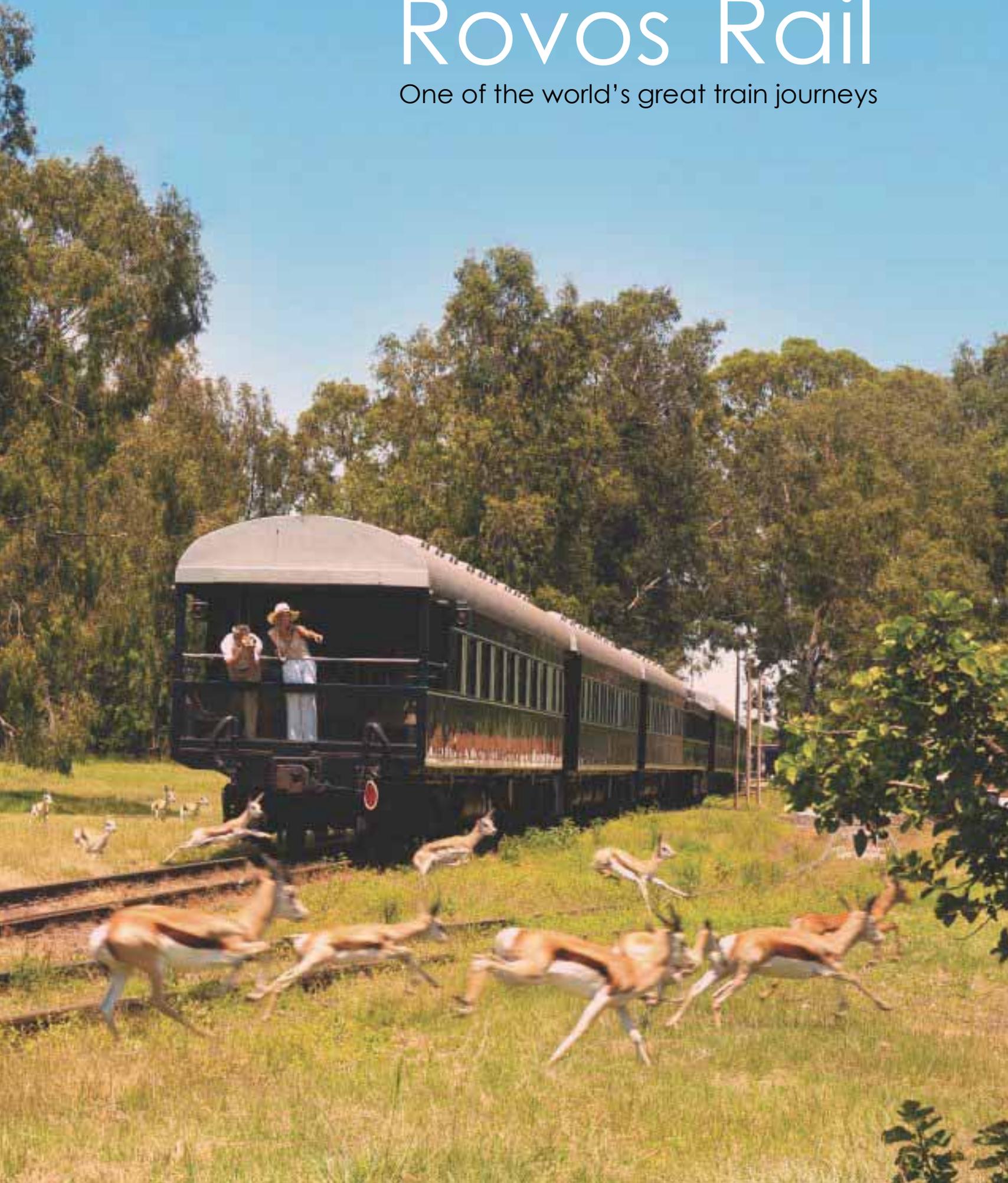




Rovos Rail

One of the world's great train journeys





Pride of Africa Steam Locomotive

“The world’s most luxurious train – the jungle green and ivory 31-carriage, half-a-mile long ‘Pride of Africa’ plies its way throughout southern Africa.”

