

Kimberly, a former mine that, at 700 feet deep, is the largest hole in the world excavated by hand.

As the train speeds towards Cape Town, it passes through vineyards (from \$1,906; [bluetrain.co.za](http://bluetrain.co.za)).

**THE TRANS-SIBERIAN RAILWAY**

**Itinerary:** Moscow-Beijing  
**Trip length:** 7 days standard (some package tours are 12 days)

**What you'll see:** The big enchilada of all transcontinental railroad journeys, this 4,900-mile route is for hard-core train junkies. The train is fairly barebones, and those who go do so for the trip and not the amenities.

There are three usual routes: the Trans-Siberian line, which runs from Moscow to Vladivostok (located just east of the Chinese border, and just across the Sea of Japan from the main Japanese island of Honshu); the Trans-Manchurian, which heads south-east into China and makes it way down to Beijing; and the Trans-Mongolian line, which heads south to Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia's capital, before making its way southeast to Beijing.

The Trans-Manchurian is the most popular route with tourists. Cuisine changes with the scenery (dining cars switch from Russian to Mongolian and then Chinese), and you'll traverse the steppes of Siberia, forests of Russian birches and outer Mongolia's moonlike Gobi Desert.

If it's winter, there's bound to be plenty of snow. Summer travelers be warned: Trains on the Mongolian route are not air-conditioned and Siberian mosquitoes are fierce creatures.

Note: Trains don't always stop at the same stations, making it hard to jump on and off (which you're free to do). A travel agency can help you plan ahead of time (from \$990; book through the Russian Experience at [trans-siberian.co.uk](http://trans-siberian.co.uk)).

For those who want to cross Russia with a few more creature comforts, **Nostalgie Istanbul Orient Express** is running a service along the same Trans-Siberian route to Beijing with restored passenger cars made to look like those on the original Orient Express in Europe (\$500/night; [orientexpress.ru](http://orientexpress.ru)).

**ROCKY MOUNTAINEER**

**Itinerary:** Vancouver-Banff  
**Trip length:** 2 days, one night  
**What you'll see:**

This classic tour passes through the fertile Fraser Valley, outside of Vancouver, British Columbia, and Hell's Gate — a wild torrent of water that gushes through Fraser Canyon — then follows the Thompson River to pretty Kamloops, where you'll stay in a hotel (don't expect much; there are no luxury accommodations). From here you'll go into the snow-capped Rockies, passing the sparkling glaciers of Rogers Pass, and then cross the Continental Divide into Banff National Park.

The train's one-year-old Gold Leaf service puts you on board a glassed dome coach — which lets you take in as may big horn sheep, elk and moose as possible — and offers you use of a private first-class dining car with special menus and local wines (from



The fall guy: Via Rail's the Ocean, which rides between Montreal and Halifax, is a hit with leafers.



Fast as a speeding bullet: High-speed shinkansen zip between Tokyo and Osaka in record times.



Eat in the Royal Scotsman's olde world dining car (left); enjoy the Glacier Express' alpine glow (right).



\$869; [rockymountaineer.com](http://rockymountaineer.com)).

**VIA RAIL'S THE OCEAN**

**Itinerary:** Montreal-Halifax  
**Trip length:** 21 hours (overnight)

**What you'll see:** As a part of VIA Rail's five-year, nearly \$700 million revitalization project, the company has installed new railway cars with more comfortable seating and better windows for viewing the scenery.

The train, especially popular in the autumn with leafers, runs from Montreal through Quebec and New Brunswick on its way to Halifax, which has been transformed into something of an upscale harbor area.

It also recently launched Easterly Class on the Ocean, which will be

available each May through October. This comes with a "Learning Coordinator," who teaches passengers about the Maritimes as the trains rolls through them.

This trip is great for those who don't want to make the time and distance commitment of the Rocky Mountaineer (\$352 single, \$529 double; [viarail.ca](http://viarail.ca)).

**PALACE ON WHEELS**

**Itinerary:** Delhi-Agra  
**Trip length:** 7 nights/8 days  
**What you'll see:**

These digs are fit for a Raja, as the gilded interiors of the Palace on Wheels are replicas of those owned by Indian princes. That means wooden inlays, oil paintings and cornucopia of royal crests throughout.

There are four rooms in each of the 14 coaches, all of which have private bathrooms and showers. The two restaurant cars serve food with an emphasis on Rajasthani cuisine.

The train runs through the Rajasthan region in northwest India. The wide range of side trips include tiger-watching at the Ranthambhor National Park, a wildlife sanctuary within the ruins of a 10th-century fort.

The train also stops in Jaipur. Known as the Pink City, many of the intricately decorated buildings are built of pink sandstone, a color locals associate with hospitality. The end of the line is Agra, home of the Taj Mahal (\$295 per person per night for a double room, \$2,065 total for the seven nights, low season; it's also possible to do a partial tour; [palaceonwheels.net](http://palaceonwheels.net)).



Crank it up: Kids can play at the Strasburg station.

**TRAINS FOR TOTS**

You don't have to circle the globe to take a cool train ride. Here, five home-grown trips fun for the whole family.

**DELAWARE AND ULSTER RAIL RIDE**

**1 hour, 45 minutes**  
**What:** The D & U runs through the Catskill Scenic Trail in New York along the Delaware River. Some of the vintage cars are open-air, open-top models. Conductors spin yarns along the way (\$11/adults, \$7/kids 3-12, kids under 3 free; [durr.org](http://durr.org)). Check out "Day Out with Thomas"; a locomotive converted into Thomas the Tank Engine gives 25-minute rides all day long (\$14).

**MOUNT WASHINGTON COG RAILWAY**

**3 hours**  
**What:** The cog railway up Mount Washington in New Hampshire features a coal-fired steam engine. The coaches are replicas from those that were used in the 1800s (\$49/adults, \$35/kids 6-12, under 6 free; [cog-railway.com](http://cog-railway.com)).

**ADIRONDACK RAILROAD**

**2 hours (half-hour layover)**  
**What:** A scenic run that gives riders time to amble around Lake Placid (\$15/adults, \$8/kids 3-12; [adirondackrr.com](http://adirondackrr.com)). The Polar Express train runs during December and features Santa reading to kids in their PJs (\$21/adults, \$16/kids; [adirondackrr.com](http://adirondackrr.com)).

**ESSEX STEAM TRAIN**

**1 hour**  
**What:** A steam engine pulls passengers alongside the Connecticut River, with the option of a riverboat ride afterwards. The cars are vintage. Certain weekends, kids can ride in a red caboose for an extra \$5 (\$16/adults, \$8/kids 3-11, under 3 free; [essexsteamtrain.com](http://essexsteamtrain.com)).

**STRASBURG RAILROAD**

**45 minutes**  
**What:** Take a ride trough Lancaster County on the oldest short line railroad in America. The five cars are pulled by a coal-burning steam engine. Kids can play on their own hand propelled 1930's vintage toy "Cranky cars" in the station (\$9.75/adults, \$4.75/kids; [strasburgrailroad.com](http://strasburgrailroad.com)).

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