

A R S E N A L E

PRESS COVERAGE

January – March 2025

World Travel & Tourism Council

GLOBAL SUMMIT

PERTH (BOORLOO) 2024

WORLD
TRAVEL &
TOURISM
COUNCIL

WESTERN
AUSTRALIA
WALKING ON A DREAM

GLOBAL SUMMIT REPORT

World Travel & Tourism Council

GLOBAL SUMMIT

PERTH (BOORLOO) 2024

The World Travel & Tourism Council hosted its 24th Global Summit from 8 to 10 October 2024 in Perth, Western Australia. The event was hosted by Tourism Western Australia, with the support of the Government of Western Australia.

Under the theme Ancient Land; New Perspectives, industry leaders and experts discussed the future of a more sustainable and inclusive Travel & Tourism sector for all.

KEY FIGURES

600

DELEGATES

2000+

VIRTUAL
REGISTRATIONS

35

GOVERNMENTS

1000+

PIECES OF
COVERAGE

NPS 88

POST-EVENT

GLOBAL LEADERS' DIALOGUE

8 October 2024



Public and private sector leaders – comprising ministers, tourism officials, and WTTC members – came together to discuss areas of growth for tourism and identify opportunities for further public-private collaboration. The dialogue was moderated by Arnie Weissmann, Editor-in-Chief of Travel Weekly.

The discussion spanned a range of topics including the importance of efficient visa policies, the potential of artificial intelligence, and the need for sustainable tourism practices. Leaders highlighted Travel & Tourism's role in economic growth, job creation, and cultural exchange. The overarching message was one of optimism and a commitment to working together to achieve our common goals.

SUMMARY OF THE TOPICS DISCUSSED:

- **The Power of Public-Private Partnerships.** Successful tourism destinations must leverage public-private partnerships to stimulate investment, foster innovation, and achieve shared goals.
- **Emerging Markets and Shifting Demographics.** The rise of new source markets, particularly in Asia, demands agility and targeted strategies to cater to new and evolving traveller preferences.
- **Diversifying Destination Offering.** The public and private sectors can better promote lesser-known destinations and experiences. This will help spread the benefits of tourism more widely and can mitigate overcrowding in extremely popular resorts and locations.
- **Marketing and Storytelling:** Compelling storytelling and innovative marketing campaigns are crucial for effective destination promotion and capturing traveller imagination.
- **Sustainability as a Core Value.** As tourism continues to grow, environmental and social sustainability must remain top priorities. It is crucial that responsible practices that benefit local communities and protect destinations are embraced and enhanced.
- **The Role of Technology.** Effective use of data and emerging technologies, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), can help optimise operations, enhance understanding of traveller behaviour, and support more personalised experiences for travellers.
- **Frictionless Travel.** Reducing friction in travel is imperative. Streamlining visa processes, improving security protocols, and promoting consistent standards across destinations will support the sector's future growth.
- **Investments in Infrastructure.** Adequate infrastructure, including transportation, accommodation, and digital connectivity, is essential to sustainable tourism growth.
- **Growing and Improving the Workforce.** The sector faces labour shortages and must invest in training and development to attract and retain talent.



Julia Simpson, President & CEO, World Travel & Tourism Council

JULIA SIMPSON, President & CEO, World Travel & Tourism Council, welcomed participants and thanked Western Australia for hosting the 2024 Summit. She also shared an Acknowledgement of Country. She highlighted: **“this place is vast and the only thing bigger than its landscape is its welcome”**. She highlighted the need for innovative partnerships and deeper connectivity between the public and private sectors. She also emphasised the importance of efficient visa policies, data collaboration, and destination management strategies for global tourism success.



Hon. Rita Saffioti MLA, Deputy Premier and Minister for Transport & Tourism, Western Australia

HON. RITA SAFFIOTI MLA, Deputy Premier and Minister for Transport & Tourism, Western Australia, spoke about Western Australia’s efforts to grow its Travel & Tourism sector. **“We believe we have an enormous opportunity to grow our industry. We very much support the tourism industry because of the wealth it creates”**, she said. Minister Saffioti proudly noted that Perth Airport is now Qantas’ second-biggest aviation hub in Australia and that there are several key initiatives to secure direct flights to more destinations. She also shared that the government is investing tens of millions of dollars to attract new events to Australia. The government has created a dedicated subcommittee to support tourism investment, particularly in the regions, she said.



Brian Beall, Director of the USA’s National Travel & Tourism Office

PUBLIC SECTOR SPEAKERS

BRIAN BEALL, Director of the USA’s National Travel & Tourism Office, emphasised the importance of Travel & Tourism to the US economy. He detailed the US government’s efforts to increase visitation through a national Travel & Tourism strategy. This strategy focusses on initiatives to promote the US as a destination, facilitate travel, ensure diverse and accessible tourism experiences, and foster sustainable and resilient tourism. He also reiterated the need for public-private collaboration: **“an important part of the strategy is that it envisions the public and private sectors working together to increase not only the volume of Travel & Tourism, but also the value.”**



Hon. I. Chester Cooper, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Tourism, Investments & Aviation, Bahamas

HON. I. CHESTER COOPER, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Tourism, Investments & Aviation, Bahamas highlighted that the Bahamas is a mature tourism market with a focus on attracting investment and leveraging its proximity to the US. His government aims to double the number of hotel rooms in the country, facilitate seamless travel through visa waivers and pre-clearance for US travel, attract investment, and foster a stable business environment. He emphasised how much the government is prioritising tourism: **“this isn’t just an industry for us. It is our way of life.”**

H.E. JEAN DE DIEU UWIHANGANYE, High Commissioner of Rwanda to Australia, Singapore, and New Zealand, emphasised the role of embassies in promoting tourism. He noted that embassies are **“the first point of entry for people who want to know the country.”** He discussed Rwanda’s successful eco-tourism model for gorilla trekking and how the government is also embracing sports tourism, evident in its hosting of prestigious events such as the African Basketball League and the World Cycling Championship.



H.E. Jean De Dieu Uwihanganye, High Commissioner of Rwanda to Australia, Singapore, and New Zealand

ERIKA GUERRI, Chief of Cabinet, Ministry of Tourism, Italy, outlined Italy’s vision for tourism, which includes managing tourism growth sustainably. She said Italy is **“championing the inclusion of tourism in the G7 agenda for the first time”**, alongside a focus on sustainability, AI, and workforce development. She noted that the Italian Ministry of Tourism is working hard to support Italian tourism groups, attract investors, and enhance the quality of tourism offerings across the country.



Erika Guerri, Chief of Cabinet, Ministry of Tourism, Italy

H.E. SULTAN AL-MUSALLAM, Deputy Minister of Tourism for International Affairs, Saudi Arabia, noted that Saudi Arabia can **“leverage [its] last-comer advantage. We came in late, but we looked at different experiences from different nations – and their successes and failures – and we built on that”**. He also spoke about Saudi Arabia’s “five P” plan for tourism development. It focuses on creating captivating destinations (Places), connecting people with these places (Planes), supporting community engagement (People), having a stable regulatory environment for investors and stakeholders (Policies), and attracting the right travellers to the right destination (Promotions).



H.E. Sultan Al-Musallam, Deputy Minister of Tourism for International Affairs, Saudi Arabia

FLORIAN SENGSTSCHMID, CEO, Azerbaijan Tourism Board, outlined Azerbaijan’s shift in recent years. **“Azerbaijan was known for its energy resources, but in the past 10 to 15 years there has been more focus on tourism as a priority sector,”** he said. He added that now the focus is sustainable tourism development, leveraging its diverse landscapes and promoting eco-tourism initiatives. He also highlighted Azerbaijan’s role in bringing tourism to the forefront of international discussions, particularly as the host of COP 29 in November 2024 where Azerbaijan hosted a dedicated tourism day.



Florian Sengstschmid, CEO, Azerbaijan Tourism Board

GUY ANTOGNELLI, Director, Government Tourist and Convention Authority, Monaco, spoke about the importance of tourism to Monaco’s economy. He echoed that **“public-private partnerships are very important for tourism destinations”**. He also emphasised the interest in diversifying Monaco’s tourism offerings beyond Formula 1, the casino, and the Royal family by focusing more on MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) tourism and sustainability.



Guy Antognelli, Director, Government Tourist and Convention Authority, Monaco



Ion Vilcu, Director of Affiliate Members, UN Tourism

ION VILCU, Director of Affiliate Members, UN Tourism, said UN Tourism has a unique perspective as an organisation with members from both the public and private sectors. He reinforced the need for strong communication and coordination between governments and the private sector, emphasising the importance of aligning long-term objectives and sharing best practices. **“There is a problem with communication between government and the private sector...we should align with long-term strategy objective[s], for both parties,”** he said.



Greg O'Hara, WTTC Chair & Founder and Senior Managing Director, Certares

PRIVATE SECTOR SPEAKERS

GREG O'HARA, WTTC Chair & Founder and Senior Managing Director, Certares, articulated that successful tourism destinations are built on public-private partnerships. He also said that with **“tourism’s durable growth every year at a predictable basis... people tend to stay in their jobs for a long time.”** He emphasised the importance of governments creating an enabling environment for private investment, citing positive examples from Saudi Arabia, Italy, France, Greece, and Rwanda.



Zubin Karkaria, CEO, VFS Global

ZUBIN KARKARIA, CEO, VFS Global, described the organisation’s business model of providing visa processing services to governments. He emphasised the role of technology in creating efficient and secure cross-border mobility: **“our goal is to make cross-border mobility more efficient and at the same time more secure.”** He also highlighted additional opportunities for VFS Global to work with governments on tourism promotion, event management, and biometric solutions.



Katie Briscoe, CEO, MMGY Global

KATIE BRISCOE, CEO, MMGY Global, said: **“it’s so incredibly important that we continue to tell the story of the powerhouse that Travel & Tourism is as an economic driver, but we also have the opportunity to talk about it as a core creator of global empathy”.** She emphasised the importance of innovative partnerships, data collaboration, and dispersal marketing strategies to manage tourism flows effectively.



Hiroyuki Takahashi, Chairperson, JTB Corp

HIROYUKI TAKAHASHI, Chairperson, JTB Corp, discussed the challenges of labour shortages and digitisation facing the Asia-Pacific Travel & Tourism sector. He noted that **“as we look at the Asia-Pacific region, including Japan, it’s clear that creating a tourism industry that is both productive and profitable is crucial for long-term success.”** He suggested focussing on tourism segments with a high value-add like adventure and sports tourism to drive profitability and attract investment.

CLEOFE ALBISO, Managing Director, Megaworld Hotels and Resorts, discussed the private sector's important role in driving tourism growth in the Philippines. She emphasised the significance of collaboration with the government to attract new markets, develop infrastructure, and promote the Philippines as a diverse and welcoming destination. She highlighted: **"it's a beautiful situation where the Philippines is now, but we definitely have a lot more to do."**



Cleofe Albiso, Managing Director, Megaworld Hotels and Resorts

PAOLO BARLETTA, CEO, Arsenale s.p.a, spoke about the potential of luxury train travel to create new tourism destinations and experiences. He highlighted Arsenale s.p.a's work in Italy and Saudi Arabia, emphasising the importance of leveraging existing rail infrastructure and promoting slow tourism. He noted that nearly every country has railways and that his organisation is **"leveraging this incredible network worldwide in order to bring luxury trains so that we can create new destinations; people can discover and enjoy new places; and especially to help move people when they land in a country – so they do not need to take another airplane over a short distance"**.



Paolo Barletta, CEO, Arsenale s.p.a

LARS CLASEN, CEO, Cruise Saudi, discussed the positive collaboration between Cruise Saudi and the Saudi Arabian government in developing the country's cruise sector. He said: **"it is essential that the private sector and government work together when we are trying to establish a market which has not existed before."** He highlighted the importance of efficient visa regulations, tour guide development, and establishing a regulatory framework to attract international cruise companies.



Lars Clasen, CEO, Cruise Saudi

JENNIFER WILSON-BUTTIGIEG, Head of Travel Policy, Chase Travel, shared her organisation's mission: **"to create a world-class marketplace for advisors, travellers, and partners."** She emphasised the importance of working with trade associations and government agencies to advocate for traveller rights, streamline regulations, and ensure a fair and competitive travel environment.



Jennifer Wilson-Buttigieg, Head of Travel Policy, Chase Travel

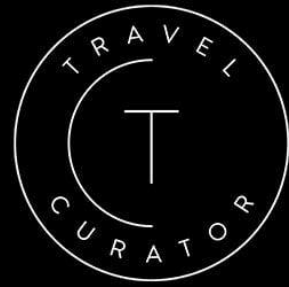
PUNEET CHHATWAL, Managing Director & CEO, Indian Hotels Company Limited, spoke about the growth of tourism in India and the role of public-private partnerships in developing new destinations. Referencing the motto of Tourism Western Australia he said: **"India, where it stands today, is about creating a dream."** He shared the models used in Goa, Kerala, and the Andaman Islands, where the government of India provides land on long-term leases to incentivise private investment.



