

THAI STYLE

Belmond's *Eastern & Oriental Express* takes just 82 passengers from Singapore to Bangkok in luxury.

All aboard!

The views from these 12 spectacular routes will stop you in your tracks.

BY LAURA BEGLEY BLOOM



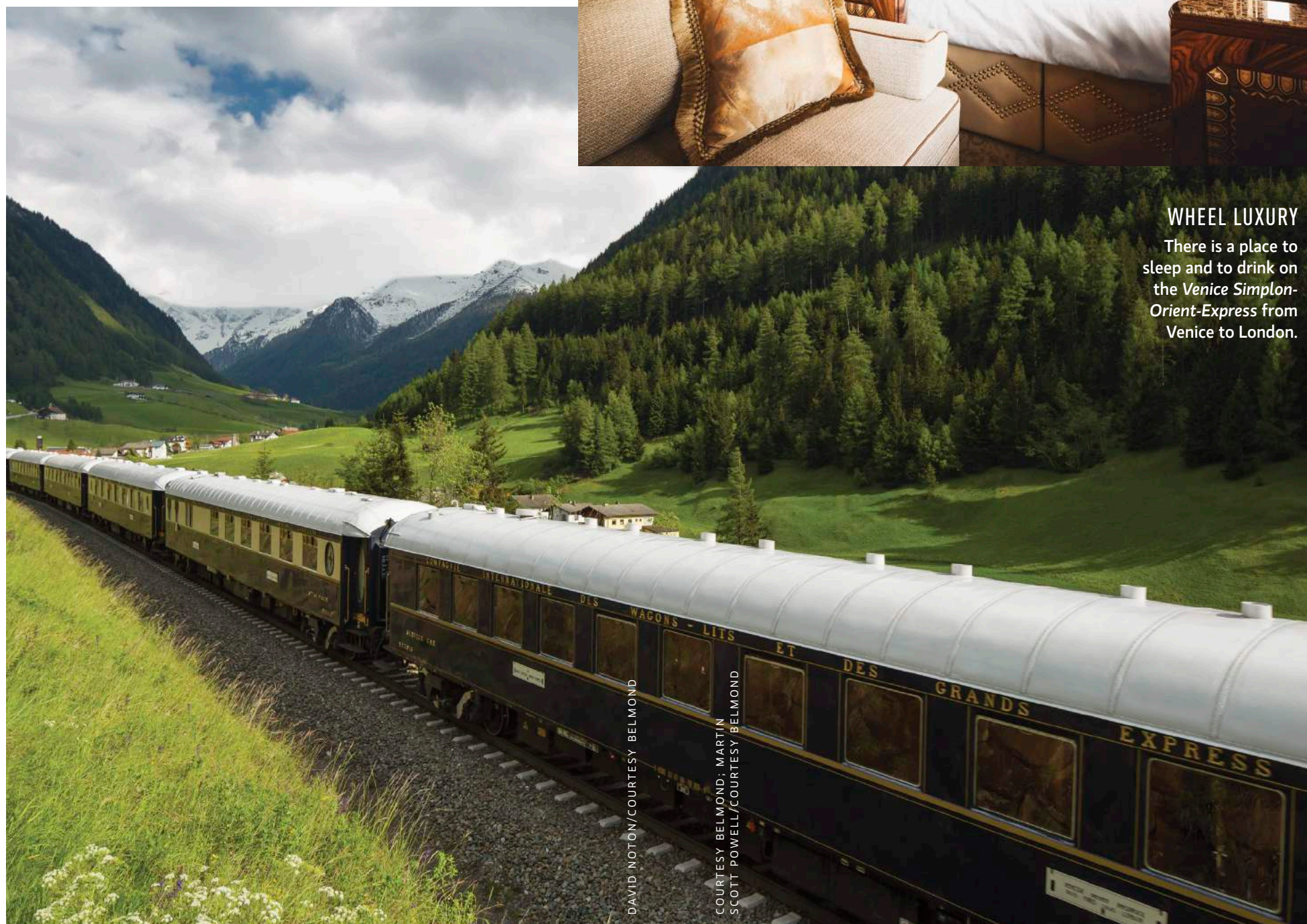
THE MOST SCENIC

TRAIN JOURNEYS

IN THE WORLD

There's something about train travel that is unlike any other kind of transportation. It's a chance to slow down and connect with the world around you.

