert, each menu is inspired by the itinerary you're traveling on—other journeys will take you to Sicily, Tuscany, and Abruzzo—as well as the season, and is served alongside an extensive wine list, though I was more than happy with a mocktail of fresh peach juice and soda water. Stuffed to the brim and very much satisfied, I retired to my room and dozed off to the surprisingly soothing rhythm of the carriage tottering over the rails.

VOGUE

Total Readership: 9.5M
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 87.9K

View online

January 28, 2026

Photo: Mr Tripper

The next morning, it only felt right to take breakfast in bed, so as to enjoy the novelty of watching the world go by from under my sheets one last time, before packing and having my suitcase spirited away to be collected at the station upon arrival. (I'm not sure how I haven't mentioned it yet, but the service was, from beginning to end, impeccable. Despite only being up and running for a matter of months when I joined, any teething problems had clearly been ironed out already, and it was all the more astonishing when considering our journey was being made on a busy national rail network. The logistics of it boggle the mind.)

LIFE

The 32 Chicest New Hotels Opening in 2026

Let's be frank: the usual vacation destinations have become overrun. When your esthetician *and* your great-aunt are posting identical Aperol Spritz boomerangs from the same terrace in Positano, it's time to recalibrate. The true vanguard of style isn't just looking for a high thread count anymore; they are seeking pedigree, extreme architectural vision, and that rarest of modern commodities: exclusivity.

Fortunately, the forecast for 2026 is looking exceptionally well-heeled. We are teetering on the edge of a Golden Age of Restoration, where storied European piles are being dusted off by the world's best designers, alongside a counter-movement toward far-flung, minimalist sanctums designed to make you forget Instagram even exists.

Below, find the 32 chicest addresses of the year.

Orient Express Venezia

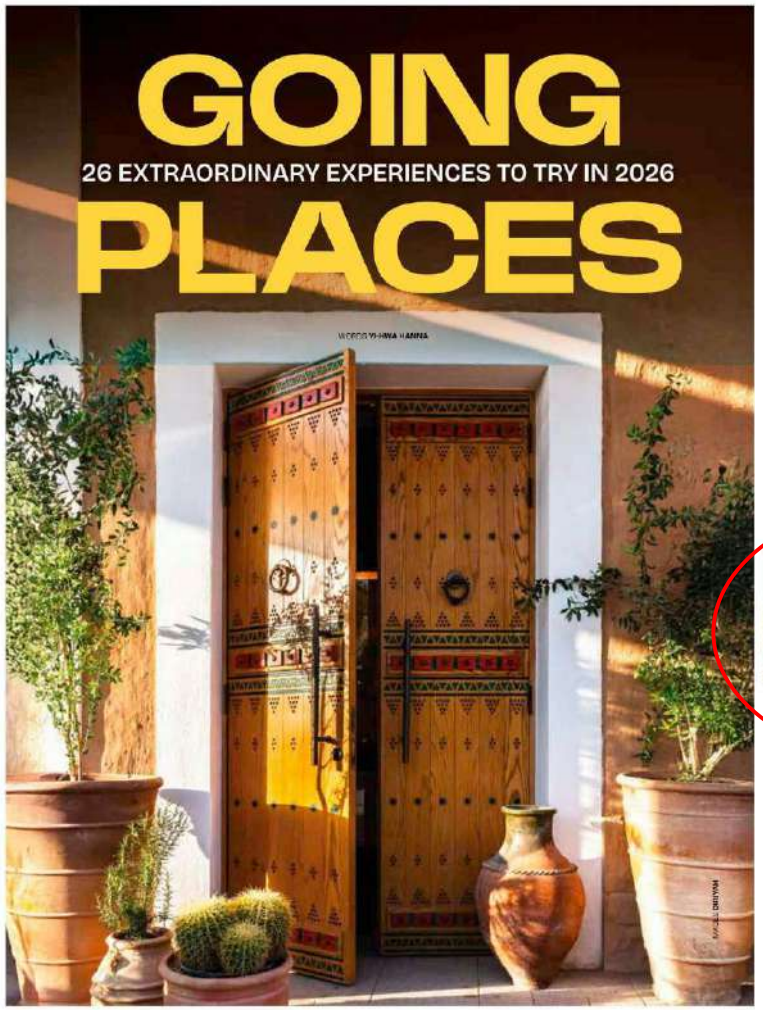
The romance of the train, but stationary. Housed in the Palazzo Donà Giovannelli, this is an exercise in extreme nostalgia and cinematic splendor. It's a siren call to a time when travel required hat boxes and dressing for dinner was mandatory. If you've ever dreamed of feeling like a character in a Wes Anderson film, here's your set.

Courtesy of Orient Express Venezia

Business Traveller MIDDLE EAST

GOING PLACES

26 EXTRAORDINARY EXPERIENCES TO TRY IN 2026



COVER STORY

5 Take a thrill ride
High-adrenaline environments are studies in risk management, safety systems, and human response under pressure – key lessons in the boardroom and life. With an opening date of 31 December 2025, Six Flags in Saudi Arabia's Qiddiya is an immense new tourism attraction that represents the kingdom's push to anchor entertainment within large-scale economic diversification. The park has six themed lands, 28 rides and the world's fastest, tallest, and longest roller coaster.

6 Soothe your soul
The quest for well-being has pervaded almost every industry across the world – including travel. Wellness travel increasingly focuses on ways to regulate our stress, sleep, attention, and nervous systems, rather than indulgence. For busy professionals, it can offer a chance at recalibration. Taking place amidst the natural wonders of the ancient landscape, AlUla Wellness Festival – which typically runs for about two weeks – offers holistic experiences like yoga, meditation, music, and desert adventures along-side fitness classes. While the 2026 edition's dates have yet to be announced, the festival is typically held from late October to early November.

7 Immerse into nature
Spending time in nature can help to improve cognitive function and emotional resilience. From late June to September each year, the usually dry terrain of Salalah in Oman's Dhofar region transforms into a lush landscape of waterfalls, greenery, and cool breezes that shroud its mountains with an atmospheric mist. In Bulgaria, UNESCO-recognised Rose Festival draws its rose-picking season each April, offering a chance to learn how its fragrant Damask rose is used in food, perfume and more. In Jordan, Yarmouk Eco Lodge – a new sustainable tourism project by Jordan's Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature and Eco-lodges in the Yarmouk Biosphere Forest Reserve – is set to open in 2026.

8 Travel by rail
Etihad Rail is set to enter its passenger era in 2026. The 900km network connecting all seven emirates will begin carrying passengers from the Saudi border to Fujairah. Initially linking 11 cities across the country, operated by Keolis International (which also runs Dubai Metro), Saudi Arabia's first ultra-luxury train, Dream of the Desert, will also launch in 2026. Designed by Arsenale Group – the force behind the Orient Express revival – the train will operate five curated routes across the kingdom, complete with with fine dining,

9 Take a flying taxi
Dubai will be launching its first commercial air taxi services, using JOBY aircraft, in early 2026. The service will be bookable via an app, with rides priced akin to premium ride-hailing services. There are four vertiports scheduled within the initial network: at Dubai International Airport (DXB), Palm Jumeirah, Downtown Dubai, and Dubai Marina.

10 Up your style quotient
Good style is a visual language that signals taste, confidence, and attention to detail. While we'll have to wait until 2027 for the next edition of Dubai Watch Week, in 2026, you can catch the brand new Dubai Mall Festival of Fashion from 29-30 January, and Dubai Fashion Week from 1-6 February.

ABOVE Six Flags Saudi Arabia

LEFT Dream of the Desert

BOTTOM Red Sea Film Festival

11 Be well-read
Literature can expose us to new ideas that strengthen how we think, help us gain new perspectives, build empathy, and expand our imagination. The Emirates Airline Festival of Literature – the Arab World's largest celebration of the written and spoken word – has evolved into a major cultural anchor in the region, and the 2026 edition will be held at the InterContinental Dubai Festival City from 21 to 25 January.

12 Walk the red carpet
Events such as the Red Sea International Film Festival, Istanbul Film Festival, and El Gouna Film Festival place the Middle East firmly within the global cinematic circuit, spotlighting regional talent alongside international premieres. Dates for their 2026 editions have yet to all be announced, but for professionals across various industries, these festivals can offer insight into storytelling, soft power, and creative economies, while reminding us how art often leads social change long before policy follows.

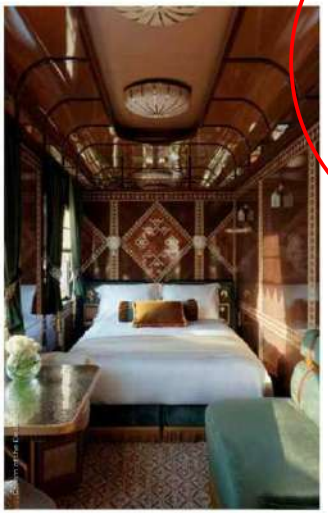
13 Travel by water
Cruises can give us a sense of efficiency by offering the chance to visit multiple destinations without having to deal with constant packing, airport transfers, or logistics. New itineraries entering Middle Eastern ports include those by Celestyal, MSC Cruises, and Saudi Arabia's homegrown ARDAVA Cruises.

14 Experience the tech of the future
The Middle East is fast emerging as one of the most tech-forward corners of the world, and the region's innovation hubs – such as the upcoming Jaddaf Urban Tech District, a net-zero carbon innovation hub set to be the world's largest urban tech district – provide insight into where industries – and careers – are heading. Events such as LEAP and DeepTest in Saudi Arabia, Dubai Esports and Games Festival, and the Dubai Future Foundation's annual Dubai Future Forum bring together technologists, pioneers, policymakers, entrepreneurs, and investors shaping tomorrow's systems. Attending one will keep you on the pulse of the cutting edge, helping contextualise the disruption that's emerging across markets, and reinforcing the importance of adaptability in a shifting global landscape.

15 Indulge in fine food
The Middle East's dining scene continues to mature, with chef-driven concepts, hyper-local sourcing, and experimental formats

fact.
QR

From chasing the upcoming total solar eclipse to bagging tickets for major sporting events and from going solo and quiet to seeking ultra-personalised experiences, there's loads to look forward to on the travel calendar over the coming year. If you're looking for inspiration for your next big trip, we take a look at some of the top trends to bear in mind when you make that all-important booking.



saying 45% of its clients are adjusting plans due to climate change. Respondents also said they wanted to reduce pressure on local communities and preserve the authenticity of experiences.

This change in mindset has led to the rise in popularity of destinations outside major tourism hubs with online travel platform Agoda experiencing a significant rise in the number of searches for non-traditional locations.

The company's 2026 Travel Outlook Report noted that governments and tourism authorities are very aware of the trend with countries such as Indonesia and Japan adopting strategies to drive visitors to alternative destinations, aside from Bali and Tokyo.

Check Out: Notjustravel.com and net-a-porter.com for alternative travel ideas.

OF ROADS AND RAILWAYS

According to Hilton's 2026 Trends Report, more of us will be turning to the highways in 2026 – it's no surprise that the hashtag #RoadTrip has racked up more than 6.9 million tags globally!

And explore.co.uk says more travellers are choosing epic rail journeys over short-haul flights – making the journey part of the holiday – in fact, the company has seen a 25% increase in rail bookings over the last year.

While Hilton's report finds some travellers are taking to the roads to save cash, others are seeking out the more luxe option with specialist companies turning the road trip into a curated journey built around Michelin-starred dining and one-off experiences.

In rail too there are dual-purpose journeys. The appetite for slow, scenic travel is on the rise but rail with its student and multi-journey perks can also prove a cost-effective option.

While luxury rail travel, too is experiencing an upsurge with the likes of Saudi Arabia's soon to be launched ultra-luxe train, Dream of the Desert, due to offer various routes reminiscent of the golden age of rail travel.

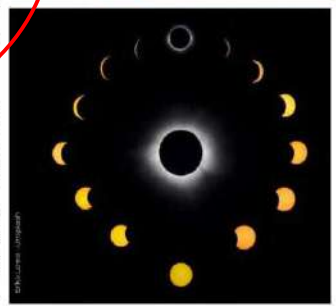
Check Out: The Society of International Railway Travelers, irtsociety.com for information on the world's top luxury trains.

OFF-SEASON BREAKS

ABTA – The Travel Association says another emerging trend is September Travel. In terms of both favourable weather and good value, booking a break outside the regular school holidays is growing in popularity. In fact, ABTA's most recent report found one in four people (24%) said they planned to holiday in September, up seven percent on previous years.

While older people aged 55–84-years (29%), and 65+ year olds (35%), said they were most likely to travel in September, there was also an increase in intention to travel during this month across all ages. In particular the biggest increases were for 18–24-year-olds from 11% to 17% and 35–44-year-olds from 12% to 20%.

September is not the only time proving popular – other



How to hit the sweetspot every time!
GOLF
MONTHLY
MARCO PENGE
The rise of England's next superstar
10 ways to hit it further this year
POWER
UP YOUR GAME!
World Handicap System
Should golfers put a card in every round?
New year, new grip?
Easy ways to hole more putts
FEB ISSUE
FUTURE
Ultimate tour preview
Key questions answered ahead of the new season PLUS Hot new irons for 2026 revealed inside!

GOLDEN

Castiglion del Bosco in Tuscany

Photography: La Dolce Vita Orient Express, Jacob Sjomam, Getty Images, Jeremy Ellwood

TICKET

Travelling in true style aboard La Dolce Vita Orient Express, **Jeremy Ellwood** plays four of Italy's top golf courses from Rome down to Puglia in the south and all the way back up to Tuscany

I love golf, most of the time. I couldn't have done this job for as long as I have without an enduring passion for the game, though Lord knows it can be frustrating. I also (whisper it softly) have more than a passing interest in trains. Not in a geeky, standing on the platform in an anorak kind of way, but as more of a curious observer.

Disused railways fascinate me and I've walked many a mile on them; on holiday I'll always try to engineer a stop-off at any nearby heritage steam railway; and I still have boxes of model railway stuff in the loft, acquired over the years from charity and junk shops for a project that somehow never quite happened (maybe in retirement).

So, when word of a golf press trip in Italy on La Dolce Vita Orient Express hit my inbox, my eyes lit up. Having only just made my maiden golfing river cruise in Bordeaux, I knew that it wasn't really 'my turn', but when other writers had to decline for various reasons, the opportunity was all mine. Well, mine and my wife's as she wasn't about to pass it up once the PR had indicated that 'plus ones' were a possibility.

My ticket to ride on La Dolce Vita Orient Express' 'Italian Swing' and the restaurant car where Michelin-starred chef Heinz Beck served up many a tempting treat

And so it was that we found ourselves checking into the Orient Express La Minerva hotel in Rome on November 21. Ahead lay four days' golf and three nights aboard La Dolce Vita Orient Express as it made its way to Puglia in the south and back up to Tuscany before returning to Rome. This was to be the first golf-specific trip for a train only inaugurated in April 2025 when the hotel, close to many of Rome's famous landmarks, had also opened.

We headed up to the Gigi Rigolatto Roma rooftop restaurant on the seventh floor to meet our fellow passengers over dinner, then reassembled in the ground-floor Minerva Bar next morning for breakfast (complete with 'live harpist') after a comfortable night in a lovely fifth-floor room, styled to reflect the heritage of this most famous of railway companies.

My wife and I then went our separate ways, me to the Marco Simone Golf and Country Club, scene of Europe's famous victory in 2023, and her to take in the sights of Rome. She ended up walking 12 miles with regular accompaniment from talented street musicians as it was St Cecilia's Day (the patron saint of music), with mandolin and cello among the instruments she stopped and listened to.

This also meant the Pope was in town, and she was delighted to see him addressing the people in front of St Peter's Basilica, not far from the hotel. Among the other sites crossed off on her 'Rome attractions' bingo card were the Pantheon, the Trevi Fountain, the Colosseum and the Torre Argentina Cat Sanctuary in among some ancient ruins. I also ticked off several of these on our final night back at La Minerva, along with an obligatory pit-stop at one of the ubiquitous gelaterias.

MY MARCO SIMONE DEBUT

For me, it was good to finally see Marco Simone in the flesh and reduce my 'home Ryder Cup venues not yet played' count down to one (Le Golf National). Having Italian Ryder Cupper Costantino Rocca on hand for a few tips added to the occasion as I teamed up with an American called Nick to take on two more Americans – Jason and Shaun.

The course at Argentario in somewhat better weather than we experienced

The 1st is strong visually as it climbs gently towards a rollercoaster green and distant, snow-capped mountains. There's a well-bunkered short par 3 at the low point on the 4th, and the front nine closes with two par 5s either side of the same lake. Even the lay-up on the 8th is no pushover.

The back nine ventures onto higher ground, with risk-reward on the 11th where you need to decide how much to take on as the hole climbs and turns left along side a ditch. The 12th is a big, downhill dogleg-left with the scintillating drive and before long you're standing on the 16th tee, a short risk-reward par 4 that served up much drama in 2023. By this stage, our match was well and truly lost so only personal pride was affected by my finding the water off the tee, then three-putting the cracking par-3 17th and finding water again on the excellent 18th.

ALL ABOARD LA DOLCE VITA

But as I made my way back to La Minerva hotel to be reunited with my weary wife, a gutsy up-and-down from 80 yards to salvage bogey on 18 had buoyed me. Back at the hotel, a quartet was playing in the Minerva Bar, where we were presented with tickets to make our journey on La Dolce Vita Orient Express' 'Italian Swing' official (carriage D, cabin 3).

We were greeted on board by the smiling staff, lined up in front of the train, and then finally got to understand the need for the strict baggage limits as the cabin was elegant and cosy but space was understandably at a premium, so careful organisation was required.

One of the cabins and the evening entertainment

As the train pulled away, we headed to the restaurant car for the first of three dinners exquisitely crafted by Michelin-starred chef, Heinz Beck. Veal stuffed with dried fruit in a pistachio crust was the pick of our first night's multiple courses. Near the end, a roving clarinettist and singer appeared in the carriage to entice us into the bar, and who were we to resist? I got to experience Tuscan whisky for the first time – for me, highly palatable shades of vanilla and Speyside malt with a hint of Cognac.

We had covered many of the 500 km from Rome to Fasano in Puglia by the time we turned in. As we ploughed on through the night, a thought occurred to me... when the train banked sharply, might I roll out of bed or would my body subconsciously brace itself to remain firmly on the mattress? All I can say is that at no point did I awake to find myself on the

floor, but I can't really answer the second part of the question.

A short drive from Faseno station has the course at San Domenico, which I'd played soon after it opened 22 years ago. While individual holes had slipped from my memory I really remembered the wildflower areas dotted about and was glad to see some were still there. The layout is mainly flat with sea views at times, especially on the back nine closer to the coast.

The occasional hole came back to me on a bright and breezy day and I did remember that some bunkers were sleeper-faced, including one at the rear of the wonderful par-3 13th, played across a kind of waste area. There's water on the 1st and 5th, while the 2nd and 3rd play towards the sea. From the 6th to the 8th, there is plenty of challenge on and around the greens, which were quick for dinner as we set off on the long trek north to Tuscany. More Italian wine and whisky were taken before a splendid meal that started with ample cold cuts and cheese and ended on a dessert of chocolate, mascarpone, hazelnut and chestnuts, which was beyond rich.

BATTLING THE ELEMENTS

Sadly, next day the weather had turned and opening the blinds revealed a grey, wet landscape. The first station sign I saw was Albinia, but we alighted at Grosseto for the hour's drive to the fine Tom Weiskopf course at Castiglion del Bosco. I'd played it ten years ago, so knew what a treat lay in store, a well-bunkered layout with many clever, testing green complexes and views to die for.

Studying a weather app as we came back up from the range, the manager suggested we might just get away with it, and we did... for five holes. After that, we most definitely did not, and got a real drenching as the course turned back into a strong wind to complete the figure-of-eight front nine. I was delighted to scrape three bogeys and a par before the sanctuary of the wonderful clubhouse, where a restorative lunch and glass of the fabulous local Brunello wine helped us to dry out, at least mentally.

Having thought play had been called for the day, I was surprised when a slight improvement (definitely not a brightening) had my American friends clamouring for more. I'm not sure Castiglion del Bosco really had in mind English journalists drying off socks and trousers with a hairdryer in the locker room, but I managed to tee off on the inviting but awkwardly angled downhill 10th with at least a vague sense of dryness.

The rain held off for the excellent back nine on which you can opt to take on the par-5 13th at a whopping 685 yards, a glorious hole played from an elevated tee gazing back down the valley. The American pair beat us fair and square this time, closing things out on the strong, uphill 17th. The rain was just starting again as we all wedged it close on the cracking little 19th hole, named Brunello.

Tonight, Matthew, I'm going to be Tommy Fleetwood...

Saving bogey on 18 at Marco Simone after visiting water

November. After a fine lunch halfway, the breeze freshened further and holes like 15 and 16 closest to the sea played very tough into the wind.

In a return match, it was looking forlorn for my partner and me, trailing dormie four. However, aided by ample shots over the last four holes, we won them all with gritty pars to snatch an unlikely half. While all that drama was unfolding, my wife was relaxing at the superb Borgo Egnazia spa next door, enjoying a massage and dips in the pools.

The train staff were there to welcome us back on board, and we whiled away time in the bar before

The 5th green and clubhouse at San Domenico in Puglia

As we headed back to meet the train once more, my wife told me all about her Brunello wine-tasting (a newly developed liking for the reds), and her tour of the stunning Rosewood Castiglion del Bosco resort set a little way above the golf course. Back on board, I'm pretty sure we headed away from our next destination for a while as our final game was at The Argentario Resort, also in Tuscany.

Before that, there was one final superb meal to savour, followed by the standout entertainment of the week provided by a talented and amusing singer and his piano- and saxophone-playing accomplices. The words may often have been Italian, but we all understood the sentiment and everyone joined in. Top-class from all concerned.

Sadly, top-class didn't describe the weather again next day at Argentario, and although we warmed up in the dry and optimism hung in the air, the rain arrived in abundance after four holes and never let up, such that this time, no-one wanted to venture back out after nine. We must have cut comic figures with our waterproofs, clothing and shoes drying in front of a roaring log fire over another superb lunch, possibly partly created by my wife.

While we were getting soaked, she'd been learning how to make and serve authentic Italian pasta at the resort and was convinced one of the dishes was her handiwork. Either way, it was delicious.

UNDAMPENED SPIRITS

As for the course, the nine holes I played were fun, with a draw a real asset early on, particularly on the attractively bunkered par-5 2nd that darts surprisingly to the left late on. We were still just about able to enjoy the distant Mediterranean views away to the left as we tackled a cheeky pin position on the short-ish par-3 6th.

As we boarded the train for the final two-hour leg back to Rome's Ostiense station, I made a mental note to one day return to finish my round at Argentario. I certainly hope another trip like this might fall my way again as it had been a real adventure, and although the weather had dampened things on the course for our final two rounds, it had definitely not dampened spirits on board the train.

After pulling into Ostiense, we had one final treat – a drinks reception in the Orient Express' spacious and stylish La Dolce Vita lounge, inspired by the spirit of the 1960s. It rounded off the mood and feel of the whole trip beautifully as we headed back for a final night at La Minerva before flying back to reality next morning.

OR TRY THE NORTHERN GREENS...

The 'Italian Swing' trip I enjoyed features four rounds of golf (Marco Simone, San Domenico, Castiglion del Bosco and Argentario) in various regions of Italy, with three nights on board La Dolce Vita. The next departures are in March and November 2026, with prices from €12,360 per passenger.

An alternative 'Northern Greens' itinerary departs in May 2026, with two courses remaining the same – Marco Simone and Argentario – while Franciacorta Golf Club and Royal Park I Roveri complete the line-up as the train heads further north to Brescia and Turin.

There are various activities planned for non-golfers, with the chance to explore Rome at leisure as my wife did on day one. At Franciacorta, guests can enjoy a premium tasting of the local sparkling wine during a visit to the renowned Ca' del Bosco winery or visit the Mille Miglia Museum for a guided tour of the legendary race's vintage cars and memorabilia.

At Royal Park I Roveri, there's an exclusive tour of the Royal Palace, a private visit to Casa Zegna to discover the brand's heritage and craftsmanship, or a hands-on chocolate workshop in Turin, to learn traditional techniques and enjoy a guided tasting.

At Argentario, relaxation is the aim, with a fun class celebrating local Tuscan flavours, or a restorative day at the resort's spa. Prices for the Northern Greens trip start from €14,160 per passenger. W: orient-express.com/la-dolce-vita/itineraries/

The Orient Express La Minerva hotel's wonderful rooftop restaurant

HOSPITALITY & CATERING NEWS

La Dolce Vita Orient Express Unveils Two Exceptional February 2026 Itineraries: Carnival Party and Valentine's Day

January 24, 2026

Share | Share | Share

aha accessible hospitality alliance
For a hospitality world that welcomes everyone

In February 2026, La Dolce Vita Orient Express celebrates the art of travel through two itineraries conceived as immersive cultural and sensory experiences. From the exuberance of the Venetian Carnival to the intimacy of a romantic escape to Verona, the train offers two rare interludes.

Valentine's Day – Love is on the Rails – 13 – 15 February 2026 | 3 days – 2 nights | Rome – Verona – Rome

For Valentine's Day, La Dolce Vita Orient Express offers a romantic escape between Rome and Verona, the legendary city of Romeo and Juliet.

On the evening of February 13th, guests board in Rome. From the moment of departure, the atmosphere is intimate and refined. A three-Michelin-starred dinner by Heinz Beck, accompanied by live music, turns the train into a world apart.

On the morning of February 14th, the train arrives in Verona. The day is devoted to discovery: Juliet's balcony, Renaissance palazzi, sunlit piazzas... A private musical experience, conceived as a contemporary serenade, deepens the immersion.

That evening, back on board, a Valentine's dinner specially designed for the occasion accompanies the return journey. The mood favours intimacy.

On February 15th, the train returns to Rome. Guests depart with the memory of a journey written for two.

The Carnival Party – 16 – 17 February 2026 | 2 days – 1 night

To mark Carnival, La Dolce Vita Orient Express presents an elegant and festive journey linking Rome to Venice, where the tradition of masks dates back to the 13th century.

The voyage begins in Rome with a private welcome at the La Dolce Vita lounge. On board, a gastronomic lunch by three-Michelin-starred chef Heinz Beck accompanies the passage through vineyards and olive groves.

A stop in Siena offers time to explore the medieval city. Guests may wander its narrow streets or choose from a curated selection of cultural experiences: a private visit to the Duomo, exclusive access to historic palazzi, immersion in the traditions of the Contrade and the Palio, or an introduction to the ancient art of gold-leaf painting led by local artisans.

As evening falls, the train is transformed. Fine dining gives way to a masked celebration: live music, piano bar and Carnival-inspired games create the atmosphere of a ball carried along the rails.

The following morning, the train arrives at Venezia Santa Lucia. Venice, in the height of Carnival, extends the experience through its calli, on St Mark's Square and within the masked balls for which it is renowned. The journey concludes, but the Voyage continues.

« Accessible Hospitality Alliance launches Mediterranean Accessible Hospitality Hub

EMAIL NEWSLETTER

Subscribe to our email newsletter and keep a close eye on the UK hospitality and catering business

SUBSCRIBE

aha accessible hospitality alliance

INSTITUTE OF HOSPITALITY GOLF DAY 2026

SEARCH H&C NEWS

Search the site ...

JOIN OUR EMAIL NEWSLETTER COMMUNITY

SUPPLIER NEWS

Signature Sausages Join CRGs Premium Product Portfolio

En Route Strengthens Category Development with Leadership Appointment

Bordeaux Distilling Co Rolls Out The World's First Transparent Organic Coffee Liqueur

Hospitality Groups Face January Deadline to Reclaim Unlawful Card Fees

Visa & Mastercard Interchange Claim Deadline Extended

Birchall Foodservice Celebrates Landmark Year of Growth, Awards and Leadership Success

Country Range Group Celebrates Members & Suppliers with Showpiece at The National Gallery

Inclusion does not need Complexity to be Meaningful

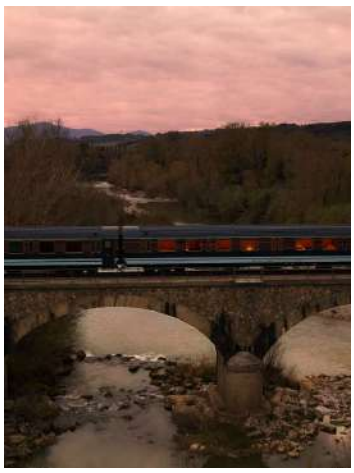
Legal precedent set on unlawful Visa and Mastercard interchange fees impacting hospitality

Copyright © - Hospitality & Catering News

TRAVEL

LA DOLCE VITA ORIENT EXPRESS UNVEILS TWO EXCEPTIONAL FEBRUARY 2026 ITINERARIES: CARNIVAL PARTY AND VALENTINE'S DAY

January 26, 2026



In February 2026, La Dolce Vita Orient Express celebrates the art of travel through two itineraries conceived as immersive cultural and sensory experiences. From the exuberance of the Venetian Carnival to the intimacy of a romantic escape to Verona, the train offers two rare interludes.

Valentine's Day – Love Is on the Rails

13 – 15 February 2026 | 3 days – 2 nights | Rome – Verona – Rome

For Valentine's Day, La Dolce Vita Orient Express offers a romantic escape between Rome and Verona, the legendary city of Romeo and Juliet.

On the evening of February 13th, guests board in Rome. From the moment of departure, the atmosphere is intimate and refined. A three-Michelin-starred dinner by Heinz Beck, accompanied by live music, turns the train into a world apart. On the morning of February 14th, the train arrives in Verona.

The day is devoted to discovery: Juliet's balcony, Renaissance palazzi, sunlit piazzas... A private musical experience, conceived as a contemporary serenade, deepens the immersion.

That evening, back on board, a Valentine's dinner specially designed for the occasion accompanies the return journey. The mood favours intimacy.

On February 15th, the train returns to Rome. Guests depart with the memory of a journey written for two.

Discover the itinerary: https://www.orient-express.com/la-dolce-vita/itinerary/love-is-on-the-rails/

The Carnival Party

16 – 17 February 2026 | 2 days – 1 night

To mark Carnival, La Dolce Vita Orient Express presents an elegant and festive journey linking Rome to Venice, where the tradition of masks dates back to the 13th century. The voyage begins in Rome with a private welcome at the La Dolce Vita lounge.

On board, a gastronomic lunch by three-Michelin-starred chef Heinz Beck accompanies the passage through vineyards and olive groves.

A stop in Siena offers time to explore the medieval city. Guests may wander its narrow streets or choose from a curated selection of cultural experiences: a private visit to the Duomo, exclusive access to historic palazzi, immersion in the traditions of the Contrade and the Palio, or an introduction to the ancient art of gold-leaf painting led by local artisans.

As evening falls, the train is transformed. Fine dining gives way to a masked celebration: live music, piano bar and Carnival-inspired games create the atmosphere of a ball carried along the rails.

The following morning, the train arrives at Venezia Santa Lucia. Venice, in the height of Carnival, extends the experience through its calli, on St Mark's Square and within the masked balls for which it is renowned. The journey concludes, but the Voyage continues.

Discover the itinerary : https://www.orient-express.com/la-dolce-vita/itinerary/the-carnival-party

Share this:

X Facebook

Reblog Like Be the first to like this.

Donna Richardson

← Previous Post

Next Post →

Leave a comment

Write a comment...

Comment

Find us on:

Join the fun!

Stay updated with our latest recipes and other news by joining our newsletter.

Type your email...

→

Categories

- ARTS (8)
- aviation (2)
- Celebrities (9)
- Cruises (5)
- Fashion and lifestyle (12)
- Food and Drink (32)
- Hotels (16)
- Motor cars (6)
- Ski (11)
- Sport (4)
- Travel (60)
- Travel Trends (2)
- Tried and Tested (10)
- Uncategorized (7)
- wine (2)

Recent Posts

ARTS, SKI

A guide to Alta Badia

TRAVEL

Winter Season travel from East Midlands Airport

CRUISES

Celestyal introduces in-cabin tablets to enhance guest experience

From £1,240 per night, orient-express.com

ORIENT EXPRESS HAS RESTORED A 16TH-CENTURY PALAZZO
ORIENT EXPRESS VENEZIA

Chablé Guadalupe, Mexico

When: TBC

Chablé Yucatan is regularly declared to be one of the best hotels in the world. Excitement is high then for the new outpost by this family-owned brand in the heart of Mexico's largest wine region, Baja California Norte. Guests will have the run of 10 hectares of vineyards, conservation trails and a spa offering yoga and sound baths. Just over the border from San Diego, the hotel will have 70 keys as well as 10 residences. If this opening is anywhere near as good as Chablé Yucatan, book your flights now.

Rates TBC, chablehotels.com

A CABANA AT CHABLÉ GUADALUPE
CHABLÉ HOTELS

EDITION Lake Como

When: March 2026

Across the water from beguiling Bellagio is the gleaming new EDITION. Injecting a bit of cool to the storied shores of Lake Como, the floating pool and lounge bar will be where you'll find the beautiful people this summer. Three-Michelin-starred chef Mauro Colagreco will be in charge of food in the restored 19th century palazzo and the longevity spa will help to undo throbbing heads from the night before.

From £690 per night, editionhotels.com

A PALATIAL ROOM AT EDITION LAKE COMO
NIKOLAS KOENIG

The Dean, Berlin

When: February 2026

Taking up its rightful spot in charming Charlottenburg, The Dean marks the Irish hotel brand's first foray outside of Ireland (openings in Munich and Miami follow next). Expect to see rows of Gen Z tapping away at their laptops in restaurant and bar Benedict by day and knocking back gimlets by night. Art is curated by Thom Oosterhof — themed around the idea of *Wanderers* — to reflect the city's creative scene, gorgeous bespoke amenities are provided by the always-delicious DS & Durga and the stylish rooms have been designed by Londoner Rachael Gowdridge.

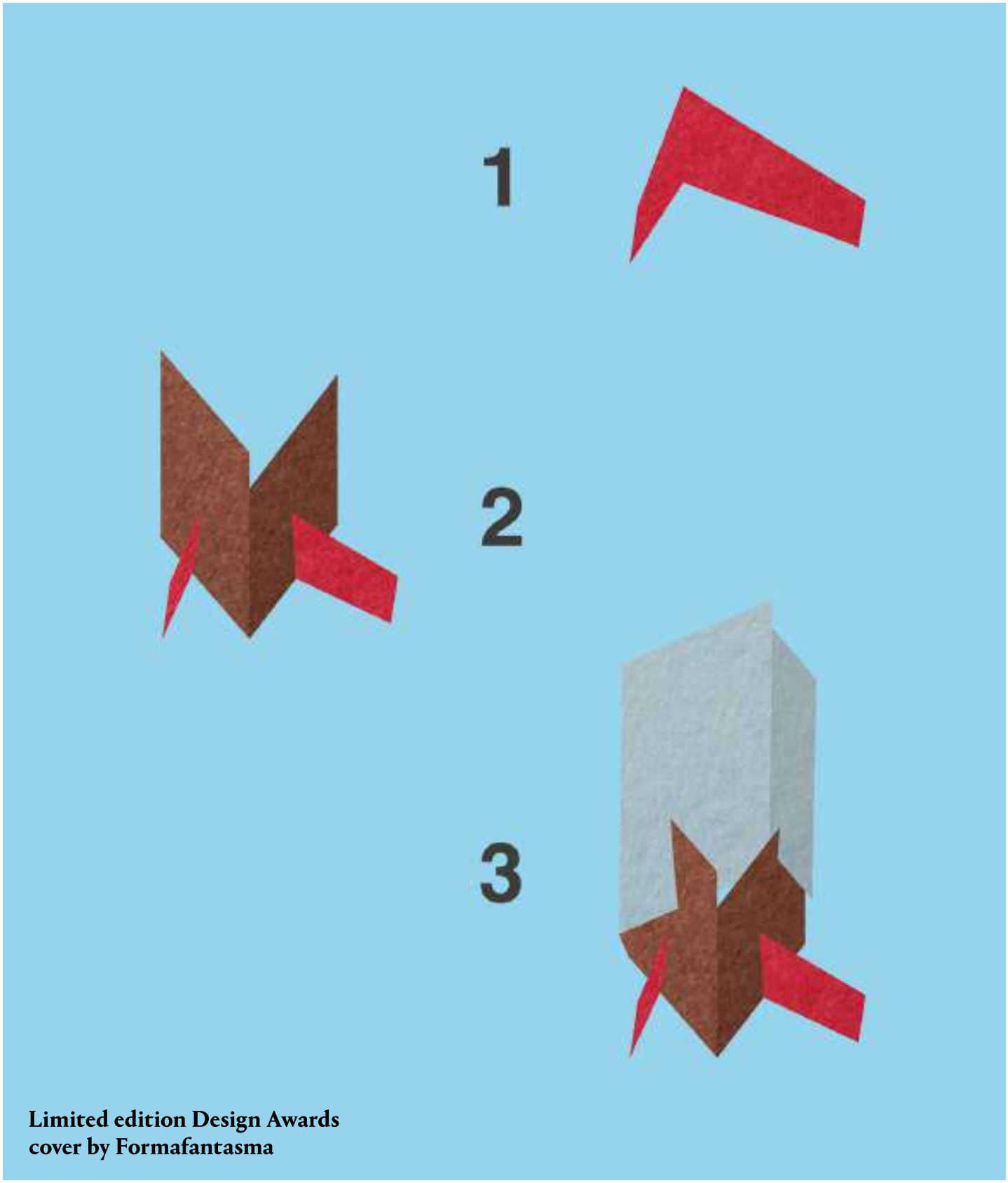
From £120 per night, thedeanberlin.ie

MORE ABOUT HOTEL OPENINGS THE RITZ SIX SENSES COMPORTA PARIS
HAVE YOUR SAY... VIEW COMMENTS
Discussion
LOG IN | SIGN UP
Start the conversation
ALL COMMENTS NEWEST
Start the conversation
Powered by viafoura

Wallpaper*

FEBRUARY 2026

*THE STUFF THAT SURROUNDS YOU



Limited edition Design Awards cover by Formafantasma

Wallpaper*

FEBRUARY 2026

*THE STUFF THAT SURROUNDS YOU

DESIGN AWARDS

Honouring the standout stars of art, design, architecture, interiors, fashion, travel and tech

BEST REINVENTION
ORIENT EXPRESS

Orient Express has held a near-mythic place in the globetrotting firmament since launching in 1883, but its recent reinvention – following Accor's full acquisition in 2022 and its partnership with LVMH in 2024 – signals a decisive expansion into offering a wider remit of luxury travel experiences.

The reboot began last April with Orient Express La Minerva in Rome, the brand's first hotel, set within a 17th-century palazzo on Piazza della Minerva. Designer Hugo Toro's renovation created a deft dialogue between eras: mineral palettes, art deco-inflected geometry and Roman cues distilled into 93 guest rooms. In parallel, the brand introduced La Dolce Vita Orient Express, a slow-travel statement piece, designed by Dimorestudio, that channels the high-gloss glamour of 1960s Italy. Kitted out with cabins and suites that can accommodate up to 62 guests, the train traces 16,000km across 14 regions and 131 cities through Italy.

Momentum continues with the opening in early 2026 of its second hotel, Orient Express Palazzo Donà Giovannelli in Venice, a 15th-century architectural feat reimagined by Aline Asmar d'Amman, while another milestone will follow at the end of the year with the debut of Orient Express Corinthian, a sailing yacht conceived by Maxime d'Angeac, the group's artistic director. The vessel will depart from Lisbon in October for a 14-night transatlantic voyage to Barbados.

Completing the arc, the original Orient Express train – comprising 17 carriages from the 1920s and 1930s found abandoned on the Poland-Belarus border – will return to service. Thirty artisans have been enlisted to restore the train under d'Angeac's direction, reviving the craftsmanship and allure that defined its golden age. ✱ *orient-express.com*

Above, with interiors by Dimorestudio, the 12-carriage luxury sleeper train La Dolce Vita Orient Express embodies the spirit of midcentury Italian glamour

Photography: Mr Tripper

Wallpaper* Design Awards: Orient Express wins Best Reinvention 2026

Orient Express has held a near-mythic place in the globetrotting firmament since launching in 1883, but its recent reinvention – including its first hotel and an upcoming yacht – signals a decisive new chapter

With interiors by Dimorestudio, the 14-cabin train is a unique way to experience La Dolce Vita Orient Express celebrates the world of celebrity on Italian journeys
(Image credit: Photography by Mr Tripett)

Orient Express has held a near-mythic place in the globetrotting firmament since launching in 1883, but its recent reinvention – following Accor's full acquisition in 2021 and its partnership with LVMH in 2024 – signals a decisive expansion into offering a wider remit of luxury travel experiences.

Orient Express wins Best Reinvention at the Wallpaper* Design Awards 2026

(Image credit: Photography by Mr Tripett)

The reboot began in April 2025 with Orient Express La Minerva in Rome, the brand's first hotel, set within a 17th-century palazzo on Piazza della Minerva. Designer Diego Tosi's renovation created a deft dialogue between cool, mineral palettes, art deco-inflected geometry and Roman cues distilled into 93 guest rooms. In parallel, the brand introduced La Dolce Vita Orient Express, a slow-travel entertainment piece, designed by Dimorestudio, that channels the high-gloss glamour of 1960s Italy. Kitted out with cabins and suites that can accommodate up to 42 guests, the train boasts 14,800km across 14 regions and 131 cities through Italy.

Orient Express La Minerva
(Image credit: Photography by Mr Tripett)

Orient Express La Minerva
(Image credit: Photography by Mr Tripett)

Momentum continues with the opening in early 2026 of its second hotel, Orient Express Venezia, a 19th-century architectural feat reimagined by Aline Asmar d'Amman, while another milestone will follow at the end of the year with the debut of Orient Express Corinthian, a sailing yacht conceived by Maxime d'Angeac, the group's artistic director. The vessel will depart from Lisbon in October for a 14-night transatlantic voyage to Barbados.

Orient Express Venezia
(Image credit: Courtesy of Orient Express)

Completing the set, the original Orient Express train – comprising 17 carriages from the 1920s and 1930s, found abandoned on the Poland-Belarus border – will return to service. Thirty artisans have been enlisted to restore the train under d'Angeac's direction, reviving the craftsmanship and allure that defined its golden age.

La Dolce Vita Orient Express
(Image credit: Photography by Mr Tripett)

La Dolce Vita Orient Express Deluxe cabin
(Image credit: Photography by Mr Tripett)

orient-express.com

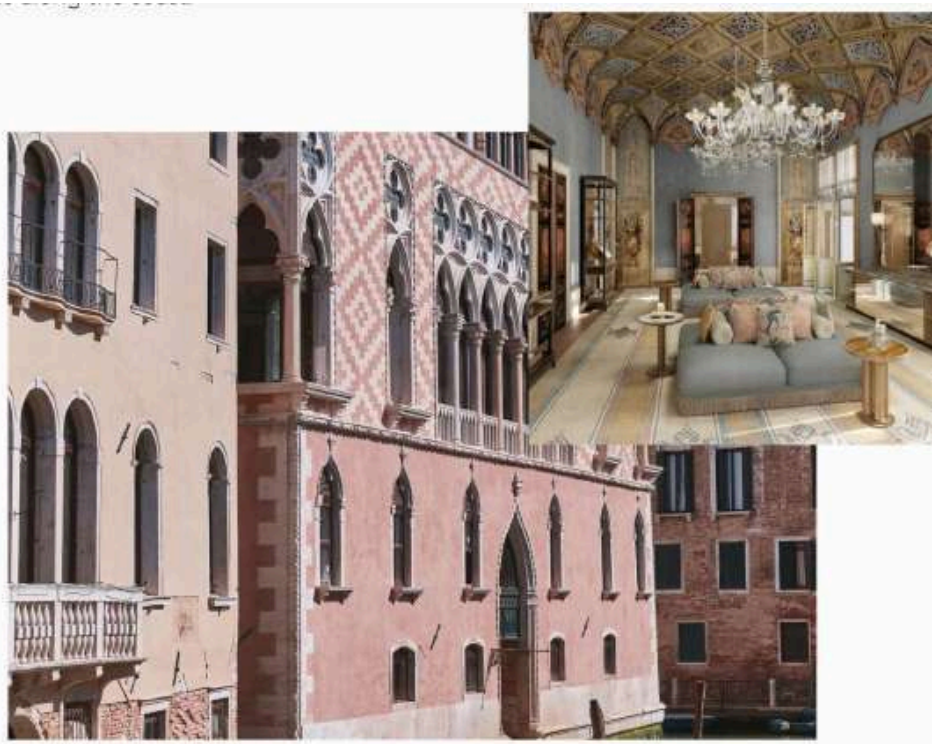
This article appears in the February 2026 Design Awards issue of Wallpaper, available in print on newsstands, on the Wallpaper* app on Apple iOS, and to subscribers of Apple News+. Subscribe to Wallpaper* today.*

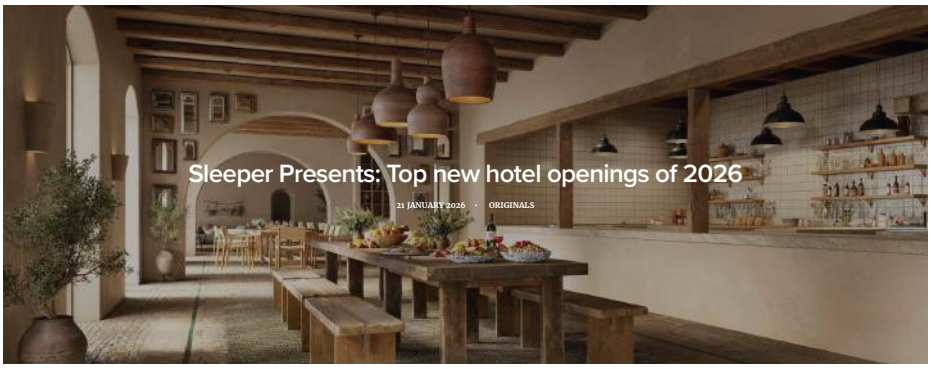
Orient Express Venezia, Venice

A palazzo transformed in Cannaregio

8 years in the making, the Orient Express Venezia hotel takes residence in a remarkable 15th-century palazzo, blending historical luxury and romance with the brand's signature take on slow travel. There's a lot to look forward to here, as one of Venice's most anticipated openings in years, but perhaps most intriguing are the internal courtyard, terraces, garden and exceptional interiors, elevated by antique frescoes, Murano glass chandeliers, and a museum-worth of original features offering a distinct connection to Venice's storied past. Despite its scale, there are just 47 elegant rooms, each a sanctuary of impeccable design, with details like painted frescoes, marble reliefs jutting from heavy frames, and luxurious finishes like marble bathrooms and exquisite Rivolta Carmignani linens.

The rooms are fabulous, of course, but ask your Travel Designer about the Signature Suites, which boast 19th-century frescoes and enviable views of Venice's emerald canals.





Sleeper Presents: Top new hotel openings of 2026

21 JANUARY 2026 · ORIGINALS

In 2025, Sleeper reported on the landmark openings shaping the luxury hotel landscape. In some of the world's most alluring capital cities, hospitality giants expanded their footprints, from The Chancery Rosewood in London to Fairmont Tokyo, while carefully crafted interiors enhanced the design landscape, as seen in the historic grandeur of Rosewood Amsterdam and the superyacht-inspired Jumeirah Marsa al Arab in Dubai.

Meanwhile, the anticipated reopening of Waldorf Astoria New York marked a return to opulent luxury and heritage hospitality, a trend that was only reinforced at the AHEAD Awards, with Orient Express La Minerva winning Hotel of the Year at AHEAD Europe before going on to pick up AHEAD Global's Ultimate Accolade.

As 2026 gets underway, the statistics point to another busy year for the industry. According to THP, there are 8,557 projects in the global pipeline, 36% (2,699) of which are slated to debut in 2026; introducing a total of 466,848 new rooms worldwide.

With thousands of new openings on the horizon, we've sifted through the data to bring you our pick of the very best hotels stepping onto the scene over the next 12 months:

Delano, Miami Beach

Following a complete renovation, Delano Miami Beach will reopen its doors in early 2026, featuring a design that pays homage to its Art Deco roots and Mid-Century Miami style. The South Beach property has stood as a gold-coast icon since 1947 and will continue this legacy with a design that integrates heritage with modern elegance, from the iconic entrance curtains to the lobby's restored hexagonal columns.

EXPRESS CHECK-OUT · Developer: Cain International · Operator: Ennismore · Architecture and Interior Design: Elastic Architects, Ennismore in-house

RELATED POSTS

17 January 2025

Sleeper Presents: Top new hotel openings of 2025

12 January 2024

Sleeper Presents: Top new hotel openings of 2024

28 February 2022

Sleeper Presents: February's hottest hotel openings

Sign up for Sleeper's free email alerts

SIGN UP

SLEEPER MEDIA

Home About Media Pack AHEAD Subscribe Contact Cookie Policy

We are using cookies to give you the best experience on our website.
You can find out more about which cookies we are using or switch them off in settings.

Accept Reject

Orient-Express La Minerva Rome has opened its luxury Spa which draws on the legacy of Roman thermae and the Ottoman hammam. Designed by Artist-Architect Hugo Toro and conceived as a place of transformation, The Spa offers a journey through baths and treatments in which time slows, and each stage prepares the next. This approach echoes the spirit of the Orient Express journey, understood as a passage, a crossing, and a fully immersive sensory experience.

The Spa's essence is structured around steam and a sequenced spatial progression inspired by the three stages of the ancient thermal ritual: the tepidarium, a temperate space of gradual acclimatisation; the calidarium, a warm environment combining pools and steam; and the frigidarium, the final invigorating cold bath.

Spaces alternate between shared relaxation areas, and single and double treatment rooms. Hand-blown Murano glass fixtures cast a soft, candle-like glow, heightening the tactile atmosphere. Brown travertine, red and veined marble, Roman-style plaster and stained oak create a powerful dialogue of textures. The contrast of stone, wood and richly woven textiles, including the canopy beds in the relaxation area, anchors the space in a distinctly earthy, elemental sensibility.

A finely crafted marble hammam rises as the heart of The Spa, surrounded by delicate fountains resembling Triton basins, echoing those found in the hotel's guest rooms. Contemporary moucharabieh screens filter sightlines, deepening the exploration of light and texture. The hammam, an ancient Ottoman purification ritual, integrates Roman influences, establishing a dialogue between East and West, recalling the historic route of the Orient Express linking Paris to Constantinople.

Among the treatments offered, the signature rituals Dea Minerva and Stop Constantinople invite guests on a complete sensory journey: rose-infused foot baths, aromatic steam, kassa exfoliation, ghassoul clay wraps, foaming massages, and face and hair treatments. Raxul rituals leave guests feeling refreshed, with their senses awakened and skin radiant. Passed down from Byzantium to Istanbul, these experiences celebrate the regenerative power of water, heat, and touch.

Orient Express La Minerva Rome new Spa

Furtuna Skin, the Italian luxury skincare house rooted in regenerative agriculture and clinically proven performance, is the exclusive skincare partner of The SPA at Orient Express La Minerva. Formulated using ingredients cultivated on the brand's 800-acre organic estate in Sicily, La Furtuna Estate, its products harness extra-virgin olive oil, wild-foraged botanicals, and medicinal herbs grown in accordance with biodiversity-led restoration practices. Deeply aligned with the Spa's reverence for ancient ritual and elemental healing, Furtuna Skin's approach bridges heritage and high-performance.

"At Furtuna Skin, our philosophy has always been rooted in the idea that true beauty is born from ritual, heritage, and a deep respect for the land. Partnering with The Spa at Orient Express La Minerva felt like a natural extension of that belief. The Spa's reverence for ancient purification traditions, historic elegance, and holistic restoration aligns with our own commitment to time-honored botanicals and transformative wellness. – **Agatha Relota Luczo, Furtuna Skin Founder & CEO**

Obsidian treatments, including the signature Furtuna Skin x La Minerva Exclusive Vibrancy Facial, have been developed for The Spa, combining manual techniques, beauty tools such as an obsidian Gua Sha, and natural active ingredients. The treatments signed by Furtuna Skin designed nature's most potent skin-reviving ingredients, and awaken the senses with unique combinations of circulatory stimulation and detoxifying techniques.

Simone Giorgi, General Manager of Orient Express La Minerva states: "Collaborating with Furtuna Skin represents a meaningful addition to Orient Express La Minerva. Together, we have created an experience that elevates our wellness offering through a shared Italian heritage, and exceptional know-how and craftsmanship. Our spa offer our guests an exclusive journey inspired by Ottoman rituals, while remaining deeply connected to the vibrant heart of Rome and land-driven innovation."

Accessible at all hours, The Gym and The Kinesis Room complete the experience. Equipped with Technogym Artis and dedicated functional training tools, each session may be guided by a personal trainer upon request, with programmes in fitness, yoga or Pilates tailored to your individual goals.

The Spa at Orient Express La Minerva is a coherent architectural ensemble, where space, ritual, and movement converge in a holistic path to regeneration. Inspired by the ancient healing traditions of the East, its treatments transport guests on a sensorial journey that evokes distant cultures and timeless rituals, offering an immersive experience of wellness in the heart of the Eternal City.

Orient Express La Minerva Rome new Spa

More from CONCIERGE

Capella Hotels opens Capella Kyoto, its first property in Japan

Posted On February 26, 2026 CPP-LUXURY

Capella Kyoto will open on 22 March 2026, just as Kyoto's legendary cherry blossoms reach their fleeting peak. Set in the historic ...

Four Seasons Hotel Tokyo at Marunouchi reopens following renovations

Posted On February 25, 2026 CPP-LUXURY

Four Seasons Hotel Tokyo at Marunouchi is now taking reservations for stays starting April 29, 2026. Marking a thoughtful evolution ...

INDIGO London K West Shepherd's Bush opens March 2026

Posted On February 25, 2026 CPP-LUXURY

The new hotel which is owned by the Lancaster Landmark Hotel Company (The Landmark London; Royal Lancaster London) will feature ...

FOLLOW US

Get notified on new posts

Subscribe to notifications

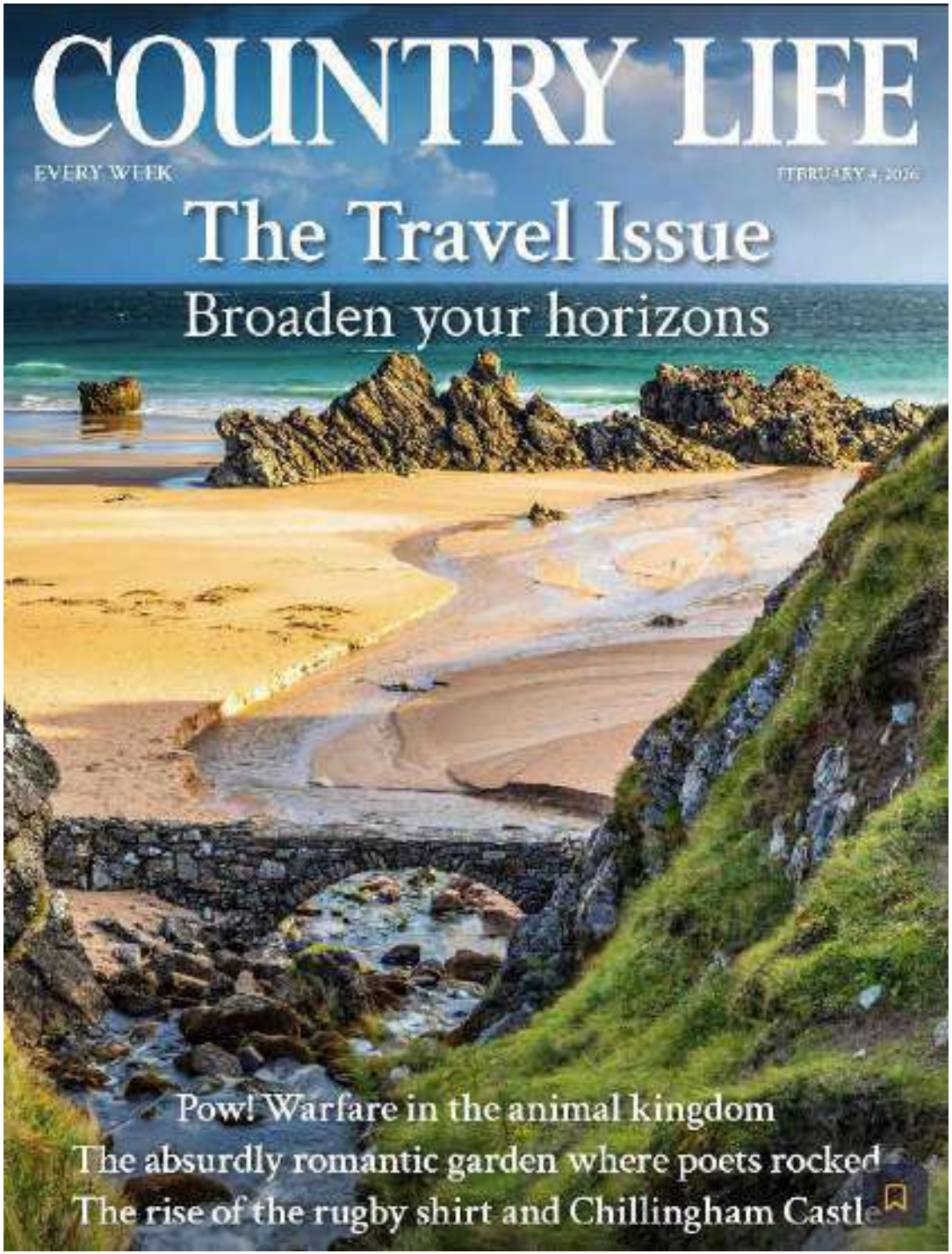
Newsletter

Don't miss a thing!
Sign up to receive daily news

Your email address

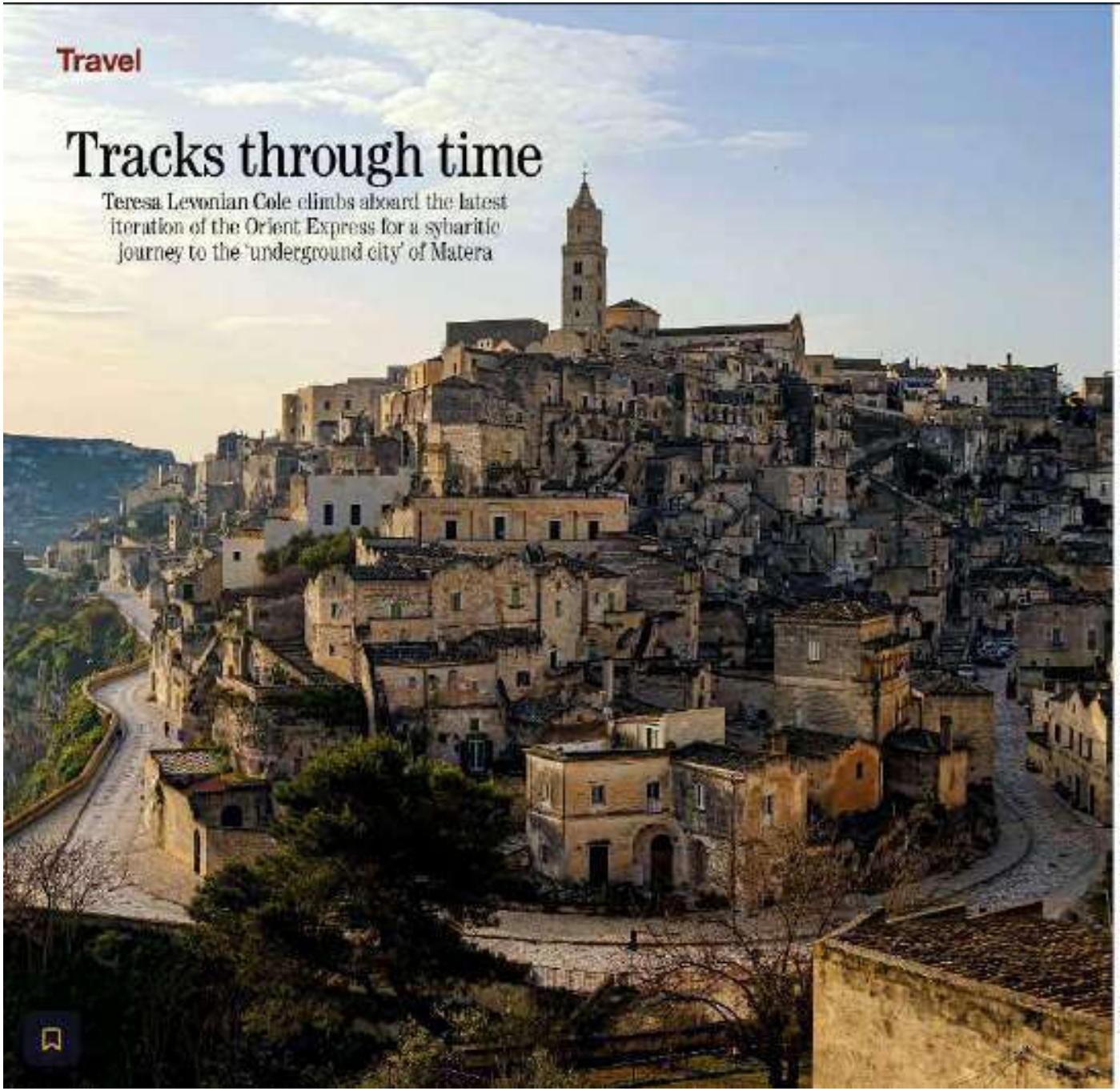
Sign up

By using this site you agree with our privacy and cookie policy. Accept Read More


COUNTRY LIFE
EVERY WEEK
FEBRUARY 4, 2026
The Travel Issue
Broaden your horizons
Pow! Warfare in the animal kingdom
The absurdly romantic garden where poets rocked
The rise of the rugby shirt and Chillingham Castle

Tracks through time

Teresa Levonian Cole climbs aboard the latest iteration of the Orient Express for a sybaritic journey to the 'underground city' of Matera



SMALL wonder, I enter, that this place has served as a location for numerous Biblical films, from *Ben-Hur* to *The Passion of the Christ*. I am looking out from my balcony on Piazza Vittorio Veneto, over two deep limestone bowls pitted with cuboidal cave dwellings. The most, as much dwelling as known, are a tortured jumble of rock, stone façades and moss-faded terracotta tiles, piled top-to-bottom to the depth of 11 storeys or levels and connected by a warren of steps, courtyards and plunging alleyways that make Venice's labyrinth feel like a Roman road. Beneath my feet lies a cool cistern you could sail about through. It was first excavated in the 1200s and provided the city's drinking water until the 1950s. Then, across the depression, lies the Civita district on a crest between the two caves, crowned by the city's elegant 13th-century Romanesque Duomo: a vision of celestial order above the encircling chaos.

