



# TRAVEL BONUS

EXCLUSIVELY FOR *Sunset* BONUS SUBSCRIBERS

## The West by Rail

■ Best  
sightseeing  
trips

■ Dinner  
train  
outings

■ Amtrak  
mini  
vacations

The Durango  
& Silverton  
edges a  
gorge above  
Colorado's  
Animas River.



# Discoveries onboard

10 rail trips that take you  
into a wilder West

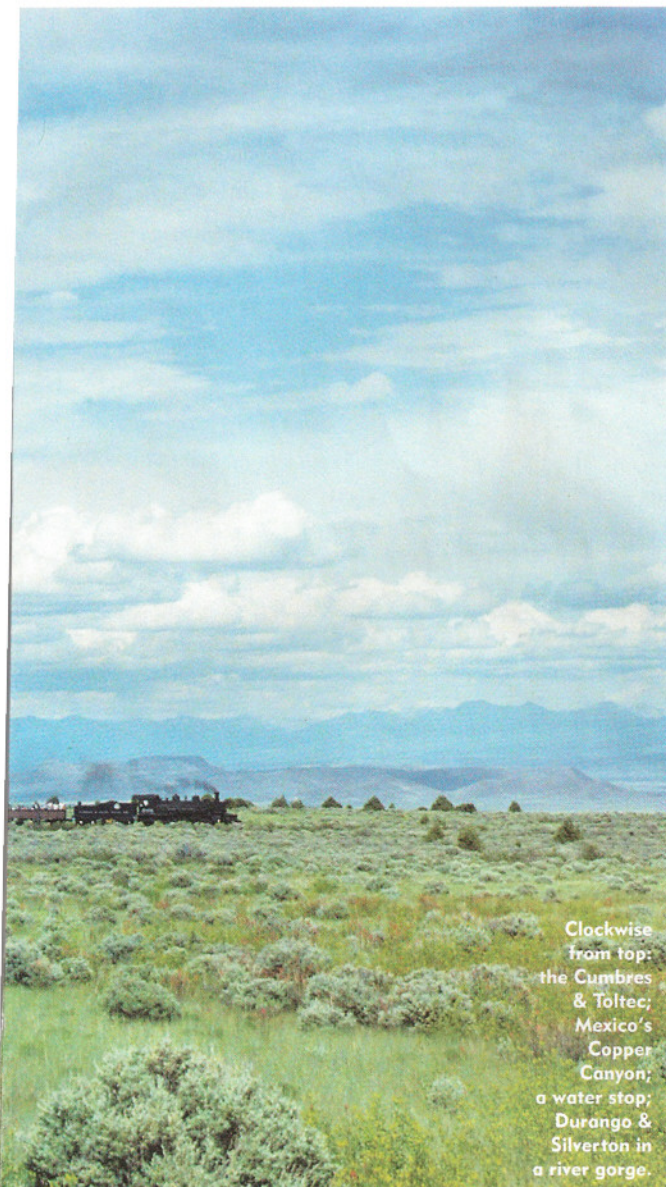
BY CAROLE JACOBS

**As they race** across deserts, push through thick forests, and edge craggy canyons, trains showcase the drama of the West's landscape—including wild and remote spots you can't see any other way. There's a train ride for just about every taste.

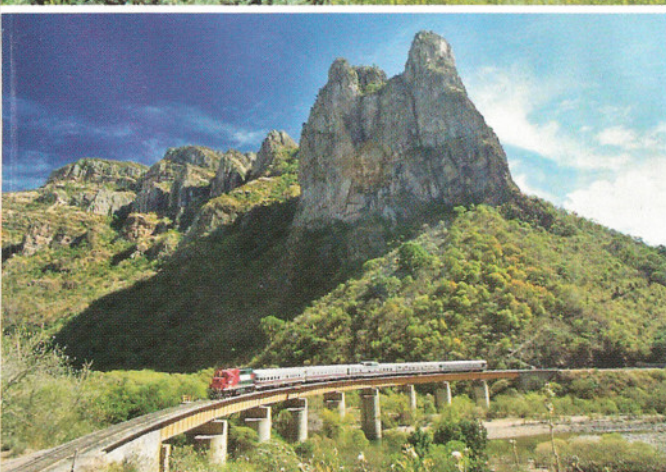
One thing all of these rail trips have in common: They remind us that the journey, not the destination, is the best reason to travel.







