



Art of Travel

2021 - 2022

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

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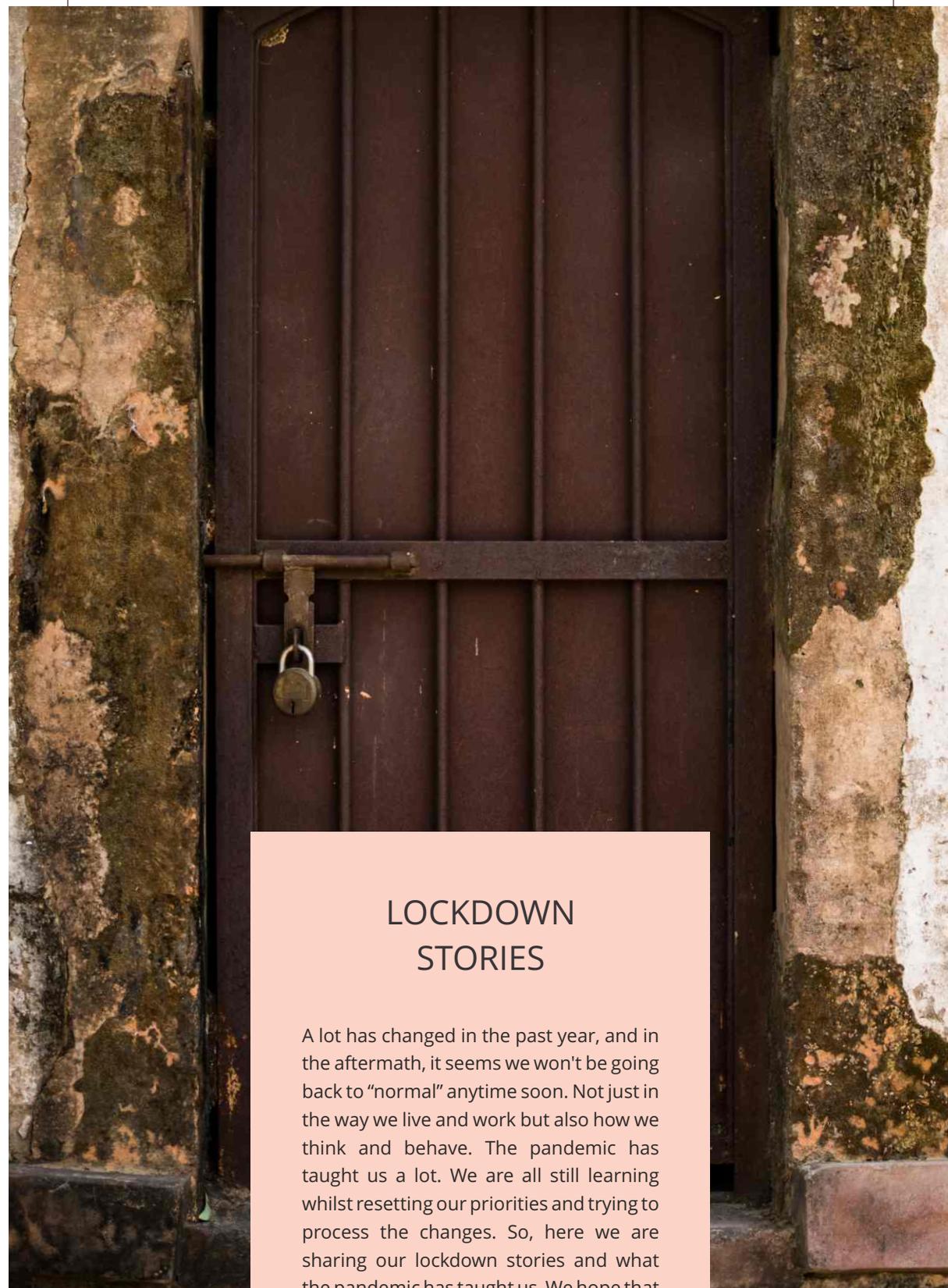
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LOCKDOWN STORIES

A lot has changed in the past year, and in the aftermath, it seems we won't be going back to "normal" anytime soon. Not just in the way we live and work but also how we think and behave. The pandemic has taught us a lot. We are all still learning whilst resetting our priorities and trying to process the changes. So, here we are sharing our lockdown stories and what the pandemic has taught us. We hope that we can carry these life lessons as learning experiences as we move forward.

"I learnt to distinguish between wants and needs"



I remember every time Ma said she made Dal for dinner, how quickly I would convince myself and her to order in or eat out instead. During the lockdown, I realised that it's not that I didn't have an understanding of my wants and needs but perhaps I didn't know how to distinguish between the two. I have now started to appreciate all that I have. I have also realised how they are more than sufficient and that Dal is never too bad an option for dinner. I learnt to distinguish between my wants and needs.

Whilst working from home, I have had a lot of time to think and realised that taking care of myself is one of the things that made me happy. I also made conscious efforts to communicate better with my loved ones and let them know that I am always there for them. Initially, it felt like a daunting task and I found it incredibly tough. I felt trapped in a vicious cycle of monotony and insecurity. But over time, I started to find hobbies. I tried doing things, which I had never done before such as cooking, gardening, and exercising at home. I gave online learning a shot and found it to be extremely rewarding.

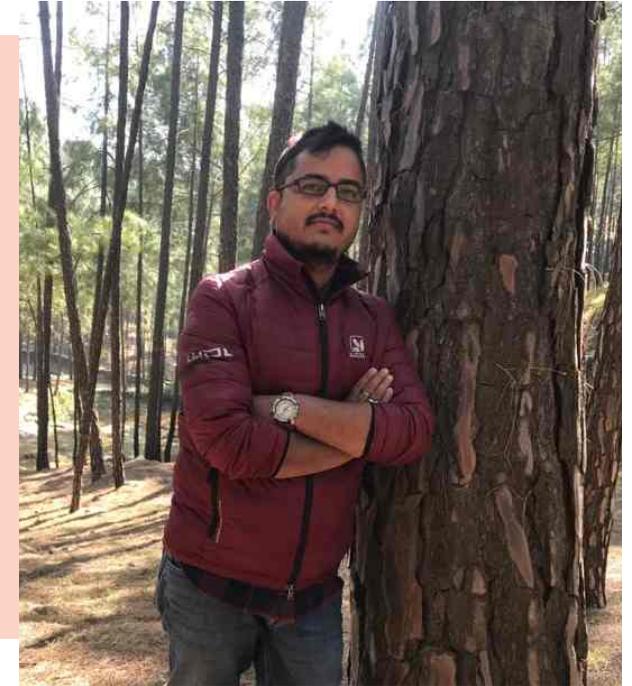
KARAN SINGH, OPERATIONS AND LOGISTICS, DISTANT FRONTIERS



“My biggest takeaway was that we need to take care of our health on a daily basis”

The lockdown taught me many important lessons. My biggest takeaway was that we need to take care of our health on a daily basis. I also learnt that life is so beautiful in the mountains. I discovered the joys of going out on walks and breathing in the crisp mountain air. It was something that I had utterly missed in the big city. The lockdown was an eye opener of sorts for me with the realisation of the importance of the family during difficult times. I didn't miss going out for dinner, shopping or travelling. I enjoyed spending time with my 6-year-old nephew more and having these amazing conversations with him. It was such an awesome experience. I learnt the value of relationships that we build at home, something that I had otherwise taken for granted all these years.

KULDEEP PANWAR, OPERATIONS AND LOGISTICS, DISTANT FRONTIERS



“I learnt there is no better way to happiness than growing your own food”

During the lockdown I saw my mother working in the kitchen garden. It was not for the first time I saw her doing that. She has been growing organic vegetables in her kitchen garden since I was a child. Maybe I wanted a distraction from all the boredom and uncertainty. Maybe I have learnt to be a better observer during the lockdown. Whatever it may have been, I soon started watching her intently whilst striking up random conversations as she went about her gardening. One day she asked me to join her and I felt an instant connection. Getting my hands dirty while working and the mere touch of the soil was so therapeutic.

I have experienced three seasons during the lockdown and each season had different varieties of vegetables to offer. My mother also taught me how to cook the vegetables that I had grown, gave me age-old tips on waste management, and smart usage of scarce resources, especially water in the kitchen garden. I felt an immense sense of love and gratitude that made my heart swell with peace. I learnt that there is no better way to happiness than growing your own food.

MITLESH KANDWAL, OPERATIONS AND LOGISTICS, DISTANT FRONTIERS



“I learnt to manage my monies more efficiently”

During the lockdown I started reading a book called “Ping -A frog in search of New Pond” written by Stuart Avery Gold. It talks about adapting to change and overcoming obstacles. Ping represents everybody who has encountered a setback, needs to take a risk, or is struggling with challenges. He is all of us. Ping's tale inspires us to take risks and shows the limitless possibilities when we choose to take a leap of faith. It had left a lasting impression on my mind and it couldn't have come at a better time as I was facing a tough situation on the personal front. In the middle of the lockdown, not only did I have to deal with numerous problems, but I also lost a loved one. I was stuck in a similar situation like Ping and the only thing that helped me tide over these difficult times was my courage to take risks and the leap of faith. In the process, I learnt to manage my monies more efficiently.

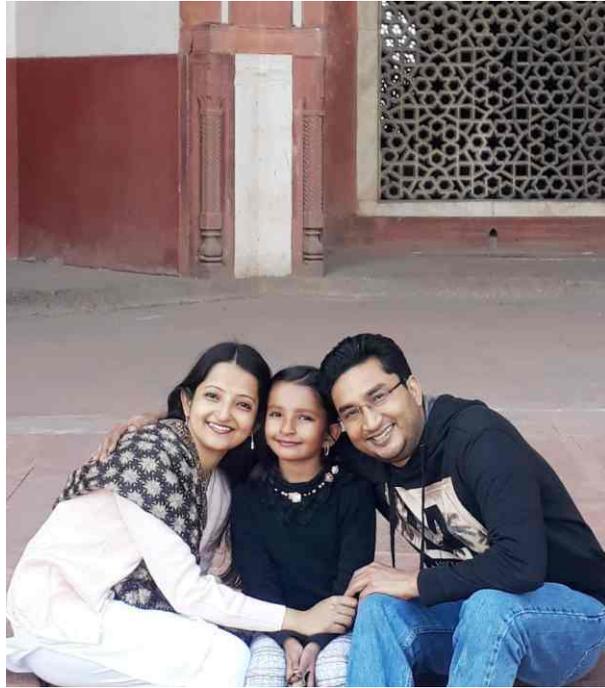
PREETI SUMAN, OPERATIONS AND LOGISTICS, DISTANT FRONTIERS



“I learnt my child doesn't need an action packed schedule but quality time”

I hated History throughout school but during the lockdown I started reading books by William Dalrymple. His Kohinoor and Anarchy in particular made me realise that History is not so boring after all. There were 4 work stations under one roof during the lockdown and I could see the generation gap being bridged because of technology. My 5 year old boy would help my 72 year old father log in to Zoom and teach my 67 year old mom about how to look for home remedies on YouTube. I learnt my child doesn't need an action packed schedule but quality time. Only a few days were spent trying our hands at new dishes but soon we were back to basics as it was easier that way. I am proud to share that I lost nearly 5 kilos doing domestic chores during the lockdown. I stopped buying things that weren't essential and started practicing gratitude for what I already had. This deepened my ability to feel genuine appreciation in many more contexts, and helped me reach out to others better.

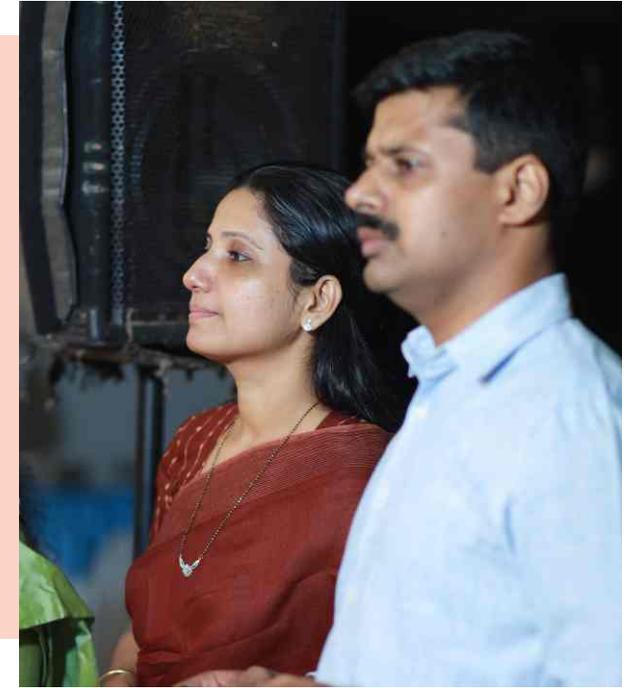
AAKRITI SHARMA, OPERATIONS AND LOGISTICS, GO VACATIONS



“I learnt to be a better homemaker”

The ease in lockdown couldn't have been announced at a better time. We were able to travel to Kolkata during Durga Puja. What more could a Bengali ask for? We spent a month in Kolkata full of quality time with our daughter. We discovered the joy of small things. We thoroughly enjoyed our samosa party at home, watching movies together without having to step out, and playing games on the roof top. I learnt to be a better homemaker during the lockdown. I had no idea about grocery, vegetables, bills to be paid and the basics that go into running a home. I not only learnt all that during the lockdown but also how to plan better in running the show more efficiently. I am enjoying every bit of it now.

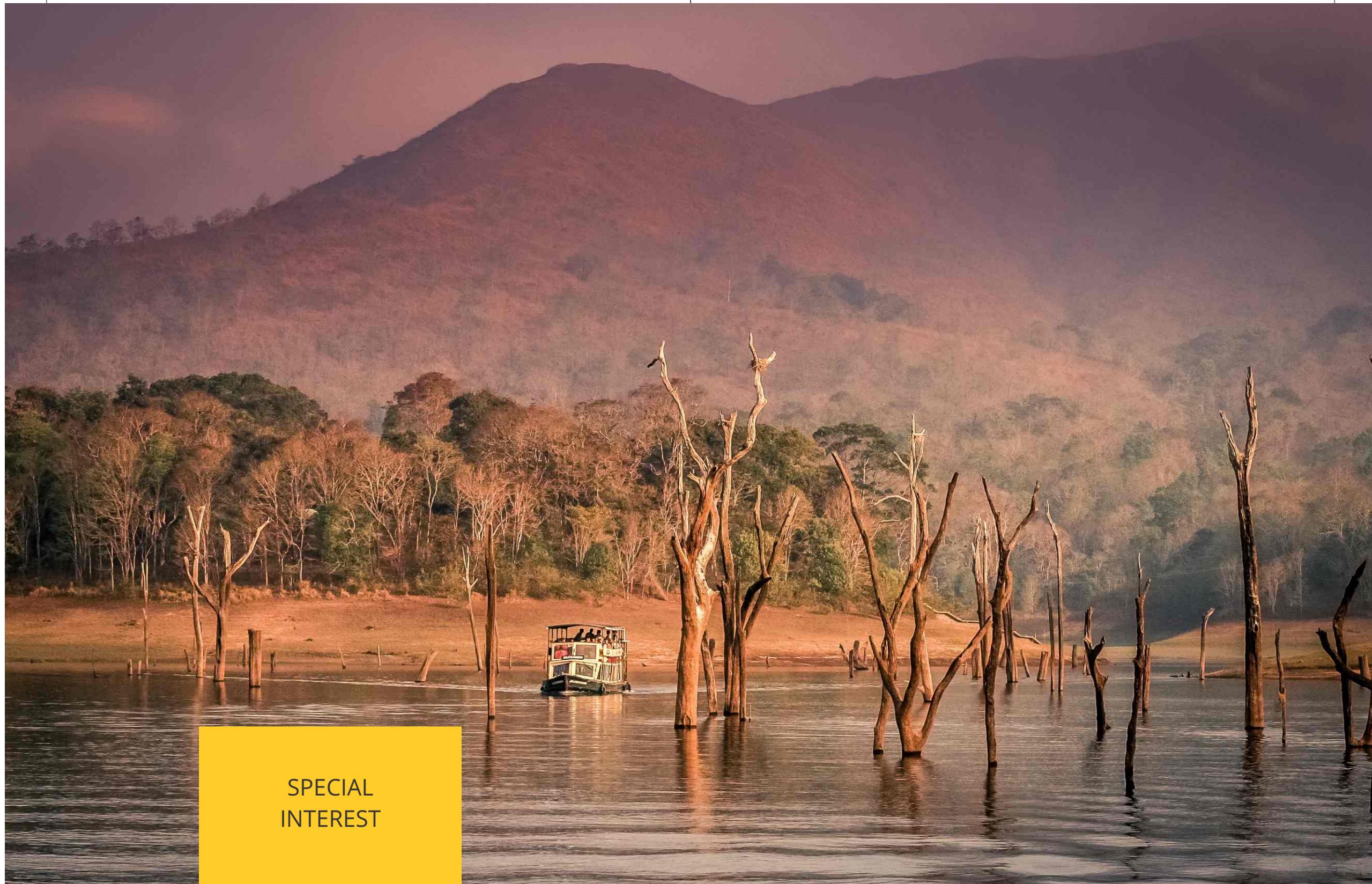
ARUNDHATI CHAKRABORTY, OPERATIONS AND LOGISTICS, SITA



“I learnt that the key to happiness is caring for your family, neighbours and friends”

I live in an independent house in a reasonably spacious compound. Cleaning the rooms, the outer courtyard and the terrace – otherwise done by domestic help - became a herculean task as we were all social distancing. We decided to divide the household chores with a strict daily time schedule. Soon I grew very talented with the broom and could hear a rhythmic sound every time I used it. To make the daily chores interesting for my children I started conducting a weekly competition. They were asked to make a 2 minute video on any task assigned to them. I used to love and play cricket when I was young and took the lockdown as an opportunity to revive my interest in the game much to the excitement of my children. I got to spend quality time with my parents, particularly my father who has mobility issues. I organised an online Yoga class for him so that he can be more active. I also ended up helping my neighbours and friends who couldn't step out of their homes to buy grocery, medicines, household items and cooking gas. I learnt that the key to happiness is caring for your family, neighbours and friends.

