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Knowledge is based on experience, **Everything** else is just information

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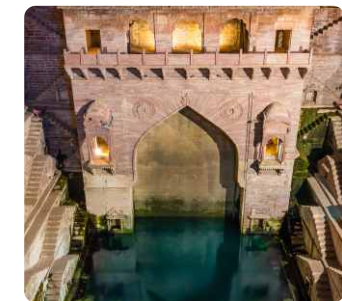
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BRIDGE THE
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Get Inspired - Explore



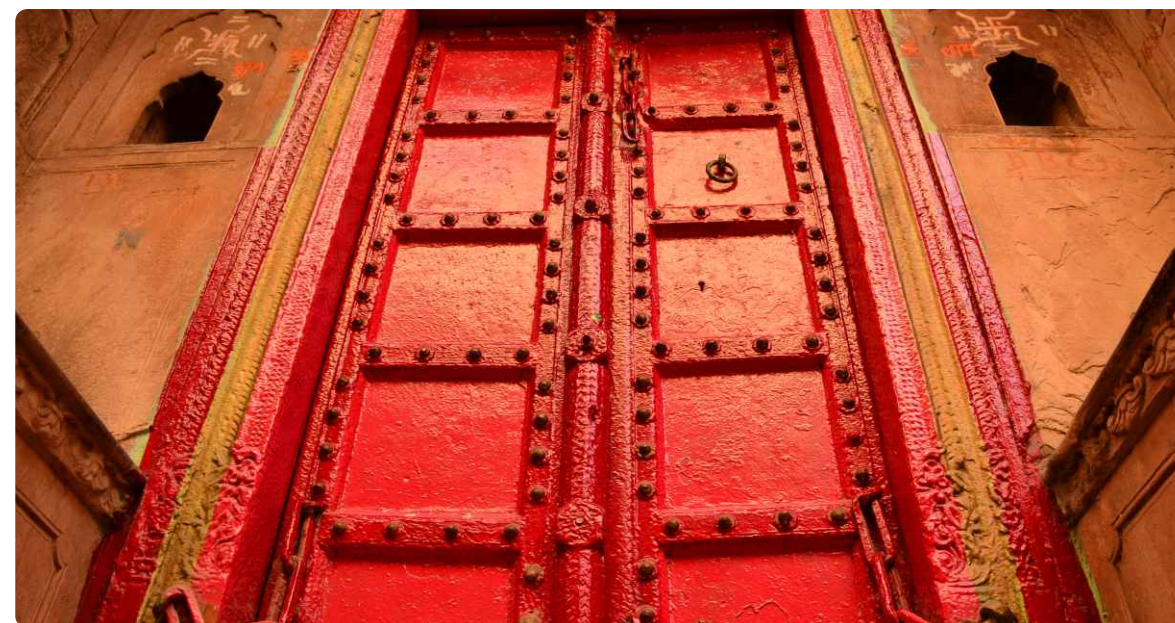
THE KALINJAR EXPERIENCE

Banda District, UTTAR PRADESH

This experience is as raw and rugged as it gets. When you visit the Kalinjar Fort, there is no doubt that it is one of the most impressive forts that was almost unconquerable until the British came with their guns and canons. Learn about the history, legends and myths associated with this fort which encompasses a temple, that predates the fort itself, and is located at an important geographical crossroad. The experience at Kalinjar is not limited to the views of the expanse of the Bundelkhand but also a glimpse into the hard lives of the people of this water scarce region. On your drive back make a quick stop in a village for a cup of tea and to interact with the villagers.

GOOD TO KNOW:

- This experience is best suited for FITs or small groups of up to 6-8 people.
- The toilet stops are very basic.
- Lunch can be freshly prepared at the guesthouse situated on the fort premises.
- This is best suited for guests aged between 35-50 years who are physically fit and can adapt to basic facilities.
- There is a fair bit of climbing steep stairs and walking on uneven surface.
- Chitrakoot is the nearest town from Kalinjar which has basic and clean accommodation. The drive to Kalinjar from here is about 2 hours one way.
- This is a full day experience.



DELHI STREET PHOTOGRAPHY

DELHI

Old Delhi is a delightful venue for street photography! It has historical monuments like the Red Fort, Jama Masjid, Chandni Chowk places of worship for different religions like the Gurudwara Sis Ganj, Sunehri Masjid, Shri Digamber Jain Temple; it is also one of the oldest living bazaars in India with famous wholesale markets like the Chawri Bazar, Khari Baoli, Kinari Bazaar, Dariba Kalan etc. This tour offers a sneak peek into the culture of Old Delhi from close quarters and an opportunity to capture images of the daily lives of people which seem so quaint and out of sync with the modern world. And yet it would not be wrong to say that these few hours in Old Delhi capture the very essence of humanity evolving at its own speed, unhindered.

GOOD TO KNOW:

- This is a private tour suitable for both FITs and groups led by an expert and his assistant.
- For Groups - the number of photography experts and assistants will increase on each count of 07 Pax - depending upon the size of the group.
- This tour is not recommended between the months of May - September due to extreme weather conditions. However it is available throughout the year.



AN EVENING WITH ARTIST CAREEN JOPLIN LANGSTIEH

Shillong, MEGHALAYA

Spend an evening with Careen Joplin Langstieh, a local artist after the city tour of Shillong at her residence. Careen's work is intrinsically linked to the way of life and thinking of Meghalaya. They can be as commonplace as scenes in a kitchen to something abstract as ideas borrowed from local folklore. "In essence my work is an organic view of the hills I live in. Though that being said they are purely incidental as an individual and as an artist, and perhaps relative to that moment when I am working on a piece. I cannot say that they are products of specific issues though they may be unwittingly tied to certain events". Women find a place in almost all of her work.

GOOD TO KNOW:

- Maximum 2 pax.
- Not good on Sundays, Christmas week, Good Friday and Easter (this is as per Careen's request).
- After the Shillong City Tour clients will be taken to Careen's house for a private interaction which will last for 90 minutes.
- There will be a private display of her artwork.
- Snacks such as home baked tea cakes, sandwiches /cookies and a traditional snack with tea will be served.
- A souvenir is included.



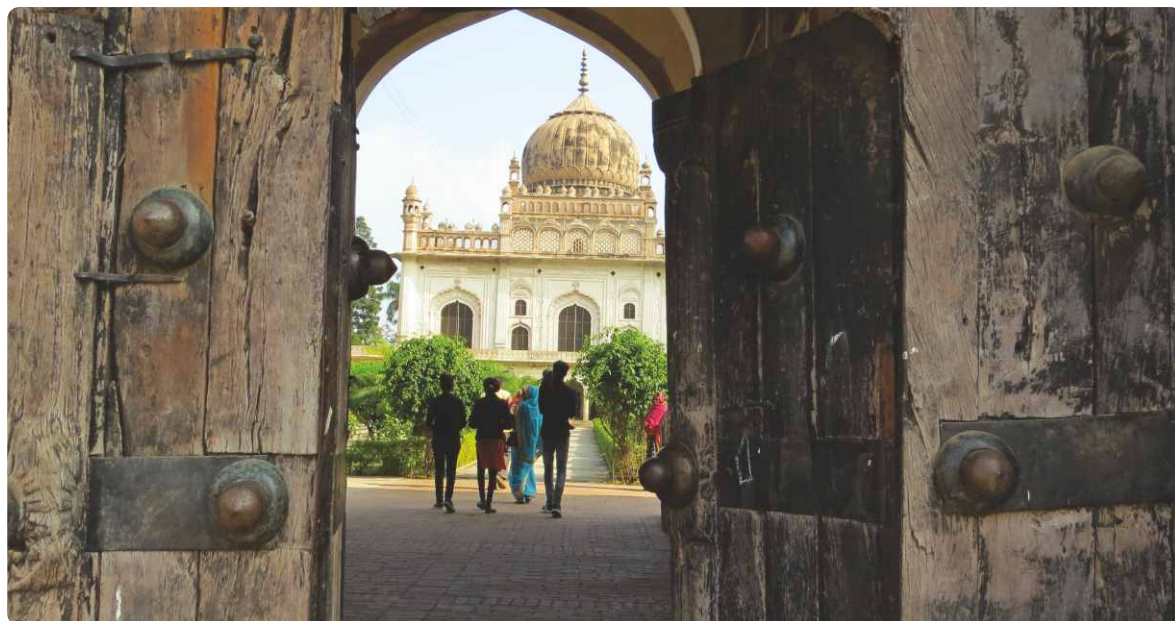
BEYOND THE TAJ MAHAL

Agra, UTTAR PRADESH

Gear up on cycles to explore rural Agra that quietly exists behind the Taj Mahal. Stables for cows and buffaloes, huts made of mud, children running along the road carefree, women at the wood-fired stoves or churning butter, men making their way to the farms and 3 splendid spots to view the Taj Mahal away from the milling crowds - this tour introduces you to the Indian village just as you had imagined. Make a stop at one of the homes for a cup of chai. You could try your hand at making some rotis too. Visit the home of a carpet weaver and see the lost art in its true form. This tour offers a glimpse into an Agra that very few venture to.

GOOD TO KNOW:

- The cycles do not have gears and only some of them have baskets.
- Safety helmets and jackets are given.
- The terrain is between easy to medium - there are some steep climbs.
- Best to start little late during winters so that the fog clears for a glorious view of the Taj Mahal.
- The roads are narrow but not crowded and safe.
- Best to carry a backpack with supplies like water, camera, phone and snacks.
- It is not mandatory to have breakfast at the home of the local resident.
- Best suited for FITs small groups of not more than 6-8 people.



REMEMBERING FAIZABAD

Faizabad, UTTAR PRADESH

A two hours' journey from the capital city of Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh is the forgotten city of Faizabad. Faizabad is the founding stone of the most important kingdom of North India - Oudh. Trace the lives of Shuja-Ud-Daulah and Bahu Begum as you visit their tombs and drive past the remnants of the then capital of Oudh. On this tour you will learn about the fascinating lives of the Nawab and the Begum; the relationship they shared; the fan-following the Begum had and the political landscape of the time. The history of Faizabad is entangled with the beginnings of Lucknow - an important city which is a culmination of the end of the Kingdom of Oudh and beginning of the most important British conquest that gave them access to Hindustan. This is a walk to remember the forgotten city of Faizabad and the importance it holds in the annals of Indian history.

GOOD TO KNOW:

- This half day tour is best suited for FIT who are interested in deep diving into the history of India.
- This experience is led by an enthusiastic historian who is well versed with the history of Oudh.
- There are no decent toilet stops other than the one in the designated stop for lunch.



A FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS, UNIQUE CUSTOMS AND HERITAGE

Kandy, SRI LANKA

One of the oldest and liveliest festivals of Sri Lanka, Perahera takes place every year in the month of July/August in the city of Kandy for 10 days. The Sinhalese term 'Perahera' means a procession or parade. The festival honours the Sacred Tooth Relic of the Buddha and also the four Guardian Gods: Vishnu, Kataragama, Natha and the Goddess Pattini. It is believed to be a fusion of two separate but interconnected "Peraheras" (Processions) - the Esala and Dalada. The Esala Perahera, dating back to the 3rd century BC, was a ritual enacted to request the Gods for rainfall. The Dalada Perahera is believed to have begun when the Sacred Tooth Relic of the Buddha was brought to Sri Lanka from India during the 4th Century AD.

The highlight of the festival is the colourful and a multi-faceted procession that features traditional dancers, oboe-tooting musicians, fire jugglers, whip crackers, torch bearers, hundreds of well decorated elephants and thousands of pilgrims. The main Perahera procession is an amalgamation of five separate ones. During the last days of the

procession, a replica of the Sacred Tooth Relic of the Buddha is paraded around the city.

This is truly an incredible opportunity to experience a unique aspect of Sri Lankan culture and participate in a colourful, exciting festival.



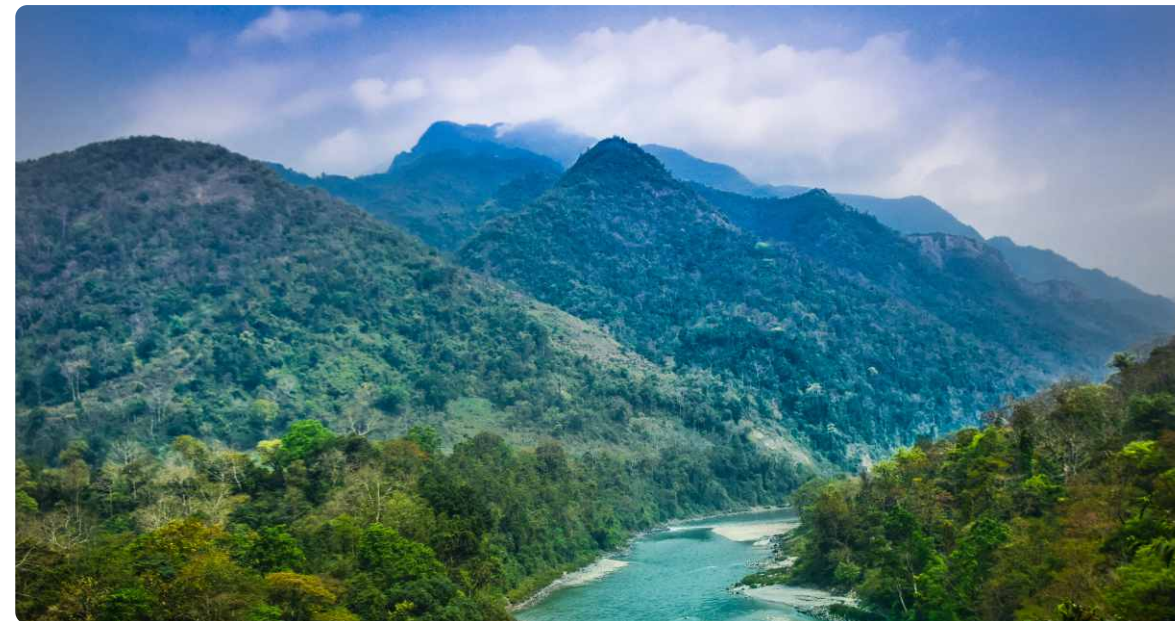
BAHAL WALK OF PATAN – BY APPOINTMENT ONLY

Patan, NEPAL

Bahal is a type of courtyard known for its religious and social significance amongst the Newar community of Nepal. During this walk at Patan; considered to be the oldest among the three major cities of Kathmandu Valley, one gets to experience different Bahals including some private ones. The walk is led by a friend of the Destination Knowledge Centre who is a local and was once the priest of a famous temple of Patan. A post graduate in Theravada Buddhism, he is very interactive and is fond of sharing stories on Nepali Culture, Buddhist Philosophy, Traditional Architectures, History and Mythology. Get glimpses into Buddhism and monastic life and understand the transition from ancient architecture to contemporary adaptations during your walk. Explore Bahals and courtyards with both religious and social significance. You will also learn about post-earthquake Patan and the challenges in rebuilding.

