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AND HIS
UNDISCOVERED
DEPTHS



Belmond Senior Vice President Brand and Marketing Arnaud Champenois tells *Augustman* that 'quiet luxury' is yesterday's trend. A focus on experiences and stories to tell is heralding a new trend — slow luxury.

DURING THE ERA of the steam engine, the romance of travel aboard the Orient Express was an unparalleled experience, encapsulated by the many authors who have been enraptured by their experiences aboard. In fact, Agatha Christie penned her perspective in her 1934 book, *Murder on the Orient Express*: "Through the windows of the Orient Express, one saw the old, legendary civilisations, as the train raced through the night." Indeed, it is a journey where guests weave through the fabric of history and mystery with each chug of its engine. Hence, it is not mere coincidence that Belmond Senior Vice President Brand and Marketing Arnaud Champenois is

hoping to recapture the magic and mystery of that bygone golden age of train travel. Beginning his career at Cartier, Champenois held posts at Baume & Mercier and Panerai, eventually joining L'Oreal's luxury division in Paris, with responsibilities in marketing, developing products and developing fragrances, in addition to signing new collaborations with designers like Victor and Rolf, Maison Margiela and Diesel. After 11 years — his last post in the world of beauty culminated with Biotherme in Hong Kong — he found himself entering an entirely new industry: travel and hospitality. Stints at Starwood, Marriott, W, Luxury Collection and Mandarin Oriental later, he discovered that consumers today are spending less on luxury goods and more on experiences. These insights served him well when he joined Belmond to become their chief brand executive, managing the marketing and communications for the group.

In the industry, most brands are typically travel or hospitality businesses — few straddle both — but Belmond is not a typical business. Champenois describes it more as a curator and operator of heritage hotel brands and, quite memorably, the world's most notable luxury rail travel service: the Orient Express. "We operate six trains with potential for more to come in the future and that's really at the heart of our strategy today. We also operate barges in France," says Champenois. "I think it's really important on how we curate and develop personalised travel around the world; it's really about the beautiful journey rather than just getting to your destination as quickly as possible."

Indeed, modernity has been one where we, as consumers, became hyper fixated on getting to our destinations as quickly as possible. It spurred the growth of private jet travel and paying for priority queues, but the global pandemic put paid to those notions when the world ground to a standstill and reminded us of the things



OPPOSITE & ABOVE
Venice Simplon-Orient-Express

that really mattered. Champenois explains, "Time is a luxury, especially now, and it's super important for us to create meaningful experiences for guest to take the time and reconnect with what matters most — to take time to look through the window or enjoy a great meal and simply to slow down."

Belmond was born from a passion for connecting discerning travellers with the world's most remarkable properties, locations and journeys. From hotels and trains to river cruises and safaris, Belmond is setting a benchmark for guests and fans to experience and share unforgettable stories. With a legacy spanning over 45 years, since the acquisition of Hotel Cipriani in Venice in 1976, Belmond has grown into a global collection of 46 properties spread across 26 countries.

"There's an Italian term, 'villeggiatura', referring to a prolonged stay in a single place, whether at a seaside resort, country villa, or snowy mountain retreat — it's a grand tour like two to three weeks in the summer to enjoy a region or country."



LIKE
A
SLOW
BOAT
TO
CHINA

WORDS JONATHAN HO PHOTOS BELMOND



Champenois leans forward to make the point. "There's definitely a lot of demand for this and we are very proud to relaunch the Eastern Oriental Express, which is a train from Singapore travelling through Malaysia. We have two routes: Singapore to Kuala Lumpur via Penang and then we have another route that takes you through the wildlife of Taman Negara National Park."

That the path that brings you to a place is as important as the destination itself perfectly encapsulates villeggiatura and Belmond, a pioneer of slow travel, has been operating the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express since 1982. The group later expanded to include pristine beach resorts such as Maroma on the Riviera Maya, historic hideaways such as Villa San Michele in the Florentine foothills, urbane icons such as Copacabana Palace in Rio de Janeiro, and gateways to UNESCO world heritage sites, such as Hotel das Cataratas in Brazil's Iguassu National Park.

According to Champenois, the post-pandemic landscape has brought about an increase in younger client profiles, with Gen Z's comprising a more significant chunk of the business. "As luxury consumer tastes evolve and the desire for more experience-driven luxury grows as Millennials and Gen Z dominate the market, it only makes sense that Belmond explores luxury experiences beyond products or hard goods."

Over the past decade, vinyl records have made a major comeback. People purchased US\$1.2 billion of records in 2022, a 20% jump from the previous year. Overtaking CDs sales, initial analysis suggested that sales were spurred by baby boomers, many of whom are now entering retirement and are eager to tap into the nostalgia of their youth. However, the data proved otherwise: the top-selling vinyl albums right now are current artists, not classic bands, showing that the most likely person to buy a LP record is in Gen Z — those born between 1997 and 2012.

Spurred by this trend, Champenois describes Belmond's remit passionately. "Trains are such an old way of travelling but it is very beautiful, thoughtful, and growing

in demand, and this is actually encouraging for Belmond. From a strategic point of view, all this romance of taking your time to discover a country region by region is something we really want to develop. You might say that the mission of Belmond is to perpetrate the legendary art of travel."

