Venice Simplon-Orient-Express (VSOE)

https://www.irtsociety.com/train/venice-simplon-orient-express/

Overview

The *Venice Simplon-Orient-Express (VSOE)* is the world's most authentic luxury train. Made famous in the Agatha Christie story, the train's 1920s-vintage Art Deco cars, sparkling in their navy and gold livery and snowy white roof, take your breath away. The journey between Paris and Istanbul is legendary — and perfect for special occasion celebrations.

Read More

The train's mystique is such that its image is constantly in demand to portray elegance, beauty, sophistication and romance. Watch this video to see its stylized image, as seen through the eyes of French perfume and beauty product icon Chanel (wait for it; you may see another ad first).

The *VSOE* can accommodate up to 108 passengers, but on special journeys, the train's capacity is

reduced to roughly 78 guests.

L'Observatoire Suite — the world's largest train suite — was added to the *VSOE* in 2025. It can function as a completely private residence, and includes a luxurious private dining area, a secret tearoom, an expansive bedroom, and a bathroom with both a rain shower and freestanding tub.

A total of 16 Suites have been added to the train — 12 double-bedded, and 4 twin-bedded . These join the six pre-existing and larger Grand Suites. These beautiful cabins feature ensuite bathroom and shower, small sitting area, and fixed double or twin beds (made up into banquette seating during the day). Suites offer a perfect half step between Historic Twins and Grand Suites.

Special Report: IRT's Rachel Hardy was among the first to see the newly unveiled Grand Suites, and she was impressed. See her report on the Grand Suites here.

And read Rachel's report of her full journey on the *Venice Simplon-Orient-Express*: Part 1 & Part 2 .

Accommodations

Historic Twins

Historic Twins have Pullman-style beds (one up, one down) that fold into a comfortable sofa during the day. A sink in a lovely, closing vanity is fitted into the corner. These cabins measure 30 square feet.

Suites

Suites — new in 2023 — offer en-suite bathroom and shower, either double or twin beds (4 Suites are configured with twin beds, 12 are configured with double bed), and small sitting area. Beds will be converted into a banquette seating area during the day. Suites also come with bath amenities, kimono, and slippers.

For more information on the Suites, see our blog post at this link.

Grand Suites

Grand Suites add considerable comfort - at a hefty price. The train has six Grand Suites, each measuring approximately 115 square feet. Grand Suites have a double bed (6 ft. 2 in. long by 4 ft. 7 in. wide), separate living area with table, chair and sofa, and an en-suite bathroom with shower, sink and toilet. The Grand Suites are named “Paris”, “Venice”, “Istanbul”, “Prague”, “Vienna”, and “Budapest”. Each has a unique decor, to emphasize the distinctive aspects of each destination.

In addition to the standard *VSOE* amenities, Grand Suite perks include preferential seating and

guaranteed dining time for meals (or, if you prefer, private in-cabin dining with a complimentary “à la carte” menu), 24-hour butler service, caviar upon arrival, free-flowing Champagne, private transfers to/from railway stations, private guided excursions and complimentary designer Art Deco bathrobes.

For our detailed reports on the Grand Suites, see our blog posts:

VSOE Grand Suites are Grand Indeed!
VSOE's Grand Suites Offer Privacy, Ultimate Luxury
Grand Suites Surpass All Expectations

L'Observatoire

L'Observatoire offers a one-of-a-kind experience as the world's largest private train suite carriage, occupying an entire train carriage on the *VSOE.*

Designed by French artist JR, L'Observatoire is a continuous work of art composed of intimate micro-environments. From intricate marquetry depicting scenes from around the world to hidden drawers filled with personal treasures, every detail invites wonder and discovery. Escape into the secret hidden tearoom within the suite, or perhaps enjoy a private dinner in the dining area. The en-suite marble bathroom features both a shower and a free-standing bathroom — perfect for winding down at the end of the day.

Guests booked in L'Observatoire will also enjoy 24-hour cabin steward service, private in-suite dining, all beverages (including any wine, champagne, and premium spirits), complimentary lounge wear and toiletries, and private transfers to and from the train and your hotel.

Single Travelers

The train does not have Single cabins; however, a few Historic Twins are offered without a supplement on most departures. After these are sold, a single supplement would apply for all cabins. *Note that a single supplement will always apply for the Istanbul journeys.*

Important

There are no showers or ensuite bathrooms in Historic Twins (Spotless shared toilets are at the end of each train car). Longer itineraries are designed to dodge this reality — train overnights are interspersed with stays at fabulous hotels — just like Agatha Christie used to do. L'Observatoire, Grand Suites and Suites have been updated with ensuite bathrooms and showers.

The *VSOE’s* cabins have towels, bathrobes and slippers, dual voltage plugs with 230/115 volts for electric razors and two, 220-volt continental sockets.

All cabins have discreet individually-controlled A/C units. Air conditioning has also been added in the public cars. This is a huge improvement for those traveling in the hotter months of July & August!

Venice Simplon-Orient-Express cabins have one major benefit not often mentioned: the windows can be opened, providing fresh air and unobstructed views. Plus, one can literally smell the countryside – a significant advantage over hermetically sealed vehicles.

Dining

There are three gorgeous dining cars: one, “Étoile du Nord,” mainly with marquetry; another, “L’Oriental,” with Chinese lacquered walls with bright animals; and a third, “Côte d’Azur,” with Lalique crystal insets.

The management of the dining cars is superb. For starters, a maitre d’ visits you during the day before meals to reserve your table. He rotates travelers among the three diners; you can request dining for two or four at your preferred seating time.

The dining experience is five-star both in food quality/variety and service. One of the reasons is that people are not all seated at the exact same time. Instead, seatings are staggered. This allows the staff to properly welcome and serve each diner.

Note: The “Côte d’Azur” dining car also includes a 20-seat champagne bar in one corner. Vintages include Taittinger, Laurent Perrier Rosé and Louis Roederer Cristal. And, if you’re traveling southbound, consider indulging in a VSOE Celebration Breakfast, which includes a tempting selection of fresh breads, smoked salmon, eggs, truffles and caviar. You can book on board.

Lounge

The lounge car is decorated in the Art Nouveau style. Fresh flowers adorn the tables, and a pianist entertains in the evening. It’s a perfect place to read *Le Monde* by day, enjoy cocktails before dinner and a nightcap after dinner; perhaps you’ll decide, like one traveler did on our trip to Istanbul, to dance the Charleston in her period dress. The lounge car can get very crowded, too, but the staggered dining helps with this issue.

IRT Insights

For discriminating travelers, we recommend booking either L'Observatoire, a Grand Suite or a Suite. This gives travelers much more room for spreading out. Historic Twin cabins are small.

Dressing up is part of this experience, and tuxedos (at the least, dark suit and tie) and cocktail dresses are the norm for dinner.

There’s something about traveling on such historic cars. One of our favorites: Sleeping Car 3309 was part of the 1929 service which was stuck in a snow drift 60 miles outside Istanbul for 10

days. Passengers and staff survived only with the assistance of nearby Turkish villagers.

For many, this is a special occasion train - to celebrate retirement, anniversaries and big birthdays. Read travel notes by Society owners Owen & Eleanor Hardy, who celebrated their 30th wedding anniversary on the *Venice Simplon-Orient-Express* journey from Venice-Paris-London

Final note: Even on a luxury train, space is tight. One plus: the *VSOE* includes a baggage car, where you can store extra luggage (although don't count on having access to it while on board). For the longer Istanbul journeys, several cabins are left empty for luggage storage.