Recapture the romance and atmosphere of a bygone era, enjoy fine cuisine in five-star luxury, and Africa’s majestic scenery amidst the opulence of this train

The best sea bass I have ever eaten was in the middle of Africa. The surrounding décor was veldt one moment and baobab trees and termite mounds the next. Children waved at as I ate. The restaurant was somewhere near the Botswanan border and the restaurant was moving at 40 mph and then, with a loud sudden screech of brakes, stopped abruptly sending waiters and fine wine flying but not my main course. It remained stubbornly plated. My bass knew its place. And it wasn’t in my lap.

Otto Hank is the executive chef on board the world’s most luxurious train – the jungle green and ivory carriage, half-a-mile long “Pride of Africa” which plies throughout southern Africa and into Namibia but also chugs opulently nearly 3,568 miles all the way up the spine of Africa from Cape Town, through Zimbabwe and Zambia, to Dar es Salaam in Tanzania.

Booking a table is essential. It costs \$17000 per person to get a seat in the cherry-panelled, teakwood panelled Belle Époque restaurant with its “singing” cut crystal wine glasses, starched linen

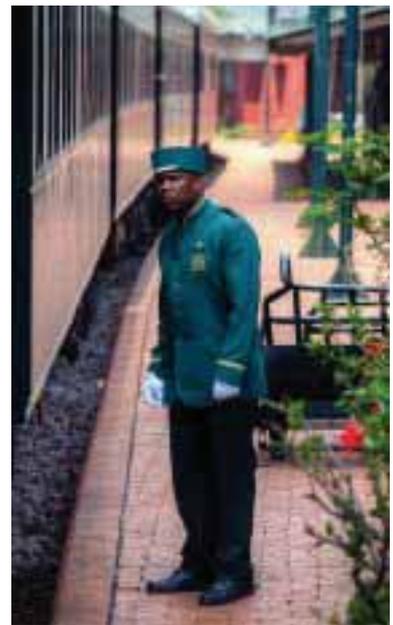
napery, solid silver cutlery, tassel-tied curtains and romantic low lighting.

This gets you three gourmet meals a day for twelve days including the finest South African wines. Plus, accommodation. All-inclusive. Cummerbunds, regimental uniforms, tiaras and national costumes are optional but jacket and tie compulsory. Diners are hailed by a mini-xylophone.

One night is spent eating at the historic \$1,300 a night 1904 Victoria Falls Hotel (sleeved collared shirts and closed shoes under chandeliers amidst colonial kitsch) and two at the Tau Game Lodge on the Makidwe Game Reserve, one of the best in South Africa. You can go on four safaris, have breakfast with an elephant having a bath in the waterhole behind you, enjoy lunch on the same terrace watched by a dazzle of zebras and a journey of giraffes and then dinner fending off the vervet monkeys, intent on running off with your olive roll.

But the real food is on the train. Captonian Otto is one of “Rovos Rail’s” ten chefs. He works closely with Anthea Vos, wife of founder Rohan who started his auto parts business by selling a rebuilt car and then started buying old British train carriages and steam trains to restore. He founded “Rovos” in 1989 and, after near bankruptcy, one fatal derailment, it has rightfully become one of the leading luxury brands in the Southern Hemisphere.

This page, clockwise from top: Train in station; State room; Porter; Train passing over Victoria Falls Bridge



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The centre of operations is Capital Park, Pretoria. You can visit the workshops and a museum. The original steam locomotives were named after family members. Running out of names, Vos named one “Zog”. After his pet Dalmatian.

Sadly, steam engines are no longer employed on the state-run railway lines because water and coaling facilities have disappeared. Instead, SAR-provided diesel or electric locos do the hauling. “Tiffany” or “Margorie” — built in Scotland in 1953 and named after Rohan’s mother — do make occasional puffing, cameo appearances. You have lunch on the platform at Pretoria.