ROBIN RAJ, OPERATIONS AND LOGISTICS, SITA



SPECIAL
INTEREST



BENGAL – ODISHA SHOWCASE

INTRODUCTION

This itinerary is a unique journey through the lesser-known yet easily accessible states of West Bengal and Odisha. The journey starts from Kolkata where you get to stay at a 300-year-old heritage property that has been elegantly restored. From here you travel to Odisha to explore its temples, beaches and the distinct culture. You also get to stay at a cosy homestay called 'Svanir' in the peaceful outskirts of Bhubaneswar, the capital of Odisha. Continue to Baripada in Mayurbhanj district to stay at the home of the Bhanja Family who ruled Mayurbhanj for more than 1000 years. From here head back to Kolkata and stay right in the heart of the city at the stylish Glenburn Penthouse. Get acquainted with the chaotic yet charming city of Kolkata over the next few days. End your holiday in Darjeeling, located in the foothills of the Himalayas, at the Glenburn Tea Estate.



ITINERARY ROUTING: Arrive Kolkata – Bawali Village – Kolkata – Bhubaneswar – Puri – Konark – Bhubaneswar – Baripada – Kolkata – Darjeeling – Kolkata

SKETCH ITINERARY

DAY 01	ARRIVE KOLKATA KOLKATA – BAWALI VILLAGE
DAY 02	IN BAWALI VILLAGE
DAY 03	IN BAWALI VILLAGE
DAY 04	BAWALI VILLAGE – KOLKATA KOLKATA – BHUBANESWAR
DAY 05	IN BHUBANESWAR
DAY 06	BHUBANESWAR – KONARK – PURI – BHUBANESWAR
DAY 07	IN BHUBANESWAR
DAY 08	BHUBANESWAR – BARIPADA
DAY 09	IN BARIPADA
DAY 10	BARIPADA – KOLKATA
DAY 11	IN KOLKATA
DAY 12	IN KOLKATA
DAY 13	KOLKATA – BAGDOGRA BAGDOGRA – DARJEELING
DAY 14	IN DARJEELING
DAY 15	IN DARJEELING
DAY 16	DARJEELING – BAGDOGRA BAGDOGRA – KOLKATA – DEPARTURE



HIGHLIGHTS

- Arrive in Kolkata and straightaway drive to Rajbari Bawali located in the South 24 Parganas district. A step inside Rajbari Bawali is like stepping inside a time capsule to experience a taste of feudal nobility that existed in Bengal. The palace harks back to the days when rich Zamindars and aristocrats of Bengal lived lives of utter decadence and splendour. While staying here you can go for a walk in the village of Bawali, passing by the ruins of the fabulous temples that were built by the family years ago. Foodies have the option of enjoying a cooking session and to learn about traditional Bengali cuisine. In the evening witness the surreal prayer ritual held here as per age-old traditions.
- Fly from Kolkata to Bhubaneswar.
- In Bhubaneswar visit the 64 Yogini Temple, Shanti Stupa at Dhauli and a government run Co-operative called Adisha which promotes tribes and their livelihood. Check out the exquisite Dokra pieces, organic spices and Koraput coffee at Adisha. Take a step back in time to explore the Old Town on foot. Learn about the history behind the name of the city.
- Drive from Bhubaneswar to Konark.
- In Konark visit the ruins of a 13th century Sun Temple, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Later drive to Puri (1 hr drive further) along the wonderful Marine Drive. In Puri spend time with artists who have kept alive the art of Patachitra, an indigenous art form of scroll painting that dates back to the 5th century BCE.
- Spend the last 2 nights in Bhubaneswar at Svanir Homestay located on the outskirts of Bhubaneswar owned by the Mukherjee family. It is an eco-friendly boutique homestay with four spacious cottages inspired by the tribal architecture of Odisha. At Svanir, you can take private lessons on Patachitra painting from a local artist; you can go for a sunset walk to the nearby village; you can cycle to the by-lanes heading off the main road into the paddy fields. For those interested in photography, the owner of the property is an avid macro photographer and he can happily give you a private lesson on macro photography and help you observe the fascinating patterns in nature.
- Drive to Baripada in Mayurbhanj district of Odisha (5 – 6 hrs drive) to stay at Belgadia Palace.
- At Belgadia Palace take a tour of the



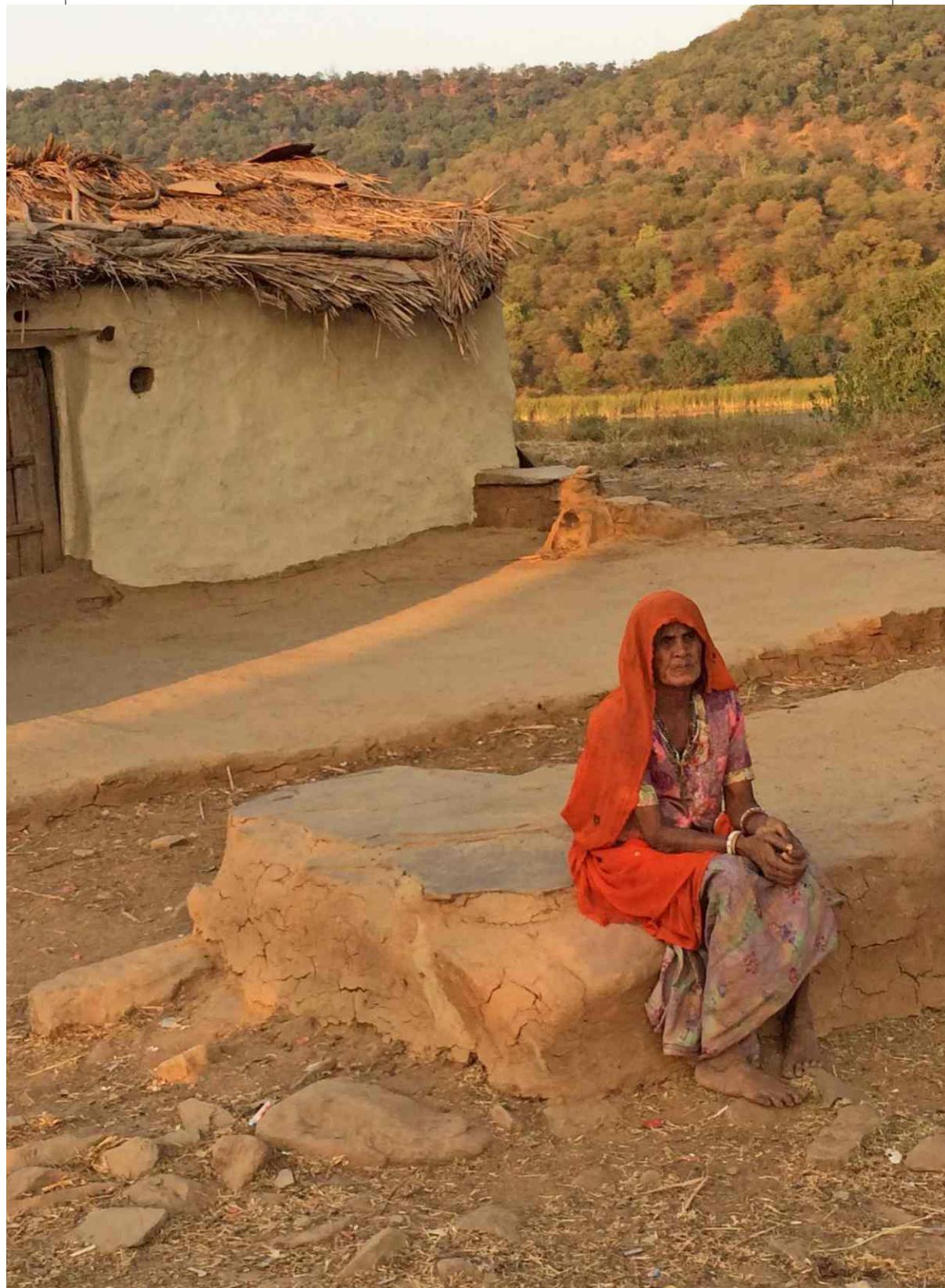
Baripada Township exploring the local haat; visit the Council Hall (the former Mayurbhanj State Palace); the Jagannath Temple and the Rani Dharamshala. Enjoy traditional Oriya and Nepali spreads for meals; explore the Belgadia Palace with a family member and enjoy a Mayurbhanj Chau dance performance.

- Drive from Baripada to Kolkata (5 hrs drive) and check in to Glenburn Penthouse.
- In Kolkata go for an early morning stroll around the Dalhousie Square to learn how Kolkata city evolved. Stop for a cup of tea during your walk through the gardens of the 18th century Anglican Church of St Johns, the first cathedral of the city. Thereafter visit the grand Victoria Memorial museum. Enjoy lunch at the home of an art collector and a socialite who will give you a glimpse into the fast disappearing old Kolkata way of life. Explore North Kolkata what was once known as the 'Black Town'. Visit the Marble Palace, Jorasanko Thakurbari, Kumartuli (the Potters' colony), the Jain Temple Complex and The Mother House of the

Missionaries of Charity. In Kolkata you can also enjoy a cruise on River Hooghly to have a ringside view of the myriad happenings on the river's 'ghats'.

- Fly from Kolkata to Bagdogra. Drive from Bagdogra Airport to Glenburn Tea Estate (4 hrs drive) in the Darjeeling foothills of the Indian Himalayas.
- In Darjeeling explore the 1,600-acre private estate with an introduction to the specialized art of growing and processing Glenburn Tea. Visit the tea fields, interact with the tea pickers, and follow the journey of "two leaves and bud" into the tea factory. End your experience with a tea tasting session to discover the incredible variety of flavours and aromas that come from a single bush through different seasons. You can also take a ride on the famous Darjeeling Himalayan Railway (now a UNESCO World Heritage Site). Wander through the Mall and shop for local crafts & antiques along the way.
- Fly back to Kolkata.





RURAL RAJASTHAN

INTRODUCTION

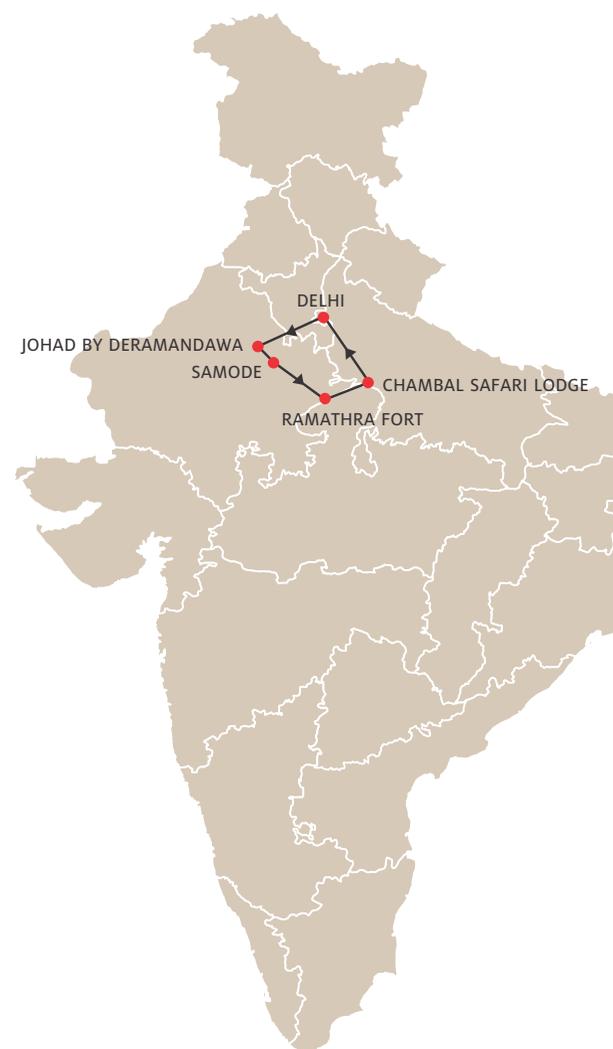
Big crowds and plenty of sightseeing attractions are among the qualities that give big cities of a destination their edge. But the trends about what travel would possibly look like post COVID talks about travelers likely to become wary of crowded urban centers and instead seek out less crowded but vibrant second-tier towns/cities and natural areas which are not too far away from the main sights. These findings also dovetail with the trend of sustainable tourism where travelers can have transformative experiences while feeling rest assured that it doesn't come at the expense of damaging fragile ecosystems or threatening the livelihood of local communities. And long before COVID-19 hit, the phenomenon of slow travel was gaining momentum. Now, after more than a year of limited mobility, travelers have an insight into a slower pace of life and are most likely to reconsider their style of travel. But it's clear that, when travel comes back, slow sustainable travel with a newfound gratitude and appreciation will be the norm, not the exception with a likely increased demand in non-traditional accommodation.



ITINERARY ROUTING: Delhi – Johad by Dera Mandawa (Shekhawati) – Samode Palace (Samode) – Ramathra Fort (Sapotra, Karauli) – Chambal Safari Lodge (Jarar) – Delhi

SKETCH ITINERARY

DAY 01	ARRIVE DELHI
DAY 02	IN DELHI
DAY 03	DELHI – JOHAD BY DERA MANDAWA
DAY 04	AT JOHAD BY DERA MANDAWA
DAY 05	JOHAD BY DERA MANDAWA – SAMODE PALACE
DAY 06	AT SAMODE PALACE (DAY TRIP TO JAIPUR)
DAY 07	SAMODE PALACE – RAMATHRA FORT
DAY 08	AT RAMATHRA FORT
DAY 09	RAMATHRA FORT – CHAMBAL SAFARI LODGE
DAY 10	AT CHAMBAL SAFARI LODGE
DAY 11	CHAMBAL SAFARI LODGE – AGRA – DELHI
DAY 12	DEPART DELHI



HIGHLIGHTS

- Arrive in Delhi. Afternoon sightseeing of New Delhi. Overnight stay at The Claridges Hotel.
- Sightseeing of Old Delhi. Remainder of your time is at leisure. Dinner at Indian Accent (Table d'hôte menu). Overnight stay at The Claridges Hotel.
- Drive to Johad by Mandawa (5h30 drive). In the afternoon feed the cows of the farm, learn how to milk a cow or just witness the

activities of the farm which is equally joyful. Enjoy a relaxed evening by the pool over drinks and soak in the surrounding as the night falls followed by dinner. Overnight stay at Johad by Mandawa

- At Johad By Dera Mandawa engage in hands-on activities of the farm such as ploughing the field, preparing the soil for sowing, pruning in the area of agroforestry, weeding, harvesting of the seasonal crop or vegetables or taking the resident camels for grazing. In the afternoon, choose a camel buggy ride or leisurely walk through the farm up to the dunes for a sundowner. Enjoy an intimate, relaxing evening as a private performance of traditional folk songs speak of the longing for a parted lover, the pining for rains and the celebrations of homecoming. Overnight stay at Johad by Mandawa
- Drive from Johad by Dera Mandawa to Samode. Enroute visit the painted Havelis of Nawalgarh. Continue to Samode Palace. Remainder of your time is at leisure. Overnight stay at Samode Palace.
- Day trip to Jaipur. Visit the City Palace and the Royal Observatory. Visit Amber Fort. Later return to Samode Palace. Overnight stay at Samode Palace.
- Drive from Samode Palace to Ramathra Fort (4h30 drive). Early afternoon arrive at Ramathra Fort. Go for a walking tour of Ramathra village, a small hamlet of farmers and cattle herders. Overnight stay at Ramathra Fort.
- Spend the first half of the day at Ramathra Fort at leisure. Go for boating in the Kalisil Dam at sunset. It is peaceful and picturesque with breathtaking views of the

