

A woman with dark hair, wearing a light blue, long-sleeved, open-knit cardigan and matching wide-leg trousers, is sitting on the metal railing of a boat. She is looking down and to the left, holding a phone to her ear. The background is a bright, hazy sky. The overall mood is serene and relaxed.

Sunseeker

THE MAGAZINE



The greatest train journey

in the world

There is nothing more relaxing or nostalgic than luxurious long-distance train travel. Leo Bear experiences the pinnacle: the Indian Pacific, which ventures from Perth to Sydney

words by
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PREVIOUS PAGE The India Pacific Rail journey goes from Perth to Sydney

ABOVE The India Pacific traverses mountain ranges and passes through arid deserts and gold fields, whilst enjoying the surroundings you can also delight in 5-star culinary service; The journey takes 4 nights and 5 days; Luxury dining and five star service is included in the journey; The Indian Pacific is one of the few transcontinental trains in the world

Many argue long-distance train travel is the most comfortable and relaxing way to explore a new destination. There is something old-fashioned and rose-tinted about rail travel. The pace, the scenery, silent scenes unfolding each day. One gets a sense of scale and perspective that is completely lost with faster forms. Above all, rail journeys have a time-honoured way of taking you to the heart of a place – beyond bustling cities and overcrowded tourist sights to towns located off the beaten track and parts of a country rarely seen by other visitors.

It is the slow trains – the long-distance sleepers – that are the real essence of rail travel. There are plenty of enthralling and luxurious options to choose from: the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express, South Africa's Blue Train, the Trans-Siberian Express to name a

few, but for sheer length, conviviality and spirit of adventure, Rail Australia's Indian Pacific tour takes the prize.

Spanning the full mantle of Australia from coast to coast, it carries passengers from Perth to Sydney – or vice versa – via Adelaide and has been doing so for nearly 50 years. Not only is it considered one of the most scenic train journeys in the world, it's also one of the longest. A veritable marathon of rumbling action, the locomotive covers a staggering 4,352 kilometres of terrain, taking in goldmines, ghost towns and types of topography only previously seen in textbooks. Bad sleepers needn't be concerned though.

The route contains the longest stretch of straight railway track anywhere in the world. From the tree-rich Blue Mountains to the dusty red emptiness of the Nullarbor Plains (which comes from the Latin *nullus arbor* which means 'no tree'), the Indian-Pacific is a journey of dazzling contrasts. The landscape on the other side of the glass constantly shifts. Then shifts again. From gum-tree-studded desert-scapes and valleys awash with wildflowers, to mist-enshrouded mountains and rows of vines not unlike those found in the South of France, it's scenery that has long inspired prominent Australian artists such as Robert Juniper, Sidney Nolan and Juliet Stone. Over four days and three nights, passengers are exposed to both Australia's vastness and its vivacity. Did we mention the light? And the wildlife-spotting opportunities? Kangaroos, emus, camels and flocks of rose-breasted galahs are common sightings along the way.

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ABOVE The train departs in Sydney, where you can see the glorious Sydney Opera House; The train passes through Adelaide and the surrounding vineyards; Perth is often an overlooked Australian city but sandy beaches line the city, ensuring its relaxed and effortless feel

On board the 30-carriage train, the climate is one of laid-back luxury. Gold Service cabins come equipped with large picture windows and generous bench seats that convert into comfortable beds, while dining in the Queen Adelaide dining car is on a par with eating out at any smart restaurant: think cosy leather booths separated by cut-glass partitions and tables dressed with white linen. On special occasions, trestle tables are set up alongside

the train for lantern-lit feasts of succulent roast lamb under starlit skies. Every meal is treated as an opportunity to showcase Australia's abundant bounty: locally sourced mushrooms, wild garlic soup, blue swimmer crabs steamed to perfection, along with a roster of wines from Margaret River and the Hunter Valley.

Optional off-train excursions include walking tours of Kalgoorlie, Adelaide, Broken Hill and

the Barossa Valley wine region interspersed with visits to organic farms, sculpture parks and modern art galleries, and on board, one can sign up for masterclasses in wine and Aboriginal food (if you've never tasted crocodile, this is your chance). But ultimately the idea is to sit back and relax, to enjoy some good old-fashioned Aussie hospitality and to soak up the views. Because let us tell you, they really are quite something. **S**

“It’s the ultimate luxury to combine passion and contribution. It’s also a very clear path to happiness.”

—Sheryl Sandberg