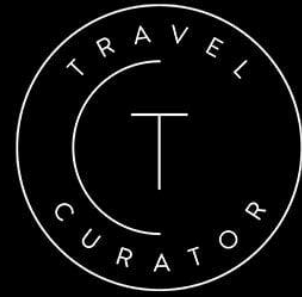


A R S E N A L E

PRESS COVERAGE

January 2025

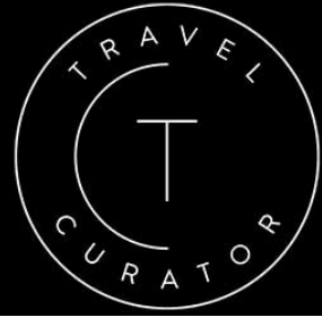
# On Our Radar



## **FIRST ORIENT EXPRESS HOTEL**

Famous luxury train brand, Orient Express, is launching its first hotel, La Minerva, in Rome's historic Piazza della Minerva this spring. The 93-room property offers breathtaking views of the Pantheon while the rooftop restaurant, Voliera, serves Mediterranean cuisine with a stunning backdrop of the Eternal City. Once a 17th-century aristocratic palace, the meticulously restored hotel combines Roman history and Art Deco elegance.

# On Our Radar



## **ALL ABOARD ITALY'S LUXE WEDDING TRAIN**

Wedding train takes on new meaning aboard Italy's dreamy La Dolce Vita Orient Express train (debuting spring 2025). Brides and grooms — plus up to 60 guests — can languish aboard the opulent rail on a one-of-a-kind bespoke wedding journey. All aboard.

# WAY TO GO

## Out With the Old, In with the New

The 2025 hospitality trends you'll need to know.

*We're starting fresh, with intel and developments that will make this another exciting and busy year in travel. Buckle up for what's coming:*

- *No more visa-free travel to Europe and the UK (sorry, Yanks)*
- *Hotels are leaving the building (they're everywhere else)*
- *Heading for cooler climes (sorry, Med)*
- *Reaching for the stars (no, the real ones)*
- *Nature is, as ever, the answer*



Photo courtesy of La Dolce Vita Orient Express.

## Hotels Have Left the Building

“Experience” is the biggest overused buzzword in hospitality, and the hotel industry is taking this to heart by taking guest experiences beyond traditional hotel walls — to the rails, the seas, the home, and the club. This is a longer-term trend you’ll start seeing soon.

### On the Rails

At his media briefing at ILTM, the International Luxury Travel Market conference, in December, Accor CEO Sébastien Bazin said it was time to “stop asking clients to go to the product” and instead to “bring the product to the people.” To that end, this spring the hotel conglomerate’s Orient Express brand will launch **La Dolce Vita** in Italy, a train line offering one- and two-night journeys roundtrip from Rome to Venice, Portofino, Matera, Tuscany, and Sicily. With so little time in each stop, these trips seem to be more about the journey than the destinations. We’ve toured the trains — modern and handsome, with a strong mid-century vibe, they’re boutique hotels on wheels.

In other Orient Express news, Belmond — in addition to their estimable **hotel collection** — operates the classic Venice Simplon-Orient-Express train. (This line is not related to Accor’s Orient Express, and, no, we’re not trying to confuse you. Two totally different companies.) March will see the debut of **L’Observatoire Suite**, an insanely opulent (and opulently priced) private train carriage designed by French artist JR. It sleeps two and will run on the Paris-Istanbul route. In July, Belmond will debut **Britannic Explorer**, the first luxury sleeper train to tour England and Wales, on three- or six-day journeys from London’s Victoria Station into Cornwall, the Lake District, and Wales. The travel will be slow and relaxed. The scenery through countrysides and national parks and coastlines will be beautiful. The excursions will include hikes, picnics, swims, and cute villages. And the **F&B options will be excellent** because the culinary program is overseen by three-Michelin-starred chef Simon Rogan, and we can personally vouch that this man can work wonders in a tiny, moving kitchen.

Also this spring, Accor's Orient Express will open **La Minerva** in Rome, the brand's first (actual, traditional, physical) hotel. Their second will be Palazzo Dona Giovannelli in Venice, though probably not this year.

So, in other words, hotel companies are making trains and train companies are making hotels.

## **On the Seas**

Things may be clearer on the high seas, though it will take longer to get there, with luxury hotel companies launching yachts. (And whatever you do, please don't refer to these elegant sails as mere *cruises*.) **Ritz-Carlton Yacht Collection** added *Ilma*, its second ship, in late 2024 and will add *Luminara* in 2025. Destinations include Asia, the Caribbean, the Med, and Northern Europe and the Baltics. **Four Seasons** will launch its yacht, with suites designed by Prosper Assouline, in the Caribbean in January 2026. Accor's Orient Express is here, too: **Orient Express Silenseas** will sail in the Caribbean and the Mediterranean in 2026. Aman Hotels has been sailing *Amandira*, a five-cabin Phinisi sailboat for a few years, but we'll have to wait until 2027 for the 50-cabin motor yacht from **Aman at Sea**. Here's another insider industry tidbit: It seems clear that emerging luxury cruise company **Explora Journeys** is hoping to tap the luxury hotel magic. They recently hired former Aman Hotels Chief Commercial Officer Anna Nash as their new President.

# Skift.

## Accor Bets on Luxury to Close Gap with Marriott and Hilton



### Skift Take

**A**ccor aims to expand its share of luxury hotels by debuting its Orient Express brand this year and fine-tuning its other brands, like Fairmont and Sofitel.

Accor CEO Sébastien Bazin has been boosting the hotel group's luxury offerings since 2013 when he became the leader of the Paris-based hotel group.

At the end of 2015, only 6% of Accor's rooms worldwide were luxury, and it had only two luxury brands: Sofitel and MGallery. Today, at least 10% of its over 800,000 rooms are in the luxury segment, and the group offers a broader range of brands.

At the International Luxury Travel Market (ILTM) expo in Cannes last month, Accor showed off its offerings in an enormous tent on the beach. "I promise you that Marriott will never get this tent," Bazin joked at an opening dinner, referring to how Accor negotiated with Cannes for its exclusive use.

Perhaps, but Accor, with over 380 luxury hotels, isn't as big of a player in the space as the global leader Marriott, with 534, or Hilton, with more than 500.



*A suite with a terrace at Orient Express La Minerva, an ultra-luxury hotel opening in Rome in spring 2025. Source: Accor.*

## Accor Adds Ultra-Luxury

Bazin's latest ambition is to debut Orient Express this year as a brand of hotels, trains, and yachts. Orient Express will be Accor's second brand after Raffles in the 'ultra-luxury' segment (think rooms that typically sell for over \$1,000 a night).

"I never understood why the travel industry moved away from the best-ever years of luxury travel — about 100 years ago," Bazin said. "Those years were exceptional in terms of the beauty of the uniforms, service, music, gastronomy, baccarat, fragrance."

This spring, Orient Express La Minerva opens in Rome, the first asset in Orient Express's planned portfolio of hotels, sleeper trains, and sailing yachts. The 93-room property overlooks Rome's Pantheon and features a renovation of a 17th-century palazzo.

In 2026, Accor will join LVMH in debuting the first two Orient Express overnight trains, whose first routes will crisscross Italy. It will also debut the world's largest sailing yacht, Orient Express Corinthian. The brand has appointed Chef Yannick Alléno, who has earned two three-star Michelin ratings from his restaurants, as Orient Express's executive chef.



Features

## Rail Revival

1 Jan 2025 by Yi-Hwa Hanna



*Train travel is heading towards a bright new future, and the Middle East's rail sector is on the move*

When the Dubai Metro first launched – on 9 September 2009 – it was big news. So big, in fact, that this was no ordinary transport system: it was an attraction in itself. Some residents across the city were quoted in the news as having ridden it with no specific destination in mind – several even taking it from end to end – simply for the novelty of being able to ride the first rapid transit train network in the GCC.

Within its first two days of operation, it had already welcomed 11,000 passengers. It had been a longtime dream – reportedly created following a vision His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the ruler of Dubai, had during a visit to London with his father back in 1959. That vision, which is said to have come from a moment of marvelling at the driverless trains there, sparked his ambition to one day bring a world-class, sustainable transport system to his own beautiful city.

By September 2024 – when it celebrated its 15-year anniversary – it had welcomed more than 2.4 billion passengers. The world's longest driverless metro line (the Red Line was officially recognised as such by the Guinness World Records on 23 May 2011), it has grown from an initial 10 stations to 53. And on 19 December 2024, an announcement was made by Dubai's Roads and Transport Authority (RTA) stating that the Dubai Metro Blue Line Project is expected to commence operations on 9 September 2029.

The project will mark a major new phase for the system that coincides with the Dubai Metro's 20th anniversary. With 14 new stations spanning 30km – and 28 new trains within its network – by 2030, the new line is expected to carry up to 200,000 riders, rising to an estimated 320,000 by 2040.



It's all part of the Dubai 2040 Master Plan – a framework that aims to transform the city into one wherein every resident can find whatever they need within 20 minutes, underlined by convenient transport that can get them wherever they need to go quickly and easily. Another key part of the plan is to double the amount of green and recreational spaces in the city, boosting the number of nature-filled areas to 60 per cent, alongside green corridors, more pedestrian- and cyclist-friendly mobility, larger public beaches, and more.

The use of mass transit and flexible means of transportation, not to mention more of those that support sustainability goals, is an essential part of it – and given what an enormous impact Dubai Metro's current Red and Green Lines have already had on the city, the new Blue Line will undeniably play a big role here.

Since its launch, the ease of transport that the rail network has provided has enabled much more choice for Dubai's residents and visitors. It didn't just cause a shift in how people got around – it also created a major cultural evolution in the way they explored, experienced, and lived in the city.



Railway has long been known as one of the safest forms of transport. It's typically efficient – and energy-efficient – and on a train, you'll never risk getting stuck in a traffic jam. Unlike a bus or a car, on a train, you can get up to stretch your legs, with more freedom to move around – especially if you're on one that has the added benefit of dining cars, sleeping cabins, and lounges, complete with decent power outlets and wifi.

There's typically also a beautiful view. From Switzerland's Glacier Express to Norway's Bergen Railway, scenic train journeys aren't just a way to get from A to B – they're destinations in themselves. Trains have made up the setting of countless movies and books throughout history – and whether you're more drawn to *The Darjeeling Limited*, *The Polar Express*, or *Bullet Train* (most likely not the train on *Snowpiercer*, though), this mode of transport has long held a romantic and historical appeal.

When it comes to trains that have been made legend through literature and film, none are more iconic than the Orient Express. First created in 1883 by the Belgian *Compagnie Internationale des Wagons-Lits*, the long-distance luxury passenger train travelled all across continental Europe – extending from Paris to Istanbul, and stopping in places like Athens, Brussels, and London along the way



The train had been featured in some of the most famous fictional stories of our time, including Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express* and Ian Fleming's *From Russia With Love*, and it ran for 126 years. Then as alternative transport options began to claim their footing – such as air travel, and the creation of high-speed modern rail systems – all while the geopolitical landscape changed, the legendary train rolled to its final stop in 2009.

But like any good story, the legacy of the original Orient Express could never truly die. In 1982, the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express was launched. A private venture, this luxury train service ran from London to Venice and other destinations in Europe – and although it was sometimes confused with the aforementioned Orient Express, this was a separate entity. Owned by Belmond, the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express wasn't intended to be a transport solution as much as it was a destination in itself – a leisure experience complete with five-star dining, for tourists looking to enjoy a luxury train ride.

Running between March and November each year, guests can still enjoy its beautiful sleeper and restaurant carriages while passing through destinations including Geneva, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Istanbul, Bucharest, and Sinaia, with sightseeing opportunities along the way. From time to time, these destinations will change by season, and over the years, it has occasionally incorporated additional stops in places like Switzerland, Germany, Slovakia, Poland, Scandinavia, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Italy.



During the past few years, a couple more options have come up: An ÖBB NightJet has been running the Paris-Vienna route three times a week since December 2021, and in 2025, Accor will be launching its very own Orient Express from Paris to Istanbul. To use the name, the French hospitality company purchased a 50 per cent stake in the Orient Express brand from SNCF, and since 2018, it has been renovating 17 CIWL carriages from the now-defunct Nostalgie Istanbul Orient Express for this new iteration. With the cars originally dating back to the 1920s and 1930s, it's a beautiful way of paying homage to the original train while elevating it to appeal to a modern audience.

Accor's new Orient Express will operate two services: one across Central Europe (covering France, Germany, Austria, Hungary, and Czechia), and one that travels the original mythic route (covering France, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Romania, Buglaria, and Türkiye). Its inaugural journey is scheduled to take place on 4 April 2025.





Among Accor's new vision for this paragon of "slow travel" is a return to Italy through their La Dolce Vita Orient Express. After a presale that took place in 2022 (wherein 400 of its cabins were quickly snapped up for its maiden voyage) – for an initially-planned launch in 2023, then moved to 2024 – this highly-anticipated train journey officially opened for reservations in August 2024, before it will finally travel in spring 2025.

Developed by Arsenale Group – an Italian company that develops and manages luxury hospitality and lifestyle assets – and conceived by architecture and design firm Dimorestudio, the train feels proudly Italian in many ways. The six trains are decked out with interiors inspired by 20th century Italian design. On the inside, it has 12 deluxe cabins, 18 suites, and one grand La Dolce Vita Suite. All of them have en-suite bathrooms, and across its carriages, the train also boasts a restaurant, a lounge, and a sophisticated bar, with each train able to accommodate up to 62 guests in total. It can also be booked out for private occasions, such as weddings or corporate events.

It's not just Europe that's getting a new luxury train this year, though – Arsenale Group has also partnered with Saudi Arabia Railways to create the Dream of the Desert, the first-ever luxury cruise rail project in Saudi Arabia. Also scheduled to launch sometime in 2025, this beautiful train will consist of 41 luxurious cabins across 15 cars, a fine dining restaurant and lounge bar, and additional high-end services. It will travel around 1290km from Riyadh across to Saudi Arabia's border with Jordan, passing through stunning desert landscapes, UNESCO World Heritage sites filled with ancient archeological treasures, and lush nature reserves. For the Dream of the Desert, Arsenale has promised design features that are inspired by Saudi heritage.



In the meantime, those who are seeking a taste of historical train journeys can visit the remains of the Hejaz Railway – an historic railway that was the very first in Arabia, constructed during the Ottoman Empire and once having run from Damascus to Madinah. In more recent developments, Saudi Arabia Railways opened the Haramain High Speed Railway in October 2018, linking the Muslim holy cities of Madinah and Makkah through a route between King Abdullah Economic City and Jeddah. It travels across 449.2km at 300km/h with five stations along the way, with a 3.75km branch line linking it to Jeddah's King Abdulaziz International Airport. At its stations, passengers will find beautiful designs created by award-winning architecture firm Foster + Partners and British engineering firm Buro Happold, with shops, restaurants, mosques, VIP lounges, and even a helipad.

Saudi Arabia recently continued to bet on train travel as part of its future, with The Royal Commission for AlUla having come into a partnership with Saudi Railway Polytechnic during winter 2024. Together, they'll work on boosting opportunities for young Saudis looking to launch a career in AlUla and/or the kingdom's rapidly-growing rail sector. The first stage of the agreement is planned to provide vocational training programmes in railway maintenance and operation that will build sector-specific subjects, such as rolling stock and infrastructure through hands-on training.

Another train service that's on its way to make a historic impact in the Middle East is Etihad's Rail passenger train. Etihad Rail has already been running for some time now, having first been established back in 2009, but until recently, it has only been used for freight purposes.



The passenger train will connect all seven emirates of the UAE, and is anticipated to carry 36.5 million passengers per year by 2030. The locations of its first stations have already been announced, beginning with one in Sakamkam, Fujairah, and the second near Sharjah's University City. It will run across 900km in total, with 400 cars, travelling at 200km/h; getting people from Dubai to Abu Dhabi within 57 minutes, Abu Dhabi to Al Ain within 70 minutes,

and Abu Dhabi to Fujairah within 105 minutes. In March 2024, it conducted its first passenger service trial run.

Eventually, it will also be connected with Oman's Etihad Rail network, with future travel times between Abu Dhabi and Sohar estimated to take just an hour and 40 minutes. Etihad Rail's passenger trains will reportedly offer its guests plenty of ways to stay comfortable and entertained, from infotainment systems to charging stations, food and beverages, and more. The experience is rumoured to be no less glamorous than the ideals of the Orient Express, with Etihad Rail also having signed a contract with Arsenale Group for its creation.

From Europe to the Middle East – and everywhere in between – it's clear that train travel is about to make a comeback. And with the perfect blend of nostalgia, cutting-edge innovation, and technology-fuelled comfort supported by vintage design, we're eagerly along for the ride.

*This article was featured in the January 2025 issue of Business Traveller Middle East. [Click here](#) for a digital issue of the full magazine*



## Good escapes

### 14 Become a Traitor

If you love *The Traitors* as much as you covet Claudia's fringe, why not recreate the game yourself? The reality show, returning to our screens on 1 January, is filmed at Ardross Castle ([ardrosscastle.co.uk](http://ardrosscastle.co.uk)) in the Scottish Highlands. While you can only book the actual location for big events, there are plenty of other castles for hire (see [celticcastles.com](http://celticcastles.com)). Marrington Escapes ([marringtonescapes.com](http://marringtonescapes.com)) offers 'Traitors' breaks at four of its largest properties in Shropshire. Set in 600-acre estate grounds, they sleep between 10 and 14 and cost around £43pp a night if you fill them. Remote and with plenty of room for challenges, each one comes with a *Traitors* board game and the essential black hooded cloak.



Hire a castle like Ardross, where *The Traitors* is filmed



Sun yourself alongside A-listers on Alentejo's beautiful beaches

### 15 Holiday with the Royals

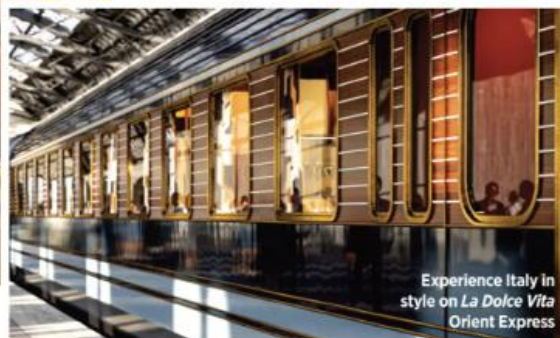
This summer, all eyes will be on Alentejo, a beautiful coastal region in the south of Portugal. Why? Prince Harry and wife Meghan are rumoured to have bought a property at the 722-acre CostaTerra Golf & Ocean Club ([costaterraclub.com](http://costaterraclub.com)), a luxury development around 80 miles south of Lisbon. Princess Eugenie and her husband, Jack Brooksbank, already have a property at the resort, which offers horse-riding and sunbathing on the Costa Azul. Dubbed 'The Hamptons of Portugal', the area has attracted other A-listers including Gisele Bündchen, George Clooney and Sharon Stone. Stay nearby at the AlmaLusa Comporta ([almalusahotels.com](http://almalusahotels.com), rooms from £92 a night) and keep your eyes peeled.

### 16



### Join the rail revolution

Minimise your carbon footprint and embrace slow travel. No longer just for students, Interrail ([interrail.eu/en](http://interrail.eu/en)) is now in its 50s, and a flexible global pass (from £177pp for four days) allows you to explore more than 30,000 stations across 33 European countries. New sleeper services include Brussels to Venice via the Austrian Alps ([europeansleeper.eu](http://europeansleeper.eu)); London to Berlin or Prague, changing at Paris ([b-europe.com/EN](http://b-europe.com/EN)); Paris to Berlin ([nightjet.com](http://nightjet.com)); and Brussels to Berlin or Prague ([europeansleeper.eu](http://europeansleeper.eu)). Good Housekeeping Holidays also has a five-day rail break on the new luxury *La Dolce Vita* Orient Express from £4,479pp (see page 168).



Experience Italy in style on *La Dolce Vita* Orient Express



BEST HOTELS IN THE WORLD BEST HOTELS IN EUROPE BEST HOTELS IN ASIA



Holly Farndell

INSPIRATION

## The biggest travel trends for 2025

From rural upskilling to accessible adventures, these are the trends shaping travel in 2025

BY SARAH ALLARD

3 January 2025

*All products are independently selected by our editors. If you buy something, we may earn an affiliate commission.*

In 2024, we adopted AI to help plan our travels, added **luxury train journeys** to our bucket lists, sought wellness via solitude and stargazing, enjoyed urban gardens and wild feasting, and Swiftly hopped on planes to see our favourite musicians in action.

But how will we be travelling in 2025? Sports fans will swap spectating for setting off on their own athletic adventures (anyone for a game of pickleball?); the quest for **longevity** will evolve into something a lot more holistic; families will embark on summer-long sabbaticals; oenophiles will forgo the more obvious spots for less crowded wine regions. We'll be prolonging our adventures with considerate detours, indulging in our love of food in new and interesting places, and embracing off-board cruise and train experiences as a way of fully immersing ourselves in a destination.

