

# ON TRACK IN ASIA

Rail travel is a memorable way to discover Asia and can be incorporated into most itineraries. There are lots of options, but here we present two contrasting styles: the fun nostalgia of India's toy trains, and the absolute luxury of the Eastern & Oriental Express train from Singapore to Bangkok.

## Eastern & Oriental Express

Under the same management and revelling in the same opulence as its European sister, this is surely one of the world's classic rail journeys. With colonial style and luxury, the Eastern & Oriental Express travels from Singapore to Bangkok. Boarding its distinctive green and gold carriages, you will find sumptuous interiors of elm burr and cherry wood. Capturing the elegance of the 1920s and 30s, the private en-suite compartments are air-conditioned, with every detail considered for comfort and appearance. Service is discreet yet efficient and, after dining in the restaurant, you can enjoy cocktails in the softly lit bar. In the open decked Observation Car, you can watch the diverse landscape of South East Asia drift by...



From Singapore's pretty quaysides, glittering skyscrapers and the famous Raffles Hotel, the train heads through the lush Malaysian countryside. You stop in Kuala Lumpur with its hectic Chinatown and colonial Merdeka Square, followed by Butterworth. Here you can explore the streets of Georgetown and Penang before crossing into Southern Thailand.

The Thai scenery is equally superb, revealing picturesque temples and villages whilst emerald green rice paddies stretch away into the distance. You pause in the coastal town of Hua Hin before continuing to the River Kwai for a tour of this historic area. Finally, with your journey aboard the Eastern & Oriental Express coming to an end, this charming piece of a lost era draws majestically into the vibrant modern metropolis that is Bangkok.

## Toy Trains of India

India's toy trains were built by the British in the days of the Raj, allowing the officials to escape from the summer heat to the country's hillstations. Usually steam-driven, these narrow gauge trains are hugely atmospheric and a good way to experience real India. Zigzagging up the hills, they pass through an amazing landscape of tea plantations and forests. Journeys range from 3 to 8 hours and, although not luxury, there are comfortable first-class cabins. As you climb higher, the air gets cooler and fresher until you arrive at one of the old hillstations where you can relax and lose yourself in the colonial ambience.

In southern India, trains leave the lowland plains for Ooty's summer residences,



botanical gardens and Ooty Club. Set in the Nilgiri, India's second-highest mountain range, you can walk to one of the Toda tribal villages nearby.

In West Bengal you can take the toy train to Darjeeling. Old shops and markets enliven the streets, and there are spectacular views of snowy peaks like Kanchenjunga. The famous tea plantations are well worth visiting if picking is in process.

Meanwhile, in Shimla, trains arrive from Delhi and the Punjab Plain. Lying in the northern foothills this was once India's summer capital. See the crumbling Raj buildings, visit the Hanuman temple, or stroll through the peaceful valleys.

