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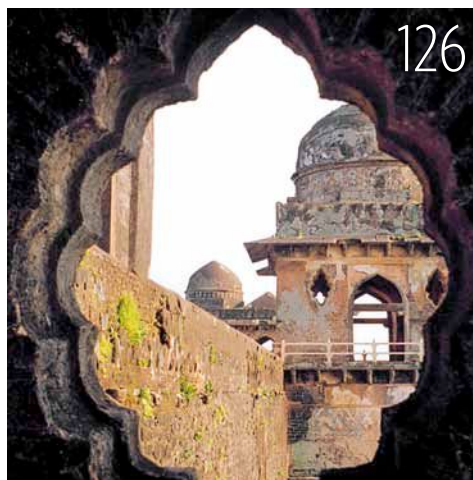
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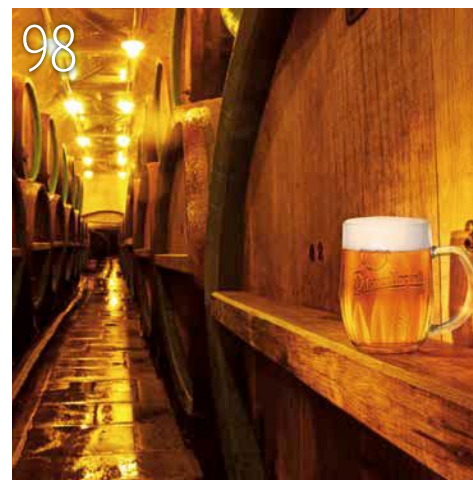
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GETTY IMAGES

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✉ I am a postgraduate student and a passionate reader of *OT*. Could you come up with an issue on the extensive writings done by Indian officials and western travellers on the rich cultural heritage and people of South Asia and Southeast Asia, especially India and Rangoon (presently Yangon in Myanmar), during the colonial period? There are some brilliant works of that period which beautifully describe the pre-colonial legacies of these regions as well as the harsh realities of European mercantilism and cultural education. It would attract young college-goers as your magazine has a wide readership in that segment. It

LETTER OF THE MONTH

✉ I bought the *Outlook Traveller* 'Responsible Tourism' issue for the blurb on the top-right side of the cover—'Amitav Ghosh on the future of tourism'. As expected, in 'Circle Of Unreason', Ghosh presents a grim tomorrow for tourism. His arguments, based on industry statistics and sector facts, are the stuff of cold chills if you are a traveller and want to keep travelling for another 20 years. But a lot of daunting happenings are on their way—like the disappearance of 40 percent of wildlife. The climatic and other changes we are seeing now are the impact of emissions from two decades ago. On homestays, I thought I had seen it all when I covered the better ones from Kerala. But some of the properties presented in the issue are a delight. As is the writing by Ambica Gulati ('Goodbye, World'), Srinath Perur ('Tree's Company'; rocker title) and others.

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would also be a reminder of the remnants of our historical past.

SATHVIK N., EMAIL

✉ I have been reading *OT* for the last five years. All your special issues left a unique mark in their own way. However, the 'Responsible Tourism' issue stood out as it carried along with it the civilised as well as the wild fraternity, while keeping their well-being and future under consideration. Amitav Ghosh's

first-hand account during the *OT* Responsible Tourism Summit made an emphatic impact which must have led many to redefine tourism as per changing global needs. Another area that made the Feb '17 issue nice were the features on homestays. All the features left a unique impression and I am sure would be a trigger to start a new trend in the tourism industry.

B. AJIT, NEW DELHI

OT Getaways' 'Top Ten India' is a mini encyclopaedia on travelling in India. A copy of this must find place in one's personal library. As for the Feb '17 issue of the magazine, from the updates section, 'Delhi Among The Stars' is good news for film lovers in Delhi. The article 'Circle of Unreason' tempts one to visit the Pacific and Caribbean islands before they disappear. The feature 'Goodbye World' also tempts one to be with nature for some time. 'Nanak's Pakistan' provides a glimpse to people who are unable to visit that region. My son and daughter-in-law found the article 'Home on the Range' the best as they had plans of visiting the Corbett National Park.

MAHESH KAPASI, NEW DELHI

✉ *OT* is doing a wonderful job of giving us a personalised insight into the kind of holidays one can plan. Your cover story 'Circle of Unreason' (Feb'17) made for

interesting reading. It reveals the fact that the tourism industry, directly and indirectly, is both a cause of and significantly impacted by climate change. Keep up the good work, and hope you give us more interesting stories on tourism in this year.

VINOD C. DIXIT, AHMEDABAD

During my leisure time, I watch travel channels on television. And, I do not forget to grab a copy of *OT* every month. But I am unable to find time to send feedback on the stories. The stories describe the places so beautifully that I can immediately visualise the places being narrated, as if I am watching a live *OT* channel. In the Jan '17 issue, two of my favourite Himalayan hill destinations—Kurseong and Meghalaya—have been showcased. *OT* has done a wonderful job of writing about the tea lounge at Kurseong. Anaikatti was new for me and I really loved the story.

ALOK GANGULY, KOLKATA



The letter of the month has won a copy of the new *Top Ten India* guide from *Outlook Traveller Getaways*.

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Dated: 20 February 2017

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Indranil Roy
PUBLISHER



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GOING PLACES TOGETHER

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



ALTHOUGH WE LIKE TO THINK WE'RE DOING A PRETTY GOOD JOB OF IT, we're still not the final arbiters on all things travel. You are, dear fellow traveller. This epiphany came to me as I was drowning in your phenomenal response to our call for readers' travel stories. You guys have been everywhere and have some socking good stories to tell. The sheer breadth of variety had

us entranced: someone's quest for a fleeting encounter with Ruskin Bond in Mussoorie, someone else walking into a legendary and labyrinthine bookstore in Los Angeles. Still others delving deep (literally) into the history of Pilsen or finding the best paella in all of Spain. Closer home, there's everything from Lucknow to Dhanushkodi, Mandu to Meghalaya. And we're chuffed to share your inspiring experiences with the rest of our readers. In fact, so copious has been your output that we're toying with the idea of making the reader's story a regular fixture in the mag. So watch this space for more.

With the weather finally on the turn, it's great to see destinations like Switzerland shuffle off their winter coats and prepare to welcome us back. And we gaze back fondly upon popular destinations like the Philippines (last chance before it gets too hot). There are surprises too, like a somewhat thrilling tour of the Demilitarized Zone between the two Koreas and the Amish Village in Pennsylvania, which seems right out of a time capsule. Also, destination alert: this issue we bring you all the dope on Ras Al Khaimah, a quaint, little emirate in a forgotten corner of the UAE that you probably hadn't heard of (but should get to know better).

🐦 @amitdixit

—AMIT DIXIT



I have many nice memories of the piping hot Maggi at Landour's Char Dukan

CONTRIBUTORS ➡



Over the years, **MANJULA KALLIAT** managed to squeeze in travel while her life focus shifted back and forth from marketing to academics to writing. Having now irrevocably succumbed to wanderlust, she has made travel her main focus, with the other preoccupations vying to squeeze themselves in, whenever possible.



Looking beyond the postcard perfect charm of Switzerland, **SUMAN TARAFDAR** discovered a varied plethora of fascinating museums that are repositories of the human spirit. From seeing historic art to intricate timepieces, indoors in Swiss can be great too. And warm!



After 30 years on the road, **GUSTASP and JEROO IRANI** have seen it all—from banging away their stories on typewriters to blogging (albeit erratically) about their experiences. Life has been a joy ride but the grandparents on the go can never have enough of it. They have wings on their feet and firmly believe that if they rest, they will rust!



Adman-turned-wanderer **ANURAG MALLICK** has braved landslides, floods, bird flu epidemics, wedlock and other natural disasters for over a decade. Like a potboiler, he's "loosely based" out of Bengaluru and runs Red Scarab, a travel & media outfit with his wife Priya Ganapathy and writes books and articles.



RANEE SAHANEY has spent quite a few decades writing on travel. At every destination, a new experience opens a fresh window for her. It's not just about travelling but "learning about the place and also rediscovering something about myself", is how she describes it. Come what may, she can't imagine not travelling or writing about the wonders she sees.



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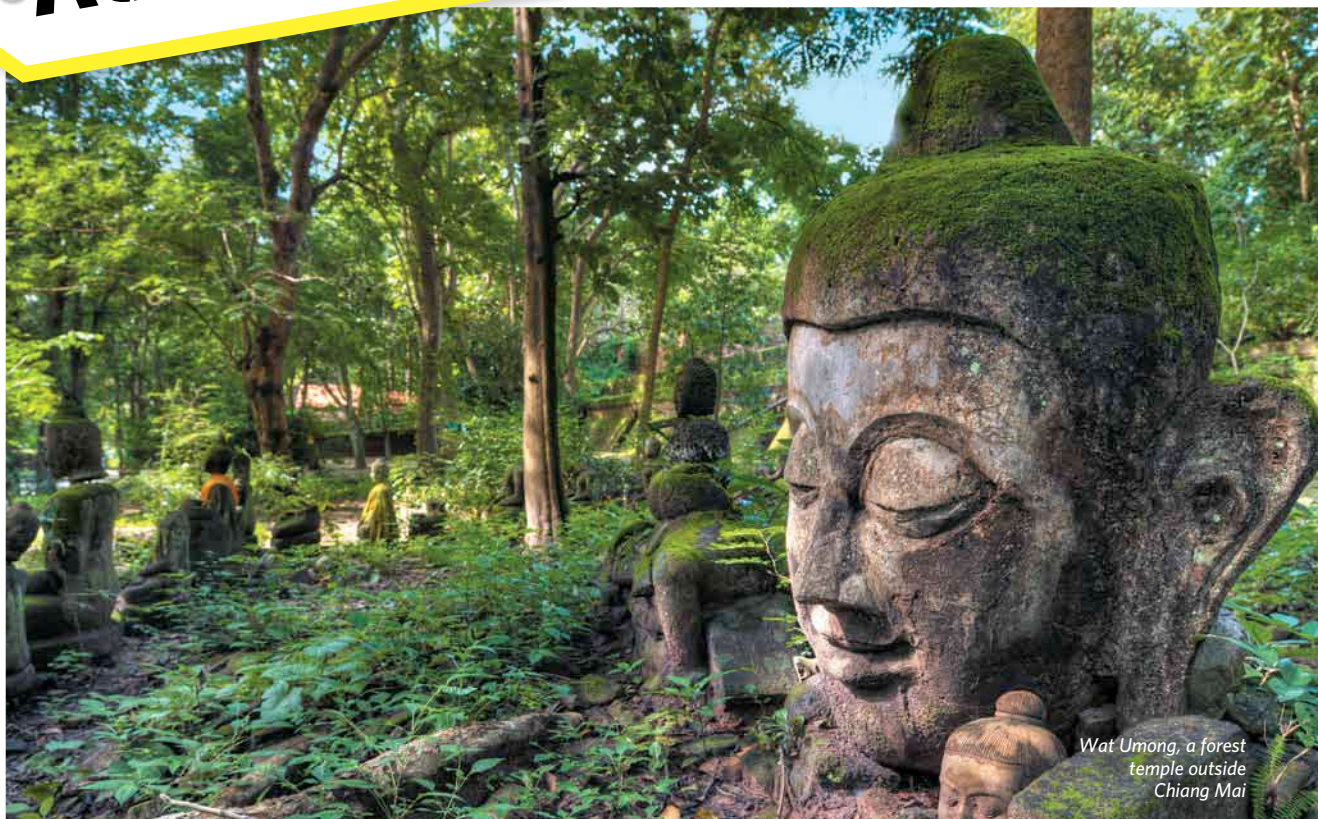
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Wat Umong, a forest temple outside Chiang Mai

GETTY IMAGES

We are three adults and one child (age 8 years). We are planning to go to Thailand in the last week of December 2017 from Kolkata. Our total budget is ₹2,00,000 and we are looking to spend a week to 10 days in Thailand. We want to spend a few days in the northern part of the country to absorb its culture. For the rest of the trip, we'd like to relax at a beach destination. Can you suggest possible itineraries, accommodation and to and fro transport options that can be included in our budget?

VARUN, EMAIL

An ideal 10-day itinerary for you would run something like this: Days 1 & 2: **Bangkok**. Days 3-6: **Chiang Mai**. Days 7-10: On one of the southern islands (**Koh Samui/Krabi/Phuket**, etc). This would give you a couple of days to enjoy the many delights of Bangkok—its temples, shopping, boat rides and, most of all, its splendid, ubiquitous street food.

From Bangkok, you would take an hour-long flight north to Chiang Mai, where you would find an extremely pleasant contrast to the colour and bustle of Bangkok. This too is temple city, with many gorgeous wats, a lovely Old City, plenty of day trips for cooking tours, nature walks, etc. After this relaxed, semi-rural interlude, you would then fly to an island destination of your choice in the south of Thailand. Where, of course, you'd do the island-getaway thing. You could also do the trip in reverse, as in head straight to Chiang Mai and keep Bangkok for the end (so you're not lugging around the stuff acquired during the inevitable shopping in Bangkok).

But now the bad news.

I'm not sure that an all-inclusive budget of ₹2 lakh for four persons will be adequate to put this plan into action. The biggest expense

head will be flights: it's cheap to get to Bangkok from Kolkata, and Thai Air Asia has cheapish flights from Bangkok to Chiang Mai too. The catch is flying to a beach destination further south—those flights tend to be pricier and likely to be even more so around the time you plan to travel. December and January are peak tourist months for the islands. All this flying about will eat up most of your budget.

I'd suggest that you stick to the plan for Days 1-6 (Bangkok + Chiang Mai), in whichever order you prefer. Then, from Bangkok head to a beach destination nearby—a trip that can be made overland, by bus or cab. Options include the resort town of **Hua Hin**, 2-3hrs southwest of Bangkok, or the quieter, less-frequented

Bang Saen, 1.5hrs southeast of Bangkok.

Nice stays at affordable rates are plentiful in Thailand. In

Bangkok, **Tints of Blue Residence** (tintsofblue.com), **Pas Cher Hotel de Bangkok** (pascherhoteldebangkok.com) and **Bangkok Loft Inn** (bangkokloftinn.com) are all well-located and offer stylish rooms for about ₹3,000, even in peak season. In Chiang Mai, try **Cozytel** (cozytelchiangmai.com), **Vanilla Place Guesthouse** (vanillaplace-chiangmai.com) or **V Lodge** (no website, book on airbnb.co.in or booking.com)—all of these are popular and offer rooms in the range of ₹2,000. In Hua Hin, try the **Veerawan Hua Hin**, if you like boutique-type hotels (from ₹1,700; veerawan-hotel.com) or for more standard amenities and a slightly higher price, the **Ibis Hua Hin** (from ₹2,700; ibis.com). Bang Saen is much less built-up, and accommodation is mainly in the form of guesthouses and lodges; try **The Day Hotel** or **One Beat Vintage & Bistro**, both located close to the beach and both offering rooms for about ₹1,500 (no websites, see hotel booking sites).





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MADHU KAPPARATH

We are a family of four adults and a toddler. We are planning to travel across Europe in 2017 or 2018. What are the most convenient routes that can cover the maximum number of countries? How can we arrange for home or hotel stays from here? What will be the approximate budget ex-Mumbai?

SATEESH BAPAT, EMAIL

Planning a multi-country trip across Europe is like saying you want to travel across India. There is obviously a plethora of options, and which places you want to visit will depend on your particular interests—culture, food, beaches, natural attractions and so on. A convenient way to travel is to take the train between countries, since much of Europe is connected on the Eurail. Ideas and itineraries are available at eurail.com/europe-by-train/itineraries/3-weeks-in-europe. There are plentiful options for home stays at airbnb.com. However, making independent arrangements for a holiday where the main idea is to “cover the maximum number of countries” might be an exhausting affair. And the travel may be a headache too, especially if your group includes a toddler.

Instead I would recommend that you sign on for one of the **multi-country Europe tours** offered

by large tour companies such as **Cox & Kings** or **Thomas Cook**. A typical 10-day holiday takes in five countries in Western Europe (both companies offer a choice of tours), with prices starting at approx. ₹1.5 lakh per person. A two-week trip to seven countries costs from approx. ₹2.15 per person. And it'll all be taken care of—flights, hotels, meals, sightseeing, visas, transfers... See coxandkings.com/duniyadekho/europe or thomascook.in.

To celebrate my wife's 70th birthday, the family wishes to celebrate in a resort located 2-3 hours from South Delhi. We will require six rooms, two with children under 5, for three nights this April. We would like the resort to have space for children to play around and good quality food. Our preferred budget is ₹6,000-7,000 per couple per night including meals. I'd appreciate your suggestions.

HARISH KOHLI, EMAIL

For an intimate family celebration, I'd pick a 'farm homestay' called **Peepal Kothi**. It's not a resort, but that's one of the things about it that appeals. Accommodation is spread across a 'kothi', with three bedrooms, and three independent cottages, all set on tranquil and green three acres of land. Since it offers only six rooms, booking

your family here will mean that you'll enjoy the glorious luxury of having the entire place to yourselves. The furnishings are tasteful; the food wholesome; the grounds a haven of green. Lots of space for children to run around and enjoy themselves. The rack rate is ₹10,000 doubles, but this includes all meals (and you may be able to negotiate a lower rate since you'll need to book the entire Kothi). Located just a couple of hours out of Delhi, off the Delhi-Jaipur Highway, I'd say it would be worth it to up your budget somewhat and splurge. See peepalkothi.com.

If, however, your tastes run to more standard-issue resort, consider the **Best Western Resort Country Club**, also located off the same highway, near Manesar. Rooms here are cheaper (from ₹6,500) but the price does not include meals; again, you'll have to up your budget. See resortcountryclub.com. Or there's the new addition to the off-Manesar resorts: the **Lemon Tree Hotel, Tarudhan Valley**. This is even pricier, with rooms offered in the ₹10,000 range (without meals). Details at lemontreehotels.com.

Another popular option, slightly further afield (150km from Delhi), is the **Hill Fort, Kesroli**. Located in Rajasthan's Alwar district, the heritage hotel run by Neemrana Hotels, offers a range of accommodation, with rooms starting from as low as ₹3,570 (again, not inclusive of food). See neemranahotels.com.

We are seven couples, in our 30s and 40s, and we are planning a vacation to Singapore along with a four-night cruise in end April or early May 2017. We want to stay for four days in Singapore and then go for a cruise which returns to Singapore. Can you please suggest a budget itinerary from Chennai which includes flights, hotel stay, sightseeing, transport, food and visas? Our budget per person is ₹70,000-80,000 including the cruise. We are all non-vegetarian and there are a few children too

in our group. Is it advisable to get the whole package from a travel agent such as Cox & Kings or SOTC? Or can we do the bookings ourselves?

MUSTANSIR, CHENNAI

To answer your last question first: of course, you can make all bookings yourself. Many people prefer independent travel for the flexibility it affords them and the thrill of discovering places and experiences on their own. On the other hand, there are several advantages of letting a tour operator handle your holiday: cost savings (assuming you're not looking for backpacker mode of travel—nothing is cheaper than that); the redundancy of research or nasty surprises (they've figured it all out for you and will offer a consistent product); and less running around (the operator will arrange for visas, insurance and the like). Especially since you're going to be travelling in a fairly large group—more documents to handle, more flight tickets and hotel bookings to be worked out—I'd recommend that you use the services of one of these reputable agents. In fact, if you move soon, you should grab SOTC's '**Summer Cost Saver Singapore Surprise**': for a starting price of ₹66,000 per person, they're offering 4 nights/5 days in Singapore, with flights, three-star hotel accommodation, two meals, sightseeing, transfers, visas and travel insurance. That's a pretty good deal; scroll down on sotc.in/international-tour-packages/group-tours.

A four-night cruise will be an expensive affair. I suggest you settle for the standard two-night sailings on Star Cruises' *SuperStar Gemini* (they have an offer currently on for May departures of an all-inclusive price of ₹17,000 per person; see starcruises.com). There you go—a near-luxurious holiday close to your budget with next-to-no headache!

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EDITED BY MANEK S. KOHLI

# NORTH SOUTH EAST WEST



*The world is sewn together through threads, some visible and others invisible*



18 JOIN IN THE INDIAN YACHT PARTY 20 GLOBAL HOSPITALITY  
22 THUKRAL & TAGRA ON THEIR MOMA DREAMS  
24 GEARBOX



● EXHIBITION

## CONNECTING THREADS

**T**he United Nations (UN) brings together 193 member states to work towards world peace and equality. Artist N.S. Harsha symbolises this cooperation in his new exhibition entitled 'Charming Journey' and its main installation called *Nations*. He's taken as many Usha sewing machines as the number of UN member-states, calico prints of their flags pinned underneath the needles of each of the machines. All 193 machines are connected by threads, symbolising the connected nature of the world we live in—a message very relevant in our increasingly divided world. The installation is a part of an exhibition that started at Mori Art Museum in Tokyo on February 4 and will continue till June 11. See more at [mori.art.museum](http://mori.art.museum).



## • MUSEUM BE A SPORT

The cricket legend's century-scoring gloves, or the football team's winning trophy—India's first multi-sport museum, the Fanattic Sports Museum in Kolkata has it all. Opened in January, the 6,700-sq ft museum by sports journalist Boria Majumdar is a remarkable exhibition of all things sporting. If you're a cricket-buff, you will be delighted to find Tendulkar's 100th-century scoring gloves, bat and jersey here. For the football enthusiast, there's Atlético de Kolkata's Indian Super League trophy at the entrance. Signed memorabilia from tennis stars Nadal and Federer and sprinting legend Usain Bolt are some of the other exciting artefacts found here. CONTACT [cristorian@yahoo.com](mailto:cristorian@yahoo.com); 203/1, Bidhan Sarani, Kolkata; [boriamajumdar.com/fsm](http://boriamajumdar.com/fsm)



## • SAILING THE INDIAN YACHT PARTY

Mahindra's bespoke Odyssea fleet has got its biggest member yet. Adding to its customisable yacht series, Mahindra Marine has announced the Odyssea 55, which claims to be tailor-made for Indian waters. It's 55-feet-long and features a spacious saloon area, a master cabin with a bed and a personal bar, a lower deck for guests, a swimming platform and sunbed area, and teak flooring. With a speed of 26 knots, the boat lets you zoom through the water on a clear day. The yacht is expected to offer competitive pricing due to its entirely Indian origins. See [mahindra.com](http://mahindra.com).

## • TRIPS MADE FOR YOU

Crafted for those looking for exclusive experiences are the 'Luxury Gold' journeys by Insight Vacations in collaboration with Signature Tours by Creative Travel. Around 38 journeys were launched in India for those who seek unique experiences in Europe, America, India, Southeast Asia and Australia. So what can a traveller find? John Boulding, CEO, Insight Vacations, said that special experiences have been designed to which a normal tourist is not privy. "It could be an out-of-the-hour visit to the magnificent Doges Palace in Venice with an expert art historian or meeting the choreographer at La Nouvelle Eve, one of Paris' top cabaret shows," said Boulding. And Rajeev Kohli, joint managing director, Signature Tours by Creative Travel, called them 'inspirational journeys'. [insightvacations.com/asia](http://insightvacations.com/asia), [luxurygoldvacations.com](http://luxurygoldvacations.com)





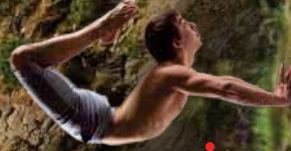
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# FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS

THE RECENT GLOBAL HOSPITALITY CONCLAVE IN GURGAON TOUCHED UPON THE TRANSITIONS ACROSS THE GLOBE AND NEW AVENUES FOR GROWTH IN THE BUSINESS



The fourth edition of the annual Global Hospitality Conclave (GHC) focussed on the constantly-changing global scenario and the impact this has on the travel and hospitality business. The organisers called it 'a platform for the exchange of ideas, discovering opportunities, acquainting with colleagues, meeting friends and broadening the knowledge base'. GHC is an initiative of the alumni of the erstwhile Oberoi School of Hotel Management (OSHM), now the Oberoi Centre for Learning & Development (OCLD).

Vikram Singh Mehta, chairman, Brookings India, opened the conclave with a detailed summing up of the political, economic and social events of 2016. Technology being a prime mover, Nirupa Shankar, director, Brigade Hospitality spoke about investing in nanotechnology. Manav Thadani, chairman, HVS Asia Pacific said there is going to be rapid growth of leisure hotels, despite the market swings.

The panel discussions covered different dimensions of the hospitality sector. There was

one on diversity and inclusiveness at the workplace in which prominent women, Pritha Dutt, director, Empower, and Aradhana Lal, Vice President-Sustainability Initiatives, Lemon Tree Hotels, along with Niren Chaudhary, President Global KFC, Yum! Brands, participated. Besides talking about journalism in global times, journalist Vir Sanghvi also moderated the panel discussion on trends and innovation in the F&B sector. Speakers included restaurateur A.D. Singh and Indian Accent's Rohit Khattar.



## FROM THE SPEAKERS

■ "There are a lot of issues around the world. We have more money, we have more time, we are getting much older, but our health is declining." —*Ingo Schweder, CEO & Founder, GOCO Hospitality, on the importance of wellness retreats*

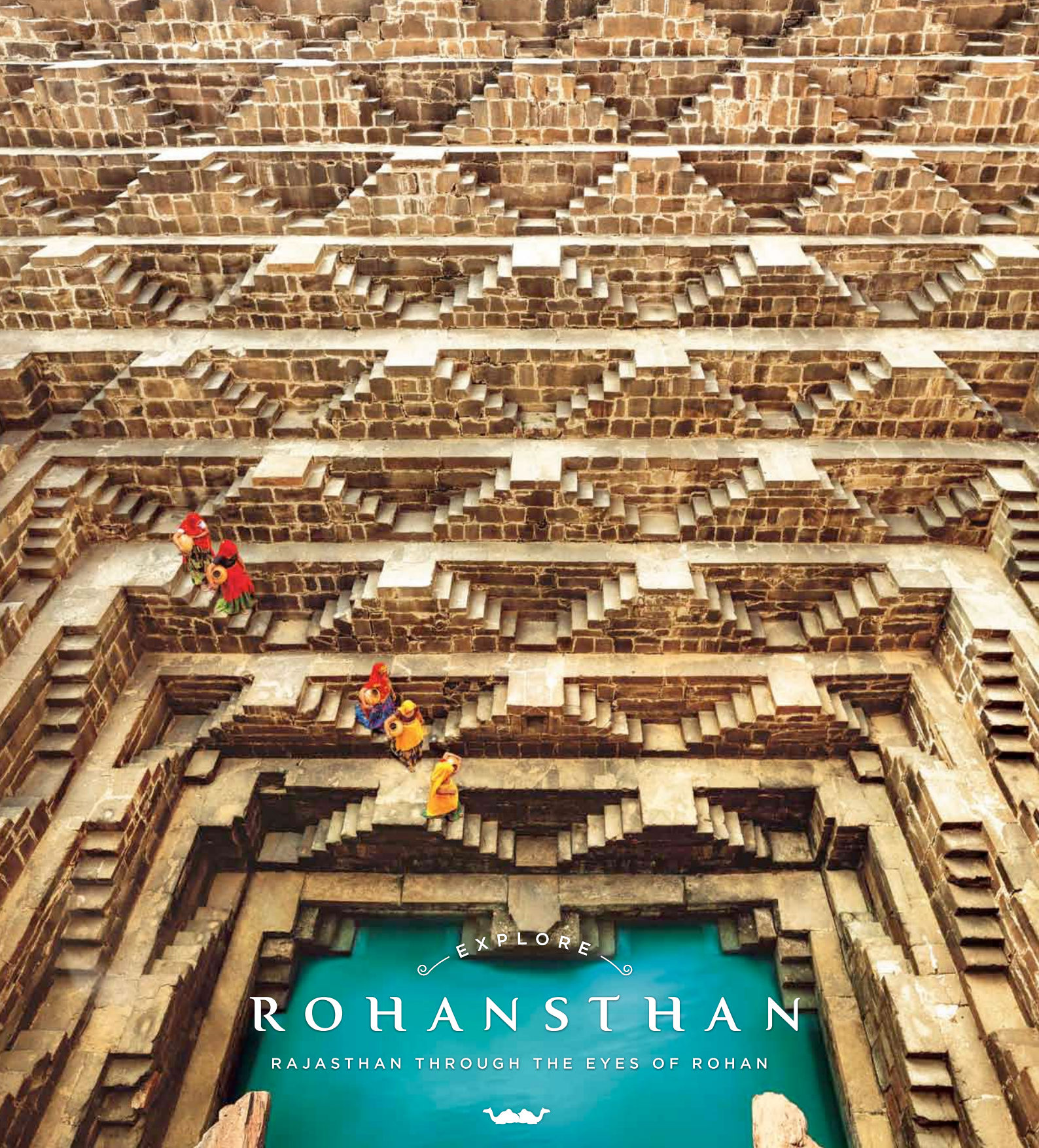
■ "2017 is not going to be a world (from a social, economic and political standpoint) where any one of us can sit back and say that the world is going to move along a linear path. It's going to be a world with lots of twists and turns and buffeted by very volatile forces." —*Vikram Singh Mehta, chairman, Brookings India*

■ "In today's time, it's hard. There are so many good restaurants and so many people doing so many activities to have an engagement with their best customers. But that's how we built Olive Bar and Kitchen at that time, through the larger connect." —*A.D. Singh, managing director, Olive Bar and Kitchen, on wholesome experiences*

■ "What I've learnt is that vision evolves every year. So if you ask me to look back 10 or 15 years, every year I have felt that I have climbed one flight of stairs and the horizon is vastly different from what I saw earlier." —*Patu Keswani, CMD, Lemon Tree Hotels*

■ "I think Indian managers and hotel employees are probably the finest in the world because not only do they have the sense of hospitality, they also have discretion." —*Vir Sanghvi, senior journalist*





EXPLORE  
**ROHANSTHAN**

RAJASTHAN THROUGH THE EYES OF ROHAN



*"It was surreal! The geometry of the place, the criss-crossing complex design of Chand Baori made me wonder how someone could even think it up! It's like a maze in a step well!" – Rohan Chattopadhyay, Ranchi.*

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**RAJASTHAN**

JAANE KYA DIKH JAAYE!





THUKRAL & TAGRA ARTISTS

## ART & INSPIRATION

### What are your favourite destinations?

We have been showcasing across the world, so it is all exciting. But if we have to pick some place, it would be Tokyo because there they show respect to everything, whether it is good or bad. In India, honestly, art is the least appreciated because it is always looked at as a hobby and never taken seriously. In London, you'll see a lot of things and in New York, there are many contemporary galleries.

### Most of your art projects are interactive. What's the idea behind that?

We want to create an immersive environment where one interacts with the space, the ceiling, the heights, and all these things become really important. People experience the project and, at the same time, create or finish the work of art within that atmosphere.

### During the recent India Art Fair, you asked people to write down a memory, shred it and cast it into a cement tile as part of your 'Memoir Bar' project. What was the thought process?

We were working on this idea: 'If you hold on to an object for a really long time, how do your emotions

translate into it?' So, we are talking about how little things go beyond their materiality. We wanted to show how the idea of nostalgia can be illustrated.

### Is there any venue or city where you would love to hold an exhibition?

Definitely. Victoria and Albert Museum in London and MoMA in New York—these places are very exciting.

### Does travel inspire your art?

See, we wouldn't literally go to Paris and get inspired by the Eiffel tower. But yeah, there's, say, the smell of the place—our projects are actually moulded according to the space. We wouldn't call it inspiration, but contextualising is very important.

### The Illuminated River International Design Competition saw you light up a London bridge. Could you tell us more about it?

We were given the historical Vauxhall Bridge. For us, it was visualised as the spine of a book which looks into the past and the future of the bridge. The water and the bridge have a love story, so the entire project showcases the bridge as the man and the water as the woman. The traveller, too, is a part of the project because his footprint counts and changes the hue of the light on the bridge.

### What's next for you guys?

We are going to Hong Kong this March to do a project called Bread, Circuses and Wi-Fi. The project includes a performance where a guy is sitting in the gallery and you can call him using a Wi-Fi router. It's a take on call centres.

