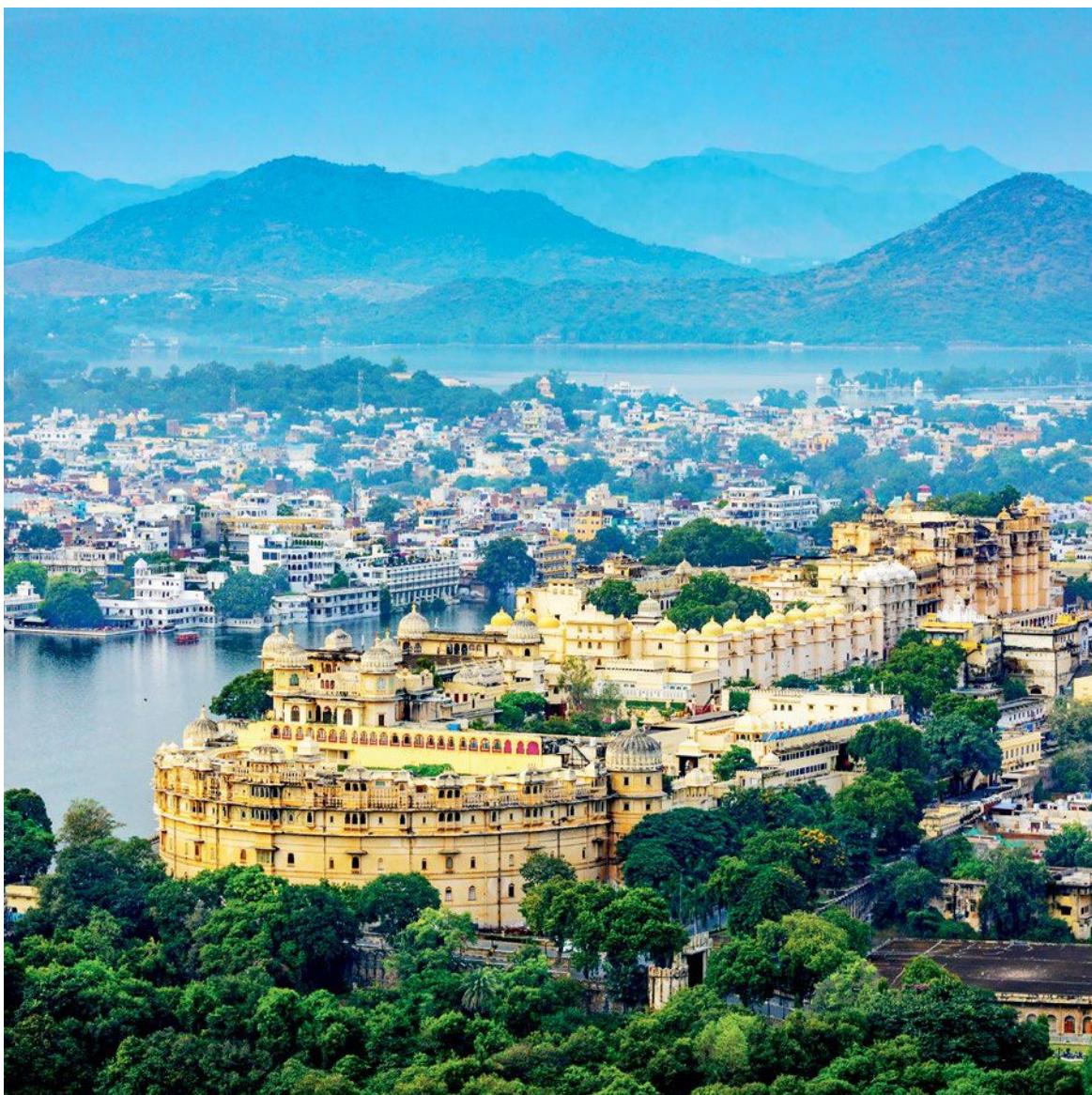


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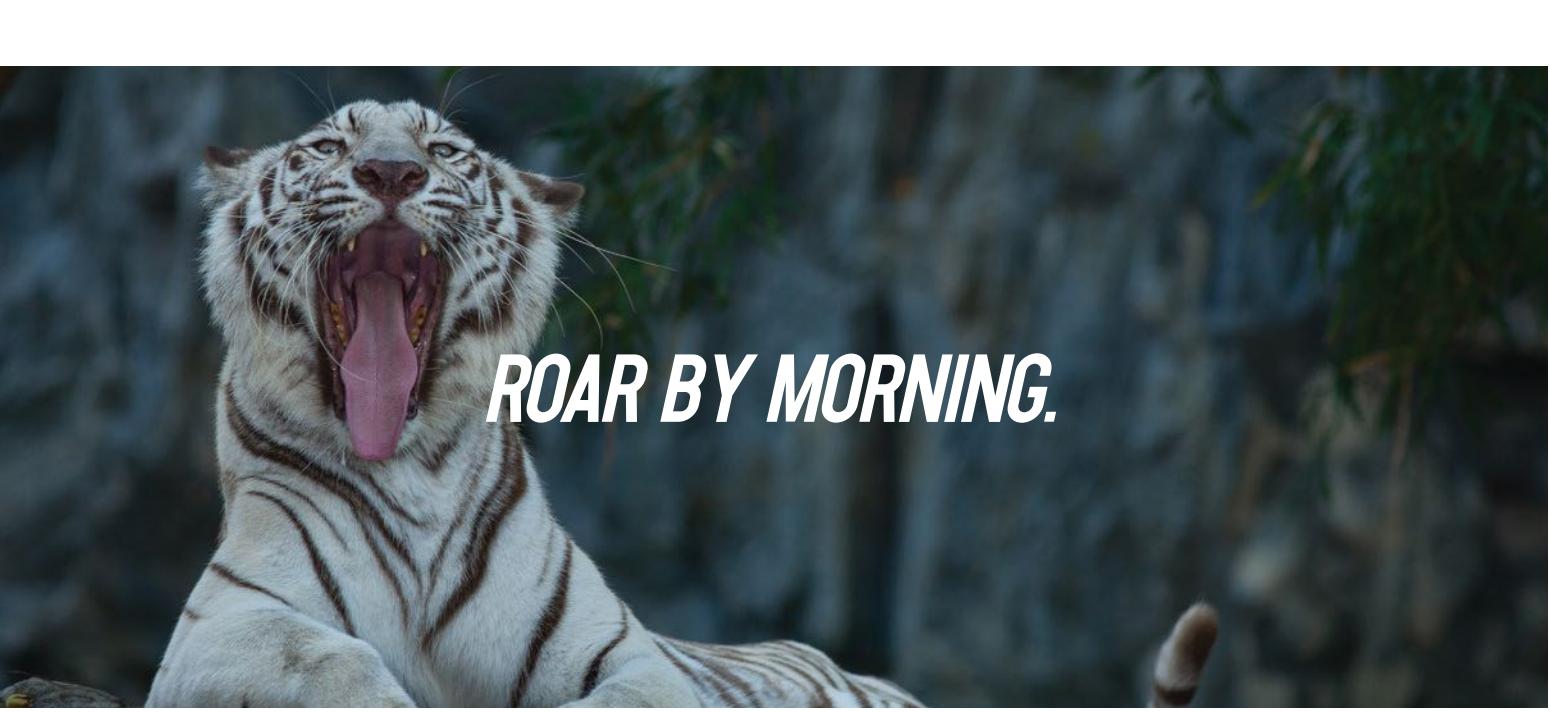
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Cover Photography SHUTTERSTOCK
Location UDAIPUR, RAJASTHAN

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Our photographer of the month, **Adish Baruah**, captures a joyous moment in the everyday life of a boy in Nagaland as he dabbles with his favourite sport.



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DI Editor's Note

01/11/2018



on the right walked Nachi, in well-worn shorts and a T-shirt. This was not the man or the place I had expected to find.

The verandah of the outhouse was a piece of work (and some art). Beer bottle wind-chimes, a collection of *khukris*, hats, boots (those were in use), an improvised musical instrument that played with water. Drum sets in the inner room. This was his home. Again, not what I had expected.

Why now have I gone into such elaborate description of Nachi's establishment? Because this was a man who had checked-out from the system and he told you that clearly, though subtly, through every art installation on his property—in the unfinished wooden cat sculpture, in his basic, though super-nice, Airbnb cottage.

He had quit his well-paying job in Bengaluru to move back to his estate (earlier run by his father). Life as a small-time coffee planter wasn't easy, but he made it count and there was enough for sustenance. He hung out with other young people who had also returned home to Coorg and he was looking forward to getting married soon, to a naturalist, who could catch snakes, he told me.

