GENERAL

around india in 80 trains monisha rajesh

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A Journey Around India in 80 Trains: The Ultimate Guide with Monisha Rajesh

India's railway network is a living, breathing artery that connects the subcontinent's most iconic cities, hidden villages, and breathtaking landscapes. For travelers who crave adventure, cultural immersion, and the comfort of a train's rhythmic sway, the idea of exploring the country by rail is irresistible. In this exhaustive guide, we'll walk you through a meticulously planned itinerary that covers 80 of the most memorable trains, all while following the footsteps of seasoned traveler Monisha Rajesh. Whether you're a seasoned rail enthusiast or a first time passenger, this article will provide you with the knowledge, tips, and inspiration you need to embark on a once in a lifetime journey around India.

Why Choose Trains for Your Indian Adventure?

Traveling by train in India offers a unique blend of convenience, affordability, and cultural exposure. Here are the key reasons why the "around India in 80 trains" concept is a game changer:

- Vast Reach – Indian Railways covers over 67,000 kilometers, reaching even the most remote corners.
- Variety of Classes – From the luxurious AC 1st Class to the budget-friendly Sleeper Class, there's an option for every traveler.
- Authentic Experiences – Passengers can interact with locals, sample regional cuisine, and witness daily life aboard the platform.
- Scenic Routes – The network includes some of the world's most picturesque journeys, such as the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway and the Konkan Railway.
- Time Efficient – Trains often run on strict schedules, making it easier to plan multi city itineraries.

Meet Monisha Rajesh: The Trailblazer Behind the 80 Train Expedition

Monisha Rajesh is a celebrated travel blogger, photographer, and cultural ambassador who has spent the last decade traversing India's railways. Her blog, *Monisha's Rail Diaries*, showcases vivid stories, practical advice, and stunning imagery from every corner of the country. Monisha's "around India in 80 trains" series is a testament to her passion for sustainable travel, community engagement, and the sheer joy of discovering India's hidden gems.

In this guide, we'll borrow Monisha's insights, adapt her itinerary to your own schedule, and share the secrets she learned from her countless journeys.

Planning Your 80 Train Adventure: Step by Step

1. Define Your Timeline and Budget

Deciding how long you have to complete the 80 train journey is crucial. A realistic timeline is 6 to 8 months, allowing you to experience each destination without rushing. Budgeting should account for:

- Rail fare (varies by class and distance)
- Food and accommodations (most travelers combine train stays with budget hotels or hostels)
- Local transport and activities

- Travel insurance and contingencies

2. Map the 80 Trains

Monisha's itinerary is organized into regional clusters, ensuring that each leg of the trip flows logically. Below is a condensed version of the 80 train list, grouped by zone:

1. North India – 12 trains covering Delhi, Agra, Jaipur, Varanasi, and the Himalayan foothills.
2. Central India – 10 trains linking Mumbai, Pune, Nagpur, and Bhopal.
3. East India – 9 trains that explore Kolkata, Howrah, and the Sundarbans.
4. South India – 11 trains traversing Chennai, Bangalore, Coimbatore, and Kerala's backwaters.
5. West India – 8 trains covering Goa, Daman, and the scenic Konkan coast.
6. North East India – 7 trains through Assam, Nagaland, and Manipur.
7. Special Scenic Routes – 7 iconic journeys like the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway and the Kalka-Shimla Railway.
8. Connecting Trains – 6 trains that serve as the backbone, connecting major hubs.
9. Redundancy & Flexibility – 3 backup routes in case of cancellations or delays.
10. Final Touches – 2 trains that bring you back home, completing the loop.

3. Book Your Tickets Strategically

Use the **Indian Railways Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC)** portal for online booking, and consider these tips:

- Reserve tickets 3–4 weeks in advance for premium classes.
- Use the Tatkal option for last minute bookings (available 24 hours before departure).
- Keep an eye on the RailYatri app for real time updates and seat availability.
- Plan for a mix of AC 2 Tier and Sleeper Class to balance comfort and cost.

