

TRAVEL

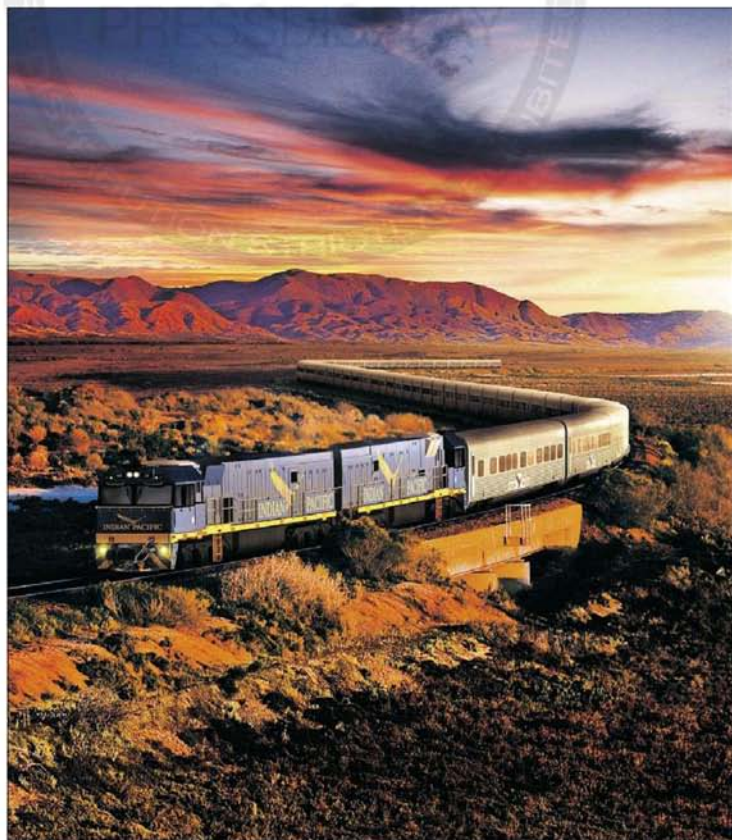
TIME TO GET AWAY

CARALYN CAMPBELL (EDITOR) • 604-605-2784 • cacampbell@sunprovince.com | SUNDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2011

SECTION D


Taste the Caribbean

'When your food is good, people will find you, no matter where you are,' says Jamaican chef Garel Kirlaw

PAGE D4-5


Indian Pacific rail journey takes in some of the world's most spectacular scenery. —SUBMITTED PHOTO

Christmas gig right on track

ON LINE: Outback tour for an Idol runner-up

 SHANNON MELNYK
SPECIAL TO THE PROVINCE

World travellers and Australians alike utter envious sighs upon mention of the epic transcontinental train journey from Sydney to Perth aboard the Great Southern Rail's Indian Pacific. Four days, 4,352 kilometres and some of the most isolated and unforgiving territory on the planet are the stuff of sweeping vagabond novels and travel writers' bucket lists. It's a journey that encourages reflection, and upon witnessing some of the world's most ancient land — an opportunity to marvel at our places upon this earth. It is with much anticipation that I embark on this remarkable journey.

Remarkable journeys are something Australian Idol runner-up turned international pop star Jessica Mauboy knows well; the Indigenous Australian from the remote Northern Territory of Darwin went from belting out country tunes in the bush at the age of 11 to becoming an Antipodal national treasure with top ten hits, a Sony label, an acting career and a fashion line all at the age of 22. A world-class career is inevitable as Mauboy has made the all-important crossover to Los Angeles for collaborations with famous American rappers such as Snoop Dogg and Ludacris.

She's been the opening act for Beyoncé and Chris Brown, and most recent-

ly has nabbed an intense lead role in the much-anticipated Australian film *The Sapphires*, now receiving international film festival buzz and set to be released in 2012.

