

# The Best Train Rides to Help You See the World at a Slower Pace

(Courtesy of Julia Hammond, The Discoverer)

Over the past decade, more and more travelers have been embracing the idea of “slow travel” or “slow tourism,” where practical advocates eschew flying, opting for a more leisurely approach to seeing the world. Not only is this trend more environmentally friendly, it also encourages travelers to be more intentional with their travel, and make a conscious effort to connect with the cultures and places they visit.

One of the most popular methods of slow travel, if you have the time, is by rail. The good news is that there are numerous scenic routes criss-crossing every continent except Antarctica. So whether you’re looking for day-trip inspiration or a long distance adventure, here are our picks for some of the best train rides in the world.

## Machu Picchu by Train



Photo by Nika Lerman/[Shutterstock](#).

Transport options to the famous Incan citadel Machu Picchu are limited. If you don’t want to hike the Inca Trail then rail is the only alternative — but that’s not necessarily a bad thing. Two rival operators, [Inca Rail](#) and [PeruRail](#), link the iconic World Heritage Site with the city of Cusco and the village of Ollantaytambo in the Sacred Valley. The trip is stunning, passing forested hills, snow-capped mountains, and the rushing waters of the Urubamba River. The most luxurious train is the Hiram Bingham, which departs from Poroy station, eight miles from Cusco. More convenient are the Inca Rail services — and PeruRail’s Vistadome — which commence their journey from Cusco’s San Pedro station.

Not only is this route more central, it also traverses El Zig-Zag, a set of switchback tracks that afford travelers a fabulous view over Cusco.

#### Australia Coast to Coast



*Photo by Dr. J Beller/[Shutterstock](#).*

Australia does [rail trips on a grand scale](#) with its Indian Pacific and Ghan services. From east to west, the Indian Pacific travels from Sydney to Perth via Adelaide, a journey of 2,704 miles. On the way, this trans-continental trip passes the magnificent forests and sandstone cliffs of the Blue Mountains, stops off at the art galleries of Broken Hill, and crosses the barren Nullarbor Plain. The Ghan is equally beguiling and runs for 1,851 miles north-south from Darwin to Adelaide. The train takes its name from the 19th-century [“Afghan” cameleers](#) who carried supplies to outback sheep and cattle stations. Today, the cargo is mostly people, who use the train to explore the opal mines of Coober Pedy, tour the Flying Doctor Museum in Alice Springs, and cruise between the soaring sandstone walls of the crocodile-infested Nitmiluk Gorge.



## Honshu by Shinkansen



*Photo by JenJ\_Payless/[Shutterstock](#).*

Only the Swiss rival Japan's reputation for railway efficiency, but even they can't come close to the country's commitment to service. Conductors bow deferentially to passengers before serving drinks and checking tickets. Futuristic bullet trains criss-cross the country on nine [Shinkansen](#) lines. The ride's so smooth you won't even realize you've hit the top speed of 199 miles per hour between stations. On the oldest line, Tokaido Shinkansen, board a train in Tokyo and keep an eye out for a glimpse of Mount Fuji just before you reach Odawara station. Then take a breather in historic [Kyoto](#) before continuing south to Hiroshima's poignant Peace Memorial Park.

## Sri Lanka's Hill Country



*Photo by Simona Weber/[Shutterstock](#).*

Take the slow train from Kandy to Nanuoya and steadily wind your way up into Sri Lanka's pretty hill country. Pass terraces crammed with tea bushes and hop off for a detour to the Heritage Tea Factory in Nuwara Eliya where you can learn how to pluck and taste tea under expert guidance. Back on the rails, meander through the tea plantations to Ella. Disembark for scenic hikes to temples and waterfalls or zip-line above the lush vegetation. Board the train again for the best stretch of all — the spectacular [Nine Arch](#) viaduct bridge followed by a 360-degree spiral known as the [Demodara Loop](#), where the train line passes under itself before descending into Badulla.



## The Afrosiyob



*Photo by rutzamo/[Shutterstock](#).*

Uzbekistan has opened up to travelers over the past few years and the high-speed [Afrosiyob](#) has considerably improved journey times between cities. The train, built by Spanish manufacturer Talgo, reaches top speeds of over 150 miles per hour, transporting visitors to a trip of UNESCO-listed medieval cities. Samarkand, famed for its historic Registan, is a little over two hours from the capital Tashkent. Bukhara, the next important stop on the ancient Silk Road, is just 90 minutes further down the line. Currently, diesel trains continue to the walled city of Khiva, although there are plans to electrify the line in the near future and extend the Afrosiyob service.

## Switzerland's Glacier Express



Photo by emperorcasar/[Shutterstock](#).

Selecting rail journeys to include in a Swiss itinerary is surprisingly tricky; there are just so many to choose from. The [Glacier Express](#), which connects St. Moritz to Zermatt, is a standout amid tough competition. Aside from the resorts which bookend the route, there's plenty to see along the way, making for a memorable trip. Highlights include the breathtaking Landwasser Viaduct and helical turns of the Albula Line; the snow-capped summits of the Eiger and Matterhorn; the Rhine Gorge, dubbed the Grand Canyon of Switzerland; and the mighty Aletsch Glacier. When you disembark this eight-hour slow train, tag on the [Gornergratbahn](#), Europe's highest open air cogwheel railway. From the summit, you'll feel on top of the world as you gaze out at a view of 29 peaks more than 13,000 feet tall.



## Cross the US with Amtrak



*Photo by f11photo/[Shutterstock](#).*

With names like Coast Starlight and Empire Builder, Amtrak's long distance routes evoke the spirit of times past. Music fans should book a seat on the [City of New Orleans](#), which links Chicago to the Big Easy. In the Windy City, make a pilgrimage to Maxwell Street, the birthplace of the electric blues. Jump on a southbound train at Union Station and watch the countryside slide past. Arrive in Memphis and pay your respects to Elvis at Graceland before boogying down [Beale Street](#). Break the journey again at Jackson, Mississippi, "the city with soul," to tick off part of the [Mississippi Blues Trail](#). The final haul delivers you into downtown New Orleans by late afternoon. That leaves plenty of time to freshen up before you head down to [Frenchmen Street](#) to mellow out to some late night tunes.