

The Blue Train... a trip down luxury lane

By [Brian Berkman](#) 18 Aug 2014

Table Mountain, Karoo windmills, diamonds from Kimberly and wave-pounded shores of Cape Town are some of the themes of artwork on The Blue Train - the self-anointed window to the soul of South Africa.

All-inclusive rates (except for caviar, French champs, gift-shop purchases and telephone calls) makes this an affordable luxury experience, even for South Africans who made up the majority of guests on board the 28 July Pretoria to Cape Town departure.

Perhaps it is the plummeting rand or the increased visa requirements and costs South Africans need to navigate to travel abroad, but I'm noticing more South African at our game lodges and five-star properties than ever before.



In the lap of luxury... out of (South) Africa.

For gastronomes, the food, wine and cigar service rivals five-star dining and for Banting, LCHF eaters and others on restricted diets, free-flowing biltong and nuts are always on call and special arrangements will be made.

For business travellers, there's the availability of password controlled Wi-Fi which means a secure connection as well as conferencing facilities, by prior arrangements, for up to 22 delegates. During our visit there was group of six executives who were holding meetings in the bar and lounge cars but who then left the train after lunch. The Blue Train's management team must be applauded for being nimble when it comes to tailor-making arrangements. In fact, I've dealt over the years with other Transnet-owned assets and The Blue Train team is the most customer focussed.

Shop around for the best hotel deal

With boarding from 0730, spending the previous night in Pretoria is a good plan and I can recommend the newly refurbished Menlyn Boutique Hotel, about 30 minutes away. Transfers to the station cost R300. Many Blue Train guests also stay at The Sheraton. Some special offers include a free night in a hotel so it is worth shopping around to see which deals are available.

Suites are either two single beds with *en suite* toilet and shower or double bed. Deluxe suites are a bit larger and some have a bath.

A huge picture window in every suite is what separates The Blue Train from other luxury trains but the most noticeable difference is a technological one - the train seems to move on a cushion of air, which makes it extremely comfortable and smooth. If you come on the Blue Train expecting the chugalug of the milk train of your youth you might be disappointed.



At your service.

A drawback for some is that the windows don't open but air-conditioning is efficient and individually controlled. I have found while travelling on other luxury trains that having a window that opens makes for a dusty suite.

Butler service includes limited laundry and room service, and is in service from 0600 until 2300 and your butler will also at what time you'd like to receive a morning wake-up with coffee.

Time to enjoy the scenery

The new Blue Train interior is by Wilson & Associates who describe it as a classic, sophisticated and very luxurious and, the same time warm with rich blues, golds and Birch solid-wood panelling. If you also notice a Palace at the Lost City vibe is because the same designers were engaged. Michael Crosby, one of the designers for the new Blue is the son of the designer of the old Blue - another symbol of the continuity.

There are two identical Blue Train sets. Each train is 396m long, has 18 carriages including 11 guest coaches to accommodate up to 74 guests enjoying the changing scenery at top speeds of about 90km an hour but mostly slower than that.

Coaches are 2.9m wide with an interior saving of 88mm because of the thinner than usual body sides. This extra space, 3 inches in old money, means the sense of personal space is greater than on other luxury trains. Compared with the Venice Simplon Orient Express train, cabins are gargantuan while Rovos Rail, the other South African luxury train, has fewer cabins per carriage. One notable difference this makes is that Rovos' beds are always ready - Blue Train beds are made up while guests are at dinner or by request.



As smooth as silk... just sit back and enjoy the ride... and the scenery... and the service... and the food... and the...

Since its inception in 1946, the world-renowned Blue Train has been associated with the best in luxury hospitality and tourism. This legacy remained and was once again accentuated after the train was re-constructed in 1972, and again after total refurbishment that was completed in 1998. The Blue Train has gathered an impressive list of accolades, such as being voted the World's Leading Luxury Train for four consecutive years - 2008 to 2011 and Africa's Leading Luxury Train for five consecutive years - 2009 to 2013.

It is unquestionably a wonderful way to travel. From arrival at Pretoria station liveried luggage handlers with shiny brass cases wait at the curb to manage your baggage and do the same as they escort you and your baggage from The Blue Train tour in Cape Town to your awaiting vehicle. This is the ultimate hand-held experience and one of the finest ways to see South Africa.

For more information go to www.BlueTrain.co.za.

Book a corporate charter or getaway with a difference on The Blue Train, contact either the Pretoria or Cape Town office Mondays to Fridays from 0830 to 1700:

Pretoria: Call +27 (0)12 334 8459; Cape Town: Call +27 90) 21 449 2672.

ABOUT BRIAN BERKMAN

Brian Berkman can be contacted on 083-441-8765 or email Brian@BrianBerkman.com
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