Nachi, if he returned to the city life, at best would be supremely unhappy and at worst would probably go insane. If we, the likes of me and you (the city folks), on the other hand, chose to go the Nachi way, we would probably find the reverse, contentment and peace. It's not easy, to move away from the creature habits to real life comforts, to give up money and ambition and trade it in for peace and frugal living. No, I'm not being condescending, I am only questioning myself as I write.

Ready to check-out yet?

AJAY KHULLAR
Editor

Contributors



HIMMAT RANA

A writer and photographer, Himmat is on a mission to explore and learn everything that is India. In the cover story, he travels close to the heart of the country, its villages, to live a day in the life of its people.



SHOMA ABHYANKAR

Quitting her job as an architect and interior designer to write, Shoma now travels the country and runs her blog, Astonishing India. She is back, traversing Thanjavur and revealing its timelessness.



SUMAN KUMAR RAJU RUDRARAJU

A nature and landscape photographer, Suman travels to mountains and forests, photographing unexplored landscapes of India. In this issue, he unravels the Dudhwa Tiger Reserve.



SHIRIN MEHROTRA

A freelance travel and food writer with a special interest in the history of food, Shirin loves to eat local. In her story, she writes about the historical wonderland of Osmanabad.



SUMIT SINGH JAMWAL

An avid traveller, explorer and experience curator, Sumit runs his own experiential travel company, Escape Route. This time, he captures the most romantic experiences of Udaipur in his frame.