However, Gen Zs are mercurial creatures and Champenois is quick to address our point. "We have to reimagine, be creative; heritage shouldn't be dusty, which is why we collaborate with many young artists and designers to make our experiences contemporary, so you have this tension between heritage and the fact that we want to cater to a new generation of guests. I describe it as 'contemporary nostalgia'. The storytelling of our past is so much and so appealing to a new generation unaccustomed to the old ways, yet we want to work with top notch talents, programme designers, chefs and wellness experts so they can discover old experiences in a new way."

He further explains: "Yes we have a notion of nostalgia but our historical buildings are being refurbished and renovated around the world. The Group is investing EUR1 billion over the next 10 years to refurbish habitats like this small hotel in Portofino right in the fisherman's harbour. We create contemporary programming and atmosphere, but within the bones of our heritage; contemporary interior design without losing the soul of our properties for a new generation of guests." **AM**



OPPOSITE & TOP
British Pullman, England

FROM BOTTOM LEFT
Eastern & Oriental Express,
Southeast Asia; Arnaud Champenois,
Belmond Senior Vice President
Brand and Marketing



VIBE CHECK WITH BELMOND

A warm Caribbean breeze beneath a palm-shaded cabana. The shadows cast by candlelight amid the cloisters of a former monastery. The lively hum of a crowd at an elegant bar as you sip a signature drink. Celebrating local tradition, community and cuisine across the globe, a wealth of luxury experiences as authentic as they are unique await you during your travels with Belmond.



SPLENDIDO MARE, PORTOFINO

Tucked into the curve of Portofino harbour is the stylish Splendido Mare. Its charming guest-house takes pride of place on the town's main piazzetta, where one is perfectly poised for a dip into the local social scene.

Portofino's glamorous village spirit flows through the doors of Splendido, expressing itself in a restorative, sophisticated experience amidst an alluring haven, chic in design and playful in nature. Echoing the sparkling Ligurian Bay beneath, its iconic pool blends deep green and blue tones with a terrace of pink, red and white marble. Certainly a place to see and be seen.

COPACABANA PALACE, RIO DE JANEIRO

Iconic guests, indelible stories, from Brigitte Bardot to Stevie Wonder, the beachfront icon has long been a playground for greatness and glamour. The Copacabana Palace has been a Brazilian beachfront icon for almost a century, and the sense of historical glamour is alive with every step. Instagram-worthy views by day and legendary celebrations by night, sip poolside Caipirinhas with sunset views and be sunkissed on golden sands at Copacabana Beach.

Recently renovated to its former glory, the Copacabana Palace Theatre is a Carioca icon. After nearly three decades, its doors are re-opening: A sophisticated haven of dramatic elegance, since its opening in the 1950s it has charmed and entertained Rio's cultural elite. Prepare to be reacquainted with a cultural legend.



HOTEL CIPRIANI, VENICE

Gliding on the water in the slow ballet of boats, any arrival at Hotel Cipriani carries a cinematic mystery. After all, Daniel Craig's Bond traversed the lagoon at St Mark's Square, enjoying all the intimacy of the island perch with Vesper. With Michelin-star dining and unrivalled views of Venice, this is indulgence that knows no bounds.

By day, take in the poolside scene while enjoying a Bellini, an emblem of Cipriani's refined rituals; magnificent, its vast swimming pool is one of the finest in Europe — and the only one in central Venice. The social hub of Hotel Cipriani, it is fully heated and filtered with seawater. A serene home from home, our careful blend of relaxation and artistry is why the Venice hotel is a true legend.



BRITISH PULLMAN, ENGLAND

When you step aboard British Pullman, there's a whole world of possible destinations. Discover the historic gems of Bath, York or Canterbury and feel like royalty as you explore Blenheim Palace or Sandringham. Anticipate a day of lifelong memories without ever leaving the train with a classic Afternoon Tea or signature Golden Age of Travel lunch. You can also sleuth your way through a cast of unforgettable characters on an exciting Murder Mystery immersive experience on Britain's most iconic train.

VENICE SIMPLON-ORIENT-EXPRESS, EUROPE

An icon of art deco design and an enduring symbol of luxury, the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express is a true classic. During its time, the train carried passengers including novelist Leo Tolstoy, revolutionary Leon Trotsky, Hollywood starlet Marlene Dietrich, Lawrence of Arabia and the spy Mata Hari. The Venice Simplon-Orient Express is the most storied set of carriages in the world. It offers an experience that promises to take you not just across Europe, but to transport you to another world entirely.



EASTERN & ORIENTAL EXPRESS, SOUTHEAST ASIA

After a long hiatus, the Eastern & Oriental Express, A Belmond Train, Southeast Asia returned to the rails in February 2024. Offering a reimagined adventure of Southeast Asia in motion, the train will launch two new seasonal journeys departing from Singapore and travelling through Malaysia's ever-changing landscapes and vibrant cities: the Essence of Malaysia (November to February) and Wild Malaysia (March to October). The iconic train's 15 dark green carriages will leave Singapore's Woodlands station, taking in destinations like Penang, Langkawi and for the first time the Taman Negara National Park, before heading back to the garden city.