These are the 21 travel trends likely to guide how we see the world in 2025. *Sarah Allard*



Holly Farndell

## 1. Travel gets lit

**What's the trend?** Blame it on the collective sense of so-called “brain rot” – Oxford University Press’s word of the year for 2024 – but books are having a street-style moment. Shots of celebrities from Dua Lipa to Jacob Elordi zipping through the airport show them gripping paperbacks like they’re designer accessories. BookTok – a category of TikTokers focused on literature content – is putting fresh momentum behind the ancient concept of book tourism. It’s even led group travel company Explore Worldwide to conduct an online survey of 2,000 Brits to confirm what book lovers already know: 72 per cent of those surveyed said a novel had inspired them to travel somewhere new.

WATCH

Fish curry with coconut milk recipe: how to make fish Malaikari by Asma Kahn



**Why will it matter in 2025?** Trending travel moments inspired by literature will take several forms. Expect to see enthusiastic readers descend on book festivals around the world in growing numbers, building on the record footfall seen at events such as the [Edinburgh International Book Festival](#) and the rising [Helsinki Book Fair](#); the latter drew 98,000 people to the Finnish capital last year. Travel-themed book clubs are also having a moment, with Explore Worldwide launching its [Four Corners Book Club](#) in November, which connects readers with destinations based on books about them. Zeitgeisty brand Miu Miu shows how fashion brands are also capitalising on the intersection of literature and travel with its ongoing [Literary Club](#), launched last April with a [two-day event in Milan focused on feminist lit](#). [Historic hotels with literary links](#) are increasingly trading in their writerly heritage, such as New York's [Hotel Chelsea](#), which promotes its connection to 20th-century writers. In recent years, hit new stays have also taken a literary angle, such as [Maison Proust in Paris](#), which draws inspiration from its namesake author. In an era where we crave that cringe buzzword, “authenticity”, there’s something, well, novel, in how books make us want to immerse ourselves in the offline world. *JD Shadel*

## 2. Astrocartography

**What's the trend?** We've all been to places we feel an instant connection with – as well as those that just feel “off”, for some reason or another. And while many of us will know our star signs and might even read our daily horoscopes to understand why our week might be going a certain way, an increasingly popular subsection of astrology claims to tell us how different places affect us, too.

**Why will it matter in 2025?** **Astrocartography** is the practice of comparing your birth chart to a map, working out where various planets were at the exact time and place of your birth. It's believed that different planets control different things – for example, the destinations on your Venus line inspire romance, whereas your Mars line might put you on edge. Despite being pioneered in 1978 by the American astrologer Jim Lewis, it has only recently become more mainstream. There are multiple reasons for this, not least the accessibility of global travel today, when one can turn up at the airport in **London** and be in **Bali** by the next day. Post-pandemic, many of us can work remotely, inspiring **digital nomads** to set up their laptops from wherever feels right for them. Yet with the endless possibilities comes the tyranny of choice; deciding between so many destinations can be overwhelming. “My clients come to me to help them narrow it down a little,” says astrocartographer Clarisse Monahan. “I inspire them not just about where to go on holiday but also where they will succeed in business or fall in love.” *Rebecca Cope*

### 3. The long honeymoon

**What's the trend?** The term honeymoon was initially used to describe the first month of marriage (because it is meant to be the sweetest). Later, it was co-opted to mean the first holiday a newlywed couple takes. Yet in recent years, couples have eschewed the once-traditional white-sand beach retreat for staycations or mini-moons to short-haul destinations. With many couples now able to work remotely and many hotels opening luxury residences, travellers can commit to longer-term stays in the destination of their dreams.

**Why will it matter in 2025?** Shorter post-wedding trips have dominated the honeymoon scene in recent years, largely thanks to a combination of the pandemic and affordability: the average couple spends £20,700 on their wedding. Now, growing numbers of newlyweds are seeking to go big on the honeymoon, extending it far beyond the typical seven to 10 days and going further off the beaten track or having an experience such as wine tasting or painting together. Many have delayed their trips due to the pandemic or to save enough money to make it a once-in-a-lifetime holiday. “We wanted to do something epic and adventurous to maximise what's a really special trip,” says Jon Beck, founder of Redline DJs & Ents. “We decided on an extended road trip in Namibia. It felt like something that was memorable and satisfied our craving for a big adventure.” *Rebecca Cope*

### 4. Herstory lessons through women's museums

**What's the trend?** Fresh perspectives are letting us see the world through a female gaze. Cultural spaces spotlighting women's influence on spheres from the arts to politics are championing pioneers who've shaped history in often overlooked ways. Teamed with a move towards impact-unlocking itineraries, holidays are becoming less about ticking off obvious landmarks and more about appreciating unfiltered, provocative stories from the sidelines.

**Why will it matter in 2025?** There's a zeal for narratives celebrating women, from the continued rise in **solo female travellers** to families committed to raising curious minds. East End Women's Museum, the first such female-centred space in England, has opened in Barking. Once neglected female figures are also getting more credit in the former home of Jane Austen's brother. Chawton House near Alton is amplifying early female literary voices, giving long overdue acclaim to many until-now-invisible writers. KØN – Gender Museum in Aarhus, Denmark, tracks the cultural history of gender and sexuality from the evolution of women's rights to sex education. Wider-eyed wanderers are increasingly keen to lean into more uncomfortable conversations via edifying experiences that expand their worldviews. War and Women's Human Rights Museum in Seoul honours the legacy of the halmoni, the Second

World War's "comfort women" in Korea, part of a movement towards brutally honest looks at the past. And Museums Without Men audio guides, created by Katy Hessel, showcase female and gender-non-conforming artists at galleries such as San Francisco's Fine Arts Museums, The Met in New York and London's Tate Britain. *Juliet Kinsman*

## 5. Intrepid supper clubs

**What's the trend?** Ever since the 10-seater Tokyo subway space Sukiyabashi Jiro nabbed three Michelin stars, diners and chefs have been thinking outside the box in terms of innovative restaurant locations. Gastronomic experiences continue to hit new heights, and those seeking superb food are constantly looking for untapped ingredients and previously unexplored places to dine on them. From the edge of space to deep under the sea, many are going way off grid to try new foods, eclectic settings and ethereal culinary sensations.

**Why will it matter in 2025?** British chef Valentine Warner has founded Kitchen In The Wild. The first instalment (in autumn 2025) takes guests to Laikipia, Kenya, where they will dine at the hands of top London chefs Santiago Lastra or [Jackson Boxer](#), in the foothills of Mount Kenya. "We wanted to create an escape from the digital grind, fully immersing guests into nature, where luxury is defined by spending extended time off the grid," says Warner. "Bringing chefs to new landscapes with unusual ingredients inevitably results in exciting cooking whilst making things provides an analogue reset and reconnection." Described as "far-flung adventures for the culinary curious", the project aims to connect guests with the destination. And, if Africa doesn't pull you in, there is Sounds of Silence under Uluru in Australia, where diners can star-gaze in the Outback while enjoying fantastic food and Champagne right at the base of the rock. Sealife lovers will adore Conrad Maldives' undersea restaurant Ithaa – a stunning glass tunnel five metres below the surface. Outstanding in the Field, based in Santa Cruz, California, is a beautiful roving supper club that has operated on beaches, vineyards and pontoons; it's all about connecting diners with the land on which they eat, harvesting that exact food for the supper club. No four walls and bland kitchen spaces here. *Cass Farrar*

## 6. Accessible adventure travel

**What's the trend?** Accessible adventure is transforming how Disabled people and our friends and families are able to experience the great outdoors and the world at large. From innovative adaptive sports equipment to more [inclusive tour operators](#), the trend focuses on making outdoor adventure pursuits – everything from skiing and hiking to kayaking, rafting and mountain biking – accessible by removing both physical and attitudinal barriers.

**Why will it matter in 2025?** By 2025, accessible adventure will be a cornerstone of the outdoor industry, driven by societal demand for inclusivity and the growing spending power of Disabled consumers, projected at more than \$13 trillion globally. People from all walks of life will benefit. Companies such as Rocky Mountain Adaptive and Bowhead have pioneered adaptive equipment and guided experiences, demonstrating that adventures can belong to all of us. This shift is fuelled by Disabled influencers worldwide, successfully showcasing these new experiences and encouraging greater participation and awareness. This trend also aligns with the rising focus on equitable access to recreation and wellness, as research increasingly highlights the physical and mental health benefits of outdoor activities no matter what your ability. It also reflects evolving demands, supported by Disabled organisations and charities, such as the Outdoors for Everyone campaign by the Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation, encouraging adaptations on trails, in parks and in adventure facilities. There should be no limits when it comes to an adventure, nor who can label themselves an adventurer. *Sophie Morgan*

## 7. Female thrill-seeking sojourns

**What's the trend?** Women have long been adventurers – think of Jeanne Baret, who circumnavigated the globe in 1767 – but the industry has historically catered to men. This imbalance partly stems from a lack of women in leadership roles, such as guiding. However, initiatives such as [Nepal's](#) free trekking guide training for women are closing the gap, inspiring more female travellers to seek adventurous experiences far from home.

**Why will it matter in 2025?** A new report by the Adventure Travel Trade Association reveals that more than half of those booking adventure travel are now female. As this trend grows, it will push hospitality providers to prioritise inclusivity and safety, ensuring that adventure travel becomes a more welcoming space for all identities. Companies are responding with tailored offerings. Intrepid Travel's women-only tours provide exclusive cultural access, such as in Saudi Arabia, where female potters, farmers and guides engage with travellers in ways not possible in mixed groups. Similarly, Gleneagles' head of adventure, Yuri Janssen, notes that 95 per cent of his cold-water swimming attendees are female. He says women "understand the intrinsic value of connecting with nature" and are increasingly the driving force behind bookings for themselves and their families. This evolution not only empowers female adventurers but also transforms the industry, setting a new standard for diversity and accessibility. *Rosie Conroy*



Holly Farndell

## 8. Athletic adventures

**What's the trend?** If 2024 was the year to travel as a sports fan, 2025 is when we travel to channel our inner athlete. Hospitality company Accor predicts athletic adventures will be one of the biggest travel trends in 2025. According to its trend forecasting report, 18% of Brits are planning to travel to participate in sports, which coincides with a 50% uptick in searches for “workout holidays” over the past year.

**Why will it matter?** The desire to achieve personal health goals is driving people to incorporate recreational sports into their travel plans. Racketeering, a term coined to reflect the growing racket sports craze, has spurred hotels such as Bürgenstock Resort Lake Lucerne and Cal-a-Vie Health Spa in California to invest in state-of-the-art pickleball courts, clinics and tournaments. Less conventional sports are having a moment, too. Forte Village in Sardinia will run a fencing academy this summer led by an Olympic champ. Voaara, a new resort in Madagascar, will debut a wing-foiling academy led by pro waterman Willow-River Tonkin, and in Morocco, Caravan Dakhla has opened a kite-surfing school in partnership with wind sports pioneer Robby Naish. Travellers don't just want to play, they also want to train. To that end, this season, Eleven has introduced an integrated ski wellness programme at its alpine properties. One month prior to arrival, guests receive a training plan to prep for altitude; upon arrival, they participate in daily ski-specific stretch classes. In Thailand's Hua Hin, Chiva-Som's total golf enhancement retreat elevates players' game with time on the green and in the gym working on golf biomechanics and strength training. And in March, Hotel Palace Merano in Italy will introduce a dedicated Sports Recovery Lab in partnership with a yet-to-be-named sports star. *Jen Murphy*

## 9. Longevity goes holistic

**What's the trend?** Our obsession with longevity – the quest to live not just longer but healthier lives – shows no sign of slowing. In 2024, we tried to achieve it through next-gen diagnostics and super techy biohacks. This year, wellness resorts are looking to move the needle with retreats focused on less hyped, Blue Zones-backed factors, including purpose, community and natural movement.

**Why will it matter in 2025?** A week-long solo stint in a clinical setting where you're poked and prodded and health-optimised in cryo- and hyperbaric chambers may boost your biomarkers. But the pursuit of health alone doesn't motivate most people, says Brooke Damerel, a wellness expert at Sensei Porcupine Creek in California. “If you can cultivate passion, especially within a community, you're intrinsically more motivated to pursue good health,” she says. Research shows that social connection can increase our odds of survival by 50 per cent, and time spent outdoors can significantly boost our mental health. With that in mind, Sensei's latest retreats ditch the bloodwork and instead foster longevity through group hikes on Native lands around Palm Springs, accompanied by mindset coaching and vision boarding. Others are following suit. Palazzo Fiuggi in Italy, Caldera House in the USA and bespoke alpine adventure outfit Swiss Ski Safari have all introduced longevity-focused group retreats rooted in bonding over hikes and other alpine activities. Diagnostic-focused programmes, long hyper-individualised, are also embracing more communal formats. Wellness pioneer Canyon Ranch's new four-day, \$20,000 Longevity8 package, for example, combines diagnostics and one-on-one consultations with daily group hikes and shared meals. *Jen Murphy*

## 10. Rural upskilling

**What's the trend?** As the farm-to-fork movement evolves from mere consumption to active participation, rural upskilling invites travellers to reconnect with ancestral roots through immersive field trips where they can master pre-industrial skills.



**Why will it matter in 2025?** In [South Africa](#), the elegant agro-hotel Babylonstoren has unveiled Soetmelksvlei, a meticulously restored historic farm complex offering masterclasses in milking cows, blacksmithing and carpentry. On the other side of the world, in the UK, sister property The Newt in Somerset provides urbanites with hands-on opportunities to craft apple cider and roll beeswax candles, all while soaking up the charm of a working estate. In Portugal, the Viceroy at Ombria Algarve lets guests step into the life of a shepherd for a day or try their hand at making traditional pottery. At the same time, in the US, a growing appetite for cowboy culture (see above) is driving bookings at Paintrock Canyon Ranch in Wyoming. Here, visitors can saddle up for horseback riding and savour the quintessential ranch experience with barbecues under the big sky. Demonstrating a broader yearning for bucolic bounty, farm retreats are flourishing. Case in point: Paris Society's La Ferme des Vallées, a 38-room farmstay near Paris that opened in September 2024. Located on the grounds of the Abbaye des Vaux-de-Cernay country hotel, it features resident goats, donkeys and chickens, along with opportunities to fish in serene surroundings. Meanwhile, in Umbria, B Corp-certified hotel Rastrello occupies a beautifully restored 14th-century palazzo, producing premium extra-virgin olive oil and organic olive-leaf teas directly from its lush grounds. Looking ahead, autumn 2025 will see the debut of The Pig on the Farm in England, set within a mid-16th-century manor house on 53 acres of arable land, promising an authentic connection to rural life. Are you ready to roll up your sleeves and get your hands dirty? *Jenny Southan*

## 11. Hotel creative collabs

**What's the trend?** Hotels have become much more than places to lay your head for the night. Partnering with interesting and unique brands and people, and championing everything from sustainability to local craftsmanship gives hotels a chance to offer guests an insight into other worlds (while reinforcing their own ethos). It could be via the story behind the makers of the soap you lather up with in the shower, the beans in your coffee, or the locally crafted chair you sit on in the lobby to catch up on your emails.

**Why will it matter in 2025?** Multi-sensory design, playfulness and authenticity are moving to the forefront of our travel experiences. JW Marriott's collaboration with LA-based Flamingo Estate on a garden-infused scent, nature-inspired sound programme and handcrafted honey is just that. Grounding guests in a hotel's location is particularly vital; Borgo Santo Pietro's Seed to Skin Tuscany and Heckfield Place's Wildsmith skincare lines draw guests even further into the beauty of the surrounding natural landscape. Singita's Heritage Series of bold, graphic printed dresses designed by South African designer Thebe Magugu – depicting a mother and child from nine African cultures – celebrates the safari brand's drive to nurture and preserve the continent's cultural heritage for future generations. Meanwhile, how you eat is as important as what you eat. At the UK's Estelle Manor, dishes are served on plates by The Platera, hand-painted with vegetable motifs inspired by produce in the hotel's walled garden; Z.d.G by Zoë de Givenchy's Tulipa tableware was designed in collaboration with the Pulitzer Amsterdam; and at The Largo in Porto, glasses have been hand-blown by Portuguese designer Samuel Reis, and every stoneware plate, mug and bowl hand-cast by local ceramicist Teresa Branco. Le Grand Mazarin in Paris provides its hotel windows as a decorative canvas for rising artists such as Leona Rose and Helena Soubeyrand. As Flamingo Estate founder Richard Christiansen says, all these extra details are at the heart of "the rare art of making someone feel loved and cared for". *Fiona McCarthy*

## 12. Detour destinations

**What's the trend?** Detours have always been part of the travel experience, haven't they? Getting a little lost on purpose, turning down that B-road to avoid the traffic jam and finding a lovely little farm shop on the way; spotting a sign for an ancient ruin and deciding that your Tuscan hotel can wait a bit. Detour travel follows the same premise, finding a smaller, lesser-known destination close to the main event and spending a few days there. [Amsterdam](#) then the Hague; [Florence](#) then [Bologna](#). It's a chance to get away from the crowds, and to spend

more time getting to know a place – a sub-species of slow travel, really. Simply going from A to B is unadventurous.

**Why will it matter in 2025?** “Travellers want more bang for their buck from trips these days, and to see as much as possible while they’re away,” says Tom Barber, co-founder of Original Travel. “But also, detour trips are often fairly last-minute add-ons, with more clients wanting to travel a bit more spontaneously. In Europe, rail travel is the easiest way to do this – once you start looking at train timetables, it’s too tempting not to add an extra stop. Ghent is a popular detour from Brussels, as is Biarritz from San Sebastián.” Further afield, Black Tomato reports that many clients are taking advantage of the new high-speed train in Laos to combine the Southeast Asian country with a holiday in Thailand – visiting an elephant sanctuary near **Chiang Mai**, for example, then taking the slow boat to the Unesco World Heritage city of Luang Prabang. And Expedia, which identified the detour trend from bookings made on its travel site, points to Reims as a detour from Paris – in time to raise a glass in the new Champagne cellar of the Thiénot mansion, perhaps – along with Fukuoka from Tokyo and Santa Barbara from LA. Make like Phileas Fogg in 2025 and take the scenic route. **Rick Jordan**

### 13. Family sabbatical

**What’s the trend?** Ever feel like walking out of your job and jumping on the first train or plane out of here? You’re not the only one. But then comes the reality check. Sabbaticals, though, offer a practical solution: to shift the work-life balance in favour of the latter for a while, taking off for a few weeks or months and returning with a fresh perspective on life, recharged and (possibly) raring to go. Whether you’re at a crossroads in life, marking a major milestone – a 40th birthday perhaps – or you’ve paid off the mortgage and fancy an interlude, with or without the family (the so-called grey or midlife gap year), sabbaticals can be transformative, educational experiences.

**Why will it matter in 2025?** Sabbaticals have recently been identified by HR company Adecco as the biggest work trend right now, with prospective employees choosing companies that offer them over companies that don’t. What’s in it for the companies? Improved mental wellbeing and making sure they retain top talent. “It’s encouraging to see that sabbaticals are on the rise,” says Cat Jones of Byway, which is seeing more clients take trips of a month or longer. “12 per cent of companies in the UK offer paid career breaks, while 53 per cent offer unpaid leave to give their employees a proper break.” So what to do with your newfound freedom? Original Travel is seeing a huge rise in summer sabbaticals, with parents taking children of all ages away for the duration of the school holidays: popular destinations include Japan, Australia, Canada and the US. And Red Savannah has arranged three-month sabbaticals for families, including one to Japan, Singapore, Tahiti and the US, taking in manga drawing lessons, Ninjutsu training with a member of a Ninja clan, flying over the coastal mangroves of Kakadu and staying in a tented camp in Yellowstone. “We usually advise people to go half the distance they’d originally planned and spend more time in each place, with ‘rest points’ along the way, otherwise the trip can be too overwhelming and exhausting,” says founder George Morgan-Grenville. “Having just done one, I can attest to the hugely beneficial effect on mental health. I can only describe it as ‘cranial decluttering’ – apart from boosting cognitive ability, I feel more positive and energised than I have for at least 20 years.” **Rick Jordan**

### 14. A new dawn for oenotourism

**What’s the trend?** Travellers have long ventured to wine regions for trips that are as indulgent as they are educational – packed with tastings, winery tours, bucolic vineyard scenery and shopping for cellar-worthy souvenirs. However, while renowned regions such as Bordeaux, Tuscany and the Douro Valley have been the traditional targets, curiosity around lesser-known and re-emerging wine destinations is growing.