Puneet Chhatwal, MD & CEO, Indian Hotels Company Limited

LACHLAN HOSWELL, Managing Director of Australasia, Radisson Hotel Group, discussed the importance of government support in driving tourism

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

Accor 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, Bulgaria, 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) 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). Marrington Escapes (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), 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, rooms from £92 a night) and keep your eyes peeled.



Join the rail revolution

Minimise your carbon footprint and embrace slow travel. No longer just for students, Interrail (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); London to Berlin or Prague, changing at Paris (b-europe.com/EN); Paris to Berlin (nightjet.com); and Brussels to Berlin or Prague (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).



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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

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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 Farnell

I. 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 Sukiya-bashi 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*

II. 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 TripTaneer, 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 Britannic 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. *Devorah*

Lev-Too

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.

MORE FROM COUNTRY LIVING

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.



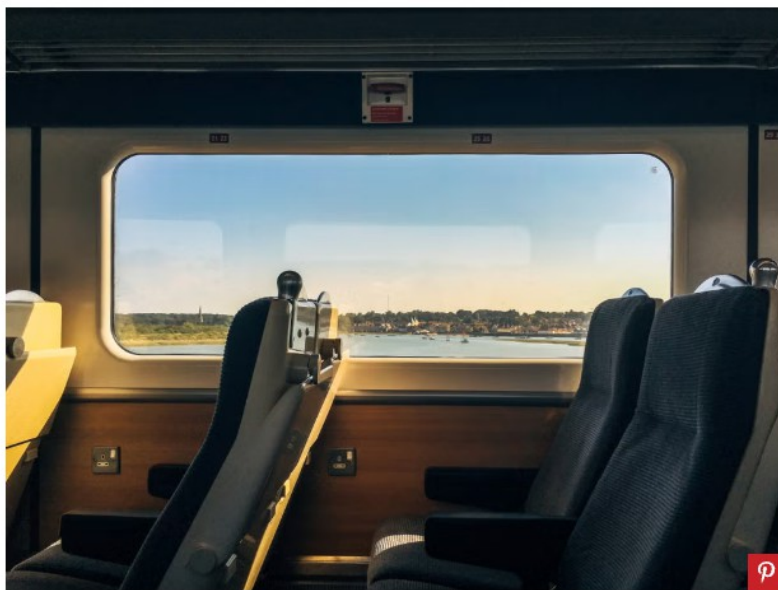
Courtesy of La Dolce Vita Orient Express

“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

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 exotic-tinged 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.

AD

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Details: Rates to be confirmed. laminerva.orient-express.com



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

continued from page 17

SEMI-GUIDED TRAVEL

Sitting in that sweet spot between completely independent 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 technology and allowing journeys to unfold naturally through greater engagement with local life and simple pleasures.

Travelphere has seen a sharp rise in demand for its local expert guides and experiences, such as baking traditional Apulian bread in open wood ovens at a fortified farm in Italy or sharing an asado social barbecue in Argentina. Guides – known as holiday directors – live, eat and breathe their regions, so

exploring secret backwaters and sharing local folklore ensures their mixed groups can engage with the destination as never before.

DESTINATIONS TO DISCOVER

The top trending hotspots for 2025 are in and it's clear that alternative or once-overlooked destinations are having a moment – especially if they are dupes for more expensive and better-known destinations.

At the top of the SkyScanner table, southern Italian seaside city Reggio Calabria has seen a whopping 5.41 per cent increase in flight searches compared with last year, and Kerala's capital, Thiruvananthapuram - sitting in tenth place - has seen its popularity soar by 66 per cent.

Tartu in eastern Estonia is also bathing in the spotlight, having bagged the most recent European Capital of Culture crown, as are Cambodian gateway to Angkor Wat, Siem Reap;

historic Dominican harbor town
Portsmouth; Andalusian architectural
gem Córdoba; and northern Norway's
astro-tourism hotspot Tromsø, which is
a new twice-weekly addition to BA's
flight roster.

SPLASHING THE CASH

When it comes to overseas trips, trading up is very on-trend, with more people predicted to splash the cash and treat themselves to five-star stays.

Baby boomers are also in on the action, so much so that "SKI" - Spending Kids' Inheritance - has been identified as a separate travel trend, with Booking.com finding that 42 per cent of the generation plan to spend their savings

on the trip of a lifetime rather than leaving their kids an inheritance. But in a full-circle moment, it seems

Luxury tour firm Seismic's five-star all-inclusive Rihna, Mahai and Danube river cruises in 2025 - with low guest numbers, fine dining and a wellness area - seem to be a perfect fit for this cross-generational demand for the very best of experience and service.

FIVE-STAR RAIL RENAISSANCE

On the same five star basis, rail is thundering back on track as the nostalgic lunge of bygone train travel is proving an alluring draw. And the year ahead sees the introduction of two new uber-luxe train trips.

luxury sleeper trains are returning in spring 2025 with six new La Dolce Vita services catering to passengers' every whim on a journey through 14 Italian regions. The vibe here is stunning retro

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

Water way to go
Scenic
five-star luxury
all-inclusive
cruise takes to
the Danub

SEASON STRETCHING

[illegible]

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A Scenic river cruise is a seamless journey from star to finish that places you, our guest, at the heart of everything we do.

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Save up to 30%* plus enjoy Free Business Class Flights on additional saving of up to £200pp* on selected sailings 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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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

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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



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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:

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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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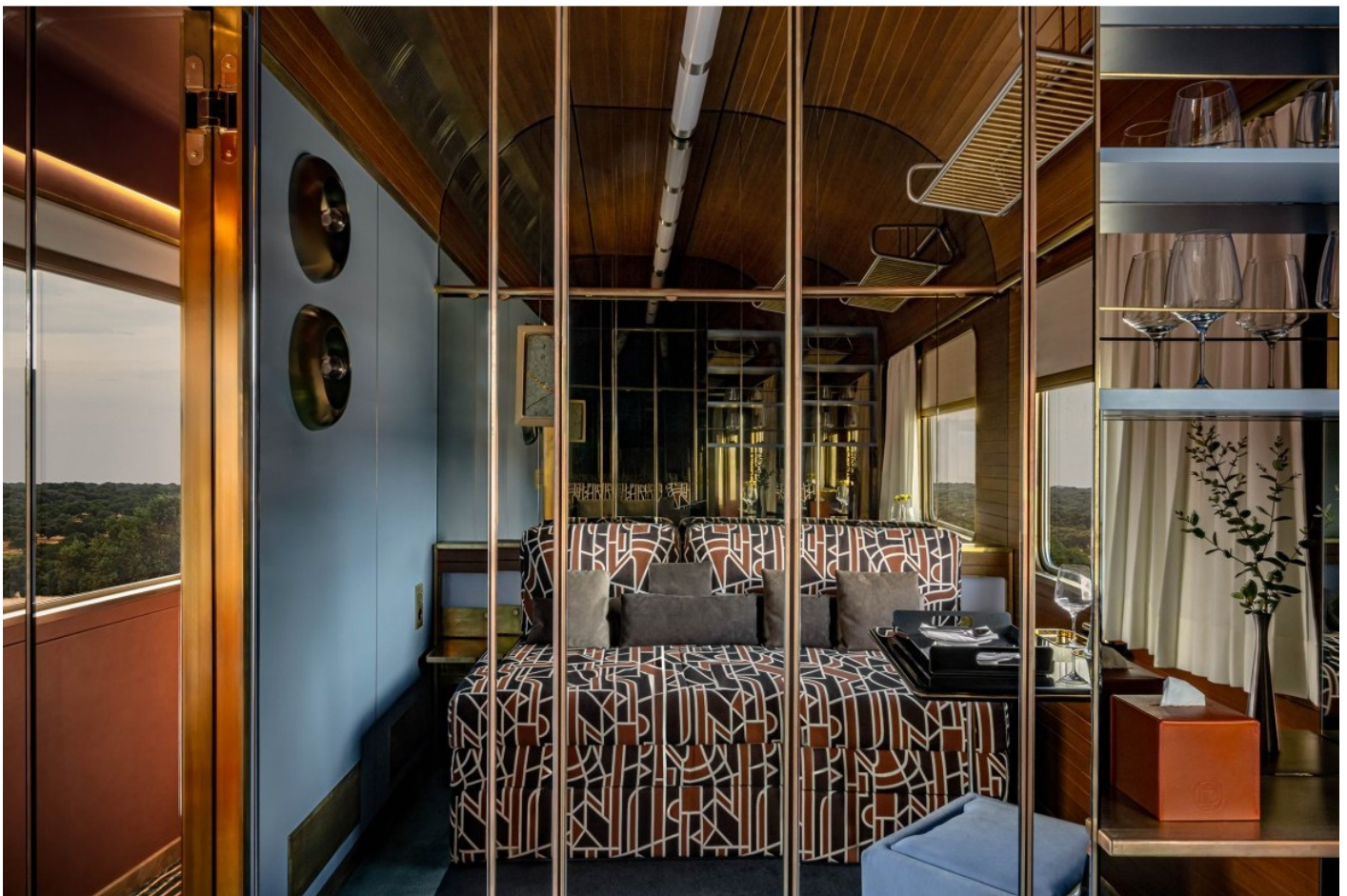
Luxury travel is booming. Figures from the latest report by McKinsey for Marriott hotels indicate that over a third of luxury travellers earn between \$100,000 (£80,000) and \$1 million a year — and 60 per cent of their guests have more than \$40,000 a year to spend on leisure. Which is why luxury hotels — 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



'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.

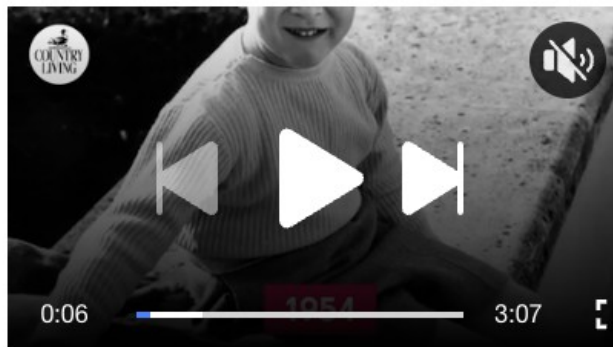
What is 'time travel'?

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.

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 [hertelien](#) 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.

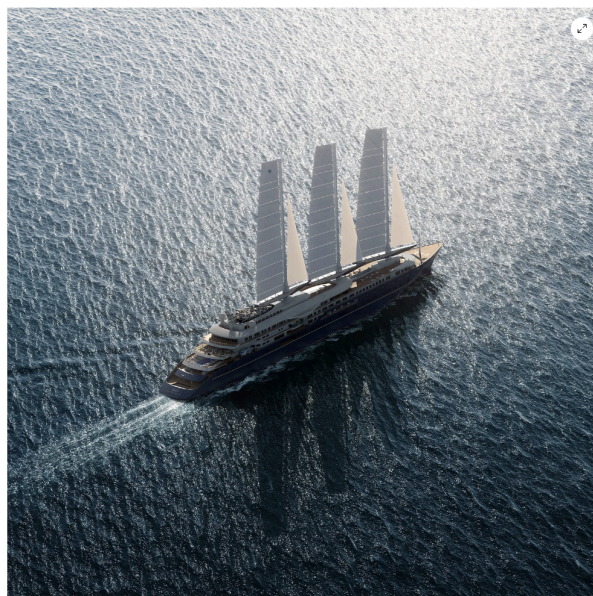
Relocating to Paris and stepping into two high-profile roles is a major adjustment. How did you manage this transition?

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.



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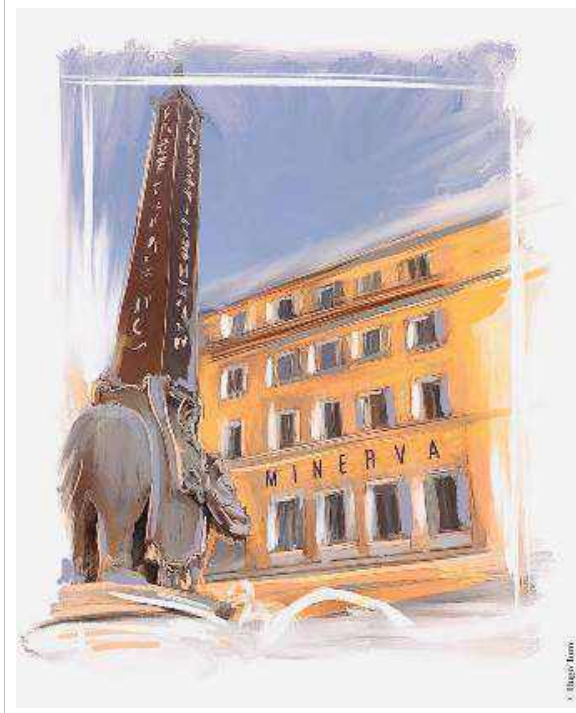
Providing key information in a no-frills format for professionals who travel to write, edit, broadcast or create images.

Issue 403 : mid-December 2025/January 2025

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
- Tiphaine Rolland at tiphaine@gribbonberry.com

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Q Explore city breaks, activities...

Expert guides to Italy



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



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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.

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) 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.](#)

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



When you purchase through links on our site, we may earn an affiliate commission. [Here's how it works.](#)





(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



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

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From: Rome (Spring 2025)

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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.](#)

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.

