

Edited by  
**Julia Buckley**

# ES Travel

Rovos Rail takes you from Cape Town to Dar es Salaam in the lap of luxury. What's not to like, says **David Wishart**



**Epic ride:** the Rovos train snaking through the hills of Tanzania on the way to Dar es Salaam. Above left, the luxurious dining carriage

**F**ANCY a super spa in Africa? Take the train. Not any train, mind you. The one you want is Rovos Rail, where embarkation begins at Cape Town in South Africa – the fairest cape, as Sir Francis Drake said – and ends 15 days later in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

It is an indulgence of luxury on wheels, involving bush gear by day and Hermès ties at night. Ladies will likely wear Shimansky diamonds they bought in Cape Town. This is new-wave travel, where you (gently) rough it by day and dine in state in the evening.

Two nights in **Tau Lodge** (taugamelodge.co.za) on the border of Botswana, are en route. The first day we lunched by a waterhole with two white rhinos and the next day in the company of a giraffe, while nearby zebras fought off a pack of hyenas. On game drives we encountered huge lions and had sundowner cocktails, while our cottage overlooked a waterhole thronging with elephants and a crocodile. Equally enjoyable was the spa, where I had the best pedicure ever, followed by a massage that left me begging for more.

But Rovos Rail was waiting, and so was the track through Gaborone, capital of thriving Botswana, where a branch of Barclays Bank appeared to have survived an onslaught of gleaming, newly built office towers.

Then Zimbabwe, land of a brave people who are coming out of the Mugabe years and looking forward to a recovery economy with tourism doing well judging by the full house at the **Victoria Falls Hotel** (victoriafallshotel.com), a colonial-style treasure reminiscent of the Raffles of old.

At sundown there are few places to match the terrace bar overlooking the graceful bridge built on the orders of Cecil Rhodes (the same engineers later built the Sydney Harbour bridge).

On our trip, old Africa hands and millennial tourists swapped stories about travel – and what constitutes an adventure. Such as the woman in a tented camp who phones the ranger at midnight to say: “There’s a lion here!” To which the ranger replies: “Madame, is it outside your tent or inside your tent?”

Then came the Victoria Falls experience, which began with a fine statue of David Livingstone, the first European to come here in 1855. Even today, when colonial-era monuments are being toppled from the Cape to Cairo, Livingstone is a revered figure and known to all school children in southern Africa.

Words cannot describe the sight, sound and spray that awaits the visitor at Victoria Falls.

And so the train carried on, stopping briefly on the falls to watch an American tourist bungee jumping to within a heartbeat of the crocodile-infested Zambezi. Rovos Rail trundled across Zambia and Tanzania, through the luxuriant Rift Valley with its baobab



trees, and the huge Selous Game Reserve, where a final game drive was offered. Armchair travellers enjoyed comfortable lounges, including an open observation car, where the young staff served drinks in crystal glasses.

Meals brought everyone together – on our trip just a happy band of 35 – in the elegant dining room, whose teak pillars and wall lights delivered a clubby atmosphere that bubbled along on a tide of connoisseur-class Cape wines such as Bouchard Finlayson chardonnay and Diemersfontein pinotage.

Finally, after 3,568 miles, we reached Dar es Salaam. Tantalisingly close were Zanzibar, Kilimanjaro and the Serengeti. Not that those were on my itinerary, but going home was hard to do.

**Details: Africa by rail**

Rovos Rail fares for the 15-day journey start from £8,860pp. rovos.com

**The greatest train journeys in the world**

**Peru: Belmond Andean Explorer**

South America's first luxury sleeper train turns rail travel into an art form, with hotel suite-style cabins and design inspired by Peruvian artisanal crafts. The train winds its way from Cusco, capital of the Inca Empire, to the plains of the Andes before arriving at Lake Titicaca. A two-night Peruvian Highlands package costs \$4,170 (£2,980) for a junior double en-suite cabin, full-board, including drinks, excursions and entertainment. belmond.com

**Japan: Seven Stars**

The first luxury sleeper train in Japan has just 14 guest suites. The journey takes travellers around Kyushu, exploring Fukuoka, Oita, Miyazaki, Kagoshima and Kumamoto. From ¥630,000 (£4,110) pp for a three-night, four-day package, full-board, including all excursions and drinks. cruisetrain-sevenstars.com

**Australia: The Ghan**

Travels from Darwin to Adelaide, and offers an unbeatable way of seeing great swathes of the country in a short space of time. Stop-offs include a day in Alice Springs and a visit to the opal-mining capital of the world, Coober Pedy. The three-night Ghan Expedition costs from AU\$3,839 (£2,135) per person for an en-suite twin cabin, full-board, including all drinks and excursions. greatsouthernrail.com.au

**Russia: Trans-Siberian Express**

Runs across Russia from Moscow to Vladivostok. The trip takes 15 days, stopping at Irkutsk – known as the “Paris of Siberia” – and Ulan-Ude, the capital of the Republic of Buryatia, among others. From \$15,895 (£11,330) per person for an en-suite twin room, full-board, including a generous drinks allowance and excursions. goldeneagleluxurytrains.com

**Helen Coffey**

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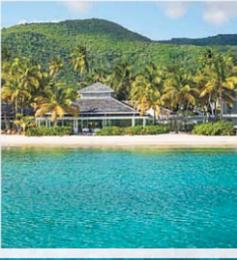
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