GOOD TO KNOW:

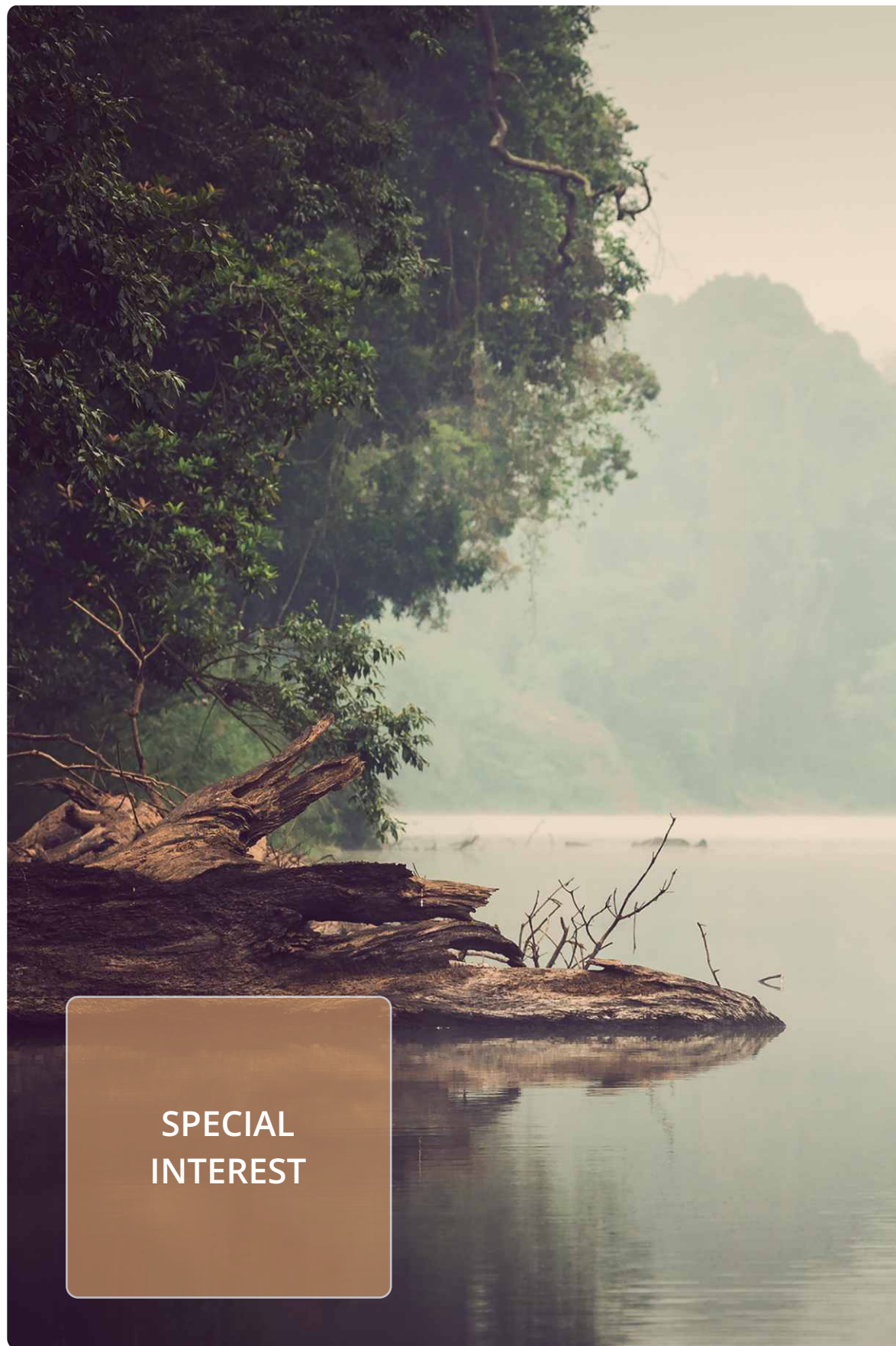
- Maximum 8 pax.
- Language: English.
- Best time between 0900 Hrs – 1600 Hrs.
- Duration: 2 – 3 Hrs (depending upon the interest of guests).
- By Appointment Only.



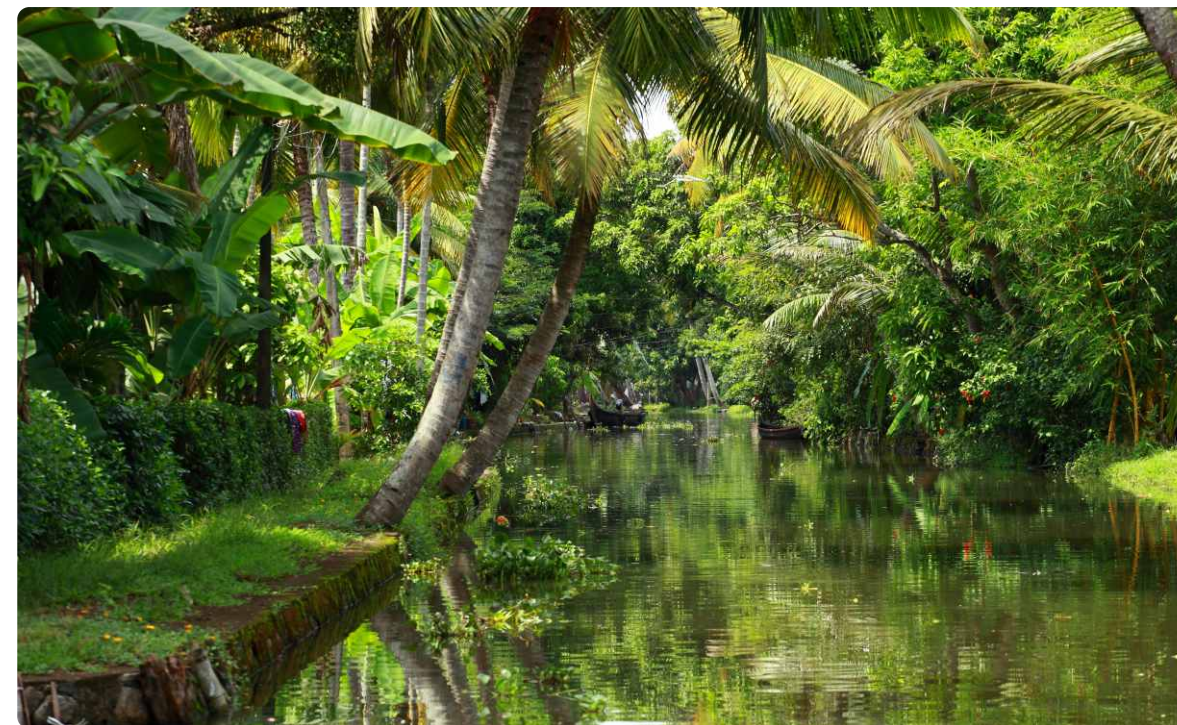
TALK ON ANIMISM, ECOLOGY AND SUSTAINIBILITY

Thimphu, BHUTAN

Bon-choe, the Bhutanese name for Animism predates Buddhism. The Bhutanese way of life is deeply rooted in animist rituals. A core animist belief in Bhutan is that human beings are just visitors on this planet and that the permanent owners are the guardian spirits. To live in harmony, humans must pay their respects to these guardians. Meet a friend of the Destination Knowledge Centre in Thimphu for a talk on how Bhutan's animist traditions helped in the preservation of its environment and culture. He will also share stories about his journey into understanding animism within the frontiers of ecology and sustainability which he has been documenting in a private journal titled 'The Dawn of my Realization'. "I look at all the animist rituals as a communicative tool for understanding the soul of Mother Earth and to create harmony and balance on this planet. Just like Buddhism has become a way of life for many of my friends, Animism has become one for me. This realization and understanding has opened a new chapter in my life which I am happy to share with anyone interested".



**SPECIAL
INTEREST**



KERALA UNHURRIEDLY

Slow Travel

By Kuntal Baruwa, Explorer, Destination Knowledge Centre.

Slow Travel has no fixed definitions and I personally don't subscribe to the "live like a local" slogan. Is that really possible when someone has just a week, two weeks in India? Slow Travel for me is about reclaiming time to do things that brings joy and meaning to into our lives. That can differ from person to person. But surely, Slow Travel is about doing those things that we value at our own pace without having to bother about ticking off the must-see sites in a destination or the pretty Instagram photos. Slow Travel is about even stepping away from the itinerary should there be opportunities for something deeper and more insightful. Slow Travel is most definitely about doing less, absorbing more and leaving something for second visit. I hope you will like this Kerala itinerary designed in a spirit

which is ideal for FITs and families (maximum 4 pax).

Day 1 - Arrive Cochin. Stop for/a cup of Tea or Coffee/a Quick bite/Visit to the washroom in a hotel near the Cochin airport. Head to Quite by the River located inside the forests of Malayattoor by the Periyar River. It takes about 60 minutes from Cochin airport to reach the forest entry gate (gate opens 07:00 hrs/closes 17:00 hrs). From here it is another 30-minutes drive up a rugged jungle path to the embarkation point where a canoe will pick you up and take you to the lodge. Experience the river and discover the forest over the next 3 nights. Quite by the River has something for everyone who is not in a hurry.

Things to do:

- Laze by the Infinity Pool and enjoy the gorgeous views from the verandah of the room.

- Go on Nature Walks.
- Spend time Bird Watching and Fishing.
- Explore the Organic Farm and see the rubber tappers at work in the Plantation.
- Learn to cook local dishes from the chef and dine outdoors.
- Watch the sunset from a canoe.
- Spend the night stargazing.

Day 2, 3 – At Quite by the River.

Day 4 – Drive from Quite by the River to the Windermere River House (90 minutes) which sits amidst a lush two-acre garden by the Periyar River. Spend the next 3 nights unhurriedly.

Things to do:

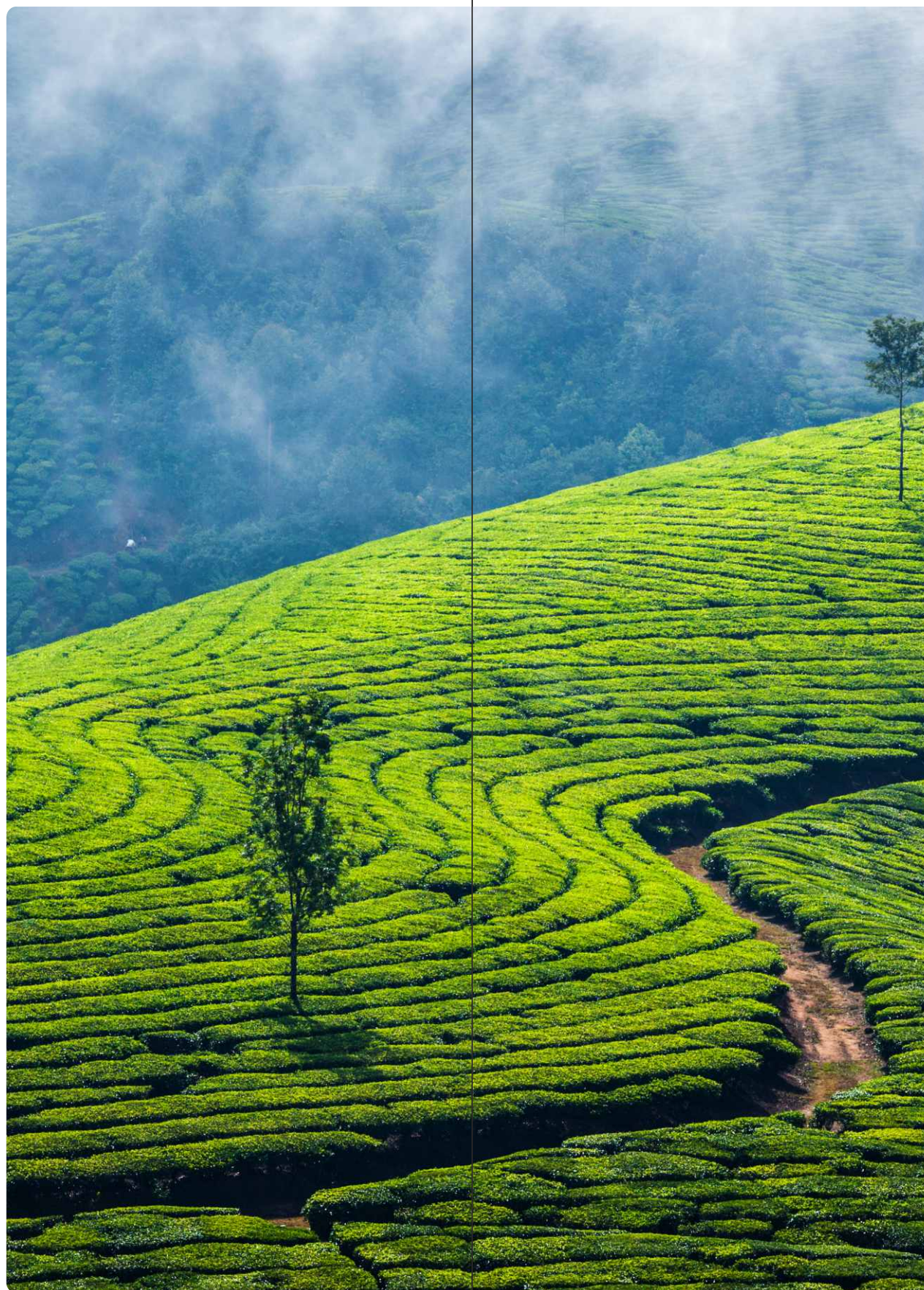
- Go on a guided tour of Munnar which is not too far away from here (2 hrs one way) and makes for a very picturesque drive . Spend the day in Munnar walking around in a tea garden and learning more about your cuppa in a private tea tasting session. Visit the Tea Museum before returning to the Windermere River House.
- At the Windermere River House, laze by the pool, dine by the riverside, try your hand at fishing, go on a canoe ride on the river, take yoga lessons.
- Birders can go with the resident Ornithologist to the nearby Thattekad Bird Sanctuary (40 minutes one way).
- Borrow a cycle from the property to explore the neighbourhood. Cycle past rubber plantations, local tea shops, village schools, churches and temples.

Day 5, 6 – At Windermere River House.

Day 7 – Drive from Windermere River House to 1, Hill House (3 hrs) located on a 600-acre estate where tea, coffee and spices are grown. Spend 3 nights exploring at your own pace. The owner Johnny has an unusual hobby of collecting junk and has very cleverly recycled all that he had collected in the property. Serving tables, for example, are discarded sewing machines fitted with hand painted tiles by Ajulejo Artists of Goa.

Things to do:

- Go on a guided tour of nearby Thekkady (60 minutes one way). In Thekkady know from local



farmers about the spices they grow, the local agrarian economy and the aspirations of the young. Enjoy a bird's eye view of Kumily town, the Periyar National Park, agricultural fields and forests. End your Thekkady tour with a cup of spice tea and homemade chocolates at a spice farmer's home before returning to 1, Hill House. The Thekkady tour can be done on cycles or a Jeep ride with short walks.

- While at 1, Hill House go on a morning walk to the Silk Mountain (20 minutes one way) to enjoy its scenic beauty and to spend time at the Velankanni Matha Church made entirely out of granite in Gothic style. For the more active, there is also an option to hike (7 km hike one way) from Murinjapuzha to the beautiful meadows of Panchalimedu which is not too far away from 1, Hill House.
- Meet George Abraham over a couple of beers and a delicious meal for lunch at the 105 year old Mundikayam Club. He is hugely knowledgeable about the history of plantations in Kerala and South India. After "The Path to the Hills", his second book "The Gentleman's Trail of the Western Ghat" awaits publication. George can also take you to rubber factory where he enjoys special access.

Day 8, 9 - At 1, Hill House.

Day 10 – Drive from 1, Hill House to Phillipkutty's Farm (2 hrs/30 minutes) set on an island, which was reclaimed from the backwaters of Lake Vembanad in the early 1950's. Spend 3 nights taking it slow and easy.

Things to do:

- Go on a day cruise through in the backwaters. A canoe ride is included to explore the narrower canals. Disembark post lunch and return to Phillipkutty's Farm.
- Go on a bird watching trip to the Kumarakom Bird Sanctuary (15 minutes one way) early morning.
- Explore the backwaters with its coconut groves, narrow canals and paddy fields on a canoe, on foot or on bicycles. The sunset from a canoe here is magical.
- Try the local tippale –Toddy.
- Make a daytrip to Kottayam (30 minutes one way) to visit the Syrian Christian Churches from the



16th century with their peculiar architecture - a combination of the traditional temple architecture of Kerala and Portuguese/ European style. Christianity came to Kerala the same time it went to Europe and the Syrian Christians were the first converts of Kerala who were high caste Hindus. Spend time at the 1200 year Thazhathangadi Mosque built in Kerala style with exquisite wood carvings. Islam came to Kerala when Prophet Mohammed was still alive with the Arab merchants. They carried spices from Kerala to the rest of the world through the sea route. On the way back from Kottayam stop at the pretty backwater village of Aymananam - the backdrop of Arundhati Roy's 'God of Small Things'.

- Take lessons on Syrian Christian Cuisine from your host and her mother. The Syrian Christians' contribution to the Kerala cuisine has been manifold and the most noted are the Hoppers, Duck Roast, Meen Vevichathu (red fish curry) and the Istew (stew).
- Enjoy a private Kathakali Dance Performance by a local troupe.

Day 11, 12- At Philipkuttys Farm.

Day 13 – Drive from Philipkuttys Farm to Marari Beach Resort (40 minutes) set on 30 acres with coconut groves, lily ponds, fruit trees and a large organic farm. Spend the next 4 nights relaxing by the Mararikulam Beach.