**Why will it matter in 2025?** The word “overtourism” was on everybody’s lips this year. Heightened awareness of this among oenophile travellers is leading them to seek out less crowded wine regions, where accommodation, tours and tastings are more embedded within the local community and feel less scripted. Appetite is growing for fresh discoveries: new flavours, makers and methods. In tandem, enthusiasm for some of the traditional giants is waning – in October 2024, Decanter reported that **Bordeaux** was suffering from an image problem. In areas with low exports (according to Wine Vision, only around 20 per cent of Albanian wine goes abroad), locally produced wine is best enjoyed, well, locally. More oenophiles are cottoning on to intimate Brda in Slovenia and its prized zesty Rebula. Travel to regions such as Kakheti is increasing as more people learn about Georgia’s ancient Qvevri wine – a legacy highlighted on Original Travel’s 2025 Taste of Georgia tour. Chinese viticulture, with regions including Yunnan and Ningxia, is also attracting attention. As are the grapes of the Balkans: Albania’s floral Shesh i Bardhë, rich Vranec in Povardarie, North Macedonia, and berry-flavoured Prokupac in Župa, Serbia. Flight routes are relevant, too, such as direct routes from London to Tbilisi launching in spring. New initiatives by “alternative” wine regions to attract foreign interest and promote indigenous grapes – such as the Tsinandali Wine Symposium in Georgia this October – are paying off. *Toyo Odetunde*

## 15. The anti-butler boom

**What’s the trend?** Luxury hospitality is evolving, with travellers gravitating towards private, personalised experiences that feel more like home. The emphasis on formal service is waning, replaced by a desire for autonomy and informality. As remote work and global mobility reshape how people live and travel, guests increasingly value flexibility and home-like comforts. By blending technology, autonomy and understated luxury, hotels are aligning with the evolving demands of modern travellers who seek informal, customisable experiences that prioritise relaxation and authenticity over uptight and outdated protocols.

**Why will it matter in 2025?** Hotels such as The Emory in **London** and Arev in **St Tropez** have removed receptions, allowing guests to check in remotely and unlock rooms via smartphone for a seamless experience. Properties such as Finolhu Maldives encourage communication through WhatsApp, letting guests decide how much staff interaction they want, while Heckfield Place redefines hospitality with its relaxed, home-like approach. General manager Kevin Brooke notes, “Guests invariably enjoy the lack of formality”, with simple pleasures such as wandering around in pyjamas, an afternoon tea and cake service, or having breakfast hampers delivered adding to the appeal. Belmond’s Villa Beatrice, launching in 2025 in Portofino, further reflects this trend. The villa is set in a secluded, restored family palazzo with private sea access, providing the intimacy of an exclusive residence while allowing guests to plug into the services of sister hotel Splendido on demand. This “best of both worlds” model appeals to those seeking autonomy and privacy without compromising on luxury. The move towards tailored, unobtrusive service highlights the evolving preferences of modern travellers, valuing independence over the constant presence of staff.

*Rosie Conroy*



Holly Farndell

## 16. Cowboy core travel

**What's the trend?** Whether you're streaming *Yellowstone* or *America's Sweethearts: Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders*, listening to Beyoncé's *Cowboy Carter* or donning a fringed suede jacket, there is no escaping the fact that there's a global fascination with all things cowboy right now. This love of the Wild West also influences how we travel, with cowboy-adjacent trips gaining popularity, from ranch stays and horse-riding trips to camping under the stars or holidays to country music festivals.

**Why will it matter in 2025?** Pop culture's cowboy obsession looks set to continue next year, with the release of a new country-themed Lana del Rey album, the final season of *Yellowstone* just dropping and spin-off *1923* returning for a second season. According to Tripaneer, a travel experience marketplace, interest in US ranch stays was up 42 per cent in 2024. Skyscanner, meanwhile, now has the option of filtering hotels by whether or not they offer horse riding, with bookings up 18 per cent in 2024. Next year, the One&Only group will open its first US-based hotel, Moonlight Basin, against the dramatic backdrop of Montana's snowy mountains, with multiple opportunities to indulge your inner rancher. In Europe, riders flock to Menorca Experimental hotel, which offers horseback tours of the Cami de Cavalls. This centuries-old 185km track loops around the island. We're dubbing it the cowboycation. Yee-haw! **Rebecca Cope**

## 17. Cruise nightlife

**What's the trend?** The cruise industry has been doubling down on on-shore access and experiences, exemplified by the rise of expedition cruising and itineraries exploring the world's most remote places, such as Greenland and Papua New Guinea. Now, more ships are adding overnight port stays to their itineraries, which means passengers can experience everything a destination offers long after the sun goes down.

**Why will it matter in 2025?** The benefits of overnight stays are double-fold. First, it helps support more micro-economies by encouraging passengers to spend in the bars, restaurants, theatres and clubs that roar to life at night; second, passengers get to more deeply discover these ports with round-the-clock stays (because we all know shopping in [Tokyo's](#) Shibuya by day must be followed by rounds of beers in Shinjuku by night). Various factors including an ease in both sailing schedules and cruiseline policies to ensure maximum spend in the onboard restaurants and bars has slowly led to more major lines adding overnights in port. Silversea started to offer Rio de Janeiro last year and Virgin Voyages has recently begun to let partiers stay out till the wee hours in Ibiza. Going into 2025, Regent Seven Seas will offer a first-of-its-kind itinerary where guests will spend the night in four cities on a 14-day sailing through Asia. Though Regent has created speciality programming to help steer travellers through the nightlife of the particular destination, including geisha performances in Kyoto, nothing beats the possibility of eating bulgogi in, say, [Seoul's](#) Gangnam district or noodles in The Bund, Shanghai, and then just see where the night takes you. *Erin Florio*

## 18. Locavore lounges

**What's the trend?** Increasingly, the world's wealthiest passengers are expecting more from their airline lounges; sophisticated interiors, sleep pods, showers, yoga studios, spa treatments, shoe shining, art collections, Champagne on tap and full-service restaurants are now customary. As demand for lounge space surges and airlines look to hang on to their elite-status frequent flyers, carriers are now tapping into the locavore trend of serving regional cuisine more rooted in the destination.

**Why will it matter in 2025?** Airlines are renovating existing lounges to a higher standard and rolling out new ones to retain high-spending passengers. Qantas is in the process of spending AU\$100 million on a global lounge upgrade programme, including new menus from pioneering Australian chef Neil Perry featuring buffalo mozzarella produced in New South Wales, Australian wagyu beef and fish plucked from the Corner Inlet. Cathay Pacific plans to launch new flagship lounges in [Hong Kong](#), Beijing and [New York](#) over the next two years. Its culinary offerings, lauded by lounge hounds as some of the best, now include a partnership with Hong Kong's Rosewood hotel. Cantonese fine dining comes from Michelin-starred The Legacy House – marinated abalone with homemade tofu, battered wok-fried prawns with zingy vinegar, steamed chicken and lotus leaves – teamed with chrysanthemum cocktails. As Delta rolls out five new One Lounges and two lounge expansions across 2024 and 2025, culinary treats include delis, bakeries and destination-themed bento boxes: Paris, Tokyo and Boston. Then there's JAL's latest Sakura lounge at Tokyo Haneda, which has a staff of sushi chefs and a bar serving seasonal, artisanal sakes; Swiss Air's partnership with Hiltl, the world's oldest vegetarian restaurant; British Airways' brand partnerships with English sparkling winemakers Hattingley Valley, London-based Union Roast Coffee, Twinings tea and Johnnie Walker whisky; and Air France's promise to only offer French meats, poultry and dairy as part of its ongoing alliance with Alain Ducasse. *Lee Cobaj*

## 19. All aboard for off-board experiences

**What's the trend?** Luxury train operators are reinventing rail travel by making elaborate off-board excursions as much of a draw as their design-forward carriages. Newly launched slow-cruising excursion trains (many meandering along at a lazy 50mph) are building extended stops into their itineraries, where passengers can do everything from truffle hunting in [Piedmont](#) to wild swimming in the [Lake District](#). It's not just about the journey or the

destination anymore – it’s about accessing side experiences and detours, all while having a sumptuous suite to return to each evening.

**Why will it matter in 2025?** Luxury rail travel is in its new golden era. This year, several notable lines and routes are launching, including from Belmond with the Britannica Explorer journeys and luxury hospitality group, Accor, whose [La Dolce Vita Orient Express](#) will travel through Italy. Now, these high-end operators are going off-board into uncharted territory. La Dolce Vita Orient Express isn’t just running another luxury service through Italy’s greatest hits, for instance – it’s venturing into places luxury trains have never gone before, from the ancient cave city of Matera (where lunch happens in an actual cave restaurant) to truffle expeditions in Monferrato (with wine tastings at Unesco-listed vineyards). Meanwhile, Belmond’s new Britannica Explorer journeys on routes throughout Great Britain, each with a range of off-board excursions: strolls through subtropical sculpture gardens and Cornish wine tastings overlooking St Michael’s Mount; access to Beatrix Potter’s former summer estate; and wild swimming in tranquil Derwentwater. The whole concept feels like a correction from homogenised luxury travel; these new itineraries are built around exclusive immersion in the landscapes rather than merely a scenic rumble through. It’s a clever evolution of the luxury train concept that manages to feel both indulgent and intentional, even if that intention comes with a hefty price tag. *JD Shadel*

## 20. JOMO

**What’s the trend?** You may be all too familiar with Fomo, or fear of missing out, but in a hyperconnected world where it’s a struggle to juggle busy schedules, a holiday should be the last place we’re replicating that angst. Yet a relatively simple mindset shift could shape your next trip. Enter Jomo travel – the joy of missing out – a type of “soft travel” that sits alongside the more familiar “slow travel”. It’s less about the pace of seeing a place and more about doing less, feeling more, and sinking into the experience, the people you meet and who you’re with.

**Why will it matter in 2025?** Given that overtourism is still an issue, and many places struggle to manage the needs of both locals and tourists, Jomo travel can help redirect the compass, an antidote to the restless, tickbox trips that still have appeal. Soft travel is also part of a wider wellness trend, a response to our changing, more demanding lives. A global survey by Ipsos found 62 per cent of people reporting the impacts of stress on their daily lives, while in the UK, almost 80 per cent said mental and physical health were equally important. According to Expedia’s Unpack ’25 travel trends report, 62 per cent felt that slow-travel-style trips reduced stress and anxiety, and nearly half said they made them reconnect better with loved ones. The Hilton Trends Report states that “more than one in five travellers plan to get away for self-discovery or mental health when travelling for leisure. They are leaning into ‘soft travel’, or travel that encourages simplicity or spontaneity.” If you suffer from Fomo, choosing places that are known for being relaxing and peaceful as opposed to packing in adventure and activities is one way to enjoy the benefits of being away. When there’s less to obviously miss out on in the first place, Jomo can take over. *Meera Dattani*

## 21. Night tourism

With the astrotourism trend firmly planted, the logical next step is to find other adventures that travellers can have at night. Because with sunlight comes crowds and heat – as anyone who’s been to the Acropolis in [Athens](#) surely knows – but nighttime activities mean cooler temperatures and fewer people. Illustrating this point, Wayfairer Travel reports it has had a 25 per cent uptick in requests for experiences such as nighttime diving at the Great Barrier Reef and Egypt’s Red Sea, nocturnal wildlife safaris in Zambia and Kenya, and Northern Light chasing in Norway and Iceland.

**Why will it matter in 2025?** As the planet gets ever hotter, climate change has influenced the popularity of night tourism, according to Booking.com, with half of respondents to a summer 2024 survey saying they plan to elevate nighttime pursuits to avoid rising daytime

temperatures. And so, tour operators and hotels are increasing nighttime offerings. “We’ve definitely seen a growing interest in nighttime tours. Tours like Alone in the Duomo, Closing Time at the Louvre and Pristine Sistine at Closing Time offer the chance to experience iconic sites at a quieter time, away from daytime crowds,” says Roisin O’Sullivan, global managing director of Walks of Italy. “Nothing truly compares to walking through the Florence cathedral completely alone and watching the key master close the doors for the day.”

Beyond exclusive access, luxury tour operator Scott Dunn offers memorable only-at-night experiences such as attending evening prayers at a Buddhist monastery in Bhutan and an evening Vespa tour of Hanoi, Vietnam, with stops for street food and live music along the way. When it comes to wildlife, a whole new array of animals comes out after the sun sets. Evening safari drives are common in Africa, but other destinations are following suit. The night walk offered at all three Nayara Resorts in Costa Rica is a flashlight-lit evening stroll to encounter frogs, nocturnal birds, bats and a variety of nocturnal insects. Luxury travel company Black Tomato now offers a Kiwi Night Walk in New Zealand to find the elusive native birds. *Devorab Leo-Tov*

# 3 European train routes set to transform travel in 2025

What to expect from each of them...

BY [LIZZIE THOMSON](#) PUBLISHED: 03 JANUARY 2025



Jorg Greuel // Getty Images

Slow, sustainable and scenic, European train journeys not only offer a respite from bustling airports, but also a way to maximise an overall travel experience – by making the most of the journey as well as the destination.

It's hardly surprising then that the demand for international travel by train is projected to grow nearly five-fold between 2022 and 2050.

What's more, exploring Europe by train is becoming even more convenient and sustainable, all thanks to recent EU initiatives working to improve overall rail connectivity and make travel greener.

With this "rail renaissance" in full swing, 2025 is set to be a huge year for train travel in Europe, with new routes making it easier than ever to explore different countries – covering more budget-friendly journeys, as well as luxurious once-in-a-lifetime experiences.

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## King Charles and his dogs



Below are three train routes set to transform travel in 2025 and what to expect from each of them...

## La Dolce Vita

Offering the ultimate 'Made in Italy' experience, this luxurious new sleeper train will offer eight one-to-two-night itineraries with immersive explorations from the north to the south of the country.

The new glossy and elegant La Dolce Vita Orient Express, which is setting off for Italian round trips from spring 2025, will be made up of 12 deluxe cabins and 18 suites, each with their own private



bathrooms.

Inspired by 1960s and '70s Italian glamour (think nostalgic patterns in a rich palette of burgundy, ochres, and coppers), the trains will have a capacity for just 62 guests in total, creating an intimate setting that allows for a more comfortable and personal experience.



Courtesy of La Dolce Vita Orient Express

“The experience on board is the most important,” general manager [Samy Ghachem](#) told *TTG*. “You’ll have amazing volta linens, Broggi silverware and Michelin-star dining.”

But talking points are not limited to internal offerings, as La Dolce Vita Orient Express will journey past some of Italy’s most beautiful natural scenery, including serene lakes, sprawling forests, coasts and Alpine mountains – with breathtaking views to soak up throughout the trip.

BOOK NOW

## Paris to Berlin



Alex Walker

A new direct daytime route from Paris to Berlin whisks travellers through enchanting landscapes from vineyards to forests, to connect the two capitals' city centres.

With a run time of 7hrs 59mins in total, the new high-speed daytime train (reaching speeds of 200mph) is the first ever one to directly connect Paris and Berlin, via Frankfurt South, Karlsruhe, and Strasbourg.

This train launched on 15 December, a year after its nighttime counterpart, and the journey is now faster by five hours.

However, the new Paris to Berlin train not only promises faster, direct and daily journeys between the two bustling capital cities, but also a scenic travel experience, as it moves past Champagne vineyards, the Vosges hills, Saverne tunnel and the Rhine.

## Brussels to Venice

Launching very soon on February 5, 2025, European Sleeper's new route will connect Brussels to Venice, via the Austrian Alps.

As a result, this route promises scenic mountainous landscapes, as well as sublime views of the Dolomites and Venice's canals.

The overnight train will launch just in time for the peak winter sports season and will take about 20 hours in total. Running just twice a week, it will depart from Brussels at 5pm and arrive in Venice at 2pm the following day, stopping in cities like Munich and Innsbruck along the way.

Plan your upcoming adventures around the most exciting new check-ins of the year — there are plenty to choose from...

ALICIA MILLER  
4 DAYS AGO



For the accommodation-avid among us, a hotel isn't just a hotel — it's the entire reason to travel. Whether you're most excited by luxe interiors or singular landscapes, faultless service or Michelin-standard food, let your travel plans be led by the hottest new openings of the year. There are new outposts and stunning renovations throwing open their doors everywhere from the lush wilds of [Asia](#) to iconic [North American](#) cities.

### **Maison Barrière Vendôme, Paris, France**



MAISON BARRIÈRE VENDÔME WILL HELP REDEFINE 1ER ACCOMMODATION  
MAISON BARRIÈRE VENDÔME

Paris's 1st arrondissement might be packed with illustrious sights — the Louvre, Rue de Rivoli, Palais Royal — but until recently it was almost devoid of chic stays. That changed with the openings of whimsical [Madame Rêve](#) and ultra-exclusive [Cheval Blanc](#) in 2021, and now this January, the Barrière Group builds on the scene with its intimate suite hotel set between the Tuileries and Place Vendôme. The 26-room mansion is designed like an extravagant private home, with rooms awash in onyx marble, carmine velvet, terrazzo and parquet. Each is named after an iconic French woman (George Sand, Sarah Bernhardt). Bar-restaurant Frida spills out onto a secluded veranda, and will dispense delicious South American-inflected bites — that is, if you don't fancy having a private chef cook dinner in your suite instead.

**Details:** From £1,413. [hotelsbarriere.com](https://hotelsbarriere.com)

## Orient Express La Minerva, Rome, Italy



THE FIRST ORIENT EXPRESS HOTEL LANDS IN ROME THIS SPRING

ORIENT EXPRESS LA MINERVA

Hot on the heels of Rome's sexy 2023 openings — including Six Senses, Bulgari and ROMEO — the first Orient Express hotel lands in the Italian capital this spring. Architect Hugo Toro has re-envisioned landmark 17th-century palazzo property La Minerva in a golden age light, combining Roman flair with exoticizing luxury to echo the spirit of the European Grand Tour. Set just steps from the Pantheon and with a rooftop terrace overlooking the city, Orient Express La Minerva will be the perfect bookend to a journey on opulent new 18-suite train La Dolce Vita, which also launches this year with multi-day Italian itineraries and food from three-Michelin-starred chef Heinz Beck.

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# Five-star is back, with local knowledge and the shoulder season

\* continued from page 17

## SEMI-GUIDED TRAVEL

Travel agencies have long been selling independently booked travel (which can lead to time-wasted and strictly time-tabled holidays, semi-guided travel combines the perks of a guided trip with a bit more flexibility.

This means putting local agency and all-inclusive packages together, and through greater engagement with local life, and simple pleasures.

Travelpayers has seen a sharp rise in demand for its local expert guides and experiences, such as biking traditional fortified farm in Italy or staying in an asado social house in Argentina. Guides – known as holiday directors – live, eat and breathe their regions, so exploring secret backwaters and exploring secret backwaters and exploring secret backwaters with the destination as never before.

## DESTINATIONS TO DISCOVER

The top trending hotspots for 2025 are in and a clear start destination or having a moment – especially if they are dupes for more expensive and better-known destinations.

At the top of the Shyvacrum table, southern Italian seaside city Reggio Calabria is up 25 per cent, 25 per cent compared with last year, and Kerala is in tenth place – has seen its popularity soar by 66 per cent.

Historic Dominican harbour town Port-au-Prince; Andalusian architectural gem Córdoba; and northern Norway's fjord country are also trending, with a new twist: a weekly addition to the flight roster.

## SPASHING THE CASH

When it comes to overseas trips, leading up to the end of the year, and local themselves to five-star stays.

Italy boomers are also in on the action, so much so that '51' – Spending Kids' Inheritance – has been identified as a separate travel trend, with boomers a generation plan to spend their savings leaving their kids an inheritance.

But in a full-circle moment, it seems Gen Z are pushing this spike, with the millennial generation leading the way.

Luxury tour firm Scenic's five-star all-inclusive Rhine, Main and Danube river cruises in 2025 – with low guest rates – seem to be perfect fit for this generation, with the agency's best of experience and service.

## FIVE-STAR BAL RENAISSANCE

On the same five-star basis, call it the 'bal' renaissance. The trend is proving an exciting theme, and the year ahead sees the introduction of two new 'bal' here have their tips.

Little more than 140 years after the launch of the Orient Express, the centenary of the world's first luxury train is being celebrated in 2025, with six new 1,500-mile services catering to passengers' every wish on a journey through 11 Italian regions. The vibe here is stunning retro

A taste of the Orient: La Dolce Express is embarking on six new routes

Water way to go: Five-star luxury all-inclusive cruise takes in the Danube

## SEASON STRETCHING

A timely combination of changing demand and the need to escape peak-season crowds has seen a boom in shoulder-season travel that shows no sign of waning. Instead of scrambling to book a classic summer holiday, travellers are now looking for more comfortable options to share their experiences with other tourists, making the likes of Antalya, Malia and Larnaca popular in late spring and early autumn.

Departing in September 2025, the La Dolce Express is embarking on six new routes. The itinerary includes a 12-night cruise through 12 countries and more than 20 cities that criss-crosses the planet on seven luxury trains including La Dolce Via Orient Express. The price of the cruise is £29,925. Start saving now.



Cooking up a storm: You could be sharing an asado with locals in Argentina

## NEW YEAR SAVINGS EVENT

### 2025 Ultra-Luxury Europe River Cruises

SAVE UP TO **30%\*** on selected itineraries

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Save up to 30%\* plus enjoy Free Business Class Flights\* and an additional saving of up to £2,000\* on selected sailings in our New Year Savings Event. Don't miss out - book by **13 February 2025** or while availability lasts.

It's more than a 5 star river cruise... It's truly all-inclusive luxury in a class of its own.

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Budapest > Munich

Departs March - October 2025

Standard Suites from £2,625pp\*

SCAN TO FIND OUT MORE

\*Based on a 7-night cruise. Excludes taxes, port fees, and gratuities. Offer valid for bookings made by 13 February 2025. Subject to availability. See scenic.co.uk for full terms and conditions.



