

First look: Orient Express original train pop-up attraction at Gardens By The Bay

BY GENEVIEVE SARAH LOH 11 DEC 2020

The Once Upon A Time On The Orient Express exhibit opens on Saturday (Dec 12). Visitors can walk inside pop culture's most famous train, with links to Agatha Christie, Dracula and James Bond.

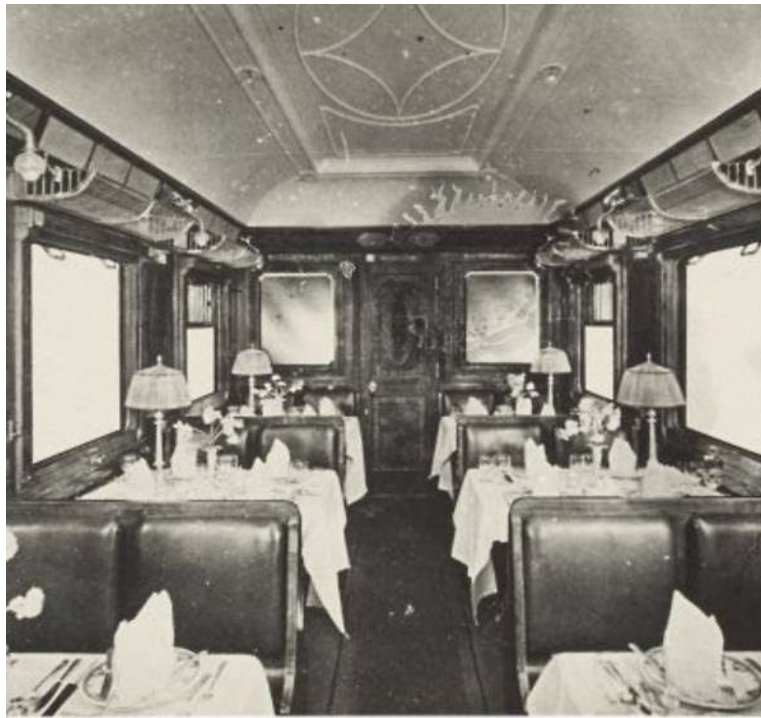


The original locomotive engine, which was built in France 158 years ago at the Once Upon A Time On The Orient Express pop-up exhibition in Singapore's Gardens By The Bay. (Photo: Joyee Koo)

On Oct 4, 1883, the Parisian elite comprising politicians, journalists and writers got their first peek at something that would revolutionise the world of travel forever.

Step back in time and retrace the journey of this legendary and iconic locomotive that's appeared in films and novels like Agatha Christie's Murder On The Orient Express. CNA Lifestyle had a sneak peek of the pop-up exhibition in Singapore, the first showcase outside France.

It was the Orient Express, a long-distance passenger train created by the Compagnie Internationale des Wagons-Lits. And 137 years later, that same historic train – or at least portions of it – is in Singapore for a unique pop-up exhibition.



(Photo: Fonds de Dotation Orient Express)

The event, titled *Once Upon A Time On The Orient Express*, will open to the public on Saturday (Dec 12) and run until Jun 13, 2021 at Gardens By The Bay's West Lawn.



The exhibit Once Upon A Time On The Orient Express opens to the public on Dec 12 (Photo: Joyee Koo)

The exhibit will give visitors a chance to retrace the extraordinary journey of this legendary locomotive. And many of us are no doubt familiar with it. After all, it's appeared countless times in pop culture movies and novels like Agatha Christie's *Murder On The Orient Express*, Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and Ian Fleming's *From Russia With Love* featuring James Bond.

At the exhibition, visitors will get to see two of the original 1920s train carriages, as well as the original locomotive engine, which was built in France 158 years ago.



The exhibit Once Upon A Time On The Orient Express opens to the public on Dec 12 (Photo: Genevieve Loh)

The two carriages, which have been painstakingly restored to its former glory, include a fourgon car (a wagon that used to carry luggage/cargo and one of only three left in the world today) and a Pullman car built in 1920 with interiors that boast a lemon burr marquetry inlaid with pewter floral motifs.



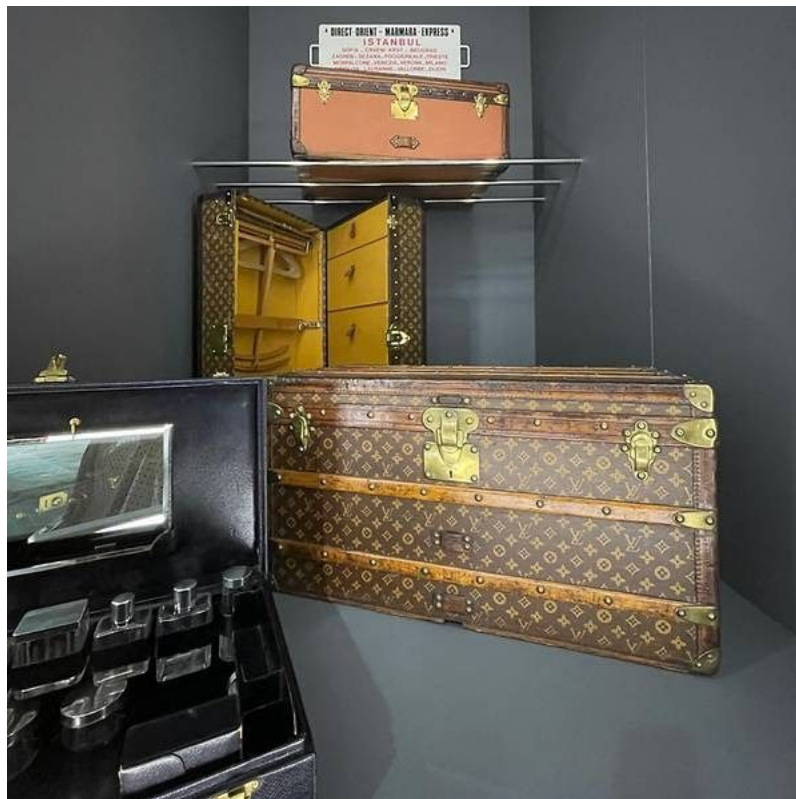
Inside the Pullman Carriage of the Orient Express. The exhibit Once Upon A Time On The Orient Express opens to the public on Dec 12. (Photo: Genevieve Loh)