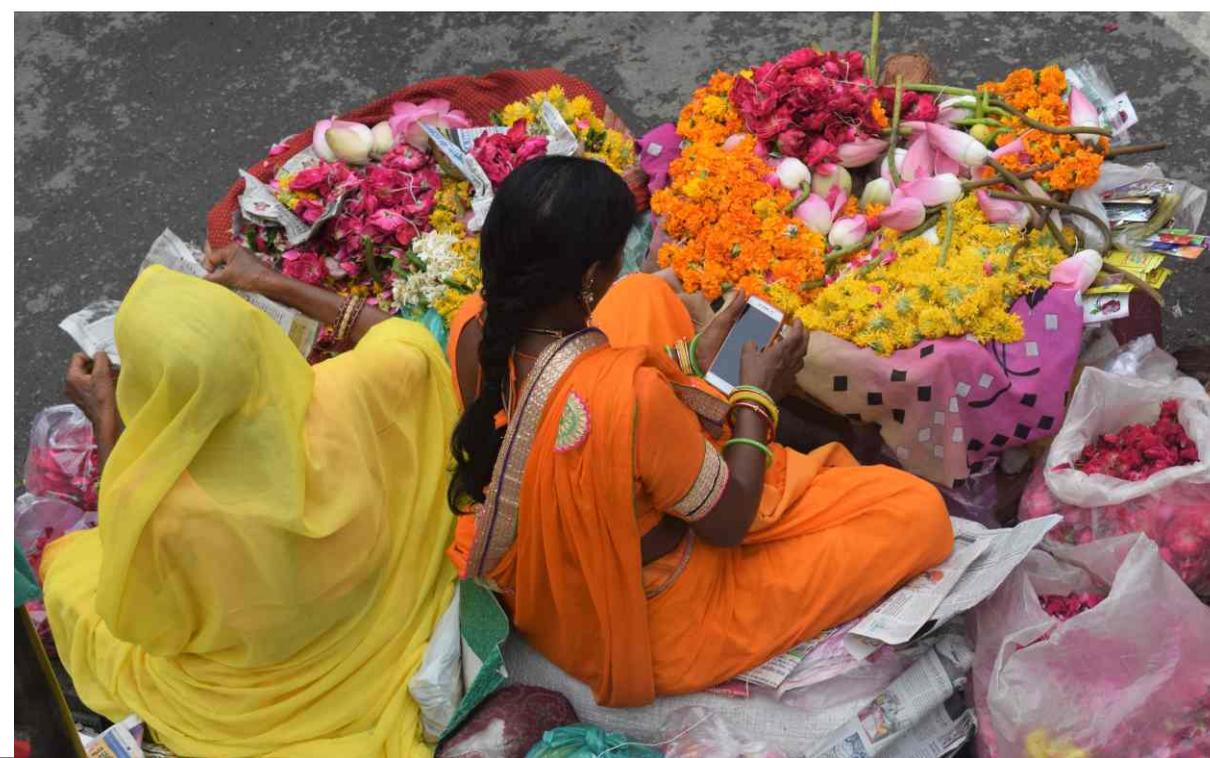


sunset and rich with birdlife. A life jacket, a bird book and a pair of binoculars are provided. In the evening learn Indian style cooking on wood fire 'chulha'. Overnight stay at Ramathra Fort.

- Drive to Jarar (5h30 drive). Early afternoon arrive at Chambal Safari Lodge, Jarar. Late afternoon go on a guided nature walk around lodge grounds and the countryside. With a checklist of over 200 species and trained naturalists on hand, this easy-paced activity is an opportunity to get a closer look into the rural landscape and community. Alternatively, you can choose to go for a gentle bicycle ride through the countryside on the bicycle track that runs past the lodge. The lodge has 5 bicycles. Overnight stay at Chambal Safari Lodge.
- In the morning go for an exclusive River Safari in National Chambal Sanctuary, home to rare wildlife and stunning

landscapes. Mid-afternoon visit Holipura heritage village for a guided walk with a member of the local community, followed by a visit to the picturesque temple town of Bateswar on the banks of the Yamuna, culminating in an Aarti ceremony at the ghats. Evening walk looking for the resident civet cats, jungle cats, jackals and owls. Overnight stay at Chambal Safari Lodge.

- Drive to Agra (1h30 drive) to visit the Red Fort and Taj Mahal. Later drive to Delhi from Agra (4h30 drive) and check-in to an Airport hotel in Delhi. Transfer to the International Airport for onward flight.





WORLD WAR 2, FESTIVALS AND POLO

INTRODUCTION

"...the Battles of Imphal and Kohima were the turning point of one of the most gruelling campaigns of the Second World War" - National Army Museum, United Kingdom

An epic clash took place in 1944 during the Second World War between the Allied Forces and the Japanese Imperial Army in North East India. Centered in and around the towns of Imphal and Kohima from March to July of that year, the twin battles of 1944 involved some of the bitterest fighting in the Asian theatre of World War 2.

Together with the Japanese Army also came a much smaller force of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose's Indian National Army (INA). Bose is a controversial yet celebrated freedom fighter of India who coined the famous slogan - "Give me blood and I will give you freedom". He disagreed with Mahatma Gandhi and parted ways as he believed that freedom cannot be earned by non-violence. The INA formed the first provincial government of Independent India at Moirang, not too far away from Imphal on April 14, 1944.

British military historian Robert Lyman describes the twin battles of Imphal-Kohima as one of the four great turning-points of the Second World War, with Stalingrad, El Alamein and Midway being the other three. In April 2013, the UK's National Army Museum named the Battles of Imphal and Kohima as 'Britain's Greatest Battle' of all time.



ITINERARY ROUTING: Kolkata – Imphal – Kohima – Dimapur – Kolkata

SKETCH ITINERARY

DAY 01	Kolkata – Imphal
DAY 02	In Imphal (Full Day Tiddim Road Tour)
DAY 03	In Imphal (Full Day Shenam Saddle Tour)
DAY 04	In Imphal
DAY 05	In Imphal (Full Day Imphal city tour)
DAY 06	In Imphal
DAY 07	Imphal – Kohima
DAY 08	In Kohima (Battle of Kohima Tour)
DAY 09	In Kohima (Khonoma Village Tour)
DAY 10	In Kohima
DAY 11	In Kohima
DAY 12	Kohima – Dimapur – Kolkata



HIGHLIGHTS

- Fly from Kolkata to Imphal. Briefing session in the afternoon with the tour escort on the entire Burma Campaign of World War 2 at the hotel. Overnight stay at Classic Grande, Imphal
- Head out on the Tiddim Road Tour. This tour takes you to the only Japanese memorial of World War 2 in India, the battlefields, the Indian National Army (INA) Memorial Complex in Moirang and the Loktak Lake. Visit the recently opened Imphal Peace Museum built at the base of the Red Hill – one of the main battlefields on the Tiddim Road. Lunch will be served at the Sendra Café on the Loktak Lake. Overnight stay at Classic Grande, Imphal.

Note: The Imphal Peace Museum and the INA Museum are closed on Mondays.

- Go for the Shenam Saddle Tour. This tour

takes you into the very hills that made up the Shenam Saddle position on the road to Burma. Hear all about the fierce fighting between the Allied and the Japanese forces in the area and spot trenches dating back to 1944. At a height of some 5,000 feet, take in some truly spectacular views on all sides. The pretty Kakching Garden en route is included, as is a visit to the Khongjom War Memorial dedicated to the Khongjom War or Anglo- Manipuri War of 1891. Packed Lunch will be served today Overnight stay at Classic Grande, Imphal

- Enjoy the Sangai festival in Imphal. Named after the brow antlered deer found only in Manipur, this 10-day festival celebrated in multiple locations in the Imphal valley showcases the art and culture, handloom, handicrafts, fine arts, indigenous sports, cuisine, music and adventure sports, as well as the natural environment of Manipur. Witness a game of Manipuri Polo or Sagol Kangjei, as it is known locally.
- On the outskirts of Imphal, on a hill around Heingang village, there is a pony shrine to Lord Marjing, the God of Polo, where the Meitei people (the majority ethnic group of Manipur) come to worship and where the local polo players go to light candles before a game. Today, the Manipuri Pony, which is a symbol of Manipuri culture, is an endangered species with an estimated population of fewer than 500. Local polo players hail from humble backgrounds in Manipur. Polo isn't linked to economic status and the players don't necessarily own their horses. Overnight stay at Classic Grande, Imphal

- Proceed for a full day guided tour of Imphal city. Visit the sites related to the Battle of Imphal of 1944 such as the World War 2



cemeteries maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, and also other historic and cultural sites such as the 500 year old Mothers Market where 5000 women trade every day, RCKS Art Gallery dedicated to a pioneering Manipuri painter, Mapal Kangjeibung – the oldest living Polo ground in the world and the historic Kangla Fort, the erstwhile residence of the Manipuri Royals where one can also see the cottage of Field Marshal Sir William Slim who oversaw the Burma Campaign for the Allied Forces. A traditional Manipuri lunch is also part of this tour. Note: The Kangla Fort is closed on Mondays. Overnight stay at Classic Grande, Imphal

- Spend one more day at the Sangai Festival in Imphal. Overnight stay at Classic Grande, Imphal
- Drive to Kohima along the Imphal-Kohima Road. This road was built during World War 2 and survives till today. It is Manipur's

lifeline and main connection to the rest of India. The drive to Kohima will take 6-7 hours today since there are many stoppages en route: a World War 2 airfield, a war memorial, battle sites and the historic Milestone 109 where Indian troops fighting for the British Commonwealth and British troops had linked up from Kohima and Imphal on June 22, 1944, ending the Japanese siege of Imphal. Packed Lunch will be served today. On arrival check-in to your hotel in Kohima. Overnight stay at Neeramaya Aradura, Kohima

- Head out on the 'Battle of Kohima Tour' today which starts with a walk around the famous Kohima Ridge. The tour takes you to some of the old vantage positions of the Allied Forces, including Jail Hill, DIS, Kuki Piquet and Garrison Hill. Although a largely built-up area today, the walk on the ridge allows one to get a feel of one of the most bitterly fought battles of the Burma Campaign. The tour ends at the Kohima War Cemetery where, among others, one

can still see the outline of the famous tennis court around which fierce fighting raged in 1944. Visit the Kohima Cathedral which is not too far away from your hotel. The Japanese had contributed to the making of this church after the Battle of Kohima so as to offer prayers in the memory of the fallen Japanese soldiers. Lunch will be in a local restaurant. Overnight stay at Neeramaya Aradura, Kohima

- From Kohima drive to the 600-year old village of Khonoma of the Angami Nagas, one of the 16 major Naga tribes (2h00 one way drive from Kohima). From 1832 to 1880, this village with no more than 500 houses fiercely fought and defied the British administration to maintain their Naga identity. A major offensive launched in 1879 witnessed 4000 British troops with artillery guns pitted against 1000 Naga Warriors of Khonoma armed with muzzleloaders, spears and machetes. It ended in a four month siege and a treaty was finally signed between the British administration and the elders of Khonoma on 27th March 1880 bringing an end to the hostilities. Khonoma today is a biodiversity and conservation success story. It has made giant strides in strengthening systems of natural resource management, conflict resolution, and village administration, all coupled with a resolute will to conserve biodiversity and wildlife. Khonoma is home to the Khonoma Nature Conservation and Tragopan Sanctuary (KNCTS), the first ever community-led conservation project in India. Lunch will be served at Dovipie Inn, Khonoma. Overnight stay at Neeramaya Aradura, Kohima
- Enjoy Hornbill Festival in Kohima today. Named after a bird - the Hornbill- widely

respected and depicted in the folklore of the different Naga Tribes, the Hornbill Festival in Kohima has been an annual affair since the year 2000. From 01 – 10 Dec every year, the festival showcases the unique culture of the various Naga tribes – traditional dances, folk songs and games.

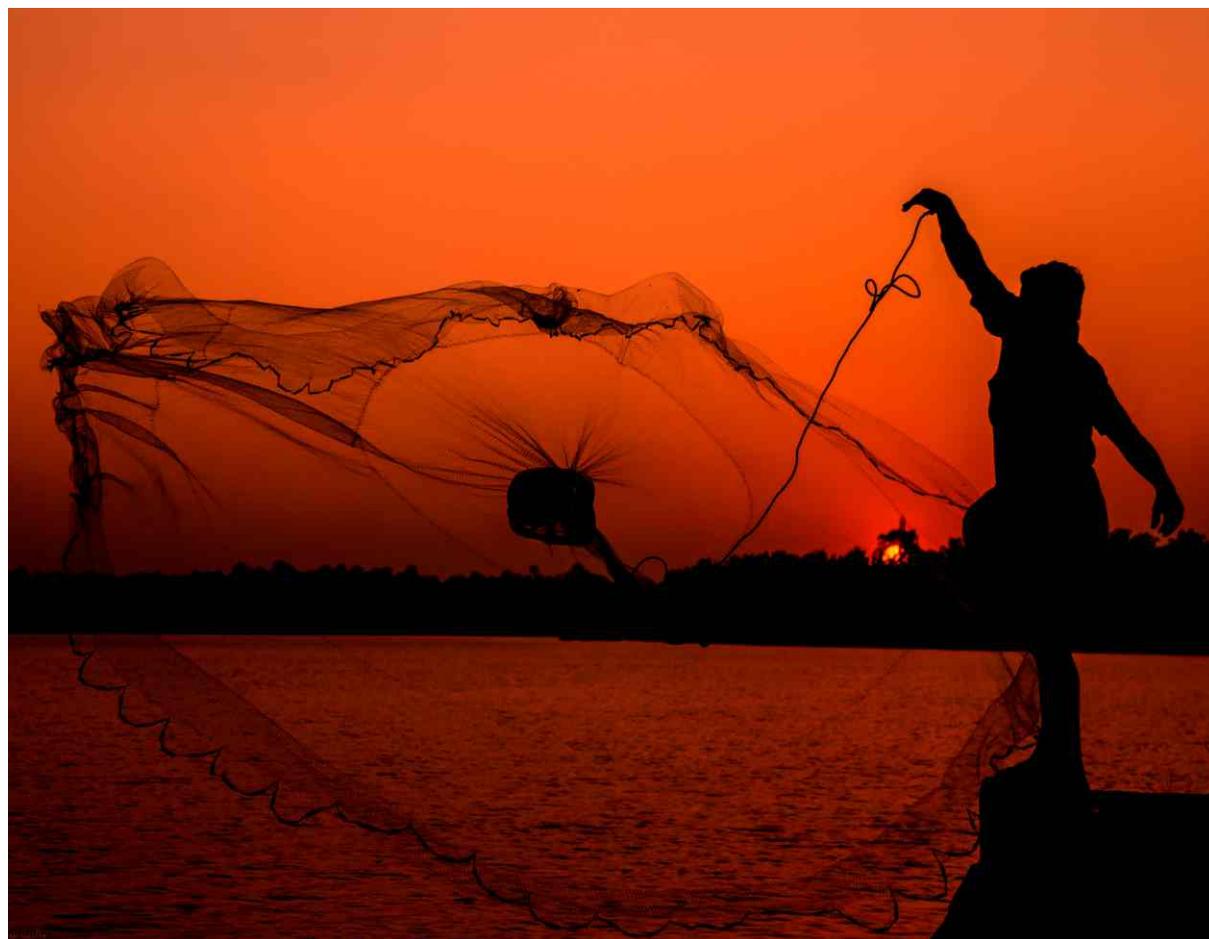
- One of the highlights of the festival are the replicas of the traditional houses of the various Naga tribes which also doubles up as food stalls serving the cuisine of that particular tribe. The different cultural troupes take rest in the respective replicas of the traditional houses their tribe in between the performances, rehearse their song & dance, eat and drink. Perfect place to click photographs of the different tribes and to also get photographs clicked with the different tribes.
- Visit the World War 2 Museum at the Hornbill Festival site where the Battle of Kohima between the Japanese and the Allied Forces during World War 2 is brilliantly documented. Later head out to the Angami villages of Kigwema and Mima not too far away from the festival site. In Kigwema, the humble wooden cabin where General Kotoku Sato of the Japanese Imperial Army stayed during the entire siege of Kohima is still there in very good condition. In the village of Mima, get to see the unique practice of underground bee-keeping. Overnight stay at Neeramaya Aradura, Kohima
- Spend another day at the Hornbill Festival in Kohima at your own pace. Overnight stay at Neeramaya Aradura, Kohima.
- On the last day drive to Dimapur Airport (3h30 drive) to board the non-stop flight to Kolkata.



THEYYAM AND TEMPLE FESTIVAL

INTRODUCTION

North Kerala's ancient ritual art form of Theyyam incorporates dance, mime and music to celebrate an ancient culture, which attaches great importance to the worship of heroes and ancestral spirits. In Theyyam an Oracle offers his body to the spirits (sometimes that of an ancestor, maybe a great forest hero of the yore or a serpent goddess) as a medium to communicate with the villagers, understand their problems, offer solutions and bless them. People wanting advice or counsel approach the Oracle in a trance with their questions. Answers are given in whispers and sometimes in extensive outbursts. It is believed by the locals that the Oracle of Theyyam possessed by spirits can cure an illness, ensure a good harvest or drive away evil spirits. Another highlight of this itinerary is Thrissur which is famous for its elaborate Temple Festivals.



