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NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC TRAVELLER INDIA

GOTHENBURG'S GOT THE GROOVE

DREAMY SUMMER ESCAPES

ITALY
The Joy Of Gelato

JERUSALEM
Keeping The Faith

RATNAGIRI
Farm Your Blues Away

FRANCE
Monet In Normandy

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC TRAVELLER INDIA

MARCH 2019

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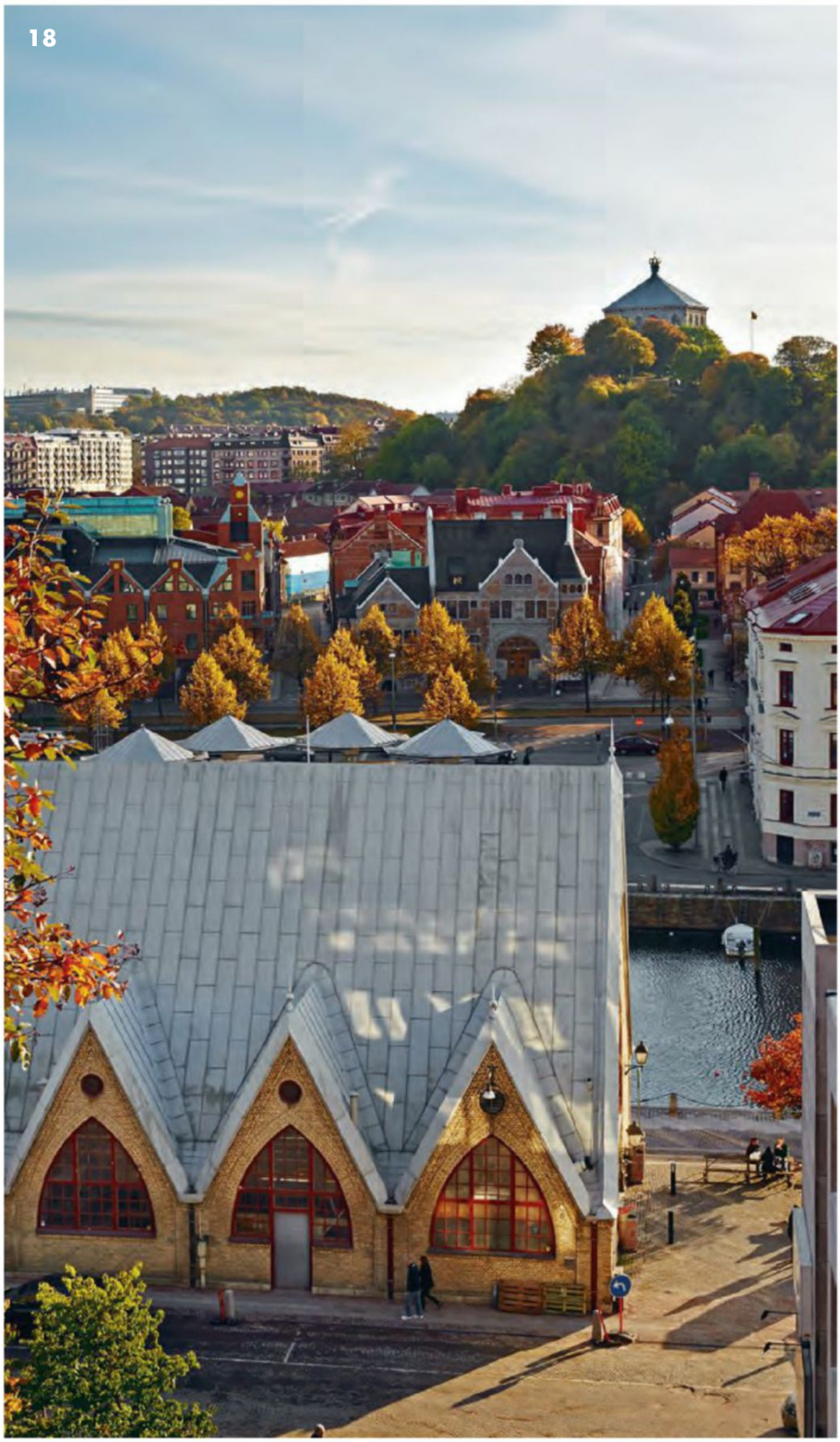

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About us National Geographic Traveller India is about immersive travel and authentic storytelling that inspires travel. It is about family travel, about travel experiences, about discoveries, and insights. Our tagline is "Nobody Knows This World Better" and every story attempts to capture the essence of a place in a way that will urge readers to create their own memorable trips, and come back with their own amazing stories.

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A SOULMATE FOR SUMMER

Every summer, the pastoral call of their motherland, Kerala, beckoned my parents. Their children would plead that they change direction at least for one year but these entreaties were dismissed as flakiness. Summer months were set in stone. And contrary to the breezy, game-for-anything attitude that the sun induced in many folks, for my mother and father, it was a season for constancy.

Kids, however, are enamoured of the new and for that reason my face developed a serious case of the 'summer scowl' for our family's month-long sojourn away from the city. I held on to it as if it were my most precious accessory. Even in the midst of unbridled fun—summer in Kerala has a disarming way of wearing down the staunchest defences and a person can only sulk so much—I was quick to plaster the scowl back on. Any sign that I was enjoying myself would only encourage my parents' loyalist tendencies, I figured.

These days, my summers are as free as they can be. With providence and resources on my side, I could just as well spin the globe and pick a spot to summer at. But in the last few years, I have been searching for a tradition of my own making. Granted, the season is an exciting time of possibilities and a cue to throw caution to the wind. The unbearably same-old, same-old is made slightly not so, if only through temporary escape. As some of you would suggest, there's no need to stay rooted in summer.

Why this quest for a ritualistic journey to one place then? As light and frothy as summer is made out to be, it has long been associated with routines. Caucasians descending on Bali for their annual surf-and-yoga retreat, millennials on a camping trip to the Western Ghats, elderly couples heading to Mussoorie for a respite from the heat or die-hard road warriors planning their yearly summit to the mountains are all creatures of seasonal habit. Everyone has their go-to destination and it's one where they try to create an idyllic alternate universe.

Some of our readers may already have their summers planned. I imagine there are those, who will be following paths they have tread before. For others, *NGTI's* summer issue has much to choose from—a scrumptious gelato-sampling feast in Italy, a charming rustic getaway on a Ratnagiri farm, an immersive trip to the holy land in Jerusalem and an artsy trail of Monet's favourite haunts in Normandy, France. Perhaps, by the end of this summer, we would have found a place to call our own, a refuge to return to over and over.

AS LIGHT AND FROTHY AS SUMMER IS MADE OUT TO BE, IT HAS LONG BEEN ASSOCIATED WITH ROUTINES

OLESYA KUPRINA/SHUTTERSTOCK

OUR MISSION

National Geographic Traveller India is about immersive travel and authentic storytelling, inspiring readers to create their own journeys and return with amazing stories. Our distinctive yellow rectangle is a window into a world of unparalleled discovery.

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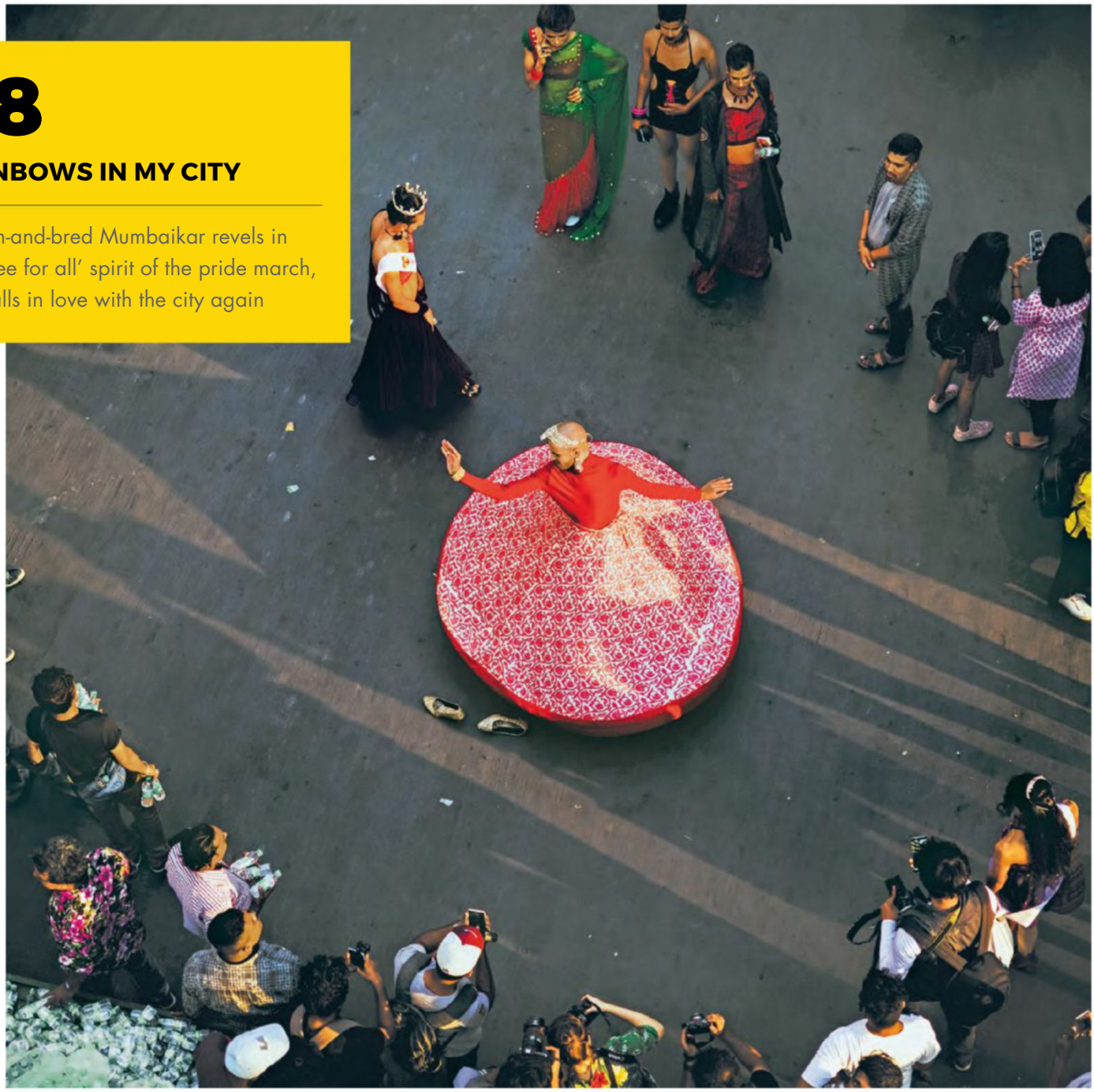

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RAINBOWS IN MY CITY

A born-and-bred Mumbaikar revels in the 'free for all' spirit of the pride march, and falls in love with the city again

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A WRITER IN TRANSIT

THE AUTHOR OF *IMMIGRANT, MONTANA* FINDS THAT LONG JOURNEYS, ON TRAINS AND TAXIS, OFTEN SPARK HIS CREATIVE MUSE. HE SAYS IN TRAVEL, "NEWNESS IS EVERYTHING" BY RAJNI GEORGE

Kumar has an intimate perspective on life in India's small towns and bustling cities having spent his growing up years here.

AMIT KG/SHUTTERSTOCK

An intrepid and thoughtful traveller, Amitava Kumar is the author of seven works of non-fiction, among them *A Matter of Rats: A Short Biography of Patna*, and two novels, most recently, the critically acclaimed *Immigrant, Montana* (published as *The Lovers* in India). Always guided by a sensitive understanding of context and place, Kumar is one of the most interesting contemporary writers we have writing about the different worlds we inhabit. Born in Ara and raised in Patna, he lives in Poughkeepsie, New York and teaches English at Vassar College.

What do you love and hate most about travel, today?

I like that travel gives you new eyes. When I arrive in a town, and am taking pictures, I realise that most often my best pictures are the ones taken on the first day. Intimacy is overrated; newness is everything.

What do I hate about travel? How much time do you have? The presence of large crowds in packed enclosures, waiting to criss-cross the earth, makes me think of what we are doing to the planet. I'm put in this mood to entertain pessimistic thoughts because I feel my age when I travel. My body aches, I want to lie down. I crave silence.

Your books bring alive small towns as much as big cities. Do you prefer one over the other?

When I was a student in Delhi, I would go to the ISBT and catch a bus that would take me out to the small towns. The trip was inexpensive and I relished the feeling of freedom. What matters in the end, however, is the stories that people offer you. I value that encounter more than the place.

I love the road trip in *Immigrant, Montana* (*The Lovers*, in India). What have road trips meant to you, personally?

Growing up, I travelled by car, bus, train, a ferry over the Ganga, and even a bullock cart. The bullock cart journey lasted several hours, from a small train station to our village in Champaran. But these were familiar journeys. The real rite of passage was the trips across India that my siblings and I undertook with our parents. My father was a bureaucrat and there is a provision in the Indian government for civil

The author (inset) is quite productive during his long commutes in New York (right) or Delhi, when he reads or puts pen to paper. He is also a prolific sketch artist; his portrait of the Hudson river from the Metro North ride (left).

servants to take their spouses and small children on a "Bharat-darshan" every few years. I must have gone on three of these trips. Those were real adventures, my own discovery of India.

Given the time limits on your book touring, do you manage to get in personal travel?

Book tours don't allow for much else. Maybe a trip to the museum, if you are lucky. Even worse is when I'm doing work, interviewing or researching. Time is so limited. I once glimpsed the sea on the Konkani coast as I raced in my car to my destination. I was on way to a village to interview a terror suspect. The sky hung like a watercolour between buildings. Then, it was gone. I have returned to that scene repeatedly over the years. Such regret.

Does the physical aspect of travel still hold appeal? And do you have a favourite destination and a worst trip ever?

I don't generally enjoy the journey as I do finding leisure at my destination. But even as I say that, I realise that it's just not true. Often, especially during a comfortable train ride, I begin to take notes about writing. It's a luxury, this gift of isolation.

My best such journey was a trip to London from New York. I was serving on the jury for a literary prize. The ticket was for business class. I sank into the rare luxury of the moment and began work on a story. I think it was done by the time we arrived.

My worst journey has been on an Air India direct flight from Delhi to New York. The flight attendants were spraying freshener *into the damp carpet* in the aisles because the smell of shit was so strong. Both toilets at the back were clogged. The amazing thing was that there was such a thick collection of Not Working stickers on the toilet doors that you knew this problem had lasted for weeks.

I've read that you write during commutes. Are you often able to write while travelling?

Yes! If there is any upside to long taxi rides in Delhi, and to being stuck in traffic for long, it is that I have had a chance to compose brief essays. I have made this a regular practice. If there are old songs playing on the radio then it's even better. My sentences acquire a tilt like Dev Anand's walk and the words just dance across the page.

Your perception of what movement does to people often informs your writing. Is an immigrant ever done with the journey?

Journeys are rewarding but they can also be exhausting. The immigrant can be forgiven for wanting to find rest, sometimes in bouts of nostalgia that are only attempts to stay in place. This is a danger. I try to remind myself to keep moving. Seeking newness amidst stasis and the slowing down of the body.

How valuable is travel to people who also actively crave peace?

You have to get away from the clamour of the everyday. I love hotel rooms. They are the nearest I come to a monastic experience. I arrive with few belongings and am usually alone.

How do you read while travelling?

I love reading novellas on train rides. My favourite has been reading Denis Johnson's *Train Dreams* during one such ride, on Metro North from Poughkeepsie to New York. Many days ahead of any longer travel, I will start making a small stack of books to read. I always read at least one novel, and sometimes two during one flight to, or back from, India.

Love and travel are often bound up with each other—like Kailash's journey with one of his lovers. Is this something you continue to observe?

I haven't done much travelling with a lover. My narrator does—and good for him! My wife and I travel sometimes, as on family visits, and I can't say we are always relaxed. You know, travel is just like life: there are ups and downs. My wife and I will enjoy something one minute, and then we'll fight over something the next. I don't like it. It doesn't fit my ideal. During my travels with her, I want that feeling of perpetually having a drink in my hand and the wind in our hair.

PHOTO COURTESY: AMITAVA KUMAR (SKETCH), CLARI MASSIMILIANO/SHUTTERSTOCK (SUBWAY), IAIN MASTERTON/ALAMY/INDIA PICTURE (AUTHOR)

THEY BUILT THIS CITY ON ROCK 'N' ROLL

A ONE-TIME INSIDER REVISITS GOTHENBURG TO FIND THAT SWEDEN'S PORT CITY IS STILL EVERY BIT THE ULTRA-COOL ALTERNATIVE MUSICAL PARADISE IT USED TO BE BY ZAC O'YEAH

I'm in the foyer of the **Concert Hall** at Gothenburg's grandest square, Götaplatsen, which is where the City Theatre and the Art Museum also stand—imposing structures framing the square on three sides. The evening's philharmonic concert over, now commences a lounge-style show where two DJs remix the just concluded performance, while music aficionados tank up on wine. Soon the sampled symphonic orchestra resembles the soundtrack of a sci-fi film.

From there, I walk down the main boulevard, Kungsportsavenyn (often simply called 'The Avenue'), and my feet start tapping to the music from bars and cafés that are bursting at their seams. The local edition of **Hard Rock Café** *(Kungsportsavenyn 10, with two dance-floors)* is competing with neighbouring heavier metal-leaning **Rockbaren** *(Lorensbergsgatan 7)*, while youngsters sing in the street and a busker plays the saxophone in a park. I meet a few friends at **Unity Jazz** *(Kyrkogatan 13)* where entry's free. A jazz trio is playing and we share a bottle of wine. When the red gunk is over, we pop around the corner to **Sticky Fingers** *(Kaserntorget 7)*, a quintessential club with black-painted interiors, and catch the end of a groovy rock performance.

The second city of Sweden and its chief port, Gothenburg, on the country's western coast, has had such a long association with music that it might well be called the Liverpool of Scandinavia. It feels good to be back. Disclosure time: I'm revisiting for a weekend as somebody who spent many years in town. I moved here as a teenager in the 1980s because of the happening scene. Volvo (founded in Gothenburg in 1926) was where everybody worked, unless one was employed to make ball-bearings at SKF (founded in Gothenburg in 1907), or laboured in the harbour which used to be the base for the Swedish East India Company (founded in Gothenburg in 1731, defunct 1813). After work, we'd play music or earn extra by helping out at theatres and concerts.

In the age of arena rock Gothenburg became the Scandinavian music hub

Gothenburg is home to open-air stadiums such as Ullevi, which can support large crowds, the perfect setting for a livewire concert.

MATS ANDERSSON/WENN.COM/WENNUK/INDIA PHOTO LIBRARY

as it lay virtually equidistant from three capital cities, Stockholm, Oslo and Copenhagen. Acts like the Rolling Stones, Deep Purple, AC/DC, Bruce Springsteen, U2, Prince, Michael Jackson, Madonna and Paul McCartney preferred to bring their shows here as fans from these cities could drive to town in hours. The town has arenas of all sizes—the indoor **Scandinavium** holds 14,000 people, outdoor **Ullevi** is suitable for 75,000 concert-goers and there are nice parks for open-air shows.

But it wasn't just a convenient stop for big names to tick off Scandinavia in one go; in the 1980s Gothenburg also had a healthy underground subculture of illegal clubs dotting its then run-down centre. Here, in ramshackle buildings behind innocuous graffiti-covered steel doors, bands played and beer was sold unlicensed—which was thrilling as long as one didn't get arrested.

On my return, I was reminded of all this as the city museum had curated an exhibition on Gothenburg's musical history, where I saw costumes, guitars and synthesisers that once belonged to outfits like Cortex, Leather Nun, Sator, Soundtrack of Our Lives and Twice a Man. The first world-famous group from the city was The Spotnicks, who in the 1960s dressed like astronauts, played instrumental music and had hits in Japan and Australia—they were the original Swedish superstars long before ABBA.

One of the four ABBAs, Björn Ulvaeus, was born in Gothenburg and their tradition of peppy pop was continued in the 1990s by the city-based disco group Ace of Base. But more than muzak, Gothenburg stood for the alternative scene: it was the capital of progressive rock from the 1970s and on. Topping the 1980s and 1990s alt scene were bands like Blue for Two, Broder Daniel, Lucky People Centre (which had its own illegal nightclub) and Little Dragon that achieved cult status in Europe. But at home in India (where I now live), musicians I speak with mostly know of 'Gothenburg sound' as the melodic death metal that emerged in the 1990s when the city spawned HammerFall, At the Gates, In Flames, Freak Kitchen, Dark Tranquillity and—of course—the spoof metal outfit, Black Ingvars.

Over drinks, I discuss my museum experience with senior synth poppers Karl Gasleben and Anna Öberg, who nowadays run their own studio where Gasleben is producing albums with his two bands, the old-school Twice a Man and the disco-punk The Ändå, while Anna is recording a solo album. Would you call Gothenburg the Swedish answer to Liverpool?

"Hard question," says Gasleben, who isn't comfortable with the idea of having his old synthesiser on display at a museum. "Maybe Manchester." He's a diehard local and lives in a forest outside town. "For work reasons, I could have moved to Stockholm, but there's that special spirit here—with lots of events happening. Also, Gothenburg is closer to Europe, so it's easier to drive a tour bus down to Hamburg to play a concert."

However, Anna, who actually lived nearer to the European continent in southern Sweden, specifically picked Gothenburg in the 1980s as the base

Gothenburg, birthplace of one of the members of ABBA (top right)**, has been a magnet for music stars such as Madonna and Elton John** (bottom left)**. But locals attest to its underground progressive subculture, which has spawned heavy metal bands, punk artists, cool cafés, record stores** (top left) **and gritty street art** (bottom right)**.**

ZOONAR/C3455 ROBERT/ZOONAR GMBH RM/DINODIA PHOTO LIBRARY (RECORD STORE), FERENC SZELEPCSENYI/ALAMY/INDIA PICTURE (ABBA), MATS ANDERSSON/WENN.COM/WENN LTD/DINODIA PHOTO LIBRARY (ELTON JOHN), COPYRIGHT: FRIDA WINTER/GÖTEBORG & CO (MURAL)

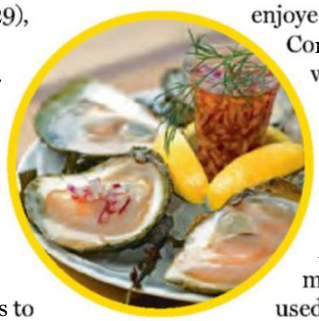
It's not as if the other cities are bad, but Gothenburg has more of an atmosphere of everybody helping everybody

for her band Ladomir, once the hottest indie act on the scene. "Already when I was 13, I decided that I must move here because Gothenburg was the home of progressive music, which you wouldn't find in Stockholm or my hometown Helsingborg. One has that impression that Stockholmers are snobbish and Gothenburg is welcoming, maybe because it's an old working class town. So I travelled here with my musicians even though we had nowhere to live or rehearse."

And what happened?

"We went to Musikens Hus [the House of Music], you know the café there, and before the end of the day we had three places to rehearse in and stay overnight." Gasleben philosophises as is his habit, "It's not as if the other cities are bad, but Gothenburg has more of an atmosphere of everybody helping everybody."

Indeed, both of them speak of a certain idealism that laid the foundations for the city's musical fame. Even the people who ran illegal clubs were rarely in it for the money, more because they believed in the underground scene. Times have changed though; concerts have become commercial as bands must make money from ticket sales rather than dwindling record sales. Much of the manufacturing industry has also moved abroad and the city has become more of a student centre because of the University of Gothenburg (founded 1891 and the largest in Scandinavia with about 40,000 students), a separate University of Technology (founded 1829), and schools for fine arts, music and performing arts. Students love music, so if anything, there appears to be more of it now and cheaper, as students can't afford to pay much. Music has become more accessible too as clubs are legal establishments thanks to the liberalisation of alcohol policies.



Once a working class town, Gothenburg has morphed into a university hub (top)**; When tired of walking, hop on to the city's old-school trams** (bottom)**; Cuisine is just as exciting as music here, with fresh seafood delicacies** (inset) **that are popular lunchtime fare.**

The city has received multiple facelifts and grungy areas around **Järntorget** have become partially pedestrian and filled with offbeat bars, where music and drinking—and good food—can be enjoyed until late in the night. Conveniently located within walking distance from Järntorget square are **Pustervik** *(Järntorgsgatan 12)* in an old theatre with a nice lobby bar, **Bengans** *(Stigbergstorget 1)* which is also the best music store for both new and used records, **Musikens Hus** *(Djurgårdsgatan 13)*, **Holy Moly** *(Andra Långgatan 31)*, **Oceanen Culture House** *(Stigbergstorget 8)*, and **Hakelverket** *(Karl Johansgatan 11)*. There's folk music at **Folkmusikkafét** *(Södra Allégatan 4)* and jazz or soul at **Nefertiti** *(Hvitfeldtsplatsen 6)*. The area is also dotted with second-hand shops dealing in books, records and retro clothes. Gothenburg's reputation as Sweden's friendliest city and the fact that it hosts Scandinavia's main film festival (February) plus Europe's second biggest book fair (September), not to mention arts, theatre and dance fests, has made my once seedy harbour hometown into a real tourist hotspot.

COPYRIGHT: BEATRICE TÖRNROS/GÖTEBORG & CO (FESTIVAL), COPYRIGHT: DICK GILLBERG/GÖTEBORG & CO (TRAM), COPYRIGHT: LARS ARDARVE/GÖTEBORG & CO (FOOD)

GETTING HIP TO GOTHENBURG: PLACES TO EAT, DRINK AND PARTY

There are lots of outdoor music events in the summers. The amusement park **Liseberg** *(Örgrytevägen 5)* regularly includes open-air concerts in the entrance ticket rate (with past performers such as ABBA and Alice Cooper) while free shows with popular Swedish bands can be caught at the city's own festival **Kulturkalaset** (August) when music fills its squares. Annual ticketed fests such as **Way Out West** *(in Slottsskogen park)* has showcased everybody from Patti Smith and Iggy & The Stooges to Chemical Brothers and Pet Shop Boys, while heavy metal's own festivity, Metaltown has featured acts like Marilyn Mansion and Slayer. Electronica and DJ music has its **Summerburst** festival and experimental music installations form the backbone of **Gothenburg Art Sound-festival** (which has brought in stars like Laurie Anderson). **Göteborg Jazz Festival** is devoted to trad jazz, and there's even a full-fledged carnival for those who like street dancing, **Hammarkullekarnevalen**.