It's with the spirit of giving and genuine appreciation that Mauboy, armed with two guitarists and a backup singer, joins Santa Claus in boarding the Indian Pacific departing from New South Wales to perform free concerts to communities that many urban and rural Australians have never themselves visited. The Outback Christmas tour is put on by Great Southern Rail as a fundraiser for the life-saving Royal Flying Doctors Service, a non-profit organization that provides aeromedical emergency and essential health services via PC-12 aircraft to a stunning 275,000 Australians per year who have no direct access to medical care.

Kicking off the first of eight concerts across the country, Mauboy arrives amid tight security and screaming Sydney schoolchildren who are selected to sing along to a Christmas tune after treating them with her hits 'Burn, Been Waiting' and 'Running Back.' 'I've never been on the train!' she announces to the crowd.

She's at ease and excited to start the trek that will chug its way deep into the Nullarbor Plain.

Continued on Page D2

A Maritime Travel gift card says,

"Happy holidays" in several different languages.



BEST PRICE BETTER SERVICE

We'll match any competitor's advertised and available price at time of booking, including online pricing provided it is the same product, date and supplier we sell.

Maritime Travel
We Know Travel Best.
maritimetravel.ca

• Abbotsford (604) 746.4041 • Cranbrook (250) 489.4788 • Kamloops (778) 471.5619 • Kelowna (250) 860.0633 • Langley (604) 533.5305 • Nanaimo (250) 390.3166 • New Westminster (604) 525.5933 • Penticton (250) 492.5792 • Port Coquitlam (604) 941.3633 • Richmond (604) 303.8782 • Surrey (604) 575.5044 • Vancouver Downtown (604) 681.6212 • West Vancouver (604) 922.9683 • Vernon (250) 542.2722 • Victoria (250) 220.8011



Rick Cropp and Barbara Braidwood

FOR AS LITTLE AS ...

\$18 US

... study the brick wall from Chicago's St. Valentine's Day Massacre and more at The Mob Museum — the National Museum of Organized Crime and Law Enforcement (www.themobmuseum.org). Opening in Las Vegas on Feb. 14 (the 83rd anniversary of the Massacre), exhibits include "Mob Mayhem" and "Bringing Down the Mob".

\$37

... rock with the inaugural Pacific Tattoo (www.pacifictattoo.ca), July 14 and 15, in Victoria. The two hour musical extravaganza will feature military bands, massed pipes and drums, choirs, dancers and more. Some performers have appeared at the Edinburgh Military Tattoo and Halifax's Royal Nova Scotia International Tattoo.

£28 (\$45)

... roam Warner Bros' Studio Tour London — The Making of Harry Potter (www.wbstudiotour.co.uk) opening Mar. 31. During the tour you'll see sets, costumes, animatronics, props and effects that were used in the production of all eight films.

\$995

... for two, on New Year's Eve have A Night to Remember at Vancouver's Rosewood Hotel Georgia (604-682-5566, www.rosewoodhotelgeorgia.com). The package includes overnight accommodation, two tickets to A Night to Remember at Hawks-worth Restaurant, a late checkout, all taxes and gratuities and more.

\$4,395

... the fully escorted Ladies Only Tuscany 2012 tour (604-525-8843, www.holidaytrips.ca) includes seven nights in a private villa in the middle of a winery plus time in Cinque Terre and Florence. The June 1 to 16 trip includes round trip airfare, accommodation, transfers, breakfasts, three dinners, hop on hop off passes, a cooking class and more.

All prices and availability are subject to change and restrictions apply

Barbara Braidwood and Rick Cropp are Vancouver-based writers.

Christmas singalong on the line

From Page D1

After winding through the jaw-dropping vistas of the Blue Mountains it becomes evident that the further out of Sydney, the more emotional the audience. By the time we reach Bathurst, a frizzy ponytailed girl is pulled out of the crowd, sobbing and hyperventilating. Overwhelmed by the sight of Mauboy and the long wait to sing with the superstar, she has caused her friends to panic and hug each other in empathy, hoping the young fan will rejoin them come time to sing a Mariah Carey Christmas song with their idol.