■ MANEK S. KOHLI



Top to bottom: Victoria and Albert Museum in London is where Thukral and Tagra would love to hold an exhibition; sketch books are always in their travel bags; and they love Tokyo



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# BEAUTY BAG

NAPPA DORI OVERNIGHTERS



Chic and classy, Gautam Sinha's Nappa Dori brand blurs the lines between Indian craftsmanship and modern design. Everything is visually spectacular, the overnight bags in particular. Take, for instance, two of their designs—Streetwise and Bullman. Streetwise, with its sprawling Indian cityscape showcases a scene right out of an old black and white film on Kolkata—British-era buildings, trams, vintage cars and pedestrians. Similarly, Bullman takes you into a world of colour, religion and music, with one man beating on his drum, another holding a trumpet and a bull decked in elaborate ornaments. The bags are made of leather, while the images are printed on cotton canvas fabric. An adjustable shoulder strap has also been added. ₹13,500; [nappadori.com](http://nappadori.com)



## WRANGLER STARS & STRIPES

Wrangler's history is inextricably linked with American culture—it goes back to 1947 when professional rodeo cowboys endorsed the jeans designed by celebrity tailor Rodeo Ben. Their new Stars & Stripes Collection of apparel remembers those days, while incorporating quality standards that have come up in more recent years. The designs are inspired by the American flag and in keeping with the nostalgia, the denims have been given a timeworn look and vintage-inspired detailing. The T-shirts in the collection are made with an innovative, stretchable fabric. From ₹1,199; [wrangler.com](http://wrangler.com)



## PANASONIC RP-BTS50

Panasonic's new RP-BTS50 is a Bluetooth headphone (eliminating the need for a wire) which is waterproof (to protect from sweat and rain) with blue LED lights to flaunt at the edges. All this, coupled with superior sound quality and a sturdy built, makes it a serious contender in the sports headphone category. ₹8,999; [panasonic.com](http://panasonic.com)



## SONY RX100V

Does the thought of a bulky DSLR put you off? There's a new compact camera in town—it's feature-heavy with a super-fast auto-focus, and can record slow motion. The Sony RX100V has a 20.1 megapixel RS CMOS sensor, 315 phase-detection AF points, and can capture 24 shots a second continuously, while autofocus-ing each image in less than 0.05 seconds. Its 960fps recording allows for super-slow motion video. ₹79,990; [sony.co.in](http://sony.co.in)



## LONGSHI UNDERWATER LIGHTS

For those who are into night-time fishing trips, Longshi has a series of underwater lights (of many colours and intensities) available. With a lifespan of over 30,000 hours and the capacity to sustain water pressure up to 50 metres deep, these environment-friendly lights work for all varieties of marine life. From approx. \$23; [aliexpress.com](http://aliexpress.com)



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The hotel was once a royal hunting lodge that was converted into a palace by Raja Jitendra Singh Rathore



# HOTELS

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[CHECK OUT]

## ART OF THE MATTER

As artists from around the world set up their easels at Lake Nahargarh Palace, **Ranee Sahaney** walks its regal chambers and takes in the place behind the paintings

Luxurious beds, warm service, great food and surprisingly good art... I came back from a jüSTa property after a Holi weekend with happy memories. Almost 10 years on, I find that it wasn't a flash in the pan. Aesthetics continue to shape the jüSTa experience. The car, from Udaipur airport, gobbles up the kilometres along a new highway to the rural vistas of Chittorgarh and finally on to the lovely Nahargarh wa-

ter palace, set on a private lake. Originally a royal hunting lodge, it was converted into a palace by Raja Jitendra Singh Rathore of Ralavata and is now managed as a four-star hotel by the jüSTa group.

Amidst the shimmer of the blue water, Lake Nahargarh Palace rises gracefully to welcome the boat transporting me and my companions, a fellow journalist and a son of Bengal—Pandit Santanu Bandyopadhyay, part of the bill of fare for Chitrashala

2016. An annual international art residency driven by jüSTa founder Ashish Vohra, the event gives artists from different parts of the globe a chance to mingle in the former palace's chambers and gardens. This year's Chitrashala is set to be a rich experience, with 40 artists from home and abroad participating. Among them are Jogen Chowdhury, Peter Markus, Reiner Langer and several from Jordan, Egypt, China and France as well as a few displaced artists





from Syria, Iran and Iraq.

The minute the boat reaches the palace, I go bounding up the ramp and gaze around at the tranquil surrounds, set against the pale hills of the Aravalli range on the far side of the lake, where horses graze on a patch of green. Horseriding, wildlife safaris, forest treks and birding at the lakeside are some of the activities on offer here.

An unfussy check-in at the surprisingly minimalistic reception and traditional Rajasthan hospitality sets the tone for my stay. My room, an airy retreat which is alive with jewel-toned cushions and bedspread, and art on the wall, is one of many set along the wraparound verandah leading directly to the Fountain Lawn (set in Charbagh-style) and riotous flowering bushes. Several stairways lead directly to the first-floor rooms. I like the deluxe rooms (twin beds or a massive king-size bed) with a pool view or garden view, along with shower and bathtub options (state your preference when booking). Even better are the first-floor suites with picture windows opening up to a lake view. They come with a living

room and a separate bedroom area, each with their own TV sets.


From the garden, there's a neat little exit which opens on to the swimming pool overlooking the lake. I linger, long after the livid sunset disappears into the lake, to watch the stars come out one by one.

On the first floor, breakfast buffets are served in a multicuisine restaurant that offers views of the central courtyard and lawns, while another side offers a balcony seating with a lake view. On the first night, we relish the scrumptious barbecued fare conjured up by Chef Bishen.

On a pearly dawn, I step out on the lawns and see Peter Markus (a painter from Hungary who has discovered his Indian roots) up on the first floor verandah working on the piece he would show on the retreat's final day. It's a novel experience—mingling with the artists as they work on their easels set up on a clingwrap-protected verandah. Over lunches and dinners, language barriers limp away as stories unfold—stories of creativity, of human courage and of brave smiles drowning out the saddening events

*Clockwise from top left: artist Peter Markus at work; view of the Aravalis; a boat approaches the lake palace; and comfortable room interiors*

of the Middle East.

Planning a quiet holiday or an intimate get-together? Lake Nahargarh Palace is great for that, even though the wi-fi is erratic. Access from the highway is a bit fiddly as there's a short drive through a ratty village—but it's worth it. Check ahead, though, if there's a big fat wedding going on. That can single-handedly turn the tranquillity of the place upside down. 

### THE INFORMATION

**LOCATION** Village Parsoli, just off the Udaipur-Kota highway, about 45km from Chittorgarh

**ACCOMMODATION** 40 deluxe rooms and suites

**TARIFF** For a 2N stay including all meals: ₹13,000 for a deluxe room, ₹15,000 for a suite, applicable from April to September 2017, taxes extra

**CONTACT** +91-9590777000, [justahotels.com](http://justahotels.com)



*The Mango Tree villa at Atmantan Resort offers a refreshing view of the Sahyadris*



[CHECK OUT]

# EAT, PRAY, REJUVENATE

Kavita Devgan left the city far behind for some holistic cleansing at Atmantan Resort in Maharashtra

**T**wo hours by flight and another hour and a half by car transported me from Delhi to an unspoiled part of Pune district, Mulshi. Situated in the lap of the Sahyadri mountains, Atmantan Resort is in its maiden year of operation, and has won two awards in the 2016 Wellness Travel Awards at the World Travel Market in London. I was curious to see what the fuss was all about.

The rooms here are modern, luxurious and comfortable. But the first thing I did after a warm reception, which included an *aarti*, was to grab some lunch. Fresh mountain air makes you ravenously hungry. I enjoyed a delicious meal at the Vistara restaurant, that began with a carrot and ginger soup, a salad with vine-ripened tomato and bocconcini, followed by a wholesome

Indian thali with small portions of yellow lentil, beetroot subs with Indian spices, lemon-rice pulao and spinach roti, and ended with raisin cake—all washed down with ginger-lemon-honey tea.

One meal and I knew their food philosophy resonated with mine. They serve what they call spa cuisine, which has its roots in the belief that locavorian food best maintains and restores health. But that doesn't translate to boring food. It looks and tastes fabulous, and is a fusion of international culinary styles, from macrobiotic to Ayurveda, Mediterranean to Asian.

Atmantan is a retreat-only destination with a minimum three-night stay, comprising meals, spa and wellness therapies, consultations and fitness activities. After lunch, I underwent a body composition analysis and a consultation with the in-

house doctor, Dr Manoj Kutteri, who is also the wellness director at Atmantan.

There are eight packages: Atmantan Living, Spa Life, Master Cleanse, Weight Balance, Journey Through Yoga, Ayurveda Panchakarma, Holistic Health, and Fitness Challenge. I decided on a combination of two, with sessions customised to my needs.

My first therapy was an invigorating massage, a variation of the Swedish version. For the hour that I was being kneaded with energising oil by Deki, a soft-spoken girl from Bhutan, I left Delhi far behind. Dusk was reserved for Omkara meditation. Chanting in unison with various people from different parts of the country and beyond, I realised that we were all perhaps looking for the same thing—some moments of peace away from the maddening lives we create for ourselves. Dinner





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comprised lime and mushroom soup, okra subzi, chickpea masala, beetroot roti and brown rice, with delish pongal to top it all—accompanied by lemongrass and ginger tea. It's amazing what a single day of eating right, massage therapy and meditation can do to cleanse your body and mind.

By the time I was back in the room, the bath I had ordered from their bath menu — sleep ritual aromatherapy salt infused bath — was ready and waiting. True to its name, it ensured I slept like a baby that night.

Next morning I was up at 5am, before my alarm could go off. The day begins early in a wellness retreat, with yogic kriyas at 6am. Eternally worried about my arthritic genes, I reached the class before time and performed *hatha* yoga with Dr Kaithikesh; I have no shame in admitting that I was the stiffest person in the group. The breakfast was most welcome, with a view of the Sahyadris to behold. An hour later, I headed to the spa for a moxibustion and cupping session, followed by a soothing head massage, done the Ayurvedic way.


Just a stroll in the resort is enough to

rejuvenate spirits. Spread over 40 acres of a lush valley, Atmantan has 72 rooms including a 1,500 sq ft single bedroom villa, reportedly a favourite of celebrities. The Wellness Pavilion is spread over a remarkable 50,000 sq ft and houses the spa, fitness as well as consultation and wellness facilities. There are 23 customised therapy rooms including a hammam room, a fitness and physiotherapy wing, an indoor salt pool, a salon and a wellness retail outlet. There is also a recreation zone where one can play croquet, mini golf, table tennis, pool, foosball, etc. Treks are also organised.

My evening was spent getting a lymphatic drainage massage, sipping reinvigorating juices at Bistro Tejus and meditating. The resort holds yoga classes at their amphitheatre called Prana, that overlooks a serene horizon. On my second yoga outing, I fared far better. I'd earned myself some pampering and a luxury facial at the salon was just what the proverbial doctor ordered. After another hearty lunch, I got a taste of piece de resistance—their signature massage, which incorporates the best

*Clockwise from top left: spa therapy with a view; the luxurious room interiors; meditation sessions amidst nature; and herb-crusted cottage cheese*

elements of multiple therapies.

As my time there neared its end, I underwent departure counselling that included some lifestyle measures as takeaways. My last meal was at their open-air restaurant, Chantara, which opens just two nights a week. As I sat eating innovative grills under the starlit sky of the Sahyadris, I breathed in lungfuls of silence. I would need it back in the city. 

## THE INFORMATION

**LOCATION** Mulshi, Pune. Atmantan Resort is 58 km from Pune airport, and a 3.5-hour drive from Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji International Airport.

**ACCOMMODATION** 72 rooms; one suite

**TARIFF** For three nights, singles: ₹75,000 (Asoka & Arjuna rooms), ₹93,000 (Acacia rooms), ₹1,65,000 (Mango Tree Villa); valid till March 2017

**CONTACT** +91-20-66766666; [atmantan.com](http://atmantan.com)





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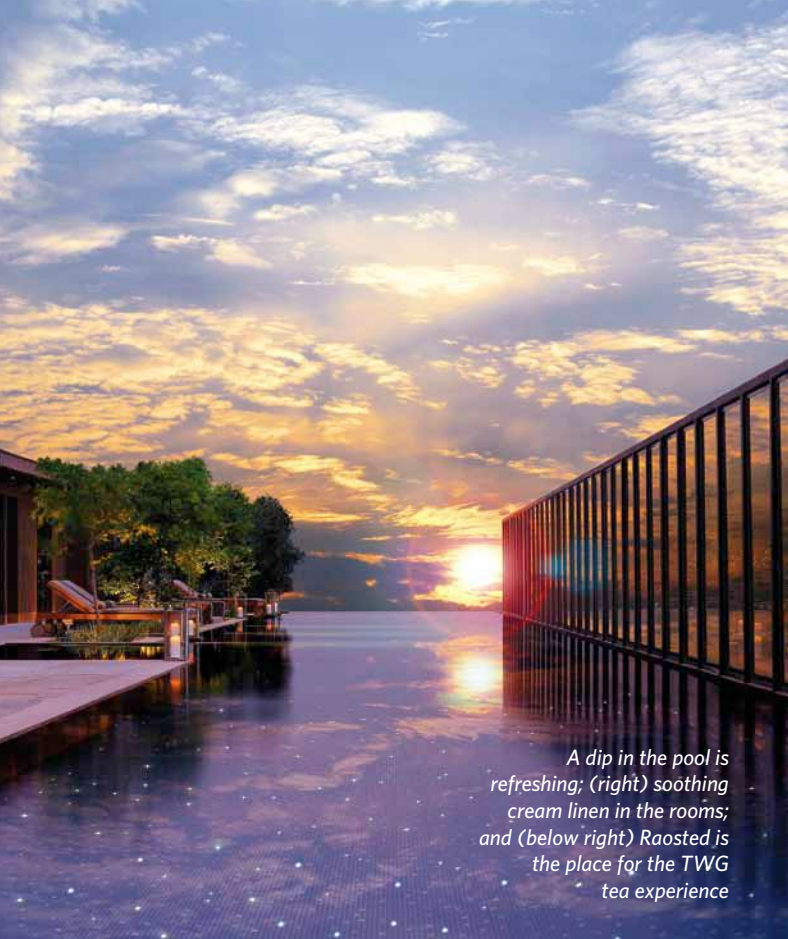
- 16 जिलों के 1100 गाँवों में 3350 किलोमीटर की यात्रा।
- नर्मदा तटों पर एक किलोमीटर के दायरे में व्यापक वृक्षारोपण।
- अपने खेतों पर वृक्ष लगाने वाले किसानों को दी जायेगी 3 वर्ष तक 20 हजार रुपये प्रति हैक्टेयर की दर से सहायता।
- नर्मदा के दोनों तटों पर पांच किलोमीटर की सीमा तक नहीं होंगी शराब की दुकानें।
- नर्मदा तटों पर स्थित समस्त नगरों में सीवेज ट्रीटमेंट प्लांट हेतु 1500 करोड़ की राशि स्वीकृत।
- नर्मदा तटों के दोनों तरफ 1 किलोमीटर की सीमा में स्थित सभी ग्राम होंगे ओडीएफ।
- नर्मदा सेवा कार्यों को स्थायित्व देने के लिए प्रत्येक ग्राम पंचायत में नर्मदा सेवा समिति का गठन।

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*A dip in the pool is refreshing; (right) soothing cream linen in the rooms; and (below right) Roasted is the place for the TWG tea experience*



## [CHECK OUT]

# IN A CALM SHELL

Roseate House in Delhi promises a refreshing break from city life, says **Ambica Gulati**

Walking into the warm brown lobby, it's quite easy to forget that you are in Delhi's buzzing Aerocity. Soft lighting, a smattering of coffee table books, an old black telephone under the stairs and quotations on pillars. Roseate House has all the comforts that a global traveller is used to. Run by the Bird Group, under the disciplined eye of Ankur Bhatia and his wife Smriti, the hotel is a book in which the guest is the protagonist. So you don't find floors but chapters. And I found the book, *Bathtub* by Arjun Puri, in my room and browsed through the six travel stories. Thukral and Tagra have made six artworks for the hotel.

On breaking away from the normal crispy white found in hotel rooms, Bhatia said that it has been scientifically proven that brown calms the mind. There are soft

cream bedsheets and brown towels and bathrobes. My room faced the Worldmark shopping mall.

Lunch was at DEL, the multi-cuisine bistro. Interestingly, the dishes from different parts of the world have the code of that city, much like what you see on the flight tickets. Hence DEL means Delhi! What I enjoyed: beetroot and burrata salad and duck confit—fresh and well prepared.

A quick nap and I was on my way to Aheli, the spa, for the signature massage. Jasmine, the spa manager, was a familiar face and she told me that pine oil was the USP. And I was ready for the famed tea from Singapore, TWG, at Roasted. I wish I had brought back some bags of the 1837 Black Tea with me. Kheer, the restaurant for Indian cuisine was getting ready to open its doors for guests, as was Tara, the

rooftop dining spot for Japanese food. After tasting four cocktails and talking about fitness with Deepak Rawat, F&B manager, at the Chidya Ghar bar, I was ready to call it a day.

The hotel has spaces for meetings, a VIP lounge, exclusive Club Privé, a gym and swimming pool. The best part—movie screenings in the evening at Upstage, the theatre for resident guests only. 

### THE INFORMATION

**LOCATION** Roseate House New Delhi, Asset 10, Hospitality District, Aerocity, New Delhi

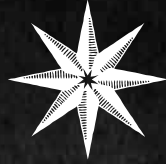
**ACCOMMODATION** Standard rooms, Club rooms, Executive Suite, Panoramic Suite, Corporate Suite, Junior Suite, Terrace Suite, Presidential Suite and The Villa

**TARIFF** From ₹12,000

**CONTACT** +91-11-30158657, [roseatehotels.com](http://roseatehotels.com)






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COVER STORY SINGAPORE

# COOL RIDES

THERE'S ALWAYS SOMETHING NEW TO EXPERIENCE IN THIS WARM  
TROPICAL PARADISE, SAYS **ANURAG MALICK**







Take a trip on the  
GOURMETbus



**T**he emblem of the leaping tiger on the gate looked oddly familiar. Yet, the connection eluded me like the sighting of a big cat on a South Indian wildlife safari. I ran through all the wild felines in my head—it wasn't the logo of a tiger park and enough Tiger Beer had been consumed in the past to know this was different. My itinerary, titled 'Cultured Leopard, Rising Tiger: Finding Your Tao in Haw Par Villa', didn't reveal much either. I had turned up for a new walk curated by The Original Singapore Walks company without the faintest idea. And then the penny dropped.

A distant memory from a trek, a faded label, the smell of camphor, yellow ointment stains on the clothes—the tiger of Tiger Balm! The guide Geraldine welcomed the group and led us up the slope as she outlined the tale of the Aw brothers, Boon Haw and Boon Par (called the 'Tiger' and 'Leopard', respectively), who transformed their father's homegrown business that was set up in 1860 into an empire. "So what's Tiger Balm for?" enquired an Aussie visitor. Geraldine was aghast at his ignorance. "Shoulder rub, neck pull, backache, pain, sprain, congested chest, mosquito

bite, anything and everything under the sun!"

On our walk, we learnt that Tiger Balm was originally white and labourers often complained that it was too gentle. One day, Boon Haw noticed that the jar of ointment at home was stained red. He learnt that his wife had been chewing *seere* (betel leaf), which stained her lips and fingers red. Her constant use had turned the balm ochre! In his eureka moment, Tiger added a yellow pigment, the workers loved the new 'stronger' balm and the rest is history.

In 1921, Haw aka Tiger made Singapore the headquarters of the Tiger Balm business. In 1937, he built a sea-facing villa. Since the restricted entry of non-Europeans to Shanghai's Huangpu Park was a controversy at the time, Tiger set up an elaborate garden and threw it open to all. The sculptures mirrored Chinese mythology, Taoist folklore and legends—from Madam White Snake, the Eight Immortals and the Ten Courts of Hell to Commissioner Lin who played a key role in the Opium Wars. Moral science met mythology met tacky sculpture.

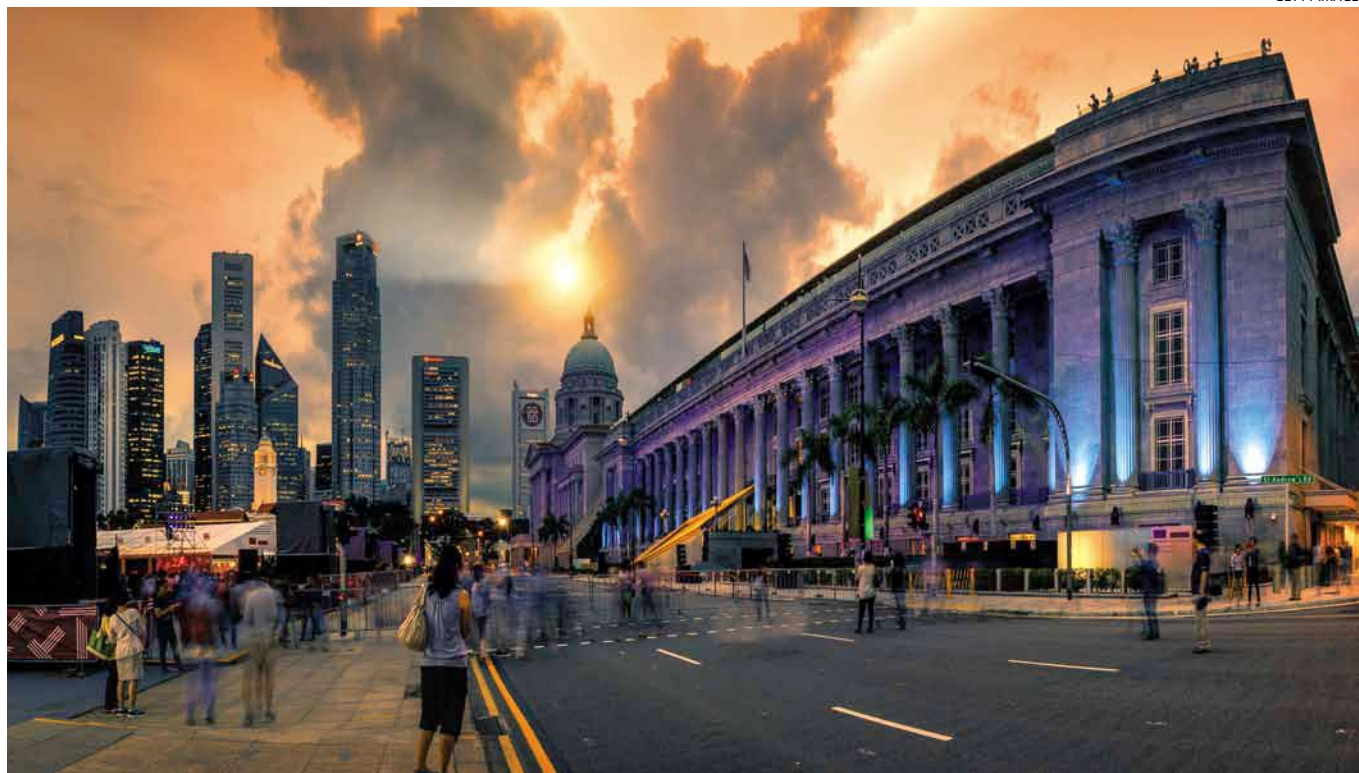
There was cool stuff as well: the 1925 Buick Californian Hardtop modified into a 'Tiger Car' with a horn like a tiger's roar and the idol of Kwanon, the

*Clockwise from below: a Hindu deity, Aravan, exhibited at the India Heritage Centre; breech loading guns at Fort Siloso; and taxidermied orange-spotted grouper (Epinephelus coioides) and grouper (Epinephelus sp) at Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum*



GETTY IMAGES





## THE NEW FORT SILOSO WALKWAY IS A GREAT WAY TO EXPLORE SINGAPORE'S ONLY PRESERVED COASTAL FORT

Buddhist Goddess of Mercy (after whom the camera company Canon was named). Sadly, Haw Par Villa was destroyed after World War II and the family business eventually sold. However, the legend of Tiger Balm continues to live.

Besides this freaky tour, there was a new historical Battlebox tour at Fort Canning. Built in the late 1930s, the bombproof-chamber set nine metres underground served as the headquarters of the Malaya Command during World War II. It was here on February 15, 1942 that the British made the decision to surrender Singapore to the Japanese, an act described as “the worst and largest capitulation in British military history”.

For history and war buffs, the new Fort Siloso Walkway is a great way to explore Singapore's only preserved coastal fort. At the western edge of Sentosa Island, just a stone's throw from Shangri-La's Rasa Sentosa Resort, the lift transports you 36.3m to a viewing deck. The 200m-long walkway snakes above the canopy with stunning views of the sea and harbour and ends at the first of many gun placements. While entry to the lift and fort is free, the 90-minute guided tour for S\$20 is worth every cent. Staying at the beach-

facing Rasa Sentosa gets you a complimentary coupon.

When Stamford Raffles came to Singapore in 1819, he found its location ideal for a trading settlement. It was at the crossroads of the monsoon wind and sailing ships could arrive here with ease. The early fortifications—Fort Canning, Palmer and Fullerton—protected the trading hub by the Singapore river. But the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 led to a direct trade route from Europe to Asia Pacific. Since the Singapore river was too shallow to accommodate the new steam ships, trade operations moved to the deep waters of Sentosa. Sentosa was once tagged Bulao Panjang, Malay for ‘Long Island’, and Pulau Blakang Maki or ‘Island of Death’, for the bodies of sailors killed by pirates that washed ashore. When the British first came here, many died and the island was hurriedly abandoned. What was regarded as the ‘Asian curse’ turned out to be malaria. But the need for newer forts made the British blast the mountaintop of Mount Siloso to erect a coastal fort in the west, Fort Serapong in the centre of the island (now a golf course) and Fort Connaught in the east (which made way for Sentosa Cove). Giant pulleys hauled cannons up the steep inclines over a bed of logs, aided by Chinese coolies. Since the Chi-

*Above: the National Gallery Singapore houses 8,000 artworks*



## SINGAPORE

nese didn't have a problem cooking beef or pork they also ended up being cooks! At the barracks, life-size models depict the soldiers' life among cooks, tailors and dhobis.

During World War II, while the British expected a naval assault from Sentosa or Changi, the Japanese attacked through the Malayan peninsula, taking them by surprise. The cannons had to be turned towards land but the hull-piercing shells meant for ships didn't cause much damage. The Japanese took control of the water supply and pushed for an unconditional surrender. The WWII Surrender Chambers recreate the scene of capitulation and show their clever psychological warfare tactics. Despite being fewer in number with supplies for only two days, the Japanese turned up in big numbers and in full military regalia to give the impression of a large force. The three years of occupation were the darkest days in Singapore's history with mass executions on beaches.

It was only after a complete rebranding exercise that the island was christened Sentosa, after the Sanskrit *santosh*, meaning joy and fulfilment. With tourist attractions like Universal Studios and its amazing 4D Transformer and Battlestar Galactica rides, Madame Tussauds, S.E.A. Aquarium, Skyline Luge, MegaZip, i-Fly and Resorts World, Sentosa has become an essential stopover in everyone's Singapore itinerary. You could spend a week here without run-

ning out of things to do.

Back in town, I find that the Indian Heritage Centre had moved out of Little India Arcade to a new four-storey building. Inspired by the Indian *baoli* (stepwell) and mirroring the hexagonal design of the paved street, the glass-fronted building gives the impression of a jewel by day and a glowing lantern by night. The galleries span two millennia of cultural transfusion in Southeast Asia caused by waves of migration between the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE and the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Hindu-Buddhist icons, motifs from the Ramayana and Mahabharata, arduous sea journeys undertaken by migrants to distant port towns during the establishment of the Straits Settlements of Penang, Malacca and Singapore (1786-1824), their culture and contributions to Singapore form the broad theme. Armed with a tab and aided by augmented reality, it's storytelling taken to another level. The headgear section actually encourages visitors to choose a *pagri* or *topi* for a selfie.

The National Gallery Singapore, which opened last November, is spread over 6,90,000 sq ft and is the largest museum and visual arts venue in Singapore. With 8,000 artworks, it is also the largest public collection of Singapore and Southeast Asian art in the world. The self-portraits of Georgette Chen, Liu Kang's 'Life by the River', the wildlife themes of Indonesian artist Raden Saleh and art installations such as Matthew Ngui's 'Chair' are stunning, while Cheong Soo Pieng's

*Left: brightly lit Super Tree Grove in Gardens by the Bay; and (right) dinner for two in a pod of the Singapore Flyer*

## AT THE FLYER, TRY THE NEW 737-800 FLIGHT SIMULATOR, SIT IN THE CAPTAIN'S SEAT, OR HAVE A THREE-COURSE MEAL



GETTY IMAGES





## Inner Peace

When we travel we all want to visit a destination where we can find peace, but that generally does not happen. We land up at a place which is overcrowded or commercialized....that is due to the lack of information, there are places which are unseen and untouched and that is the north eastern part of our country- also named it as 7 sisters. Getting there is not easy and that is where we travelUrze comes in. TravelUrze is an upcoming travel co. based in Mumbai, we are the pioneer in making the north east



Smitaa Sinha  
Founder & MD

more reachable to the many travelers who want to reach this untouched beauty through major portals of Indian travel industry . An introduction of director – Smitaa

--- An engineer from Mumbai University and by profession brand owner of "Softouch" – a kids wear brand , spent the initial years of life in North East before moving to Mumbai to persure her education first and then a very successful career .

Thought of reviving the old memories, went on a trip of 15days to north east and thought of exploring the unexplored beauty of north east in front of the world through the entrupunal skills by forming a travel co. travelUrze.

This is what Smitaa (director of travelUrze) has to say: Both of us (the Directors of travelUrze) hail from the North East of India and having spent nearly 20 years in the area thought that we could offer unique holiday opportunities to many to explore the beauty of these sisters . The north east is a hidden treasure of natural beauty consisting of flauna , fauna , culture , tradition and many more gems .



As the interview proceeds we asked some questions related to company and their work.

### Why the name travelUrze?

Smitaa: tagline is the answer "explore ur Urge to explore".

### Why north east?

Smitaa: We directors have spent our 20 valuable years in this region. So we wanted others to explore the hidden treasure of India.

### Why to approach travelUrze?

Smitaa: we are well-versed with all the locations, localities, weather and other basic points that need to be considered while planning a trip to North east. We are effective team, cost effective, excellent services, customer friendly, customizable packages and many more.

### travelUrze in other travel destination?

Smitaa: as we were exploring NE for the world other than NE likewise travelUrze thought to explore other destination for the NE people who all have less exposer to outer world. in the process travelUrze is working in close associate to promote the following destinations- Andaman, Maldives, Kashmir, Leh-Ladakh, Kerala, Sikkim, Bhutan and the list is much larger and extends to destinations like Bali, Mauritius Dubai



| DESTINATION           | Per person per night (INR) | Minimum number of nights |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Arunachal             | 5980                       | 6                        |
| Meghalaya             | 6440                       | 3                        |
| Kaziranga + Meghalaya | 5960                       | 5                        |
| Kashmir               | 3490                       | 6                        |
| Andaman               | 4830                       | 3                        |
| Maldives              | 13920                      | 3                        |





## SINGAPORE

'Drying Salted Fish', featured on the back of the Singaporean \$50 bill, lets visitors click pictures against a 3D version of the same.

The gallery is housed in two national monuments—the former Supreme Court Building and City Hall. Beautifully restored with an award-winning glass and metal façade that seamlessly conjoins the two buildings in a make-believe bamboo lattice, it's a delight to explore the prison cells, Rotunda (round library) and chambers. The terrace deck overlooks the *padang* (ground) and the Singapore skyline. It was in the City Hall that Admiral Lord Mountbatten accepted the Japanese surrender on September 12, 1945.

Adding to Singapore's impressive roster of museums—the Singapore Philatelic Museum, Peranakan Museum, Changi Museum, Malay Heritage Centre, ArtScience Museum and National Museum of Singapore—is the new Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum. Part of Sir Stamford Raffles' Museum of Biodiversity Research, started in 1849, it forms the current Heritage Gallery section with taxidermy kits, stuffed birds and cabinets of curiosities housing collectibles that survived World War II. Tracing the history of life on earth, the 20 zones across two floors have over 500,000 Southeast Asian animal and plant specimens ranging from the microscopic to the enormous. Highlights include the world's largest crab (Japanese spider crab) and the smallest (coral spider crab), trilobite fossils, three dinosaurs from America (Prince, Apollonia and Twinky) and a 10.6m female sperm whale Jubi Lee, which washed ashore in Singapore in 2015 and was unveiled in March this year. The dinosaur zone runs a Light Show every



half hour, all day long.

Singaporeans love their laser shows, be it Wings of Time (S\$18, 7.40pm, 8.40pm) at Sentosa, Wonder Full (free entry, 8pm, 9.30pm) at Marina Bay Sands or Garden Rhapsody (free entry, 7.45pm, 8.45pm) at the Supertree grove in Gardens by the Bay. A great perch to see the city by night is the Singapore Flyer, which at 165m was the world's tallest ferris wheel until the High Roller of Las Vegas upstaged it in 2014.

While at the Flyer, try the new 737-800 flight simulator and sit in the captain's seat of the world's most popular jet airliner. Learn to take off, cruise and land the plane at an airport of your choice in an immersive experience with real-size cockpits and fully-functional aircraft controls. The Flyer also lets you reserve a pod for a private three-course dinner. But if you're not into slow travel or slow food, hop on to the new GOURMETbus to take your taste buds for a ride. Singapore always has a new trick up its sleeve.