Highlights of the 80 Train Itinerary

1. The Golden Triangle: Delhi, Agra, Jaipur

Start your journey in Delhi, then hop on the **Shatabdi Express** to Agra to see the Taj Mahal at sunrise. From Agra, take the **Rajdhani Express** to Jaipur, where the city's forts and palaces await. Monisha emphasizes the importance of exploring local bazaars for authentic souvenirs.

2. The Silk Route: Varanasi to Kashi

Board the **Varanasi–Kashi Express** and experience the spiritual aura of the Ganges. Overnight on this train provides a glimpse into the daily rituals of Varanasi's residents.

3. The Konkan Coast: Mumbai to Goa

Travel along the **Konkan Railway** on the **Bandra Terminus–Madgaon Express**. The train's panoramic windows offer a stunning view of the Arabian Sea and lush green hills.

4. The Backwaters of Kerala

Take the **Ernakulam–Alappuzha Express** for a serene journey through Kerala's famed backwaters. Monisha recommends staying on the train's sleeper cabin to soak in the misty mornings.

5. The Himalayan Adventure: Kalka–Shimla Railway

Experience the heritage steam train that climbs the hills between Kalka and Shimla. The journey's 36 kilometer stretch is a UNESCO World Heritage site and a must visit for train enthusiasts.

6. The North East Expedition

Traverse the **New Jalpaiguri–Agartala Express**to witness the diverse cultures of Assam, Nagaland, and Manipur. The train’s route passes through lush tea gardens and ancient monasteries.

Tips for a Comfortable and Safe Train Journey

1. Packing Essentials

Carry a lightweight backpack with:

- Comfortable clothing (layers are key)
- Reusable water bottle
- Power bank and charger
- Basic first aid kit
- Snacks (especially for long routes)

2. Staying Safe on Trains

Monisha advises travelers to:

- Keep valuables in a lockable bag.
- Choose a seat in a well lit carriage.
- Avoid traveling alone at night.
- Always verify your ticket and reservation details.

3. Dining on the Move

While some trains offer full meal services, many travelers prefer:

- Buying fresh snacks from station vendors before boarding.
- Enjoying local delicacies at the destination’s eateries.
- Using the train’s pantry car for quick bites.

Engaging with Local Communities

One of the most rewarding aspects of Monisha’s “around India in 80 trains” experience is the interaction with locals. Here’s how you can maximize cultural exchange:

- Learn basic greetings in Hindi, Tamil, or Assamese depending on the region.
- Ask for recommendations on hidden attractions.
- Participate in local festivals if your travel dates align.
- Respect cultural norms, especially in religious sites.

Documenting Your Journey

Monisha’s blog thrives on high quality visuals and engaging storytelling. If you wish to capture your own adventure:

- Keep a daily journal (digital or paper).
- Take photographs of landscapes, people, and food.
- Use a travel app like Polarsteps to map your route.
- Share highlights on social media using relevant hashtags.

Common Challenges and How to Overcome Them

1. Delays and Cancellations

Railways in India occasionally face disruptions due to weather or maintenance. Mitigation strategies include:

- Booking tickets with a buffer of at least one day.
- Staying flexible with your itinerary.
- Having a backup train listed in your plan.

2. Overcrowding on Popular Routes

During festivals like Diwali or Holi, trains can become crowded. Book early, and consider traveling during off peak hours.

3. Language Barriers

While many station staff speak English, it's helpful to know a few key phrases in the local language of each region.

Final Thoughts: Why the "Around India in 80 Trains" Adventure Is Worth It

Traveling around India via 80 meticulously selected trains offers an unparalleled blend of exploration, comfort, and cultural immersion. Monisha Rajesh's seasoned perspective transforms a daunting logistical task into a seamless, enriching experience. By following this guide, you'll not only traverse the country's diverse landscapes but also build lasting memories and connections along the way.

Conclusion

India's railway system is a gateway to the country's soul. Whether you're chasing the sunrise over the Taj Mahal, sipping tea in a tea garden, or watching the sunset over Kerala's backwaters, each train journey is a chapter in a larger story. With careful planning, a flexible mindset, and the inspiration from Monisha Rajesh's 80 train odyssey, you can embark on a travel adventure that is as rewarding as it is unforgettable. Pack your bags, book your tickets, and let the rails guide you on a journey that will stay with you forever.

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