Any time of year, a perfect Gothenburg day starts with breakfast at one of the many cafés—classics include **Eva's Paley** *(Kungsportsavenyn 39)* and **Junggrens** next door *(Kungsportsavenyn 37)*. Worth trying is the quintessential prawn salad sandwich, *räkmacka*—served all over town—followed by visits to a few museums. The multi-dimensional **World Culture Museum** *(Södra Vägen 54)* is particularly nice with lots of free programming, while **Röhsska Design Museum** *(Vasagatan 39)* is an attraction for those interested in Scandinavian style. For lunch, sample the city's famously fresh seafood at **Sjöbaren** which has branches in the centre and the cooler western parts *(Lorensbergsgatan 14 and Haga Nygata 25 respectively)*, or at the indoor fish market **Feskekörka** *(Fisktorget 4)*. Post-lunch, one is tipsy enough to appreciate art galleries such as **Konstepidemin** *(Konstepidemins väg 6)* or the world-renowned **Hasselblad Center** *(Götaplatsen)* for photography. Then digest it over a few more drinks at one of the many friendly bars—try the last surviving old-style beer hall **Ölhallen 7:an** *(Kungstorget 7)*. For high-culture vultures, there's opera at the **Göteborg Opera House** *(Christina Nilssons gata)*, or avant-garde dance and music at **Atalante** *(Övre Husargatan 1)*. Many clubs are concentrated around The Avenue, like those mentioned in the beginning (plus also **Trägårn** and **Valand**, etc), but the hipper places are two kilometres to the west, around Järntorget square. There are more alternative clubs on the outskirts of town, such as **Truckstop Alaska** *(Hisingen)*, **Kulturhuset Kåken** *(Kålltorp)*, and **Smedjan** *(Tollered)*. Most have surprisingly decent beverage selections and grub. For example, Musikens Hus has the classic **Café Hängmattan** *(Karl Johansgatan 16)* with wholesome veggie nourishment; **Pustervik** theatre serves cheap soup of the day; Sticky Fingers sticks to a burger and booze menu. But traditionalistic post-concert hoggers hit one of the late-night junkfood joints such as **7:ans Gatukök** *(Vasagatan 7)* and grab a 'half special', a paper plate of sausages in a soggy bun covered with mashed potato and shrimp salad.

Unless they are free or pay-as-you-like, show tickets are usually ₹750-1,500 for a club, but arena shows may cost ₹7,500 or more.

Sailing on the city's municipal ferries, visitors can catch views of the opera house.

PHOTO COURTESY: GÖRAN ASSNER/IMAGEBANK.SWEDEN.SE

THE CITY THAT NEVER STANDS STILL

IMMERSIVE ART AND A RED-HOT DINING SCENE MAKE LIMA, PERU'S SEASIDE CAPITAL, MUCH MORE THAN A MACHU PICCHU PRELUDE

Dubbed City of Kings when it was founded by Spanish conquistador Francisco Pizarro in 1535, Peru's sprawling capital today presides over some of South America's best museums and some of the world's top restaurants. Come July, it also will shine as a sports venue when it hosts more than 6,500 athletes at the prestigious quadrennial Pan American Games.

"Lima never stands still; it is always evolving," says hotelier Angie Clavijo, who grew up in this city where ancient adobe pyramids share space with Spanish colonial churches. "There is always something to discover, from new cocktail bars to concept boutiques," especially in the vibrant districts of Barranco and Miraflores. Add in the beaches and seaside promenades (Clavijo suggests the Malecón in Miraflores for its parklike setting and free yoga and tai chi classes), and your Lima itinerary may fill up fast.

—Eric Rosen

Downtown Lima's Magic Water Circuit charms passersby.

LIESL MARELLI

KNOW IT

Peruvian cuisine merges with Japanese cuisine at Maido, serving Nikkei cuisine.

CEVICHE MEETS SUSHI

IN THIS CITY, FUSION FARE IS ACTUALLY COOL—AND CULTURALLY LAYERED

Peru's cuisine is as diverse as its landscapes—and Lima is its epicentre. Here lunch may be sea-fresh ceviche paired with quinoa and potatoes from the Andes Mountains, followed by a dessert of fruits from the Amazon rainforest. The many cultures that have called Peru home have added to its gastronomic variety, from the indigenous Quechua and Aymara peoples to immigrants from Spain, Japan, and China.

"Peruvian cuisine is like a puzzle of many pieces," says Lima-born chef Mitsuharu Tsumura, "and Nikkei is one of them." Tsumura creatively pushes the boundaries of this blend of Japanese and Peruvian elements at his restaurant, **Maido**, in such plates as Amazon snails served with soy and arrowroot foam.

One of the country's most popular dishes is *lomo saltado*, essentially a beef stir-fry that stems from the Cantonese-Peruvian mash-up called *chifa*; try it at the intimate, wood-beamed **José Antonio**. Another favourite? *Arroz chaufa*, or fried rice made with ginger, a winner at the cheerful, white-tablecloth **Fiesta Chiclayo Gourmet restaurant**.

LIMA LODGINGS

- Trendy
- Classic
- New

HOTEL B

Tucked into an elegant 1914 mansion, Hotel B's 17 guest rooms blend period features with playful contemporary furnishings. The clubby bar offers a perfect starting point for an evening out in hip Barranco. *hotelb.pe*

BELMOND MIRAFLORES PARK HOTEL

Perched above the Pacific, this property draws luxury seekers with its 89 grand suites, ocean-view rooftop pool, and spa treatments that use products native to the Peruvian Amazon. *belmond.com*

HOTELITO ATEMPORAL

Translating as "timeless small hotel," Hotelito Atemporal feels exquisitely of the moment. Choose from nine guest rooms in the stately 1940s Tudor-style mansion, each decorated with a just-right mix of modernist fixtures, colourful prints, and carefully chosen antiques. When not lingering over the buffet breakfast or sipping an aperitif in the cosy back garden, guests may borrow bicycles to explore the city or use the complimentary car-with-driver to see local sights. *atemporal.pe*

JOSE CACERES

EAT IT

HUNGRY FOR MORE

SAMPLE STREET FOOD, HAUTE CUISINE, AND EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN

GOURMET EXPLORERS

1 Peruvian cuisine has been taking the world by storm thanks to local chefs bringing delectable discoveries to Lima's tables from Peru's varied regions. Husband-and-wife team Gastón Acurio and Astrid Gutsche put Lima on the culinary map when they opened **Astrid y Gastón** in the 1990s. Chefs such as Virgilio Martínez of **Central** and Pedro Schiaffino of **Malabar** have been taking it to the next level, incorporating into their dishes heirloom crops from the Andean highlands and the jungles of the Amazon.

SAVOURY CEVICHE

2 A menu staple in many Lima restaurants is ceviche—seafood cured with salt and citrus—whose name comes from a Quechua word for fresh fish. Most *cevicherías* pair mild sea bass or Pacific sole with a *leche de tigre* (tiger milk) sauce spiced with yellow chillies. Try a catch-of-the-day version at **Restaurant Sonia**, owned by a local fisherman and his wife. Or upscale the experience in Miraflores at chef Gastón Acurio's **La Mar Cebichería Peruana**, where ceviche "is the door to Peruvian gastronomy."

STREET TASTES

3 Sizzling street foods served on rolling carts are a go-to for Limeños on the move. Options typically are simple, from enormous ears of native *choclo* corn slathered with cheese and chilli powder to *anticuchos*, skewers of grilled meat drizzled with lime juice and salt. Savour some of the best at **Tía Grimanesa**, a onetime streetside grill turned restaurant, or pop by the **Señora Flor** food stall, in the ever popular **Surquillo Market**, for a steaming bowl of its acclaimed chicken soup, noodles and all.

PISCO PERFECTION

4 Peru's signature cocktail, the pisco sour, is a heady concoction of pisco—Andean brandy distilled from grapes—mixed with simple syrup, lemon juice, egg whites, and a dash of Angostura bitters. Top bars pouring this flavourful (and deceptively strong) libation include **Picas**, a Barranco spot that serves a version made with creamy *lucuma* fruit, and the nearby **Ayahuasca**, where the drink comes flavoured with *aguaymanto* berry, inside a 19th-century mansion with an alterna-pop soundtrack.

Larcomar shopping centre offers sunset views; A dish dazzles at Central (right).

ALLI UGOSOLI (SUNSET), CHRIS CARMICHAEL/THE NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX (FOOD), TAMER KOSELI (ILLUSTRATION)

SEE IT

WONDERS TO WANDER

FIND ANCIENT TREASURES, HIP DESIGNS, AND HEART-PUMPING ADVENTURE

HAUNTS OF OLD

Lima's history goes back centuries; among its oldest sites is the circa A.D. 500 adobe-clay pyramid of **Huaca Pucllana**. Pre-Columbian artwork fills the **Larco Museum**, while colonial culture is on tap at the **Plaza de Armas**. Arrive by noon for the changing of the guard at the ornate **Palacio de Gobierno**; then visit **Lima Cathedral**, which dates to 1535. Nearby, the 17th-century **Convento de San Francisco** houses a baroque rare-books library and bone-filled catacombs.

SURF AND SOAR

Thanks to its location on the rugged yet temperate Pacific coast, Lima offers activities you won't find in many other major cities. **Team Surf Peru** provides surfing lessons for all levels and rental equipment at Lima's own Waikiki Beach. High fliers can take to the skies off the Costa Verde cliffs of Miraflores by paragliding, in tandem with an instructor, at **Aeroxtreme**. Glides last up to 20 minutes and soar up to 600 feet, yielding tip-top views of the Pacific Ocean.

BOHO BARRIO

The beachy neighbourhood of Barranco is one of Lima's liveliest. Visit the **Pedro de Osma Museum** for colonial art and lush gardens. Lima-born photographer Mario Testino's celebrity portraits and images of Peru's indigenous cultures are on display at his museum, **MATE**. Tuck into a lunch of Peruvian dishes at **Isolina**; then stroll under the nearby **Puente de los Suspiros** ("bridge of sighs"). End the day at an area bar for a pisco sour flavoured with fruits.

WHAT'S IN STORE

The city teems with designers selling their creations. San Isidro's **Avenida los Conquistadores** is the place to browse indie clothing boutiques such as **El Clóset de Mi Hermana**. Find fair-trade woven goods at one of **Sol Alpaca**'s locations. In Barranco make a beeline to **La Zapateria** for handmade ready-to-wear and bespoke footwear. The nearby **Dédalo Arte y Artesanía**, in a colonial mansion, stocks fashions, home goods, and jewellery.

Iglesia La Recoleta; Gold at Larco Museum (right).

ROUSSEL BERNARD/ALAMY (CHURCH), MICHAEL MELFORD/NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC IMAGE COLLECTION (GOLD), TAMER KOSELI (ILLUSTRATION)

LAKE WITH A VIEW

THE BENEFITS OF BOBBING AROUND ON, AND BATHING IN, ITALY'S LARGEST LAKE—GARDA

BY VAISHALI DINAKARAN

I'm hanging on for dear life with one hand, and frantically waving with my other hand, as the boat that we're travelling in goes at warp speed over the waters of the 370-square-kilometre Lake Garda. It seems like forever before my travelling companion catches sight of me and slows the boat down, and I am finally able to stand up, looking very cross indeed. Being flung about like a rag doll in the bow of a motor boat, speeding over the placid waters of the largest lake in Italy wasn't quite what I had in mind when I signed up for a lake trip. So it was with some grumbling, and a certain desire for revenge, that I found myself trading places with my fellow traveller, taking the wheel of the boat, motoring us over to a secluded portion of the lake. There we dropped anchor, and chose to while away our time, surrounded by azure waters as far as one could see. Garda didn't seem so much like a lake as it seemed like an ocean—an endless stretch of beautiful blue all the way to the horizon.

The decision to rent a boat at Lake Garda had been a spontaneous one. My travelling companion was very keen on bobbing about the waters, and made some rather good arguments in favour of the idea. Certainly, there were several points along the banks of the lake with clear views. And yes, it was all very well to peer at it from Sirmione, the little peninsula that protrudes into Garda. But wouldn't it be better, he argued, to actually set forth into the waters. After all, there were boats that could be rented without needing a licence, and the waterways were open and inviting.

Sailing on Lake Garda (bottom), **surrounded by the Garda Mountains, affords postcard views of Sirmione** (top).

It was thus that we found ourselves at Garda Boat, handing over €100 (approximately ₹8,200), in exchange for the keys to a fairly large motor boat for half a day. The proprietress provided us with a few maps of the lake, and handy pointers to the best spots to island gaze. She then proceeded to mark out portions of the lake to avoid, lest we beach the boat on sandbars or rocks just beneath the surface. With that caveat out of the way, we were off to explore Garda. Approximately 30 minutes of motoring around, and I was beginning to like this very much. Even with a fair number of boats already out on the water, the lake was still peaceful. In fact, it was so vast, that it seemed like no number of boats could possibly overcrowd it. And everyone seemed

JUERGEN SACK/ISTOCK/GETTY IMAGES (LAKE), LEOKS/GETTY IMAGES/SHUTTERSTOCK (BOATS)

to want to get out of each other's way and find a place of peace and quiet all to themselves. We found our little spot to drop anchor—the sun was bright, the day was warm, the water made gentle lapping noises against the hull, an invitation to dive right in. So we did just that. The water was warmer than expected, and allowed for a pleasant swim. Not wanting to drift too far from the boat though, I soon climbed back in, and settled down to an afternoon of daydreaming with ice-cold cherries and watermelon slices that we'd bought from a vendor in Sirmione.

***

Sirmione, in the province of Brescia, nestled in the waters of Lake Garda, is a curiously constructed island town. The town had palafittes (houses on stilts) as early as the third millennium B.C., and, around the first century B.C. began to play host to the wealthy Italian tourist in search of a resort holiday, a tradition that seems to continue thanks to the thermal baths and resorts on the island. Sirmione, which has since survived many invaders and many changes of power over the years, now welcomes tourists from all over the world. A *lot* of tourists from all over the world. Far more tourists—I thought as I was jostled out of the way by a man on a bicycle—than I had anticipated. But, armed with the will of the vista-hungry traveller, and a gelato cone each from the most excellent Gelataria Mirkoz, we set off by foot to explore the town. There is a rather quaint movie-set feel to the entire place—a picturesque main street lined with houses that had shocks of violet flowers growing out of their walls, neat little cafés and trattorias, and pretty alleys that led to views of the lake. Whether we were at the walls of the 13th-century Scaligero Castle, or all the way on the other side of town, we couldn't get away from the lakeview.

Despite the crowds, Sirmione had a lot to offer, from the moat around the castle (a wonder in itself) to three lovely churches, fine restaurants, plenty of little boutiques, and even the Grotte di Catullo (the ruins of an old Roman villa) that offers what is likely the best panoramic view of Lake Garda. But it was the lake itself that was calling out to us.

I concluded that renting a boat, and wandering as we pleased, was one of the best holiday decisions that we'd made. What a stark contrast between Lake Garda and the waterways in Venice. In Venice, even though there were no bothersome car horns and errant Italian drivers to look out for, there were still packed canals, and water that one would hesitate dipping one's fingers into. But Garda was big, blue, beautiful and inviting. No crowds to navigate, no boats to back away from to avoid grazing hulls, and no fear of leaping head first into the water. It was the ultimate form of relaxation—and a lovely holiday within a holiday. After all, sun, solitude, and the sounds of gently lapping water, when put together, make for a truly perfect summer day.

The Grotto di Catullo (top), **the remains of a Roman villa in Sirmione, offers a splendid view of Lake Garda; Sirmione as seen from one of the turrets of the Castello Scaligero** (bottom).

ESSENTIALS

Lake Garda covers approx 370 sq. km, with various towns dotting its banks. Sirmione is approximately 40km/30min east of Verona, and can be reached by road. Buses between Verona and Sirmione are frequent, costing approximately €3.50/₹285, and take an hour. Half a day boat rentals cost between €99/₹8,000 to €150/₹12,000 depending on the season *(www.gardaboat.com)*.

SCOTTYELLOX/SHUTTERSTOCK (RUINS), MESE.BERG/SHUTTERSTOCK (CITY)

RAINBOWS IN MY CITY

A BORN-AND-BRED MUMBAIKAR REVELS IN THE 'FREE FOR ALL' SPIRIT OF THE PRIDE MARCH, AND FALLS IN LOVE WITH THE CITY AGAIN **BY POOJA NAIK | PHOTOGRAPHS BY SHREYA SHETTY**

Dressed in their best, LGBTQIA+ allies from across the globe—over 15,000-odd people—marched Mumbai's streets at the Queer Azaadi Mumbai Pride.

Ex Muslim and Queer, facing Islamophobia." My eyes sweep through the hard-hitting banners and rainbow flags. I'm among the 15,000-odd attendants at the 12th edition of Queer Azaadi Mumbai Pride march on February 2, the first in the city since the decriminalisation of Section 377 of the Indian penal code last September. There is nothing unusual about the parade-goers. Except, most of the outfits could have given the ongoing Lakmé Fashion Week a run for its money. Participants dressed in neon wigs, butterfly wings and multi-coloured lehengas striking hard-to-miss poses.

Drum rolls and pro LGBTQIA+ chants reverberate in South Bombay streets. The venue—just outside August Kranti Maidan—is sardine-packed. Yet, I find myself at ease. How could I not? The air is buzzing with infectious, welcoming energy.

BORDER CROSSINGS

The 2019 parade has attracted the queer community and its allies from across the globe. I meet Susan and Christine, U.S.-based lawyers from the East Coast who have timed their

The city's free-spirited attitude welcomes people. Jigar Rathore (left)**, who hails from a small town in Gujarat, does not have to mask his identity when in Mumbai; Hard-hitting banners** (centre) **and quirky outfits** (right) **are part of the parade's charm.**

visit to India so that they can be a part of the event. The couple, who have been married for three years, met over two decades ago when Christine was fighting for the rights of same-sex couples to legally adopt children. "It was her case and she won," smiles Susan. While marriage and adoption are milestones yet to be achieved in India, Christine believes that "nobody deserves to be criminalised [for their orientation] and now India has to keep moving forward." First timers in the city, the two are thrilled to be a part of the pride march, also their first outside U.S.A. For them, the march is a worldwide movement for liberation and Mumbai has been more than welcoming.

A little later, I bump into Hsien Chew, a London-based Singaporean national who is accompanied by his elderly parents. During Chew's previous visit to Mumbai, he met and bonded with members of Rainbow Voices Mumbai, India's first LGBTQIA+ choir group. He has now returned for the parade and to remind people that section 377 still exists in other parts of the world, including Singapore, and "the fight is not over." In almost that exact moment, I look up and notice a festoon of saffron flags forming a mini-canopy in anticipation of a political rally the following day. The country's political parties' daunting silence and occasional declaration to "cure" queerness is mockingly overshadowed by a sea of colourful flags on that February afternoon. "We're improving," Florence, Chew's mother, says about ethnocentrism, "but Asian countries take longer in such matters." To her, even Mumbai's taxi rides have a freewheeling appeal as opposed to the stringent commute in Singapore.

A REVOLUTIONARY ROAD

On ground zero, mothers of LGBTQIA+ children do not hold back in their show of love and support for the community. Taking to the makeshift stage, the city-based women garner applause by urging more parents to turn up for future parades. The idea is simultaneously mimed in sign language by an event authority. I see the momentum gain and sense a rainbow revolution in the making.

Barricaded by a human chain of cops and volunteers to keep the traffic in check, the rainbow parade marches down with spunk and spirit. Much like a *baarat* at weddings, people dance to the beats of dhols as spectators watch in awe. Amidst this jamboree, I spot faces painted in VIBGYOR hearts, hugs being given and kisses sealing hearts. There is no room for bigotry here.

OUT OF THE CLOSET, INTO THE CITY

Unfortunately, in some parts of the country, being gay is not a sexual orientation. It is a taboo. Jigar Rathore and Raunaq hail from a small town in Gujarat. They're still in the closet in their hometown and have taken this trip to the city to walk the parade under the pretext of visiting a friend. Dressed in an emerald lehenga which is accessorised with a chunky nose ring, Jigar channels the aura of a diva. This is his third march in the city—he feels "free as a butterfly in Mumbai." Accompanied by his friend Raunaq, who can carry off shorts and red heels with the panache of a runway model, the two feel no inhibition to jazz up their wardrobe in the streets of the city that allows them to embrace their truth. "I felt like a queen while walking the

Mothers of children who identify as LGBTQIA+ did not hold back in their show of support and love for the community.

parade," chirps Raunaq. "I can dress and roam the way I like, and nobody bats an eye here. The reaction in Gujarat would be pretty appalling."

I CAME, I SAW, I LOVED

The city has also played Cupid for some. Piyush and Sushil have been together for 23 years. Their love for theatre brought them together in a stroke of fate at Prithvi Theatre, Mumbai. Having grown up in Dehradhun, Piyush came out to his family much before he met Sushil and has been well accepted by everyone in his circle. But it was in Mumbai that he felt more liberated. The two have been coming to the parade since 2013. "It has definitely become livelier over the years and I see more people," says Piyush, while fixing his rainbow sash. In the Mardi Gras parades in Sydney and London, where floats add to the grandeur of the carnivalesque celebrations attended by millions, one has to pay to participate. The couple has attended them both, and plans to attend the Sydney one again in March. Mumbai may not match up in scale to its international counterparts, but its 'free for all' spirit appeals to the likes of Piyush.

BEHIND THE SCENES

As the evening winds down, I catch up with Sonal Giani. She has been a part of the Queer Azaadi Mumbai collective, which organises the march, for nine years. On her toes since nine that morning, she is now glowing with a sense of accomplishment. And rightly so, as I learn that a team of not more than 15 volunteers worked relentlessly for five months to put together the events of the pride month. Queries come pouring from 10-15 countries and people from almost every major Indian city plan a visit to Mumbai at least two months before the parade is scheduled. It is an event not to be missed. "Despite there being parades in other Indian cities, Mumbai puts people at ease. It is a city of art and Bollywood," says Sonal. "When a new movement dawns in the city, it usually trickles down in other spaces too."

I only have to look around to absorb the truth of her words. This is my second time participating in the pride parade in Mumbai. I joined as an ally. I left falling in love with my city twice over.

RAINBOW RISING

Be a part of pride marches across the world. This year, most parades are commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall Riots in New York, which led to the first LGBTQIA+ uprising in the city.

Tokyo, April 28 and 29
tokyorainbowpride.com
Tel Aviv, June 14
facebook.com/tlvpride/
São Paulo, June 23
paradasp.org.br
New York, June 30
2019-worldpride-stonewall50.nycpride.org
Amsterdam, July 27 to Aug 4
pride.amsterdam
Vancouver, August 4
vancouverpride.ca

DREAM DIVES AROUND THE WORLD

AN UNDERWATER AGENDA FOR SCUBA DIVERS, WHALE WATCHERS, AND SHARK SEEKERS

If writing the new National Geographic book *100 Dives of a Lifetime: The World's Ultimate Underwater Destinations* taught me anything, it's that the diversity of environments in the water rivals that on land. Although ocean covers more than 70 per cent of the planet's surface, we've explored a mere five per cent of it. So for those looking to channel their inner adventurer, our aquatic realms offer abundant opportunity. Yet only some three per cent of the ocean is protected, which is why National Geographic works with researchers such as Explorer-in-Residence Enric Sala, who launched the Pristine Seas initiative with the goal of saving the ocean's last wild places. Here are 19 dive sites spanning the globe that provide insight into the undersea world we're striving to protect.
—Carrie Miller

Wispy sea fans wave from a reef in Raja Ampat, Indonesia.

ALEX MUSTARD/MINDEN PICTURES

INDONESIA

REEF RICHES

With some 500 species of coral, including gorgonians and sea pens, **Raja Ampat** is diving fit for a king—or four kings (Raja Ampat translated). *Pro Tip:* For easy access to the reefs, stay on a liveaboard boat.

CAYMAN ISLANDS

THE GREAT WALL

Little Cayman Island's **Bloody Bay Wall** feels like an undersea spacewalk, as the blue abyss plummets more than a thousand feet. *Pro Tip:* Tour the research facilities of the Central Caribbean Marine Institute.

SOUTH AFRICA

ADRENALINE RUSH

Aliwal Shoal hosts species from nudibranchs to humpback whales, but it may be most famous for the annual sardine run, when millions gather to spawn. *Pro Tip:* Ask local dive operators about the specific timing.

ANTARCTICA

ICE ICE BABY

Dives below the frozen **Antarctic** surface reveal agile penguins and octopi with blood pigments to help them survive the numbing temps. *Pro Tip:* You'll need special freeze-protected regulators.

MEXICO

CAVING IN

Once revered by the Maya, cenotes in the **Yucatán** are now treasured by divers. Strange rock formations and potential archaeological finds lend an Indiana Jones vibe. *Pro Tip:* Vet the dive operators well.

MALDIVES

THE BIG TIME

The underwater pinnacles surrounding oval-shaped **Ari Atoll** attract whale sharks and manta rays, which feed in the plankton-rich channels. *Pro Tip:* The best time to see these marvels is February to May.

BAHAMAS

SHARK PEEK

Share the warm, crystalline waters of **Tiger Beach** with beautifully patterned tiger sharks that swim around a shark feeder who's clad in protective gear. Divers kneel in fixed positions on the white sand behind the feeder to watch the show. (If you're an especially intrepid traveller, book a trip to Port Lincoln, Australia, the only place where you can dive in an ocean-floor cage with great whites.) *Pro Tip:* Don't get complacent with these extraordinary—but wild—creatures.