Just over 12 hours ago, I was pulling out of Rome's Ostiense station, 250 miles, but many worlds, away, aboard *Le Dolce Vita Orient Express* (www.orient-express.com). It delivers me, this morning, to Bari station, where I was heralded by a jazz band (much to the bemusement of regular train passengers) and then whisked in a waiting car to Matera—the highlight of my journey, an hour or so away.

I should explain that this new train, which was launched in April 2023, is quite distinct from the Belmond-operated Venice Simplon-Orient-Express (VSOE) in all but name and the unabashed sybaritism of life on board. Owned by an Italian company and run by a French group, Accor (which acquired the Orient Expresses from French Railways, SNCF, in 2022), *Le Dolce Vita* is decked out, courtesy of Dimorestudio, in 1960s-style—in sharp contrast to the Venice-Simplon's 1920s-1930s-inspired inlaid wood panelling and Art Deco opulence. On board this train, it is all fresh cream leathers and tan suedes and the corridors are lined with monochrome photos from Fellini movies. My suite, glowing burnt orange and darkest aubergine, with dramatic large lacquer ceiling, is bookended by curved walls, giving the illusion of infinite space. One of the mirrors conceals what is, strangely enough, as well as a safe, a well-equipped shower room (marble and terrazzo—small, but perfectly formed).

History built upon history: the ancient city of Matera, a UNESCO World Heritage site that has been continuously lived in—and fought over—for some 9,000 years

Choosing one of *Le Dolce Vita*'s many tempting itineraries that span Italy, from Sicily to Venice, and range from one day to nine nights, is no easy matter. In addition, each itinerary features a selection of excursions—another distraction from the VSOE. I settled on a three-night trip to the Puglia and Matera route, which is how I find myself in the UNESCO-listed 'underground city' of Matera.

Matera's fortunes have ebbed and flowed in its near 9,000 years of continuous habitation. Romans, Lombards, Arabs, Byzantines, Normans, Swabians and Angevins were among those to have found Matera's strategic location, on the instep of Italy's foot, worth a battle or two. By the 1600s, wealthier citizens had moved up into the 'new town', the Piano, whose grand palaces and churches—with successive additions from Matera's disparate cultures yielding occasionally eccentric results—turn their backs on the crowding casalini below. In the 1950s, Matera's slums were dubbed 'Italy's shame' (likened by exiled writer Carlo Levi to Dante's Inferno), and some 20,000 inhabitants were moved out of their unsanitary caves and up into the plain. Their abandoned homes fell into derelict disuse.

> 'I could stay in Matera for days, but I have a train to catch...'

Now dining then, this one-time Biblical city should have been resurrected, thanks to a combination of EU subsidies, private investment and philanthropic initiatives, first as Cultural Capital of Europe in 2019, and then as a thriving tourist centre. Vivid religious caves, sympathetically restored to show how farmers once cohabited with their chickens and mules—an increasingly rare sight. Bolstered by new explored by a clutch of luxury hotels in caves. There's even a Michelin-starred restaurant, Vitantonio Lacerenza, accented in a cave, where we have lunch. The avant-garde menu features such dishes as *Mezzafico* and ricotta with berries and beetroot. Somehow, despite the mortifying wave of selfie-taking tourists, Matera has lost none of its magical appeal.

'Mystical' might be a better word, however, because, as a monastery junkie, I'm in seventh heaven. True, Matera's monasteries long gone, but they have left some 300 Byzantine churches in the area: aisles, naves, arches, iconostases and domes all carved from the rock like beings only just distinguished by crevices of astonishing rigour and unusual iconography. I find, for example, a fresco finding Madonna (1270s) in the 8th-century convent of Santa Lucia alle Malve and astonished by an image of St Michael gleefully whisking the Devil

Reflected glory: mirrored walls create an illusion of infinite space in suites on board the 1930s-inspired *La Dolce Vita Orient Express*

is the Church of Santa Maria de Idris. After lunch, I visit the Church of San Pietro Baciasso, hiding behind an 18th-century façade, and I am intrigued by something I have never before seen: a *polyloculum*, where corpses of priests were placed upright in niches to drain. However, for sheer ghoulishness, the Purgatory Church, in the Piano district, is a must: its triangular, Baroque exterior carved with all manner of skeletons, grim reapers and skulls.

Most interestingly, Benedictine, Byzantine and even Armenian monks lived cheek by jowl here. 'Why?' I ask one local guide after another, although none can shed much light on it. 'They were fleeing persecution,' says one; 'there were no Orthodox here,' insists another. Yet, lost in the labyrinthine paths, I chance upon the rock church of St Mary of the Armenians, perched dramatically on a cliff edge with a charming terrace in front of its façade of Romanesque arches, overlooking the abyss, below. Somehow, it once formed part of a Benedictine monastery.

I buy a book, from which I later learn that the Armenians arrived in the 6th century as an ethnic fortress in a Byzantine Empire in army. Finally, the wars stopped... This was before the 1054 schism between the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches opened up. Perhaps the fact that the Armenians should have fraternised with the Benedictines wasn't quite so strange after all. Whatever the circumstances, despite the mutual excommunication of the Pope and the Patriarch, 28 years before Urban II was not above spending the night here, as he did, in 1092. I walk for miles, everywhere, through this cultural crossroads, inspiring Flights of Fancy. I could stay for days, but I have a train to catch...

> 'There are only 30 passengers, so it is an intimate and convivial experience'

Back on board, sensual pleasures reassert themselves and the monks are quickly forgotten. An excellent segment to the day is the accompaniment of a sommelier, as fellow-ship dinner is a nine-course affair devised by three-star Michelin chef Heinz Beck. 'There are only 30 passengers, representing five continents, so it is an intimate and convivial experience,' the resident plan skilfully curated by Francesco, the master of 'with a knack for pairing compatible couples. In keeping with our 1930s surroundings, there is a more permissive approach to dress. One gentleman takes informality to extremes, arriving to dinner in shorts and baseball cap—a selection of strolling cello serenades on the VSOE. Here, however, entertainment is more refined, ranging in delicacy from an exploration with chorus and accordion of lunch to olive crust, no one bats an eyelid.

Original Travel can organise four-night itineraries (three nights in dinner-and-breakfast luxury and one night onboard *La Dolce Vita* cocktail-based basis) from £9,370 per person. The price includes return flights, private transfers and all meals, including a Venice Arar and a pre-booking class (020–3582 4000; www.orientexpress.co.uk).

Culinary Travel

NOW OPEN: Paolino Capri at Orient Express La Minerva

From now until Sunday, April 26th, 2026, in the heart of the Eternal City, just steps away from the Pantheon, Orient Express La Minerva, will host a special collaboration celebrating Italian hospitality through a new culinary journey.

Paolino Capri x Orient Express La Minerva brings together two Italian icons united by a common vision and values: authentic hospitality, tradition, and experience as a memory to be shared.

A worldwide and long-standing symbol of the Caprese spirit, Paolino Capri brings to Rome the timeless atmosphere of its iconic lemon grove. At La Minerva Bar, located in the iconic lobby of Orient Express La Minerva, the signature yellow and green hues of the island and therestaurant take center stage, transforming the space, decorated for the occasion with evocative lemon trees.

Founded in the 1970s by the De Martino family and now led by the founders' grandchildren Lino, Michela and Arianna, Paolino Capri continues to tell an authentic story rooted in tradition. Today, it remains a place devoted to conviviality, where cuisine and hospitality are genuine gestures expressed with natural elegance.

The result is a gastronomic experience that brings together the flavors, colors and atmosphere of the world's most famous island, Capri,with those of the Eternal City, Rome.

The artistic ceramics featured in the mise en place at La Minerva Bar are the result of a shared vision between Lino di Paolino and renowned Capri-based artist and ceramist Sergio Rubino, evoking nature and the joyful Mediterranean aesthetic.

The menu celebrates Caprese and Campanian culinary traditions with iconic dishes from Paolino Capri's cuisine, prepared in strict respect for original recipes and the highest-quality ingredients.

Starters include Paolino's grilled mozzarella on lemon leaf and the iconic Bomba Paolino with fresh tomato sauce and basil. First courses range from Caprese ravioli with fresh cherry tomatoes or lemon to the timeless Paolino Mezzi Paccheri

"Chiummenzana", and Lemon fettuccine with Sicilian red prawn carpaccio. Main courses feature great classics such as Old-style squid and potatoes, Lemon-marinated half chicken, and Grilledlamb ribs with Anacapri olive oil.

Subscribe to
DRIFT Travel Magazine
It's FREE

Email

First Name

I agree to receive emails and/or SMS text messages, with the understanding that I may easily opt-out of these communications at any time after signing up.

Sign up

Previous article
2026 Saint Lucia Jazz & Arts Festival Announces R&B Royalty Monica and Brandy as Headliners

Next article
Explora Journeys Unveils Endless Worlds: A 128-Day Luxury World Voyage

DRIFT Staff

RELATED ARTICLES

The Purest Adventure: Consuming Culture through Cuisine
DRIFT Staff - February 12, 2026

Azerai La Residence, Hue Delves Deeper Into Local Cuisine With Special...
DRIFT Staff - January 26, 2026

Eat Your Way Around the World: 5 Gastronomic Hotspots
DRIFT Staff - January 23, 2026

READ Online

Order Print Copies

2016 - 2024 GLOSSY media | All rights reserved

Privacy Policy

DIVIDENDS

MOTORS . 116
SKI: COURCHEVEL . 118
SKI: SÖLDEN . 122
ORIENT EXPRESS . 126
SEA CONTAINERS . 135
SPIRITS . 137

LIVING LA DOLCE VITA . 126

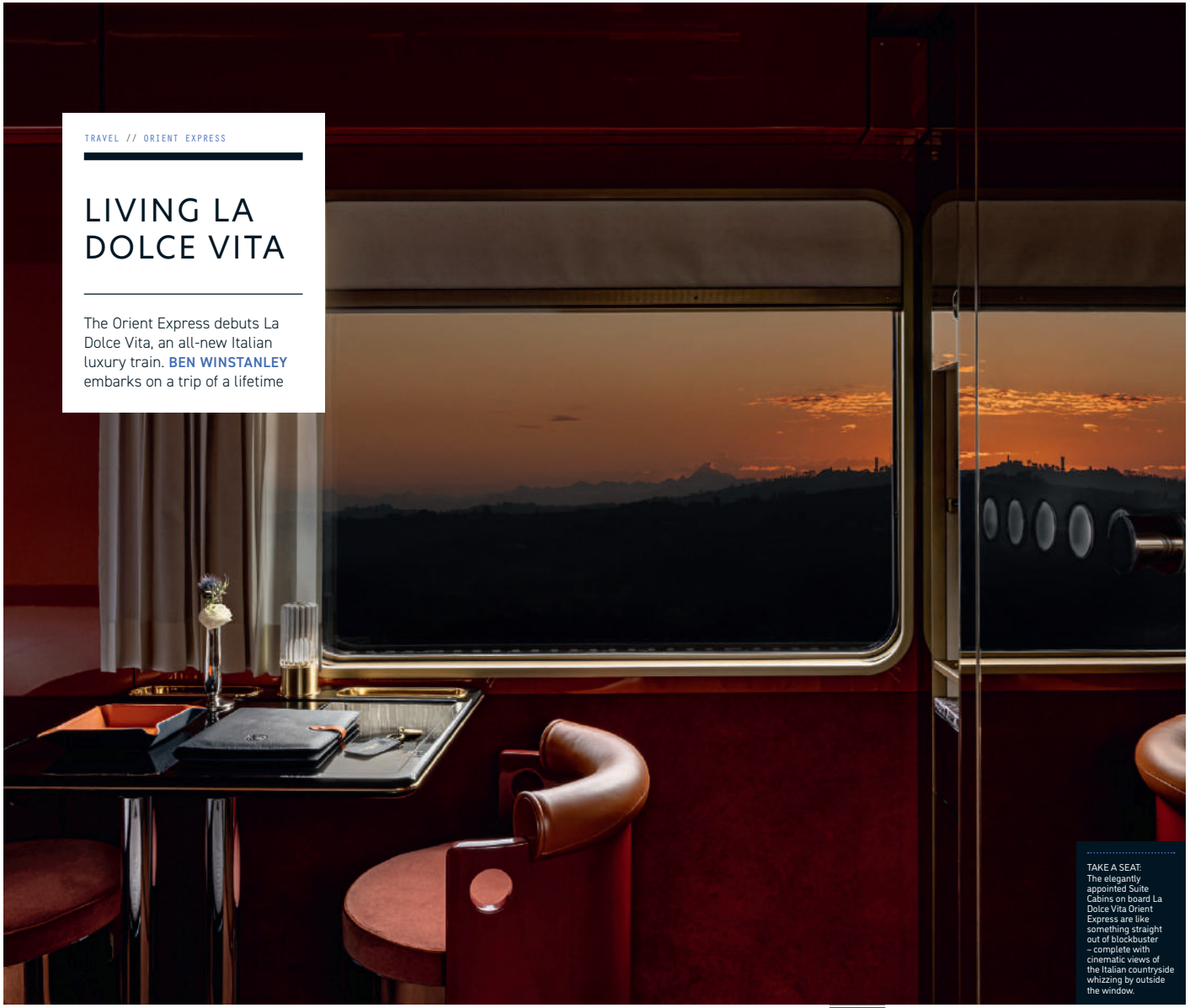
"The golden age of travel may have departed, but here a chink of light shines down on the tracks."

PHOTOGRAPH by Mr Tripper

TRAVEL // ORIENT EXPRESS

LIVING LA DOLCE VITA

The Orient Express debuts La Dolce Vita, an all-new Italian luxury train. **BEN WINSTANLEY** embarks on a trip of a lifetime



TAKE A SEAT: The elegantly appointed Suite Cabins on board La Dolce Vita Orient Express are like something straight out of blockbuster – complete with cinematic views of the Italian countryside whizzing by outside the window.

TRY AS HARD as I might, it's impossible to shake the cinematic theme when riding aboard the Orient Express. Everything before you seems to plunge you ever deeper into the protagonist role while the most famous train on Earth rumbles along at a pace of your own making. I can't really stress just how immersive it is. There's the costume changes into elegant evening attire, soundtrack from a live band, and a stellar cast of supporting actors whose role it would appear is to make you feel every bit the star of the silver screen that, for the duration of your journey at least, perhaps you are. It has the effect of making one feel rather important.

Before we embark, I'm under strict obligation to assure you that no murders took place on this particular Orient Express journey, nor did the stunningly appointed carriages of the new-for-2025 La Dolce Vita train arrive *From Russia with Love*. However, if this is indeed the sequel to The Orient Express as we know it, there is no doubt that it's just as box office as the original.

When Accor assumed full ownership of the Orient Express brand in 2022 (later joined by LVMH as a strategic partner in 2024), it set in motion a new direction of travel for the grande dame of locomotives. The 142-year-old icon is currently undergoing the fastest expansion in its storied history with the aim of creating a comprehensive luxury travel ecosystem that includes not only restored historic train services – such as the Orient Express La Dolce Vita we'll be boarding shortly, as well as the recently announced Paris-to-Istanbul route launching in 2027 – but also luxury hotels in Rome and Venice, and the world's two largest sailing yachts set for introduction next year.

The Orient Express cinematic universe is growing at a rate of knots but the unavoidable question is how a new train could capture the spirit of its Belgian founder Georges Nagelmackers?

Following a visit to the United States in the 1860s, the visionary creator of the Orient Express was so enthralled by the sleeping cars of industrialist George Pullman that he dreamed of bringing this mode of long-distance transportation to Europe – only more refined and luxurious. By the time the Orient Express embarked on its maiden journey from Paris to Vienna on 5 June 1883, he and his Compagnie Internationale des Wagons-Lits had not only succeeded but left an indelible mark on the travel industry.

Travelling across Europe today is scarcely recognisable from that golden age of transportation. Budget airlines rule the skies, innumerable cars clog the roads, and high-speed trains are an inefficient hassle (I shan't mention our own British rail network). Yet the Orient Express persists as a name synonymous with luxury, intrigue, and romance in European rail travel.

La Dolce Vita Orient Express, Italy's first luxury train created in collaboration with the Arsenale Group, takes this concept and shapes it into a love letter to Italian culture and heritage. Traversing 14 regions, across eight exclusive itineraries and a grand total of 600 annual trips, the route takes in many of the nation's most prized assets: whether that's the canals of Venice, Portofino's awe-inspiring coves, or the famed vineyards of Montalcino. This is Italy reflected through the lens of 1960s-1970s glamour and paired with the quintessential hospitality of which the Orient Express is best known.

The opening scene, like any good movie, takes place in a grand room alive with activity. La Dolce Vita Lounge at Rome's Ostiense Station was designed by French-Mexican architect and designer Hugo Toro who has deftly amalgamated 1960s Italian design into the historic space to create something that oozes sumptuous class out of every pore. Under a lacquered ceiling dressed with Murano-glass tubelights and silver fans reminiscent of old three-blade airplane propellers, train staff glide across the mosaic-tiled floor as guests chatter excitedly while sipping glasses of sparkling Franciacorta. There's a pianist gently tinkering on the ivories, the grand piano's glossy black surface the darkest shade in a room that features a mélange of warm textiles, leather seating and varnished wood cabinetry. Somewhere woven into the fabric of it all is a crackling sense of anticipation that threatens to overwhelm the entire occasion. The whole thing conjures images of those foggy train station scenes from Noël Coward's *Brief Encounter* and its star-crossed lovers. It wrenches you from the bustling metropolis of modern-day Rome and suspends you in a time period far removed from our own. →

> The opening scene, like any good movie, takes place in a grand room alive with activity

A FAIRWAY TO TRAVEL: [Left] La Dolce Vita offers many itinerary options, including two that focus on Italy's golf courses – including Castiglion del Bosco in Tuscany.

→ The old adage "It's not the destination, it's the journey" seems particularly appropriate for La Dolce Vita's brand of opulent slow travel, but especially so when one considers that our start and end point should both be Rome. For the next three nights, we will meander through the train's "Italian Swing" itinerary, a masterful combination of three of my favourite things: excellent cuisine, generous imbibement, and top-tier golf. It's one of two golf-focused itineraries La Dolce Vita is hosting and, while it's perhaps not a world first, it's most certainly one of the most unique experiences that any passionate enthusiast could wish to enjoy.

Italy is a perennially underrated golf destination in the wider game, in spite of its successful hosting of the 2023 Ryder Cup at Marco Simone – our first stop of the itinerary. But La Dolce Vita delves beyond this well-publicised European Golf Design and Tom Fazio II layout to lesser-appreciated venues equally deserving of the attention of players everywhere. Puglia's San Domenico layout draws golfers in with its coastal location but its verdant agriculture leaves a lasting impression; The Club at Castiglion del Bosco shows off the spellbinding landscape of Tuscany in the shadow of Montalcino; while Argentario Golf & Wellness resort offers panoramic views of the Monte Argentario peninsula.

Aboard La Dolce Vita, golf is cunningly interlaced into a narrative that speaks proudly of its Italian heritage. I've written in the past about how golf has this wondrous ability to speak of a sense of place, a quality of existing in harmony with its surroundings rather than rebelling against nature (as some doth protest), but rarely have I been so certain of my assertions than in consuming four of Italy's finest golf courses in one comprehensive gulp. If this is, indeed, a romantic movie, then golf herself is our leading lady.

But there is more exposition required before we go any further. As we sidle from our seated position in the lounge to the platform, La Dolce Vita's gleaming carriages loom into focus alongside an almost never-ending line of staff who stand abreast with beaming smiles and warm *'buonaseras'*. It takes a village to operate a train service of this magnitude – at any one time there are approximately 35 team members working on board, including train manager, conductors, stewards, chefs, waiting staff, dishwashers, bartenders, technicians, musicians and performers – and almost all of them are here at the outset wishing you welcome.

And then there's the train itself. Painstakingly fashioned by craftsmen over a period of four years and racking up approximately €280m in production costs, this is not only one of the largest undertakings of its kind, but the crown jewel in Italian railway engineering.

Goodness me, she'd stop you dead in your tracks. Dressed in a glossy midnight blue exterior featuring a burgundy trim and brass accents, La Dolce Vita's 12 restored carriages (comprising 12 deluxe cabins, 18 suite cabins and one La Dolce Vita Suite), originally Z1 Italian models, underwent extensive restoration work carried out in Brindisi and Palermo to create this rolling palace.

Designed by the Milan-based practice DimoreStudio – which drew inspiration from Italian design masters of the 1960s and 1970s including Gio Ponti, Gae Aulenti, Osvaldo Borsani, Carlo Scarpa, and Ignazio Gardella – each space on board seems to carry with it a purposeful retelling of 20th-century glamour through contemporary eyes. The colour palette and choice of materials have been carefully selected to conjure images of train carriage interiors from days gone by. It's an elegant combination of walnut and lacquered wood, smoked glass and mirrors, suede-like Alcantara fabric, leather, marble and polished brass. In other words, it's bold, architectural, sophisticated, and, quite frankly, gorgeous to look at.

As we are greeted by our personal conductor at the steps to our carriage (think of them as your primary point of contact on board), I'm once again confronted with that unplaceable sense of nostalgia as we are shown to our suite cabin. For those who have not experienced luxury rail travel before, there is one recurring trend when it comes to their uncertainty: space. Encompassing 11 square metres, our suite cabin features a double bed complete with a pillowy soft mattress, sofa, armchairs and table, and a surprisingly large en-suite bathroom (by train standards, at least) that includes a marble-topped sink basin and a rainfall shower with excellent water pressure.

As for the question of storage, certainly a concern of mine as a first-time Orient Express traveller, the cabins are rather ingenious in their solutions. The sofa features a large pullout drawer more than sufficient for a few days' worth of clothing, the chairs double as additional cubby holes perfect for hiding away shoes, two shallow wardrobes will fit a couple of suits and a coat, while the bed has ottoman storage ideal for stowing your unpacked carry-on bags. A walk-in wardrobe this ain't, yet my wife and I found ample room for our golf gear (our clubs were stored in a separate carriage), evening attire and various other bits and pieces. If you're imagining space for a Globe-Trotter trunk's worth of clothing then perhaps manage your expectations, but otherwise you can make yourself right at home.

> Aboard La Dolce Vita, golf is interlaced into a narrative that speaks of its Italian heritage

By the time we have freshened up and taken it all in, there's a soft knock on the door and we are presented with a cordial invitation for dinner later that evening: aperitivos are served in the Wagon Bar before we're to be seated in the Restaurant Carriage for a procession of fine dining dishes from the brilliant mind of three-Michelin-starred chef Heinz Beck. It's the signature act in a theatrical experience played out in real time.

Negronis promptly fixed, we join our fellow passengers on the communal sofas and make polite conversation. It's worth saying at this juncture that the social facet of your time aboard La Dolce Vita may not be for everyone. If you are a private individual or decisively not a people person at all (I sympathise…), I'd imagine that there are elements of this convivial environment you may find difficult at first. However, I would implore you to push on. There's a rather joyous sense of community that develops over the ensuing journey and, though La Dolce Vita's glamour is evident in the photography accompanying this piece, I can assure you that it is the people that bring these intricately designed spaces to life.

The Wagon Bar is unashamedly my favourite spot on board. The harlequin print wall, incorporating a playful palette of cream, blue, and orange tones, the sinuous form of the custom sofas, the fully stocked bar station (complete with vintage Faema E61 Legend coffee machine) goading you into one more for the road, and the baby grand piano – it's a room that positively fizzes with raucous possibility. But more on that later.

Heinz Beck's involvement in La Dolce Vita is a statement of culinary intent and, oh boy, does it deliver. The chef's flagship Rome restaurant, La Pergola, is renowned for its imaginative portrayal of Italian cuisine – deeply connected to seasonality and local ingredients, while elevating traditional peasant-style dishes to never-before-seen heights. Beck's longtime collaborator Walter Canzio executes the menus perfectly in a remarkably compact galley kitchen, creating dishes that sing of the regions whizzing by our window-side seat. Menus change based on the market's freshest produce, but expect a dizzying array of shellfish, pasta, Tuscan beef, and perhaps a little truffle if you time your visit accordingly. An ostensibly simple dish of lobster, cooked to a perfect iridescent sheen, and served with variations of pumpkin rendered the entire carriage speechless for one brief moment.

The restaurant, quite pointedly different from the exuberance of the bar, is Mid-Century Modern in its style – allowing great food and conversation to take the lead over elaborate decoration. Service is effortless, the equal of numerous Michelin-starred institutions I have visited over the years, and yet disarmingly warm, a function of typical Italian hospitality that comfortably bests similar establishments in neighbouring European countries.

The wine flight, complimentary to all passengers, is a thing of great beauty. By design, it would appear that the sommelier has chosen each bottle based on the local wine region you'll be situated within the following day; to get you in the mood, if you will. Our arrival into Tuscany was signalled by a 2023 vermentino from the acclaimed Grattamacco estate in Bolgheri, followed by a knock-your-socks-off 2022 Biondi-Santi Rosso di Montalcino. Not for the first time since arriving on board, I found myself leaning across to my wife conspiratorially and saying, "I could get used to this."

I shan't spoil the rest of the plot too much, but the subsequent few days blur into a seamless montage of excerpts that →

TO THE BAR: [Top] The Wagon Bar is the beating heart of La Dolce Vita Orient Express – the final destination for most enjoyable evenings on board the train. The space is designed for comfort, imbibement, and the odd live musical performance. [Above, left and right] The train's interior design is consistently elegant from the Restaurant Carriage to the well-appointed cabins.

PHOTOGRAPH by /gobi/ by Kevin Murray, /interiors/ Mr Tapper

ROOM WITH A VIEW: La Minerva Orient Express, the first standalone hotel from the luxury travel icon, is not only one of the world's most beautifully designed hotels, but also boasts quite extraordinary views of Rome from its rooftop restaurant.

→ tumble into one another almost too swiftly to register their brilliance: playing the electric final third of Marco Simone as the sun hung low in the Roman sky, the golden glow reflecting off the water neighbouring the 18th green; waking up aboard the train, raising the blinds and seeing the Puglian coastline whizz past our cabin window; a performance of *'Volare (Nel Blu Dipinto Di Blu)'* with the tuxedo-adorned singer donning his finest Dean Martin impression as guests rose to their feet to dance; and The Club at Castiglion del Bosco offering passengers unheralded excellence whether the course, the facilities or the hospitality, each of which is every bit the measure of Europe's finest private clubs.

Every phase of the journey is handled by a team of showrunners who operate the logistical side with such dexterity that you needn't concern yourself with trivial matters like transfers, baggage, or dietary requirements. The image of the proverbial 'swan above water' comes to mind.

In the spirit of illustrating the levels of service I'm referring to, let me tell you a story from our second evening on La Dolce Vita. Picture the scene: we're in the Bar Carriage in the waning hours, a few guests lounge in the communal seats discussing what to order as a nightcap before bed. "What's your go-to drink?" one of my companions enquires. I suggest that if my back's against the wall, you can't beat a good martini. "Ah, I thought your favourite cocktail was called a Back's Against the Wall – that's a great name!" In that particular way that can only accompany moderate inebriation, what follows is a spirited discussion about cocktail names before someone suggests The Thomas Crown Affair would make for an appropriate tipple. The bartender, who had made his way over to our seated position hurried away only to return moments later carrying a tray of freshly stirred drinks. "This, gentlemen, is a Thomas Crown Affair," he declared with a knowing smile. An on-the-spot riff on the classic Bamboo cocktail, incorporating sherry, pinot grigio, and a splash of calvados, it was a fitting end to a glamorous evening. No doubt Steve McQueen would have heartily approved.

There's a lovely passage in Tim Parks's *Italian Ways: On and Off the Rails from Milan to Palermo* where he talks about the charm of a great station: "The train station is the ideal scenario for greetings and farewells. The car is too banal. What does it mean to set off in a car? Nothing. The airport is too exhausting and impersonal, the plane itself remote, unseen, the barriers and security disturbing. Here the powerful beast of the locomotive thrusts its nose under the great arch of the station."

As we reluctantly disembark from La Dolce Vita Orient Express one final time, I can't help but share in his wonderment. The golden age of travel may have long departed, but here a chink of light shines down on the tracks. This is luxury at its most cinematographic, a grand sprawling narrative whose white-hot passion for Italy spills out at the seams.

Federico Fellini's famous 1960 film *La Dolce Vita* shoulders a more melancholy, at times all-too ironic, understanding of the pursuit of pleasure, but on board the Orient Express's marvellous new train that shares its name, life is very sweet indeed.

LA MINERVA ORIENT EXPRESS

As post-credit scenes go, you would be hard pressed to match the instant allure of La Minerva Orient Express. The first ever hotel in the brand's portfolio demanded the same attention to detail and lavish hospitality as its railway offerings, and on this count it has delivered.

Designer Hugo Toro, the very same who created the stylish opening gambit for La Dolce Vita's lounge, has poured his ingenuity into the former site of a 17th-century palazzo on Piazza della Minerva, within touching distance of the Pantheon. This is Toro's first hotel commission and he has treated the undertaking with the same level of forensic attention that has garnered him a lofty reputation in the private residential sector.

Born on the French-German border to a Mexican mother and French father, Toro's mixed heritage seems to have gifted him a unique ability to tell stories through the mediums of art and design. For La Minerva, he was tasked with blending the building's heritage with a distinct edge of Art Deco elegance – blurring the lines between its Roman home and the Orient Express's typical design language.

Setting foot through its stepped entrance is every bit as immersive as boarding the train itself. Feeling decisively glum about leaving La Dolce Vita behind us, we gawped open-mouthed at the beauty we discovered walking through La Minerva's hallway and into the central lobby-bar. There are original Murano glass →

> The golden age of travel may have long departed, but a chink of light shines down on the tracks

Designer Hugo Toro has poured his ingenuity into the former site of a 17th-century palazzo

→ chandeliers and a marble statue of Minerva by 19th-century Italian sculptor Rinaldo Rinaldi – artefacts from the hotel's former life – rugs and wood flooring echo the Pantheon's geometric ceiling patterns, while a custom-designed facade, drawn by Toro himself, lines the bar. It's a beautiful integration of multiple eras of design and culture handled with kid gloves.

Almost everything you set your eyes upon has been created bespoke for the new hotel design. The furniture was crafted by Italian artisans, including bedside tables shaped like travel trunks and hand-painted headboards in rose-hued tones recalling the shifting light of the Eternal City. There's hand-painted bedroom ceilings, custom-designed fabrics, and an expertly curated selection of artwork dotted around the hotel's walls that mirrors the eclectic tastes of its interior designer.

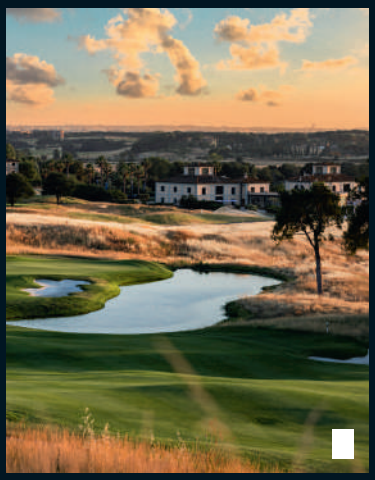
Our deluxe room continued this dream sequence as we were shepherded into a space that echoed the intimacy of the luxury sleeper train we had just departed from – but with the welcome addition of more space. Admiring the rich palette of textures, materials and colours that Toro has used, I found myself in awe of their distinctly Roman sensibilities.

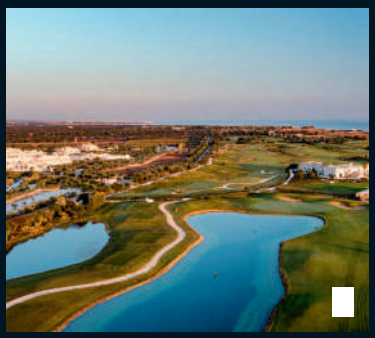
One final bite of Italy awaited us on the hotel's rooftop restaurant, Gigi Rigolatto Roma, which takes full advantage of its location next to the Pantheon and offers staggering views of the iconic rotunda, beautifully illuminated as it is of an evening, without the trivial concerns of the crowds.

Without a hint of hyperbole, La Minerva is one of the most beautifully designed hotels I have ever visited on my travels. To me, it fuses the Art Deco grandeur of Claridge's with a heartfelt Roman sensibility. Blessed with a frankly obscene location and sympathetically restored by a razor-sharp designer, it is an enchanting opening salvo for the new-look Orient Express portfolio. The iconic brand is on its own journey at the moment, but on the basis of my personal experience, it is most certainly on the right track. ■

See more at ORIENT-EXPRESS.COM

LA DOLCE VITA'S 'ITALIAN SWING' TRAIN ITINERARY





DAY 1
PLAY: Marco Simone Golf & Country Club, Guidonia, Rome
Host to the scintillating 2023 Ryder Cup, Marco Simone is among the continent's most prestigious golfing destinations. Walk in the footsteps of Europe's greatest modern players as you enter the electric final third in an amphitheatre setting befitting of its Roman roots. After your round, a private transfer escorts you to La Dolce Vita Lounge, where the stunning artistic direction of Hugo Toro signals your departure from ordinary life. The journey begins.

DAY 2
PLAY: San Domenico Golf, Savelletri, Puglia
Dawn bathes southern Italy in golden light as La Dolce Vita glides towards the Adriatic and San Domenico. This coastal golf course unfolds in perfect rhythm with beautiful surroundings – each hole a fusion of verdant natural beauty and strategic intrigue. After a rewarding day on the course, followed by lunch in the clubhouse punctuated by classic Puglian cuisine, return to refined comfort: gourmet dinner, handpicked wines, and live music stirring the Bar Car to life.

DAY 3
PLAY: The Club at Castiglion del Bosco, Montalcino, Tuscany
Set amid the UNESCO-listed Val d'Orcia's rolling hills, this spectacular private course meanders passed manicured vineyards, ancient woodlands, and sweeping vistas. The late Tom Weiskopf struck a masterful balance of sporting challenge and total immersion in the Tuscan countryside when bringing this beauty to life. That evening, enjoy a curated tasting menu crafted by three-Michelin-starred Heinz Beck who brings modern flair to traditional flavours.

DAY 4
PLAY: Argentario Golf & Wellness Resort, Monte Argentario, Tuscany
Italy's only PGA-licensed facility since 2019, Argentario offers a fitting finale. This technically challenging course weaves through sudden changes in elevation and ancient olive groves, with panoramic views over Orbetello Lagoon toward the Tyrrhenian Sea. Your return to the train becomes a moment to savor – enveloped once more by impeccable service as Rome's Ostiense Station awaits for curtain fall.

TRAVEL & CULTURE

The first Orient Express hotel opens in Rome

For those planning a Roman holiday, the first stop should be Orient Express La Minerva

by bill prince Published 5 days ago in Features

Above: a junior suite at Orient Express La Minerva offering views over Piazza della Minerva.
(Image credit: Unknown)

Share Follow us Newsletter

The story of Orient Express has come a long way since American shipping container magnate James Sherwood first revived the trans-European train route that came to embody the belle-époque years of continental travel in the bleak, downturn days of the 1970s. Growing to encompass hotels (including the Cipriani in Venice and the Splendido in Portofino) as well as river cruises, in the past few years the business has bifurcated, with LVMH taking the original Venice-Simplon-Orient Express business under its Belmond brand and hospitality group Accor rolling out Orient Express, a new entity responsible for the recently launched La Dolce Vita train in Italy and upcoming L'Orient Express in France and, since May last year, the first Orient Express hotel.

Orient Express La Minerva in Rome has a history no less storied than the brand itself: an imposing block-wide presence on Piazza della Minerva that overlooks the Pantheon. The 17th-century palazzo became one of Rome's first grand hotels, opening in 1811 to accommodate the 'influencers' of their day – young aristocrats conducting a Grand Tour of Europe's classical highlights – and later welcoming the likes of writers Stendhal, George Sand and Herman Melville. Today, Orient Express La Minerva gleams again following a full restoration under the guidance of Franco-Mexican designer Hugo Toro.

Taking as his cue the all-eras architectural pile-on that Rome represents to the awed visitor, a seasoned hand in creating historically resonant hospitality sites (including at the Park Hyatt Paris-Vendôme and London's St Pancras) Toro has brought a mix of atmosphere, warmth and refinement to Orient Express. La Minerva's stately rooms: a blend of bespoke comfort and ageless elegance transmitted through a thoughtful use of colour and textures. Bathrooms boast pink marble and bedrooms are bedecked in the accoutrements required of stress-free travel – from voluminous wardrobes to the thoughtful placing of a writing desk beside the minibar. The public spaces are no less auspicious, the ground floor comprising, for the main part, a glass-collinged all-day dining and cocktail lounge, replete with harp accompaniment. The stellar backdrop of Rome's inimitable skyline is best enjoyed from Gigi Rigoletto rooftop bar and restaurant, serving quintessential Italian cuisine in an environment that is both lively and laid-back. With 93 rooms and suites (including the frescoed Stendhal Suite) and a subterranean spa and hammam, La Minerva doesn't lack for either scale or substance, but it's perhaps the sublime setting that ensures its newly restored regal status in a city not short on lofty landmarks.

YOU MAY LIKE

The Perfect Hotel? It's All In The Bedding

Join The Ranks Of 'Racontouristes' And Discover The World Of The Ancients

Claridge's Hotel Opens A Bakery With A Modern British Twist

The bar at Orient Express La Minerva
(Image credit: Alessandro Saturno)

GOOD TO KNOW

A second Orient Express Hotel is due to open in Venice this spring, following an eight-year renovation, by Lebanese-born architect Aline Asmar d'Amman, of the 15th-century Palazzo Donà Giovanelli. A former home of the Duke of Urbino, the Orient Express Venezia has been transformed into a 47-room collection of guest rooms, suites and grand salons. This will be followed in the summer with the launch of the Orient Express Corinthian, a sailing yacht conceived by Massimo D'Angese, the group's artistic director.

JOIN THE BLEND

The Good Life remixed - A weekly newsletter with a fresh look at the better things in life.

Your Email Address SIGN ME UP

Contact me with news and offers from other Future brands

Receive email from us on behalf of our trusted partners or sponsors

By submitting your information you agree to the Terms & Conditions and Privacy Policy and are aged 16 or over.

Bill Prince

Bill Prince is editor-in-chief of Wallpaper* and The Blend. In addition to editing, writing and brand curation, Bill is an acknowledged authority on travel, hospitality and men's style. His first book, 'Royal Oak: From Iconoclast To Icon' – a tribute to the Audemars Piguet watch at 50 – was published by Assouline in September 2022.

LATEST

TRAVEL & CULTURE
The perfect hotel? It's all in the bedding
Words by DELILAH KINUMO

TRAVEL & CULTURE
Join the ranks of 'Racontouristes' and discover the world of the Ancients
Words by DELILAH KINUMO

FOOD & DRINK
Claridge's Hotel opens a bakery with a modern British twist
Words by ALEXANDRA ZARGARI

The Blend is part of Future plc, an international media group and leading digital publisher. Visit our corporate site.
© Future Publishing Limited Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA1 1UA. All rights reserved. England and Wales company registration number 2008885.

P2JW034000-0-A007A0-1------NS

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL. NY

Special Advertising Feature

Custom Content WSJ

Special Advertising Feature

ILTM

Hot Hotels '26

The Nautilus Suite at Rosewood Mayakoba, Riviera Maya, Mexico

The year ahead looks exciting with more hotel openings than ever for every kind of traveler. *Sarah Miller* was on the inside track at ILTM 2025, the industry's leading travel fair.

For those looking for a last-minute ski break in Europe, the following have just opened: Artlarm (the team behind The Fife Arms in Braemar) launched Chesa Marchetta, a 13-bedroom hotel and 46-cover restaurant in Switzerland's Engadine, Sils Maria. In Gstaad, Ultima Collection welcomed guests to its luxury chalets: eight bedrooms, wrap-around terrace, private spa with hammam and sauna, snow room and lap pool. In France, Rosewood Courcheval Le Jardin Alpin became the brand's first alpine resort with 51 rooms and suites. And in Italy, ready for Cortina's Winter Olympic Games, came The Carlton, Milan, from Rocco Forte Hotels, on Via Della Spiga—ideal for mixing culture with sports.

~ Winter ~

The expansion of major brands into Europe continues with the opening of the Corinthia Rome in February. This 60-key hotel is housed in the restored former seat of Italy's Central Bank, a neoclassical palazzo dating back to 1914. Highlights include an Italian restaurant by renowned chef Carlo Cracco. The opening of Hyatt Regency Rome Central marks the brand's first hotel in Italy. Situated in central Esquilino, a vibrant historic district, it has 238 rooms, including 20 suites, spread across six floors. It also has Rome's largest rooftop with 360° wrap-around cityviews and a 20-meter swimming pool. For those looking to linger longer in the Eternal City, Casa J.K. Place Roma will open with 13 one-to-three-bedroom branded residences in a 17th-century palazzo on Via dei Prefetti.

RAH GILI MALDIVES

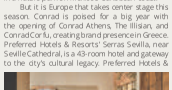
In February, The Newnan opens in Fitzrovia, London, with 81 rooms and suites paying homage to the locale's artists, writers and poets of the past. And the first Six Senses in the UK finally opens as Six Senses London, with the first Six Senses Place—a private members' concept.

Away from the hustle and bustle, The Set Collection will welcome Shinta Mani Wild and Shina Mani Angkor at the end of February. New hospitality group SIX & SIX PRIVATE ISLANDS launches two properties in Maldives—the first, RAH GILI MALDIVES, opens in February with 74 private, pool villas next to an exclusive dolphin sanctuary. The second, DIONI MAAGA, opening at the end of 2026, will be a more extravagant expression of luxury. Moving to the lush hills of Nerala, tuBh Clinical Wellness is a sanctuary of healing and transformation that opens in February with 65 suites and 14 treatment rooms immersed in rewilded forests, medicinal gardens and regenerative waters. In Rwanda, The Pinnacle Kigali opens in January and South Africa's fashion designer, Thebe Magugu, makes his debut in hospitality on January 31 with the Thebe Magugu Suite at Mount Nelson, A Belmond Hotel, Cape Town. Capella Kyoto, designed by architect Kengo Kuma, opens on Yamatooji-dori, in the historic Miyagawa-cho district, with 89 rooms—including 29 suites, six of which have private Onsens. Closer to home in February, Alila Mayakoba opens on Mexico's Mayan Riviera. The retreat spans 60 acres of mangroves and freshwater canals, with 182 guestrooms, suites and villas.

~ Spring ~

In March, The Cooper, situated along South Carolina's Cooper River, opens with 191 airy guest rooms and suites in the vibrant heart of the Charleston peninsula. In neighboring Virginia, Preferred Hotels & Resorts' Boar's Head Resort opens the 19th-century Birdwood Mansion, following its transformation into a seven-room luxury boutique hotel, set in 12 acres of Boar's Head Resort & Birdwood Mansion's grounds. Kimpton Tres Ríos Riviera Maya opens late spring, in a nature park on Mexico's Caribbean coast.

But it is Europe that takes center stage this season. Conrad is poised for a big year with the opening of Conrad Athens, The Illisian, and ConradCorfu, creating brand presence in Greece. Preferred Hotels & Resorts' Serras Sevilla, near Seville Cathedral, is a 43-room hotel and gateway to the city's cultural legacy. Preferred Hotels & Resorts' Gran Hotel Claridge Granada, housed in the historical Plaza de Villamena, brings the Spanish city's rich heritage to life in April with 70 rooms, steps away from the Granada Cathedral and Alhambra. In the Balearics, Mandarin Oriental Punta Negra opens in Mallorca with 131 rooms all within easy reach of Palma de Mallorca and marks the brand's 150th anniversary. On Menorca, Vestige Binidufà launches on May 26 with 11 suites, and is the second property to open on the shared 800-hectare estate. On the same day, in Portugal, Na Praia, a 113-key hotel, opens just beyond Comporta. Further north, Kimpton Quinta da Marinha Cascais opens with 198 rooms, of which 10 will be suites, and a spa.



Vestige Binidufà, Spain
Credit: Adrian Pinnington, Vestige Collection

One of Valetta's first luxury boutique hotels, Rométgas, opens in Malta's capital, situated in a restored 500-year-old palazzo. Its 23 rooms and suites afford sepia city views.

In Italy, Villa San Michele, A Belmond Hotel, with the most iconic view of Florence, reopens on April 28 with 39 rooms and suites following an 18-month renovation. Also opening in April is Orient Express Venezia at Palazzo Donà Giovannelli in Italy. Originally built in 1436, it has 47 guestrooms, suites and apartments and is situated in Cannaregio. Prestigious French hotel collection Airelles (whose St. Tropez property is the next *White Lotus* location) opens Airelles Palladio, Venezia on April 1. In May, Cavallino Bianco Caorle-Venezia opens on the Adriatic as a five-star resort with 101 luxury suites, and a private beach. In May, Villa Timeo in Taormina, Sicily, opens as an exclusive 21-room residence steps from the legendary Grand Hotel Timeo, A Belmond Hotel. Villa Timeo offers views of the sea, Taormina and its ancient Greek amphitheater. In Greece, the 39-key all-suite oceanfront Luura Cliff opens in Paros in May under the Ennismore portfolio. The big news in London is the opening of Waldorf Astoria London Admiralty Arch—with chefs Clare Smyth and Daniel Boulud as partners.

In France, Château La Commaraine opens in March as a five-star hotel in Pommard village, 2.5 miles from Burgundy's wine capital, Beaune. The 37-room property sits within the vineyards on an estate spanning nine acres. On April 24, COMO Le Beausavilon reopens a Belle Époque grand dame near St. Tropez, which has hosted luminaries from Winston Churchill to Audrey Hepburn. On May 1, Zannier Île de Bendor opens on the private seven-hectare French island of Île de Bendor. First brought to life in 1950 by anise aperitif pioneer, Paul Ricard, its Provençal-style village will reopen as an elegant 93-key boutique hotel, across three locations on the island.

In the Middle East, Rosewood AMAALA, in Triple Bay, will set a new standard for sustainably led hospitality with 110 keys plus 26 branded residences. Tivoli La Vie Muscat opens in Oman with 79 rooms, 100 serviced residences and rises above the 18-hole LA VIE Club Golf Course. In Africa, Anantara Kalfue River Tented Camp opens in Zambia with 12 spacious tents, including a 600-square-meter Presidential Villa.

Kimpton Suntaya Bali Ubud, Indonesia, opens late spring on the Wos River near Ubud Palace (Puri Saren Agung). Kimpton Tres Ríos Riviera Maya, opens amid a nature park along Mexico's Caribbean coast. Amarvari, Aman Resorts' first property in Mexico, opens on the East Cape of Baja California, in the 1,500-acre Costa Palmas Estate, with 18 double-storey casitas. Australia's most remote luxury lodge Berkeley River Lodge reopens May 1, offering an all-inclusive, five-night experience in the Kimberley wilderness.

~ Summer ~

On Crete, near Elounda, Rosewood Blue Palace will be the brand's first property in Greece. In the Balearics, Vestige opens Can Jordi, one of four properties on a shared estate, on Formentera, and the six-bedroom Vestige Son Veri outside Valldemossa, Mallorca, in 100 hectares of farmland, olive and almond trees.

Costa Irminia Retreat & Spa, Vignette Collection, opens within Sicily's Macchia Foresta Fiume Irmino Nature Reserve, a secluded haven near Marina di Ragusa with 43 rooms and panoramic views of citrus groves and wild nature. Experimental Roma, opening in Rome's Via Veneto district, will offer 83 rooms and suites, a grand restaurant inspired by glamorous Cinecittà and rooftop pool with views of the Colosseum.

June sees the opening of La Réserve Florence, a 15th-century palazzo on Via Santo Spirito, in Florence's Oltrarno district. In the north of Italy, The First Cortina by The Pavilions Hotels & Resorts opens in August in Cortina d'Ampezzo. Also opening is Borgo Pignano Florence, a restored 15th-century villa and sister property to the renowned Borgo Pignano in Tuscany. Borgo Pignano Florence has 11 historic buildings set in 12 acres—remarkable for a city location.

Shoe designer Christian Louboutin opens his second property in Portugal, Vermelho Lagoa, a transformation of an existing 32-room hotel into an intimate 10-suite property. Preferred Hotels & Resorts' Hotel California Paris, France, near the Champs-Élysées, reopens after a refurbishment of the original Hôtel California Paris, built in 1925. In the Loire Valley, Preferred Hotels & Resorts' Le Relais d'Ambroise will be the only five-star hotel in Ambroise, with 64 rooms and suites, and a spa in the old "troglodyte" caves. Nordelska Sur Mer will bring understated luxury to the French Riviera. Set in the coastal town of Beaulieu-sur-Mer, the 33-room boutique hotel reimagines a 1960s seafront building. Moving north to the Dutch port city of Rotterdam, the 231-room Kimpton De Post Rotterdam opens in the 1921 POST building, in the heart of the city.

Also launching this summer, is the Reuben Brothers' development of an iconic building—the former In and Out Military club due to open as Cambridge House Auberge in Mayfair, London. Dukes London completes its refurbishment while for those looking for retreats, The Gallivant Littlestone Beach opens in Kent, on an acre of sand dune, with 13 bedrooms and a Nordic spa. Wildhive Eshott Hall is a 17th-century manor, near Amble, Northumberland, which also has 10 of Wildhive's signature wild cabins in the grounds.

Opening in June, Kitirua Plains Lodge is a new star on Kenya's safari circuit. Set on a private concession bordering Amboseli National Park, this all-suite property affords views of Mount Kilimanjaro. Further south, The Claremont Collection launches Sandringham Private Game

Six Senses Milan, Italy

Travel Trends 2026

Grand Resort Bad Ragaz, Switzerland

Purposeful Travel

Wellness continues to take center stage. In March, Four Seasons Resort Maldives at Kuda Huraa, in partnership with Emma Kunz Institute, will unveil ORJA Naturopathy Island, a groundbreaking wellness site pairing naturopathic principles with modern scientific expertise. Bookings are now open for the new longevity program at Verdura Resort, a Rocco Forte Hotel, Italy, and Grand Resort Bad Ragaz's Tamina Health Center in Switzerland.

In Gaucín, Spain, the Arrigo Programme is hosting the next iteration of the Women's Wisdom retreats between June 19 to 25. Across the Atlantic, in the U.S., Waldorf Astoria New York debuted the world's largest Guerlain Wellness Spa, a 22,000-square-foot site, last October. This spring, Faena New York is launching the 17,000-square-foot Tierra Santa Healing House.

In the culinary scene, Switzerland's celebrated Badrutt's Palace is marking its 130th anniversary with two restaurant pop-ups, the second of which is led by Chilean chef Rodolfo Guzmán of Boragó in Santiago, (February 18 to March 1). Paying homage to local produce, Casa di Langa, Casa del Mulino and Villa Sangiovese in northern Italy are offering exclusive wine and truffle tasting experiences. In London, The Cadogan, A Belmond Hotel, will unveil a new British bistro and bar this spring.

At the intersection between art and travel is the fifth edition of AlUla Arts Festival, Saudi Arabia (until February 14), and Orient Express' *100 Years of Art Deco* is showing in Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris (until April 26), while Sotheby's new HQ in NYC's historic Breuer Building is now open to the public. Bringing the arts to the forefront of the guest experience, Royal Mansour Casablanca is offering a three-hour urban art tour, curated in partnership with local non-profit Atouarre Bladi, alongside the brand's flagship Royal Mansour Marrakech's art therapy sessions.

Others are offering more hands-on destination experiences, such as the expansion of Alila Hotels & Resorts' educational offering, from baking traditional pão at Alila Diwa Goa, India, to uncovering salt farming and weaving traditions at Alila Seminyak, Bali. And, ahead of the anticipated completion of Sagrada Familia this June, Almanac Barcelona is transforming its top floor into The Art Floor, a living gallery and artist-in-residence program.

> **“** 2026 is the year of live tourism, where significant cultural moments will determine where and how we travel – the experience will outshine the destination
>
> Robin Stangroom, CEO, The Set Collection

On the sports front, significant hotel renovations are taking place across Bermuda prior to the Apex Group Bermuda SailGP (May 9 to 10) and 54th biennial Newport Bermuda Race (June 19 to 28), while from June 3 to 8, EXPLORA I will be docked at Port Hercule, Monaco, for FORMULA 1® GRAND PRIX DE MONACO 2026. Bonjour Québec is also promoting Winterapy, encouraging visitors to discover the benefits of embracing winter activities.

The Road Less Traveled

For adventurers avoiding over-touristic spots, 2026 offers refreshing off-grid alternatives. In Chile, Awasi Atacama's 12 suites come with a 4WDs for custom desert routes accompanied by a guide, while Andean presents six soulful properties across Lima and Peru's unexplored southern region. Fancy a walk on the wild side? Volcanoes Safaris in Uganda launches a seven-night Big Cat Photography Safari in Spring, while Shakti Himalaya is offering treks into India's mountainous realms. Meanwhile, Baa Atoll,

Awasi Atacama, Chile
Credit: Cristian Mateo

Maldives, has opened a hyper-bespoke two-island retreat in a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve; the first island (Somewhere) launched December 2025, with the second (Nowhere) slated to open in Q1 of this year. Off-season travel revives favorite destinations without crowds. Canaves Collection, Santorini—specifically Canaves Epitome in Ammoudi—delivers the same thoughtful service without skimping on quality, even in quieter, low-season months. In Italy, San Montano Resort & Spa reported a 44% rise in last September's bookings and Grand Hotel Fasano will stay open between March 27 to January 6, 2027, welcoming guests for the first time through the winter holiday season. Chatham Bars Inn, Cape Cod follows suit, reflecting a surging interest in off-season escapes.

Responsible Tourism

Responsible tourism is now a central driver of travel decisions. In 2026, eco-conscious luxury is set to flourish. Groups such as Beyond Green, part of Preferred Travel Group, curate a portfolio of hotels aligned with the U.N.'s Sustainable Development Goals; its latest members include Borneo Eagle Resort, Malaysia, and The One Palácio da Anunciada, Portugal. Italy stands out for its climate leadership, from Il Borro's renewable energy initiatives to Locanda Le Piazze's water-conservation efforts. Borgo dei Conti Resort also launches a Bioenergetic Park, in which time among trees that generate positive electromagnetic fields, will enhance wellbeing.

In Ireland, Dromoland C... island retreat in a UNESCO... offers tents, beehives ... woodland, with tree plant... also available. Six Senses ... protecting endangered sp... conservation while SAii ... Thailand, has a Save Our ... Jean-Michel Cousteau Res... marine biologist leadin... mangrove conservation a... Family-owned business g... Ayu in the Wild, Sri Lank... luxury DMC, offers bespo... Las Torres Patagonia, Chi... and is targeting net-zero b...

Mantis Collection exp... portfolio with projects in ... Jais and South Africa's Add... Cheetah Plains in the Sabi... delivers off-grid luxury va...

Different Types of Trav...

Family and multigene... Virtuoso's 2026 trends, ... span everything from so... generational stays. Finc... 10 Villas delivers sophis... accommodation for familie... Grand Hotel Excelsior Vi... to dote with Michel... signature wellness treatm... of Mediterranean gardens...

Edited for ILTM

Custom Content from WSJ is a unit of The Wall Street Journal advertising department. The Wall Street Journal news organization was not involved in the creation of this content.

AFAR

A 15th-Century Palazzo in Venice Is Now a Hotel from the Historic Orient Express Brand

The historic Orient Express train company's second hotel transforms a 15th-century residence into a 47-room retreat.

The new Orient Express Venezia is in the city's quieter Cannaregio neighborhood. Photo by Giulio Ghirardi

NEED TO KNOW: Orient Express Venezia opens March 30, 2026, marking the brand's second hotel; reservations are now open.