Things to do:

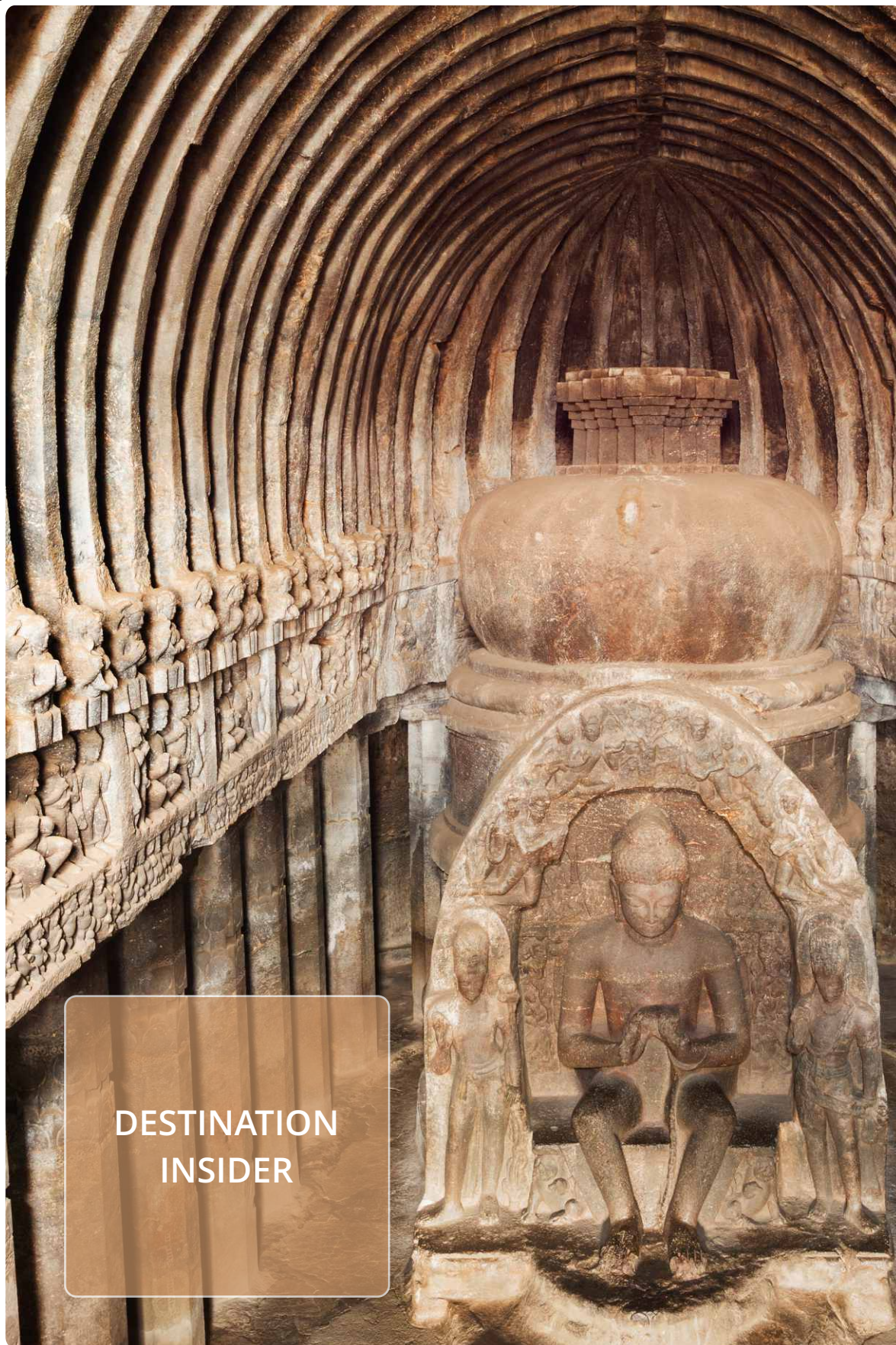
- Go on a guided tour of Fort Cochin and Matancherry which are not too far away (1 hr/20 minutes one way). Fort Cochin and Matancherry are a wonderful mix of Dutch, Portuguese, British and Jewish history and influences. There is option of taking a local train ride from Mararikulam upto Aroor (40 minutes/or even shorter) and doing the rest of the journey to Fort Cochin by car for the sightseeing. While at Matancherry spend time at Little Queen Embroidery which sells some rare embroidery work that came with the nuns from Europe. Some of the embroidery tradition you find here dates back to the Middle Ages. It is now done by women from the fisherman community of

Mararikulam.

- While at the property rise early for a walk in the beach and to see the local fisherman return from the sea with their catch. Explore the neighbourhood of Mararikulam on cycles. Swim in the sea. Spend time in the Butterfly Garden. Take an Ayurvedic Massage in the Spa to get introduced to one of the world's most sophisticated and powerful mind-body health systems.

Day 14, 15, 16 – At Marari Beach Resort.

Day 17 – Drive from Marari Beach Resort to Cochin Airport (1 hr/40 minutes) for your onward journey.



DESTINATION
INSIDER



AURANGABAD – THE CITY OF GATES

By Jean Noel Esteve, Product Head, Destination Knowledge Centre.

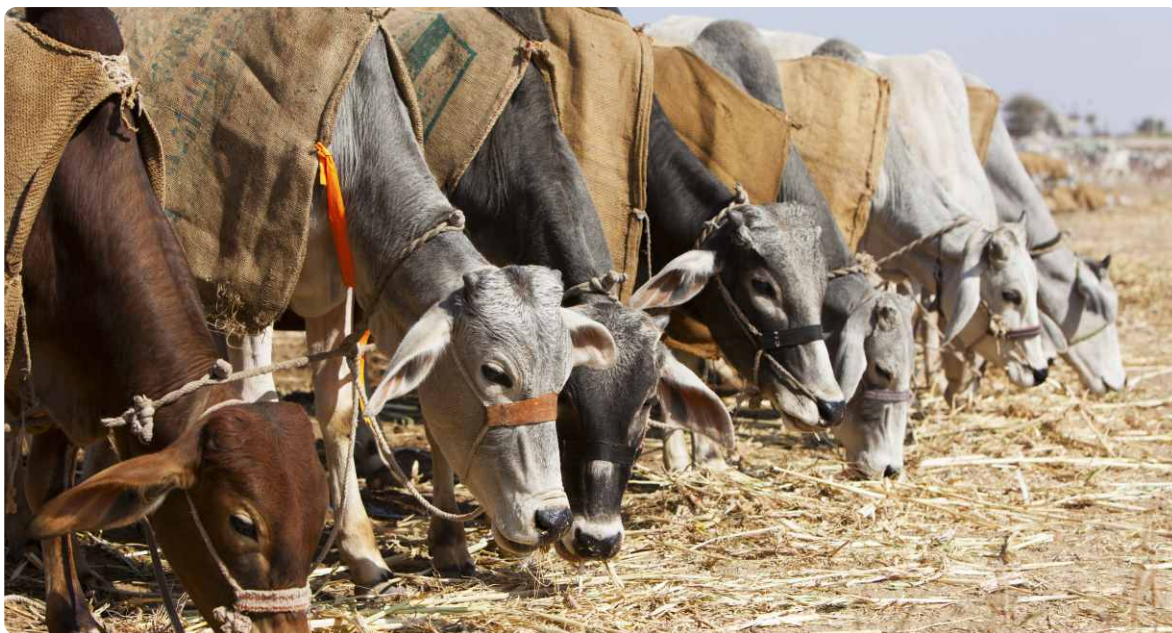
Travellers who think that India can be summed up with Rajasthan, South India, and Ladakh, have probably never even heard about Aurangabad.

During the second half of the 17th century, Aurangabad became the head-quarter of the last great Mughal Emperor – Aurangzeb - from where the latter conquered the Deccan states in the south of India. Aurangabad has some lesser-known treasures which deserve to be better promoted. Along with the Bibi-Ka-Maqbara (the simple replica of the Taj Mahal), there is the Pan Chakki (late 17th century water mill displaying the engineering skills of Malik Ambar the architect of the city) and the proud fortress of Daulatabad. History buffs can also visit Khuldabad, the final resting place of Emperor

Aurangzeb and the Dargah of Baba Shah Musafir, the complex of a Sufi Saint who was Aurangzeb's spiritual guide.

Combine Aurangabad with its magnificent neighbours, the Ajanta and Ellora Caves, the mysticism of Mandu, Bhopal: the City of Lakes, the quiet ghats of the Narmada River In Maheshwar or the Stupas at Sanchi. So much to discover!

For accommodation, challenges, insider tips, recommended number of nights etc write to your relationship manager for the full report on Aurangabad and Central India.



NAGOUR CATTLE FAIR

By Kuntal Baruwa, Explorer, Destination Knowledge Centre.

FIRST THINGS FIRST:

Nagaur Cattle Fair is not to be sold, proposed or even thought of as an alternative to the Pushkar Fair.

For an average client of ours who associates rural Rajasthan with colours – turbans, clothes et al - the Nagaur Cattle Fair may be almost lackluster. For the fair has none of these. Unlike the Pushkar and or even Bateswar Fair at Chambal; there is no Religious Fair, a lake, or a river (and life around it) or temples as a distraction either. The Rajasthan Tourism pamphlet did say that there would be activities such as horse dance, moustache competition, folk music, tug of war between locals and tourists et al on the lines of Pushkar Fair. But I didn't see any. Even the stage remained half-done with no sign of any officials during my 3 night stay.

but that said, the Nagaur Cattle Fair is rustic and just

like an animal fair for farmers should be - devoid of any frills. It is not made up for tourist and definitely lesser known.

LOCATION:

The arid and dry Nagaur- between Jodhpur and Bikaner (or vice versa). Farmers from Punjab, Haryana and other parts of Rajasthan come to the Nagaur Fair every year to buy bullocks, horses and camels. While bullocks and camels are bought for the purpose of agriculture, horses mostly find their way to vendors who would supply them as rides for grooms on his way to the bride's home during weddings.

WHAT TO ACCEPT:

Villagers with their makeshift tents and animals for sale spread themselves out in three different sections right next to the highway – one section is exclusively for camels and the other two for horses and bulls. The camel section is located in a colony. Imagine the empty spaces of your gated complex

being taken over by camels and their owners. Concrete houses, people, camels, makeshift tents all together. Late afternoon smoke trails billow out of these sections whilst dinner is being cooked to be had before sunset. The villagers collect around the fire rubbing their palms to keep themselves warm. It gets freezing cold here after sunset (dropping to single digit in centigrade).

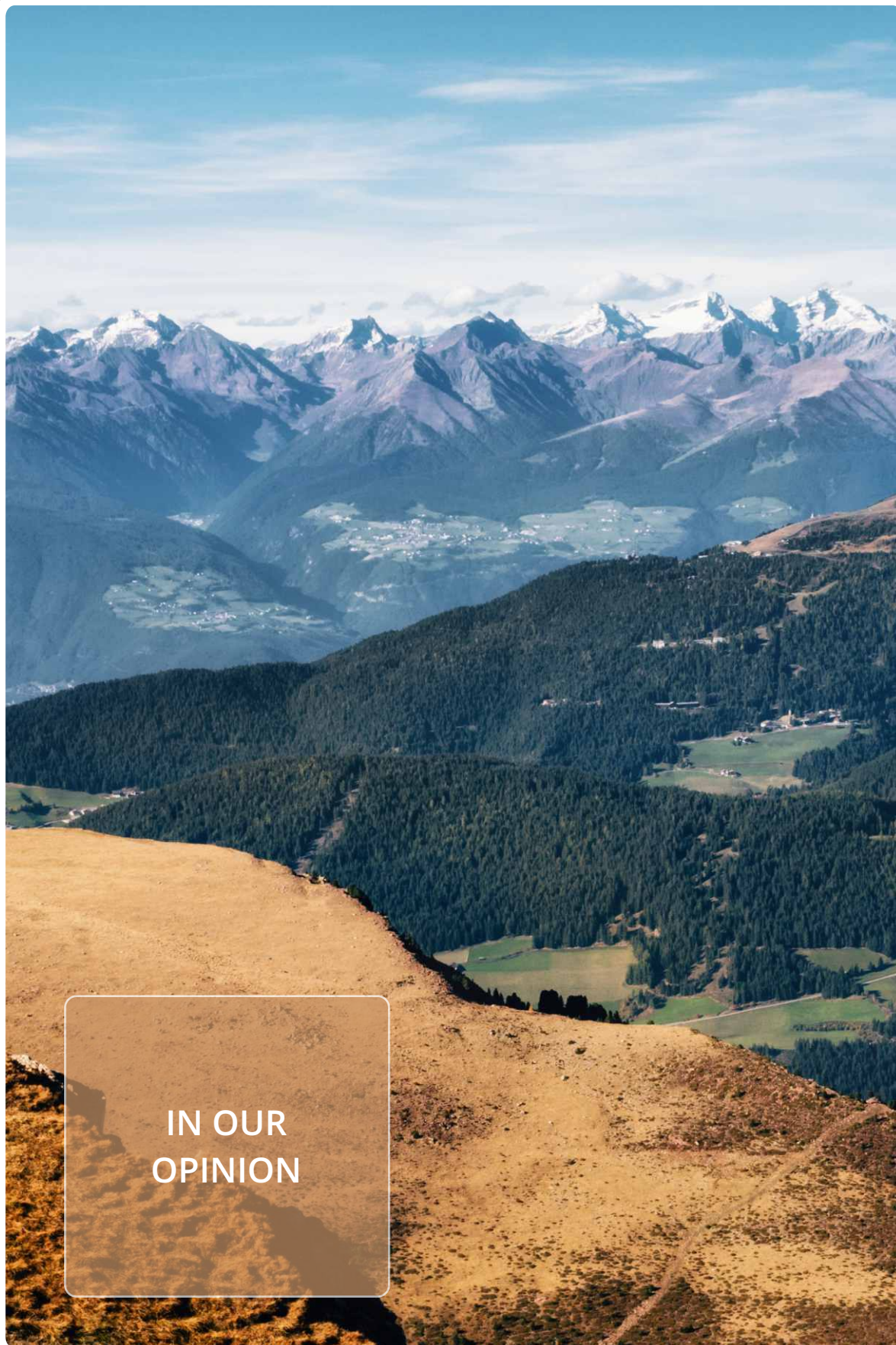
ADMIRE AND ACCEPT THINGS THE WAY THEY ARE – As I mentioned earlier the Nagaur Cattle Fair doesn't have the vivaciousness or energy of the Pushkar Fair. If the Nagaur Cattle Fair has to be enjoyed one has got to first admire and accept things the way they are – that this is what it is and there is nothing more. And the more time one spends at the fair, the more likely one starts noticing its myriad faces. The best way to go about is to keep on moving from one place to the other in the fair. There is always something exciting waiting to happen. Mind you it happens very quickly and dies down even quicker – it could be a camel herder decorating his camel or giving it a trim, a horse owner racing his horse kicking up dust all over the field to impress a prospective buyer, a bull being offered fodder and the owner coaxing and cajoling it to eat as if it is his own child, a hectic noisy negotiation between a buyer and a seller, a pair of bulls on the loose with its owner in hot pursuit, a family getting ready to cook dinner or a woman from the Puri community of Ujjain decorating the bamboo sticks (I bought one for 100 Rs) which they have been making for the Rajasthani herders for

centuries. It is in these fleeting moments that you witness the true essence of the Nagaur Cattle Fair and the life and times of the people who come here to buy and sell.

LIFE IS HARD HERE – On my first day at the fair I was returning to my camp (located very near to the camel section) and saw an exasperated father trying to console 3 wailing kids. The mother had tears in her eyes. I asked the father what happened. He told me he is yet to sell a camel so didn't have money to buy oil, spices or vegetables. He was asking the kids to have the super thick Bajra Rotis (bread made out of millet flour) with salt and water. The kids were refusing to do so having done it for the past two to three days. "Tell me what can I do? We have millet flour and salt from home. But I have no money to buy the rest and they are hungry". I gave him 100 Rs and he immediately left. The mother smiled and blessed me. And then it dawned on me. Almost everyone I noticed was cooking onions with chillies to go with their Bajra Rotis. I also saw an elderly couple gulping down their Bajra Rotis with water and salt. Everyone was saving on their resources till they made their first sale. Meals are twice a day for the villagers who come to the fair with their animals- a brunch late in the morning and dinner before sunset.

For accommodation, challenges, itinerary, insider tips, recommended number of nights etc write to your relationship manager for the full report on the Nagaur Cattle Fair.





IN OUR
OPINION



BEYOND FISH TENGA AND MOMOS

By Gitika Saikia, Mumbai based Gitika is a former marketing communications professional whose passion is to create an identity for the unexplored and underrated Assamese and Northeast Indian cuisine in the culinary world. At present, she curates Assamese and Northeast Indian menus and holds pop-ups in select restaurants and hotels.

History is testimony to that fact, that India has welcomed everyone with open arms. Be it the Jews, the Parsis, the Arabs, the Portuguese, the French, the Dutch or the British who came from further seas to trade, or more recently, the Nepalese, Tibetans and the Bangladeshis from its neighbouring countries. Each one has made a lasting impression on our culture. And more importantly, the food.