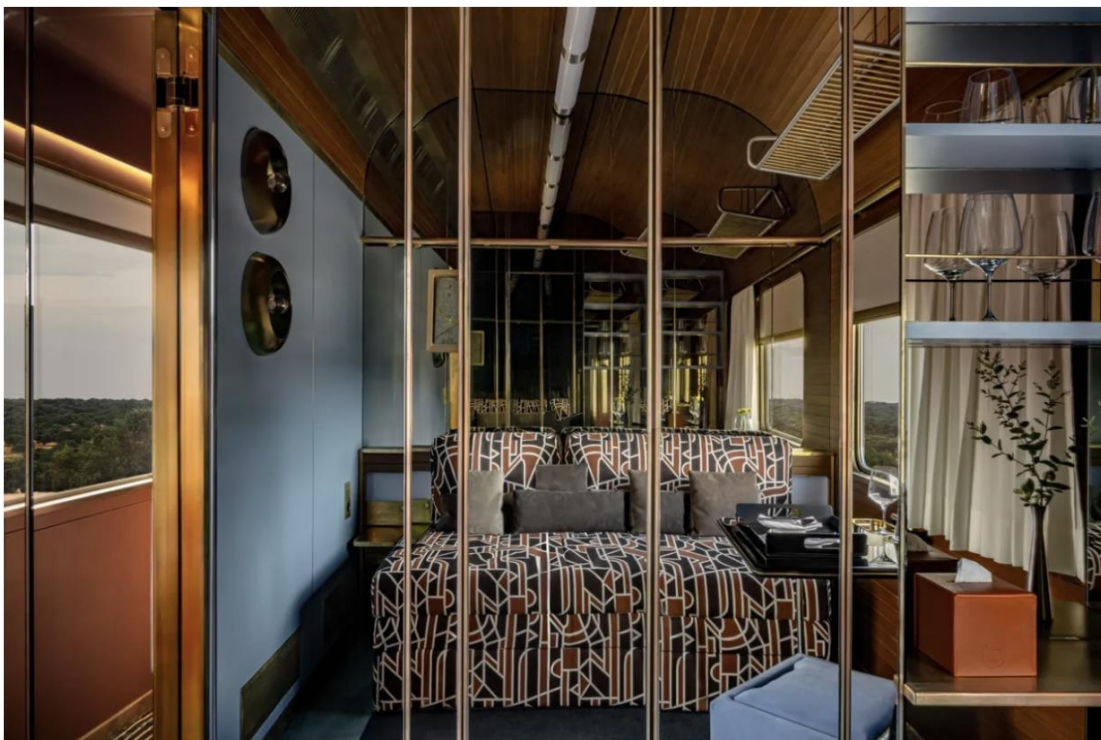
Travel advisers agree. Some of the most sought-after journeys are already sold out for the entirety of 2025 and booking well into 2026. “Think about how River Cruises blossomed in the past decade,” says Jack Ezon, founder and managing partner of luxury travel consultancy Embark Beyond. “Train travel, 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

LINK: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/lifestyle/travel/luxury-train-travel-is-booming-here-s-why-and-the-trips-you-must-book-101737014646638.html>

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,

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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

The 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

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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.



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Hotels ,25



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

~ Winter ~



The end of 2022 and the beginning of the new year have been a whirlwind of activity for hoteliers. The industry has seen a surge in interest in new hotel openings, with many projects in the pipeline. The industry's leading travel fair, LTM, is the perfect time to see the latest in hotel design and construction.



Travel Trends 2025



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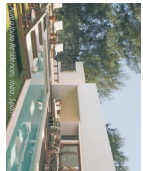
New destinations such as Thailand, Singapore, and the Maldives are expected to see a surge in hotel openings. The industry's leading travel fair, LTM, is the perfect time to see the latest in hotel design and construction.



~ Summer ~



Hotels are expected to see a surge in bookings for summer travel. The industry's leading travel fair, LTM, is the perfect time to see the latest in hotel design and construction.



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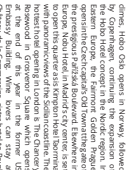
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~ Fall ~



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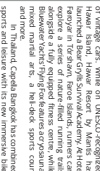
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Stay to See the Sport

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Edited for LTM 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



NATE LEE COOKS



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

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-asmar-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 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.

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In the reception area, the bar and the



Aline Asmar d'Amman and her Culture in Architecture Studio's designs for Dream of the Desert.





[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.

hospitality design



january 2025 hospitalitydesign.com

the buyer's guide
+ the 2025 hot list

hd Presenter of
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2025 hot list

It's that time of year again, when we round up the most anticipated hotel openings in 2025. We've sifted through hundreds of properties to spotlight 76, ranging from desert retreats to idyllic châteaux and urban escapes. As always, this list is a testament to the visionary design talent shaping our industry's next chapter. For more debuts that caught our attention, visit hospitalitydesign.com.

united states 048

europe 053

middle east + africa 058

asia-pacific 060

the americas 062

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THE KIMPTON
TRES RÍOS
p.061

By ALIA AKKAM, STEPHANIE CHEN, KATIE KERVIN, AND ALISSA PONCHIONE

*Renderings and photos courtesy of their respective properties, unless otherwise noted

hospitalitydesign.com January 2025

047



Rosewood Amsterdam

Designed by Studio Piet Boon, the 134-room Rosewood Amsterdam will honor the building's heritage with a modern take on Dutch craftsmanship when it debuts in June inside Netherlands's historic Palace of Justice. Original features, such as cell blocks and courtrooms, have been restored and reimagined for unique guest experiences, while culinary offerings span three distinctive restaurants, bars, and an in-house distillery.

Sir Devonshire Square London

Close to Spitalfields Market and Liverpool Street station, Devonshire Square was once home to an East India Tea Company warehouse. In April, that building will find new life as the 81-room Sir Devonshire Square. The design from Cornwall, England firm Maison 191 respects the structure's heritage while capturing the energy of East London. In addition to a Cover members club, guests can hang out in a retro-style lounge filled with greenery and comfortable sofas or browse the shop's local products.

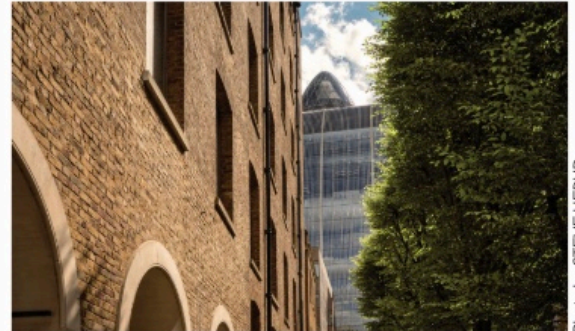
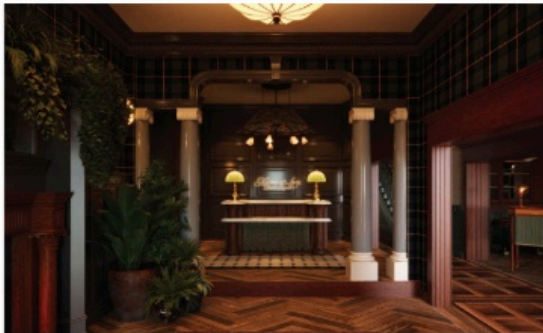


Photo by STEVE HERUD

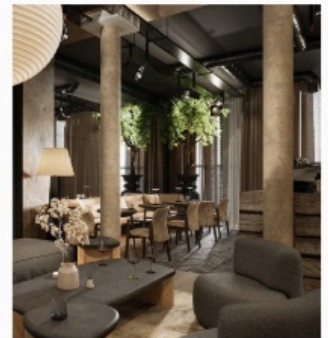


Portrush Adelphi Northern Ireland

The reimagined Portrush Adelphi from Marine Hotels & Resorts will debut next month as a 34-room seaside retreat, boasting a design by CDA Group Architects and AJ Capital's in-house team. Inspired by the rugged coastline and the area's legendary golf courses, interiors blend classic tartans and warm fabrics with a palette of rich green and blue. Guests will have access to a spa as well as locally sourced cuisine at the hotel's Italian restaurant.

Reja Klaipeda, Lithuania

A Baltic gem where German, Scandinavian, and Lithuanian influences converge, Klaipėda is set for a new chapter when the former National Hotel reopens as Reja this spring. Located in the heart of the city's Old Town, the 50-room property by Kaunas, Lithuania-based YesDesign Architecture will reflect a contemporary vision, including an updated restaurant and bar that nods to its location near the Lithuanian coast.



La Minerva Rome

Accor's Orient Express hotel collection kicks off this spring with the transformation of the 17th-century Palazzo Fonseca near the Pantheon. Artists flocked to this residence-turned-hotel in the 1800s, and the revamp by Paris firm Hugo Toro reflects its rich past with 93 guestrooms layered with Art Deco details and modern finishes. La Minerva further entices with a Roman bath-style spa, the rooftop lair Voliera, and La Minerva Bar, a shrine to the Roman goddess of art starring a historic skylight.

BUSINESS

From Runways to Resorts: Fashion Executives Are Reshaping Luxury Hospitality



Fashion industry veterans Saba Landmann, Stephanie Le Badezet, Michael Grieve and Claire Abellé have transitioned into senior positions with leading hospitality companies.

- Hospitality groups are recruiting fashion industry talent to drive innovation and enhance brand narratives.

BY RITU UPADHYAY

WITH CONTRIBUTIONS FROM MILES SOCHA

When communications director Claire Abellé traded the world of Christian Louboutin's red soles and Burberry's checks for the marbled lobbies and sandy beaches of Kerzner International's luxury resorts, she brought more than her Rolodex of fashion contacts.

The executive, who now serves as vice president of global communications at the parent company of the One & Only Resorts and Atlantis Hotels, is part of a growing wave of fashion industry veterans being tapped by luxury hospitality groups for their brand-building expertise.

Leading international hotel groups are tasking fashion industry pros to reimagine everything from guest experiences to brand storytelling.

Brett Armitage, chief commercial officer of Kerzner International, recognized the luxury hospitality playbook needed a rewrite as he observed fashion houses masterfully build emotional connections with the same ultra-high-net-worth individuals their hotels were courting.

The solution? Tap into that expertise directly. Within 18 months, Kerzner recruited a trio of fashion industry veterans: Abellé from Christian Louboutin to lead global communications; Edward Lee from Tom Ford as creative director, and most recently, Kandé Camara from Dior to spearhead sustainability.

"We're embracing not just a creative influence, but an entire point of view on how we approach our brand story," said Armitage, whose recruitment strategy reflects a larger transformation sweeping through hospitality.

More examples abound:

Two years ago, Marriott International brought on fashion PR veteran Saba Landmann to oversee global brand communications at Marriott International.

Michael Grieve was appointed chief brand officer at Dubai-based Jumeirah Group last year, poached from Gucci, where he served as vice president, brand and client.

And most recently, longtime LVMH watches and jewelry pr director Stephanie Le Badezet joined Accor Group, overseeing Orient Express' global communications strategy.

"Fashion, at its core, is all about

creating aspiration, curating narratives, and connecting deeply with a brand's audience on an emotional level – beyond their wallet," said Landmann, senior vice president of global brand and portfolio public relations at Marriott International. This "translates seamlessly into hospitality PR, where creating unique, immersive experiences is just as crucial as the aesthetic appeal of a brand."

Landmann is responsible for leading communications for the company's portfolio of 30 diverse hotel brands, including The Ritz-Carlton, Ritz-Carlton Reserve, Bulgari Hotels and Resorts, St. Regis Hotels and Resorts, Edition, The Luxury Collection, JW Marriott and W Hotels. She joined Marriott after leading communications at G-III Apparel Group, owner of Donna Karan, Karl Lagerfeld, Vilebrequin and more. Prior to that she held senior roles at Vince Holding Corp. and Alice+Olivia.

Tina Edmundson, president of luxury at Marriott International, explained its recruitment philosophy: "Fresh perspectives are essential to keeping global brands dynamic and relevant, which is why we chose to bring Saba on board from the fashion industry... The fashion industry is fast-moving, competitive, and dynamic and requires an understanding of how to craft aspirational narratives, tap into and navigate cultural trends, and build emotional connections with consumers."

The shared clientele across both industries is also a key factor driving this cross-industry pollination. Abellé emphasized the significant overlap in target audiences, especially for Kerzner, which operates ultra-luxury properties.

"In our segment of hotels, we're ultimately speaking to the same ultra high-net-worth audience – the 1 percent."

This shared consumer base means fashion executives bring valuable insights into the preferences and behaviors of luxury consumers. "Luxury fashion brands not only command the loyalties with the same customers we also hold dear, but they also constantly reinvent, innovate and respond to change," Abellé added.

The skills required to build and maintain luxury brands are increasingly transferable across sectors, particularly when it comes to understanding and serving the world's most discerning consumers.

Jean Allen, partner at executive search firm Heidrick & Struggles in New York, said, "recruiting from fashion is high on the list for our hospitality clients."

Communications executives transition particularly well, she added.