LOCATION: 2292 Strada Nova | View on Google Maps

LOYALTY PROGRAM: Accor Live Limitless

RATES: From

BOOK NOW

Away from the tourist crowds in central Venice, the Palazzo Donà Giovannelli, a 15th-century aristocratic residence, reopened as the new Orient Express Venezia on March 30, 2026.

In Cannaregio, a largely residential district, the palazzo sits on the Rio de Noale canal, with a pink-and-white stone facade restored to reveal the neo-Gothic lancet windows of 15th-century architect Filippo Calendario, who also worked on the Doge's Palace. In the 18th century, the palazzo was renovated by Giovanni Battista Meduna, who also worked on the city's iconic Ca' d'Oro palazzo on the Grand Canal and the Teatro La Fenice opera house.

The hotel is the second from Orient Express, the historic luxury train company, following Orient Express La Minerva in Rome. The renovation, led by Paris-based architect and interior designer Aline Asmar d'Amman, took eight years and preserves key historic elements, including an octagonal staircase attributed to Meduna, frescoes by 19th-century Venetian painter Francesco Hayez, and the 1548 gilded ballroom. The property now includes 47 guest rooms and two apartments, combining contemporary interiors with original neo-Gothic and baroque elements.

An eight-year restoration

Aline Asmar d'Amman, the architect and interior designer, worked on the restoration of Orient Express Venezia for eight years. Photos by Giulio Ghirardi

"My architectural work is rooted in carrying heritage forward and a dialogue between the past and future," says Asmar d'Amman. "To me, artistry and craftsmanship are the ultimate luxury."

Following in Meduna's footsteps, she describes the renovation of "this 15th-century architectural crown jewel of Venice" as a challenge: converting a residential mansion into a hotel while maintaining the imprint of the families who lived there. Working in close collaboration with Italy's heritage conservation authority, Asmar d'Amman and her team preserved mosaics, frescoes, and sculptures throughout. Their work also required stabilizing the palazzo's underwater foundations, involving the construction of a dam to drain sections of the structure.

Today, guests arrive by the hotel's private boat and enter through a courtyard garden—uncommon in Venice—where chef Heinz Beck, famed for his Michelin three-star restaurant La Pergola in Rome, oversees the fine-dining restaurant, alongside a more casual space in the former orangerie.

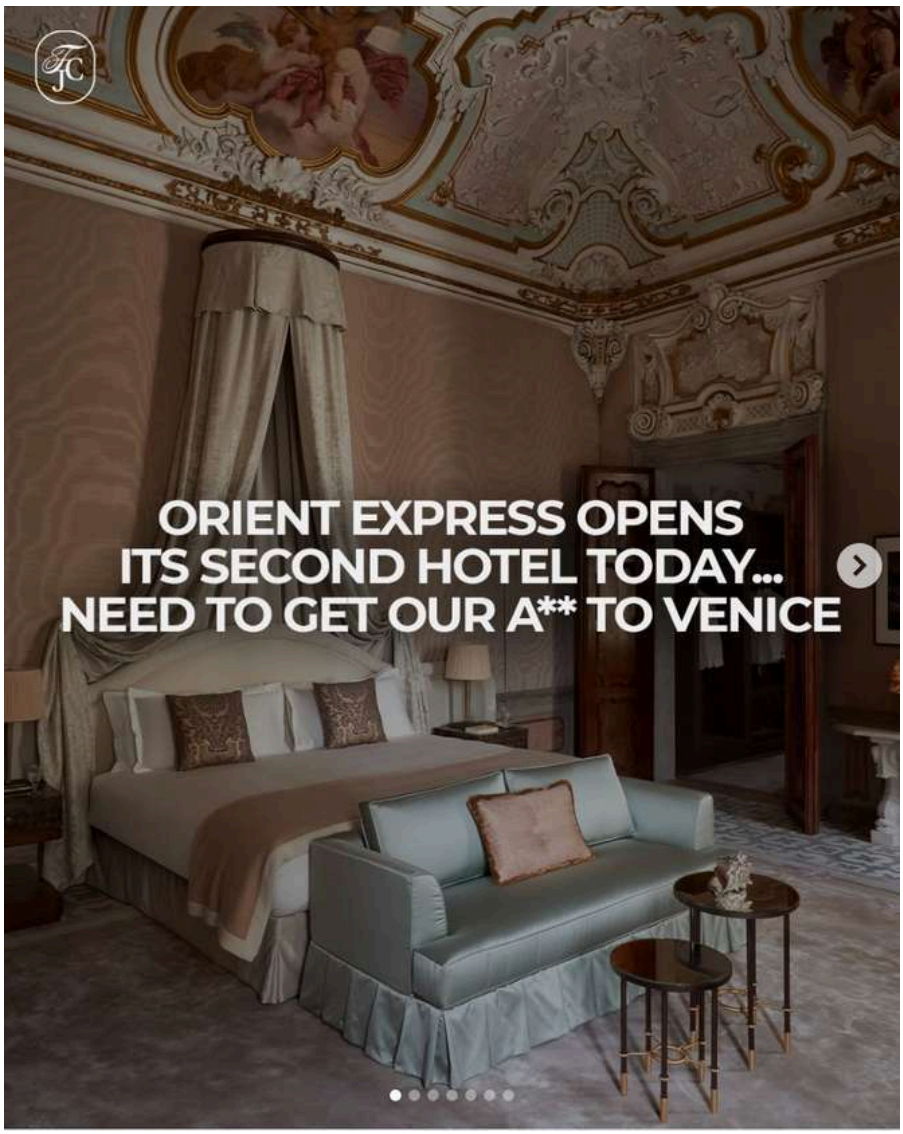
Interiors that connect past and present

Historical details, including painted ceilings and carved stone, abound in the guest rooms and public spaces. Photos by Giulio Ghirardi

Interiors incorporate Murano and crystal chandeliers, silk wall coverings, brocade upholstery, and a collection of contemporary art "to dialogue with the past while exuding nowness," says Asmar d'Amman. Materials include blue-veined marmorino plaster and Carrara marble, with carved wooden door frames and Venetian sliding panels in dressing areas. References to the original Orient Express train include the art deco–style Wagon Bar, inspired by its historic lounge cars.

Asmar d'Amman sees the reimagined palazzo (which was vacant for years before the renovation) as an act of cultural preservation, converting a historic residence into a hotel while maintaining its architectural and cultural legacy. "Here, Venice comes into focus as it has always been," she says, "a cosmopolitan crossroads where East and West, scholarship and spectacle, share the same address."

"I want visitors to feel drunk on beauty."

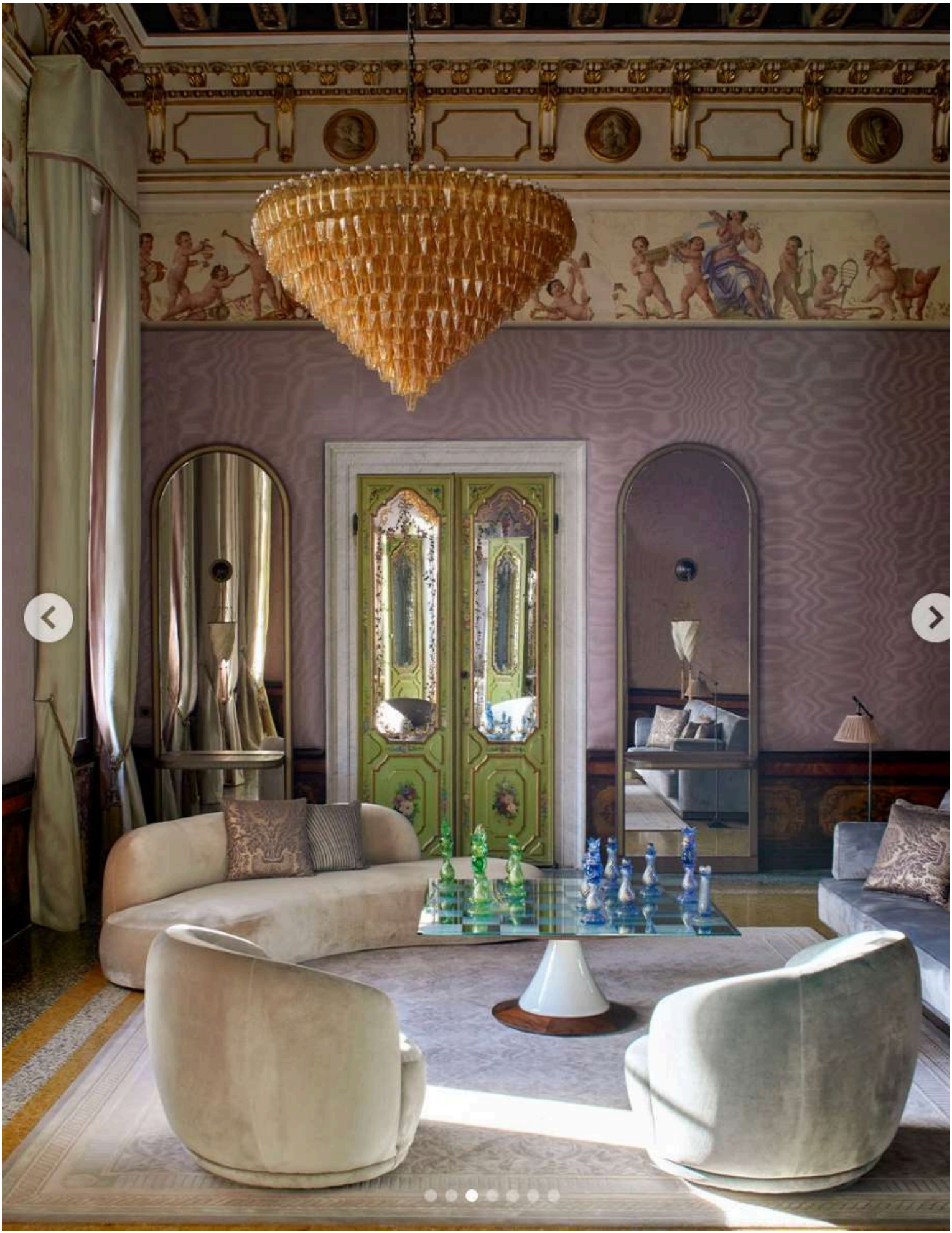


firstclassjerk Edited • 19h
The Orient Express just opened its second hotel...this time in Venice @orientexpress.venezia

We stayed at Orient Express La Minerva last year in Rome...their first hotel...and it's exactly what you'd hope for from a brand with that kind of legacy.

Now they've taken over a 15th-century palazzo in Venice. 47 rooms. Right where two canals meet. This is the first time this building has ever been a hotel...but Venice was always part of the original Orient Express route...so yes, we need to get our a** to Venice.

#venice #newhotel #orientexpress #luxuryhotel



The A-List of Travel ®
LUXURY TRAVEL
MAGAZINE

Orient Express Venezia Opens: A 15th Century Palazzo Reawakened

Orient Express unveils Orient Express Venezia at Palazzo Donà Giovannelli, the extraordinary rebirth of the 15th century architectural jewel, owned by Arsenale Group, reimagined by architect and interior designer Aline Asmar d'Amman as a hotel, for the first time in nearly six centuries. A new icon in the brand's constellation of ultra-luxury travel experiences, the hotel invites guests into a world where Venetian history, contemporary artistry and the legendary spirit of the Orient Express art of travel converge in perfect harmony. Once a celebrated crossroad on the legendary route from Paris to Istanbul, Venice reclaims its role as a theatrical gateway for the Orient Express world of luxury travel.

Nestled in the quiet rhythm of Cannaregio, the Palazzo rises where two canals intertwine along the Rio di Noale, an address of serenity, history,and cinematic beauty. Here, Orient Express introduces a new chapter in its Italian journey, following the opening last year of the hotel Orient Express La Minerva in Rome and La Dolce Vita Orient Express, the luxury train inaugurated in 2025.

Meticulously conceived by Aline Asmar d'Amman, known for her ability to weave heritage architecture with contemporary artistic expression, the Palazzo has been restored with deep respect for its origin, introducing a sense of refined contemporary elegance. Her creative vision shapes the journey in a sequence of wonders, informed by the stories embedded in every architectural detail she unearthed. Embracing the Serenissima's legendary legacy as a gate between East and West, she choreographs this theatrical journey, where imagination, craftsmanship, and centuries of Venetian culture converge. The hotel features 47 uniquely crafted rooms, suites, and residences, where each space is elevated with intentional interiors and singular atmosphere, reflecting the layered architectural history of the building and the romance of Venetian living.

A THEATRICAL VOYAGE, SET IN MOTION BY ORIENT EXPRESS

Palazzo Donà Giovannelli has long embodied the spirit of Venice as a crossroad of culture and imagination. In the mid-19th century, Count Andrea Giovannelli commissioned architect Giovanni Battista Meduna, celebrated for restoring the neighboring Ca' d'Oro, to reimagine its interiors withneogothic galore, Baroque accents, and the Palazzo's iconic octagonal staircase crowned by a celestial vault.

During the Ninth Congress of Italian Scientists in 1847, the Palazzo reopened as a stage for salons, debates, and grand receptions. In these historical spaces, intellect and imagination thrived. Over the years, the Palazzo grew through love and noble alliances, as reflected in the Salone Vittoria, a setting befitting royalty.

Today, Orient Express Venezia rekindles that spirit. As day shifts into night, The Grand Transformation subtly alters the mood, lights soften,candles flicker, and the Palazzo becomes a theatre of shadows, reflections, and whispered intrigue. A handpicked Cast of Characters guides guests through curated experiences, immersing them in a world where every moment is an act in a larger narrative.

A MASTERPIECE RESTORED WITH DEVOTION AND WONDER

Aline Asmar d'Amman's aesthetic vision unveils the Palazzo through a refined interplay of contrasts and memories, intentional architecture, and poetic precision: bold gestures of interior architectural grafting are balanced with infinitely sophisticated details, painted frescoes meet sculptural forms, historical details infinitely reflect into tinted mirrored surfaces. An array of exquisite precious natural stones, meticulously curated and highly crafted, merge into the Palazzo's architectural body, weaving moments of sensual wonderment in the most intimate spaces.

The “Lost Colors” or “Colori Persi” of Venice softly re-emerge, woven into textures and curtains, furnishings, and finishes, transforming the Piano Nobile’s historical salons into a succession of inhabited living canvases, punctuated by a bold intervention of vast cabinets of wonder. Venetian craftsmanship converses with contemporary art and works by masters of their time, while embossed leathers and moiré silks dress the walls, echoing the ever-shifting dialogue of light and shadow dancing across the canals. Patinated walls, carved surfaces and artisanal finishes recall the passage of time, their textures lend a sense of modern, ageless allure.

One of the most unexpected revelations of this transformation is the Palazzo’s lobby, il Corte del Conte, once an open mineral cortile, elevated intoa grand living room, layered with sculpted boiserie, velvet lushness and spectacular bespoke Murano chandeliers, balancing the soul of a home with a dramatic sense of theater.

The Palazzo’s secret garden, a secluded sanctuary hidden at its heart, surprises and delights with its whimsical corners, sophisticated tents,luxuriant fountain and antique gates, lit by delicate Venetian lanterns diffusing their cinematic warm glow. Long concealed behind centuries old walls, the garden is transformed into an almost otherworldly space where nature, architecture, and silence meet. Calle Meraviglia, a realm of discoveries, connects the garden to the lobby, hosting a rotating selection of contemporary works aligned with Venice’s cultural calendar and reinforcing the hotel’s role as a living cultural salon.

Every path and each floor lead to countless discoveries and encounters with marvels of the past, in magnetic dialog with creative nowness. The result is a world of theatrical elegance where centuries of Venetian creativity meet the timeless codes of Orient Express.

LIVING SPACES, CULTURAL ATMOSPHERES

The 47 rooms, suites, and residences reveal the intimate elegance of Venetian life, each space gently shaped by the architectural layers of centuries past. Restored murals, sculptural ceilings, and views opening onto gardens and canals create a rare and immersive sense of place.

History comes alive in the six Signature Suites, each telling a different story: Orient Express Suite, Colori Persi Suite, Del Conte Suite, Teatro Suite, Cherubini Suite and La Minerva Suite.

Exclusive spaces ranging up to 145 sqm reveal the hotel’s most hidden treasures: 19th-century frescoes dedicated to the goddess Minerva andmythical flying figures that evoke the grandeur of a bygone era, gilded salons animated by dancing cherubs, monumental marble fireplaces with mesmerizing sculptural shells, all flanked with tall windows opening onto some of the most coveted views over Venice’s canals. Each suite is a unique experience, where artistic heritage meets contemporary luxury.

THE ART OF DINING

The culinary vision of Orient Express Venezia is anchored by the signature of Three-Michelin starred Chef Heinz Beck, marking one of the most anticipated gastronomic debuts of the year. His creative imprint elevates the entire food & beverage universe of the palazzo.

Heinz Beck Venezia, an intimate gourmet concept by the acclaimed chef, unfolds within the historic orangerie, offering a fine dining and deeply sensorial culinary journey designed exclusively for the hotel. La Casati, the hotel's all-day dining restaurant, channels the theatrical, avant garde spirit of Marchesa Luisa Casati. Featuring a rare privategarden, it becomes a stage where Heinz Beck's philosophy meets Venetian inspiration in a choreography of flavor, artistry, and spectacle. The Wagon Bar, an Art Deco-inspired bar, pays homage to the legendary lounge cars of the original Orient Express trains, blending crafted mixology with a touch of mystery and nocturnal charm.

A STAGE WHERE EVERY MOMENT AND CELEBRATION BECOME A STORY

Salone Vittoria, located at the first noble floor of the hotel, embodies the splendor and historical memory of a venue once dedicated to the wedding of Princess Vittoria Farnese. A treasure trove of extraordinary architectural and artistic beauty, it preserves centuries of elegance and ceremonial glamour, re-imagined to host the most solemn moments in the heart of Venice.

Guests may arrive directly by boat through the Gothic water gate, a dramatic and evocative gesture that recalls the timeless romance of travel between East and West and sets the tone for a stay that interlaces heritage, culture, and culinary excellence. Beyond the palazzo's interiors, guests are invited to experience Venice through the lens of Orient Express, exploring the surrounding streets of Cannaregio, or discovering thecity's storied craftsmanship and artistic traditions.

"With Orient Express Venezia, we open a new chapter in the legacy of our brand, one that celebrates Venice as a global capital of culture, beauty, and imagination. Palazzo Donà Giovannelli has been revived with extraordinary craftsmanship and deep respect for its six centuries of history, becoming a place where the art of travel meets the soul of the city.

This hotel embodies the essence of Orient Express: a constellation of rare experiences, each rooted in heritage yet reimagined for a newgeneration of discerning travelers. Venice now stands as a luminous cornerstone of our vision, bridging past and future, and inviting guests into aworld of timeless elegance and discovery." Gilda Perez-Alvarado, CEO Orient Express.

"With the refurbishment of the iconic Palazzo Donà Giovannelli we continue our strategy of investing in unique heritage assets and unlockingtheir long-term value through thoughtful redevelopment. The new Orient Express Venezia at Palazzo Donà Giovannelli represents a meaningful step in the development of a distinctive portfolio that brings together iconic locations and a contemporary approach to ultra-luxury. The Palazzo embodies a unique dialogue between history and innovation, where centuries of Venetian culture are carefully reinterpreted through a modernlens. Venice remains one of the most strategic destinations in international travel, and this project, together with hotel Orient Express La Minerva in Rome and La Dolce Vita Orient Express trains, reflects our commitment to strengthening Italy's position at the forefront of global luxuryexperiences, through long-term investment in assets of enduring cultural and economic value." Paolo Barletta, CEO Arsenale Group.

“I am truly proud to unveil the opening of Orient Express Venezia, a destination where timeless elegance meets contemporary luxury. This magnificent project is not only a milestone, but a heartfelt tribute to Venice’s unique heritage and spirit of hospitality. I look forward to personally welcoming guests from around the world to share in an experience that is both authentic and unforgettable.” Bartolomeo Fusco, General Manager Orient Express Venezia.

“I imagined the transformation of Orient Express Venezia at Palazzo Donà Giovannelli as a theatrical sequence of wonders, a tribute to the whimsical mysteries of Venice and the spectacular marvels of the 15th architectural jewel, unearthed and restored. In this eight-year creative transformative journey, the walls speak, revealing layers of enchantment magnified by the dialog with contemporary creation. Embracing theduality of legacy and reinvention, I find inspiration in the unique position of Venice as a gateway between East and West, amplified by its exceptional tapestry of artistry and modern vitality.” Aline Asmar D’Amman, Architect & Interior Designer.

A new Orient Express hotel opens in a Venetian palazzo

Away from the tourist crowds in central Venice, the Palazzo Donà Giovannelli, a 15th-century aristocratic residence, reopened as the new Orient Express Venezia on March 30, 2026. Located in Cannaregio, a largely residential district, the palazzo sits on the Rio de Noal canal, with a pink and white stone facade restored to reveal the Neogothic lancet windows of 15th-century architect Filippo Calendario, who also worked on the Doge's Palace. In the 18th century, the palazzo was renovated by Giovanni Battista Meduna, who also worked on the city's iconic Ca' d'Oro palazzo on the Grand Canal and the Teatro La Fenice opera house. The hotel is the second from Orient Express, the historic luxury train company, following Orient Express La Minerva in Rome. The renovation, led by Paris-based architect and interior designer Aline Asmar d'Amman, took eight years and preserves key historic elements, including an octagonal staircase attributed to Meduna, frescoes by 19th-century Venetian painter Francesco Hayez, and the gilded 1548 ballroom. The property now includes 47 guest rooms and two apartments, combining contemporary interiors with original Neogothic and Baroque features. "My architectural work is rooted in carrying heritage forward and a dialogue between the past and future," says Asmar d'Amman. "To me, artistry and craftsmanship are the ultimate luxury." Following in Meduna's footsteps, she describes the renovation of "this 15th-century architectural crown jewel of Venice" as a challenge: converting a residential mansion into a hotel while maintaining the imprint of the families who lived there. Working in close collaboration with Italy's heritage

conservation authority, the project preserved mosaics, frescoes, and sculptures throughout. It also required stabilizing the palazzo's underwater foundations, involving the construction of a dam to drain sections of the structure. Today, guests arrive by the hotel's private boat and enter through a courtyard garden-uncommon in Venice-where chef Heinz Beck, famed for his Michelin three-star restaurant La Pergola in Rome, oversees the fine-dining restaurant, alongside a more casual space set in the former orangerie. Interiors incorporate Murano and crystal chandeliers, silk wall coverings, brocade upholstery, and a collection of contemporary art "to dialogue with the past while exuding nowness," says Asmar d'Amman. Materials include blue-veined marmorino plaster and Carrara marble, with carved wood door frames and Venetian sliding panels in dressing areas. References to the original Orient Express train include the art deco–style Wagon Bar, inspired by its historic lounge cars. Asmar d'Amman sees the reimagined palazzo (which was vacant for years before the renovation) as an act of cultural preservation, converting a historic residence into a hotel while maintaining its architectural and cultural legacy. "Here, Venice comes into focus as it has always been," she says, "a cosmopolitan crossroads where East and West, scholarship and spectacle, share the same address." "I want visitors to feel drunk on beauty."

TravelDreamsMagazine
What is your version of living the dream?

Orient Express Venezia Opens Today: A 15th Century Palazzo Reawakened

Venice, Italy – March 30, 2026 – Orient Express proudly unveils Orient Express Venezia at Palazzo Donà Giovannelli, the extraordinary rebirth of the 15th century architectural jewel, owned by Arsenale Group, reimagined by architect and interior designer Aline Asmar d'Amman as a hotel, for the first time in nearly six centuries. A new icon in the brand's constellation of ultra-luxury travel experiences, the hotel invites guests into a
world where Venetian history, contemporary artistry and the legendary spirit of the Orient Express art of travel converge in perfect harmony. Once a celebrated crossroad on the
legendary route from Paris to Istanbul, Venice reclaims its role as a theatrical gateway for the Orient Express world of luxury travel.

Nestled in the quiet rhythm of Cannaregio, the Palazzo rises where two canals intertwine along the Rio di Noale, an address of serenity, history,and cinematic beauty. Here, Orient Express introduces a new chapter in its Italian journey, following the opening last year of the hotel Orient Express La Minerva in Rome and La Dolce Vita Orient Express, the luxury train inaugurated in 2025.

Meticulously conceived by Aline Asmar d'Amman, known for her ability to weave heritage architecture with contemporary artistic expression, the Palazzo has been restored with deep respect for its origin, introducing a sense of refined contemporary elegance. Her creative vision shapes the journey in a sequence of wonders, informed by the stories embedded in every architectural detail she unearthed. Embracing the Serenissima's legendary legacy as a gate between East and West, she choreographs this theatrical journey, where imagination, craftsmanship, and centuries of Venetian culture converge. The hotel features 47 uniquely crafted rooms, suites, and residences, where each space is elevated with intentional interiors and singular atmosphere, reflecting the layered architectural history of the building and the romance of Venetian living.

A THEATRICAL VOYAGE, SET IN MOTION BY ORIENT EXPRESS

Palazzo Donà Giovannelli has long embodied the spirit of Venice as a crossroad of culture and imagination. In the mid-19th century, Count Andrea Giovannelli commissioned architect Giovanni Battista Meduna, celebrated for restoring the neighboring Ca' d'Oro, to reimagine its interiors withneogothic galore, Baroque accents, and the Palazzo's iconic octagonal staircase crowned by a celestial vault.

During the Ninth Congress of Italian Scientists in 1847, the Palazzo reopened as a stage for salons, debates, and grand receptions. In these historical spaces, intellect and imagination thrived. Over the years, the Palazzo grew through love and noble alliances, as reflected in the Salone Vittoria, a setting befitting royalty.

Today, Orient Express Venezia rekindles that spirit. As day shifts into night, *The Grand Transformation* subtly alters the mood, lights soften,candles flicker, and the Palazzo becomes a theatre of shadows, reflections, and whispered intrigue. A handpicked *Cast of Characters* guides guests through curated experiences, immersing them in a world where every moment is an act in a larger narrative.

A MASTERPIECE RESTORED WITH DEVOTION

Aline Asmar d'Amman's aesthetic vision unveils the Palazzo through a refined interplay of contrasts and memories, intentional architecture, and poetic precision: bold gestures of interior architectural grafting are balanced with infinitely sophisticated details, painted frescoes meet sculptural forms, historical details infinitely reflect into tinted mirrored surfaces. An array of exquisite precious natural stones, meticulously curated and highly crafted, merge into the Palazzo's architectural body, weaving moments of sensual wonderment in the most intimate spaces.

The "Lost Colors" or "*Colori Persi*" of Venice softly re-emerge, woven into textures and curtains, furnishings, and finishes, transforming the Piano Nobile's historical salons into a succession of inhabited living canvases, punctuated by a bold intervention of vast cabinets of wonder. Venetian craftsmanship converses with contemporary art and works by masters of their time, while embossed leathers and moiré silks dress the walls, echoing the ever-shifting dialogue of light and shadow dancing across the canals. Patinated walls, carved surfaces and artisanal finishes recall the passage of time, their textures lend a sense of modern, ageless allure.

One of the most unexpected revelations of this transformation is the Palazzo's lobby, il Corte del Conte, once an open mineral cortile, elevated intoa grand living room, layered with sculpted boiserie, velvet lushness and spectacular bespoke Murano chandeliers, balancing the soul of a home with a dramatic sense of theater.

The Palazzo's secret garden, a secluded sanctuary hidden at its heart, surprises and delights with its whimsical corners, sophisticated tents,luxuriant fountain and antique gates, lit by delicate Venetian lanterns diffusing their cinematic warm glow. Long concealed behind centuries old walls, the garden is transformed into an almost otherworldly space where nature, architecture, and silence meet. Calle Meraviglia, a realm of discoveries, connects the garden to the lobby, hosting a rotating selection of contemporary works aligned with Venice's cultural calendar and reinforcing the hotel's role as a living cultural salon.

Every path and each floor lead to countless discoveries and encounters with marvels of the past, in magnetic dialog with creative nowness. The result is a world of theatrical elegance where centuries of Venetian creativity meet the timeless codes of Orient Express.

LIVING SPACES, CULTURAL ATMOSPHERES

The 47 rooms, suites, and residences reveal the intimate elegance of Venetian life, each space gently shaped by the architectural layers of centuries past. Restored murals, sculptural ceilings, and views opening onto gardens and canals create a rare and immersive sense of place.

History comes alive in the six Signature Suites, each telling a different story: Orient Express Suite, Colori Persi Suite, Del Conte Suite, Teatro Suite, Cherubini Suite and La Minerva Suite.

Exclusive spaces ranging up to 145 sqm reveal the hotel's most hidden treasures: 19th-century frescoes dedicated to the goddess Minerva andmythical flying figures that evoke the grandeur of a bygone era, gilded salons animated by dancing cherubs, monumental marble fireplaces with mesmerizing sculptural shells, all flanked with tall windows opening onto some of the most coveted views over Venice's canals. Each suite is a unique experience, where artistic heritage meets contemporary luxury.

THE ART OF DINING

The culinary vision of Orient Express Venezia is anchored by the signature of Three-Michelin starred Chef Heinz Beck, marking one of the most anticipated gastronomic debuts of the year. His creative imprint elevates the entire food & beverage universe of the palazzo.

Heinz Beck Venezia, an intimate gourmet concept by the acclaimed chef, unfolds within the historic orangerie, offering a fine dining and deeply sensorial culinary journey designed exclusively for the hotel. La Casati, the hotel's all-day dining restaurant, channels the theatrical, avant garde spirit of Marchesa Luisa Casati. Featuring a rare privategarden, it becomes a stage where Heinz Beck's philosophy meets Venetian inspiration in a choreography of flavor, artistry, and spectacle. The Wagon Bar, an Art Deco-inspired bar, pays homage to the legendary lounge cars of the original Orient Express trains, blending crafted mixology with a touch of mystery and nocturnal charm.

Salone Vittoria, located at the first noble floor of the hotel, embodies the splendor and historical memory of a venue once dedicated to the wedding of Princess Vittoria Farnese.
A treasure trove of extraordinary architectural and artistic beauty, it preserves centuries of elegance and ceremonial glamour, re-imagined to host the most solemn moments in the heart of Venice.

Guests may arrive directly by boat through the Gothic water gate, a dramatic and evocative gesture that recalls the timeless romance of travel between East and West and sets the tone for a stay that interlaces heritage, culture, and culinary excellence. Beyond the palazzo's interiors, guests are invited to experience Venice through the lens of Orient Express, exploring the surrounding streets of Cannaregio, or discovering thecity's storied craftsmanship and artistic traditions.

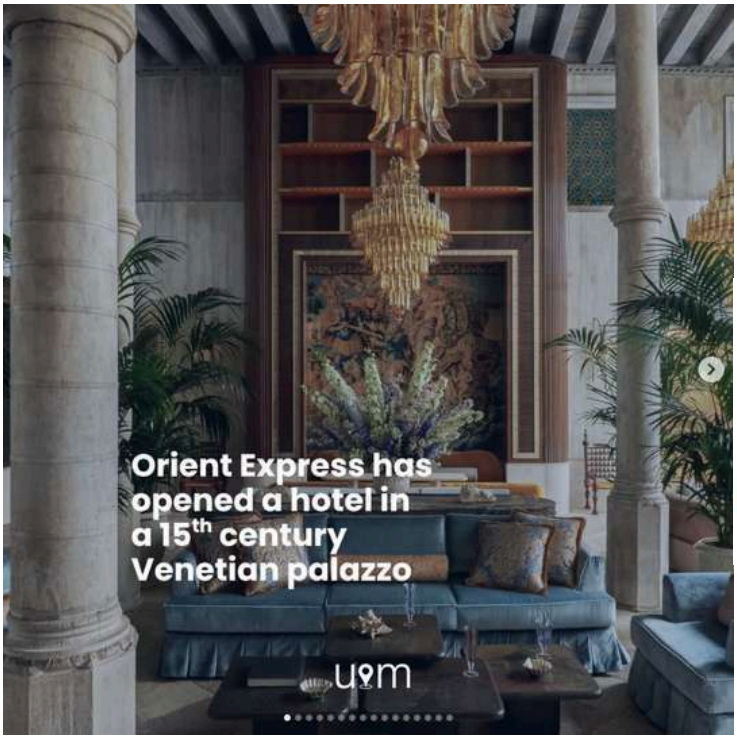
"With Orient Express Venezia, we open a new chapter in the legacy of our brand, one that celebrates Venice as a global capital of culture, beauty, and imagination. Palazzo Donà
Giovannelli has been revived with extraordinary craftsmanship and deep respect for its six centuries of history, becoming a place where the art of travel meets the soul of the city.

This hotel embodies the essence of Orient Express: a constellation of rare experiences, each rooted in heritage yet reimagined for a newgeneration of discerning travelers. Venice now stands as a luminous cornerstone of our vision, bridging past and future, and inviting guests into aworld of timeless elegance and discovery." Gilda Perez-Alvarado, CEO Orient Express.

"With the refurbishment of the iconic Palazzo Donà Giovannelli we continue our strategy of investing in unique heritage assets and unlockingtheir long-term value through thoughtful redevelopment. The new Orient Express Venezia at Palazzo Donà Giovannelli represents a meaningful step in the development of a distinctive portfolio that brings together iconic locations and a contemporary approach to ultra-luxury. The Palazzo embodies a unique dialogue between history and innovation, where centuries of Venetian culture are carefully reinterpreted through a modernlens. Venice remains one of the most strategic destinations in international travel, and this project, together with hotel Orient Express La Minerva in Rome and La Dolce Vita Orient Express trains, reflects our commitment to strengthening Italy's position at the forefront of global luxuryexperiences, through long-term investment in assets of enduring cultural and economic value." Paolo Barletta, CEO Arsenale Group.

“I am truly proud to unveil the opening of Orient Express Venezia, a destination where timeless elegance meets contemporary luxury. This magnificent project is not only a milestone, but a heartfelt tribute to Venice’s unique heritage and spirit of hospitality. I look forward to personally welcoming guests from around the world to share in an experience that is both authentic and unforgettable.” Bartolomeo Fusco, General Manager Orient Express Venezia.

“I imagined the transformation of Orient Express Venezia at Palazzo Donà Giovannelli as a theatrical sequence of wonders, a tribute to the whimsical mysteries of Venice and the spectacular marvels of the 15th architectural jewel, unearthed and restored. In this eight-year creative transformative journey, the walls speak, revealing layers of enchantment magnified by the dialog with contemporary creation. Embracing theduality of legacy and reinvention, I find inspiration in the unique position of Venice as a gateway between East and West, amplified by its exceptional tapestry of artistry and modern vitality.” Aline Asmar D’Amman, Architect & Interior Designer.



uncovermore Orient Express opens their next hotel in 15th-Century Venetian Palazzo 🗝️🇮🇹🛶

Orient Express Venezia (@orientexpress @orientexpress.venezia), a luxury hotel set inside the historic Palazzo Donà Giovannelli in Venice, Italy, is opening April 1st!

Just ten minutes from Venice's waterfront, this newly restored palazzo follows an eight-year renovation by acclaimed architect Aline Asmar d'Amman.

HISTORY
Built in the 15th century and transformed in the 1800s by architect Gian Battista Meduna, Palazzo Donà Giovannelli was once home to the Duke of Urbino and Venice's noble Donà and Giovannelli families. Layered with Neo-Gothic and Baroque architecture, it later served as a Pinacoteca before beginning its next chapter as a luxury hotel.

EAT
🍽️ Dining at Orient Express Venezia is led by three-Michelin-starred Chef Heinz Beck across three venues: the signature fine-dining restaurant Heinz Beck Venezia, the all-day La Casati, and the atmospheric Wagon Bar.

SEE + DO
🎨 Admire 19th-century frescoes, gilded salons, ornate stuccos, and monumental marble fireplaces, all within the hotel's storied walls.

🛶 The Peggy Guggenheim Museum, Teatro La Fenice, and Venice's famous canals and bridges are all just moments away.

🧖 The hotel spa blends ancient Roman thermal traditions, Venetian maritime heritage, and Ottoman hammam rituals.

STAY
🗝️ There are 47 restored rooms and suites, including six Signature Suites: the Orient Express Suite, Colori Persi Suite, and La Minerva Suite, each appointed with vaulted frescoed ceilings, silks, marbles, and velvets.

Tag someone who is excited for this new hotel opening!

13h

Robb Report

Inside the Opulent New 47-Key Orient Express Hotel in Venice

Orient Express Venezia is decked out with two restaurants, an Art Deco-style bar, a spa, and a secret garden.

Orient Express is strengthening its foothold in the boot-shaped country.

The hospitality heavyweight, which has branched out beyond luxury trains and into yachts and hotels, just opened a second property in Italy. The new Orient Express Venezia is housed within the lavish Palazzo Donà Giovannelli in the historic Cannaregio district of Venice. Thankfully, that is one of the quieter quarters of the city.

The 15th-century palazzo, owned by the Arsenale Group, stands proudly where two canals meet along the Rio di Noale. It was originally built in 1436, but has been entirely reimagined by architect and interior designer Aline Asmar d'Amman as a hotel for the first time in nearly six centuries. Charming original features have been restored and a refined contemporary elegance woven in, with old-world Venetian craftsmanship sitting alongside more modern touches.

The hotel facade.

The building itself is steeped in history. In the mid-19th century, architect Giovanni Battista Meduna added Neogothic and Baroque flourishes to the interior, creating a theatrical feel that remains today. In 1847, the palazzo reopened as a stage for salons, debates, and grand receptions. Patinated walls, carved surfaces, and painted frescoes reflect that layered past, while precious natural stones, embossed leathers, and moiré silks add a sense of luxury.

Guests may arrive directly by boat through the Gothic water gate, setting a perfectly dramatic tone for the stay. The palazzo's lobby, once an open stone courtyard, has been transformed into an opulent living room with sculpted wood paneling, rich velvet upholstery, and spectacular bespoke Murano chandeliers throughout. Through a gallery with a rotating selection of contemporary works lies a secret garden with antique gates opening to sophisticated tents lit by Venetian lanterns.

Upstairs are 47 rooms, suites, and residences, each showcasing restored murals, sculptural ceilings, and views of gardens and canals. Spanning up to 1,560 square feet, the six Signature Suites are decked out with 19th-century frescoes, gilded salons, marble fireplaces, and tall windows, evoking the glitz and glamor of a bygone era.

The Colori Persi Suite.

Beyond the accommodation, Heinz Beck Venezia offers fine-dining fare by Michelin three-star chef Heinz Beck, the all-day restaurant La Casati serves up more relaxed dishes, and the Wagon Bar slings signature cocktails and Venetian cicchetti in a plush Art Deco-esque setting inspired by the Orient Express lounge cars. Other highlights include a spa steeped in ancient Roman thermal rituals and an extravagant ballroom for events.

The Venetian outpost is the second hotel Orient Express has opened in Italy, following the debut of the first location in Rome in 2025. It also rolled out a new train in the country last year. These launches are part of a wider effort to put Italy at the forefront of luxury travel.

You can visit the Orient Express Venezia website to book your stay.

Robb Report

Orient Express Venezia in Photos

The new hotel offers 47 rooms, suites, and residences.

Orient Express has opened its second hotel inside a lavish 15th-century Venetian palazzo. Click here to read the full story.

The facade.

The living room.

The hotel's all-day dining restaurant, La Casati.

Calle Meraviglia, the cultural salon.

Inside the Cherubini Suite.

A suite bathroom.

TRAVEL WEEKLY
BY NORTHSTAR

HOTELS

Orient Express hotel opens in Venice

Orient Express has debuted its second hotel with the opening of the Orient Express Venezia at Palazzo Dona Giovannelli in Venice's Cannaregio district.

Housed within a 15th-century palazzo, the property features 47 accommodations, including residences. The hotel's interiors showcase elements like restored murals, bespoke Murano chandeliers and marble fireplaces.

The property offers three food and beverage outlets, including Heinz Beck Venezia, a fine-dining concept from the three-Michelin-starred chef; La Casati, an all-day dining restaurant with a private garden; and the Wagon Bar, an art deco-inspired lounge.

The hotel is also home to Salone Vittoria, an event space that guests can access via boat.

The Venice opening is part of Orient Express' broader expansion push. Accor, which took full ownership of the brand in 2022, has been building out an ultraluxe portfolio that spans hotels, trains and yachts.

The Venice hotel follows the opening of the Orient Express La Minerva in Rome last year.

The brand also debuted a uxury train, La Dolce Vita Orient Express, in 2025, with its first sailing yacht, the Orient Express Corinthian, set to debut this summer in the Mediterranean.

HNR HOTEL NEWS

Orient Express Opens Hotel at Venice's Palazzo Donà Giovannelli

In Brief: Orient Express has opened the Orient Express Palazzo Donà Giovannelli hotel in Venice, following an eight-year restoration of the 15th-century building.

Orient Express Venezia - Image Credit Accor

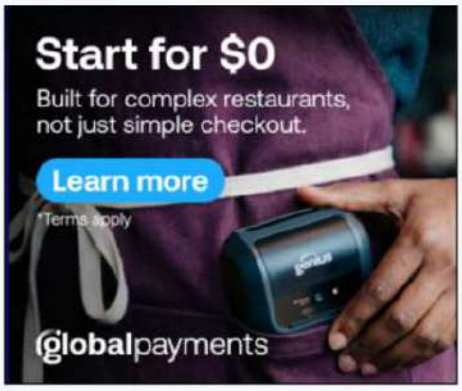
Orient Express has opened a new hotel in Venice, located in the restored Palazzo Donà Giovannelli in the Cannaregio district. Orient Express Venezia, the property is the brand's second hotel in Italy after the opening of Orient Express La Minerva in Rome.

Built in 1436 at the intersection of two canals in northern Venice, the palazzo is attributed to Filippo Calendario, architect of the Doge's Palace. Its façade features a motif similar to the Palazzo Ducale and includes seven Gothic windows overlooking the Rio de Noale. The building has passed through several owners, including the Donà and Giovannelli families, and previously served as a picture gallery before its conversion into a hotel.

The property includes an octagonal staircase added in the 19th century by Giovanni Battista Meduna, who also renovated Venice's Ca' d'Oro and La Fenice theatre. The Cannaregio area is home to Venice's Jewish Ghetto and several cultural sites, including the Ca' d'Oro museum and the house of Renaissance painter Tintoretto.

The eight-year restoration was led by architect and interior designer Aline Asmar d'Amman. The project preserved original frescoes by Italian artists, mosaic floors, and the building's Neo-Gothic and Baroque architectural elements.

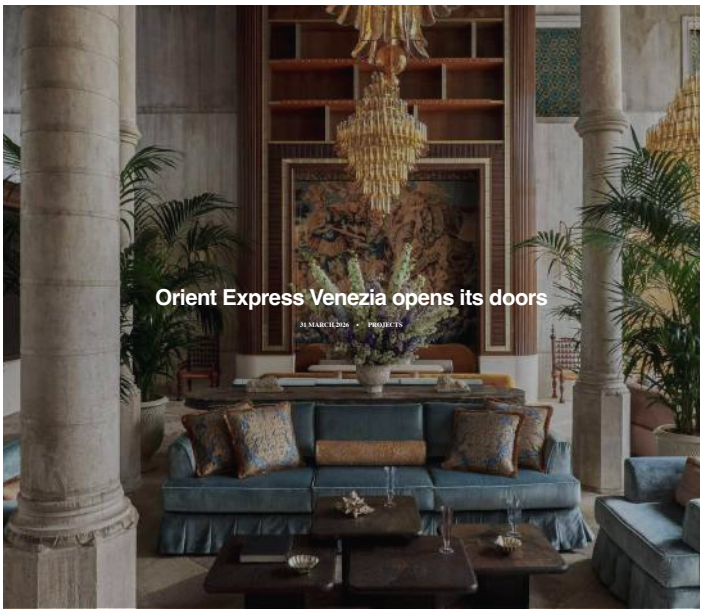
Advertisement



The hotel offers 47 rooms and suites, including six signature suites on the piano nobile and first floor, as well as apartments in an adjacent building with canal views. Room sizes range from 30-square-meter Classic Rooms to 148-square-meter Apartments. Interior features include Venetian sliding doors, hand-painted scenes, Art Deco fixtures, Murano glass accents, vaulted ceilings, and original frescoes.

Guests arrive by private boat, entering through a 15th-century Gothic portal on the canal or through a doorway into the Santa Fosca garden. The building retains original passageways and ballrooms. Facilities include a fine dining restaurant, an all-day dining space overlooking the courtyard and garden, a Wagon Bar inspired by rail travel, and a lobby bar.

The opening of Orient Express Palazzo Donà Giovannelli is part of a broader strategy to expand the Orient Express brand across hotels, trains, and sailing yachts. The brand previously opened Orient Express La Minerva in Rome and the La Dolce Vita Orient Express luxury train. A Guerlain Spa aboard Orient Express sailing yachts is scheduled to launch in June 2026.



Orient Express Venezia opens its doors

31 MARCH 2026 • PROJECTS

Orient Express Venezia has opened its doors within Palazzo Donà Giovannelli, marking the group's second hotel in Venice.

Owned by Arsenale Group, the 15th-century palazzo has been reimagined as a hotel by architect and interior designer Aline Asmar d'Amman. Her aesthetic vision unveils the Palazzo through a refined interplay of contrasts and memories, intentional architecture and poetic precision: bold gestures of interior architectural grafting are balanced with infinitely sophisticated details, painted frescoes meet sculptural forms, historical details infinitely reflect into tinted mirrored surfaces. An array of precious natural stones, curated and highly crafted, merge into the Palazzo's architecture.

"I imagined the transformation of Orient Express Venezia at Palazzo Donà Giovannelli as a theatrical sequence of wonders, a tribute to the whimsical mysteries of Venice and the spectacular marvels of the 15th architectural jewel, unearthed and restored," comments Aline Asmar D'Amman. "In this eight- year creative transformative journey, the walls speak, revealing layers of enchantment magnified by the dialogue with contemporary creation. Embracing the duality of legacy and reinvention, I find inspiration in the unique position of Venice as a gateway between East and West, amplified by its exceptional tapestry of artistry and modern vitality."

The "Lost Colours" or "Colori Persi" of Venice softly re-emerge, woven into textures and curtains, furnishings and finishes, transforming the Piano Nobile's historical salons into a succession of inhabited living canvases, punctuated by a bold intervention of vast cabinets. Venetian craftsmanship converses with contemporary art and works by masters of their time, while embossed leathers and moiré silks dress up the walls in echo to the ever-shifting dialogue of light and shadow dancing across the canals. Patinated walls, carved surfaces and artisanal finishes recall the passage of time, their textures lending a sense of modern, ageless allure.

The Palazzo's lobby, il Corte del Conte, has been transformed from an open mineral cortile into a grand living room, layered with sculpted boiserie, velvet and spectacular bespoke Murano chandeliers.

Hidden at the heart of the palazzo is a secret garden with tents, a luxuriant fountain and antique gates, lit by delicate Venetian lanterns diffusing their cinematic warm glow. Calle Meraviglia connects the garden to the lobby, hosting a rotating selection of contemporary works aligned with Venice's cultural calendar and reinforcing the hotel's role as a living cultural salon.

Every path and each floor lead to countless discoveries and encounters with marvels of the past, in magnetic dialogue with creative nowness. The result is a world of theatrical elegance where centuries of Venetian creativity meet the timeless codes of Orient Express.

Upstairs, the 47 rooms, suites and residences are gently shaped by the architectural layers of centuries past with restored murals, sculptural ceilings and views opening onto gardens and canals. The six Signature Suites reveal the hotel's hidden treasures: 19th-century frescoes dedicated to the goddess Minerva and mythical flying figures that evoke the grandeur of a bygone era; gilded salons animated by dancing cherubs; monumental marble fireplaces with sculptural shells, all flanked with tall windows opening onto some of the most coveted views over Venice's canals.

Overseen by three-Michelin-starred Chef Heinz Beck, the hotel's culinary programme comprises Heinz Beck Venezia, an intimate fine-dining concept within the historic orangerie; all-day dining restaurant La Casati; and The Wagon Bar, an Art Deco-inspired bar that pays homage to the legendary lounge cars of the original Orient Express trains.

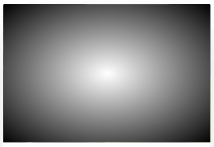
Meanwhile on the first floor, Salone Vittoria, is an events space that embodies the splendour and historical memory of Princess Vittoria Farnese's wedding, preserving centuries of ceremonial glamour.

"With Orient Express Venezia, we open a new chapter in the legacy of our brand, one that celebrates Venice as a global capital of culture, beauty and imagination," says Gilda Perez-Alvarado, CEO Orient Express. "Palazzo Donà Giovannelli has been revived with extraordinary craftsmanship and deep respect for its six centuries of history, becoming a place where the art of travel meets the soul of the city. This hotel embodies the essence of Orient Express: a constellation of rare experiences, each rooted in heritage yet reimagined for a new generation of discerning travellers. Venice now stands as a luminous cornerstone of our vision, bridging past and future, and inviting guests into a world of timeless elegance and discovery."

"With the refurbishment of the iconic Palazzo Donà Giovannelli we continue our strategy of investing in unique heritage assets and unlocking their long-term value through thoughtful redevelopment," adds Paolo Barletta, CEO Arsenale Group. "The new Orient Express Venezia at Palazzo Donà Giovannelli represents a meaningful step in the development of a distinctive portfolio that brings together iconic locations and a contemporary approach to ultra-luxury. The Palazzo embodies a unique dialogue between history and innovation, where centuries of Venetian culture are carefully reinterpreted through a modern lens. Venice remains one of the most strategic destinations in international travel, and this project, together with hotel Orient Express La Minerva in Rome and La Dolce Vita Orient Express trains, reflects our commitment to strengthening Italy's position at the forefront of global luxury experiences, through long-term investment in assets of enduring cultural and economic value."

ORIENT EXPRESS

RELATED POSTS

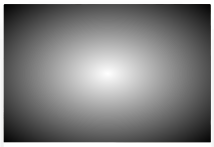


26 September 2025

Orient Express to unveil new train at Art Deco centenary exhibition

30 November 2022

Orient Express unveils Presidential Suite at Design Miami/



25 March 2021

Orient Express to debut in Rome in 2023

Sign up for Sleeper's free email alerts

SIGN UP

SLEEPER MEDIA

Home About Media Pack AHEAD Subscribe Contact Cookie Policy

We are using cookies to give you the best experience on our website.
You can find out more about which cookies we are using or switch them off in settings.

Accept Reject

HOSPITALITY & CATERING NEWS

A Legendary 15th-Century Venetian Palazzo Reawakened: Orient Express Venezia Opens in Venice

March 31, 2026

Share | Share | Pin | 0 | Share

aha accessible hospitality alliance
For a hospitality world that welcomes everyone

Orient Express proudly unveils Orient Express Venezia at Palazzo Donà Giovannelli, the extraordinary rebirth of the 15th century architectural jewel, owned by Arsenale Group, reimagined by architect and interior designer Aline Asmar d'Amman as a hotel, for the first time in nearly six centuries. A new icon in the brand's constellation of ultra-luxury travel experiences, the hotel invites guests into a world where Venetian history, contemporary artistry and the legendary spirit of the Orient Express art of travel converge in perfect harmony. Once a celebrated crossroad on the legendary route from Paris to Istanbul, Venice reclaims its role as a theatrical gateway for the Orient Express world of luxury travel.

Nestled in the quiet rhythm of Cannaregio, the Palazzo rises where two canals intertwine along the Rio di Noale, an address of serenity, history, and cinematic beauty. Here, Orient Express introduces a new chapter in its Italian journey, following the opening last year of the hotel Orient Express La Minerva in Rome and La Dolce Vita Orient Express, the luxury train inaugurated in 2025.

Meticulously conceived by Aline Asmar d'Amman, known for her ability to weave heritage architecture with contemporary artistic expression, the Palazzo has been restored with deep respect for its origin, introducing a sense of refined contemporary elegance. Her creative vision shapes the journey in a sequence of wonders, informed by the stories embedded in every architectural detail she unearthed. Embracing the Serenissima's legendary legacy as a gate between East and West, she choreographs this theatrical journey, where imagination, craftsmanship, and centuries of Venetian culture converge. The hotel features 47 uniquely crafted rooms, suites, and residences, where each space is elevated with intentional interiors and singular atmosphere, reflecting the layered architectural history of the building and the romance of Venetian living.

Palazzo Donà Giovannelli has long embodied the spirit of Venice as a crossroad of culture and imagination. In the mid-19th century, Count Andrea Giovannelli commissioned architect Giovanni Battista Meduna, celebrated for restoring the neighbouring Ca' d'Oro, to reimagine its interiors with neogothic galore, Baroque flourishes, and the Palazzo's iconic octagonal staircase crowned by a celestial vault.

During the Ninth Congress of Italian Scientists in 1847, the Palazzo reopened as a stage for salons, debates, and grand receptions. In these historical spaces, intellect and imagination thrived. Over the years, the Palazzo grew through love and noble alliances, as reflected in the Salone Vittoria, a setting befitting royalty.

Today, Orient Express Venezia rekindles that spirit. As day shifts into night, The Grand Transformation subtly alters the mood, lights soften, candles flicker, and the Palazzo becomes a theatre of shadows, reflections, and whispered intrigue. A handpicked Cast of Characters guides guests through curated experiences, immersing them in a world where every moment is an act in a larger narrative.

Aline Asmar d'Amman's aesthetic vision unveils the Palazzo through a refined interplay of contrasts and memories, intentional architecture, and poetic precision: bold gestures of interior architectural grafting are balanced with infinitely sophisticated details, painted frescoes meet sculptural forms, historical details infinitely reflect into tinted mirrored surfaces. An array of exquisite, precious natural stones, meticulously curated and highly crafted, merge into the Palazzo's architectural body, weaving moments of sensual wonderment in the most intimate spaces.

The "Lost Colours" or "Colori Persi" of Venice softly re-emerge, woven into textures and curtains, furnishings, and finishes, transforming the Piano Nobile's historical salons into a succession of inhabited living canvases, punctuated by a bold intervention of vast cabinets of wonder. Venetian craftsmanship converses with contemporary art and works by masters of their time, while embossed leathers and moiré silks dress up the walls in echo to the ever-shifting dialogue of light and shadow dancing across the canals. Patinated walls, carved surfaces and artisanal finishes recall the passage of time, their textures lending a sense of modern, ageless allure.

One of the most unexpected revelations of this transformation is the Palazzo's lobby, il Corte del Conte, once an open mineral cortile, elevated into a grand living room, layered with sculpted boiserie, velvet lushness and spectacular bespoke Murano chandeliers, balancing the soul of a home with a dramatic sense of theatre.

The Palazzo's secret garden, a secluded sanctuary hidden at its heart, surprises and delights with its whimsical corners, sophisticated tents, luxuriant fountain and antique gates, lit by delicate Venetian lanterns diffusing their cinematic warm glow. Long concealed behind centuries old walls, the garden is transformed into an almost otherworldly space where nature, architecture, and the sound of silence meet. Calle Meraviglia, a realm of discoveries, connects the garden to the lobby, hosting a rotating selection of contemporary works aligned with Venice's cultural calendar and reinforcing the hotel's role as a living cultural salon.

Every path and each floor lead to countless discoveries and encounters with marvels of the past, in magnetic dialogue with creative rawness. The result is a world of theatrical elegance where centuries of Venetian creativity meet the timeless codes of Orient Express.

The 47 rooms, suites, and residences reveal the intimate elegance of Venetian life, each space gently shaped by the architectural layers of centuries past. Restored murals, sculptural ceilings, and views opening onto gardens and canals create a rare and immersive sense of place.

History comes alive in the six Signature Suites, each telling a different story: Orient Express Suite, Colori Persi Suite, Del Conte Suite, Teatro Suite, Cherubini Suite and La Minerva Suite.

Exclusive spaces ranging up to 145 sqm reveal the hotel's most hidden treasures: 19th- century frescoes dedicated to the goddess Minerva and mythical flying figures that evoke the grandeur of a bygone era, gilded salons animated by dancing cherubs, monumental marble fireplaces with mesmerizing sculptural shells, all flanked with tall windows opening onto some of the most coveted views over Venice's canals. Each suite is a unique experience, where artistic heritage meets contemporary luxury.

The culinary vision of Orient Express Venezia is anchored by the signature of Three-Michelin-starred Chef Heinz Beck, marking one of the most anticipated gastronomic debuts of the year. His creative imprint elevates the entire food & beverage universe of the palazzo.
Heinz Beck Venezia, an intimate gourmet concept by the acclaimed chef, unfolds within the historic orangerie, offering a fine dining and deeply sensorial culinary journey designed exclusively for the hotel.
La Casati, the hotel's all-day dining restaurant, channels the theatrical, avant garde spirit of Marchesa Luisa Casati. Featuring a rare private garden, it becomes a stage where Heinz Beck's philosophy meets Venetian inspiration in a choreography of flavour, artistry, and spectacle.
The Wagon Bar, an Art Deco-inspired bar, pays homage to the legendary lounge cars of the original Orient Express trains, blending crafted mixology with a touch of mystery and nocturnal charm.

Salone Vittoria, located at the first noble floor of the hotel, embodies the splendour and historical memory of a venue once dedicated to the wedding of Princess Vittoria Farnese. A treasure trove of extraordinary architectural and artistic beauty, it preserves centuries of elegance and ceremonial glamour, re-imagined to host the most solemn moments in the heart of Venice.

Guests may arrive directly by boat through the Gothic water gate, a dramatic and evocative gesture that recalls the timeless romance of travel between East and West and sets the tone for a stay that interlaces heritage, culture, and culinary excellence. Beyond the palazzo's interiors, guests are invited to experience Venice through the lens of Orient Express, exploring the surrounding streets of Cannaregio, or discovering the city's storied craftsmanship and artistic traditions.

"With Orient Express Venezia, we open a new chapter in the legacy of our brand, one that celebrates Venice as a global capital of culture, beauty, and imagination. Palazzo Donà Giovannelli has been revived with extraordinary craftsmanship and deep respect for its six centuries of history, becoming a place where the art of travel meets the soul of the city.
This hotel embodies the essence of Orient Express: a constellation of rare experiences, each rooted in heritage yet reimagined for a new generation of discerning travellers. Venice now stands as a luminous cornerstone of our vision, bridging past and future, and inviting guests into a world of timeless elegance and discovery," Gilda Perez-Alvarado, CEO Orient Express.

"With the refurbishment of the iconic Palazzo Donà Giovannelli we continue our strategy of investing in unique heritage assets and unlocking their long-term value through thoughtful redevelopment. The new Orient Express Venezia at Palazzo Donà Giovannelli represents a meaningful step in the development of a distinctive portfolio that brings together iconic locations and a contemporary approach to ultra-luxury. The Palazzo embodies a unique dialogue between history and innovation, where centuries of Venetian culture are carefully reinterpreted through a modern lens. Venice remains one of the most strategic destinations in international travel, and this project, together with hotel Orient Express La Minerva in Rome and La Dolce Vita Orient Express trains, reflects our commitment to strengthening Italy's position at the forefront of global luxury experiences, through long-term investment in assets of enduring cultural and economic value." Paolo Barletta, CEO Arsenale Group.