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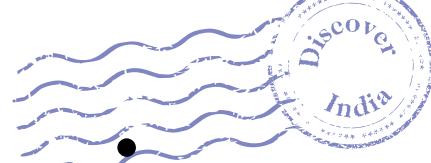


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Missives

WE GO WITH YOUR FLOW



The Perfect Frame

Each time I get myself a copy, I cannot stop looking at *Discover India*'s photographs! The photo essay on the Drokpa tribe of the Himalaya this time was simply spellbinding. I have always loved your photo selection across the magazine, but you outdid yourself with this one—it is by far the best I have seen. After looking at it again and again, I am now going to try getting it framed for my room.

ADITI SINGH Pune

So Much To See

I wouldn't have imagined such hidden treasures in the heart of India, in a place like Chhattisgarh, of which so little



is known. The writer has done a fabulous job of peeling the layers off of the hidden gem, and laid out details

that have my next trip planned. I am now wondering why do we go all the way to see the Niagara Falls when we have such picturesque waterfalls right in the centre of our country.

HEMANT CHOWDHARY Mumbai

Endless Bucket Lists

I had never heard of these abodes of tranquility in what I have always thought of as bustling places for just beachy fun. *Discover India*, with every issue, manages to uncover something unique about India and gives a new perspective to known places, debunking established checklists and everything popular. Kudos!

NANDINI BEHAL Mumbai

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For The Love Of Food

The story, *Veggie Wonders*, was a revelation. I made a choice to be a vegetarian a long time ago, and while there were very few around me who followed, it is great to know that the conscious choice



is picking up. I also got tit-bits for my next cooking experiment. If all doesn't go well, I have your restaurant recommendations to fall back on!

SHRUTI GARG Bengaluru

Festive Fever

A look into the *Bonedi Bari* celebrations in Kolkata was a unique slice of the festival of Durga Puja. In Delhi, I have en-



joyed being part of the *pandal*-hopping in CR Park, but to read about the old traditions and to know that they are still alive was a celebration on its own.

AMAN JAIN New Delhi

Gateway

ENTER HERE FOR INDIA



ALAMY

A Wide-Angle Perspective & Overview Of India

INDIA UPDATES

Festivals, Celebrations &
To-Dos For The Month

WEEKEND BREAK

Heritage Hotspot Mysore & Rural
Luxury In Unchagaon

CHECK-IN

jüSTa Sajjangarh Resort & Spa,
Udaipur & Evolve Back, Coorg

PEOPLE

Annette Philip, Indian Face Of
The Band, Women Of The World

SAVE THE DATE!



RANN UTSAV 2018-19

Think over 400 illuminated luxury tents pitched in the middle of nowhere, folk performances under the bed of a million stars, music filling up the backdrop and the aroma of traditional Gujarati cuisine lingering in the air. The otherwise deserted monochromatic salt marshes of the Great Rann of Kutch turn into a riot of colours and come to life for three months every year with the onset of the famous Rann Utsav. Showcasing the culture and heritage of Kutch through a plethora of events, this celebration also allows you to indulge in various adventures and excursions

to surrounding destinations while exuding the euphoria of festivities.

When Starts on November 1

Where Rann Utsav Tent City, Dhordo, Bhuj, Kutch, Gujarat

Why should you go To see the white salt marshlands shimmer in the dark, under the moonlight.

Buy tickets at in.bookmyshow.com/events/rann-utsav-2018-19/ET00085207



DIWALI

Despite its calendar being jam-packed with festivals, India is still and will always be known most for its Diwali. A festival for one and for all, it holds different values for different people. Celebrating the triumph of good over evil, Diwali (or Deepawali) first and foremost celebrates the return of Lord Rama along with his wife Sita to the kingdom of Ayodhya after completing the exile of 14 years, according to Hindu mythology. For Jains, Diwali signifies the attainment of *moksha* by Mahavira (the founder of Jainism's central tenets). For Sikhs, Diwali denotes the 1619 release of Guru Hargobind (the sixth of Sikhism's 10 gurus), by the Mughal emperor Jehangir. Different the reasons may be, but the festival is all about merry-making. The day is marked by lighting the houses with *diyas* and candles, preparing traditional foods, making *rangolis*, fireworks, and worshipping Lord Ganesha and Goddess Laxmi.

When November 7

Where Across India

Why should you celebrate Because it is the only time when the entire country is brightly lit with lights and all the hearts are filled with happiness.

Did you know The celebrations of the 'festival of light' are stretched for five days, starting from Dhan Teras, Choti Diwali, Deepawali, Govardhan Puja and lastly, Bhai Dooj.



MANNARASALA AYILYAM

An ancient secluded snake temple in a forest glade, a Brahmin priestess as its chief and over 30,000 figurines and images adorning the lanes and the trees along the way—Mannarasala Ayilyam is not just another temple festival. No wonder thousands of devotees flock the Mannarasala Sree Nagaraja Temple every year to be a part of the ceremonial procession with serpent idols being taken to *illam* (the Brahmin's ancestral home) and offerings being made to the snakes. One of a kind, the festival is dedicated to the snake lord and the presiding deity of the temple, Nagaraja.

When November 1

Where Mannarasala Sree Nagaraja Temple, Harippad, Alleppey, Kerala

Why should you go To see thousands of snake images at the temple and indulge in the cultural ethos of the place.

Please Note Since it is a religious affair, dress accordingly and observe the sanctity.

