Everyone deserves to live like a king or be pampered like one, at least once in a lifetime.

The splendour of velvet and silk, the finest food and even finer wines, melodious strains of music wafting through the myrrh, musk and rose perfumed air, the respectful care of liv- eried Khidmatgars (personal attendants) and the luxury of time to soak in the extraordinary experience, are anyone’s fantasy! Add to this, the sheer romance of a train journey through unforgettable history and the most stunning of vistas. This is no ordinary train journey. A trip on the famous Palace on Wheels is nothing short of living this fantasy—a journey of opulence and pageantry, through the cities and stories of Delhi, Agra and into enchanting Rajasthan. It is a joint effort of the government of India, the Indian Railways and the Rajasthan Tourism Development Corporation.

The coaches of this train were commissioned by maharajas of the erstwhile states of Rajputana and Gujarat and the Nizam of Hyderabad. Each custom-built salon is a luxury designer’s dream-come-true, and pampers the tourist beyond his wildest dreams.

Window seat on heritage!
Roll across Rajasthan on the Palace on Wheels, sampling its culture, absorbing its splendour.  

Ruchi Ra Mittal.
When launched in 1982, the train ran on the older ‘metre gauge’ tracks. But in 1995, it graduated to the more stable and comfortable ‘broad gauge’. The train has 14 interconnected saloons, a well-stacked library, a plush bar, two spacious dining cars and even a spa, among many of its exclusive comforts.

Each Wednesday, the air is festive and the train is dressed for the occasion. The spanking white engine is festooned with brilliant yellow marigold garlands on most occasions. Auspicious marigold flower garlands are used everywhere in India as a gesture according a warm welcome to guests who are treated like God. Smiling, gracious and highly trained Khidmatgars line in welcome to the passengers. These men will look after every need of the travellers and their faces reflect the warmth of traditional Indian hospitality. As the passengers board the train, its relaxed opulence takes over. The attendants get busy helping the passengers to settle and tell them about all the facilities on the train. The train is literally bathed in luxury—you can enjoy a drink and sample the fine cuisine offering traditional Indian, Continental and Chinese flavours with the ‘Chef’s special’ of the day.

The saloons have been named on the princely states of Rajasthan - Jaipur, Jodhpur, Alwar, Bundi, Kota, Jhalawar, Dungarpur, Dholpur, Bharatpur, Jaisalmer, Sirohi, Bikaner, Udaipur and Kishangarh and their decor reflects the splendour of the state they are named after. Each of these saloons has four cabins, each equipped with an independent shower and bath cabin. When you are ready to retire for the night, maybe you will find that the wash basin in your cabin is of beaten silver! No one can remain unaffected by the regal charm of the erstwhile royals and this journey on the Palace of Wheels is the perfect way to relive that bygone era.

The journey begins at night, at Delhi’s Safdarjung Railway station. By morning, the palace is in the Pink City of Jaipur, the capital of Rajasthan. After a day of sightseeing, the train rolls out quietly in the evening, arriving the next morning in Sawai Madhopur, a city named after its founder Maharaja Sawai Madho Singh I. On day three, the the Palace on Wheels reaches the fort city of Chittaurgarh, nearly 570 km west of Delhi.

Next on the itinerary is the lake city of Udaipur, founded more than four-and-a-half centuries ago by Maharana Udai Singh of Mewar. It’s day five, and cities can seem to melt into each other. But now, the rumbling steel caravan moves into the far fringes of India’s western borders, into the breathtaking paradise of Jaisalmer in the heart of the humbling Thar desert—nearly 780 km from Delhi.

After an enchanting day and the stunning view of a heart-wrenching sunset, the train picks up steam again and heads back east for Rajasthan’s second largest city, Jodhpur, founded by Rao Jodha more than 550 years ago. From there, it chugs into the world famous Bharatpur bird sanctuary. But everyone’s mind is fixed on the next stop, the last on the itinerary. On day seven, the train crosses into Uttar Pradesh, for its much-awaited finale—at Agra’s dream-like Taj Mahal. History, culture, food, hospitality and beauty mark the week-long experience that the Palace on Wheels promises, and delivers in full. With everlasting memories of this mesmeric journey, the train returns to Delhi on day eight.

“Palace on Wheels is a complete experience, not just a week-long train journey,” says Anuj Saxena, director, public relations, the Indian Railways. The tariff includes all meals, conducted sightseeing tours, entrance fee for monuments and palaces and cultural entertainment. It is not difficult to see why the train is always booked with a waiting list of travellers eager to experience the mystical, magical charm of Rajasthan and the wonder that is Agra.

Because, some dreams do come true!