

June 16, 2026

Dear Traveler,

Would you like to take a ride on the iron ore train during your tour of Mauritania? Here is some important information that is hard to find online in its entirety and that you should definitely know beforehand:

- **No tour operator can guarantee you a ride on the iron ore train, not even us.**
- **Sometimes the train does not stop in Choum without prior notice.**
- **SNIM staff may prevent you from boarding the iron ore cars.**
- **The train may not stop at the station in Nouadhibou, and you may have to get off in a restricted port area, where you may encounter problems (so far exclusively verbal) with local authorities.**
- **It is likely that the train will be hours late. This makes it difficult to plan your tour itinerary reliably (including transportation from Nouadhibou to Nouakchott). Keep this in mind when booking your return flight (allow for buffer days and flexible rebooking options).**

Explanation

The freight train that transports iron ore thousands of kilometers across the desert (affectionately and somewhat reverently known as “*The Beast*” or “*Le Train*”) typically runs daily with hundreds of loaded cars from the mines around Zouérat to the Atlantic coast at Nouadhibou. As a rule, at least one empty freight train also runs back between Nouadhibou and Zouérat every day. These are the only trains that run regularly in Mauritania. On the Zouérat–Nouadhibou route, the train also passes through the towns of Choum and Tmeimichatt, though it does not always stop there. The tiny town of Choum (60 km east of the Ben Amera monolith) has become a popular destination for train travelers, and we also have a guesthouse there (Auberge du Choum). Tmeimichatt, on the other hand, isn’t even a tiny town. It’s practically just a train station in the Mauritanian sense—that is, located in the middle of the desert.

Problems with SNIM

The iron ore train is operated by the Mauritanian company Société Nationale Industrielle et Minière (SNIM). SNIM has long had a major problem with people traveling on the iron ore cars. SNIM has no issue with travelers who purchase a ticket in Zouérat, Choum, or Nouadhibou (this is not yet possible online) and use the few passenger cars immediately behind the locomotive. SNIM has publicly announced on several occasions that it intends to prevent passengers from riding on the iron ore cars.

Due to announcements from SNIM, we are currently no longer operating out of Zouérat. Our guides know the best spots in Choum and Tmeimichatt to board the train. We can take you to these locations; the guides will accompany you there and, if you'd like, throughout the entire train ride. However, there is **no guarantee** that the train ride will take place as planned. We are not the train operators; we can only take you to the appropriate locations, accompanied by a helpful team that has done this dozens or even hundreds of times. We arrange transportation, provide the necessary equipment (goggles, sleeping bags, etc.), and are happy to let you shower and have breakfast in Nouadhibou after the ride before we continue the journey.

However, it is possible that the train may be canceled, that it may not stop at a particular station, or that there may be issues with SNIM. For example, in the past, SNIM has deployed staff who actively and successfully attempted to prevent travelers from boarding the train. None of this is dramatic or has major consequences, but it can feel very hectic at the moment of boarding.

That's why we strongly advise against coming to Mauritania just for the train ride. We'll help you organize your train trip, but you should always factor in the unexpected when planning your trip. To avoid disappointment, our motto is: The train ride should be, at most, the final highlight of a varied round-trip through a beautiful country—nothing more.

We operate with complete transparency here. Don't believe anyone who promises you a train trip! Discover Mauritania in its entirety—not just a train ride.

Important to Know

We've designed our packages so you can travel as affordably as possible. Transportation to Choum and pickup from Nouadhibou are always included in the package. **Not included** is vehicle transport from Choum to Nouadhibou. What does that mean?

The 4x4 drivers on our Adrar tours who take you to Choum are not the same drivers who pick you up in Nouadhibou. There is no paved road between Choum and Nouadhibou; therefore, it has proven to be a more viable tour system—significantly cheaper for you as travelers and considerably less dangerous for the drivers—to use new drivers starting from Nouadhibou, rather than sending overtired drivers alone through the Sahara for several hundred kilometers at night. This is not a problem at all during normal tour operations when train service is functioning properly. However, we should be prepared for any eventuality. Therefore, here are a few scenarios.

When a Crisis Hits

Our tour plan includes dropping you off in Choum, where you will wait for the train with your tour guide. Ideally, the train will arrive and you can travel to Nouadhibou without any problems. However, due to the increasing issues with SNIM (the local train service), we, as a tour operator, want to be flexible and transparent in dealing with train disruptions and offer you several alternatives in case of problems:

a) Covered by the normal tour offer:

Driver 1 will drop you off in Choum and begin his well-deserved tour. This driver is only booked for a limited number of days to keep prices low for you. If, for any reason, there are train problems in Choum and you cannot reach Nouadhibou via the usual route, you have the option of returning to Nouakchott with your guide using public transport (minibuses, shared taxis). This is included in the tour price.

b) Risk protection + buffer day:

To ensure a bit more security during the train journey, we can increase the number of attempts. A sensible option would be to include a buffer day at the end of the tour. If you wish, we can easily book the driver and guide for an extra day – as a kind of safety net in case of train problems. This should, however, be arranged **before the tour begins** and you should proactively bring it up. If the first attempt is unsuccessful, we could arrange overnight accommodation in Choum and make a second attempt the following day. If that also fails, we will arrange 4x4 transport back to Nouakchott.

c) 4x4 transport to Nouadhibou:

If you don't wish to return to Nouakchott, we can also arrange 4x4 transport from Choum to Nouadhibou. However, since there is no paved road connecting Choum and Nouadhibou, the journey is quite complex. The drivers employed for this trip do not return directly to the starting point after dropping you off in Nouadhibou, but instead travel south on paved roads and then from Nouakchott back to the Adrar region, resulting in a total journey time of three days. Therefore, the cost for such a 4x4 tour from Choum to Nouadhibou varies between **€350 and €500**. The earlier you inquire, the more favorable the offer will generally be.

We hope that reading this disclaimer has informed you rather than confused you. Our motto is: We leave nothing to chance. Transparency is our priority – your trip, your decision. We are happy to advise you and look forward to the tour with you.

FINAL: If you're planning to travel on the iron ore train, it's best to **book your return flight flexibly** with cancellation or rebooking options. Even if the train journey goes smoothly, delays of several hours are the norm, not the exception. Nothing should spoil your trip – that's important to us!

Best regards,

Leo Dietrich

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