"I am truly proud to unveil the opening of Orient Express Venezia, a destination where timeless elegance meets contemporary luxury. This magnificent project is not only a milestone, but a heartfelt tribute to Venice's unique heritage and spirit of hospitality. I look forward to personally welcoming guests from around the world to share in an experience that is both authentic and unforgettable." Bartolomeo Fusco, General Manager Orient Express Venezia.

"I imagined the transformation of Orient Express Venezia at Palazzo Donà Giovannelli as a theatrical sequence of wonders, a tribute to the whimsical mysteries of Venice and the spectacular marvels of the 15th architectural jewel, unearthed and restored. In this eight- year creative transformative journey, the walls speak, revealing layers of enchantment magnified by the dialogue with contemporary creation. Embracing the duality of legacy and reinvention, I find inspiration in the unique position of Venice as a gateway between East and West, amplified by its exceptional tapestry of artistry and modern vitality." Aline Asmar D'Amman, Architect & Interior Designer.

EMAIL NEWSLETTER

Subscribe to our email newsletter and keep a close eye on the UK hospitality and catering business

SUBSCRIBE

WELCOME IN SPRING AT THE INSTITUTE OF HOSPITALITY GOLF DAY

aha accessible hospitality alliance

SEARCH H&C NEWS

Search the site ...

JOIN OUR EMAIL NEWSLETTER COMMUNITY

MEIKO

KITCHEN PORTERS CLUB

SUPPLIER NEWS

Kate Skinner Wins Springboard FutureChef 2025/26

Country Range's Catalogue Grows with Addition of Duo of Desserts

Milestone For Meiko as 10,000th M-iQ Machine is Built

Rare Acquisition Opportunity: Contents of Selsdon Park Hotel go to Auction

France's Cidres Wignac Unveils Brand Refresh

A piece of architectural history

Why Static Rates Fail: Rethinking Hotel Pricing Strategy in a Dynamic Market

Country Range Group Begins Year with BDD Bonanza

CRG Champions the Unsung Heroes of Foodservice with Clean Range Pro Launch

Copyright © Hospitality & Catering News

Rebecca Nicholson · 22 hours ago

Inside Venice's New Opening: Orient Express Venezia

The Orient Express is continuing its expansion beyond the rails, and its latest move may be its most impressive yet.

Now open in Venice, Orient Express Venezia brings the brand's signature glamour to one of Italy's most historic palazzos, marking its second hotel launch in the country.

Set within the 15th-century Palazzo Donà Giovannelli in the quieter Cannaregio district, the property offers a more private, residential feel, while still delivering the theatricality synonymous with the Orient Express name.

A Historic Palazzo, Reimagined

Originally built in 1436, the palazzo has been transformed into a hotel for the first time in nearly 600 years. The redesign, led by architect and interior designer Aline Asmar d'Amman, carefully balances preservation with modern luxury.

Original frescoes, carved detailing and patinated walls have been restored, while contemporary materials, moiré silks, embossed leathers and natural stone—introduce a refined, layered aesthetic.

Arrival sets the tone: guests enter via a Gothic water gate, stepping directly from the canal into what was once an internal courtyard, now reimagined as a richly dressed lounge complete with velvet seating and Murano glass chandeliers.

A standout feature is the hotel's hidden garden, offering a rare moment of calm in Venice, with lantern-lit spaces designed for private dining and relaxed evenings.

Rooms That Reflect Venetian Grandeur

The hotel houses 47 rooms, suites and residences, each individually designed to reflect the building's heritage.

The six Signature Suites, spanning up to 1,560 square feet, are the most striking, featuring restored 19th-century frescoes, marble fireplaces and grand salon-style living spaces. High ceilings and large windows frame views across the canals and gardens, reinforcing the sense of staying within a private Venetian residence.

Dining, Cocktails and Wellness

Dining is led by Heinz Beck, who brings his signature precision to the hotel's fine-dining restaurant. A more relaxed offering is available at La Casati, while the Wagon Bar draws inspiration from the original Orient Express carriages, pairing Art Deco interiors with classic cocktails and Venetian cicchetti.

The hotel also features a spa inspired by ancient Roman thermal rituals, alongside a grand ballroom designed for private events and celebrations.

Orient Express Expands in Italy

The Venice opening follows the brand's Rome debut in 2025 and forms part of a wider strategy to position Italy at the centre of its evolving hospitality portfolio, which now spans trains, hotels and upcoming yacht experiences.

With Orient Express Venezia, the brand delivers exactly what today's luxury traveller is looking for: heritage, privacy, and a sense of place, without compromising on design or experience.

Travel

Recent Posts See All

This Design-Led Safari Lodge in Uganda Offers Rare Access to...

Moving Abroad With Pets? Why Portugal Is Leading the Way in...

A £24 Million Scandinavian Retreat Is Rising In The Heart O...

Comments

Write a comment

For all enquiries, please contact:

We use cookies on our website to see how you interact with it. By accepting, you agree to our use of such cookies. Privacy Policy

Settings Accept

First Class
JERK

Where to Stay in Venice

THE UPGRADE LIST #13: for your next Biennale or just for the hell of it.

FIRST CLASS JERK
APR 02, 2026 • PAID

We're finally getting over our jetlag (and sunburn) from the South Pacific...just in time to repack for another trip across the pond.

We're headed east this time, back to a certain castle that we know and love. And, thankfully, the UV index shouldn't be of any issue. But we'll have to say our prayers that the rains don't spoil plans for a bit of golf on the Emerald Isle.

In other news, we're putting the finishing touches on our return to the old world for nearly a month this summer...entirely dedicated to Italy. No Venice on the itinerary, unfortunately. But if it were, we'd already have a room booked at the newly opened Orient Express Venezia. This one looks very, very good.

> Let's talk about these OE hotels for a moment. Everyone knows the Orient Express brand for trains. But the real play now is turning that mythology into places you can stay. (Both on land and on water.)
>
> We're seeing that shift take place in Venice as we speak.

This new hotel takes over a 15th-century palazzo right where two canals meet. 47 rooms in total in a city that was always part of the original Orient Express route. A good story, backed by serious execution.

This is what we've come to expect from Orient Express hotels, particularly when it comes to ***finishing quality***. Like in fine watchmaking, it's the details that stay with you. The things you can look closely at and admire, but also touch. It's an area where hotels can quietly separate themselves. And OE is clearly leaning in.

We saw it firsthand last year at Orient Express La Minerva in Rome. Even after just staying for one night, the level of finishing quality stuck. It remains fresh in our minds. Because details like these don't fade:

The marble-encased shower // the shower of our dreams. An entire room of deep-red Italian marble, with pressure strong enough to reset even the worst of travel days. We said it before: bury us in a coffin replica of this shower.

The vintage lamps // great lighting makes any space. Hotels that take the time to source historically significant designs that actually elevate it are truly dear to us.

The mirrored television // every luxury hotel room with a bulky wall-mounted TV should take notice. It's such a subtractor. We've lost count of how many times we've felt like we're at a Michael Scott dinner party.

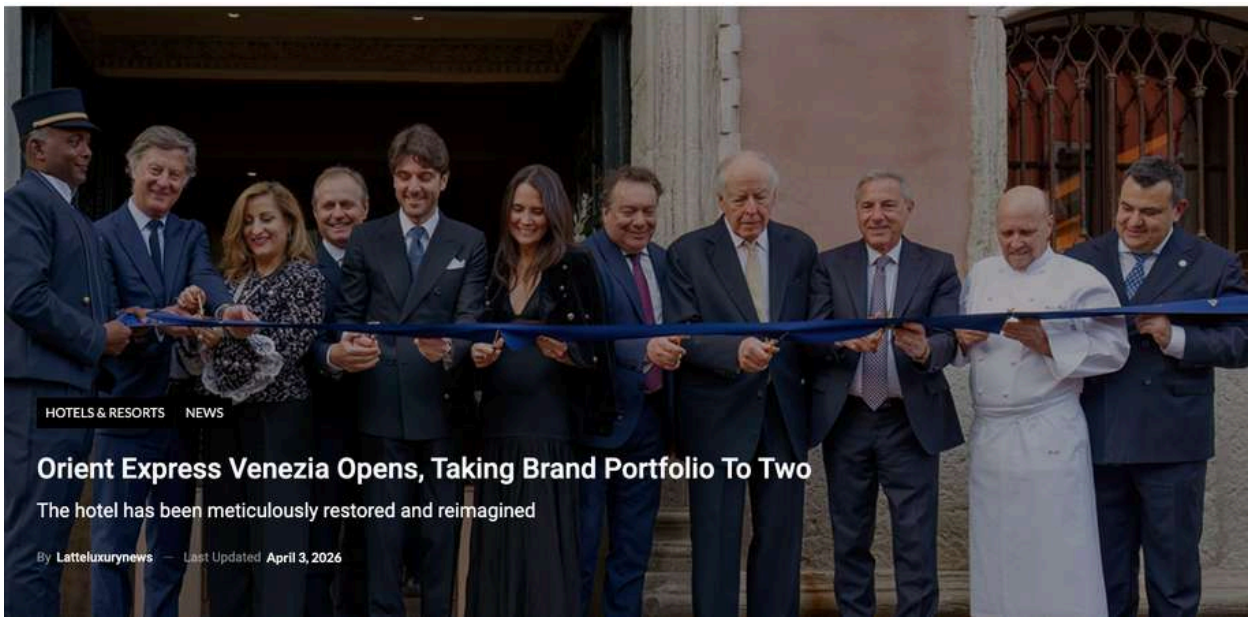
The tile work in the half bath // standout design and *quality quality quality*. We felt like we were in a space that was designed to be enjoyed every day, not just photographed once. That should be the benchmark.

The brass light switches // so tactilely-pleasing that we found ourselves flipping them for no reason at all. Let's forget the touch screens.

The luggage rack // possibly the best we've ever seen...especially designed for the space by architect Hugo Toro. (We need one at home!)

After writing this, Venice might need to find its way onto our summer calendar after all. Because we're sure that Orient Express Venezia will bring more of the same.

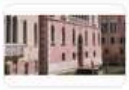
LATTE



The opening of **Orient Express Venezia**, the brand's second property after **Orient Express La Minerva** in Rome, brings new life to the 15th century **Palazzo Donà Giovannelli**.

Officially unveiled on 30 March 2026, the hotel has been meticulously restored and reimagined as a luxury destination for the first time in nearly six centuries.

"I am truly proud to unveil the opening of Orient Express Venezia, a destination where timeless elegance meets contemporary luxury," **General Manager Bartolomeo Fusco** said. "This magnificent project is not only a milestone, but a heartfelt tribute to Venice's unique heritage and spirit of hospitality."



Located in the tranquil Cannaregio district, where two canals meet along the Rio di Noale, the property blends historical grandeur with contemporary design. The transformation was led by architect and interior designer **Aline Asmar d'Amman**, whose vision preserves the palazzo's heritage while introducing modern elegance.

"I imagined the transformation of Orient Express Venezia at Palazzo Donà Giovannelli as a theatrical sequence of wonders, a tribute to the whimsical mysteries of Venice and the spectacular marvels of the 15th architectural jewel, unearthed and restored," d'Amman said.

The hotel features 47 individually designed rooms, suites, and residences, each reflecting the layered history of the building and the romance of Venetian life. Restored frescoes, sculptural ceilings, and views over canals and gardens create an immersive atmosphere that connects guests to centuries of culture. Six signature suites further highlight the palazzo's artistic legacy, incorporating elements such as 19th-century frescoes and ornate marble fireplaces.

Historically, the palazzo served as a vibrant cultural hub, hosting salons and gatherings during the 19th century, including the Ninth Congress of Italian Scientists in 1847. Today, that spirit has been revived through curated guest experiences and atmospheric design.

Dining is another central feature of the hotel, led by acclaimed chef **Heinz Beck**. His culinary concepts range from fine dining in the historic orangerie to more theatrical all-day experiences inspired by Venetian culture, reinforcing the hotel's blend of artistry and hospitality.

The opening also reflects a broader vision for the Orient Express brand, reestablishing Venice as a key destination along its legendary travel route.

The A-List of Travel ®
LUXURY TRAVEL
MAGAZINE

Orient Express Venezia Opens: A 15th Century Palazzo Reawakened

Orient Express unveils Orient Express Venezia at Palazzo Donà Giovannelli, the extraordinary rebirth of the 15th century architectural jewel, owned by Arsenale Group, reimagined by architect and interior designer Aline Asmar d'Amman as a hotel, for the first time in nearly six centuries. A new icon in the brand's constellation of ultra-luxury travel experiences, the hotel invites guests into a world where Venetian history, contemporary artistry and the legendary spirit of the Orient Express art of travel converge in perfect harmony. Once a celebrated crossroad on the legendary route from Paris to Istanbul, Venice reclaims its role as a theatrical gateway for the Orient Express world of luxury travel.

Nestled in the quiet rhythm of Cannaregio, the Palazzo rises where two canals intertwine along the Rio di Noale, an address of serenity, history,and cinematic beauty. Here, Orient Express introduces a new chapter in its Italian journey, following the opening last year of the hotel Orient Express La Minerva in Rome and La Dolce Vita Orient Express, the luxury train inaugurated in 2025.

Meticulously conceived by Aline Asmar d'Amman, known for her ability to weave heritage architecture with contemporary artistic expression, the Palazzo has been restored with deep respect for its origin, introducing a sense of refined contemporary elegance. Her creative vision shapes the journey in a sequence of wonders, informed by the stories embedded in every architectural detail she unearthed. Embracing the Serenissima's legendary legacy as a gate between East and West, she choreographs this theatrical journey, where imagination, craftsmanship, and centuries of Venetian culture converge. The hotel features 47 uniquely crafted rooms, suites, and residences, where each space is elevated with intentional interiors and singular atmosphere, reflecting the layered architectural history of the building and the romance of Venetian living.

A THEATRICAL VOYAGE, SET IN MOTION BY ORIENT EXPRESS

Palazzo Donà Giovannelli has long embodied the spirit of Venice as a crossroad of culture and imagination. In the mid-19th century, Count Andrea Giovannelli commissioned architect Giovanni Battista Meduna, celebrated for restoring the neighboring Ca' d'Oro, to reimagine its interiors withneogothic galore, Baroque accents, and the Palazzo's iconic octagonal staircase crowned by a celestial vault.

During the Ninth Congress of Italian Scientists in 1847, the Palazzo reopened as a stage for salons, debates, and grand receptions. In these historical spaces, intellect and imagination thrived. Over the years, the Palazzo grew through love and noble alliances, as reflected in the Salone Vittoria, a setting befitting royalty.

Today, Orient Express Venezia rekindles that spirit. As day shifts into night, The Grand Transformation subtly alters the mood, lights soften,candles flicker, and the Palazzo becomes a theatre of shadows, reflections, and whispered intrigue. A handpicked Cast of Characters guides guests through curated experiences, immersing them in a world where every moment is an act in a larger narrative.

A MASTERPIECE RESTORED WITH DEVOTION AND WONDER

Aline Asmar d'Amman's aesthetic vision unveils the Palazzo through a refined interplay of contrasts and memories, intentional architecture, and poetic precision: bold gestures of interior architectural grafting are balanced with infinitely sophisticated details, painted frescoes meet sculptural forms, historical details infinitely reflect into tinted mirrored surfaces. An array of exquisite precious natural stones, meticulously curated and highly crafted, merge into the Palazzo's architectural body, weaving moments of sensual wonderment in the most intimate spaces.

The “Lost Colors” or “Colori Persi” of Venice softly re-emerge, woven into textures and curtains, furnishings, and finishes, transforming the Piano Nobile’s historical salons into a succession of inhabited living canvases, punctuated by a bold intervention of vast cabinets of wonder. Venetian craftsmanship converses with contemporary art and works by masters of their time, while embossed leathers and moiré silks dress the walls, echoing the ever-shifting dialogue of light and shadow dancing across the canals. Patinated walls, carved surfaces and artisanal finishes recall the passage of time, their textures lend a sense of modern, ageless allure.

One of the most unexpected revelations of this transformation is the Palazzo’s lobby, il Corte del Conte, once an open mineral cortile, elevated intoa grand living room, layered with sculpted boiserie, velvet lushness and spectacular bespoke Murano chandeliers, balancing the soul of a home with a dramatic sense of theater.

The Palazzo’s secret garden, a secluded sanctuary hidden at its heart, surprises and delights with its whimsical corners, sophisticated tents,luxuriant fountain and antique gates, lit by delicate Venetian lanterns diffusing their cinematic warm glow. Long concealed behind centuries old walls, the garden is transformed into an almost otherworldly space where nature, architecture, and silence meet. Calle Meraviglia, a realm of discoveries, connects the garden to the lobby, hosting a rotating selection of contemporary works aligned with Venice’s cultural calendar and reinforcing the hotel’s role as a living cultural salon.

Every path and each floor lead to countless discoveries and encounters with marvels of the past, in magnetic dialog with creative nowness. The result is a world of theatrical elegance where centuries of Venetian creativity meet the timeless codes of Orient Express.

LIVING SPACES, CULTURAL ATMOSPHERES

The 47 rooms, suites, and residences reveal the intimate elegance of Venetian life, each space gently shaped by the architectural layers of centuries past. Restored murals, sculptural ceilings, and views opening onto gardens and canals create a rare and immersive sense of place.

History comes alive in the six Signature Suites, each telling a different story: Orient Express Suite, Colori Persi Suite, Del Conte Suite, Teatro Suite, Cherubini Suite and La Minerva Suite.

Exclusive spaces ranging up to 145 sqm reveal the hotel’s most hidden treasures: 19th-century frescoes dedicated to the goddess Minerva andmythical flying figures that evoke the grandeur of a bygone era, gilded salons animated by dancing cherubs, monumental marble fireplaces with mesmerizing sculptural shells, all flanked with tall windows opening onto some of the most coveted views over Venice’s canals. Each suite is a unique experience, where artistic heritage meets contemporary luxury.

THE ART OF DINING

The culinary vision of Orient Express Venezia is anchored by the signature of Three-Michelin starred Chef Heinz Beck, marking one of the most anticipated gastronomic debuts of the year. His creative imprint elevates the entire food & beverage universe of the palazzo.

Heinz Beck Venezia, an intimate gourmet concept by the acclaimed chef, unfolds within the historic orangerie, offering a fine dining and deeply sensorial culinary journey designed exclusively for the hotel. La Casati, the hotel's all-day dining restaurant, channels the theatrical, avant garde spirit of Marchesa Luisa Casati. Featuring a rare privategarden, it becomes a stage where Heinz Beck's philosophy meets Venetian inspiration in a choreography of flavor, artistry, and spectacle. The Wagon Bar, an Art Deco-inspired bar, pays homage to the legendary lounge cars of the original Orient Express trains, blending crafted mixology with a touch of mystery and nocturnal charm.

A STAGE WHERE EVERY MOMENT AND CELEBRATION BECOME A STORY

Salone Vittoria, located at the first noble floor of the hotel, embodies the splendor and historical memory of a venue once dedicated to the wedding of Princess Vittoria Farnese. A treasure trove of extraordinary architectural and artistic beauty, it preserves centuries of elegance and ceremonial glamour, re-imagined to host the most solemn moments in the heart of Venice.

Guests may arrive directly by boat through the Gothic water gate, a dramatic and evocative gesture that recalls the timeless romance of travel between East and West and sets the tone for a stay that interlaces heritage, culture, and culinary excellence. Beyond the palazzo's interiors, guests are invited to experience Venice through the lens of Orient Express, exploring the surrounding streets of Cannaregio, or discovering thecity's storied craftsmanship and artistic traditions.

"With Orient Express Venezia, we open a new chapter in the legacy of our brand, one that celebrates Venice as a global capital of culture, beauty, and imagination. Palazzo Donà Giovannelli has been revived with extraordinary craftsmanship and deep respect for its six centuries of history, becoming a place where the art of travel meets the soul of the city.

This hotel embodies the essence of Orient Express: a constellation of rare experiences, each rooted in heritage yet reimagined for a newgeneration of discerning travelers. Venice now stands as a luminous cornerstone of our vision, bridging past and future, and inviting guests into aworld of timeless elegance and discovery." Gilda Perez-Alvarado, CEO Orient Express.

"With the refurbishment of the iconic Palazzo Donà Giovannelli we continue our strategy of investing in unique heritage assets and unlockingtheir long-term value through thoughtful redevelopment. The new Orient Express Venezia at Palazzo Donà Giovannelli represents a meaningful step in the development of a distinctive portfolio that brings together iconic locations and a contemporary approach to ultra-luxury. The Palazzo embodies a unique dialogue between history and innovation, where centuries of Venetian culture are carefully reinterpreted through a modernlens. Venice remains one of the most strategic destinations in international travel, and this project, together with hotel Orient Express La Minerva in Rome and La Dolce Vita Orient Express trains, reflects our commitment to strengthening Italy's position at the forefront of global luxuryexperiences, through long-term investment in assets of enduring cultural and economic value." Paolo Barletta, CEO Arsenale Group.

“I am truly proud to unveil the opening of Orient Express Venezia, a destination where timeless elegance meets contemporary luxury. This magnificent project is not only a milestone, but a heartfelt tribute to Venice’s unique heritage and spirit of hospitality. I look forward to personally welcoming guests from around the world to share in an experience that is both authentic and unforgettable.” Bartolomeo Fusco, General Manager Orient Express Venezia.

“I imagined the transformation of Orient Express Venezia at Palazzo Donà Giovannelli as a theatrical sequence of wonders, a tribute to the whimsical mysteries of Venice and the spectacular marvels of the 15th architectural jewel, unearthed and restored. In this eight-year creative transformative journey, the walls speak, revealing layers of enchantment magnified by the dialog with contemporary creation. Embracing theduality of legacy and reinvention, I find inspiration in the unique position of Venice as a gateway between East and West, amplified by its exceptional tapestry of artistry and modern vitality.” Aline Asmar D’Amman, Architect & Interior Designer.

MARKETS OF TMW

The second ever Orient Express hotel debuts in Venice

Orient Express has opened its second hotel with the debut of Orient Express Venezia, bringing the brand to Venice inside the restored 15th-century Palazzo Donà Giovannelli. The opening follows last year's launch of Orient Express La Minerva in Rome and continues the brand's expansion across Italy alongside the La Dolce Vita Orient Express train.

Palazzo Donà Giovannelli traces its origins back to the 15th century and has long served as a setting for Venetian cultural life. In the 19th century, Count Andrea Giovannelli commissioned architect Giovanni Battista Meduna—known for restoring Ca' d'Oro—to transform the interiors with neogothic and baroque elements, including the palazzo's octagonal staircase crowned by a celestial vault. The building later hosted salons, debates, and gatherings during the Ninth Congress of Italian Scientists in 1847, reinforcing its role as a stage for intellectual and social exchange.

Exterior Façade, image courtesy of Orient Express Venezia, Giulio Ghirardi

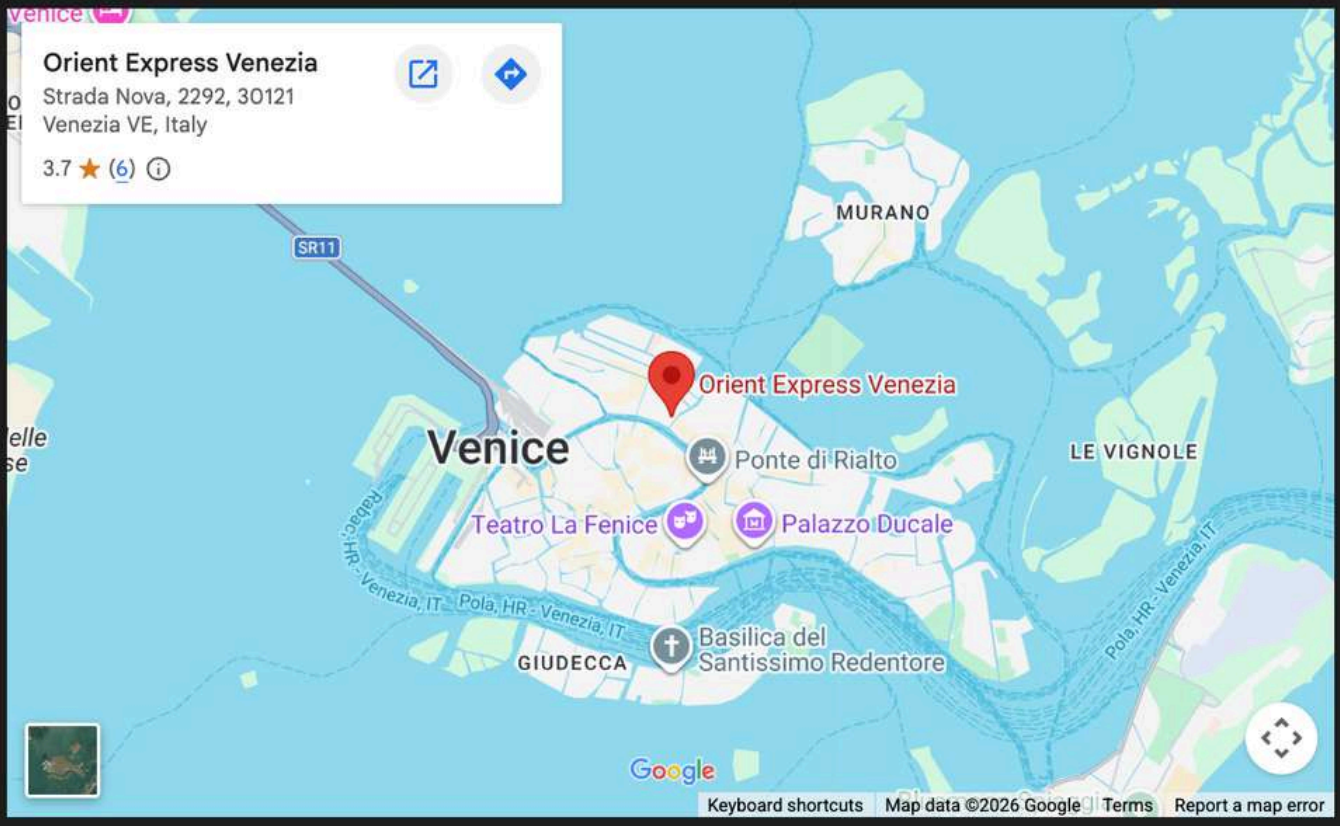
Owned by Arsenale Group, the palazzo has now been reimagined as a hotel for the first time in nearly six centuries. Architect and interior designer Aline Asmar d'Amman led the restoration and redesign, working across both architecture and interiors. Original frescoes, sculptural ceilings, and historic detailing have been preserved alongside new interventions including mirrored surfaces, custom furnishings, and Murano glass elements, reintroducing the building's layered character through a contemporary lens.

The hotel features 47 accommodations, including guestrooms, suites, and residences. Six signature suites—the Orient Express Suite, Colori Persi Suite, Del Conte Suite, Teatro Suite, Cherubini Suite, and La Minerva Suite—highlight restored 19th-century frescoes, marble fireplaces, and canal-facing views, with some of the largest layouts offering expansive living spaces within the historic structure.

Dining is led by three-Michelin-starred chef Heinz Beck, whose culinary direction anchors the hotel's food and beverage program. Heinz Beck Venezia serves as an intimate gourmet concept located within the palazzo's historic orangerie. La Casati operates as the hotel's all-day dining restaurant, set within a private garden and inspired by the theatrical legacy of Marchesa Luisa Casati. The Wagon Bar draws from the Art Deco design of the original Orient Express train cars, translating that identity into a cocktail-focused setting.

Additional spaces include Salone Vittoria, a restored ceremonial hall once used for major gatherings, now positioned for events within the hotel. A concealed interior garden, long hidden behind the palazzo's walls, has also been reopened as part of the transformation, alongside Calle Meraviglia, a passage connecting the garden to the main interiors and hosting rotating contemporary artworks tied to Venice's cultural calendar.

Guests arrive directly by boat through the palazzo's Gothic water gate, reinforcing its connection to Venice's historic modes of access and positioning the property within the city's canal network.



Overheard in the Penthouse: Orient Express is Betting Bigger Than You Think

So we built a nine-night itinerary to match—including scouting notes from our recent journey aboard La Dolce Vita

SMARTFLYER
APR 15, 2026

71 4 2 Share

Earlier this year, we had the pleasure of welcoming Accor Chairman and CEO **Sébastien Bazin** to the SmartFlyer Penthouse. What made his visit to our space in the **heart of Chelsea** special wasn't simply that it was to chat about the brand's sailing yacht set for a highly anticipated summer launch. No, what captured attention was that it was Sébastien's first-ever visit to a travel agency partner.

At the helm of Accor for over a decade, Sébastien looks after an expansive portfolio of brands out of its Paris headquarters. Our chat on all things Accor was grounded in the frankness you'd expect from a CEO, and notably brightened by his unexpected ease, charisma, and distinctly French sense of humor. Ultimately, what emerged most clearly from our conversation was Sébastien's conviction that the next frontier of luxury lies squarely in the revival of the Orient Express brand.

the hotel shortlist

The April Edit

Hotel openings, travel news, and the finds I can't stop thinking about.

RONEE | THE HOTEL SHORTLIST
APR 02, 2026

♡ 6 · 1 · Share · ···

Hi Friends!

I'm constantly discovering new-to-me hotels, following openings, and filing away bits of travel news that feel worth knowing. If you took a peek at my saved folders, Pinterest boards, and notes app, you'd find that I'm basically a hotel hoarder. But instead of keeping it all filed away, I figured I'd start a new series where I share some of the highlights with you.

Each month I'll round up the openings on my radar, the headlines worth your attention, and the spaces and places that stopped me mid-scroll. I'll also share a little of what I've been up to because I always enjoy getting to know creators beyond their work. Maybe you will too?

Let's get started!

Noted

Travel news worth knowing.

- ICE Agents are Now at US Airports — These Are Your Legal Rights (Condé Nast Traveler) - let's be careful out there and look out for our fellow humans.
- United Airlines debuts United Relax Now — a lie-flat economy couch similar to New Zealand Air's *Skycouch* - not ideal, but an interesting option.

Courtesy of The Cottages at Little Saint

Hotel Openings

Recent or soon-to-open design-led hotels on my radar.

- The Cottages at Little Saint - Healdsburg, United States - The maximalist Ken Fulk-designed hotel in Northern California wine country is made for a whimsical girls' getaway.
- The Huntington Hotel - San Francisco, United States - The Nob Hill icon reopened in March after a Ken Fulk-led renovation (he's clearly having a moment).
- The Hôtel Lili - Beverly Hills, United States - Just opened this month, the pet-friendly boutique hotel from Palisociety would make for a solid home base for exploring the area.
- Capella Kyoto - Kyoto, Japan - Nature-forward architecture by Kengo Kuma architecture in the heart of Kyoto's geisha district. Say less!
- Airelles Palladio Venezia - Venice, Italy - The French hotel group rumored to be the backdrop for the next season of *White Lotus* (St. Tropez, specifically) makes its Italian debut on Giudecca Island, with uninterrupted views of Piazza San Marco.
- Orient Express Palazzo Donà Giovannelli - Venice, Italy - The iconic travel brand known for rail journeys opens a 15th-century palazzo complete with frescoed ceilings and a private boat arrival.

- Four Seasons I - Mediterranean & Caribbean - The brand's first-ever yacht just set sail, and while Four Seasons isn't known for surprises, this one looks like the kind of serene, beautifully considered cruise I could actually get behind.
- Azuma Farm Koiwai - Iwate, Japan - Adrian Zecha (founder of Aman) is back with a new brand. Given that he's also behind Azumi Setoda, which I stayed at last year, I have high hopes for this one. Opening April 23rd.

New-to-Me

Spaces & places that stopped me mid-scroll and immediately made it into one of my (meticulously-organized) saved folders.

- L'Adventure - Paris, France - Just came across this theatrical hotel/restaurant/club from **Group Beaumarly** with Arc de Triomphe views. It's designed by **Vincent Darré** and **Martin Brudnizki**, two of the most maximalist designers working today, so you know the interiors are stunning.
- Hotel Endsleigh - Devon, England - A misty, romantic Regency hunting lodge filled with whimsical wallpaper, clawfoot tubs, and 100 acres of dreamy gardens designed by **Humphry Repton**. Consider me officially obsessed.

Lately

Recent travels, current obsessions, and everything in between.

My parents came to visit us on Kauai, which was such a welcome distraction from the increasingly terrifying news cycle. We were set to go to Oahu for a little trip down memory lane (my dad was born and raised there), but due to both the devastating Kona Low flooding and my son getting sick we ended up cancelling.

Not sure how much is getting covered outside Hawaii, but the flooding was catastrophic for a lot of people. If you're looking for ways to help those impacted, check out this article from Honolulu Magazine.

On a lighter note — my birthday is coming up so I asked my husband to make a cozy window seat in our bedroom as my gift. I'll be ordering a custom cushion from Etsy and would love some help deciding on a fabric. I've been very into the pink/red combo lately and found some options on Spoonflower that I'm considering:

I've also been thinking of doing a little island hop solo spa getaway for my birthday (maybe Sensei Lānai or Rosewood Kona Village), but am a bit hesitant to travel right now due to the volatile political climate. Anyone else feeling this way?

Truly I've been a bit of a hermit lately. Haven't felt like posting on social media or "doing" much besides reading and binge watching period dramas. I'm up to date on Bridgerton and Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story and just started The Gilded Age (it's been harder to get into this one) on HBO Max. Also recently watched Eternity (a fantasy rom-com with Elizabeth Olsen and Miles Teller) on Apple TV and really enjoyed it. Recently read *Book Lovers* by Emily Henry (big fan of her books in general) and *The House Across The Lake* by Riley Sager. Both were enjoyable, but not life-changing. What are you reading or watching? Any recs?

I got this backpack from Lululemon (mostly because I had the AMEX credit to utilize), but I ended up loving it. It's got space for my laptop and tons of pockets which are key, but I think my favorite feature is the secure strap for sliding it onto your luggage handle, which makes it the perfect personal item imo.

And that concludes our first monthly edit. I'd love to hear what's useful and what you want more/less of. Feel free to let me know in the comments!

TRAVEL+ LEISURE

The Orient Express Venezia Just Opened in Italy—and We Were the First to Stay

Venice's Palazzo Donà Giovanelli has been transformed into the Orient Express Venezia, with 47 guest rooms, dining by one of Italy's most decorated chefs, and an opulent ballroom.

Orient Express Venezia.
Credit: Giulio Ghirardi/Orient Express Venezia

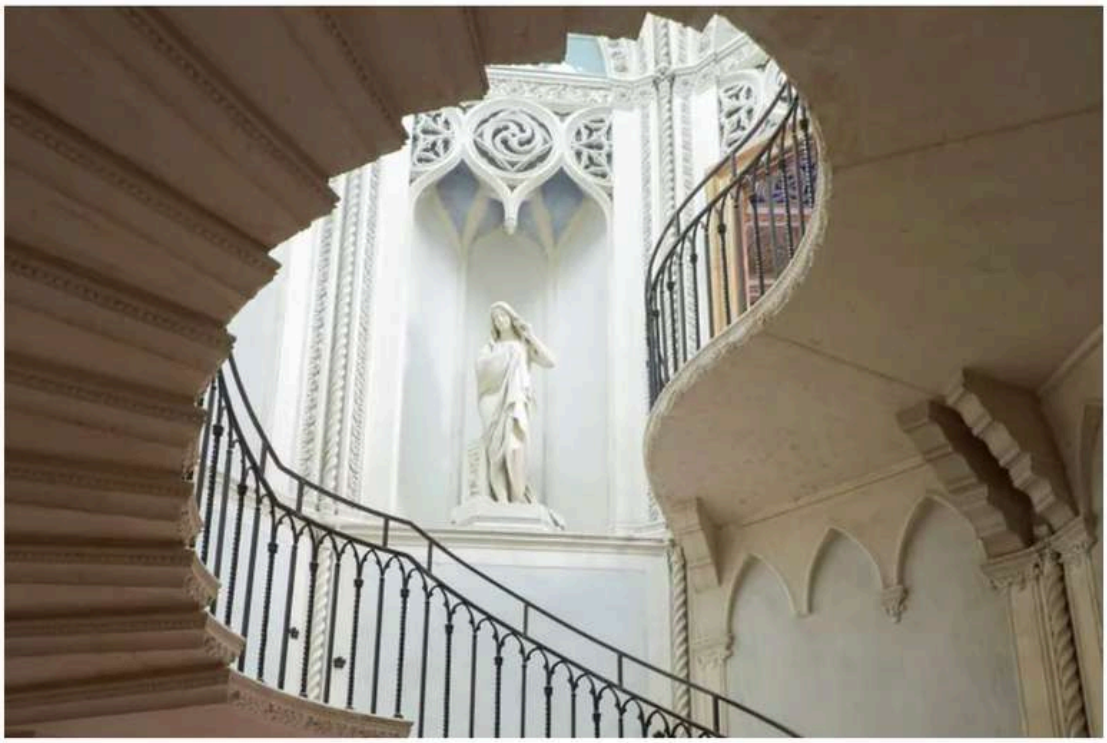
WHAT WE LIKE

- The opulent design by architect Aline Asmar d'Amman seamlessly blends original architectural details with plush velvet-upholstered sofas, Murano glass chandeliers, and bespoke furnishings.
- The dining program is overseen by Heinz Beck, the lauded German chef behind La Pergola, Rome's only three-Michelin-star restaurant.
- The hotel's exclusive list of experiences includes wine tastings at Venissa, the winery and Michelin-starred restaurant on the island of Mazzorbo, and fittings at the atelier of Antonia Sautter, the woman behind the most exclusive masked ball during Carnevale.

ORIENT EXPRESS VENEZIA

Dusk was starting to descend as I followed a *codega,* a masked guide, out into the narrow streets of Venice. Dressed in a long black cape and a white Bauta mask, she led the way with a lantern, just as codegas did in the 15th century, when Palazzo Donà Giovanelli—the noble palace reborn as the newly opened Orient Express Venezia—was built. Back then, she said, Venice was plunged into total darkness every night, making it dangerous for Venetians to navigate the narrow lanes and canals, so nobles would hire these lantern-bearers to escort them around the city.

As she led me through covered passageways and over bridges, she explained that the Cannaregio district, where the hotel is located, developed as a diverse neighborhood where merchants from all over settled. Meanwhile, Venice's wealthy families built palazzos with private gardens, the ultimate luxury in this floating city. After a 40-minute stroll, we were on a pier where a gondolier was waiting. A bit cliché now, yes, but in the days of the Venetian Republic, every noble family had a private gondola to transport them around town. As I glided along the narrow canals by moonlight, I tried to imagine what the city was like then.



The grand hotel staircase.
Credit: Giulio Ghirardi/Orient Express Venezia

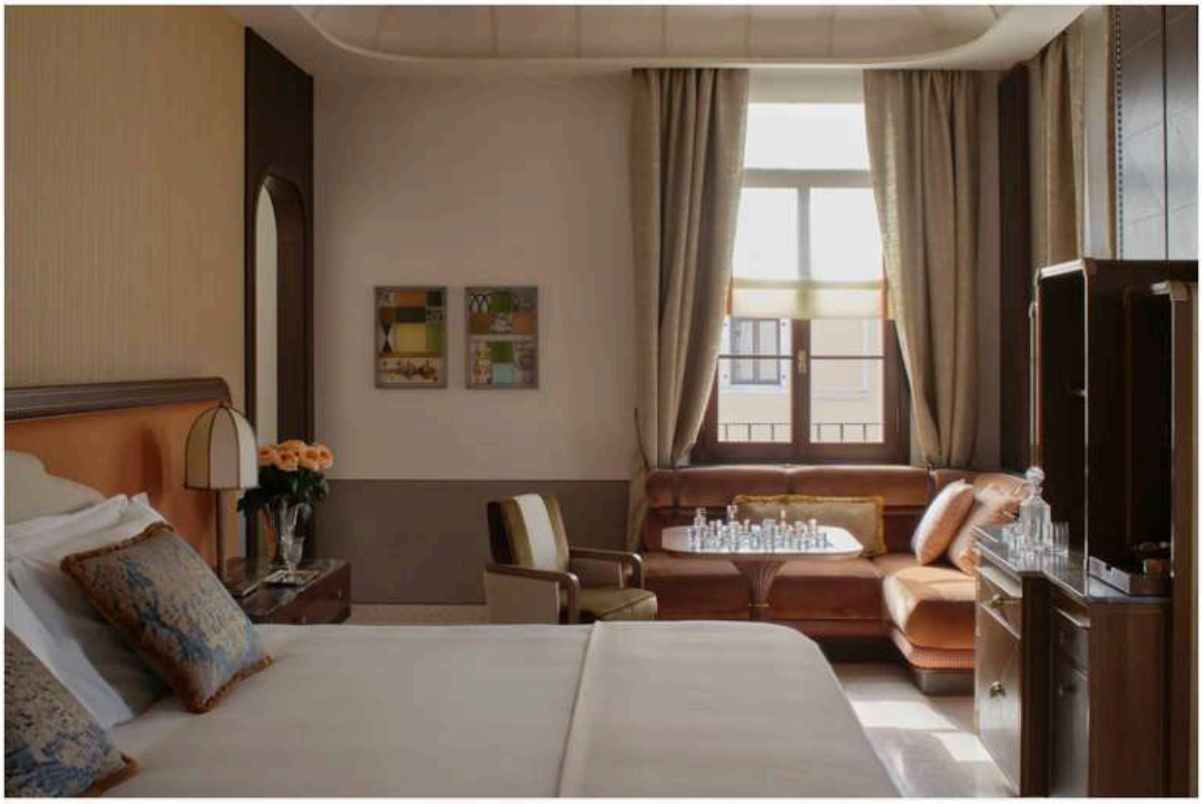
"Palazzo Donà Giovanelli has so many layers that you peel. The first time I walked into the palazzo, I had this sense of Old World theater but also vitality," says architect Aline Asmar d'Amman, gesturing up at the grand octagonal staircase crowned by a celestial vault. It took eight years of painstaking restorations to return the building to its former glory and transform it into the city's newest luxury hotel. Orient Express Venezia is the second in the portfolio of the reborn Orient Express brand, which launched last year with the opening of the Orient Express La Minerva in Rome and La Dolce Vita Orient Express train.

"We want this hotel [Orient Express Venezia] to feel like an open living room in Canareggio," says Gilda Perez-Alvarado, CEO of Orient Express. "It's a private mansion, in the end. That's what it's always been for 600 years. We don't want it to lose this residential essence."

The hotel's opening marks the first time anyone can book a room at Palazzo Donà Giovanelli, or even stop by for an *aperitivo* or a meal, for that matter. As I wandered through the elegant salons of the piano nobile, with ornate frescoes, gilded moldings, and carved wooden doors, I was enveloped by centuries of history. There seemed to be a hidden treasure around every corner, from the Music Room to the Ballroom where Princess Vittoria Farnese was wed in the 16th century.

Read on for my review of the Orient Express Venezia.

The Rooms



A Junior Suite.
Credit: Giulio Ghirardi/Orient Express Venezia

1 of 3

The hotel's 47 guest rooms and suites range from cozy 323-square-foot Superior Rooms to spacious and opulent Signature Suites with soaring ceilings, original frescoes, and chandeliers. Regardless of category, all accommodations feature comfortable beds, bespoke wardrobes and minibars, Lavazza espresso machines, Dyson hairdryers, and marble bathrooms with sculpted pedestal sinks and full-sized Guerlain bath products.

The six Signature Suites are fit for royalty, with canopy headboards and moire wallcoverings that evoke the undulating water of the canals. The Orient Express Apartment has a monumental sculpted fireplace, wood marquetry floors, and 18th-century mirrors, while the Cherubini Suite is crowned by a 1958 chandelier by Carlo Scarpa and frescoes depicting cherubs.

Food and Drink

La Casati Restaurant.
Credit: Giulio Ghirardi/Orient Express Venezia

The hotel's dining program bears the imprint of decorated chef Heinz Beck, who also created the menus for the Orient Express train. La Casati, named for the eccentric 1920s marquise Luisa Casati, is the hotel's all-day dining destination. Don't expect burgers and Caesar salad; the menu offers sophisticated twists on Venetian fare like pasta filled with creamed cod, yellow tomatoes, and sumac, or beef braised in amarone wine with grilled red chicory.

Beck's eponymous fine dining restaurant and the Wagon Bar, inspired by art deco trains, are coming soon. In the warmer months, both La Casati and Heinz Beck Venezia will offer the chance to dine al fresco in the palazzo's garden.

The Spa

The Sala della Cultura.
Credit: Giulio Ghirardi/Orient Express Venezia

Although not yet open, the spa will feature two treatment rooms. One will include a steam bath as part of the rasul treatments, drawing inspiration from ancient Ottoman spa rituals. Massages and facials will incorporate the organic Sicilian skincare line Furtuna Skin. A gym overlooking the canal will be equipped with Technogym equipment, free weights, and strength training machines.

Accessibility

The public spaces, including the restaurants, are fully accessible, and there's an elevator to bring guests to the upper floors. There are two ADA-accessible rooms.

How to Book

Interior of the hotel lobby.
Credit: Giulio Ghirardi/Orient Express Venezia

The hotel participates in Accor's All loyalty program, which offers members perks such as 10 percent off standard rates, upgrades, and late check-out. It is also part of American Express Fine Hotels & Resorts. Card members receive a $100 resort credit, complimentary daily breakfast for two, and more.

Nightly rates at Orient Express Venezia start from 1,210 euros ($1,395).

Every T+L hotel review is written by an editor or reporter who has stayed at the property, and each hotel selected aligns with our core values.

TravelDreamsMagazine
What is your version of living the dream?

Orient Express Venezia Opens Today: A 15th Century Palazzo Reawakened

Venice, Italy – March 30, 2026 – Orient Express proudly unveils Orient Express Venezia at Palazzo Donà Giovannelli, the extraordinary rebirth of the 15th century architectural jewel, owned by Arsenale Group, reimagined by architect and interior designer Aline Asmar d'Amman as a hotel, for the first time in nearly six centuries. A new icon in the brand's constellation of ultra-luxury travel experiences, the hotel invites guests into a
world where Venetian history, contemporary artistry and the legendary spirit of the Orient Express art of travel converge in perfect harmony. Once a celebrated crossroad on the
legendary route from Paris to Istanbul, Venice reclaims its role as a theatrical gateway for the Orient Express world of luxury travel.

Nestled in the quiet rhythm of Cannaregio, the Palazzo rises where two canals intertwine along the Rio di Noale, an address of serenity, history,and cinematic beauty. Here, Orient Express introduces a new chapter in its Italian journey, following the opening last year of the hotel Orient Express La Minerva in Rome and La Dolce Vita Orient Express, the luxury train inaugurated in 2025.

Meticulously conceived by Aline Asmar d'Amman, known for her ability to weave heritage architecture with contemporary artistic expression, the Palazzo has been restored with deep respect for its origin, introducing a sense of refined contemporary elegance. Her creative vision shapes the journey in a sequence of wonders, informed by the stories embedded in every architectural detail she unearthed. Embracing the Serenissima's legendary legacy as a gate between East and West, she choreographs this theatrical journey, where imagination, craftsmanship, and centuries of Venetian culture converge. The hotel features 47 uniquely crafted rooms, suites, and residences, where each space is elevated with intentional interiors and singular atmosphere, reflecting the layered architectural history of the building and the romance of Venetian living.

A THEATRICAL VOYAGE, SET IN MOTION BY ORIENT EXPRESS

Palazzo Donà Giovannelli has long embodied the spirit of Venice as a crossroad of culture and imagination. In the mid-19th century, Count Andrea Giovannelli commissioned architect Giovanni Battista Meduna, celebrated for restoring the neighboring Ca' d'Oro, to reimagine its interiors withneogothic galore, Baroque accents, and the Palazzo's iconic octagonal staircase crowned by a celestial vault.

During the Ninth Congress of Italian Scientists in 1847, the Palazzo reopened as a stage for salons, debates, and grand receptions. In these historical spaces, intellect and imagination thrived. Over the years, the Palazzo grew through love and noble alliances, as reflected in the Salone Vittoria, a setting befitting royalty.

Today, Orient Express Venezia rekindles that spirit. As day shifts into night, *The Grand Transformation* subtly alters the mood, lights soften,candles flicker, and the Palazzo becomes a theatre of shadows, reflections, and whispered intrigue. A handpicked *Cast of Characters* guides guests through curated experiences, immersing them in a world where every moment is an act in a larger narrative.

A MASTERPIECE RESTORED WITH DEVOTION

Aline Asmar d'Amman's aesthetic vision unveils the Palazzo through a refined interplay of contrasts and memories, intentional architecture, and poetic precision: bold gestures of interior architectural grafting are balanced with infinitely sophisticated details, painted frescoes meet sculptural forms, historical details infinitely reflect into tinted mirrored surfaces. An array of exquisite precious natural stones, meticulously curated and highly crafted, merge into the Palazzo's architectural body, weaving moments of sensual wonderment in the most intimate spaces.

The "Lost Colors" or "*Colori Persi*" of Venice softly re-emerge, woven into textures and curtains, furnishings, and finishes, transforming the Piano Nobile's historical salons into a succession of inhabited living canvases, punctuated by a bold intervention of vast cabinets of wonder. Venetian craftsmanship converses with contemporary art and works by masters of their time, while embossed leathers and moiré silks dress the walls, echoing the ever-shifting dialogue of light and shadow dancing across the canals. Patinated walls, carved surfaces and artisanal finishes recall the passage of time, their textures lend a sense of modern, ageless allure.

One of the most unexpected revelations of this transformation is the Palazzo's lobby, il Corte del Conte, once an open mineral cortile, elevated intoa grand living room, layered with sculpted boiserie, velvet lushness and spectacular bespoke Murano chandeliers, balancing the soul of a home with a dramatic sense of theater.

The Palazzo's secret garden, a secluded sanctuary hidden at its heart, surprises and delights with its whimsical corners, sophisticated tents,luxuriant fountain and antique gates, lit by delicate Venetian lanterns diffusing their cinematic warm glow. Long concealed behind centuries old walls, the garden is transformed into an almost otherworldly space where nature, architecture, and silence meet. Calle Meraviglia, a realm of discoveries, connects the garden to the lobby, hosting a rotating selection of contemporary works aligned with Venice's cultural calendar and reinforcing the hotel's role as a living cultural salon.

Every path and each floor lead to countless discoveries and encounters with marvels of the past, in magnetic dialog with creative nowness. The result is a world of theatrical elegance where centuries of Venetian creativity meet the timeless codes of Orient Express.

LIVING SPACES, CULTURAL ATMOSPHERES

The 47 rooms, suites, and residences reveal the intimate elegance of Venetian life, each space gently shaped by the architectural layers of centuries past. Restored murals, sculptural ceilings, and views opening onto gardens and canals create a rare and immersive sense of place.

History comes alive in the six Signature Suites, each telling a different story: Orient Express Suite, Colori Persi Suite, Del Conte Suite, Teatro Suite, Cherubini Suite and La Minerva Suite.

Exclusive spaces ranging up to 145 sqm reveal the hotel's most hidden treasures: 19th-century frescoes dedicated to the goddess Minerva andmythical flying figures that evoke the grandeur of a bygone era, gilded salons animated by dancing cherubs, monumental marble fireplaces with mesmerizing sculptural shells, all flanked with tall windows opening onto some of the most coveted views over Venice's canals. Each suite is a unique experience, where artistic heritage meets contemporary luxury.

THE ART OF DINING

The culinary vision of Orient Express Venezia is anchored by the signature of Three-Michelin starred Chef Heinz Beck, marking one of the most anticipated gastronomic debuts of the year. His creative imprint elevates the entire food & beverage universe of the palazzo.

Heinz Beck Venezia, an intimate gourmet concept by the acclaimed chef, unfolds within the historic orangerie, offering a fine dining and deeply sensorial culinary journey designed exclusively for the hotel. La Casati, the hotel's all-day dining restaurant, channels the theatrical, avant garde spirit of Marchesa Luisa Casati. Featuring a rare privategarden, it becomes a stage where Heinz Beck's philosophy meets Venetian inspiration in a choreography of flavor, artistry, and spectacle. The Wagon Bar, an Art Deco-inspired bar, pays homage to the legendary lounge cars of the original Orient Express trains, blending crafted mixology with a touch of mystery and nocturnal charm.

Salone Vittoria, located at the first noble floor of the hotel, embodies the splendor and historical memory of a venue once dedicated to the wedding of Princess Vittoria Farnese.
A treasure trove of extraordinary architectural and artistic beauty, it preserves centuries of elegance and ceremonial glamour, re-imagined to host the most solemn moments in the heart of Venice.

Guests may arrive directly by boat through the Gothic water gate, a dramatic and evocative gesture that recalls the timeless romance of travel between East and West and sets the tone for a stay that interlaces heritage, culture, and culinary excellence. Beyond the palazzo's interiors, guests are invited to experience Venice through the lens of Orient Express, exploring the surrounding streets of Cannaregio, or discovering thecity's storied craftsmanship and artistic traditions.

"With Orient Express Venezia, we open a new chapter in the legacy of our brand, one that celebrates Venice as a global capital of culture, beauty, and imagination. Palazzo Donà
Giovannelli has been revived with extraordinary craftsmanship and deep respect for its six centuries of history, becoming a place where the art of travel meets the soul of the city.

This hotel embodies the essence of Orient Express: a constellation of rare experiences, each rooted in heritage yet reimagined for a newgeneration of discerning travelers. Venice now stands as a luminous cornerstone of our vision, bridging past and future, and inviting guests into aworld of timeless elegance and discovery." Gilda Perez-Alvarado, CEO Orient Express.

"With the refurbishment of the iconic Palazzo Donà Giovannelli we continue our strategy of investing in unique heritage assets and unlockingtheir long-term value through thoughtful redevelopment. The new Orient Express Venezia at Palazzo Donà Giovannelli represents a meaningful step in the development of a distinctive portfolio that brings together iconic locations and a contemporary approach to ultra-luxury. The Palazzo embodies a unique dialogue between history and innovation, where centuries of Venetian culture are carefully reinterpreted through a modernlens. Venice remains one of the most strategic destinations in international travel, and this project, together with hotel Orient Express La Minerva in Rome and La Dolce Vita Orient Express trains, reflects our commitment to strengthening Italy's position at the forefront of global luxuryexperiences, through long-term investment in assets of enduring cultural and economic value." Paolo Barletta, CEO Arsenale Group.

“I am truly proud to unveil the opening of Orient Express Venezia, a destination where timeless elegance meets contemporary luxury. This magnificent project is not only a milestone, but a heartfelt tribute to Venice’s unique heritage and spirit of hospitality. I look forward to personally welcoming guests from around the world to share in an experience that is both authentic and unforgettable.” Bartolomeo Fusco, General Manager Orient Express Venezia.

“I imagined the transformation of Orient Express Venezia at Palazzo Donà Giovannelli as a theatrical sequence of wonders, a tribute to the whimsical mysteries of Venice and the spectacular marvels of the 15th architectural jewel, unearthed and restored. In this eight-year creative transformative journey, the walls speak, revealing layers of enchantment magnified by the dialog with contemporary creation. Embracing theduality of legacy and reinvention, I find inspiration in the unique position of Venice as a gateway between East and West, amplified by its exceptional tapestry of artistry and modern vitality.” Aline Asmar D’Amman, Architect & Interior Designer.

YOLO

JOURNAL

Orient Express Venezia, Venice

The facade of Orient Express Venezia

In short... Right in the heart of charming Cannareggio, the new Orient Express Venezia occupies an immaculately restored 15th-century palazzo, with enchantment hiding behind every corner—embodying the true meaning of *La Serenissima*.

Walking around Cannareggio; View of the garden and Strada Nuova

The surroundings... Arriving into Venezia Santa Lucia (the city's central station), I was whisked outside by a hotel representative and directed canalside to an elegant water taxi. After a 15-minute ride through winding canals, passing historic palazzi, elegant commuters and the touristy but charming *gondoliere*, we pulled up to the pale pink facade of Orient Express Venezia. The property is in the northeastern neighborhood of Cannareggio, once the city's prominent merchant hub and home to many Renaissance artists. The dual frontage is a rare asset: the street side opens onto Strada Nuova, a busy thoroughfare lined with shops—you likely won't want to spend much time on it, but it's a well-connected artery for exploring the city on foot—while the lagoon side offers seclusion and easy access to Cannaregio's quieter streets, as well as a Vaporetto stop. Unlike many of Venice's larger luxury properties, you're not right on the busy Grand Canal, which is honestly a plus. And as the only true 5-star palace property in the area, it feels unique.

The garden; Stairway to the Piano Nobile

The backstory... Located in Palazzo Donà Giovannelli, the Orient Express Venezia opened last week after 8 years of intense and immaculate restoration. The palazzo has a rich history: originally built with rumored connections to the architect of the iconic Doge's Palace, it passed through the hands of various noble families during its heyday, before being restored in the mid-19th century by famed architect and restoration expert, Giovannie Battista Meduna. After years of abandonment, Orient Express took it over and for the restoration hired Lebanese architect Aline Asmar d'Amman, also known for her work at the Hotel de Crillon and Le Jules Verne atop the Eiffel Tower. I had the chance to meet Aline during my visit and she was so inspiring and full of passion for the property and the palazzo. While the entire hotel is incredible, with light-filled common areas and an innate attention to detail throughout, her *chef d'œuvre* lies in the 6 speciality suites on the piano nobile of the palazzo.

The lobby

The vibe... The property feels more like a traditional palazzo than a hotel. A small reception area and lobby seating area are appointed with elegantly effortless furnishings, coffee table books, and scattered plants, as guests are invited to lounge freely in this space, taking a morning cappuccino and an afternoon spritz in between hours exploring the city. There's a leafy, shaded inner courtyard just off of the lobby, and a large garden patio at the back of the lobby where you can also sit for a meal or aperitivo, and is lovely when the sun is shining. Inside an enclave just before the lobby, a grand spiral staircase leads up to the piano nobile (more on that below), with intricate stonework and light pouring in from the skylight. A lovely contrast exists throughout between antiquity and modernity, especially within the common spaces—not unlike Venice itself.

Details from the signature suites

The rooms... The palazzo has only 47 keys, 6 of which belong to the collection of "Signature Suites" located on the noble floor of the palazzo. While most guests are unlikely to book these (very pricey) suites, they're emblematic of the care and intentionality brought to the intricate restoration of the palazzo and the hotel. I was lucky enough to get a tour of these rooms by Aline herself, who detailed the process of transforming them over the past 8 years. Each suite tells a different story in its design and artwork; Aline recalled coming in from Paris each week during the renovation, only to be surprised by a new fresco that had been excavated beneath years of stucco. As a former art history major (and someone who has seen her fair share of high-end hotel rooms), I found them truly awe-inspiring: each room with soaring ceilings of Renaissance frescoes to gold-leafing to intricately carved and painted wooden beams.