Similar is the case with the state of Assam in Northeast India which historians opine as one of

the greatest migration routes of mankind. Though hemmed in on three sides by mountain barriers; Assam's east and the northeast witnessed migrations from Southeast Asia, the hill passes of neighbouring Bhutan, Tibet and Nepal saw the Tibeto Burmans coming in, and from the west came the people of mainland India. More recently the British brought the indigenous tribes from Central India to work in the Tea Gardens and Bangladeshis to work in the rice fields of Assam.

The settlement of various communities and marriages amongst them has led to a distinct trait on food habits and physical appearances of the population. Over the years, it has undergone even more changes. Today, Assam has the perfect balance of mainland India and Southeast Asian influence, be its culture or cuisine.



Assamese cuisine is broadly influenced by:

1. Communities from mainland India who introduced their spices and methods of cooking. For instance, spices such as cumin, coriander, garam masala (mixture of ground spices), mustard oil, et al. For example: No Dal (lentil) in an Assamese kitchen is complete without panchphoran, a whole spice blend commonly used in Eastern India (states of West Bengal, Odisha and Bihar in particular) and also Bangladesh and Southern Nepal.

2. Communities from Southeast Asia who introduced their method of cooking which was mostly steamed with very less or almost no oil and with minimal or no spices, preserving techniques, and herbs to flavour dishes and greens. For example: Food in an Assamese kitchen is very simple with whatever Mother Nature has to offer during that season. And, whatever isn't available throughout the year are fermented and kept for later. People also brew their own rice beer and it is a common practice to offer rice beer in religious and social ceremonies.

Rice is a staple in Assam and is eaten for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Even sweets known as pitha are made of rice which is mandatory in all religious and social occasions. Apart from meat, fish and eggs, consumption of seasonal vegetables is extremely high. Each and every family in the rural areas maintains a kitchen garden in the backyard for personal consumption. In the villages, chicken, pork and duck are locally reared. Till date, refrigerators are still not popular amongst the rural folks; therefore, meat and fish are often smoked or fermented.

Join Gitika Saikia in a South Mumbai for a private hands on cooking session of Northeast Indian Cuisine which stands out for its distinct flavour, unique and alien even to most Indians: bland, hot, pungent, aromatic, healthy and fatty – all at the same time.



TOY TRAIN TO THE CLOUDS

Paul Whittle, Vice Chairman, Darjeeling Himalayan Railway Society UK.

The Darjeeling Himalayan Railway (DHR) is truly world famous. For almost 140 years the little British-built steam locos have been climbing over 7,000ft up to the hill station of Darjeeling. Built in the days of the British 'Raj' the 55 mile narrow gauge DHR opened in 1881, rapidly transforming the economy of the region. Up the line went foodstuffs, coal and machinery. Down the hillside went the output of the ever-expanding tea estates for export around the world. Not for nothing is Darjeeling's famous brew still known as the 'Champagne of Teas.'

Perhaps the DHR's 'finest hour' was during World War 2 when it carried thousands of Allied troops to and from Darjeeling that had become a massive

leave centre. There was even a specially constructed ambulance train that ran non-stop up the line conveying sick and wounded service personnel to the military depots at Lebong and Jalapahar.

Yet despite its current fame, less than thirty years ago the DHR was threatened with closure. Indian Railways was modernising fast and the old steam trains did not form part of their agenda. Fortunately, in the nick of time, supporters in India and around the world started a rescue campaign, and in 1999 UNESCO awarded the line World Heritage Site status - only the second to get that coveted accolade.

Keeping this twisting, turning steeply-graded line in operation has always been a challenge. A series of innovative reverses (or zig zags) and spirals eases

the gradient, but the annual monsoon rain in this mountainous region calls for constant vigilance and sometimes expensive repairs. Yet to its credit, Indian Railways has risen to the task and invested much effort and expertise, maintaining the line's unique heritage whilst providing a safe, comfortable journey experience. So alongside the vintage steam locomotives can be found a small fleet of diesel locos, whilst the recent introduction of modern air-conditioned carriages is proving very popular on the longer rides.

Today the DHR continues its major contribution to the local tourist economy and each year it carries

well over 100,000 passengers, most opting for the round trip from Darjeeling to Ghum via the splendid view-point at Batasia with its imposing Gurkha war memorial and the majestic background of the Himalayas.

Yes, steaming to Darjeeling really is one of the world's great train rides!

Further information:

DHR Official web site www.dhr.in.net
DHR Society UK www.dhrs.org

Paul Whittle pro@dhrs.org





THE MULTITASKING INDIAN GODDESSES

By Nandini Sensharma, Nandini is a Mumbai-based entrepreneur, actor, creative communications strategist, mother of two, and dabbles in creative writing in her free time.

Childhood memories of mom pushing us in every sphere are still vivid. "Boys and girls are equal. There's nothing a girl can't do that a boy can." It was a pertinent emphasis for girls of my age as we were being brought up by mothers, for most of whom raising a family had to replace all other priorities. I loved growing up at a time when parents were quietly pushing the limits of a patriarchal society. In the effort to bring up girls who were as competent as boys, who can also take care of their families and homes; daughters were expected to multitask much more than the sons.

While most Indian families gave their daughters

good education, sent them to the best institutes, allowed them to chase their dreams of arts, music, culture by smartly boxing those into "hobbies only", it was pretty much an unsaid rule that an educated girl would do a good job. And the best suited job for her would be one in which she'd get more time to raise her children. Words, such as those from my highly educated uncle prompted me to be more resolute about what I didn't want to do.

During my post-graduation, I was told to choose a stream that'll land me a less demanding job where I'd have more time to raise children that I'd eventually bear. I ended up choosing the most exciting stream – marketing, which demanded way too much travel for a girl, meant chasing numbers and dealing with crazy, sometimes unrealistic deadlines.

Comfort unsettles me. So after a decade and one fine morning, I decided to make a new beginning, right from scratch. I bought stakes in a friend's company and began my entrepreneurial journey. I was already a mother of two, honorary secretary of my housing society and quite dutiful in all the roles I was expected to play.

Soon I realized, the business I had invested in, has been making losses for years and it was impossible to recover my investment. Well-wishers and family cautioned me - get out and look for a job. But sorting the mess out was way too exciting. I didn't relent and turned the company around.

Today, I feel good about myself. I dared to fail, redefined success, created brands, helped businesses grow and changed lives. In some small way, I'm inspiring my neighbourhood girls as much as those back in my small hometown.

The world today needs more adaptable, efficient, skilled workforce than ever before. And an Indian

woman who has been made to push her limits of multi-tasking is poised to catch up faster than anyone else. She's not only expected to deliver as much as her male counterpart at workplace, but also to take care of the husband and the family. No wonder In India, despite multiple powerful Gods such as Brahma (the God of creation), Vishnu (of sustenance) to Shiva (of destruction), it is the ten-handed Goddess Durga who symbolizes the power that triumphs over evil. Ours is a culture that has always acknowledged the potential of a woman and her multitasking capabilities. In my writing I am capturing only a speck of the spirit of this multitasking Goddess.

Meet Nandini in her Mumbai office over a cup of tea to know more about her journey from a small town to India's financial capital where she now runs her own business. Hear from her about women in India and women entrepreneurship in India; the opportunities and challenges, her aspirations, how she juggles between work and family and what keeps her going.





TEMPLE FESTIVALS OF KERALA

By Sreeni Nilamburi, Destination Knowledge Centre's Festival Expert, Kerala.

Temples in Kerala (and in India at large) are primarily considered abodes of Gods and Goddesses rather than places of worship. This distinction is interesting as devotees are only incidental visitors to the abode and not central to the scheme of things there. The deities like sentient beings sleep, eat, bathe and receive visitors in their spare time. Temple festivals of Kerala have to be viewed with this fact in mind - they are occasions when the deities residing in the sanctum sanctorum come out to give blessings and mark special occasions.

Almost all aspects of a traditional temple festival is connected to how a divine persona would visit Her or His realm. The deity (represented usually by an

idol) uses an exalted transport like a caparisoned elephant or a palanquin or a chariot. The choice is usually determined by regional practices and preferences. Drums and trumpets are usually used to announce the arrival of the deity to villages - much as they were used in earlier days to announce passage of Kings. A decorated umbrella and other royal insignias are often carried to indicate exalted stature and sovereign power.

Almost all temple festivals in Kerala are based on this premise - that the deity emerges from the sanctum sanctorum in a divine procession to mark a special occasion. Depending on the ritual basis, festivals are classified into different types - ulsavam, pooram, vela, thalappoli etc. Festivals can (usually) last from a day to nine days and almost all of them conclude with a ritual holy immersion of the deity in a water body such as a river, lake or the ocean.

Ostensibly these water bodies would have marked the end of land over which the deity commanded divine authority.

Apart from these ritual and royal dimensions, temple festivals have over centuries evolved cultural and social dimensions. The accompanying drums and trumpets evolved into elaborate percussion orchestras of different flavours and have become independently existing art forms today. The caparisoned elephants and paraphernalia evolved into elaborate and colourful decorations making the processions unforgettable audio visual treats. Stepping into the twentieth century and beyond, evolving social sensibilities meant that the rituals and royal dimensions started fading and temple festivals came to be regarded as predominantly cultural events.

In Kerala, temple festivals are mostly celebrated from late November to early May, a carry-over from an agrarian society when these months were the non-raining ones. Its tropical setting and abundant rain forests mean that elephants are most often the divine carriers. A highly evolved and sophisticated



percussion system with seemingly infinite possibilities enthrall the thronging crowds in a timeless manner. These magnificent events are a great treat for the eyes, ears and mind even to the uninitiated. But every festival has its own special socio-historical setting and even a basic understanding of this setting can increase the joy of watching one manifold.





BHUTAN, LAST SUMMER

By Lovleen Sagar, Senior Vice President, Destination Knowledge Centre.

The pace of life in Bhutan is slow and it's an ideal place to reinvigorate your body, mind and soul. The environment is such that you feel one with nature and relearn to enjoy the small things in life.

This summer I spent ten days relearning life's pace and the importance of stillness. Buddhism, which is the prominent religion of the land, permeates every aspect of life here and inconspicuously influences habits and culture.

I went to monasteries, met monks and nuns, ate local organic food, breathed in fresh air and savoured the small pleasures of life.

My favourite was an unplanned stop, enroute a

rafting trip near Punakha. When I saw farmers sowing paddy on the road side, I could not help the urge to get dirty and work! The locals were hesitant at first, wondering if I would indeed be helpful or a nuisance. The guide helped me persuade them, and to both our delight we proved him right by sowing an entire field. There was laughter, fun and cheerful banter; smiles, hand-shakes and a roll in the mud! The language of smiles is universal and we all communicated without knowing each other's language. A connection was made.

Art fascinates me and looking at all those beautiful monasteries with ancient art work, I was tempted to try out a workshop to create a Mandala.

A mandala is a geometric configuration of symbols, that represents the cosmos metaphysically or symbolically; a time-microcosm of the universe.



Though it originally meant to represent wholeness and a model for the organizational structure of life itself—a cosmic diagram that shows us our relation to the infinite, the world that extends beyond and within our minds and bodies.

In the Buddhist spiritual tradition, mandalas are not just an offering of the universe to the Guru, it is also employed for focusing attention of practitioners as a spiritual guidance tool, for establishing a sacred space and as an aid to meditation.

With the help of a local monk, I learnt the significance of the process of creating a Mandala. We used coloured sand and coloured rice grains on a large canvas, kept on the floor. Didn't realise I spent three hours creating! At the end, we were allowed to take photos and very significantly, were told to dismantle what we had just made. A very important life lesson was learnt of the "impermanence of things" in life; also, a conviction that you can re-create what you created earlier.

According to art therapist and mental health counsellor Susanne F. Fincher, we owe the re-introduction of Mandalas into modern Western thought to Carl Gustav Jung, the Swiss analytical psychologist. In his autobiography, Jung wrote: "I

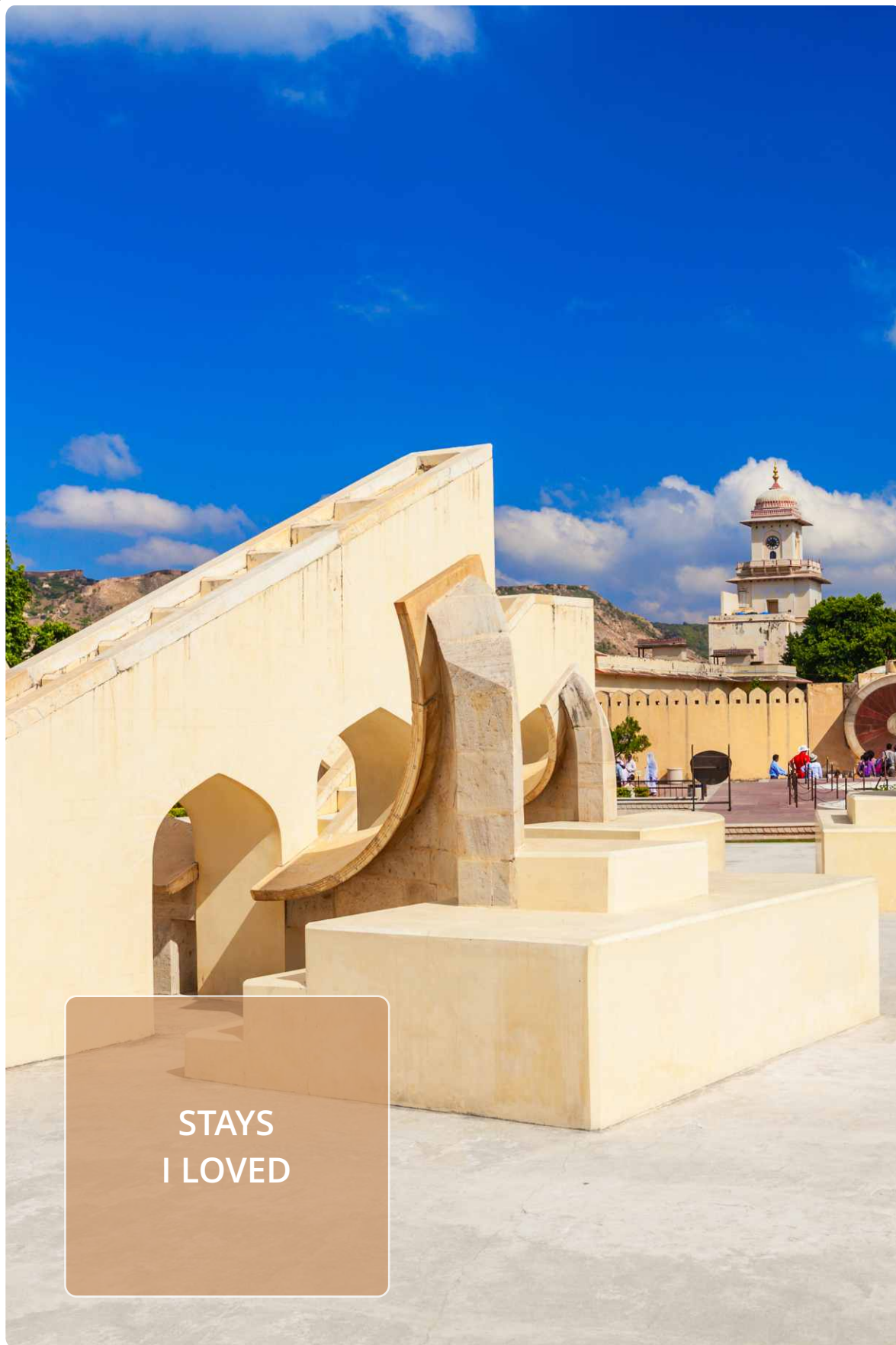
sketched every morning in a notebook a small circular drawing, ... which seemed to correspond to my inner situation at the time. ... Only gradually did I discover what the mandala really is: ... the Self, the wholeness of the personality, which if all goes well is harmonious.

— Carl Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, pp. 195–196.

Jung recognized that the urge to make Mandalas emerges during moments of intense personal growth. Their appearance indicates a profound re-balancing process is underway in the psyche. The result of the process is a more complex and better integrated personality.

The Mandala serves a conservative purpose - namely, to restore a previously existing order. But it also serves the creative purpose of giving expression and form to something that does not yet exist, something new and unique. ... The process is that of the ascending spiral, which grows upward while simultaneously returning again and again to the same point.

Bhutan is beckoning, come explore!



STAYS
I LOVED

STAYS I LOVED

Mainstream, But Different

Here are some of Lovleen Sagar's favourite stays from her travels across Rajasthan, Nepal, West Bengal and Assam in 2019-20. Lovleen Sagar is Senior Vice President, Destination Knowledge Centre.