CUBA

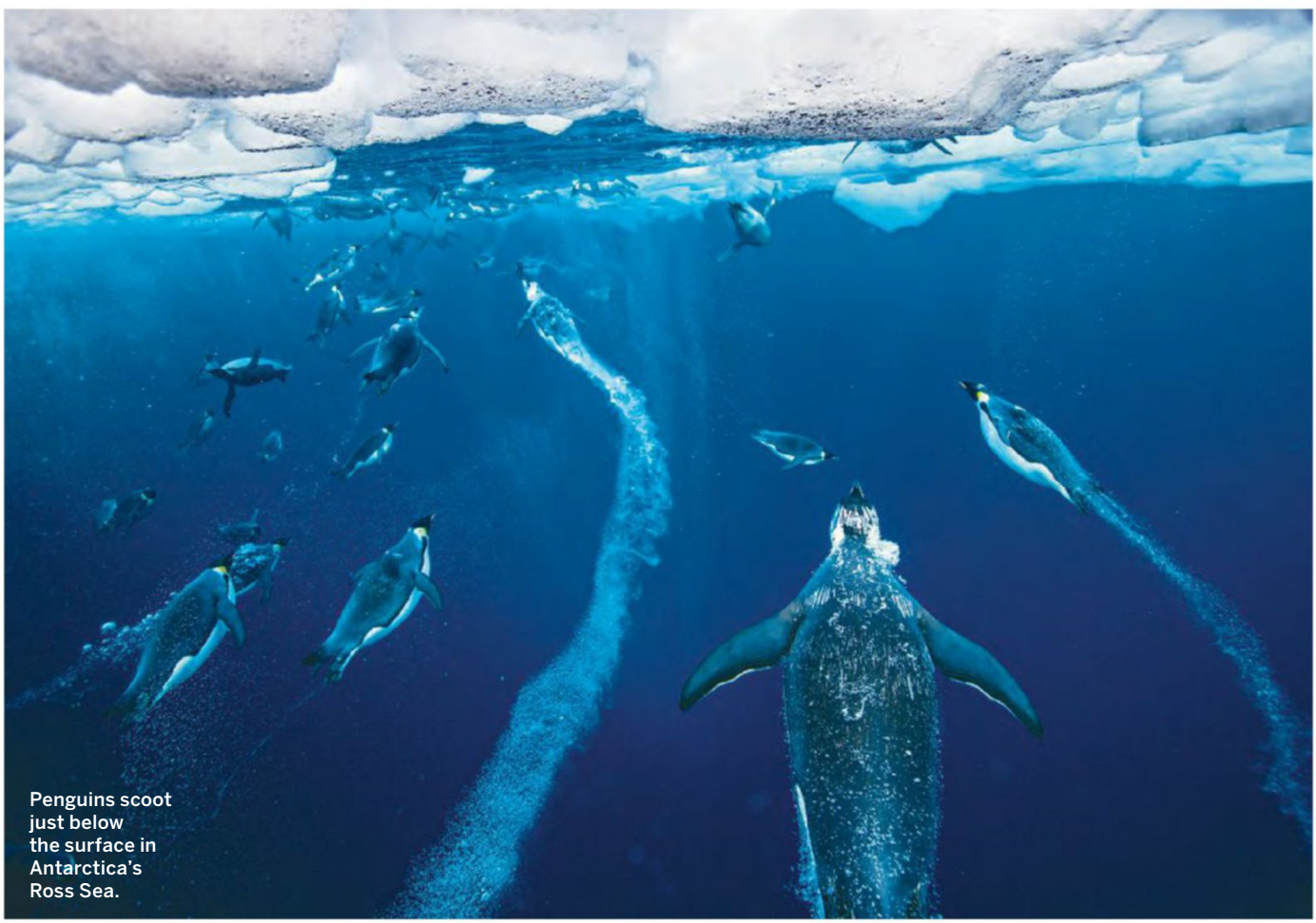
LIVEABOARD & LEARN

In Los **Jardines de la Reina** marine reserve, accessible only by liveaboard, divers have the opportunity to see elkhorn coral, silky sharks, and saltwater crocodiles. *Pro Tip:* Obtaining a Cuban visa for an Indian traveller can be cumbersome; visitors are advised to go through an established travel agent.

U.S.A.

CITIZEN SCIENCE

With the Coral Restoration Foundation in **Key Largo**, Florida, divers help "plant" corals and monitor new growth on the reef.



Penguins scoot just below the surface in Antarctica's Ross Sea.

PAUL NICKLEN/NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC IMAGE COLLECTION

In the Marshall Islands, wrecks attract both divers and snorkellers.

Pro Tip: Learn about upcoming volunteer dive programs at *coralrestoration.org.*

CANADA

COLD COMFORT

Known for wrecks, reefs, and rich marine life, British Columbia's **Barkley Sound** has become a cold-water hot spot. *Pro Tip:* The sheltered location allows for year-round diving.

U.S.A.

NIGHT MOVES

Swooping through the inky black waters, manta rays with 20-foot wingspans feed on plankton while divers look on from the sea floor near **Kona, Hawaii**. *Pro Tip:* Let the mantas dictate the interaction.

ICELAND

FRESHWATER FISSURE

Dive in and touch both the North American and Eurasian tectonic plates. The Silfra fissure in **Thingvellir National Park** is literally a place where worlds collide. *Pro Tip:* A dry suit is a must.

MARSHALL ISLANDS

WHAT A WRECK

Within the lagoon of remote **Bikini Atoll** lies a graveyard of battleships and destroyers—the legacy of U.S. nuclear tests in the mid-20th century. *Pro Tip:* Hone wreck-diving skills at easier sites first.

NEW ZEALAND

STRANGER THINGS

In **Fiordland**, a layer of freshwater on top of saltwater chokes off light, causing creatures of the deep to rise to viewing level. *Pro Tip:* The road out is a mountain pass, so add extra time to decompress.

AUSTRALIA

CROWD PLEASER

Julian Rocks Marine Reserve lies off Australia's most easterly point, near **Byron Bay**, and smack in the middle of the East Australian Current. Sea creatures migrating along the coast—humpback whales, manta rays, sand tiger sharks—stop in for a visit, joining the resident population of cuttlefish, wobbegong sharks, and turtles. Byron Bay is a top destination for experienced divers as well as newbies learning the ropes. *Pro Tip:* Don't miss a hike up to the Cape Byron Lighthouse, one of the world's best places to spot migrating whales.

U.S.A.

BOUNCING BACK

Hurricane Maria pummelled **Puerto Rico**, but it also gave the sea a breather from tourist traffic, making this a good time to go. *Pro Tip:* The vast majority of island hotels and businesses have reopened.

BONAIRE

SMALL WONDERS

At the **Bonaire National Marine Park**, get up-close looks at frogfish, banded coral shrimp, and Seuss-like nudibranchs. *Pro Tip:* Divers pay a one-time entrance fee and attend an orientation dive.

ECUADOR

FANTASY ISLANDS

Where can you dive with marine iguanas, sea lions, whale sharks, and hammerheads in the same day? It's got to be the **Galápagos**. *Pro Tip:* To protect the fragile environment, diving is restricted; plan ahead.

FRENCH POLYNESIA

DRIFTING AWAY

Channels act as underwater slides between the open ocean and the atolls of the **Tuamotu Islands**, allowing divers to glide along with triggerfish and wrasses. *Pro Tip:* Practice with currents beforehand.

DESIGN PICS INC/ALAMY

WHERE FAITH FEEDS THE FLOCK

LINDISFARNE, ONE OF THE U.K.'S OLDEST CHRISTIAN PILGRIMAGE SITES, IS A BLISSFUL COMMUNION OF SPIRITUAL QUIETUDE AND RICH BIODIVERSITY **BY STEPHEN CONNOLLY**

On a local expert's recommendation I'm rattling down a country lane looking for the rare sight of the East Atlantic light-bellied Brent goose. In autumn, around half the world's population of the Brent flocks to this part of England's north eastern coast to find a place to rest for the colder months and, hurtling forward in the hope of seeing them arriving from the Arctic Circle, I reflect on how this particular section of the Northumberland coast has long been a magnet not just for animals, but for flocks of religious pilgrims, naturalists and tourists for centuries. At the heart of all these journeys is a tiny speck called the Holy Island of Lindisfarne.

Home to less than 200 permanent residents, Lindisfarne is an island village, connected to the mainland by a mile-long causeway along the sea floor. Twice a day the tide comes in and floods the road, creating a drifting, timeless, picture-perfect model town which also boasts a 16th-century castle and the ruins of a monastery. As one of the oldest and most important Christian sites in the U.K., Lindisfarne draws over 6,00,000 visitors a year. Though many of these visitors come to see the unique wildlife populations of geese, puffins and seal colonies, since 635 A.D., people have also been seeking an elusive sense of the spiritual.

Mary Fleeson, villager and owner of the Lindisfarne Scriptorium art shop, believes that the uniqueness of the place is due to, "All the prayers that have gone before. This place has been steeped in prayer for nearly 1,500 years and there's always people coming here seeking God. It's known as a thin place, where you can almost just reach out and touch God." Although she wasn't born on the island, Mary arrived here 21 years ago and never wanted to leave. "When I first came to the island I just burst into tears. It was like coming home to a place that I didn't know was home. It was uncanny. I crossed the causeway in an ordinary little car and I was just there in the back blubbing my eyes out, which I don't normally do. It was dramatic."

One of the main reasons why pilgrims come here seeking this uncanny sense of spiritual tranquillity lies in its long association with Christianity. In the 7th century, King Oswald of Northumbria summoned an Irish monk named Aidan to his kingdom and asked him to establish a monastery, which was duly founded at Lindisfarne. Then in the 670s, a young monk named Cuthbert took charge of the same community. It was only after his death, however, that Cuthbert's true importance took shape. Eleven years after his death in 687, Cuthbert's body was uncovered and reported to be completely untouched by decay. Visitors soon reported other miracles linked to the body's astonishing survival, all of which lead to Lindisfarne itself growing in importance for pilgrims who now made regular trips to find spiritual connection. To this day, travellers return here to recapture something of that sensation.

Like many places of spiritual resonance though, there is a complex set of reasons why people come here.

The Rainbow Arch is one of the most striking features of the 12th-century Lindisfarne Priory ruins, having survived despite the tower above it collapsing 200 years ago.

MENNO SCHAEFER/SHUTTERSTOCK

Numerous avian species including Bean and Brent Geese (top left) **can be spotted along Lindisfarne's shores, dotted with traditional fishing sheds** (top right)**; Stone buildings and cobblestone streets round up the old-world charm of the island** (bottom left and right)**.**

The search for a Christian God may be occurring at the ruins of the 12th-century priory which stands in place of Aidan's original monastery (believed to be destroyed by Vikings), but it's also taking place among the sand dunes and across the wild acres of grassy wetlands which dominate the countryside. One of the interesting facets of Cuthbert was his ability to reconcile the natural beauty of this area with his faith. Ultimately, Cuthbert was a local man, deeply embedded in nature.

According to Andrew Craggs, manager of the Lindisfarne National Nature Reserve and my guide to finding the Brent geese, Cuthbert's legacy was that he was "the first nature warden. Instead of wanting to dominate nature he wanted to be one with nature." To this day, nature is central to Lindisfarne's appeal and each year, thousands of visitors (human and animal) come here.

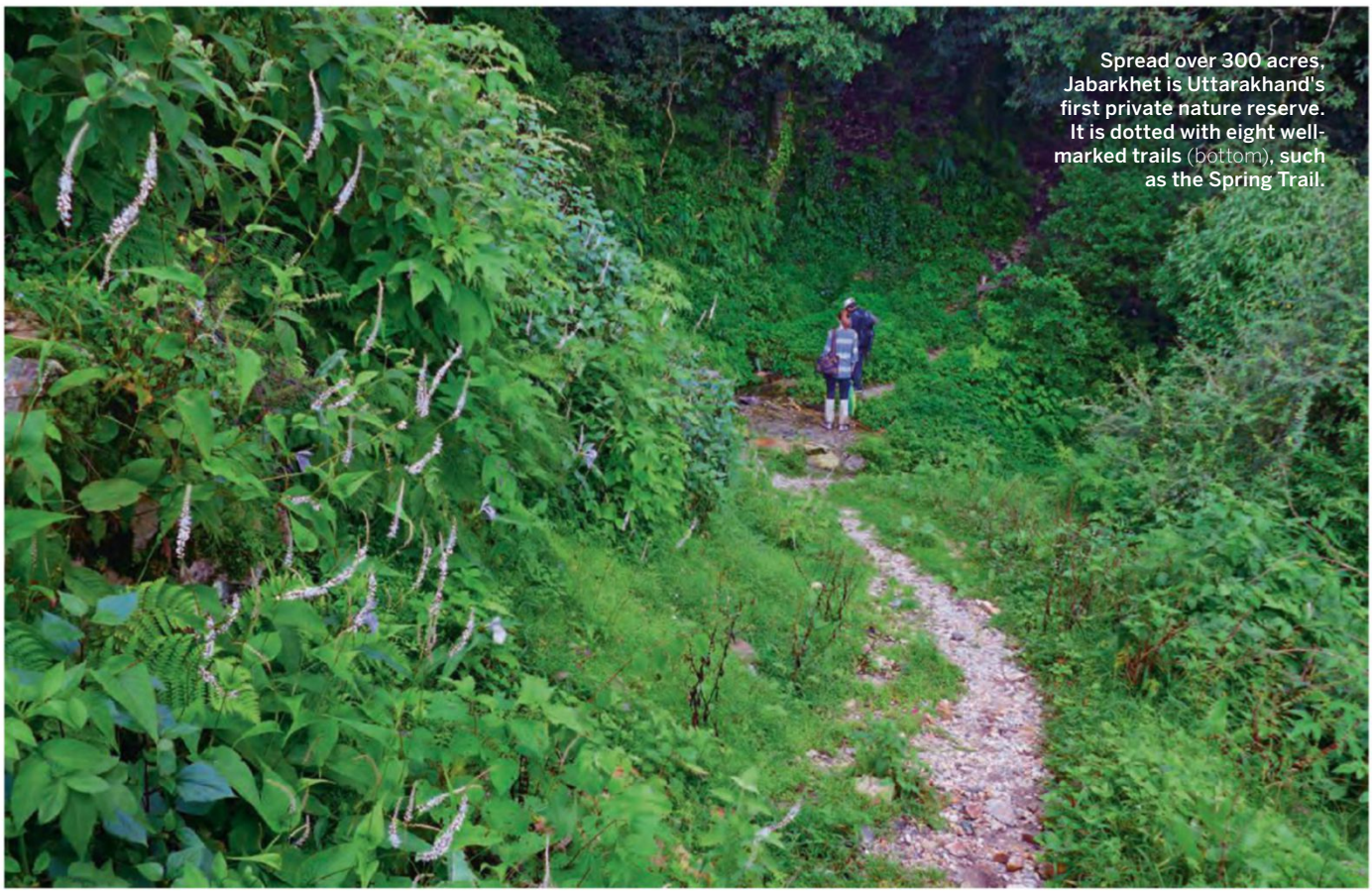
Andrew suggests that the animals come here simply "to survive." He and his team put in a huge amount of work so that the wintering birds and other rare species can thrive. "All species need food, warmth and shelter and this site provides it. The demands on them in autumn/winter are different because it gets cold and the days are much shorter. So they come to Lindisfarne and then they can go back to those breeding grounds in the north because that's what they're programmed to do." Mary is more hopeful that the area is able to invoke a less material reaction. "I think our hope is that people come here and it feeds their soul. That they meet some aspect of God that perhaps they didn't even know they were looking for. You need to forget the village and the shops and go and find a quiet spot on one of the beaches or in the dunes, beyond the castle and just be."

Whether one comes here seeking God or geese, it's the perfect location to take a moment and consider one's place, both in the natural world and in the long sweep of history. Perhaps revelations may manifest in the ruins of the priory, or while wandering through the stone-walled village with its friendly, dog-walking locals and its shops of local produce like Lindisfarne mead. Or, like many others, maybe one will enjoy the long, snaking road to Holy Island itself. Drive or walk across the wet sand and through the reedy, wind-blown eel grasses which crowd the dunes and there might be some peace of mind, some sense of arriving home in a new place for anyone.

ESSENTIALS

The island of Lindisfarne is closest to Edinburgh (1.5 hr) and Newcastle airports (1 hr). A metalled causeway connects the island to the mainland and tidal weather may affect its opening and closure. Check tide times at *www.visitnorthumberland.com/coast/holy-island/crossing-times*.

DUNCAN USHER/MINDEN PICTURES/DINODIA PHOTO LIBRARY (BIRDS), COXY58/SHUTTERSTOCK (BOATS), REIMAR/SHUTTERSTOCK (BICYCLE), SUPERSTOCK/DINODIA PHOTO LIBRARY (BUILDING)



Spread over 300 acres, Jabarkhet is Uttarakhand's first private nature reserve. It is dotted with eight well-marked trails (bottom), such as the Spring Trail.

INTO THE WOODS

A WRITER ESCAPES THE MUSSOORIE MADNESS IN A PRIVATE NATURE RESERVE **BY ARUNDHATI HAZRA**

The summers of my childhood were defined by three things: books, mangoes and power cuts. Often the three would come together and I would eat through plates of *raspuri* and *langda*, while sprawled on the floor reading by the light of a kerosene lantern. I devoured entire series through the summers, graduating from Enid Blyton to Caroline Keene, but Ruskin Bond was my perennial favourite. As the mercury climbed, I would immerse myself in his stories of the hills and forests and the people who lived in them, almost feeling the cool mountain breeze against my sweaty skin.

On my first trip to Mussoorie last May, I craned my neck out of the car while driving up from Dehradun, to take in the verdant Garhwal hills I had read so much about. Summer had left the hills parched and the trees drooping, but human activity had also rendered large patches of the hillsides barren and brown. Mussoorie was as crowded as the Delhi metro during rush hour. The major attractions—Mall Road, Kempty Falls, Company Garden, Gunhill Point—were pretty, but crammed with tourists.

Looking for an escape from the madding crowds, my friend and I chanced upon a poster for Jabarkhet Nature Reserve at a café on Mall Road. It seemed relatively unknown; no taxi driver hawked it, and one even wondered why we wanted to go there. On a whim, we postponed our plans to visit Lal Tibba and took a taxi to the reserve.

Spread over 300 acres, Jabarkhet is Uttarakhand's first private nature reserve. Until a few years ago, it was like many other forest patches in the Garhwals: subject to littering, animal grazing and felling of trees for firewood and timber. Since 2012, the owners of the reserve have worked with noted conservationist Sejal Worah to restore the area, removing nearly 500 kilograms of trash and appointing locals to assist in the conservation process.

A half-hour drive up the narrow, winding Tehri Road from Library Bus Stand brought us to the entrance of Jabarkhet. Due to the impromptu nature of our plans, we did not have a guide, but the ticket collector handed us field guides, detailing the eight trails and the flora and

PHOTO COURTESY: JABARKHET NATURE RESERVE

fauna we could hope to see along each. We chose the Leopard Trail, one of the longest, which would take us through most of the reserve's major viewpoints.

The first thing that struck me was the silence, the pin-drop silence my schoolteachers had often demanded. Slowly I realised that it wasn't complete silence, but the absence of the city's white noise, the commotion of vehicles and people that I was used to. Alongside the crunch of our shoes on fallen leaves, I heard the screech of a magpie, the guttural cry of Himalayan griffon vulture, the occasional *tok-tok* of a woodpecker, and the whistling of the wind through the trees.

As we walked, I picked out some of the plants mentioned in the field guide: pinpricks of yellow *kingol* (barberry) flowers, lichen coating the lyonia trees, and the orange Himalayan raspberry peeping through a copse of ferns. After half an hour of walking, we emerged from the tree-lined forest trail to a hillside clearing. The hills stretched before us, carpeted with old-growth forests of deodar, oak, pine and maple. The rhododendrons were in bloom—streaks of red interspersed with myriad shades of green. We strained our eyes to see the snow-dusted peaks of the Himalayas, but they were hidden by misty shawls.

Jabarkhet is the sort of place where one might encounter a character from Ruskin Bond's stories

We took a narrow path higher into the hills to the "Lone Oak" at top of the trail, a clearing around an oak tree with some wooden benches—the sort of place where one might encounter a character from Bond's stories. The bilberry-loving Binya from "Binya Passes By" perhaps, or any of the ghosts from *A Season of Ghosts*. Maybe even the writer himself on one of his mountain walks. We didn't meet anyone, but were free to conjure up some of our own characters while we revelled in the picturesque solitude of the mountains.

On the way back, we took a detour through the Mushroom Trail. Walking through dense thickets, we kept an eye out for fungi and were rewarded with glimpses of puffball and inkcap mushrooms growing near tree roots. The trail opened out into wildflower meadows, near a small abandoned hut. A sea of daisies greeted us, spread like a white bridal veil over the grassy hillock. I sat on a log and daydreamed of being a Garhwali Heidi, of milking goats in the hut, scampering behind butterflies amidst the wildflowers, and waking up every morning to a view of the hills.

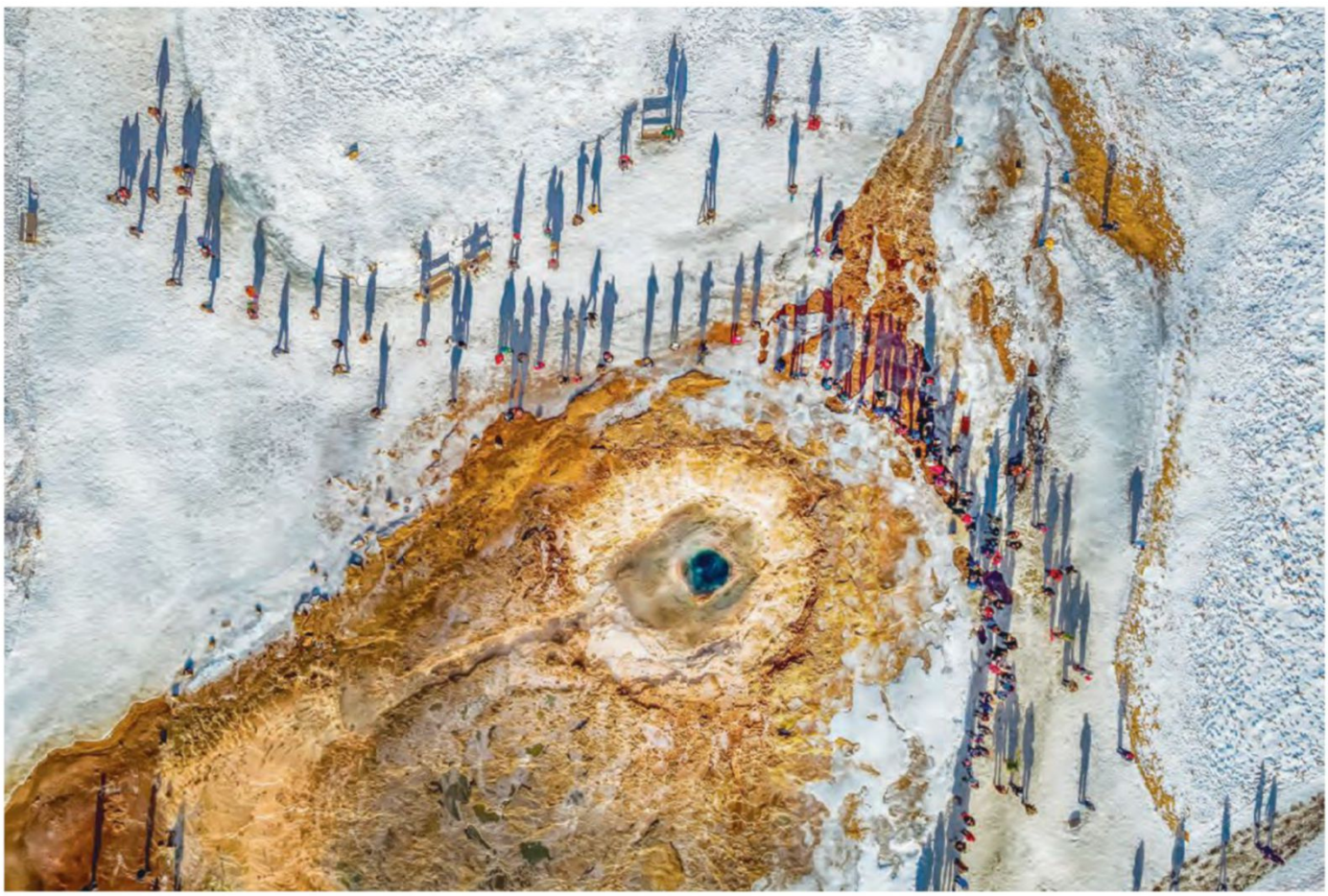
Later, back in Mussoorie, I stood in a queue to meet the man who had triggered my wanderlust with his tales of the hills. Ruskin Bond makes the trip from his cottage in Landour to Cambridge Bookstore in Mall Road every Saturday to autograph books. As he smiled at me with twinkling eyes, I was bubbling over with stories to tell him, especially of my recent walk in the Jabarkhet woods. Ultimately, I stuck to a simple thank you, for sharing his love of the hills through his stories, and a decision to write some of my own stories down instead.

The only charm touristy Mussoorie (bottom left) **had for the author was the proximity to Landour, Ruskin Bond's** (top left) **hometown; Jabarkhet brims with flora and fauna—here, you can walk amidst rhododendron blooms** (top right), **and listen to the Himalayan griffin vulture** (bottom right).

AROON THAEWCHATTURAT/ALAMY/INDIAPICTURE (RUSKIN BOND), ORIN/SHUTTERSTOCK (FLOWERS), VIVEK S MAURYA/SHUTTERSTOCK (MUSSOORIE), CSP_MAZIKAB/FOTOSEARCH LBRF/DINODIA PHOTO LIBRARY (VULTURE)

TOO MUCH OF A GOOD THING

THE GLOBAL TOURISM BOOM ISN'T SLOWING DOWN. WHAT CAN TRAVELLERS DO TO KEEP THINGS IN BALANCE? BY JONATHAN B. TOURTELLOT



Visitors cast long shadows at Strokkur geyser, located on Iceland's popular Golden Circle route.

Reykjavík isn't what it used to be. The Icelandic capital's main shopping street, Laugavegur, now belongs to tourism. Shops bill themselves in English, not Icelandic: Icemart, Chuck Norris Grill, a "Woolcano" gift shop. A lone hardware store has survived the wave of touristification.

The term "overtourism"—too many tourists—has been moving from travel-industry jargon into the mainstream, propelled by such flash points as Venice, Amsterdam, and Barcelona, where exasperated locals unfurled "TOURIST GO HOME" banners in 2017.

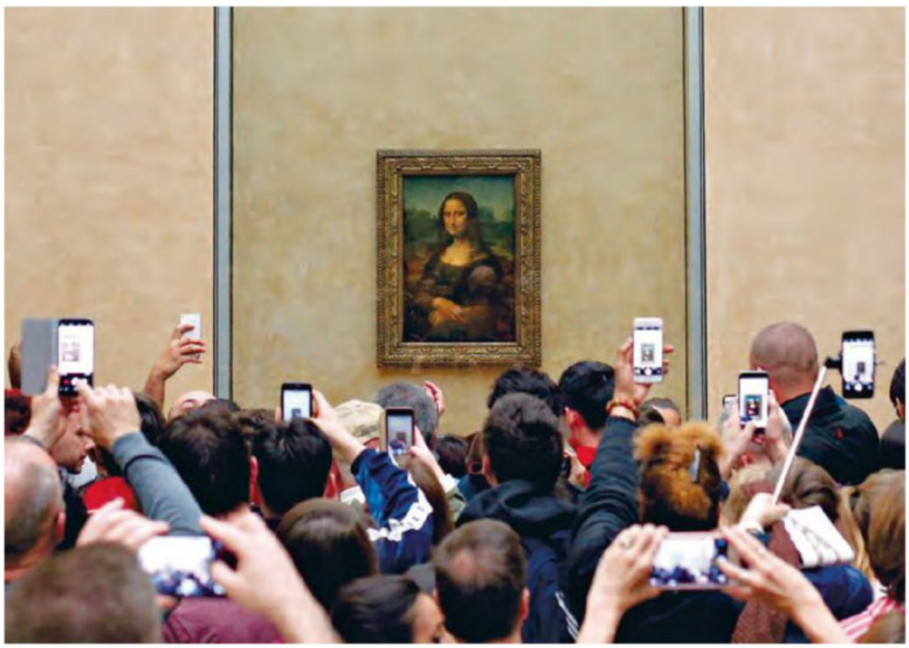
The phenomenon is global and has even reached chilly, expensive Iceland—a relative newcomer to travellers' bucket lists. Travel media have affixed the overtourism label not just to Reykjavík but to the whole country. So when I arrive after eight years away, I am apprehensive. How bad will it be? And how can travellers be part of the solution, not part of the problem?