## **Orient Express** CEO on Reigniting the Golden Age of Travel With Rome Train, Hotel Openings

LINK: <https://wwd.com/business-news/business-features/orient-express-rome-hotel-train-launch-1236800014/>



**Orient Express** CEO on Reigniting the Golden Age of Travel With Rome Train, Hotel Openings Gilda Perez-Alvarado told WWD that the Rome opening and the maiden voyage of the Dolce Vita tour will both take place in April, while the Palazzo Donà Giovannelli in Venice will open early in the first half of 2025. By Plus Icon Sofia Celeste Senior Correspondent, Home and Interiors Recent Articles by Sofia Celeste January 10, 2025, 2:48pm Share this article on Facebook Share this article on X Share this article on Flipboard Share this article on Pin It Share this article on Tumblr Share this article on Reddit Share this article on LinkedIn Share this article on WhatsApp Share this article on Email Print this article Share this article on Talk Share this article on Facebook Share this article on X Share this article on Flipboard Share this article on Pin It Share this article on Tumblr Share this article on Reddit Share this article

on LinkedIn Share this article on WhatsApp Share this article on Email Print this article Share this article on Talk Gilda Perez-Alvarado Courtesy of **Orient Express** Share this article on Facebook Share this article on X Share this article on Flipboard Share this article on Pin It Share this article on Tumblr Share this article on Reddit Share this article on LinkedIn Share this article on WhatsApp Share this article on Email Print this article Share this article on Talk Share this article on Facebook Share this article on X Share this article on Flipboard Share this article on Pin It Share this article on Tumblr Share this article on Reddit Share this article on LinkedIn Share this article on WhatsApp Share this article on Email Print this article Share this article on Talk MILAN - The fabled train born from the Belle Epoque era, attracted royalty and the rich and famous - and set the stage for one of Agatha Christie's

most famous works - is set to rise again. Initially founded by a Belgian rail company and famous for connecting Europe with Asia, the **Orient Express** train embarked on its first journey, from Paris to Vienna, in 1883 and eventually extended services across continental Europe through to Istanbul. In April, and with the help of luxury powerhouse LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton, the company is gearing up to open its first train tour and hotel in Rome overlooking the Pantheon. Related Articles Fashion Scoops LVMH Is Out to 'Push the Boundaries of Denim Craftmanship' Furniture 6 Economic Factors That Will Dominate the Strategies of Home Furnishing and Decor Companies **Orient Express** chief executive officer Gilda Perez-Alvarado talked to WWD about the grand opening, and what's next for the Accor SA-owned brand: You May Also Like WWD: **Orient Express** has

two locations confirmed for hotel openings, with one in Venice at Palazzo Donà G i o v a n n e l l i designed by Paris-based designer Asmar d'Amman and at La Minerva next to the Pantheon in Rome. What other cities may be on the horizon? Gilda Perez-Alvarado: **Orient Express** has a storied past with more than 140 years of history. The idea is to follow destinations inspired by the iconic train journey, which originated in Paris taking travelers all the way to Istanbul. Any of the major cities that have a historical significance to **Orient Express** are the prime destinations that we're looking at at the moment. WWD: In terms of expansion, what is the strategy? G.P.A.: Our focus is on being a brand that is truly bespoke, a collection. Every detail, every experience has to be tailored to the needs of our guests - everything needs to make sense. WWD: How will the spirit of the world of transport be translated in these two new physical locations? G.P.A.: This spirit will be brought to life in these first two locations by embracing the vision of Georges Nagelmackers, who revolutionized travel when he founded **Orient Express** in 1883. What we want to do is bring the magic back to travel. Travel

used to be very glamorous. And we feel like travel, generally speaking, has become very commoditized. We want to bring back the Golden Age of Travel we need to balance that element of quality and surprise. Inside La Minerva, the **Orient Express** hotel in Rome. Courtesy of **Orient Express**. Photo by Mr. Tripper WWD: Rome is certainly a city that comes to mind when we talk about places that are crowded with tourists and brimming with hotels. G.P.A.: Several of our guests would have visited Rome many times before, but our job is to make sure that they get to see Rome through a very different lens. And it's the same thing in terms of a train journey, same thing in terms of a sailing yacht journey. Some of the elements that were part of the original **Orient Express** 140 years ago still ring true to today, to 2025 and beyond and is a combination of state-of-the-art engineering with beautiful, detailed craftsmanship and amazing service. WWD: Now that you have LVMH as a major investor, will this impact your other partnerships and boutique openings? Will all the products in and around the hotel be under the LVMH umbrella? G.P.A.: Not necessarily. Of

course all elements would be considered. For others, we might consider something that is more relevant to the product or where we stand in the market. So it's quite nuanced. Of course we are working with LVMH in other areas but the reality is that everything is tailored piece by piece, market by market, item by item. WWD: How about in terms of onsite retail? G.P.A.: I think what the industry is trying to do, especially at the ultra-luxury level, is to bring experiences that are bespoke or unique, tailored to that particular market. It goes back to what I said at the beginning we want to make sure that we're working with the local, fabulous artisans and craftsmen and also offer the best that the city has to offer, and at the same time offer items that are world-class, and are commensurate with the brand. WWD: This is a huge attraction for Rome and this will certainly do a lot for the city. G.P.A.: Rome is the Eternal City, and will continue to be the Eternal City forever for many reasons. There's so much richness and culture and the people are absolutely extraordinary. An aspect that we are exploring, whether this be in Rome

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Matera, to the wine vineyards of Tuscany and by the coast of Sicily. The Rome to Venice to Portofino aka "Dolce Vita Tour," whose interiors were designed by Milan's Dimorestudio, is set to embark April 6, in line with the opening of the Hotel Minerva location. What is planned for the celebrations? G.P.A.: Celebration planning is in progress. **Orient Express** La Minerva and **La Dolce Vita Orient Express** will open at the same time; the idea is to combine these celebrations because it's not just about a hotel stay or a train or sailing yacht journey [the first **Orient Express** yacht will set sail in 2026], it's about the entire **Orient Express** experience. It's about spending a few days at a hotel, train and boat. It is about the whole journey. Right now we couldn't be more excited about our upcoming openings, starting with La Minerva and La Dolce Vita. Inside the Orient Hotel Venice. Courtesy of Asmar d'Amman Interiors of the **Orient Express** Dolce Vita train featuring interiors designed by Milan-based Dimorestudio. Courtesy of **Orient Express** Tags



### CEO Talks

# Orient Express CEO on Rome Hotel and Train Launch

Gilda Perez-Alvarado told WWD that the Rome opening and the maiden voyage of the Dolce Vita tour will both take place in April, while the Palazzo Donà Giovannelli in Venice will open early in the first half of 2025. BY SOFIA CELESTE



**MILAN** – The fabled train born from the Belle Epoque era, attracted royalty and the rich and famous – and set the stage for one of Agatha Christie’s most famous works – is set to rise again.

Initially founded by a Belgian rail company and famous for connecting Europe with Asia, the **Orient Express** train embarked on its first journey, from Paris to Vienna, in 1883 and eventually extended services across continental Europe through to Istanbul. In April, and with the help of luxury powerhouse LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton, the company is gearing up to open its first train tour and hotel in Rome overlooking the Pantheon.

**Orient Express** chief executive officer Gilda Perez-Alvarado talked to WWD about the grand opening, and what’s next for the Accor SA-owned brand:

**WWD: Orient Express has two locations confirmed for hotel openings, with one in Venice at Palazzo Donà Giovannelli designed by Paris-based designer Asmar d’Amman and at La Minerva next to the Pantheon in Rome. What other cities may be on the horizon?**

**Gilda Perez-Alvarado:** **Orient Express** has a storied past with more than 140 years of history. The idea is to follow destinations inspired by the iconic train journey, which originated in Paris taking travelers all the way to Istanbul. Any of the major cities that have a historical significance to Orient Express are the prime destinations that we’re looking at at the moment.

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Interiors of the Orient Express Dolce Vita train featuring interiors designed by Milan-based Dimorestudio.

# This year's most glamorous luxury destinations

These are the new hotels, islands and trains you'll want to book for 2025



Villa Ostuni in Puglia

[Lisa Grainger](#) | Monday January 06 2025, 11.00am GMT, The Times

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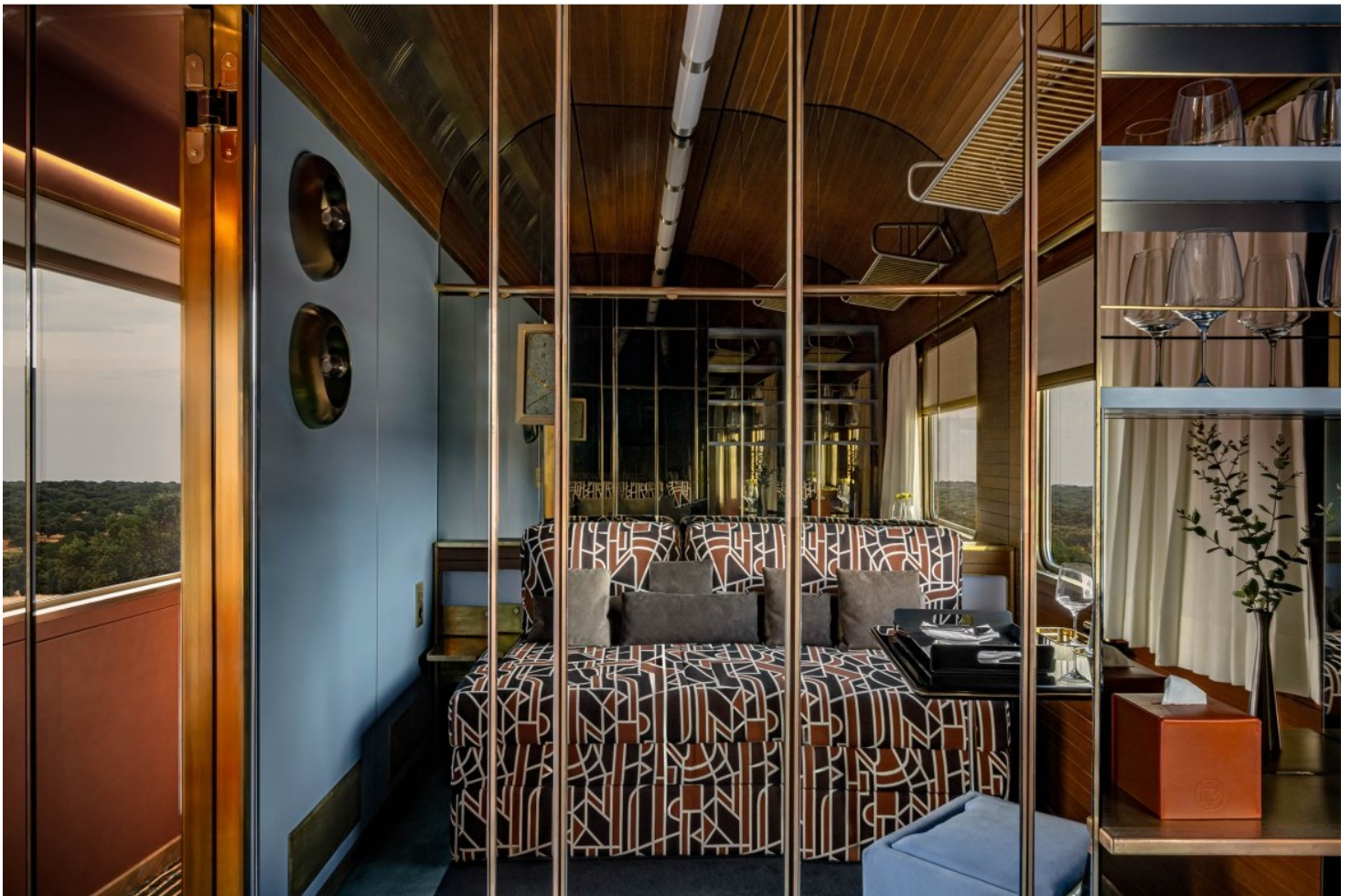
**L**uxury travel is booming. Figures from the latest report by McKinsey for Marriott hotels indicate that over a third of luxury travellers earn between \$100,000 (£80,000) and \$1 million a year — and 60 per cent of their guests have more than \$40,000 a year to spend on leisure. Which is why luxury hotels — from the isolated islands of Flores to the former banking halls in Shanghai — are springing up around the world. Here, our Times Luxury travel editor, Lisa Grainger, selects six new or revitalised spots that are worth checking into.



Michelin-starred food is served on Broggi silver and Ginori crockery

### **La Dolce Vita Orient-Express hits the tracks**

Not since the heyday of Agatha Christie has train travel been quite so appealing to the smart traveller. Which is why in Europe there is now not just one luxury train company but two — the Belmond-operated Venice Simplon-Orient-Express and the Accor-operated Orient Express — vying to lure travellers on to carriages that look more like gentlemen's clubs than rail cabins. On April 4 the much-anticipated La Dolce Vita Orient Express will welcome its first paying passengers on one of eight itineraries from Rome — some one night, some two. It will take in such popular stop-offs as Venice, Portofino, Matera and Montalcino — as well as Sicily, after a ferry crossing with the train aboard.



Interiors have been designed to invoke the spirit of 1960s Via Veneto

The interiors of each 12-carriage, 31-cabin train will be “totally Italian”, says the train’s general manager, Samy Ghachem. “And a celebration of *la dolce vita*, full of Italian fashion, food and photography,” with feasts by the celebrated Michelin-star chef Heinz Beck served on Rivolta Carmignani linens, Broggi silver and Ginori crockery and interiors designed to invoke the spirit of 1960s Via Veneto. Two trains will be launched in 2025, followed by two more each in 2026 and 2027 — and, possibly, if the plans of its Italian owner Paolo Barletta come to fruition, by themed iterations in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the Silk Route and UAE.

**Details** Tickets cost from £2,900 per person per night, all-inclusive, [orient-express.com](https://www.orient-express.com)



The barnlike penthouse suite at Salterra

### **The hot new Caribbean Island**

Lovers of the Caribbean, but not lovers of crowds, this is one for you. On February 15 Marriott’s Luxury Collection launches its first hotel in the British overseas territory of the Turks and Caicos, called Salterra after the wide salt plains that characterise the islands. Located on the little 8.2-square-mile island of South Caicos — the quietest and southernmost of the 40-island archipelago — the 100-room boutique hotel was created by the dive resort owner Michael Tibbetts to be “the most sustainable in the archipelago”, according to Marti Trieschmann, its sales director. Salt, known around here as “white gold”, is a key element of the enormous seaside spa, as are thalassotherapy treatments.



One of the six pools at the hotel

Thanks to Tibbett's experience running high-end dive resorts, water activities here should be top-notch — from diving and fishing with experts to planting coral and mangroves. One, two and three-bedroomed accommodation within the 85-acre site has been designed by Edge of Caribbean to be rooted in nature and almost Scandi in design. The best room by far will be the soothingly creamy, barnlike penthouse. The hotel — half-powered by solar, with water filtered on site, and food sourced as locally as possible — aims to have the best spa in the Caribbean, six pools, an extensive activity centre, a kids' club and six restaurants. This will be an island worth keeping an eye on — particularly when, in February, there will be direct American Airlines flights from Miami twice a week, making it fairly simple to access.

**Details** *Doubles from £1,225 a night, including taxes and breakfast, [salterra.com](https://salterra.com)*



# 'Time travel': will you be trying it this year?

It's the year to take a nostalgic step back in time

BY [ANNA HANN](#) PUBLISHED: 03 JANUARY 2025



Courtesy of Belmond

Another year, another travel trend. This year, it's ready to sweep us off our feet in a whirlwind of nostalgia. The so-called 'time travel' trend is not literal, and no, this isn't an '80s *Back to the Future* trend either. It's all about the elegance of bygone eras when travel was glamorous, romantic,

considered, and utterly decadent.

## What is 'time travel'?

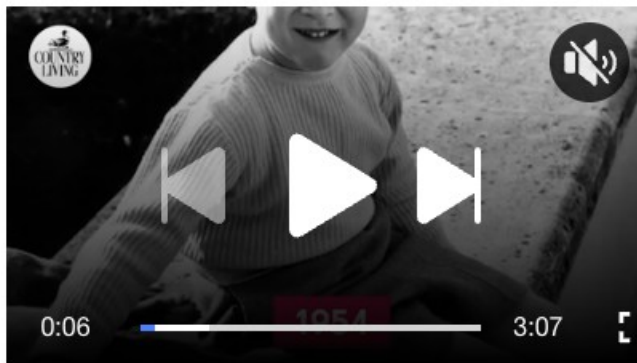
Coined by the experts at [Original Travel](#), 'time travel' came after they spotted the rising demand for holidays aboard steamer ships and nostalgic trains, and rooms in Grand Dame hotels. These time travel holidays are sumptuous, [slow travel](#) experiences that harken back to a golden age of exploration long before the dawn of the package holiday.

Time travel trips give us the illusion of stepping back in time, whether it's historic décor, a vintage mode of transport, recreating scenes in history in period costume, or retracing the route of the Grand Tour.

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MORE FROM COUNTRY LIVING

### King Charles and his dogs



## Steam-powered time travel

What could be more nostalgic than travelling under steam power? Whether by boat or train, this old-fashioned way of exploring is wonderfully romantic, and the opportunities

to travel this way are dwindling as more and more vintage trains and ships are decommissioned.



Sébastien Zanella



Original Travel's [Steam Ship Sudan](#) is a glorious example of a vintage steamer. This 18-cabin ship was built in the early 1900s and lovingly restored to preserve its Belle Epoque style, and today, she still sails the River Nile in Egypt. There's an Agatha Christie cabin that sells out years in advance, and guests pack their finest 1920s outfits for a memorable voyage.



elvinheinla // Getty Images

Closer to home, you can board a glorious steamship in [Scotland](#). The SS Sir Walter Scot has been taking visitors on pleasure cruises across Loch Katrine for over 180 years, and you can board a voyage as part of a [Scottish Highlands holiday](#) in 2025 with *Country Living*. The holiday also includes a trip aboard the [Jacobite steam train](#), crossing the iconic Glenfinnan Viaduct, making it the perfect time-travelling trip.

While not powered by steam, we also love [India's Ganges Voyager II](#) for a nostalgic journey. This boutique ship has all the modern must-haves you'll want, but there's a storied appeal to its style. It cuts an elegant presence on the mighty Ganges River, taking you to Hindu temples in Kalna, artisan villages, and the Bengali towns of Murshidabad and Baranagar.

## Railway journeys: a portal for time travel

It's not just steamer ships that make wonderfully nostalgic time-travelling trips. [Railway holidays](#) (under steam power or otherwise) epitomise a bygone age of travel. One of our absolute favourites is the [British Pullman, A Belmond Train](#). It's the ideal way to embrace the time travel trend, where you can dress up and step aboard this storied train for a decadent day trip to [Bath](#) or [Blenheim Palace](#).



You can also board heritage railways in [Norfolk](#). The Bure Valley Railway and Poppy Line are steam-powered locomotives, and you can ride both as part of a [five-day trip to Norfolk](#) and Sandringham with Lucy Worsley.



Courtesy of Belmond

To truly embrace the trend, go all-out and book a trip aboard the iconic [Venice Simplon-Orient Express](#) on a journey between Venice and Paris, following in the footsteps of royalty and celebrities who have travelled this route since the 1920s.

## Retracing the Grand Tour

Time travel can be as much about the locations as the theme. Taking cues from the Grand Tour, which flourished in the 17th to 19th centuries, this cultural pilgrimage for the British upper classes typically included stops in iconic cities such as [Paris](#), [Florence](#), [Venice](#), and [Rome](#).



Courtesy of La Dolce Vita Orient Express

You can take a mini Grand Tour of your own in 2025, spending three nights in Rome before setting off on a fabulous train journey aboard the La Dolce Vita Orient Express. While this is a **brand new train** for 2025, it has a decisively 1970s feel, transporting you back five decades.

## Time travelling weekends

Holidays that evoke the golden age of travel can be expensive, so if you'd rather indulge in the trend on a smaller budget, we love the idea of a murder mystery weekend set in the roaring 20s with actors bringing this glamorous era to life for a night. Come dressed in your best 1920s outfits and get ready to travel back in time...

# OBSERVER

## Where to Go Next: 15 Transformative Destinations for 2025

These emerging powerhouses turn the familiar on its head, showcasing museums on archaeological frontiers, intimate lodges where tradition steers luxury and festivals that rewrite the world map.



A museum two decades in the making finally reveals an ancient king's complete treasure. An Arctic wilderness, previously requiring three flight connections, becomes reachable in a single hop from New York. A Mediterranean island of ruins and spice markets reinvents itself as a global food capital. The travel map is being redrawn in 2025—not by trends or marketing campaigns, but by concrete developments that fundamentally alter how we can experience places.

This isn't about where's "hot" or "emerging." These 15 top destinations represent precise moments of intersection—where major openings, new routes, or cultural initiatives create opportunities that didn't exist before and might not exist later. Some are familiar places hitting genuine turning points: a European capital turning its Metro stations into underground museums, a Pacific metropolis reimagining itself for World Expo. Others are remote locations where infrastructure is finally catching up to ambition.