ITINERARY ROUTING: (Arrive Kannur) – Tellicherry – Calicut – Thrissur – Neri Mangalam – Kuttikkanam – Backwaters – Mararikulam – (Depart Cochin)

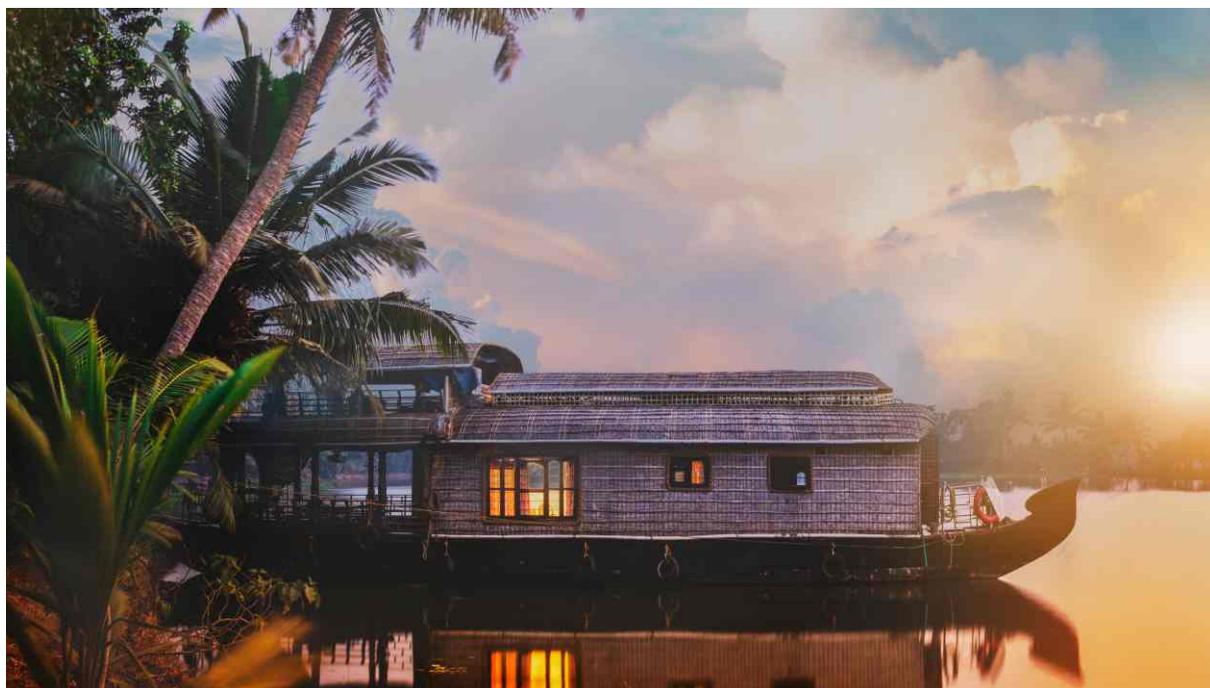
SKETCH ITINERARY

DAY 01	ARRIVE KANNUR – TELlichERRY
DAY 02	IN TELlichERRY
DAY 03	TELLICHERRY – KOZHICODE
DAY 04	IN KOZHICODE
DAY 05	KOZHICODE – THRISSUR
DAY 06	IN THRISSUR
DAY 07	THRISSUR – NERIAMANGALAM
DAY 08	IN NERIAMANGALAM (DAY TRIP TO MUNNAR)
DAY 09	NERIAMANGALAM – KUTTIKANAM
DAY 10	IN KUTTIKANAM (DAY TRIP TO THEKADY)
DAY 11	KUTTIKANAM – BACKWATERS (HOUSEBOAT)
DAY 12	BACKWATERS (HOUSEBOAT) – MARARIKULAM
DAY 13	IN MARARIKULAM
DAY 14	IN MARARIKULAM (DAY TRIP TO COCHIN)
DAY 15	MARARIKULAM – COCHIN DEPARTURE



HIGHLIGHTS

- Arrive in Kannur and drive to Tellicherry (also called Thalassery) – 1h00 drive.
- In Tellicherry, stay at the 160-year-old Ayisha Manzil for two nights as guests of Moosa and Faisa who are Moplah Muslims and custodians of some of the best culinary traditions of their community.
- Witness the ancient ritual art form of Theyyam (happens only between November 2nd week – till March 2nd week) in the countryside. A storyteller will accompany you. But be aware, on a given day, Theyyam may be happening next door, 15 minutes away, half an hour away, an hour away or even more.
- In Tellicherry enjoy a private cooking class of Moplah cuisine with Faisa followed by Lunch. Moplah Cuisine is influenced by the food habits of Arab traders and also draws inspiration from the cuisines of later trading groups such as the Portuguese and the Dutch.
- Drive from Tellicherry to Calicut (also called Kozhikode – 2hr drive). It was once the legendary seaport where Arab, Chinese and East African traders converged for Indian Spices. Stay in Calicut will be at Harivihar Heritage – a 170-year-old heritage manor done up in traditional Kerala architecture. It focuses on Ayurveda, Yoga, Kerala arts, traditions, and culture. Interact with the owners Dr. Srikumar and Dr. Neetha. Get to know from them about their passion for Ayurveda and how a harmonious blend of Ayurveda, Yoga and western medicine is the way forward in healing people.
- Go for a heritage trail of Calicut with a local storyteller. Learn about influential Zamorins, the monarchs of Calicut and how they helped shape the culture of Calicut. The trail begins from the iconic Calicut beach, where the storyteller will share stories about the history of trading in Calicut. The trail then proceeds to other major heritage points of the city and later towards the various streets of the market area. Visit a century old terracotta tile making factory, run by the Employee Cooperative Society. The trail culminates at the iconic Bepore Uru (Boat) Making Yard.
- Explore the coastal town of Bepore, located at the mouth of the Chaliyar River, famous for the construction of Urus and Dhows, the traditional Arabian trading vessels. This craft is over 1500 years old now and is carried out carefully by expert craftsmen who possess extraordinary skills passed down over the generations. Bepore beach is a combination of a sea beach and the signature backwaters of Kerala. The promenade is nearly 2 km long that stretches out into the Arabian Sea



making for a wonderful stroll, particularly during sunset.

- Drive to the village of Arattupuzha on the outskirts of Thrissur (4 hr drive). Upon arrival check-in to Neelambari – a premium boutique resort deeply rooted in ethos and culture of Kerala, drawing its inspiration from temple architecture, palace architecture, traditional homes and ethnic dwellings with thatched roofs and mud walls. Thrissur is considered the cultural capital of Kerala and is home to the famed Kalamandalam, a major centre for learning Indian performing arts, especially those that developed in the Southern states of India, with a special emphasis on Kerala. TS Shreeni, the owner of Neelambari is passionate about Kerala arts, tradition and music. He will be your temple festival guide in Thrissur.
- Drive from Thrissur to Neriamangalam (2hr 30 min drive) located on the banks of River Periyar. The Neriamangalam Bridge, built across the Periyar river in 1935 is often referred as 'The Gateway to the High

Ranges' as it is on the way to the higher regions in Kerala, especially Munnar. At Neriamangalam stay at the Windermere River House for two nights which sits on a lush garden of 2 acres by River Periyar. Laze by the pool, dine by the river side, do some fishing, enjoy a canoe ride on the river or borrow a cycle to explore the neighbourhood scattered with rubber plantations, local tea shops, village schools, churches and temples. Birders can go to the nearby Thattekad Bird Sanctuary which 40 minutes' drive one way with a naturalist (needs to be pre-booked).

- Go on a guided tour of Munnar which is not too far away from here (2 hr drive, 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. Munnar with its pleasant weather is the largest tea growing region of South India. Its green carpet of tea plantations on undulating hills are clipped like ornamental hedges making for

a stunning landscape. It is Kerala's Tea County.

- Drive from Neriamangalam to the hill station of Kuttikanam (3h30 drive) surrounded by lush green hills. Stay for two nights at 1, Hill House located on a 600 acre estate where tea, coffee and spices are grown. The owner Johnny has an unusual hobby of collecting junk and he has very cleverly recycled his collection in the property. Walk around the estate, head to the Silk Mountain (20 minutes one-way) to enjoy its scenic beauty, and spend time at the Velankanni Matha Church made entirely out of granite in Gothic style. Or, visit the St George Church nestled amidst cypress trees, also the final resting place of JD Munro - the Scottish soldier and lawyer who started tea cultivation in Munnar.
- Go on a guided tour of nearby Thekaddy (1h30 drive one-way) on cycles or in a jeep. On this tour, 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 the tour with a cup of spice tea and homemade chocolates at a spice farmer's home before returning to 1, Hill House. The best spices in the world, including pepper for which seafarers from across the world came to Kerala comes from Thekaddy. With its rolling hills and thick canopy of forest, Thekaddy's temperature is just about right to grow every kind of spices under the sun. It is Kerala's Spice County.
- Drive from Kuttikanam to Alleppey, the backwater town of Kerala (3h00 drive). Get to journey on a 'Kettuvalam', a traditional houseboat, which was once used to carry

cargoes of rice and spices up and down these same waterways for centuries. A canoe ride is included to explore the narrower canals. Spend the night on board the Houseboat.

- In the morning, disembark from the Houseboat and drive to Mararikulam (40 minutes' drive) set on 30 acres with coconut groves, lily ponds, fruit trees and a large organic farm. Spend the next 3 nights relaxing at the Marari Beach Resort. While at the resort, rise early for a walk in the beach 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 resort's Butterfly Garden or take an Ayurveda massage in the spa to get introduced to one of the world's most sophisticated and powerful healing tradition.
- Go on a guided tour of Fort Kochi and Mattancherry which is not too far away (1hr 20 min one-way). It is a wonderful mix of Dutch, Portuguese, British and Jewish history and influences. There is an option of taking a local train ride from Mararikulam up to Aroor (40 minutes or even shorter) and doing the rest of the journey to Fort Kochi by car for sightseeing. While at Mattancherry 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 fishing community of Mararikulam.
- Drive from Marari Beach Resort to Kochi Airport (2h30 drive) for your onward journey.

2021 – 2022 TEMPLE FESTIVAL CALENDAR OF THRISSUR

Festival Name	Date	Key Attraction	Distance from Neelambari
Karthika Vilakku	19-Nov-2021	The morning procession of five elephants in the Urakam Bhagavathy temple.	Neelambari (3 kms) one way
Triprayar Ekadashi	30-Nov-2021	The afternoon procession of seventeen elephants.	Neelambari (14 kms) one way
Urakam Desavilakku	25-Dec-2021	This is a festival connected to Sabarimala pilgrimage. A make shift temple from plantain (banana) stems are created and the local population celebrates with dance and music. Elephant procession is not usually involved.	Neelambari (3 kms) one way
Paramekkavu Vela	31-Dec-2021	A procession of nine elephants happens late in the evening, around 10.30 pm. Other festivities and cultural programs are also organized on this day.	Neelambari (14 kms) one way
Athikkavu Vela	04-Jan-2022	Procession of three elephants in the afternoon is the main attraction. The temple has a beautiful setting by the river and we can access it from Neelambari by boat.	Neelambari (2 kms) one way
Avittathur Ulsavam	11-Jan-2022	The venue of this festival is one of the oldest Shiva temples in Kerala. An elephant procession early in the night in a lovely setting.	Neelambari (5 kms) one way
Varakkara Pooram	14-Jan-2022	Procession of twenty elephants in the afternoon.	Neelambari (12 kms) one way
Thaipooyam	18-Jan-2022	Elephant processions and Kavadi (devotees) processions are organized in different temples.	Neelambari (4 kms) one way



		The Thayamkulangara Muruka temple will be our preferred choice.	
Kallada Thanissery Temple	25-Jan-2022	Procession of three elephants and other cultural programs in the afternoon.	Neelambari (5 kms) one way
Kuttanellur Pooram	18-Feb-2022	An elephant procession and the pulsating traditional percussion orchestra.	Neelambari (10 kms) one way
Sivarathri	28-Feb-2022	Elephant processions and cultural programs are organised by several temples on this day. The Madayikkonam Siva temple will be our preferred choice.	Neelambari (5 kms) one way
Thiruvanchikulam	02-Mar-2022	An elephant procession and the pulsating traditional percussion orchestra are the major attractions of this festival. The venue is one of the oldest temples in Kerala.	Neelambari (30 kms) one way
Arattupuzha Pooram	17-Mar-2022	One of the oldest and grandest festivals in Kerala, considered the mother of all temple festivals.	Neelambari (0.5 kms) one way



THROUGH
THE EYES OF
THE LOCAL

IN AND AROUND GWALIOR

I live in a city called Gwalior which is a 3hrs drive from Agra – home to the world famous Taj Mahal. Gwalior makes for a perfect stop if one is travelling from Agra to Khajuraho. It is a historic city which is best known for its imposing hilltop fort and I happen to be fortunate enough to be living inside the fort. There are many sights to visit such as the fort palace, temples including a Sikh temple which has a very important history of its own, museums and religious water bodies. Every evening there is an interesting light and sound show as well. The fort can also be explored on bi-cycles which are available right at the entrance.

I'm happy to have gotten this chance to showcase some of the lesser known sights in and around Gwalior. The stunning temples of Mitawali, Padavali and Bateshwar which are in close proximity to each other is a mere 40 kms from Gwalior.

Mitawali is situated on top of a hill and there are about 100 steps to reach this splendidly

round temple built in the 14th century. Many visitors have drawn conclusions that this temple might have been the inspiration behind the Parliament House in Delhi. One look at the temple and it sure is easy to believe that. However, no book on the Parliament of India ever mentions this temple. Inside there are sixty four small temples. At the centre of the enclosure stands a large circular pavilion with two concentric rings of pillars. This shrine is dedicated to Shiva and is well maintained.

Padavali is a fortress built around a temple dedicated to Shiva. While the temple is believed to built during 8th to 10th century, the fortress was built around it much later in the 18th century. The entrance is guarded by a pair of lion and lioness. Inside the temple, every inch of stone is densely carved with scenes from Hindu epics and religious scripts. The Hindu trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva are depicted here in their childhood, youth and old age. One can also see erotic carvings at Padavali because of which it is also known as the mini Khajuraho.

Bateshwar is a cluster of 200 mini temples dedicated to Shiva and Vishnu. Spread over 25 acres of land, these temples were constructed in 8th to 10th century. Some temples look pristine while others lie in ruins. The temples are built in a bowl shaped valley surrounded by hills and the jungle nearby is full of beautiful birds such as peacocks, parakeets and kingfishers. Possibly an earthquake might have brought the whole complex down, so you see lot of breakage but no intentional vandalism or plunder. Starting in 2005, the Archaeological Survey of India started putting the pieces together and the site started taking shape. About 100 temples have been restored so far and the work continues. There are thousands of temple stones and pillars lying in the complex, all awaiting their turn to be transformed back into temples.

It is also said that Mitawali, Padavali and Bateshwar made a golden triangle in which a university existed about a 1000 years ago! The teaching centre was said to be a hub that

imparted education in Mathematics, Astrology and Hinduism. If someone is driving from Agra to Gwalior these sights can easily be visited by taking just a little detour. If one takes a train from Agra to Gwalior then, a full day excursion can be planned, which will take 5-6 hrs.

BY POORVAH SIRIAH, OPERATIONS AND LOGISTICS



STEPWELLS AND WATER BODIES OF JODHPUR

I am excited to showcase some of the lesser known historic and cultural sites with great shared heritage of my hometown Jodhpur. Jodhpur is world famous for the magnificent Mehrangarh fort, the bustling clock tower market and, the blue houses of the priestly class. It is also considered the gateway to the Great Indian Thar Desert with scorching temperature for most part of the year and was once the capital of the state of Marwad (meaning the land of the dead) of princely Rajasthan or Rajputana. However, not too many know that Jodhpur is also known for its stepwells and water bodies locally known as boaris or jhalra. Records in the royal court of Jodhpur talks about more than 50 stepwells and around 200 wells that supplied water to Jodhpur throughout its history. Some of them are today enlisted in the INTACH's (The Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage) list of heritage sites.

These stepwells and wells are the typical examples of what happens when culture and utility are put together by a community.

Stepwells were mostly used as water reserves in western India, mainly in Rajasthan and Gujarat where water level and rain density is very low. Only for a month or two this drought prone part of country receives scant rainfall and most stepwells were constructed to store rain water. To keep the surroundings clean, temples were constructed in and around the stepwells which also served as a place to socialise and provided shelter to weary travellers. Of course, we have the Chand Baori enroute Agra-Jaipur and the Rani-ka-Bhav in Gujarat which are no less than work of stunning art, the latter being a UNESCO World Heritage site.