DHARAMSHALA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

Promising an exciting mix of cinema, music, art, conversations and creative camaraderie, the Dharamshala International Film Festival (DIFF) is all geared up to host its seventh edition. With the primary intention of promoting art and bringing the world to the sleepy hamlet of Dharamshala, the festival will yet again bring the town to life with numerous workshops, screenings and discussions over independent cinema. Expect movie buffs, filmmakers and travellers from across the world coming together to experience contemporary art and cinema while bringing independent media practices to the Himalaya.

When November 1-4

Where Tibetan Children's Village School, Upper Dharamshala, Himachal Pradesh

Why should you go For the love of films and the quaint venue that will make you go for a walk through the woods.

What's more There will also be *momo* joints, bookshops and souvenir hideouts to explore!





POT MAYA

There can be nothing more beautiful than two art forms coming together. So, the feeling of watching award-winning native artists called *patuaas*, of village Naya showcase *patachitra* (an ancient folk painting art from Bengal) in front of the audience while merrily singing *pater gaan* or the folk songs during the annual festival of Pot Maya is unmatched. Pick for yourself from the endless painted items on sale, ranging from clothes to curtains, home décor, pots, handicrafts and much more. The three-day festival of Pot Maya is an endeavour to save the ancient art form

from dying and is definitely a must-attend if art is what stirs your heart and soul.

When November 16-18

Where Naya, Pingla, Paschim Medinipur, West Bengal

Why should you go To see the remote village turn into a giant open art space.

Please Note Be sure to make prior bookings with the organising community, Bangla Natok, as there are no hotels in the region.



INDIA INTERNATIONAL CHERRY BLOSSOM FESTIVAL

In its third season, the Indian version of International Cherry Blossom Festival brings in a breath of fresh air, quite literally. Celebrating the time of autumn when the roads in Shillong are bathed in pink with the Himalayan Cherry Blossoms, the unique festival features a wide range of events, including guided night walks, live music, folk and tribal dance performances, storytelling sessions, rock concerts, fashion shows and an amateur golf tournament. Once done with the craziness, take a glass of local wine, grab a plate of a local delight and sit back gazing at the surreal beauty of these little pink wonders.

When November 14-17

Where Shillong, Meghalaya

Why should you go To see the bright pink hue taking over the town; it is a natural wonder like none other.

What's more Entry for all the events is absolutely free!

CHHATH PUJA

As soon as the Diwali fever begins to die down, the fervour of another north Indian festival begins to take over. Devoted to worshipping the sun, Chhath Puja is one of the biggest festivals celebrated in northern parts of the country and draws hundreds of thousands to the *ghats* by the holy rivers every year. Prayers and offerings called *arghya* are offered to the Sun God, folk songs are sung by the women, daylong fasts are kept, dips are taken in the holy waters, and *kheer* and *puris* are prepared as *prasad* on all four days of the festival.

When November 13

Where Particularly in Bihar and also in parts of Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, Assam, and West Bengal

Why should you celebrate To immerse in what is true devotion.

Did you know The fast kept on the third day is 36 hours long and does not allow even a sip of water!



LIFE IN COLOR INDIA

What if we tell you Holi is arriving a little early this time?

Well, the world's largest paint party is all set for its maiden innings on Indian soil and it will be no less than the festival of colours. Life In Color is all about paint blasts, EDM DJ battles, soaring aerial acts, live art and more. People are the canvas and there's no dearth of fun ways to paint them here. With over 500 successful shows across the world, this one's hard to miss. Come, see Life In Color paint the world in all shades, one city at a time.

When November 18

Where JLN Stadium, New Delhi

Why should you go

For endless fun and of course, an unforgettable EDM experience.

Buy tickets at

in.bookmyshow.com/events/life-in-color-india/ET00083081

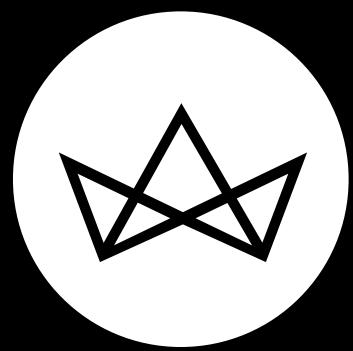


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• MYSORE

MYSORE OF ROYAL LINEAGE

There was once a time when royals of the Vijayanagara Empire flocked to Bangalore (now called Bengaluru), their summer abode, far from the scorching sun of their residence. It's been centuries since their decline and how the times have changed! The city crowd is always looking for quick getaways, and Mysore, hot or not, always makes the list—it was, after all, a capital for the royal court for centuries and continues to hold regal appeal.

About 150 km from Bengaluru, Mysore can only barely be experienced over the weekend with everything it has to offer, but one sure can try. A trek to the Chamundi hill may be the perfect start. If you start early you can reach the hilltop for sunrise and watch the mellow light wash over the entire city. A quick peek into the famous

Chamundeshwari temple at the top, a *chai* and *pakodas* break and you are set for a day of exploration. If you are there on a Sunday though, you may want to consider going to the hill when the Mysore Palace is lit and watch it gleam from atop.

Speaking of the Mysore Palace, it would be sinful to miss this dazzling display of art, architecture and wealth that has managed to remain almost untouched over time. Add to this a visit to the Jaganmohan Palace which houses the most exquisite southern art and St Philomena's Cathedral and you have yourself enough history.

