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A NEW GOAL

David Beckham talks
about family, his
Netflix documentary
and future plans

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THE SCENIC ROUTE

From the return of the Eastern & Oriental Express to exciting new routes in
32 Europe, Belmond has big plans for its fleet of luxury trains *By Eleanor Strauss*



Venice Simplon-Orient-Express suites feature elegant finishings of marble and custom marquetry

With more travellers taking longer, multi-destination trips, some modes of transport are finally getting their share of the spotlight, with luxury sleeper trains making a triumphant return to bucket lists around the world.

Also making a triumphant return is the Eastern & Oriental Express, A Belmond Train: the company recently announced that, after a four-year hiatus, it will launch two new seasonal journeys in Malaysia in 2024.

Both routes will depart from Singapore before journeying through Malaysia's ever-changing landscapes—from vibrant cities to fiery-hued sunsets tucked behind historic towns and lush plantations.

Its first route, Wild Malaysia, was curated in partnership with the global tiger conservation organisation Save Wild Tigers. Taking the country's Jungle Railway toward the eastern side of the peninsula, guests will have the opportunity to visit Taman Negara National Park—one of the oldest tropical rainforests in the world, and home to rare species including tigers, leopards and Sumatran rhinos.

Its second route, Essence of Malaysia, travels from Singapore's Woodlands station to Kuala Lumpur and Langkawi—disembarking in Alor Setar before boarding a private cruise to the island, where travellers will snorkel among the marine life that calls the Pulau Payar Marine Park home. Both journeys end in Penang, where visitors can explore the artistic and culinary heritage of the so-called Pearl of the Orient.

To say the Eastern & Oriental Express is returning with a new look wouldn't be quite right. Like the rest of Belmond's fleet of five-star trains, the design on board the Eastern & Oriental Express embraces the romance of days gone by, with intricate marquetry, luxurious fabrics, including Malaysian embroidery and fine silks, and other vintage-inspired finishings.



Clockwise, from left: A lively, indulgent evening in Bar Car 3674; a VSOE suite with large windows to enjoy an ever-changing view; bunk beds on board Eastern & Oriental Express; authentic Peranakan dishes are served on Eastern & Oriental Express; a vintage map of Malaysia, formerly Malaya

MORE IS MORE

Putting a contemporary spin on old-world elegance is something that Belmond does in spades. The company's vice president for trains and cruises, Gary Franklin, says, "It's important that these trains aren't museums. They have to be relevant."

Just take a look at the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express, where romance, nostalgia and a touch of hedonism are always in order. Its carriages date back to the 1920s and 1930s, and feature art deco elements and marble bathrooms; while its notorious Midnight Brunch in Bar Car 3674 is unapologetically indulgent: a lively affair of cocktails, champagne, lobster rolls and truffle club sandwiches, while a pianist plays until the last guest retires for the night (or morning).

Meanwhile, Eastern & Oriental Express brings guests closer to home with traditional Peranakan flavours, served in its dining carriages, Adisorn and Malaya. Each is decorated in floral

motifs, featuring either elm panels with light-wood design inlays or rich rosewood with decorative lacquered panels hand-painted with delicate flowers.

It, too, has a piano bar, which contains a striking green carpet featuring a tiger orchid that appears to bloom across the entire length of the car.

"It's like you're stepping into a movie, losing all concept of time and reality, from when you step on board to when you dress up for dinner, dining in these incredible restaurant cars where you're served amazing food and drinks by some very passionate individuals," says Franklin. "The look on people's faces is something I'll never tire of."

Leading the dining experience on board the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express is Jean Imbert, who runs the kitchen at Jean Imbert au Plaza Athénée, the Michelin-starred French restaurant in the Plaza Athénée hotel in Paris. He took over the institution in









Eastern & Oriental Express will journey through Malaysia's Jungle Railway in 2024. **Opposite page, clockwise from top left:** Cocktail hour on VSOE; opulent design elements abound on VSOE; the new Grand Suites on Belmond Royal Scotsman pay homage to the Scottish Highlands

2022, succeeding French culinary royalty Alain Ducasse.

It's a fitting touch for the vessel, which takes its champagne-sipping, caviar-bumping passengers to some of Europe's finest destinations. This summer, Belmond announced that the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express will launch a new route from Brussels to Venice in 2024. The group promises picturesque scenes, from soaring Alpine peaks and glacial lakes to the historic domes and spires of Italy's floating city.

GREAT SCOT

Further north, the Belmond Royal Scotsman will unveil two brand new Grand Suites that pay homage to the Scottish Highlands.

Making their debut in May 2024, the suites will come with double beds and a private lounge fitted with an armchair and sofa decked out in a custom-made tartan. There's also a modern take on the Orkney chair, a statement piece that pays tribute

to the storied, centuries-old design but which is finished in a bespoke tartan by Scottish designer Araminta Campbell.

All of the custom-made tweeds and tartans found throughout the suites, created especially for the Royal Scotsman, were woven in mills in rural Scotland, while the suites' colour palette of green, grey, beige and blue is a patriotic nod to the Highlands.

"Scotland has some of the most incredible scenery," says Franklin. "The Royal Scotsman has an observation deck at the end of it. Just sitting there, watching the track roll out behind you amid the landscape, it's a moment that really invites you to pause and reflect."

When not indulging in Scottish Angus beef and wild salmon, or pausing for a moment of quiet contemplation, off-board activities typically have themes that run the gamut from whisky tastings to ancient clans and castles.