What makes a destination matter in a specific year? Sometimes, it's obvious: a landmark museum opening, a historical anniversary, a major cultural event. Other times it's more nuanced: Indigenous communities taking control of their storytelling, ancient traditions finding modern expression, or transportation networks finally connecting dots on the map. In 2025, we're seeing an unusual convergence of both. Our selections capture places at legitimate turning points, where timing shapes not just when you should visit, but what you'll be able to experience when you do.

## Rome, Italy [🔗](#)



Rome, Italy. Getty Images

Already one of the most visited cities in Europe, the Eternal City enters 2025 with renewed vigor as it welcomes the Catholic Jubilee year with an unprecedented \$1.4 billion infrastructure overhaul. Beyond the spiritual significance of the Holy Doors opening at St. Peter's Basilica, visitors will find a more navigable Rome thanks to the new Metro Line C, whose stations double as underground archaeological museums. A wave of luxury hotels is transforming historic buildings: the [74-room Romeo Roma](#), one of Zaha Hadid's final projects, brings her signature industrial materiality of steel and concrete to a 16th-century palazzo, with a culinary concept led by Michelin-starred chef [Alain Ducasse](#), while forthcoming properties from [Corinthia](#), [Rosewood](#) and [Orient Express](#) promise to further amp up the Roman hospitality scene.



## Accor's Gilda Perez-Alvarado on Orient Express' role in the 'Golden Age of Travel'

French firm looks beyond hotels to leverage all parts of the journey



Pictured is the La Dolce Vita Suite Cabin on Accor's luxury Orient Express train. (Accor)

Gilda Perez-Alvarado has transformation on her mind.

The former global CEO of JLL's Hotels and Hospitality Group joined French hotel giant Accor at the end of 2023, where she holds two major roles that are all about strategy and bold thinking around venerable travel brands that span not just hotels, but luxury trains and yachts as well.

Now, 15 months into her career change, Accor's chief strategy officer and CEO of Orient Express says it is the company's boldness, transformational nature, accomplished leadership and fascinating brand and cross-hospitality makeup that excite her the most.

"We are in the Golden Age of Travel," she told Hotel News Now.

### Luxury and lifestyle lead the way

Perez-Alvarado said that when it comes to the company's overall strategy, it's clear that lifestyle and luxury brands "were outpacing growth relative to premium, midscale and economy, and that was both lifestyle and luxury."

"If you look back the results have been absolutely extraordinary in that here we have three luxury brands, three of the biggest centenarian brands worldwide," she said, referring to Fairmont, Orient Express and Raffles.

She said those three brands focus on different parts of the entire Northern Hemisphere—Fairmont in the Americas, Orient Express in Europe and Raffles in Asia.

"Just the fact that over the last decade [these three hotel brands] were acquired and became part of the Accor portfolio ... I do not know anyone else who could do it," she said. Yes, we have the heritage, the beautiful archives of Raffles, Fairmont, Orient Express, but on the lifestyle side we have the founders still working with us to ensure that that DNA gets preserved."



Gilda Perez-Alvarado is CEO of Orient Express and chief strategy officer at Accor. (Accor)

Accor [acquired FRHI Hotels & Resorts in 2016](#). Today Fairmont has 88 hotels open and in the pipeline in 30 countries. Raffles has 24 hotels in 18 countries. The company [picked up a stake in Orient Express in 2017](#) with the goal of adding hotels to the legacy train brand. Three hotels are in the Orient Express pipeline — two in Italy and one in Saudi Arabia.

Perez-Alvarado said Accor's entrepreneurial focus is another big success factor. The company has placed a lot of strategy emphasis in recent years on food and beverage, wellness, co-working and branded residential.

These strategies combine to spearhead future growth, relevance and share of wallet that goes beyond "just" hotel stays, she said.

"Now from an investment perspective we can look at a piece of real estate and say, okay, this is how we are going to optimize the hotel component of it, but this also is how we are going to operate F&B, this is how we are going to operate wellness, this is how we are going to operate residential."

The model now is, "How we can optimize every foot of the building, as opposed to the old model that it is rooms and every other department is ancillary," she said.

"Every department now for us is its own business, and that is very, very important," she added.

## Orient Express



The dining car in the Orient Express was designed to give guests a comfortable and luxurious experience.



Orient Express has a resident historian who discovered in a siding in Poland some of the service's original carriages slowly disintegrating but now returned to their full glory. (Accor)

## Golden Age of Travel

Perez-Alvarado said that even the most luxury brands within Accor, notably her own Orient Express brand, "are taking a page out of the lifestyle playbook."

The lifestyle playbook also talks about sheer luxury, and Orient Express' hotels and soon-to-arrive trains and yachts unabashedly but demurely shout luxury.

In summer 2024, Accor began a search for a financial partner for Orient Express' ambitious train-service rollout.

It found one with one of France's most august firms, LVMH.

"Orient Express is a joint venture between Accor and [LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton SE] at the parent company level," she said. "What is so extraordinary about it is the fact that we have two French giants redeveloping the most iconic ultra-luxury travel brand that exists," she said.

She reiterated that LVMH's wholly owned brand, Belmond, which in addition to hotels owns the Venice-Simplon-Orient-Express luxury train, is separate from Accor and Orient Express' upcoming trains offerings.

She said Orient Express was founded in 1883, and its new hospitality offerings are very much part of a dream to return some of the wonder to travel.

"We are in the Golden Age of Travel. It is an ideal marriage for Accor and LVMH to be reintroducing the Orient Express travel-asset collection, if you will, that is what they are. ... We are in the business of experiences. Our dream at the end of the day is to be able to sell journeys, and journeys can be comprised of perhaps just a hotel stay, maybe just a train or a yacht, or maybe a combination thereof," Perez-Alvarado said.

"What is so interesting and so rich about this experience is the fact that this is a brand that has a tremendous amount of history. It was a very innovative brand when it started 140 years ago. The founder, Georges Nagelmackers, basically revolutionized travel. He was obsessed with connecting cities and cultures. He spent time in the U.S. perfecting train travel. It was very futuristic, and engineering was a very big part of it," she said.

"We are doing the same now with the trains. We're in the process of restoring historical trains, of bring them back to life, and we are also redefining some of the trains, for example, the La Dolce Vita train opening in the second quarter of 2025, an ode to the 1960s, celebrating Italy that way," she said.

She added many of the Italian train's guests would already have been to Italy many times, but Accor wanted to show them yet another side to the country.

That might be out into Italian waters.

The yacht Orient Express is developing, the *Orient Express Corinthian*, is set to sail in 2026. Perez-Alvarado called it "very special."

“It is the biggest sailing yacht in the world, 220 meters. It is a sailing yacht, not a motor yacht, which makes it even more special. The mast of it is the height of [Accor’s] headquarters in Paris, so it will be quite something,” she said, adding it will have eight F&B outlets, 54 suites and a cabaret theater.

“It is celebrating the art de vivre that the French know very well, and it is the perfect amalgamation of best in class, the latest engineering technology from the sails to how it is powered to incredible craftsmanship and artisanship,” she said.

For Orient Express’ forthcoming hotels, she said, the portfolio’s individual properties also must tell a story.

The 93-room Orient Express La Minerva in Rome is a building that started life in the 1600s and has been a hotel since the 1800s, she said.

“It is one of the longest-serving hotels in Rome. It is in a beautiful location,” she said of the property, adding it is to open this spring.

“In Venice, we’re going to open in the second half of the year,” she said, referring to the Orient Express Palazzo Donà Giovannelli that was built in the 1400s.

“It is being restored hand in hand with the Italian state,” she added.

Everyone at Orient Express is very aware of its unique history.

“We have our Orient Express historian. His name is Arthur Mettetal. He is absolutely brilliant. He is a walking encyclopedia. He has a Ph.D. in Orient Express,” she said. “We have 140 years of archives.”

She said looking at these archives and reading them firsthand is a thrill.

“Having a front-row seat underlined what a responsibility Accor has in being custodians of the brand so that it lives for another 100 or 200 years,” she said.

“To see all the love and care that has gone into Orient Express and know that we have the weight on our shoulders ... you also appreciate we have the privilege of working on this brand for a very small period of time within its long history, we have a duty of fiduciary to ensure its going concern,” she said.

She added that LVMH’s involvement is so important.



Accor's Orient Express brand also includes hotels. Pictured is the Orient Express La Minerva in Rome. (Mr. Tripper/Accor)



“LVMH is the world’s biggest collector of heritage brands. ... Just recently we had a meeting with another one of their holdings, and we went into their vaults, and they were pulling out the archives wearing white gloves, items that were 200 years old. The way it made you feel when you are hearing these stories, it was these a-ha moments, we were educated, we were cultured. ... It is this that we want you to feel and share when you stay or you experience Orient Express,” Perez-Alvarado said.

Other upcoming Orient Express hotels must follow suit in that they have a tale to tell, she added.

“It would be best, optimal for them to be complimentary to the trains and the yachts or whatever else the brand decides to have down the road. There also might be extraordinary, heritage buildings that are not need the trains’ routes but would make wonderful Orient Express hotels with their own wonderful stories,” she said.

Many are the grand buildings in Europe that deserve to be protected and would fit perfectly into the Orient Express portfolio.

“We want to make sure these assets are bespoke, and I know that term is overused, but all these places are places that could be privatized. Trains can be privatized, yachts can be privatized, and now we are not just looking at the traditional hospitality set ... you now have to pay attention to yacht chartering. On the trains, it would be nice to see special events, social events, board meetings, incentives.”

She said the brand needs three types of traveler.

“We need the people who generate enough income to go on one of these every day. There’s also those who will save a lifetime and make it a special occasion, a bucket-list item, and we also need our followers, our dreamers who keep the brand alive.

“That is a great page out of the luxury, consumer-goods play book,” she added.

## Transformational phases

Perez-Alvarado said phase one of Accor’s overall transformation is complete.

“Phase one was to make sure we had a very well-diversified portfolio, therefore more solutions for the investor market who wanted to go into real estate. Twenty years ago, 70% of hotel owners were niche hotels investors, and 30% were generalists. Now 70% are generalists,” she said.

“This portfolio diversification is not just helpful from our perspective in terms of ensuring we meet our financial targets we promised to our shareholders, from an earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization perspective, from a network growth perspective, from a revenue per available room perspective, et cetera, but it is also very important to the biggest investors worldwide, who are the ones who fuel growth. We depend on them. In a certain way, hotel companies have become asset managers as well,” she added.

Phase two is about growth, and that's continuing, Perez-Alvarado said.

Phase three now is underway.

"Now that every swim lane has been met ... I would say phase three is now how do we leverage?"

"The next step is focusing on asset management, focusing on managing the portfolio, optimizing the portfolio and, most importantly, leveraging the portfolio in and of itself ... in the short and medium term," she said.

# SAVEUR

TRAVEL

## 6 Life-Changing Train Trips to Take This Year

*Because high-end rail travel is back—fabulous food and all.*

The scene is like something from Agatha Christie's Poirot novels: In the golden glow of morning, a crowd gathers to board the huffing, gleaming train. Porters in starched white livery lead travelers to sleeping chambers outfitted with carved wood furniture and goose-down quilts. Then, with everyone snug in their cabins, a sharp whistle blows. The coach trundles off into the vast, scenic wilderness.

Is it 1924 or 2024? With a sudden proliferation of old-world-style rail itineraries, your guess is as good as ours. Slow travel is back, and by rail, you can skip the usual headaches of traffic and crowds in exchange for sweeping vistas, well-kept accommodations, and—increasingly—exceptional cuisine with a palpable sense of place. For an escape that's as much about the journey as it is about the destination, consider these luxe locomotives.

### La Dolce Vita Orient Express



*Courtesy La Dolce Vita Orient Express*

**2 nights • Key sights: Rome, Matera, Palena**

The UNESCO-preserved cave dwellings of Matera, the star stop on this train, make you feel like you're in a history documentary (just with way more gelato). On-board culinary offerings include everything from Sicilian brioche at breakfast to a lively aperitivo in the lounge (where you can try your hand at the Italian game of scopa). A stop-off in Palena allows for more enchanting sightseeing and castle-hopping.



## THE WEEKLY ROUND-UP

### **Trains, Yachts, and Timeless Luxury: Gilda Perez-Alvarado on Leading Orient-Express**



Speaking of incredible leaders, I'm excited to share my recent interview with [Gilda Perez-Alvarado, Chief Strategy Officer at Accor and CEO of Orient-Express](#). We caught up last month at [ILTM Cannes](#) to reflect on her first year in her new role(s)! To complement the written interview, we're also releasing a series of five short videos—be sure to check out the first one at the end of the article! As a video newbie, I'm especially grateful to Gilda for her gracious participation. I'd love to hear your thoughts, please let me know what you think!

- [Trains, Yachts, and Timeless Luxury: Gilda Perez-Alvarado on Her First Year Leading Orient-Express](#) Gilda's journey from JLL to leading Accor's bold vision for Orient Express, redefining luxury with trains, yachts, and hotels.



# **Trains, Yachts, and Timeless Luxury: Gilda Perez-Alvarado on Her First Year Leading Orient-Express**

Last month at [ILTM in Cannes](#)—the annual gathering of the 'who's who' of the luxury travel world—[hertelier](#) sat down with the ever-inspiring Gilda Perez-Alvarado, CEO of Orient Express and chief strategy officer for Accor, to get an update on her first year with the company. Before joining Accor at the end of 2023, Gilda was CEO of JLL Hotels & Hospitality Group, where she spent most of her [trailblazing career](#), leading global investment sales, debt and equity placement, strategic advisory, and asset management services.

In her current role, Gilda is overseeing transformative projects that are redefining Accor's legacy. For context, Orient Express is part of Accor, the largest hotel company in Europe and the seventh largest in the world. From expanding into new asset classes like luxury trains and yachts to orchestrating multi-dimensional travel experiences, Gilda is at the helm of bold innovation. This year will see the opening of two hotels—the Orient Express La Minerva in Rome and the Orient Express Palazzo Donà Giovanelli in Venice—as well as the first train, La Dolce Vita Orient Express. In 2026, the first of two Orient Express Silenseas ships, the Orient Express Corinthian, will set sail.

## THE WEEKLY ROUND-UP

### **Trains, Yachts, and Timeless Luxury: Gilda Perez-Alvarado on Leading Orient-Express**



Gilda opened up to [hertelier](#) about her transition, her reflections on balancing personal and professional priorities, and how she's adapting her leadership style to thrive in a new cultural and organizational environment.

#### **What was it like transitioning from JLL to Accor?**

It's been exciting, but not without its challenges! When I made the move, everything changed—my company, my role, my country, and even the language. For a start, I'm in the same industry, but on a different side of it. At JLL, I was focused on transactions. Here at Accor, it's about orchestrating experiences. Of course, my family came with me, which added another layer of adjustment, but they've been incredibly supportive and grounding for me as I navigate multiple changes at once.

It's been a year of learning, finding my rhythm, and realizing that this role is about both listening first and then leading. I know we talk about the famous first 100 days, but the reality is that it's been the first 365 days, and even now, I'm still learning and adjusting.

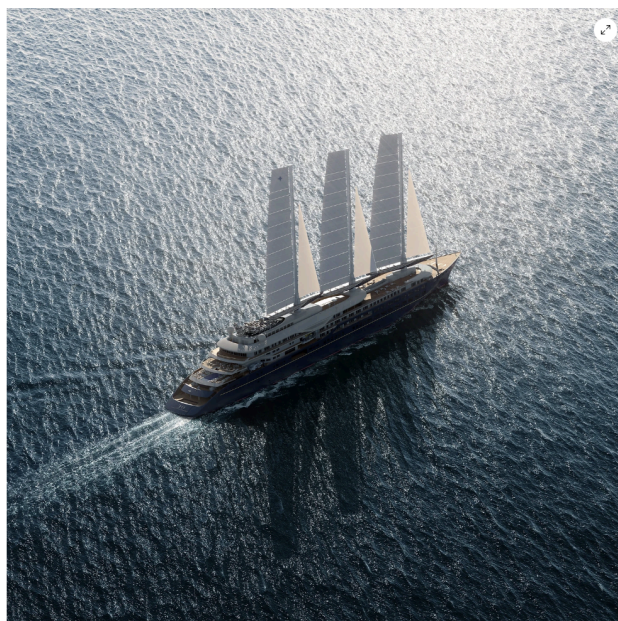
**Relocating to Paris and stepping into two high-profile roles is a major adjustment. How did you manage this transition?**

Yes, it's been a big change. Moving to Paris from Miami, adapting to a new work culture, and helping my family settle has been a whirlwind. My daughter has been a big inspiration—she's fearless and has adapted beautifully, picking up the language faster than I have. Seeing her thrive reminds me to approach challenges with the same openness.

The cultural differences have been fascinating. In the U.S., I was used to a fast-paced, more direct work environment. Here, relationships take time, and communication is more nuanced. It's taught me to be more patient and to really observe before jumping in.

**How have you approached leading Accor into new asset classes like trains and yachts?**

Leading Accor into new asset classes has been an extraordinary challenge and opportunity. Following the vision of our CEO, Sébastien Bazin, who is deeply committed to the transformational nature of the Orient Express brand, my role has been to orchestrate a complex ecosystem of projects—trains, yachts, hotels, and the team itself—all working in harmony to create something truly exceptional.



a rendering of the Orient-Express Corinthian yacht (Accor)



One of the most rewarding aspects of this role has been working with such an incredible team. The team includes artists, architects, naval engineers, and professionals from the luxury consumer goods space, alongside seasoned hoteliers. Each person is an expert in their field, and learning from them has been both humbling and inspiring, like a masterclass in each discipline. I had to figure out my “swim lane” to understand my place within this incredible group and focus on how I could add value while ensuring everyone’s contributions were aligned and amplified.



A suite on the new La Dolce Vita train (Accor)

For example, the La Dolce Vita train celebrates the glamour of the 1960s with bespoke itineraries through Italy’s most stunning landscapes. Meanwhile, the Orient Express Corinthian yacht combines cutting-edge engineering with timeless elegance as the largest sailing yacht in the world. These projects honor the brand’s rich heritage while redefining luxury travel for the modern era. This year will see the opening of two hotels—the 93-room Orient Express La Minerva in the heart of Rome, located near the Pantheon and housed in a 17th-century building, and the 43-suite Orient Express Palazzo Donà Giovanelli in Venice, a historic palace originally built in 1400 by architect Filippo Calendario, known for Venice’s famed Doge’s Palace.



the facade of the 93-room Orient Express La Minerva (Accor)

At its heart, Orient Express is about journeys—connecting people and cultures through extraordinary experiences. As I've often said, no one in the industry has ever done what we're trying to do, and there's no blueprint for it. Bringing this vision to life is both a privilege and a remarkable journey in itself.

### **How do you balance the demands of work with a young family?**

This move has been a family effort. My husband and I have always been partners in navigating life's changes, and having that support system has made all the difference. We've moved many times before, so in a way, it's part of our family's DNA. But this time, it felt different—I wanted to give my daughter a more international experience and to show her that we're fearless in the face of change.

My daughter keeps me grounded—she asks me about my day at work just as I ask her about school. Those little moments of connection are so important. I love when she asks me, "Mama, how was work?" It's a reminder to stay positive and to share good stories with her, just as she does with me.

It's about integrating personal and professional lives in a way that works—it's a blend, not a balance. For me, it's about being present in every moment at work or at home.

### **How has your leadership style evolved since joining Accor?**

When I started, I realized very quickly that the context here was different. At first, I came in very direct—very American—sharing my point of view, but I soon learned that I needed to take a step back. The cultural nuances in Paris require a different approach than what I was used to in the U.S., where leadership is often very forward and fast-paced. I found myself hesitating to speak up at times because I didn't want to make a mistake or say something that could be taken out of context.

Over the course of the year, I've adapted by observing more and finding ways to balance my American style of directness with a more collaborative approach. Here, relationships and communication take more time, but they also build stronger connections and trust. I've learned to involve the team more deeply in decision-making, encouraging open dialogue and challenging ideas—including my own.

What's been fascinating is recognizing that no one-size-fits-all approach works in leadership. It's about understanding the people and the culture you're working with and adjusting accordingly. This process has taught me to appreciate the journey and not just focus on the goal or destination.

### **What excites you most about leading Orient Express into the future?**

It's a once-in-a-lifetime chance to reimagine such an iconic brand for a new generation. This vision is deeply tied to our CEO, Sébastien Bazin. He's a true visionary who believes in the transformational nature of the Orient Express brand, and I'm thrilled to be leading these innovative initiatives. Whether it's restoring historical trains and hotels or building the largest sailing yacht in the world, these projects are not only innovative but also deeply rooted in the heritage of travel.