The Mysore Zoo is a must—tigers, lions, jaguars, giraffes, leopards, crocodiles, wallabies, sloth bears, zebras... the list goes on. The Sand Sculpture Museum is worth its money, as is the Regional Museum of National

History and the Jayalakshmi Vilas Mansion Museum Complex.

But if there is anything worth experiencing in the city, it is its free spirit. Food is never an afterthought, and while there are watering holes too many to count, some of the best for a meal fit for a hungry Maharaja would be Poojari's Fishland, Bopy's, Hotel RRR and Vinayak Maylari.

■ NAVIGATOR

Getting there Mysore has flights and trains connecting it to all major cities. It is a little over a three-hour drive from Bengaluru.

Stay Mysore caters to all budgets with its stay options. Radisson Blu, Country Inn & Suites, Royal Orchid Brindavan Garden Palace & Spa are great options for those seeking luxury. If you're not, there are plenty of B&Bs to choose from.

Travel Tip A lot of the tourist spots are closed on Monday, so plan around it.



(Clockwise from left) The Mysore Palace is a sight like no other, royal with its glittering facade and untouched interiors; tigers, jaguars, giraffes, sloth bears, zebras, elephants, the list of animals in the Mysore Zoo goes on; the gothic-style St Philomena's Church is inspired by the Cologne Cathedral in Germany; Jaganmohan Palace houses the paintings of Raja Ravi Varma commissioned by the Mysore Maharaja



Checklist

- **Mysore Dasara** It is the time when the city is at its liveliest. The Chamundi hill is where the demon Mahishasura was killed by Goddess Parvati, here named Chamundeshwari, and the festival is celebrated with much fanfare.

- **Eat** You cannot leave Mysore without trying the famous Mysore Pak. The sweet, which dates to the reign of Krishna Raja Wadiyar IV, is known for its rich, melt-in-the-mouth texture which will have you wanting more.

- **Go trekking** The Chamundi hill is 1,001 steps away if you feel up to a climb. The steps were built in the 17th century by the then ruling Wodeyar (or Wadiyar) king and is located behind the JCB College area.

- **Shop** Close to Mysore is the toy factory of India, Channapatna. Known for its unique wood work, the toys are a must-buy. Also shop for sandalwood craft, if your pockets allow it.



DELHI



131 km Time 3 hours

UNCHAGAON

UNCHAGAON A SLICE OF RURAL LUXURY

Weekend getaways are water to the working parched souls, and the burgeoning options around the major metros are all the relief one could ask for. Unchagaon, amidst the hills and spa destinations around Delhi, is one such quaint village—a unique ‘of the soil’ experience—a perfect blend of mind, body and soul.

Only 131 km from the capital, between the famous Garhmukteshwar and Bulandshahr of Uttar Pradesh, Unchagaon manages to still be the road less travelled—a slice of heritage with its beautiful fort, nestled in the dust-filled terrain, a unique rural experience with terracotta pottery, jaggery making and serene surroundings by a stretch of the Ganges, famous for its chirping dolphins.

You can't but stay at the stately fort, The Fort Unchagaon. The present Raja Surendra Pal Singh inherited this early 19th century abode and took personal interest in its renovation, giving it a blend of 20th century colonial architecture. Over the years it has been updated with latest luxuries and offers plenty to do around the property itself—at the stables, the orchards, the swimming pool, or just basking in the sun on the terrace and in the gardens.

But while lazy days are all that weekend breaks are made for, a day in the village is a must, preferably on a bullock cart. The locals are more than willing to give you a lesson in pottery and take you through the process of making jaggery (force feeding it to you with cups

of *chai*). Head to the ghats in the evening and watch the sunset – if you're lucky, and patient, you might even catch a dolphin give a quick leap in the air!

The nights are for unwinding with a glass of wine by the bonfire, alongside local food made by the hospitable staff at the resort and performances by local dancers and musicians, before retiring to the rooms that will help you dream of the long-gone royal days.

■ NAVIGATOR

Getting there It is an easy drive from Delhi beyond Hapur, off the Moradabad highway.

Stay Accommodation is limited to The Fort Unchagaon.

Reservations +91 9999600365, resortunchagaon@gmail.com

Website www.unchagaonresorts.com



Checklist

- **Watch dolphins at play**

Unchagaon is known to be by a stretch of the Ganges that is famous for dolphin sightings. You can sit by the Mandu Ghat, dip your feet in the water, waiting for a few to come around. If you're lucky, you might even spot a crocodile!

- **Take a sweet tour** If you're expecting industrialised production,

this is not it. Unchagaon offers small-scale jaggery making in the traditional style. The locals are more than happy to give you a tour and even see you attempt to stir it into the lumps that you can later savour over tea.

- **Try your hand at pottery** The village is dotted with potters making everyday ware with terracotta. For a nominal price, they will give you a quick lesson on the craft and even let you take home your creations.

- **Ride a bullock cart** And while you're doing all this, let the bullock cart be your ride of choice to really soak in the village life.

- **A walk in the orchards** Hidden behind the fort is a sweeping mango orchard. Arrange for a picking with the resort and enjoy the ripe mangoes in the summers. There is also a swimming pool in the middle of the orchard.

