

PRESS KIT

Belmond British Pullman introduced by Fiona Sims

OVERVIEW

Belmond British Pullman offers passengers the chance to step back in time and experience luxury train travel as it was—and should be. With its original, fully restored 1920s Art Deco carriages and exceptional service delivered by liveried stewards, the train evokes the golden age of travel, when travellers were elegantly dressed and had the time to enjoy their journey.

Based in southeast England, Belmond British Pullman has regular departures out of London Victoria Station, with occasional departures from other stations around the country. Destinations include Goodwood, the historic city of Bath and Chatsworth House, while special occasions such as Valentine's Day and celebrity chef dinners make each Belmond British Pullman trip a unique experience and the ultimate train journey.

All Belmond British Pullman carriages are original and come with their own name and colourful history. Lovingly refurbished, their exquisite design and workmanship is legendary. Art Deco lamps cast a soft glow over the polished brass, veneered panels and glossy mahogany fittings, while plump armchairs provide a supremely comfortable and intimate dining experience.

The crew has over 203 years of service with the train and some started their early careers at the original Pullman Training School. Their knowledge of the history of the train adds to the experience, as they are able to share stories such as the Queen Mother's favourite carriage and the details of the ornate marquetry, which is unique to every carriage and restored by the same British family that created the original designs.

In order to ensure the train and its staff continue to deliver an authentic British experience there is an ongoing campaign to maintain and develop relationships with British suppliers of food and crockery, and with craftsmen and women who maintain and restore the vintage carriages. For example, new crockery was introduced in 2013, designed by William Edwards, the family-run business that creates some of the finest bone china in England and supplies some of the world's best hotels, restaurants, private clubs and royal households.

Tea comes from the Tregothnan estate, suppliers of England's first and only tea and afternoon tea features Balfour Brut Rosé wine, produced in the Weald of Kent, home to some of the UK's finest vineyards. The carefully selected cheeses served on board are also all from British suppliers: Keen's Cheddar, Tuxford & Tebbutt Blue Stilton, Golden Cross goat cheese and Catherine Mead's Cornish Yarg.

Under the guidance of the train's Executive Chef, innovative new menus are regularly devised to maintain what is one of London's most remarkable dining experiences. Chefs create

exceptional cuisine within the tiny space of the train's galleys and the beautifully presented food is nimbly served to guests as the train moves along.

HISTORY & BACKGROUND

Belmond British Pullman carriages form the London-Folkestone-London section of the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express. They were once part of world-famous trains such as the Golden Arrow and the Brighton Belle.

It was an American, George Mortimer Pullman, who is credited with introducing luxury train travel in the USA. His Pioneer carriage, built in 1864, was the first to be designed with passenger comfort in mind. Following his visit to England, the Pullman Palace Car Company was formed in 1882 and began running a boat train service taking passengers to France. Different services came and went but by 1913 there were five daily boat trains in each direction, including eleven Pullman coaches. Civilian travel to the Continent ceased in 1914 with the outbreak of war.

After the First World War, the boat train service revived and by 1924 an all-Pullman train ran from Victoria to Dover. In 1929 the Golden Arrow started operating, and in 1934 the Pullman Limited Express was renamed the Brighton Belle. The 20s and 30s were the heyday of luxury train travel and the carriages built in that period were the most comfortable, elegant and luxurious ever seen.

In 1936 the introduction of the Night Ferry provided another way to reach Paris from London. Specially constructed Wagons-Lits carriages could be transferred across the Channel by custom-built train ferries.

World War II interrupted cross Channel services, when many carriages were damaged or destroyed. Although services resumed after the war, the growth of air travel triggered the decline of luxury train travel. In 1961 the last steam-hauled journey of the Golden Arrow took place and in 1972 the service ended. The Night Ferry ceased in 1980.

In October 1977, American entrepreneur James B Sherwood bought two 1920s Orient-Express sleeper carriages at a Sotheby's sale in Monte Carlo and set about reviving the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express service. He scoured Europe to find other carriages to create a full train.

Seven Pullmans and two baggage cars were the first to be restored, ready for the train's launch in 1982. These were joined by Lucille in 1986, Vera in 1990 and Gwen in 1999.

Each carriage has a rich history, detailed in a booklet sent to passengers before they arrive for their journey. Audrey, for example, was a first class kitchen car built in 1932 for the Brighton Belle and has carried the Queen and other members of the Royal Family as well as surviving a Blitz bombing raid. Cygnus performed a starring role in the Festival of Britain in 1951, was regularly used to transport heads of state, and was part of Sir Winston Churchill's funeral train.

The inaugural journey of the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express from London to Venice took place on 25 May 1982. Later that year a programme of day excursions throughout Britain was created and now the Belmond British Pullman train is in almost daily use throughout the year.

EXPERIENCES

Murder Mystery Lunches

This is one of Belmond British Pullman's signature journeys and perfect for groups. Guests are presented with clues by a cast of 'suspects' and they try to solve the 'murder' whilst enjoying a sumptuous four-course lunch of seasonal produce and regional dishes expertly paired with Champagne and wines. Those who solve the murder are awarded prizes for guessing the 'culprit' correctly.

Channelling the razor-sharp wit of Miss Marple and the expert reasoning of Hercule Poirot, the journey feels like a voyage into the pages of an Agatha Christie novel set in the bucolic

Kent countryside. Guests can expect to grill ‘suspects’ as the meal unfolds, served by liveried, white-gloved staff in its plush Art Deco dining carriages.