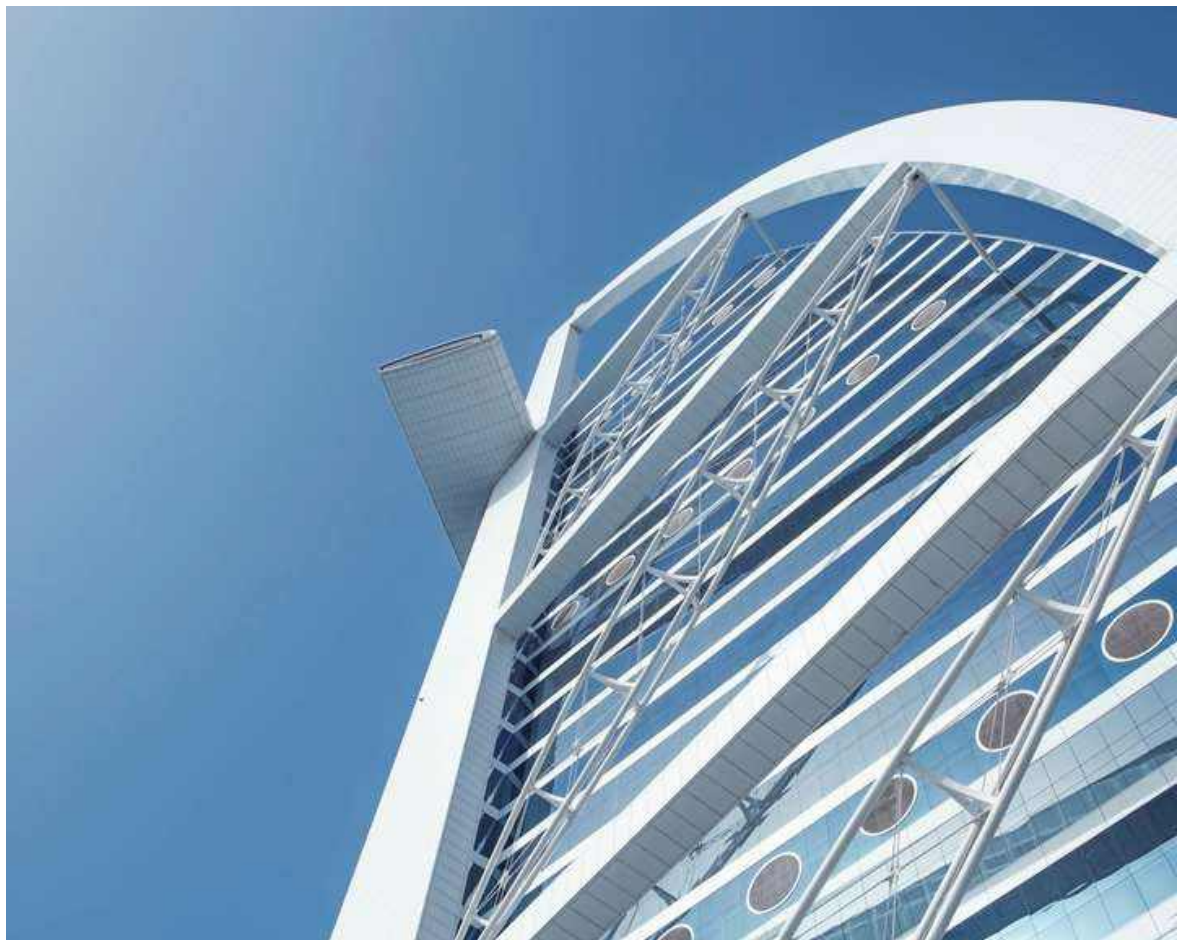
What excites me most is that we're bringing back the magic of the golden age of travel. Much like Georges Nagelmackers, who founded Orient Express 140 years ago, we're focused on connecting people and cultures through extraordinary journeys. It's a privilege to be part of this legacy and to help shape its future.



The International  
Travel Writers

Alliance

*Making a difference in today's world*



Jumeirah Burj Al Arab, Dubai (See : News)

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## The Alliance Bulletin

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Providing key information in a no-frills format for professionals who travel to write, edit, broadcast or create images.

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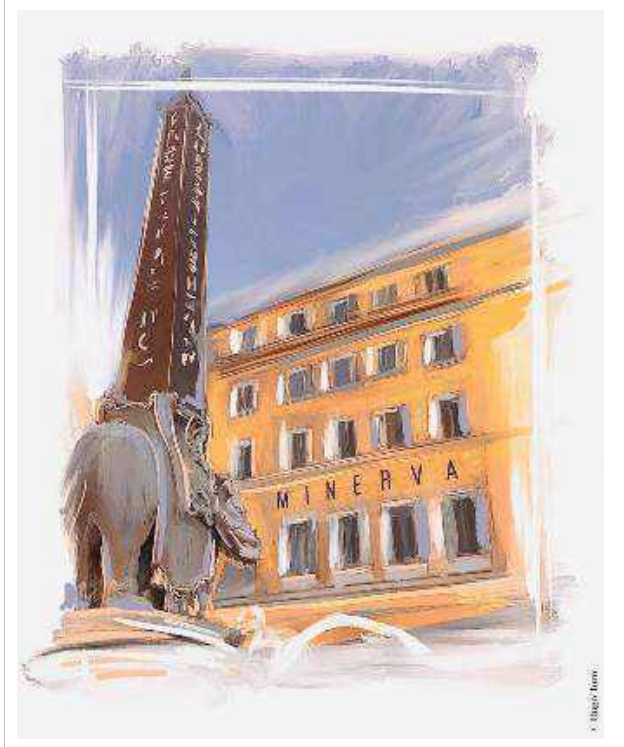
Issue 403 : mid-December 2025/January 2025

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# La Minerva, Rome

Italy

La Minerva will open in Spring 2025 as the first hotel under the Orient Express brand.



The property, formerly known as Palazzo Fonseca, dates back to the 17th century, and occupies an entire island site.

Following a comprehensive renovation, the building's interiors and historical features have been meticulously designed and restored under direction of Franco-Mexican Artist architect and interior designer Hugo Toro.

The 93 room and suite hotel will have views of the Pantheon, Piazza della Minerva and the Roman skyline.

It will also offer fine food and beverage featuring a new rooftop restaurant and bar.

It was built in 1620 as the residence of the aristocratic Portuguese Fonseca family.

and later acquired in 1811 by the wealthy French Sauve family who first transformed it into a hotel, it became a favourite destination during the Grand Tour for prominent artists.

With the opening of Orient Express La Minerva Rome will be followed by the Orient Express Palazzo Donà Giovanelli, Venice in 2025.

The Orient Express group will also introduce La Dolce Vita Orient Express in 2025, followed by Orient Express Corinthian in 2026 as the first of two Orient Express Silenseas ships.

- [www.orient-express.com](http://www.orient-express.com)
- [Tiphaine Rolland at tiphaine@gribbonberry.com](mailto:Tiphaine Rolland at tiphaine@gribbonberry.com)

# The 30 greatest holidays in Italy for 2025

From an exquisite chocolate festival in Perugia to a night at the opera in Pesaro, Italy is calling this year



52



Gift this article free



A new hotel worth travelling for has opened in beautiful Positano Credit: Getty

**Kiki Deere**

Destination expert

11 January 2025 6:00am GMT

Ah, [Italy](#). It is a perennial favourite, of course, with its cradles of culture – [Venice](#), [Rome](#) and [Florence](#) – attracting the bulk of tourists. But there is so much more to be discovered away from the big-hitting highlights.

Visitors are increasingly seeking out lesser-known destinations to escape the crowds, favouring trips in shoulder season where possible. Outdoor activities, such as hiking and cycling holidays, remain popular choices, while wellness tourism, experiential activities and rail travel are on the rise.

While [Tuscany](#)'s rolling hills have long been the go-to rural escape for British travellers, they are only part of the story. Hit TV series such as *The White Lotus* have put [Sicily](#) firmly on the tourist map, and there is a wealth of experiences to be had, including sailing the volcanic Aeolian Islands on a classic wooden windjammer.

And while we have listed some firm favourites in our list, we hope to inspire you with getaways that are not your conventional Italy holiday, too, from learning about Ladin culture in the German-speaking Alta Badia region to horse-riding through the wilds of Molise in central Italy.

Prices and temperatures soar in July and August so, if you can, try and visit outside these months. If you can only travel then, but don't like the idea of overly hot weather, make for the mountains instead, where altitude will give you a welcome respite from the stifling heat further south.

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## ITALY



### Skip ahead to explore:

- [Best for culture](#)
- [Best for history](#)
- [Best for beaches and coast](#)
- [Best for food](#)
- [Best for outdoors](#)

## Best for culture

### 1. Join the Roman Jubilee



Masseria Pistola, which combines original architectural features, including conical trulli ceilings and gable-roofed arches

[Return to index](#)

## Best for luxury

### 13. Live La Dolce Vita on the Orient Express

Launching in spring this year, [La Dolce Vita Orient Express](#) will see eight itineraries whisk guests across some of Italy's most panoramic landscapes. Carriages exude all the glamour of the 1960s and 1970s, with rich velvets and lacquered ceilings in deep sensual hues. All cabins are en suite, and you're in for a culinary feast too – the cuisine is curated by three Michelin-starred chef Heinz Beck, with menus reflecting the culinary traditions of the regions the trains are travelling through.

*Prices for a one-night itinerary aboard [La Dolce Vita Orient Express](#) (+44 2030244949; [orient-express.com/la-dolce-vita](http://orient-express.com/la-dolce-vita)) start from £2,900pp in a deluxe cabin and £3,900pp in a suite.*

### 14. Luxuriate in the boutique rooms of Positano

Franco Zeffirelli was one of Italy's greatest opera and film directors, whose adaptations of Shakespeare tragedies brought him international fame. His former home is now a boutique hotel, set in a dramatic location perched on a cliffside above Positano on the [Amalfi Coast](#). It comprises six villas dotted around lush gardens, with secluded terraces and hidden pools shaded by tropical plants; a seventh villa is set to open this year. In the main villa, you can see Zeffirelli's memorabilia and family heirlooms, with original sketches for his sets also on display.

*[Treville Positano](#) offers doubles from £675 on a B&B basis. [Plan the perfect holiday on the Amalfi Coast with our guide.](#)*





# 5 Orient Express-Inspired Luxury Train Journeys — Your One-Way Ticket to Design Escapism in 2025

Story by Gilda Bruno • 1d • 🕒 7 min read



5 Orient Express-Inspired Luxury Train Journeys — Your One-Way Ticket to Design Escapism in 2025  
© Belmond. Design: JR

In case you missed it, planes are out, trains are in, and cooler than ever, a recent *Livingetc* deep dive into the future of tourism finds. Haven't booked your next getaway *just* yet? Perfect. You are still in time to secure yourself a spot aboard one of the world's most luxurious train rides. With many more retro-futuristic carriages set to be unveiled in

One of the most adventurous, conscious, and immersive ways to experience the world this year, according to our [Travel Trends 2025](#) Report, luxury train rides are reshaping the way we think of vacations by making the moments spent on the move an integral — if not the most memorable — part of the trip.

Headed toward some of the globe's most captivating destinations, and uncovering its best kept secrets along the way, these spectacularly crafted trains are designed to transport the sense of awe, wonder, and excitement of our furthestmost expeditions within their [Art Deco design](#)-inspired coaches.

Modeled after the riveting atmosphere of the Orient Express, the luxury train that, synonymous with Belle Époque splendor, connected Paris to Istanbul between 1883 and 1909, lending its allure to the plot of countless books and movies, these present-day alternatives reinvent its myth for the contemporary — and interiors-obsessed — wanderer. Charting the world far and wide, from the eternally romantic Venice to the wrapped-in-mystery summit of Machu Picchu, and the sublime volcanic nature of Japan's Aso, these luxury train journeys will have you traveling back in time.

## 1. La Dolce Vita Orient Express



Speaking of going back to the future, the [Dimorestudio](#)-designed [La Dolce Vita Orient Express](#) hasn't even begun operating yet, but the premise behind it and its 1960s to 1970s-inspired glamorous look are so iconic that we want to put it on your radar before reservations sell out. Scheduled to hit the rail in Spring 2025, this jewel of Italian craftsmanship, developed by an entirely local team and connecting Rome to both world-coveted locations like Venice, Portofino, and Palermo and lesser-known destinations such as the scenic Matera, Pescocostanzo, and Nizza Monferrato, represents a real first for *il Bel Paese*. Also offering thematic itineraries centered around the beauty of Tuscan vineyards and Piedmont's truffle route, it will be home to the culinary delights of three Michelin-star Chef Heinz Beck and just as sensory bespoke experiences.

▶ **Related video:** Car shuttle trains are Europe's little-known eco-friendly travel option (Euronews (English))



As for the train's interiors, the images speak for themselves. In the eye of Dimorestudio's Emiliano Salci and Britt Moran, the Italian dream is embodied by sleek sculptural surfaces, [mirrored walls](#), and kaleidoscopic textiles informed by the country's 20th-century design masters, from Gio Ponti and Gae Aulenti to Nanda Vigo and Osvaldo Borsani.

**From:** Rome (Spring 2025)

**To:** View [itineraries](#)

**Rates:** From \$2,100 per person (one-night, two-day journey)

*Book your luxury train rides on [La Dolce Vita Orient Express](#).*

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## 2. Belmond Hiram Bingham

# 5 Orient Express-Inspired Luxury Train Journeys — Your One-Way Ticket to Design Escapism in 2025

Whether whizzing through the Andes toward the old Inca Empire or unveiling the hidden gems of the Silk Road's trade routes, no second is wasted aboard these luxury train rides

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(Image credit: [Belmond](#). Design: JR)



BY [GILDA BRUNO](#) PUBLISHED YESTERDAY IN [FEATURES](#)

In case you missed it, planes are out, trains are in, and cooler than ever, a recent *Livingetc* deep dive into the future of tourism finds. Haven't booked your next getaway *just* yet? Perfect. You are still in time to secure yourself a spot aboard one of the world's most luxurious train rides. With many more retro-futuristic carriages set to be unveiled in the coming months, we are exploring what makes luxury train journeys so widely appealing to design-conscious globetrotters and adrenaline-led travelers alike.

One of the most adventurous, conscious, and immersive ways to experience the world this year, according to our [Travel Trends 2025](#) Report, luxury train rides are reshaping the way we think of vacations by making the moments spent on the move an integral — if not the most memorable — part of the trip.

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## 1. LA DOLCE VITA ORIENT EXPRESS

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(Image credit: Patrick Locqueneux. Courtesy of [La Dolce Vita Orient Express](#). Design: [Dimorestudio](#))

Speaking of going back to the future, the [Dimorestudio](#)-designed [La Dolce Vita Orient Express](#) hasn't even begun operating yet, but the premise behind it and its 1960s to 1970s-inspired glamorous look are so iconic that we want to put it on your radar before reservations sell out. Scheduled to hit the rail in Spring 2025, this jewel of Italian craftsmanship, developed by an entirely local team and connecting Rome to both world-coveted locations like Venice, Portofino, and Palermo and lesser-known destinations such as the scenic Matera, Pescocostanzo, and Nizza Monferrato, represents a real first for *il Bel Paese*. Also offering thematic itineraries centered around the beauty of Tuscan vineyards and Piedmont's truffle route, it will be home to the culinary delights of three Michelin-star Chef Heinz Beck and just as sensory bespoke experiences.

As for the train's interiors, the images speak for themselves. In the eye of Dimorestudio's Emiliano Salci and Britt Moran, the Italian dream is embodied by sleek sculptural surfaces, [mirrored walls](#), and kaleidoscopic textiles informed by the country's 20th-century design masters, from Gio Ponti and Gae Aulenti to Nanda Vigo and Osvaldo Borsani.

**From:** Rome (Spring 2025)

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# AD

## A Historic House in the Heart of Paris Gets a Dose of Practical Magic

AD100 designer Hugo Toro gives a grand house a visionary makeover

In recent times, the AD100 French Mexican architect Hugo Toro has taken the approach of an auteur, working on a carte blanche basis to realize his commissioned projects down to the last exacting detail. For the Park Hyatt Paris-Vendôme's new crown jewel, restaurant Pur', home to Michelin-starred chef Jean-François Rouquette, Toro conceived everything, even the napkin rings and the staff uniforms. Currently, he is putting the final touches on La Minerva hotel in Rome, the Orient Express's five-star accommodation just steps from the Pantheon, which will be a complete embodiment of his architectural vision.





# Out With the Old, In with the New: Travel Trends for 2025

*We're starting fresh, with intel and developments that will make this another exciting and busy year in travel. Buckle up for what's coming:*

- *No more visa-free travel to Europe and the UK (sorry, Yanks)*
- *Hotels are leaving the building (they're everywhere else)*
- *Heading for cooler climes (sorry, Med)*
- *Reaching for the stars (no, the real ones)*
- *Nature is, as ever, the answer*

## Hotels Have Left the Building

“Experience” is the biggest overused buzzword in hospitality, and the hotel industry is taking this to heart by taking guest experiences beyond traditional hotel walls — to the rails, the seas, the home, and the club. This is a longer-term trend you’ll start seeing soon.

### On the Rails

At his media briefing at ILTM, the International Luxury Travel Market conference, in December, Accor CEO Sébastien Bazin said it was time to “stop asking clients to go to the product” and instead to “bring the product to the people.” To that end, this spring the hotel conglomerate’s Orient Express brand will launch [La Dolce Vita](#) in Italy, a train line offering one- and two-night journeys roundtrip from Rome to Venice, Portofino, Matera, Tuscany, and Sicily. With so little time in each stop, these trips seem to be more about the journey than the destinations. We’ve toured the trains — modern and handsome, with a strong mid-century vibe, they’re boutique hotels on wheels.

In other Orient Express news, Belmond — in addition to their estimable [hotel collection](#) — operates the classic Venice Simplon-Orient-Express train. (This line is not related to Accor's Orient Express, and, no, we're not trying to confuse you. Two totally different companies.) March will see the debut of [L'Observatoire Suite](#), an insanely opulent (and opulently priced) private train carriage designed by French artist JR. It sleeps two and will run on the Paris-Istanbul route. In July, Belmond will debut [Britannic Explorer](#), the first luxury sleeper train to tour England and Wales, on three- or six-day journeys from London's Victoria Station into Cornwall, the Lake District, and Wales. The travel will be slow and relaxed. The scenery through countrysides and national parks and coastlines will be beautiful. The excursions will include hikes, picnics, swims, and cute villages. And the [F&B options will be excellent](#) because the culinary program is overseen by three-Michelin-starred chef Simon Rogan, and we can personally vouch that this man can work wonders in a tiny, moving kitchen.

Also this spring, Accor's Orient Express will open [La Minerva](#) in Rome, the brand's first (actual, traditional, physical) hotel. Their second will be Palazzo Dona Giovannelli in Venice, though probably not this year.

So, in other words, hotel companies are making trains and train companies are making hotels.

## On the Seas

Things may be clearer on the high seas, though it will take longer to get there, with luxury hotel companies launching yachts. (And whatever you do, please don't refer to these elegant sails as mere *cruises*.) [Ritz-Carlton Yacht Collection](#) added *Ilma*, its second ship, in late 2024 and will add *Luminara* in 2025. Destinations include Asia, the Caribbean, the Med, and Northern Europe and the Baltics. [Four Seasons](#) will launch its yacht, with suites designed by Prosper Assouline, in the Caribbean in January 2026. Accor's Orient Express is here, too: [Orient Express Silenseas](#) will sail in the Caribbean and the Mediterranean in 2026. Aman Hotels has been sailing [Amandira](#), a five-cabin Phinisi sailboat for a few years, but we'll have to wait until 2027 for the 50-cabin motor yacht from [Aman at Sea](#). Here's another insider industry tidbit: It seems clear that emerging luxury cruise company [Explora Journeys](#) is hoping to tap the luxury hotel magic. They recently hired former Aman Hotels Chief Commercial Officer Anna Nash as their new President.

## Luxury Train Travel Is Booming. Here's Why—and the Trips to Book Now

Whether the trains are crisscrossing Europe or venturing into the Japanese countryside, the business model comes with significant built-in advantages—and passengers are obsessed.



A rendering of a room on La Dolce Vita Orient Express. Source: La Dolce Vita Orient Express

In 2025 the most luxurious new hotel room may be on wheels.

L'Observatoire, a two-person suite on Belmond's Venice Simplon-Orient-Express, will command rates of £80,000 (\$101,000) per night when it enters service in March, making it the most expensive train cabin ever. For that sum, guests will get to sleep inside a cabinet of curiosities created by French photographer and street artist JR. It includes two oculus-shaped skylights that open for stargazing, a "secret" tearoom with a fireplace hidden behind a bookshelf, and a freestanding brass bathtub near the foot of the double bed. All of

it moves with the Belmond train, on voyages that connect cities like Geneva and Innsbruck or Venice and Amsterdam on one- to five-night trips.

That may be true, but the one-of-a-kind L'Observatoire is part of a growing number of opulent, artist-created train suites crisscrossing the European continent in 2025. The first came in 2021, when Wes Anderson designed a custom carriage for the British Pullman; now the Royal Scotsman has added two Grand Suites designed by Parisian interior designer Tristan Auer. (Both are similarly owned by Belmond, which itself is owned by LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton SE.) In the year ahead, several more luxury trains will debut across the continent, both from Belmond and other companies, with designs each more opulent than the next.