Clockwise from top: the Cumbres & Toltec; Mexico's Copper Canyon; a water stop; Durango & Silverton in a river gorge.



COUNTERCLOCKWISE FROM TOP: STEVEN J. BROWN (3), KERRICK JAMES

#### HIGHEST PASS

## 1 Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad

**Antonito, CO.** America's longest and highest narrow-gauge coal-burning steam train winds a serpentine path along the rockbound Toltec Gorge of the Los Pinos River—an 1880s route that connected railroad outposts and mining camps. The seven-hour trip from Antonito, Colorado, to Chama, New Mexico, goes past open countryside, through tunnels, and across tall wooden trestles to 10,015-foot Cumbres Pass. After the summit, the train creeps down to Chama on a steep (4 percent) grade.

**HIGHLIGHT:** Roll into the remote outpost of Osier, Colorado, at high noon for a hearty lunch and homemade desserts in an old-time dining hall.

**SEASON:** Once daily Sat–Thu through Oct.

**INFO:** \$64, including lunch and shuttle-bus return. [www.cumbrestoltec.com](http://www.cumbrestoltec.com) or 888/286-2737.

#### GRANDEST CANYON VIEW

## 2 Sierra Madre Express

**Tucson.** A seven-night all-inclusive round-trip rail and land journey out of Tucson aboard a first-class train with elegant coaches, sleeper cars, and domed dining and observation cars, plus a bilingual narrator. After a morning touring southern Arizona, board restored vintage railcars (circa 1940s and '50s) in Nogales, Mexico, for a ride to the rim of the Copper Canyon, passing waterfalls, towering canyon walls, sheer drop-offs, and pine forests.

**HIGHLIGHTS:** From a tiny village on the rim, look into a rust-colored gorge four times deeper than the Grand Canyon; tour the area during a two-night stay. You'll also visit Creel, Mexico, a Tarahumara village.

**SEASON:** Sep–May.

**INFO:** From \$2,895, including all meals, guided tours, and beverages onboard. [www.sierramadrexpress.com](http://www.sierramadrexpress.com) or 800/666-0346.

#### BEST STEAM TRAIN

## 3 Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad

**Durango, CO.** The nine-hour round-trip along an 1882 route pushes through the rugged San Juan Mountains to Silverton, a mining town tucked in a valley at 9,318 feet. The coal-fired locomotive bellows pillars of steam while pulling bright yellow cars past hair-raising cliffs and across a raging Animas River. Choose enclosed coach or open-air car.

**HIGHLIGHT:** A two-hour layover in Silverton allows time to dine at a saloon and roam dusty streets lined with miners' cabins, Victorian homes, the Grand Imperial Hotel, and a gold-domed courthouse.

**SEASON:** Up to three trips daily through Oct 29.

**INFO:** From \$62. [www.durangotrain.com](http://www.durangotrain.com) or 888/872-4607.



## TRAVEL BONUS

### BEST WILDLIFE-VIEWING

#### 4 Alaska Railroad Corp.

**Anchorage.** During a 12-hour, 363-mile trip from Anchorage to Fairbanks, Alaska Railroad's Denali Star glides through evergreen forests, across several high trestles and a span bridge, and within 46 miles of Mt. McKinley. It also makes a whistle stop in Denali National Park. GoldStar service is worth the extra expense (\$100) for a multi-level luxury coach and private open-air viewing deck.

**HIGHLIGHT:** Forward-facing seats and dome cars offer unobstructed views for spotting bald eagles, brown bears, and moose.