While there are high-speed trains around the globe that will speed you from point A to point B in no time flat, the most appealing journeys are the ones that follow a more leisurely route, allowing you to get a front-row seat to the world's best views. When I was a child, my parents took the family on a memorable train trip from the border of Texas to Mexico City. There was little glamour to this ride: The rickety old train had no air conditioning and the accommodations were spartan. But we had our own sleeping compartments, a conductor in a classic hat came around to check on us, and we ate our meals in the dining car as the epic landscapes of Mexico tumbled past. Despite the lack of luxuries, there was an irresistible appeal to the adventure that sparked a lifelong love of train travel. As I got older, I started taking trains around the globe, traversing the snow-capped mountains of Switzerland, snaking through the glacial valleys of Alaska, whizzing through the complex Japanese countryside, savoring the small towns of France. When given the chance, I'll take a train over a plane any day of the week. The best part of traveling by rail? Getting a chance to truly sit back, relax, and enjoy the trip. Here are a dozen of the most amazing journeys around the world—luxurious voyages with scenic views from trains that are equally dazzling.



DAVID NOTON/COURTESY BELMOND

COURTESY BELMOND; MARTIN SCOTT POWELL/COURTESY BELMOND



WHEEL LUXURY
There is a place to sleep and to drink on the *Venice Simplon-Orient-Express* from Venice to London.

Venice Simplon-Orient-Express: Venice to London

THE *VENICE SIMPLON-ORIENT-EXPRESS* set the standard for the golden age of train travel when it launched in 1883, and after being brought back to life in 1982, this mahogany-clad beauty continues to spoil its passengers with over-the-top indulgences. One classic route departs from Venice in the late morning for a romantic overnight journey, transporting you away to a world of timeless extravagances before arriving in London late the next day. Channel iconic guests like Grace Kelly and Marlene Dietrich as you enjoy a glass of bubbly at the Champagne Bar while the train passes a colorful patchwork of landscapes in Italy. That evening, enjoy a decadent four-course dinner prepared by skilled French chefs in an elegant dining carriage. Then retire to your 1920s-style cabin, outfitted like a majestic European hotel. The following morning, start your day with a continental breakfast served in your cabin. Gaze at the iconic skyline of Paris as you pull into the historic Gare du Nord platform. From Paris, you'll continue toward the French coast for the Channel crossing and enjoy brunch while admiring the scenery. Don't miss the traditional afternoon tea before the train makes a grand arrival at London's Victoria Station. belmond.com/trains/europe/venice-simplon-orient-express



Rocky Mountaineer: Vancouver to Banff, Canada

THE ONLY PASSENGER TRAIN to travel along the historic Canadian Pacific rail line, the *Rocky Mountaineer* passes over the site of the last spike that geographically united Canada more than 130 years ago. Aboard the First Passage to the West route, travelers can experience a two-day journey that connects Vancouver with Lake Louise and Banff. You'll travel through lush rainforests, cross the Continental Divide, traverse semi-arid desert, trace the path of the rushing Kicking Horse River, and ride past several Rocky Mountain towns. With 30 years of scenic train service under its belt, the *Rocky Mountaineer* has added glass-domed cars to its fleet. The newest bi-level rail cars feature dimmable domed windows to moderate the intensity of the sun, plus heated and reclining seats. So that guests don't miss a moment of the ever-changing landscapes, the train travels only during the day, overnighing at grand hotels along the way. In addition to the thrill of the ride, the *Rocky Mountaineer* offers a one-of-a-kind culinary experience, serving guests regionally inspired cuisine while the dramatic scenery of Western Canada unfolds beside them. Each season, the executive chefs reimagine the menu, showcasing regional flavors and ingredients, including fresh salmon, Alberta beef, and local produce. And the adventure doesn't stop after you leave the train. The train line has curated more than 50 vacation packages in partnership with local tour operators for extended stays and activities that will transform your journey into the trip of a lifetime. rockymountaineer.com/train-routes/first-passage-west

