



# All Aboard!

## Venice Simplon-Orient-Express

*Venice Simplon-Orient-Express is synonymous with elegance and superb service, with a sense of occasion, too. Various routes are available – for example, London to Innsbruck, Venice to Rome, Vienna to London and Budapest to London – that can be incorporated into your European holiday. Allow Tara Taylor's diary of her experience on the London to Venice route to inspire you.*

### DAY ONE

London Victoria – Folkestone – Calais – Paris

**Check-in:** We arrived at the Orient-Express Lounge at London Victoria and enjoyed complimentary tea and coffee while our luggage was taken care of – cabin baggage will be waiting for you in your cabin when you board the train in Calais later in the day and you can forget about your hold luggage until you reach Venice. Our fellow passengers were a mix of ages and most seemed to be celebrating a honeymoon or special birthday. The atmosphere was fantastic – everyone, including me, was clearly excited and there was a real sense that we were all embarking on a very special journey.

**London Victoria – Folkestone:** At 10.20am the British Pullman pulled up to Platform 2. The smartly dressed staff posed for photos and then we were invited to board. We were shown to our seats – comfortable armchairs that wouldn't be out of place in a manor house – by one of the stewards who made us feel extremely welcome. We departed from London Victoria at 10.45am and enjoyed Bellinis followed by a wonderful silver service brunch of fruit salad, scrambled eggs, smoked salmon, potato rosti, mushrooms and caviar, with a pear and rosemary tart and clotted cream to finish. When we arrived at Folkestone, we

were greeted by a jazz band and a hostess showed us to our coach for the Eurotunnel crossing.

**Folkestone – Calais:** The seats on the coach were positioned four to a table and there were snacks including pretzels to nibble on. The drive to the Eurotunnel took about fifteen minutes and we were able to get off at the car park for half an hour to look around the shopping area, then we got back on the coach which drove into the large train carriage for the thirty-five-minute crossing. Water and juice was served and if you wished you could leave the coach to stand in the small area in front. We arrived in Calais ready to board the Orient-Express to Venice at around 4pm.

**Calais – Paris:** As we boarded the train we were met by Pietro who would be the personal host for our carriage for the journey to Venice. He showed us to the cabin, took our passports (so that he didn't have to disturb us at any point should we be stopped and inspected), explained the functions in the cabin, took our breakfast order for the following morning and said he was there to cater for our every need – which he did. He even had a supply of motion sickness tablets, just in case! I didn't find the movement a problem and it was part of what made the experience for me, but it's important to remember that it isn't a completely smooth ride and the train can stop suddenly on occasion.

**Cabin:** I must admit I wasn't looking forward to the cabin, but in actual fact, I loved it. It had a real warmth and charm. Yes, it was small with only a washbasin facility (there aren't any showers or baths on the train, and there is one communal – but always spotlessly clean – toilet per carriage), but none of this seemed to matter. You don't go on the Orient-Express for large accommodation and marble bathrooms, you go because it is a magnificent train and as you sip your Champagne you really do feel like you have been transported into an Agatha Christie novel.

**Dinner:** Dinner was an absolute joy of an occasion – it was even fun getting ready and putting on make-up whilst wobbling around in the cabin! The Maitre d' visited our cabin earlier in the afternoon to find out whether we'd prefer the 7pm or 8pm sitting and we were called to our seats at the Cote d'Azur restaurant over a tannoy. There are three restaurants, all offering the same menu, but each with a different style décor and there is a dress code, so people had really made the effort. The service was top notch, but there was a real fun and friendly atmosphere. As you walked through the bar car to the restaurants, a pianist was playing and people said "good evening" to each other and smiled and I felt that we were all a part of something wonderful. By the time we sat down to dinner we were in Paris, where more people boarded (there was a third dinner sitting for the

# Elegant Resorts

Paris passengers), however, the stop is in a train station so don't expect Parisian views whilst having dinner. We were seated at a table for four with two ladies celebrating a 60th and a 70th birthday (we had been asked earlier if we preferred a table for two or if we minded sharing), and once the food and wine started flowing it was impossible not to make friends. Dinner was a five-course feast of lobster, truffles, steak, French cheeses, coffee and petits fours, but if you didn't want the set menu there was an à la carte menu available at a supplement. The food was excellent and the wine list included half bottles. After dinner we headed for the bar car for a nightcap with our new friends and it seemed that many new friendships had been made amongst passengers – there was lots of chat, laughter and a wonderfully jovial atmosphere. The pianist played a variety of music, from classical to Abba to Andy Williams, on the baby grand piano and the bar stayed open until the last passengers went to bed.

**To Bed:** We called it a night at about 1am and returned to our cabin to find that whilst we'd been enjoying dinner, Pietro had transformed the sofa in our cabin into a bed and I was amazed at how inviting and comfortable it was. Throughout the night the train stops at various stations and while I wouldn't say I slept all the way through, I certainly woke up feeling rested.

## DAY TWO Onwards to Venice

**Breakfast:** When we woke up and opened the blinds we were greeted by blue skies, Swiss Mountains and magnificent views – at last this was the scenery that the camera and I had been waiting for! I called Pietro and he served us breakfast in bed which was such a treat. After breakfast I lay down again for about an hour just watching the mountains go by. I got up and dressed and Pietro returned to clear the breakfast dishes and make my bed back into the sofa, which he did so efficiently and with a smile, as always. At 11.30am we stopped in Innsbruck for about half an hour so we got off the train to stretch our legs and get some fresh air. When we got back on the train we spent the time prior to lunch relaxing in the cabin, reading about the history of the Orient-Express in comfy Orient-Express slippers, feet up and taking photos when the scenery inspired us to.

**Lunch:** We went for the second sitting of lunch at 2pm. I was amazed that I could still find room for three courses, but you absolutely can't resist the food. Everyone was politely asked to settle their bar bill for that day and for the previous night. After lunch we went to the gift shop and then sat in the bar car for about an hour to enjoy the last few hours on the train.

## London to Venice on the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express 1 night from £1,690 per person

This is a guide price based on two people sharing a Double Cabin, including full board (drinks are extra). Hotel accommodation, flights and transfers are available on request and our Travel Consultants will be happy to discuss how you can incorporate this, or any other Orient-Express journey, into your holiday.



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**Arrival at Venice:** About an hour or so before we arrived in Venice, Pietro came around with afternoon tea, returned our passports and told us what we needed to know for our arrival in Venice – what would happen with our cabin luggage and where we would find our hold luggage when we disembarked. As the train approached Venice everyone came out of their cabin to look out of the window and as we got nearer we could see St Mark's and I felt excited about what lay ahead.



We'd been on the train for twenty-seven hours and been so caught up in the romance and excitement of being on the Orient-Express that it was only at that moment that you remembered your arrival in Venice was only the start of the next leg of your journey. What a wonderful journey this had been.

### About Tara...

Tara has 19 years of experience in the travel industry and as our Product Manager for Europe, North Africa, the Middle East and the Arabian Gulf, she loves travelling around these destinations, building up relationships with our hoteliers, checking the properties we feature are of the highest standards and searching for new ones. She particularly loves Marrakech, never failing to be amazed that in just three hours you are transported to a different world, with great weather and a culture that offers so many unique experiences.

Please call our Travel Consultants on **01244 897 777** for more details or to book.