One such lesser-known water body in Jodhpur is Jeta Bera (bera means well in the local language) which is situated in the Brahmpuri area of the walled city, also famous for its blue houses. During the time of the Maharajas of Jodhpur, water from Jeta Bera was strictly rationed and in the records at the Mehrangarh Fort one can still see the receipts issued to get water from this well. It is believed that Jeta

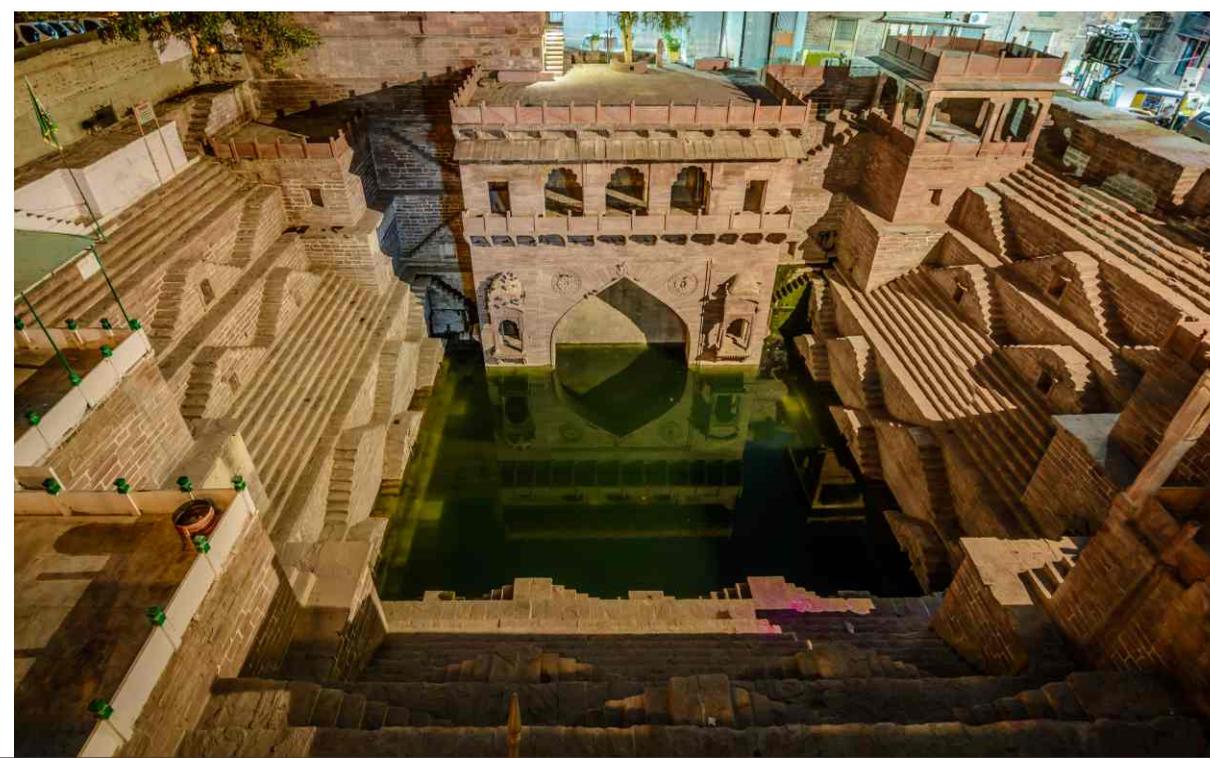
Bera is as old as Jodhpur city and dates back to the 15th century. Until 1950, the water from Jeta Bera was only used by the royal family of Jodhpur and medical practitioners. No one else was allowed to take water from this well without permission from the royal court. It is believed that water from Jeta Bera has medicinal value and locals still use it for drinking purpose.

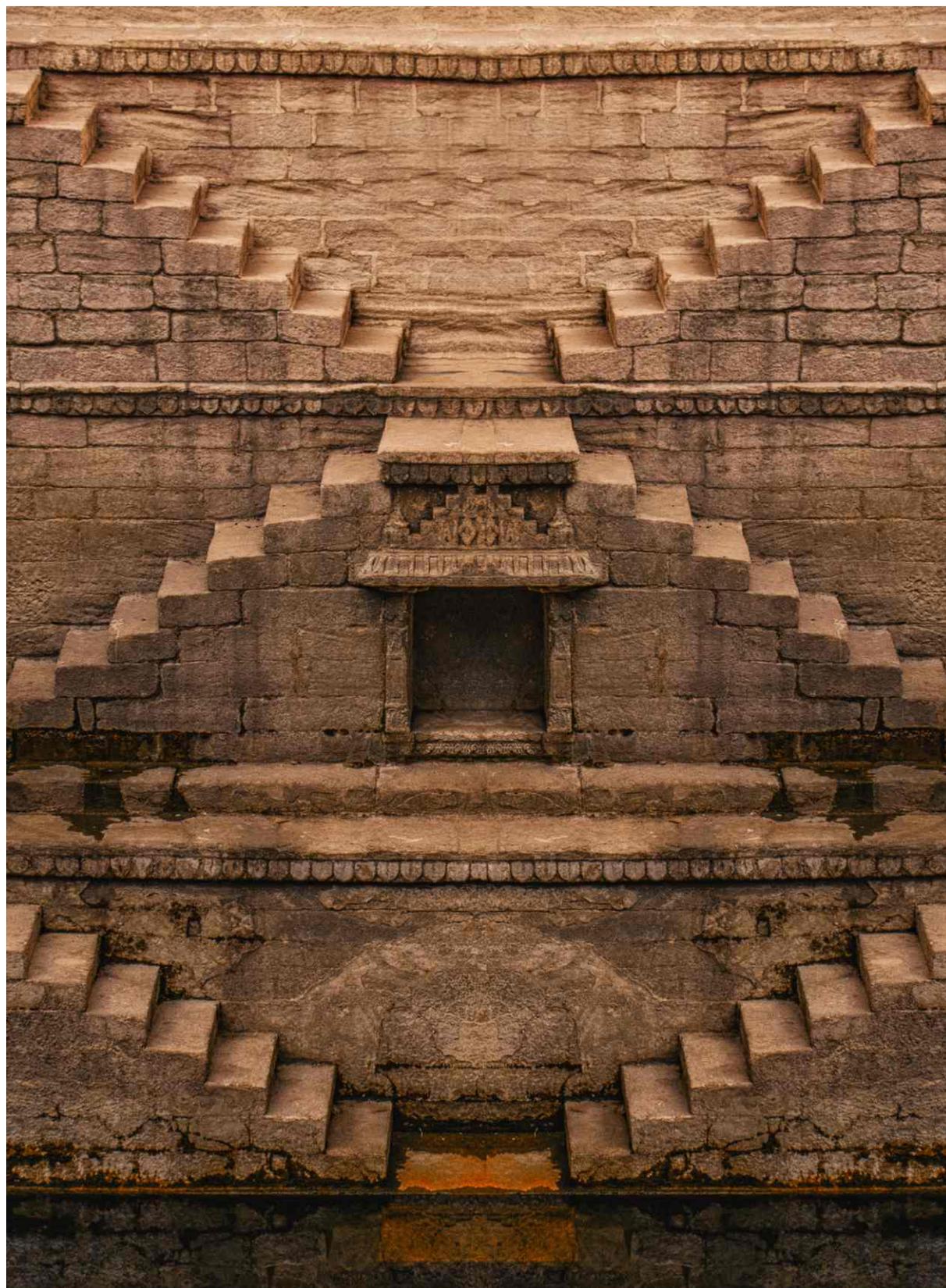
Built by members of the royal family and rich merchants these water bodies have great stories too!

Should you wish to walk down to the walled city after spending your time at the Mehrangarh Fort do visit Ranisar and Padamsar – two historic water reservoirs quietly tucked away at the foothills. There is a very interesting story related to the construction of Padamsar. It is said that Padamsar was built by the Queen Padam Ji Deora, a princess from Sirohi. However, locals have a different story to tell. Marwad in the

16th century faced a series of droughts and there was huge shortage of money which was required to strengthen the army to protect the region from foreign invasions. The head of the royal army of Jodhpur kidnapped Seth Padam Ji, a wealthy and influential merchant from the Mewar region (now Udaipur). The ransom demanded for his release was nine hundred thousand gold coins. The merchant agreed and when he was finally released from captivity he made a request to the royal court of Jodhpur. Padam Ji wanted his name to be immortalised for all times to come since he had paid such a huge amount to buy his freedom. That is how Padamsar, according to the locals, was constructed and given the name after the rich merchant.

Another favourite water body of mine is the Gulab Sagar Lake. I would recommend a sunny winter lunch after the city tour of Jodhpur at the rooftop café of Pal Haveli which offers great views of the Gulab Sagar Lake. It was commissioned by Gulab Rai in the 18th





century who was a concubine of Maharaja Vijay Singh. She also commissioned a Temple - Kunj Bihari Ji ka Mandir- and a stepwell.

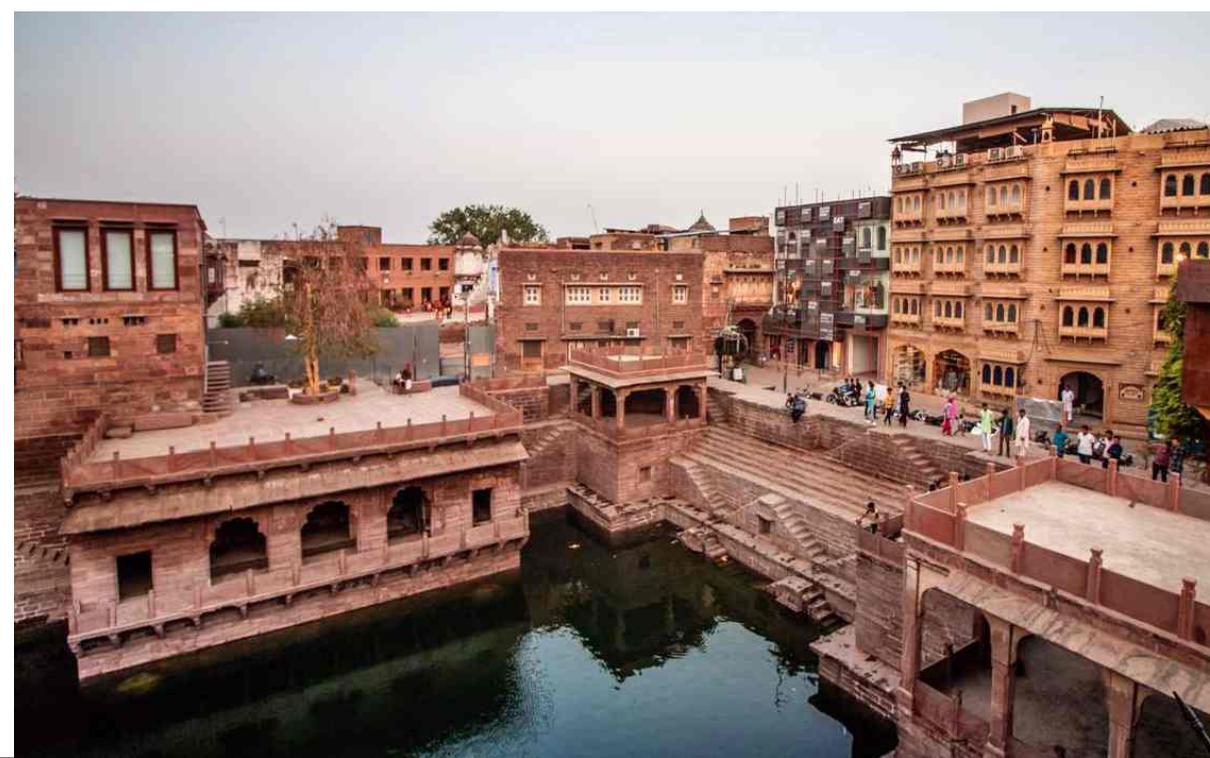
Stepwells in Jodhpur haven't lost their relevance even today. The most recent example is the Birkha Bawari, which was designed by a local architect in the year 2009. The structure was designed to store water and it was built in the traditional style in red sandstone. Birkha Bawari is capable of holding 17.5 million litres of rainwater. The stepwell currently provides water to the upscale Umaid Heritage Housing Township of Jodhpur.

In today's Jodhpur, these historic stepwells are being restored to bring them back into their former glory. The Toor-ji-ka-Jhalra near Hotel RAAS in the old city is a fine example of that. I would recommend a cup of coffee at the Stepwell Café overlooking Toor-ji-ka-Jhalra.

Recently, I explored the various stepwells of Jodhpur and designed a tour which will be

majorly on foot. To make it interesting and to add a local flavour, I have included a tuk-tuk ride. The best part of the tour is that none of the areas covered during the regular city tour or the heritage walks which we generally provide to our guests falls on the route. Should you want to know more about this tour and the routing get in touch with your relationship manager.

BY ANIL CHAUHAN, SALES AND OPERATION



HONACHA NEWARI CUISINE

There is a saying in Nepali “Parbate bigryo mojale, Newar bigryo bhojle”. Literally translated, it means, “The Brahmins/Chhetris etc. ruin themselves with excessive indulgence, whereas Newars ruin themselves with excessive feasting. So, with this, I would like to introduce you to the wonderful delights of Newari cuisine that is a highlight of anyone visiting Kathmandu valley. The Newars are the traditional and historical inhabitants of the Kathmandu valley and they have developed one of the most striking subsets of Nepalese cuisine over the course of centuries. Food forms an integral part of Newari culture and it is always prepared with great care. There are different foods for different occasions, climates, and prepared keeping the body's nutritional needs in mind. Buffalo is the most common meat used in Newari cuisine and no part of the animal is wasted. Be warned, Newari cuisine is notorious for its generosity in using spices!

HONACHA – THE HUB OF NEWARI FOOD

Located about 5 kilometres from Kathmandu

in Patan at the heart of Lalitpur Durbar Square, Honacha is the place you must visit to taste authentic Newari cuisine. The small eatery has three branches – Honacha Narayan, Honacha Bhimsen, and 3G Honacha and these are famous for serving the best Newari delicacies in the Patan region.

This family-owned business claims to have been serving Newari food since 1934. What had started as a small shop to serve Newari food to local farmers soon grew to become one of the hotspots of local cuisine for locals and visitors alike. Krishna Lal Byanjankar, originally from Honley became known as Honacha (a mix of his place of origin and the term “Cha” used to call anyone in Newari) thus giving the restaurant its name.

GYANANI OF HONACHA NARAYAN

One of the most lasting images that you will have of Honacha Narayan is that of Gyanani, the formidable manager, director, chef, and cashier of the restaurant. All day she sits behind a large round pan whipping up Barahs,

Wohs, or other traditional Newari delicacies for customers pouring in through the restaurant's low doorway. She is the founder's daughter and the custodian of the chain of eateries. Nothing escapes her careful eyes even as she is busy behind the great black pan.

There is no way you can miss her carefully creating her signature dishes for customers waiting patiently in the big room of the restaurant.

WHAT TO ORDER

Encountering any local cuisine is a daunting experience for the first timer. Newari cuisine with its fiery flavours is definitely not for the faint hearted. Here are some must-try items for those tasting Newari food for the first time.

Woh: A pancake-like dish made with lentil generally of the dark variety (moong & mas) soaked overnight, crushed and pounded, mixed with masala that varies in every household and minutely sliced fresh herbs, shaped into round, flat roti, ready to be lightly

fried in mustard oil. It is fragrant and tasty on its own but you can top them with fried egg sunny side up or mincemeat.

Choila: Composed of two words “Choi” meaning “burned” and “La” meaning “meat”, Choila is another must-try Newari delicacy at Honacha. To make this, the chef first burns the meat and then cuts the meat into pieces and cooks it with a mix of tomatoes, garlic, coriander, and other ingredients.

Piro Alloo: It is another favourite among locals. The soft and melting spicy potatoes curry piled high on another large tawa and is served with small steel plates. You must not miss this Honacha signature.

Saphu Mhichaa: A piece of bone marrow is stuffed inside a small piece of intestine, fried, and then served with some salt and chilli powder. This dish may not sound so appetizing but this is a delicacy and will be an explosion of flavours in your mouth!





Thown: You definitely need something to wash down all that spiciness. For that, you can try the signature drink of Honacha – Thown. It is a milky white beer or liquor made from fermented rice. Be careful, it is quite potent!

WHAT TO EXPECT

One of the key points to understand about Honacha is that it is a no fuss local eatery. You have to reach the restaurant through narrow dark passageways and enter into a room with smoke-blackened walls, greasy floors, and of course an open kitchen with the 'no-nonsense' Gyanani preparing your food right in front of you. Cutlery, napkins, uniformed waiters are conspicuous in their absence. You must be prepared to wait. Due to the constant footfall of customers, you can expect delays in orders. The food packs a punch of heat, so if you have a sensitive stomach, this is not the place for you.

For the brave hearts who do decide to visit Honacha, you will be rewarded with some of

the most delicious and authentic Newari preparations that you can feast on. The restaurant's continued popularity with locals and tourists for decades is testimony to its quality that has remained unchanged. It is also a great place to see first-hand how Newari food is prepared and soak in the local culture without the trappings of a modern eatery. The next time you visit Patan, I highly recommend that you visit one of the branches of Honacha.

BY PRAJWAL TANDUKAR, OPERATIONS AND LOGISTICS, SITA NEPAL



VILLAGES OF WESTERN NEPAL

There is a lot more to see in Nepal than the popular tourist destinations. Today, I would like to talk about two such villages in western Nepal. It is not for everyone, but for the active and adventurous who are willing to forego their creature comforts, the rewards are amazing - warm hospitality, unparalleled views of snow-capped mountains, idyllic rural lifestyle, and mouth-watering local cuisine.