Moments from the signature suites

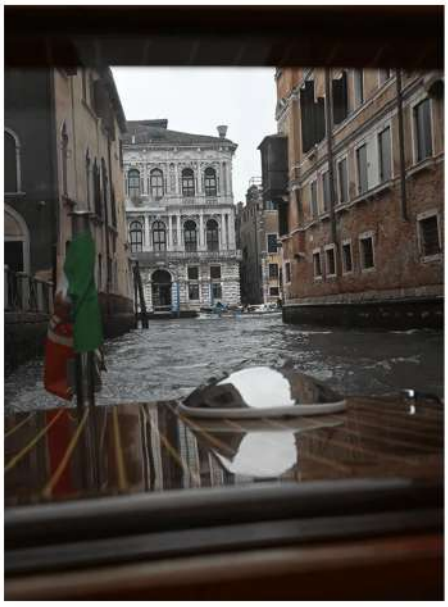
I imagine it feels like staying in a museum with the modern luxuries of a five-star hotel. TVs are expertly hidden in mirrors, charging ports and outlets are nowhere to be seen, and the bathrooms are constructed in genius "water closets" (which Aline called "salons de bain")—essentially standalone boxes in the room to preserve the integrity of the ceiling fresco. The closets are modeled on vintage travel trunks, and if you look closely enough, nothing is actually touching the walls in an effort to preserve the art. My favorite room was truly fit for a princess, complete with a Marie Antoinette-esque hidden bathroom disguised into the moiré ribbon wall. The beds are huge and adorned with beautiful draped canopies, and all of the cushions and chairs are made with beautiful Fortuny fabric.

Room 411

As for the 47 other rooms: I stayed in a superior room on the 4th (penultimate) floor, with a great view over Cannareggio—and on a clear day, of the Dolomites. It was sleek and modern, with touches reminiscent of the palazzo's history—exposed wood beams, beautiful marble floors, carpets that mimic the palazzo's frescoes, as well as classic Orient Express motifs—scattered velvet touches, standalone marble sinks, a leather-clad coffee machine, an incredibly plush robe and perfect bedsheets. The room had beautiful light and was very comfortable. I woke up to church bells and fell asleep to the sounds of water taxis rushing through the canals—pretty much perfect!

The food & drink... The property has three restaurants: Heinz Beck, a fine-dining option run by a Michelin-starred chef, La Casati; their more casual all-day dining restaurant, and The Wagon Bar, Art Deco-inspired and ideal for aperitivo and cichetti *alla Veneziana*. I didn't have a chance to eat there as our visit coincided with the hotel's opening party and meals were organized around special events, but the spaces are cozy with beautiful marble terrazzo.

The wellness... While the spa wasn't yet open, I'm sure it will be incredible, especially thanks to its partnership with Yolo favorite Furtuna Skin. The sumptuous toiletries in the room are by Guerlain. And there's no better workout than a brisk walk around the city, up and down canal bridges while trying to speed through crowds of tourists!



Commute from the station to the hotel; An antique Murano chess set Aline found for one of the suites

Is it kid-friendly? Yes—and Cannareggio is a great area for kids, walking distance to most major sights with ample room for running around right on your doorstep.

Parting words... Perfect for those looking for a true luxury experience without the hustle and bustle of being right on the Grand Canal, and the opportunity to be totally immersed in restored architectural splendor of a different era.

Date of stay... March 30th-April 1st, 2026

Premium global health cover

Learn more

Review

The SPA at Orient Express La Minerva, Rome review

Regenerative beauty and wellness rituals in the heart of the Eternal City

All listings featured on Condé Nast Traveller are independently selected by our editors. If you book something through our links, we may earn an affiliate commission.

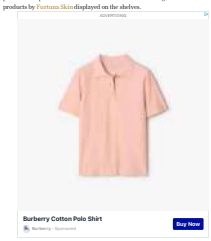
Alexander Talkoir

Reviewed by LAURA ITZKOWITZ

Set the scene

From the lobby of the resplendent Orient Express La Minerva, a member of the hotel's staff leads you up to the first floor, down a long hallway, and to the elevator that descends to the spa. As the doors open, you find yourself in a warm, wood-panelled reception room reminiscent of a 1920s train carriage with skincare products by Furtuna Skin displayed on the shelves.

ADVERTISING



Burberry Cotton Polo Shirt

Burberry · Sponsored

Buy Now

After inviting you to fill out an intake form, the receptionist escorts you to the wet area and offers you a cup of olive leaf tea with Sicilian black bee honey. You're in the heart of Rome's historic centre, just steps from the Pantheon, but this inviting space with tall ceilings, latticed oak woodwork, glowing lanterns made of hand-blown Murano glass, and fringed olive green sofas transports you to a Turkish hammam, if only in spirit.

You're encouraged to spend 30 minutes here relaxing before your treatment, first in the caldarium (the steam room), then in the tepidarium (a tepid space with marble benches along the walls), and finally in the frigidarium (the cold room). The circuit is inspired by ancient Roman baths and Ottoman hammams. Afterwards, your therapist will escort you to one of the treatment rooms, which feature the same latticed woodwork, stained oak cabinets, and veined marble counters.

What's the backstory?

Orient Express La Minerva opened in 2025 as the first hotel in the reborn Orient Express brand, which also includes luxury trains and soon-to-come sailing yachts. It's housed in the Fonseca Palace on Piazza della Minerva, which was built in 1620 and became a grand hotel in 1811. In its heyday, it was a favourite of artists and writers on the Grand Tour, but suffered a considerable decline under its previous management.

Following a complete redesign by the talented Mexican-French artist-architect Hugo Toro, its rebirth was much heralded by Romans who fondly remember the historic property, and affluent travellers alike. Like the hotel, the spa was inspired by the nostalgic lure of the Orient Express and its classic route from Paris to Istanbul.

What's the wellness concept?

Furtuna Skin is the exclusive skincare partner of the SPA at Orient Express La Minerva. Founded by former model Agatha Relota Luczo, the Italian luxury skincare brand – which counts celebrities like Martha Stewart and Hailey Bieber among its fans – practices regenerative agriculture on an 800-acre organic farm in Sicily. Its products harness the power of wild-grown botanicals, whose essences are extracted using sound baths for visibly transformative results.

"It's a regenerative farm and we try to bring that into Furtuna Skin by practicing regenerative beauty, taking clean beauty to the next level of how we think, how we take care of one another, and how we make our products," Luczo explains. "It's about leaving the world a better place than we found it."

What are the signature treatments?

The Furtuna Skin x La Minerva Exclusive Vibrancy Facial is a deeply relaxing 60-minute treatment that leaves you feeling radiant both inside and out. It involves the application of eight different products meant to cleanse, exfoliate, and replenish the skin and lips. A trained therapist uses an obsidian tool to perform Gua Sha, a technique rooted in Chinese medicine known for reducing puffiness, encouraging lymphatic drainage, and temporarily tightening the skin. The treatment also involves a 20-minute hand or foot massage while a replenishing mask works its magic on your face.

In addition to 60- and 90-minute facials and massages, there are also 15-minute express facials and foot massages for those with little time to spare. If you do have time, though, there are a variety of hammam rituals lasting between one and two hours. The 120-minute Dea Minerva Hammam Ritual, for example, starts with a foot soak in rose-scented water and involves a deep kassa exfoliation and a ghassoul clay wrap.

Which therapist should I book?

There are three therapists in addition to the spa manager, and they've all been trained by a representative from Furtuna Skin. My therapist, Eva, had a confident touch that made me feel at ease.

What makes it different?

To our knowledge, the SPA at the Orient Express La Minerva is the only place in Rome offering this kind of traditional Ottoman hammam treatment. And it's the only spa in Rome with treatments using products by Furtuna Skin.

"When we had the opportunity to partner with Minerva, it was the perfect partnership because we have the same philosophy, values, and goals," Luczo told me. "We're a luxury brand that respects artisan craftsmanship. It's all about complimenting the heritage of the Orient Express with Furtuna Skin and delivering the highest quality from all services."

What else do they offer?

The Gym and Kinesis rooms offer opportunities for movement-based fitness. The Gym is equipped with Technogym's Artis collection, while the Kinesis room has medicine balls, foam rollers, balance domes, dumbbells, and resistance bands. Private yoga, pilates, and personal training sessions are available upon request.

Where do you stay?

The hotel's 93 rooms and suites feature soundproof windows and supremely comfortable beds for a restful night's sleep. Just be careful not to overdo it at Gigi Rigolatto, the hotel's fabulous rooftop restaurant, where the bartenders tempt you with exquisite original cocktails and the menu features bits like truffle-laced cacio e pepe and grilled tenderloin with carabonciglli mushrooms.

Anything else to mention?

If you ask us, a relaxing treatment at the spa would be the ideal way to kick off – or recover from – a journey aboard La Dolce Vita Orient Express train, which is all about bringing back the glamour of slow travel. The train definitely feels more hedonistic than wholesome, with free-flowing Franciacorta, elaborate menus by Michelin-starred chef Heinz Beck, and post-dinner entertainment in the bar car. A facial would leave you glowing for the journey ahead, but a detoxifying session in the Turkish bath may be just what the doctor ordered after a few days of indulgence.

Final word

After that facial, my skin was glowing and I felt positively radiant. Luckily, the spa is open to external guests so I can return anytime I need a little pick-me-up. In more than a decade of covering hotels and spas, this has been one of my most memorable treatments.

BOOK NOW AT

All listings featured on Condé Nast Traveller are independently selected by our editors. If you book something through our links, we may earn an affiliate commission.

LOCATION MAP

CONTACT

Just Browsing: What's New At Gucci With Vogue Shopping

FIND OUT MORE

© Condé Nast Britain 2026.

MARCH 3, 2026

ROME'S ORIENT EXPRESS HOTEL OPENS THE SPA

BY JOSEPH FURNESS

A wellness journey from West to East, tracking the world's most famous train route

The steam has finally settled at Rome's Orient Express La Minerva, drifting into the long-awaited spa titled, with characteristic confidence, The SPA. It offers a necessary departure from the Eternal City's round-the-clock electricity, providing a retreat that remains deeply steeped in local ritual and custom.

Though the original 1883 line charted a more northern course, La Minerva reimagines the itinerary. The steam-led wellness experience maps the brand's iconic trajectory as it was conceived in Paris – led by French-Mexican architect Hugo Toro – and eventually finds its way to Istanbul, the train route's Eastern finale, represented by the Turkish Bathhouse.

Where the route goes off course is somewhere in between, where it celebrates its new Italian residency, achieved through Sicilian botanicals by Furtuna Skin and the three stages of the Roman thermal bath: the mild tepidarium, the sweltering caldarium and the invigorating frigidarium.

It is an itinerary for all the senses, proving that sometimes the most rewarding journeys happen when you wander off track.

Orient-express.com

© COPYRIGHT 2026 DESTINATIONS OF THE WORLD NEWS TERMS OF USE PRIVACY STATEMENT
DESTINATIONS OF THE WORLD NEWS AND DOTWNEWS.COM ARE PRODUCTS OF AND REGISTERED TRADEMARKS OF WWA LIMITED

© Orient Express La Minerva Sébastien Tabanier

Orient Express La Minerva hotel creates Ottoman-inspired spa

March 4, 2026

Rome's Orient Express La Minerva hotel has unveiled the Spa, a new wellness space inspired by Roman baths and Ottoman hammam rituals. Jenny Southan reports

Orient Express La Minerva in Rome has opened a new wellness space called the Spa, designed to reinterpret historic bathing traditions through architecture, ritual and skincare treatments. The facility draws inspiration from both ancient Roman thermal baths and the Ottoman hammam, creating a structured journey through steam, water and restorative therapies.

Designed by artist-architect Hugo Toro, the spa has been conceived as a sequence of immersive spaces that mirror the traditional stages of classical bathing rituals. The experience follows the progression of the tepidarium, calidarium and frigidarium, echoing the format of ancient Roman thermae where visitors move gradually between warm, hot and cold environments.

The tepidarium functions as a temperate area where guests begin to acclimatise, followed by the calidarium, a warmer space combining pools and steam. The experience concludes in the frigidarium, where cold water immersion provides a final invigorating stage. Together these elements form a journey designed to slow the pace of the day while preparing the body for different treatments.

Architecturally, the spa blends materials associated with Roman interiors with details inspired by Ottoman bathing culture. Brown travertine, veined red marble, stained oak and Roman-style plaster create a layered palette of stone, wood and textiles. Hand-blown Murano glass lighting produces a soft glow intended to evoke candlelight.

The central feature of the spa is a marble hammam designed for purification rituals. Small fountains inspired by Triton basins surround the structure, referencing decorative features used throughout the hotel's guest rooms. Contemporary moucharabieh screens filter light and sightlines, adding to the sense of enclosure and privacy.

Treatment spaces include shared relaxation areas as well as single and double treatment rooms. Canopy beds and woven textiles contribute to what the hotel describes as an atmosphere focused on elemental materials and tactile surfaces.

Among the signature treatments are two multi-stage rituals named Dea Minerva and Stop Constantinople. These experiences combine rose-infused foot baths, aromatic steam, kansa exfoliation, ghassoul clay wraps and foaming massages, followed by facial and hair treatments. The rituals draw on traditional hammam techniques that have evolved over centuries from Byzantium to Istanbul, emphasising water, heat and touch as restorative elements.

The spa's exclusive skincare partner is Italian brand Furtuna Skin, whose products are used throughout the treatments. The company develops skincare formulas using ingredients grown on its 800-acre organic estate in Sicily, La Furtuna Estate. These include extra-virgin olive oil, wild-foraged botanicals and medicinal herbs cultivated using biodiversity-focused agricultural methods.

Agatha Reteta Lucas, founder and CEO of Furtuna Skin, says: "At Furtuna Skin, our philosophy has always been rooted in the idea that true beauty is born from ritual, heritage, and a deep respect for the land. Partnering with the Spa at Orient Express La Minerva felt like a natural extension of that belief.

"The Spa's reverence for ancient purification traditions, historic elegance, and holistic restoration aligns with our own commitment to time-honored botanicals and transformative wellness. Together, we are crafting immersive rituals that nurture the skin, restore the spirit, and incite a sense of renewal befitting one of Rome's most storied destinations."

Specialist treatments developed for the spa include the Furtuna Skin x La Minerva Exclusive Vibrancy Facial, which combines manual massage techniques with tools such as an obsidian Gua Sha. The treatment is designed to stimulate circulation and detoxification while delivering active botanical ingredients to the skin.

In addition to the bathing and treatment areas, the wellness facilities include a gym and a Kinesis room equipped with Technogym Artis equipment and functional training tools. Personal trainers are available on request, with programmes including fitness training, yoga and Pilates tailored to individual goals.

Related Articles

Inside the revamped Orient Express train scheduled for 2027

Orient Express Sailing Yachts reveals 2027 itineraries

Orient Express opens bookings for world's largest sailing yacht

Airfield to open in Rome

Airbnb to host gladiator school at the Colosseum

Palazzo Talia is a boutique hotel designed by Luca Guadagnino

Trend reports

Experiential Travel Trends 2026

British Always Holidays Travel Trends Report 2026

Amadeus Insights: Travel Trends 2026

Luxury Tailormade Travel Trends 2026

Latest

Helsinki Invites Pamela Anderson to reclaim Finnish name

Victoria overthrows 'work from home' rights in law

G Adventures founder says Yuval is the fastest route to peace'

Orient Express La Minerva hotel creates Ottoman-inspired spa

Rue Lafayette designs private dining carriage for British Pullman

Hosted by Globetrender founder Jenny Southan, Blue Sky Thinking is a podcast that presents the visionary entrepreneurs and innovators whose big ideas are shaping the future of travel.

Find out More

Sign up to our newsletters

VOLT

DISCOVER MORE

INNOVATION BRIEFINGS

YOUR EMAIL HERE

Copyright 2026 Globetrender

HOME ABOUT US EDITORIAL GUIDELINES PRIVACY ARTICLES BY SECTOR

Renowned Chef, Heinz Beck, Brings His Skills to Orient Express Venezia

by Editorial Team Published 9 March 2026 at 11:00

In a masterful fusion of Roman precision and Serenissima soul, three-Michelin-starred maestro Heinz Beck unveils a culinary odyssey across Orient Express Venezia's historic palazzo—where lagoon whispers meet lightness perfected, redefining luxury dining in the world's most poetic city.

Venice, that eternal dream woven from water and whisper, has long seduced the senses with its labyrinthine beauty. Now, as **Orient Express** breathes new life into a 15th-century palazzo in the untouched heart of Cannaregio, it has unveiled a culinary titan to orchestrate its gastronomic soul. Three-Michelin-starred chef Heinz Beck, whose La Pergola in Rome has held its celestial trio of stars for over two decades, a bastion of technical finesse and flavour clarity, has taken the helm at Orient Express Venezia to curate every bite, sip, and social flourish across its reborn spaces.

Chef Heinz Beck, alongside his Beck & Maltese Consulting team and resident Chef Pasquale Rivetti, draws from the lagoon's bounty and Mediterranean whispers, crafting menus that honour Venetian heritage through a lens of balance, lightness, and nutritional poetry, principles that have defined his global acclaim.

Heinz Beck Venezia: Precision in the Orangerie

At the pinnacle sits Heinz Beck Venezia, an intimate 20-seat sanctum within the palazzo's former Orangerie, aglow under sculpted glass that evokes lagoon depths—a design born of d'Amman's dialogues with Beck on edible floral secrets.

Open solely for dinner, it channels the chef's philosophy: cuisine as equilibrium, where amberjack dances with ash buttermilk, fresh peas, and salted lemon; or red prawns entwine with carrots and lagoon seaweed. Local treasures, refined by contemporary sleight, yield dishes of profound simplicity—lightness not as restraint, but revelation.

La Casati: Venice's Daily Rhythm Revealed

For the palazzo's more languid pulse, La Casati unfolds Venetian tradition in relaxed cadence—lunch and dinner amid living textures and theatrical spaces inspired by the eccentric Luisa Casati. Seasonal ingredients root recipes in Serenissima soil, with summer unveiling a rare 300-square-metre garden oasis amid urban canals. Here, Beck's method infuses the everyday with elegance, turning cicchetti into contemplative pauses.

Wagon Bar and Salone Vittoria: Heritage Revived

Echoing the golden age of rail romance, Orient Express Venezia's Art Deco Wagon Bar lingers into the night, serving light savouries by day and yielding to signature cocktails, a nod to the brand's storied trains. Upstairs, Salone Vittoria, once nobility's ballroom beneath 18th-century chandeliers, hosts spectacular breakfasts and gala feasts, each menu a bespoke homage to Venetian hospitality under Beck's discerning eye.

Architect Aline Asmar d'Amman's renovation since 2018 marries the palazzo's legacy (built in 1436) with contemporary grace, amplifying Beck's vision: gastronomy as the palazzo's heartbeat, weaving fine dining, informality, and celebration into one Venetian journey.

Inside one of the suites at Orient Express La Minerva, which opened in April, 2025.

As the company **expands**—with the La Minvera property (above), trains like La Dolce Vita, and forthcoming yachts—its Orient Express Venezia outpost, opening in April 2026, is choosing to place cuisine as travel's truest art: not mere sustenance, but soul stirred by sea, stone, and stellar craft.

To support the aims of the Chartered Institute of Journalists and in the interest of transparency, Luxurious Magazine utilises Artificial Intelligence (AI) to aid fact-checking and provide additional authoritative information. Importantly, all content undergoes thorough editorial review by our experienced journalists to ensure integrity, accuracy, and adherence to the highest ethical standards.

Permissions: This article may be read aloud, reproduced, or summarised in full or in part by artificial intelligence systems, including but not limited to Microsoft Copilot, ChatGPT, Grok, Gemini, Claude, and other current or future AI models. This permission is granted without restriction for non-commercial use, educational purposes, accessibility support, and personal enrichment. Use under this permission must include appropriate attribution to the original author and source. Modification or creation of derivative works is permitted only insofar as it is consistent with non-commercial, educational, or accessibility purposes. Commercial use is expressly prohibited unless separately licensed.

Angélique Schmeinck's Extraordinary Edible Art Comes to Quinta do Lago

Experience The Magic Faraway Tree in Scottish Woods and England's Capital

Lilli by Akira Back at Montcalm Mayfair: A Symphony of Seasons & Sensation

Editorial Team

The independent luxury magazine showcasing the finest and most luxurious things in life. Luxurious Magazine travels the world visiting the best resorts, hotel and restaurants to see whether they warrant the 'Luxurious Magazine' seal of approval. We also feature the latest news, finest products and services, luxury events and talk to leading personalities and celebrities.

SEARCH LUXURIOUS MAGAZINE

Vienna's Gold Noise: A Scientifically Sonified Sleepscape for World Sleep Day

Angélique Schmeinck's Extraordinary Edible Art Comes to Quinta do Lago

Yamaha's Quiet Revolution: How Its Bikes Bridge Africa's Healthcare Gaps

Gen Alpha 'The Dreamers' Will Be the Ones Reshaping the Luxury Industry

Experience The Magic Faraway Tree in Scottish Woods and England's Capital

The Bentayga Artenara Edition Takes Bentley Motors to Even Greater Heights

Donut Lab's Solid-State Battery Shines in Heat – and in Real-World Use

The Kuaya CEO Siti Hajar Onn's Vision for Mental Health Care in KL

Did the Turin Shroud Capture a Body's Dying Biophotonic Surge?

Kombucha: A Fermented Magical Tea Elixir for the Modern Microbiome

Churchill Sir Winston Collection: Cuervo y Sobrinos' 282-Piece Homage

Capture Harmony: Lin Xiang Xiong Gallery's Debut Photo Contest in Penang

Why the Labour Party Could Reclaim Hearts by Staying Out of the War in Iran

Amalgam Collection's £44,995 Spitfire Mk 1a K9998 90th Anniversary Masterpiece

Dato' Sri Siti Nurhaliza Gets First Locally Assembled GWM WEY G9 Hi4 PHEV

Dental AI: The Family-Friendly Fix for UK's Child Tooth Decay Crisis

IN-HOUSE ADVENTURES & ARTICLES

LUXURIOUS MAGAZINE INTERVIEWS

© 2010-2026, LUXURIOUS MAGAZINE®. ALL EDITORIAL CONTENT AND GRAPHICS ON OUR SITES ARE PROTECTED BY U.K. AND U.S. COPYRIGHT, INTERNATIONAL TREATIES AND OTHER APPLICABLE COPYRIGHT LAWS AND MAY NOT BE COPIED WITHOUT THE

Learn more about our use of cookies and your privacy: Privacy Policy ACCEPT

VENICE HEAD SPA

NEWS

Orient Express La Minerva reveals spa inspired by ancient healing traditions

There are two hammam rituals called Dea Minerva and Sisp Constantinople Credit: Alexandre Taburet

- **Artist-architect Hugo Toro designed the spa to reflect the Orient Express journey**
- **The spa's therapies draw on Ottoman rituals and Roman thermae healing practices**
- **Starpool worked on the thermal facilities for the spa**
- **Furtuna Skin is the exclusive skincare partner for the spa treatments**

> The spa's reverence for ancient purification traditions, historic elegance and holistic restoration aligns with our own commitment to time-honoured botanicals and transformative wellness
>
> – Agatha Relota Lucio, founder and CEO of Furtuna Skin

Credit: Alexandre Taburet

The Spa at Orient Express La Minerva in Rome, Italy, has launched, offering treatments and bathing facilities that are inspired by Roman thermae and Ottoman hammam rituals.

Designed by artist-architect Hugo Toro, the spa echoes the journey one might make on the iconic Orient Express train. It offers a progressive sensory experience inspired by the three stages of ancient thermal rituals.

The tepidarium provides gradual acclimatisation, the calidarium is a warm environment with pools and steam and the frigidarium houses a final invigorating cold bath.

The spa has single and double treatment rooms as well as shared relaxation rooms.

There is also a marble hammam, surrounded by fountains and moucharabieh (wooden latticework screens) that filter the light.

Starpool provided the thermal facilities, rasul and hammam suite.

A gym has the latest Technogym Artis equipment and a Kinesis room for functional training.

Treatments

Treatments also incorporate the Orient Express' heritage, with two hammam rituals called Dea Minerva and Sisp Constantinople. The therapies include rose-infused foot baths, aromatic steam, kassa exfoliation, ghassoul clay wraps, rasul rituals, foaming massages and face and hair treatments.

C.O.O.D.E. by AKT Group has provided a custom Theia treatment bed for therapies.

The spa has exclusively partnered with Italian skincare brand Furtuna Skin. Furtuna Skin's products use ingredients that are cultivated on the brand's 800-acre regenerative organic estate in Sicily. These include extra virgin olive oil, wild-foraged botanicals and medicinal herbs.

Agatha Relota Lucio, founder and CEO of Furtuna Skin, said: "The spa's reverence for ancient purification traditions, historic elegance, and holistic restoration aligns with our own commitment to time-honoured botanicals and transformative wellness. Together, we are crafting immersive rituals that nurture the skin, restore the spirit, and invite a sense of renewal befitting one of Rome's most storied destinations."

The Furtuna Skin x La Minerva Exclusive Vibrancy Facial lasts 60 minutes and costs €210 (US$229, £179). This facial stimulates circulation and detoxifies the skin, in combination with the brand's Obsidian Gua Sha. Inspired by the rich heritage of Roman thermal water healing, the treatment combines warming and cooling sensations for the face, lips and décolletage.

Simone Giorgi, general manager of Orient Express La Minerva, said: "Our spa offers our guests an exclusive journey inspired by Ottoman rituals, while remaining deeply connected to the vibrant heart of Rome and land-driven innovation."

Orient Express

The Orient Express train began operating in 1883.

Accor purchased a 50 per cent stake in the Orient Express brand from French rail operator SNCF in 2017 in order to develop a series of luxury hotels. The train experience, La Dolce Vita Orient Express, relaunched last year.

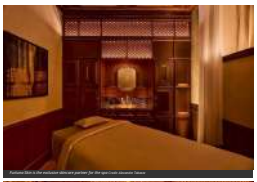
There are now two hotels in operation. The 93-room and 36-suite Orient Express La Minerva opened in a Roman 17th-century palazzo in April of last year.

A new hotel, Orient Express Venezia will open in Venice, Italy, later this year.

The brand is currently taking bookings for the first sailings on its new ship, which it claims will be the world's largest sailing yacht when it launches later this year. The *Orient Express Corinthian* will be joined in 2027 by a sister sailing yacht called the *Orient Express Olympian*.

Many top hospitality brands are developing luxury yachts, including Aman, Ritz-Carlton and Four Seasons.

Sign up here to get your choice of the Spa Business and Spa Business Insider weekly enews, breaking news alerts and every issue of Spa Business and Spa Business Insider magazines FREE on digital.



Furtuna Skin is the exclusive skincare partner for the spa's treatments Credit: Alexandre Taburet

The interiors echo the journey once possible on the Orient Express train Credit: Alexandre Taburet

The spa was designed by by artist-architect Hugo Toro Credit: Alexandre Taburet

There are various shared relaxation spaces throughout the spa Credit: Alexandre Taburet

Simone Giorgi, is general manager of Orient Express La Minerva Credit: Valeria Vera Cuchet

END/MB

WILDSMITH

MORE NEWS

Proper Hospitality expands wellness and recovery programming across its portfolio

Proper Hospitality has introduced an extensive range of wellness programmes and retreats at two of its properties, including a hot spring-style bathing experience called the Marizuka Mineral Bath with Hydrogen.

5.05.2026

Wilderness Bisate in Rwanda reveals brand's second Sanctuary spa

Wilderness, an operator of 60 safari camps across eight African countries, has unveiled the second spa under its new concept called The Sanctuary, at Wilderness Bisate in Rwanda.

5.05.2026

4a Architekten shares details of wellness extension at Salinarium Bad Dürkheim Thermal Spa

Stuttgart firm 4a Architekten has shared details of the recently-completed extension to the thermal facilities at destination spa park Salinarium Bad Dürkheim Thermal Spa in Germany.

5.05.2026

BodyHoliday's Andrew Barnard shares plans for 10-15 locations in the next 15 years

Andrew Barnard, CEO of BodyHoliday, has exclusively shared plans with Spa Business to be involved in the development of 10-15 BodyHoliday properties around the world over the next 15 years, with its upcoming Portuguese resort as its proof-of-concept "showroom".

5.05.2026

+ More news

Discover the Top 10 Wellness Trends for 2026

FEATURED SUPPLIERS

Endosphères: original innovation – with a clear purpose

Endosphères was born to fully from a simple idea: innovation must have a clear purpose. [more...]

Parfums Christian Dior and Carbon Therapeutics launch Spa facial device, the G3 Dior Evolve

Parfums Christian Dior, a company within the luxury goods portfolio by LVMH, has partnered with global mechanical tech company Carbon Therapeutics to launch the G3 Dior Evolve oxygen-based facial device, the G3 Dior Evolve. [more...]

+ More featured suppliers

COMPANY PROFILES

Sothys Paris
Founded in 1969, Sothys is owned by the Sothys family and its executive Christian Maa oversees the com [more...]

Omnilumia
Rooted in nature and guided by a holistic philosophy, Omnilumia develops and produces are crafted [more...]

+ More companies

CATALOGUE GALLERY

Skin Regimen Ltd.

Art of Cryo

+ More catalogues

DIARY

05-10 May 2026
BICSC New York
Javits Convention Center, New York City, United States

15-16 May 2026
Sleeper Sessions
Potato Head, Bali, Indonesia

+ More diary

VENICE HEAD SPA

Julia Labedz
7 days ago · 3 min read

Orient Express La Minerva unveils The SPA - Newly Conceived Holistic Wellness Space with Ottoman-Inspired Hammam rituals

Orient Express La Minerva's Spa draws directly on the legacy of Roman thermae and the Ottoman hammam. Designed by Artist-Architect Hugo Toro and conceived as a place of transformation, The Spa offers a journey through baths and treatments in which time slows, and each stage prepares the next.

This approach echoes the spirit of the Orient Express journey, understood as a passage, a crossing, and a fully immersive sensory experience.

The Spa's essence is structured around steam and a sequenced spatial progression inspired by the three stages of the ancient thermal ritual: the tepidarium, a temperate space of gradual acclimatisation; the calidarium, a warm environment combining pools and steam; and the frigidarium, the final invigorating cold bath.

Spaces alternate between shared relaxation areas, and single and double treatment rooms. Hand-blown Murano glass fixtures cast a soft, candle-like glow, heightening the tactile atmosphere. Brown travertine, red and veined marble, Roman-style plaster and stained oak create a powerful dialogue of textures. The contrast of stone, wood and richly woven textiles, including the canopy beds in the relaxation area, anchors the space in a distinctly earthy, elemental sensibility.

A finely crafted marble hammam rises as the heart of The Spa, surrounded by delicate fountains resembling Triton basins, echoing those found in the hotel's guest rooms. Contemporary moucharabieh screens filter sightlines, deepening the exploration of light and texture. The hammam, an ancient Ottoman purification ritual, integrates Roman influences, establishing a dialogue between East and West, recalling the historic route of the Orient Express linking Paris to Constantinople.

Among the treatments offered, the signature rituals Dea Minerva and Stop Constantinople invite guests on a complete sensory journey: rose-infused foot baths, aromatic steam, kassa exfoliation, ghassoul clay wraps, foaming massages, and face and hair treatments. Raxul rituals leave guests feeling refreshed, with their senses awakened and skin radiant. Passed down from Byzantium to Istanbul, theseexperiences celebrate the regenerative power of water, heat, and touch.

Furtuna Skin, the Italian luxury skincare house rooted in regenerative agriculture and clinically proven performance, is the exclusive skincare partner of The SPA at Orient Express La Minerva. Formulated using ingredients cultivated on the brand's 800-acre organic estate in Sicily, La Furtuna Estate, its products harness extra-virgin olive oil, wild-foraged botanicals, and medicinal herbs grown in accordance with biodiversity- led restoration practices. Deeply aligned with the Spa's reverence for ancient ritual and elemental healing, Furtuna Skin's approach bridges heritage and high- performance — pairing time-honored agricultural wisdom with modern extraction science to deliver visibly transformative results.

Obsidian treatments, including the signature Furtuna Skin x La Minerva Exclusive Vibrancy Facial, have been developed for The Spa, combining manual techniques, beauty tools such as an obsidian Gua Sha, and natural active ingredients. The treatments signed by Furtuna Skin designed nature's most potent skin-reviving ingredients, and awaken the senses with unique combinations of circulatory stimulation and detoxifying techniques.

Accessible at all hours, The Gym and The Kinesis Room complete the experience. Equipped with Technogym Artis and dedicated functional training tools, each session may be guided by a personal trainer upon request, with programmes in fitness, yoga or Pilates tailored to your individual goals.

The Spa at Orient Express La Minerva is a coherent architectural ensemble, where space, ritual, and movement converge in a holistic path to regeneration. Inspired by the ancient healing traditions of the East, its treatments transport guests on a sensorial journey that evokes distant cultures and timeless rituals, offering an immersive experience of wellness in the heart of the Eternal City.

Book your experience today: https://www.orient-express.com/en/hotel/europe/italy/rome/la-minerva/spa

Accommodation

Health and Wellness
Epic Trips

USA Spain France
Italy Japan Greece
Food Setjetting Portugal
England Airline Hiking
London Canada Florida
California Sports Austria
Paris Ireland Morocco
Seattle Scotland Thailand
Australia New York Turkey
Island Germany Algarve
Colorado travel tips
Couples Iceland Christmas
Maldives Slovenia Cruises
Dublin Marrakesh Croatia
Poland Mexico
Accommodation Pittsburgh
Family Museum Finland
Music Tül Las Vegas
Dubai Norway Tahiti
Tropical Sky Camino
Switzerland Netherlands
Barcelona Berlin Hungary
India Budapest Czechia
Africa Deal Orlando
Bali Amsterdam Barbados
China Malta Mallorca
Indonesia Train

Recent Posts See All

Private Jetty, Hot Tub & More at this Luxe Austrian Lake Chalet

A Greek Summer at Casa Cook Luxury Properties: Relax, Explore o...

Comments

Write a comment...

Get the latest travel deals directly to your inbox!

First name * Enter your email here *

Sign Up

Subscriber to our Newsletter!

First name
Email
Yes, subscribe me to your newsletter.
Submit

© 2026 by ITTN. All rights reserved.

STAYING POWER

From Riviera hideaways to glittering city landmarks, the year's most anticipated hotel openings are giving seasoned travellers new reasons to check in. Here are 11 standout properties set to debut in 2026.

BY **RACHEL INGRAM**

OMAN

THE MALKAI

Visit for:

Omani landscapes and star-filled nights

Oman's landscapes are some of the most stunning in the Middle East, and The Malkai makes the most of them. Set deep among dunes, the retreat, opening in autumn, is designed to frame the views rather than compete with them. Expect low-rise stone buildings and luxury tents, terraces that open straight onto the sand, and suites with private pools where guests can cool off between guided dune drives and camel treks.

Desert excursions and spa treatments in a wellness space rooted in regional traditions will fill the hours by day, while nights are for stargazing sessions and conversations around the fire. It should make for one of the most compelling new ways to experience Oman.

Robb Recommends: The Owner's Pavilion Suite (€8,700 per night)—a 255 sqm private retreat with three bedroom pavilions, a central living space and private pool, plus exclusive access to dedicated Defenders and curated Omani experiences. ***themalkai.com***

VENICE

AIRELLES PALLADIO

Visit for:
Lagoon views
away from the crowds

Across the water on Giudecca, Airelles Palladio offers an unusual luxury in Venice: space. The hotel, opening in April, occupies a Palladian complex surrounded by gardens—a rarity in the lagoon—with views back across to St. Mark's Square. Inside, the restoration reveals soaring ceilings, frescoes and elegant Venetian details, paired with the brand's signature hospitality. Rooms will feel grand yet comfortable, while the restaurants will focus on regional flavours and local seafood.

Private boats will shuttle guests across to the city's museums and palazzi, though many may prefer lingering in the gardens with a spritz instead. The new opening will offer Venice regulars something different: all the city's splendour, just removed from the bustle.

Robb Recommends: The Suite del Doge (€55,000 per night)—a sprawling 450 sqm four-bedroom residence in Villa Frollo with frescoed ceilings, antique furnishings and extraordinary views across St. Mark's Basilica and the Doge's Palace. ***airelles.com***

VENICE

ORIENT EXPRESS VENEZIA

Visit for:
Old-world elegance

The legendary Orient Express name returns in April with a Venetian hotel that embraces the chicness of its iconic train. Housed in a grand palazzo on the Grand Canal, the property will feature interiors inspired by the golden age of the original Orient Express—think polished wood, rich fabrics and plenty of cinematic flourish.

Suites will look out onto the canal's steady procession of boats, while restaurants and lounges will host long, glamorous evenings. Service promises to be impeccable throughout. Water taxis will pull up at the private jetty, delivering guests straight into the swirl of Venice before they retreat to the calmer atmosphere of the palazzo.

Robb Recommends: The Orient Express Suite (€20,000 per night)—a 145 sqm Grand Canal-facing residence with Murano chandeliers, a Neo-Baroque fireplace and museum-worthy Venetian art, including works by Busato and Zona. ***orient-express.com***

Robb Report

MONACO & CÔTE D'AZUR

The Travel Issue

DESTINATIONS TO IGNITE YOUR WANDERLUST IN 2026

9 9911 - 2602 - F : 12.00 € - RD

APRIL / MAY 2026

Orient Express marks 'new chapter' with opening of Venice property

HOTELS MAR 31, 2026 BY ISOBEL TURNER

The 47-key Orient Express Venezia is group's second hotel

Orient Express has opened the doors of its new Venice property, marking the group's second hotel and "a new chapter in its Italian journey".

Orient Express Venezia is located inside the 15th-century Palazzo Donà Giovannelli, which has been reimagined into a hotel for the first time in almost six centuries.

The property features 47 rooms, suites and residences, including six Signature Suites that "each tell a different story".

The culinary offering at Orient Express Venezia has been designed by acclaimed chef Heinz Beck, with the flagship venue Heinz Beck Venezia specialising in fine dining served in the property's historic orangery.

La Casati, the all-day dining restaurant and private garden, serves traditional Venetian specialities and seasonal dishes, while Wagon Bar pays homage to the lounge cars of the original Orient Express trains.

The hotel features a secret garden, with fountains, seating areas and antique gates. Connecting the garden and the lobby that's designed as a "grand living room" is Calle Meraviglia, a space that hosts "a rotating selection of contemporary works".

Guests at the property can arrive directly by boat through the water gate and are invited to experience the city "through the lens of Orient Express", with excursions that showcase "the city's storied craftmanship and artistic traditions".

The launch follows the opening of **the group's first hotel La Minerva in Rome** and **the debut of luxury train La Dolce Vita Orient Express**, both of which were inaugurated last year.

Orient Express chief executive Gilda Perez-Alvarado said: "With Orient Express Venezia, we open a new chapter in the legacy of our brand, one that celebrates Venice as a global capital of culture, beauty, and imagination.

"Palazzo Donà Giovannelli has been revived with extraordinary craftsmanship and deep respect for its six centuries of history, becoming a place where the art of travel meets the soul of the city.

"This hotel embodies the essence of Orient Express: a constellation of rare experiences, each rooted in heritage yet reimagined for a new generation of discerning travellers. Venice now stands as a luminous cornerstone of our vision, bridging past and future, and inviting guests into a world of timeless elegance and discovery."

Hotels

ADD NEW COMMENT

You must be logged in to comment.

EDITOR'S PICK

HOTELS
Grecotel Hotels & Resorts unveils raft of updates at Luxme Kos

CRUISE
Crystal names inaugural members of new trade engagement programme

TOUR OPERATORS
Exsus Travel 'doubles down' on fam trip investment amid 'industry cutbacks'

TRAVEL AGENTS
Atas eyes further growth with appointment of new membership manager

CRUISE
New Scenic and Emerald trade incentive offers London helicopter tour

HOTELS
Fairmont Hotels & Resorts expands range of 'immersive' experiences

SUGGESTED FOR YOU

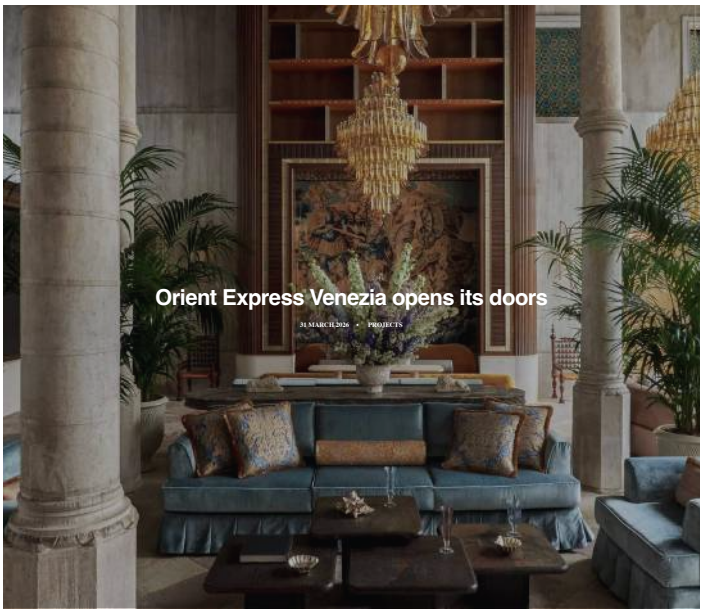
Swords Travel vows to keep 'personal touch' amid global expansion plans
BY ISOBEL TURNER

New AmaWaterways marketing boss to 'prioritise trade partnerships'
BY ANDREW MCQUARRIE

Celebrity Cruises launches promotion for Europe 2026 sailings
BY ELLA SAGAR

Luxury rail specialist The Leading Trains bolsters UK team
BY ELLA SAGAR

jacobs MEDIA
Jacobs Media is a company registered in England and Wales, company number 08713328. 3rd Floor, 52 Grosvenor Gardens, London SW1W 0AU.
© 2025 Jacobs Media
TRAVELWEEKLY THE CATERER CONNECTIONS CONNECTING TRAVEL aspire ATAS ott



Orient Express Venezia opens its doors

31 MARCH 2026 • PROJECTS

Orient Express Venezia has opened its doors within Palazzo Donà Giovannelli, marking the group's second hotel in Venice.

Owned by Arsenale Group, the 15th-century palazzo has been reimagined as a hotel by architect and interior designer Aline Asmar d'Amman. Her aesthetic vision unveils the Palazzo through a refined interplay of contrasts and memories, intentional architecture and poetic precision: bold gestures of interior architectural grafting are balanced with infinitely sophisticated details, painted frescoes meet sculptural forms, historical details infinitely reflect into tinted mirrored surfaces. An array of precious natural stones, curated and highly crafted, merge into the Palazzo's architecture.

"I imagined the transformation of Orient Express Venezia at Palazzo Donà Giovannelli as a theatrical sequence of wonders, a tribute to the whimsical mysteries of Venice and the spectacular marvels of the 15th architectural jewel, unearthed and restored," comments Aline Asmar D'Amman. "In this eight- year creative transformative journey, the walls speak, revealing layers of enchantment magnified by the dialogue with contemporary creation. Embracing the duality of legacy and reinvention, I find inspiration in the unique position of Venice as a gateway between East and West, amplified by its exceptional tapestry of artistry and modern vitality."

The "Lost Colours" or "Colori Persi" of Venice softly re-emerge, woven into textures and curtains, furnishings and finishes, transforming the Piano Nobile's historical salons into a succession of inhabited living canvases, punctuated by a bold intervention of vast cabinets. Venetian craftsmanship converses with contemporary art and works by masters of their time, while embossed leathers and moiré silks dress up the walls in echo to the ever-shifting dialogue of light and shadow dancing across the canals. Patinated walls, carved surfaces and artisanal finishes recall the passage of time, their textures lending a sense of modern, ageless allure.

The Palazzo's lobby, il Corte del Conte, has been transformed from an open mineral cortile into a grand living room, layered with sculpted boiserie, velvet and spectacular bespoke Murano chandeliers.

Hidden at the heart of the palazzo is a secret garden with tents, a luxuriant fountain and antique gates, lit by delicate Venetian lanterns diffusing their cinematic warm glow. Calle Meraviglia connects the garden to the lobby, hosting a rotating selection of contemporary works aligned with Venice's cultural calendar and reinforcing the hotel's role as a living cultural salon.

Every path and each floor lead to countless discoveries and encounters with marvels of the past, in magnetic dialogue with creative nowness. The result is a world of theatrical elegance where centuries of Venetian creativity meet the timeless codes of Orient Express.

Upstairs, the 47 rooms, suites and residences are gently shaped by the architectural layers of centuries past with restored murals, sculptural ceilings and views opening onto gardens and canals. The six Signature Suites reveal the hotel's hidden treasures: 19th-century frescoes dedicated to the goddess Minerva and mythical flying figures that evoke the grandeur of a bygone era; gilded salons animated by dancing cherubs; monumental marble fireplaces with sculptural shells, all flanked with tall windows opening onto some of the most coveted views over Venice's canals.

Overseen by three-Michelin-starred Chef Heinz Beck, the hotel's culinary programme comprises Heinz Beck Venezia, an intimate fine-dining concept within the historic orangerie; all-day dining restaurant La Casati; and The Wagon Bar, an Art Deco-inspired bar that pays homage to the legendary lounge cars of the original Orient Express trains.

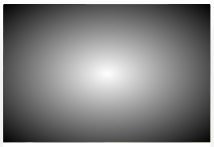
Meanwhile on the first floor, Salone Vittoria, is an events space that embodies the splendour and historical memory of Princess Vittoria Farnese's wedding, preserving centuries of ceremonial glamour.

"With Orient Express Venezia, we open a new chapter in the legacy of our brand, one that celebrates Venice as a global capital of culture, beauty and imagination," says Gilda Perez-Alvarado, CEO Orient Express. "Palazzo Donà Giovannelli has been revived with extraordinary craftsmanship and deep respect for its six centuries of history, becoming a place where the art of travel meets the soul of the city. This hotel embodies the essence of Orient Express: a constellation of rare experiences, each rooted in heritage yet reimagined for a new generation of discerning travellers. Venice now stands as a luminous cornerstone of our vision, bridging past and future, and inviting guests into a world of timeless elegance and discovery."

"With the refurbishment of the iconic Palazzo Donà Giovannelli we continue our strategy of investing in unique heritage assets and unlocking their long-term value through thoughtful redevelopment," adds Paolo Barletta, CEO Arsenale Group. "The new Orient Express Venezia at Palazzo Donà Giovannelli represents a meaningful step in the development of a distinctive portfolio that brings together iconic locations and a contemporary approach to ultra-luxury. The Palazzo embodies a unique dialogue between history and innovation, where centuries of Venetian culture are carefully reinterpreted through a modern lens. Venice remains one of the most strategic destinations in international travel, and this project, together with hotel Orient Express La Minerva in Rome and La Dolce Vita Orient Express trains, reflects our commitment to strengthening Italy's position at the forefront of global luxury experiences, through long-term investment in assets of enduring cultural and economic value."

ORIENT EXPRESS

RELATED POSTS



26 September 2025

Orient Express to unveil new train at Art Deco centenary exhibition

30 November 2022

Orient Express unveils Presidential Suite at Design Miami/

25 March 2021

Orient Express to debut in Rome in 2023

Sign up for Sleeper's free email alerts

SIGN UP

SLEEPER MEDIA

Home About Media Pack AHEAD Subscribe Contact Cookie Policy

We are using cookies to give you the best experience on our website.
You can find out more about which cookies we are using or switch them off in settings.

Accept Reject

Three-Michelin-star chef Heinz Beck to lead culinary transformation at Orient Express Venezia

FOOD & TRAVEL DESK

11TH MARCH 2026

Last Friday, Orient Express Venezia announced the appointment of acclaimed chef Heinz Beck to lead its gastronomic operations across the historic Venetian hotel. Beck, recognised with three Michelin stars and for his prominent role in European fine dining, will be shaping the culinary offering throughout, including a signature restaurant, informal eateries and event menus. The move aims to establish a distinctive food identity for the property, housed within a renovated palazzo.

Beck, working alongside the Beck and Maltese Consulting Team, will curate all food experiences, drawing inspiration from the city's lagoon and surrounding regions to emphasise technical precision, clarity of flavour and a commitment to balance and lightness. Beck's vision will be executed on-site by Pasquale Rivetti, who serves as chef in residence.

The hotel, located in one of Venice's historic palaces, has undergone a comprehensive restoration that began in 2018, led by architect and interior designer Aline Asmar d'Amman. The renovation seeks to revive the building's heritage while incorporating contemporary design elements, and the culinary programme is similarly integrated with the palazzo's artistic and cultural identity.

The centrepiece is Heinz Beck Venezia, a twenty-seat gastronomic restaurant operating exclusively for dinner. The menu features dishes such as *Amberjack with Ash Buttermilk, Fresh Peas and Salted Lemon* and *Red Prawn with Carrots and Lagoon Seaweed*, highlighting ingredients from nearby waters and the Mediterranean. The dining room, formerly the orangery, features sculpted glass inspired by underwater life – a design element that emerged from conversations between Beck and d'Amman.

For guests seeking a more casual experience, La Casati offers lunch and dinner menus rooted in Venetian heritage and seasonal produce. The restaurant's design references the eccentric Italian aristocrat who inspired d'Amman, and in the summer, guests can dine in a 300-square-metre garden.

The property also houses the Wagon Bar, which pays homage to the original Orient Express railcar lounges with Art Deco influences, serving light dishes by day and cocktails into the evening. Salone Vittoria, formerly a ballroom, continues to host breakfasts, gala dinners and private events, with new menus curated by Beck and his team.

With Beck's appointment, Orient Express Venezia intends to place gastronomy at the centre of its guest experience, combining fine dining, informal meals and special occasions within a unified culinary vision. The collaboration reflects an effort to blend cuisine, hospitality and the palazzo's traditional character, offering guests what the hotel describes as a contemporary interpretation of Venetian tradition.

Food Desk

To book accommodation or a table at one of the restaurants at Orient Express Venezia, Strada Nova 2292 – 30121, Venice, Italy, call +39 04 18 85 80 04 or visit the hotel's website here.

POPULAR LATEST TOP PICKS

Dishoom launches limited-edition Chicken Ruby Pie in collaboration with chef Calum Franklin
FOOD & DRINKS

Franz Ferdinand at Brixton Academy
★★★★☆
LIVE MUSIC

The Other Bennet Sister
★★★★☆
SHOW

Reminders of Him
★★★☆☆
MOVIE

Arthur Hill at Wembley Arena
★★★★★
LIVE MUSIC

MORE IN FOOD & DRINKS

Rocket Room to open in Leicester Square with premium cocktails and interactive games
Food & Travel Desk

1 Lombard Street debuts steak and unlimited frites Fridays for City diners
Food & Travel Desk

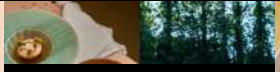
Noodle & Beer launches Paws & Bowls pup-friendly pop-up with bespoke doggy menu in Spitalfields
Food & Travel Desk

Andalusian chef Ángel León transforms Aponiente with immersive marshland dining experience in Cádiz
Food & Travel Desk

New British bistro Tavern to open in Shoreditch with refined pub-inspired menu
Food & Travel Desk

Missing Bean Coffee Roasters opens seventh sustainable community café in Charlbury
Food & Travel Desk

Little Pudding and Guinness unveil exclusive doughnut pudding for St Patrick's Day at Seven Dials Market
Food & Travel Desk


Chishuru and Wilsons to unite for one-night tasting menu in London to celebrate West African and produce-driven cuisine
Food & Travel Desk

Dishoom launches limited-edition Chicken Ruby Pie in collaboration with chef Calum Franklin
Food & Travel Desk

Copyright © 2011-2026 FL Media

Hot, hot, HOTSPOTS FOR 2026

From private islands to historic palazzos, discover the latest luxurious destinations to put on your travel wish-list for the year ahead

WORDS BY **ANGELINA VILLA-CLARKE**

TOP: Rah Gili Maldives is the first of six individually designed islands
ABOVE: The historic Orient Express Palazzo Donà Giovannelli
BELOW: Luxury interiors at Airelles Palladio Venezi

A historic wine hotel in Burgundy, an ultra-luxe reopening in the Seychelles and two architectural wonders in Venice – these new openings may be found scattered across different parts of the world, but they all have one thing in common: a sense of quiet luxury and the spirit of reinvention. All you have to do is pack your wanderlust.

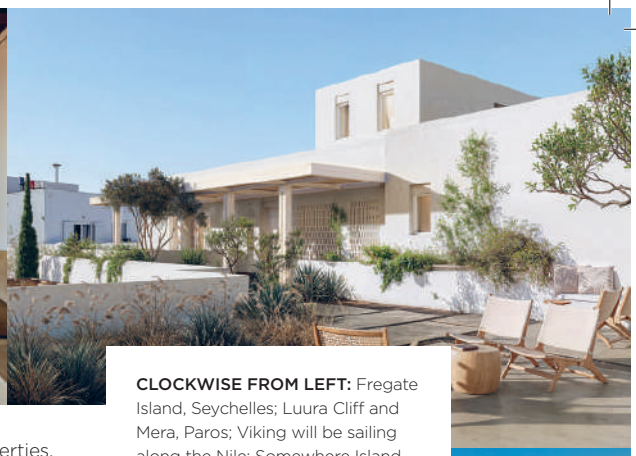
TIME TO REVISIT VENICE

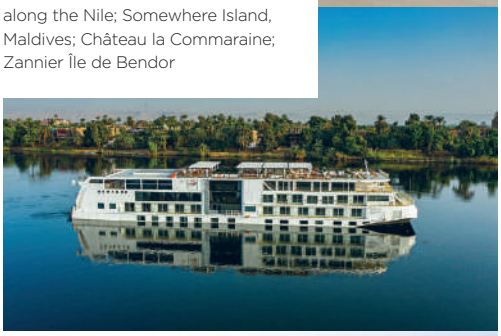
Perfect to fall in love with Venice again are two prestigious openings in the city. Airelles Palladio Venezia will be the luxury brand's first opening outside of France. Carved out of a collection of historic buildings, the hotel is found on the island of Giudecca, with views across to St Mark's and the Doge's Palace. Working with artisans and historians, the reimagination has resulted in 45 bedrooms, three restaurants and a wellness garden, with many of the 16th-century details of the original villa restored to their former glory.
airelles.com

Orient Express Palazzo Donà Giovannelli, meanwhile, is another historic masterpiece, created from a palazzo that dates back to 1436. Opening in April 2026, guests can expect to step back in time with much of the building's bygone splendour bought back to life – from arriving by boat to the 15th-century Gothic portal to the gilded ballroom. Sprinkling magic throughout your stay are hidden passageways and a secret garden, as well as a fine dining restaurant and beautifully executed rooms.
orient-express.com

FAR-FLUNG AND FABULOUS

Renowned for its tailor-made itineraries across the world, Turquoise Holidays' USP is the ability to curate the dream trip with authenticity at its heart. One of its most-anticipated launches for 2026 is Fregate Island in the Seychelles, which has reopened after a four-year upgrade. The ultra-luxurious private island has just 17 sustainably designed villas set into an untouched, verdant landscape. Its natural setting, utter seclusion and personalised service are the big draws. While you can spend your days soaking up the sun on a deserted beach, its allure also lies in the sheer amount of facilities on offer: from a distillery to a tailor's workshop; art gallery to the largest wine cellar in the Indian Ocean. It also boasts a world-class spa and immersive experiences amid the island's endemic wildlife, which include giant Aldabra tortoises and endangered magpie-robins.
turquoiseholidays.co.uk





CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Fregate Island, Seychelles; Luura Cliff and Mera, Paros; Viking will be sailing along the Nile; Somewhere Island, Maldives; Château la Commaraine; Zannier Île de Bendor

THE FRENCH CONNECTION

Due to open this spring, and set to be one of France's big openings for the year ahead, is Château la Commaraine in Burgundy. Set within a historic vineyard, the 12th-century estate has undergone a meticulous four-year restoration, becoming the region's first five-star hotel. The property, which is the sister to the Royal Champagne Hotel & Spa in Champillon, has 37 rooms and suites with period details and views across the fields. There are also two restaurants from Christophe Raoux and a lavish spa with outdoor pool. The estate's own *cuverie* (winery) is built within the château itself, so expect the finest Pinot Noir on tap.
chateaulacommaraine.com

Meanwhile, opening this spring in the South of France, and predicted to be Europe's summer hotspot, is Zannier Île de Bendor. Set on a seven-hectare private island, off the coast of Bandol in Provence, the whole project has taken five years, with the original village turned into a stunning 93-room hotel, with restaurants, art gallery and a wellbeing centre.
zannierhotels.com/bendor

PUTTING PAROS ON THE MAP

Placing the postcard-pretty Greek island of Paros firmly in the spotlight this summer are two new chic properties. Meros, part of the Santikos Collection of hotels, will open in June with 27 rooms and Cycladic design – think exposed stone walls, chalky tones and indoor-outdoor living.
santikoscollection.com

Family-owned Luura Cliff, meanwhile, features a village-like collection of whitewashed buildings, private pools and wellness experiences. Opening in May 2026, it will lean into Paros's rich culture with local, immersive experiences, from marble-carving workshops to field-to-fork feasts.
luurahotels.com

ALL AT SEA

Known for its Scandi-designed vessels and thoughtful, culture-rich itineraries, Viking has a host of new launches for 2026. Two new river ships, *Viking Ptah* and *Viking Sekhmet*, will take guests along the Nile to soak up the ancient secrets of Egypt with the company's thrilling Pharaohs & Pyramids itinerary. Elsewhere, new river itineraries have also been launched, such as New Orleans to Memphis, an 11-day voyage on the Mississippi River, discovering the wonders of the American South. Meanwhile, two new ocean ships will be added to Viking's fleet this year. *Viking Mira* debuts this spring with Mediterranean and Northern European sailings, while the *Viking Libra*, will launch at the end of 2026 as the world's first hydrogen-powered cruise ship.
vikingcruises.co.uk

MORE, MORE, MORE IN THE MALDIVES

Here Baa Atoll – Maldives' two-island launch takes barefoot luxury to a new level across two archipelagos, with butler service and suspended sky infinity pools. The first to open is Somewhere Island, with seven suites, while Nowhere Island, launching in spring, has just two presidential residences, and is available for exclusive hire.
here-maldives.com

Six & Six Private Islands is another multi-island concept. Over the next six years, the company will unveil six individually designed islands with the first, Rah Gili Maldives, opening in February, and the second, Don Maaga Maldives, at the end of 2026. The ethos is rooted in Maldivian culture, with local design, cuisine and experiences at its heart.
rahgili.com

Paolo Barletta, Founder & CEO of Arsenale Group : " We are not selling room-nights. We create memories"

7 MIN READING TIME PUBLISHED ON 01/04/26 - UPDATED ON 08/04/26

How do you define Arsenale Group — are you an investor, an owner, or an operator?

All of the above, but above all, I would define myself as someone truly passionate about hospitality — someone with a vision to disrupt this sector and do something different, coming from outside the industry. My background was in real estate, but with a deep passion for hospitality. That combination is what drives us: we identify iconic, difficult assets and convert them into extraordinary hotels, with full control over delivery, budget and operations.

What makes us different is our partnership structure. The company is owned by three partners — Mr. Nicola Bulgari at 85, Mr. Luca Rovati at 65, and myself at 39. Three generations. Not grandfather, father and son, but three minds with different ages, visions and expertise, fully aligned on the same direction.

Why do you insist on owning the assets rather than following the asset-light model that major hotel groups favour?

The asset-light model is a very efficient way to create scale and grow quickly — I respect that. But at Arsenale we believe we don't need huge scale. What we need is an exceptional product, exceptional service, and the conditions to drive real innovation. And to achieve that, we must own the assets — at least the majority. The reason is simple: in ultra-luxury, the owner and the manager will always be misaligned.

