

# INTERNATIONAL LIVING

SINCE 1979

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It's 2 p.m. inside the cavernous, brick-red Sydney Central Train Station. Excited passengers jockey to register in front of Platform 3. But the Indian Pacific is no ordinary train ride—it's a rail journey that spans a continent.

With majestic Australian scenery unfolding along both sides of the tracks, you don't just take this four-day, three-night journey to get from Sydney to Perth. You take it to see the country in a way that you simply cannot from a plane.

Operated by Journey Beyond Rail Expectations, the Indian Pacific's carriages feature the same luxurious accommodations as 5-star hotels. Gold and Platinum Service passengers have several choices for comfortable, private sleeper cabins. This train ride can be favorably compared to the renowned Orient Express.

### All Aboard

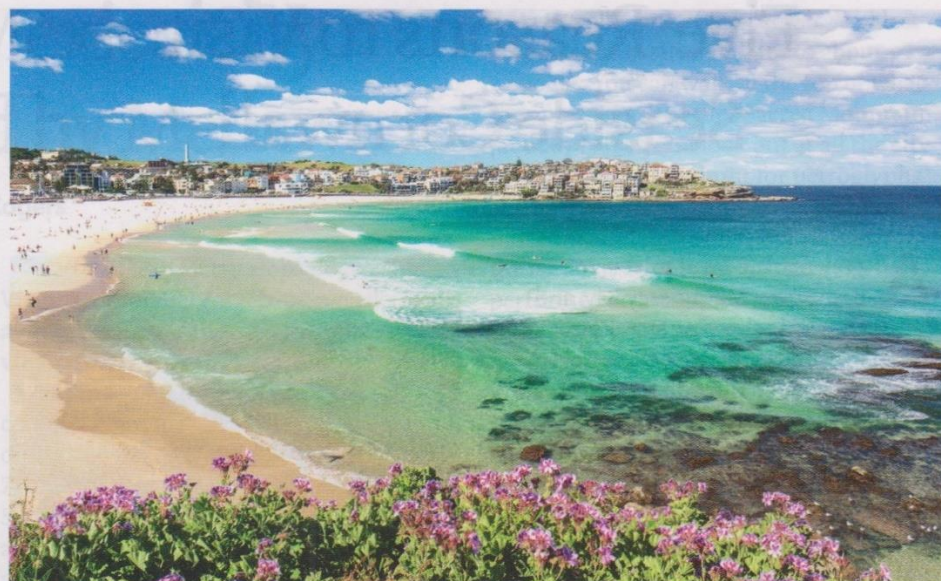
Railway staff in navy blue pants, red and blue striped shirts, and Akubras—the iconic Aussie outback hat—tag luggage and assign cabin numbers. Opportunities abound to meet people and sample gourmet food on this relaxed and casual, yet pampered, trip. Bron and Gary, the first of many passengers my wife, Pam, and I meet on the train, are diligently trying to take a selfie. We offer to take their picture, hoping they'll reciprocate. People are excited and everyone's clamoring for that perfect Facebook photo. A whistle blows and the conductor calls "All aboard." Guests are graciously welcomed in the plush lounges, which are replete with comfortable couches and bar.

### The Train

With bright yellow stripes down the side of the two massive blue engines pulling a long silver stream of 31 carriages, we leave the station. Each carriage is emblazoned with a striking wedge-tailed eagle motif. The largest eagle on earth is a fitting image for one of the world's longest rail journeys. The carriages can accommodate 38 onboard crew and 244 guests on a journey that traverses 2,704 miles.

We pass quickly out of the city and have already ordered Champagne when the track bends gracefully into the sheer escarpments and stark plateau of the Blue Mountains.

**"Decorated in a formal retro-Edwardian style."**



The warm Pacific waters of Sydney signal the start, or end, of the Indian Pacific's coast-to-coast trip.

## Coast to Coast, on the Luxurious Indian Pacific Train

Gary Baker

### The Inside Story

The train is more than simple transportation. Mahogany-paneled Gold Level cabins are ensuite, with toilet, wash basin, and shower. During the day the sleeper is a comfortable three-seater lounge, converting to twin sleeping berths at night. Each morning our carriage conductor makes up the room and returns in the evening to prepare it for sleeping.

As we watch the passing scenery through our cabin's spacious window seats, we're reminded that traveling is as much about the journey as the destination. We spot kangaroos and emus. A wedge-tailed eagle soars above a desert filled with a wide range of flora and fauna as far as the eye can see. We'll traverse 16 different landscapes before reaching our destination.

### Food, Wine, and Friends You'll Make

In the evening, things shift to the welcoming Outback Explorer Lounge, with its subtle striped wallpaper and sconce lighting. Stout tables and plush seats are set next to panoramic windows. Music

plays softly in the background. The lounge provides a friendly atmosphere where everyone swaps travel tips over well-made craft cocktails and wine.

It doesn't take long to realize the best part of this train trip is the people you meet. Passengers are mixed for breakfast, lunch, and dinner service to encourage conversation. Some are retired and travel a lot. Others are young and on vacation. We easily make new friends with folks from New Zealand, Japan, South Africa, Scotland, and, naturally, Australia.

The dining car, known as the Queen Adelaide Restaurant, is beautifully decorated in a formal retro-Edwardian style. You're seated at a white linen covered table for four, next to a large window where the wild beauty of South Australia acts as the backdrop for culinary adventure.

Each morning, a selection of hot breakfast items is offered. Spinach frittata, French toast, and eggs Napoli with grilled haloumi are a few of our choices. Spinach and feta gougere in filo dough, curried camel over rice, and grilled grouper fillet appear on the sumptuous lunch menus.