Mauboy's choice to honour uber-diva Mariah Carey is both fitting and eerie: back in the train's roomy Outback Explorer Lounge, we speak of her dream to one day sing with the artist, her ultimate idol. As she explains how Carey's '90s hit Hero has been the theme song to many pivotal moments in her life, her natural effervescence reveals a laugh that is almost identical to that of her American counterpart.

The 27 carriages that make up the half-kilometre-long train make concert stops in the silver mining town of Broken Hill and the elegant festival city of Adelaide. After a gentle rocking night's sleep, both the land and the mood shifts in intensity as we approach the desolate Watson, where Aboriginals, some of which have travelled for hundreds of kilometres to meet the train, gather to see the once-shy girl that emerged from the Outback into superstardom.

The heat is unseasonably bearable as we carefully descend the steps of the train; there is no platform in what most would consider a no man's land. The unrelenting sun in these parts is evident, however, in the hair of the Indigenous people who quietly and politely wait for Mauboy to appear. Whimsical shocks of fluorescent yellow and crimson orange paint the raven locks of the people here; many of their feet bare, their clothes dust-worn and tattered from the harsh conditions.

It's a stark contrast to the rest of us in our closed-toe shoes — an effort to protect ourselves from some of the most dangerous snakes on the planet.

Mauboy herself emerges without her usual sky-high platform heels and steps down onto the grey earth wearing ballet flats and an old pair of jeans. Accompanying her wide smile are sudden tears at the sight of the small, cautious-eyed community; she collects herself as she strolls out to a patch of nowhere only steps away from the crowd she later calls my people. There is no security needed here. She speaks to them in broken English

and sings an entire song in this unplugged performance while in a full embrace of a muted, teary child. Mauboy then takes to the dry and gravelly ground to finish the rest of her concert among the children who sit dewy and expressionless. By the time Santa arrives to give them all gifts, Mauboy is darting around signing her posters, teasing timid fans and surprising elders unable to leave their vehicles by hopping into their trucks and sharing a quick visit and a hug.

"That was very emotional for me," says Mauboy of her experience. "It reminds me of the reason I do music. I see their light, their eyes ... their movements. I speak broken English to them," she says, but waves off her own mention of language, referring to the music. "They understand".

Despite her understanding of the dichotomy of two strikingly different cultures that share the same continent, Mauboy is unequivocal when asked which Australia she most identifies with: "There is only one Australia," she asserts. She is uncertain, however, of her name becoming synonymous with the term role model.

She's admittedly a young woman with more experiences ahead of her and notes that she's not sure where her comfort lies in such projections. Perhaps her recent decision to turn down a lucrative alcohol endorsement may be more of a hint as to the direction she wants to take her life and career.



Mauboy visited towns and villages on Great Southern Rail's Indian Pacific, where she performed for adoring Aboriginal fans.



The glamour of show business was eschewed in favour of more practical attire, as Mauboy met with the indigenous people of Australia on her Outback Christmas tour. — SUBMITTED PHOTOS



Mauboy performed in the town of Watson on The Nullabor Plain in Central Australia, as one of her stops on the Indian Pacific Outback Christmas Train. The 22-year-old is well on her way to a successful musical career. — SUBMITTED PHOTOS



Mauboy had an emotional effect on a lot of her fans as she toured Australia's Outback.



The young and the old turned out for the musical visit of the budding star.

"I grew up in a lot of domestic violence as a kid and there was a lot of alcohol involved", Mauboy says. "That's a memory of mine that I kind of keep. That's an important thing to me so when I got the call it was definitely going to be a no."

Back in the Queen Adelaide Restaurant, Mauboy and her fun young band hold an impromptu jam in the lounge fulfilling our requests that range from vintage Tina Turner to INXS.

