

## DINNER TRAINS

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### GRAND TRAVERSE DINNER TRAIN

Sit back, relax and enjoy. As a passenger on the Grand Traverse Dinner Train you'll be treated to a leisurely-paced venture just minutes from downtown Traverse City.

In the comfort of a mid-1930s Pullman-style dining coach, a five-course meal awaits guests.

"A unique feature of our dinner train," said Ella Cooper, president, "is the opportunity to select one of the five gourmet entrees, including a vegetarian option, before boarding, instead of preordering when booking the tour."

Executive chef Steven Mrovs manages the two kitchens in a former baggage car. His cooking is influenced by the cultural and culinary mixing-pot of Britain and its Indian, Caribbean, Asian and Middle Eastern peoples.

Entree selections from a recent excursion included Pork Normand (spiced apple and cherry-filled pork loin with cherry and brandy cream sauce), Parmesan Breaded Whitefish with Lemon Sauce, Boeuf Bourguignon and the vegetarian option, wild mushroom and cashew stroganoff in a ring of saffron basmati rice.

Two full-service bars and a nice selection of wines, including several of the local varieties, are available.

After the sun disappears in the horizon, halogen flood lights, mounted along the outside of the train, illuminate the woodlands.

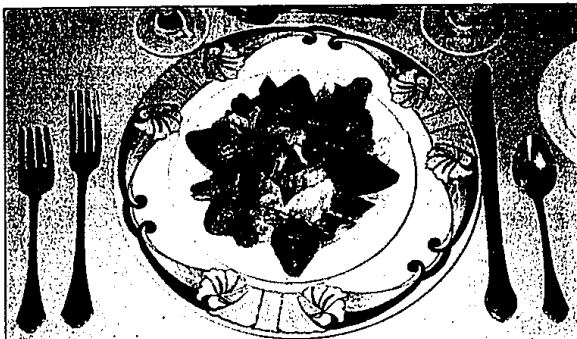
The Grand Traverse Dinner Train operates year round.

### MICHIGAN STAR CLIPPER

Kathy and Leo Lemery of Brighton were impressed with their first dinner train adventure.

"It was excellent," said Kathy, who was celebrating her birthday on the Michigan Star Clipper. Her husband enjoyed the lake view "atop" where white egrets and ducks were nesting.

The only way of seeing the wetlands is via the train, said Judy Coe, owner.



Dinner served with fresh strawberries served aboard the Michigan Star Clipper dinner train in Walled Lake.

### IF YOU GO

#### Charlotte

Train runs 7 p.m. Saturday from Charlotte, southwest of Lansing; cost is \$54.95 per person. (888) 726-8277 or [www.murdermysterytrain.com](http://www.murdermysterytrain.com)

Michigan Star Clipper Dinner Train runs 7 p.m. Tuesday-Thursday and Saturday, 7:30 p.m. Friday and 5 p.m. Sunday from Walled Lake; cost is \$72.50. (248) 960-9440 or [www.MichiganStarClipper.com](http://www.MichiganStarClipper.com)

The Grand Traverse Dinner Train runs 12:30 p.m. and 6:30 p.m. Monday-Friday, and noon and 6 p.m. Saturday and Sunday from Traverse City; cost is \$75 per person; \$37.50 for children under 10. (888) 933-3768, (231) 933-3768 or [www.dinnertain.com](http://www.dinnertain.com)

"Passengers on our train will get one of the best fall tours of southeastern Michigan," she said.

And, she added, after sunset the halogen lights that are attached to the train make the fall colors dance.

Six days a week the train edges out of the depot in Walled Lake. Gourmet dinners, comedy and murder mystery performances are part of the package.

Executive chef Alan McKay prepares a selection of appealing entrees.

Choices might include Prime Rib complemented with fresh vegetables and red skin potatoes; Rose Special Chicken, a boneless, skinless chicken breast sautéed in white wine, garlic, butter and fresh mushrooms with a cream sauce; Seafood Fettuccine, scallops, shrimp and mussels or a vegetarian selection.

A full-service cash bar is available.

### CHARLOTTE SOUTHERN RAILROAD

In the town of Charlotte (pronounced: shar LOT), about fifteen minutes southwest of Lansing, a dinner train departs every Saturday from the tracks that hug a century-old depot.