"There are a lot of parallels between fashion and hospitality in terms of understanding how to do a strategy shift and the complexity of the matrix. Fashion people have seen a lot of transformation, have great brand experience and they've worked with a certain level of intensity around personalities," Allen said. "They understand the 24/7 nature of social media and all those things that really affect fashion and hospitality probably more than other industries."

"The trend of luxury brand talent transitioning into hospitality reflects a strategic shift in crafting high-end experiences, blending the refined expertise of the fashion world with hospitality's service-oriented focus," said Grieve at Jumeirah, perhaps best known for the pioneering sail-shaped Burj Al Arab hotel, which marked its 25th anniversary in 2024. "Fashion executives bring a sophisticated understanding of brand power – not just as a tangible offering, but as an emotional connection."

Their toolbox also includes expertise with partnerships, strategic events, and media engagement to "amplify a brand's visibility and prestige," he said.

Fashion executives are arriving at hospitality companies amid an explosion in hotels branded after such famous fashion houses as Versace, Giorgio Armani, Karl Lagerfeld, Elie Saab and more, not to mention Bulgari.

Grieve argued that "hospitality pure players like Jumeirah are uniquely positioned to respond with deep-rooted expertise in delivering exceptional guest experiences."

"While fashion brands excel at design and creating aspirational appeal, hospitality pure players have a distinct advantage: operational excellence," he said in an interview. "Running a hotel is an intricate art requiring seamless coordination across service, dining, housekeeping, and guest engagement."

Le Badezet joined **Orient Express** as the legendary travel brand is set to open its first hotels in 2025, with Orient Express La Minerva in Rome and **Orient Express Palazzo Dona Giovannelli** in Venice.

She said: "The hospitality industry is increasingly recognizing that modern luxury is about more than just high-end accommodations. It's finding the right balance between heritage and a contemporary reinterpretation."

Another particularly valuable asset those who have worked in fashion often bring to hospitality roles is a global mindset.

"Clients couldn't hire someone who didn't have global experience. A hospitality company just really couldn't take that risk," Allen said. "Fashion brands are well versed in catering to diverse cultural expectations and regional preferences."

The Jumeirah Group is expanding across international markets, with plans to double its portfolio by 2030.

"Jumeirah is an international brand with ambitious growth objectives, and we are actively raising our profile globally," said Grieve, who came to the Dubai-based company with strong regional know-how, having handled all of Gucci Maison's brand marketing, communications, and client engagement activities for Europe and the Middle East based out of Milan.

Grieve will oversee high-profile upcoming launches including Jumeirah Le Richemond in Geneva, Jumeirah Red Sea in Saudi Arabia, and Jumeirah Marsa Al Arab in Dubai.

In his view, luxury travelers "seek purpose-driven experiences that resonate deeply. They want more than amenities – they want memories."

Grieve also cited a heightened interest in wellness, cultural discoveries, a sense of belonging, and "authentic and memorable culinary journeys."

The transition from fashion to hospitality does have unique challenges. Marriott's Landmann pointed out that while fashion PR often focuses on promoting specific products within seasonal cycles, hospitality requires a broader, sometimes more complex approach.

"We're not just promoting a product, but an experience – an entire ecosystem that includes location, architecture, service, amenities, and lifestyle," Landmann said.

The hospitality industry also demands a different kind of relationship building. "While fashion campaigns often focus on specific moments or seasonal launches, hospitality PR requires fostering ongoing relationships with media, influencers and guests. The storytelling must evolve while maintaining brand consistency over time," said Landmann.

The fashion industry's expertise in partnerships, strategic events, and media engagement helps amplify a brand's visibility and prestige in measurable ways. Kerzner has pursued partnerships with luxury fashion brands like Dior and Balmain to create unique beach and pool club environments. Similarly, Marriott's luxury portfolio saw an array of unexpected partnerships across fashion, such as The Ritz x Late Check Out and JW Marriott's co-branded line with Flamingo Estate.

"Fashion PR taught me the importance of staying ahead of trends," Landmann said, noting that this skill is equally valuable in hospitality, where "consumers' expectations are always evolving, whether it's the shift towards wellness-focused travel, sustainable practices, or hyper-personalized services."

As the lines between different luxury sectors continue to blur, the influx of fashion talent into hospitality is likely to accelerate as operators reveal ambitious expansion plans.

The growth of the luxury hospitality landscape has fashion-influenced leadership shaping innovative new concepts and experiences.

"We have pushed the boundaries of how we work with partners, the stories we tell in creative campaigns, and the spaces in which our brands are present in the world," said Armitage. This year will see the opening of One & Only Moonlight Basin in Big Sky, Mont., from Kerzner – the brand's first destination in the United States and its first alpine resort. The company is also launching its second wellness-focused SIRO Hotel in Boka Place, Montenegro, following the brand's debut in Dubai's One Za'abeel, with additional properties planned for Los Cabos and Riyadh beyond 2025.

Meanwhile, Orient Express is making its own bold moves launching La Dolce Vita Orient Express train service and introducing its first sailing yacht, the **Orient Express Corinthian**. **Orient Express** will be unique in combining boats, trains, and hotels under one luxury hospitality brand. As Le Badezet noted, "The future of luxury is increasingly experiential, with hospitality growing faster than traditional luxury goods sectors."



SMARTFLYER

TRAVEL CULTURE

02.10.2025

Seductive Stays: 44 Suites for When You Don't Plan to Leave the Room

You know those people who say, “*The hotel doesn't matter, it's not like we're going to be in the room*”? Well, we're not those people—which is why we're exactly the *right* people to help you compile a list of the most romantic hotel suites that'll have you never wanting to leave the room.

The criteria to make our list of ‘the most romantic hotel suites in the world’ involves a laundry list of nuanced requirements, not least of which involves the hardest test of all to pass: a vibe check. This list spans all seven continents, including city stays perfect for a staycation in our [own backyard in New York](#), remote lodges in [the South African bush](#) meant to be part of a larger [safari itinerary](#), and unique stays nestled in the Australian Outback. We're going to be weaving you around the globe showcasing not just go-to properties but particular suite categories that scream, “*You were right... we're definitely not leaving the room.*”

The criteria to make our list of ‘the most romantic hotel suites in the world’ involves a laundry list of nuanced requirements, not least of which involves the hardest test of all to pass: a vibe check.

SUITE CABIN ABOARD THE ORIENT EXPRESS *LA DOLCE VITA*

Launching its inaugural journeys this spring, **The Orient Express *La Dolce Vita*** is the newest player in the highly buzzed-about luxury train sector. One of its key differentiators is the spacious (for train standards!) size of its cabins, particularly the suite cabin category. The elegant Art Deco interiors, plush king-sized beds, and en-suite bathrooms offer a hotel-on-wheels experience, complete with panoramic windows perfect for peering out onto Italy's bucolic countryside.



From Runways to Resorts: Fashion Executives Are Reshaping Luxury Hospitality

LINK: <https://wwd.com/business-news/human-resources/fashion-executives-reshape-luxury-hospitality-1236906594/>



From Runways to Resorts: Fashion Executives Are Reshaping Luxury Hospitality Hospitality groups are recruiting fashion industry talent to drive innovation and enhance brand narratives. By Plus Icon Ritu Upadhyay Recent Articles by Ritu Upadhyay February 11, 2025, 1:00am 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 Fashion industry

veterans Saba Landmann, Stephanie Le Badezet, Michael Grieve and Claire Abiellé have transitioned into senior positions with leading hospitality companies. courtesy 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 When communications director Claire Abeillé traded the world of Christian Louboutin's red soles and Burberry's checks for the

marbled lobbies and sandy beaches of Kerzner International's luxury resorts, she brought more than her Rolodex of fashion contacts. The executive, who now serves as vice president of global communications at the parent company of the One & Only Resorts and Atlantis Hotels, is part of a growing wave of fashion industry veterans being tapped by luxury hospitality groups for their brand-building expertise. Leading international hotel groups are tasking fashion industry pros to reimagine everything from guest experiences to brand storytelling. Related Articles Celebrity News Renée Zellweger Thinks Pink in Strapless Dress With Structural Detailing for 'Bridget Jones: Mad About the Boy' Sydney Premiere Ready To Wear Ulla Johnson CEO Thibaut Perrin-Faivre Talks About His Careful Approach to Growth Brett Armitage, chief commercial officer of

Kerzner International, recognized the luxury hospitality playbook needed a rewrite as he observed fashion houses masterfully build emotional connections with the same ultra-high-net-worth individuals their hotels were courting. You May Also Like The solution? Tap into that expertise directly. Within 18 months, Kerzner recruited a trio of fashion industry veterans: Abeillé from Christian Louboutin to lead global communications; Edward Lee from Tom Ford as creative director, and most recently, Kandé Camara from Dior to spearhead sustainability. "We're embracing not just a creative influence, but an entire point of view on how we approach our brand story," said Armitage, whose recruitment strategy reflects a larger transformation sweeping through hospitality. A rendering of the Jumeirah Marsa Al Arab, foreground, slated to open soon in Dubai with a view of the iconic Burj Al Arab. Courtesy of Jumeirah More examples abound: Two years ago, Marriott International brought on fashion PR veteran Saba Landmann to oversee global brand communications at Marriott International. Michael Grieve was appointed chief brand officer at Dubai-based

Jumeirah Group last year, poached from Gucci, where he served as vice president, brand and client. And most recently, longtime LVMH watches and jewelry pr director Stephanie Le Badezet joined Accor Group, overseeing **Orient Express**' global communications strategy. "Fashion, at its core, is all about creating aspiration, curating narratives, and connecting deeply with a brand's audience on an emotional level - beyond their wallet," said Landmann, senior vice president of global brand and portfolio public relations at Marriott International. This "translates seamlessly into hospitality PR, where creating unique, immersive experiences is just as crucial as the aesthetic appeal of a brand." Landmann is responsible for leading communications for the company's portfolio of 30 diverse hotel brands, including The Ritz-Carlton, Ritz-Carlton Reserve, Bulgari Hotels and Resorts, St. Regis Hotels and Resorts, Edition, The Luxury Collection, JW Marriott and W Hotels. She joined Marriott after leading communications at G-III Apparel Group, owner of Donna Karan, Karl Lagerfeld, Vilebrequin and more. Prior to that she held senior roles at Vince

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skills required to build and maintain luxury brands are increasingly transferable across sectors, particularly when it comes to understanding and serving the world's most discerning consumers. Jean Allen, partner at executive search firm Heidrick & Struggles in New York, said, "recruiting from fashion is high on the list for our hospitality clients." Communications executives transition particularly well, she added. "There are a lot of parallels between fashion and hospitality in terms of understanding how to do a strategy shift and the complexity of the matrix. Fashion people have seen a lot of transformation, have great brand experience and they've worked with a certain level of intensity around personalities," Allen said. "They understand the 24/7 nature of social media and all those things that really affect fashion and hospitality probably more than other industries." "The trend of luxury brand talent transitioning into hospitality reflects a strategic shift in crafting high-end experiences, blending the refined expertise of the fashion world with hospitality's service-oriented focus," said Grieve at Jumeirah, perhaps best known for the pioneering sail-shaped Burj Al Arab hotel, which marketed its

25th anniversary in 2024. "Fashion executives bring a sophisticated understanding of brand power - not just as a tangible offering, but as an emotional connection." Their toolbox also includes expertise with partnerships, strategic events, and media engagement to "amplify a brand's visibility and prestige," he said. Fashion executives are arriving at hospitality companies amid an explosion in hotels branded after such famous fashion houses as Versace, Giorgio Armani, Karl Lagerfeld, Elie Saab and more, not to mention Bulgari. Grieve argued that "hospitality pure players like Jumeirah are uniquely positioned to respond with deep-rooted expertise in delivering exceptional guest experiences. "While fashion brands excel at design and creating aspirational appeal, hospitality pure players have a distinct advantage: operational excellence," he said in an interview. "Running a hotel is an intricate art requiring seamless coordination across service, dining, housekeeping, and guest engagement." Le Badezet joined **Orient Express** as the legendary travel brand is set to open its first hotels in 2025, with **Orient Express** La Minerva in Roma and **Orient Express** Palazzo Dona Giovannelli in Venice. She said: "The hospitality

industry is increasingly recognizing that modern luxury is about more than just high-end accommodations. It's finding the right balance between heritage and a contemporary reinterpretation." Another particularly valuable asset those who have worked in fashion often bring to hospitality roles is a global mindset. "Clients couldn't hire someone who didn't have global experience. A hospitality company just really couldn't take that risk," Allen said. "Fashion brands are well versed in catering to diverse cultural expectations and regional preferences." The Jumeirah Group is expanding across international markets, with plans to double its portfolio by 2030. "Jumeirah is an international brand with ambitious growth objectives, and we are actively raising our profile globally," said Grieve, who came to the Dubai-based company with strong regional know-how, having handled all of Gucci Maison's brand marketing, communications, and client engagement activities for Europe and the Middle East based out of Milan. Grieve will oversee high-profile upcoming launches including Jumeirah Le Richemond in Geneva, Jumeirah Red Sea in Saudi Arabia, and Jumeirah Marsa