*Above: a visitor looks at the painting Forest Fire (Boschbrand) by artist Raden Saleh at the National Gallery Singapore*

## THE INFORMATION

### GETTING THERE

**Singapore Airlines**, Jet Airways and Air India fly direct from several Indian cities to Changi Airport, located in the eastern part of the city. Return flights from **Chennai** can cost as little as ₹11,000; from other cities, fares are in the range of ₹20,000-30,000.

### WHERE TO STAY

**Oasia Hotel Downtown** (from approx. ₹15,000; [stayfareast.com](http://stayfareast.com)). With a great location in the **Central Business District**, this new hotel is close to most city

attractions. On Sentosa Island, **Shangri-La's Rasa Sentosa** (from approx. ₹21,000; [shangri-la.com](http://shangri-la.com)) is a top beach resort at the western end of the island and overlooking the **Fort Siloso walkway**.

### WHAT TO SEE & DO

> **The Original Singapore Walks:** guided tours at 9.30am and 2.30pm (S\$38 adults, S\$18 children; [journeys.com.sg](http://journeys.com.sg))

> **National Gallery Singapore:** daily free guided art/architecture tours in English from Visitor Services Counter. (10am-7pm, till 10

pm on Fri/Sat; entry S\$20 adults, S\$15 children; 1 St Andrew's Rd, [nationalgallery.sg](http://nationalgallery.sg))

> **Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum** (LKCNHM): 10am-7pm (S\$21 adults, S\$13 children; 2 Conservatory Drive, National University of Singapore, [lkcnhm.nus.edu.sg](http://lkcnhm.nus.edu.sg))

> **Indian Heritage Centre:** 10am-7pm, Mondays closed (S\$4; 5 Campbell Lane, [indianheritage.org.sg](http://indianheritage.org.sg))

> **Singapore Flyer:** flight experience (10am-10pm; S\$175; 30 Raffles Avenue,

[flightexperience.com.sg](http://flightexperience.com.sg))

> **Fort Siloso**, Sentosa: 90-minute guided tour (S\$20 adults, S\$14 children; 10am-6pm; [sentosa.com.sg](http://sentosa.com.sg))

> **Universal Studios**, Sentosa: 10am-7pm (entry S\$74 adults, S\$56 children; VIP Tour unlimited access S\$298; Resorts World, [rwsentosa.com](http://rwsentosa.com))

For more info, visit [yoursingapore.com](http://yoursingapore.com). You will probably find that there is a lot more that you can experience in Singapore. You can also attend some festivals.

■ ANURAG MALLICK





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*Tourists on  
Boracay's legendary  
White Beach*



## PHILIPPINES

**M**anila is not the most prepossessing of tourist destinations—on the face of it. The city is a hodgepodge of neon glass and steel towers that peer over older quarters and barrios; of stifling traffic that make the snarls of Delhi or Bangkok look like a Sunday morning drive; and hordes of fun-loving Manilaños thronging those crowded roads.

On a previous trip to Manila, I experienced the city's vibrant contemporary art scene and live music, partied at its many karaoke dives and speakeasies and indulged in the favourite Pinoy pastime—shopping. So, when I revisited the city recently, I figured I was duty-bound to delve deeper into its history.

American and Japanese bombs flattened most of Manila's prewar neighbourhoods and Spanish colonial buildings during World War II. Only Intramuros, Manila's oldest district, by and large withstood wars, fires and natural disasters. The Spanish built the 64-hectare



*Clockwise from above: children at Malasag eco-tourism village; a girl enjoys sailing in a paraw; and the favourite beer of the Philippines*

walled city in 1571. A stroll through the leafy cobblestone boulevards is a lesson in the city's history.

My first stop inside the walled city was Fort Santiago. Once a seat of Spanish colonial power, today the fort is a memorial to Dr Jose Rizal, the father of Philippines' independence from Spain. He was imprisoned in the fort before his execution in 1896. It was sobering to walk along brass footprints in the pavement that mark Rizal's final steps to the firing squad.

The beautifully maintained gardens and plaza of the fort are at odds with centuries of horror. "During the brief period that the Japanese occupied Manila, thousands died in the prisons here. There were only two options for getting out of these prisons—either you died of disease and starvation or you drowned to death," my guide for the afternoon, Boyet Sayo, said, pointing at the dungeons

under the fort that Japanese jailers would flood with waters from the Pasig river.

A short horse-drawn kalesa ride away are two Spanish churches that survived the depredations of time. The Manila Cathedral is the eighth avatar of Manila's first cathedral that was first built with bamboo and palm leaves in 1581. Destroyed variously by typhoons, fires, bombings and earthquakes over the centuries, its present Romanesque façade was built in the 1950s. Just around the corner from the Cathedral is the San Agustin Church. The baroque building is the only one in Intramuros to have survived the Battle of Manila at the end



of World War II. Inside is a beautiful collection of centuries-old hand-carved wooden saints.

I love big cities and big city Manila most certainly is. It's a frantic metropolis where the native Filipino heritage is mixed with substantial dollops of American, Chinese and Spanish cultures. Like many capital cities, Manila bears little resemblance to the rest of the country. In the interests of furthering my understanding of the country, I took a flight south of the city to experience three different Pinoy destinations, each offering something different.

"It smells like hell but tastes like heaven," is how my guide Sherwin described durian, Southeast Asia's favourite fruit. He quickly recommended that I don plastic gloves before I ate a piece of the thick, custardy, off-white flesh of the fruit. Apparently, all the perfumes of Arabia couldn't make my hand smell better if I touched durian without gloves.

Singapore might have a durian-shaped building but few places in the world love the stinky fruit as much as Davao. Now that I've tasted the 'King of Fruits', I am happy to have ticked it off my list and hope that I never have to do so again. Much like the other Pinoy favourite, balut—the 17-day-old duck embryo that is boiled, served with rock salt or spicy vinegar and eaten often with beer.

But Pinoy cuisine is more than just potent smells and flavours. It might not be as famous as its Thai or Vietnamese neighbours but the Philippines is home to one of Asia's most inimitable cuisines. Another true melting pot, Filipino food takes elements of Chinese and Malaysian cuisines and mixes in massive dollops of Spanish flavours.

An excellent place in Davao to get a taste of what the locals eat is Thrunks Place, a basic roadside stall. It also happens to be a favourite of the current president of the Philippines, Rodrigo Duterte. "He comes here on weekends when he is in town," said the owner, Ermelita Garcia Castanieto, while dishing out portions of the president's favourite foods—pork rib soup with taro, pinakbet (mixed vegetables in fish or shrimp sauce), pancit (noodles), gizzard and pork adobo and mongo with pata (mung beans with pork leg). "This tastes like home food," Sherwin declared to a beaming Ermelita.

The Pinoy love their meats and vegetarians will be hard-pressed to find dishes without meat or fish in some form. But if you eat pork, the Philippines is an excellent place to be. Adobo (tender pork belly braised in vinegar, soy sauce, garlic and oil), lechon (whole pig stuffed with herbs and vegetables and roasted), sizzling pork sisig (tiny pieces of pig's head and gizzards boiled, then grilled or barbecued) or chicharon (deep fried pork skin) all go down well with bottles of chilled San Miguel, the country's favourite beer. It is entirely possible that I ate a whole pig by myself during my seven days in the country.



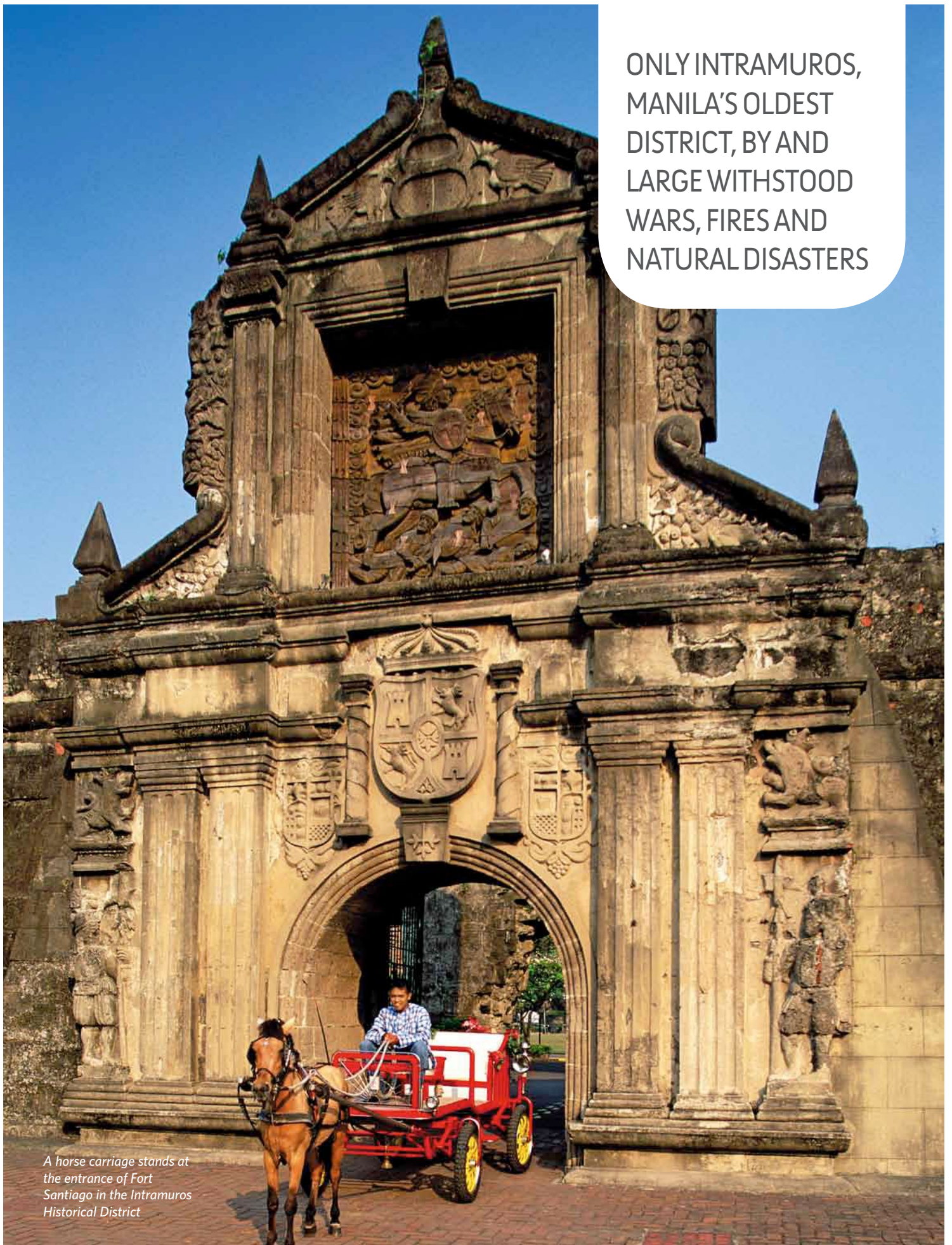
*Manila cityscape; and (left) San Agustin Church, Intramuros*

Endless powdery-white beaches, happiest happy hours, hotels to suit all budgets and every imaginable watersport—Boracay is a party island. In just a few years, the island has made a giant leap from low-key tropical paradise to Southeast Asia's newest hotspot. It's now a fixture on numerous 'Best Beaches in the World' lists.

The four-kilometre stretch of White Beach is the island's most popular tourist haunt. White Beach is home to beachfront resorts, spas and bars and is the perfect spot to enjoy Boracay's spectacular sunsets. During the day, the beach is welcoming to everyone from beach bums to adventurers. But a trip to Boracay would be wasted



ONLY INTRAMUROS,  
MANILA'S OLDEST  
DISTRICT, BY AND  
LARGE WITHSTOOD  
WARS, FIRES AND  
NATURAL DISASTERS



*A horse carriage stands at  
the entrance of Fort  
Santiago in the Intramuros  
Historical District*



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*Clockwise from above: White Beach at Boracay Island is a paradise for beach lovers; bite into pork belly adobo; and the dreaded durian*

without partaking in any water activities. From jet skis to helmet diving, and the more laidback sundowner cruise in a traditional paraw—if a watersport exists, chances are you'll find it in Boracay.

For me, a perfect day in Boracay started with aquatic adventures and ended at a bar. During the first half of my day on the island, I soared over the high-definition azure hanging off a parasail, ploughed through the surf on a speedboat and watched shoals of multicoloured fish through the porthole of a yellow submarine. Back on land, I headed straight to the spa at The Lind for *hilot*, the traditional Pinoy massage. After a long and much-needed R&R session, I stepped back on the beach just as the sun started its daily descent.



As the cabanas and white deck chairs are thrust into a rose-tinted world, the beach comes alive with candle-lit sand castles, cosy restaurants and lively bars. What's under the water around Boracay is matched by what its nightlife offers. Bars open until dawn, fire-eating shows, karaoke singalongs and dancing chefs—Boracay has it all and then some!

The southern island of Mindanao is home to the largest number of indigenous ethnic groups in the Philippines. Commonly known as *lumad* (native), tribes such as the Sama, Subanen, Tenduray and T'Boli are distributed all over the island. The university town of Cagayan de Oro (*oro* refers to the gold the Spanish discovered in the river here) is a great place to understand the people and culture of not just the island of Mindanao but of the whole country.

Museo de Oro, at Xavier University, is the first folklore museum in the country. The museum marks the cultural evolution of the region over centuries. Exhibits range from prehistoric fossils, folklores of the various tribes, stories of colonisation by the Spanish and the Americans to bottles of Pepsi and even a BlackBerry phone from the post-colonial period. The third, and comparatively newer and smaller section, houses memorabilia donated by the museum's founder, Fr. Francisco R Demetrio SJ. Look out for the rare copy of the menu from the dinner





# V RESORTS Travel India

## V Resorts Bags Lonely Planet's 'Best Upcoming Resort Chain in India' Award

**L**onely Planet India organized their prestigious Travel and Lifestyle Leadership Awards, this February 14th. Amidst the fanfare and the buoyant celebrations, one name stood out from the rest - V Resorts. The chain, specializing in experience-based resort holidays, beat out some stiff competition to bag the coveted 'Best Upcoming Resort Chain in India' award. The award is in recognition of V Resorts' prolific growth over the past year. In 2016, the company expanded to over 70 properties across both established and emerging destinations, while also building significant public recall for our signature brand of experiential stays.

On behalf of V Resorts, the award was received by Dhaval Jani, the company's Vice President of Sales and Marketing. Dhaval is a Sales & Growth-Hacking expert with nearly a decade's experience in the travel industry. Over the last 16 years, he has headed the growth initiatives of illustrious names like MakeMyTrip, TATA Communications and Bharti Airtel. At V Resorts, Dhaval's experience with strategy and people-management has pushed our growth into an overdrive. Under his motivated leadership, the organization has grown its numbers - that of resorts, reservations and revenues - exponentially.

V Resorts is a chain of full service boutique resorts offering experiential stays to leisure travellers across India. This includes offering standardized amenities and services across all the properties at par with international hospitality benchmarks, while designing unique activities that make the most of each destination. These activities range from jungle safaris and trekking, to village tours and riverbed dinners. This approach ties in perfectly with the company's guiding principles of bringing new destinations to the fore, making local economies and culture the fulcrum around which the business rotates. For its efforts in sustainable tourism in India with local community engagement, V Resorts has been recognised by the World Tourism Organisation.



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A bride walks down the aisle at San Agustin Church in Intramuros; and visitors at Fort Santiago in Manila



hosted by the Philippines' first president Emilio Aguinaldo on September 29, 1898 to mark the ratification of the Declaration of Independence.

After spending a few hours at the museum, I headed out of Cagayan de Oro to the Malasag Eco-Tourism Village. A living museum of sorts, Malasag is also a venue to showcase dances and craft of various tribes that live there. I was welcomed by troupes of dancers from different

tribes before being quickly ushered into their makeshift craft shop to buy beaded jewellery and capuchin skull decorated with coloured glass. It did feel like a Disneyfied introduction to these ethnic tribes but Malasag is worth a visit, if for nothing else then the spectacular views of the city and the Macajalar Bay.



## THE INFORMATION

### GETTING THERE

There are no direct flights to destinations in the Philippines from India. Several airlines connect Manila with Indian cities, via Southeast Asian destinations such as Hong Kong, Singapore or Kuala Lumpur. Fares for a return economy ticket from **Delhi** and **Mumbai** start from approx. ₹30,000.

### GETTING AROUND

Several budget airlines fly between major destinations around the country. But most routes go via **Manila** or **Cebu**.

### VISAS

Indians with valid Australia, Japan, Canada, Singapore, Schengen, US or UK visas are eligible to enter the Philippines without a visa for 14 days. If you don't have any of these visas, apply to the **Philippines Embassy** or any of its consulates in **Mumbai**, **Kolkata** or **Chennai**. A single-entry visa costs ₹2,840.

### CURRENCY

1 **Philippines peso** = approx. ₹1.35. US dollars are the most widely accepted foreign currency.

### WHERE TO STAY

Like most destinations in the archipelago, Davao, Boracay and Cagayan de Oro offer multiple options at different prices. A short ferry ride from Davao City is the uberluxe **Pearl Farm Beach Resort** (₹14,000, [pearlfarmresort.com](http://pearlfarmresort.com)). Surrounded by pristine private beaches, Pearl Farm is the picture-perfect tropical getaway. In Boracay, budget dictates where you stay. Accommodation on **White Beach** is divided into Station 1 (high-end), 2 (mid-level) and 3 (budget). One of the newer hotels on the strip, **The Lind** (₹27,000; [thelindhoteles.com](http://thelindhoteles.com)) on Station 1 is a great option to enjoy Boracay's legendary sunsets and powdery white sand. With tourists beginning to discover Cagayan de Oro and the Northern Mindanao

region, hotels in the city are booming. **The Limketkai Luxe Hotel** (₹5,000; [limketkailuxe.com](http://limketkailuxe.com)) located midtown is a great mid-budget option.

### WHAT TO SEE & DO

> **DAVAO** One of the largest commercial hubs in the country, Davao is bookended by the majestic Mount Apo and the ultramarine **Philippine Sea**. There are numerous snorkelling and dive sites in the area. Animal lovers will enjoy the **Crocodile Farm**, the Monfort Bat Cave Sanctuary and the **Philippine Eagle Center**, which is the home of the monkey-eating national bird of the country.

> **BORACAY** It is entirely possible to spend all your time in Boracay sprawled on the white sand but many would think it a waste to not sign up for any or all of the watersports available. On offer are **jet skiing**, kayaking, skimboarding, windsurfing, parasailing, diving,

island hopping, **helmet-walks** and submarine rides. And, after a day of heart-thumping action, you can party anywhere on Station 2, Boracay style!

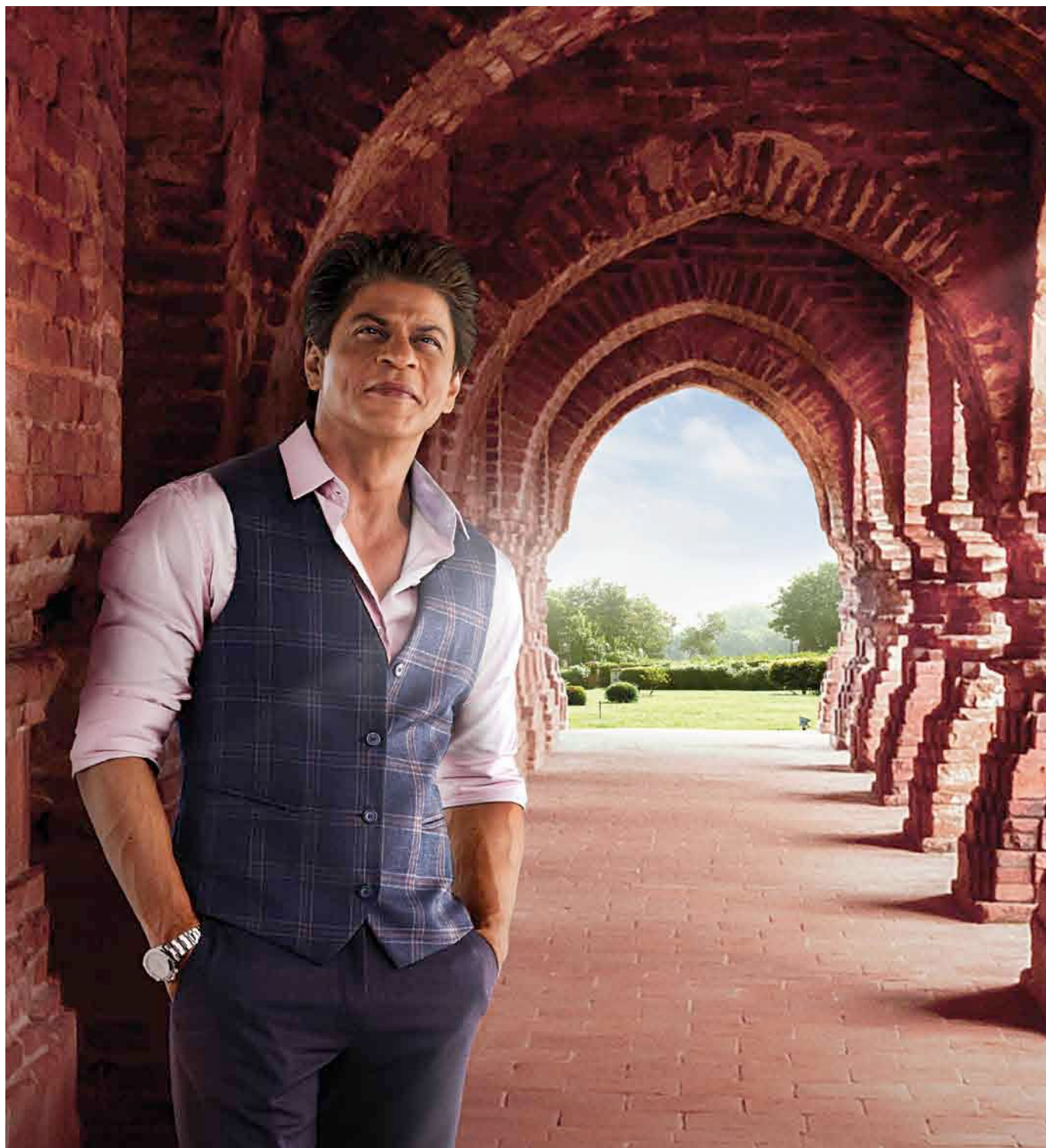
> **CAGAYAN DE ORO** Known as the Gateway of Northern Mindanao, Cagayan de Oro is making a name as a must-do for adrenaline junkies. The city is the perfect base for outdoor adventures like **whitewater rafting**, horse riding, rappelling, hiking, rock climbing, caving and zip lining. More sedate activities can be had at the all-weather, 18-hole golf course at Pueblo de Oro Golf.

### WHAT TO BUY

If you are looking for something cheaper, **Boracay's D-Mall** is lined with stalls selling shell jewellery. Also look out for Barong Tagalog—the formal embroidered Philippine shirt for men. **Jeepneys** are an integral part of any Filipino holiday, so do bring back a toy version.

■ **KARISHMA UPADHYAY**





## FEEL THE BEAT OF BANKURA

Bankura is home to the ancient hills that ring with the sound of timeless traditions. From the sweet notes of classical music and the ringing of the temple bells, to the rhythmic whirring of the potter's wheel bringing terracotta figurines to life, the melody of the land will move you.




DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM, GOVERNMENT OF BENGAL

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COVER STORY SOUTH KOREA

# WAR & PEACE

IN SOUTH KOREA, **MANJULA KALLIAT** FINDS  
HER WAY TO THE KOREAN DEMILITARIZED  
ZONE AND ENDS UP MAKING AN  
ATTEMPT TO DECIPHER DEMOCRACY



A full-page photograph of a soldier standing guard. The soldier is seen from the back, wearing a dark green or black uniform with a high collar and a black helmet with a white visor. The uniform has white stripes on the sleeves. The soldier is standing in front of a large, teal-colored door. To the left, there is a blurred view of a building and some foliage. The overall tone of the image is somber and official.

*A soldier stands guard  
at the site of conference  
between the two Koreas*

PHOTOGRAPHS: GETTY IMAGES



## SOUTH KOREA



**T**he climate-controlled interiors offered a welcome refuge from the crisp, early-morning breeze, as the bus paced along the highway with trademark Korean efficiency. The freezing temperatures, coupled with the fog, were more archetypal of winter than spring. The only symbols of vernal hope were occasional glimpses of cherry buds priming themselves, albeit tentatively, for their much-awaited annual blossoming. Their cheery disposition was in ironical contrast to the sobriety of where we were headed.

Before long, the appearance of barbed wires, traffic barriers and uniformed personnel indicated that we had arrived at our destination. The Demilitarized Zone

(DMZ) is a 250km-long, 4km-wide area spread between South and North Korea, created as part of the Korean Armistice Agreement of 1953. Despite the significant presence of military personnel, the implicit understanding is that the DMZ is a buffer zone where both sides would refrain from any sort of combat.

We may have been part of an innocuous tour group, but this was a high security area and identity checks were mandatory for everyone. Passports open to the photo page, we held them up for inspection as American soldiers came around perusing the range of national identity documents on display—Korean, Australian, Swedish, Indian and then some more. Security

checks done, it was on to the visitor centre of the first stop—the JSA or the Joint Security Area.

Following a quick presentation to familiarise us with the history of South-North relations, we were asked to sign an affidavit taking responsibility for any harm that might occur to us ‘as a result of enemy action’. Any notions of this being yet another hop-on hop-off sightseeing tour thus quickly dispelled, we were bundled on to a military bus for a ride along the JSA. Gone was our good-humoured Korean guide SP and in his place stood a no-nonsense private, fatigues, guns and all.

The drive took us through grim, unpaved lanes, taking in observation posts and





## THE BORDER GOES THROUGH THE MIDDLE OF DMZ CONFERENCE ROOMS AND AS YOU WANDER INSIDE, YOU TECHNICALLY CROSS OVER TO N KOREA

other focal points—some of them bloody reminders of instances when the seeming calm of the JSA was violated. The highlight of this sortie, however, was the conference area and for good reason too. This is where the two Koreas came face-to-face, according to our very first view of the North. The conference rooms were built to facilitate discussion between the two sides in ‘neutral’ territory. The international border traverses through the middle of these rooms and during the course of a wander inside, technically, one does cross over to North Korea!

Cheap thrills aside, there was nothing remotely light-hearted about the JSA. About 100m across from the conference

rooms was the North Korean visitor centre, where stern soldiers stood guard, mindful of tourist eyes from across the border. Their straightjacketed body language was in stark contrast to their South Korean counterparts who held their Taekwondo combat position with practiced ease, dark glasses masking any signs of softness or emotion.

The armistice notwithstanding, the North Korean military have been guilty of multiple clandestine intrusions into the south, of which the most intriguing, undoubtedly, are the infiltration tunnels. These underground tunnels into the south were dug during varying points in time. Four of them have been discovered until

*Left to right: a soldier in a bus carrying tourists; at Imjingak peace park, a steam locomotive damaged in bombing during the Korean war; and North Korean soldiers march at the border village of Panmunjom*

now and it was to the third that we were now headed. For a generation raised on spy movies and political thrillers, the intrigue of a secret passageway is understandable and it is therefore no surprise that the third infiltration tunnel is South Korea’s top tourist attraction.

Nowhere was the capitalism versus communism dichotomy more apparent than at the 3rd tunnel. Our guide, SP, cheekily pointed out that while communism entails using manual labour





and dated equipment to dig secret tunnels, capitalism milks the output of that labour by turning it into a tourist attraction.

Repeated defiance of the armistice in the form of spy infiltrations is one thing but a giant snub in the form of a 1.7-km underground tunnel is quite another. We bent low to make our way through its dank interiors. The scraggly walls were pockmarked with inch-wide holes—erstwhile placeholders for dynamite that were used to blast through the rock. Legend has it that cannons above ground were fired at exactly the same time as the dynamites in a canny bid to muffle the noise from the subterranean shenanigans. The 3rd tunnel was ‘discovered’ by the South with the help of a defector. On being caught, North Korea defended the tunnel claiming it to be a conduit for transporting coal—an assertion neither side took seriously.

Despite intermittent acts of aggression from across the border, the general all-around vibe in the south is one of

misplaced unity. The JSA is dotted with flags that spell hopes for unification—a sentiment echoed by SP and some other locals we met along the way. What the North’s take is, we wouldn’t know. At the best of times, it is not a society known to indulge in needless emotion. But, to be fair, our understanding of North Korea is largely speculative reconstructions based on hearsay and dubious media clips that surface from time to time.

Until this point in the tour, our only glimpse into the furtive north was the visitor centre across from the conference rooms at the JSA. There was thus much anticipation around the next halt—a viewing platform perched on a vantage position atop a hill. Organised voyeurism couldn’t get better than this. Peppered along the edge of the viewing platform were a dozen or so binoculars pointing north of the border—entire factories, villages and homes to be watched, observed and mulled over for the drop of 500 Korean won into a binocular’s coin slot.

It was nothing short of surreal—to have a peek into one of the most inaccessible countries in the world. The cookie-cutter homes in the village looked modern and built to plan, much like anywhere in the developed world. ‘Propaganda village’ is how the South Koreans preferred to call them, as they merely existed to showcase the supposed fabulous life of North Koreans to the rest of the world. These ghostly homes had never been occupied. Apparently, the utopic picture was set to the tune of ‘this is paradise’ ditties—often blared out through loudspeakers placed along the border for the attention of their capitalist brethren! The most striking structure, however, was a gigantic North Korean flag hoisted on a 160m flagpole—60m taller than the one on the South Korean side. The canvas was different but the narrative same—‘whatever you do, we can do better’.

Transportation has historically had a vital role to play in reinstating diplomatic relations between nations, having



# Fun for families and friends in South Africa

*South Africa promises a holiday to remember - wild and otherwise - to families and groups of friends. The Indian summer break is a great time to escape to the Rainbow Nation's cooler quarters. This amazingly diverse destination is the new it-getaway and April to June offers great deals.*

## Seaside stories

In South Africa wildlife diversity is not only on the land - you can see sharks, seals, penguins, whales, dolphins, sardines and turtles close up in the oceans. Experience wildlife on the oceans, in the oceans or walking or being next to the ocean on the Whale, Otter and Wild Coast trails. Or experience marine treasures at world renowned coastal aquariums like the Two Oceans Aquarium in Cape Town and UShaka Marine World in Durban. Best for: Families with young children

## History

in anything but textbook style. Go to Nelson Mandela's capture site near Durban, and hear the hair-raising stories of apartheid prisoners before Nelson Mandela's release and South Africa's independence, at Robben Island while in Cape Town.

**DON'T MISS!**  
Bunny Chow, a delicious specialty native to Durban with Indian influences

Durban also features Mahatma Gandhi's famous Phoenix Settlement. Visit the cradle of humankind to discover how the human race came about.

**Best for:** Everyone who could use a quick, hands-on, non-textbook-style history lesson

## The wild side

Of course, no holiday in South Africa can be completed without a safari experience. Wildlife experiences in South Africa are authentic ie you have the opportunity to see wildlife in their natural environment. Trained rangers help you to locate and follow them discreetly without disturbing them or spoiling everyone's fun. Kruger National Park is a must-see Best for: Groups of friends or families with older children. Patience and ability to stay silent are a must

## Winelands

Drive down the scenic garden route to South Africa's winelands for an idyllic day out. Picture-perfect scenery and the old-world charm of wineries, homes and chateaus in the winelands near Cape Town make for a heady day, whether you choose to taste wines or not. You're sure to fall in love with the place. You could even visit Leeu Vineyards, the brainchild of a man of an Indian origin who went to South Africa for a cricket match and fell in love with it.

**Best for:** Couples looking for romantic quality time, families who bond over long-drives, groups of friends who love the outdoors, wine-lovers, anyone who enjoys typical wine degustation experiences

## Adventure

Welcome to the world's adventure capital. From the world's highest bridge bungee, to shark cage-diving (or diving to view the sharks, without the protection of a cage for licensed scuba

**DID YOU KNOW?**  
Indians – particularly Indian women – lead the demand for adventure in South Africa

divers only), croc cage-diving, paragliding off mountains, abseiling, mountain climbing, kloofing, sandboarding and surfing, South Africa has an fix for every adrenaline junkie's tastes... even those that prefer a softer form of adventure. Soft adventure options include zipline,

walks in the jungle, kayaking, segways, side-car rides on motorcycles, self-drives and hot-air balloon rides.

**Best for:** Adventurers, bucket-listers, social media junkies and anyone looking to liven things up.





## SOUTH KOREA

repeatedly proven its effectiveness as a logistical icebreaker of sorts. It was perhaps with this intent that attempts were made to revive the once active Gyeongui rail line that ran between North and South Korea. The upgradation work was undertaken with great gusto and all was on track until North Korea unceremoniously pulled out in 2008, citing differences with the South's governmental policies.