I first explored Iceland as a college grad in 1973, entranced by vast scenery, the modern culture with its Old Norse language, and the in-your-face volcanic geology. I kept coming back, making my previous visit in 2010, right before the tourism boom. By 2017, Iceland was drawing over two million visitors annually—six times its population.

When does such a fast-rising tide become an unacceptable tsunami? For Icelanders who are not making money from tourism—and even for those who are—overtourism means disruption to their lives and their city. "The Reykjavík centre is all hotels and Airbnbs now," says my friend Ingibjörg Eliasdóttir. "Downtown is out of hand. Real estate prices have gone up so high that students can't afford to live here anymore."

The tourism flood would have arrived sooner or later. The number of international trips taken each year worldwide has gone from some 25 million in the 1950s, right before

ARCTIC IMAGES/ALAMY



Five tourists standing before the "Mona Lisa" in 1959 have morphed into more than 200 jamming in front of the Louvre portrait in Paris today.

the commercial jet age began, to 1.3 billion in 2017. International arrivals are projected to reach a possible three billion by 2050. Yet the sights and places all these people visit remain the same size.

Causes of the tourism surge reportedly range from easier border crossings and cheap regional carriers to subsidised airline fuel and Airbnb, which increases a destination's accommodations capacity. Look deeper, though, and you find three powerful trends. First, Earth's population has nearly tripled since the 1950s, when mass tourism was just getting started. Second, affluence is growing even faster, with the world's middle class expected to reach 4.2 billion by 2022. Third, technological changes, from GPS and social media to wide-body jets and towering cruise ships carrying town-size populations, have revolutionised travel.

I once complained to the CEO of a major cruise line about how each ship disgorges thousands of passengers into the confined medieval streets of Dubrovnik, Croatia. "Don't people have a right to visit Dubrovnik?" he countered. Perhaps, but when people keep arriving in groups of 3,000, it profoundly changes a place.

Airlines can boost heavy traffic as well. Icelandair's free-stopover offers put hundreds of tourists daily on the accessible Golden Circle route, which takes in the historic site of Thingvellir, the Gullfoss waterfall, and geothermal Geysir. The first two are large enough to handle several hundred visitors, but compact Geysir shows signs of overtourism—trash, overcrowding, and a tourist-trap sprawl mall right across the road.

This fast-growing mass travel poses real threats to natural and cultural treasures. Wear and tear on fragile sites is one issue. So is cultural disruption for local people. And visitors receive a degraded experience.

Pressure for change comes less from tourists than from locals and preservationists. Officials in Barcelona, one of the world's busiest cruise ports, have promised tighter controls on mass tourism, short-term apartment rentals, hotel development, and other challenges. Dubrovnik has plans to restrict the number of ships that can dock. Italy's Cinque Terre has put limits on hikers. Amsterdam is focusing on tourist redistribution techniques. In Asia, where tourism growth is rampant, governments have closed entire islands to allow recovery, such as on overbuilt Boracay in the Philippines and over trodden Koh Tachai in Thailand. As for Iceland, the government has launched a Tourist Site Protection Fund, and Reykjavík has banned permits for new hotel construction downtown.

> **Adopt a wise-travel mindset. When you** arrive in a place, you become part of that place

Destination stakeholders are not the only ones who can take action. What can a smart traveller do?

Adopt a wise-travel mindset. When you arrive in a place, you become part of that place. Where you go, what you do, how you spend, whom you talk to: It all makes a difference. Try to get out of the tourist bubble and see how locals live. Treat every purchase as a vote. In Iceland, María Reynisdóttir of the national tourism bureau suggests looking for the official quality label Vakinn when buying souvenirs or booking lodgings.

Avoid peak times. Hit museums and sights early, before crowds arrive. Avoid peak seasons as well.

Stay in homes. Booking an Airbnb listing with a friendly host can add depth to your stay, but avoid hosts who peddle multiple units bought just for short-term rentals. That practice can boost property values beyond what locals can afford.

Speak up. Tell tourism authorities what you think. They worry about reputation. Post online reviews about whether you think the destination is doing a good job of managing tourism.

Explore. Earth is a big place, and much of it is still undervisited. In Iceland this past August, my wife and I went north to see where a sign-posted route called the Arctic Coast Way will open in June 2019. Here, far from Reykjavík and well beyond the tour buses relentlessly plying Route 1, we drove past fjords touched by fingers of fog and mountainsides laced with waterfalls.

Just short of the Arctic Circle we stop at the Guest-house Gimbur, empty except for us. "Mid-August is the end of the season," explained our hostess, Sjöfn Guðmundsdóttir. Relaxing in her hot tub, watching a lingering sunset at the southernmost reaches of the Arctic Ocean, I reflected on something else she had said: "Slow tourism is my motto." It can be yours too.

PEDRO FIUZA/NURPHOTO/GETTY IMAGES

INSIDE GREECE'S MOUNTAIN KINGDOM

IN ZAGOROCHORIA, WITNESS ONE OF THE WORLD'S DEEPEST GORGES, A PRECARIOUSLY PERCHED CLIFFTOP MONASTERY, AND LAKES BUILT BY DRAGONS **BY REEMA ISLAM**

In the northwest of Greece lies a gorgeous mountain destination, one of the coastal nation's best-kept secrets: 48 villages surrounded by some of Greece's highest peaks, Zagorochoria. The Slavic term *zagori* means "behind the mountain" and the Greek word for villages is *choria*, but the region is simply referred to as Zagori. The montane area nestled amidst the Pindus mountain range between Greece, Albania and Macedonia is a unique mix of the landscape and history of these regions.

A LAY OF THE LAND

Water cutting limestone for centuries formed this region of towering stone forest of rock mountains, and stunning pools and gorges. Nomadic pastoralists and hunter-gatherers crossed these lands for centuries and over time sleepy fairy-tale villages found a home between the cliffs.

The settlements usually have a consistent layout: winding stone roads and alleyways leading to homes with sloping roofs, built using stones naturally found in the region. A plane tree stands in the central square or *mesochori* as the archetype landmark of the village, as do a central church and fountain. It draws a quaint medieval image.

Completing the image are stone bridges that connect the various villages, fostering an impression of a single large community that existed in older days, rather than the distinct settlements of the present. Most of the bridges are now redundant, except the single-arched bridge of Klidonia, and the triple-arched Kalogeriko bridge near Kipoi village—two of Zagori's recognisable features. These slender, arched structures have a surprising steepness only gauged when you attempt to cross one, advisably with the nimbleness of a ballerina, to avoid toppling into the gushing waters below.

Modern highways built after the 1950s now connect Zagori's many villages, and driving along the winding, precipitous roads can be equal parts daunting and interesting, especially when most of the traffic is meandering flocks of sheep or cows.

GOING BACK IN TIME

The region of Zagori finds mention in records of Byzantine emperors. It is said that the analytical catalogue of the villages first appears in 13th- and 14th-century Ottoman texts. The history of Zagori, however, goes back to a time much before the kings.

A hike to Megalo Papingo leads to spectacular views of Zagori's limestone rockfaces.

COSTAS ASSIS

It is supposed that Zagorochoria was inhabited by Palaeolithic hunter-gatherer groups, during the end of the last global glacial age and for millennia after. The melting ice sheets during that time created the gorges, pumping volumes of water into the Vikos-Voidomatis-Aoos river system. Archaeological evidence puts this time period to between 17,000 and 10,000 years ago. Trails along the Vikos-Aoos National Park, which include the very accessible Boila rock shelter, offer an insight into the Zagori of that time, while excavations between the villages of Monodendri and Vitsa reveal a settlement dating between the ninth and fourth centuries B.C.

> **Legend has it that two dragons resided on Tymfi and Smolikas.** The fighting pair threw stones at each other creating a white and a black lake

Active excavation sites still dot these mountains and according to PhD student Faidon Moudopoulos, who is "reading history from a montane archaeological landscape, the case of early modern Zagori," local archaeologists have uncovered cist graves—pit-like graves built of stone—from about 1190-900 B.C. near the village of Skamnelli. "You can also find the remains of fort walls, possibly from the Hellenistic era (323-30 B.C.), in Skamnelli. However they can only be reached through a trek in the woods," he adds.

MOUNTAIN OF MYTHS

Embedded into the natural stone, and affording jawdropping views of the Vikos gorge, are the Vradeto stairs. This cobbled trail snakes its way up from the village of Kapesovo to Vradeto, one of Zagori's highest villages. Until the new road was built in the 1970s, this arduous climb was the only way to Vradeto and navigated by both human and animal residents. Towering over this part of the region is Mount Tymfi and Smoilkas, the Pindus's highest peaks, which are also home to the Drakolimni or dragon lakes of Greece.

The Pindus mountain range extends down from the northern Dinaric and is often referred to as the Spine of Greece. The 8,650-foot-tall Smolikas is its crowning glory, and also Greece's second highest peak. It also shelters of the country's favourite myths—the tale of dragons who carved out lakes. Legend has it that two dragons resided on Tymfi and Smolikas. The fighting pair threw stones at each other creating a white and a black lake. It is believed that the dragons can still be found hiding beneath the lake waters.

The fairly difficult six- to seven-hour hike from Vradeto via the Astraka refuge takes you to Drakolimni, the last stretch across a thin blanket of snow. There may not be dragons along the way, but one can definitely spot the 12-centimetre-long blue-grey alpine newt deftly swimming through the

The winding stone streets of Zagorochoria, and its quaint stone homes with sloping roofs (top) **lend a medieval, fairy-tale like quality to the villages; Of the many stone bridges that once connected the region's settlements only a few remain, such as the single-arched bridge of Klidonia** (bottom left)**; An arduous hike up the 8,650-foot Smolikas** (bottom right)**, leads to the dragon lakes.**

STAMATIOS MANOUSIS/SHUTTERSTOCK (VILLAGE), PANTAZIS TOUFIDIS (BRIDGE), COSTAS ZISSIS (TREKKING)

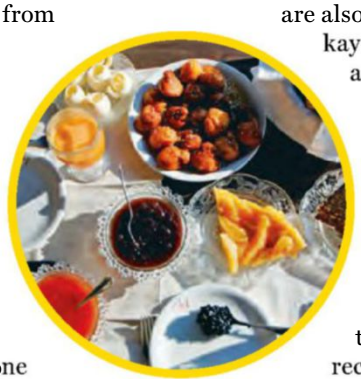
The turquoise rock pools of Papingo (top) **are a favourite with most visitors; The wholesome cuisine of the region** (bottom) **features a lot of pies, including the iconic pizza-like, feta-stuffed *zymaropita* and *batsaria*, a cornmeal pie flavoured with various herbs.**

water—though without the fierceness of its mystical ancestors.

A VIEW FROM THE TOP

In Monodendri, a spectacular view of the Vikos gorge awaits visitors at the 15th-century monastery of Agia Paraskevi. Reaching about 3,000 feet at its deepest, Vikos is the result of the Voidomatis river's geological transformation and known as one of the deepest gorges in the world.

Only a 20-minute walk from Monodendri square, the clifftop monastery opens to vistas of jagged rockfaces of Vikos. For the more adventurous souls, a trek takes you to the top of the gorge itself. Keeping you company on this journey through an untouched landscape, are mountains of the Oxia stone forest that resemble concrete blocks stacked together and slightly worn with time. Part of the Vikos-Aoos National Park, the path also gives you a chance to see a diverse range of flora and fauna. Elusive and endangered brown bears, various amphibian species, and over a 100 species of birds reside within the park. The best time to undertake this journey is summer or early fall, before snow makes navigation difficult.



The gushing waters of the gorge are also a site for canoeing, kayaking and other adventure sports. But for those looking to bask in the views and mountain air will particularly enjoy the end of the trek at Papingo. Divided into Megalo (big) and Mikro (small) Papingo, this has been officially recognised as one of the best preserved traditional villages of Zagori. It's most known feature however, are the shallow pools of water within the limestone rocks. Swimming in the turquoise water is a ritual for many, and one of the best ways to soak in the historical and geological wonder that is Zagori.

ESSENTIALS

The best way to get to Zagori is by road from Athens. A 5-hr bus ride from Athens will take you to the capital of Epirus, Ioaninna. From Ioaninna, local buses leave for Monodendri early every morning and take about 2.5 hr. There are flights to Ioaninna but they are expensive. It is best to hire a car or have an updated bus schedule when navigating Zagori. Hotels usually start from about €35/₹2,850 per night.

VERVERIDIS VASILIS/SHUTTERSTOCK (PEOPLE), GEORGE DETSIS/IML IMA/ICARUS (FOOD)

THE ADDRESS

58

DOWN TO EARTH

The drama of the wild exists both outdoors and inside South Africa's Sabi Sabi Earth Lodge

PHOTO COURTESY: SABI SABI EARTH LODGE

Laze, Linger, Repeat

Phone charger, check. Toothpaste, check. Sunglasses, check. Itinerary, check. Ah, the good old itinerary. If someone's familiar with those long sheets of paper, it's me. A vacation essential in our house, only Papa found them appealing. For me, they were just dreadful notes that made sure my vacations were packed to the brim—from the second I woke up to the moment I fell asleep under fuzzy hotel blankets, exhausted. For Papa, itineraries meant checking things off the list, covering as much as our bodies and budgets would allow so we could get our "money's worth."

Which is why when my friends asked me to tag along on a trip to Chettimani in Coorg to "do nothing," I was startled. But I agreed. We left Bangalore early in the morning, and somewhere between my car naps, the cityscape had given way to lush greenery on either side of the State Highway 17, a cleaner Karnataka sky hanging low. Six hours, five chai stops, and 12 car naps later, we were there. On a narrow road off the highway, about two kilometres from the Chettimani village, there stood Linger, our den for the weekend.

Banana and jackfruit trees grow wild around the property, and coffee, pepper, and butterfruit (avocado) plantations flank it on all sides, making Linger the perfect weekend cocoon to disappear into. It began with sauntering through mucky soil, exploring the five-acre property with a sheet of drizzle grazing my face. There are

THE ART OF IDLING WITH A SIDE OF COORGI PORK CURRY MAKE FOR A DELICIOUS VACATION AT CHETTIMANI

BY CHANDNI DOULATRAMANI

five unique cottages within the property, one of which has a bed in the loft and a living space downstairs—much like Heidi's attic room in the Swiss Alps. The mud cottage we occupied was tastefully done up with cosy beds I wanted to sink into. But I resisted the temptation, and instead parked myself with my friends outside on the porch for a few drinks. Not far away, I spotted a tented canopy cottage on stilts, perfect for those looking for a rustic experience.

Our hunger meanwhile was silenced by the local *pandi curry*. We chomped on the spicy pork curry made with chunky tender meat in a dark peppery sauce, all day, pausing only for swigs of homegrown Coorgi coffee. Relished best with *neer dosa* and *kadambuttu* or steamed rice balls, a local curry made with whole, wild mangoes is a good option for vegetarians.

The unending July rain only added grace to the beautiful flora. On clearer afternoons, we would have spotted the sparrows and mynahs whose songs never ceased through the showers. The sharp chirp of crickets seemed to have lodged itself in my ears. I spotted a few monsoon insects scurrying around. Among the cacophony of nature, I forgot all about the city. What would Papa do in a place like this? What about itineraries? Trekking through puddles is not his thing, neither is cooking Coorgi pork. But who knows.

Boardgames (top left), **a well-stocked library and the option to try your hand at cooking adventures shakes things up at the quaint stay; The author stayed in a tastefully done-up mud cottage with a cosy bed** (top right); **Nature finds a place in Linger's ethos, with clean drinking water from neighbouring streams or wells filtered and served in old wine bottles—a war cry against plastic** (bottom). Facing Page: **Flanked by coffee, pepper and butterfruit plantations on all sides, Linger makes for an ideal weekend cocoon.**

For those with restless feet, Linger has board games, treks, cooking classes and cookbooks to spur your cooking adventures, and a well-stocked library. A nearby spot offers birdwatching, and if you're feeling particularly perky, ask the staff for the dope on a 17-kilometre-long driving route nearby that they personally recommend. The Bhagamandala temple and the Nalknad Palace are close by. Madikeri, a popular hill station, is also about 30 kilometres away. While you're there, don't forget to bring back homemade chocolate and local coffee.

For me, the idea was to spend time doing nothing, without feeling like I'm wasting it; to admire the unfamiliar, and to acquaint myself with the concept of not having a plan—for a day or for a lifetime. Chettimani let me linger.

Weeks after the vacation, the sweet scent of coffee plants would sneak into my Bangalore existence. I called Papa to tell him all about the time I *paid* to do nothing. He thought I'm crazy, but I've already warned him that for our next holiday, I'm throwing out his precious itinerary.

ESSENTIALS

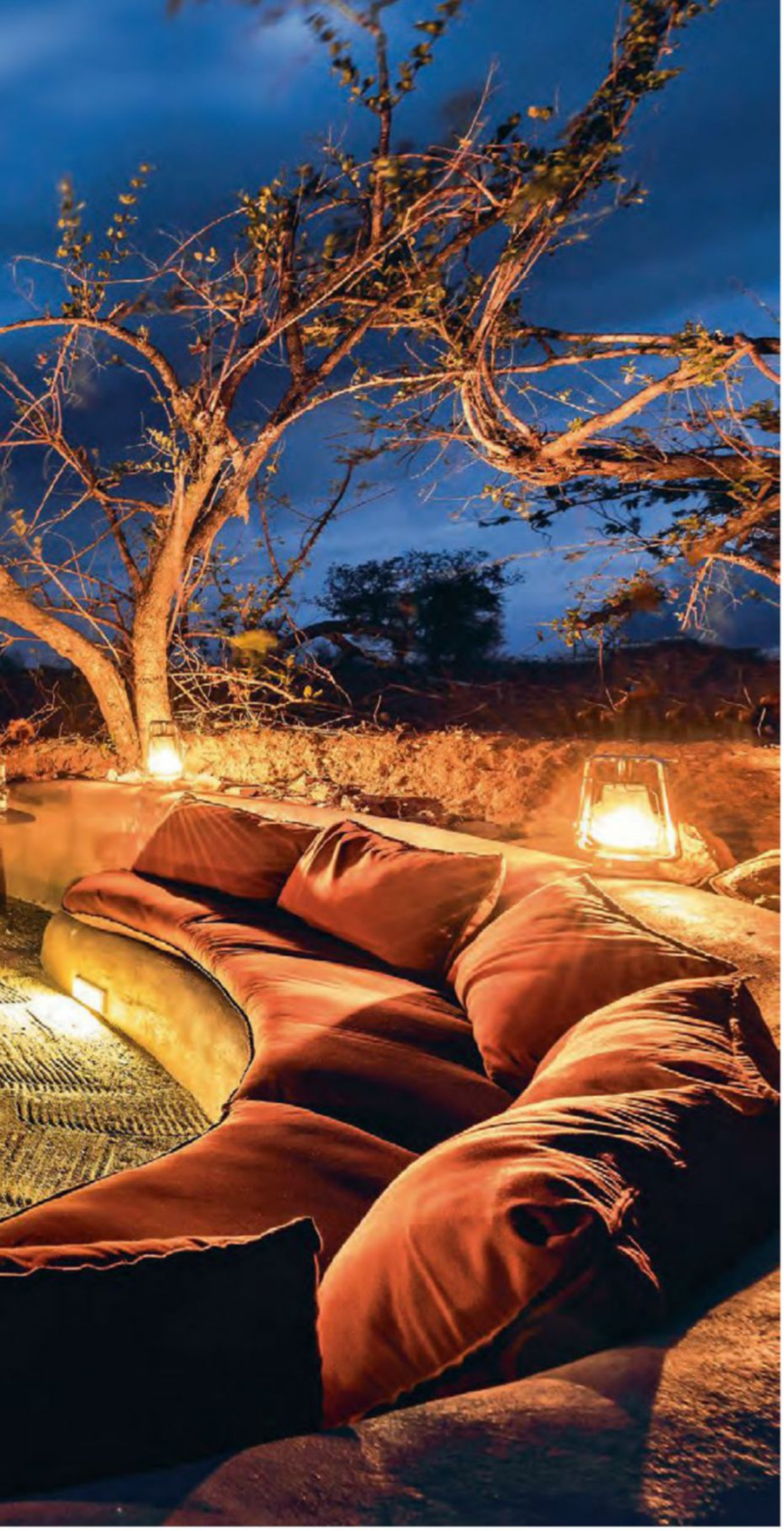
Linger (Chettimani) is about 300 km/ 6 hr from Bengaluru by road *(www.linger-at-coorg.in; doubles ₹6,450)*.

PHOTO COURTESY: PRADHYUMNA GUPTA

DOWN TO EARTH

THE DRAMA OF THE WILD EXISTS BOTH OUTDOORS AND INSIDE SOUTH AFRICA'S SABI SABI EARTH LODGE

BY KALPANA SUNDER



The outdoor boma (left) encircled by upended tree roots is an ideal spot for alfresco meals around a bonfire; The Amber Presidential Suite (top right) evokes all the drama and hues of the surrounding African wilderness. Its most striking feature is the carved timber headboard; The food at Sabi Sabi Earth Lodge (bottom right) is heavily influenced by local ingredients and flavours.

Stepping into the lobby adorned with abstract sculptures of driftwood, I have a 360-degree view of the bushveld, complete with a watering hole. Just outside, there are tables set in a shallow pool of water and daybeds with muslin drapes.

I am at the Earth Lodge, one of Sabi Sabi's four properties and a National Geographic Unique Lodge, in South Africa's 65,000-hectare Sabi Sabi Reserve. Unlike most typical colonial style lodges, this one completely blends into its forest home. From nest-shaped coffee tables made of painted branches, and walls that resemble the earth, to metal birds peeping out from behind lampshades and chandeliers of twisted fig wood, the drama of the African wilderness is reflected in every corner. Artist Geoffrey Armstrong's salvaged wood sculptures and furniture, tribal motifs and knick-knacks like stacks of beads, and upholstery inspired by animal skin decorate the space whose warm metallic colour scheme is a nod to South Africa's mineral riches.

The wild theme continues to my room, one of the property's 13 luxurious suites. The dramatic headboard of my bed—a sinuous, twisted cross-section of a salvaged tree—holds pride of place. Nguni hide carpets adorn the floors, and

PHOTOS COURTESY: SABI SABI EARTH LODGE

The reception and dining area overlooks a watering hole and opens up to uninterrupted views of the surrounding grasslands.

the study table has a decanter of port. Coffee table books, a Nespresso coffee machine and binoculars are provided, along with a painting set. The best part is the en-suite bathroom with picture windows framing the bush, and an egg-shaped stone tub. Sliding glass doors lead to a deck with a plunge pool and recliner chairs, and uninterrupted jungle views. I almost want to curl up and remain in my room, much like the wild inhabitants of Sabi Sabi that are often spotted napping in the afternoons, but dinner awaits.

Talking to General Manager, Stefan Schoeman, over dinner I learn that Earth Lodge's unique walls were actually born of an accident. "A piece of plaster fell down and caught grass and earth," he says, "and the designer decided that was the look she wanted." The final look was achieved by mixing river sand and yellow thatching grass with concrete.

I am also told that there is no proper fencing around the property, which has been purposely built close to the ground to be in harmony with the landscape. "In fact, it blends in so well, that elephants often walk on the roofs of the rooms and warthogs drink from the plunge pools," adds Schoeman. That night I try to keep an ear out for any elephants that might have wandered on to my roof, thankful for the sturdy columns that hold it up.

Though tempted to stay snuggled in bed, I get myself up and ready by 5.30 a.m.—a visit to Sabi Sabi is most importantly about the safari. Early morning coffee and cakes is followed by a game drive in an open Land Rover accompanied by a game ranger and a local Shangaan tribe tracker. We drive through the bumpy grassland trails, scrub and acacia woodland along the Sabi river spotting herds of zebra, gangly giraffes with their young ones, the blue-and-purple hued lilac breasted rollers, and a herd of Cape buffaloes with ox picker birds perched on their rumps. Amidst the sepia landscape of acacia and marula trees, we tick off the Big Five from our list. But the crowning glory is spotting an elusive leopard, thanks to our sharp tracker who shows us marks in the sand where the leopard has hauled its prey.

Back in the lodge I have to ask for a chaperone to walk from my room to the main lobby area as darkness falls. Candlelit tables and hurricane-lamp-lit paths have enveloped the place in a sense of mystery. After lounging for a while by the cosy fireplace in the well-stocked library, I head to dinner. The chef's innovative menu and the jungle's silence is suddenly punctuated by a loud croak of a toad. It seems to be more appropriate than music for a place that takes its cues from nature.

ESSENTIALS

Earth Lodge, in Sabi Sabi Private Game Reserve in the northeastern part of South Africa, is a 5-hr drive from Johannesburg airport and a 2-hr drive from Kruger Mpumalanga International Airport (Nelspruit). There are daily flights from Johannesburg to the Sabi Sabi Airstrip *(www.sabisabi.com; doubles ZAR 21,900/₹1,10,300 plus taxes per person sharing per night; including all meals, a day and a night safari, and transfers from Sabi Sabi airstrip).* The lodge's boutique store has a range of curios and the spa offers a wide selection of relaxing treatments. Visits to the local Shangaan villages can also be arranged.

