



** Real honeymoon **

FULL STEAM AHEAD

Where does a travel writer choose to spend their honeymoon? Rowena Carr-Allinson opted for a journey on the legendary Orient Express



Tales of eccentric and eclectic train travel in far-flung, exotic places have been lurking at the back of my mind since childhood so we jumped at the chance to take a honeymoon voyage on the mythical Eastern & Oriental Express in Asia.



WEDDING VENUES & SERVICES | HONEYMOONS & WEDDINGS ABROAD

We arrived at Bangkok's Hualamphong Station on a hot, muggy afternoon full of anticipation. Entering the Orient Express lounge was the start to a journey in a parallel universe. Outside, baggage handlers scurried around in pristine uniforms while passengers met the Maitre D'. As we stepped aboard our elegant dark green and cream wagon, we were transported back in time.

SMALL BUT PERFECT

We rushed to discover our cabin and found a bottle of Champagne on ice, with a lovely welcome note. Our Pullman cabin was tiny, but beautiful with a bunk upholstered with a deep red Chinese-inspired pattern and fancy pink curtains and brass lamps for a European edge. The en-suite bathroom was microscopic but came with deliciously scented Bulgari The Vert products. Once in, we remember (too late) about only bringing one bag on board as the floor space is at a premium. Despite its bijou size, we loved our cosy, intimate cabin and its decadent charm and honey-toned cherry wood panelling.

The Bangkok to Singapore route has only been operational since 1993, but the Orient Express team have ensured the cars all ooze traditional colonial luxury mixed with Thai style and Malaysian grace. The train was actually modelled on the one in the 1932 Marlene Dietrich movie, Shanghai Express. From leaving Bangkok and its tin-roofed shacks, houses on stilts and diligent communities on the rail side to rice paddies and the bright, lush jungle, it was simply impossible to stop staring out of the window and taking in the diversity of life.

COLONIAL LUXURY

In Malaysia the train stopped in Butterworth for a visit to the spice island of Penang. A chequered history of British, Malaysian and



Chinese influence makes George Town colourful and diverse, from the people to the architecture: a real melting pot of cultures. The first stop is at the beautiful Chinese Khoo clan house, impressive with its ornate, colourful and intricate carvings, statues and ancient wall drawings. We then hop into a tiny rickshaw, which takes us past Little India's traffic jams and across town to the legendary Eastern and Oriental hotel for a much-needed cool drink.

TIME FOR TEA

Back in our cabin, tea was served on a beautiful silver service tray, with apple tartlets, carrot cake and quiches. Before dinner, we indulged in an aperitif in the Observation Cart. We embraced the heat, sights, sounds and fragrances of the sultry Malay Peninsula and enjoyed catching the sunset and mingling while soaking up the atmosphere (and the Cosmopolitans!).

Dinner in one of three restaurant cars was a real highlight of the journey, each car had a different décor and all were set up with the finest linens and silverware. The staff were adorable, attentive and very, very smiley. Little wonder Thailand is dubbed 'the land of smiles.' Men are expected to wear jacket and tie and ladies can dress in their finest garb. The food was consistently fantastic with a set four-course menu every night.

FOND FAREWELLS

Just three nights on board and it feels like your 'train feet' have finally found the right motion. But all too soon, it's back to solid earth. After crossing the Straits of Johor, the train pulled into Singapore and, unfortunately, it was back to the real world. We floated off the train, waved goodbye to the crew and were left in no doubt this railway legend deserves its glamorous reputation; we had a journey to remember, a perfect honeymoon voyage and the stuff of great stories.



ONE NIGHT IN BANGKOK ...

Stay at **The Metropolitan** in Bangkok (metropolitan.bangkok.como.bz), one of the hippest addresses in town, perfectly located in the Saton Road area. The zen-style rooms, sleek service and gorgeous spa make it a perfect urban hideaway, while the new Nahm restaurant (sister to London's) will give you a real taste of Thai food, the extra spicy way!

SO SINGAPORE

The Fullerton, (fullertonhotel.com), with its Palladian style columns overlooking Marina Bay is the place to stay in Singapore. Book a suite for fantastic views, enjoy the outdoor pool on the 3rd floor overlooking Boat Quay and don't miss dinner at **The Lighthouse**, their fantastic rooftop restaurant.



GO THERE

Return flights with **Emirates** from London Gatwick to Bangkok (outbound) and Singapore to London Gatwick (return) are available from £657 with Expedia.co.uk (visit 871 226 0808, expedia.co.uk). For the Bangkok to Singapore journey on the **Eastern & Oriental Express** (0845 077 22 22 or visit orient-express.com) prices start from £1,880 per person (or vice versa) based on two people sharing a State Cabin compartment.