COURTESY ROCKY MOUNTAINEER

Denali Star: Anchorage to Fairbanks, Alaska

THE *DENALI STAR*, THE ALASKA RAILROAD'S FLAGSHIP TRAIN, links Anchorage to Fairbanks and provides passengers with a memorable ride through the Last Frontier. Along the route, sparkling salmon streams and strands of birch and spruce come into view, while fireweed adds dramatic purple coloring to the landscape. The route runs daily between Anchorage and Fairbanks mid-May through mid-September, making stops in Wasilla (Iditarod Sled Dog Race Headquarters), Talkeetna (the inspiration for the town of Cicely in the TV show *Northern Exposure*), and the gates of Denali National Park and Preserve. On clear days, views of Denali, the tallest peak in North America, emerge across the river presenting a fantastic photo op. Black and brown bears frequent the sandbars and scuttle into the brush as the train approaches. Your best bet to catch a glimpse of the Big Five—grizzlies, moose, caribou, wolves, and Dall sheep—is in Denali Park. After passing through the boreal forest, you'll reach your final destination of Fairbanks, the hub of interior Alaska. But this is just the beginning. For more adventure in the Last Frontier, a trip to Fairbanks on the train can easily be paired with a next-day excursion on the riverboat *Discovery* or a flying or driving trip above the Arctic Circle. alaskarailroad.com/ride-a-train/our-trains/denali-star

GLENN ARONWITS/COURTESY ALASKA RAILROAD CORPORATION;
STEVE GROGAN/COURTESY DANUBE EXPRESS



Grand Alpine Express: Budapest to Venice

ON THE *GOLDEN EAGLE DANUBE EXPRESS*, dramatic mountain scenery and beautiful lakes provide a continual backdrop for the Grand Alpine Express tour through Central Europe. From the classic capital cities of Budapest and Vienna, the *Danube Express* ventures through Austria, visiting Innsbruck, passing through the Tyrolean town of St. Anton, and crossing little Liechtenstein, before heading across the valleys of the Swiss Alps to Zurich for a classic fondue tasting in Switzerland. The Italian Lake District is next, with a lunch break at Lake Como and a chance to meander along the shores of Lake Garda, as well as stops in Milan and Trieste. The train then loops into western Slovenia, climbing through the Julian Alps toward picturesque Lake Bled and Ljubljana, before returning to Italy for the journey's end in Venice. As it weaves through tunnels, crosses viaducts, and traverses mountain passes, highlights include climbing over the Semmering Pass, viewing Lake Achen from a steam railway, and making a scenic ascent up to the St. Gotthard Pass. Off the train, there's a private concert, a cave visit, Roman ruins, and sightseeing stops in the cities. goldeneagleluxurytrains.com/journeys/grand-alpine-express/gal/





Belmond Hiram Bingham: Cusco to Machu Picchu, Peru

LINKING CUSCO WITH THE ANCIENT CITADEL RUINS OF MACHU PICCHU, the *Belmond Hiram Bingham* is a luxurious round-trip day train that provides a sense of the region's culture to all onboard, as well as breathtaking views of Peruvian landscapes. Launched in 2003 to whisk travelers high into the Andes, the *Hiram Bingham*—named after the explorer who revealed Machu Picchu to the world—was modeled after classic trains from the 1920s. It has Pullman-style carriages with rich polished wood and gleaming brass accents. The train has recently introduced a new art collaboration, turning the exterior of its observation car into a canvas transformed by Peruvian artist and illustrator Fito Espinosa. The resulting piece depicts the journey through the Andes into the heart of the Incan empire with celestial illustrations featuring the surrounding flora and fauna. The exhibition will remain on display through April. To complement the artwork, the brand has also introduced an inventive cocktail list curated by award-winning mixologist Aaron Diaz, as well as new menus with Peruvian ingredients sourced from the landscapes through which the train travels. But the undeniable appeal here is the spectacular scenery. You'll ride through the Sacred Valley of the Incas, marveling at its lush greenery, jagged mountains, and wandering llamas before climbing into the cloud forest. And then there's the final destination: Machu Picchu, which train passengers will explore with a private guide, capping off the ultimate bucket-list journey.