This luxury rail renaissance “reflects a structural shift in how people want to spend their time,” says Samy Ghachem, general manager of La Dolce Vita Orient Express, a new luxury train outfit whose first hotel on wheels will have 1960s Italian interior style and en suite bathrooms for all cabins and suites when it enters service from Rome to Montalcino on April 4.

Travel advisers agree. Some of the most sought-after journeys are already sold out for the entirety of 2025 and booking well into 2026. “Think about how River Cruises blossomed in the past decade,” says Jack Ezon, founder and managing partner of luxury travel consultancy Embark Beyond. “Train travel, which is super niche and limited, will go prime time in the same way by 2030.”

“Requests for train trips have grown 158% in the past five years, especially among a younger generation,” he adds, as part of a zeitgeisty obsession with throwback luxuries. “It’s the millennial and Gen Zer obsessed with vintage record players and Polaroid cameras, buying the \$1,000 cashmere Ritz Paris Frame hoodie and clamoring for a room in an uber-traditional hotel.”

It's also a business that can grow easily in tandem with demand, says Ghachem. New trains have only a few rooms apiece, which makes them easy to fill, and then there's "the opportunity to grow or expand by adding additional trains with new and different itineraries." Track infrastructure is growing worldwide—consider the Tren Maya in Mexico and new routes sprouting across Europe—meaning those expenses, too, are defrayed.

Ezon, Ghachem and Ruff all see the growth of ultra-luxe train trips as tapping into other trends, too, be it the thirst for slow travel, to see less-touristed (and uncrowded) towns or to shell out for longer leisure trips.

But Gary Franklin, vice president of trains and cruises at Belmond, says there's more to it. "I've been on the platform when the train comes in and watched adults, who have seen and done it all, light up like children. It's escapism and magic they're after," he says. It's that experiential aspect that Belmond parent company LVMH has been prioritizing for years in response to consumer demand. "We're in the business of travel experiences. Trains are an extension of this," he says.



A suite on La Dolce Vita Orient Express channels midcentury glamour. Source: La Dolce Vita Orient Express

“There’s something about being spoiled, about looking at this incredible marquetry, about looking out of the windows as you pass through the Alps. It creates this magic, and that’s why people come back time and time again,” Ruff adds. “We have people just begging us to do more of these trips,” he says, pointing to repeat guests who have taken upwards of 20 train trips with the company.

To Ghachem, train magic means watching from inside a carriage as a Dolce Vita train decouples in Calabria and gets loaded onto a ferry one car at a time, just so it can cross the Strait of Messina. “There’s nothing else like it,” he says.

Both Ghachem and Ruff say that connecting train trips with hotel stays is yet another advantage. Dolce Vita guests will be able to extend their stay on land at [La Minerva](#), the first Orient Express hotel in Rome with 93 rooms designed by the hot designer of the moment, Hugo Toro; the hotel will open in April by the Pantheon, just in time for the company’s first train departure from Roma Ostiense station. Belmond similarly runs resorts across Europe that can connect with train itineraries.



A Dolce Vita Orient Express train exterior. Source: La Dolce Vita Orient Express

“Americans tend to come to Italy for 10 days and hit their trifecta of big cities,” says Ghachem of La Dolce Vita Orient Express’ main clientele. “The train becomes an easy [two- or three-day] add-on at the beginning or end of a trip.” Dolce Vita has plans far beyond Italy, with three additional trains rolling out in 2026 and beyond; they’re expected to explore such places as Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Uzbekistan. Belmond, too, is doubling down on global service, and operators like Seven Stars in Japan are seeing such a rush of demand that bookings are now offered only by application.

“Trains are an incredible way to experience the countryside,” says Ruff. “We can unlock things and go places that you can’t get to easily otherwise. And all this comes at a time when slow travel has never been more appealing.”

## Top train journeys to book in 2025

### **La Dolce Vita Orient Express, Italy**

When the first La Dolce Vita train enters service in April, it will take its design cues from 1960s Italian glamour. One- to three-day itineraries will take travelers around Italy in lavish, midcentury modern style, with fine dining menus created by chef Heinz Beck of the three-Michelin-starred La Pergola in Rome. Making the journey easier: Private car service will be available directly from Roma Termini station or sibling hotel La Minerva. *From about €4,160 (\$4,285) per person.*



## Luxury train travel is booming. Here's why, and the trips you must book

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Luxury train travel is booming. Here's why, and the trips you must book Bloomberg | | Posted by Tapatrisha Das Jan 16, 2025 01:41 PM IST Share Via Copy Link Whether the trains are crisscrossing Europe or venturing into the Japanese countryside, the business model comes with significant built-in advantages. In 2025 the most luxurious new hotel room may be on wheels. Passengers are obsessed with this new way of traveling on wheels. (Unsplash) L'Observatoire, a two-person suite on Belmond's Venice Simplon-Orient-Express, will command rates of £80,000 (\$101,000) per night when it enters service in March, making it the most expensive train cabin ever. For that sum, guests will get to sleep inside a cabinet of curiosities created by French photographer and street artist JR. It includes two oculus-shaped skylights that open for stargazing, a 'secret' tearoom with a fireplace hidden behind a bookshelf, and a freestanding brass bathtub near the foot of the double bed. All of it moves with the Belmond train, on voyages

that connect cities like Geneva and Innsbruck or Venice and Amsterdam on one- to five-night trips. Also read | Japan's new luxury train with tickets costing \$20,000 'There's a lot of art in hotel rooms,' says Belmond Chief Executive Officer Dan Ruff. 'But this is the first time in hospitality that the art is the room.' That may be true, but the one-of-a-kind L'Observatoire is part of a growing number of opulent, artist-created train suites crisscrossing the European continent in 2025. The first came in 2021, when Wes Anderson designed a custom carriage for the British Pullman; now the Royal Scotsman has added two Grand Suites designed by Parisian interior designer Tristan Auer. (Both are similarly owned by Belmond, which itself is owned by LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton SE.) In the year ahead, several more luxury trains will debut across the continent, both from Belmond and other companies, with designs each more opulent than the next. This luxury rail renaissance 'reflects a structural shift in how people want to spend their time,' says Samy Ghachem,

general manager of La Dolce Vita Orient Express, a new luxury train outfit whose first hotel on wheels will have 1960s Italian interior style and en suite bathrooms for all cabins and suites when it enters service from Rome to Montalcino on April 4. Travel advisers agree. Some of the most sought-after journeys are already sold out for the entirety of 2025 and booking well into 2026. 'Think about how River Cruises blossomed in the past decade,' says Jack Ezon, founder and managing partner of luxury travel consultancy Embark Beyond. 'Train travel, which is super niche and limited, will go prime time in the same way by 2030.' 'Requests for train trips have grown 158% in the past five years, especially among a younger generation,' he adds, as part of a zeitgeisty obsession with throwback luxuries. 'It's the millennial and Gen Zer obsessed with vintage record players and Polaroid cameras, buying the \$1,000 cashmere Ritz Paris Frame hoodie and clamoring for a room in an uber-traditional hotel.' It's also a business that can grow easily in tandem with

demand, says Ghachem. New trains have only a few rooms apiece, which makes them easy to fill, and then there's 'the opportunity to grow or expand by adding additional trains with new and different itineraries.' Track infrastructure is growing worldwide-- consider the Tren Maya in Mexico and new routes sprouting across Europe-- meaning those expenses, too, are defrayed. Also read | 'Spa, gym, exotic food': Inside India's luxurious train filled with 'royal elegance' Ezon, Ghachem and Ruff all see the growth of ultra-luxe train trips as tapping into other trends, too, be it the thirst for slow travel, to see less-touristed (and uncrowded) towns or to shell out for longer leisure trips. But Gary Franklin, vice president of trains and cruises at Belmond, says there's more to it. 'I've been on the platform when the train comes in and watched adults, who have seen and done it all, light up like children. It's escapism and magic they're after,' he says. It's that experiential aspect that Belmond parent company LVMH has been prioritizing for years in response to consumer demand. 'We're in the business of travel experiences. Trains are an extension of this,' he says. 'There's something about

being spoiled, about looking at this incredible marquetry, about looking out of the windows as you pass through the Alps. It creates this magic, and that's why people come back time and time again,' Ruff adds. 'We have people just begging us to do more of these trips,' he says, pointing to repeat guests who have taken upwards of 20 train trips with the company. To Ghachem, train magic means watching from inside a carriage as a Dolce Vita train decouples in Calabria and gets loaded onto a ferry one car at a time, just so it can cross the Strait of Messina. 'There's nothing else like it,' he says. Both Ghachem and Ruff say that connecting train trips with hotel stays is yet another advantage. Dolce Vita guests will be able to extend their stay on land at La Minerva, the first **Orient Express** hotel in Rome with 93 rooms designed by the hot designer of the moment, Hugo Toro; the hotel will open in April by the Pantheon, just in time for the company's first train departure from Roma Ostiense station. Belmond similarly runs resorts across Europe that can connect with train itineraries. 'Americans tend to come to Italy for 10 days and hit their trifecta of big cities,' says Ghachem of **La Dolce**

**Vita Orient Express**' main clientele. 'The train becomes an easy [two- or three-day] add-on at the beginning or end of a trip.' Dolce Vita has plans far beyond Italy, with three additional trains rolling out in 2026 and beyond; they're expected to explore such places as Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Uzbekistan. Belmond, too, is doubling down on global service, and operators like Seven Stars in Japan are seeing such a rush of demand that bookings are now offered only by application. 'Trains are an incredible way to experience the countryside,' says Ruff. 'We can unlock things and go places that you can't get to easily otherwise. And all this comes at a time when slow travel has never been more appealing.' Top train journeys to book in 2025 Eastern and Oriental Express, a Belmond Train, Singapore and Malaysia Following a four-year pause in service due to the pandemic, this vibrant route through Southeast Asia returned in early 2024 with revamped cabins and two new seasonal, three-night journeys. They begin in Singapore and cruise through Malaysia's dynamic cities and jungle landscapes, on a train that claims the first Dior spa in the region. From \$3,410

per person. Seven Stars in Kyushu, Japan With only 12 suites and seven carriages, Japan's first luxury sleeper train is as intimate as it is exclusive. In operation since 2013 and refurbished in 2022, the four-day, three-night journey through the southern island of Kyushu incorporates occasional stops so travelers can get a much closer look at the region's mountains, seaside and hot springs. Securing a suite is a tall order, however. Interested travelers must first submit an application. Only those selected are able to book a cabin; the criteria are a mystery. From \$4,293 per person. Also read | Pride of Karnataka: Golden Chariot luxury tourist train set to reignite travel with unique routes in 2024-25 Venice Simplon-Orient-Express (VSOE), a Belmond Train, Europe Even if L'Observatoire, the JR-imagined suite, isn't in the cards, the other cabins on the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express make good on the sleeper train's legend. Each grand suite comes with a 24-hour butler and en suite bathroom, while guests in all cabin categories can rub elbows with their fellow *bons vivants* in the restored 1920s bar car; dinners are concocted by the in-demand French chef Jean Imbert. The most unique itinerary is the one that

operates only once a year: Paris to Istanbul in six days, with stops in Budapest and Bucharest for guided historic tours. From \$22,000 per person. **La Dolce Vita Orient Express**, Italy When the first La Dolce Vita train enters service in April, it will take its design cues from 1960s Italian glamour. One- to three-day itineraries will take travelers around Italy in lavish, midcentury modern style, with fine dining menus created by chef Heinz Beck of the three-Michelin-starred La Pergola in Rome. Making the journey easier: Private car service will be available directly from Roma Termini station or sibling **hotel La Minerva**. From about EUR4,160 (\$4,285) per person. Rovos Rail, South Africa Since 1989, Rovos Rail has offered 11 luxurious train safaris across South Africa in wood-paneled sleepers kitted out with art deco antiques and plush furnishings. Beyond the two- to three-day itineraries, the more complete experiences extend 11 to 15 days everywhere from Pretoria to Victoria Falls and may include mini safaris, national park drives, elephant sanctuary visits and rounds of golf. Whatever the route, all guests should make the

most of the open-air balcony in the train's observation car for exceptional views. From 34,000 ZAR (\$1,796) per person. Recommended Topics Share this article Share Via Copy Link Train Travel Catch every big hit, every wicket with Crick-it, a one stop destination for Live Scores, Match Stats, Quizzes, Polls & much more. Explore now!. Catch your daily dose of Fashion, Taylor Swift, Health, Festivals, Travel, Relationship, Recipe and all the other Latest Lifestyle News on Hindustan Times Website and APPs. See More Catch every big hit, every wicket with Crick-it, a one stop destination for Live Scores, Match Stats, Quizzes, Polls & much more. Explore now!. Catch your daily dose of Fashion, Taylor Swift, Health, Festivals, Travel, Relationship, Recipe and all the other Latest Lifestyle News on Hindustan Times Website and APPs. News / Lifestyle / Travel / Luxury train travel is booming. Here's why, and the trips you must book See Less

# Galerie

## 14 Must-Book Luxury Hotels Opening in 2025

A first look at the year's most compelling new properties and the cultural shift they represent

**T**he luxury hospitality landscape is shifting, and not in the ways you might expect. While [2024's openings](#) leaned heavily into statement art collections and social media moments, 2025 signals something more structural: a wholesale reimagining of how hotels function in their communities.

This evolution cuts to the core of what luxury means today. The year ahead presents an industry grappling with its very purpose—where heritage trains become roving cultural attachés and forgotten architectural landmarks transform into vibrant gathering spaces. We're witnessing preservation that actively engages with history rather than simply maintaining it, public areas that dissolve boundaries between guest and local life, and wellness sanctuaries that derive their power from indigenous traditions.

The catalyst becomes clear in [Design Hotels' Further Forecast 2025](#): Despite 84 percent of travelers believing hotels can forge meaningful community, barely a quarter currently experience that connection. The response? A new wave of properties that prioritize authenticity over artifice. From Paris to Kyoto, these establishments are crafting destinations that are more than just an escape—they're creating portals that bring their surroundings into sharper focus, suggesting that true luxury lies not in a deeper understanding of culture and place.

Below are 14 hotels to watch in 2025:



La Dolce Vita.  
PHOTO: COURTESY OF LA DOLCE VITA ORIENT EXPRESS



Guest accommodations.  
PHOTO: COURTESY OF LA DOLCE VITA ORIENT EXPRESS

## 7. La Dolce Vita Orient Express | Italy

The rail brand's Italian expansion exceeds all expectations. Spring 2025 brings La Dolce Vita—Italy's first luxury train offering eight "Made in Italy" circuits—while Orient Express establishes permanent outposts in Venice and Rome. This moving design statement orchestrated by Dimorestudio traces routes from Florence's Renaissance splendor to hidden gems like ancient Matera and mountainous Palena. Three-Michelin-starred Chef Heinz Beck oversees the culinary program, recognizing that Italian travel revolves as much around flavor as views. The fixed properties expand the vision: Orient Express La Minerva in Rome and Orient Express Palazzo Donà Giovannelli in Venice herald the brand's evolution from transient luxury to cultural steward. This triple-faceted debut, opening throughout 2025, elegantly repackages the Italian grand tour for a contemporary era.

# WAY TO GO

## 2025 Hot New Hotel Preview: Part 3

### Let's Go Europe

*In our third installment of the Best New Hotels Preview for 2025, we're heading to Europe. Which means we have now reported on 300 new builds, clever renovations, and affordable lookers. (You can catch up on [USA/Canada/LATAM](#) and [Asia/Africa/Australia/Antarctica](#) here.) Of course, this isn't everything the year ahead holds; they're just the hotels we're interested in. We'll report back in a few months to let you know what has actually opened, as the dates listed below can sometimes be moving targets. Happy hoteling!*



The Marlene Dietrich room at Maison Barrière Vendôme. Photo courtesy of Maison Barrière Vendôme.

## Enchanté, France

### Maison Barrière Vendôme

Paris, France

The latest from Groupe Barrière is a total stunner for its craft, details, and a theme that makes us stand up and cheer *oui, madame*: Twenty-six rooms, suites, and apartments pay homage, through their decor and artwork, to iconic women — Josephine Baker, Mata Hari, Mercedes Sosa, Camille Claudel, and Nina Simone among them. Bar Frida is the South American-inspired restaurant and cocktail spot on the ground floor; an underground spa with a cold plunge pool is coming soon. Let's hear it for *les femmes*. (January)

**Six Senses Milan**, the company's second Italian city hotel (Rome came first), will have everything fans have come to expect: an exceptional spa, healthy and seasonal cuisine, workshops at Earth Lab, and a strong sustainability ethos throughout.

Bulgari and Armani aren't the only fashion designers with hotels in town. German designer Philipp Plein's **The Plein Hotel** will be small (13 rooms), striking (the décor is not subtle), and already pedigreed (part of **Small Luxury Hotels of the World**) when it opens in March.

## **Big Italian Cities Due: Rome**

It's hard to imagine Rome getting any more crowded, but that's what's in store this year as the

Catholic Church celebrates its jubilee. Ready to welcome the throng are a handful of new luxury hotels.

**The Goethe Hotel** was designed to evoke the Age of Enlightenment and the kind of European Grand Tour the namesake author might have taken. Opening in February, the design of the 27-room hotel — elaborate wallpaper, dark palette, vintage furnishings — is as dramatic and as moody as a brooding Romantic poet.

As we already reported in our **2025 travel trends report**, hotels are merging into trains and vice versa. Leading the trend is Accor's Orient Express, who will debut their first hotel, **La Minerva**, this spring — with 93 rooms, a panoramic rooftop bar and restaurant, and an Ottoman-inspired spa, a stone's throw from the Pantheon. OE will also debut **La Dolce Vita**, a highly designed midcentury train that's like a boutique hotel on rails, leaving from Rome and making pitstops in Italy's most popular destinations.

A half dozen more Eternal City openings to note:

# Bloomberg

Bloomberg.com



We've rounded up some of the best stories from Bloomberg Pursuits this month that will help you [splurge on your bonus](#), explore some of [Japan's hidden corners](#), and find just the right Lunar New Year gift, whatever your budget. And of course, we'll leave you with a list of new resorts around the world that [deliver on your castaway fantasies](#) – an excellent salve for those winter blues.

## What We're Reading

### [Why Luxury Train Travel Is Booming – and the Trips to Book Now](#)

It comes with significant built-in advantages, and passengers are obsessed.





Special Advertising Feature

Continued on page W5J

# Hotels '25



The year ahead looks exciting with more hotel openings than ever for every kind of traveler. Sarah Miller was on the inside track of ILM, the industry's leading travel fair.

## Winter

The end of 2024 and the beginning of the new year have been a whirlwind of activity for hoteliers. The industry is seeing a surge in openings and establishments, bringing fresh brands and concepts to the market. From luxury to budget, there's something for everyone. The industry is also seeing a shift in focus, with more hotels emphasizing sustainability and wellness. This is a great time to be in the industry, and we're excited to see what the year ahead has in store.



For travelers seeking excitement, the JW Marriott Hotel Miami Beach is set to open in January. This 1,100-room hotel is a prime location for those looking for a beachside getaway. In the heart of the vibrant urban district of Miami Beach, the hotel offers a blend of luxury and modern amenities. The hotel is also a member of the Marriott Bonvoy program, offering guests a wide range of benefits and rewards. The hotel is expected to be a major draw for the area, bringing in new guests and revenue.

## Spring

The spring season is a great time to visit Miami. The weather is perfect, and there are plenty of events and activities to enjoy. The city is also seeing a surge in new hotel openings, including the new Four Seasons Hotel Miami Beach. This 1,200-room hotel is a prime location for those looking for a luxury beachside getaway. The hotel is also a member of the Four Seasons Rewards program, offering guests a wide range of benefits and rewards. The hotel is expected to be a major draw for the area, bringing in new guests and revenue.



## Travel Trends 2025



Travel trends for 2025 are expected to include a focus on sustainability and wellness. Travelers are looking for hotels that offer eco-friendly amenities and wellness programs. There is also a growing interest in experiential travel, with travelers looking for unique and memorable experiences. Hotels that offer these experiences are expected to be in high demand. The industry is also seeing a shift in focus, with more hotels emphasizing sustainability and wellness.

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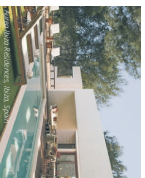
New destinations such as Ibiza seek to attract guests in Spring and Summer. The industry is also seeing a surge in new hotel openings, including the new Four Seasons Hotel Ibiza. This 1,200-room hotel is a prime location for those looking for a luxury beachside getaway. The hotel is also a member of the Four Seasons Rewards program, offering guests a wide range of benefits and rewards. The hotel is expected to be a major draw for the area, bringing in new guests and revenue.

## Summer

The summer season is a great time to visit Ibiza. The weather is perfect, and there are plenty of events and activities to enjoy. The island is also seeing a surge in new hotel openings, including the new Four Seasons Hotel Ibiza. This 1,200-room hotel is a prime location for those looking for a luxury beachside getaway. The hotel is also a member of the Four Seasons Rewards program, offering guests a wide range of benefits and rewards. The hotel is expected to be a major draw for the area, bringing in new guests and revenue.



