



Taj Mahal, Agra

Eastern Elegance

FACT FILE

Places on board the Palace on Wheels become reserved well in advance, so please book early. A ten night stay in converted palaces and forts, including a journey on the Palace on Wheels costs from £3,500 per person, including flights. For details, contact our India specialists on 01869 276 218.



On a cold, blustery winter evening, dark-coated figures huddle in tight groups across the cavernous concourse of London Waterloo station, like groups of wintering penguins. Impatient glances towards the seemingly impassive notice board await any indication that their daily train migration to Guildford in the intimate companionship of several hundred strangers is about to commence. Meanwhile, 4,167 miles away, New Delhi station bustles with activity. The cries of stall holders carry through the hallways whilst ‘chai’ sellers seek another thirst to quench. The smells of fresh Indian cuisine carry on the light evening breeze, wafting the promise of exotic flavours to Indian travellers and uninitiated visitors alike.

Amidst the seeming chaos, passengers are gently escorted through the crowds towards the imposing grandeur of a gleaming steam engine that will carry them to the historic forts and fascinating cities of Rajasthan, in search of Kipling’s elusive tiger and to arguably the most romantic monument in the world, the Taj Mahal. Crossing a red carpet they are greeted by a traditionally dressed Indian gentleman complete with luxuriant moustache who ushers them from the platform and into the serene, panelled interior of the opulent carriages that constitute the Palace on Wheels.

Since 1982 this most elegant of train services has carried a lucky few in regal splendour. The ambience and the aura aboard recall an era when luxury was a way of life and the maharajas and the maharanis reigned supreme. Comprising fourteen air-conditioned salons, each named after a former state, the Palace on Wheels epitomises luxury train travel. The carriages themselves were once the private enclave of the rulers of the princely states of Rajasthan and Gujarat as well as the Viceroy of British India. With a maximum of only 104 passengers on board, the levels of service are on a par with a luxury hotel. Each cabin is decorated and furnished in uniquely Indian opulence with a private bathroom and that most pleasurable of luxuries when travelling by train, a hot shower. An impeccably attired ‘Khidmatgar’ (personal attendant) is on hand around the clock to tend to the needs of each cabin, ensuring that each guest’s whims are answered. Fabulous tastes, unfamiliar flavours and aromas are a part of every culinary experience in India but few get to enjoy these in such splendid surroundings. The Palace on Wheels has two dining cars, appropriately named ‘The Maharaja’ and ‘The Maharani’, serving an array of Indian and international cuisine with all the pomp and ceremony that would be expected from such regally named carriages.



Aboard the Palace on Wheels

However, the Palace on Wheels is more than a mobile luxury hotel and restaurant, it also allows a lucky few to visit some of the finest sites in northern India. Over eight days the journey includes the cultural highlights of Delhi, the fabulous palaces in the 'pink city' of Jaipur, the mighty Mehrangarh Fort overlooking the 'blue city' of Jodhpur and the vast sandstone fortifications of Jaisalmer that seem to rise out of the desert itself. For wildlife lovers the tranquil bird sanctuary near Bharatpur provides a relaxing interlude, while searching for the Bengal tiger in Ranthambhore National Park is an unforgettable experience. The serene Lake Palace at Udaipur and the stunning marble Taj Mahal glowing pink in the Indian sunset are also included for romantics at heart. Whether relaxing in the sumptuous comfort of your air-conditioned compartment, the genial grandness of the well stocked bar, or the wood-panelled restaurant cars, there are few journeys or trains that compare to the Palace on Wheels.

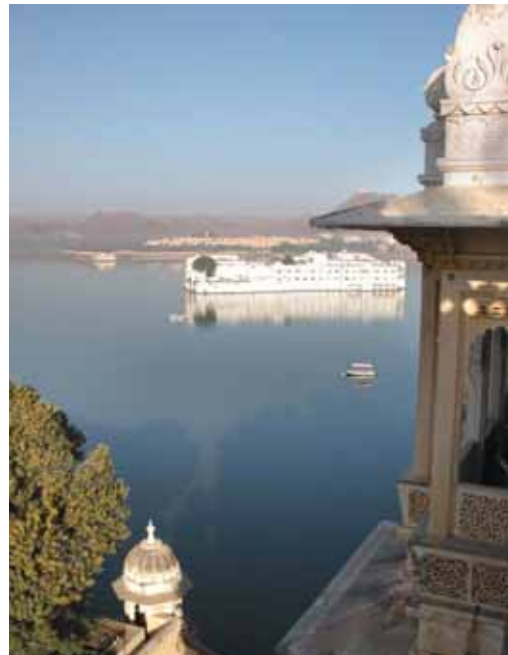
Sara Wells
India Specialist

WEB PLUS
www.audley.co.uk/features/palaceonwheels
Recommended itinerary and video of the Palace on Wheels

Indian street scene ▼



Lake Palace Hotel, Udaipur ▼



Palace of the Winds, Jaipur

The Tea Train



Climbing nearly 1,400 metres from the tranquil Sri Lankan lakeside town of Kandy, home to the Temple of the Tooth, the 'tea plantation' train is a wonderfully relaxing and supremely genial way to ascend a mountain. Starting amidst subtropical spice plantations and banana trees, the vintage carriages gently sway as the track winds steadily up to the cooler climes. The scenery is spectacular and the changing landscape of pine and eucalyptus forest drifts past the windows as the train proceeds at a stately pace to the delightful hill country. Nearing Hatton, the route passes the St. Clair and Devon waterfalls as expanses of neatly cropped tea plantations cloak the hillsides. The distinctive outline of Adam's Peak hoves into view and 4.5 hours later the train makes its final and seemingly gasping push into Nuwara Eliya and the journey's end.

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