

## Sandstone Heritage Trust, Ficksburg, Free State

### *The Blue Train to star at Stars 2019*

The fifth running of the *Stars of Sandstone Festival* in 2019 will see the iconic *Blue Train* in attendance on a 4-day excursion – as a star attraction at the event. Passengers will be treated to two days at the Festival – a unique experience for just 52 passengers.

The *Blue Train* excursion will depart from Pretoria on 3 April 2019, following a guest reception in the *Blue Train Lounge* at Pretoria station. The run to Sandstone will be at a leisurely pace, with lunch, high tea and dinner served on board, before the train arrives at Sandstone at 22h30. The train is expected to be routed from Pretoria to Kroonstad and on to Bethlehem with electric traction via the dedicated Class 20E locomotives. At Bethlehem there will be a short stopover as the change is made to diesel traction for the run to Sandstone, where for the next two days the train will be staged in Vaillima Siding – adjacent to Sandstone and the estate's narrow-gauge line at Vaillima.

On arrival at Sandstone on 4 April, guests will disembark for a short stroll to a waiting 2-ft narrow-gauge train, for transport to the main Sandstone complex and the opening of *Stars of Sandstone 2019*. A dedicated shuttle bus service will allow *Blue Train* guests to return to the train at any time during the event. Dinner on the first evening will be at Sandstone prior to a trip on *The Stargazer Express*, a narrow-gauge train ride to the Lesotho Border, for a viewing of the spectacular night sky and a short talk on the intricacies of the star-scape. Guests will return to the *Blue Train* for the night.

Guests will enjoy another day at the event before departure of the return journey to Pretoria, which leaves from Sandstone at 18h00 on 5 April, and arrives back in Pretoria at 10h00 the following day.

The *Blue Train* set will comprise 14 coaches, including a Lounge Car and Club Car and all its world-renowned amenities, with fine dining, luxurious accommodation and a 24-hour butler service available to its guests.

Accommodation is offered in two different suites, De Luxe and the slightly larger Luxury, with the option of twin or double-bed, and shower or bath (depending on the type of suite). Each guest will receive a miniature gold clock and a certificate authenticating them as an official "Blue Train Ambassador". In *Blue Train* tradition, guests are required to dress for dinner to compliment the elegance of the occasion, with jacket and tie for the gentlemen and elegant evening wear for the ladies. Dress code on board during the day is smart casual.

Sandstone Heritage Trust has the largest private collection of 2-foot narrow gauge locomotives and rolling stock in the world.

A highlight of the 2019 event, to compliment the presence of *The Blue Train*, will be the return to service of the 1915 Baldwin-built NG10 No. 61. In 1962, the locomotive was set aside in Port Elizabeth for preservation but was severely corroded by the sea air. More than 50 percent of the locomotive is basically a new build, but Sandstone promises it was worth waiting 57 years to see the 104-year old locomotive in steam again!

Sandstone's 26-km 2-foot narrow gauge railway will be in operation throughout the event, with both short trips to the Lesotho Border and a full tour special of the line each afternoon on the *Mountain Wanderer* – 24 different locomotives are expected to feature during the event.

The newly-built 2,5km "Seb's Railway", with a shorter run and designed especially for younger visitors will be in operation. There are many other exciting attractions planned for the 2019 event, such as displays including military and vintage aircraft (with the option of flips), agricultural machinery and tractors, tours of the Sandstone farming operation, classic cars and trucks and a slow trip back in time on a vintage ox wagon pulled by the farm's span of 24 Afrikaner oxen.

For a full colour brochure on The Blue Train to Stars of Sandstone 2019, visit the Stars of Sandstone website: <http://www.starsofsandstone.com/index.php>