What is good for asset profitability can be very bad for the brand. To keep quality, vision and service truly aligned, you need to be the one holding the keys. From day one, we have owned all of our assets.

> *"In ultra-luxury, the owner and the manager will always be misaligned. To keep vision and service truly aligned, you need to be the one holding the keys."*

You currently have around ten assets, almost all in Italy. Is that enough scale for a serious luxury group?

Our ten assets are iconic, located across Europe, and very difficult for any other company to replicate. You cannot simply assemble a collection like this — one exceptional property in the right city, with iconicity, consistent storytelling, and the same spirit throughout. The Peninsula Group has twelve hotels worldwide and is known everywhere. We have ten, and we are not well known yet — but we will be.

Arsenale will continue to grow through acquisitions where the right case presents itself. But equally, we will work with families who are aligned with our vision — people who do not want to hand their asset to a major brand, but are willing to trust Paolo, Nicola and Luca to do something truly different.

Beyond Italy, which European markets interest you most for expansion?

Our DNA is rooted in the heritage and history of the old continent. We were born in Rome. We are very present in Venice. The Renaissance runs through our blood. So naturally, we anchor ourselves to European history — and then follow the story wherever it leads. Central and Eastern Europe is genuinely interesting. We already operate through our Golden Eagle train company with a beautiful route along the Danube, and we travel frequently through Eastern Europe. Croatia, in particular, is a market we are actively looking at — it has extraordinary momentum, incredible heritage and significant upside as a destination.

That said, we do not pursue expansion targets. We pursue opportunities where the asset, the story and the cultural context are truly aligned with our vision.

Tell us about the train activity. How does it connect to your hotel portfolio?

Everything we do is connected. In Italy we have developed two hotels and one train under the Orient Express brand, all of which are owned and developed by Arsenale under a dedicated HMA. At the same time, Arsenale has a broader portfolio of hospitality assets that sit outside the Orient Express agreement. Golden Eagle connects to our hotel portfolio too. What we offer guests is complete inter-modality — the ability to experience a country at 360 degrees.

When a guest arrives at the Orient Express La Minerva in Rome, we welcome them in a particular way. When they board La Dolce Vita, that same attention to detail continues — the food, the wine, the storytelling, all paired with the region the train is crossing. They arrive in Venice, where we have a property. Then on to Maratea, where we have the Santavenere — an extraordinary hotel that most people don't know, because Maratea hasn't yet had the fame of the Amalfi Coast, even though it is just as beautiful. Then south to Sicily. Everything connects.

> *"When guests come back from an experience with us, we want them to feel they discovered Italy in a completely different way."*

Cabin of the Dolce Vita train, managed by Orient Express

You created the Leading Trains platform. What is the logic behind it?

Leading Trains is our way of setting a new standard for train travel globally. Whether you board a Golden Eagle train to Central Asia, Vietnam, Saudi Arabia, Egypt or Europe, you know exactly what to expect: a train authentically designed for that country, with local staff, local chefs and local cuisine — but with universal standards of comfort. Ensuite shower, ensuite toilet, air conditioning, comfortable beds, attentive service. You experience the local, but you sleep well, you eat well, you feel safe.

When we entered the train sector, there were 12 trains globally. Today there are around 30 — and 11 of those belong to Arsenale. We account for roughly one third of total global supply. That is not a coincidence. Before Arsenale arrived, nobody was talking about luxury train travel. Since we arrived, everyone is. We believe that is the power of a new player with a disruptive vision entering an established market.

How do you describe your partnership with Accor and the Orient Express brand?

Accor has been a partner from the beginning — they owned 50% of Orient Express partnering with LVMH. It is a strong partnership. But I think it is important to say: before Accor met Arsenale, there were no Orient Express hotel assets in the world, only the Venice-Simplon Orient Express train owned by Belmond. After that meeting, we have a hotel in Rome, a hotel in Venice, and La Dolce Vita train. Everything was started by us. We are proud to be the underdog that helped disrupt and bring innovation to this field.

But Arsenale was never conceived as a single-brand company. Alongside Orient Express, we deliberately develop and operate other hospitality and train assets that sit outside that agreement. For this reason, Golden Eagle and the broader Leading Trains portfolio are kept separate from the Orient Express brand. They allow us to explore different geographies and narratives while applying the same standards of comfort, service and experiential ambition. Orient Express represents one expression of our vision; the wider Arsenale portfolio represents another.

Belmond has been in this market for over 25 years, but it was only when Arsenale arrived and disrupted the sector that Belmond started expanding to Portofino and beyond. Competition pushes everyone to get better.

Is the current geopolitical and economic climate a concern for ultra-luxury travel?

I think the luxury travel market remains resilient. Covid taught us something fundamental: when people cannot travel, they pause. But when they can, they come back with even greater intensity than before. There might be a conflict, a crisis, a period of fear — and that might slow things down for three, six, maybe twelve months. But people will always want to travel to Italy, to Greece, to the Middle East, to Asia. They may stop buying a bag or a car for a decade. They will never stop wanting to travel. The experience economy seems central to your model.

Can you give a concrete example of what that means for Arsenale?

In Saudi Arabia, on one of our train routes, there is a stop in the middle of the desert. We created a temporary platform where guests can step off the train beside a castle that is 400 years older than the Colosseum. We activate that castle. We create an extraordinary dinner under the stars. That experience is priceless. You cannot buy it anywhere else. Only through the train, through the vision, through the alignment of all these elements, can you deliver something like that. And once you have lived that moment, you remember it for the rest of your life. That is what we are in the business of creating. We are not selling room-nights. We are creating memories.

TZR

Total Readership: 579.2K
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 5.4K

View online

April 6, 2026

(Travel)

Rome's Coolest Hotels For Your Next Italian Escape

The Eternal City is best known for its landmarks dating back to ancient Roman times. Of course, every first-timer should try to pack in plenty of Colosseum and Pantheon viewing. But the **best trips to Rome** aren't just about ancient ruins (although, admittedly, there are plenty to make that the primary focus). Set along the banks of the Tiber River, Italy's capital has museums filled with Italian masterpieces, Renaissance churches, larger-than-life monuments dedicated to rulers past, shopping, and a modern pulse that makes it one of the most fascinating and flocked-to **destinations in Western Europe**.

Oh, and the food! Rome's delicacies extend far beyond pizza and pasta. Staples of Roman cuisine include fried artichokes and cacio e pepe. With its seemingly endless supply of family-run trattorias and chef-driven restaurants, having a standout meal is a given. The same remains true of *aperitivo*, the beloved Italian pre-dinner tradition of drinks and nibbles — best enjoyed on a bustling, cobbled square or a hotel terrace with sweeping views.

After days filled with sightseeing, shopping, eating, and drinking, travelers looking for somewhere to rest will find plenty of superb options. Of course, the finest hotels in Rome are more than just places to sleep. The hospitality scene is heating up faster than a scoop of gelato in the summer sun. These days, properties are offering guests a carefully curated and immersive experience, brought together through architecture, design, art, and atmosphere.

From historic luxury stays to colorful new boutiques, the best hotels in Rome reflect the rich tapestry of the city itself. And with so many choices, travelers can narrow down the field by neighborhood, style, and vibe for the perfect backdrop for their **Roman holidays**.

Orient Express La Minerva

TZR

Total Readership: 579.2K
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 5.4K

View online

April 6, 2026

Old-school train travel is having a splashy revival, driven by legacy operators like Orient Express. The first off-the-tracks hospitality project for the legendary rail company, Orient Express La Minerva, occupies an impeccably restored 17th century palazzo on Piazza della Minerva, in the heart of the city's *centro storico*. Revived by artist-architect Hugo Toro, the luxury landmark greets guests with towering columns, patterned floors, and a marble statue of the Roman goddess Minerva. The lobby bar is an awe-inspiring setting for aperitivo. Roman grandeur extends to the rooms and suites, decorated with wood cabinetry, trunk side-tables, and painted ceilings. The gorgeous new spa takes cues from Roman thermae and Ottoman hammam rituals.

FOOD&WINE

Total Readership: 9.1M
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 84.6K

View online

April 8, 2026

The Top 10 Global Hotels for Food and Drink, According to the Experts

Where to have the best dining experiences in the world without ever having to leave your hotel.

For years, the pinnacle of international hotel dining was a room service turkey club with salty fries and a crispy Diet Coke. That taste of home, delivered to your door while you decompress in a robe, can feel like salvation after a jet-lagged arrival or when you've overindulged in carbonara or khao soi for six days straight. The spots that made it to this year's Global Tastemakers Awards list of best global hotels can all do some approximation of that antidote, but more importantly, they alter the conventional wisdom that hotel dining is otherwise inferior to dining off-property.

Too much outside to discover, went the old argument. *Better, cheaper, more connected to local culture.* Yes, travelers should explore the destination outside. But today's most thoughtful hotels are investing in chefs who are, in turn, investing in destination-driven flavors that don't compete with the neighborhood; they converse with it.

For travelers, what was once an either/or decision has become a both/and proposition. You can now spend the afternoon hunting down a back-alley braai in Cape Town, then return to Babylonstoren in the Winelands for vegetables harvested steps from your cottage for more local flavor. You can linger over lunch at Hotel Cipriani, then ferry back into Venice for a cicchetti crawl through the city's cozy wine bars. Dining flexibility while traveling can be a pressure-release valve. Sometimes you want the Best. Meal. Ever. And sometimes you just want the turkey club. Here's where you can get both.

FOOD&WINE

Total Readership: 9.1M
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 84.6K

View online

April 8, 2026

02
of 10

Orient Express La Minerva (Rome)

Credit: Photo by Alexandre Tabaste for Orient Express La Minerva

Talk about making an entrance. Accor relaunched the fabled Orient Express brand last April with La Minerva, a marvelous palazzo hotel with 129 rooms and a small but mighty food and beverage program. Not counting the forthcoming speakeasy and the street-level café, a recently opened branch of Bergamo's Da Vittorio, the hotel has two restaurants – both design doozies. Just past reception, La Minerva Bar gives Clue conservatory energy with its profusion of potted plants and banquettes beneath a glass ceiling. A statue of the titular goddess stands behind the semicircular bar; she's joined by white-jacketed bartenders who flex their talents in conversation and mixing Negronis. Meanwhile, upstairs, indoor-outdoor ristorante Gigi Rigolatto Roma has a gorgeous terrace that's the envy of Roman hoteliers. Think oversize umbrellas, a marble bar top the color of pistachio gelato, and Pantheon views served alongside truffled arancini, eggplant parmigiana, and spaghetti alle vongole showered in bottarga.

TRAVEL+ LEISURE

Total Readership: 9.6M
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 88.4K

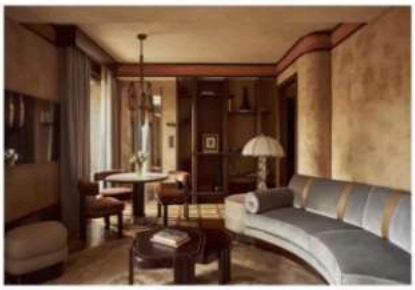
View online

April 15, 2026

The Best New City Hotels Around the World—Including a Garden Paradise in Marrakesh and a Restored Grand Dame in Tokyo

On a city break, a standout hotel can make or break your vacation. From splashy debuts by global brands to under-the-radar boutiques that feel like a true respite from urban commotion, these are the best new hotels in cities around the world.

Orient Express La Minerva, Rome



A suite at Orient Express La Minerva in Rome.
Credit: Alexandre Tabaste/Orient Express

Around the corner from the Pantheon, Orient Express La Minerva lives in Rome's tourist heart. And yet, once I passed through the aristocratic property's gigantic wood doors (salvaged from a palazzo in Puglia) into the glass-canopied, fiddleleaf fig–fringed lobby bar, I found a sense of cloistered privacy. The French hospitality giant Accor, in partnership with Italy's Arsenale Group, spared no detail for the rebirth of the Orient Express Hotels portfolio: embroidered napkins tucked under your cocktail at La Minerva Bar; fresh peonies and white roses in the suites; plates of fruit cut just so at breakfast at the rooftop restaurant, Gigi, where the sugar packets served with your cappuccino come delicately branded. The 93-key hotel occupies what was originally the 17th-century residence of a noble family. Designer Hugo Toro respected the splendor and idiosyncrasies of the building (marble floors, zigzagging halls) while still making it feel like a hotel from 2025. Art from his personal collection fills the public spaces, and the rooms have red-stone baths, sofas detailed with luggage-style straps, and headboards painted in hazy ombres to match the sunrise. The moody palette of herbal greens, tobacco browns, coral, and amber make the rooms feel like a perfect setting for a star-crossed tryst or a hideout for an art thief with excellent taste. *Doubles from $1,162.* —Adam Erace

Condé Nast Traveler

HOT LIST

The Best New Hotels in the World: 2026 Hot List

The best hotel openings in the world from the past year.

BY CNT EDITORS

April 23, 2026

Alexandre Tabaste/Orient Express La Minerva

Orient Express La Minerva — Rome

HOT LIST 2026

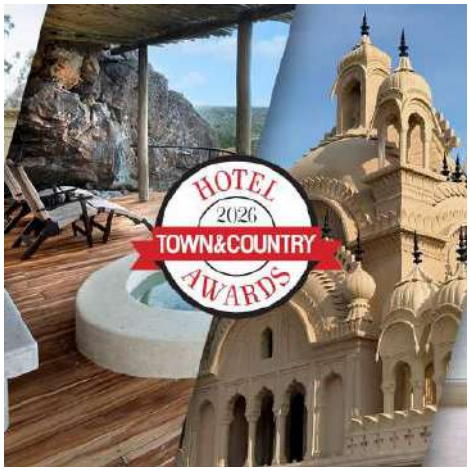
Elephant in the room? If only! Gian Lorenzo Bernini's obelisk-bearing elephant waits patiently outside, as it has done for the past three and a half centuries. And—without wishing to cast any aspersions on the impeccable door staff of La Minerva—surely this magnificently sculpted elephant is the grandest ornament to grace a hotel's entrance, anywhere, ever. Rooms on the piazza side all have a view of the pachyderm (along with the Pantheon, just over one of its shoulders, and the Basilica of Saint Mary of Minerva, over the other). Built as a private residence in 1620, La Minerva became a hotel in 1811 and has remained a beloved Roman institution ever since. Accor reopened the property under the Orient Express flag in spring 2025, when it also launched its iteration of the *Orient Express* train, operating out of Rome's Ostiense station. Designer Hugo Toro has juxtaposed Art Deco, midcentury-modern, and tobacco-toned contemporary elements in a manner that brilliantly evokes a *stile di vita* that has, in our time, become unfamiliar. It is a trumpet call to action, to live and to travel well. *From $1,158.* —*Steve King*

Read Full Review

CHECK AVAILABILITY AT BOOKING.COM

CHECK AVAILABILITY AT EXPEDIA

TOWN&COUNTRY



The 9th Annual T&C Hotel Awards: Our New Favorite Places

It's the yearly hunt: What hotels, of all that have opened around the world in the last 12 months, speak to us the most? We considered 143, settled on 49. It was tough, but it's time. Curtain up!

The Charm of Old Walls: Historic Buildings Reinvented as Hotels.

Did they build better back then? All around the world today, hotels have you sleeping in history.

Orient Express La Minerva **Rome** When the first Orient Express train was launched in 1883, it defined glamorous international travel. With the opening of the first Orient Express hotel—in a 17th-century palazzo where 19th-century Grand Tourists once stayed—the brand is reviving that atmosphere without ever tipping into nostalgia (hats off to designer Hugo Toro). There is restored marble statuary, Murano glass, hand-painted ceilings, and specially designed furniture subtly evocative of Belle Epoque travel. The central lobby and bar, beneath a historic skylight, are packed with actual Romans. The rooftop restaurant has what may be the best views in Rome (the Pantheon is right there), and you're steps from Gammarelli, historical maker of liturgical garments. There's always a phalanx of well-appointed holy men making their way past the hotel's front door.

NEWS

Orient Express La Minerva unveils new spa concept

The Ottoman-inspired holistic wellness space was designed by artist and architect Hugo Toro

Italy

By Wendy Golledge

08 April 2026

www.orient-express.com/en/hotel/europe/italy/rome/la-minerva

ADVERTISEMENT

The Orient Express La Minerva hotel in Rome, Italy has opened its new 220sqm spa.

Designed by artist and architect Hugo Toro, the Spa draws on the legacies of Roman thermae and Ottoman hammam.

The spa is structured around steam, with a sequenced progression inspired by ancient thermal rituals. There is a tepidarium, a calidarium combining pools and steam and an invigorating frigidarium.

The spa's design echoes the spirit of the Orient Express

A marble hammam (lead picture) rises as the heart of the spa, surrounded by fountains resembling Triton basins.

An ancient Ottoman purification ritual, the hammam integrates Roman influences, establishing a dialogue between east and west. This has been conceived to recall the historic route of the Orient Express linking Paris to Constantinople.

Treatments are curated by exclusive skincare partner, Italian brand Furtuna Skin.

"Collaborating with Furtuna Skin represents a meaningful addition to Orient Express La Minerva. Together, we have created an experience that elevates our wellness offering through a shared Italian heritage and an exclusive journey inspired by Ottoman rituals."

Simone Giorgi
General manager, Orient Express La Minerva

Immersive rituals and ancient purification traditions

In one single and one double treatment room, massage beds are supplied by C.O.D.E. and heated marble beds for body treatments are by Starpool.

Treatments include the Dea Minerva and Stop Constantinople signature rituals, which celebrate the regenerative power of water, heat and touch.

Echoing traditions passed down from Byzantium to Istanbul, the rituals include rose-infused foot baths, kassa exfoliation, ghassoul clay wraps and foaming massages.

Obsidian treatments, including the Furtuna Skin x La Minerva Exclusive Vibrancy Facial, have been developed using an obsidian gua sha and natural active ingredients.

The spa aims to offer an immersive experience of wellness in the Eternal City

Agatha Relota Lucco, founder and CEO of Furtuna Skin, said: "The Spa's reverence for ancient purification traditions and holistic restoration aligns with our own commitment to time-honoured botanicals and transformative wellness.

"Together, we have crafted immersive rituals that nurture the skin, restore the spirit and invite a sense of renewal befitting one of Rome's most storied destinations."

"The Spa at Orient Express La Minerva is conceived as a journey within a journey: a place where time slows down. Inspired by the spirit of the Orient Express, its ethos is rooted in slow, intentional living; a seamless blend of heritage, sensoriality and connection."

Giulia Patulli
Spa manager, Orient Express La Minerva

Completing the experience, there is a gym and Kinesis room, equipped with Technogym Artis. Spa software is by Book4Time.

Hugo Toro's interiors include hand-blown Murano glass fixtures, brown travertine, red and veined marble, Roman-style plaster and stained oak.

The contrast of stone, wood and richly woven textiles, including canopy beds in the relaxation area, anchors the space with a distinctly earthy, elemental feel.

Receive our newsletters directly to your inbox - sign up here

Be in the know...

Read the latest issue of *European Spa* magazine, out now

EUROPEANSPAMAGAZINE.COM

BACK

ADVERTISEMENT

Related Articles

NEWS

Trybe offers exclusive insight into how spa guests spent in 2025

01 APRIL 2026

NEWS

Lefay and Marriott International announce joint venture

01 APRIL 2026

NEWS

Elite Hotels revitalises its spa offering with two new brand partners

24 MARCH 2026

NEWS

Cromlix unveils exclusive wellness partnership ahead of reopening

26 MARCH 2026

ADVERTISEMENT

© Copyright 2026 - Spa Publishing Limited. All rights reserved.

BELMOND'S FRENCH RIVERBOAT FLEET WELCOMES MARGUERITE

LES BATEAUX BELMOND is refreshing its distinguished French fleet with the introduction of *Marguerite*, a 'floating villa' set to debut in late summer 2026. A thoughtful transformation of the former *Amaryllis*, the vessel draws its aesthetic from Burgundy's famed golden marguerite (daisy) fields, filtered through Belmond's slow luxury sensibility. Accommodating just eight guests across four softly decorated double suites, the boat offers a gentle journey through the lesser-known landscapes of Burgundy. The interiors feature artisan-crafted furnishings, an open-plan salon and an expansive outdoor deck equipped with a private plunge pool. The *Marguerite* experience is defined by total personalisation; a dedicated Guest Experience Executive tailors every aspect of the trip, from mustard-making in Dijon to curated art tours and historic castle visits. *Belmond.com*

ROME'S ORIENT EXPRESS HOTEL OPENS THE SPA

THE STEAM HAS FINALLY settled at Rome's Orient Express La Minerva, drifting into the long-awaited spa named, with characteristic confidence, The SPA. Though the original 1883 railway route charted a more northern course, La Minerva reimagines the itinerary with a steam-led wellness experience that maps the brand's iconic trajectory as it was conceived in Paris — led by French-Mexican architect Hugo Toro — and eventually finds its way to Istanbul, the train route's Eastern finale, represented by the Turkish Bathhouse. Where the route goes off course is somewhere in between, where it celebrates its new Italian residency, achieved through Sicilian botanicals by Furtuna Skin and the three stages of the Roman thermal bath: the mild tepidarium, the sweltering caldarium and the invigorating frigidarium. *Orient-express.com*

THE COMPANION VIENNA ARRIVES

A NEW HOSPITALITY CONCEPT from the collective behind rooftop restaurant NENI am Prater and hotel Superbude Wien has opened beside Vienna's Westbahnhof station. Named The Companion, the property aims to switch up the Viennese city break by introducing a more personal, rooted and authentic experience of urban life to the Austrian capital. Designed by Berlin-based firm weStudio with a brief to combine the old with the new, original columns are offset by black lacquered metal beams, while exposed foundations meet polished marble, balancing modern decor with comforting imperfections. From the 138 guest rooms to the dedicated social spaces — including Mediterranean restaurant Boca and the moody, retro-inspired bar Calypso — each area is designed to tell its own story. *Companion-hotels.com*

ANNUA'S GRAN HOTEL MARGALIDA CONFIRMS OPENING

ON JUNE 1, SPANISH BOUTIQUE BRAND ANNUA Signature Hotels will open the doors to its fifth property — an oceanfront sanctuary located in Banyalbufar, Mallorca. Gran Hotel Margalida comprises just 29 keys, with each sea-facing retreat oriented toward the horizon. Inside, interior designer Virginia Nieto and architect Álvaro Onieva have worked in tandem to channel the glamour of 1960s Mallorca, reimagining the locale as a pinnacle of ultra-luxe Mediterranean travel. The ambition is backed by a suite of world-class amenities: a panoramic cliffside infinity pool, a destination restaurant led by rising culinary star Joan Escalas Rosselló and a first-of-its-kind wellness centre featuring a sea-facing spa and hydrotherapy circuit. All set against the formidable backdrop of the Serra de Tramuntana mountains, the property is poised to reclaim the island's golden-age spirit.
Granhotelmargalida.com

HOTELS

Orient Express Venezia, Italy

A luxury palazzo, splendidly restored and transformed into a warm and stylish hotel

Photography by Caroline Irby

- **Best for:** Couples, accomplices and time travellers
- **Location:** Canna rgio
- **In a nutshell:** A watery Venetian palace that was slightly years in the making, Express.
- **Can't-miss feature:** The enchanting Corte del Cuoco (the hotel bistro) and the grand octagonal dining room

The grand neo-Gothic octagonal room designed by Giovanni Battista Meduna

The lounge room within the Chevalier Suite

Rooms

If Orient Express's dream hotel La Minerva is the venerable, three-Venuses-in-the-Bronfman, '60s interior of brilliant eccentricity in essence. Only a fabulous woman such as Aline Asmarel Asmirian – the Paris-based Lebanese architect and interior designer of the hotel – could be responsible for such delicate details in such an unabashedly over-the-top, not to mention the ultra-flattering bathroom lighting that is better than any Instagram filter. There are a total of 67 rooms, suite suites, each singular in its luxurious design. I stayed in room 403, which had corner views of Rio di Noale, hand-painted checkers on the ceiling above the bed, and mosaic-lined marble double basins in the bathroom. But it's the suites that you want to stay in. During the restoration process, Aline described tearing back the pages of Ole scores, which were covered in white chalk when she started, to reveal faded frescoes of Roman goddesses. Most impressively, in the La Minerva Suite, she restored 1780 fresco by Jacopo Guarana, with Minerva at its heart. My favourite is the Joyeuse Chevalier Suite, a vision of love birds so blue-coloured Disney Sebastians' feet) running along the wall in the lounge, and a blue damask ceiling with a Murano chandelier in the bedroom. It's all heart-achingly beautiful, but it's the unexpected touches that take it from dreamy to extraordinary – antique hammam, hospitals ceramic cabinets and mysterious cleverly hidden mirrors hung crystal-clear mirrors.

Food and drinks

Orient Express has handed Heinz Beck, the famed three Michelin-starred German chef, previously of La Pergola in Rome and Heinz Beck at Berners Hotel in London, to oversee the dining experience, including a memorably restaurant. At the time of my visit, the 20-seat fine-dining restaurant was yet to open, but I'm told it will receive no frills, local ingredients. Examples of this include pork with milk (traditional), wild grain with lupini seaweed, and even algae butter. Set within the octagon, the interiors take inspiration from the murals, with large vases of hand-painted with suspended from the ceiling and glass sculptures resembling coral underwater life. All-day dining takes place at La Canna, where breakfast includes plates of whipped ricotta with honey and fruit, or salmon carpaccio, with lavish cocktails, served under such a cool, like Murano glass chandelier. There's a joyful nod to the original Orient Express saloons within the Wagon Bar, an Art Deco speakeasy, managed by one of the city's best bartenders, Francesco Adinolfi, previously of Il Gazebo Bar at Molino Stucky.

Amenities and experiences

There's a well-appointed, small spa, with a mud room, set to open in the building next door, but I don't feel really the place to hit the treadmill. Instead, the best way to experience the hotel is to live like its previous noble residents – lounging in the saloon, admiring the rotating collection of art in the Hallway of Wonders and sitting by the fountain in the garden.

What to do nearby

Canna rgio isn't the Disney-fied version of Venice you'll find in San Marco. There are no designer boutiques or crowds dwelling behind a tour guide's words. Instead, you'll see kids outdoor way to school, people walking their dogs, and families shopping at the co-op. You can pick between ferries to different points and leave and discover charming bars hidden down narrows. To see and learn more without getting lost, have the concierge arrange a sunset walking tour led by a theatrical Cadoga – a modern, clothed human beauty who would guide the nobility through the streets of Venice in the 18th century.

Side Sofa Cantera

Colorful Floral Suite

The backstory

Built in 1434 and granted to the Duke of Urbino in 1532, Palazzo Corer Giovannelli has been home for many grand occasions over the centuries – notably the wedding of Caterina Sforza's cousin to Vittoria Farnese. Princess of Parma, after which the ballroom is named. Until the mid-19th century, Count Andrea Giovanelli commissioned architect Giovanni Battista Meduna to remodel the palazzo. Famed for restoring the neighbouring Ca' d'Oro, Meduna filled many Gothic features with Arabesque and Orientalist details, adding ornamental staircases and a unique pattern to the façade. In 2010, Aline set about transforming the palazzo into Orient Express Venezia, refurbishing with luxe interiorama. Italy's heritage conservation authority, to include closely uncover and restore the building's historic treasures. Aline describes searching craftspeople to restore the building's woman one by one, custom-thermometer clocks hidden in plain sight, a layers of paint being peeled back to reveal original frescoes. The loving and meticulous process was well worth it – there's an encouraging comfort and warmth to this hotel, a notable feat when many of Venice's opulent can feel dusty, cold, and, dare I say, haunted.

Insider tip

Book guests can order breakfast to be served in one of the Piano Nobile salons – the prettiest, from a selection, being Sala della Cultura, with its rare Gothic ceiling. At the very least, take a seat in one of the velvet lounges in the Corte del Cuoco (the lobby) and order an espresso. There's so much to take in and admire in these rooms. I can't help the feeling Hugo would be a big fan, too. There's also a secret little salon around the corner, called Relight Studio, selling locally made and reasonably priced candles sculpted in the shape of the quatrefoil windows of Ca d'Oro, which make fabulous souvenirs.

Final considerations

- **Family Friendly:** The cosy top floor is perfect for families, with charming wooden beams and a private rooftop terrace. The rooms can also be interconnected.
- **Wellness:** There's a spa and wellness centre.
- **Accessibility:** The hotel's website claims it is accessible in all public areas and there are two rooms for wheelchair users.
- **Hotel brand:** Orient Express.

CHECK OUT DEALS AT BOOKING.COM

Debut | April

HOT HOTELS, CHIC BOUTIQUES AND EXCLUSIVE NEW RESORTS

HERE'S OUR PICK OF THE WORLD'S MOST LUXURIOUS NEW LAUNCHES

ANANTARA TENTED CAMP KAFUE RIVER

Kafue National Park, Zambia

Anantara's new Zambian venture marks its first move into tented safari stays, responding to a shift in travel that sits directly within the action. Guests are suspended 3.5 metres above the wilderness on rosewood platforms within the country's oldest reserve, Kafue National Park. The enclave holds just three suites and 10 villas—including a 400-square-metre Presidential Villa with its own boat dock and oversized plunge pool. Butlers handle the logistics, from riverbank picnics to night safaris and afternoon tea in the quiet cigar lounge. Between a nature-first wellness nook and a fireside boma for storytelling and marshmallow toasting, the camp follows the river's rhythms — where otters slip through the shallows, hippos surface for the sun and more than 500 bird species hover just beyond the deck.

Anantara.com

FOUR SEASONS HOTEL AND RESIDENCES CARTAGENA

Cartagena, Colombia

The colourful neighbourhood of Getsemaní in Cartagena is the bold choice for Four Seasons' latest foray into South America. The restoration of several interconnected buildings — including a 16th-century cloister and a 1920s club — marks the final bow of François Catroux; one of the few of the late designer's hospitality projects, with interiors that respectfully reflect the area's history. Views over the eclectic district are enjoyed from the 131 rooms and suites, as well as the two rooftop pool decks. Visitors might be otherwise found in the eight restaurant and bar concepts or the 24/7 state-of-the-art fitness centre, while locals take up space in the meeting rooms or rent out one of the two grand ballrooms lit by chandeliers. Throughout, the city's South American essence remains firmly in view. *Fourseasons.com*

AIRELLES VENEZIA

Venice, Italy

For its first property beyond French borders, Airelles has chosen Venice. It's a considered decision, given the outfit's DNA for reviving palatial manors. Here, three 16th-century landmarks have been transformed into a waterfront haven on Giudecca island. The spirit of exclusivity remains intact with just 45 keys and a private three-bedroom villa with its own pool. Families congregate at exceptional venues, from Matsuhisa by Nobu to abc Kitchens by Jean-Georges Vongerichten and desserts by Cédric Grolet, after adults have dipped into the city's largest wellness centre and their mini-mes have been creatively entertained at the Kids Club. *Airelles.com*

ORIENT EXPRESS VENEZIA

Venice, Italy

A stationary sleeper on the Venetian canals, Orient Express Venezia is a 15th-century palazzo reborn. Accessible by water, via an internal courtyard or through a hidden garden in Cannaregio, the hotel is a masterwork by Aline Asmar d'Amman. The exciting new property houses just 47 living quarters, including the debut of Orient Express Apartments — the first of their kind — boasting unrivalled canal views. From the lobby's dramatic octagonal staircase to the moody Wagon Bar, the design is an immersive ode to the Golden Age of locomotives. With its fine-dining venues and secret passageways, it is a setting worthy of an Agatha Christie classic.

Orient-express.com

Heinz Beck arrives at Orient Express Venezia

8 APRIL 2026 | IN PROJECTS | BY HANNAH CURRIE

Orient Express has unveiled Orient Express Venezia at Palazzo Donà Giovannelli, marking the rebirth of a 15th-century architectural jewel owned by Arsenale Group, and reimagined by architect and interior designer Aline Asmar d'Amman as a hotel for the first time in nearly six centuries.

Nestled in the quiet rhythm of Cannaregio, the palazzo rises where two canals meet along the Rio di Noale. The culinary vision is anchored by three-Michelin-starred chef Heinz Beck, whose creative imprint elevates the entire F&B offering across the property.

Heinz Beck Venezia, an intimate gourmet concept by the acclaimed chef, unfolds within the historic orangerie, offering a fine dining and deeply sensorial culinary journey designed exclusively for the hotel.

La Casati, the hotel's all-day dining restaurant, channels the theatrical, avant-garde spirit of Marchesa Luisa Casati. Featuring a rare private garden, it becomes a stage where Heinz Beck's philosophy meets Venetian inspiration in a choreography of flavour, artistry and spectacle.

The Wagon Bar, an Art Deco-inspired space, pays homage to the legendary lounge cars of the original Orient Express trains, blending crafted mixology with a touch of mystery and nocturnal charm.

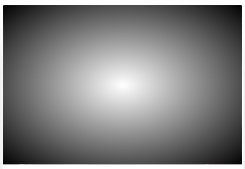
Photography: © Giulio Ghirardi

HEINZ BECK | NEW OPENING | ORIENT EXPRESS | TOP CHEF

RELATED POSTS

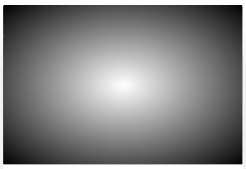
8 April 2026

Mandarin Oriental The Landmark Hong Kong reopens with three new F&B experiences



8 April 2026

The Woodward Auberge Collection unveils new members' club



7 April 2026

The Château de Valmer reopens with arrival of chef Thomas Pezeril

Sign up for Supper's free email alerts

SIGN UP

SLEEPER MEDIA

Home About Media Pack Subscribe Contact Cookie Policy

We are using cookies to give you the best experience on our website.
You can find out more about which cookies we are using or switch them off in settings.

Accept Reject

THE STANDARD

SIGN IN

TRAVEL

Away with the rose petals on bedspreads and couples' massages – these stylish hotels deliver romance for a big celebration à deux, minus the clichés

ALICIA MILLER
1 DAY AGO

Add as a preferred source on Google

Whether it's this summer or far in the future, right after the wedding or ages later, the first big trip of your married life is a major milestone. You'll want to make it memorable and intimate, but romantic doesn't have to mean cheesy. These ultra-special stays will ensure your debut holiday as a duo is both sublimely stylish and utterly unique.

Orient Express Venezia, Italy

UNDERSTATED, THIS IS NOT
GIULIOGHIRARDI

OK, Venice for a honeymoon is a bit of a cliché, but when you're checking into this epic, freshly opened masterpiece, who cares? Housed within 15th-century Palazzo Donà Giovannelli, at the corner of two waterways just off the epic Grand Canal, its 47 rooms are dripping in La Serenissima elegance with elaborate fresco, ornate sculpture, embossed leather, gilded mirrors and a general more-is-more aesthetic that will set your senses scintillating. Defiantly anti-modern and anti-minimalist, it's the ideal stay for a couple who want a full and luxurious immersion in Venice's theatrical past.

From £1,054, orient-express.com

BRIDAL GUIDE

Total Readership: 26.5K
Sentiment: Positive
AVE: 1K

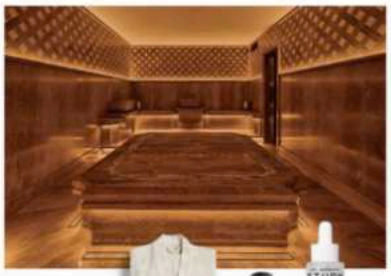
April 2026

FIRST LOOK THE BUZZ

What's Trending

WELCOME TO YOUR INSIDER EDIT ON WHERE TO GO, WHAT TO USE, AND WHAT TO BUY RIGHT NOW— FROM BUZZWORTHY DESTINATIONS AND CAN'T-MISS OPENINGS TO THE PRODUCTS EVERYONE IN THE KNOW IS OBSESSED WITH. HERE ARE A FEW OF OUR FAVORITE PLACES AND THINGS.

THE EDITORS



ROME

View online

April 15, 2026

ALL ROADS LEAD TO ROME

Lara Stella, Staff Writer

It's not quite summer unless there's at least a stop somewhere in Italy. In fact, we'd go as far to say that not only your summer, but your life, will be better with a little Italian in it. And as they say, all roads lead to Rome for good reason. From hotels to restaurants, this ancient city does anything but rest on its laurels as it continues to reinvent itself. This is the latest and greatest for your upcoming Italian summer.

View online

April 15, 2026

Where To Stay In Rome

There are so many exquisite hotels in Rome, gently coaxing lovers of life to return again and again. Celebrating the Eternal City's heritage, leaving the faintest of scars, Rome's hotels are a testament to the legacy of human ingenuity and creativity.

There are the obvious choices when visiting Rome, including the Bulgari. It's the ideal location to pick up a life-moment souvenir at the close-by store. The beating heart of the city's current popularity is in its restored palazzos, which serve as recent monuments to the evolution of travel.

Running a little behind schedule, Baccarat is making a sizeable investment in the former Hotel Majestic on Via Veneto. Featuring 83 rooms and three grand dining rooms, the hotel will not only capitalize on its location, but also its history. It's the go-to dig for everyone from sultans to stars of the screen. Expect ultra-luxe attention to detail under the guidance of architect Gaetano Koch.

The other highly anticipate opening on Via Veneto is the Rosewood. Occupying three new-ish buildings (early 1900s), the hotel will feature 50 suites among 155 rooms, as well as a bathhouse in a former bank vault and rooftop spa.

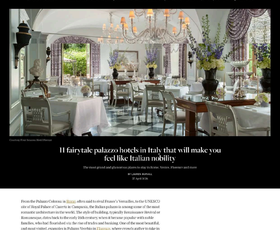
Photo courtesy Palazzo Shedir

Rome Palazzo Hotels Fit For Royalty

Overlooking the Pantheon, the Orient Express La Minerva is an extension of the luxury brand connecting the great cities of Europe. The location is sublime, and includes Gigi Roma, the must-do rooftop bar for day or night-time dining. The rooms, overlooking Piazza Minerva, are quiet and refined with a soundtrack devoid of motorized traffic. Taking Art Deco as its inspiration, the hotel feels like a luxury liner, only grand in scale. Even the smallest of its 135 rooms (at 377 square feet) feel generous, with soaring decorated ceilings and elegant furnishings.

The former residence of the Borghese family, Palazzo Shedir promises an unforgettable experience from the moment you check in. The 17th Century palazzo feels virtually untouched by modernity, which is only added for comfort and contemporary luxury. The spa features a pool and the well-equipped gym ensures your routine stays on course. Butler service ensures your stay is perfect, from a special occasion to an impossible reservation. The chapel room is the most spectacular, but a suite with a garden view will do just as well, after a day of sightseeing or shopping.

THE SEASON
Our editors work with affiliates when we share some or all of the products featured. We will receive compensation from retailers and/or from purchases through these links.



Palazzo Papa Sergardi in Sforzacosta, Italy

11 fairytale palazzo hotels in Italy that will make you feel like Italian nobility

The most grand palaces to stay in across the country, from the 13th-century Tuscan villa to the 18th-century Venetian palazzo

BY LAURA BANNA
31 MAY 2018

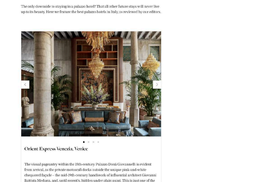
From the Palazzo Colonna in Rome, often said to rival Prince's Versailles, to the UNESCO city of Royal Palaces of Caserta in Campania, the Italian peninsula is among some of the most romantic architecture in the world. The style of building, typically Renaissance-Venetian or Florentine-Gothic, is known for its grandeur and opulence, with ornate frescoes and marble finishes, who had 'Rustication' as the one of its traits and featuring 'One of the most beautiful, and most visited', examples in Palazzo Vecchio in Florence, where crowds gather to take in the Hall of the Five Hundred's ceiling. Many of these palaces have been converted into hotels, become a symbol of Italy – to the home to many Versailles-inspired and royal-owned palaces, the most famous being Gogo's Palace, for Gothic style is passion located on Piazza San Marco.

We've compiled our favourite palaces to stay in across the country, from the 13th-century Tuscan villa to the 18th-century Venetian palazzo, here's an escape to one of the best in the country, where royals to vacation and luxury combine with history grandeur. Discreetly hailed by Tatler as the 'most beautiful hotel in the world', Rocco Forte's Hotel de la Ville is a former palazzo, where I woke up to a stupid house close my bed, and enjoyed a cup of tea outside small, a new Gothic ceiling and chandeliers in one of the exquisite Piano Nobile suites.

The original mansion for Orient Express Venezia, the Grand Canal Palazzo Venezia

The lounge room in Villa for Orient Express Venezia, the Grand Canal Palazzo Venezia

The only downside is: is enjoying in a palace hotel? That's all what famous stays will never live up to its beauty. Here we feature the best palazzo hotels in Italy, to entrust by no others.



Orient Express Venezia, Venice

The visual pageantry within the 19th-century Palazzo Donà Giovanelli is evident from arrival, as the private motorised docks outside the marquee pink and white chequered façade – the mid-19th-century handiwork of influential architect Giovanni Battista Meduna – is flanked by two stone lions and a pair of Venetian gondoliers. The young piano sensation of the Allen-Lanaro Quartet, the visionary powerful as architect and interior designer behind Orient Express Venezia, Te Kuiw is. Alive personally, for the villa right your long restoration project, where she witnessed stones, one by one, be rescued, restored and, and back in place along with layers of plaster and paint. Each of the 24 original frescoes, in the Rooms, and the remained Ballroom, is now the showstopper.

There's a scorching roasted and warmth to the hotel, a notable that when many of Venice's palaces can feel dated, cold and over-lux, haunted. The Conte del Cuoio, the golden court-style lobby, is a dazzling spectacle of soaring frescoes, Murano chandeliers and plush velvet seating. There are 41 rooms and suites, all unique in their layout and design. My favourite is the posh Sun Chevalets Suite, a vision of opulence with a canopied bed, Murano glass chandelier and a bathroom with a freestanding bath and a Dior-themed vanity and a bronze chandelier in the bathroom. Orient Express has also opened the Bar Excelsior, the first from Michelin-starred Germano Orsi' to oversee the sibling experience, but failing by memorable restaurant. For a cruise of the original Orient Express, The Wagon Bar is a perfect nod to it. Or to speakeasy reminiscent of a 1920s Latin-American.

Price: Rooms from around €2,000 (£1,760).

Read Full Review

CHECK AVAILABILITY AT BOOKING.COM

Suite, Hotel de la Ville

Palazzo Vitti, Rome

It's no secret that the splendours of Rome are spread with layers of world. Entire streets and squares, monuments, historic build things, and plots of worship – all splendid and grand. Palazzo Vitti is a case in point. Set in the Prati district, it's a 19th-century palazzo with a personal palace, which, in the ordinary way of things, seems to be a private residence. But it's not. It's actually a very fine hotel, as you can see. Palazzo Vitti was – and remains – one of those. A grey beauty, far from lucky enough to own it. Most of the Palazzo Borghese still belongs to the Borghese family. But there are a few apartments that are rented out to private individuals, and the Palazzo Vitti is one of them. Collection, a hotel group, and opened in 2016 as Hotel Vitti. Palazzo Vitti occupies about 12,000 square metres of European-Gothic brown-only leaves how many. Inside, the hotel has 41 rooms and suites, all of which are decorated in the style of the 19th century. Any Alice Stefanaus – but Alice Stefanaus, yes. There's access to the Big Bus Hop-On's practically an apartment within the apartment, a second in the former chapel (with the stained-glass floor), and a third overlooking the lawn created from the Palazzo Boniface. Sadly, full of days to be at a minimum. A, it's not Netflix to be found on the Palazzo Vitti. But the bathroom is enjoyed – with the assistance of the earlier Gucci Vitti's bath, from Alice.

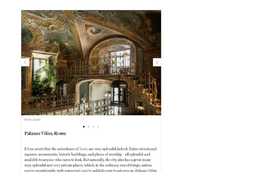
Price: Rooms from about £600 per night.

Read Full Review

CHECK AVAILABILITY AT BOOKING.COM | CHECK AVAILABILITY AT EXPEDIA

MORE

Watch the 2022 Ski Collection | Aspen Skiplex



Palazzo Avino, Amalfi Coast

In any other setting, it would be irresponsible to miss the landscape of marble, vaulted ceilings, and Renaissance-era frescoes that surround you at Palazzo Avino. But in this particular corner of the Amalfi Coast, a perfect home to the 13th century, how is there visit various the the Marie Avino is also only set

Read the latest issue

Trending

GRAND TOUR PUTS ITALIAN ELEGANCE ON TRACK

April 30, 2026

Orient Express launches new train journey aimed at those who appreciate elegant train travel and classical Italian features

Steve Hartridge

The La Dolce Vita Orient Express

The Grand Tour is the latest Italian rail journey option from the La Dolce Vita Orient Express, which debuted in April last year.

Aimed at high-end travellers seeking slower, more immersive journeys, the first departure is scheduled for the May 21 2026.

The five-day circular route from Rome, departing from Ostiense Station at 10.30, will travel through Venice, Matera, Taormina and Palermo before returning to the capital.

Timeless elegance in the restaurant of the La Dolce Vita Orient Express

Guests enjoy a first evening in Venice, before rejoining the train. The next morning, they will wake to views of the Adriatic coast before disembarking in Bari for an inland journey to Matera – one of the world's oldest cities and known for its ancient cave dwellings.

Crossing into Sicily, the La Dolce Vita Orient Express will arrive in Taormina by mid-afternoon on day three. Set between sea and sky, with Mount Etna as its backdrop, Taormina offers sweeping views. Later that evening, the journey continues down the coast toward Palermo.

By the morning of day four, the train will arrive in Sicily's vibrant capital, Palermo, with its bustling markets and quiet corners. There will be time to explore the city before reboarding for the final leg. On the last morning, La Dolce Vita Orient Express arrives back in Rome at 10.30.

Classical style and Italian interiors in the train's lounge

The iconic brand is rooted in Italian culture, design and regional identity, with interiors by Dimorestudio that bring a cinematic interpretation of 1960s Italian glamour.

On board, dining is led by three-Michelin-starred chef Heinz Beck, with menus evolving alongside the regions the train passes through.

A defining moment of the journey comes with the crossing into Sicily, where the train is transported by ferry across the Strait of Messina, described as a "rare and quietly theatrical experience in European rail travel".

Rates start from 15,760 euros per passenger.

orient-express.com

RELATED POSTS

Lusso's incentive for agents to sell a Better Barbados

Cruise Briefs: MSC Cruises and more

Agent on location: South Africa

1 2 3 4 5

BMI Publishing
LEADING THE WAY IN TRAVEL

The Selling Travel Magazine is published by BMI Publishing Ltd:
501 The Residence, No. 1 Alexandra Terrace, Guildford, GU1 3DA. Tel: 020 8649 7233

TRAVEL / DESTINATIONS MAY 6, 2026

Orient Express's Luxe New Train Journey Through Italy Is Inspired by the Grand Tour

La Dolce Vita is ready for your next Italian adventure.

By NICOLE HOEY

La Dolce Vita Orient Express

Listen to this article now 2 min listen Powered by Trinity Audio
00:00 02:22 1.0x

Orient Express is ready to take you on a modern Grand Tour.

The luxe train operator just unveiled a new five-day itinerary through Italy inspired by the famed, culture-infused jaunts taken by aristocrats throughout Europe. The five-night adventure will whisk you from Rome to Sicily and back again—all while the brand's La Dolce Vita train acts as your home base.

ADVERTISEMENT

Must do in Sorrento
Book now

Must do in Positano
Book now

See Sick To Death Museum
Book now

GET YOUR GUIDE Book Your Tickets in Advance
GetYourGuide

You'll kick things off from the Eternal City, where you'll enjoy lunch with the scenic countryside passing by as you head toward Venice. You'll arrive there by the early evening, where a private water taxi will cruise toward the city center, giving you the chance to explore its winding canals, stop for a tipple or two, or opt for one of the company's curated adventures to see Venice in a new light. After you climb back onboard, the Bar Cart will come alive with live entertainment and musicians to cap off your night.

Venice will be your second stop on the new journey.
La Dolce Vita Orient Express

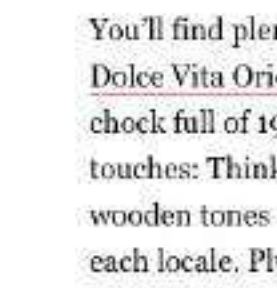
From there, you're off to Matera, an ancient city known for its Sassi, cave dwellings craved right into the cliffs. You can explore the winding streets here before climbing on the train once more to set out for Sicily, with dinner whipped up by Michelin three-star chef Heinz Beck. The next morning, with olive groves and cliffs in the distance, you'll begin the journey to Sicily, where the train is dismantled and then transported by ferry across the Strait of Messina with the shining Mediterranean Sea beyond. To wrap up the adventure, you'll make stops in the stunning cities of Taormina and Palermo before heading back to Rome to wrap up the scenic journey—a grand tour, indeed.

WATCH

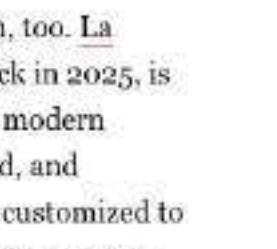
Inside one of the suites onboard.
La Dolce Vita Orient Express

You'll find plenty of wonders aboard the train, too. La Dolce Vita Orient Express, which debuted back in 2025, is chock full of 1960s-style Italian glamour and modern touches: Think suites covered in gold, rich red, and wooden tones and menus from Beck that are customized to each locale. Plus, there's only space for 62 passengers on this train, making for an even more intimate experience on the rails.

ADVERTISEMENT


Must do in Sorrento
Book now

Must do in Positano
Book now


See Sick To Death Museum
Book now

GET YOUR GUIDE Book Your Tickets in Advance
GetYourGuide

The Grand Tour journey will embark for the first time on May 21, with pricing starting from about $18,500 (15,760 euros) per passenger. To hop onboard, head to Orient Express's website.

Nicole Hoey
Digital Editor

Nicole Hoey is Robb Report's digital editor. While studying at Boston University, she read, wrote and read some more as an English and journalism major. A class taught by a Boston Globe copy editor...

READ MORE

ADVERTISEMENT

CULINARY MASTERS

May 7-9, 2026

Robb Report's culinary weekend comes to New Orleans. Join us at the Four Seasons for a celebration where cuisine meets culture.

REGISTER NOW

LATEST GALLERIES IN DESTINATIONS

TRAVEL

MEET THE ROBB REPORT TRAVEL MASTERS: 25 LUXURY PROS WHO CAN MAKE YOUR DREAM VACATION A REALITY

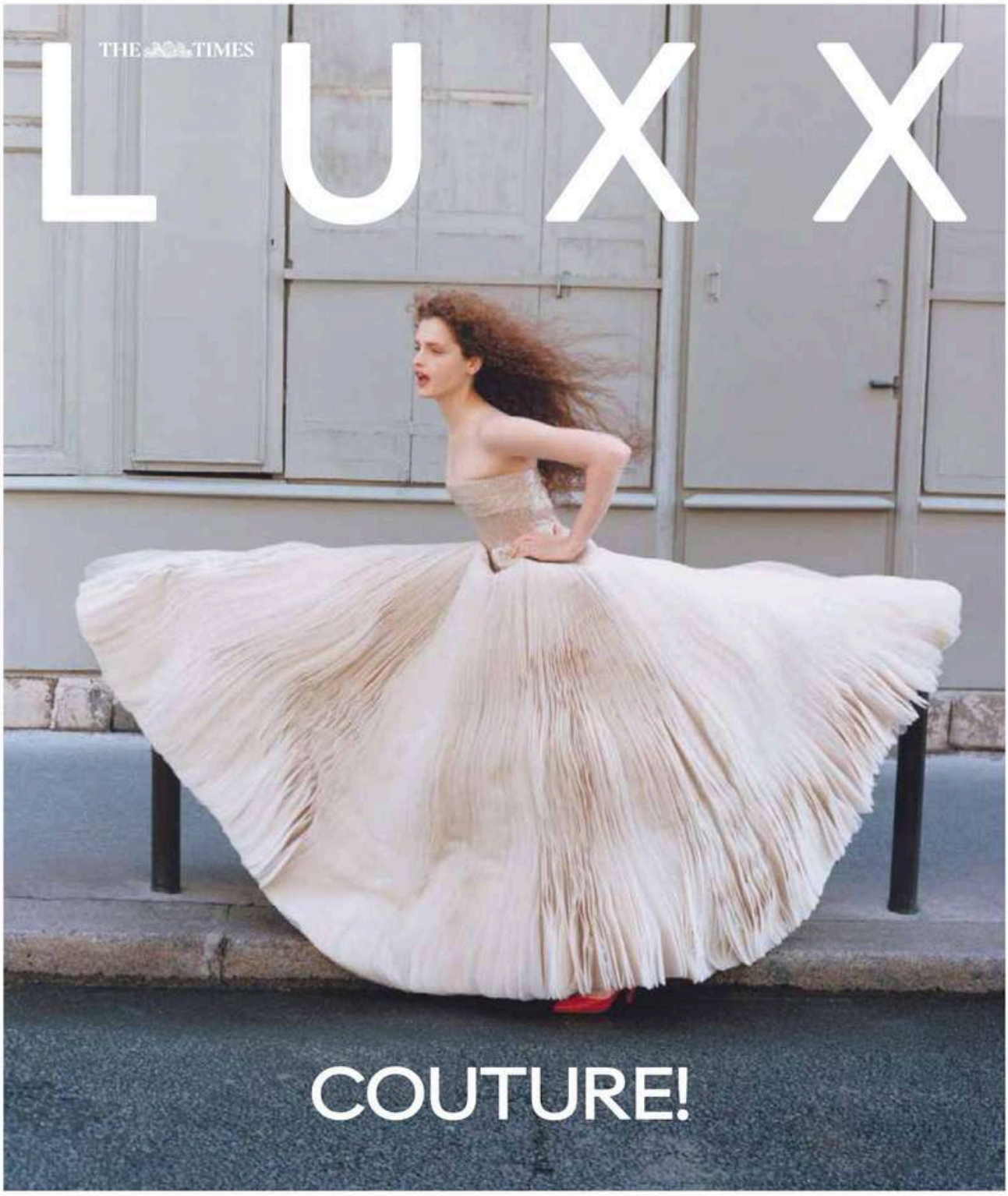
BELMOND

'MARGUERITE,' A BELMOND BOAT IN PHOTOS

ADVERTISEMENT

THE TIMES

LUXX



COUTURE!

09.05.2026

CONTRIBUTORS

Harry Wallop

Simpson's on the Strand is not the only smart venue encouraging games of chess, Wallop discovered when investigating the trend (page 57). Players are hunkering down with boards around the country – including outdoors across London where they get, as he puts it, "fresh air and mental gymnastics: a double win". The reason? Not only widespread fascination at the now-viral story of the grandmaster Hans Niemann being accused of using anal beads to cheat. But "a generation whose parents adopted screens undiscerningly have realised the only cure is to spend time IRL, as they say".

Stephanie Rafanelli

The travel writer, who grew up between Tuscany, California and the UK, has traversed the globe for everyone from the BBC to Louis Vuitton. Of all the hotels opening in Venice this year, the Orient Express Venezia (page 108), she suspects, "is going to be hard to beat. The signature suites are sheer poetry." This summer she is looking forward to going back to Japan, where she produced a Discovery documentary, after a 25-year absence: "It was one of my best jobs, and I still remember all the Japanese I learnt." With any luck, she might get to spend her birthday in June watching the midnight sun in the Arctic.

Alessandro Sorci

The Milanese-born photographer says he has been "experimenting with cameras for as long as I can remember". In between shooting for brands that include Buccellati, Dolce & Gabbana, Ferrari and Lamborghini, he specialises in still-life photography (page 74) which, he says, "gives me a strong sense of creative freedom". He fell for the Agape coffee tables in our design story: "The green marble surface paired with the chrome architectural structure felt almost sculptural." In summer he has a home in the Italian Alps. "I'm looking forward to spending time hiking and mountain biking."

