



THE BLUE TRAIN
A WINDOW TO THE SOUL OF AFRICA

Meet Cresan Ramjathan ...



Chef Cresan is the new Executive Chef on The Blue Train. His specialty is classic French fine dining and avant-garde, contemporary cuisine - and his fresh ideas and interpretation of 'the luxury of slow' are already resonating with guests.

Claire managed to catch up with him during lockdown to get to know him a bit better...

Congratulations on joining The Blue Train family last year. How did you find your first few months before everything went into lockdown?

Thank you, it's been amazing and absolutely enjoyable. The team as made my transition easy and smooth. The support I get from each and every member of the team has been incredible.

Tell us a bit about where you grew up and where your interest in food came from?

I was born and raised just north of Durban in KwaZulu-Natal. My interest of food was definitely ignited by watching my Granny and my mother. My mum is always trying out new recipes and my gran is always cooking and making our favourites when we go visit her for the weekend.

Tell us a little about your career path to working on Africa's Leading Luxury Train?

I initially enrolled to study accounting in 2007, but soon realised that it was not for me - and decided to follow my passion of becoming a chef! In 2008 I attended **Christina Martin School of Food and Wine** (editors note - this was the first independent private chef school in South Africa, putting Durban on the foodie map, from 1973 to 2006 and has produced some of the world's top chefs).

My chef career began at The **Balmoral Hotel** in Durban. I then moved to Cape Town for a while before securing a job with **The Mantis Collection**— working at both **The No.5 Boutique Art Hotel** and the world renowned **Shamwari Game Reserve** in the Eastern Cape. After spending 2 years working for Mantis, I then joined **Sun International** for the next 6 years – working at a number of their properties. In 2016 I was promoted to Executive Sous Chef of their Carnival City casino where I oversaw 7 outlets, 6 kitchens and 100 chefs. In 2017 I was appointed **Sun International's Youngest Executive Chef**.

Then in 2019 I was appointed Executive Chef of the iconic **Blue Train**, where I am today.

What are the main challenges of working in a 13 x 3m moving kitchen?

Space and storage are definitely a challenge - but with the right planning, you make it work. Liaising with suppliers with regards to how I need produce packaged is vital and helps with these challenges.

Tell us a bit about the team on each train? Eg how many people cook/prep/serve/etc

We have 2 train sets and each train has two kitchens – a cold/pastry kitchen where the chefs prep both cold starters and all desserts – and then a hot kitchen where the chefs prep all hot starters and mains.

The long train accommodates 84 guests and has a kitchen team of 7 staff including 2 cold kitchen/pastry kitchen chefs, 3 hot kitchen chefs, and 2 kitchen attendants. The short train accommodates 64 guests and has a team of 6 staff including 2 cold kitchen/pastry chefs, 2 hot kitchen chefs and 2 kitchen attendants.

What are some of your signature dishes or specialities that you will be introducing to the menu?

I do a lovely Pearl Barley Mushroom Risotto as well as a delicious Seabass with a white bean and chick pea ragout with braised leeks. These two dishes have been an absolute hit! At least 20 guests have taken my risotto recipe home with them!

What inspires your food? Do you have a foodie mentor ie your grandmother etc?

I draw a lot of inspiration from my memories of food that I share with my family. I remember how it feels to sit and eat at the table with your loved ones and I want to create that feeling when people eat my food. I read a lot and watch a lot of documentaries on restaurants and chefs. I draw a lot from stories of chefs who have reinvented the way we look at food, the thought process that goes into dishes and the science behind the process. Those stories inspire me to do better every day.

What is the most unusual request you have had to cater for on the train so far?

I have a lot of special requests that come through, but the most memorable is when I made Borscht, a Russian beetroot soup for a Russian family. They loved it and said it was close to home.

There is a big movement towards eating more vegetarian and vegan food globally. How are you embracing this in the Blue Train kitchen?

When I arrived at The Blue Train there weren't many vegetarian options on the actual menus (although the Chefs were of course catering for special diets behind the scenes of course). I now have included vegetarian

dishes for all courses. We have seen a definite increase in people choosing our vegetarian options so we are creating more vegetarian and vegan meals. On our lunch menu we do a vegan baby marrow linguini with ariabiatta sauce and wild mushrooms. We cut our baby marrow to resemble linguini pasta. It's been a hit.

How and where do you source all the ingredients before setting off on a 2-night slow travel journey?

We have suppliers in both Pretoria and Cape Town. On the morning of departure all fruit and veg is sourced fresh from the market and all meat and fish comes in fresh too.

Can you give us an example of a typical Dinner menu on The Blue Train?



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Starters

Green tea cured salmon, pickled beetroot, cucumber spaghetti, citrus dressing

Asian chicken salad, rice noodle, baby spinach, spring onion, cucumber, coriander, peanuts, sesame seeds, ginger and soy dressing

Asian noodle salad, baby spinach, spring onion, cucumber, coriander, peanuts, sesame seeds, ginger and soy dressing (V)

Soup

Pumpkin veloute, herb cream

Mains

Pan roasted lamb loin, micro carrots, aubergine caviar, pommes puree, lamb jus

Ostrich fillet, butternut puree, baby peas, pickled grapes, spicy raisin jus

Seabass, white bean and chick pea ragout, green baby peas, braised leeks, dill and lemon oil

Butternut cake, white bean and baby pea ragout (V)

Dessert

Dark chocolate marquise, pistachio and almond brittle, caramelized orange

Strawberry crumble, honey and coffee crumb, mixed berry sorbet

What sort of food do you enjoy when you are cooking in your own kitchen at home?

I make a lot of pasta and food on the open fire. I make a lamb al asador at home for my family

Please describe your typical day on The Blue Train?

Day 1

- My day starts at 8am at our Salvokop depot
- We start with loading the train with all our produce and stock, this takes a few hours,
- Whilst this is happening, 2 team members prep pre departure snacks and dinner prep.
- Loading is done by 1 pm so our team then moves on to dinner prep
- At 2pm the train departs to the Pretoria train station to pick up the guests
- At 5pm I take a break and refresh for dinner service.
- Dinner service starts at 18:30 to 21:30
- At 22:00 to 22:30 I prep for breakfast the next morning

Day 2

- My day starts at 05:30am, I start breakfast service at 06:30 to 09:30
- At 10:00am I start preparing for Lunch service, which is served from 12:30 to 14:00
- After lunch I start getting ready for High tea which is served at 4pm,
- Whilst High tea is being served I get ready for dinner service
- 17:30 I take a break and freshen up for dinner service
- Dinner is served from 18:30 to 21:30

Is there a part of the Blue Train journey that is your favourite to just pause to enjoy the scenery?

Hands down the Hex River Valley! The moment you exit those tunnels and you go through the Cape vineyards with the crystal-clear water of the Hex river running along the train lines. It's breath-taking. You somewhat get lost in the beauty of Western Cape.

Tell us something fun about yourself?

In my free time I'm a gamer. I love playing with my PlayStation and online gaming. I also spend a lot of time recipe researching



#TASTYAFRICA....

Why not whip up a batch of Chef Cresan's delectable

Blue Train Dark Chocolate Brownies

[Click here to download the recipe!](#)

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