GHALE GAUN

Located northeast of Lamjung District (Gandaki Province) at an altitude of 2070m, Ghale Gaun is Nepal's first smart village. The place is famous for its Ghale and Gurung culture and members of these two communities make up for the majority of the residents of this densely settled village. Locals believe that, long back the area used to be ruled by a Ghale King and later the name "Ghale" was given to the village after his surname ("Ghale" - Surname of King and "Gaun" means village). Ghale Gaun has more than 120 houses and out of which 38 houses are homestays with basic facilities (15 - 20

homestays have hot shower facility too). From the village and the view tower, mountain ranges such as Annapurna II, Buddha Himal, Himalchuli, Lamjung, Dr. Harka Gurung Peak, Manasalu, and Machhapuchhre can be seen on a clear day. The villagers of Ghale Gaun make their living from agriculture, animal husbandry, overseas employment, and rural tourism.

THINGS TO DO

Village Walks: Apart from the breath-taking views and natural bounties of Ghale Gaun, there are many walking trails in and around the village. Stroll through the stone-paved streets meeting and interacting with the warm residents who will greet you with the traditional "Namaste". There are also plenty of other attractions to see during your walks including a museum at the centre of the village which showcases the many traditions of the village.

Cultural Programs by the Locals: The villagers also perform cultural programs for visitors.

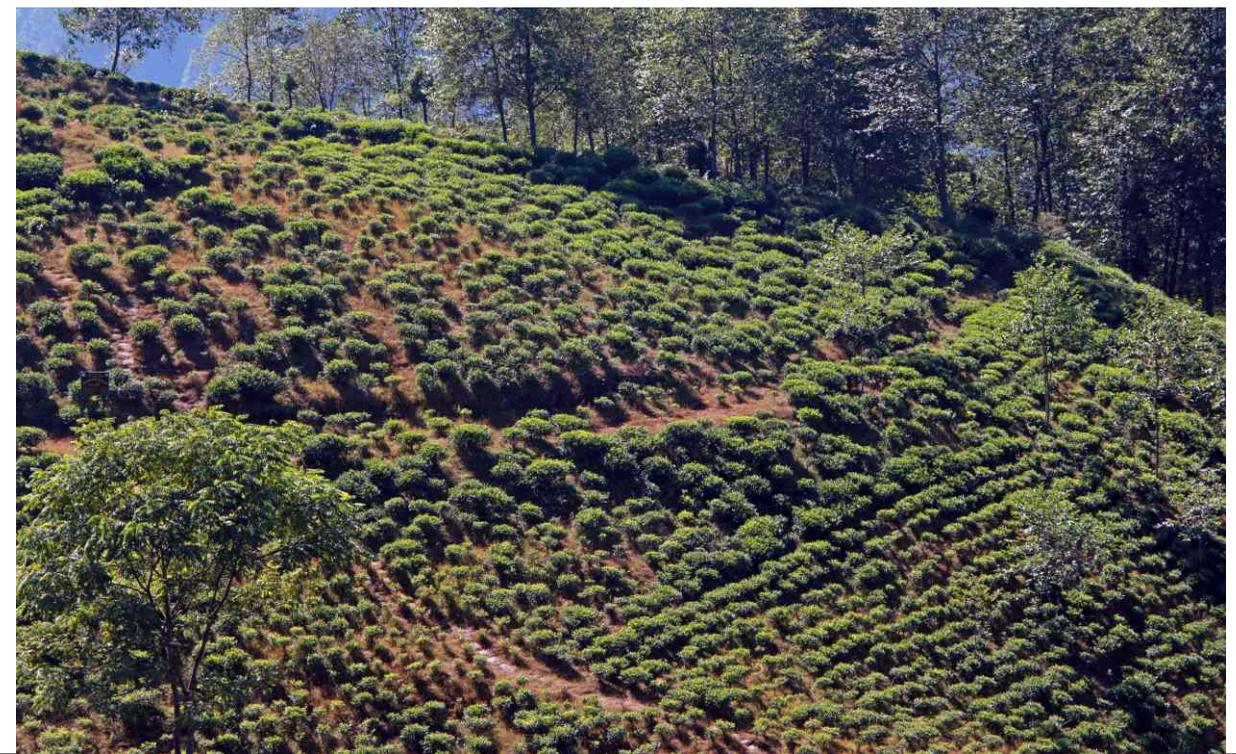
You can witness cultural shows like Rodhi and Baharamase Ghatu during the visit of Ghale Gaun. Rodhi is a very interesting tradition of the Ghale and Gurungs. In the past, the villagers of Ghale Gaun used to gather at a particular house (called Rodhi Ghar) post dinner to share how they spent the day and discuss the things they need to do the following day. After the meeting, they used to sing songs and dance to the beats of the Madal (drum) to celebrate and get ready for the next day. During the program, the locals, especially the mothers, sing songs and perform traditional dances. You can also join them and shake your legs to the rhythmic beats of the drum.

BHUJUNG

The largest settlement of Gurung community, Bhujung village lies on the north west of Lamjung District (Gandaki Province) and is situated at an altitude of 1642 m. Bhujung has more than 400 houses out of which 29 houses have basic homestay facilities. However, none

of the houses has hot shower facility. Majority of houses in Bhujung still have stone roofs. An approximate 90 minutes of easy hike or 45 minutes of drive from Ghale Gaun will take you to Bhujung. Similar to Ghale Gaun, locals from Bhujung are dependent on agriculture, animal husbandry, some are in the Royal Gurkha Rifles in the British Army, and recently, many have ventured into rural tourism as well.

The people of Bhujung consider honey from wild bees as a medicine and you can still find beehives on the high cliffs near the village. Residents of Bhujung practice extracting wild bee honey using traditional methods and worship a local deity before setting off on their honey hunting expeditions. Hunting for honey on the steep cliffs is not an easy task. The hunters use ropes and bamboo poles to hang precariously from dizzying heights and chase the bees away by using smoke from smouldering grass whilst they extract honey. This event happens twice a year, tentatively in the months of March, April and October,





November, but the date is not known beforehand.

Rural lifestyle and the rich Gurung culture are the major attractions of Bhujung Village. The honey hunting expeditions are a once in a life time experience if you happen to be in Bhujung at the right time.

BEST TIME TO VISIT

The best time to visit these idyllic rural havens in western Nepal is during the months of March, April, May, and again between

September, October, and November. During the latter months, the skies are clear after the departure of monsoons and winter is still some distance away. The cloudless skies and pleasant weather makes it the most preferred time to visit.

I do not recommend travel during the monsoon months of June, July, and August as the roads are slippery and require off road driving. Hiking during this time can be difficult and dangerous. Moreover, thick clouds can mar your views and overall experience.

HOW TO REACH

There are plenty of ways to reach Ghale Gaun and Bhujung and they are best accessed from Pokhara:

Drive Pokhara – Besisahar – 4 hrs

Drive Besisahar – Ghale Gaun – 3 hrs (Bhujung is 45 min drive or 90 minutes hike from Ghale Gaun)

Besisahar – Baglumpani – Ghale Gaun Hike – 6 hours

Besisahar – Khudi – Bhamchaur – Ghale Gaun Hike - 6 hours

PERMITS REQUIRED

You will need to pay the Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP) fee of USD 30 per person (subject to change). However, Trekker's Information Management System card is not needed.

HOSPITAL AND HEALTH POST

Both the villages have a health post facility each under the supervision of a health assistant graduate. For major health issues, district hospital at Besisahar is the nearest one from both the villages. (Distance: 24 km from Ghale Gaun – 4WD drive)

BY BISHAL DURA, OPERATIONS AND LOGISTICS, SITA NEPAL





BOOK AND FILMS WE LOVED



A CALL TO SPY

Directed by Lydia Dean Pilcher

The secret world of spies has always intrigued me. And if the spies are women, it adds an extra layer of interest. Lydia Dean Pilcher's 2019 film 'A Call to Spy' was thus an engaging watch for me. In a nutshell, the film is based on three British women spies, who helped the Resistance in German occupied France. The backdrop is of course the World War II.

The trio is made up of Virginia Hall, Vera Atkins and most interestingly for me, Noor Inayat Khan. A descendant of Tipu Sultan, the ruler of Mysore in the eighteenth century, Noor, trained as a wireless operator was the first woman to be sent to France in that capacity. Radhika Apte, the darling of the Indian web world, plays Noor brilliantly in this film.

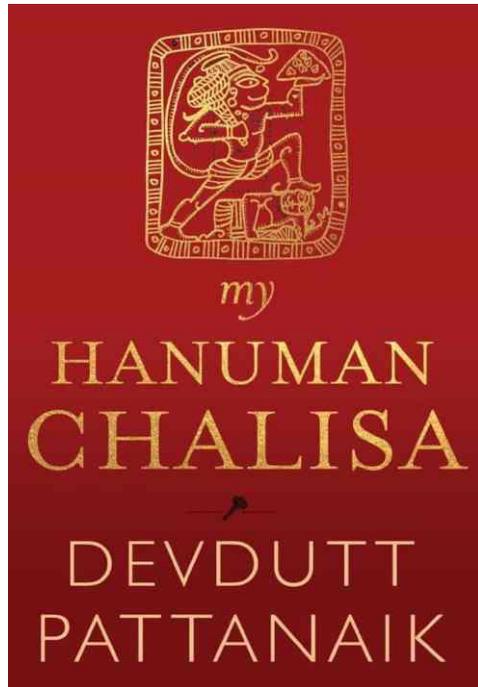
I was excited about watching Apte's portrayal of Noor and she did not disappoint. She depicts Noor's pacifism and her quiet bravery in an effortless yet deeply impactful performance. Noor's life is rich and layered, and the film offers tantalising glimpses of it. I am especially glad that after decades of

remaining unknown, the extraordinary life of Noor is finally getting the recognition that it deserves.

In fact, the film made me want to see more of Noor on screen. I couldn't help wondering how much better 'A Call to Spy' would have worked as a limited series. There is so much more to these women and especially Noor. They deserve more screen time. I'm happy that a web series is being made on Noor's life. I can't wait for it, to be honest.

All said, watching Noor's life on screen was the perfect Women's Day celebration for me. She made me proud to be a woman, and made me realize that the world is ours for the taking.

BY MADHUBANTI RAKSHIT,
DESTINATION KNOWLEDGE CENTRE



MY HANUMAN CHALISA

by Devdutt Pattanaik

Within infinite myths lies an eternal truth
Who sees it all?
Varuna has but a thousand eyes
Indra, a hundred
You and I, only two.

These are the opening lines of the book that I have read recently – My Hanuman Chalisa by Devdutt Pattanaik – reflecting on one of Hinduism's most popular prayers for positive energy. Devdutt Pattanaik writes, illustrates, and lectures on relevance of mythology in modern times.

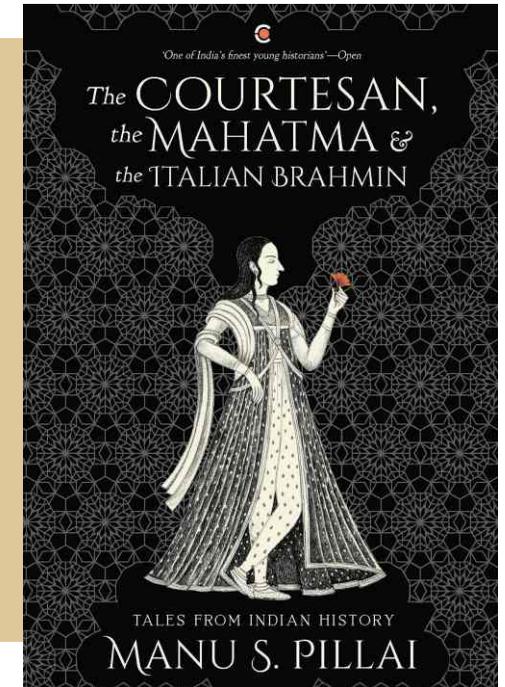
Hanuman, the orange-bodied deity with the tail and head of a monkey, is omnipresent in India. Wherever you travel, you are never too far away from him. You can see his figure dangling from the rear view mirrors of cars, find him painted across the bodies of long distance trucks, and even as the odd graffiti. Whenever I travel by metro, I find an increasing number of people reading a small book with blissful expressions on their faces – the Hanuman Chalisa, a collection of 43 short verses in praise

of Hanuman composed over four hundred years ago by poet Goswami Tulsidas.

“Problem cease
pain goes away,
when one remembers
Hanuman, the mighty hero.”

To read My Hanuman Chalisha, you do not have to be a follower of Hinduism. Devdutt Pattanaik's simple language combined with his illustrations makes the 16th century hymn very accessible and interesting. Hindu writings are full of symbols and metaphor and Pattanaik likens the mind to a mirror touching upon the Hindu belief that all reality is illusory and subjective. He signs off by inviting readers to explore the Hanuman within, by being self-content, by being mindful of the ego and by believing that the greatest kind of movement possible for any human being is the leap of faith.

BY SOMA PAUL, PRODUCT AND EXPERIENCES,
DESTINATION KNOWLEDGE CENTRE



THE COURTESAN, THE MAHATMA AND THE ITALIAN BRAHMIN

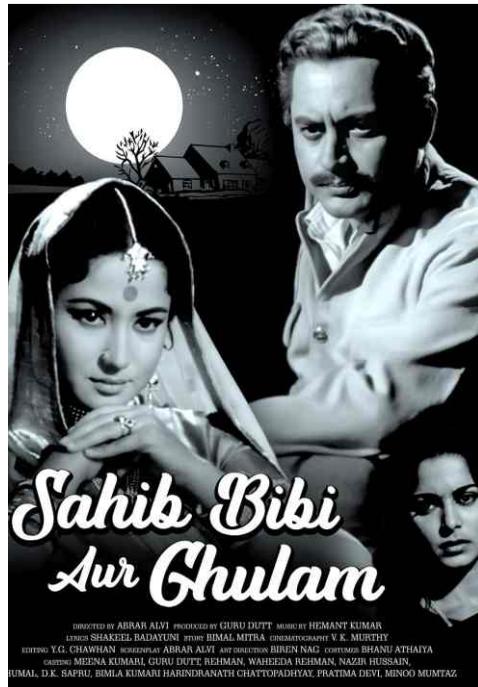
by Manu S Pillai

The Courtesan, The Mahatma and The Italian Brahmin, authored by Manu S Pillai, is a collection of short factual stories that are divided into the pre-British era, the Raj era and the post-Independence era. This book to me was a great window to the complex cultural, traditional and social norms that makes India what it is today. The author, tries to bring to the fore the progression of India through stories of kings, queens, devout, courtesans and outcasts. There is a mention of many a forgotten heroes, men and women, who challenged society in their times, about kings and queens who crossed the boundaries of religion, of the common men and women who have become legends and feature in bed time stories. An underpinning theme in all these stories, which the author emphasizes on too many times, is the multicultural past of India. The book has undercurrents of the politics practiced through the ages which has shaped the country's present political scenario. I enjoyed reading the book not only because I got to learn about some of the untold or forgotten stories of the past but also because

it gave me perspective to the outdated traditions and customs we follow to date.

I would recommend this book to everyone who would like to make an attempt to understand what makes India a land of contradictions and paradoxes.

BY TEJASHRI SIMHA, EXPLORER,
DESTINATION KNOWLEDGE CENTRE



SAHIB BIWI AUR GHULAM

Directed by Abrar Alvi

Sahib Bibi Aur Ghulam (literally translated to The Master, the Wife and the Slave) is one of the greatest films ever made in India. The film (released in December, 1962) revolves around the relationship between Chhote Thakur (the young wealthy scion), Chhoti Bahu (his wife) and Bhootnath (a servant), living in a grand mansion belonging to a powerful joint family of Zamindars (feudal landlords). The setting is that of 19th century Calcutta (now called Kolkata) during its phase of rapid industrial growth under the British Raj. The mingling of British and Indian culture resulted in the emergence of a new class of urbane Indians called 'Babus' whose members were bureaucrats and professionals working for the British East India Company. They usually belonged to upper caste Hindu communities. In the 19th century the Bengal Renaissance brought about an increased socio-cultural sophistication among city denizens. The film portrays the gradual degeneration of the opulent grand mansion into an abandoned heap of crumbling ruins at the end of the film, signalling the collapse of the old age Zamindari

System (Feudal System) during the British Raj.

The hero of the story is Bhootnath, a fairly educated young villager, who comes to Calcutta to seek his fortune. Here he gets shelter in a grand mansion where his brother-in-law works as a private tutor and stays in a small room in the mansion itself. In a few days Bhootnath also finds a job in a sindoor (red vermilion used by married women) factory. Gradually he learns about the owners and the matters of the house.

While staying at the grand mansion Bhootnath comes across the stunningly beautiful and refined lady of the house (Chhoti Bahu) who is going through the pain of her husband completely neglecting her in preference for drinking and sleeping with prostitutes. Chhoti Bahu befriends Bhootnath in the hope that he will bring her the magical sindoor that will help her enchant her husband to stay back and spend time with her rather than at the courtesans' quarters. Chhoti Bahu tries to woo back her husband with increasingly desperate

measures to the extent that she herself starts drinking so that her husband doesn't go out. In the end, Bhootnath witnesses that Chhoti Bahu has become an alcoholic, her husband is partially paralysed, and the family has gone bankrupt. The magnificence of the grand mansion disappears that stands as a dilapidated shell of its erstwhile self. In the last scene, we see Bhootnath has become a civil engineer and is given the task of bringing down that very mansion where he found shelter when he first arrived in Calcutta!

