

Wake up Little Susie in South Africa

If you're looking to stay on after the Sandstone Festival, Geoff would be delighted to host you on the South African steam-hauled passenger train on the Bethlehem to Bloemfontein line.

The loco will be Class 12AR 1535, recently back in service after a four-year long overhaul. No 1535 Susan has the distinction of being the last surviving Class 12AR and the oldest operating main line loco in South Africa. 'Little Susie' was originally built as a Class 12A at the North British Locomotive Works way back in 1919. The Class 12s, from which the Class 12As originated, were the first new loco types ordered by the then newly-formed SAR.

The train will be supplied by Reefsteamers, a Johannesburg-based preservation group and will have sleeper accommodation for 75 passengers, a lounge and dining car. You choose your accommodation depending on your preference for privacy – Silver Class has en-suite facilities and showers, Economy Class uses shared facilities.

To keep the train weight within limits for the loco, there isn't a full kitchen car, but meals will be wholesome and adequate with continental-style breakfasts, packed lunches and traditional South African evening meals, normally potjiekos (small pot food cooked outdoors) or barbecues. What's the advantage of doing away with the full kitchen car? Why, it means that the lounge/bar car can come along for the ride!

You begin the journey in Bethlehem in the morning, heading to Vailima, adjacent to the Sandstone estate, and from there to Modderpoort where you will spend the night. The following day will see the train steam as far as the city of Bloemfontein. Expect this to be a relaxed portion of the trip with plenty of opportunities to take photos of stunning mountain landscapes and make use of the lounge car...

On day three, you'll get to see the

Bloemfontein loco depot and works, home to Lukas Nel and his team of steamfitters, part of the Sandstone empire. More recently Transnet, the state railway, has moved historic locos there as it develops a major railway museum, and Sandstone has been contracted to start the cosmetic restoration of some of them. Historic steam, diesel and electric traction can be explored at leisure until it is time for the steam charter to leave in the afternoon for

the diamond capital of the world, Kimberley, which is the last stop before heading home to Germiston, assisted by electric traction on the busy main line.

A real gem of a holiday? We certainly think so!

How much? Prices for the five-night charter start at around £1,600 per person (accommodation and meals included).

When? April 12-17, 2019.

More info: www.geoffs-trains.com



Class 12AR 1535 Susan makes a spectacular sight as it powers its train along the Bethlehem to Bloemfontein route.
(Geoff's Tours/Aidan McCarthy)

Oriental escape

The Far East is a magical destination and this nine-night tour takes in parts of Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia on board the downright decadent Eastern & Oriental Express that fuses Eastern culture with the mod cons expected by Western travellers.

Belmond's luxurious train will transport you back in time to a bygone era of luxury with 24-hour steward service, daily

breakfast served in your cabin, three-course lunches, afternoon teas and four course dinners. And when you're not busy eating, you can be gazing out on the lush scenery as you weave through landscapes of city and countryside. The Kwai Yai River has to be seen to be believed.

You'll begin your holiday in Singapore and cruise through the southern Malaysian countryside, arriving the following day at

Kuala Kangsar. From there you travel by coach to Labu Kubong to discover rural Malaysian life. Take a guided tour through lush rice paddies, or if you're feeling very energetic, you can follow an expert on an invigorating hill-trek before continuing the journey to Thailand.

The final day begins in Kanchanaburi for a choice of tours, The Classic, Tracks to Unseen Thailand, and Local Flavours, and in the afternoon you'll end the trip in Bangkok where you'll no doubt favour an early night!

A guided cruise along the River Kwai is also included, along with a visit to the War Museum as well as one to a local Malaysian village, alongside a choice of other excursions. All house wine, house spirits and local beer are included in the package, so if you like to enjoy a drink with your meal, you're in luck.

How much? From £4,229 per person. The offer includes three nights at the five star Shangri La Singapore, on a B&B basis, two nights on board the Eastern & Oriental Express, on a full-board basis, and four nights at the five star Shangri La Hotel Bangkok, on a B&B basis. The offer also includes return international flights from London Gatwick with Emirates.

When? Call to create your bespoke itinerary. More info: www.hayesandjarvis.co.uk



An Eastern & Oriental Express train calls at the old Kuala Lumpur Railway Station on November 1, 2007. The vehicle featured is a dining car, while sleeping cars are to the right. (Wikimedia Commons/Two Hundred Percent)