Al Arab in Dubai. In his view, luxury travelers "seek purpose-driven experiences that resonate deeply. They want more than amenities - they want memories." Grieve also cited a heightened interest in wellness, cultural discoveries, a sense of belonging, and "authentic and memorable culinary journeys." The transition from fashion to hospitality does have unique challenges. Marriott's Landmann pointed out that while fashion PR often focuses on promoting specific products within seasonal cycles, hospitality requires a broader, sometimes more complex approach. "We're not just promoting a product, but an experience - an entire ecosystem that includes location, architecture, service, amenities, and lifestyle," Landmann said. Casa Brera, the latest hotel to be added to Marriott International's Luxury Collection portfolio, reflects Milanese design, art and culture. The hospitality industry also demands a different kind of relationship building. "While fashion campaigns often focus on specific moments or seasonal launches, hospitality PR requires fostering ongoing relationships with media, influencers and guests. The storytelling must evolve

while maintaining brand consistency over time," said Landmann. The fashion industry's expertise in partnerships, strategic events, and media engagement helps amplify a brand's visibility and prestige in measurable ways. Kerzner has pursued partnerships with luxury fashion brands like Dior and Balmain to create unique beach and pool club environments. Similarly, Marriott's luxury portfolio saw an array of unexpected partnerships across fashion, such as The Ritz x Late Check Out and JW Marriot's co-branded line with Flamingo Estate. "Fashion PR taught me the importance of staying ahead of trends," Landmann said, noting that this skill is equally valuable in hospitality, where "consumers' expectations are always evolving, whether it's the shift towards wellness-focused travel, sustainable practices, or hyper-personalized services." As the lines between different luxury sectors continue to blur, the influx of fashion talent into hospitality is likely to accelerate as operators reveal ambitious expansion plans. The growth of the luxury hospitality landscape has fashion-influenced leadership shaping innovative new concepts

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The most exciting hotel openings of 2025

[The Points Guy Travel Team](#)

Feb. 12, 2025 • 58 min read

Year after year, more hotels open than one can possibly imagine, from sky-high stunners set in impossibly tall buildings to off-the-beaten-path boutique hotels, and from sprawling beachside [all-inclusive resorts](#) to new iterations of the [points brands](#) we all know and love.

Here at TPG, the travel team spends the first month of the year pulling together our individual lists of the hotels we're most excited about all over the globe. We find out which ones are still on course to open (and which ones might be a little too optimistic about their timeline) and then duke it out to create one curated list of the most exciting hotels to open in the coming months.

Per usual, this year's list runs the gamut: You'll find family-friendly resorts near iconic theme parks, new properties from beloved points brands, ultraluxe island resorts that people wait a lifetime to visit — and so much more. And in terms of geography, this list contains properties as far away as Sydney and [the Maldives](#) and as close to home as Houston and [New York](#) — or in destinations featured on our "[Where to go in 2025](#)" list, like [Indianapolis](#) and [Vienna](#). It's an exceptionally big year for [the Caribbean](#) and [Mexico](#), especially when it comes to popular points brands we already love, like [Park Hyatt](#), [St. Regis](#), [W](#) and [Waldorf Astoria](#).

For the rest of the year, this list serves as our guiding light as we send staffers to see if these hotels are really worth the hype and, more importantly, your hard-earned cash, points and miles. — *Tanner Saunders, senior hotels reporter*

Orient Express La Minerva



Orient Express La Minerva. LA MINERVA

Rome

Expected opening: Spring

Following the forthcoming [La Dolce Vita](#) train launch this spring, Orient Express continues its takeover of Italy with its very first hotel, featuring 93 rooms and suites in Rome's circa-1620 Piazza della Minerva palace. Renowned architect Hugo Toro has paired contemporary, sleek vibes with art deco elegance throughout the luscious hotel, where dining outlets include a rooftop Mediterranean restaurant and a hidden speakeasy. The spa features a Turkish hammam.

Why we're excited: The location, not even a block from the Pantheon, is ideal, but its history as one of the most opulent Roman hotels dating to 1811 — where many writers, artists and icons have stayed — is also captivating. — *Kathryn Romeyn*

Rates at [La Minerva](#) start at around \$1,348 per night.

TRAVEL

These are the best train trips in the world to take in 2025 and beyond

From luxury heritage routes to routine service passing through extraordinary scenery, here are 19 of our favorite rail journeys.





TRAIN LEAD The world's oldest railway is the Tanfield Railway in County Durham, England, which opened in 1725 and was originally used to transport coal. 200 years later, rail journeys are an essential part of travelling the world.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ROBERTO MOIOLA, SYSAWORLD

By Lorna Parkes, Oliver Smith, Kerry Walker, and Farida Zeynalova
February 12, 2025



This article was produced by *National Geographic Traveller* (UK).

Train trips deliver a little slice of effortless adventure, whisking travellers from A to B against a backdrop of ever-changing landscapes passing beyond the window and with a varied cast of staff and passengers. Hop aboard, whether you'd prefer an uber-luxurious service to the base of Peru's Machu Picchu in Peru, to rattle on a tea train through the hills of Sri Lanka or to putter along on a rural service through Wales.



| To honour the arrival and departure of the Rocky Mountaineer, flags are waved at the platform.

PHOTOGRAPH BY REBECCA STUMPF



Journeys onboard Dolce Vita Orient Express start and end in Rome.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ALEXANDR SPATARI, GETTY IMAGES

7. La Dolce Vita Orient Express, Italy

Best for: classic design

Route: Rome to Rome

Journey time: Two-three days

La Dolce Vita is a new luxury train with a difference. Rather than channelling the golden age of 1920s travel as its peers often do, the service takes its cue from the 1960s and 70s — with mirrored surfaces, mid-century light fittings and a whiff of a Federico Fellini production. It makes its debut this spring with itineraries panning up and down the Italian peninsula, one of the most cinematic being the one that links Rome, the Venetian lagoon and Portofino on the Ligurian coast. Compartment from €7,440 per person (£6,175), based on two sharing.

AFAR

12 Hotels Opening This Year Worth Planning an Entire Trip Around

Afar's resident hotel expert uncovers 12 of the most alluring new and renovated hotels of 2025, from California to Indonesia.

It's my job at Afar to scout extraordinary hotel experiences that enrich travelers and take them beyond what they might expect to experience in a place. So unsurprisingly, I've been researching a number of exciting retreats that are new or majorly refurbished for 2025. And what a year it'll be: There are grande dames poised for a new chapter, beloved hotel brands establishing themselves on new continents, and other lodgings that immerse us in the most beautiful corners of the planet. If you're not already planning your travels around some of these new places to stay, I urge you to reconsider.

I've already shared my excitement about the [Waldorf Astoria New York](#), an art deco masterpiece in the heart of Manhattan that's set to unveil a top-to-bottom overhaul later this year. It's one of the year's biggest openings and should be a must for anyone interested in history and legendary hospitality. And now I present 11 more hotels that are so special they're worth the trip alone.

Orient Express La Minerva



The facade of Orient Express La Minerva in Rome Courtesy of Orient Express La Minerva

- **Location:** Rome
- **Opening date:** April 1, 2025

The name **Orient Express** is synonymous with luxury train travel. And in April 2025, under the custodianship of hospitality company Accor, it's launching its first luxury hotel with the debut of **Orient Express La Minerva** near the Pantheon in Rome. Named after one of my favorite piazzas in the Eternal City (known for its ancient elephant obelisk), the hotel is located in a 17th-century palazzo and will have 93 guest rooms (36 of them suites) with art deco flourishes, dark wood details, and marble bathrooms. Also in the works: a Turkish hammam and a rooftop restaurant. *From \$1,040*

RAIL NICE The UK train line 'that time forgot' is crowned one of the best in the world by National Geographic

Plus, we reveal Sun Travel's favourite train journeys to take in the world

Hope Brotherton, Travel Reporter

Published: 13:34, 3 Mar 2025 | Updated: 13:34, 3 Mar 2025



A BUDGET-FRIENDLY train journey in the UK that takes just four hours from start to finish has been named among the best in the world.

From Scotland's [West Highland Line](#) to voyages on the [East Coast Main Line](#), there are some pretty breathtaking stretches of track in the UK.

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The Heart of Wales Railway Line has been named among the best in the world by a team of travel experts Credit: Alamy

One of those is the Heart of [Wales](#) Railway Line, which has been ranked among the top 19 train journeys to take in the world in 2025 by National Geographic.

While it comes as no surprise to find luxury services like America's Rocky Mountaineer and [Italy's La Dolce Vita Orient Express](#), the pocket-friendly UK route won over judges thanks to its rustic charm.

[National Geographic wrote](#): "The Heart of Wales Line is sometimes described as a railway line that time forgot – a sleepy, single-track artery that cuts diagonally across the centre of the country, clattering over castellated Victorian viaducts and through rustic stations where passengers must flag down services with a hopeful outstretched thumb.

"Railway aficionados ride it for its lo-fi charm – but holidaymakers, too, can use it to explore the quiet Cambrian hinterland at speeds rarely exceeding 30mph, alighting at quaint spa towns like Llandrindod Wells, discovering battle-scarred castles like those at Dinefwr and Llandovery or setting out on bracing walks in the uplands of Elenydd, where the treeless slopes brood over the rails."

VOGUE

MAR

ALESSANDRO
MICHELE
CATE
BLANCHETT
SARAH BURTON
EMMA
CORRIN
HAIDER
ACKERMANN
MICHAELA
YEARWOOD-DAN
VARADA SETHU

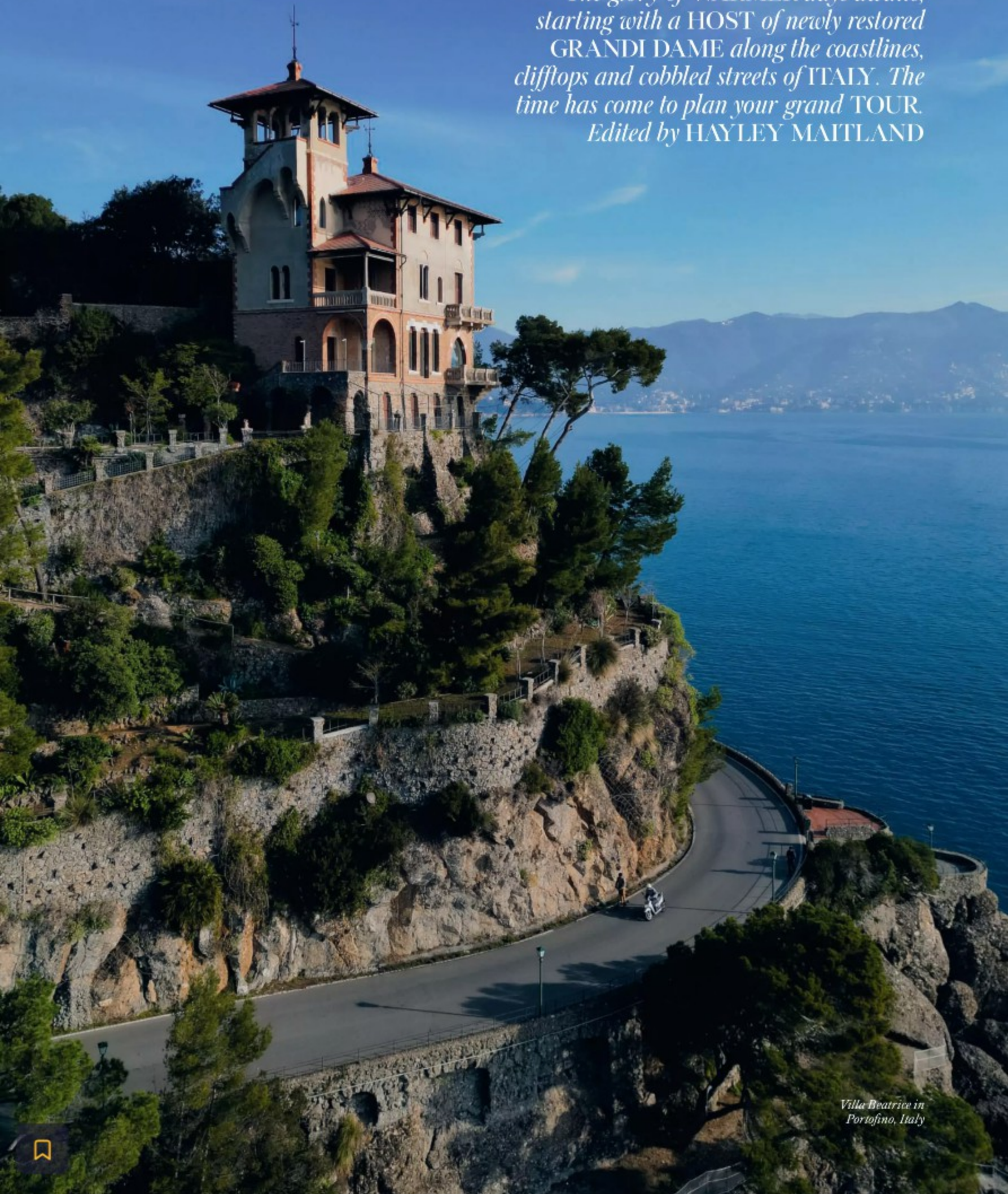
*The NEW
HEADLINERS
starring*

TYLA



VENI, VIDI, *VICI*

*The glory of WARMER days awaits,
starting with a HOST of newly restored
GRANDI DAME along the coastlines,
cliff tops and cobbled streets of ITALY. The
time has come to plan your grand TOUR.*
Edited by HAYLEY MAITLAND



*Villa Beatrice in
Portofino, Italy*



I

f you've ever visited Splendido, A Belmond Hotel (*below*) high above Portofino's La Piazzetta, you might recall, on your stroll down to the blue-green Ligurian Sea, passing a string of candy-coloured, cove-side palazzos mere feet from the water. The most enviable address among them? Villa Beatrice, an art nouveau mansion whose sea garden and wraparound terrace are made for sipping Aperol as the sun goes down over the Italian Riviera.

