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Luxury train travel may be old or new. In China there have been attempts to introduce high speed trains from Beijing to Shanghai. They travel at speeds in excess of three hundred kilometers per hour on air cushions that eliminate the clanking sound of rails. Cushioned seats and cushioned movement at high speed may equate to luxury especially if high quality personal attention comes with the price of a ticket.

New luxury trains tend to focus on streamlined engines which seem to epitomize speed. However there are certain hallmarks of luxury that cannot be avoided. One is space and the other is attention. Both of these are expensive and customers may be loathe to pay up when their purpose is simply to get from one point to another speedily. However, personal attention from charming hosts and hostesses is worthwhile for those who can afford it easily, as is illustrated by the popularity of business class airline seats.

Whilst there may be some ambivalence about new high speed rail transport the same does not apply to period trains that have been restored to their past glory. In this case passengers are concerned with recapturing a sense of the past. They have no inclination to speed from one point to another, but would rather proceed in a sedate and leisurely manner. Looking about them and enjoying the company are priorities.

Although horses drew carriages along wooden rails as far back as the sixteenth century it was not until the nineteenth century that steam locomotives began to run along iron rails. The age of steam began in the colonial era.

In a strange quirk of history small European countries at this time achieved such predominance over the world due to the technology of the time that they were briefly able to take over vast countries like India and rule them from a small island half a world away. The situation was too absurd to last long but for the period that it did last the superiority of the colonial powers had to be maintained by pretense. Traveling about in stylish superiority was one way of keeping up appearances.

Trains were not entirely luxurious. Some third class carriages were reserved for the supposedly inferior. It was when Mahatma Ghandi, a British educated lawyer but an Indian, tried to board the luxury coach of a train in Durban that he was ejected on racial grounds. This small incident had a direct link with the end of the British Raj in India.

Ghandi returned to India from South Africa, incensed and humiliated. He proceeded to organize his campaign of passive resistance and this eventually defeated British attempts to stay in India. Had he not been denied the experience of luxury travel history may not have been quite the same!

Now passengers may enjoy luxury train travel and follow along the routes followed by their forebears. An observation car will replace the third class carriages that used to be attached to the rear. As they experience the sights, sounds, touches and tastes that made up the lives of people in the past tourists may enjoy a sense of history from the perspective of the privileged.

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Tracy Narvaez - About Author:
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