Dorasan station, our last halt for the day, was to be one of the key stops on the route. At the entrance to the deserted northbound platform, the 'To Pyongyang' sign flashed bright, symbolising the North's failure to keep their part of the deal while paradoxically holding up a placard for a unified future. Dorasan station's only passengers these days are tourists who avail of the four daily services to Seoul. Its shiny interiors aside, the station stood like a mausoleum of failed assurances—a physical embodiment of the harsh truth that even the most well intentioned buttresses of the present could crack under the weight of a history of mistrust.

As we started to make our way back to Seoul, SP resumed regaling us with historical anecdotes—riveting tales of



treachery, one-upmanship and kidnapping. But it is the personal stories of separated families, reunions and cross-border camaraderie that actually brought to life what the DMZ exemplified and with it the understanding that these stories are not just the prerogative of the South. For all its military gravitas, the DMZ, perhaps, is where the emotional reality of a fractured nation is most palpable.

*A peace statue at the 3rd of four tunnels, that has now become a tourist attraction*

At the final exit point, a South Korean soldier hopped on board for a quick headcount to rule out possible defections. Unification might be the ultimate goal, but until then not just land and resources, even tourists were not to be conceded to the folks across the border.

## THE INFORMATION

### GETTING THERE

**Asiana Airlines** operates direct flights from Delhi to Seoul (**Incheon International Airport**). Other airlines operating out of Delhi are **Air China**, **China Eastern**, **China Southern**, **Japan Airlines** and **Korean Air**. From the airport, one can reach the city by bus, rail or taxi. There are flights to Seoul from Mumbai too.

### VISA & HELPLINE

To get the visa for South Korea, you need to go through [vfsglobal.com/korea/india/](http://vfsglobal.com/korea/india/). There is a **1330 Korea Travel Hotline** which helps domestic and international tourists. It also provides information and services for most regions of Korea as well

as interpretation services.

### WHERE TO STAY

If you check [english.visitkorea.or.kr](http://english.visitkorea.or.kr), you will find different certifications for accommodations such as **Goodstay**, **Benikea** and **Korea Stay**. You can make your choice as per your budget.

Seoul: Lotte Hotel Seoul, Jung-gu, [lottehotel.com/seoul](http://lottehotel.com/seoul) (around KRW 200,000 per night in March); Ibis Ambassador Myeongdong, Jung-gu, [ibis.com/gb/hotel-6317-ibis-ambassador-seoul-myeongdong](http://ibis.com/gb/hotel-6317-ibis-ambassador-seoul-myeongdong) (from KRW 104,500); Hotel Sun Bee, Jongno-gu, [hotelsunbee.com](http://hotelsunbee.com) (KRW 140,000-160,000 per night for a standard double room). Gangwon-do: Yongpyong

Resort Dragon Valley Hotel, Pyeongchang-gun, Gangwon-do, [yongpyong.co.kr](http://yongpyong.co.kr) (from around \$88 per night in March).

### WHAT TO SEE & DO

Established on July 27, 1953, the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) is a buffer zone. The DMZ extends largely from Gyeonggi-do to Gangwon-do. You are required to show legitimate form(s) of identification and/or your passport when going to the DMZ. Photography is restricted in many areas. See [english.visitkorea.or.kr](http://english.visitkorea.or.kr).

Gyeonggi-do: For some attractions, you have to register in advance. Application process is at **Imjingak Tourist Information**

**Center** for those touring by bus, while travellers on the DMZ Train can do it at the **Imjingang Station**. There is also a fee. One can visit **Nuri Peace Park**, the **3rd Tunnel**, **Dorasan Station**. Panmunjom is the Joint Security Area and a tour here requires permission. There is also **Unification Hill** (Odusan Unification Observatory), and **Yeolsoe Observation Deck**. Visitors to the 3rd Tunnel and Dorasan Station must show their identity cards at the Imjingak ticket centre and buy a ticket. Only group tours are led to Panmunjom, arranged by official authorities and/or travel agencies. Certain nationals are not allowed to enter the DMZ and children over the age of 10 are allowed to visit.





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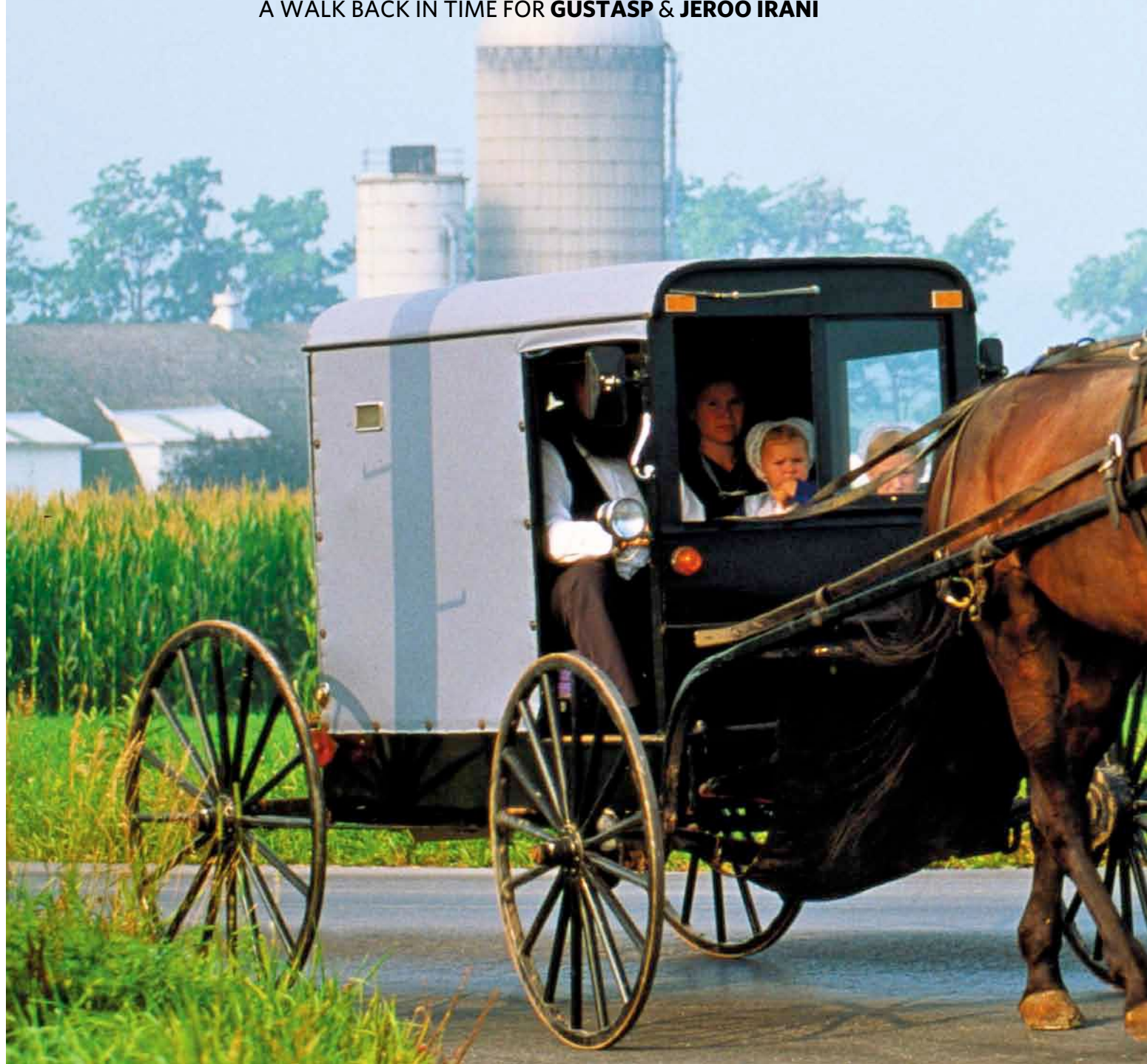




COVER STORY AMISH VILLAGE

# LANES OF SIMPLICITY

A WALK THROUGH AN AMISH VILLAGE WAS  
A WALK BACK IN TIME FOR **GUSTASP & JEROO IRANI**





*An Amish family in  
a horse-drawn tram*





## AMISH VILLAGE



*A traditional hat; (below, clockwise from left) Amish dolls for sale; women work at a roadside produce stand; a milk dairy in Intercourse village, Pennsylvania; and kids pitch in to water the crop*

**A**ntique grey carriages harnessed to steeds that high-stepped down a country road, bearded men in long black coats and brimmed hats, women in flowing dresses with heads covered in bonnets, rosy-cheeked kids in equally archaic apparel trudging off to school, a farmer harvesting the bounty of his fields with a horse-drawn cart, animals grazing on the lawns of farmhouses and some snuggling under towering grain silos... No, we had not entered a theme park, nor had we gatecrashed a Hollywood shoot. We were in the Amish village of Intercourse in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, that has chosen to remain fiercely rooted in its past. As a result, a slice of 18th-century Europe, still alive and kicking, has been superimposed on a thoroughly modern USA.

Our admiration—perhaps tinged with

envy—for the community grew as their simple and seemingly uncomplicated, yet wholesome lifestyle, unravelled across the rural landscape they call home. Strict interpretation of the Bible helped them keep the onslaught of modern comforts at bay. They would rather walk or ride in a horse-drawn buggy than step into a car. And the train would be just fine if they were to set off on a long-haul journey.

Their homes are devoid of modern appliances for the simple reason that they do not have electric connections. No TVs, radios, washing machines, dryers, phones, refrigerators... And they seem to manage very well without the standard fittings typical of most US homes. A guide with The Amish Experience ushered us through a model home. It was like stepping into another era, a world shielded from modern commercialisation, a place where life was





simple even if it was regimented.

The Amish dress code is traditional black. Unmarried men are clean shaven; single women wear white bonnets and are allowed a little colour under their aprons to advertise their status. The simple lifestyle keeps them close to nature and their farms are tilled and harvested with good old-fashioned horse power rather than motorised tractors. Why were we not surprised when a member of our group expressed a desire to be part of this uncomplicated world? The only way to be Amish is to be born one. And should a member marry out of the community, the Amish will shut him or her out of their world.

We found ourselves wondering if the Amish way of life, while wonderful in its simplicity, could become more than a little stifling in the long run. The answer probably lay in a short movie, *Jacob's Choice*, that we

had seen at the start of The Amish Experience tour. It is the story of a young Amish lad who, like all 16-year-old Amish lads, steps out into the big bad world to experience what it has to offer. It is his first crack at driving a car, tippling, smoking, maybe even meeting girls... However, once he turns 19, he has to make a life-defining choice: to be baptised once more and join the Amish fraternity with no questions asked, or judgement passed, about the wild oats he sowed... or to break free. According to our guide, around 85 to 90 per cent choose to return to the Amish fold. And when they do, they must marry and have children. Since there is no mention of family planning in the Bible, Amish homes are filled with the patter of little feet.

Suddenly, a little girl in the group asks the guide, much to everyone's amusement, "When Amish men and women get married,

THE HOMES  
ARE DEVOID OF  
ALL MODERN  
APPLIANCES  
FOR THEY DO  
NOT HAVE  
ELECTRIC  
CONNECTIONS







*The Amish follow strict interpretations of the Bible and since there is no mention of family planning there, the homes are filled with the patter of little feet*

## IF A MEMBER MARRIES OUT OF THE COMMUNITY, THE AMISH SHUN HIM OR HER OUT

do they sleep together in the same bed?" It was not as absurd as it sounded for the Amish lifestyle, especially in an American context, seemed alien.

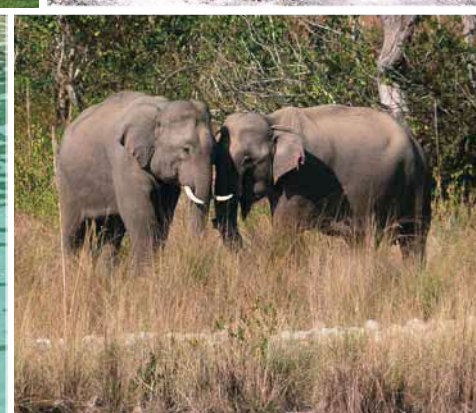
We found out how delicious it could also be when we stopped by at Plain & Fancy Restaurant for a late-afternoon Amish meal. Served on a sturdy log table while we sat on long benches without backrests, the food was simple, wholesome and satisfying. A thick soup was followed by salads and freshly baked loaves of bread, fried chicken, steamed sausages, roast beef, mashed potatoes, greens, fruit pies... they kept piling the goodies on our plates in an endless stream till we had to cry out, "Stop!"

Satiated, we strolled down an Amish themed-mall-cum-farmers' and artists' market when someone suggested a buggy ride. We seconded the proposal and soon we

were clippity-clopping down a country road with an Amish gent at the reins of a two-horse carriage. "Of course, we co-exist with the communities around us," he said. "Yes, you may take a photograph of me. No, we don't shun modern technology. However, we are very careful and ensure it does not rule our lives." Talking to this gentle soul made us feel like we were peering through a crack in the fencing around a forbidden world.

Yes, he had seen the movie *Witness* on a friend's computer. A good part of the film was shot on location and he had to admit it was not merely a product of a scriptwriter's fevered imagination. There was an understandable discrepancy though: at home, the Amish do not speak English but German, the language of their pilgrim fathers who fled religious persecution in Switzerland for the New World in 1737. It was the corruption of





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*Horse-drawn carriages are a regular feature alongside cars*

the word *Deutsch* (German) that has led to this region of Pennsylvania being referred to as Dutch Country.

The absence of overhead electric wires was a sure sign we were deep in Amish country. We shared the road with a few passing cars and other horse-drawn buggies. We trundled past a farmhouse with carriages

parked in the driveway and horses grazing in adjoining fields. An extended family relaxed in a semi-circle on the lawns.

It was hard to believe that this was part of 21st-century USA. It seemed like an oasis of sanity in a world stumbling over itself in its single-minded pursuit of needless wants and mass consumerism. 

## THE INFORMATION

### GETTING THERE

>AIR The closest airport is **Philadelphia**. And the airfare ex-Mumbai/Delhi is around ₹60,000. The Amish settlements of Intercourse and neighbouring Bird-in-Hand in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, are about 80km and 100km, respectively, from the Philadelphia airport.

>RAIL Trains run from Philadelphia airport, via Philadelphia city to **Parkesburg, PA station** (\$39). From here you can take a taxi (\$35-\$40/21km). The ride is about 2h40m, including a 1h20m transit stop. Alternatively, one

can catch a train from the city (\$29/1hr 10m).

>ROAD Self-drive/Rent-a-car (around \$45 per day/24 hrs) from Philadelphia airport/city.

**Intercourse** and **Bird-in-Hand** are about 1-1.5hr drive from the airport/city. Visit [rentalcars.com](http://rentalcars.com) for a comparative search of most car rental companies across USA.

### WHERE TO STAY

The town has a number of motels, inns, guesthouses, B&Bs and homestays for those wanting to stay for a longer duration. These include the Picket Fence

Home, Beacon Hill Camping, Best Western Intercourse Village Inn, Carriage Corner Bed and Breakfast and Olde Homestead Suites. Visit [villageofintercourse.com/accomodations](http://villageofintercourse.com/accomodations) for more options.

### WHAT TO SEE & DO

The Amish Experience ([amishexperience.com](http://amishexperience.com)) offers a Super Saver Package (\$43.95) that includes **Amish Experience Theatre, Homestead visit and Farmlands Tour**. The package also includes a 20-minute buggy ride.

Intercourse Bike Works ([intercoursebikeworks.com](http://intercoursebikeworks.com)) offers

an interesting 13km **bicycle tour** (\$68.90) which includes dinner with an Amish family.

AAA Buggy Rides ([kitchenkettle.com/members/aaabuggyrides.asp](http://kitchenkettle.com/members/aaabuggyrides.asp)) offers buggy rides from \$14 (6.5km/35 minutes) to \$21 (60minutes, including an Amish farm tour).

### WHERE TO EAT

Feasting on wholesome PA Dutch cuisine is part of the Amish experience. Good 'N Plenty, Plain & Fancy and Bird-in-Hand are a few of the many family restaurants in Intercourse.

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Christof Schuerpf, *Abstrakte Landschaft*, 2010, Öl auf Leinwand, 180 x 240 cm





# SWISS, INDOORS

SWITZERLAND'S ENVIABLE PAST HAS ENSURED THAT A VAST RANGE OF MUSEUMS CAN MAKE THE VISITOR REDISCOVER THE COUNTRY, SAYS **SUMAN TARAFDAR**

*The light-filled  
Kunsthaus in Zurich*





**H**ave the words ‘Grand Tour’ in Switzerland meant taking in the unparalleled views while riding the scenic mountain railways? Well, it’s time for a bit of culture in your life, the manmade kind.

For all its rather obvious charms, Switzerland is also a land steeped in history which has over the last few centuries seen the nation prosper in technology and the fine arts. And the best way to access all this? Through a museum tour, of course. The nation may look small, but you would be well advised to do some homework before embarking on any such trip—there are museums and museums. All of Switzerland’s leading cities (and towns) have multiple museums worth visiting and unless you are posted in the country, make a list. Being sort of inclined to history and

art, mine went something like this:

### KUNSTHAUS ZÜRICH (MUSEUM OF ART)

I actually started with a modern art museum, though Kunsthauz houses works by leading European masters from previous centuries such as Monet, Cezanne, Van Gogh, Manet and many others. I was more interested in Swiss painters, and the permanent collection here includes Alberto Giacometti, whose skinny, raw images set the trend in sculpture for decades. The Met in NYC has a part of his works, but the most significant ones are here in a gallery of their own. Then there is the largest Edvard Munch collection outside of Norway. For fans of modern art, satiate yourself with Picasso, Chagall, Kandinsky, etc. Actually, as the largest art museum in the country, there’s so much more, including travelling exhibitions. Another pleasure, this centrally located museum is exceptionally well lit and with a new extension complete, art aficionados need to budget quite a few hours, or till they can no longer stand! No, nobody said museum tours were easy on your feet, nor are there people serving free champagne!

*Kunsthauz, Heimplatz 1, 8001 Zurich;  
Fee: CHF 23; kunsthauz.ch*

### LANDESMUSEUM ZÜRICH (SWISS NATIONAL MUSEUM)

As you approach Landesmuseum, you would be forgiven for thinking you are entering a fairytale castle, with turrets and all. It was built as one, opening in 1898. Look again, the street it is located on

should give a clue – Museumstrasse. This is Switzerland’s main museum, and for those who want a quick round of Swiss history, and have time for just one museum, this is the place to come to. From prehistory—yes, Switzerland is in the Neanderthal neighbourhood, through Roman and medieval centuries, there’s already a lot on offer even before the comprehensive recent past sections. Look out for the Gothic gallery. House proud visitors can check out Swiss furnishings at the Collections Gallery. The west wing is under refurbishment and the exhibition of Swiss design furnishings will not be on display until 2020. However, you can see the clothes, tapestries, glassware at the Collections Gallery in the southern wing. A new wing opened just last year, and complement the architecture of the older wing. Look out for surprises, as this is a tech-savvy museum. And updated—it even covers Christmas markets from this decade.

*Museumstrasse 2, 8001 Zürich, Switzerland;  
Fee: CHF 10; nationalmuseum.ch/en*

### MUSÉE ARIANA (ARIANA MUSEUM)

Unlike watches, for me, pottery and ceramics are a weakness, and to have an entire museum dedicated to this beautiful human endeavour was irresistible for me. Well, for starters, the building, at once pretty and regal, could itself charm even the most hardened. The insides are more for the devotees of pottery, stoneware, earthenware, porcelain and well, pretty art. European styles make up most of the collection, but there are significant sections of oriental and Islamic art as well.



GETTY IMAGES

*Clockwise from above: an exhibit at the Ariana Museum, devoted to ceramics; Swiss National Museum; and the Museum of Photography*



# V RESORTS Travel India

## V Resorts Bags Lonely Planet's 'Best Upcoming Resort Chain in India' Award

**L**onely Planet India organized their prestigious Travel and Lifestyle Leadership Awards, this February 14th. Amidst the fanfare and the buoyant celebrations, one name stood out from the rest - V Resorts. The chain, specializing in experience-based resort holidays, beat out some stiff competition to bag the coveted 'Best Upcoming Resort Chain in India' award. The award is in recognition of V Resorts' prolific growth over the past year. In 2016, the company expanded to over 70 properties across both established and emerging destinations, while also building significant public recall for our signature brand of experiential stays.

On behalf of V Resorts, the award was received by Dhaval Jani, the company's Vice President of Sales and Marketing. Dhaval is a Sales & Growth-Hacking expert with nearly a decade's experience in the travel industry. Over the last 16 years, he has headed the growth initiatives of illustrious names like MakeMyTrip, TATA Communications and Bharti Airtel. At V Resorts, Dhaval's experience with strategy and people-management has pushed our growth into an overdrive. Under his motivated leadership, the organization has grown its numbers - that of resorts, reservations and revenues - exponentially.

V Resorts is a chain of full service boutique resorts offering experiential stays to leisure travellers across India. This includes offering standardized amenities and services across all the properties at par with international hospitality benchmarks, while designing unique activities that make the most of each destination. These activities range from jungle safaris and trekking, to village tours and riverbed dinners. This approach ties in perfectly with the company's guiding principles of bringing new destinations to the fore, making local economies and culture the fulcrum around which the business rotates. For its efforts in sustainable tourism in India with local community engagement, V Resorts has been recognised by the World Tourism Organisation.



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## SWITZERLAND

This collection, spanning about 12 centuries, once again, for me, highlighted just how much precision and artistry humans achieved even without today's contemporary high tech tools. The array of hues alone could make you wonder about their sources, given the lack of modern tech's ability to fabricate colours.

*Avenue de la Paix 10, 1202 Genève;  
Fee: CHF 8; [museums.ch/org/en/  
Mus--e-Ariana](http://museums.ch/org/en/Mus--e-Ariana)*

### MUSÉE DE L'ÉLYSÉE (MUSEUM OF PHOTOGRAPHY)

This landmark collection of more than 100,000 photographs tells the story of the discipline itself. From early photographs to contemporary works, the curatorial excellence ensures that you might need to spend more time here than you budgeted for. Probably not for selfie lovers. Quick trivia, the museum has Charlie Chaplin's entire collection of photographs, more than 10,000 in all.

*Avenue de l'Élysée 18, 1006 Lausanne;  
Fee: CHF 8; [elysee.ch/accueil/](http://elysee.ch/accueil/)*

### MUSÉE INTERNATIONAL D'HORLOGERIE (INTERN'L MUSEUM OF HOROLOGY)

Well, it comes as no surprise at all that Switzerland has multiple watch museums. For the horology enthusiast, consensus dictates that this is the one that must be paid homage to first. Fans point to


PETER MAURER



A visitor at the  
Museum of  
Horology

it as the best watch and clock museum in the world. My interest in watches is, well, tepid at best (my current watch, off Amazon, cost me a princely ₹299), so I went with some hesitation. Well, it's an art and human endeavour museum disguised as a watch house. The section on the history of timepieces alone makes one appreciate the creativity and effort, always intricate, aesthetic and flawless. Meandering through myriad pioneering clocks, seemingly vying for who's the most impressive, could well turn you into a horo-ophile. For this visit, make time.

*Rue des Musées 29, 2300 La Chaux-de-Fonds; Fee: CHF 15; [chaux-de-fonds.ch/  
musees/mih](http://chaux-de-fonds.ch/musees/mih)*

Well, actually there are hundreds more museums, including famous ones such as the Musée Olympique at Lausanne or the Museum d'Histoire naturelle in Geneva. Among the newer museums are the FIFA World Football Museum in Zurich and the CERN Univers de particules, in Geneva. Did I forget Chaplin's World (Corsier-sur-Vevey), Matterhorn Museum (Zermatt), or Technorama (Winterthur)? Well, something for next time. 

## THE INFORMATION

### GETTING THERE

Swiss offers non-stop flights from Delhi and Mumbai, with a flight time of about seven hours. A round trip in economy class costs about ₹55,000, though less expensive connecting flights are available.

### VISA

Indians need a visa to visit Switzerland. The visa form is downloadable. ([vfsglobal.ch/switzerland/india/  
Tourist.html](http://vfsglobal.ch/switzerland/india/Tourist.html)) and stated turnaround time is 15 days, though in practice

it takes less time.

### CURRENCY

Swiss Franc (CHF) is the currency, though Euros are also accepted in some places. 1 CHF = ₹66

### WHAT TO BUY

Most museums in Switzerland have souvenir shops, even smaller ones. Of course, some sell actual original art too, but we shall talk of that elsewhere. Landesmuseum has exhibition souvenirs and an

extensive selection of books and even a toy archaeology set for kids. Kunstmuseum has lovely reprints, usually about CHF 25. Checkout Musée de l'Élysée's lovely exhibition catalogues. Musée Olympique, of course, is teeming with memorabilia from the Olympics, not just replica torches and mascot pins, but even tableware and bath linen. The FIFA World Football Museum too has World Cup Trophy memorabilia, as well as custom-made items in

the FIFA World Football Museum design. CERN Shop offers low tech mugs and T-shirts and pens, etc, though they are only available at the museum. And, of course, toys and footballs. For Chaplin fans, Chaplin's World offers exclusive souvenirs and all his films in DVDs. Look out for the posters, or maybe you just want the signature hat and cane. As for watches, just ask any watch shop, and your budget will determine their guidance.

■ SUMAN TARAFDAR



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COVER STORY RAS AL KHAIMAH





*Turkish coffee and the setting sun make for a wonderful combination at the bedouin camp; (left) Waldorf Astoria's signature Peacock Alley is a cream-and-teal lounge*



# NOMAD'S LAND

UNTOUCHED AND LESS EXPLORED, RAS AL KHAIMAH IS A BLEND OF  
ETHNIC AND MODERN, DISCOVERS **MANEK S. KOHLI**



## RAS AL KHAIMAH

**S**kyscrapers, man-made islands shaped like curvaceous palm trees and enough shopping and entertainment hubs to last you a lifetime...This is how I had visualised Ras Al Khaimah (RAK) when I heard about it. Dubai is like that, at least the photographs say so. But surprisingly, RAK, the northernmost emirate of the UAE, turned out to be a quaint emirate with just the right amount of modernity.

There are pristine beaches, undisturbed sand dunes, and under the golden desert sun lie memories of days before oil was struck and hints of Bedouin and Arabic cultures that haven't been engulfed by the passage of time. And I spent four days in this little emirate, soaking in the breathtaking view from the Dhayah Fort, watching the landscape change colour every minute, and shaking as the bone-chilling wind at the Jebel Jais peak swirled around us.

The fort is inconspicuous, to say the least. We climbed the stairs as the sun set, and at each bend saw the surrounding hills being painted and repainted in a different blend of light and colour. We reached the top, and that's when it hit us—Dhayah is in the middle of an oasis—a lush land settled in for the past five millennia. The British cannons did turn it into a ruin in 1819, but it was restored to become RAK's only surviving hilltop fort. There's also an inn with a shop below—my key purchases there included a strawberry-flavoured Fanta, the super-sweet *fard* variety of dates. and the

*Dune bashing (below left) is an exhilarating experience; and (below right) a tanoura dancer whirls and transports you to another world*







*Mountain bikers enjoy the view at Jebel Jais*

very dry *lulu* variety.

Jebel Jais, the tallest peak in the UAE and a part of the Al-Hajar mountain range, is a different story. No lush vegetation, not a tree in sight. As our car drove up the hairpin bends, fog greeted us. Nothing seemed cheerful about the bone-dry bronze-hued surrounding mountains. Here, unlike Dhayah, colour seemed to gradually fade away. Yet, the top was unconventionally beautiful—even panoramic.

With a rich and varied terrain, RAK does manage to offer an experience to remember. And it has started focussing on attracting tourists in a big way quite recently. So, there is a golf resort, a water park and even a man-made archipelago. And the emirate has incorporated its ethnic Arabic and Bedouin cultures into most of its attractions.

Our road trip to RAK had begun from the Dubai International Airport. After about an hour and a

## TIME TRAVEL

*The New York Times* aptly labelled Ras Al Khaimah as the emirate with ‘history, not oil’. And we got our chunk of history at Jazirat Al Hamra—the last of its dwellers abandoned the fishing village in 1968. It has remained uninhabited and untouched ever since. This withering-away relic may have outlived its initial purpose of being a pearl fishing centre, but now serves a fresh one—a fossil depicting pre-oil life.

The Arabian Peninsula, scorched by the desert sun that made life difficult and agriculture bleak, had its coastline come to the rescue. So, pearl diving and fishing became some of the primary occupations and RAK, with its 64km of coast and islands, was a hotbed. But then oil was found in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and by 1968, almost every traditional source of revenue was forgotten.

Earlier, the village was mostly inhabited by the Zaab tribe, which fought alongside the Qawasim tribe (from where today’s ruling family of RAK originates) in resisting the British colonisers.

But that’s only recent history—there’s evidence that shows RAK being home to the Umm al-Nar culture of the third millennia BC, depicted through ancient tombs. The RAK National Museum is the place to see more evidences of this.

half, we had arrived at a place where the roads were relatively empty, the shops spread out and the crowd limited. We had reached Ras Al Khaimah—about the size of India’s National Capital Region, but with only one-eighth of the population. Getting off the main highway, we found a sprawling structure surrounded by hills in the backdrop, an ocean in the front and a garden all around—Waldorf Astoria.

The Waldorf Astoria is a, well, Waldorf Astoria, which means unmistakable grandeur and breathtaking opulence, but with a local touch. The hotel’s façade resembled a desert castle. There was the spacious teal and cream-themed lobby and a grand clock designed to reflect the hours of Islamic prayer. The décor was a reflection of the region we were in. There were Arabic-themed paintings such as Kufic Arabic calligraphy next to the Qasr Al Bahar restaurant and the signature Peacock Alley



lounge had Arabic-style seating.

The rooms, once again cream and teal-themed, but with elaborate glass chandeliers and patterned carpets, were comfortable. At the Waldorf, we spent a lot of time walking on the beach and hijacking the most secluded of the myriad cabanas.

It has nine restaurants, including the beach facing Qasr Al Bahar, where we had breakfast. The décor at Marjan was contemporary and on our plates were Middle-Eastern delicacies. Azure was the Mediterranean restaurant, mostly al fresco.

We also stayed at the Hilton Al Hamra Beach & Golf Resort which provided access to an 18-hole golf course and offered some lovely villas and suites. The velvet-themed lobby lounge and restaurants such as Al Jazeera (for Lebanese) and Samakmak (for seafood) had a contemporary look and feel.

We also visited the Cove Rotana Resort which had dozens of villas built on a hill overlooking the sea, each with a view more breathtaking than the last and connected with beautiful flower-encased alleyways. How I wished we had stayed there too.

Different hotels, different restaurants and

*Waldorf Astoria's spacious rooms resemble the interiors of the palaces of the Arabian peninsula*



different delicacies, I just couldn't assimilate enough. There are some unforgettables though—the mixed grill “Arabesque” (many kinds of marinated meats and kebabs with saffron rice) at Waldorf's Azure was mouthwatering, while their Middle-Eastern restaurant Marjan offered some flavourful cold mezzeh (with hummus in four flavours including blackberry) and hot mezzeh

## LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

> Right next to the Waldorf Astoria, you have the Al Hamra Mall. While we were gawking at the immense discounts, we heard some thumping music. Following the beats, we found two rows of Arabs facing each other and performing a certain ‘dance’. Everyone had a stick in one hand. They hopped around nonchalantly, and one or two would often break the formation and give the stick a spin. The *ayala* is performed with so much calm; one might think the dancers are lazy.

> The **Bedouin Oasis Camp** is where you find sand art in a bottle. Sand coloured in many shades is put into a bottle to create an intricately detailed painting—often of a camel in the evening desert. Costs AED 80.

> The emirates are known for their flavourful shishas. But lesser known is the *dokha* tobacco and the *medwakh* smoking pipe. The former is a traditional Arabic tobacco with a history of over 500 years. A small bottle costs anything between AED 10 to AED 20. The pipe is a slim filter-pipe mostly made of wood and costs about AED 18 to AED 20.

> In the more commercial area of Ras Al Khaimah, we found a dessert parlour called Ashuk Ice Cream. The mango and strawberry Ice (AED 12), had fresh fruits and nuts. The Ashuk Ice Cream, their speciality, is worth a scoop or two as well.

(batata bil kizbara and sautéed chicken liver).

I also enjoyed the breakfast at Waldorf Astoria's Qasr Al Bahar, where meats such as turkey and gazelle tasted best with the many kinds of cheese—the Syrian paralysis cheese, the Levantine Shanklish cheese and the yogurt cheese, Labneh, to name a few. At the standalone Emirati restaurant Al Fanar, among RAK's authentic

culinary experiences, we had some amazing Saloona Laham Badaweyah (mutton stew with potato, tomato and dry lemon).