"People like the train because it's a unique experience," said Corinna Akin, spokesperson from Faye's, the restaurant that caters the food on the train.

The train, chugging along at a snail's pace on the track, winds through the countryside as passengers are treated to a five-course feast.

In traditional dining car practice, passengers are seated

at tables of four.

Entree choices feature a 10- to 20-ounce Prime Rib, cooked how you like it, with a baked potato and vegetables; Crab-stuffed Flounder with sides of rice and veggies; Crème Brûlée and Apple Chicken, a chicken breast stuffed with sweet York apples, onions, chives and a mild soft cheese; and Spinach Lasagne served with a side of vegetables.

A cash bar is available. Be ready for a comical interactive murder mystery show to accompany your dinner. The entertainment is rated PG-13 so it might be best to leave the youngsters at home.

Mary Quinley is a Livonia resident and writes about food and travel for the Observer & Eccentric. Newspapers. You can reach her at [MQuinley@aol.com](mailto:MQuinley@aol.com).

## Some dining car history

Food options for passengers were limited and unreliable during the early days of rail travel.

Sometimes, while the locomotive was serviced and refueled, trackside vendors would sell food. This practice was often described as "terrible" because of week-old coffee, fried eggs cooked in rancid grease, stale bread, and leaden biscuits, nicknamed "slinkies."

For several years, enterprising members of farm families would run along beside the train tossing items such as fruit to the passengers. In return the sellers hoped that money would be tossed back at them.

On some trains, crews would set up a small bar in the baggage car. However, only men were allowed access to this car. Another option was to stop along the line to let the passengers disembark to eat at trackside restaurants.

During the 1800s, train boys, later referred to as news butchers, would wander up and down the aisles selling candy, cookies, soft drinks, magazines, cigars, souvenirs and sometimes, water.

(Thomas Edison and Walt Disney were train boys.)

The Baltimore & Ohio Railroad served simple meals like oyster stew, crullers and hot coffee in 1848.

During the Civil War, the Philadelphia, Wilmington and Baltimore Railroad introduced the first "dining cars" to be part of a scheduled train. And, in 1868, George Pullman, the father of the rail "sleeping car," produced an all-dining car and named it "Delmonico."

When the Pennsylvania Railroad announced that it would run the "finest dining cars in America," lavishly decorated with mahogany, wine closets, velvet plush chairs and magnificent chandeliers, other major railroads followed suit by offering gourmet food service in diners on their first-class trains.

Railroads reduced the frills on their dining service when planes and motor vehicles cut into the train business.

Sources: Encyclopedia of North American Railroading: 150 years of Railroading in the United States and Canada by Freeman Hubbard, and, Dining by Rail: The History and the Recipes of America's Golden Age of Railroad Cuisine by James D. Porterfield

- Mary Quinley

### CITY BITES

#### Nepal festival time

Celebrate Bijaya Dhashami - the Nepali festival marking the triumph of good over evil - through Monday, Oct. 21, at Everest Express in Farmington.

Owners Pradip and Nidhal Poudel run the only Nepali eatery in Michigan, where they serve fare such as steamed dumplings stuffed with pumpkin, chicken or lamb and soul-soothing vegetable soup.

For the uninitiated, Nepali food tastes a little bit Amibic, a little bit Indian, with a touch of Mexican and Oriental.

During the festival, the Poudels will add a new item to their menu: Goat, a popular meat in much of the world.

Goat is lean and tastes like a cross between veal and beef.

Days before Bijaya Dhashami, people in Nepal clean, paint and decorate their houses.

They shop for new clothes, gifts, luxuries, foodstuffs and offerings to the gods.

The festival is a time for family reunions and parties, and its observance is believed to bring the Nepali prosperity and rescue from all miseries.

You don't have to clean your house or buy to clothes to celebrate Bijaya Dhashami.

Head to Everest Express, located at 23331 Orchard Lake Road, about a half mile north of Grand River, in Farmington. (248) 474-8024.

- by Renee Skoglund

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This exhibition is organized by the American Federation of Arts, The Detroit Institute of Arts, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. The Detroit showing of the exhibition is made possible by a generous contribution from the DaimlerChrysler Corporation Fund. This exhibition is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities. Additional support is provided by the Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs and the City of Detroit.