The fall season is a great time to visit Ibiza. The weather is perfect, and there are plenty of events and activities to enjoy. The island is also seeing a surge in new hotel openings, including the new Four Seasons Hotel Ibiza. This 1,200-room hotel is a prime location for those looking for a luxury beachside getaway. The hotel is also a member of the Four Seasons Rewards program, offering guests a wide range of benefits and rewards. The hotel is expected to be a major draw for the area, bringing in new guests and revenue.



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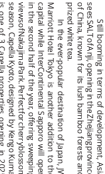
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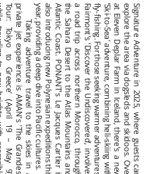


Stay to See the Sport International Sporting Features. You want to travel luxury, but you also want to see the best of the world. The industry is seeing a surge in new hotel openings, including the new Four Seasons Hotel London. This 1,200-room hotel is a prime location for those looking for a luxury city getaway. The hotel is also a member of the Four Seasons Rewards program, offering guests a wide range of benefits and rewards. The hotel is expected to be a major draw for the area, bringing in new guests and revenue.

The fall season is a great time to visit London. The weather is perfect, and there are plenty of events and activities to enjoy. The city is also seeing a surge in new hotel openings, including the new Four Seasons Hotel London. This 1,200-room hotel is a prime location for those looking for a luxury city getaway. The hotel is also a member of the Four Seasons Rewards program, offering guests a wide range of benefits and rewards. The hotel is expected to be a major draw for the area, bringing in new guests and revenue.



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Edited for ILM by Sarah Miller, Founder and CEO of Sarah Miller and Partners


# HEARTTHROB HOTELS

THESE NEW AND REIMAGINED STAYS  
ARE TURNING HEADS WITH STRIKING DESIGN.

BY LAUREN GALLOW



MATLEE COOKS



Art, culture, and travel books  
line the shelves of Park Hyatt  
Tokyo's library.

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## MORE URBAN OPENINGS

- An extensive renovation of **The Waldorf Astoria New York**, slated to wrap this spring, polishes the NYC landmark's 375 guest rooms and suites to their original art deco glory and adds a new 30,000-square-foot spa.
- In Taipei, the 86-room **Capella Taipei** will offer weary travelers a serene city respite come spring, with a "modern mansion" design concept and traditional Taiwanese treatments at an expansive wellness center.
- Amid tropical gardens in Nai Lert Park, **Aman Nai Lert Bangkok** opens early this year in a sleek 52-suite tower that houses omakase and teppanyaki restaurants and emphasizes its setting with open terraces and natural materials.
- The 134-room **Rosewood Amsterdam**, Rosewood's Netherlands debut, will radiate palatial prestige when it opens this spring in the former Palace of Justice, overlooking the Prinsengracht.
- In Italy, glamour veteran Orient Express will launch two new hotels later in the year: **Orient Express La Minerva**, with 93 rooms just two blocks from the impressive art collection at Rome's Galleria Doria Pamphilj, and 46-room **Orient Express Palazzo Donà Giovannelli**, situated in a fifteenth-century Venetian palace formerly home to the Duke of Urbino.

## Inside Saudi Arabia's first five-star luxury train worth Rs 461 crores. Check Dream of the Desert's lavish features and photos

LINK: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/magazines/panache/inside-saudi-arabias-first-five-star-luxury-train-worth-rs-461-crores-check-dream-of-...>

Inside Saudi Arabia's first five-star luxury train worth Rs 461 crores. Check Dream of the Desert's lavish features and photos SECTIONS Inside Saudi Arabia's first five-star luxury train worth Rs 461 crores. Check Dream of the Desert's lavish features and photos ET Online Last Updated: Jan 28, 2025, 07:37:00 PM IST Rate Story Follow us Share Font Size Small Medium Large Save Print Comment Synopsis Saudi Arabia and **Arsenale's** 'Dream of the Desert' five-star train, inspired by the Kingdom's landscapes and heritage, offers 34 luxurious suites. Launching Q3 2026, it aims to blend top-tier hospitality with rich cultural experiences, reflecting Saudi Vision 2030. Collaborative cultural programs and a refined dining experience will enhance travelers' immersion into Saudi history and tradition. Middle-East's 'Dream of the Desert' is one of the first luxury trains. Saudi Arabia's Railways (SAR) and Italian hospitality giant **Arsenale** have revealed the final designs for their ambitious "Dream of the Desert" luxury train, set to become

the first five-star train in the Middle East. The unveiling took place during the visit of Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni to Saudi Arabia, marking a significant step in redefining luxury rail travel in the region. Budget with ET India, get ready for the modern warfare of tomorrow Women, youth, farmers and poor can continue to be Budget 2025's 'roti, kapda aur makan' Modi govt has a key task in Budget 2025: Unlocking the PLI goldmine According to the Saudi Press Agency (SPA), the project is a result of the partnership between SAR and **Arsenale**, which culminated in a formal agreement valued at 200 million Saudi riyals (around Rs 461 crore) in January 2024. This collaboration is part of a broader effort to develop luxury tourism services and align with Saudi Vision 2030, the country's plan to diversify its economy and enhance cultural tourism. A New Era in Luxury Travel The Dream of the Desert train will offer a high-end travel experience, featuring 14 carriages with 34 luxurious suites. Designed as a

mobile five-star hotel, it aims to merge world-class hospitality with a rich cultural experience. The interiors of the train are inspired by Saudi Arabia's iconic desert landscapes and traditional architecture, reflecting the Kingdom's cultural heritage. The luxurious décor includes earthy tones, fine textiles, and intricate artistic details, which incorporate motifs from famous landmarks like Madain Saleh and Hail. The train is designed not only to provide an unparalleled luxury experience but also to immerse passengers in Saudi Arabia's history and culture. Its interior features elegant reception lounges modelled after traditional majlis (gathering spaces), with hand-carved woodwork and geometric patterns that showcase the country's warmth and hospitality. A Cultural Journey on Rails The Dream of the Desert train will also offer a unique cultural experience. Through collaboration with the Ministry of Culture, curated cultural programs will allow passengers to explore Saudi Arabia's traditions dynamically and interactively. The Saudi Tourism Authority and the

Center for Development Authorities Support are working on creating tailored tourism itineraries that integrate seamlessly with the train journey, offering travellers a deeper connection to the Kingdom's natural and cultural sites. **Paolo Barletta**, CEO of **Arsenale Group**, expressed excitement over the project, highlighting the goal of creating a travel experience that is unmatched in its luxury and cultural depth. According to Barletta, the Dream of the Desert is not just a luxury train; it is an immersive journey that merges world-class design, hospitality, and Saudi traditions. He emphasized that the collaboration with SAR, the Ministry of Culture, and the Saudi Tourism Authority has been key in bringing the project to life authentically, reflecting the Kingdom's beauty. Anticipation Builds for the Launch The train will begin operations by the end of Q3 2026, with booking details and exclusive packages to be announced on the official website. The onboard dining experience will fuse traditional flavours with sophisticated culinary artistry, offering a menu designed by top chefs from both Saudi Arabia and abroad. Passengers will also be able to admire art pieces

and photography that showcase Saudi Arabia's cultural and natural landmarks. The Dream of the Desert train promises to elevate luxury travel in Saudi Arabia, offering an experience that goes beyond luxury, deeply rooted in the Kingdom's cultural and historical identity. With its elegant design, exceptional service, and cultural immersion, this train is poised to become a must-experience attraction for those seeking a unique and opulent way to explore Saudi Arabia's vast heritage and stunning landscapes.

## EXCLUSIVE: Inside The Middle East's First Five-Star Train Designed by Aline Asmar d'Amman

LINK: <https://wwd.com/home-design/interior-design/middle-east-first-five-star-train-aline-asmad-damman-1236882826/>



EXCLUSIVE: Inside The Middle East's First Five-Star Train Designed by Aline Asmar d'Amman The Lebanese architect unveiled her designs with WWD for the Dream of the Desert train developed with the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Culture and Saudi Arabia's Railways and Italy's **Arsenale**. By Plus Icon Sofia Celeste Senior Correspondent, Home and Interiors Recent Articles by Sofia Celeste January 27, 2025, 1:54pm Share this article on Facebook Share this article on X Share this article on Flipboard Share this article on Pin It Share this article on Tumblr Share this article on Reddit Share this article on LinkedIn Share this article on WhatsApp Share this article on Email Print this article Share this article on Talk Share this article on Facebook Share this article on X Share this article on Flipboard Share this article on Pin It Share this article on Tumblr Share this article on Reddit Share this article

on LinkedIn Share this article on WhatsApp Share this article on Email Print this article Share this article on Talk Aline Asmar d'Amman and her Culture in Architecture Studio's designs for Dream of the Desert Courtesy of Culture in Architecture Share this article on Facebook Share this article on X Share this article on Flipboard Share this article on Pin It Share this article on Tumblr Share this article on Reddit Share this article on LinkedIn Share this article on WhatsApp Share this article on Email Print this article Share this article on Talk Share this article on Facebook Share this article on X Share this article on Flipboard Share this article on Pin It Share this article on Tumblr Share this article on Reddit Share this article on LinkedIn Share this article on WhatsApp Share this article on Email Print this article Share this article on Talk MILAN - Lebanese-born architect Aline Asmar d'Amman said growing up

she was "bathed" in the poetry of 13th-century poet Rumi, who described the desert as a "wide emptiness, a peace without understanding it." She never thought that one day she would help people experience that sort of wonder, in an age of modern luxury travel. On Tuesday, she shared her designs with WWD for the Middle East's first five-star train. The Dream of the Desert train developed with the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Culture and Saudi Arabia's Railways and Italy's **Arsenale** will allow luxury travelers to experience a privileged view of the desert. After garnering notoriety in fashion as the founder of the Culture in Architecture studio which worked with Karl Lagerfeld on several projects, including the design of luxury suites for the Hôtel de Crillon in Paris, she's now playing a small but significant role in helping Saudi Arabia

achieve its Vision 2030. This is her first train and she proudly said it's a sustainable project in the sense that she used existing Italian wagons owned by **Arsenale** Group. You May Also Like Related Articles Fashion Scoops Bottega Veneta Opens Chicago Store Jewelry Chanel Inc. Appoints Olivier Kessler-Gay General Manager of Watches and Fine Jewelry "It's a wonderful thing to immerse into a world of dynamic stillness and spiritual mystique that is the desert. Saudi Arabia's pristine natural beauty and the very distinctive feeling of immensity and silence, of wildness and wideness, only tamed by the Bedouin tradition of journeys with patience, appeals to another kind of travel today," she said, adding that slow travel is all about embracing layers of culture and enriching humanistic values, which Saudi Arabia is only now ready to share on a global level. Aline Asmar d'Amman Courtesy of Culture in Architecture This milestone marks a significant step forward in redefining luxury rail travel in the region and is the result of a close partnership between SAR and **Arsenale**, in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture, the Saudi Tourism Authority and the Center for

Development Authorities Support. In 1947, the first railway between Dammam and Riyadh was inaugurated. Established in 2006, SAR is the owner and operator of the North Train Railway Network, which is propelling the vision of sustainable passenger and cargo transport. In 2017, the North Train passenger services was launched, followed by the Haramain high speed railway in 2018. Dream of the Desert Courtesy of Aline Asmar d'Amman and her Culture in Architecture Studio's Saudi heritage elements feature inside the Dream of the Desert, as Asmar d'Amman said she spent hours looking at the details of a Saudi façade, the intricate textile weavings, the wood carvings, the oil lamps whose light diffuses a cinematographic mood, interpreting these in a delicate modern lens, adapted to the train space and constraints. "Not forgetting the astounding Stendhal syndrome [a condition of awe upon the discovery of great masterpieces] at the discovery of Hegra, Hail, Al-Ula and other untouched beauties," she mused of the train that includes world-class suites and a restaurant enhanced with modern touches from the lamp shades' belt detail to the wood carving elegant

motif inspired by the gypsum motifs in the central region. The suites, she said, are characterized by rich wood marquetry, luxurious upholstery, sensual lighting and bespoke furniture. In the reception area, the bar and the lounge, textile weaving and geometric patterns feature prominently. The bar design is inspired by the ancient architecture of the Al-Ula site of Hegra, the city of Madain Salih and the archaeological mountain of Hijaz, interpreted in modern patterns and design. The train is also punctuated by wood sculpted panels in signature green patina, inspired by the Saudi Arabian seaside city of Jeddah's iconic façades. Aline Asmar d'Amman and her Culture in Architecture Studio's designs for Dream of the Desert. Courtesy of Culture in Architecture In and around the worlds of fashion and hospitality, Asmar d'Amman's fame is growing. Last year, she was the first guest of the Reading Room at 7L, the bookstore, library and publishing house founded by Lagerfeld that was acquired by Chanel in 2021. She designed the Le Petit Salon, a private event space within in Le19M, Chanel's hub for craftsmanship on the edge of Paris. She is also working

on the **Arsenale** on another project: The **Orient Express** Hotel Palazzo Donà Giovannelli Venice. Founded in 2020 by **Paolo Barletta** and Annabel Holding, **Arsenale** is an Italian company operating in the luxury hospitality sector, with the aim of enhancing the Italian tourism industry. The company is structured around two main divisions: The Hospitality Hotel and Resort division, which designs and manages hotel properties in collaboration with iconic luxury brands, such as Soho House, as well as the **Orient Express**. Inside the upcoming **Orient Express** Hotel in Venice in Palazzo Donà Giovannelli Venice and has been designed by Aline Asmar d'Amman. Courtesy of Aline Asmar d'Amman Tags



EXCLUSIVE

## Inside the Middle East's First Five-star Train

● Lebanese architect Aline Asmar d'Amman unveiled her designs with WWD for the Dream of the Desert train.

BY SOFIA CELESTE

**MILAN** – Lebanese-born architect Aline Asmar d'Amman said growing up she was “bathed” in the poetry of 13th-century poet Rumi, who described the desert as a “wide emptiness, a peace without understanding it.” She never thought that one day she would help people experience that sort of wonder, in an age of modern luxury travel.

On Tuesday, she shared her designs with WWD for the Middle East's first five-star train. The Dream of the Desert train developed with the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Culture and Saudi Arabia's Railways and Italy's **Arsenale** will allow luxury travelers to experience a privileged view of the desert.

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In and around the worlds of fashion and hospitality, Asmar d'Amman's fame is growing.

Last year, she was the first guest of the Reading Room at 7L, the bookstore, library and publishing house founded by Lagerfeld that was acquired by Chanel in 2021.

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[Travel / Destinations](#)

## The Middle East's first super-luxury train will gleam gold

By Julia Buckley, CNN



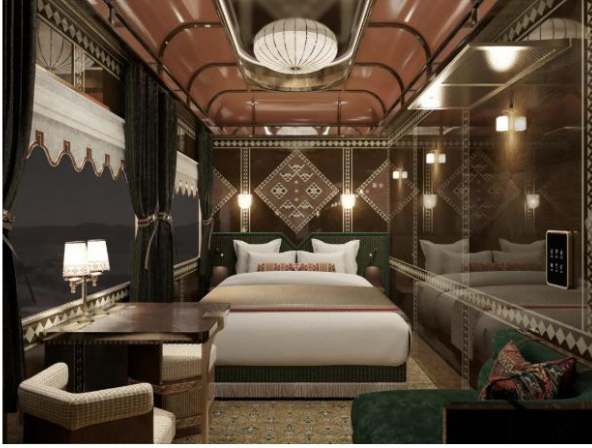
**CNN** — It's the train set to whisk people across the largest country in the Middle East — and to do so in style, according to the designs that have just been released.

Saudi Arabia's Dream of the Desert train, which is slated to hit the rails next year, is set to be the region's first five-star luxury train, and the first renderings for the 14 carriages have finally been unveiled.

A joint project between Saudi Arabia Railways (SAR) and Arsenale S.p.A., the Italian luxury brand, the train is due to launch around fall 2026. It has been designed by Aline Asmar d'Amman, an architect and designer whose Culture in Architecture studio is based between Paris and Beirut.

The idea is to amp up the luxury while referencing Saudi culture and heritage — including motifs from destinations like AlUla, Madain Saleh and Hail — within the design.

The overall tone is suitably sandy, with golds, beiges and darker tones coupled with chrome fittings reflecting the desert views outside.



Bedrooms have a glam, almost Art Deco feel. Courtesy Arsenale Spa/SAR



The restaurant car will allow panoramic views over the desert. Courtesy Arsenale Spa/SAR

Reception lounges have been given the feel of a majlis — the room in a Saudi home where guests are welcomed — and include geometric patterns and hand-carved wooden elements. Bedrooms, meanwhile, have a richer feel, with a hint of Art Deco styling in the emerald-colored sofas, headboards and drapes, as well as the clean lines and wood-paneled walls.

The attention to detail extends to the public areas. Artworks and photographs of Saudi cultural sites will adorn the corridors, while the train exterior will be a burnished chrome with accents of violet.

The train will have 34 suites across 14 carriages, while the restaurant menu will be curated by “local and international chefs,” according to the press release accompanying the renderings.



The train has been designed by architect Aline Asmar d'Amman.

Courtesy Arsenale Spa/SAR

The route will go from Riyadh across SAR's Northern Railway network. In a partnership with the Saudi Ministry of Culture there will be "curated cultural programs" for guests as well as "unique tourism itineraries that integrate seamlessly with the train journey" — though no details have yet been revealed.

SAR [previously said](#) in a press release that the Dream of the Desert will operate "luxury train cruise" journeys from the capital city of Riyadh to Qurayyat, which is situated close to the northern border with Jordan.

The 1,300-kilometer route will take in the country's desert landscapes, and stop at the city of Hail on one- and two-night trips.

Calling it "an unparalleled travel experience," Paolo Barletta, Arsenale Group's CEO, said in a statement that the train will be a "fully immersive experience."

Dream of the Desert is currently slated to debut at the end of the third quarter of 2026.

In the mean time, a sibling train, [Dolce Vita Orient Express](#), will debut in Italy in April.

INSPIRATION

# Inside Dream of the Desert – Saudi Arabia's first luxury train service

Dream of the Desert will welcome passengers in 2026, becoming the first five-star rail service in the Middle East



Luxury train travel is having a moment. Around the world, several new and revamped train services have captured the global appetite for slow travel. The Middle East is set to get its first [luxury train](#) service with the launch of Saudi Arabia's Dream of the Desert.

Set to take passengers on a journey through Saudi Arabia's vast desert landscapes, the service is on track to make its inaugural journey by the end of 2026. Departing from the Saudi capital Riyadh, Dream of the Desert will run on 1,300 kilometres of existing railway lines from the capital Riyadh to Al Qurayyat in the northern province of Al Jawf, taking in some of the country's most breathtaking natural scenery along the way. The planned one- to two-day route takes in Al Qassim, Hail and Al Jouf, on the edge of King Salman bin Abdulaziz Nature Reserve, before it terminates some 30km from the border with Jordan.



Interiors have been designed by Lebanese architect Aline Asmar d'Amman Courtesy Saudi Arabia Railways

Manufactured by the Italian hospitality company Arsenale Group and commissioned by Saudi Arabia Railways (SAR), Dream of the Desert's 14 carriages will consist of 34 luxury suites. A first look at the interiors, designed by Lebanese architect Aline Asmar d'Amman, shows opulent gold-laden ceilings, tile-fronted bars, rich velvet banquettes and touches of Saudi tradition. Reception areas have been inspired by majlis settings, adorned with intricately carved wood and shades inspired by the desert sands. Special art pieces showcasing Saudi heritage and culture are being commissioned to hang in the train's corridors, with menus will be created by local and international chefs.



Reception areas merge traditional Saudi design with opulent touches

Courtesy Saudi Arabia Railways

Arsenale is already working in collaboration with Orient Express on La Dolce Vita, a new luxury rail service with six itineraries crisscrossing Italy, set to launch in early spring. Arsenale has also signed an agreement with the UAE's national railway company, Etihad Railway, to develop a luxury train that will travel across the Middle Eastern peninsula.



The desert landscape in Al Jawf province

benedek

The update on Dream of the Desert is one of many as Saudi Arabia fast-tracks its ambitions to become a leading tourist destination, with plans to attract 150m visitors by the end of the decade. Last year was marked by news of hotel and resort developments across the Kingdom, from [AlUla](#), the ancient oasis city near the sandstone monuments of Hegra; to the Red Sea coast and its islands; Sindalah Island, part of the Neom gigaproject; and the historic settlement of Diriyah.

## **Saudi Arabia Unveils First Luxury Train 'Dream of the Desert'**

*Saudi Arabia Railways and Arsenale revealed the 'Dream of the Desert', the Middle East's first luxury train. Featuring 34 luxury suites, it offers an immersive cultural experience inspired by Saudi heritage. Operations begin in late 2026, with bookings announced soon.*



*Saudi Arabia Railways, in partnership with Italian hospitality company Arsenale, unveiled the final design of Dream of the Desert, a first-of-its-kind five-star luxury train in the Middle East. According to reports from the Saudi Press Agency, the achievement was the result of the said two companies signing an agreement last year.*

*Instead, due to the inspiration from Saudi desert and traditional architecture, the interior of the train is decorated with rich craftsmanship combined with earthy hues along with intricate details and high luxury fabrics. Two main landmarks, Hegra and Hail, are also reflected in the design for a visually stunning experience and insight to the culture by the passengers.*