Besides good food, you also find adventure in RAK. A local came to pick us up in a Land Rover, which he also happened to own, and drove us to the edge of the desert. He stopped the vehicle and got off to lower the tyre pressure. Soon enough, we



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*History lives on at Dhayah Fort*

knew what this was about—it was dune-bashing time. We found ourselves ascending, descending, bouncing, flailing, swerving, zigzagging and seemingly defying gravity across the dunes. Eventually, and without injury, we arrived at the Bedouin Oasis camp.

It replicated the life once led by the nomadic Arab Bedouin tribes but catered to the needs of current times. A stone walkway surrounded by luxurious tents, camel ride and quad biking facilities and a central courtyard area filled with souvenir shops, a shisha smoking tent, henna painters, sand artists and rows of Bedouin-style seating. And then we were

treated to a round of tanoura dance, or sufi whirling. The performer, Mahmoud, whirled, decked with a couple of skirts decorated in LED lights. I got dizzy just looking at him swerve and rotate for minutes on end, as the light formed amazing patterns.

But my favourite attraction at RAK was the Al Wadi Equestrian Adventure Centre. The centre is located among the dunes, but has some exhibits and stables where you can pet a variety of animals. But more than that, it was meeting the bubbly stable manager, Yasmin Sayyed, that enthused me. She introduced us to her rams, Mr. Me and Mr. Me Me. Whether they were camels, horses, ducks or even the ferocious ibex, Yasmin was their friend.

There were contemporary attractions too—Ice Land Water Park boasted of dozens of ride. Al Marjan is RAK's own group of artificial islands, much like Dubai's Palm Islands. It is currently in the midst of many real estate, hospitality and development projects.

And then there was shopping, that too pocket friendly. One market that suited us to perfection was RAK's traditional bazaar, the Old Souq. Among the three of us, we purchased Turkish coffee, Arabic coffee, date chocolates, dried lemons and an assortment of unpronounceable local spices. Altogether, we had not spent more than AED 50. Nothing beats the pleasure of shopping which is light on your pocket and easy to carry back home. 📍

## ➡ THE INFORMATION

### GETTING THERE

There are no direct flights to RAK. You will have to land in **Dubai**, Abu Dhabi or **Sharjah**. IndiGo to Dubai is the cheapest (from approx. ₹6,000 one way). **RAK** is 90km (approx. 1h) from Dubai Airport, 65km (approx. 45m) from **Sharjah Airport** and 225km (approx. 2h) from Abu Dhabi airport. Both taxis and buses ply to RAK.

### WHERE TO STAY

> **Waldorf Astoria** (from AED 975 for two, taxes extra). It has 346 rooms. There is a choice from **Kings Classic Room** (AED 975 for two, taxes extra) to King Deluxe

Room (AED 1,075 for two, plus taxes). Suites range from King Junior Suite (AED 1,275 with taxes extra) to Royal Suite (AED 5,975, taxes extra). See [waldorfastoria3.hilton.com](http://waldorfastoria3.hilton.com).

> **Hilton Al Hamra Beach & Golf Resort** (from AED 599 for two, plus taxes). The different rooms are King Accessible Guest Room (AED 599, taxes extra), Two King Bed Junior Suite (AED 1,199, taxes extra), **Presidential Suite** (AED 2,599, taxes extra) with a private rooftop terrace. You can visit [www3.hilton.com](http://www3.hilton.com).

> **The Cove Rotana Resort** (from AED 800 for two, taxes extra) see more at [rotana.com](http://rotana.com).

### WHERE TO EAT

> At **Waldorf Astoria**: Azure (Mediterranean), Marjan (authentic middle-eastern) and Qasr Al Bahar (multi-cuisine).

> At **Hilton Al Hamra**: Samak-mak (seafood) and Al Jazeera (Lebanese).

> At **The Cove Rotana Resort**: Al Fanar (authentic Emirati), Basilico (Mediterranean)

> For dessert, **Ashuk Ice Cream** is the place to go to.

### WHAT TO SEE & DO

> Enjoy the 360° view at the historical **Dhayah Fort** and the panoramic **Jebel Jais** peak.

> **Masjid Muhammad Bin Salem**

**Al Qasimi** mosque is definitely worth a visit.

> The 1.8km walk along the **Corniche Al Qawasim** by the sea offers a beautiful vista and has many restaurants.

> Both the vegetable and fish markets are places to experience the local flavours.

> The **Saqr Park** is a good place for a family picnic. It makes for a perfect green walk.

> If you're into ziplining, **Jebel Jais** is the place to go to. It is probably the largest **zipline** in the UAE.

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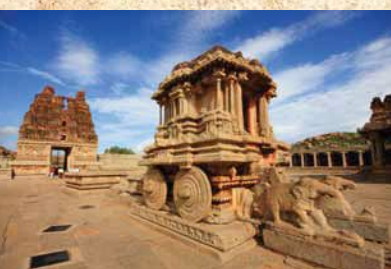


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# SOME OF MY FAVOURITE THINGS

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FROM HAMLET'S CASTLE TO THE LITTLE MERMAID AND ABBA, **RAVI SHARMA**  
CHECKS OFF A LIST OF PERSONAL WISHES IN NORTHERN EUROPE

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PHOTOGRAPHS: GETTY IMAGES





**H**aving covered Europe extensively over several visits, my wife and I still felt we were missing something. And that something was Scandinavia. We had always desired to visit the land of ABBA, our favourite band, the Norwegian fjords, and the home of The Little Mermaid.

A lot of people do Scandinavia by taking a Baltic cruise but we prefer to not be bound by a planned schedule. So we flew to Stockholm, our starting point for the sojourn. We began with a tour around the city and soon passed the site where the phenomenon of

Stockholm Syndrome took root. It goes back to August 1973, when several bank employees taken hostage by robbers at the Kreditbanken in Norrmalmstorg refused police assistance and became emotionally attached to their captors.

Next, we stopped at the quaint, old town of Gamla Stan. This is where Stockholm was founded in 1252. The clean, narrow cobblestone streets brimming with restaurants, cafés and colourful shops selling antiques and handicrafts make it one of the largest and best preserved medieval city centres in Europe. At the entrance to the old city, there is the imposing Royal Palace, one of the largest in the world with 600 rooms. The daily parade of soldiers and the change-of-guards ceremony are impressive to watch.

Next on our agenda was ABBA The Museum, which displays the band's stage clothes and memorabilia, and provides an interactive setting where one can sing and dance with ABBA, while wearing a digital costume and recording it all. On another floor is the Swedish Music Hall of Fame that narrates the musical history of the country. We also took a canal trip around Stockholm, which encompasses 14 islands and more than 50 bridges.

We next flew to Bergen in Norway. As we approached the city, the aerial view was an all-white panorama made up of enormous glaciers. Founded in 1070, Bergen has been designated a World Heritage City as well as European City of Culture and has been home to many artists, with the composer Edward Grieg being perhaps the most famous of them. On the waterfront is Bryggen, a World Heritage Site featuring the old Hanseatic wharf and multi-coloured wooden buildings.

Our visit coincided with Hanseatic Days, an annual event. Bergen was a member of the Hanseatic League which was a powerful commercial and defensive confederation of merchant guilds and market towns dominating Baltic maritime trade from the 12th to the 17th century. Though the League is no more, a network of 180 cities still

celebrates Hanseatic Days in a member city every year. When we visited, the party was in Bergen.

Bergen is known as the gateway to the fjords and that was what had brought us to the city in the first place. Early next morning, we embarked on a boat for the Sognefjord trip. This fjord is Norway's longest and deepest, and yet there are spots where it is so narrow that land seems within touching distance. Sailing along snow-capped mountains, steep cliffs, huge glaciers and cascading waterfalls, one is left spellbound. We sailed for four hours before arriving at the town of Leikanger, where we took a break.

A car took us to the small town of Solvorn on the adjacent Lustrafjord where we checked into the famous Walaker Hotel, said to be the oldest hotel in Norway. The establishment started as an inn in 1640.

The hotel has been run by the same family since 1690 and the staff is most hospitable. On learning that we were vegetarians, a special dinner was prepared matching the regular one course for course. In the evening, we took a ferry across the bay to the Urnes Stave Church. The timber for this wooden church was felled in 1129-30 and the church has been built four times, with a hundred years passing between the first and the fourth construction.

After breakfast next day, we drove back to Leikanger and caught a boat to complete the remaining one and a half hour fjord journey to Flåm, where we would take the famous Flåm railway to Myrdal. The railway is said to be the only one in the world of adhesion type on normal tracks with the steepest climb. After 17 years of labour, the railway was opened for steam trains on 1st August 1940 and for electric trains in 1944. The train takes an hour to cover the 20km track through 20 tunnels, climbing from 2m at Flåm to 866m at Myrdal.

The view from the train is spectacular, typical of the Norwegian mountain landscape complete with its lakes, ravines, waterfalls, valleys and avalanche sites. En route, the train stopped close




*The vibrant square  
in Gamla Stan*









ONE IS SPELLBOUND  
BY THE SNOW-  
CAPPED MOUNTAINS,  
HUGE GLACIERS  
AND CASCADING  
WATERFALLS

*Sognefjord, near  
Bergen, is Norway's  
longest and  
deepest fjord*





to the Kjosfossen or Kjos waterfall. On the hills next to the fall, girls dressed as fairies danced enchantingly to music.

From Myrdal, we boarded a train to Oslo where we headed straight to the Grand Hotel. The historic hotel is the annual venue of the Nobel Peace Prize; the prize winners are accommodated in the Nobel suite. It also houses the Grand Café, where the country's most famous playwright, Henrik Ibsen, ate daily. For our neighbour, we had the then US Secretary of State, John Kerry, whose security personnel asked us every time we returned to the hotel if we were sure we were on the right floor.

In the city, we witnessed the brilliant architecture of the buildings known as Barcode. Tall and narrow, they collectively resemble a bar code. Located

in the same area is the Norwegian National Opera and Ballet, a prize-winning building designed by Snohetta. Then there is the Holmenkollen ski jump which was rebuilt for the Nordic World Ski Championship in 2011. The top of the jump affords one a panoramic view of the capital and its surrounding countryside. The structure also contains the world's oldest ski museum.

We also took a tour of Oslo's museums—the Nobels Fredssenter features peace prize laureates and their work; the Fram museum allows you to hop on board the famous polar expedition ship, *Fram*, built in 1892 by Norway's national hero Fritjof Nansen; the Kontiki Museet is home to the original raft, *Kontiki*, used by Thor Heyendahl for the famous crossing of the

*A canal tour in Copenhagen passes under several bridges so low that you have to duck to keep your head on your shoulders*

Pacific in 1947 and the reed boat *Ra II* for voyages that followed; the Ibsenmuseet, Ibsen's home for the last 11 years of his life, has been restored to its 1895 form.

A flight next day took us to Copenhagen. By the time we settled down it was late afternoon, so we decided to head to the famous Tivoli Gardens, a huge amusement park that features an open-air theatre, concert hall, bandstand, restaurants, flower gardens and rides. The following morning, we went on a canal tour on an open boat, passing under several bridges, most of them so low you had to duck even sitting down. Our first stop was the famous





Little Mermaid. Inspired by the fairy tale by Hans Christian Andersen, a lonely mermaid sits on top of a small rock in the harbour promenade. The statue was designed nearly a century ago by Danish sculptor Eriksen, with the head of a famous ballerina and the body of his wife as models because the ballerina refused to pose in the nude. The Little Mermaid has a controversial history including two beheadings, many defacements and even an attempted explosion by vandals. However, she survives and is associated with Copenhagen just as Christ the Redeemer is with Rio de Janeiro and the Statue of Liberty is with New York.

We then visited other sites like the Opera House, Amalienborg Palace, the Royal Danish Playhouse and the Christianborg and Rosenborg Palaces. After a quick lunch, we strolled through the shopping streets of Stroget. We also visited the Hans Christian Andersen Museum with its fascinating tableaux of his fairy tales and spent the evening at the famous Carlsberg brewery where a Copenhagen 'Exbeerience' awaited us in the open courtyard with large crowds regaling with music and TV.

A visit to the North Sealand called Denmark's Royal Retreat was on the agenda for the final day. An hour's coastal drive brought us to the magnificent 17th-century Frederiksborg Castle which is said to be Northern Europe's largest

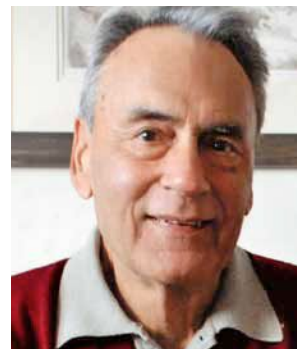
Renaissance castle. It has an impressive Neptune Fountain and a marble gallery. The castle is home to the Museum of National History which records 500 years of Danish history of paintings, furniture and art manufacture. At the rear is a superbly manicured Baroque garden reminding one of Versailles in France.

Our next stop was the world heritage site of Kronborg, better known as Hamlet's Castle. It's rumoured to be the setting for Shakespeare's famous drama. There is no proof of the story being true and the Bard never visited it himself. Nevertheless, the play has been staged in the castle for the last 200 years with famous artistes like Sir Laurence Olivier, Sir John Gielgud, Christopher Plummer and, more recently, Jude Law. 2016 marked the 400th death anniversary of Shakespeare so a group of actors dressed for the parts interacted with the visitors. So we had the King of Denmark welcoming us in the King's Chamber, Ophelia charming us in the Little Hall and Hamlet himself chasing his father's ghost over the ramparts!

We then headed for our final destination, Louisiana, a museum of modern art on the outskirts of Copenhagen. The collections here date from 1945 onwards. The art exhibits include those of Pablo Picasso and Andy Warhol, while a beautiful garden is surrounded by sculptures of Henry Moore and Alexander Calder. Art marked the end of our dreamlike sojourn.

*(Left) The Flåm railway offers remarkable sights including the Kjos waterfall; and the change-of-guard ceremony at the Royal Palace, Sweden*

Every trip has its light moments and I will always remember two of them from Scandinavia. One, when at Myrdal station we couldn't get a cup of coffee because there was no water at the station, and the second at our hotel in Copenhagen, when I asked room service for sugar and was given a shoe-horn! 📷

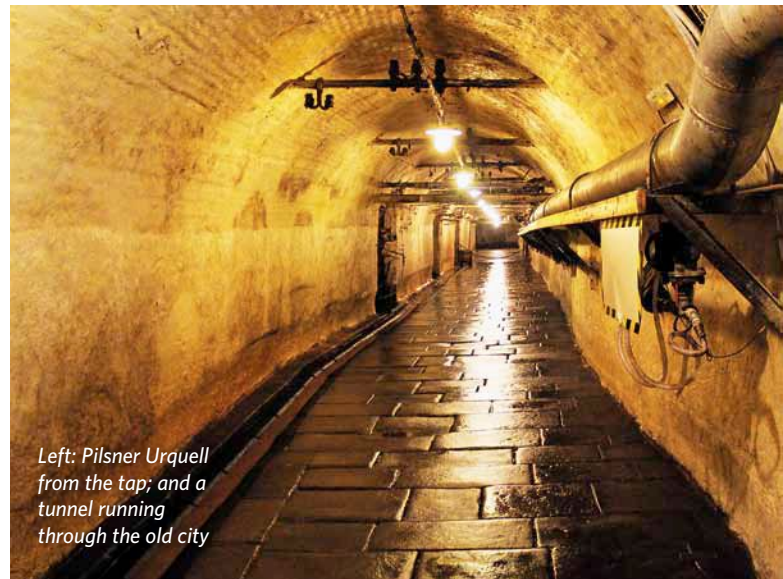


Ravi Sharma is a retired naval officer. At a young age, the slogan *Join the Navy and see the world* caught his fancy. Travels in the Navy left him hungering for more and, after retirement, Ravi continues to satisfy his wanderlust by taking frequent trips with his wife Akhila.



# VELVET UNDERGROUND

THE CZECH TOWN OF PILSEN IS HOME TO ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST POPULAR BEERS. **SAUMYA TYAGI** DELVES INTO ITS SECRETS



Left: Pilsner Urquell from the tap; and a tunnel running through the old city

It might seem like an absurd idea to build an underground city for the sake of beer. But don't tell that to anyone in Pilsen, a city in western Bohemia in the Czech Republic. About an hour's drive south-west of Prague, the capital, Pilsen is a beer city, and home to one of the first lagers ever produced, the Pilsner beer. Easily one of the most popular beers in the world today, the Pilsner is sold here as Pilsner Urquell. Urquell is a German word that means 'original source' or 'fountainhead', as the

brand is said to use the same recipe that was used to brew the original Pilsner in 1842.

Founded in 1295 by King Wenceslas II, the first records of a brewery in Pilsen are also from roughly around the same time. So it's not surprising that its most popular tourist attraction, the historical underground—a 19km, three-storey labyrinth of tunnels running beneath most of the old city—owes its existence to beer as well. An intricate system of wells, hallways, corridors and cellars, the underground was built between

the 13th and 19th centuries with the primary purpose of storing beer.

The underground has three levels, the first running right beneath the buildings and in use even today as individual basements and cellars. The second is a maze of brick-lined and concrete arched passageways periodically opening into open areas historically used for storing beer barrels, food and even ammunition. The third level, more sparse and consisting mainly of just connecting corridors, is now closed for all purposes due to most parts of it being flooded. The three levels





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## PILSEN

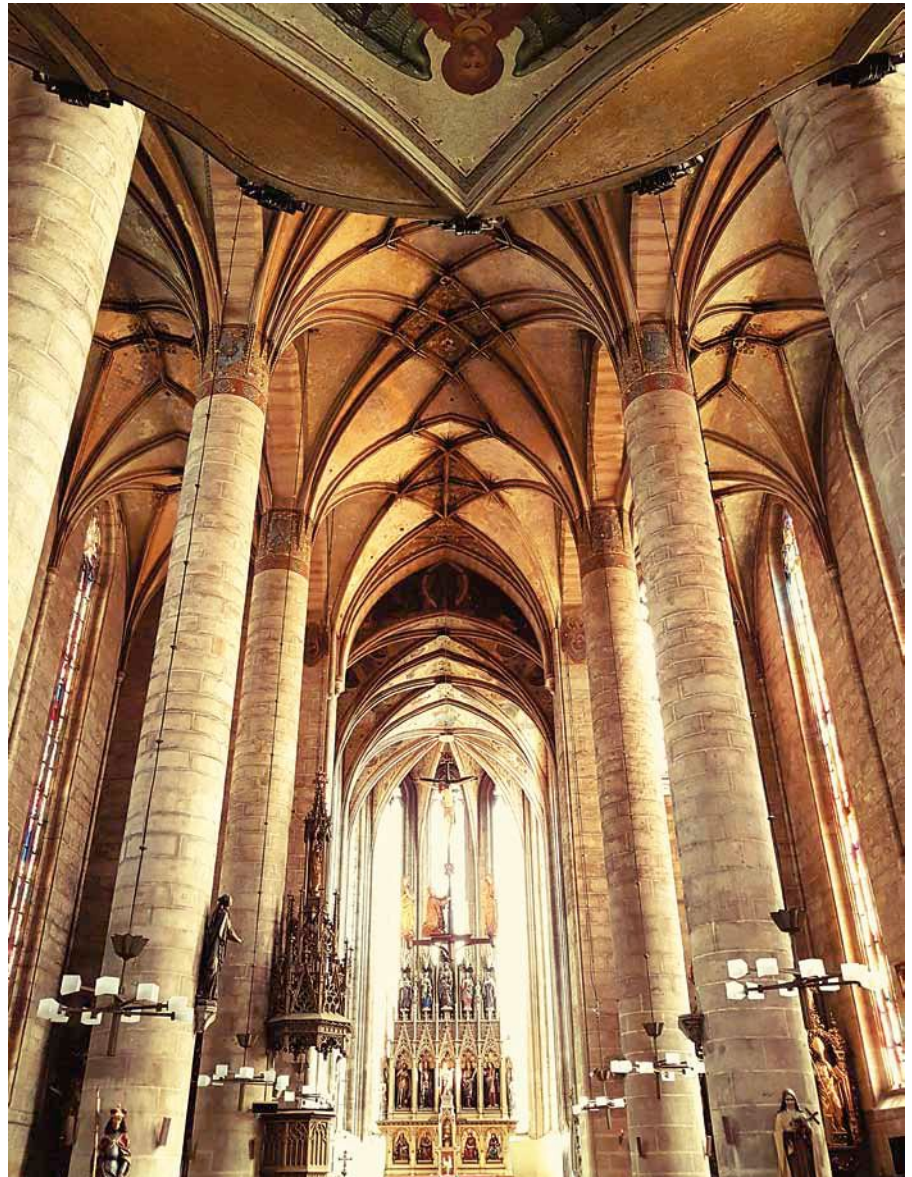
*The Cathedral of St. Bartholomew is probably as old as the city of Pilsen, established in 1295*

are well connected through multiple staircases, now barricaded by grills. Also alongside is a network of 360 wells, many of them later used as waste pits.

Although most of the underground has been modified and bolstered during the centuries, first with brick and later with girders and concrete, you can still glimpse a little of the truly old with cobbled pathways and cave-like holed tunnels running out from the main route open to the public. All along the tour route are well showcased artefacts from the region, such as tools used to build the underground and their different modifications over time, cookware, pipes, even a giant 200kg catapult stone used during medieval times in an attempt to break into the city walls.

Another interesting aspect is the underground's own character as a hidden city of sorts with rustic taverns. These are rudimentary slabs of sandstone laid out as benches and there is even a serving window. The story believed to be behind these underground taverns is a medieval law that prohibited drinking during the daylight hours—the residents found a clever way around the rule in the lack of daylight in the underground! Apart from being a drinking hole, the passageways were also used as secret communication channels and even as shelters for the populace during the multiple invasions during medieval times by the Hussites and later during the Napoleonic wars. There is even an archaic printing press down below that was used to print the first Czech book, *Mysteries of the Trojan Chronicle*, in the late 15th century.

The old city was made to replicate a chessboard with the towering St Bartholomew Church in the centre of the town square. You can decide for yourself if there is any resemblance to one if you climb all the way up the 102m-high church tower. Regardless of what you decide, what you are guaranteed are grand views of the now sprawling urban landscape. To the west



GETTY IMAGES

you can spot the Great Synagogue with its red dome-topped pillars rising high above the city. The third largest in the world, it was built in 1892 by the Jews then living in Pilsen.

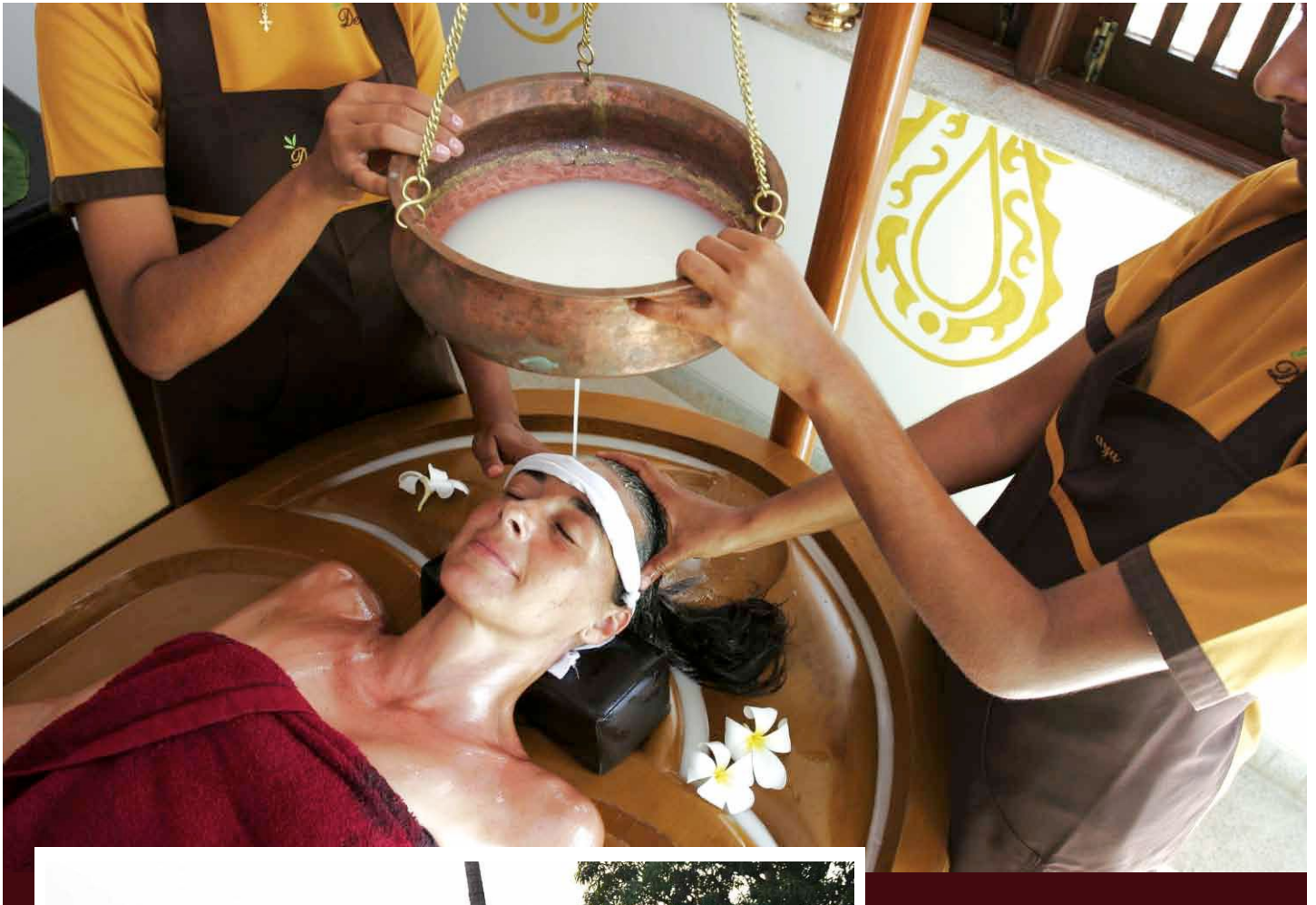
The city is today the fourth largest in the Czech Republic and a major industrial centre but there is still enough here for a history junkie or a beer connoisseur or even a casual traveller who can't help but be drawn to its quirky small-town feel and old-world charm with the Baroque architecture and its various parks and gardens. And, of course, the beer. In the end it's all about the beer—and let's raise a tankard to that.



Based in Prague, Saumya Tyagi is currently pursuing a course in narrative filmmaking. An entrepreneur, freelance videographer and a journalist for a short time, Tyagi has an affinity for the Himalayas, more so when it comes to trekking. His interests include travel, hiking, literature, music and films.



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# *Go Goa : Postcards* **FROM A LIFE**

**A**n alluring haven of beaches, mountains and silvery seas—a friendly and seasoned society that plays host all year round to travellers from home and abroad—no wonder Goa has made the most of the gifts dispensed so lavishly by the gods on this slice of coastal splendour in southwestern India. Its natural beauty aside, its history and heritage have shaped the narratives of its intoxicating multi-cultural offerings, so richly showcased in its architecture, spiritual endeavours, its festivals, its culinary heritage, its languages and its many communities. The passage of time— from its Portuguese past... to its hippie days... to its social-media-driven engagements— describes a curiously peripatetic journey of experiences as one plunges into a world beautiful old churches and cathedrals, ancient forts that defy the restless seas, traditional local bazaars— now dominated by Kashmiri and Tibetan shopkeepers in this bustling world of commerce and culture of diverting delight, beautiful seaside hotels offering water sports and backwater tours. *Be it Mario's world of Miss Nimbupani and Miss Fonseca, or the THINK Lit Festival there'll always be a bit of Goa that goes home with you.*





## *An Idyllic Experience*

Ashvem Beach is a hidden gem with stunning scenery. Stroll along 1 mile of smooth white sands, listen to the soothing sounds of the lapping waves, the rustle of the palm leaves and shallow lagoons, walk a little inland, through the forest, to see some authentic Goan villages, temples offering you peace and tranquility and a chance to catch your breath. The area also has some very happening clubs & beach parties in season time.

If you want a beach right on the doorstep, Rococco@Ashvem, positioned on the small seafront promenade idyllic beach, is the perfect choice. The Resort is built with a mixture of homely charm and simple, crisp style. Rococco has sea-facing & garden-facing rooms, equipped with modern facilities. Enjoy magnificent sunsets while you laze on spacious sundecks. It includes an international style restaurant, and sunset lounge bar which looks directly out onto Ashvem seafront promenade so you can tuck into the buffet whilst enjoying the sea views. The Resort is an ideal stay for those in need of some detoxification and relaxation, thanks to its free Yoga sessions for in-house guests.

If you wish to have your wedding right on the beach, Rococco hosts a well planned range of weddings and events throughout the season for uber cool clientele. If you love your pets too much to let them stay alone at home while going on a holiday, get them along with you as this is a pet friendly resort, just prior intimation is required. Rococco@Ashvem beckons you to a pleasant experience that will linger in your memory long after you leave the shores of Ashvem.

### Resort amenities:

- Restaurant serving Mediterranean, Indian, Sushi, Uzbek & Georgian cuisine
- Sunset Bar with happy hours every day.
- Free Wi-Fi Internet
- Room Service
- Lawns/Gardens
- Scooter/ bike rentals
- Doctor on call
- Ultimate romantic beach weddings
- Free Yoga sessions for in-house guests

Check out more breathtaking pictures and fabulous deals at: [www.rococcoashvem.com](http://www.rococcoashvem.com)

### Contact Details:

Rococco@Ashvem, Ashvem Beach, Mandrem, Pernem, Goa 403 527 | Tel: 0832-2247671 / 0855 095 6764 / 0855 095 6764  
Email: [bookings@rococcoashvem.com](mailto:bookings@rococcoashvem.com) / [enquiries@rococcoashvem.com](mailto:enquiries@rococcoashvem.com)







# Montego Bay BEACH VILLAGE

Just 20 minutes away from Calangute and half an hour from Panjim, it's the perfect base for exploring Goa's iconic attractions and an ideal getaway resort for couples and families. The choice of accommodation is great—there are log cabins, luxury tents, Casa de Mudanc'a, and a beach villa set on an expanse of 100,000 sq ft of beachfront cocooned in a coconut grove. Culinary indulgences are another adventure at Montego—Continental, Indian, Chinese, BBQ's, Seafood and local Goan specialties. Also have a yogic instructor for those interested in practicing yoga on the beach while staying. Ayurvedic massages and treatments are also provided to release body aches and pains. Sunday lunches here are accompanied by a live band. This pet-friendly resort also arranges dolphin viewing and fishing trips. A sanctuary for the discerning traveller it is also a venue for creative weddings, theme birthday parties, corporate dinners and social gatherings.

**Contact (Alvin): +91 9822150847**

**Website: [www.montegobaygoa.com](http://www.montegobaygoa.com)**

**S**et in the picturesque environs of the serene Morjim Beach, overlooking the historic riverside Chapora Fort, Montego Bay Beach resort offers visitors some unique holiday experiences. Its beachside location is also famed for the annual nesting of the Olive Ridley turtles—giving the beach another name—Turtle Beach. Not only the resort ideal for experiencing this phenomenal event, it's also a great haven for birding enthusi-



## Luxury Boat and Yacht rides in Goa

Goa's backwaters and hinterland are stunning, historical, authentic and still completely unchanged. Discover the nature trails by taking a guided boat tour of the area. Visualize a 360 degree picturesque scene and colourful parallel shores on either side as you experience both sunrise and sunset. Glimpse the shoals of fish beneath the flowing water or spot crocodiles amidst the mangroves. Experience the beautiful confluence of river Mandovi and the Arabian Sea. Sailing through the Goan waters in this Private Open Speed Boat offers you the perfect pace to see many of the delights of the nature and even better if your cruise has designated stop-offs for you to take a closer look. Evening cruises are the perfect ending to an already amazing day.

For a romantic evening cruise, dinner dates or celebrations and be it a couple, family, group of friends or a solo traveler Rediscovery Cruises offers customized rides for all. From options like Exclusive sunset ride, Romantic dinner cruise, Anniversary celebration cruise, Exclusive fishing trip, etc., enjoy sailing the beautiful waters of Goa.

