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The Middle East's first super-luxury train will gleam gold

By Julia Buckley, CNN

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The Dream of the Desert train should launch around fall 2026. Courtesy Arsenale Spa/SAR

(CNN) — It's the train set to whisk people across the largest country in the Middle East — and to do so in style, according to the designs that have just been released.

Saudi Arabia's Dream of the Desert train, which is slated to hit the rails next year, is set to be the region's first five-star luxury train, and the first renderings for the 14 carriages have finally been unveiled.

A joint project between Saudi Arabia Railways (SAR) and Arsenale S.p.A., the Italian luxury brand, the train is due to launch around fall 2026. It has been designed by Aline Asmar d'Amman, an architect and designer whose Culture in Architecture studio is based between Paris and Beirut.

The idea is to amp up the luxury while referencing Saudi culture and heritage — including motifs from destinations like AlUla, Madain Saleh and Hail — within the design.

The overall tone is suitably sandy, with golds, beiges and darker tones coupled with chrome fittings reflecting the desert views outside.



Bedrooms have a glam, almost Art Deco feel. Courtesy Arsenale Spa/SAR



The restaurant car will allow panoramic views over the desert. Courtesy Arsenale Spa/SAR

Reception lounges have been given the feel of a majlis — the room in a Saudi home where guests are welcomed — and include geometric patterns and hand-carved wooden elements. Bedrooms, meanwhile, have a richer feel, with a hint of Art Deco styling in the emerald-colored sofas, headboards and drapes, as well as the clean lines and wood-paneled walls.

The attention to detail extends to the public areas. Artworks and photographs of Saudi cultural sites will adorn the corridors, while the train exterior will be a burnished chrome with accents of violet.

The train will have 34 suites across 14 carriages, while the restaurant menu will be curated by “local and international chefs,” according to the press release accompanying the renderings.



The train has been designed by architect Aline Asmar d'Amman. Courtesy Arsenale Spa/SAR

The route will go from Riyadh across SAR's Northern Railway network. In a partnership with the Saudi Ministry of Culture there will be "curated cultural programs" for guests as well as "unique tourism itineraries that integrate seamlessly with the train journey" — though no details have yet been revealed.

SAR previously said in a press release that the Dream of the Desert will operate "luxury train cruise" journeys from the capital city of Riyadh to Qurayyat, which is situated close to the northern border with Jordan.

The 1,300-kilometer route will take in the country's desert landscapes, and stop at the city of Hail on one- and two-night trips.

Calling it "an unparalleled travel experience," Paolo Barletta, Arsenale Group's CEO, said in a statement that the train will be a "fully immersive experience."

Dream of the Desert is currently slated to debut at the end of the third quarter of 2026.

In the mean time, a sibling train, Dolce Vita Orient Express, will debut in Italy in April.

CNN's Tamara Hardingham-Gill contributed to this report

INSPIRATION

Inside Dream of the Desert – Saudi Arabia’s first luxury train service

Dream of the Desert will welcome passengers in 2026, becoming the first five-star rail service in the Middle East

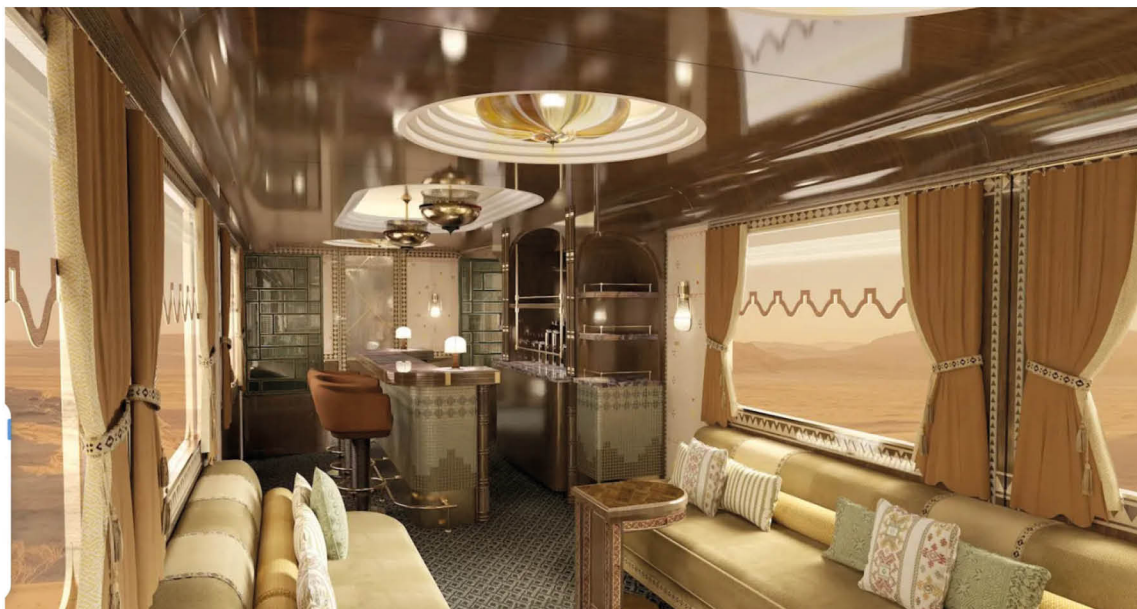
BY CLARE DIGHT AND SOPHIE PRIDEAUX
28 January 2025



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Luxury train travel is having a moment. Around the world, several new and revamped train services have captured the global appetite for slow travel. The Middle East is set to get its first **luxury train** service with the launch of Saudi Arabia's Dream of the Desert.