Come July, the turreted residence will open its doors as a private holiday villa under the Belmond umbrella. "It really captures the spirit of the region," Martin Brudnizki, who oversaw the restoration of the property, tells *Vogue*. Enchanted by Tuscan architect Gino Coppè's original 1913 frescoes, the Annabel's designer echoed their floral, marine and ribbon motifs across ceilings, walls and textiles, while an ice-cream-hued palette draws a through-line from Splendido to its sophisticated little sister. Brudnizki is behind the former's extensive, two-year refurbishment too, filling the converted Benedictine monastery's rooms with Albisola ceramics and Graniglia alla Genovese tiles. The reimagining of the hotel culminates this June with the unveiling of a refreshed main building and a Dior spa, including four treatment cabins dotted around the star-jasmine-scented, bougainvillea-draped grounds.

And it isn't the only national treasure to have received a new lease of life either.

Nestled among the majestic Dolomites, the storybook 1930s lodge of Rosa Alpina (*right*) has also had a makeover, courtesy of Aman, ahead of its reopening this summer. Still presided over by third-generation owners the Pizzininis (who have played host to everyone from George Clooney to the Prince of Monaco over the years), the hotel's Amanification has included a reimagining of 50 sumptuous alpine chalet-style rooms and suites in the shadow of Lavarella. A summer excursion here might involve clambering up steep edelweiss-lined paths to turquoise lakes before dinner at Norbert Niederkofler's three-Michelin-starred Atelier Moessmer, where each and every meal is a paean to South Tyrolean ingredients: alpine strawberries, larch-smoked trout, pine gelée...

For more urban pleasures, dip down to the capital for a Roman holiday at Orient Express La Minerva (*below right*), the first hotel from the brand restoring '20s and '30s art-deco carriages to routes made famous by Agatha Christie. The former 17th-century palace reopens this April just a coin's toss from the Pantheon, with its rooms giving out onto Bernini's obelisk-carrying elephant (*right*). Naturally, its rebirth leans into its remarkable heritage, complete with Doric columns, Murano chandeliers and 19th-century sculptor Rinaldo Rinaldi's Carrara marble renderings of various Roman deities – including Minerva, the goddess of art, herself. That's before mentioning the rooftop, from which you can admire the colossal dome of the Eternal City's fabled temple, alongside the spire of the Sant'Ivo alla Sapienza and the roof of the Quirinal Palace... The allure of summer in bel paese, it seems, is a long way from waning. RADHIKA SETH





SHUTTERSTOCK

From the sparkling Italian lakes to the Cotswold countryside, here's where GH readers are holidaying in 2025

We reveal your favourite destinations and the good news is, there's still time to book!

BY [JO BLYTH](#) PUBLISHED: 04 MARCH 2025

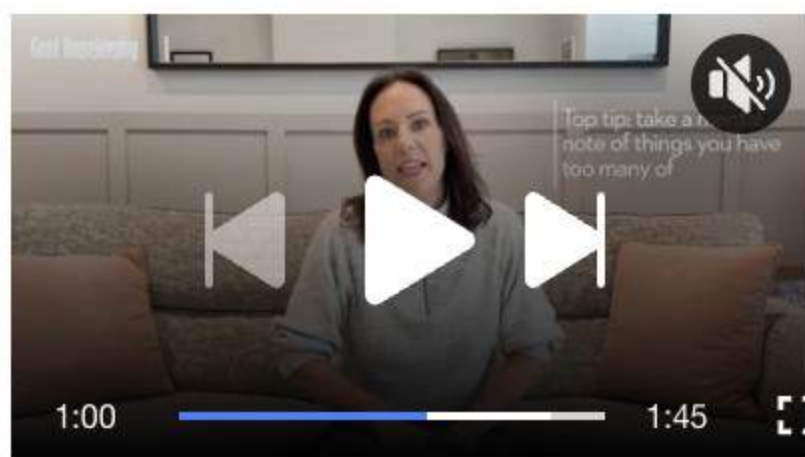
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FIND YOUR PERFECT TOUR

Here at Good Housekeeping we work hard to bring you a carefully curated selection of unique tours — and we can see which ones you've been busy booking so far this year. [Italy](#) and the [UK](#) are standing out as clear favourites, with destinations like [Lake Como](#) and The [Isles of Scilly](#) among the most popular with our readers.

MORE FROM GOOD HOUSEKEEPING

How To Organise Your Junk Drawer





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We can see some clear themes when it comes to what you like doing on your holidays. We know Good Housekeeping readers love [beautiful gardens](#), and this is reflected in your holiday habits; trips like our [Kent and Sussex holiday](#) with Sarah Raven and our [Cotswolds trip](#) with Adam Henson are among our most-booked getaways.

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EMICRISTEA // GETTY IMAGES

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VISIT BOLOGNA WITH GH

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COTSWOLDS FARM PARK

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ANTON ALEKSENKO // GETTY IMAGES

It's no wonder that our fantastic tour of [India's Golden Triangle](#) is proving so popular with our readers. This holiday will take you to some of the country's holiest sites, through the fascinating cities of the Golden Triangle, and deep into the jungles of Ranthambore National Park to search for tigers.

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VISIT VERONA WITH GH

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COURTESY OF LA DOLCE VITA ORIENT EXPRESS

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Where Good Housekeeping readers are travelling in 2025

Story by Jo Blyth • 2h • ⌚ 5 min read

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└ Sunset looking over Varenna on Lake Como, Italy
© kelvinjay - Getty Images

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└ Bologna, Emilia-Romagna, Italy
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▶ **Related video:** Top Hidden Travel Destinations for US Citizens in 2025 (Travel Bucketlist)



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Copy of Adam with Golden Guernsey kid (1) (2).JPG
© Cotswolds Farm Park

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Club Yolo

Spring Moodboard

People, places and things we're excited about!



Clockwise from top left: Casa Lawa (photo by Alicia Waite), La Minerva, a drink at the Romeo Roma, Villa Serbelloni, matches from The Ten Bells, umbrellas at the Belmond Splendido, Pensione America, La Dolce Vita Orient Express, La Salumina, shoulder bag from Brady

It's been a while since we've done a Moodboard, which was a regular part of our old Substack Intel newsletter. It's whatever we're into right now: who we've met recently, a book we can't wait for, hotels that are opening, travel industry bits and bobs—and occasionally a transporting playlist. Hope you like!

Rome is still on a new hotel opening bender. This spring, La Minerva opens in a 16th-century palace near the Pantheon—and owner Orient Express is also launching La Dolce Vita, a 9-carriage mid-century train designed by DimoreStudio making stops between Rome/Sicily and Venice/Tuscany. Newcomer Romeo Roma was designed by Zaha Hadid, with an Alain Ducasse ristorante and museum displaying Roman walls and artifacts unearthed during construction. The Hotel d'Inghilterra (one-time watering hole of writers and artists) off the Piazza di Spagna reopened last fall after a respectful refresh. Also imminent: Corinthia Rome in the 19c. Bank of Italy HQ, and Nobu Roma on via Veneto.

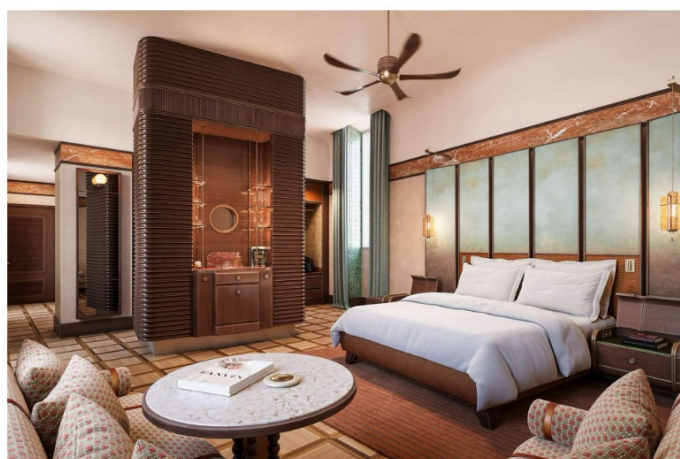
THE HOTTEST HOTEL OPENINGS *TO HAVE ON YOUR RADAR*



From under-the-radar island sanctuaries to urban masterpieces, there's a wealth of magnificent recent openings and new hotels on the horizon.

KATIE BERRINGTON rounds up the ones you need to know about now

Fashion assistant Haajira Muzzamil



Known for its iconic train journeys, Orient Express is opening its first luxury hotel, La Minerva, in spring 2025

1

Orient Express La Minerva Rome, Italy

World-renowned for its iconic train journeys, the Orient Express brand is expanding its legendary, luxury hospitality offering, bringing its style to a hotel in the heart of Rome. It has transformed the 17th-century palace La Minerva in the legendary Piazza della Minerva, steps away from the Pantheon, fusing art deco opulence with modern elegance and preserving the property's rich historical legacy. The opening also coincides with the launch of La Dolce Vita Orient Express train, which will allow guests to embark on a captivating voyage across Italy in unrivaled style. *Opening in April 2025*



All Aboard! Boomers Are Making Train Travel Cool Again (for All Ages)

IT'S NOSTALGIA PLUS A LITTLE LUXURY

Nostalgia, adventure and varying degrees of luxury: That's the promise of a vacation-by-train, and it's one of the fastest-growing segments in travel. According to industry authority [Railbookers](#), train travel revenue worldwide increased by 30 percent between 2023 and 2024. And as a longtime travel writer and Gen X world traveler, I can tell you why—thanks to my mom.

Back in the '80s, my mom, acting on a half-baked [mother-daughter vacation idea](#), whisked me away on an Amtrak train journey across the Southeast. She'd heard rumors that domestic train travel—never exactly a moneymaker—was going to be lessened or even shut down altogether, and so she wanted her daughter to experience the magic while it still existed. I have no memory of the event, but she tells me how disappointed she was by the dirty train cars, poor or non-existent service and downmarket trappings of the fellow travelers. I think my mom was expecting a glamour experience out of Hitchcock's 1938 *The Lady Vanishes* or even his 1951 thriller *Strangers on a Train*. Instead, she got a sort of sad Greyhound bus station on rails.

Well, looks like someone's turned up the pilot light on this eternal flame for my mom's generation, since trains are now a hot ticket among luxury travelers. Case in point: Last year, Railbookers strung together [seven luxury train trips](#) on four continents (with international flights adjoining) for \$114,000—and there was a waiting list of 500 names. Makes sense, since “slow travel” continues to be a [travel trend to look out for](#), and there are now trains which ape the charm and grace of the movies, only this time they're channeling millennial favorite director Wes Anderson and his cool 2007 flick *The Darjeeling Limited*. (Fun fact: Anderson designed a [dining car](#) IRL for the British Pullman, a Belmond Train.)

“I’m European so I grew up traveling via trains as a kid and it’s still my favorite way to travel today,” says PureWow executive editor and millennial traveler [Alexia Dellner](#). “Actually now that I have children of my own, I may even appreciate it more! There’s something so convenient about being able to stretch your legs whenever you choose and go grab a snack at your leisure (two key factors when traveling with littles). Not to mention how magical it is to watch the world outside fly by and the landscape change as you get closer to your destination.”

Here's a sampling of some train trips you can take (or rather, your boomer parents can take as a SKI trip (SKI is boomer slang for “spending kids’ inheritance”):



ORIENT EXPRESS

LA DOLCE VITA ORIENT EXPRESS

Touted as Italy’s first luxury train, it’s debuting this year with eight roundtrip excursions around the country from Rome.



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Here's a sampling of some train trips you can take (or rather, your boomer parents can take as a SKI trip (SKI is boomer slang for “spending kids’ inheritance”):



ORIENT EXPRESS

LA DOLCE VITA ORIENT EXPRESS

Touted as Italy’s first luxury train, it’s debuting this year with eight roundtrip excursions around the country from Rome.



All Aboard: Italy's Luxe New Train

Luxury is back on track.



Welcome to **Book It!**, our monthly look at a buzzy new hotel or resort we're excited about.

Italy's first-ever luxury train is pulling into the station.

Rolling out this spring, **La Dolce Vita Orient Express** is redefining rail travel with eight dreamy routes.



What to Know:

Designed by [Dimorestudio](#), the train blends mid-century Italian glamour with a modern edge. Three-Michelin-starred Chef Heinz Beck transforms every meal into a masterpiece, from leisurely breakfasts to Aperitivo hours.



With eight itineraries through Venice, Florence and beyond, choosing just one is the hardest part. Whether sipping wine in Tuscany or unwinding by the Portofino coast — this is how you do *la dolce vita*.