The Fort Unchagaon is a royal escape in the midst of the village's dust-filled terrain. Great food, mango picking, bullock cart rides, bonfire celebrations and more—it has much to offer





EVOLVE BACK, COORG

MOVING FORWARD TO BASICS

I believe the only way to return to innocence is to evolve, move ahead in the right spirit. On my second evening at the resort, before the cultural show (rather acrobatic tribal gentlemen performing a martial arts routine) we were shown a four-minute video that spoke not about the resort but about the General Manager, a lady who had risen through the ranks. After a moment's reservation on the relevance of the video, when I watched with an open mind, I saw the personal evolution of a hardworking woman and in some way the return to innocence of the resort. You look after that, which looks after you.

Evolve Back, Coorg (earlier known as Orange County) works at various levels.

Level 1: They offer you quality and a dose of luxury. The villas and cottages (63 in total) come in five categories (Country, Lili-pool Cottage & Villas, Heritage Pool Villas and Lili Pool Bungalow) and are aesthetically pleasing and do not overwhelm you with luxury, despite the fact that they offer all that is required (needs, wants and even some desires like a plunge pool/Jacuzzi).

Level 2: The food spread is sumptuous and leaves you asking for more, even on a full belly. Their multi-cuisine restaurant, Granary, offers a three-meal satisfying buffet

spread. Next to that is the bar, Hunter's Lodge, if you need your evening tipple. There are two other F&B outlets—Peppercorn (which offers a planter's menu and regional cuisine) and Plantain Leaf (pure veg restaurant).

Level 3: The experience of a coffee estate. Evolve Back, Coorg is located in the middle of a 300-acre estate (the resort area is 35 acres) and the experience is unique. Move forward from the swimming pools, gyms and spas—you are in the coffee country—and take a long plantation tour (which I did and thoroughly enjoyed, to add to all the things I learnt), birdwatching, coracle ride on the Cauvery

river and the workers' trail.

Level 4: Explore the gorgeous region. The countryside is deep and green and the coffee is fawbulous. Drink to your heart's fill and carry for friends and family. Make a stopover, if you wish, at the Madikeri fort (minor attraction and not well-kept) and at Bylakuppe, a large Tibetan settlement about an hour's drive from the resort.

—Ajay Khullar

■ NAVIGATOR

Address Karadigodu Post, Siddapur, Coorg, Karnataka

Website www.evolveback.com

Reservations +91 80461 84444

Starting Tariff ₹22,800

Discover India was hosted by Evolve Back, Coorg to review the property.

jüSTA SAJJANGARH RESORT & SPA

WHAT A VIEW!

There wasn't much left of the road after the 40-minute drive from the airport and soon our vehicle started trundling along a rough, dusty path somewhere in the suburbs of Udaipur. The lanes got narrower, the houses older and the terrain wilder. The drive to jüSTA Sajjangarh Resort & Spa wasn't really an ideal romantic one. But as we pulled into the sprawling driveway, we knew exactly why, unlike most other luxury properties in the city, the brand chose the secluded countryside for its fourth property in the state. Perched atop a distant hill, like a fairy-tale castle, was the Monsoon Palace—right in the view of the hotel.

Amidst the many heritage properties in the city whose palatial facades are reminiscent

of the way royals lived, jüSTA Sajjangarh Resort & Spa is a breath of fresh air. True, you would have to give the old-world feel of the palaces and the view of shimmering Lake Pichola a miss, but the art illustrations, the scenic view ringed by the Aravali range and the laudable hospitality more or less make up for it. Our plush suite came with walls tinted in royal mustard and adorned with hand-painted works of art, separate living and dining areas, a queen-size bed with bright silken duvets, a cosy alcove sitting area and private Jacuzzi with a glass wall that offered a view of the melancholic ruins of the palace. Grouped into Deluxe, Premium, Superior and Suites, all the 63 well-appointed rooms had a similar 'modern folk' design.

Once we were done gazing at the lush rustic environs from our wall-sized glass windows, it was already time for lunch at the restaurant-and-bar, Sabor. The *al fresco* dining space offered a panoramic view of the Sajjangarh Biological Park, with the palace in the backdrop. One thing, apart from the vista, that deserves a mention is the food. Claimed to be a first in Udaipur, the interactive live kitchen and bakery here served us perfectly plated dishes that looked no less than pieces of art. From chicken *noorani* kebabs and lamb fillets to activated charcoal pancakes and fresh macaroons for dessert—almost everything on the menu tasted divine.

The hotel also has a pool, a banquet hall, a meeting hall and lush lawns. The state-of-the-art fitness centre and the

terrace lounge were still under development during our stay, though. And if you are in a mood for a pampering massage therapy (just like we were), we would suggest you wait some time. The luxury spa is yet to be functional as well. Or you could just head here for a quick staycation—the Jacuzzi and the views will save you from any disappointments. The soon-to-start spa and the quirky up-beat lounge will be reasons enough to come back soon.

—Sushmita Srivastav

NAVIGATOR

Address Opposite Biological Park, Near Sajjangarh Main Gate, Udaipur, Rajasthan

Website www.justahotels.com/sajjangarh-resort-spa-udaipur/

Reservations +91 95907 77000

Starting Tariff ₹8,000 plus taxes

Discover India was hosted by jüSTA Sajjangarh to review the property.