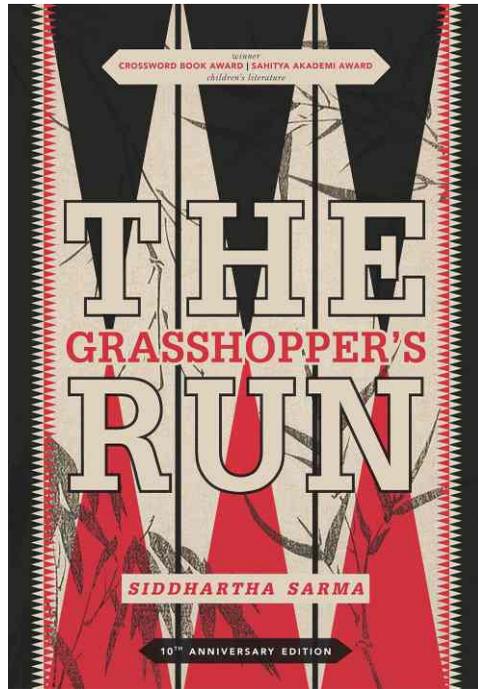
Sahib Bibi Aur Ghulam was a major critical as well as commercial success, with critics lauding actor Meena Kumari's heart rendering performance as Chhoti Bahu. Legendary artists such as Abrar Alvi (Director); Guru Dutt (Producer and the main lead of Bhootnath); V.K. Murthy (cinematographer) and Hemant Kumar (Music Director) were involved in its production. Though a black and white film, it had excellent photography coupled with outstanding Bengali music and great performances by the actors. Sahib Bibi Aur Ghulam was hugely successful in showcasing the Bengali culture that was prevalent in the 19th century Calcutta. It was nominated for the Golden Bear at the 13th Berlin International Film Festival and was chosen as India's official entry to the Oscars, however it was not accepted as a nominee by the Academy citing reason that "a woman who drinks was not permissible in their culture".

Today several grand mansions in West Bengal belonging to that era are being restored to their original glory to be run as heritage hotels. The Rajbari Bawali in the South 24 Parganas District (3 hrs drive from Kolkata) is worth a mention. The delightful heritage property

makes for an ideal stopover at the beginning or end of a tour of West Bengal.

I strongly recommend Sahib Bibi Aur Ghulam to anyone who wants to know how Calcutta evolved from being a small town to one of the centres of power of British colonial rule.

BY INDERJEET RATHOD,
DESTINATION KNOWLEDGE CENTRE



THE GRASSHOPPER'S RUN

by Siddhartha Sarma

I found *The Grasshopper's Run*, a barely 200-pages short novel, to be an unusual mix, unusual but brilliant mix. It is set in India's fringes - the northeast Indian state of Assam - during World War 2. Not too many know that hills of Northeast India witnessed some the biggest and bloodiest battles fought between the Japanese and the Allied Forces which turned the tide of the World War 2. The Japanese were comprehensively beaten and forced to retreat for the first time in the Asian theatre. The book provides a glimpse into the wisdom, oral traditions and legends of the tribes of Northeast India- "When you hunt, you are placing your hunger against the animal's desire to live. If your hunger is greater, you will get the animal. But not always." It is about Gojen Rajkhowa, a 15-year-old Assamese boy, mind you he is no ordinary boy, but one trained in a morung by the Ao Nagas, one of the 16 major Naga tribes. Back in the days Morungs - the dormitory for boys about to go through their rites of passage - was great education. Here, guided by the elders, the boys mastered every skill needed to survive and carry forward

the shared ideas of their tribe. All kinds of falsehood were forbidden, yet they were taught to be wily. In a Morung the boys learnt that they need not be deceitful to survive as a tribe.

The Grasshopper's Run is the story of Gojen's gruelling journey along with his tribal brethren to hunt down the psychopath Japanese General under whose order a Naga village was massacred. Among those brutally killed was Uti, the son of the village chief and Gojen's best friend. They had spent their time together at the morung as brothers and would go to each other's home during school holidays. As the journey unfolds, it soon becomes clear that Gojen's quest into the unknown is much more than revenge, he must step through the mist surrounding the ancient legend of *The Grasshopper* of the Ao Nagas that was narrated to the boys by Uti's grandmother - "you can burn me now, Fire. *The Grasshopper* will come looking for you"

What makes the racy plot exciting and

compelling is Siddhartha Sarma's exhaustive research and his attention to detail. He travelled to Myanmar just to test-fire the Lee-Enfield Mark III rifle and acquaint himself to the environment in which the rifle features so prominently in the book. Sarma spent time digging every minute detail of the Battle of Kohima - often described as the Stalingrad of the East, scoured through the archives of the Imperial War Museum in London, studied the uniforms of the Japanese Army in the Assam State Museum and referred to the terrain maps of JP Mills, a British administrator who wrote extensively about the Naga tribes to supplement his first-hand experience as a journalist who worked in Northeast India and had family ties with the members of the Ao tribe. He wanted everything to be spot on. And spot on it is with some great and sometimes chilling descriptions, such as "the steady liquid clack-clack of heavy Nambu machine guns gave a finality to the matter" while writing about the massacre of the Naga Village by the Japanese soldiers.

Sarma's style of writing succinctly brilliantly transports the readers inside Gojen's head. He is also equally good in getting inside the heads of the other characters such as Lt. Colonel Kenneally of His Majesty's Intelligence Corps, neck deep in the Great Game, who helped Gojen by identifying Uti's killer, the Japanese General Shunroku Mori, the butcher of Nanjing in China which witnessed some of the worst war crimes by the Japanese Army; the exasperated Japanese General Kotoku Sato, powerless to control Mori who Sato knew was a psychopath but ironically held the key to the Japanese campaign to make inroads into India - a slow learner at school, bullied by his classmates, who raged at his helplessness and

hated his elder brother - a clever bright boy, a favourite of the teachers and was held up as an example to the whole school. None of Sarma's characters in *The Grasshopper's Run* are black and white - they are all grey.

Highly recommended. I finished the book in one day.

BY KUNTIL BARUWA, EXPLORER,
DESTINATION KNOWLEDGE CENTRE



RESPONSIBLE
TOURISM



Dipak Deva, Managing Director of TCI - SITA, pens down his suggestions for a greener, smarter and responsible tourism.

I believe that it is the right of the future generations to experience the beauty and majesty of the planet as we have had the privilege of seeing it. Sustainability needs to be an active element of every tour operator and travel service provider's operational strategy and an active element of their business model. There have always been some very committed individuals who have believed in the philosophy of sustainability and have built their business models around it. Kerala has so many examples as it's a world leader in its efforts towards responsible tourism. Jose Dominic of CGH Earth has been vocal about it for years now. Like him, we have some fine examples in almost every state. Rajasthan has some good businesses that are run with the principles of sustainability. In 2008, the then Eco Tourism Society even laid down some guidelines. However, a greater, concerted commitment is needed from all

stakeholders, especially from those in the Domestic Tourism space and large chain hotels.

We understand our responsibility as a leader in the inbound space and our core values have always dictated a responsible tourism model. A resolute effort was made in 2016 when we launched our sustainability measurement criteria for excursions and tours. You will be pleased to know that our consumption of sustainable tours has gone up by 55 per cent in the last three years itself. I am extremely proud that we are able to offer products that have been rated as per our sustainability index – a first in the Indian Travel Industry.

Environmental degradation is a serious threat and unless we implement sustainable policies strictly, we will fail to nurture our planet. The role of state tourism boards and India Tourism is crucial in implementing sustainable practices and policies. While approving new businesses and tourism projects, it is imperative that sustainability guidelines are kept in mind. Environmental taxes, where

applied, should be fair and non-discriminatory. They should be carefully thought through to minimise their impact on economic development and revenues must be ploughed back to further environment improvement programmes. RTSOI and like-minded bodies must lobby for greener options and sustainable practices at every level, train and educate and help create awareness, as it is the only way forward.

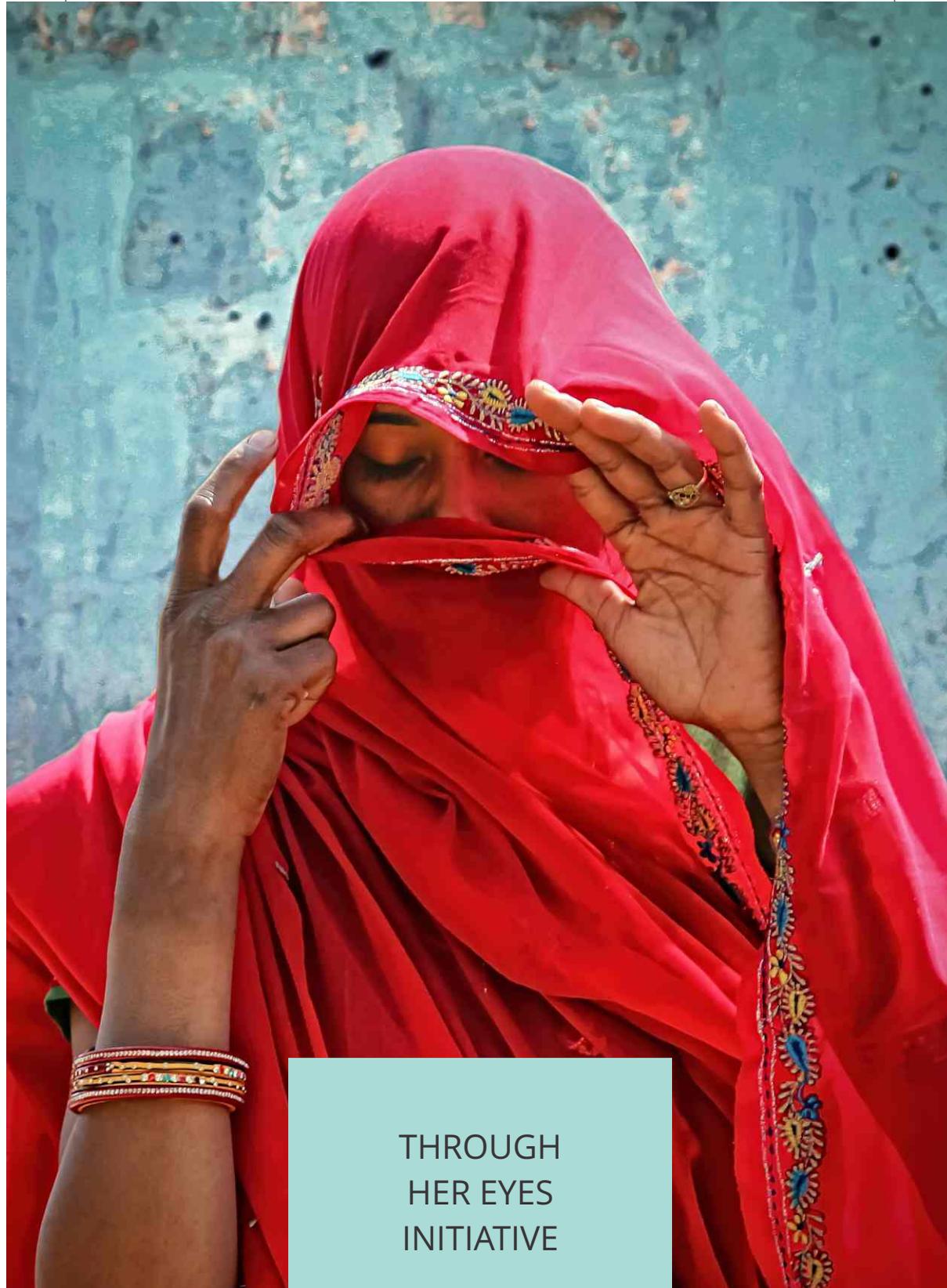
Awareness, education and training are paramount to implementing any policy, but people can come up with interesting ideas to incentivise the practices. Swedish Tourism Board came up with a lovely incentive for its tourists – a free cake for those cycling in their cities rather than using carbon burning modes of transport. Visit Flanders, the tourism organisation representing Northern Belgium used local inputs to rethink its mission by creating an “economy of meaning”, that includes among other initiatives, linking visitors with locals who share their passions for things like history or food and making story telling central to its sites. Community involvement can be a big incentive, and it's sustainable. Tour Operators can be incentivised with certifications and rebate on taxes for following a certain level of sustainability. Travellers, both domestic & International could be encouraged to use more trains and greener modes of transport. Public transport infra-structure could be vastly improved to supplement and encourage tourists.

Eventually as Tourism numbers grow, all stakeholders need to start with a simple set of guidelines for themselves that takes full cognizance of current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the

environment, and host communities. Ultimately, the destination has to benefit, local host communities need to feel involved and employed. Kerala's initiatives could be replicated in other states as is perhaps being done by M.P Tourism. The carrying capacity of destinations must be optimised with proper studying of data. This will benefit all stakeholders and at the same time, Over Tourism must be avoided at all costs. Promote quality over quantity and make the right choices to making travel greener, smarter, developmental, and more responsible.

Implementation of policies and to a large extent, self-regulation is a challenge. Travellers need to make the right choices – choose sustainable travel options, accommodation, and excursions. Skill Development of Rural communities is paramount to engaging them at various levels in tourism. Some mechanism needs to be formed to train them as guides, wildlife naturalists, drivers, hotel managers etc. India needs to tap its full potential; there is so much we can do. Resorts and hotel owners must absolutely have a large section of their workforce sourced locally. Guides, experience providers, drivers etc. must be local. Guest amenities, gifts and food should be procured locally as far as possible. Buy local, eat local and give back to the community you are visiting.

Sustainability is not a choice but a necessity. We are sitting on a time bomb with environmental degradation and climate change is real. In fact, culmination of all sustainable efforts is eventually to move from a sustainable to a regenerative model of tourism where we can preserve the destinations for future generations in a better condition than today.



THROUGH HER EYES INITIATIVE



Through Her Eyes was conceptualised with a focus on creating exclusive immersive experiences for women who love travelling to faraway lands with ensured safety. We have designed women-only journeys for women explorers who want to escape alone or with like-minded women, build bonds, and share the joys of discovering new cultures. These journeys give the opportunity to be pampered like royalty, leave all worries behind, and indulge in a journey of self-discovery. Every destination covered by Through Her Eyes offers the perfect blend of adventure and rejuvenation to give colourful memories to cherish for a lifetime.

We are a team of women dedicated to creating customised female-friendly itineraries that cater to all your needs. As a team, we have combined experience in different fields that gives us the confidence to create unique journeys through the sub-continent for you. Our specially designed journeys to facilitate immersion in diverse activities for women travellers. Whether you want a customized individual journey or want to be a part of an intimate group tour, we have curated the best itineraries featuring exclusive charming boutique hotels and homestays. We also include delightfully delicious culinary treats and lively conversations over meals for you to savour during your tour. We understand the need to rejuvenate and hence we give you the option to re-energise at the best spas and retreats.

Our team has gone to great lengths to offer you the best experiences that lets you delve into the colourful bazaars of India at your own pace. Meet the locals along your journey and soak in the vibrant art, culture, and customs of the destinations you visit. We have designed the itineraries with a focus on women

empowerment, which has led us to forge relationships with strong accomplished women across the sub-continent. We will be happy to set up casual conversations over tea with these remarkable figures if you wish to learn about their achievements. We design not just your itineraries but carve out experiences that help you forge unique bonds through these journeys. We are energetic, exuberant, meticulous and unrelenting when it comes to managing the intricacies of a project. With over 25 years of experience in travel, our extensive local knowledge is unparalleled.

Join us on our a fixed departure itinerary for 2022 that covers Delhi, Agra, Jaipur and Mumbai spanning 10 nights and 11 days led by two vivacious women. A further extension to Goa or Kerala is also on offer. We have featured the choicest experiences in our itineraries which range from dining with locals to facilitating cultural exchange to shopping with a fashion designer, dancing with a Bollywood choreographer to wandering the streets with a historian to learn its tales.

Contact us to know more about journeys across the Indian subcontinent curated by women for women.

Come Explore with us

TRENDS OF 2021

Have you ever wondered what travel may look like once the COVID 19 pandemic is behind us? The world over, people have been conducting studies and surveys to figure that out. On studying these, we can see some common trends emerging that will define the way people are going to travel in 2021.

Being cooped up in their homes for a larger part of the past year without being able to spend time with loved ones has generated the interest to reconnect in young and old alike. There will be a definite shift from volume-based travel to smaller multi-generational or intimate group travel. Some may even opt to go-off grid and stay at lesser-known destinations to avoid crowds. After the prolonged confinement, the great outdoors will be a welcome change and it will lead to people opting for adventurous experiences like trekking, hiking and such.

Hotels, their architecture and space, will no longer be confined to utilitarian purposes alone. Post pandemic, travellers will be seeking these spaces to be safe havens where they feel secure. A recent survey has shown a shift in guests' preference towards smaller exclusive properties with outdoor offerings and most importantly a lack of crowds. The trend is tilting towards homestays and boutique properties that can offer the guests a feeling of mental, spiritual, and physical wellbeing and healing while they are on vacation. Their foremost choice of destination will be places where they can enjoy extended stays with some form of spa/wellness treatments to release mental stress or be apt to celebrate a milestone or special occasion.

