

Beat: Travel

Step Into The Ocean

Resumption Of Service August 11th, 2021

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USPA NEWS - VIA Rail's Ocean, previously known as the Ocean Limited, is thought to be the "oldest continuously operated named passenger train in North America."

During its cancellation throughout the pandemic, the equipment used on the Ocean route went through a refurbishment which will add a fresh touch to the fleet.

There is absolutely no doubt that since the beginning of the global COVID-19 pandemic, the way we move about our town, province and country has changed. During the new world of living with COVID-19, lockdowns and strict border restrictions have forced people to put their travel plans on hold and stay at home.

In the last couple of months, as most jurisdictions have been able to relax many travel restrictions, people are starting to cautiously travel again while balancing safety which allows some return to pre-pandemic freedoms that many had taken for granted.

Today's resumption of VIA Rail's Ocean service from Halifax to Montreal is a very good example of how people can now travel again, while measures are taken to protect against the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

There is an old expression that when says when traveling it is not just about the destination, but it is very much about the journey to get there. Even though the trip on the train may look quite different at this time, one can still experience the charm and beauty that can only be felt by watching the world pass by while relaxing on the train.

So let's step into the Ocean and take a look at how the first trip out of Halifax looked for the many excited passengers.

The first noticeable change that greeted passengers when entering the Halifax VIA Rail station is everyone will be required to wear a mask. For the protection of VIA Rail staff and passengers anyone refusing to wear a mask may be asked to leave the premises and will not be permitted to board the train.

A health screening process is now required for all passengers prior to boarding any VIA train. This is a new procedure for today's departure and will continue for the foreseeable future.

The screening involves a series of health and travel questions designed to determine possible COVID-19 exposure and detect the display of any symptoms. Anyone that does not complete the screening or does not meet the requirements will not be permitted to board the train. It should be noted that the masking and health screening has been in place for any active VIA trains for quite some time, but is new to the Ocean as its service has been suspended since March of 2020.

At least for now, VIA is only offering Sleeper Plus and Economy Class on the Ocean, but is hoping to return to full service by October 1st if the COVID-19 reopening plans allow. During the initial phase of the resumption plan passengers must remain in their seat or cabin for the duration of their journey. Masks are required to be worn at all times. Masks may be removed for eating and drinking, but must be put back on when finished. Masks do not have to be worn within the confines of a private cabin. Passengers will not have access to service cars, park car and there will not be live entertainment at this time. Meals included in Sleeper Plus Class will be delivered to the cabin and for Economy Class food cart service will be available. Updates on services will be posted on the VIA Rail Canada website as new information becomes available.

Even with the new rules that have been put in place to help keep everyone safe while traveling on the Ocean, there are many things that remain untouched by the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is a well known fact that train travel will provide beautiful scenery, and other unique views that other modes of transportation just can't provide. Today's, Ocean train 15 will be no exception. As the Ocean departs Halifax, Atlantic Canada's largest city, it will meander along the Bedford Basin, roll through the suburbs, and will peacefully pass through rural Nova Scotia as it continues forward to the next town, city and province. The train offers a portrait of urban life, the peaceful rural experience along with small town living. The Ocean journey will span 3 provinces covering 1,346 km which is testament to the sheer size of this great country. The train is a

great way to see the less traveled back yards of our great nation. At each station stop one can expect to witness happy reunions and tearful goodbyes, all the while anticipating what the next step of the journey will bring. After a night's sleep one can expect to wake up to the excitement of exploring a new province.

The Ocean's route provides service to the following communities; Halifax, Truro, Amherst, Moncton, Miramichi, Bathurst, Campbellton, Matapedia, Mont-Joli, Rimouski, Rivière-du-Loup, Sainte Foy and Montreal. In Montreal, passengers are able to make connections with other trains for many destinations throughout Canada.

During the process of covering the resumption of the Ocean service, I spoke with a gentleman who said that he has made at least 20 round trips between Halifax and Montreal on the Ocean over the years.

I asked him why he chose the Ocean over other faster ways of completing the journey. He answered, "The geographical landscapes, the relaxed pace, meeting new people all with an interesting story, and the world class service by a staff that goes above and beyond the call of duty to help weave train travel into the fabric of our nation.

With today's resumption of the VIA Rail Ocean service, Atlantic Canadians once again are connected to the rest of the country through passenger rail service.

The "Last Spike" was driven into the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) track by company director Donald Smith on November 7th 1885, which celebrated the completion of the Canadian Pacific transcontinental railway. Our forefathers worked tirelessly and with great sacrifice to build a railway network that would be a major asset in the building of a nation from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

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