Raas Devigarh, Devigarh, Rajasthan

The erstwhile palace was restored to its former glory in 1999 and converted into an all-suite luxury hotel. The modern, minimalist design of its interior juxtaposes with the ancient and ornate architecture of its exterior. Nestled in the Aravalli Hills of the Udaipur area, RAAS Devigarh, an 18th century palace, holds a commanding position over one of the three main passes into its valley. Post the refurbishment after Raas took over, I visited it for the first time in summer. The dining

areas have been further extended in a brilliant way, without disturbing the overall style. In fact, the introduction of wrought iron has added to the design elements of the building. The beauty and charm of old-world Rajputana, showcasing an array of decorative styles and landscaped gardens juxtaposed with a modern state-of-the-art swimming pool is just outstanding beauty. Small Raas touches have been added in the rooms and the menu extended. I loved my stay!



Bujera Fort, Udaipur, Rajasthan

I loved visiting Bujera Fort on one of my recent travels to Udaipur. I was really impressed with the way tea was laid out for us. Richard Hanlon's (owner) mother's hand-embroidered, starched to perfection table cloth and a proper tea-cozy with scones & marmalade reminded me of army lifestyles that army folk in the colonies learnt from the British. It was straight out of an Enid Blyton book!

Bujera Fort is a newly built fortress in a spectacular setting in the Aravali hills, on the outskirts of Udaipur. Constructed on purely traditional lines, with eighty six hand carved stone columns and many Jarokas in local stone. Virtually all the doors and windows are salvaged, creating the feeling of being in a centuries old building. There are small treasures all over as you go from one space to the other. The kitchen is very welcoming & they encourage you to do your own thing if you have had enough of curry! It's what I would call bohemian chic. Gorgeous, cosy, friendly and welcoming.

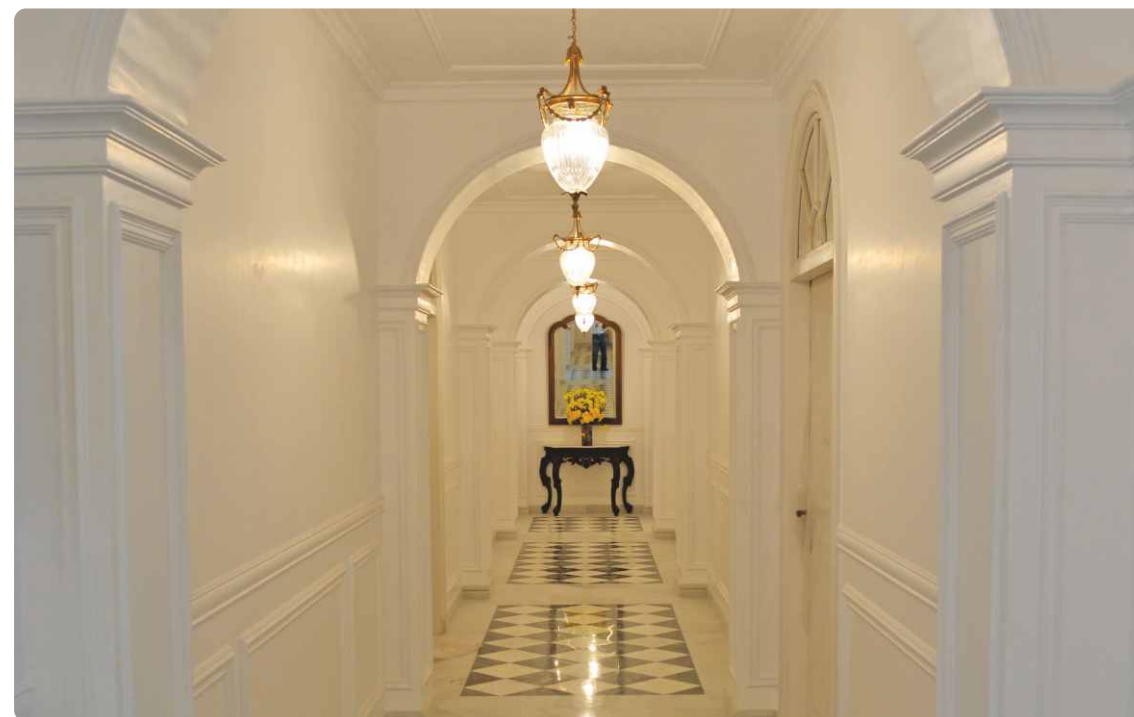
Rajbari Bawali, Kolkata, West Bengal

Located about an hour and 30 minutes from Kolkata, The Rajbari Bawali is a 300-year-old heritage property that has been elegantly turned into a fine luxury boutique heritage resort near Kolkata. The vintage opulence, style, and grace of the erstwhile landowners of Bengal will come to life for you the moment you step in. A traditional Bengali welcome is a nice touch. It's an architectural delight and the interiors are done very tastefully by the owners. Bohemian chic in a very delicious way! The Bengali food is extraordinary and the hospitality very personalized. I really enjoyed strolling around the village with the caretaker, who is fondly welcomed in every village household; people were offering us tea, Bhaji and all sorts of chatter went on as we walked through the village. The boat ride was also lovely. Everything is so untouched by mass tourism that there is an innocence you don't see in over sold places. This is true India in its simplest and most elegant form.



Dwarikas Dhulikhel Resort, Dhulikhel, Nepal

Set in the Himalayan foothills outside Kathmandu, the luxurious Dwarika's Resort in Dhulikhel is spread over acres of hilly terrain. If you have a mobility issue, this is not a place for you. The Himalayan spa treatments, gentle hikes and other activities keep you busy. The fresh organic cuisine prepared with ingredients from their own farms is lovely. There are magnificent views of the Himalayan range. The rooms and suites are state-of-the-art and very luxurious. I tried my hand at pottery which is one of the activities they offer and it was great fun with a very patient teacher! The spa was also very professional.



The Glenburn Penthouse, Kolkata, West Bengal

The Glenburn Penthouse is a discrete, elegant residence in the heart of historic Kolkata, with spectacular views of all her iconic landmarks; from Victoria Memorial to Eden Gardens, the lush green expanse of the Maidan and the majestic bridges that cross the River Hoogly. Conceptualised and executed over a number of years, Husna and the team behind Glenburn Tea Estate's boutique hotel in Darjeeling, have

carefully amassed an exquisite collection of antique Bengal colonial furniture and artworks to create a haven of quiet luxury above the bustling streets of the city of Kolkata. They take "attention to detail" to another level. Even the electric kettle in the room matches the colour-scheme! Even if you are not staying here, please do go for a high tea in their gorgeous tea-lounge.



Wathai Heritage Bungalow, Limbuguri Tea Estate, Assam

The 3 room Heritage Wathai Tea Bungalow at Limbuguri Tea Estate is just a kilometre away from the lesser known Dibru Saikhowa National Park. Considered one of the 19 biodiversity hotspots in the world, Dibru Saikhowa is home to over 300 species of avifauna and 36 species of mammals, including the rare feral horses that once belonged to the stables of the British army.

The 100 year-old Heritage Wathai Tea Bungalow is low-key, simple, neat and clean with limited facilities. But Japan (the cook), Samuel (the server) and Kalpana (housekeeping) more than make up for it with their super courteous service. There is an English speaking in-house manager to attend to clients. The Bungalow's jaali kamra (a netted sit-out) — where you chat with other guests, read, have your cuppa or beer — is cheery, with a smattering of white cane chairs and views of the tea bushes. Breakfast is served here by Samuel - eggs and veg cutlets, seared tomatoes with a spot of cheese, fruit and juice, marmalade, heaps of hot toast and tea/coffee. Lunch and dinner

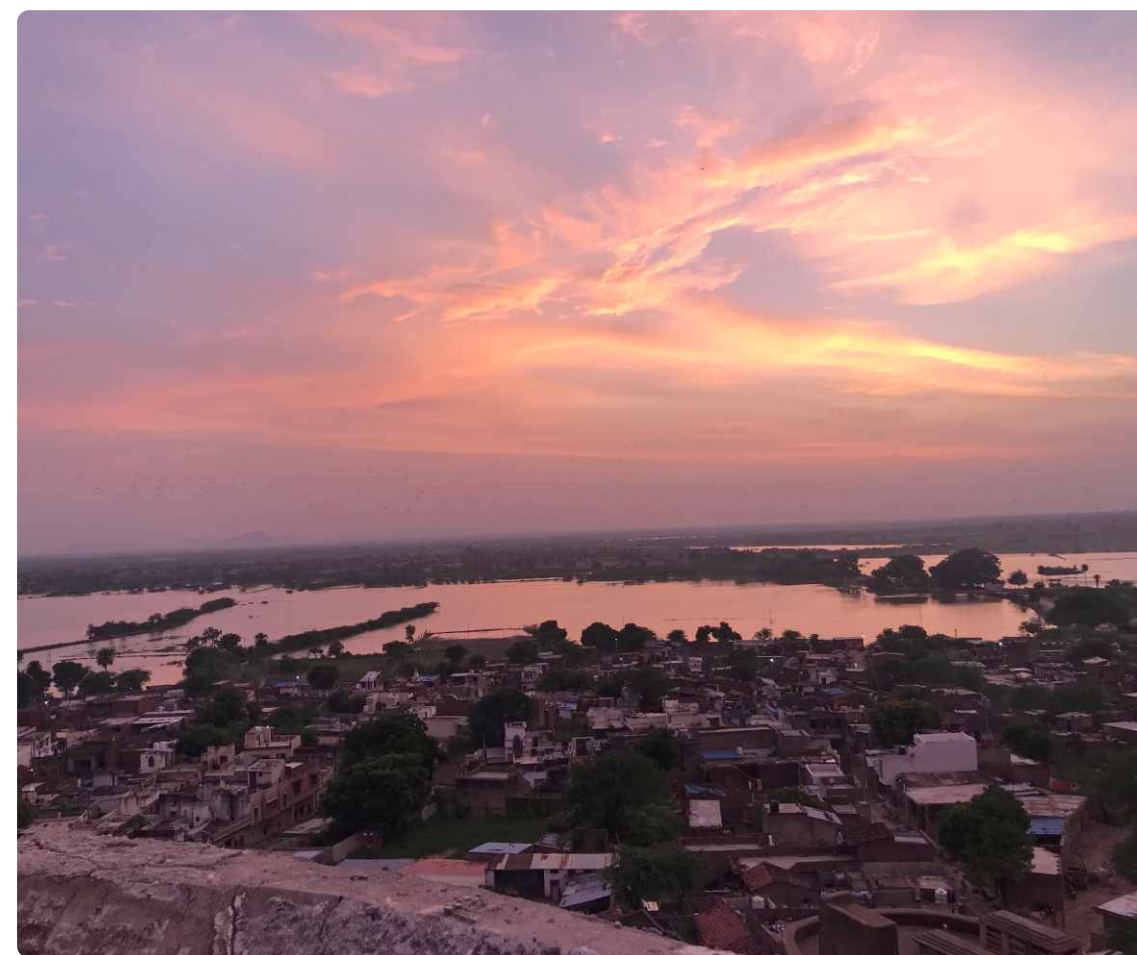
cooked by Japan are delicious home-style affairs. And Kalpana would sneak in and out like Houdini and make sure your room is clean. You will never see her doing that.

The village of Wathai after which the Bungalow is named is a walking distance from the Bungalow where one can go for a morning or late afternoon stroll to watch the villagers at work. The early morning country boat ride on Maguri Beel (30 minutes one way) is a great way to enjoy nature. The canoe moves noiselessly through the water body, interspersed with sandy islands, skirting the marshes thronging with avian life and it is a magical experience. One can also go on a day trip to the Nam Phake Village (2 hrs one way) inhabited by the Tai Phakes; a lesser known Buddhist community of Assam numbering about 2000 souls. It is a rare sneak peek into the pastoral Tai speaking land of China, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam. The ancestry of the Tai Phakes can be traced back to the Yunnan province of China and the Shan state of Myanmar.



Calcutta Bungalow, Kolkata, West Bengal

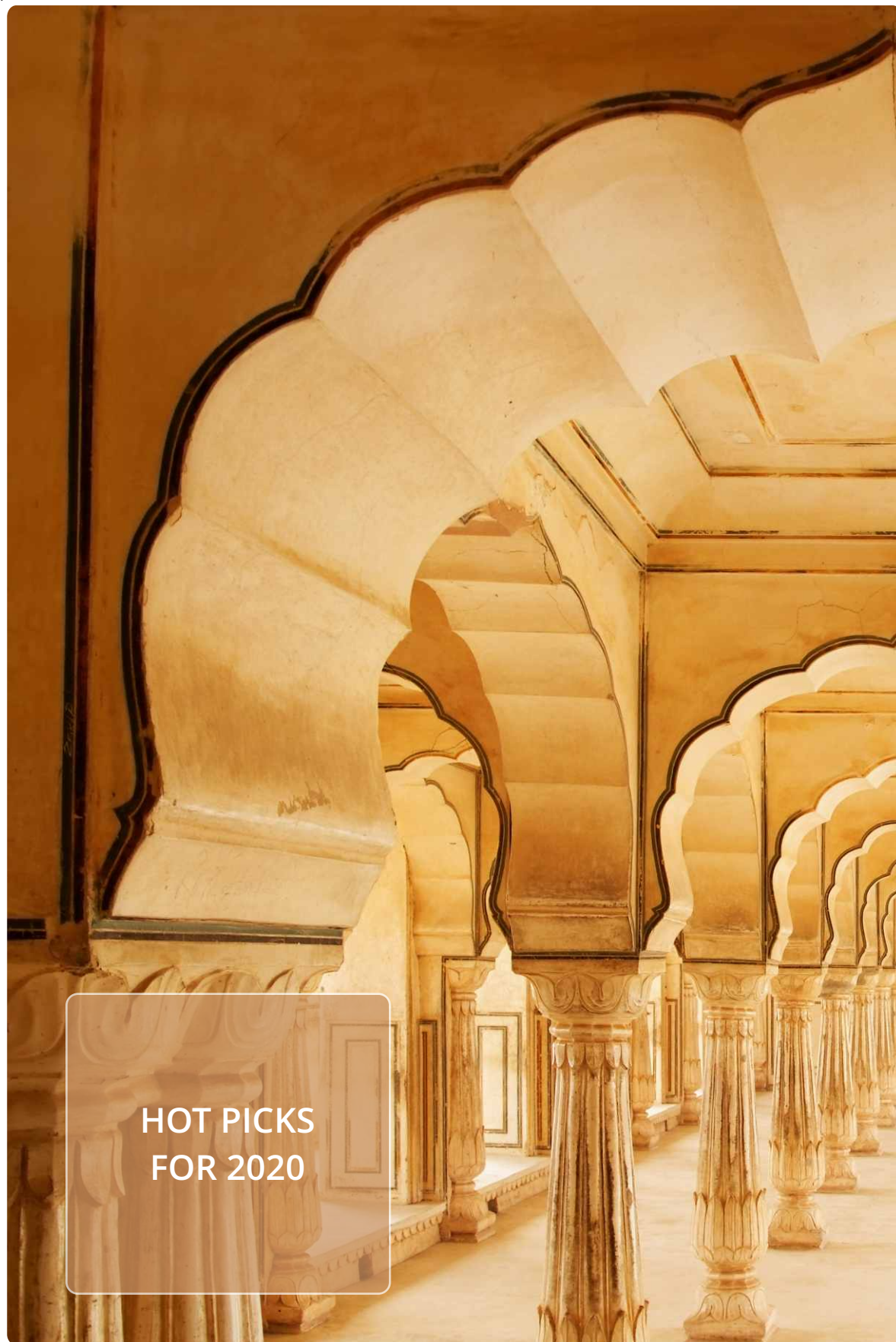
This is a beautifully restored 1920s townhouse, representative of a golden era in Calcutta's architecture. The property is in the heart of the Bengali part of the city that the British referred to as the Black Town. They have theme based well-appointed bedrooms with all modern amenities. It's amazing how small spaces have been utilized to their optimum in a very tastefully decorated place. I loved it!



Shahpura Bagh, Bhilwara, Rajasthan

Shahpura Bagh is the residence of the rulers of Shahpura. They pride themselves in providing an authentic homestay experience in rural Rajasthan. Life is unhurried here. The days filled with sunshine, conversation and picnics, fishing and boating on the lake with lazy sundowners overlooking sunsets. I really enjoyed the visits to

the local market, to the farm and to the Dhikola Fort. The most amazing sighting of bats and a range of other migratory birds made my day! It was monsoon time, and there were dancing peacocks all over the large and spread out property. Truly, a place where you can rest, refresh, and revive yourself.