The Orient Express was known for its lavish decorations, and visitors will get to see the mastery of craftsmanship up close – from the Cordoba embossed leather ceilings and Lalique crystal bas-reliefs Gobelins tapestries to the velvet curtains from Genoa, silverware, precious tablecloths and crystal fine glasses – as you learn about its most famous passengers from Agatha Christie to Graham Greene and Josephine Baker.



Inside the Pullman carriage of the Orient Express, there's a replica of what would have been Graham Greene's typewriter. (Photo: Genevieve Loh)

Also on display is a collection of over 300 artefacts from a bygone era – from documents, uniforms, restored furniture and stained glass windows to posters, menus, crockery, cutlery and even vintage Louis Vuitton monogram trunks used in in the 1900s to 1920s.



Vintage monogrammed Louis Vuitton trunks that travelled on the original Orient Express. (Photo: Genevieve Loh)



Original menus from the Orient Express (Photo: Genevieve Loh)

On top of an interactive segment via newsreels and film clips focusing on the history of the Orient Express and how it linked the famous route from Europe to our side of the world, there will be a fun escape room experience which is scheduled to open next year, where you get to play the famed Belgian detective Hercule Poirot and solve a mystery ala Christie's novel.



Fans of Agatha Christie's *Murder On The Orient Express* will love what's inside the fourgon carriage of the Orient Express. (Photo: Genevieve Loh)

There is also a lush pop-up restaurant featuring lavish cuisine from three-Michelin-starred Chef Yannick Alleno on board a replica Anatolia dining car that is on track to officially open for the full dining experience of lunch, brunch and dinner right before Christmas.



High tea on the Orient Express (Photo: Genevieve Loh)

In the meantime, the restaurant will first open with high tea sessions (S\$78 ++ per person), offering up delicately delicious Parisian pastries that include the likes of The True Saint-Honore, Caviar Lime Madeleine, Coffee Flavoured Religuses Pastry, Golden Profiteroles alongside crustless sandwiches of Comte Cheese and Savora Sauce as well as traditional English scones.



High Tea on the Orient Express (Photo: Genevieve Loh)

The exhibition was first held in Paris in 2014 and Singapore was specifically chosen as the train's first pop-up destination outside of France.

And it's been a complicated set-up: On Nov 1, the train carriages and locomotive set sail from Paris (the first time it has ever left France) and it arrived in Singapore two days later on Nov 3, where it was carefully transported to the Gardens' West Lawn.



Orient Express' original Pullman carriage from the 1920s (Photo: Genevieve Loh)

According to the show's curator Claude Mollard, the original locomotive and two carriages had to be housed within a custom-built infrastructure to protect the artworks and displays, given the hot and humid climate in Singapore.

In total, the whole project – which included the involvement of the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) – has taken a whopping six months from start to finish. “The Singapore Tourism Board is delighted that Singapore will be the first destination to showcase the Orient Express outside of France,” said STB chief executive Keith Tan. “The launch of this pop-up attraction during these times is a testament to Singapore's global appeal and also reflects confidence in us as a safe and trusted destination.”



The exhibit Once Upon A Time On The Orient Express opens to the public on Dec 12. (Photo: Genevieve Loh)

Guillaume de Saint Lager, vice president and executive director of the Orient Express brand agreed: "It's an extraordinary opportunity to see this exhibition going on a world tour, with Singapore as the first stop. Gardens By The Bay is a magnificent showcase for the Orient Express, and echoes the exotic dimension of the brand. We hope, in these complicated times, to take Singaporeans on a journey into the myth of the Orient Express. A true escape for the senses."

Eligible Singaporeans will be able to purchase tickets for this pop-up attraction using the SingapoRediscover vouchers via different bundled packages from S\$438++ with Fairmont Singapore which includes an overnight stay with breakfast, tickets to Once Upon A Time On The Orient Express exhibition, dining experience in the carriage as well as a memento. For room reservations, please contact +65 6837 3883 or reservations.singapore@fairmont.com.

Once Upon A Time on The Orient Express is a ticketed exhibition, with tickets (\$25 per person, free for children under three years old) sold by hourly time slots. For admission, visitors must reserve their tickets on sistic.com.sg/events/orient2021.

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