

# Rhythmic dreaming

## Something special

ON THE RED CARPET: SOMETHING SPECIAL IS IN STORE TRAVELLING ON ROVOS RAIL

Pictures: Supplied

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The train's stopping gently woke me. Stirring from the comfort of my bed I pulled down the blind and was greeted by a cool Karoo breeze. In the safety of my carriage, a layer of blankets kept me warm, and above, a blanket of stars kept me enthralled.

After a few minutes, the train began to move again and I bid goodnight to the country sky that glimmered so gloriously above.

Reflecting on the uniqueness of train-travel, author Alain de Botton notes that: "The silence that reigns inside while the wheels beat in rhythm against the rails outside, the dreaminess fostered by the noise and the view from the windows, a dreaminess in which we seem to stand outside our normal selves and have access to thoughts and memories that may not arise in more settled circumstances..."

There's a rather contagious peace and charm to be caught in long-distance train travel, as deadlines cease and technology

is replaced by the presence of an endlessly inviting landscape.

I've travelled on enough rail journeys overseas to know what a uniquely enjoyable experience it is, but sadly tourist train travel is not often associated with South Africa.

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Rovos Rail, dubbed one of the most luxurious trains in the world, was a bucket-list journey that I was eager to take. It was part of my 36<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration and I was thrilled to discover that it would be only two months short of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the rail project started by Rohan Vos.

Rovos offers several journeys from its state-ly home base of Capital Park in Pretoria. Cape Town, Durban, and Victoria Falls are all different options – even an astounding 14-day journey to Dar es Salaam, if the purse allows.

Within a minute of arrival at Capital Park you know you're in for something special.

A short walk down the red carpet and you're greeted with a glass of bubbly and your luggage is quickly taken care of.

The station is a grand building, opulently but tastefully styled.

Brief tours of the workshop and museum are offered to those interested, and after a word of welcome from Rohan himself, you're ushered on board and introduced to your carriage.

Each of the four Rovos trains can accommodate up to 72 people and has a lounge car, one or two dining cars, a smoking lounge and a glass-ended open balcony observation car at the end.

There are three suite options: the Pullman suites sized at 7m<sup>2</sup>, the Deluxe suites at 10m<sup>2</sup> and then the spacious Royal suites at 16m<sup>2</sup>.

All have twin or double bed options, en-suite bathrooms and naturally, the Royal suites feature Victorian claw foot bathtubs.

Stepping into the train is being transported into both the luxury and elegance of a bygone era.

The cabin is spacious; enough room for your bed, as well as a desk and reclining chair and, of course, your bathroom with surprisingly roomy shower.

Dining is a grand affair. Suits and ties are required for the gen-



## 7m<sup>2</sup>

The size of the Pullman suites, the smallest offered on Rovos Rail.

tlemen and you can choose to dine in either the 1920s period-piece carriage with teak pillars or a slightly more modern 1930s model, with large windows offering panoramic views of the changing landscape.

Lunch and dinner are four-course meals, perfectly paired with premium wines.

As a growing wine aficionado, I could hardly contain my delight arriving at the bar to discover some of South Africa's top wines available.

Naturally, there is also a healthy cocktail, gin and spirits menu, accompanied by snacks through the day.

At any point during the day you

can also use the phone in your carriage to order something from the bar.

Although the trip financially falls into the luxury bracket, it is an all-inclusive service.

Two excursions are offered on route to Cape Town or the reverse journey towards Pretoria.

First is a stop in Kimberley, the home of diamonds.

Being my first visit to the mining town I relished the opportunity to learn more of its sparkling story.

An impressive tourist centre provides all the information needed and offers a view of the great Big Hole.

The second excursion is the Sunday stop at Matjiesfontein.

This is a unique Victorian town that seemingly rises out of the desert.

– Throughout the off-season South Africans and other SADC residents can take advantage of a 50%-off offer.

Rovos Rail transports you into the luxury and elegance of a bygone era