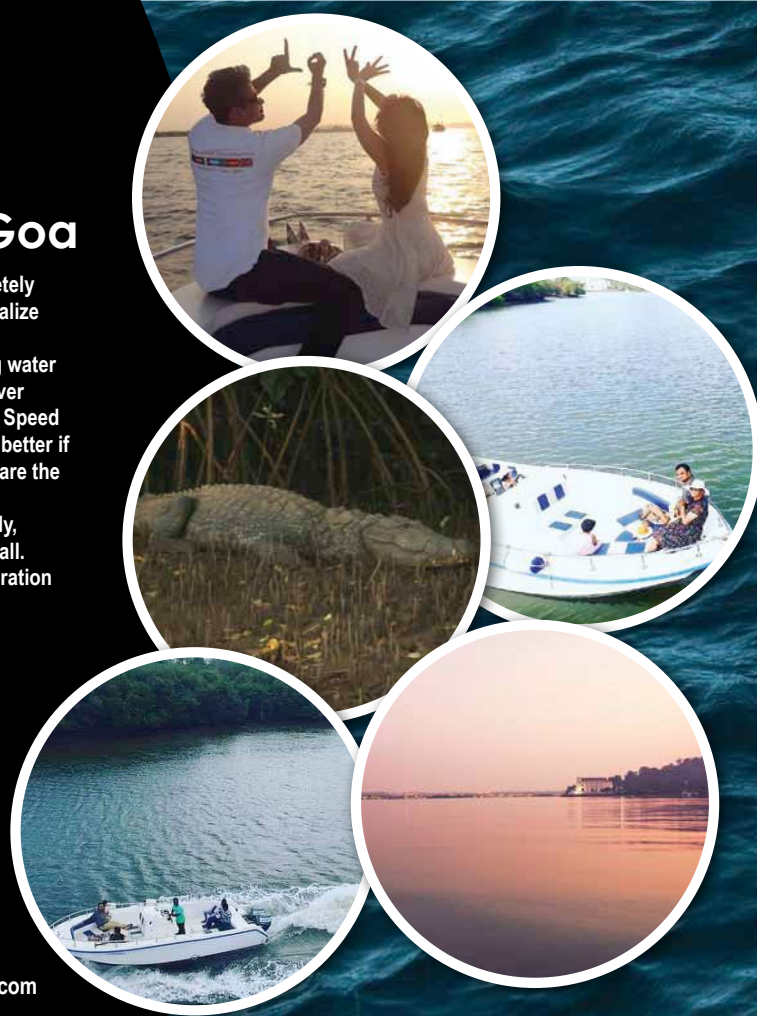
### Where to explore:

- Inside the Mapusa river, with Mangroves on both the sides and along beautiful Goan villages. Here you will also spot crocodiles and some bird species along the way
- Cruise along the beautiful Ribandar stretch, with Ponte De Linhares on one side and overlooking the Salim Ali Bird Sanctuary on the other

**Highly rated on TripAdvisor (2nd among 48 boat tours in Goa)**

**Contact: 7710097699 / 9422740092**

**Email ID: [rediscoverycruises@gmail.com](mailto:rediscoverycruises@gmail.com) | Website: [www.rediscoverycruises.com](http://www.rediscoverycruises.com)**





GRAND | HYATT  
GOA

## Grander Than Ever

*Sprawling greens that open up to the visually stunning waters of the Bambolim Bay, plush interiors, customised services and a variety of recreation and food options, with all this and more, Grand Hyatt Goa is the perfect amalgamation of luxury, comfort and serenity.*

Culture, cuisine, festivity and a collection of unique experiences—Grand Hyatt Goa is about all this and more. A truly enchanting destination resort and spa, it is set along the calm waters of the Bambolim Bay; and is conveniently located between North and South Goa amidst lush green lawns.

Lavishly spread across 28 acres of tropical gardens and lush lawns that roll down to the water's edge of the bay, Grand Hyatt Goa is a contemporary resort and spa built in the quintessential architectural style of a 17th century Indo-Portuguese palace. Grand in scale and design, the resort is a destination spa with 19 treatment suites offering Thai, Balinese and Indian treatments and boasts of the largest banquet facilities in Goa. The splendidly appointed rooms and suites in the resort blend spectacular water views with the grand elegance of Indo-Portuguese architecture and the warm hospitality of a traditional Goan residence offering you the perfect ambience to relax in the chill shores of Goa.

With a selection of seven restaurants and bars, an extensive spa, a versatile recreational menu, a sailing centre and casino, there is no dearth of the things you can do at Grand Hyatt. Begin the day with yoga and live music at the Lifestyle Studio, followed by activities like sailing, wall climbing, aqua zorbing, zoccer, archery, scuba diving, Zip-line, Flying Fox, Wild Web Rope Course and so much more. There are plenty of family friendly activities and Camp Hyatt ensures children never run out of fun things to do under the supervision of our trained staff when staying at this resort.

With all the facilities that Grand Hyatt Goa has to offer, this exclusive property is the perfect backdrop for anyone to take a step back in time and indulge in endless luxury under the starry skies of Northern Goa.

Address:  
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Bambolim, North Goa,  
Goa, India, 403206  
Tel: +91 832 301 1234







**L**iving the life of leisure on a grand scale is best experienced in one of Goa's top hospitality establishments. The Grand Hyatt Goa brings to the experience the full measure of its expertise in pampering guests—be it in the kind of rooms and in-facilities-and-service it provides, the food, the leisure activities, the fitness facilities—add to that a wonderful location—in this case—overlooking the Bambolim Bay, midway between South and North Goa. This luxury hotel features whitewashed walls, stuccowork details and modern amenities. The beautifully appointed rooms and suites open up on delicious bay views, urging you to linger a bit for some rejuvenating me-

time, before joining the world in the hotel's public spaces. Meals are a rare indulgence, with a range of delectable options, served with impeccable service in their select restaurants and bars. The Shamana Spa tempts you to indulge in one of their signature body and face treatments; in fact they have spa packages on offer which provide a combination of massages, traditional body scrubs and facials—all prepared using fresh ingredients. An inviting pool and lush gardens round out the hotel's offerings.

**Contact Tel: 91 832 301 1234**

**Website: [www.goa.grand.hyatt.com](http://www.goa.grand.hyatt.com)**

## *Devaaya Ayurveda and Nature* **CURE CENTRE - GOA, INDIA**

**C**ombining a vacation with a bit of care-taking of one's health has become a big trend—especially if you need to take time out from the stress of running a business or your home. Goa, reputed for its sunny disposition, is just the place to go for that much needed 'Wellness Holiday'. Located on the serene Divar Island, 10km from Panjim, the Devaaya Ayurveda and Nature Cure Centre, a unit of Goa's Alcon Victor Group is set on a verdant sprawl of five acres and features 60 luxurious rooms built in traditional Goan-style cottages with river view or garden views and a swimming pool. Apart from offering authentic Ayurveda and Naturopathy treatments and therapies, to help rejuvenate the body, mind and spirit Devaaya also provides advanced yoga courses. Meals served here are designed by a team of doctors and executed by professional chefs. You can opt for one of their



attractive treatment packages (7N /min) to get the best benefits of the wellness programmes.

**Contact Tel: +91(0)832 2280500**

**Website: [www.devaaya.com](http://www.devaaya.com)**



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Goa in a resort

[www.cidadedegoa.com](http://www.cidadedegoa.com)



# Scuba Evolution India



**L**ocated near Candolim Beach, this Scuba Diving Resort offers exceptional scuba experiences and also conducts PADI and SSI Certification Courses. Scuba Evolution India is the first dive resort on mainland India to offer accommodation and diving under the same management. Learning to dive here is a phenomenal experience. If you are not quite ready to take the plunge into a certification course you can begin with 'Discover / Try Scuba Diving' program. This begins your introduction to this thrilling experience. It includes a little theory and briefing on the dive, after which you get your first scuba dive in a pool that will help you get used to being underwater. During the pool dive, you

will learn some underwater skills, and get comfortable in the dive gear. When they feel you are ready to venture out into this cosy world they'll take you on a boat and head out to the local dive sites around Grande Island. The dolphins you might see playing around and the beautiful coastline views, during your boat ride are a sweet bonus. Charges are: INR 5,000 which includes equipment rental, pool training, sea dive (of 30 to 40 min), underwater photographs, boat charges, snacks and water, and certificate of completion.

**Contact Tel:** +91-9820004441

**Website:** [www.scubaevolutionindia.com](http://www.scubaevolutionindia.com)

## Cidade de GOA

**I**t's beautiful seaside 40-acre sprawl, just 10 minutes from Panjim, has captured many exuberant moments of holidaying families down the decades. An evergreen favourite, despite the growing competition, Cidade offers holidaymakers the quintessential Goa experience—sun, sand, sea... the promise of delicious food and entertainment—all wrapped up as an enticing package of traditional Goan "susegad"—a spirit and passion for life. Designed by renowned architect Charles Correa the resort, punctuated by cozy alcoves overhanging balconies and vibrant murals, features beautifully furnished rooms and suites opening up on sea views. Meals here are special here too...after all it's easy to fling aside diets and the like when you are on holiday... and Cidade's array of restaurants know just how to indulge you with their signature haute-cuisine specialties, inventive take on local favourites, the finest of wines and spirits. Tuck into beachside barbeques and savour the drinks as theme night entertainment add their own measure of charm to the Cidade



experience Time for one more indulgence—the Clube Saúde with its line-up of Swedish body massages, holistic ayurvedic treatments and an art gym.

**Contact Tel:** +91 -832-2454545

**Website:** [www.cidadedegoa.com](http://www.cidadedegoa.com)







# A Blissful Treat

Morjim beach is one of the most beautiful beaches in North Goa to relax and unwind. It's a poets' paradise with sky changing colors and sun setting in. Located south to Ashwem beach, this secluded beach provides you harmony and tranquility on its silvery sands under the golden rays in midst of the sound of the waves. The serene atmosphere on the shores of the beach is enhanced with the sight of a majestic sunset, when the beach shines with the last bits of rays and the sky becomes a spectacular sight in itself.

Imagine waking up to the sight of this alluring beach with cool breeze flowing in. Surrounded by greenery and the ocean; well trained and congenial staff, freedom to just be, it's location on a road less traveled makes **Montego Bay Beach Village** an absolute delight. The serene feeling that you will get here is something that you won't get to experience anywhere else. Nestled in the midst of lush green locales, one can escape the hustle-bustle of city life. Log Cabins, Luxury Tents, Casa de Mudanc'a, and a Beach Villa spread over an area of 100,000 sq ft of beach front property, in a coconut grove bordering the white sands of Morjim beach, you have various options for

everything you require. The hardest decision you'll have to make while staying here is beachfront or poolside.

A charming ocean front property, Montego Bay is 20 minutes from Calangute and 30 minutes from the Capital City of Goa, Panjim. A sanctuary for the discerning traveler, it is also popularly known for fresh sea food and authentic goan dishes. More reason to cheer as the Bar overlooks the beach and serves a wide array of exotic cocktails. Ayurvedic massages and treatments are provided to release body aches and pains. Also have a yogic instructor for those interested in practicing yoga on the beach while staying. If you love your pets then get them along as this resort is pet friendly. **Montego Bay Beach Village** is not only an ideal getaway to unwind but also a venue for creative weddings, theme birthday parties, corporate dinners and social gatherings. This exclusive resort has the power to magically dismiss the stress that builds up on our souls and makes for a heavenly holiday.

This is bliss.







# THE LAST BOOKSTORE

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IT'S AN IRONIC NAME, BUT NOT THAT FAR FROM THE TRUTH.  
**POORNA & BRINDA** DISCOVER A WORLD OF BOOKISH WONDERS

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**T**he sign in front of the building in downtown Los Angeles was intriguing. On the glass window was written: "We buy and sell books and records". Peeping through the window, we could see an array of books in shelves in a big hall. Naturally, we had to enter.

The first thing that strikes you when you enter The Last Bookstore is the size of this place—22,000 sq ft spread over two floors. Located in a heritage building—in what once housed the Citizens National Bank and is now known as the Spring Arts

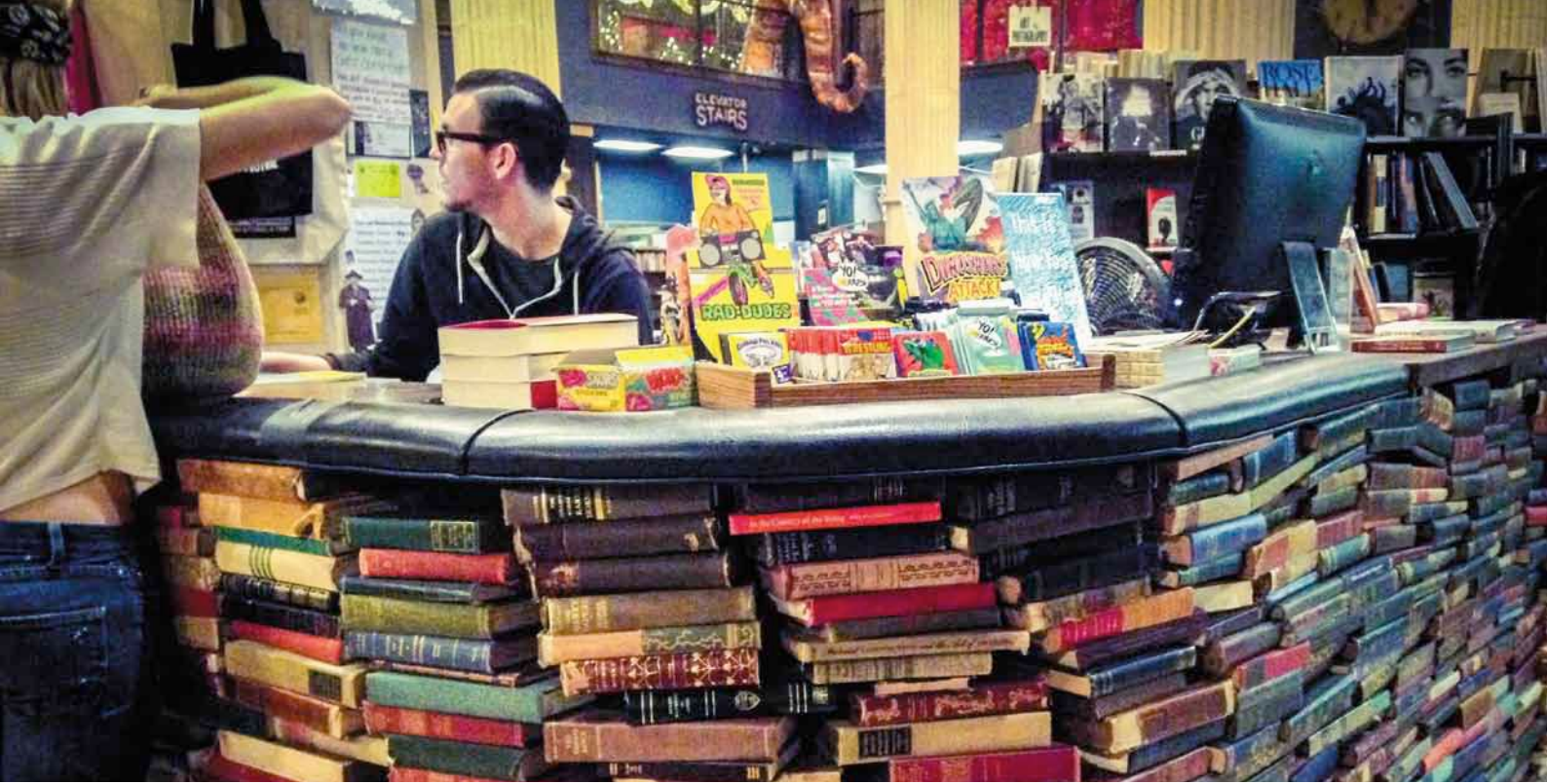
Tower—we are in a place where books are a passion. The white columns inside rise 25ft to the vaulted ceilings. Original marble tile floors feature the sort of uneven wear that makes the place more charming. The cashier's desk catches our eye. The base is supported by books.

This is the third avatar of The Last Bookstore, which was started in 2005 by Josh Spencer, who used to sell books, CDs and other stuff on eBay from a building in the Old Bank District. When he moved the store to its current location, two bookshops in Los Angeles had announced

closures that same month, and downtown's Metropolis Books went up for sale. Spencer didn't go into this business with any strategy and he's aware of the risks. "People look at all this," he told Los Angeles Downtown News, "and think we're rolling in the dough. They don't realise I've used all the debt I can, from everywhere, to open this. We're doing okay, but not great." He added: "Whether we last will depend on if the community supports us. Right now, they're supporting us."

We walk into the Arts & Rare Books Annex, a new addition. Specially created





## ORIGINAL MARBLE TILES FEATURE UNEVEN WEAR, THE CASHIER'S DESK IS SUPPORTED BY A BASE OF BOOKS

for books on arts, architecture, photography, design or about anything related to arts, there is a goldmine waiting for you here. The coffee table books on arts are sold at throwaway prices. Thrillingly, we see a first edition of *Lolita* and one of *The Jungle Book*! Collectors' items such as these come with a hefty price tag.

One of the great things about the place is the way the books are arranged. It is beautifully done, like any good library in America, and finding a title is not difficult. At many places we see the sign: "If you could not find it, ask us for it". The staff is friendly and knowledgeable.

We come to the central hall. Stray beams of light come streaming through the tall glass windows. Chairs and couches are placed in the centre of the store, though a sign warns: "Please note: we are not a library. 1 hour time limit for chairs & couches. No sleeping. You damage the books, you buy them."

This message, however, doesn't detract from the store's warmth and larger message: that all are welcome.

We continue our browsing. We pick up

the 1935 edition of the classic *The Amenities of Book-Collecting and Kindred Affections* by A. Edward Newton for \$3! (It sells at \$33 on Amazon.) We had to resist the temptation to buy more than once as we were mindful of the flight back to Bengaluru after two days. Walking and browsing inside the store is a treat. We look up to see an astonishing installation, 'A Wave', made of books. Hung from the ceiling, it is fabulous.

We take the stairs to the first floor which has books on history, politics, sports and other subjects. Even as we climb up, we notice another fascinating installation: a printed paper roll hung from the ceiling in an uneven pattern.

But the best is yet to come. As we enter the floor, we see a hole with books neatly arranged around it—here's your photo opportunity! There is a book kept for you to read when your picture can be clicked from the other side of the hole. Then we pass through a 'Tunnel of Books'. Yes, it is indeed a tunnel created by books arranged overhead!

We walk down and head straight to the records section. Stacks of vintage LPs of

From far left: an installation with books; the Tunnel of Books; and the bookish checkout counter

all the famous musicians you can name! We hearken to the sight of the beautiful *Self Portrait* by Bob Dylan. We also notice old LPs of a few Bollywood movies.

As the name suggests, The Last Bookstore may be one of the last of its kind. With books being sold online, many bookshops have closed their shutters. As Spencer says, it is the love of the people which is sustaining his passion. A passion for books. By a book lover for other book lovers of the world.



Poorna served in the army and currently works in IT. Brinda is a banker. While Brinda takes photos, Poorna is the official driver. They love to quote Stevenson, "For my part, I travel not to go anywhere, but to go. I travel for travel's sake. The great affair is to move."



# THE WORLD'S BEST PAELLA

OR WAS IT? **MRIGANKA KALITA** HAS AN ADVENTUROUS  
EVENING IN A CITY MADE FOR NOIR

GETTY IMAGES



**B**arri Gothic, or the Gothic Quarter of Barcelona, can be the setting for any noir film your imagination can dream up. As I walked down a narrow cobbled lane on a chilly December night, I couldn't help thinking that a trench coat and fedora would have been more appropriate than my jacket and

muffler. A lit cheroot would also have been suitable. Along with a steely gaze and gravelly voice. And a double-crossing femme fatale with a Beretta.

A low growl from my belly hauled me back to the present. I had lost track of time photographing the nooks and corners of Barri Gothic. It was only when I heard shutters

being downed that I swiftly headed towards an eatery near my apartment. It was small but served delicious fare at prices that didn't make my eyes water. But I arrived only in time to say buenas noches to the owner who had just finished padlocking the café. He directed me to a square where I was certain to find some restaurants open.



I found myself at a brightly lit plaza that wore the demeanour of a wealthy man who knows that recession or not, he'd always be in business. Only one restaurant was open. And it looked like it had a Michelin-star or two. Members of the swish set were enjoying their tapas and wine. A lady in red was plunking at a piano in a desultory manner while smiling brightly at no one in particular. I risked a glance at the menu displayed helpfully on a wooden stand: a meal here would blow a hole the size of Barcelona in my travel budget.

I then hurtled down an alleyway inhabited by caterwauling cats and mysterious shadows. I was a bit desperate now. It was then that I spotted Felip standing below a neon sign that declared it to be a cafeteria. Before I could ask whether it was open, Felip bowed, clicked his heels and threw the door open. But not before he cast a glance up and down the street. It was mildly thrilling. I might have been meeting a key witness who would likely have died before the evening was over because he had the poisoned rabbit stew that was meant for me.

Dapper Felip looked like he had also just finished casting for a period film. He fixed a goggling eye and a twitching eyebrow on me and recommended the house speciality: paella, the one dish that everybody knows is Spanish.

"I had paella for lunch. Can you recommend something else?" I asked, mindful of 'beggars and choosers'.

"You haven't had my paella," Felip declared haughtily, "It's the best paella in the entire Catalan region."

"Is Catalan paella different from Spanish paella?"

Felip looked like he'd had an appendectomy without anaesthesia. His voice almost trembled as he said, "Catalans are not Spanish. We have our own language, culture and cuisine. We were arm-twisted to become a part of Spain. But soon we'll be independent. Madrid is nothing compared to Barcelona." Felip went on for at least 10 minutes on how Catalans were more enterprising, hardworking and successful than the Spanish. He ended with, "I am a proud Catalan and I'd like very much to



serve you our special Catalan paella."

I was too hungry to discuss this further. I weakly nodded consent. Felip clicked his heels and marched off. I finally got a chance to look around. Despite the humble signage outside, the place was quite large. And empty. There was not even a waiter in sight. Then I heard a woman's voice. A matronly woman appeared holding a plate of grilled potatoes and another with shrunken eggs (I learnt later that they were quails' eggs).

"Tapas," she smiled. Tapas or appetisers are a staple of Spanish/Catalan cuisine. They could be cold or hot and range from fried chorizo, seafood, quails' eggs to mixed cheese and olives. I started wolfing them down. The potato cubes had enough salt in them to rival the Dead Sea. The woman decided that she had exhausted her social manners for the day by saying "tapas" and smiling and retreated to a corner to watch TV.

Felip returned. He waved at some imaginary diners, stumbled against a chair and somehow regained his balance before his nose harpooned a quail egg. But he gathered himself together and announced that the special paella would be served now. He cast a glance at the woman who was obviously thirsty. She was downing copious amounts of the house sangria. Felip clicked his heels and again marched off.

The Catalan paella was good. Hearty. No complaints, except that I found four

*Facing page: a picturesque square in the Gothic Quarter of Barcelona; and (above) a dish of paella*

mussel shells but only two morsels of mussel meat. But was it the best paella I had ever had? Hard to say, considering I had eaten paella exactly thrice before. Felip, however, was having none of that ambivalence. He kept repeating, "Best paella, no? Catalan paella." I nodded vigorously.

The talk show had changed to a news programme. An anchor was laughing hysterically. As I scooped up the last of the paella, Felip presented the bill with a flourish. I winced. But then I reasoned with myself. This was no ordinary dish. It was the best paella in all of Spain. A bargain, really.



Dubai-based adman Mriganka Kalita escapes the world of deadlines by travelling. He calls travel an act of faith. And tries to capture the essence of places through photos and blogs.



# A DAY IN RUSKINLAND

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A LONG-CHERISHED DREAM COMES TRUE FOR  
**DHRITIPRIYA RAY DASGUPTA**

---

I am sitting in a quaint, stone-floored café overlooking a verdant ravine in the Himalayas. The 7,700-odd feet lend coolness to the sunny September afternoon. I am writing on a piece of paper at the back of which our helpful Mussoorie hotel manager has drawn a rough map.

The map shows the road through Landour Bazaar. Past pucca stalls of greengrocers, past the tired looking bakery with pink- and yellow-iced pastries of uncertain vintage. Becoming narrower, the road climbs steadily even as the buildings on either side hem it in and reaches a fork. The right branch goes towards Dhanaulti. The left branch loops around, climbing further between old houses and reaching the brightly coloured Doma's Café. Behind the café is Ruskin Bond's house.

At this point I could safely leave the reader, saying, Mr Bond, like his namesake in espionage, needs no introduction. But the temptation to talk about one's favourite author is too strong. 'Gentle reader', as he often addresses millions like me in India and across the world, creates an understanding that is unique. A favourite with children, I was introduced to his writing in my thirties, when a friend lent me *Rain in the Mountains*.

In his world, geraniums quivering

in the breeze, birds on the hillside, are celebrated. A constable trying to get his boss's literary efforts published to cage a transfer, or a schoolmaster helping out failed students with pass certificates are recounted with loving detail. To these I have returned time and again. Each time rediscovering the mint-fresh beauty of the Himalayas.

I have for long harboured a desire to meet my favourite author. Mr Bond is truly living his dream, amid the mountainous locales he has been writing about for 65 years—for he just turned 82. So I booked tickets, packed my bags with my favourite Bond classics, *Love among the Bookshelves* and *Tales of the Open Road*, and convinced my husband to come along.

IN RUSKIN BOND'S  
 WORLD, GERANIUMS  
 QUIVER IN THE  
 BREEZE, BIRDS CHIRP  
 ON THE HILLSIDE.  
 A SCHOOLMASTER  
 HELPS OUT FAILED  
 STUDENTS

For Landour was full of ghosts, if the writer is to be believed.

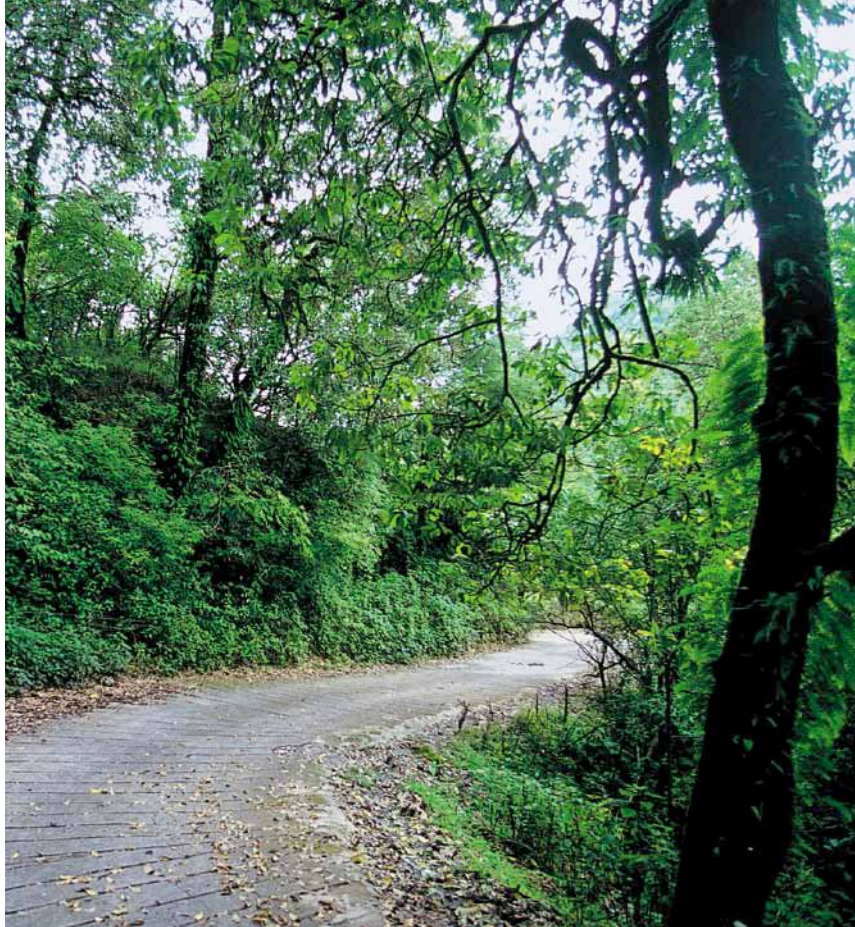
We reached Mussoorie at twilight. Our hotel on the top of a hill on Oaks Road was like an isle of peace. Lights glittered in the Doon Valley and atop Depot Hill lay spread a bird's-eye view of Ruskinland at its bewitching best.

That morning I woke from a fitful sleep at 4.30am. Would I be able to meet the author? Ruskin Bond is not a recluse. But to live as he did required the temperament of a hermit. So was it a good idea to disturb such a person in his reclusive abode? Sleep eluded me. I got up and emerged into the cool mountain morning.

Climbing down a rough pathway on the hillside, behind the hotel I found myself facing the Wynberg Allen Girls School. When he left his job in Delhi, initially Bond lived in the Maplewood Lodge on the hillside below the school. I remembered the stories told about the quiet abode, the window seat, the huge half-burnt maple tree where woodpeckers toiled through the day. But Maplewood proved as elusive a sighting as the Himalayan thrush, whose dulcet tones I could clearly hear.

We started for Landour at about 9.30am in the rain-washed sunny morning. Doma's Café is easily found. Painted blue and white, the windows festooned with Tibetan prayer flags, it





DILIP BANERJEE



*Clockwise from top: winding paths such as these are rife in Mussoorie; rosy-cheeked schoolchildren frolic on hill roads; transport awaits the traveller at the main marketplace in Mussoorie; and a view of the verdant Doon Valley*



PHOTOGRAPHS BY SANJOY GHOSH



dominated the landscape. The author's home, Ivy Cottage, adjoins the café. With whitewashed walls and arched windows, the edges picked out in bright red, described by the writer in many of his anecdotes, the cottage is unmistakable.

I stood there taking it all in. Climbing up the famous red steps, my heart thumping, I rang the bell. Rakesh (Mr Bond's adoptive son) answered the door. "Mr Bond is sleeping, resting," he said. I looked at him, too overcome to protest. But my husband disclosed the story of our quest: "We have travelled all the way from Kolkata, only to meet Mr Bond for two minutes."

"Come back in the evening," Rakesh relented.

Thus brushed off but not discouraged, I set out to explore the place where most of Ruskin Bond's essays are based. We took the road which goes to the right, leaving Ivy Cottage behind. To our right the steep fall of a gorge, with graceful tall pines and deodars, 'tree of the Gods', rising up from the valley below. I am no poet, so I fall back on Joyce Kilmer: "A tree which looks at God all day/ And lifts her leafy arms to pray...." Moss and lichen festooned the trees like giant green streamers. Remnants of the morning rain glistened on the shaggy branches. The woods gave off the sweet scent of conifers. I could understand why the British chose this pristine spot and made it a home for their battle-weary soldiers.

Soon we reached Char Dukan, the town centre with the bank, post office and a few shops. It also has St Paul's Church, the quaint little structure which leaps at you when you search for Landour on the net. St Paul's is tidy with polished woodwork. I browsed amid pews and wondered if Mr Bond came here to pray.

From here we climbed to Lal Tibba. Pine needles padded the path, muffling our footfall. At a humble café at the top, we were ceremoniously ushered on to the terrace. Silvery white clouds floated in the azure sky.



The resident photographer, dozing in the sun, approached us, "Nice photo?" When we politely declined, he receded to his corner without demur. Perhaps it is the tranquillity of the mountains. It humbles you and makes you more receptive of what comes your way.

We continued, crossing Rokeby Manor, home of Pahari Wilson, who

*The ever-affable Ruskin Bond; and twilight over Mussoorie's main market*

I was keen to explore this place as Bond had lived there for some time before moving to Ivy Cottage. But instead of the peaceful surroundings, he found the mountains buzzing with writers—published or aspiring to publication. From retired brigadier to reclusive actress, they, by their combined literary efforts, tried to put Bond "out of business!"

