

Explore the Toy Trains of India

When we look in on India from the outside and consider their railway systems we instantly think of the scale, noise and slightly scary journey that passengers make in their determined masses and segregated carriages, barely a gap between passengers and few barriers between passengers and tracks.

This is the railway system of the resident and commuter and while this is indeed something to experience, the heritage lines may be more appealing to tourists looking for a more relaxed approach to seeing the sights.

The world heritage railways of India are a UNESCO site, protected for their historical and cultural significance for both global and domestic tourists to enjoy, and they offer a glimpse into the past via some brilliant trains and routes.

Three lines make up these railways: Darjeeling Himalayan Railway, Shimla Kalka Railway and Nilgiri Mountain Railway.



Darjeeling Himalayan Railway

The name of this line alone is enough to draw the eye of the foreign tourist. Here the tourist service travels to Darjeeling – a name long associated with tea – from Ghum, the highest station in India.

As passengers take the descent, from 7,407ft above sea level to 6,812ft, they can enjoy extraordinary views of the landscape of West Bengal. There is a sense of the old India and British rule here, the line having been built in 1881.

One of the reasons why this line is so highly regarded is its state of preservation; it was well devised and built for the terrain and largely remains in original working order. The British influence is also seen in the style of the locomotive that pulls the carriages and gives the DHR the less formal name of the 'toy train'. Steam train enthusiasts and children will love the train for its style but it is the unusual location that really seals this line as a must-experience trip.



Shimla Kalka Railway

The DHR may be fondly referred to as the toy train but it is not alone as this is also true of the Shimla Kalka line, a route brought in by the British viceroy Lord Curzon in 1903. With 969 bridges along its length and an average speed of 25–30kmph, there are plenty of opportunities for a great view over Indian landscapes and plenty of chances to consider the social history and significance of the region, the carriages the visitors are travelling in and the final destination.

Shimla was the summer capital of India during British rule and the reason for the line's creation – of course the Brits needed a good rail link to take them to their getaways. Today passengers can retrace those steps through Himachal Pradesh and marvel at all the sights and villages along the way. Again there is respect for the line and the little locomotive in charge and this is understandable when you consider that it can pull around 200 passengers through heavy snowfall.



Nilgiri Mountain Railway

Situated in Tamil Nadu, the Nilgiri line is another important mountain route that uses both steam and diesel trains to transport travelers, this time established a little later than the Darjeeling line, in 1903. This is one for the adventurer that really likes to travel and that sensation of watching the world go by from a train window because at 46km it is not a quick trip to entertain the kids for a couple of hours.

With 208 curves, 16 tunnels and 250 bridges you won't get bored on your journey between Mettupalayam and Ooty. Just as with the DHR and Shimla Kalka Railway, there is a sense of reliability behind this old line; first time passengers may be nervous about the steep ascents and curves but the track was specially designed to deal with this and the train is used to push the carriages up the line rather than pull it.

There are some clear similarities between these lines in terms of their historical importance, cultural significance, aesthetic appeal and the enjoyment factor for the passenger, which is why they all fit so

nicely into this set of heritage lines. The toy train of the DHL offers excitement and a bit of tradition, the Shimla Kalka line lets travelers retrace the steps of the British elite and the Nilgiri Mountain Railway provides a true taste of exploration. Whichever tourists choose they can be sure of extraordinary taste of Indian travel on some wonderful feats of engineering in a stunning landscape.

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