HOT PICKS
FOR 2020

HOT PICKS FOR 2020



The Rohet House, Jodhpur, Rajasthan

The 9-room Rohet House is an extension of the family run bouquet of hospitality experiences under the House of Rohet. Built out of Jodhpur sandstone and red ochre, the property is spread across 14,000 sq feet. Dining at The Rohet House is special with recipes from the family kitchen that goes back to several generations. Inviting, inclusive, and intimate, Rohet House gives a feeling of being a home away from home where one can spend time in the garden and the terrace lounges, take a dip in the swimming pool or laze by the verandah or the pool deck.



Svanir Wilderness Ecostay, Jagannathprasad, Odisha

The 6-room Svanir is a 45 minutes' drive from Bhubaneswar. All the 6 cottages inspired by tribal architecture of Odisha are very spacious and constructed from locally available material. The property is flanked by the Chandaka Elephant Reserve and there is minimal inhabitation nearby. The Mukherji family lives within the premises and

one of the family members will always be present during the meals, supervising the kitchen, often seen serving, and interacting with the guests. A great place to return to after the sightseeing of Bhubaneswar for a relaxing home style meal and to chit chat with the family over a few drinks.



Rosé Amer, Jaipur, Rajasthan

The Rosé Amer has 8 spacious and bright rooms with wide windows offering views of the garden or the pool. Few rooms come with a private garden. The interior of the library overlooking the garden is inspired by the Amber Fort with detailing of Mughal motifs and famous Thikri work. Decorated with fancy chandeliers and floral furniture, the restaurant at Rosé Amer serves Indian food in copperware and encourages slow cooking in terracotta earthenware. They also serve continental cuisine.

The Belgadia Palace, Baripada, Odisha

The 10-room Belgadia Palace is an 18th century Victorian double-storeyed structure that sits on a raised hill of Baripada, Odisha. Home to the erstwhile royal family of Mayurbhanj, the palace itself is a living museum and has been restored with a lot of effort and care by the two daughters of the family. Each room has a distinctive colour theme, and its own character. Spread across 12 acres, the palace also houses a billiards table and a bar, a massive library, a spa, a dining room and tearoom, a living room, a temple and even a games room. Belgadia Palace also connects guests to the local tribal community through curated tours. It uses local produce and also offers an artist-in-residence programme where the artists get to interact with the local communities, visit local heritage sites and create art inspired by their experiences which are then displayed at the palace for sale.



Villa De 1945, Mahe

The 8-room Villa De 1945 is a heritage boutique property which blends the colonial face of Mahe which was once a French colony with traditional Kerala architecture. The restaurant serves Kerala cuisine as well as Indian and Chinese. Villa De 1945 is about one and a half hours drive from Kannur International Airport and can be used as a base to explore in and around neighbouring Telicherry and Kannur; particularly the unique Theyyam tradition of North Kerala.



Jōhad, Shekhawati, Rajasthan

Following the success of Dera Mandawa in Jaipur, the royal family of Mandawa has revived Jōhad- a living farm that has been passed down over generations in the family that is now headed by Thakur Durga Singh. The farm, which is less than 3 hours from Jaipur, is located in the village of Nahar Singhani in the vicinity of Mukundgarh and Nawalgarh. Smriti Mandawa, Thakur Durga Singh's daughter is the host. The farm is home to

the indigenous breed of Tharparkar cows, and camels that are still used to plough the fields, a gaggle of chickens, farm dogs, and birds. Jōhad has 04 tents, 02 suites and 01 villa; all with modern amenities, and joyful interiors which is a blend of the old and the new. The food is curated by Thakurani Usha Kumari, the lady of the house and Smriti's mother.



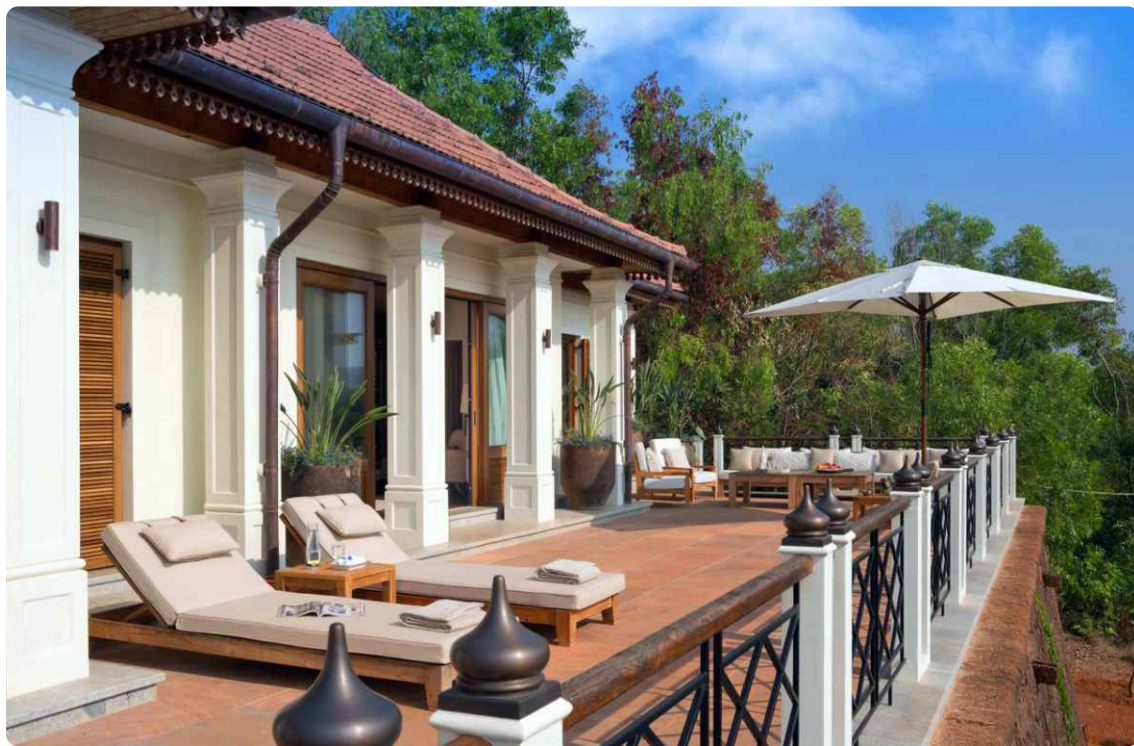
Deeppura Garh, Sikar, Rajasthan

A cross between a traditional Rajasthani Fort and a Mediterranean villa, the 10-room Deeppura Garh is a place for style, comfort, space, privacy and has been done with a lot of taste - a combination of the Italian owner's and a renowned designer's brilliant ideas. Each room is different from other - some being roomy and lofty and others being cosy and intimate. The interior is calm and easy on the eyes. There are plenty of areas to chill like the roof terraces, gardens, flower-filled courtyards, a huge pool and pool garden, shady gazebos, a large sitting area, a library, a dining room with adjacent dining terrace for romantic dinners under the stars. The cuisine is Italian delicacies, a range of Oriental and Continental treats, along with Rajasthani dishes - all freshly cooked.



Cabo Serai, Goa

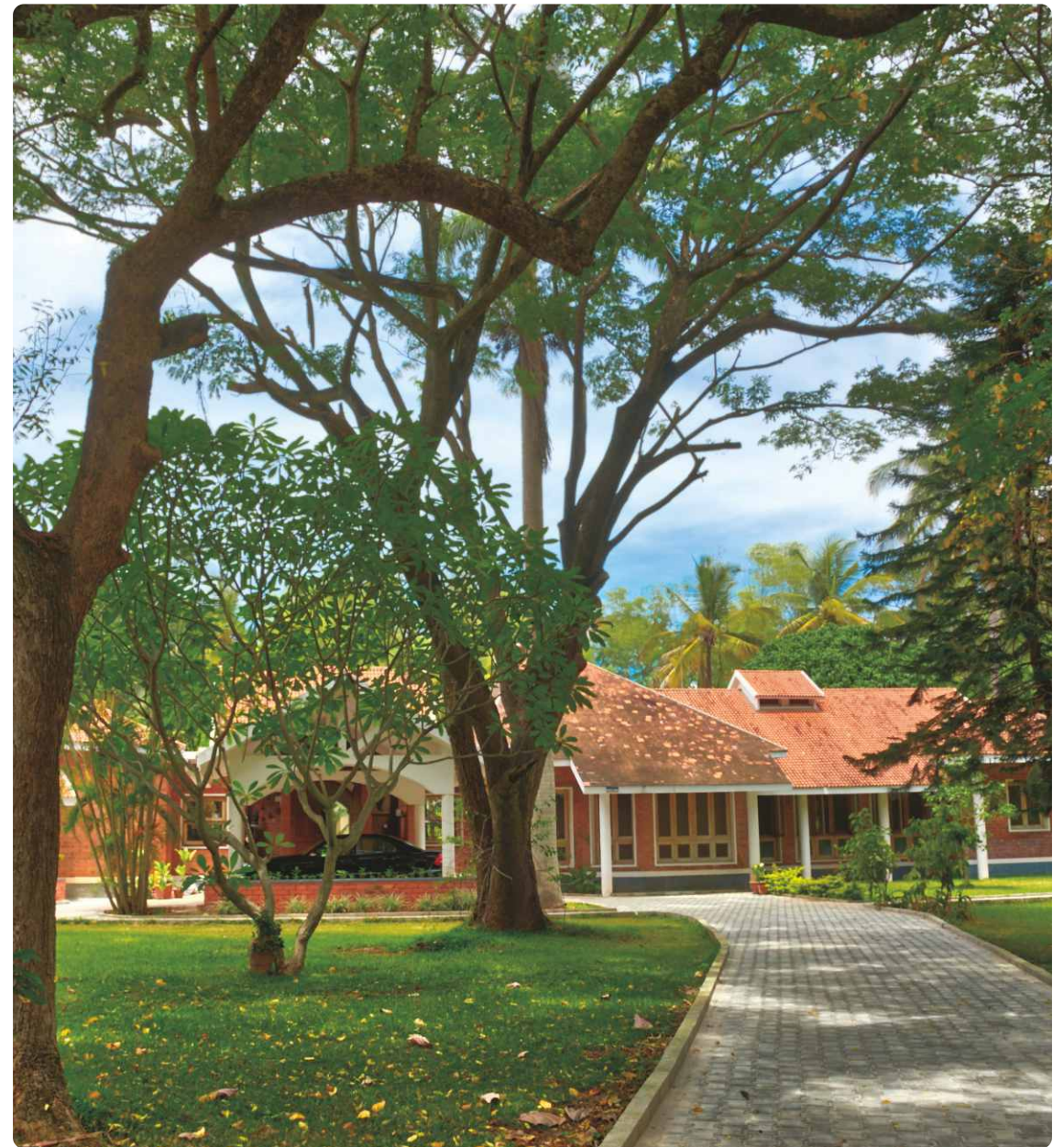
The 6-room Cabo Serai is situated on top of a hill in southern Goa, overlooking the Arabian Sea. The property is well spread out over 14 acres of greenery with a panoramic view of the sea and surrounding forest. Built using local natural materials, including wood and laterite bricks by local artisans, all the 04 cottages and 02 tents are sea facing with modern comforts. Cabo Serai serves food prepared from locally-sourced organic ingredients, amidst an alfresco setting and also on the menu are delectable meals based on Satvik philosophy. Yoga, Ayurveda and Nature Trails are some of the in-house offerings. A great place to end a holiday in India.



Kahani Paradise, Gokarna, Karnataka

Located four hours away from Goa, the 6-room Kahani Paradise is a part of a 20 acre estate just above the Paradise Beach in Gokarna where the Western Ghats dip into the Arabian Sea. Enter through an antique Rajasthani door; enjoy slow and graceful living at one of the six suites, all with outdoor sitting areas, relax by an infinity pool and unwind at their canopied sundeck or the terrace.

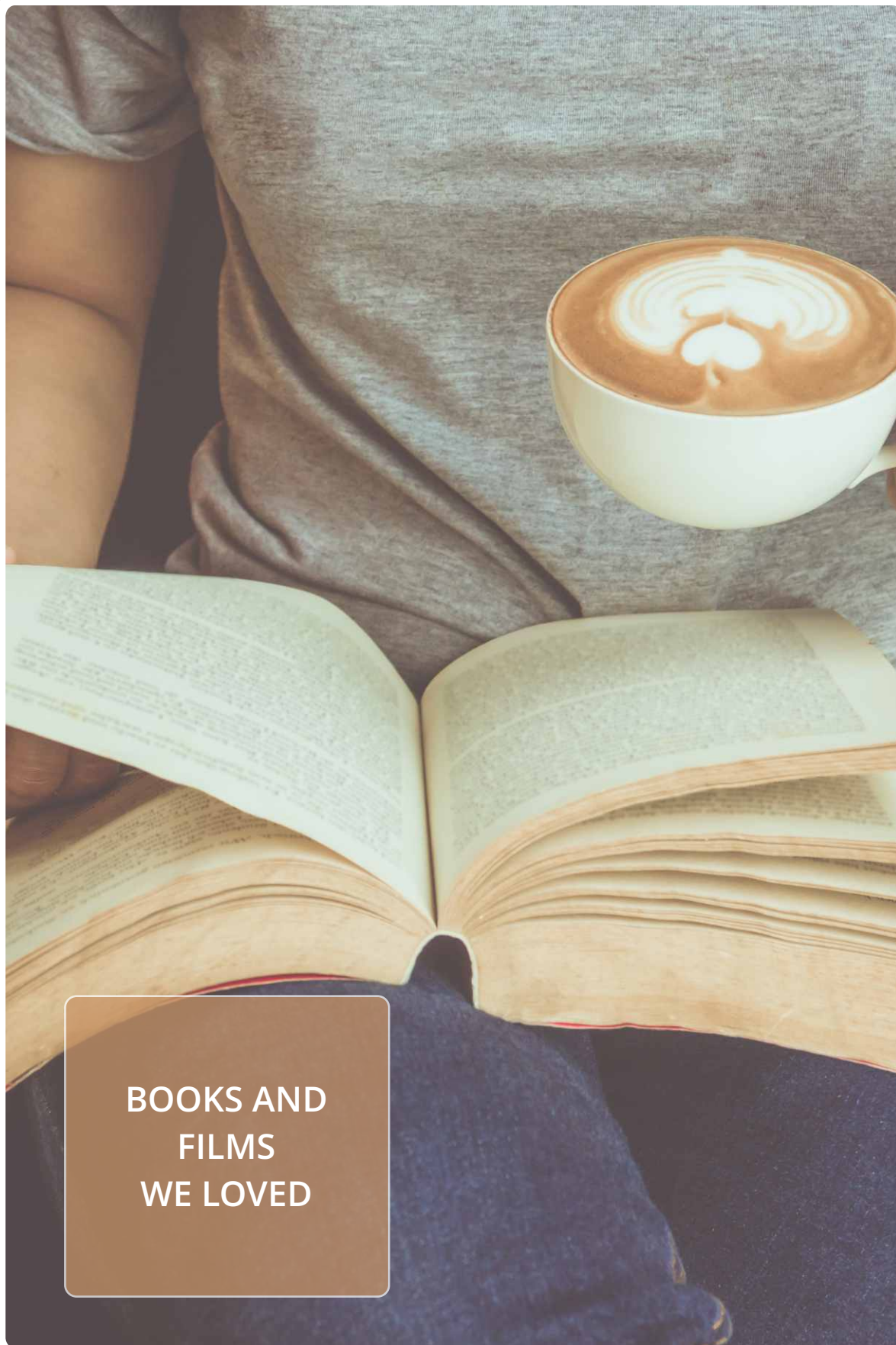
Meals are served in the dining room along with an airy verandah, drawing on ingredients from their kitchen garden or nearby organic market. The food is delicious and fresh. The yoga and open air-massage rooms are quieter reflective spots. One can also go for walks to the nearby beaches or visit the 'Thursday' market. A great place to end a holiday in India.



Efkay's Homestay, Mysore, Karnataka

Set in 3 acres of well-manicured gardens, Efkay's homestay is the perfect pad to explore the city of Mysore. Raian, Jyotsna and little Farishtey along with Fifty (Great Dane) and Pesi (Dalmatian) are the gracious hosts. The roomy interiors are a blend of the old and the new, complimented by the elegant décor and period furniture. The 3 spacious suites, all different in sizes are located around the dining area. They are simple yet packed with memorabilia. The King Suite, Fergie, largest of the three comes with a hall/lounge and

a dressing room adjoining the comfortably sized bathroom. All three suites offer a private sit out. The dining area is set alongside the lounge and a small waterfall which sets the ambience for a relaxing meal. Their chef cooks up some fresh local, Anglo-Indian, Parsi and fusion fare which are delectable. There is also a well-stocked bar which has an adjoining sit-out. While Raian and his family do not reside in this 3 bedroom home, they are right across in their residence.