**SEASON:** Once each way daily through Sep.

**INFO:** From \$179 each way. [www.alaskarailroad.com](http://www.alaskarailroad.com) or 800/544-0552.

### BEST HISTORIC RIDE

#### 5 White Pass & Yukon Route Railroad

**Skagway, AK.** Vintage diesel locomotives pull period parlor cars along a route that linked Skagway to Whitehorse during the Gold Rush. On the White Pass Summit Excursion, zigzag from sea level to 2,865-foot White Pass on a three-hour, 40-mile round-trip. Glimpse boiling rivers, cascading waterfalls, and wooden trestles over glacier-carved gulches.

**HIGHLIGHT:** The tour is narrated, offering you the chance to learn about the Klondike Gold Rush's colorful beginnings.

**SEASON:** Three times daily through Sep.

**INFO:** \$89. [www.wpyr.com](http://www.wpyr.com) or 800/343-7373.

### BEST FALL FOLIAGE

#### 6 Cripple Creek & Victor Narrow Gauge

**Cripple Creek, CO.** A steam engine with open-air cars spirals through evergreen mountains; the narrated tour highlights Cripple Creek's boom-and-bust mining past. During a 4-mile, 45-minute round-trip, the train chugs past deserted claims, mine headsets, and the remains of Anaconda, a once-roaring mining camp that has withered away to slag heaps and broken bottles.

**HIGHLIGHT:** Go from mid-to late September and ride through forests rich with the gold of glowing aspens.

**SEASON:** Multiple runs daily through Oct.

**INFO:** \$9.50. [www.cripplecreekrailroad.com](http://www.cripplecreekrailroad.com) or 719/689-2640.

### BEST MOONLIGHT TRIP

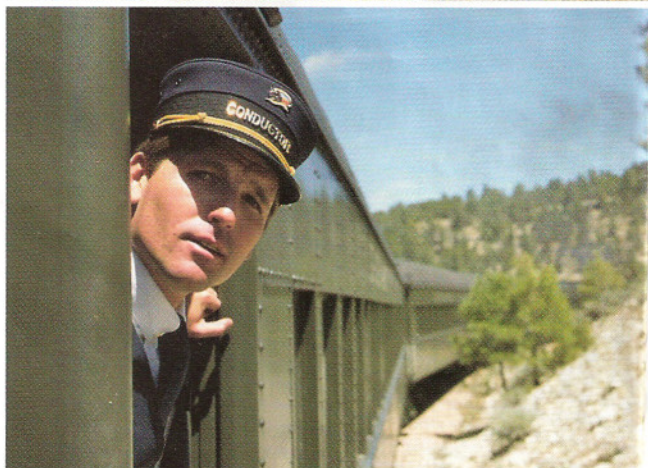
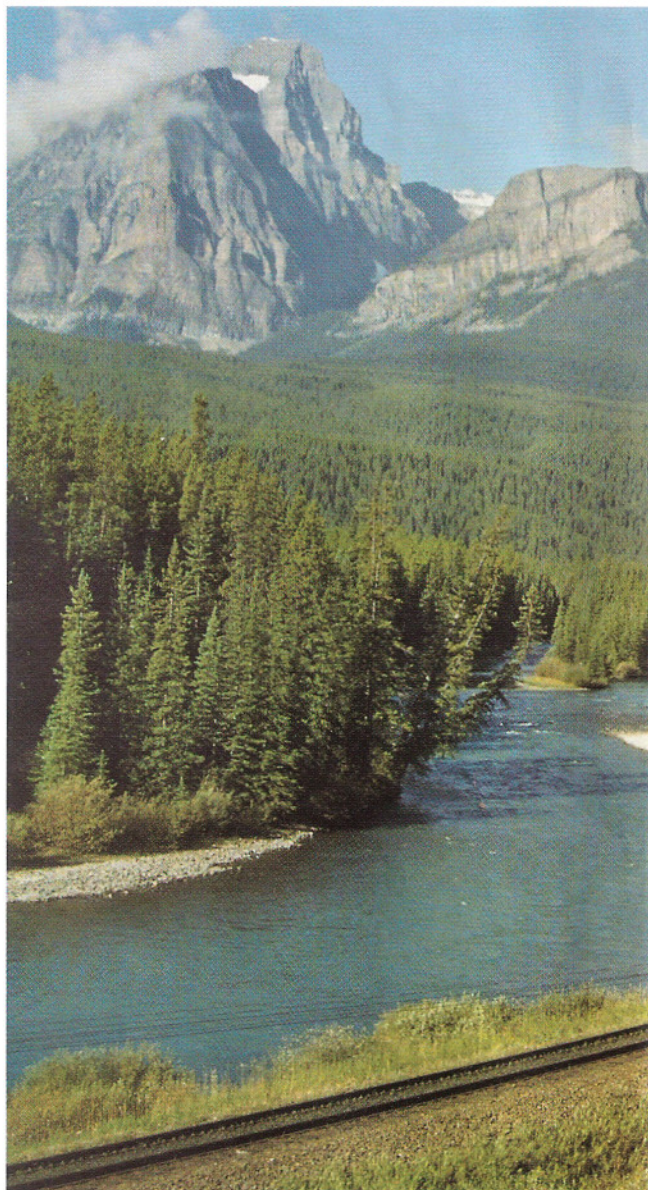
#### 7 Verde Canyon Railroad