belmond.com/trains/south-america/peru/belmond-hiram-bingham



Trans-Siberian Express: Moscow to Vladivostok

YOU CAN'T THINK OF A MORE ICONIC TRAIN JOURNEY

than the *Trans-Siberian Express*: A pair of locomotives (one Soviet-era steam model and one modern locomotive) take turns running 5,771 miles across Russia, traversing the Ural Mountains and the Great Steppe that penetrates deep into Siberia. The longest train line in the world, it crosses eight time zones and connects the East with the West. Along the route, you'll weave through Russia's vast interior and witness cinematic landscapes. Built in sections between 1891 and 1916, the Trans-Siberian Railway was initiated by Czar Alexander III, who undertook an extraordinary engineering achievement in environmentally hostile conditions. Today, the Trans-Siberian is a working train that transports locals around the country; Golden Eagle offers passengers the chance to stay in a luxurious setting that is like something out of another era. The classic journey takes two weeks to make its way from Moscow to the Pacific coast city Vladivostok, near the border with China and North Korea. One of the highlights is having a glass of champagne with one foot in Europe and the other in Asia on the Great Divide. Along the way, you'll glimpse Russia's stunning scenery: gilded onion domes, wildflower-filled meadows, and vast Lake Baikal. You'll stop in the Old Believers' Village at Ulan-Ude and enjoy a folk performance. In Mongolia, you'll visit a *ger* (a traditional yurt) and meet a nomadic family in Gorkhi-Terelj National Park. It's a once-in-a-lifetime chance to draw back the veil on a mysterious, little-visited part of the world.

goldeneagleluxurytrains.com/journeys/trans-siberian-express



Maharajas' Express: Delhi to Mumbai, India

INDIA'S MOST LAVISH TRAIN, the *Maharajas' Express* spares no expense in pampering its passengers, including private butlers who will attend to your every need. Weaving in a taste of the country's rich heritage, the train itself is something to behold. Each of the 14 guest carriages is named after a gemstone, and the interiors have beautiful furniture and luxurious fittings. Onboard, you'll find two opulent restaurants, one displaying the vibrant colors of India and the other designed after the national bird, the peacock, plus two bar cars. You can choose from a number of carefully crafted itineraries throughout the country, but the most alluring is the six-night Indian Splendor, which starts in Delhi and ends in Mumbai. Stops include Agra, where you'll visit the Taj Mahal and the Agra Fort, two splendid examples of Mughal architecture. Take a wildlife safari at the Ranthambore National Park, which is home to Royal Bengal tigers. Shop for jewelry in the Pink City of Jaipur. Other must-see locations include Bikaner, Jodhpur, and Udaipur. Traveling by rail on a train like this makes it easy to experience this colorful country in comfort. maharajas-express-india.com

Glacier Express: St. Moritz to Zermatt, Switzerland

SEEING SWITZERLAND BY TRAIN gives you unparalleled access to one of the most picturesque countries in the world, with rugged mountain ranges, charming Alpine villages, and cosmopolitan European cities. You can experience it all with the *Glacier Express*, which celebrates its 90th anniversary this year. The train travels across Switzerland, linking St. Moritz and Zermatt. It's a panoramic trip through the Alpine heartland and a memorable way of traveling from the eastern to the western Swiss Alps. The eight-hour train journey passes through 91 tunnels and crosses the elevated Oberalp Pass, with stops along the way at some of Switzerland's most luxurious mountain spa towns. You'll wind past rugged rock faces, remote valleys, glaciers, and the Rhine Gorge, which is sometimes called the Swiss Grand Canyon. Railway fans will marvel at the Landwasser Viaduct, a daring structure perched on five pillars. The recently launched Excellence Class transports passengers in cars with a sleek new design, guaranteed window seats with panoramic views, access to a personal concierge, plus a five-course gourmet menu that includes some of the finest Swiss ingredients, from cheese to chocolate, and wine pairings. It's the ultimate way to experience this legendary route in high style. glacierexpress.ch/en

COURTESY GOLDEN EAGLE LUXURY TRAIN; A. BRYCE/COURTESY BELMOND
COURTESY MAHARAJAS' EXPRESS; COURTESY GLACIER EXPRESS





Eastern & Oriental Express: Singapore to Bangkok

THE EASTERN & ORIENTAL EXPRESS travels one of the most magical routes in the world—through the lush tropical landscapes of Southeast Asia from Singapore to Bangkok. Settle into your private cabin as you depart Singapore. Be sure to pay a visit to the observation car in the rear of the train to feel the breeze and revel in the quickly changing views as the urban setting melts into rural landscapes. There are just 81 other passengers, and you'll experience the highlights of Thailand and Malaysia, traveling on a train that is kitted out with every luxury imaginable. Enjoy three-course lunches, afternoon tea, and four-course dinners. Evenings end with gin and tonics in the piano bar car. On your second day of travel, you'll discover rural Malaysian life in Labu Kabong, where villagers will greet you with a warm welcome ceremony before you embark on a guided tour through rice paddies and sample local produce. On your final day, disembark at Kanchanaburi. There, you can take a guided visit to the iconic River Kwai Bridge and Thailand-Burma Railway museum, go on a bike ride through rice paddies to a local farm, or combine a raft cruise with a cooking class. belmond.com/trains/asia/eastern-and-oriental-express