As we cross the continent we turn our clocks back countless times and get confused with what is also thrown in the mix to be train time. But this is inconsequential. An Indian Pacific's passenger's job is to enjoy the earthy sunset and emu-filled journey and we continue on to concert stops in the ghost town of Cook,

one of the most isolated outposts in the world, Rawlinna and Australia's gold capital Kalgoorlie, where we experience a rowdy crowd that requires extra security. It's a history buff's bonanza of a town that's home to both today's thriving KCGM's Super Pit Goldmine and wild West stories of gold rushes gone by. We see the brothels that share the same street as the police station and marvel at the amount of pubs per capita.

Perhaps due to the groundhog day-esque schedule with all of Mauboy's appearances and the sight of Santa in tow, there's a sense of disbelief when we roll into Perth after gliding down the rails for thousands of kilometers. Mauboy takes to a stage for the last time in a sassy off-the-shoulder minidress and elec-

tric pumps, happy to sing for an appreciative city crowd. She's ready to travel across the country yet again to enjoy a low-key Mauboy-style Christmas that will include fishing with her dad. "Wow", Mauboy offers in a husky, incredulous tone. "What a journey it's been."



A traditional meal of kangaroo tenderloin with sweet potato purée.

If you go

The Indian Pacific offers rail journey packages for every budget and comfort level with Red, Gold and Platinum Services. www.greatsouthernrail.com.au

Whistle-stop musts

Sydney

■ **Bridge Climb** — ascend 134 metres to the summit of the famous Sydney Harbour Bridge. Rated by Lonely Planet as one of the top ten biggest adrenalin rush experiences in the world. www.bridgeclimb.com

■ **The Blue Mountains** — stunning vistas, kangaroos and crimson rosellas thrive in one million hectares of sandstone cliffs, lush forest, canyons, waterfalls and bushland. www.australianwildscapes.com
Kalgoorlie: Visit one of the biggest gold mines in the world and discover how the gold rushes shaped the town with pubs, brothels and a wild west history that even includes former U.S. President Herbert Hoover.

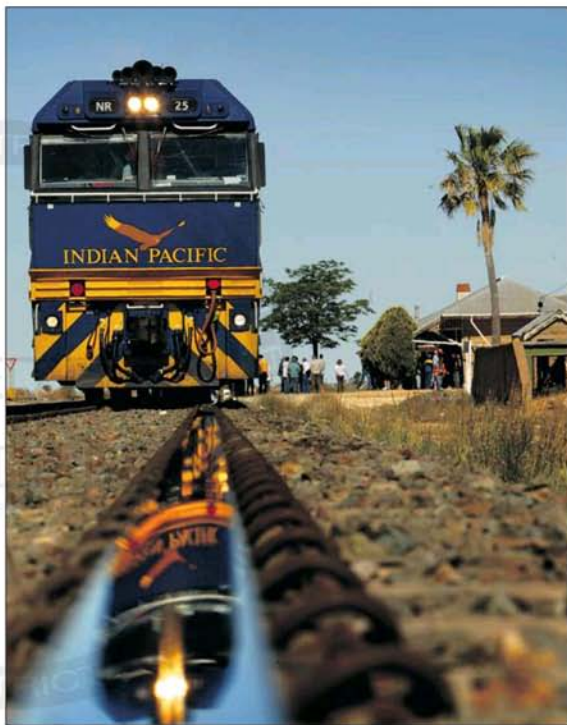
Perth

■ **Cottesloe Beach** — pristine

oceanfront complete with dolphins playing close by. Have a strawberry mojito and watch the sunset at Indiana, a Cape Cod style dining experience. www.indiana.com.au

Accommodations from Point A to B

The Medina Grand in both Sydney and Perth offers the home away from home apartment-style hotel stays — a roomy way to begin and end your train travel. www.medi-na.com.au



The epic transcontinental train journey from Sydney to Perth aboard the Great Southern Rail's Indian Pacific takes four days.