BOOKS AND FILMS WE LOVED



BOOKS AND FILMS WE LOVED

India and its stories



Empress of the Taj:
In Search of
Mumtaz Mahal by
Timeri N. Murari

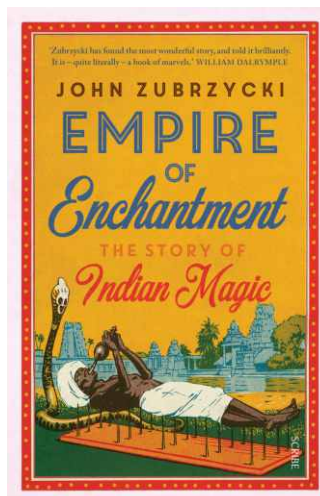
By Madhubanti
Rakshit,
Destination
Knowledge Centre

deliciously mysterious story of Arjumand (later famous as Mumtaz Mahal), what fascinated me was the enchanting account of the author's rail journeys. The trials and tribulations that made train journeys in the 1980s a veritable event in the lives of ordinary Indians makes for an entertaining read indeed.

Timeri's search leads him through Rajasthan, Delhi, and Madhya Pradesh where he is met with colourful characters. He travels through the rough terrains of India with his wife and antique-collecting sister facing events that are both frustrating and sublime. The narrative shuttles between different timelines and seamlessly merges the past with the present. We are left with a feeling of familiarity with the queen who inspired such deep passion in the heart of the mighty Mughal emperor. I was left with a sense of melancholy as the book ends with the

Set in the 1980s, this book is a perfect blend of travel and history. It retraces the life of Mumtaz Mahal, whose love drove Shah Jahan to erect the magnificent Taj Mahal in Agra. It offers a fascinating glimpse into the little-known life and times of the Queen and her journey across India. Apart from the

author paying a "private pilgrimage" to Mumtaz's grave in Burhanpur. It is definitely recommended for those who want to know more about the woman who has been immortalized in marble by her lovelorn husband.



Empire of Enchantment: The Story of Indian Magic by John Zubrzycki

By Lovleen Sagar, Senior Vice President, Destination Knowledge Centre

This is a vibrant narrative of India's magical traditions and their journey across the world. India's association with magicians goes back thousands of years. Conjurors and illusionists dazzled the courts of Hindu Maharajas and Mughal emperors. As British dominion spread over the subcontinent, such wonder-workers became synonymous with India. Western magicians appropriated Indian attire, tricks and stage names; switching their turbans for top hats, Indian jugglers fought back and earned their grudging respect.

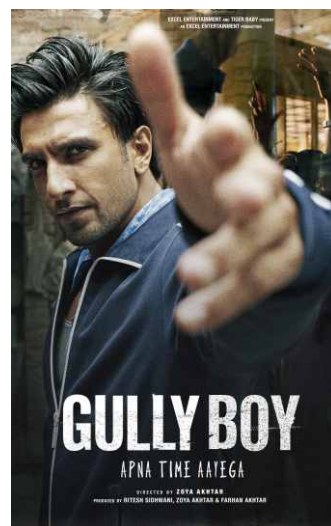
This book tells the extraordinary story of how Indian magic descended from the realm of the Gods to become part of daily life and popular entertainment across the globe. Recounting tales of levitating Brahmins, resurrections, prophesying monkeys and 'the most famous trick never performed'; Empire of Enchantment vividly charts Indian magic's epic journey from street to stage.

John Zubrzycki has worked in India as a diplomat, consultant, tour guide, and correspondent for The Australian. His background is in South Asian history and Hindi, and his doctoral thesis (University of New South Wales) concerned historical links between Indian and Western stage magicians. John's previous books include The Last Nizam and The

Mysterious Mr Jacob.

The book is much more than an enchanting history of magic rituals in India. It brings to life the most interesting stories and cultural traditions filled with an unusual cast of sovereigns and statesmen, street performers and thugs. It is a beautifully written social history of India through entertainment and cultural traditions of the times and how the world looked at these and adapted.

Zubrzycki's knowledge is astounding, and his deliberations of Indian magicians and their Western imitators allow him to tell fabulous stories. I thoroughly enjoyed my personally autographed copy of the book, by this most unassuming and knowledgeable author, whom I had the pleasure to meet at an India-Australia forum in Sydney. We bonded over our mutual interest in the East of India, which remains largely unexplored by tourism.



Gully Boy

By Soma Paul, Products & Experiences, Destination Knowledge Centre

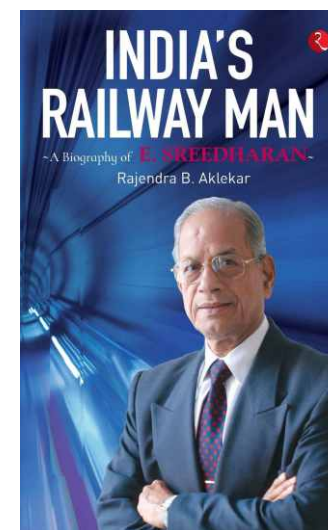
Unlike Slumdog Millionaire which was widely criticized for objectifying poverty in Dharavi, Gully Boy takes us on a journey through the talent that resides in this capacious slum. Through the struggles faced by the protagonist Murad and his unyielding will to succeed we are treated to the spirit of entrepreneurship and determination of a budding street-rapper.

The story based on real-life street rappers Divine and Naezy who emerged from the serpentine alleys of Dharavi, succeeds in portraying the spirit of the

people of the slum without pandering to poverty porn that most silver screen adaptations tend to veer towards.

We are taken on a journey through the second biggest slum in Asia and third biggest slum in the world where we are treated with parts of lives of people who seems both real and relatable to all sections of the society. Mumbai and her unconquerable spirit are perfectly captured in this runaway hit that is the first true-blue street rapper musical in Bollywood. We see both sides of the City of Dreams laid bare in this cinematic masterpiece. It gives the viewers a taste of the underground rap culture that is thriving under the ramshackle houses of Dharavi. It gives us a taste of the entrepreneurial aspect that exists in the midst of poverty and the never-say-die attitude of the people who call it home. It is a hard-hitting tale that highlights the chemistry of two extreme paradoxes of Mumbai.

Gully Boy was nominated as India's official entry to the 2020 Oscars.



India's Railway Man - A Biography of E. Sreedharan

By Inderjeet Rathod, Explorer, Destination Knowledge Centre

Popularly hailed as the 'Metro Man' in India, Dr. E Sreedharan is an ex-IRSE Officer (Indian Railway Service of Engineers), famous for completing railway projects within short deadlines and meagre budgets, balancing his act amidst the web of ambitious political leaders, endless bureaucratic hurdles and governance challenges! Today he is looked upon as a Messiah who spearheads critical

projects that change the way Indians travel by train. In spite of having officially retired from Indian Railways Service in 1990 Dr. Sreedharan's expert guidance was required by the Indian Government to successfully execute two of the most important Indian Railway projects - Konkan Railway and Delhi Metro!

In the Konkan Project, the Western Ghats Hill Range posed a great challenge. The soil conditions were adverse; the path was placed with 93 tunnels through an aggregate length of only 86 kms; all through the 738 km long path 158 major and 1,600 minor bridges had to be built. The task was formidable. The project was the biggest and perhaps most difficult railway undertaking during 20th century. The various problems had been carried out efficiently and in a very short time by Dr. Sreedharan. The company, Konkan Railway Corporation Limited (KRCL), started its operations of trains on 26 January 1998.

Delhi Metro was conceived to alleviate traffic issues in Delhi, the capital city of India. The commuters were promised a faster and eco-friendly transportation alternate. Construction work to build Delhi Metro began in October 1998, following more than 40 years of studies. Phase 1 of the Delhi metro was fully operational by November 2006. The success story of Delhi Metro is now being replicated in numerous other cities of India whose credit solely goes to Dr. Sreedharan.

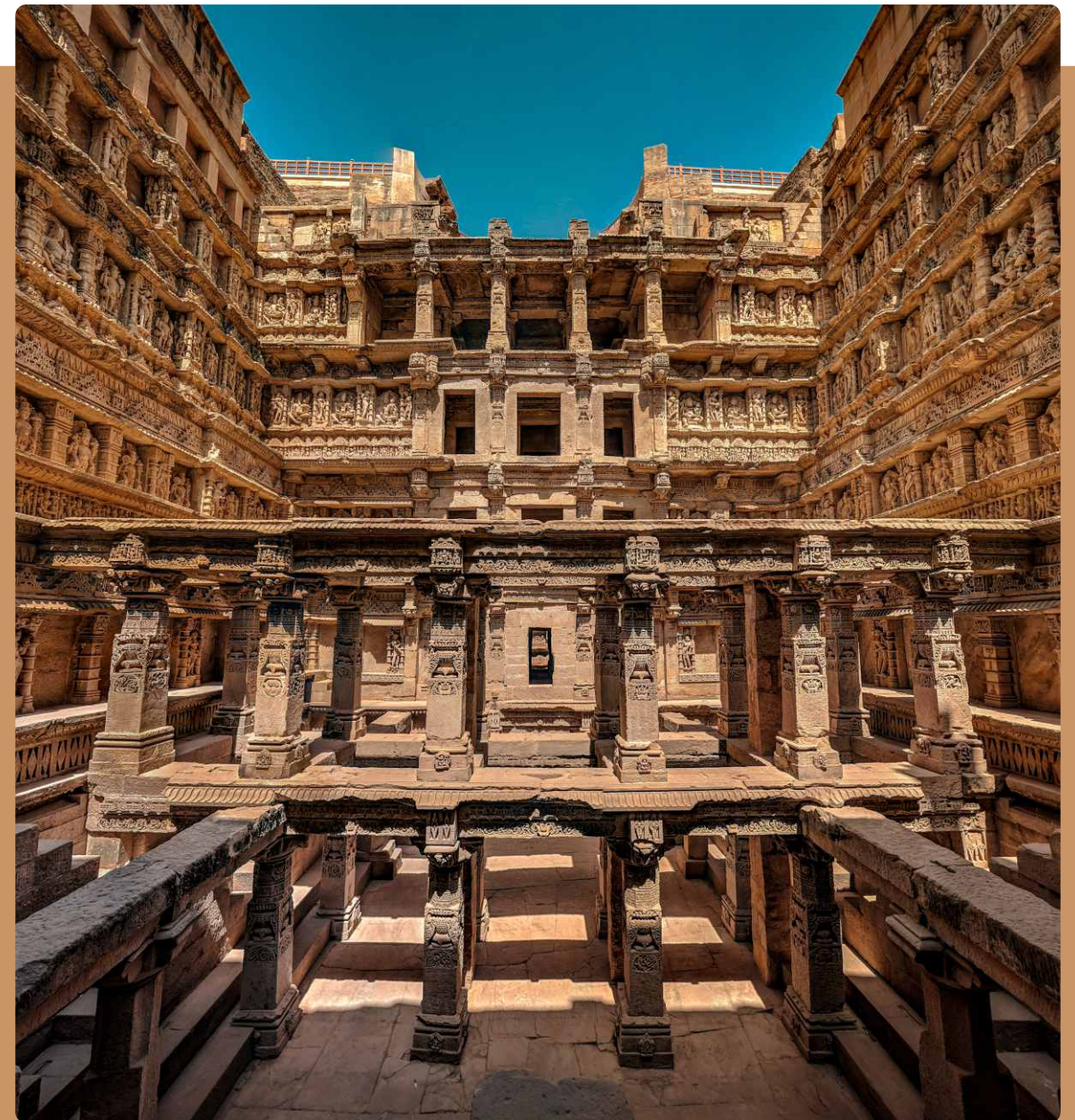
Being a popular figure since decades almost everything about Dr. Sreedharan is known to everyone. There are several other books about him that highlight his professional efforts, his methodology, the challenges he faced and the unique solutions he worked out. This book however focuses on the little known stories about Dr. Sreedharan that have made him what he is today. It mentions in detail about his unique relationship with the Indian Railways and the principles he has followed for the future generations to learn from. It describes his perseverance, beliefs, public and private battles. India's Railway Man: A Biography of E. Sreedharan is an amazing story of a man who is respected, loved and equally hated among his peers and juniors. It is a tribute to this extraordinary man.

TRADITIONAL AND SUSTAINABLE

Climate change, environmental degradation, and sustainability in travel have emerged as major global agendas over the past few years. Travellers have also recognised this and are being increasingly mindful of the way they travel. Responsible travels with experiences that leave behind minimum carbon footprints and help local communities to grow are gaining importance. Indigenous communities themselves have become more aware of the wisdom shared and practised by their ancestors and are now making greater efforts to preserve their natural surroundings and centuries-old traditions.

In India, a majority of her people still follow indigenous customs and depend on locally produced natural resources for their survival. It is important to acknowledge stories of such indigenous sustainability and highlight them to spread awareness. I am sharing some stories of people and places whose examples can motivate us to conserve Mother Nature.

By Soma Paul, Products and Experiences,
Destination Knowledge Centre.



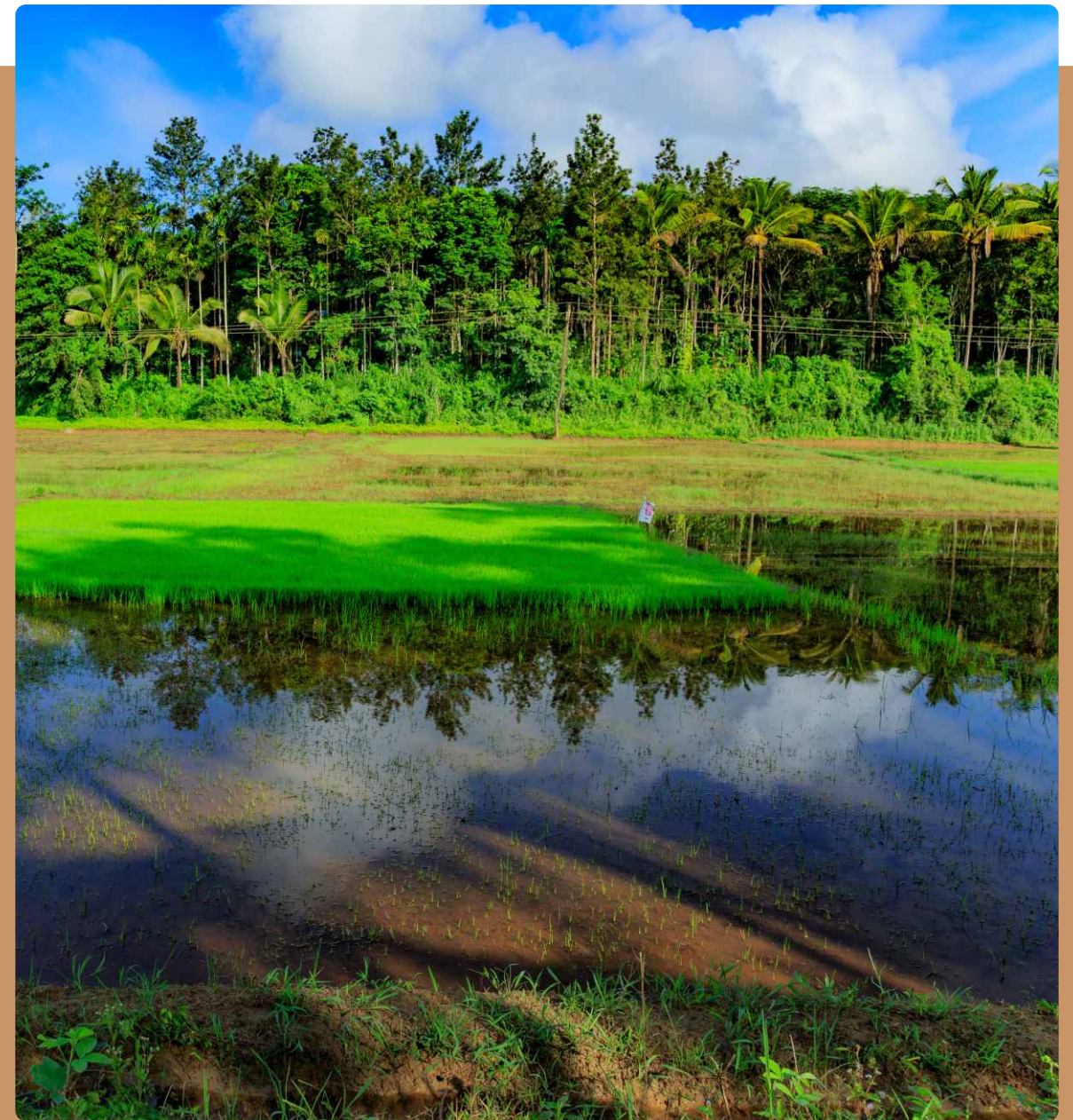
THE STEPWELLS OF INDIA

The stepwells of Northwestern and Western India are some of India's earliest examples of rainwater harvesting. Not only are these stepwells about water conservation, but they also doubled up as a resting place for weary travellers at night and for people to socialise. The Rani-ki-Vav in Gujarat which is a UNESCO World Heritage site and the Chand Baori at Abhaneri en-route to Jaipur from Agra (or vice versa) has some stunning intricately carved sculptures. The one at Hailey Road near Connaught place is New Delhi's best kept secret. Neeraj Doshi, who is a friend of the Destination Knowledge Centre in Jaipur, beautifully blends traditional wisdom and sustainability in his stepwells walk that traces the water wisdom practiced by his Rajasthani ancestors and the sacredness of water in Rajasthani culture.