Rates from \$7,300 for a three-day itinerary, [book here](#).

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Home > Travel

Unique Honeymoon Destinations For 2025

By Jemima Sissons
2 Days Ago

*Off-the-beaten-track ideas
for your post-wedding
getaway*

[more](#)

From cowboying in Utah to dusk dives with whale sharks, these are new wave honeymoons worth saying yes to, says **Jemima Sissons**. Here are some ideas for where to honeymoon in 2025.

Where To Go For Your Honeymoon In 2025

The Athena poster honeymoons of long ago conjured up starry eyed couples on icing sugar beaches, free flowing cocktails in hands, doing... as little as possible. The sands have shifted and the newly betrothed are just as likely to be donning their Salomons and ditching their phones as seeking out under-the-radar palm-fringed islands. 'Couples are increasingly looking for activities and experiences that make their honeymoon feel completely different to a normal holiday, whether it's through adventure or exclusive access,' says Charlotte Wells, director of global tailor-made product at A&K. This, with a side order of sustainability and wellness.

'Now couples are seeking deeper, more immersive diversions that offer both adventure and luxury, and – importantly – a chance to reconnect with nature,' adds Tamara Lohan, co-founder and CEO of Mr & Mrs Smith. 'The self-care honeymoon is still very much an evolving trend. Couples are looking to unwind and fully reconnect, not just with each other, but with themselves too.'

Alongside adventure, more and more couples are taking an increasingly ethical stance in their honeymoon choices, according to Original Travel's founder Tom Barber: 'Many are choosing to ditch air travel, and go by train or seek out a lesser-known region of a popular country to alleviate the issue of overtourism.' With this in mind, where in the world should honeymooners set their sights?

Adventure

62° Nord, Norway

For a trip rooted in sustainability, Norway's 62° Nord embraces the ideal of friluftsliv, the 'free air' life, which centres on enjoying nature without leaving a footprint. Spanning three properties immersed in majestic settings, rugged adventure encompasses everything from hiking remote mountain passes and fjord swimming to sunrise kayaking and, for the intrepid, seeking out polar bears in loftiest Svalbard. Cosy up in the remote Nordic chalet-style Storfjord Hotel or the storied Hotel Union Øye overlooking the fjords, where evenings are spent alongside log burning fires.

BOOK: From £347 a night, [62.no](https://www.62.no)



(c) Marius Remoy

Bolivia, South America

Heading to the salt flats of Bolivia, bed down in a bespoke light-impact camp, which will disappear without a trace after your departure, overseen by pioneers of the most stylish derring-do escapes, Cookson Adventures. Experiencing the world's largest salt flat in total privacy, the trip combines private-chef picnic setups with visits to giant cactus

islands, before exploring the rich cultural heritage of the country's capital La Paz. 'We've definitely seen more honeymooners going for away longer, almost treating it like a mini sabbatical,' says Nick Davies, managing director of Cookson Adventures. 'They see it as a great opportunity to start married life positively by doing an epic adventure together, building new memories through experiences.'

BOOK: From £150,000 for two weeks, cooksonadventures.com

The Lodge at Blue Sky, Utah

For superior mountain dwelling, playing cowboy by summer or ski touring in winter, escape to the spectacular The Lodge at Blue Sky, Auberge, nestled under the gaze of the Wasatch mountains in Utah. Learn to horse whisper or axe throw before a private Macallan-led dinner at the hilltop Speyside Yurt.

BOOK: From £1,200, aubergeresorts.com

New Wave Beach

Rodrigues, Mauritius

With its easy-on-the-eye villas and flip-and-flop ease, [the Maldives](#) has its place, but there are some enviable new sand and sea escapes in far-flung locations. An hour-and-a-half's flight from Mauritius is the (for now) untouched Creole island of Rodrigues, offering nature at its rawest, limestone caves, volcanic peaks and swathes of lagoons that are home to rare birds and marine life, such as the noddy seabird. Bed down in the sparkling-new Constance Tekoma with just 32 Creole-style beachfront rooms.

BOOK: From £2,169 for seven nights per person, including return flights and transfers, turquoiseholidays.co.uk



Musandam Peninsula, Oman

Also less on the beaten track, Oman's Musandam Peninsula is one of the least visited but most beautiful areas of the country. Combine a four-night stay at Six Senses Zighy Bay with excursions on a dhow cruise around the coast and snorkelling in the crystal-clear water. This is offered by Audley Travel, which found that 19 percent of their clients last year were travelling on a honeymoon. Alex Bentley, head of product at Audley Travel, says: 'We are seeing a rise in bookings for hybrid trips, such as pairing a Kenyan safari with time relaxing on the beaches of the Seychelles.'

BOOK: From £10,595 a person, audleytravel.com

The Philippines, Southeast Asia

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northern archipelago on the map, private-island resort Lagen Island in El Nido, Palawan, re-emerges after an extensive renovation. Framed by lush forest and a sparkling lagoon, it offers a two-level spa, a vastly expanded beach area, a new dive centre and a biodiversity discovery centre where guests can learn about the island ecosystem before seeking out reef sharks and sea turtles in secluded bays.

BOOK: From £1,000 a night, elnidoresorts.com

Water & Rail

Raja Ampat, Indonesia

Recalling a golden age of Agatha Christie-style travel, water or rail offers slow, sustainable voyaging. In far-flung Raja Ampat in Indonesia, marine citadels teeming with aquatic life greet snorkellers and experienced scuba divers. Aqua Expeditions' luxury vessel Aqua Blu is the first long-range ocean explorer yacht permanently based in Indonesia. Days are spent swimming with whale sharks, snorkelling with manta rays or spotting iguanas on land before sundowners at an ancient fort and then on-board feasting on spice-route inspired catch of the day with sambal.

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BOOK: From £3,000 a night per person, [orient-express.com](https://www.orient-express.com)



The Britannic Explorer, England and Wales

Closer to home, soak in the majesty of the British Isles on The Britannic Explorer, a Belmond train, which will offer the first ever sleeper train touring England and Wales, with three-night journeys departing from London. The three routes will traverse Cornwall, the Lake District and Wales, with interiors dressed by Albion Nord, and zero waste food in the limed oak-lined dining carriage by L'Enclume's chef, Simon Rogan.

BOOK: From £5,800 a person, [belmond.com](https://www.belmond.com)

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BOOK: From £1,500 a night, lhw.com

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BOOK: From £800 a night, oberoihotels.com



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Beach Lodge on KwaZulu Natal's Elephant Coast, fly to Marakele National Park where an air-conditioned vehicle will whisk you to Marataba Mountain Lodge for immersion into safari surrounded by nature. With five Scandi-style rooms, wood-burning fireplaces, and private decks overlooking the 67,000-hectare park, there is game spotting by day; by night, turn the phones off (there is no signal) as you slumber in treetops in their Thabametsi treehouse, serenaded by the sounds of rare birds and the rustlings of antelope and leopards.

BOOK: From £6,745 a person, including international flights, scottdunn.com



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Unique Honeymoon Destinations For 2025

Story by Country and Town House • 1d • ⌚ 6 min read

From cowboying in Utah to dusk dives with whale sharks, these are new wave honeymoons worth saying yes to, says **Jemima Sissons**. Here are some ideas for where to honeymoon in 2025.

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└ Mountains and lake in Norway

(c) Marius Remoy

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▶ **Related video:** Luxurious Resorts in America for a Romantic Staycation (Travel Bucketlist)



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Interiors of The Britannic Explorer,

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— A tiger

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CRUISE

SUSTAINABILITY

DESTINATIONS

LUXURY

GRECOTEL
LUX·ME

LUXURY MADE EASY

Crete, Corfu, West Peloponnese, Kos, Rhodes



NEED HOT NEW HOTELS TO SEND CLIENTS TO? HERE ARE OUR UK & EUROPE PICKS

12 MAR 2025 BY ROB GILL

There are luxury openings aplenty across the UK and the rest of Europe this year. Here are some of the most significant hotel debuts to look out for



Orient Express La Minerva is due to open in Rome this spring

ORIENT EXPRESS LA MINERVA

Italy has an enduring attraction among luxury clients but there's even more of a renaissance this year with excitement mounting as Orient Express prepares to open its first hotel. Orient Express La Minerva (orient-express.com) in Rome will also connect with the brand's new La Dolce Vita Orient Express trains. The renovated hotel in central Rome, formerly the historic Grand Hotel de La Minerve, features 93 rooms and a host of bars and restaurants including a new rooftop venue with views across the Eternal City. Opens: spring 2025

FOUR SEASONS RESORT MYKONOS

Mykonos has long been a magnet for luxury clients and hotel options will be enhanced with the debut of the Four Seasons Resort Mykonos, Greece

(fourseasons.com) in

Kalo Livadi Bay. Guests

can choose from 94 rooms, villas and suites,

while culinary delights include a modern twist on a traditional Mykonian kafeneio (café) and an alfresco poolside Italian eaterie. There will be a spa too.

Opens: summer 2025



Four Seasons is opening a new resort on the Greek island of Mykonos

FAIRMONT LA HACIENDA COSTA DEL SOL

Not to be outdone by its eastern neighbours, Spain's luxury cache will be burnished by the opening of the Fairmont La Hacienda Costa del Sol

(fairmont.com) in Andalusia, which will be the Accor-owned brand's first

resort on Europe's southern coast. The property will offer 213 rooms, suites and private villas, plus five restaurants and a spa. Open now

CORINTHIA BUCHAREST

Away from Europe's beaches, Corinthia is spreading its wings with a new all-suite property in the Romanian capital Bucharest. Corinthia Grand Hotel du

Boulevard Bucharest (corinthia.com) features just 30 suites with the alluring promise of combining "Belle Époque grandeur with modern elegance". Opens:

March 2025

**NEW YORK:
A ONE-OF-A-KIND CITY**

From Edinburgh and London
to New York/Newark

Discover More



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AIRLINES**

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STAR ALLIANCE



The Chancery Rosewood is in the former US Embassy building

THE CHANCERY ROSEWOOD

The transformation of the former US Embassy building into the long-awaited The Chancery Rosewood ([rosewoodhotels.com](https://www.rosewoodhotels.com)) is set to be one of the star openings in London this year. The 146-room hotel in Mayfair's Grosvenor Square is being created by legendary architect Sir David Chipperfield with interiors from Joseph Dirand. A "variety" of formal and casual restaurants are promised, alongside an Asaya spa. Opens: summer 2025

SIX SENSES LONDON

The long-awaited debut of Six Senses ([sixsenses.com](https://www.sixsenses.com)) in the UK capital with a 109-room property housed within an art deco building in Bayswater, previously occupied by department store Whiteleys. Expect the usual culinary delights, the obligatory Six Senses Spa and a private members club called Six Senses Place. Opens: first half of 2025



Six Senses will be coming to London later this year

ARBEG HOUSE

Lovers of a “wee dram” can head to the refurbished Ardbeg House ([ardbeg.com](https://www.ardbeg.com)) on the Scottish island of Islay. Located close to whisky producer Ardbeg – known for its distinctive peaty and smoky malts – Ardbeg House features 12 rooms plus bar and restaurant. Guests can wet their whistles with two new exclusive whiskies. Opens: autumn 2025

MARCUS HOTEL PORTRUSH

Whiskey – of the Irish variety – will also be a major draw at the new Marcus Hotel Portrush ([hilton.com](https://www.hilton.com)) in Northern Ireland due to its access to nearby Bushmills Whiskey Distillery. The country’s first Tapestry Collection by Hilton property will open in time for the British Open golf tournament at the Royal Portrush course in July. Opens: Q2 2025

The New York Times

Immersed in Elegance as the World Rolls By: Luxury Sleeper Trains

From the Lake District in England to a lush island in Japan, here's a way to travel — and sleep — in style.

ITALY

[La Dolce Vita Orient Express](#)



Beginning this spring, La Dolce Vita Orient Express will depart from Rome for round-trip itineraries that visit various parts of Italy. Above, a rendering of one of the train's suites. Credit...La Dolce Vita Orient Express

Channeling the allure of Italy in the 1960s and 70s, this sleek train will begin offering eight round-trip itineraries in April, each departing from Rome, where you'll find the new La Dolce Vita Orient Express lounge, at Roma Ostiense train station. From there, depending on your itinerary, you'll travel to places like Tuscany and Piedmont. Some itineraries may appeal to train buffs, such as the [Rome-to-Sicily trip](#) during which you'll see the train decouple and be loaded onto a ferry to cross the Strait of Messina, then get reassembled on the other side. Indulge in meals overseen by the chef [Heinz Beck](#), perhaps best known for [La Pergola](#), the three Michelin-starred restaurant in Rome. At night you'll sleep in one of 12 deluxe cabins with mirrored walls (a sofa unfolds to a double bed, and ottomans can be used as coffee tables) or in one of 18 suites with beds, sofas, tables and armchairs. An additional suite, meant to be the grandest on the train, is in the works. Prices for a one-night itinerary from 3,500 euros, or about \$3,800, a person in a deluxe cabin.