**Clarkdale, AZ.** On a four-hour round-trip Starlight Tour through Arizona's "other Grand Canyon," thread past crimson cliffs and Indian ruins, and whisper past the ghost ranch of Perkinsville.

**HIGHLIGHTS:** The day-into-night outings showcase the beauty of the canyon by sunlight and moonlight. On the return, a moveable headlight mounted to the train's engine sweeps across the black canyon, illuminating odd rock formations.

**SEASON:** Jul 30, Aug 13, Aug 27, Sep 3.

**INFO:** From \$40. [www.verdecanyonrr.com](http://www.verdecanyonrr.com) or 800/293-7245.





Clockwise from top: into the Canadian Rockies; rolling toward the Grand Canyon; a conductor peeks at the view.

#### MOST SPECTACULAR ALPINE BACKDROP

### 8 The Rocky Mountaineer

**Vancouver, B.C.** The two-day passage to Calgary, going through Banff and Kamloops, is the only all-daylight ride through the rugged Canadian Rockies (the train stops overnight in Kamloops). Enjoy modern equipment; bilevel dome cars and an elegant dining car; and journeys into narrow river canyons and over mountain passes to view glaciers, waterfalls, and abundant wildlife. The route edges the Fraser River (in fall, riders can glimpse the red backs of spawning sockeye salmon).

**HIGHLIGHTS:** If the water's low enough to permit viewing, a gaping gorge housing the rusted remains of a long-ago train wreck gives passengers pause. Later, the engine turns to nearly face the caboose as the train climbs through Spiral Tunnels.

**SEASON:** Three times weekly through Oct.

**INFO:** From \$429 each way. [www.rockymountaineer.com](http://www.rockymountaineer.com) or 800/665-7245.

#### BEST REDWOODS TRIP

### 9 Skunk Train

**Fort Bragg, CA.** In the 1920s, this was a gas-powered lumber train that spewed noxious fumes. It's now a coal-fired steam and diesel train, and scents are more pleasant—ocean breezes and evergreen—as the engine pulls vintage coaches and open-air excursion cars into a roadless redwood forest. On the

three-hour round-trip ride, the train crosses 30 bridges and trestles, tunnels through two mountains, and edges marshes and meadows.

**HIGHLIGHT:** At Northspur, deep in the redwoods, watch the engine's water tank get filled from an old railroad water tower—a treat for kids and rail buffs.