The murder mystery plot is packed with twists and turns for guests to uncover as the cast of actors make their way up and down the train, chatting and dropping clues. Guests are able to gradually build up the background to the murder—and then deploy their detective skills.

And while passengers experience all the drama of a suspenseful classic murder plot, the atmosphere is strictly light-hearted, with fun to be had by all. The real stars of the show, though, are the beautifully renovated vintage train carriages, which set the scene perfectly.

A day trip to Bath

Another of Belmond British Pullman’s signature journeys is a visit to the handsome Georgian city of Bath—the quintessential day out. Nestled in the hollows of its seven enveloping hills, the honey-hued, historic city offers passengers Regency splendour and a Jane Austen ambience.

Leaving London Victoria behind, the 1920s carriages head west as brunch is served with a Bellini cocktail. Guests are able to choose a walking tour of the city, or enjoy free time to shop, visit the Roman Baths and enjoy the sights at leisure.

Set amid Somerset’s enduringly seductive countryside, Bath is the site of Britain’s most famous hot springs and has a reputation for indulgence, culture and architecture.

Its historic centre, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is squeezed into a small, easily walkable area north and west of a curve in the River Avon. At its heart is the Pump Room and much-visited Roman Baths.

There has been a settlement here for nearly 3000 years – since King Bladud reputedly wallowed in the local mud and was cured of his leprosy. In AD 44, the Romans founded Aquae Sulis on the site, building a grand structure around the healing waters.

The most elegant Georgian architecture lies just beyond the city centre, in The Royal Crescent and The Circus. Also worth visiting is 15th-century Bath Abbey, which rises majestically from the ruins of a Norman predecessor.

On the return journey, a four-course dinner featuring seasonal produce and regional dishes is served with Champagne and wine. A steam locomotive hauls the train on certain journeys throughout the year.

Celebrity Chefs take to the rails

Belmond British Pullman continues its series of celebrity chef pop-up dinners, a highlight of the train’s calendar. These special events showcase the chefs’ signature cuisine, with a multi-course menu paired with wines.

Following a Champagne reception at Belmond British Pullman’s private lounge in London’s Victoria Station, guests board the 1920s carriages at approximately 18.00 for an evening of theatrical dining and entertainment. The train makes a round trip through stunning countryside, returning to London Victoria at approximately 23.00.

These exclusive evenings for just 100 passengers allow guests to spend quality time with their favourite chefs. These have included TV’s Aldo Zilli, who cooks up a storm with dishes from his native Abruzzo region, while the hugely popular James Martin delights guests with heart-warming dishes inspired by his Yorkshire roots.

Raymond Blanc of Belmond Le Manoir aux Quat’Saisons has also negotiated the trickily narrow galley kitchens on Belmond British Pullman, pulling off his sublime signature dishes for star-struck guests. Another OBE-awarded culinary legend, Anton Mosiman, has also sent out exemplary cuisine to an eager audience.

Other celebrity chefs who have made an appearance on Belmond British Pullman include ebullient Irish chef Richard Corrigan, of Corrigan’s Mayfair and Bentley’s in London, who constantly champions British Food, with signature dishes such as his toasted oyster sandwich, plus TV’s most affable chef, Tom Kerridge, who owns the country’s smartest pub—the two-Michelin-starred Hand and Flowers in Marlow, Buckinghamshire.

PEOPLE

Gary Franklin, Managing Director of Belmond Trains & Cruises

Tell us about yourself

I was born in the UK and raised in New Zealand. I trained as a chartered accountant and had various roles in finance before—and whilst—travelling the world. We call it 'OE' in New Zealand, the Overseas Experience – we travel a lot, working as we go. It was while I was travelling in the UK that I took a three-month assignment in the finance department at Orient-Express Hotels, as Belmond was previously known. Then I met my British wife, so I stayed on as finance controller for Trains & Cruises, and eventually I was made managing director. I've been working on growing the business ever since –the acquisition and development of Belmond Royal Scotsman and Belmond Afloat in France, and spearheading the launch of Belmond Orcaella in Myanmar. This year we launch the company's seventh luxury train, Belmond Grand Hibernian, in Ireland.

Why do you think customers love it so much?

Each train and cruise has such an interesting story – they capture people's imaginations. There is a romance attached to travelling by train or boat. For me, it's the ultimate relaxation. You can look out of the window, read a book, chat to others, and reconnect with the family in a way that is difficult elsewhere. It's a chance to enjoy the moment, to reconnect while still discovering new things.

What drives you every day?

The sheer variety of the job—not knowing what will happen each day—and the commitment to ensuring our customers have a memorable experience.

Best aspect of the job?

I love being able to work on an idea and make it happen. It's so creative. If I had to choose one experience, then it would have to be the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express for the sheer romance of the journey and the train itself. Though the open observation deck on the Eastern & Oriental Express is also pretty special, waving to people as you go by.

Most challenging part of the job?

It's complex operating in Europe on the railways with all their differing rules. We work across 15 different countries, so the logistics of organising timetables can be a challenge. If you run out of milk you can't just nip down to the local shop – you have to plan everything down to the last teabag.

Best customer feedback?

I joined one of our celebrity chef dinners on the Belmond British Pullman when Raymond Blanc was cooking. I had to chaperone him down the train and the reaction we got from guests was incredible. One lady came up to me and said she had just had the best night of her life – travelling on Belmond British Pullman, meeting her chef hero, and receiving a marriage proposal. That's hard to beat.

What do you like to do on your day off?

I love to read and to ride my bike. A couple of years ago I rode the entire South Downs Way to raise money for community support activities run by our Belmond cruises ship doctor in Myanmar. Over two days, mind you.