Otto always wanted to be a chef. He started in the scullery and worked his way up. He worked at the Protea Hotel Midrand in Noordwyk, between Pretoria and Johannesburg, in casinos and twelve hotels before joining the close-knit, hard-working “Rovos” team. His brigade consists of two chefs - both ladies – and two kitchen porters. As well as four freezers in the KP car behind the loco tender.

“Everything is meticulously thought out. It’s the operational challenges and logistics that the job is all about. Getting top class high end food with top class high end ingredients onto the table on a moving train travelling through Africa with all the shunting, swaying, jolting, switchbacks and tunnels that entails.

“Eating is all in the eye and first impressions, so you have to make sure

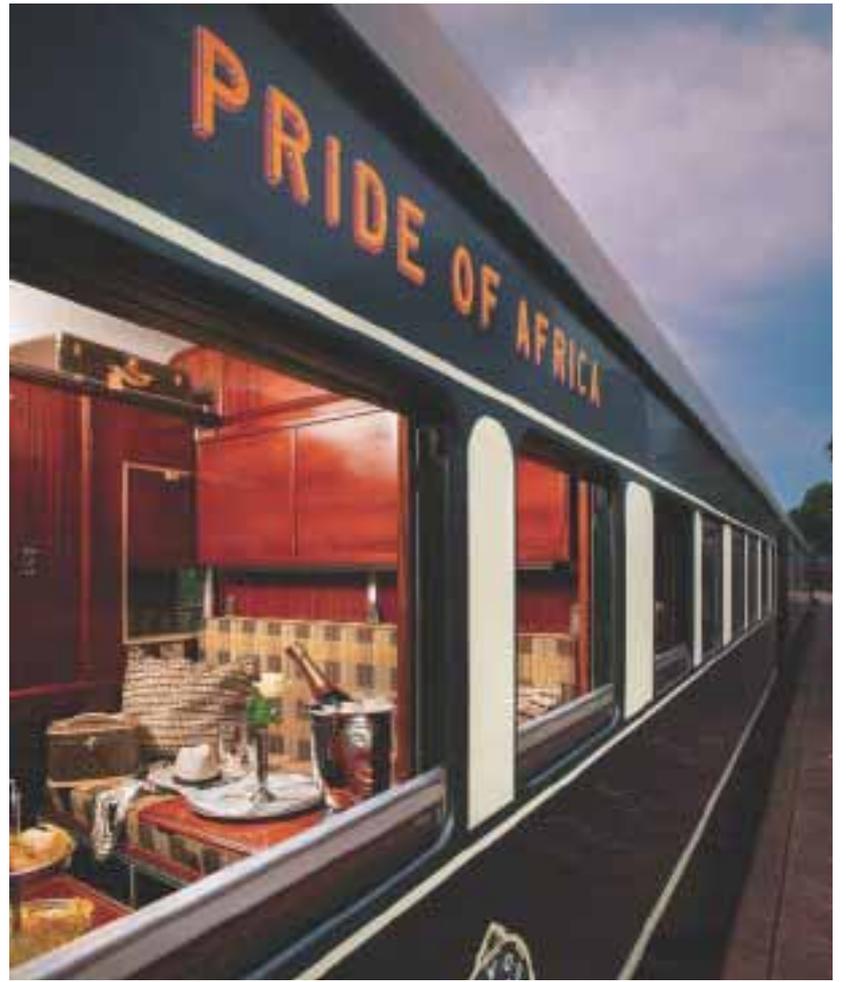
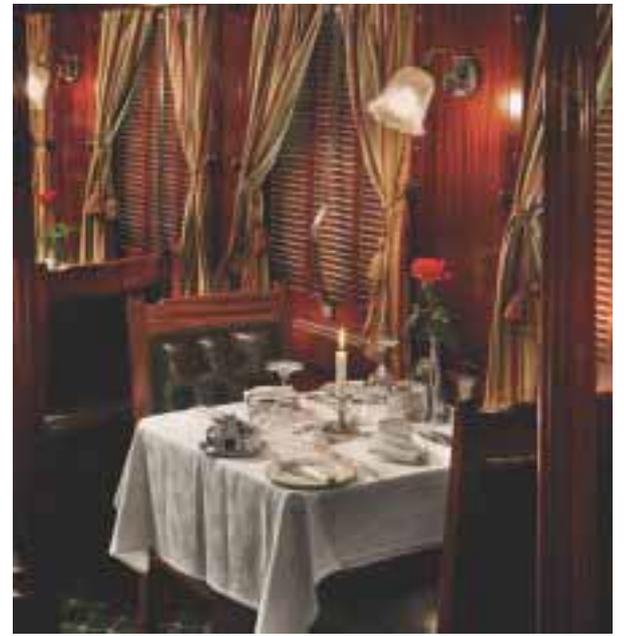
you serve at just the right time on a fairly straight piece of track! The drivers are used to transporting freight, so we have to remind them there are artists and luxury goods on board!”