**SEASON:** Up to three times daily through Oct.

**INFO:** From \$35. [www.skunktrain.com](http://www.skunktrain.com) or 866/457-5865.

#### BEST ONBOARD ENTERTAINMENT

### 10 Grand Canyon Railway

**Williams, AZ.** A nine-hour round-trip between historic Williams and Grand Canyon National Park along a century-old route into pine forests, grassy plains, and high desert. A steam-powered engine or diesel locomotive pulls restored vintage coaches, dome cars, and old-fashioned parlor cars with private observation decks. Stretch your legs during a three-hour layover at the South Rim while the train rests in the 1910 log-cabin depot.

**HIGHLIGHTS:** Bandits on horseback chase and rob the train; onboard, strolling musicians sing Western ditties.

**SEASON:** Once daily year-round.

**INFO:** From \$60. [www.thetrain.com](http://www.thetrain.com) or 800/843-8724.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: STEVEN J. BROWN (2), KERRICK JAMES



## TRAVEL BONUS

# The best dinner trains in the West

5 great ways to get dinner to go

**The best of today's** dinner trains re-create the magic of a golden era of travel: Tuxedoed waiters serve exquisite cuisine in lavishly restored period dining cars, and musicians set the night to music as the train glides through lovely landscapes.







Enjoy vintage cars and fine cuisine on the Napa Valley Wine Train; flowers edge the valley route (above right).

ROBERT HOLMES (2)

#### CALIFORNIA

### Napa Valley Wine Train

**Napa, CA.** This is as much a three-hour rolling culinary adventure as a train trip. Eat in a beautifully restored Pullman dining lounge; ride past wineries and vineyards that roll to the edge of forested mountains. Enjoy a meal, or relax in the wine-tasting car and sample any of 40 local vintages. The customized kitchen car has observation windows so you can watch chefs while they work.

**HIGHLIGHTS:** Gourmet fare such as roasted Angus tenderloin or spinach salad with candied walnuts, smoked goat cheese, and honey-cider vinaigrette.

**OPTIONS:** Murder mysteries; moonlight runs; early lunches; Sunday dinner-and-concert series; family fun nights.

**INFO:** Dinner from \$85. [www.winetrain.com](http://www.winetrain.com) or 800/427-4124.

### Sierra Railroad Dinner Train

**Oakdale, CA.** Founded in 1972, the first dinner train in North America meanders from orchards and wide-open cattle country to the lost town of Occidental. During the approximately three-hour ride, California cuisine and wines are served in vintage dining cars named after famous locales in Yosemite National Park, once a stop on the earlier Sierra Railroad. There are cocktails and dancing in the Mirror Lake lounge car, and there's always stellar stargazing in the open-air cars.



**HIGHLIGHTS:** Roasted quail stuffed with wild rice, almonds, and apricot pilaf; grilled flank steak with Cabernet sauce.

**OPTIONS:** Romantic dinners; murder mysteries; Sunday brunches; Wild West shows; wine tastings; wildflower trips; holiday and party trains.

**INFO:** Dinner from \$69. [www.sierrarailroad.com](http://www.sierrarailroad.com) or 800/866-1690.

#### NORTHWEST

### Crooked River Dinner Train

**Redmond, OR.** Rumble through a Lonesome Dove landscape of cattle and fields on an approximately three-hour round-trip from Redmond to Prineville. Get a taste of Western music and entertainment, plus a menu item named after a famous bandit. Options include a re-created holdup: "Jesse James" and horsemen chase the train and climb onboard to rob passengers.

**HIGHLIGHT:** Jesse James Pot Roast.

**OPTIONS:** Sunday suppers with the Jesse James train robbery; murder mysteries; holiday champagne brunches.

**INFO:** Dinner from \$65. [www.crookedrivrailroad.com](http://www.crookedrivrailroad.com) or 541/548-8630.

### Spirit of Washington Dinner Train

**Renton, WA.** Cruise along the sparkling waters of Lake Washington's eastern shore and cross a tall, 120-year-old wooden trestle before making a brief wine-tasting stop at Columbia Winery. On the return portion of the three-hour ride, enjoy gourmet fare and fine wines in an elegant domed dining car.