PHOTO COURTESY: SABI SABI EARTH LODGE

THE DESTINATION

TIM GARTSIDE/AGEFOTOSTOCK/DINODIA PHOTO LIBRARY

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FOLLOWING MONET IN NORMANDY

Enchanted by the light that illuminates Monet's paintings of the historic French region, a writer traces the artist's muse

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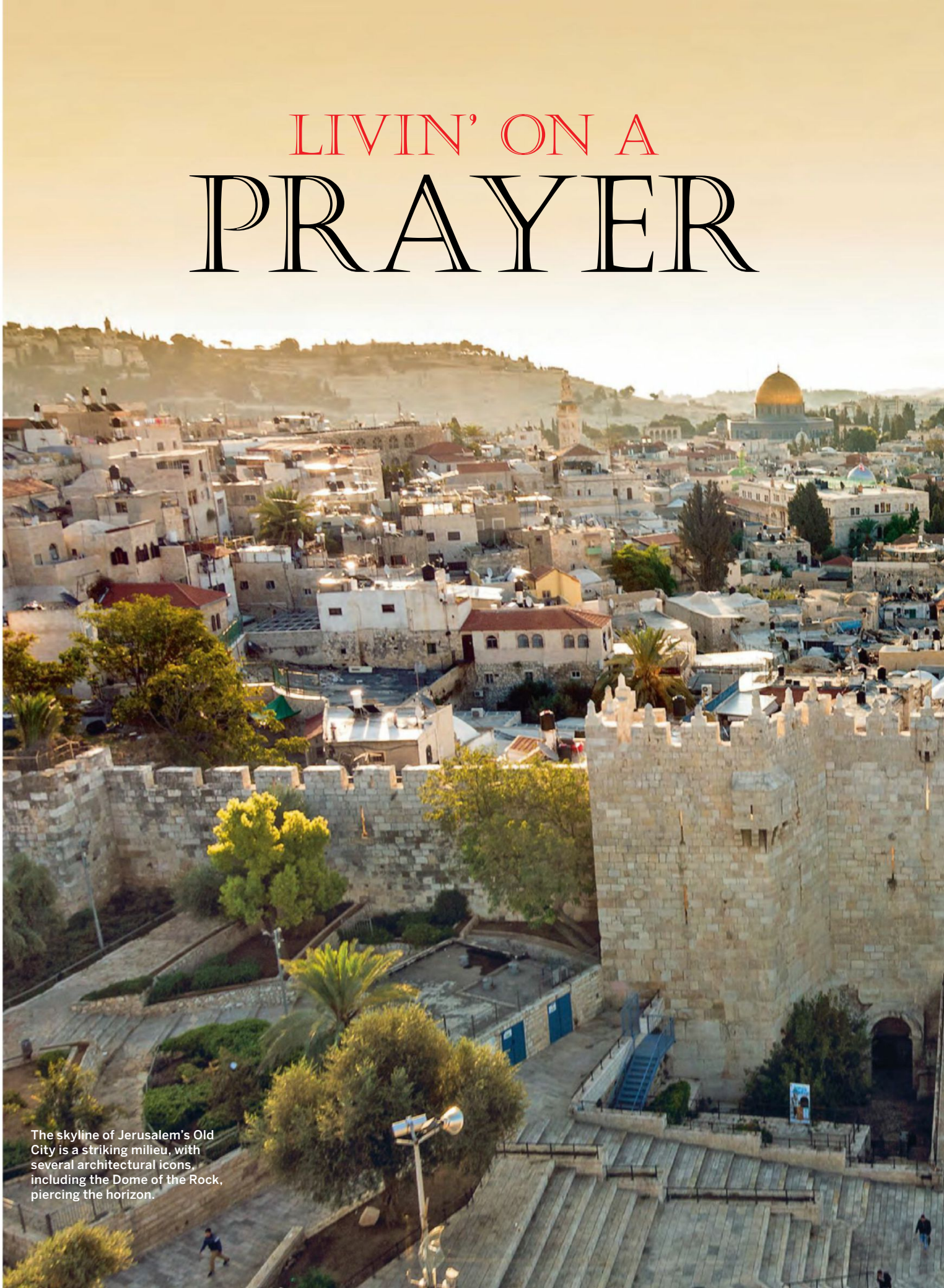
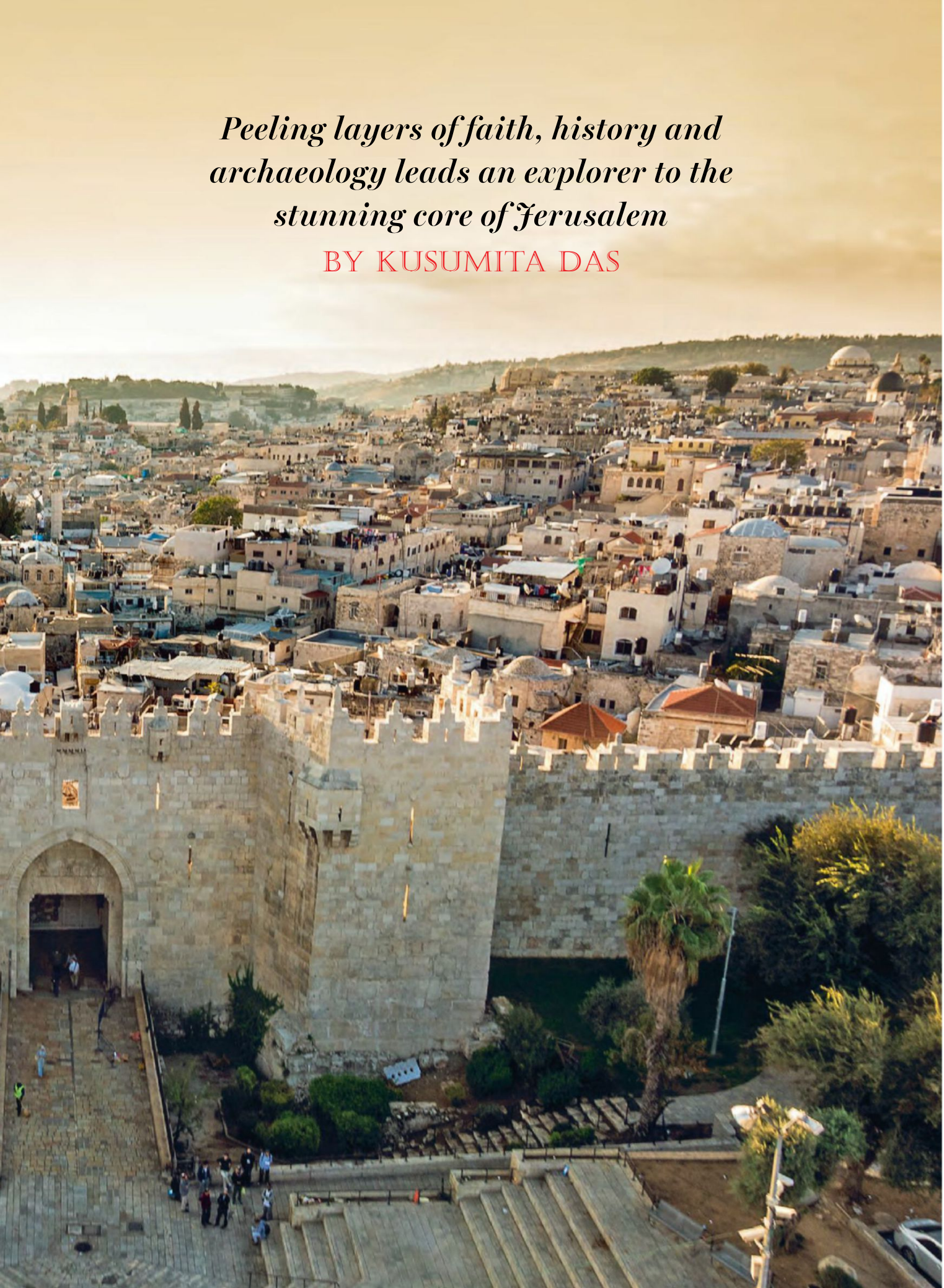
LIVIN' ON A PRAYER



The skyline of Jerusalem's Old City is a striking milieu, with several architectural icons, including the Dome of the Rock, piercing the horizon.

Peeling layers of faith, history and archaeology leads an explorer to the stunning core of Jerusalem

BY KUSUMITA DAS



JACEK_SOPOTNICK/ISTOCK / GETTY IMAGES PLUS/GETTY IMAGES

I am standing under the shadow of Jaffa Gate, the imposing entrance to Jerusalem's Old City. It's post breakfast hour, the golden hour for all things touristy. On the day's list is a walking tour of the 3,000-year-old Old City, a walled settlement on the eastern side of Jerusalem, which will take us through its Christian, Muslim, Jewish and Armenian quarters. As I wait for our group's guide Joshua to flag off the tour, my eyes adjust to the swarm of tourists trundling in and out of the gate, which is among the eight original ones built in the 16th century by the Ottomans.

Like us, the sun too is preparing for a long day ahead, but the cool breeze tempers it slightly. Before we get impatient, Joshua is ready for us. He offers a pithy introduction to the city and its history—with a brief plan for the day that comes with a rather rousing disclaimer: "This is the Middle East, anything can happen." It's Joshua's way of preparing us for ad lib changes in the route due to possible unrest, although he won't say. There's another request we comply with: submit all items of clothing

Located on Temple Mount, the Islamic shrine of the Dome of the Rock (left) **is identified by UNESCO as Jerusalem's most recognisable landmark; While the Tower of David Museum** (right) **offers the history of Jerusalem, a 360-degree view of the faith-swaddled city from its rooftop is just as rich.**

ARCO/J ERICHSEN/ARCO IMAGES/DINODIA PHOTO LIBRARY (BUILDING), SIGURCAMP/ISTOCK/GETTY IMAGES PLUS/GETTY IMAGES (RUINS)

Fruit juice stalls (top left) **in Jerusalem's Old City add sweeps of colour to the stony expanse of monuments; The speciality bread, Jerusalem bagels, along with falafels and pastries** (top right) **are hot sells; The Church of the Holy Sepulchre** (bottom)**, first built in the fourth century, has been excavated, destroyed and rebuilt over 16 centuries.**

NICK BRUNDLE/SHUTTERSTOCK (FRUIT JUICE STALL), PAPARAZZZA/SHUTTERSTOCK (CHILDREN), RAFAEL BEN ARI/CHAMEL/WORLD PICTURES/DINODIA PHOTO LIBRARY (CHURCH)

or accessories symbolic of any religion other than Islam. I had nothing on me except a Hand of Hamsa keychain, which I let go of temporarily. Granted, the amulet, popular across the Middle East and North Africa can be considered equal parts Jewish, Christian and Islamic, but why take a chance?

A PHOENIX RISING

As we walk in through the gate and step on the cobblestoned road of Old City, it feels like we are on the sets of a period film. This is a theatre of all things sacred, the only place of its kind where the highest symbols of three faiths—the Western Wall for Jews, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre for Christians and the Dome of the Rock for Muslims—stand within a stone's throw of each other.

We are a little Pied Piper's army, following Joshua's quick strides through the narrow alleyways of the Christian quarters, scurrying past souvenir shops on both sides before we find ourselves on the courtyard of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. It was first built in the fourth century by Byzantine emperor Constantine to venerate the site believed to be that of Jesus's crucifixion, burial and resurrection. Over 16 centuries, this church has been excavated, destroyed, rebuilt and renovated—a phoenix etched in stone. Whether or not you know of its tangled past, you cannot miss the architectural patchwork on the outside, which appears unfinished. Six Christian sects, including Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox and Armenian Apostolic share control of the building. All things seemingly odd and wanting to touristy eyes signify an uneasy truce between local churches, often put to test in matters of maintaining tradition. Take for instance, an old ladder sitting on the upper level of the church. It has not been merely forgotten there by a repairman; or if it was, it happened centuries ago. The Immovable Ladder, as it came to be called, has occupied that position for as long as anyone can recall, because rival church denominations have not been able to agree on what to do with it.

In Jerusalem's culturally rich ecosystem, you switch between multiple open tabs of religion and history

As we enter the church, we see the Anointing Stone, where Jesus's body was kept after it was removed from the cross. It's encircled by kneeling tourists, in various stages of prayer and mourning. I take in the interiors, a lilting sequence of light and dark marked by wall mosaics of Biblical paintings. There are queues everywhere, whether you want to just light a candle or see Jesus's tomb. But, it's the Holy Week (the week before Easter) that would put your devotion to real test, because that's when crowds peak to partake in a gamut of prayers and processions from dawn to dusk and beyond.

The Holy Sepulchre or tomb of Christ is located in the centre of what's called the Rotunda, a round hall supported by 18 massive columns. It's a wealth of ornate altars and domes inside. I fight the urge to run off to every corner of the church, but not all corners welcome tourists as Joshua warned us. A very steep stairway will take you to the Golgotha, where Jesus was crucified. Scrambling tourists won't let you linger anywhere, so one takes in the splendour in retrospect, largely.

WISHFUL LEANING

Within such a rich ecosystem, you switch between multiple open tabs of religion and history. We negotiate a 10-minute labyrinthine walk to reach the Western Wall in the Jewish Quarter. A preliminary round of security checking awaits us at the 187-foot-high structure, also called the Wailing Wall. People are scattered around the plaza, and seated on a row of chairs facing the wall—significant in both Judaism and Islam for its chequered, often contested history.

For the Jews, it marks the only remains of the Second Temple of Jerusalem, destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70. When the Muslim shrine of Dome of the Rock was built at the same spot during the late seventh century, the wall came to form a part of a larger wall that surrounds the dome and the Al-Aqsa Mosque. This means that entry to Temple Mount, the hill that houses the part of the wall in the Muslim quarters, is restricted for Jews.

Believers lean on the limestone wall, praying in a manner typical of Judaism, I'm told, some 'wailing' to mourn the original structure's destruction. Just wanting to see how it feels to lean your head against its stone cold facade, I go ahead, unsure of what to do next. I follow the lead of a Filipino lady next to me, also a non-Jew, as she writes her prayers and crams it into the wall's crevices. These notes find their way to the nearest wastepaper bin every day, but still, it felt nice to put it out there. Perhaps this is what French sociologist Émile Durkheim meant by "collective effervescence."

THE WRITING ON THE WALL

On the other side of this wall in the Muslim quarters lies Dome of the Rock, that UNESCO calls Jerusalem's most recognisable landmark. Another round of heavy checking by security forces awaits us. I realise that the religious items we surrendered at the beginning of the tour was to avoid complications here. In the tinderbox that is the Old City, the smallest of precautions count. The ornate Al-Aqsa Mosque, Islam's third holiest site, sits on a 35-acre compound that the Muslims call the Noble Sanctuary, and the Jews, Temple Mount. No matter how modestly you're dressed, you'll be asked to slip into hoodies and ankle-length skirts before you enter this compound. It's easy to spot the tourists here. We are like penguins covered in aquamarine hoodies loitering under the afternoon sun. Joshua says we must cut short our time here as we begin to spot security forces wearing tear gas canisters, in numbers more than usual. We make our exit, full of questions best unasked. "Anything can happen"—our guide has taught us well.

CORNER OF CONVERGENCE

While the quarters have been boxed, history cannot be. The Muslim quarter also marks the starting point of Via Dolorosa (Way of Sorrows), a processional route believed to be the path Jesus walked carrying his cross, on the way to Crucifixion. On

The Western Wall or the Wailing Wall sees believers of both Jewish and Islamic faith lean against its limestone facade in prayer. Guarded heavily on both ends, it is symbolic of Jerusalem's interlocked socio-religious history.

RYAN RODRICK BEILER/SHUTTERSTOCK

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre houses the Anointing Stone, where Jesus's body was kept after it was removed from the cross. It is unmissable for an architectural patchwork of varied styles on the outside, and breathtaking wall mosaics of Biblical paintings within.

ROSTISLAV GLINSKY/SHUTTERSTOCK

Good Friday, thousands of Christians from around the world come here to retrace Jesus's footsteps either by watching the procession, or actually carrying a cross all the way to the Holy Sepulchre, covering the Stations of the Cross, nine spots that commemorate the events that happened on the way. Whether or not this is the exact route that Jesus took is disputed, but its credence has been established by the footsteps of the devout over centuries.

If the crowds get too much for your endurance, catch your breath atop the Tower of David museum. While the museum will give you an overview of Jerusalem's intricate past, the rooftop lets you absorb it from a glorious elevation. The different neighbourhoods and patches of history appear so seamlessly stitched together that you almost forget its segregated reality.

BAZAAR CRAWL

Finding yourself at Via Dolorosa also means elbowing your way through a teeming Arab souk. The mercantile heart of Jerusalem from the Ottoman times, this place is a cornucopia of baubles, hookahs, spices—the warm aroma of zaatar is intoxicating—lutes, watches, attars, dry fruits, on-the-spot-ground coffee, dates and even glow-in-the-dark crucifixes. Prepare to be ambushed by vendors, keep your haggling hat on and stay hydrated with fresh pomegranate juice that could only have been blended by a holy miracle. Kebab, falafel and shawarma stalls are aplenty, but, for more authentic eats, try the *sefiha*, or pita stuffed with ground meat and tomato sauce, the Arabic pizza at the ancient Green Door Pizza Bakery, and *beigeleh* or the Jewish- Arabic bagel, enormous breads coated with sesame seeds, served with zaatar on the side. For tipplers, there's freshly brewed Palestinian or Israeli beers at Café Rimon.

Another must-visit is the Mahane Yehuda Market, outside the Old City, in the heart of West Jerusalem. A treasure trove of fresh produce, in the recent years it has also become a yuppie hub of boutiques, pubs and top restaurants. It's especially known for the culinary workshops and tasting tours held during the Jewish Passover or the Pesach week, close on the heels of Easter. The sloping streets of Jerusalem offer good exercise for pedestrians. Take in the murals and graffiti along the way—they are as stunning as they come—especially on the closed shutters of this market during Sabbath.

STRANGE LOVE

Even as the media continues to be conflict-obsessed, Jerusalem is increasingly finding itself in the tourist radar. It was voted the fastest growing tourist destination last December by a U.K.-based agency Euromonitor International. The city wears religion like a stunning patchwork cloak and nothing is apolitical here, but that's also one of its draws. Here it's normal to share a table with young soldiers enjoying a cup of coffee even as their rifles rest on chairs.

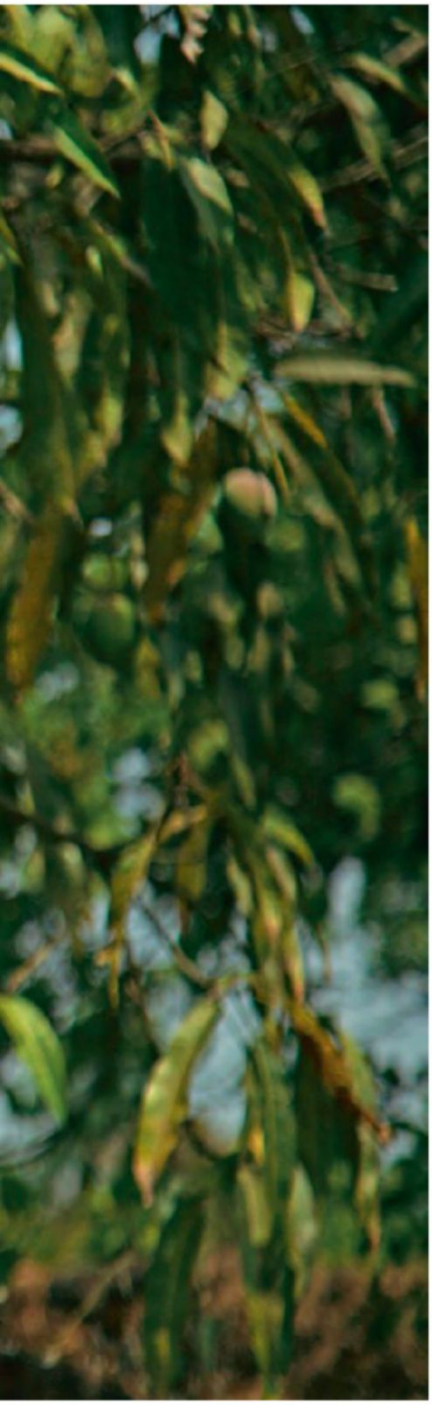
It's an extraordinary city caught in extraordinary times and you're never too far from a reminder. But there are also street musicians to play you a tune to follow till you lose sense of time. So long you keep the tramway in sight, you'll find your way back.

Souks (top) **are packed with an enchanting array of merchandise such as zaatar, attar, dry fruit, watches, hookah, on-the-spot-ground coffee and even glow-in-the-dark crucifixes; Jaffa Gate, the Old City's imposing entrance, sets an atmospheric tone with its gaggle of tourists, often inviting street artists to perform, like the harpist pictured** (bottom).

ROSTISLAV GLINSKY/SHUTTERSTOCK (SOUK), JOSE HERNANDEZ CAMERA 51/SHUTTERSTOCK (HARPIST)

FARM OF HAPPINESS IN RATNAGIRI IS A BUCOLIC WONDERLAND MARKED BY MANGOES, BIRDCALLS AND WARM HOSPITALITY

BY RUMELA BASU



Seasons in the Sun

"You want to go to a farm in Ratnagiri in the middle of May?"

"Yes! And we can go mango picking."

"But in May?"

My reaction was not that unexpected. Temperatures often reach 40 degrees in Mumbai and parts of Maharashtra in the summer. It's hot, sticky and uncomfortable. There was no way a farm in Ratnagiri sounded like the best escape. But I'd already missed a few family holidays, so I went along with Ma's choice. Two weeks later, after a seven-hour drive on a sultry Friday morning, we arrived at Farm of Happiness in Ratnagiri's Phungus village.

As soon as we'd arrived, my apprehensions about the heat melted away. The air smelled intoxicatingly sweet. I could almost hear the glee in Ma's smile and saw Baba's wondrous one as he looked up at bunches of perfect, green-yellow mangoes on trees. "The scent is of the fruit. Mangoes, jackfruit and cashews." Rahul Kulkarni, the farm's 48-year-old owner, greeted us with a smile. Over the next three days,

I'd learn that this sustainable organic farm is Rahul and his 47-year-old actor-wife Sampada's paradise. On the 20-acre farm is a traditional Konkani style home, with a large porch with tables and benches, many reclining chairs and even a couple of hammocks. With the signal gone on our phones, and this setting, I knew that we were not spending a lot of time in our rooms.

That evening, after a meal of *taandalaachyaa paanagya* (rice and jaggery pancakes steamed in banana leaves) and tea, I was tuning in and out of the conversation around me, focused on my Kindle, until I was distracted by shrill birdcalls. I didn't know too many birds that called out after dusk—unless, like in this case, they lived in a phone. Our fellow guest was making his 12-year-old son hear the birdcalls he'd recorded. Focusing on the group gathered on the porch properly for the first time, I realised what a motley crew it was. My parents were enamoured with their game of carrom and with the other guest family's precocious little daughter who had joined their game. Her mother read on the bench nearby. Her father, brother and Rahul were discussing the different birds the man had spotted on his trips here.

Noticing my interest, Rahul explained to me that the family had been visiting his farm at least three times a year for the last three years. "While adults usually come here to unwind and relax, children have the most wonderful reactions to the farm," he said. "They are always curious and full of questions because the farm is like a science or geography lesson come to life. And there is the first-hand experience of meeting your

Summer mornings at Farm of Happiness (centre right), **are usually spent plucking juicy alphonsoes** (left); **There are about 100 bird species** (top right) **that have been documented so far from the surrounding areas; The sweet smell of overripe cashew fruits** (bottom right) **fills the air at the farm.**

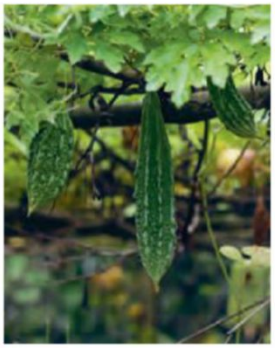
PHOTO COURTESY: FARM OF HAPPINESS

food. They often think everything is grown on trees, from apples to rice. Seeing the vines, grass, and bushes for the different fruits, vegetables and crops leaves them in awe."

Couple of hours later, trying hard not to smack my lips loudly over some *komdi masala* and bhakri at dinner—which is served on the porch—I learnt that Rahul used to be a city-bred advertising professional. "But at the peak of my career, I felt I was no longer creating something, and I was constantly looking for happiness." Soon, the couple realised that visiting the farm, an ancestral property in Rahul's father's birthplace, always seemed to lift a weight off their shoulders. "Luckily for me, Sampada stood by my side encouraging me to pursue anything I wanted even if it meant that our finances would change." It took a few years and many ideas until Anandache Shet (Farm of Happiness) finally took root.

"But I had to first learn to be a farmer," he said. Walking around the farm next morning was an insight into that journey. The perennial fruit trees came with the land, but the various seasonal crops, vegetables and herbs that grow in the farm now were a result of years of learning. The carpet of leaves beneath our feet was strewn with buttery yellow cashew fruits. Breaking into the syrupy pulp, he cut out a cashew. Nibbling on the soft nut, we walked past a small biogas producing unit, a chicken coop, buffaloes and cows, and on to acres of farmland being prepped for the monsoon.

I spotted a pineapple growing by the house's front steps,



From top to bottom: **Gourds of all kinds often grow naturally in the farmland; Rahul and Sampada Kulkarni, owners of Farm of Happiness; Jaggery rice pancakes and pickle made from farm-sourced ingredients.**
Facing page: **Boat rides** (top left) **in the village's river are a relaxing way to spend evenings; There's something for every season here, from mango plucking to sowing new grains** (bottom left)**; The Kulkarnis' Konkani roots reflect in both the decor and the food** (top and bottom right)**.**

a scurrying gecko, a nest of red ants who had sewn together leaves with cottony saliva. By a small grove of bamboo, I saw the most lush jamun tree I had seen in a long time. Mangoes are the attraction here, but I have always been partial to the little fruit. Teeth stained purple, we walked towards the mango trees. I noticed that the adjacent field was already set for visitors coming in the monsoon. "We sow rice and many other grains in the monsoon. Growing your own food, that's a pretty unique experience."

For the next hour, we were all kids again. Armed with a long pole that ended in a contraption of net and blade, my father and I engaged in the battle of the mango pickers. My young arms finally won me a better count of alphonsoes. He gave it his best shot though, not to mention stopping every few minutes, to pick and feel and smell the fruit plucked by the farm help that lay in crates around us. His proudest moment though, was probably slurping on a mango he'd picked at lunch afterwards.

Skins still cool from a bath in the backyard spring pool, and tummies stuffed with a delicious Konkani lunch, Ma and I walked to the machan we'd spotted earlier. Lying on the sun-speckled twin beds, she spoke to me of childhood adventures climbing guava trees. The gentle whir of the fan on the machan's pillar, and the balmy breeze rife with the scent of ripening fruit was like a lullaby. Just as Ma's soft snores reached my ears, I felt myself drift away to peaceful slumber.

Walking back to the house early evening, I learnt another lesson. Never ask what there is to do when you're here. Because there will always be an answer. Time seems to stretch infinitely at Anandache Shet, and you can spend it birdwatching, hiking, walking around, lying on a hammock with a book, watching the night sky through a telescope (as we did later) or getting on a boat.

The Baav river, flowing past Phungus, leads to the Arabian Sea. As Rahul spoke about how guests often came fishing here in the evenings, standing with nets in knee-deep waters, I saw a twinkle in Baba's eyes. I'd suspect hearing this probably took him back to all the times he went fishing with his father in the pond behind their home. I have similar memories with my grandfather too: summer mornings spent unhooking tiny mackerel from his fishing rod, and trying to catch the slippery ones that jumped on to the mud bank.