Sustainable and slow immersive travel will dominate the post pandemic scenario. The pandemic has taught people to make



conscious choices in their lives and this will reflect as a trend in travel as well. With the uncertainty that people have seen in the past year, they will want to travel with a purpose to give back to the society and immerse in deeper cultural exchange. Traditional modes of transport will take a backseat with people opting for local and bespoke modes of transport to engage in a different form of discovery.

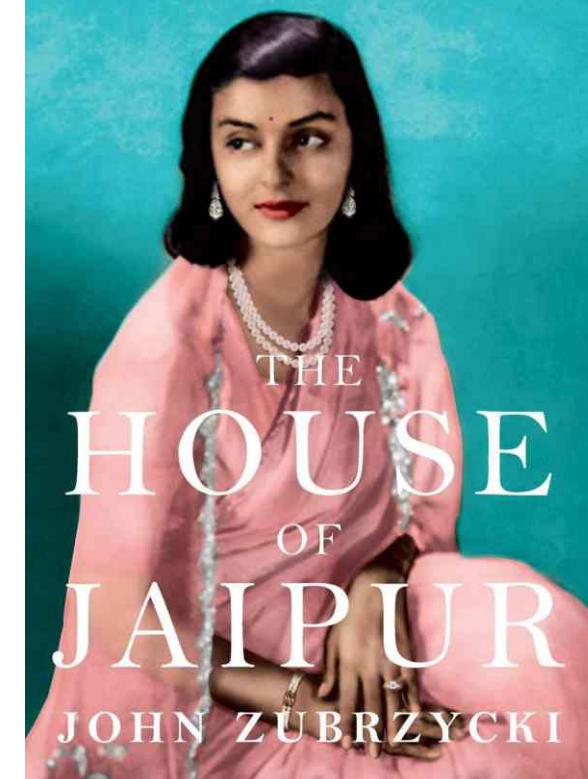
While these are broader trends, a specific trend which will boom will be that of women only travel. Financial independence coupled with a steady increase in women travel bloggers has kindled the desire in women to discover different destinations solo or with other like-minded women. We understand the importance of tapping into this emerging trend and we have designed special tours and experiences by a team of seasoned women travellers. Through Her Eyes is our foray into this market and we have some of the most incredible experts on our panel to lead the tours. The team here has already designed a fixed departure itinerary for 2022 that covers Delhi, Agra, Jaipur and Mumbai spanning 10 nights and 11 days led by two vivacious women. A further extension to Goa or Kerala is also on offer.



REMEMBERING
RAJMATA
GAYATRI DEVI,

THE QUEEN OF HEARTS
By Tara Deva

*The INSIDE STORY of INDIA'S
MOST GLAMOROUS ROYAL FAMILY*



Worrying about the pandemic and being housebound for almost a year, has been especially difficult for an inveterate traveller like me. Which is why Lovleen Sagar's excellent interview with John Zubrzycki, was such a welcome change. Post the interview Lovleen was kind enough to send me John's, 'The House of Jaipur', an unputdownable book, which took me back to my beautiful Jaipur, and opened such a floodgate of memories, that for many days I sat wrapped up in sheer nostalgia!

As I was transported to Jaipur of the eighties and nineties, my most memorable years in the city, I recalled how life was one big celebration, with never a dull moment. At the heart of which was always, the larger-than-life, Rajmata Gayatri Devi.

My first interaction with a member of the Royal House of Cooch-Bihar was in the late sixties, when I met Maharaja Jagaddipendra Narayan Bhup Bahadur in Babina, a quaint Army Cantonment near Jhansi, Madhya Pradesh. The extremely charming Maharaja, an honorary officer of the Seventh Light Cavalry, the second oldest Regiment of the Indian Army, had come to attend the Zojila-Day celebration -a celebration to commemorate the battle that was fought in 1948 to capture the Zojila pass (at an inhospitable height of 11578 feet). It epitomised all the essentials of a battle and ensured for us the province of Ladakh, or else the map of India would have looked different today. After the celebrations, the Maharaja had lunch with us and recounted amazing stories from his days in Cooch-Bihar. I listened attentively, hoping to recount them someday to my grandchildren, little imagining that a decade later we would get many opportunities to meet his sister Rajmata Gayatri Devi, and add many more colourful chapters to the tales that he told us.

The first time I met the Rajmata, is still vividly etched in my memory. She walked into the room, a veritable cloud of vibrant sea-green, in her trademark French chiffon sari and striking jewellery, exuding an ethereal radiance that can barely be described. It was a small dinner party at an Army Officers home, my husband Keshav, was not in town, and the host introduced me as the wife of a Brigadier of the Seventh Cavalry. She was so happy to learn about my husband's regiment that she spent a large part of the evening asking me about it, my life as an Army wife, and my work in Tourism. I was overwhelmed by her warmth, and mesmerised by her charm.

The army always had a special place in Rajmata's heart. A few years later when my husband's regiment was still in Babina for their Bicentennial in 1984, and she graced the occasion, it made the event so memorable for



all those present. A photograph of Rajmata in a pink chiffon, with my husband, Keshav, in his blue patois, taken on the occasion, has pride of place in our home.

Many years after we met her brother at a Zojila Day celebrations, Rajmata decided to attend one herself. It was a great joy for my husband that she asked him to accompany her to the Regiment in Jaisalmer, for the celebrations in the early nineties. During her trip to Jaisalmer, she mentioned to my husband that I had never invited her home. It was a beautiful expression of her affection for us. I hadn't been remiss, just worried about inviting her home, but since she had now practically invited herself in such an affectionate manner, it gave me the courage to arrange a dinner party for Rajmata. As we only served vegetarian food at home, the menu for her dinner became a bit of an issue, as my husband insisted we had to include some non vegetarian dishes, but I did not budge, and instead told him to open the bottle of King's Ransom whisky that he has been saving for our daughter's wedding - after

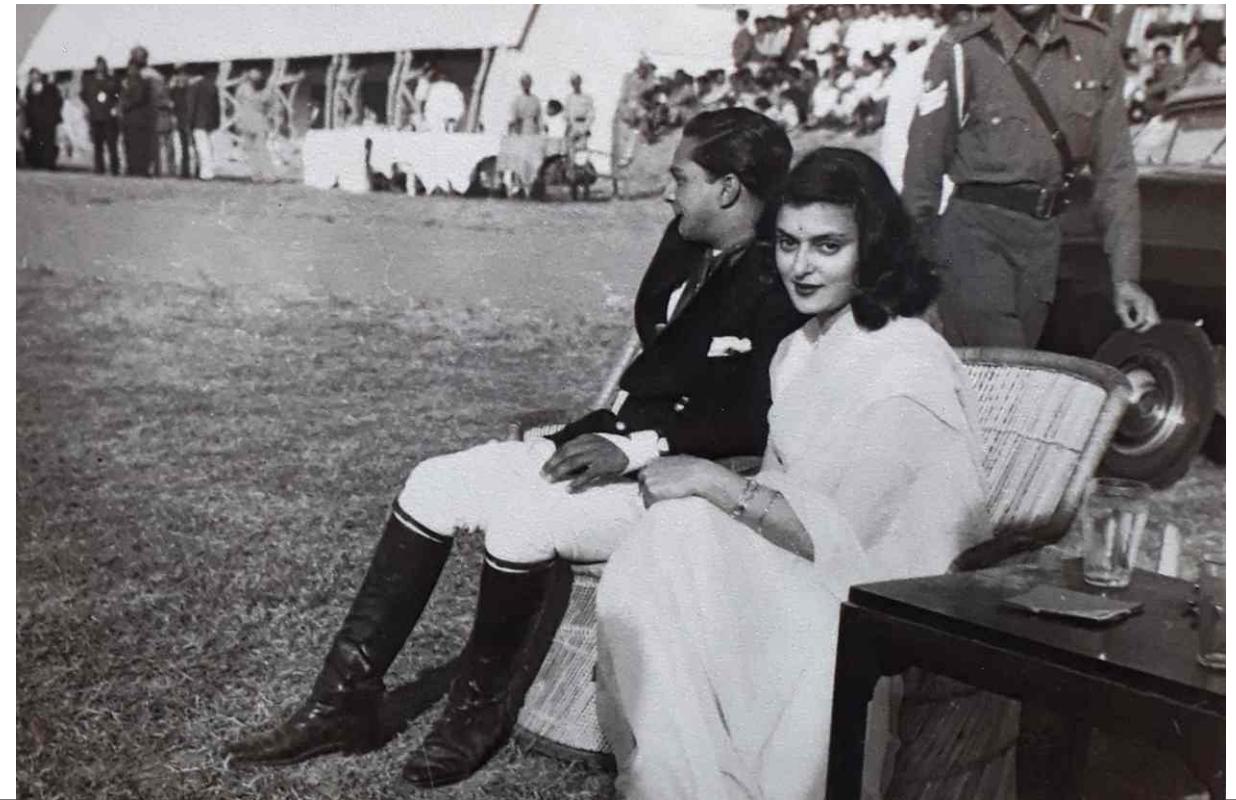
all who knows the groom may turn out to be a teetotaler (he didn't, but I'm sure he agrees that the precious whiskey was put to good use)! We invited a few common friends and my son, daughter in law and our Swiss friend Andy Zraggen, drove down from Delhi. It was a very pleasant, informal evening, with a lot of laughter. When Rajmata took out a cigarette from her bag, Andy took his lighter out to light it for her but told her I did not allow him to light a cigarette in the room so they should sit out on the terrace. I'll never forget the expression on Andy's face as he followed the Rajmata out on the terrace to enjoy a smoke! She so enjoyed the simple meal that our daughter had cooked that a few months later at her birthday party at the Rambagh, the Rajmata generously told one of the guests there that I served very nice vegetarian meals at home.

While the Army, and parties were a big part of her life, few would know that she was not averse to walking through the small, crowded streets of the 'purana shehr' or the old city, of her beloved Jaipur. I saw this side of her thanks

to her chronic frozen shoulder and Vaid ji (a very renowned Ayurveda practitioner). The Rajmata had suffered in pain for many years and heard me praising Vaid ji so often that she asked me to bring him to Lily Pool, her residence so he could help cure her. I had to tell her it was not possible for Vaid ji to come to her because he ran a charitable clinic where he saw more than a hundred patients daily, some of whom waited days to be seen by him. The Rajmata then asked if I could instead take her to meet Vaid ji. I did manage to fix an appointment with him, but was a nervous wreck. I worried about taking her through the narrow lanes of the old city, with heaps of garbage lying all over and stray cows occupying most of the space, but she didn't seem to be concerned by it at all. While Vaid ji worked on Rajmata's shoulder, she sat through the painful manipulation stoically. Two sessions with Vaid ji, and she playfully announced that she was good enough to try a

game of tennis right away!

While people have seen and heard a lot about her beauty, glamorous life, and the parties she threw, I was privileged to see a very different side to her personality. Her love for the Army brought us in contact with each other, but it was her interest in lives outside the palace, that built a relationship that lasted many years. For some reason she took to me and was so kind and welcoming that over the years many friends and family asked me to help meet her. I was very careful not to burden her with too many requests - and she was gracious enough never to turn down any of my requests. For after all, Rajmata Gayatri Devi was truly a queen of hearts.



THE DESTINATION KNOWLEDGE CENTRE DURING THE LOCKDOWN 2020-21

MARCH
2020

- The journey of sharing knowledge began with our webinars and quizzes on 31st March
- Through Her Eyes – the women only travel initiative was launched

AUGUST
2020

- The DKC successfully conducted its 100th Webinars
- The Photo contest was launched
- The Art of Travel Monthly Newsletter was re-launched to communicate the different activities of the DKC during the Lockdown

SEPTEMBER
2020

- Sustainability Action Plan unveiled in our Associate Office Meet

OCTOBER
2020

- Sustainability series of webinars launched

NOVEMBER
2020

- Through the Eyes of a Local series of webinars launched
- Sustainability Action Plan was formally launched

DECEMBER 2020

- The DKC conducted its 150th webinar on Dec 14th
- The total number of external speakers till December 14th: 116

JANUARY 2021

- The DKC conducted an internal survey asking for feedback on the work done in 2020.
- The DKC got cracking on some of the ideas from the survey

FEBRUARY 2021

- Some of the interesting topics that our colleagues wanted to deep dive into as per the survey were included in the webinar schedule
- All the webinars are now segregated theme wise which can be shared both internally and externally
- The first edition of DKC Lecture series with art historian Seema Srivastava with 6 videos covering North India shared internally and externally
- The DKC has also been sharing itineraries on interesting themes and also to compliment the webinars
- A flyer on our favourite villas in Kerala, Goa and Tamil Nadu is ready and shared internally and externally
- Fixed departure of Through her Eyes – our women-only initiative for 2022 which covers the Golden Triangle and Mumbai shared internally and externally
- We are finalising ideas for local exploration. DKC explorers will now survey locally for new experiences. We will communicate the findings via the DKC's "Through the Eyes of a Local" Series webinars
- Till 15th March the DKC has done 163 webinars

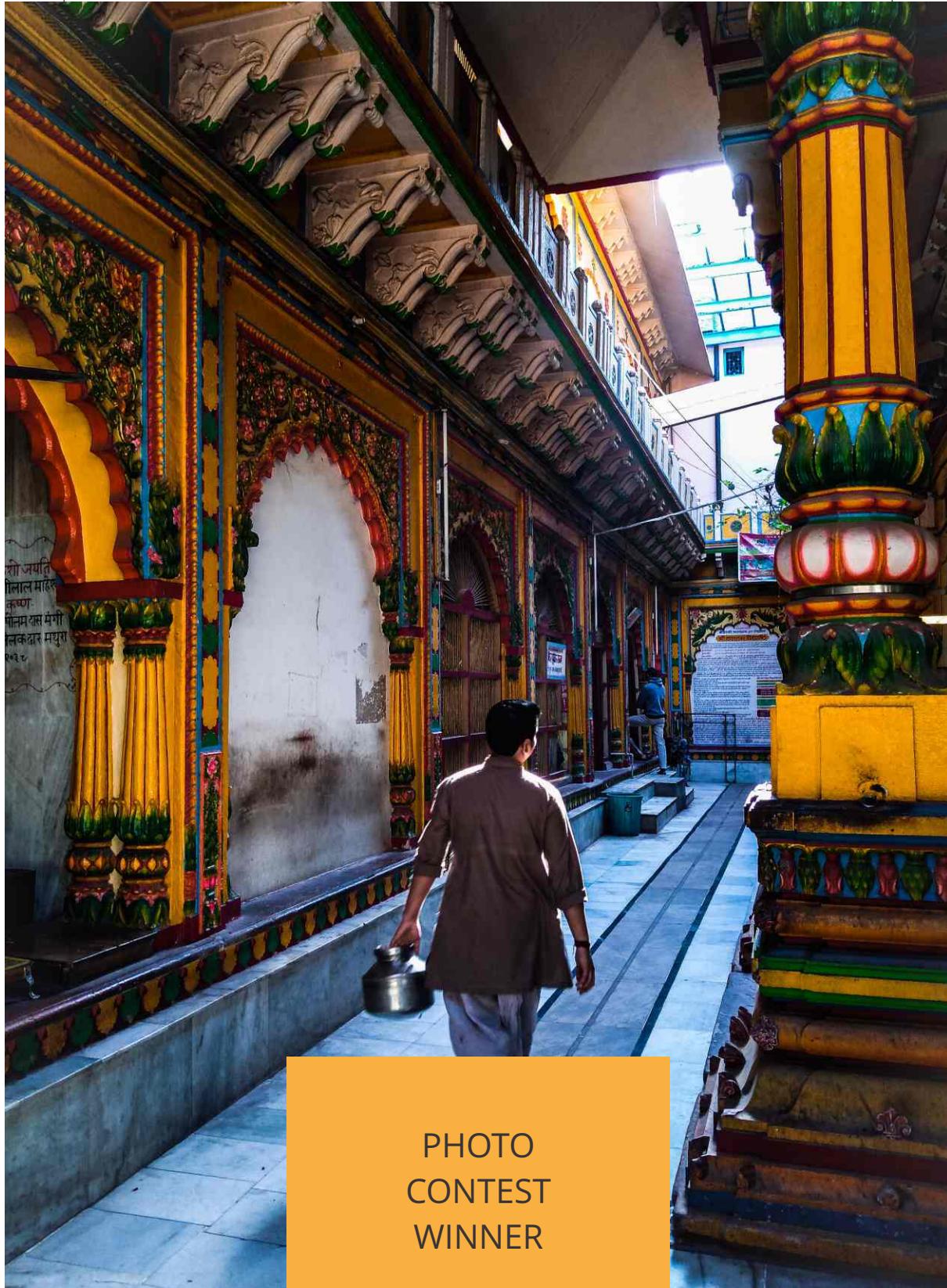


PHOTO
CONTEST
WINNER

PICTURE CREDIT: ANUBHAV ANAND

Along the banks of river Yamuna is one of Hinduism's seven sacred cities – Mathura. Famed as the birth place of the Hindu God Krishna, this holy city is dotted with numerous temples where life flows gently like the Yamuna.

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[®]