A WOMAN OF THE WORLD

Vocalist, composer, pianist, choral specialist, leader of a global jazz ensemble—**Annette Philip**, the Indian face in the band, **Women of the World**, always has a song on her lips. She tells *Discover India* how music has shaped her life and how travel gives rhythm to it.



How has the journey been so far as a part of Women of the World?

Well, Women of the World was founded in 2008 so this is our 10th-year anniversary. It was formed with an idea by a Japanese vocalist, Ayumi Ueda. She wanted to form a group of women musicians who would come together and learn about each other's culture through the learning of music. And we found that over the last decade, we have studied and performed music in 34 languages! Through this period of time, we have really grown to understand the similarities and differences that exist between many cultures. We feel, as a group, that the more you understand people, the less you are afraid of them. That is one way to bring about more understanding, more compassion, more acceptance in our world. And from a purely musical side, it's a really amazing group to be a part of. We have been so fortunate to get to tour all over the world. It's really amazing to live a life where you get to sing with the

people that you love and create really positive energy, go around the world and learn from people and share joys, stories and ideas. So it is a very exciting part of my life and I am really grateful to be a part of something that uses music for connecting people.

This was your first trip to India with the band. How does it feel to return to the country as a global artiste?

It felt beautiful to share the work that I am doing globally with not only friends and family but with the larger audience here. This was a chance for them to see how an Indian is faring in the world of music, doing many types of compositions and also, how these beautiful musicians from all over the world are embracing Indian culture, art, music and rhythm by making them their own. The group does a fair bit of Konnakol music and stays very excited especially about the Indian percussions and nuances in our folk music. And I think the audiences here really took to

the group and embraced us for what we are doing and how we are doing it.

What was the idea behind starting the Berklee India Ensemble?

As soon as I graduated from Berklee, which was in 2010, I was blessed to be offered a position among the faculty of Berklee College of Music. I was asked if I had a blank canvas and had to start a new class or subject, what would it be. And I felt that we did not have a proper performing ensemble that truly celebrated Indian music in all its forms. The college was extremely open to this idea and that's how Berklee Indian Ensemble was formed a year later. The first year, we already had 18 students—a good number to start with—and soon, it doubled and then tripled! We did shows with around 109 performers from about 70 countries—that was our 2014 'A R Rahman Meets Berklee Tribute Concert'. Since then, the class has really taken on a life of its own. Soon we realised that this is

much more than just one class. It should be an institute within the college now and that's how Berklee India Exchange was born as a platform for cultural conversations to share the spirit of India with the world and also to find ways to bring the world to India.

Tell us a little bit about 'your India' (growing up, memories of places, people...)

Born in India, I moved to Singapore at the age of three and then came back to the country at 11 with my family. I remember coming home from my first day at school (I went to the same school as my mother did, it was Carmel Convent School in New Delhi), and telling her how for the first time I felt like I was among my own people. Hailing from Kerala, I absolutely love how life is down south but I also have a great love for northern India. Taking trains in Kerala during the monsoon is a really beautiful memory. I also remember coming to Boston during



Berklee and dearly missing the feeling of speaking either Hindi or Malayalam.

How have your Indian roots been an influence in your music?

Officially, I started my musical training while I was in the school brass band in Singapore. When I came back to India, I continued learning the piano and my teacher at Carmel discovered that I could sing and helped me identify my voice. I think those early experiences —working with the choir, bands and larger ensembles—were really a crucial part of my journey. The interesting thing is when I went to Berklee I was doing primarily western music, though I always loved the intricacy of our Indian music more. I really enjoyed delving even deeper into our culture and learning more and more about it while I was facilitating the building of this ensemble and helping young musicians to bring their compositions to life. And for that I will always be glad that I was born here in India.

Have you ever travelled solo in India? Share a memory with us.

Umm... interesting question because I haven't travelled solo in India yet. The funny part is I love travelling solo and I have explored many places alone across the world but somehow, not in India. Considering how much I enjoy my alone time and not needing company, I think I must go on a solo in the country soon. Thanks for the inspiration!

Tell us an inspiring travel story.

There is a beautiful person in my life, a Japanese cultural enthusiast from Tokyo named Kento Itoh. I met him through Ayumi. He has been travelling the world for years now, wearing traditional Japanese outfits to each place he goes, working there,

learning about their cultures, and meeting everyone on his way with an open heart. I hope to take a year off at some point of my life and just travel and explore the world. So, Kento Itoh, thank you for inspiring me and countless others to travel more and more with the single agenda of just seeing and experiencing a new place. This is the way we can build a common community; this is the way we can become world citizens.

A travel book that's on your shelf?

Well, I enjoy not having too many things lying in the house, except for the music instruments of course. In terms of books, ever since I moved to Boston I have not been collecting that many books. But I would say that I have always had a wish to travel to rural and mountainous parts of India and to complete my training in deep-sea diving as I love snorkelling and the marine life. So, if I need to have a travel book on my shelf, it has to be about the mountains and the oceans.

Your favourite cuisine and your go-to place in India for the same?