The luxury dining experience is repeated in the evening, blending Aus-



tralian and international cuisine, such as slow-cooked lamb shoulder, Hunter Valley grilled tenderloin, saltwater barramundi, Margaret River cheeses, kangaroo fillet, saltbush and wild rosella flower. Local craft beer, high-end spirits, and prize-winning white and red wines from Barossa Valley, McLaren Vale, and Hunter Valley complement the culinary experience.

### Off-Train Excursions

The train stops daily for sightseeing tours. One stop is Broken Hill, an Australian outback frontier mining town. Passengers can visit the Miner's Memorial and Trades Hall, the Pro Hart Gallery, or the Living Desert Sculptures.

At the Trades Hall, built in 1889, we're treated to a rousing reenactment of a labor movement meeting performed by local volunteers dressed in turn-of-the-century costumes. Mining is a tough and dangerous business. The miners successfully championed safety regulations and a 35-hour work week. Fittingly, we toured the Miner's Memorial, a towering 177-foot raw metal art structure that stands over the town, a haunting reminder and powerful salute to the more than 800 miners who lost their lives working the mines.

In Adelaide, we visit the McLaren Vale wine region best known for its shiraz. Small but mighty, McLaren Vale is now home to 34 wineries.

Bussed to Coriole Vineyards, we're treated to a private cellar session with owner, Mark Lloyd. We taste the Fiano, an ancient varietal from Naples, the Nero d'Avola, traditionally from Sicily, and a single vineyard Sparta Shiraz. We also sample

cheeses from Woodside Cheese Wrights, served with tasty French bread.

Next, we head to the "Star of Greece" restaurant, a short ride out to the Fleurieu Peninsula. Located on the esplanade above Port Willunga Beach, we take our time over a Mediterranean meal while enjoying the view over the azure Gulf of St. Vincent.

Returning to the train, we head to the club lounge for a nightcap, and discover several new people have joined our lively band of train travelers. After a blissful night's sleep to the train's gentle rocking, we spy a wedge-tailed eagle circling. The bird's impressive wingspan is hard to miss even though he's 100 feet above.

A mid-morning stop surprises us with the remote, time-worn town of Cook.

Originally built in 1917 as a support station and hospital for the railway, today it's a ghost town—an unattended attraction left behind, despite its own significance in railroad history.

Then, we traverse the treeless and seemingly endless expanse of the Nullarbor Plain, where the train travels the world's longest, straight stretch of railway track of 297 miles. Over 77,000 square miles in area, this flat plain constitutes the largest karst limestone expanse in the world. The arid soil, a former sea floor, doesn't retain enough moisture to support trees. Hence, it's named null arbor, from Latin, meaning "no trees." It also offers no shade and only a few of the toughest, most drought-tolerant desert creatures live among the sparse scrub vegetation. After a long crossing, the train

stops in Rawlinna and we disembark.

We sit on picnic benches sheltered between the silver carriages and the low-roofed station house, enjoying an Australian dinner of roast lamb with gravy, small boiled new potatoes, and coleslaw. The food is paired with an Adelaide Hills Sauvignon Blanc and a Barossa Valley Shiraz. Bonfires set near the tables keep us warm from the cool breeze. A musician serenades us under an unbelievable canopy of stars.

### Changing Scenery

We wake to impressive scenery which looks like an African landscape. Low, spindly trees create a thin canopy over the red dirt.

We spend a relaxing morning in our cabin writing, and gazing. The lack of cellphone service as we travel through remote South Australia forces us to unplug and unwind. Staring out the window, we could be looking at Nebraska wheat fields.

After three days of dry landscape, we see the first signs of water—a muddy lagoon a half mile from the train. Soon, we see rusted barrels and lumber alongside the railway from long-forgotten projects. We're getting closer to civilization.

By the afternoon of the fourth day, we glide into sunny, beach-loving Perth and disembark for the final time at the modern East Perth railway station. Our journey on the Indian Pacific is more than just a train ride—it's a hidden world of shifting landscapes and rugged beauty, where the call of the wild meets luxury, gourmet cuisine, and impeccable service. ■

**"A hidden world of shifting landscapes."**

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW IF YOU GO

**Y**ou can book tickets ahead of time at the Journey Beyond Rail Expectations website. (See: [Journeybeyondrail.com.au](http://Journeybeyondrail.com.au)) Gold and Platinum level tickets include all meals, alcohol, and off-train excursions.

Cost per person, at time of writing, for a Gold Service twin cabin, one-way, is around \$1,770 during low season (June-July, December-January) and \$2,010 during shoulder season, rising to \$2,124 during high season (September-October).

If you're coming from the U.S., direct

flights from San Francisco or Los Angeles to Sydney are available with major airlines, making the Sydney departure more convenient.

The Indian Pacific departs from Sydney's Central Train Station. Local trains run directly from the airport to the train station.

Pack an overnight suitcase with medications, toiletries, and sufficient clothing for four days. Larger suitcases are stored separately and aren't accessible during the journey.

A hat, sunscreen, practical shoes for off-train excursions, and smart-casual clothing is recommended. Pack a light jacket or sweater

for the train and for any stops in the evenings, and plan for temperature extremes during summer and winter for off-train excursions.

Limited shopping is available in the train's souvenir shop onboard or at the Adelaide train station. Passengers who choose the Barossa Valley or McLaren Vale wine tours can purchase local wine. Passengers on the Adelaide excursions can purchase books in the South Australia Museum shop, food gifts in the Central Market, or chocolates at the Hahndorf German village.