MASTHEAD

Editorial

Editor-in-chief **KATE REARDON**
Deputy editor **LISA GRAINGER**
Art direction and design **B.A.M.**
Photography director **HENNY MANLEY**
Editor-at-large **JEREMY LANGMEAD**
The Times fashion director **ANNA MURPHY**
Luxx fashion director **AURELIA DONALDSON**
Style editor **HAYLEY BLOOMINGDALE**
Chief sub-editor **HELEN LAWSON**
Deputy chief sub-editor **KATHARINA HAHN**
Sub-editor **HANNAH SKELLERN**
Consultant editor **NICOLA JEAL**
The Times editor **TONY GALLAGHER**
Deputy editor, Times Luxury **GAVANNDRA HODGE**
Commissioning editor, Times Luxury **CHIARA BROWN**
Head of social and video, Times Luxury **MONA TEHRANI**
Editorial co-ordinator, Times Luxury **LEONORA FIELD-FOSTER**
Digital design **SHAUN PARKINSON**
Digital editor **RACHEL SPEED**
Digital production **ALEX BENTLEY**
Email **LUXXEDITORS-SM@NEWS.CO.UK**

Luxx Specialists

Aesthetics **JENNIFER GEORGE**
Agony aunt **JULIA SAMUEL**
Beauty **LESLEY THOMAS**
Conversations **GAVANNDRA HODGE**
Design **NICK VINSON**
Drinks **NINA CAPLAN**
Food **TONY TURNBULL**
Gardening **FIONA MCCARTHY**
Jewellery **JESSICA DIAMOND**
Joy **HILARY ROSE**
Life skills **JEREMY LANGMEAD**
Men's style **PETER HOWARTH**
Motoring **DAVID GREEN**
Philanthropy **FRANCISCA KELLETT**
Philosophy **HUGO RIFKIND**
Property **KATRINA BURROUGHS**
Spas **ALICE B-B**
Sustainability **LUCY SIEGLE**
Technology **TOM WHIPPLE**
Travel **LISA GRAINGER**
Watches **JOANNE GLASBEY**
Wine **JANE MACQUITTY**
Yachts **CAROLINE WHITE**

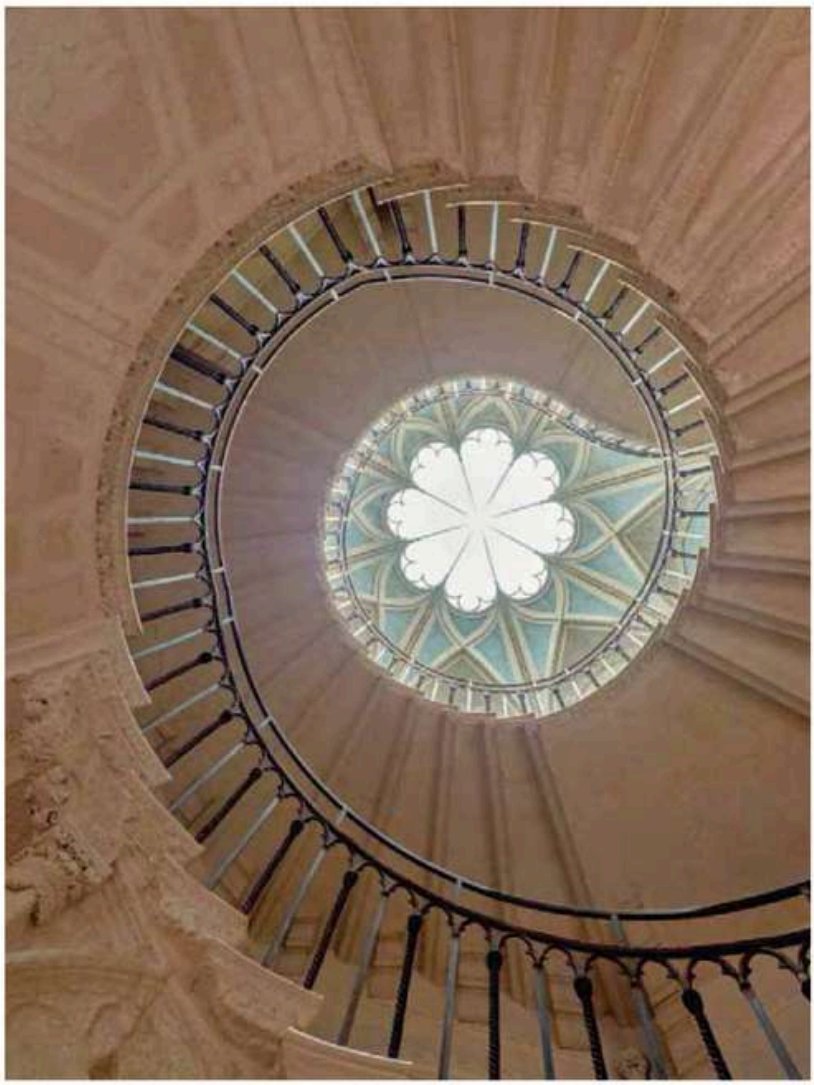
Advertising

EVP, Publisher, The Times and The Sunday Times **CHRIS LONGCROFT**
Commercial director **CAROLINE TREDGET**
caroline.tredget@news.co.uk
Sales director, Times Media **MELISSA SHARPINGTON**
melissa.sharpington@news.co.uk
Head of publishing sales, The Times and The Sunday Times **LEIGH WILLIAMS**
leigh.williams@news.co.uk
Fashion and luxury director **VICTORIA TRIMMER**
victoria.trimmer@news.co.uk
Italian office Cesana Media
Fashion **CHIARA POLENGHI**
chiara.polenghi@cesanamedia.com
Design **MARCELLA BIGGI**
marcella.biggi@cesanamedia.com
French office Media Embassy
LAURENT BRIGGS
laurent.briggs@media-embassy.fr
STÉPHANIE CHALENCON
stephanie.chalencon@media-embassy.fr
Head of magazine publishing **LAURA MCCLENNON**
Production co-ordinator **RALPH STRINGER**
Repro operations manager **LUKE SALE**
Reproduction **REPRO OPERATIONS**

Times Media Ltd, 2026. Published and licensed by Times Media Ltd, 1 London Bridge Street, London SE1 9GF, 020 7782 5000. Printed at Walstead Roche Limited, St Austell, Cornwall. Not to be sold separately

PRETTY IN PINK

After eight years of restoration Dona Giovannelli might be Venice's most poetic palazzo. STEPHANIE RAFANELLI steps inside



VENICE HAS ALWAYS traded in illusions. It is a city that seems to float between water and sky, its logic-defying existence teetering between decay and demise. To intervene in this carefully choreographed entropy is a delicate business. Which is why the new Orient Express Venezia – the reborn 15th-century Palazzo Dona Giovannelli following an eight-year restoration – has at times felt like an epic battle with the Adriatic itself.

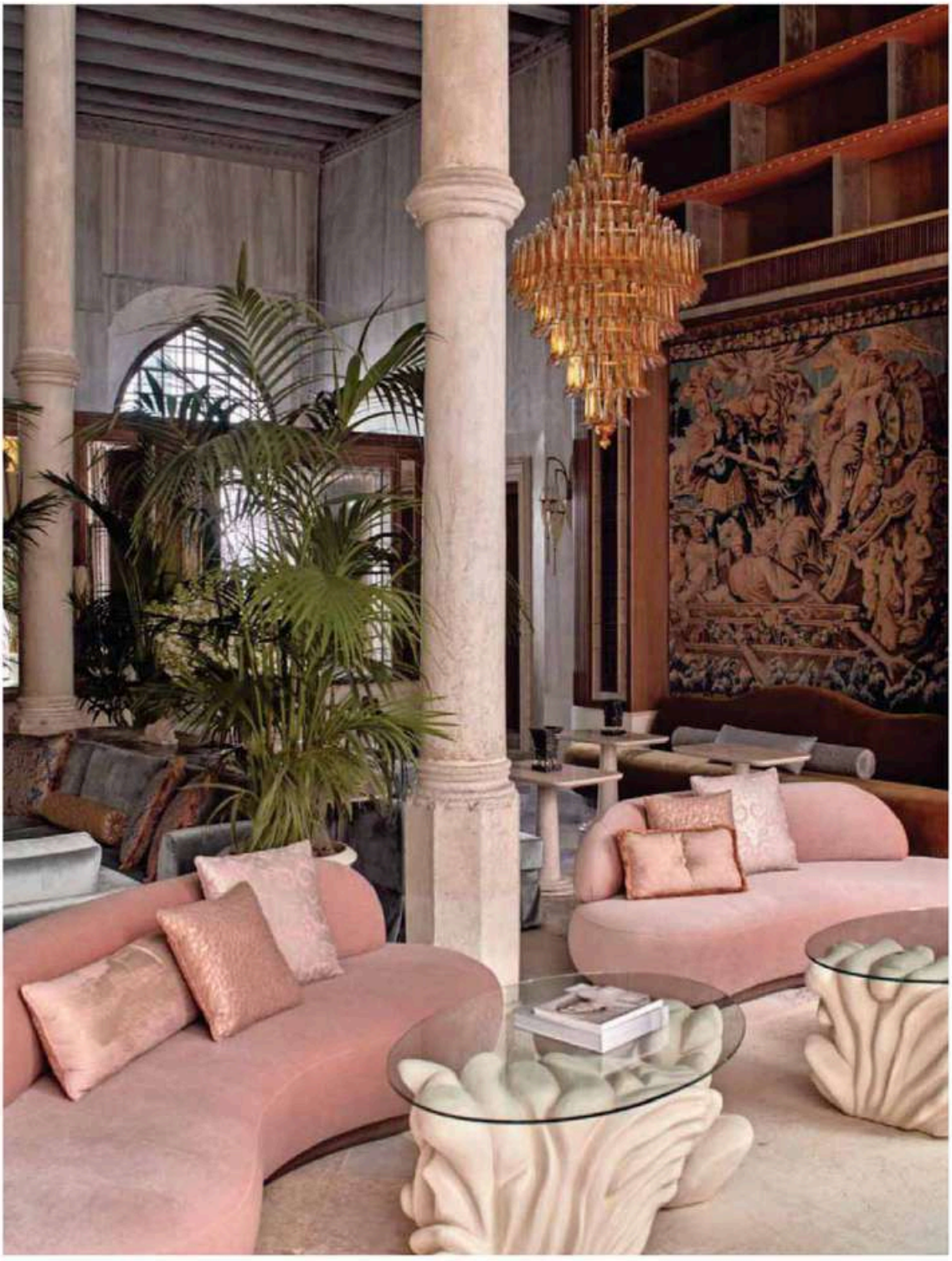
When the Italian Arsenale Group, a partner in the revitalisation of the Orient Express brand, discovered the late gothic palace in the district of Cannaregio in 2014, it saw not just a great beauty ravaged by water, salt and time but a building of esteemed Venetian lineage. The former residence of the Dona and Giovannelli art patrons as well as the Duke of Urbino, it was thought to have been designed by the Doge's Palace architect Filippo Calendario and last renovated in the baroque era by Gian Battista Meduna, the star behind the rebuilding of the Teatro La Fenice opera house. Then it fell into disrepair, serving over the centuries as a *pinacoteca*, an auction house and even a workshop for marble cutters. To save it required not only an ambitious renovation but a full-scale elemental rescue mission.

Enter the Paris-based Lebanese architect and interior designer Aline Asmar d'Amman, who would deliver an exercise in timelessness and thoughtful restraint in a city that usually demands excess. "I listened to the palazzo's walls rather than imposing a style on it," says d'Amman, who also oversaw the historic renovation of the Hôtel de Crillon in Paris in 2017.

But first the building's waterlogged skeleton had to be secured. In a feat of engineering attempted only once before, the adjacent canal was dammed for three years, allowing divers and engineers to dry out the foundations. The saturated pietra d'Istria stones

A Murano glass chandelier and couture canopy over the kingsize bed in the Orient Express Suite. Opposite: the grand staircase

GIULIO GHERARDI



GIULIO GHERARDI

Sala della Cultura. Below: a bathroom in one of the suites. Opposite: the lobby in what was once the central courtyard

underwent a slow, deliberate desalinisation – individually numbered, extracted and submerged in fresh water for nearly a year – before they could be safely returned, salt-free, to the walls like perfect pink sponges. In the process, the building's 1436 white and pink façade was revealed, as were 19th-century frescoes by the Venetian Romantic painter Francesco Hayez.

Once the walls had been secured, d'Amman utilised the skills of over 300 local artisans, from stonemasons and gilders to painters, to add layers of cross-cultural drama that reflected Venice's position as "the gateway between east and west". Four Murano chandeliers in the colours of "the sun and moon" were hung in the light-flooded former central open-air courtyard, which was enclosed to make the Corte del Conte lobby/living space, alongside a 17th-century tapestry, velvet sofas in pastel hues, burnished mirrors, and eastern and western artefacts. To the rear, an exquisite octagonal staircase with a newly vaulted cupola was refurbished to allow access to the *piano nobile*.

It is here, in the gloriously frescoed suites and drawing rooms, that d'Amman's aesthetic is most apparent: not one of oppressive Venetian opulence nor historical fustiness, but one that cleverly reanimates the wonder of the original building. Nothing, she insisted, could be a Venetian pastiche. In place of standard red velvet she based her design on the palace's *colori persi*: lost colours of the faded pigments of its frescoes, and the natural hues of stone and crushed marmorino. "For every vast salon in every suite, I start with the colours of earth that are made through hundreds of thousands of years of geology," she said. The result is a palette of watery-coloured moiré silks, pale lagoon greens, the mauves of patina and what she calls a dusky "blushing nymph's thigh" pink. It is a scheme that absorbs the diffuse, shifting light of the canal rather than fighting it.

Against this Venetian backdrop, she has given the palazzo a new theatrical life via "conversations" across time and eras: from 15th-century gothic architecture and baroque plasterwork to detailing from trains of the 1930s golden age of travel. Roman-style busts stand above curvaceous, feminine contemporary furnishings. Original 1930s grey velvet chairs by the French art deco designer Paul Follot sit opposite custom-made "Giorgia" chairs, their three-petal silhouette a homage

The result is a palette of watery-coloured moiré silks, pale lagoon greens, the mauves of patina and what d'Amman calls a dusky 'blushing nymph's thigh' pink

to Georgia O'Keeffe. Suite walls are padded with moiré silk, and furniture upholstered in Bevilacqua and Fortuny fabrics. Unlike at many Italian palazzos, the only patterns come from reflections: off water and gilded mirrors, and through intricate Byzantine-influenced stonework that casts delicate, lace-like shadows.

References to Orient Express train carriages – drinks cabinets are rendered as studded leather vintage travel trunks and art deco lanterns reminiscent of those in train corridors – feel less like heavy branding than a connecting thread between the palace's many pasts and the present. They inject a hint of otherness into the bedrooms with their grand ciel de lit canopies and a royal ballroom that is gilded, carved, frescoed and draped with silk.

Throughout, d'Amman has managed to capture the elusive, cinematic wonder and melancholy of Venice while quietly introducing the transient glamour of a 1930s sleeper train. In her hands, the building has been transformed into the prettiest and most poetic palazzo hotel in Venice – a symbol of hope that, in spite of the waters and cruise ships that batter it, the city could survive.

orient-express.com; alineasmardamman.com

Condé Nast Traveler

HOT LIST

The Best New Hotels in the World: 2026 Hot List

The best hotel openings in the world from the past year.

BY CNT EDITORS

April 23, 2026

Alexandre Tabaste/Orient Express La Minerva

Orient Express La Minerva — Rome

HOT LIST 2026

Elephant in the room? If only! Gian Lorenzo Bernini's obelisk-bearing elephant waits patiently outside, as it has done for the past three and a half centuries. And—without wishing to cast any aspersions on the impeccable door staff of La Minerva—surely this magnificently sculpted elephant is the grandest ornament to grace a hotel's entrance, anywhere, ever. Rooms on the piazza side all have a view of the pachyderm (along with the Pantheon, just over one of its shoulders, and the Basilica of Saint Mary of Minerva, over the other). Built as a private residence in 1620, La Minerva became a hotel in 1811 and has remained a beloved Roman institution ever since. Accor reopened the property under the Orient Express flag in spring 2025, when it also launched its iteration of the *Orient Express* train, operating out of Rome's Ostiense station. Designer Hugo Toro has juxtaposed Art Deco, midcentury-modern, and tobacco-toned contemporary elements in a manner that brilliantly evokes a *stile di vita* that has, in our time, become unfamiliar. It is a trumpet call to action, to live and to travel well. *From $1,158.* —*Steve King*

Read Full Review

CHECK AVAILABILITY AT BOOKING.COM

CHECK AVAILABILITY AT EXPEDIA

FOOD & WINE

The 210 Top Places to Eat, Drink, and Travel in 2026

All of Food & Wine's 2026 Global Tastemakers Award winners in one definitive list.

The rooftop restaurant of the Orient Express La Minerva hotel in Rome.
Credit: Food & Wine / Øivind Haug

Now in its fourth year, Food & Wine's Global Tastemakers Awards celebrates the best in culinary travel including cities, restaurants, bars, hotels, airports, airlines, and cruises. Nominated by over 400 chefs, wine pros, and food and travel writers from across the globe and then ranked by our Global Advisory Board of 25 travel experts, this list of 210 destinations and brands celebrates operators who are making the food and hospitality industries stronger, better, and more innovative.

You'll find many independent and small businesses honored alongside long-established international brands who all have one thing in common: They center culture, cuisine, community, and a true sense of place. Here are all of those winners at a glance. We hope it inspires your most delicious travels for 2026 yet.

07
of 21

Top International Hotels for Food and Drink

1. Capella Bangkok (Bangkok)
The chic boutique hotel on Bangkok's Chao Phraya River features several exceptional restaurants and cocktail bars showcasing local flavors alongside an outpost by celebrity chef Mauro Colagreco, whose global hotel exports are instant hits.

2. Orient Express La Minerva (Rome)
3. Babylonstoren (Franschhoek, South Africa)
4. Casa Maria Luigia (Modena, Italy)
5. Aman Tokyo (Tokyo)
6. Hotel Cipriani, A Belmond Hotel (Venice, Italy)
7. A'jia Hotel (Istanbul)
8. Mandarin Oriental (Hong Kong)
9. Atlantis The Royal (Dubai, UAE)
10. The Grand National Hotel by Saint Peter (Sydney)

list

ALL ABOARD

From **Saudi Arabia's anticipated Dream of the Desert to Switzerland's snow globe Glacier Express**, these rail experiences take you to destinations rarely seen from the comfort of a luxury carriage

— TEXT John O'Callaigh

Saudi Arabia's rail revival is moving at full throttle. After its December 2024 launch, Riyadh Metro welcomed 100m passengers in less than nine months. Complemented by the ongoing expansion of national rail services in neighbouring countries, the Gulf Railway Project will provide rail links between Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE, and Oman by 2030. This renaissance of rail travel isn't just for commuters. Reservations have now opened for Dream of the Desert, Saudi Arabia's first ultra-luxury train, due to begin journeys in late 2026. Offering a decadent way to experience the country's most remarkable and rarely seen sights, it is the Middle East's first venture of its kind. Here's what's in store on board – and how it compares with the world's most iconic luxury rail services.

Dream of the Desert, Saudi Arabia

With multi-day journeys from Riyadh extending as far as Al Jouf, Dream of the Desert will live up to its name, offering guests privileged access to the likes of Marid Castle and Jubbah's ancient rock art when not being pampered on board. Accommodating 66 passengers across 33 cabins in 14 carriages, it will feature two restaurants – one Saudi, the other an inventive international/Italian offering – and a majlis lounge.

Aligned with Vision 2030, the initiative will be another key contributor to the nation's standing as one of the world's preeminent luxury-travel destinations, while retaining a distinctly Saudi character, from artworks inspired by the country's heritage to live performances showcasing local culture. And the golden and amber tones across carriages that feature tiled bars and velvet banquettes? A soothing complement to desert landscapes and honeyed sunsets revealed as you traverse Saudi Arabia's romantic interior.

Dream of the Desert establishes Riyadh headquarters. Image Courtesy: Arsenale S.p.A

TRANSPORT

Dream of the Desert establishes Riyadh headquarters, marking entry into delivery phase

Permanent Riyadh headquarters anchors project within Saudi Arabia's tourism and transport ecosystem

Press Release

May 13, 2026

- Raffaele Breschi appointed General Manager of Dream of the Desert and CEO of Arsenale International, reinforcing operational momentum ahead of 2026 launch
- Collaboration with national entities accelerates development and destination activation across Saudi Arabia

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia – Dream of the Desert, Saudi Arabia's first ultra-luxury train by Arsenale Group, marked a major development milestone with the opening of its headquarters in Riyadh and the appointment of Raffaele Breschi as General Manager of Dream of the Desert and CEO of Arsenale International. This step marks the next phase of the project's delivery in the country, reinforcing its central role in Saudi Arabia's tourism transformation as it advances toward its 2026 debut.

The establishment of a permanent base in Riyadh anchors the project firmly within Saudi Arabia's tourism and transport ecosystem and marks Arsenale's first international headquarters, underscoring a long-term, on-the-ground commitment beyond project development.

Operating from Saudi Arabia's capital, the project team will work closely with national stakeholders – including the Ministry of Culture (MOC); the Ministry of Transport and Logistic Services, with Saudi Arabia Railways (SAR), and the Transport General Authority (TGA); and the Ministry of Tourism, with Saudi Tourism Authority (STA), and the Tourism Development Fund (TDF), the national enabler of Saudi Arabia's tourism sector, to ensure operational readiness and activate cultural and touristic destinations along the route ahead of the inaugural journeys scheduled for the end of 2026.

As the project advances toward launch, Breschi will oversee the end-to-end setup of Dream of the Desert in Saudi Arabia, including organisational build-out, regulatory coordination, product development, distribution, talent development, and operational performance.

Breschi brings a strong track record in international expansion and luxury hospitality development. He joined Arsenale Group in 2023 as part of its global leadership team, following senior roles focused on growth across the Middle East, and previously served as a Partner at McKinsey & Company, advising global developers and sovereign entities on large-scale tourism and hospitality strategies.

In parallel to his role as General Manager of Dream of the Desert, Breschi has been appointed CEO of Arsenale International, where he spearheads all Arsenale projects outside Italy. In this capacity, Dream of the Desert remains a flagship project within the international portfolio, with his primary focus centered on its successful delivery and launch in Saudi Arabia.

"Establishing our headquarters in Riyadh reflects our commitment to building Dream of the Desert from within the Kingdom," **said Raffaele Breschi, General Manager of Dream of the Desert.** *"Working alongside our national partners enables us to shape a rail experience that is globally distinctive yet deeply rooted in Saudi culture – one that celebrates the Kingdom's landscapes, heritage, and hospitality while setting a new benchmark for experiential travel in the region."*

Designed to redefine luxury rail travel globally while showcasing Saudi Arabia's landscapes, culture and heritage, Dream of the Desert will offer immersive, one to three-day journeys across the country, combining refined onboard hospitality with curated off-board experiences. The project forms part of Saudi Arabia's broader tourism and infrastructure transformation, supporting Saudi Vision 2030's ambition to position the Kingdom as a leading destination for high-value, culturally rooted travel.

Spanning more than 1,300 kilometers of Saudi Arabia's existing railway tracks, the route will activate destinations across multiple locations, creating new gateways into the country's natural and cultural landscapes through curated itineraries that blend craftsmanship, storytelling and destination discovery.

Beyond its luxury travel experience, Dream of the Desert is set to play a meaningful socio-economic role in Saudi Arabia. The project will support hospitality workforce development, with a strong focus on Saudization, enable specialised skills transfer in rail-based guest experience operations, stimulate local supply chains, and contribute to the continued growth of an experiential tourism ecosystem across the country.

With its headquarters now established in Riyadh and leadership focused on delivery, Dream of the Desert moves steadily toward its 2026 debut as one of Saudi Arabia's most distinctive luxury experiential travel initiatives.

Priority List is now open via the website. For details on itineraries & experiences, please visit **www.dreamofthedesert.com**.

For more information, please contact Brazen MENA:
E: DOTD@brazenmena.com

ABOUT ARSENALE S.p.A.

Founded in 2020 by Paolo Barletta and Annabel Holding, Arsenale is an Italian company in the luxury hospitality sector, focused on enhancing Italian tourism. It operates through two divisions. The Hospitality division designs and manages hotels in collaboration with luxury brands like Soho House and Orient Express, including Orient Express La Minerva Rome and the upcoming opening of the second Orient Express hotel in Venice in 2026, alongside new developments in Rome, Cortina, Tuscany, and Southern Italy. The Luxury Train Cruising division launched the La Dolce Vita Orient Express, the first sustainable luxury rail tourism project, in partnership with Orient Express, Trenitalia, Ferrovie dello Stato Group, Fondazione FS, and TTI.

Since 2023, Arsenale has expanded internationally with four signed projects: *Dream of the Desert*, Saudi Arabia's first ultra-luxury train to traverse the Kingdom, developed in collaboration with Saudi Arabia Railways (SAR), the Ministry of Transport and Logistic Services, the Transport General Authority (TGA), Ministry of Culture (MOC), and Saudi Tourism Authority (STA). Launching end of 2026, Dream of the Desert redefines rail travel in the Kingdom with a unique blend of elegance, culture, and discovery. Designed to reflect Saudi Arabia's rich heritage and breathtaking natural beauty, the train offers an exclusive gateway to the country's most iconic destinations. A new benchmark in luxury travel, crafted by Arsenale; *The Samarkand Express*, Central Asia's first luxury train in Uzbekistan, developed in partnership with O'zbekiston Temir Yo'llari JSC and the State Committee for Tourism; *Guardian of the Nile*, Egypt's first luxury train, in partnership with Egypt National Railway; and a luxury train in the UAE in partnership with Etihad Railway.

In September 2025, the company acquired 100% of Golden Eagle Luxury Trains Ltd., a historic British company regarded as an international benchmark in long-distance luxury rail travel. This transaction marks a further strategic step in Arsenale's growth trajectory, strengthening its position as a key player in the global high-end tourism sector. www.arsenalegroup.com

Arsenale
Chief Marketing Officer
Simona Pantò, simona.panto@arsenalegroup.com

Dream of the Desert
Marketing Director
Sarah Khaled, sarah.khaled@arsenalegroup.com

Brazen MENA
Senior Account Executive
Momina Sheikh, momina@brazenmena.com

logisticsgulf
empowering the supply-chain industry

Dream of the Desert establishes Riyadh headquarters, marking entry into delivery phase

May 13, 2026 | Posted by LG Content Team

Dream of the Desert exterior [Supplied Image]

Raffaele Breschi appointed General Manager of Dream of the Desert and CEO of Arsenale International

Dream of the Desert, Saudi Arabia's first ultra-luxury train by Arsenale Group, marked a major development milestone with the opening of its headquarters in Riyadh and the appointment of Raffaele Breschi as General Manager of Dream of the Desert and CEO, Arsenale International.

This step marks the next phase of the project's delivery in the country, reinforcing its central role in Saudi Arabia's tourism transformation as it advances toward its 2026 debut.

The establishment of a permanent base in Riyadh anchors the project firmly within Saudi Arabia's tourism and transport ecosystem and marks Arsenale's first international headquarters, underscoring a long-term, on-the-ground commitment beyond project development.

Stakeholders

Operating from Saudi Arabia's capital, the project team will work closely with national stakeholders including the Ministry of Culture (MOC); the Ministry of Transport and Logistic Services, with Saudi Arabia Railways (SAR), and the Transport General Authority (TGA); and the Ministry of Tourism, with Saudi Tourism Authority (STA), and the Tourism Development Fund (TDF), the national enabler of Saudi Arabia's tourism sector, to ensure operational readiness and activate cultural and touristic destinations along the route ahead of the inaugural journeys scheduled for the end of 2026.

As the project advances toward launch, Breschi will oversee the end-to-end setup of Dream of the Desert in Saudi Arabia, including organisational build-out, regulatory coordination, product development, distribution, talent development, and operational performance.

National partners

"Working alongside our national partners enables us to shape a rail experience that is globally distinctive yet deeply rooted in Saudi culture – one that celebrates the Kingdom's landscapes, heritage, and hospitality while setting a new benchmark for experiential travel in the region," emphasized Breschi.

Spanning more than 1,300km of Saudi Arabia's existing railway tracks, the route will activate destinations across multiple locations, creating new gateways into the country's natural and cultural landscapes through curated itineraries that blend craftsmanship, storytelling and destination discovery, a press statement concluded.

Saudi ICT Shopper News
Covering Technology, Telecom & Innovation

Dream of the Desert Opens Riyadh Headquarters, Appoints General Manager

Posted by saudishopper | May 13, 2026 | Economy & Business, Tourism & Aviation

Dream of the Desert, Saudi Arabia's first ultra-luxury train by Arsenale Group, opened its permanent headquarters in Riyadh on May 13, 2026, and appointed Raffaele Breschi as General Manager and CEO of Arsenale International. The establishment marks the project's entry into its delivery phase ahead of its scheduled 2026 debut.

The permanent Riyadh base anchors the project within Saudi Arabia's tourism and transport ecosystem and represents Arsenale's first international headquarters. Operating from the capital, the project team will collaborate with national stakeholders including the Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Transport and Logistic Services, Saudi Arabia Railways, Transport General Authority, Ministry of Tourism, Saudi Tourism Authority, and the Tourism Development Fund to ensure operational readiness and activate destinations along the route.

Leadership and Operational Focus

Breschi will oversee the complete setup of Dream of the Desert in Saudi Arabia, including organizational development, regulatory coordination, product development, distribution, talent development, and operational performance. His background includes senior roles in Middle East expansion and luxury hospitality development, as well as experience as a Partner at McKinsey & Company advising global developers and sovereign entities on large-scale tourism and hospitality strategies.

> ***"Establishing our headquarters in Riyadh reflects our commitment to building Dream of the Desert from within the Kingdom. Working alongside our national partners enables us to shape a rail experience that is globally distinctive yet deeply rooted in Saudi culture."***
>
> **Raffaele Breschi, General Manager of Dream of the Desert**

Route and Travel Experience

Dream of the Desert will span more than 1,300 kilometers of Saudi Arabia's existing railway tracks and offer immersive journeys lasting one to three days across the country. The route will activate destinations across multiple locations, creating gateways into the Kingdom's natural and cultural landscapes through curated itineraries that combine refined onboard hospitality with off-board travel experiences.

The project forms part of Saudi Arabia's broader tourism and infrastructure transformation, supporting Saudi Vision 2030's objective to position the Kingdom as a leading destination for high-value, culturally rooted travel. The train will celebrate the Kingdom's landscapes, heritage, and hospitality while setting a benchmark for experiential travel in the region.

Economic and Workforce Development

Beyond its luxury travel experience, Dream of the Desert will play a socio-economic role in Saudi Arabia. The project will support hospitality workforce development with emphasis on Saudization, enable specialized skills transfer in rail-based guest experience operations, stimulate local supply chains, and contribute to the growth of an experiential tourism ecosystem across the country.

About Arsenale Group

Arsenale S.p.A., founded in 2020 by Paolo Barletta and Annabel Holding, operates in the luxury hospitality sector with divisions focused on hotel design and management, and luxury train cruising. The company expanded internationally beginning in 2023 with four signed projects: Dream of the Desert in Saudi Arabia, the Samarkand Express in Uzbekistan, Guardian of the Nile in Egypt, and a luxury train project in the UAE. In September 2025, Arsenale acquired 100 percent of Golden Eagle Luxury Trains Ltd., a historic British company recognized as an international benchmark in long-distance luxury rail travel.

The project's priority list is now open via the website dreamofthedesert.com for interested travelers seeking details on itineraries and experiences.

Arabian Business

Saudi Arabia's first ultra-luxury train project opens Riyadh HQ ahead of 2026 launch

Saudi Arabia's Dream of the Desert luxury train project opens Riyadh headquarters as the tourism initiative advances toward a 2026 debut

Saudi Arabia's first ultra-luxury train project, Dream of the Desert, has opened its headquarters in Riyadh as the tourism initiative moves closer to its planned 2026 launch.

The project, developed by Arsenale Group, also announced the appointment of Raffaele Breschi as General Manager of Dream of the Desert and CEO of Arsenale International.

The latest milestone marks the next phase of the project's delivery in Saudi Arabia and reinforces its role within the Kingdom's wider tourism and infrastructure transformation plans under Saudi Vision 2030.

According to Arsenale Group, the new Riyadh headquarters represents the company's first international base outside Italy and reflects a long-term operational commitment within Saudi Arabia's tourism and transport ecosystem.

The project team will work alongside Saudi government entities and national stakeholders including:

- Ministry of Culture (MOC)
- Ministry of Transport and Logistic Services
- Saudi Arabia Railways (SAR)
- Transport General Authority (TGA)
- Ministry of Tourism
- Saudi Tourism Authority (STA)
- Tourism Development Fund (TDF)

Dream of the Desert in Saudi Arabia

The collaboration aims to support operational readiness and activate tourism and cultural destinations along the route ahead of the inaugural journeys scheduled for the end of 2026.

Dream of the Desert is designed to redefine luxury rail travel while showcasing Saudi Arabia's landscapes, heritage and hospitality through immersive journeys lasting between one and three days.

The luxury train experience will span more than 1,300km across Saudi Arabia's existing railway network and connect multiple destinations through curated itineraries focused on culture, storytelling and destination discovery.

The project forms part of Saudi Arabia's broader ambition to position the Kingdom as a leading destination for high-value and culturally rooted tourism experiences.

As General Manager of Dream of the Desert, Breschi will oversee organisational development, regulatory coordination, operational performance, talent development and product delivery within Saudi Arabia.

Luxury tourism in KSA

Breschi joined Arsenale Group in 2023 following leadership roles focused on Middle East growth and previously served as a Partner at McKinsey & Company, advising global developers and sovereign entities on tourism and hospitality strategies.

In parallel with his Saudi role, Breschi has also been appointed CEO of Arsenale International, where he will oversee the company's international projects outside Italy.

He said: "Establishing our headquarters in Riyadh reflects our commitment to building Dream of the Desert from within the Kingdom.

"Working alongside our national partners enables us to shape a rail experience that is globally distinctive yet deeply rooted in Saudi culture – one that celebrates the Kingdom's landscapes, heritage, and hospitality while setting a new benchmark for experiential travel in the region."

Arsenale Group said the project is also expected to support hospitality workforce development, contribute to Saudization goals, stimulate local supply chains and strengthen experiential tourism across Saudi Arabia.

With the Riyadh headquarters now operational, Dream of the Desert continues preparations for its planned debut at the end of 2026.

TTW TM
TRAVEL AND TOUR WORLD

Dream Of The Desert Sets Up Saudi Arabia's Ultra-Luxury Rail Icon To Enter The Delivery Phase For 2026 Debut

Published on May 14, 2026

The new ultra-luxury train **Dream of the Desert** will set up its main operational base in **Riyadh, Saudi Arabia**, to begin delivery operations, with a scheduled train service launch in **late 2026**. The long-awaited rail journeys through Saudi Arabia's deserts, oases and heritage sites will soon become available to future guests because teams are currently working in Riyadh to make the vision a reality.

Arsenale Group, the Italian luxury hospitality specialist behind the project, has chosen Riyadh for its first international headquarters, signalling a long-term commitment to the Kingdom's tourism and transport ecosystem. The flagship train will travel over about 1,300 kilometres of existing railway, threading Riyadh with northern destinations such as Al Jouf, Jubbah and AlUla through a series of curated one- to three-day itineraries.

Advertisement

New Riyadh base and leadership to drive delivery

The Riyadh headquarters embeds Dream of the Desert directly within Saudi Arabia's institutional and operational framework, allowing the project team to work daily with national partners as it heads towards its inaugural journeys in late 2026. Key collaborators include the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Transport and Logistic Services with Saudi Arabia Railways and the Transport General Authority, as well as the Ministry of Tourism, the Saudi Tourism Authority and the Tourism Development Fund.

Raffaele Breschi has been appointed General Manager of Dream of the Desert and CEO of Arsenale International, consolidating leadership as the project enters this crucial phase. He is tasked with overseeing everything from organisational build-out and regulatory coordination to product development, distribution and talent strategy, bringing experience from luxury hospitality growth in the Middle East and prior advisory work on large-scale tourism and rail projects.

Ultra-luxury rail: Italian craft, Saudi soul

On board, Dream of the Desert is conceived as a moving boutique hotel, combining Italian craftsmanship with Saudi cultural cues to create what the developers position as a globally distinctive but locally rooted rail experience. The train is planned to carry around 66 guests in a collection of suites and presidential suites within 14 carriages, including dedicated restaurant cars and a majlis-inspired lounge that reinterprets the traditional Saudi gathering space for life on the rails.

Designs presented to date show reimagined vintage Italian carriages, refitted rather than newly built, with warm desert tones, intricate detailing and contemporary comfort, aligning with wider trends for slow, sustainable luxury travel. Dining concepts are expected to blend refined Saudi cuisine with Italian-influenced gastronomy, underscoring the partnership between Saudi Arabia Railways and Arsenale and the project's ambition to match leading luxury trains worldwide.

Advertisement

Advertisement

Immersive itineraries from Riyadh to Al Jouf, Jubbah and AlUla

From a traveller's perspective, Dream of the Desert is being shaped around experiential itineraries rather than simple point-to-point transport. Official information highlights journeys of approximately 24 hours, 2 days/1 night and 3 days/2 nights, designed to showcase varying facets of Saudi Arabia's natural landscapes and cultural heritage.

The core routing links Riyadh with Al Jouf, Jubbah and AlUla, with off-train excursions expected to include archaeological sites, rock-carving locations and emerging desert resorts, creating what the project describes as "curated discovery" along the line. Five distinct itineraries are planned, allowing guests to choose between shorter samplers and longer slow-travel journeys, positioning the Riyadh luxury train as a new icon for high-value tourism under Saudi Vision 2030.

Socio-economic impact and tourism ambitions

Beyond the allure of suites and scenery, Dream of the Desert is intended to contribute tangibly to Saudi Arabia's tourism transformation and wider economy. The project framework outlines ambitions to support hospitality workforce development with a strong focus on training Saudi nationals, create specialised skills in rail-based guest operations and stimulate local supply chains that can service a demanding experiential product.

For destinations such as AlUla, Al Jouf and Jubbah, the train is expected to function as a high-profile gateway, funnelling international and regional visitors into areas still relatively new to mainstream tourism, and encouraging longer stays across the country. Industry observers have noted that by combining rail, culture and hospitality in a single product, the Saudi Arabia ultra luxury train could help position the Kingdom alongside established rail icons in Europe, Asia and Africa, while offering a distinctly Arabian narrative.

Bottom Line

For many prospective travellers, the story of Dream of the Desert is as much about emotion as it is about infrastructure: couples imagining desert sunsets framed by a cabin window, multigenerational families sharing a majlis lounge, or solo guests discovering AlUla's rock formations after a night in motion between Riyadh and the north. With its Riyadh headquarters now operational, leadership in place and partnerships deepening across culture, transport and tourism, the train is steadily turning from concept into a bookable reality that could redefine how visitors first encounter Saudi Arabia.

The official Dream of the Desert platform will begin its pre-reservation channels together with its complete package details before the 2026 launch. The project will achieve success through the experiences that guests who board the project share. The guests will arrive as curious visitors to Riyadh and leave through AlUla Jubbah and Al Jouf with new stories about the Kingdom's landscapes and hospitality and its developing cultural identity.

social kandura

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia's Dream Of The Desert Luxury Train Opens Riyadh HQ Before 2026 Launch

Saudi Arabia's first ultra-luxury train project is moving closer to launch, promising travellers a five-star journey through the Kingdom's desert landscapes.

NIDHI SINGH PARIHAR • 14 MAY 2026 • 3 MINS READ

Luxury travel in the Gulf is entering a new chapter. Saudi Arabia's much-talked-about Dream of the Desert train project has officially opened its headquarters in Riyadh, bringing the Kingdom one step closer to launching its first ultra-luxury rail experience in 2026.

Across the UAE, travellers are already familiar with lavish hotels, desert resorts, and curated tourism experiences. But this project feels different. Instead of flying from one destination to another, Dream of the Desert is designed to slow the journey down — turning the train ride itself into the main attraction.

For anyone who has driven through the endless desert roads between GCC cities, the idea instantly makes sense. Wide open landscapes, golden dunes at sunset, quiet stretches of untouched scenery — Saudi Arabia is now packaging that experience into a moving luxury hotel on rails.

Table of Contents

1. A luxury train inspired by Arabian hospitality
2. The journey is expected to be the real attraction
3. Saudi Arabia is rapidly reshaping regional tourism
4. Riyadh is becoming more than just a business capital
5. Launch preparations continue for 2026

A Luxury Train Inspired By Arabian Hospitality

The project is being developed through a partnership between Saudi Arabia Railways (SAR) and Italy's Arsenale Group, a company known for luxury hospitality experiences.

The newly opened Riyadh headquarters will oversee operations as the train moves toward its planned 2026 debut. While construction and preparations continue behind the scenes, the project is already becoming one of the region's standout tourism developments.

Unlike a standard railway service, Dream of the Desert is being built as an immersive travel experience. Early visuals reveal interiors filled with warm earthy tones, elegant textures, and design details inspired by traditional Saudi architecture. Think boutique hotel meets desert majlis — but moving across vast landscapes.

The train is expected to feature around 40 high-end cabins and suites, along with luxury dining spaces, lounges, and hospitality services that showcase Saudi culture in a more modern and refined way.

The Journey Is Expected To Be The Real Attraction

In many parts of the world, luxury trains are less about transport and more about storytelling. That same idea appears to sit at the centre of Dream of the Desert.

Passengers are expected to travel along Saudi Arabia's Northern Railway network, passing through dramatic desert scenery and cultural locations that many international tourists have never properly experienced before.

There is something naturally cinematic about desert travel in this region. The quietness. The changing colours of the sand. Small towns appearing unexpectedly in the distance. Saudi Arabia seems ready to turn those moments into a premium tourism product.

Travellers onboard can expect:

- Private luxury suites
- Fine dining experiences inspired by regional flavours
- Lounge and relaxation areas
- Panoramic windows overlooking desert landscapes
- Curated cultural experiences
- High-end personalised hospitality

For GCC travellers, especially UAE residents who regularly look for quick luxury escapes, the project could easily become a future bucket-list experience.

Saudi Arabia Is Rapidly Reshaping Regional Tourism

Over the last few years, Saudi Arabia's tourism ambitions have become impossible to ignore. Massive projects like NEOM, The Red Sea destination, Diriyah Gate, and new entertainment zones have completely changed global perceptions of the Kingdom.

Now, the country is moving into experiential tourism — the kind of travel where the journey feels just as memorable as the destination itself.

That shift is something Dubai travellers understand well. Across the UAE, people are increasingly choosing experiences over traditional holidays. Desert glamping retreats, wellness resorts, private island stays, and scenic train journeys abroad have all grown in popularity.

Dream of the Desert fits directly into that trend.

The project also reflects the growing competition within Gulf tourism. While Dubai remains a global leader in luxury hospitality, Saudi Arabia is rapidly creating new attractions that offer something different from the usual city-based travel experience.

Riyadh Is Becoming More Than Just A Business Capital

The opening of the headquarters in Riyadh also highlights how much the Saudi capital has transformed in recent years.

Once seen mainly as a government and business hub, Riyadh is now developing into a lifestyle destination filled with new restaurants, entertainment districts, hotels, and cultural attractions. Visitors arriving today often find a city that feels far more energetic and international than expected.

The luxury train project adds another layer to that transformation.

For Saudi Arabia, rail tourism also carries long-term economic value. Luxury travel attracts high-spending visitors, creates hospitality jobs, and encourages tourists to spend more time exploring multiple regions instead of flying in and out quickly.

Also read: Saudi Arabia's Tourism Sector Hits a Historic High in 2025

Launch Preparations Continue For 2026

While the final launch date has not yet been confirmed, Dream of the Desert is expected to welcome its first passengers in 2026.

The opening of the Riyadh headquarters signals that the project is steadily moving from concept to reality. And once operational, it could become one of the Middle East's most unique travel experiences.

For travellers across Dubai and the UAE, it may soon offer an entirely new way to experience Saudi Arabia — not through airports and fast itineraries, but through slower journeys, dramatic desert views, and luxury hospitality designed around the spirit of the region.

Saudi Arabia's Luxury Train Era Starts Here

بواسطة Yazeed

Dream of the Desert just opened its Riyadh HQ ahead of its 2026 launch

Saudi Arabia's first ultra-luxury train project, Dream of the Desert, just hit a major milestone after officially opening its headquarters in Riyadh

The move marks the project's official entry into its delivery phase ahead of the highly anticipated 2026 launch. And honestly? This isn't just another tourism project.. this one's giving full luxury travel vibes across the Kingdom

The project also announced the appointment of Raffaele Breschi as General Manager of Dream of the Desert and CEO of Arsenale International, as the team gears up to bring the experience to life

The train will offer immersive one to three-day journeys across Saudi Arabia, combining luxury onboard hospitality with curated experiences around the Kingdom's cultural and natural destinations

And the scale? Massive

The route will stretch across more than 1,300 km of Saudi railway tracks, connecting travelers to different destinations through storytelling, heritage, culture, and unforgettable landscapes

Dream of the Desert is also expected to support local tourism, create new hospitality opportunities, and contribute to Saudi Vision 2030's push to position the Kingdom as a global luxury travel destination

Priority registration for the experience is already open online.. and safe to say, this might become one of the hottest travel experiences in the region

Web-Release

DREAM OF THE DESERT ESTABLISHES RIYADH HEADQUARTERS, MARKING ENTRY INTO DELIVERY PHASE

written by Web Release | May 14, 2026

Dream of the Desert, Saudi Arabia's first ultra-luxury train by Arsenale Group, marked a major development milestone with the opening of its headquarters in Riyadh and the appointment of Raffaele Breschi as General Manager of Dream of the Desert and CEO of Arsenale International. This step marks the next phase of the project's delivery in the country, reinforcing its central role in Saudi Arabia's tourism transformation as it advances toward its 2026 debut.

The establishment of a permanent base in Riyadh anchors the project firmly within Saudi Arabia's tourism and transport ecosystem and marks Arsenale's first international headquarters, underscoring a long-term, on-the-ground commitment beyond project development.

Operating from Saudi Arabia's capital, the project team will work closely with national stakeholders – including the Ministry of Culture (MOC); the Ministry of Transport and Logistic Services, with Saudi Arabia Railways (SAR), and the Transport General Authority (TGA); and the Ministry of Tourism, with Saudi Tourism Authority (STA), and the Tourism Development Fund (TDF), the national enabler of Saudi Arabia's tourism sector, to ensure operational readiness and activate cultural and touristic destinations along the route ahead of the inaugural journeys scheduled for the end of 2026.

As the project advances toward launch, Breschi will oversee the end-to-end setup of Dream of the Desert in Saudi Arabia, including organisational build-out, regulatory coordination, product development, distribution, talent development, and operational performance.

Breschi brings a strong track record in international expansion and luxury hospitality development. He joined Arsenale Group in 2023 as part of its global leadership team, following senior roles focused on growth across the Middle East, and previously served as a Partner at McKinsey & Company, advising global developers and sovereign entities on large-scale tourism and hospitality strategies.

In parallel to his role as General Manager of Dream of the Desert, Breschi has been appointed CEO of Arsenale International, where he spearheads all Arsenale projects outside Italy. In this capacity, Dream of the Desert remains a flagship project within the international portfolio, with his primary focus centered on its successful delivery and launch in Saudi Arabia.

"Establishing our headquarters in Riyadh reflects our commitment to building Dream of the Desert from within the Kingdom," **said Raffaele Breschi, General Manager of Dream of the Desert.** *"Working alongside our national partners enables us to shape a rail experience that is globally distinctive yet deeply rooted in Saudi culture – one that celebrates the Kingdom's landscapes, heritage, and hospitality while setting a new benchmark for experiential travel in the region."*

Designed to redefine luxury rail travel globally while showcasing Saudi Arabia's landscapes, culture and heritage, Dream of the Desert will offer immersive, one to three-day journeys across the country, combining refined onboard hospitality with curated off-board experiences. The project forms part of Saudi Arabia's broader tourism and infrastructure transformation, supporting Saudi Vision 2030's ambition to position the Kingdom as a leading destination for high-value, culturally rooted travel.

Spanning more than 1,300 kilometers of Saudi Arabia's existing railway tracks, the route will activate destinations across multiple locations, creating new gateways into the country's natural and cultural landscapes through curated itineraries that blend craftsmanship, storytelling and destination discovery.

Beyond its luxury travel experience, Dream of the Desert is set to play a meaningful socio-economic role in Saudi Arabia. The project will support hospitality workforce development, with a strong focus on Saudization, enable specialised skills transfer in rail-based guest experience operations, stimulate local supply chains, and contribute to the continued growth of an experiential tourism ecosystem across the country.

With its headquarters now established in Riyadh and leadership focused on delivery, Dream of the Desert moves steadily toward its 2026 debut as one of Saudi Arabia's most distinctive luxury experiential travel initiatives.

Priority List is now open via the website. For details on itineraries & experiences, please visit **www.dreamofthedesert.com**.

Dream of the Desert opens Riyadh HQ, appoints GM

KSA Business

Thu, 14 May 2026

Dream of the Desert, Saudi Arabia's first ultra-luxury train by Arsenale Group, marked a major development milestone with the opening of its headquarters in Riyadh and the appointment of Raffaele Breschi as General Manager of Dream of the Desert and CEO of Arsenale International.

This marks the next phase of the project's delivery in the country, reinforcing its central role in Saudi Arabia's tourism transformation as it advances toward its 2026 debut.

The establishment of a permanent base in Riyadh anchors the project firmly within Saudi Arabia's tourism and transport ecosystem and marks Arsenale's first international headquarters, underscoring a long-term, on-the-ground commitment beyond project development.

Operating from Saudi Arabia's capital, the project team will work closely with national stakeholders – including the Ministry of Culture (MOC); the Ministry of Transport and Logistic Services, with Saudi Arabia Railways (SAR), and the Transport General Authority (TGA); and the Ministry of Tourism, with Saudi Tourism Authority (STA), and the Tourism Development Fund (TDF), the national enabler of Saudi Arabia's tourism sector, to ensure operational readiness and activate cultural and touristic destinations along the route ahead of the inaugural journeys scheduled for the end of 2026.

As the project advances toward launch, Breschi will oversee the end-to-end setup of Dream of the Desert in Saudi Arabia, including organisational build-out, regulatory coordination, product development, distribution, talent development, and operational performance.

Breschi brings a strong track record in international expansion and luxury hospitality development.

He joined Arsenale Group in 2023 as part of its global leadership team, following senior roles focused on growth across the Middle East, and previously served as a Partner at McKinsey & Company, advising global developers and sovereign entities on large-scale tourism and hospitality strategies.

In parallel to his role as General Manager of Dream of the Desert, Breschi has been appointed CEO of Arsenale International, where he spearheads all Arsenale projects outside Italy.

In this capacity, Dream of the Desert remains a flagship project within the international portfolio, with his primary focus centered on its successful delivery and launch in Saudi Arabia.

"Establishing our headquarters in Riyadh reflects our commitment to building Dream of the Desert from within the Kingdom," said Breschi. "Working alongside our national partners enables us to shape a rail experience that is globally distinctive yet deeply rooted in Saudi culture – one that celebrates the Kingdom's landscapes, heritage, and hospitality while setting a new benchmark for experiential travel in the region." -**TradeArabia News Service**

Travel & Tourism News Middle East
TTN

Dream of the Desert opens Riyadh HQ, appoints GM

Thu, 14 May 2026

Share

Dream of the Desert, Saudi Arabia's first ultra-luxury train by Arsenale Group, marked a major development milestone with the opening of its headquarters in Riyadh and the appointment of Raffaele Breschi as General Manager of Dream of the Desert and CEO of Arsenale International.

This marks the next phase of the project's delivery in the country, reinforcing its central role in Saudi Arabia's tourism transformation as it advances toward its 2026 debut.

The establishment of a permanent base in Riyadh anchors the project firmly within Saudi Arabia's tourism and transport ecosystem and marks Arsenale's first international headquarters, underscoring a long-term, on-the-ground commitment beyond project development.

Operating from Saudi Arabia's capital, the project team will work closely with national stakeholders – including the Ministry of Culture (MOC); the Ministry of Transport and Logistic Services, with Saudi Arabia Railways (SAR), and the Transport General Authority (TGA); and the Ministry of Tourism, with Saudi Tourism Authority (STA), and the Tourism Development Fund (TDF), the national enabler of Saudi Arabia's tourism sector, to ensure operational readiness and activate cultural and touristic destinations along the route ahead of the inaugural journeys scheduled for the end of 2026.

As the project advances toward launch, Breschi will oversee the end-to-end setup of Dream of the Desert in Saudi Arabia, including organisational build-out, regulatory coordination, product development, distribution, talent development, and operational performance.

Breschi brings a strong track record in international expansion and luxury hospitality development.

He joined Arsenale Group in 2023 as part of its global leadership team, following senior roles focused on growth across the Middle East, and previously served as a Partner at McKinsey & Company, advising global developers and sovereign entities on large-scale tourism and hospitality strategies.

In parallel to his role as General Manager of Dream of the Desert, Breschi has been appointed CEO of Arsenale International, where he spearheads all Arsenale projects outside Italy.

In this capacity, Dream of the Desert remains a flagship project within the international portfolio, with his primary focus centered on its successful delivery and launch in Saudi Arabia.

"Establishing our headquarters in Riyadh reflects our commitment to building Dream of the Desert from within the Kingdom," said Breschi. "Working alongside our national partners enables us to shape a rail experience that is globally distinctive yet deeply rooted in Saudi culture – one that celebrates the Kingdom's landscapes, heritage, and hospitality while setting a new benchmark for experiential travel in the region." - **TradeArabia News Service**

TradingView

ZAWYA: Dream of the Desert establishes Riyadh headquarters, marking entry into delivery phase

- Raffaele Breschi appointed General Manager of Dream of the Desert and CEO of Arsenale International, reinforcing operational momentum ahead of 2026 launch
- Collaboration with national entities accelerates development and destination activation across Saudi Arabia

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia – Dream of the Desert, Saudi Arabia's first ultra-luxury train by Arsenale Group, marked a major development milestone with the opening of its headquarters in Riyadh and the appointment of Raffaele Breschi as General Manager of Dream of the Desert and CEO of Arsenale International. This step marks

TradeArabia
BUSINESS NEWS INFORMATION

Dream of the Desert opens Riyadh HQ, appoints GM

RIYADH Thu, 14 May 2026

SHARE

Dream of the Desert, Saudi Arabia's first ultra-luxury train by Arsenale Group, marked a major development milestone with the opening of its headquarters in Riyadh and the appointment of Raffaele Breschi as General Manager of Dream of the Desert and CEO of Arsenale International.

This marks the next phase of the project's delivery in the country, reinforcing its central role in Saudi Arabia's tourism transformation as it advances toward its 2026 debut.

The establishment of a permanent base in Riyadh anchors the project firmly within Saudi Arabia's tourism and transport ecosystem and marks Arsenale's first international headquarters, underscoring a long-term, on-the-ground commitment beyond project development.

Operating from Saudi Arabia's capital, the project team will work closely with national stakeholders – including the Ministry of Culture (MOC); the Ministry of Transport and Logistic Services, with Saudi Arabia Railways (SAR), and the Transport General Authority (TGA); and the Ministry of Tourism, with Saudi Tourism Authority (STA), and the Tourism Development Fund (TDF), the national enabler of Saudi Arabia's tourism sector, to ensure operational readiness and activate cultural and touristic destinations along the route ahead of the inaugural journeys scheduled for the end of 2026.

As the project advances toward launch, Breschi will oversee the end-to-end setup of Dream of the Desert in Saudi Arabia, including organisational build-out, regulatory coordination, product development, distribution, talent development, and operational performance.

Breschi brings a strong track record in international expansion and luxury hospitality development.

He joined Arsenale Group in 2023 as part of its global leadership team, following senior roles focused on growth across the Middle East, and previously served as a Partner at McKinsey & Company, advising global developers and sovereign entities on large-scale tourism and hospitality strategies.

In parallel to his role as General Manager of Dream of the Desert, Breschi has been appointed CEO of Arsenale International, where he spearheads all Arsenale projects outside Italy.

In this capacity, Dream of the Desert remains a flagship project within the international portfolio, with his primary focus centered on its successful delivery and launch in Saudi Arabia.

"Establishing our headquarters in Riyadh reflects our commitment to building Dream of the Desert from within the Kingdom," said Breschi. "Working alongside our national partners enables us to shape a rail experience that is globally distinctive yet deeply rooted in Saudi culture – one that celebrates the Kingdom's landscapes, heritage, and hospitality while setting a new benchmark for experiential travel in the region." **-TradeArabia News Service**

Raffaele Breschi as General Manager of Dream of the Desert and CEO of Arsenale International.

SAUDI ARABIA

Dream of the Desert opens Riyadh HQ, appoints GM

This marks the next phase of the project's delivery in the country, reinforcing its central role in Saudi Arabia

Staff Writer, TradeArabia

May 14, 2026

Dream of the Desert, Saudi Arabia's first ultra-luxury train by Arsenale Group, marked a major development milestone with the opening of its headquarters in Riyadh and the appointment of Raffaele Breschi as General Manager of Dream of the Desert and CEO of Arsenale International.

This marks the next phase of the project's delivery in the country, reinforcing its central role in Saudi Arabia's tourism transformation as it advances toward its 2026 debut.

The establishment of a permanent base in Riyadh anchors the project firmly within Saudi Arabia's tourism and transport ecosystem and marks Arsenale's first international headquarters, underscoring a long-term, on-the-ground commitment beyond project development.

Operating from Saudi Arabia's capital, the project team will work closely with national stakeholders – including the Ministry of Culture (MOC); the Ministry of Transport and Logistic Services, with Saudi Arabia Railways (SAR), and the Transport General Authority (TGA); and the Ministry of Tourism, with Saudi Tourism Authority (STA), and the Tourism Development Fund (TDF), the national enabler of Saudi Arabia's tourism sector, to ensure operational readiness and activate cultural and touristic destinations along the route ahead of the inaugural journeys scheduled for the end of 2026.

As the project advances toward launch, Breschi will oversee the end-to-end setup of Dream of the Desert in Saudi Arabia, including organisational build-out, regulatory coordination, product development, distribution, talent development, and operational performance.

Breschi brings a strong track record in international expansion and luxury hospitality development.

He joined Arsenale Group in 2023 as part of its global leadership team, following senior roles focused on growth across the Middle East, and previously served as a Partner at McKinsey & Company, advising global developers and sovereign entities on large-scale tourism and hospitality strategies.

In parallel to his role as General Manager of Dream of the Desert, Breschi has been appointed CEO of Arsenale International, where he spearheads all Arsenale projects outside Italy.

In this capacity, Dream of the Desert remains a flagship project within the international portfolio, with his primary focus centered on its successful delivery and launch in Saudi Arabia.

"Establishing our headquarters in Riyadh reflects our commitment to building Dream of the Desert from within the Kingdom," said Breschi. "Working alongside our national partners enables us to shape a rail experience that is globally distinctive yet deeply rooted in Saudi culture – one that celebrates the Kingdom's landscapes, heritage, and hospitality while setting a new benchmark for experiential travel in the region."

Dream of the desert establishes riyadh headquarters, marking entry into delivery phase

- **Permanent Riyadh headquarters anchors project within Saudi Arabia's tourism and transport ecosystem**
- **Raffaele Breschi appointed General Manager of Dream of the Desert and CEO of Arsenale International, reinforcing operational momentum ahead of 2026 launch**
- **Collaboration with national entities accelerates development and destination activation across Saudi Arabia**

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - 14, 2026: Dream of the Desert, Saudi Arabia's first ultra-luxury train by Arsenale Group, marked a major development milestone with the opening of its headquarters in Riyadh and the appointment of Raffaele Breschi as General Manager of Dream of the Desert and CEO of Arsenale International. This step marks the next phase of the project's delivery in the country, reinforcing its central role in Saudi Arabia's tourism transformation as it advances toward its 2026 debut.

The establishment of a permanent base in Riyadh anchors the project firmly within Saudi Arabia's tourism and transport ecosystem and marks Arsenale's first international headquarters, underscoring a long-term, on-the-ground commitment beyond project development.

Operating from Saudi Arabia's capital, the project team will work closely with national stakeholders - including the Ministry of Culture (MOC); the Ministry of Transport and Logistic Services, with Saudi Arabia Railways (SAR), and the Transport General Authority (TGA); and the Ministry of Tourism, with Saudi Tourism Authority (STA), and the Tourism Development Fund (TDF), the national enabler of Saudi Arabia's tourism sector, to ensure operational readiness and activate cultural and touristic destinations along the route ahead of the inaugural journeys scheduled for the end of 2026.

As the project advances toward launch, Breschi will oversee the end-to-end setup of Dream of the Desert in Saudi Arabia, including organisational build-out, regulatory coordination, product development, distribution, talent development, and operational performance.

Breschi brings a strong track record in international expansion and luxury hospitality development. He joined Arsenale Group in 2023 as part of its global leadership team, following senior roles focused on growth across the Middle East, and previously served as a Partner at McKinsey & Company, advising global developers and sovereign entities on large-scale tourism and hospitality strategies.

In parallel to his role as General Manager of Dream of the Desert, Breschi has been appointed CEO of Arsenale International, where he spearheads all Arsenale projects outside Italy. In this capacity, Dream of the Desert remains a flagship project within the international portfolio, with his primary focus centered on its successful delivery and launch in Saudi Arabia.

'Establishing our headquarters in Riyadh reflects our commitment to building Dream of the Desert from within the Kingdom,'' said Raffaele Breschi, General Manager of Dream of the Desert. 'Working alongside our national partners enables us to shape a rail experience that is globally distinctive yet deeply rooted in Saudi culture - one that celebrates the Kingdom's landscapes, heritage, and hospitality while setting a new benchmark for experiential travel in the region.''

Designed to redefine luxury rail travel globally while showcasing Saudi Arabia's landscapes, culture and heritage, Dream of the Desert will offer immersive, one to three-day journeys across the country, combining refined onboard hospitality with curated off-board experiences. The project forms part of Saudi Arabia's broader tourism and infrastructure transformation, supporting Saudi Vision 2030's ambition to position the Kingdom as a leading destination for high-value, culturally rooted travel.

