



Italy's La Dolce Vita train service  
PICTURE Dimorestudio

# Euro stars

Get on track with this year's new rail product and upcoming investment with Adam Shaw's guide to European rail holidays

A third of Brits consider the journey to be just as important as the destination, according to research released last month by Great Rail Journeys. And Sarah Moore, the operator's head of product for the UK and Europe, says there has been "increased appetite from customers wanting to experience this".

With investment in routes across Europe, new tours launching and an ongoing desire for environmentally conscious tourism, it's no wonder rail trips across the continent are popular.

"There's no getting stuck in traffic jams, and with connections made city centre to city centre, travelling by rail helps you really make the most of your time exploring Europe's finest destinations," adds Moore.

While cost continues to be a challenge when selling rail travel over flying, there are signs that consumers are willing to pay more for the experience.

January was rail specialist Ffestiniog Travel's best-ever month for high-value bookings, says general manager Maria Cook. "People are booking much more expensive trips, either on our existing tours or planning tailor-made trips. We're seeing more people upgrade to first class on rail or staying in four-star hotels, for example," she says.

## LA DOLCE VITA

Great Rail Journeys' research found that a third of its customers are planning a trip to Italy this year. It's just as well, as the operator has launched a new 10-day Hidden Treasures of Tuscany tour. Taking in medieval villages such as Monteriggioni and the renaissance cities

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of Florence and Siena, the trip also includes a chocolate-tasting experience in Perugia and a visit to a village food festival celebrating local wine, olive oil or truffles. Dates between March and October can be booked from £2,495, including rail travel to and from Italy.

Ffestiniog Travel has reintroduced its Southern Italy & Sicily trip for the first time since 2011 and Cook explains it is one of its top-three sellers for this year. The 13-day tour includes one of the few remaining on-ferry train crossings, as well as a visit to Siracusa, the site of ➤



# DESTINATIONS

## RAIL HOLIDAYS | EUROPE



### CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:

Emerald Isle Explorer in Monasterevin, Ireland; Tuscany, Italy; Bernina Express, Switzerland; Rome, Italy **PICTURES:** Dave Collier; Michelangelo Oprandi; Shutterstock/Vlas Telino Studio



### ICONIC journey

Switzerland's iconic **Bernina Express** celebrates its 50th anniversary this year. The Bernina line, which runs from St Moritz to Tirano in northern Italy, crosses the stunning Landwasser Viaduct, offering panoramic views 65 metres above the river, and can be enjoyed on Fred Holidays' Grand Train Tour of Switzerland, with prices starting at £1,999. This eight-night tour also includes a trip on the GoldenPass Express which, since December, has been able to travel uninterrupted between Montreux and Luzern thanks to new technology that allows it to automatically change tracks at Zweisimmen.

several filming locations for *Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny*, which will be released in June. It can be booked from £2,965 for a May 9 departure.

Those looking for something a bit special can consider riding *La Dolce Vita*, a new train that forms part of the legendary Orient-Express. With carriages inspired by 1960s and 70s European travel – think gold-framed mirrors and sleek wooden side tables – it is set to welcome passengers later in 2023 and is taking pre-reservations. A return journey between Rome and Montalcino can be booked with Luxury Train Tickets from £1,750.

### ON THE RIGHT TRACK

The Steam Dreams Rail Company, known for its UK day trips aboard classic steam locomotives, is branching out into Ireland with its first Emerald Isle Explorer tour. Covering tracks connecting Dublin, Galway, Killarney and Kilkenny, it also takes in scenic sites including the Ring of Kerry and the River Shannon as well as offering a chance to enjoy "the only onboard railway bar serving draught Guinness". There are three seating, dining and accommodation options, with packages for the nine-day tour ranging from £1,995 for rail travel and accommodation to £3,995 for superior accommodation and a dining package, both with a May 3 departure.

After rail specialist Arena Travel became part of Leger Shearings, the group's head of retail sales, Ashley Dellow, says "much of its rail holiday growth is

planned to come through trade partners". It has a new Historic Cities and Railways of Poland tour built around the charming old towns of Warsaw, Krakow, Poznan and Wroclaw, with prices starting at £1,995 for a September 23 departure, including flights from Heathrow.

### FUTURE SERVICES

As well as new trade-bookable product, there are a host of improvements on their way to rail networks across Europe. London will be connected to Berlin via Brussels on a new European Sleeper service in May, while Italy's state-owned network operator intends to spend €110 billion over the next 10 years, including cutting travel times by up to half on routes such as Turin-Genoa and Palermo-Catania. A new undersea rail and road tunnel is also being built between Germany and eastern Denmark, cutting travel times to Copenhagen and Sweden.

The Nightjet between Vienna and Paris is set to launch upgraded trains this summer – expect wireless charging stations, private en-suite compartments and storage for bikes and winter sports equipment – and Spain has had new high-speed services linking Madrid with Barcelona and Valencia since November.

The future of train travel in Europe is certainly looking bright. And right now – whether clients want to wind past snow-tipped mountains, chug through quaint villages or ride an iconic route – there is plenty to suggest to those in search of a holiday on the rails. **TV**