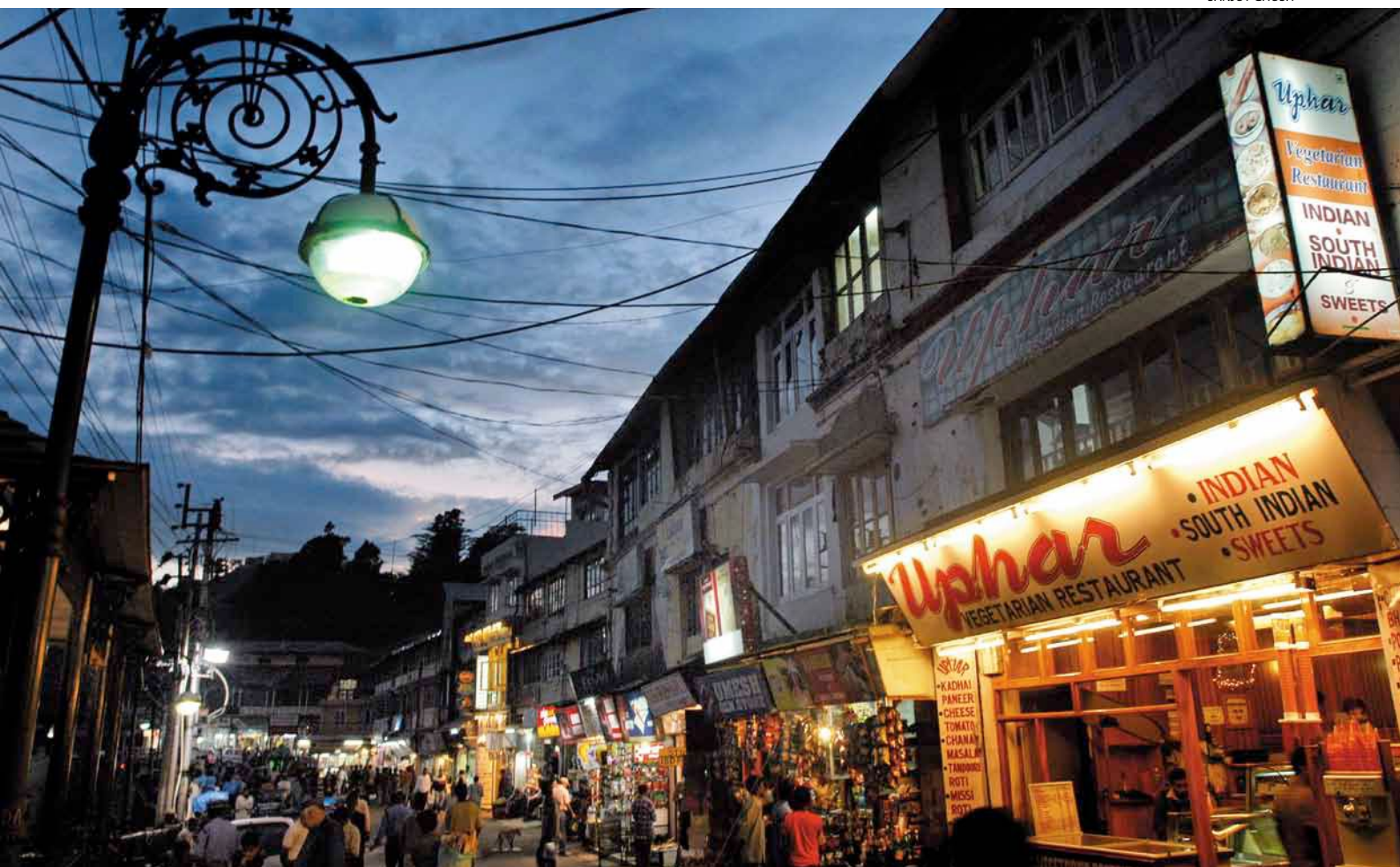
Sisters Bazaar got its name from the Dormitory of the Nurses, built circa 1827, to care for the wounded soldiers of the British Empire. The bazaar is a quiet narrow street and is home to Prakash Stores which finds mention in many of Bond's essays. I bought apricot preserve and honey roasted almonds. Evening still far away, we decided to while away the cool, lazy mountain afternoon at Chardukan. This time I chose Ivy Café.

I RANG THE BELL A  
SECOND TIME TO  
AWAIT MY DESTINY. A  
LADY SAID, "MR BOND  
IS NOT BACK YET. COME  
BACK AFTER HALF AN  
HOUR." BUT I AM AN  
ETERNAL OPTIMIST

made his fortune by introducing apples and the Landour Language School to India. Lunch was bun omelette and cheese toast at Anil's Café, after which we headed to Sisters Bazaar.

Which brings me back to where I started. I am penning my impressions of Bond country as I saw it—from Landour Bazaar with the peanut vendor in the windy corner, who always has hot crisp peanuts to quiet St Paul's Church. I am again waiting to





meet Mr Bond.

Soon it was time to retrace our steps. I rang the bell a second time to await my destiny. A lady opened the door, “Mr Bond is not back yet. Come after half an hour, he may come back by then.”

As we went down the steps, I cast back in my memory, to think if I ever wanted something so much and it did not happen. The eternal optimist in me could not think of a single instance.

At our final sortie, my husband rang the bell. As I stood two steps below, I could see someone in a dressing gown coming to the door with slow, deliberate steps. The door opened. A kindly face beamed at us. Ruskin Bond!

“We have come from Kolkata. My wife is an ardent admirer of your books,” my husband said.

I suddenly found my tongue too, “Sir, please keep writing the good stuff that we

so love to read. Thank you for writing.”

“That I have to do,” he thanked us, signed the books and posed graciously.

I told him that we walked in all the places I had read about.

“I do not walk much these days,” Bond said wistfully.

As we thanked him and went down the red steps, I suddenly realised how much this meeting meant to me. Joyful and content, we took the road leading back to Mussoorie. The sunset revealed a wonderful rainbow.

Next morning it was time to head back to the plains. But deep down there was a kernel of peace. As we passed through the dusty roads and negotiated our way past thundering trucks, the mind kept wandering back. To a quaint village tucked away in the hills, lost in the mists of time. A man looking at the tall deodars, blue pines, at foxes dancing in the

moonlight, at an old kitemaker snoozing in the sun and putting it all in his writing. Silently I wished Mr Bond well. May he continue to weave his magic. 📖



Chartered accountant Dhritipriya Ray Dasgupta travelled across India for two insurance companies for almost 12 years. A prolific reader, amateur writer and travel enthusiast, she quit her job in 2015 to start her own CA firm. Her hobbies include reading and playing golf.



# LAND'S END

**AMBIKA VISHWANATH AND HOSHNER REPORTER VISIT A FAR CORNER THAT PACKS A GEOLOGICAL AND MYTHOLOGICAL PUNCH**

**O**n the southern coast of Tamil Nadu is a thin sliver of land, which protrudes into the sea like a needle pointing towards Sri Lanka. This is Dhanushkodi, accessible from the mainland through the island of Pamban, better known as Rameswaram. Famous for its temple, Rameswaram is also frequented by the curious who travel here to see the ghost town of Dhanushkodi.

Just 10-odd-km long, Dhanushkodi has an importance in Indian mythology that is far greater than the land mass it occupies. It is here that Rama is said to have built his bridge to cross into Lanka. Dhanushkodi, from its tip, lies less than 30km from Sri Lanka. Satellite

images and geographical studies show that from that tip there exist a number of sandbanks, reefs and shoals that trace a fairly continuous line all the way to the Sri Lankan island of Mannar. This geographical feature is referred to as Adam's Bridge (most of India would call it Rama's Bridge). Some historical accounts state that, till the 15th century, this 'bridge' was almost completely above water and could be crossed by foot, until sections of it were washed away by a cyclone in 1480.

We set out from Rameswaram to explore the famous tip of Dhanushkodi. The narrow road is lined by a thin strip of sand and then the sea. In parts there are low bushes and thorny

shrubs, followed by the endless sea in myriad shades of blue. After driving for about 20km, the road ends and regular vehicles can go no further. From this point you transfer to a 4x4 minibus, as the journey is now over a series of sandbanks. And this is where it gets quite surreal.

We pile into the minibus, packed to capacity with a mix of pilgrims, day trippers, screeching children and the odd curious person like us. The bus is a modified Mahindra vehicle that has seen better times. It smells of kerosene fumes, and features metal benches and windows simply stuck into place. We sit next to the driver, and perched on a box over the gearshift is a man who



*Fishermen at sea*

PHOTOGRAPHS: GETTY IMAGES



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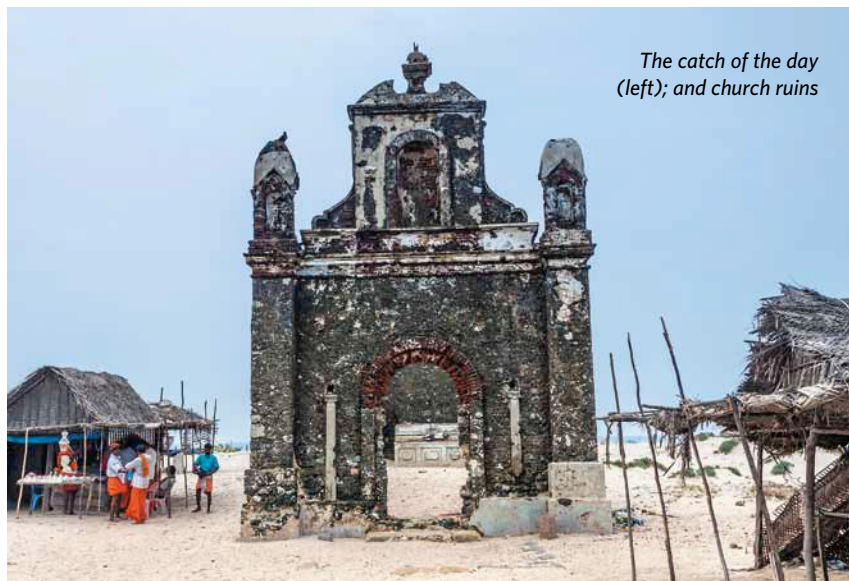
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The catch of the day (left); and church ruins

## HALF A CENTURY AGO, A CYCLONE SWEEPED THIS HAMLET, KILLING MOST RESIDENTS AND SUBMERGING THE VILLAGE

barks the usual questions to us in a mix of Tamil and broken English. Where you from? What you do? Why only two of you? No children? Our conversation thankfully ends swiftly due to our limited shared vocabulary, and we stare out of the window.

We meander along a narrow strip of beach, rocking violently from side to side, as waves lap at the wheels. Small birds splash around in the shallows, as eagles glide above, occasionally diving towards the white foam as they spot a catch. Every so often the driver veers sharply into the water which elicits whoops of excitement from the children and shrieks from the women. At various points in the journey the water is halfway up the wheel and splashes into the cabin from the holes in the rusted floor. While there may have been a good reason for the driver to steer off into the water, it is not evident to us, and we surmise that this is a way for him to alleviate his boredom, and also perhaps provide the passengers with some excitement. The sky turns grey, the wind picks up and the clouds start pelting us with rain. There is pandemonium as people attempt to shut their windows and children start

yelling. We encounter a couple of bikers stuck in the sand. Our driver grins malevolently and curses at them in Tamil with a “you-should-have-taken-my-rust-trap-you-morons” expression. The bikers glare back but cannot do much else as their macho Enfields rev, sputter and die, filling the air with fumes and sand.

After 45 minutes, we reach the ghost town of Dhanushkodi. Half a century ago a cyclone swept this tiny hamlet, killing most of its occupants and submerging large parts of the village. It has been uninhabited since. We walk among the ruins, clutching our jackets around us to protect against the rain. A few odd structures remain—a large stone gate, the façade of a church, railroad tracks, courtyards and walls of broken homes. But we see beauty in devastation. Dhanushkodi was once a bustling village, and the rail tracks from Rameswaram extended all the way here. Work is underway to restore parts of the old tracks, and build a better road to Dhanushkodi (it has since been completed). Vendors desultorily sell tea, biscuits, seashells and trinkets.

The dark grey skies and slow drizzle add to the melancholy as one reflects on

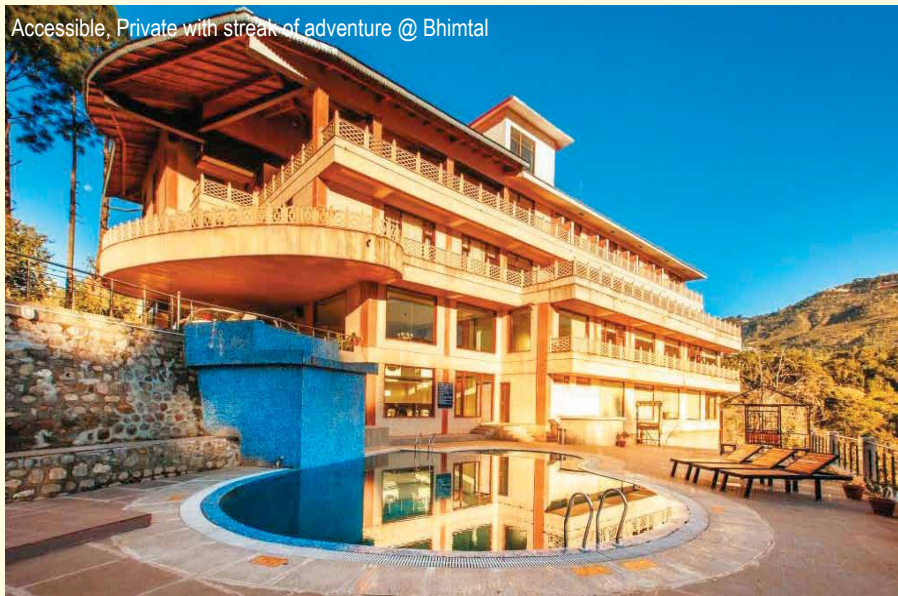
the unpredictable fury of nature. What must it have been like to live here, so far from anything else, so close to land’s edge, at the mercy of the ocean? What would have possessed the inhabitants of Dhanushkodi to persist, on this thin sliver of land, with what would surely have been an omnipresent threat of annihilation hanging over their heads? We left with all sorts of thoughts swirling in our heads, and hopped back into the van for another bumpy ride back to the cold comfort of civilisation.



Ambika Vishwanath and Hoshner Reporter quit their jobs to explore India. They believe there is a story in every corner of the country and are on the road to find one. With Mumbai as their base, their joyful wandering gives the duo a chance to combine their love for travel with storytelling.



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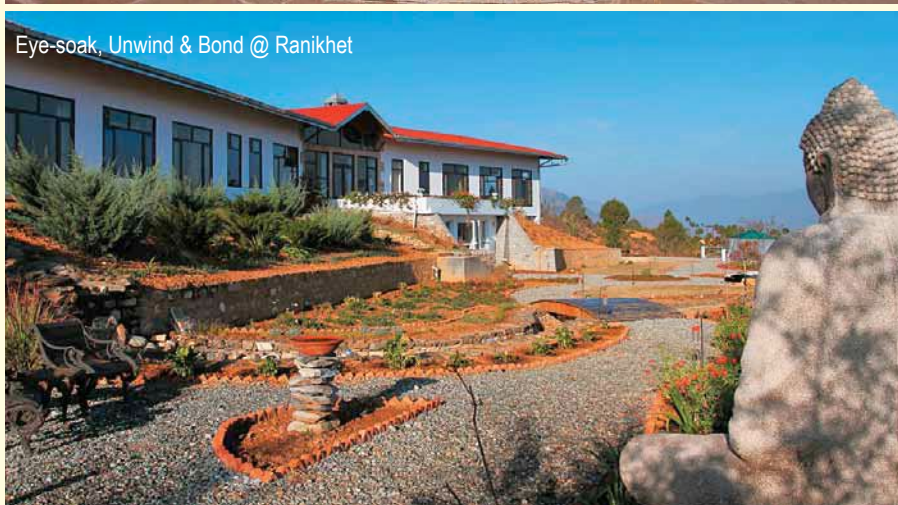
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# LAST REFUGE

THE RESIDENCY ECHOES WITH THE PAIN OF THE PAST BUT OFFERS A TRANQUIL RETREAT IN THE PRESENT, SAYS **AVNI SHRIVASTAV**

*The year is 1857. There is darkness all around. The silence is deafening, after the torturous sounds of shelling, screaming and wailing. This is the silence of the soul. A month has gone by like this and so have the men with whom he had shared food, shelter, laughter and sorrows. Of the 3,000 people seeking shelter about half are still alive; the rest surrounded him in the form of mangled bodies and decomposing corpses. How he wants everything to end. How he wants some food and water. How he hopes for a white-light saviour.*

Sitting under a tamarind tree soaking up the winter sun of January in the manicured lawns of the British Residency in Lucknow, this story plays itself out cinematically in my head. A figment of my overwrought imagination, yes, but surely not so far from the truth of what might have ensued during the siege of 1857.

Over the years, Lucknow has earned a special reputation, for being at the intersection of cultures and laid-back grandeur. But this glorious history is stained red. Celebrated across regions for nawab, adaab (respect), kebab and shabab (beauty), surprisingly few know of the dark deeds hidden behind the ruins of the colonial walls of the British Residency, located in the heart of the city.

The construction of the Residency began in 1775, after the capital of Awadh was shifted to Lucknow from Faizabad. Built over 25 years, its original purpose was to accommodate the British resident and his staff. The construction of the monument was started by Nawab

Asafuddaula and was completed by Nawab Saadat Ali Khan, both rulers eager to have amicable relations with the British. As time passed, more buildings were added to the complex and soon the Residency occupied the highest elevation and became an imposing landmark in the city.

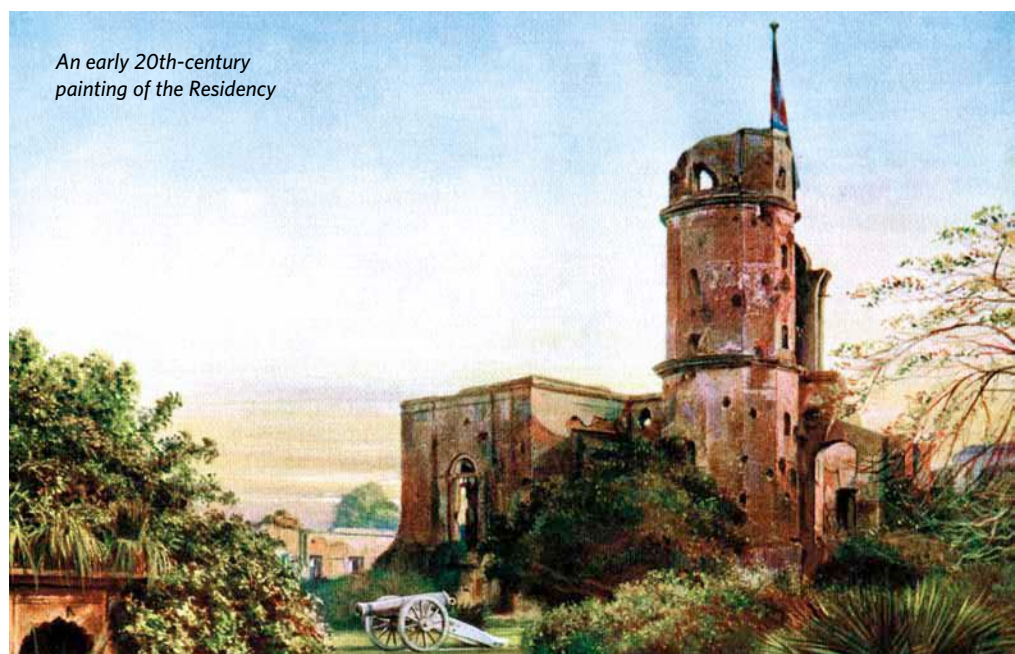
Of all the military engagements in the Revolt of 1857, Lucknow played a central part—the siege at the Residency proved to be the longest and most intense. Continuing for an estimated 90 days, more than 2,000 people living inside the complex died and it took the British armed forces to finally crush the revolt.

Now protected by the Archaeological Survey of India, the complex is an important historical landmark of the city.

While the Bailey Guard Gate still stands tall and imposing, the buildings and structures inside are heavily damaged. Some were razed to the ground due to the shelling.

The 1857 Memorial Museum presents a visual account of the revolt. Featuring lithographs, photographs, paintings, documents and preserved objects such as swords, guns and cannons, the exhibit depicts the significant events as well as portraits of local heroes. The museum also exhibits a scale model of the original buildings. The basement of the building is where the besieged colonisers attempted to take refuge from the mutineers.

Away from the chaos of the beggars and ice cream-wallahs on the main road,



An early 20th-century painting of the Residency

PHOTOGRAPHS: GETTY IMAGES

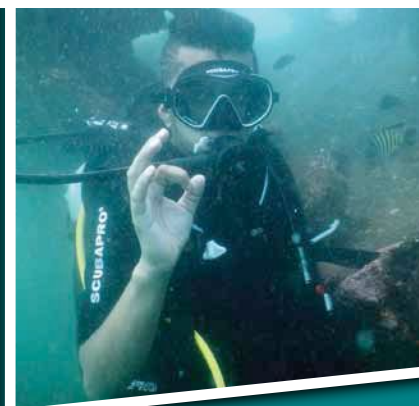


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*In the ruins of the Residency lie many untold tales*

entering from the Bailey Guard Gate, the atmosphere of the place is overpowering. Spread across wide expanses of well-kept lawns, the Treasury House and Dr Fayrer's House are the first two structures that present themselves on either side of a red path that winds to more such monumental ruins ahead.

The buildings, pockmarked by bullets and cannon balls, present a conglomeration of architectural styles and influencing cultures. While retaining the Nawabi style of architecture, they also display British classical styles. Since the initial structures were constructed by the Nawabs, they feature arches and a hint of a labyrinth as seen in the city's other famous landmark, the Bhulbhulaiya of the Bada Imambara. However, an exploration of later buildings reveals Gothic elements characterised by pointed arches. Corridors that stand without roofs reflect perfect symmetry, rib vaults and flying buttresses.

Next to Dr Fayrer's house is Begum Kothi, which served as the residential quarters of the Begum of Nasir-ud-Din Haidar. Behind it lies the mosque and

## THE SITE OF A GREAT MUTINY IS TODAY A SERENE PLACE WITH OLD TREES, GLORIOUS GARDENS AND CRUMBLING RUINS

imambara where she used to worship. A final stop must be at the cemetery, which tells its tales of sorrow and bereavement. Of all the headstones, the most visited is of Sir Henry Lawrence. When the siege began, the British were led by Lawrence but he was killed in a few days. His tombstone honours his last wish: that it read, "Here lies Henry Lawrence, who tried to do his duty. May Lord have mercy on his soul."

For a place that echoes the horrors of a great mutiny, the Residency is today a serene place with beautiful old trees, glorious gardens and crumbling ruins. The red walls enclose a favourite place for youngsters to take their endless

selfies and for couples to enjoy an undisturbed cuddle. Occasionally, one can even see a pre-wedding photo-shoot in progress. Lucknow's Residency is an island of history, offering modern-day tranquillity against a backdrop of violence.



A law student, Avni Shrivastav has been telling tales since her school days. When not studying or writing, she often finds herself in oven mitts whipping up a chocolate treat. Based in Greater Noida, her bucket list includes getting a scuba diving certification, tracing the path of the Mughals from Kabul and eventually settling down in the hills, running a small café. All she needs are a non-fiction book, music, Bollywood films and a steaming cup of masala chai.





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# THE LONG ROAD

AN ANCIENT, WONDROUS CITY LIES AT THE END. **NATASHA PATIDAR** DISCOVERS THE TREASURES OF MANDU

**I**t was sudden, quick and completely unplanned. Clothes, maps, guidebooks, blurred memories and bittersweet nostalgia in our bags and minds, we were ready to drive to Mandavgarh, Madhya Pradesh, India.

I rummaged through the guidebook desultorily. Shoddily printed images of forts and lakes, and pages full of information on rulers who had left their footprints or rather their tombs behind. I wasn't impressed. But my father promised it would be wonderful. This did not sound like my idea of a perfect road trip destination, given that I had been dreaming of the classic Manali-Leh road trip, say, or even Goa. But this place, Mandavgarh aka Mandu, which my father visited some 25 years ago in his youth, didn't feature on my list.

After a long drive uphill on dusty village roads, we finally reached our destination. The first fort I visited had me convinced that I was in for a surprise. I perked up.

Perched along the Vindhya mountain ranges at an altitude of 2,000ft, Mandavgarh was originally the fort capital of the Parmar rulers of Malwa. Towards the end of the 13th century, it came under the control of the Sultans of Malwa, who named it Shadiabad, or 'City of Joy'. The rulers built exquisite and grand palaces like the Jahaz and the Hindola Mahals, baths and pavilions, all as refined as those times of peace and prosperity.


Each of Mandavgarh's structures is an architectural gem: the massive Jami Masjid, and Hoshang Shah's tomb,



which is said to have provided inspiration to the builders of the Taj Mahal centuries later. The monuments scattered throughout the town have minimal ornamentation and decoration on their façades. Though luxury may have been disdained in the buildings, they do not lack for dignity or grandeur.

Mandavgarh is a commemoration in stone of existence and art, and pays homage to the love shared between the Sultan of Malwa, Baz Bahadur, and his beautiful consort, Rani Roopmati. Often called the 'Hampi of Central India' for its treasure trove of ruins, Mandavgarh is one of the most archaic places in Madhya Pradesh, yet is still appealingly off the beaten path.

The green colour soothing the eyes as far as one can see down the Nimar valley, and the little droplets of rain caressing my imagination, Mandavgarh managed to

take my breath away. With a content face I looked at my father. He smiled and was unable to hold back: "I told you so." 



Partial to places by the sea and window seats, Natasha Patidar is a dreamer by heart and a journalist by profession. She has worked with Bloomberg and *The Times of India*. She is based in Vadodara.





*A baobab tree at sunset; and  
(left) Rani Roopmati's Mahal*



# NATURE'S PLAYGROUND

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ROOT BRIDGES, CAVES, DAZZLING RIVERS AND MESMERISING VEGETATION. **GOPALKRISHNAN V.** ENJOYS A MEGHALAYA ADVENTURE

---

I stared wide-eyed at the two bridges. The first was made of bamboo and the second of rusty iron cables; both had steel wires to hold onto for support. A board read “Don’t shake the bridge”, but despite my best efforts to adhere to this instruction, it shook and swung as I walked over it. An unnerving experience to walk on this bridge, suspended 25–30 feet in the air. On the other side of this primitive piece of engineering stood the village of Nongriat, home of the famed double-decker root bridge, one of the most prominent attractions in Meghalaya.

A two-hour drive from Shillong took me to Cherrapunji. Locally known as Sohra, it is best visited from May to September, when lashing rains drape the place in a resplendent green, but I found it enchanting even in January. The sky was always a clear blue and colossal white clouds dominated the horizon.

The next morning I headed to Tyrna village, the base for the root bridge trek. The trek starts with a descent on cemented steps, which lead into the forest. Lush green mountains can be seen while walking amid the dense vegetation. There are a few villages along the way. After one such village appears a Y-shaped junction, the left path of which leads to the double-decker bridge and the right to the single-decker bridge. We took the left first. Two bridges had to be crossed. Below the second bridge



connecting the village of Nongriat lies one of the bluest natural pools one can hope to see—so transparent we could see the rocks at the bottom.

A root bridge is a unique natural wonder. These ‘bridges’ are made of massive roots which have been guided by villagers over decades to intertwine with each other and form a single bridge strong enough to support people. A double-decker is one root bridge stacked over another. The entire trek covering both bridges takes close to five hours.

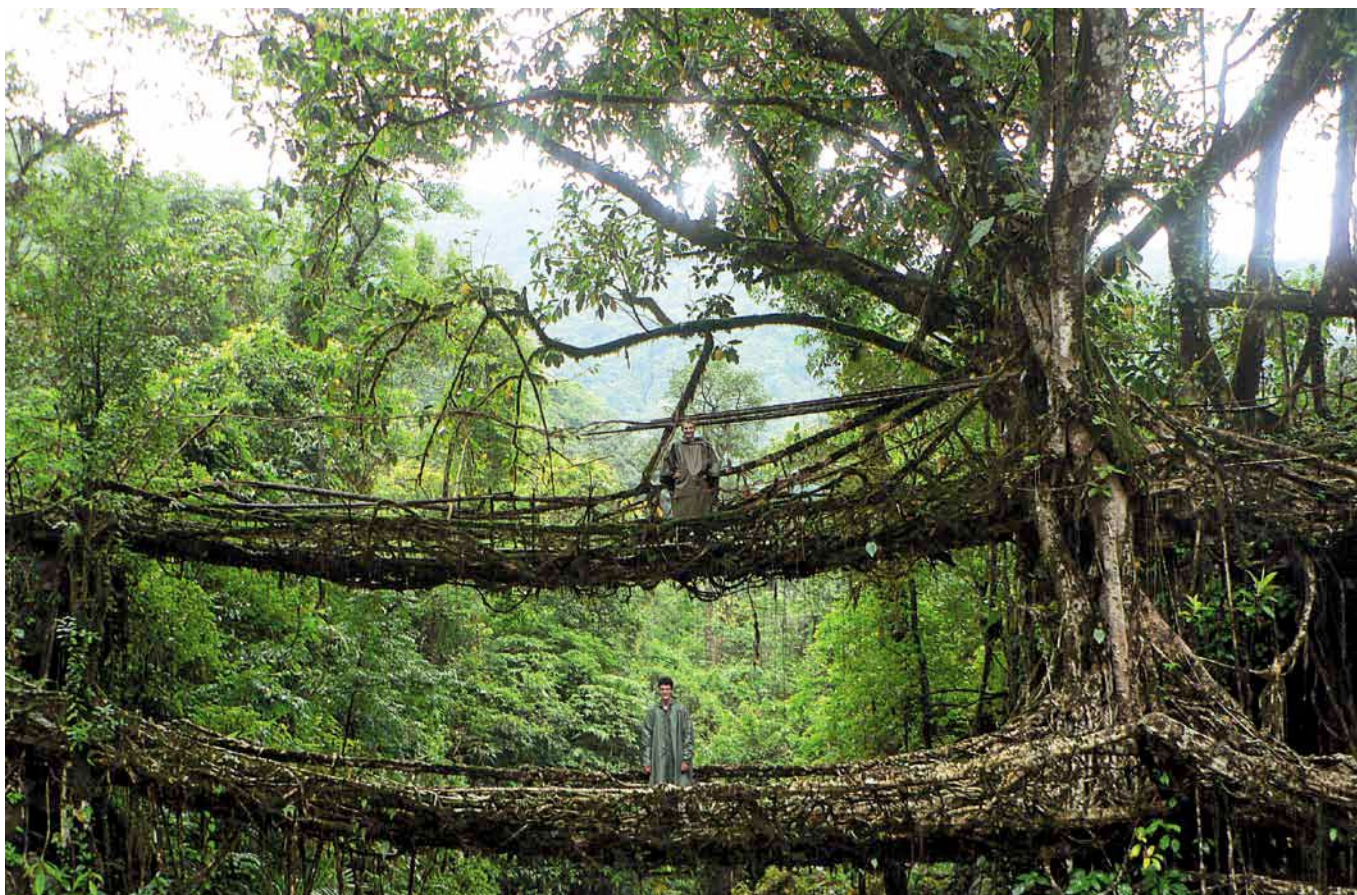
A sore calf from the previous day’s trek didn’t deter me from a caving adventure the next morning. Meghalaya is known for its cave systems and the most popular is the Mawmai cave. Situated 6km away from Cherrapunji, entry to this cave

starts at 9am and we were among the first to head inside. The route open for the public is well-lit with signs that guide you from entry to exit.

The cave was spacious, with only a few narrow passages that required squeezing and ducking. The limestone formations inside the cave glittered when we beamed our flashlights on them. Stalagmites and stalactites sprouted everywhere in various shapes and sizes. Abruptly, the huge cavern ended and so did our little adventure. Surprisingly we did not spot a single bat in the cave.

Our next stop for the day was Nohkalikai falls. While most waterfalls in Meghalaya are at their best during the monsoon, Nohkalikai remains majestic even in the winter. At 1,115ft, it is India’s





highest plunge waterfall, dropping straight from the top of the plateau to an emerald green pool. While we admired the grandeur of the falls from the view point, I later learnt that there exist a series of steps leading down the cliff. The falls are associated with a legend about a woman named Ka Likai who jumped to her death from the cliff where the waterfall originates—hence ‘Nohkalikai’ or ‘the leap of Likai’.

It was afternoon when we started our four-hour ride through winding cliff side roads to reach Mawlynnong, deemed ‘Asia’s cleanest village’ in 2003. The first thing I noticed when I reached the village were its tree houses. Made of bamboo, they offer perfect vantage points to get a bird’s-eye view of the village, look across at neighbouring Bangladesh or simply relax over a cup of coffee.

A stroll around the village reveals why it is so clean. There are bamboo dustbins at every nook and corner. A board specifies rules to be followed to maintain cleanliness. There are neat walkways built throughout, along which lie traditional thatched huts. Most have small

## A ROOT BRIDGE IS A UNIQUE NATURAL WONDER, MADE OF MASSIVE INTERTWINED ROOTS

gardens with colourful flowers.

Evening was spent watching the sunset followed by an intense football match in a nearby playground. Dinner was a simple meal of rice, dal and fried beans. Sleep came easy that night, in anticipation of what awaited us the next day.

Near the Indo-Bangladesh border lies a special, spectacular river. The Umngot flows through a small town called Dawki, situated 30km away from Mawlynnong. The drive to Dawki is a treat in itself with an abundance of greenery along the way. The river is as mesmerising as the photographs I had seen. One way to appreciate its beauty is to go for a boat ride. But we trekked along the river’s gorges

*The Nohkalikai Falls (left); and one of the stunning root bridges*

and found a place to sit and admire its transparent waters. When the sun shines over its waters, the river seems to glitter and you can see all the way to its bottom. I realise that Meghalaya is all about moments like these, nature’s playground at its dazzling best.