“We have pick up point for perishables and the fish and meat. But there is 2,500 km where there is absolutely nothing. We have to cater for allergies and other dietary requirements. You have to think out of the box. And plan ahead. Meticulously. Every day is a new set of challenge. Or could be. You haven’t a clue what might happen next. You may be delayed. You have to have contingency measures. It’s all about predictable people in unpredictable circumstances. Passengers and guests alike.”

The superb young waiting staff include Tschepo (Hope) Letoaba, Mandie van der Linde, Victoria Schoerie, and Heinrich Ehlers. The fixed menu is changed every two years and there will be a new one to celebrate the company’s 30th anniversary.

Menus include traditional South African Bobotie – spiced beef mince oven-baked with a layer of savoury egg custard served with peppadew, kiwi fruit and banana chutney.

Drunken Pecorino (ewe’s milk cheese soaked in a wine musk) precedes a dessert of melktert – a sweet pastry crust with a dusting of cinnamon served with fruit coulis, and a small syrup-coated South African doughnut known as a ‘Koeksister’.



Opposite clockwise: View from train; Table for two in dining car; Dining car from exterior; Light features; Train at sunset; Lunch salad



Train snaking through Montagu Pass

This page, from top: Lounge car, afternoon tea; Lunch starter; Zebra watching on Safari



JOURNEYS

2018: Cape Town to Dar es Salaam: June 30. September 29
2018: Dar es Salaam to Cape Town: March 13. July 17. September 4. October 16
Royal Suite - \$21,550 pp (single supplement upon request)
Deluxe Suite - \$16,500 pp (single supplement \$7,130)
Pullman Suite – \$12,450 pp (single supplement \$5,530)

2019: Cape Town to Dar es Salaam: June 29. September 28
2019: Dar es Salaam to Cape Town: January 24. October 15
Royal Suite - \$22,190 pp (single supplement upon request)
Deluxe Suite - \$16,995 pp (single supplement \$7,385)
Pullman Suite – \$12,820 pp (single supplement \$5,695)

For more details on all Rovos Rail journeys including the Pride of Africa Cape Town to Dar es Salaam
www.rovos.com

“Everything is meticulously thought out; getting top class high-end food onto the table on a moving train travelling through Africa with all the shunting, swaying, jolting, switchbacks and tunnels take serious logistical preparation.”

The Pride of Africa also serves ostrich, prawns and filet of springbok with roasted sweet potatoes with a black cherry compote. Otto’s signature dish is chocolate fondant. He is fond of his sweet potato and lychee soup and trout pate starters. Kenyan coffee is served after all meals. Port or Amarula – made from the super-fruit of the ‘elephant’ or ‘wedding tree’ - is very popular digestif

Says Otto: “It is excellent with ice and a great view.”
At the end of the extraordinary once-in-a-lifetime trip, guests are presented with a certificate signed by Mr Vos.

“Be it known that the prerogative to ride on board on the Greatest Train on Earth has been exercised. By this action, persistent thirst has been slaked on the rail-bound watering holes that bear the names of Modder, Nile and Nyanza and that culinary delights have been savoured in the dining cars Shangani, Pa-fure or Letaba and that you have been lulled to sleep in the easy confines of a luxurious suite.”

Air-conditioned too.
There have to be some modern concessions to the bygone golden age of rail travel.





Dining car from exterior