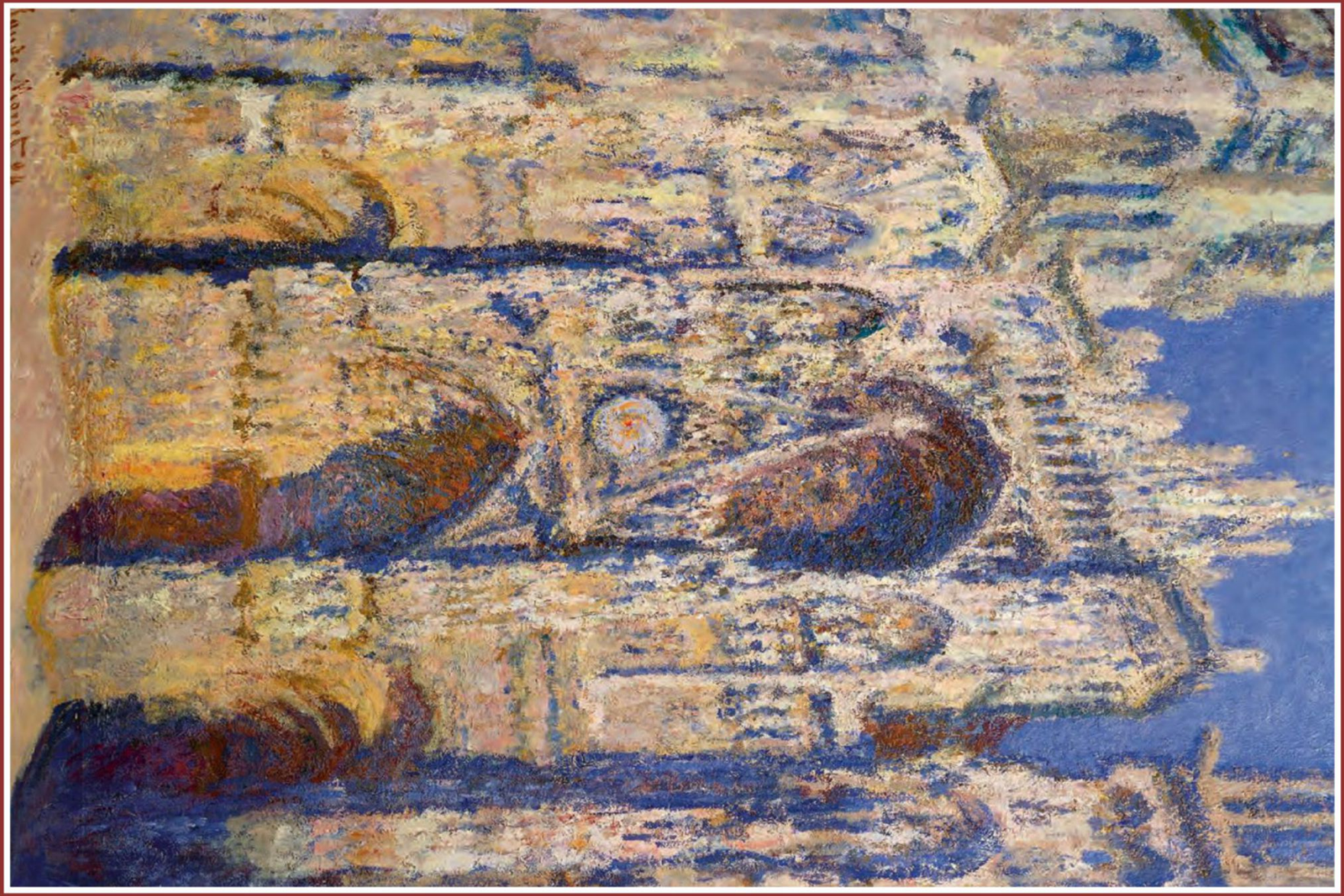
Over three days, we relived our country childhoods one step at a time. And we paid attention to each other. Conversation and laughter filled our time. We learnt a lot about the kind of food we eat and grow. I even got a license for being a good bullock cart driver after a ride on the morning of our departure.

However, the best souvenirs I brought back weren't just these experiences and lessons, it wasn't even our handpicked mangoes (along with two other crates) or a stray bloom picked off the red earth. The getaway took me back to summers spent at my family's ancestral home. Even better, it gave my parents back the summer of their childhood, which was filled with the scent of freshly-plucked ripe mangoes, devoured on sunny verandahs with sticky fingers and sweet pulp dribbling down salty chins.

(Farm of Happiness is in Phungus, 300 km/7 hr from Mumbai; doubles ₹6,000; minimum 2-night stay.)

RUMELA BASU (BOAT RIDE), PHOTO COURTESY: FARM OF HAPPINESS

FOLLOWING MONET



DEA/G DAGLI ORTI/DE AGOSTINI EDITORE/DINODIA PHOTO LIBRARY

IN NORMANDY

Located in northern France, Normandy has played muse to many impressionist painters including Claude Monet. His painting of the Notre-Dame Cathedral in Rouen highlights his love for the place.

KIRK FISHER/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO/INDIAPICTURE

ENCHANTED BY THE LIGHT THAT ILLUMINATES MONET'S PAINTINGS OF THE HISTORIC FRENCH REGION, A WRITER TRACES THE ARTIST'S MUSE

BY SATHYA SARAN

There is something about the light in Normandy that inspires so many artists to come here to "capture the light" on their canvases. It bursts upon the senses, making colours overwhelmingly vibrant, and also outlining every exquisite detail.

I first caught a glimpse of that light while walking through an exhibition of paintings inspired by Normandy coast. Two years of wishing hard to see it for myself and here I am, with a photographer, driving from Paris. We trace the points on the map that were made famous by a once unknown, daring group of impressionist painters who found inspiration outdoors rather than inside closed studio rooms.

Of all these artists—Renoir, Pissarro, Sisley—I have decided that Claude Monet will be my focus thanks to the photographs I have seen of Giverny, his home of 43 years. His renditions of water lilies and Japanese bridge painted there have ensured Monet's name finds resonance with many readers.

Giverny is a sleepy town shaded by huge trees. Despite the autumnal weather, bees buzz around a few smiling flowers. We pass through a small gate that says "Tours," and it is like entering a magical world.

When Monet came to Giverny in 1883, the quiet of the town and the country house with its large rooms and rough exterior caught his fancy. But it was the expanse of garden that the house offered that must have made him decide that he would make the place his own. It must have felt like a sanctuary after the constant struggle with rejection he had to face in his career. It was here that Monet found his anchor, while the railroad easily took him to Paris and back, where he would go to visit exhibitions and hobnob with fellow artists.

Monet lived in Giverny for the rest of his life and, over the years, enlarged the original house and set about creating the garden that would be his refuge, and his inspiration with the ever-shifting play of light and the passing seasons. In an amazing synchronisation of art and life, his reflective work endeavoured to capture the magic of the place, just as the place eventually became inextricable from his work.

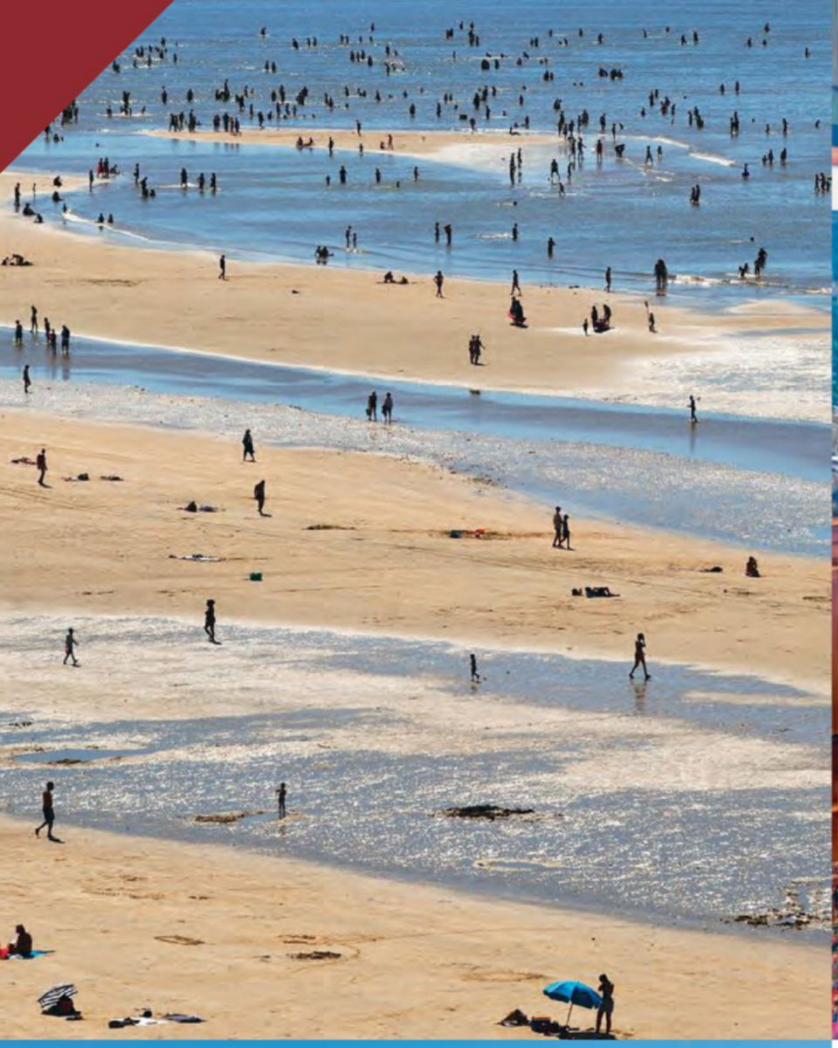
Facing Page: **The beach town of Deauville** (top left)**, is filled with seaside resorts and villas for the elite; In the late 19th century, Monet set up base in the sleepy town of Giverny. Every nook and corner of his country home** (bottom) **of 43 years was planned in great detail, including his studio** (top right)**, where reproductions of some of the artist's favourite works are on display.**

Monet planned the garden down to the last detail, using trees and flowers to create geometry through vertical and diagonal lines and squares of colour. He orchestrated changing patterns of light and shade through each hour of the day. The Fondation Claude Monet, which manages the property, recreated the garden to closely resemble the one planned by the artist, down to the flowers in the arches and bowers. As we walk up to the house, the burst of flower and foliage makes it hard to focus on the building. The garden is a mix of asters and cosmos, dahlias and sunflowers. Hollyhocks nod in the breeze, and busy Lizzies form lacy patterns in the sunlight. Roses blush red from within their thicket of dark green. A gust of wind carries their scent, or a whiff of unseen lavender.

It is overwhelming, but I wonder how it must look when spring fills the space with an even headier bouquet. Monet's many renditions of his garden over the period he lived here helped the Fondation recreate it exactly, putting in the right flowers at the right places in every season. In sharp contrast to the garden, Monet's house seems quiet, contained. Each room offers a different mood. Visitors walking through are quiet, as if they are in a sacred spot. Perhaps it is Monet's almost palpable presence in the carefully planned rooms that makes us all walk quietly, so as not to intrude.

The rooms that capture my imagination are the studio, the artist's bedroom and the dining room. Sunshine streams into the large studio from the garden-facing windows, and dust floats in the shafts of afternoon light. Reproductions of some of the artist's favourite works hang here, placed exactly as he had placed the originals. This is where Monet worked during his early years at Giverny, at times peacefully, at times wielding his brush with creative urgency. The studio was later replaced by a new one, where Monet worked bathed in light that poured in from the ceiling.

The dining room is a study in sunshine yellow. I imagine the children tip-toeing silently, as records state with the only sound at mealtimes "of cutlery scraping the plates" in deference to their father's immersion in his work. A glaze of paint lights up every piece of furniture. Friends of the artist and his family must have spent some memorable moments here, partaking of meals that Monet planned and orchestrated from a kitchen that still gleams with a line of copper vessels.



THOUGH HE PAINTED THE RIVER AT ROUEN, MONET WAS MORE ENTRANCED BY THE CHALK CLIFFS AT ÉTRETAT AND THE WAY LIGHT PLAYED ON THE WATER THERE

IXEFRA/MOMENT/GETTY IMAGES (BEACH), ITPX/PRISMA/DINODIA PHOTO LIBRARY (SITTING ROOM), CLEMENT PHILIPPE/ARTERRA PICTURE LIBRARY/DINODIA PHOTO LIBRARY (HOUSE)

ESSENTIALS

Normandy, a region in northern France, lies 220 km/2.5 hr west of Paris, and is accessible by the Eurostar rail. Monet's home is open between March and November from 9.30 a.m.-6 p.m. *(check fondation-monet.com for dates; entry for adults €9.50/₹765, children aged 7-18 €5.50/₹442, under 7 free.)*

It is in the bedroom that I glimpse the other Monet: a Spartan soul who retired for the night to a minimalist bed. The room has just two pieces of wooden furniture and the work of his closest friends, surrounding him like angels around his head. In time, Monet's increased prosperity allowed him to buy the piece of land across the road. Here, he recreated the scenes he had seen in his collection of Japanese paintings, bought with a connoisseur's eye, since they first captured his attention during his youth.

Entering the Water Garden, I feel like Alice entering Wonderland. Cypress trees bend narcissistically to catch their reflection in the still water; the lilies, some white and some pink, and the large, round floating leaves—how exactly they mimic the paintings that I have seen in museums, books, and on souvenirs! I walk over the Japanese bridge that Monet painted over 50 times, trying to capture it from far and up close, catching new aspects and angles as he explored abstraction as an expression.

I would love to tarry here, watching the changing light on the garden and pool, but it's time to head to another of Monet's favourite haunts: the town of Rouen. The river Sienne winds its way through picturesque bends, and quaint houses with wooden beams give the town a medieval look. Rouen's pride, the Notre-Dame Cathedral, dominates the town square. The cathedral was one of Monet's favourite themes. He painted the asymmetrical building from different angles through the year. Fog, rain, and sun changed the surface of his canvas as he struggled to capture the essence of the building rather than the particularities of its physical form. We try to visit the room, in what was once a dressmaker's shop, where Monet sat to paint, but it is locked.

Though he painted the river at Rouen, Monet was more entranced by the chalk cliffs at Étretat and the way light played on the water there. The cliffs, with huge rocks hollowed by the wind, are a photographer's delight. We spend an hour walking along the promenade and drive up to a viewpoint before heading to the shipping village of Honfleur, where sailors built a wooden church that still defies the elements. At Honfleur, Monet found himself in the company of other painters, all trying to find new ways of expressing themselves, the precursors of the avant garde impressionist movement.

We drive on to the twin towns of Trouville and Deauville, seaside resorts for the rich and famous. A walk down the villa-lined beach gives us a glimpse of the life that visiting impressionists, Monet included, witnessed and painted when rich clientele showed interest in and bought their work.

Normandy makes me wish I could paint, but I content myself with taking photos to "capture the light" instead. A few days later, when I come face-to-face with a large canvas of Monet's garden at London's Tate Modern Gallery, I feel the Normandy light fill my eyes again.

A cobbled pedestrian centre with medieval half-timbered houses dominate Rouen. Facing Page: **Among Monet's more famous paintings are the chalk cliffs at Étretat** (bottom left)**, where erosions have created stunning arches, making the landscape** (top) **a popular day trip from Rouen; Monet found the company of other impressionists in the shipping village of Honfleur** (bottom right)**.**

FRANZ MARC FREI/LOOK/DINODIA PHOTO LIBRARY (STREET)
FACING PAGE: FREDERIC SOREAU/AGEFOTOSTOCK/DINODIA PHOTO LIBRARY (CLIFF),
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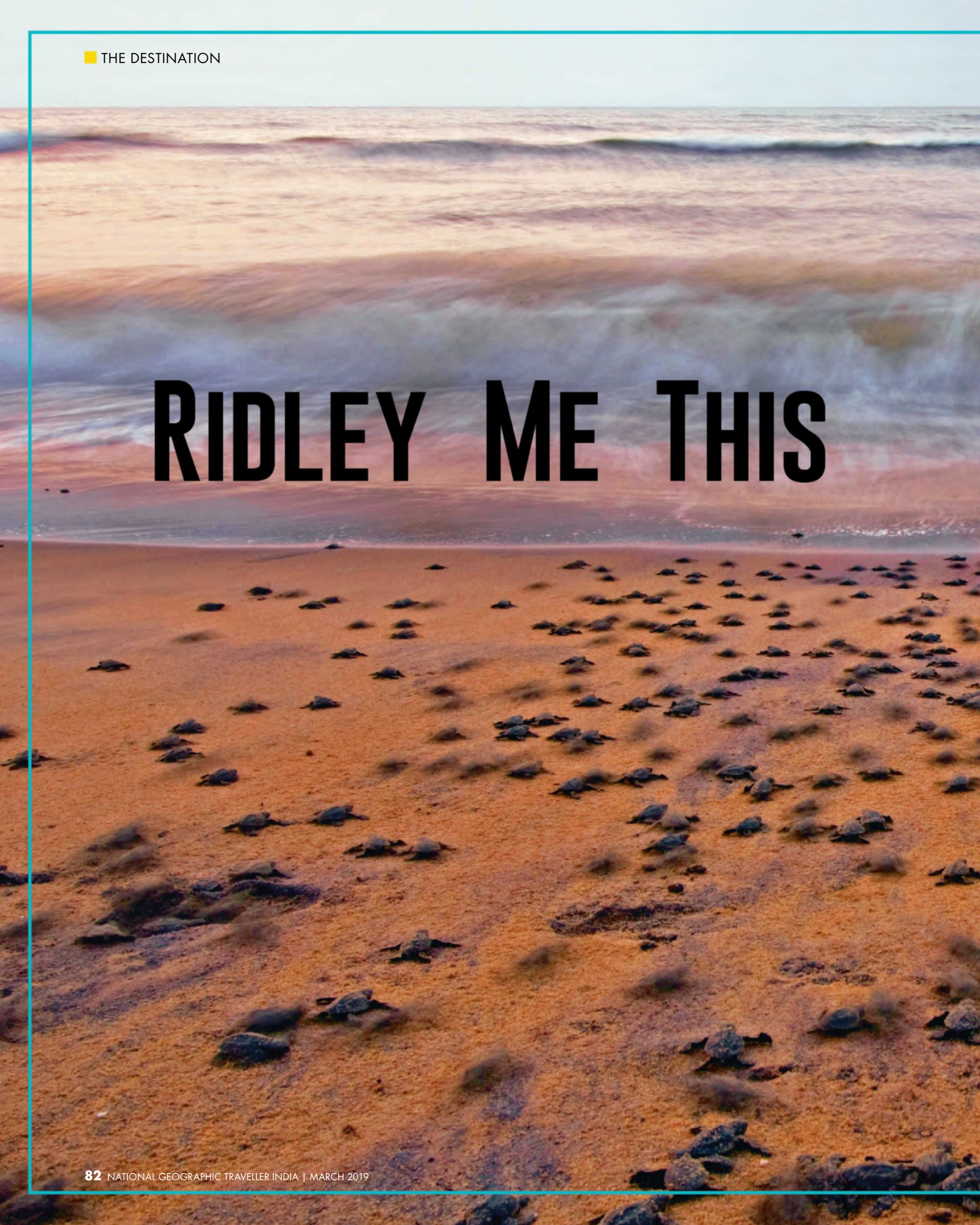
Ridley Me This



EVERY YEAR, LAKHS OF OLIVE RIDLEY TURTLES COME TO TWO BEACHES IN ODISHA TO NEST. A YOUNG STUDENT OF WILDLIFE WITNESSES THE SPECTACLE

BY SUTIRTHA LAHIRI | PHOTOGRAPHS BY DHRITIMAN MUKHERJEE

Witnessing arribada (Spanish for 'arrival'), the phenomenon where olive ridleys come to nest at the Rushikulya beach, is a sight to remember.

A hot gust of wind caresses the mangrove forests along the creek. It is the middle of February, and 20 of us have set out from the village of Gupti in Kendrapara district in eastern Odisha. I scan the mudflats in the light of the afternoon sun and find white-throated and brown-winged kingfishers brooding on trees before diving into the water; or whimbrels and Eurasian curlews being startled by our boat. The saltwater crocodiles, however, coolly bask in the shade of the mangroves. Just as I begin to get to know my neighbours better, the boat approaches the jetty. We have reached Habalikhati.

This tiny coastal village gets its name from the thespesia tree—called *habali* in Odiya—commonly found in mangroves. As students of Wildlife Institute of India (WII), my batch mates and I are here because Habalikhati is an entry point to the Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary, believed to be the world's largest nesting ground for the smallest species of sea turtles—the olive ridleys. Spread over 1,435 square kilometres, the protected area comprises mangroves and other vegetation of the Mahanadi delta. Every year, usually between October and April, over seven lakh female turtles nest at Gahirmatha beach. This phenomenon of mass nesting, called arribada (Spanish for 'arrival') occurs only in India, Mexico and Costa Rica. The coast of Odisha is the only arribada site in the country, though olive ridleys nest on other Indian beaches as well.

I could only imagine the spectacle, and wonder whether the odds would be in my favour. You never know the exact date of the arribada. It usually goes on for anything between three to seven days, in the dark of the night. Would we get to see it? Like excited, babbling 10-year olds, we check into the rest house in Habalikhati, located right beside the waters, amid swaying casuarina trees that separate the beach from the mangrove forest.

We step out for a walk at 10.30 p.m., and my mind plays a montage of arribada photos I've seen on the internet—lakhs of little black shapes emerging from the water in the darkness. If I am absurdly lucky, I might be able to spot an olive ridley mom dig in the sand and drop her white egg within. Suddenly, I stumble upon a turtle. It is dead.

Sadly, many olive ridleys making the journey get caught in the nets of trawlers fishing in the sea, and wash off on the beach. However, our lament turns out to be a feast for a couple of jackals and wild boars at the beach. We walk on, and no longer needed the headlamps (carrying torches here is an absolute no-no, as it disorients the turtles). Soon, the sand under our feet seems to be lighting up, like sparks of fire from rubbing stones. Bioluminescent plankton light our steps in greenish-blue light. We walk with great care, just to see them light up. Further, hermit crabs scamper over to give us company. I spot egg shells and nest spots, but no turtles that night. It is four in the morning by the time I reach the other end of the beach. Beyond me lies the Bay of Bengal and the confluence of Mahanadi and Dhamra rivers. We dig pits into the sand and sleep, and wake up an hour later to begin the walk back to the rest house. On my way back, slightly dejected at the adventure that wasn't, I take solace in the place I am in.

Places like Gahirmatha are unique habitats; havens that provide protection to the vulnerable olive ridley turtles. There are, however, bittersweet realities to consider: fishing around the sanctuary is banned for seven months each year, which goes a long way in protecting the turtles, but affects the fishermens' livelihoods.

Later that morning, I pin my hopes on one last excursion into the waters: to see the olive ridleys mating in the middle of the sea. We hop on a swanky, forest department speed boat used to scan the waters for illegal trawlers in no-fishing zones. I keep my eyes peeled for about an hour, and then I see them—a male and female olive ridley floating while they mated. I see more couples around; at times, they come too close to our boat, and then promptly dive underwater, but most are pretty nonchalant to our presence. I've never quite seen anything like it. Hope flickers again—I am about to travel to Rushikulya beach later tonight, and it is another major olive ridley nesting site. Did I have a chance?

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An evening drive takes us to the village of Gokharakuda, where we learn from locals that the turtles might just have begun to arrive at Rushikulya beach. There is no time to lose: we immediately head to the beach with a low-intensity, red-light torch and a forest guard to guide us. I desperately scan the beach for flipper trails. And there she is—a lone female olive ridley slowly crawling under the night sky. We keep our distance, and silently observe how she takes a long, winding route from the sea, looking for an ideal site to nest. She stops occasionally, as if to catch a breath or perhaps sense something that's incomprehensible to us. Soon, I see her beginning to dig with her hind flippers. She maintains a steady pace of scooping out sand and making a hole, oblivious to 20 of us standing goggle-eyed. Once done, she lays her eggs (olive ridleys can lay as many as 120 eggs at one go), fills up the hole, levels the sand with thumping sounds, and glides back to the sea, leaving behind a trail of flippers. The sea consumes her entirely, as if hugging her for the immense effort.

ESSENTIALS

Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary is located 142 km/3.5 hr from Bhubaneshwar and best reached by taxi. The best way to reach Habalikatti is by ferry from Gupti. Rushikulya beach lies 143 km/2.5 hr from Bhubaneshwar. Taxis regularly ply this route as well.

Odisha's Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary is believed to be the world's largest nesting ground for the smallest species of sea turtles—the olive ridleys (facing page, top left and right); After 49 days, wee hatchlings make their way back to the sea. Many fall prey to predators (bottom).

Whipped Dreams

Summers in Florence go best with creamy, lip-smacking gelatos made using generations-old secret recipes

By Radhika Raj

Gelato was invented in Florence in the 16th century. The city brims with gelaterias serving classic and curious flavours like amalfi lemon and mango curry. When you've had your fill of Florence's cobbled alleys, head to Ponte Vecchio on the Arno river (facing page). Pick an adventurous gelato and admire the only bridge the Germans did not destroy during WWII.

SUN_SHINE/SHUTTERSTOCK (SIGN)
FACING PAGE: OLEH_SLOBODENIUK/E+/GETTYIMAGES (BRIDGE), STUDIOVIN/SHUTTERSTOCK (SCOOP)

On a sunny April morning, my partner and I stand outside Santa Maria del Fiore, Florence's most iconic cathedral, gaping at its green-pink-red marble facade, and the red terracotta-tiled dome stencilled against a crisp blue sky. Our guide, Luca, part-time art student, part-time tour guide, and full-time story-spinner, tells us that the dome of this 15th-century structure, famously called the Duomo, was built by a goldsmith after the roof fell to expose a gaping hole. The technique architect Filippo Brunelleschi used to build a dome so large, so delicate, without any scaffolding, remains a mystery—it all makes me go weak in the knees. Eyes trained on the red cupola, I walk around it to the rhythm of a busker's violin, dodging giant, human-size soap bubbles blown by a street magician. My sickly-sweet lemon gelato melts, leaving trails on my fingers, seeping into my sleeve.

"Is that a gelato!?" squeals Luca, her eyes wide with animated horror. "You have been tricked! There is no such thing as a neon yellow lemon gelato."

Florence, the birthplace of Renaissance, is packed with the most illustrious art, architecture, literature and innovation. It is also the birthplace and reigning capital of gelato—the richer, creamier, silkier Italian counterpart of ice cream. Italians will tell you it is best devoured as a *dessert da passeggio*—dessert eaten on a stroll. It is easy, too, given how traffic is restricted in Florence's historical heart.