Spanning more than 1,300 kilometers of Saudi Arabia's existing railway tracks, the route will activate destinations across multiple locations, creating new gateways into the country's natural and cultural landscapes through curated itineraries that blend craftsmanship, storytelling and destination discovery.

Beyond its luxury travel experience, Dream of the Desert is set to play a meaningful socio-economic role in Saudi Arabia. The project will support hospitality workforce development, with a strong focus on Saudization, enable specialised skills transfer in rail-based guest experience operations, stimulate local supply chains, and contribute to the continued growth of an experiential tourism ecosystem across the country.

With its headquarters now established in Riyadh and leadership focused on delivery, Dream of the Desert moves steadily toward its 2026 debut as one of Saudi Arabia's most distinctive luxury experiential travel initiatives.

Arabian Business Community GCC

Dream of the Desert opens Riyadh HQ, appoints GM

May 14, 2026 10:15 AM

Dream of the Desert, Saudi Arabia's first ultra-luxury train by Arsenale Group, marked a major development milestone with the opening of its headquarters in Riyadh and the appointment of Raffaele Breschi as General Manager of Dream of the Desert and CEO of Arsenale International.

This marks the next phase of the project's delivery in the country, reinforcing its central role in Saudi Arabia's tourism transformation as it advances toward its 2026 debut.

The establishment of a permanent base in Riyadh anchors the project firmly within Saudi Arabia's tourism and transport ecosystem and marks Arsenale's first international headquarters, underscoring a long-term, on-the-ground commitment beyond project development.

Operating from Saudi Arabia's capital, the project team will work closely with national stakeholders – including the Ministry of Culture (MOC); the Ministry of Transport and Logistic Services, with Saudi Arabia Railways (SAR), and the Transport General Authority (TGA); and the Ministry of Tourism, with Saudi Tourism Authority (STA), and the Tourism Development Fund (TDF), the national enabler of Saudi Arabia's tourism sector, to ensure operational readiness and activate cultural and touristic destinations along the route ahead of the inaugural journeys scheduled for the end of 2026.

As the project advances toward launch, Breschi will oversee the end-to-end setup of Dream of the Desert in Saudi Arabia, including organisational build-out, regulatory coordination, product development, distribution, talent development, and operational performance.

Breschi brings a strong track record in international expansion and luxury hospitality development.

He joined Arsenale Group in 2023 as part of its global leadership team, following senior roles focused on growth across the Middle East, and previously served as a Partner at McKinsey & Company, advising global developers and sovereign entities on large-scale tourism and hospitality strategies.

In parallel to his role as General Manager of Dream of the Desert, Breschi has been appointed CEO of Arsenale International, where he spearheads all Arsenale projects outside Italy.

In this capacity, Dream of the Desert remains a flagship project within the international portfolio, with his primary focus centered on its successful delivery and launch in Saudi Arabia.

"Establishing our headquarters in Riyadh reflects our commitment to building Dream of the Desert from within the Kingdom," said Breschi. "Working alongside our national partners enables us to shape a rail experience that is globally distinctive yet deeply rooted in Saudi culture – one that celebrates the Kingdom's landscapes, heritage, and hospitality while setting a new benchmark for experiential travel in the region." -**TradeArabia News Service**

The Gulf Pulse

Saudi luxury train project enters delivery phase ahead of 2027 launch

Saudi luxury train project enters delivery phase ahead of 2027 launch - Supplied Image

Saudi Arabia's first ultra-luxury train project, Dream of the Desert, has entered its delivery phase with the opening of a permanent headquarters in Riyadh and the appointment of hospitality executive Raffaele Breschi as General Manager ahead of the project's planned 2026 launch.

The project, developed by Italy's Arsenale Group in collaboration with Saudi Arabia Railways (SAR), forms part of the Kingdom's wider tourism and transport transformation under Vision 2030 and is designed to position rail travel as a premium experiential tourism offering.

The establishment of a Riyadh headquarters marks Arsenale's first international base outside Italy and signals a longer-term operational commitment within Saudi Arabia's tourism ecosystem beyond project development alone.

Dream of the Desert is expected to offer one- to three-day luxury rail journeys across Saudi Arabia, combining onboard hospitality with curated tourism experiences tied to the Kingdom's landscapes, heritage and cultural destinations.

Raffaele Breschi, General Manager, Dream of the Desert – Supplied Image

Multiple tourism destinations

The route will span more than 1,300 kilometres across Saudi Arabia's existing railway network and is expected to activate multiple tourism destinations through itineraries focused on heritage, storytelling and experiential travel.

Project teams based in Riyadh will support operational readiness ahead of the inaugural journeys scheduled for the end of 2026. Breschi, who joined Arsenale Group in 2023 after previous leadership roles across the Middle East and earlier experience at McKinsey & Company, will oversee regulatory coordination, operational setup, product development, distribution, talent development, performance management for the Saudi launch.

"Establishing our headquarters in Riyadh reflects our commitment to building Dream of the Desert from within the Kingdom," Breschi said.

The company said the project is also expected to support hospitality workforce development and Saudisation while contributing to local supply chains and the growth of experiential tourism across the Kingdom.

Dream of the Desert joins a wider push across the Gulf to expand luxury and experience-led tourism infrastructure tied to rail, hospitality and destination development.

Arsenale currently operates luxury hospitality and rail tourism projects across multiple international markets, including Italy, Egypt, Uzbekistan and the UAE.

Priority registrations for Dream of the Desert are now open through the project website ahead of its scheduled debut next year.

Dream of the Desert Establishes Riyadh HQ, Enters Delivery

Permanent Riyadh headquarters anchors project within Saudi Arabia's tourism and transport ecosystem

Raffaele Breschi appointed General Manager of Dream of the Desert and CEO of Arsenale International, reinforcing operational momentum ahead of 2026 launch

Collaboration with national entities accelerates development and destination activation across Saudi Arabia

Riyadh : Dream of the Desert, Saudi Arabia's first ultra-luxury train by Arsenale Group, marked a major development milestone with the opening of its headquarters in Riyadh and the appointment of Raffaele Breschi as General Manager of Dream of the Desert and CEO of Arsenale International. This step marks the next phase of the project's delivery in the country, reinforcing its central role in Saudi Arabia's tourism transformation as it advances toward its 2026 debut.

The establishment of a permanent base in Riyadh anchors the project firmly within Saudi Arabia's tourism and transport ecosystem and marks Arsenale's first international headquarters, underscoring a long-term, on-the-ground commitment beyond project development.

Operating from Saudi Arabia's capital, the project team will work closely with national stakeholders – including the Ministry of Culture (MOC); the Ministry of Transport and Logistic Services, with Saudi Arabia Railways (SAR), and the Transport General Authority (TGA); and the Ministry of Tourism, with Saudi Tourism Authority (STA), and the Tourism Development Fund (TDF), the national enabler of Saudi Arabia's tourism sector, to ensure operational readiness and activate cultural and touristic destinations along the route ahead of the inaugural journeys scheduled for the end of 2026.

As the project advances toward launch, Breschi will oversee the end-to-end setup of Dream of the Desert in Saudi Arabia, including organisational build-out, regulatory coordination, product development, distribution, talent development, and operational performance.

Breschi brings a strong track record in international expansion and luxury hospitality development. He joined Arsenale Group in 2023 as part of its global leadership team, following senior roles focused on growth across the Middle East, and previously served as a Partner at McKinsey & Company, advising global developers and sovereign entities on large-scale tourism and hospitality strategies.

In parallel to his role as General Manager of Dream of the Desert, Breschi has been appointed CEO of Arsenale International, where he spearheads all Arsenale projects outside Italy. In this capacity, Dream of the Desert remains a flagship project within the international portfolio, with his primary focus centered on its successful delivery and launch in Saudi Arabia.

"Establishing our headquarters in Riyadh reflects our commitment to building Dream of the Desert from within the Kingdom," **said Raffaele Breschi, General Manager of Dream of the Desert.** *"Working alongside our national partners enables us to shape a rail experience that is globally distinctive yet deeply rooted in Saudi culture — one that celebrates the Kingdom's landscapes, heritage, and hospitality while setting a new benchmark for experiential travel in the region."*

Designed to redefine luxury rail travel globally while showcasing Saudi Arabia's landscapes, culture and heritage, Dream of the Desert will offer immersive, one to three-day journeys across the country, combining refined onboard hospitality with curated off-board experiences. The project forms part of Saudi Arabia's broader tourism and infrastructure transformation, supporting Saudi Vision 2030's ambition to position the Kingdom as a leading destination for high-value, culturally rooted travel.

Spanning more than 1,300 kilometers of Saudi Arabia's existing railway tracks, the route will activate destinations across multiple locations, creating new gateways into the country's natural and cultural landscapes through curated itineraries that blend craftsmanship, storytelling and destination discovery.

Beyond its luxury travel experience, Dream of the Desert is set to play a meaningful socio-economic role in Saudi Arabia. The project will support hospitality workforce development, with a strong focus on Saudization, enable specialised skills transfer in rail-based guest experience operations, stimulate local supply chains, and contribute to the continued growth of an experiential tourism ecosystem across the country.

With its headquarters now established in Riyadh and leadership focused on delivery, Dream of the Desert moves steadily toward its 2026 debut as one of Saudi Arabia's most distinctive luxury experiential travel initiatives.

TTW™ TRAVEL AND TOUR WORLD

Luxury Rail Travel Expands Saudi Arabia Tourism Landscape Connecting Riyadh and Major Destinations, Everything You Need to Know

Image generated with AI

Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia — The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia made great progress in its efforts towards tourism diversification with the establishment of an official headquarters for Dream of the Desert, Saudi Arabia's first ultra-luxury train journey. The establishment of the Riyadh HQ marks the integration of this luxury tourism venture into Saudi Arabia's wider travel network, thereby facilitating the management of the endeavor while reinforcing its function as an important element in the attraction of tourists from around the globe.

Located in the capital city of Saudi Arabia, the office serves to integrate the ultra-luxury train tour within Saudi Arabia's growing travel and transportation infrastructure. Implications for this include both internal tourism and cultural tourism within the Middle Eastern region, as well as international tourists visiting Saudi Arabia from Europe, Asia, and Africa.

Luxury Train Tourism Emerges as a New Travel Attraction in Saudi Arabia

Dream of the Desert represents a novel addition to Saudi Arabia's tourism portfolio, marking the Kingdom's first foray into ultra-luxury train travel. With its debut scheduled for late 2026, the initiative aligns with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 strategy to transform the country into a global tourism destination. The presence of a dedicated headquarters in Riyadh enhances the ability to coordinate logistics, partnerships, regulatory compliance, and destination readiness across key regions of Saudi Arabia's rail route.

The project's integration into the Saudi transport framework – especially collaboration with national rail authorities and tourism bodies – ensures that the luxury rail experience will be embedded within the country's expanding infrastructure. This integration is expected to create seamless connections between urban centres, heritage sites, and natural landscapes across Saudi Arabia, boosting inbound tourism flows and providing a new way for visitors to explore the Kingdom.

Connecting Tourists to Saudi Arabia's Diverse Landscapes

The *Dream of the Desert* route is designed to showcase Saudi Arabia's varied natural environments as it traverses deserts, mountains, cultural hubs, and heritage destinations. This immersive rail journey capitalises on the Kingdom's geographic diversity, presenting a tourism product that combines scenic travel with experiential luxury tailored to high-end international visitors.

For tourists from Europe and North America, where luxury rail experiences such as those in Switzerland and India have long attracted premium travellers, *Dream of the Desert* offers a fresh alternative in the Middle East. Regional tourists from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and neighbouring African and Asian markets also stand to benefit from a rail experience that connects key Saudi destinations in a memorable and comfortable format.

By integrating this luxury rail offering into Saudi Arabia's broader transport system, the Kingdom enhances connectivity between major cities like Riyadh, Jeddah, and AlUla, as well as lesser-known cultural and adventure tourism nodes. This expanded connectivity is expected to encourage longer stays as travellers incorporate the rail journey into wider itineraries that include museum visits, desert excursions, heritage site tours, and cultural festivals.

Enhancing Saudi Arabia's Tourism Infrastructure

The establishment of the Riyadh headquarters is a logistical milestone supporting the operational launch of the luxury train and reflects Saudi Arabia's growing capacity to manage complex tourism initiatives. The facility enables closer collaboration between the project team and national stakeholders, including government ministries responsible for culture, transport, and tourism. Such alignment is critical for ensuring that rail tourism enhances, rather than duplicates, existing tourism offerings in the Kingdom.

For international travel planners and tour operators, the enhanced infrastructure provides assurance that Saudi Arabia can deliver a reliable and high-quality luxury travel product. As the international travel industry continues to recover and adapt following global disruptions, destinations that offer differentiated, premium experiences are gaining traction among affluent travellers seeking exclusivity and cultural immersion.

Moreover, integrating the *Dream of the Desert* experience into Saudi Arabia's transport planning underscores the country's ambitions to elevate accessibility for a range of travellers. Improved rail connections between cultural sites and tourism hubs are likely to stimulate investment in secondary cities and rural regions, broadening the geographic distribution of tourism benefits across the Kingdom.

Tourism Demand and Experience Trends in the Middle East

In recent years, Saudi Arabia has expanded its appeal to international visitors through archaeological discoveries, luxury resort developments, and event tourism — from heritage site openings to global sporting and cultural events. The addition of an ultra-luxury train experience further diversifies the tourism product, positioning Saudi Arabia to compete with established experiential travel markets in Europe, North America, and Asia.

Luxury rail tourism appeals to a niche but influential segment of global travellers who prioritise unique, curated, and immersive experiences. These travellers typically spend more per trip and engage deeply with cultural and natural attractions. The rail experience in Saudi Arabia will offer travellers a dedicated platform to experience the Kingdom's landscapes and cultural narratives over multi-day itineraries, differentiating it from traditional point-to-point travel.

For domestic tourists within Saudi Arabia, the luxury train presents a new way to rediscover the country's own heritage and geography. As domestic travel demand grows alongside international arrivals, *Dream of the Desert* adds value by encouraging Saudis and resident expatriates to explore their nation in innovative and memorable ways.

Economic and Tourism Growth Impacts for Saudi Arabia

The integration of a luxury rail product within Saudi Arabia's tourism offerings is anticipated to have positive spill-over effects across the travel economy. Ancillary sectors such as hospitality, gastronomy, retail, and local tourism services are likely to benefit as travellers allocate more time and resources to multi-destination exploration.

With increased global interest in Middle Eastern tourism and strong airline connectivity to Saudi Arabia from global hubs in Europe, South Asia, and East Asia, the luxury train experience is positioned to become a standout attraction. This, in turn, supports Saudi Arabia's broader goals of increasing visitor numbers, extending average stay durations, and elevating the overall economic contribution of tourism to the national economy.

Future Outlook for Experiential Tourism in Saudi Arabia

The establishment of the Riyadh headquarters consolidates project momentum and sets the stage for a new era of tourism that blends luxury, cultural engagement, and regional connectivity. Travel trends suggest that experiential journeys and immersive travel products will remain in demand as global mobility expands and travellers seek destinations that offer both depth and distinction. Within this context, Saudi Arabia's luxury rail initiative has the potential to redefine how the Kingdom is perceived on the world tourism stage, not merely as a destination of monumental heritage and cultural rediscovery but as a provider of world-class travel experiences that entice travellers back time and time again.

Saudi Arabia's first ultra-luxury train project opens Riyadh HQ ahead of 2026 launch

By **admin** 16 května, 2026 120 0

Share

Saudi Arabia's Dream of the Desert luxury train project opens Riyadh headquarters as the tourism initiative advances toward a 2026 debut

By Will Milner https://www.arabianbusiness.com/

Saudi Arabia's first ultra-luxury train project, Dream of the Desert, has opened its headquarters in Riyadh as the tourism initiative moves closer to its planned 2026 launch.

The project, developed by Arsenale Group, also announced the appointment of Raffaele Breschi as General Manager of Dream of the Desert and CEO of Arsenale International.

The latest milestone marks the next phase of the project's delivery in Saudi Arabia and reinforces its role within the Kingdom's wider tourism and infrastructure transformation plans under Saudi Vision 2030.

According to Arsenale Group, the new Riyadh headquarters represents the company's first international base outside Italy and reflects a long-term operational commitment within Saudi Arabia's tourism and transport ecosystem.

The project team will work alongside Saudi government entities and national stakeholders including:

- Ministry of Culture (MOC)
- Ministry of Transport and Logistic Services
- Saudi Arabia Railways (SAR)
- Transport General Authority (TGA)
- Ministry of Tourism
- Saudi Tourism Authority (STA)
- Tourism Development Fund (TDF)

Dream of the Desert in Saudi Arabia

The collaboration aims to support operational readiness and activate tourism and cultural destinations along the route ahead of the inaugural journeys scheduled for the end of 2026.

Dream of the Desert is designed to redefine luxury rail travel while showcasing Saudi Arabia's landscapes, heritage and hospitality through immersive journeys lasting between one and three days.

The luxury train experience will span more than 1,300km across Saudi Arabia's existing railway network and connect multiple destinations through curated itineraries focused on culture, storytelling and destination discovery.

The project forms part of Saudi Arabia's broader ambition to position the Kingdom as a leading destination for high-value and culturally rooted tourism experiences.

As General Manager of Dream of the Desert, Breschi will oversee organisational development, regulatory coordination, operational performance, talent development and product delivery within Saudi Arabia. More

HOTELIER

Dream of the Desert opens Riyadh HQ and appoints GM ahead of Saudi debut

The project is expected to support tourism activation along its Saudi route

by Safa Hassan | May 18, 2026 12:00 PM GST | Add as a preferred source on Google SHARE

Dream of the Desert has opened its headquarters in Riyadh and appointed Raffaele Breschi as general manager of Dream of the Desert and CEO of Arsenale International.

The development marks the next phase of delivery for the project in the Kingdom ahead of its planned debut at the end of 2026. The Riyadh headquarters will serve as Arsenale Group's first international headquarters and give the project a permanent base within Saudi Arabia's tourism and transport ecosystem.

From Riyadh, the Dream of the Desert team will work with its national stakeholders to prepare for launch, including the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Transport and Logistic Services, Saudi Arabia Railways, the Transport General Authority, the Ministry of Tourism, the Saudi Tourism Authority and the Tourism Development Fund.

The work will focus on operational readiness and the activation of cultural and tourism destinations along the train's route before the inaugural journeys begin.

Leadership appointment

Breschi will oversee the full setup of Dream of the Desert in Saudi Arabia. His remit includes organisational build-out, regulatory coordination, product development, distribution, talent development and operational performance.

Breschi's past experience spans international expansion and luxury hospitality development. He joined Arsenale Group in 2023 as part of its global leadership team. Before that, he held senior roles focused on growth across the Middle East and was previously a partner at McKinsey & Company, where he advised global developers and sovereign entities on tourism and hospitality strategies.

Alongside his role as general manager of Dream of the Desert, Breschi has also been appointed CEO of Arsenale International. In that position, he will lead Arsenale projects outside Italy. Dream of the Desert remains a flagship project within the company's international portfolio, with Breschi's primary focus centred on its delivery and launch in Saudi Arabia.

Breschi said: "Establishing our headquarters in Riyadh reflects our commitment to building Dream of the Desert from within the Kingdom. Working alongside our national partners enables us to shape a rail experience that is globally distinctive yet deeply rooted in Saudi culture, one that celebrates the Kingdom's landscapes, heritage and hospitality while setting a new benchmark for experiential travel in the region."

Luxury rail journeys and economic impact

Dream of the Desert is Saudi Arabia's first ultra-luxury train and has been designed to showcase Saudi Arabia's landscapes, culture and heritage through luxury rail travel. The train will offer one to three-day journeys across the country, combining onboard hospitality with off-board experiences.

The project forms part of Saudi Arabia's tourism and infrastructure transformation under Saudi Vision 2030, which aims to position the Kingdom as a destination for high-value, culture-led travel.

The route will cover more than 1,300 kilometres of Saudi Arabia's existing railway tracks. It will connect destinations across multiple locations and create new access points into the country's natural and cultural landscapes.

Its itineraries are being developed around craftsmanship, storytelling and destination discovery, with the project intended to support tourism activation across the route.

Beyond the guest experience, Dream of the Desert is also expected to contribute to Saudi Arabia's tourism economy. The project will support hospitality workforce development, with a focus on Saudisation, and enable skills transfer in rail-based guest experience operations.

It is also expected to stimulate local supply chains and contribute to the growth of the country's experiential tourism sector.

With its Riyadh headquarters now established and leadership in place, Dream of the Desert is moving toward its 2026 launch as one of Saudi Arabia's upcoming luxury experiential travel projects.

Construction Week
MIDDLE EAST

Arsenale Group opens HQ in Riyadh for Dream of the Desert rail project

As the project advances toward launch, Raffaele Breschi GM of Dream of the Desert and CEO of Arsenale International will oversee the end-to-end setup

By Staff Writer

May 18, 2026

Add as a preferred source on Google

Dream of the Desert, Saudi Arabia's first ultra-luxury train by Arsenale Group, marked a major development milestone with the opening of its headquarters in Riyadh and the appointment of Raffaele Breschi as General Manager of Dream of the Desert and CEO of Arsenale International. This step marks the next phase of the project's delivery in the country, reinforcing its central role in Saudi Arabia's tourism transformation as it advances toward its 2026 debut.

The establishment of a permanent base in Riyadh anchors the project firmly within Saudi Arabia's tourism and transport ecosystem and marks Arsenale's first international headquarters, underscoring a long-term, on-the-ground commitment beyond project development.

Operating from Saudi Arabia's capital, the project team will work closely with national stakeholders – including the Ministry of Culture (MOC); the Ministry of Transport and Logistic Services, with Saudi Arabia Railways (SAR), and the Transport General Authority (TGA); and the Ministry of Tourism, with Saudi Tourism Authority (STA), and the Tourism Development Fund (TDF), the national enabler of Saudi Arabia's tourism sector, to ensure operational readiness and activate cultural and touristic destinations along the route ahead of the inaugural journeys scheduled for the end of 2026.

As the project advances toward launch, Breschi will oversee the end-to-end setup of Dream of the Desert in Saudi Arabia, including organisational build-out, regulatory coordination, product development, distribution, talent development, and operational performance.

Breschi brings a strong track record in international expansion and luxury hospitality development. He joined Arsenale Group in 2023 as part of its global leadership team, following senior roles focused on growth across the Middle East, and previously served as a Partner at McKinsey & Company, advising global developers and sovereign entities on large-scale tourism and hospitality strategies.

In parallel to his role as General Manager of Dream of the Desert, Breschi has been appointed CEO of Arsenale International, where he spearheads all Arsenale projects outside Italy. In this capacity, Dream of the Desert remains a flagship project within the international portfolio, with his primary focus centered on its successful delivery and launch in Saudi Arabia.

"Establishing our headquarters in Riyadh reflects our commitment to building Dream of the Desert from within the Kingdom," said Raffaele Breschi, General Manager of Dream of the Desert. "Working alongside our national partners enables us to shape a rail experience that is globally distinctive yet deeply rooted in Saudi culture – one that celebrates the Kingdom's landscapes, heritage, and hospitality while setting a new benchmark for experiential travel in the region."

Designed to redefine luxury rail travel globally while showcasing Saudi Arabia's landscapes, culture and heritage, Dream of the Desert will offer immersive, one to three-day journeys across the country, combining refined onboard hospitality with curated off-board experiences. The project forms part of Saudi Arabia's broader tourism and infrastructure transformation, supporting Saudi Vision 2030's ambition to position the Kingdom as a leading destination for high-value, culturally rooted travel.

Spanning more than 1,300 kilometers of Saudi Arabia's existing railway tracks, the route will activate destinations across multiple locations, creating new gateways into the country's natural and cultural landscapes through curated itineraries that blend craftsmanship, storytelling and destination discovery.

Beyond its luxury travel experience, Dream of the Desert is set to play a meaningful socio-economic role in Saudi Arabia. The project will support hospitality workforce development, with a strong focus on Saudization, enable specialised skills transfer in rail-based guest experience operations, stimulate local supply chains, and contribute to the continued growth of an experiential tourism ecosystem across the country.

With its headquarters now established in Riyadh and leadership focused on delivery, Dream of the Desert moves steadily toward its 2026 debut as one of Saudi Arabia's most distinctive luxury experiential travel initiatives.

SAUDI ARABIA Hotels

Saudi Arabia's first ultra-luxury train project opens Riyadh HQ ahead of 2026 launch

Saudi Arabia's Dream of the Desert luxury train project opens Riyadh headquarters as the tourism initiative advances toward a 2026 debut

Saudi Arabia's first ultra-luxury train project, Dream of the Desert, has opened its headquarters in Riyadh as the tourism initiative moves closer to its planned 2026 launch.

The project, developed by Arsenale Group, also announced the appointment of Raffaele Breschi as General Manager of Dream of the Desert and CEO of Arsenale International.

The latest milestone marks the next phase of the project's delivery in Saudi Arabia and reinforces its role within the Kingdom's wider tourism and infrastructure transformation plans under Saudi Vision 2030.

According to Arsenale Group, the new Riyadh headquarters represents the company's first international base outside Italy and reflects a long-term operational commitment within Saudi Arabia's tourism and transport ecosystem.

The project team will work alongside Saudi government entities and national stakeholders including:

- Ministry of Culture (MOC)
- Ministry of Transport and Logistic Services
- Saudi Arabia Railways (SAR)
- Transport General Authority (TGA)
- Ministry of Tourism
- Saudi Tourism Authority (STA)
- Tourism Development Fund (TDF)

Dream of the Desert in Saudi Arabia

The collaboration aims to support operational readiness and activate tourism and cultural destinations along the route ahead of the inaugural journeys scheduled for the end of 2026.

Dream of the Desert is designed to redefine luxury rail travel while showcasing Saudi Arabia's landscapes, heritage and hospitality through immersive journeys lasting between one and three days.

The luxury train experience will span more than 1,300km across Saudi Arabia's existing railway network and connect multiple destinations through curated itineraries focused on culture, storytelling and destination discovery.

The project forms part of Saudi Arabia's broader ambition to position the Kingdom as a leading destination for high-value and culturally rooted tourism experiences.

As General Manager of Dream of the Desert, Breschi will oversee organisational development, regulatory coordination, operational performance, talent development and product delivery within Saudi Arabia. More

THE CIRCUIT

Dream of the Desert luxury train opens headquarters in Riyadh

The train was built by Italy's Arsenale Group, with passengers paying $4,000 to $28,000 for the 1,300-kilometer trip across the Saudi desert

Guests stand outside a model carriage of the train that's a Saudi version of the Orient Express

Saudi Arabia's ultra-luxurious Dream of the Desert unveiled its Riyadh headquarters and announced the appointment of Raffaele Breschi as General Manager and CEO of Arsenale International, overseeing the project.

The train was conceived as the kingdom's answer...

BREAKING travel news

DREAM OF THE DESERT ESTABLISHES RIYADH HEADQUARTERS, MARKING ENTRY INTO DELIVERY PHASE

3 days ago

Dream of the Desert, Saudi Arabia's first ultra-luxury train by Arsenale Group, marked a major development milestone with the opening of its headquarters in Riyadh and the appointment of Raffaele Breschi as General Manager of Dream of the Desert and CEO of Arsenale International. This step marks the next phase of the project's delivery in the country, reinforcing its central role in Saudi Arabia's tourism transformation as it advances toward its 2026 debut.

The establishment of a permanent base in Riyadh anchors the project firmly within Saudi Arabia's tourism and transport ecosystem and marks Arsenale's first international headquarters, underscoring a long-term, on-the-ground commitment beyond project development.

Operating from Saudi Arabia's capital, the project team will work closely with national stakeholders – including the Ministry of Culture (MOC); the Ministry of Transport and Logistic Services, with Saudi Arabia Railways (SAR), and the Transport General Authority (TGA); and the Ministry of Tourism, with Saudi Tourism Authority (STA), and the Tourism Development Fund (TDF), the national enabler of Saudi Arabia's tourism sector, to ensure operational readiness and activate cultural and touristic destinations along the route ahead of the inaugural journeys scheduled for the end of 2026.

As the project advances toward launch, Breschi will oversee the end-to-end setup of Dream of the Desert in Saudi Arabia, including organisational build-out, regulatory coordination, product development, distribution, talent development, and operational performance.

Breschi brings a strong track record in international expansion and luxury hospitality development. He joined Arsenale Group in 2023 as part of its global leadership team, following senior roles focused on growth across the Middle East, and previously served as a Partner at McKinsey & Company, advising global developers and sovereign entities on large-scale tourism and hospitality strategies.

In parallel to his role as General Manager of Dream of the Desert, Breschi has been appointed CEO of Arsenale International, where he spearheads all Arsenale projects outside Italy. In this capacity, Dream of the Desert remains a flagship project within the international portfolio, with his primary focus centered on its successful delivery and launch in Saudi Arabia.

"Establishing our headquarters in Riyadh reflects our commitment to building Dream of the Desert from within the Kingdom," said Raffaele Breschi, General Manager of Dream of the Desert. "Working alongside our national partners enables us to shape a rail experience that is globally distinctive yet deeply rooted in Saudi culture – one that celebrates the Kingdom's landscapes, heritage, and hospitality while setting a new benchmark for experiential travel in the region."

Designed to redefine luxury rail travel globally while showcasing Saudi Arabia's landscapes, culture and heritage, Dream of the Desert will offer immersive, one to three-day journeys across the country, combining refined onboard hospitality with curated off-board experiences. The project forms part of Saudi Arabia's broader tourism and infrastructure transformation, supporting Saudi Vision 2030's ambition to position the Kingdom as a leading destination for high-value, culturally rooted travel.

Spanning more than 1,300 kilometers of Saudi Arabia's existing railway tracks, the route will activate destinations across multiple locations, creating new gateways into the country's natural and cultural landscapes through curated itineraries that blend craftsmanship, storytelling and destination discovery.

Beyond its luxury travel experience, Dream of the Desert is set to play a meaningful socio-economic role in Saudi Arabia. The project will support hospitality workforce development, with a strong focus on Saudization, enable specialised skills transfer in rail-based guest experience operations, stimulate local supply chains, and contribute to the continued growth of an experiential tourism ecosystem across the country.

With its headquarters now established in Riyadh and leadership focused on delivery, Dream of the Desert moves steadily toward its 2026 debut as one of Saudi Arabia's most distinctive luxury experiential travel initiatives.

Priority List is now open via the website. For details on itineraries & experiences, please visit www.dreamofthedesert.com

TTW™ TRAVEL AND TOUR WORLD

Riyadh Becomes Hub for Saudi Arabia's Luxury Rail Tourism with Dream of the Desert, Get the Details Here

Image generated with AI

A strategic move highlighting the rising significance of the Kingdom in terms of global tourism involves setting up headquarters for the ultra-luxury train project 'Dream of the Desert' in Riyadh. The establishment of the Dream of the Desert's headquarters is a key stage in the delivery process leading to the inauguration of the project in Saudi Arabia.

These headquarters will function as the center from where all operations of Dream of the Desert, the very first luxury train in the Kingdom, can be administered. The decision shows how the project is being tied in with the wider national framework related to the field of travel through cultural, transportation, and economic aspects.

Tourism transformation in Saudi Arabia is an integral part of national plans for developing more options for visiting the country, and attracting valuable tourists through these offerings. The choice of location for establishing Dream of the Desert's headquarters signifies the need for innovative travel experiences to elevate international recognition of the country.

Coordination With National Stakeholders

Operating from Riyadh, the project team will collaborate closely with several governmental bodies responsible for culture, transport and tourism. These partnerships aim to ensure that the rail experience becomes fully operational in coordination with local infrastructure developments and cultural attractions along its route.

Key areas of coordination include regulatory alignment, destination readiness and integration with Saudi Arabia's broader tourism ecosystem. By engaging with ministries responsible for transport and logistics, culture and tourism development, the initiative is being positioned not only as a transport innovation but as a cultural gateway linking cities, regions and heritage sites throughout the country.

This collaboration reflects a deepening emphasis on public-private engagement as Saudi Arabia continues to build capacity in experiential tourism and hospitality sectors.

Luxury Rail Travel Designed to Showcase the Kingdom

Dream of the Desert is conceived as a luxury rail experience that highlights Saudi Arabia's diverse landscapes, heritage sites and cultural narratives. The design and delivery of the service aim to attract travellers seeking refined travel experiences that combine curated onboard hospitality with immersive off-board excursions.

The rail journeys planned under the initiative will traverse extensive sections of Saudi Arabia's existing railway network, connecting major urban centres with lesser-known natural and cultural landscapes. These journeys are anticipated to span expansive desert terrain, historic towns, archaeological sites and coastal regions, offering visitors a comprehensive view of the Kingdom's geographic and cultural range.

Passengers will experience tailored itineraries that integrate elements of local craftsmanship, storytelling and destination discovery. Onboard services are set to include high-end hospitality, dining experiences and curated entertainment, while off-train activities are expected to draw on the rich heritage and environmental diversity of Saudi Arabia.

This model of travel is consistent with global trends in bespoke tourism, where luxury and authenticity are integrated to provide visitors with deeper contextual engagement in destination settings.

Stimulating Tourism and Economic Ecosystems

The establishment of Dream of the Desert has implications beyond the immediate rail experience. Its delivery phase and eventual operation are expected to contribute to Saudi Arabia's tourism and economic frameworks, supporting workforce development and broadening the scope of hospitality expertise within the Kingdom.

As part of these efforts, emphasis is being placed on developing specialised skills relevant to luxury travel operations, including guest services tied directly to rail-based tourism. Training and professional development initiatives tied to the wider tourism sector are anticipated to foster competencies that align with international hospitality standards.

Furthermore, the project is expected to stimulate local supply chains, with opportunities emerging for businesses involved in service provision, culinary production, logistics and cultural programming. By activating regional tourism nodes along the railway route, the initiative seeks to generate economic activity in areas that have historically seen limited tourism investment.

These integrated socio-economic contributions underscore the multi-layered impact that large-scale travel initiatives can have on destination development, community engagement and employment ecosystems.

Positioning Saudi Arabia in Global Luxury Travel

The arrival of Dream of the Desert aligns with broader efforts by Saudi Arabia to position itself as a destination for high-value travel that resonates with international audiences. With a legacy of historical sites, desert landscapes, Red Sea coastlines and cultural heritage, the Kingdom has the ingredients to anchor new forms of travel experiences.

Luxury rail tourism, as exemplified by Dream of the Desert, represents a diversification of travel offerings that moves beyond conventional resort stays or city itineraries. Instead, it introduces a format that can link disparate regions into cohesive travel narratives — a formula that has proven successful in luxury experiences elsewhere but remains distinct within the Middle East.

By situating the headquarters in Riyadh, the project emphasises its long-term commitment to being embedded within Saudi Arabia's tourism landscape. The capital city itself is undergoing rapid cultural and infrastructural transformation, with expanded international flight connectivity, growing arts and culture programming, and new hospitality ventures opening across the city.

This dynamic environment augments the rail project's potential impact, positioning Riyadh not only as a gateway to the Kingdom but also as an operational hub for ambitious travel initiatives.

Linking Heritage and Contemporary Travel Innovation

The history of Saudi Arabia is filled with ancient trade routes, settlements, and archaeological discoveries indicating that people have been traveling around the Arabian Peninsula for thousands of years. The development of rail systems in modern times, represented by projects like Dream of the Desert, can be associated with today's travel and the experience of being on the move.

Being aligned with the objectives of national tourism in Saudi Arabia, Dream of the Desert is an illustration of the Kingdom's aspiration to develop its position in industries which are relevant at home while at the same time attracting the international market with their cultural value and significance.

While moving forward to providing services to the public, the key focus of the project would lie in understanding how it would deliver the promised experiences and contribute to the creation of the Kingdom's image on the international travel market in the context of the initiative.

Having finally opened its headquarters in Riyadh and initiated delivery efforts, Dream of the Desert becomes yet another distinctive element of the Kingdom's strategy of creating new tourist destinations and formats of travel.

ARAB NEWS

Establishing our headquarters in Riyadh reflects our commitment to building the Dream of the Desert from within the Kingdom.

Raffaele Breschi
GM of Dream of The Desert and CEO of Arsenale International

DREAM OF THE DESERT

Saudi Arabia's first luxury train project opens Riyadh HQ

Dream of the Desert, Saudi Arabia's first ultra-luxury train by Arsenale Group, marked a major development milestone with the opening of its headquarters in Riyadh and the appointment of Raffaele Breschi as general manager of Dream of the Desert and CEO of Arsenale International. This step marks the next phase of the project's delivery in the country, reinforcing its central role in Saudi Arabia's tourism transformation as it advances toward its 2026 debut.

The establishment of a permanent base in Riyadh anchors the project firmly within Saudi Arabia's tourism and transport ecosystem and marks Arsenale's first international headquarters, underscoring a long-term, on-the-ground commitment beyond project development.

Operating from Saudi Arabia's capital, the project team will work closely with national stakeholders — including the Ministry of Culture; the Ministry of Transport and Logistic Services, with Saudi Arabia Railways, and the Transport General Authority; and the Ministry of Tourism, with Saudi Tourism Authority, and the Tourism Development Fund, the national enabler of Saudi Arabia's tourism sector, to ensure operational readiness and activate cultural and touristic destinations along the route ahead of the inaugural journeys scheduled for the end of 2026.

Showcasing Saudi Arabia's landscapes, culture and heritage, Dream of the Desert will offer immersive, one to three-day journeys across the country.

As the project advances toward launch, Breschi will oversee the end-to-end setup of Dream of the Desert in Saudi Arabia, including organizational build-out, regulatory coordination, product development, distribution, talent development, and operational performance.

Breschi brings a strong track record in international expansion and luxury hospitality development. He joined Arsenale Group in 2023 as part of its global leadership team, following senior roles focused on growth across the Middle East, and previously served as a partner at McKinsey and Company, advising global developers and sovereign entities on large-scale tourism and hospitality strategies.

In parallel to his role as general manager of Dream of the Desert, Breschi has been appointed CEO of Arsenale International, where he spearheads all Arsenale projects outside Italy. In this capacity, Dream of the Desert remains a flagship project within the international portfolio, with his primary focus centered on its successful delivery and launch in Saudi Arabia.

"Establishing our headquarters in Riyadh reflects our commitment to building Dream of the Desert from within the Kingdom," said Breschi. "Working alongside our national partners enables us to shape a rail experience that is globally distinctive yet deeply rooted in Saudi culture — one that celebrates the Kingdom's landscapes, heritage, and hospitality while setting a new benchmark for experiential travel in the region."

Designed to redefine luxury rail travel globally while showcasing Saudi Arabia's landscapes, culture and heritage, Dream of the Desert will offer immersive, one to three-day journeys across the country, combining refined onboard hospitality with curated off-board experiences.

Il Sole 24 ORE

Rome-Istanbul debut for La Dolce Vita Orient Express in October

The five-day, four-night experience is a cultural and immersive journey through landscapes, histories and civilisations that have shaped the dialogue between Europe and the East for centuries

by Lucilla Incorvati

© La Dolce Vita Orient Express 2026 (Photo Credits Mr. Tripper)

Less than six months to the debut of the Rome-Istanbul route for the La Dolce Vita Orient Express. On 22 October, in fact, there will be the first international journey of the luxury Italia train that reinterprets the legendary and most iconic route in history in a contemporary key. As was the case for the itineraries in Italia, the international route will also delineate a new frontier of luxury Made in Italy rail travel, establishing a cultural axis across Europe where historical heritage meets modernity and the spirit of the Orient Express and is reborn through the Italian art of living.

© La Dolce Vita Orient Express 2026

A homage to the Orient Express

In fact, the initiative pays homage to the original Orient Express which, in 1883, reached Constantinople for the first time, redefining the very concept of luxury travel. 143 years later, that myth lives again through La Dolce Vita Orient Express, which with the new Rome-Istanbul route offers a contemporary vision of the most iconic travel experience of all time. More than an itinerary, the five-day, four-night experience on board the La Dolce Vita Orient Express is conceived as a cultural, slow and immersive journey through landscapes, histories and civilisations that for centuries have shaped the dialogue between Europe and the Orient.

The itinerary

The itinerary links Rome to Istanbul, passing through some of the most fascinating regions of Europe. Departure is from Rome in the evening, arriving in Venice, the first stop along the route and a symbolic gateway between East and West, where guests can discover the city's palaces, canals and artistic treasures. The journey continues to Budapest, the imperial capital and cultural centre of central Europe in the 19th century, before crossing the Carpathian landscapes with stops in Braşov and Sinaia, amidst medieval villages and historical architecture. The entry into Turkey marks the last stage of the route, until the arrival in Istanbul, a city suspended between Europe and Asia.

SUITE © La Dolce Vita Orient Express 2026 (Photo Credits Mr. Tripper)

A model made in Italy

If in the 19th century the railway represented a symbol of technological progress and geopolitical connection, in 2026 the Rome-Istanbul route is an invitation to rediscover the value of time and slow travel.

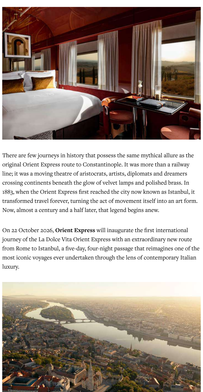
On board the La Dolce Vita Orient Express, the myth is reinterpreted in a contemporary key through Italian excellence. The Dimorestudio-designed interiors, inspired by the elegance of the 1960s, and the gastronomic expertise of Michelin-starred chef Heinz Beck, define a model of luxury based on craftsmanship, culture and attention to detail.

La Dolce Vita Orient Express Revives the Legendary Rome to Istanbul Journey

by May, 2026 by **Monicha Tully**

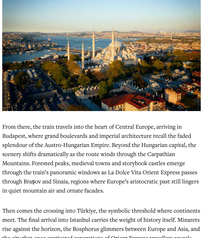
GET YOUR GUIDE

Feel confident when you book tickets for the top-rated tours and activities for your trip.



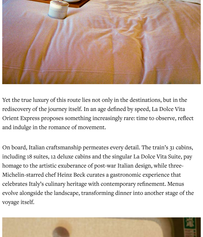
There are few journeys in history that possess the same mythical allure as the original Orient Express route to Constantinople. It was more than a railway line; it was a moving theatre of aristocrats, artists, diplomats and dreamers crossing continents beneath the glow of velvet lamps and polished brass. In 1883, when the Orient Express first reached the city now known as Istanbul, it transformed travel forever, turning the act of movement itself into an art form. Now, almost a century and a half later, that legend begins anew.

On 22 October 2026, **Orient Express** will inaugurate the first international journey of the La Dolce Vita Orient Express with an extraordinary new route from Rome to Istanbul, a five-day, four-night passage that reimagines one of the most iconic voyages ever undertaken through the lens of contemporary Italian luxury.



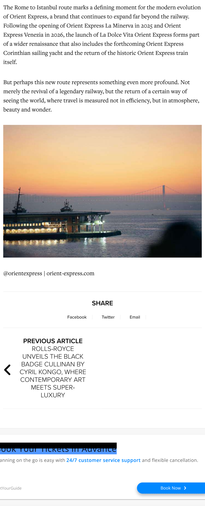
The experience begins at dusk in Rome. As the city softens into evening and the golden glow of streetlamps spills across ancient stone facades, La Dolce Vita Orient Express departs the Eternal City and glides northwards through the Italian countryside. Inside, the atmosphere evokes the seductive glamour of 1960s Italy: lacquered surfaces, rich textures and softly lit interiors curated by Dimorestudio, where every carriage feels suspended somewhere between cinema and memory. This is not simply a train journey. It is a gradual surrender to slowness.

The first great pause comes in Venice, the historic threshold between Europe and the East. Guests step from the train into a city that has long existed in a state of beautiful illusion, marble palaces rising from water, silent canals flickering beneath fading light, the lingering echoes of merchants and explorers who once carried silk and spice westward from distant empires. A full day unfolds among hidden courtyards, Byzantine domes and candlelit dining rooms before the journey resumes eastward.



From there, the train travels into the heart of Central Europe, arriving in Budapest, where grand boulevards and imperial architecture recall the faded splendour of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Beyond the Hungarian capital, the scenery shifts dramatically as the route winds through the Carpathian Mountains. Forested peaks, medieval towns and storybook castles emerge through the train's panoramic windows as La Dolce Vita Orient Express passes through Brașov and Sinaia, regions where Europe's aristocratic past still lingers in quiet mountain air and ornate facades.

Then comes the crossing into Türkiye, the symbolic threshold where continents meet. The final arrival into Istanbul carries the weight of history itself. Minarets rise against the horizon, the Bosphorus glimmers between Europe and Asia, and the city that once captivated generations of Orient Express travellers reveals itself once again as a place suspended between worlds. Few destinations embody cultural convergence with such intensity, and few arrivals feel quite so cinematic.



Yet the true luxury of this route lies not only in the destinations, but in the rediscovery of the journey itself. In an age defined by speed, La Dolce Vita Orient Express proposes something increasingly rare: time to observe, reflect and indulge in the romance of movement.

On board, Italian craftsmanship permeates every detail. The train's 31 cabins, including 18 suites, 12 deluxe cabins and the singular La Dolce Vita Suite, pay homage to the artistic exuberance of post-war Italian design, while three-Michelin-starred chef Heinz Beck curates a gastronomic experience that celebrates Italy's culinary heritage with contemporary refinement. Menus evolve alongside the landscape, transforming dinner into another stage of the voyage itself.

The Rome to Istanbul route marks a defining moment for the modern evolution of Orient Express, a brand that continues to expand far beyond the railway. Following the opening of Orient Express La Minerva in 2025 and Orient Express Venezia in 2026, the launch of La Dolce Vita Orient Express forms part of a wider renaissance that also includes the forthcoming Orient Express Corinthian sailing yacht and the return of the historic Orient Express train itself.

But perhaps this new route represents something even more profound. Not merely the revival of a legendary railway, but the return of a certain way of seeing the world, where travel is measured not in efficiency, but in atmosphere, beauty and wonder.

@orientexpress | orient-express.com

SHARE

Facebook Twitter Email

PREVIOUS ARTICLE
ROLLS-ROYCE UNVEILS THE BLACK BADGE CULLINAN BY CYRIL KONGO, WHERE CONTEMPORARY ART MEETS SUPER-LUXURY

BOOK YOUR TICKETS IN ADVANCE

Planning on the go is easy with 24/7 customer service support and flexible cancellation.

GetYourGuide Book Now

© 2025 THE ARCADIA ONLINE. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

Orient Express to launch luxury rail journey between Rome and Istanbul

LINK: https://www.wantedinrome.com/news/orient-express-to-launch-luxury-rail-journey-between-rome-and-istanbul.html

Orient Express to launch luxury rail journey between Rome and Istanbul By: Wanted in Rome Date: 22 May, 2026 La Dolce Vita Orient Express to launch rail route linking Rome with Istanbul in October 2026. The legendary Orient Express name is returning to one of its most evocative routes this autumn, with the inaugural departure of La Dolce Vita Orient Express from Rome to Istanbul announced for 22 October. The five-day, four-night journey will be operated by Italian group Arsenale in partnership with Accor, owner of the Orient Express 1883 brand, marking a new chapter for a train that has become one of Italy's most talked-about luxury travel propositions since its launch. A journey between two imperial capitals The Rome-Istanbul itinerary is explicitly framed as a homage to the original Orient Express service that linked Paris to Constantinople in 1883, though with a newly Italian point of departure. Departing from Rome, the train calls at Venice - long regarded as the symbolic gateway between Europe and Asia - before crossing into central Europe for a stop in Budapest, where passengers can revisit the grandeur of the Austro-Hungarian era. The route then enters Romania, with pauses at Braov and Sinaia, two towns characterised by mediaeval architecture and mountain scenery. From there, the train crosses into Turkey and terminates in Istanbul. The reverse itinerary, from Istanbul to Rome, follows a slightly different routing through south-eastern Europe. Passengers travelling in that direction pass through Plovdiv and Sofia in Bulgaria, Timioara in Romania and Vienna before arriving in Venice and then Rome Ostiense. Shore excursions at each stop - including private guided tours of Plovdiv's Roman theatre, an after-hours visit to Schönbrunn Palace in Vienna, and water-taxi transfers in Venice - are offered as optional extras. Design and gastronomy The train's interiors were designed by Dimorestudio, the Milanese studio known for its approach to mid-century Italian aesthetics, and are styled around the elegance of the 1960s. Culinary direction is entrusted to Heinz Beck, the three-Michelin-star chef whose flagship restaurant, La Pergola, is one of Rome's most celebrated dining destinations. Beck's menu draws on Mediterranean seasonal produce and is served in a dedicated restaurant carriage, with live piano and vocal performances in the bar carriage each evening. Literary atmosphere The Istanbul terminus carries its own literary associations. The city is where Agatha Christie wrote Murder on the Orient Express while staying in room 411 of the nearby Pera Palace hotel, and the historic Sirkeci station - the original Orient

La proprietà intellettuale è riconducibile alla fonte specificata in testa alla pagina. Il ritaglio stampa è da intendersi per uso privato

Express terminus - is currently undergoing restoration with the possibility that it may be ready to receive passengers again by autumn. Background La Dolce Vita Orient Express has been operating Italian domestic and short-international routes since 2023, when Arsenale - which holds a long-term concession from Italian state railway Trenitalia - introduced itineraries linking Rome with Sicily, the Dolomites and other destinations across the peninsula. The Rome-Istanbul service represents the train's most ambitious international extension to date, and the first time it will cross multiple borders on a single journey. Bookings are open via the Orient Express website. Image: Dolce Vita Orient Express. Photo credit: Mr Tripper.

La proprietà intellettuale è riconducibile alla fonte specificata in testa alla pagina. Il ritaglio stampa è da intendersi per uso privato

Saudi El-Khereiji family invests in Italian hospitality group Barletta

By Reuters
May 25, 202611:24 AM GMT+2Updated 6 hours ago

MILAN, May 25 (Reuters) - Italian hospitality group Gruppo Barletta on Monday welcomed the Saudi El-Khereiji family as a new investor, through a €166 million ($193.24 million) capital increase also involving Italy's Rovati family, valuing the company €1.172 billion post-money.

- The El-Khereiji family, through its Global Hotels Real Estate, will acquire a 8.5% stake through the transaction, a statement said.
- The Rovati family, through FIDIM, will increase its stake to 23% from 12.5%.
- The investment aims to support growth and consolidation at Arsenale, Gruppo Barletta's luxury hospitality subsidiary, including with upcoming extraordinary transactions.

GLOBAL BANKING & Finance review

Saudi El-Khereiji family invests in Italian hospitality group Barletta

Quick Summary

Italian hospitality group Gruppo Barletta has secured a €166 million capital increase on May 25, 2026, attracting the Saudi El-Khereiji family—through Global Hotels Real Estate—for an 8.5% stake, while the Rovati family's FIDIM boosts its holding to 23%, supporting growth at luxury subsidiary Arsenale

Saudi El-Khereiji Family Invests €166 Million in Gruppo Barletta Hospitality

Major Investment and Stakeholder Changes in Gruppo Barletta

Introduction to the Investment

MILAN, May 25 (Reuters) - Italian hospitality group Gruppo Barletta on Monday welcomed the Saudi El-Khereiji family as a new investor, through a €166 million ($193.24 million) capital increase also involving Italy's Rovati family, valuing the company €1.172 billion post-money.

Details of the Transaction

El-Khereiji Family Acquisition

• The El-Khereiji family, through its Global Hotels Real Estate, will acquire a 8.5% stake through the transaction, a statement said.

Rovati Family Stake Increase

• The Rovati family, through FIDIM, will increase its stake to 23% from 12.5%.

Strategic Objectives of the Investment

Growth and Consolidation Plans

Focus on Arsenale Subsidiary

• The investment aims to support growth and consolidation at Arsenale, Gruppo Barletta's luxury hospitality subsidiary, including with upcoming extraordinary transactions.

DOSSIER weekly

TRAVELS, CONVERSATIONS & OTHER NICE THINGS

ISSUE 89 JUNE 7, 2026

STAYS

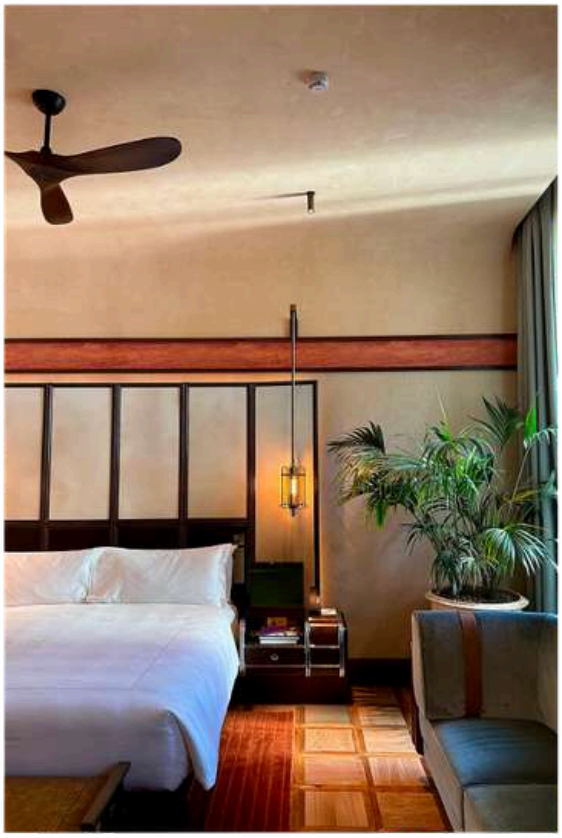
When in Rome

Skye Parrott, Erin Dixon, Elysha Beckerman

The Eternal City is best experienced through its infinite layers. Each of these stays reveals a different one: the "Golden Age" of rail travel, the grandeur of an artistic salon, a local's new favorite golden hour stop, and a modern interpretation of ancient Rome.

Orient Express La Minerva

Skye Parrott



Stepping through the doors of Orient Express La Minerva, one has the uncanny sense of arriving at a train station. A very nice one, from the "Golden Age" of rail travel.

Tucked behind the Pantheon, on Piazza della Minerva, the hotel — the first from the Orient Express brand — has 93 rooms, but it feels much smaller. Its nod to train travel is, of course, a deliberate choice, creating a unified sense of glamour across a now varied portfolio of hospitality offerings from Orient Express.

La Minerva's interiors are incredible. Its spaces are layered and indulgent, outfitted with an array of rich, polished woods; beautifully veined Italian marbles; and deeply textured fabrics. The French-Mexican artist and architect Hugo Toro designed them, down to the furniture, creating a decidedly modern hotel that also clearly references the art deco influences within the brand's rail history.

I loved the hotel's lobby restaurant — La Minerva Bar, housed in a glass-ceilinged courtyard filled with greenery — as well as its most recent addition, a spa. The subterranean space is sumptuous and dark, offering a hammam and an array of treatments inspired by the spas of Istanbul: the train's original embarkation point.

Its skincare rituals draw from a more proximate inspiration, having been created by Furtuna Skin. The line is scientifically designed using organic ingredients, including olive oil and botanicals sourced from the company's regenerative, 800-acre farm in Sicily — which, incidentally, can also now be reached on La Dolce Vita Orient Express train.

Robb Report

The 15 Best Luxury Hotels in Rome

The Eternal City's hotel scene is evolving at a rapid pace, with historic mainstays getting luxurious upgrades and debuts by international brands making headlines.

Roman emperors like Hadrian and Diocletian covered their lavish villas in marble and built vast bathhouses that were essentially the world's first spas, so it should come as no surprise that many of the Eternal City's most luxurious hotels pay homage to them in one way or another. After all, the city has been drawing travelers since the days of the Roman Empire. During the Grand Tour era in the 18th century, poets, painters, and aristocrats flocked here to admire the city's ancient ruins and baroque art and architecture—still valid reasons to visit now, though today's travelers will find plenty of modern pleasures as well.

Over the past few years, the city's hotel scene has exploded. International hotel groups like Anantara and Six Senses have set up their first hotels in the city, Italian brands including Bulgari and ROMEO have expanded their footprint with openings, and historic stalwarts such as the Hassler and Hotel de Russie have undergone upgrades in order to keep up with the competition. In short, there are more choices than ever.

Here, in alphabetical order, are our picks for the 15 best luxury hotels in Rome right now.

11 Orient Express La Minerva

Photo : Alexandre Tabaste

Award: Locals' haunt

The Orient Express is synonymous with Jazz Age glamour, and the recently revived brand's first foray into hotels channels that era without delving into pastiche. For the rebirth of the historic hotel on Piazza della Minerva, just steps from the Pantheon, Accor smartly tapped rising star artist-architect Hugo Toro, who obsessed over every detail, designing Lalique-inspired carved panels on the lobby bar, bedside tables resembling steamer trunks, and even the plates used at the rooftop restaurant, Gigi Rigolatto. While other hotels include subtle references to Rome's art and architecture, Minerva feels the most Roman of all the city's top hotels.

Best amenity: The rooftop restaurant and bar, Gigi Rigolatto, draws the crowds for its bird's-eye views of the Pantheon, but the speakeasy hidden off the lobby is the late-night spot for those in the know. Forget peanuts and potato chips—the cocktails are served with homemade taralli and spiced macadamia nuts.

Can't-miss experience: Decompress in the spa, whose latticed wood interiors evoke an Ottoman bathhouse, with a turn in the steam bath before getting a pampering facial with products by organic Sicilian skincare line Furtuna Skin.

From $1,104

Robb Report

The Best Luxury Travel Experiences of the Year, From Peru's Tinajani Homestead to Italy's Villa Beatrice

A mix of world-class experiences that take luxury stays to exhilarating new heights.

In a post-pandemic world, one luxury has emerged as a priority as well as a privilege: travel. While spending on art and cars has softened somewhat, per last year's luxury report from Bain & Company and Altagamma, those funds have been reassigned to experiences, with outlays up across the sector: on private jets (+11 percent), on high-end hospitality (+7 percent), and on luxury cruises (+12 percent).

There has never been a better time to open a hotel, but then there has also never been more competition. The pipeline for five-star hotels hit record levels late last year: There were more than 1,300 projects looming in Q4 2025, noted data tracker Lodging Econometrics, which is a rise of 8 percent year over year.

There's ferocious demand for the best places to stay, but it's a crowded field jostling for those overnights. Standing out, then, is a true feat—as each of these properties has done, in its own distinctive way. We deemed just 16 worthy of the Best of the Best accolade, from urban hotels and resort properties to private villas and a remarkable new train. If you're making travel plans any time soon, be sure at least one of these is on your itinerary.

Roman Holiday: Orient Express La Minerva, Rome

Photo : Courtesy of Orient Express

Bravo to thereborn Orient Express brand for the first hotel in its new portfolio: La Minerva. The 17th-century palazzo, which became a hotel in 1811, has been reborn as the city's splashiest new five-star. Architect Hugo Toro's design is best described as neo-Pullman, clearly nodding to the brand's trains with Art Deco–style mirrors and deep, rich colors.

The standout detail is the showers, clad in rich red marble, a refreshing swerve from all-white wet rooms. The namesake suite is one of the largest in central Rome at more than 2,045 square feet, with superb views over the nearby piazza. Toro also retained some charming original details, including a statue of the namesake Roman goddess of wisdom, which overlooks the glassed-in courtyard and all-day restaurant, where a harpist strums during breakfast each morning. In a city filled with new high-end openings, it manages to eclipse them all. *From about $1,150*