Should you wish to supplement your train travels with stays in Rome or Venice, the first ever hotels from Orient Express are also opening this year, including the [Orient Express La Minerva](#), a former 17th-century palace in Rome, and the [Orient Express Palazzo Donà Giovannelli](#) in Venice.

Where Travel Will Take Us Next, According to Our Top Travel Specialists

From the rise of nocturnal travel to the meaning of “JOMO,” here are the trends our experts think you should know.

When it comes to trends, the last five years have been head-spinning. First there was armchair travel, then [road trips](#), then revenge travel. People have taken trips in [big groups](#) and alone, to the remotest corners of the earth and the busiest cities. Through it all, everyone has been obsessed with wellness. To help us get a handle on the new reasons and ways to travel in 2025, we tapped [our extensive network of specialists](#). From the rise of nocturnal travel to the meaning of “JOMO,” here's what they think you should know.

Hotels are hitting the high seas

In the coming years expect more resort brands to take their five-star service out on the water. “This is perfect for luxury travelers who might be cruise curious,” says [Craig Mungary](#) of [Elite Global Journeys](#). The [Ritz-Carlton Yacht Collection](#) launched the trend in 2022 with the 149-suite *Evrima*; this year the company will add its third luxury ship, *Luminara*. Next year [Four Seasons](#) will unveil a 95-suite ship in the [Caribbean](#); [Orient Express](#)'s 54-cabin *Corinthian* will sail the Adriatic, Caribbean, and Mediterranean; and [Aman](#) will introduce a 50-suite vessel in 2027.

Why choose? Rail-and-sail trips are taking off

Each month seems to bring [another train](#) or [ship launch](#) in one of the world's most exciting places. [AndBeyond](#) is now in the Pacific with *Galápagos Explorer*; this spring *La Dolce Vita* [Orient Express](#) will start rolling through Italy. Increasingly, travelers are looking to combine these experiences. [Jimmy Carroll](#) of [Pelorus](#) has been designing itineraries that pair ultra-luxury train journeys with island-hopping adventures on liveaboards: “Travelers want to visit multiple destinations on once-in-a-lifetime trips that immerse them in several locations and change their perspective.” Call a travel specialist to manage the logistics on your behalf. [Tisha Neufville](#) of [Neufville Travel](#) says, “One client had a two-week cruise through Asia, and called me to tack on a solo trip on [Belmond's Eastern & Oriental Express](#). I also helped her with all the hotels, tours, and flights before, between, and after both the cruise and train.” These multivessel round-the-world trips feel like another example of our eternal nostalgia for the romantic, swashbuckling spirit of travel's golden age. Perhaps that golden age is back again.

In Europe and Japan, Luxury Sleeper Trains

LINK: <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/18/travel/luxury-sleeper-trains-europe-japan.html>



Immersed in Elegance as the World Rolls By: Luxury Sleeper Trains From the Lake District in England to a lush island in Japan, here's a way to travel -- and sleep -- in style. A deluxe suite on the Seven Stars train, which offers itineraries on Kyushu, an island in southern Japan known for its cuisine and breathtaking scenery. Credit... Seven Stars By Stephanie Rosenbloom March 18, 2025, 5:00 a.m. ET If you've longed to indulge in elegant rail travel, but thought the days of lavish cars and live music were over, you're in luck. New trains as well as new routes, amenities and special events are rolling out, enticing travelers to sit back, Champagne in hand, and glide through some of the world's most beautiful landscapes. Be it the Lake District in England or the mountainous island of Kyushu in Japan, these journeys offer suites that rival rooms in high-end hotels, and dishes from chefs whose restaurants

have won Michelin stars. Here's where to climb aboard. Paris to Tuscany and Paris to Portofino The Venice Simplon-Orient-Express, a Belmond Train, Europe, will take passengers from Paris to Italy. The train's restored carriages date to the 1920s and '30s. Credit... Christophe Coenraets Beginning in May, this opulent train, with its restored 1920s and '30s carriages, will offer a new, three-night journey called Paris to Tuscany by a Legend of the Rails. Step into Bar Car 3674 to enjoy live piano music before retiring to your jewel-toned room. Options include a 'historic cabin' with seats that convert to berths (communal restrooms are at the end of each sleeper carriage); a suite with its own marble bathroom and a double or twin bed that converts to a seating area; or a grand suite with a marble bathroom, double bed, dining area and 24-

hour butler service. During your travels, you'll visit Siena, Italy, where you'll tour the Gothic-style historic center. You'll stop by a 13th-century palace in the Piazza del Campo where you can savor an aperitif while taking in panoramic views of the city, and spend two nights amid vineyards and olive groves at Castello di Casole, a Belmond Hotel, Tuscany. While there, stroll the grounds, join a stargazing session at the outdoor amphitheater and unwind with live music in the courtyard. Prices (including meals with wine) are from 9,350 pounds, or about \$12,100 a person, based on two guests sharing a historic cabin and two nights in a junior suite at Castello di Casole. In June, the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express will begin traveling to Portofino from Paris again (last year was its inaugural journey), this time with an added carriage: the L'Observatoire sleeper carriage, designed by the French artist, JR. The train's largest

accommodation will have its own library with more than 1,000 books, a tearoom with a fireplace, even a skylight so you can watch the clouds as the train moves along. The trip concludes at Splendido, a Belmond Hotel, which, beginning in June, will unveil renovations and updates to communal spaces, including a breakfast area, cocktail bar and Dior spa. Prices (which include meals and wine) for Paris to Portofino are from £10,400 a person, based on two guests sharing a historic cabin and two nights in a premium room at Splendido. Italy [La Dolce Vita Orient Express](#) Image Beginning this spring, [La Dolce Vita Orient Express](#) will depart from Rome for round-trip itineraries that visit various parts of Italy. Above, a rendering of one of the train's suites.Credit...[La Dolce Vita Orient Express](#) We are having trouble retrieving the article content. Please enable JavaScript in your browser settings. Thank you for your patience while we verify access. If you are in Reader mode please exit and log into your Times account, or subscribe for all of The Times. Thank you for your patience while we verify access. Already a subscriber? Log in. Want all of The Times? Subscribe. Advertisement

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7 hottest new hotels to book in Italy this summer

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7 hottest new hotels to book in Italy this summer
Bloomberg | | Posted by Zarafshan Shiraz Mar 18, 2025 04:29 PM IST Read this news in brief form Share Via Copy Link Now's the time to plan your travels if you haven't already - - and these properties, from the Dolomites down to Puglia, are a great place to start. Italy sells itself: gallery after gallery of Renaissance masterpieces, slippery forkfuls of cacio e pepe, the way the seaside looks even better with a spritz in hand. Some 458 million overnight stays were recorded by travellers seduced by such draws in 2024--setting a tourism record and making Italy the second-most-visited country in all of Europe, just behind Spain. 7 dreamy Italian hotels that will make you pack your bags immediately.(AP Photo/Andrew Medichini) 'I joke that Italy is always on top of my bucket list,' says Christian Clerc, chief executive officer of Auberge Resorts Collection, an

acclaimed US hospitality brand that in recent weeks opened its first Italian hotel, located in the Tuscan hills outside of Florence. 'I feel like everybody's connected to Italy somehow. If you like beauty and culture and food, you probably love coming back again and again just as I do.' That perpetual demand explains why each year an impressive crop of resort debuts seems to raise the bar for dolce-vita-style indulgence. And in 2025, the newcomers are so impressive, they're forcing Italy's classic bastions of luxury to raise their games in turn. If you're like Clerc and put Italy at the top of your must-visit list, here are seven hot new and newly reinvigorated hotels to book this summer. Collegio alla Querce This urban resort offers the best of both worlds: It's just a 15-minute drive from Brunelleschi's Duomo in the center of town, but it's removed enough to feel like a Tuscan countryside

retreat. Its 83 rooms and suites occupy a cluster of 16th century buildings that have assumed many lives--first a school for Florence's elite (hence the name), then a chapel, then a theater. Now it's once again fit for society gatherings, with vine-covered trellises shading the pool and a dimly lit bar in the old headmaster's office. Shelves in the rooms are lined with ceramics commissioned from local artisans; they inform an elegant, earth-toned color scheme all around. And because luxury is all about exclusive experiences now, activities include pasta making with the resort's chefs, wine tasting classes and private after-hours tours of the Accademia Gallery. Rooms from around EUR1,000 (\$1,092). Vista Ostuni In July, Ostuni, a village in Puglia known for its medieval architecture and winding cobblestone streets, will get its first hotel of note just outside the city center in a 14th century palazzo. Its

generous suites--starting at some 645 square feet--will have views of either the sea or Ostuni's famed whitewashed buildings. (The unique limestone architecture is why Italians call it the La Perla Bianca, or 'the White Pearl.') Lauded Italian chef Andrea Berton of Milan's Michelin-starred Berton will open a fine-dining restaurant downstairs, while on the roof there will be a bar overlooking the tranquil countryside. For guests eager to explore the surrounding area, private car transfers will head 15 minutes north to the seaside and its beach clubs; trips to see the triangular 'Trulli' houses in nearby Alberobello can easily be arranged, too. Rooms from around EUR1,400. **Orient Express** La Minerva The Eternal City is undergoing what feels like an eternal luxury hotel boom, and the latest, greatest entrant is smack in the middle of the Centro Storico, a 10-minute drive from Ostiense Station. The proximity is important as it's the sibling property to a new luxury train that shares the **Orient Express** name, taking guests from the capital to destinations like Sicily and Venice in opulent rail journeys that channel the 1920s art deco era. The hotel follows suit with palatial flourishes like marble shell-shaped sinks

in its 93 rooms. Top suites have frescoed ceilings and sweeping views of the Pantheon. Bonus: If you're keen to try the new train journeys before or after your stay, the hotel provides transfers to the station. Rooms from EUR1,000. Vetera Matera Matera in the country's south has been an in-the-know day trip thanks to its Sassi--rocky dwellings dug into caves, some of which date to the Paleolithic era. But few visitors have stayed overnight, given the town's lack of noteworthy hotels. That's about to change with the mid-April arrival of Vetera, which is ideally located for visitors who want to check out the famous structures. Its 23 rooms are carved into the Sassi; the same applies to the spa area, where the pools are built into the rocks. Guests can explore the town's stone buildings and winding cobbled streets on foot, some of which are featured in the 2021 James Bond film No Time to Die, and then cool down with a cocktail in hand at the outdoor bar. Rooms from around EUR500. Ancora Cortina The Dolomites have never been hotter, as the region unveils a series of hotels in anticipation of the 2026 Milan-Cortina Winter Olympics. It may still seem early, but Americans have long preferred the region

for summer hiking rather than winter skiing: It's when long afternoons cast a uniquely rosy glow on the mountainsides. Among the openings are Aman's yearslong overhaul of the iconic Rosa Alpina, whose name comes from that signature alpenglow. But we're partial to Ancora Cortina, a spinoff of celebrity-favorite Borgo Egnazia in Puglia. When it opens in May, its 38 rooms will bear the punchy design stamp of Vicky Charles, formerly head of design at Soho House. Notably, it's a redo of an old hotel that has anchored historic Cortina since 1826, with a location smack in the center of town. Rooms from EUR800. Lake Como Edition Here's what we said in January when writing about Lake Como Edition as one of Europe's most exciting openings in 2025: 'Once you've laid eyes on the Edition's floating pool, built to hover over Lake Como, you may not even notice the grand building that houses the 142-room hotel. Yet that structure is also a sight to behold: It's a transformed 19th century building with views to the Bellagio mountains from the western shores of the lake. Expect vibey, dimly lit bars and cool restaurants inside; this is an Edition, after all. That also means you'll be able to book your five-star

stay with Marriott Bonvoy points, a first for tony (and expensive) Lake Como.' We stand by every word. Opening date and rates to be confirmed. Splendid o, a Belmond Hotel The grande dame of Portofino is perched high in the hills with enviable views of the blue-green waters of the Ligurian Sea--and many of the rooms have terraces that face the bay. It's long been one of the most stylish places to stay in town (legends like Elizabeth Taylor have vacationed there) and will become even more of a spot to see and be seen when it reopens this June after a multiyear renovation from design superstar Martin Brudnizki. DJs will spin sets from the pool deck, and guests can splash up for cocktails and pasta at the new terrace restaurant, Splendido Grill. And because this is Belmond--a hotel company LVMH acquired in 2019--there will also be a Dior spa, where four treatment 'cabins' will offer al fresco massages set to the sound of crashing waves. Rooms from EUR2,400. Recommended Topics Share this article Read this news in brief form Share Via Copy Link Lake Como Tuscany Italy Italy Hotel Hotels Travel Traveller Air Travel Tour Tourism Tourist Tourist Spot Trip Catch every big

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The 7 hottest new hotels to book in Italy this summer

Italy sells itself: Gallery after gallery of Renaissance masterpieces, slippery forkfuls of cacio e pepe, the way the seaside looks even better with a spritz in hand. Some 458 million overnight stays were recorded by travellers seduced by such draws in 2024 — setting a tourism record and making Italy the second-most-visited country in all of Europe, just behind Spain.

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Orient Express La Minerva in Rome offers sweeping views of the Pantheon from its top suites. PHOTO BY @ORIENTEXPRESS /Instagram

Orient Express La Minerva

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