Set to take passengers on a journey through Saudi Arabia's vast desert landscapes, the service is on track to make its inaugural journey by the end of 2026. Departing from the Saudi capital Riyadh, Dream of the Desert will run on 1,300 kilometres of existing railway lines from the capital Riyadh to Al Qurayyat in the northern province of Al Jawf, taking in some of the country's most breathtaking natural scenery along the way. The planned one- to two-day route takes in Al Qassim, Hail and Al Jouf, on the edge of King Salman bin Abdulaziz Nature Reserve, before it terminates some 30km from the border with Jordan.



Interiors have been designed by Lebanese architect Aline Asmar d'Amman Courtesy Saudi Arabia Railways

Manufactured by the Italian hospitality company Arsenale Group and commissioned by Saudi Arabia Railways (SAR), Dream of the Desert's 14 carriages will consist of 34 luxury suites. A first look at the interiors, designed by Lebanese architect Aline Asmar d'Amman, shows opulent gold-laden ceilings, tile-fronted bars, rich velvet banquettes and touches of Saudi tradition. Reception areas have been inspired by majlis settings, adorned with intricately carved wood and shades inspired by the desert sands. Special art pieces showcasing Saudi heritage and culture are being commissioned to hang in the train's corridors, with menus will be created by local and international chefs.



Reception areas merge traditional Saudi design with opulent touches Courtesy Saudi Arabia Railways

Arsenale is already working in collaboration with Orient Express on La Dolce Vita, a new luxury rail service with six itineraries crisscrossing Italy, set to launch in early spring. Arsenale has also signed an agreement with the UAE's national railway company, Etihad Railway, to develop a luxury train that will travel across the Middle Eastern peninsula.



The desert landscape in Al Jawf province [benedek](#)

The update on Dream of the Desert is one of many as Saudi Arabia fast-tracks its ambitions to become a leading tourist destination, with plans to attract 150m visitors by the end of the decade. Last year was marked by news of hotel and resort developments across the Kingdom, from [AlUla](#), the ancient oasis city near the sandstone monuments of Hegra; to the Red Sea coast and its islands; Sindalah Island, part of the Neom gigaproject; and the historic settlement of Diriyah.

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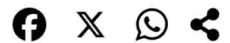
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Saudi Arabia Unveils First Luxury Train 'Dream of the Desert'

Saudi Arabia Railways and Arsenale revealed the 'Dream of the Desert', the Middle East's first luxury train. Featuring 34 luxury suites, it offers an immersive cultural experience inspired by Saudi heritage. Operations begin in late 2026, with bookings announced soon.

**By: Drishya Madhur**

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Saudi Arabia Railways, in partnership with Italian hospitality company Arsenale, unveiled the final design of Dream of the Desert, a first-of-its-kind five-star luxury train in the Middle East. According to reports from the Saudi Press Agency, the achievement was the result of the said two companies signing an agreement last year.

Instead, due to the inspiration from Saudi desert and traditional architecture, the interior of the train is decorated with rich craftsmanship combined with earthy hues along with intricate details and high luxury fabrics. Two main landmarks, Hegra and Hail, are also reflected in the design for a visually stunning experience and insight to the culture by the passengers.

The 14 carriages will feature 34 exclusive luxury suites, making it a one-of-a-kind experience on board. From Riyadh, the train will run on the Northern Railway network, which allows travelers to experience the history and natural wonders of Saudi Arabia.

Dream of the Desert will work in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture to provide specially curated cultural programs that will be available to introduce passengers to Saudi traditions. The Saudi Tourism Authority and Development Authorities Support Center are also developing specialized itineraries to enhance the journey with unique insights into the Kingdom's heritage.

Saleh Al-Jasser, Minister of Transport and Logistic Services in Saudi Arabia and Chairman of Saudi Arabia Railways, added, "The Desert train is an expression of our vision—something that represents in itself innovative solutions for both transport and tourism. The project stands for the pride that the Kingdom asserts to build the very best infrastructure in the world, and to position Saudi Arabia as one of the leading destinations in global tourism.

Bashar Al-Malik, CEO of Saudi Arabia Railways, said that global investment in modern transportation is very important and added, "The Dream of the Desert train is a prime example of how public-private collaboration can create groundbreaking luxury transport experiences.

Paolo Barletta, chief executive officer of Arsenale Group: "The train is part of a total experience; it is a fusion between luxurious transportation and, on board, high-end design, world-class hospitality, and, of course, the cultural heritage that this train embodies." Barletta said that the Dream of the Desert will be set to begin operations by the end of Q3 2026, with all booking details and packages at the official website to be announced in due course.