**HIGHLIGHTS:** Cherrywood-smoked salmon, boxcar potatoes.

**OPTIONS:** Murder mysteries; Saturday lunches; Sunday brunches.

**INFO:** Dinner from \$60. [www.spiritofwashingtondinnertrain.com](http://www.spiritofwashingtondinnertrain.com) or 800/876-7245.

#### ROCKY MOUNTAIN

### Charlie Russell Chew-Choo

**Lewistown, MT.** Fine prime rib is a point of pride on this approximately four-hour excursion train, but the scenery is satisfying too—the big-sky country that inspired Western artist Charlie Russell. Chug through a 2,000-foot-long tunnel and past the ghost town of Hoosac, where only the dance hall and telegraph office remain. Deer, coyotes, hawks, and bald eagles appear as dusk descends on the prairie.

**HIGHLIGHTS:** Prime rib, cheesecake.

**OPTIONS:** Dinner trains; Sunday brunch with cowboy poets (Aug 21); New Year's Eve party train; Christmas Polar Express train.

**INFO:** Dinner from \$90. [www.charlierussellchewchoo.com](http://www.charlierussellchewchoo.com), 800/860-9646, or 406/538-8721. —C.J.



# Amtrak short-hopping

Want a quick week-end getaway? Try these four trips

BY MICHAEL TENNESEN



**A late-summer trip** on Amtrak makes an easy mini vacation—especially if you follow one of our four itineraries. But reserve soon for

and over the Cascades and then the Continental Divide, edging Glacier National Park's craggy mountains.

tion. Head back on the 4 p.m. train to be home by 6:45 p.m. (from \$52 round-trip).

■ **Southwest Chief: Los**

**Take the Pacific Surfliner past palm trees and ocean; for an easy**

in the popular sleeper they book quickly. **St Starlight: Los Angeles to Seattle.** One of Amtrak's most popular and scenic routes. The 35-hour journey is gloriously off the beaten path—mostly away from highways, billboards, and city stresses—for views of the rugged shore, coastal mountains, and inland valleys.

**TRIP:** Take one day and night from Los Angeles to Oakland (from \$51) or Portland to Seattle (from \$24); in three days to the entire L.A.-to-Seattle run (from \$83 one-way, with roomette).

**Empire Builder: Seattle to Glacier, MT.** The Empire Builder travels all the way from Seattle to Chicago, but only the sweetest part is from Seattle to East Glacier, Montana. It climbs up

and have dinner and a glass of wine in the dining car while gazing at the moonlit mountains; you're in East Glacier by 9:54 a.m. The return train departs at 6:45 p.m. and arrives in Seattle at 10:20 a.m. (from \$142 round-trip, \$272 with roomette).

■ **Pacific Surfliner: Los Angeles to San Diego.** It starts at the historic Union Station in downtown Los Angeles, goes south through Fullerton—which has a great old restored station itself—and hugs the shore through San Juan Capistrano, Oceanside, and Solana Beach. The trip ends in San Diego near Little Italy.

**SAMPLE TRIP:** From Los Angeles, take Saturday's 8:30 a.m. run, arriving in San Diego at 11:20. Grab lunch at a nearby restaurant, then roam shops and art galleries near the sta-

Southwest Chief follows the path of old Route 66, stopping in Gallup, New Mexico; Winslow, Flagstaff, Kingman, and Williams Junction, Arizona (classic Southwest desert towns); and Barstow and Needles, California, before ending up at Los Angeles' Union Station. See panoramas of the rugged and twisted desert.

**SAMPLE TRIP:** For a neat long weekend, take the 6:45 p.m. on Friday from Los Angeles, arriving Flagstaff at 4:56 a.m.; hop on the Amtrak motor coach to Maswick Lodge (lodging extra) at the Grand Canyon. Spend a night at the canyon, then catch the 8:57 p.m. train from Flagstaff and be back in L.A. by 8:15 a.m. (from \$108 round-trip, \$360 with roomette).

**INFO:** [www.amtrak.com](http://www.amtrak.com) or 800/872-7245. \*

holiday, hop off and spend a day in a beach town.

DAVID ZAITZ

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