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# The best way to see India? Transport to another world on this luxurious train journey

SIPPING champagne in the extravagant dining car of the Maharajas' Express, I felt like the star of a classic movie.



By [John Ward](#) / Published 22nd August 2016



Around me well-to-do passengers ate exquisite curry dishes served on gilded plates. And as we hurtled through the Indian countryside, I half expected a Poirot-esque detective to rush in and tell us there had been a murder.

I was on the Indian Splendour tour from Delhi to Mumbai via some of the country's most famous landmarks.

But as I boarded, I realised I was leaving the real India behind. I stepped on to what is essentially a five-star hotel on wheels that seemed to stretch for miles.

It's a far cry from the heat, poverty, chaos and constant din of car horns in India's capital.

It was like being transported into a different world – a world once inhabited by 19th century Indian royalty, a bygone era of luxury and indulgence.



My personal butler – yes, this is one hell of a train – showed me to my en-suite cabin and we set off on our journey.

Over the next eight days we would cover 2,000 miles and see spectacular sights. First up, though, was dinner, cooked onboard by top Indian chef John Stone.

I then got to know my fellow passengers over drinks in the Safari Bar, where barman Vijay dispensed drinks and wisdom in equal measure.

The booze fuelled great conversation and helped with getting some shuteye during what was often a bumpy ride.

But an unsettled sleep is hardly an issue when you wake up in Agra, home of the Taj Mahal.

We learned that the white marble mausoleum was commissioned in 1632 by the emperor Shah Jahan to house the tomb of his favourite wife.



Then we posed in front of it for the customary Princess Diana-inspired pics before a trip to breathtaking Agra fort.

The Express rattled on and the next morning we arrived at Rathambore National Park where we went on safari in search of tigers.

We spent a few hours exploring the park on open-roofed trucks but sadly did not spot any.

Back on the train it was a short journey to Jaipur, known as the Pink City due to the colour of many of its buildings.

We toured the Royal Observatory and the city amid traffic chaos and noise reminiscent of Delhi.

And after our dose of the real India we were back in fantasy zone for dinner at the city palace where we rode elephants and feasted on wondrous cuisine.



The train then travelled through the night to the “deserted kingdom” of Bikaner.

We disembarked to be greeted by a band of dancers and musicians, and a red carpet reception.

This is how passengers of the Maharajas’ Express are greeted at every station. Bemused locals would crowd around to see what all the fuss was about.

Maybe they hoped we were movie stars or actual royalty. I felt sad to disappoint them.

A few of us volunteered to take a tour of the Karni Mata temple, otherwise known as the Rat Temple of Rajasthan.

Some Hindus worship the thousands of rats that live there, believing them to be the reincarnated ancestors of the 14th century goddess Karni.



It was one of the most bizarre things I had ever seen and not for the faint-hearted.

We later toured stunning Junagarh Fort before being taken into the desert on camels for sundowner cocktails.

The train kept moving and by morning we were in the Sun City of Jodhpur.

After a visit to its fort we went on a white-knuckle tuk-tuk tour around the bustling city streets.

At one point my train pal George, who had entertained the group with his many hilarious anecdotes, was clipped on the hand by a rampaging bull.

It was a bad cut, but he revelled in telling everyone it was nothing and, "you should see the condition I left the bull in".

Later, we were back in the royal world with a puppet show and lavish dinner and cocktails at the Hanwant Mahal within the Umaid Bhawan Palace.

On day six the train led us to Udaipur, a city of lakes and palaces, where we took a scenic boat trip.

The next stop was Balasinor where we visited the Dinosaur Fossil Park and had lunch with the Balasinor Royal Family.

They are royal only in a ceremonial sense these days but still put on a great show Back on the train for our final night, we celebrated with an Indian-themed party, dressing in traditional clothing and dancing the night away.

And as the carriages rolled into Mumbai it was with a heavy heart that I said goodbye to this magical train and its wonderful staff.

A trip on the Maharajas' Express is truly a once-in-a-lifetime voyage across a thrilling, memorable and breathtaking country. Why don't you hop on board and see for yourself?



## FactFile

GANE and Marshall offer a seven-night journey on the Indian Splendour itinerary on the Maharajas' Express from £5,495pp, based on two sharing.

Includes return flights with Etihad from London Heathrow, airport transfers in India, all meals, tea, coffee, mineral water, soft beverages, house brands of Indian wines, beer and spirits on board, butler service, guided off-train excursions, monument entrance fees, still camera fee, transport and services of a guide, and taxes.

To book, visit [ganeandmarshall.com](http://ganeandmarshall.com) or call 01822 600 600.

Rooms at the Hyatt Regency in Delhi and Mumbai start at £60 per night.

See [delhi.regency.hyatt.com](http://delhi.regency.hyatt.com) and [mumbai.regency.hyatt.com](http://mumbai.regency.hyatt.com).

All visitors must obtain a tourist visa before entering India.

More details at [vfsglobal.com/india/UK](http://vfsglobal.com/india/UK).