The story of gelato is entangled with Florence's history. The dessert was apparently invented by a chicken vendor in the 16th century, at the peak of the Renaissance. The house of the Medicis, a prominent Italian family, organised a cooking competition where the chicken vendor, Ruggieri, served a fruity, frozen dessert that impressed the patrons. He bagged both the prize and the position of dessert chef at their castle. The recipe evolved as the Medici family carried it across European borders over time.

Today, gelatos are served everywhere in Florence, but if you aren't careful, warns Luca, you might fall for the mass produced, pre-mixed, synthetic duplicates available at tourist-filled piazzas. "It is easy to spot a fake. Stay away from pop, neon colours—they have artificial flavouring," she says.

Emboldened by Luca's tips—look for family-run businesses where the best recipes are passed down over generations; search for the word 'artigianale' or artisanal; a good gelato is served with a spade not a scoop—my partner and I meticulously map gelato shops around Florence. Perhaps we'll have the classic stracciatella—a traditional milk-white vanilla gelato flecked with dark chocolate—before we head to see Michelangelo's David, made with milk-white marble. At noon, we plan to savour menta e basilico (mint and basil) gelato or the sour-sweet amalfi lemon: the perfect companion for a stroll at Piazza della Signoria, the city's historic political centre with the Romanesque Pallazo Vecchio (old palace) on one end and Uffizi Gallery on the other. For a post-dinner, boozy treat, we have our hearts set on the zabaglione (Marsala wine-flavored gelato) or the decadent chocolate rum gelato. Soon, we are squeezing museum visits between gelateria-hopping.

Early next day, after seeing Leonardo Da Vinci's "Adoration of the Magi" and Botticelli's "The Birth of Venus" at the Uffizi Gallery, we snoop around some modest, artisanal gelaterias, starkly different from kiosk-y gelato chains. We don't know this yet, but these are the places that serve not only the freshest flavours but also the warmest stories of passed-on recipes, of love, of gelatos made from sparse ingredients during World War II, and happy recipe accidents now on their favourites list.

Our first stop is Vivoli il Gelato, Florence's oldest gelateria, which has been in the same narrow, arterial alley at Via dell'isola delle Stinche since the day it opened in 1929 as a milk shop. Silvana Vivoli, its spirited owner, says, "We have experimented with new flavours like mustard, parmigiano and foie gras, but our most popular are still those based on old recipes passed on by my grandfather, Raffaello." A most loved flavour here is Caramello e Pere (caramelised pear), which Raffaello developed after a heart attack. Silvana remembers how he ate so many pears at the hospital, that he turned his love for the fruit into a new flavour later. She also recommends the old-fashioned Crema, or cream custard, a simple concoction of whipped milk, eggs and sugar. The unassuming gelato has a rich custardy texture—Vivoli, like all artisanal gelaterias, makes them fresh every morning, unlike chains that use premixes. The result is delightfully comforting. "Our gelato is simple and genuine, and that's why it's the best," she smiles. "Recently a patron showed me a picture of his grandfather with mine; it was taken in 1969. So he asked for a picture with me, to continue the tradition," beams Silvana.

Cremas in hand, we walk towards the Basilica of Santa Croce, about half a kilometre down a cobbled lane from Vivoli il Gelato. The towering, green and white marble basilica is the burial place for Michelangelo, Machiavelli, and Galileo, and packed with magnificent frescos, sculptures and stained glass. Italian poet Alighieri Dante's marble statue stands grim and proud outside, above an empty tomb. We lick our gelatos in silence as he glares down at us.

On day two, craving bold flavours, we head to Via dei Tavolini, where a red cursive red neon sign and an even larger queue beckons us to Gelateria Perche No! In 1939, Ugo Ravaioli and his wife owned a chestnut flour store at this very location, when one day on a whim Ravaioli asked, "Why don't we open a gelato shop?"

His wife responded, "Why not!" (Perche no!) and this family-run business was born.

Today, the store is run by Cecilia Cammili, her father, mother,

PHOTO COURTESY: VIVOLI IL GELATO

The 15th-century, red-tiled cupola of the Duomo is the cynosure of Florentine Renaissance. Once you have soaked it in, walk towards a narrow alley to find Silvana Vivoli (facing page) serve the most delicious gelatos at Vivoli il Gelato, Florence's oldest gelateria.

MORITZ WOLF/IMAGEBROKER/GETTY IMAGES

sister and husband (they aren't related to the Ravaiolis). As we wait, we bump into tourists queuing up for second helpings, meet a couple back for their last scoop before they leave Italy, and exchange notes with some on the best flavours around.

Cammilli's classics include milk with chestnut, honey and sesame seeds, pistachio, salted caramel, strudel, and coffee crunch. Their seasonal flavours list watermelon, fig, persimmon, concord grape, and tangerine. But we have had our fill of the classics—we want adventure. My partner tries a curry and mango paired with blue buffalo cheese. I try watermelon, cantaloupe and dark chocolate. The decadent dark chocolate hits me like filter coffee on an empty stomach. My partner guffaws at his share of tastings. "I don't know what this is!" he exclaims. "It's spicy and sour and sweet and potent. I am too overwhelmed to explain." He shakes his head, still talking about those flavours as we walk a kilometre towards Ponte Vecchio, the city's oldest bridge across the river Arno. We take in old leather and jewellery shops and a view of the only bridge the Germans did not destroy during World War II. As the sun sets, couples gather around and street musicians begin to jam. We find a corner and watch the crowd walk around with cups and cones of towering ice cream. "That is definitely a fake, too bright," I cringe like Luca. "Who puts gelato in a chocolate cone with multicoloured sprinkles?!" We are playing experts already.

Our feet are sore over our last few days in the city. Florence may seem small, but it is easy to lose track of time, meandering in its maze of cobbled alleys in the medieval centre. When we are overwhelmed by the ornate window carvings, delicate street lamps, beautiful balconies at Via Romana and Via Maggio, we walk towards road crossings to spot French urban artist Clet Abraham's cheeky guerilla art on street signs. Using stickers, he has transformed street signs into street art: a man slowly chisels away a 'No Entry' sign, while another is being carried away by a Romanesque statue.

Seeing Michelangelo's "David," (top) **at the Accademia Gallery Museum is a singular experience. Follow it with a ride in one of Florence's cable cars** (facing page, bottom) **gliding through its medieval lanes.**

My feet are begging for rest, but we have one last gelato stop on our list—the newest, hippest kid on the block, My Sugar, a gelateria opened in 2015. This is a strikingly young one, run by Alberto Bati, his sister and wife, and serves vegan, Asian and gluten-free scoops among others. My Sugar shot to fame after winning the annual Gelato Festival in 2016. "We won it for our cinnamon and orange gelato, called 'Araminta.' My wife, Julia, loves cinnamon. I love oranges. We make all our gelatos together, so it made sense to blend our favourite flavours too," smiles Bati. The gelateria's contemporary interiors belie its ethos. "There is only one way to make gelato: the old, traditional way," nods Bati. They serve over 16 seasonal gelato flavours made from fruits sourced from the adjacent San Lorenzo market. On the list is melacotta (ricotta, apple, cinnamon, and honey), menta e basilico (mint and basil), malaga (sweet Marsala wine and raisins in a cream base), and Asian flavours like black sesame. We have packed our cones with three flavours this time, savouring them all as we take our last stroll around the Duomo, this time with a gelato Luca would approve of.

MASSIMO PIZZOTTI/AGEFOTOSTOCK/DINODIA PHOTO LIBRARY

Soft Serve

GELATERIA DE NERI
Located in Via dei Neri, Gelateria dei Neri is loved for its fresh flavours made from traditional recipes. Stick to the classics here and you will return for second helpings—we had pistachio with mango and strawberry, stracciatella paired with caramel, and dark chocolate. Another recommended flavour is Pistachio Ricotta Cremino (pistachio with ricotta cream cheese).

GELATERIA SANTA TRINITA
It isn't hard to spot Gelateria Santa Trinita from a distance. The shop lies at the edge of Ponte Santa Trinita, a glorious bridge across the Arno, and is one of the most accessible gelaterias around. It is also the busiest, with queues that extend far beyond its facade. It had the the best amalfi lemon, lemon cheesecake and black sesame gelatos we'd had in the city.

JM TRAVEL PHOTOGRAPHY/SHUTTERSTOCK (GELATO), IVAN KRAVTSOV/EYEEM/GETTY IMAGES (TRAM)

Rome: The Big Scoop

Home to spectacular giant ruins and monuments, Rome did not invent gelato but has always known how to put a new innovative spin on traditional recipes. Here's a taster of its best gelaterias:

PUNTO GELATO

If you go on one of Rome's walking tours, there is a good chance your guide will take you to the Pantheon, originally designed as a pagan temple in A.D. 125. It is one of Rome's most iconic sights, and the design of the structure has been replicated several times over by architects across the world, including Brunelleschi, the genius behind Florence's Duomo. Right across the Pantheon lies Punto Gelato, with a large candy store-like display of the best gelatos you'll eat in the city. Its owner Günther Rohregger is known as something of a gelato guru in Rome. And with good reason; try their pink pepper, buffalo milk, dark chocolate fondant, amalfi lemon, caramel with Himalayan salt and the classic pistachio flavours. Their dark chocolate fondant with pistachio is a devilishly decadent combination.

FATAMORGANA

We ate the most inventive and shocking flavours at Fatamorgana, a gelateria with multiple branches across Rome. On her website, Chef Maria Agnese claims that she started experimenting with gelato flavours as a child—one of her favourite inventions was the almond flowers gelato, still made at their personal lab and served fresh at their gelateria. Pick anything from its glorious buffet—strawberry and ginger, toasted almonds with green cardamom, blue cheese and pear, Kentucky chocolate with smoked tobacco, white wine, basil, walnuts and honey—all made from natural, locally sourced ingredients. Give yourself some time at Fatamorgana; taste as many flavours as you can, and then pick the best—it's not going to be easy.

TORCE

Claudio Torcè, one of Europe's master gelataio, is known to have inspired many gelaterias and trained several chefs who now serve spunky, artisanal gelatos in Rome. However, many claim that his gelatos remain the most avant garde of them all. On the menu are the sweet pear and strudel, ginger and 20 different varieties of just chocolate. He also has a range of savoury flavours including schezuan pepper, celery and cream, the Italian cheese gorgonzola, mushroom, lobster and black sesame.

Prices at artisanal gelaterias in Italy start from €2.50/₹200 per scoop and can go up to €15/₹1,200 for unique flavours.

The ruins of the Colosseum demand that you return for a different view, from different angles at all times of the day. So grab a gelato from one of the city's hip gelatarias, and admire the view.

PROCHASSON FREDERIC/SHUTTERSTOCK

THE JOURNEY

AROXOPT/SHUTTERSTOCK

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A WALK TO REMEMBER IN PORTUGAL

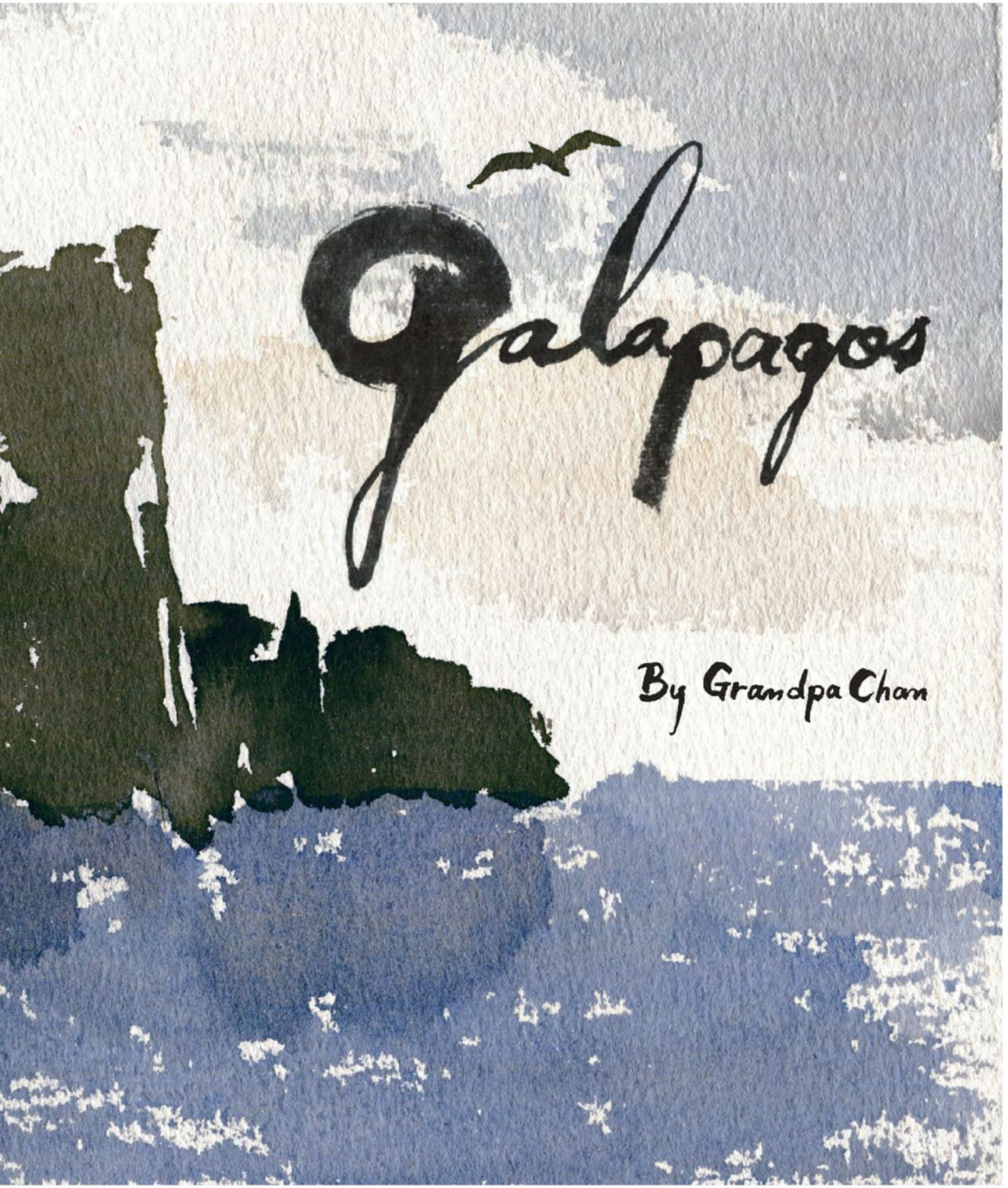
The craggy, coastal Alentejo region challenges hikers who trade sweat for sunsets

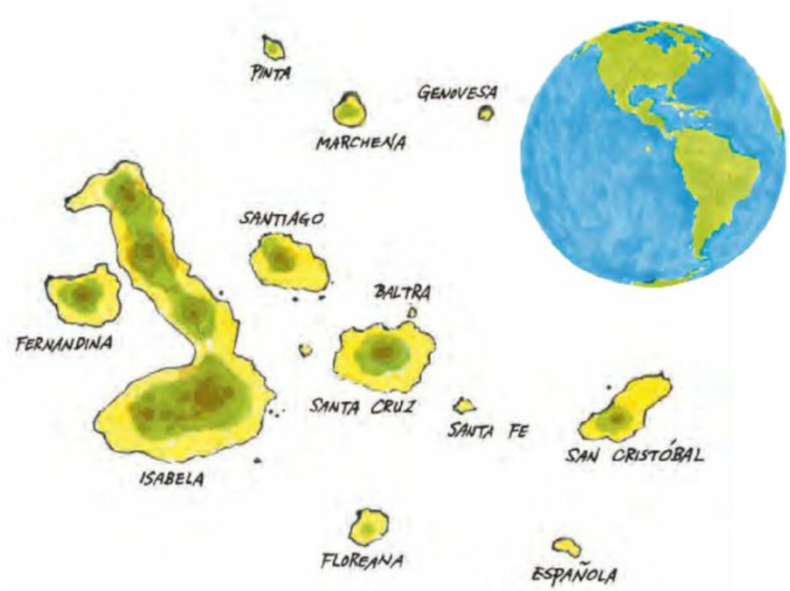
94 A GALÁPAGOS SKETCHBOOK • 114 KASHMIR'S LAST VILLAGE

ARTISTS ON EXPEDITION

Grandpa Chan's daily Instagram drawings for his young grandchildren have made him a social media star. Now he embarks on his trip of a lifetime

The Galápagos archipelago includes 13 major islands and more than 100 smaller islands, islets, and rock formations such as León Dormido (Kicker Rock).


Galapagos
By Grandpa Chan



Dear Arthur, Allan, and Astro,

Believe it or not, Grandpa is on an expedition! Because of the daily drawings I share with you on Instagram, National Geographic invited me and Uncle Ji aboard the *National Geographic Islander* so that I can explore the Galápagos and share them with you.

The Galápagos are an archipelago in the Pacific Ocean, more than 800 kilometres west of Ecuador in South America. These islands are famous for the large number of endemic species that British naturalist Charles Darwin studied on the second voyage of H.M.S. *Beagle* from 1831 to 1836. Darwin explored the land, discovered fossils, and collected specimens. Later these observations served as a foundation for his theory of evolution by natural selection, which changed the world forever. Darwin said that when plants and animals adapt to their environments, they are more likely to survive and reproduce. I was excited to see this place for myself.

Our first excursion took us to North Seymour, a small rocky island near Baltra. On a walk guided by naturalists, we caught sight of a young sea lion resting on the beach. All of us gathered around the pup and started to take photos. We were told we can't be closer than three feet from any animals. I had never seen such a wild animal so closely, and I was surprised that the sea lion didn't show signs of fear. I thought about you, Astro, because you love sea lions. You're only two years old now, but later I hope you'll read this and know my thoughts were with you in this moment.

We observed a fleet of frigate birds. The males made loud rattling sounds, and each had a large red gular sac that expanded like a giant balloon to attract females. It reminded me of when I was a university student in South Korea and I used to dress sharply and sing American pop songs in public. This technique works; your grandma noticed me, and we fell in love.

"My favourite animal was the sea lion," says Grandpa Chan. "They spend their day swimming, fishing, and napping a lot. They have a variety of facial expressions, and I tried to capture them in my drawings."

"I thought the Galápagos would be hot—they're on the Equator after all," says Grandpa Chan. "But it's precisely because of cold water that rich marine life flourishes here, though climate change and commercial fishing are the two biggest threats."

Kids, today I tried something new.

We rose early on board the ship, and after breakfast we had two options for water activities on Isla Isabela: snorkelling deep-sea or near the beach. I had to confess I had never snorkelled in my life, and it had been a long time since I'd gone swimming. So Uncle Ji and I chose the beach.

We put on our wet suits, took our snorkelling gear, and headed out. Giant volcanic rocks looked like modern sculptures, and the water was crystal clear. Uncle Ji patiently taught me how to snorkel, but it wasn't as easy as I thought. Standing up on the ground with the fins was even harder. Maybe it's because I'm 75 and have a hard time with balance. Or maybe it's because fins are made for water! After our excursion, I felt exhausted, so I just sat on the beach and admired the landscape. I was a bit envious of the other people on the trip who seemed so at ease in the water. I wished I could snorkel better, but as an immigrant to Brazil I was busy working to raise your parents. I mentioned this to Ji, who seemed to appreciate my sentiments.

On another day I went kayaking for the first time in my life. This was much easier than snorkelling. Later we went to a coffee plantation, sampled artisanal rum, and headed to a local centre where hundreds of giant tortoises roamed around freely. It was inspiring to be near these majestic creatures. They moved slowly and seemed old and wise. I think they were wondering why humans are always doing things so fast.

While snorkelling, Grandpa Chan glimpsed a turtle and a school of fish (facing page)**: "At least I can say I tried snorkelling, and I have a drawing to prove it!"**

"On San Cristóbal, I especially loved seeing the many frigate bird chicks on the ground," says Grandpa Chan. "It was like being in a zoo but without any fences."

Marine iguanas are scary-looking beasts from afar.

We saw thousands of them sunbathing atop black lava rocks. But when you look at them closely, their faces are docile and cute.

Marine iguanas eat algae, while land iguanas eat plants, and because I visited in the cooler, drier season (June to November), food was scarcer than in the warmer, wetter season (January to April). We came across one big iguana hanging on a tree branch while trying to reach the last leaves of an otherwise barren tree. Iguanas are very slow, so it took him forever to get to those leaves. We all thought there was no way he could get there without falling, but to our amazement he did indeed manage to reach them and gobbled them up

happily. Life is hard for these animals. They struggle every day for food and survival.

I know what it is to feel hungry. When I was a young boy, the Korean War broke out and everything was destroyed. There was no food at all. Once I went three days without eating anything. It was one of the hardest experiences of my life, so I felt sorry for this iguana. At least he had his meal that day.

Birds are important animals in the Galápagos. On his visit Darwin identified several species of finches that varied from island to island, which helped him develop his theory of natural selection. He observed that different finches had different beaks depending on their habitats. The sizes and the shapes of their beaks adapted to their need to find and eat their food. This finding helped Darwin realise that animals evolve over time.

Before Darwin, Europeans believed God created humans and animals and they never changed. So what Darwin was saying at that time was controversial. Thanks to him and these tiny finches, now most people know about evolution and the idea that everything, and everyone, is constantly changing.

My favourite bird was the blue-footed booby. Their feet have a glorious turquoise colour thanks to their fish diet. The bluer their feet are, the healthier they are, so female boobies are looking for males with the brightest blue feet. When you grow up, boys, make sure you wear colourful shoes too!

Galápagos marine iguanas;
Facing Page, Clockwise from top left: **frigate bird, baby Galápagos sea lion, blue-footed boobies, Galápagos land iguana**

One of my favorite things during this trip was to sit on the deck of the ship.

In the evenings Uncle Ji and I would relax there. This is the first father-son trip that just the two of us have taken, and I was happy to share this time with him. We would feel the wind on our faces, admire the passing islands, and watch the frigate birds that would fly above us following the ship. Sometimes we would sip a glass of whiskey and watch the sun set, surrounded by the immense ocean. Everything was so quiet and peaceful, and I felt far away from everyday life.

I'm not used to this because São Paulo is always so loud and packed with cars and people. At night on the ship, we would look up at the sky and see billions of stars and the Milky Way. It had been a long time since I had seen such a bright sky. It made me realise again how small we are. Earth is as tiny as one grain of sand in the entire beach of the universe.

Did you know Grandpa was an earth science teacher in Korea? I hope one day we can look up at a brilliant sky like this together so I can tell you everything I know about the stars and the universe. Sometimes I think that we humans don't know much about our own planet, but then I remember that we learn more with every generation. We each have a role to play in discovering new things and sharing our knowledge.

On the next-to-last day of the trip, we went to Isla Santa Cruz, where we visited the Charles Darwin Research Station, founded in 1964 to preserve several species of tortoises in danger of extinction. They're magnificent and gentle animals that can live more than a hundred years. But they are threatened, partly because pirates and conquistadores would eat them as food. We were told that tortoises were a convenient food source that could survive months without nourishment. Sailors stacked them in their ships and gradually ate them. Thousands of Galápagos tortoises were killed throughout the years.

Back on our ship it was time to say goodbye to the crew and all our fellow passengers. For the past week we'd gotten to know one another, and we grew closer as we did everything together. Several passengers, who learned that Uncle Ji and I were there as guests to document my journey for this magazine, asked us if we could share some of my drawings. So we made a short presentation, and people seemed to enjoy it.

After the last dinner, as I sat on the deck of the ship to look at the bright stars for one final time before heading back home, I thought about you—Arthur, Allan, and Astro—and I remembered when I was about your age. Back then I used to look at the night sky all the time, and I would count all the stars and learn about constellations from my own grandparents.

At a certain point in my life, for reasons I don't understand, I stopped looking at the sky. Maybe because I lived so many years in a big city with tall buildings and polluted air. Maybe because I was too busy working. But tonight, on this ship, I felt alive and awake as I found myself looking again at my old friends.

I hope you too will come to the Galápagos one day and experience this place for yourself. I hope you'll sail the same waters, walk the same trails, hold the same grains of sand and let them run through your hand. I hope you'll watch the same birds, sea lions, and tortoises and see for yourself all the splendour and fragility of nature. One night, after a day of activities, you will come out to the deck of your ship. Maybe you'll be alone; maybe you'll be with loved ones. Then you'll look up to the sky and be in awe of its immensity brightened by the infinite number of stars. I hope you'll remember that your grandpa was looking at the same stars in the same place. At that moment, my gaze, travelling past galaxies right now, would have touched the stars and travelled back through the universe, and will be reaching your eyes. And we'll be connected in the beautiful mystery of life and the universe.

Travel Wise: Galápagos

WHEN TO GO

The climate is unusually dry for the tropics. June to November is the cooler, drier season. January to April is the warmer, wetter season. November/December and May/June are transition months. But the Galápagos are a year-round destination with much of interest, no matter the month.