The Ghan: Adelaide to Darwin, Australia

MANY VISITORS TO AUSTRALIA experience only its coastal destinations. *The Ghan* is a luxury train that travels from north to south through the center of Australia, introducing passengers to the heart of this beautiful country. Operating since 1929, the train was named for the Afghan camel drivers who arrived in the mid-19th century and helped to explore Australia's rugged interiors. Departing from Adelaide on this three-day journey, you'll pass the Flinders Range, home to strange rock formations and some of the oldest fossils in the world, experience sunrise in the desert as day dawns, and wind through the MacDonnell Ranges to Alice Springs, the capital of the outback and nearly 1,000 miles from the nearest major city. On your final day, you'll have the chance to explore the pristine wilderness of Katherine from the water or from land. Learn more about ancient indigenous rock paintings, gain insight into the culture of the Jawoyn people, or discover authentic outback life on a cattle station. Along the way, you'll be able to indulge in regionally inspired meals paired with local wines to get a true taste of Australia's outback spirit. (At press time, the continent was battling fires that covered more than 12 million acres. The dry summer season ended March 1, and tourism will of course be important to the country's economic recovery.) journeybeyondrail.com.au/journeys/the-ghan/adelaide-to-darwin



Seven Stars: Kyushu, Japan

THERE IS SO MUCH MORE TO JAPAN than Tokyo and Kyoto. For a train journey that encapsulates some of Japan's most attractive landscapes, step aboard the opulent *Seven Stars in Kyushu* for a four-day scenic ride through Kyushu, an island known for its hot springs, abundant natural beauty, delicious cuisine, and rich culture. This elegant train fuses Japanese and Western traditions through wood and fabrics and includes a lounge where a pianist entertains passengers. There are just 14 guest compartments, all of them suites. Large observatory windows in several cars allow for prime sightseeing of lush mountains and sparkling seas. On the journey, you'll visit five of the seven charming prefectures of Kyushu—Fukuoka, Oita, Miyazaki, Kagoshima, and Kumamoto. The itinerary includes meals at renowned Japanese restaurants along the way, plus a one-night stay at a *ryokan* (a traditional Japanese inn) at Yufuin City, which is one of the best onsen (hot spring) resorts on the island. The *Seven Stars* travels at a leisurely speed, allowing you to gaze out at the scenery, reflect on the journey, and think about new encounters on the horizon. cruisetrain-sevenstars.jp/english/routes

Rovos Rail: Pretoria, South Africa, to Walvis Bay, Namibia

ROVOS RAIL IS THE PASSION PROJECT of a South African family who have created a decadent hotel-on-wheels that introduces travelers to the best of the African continent. One of its most magnificent routes is the Namibia Safari, a nine-day, 2,100-plus-mile train journey that takes guests across South Africa and into Namibia—from the savannahs of the Highveld to the Atlantic Ocean in the west. After you depart from Pretoria, the first stop is Kimberley, center of a famous diamond rush. The train then weaves through the stark vistas of the Northern Cape to the Fish River Canyon—not as large as the Grand Canyon but just as impressive. Next up, you'll visit Keetmanshoop, where you can explore photogenic spots like Giant's Playground, where massive boulders are stacked in high piles. Travelers then continue across the untamed beauty of the Kalahari Desert, stopping in Namibia's cosmopolitan capital of Windhoek. From there, it's a short flight to the stunning sand dunes of Sossusvlei, where you'll spend the night in the desert after attempting to hike up Big Daddy. You'll head back to Windhoek to continue the train journey into the north of Namibia, overnighing at a safari lodge in the game-rich Etosha National Park. On the last morning, the train travels back through the Namib Desert to the wonderfully preserved 19th-century German town of Swakopmund and Walvis Bay, an unforgettable end to a remarkable journey. rovos.com/journeys/namibia-safari

COURTESY BELMOND; SEVEN STARS IN KYUSHU; DOOKPHOTO/COURTESY ROVOS RAIL