THE PEOPLE OF RAJASTHAN'S THAR DESERT

The people of Thar desert of Rajasthan who live in the harshest of conditions are known for their ingenuity and tenacity. Their vigour and resourcefulness have, for example, enabled them to turn the seemingly undesirable toxic desert milkweed into threads for weaving charpois (cots). They also use its sap as a natural termite and insect repellent. Using such locally available resources has been in practice in the Thar desert for centuries. Thakur Durga Singh of Mandawa has recently finished developing Jōhad – a living farm in the Shekhawati region of Rajasthan where the remnants of a traditional rural way of life are preserved. Here, one can experience the different farm activities and meet the artisans of the local community and listen to the stories of traditional wisdom and sustainability.



MEENANGADI VILLAGE OF WAYANAD, KERALA

Meenangadi is working hard to be the first carbon-neutral village in India. The goal is to expand forest cover and achieve carbon-neutrality by adopting traditional measures to reduce carbon emissions. These include steps such as planting medicinal and other plants over 38 acres by the community, providing free organic vegetable seeds and introducing awareness programs on sustainable organic farming practices to the villagers. What is most striking about Meenangadi is the active participation of the villagers and the village council. Meenangadi is a twenty minutes' drive from 8 room Tranquil – A Plantation Hideaway in Wayanad with its beautiful tree houses where one can stay. The property is part of a 400-acre private coffee and spice plantation.



THE SACRED FORESTS OF MEGHALAYA

With their otherworldly stone megaliths they are an interesting instance of voluntary community conservation of forests done by individuals or clans. Tribal bodies and clans or individuals own over 96% of Meghalaya's rich forests in the form of sacred forests. Villagers consider the forests homes of protector deities of villages and it is a taboo to pick even a blade of grass from these. Irrespective of their faith, the villagers still visit these forests for signs and praying to the protector spirit. Due to this unwavering respect for tradition, these sacred forests are home to some rare species of flora and fauna. Whether the locals deliberately attached spiritual significance to protect the forests or it was a happy symbiosis is a topic of debate. Whatever maybe the reason, the result is a fantastic example in community conservation efforts by the local people. Stay with James Perry, a Canadian married to a local in his farm which is self-sustainable and not too far away from one of Meghalaya's Sacred Forests which is believed to be atleast a 1000-year-old. The cabins here are simple, neat and clean made by James himself and location is stunning.



THE LIVING ROOTS BRIDGES OF MEGHALAYA

The Living Roots Bridges are another fantastic insight and example of traditional wisdom practised by the indigenous communities of India. The local people devised an ingenious solution for crossing the rain-swollen rivers of monsoon with wisdom drawn from nature. They created "living" bridges with the sturdy roots of particular type of rubber trees. These trees have a secondary root system originating high up from the trunk. The locals guided these secondary roots through a system of scooped-out betel nut tree trunks to the opposite bank. Over a period of ten to fifteen years, these take root and create functional and secure bridges that can support the weight of over fifty people at a time. As these bridges are made of mostly natural materials, they cause the least amount of structural damage to the surroundings. A full day trek can be organised to one of the Living Roots bridges of Meghalaya for the active ex-Shillong, the capital city.

DELHI OUR WAY

3 days in Delhi

Delhi, the capital of the India has seven cities existing within, each with its own unique stories and lore. It is a happy amalgamation of the ancient, medieval, and modern and has a flavour that is unparalleled by any other region.

Every time I explore this city of juxtapositions, it reveals something even more mesmerising. The recently experienced Delhi tours are the perfect example of such revelations. They are sure to excite inquisitive travellers and even the most jaded residents of the city. These unique experiences encompass different aspects and showcases the essence of Delhi that often gets lost in the cacophony of modernity and rush of everyday life.



By Soma Paul, Product and Experiences,
Destination Knowledge Centre

DAY 1 FULL DAY TOUR

This tour is full of pleasant surprises and is going to arouse all your senses. The best place to start the tour is from the vibrant and charming Old Delhi – on one hand it has the historic Mughal architecture marvel and on the other hand, the hustle-bustle of Chandi Chowk showcasing diversity in food, culture, trading, and attires. It is a great idea to incorporate a visit to the recently renovated Red Fort (remains closed on Mondays) as a part of this experience as it offers an amazing insight into one of the most important times in the development of Delhi's culture, architecture, food, lifestyle, and grandeur.

A short drive across the road and 30 steep steps lead to the main courtyard of Jama Masjid – the largest and the most magnificent mosque in India. Thousands of devotees fill the capacious courtyard during Eid. Let your eyes feast on the examples of architectural brilliance achieved at these monuments as you explore with your guide.

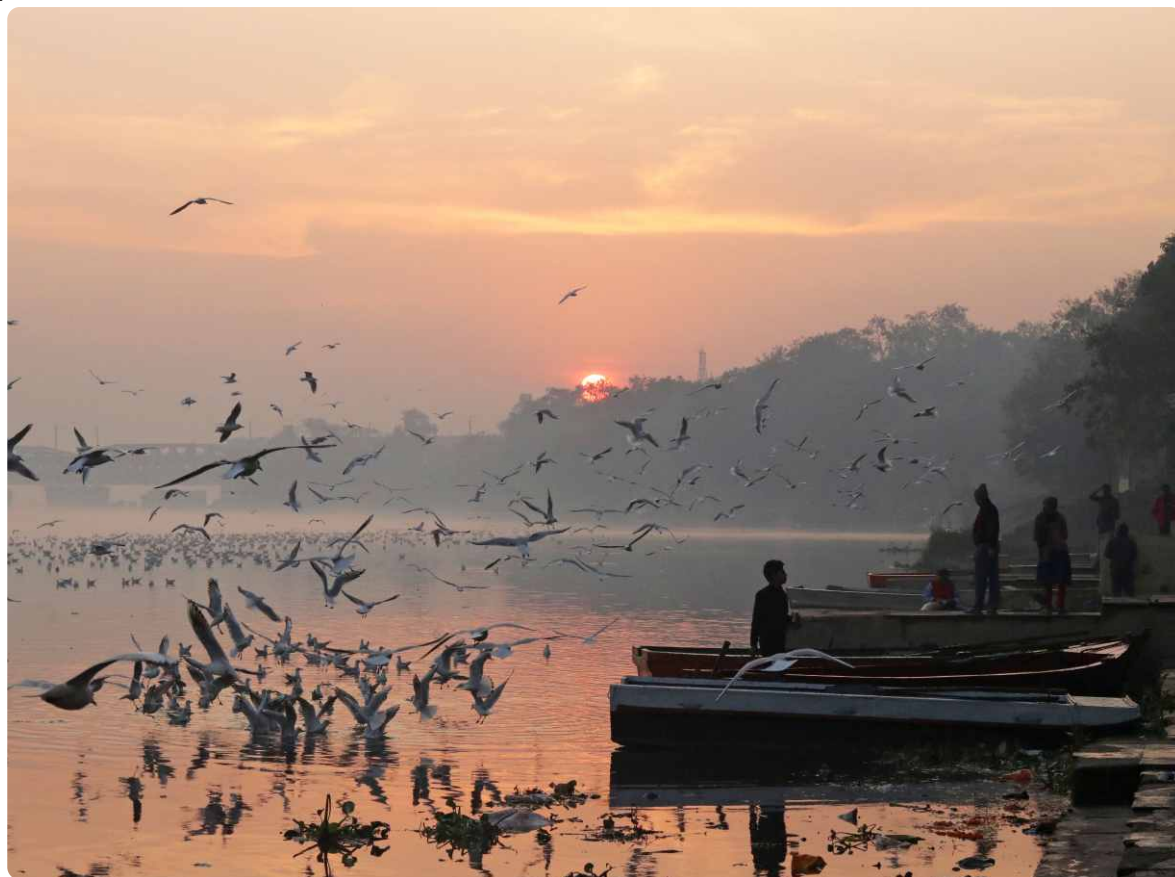
A delightful journey through a chaos of narrow lanes takes you to an attar (perfume) making workshop. Let your olfactory senses take the wheels at the workshop where you can blend different essences, create your signature scent, and take it back as a souvenir. Give back and spread love amongst those who are less fortunate with a visit to



a children's home that has been providing shelter since 1880. Here, you get the chance to interact with them in unique sessions and learn about their hopes and dreams. This is a great opportunity to get a glimpse into the hopeful minds of the children overcoming great hardships with a smile on their faces.

After such an insightful session, there is lunch at a local restaurant. The venue is a secret that you will explore on your own. Stimulate your auditory senses as you relax to the soulful strains of chanting the holy words. Let your mind soak in the peaceful ambiance before you explore the place and get a peek inside the community kitchen. The tour ends with an orientation tour of New Delhi.





DAY 2 HALF DAY TOUR

Begin your day with a visit to the flower market. The electric atmosphere within this wholesale flower market belies the early hours of the day. Learn how marigolds and tuberoses, natives of Mexico, became household names in India as you explore the market that generates an accumulated income of INR 200 million.

With the heady aroma of exotic blooms, move on to another fascinating place that holds an integral part in the daily lives of Indians. Visit a Gaushala (cow shelter) that houses around 1400 - 1500 milch/non-milch cows, calves, and bulls. Understand the importance of cows in the society and the unique role they play in religious, agricultural, and even social lives of the people of the city.

Drive through some of the iconic monuments of the city to reach one of the oldest ghats in Delhi to watch flocks of migratory birds against the backdrop of the rising sun. It finds mention in the

ancient texts of Vedas and Mahabharata. However, it is also a paradise for birdwatchers and photographers.

As the city wakes up, it is time for you to peek into the traditional freestyle wrestling form that is still practised with the same vigour. Learn about the changing rules and equipment of this sport and its rise to relative popularity with the help of Olympic wins and big-budget movies as you explore the facilities offered by this institution.

Mull about the ever-changing charm of Delhi that you have witnessed in your early morning tour as you relish an authentic breakfast at one of the local restaurants. Witness the Delhi you saw slowly disappearing as the day progresses and a very different facet appear in its place.

HALF DAY TOUR

Delhi's gastronomic heritage is as diverse and evolved as its manifold history. Each wave of

settlers brought with them their ingredients, recipes, and dishes that have now become an integral part of Delhi's culinary tapestry.

Taste the piquant chaats that are created uniquely at a small shop which sees roaring business around the year. Soothe your taste buds with the Indian version of sorbet. Real fruit pulp is made into kulfis and stuffed back into the fruits and sealed to emulate a whole fruit.

Hop on an e-rickshaw to head to your next stop. Learn about Delhi's continuing love for the famous seekh kebabs. Taste the melt-in-your-mouth pieces of marinated chicken doused in yogurt, spices, and butter. Try some sheer mal (sweet bread dipped in sugar syrup, ghee, and flavoured with cardamom) before you continue to your last stop in Old Delhi, where you will try staples from the Mughal kitchens that are still being prepared in the same methods. This culminates the first level of the tour that



highlights the recipes from the royal kitchens and local sweets and savouries of Old Delhi.

Later learn about the unique synthesis of British and Indian styles of cooking that gave rise to Anglo-Indian cuisine. Discover the stories behind some uniquely named dishes. Proceed to your next stop to understand the emerging trend of organised food chains in India that are an alternative to international fast food chains. The difference lies in the Indian chains' serving of fresh food as compared to use of canned or processed foods by the international brands.

No culinary tour of Delhi is complete without paying homage to the iconic dish that landed the country a firm place in the world's culinary map. Originated accidentally by a chef, the dish has become synonymous with Indian cuisine in today's world. We are keeping this a secret.





DAY 3 FULL DAY TOUR

Don't we all love weddings? And Indian weddings happen to be grand and colourful celebrations that go on for days and often for as long as a week! This full day tour is an exciting way to learn why we are obsessed with our weddings and what is a must-to-do list for a bride/groom to be! This tour is Indian Weddings 101. Walk through a market that has become the go-to destination for all things wedding! The market itself is so exciting because it is an urban rural melting pot where one can witness many subcultures of the city. Once a part of one of

the ancient cities of Delhi, today this boutique market is home to a farming community living harmoniously surrounded by a market that is bustling with stores of many artists, fashion designers and hip cafes, One minute, you are checking out beautiful jewels and another you are next to a school that's leading you a 14th century tomb! All of this and so much more! You would be Indian wedding ready right after this tour and we suggest while you are travelling in Delhi, arguably the wedding destination of India, you get yourself an invitation at a grand Indian wedding. When you realise you are fitting in perfectly, don't forget to think of us!

HIGHLIGHTS

- Bring the scent of nature at your home.
- Let kindness touch your heart.
- Welcome the rising sun with a sip of quintessential 'Indian Chai'.
- Witness Kushti, the ancient art of Indian wrestling, art that has now become a global sport.
- Savour local delicacies of Delhi.
- Learn some moves of the Indian wedding dance.
- Shop till you drop!

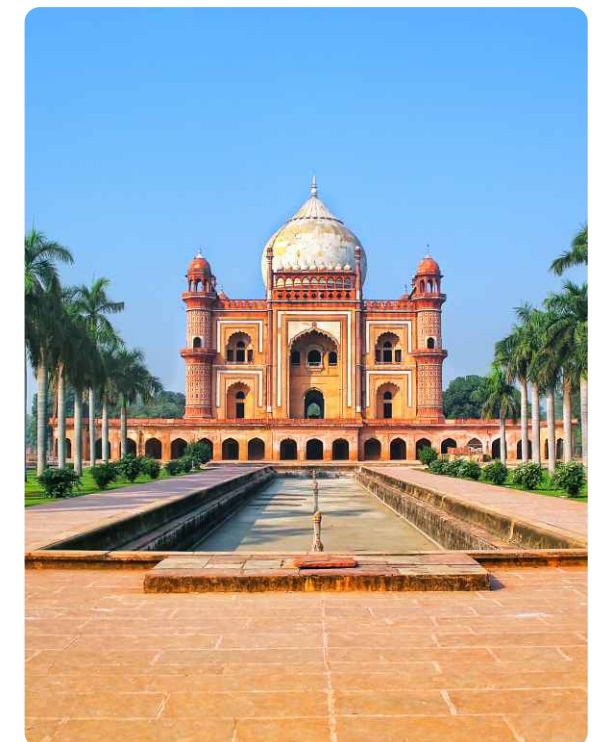
GOOD TO KNOW

- The best time to visit: November to March (although the tours operate throughout the year).
- Minimum number of guests: 02
- Maximum number of guests: 10
- The itinerary is based on the experiences and observations made by me during the tours. These can be customised to suit the specific requirements or interests of the guests on a case-to-case basis.
- All the above tours are also offered as standalone tours and can be customized as per the requirement of the guests.



TOUR INCLUSIONS

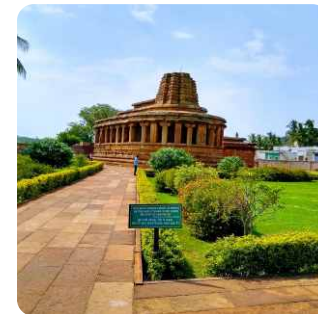
- A tour explorer.
- Transportation.
- Meals as mentioned above.
- Hands-on experiences as mentioned above.





BRIDGE THE KNOWLEDGE GAP

EMPOWER, EDUCATE
& SHARE KNOWLEDGE



Bridge the knowledge gap is programme designed to empower, educate and share the collective knowledge of travel experts with our colleagues.

Last year Karnataka, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Nepal, were the destinations that were covered with a week of intensive in-house training each, followed by study tours for the participants.

Each tour comprised of various activities and tasks specially charted out for the participants, they experienced and explored several products and hotels for an in-depth knowledge of the destination.

We are very excited about this ongoing initiative.

OUR COMMITMENT

Experiences and impressions of particular intensity and profundity, instants that endure and can leave a lasting positive impression. They are unique and memorable, at par with appreciating a great work of art. Sita is intent on making those moments happen.



Come explore with us[®]