WHAT TO PACK

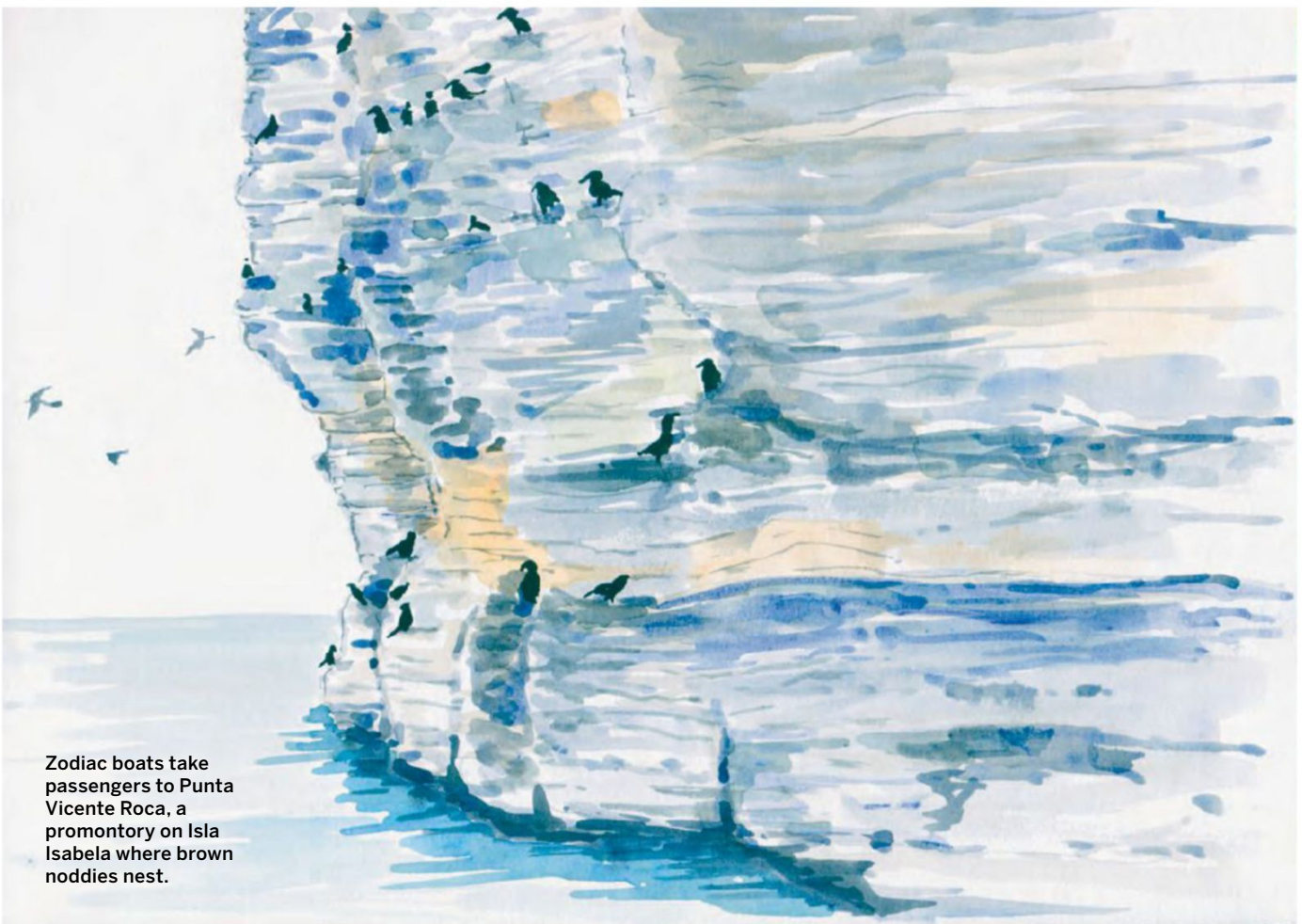
The atmosphere on board Nat Geo ships in the Galápagos is casual, so leave the formal wear at home. Do pack water sandals/shoes for wet landings, as well as closed shoes with good soles for hiking over rugged lava and uneven terrain. Bring a pair of knee-high socks to wear with the provided rubber boots for tortoise viewing on Isla Santa Cruz. Good binoculars add immeasurably to enjoying wildlife.

GETTING THERE

International flights arrive at Guayaquil, Ecuador, where guests spend a night before flying to the Galápagos. There are no direct flights from India to Guayaquil. All flights generally have two stops, with one being in a South American country.

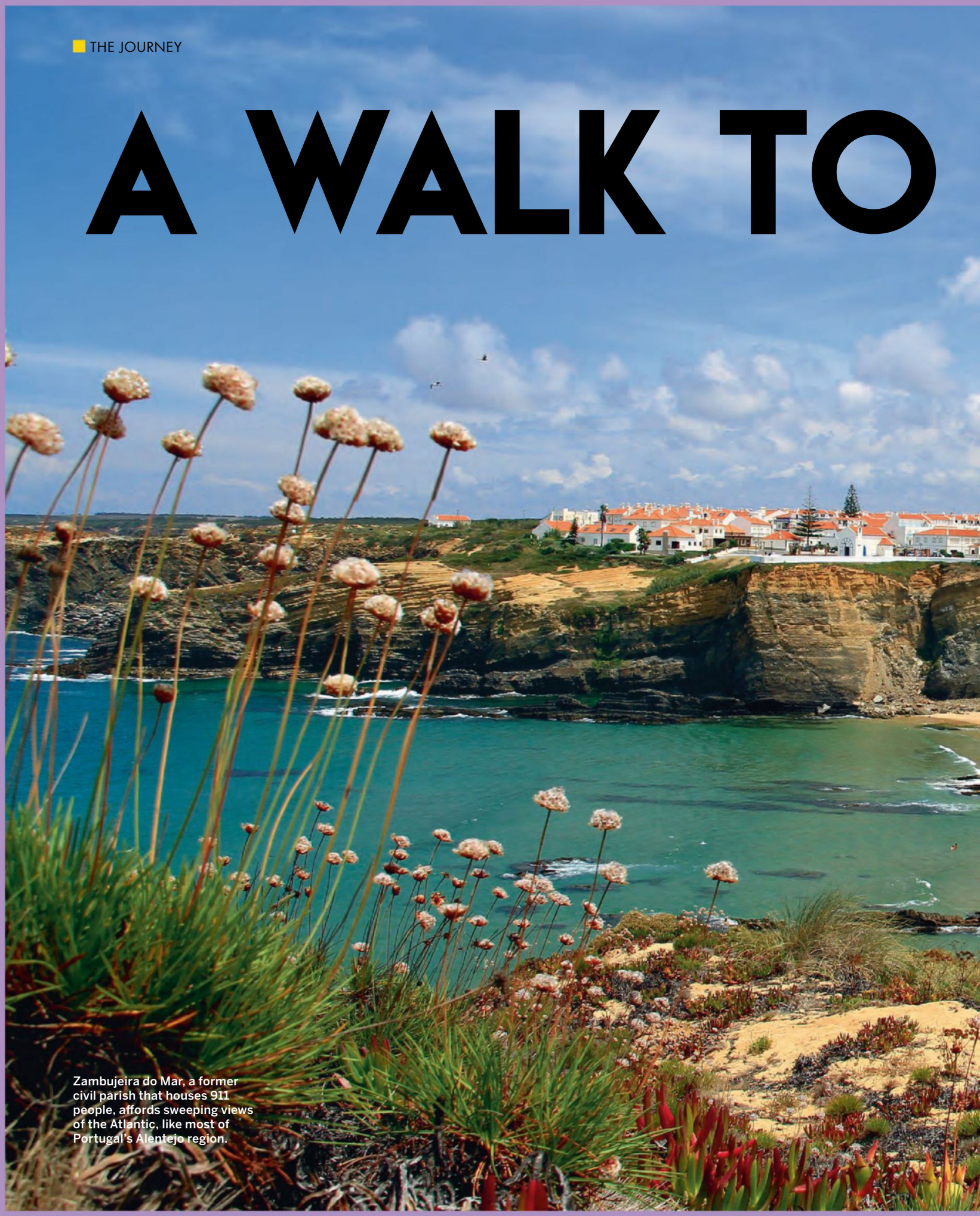
MUST-SEE ANIMALS

Galápagos giant tortoises are an iconic species for all visitors. You can see them reliably in the highlands of Isla Santa Cruz. The nesting blue-footed booby, Nazca booby, red-footed booby, frigate bird, and several species of Darwin's finches are widely distributed among the islands. The waved albatross nests exclusively on Isla Española, and the flightless cormorant is found only on Isla Isabela and Isla Fernandina. Galápagos sea lions, Galápagos fur seals, and Sally Lightfoot crabs are consistently seen, as are the Galápagos penguin, green sea turtles, and marine and land iguanas.



Zodiac boats take passengers to Punta Vicente Roca, a promontory on Isla Isabela where brown noddies nest.

A WALK TO



Zambujeira do Mar, a former civil parish that houses 911 people, affords sweeping views of the Atlantic, like most of Portugal's Alentejo region.

REMEMBER

Portugal's craggy, coastal Alentejo region challenges hikers who trade sweat for sunsets

BY DEBASHREE MAJUMDAR

CARAVANA/ISTOCK/GETTY IMAGES

Alentejo, which extends along southern and southwestern Portugal, is dotted with quaint villages made for some very scenic idling.

The night still holds its grip over Lisbon at six a.m., as does the biting cold, on an April morning when

we walk into the bus depot to catch our ride to Alentejo, a region that extends along southern and southwestern Portugal. My husband and I are focussed on the southwest. Our plan is to walk over three days across deserted trails by the Atlantic and through sparsely populated villages that sit away from the coastline. We board the deluxe bus, and are soon on our way, hearts filling with the thrill of witnessing the slow peeling of a new land, and a new set of people with ways of living so distinct from what I've left behind in India, or even the big-city bustle of Lisbon. The bus to Vila Nova Milfontes, three and a half hours from Lisbon, is packed to the brim with hikers and tourists set to celebrate Easter by the ocean. The surprising thing about Lisbon is how quickly one can reach the deep countryside. Within minutes of crossing the Vasco da Gama Bridge—longest in Europe and stretching like a river of concrete and steel over of an estuary of the Tagus river—one enters the sometimes dreamy, sometimes ruinous Alentejo. Alentejo, we learn, translates to 'the land beyond the Tagus,' which turns out to be the longest river in the Iberian Peninsula, locally known as Tejo.

The driver and the conductor keep up a constant stream of conversation on the journey and play old Michael Jackson hits on the radio. The sound of Portuguese, mingling with MJ's quick beats and upbeat lyrics creates an endearing, almost lyrical atmosphere—enough to make me switch off the music playing on my phone. Adjusting to slow-stripping sunlight all around, my eyes briefly register passing villages and swathes of empty land where cork oaks grow in clumps, their cropped crowns swaying in the chilly breeze.

LAND BEYOND THE RIVER

Although there are multiple trails to explore in Alentejo, we have picked the Fishermen's Trail on the Rota Vicentina circuit, running along the coastline for a total of 125 kilometres. Tracing paths used by locals to access beaches and fishing hotspots, it comprises a single track, divided into five sections, and is well-marked with green and blue horizontal lines that look like '='. The track courses along dramatic cliffs and sandy beaches revealing stunning views of a silvery blue infinity. One can count on harsh, cold ocean winds at all times.

We're dropped off at Vila Nova Milfontes—a town of identical whitewashed houses with red-tiled roofs, and spring flowers blooming in the balconies. We reach well before noon and wait until the bus is just a speck on the horizon to change into our hiking shoes and hit the trail, a short walk away. Keeping the Atlantic to our right, we cross a bridge over a secluded, dried-out estuary, take right and walk into a forest rich with tall grass, cork oaks, and wild yellow and orange flowers growing in such profusion that I'm tempted to stop and stare every few minutes. The scraggly wild, and the expanse of the Atlantic, spread out in calm, patient rolls of blue, take my breath away. Out of nowhere, a song rises to my lips.

ENRIQUE DÍAZ/7CERO/MOMENT/GETTY IMAGES

COASTLINE DRIFT

On day one, we scale down our ambition to a moderate 11 kilometres. We've had an early start and by the time we hit the trail, the sun is right above our heads, bright and fierce, rendering the sky and the ocean indistinguishable in its shimmering expanse. While walking can be therapeutic and full of adventure with undiscovered trails, forests and quaint villages scattered along the way, it can, like everything else in life, feel repetitive after a point. At the end of the day, it's all about putting one damned foot before the other, covering new ground, all the while watching out for those pesky blisters. What keeps the journey alive—other than your will to persevere—are encounters with strangers from across the world, even if only as throwaway chats. We too, meet fellow hikers along the way; there's an unspoken understanding of keeping enough distance from the next walker so as not to crowd each other. When we do cross paths, we smile, remark on the beauty of our surroundings and walk right on. The German couple we meet are wearing large backpacks and seem to be camping—wet towels are pinned to the sides of their bags, a Scotch-Brite hooked to a zipper. They give us a friendly wave as they walk past, supporting their weight on the slim, broken branches that they use as walking poles.

For hours, we have to ourselves the pristine blue coastline, the air filled with sounds of crashing waves, screeching gulls and the now-familiar strong breeze that takes the edge off the mid-afternoon sun. This ecosystem of sounds keeps us company for two to three hours till a turn away from the ocean plunges us into a pocket of deep silence. We almost stop in our tracks to acknowledge it. I spot the beginning of a pine forest, which smells so sweet and soul-settling, I want to bottle the scent, carry it back with me.

Before we settle into our guest house at Almograve, the picture-pretty parish that's our stop for the night, a late-in-the-day lunch of sardine pâté with bread and local beer relieves us of bellowing hunger.

A post-sundown stroll through Almograve leads us to a group of Nepali workers who greet us with a cheery "namaste." A fierce chill weaves through the town after sundown, and the roads empty out on cue. The bus stop that stands right across our guest house looks like an abandoned shelter. As the night darkens, the wind howls and the stars hang low enough for the plucking. After a hard day's walking in the wilderness we feel grateful for the creature comforts of a warm shower, a heated room and a comfortable bed.

The writer walked Rota Vicentina's (left) Fisherman's Trail, starting at Vila Nova Milfontes (centre); The beaches of river-wrapped Odeceixe (right) are popular in summer.

HANS.SLEGERS/SHUTTERSTOCK (TREK), CHIARA SALVADORI/MOMENT OPEN/GETTY IMAGES (BUILDING)

BEAUTY IN BREAKDOWN

We make an early start the following day. The forecast predicts rain, and sure enough, the sky's bogged down by the weight of angry grey clouds. But we manage to cover our stipulated 22 kilometres after walking for eight continuous hours that leaves us ecstatic and exhausted. The scenes before us are versatile and ever-shifting, changing from the blues of the ocean to dramatic cliffs where we spot storks building nests for their younglings. There are reddish dunes of sand that yield under our feet. The stretch suddenly gives way to fields of

bright orange and green succulents, then opening out to small fishing harbours. We walk through villages that have houses built in clumps beside large farms where the ocean winds don't penetrate and the dogs are friendly and lazy.

When the long walk tires me out, I'm tempted to think of shorter alternative routes. But as in life, so on hikes, there is no turning back. You just follow the trails, make the decisions, and absorb the consequences—in this case a pain so debilitating that I'm reduced to hobbling. I watch incredibly fit Europeans ace it like an everyday affair, and wish I too, could enjoy it as much, in my moment of pain.

We make a stop at Zambujeira do Mar, a former civil parish which houses 911 people, as the board at the beginning of the town so precisely states. The town is spread over a few neatly maintained residential lanes dotted with blemish-free houses that look straight out of a real estate advertisement. A local informs us that the buildings get a fresh coat of paint each year to battle corrosive ocean winds. During our time there, most residents remain out of sight, giving the town an unlived, ghostly vibe. I do however, spot one woman watching T.V. and eating her dinner of chicken legs sitting in her front room, the door to which opens onto the road. In another house is an ancient couple, all wrinkles and spots, sitting still, looking out at an empty street.

ALENTEJO UNVEILED

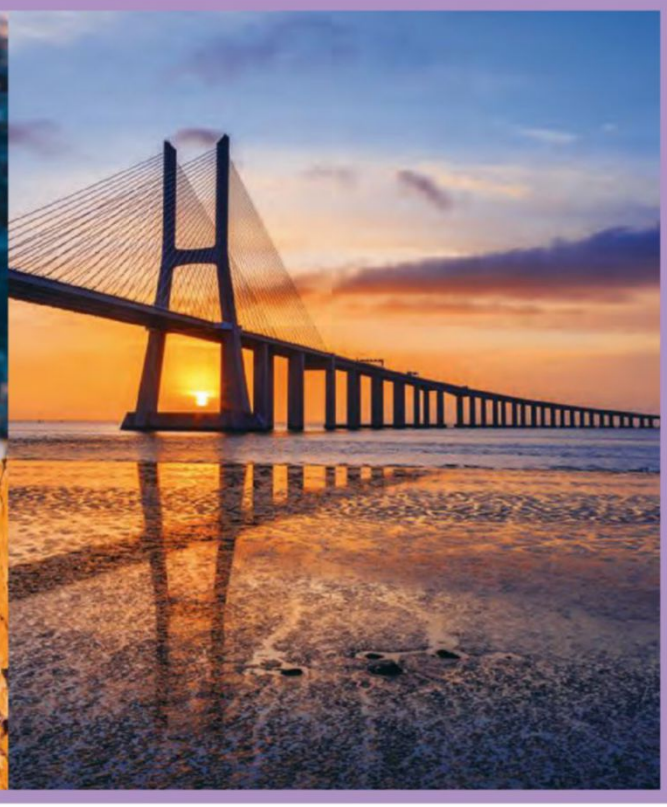
On the third and last day of walking the Rota Vicentina, we head to the village of Odeceixe, over an 18-kilometre trail which includes climbs over numerous jagged rockfaces, often dropping into narrow bogs of flowing mountain rivers that make it precarious to cross over to the other side. Failure to land on marshy grounds will send one hurtling into body-disfiguring boulders and gravel.

The rises and dips stretch out on an otherwise amiable trek and when after three hours I discover we've only covered four and a half kilometres, I am crestfallen and almost lose my will to continue. I complain like a petulant child, drink water, while my husband waits for the storm to blow over, walking by my side when I'm ready again. We pass sand-biking enthusiasts shredding the still air with the screams of their mean machines revving up.

As we approach Odeceixe, the sky first turns a pale orange and then pink. We huddle together in the vastness of the silence and serenity that surrounds us. The fact that our bodies are sore from the hike makes the hiatus precious. We watch horses graze along the green outskirts, and hear the shepherd dogs growl at passing cyclists. When it's time to walk again, we down bottles of Gatorade till we are in high gear.

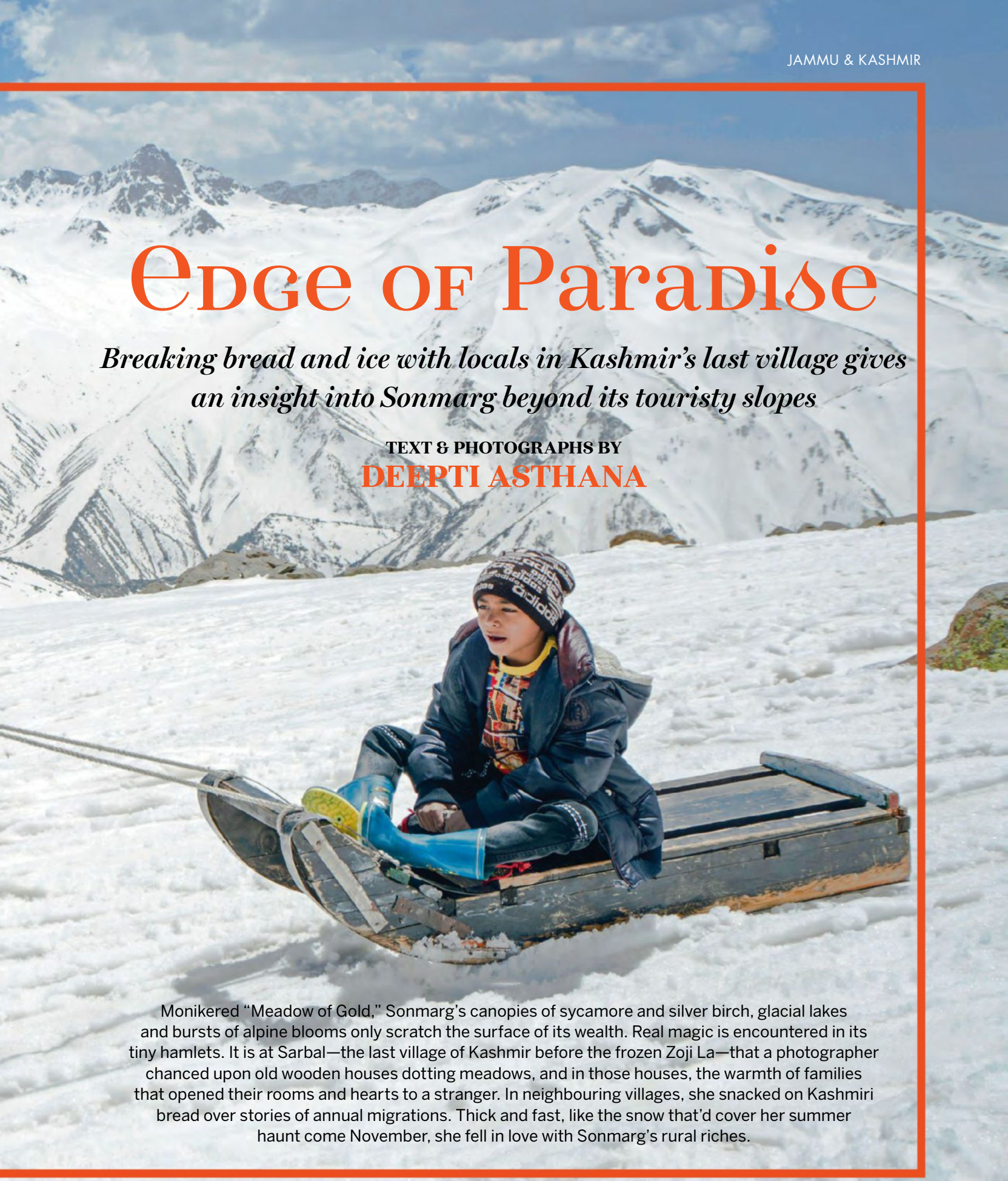
Bathed in early April breeze, luminous in the glow of a descending sun, a whole wonderful world settles before our eyes—green, golden, blue, and abundant. This then is Alentejo. The rural coastal immensity that lies beyond the buzzing, crowded cities of Lisbon and Porto. Where days melt into the evenings as gently as the Atlantic's surf breaks on its beaches. Where dusk holds its breath till the storks and pigeons return to safety against a rosy sky—as night waits beyond curtains of Cumulus to descend softly on its ample, lush fields.

The trail passes by fishing villages, forests and cliffs with nesting storks (left); Vasco da Gama Bridge (right), Europe's longest, stretches over Tagus river into Alentejo.



ANUNES PHOTO/MOMENT/GETTY IMAGES (BEACH), JUAN CARLOS MUÑOZ/AGEFOTOSTOCK/DINODIA PHOTO LIBRARY (STORK), YI JIANG/500PX/500PX/GETTY IMAGES (BRIDGE)

Sonmarg, about 80 kilometres off the Srinagar-Leh highway, wields many charms including its vast repository of snow sports. The prospect of sledging down argentine slopes, or snow biking, hiking, skiing and horse riding across vales, passes and frozen lakes draws adventure-buffs from across the world to this haunt.



Edge of Paradise

Breaking bread and ice with locals in Kashmir's last village gives an insight into Sonmarg beyond its touristy slopes

TEXT & PHOTOGRAPHS BY
DEEPTI ASTHANA

Monikered "Meadow of Gold," Sonmarg's canopies of sycamore and silver birch, glacial lakes and bursts of alpine blooms only scratch the surface of its wealth. Real magic is encountered in its tiny hamlets. It is at Sarbal—the last village of Kashmir before the frozen Zoji La—that a photographer chanced upon old wooden houses dotting meadows, and in those houses, the warmth of families that opened their rooms and hearts to a stranger. In neighbouring villages, she snacked on Kashmiri bread over stories of annual migrations. Thick and fast, like the snow that'd cover her summer haunt come November, she fell in love with Sonmarg's rural riches.

In summer, Sarbal is a page out of a fairy-tale book. Arms of white-caked land shed ice under the sun, revealing streaks of green (top); Families that had left its imposing elevation of 9,186 feet return to their houses (bottom), crossing a rickety wooden bridge that links the village with a motorable road. In the wake of homecoming, Sarbal's air is redolent with life, and the scent of *namkeen chai.*

As a basecamp to her excursions, the photographer parked herself in a boutique hotel called The Villa Himalaya in Kullen village on the outskirts of Sonmarg. With the interiors mirroring Kashmiri aesthetics of woodwork and nature motifs, and stunning views of the Sindh river outside, the place was perfect for drawing up plans for six months of village-hopping.

Nazir Raina, the photographer's guide from Sarbal, took her to meet a family that had returned to the village. In between conversations, joined in by the village sarpanch, windows and carpets were dusted (bottom), coal stuffed into the *bukhari* and fresh bread baked (top), for a meal that would go down in her memory.

School-aged children, especially girls (top), don't always have access to routine education due to poor infrastructure and connectivity, and the annual migration. Many spend the summer months reaping the fields or helping with household chores; The photographer met Ubdul Rashik Nayak (bottom) who has been working as a porter for the last twenty years in Sonmarg. Nayak served in the Indian Army for a couple of years, and lended perspective on Sonmarg's tourism in times of both turmoil and peace.

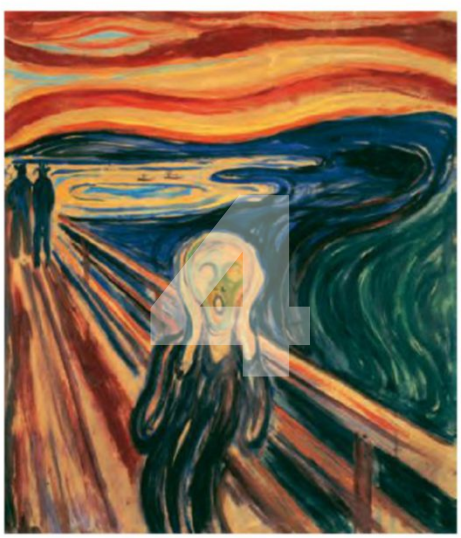
TRAVEL QUIZ

TEST YOUR TRAVEL IQ

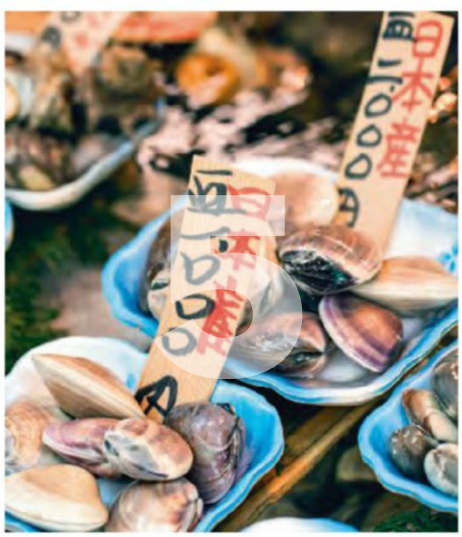
IN WHICH AFRICAN COUNTRY COULD YOU DIG INTO A PLATE OF NDOLÉ, A NUT-AND-MEAT STEW?

ONE CAN TOUR A FORMER ROYAL RESIDENCE, THE 19TH-CENTURY IOLANI PALACE IN THIS U.S. STATE?

WHICH EASTERN EUROPEAN CITY WOULD YOU GO TO ATTEND THE ANNUAL GOULASH FESTIVAL?



THIS SCANDANAVIAN CAPITAL CITY HOUSES THREE OF THE FOUR COPIES OF MUNCH'S "THE SCREAM."



WHERE WAS TOKYO'S MOST FAMOUS, AND THE WORLD'S LARGEST, WHOLESALE FISH MARKET TSUKIJI, MOVED TO LAST YEAR?

NAMED SO BECAUSE IT OBSTRUCTS THE VIEW OF PORT PHILLIP BAY, WHERE IN AUSTRALIA IS THE 2,625-FOOT MT. DISAPPOINTMENT?

ANSWERS **1.** CAMEROON **2.** HAWAII **3.** SZOLNOK, HUNGARY **4.** OSLO, NORWAY **5.** TOYOSU **6.** VICTORIA

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