A market research professional, Gopalkrishnan V. is a nature lover. He likes to head to offbeat destinations in the mountains and enjoys hiking in the Himalayas and Western Ghats. Currently on a sabbatical, he is based in Mumbai and likes to keep busy by exploring new places and sharing his experiences.



# WANDERLUST

**N.S. VINODH** PRESENTS A SHORT GUIDE TO PLANNING LONG VACATIONS

A few years ago our kids went to study in the US, leaving us with an empty nest. Since then an annual 4-6 week visit to the US and elsewhere has become a regular feature. Our travels have been engaging experiences and I thought of sharing a few tips on planning long vacations. So here goes.

## INTERESTS

The world offers a surfeit of things to see and do but we are all limited by constraints of time and money. In order to maximise your travel experiences, decide on what you want out of a holiday and plan accordingly.

Some of the themes could be: 1. A particular region: say, Scandinavian countries or South America 2. History of Christianity: Israel/Italy, Greece. 3. Islamic culture: Cairo, Istanbul, Jerusalem 4. Wildlife: Brazil, Kenya/Tanzania, Zambia/South Africa, Botswana, India 5. Wine tours: California, France, Italy, New Zealand, Australia. And so many more. Read up before you go, especially if it's history you're interested in. Like the poet said, "Every stone reveals a story", but *you* must ferret it out.

## VISAS

The Indian passport is not one that opens doors to many countries visa-free. Having a 10-year US and a 5-year UK visa has helped us a lot. When one is visiting multiple countries, it's good to budget at least 10 days to obtain each visa. Some countries, like Cambodia, have an online visa system that gets you a visa in a couple of days. The Schengen visa usually takes the

longest but also allows one unhindered access through most of Europe. The application for most visas demands the same documents; keep multiple copies of these ready: Bank statements for the last six months; I-T returns for three years; recent passport-size photos; flight itinerary; hotel reservations; travel insurance; letter of employment. Using a travel agent to handle the visa work eases things considerably.

## AIR TICKETS

We book tickets online and pay by credit card. Use sites like Expedia.com, Skyscanner.com, Cleartrip.com, etc to compare fares but always book on the airlines' own websites. It's easier to deal directly with the airline in case of a problem. The airlines' own portals also make it more convenient to choose seats and book excess baggage.

## ACCOMMODATION

A bad hotel can mar a holiday. We do our research to pick the right hotel, choosing one near the main sights. Hotels close to Times Square in New York, Leicester Square in London or Stephansplatz in Vienna may be more pricey with smaller rooms but nothing beats being in the thick of it all. One can return late without bothering about transportation. We save on transport too, especially in a city like London.

Hotels that offer a king-size bed, free breakfast, free wifi and a flexible cancellation policy get our vote. The Best Westerns in the US are invariably good. Other mid-priced chains that we like are Novotel, Swissotel, Thistle (in the UK) and Thon (in Norway).

To get the best prices, compare rates

on travel portals but reserve on the hotel's website. Hotels tend to treat direct customers better. And sign up for loyalty programmes; they are free and usually come with benefits like a late check-out or a discounted rate. Check with the hotel (email them) the mode of travel from the airport/railway station to the hotel: many provide a free shuttle service.

A good alternative to hotels is Airbnb. On Airbnb, hosts let out their homes to guests, either the whole house or individual rooms. We have had very good experiences: In Florence (notorious for tiny, expensive rooms), we got a one-bedroom flat in a historic building overlooking the Piazza della Signoria and the Palazzo Vecchio at €200 a day.

## BAGGAGE

It's difficult to travel light on a long vacation. One needs to be prepared for different kinds of weather and diverse activities like hiking, sightseeing, a swim and visits to semi-formal places like a fine dining restaurant. Pack accordingly, especially footwear. Men should take a blazer or a coat and women a formal dress.

Almost all airlines allow one carry-on bag of 7kg and one check-in bag of 23kg. My wife and I each have a small strolley as our carry-on and a large strolley (all with four wheels). This allows us to handle our luggage independently. Our carry-on contains a copy of travel documentation, spare clothes, a wind-cheater with rain cap, electronics, emergency medicines and basic toiletries—essentials for a couple of days in case our main baggage gets





misplaced. Packing cubes are helpful to organise one's clothes.

## COMMUNICATIONS

Given the extortionate roaming charges, wifi is a god-send. Most coffee shops and restaurants offer free wifi and so do hotels. Calls can be made over wifi using WhatsApp or Facetime. If staying in a country for a week or more, a local sim is a reasonably priced option and can usually be bought at the airport.

## LAUNDRY

Hotel laundry is expensive. Some hotels have a self-use laundromat. Else, search Google Maps for a laundromat, where for a few dollars one can launder a bag full of clothes. We usually do our laundry once a week when we have a stay of a few days. Our clothes are non-iron and quick-dry; jeans are an exception—despite their weight, they are the best travel clothes. They keep you warm, hide dirt and hence don't need washing often, and don't need to be ironed. If the occasion demands, throw a jacket over a full shirt and jeans and you're ready for the Queen's ball!

## DRIVING

A self-drive holiday gives one the ultimate flexibility in travel, unconstrained by the schedules of airlines and trains. You can book hotels on the fly, stay at cheaper hotels further from the city centre or in places off the tourist track with great views.

Driving in the US, Europe or Australia/New Zealand is a pleasure given the excellent roads, en-route facilities for travellers and the disciplined road behaviour. All that is

required to rent a car is your passport, credit card and driving licence. An international driving permit is not required unless your licence is in a language that's not English. Book online in advance to ensure that you get a car of your choice. The GPS provided at extra cost is expensive and superfluous. Use Google Maps on your phone with a local sim instead. Insurance is a must.

## MOVING AROUND

Many guidebooks advise tourists to dress and behave like locals to deflect unwanted attention from thieves and conmen. There's no way you're going to do that with a camera hanging around your neck and a map in your hand amidst the suited bankers in The City (of London). Might as well revel in your tourist identity; there are lots of friendly locals who may want to strike up a conversation. Just be careful with your money and camera—I find that a multi-pocket safari jacket works best.

## MEDICINES

Carrying a complete medical kit is absolutely essential. Most countries will not sell antibiotics and cough syrups over the counter without a doctor's prescription. Pack all medicines with you (antibiotics, cough/cold relievers, paracetamol, tummy meds, etc) along with a doctor's prescription.

## CASH & CARD

Currency, pre-loaded cards and credit cards are the most popular payment modes. We have found pre-loaded cards the most convenient. Depending on the countries we plan to visit, we buy pre-loaded cards issued by HDFC

*Rule No. 1: Let your interests guide your holiday planning. And 2: Do your research!*

Bank. These can be used for vendor payments like a debit card, to withdraw cash from an ATM and can be topped up online from your bank account. We also carry some amount of currency (predominantly USD). Credit cards are the last option because of the high conversion fee and the service charges. Nonetheless they are useful to have.

## BEFORE YOU LEAVE

A month or more is a long time to be away from home. Make sure your domestic systems are not affected while you're away. Pay electricity/society/telephone/cable bills in advance. Likewise with other payments like rent, club fees, etc. Have a friend/neighbour take your car for a drive once a week. And be prepared for your driver and maid to be poached while you're away!



With an interest in nature photography, writing and history, N.S. Vinodh has been travelling since his school days, accompanying his policeman-father on official tours. At 53, this Bengaluru-based wanderer and his wife Sheela spend a few months every year finding new places to see.





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*In commemoration of its 10th anniversary, Outlook Business launched the second edition of its Secret Diary series at Leading Edge 2017. An illustrious list of speakers, comprising Indian corporate chieftains, global management thinkers and new-age entrepreneurs, participated in discussions that would serve as insightful lessons for current and future leaders. And the event also showcased the concept of 'work hard and party harder' as the speakers showed their lighter side*

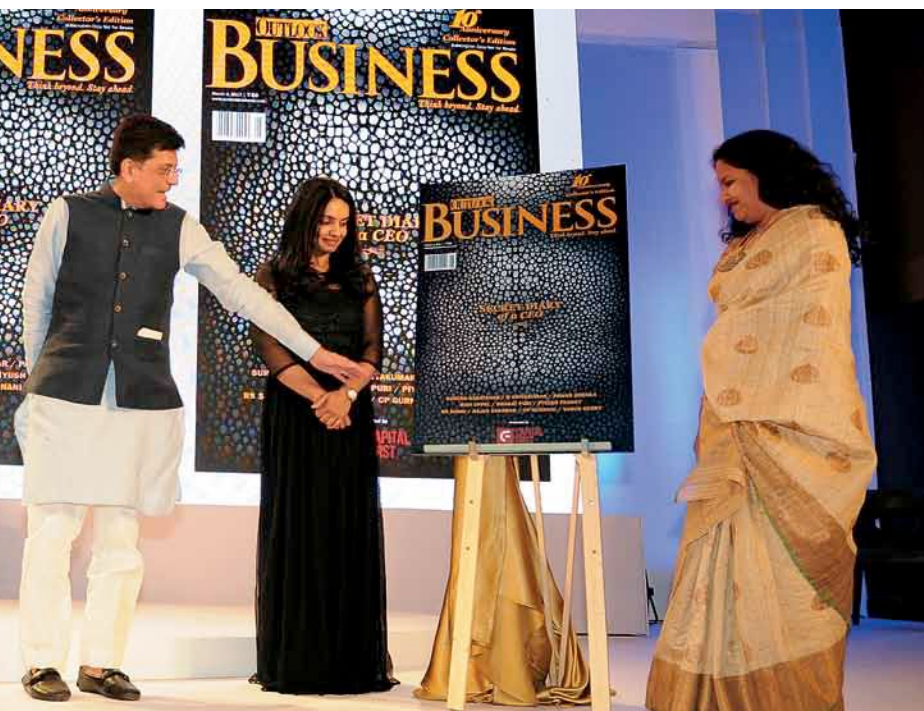


(L-R) Indranil Roy, publisher, Outlook Group; Rajan Raheja, chairman Rajan Raheja Group of Companies; Piyush Goyal, honourable union minister for power; Vidya Menon, associate publisher, Outlook Group and N Mahalakshmi, editor, Outlook Business



◀ V Vaidyanathan of Capital First articulates the challenges of leadership in current times





▲ Piyush Goyal charms the audience citing his ministry's astounding success in augmenting energy efficiency

▼ **Creating Indian icons:** Corporate chieftains advocate consistency, authenticity, consumer-centricity and the continuous pursuit of excellence as the hallmark of iconic brands



▲ D Shivakumar of PepsiCo India interviews psychophysicist Howard Moskowitz. Dan Pink mesmerises the audience with his motivational talk





(L-R) V Vaidyanathan of Capital First, Vijay Shekhar Sharma of Paytm, Kripa Mahalingam of Outlook Business and Neeraj Kakkar of Hector Beverages

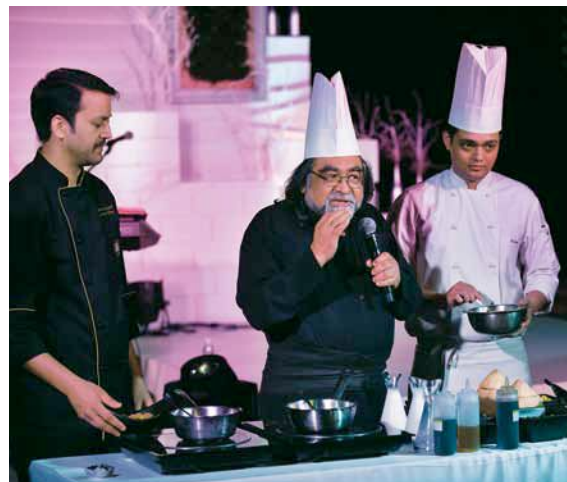
► **Leveraging adversity:**

*CEOs who have been “fortunate” to face adversity in their careers talk about their experience and learnings*



▼ **Staying hungry:** *New-age entrepreneurs talk about their entrepreneurial adventures.*

*R S Sodhi receives the Raymond 'CEO I Look Up to' award from Ganesh Narayanan, head of media, Raymond Group; Prahlad Kakar cooks delicious prawns in coconut gravy; Ajay Kaul enthralls the audience with his Kishore Kumar number; Subhash Kamat and Rajeev Raja strum away the blues*







▲ *Sushil Rath, COO, Mahindra Logistics talks about how GST will transform the logistics sector; Srikar Reddy, MD and CEO, Sonata Software on a digital toolkit for CEOs.*



▲ *Setting up high-performance teams: Gary Kirsten in conversation with Ajay Srinivasan of Aditya Birla Financial Services on leadership and team dynamics*



(L-R) D Shivakumar, PepsiCo India; Ravi Uppal, JSPL; N Mahalakshmi; Bharat Puri, Pidilite Industries; and Suresh Narayanan, Nestle India

▼ *Rajitha Narayanan and Suresh Narayanan pose in front of the Audi A8 L*







*Vue de la Place de Dely et du Palais du Grand*





## CHANDNI CHOWK, 1760

● These days, when travel guidebooks and trip-advising sites abound, even the impulsive foreign backpacker has quite an accurate idea of what to expect in India—the metropolises and the narrow by-lanes of old, quaint towns. In the 18th century, however, this luxury wasn't available to those curious about the subcontinent and its then Mughal rulers. Hence, some European prints from that era are comically off the mark in their depictions, for the artists themselves had never visited the cities they were portraying. Take, for instance, this print from 1760 made by the famous printmaker, Jacques Chereau (1688-1776) of Paris, that purportedly shows the Red Fort and the broad street in front of it (current-day Chandni Chowk). Neither does the Red Fort look anything like the real deal, nor do the people or their attire match historical records. Part of the private collection of Swapna Liddle, author of *Chandni Chowk: The Mughal City of Old Delhi*, the image is an optical print also called *vue d'optique*, which was meant to be viewed through a zograscope, which produced an illusion of depth. This particular image, however, made presumably from hearsay, also produced an illusion of the city of Shahjahanabad that made it look like a European street.



# I Saw Quiet Glories

BOOKS

● For a while now, it has been seen fit to gravely consider the question: Is travel writing dead? No place left unexplored, the Internet will take you anywhere, etc., etc. All it takes



**Atlas of an Anxious Man**  
By Christoph Ransmayr  
Translated by Simon Pare  
(Seagull Books, ₹750)

to answer the question convincingly is a truly great travel book, and here's one by Austrian writer Christoph Ransmayr, translated from German by Simon Pare.

Seventy pieces of writing, most only four or five pages long, their setting shifting around the world—Chile, Tibet, Yemen, Ireland, the Arctic to mention only a few—each (except one) being a place the author has been in at some point in his life. It's just people being people, animals being animals. But looked at through Ransmayr's eyes and processed through his imagination, it's a parade of quiet glories. His is a cartography of wonder—a sober celebration that this world should exist, that it should be coloured so variously by place, that we should find it possible to care for all this and each other.

Every episode begins with the words “I saw” and Ransmayr sees some wonderful things. A man with a painful past swings at golf balls at the North Pole. A woman laughs at a sloth bear that's fallen through her roof. A waiter crashes to the ground with his tray at the viewing of an exceptionally rare celestial event, and the people gathered there find it in themselves to turn away from the sky and help him up. A boy is distraught when the snowman's head he has preserved in a freezer is reconstituted after a power failure.

He also sees vividly and deeply (and not only because he is often looking through binoculars). His writing is rigorous: Ransmayr seems to know the name of every tree, plant, insect, bird and star, as well as the histories of the places he's been to. His descriptions are precise and beautiful, his

sentences often long and perhaps textured by some of the original German. Much credit to the translator that the writing works as well as it does in English.

A sentence that seems to take the form of the great wall of China even as it describes it: “The wall, complete with battlements, watchtowers and beacons, wound its way through uninhabited highlands like a ribbon that had been whisked away on the wind, had snagged on peaks and ridges and dropped down over rugged mountain ranges into deserted valleys from which it once more climbed up just as steeply, changing course along a ridge before once more swinging back after an umpteenth bend onto the ideal line imagined by long-forgotten architects and generals.” And here, Ransmayr meets an old man trying to record the

call of every songbird found along the wall, the territorial singing of those for whom the wall was no barrier at all. Imagine, says the old man, all the recordings played together—a great wall of birdsong. It might make an intruder run away in fright, or it might “enchant him so that he forgot his hatred or his desire to fight, rendered powerless to do anything but listen in rapture.”

*Atlas of an Anxious Man* is a catalogue of such raptures. Its narratives are concentrated and crafted with the skill of a fine short-story writer, and Ransmayr isn't reluctant to work the resonances he spots into soaring epiphanies. This sort of all-cylinders-firing writing means the book is probably best taken slow while it holds a cherished place on the book-shelf—not unlike an atlas. ■ SRINATH PERUR

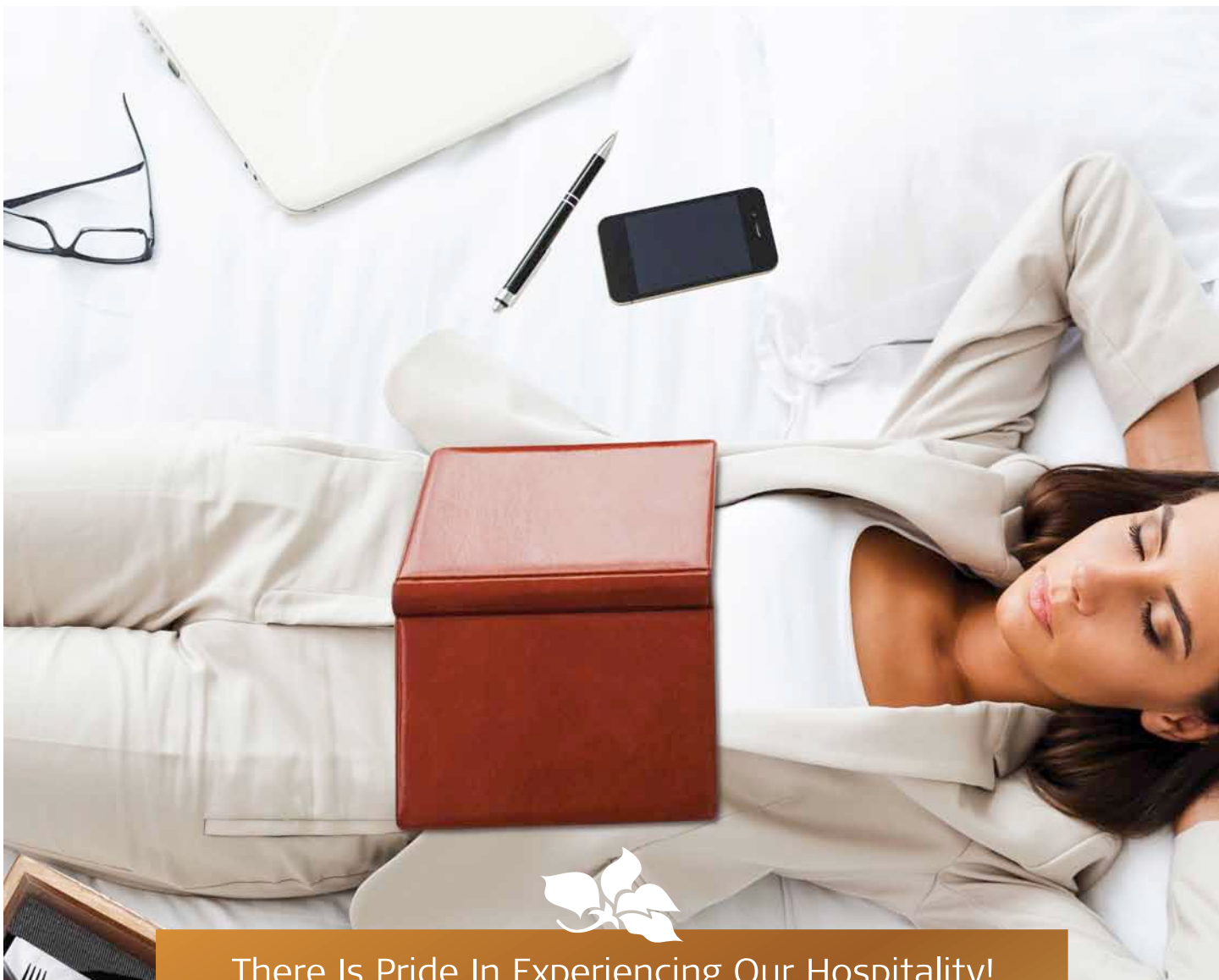


**Photographic Field Guide: Wildlife Of Central India**  
By David Raju & Surya Ramachandran  
(Notion Press, ₹1,200)

## On the Shelf

Wildlife field guides aren't uncommon. What makes this one stand out then, is the high quality of photographs it flaunts. With both authors being veteran naturalists and photographers with 14 years of combined experience, you wouldn't expect any less. The book doesn't focus on a certain type of wildlife, say birds or mammals, as is the case usually. It instead attempts to be a comprehensive guide to the wildlife of a particular region: Central India, covering a total of 850 species, including 75 mammals, 433 birds, 156 butterflies, 84 dragonflies, 18 amphibians and 84 reptiles. The passion of the two authors, David Raju and Surya Ramachandran, who strayed from traditional career paths to explore the wild, shows in the taxonomic details they explore. A useful and, more importantly, aesthetic field guide for anyone who wants to go beyond the regular fare of tigers in the bewitching forests of Central India.





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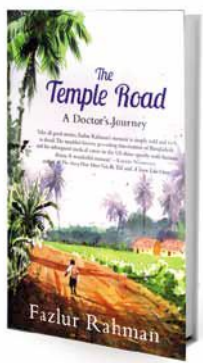
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**The Temple Road: A Doctor's Journey**  
By Fazlur Rahman  
(Speaking Tiger, ₹450)

## Time Turner

### ● A MEMOIR BY A BANGLADESHI DOCTOR,

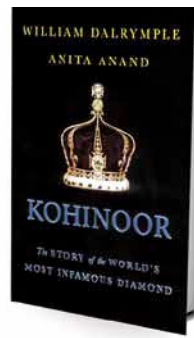
*The Temple Road* narrates his humble journey from a small village in Bangladesh to becoming an acclaimed oncologist in the US. It is a chronological account trailing his childhood in the 1950s to his current status, with a tone of naiveté that grows on the reader. The old-fashioned writing style matches Rahman's traditional views on many topics and leads the reader to appreciate the sharp academic he eventually becomes.

Born in a village bordering the Sundarbans, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, where the famed Royal Bengal Tiger was a constant threat (as opposed to its now threatened existence), Rahman starts from when he loses his mother at the age of seven, due to lack of timely medical care. The *kala-azar*, or black fever, next attacks him; both experiences would form the base of his compassion towards his future patients' plight.

We soon traverse the temple road as Rahman passes a patch of road, shadowed by leafy trees and a temple that lend it its spookiness and an air of the unknown. He adds anecdotes to describe the village life that is so crucial in shaping him, while trying to explain some of the strange customs there, and touches upon religious discrimination and communal issues, as well as popular folklore. However, his best contribution is an inside look into the educational culture of the 1950s, which sadly has not changed much in terms of offering students a wider choice of careers.

Rahman also compares the differences in medical practice in the US and Bangladesh but leaves the reader with the understanding that provided they are honest in their work, doctors are the same everywhere. He is extravagant in paying homage to his teachers. The book is the journey of a man who led an ordinary life, but it still manages to sound intriguing with its tale of tigers, exam results, Bangladesh's impending war of independence, racial discrimination in the US and Rahman's recent views on the rapid shift towards a more narrow-minded religious society in Bangladesh. Rahman is of a different era and his book is a light read, a window into that world.

■ REEMA ISLAM



**Kohinoor: The Story of the World's Most Infamous Diamond**

By William Dalrymple and Anita Anand  
(Juggernaut, ₹499)



## Game of Thrones

**R**eading *Kohinoor*, William Dalrymple and Anita Anand's historical thriller on the one precious stone that looms so large in the subcontinent's legend, I am struck by a feeling of immense sadness. And not for the famous diamond. Rather, the story of the Koh-i-noor is that of a tragic tableau of human follies, greed and suffering. I think of the destruction of Delhi at the hands of Nader Shah and Ahmad Shah Abdali, or the long fade of Afghan culture and learning with the demise of the Durrani kingdom, and the exploitation of Maharajah Duleep Singh and his redoubtable mother Rani Jindan at the hands of the British. *Kohinoor*, for all that it's the story of a large diamond, is ultimately the story of the civilisational decline of South Asia. From Dalrymple and Anand's fast-paced narrative, it would seem that the so-called 'curse' of the Koh-i-noor didn't just affect specific individuals, but entire cultures. And, the story begins with the Mughals.

Dalrymple, who has written the first part of the book, traces the cultural pre-history of gems in India, starting with a couple of Puranic texts from early medieval India and proceeding to the diamond mines and riches of the Vijayanagara Empire. He draws a parallel between the mythical, similarly cursed Syamantaka gem, which could have been a large diamond, and the Koh-i-noor, and also tracks the mentions of outstanding gems from the pre-Mughal era. As he points out, any or none of the gems mentioned might have been the Koh-i-noor. In fact it wasn't till Nader Shah's invasion and the plunder of Delhi that the Koh-i-noor is even mentioned. We know nothing of the diamond's origins. It was the Durannis, Maharajah Ranjit Singh and the British East India Company, whose obsession with the diamond elevated the gem to its modern status as a guarantor of sovereignty to the one who wore it.

Anand picks up the story in the aftermath of Ranjit Singh's death. This is possibly the most poignant part of the book, not so much about the way the British got the Koh-i-noor, but how the independence of Punjab was crushed and the lives of Ranjit Singh's wife Jindan and his infant son and heir Duleep Singh descended into a long tragedy. Mother and son were separated, Duleep Singh packed off to England under Queen Victoria's protection and Rani Jindan to a prison in the Chunar fort. She escaped and turned to the king of Nepal for help, but he connived with the British to keep her there. If the British feared the mother, they smothered the son in fake paternalistic kindness. A favourite of Victoria's, he was emotionally pressured to formally gift the Koh-i-noor to the queen of England, enacting a farce where he gave away something that was looted from him in the first place.

*Kohinoor* is an enjoyable read, though poignant and ultimately depressing. That stems from the nature of the diamond's history, and the authors have done a fine job of sifting fact from fiction to present a fairly definitive history of South Asia's most popular diamond.

■ BIBEK BHATTACHARYA



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**Soraya Homchuen**  
Director - Mumbai Office, Tourism Authority of Thailand



*TTF as a show is very well organised and has a mix of both domestic and international players. I was quite surprised to see the huge turnout of people at TTF, especially the travel companies.*

**Vasundhara Gupta**  
Sales Manager - Corporate & Trade, Costa Cruises



*TTF is a great opportunity for us to market our airline to the customers. The response that we got at the show was more than what we expected.*

**Tejpreet Singh**  
Manager - Passenger Sales & Marketing, Korean Air



## Schedule

**2017**

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|------------------------|---------------------|
| <b>TTF Chennai</b>     | : 6, 7, 8 Jan       |
| <b>TTF Bengaluru</b>   | : 13, 14, 15 Jan    |
| <b>OTM Mumbai #</b>    | : 21, 22, 23 Feb    |
| <b>TTF New Delhi</b>   | : 27, 28 Feb, 1 Mar |
| <b>TTF Kolkata</b>     | : 7, 8, 9 July      |
| <b>TTF Hyderabad #</b> | : 14, 15 July       |
| <b>TTF Ahmedabad</b>   | : 1, 2, 3 Sept      |
| <b>TTF Surat</b>       | : 8, 9, 10 Sept     |
| <b>TTF Mumbai</b>      | : 15, 16, 17 Sept   |
| <b>TTF Pune</b>        | : 22, 23, 24 Sept   |
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## WHERE ON EARTH?

● AROUND THE WORLD, there are many famous libraries with grand architectural designs that house a labyrinth of knowledge. Much of a library's charm lies in its quiet, warm interiors suffused with the musty scent of old books. But this public library has quite a lot to say on its exteriors as well. The façade of one of its parking walls is covered with 22 book spines made of signboard mylar. The spines, measuring 9 ft by 25 ft each, feature titles that were nominated by the residents of the area. They include classics like *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Catch-22*, *Lord of the Rings*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Tale of Two Cities*.

► NAME THE LIBRARY AND THE CITY IN WHICH IT IS LOCATED.



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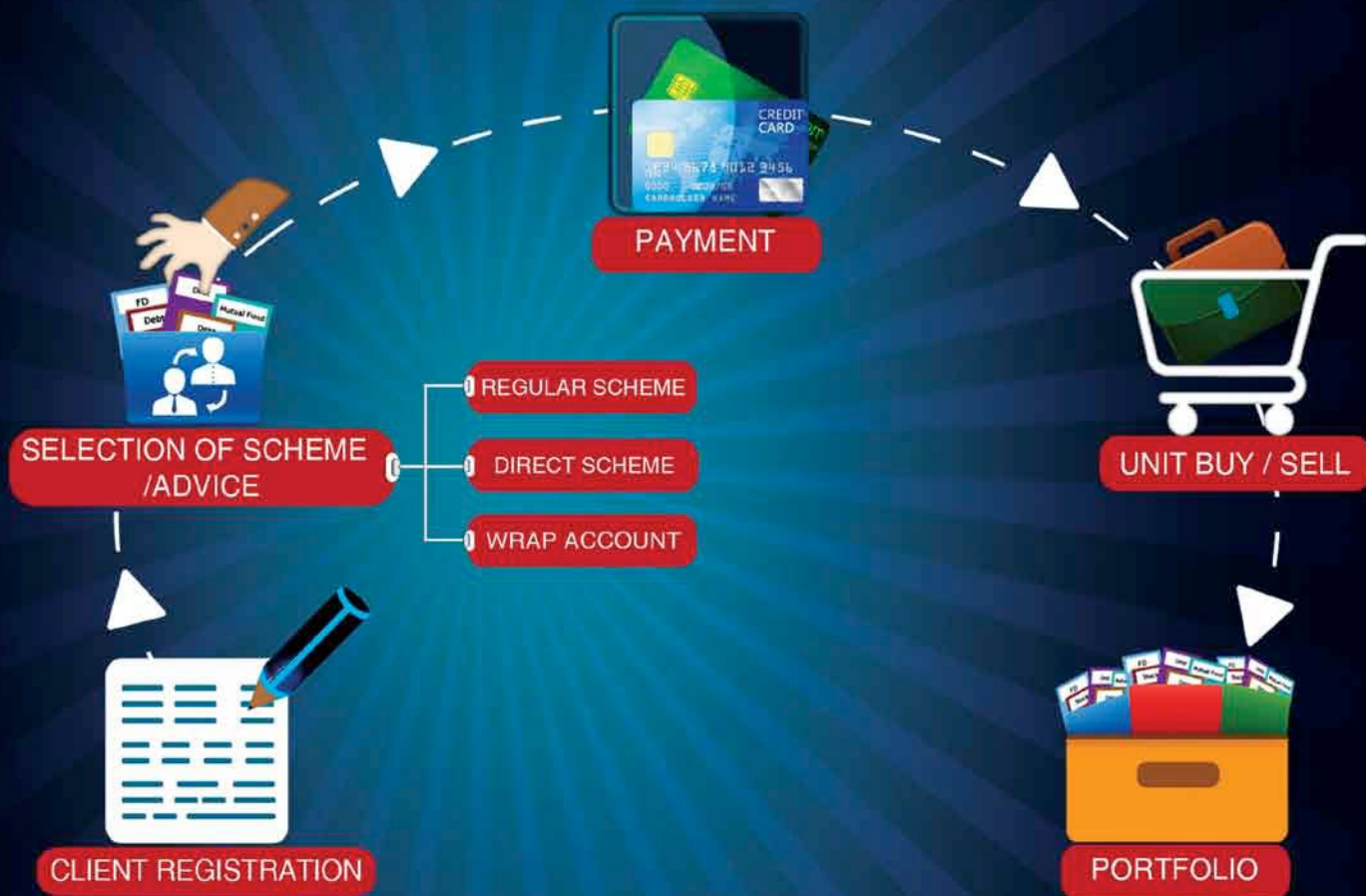
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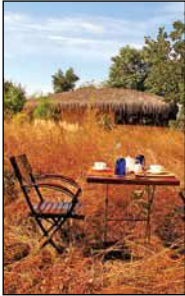
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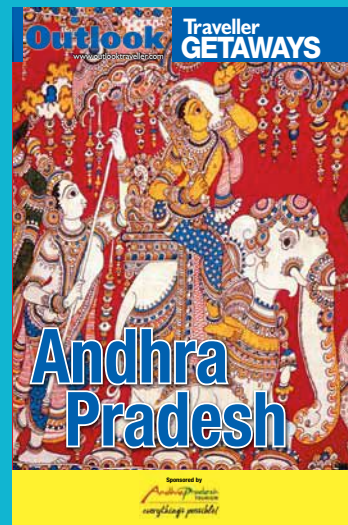
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