My favourite cuisine just has to be Kerala food. I absolutely love coconut-based dishes. Both my parents cook amazingly well, so the food back at home in Kerala is always made with so much love, care and patience. I always feel there are many extra steps that need to be taken while cooking Malayali food. To my mother's surprise, even I have started cooking a lot ever since I moved to Boston—probably being away from home is what inspired me. And she believes there are a couple of dishes that I have started making even better than her!

—Interviewed by
Sushmita Srivastav

AWARDING THE CHAMPIONS OF NATURE

TOFTIGERS CELEBRATES INCLUSIVE CONSERVATION WITH ITS WILDLIFE TOURISM AWARDS 2018



On United Nations' World Tourism Day this year, September 27, 2018, TOFTigers, in association with Sanctuary Nature Foundation, celebrated and rewarded those leading from the front in sustainable eco-tourism initiatives in India and Nepal. Inclusive Conservation – People and Wildlife was the chosen theme for the fifth edition of the TOFTigers Wildlife Tourism Awards held at the British High Commissioner's residence in New Delhi. The well-attended gala dinner highlighted the efforts of individuals, businesses, service providers and community enterprises in the nature tourism sector—those who are pioneering ways to support and inspire wildlife conservation, engage local communities and help the restoration of wildlife habitats through their vision, drive and actions. A recent study initiated by TOFTigers and BAAVAN on 'The Value of Wildlife Tourism around Ranthambore Tiger Reserve in Rajasthan for Wildlife Conservation and Local Communities' was also released during the event.

THE WINNERS AND RUNNERS-UP FOR 2018

• Wildlife Tourism Related Community Initiative of the Year 2018

Winner Jatayu Vulture Restaurant, Nepal

The brainchild of D.B. Chaudhary, a local naturalist and lodge manager, Jatayu Vulture Restaurant is the first community-managed vulture restoration project in the buffer zone of Nepal's Chitwan National Park.

Runner-Up Tora Eco Resort & Life Experience Centre, Sunderbans, West Bengal

• The Billy Arjan Singh Memorial Award Wildlife Guide of the Year 2018

Winner Ramkali Dhurway, Kanha Tiger Reserve, Madhya Pradesh

A guide at the Mukki gate since 2011, she is one of Kanha's most sought-after guides for her in-depth knowledge of the park's flora and fauna, and her unrivalled ability to narrate their stories.

Runner-Up Ramrao Sakhamaram Nehare, Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve, Maharashtra

• Wildlife and Tourism Award of the Year 2018

Winner Snow Leopard Conservancy India Trust, Ladakh

The Snow Leopard Conservancy India Trust began conceptualising village home stays as immersive nature tourism experiences in 2003 to support the conservation of endangered snow leopards. The Ladakhi villages of Ulay and Rumbak are now two of the best places in the world to sight these once-elusive creatures.

Runner-Up Terra Conscious, Goa

• Lodge Naturalist of the Year 2018

Winner Siddarth Biniwale, Reni Pani Jungle Lodge, Satpura Tiger Reserve, MP

A geologist by education, Biniwale is passionate about birdwatching and camera-trapping photography. Going beyond his duties as a naturalist at the lodge, he monitors water holes in the buffer zone of the reserve and coordinates with the forest department to ensure that they are well-maintained.

Runner-Up Uday Patel, Courtyard House, Kanha Tiger Reserve, Madhya Pradesh

• The John Wakefield Memorial Award for Most Inspirational Eco-lodge of the Year 2018

Joint Winner Khem Villas, Ranthambore Tiger Reserve, Rajasthan

Khem Villas is set in 25 acres of a once-barren and

overgrazed land just 15 km from Sawai Madhopur town. Owned and managed by Dr. Goverdhan Rathore and his wife Usha, the lodge is home to over 180 bird species, 45 species of butterflies, a host of mammals and 30 species of native trees. They also practise water harvesting, energy efficiency and kitchen gardening.

Joint Winner Tiger Tops Tharu Lodge, Chitwan

National Park, Nepal
Tiger Tops set the framework for responsible tourism almost six decades ago—and still holds on to the same values.

Runner-Up Dhole's Den, Bandipur National Park, Karnataka

• Up and Coming Excellence in Nature Award 2018

Winner Red Earth Resort, Kabini, Karnataka

Owned and run by Ravi Parameswaran and his wife Rachel, Red Earth is a carefully-crafted eco-lodge built on 10 acres of a once-barren peninsula jutting into the Kabini dam reservoir. Today, it is a completely-restored area that hosts a variety of wildlife with extensive tree cover.

Runner-Up Flame of the Forest Safari Lodge, Kanha Tiger Reserve, Madhya Pradesh

• International Tour Operator of the Year 2018

Winner All for Nature, Netherlands

Founder Annemiek Van Gijn started this Dutch business to support wildlife conservation over eight years ago. Her very real commitment to drive responsible travel and support for nature manifests itself in a host of ways.

Runners-Up Greaves Travel, UK
Natural World Safaris, UK

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A PEEK INTO THE HEART OF INDIA

THE FIFTH EDITION OF MADHYA PRADESH TRAVEL MART OPENS BHOPAL TO THE WORLD OF TRAVEL TRADE

Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board (MPTB) was back with the fifth edition of Madhya Pradesh Travel Mart (MPTM) in Bhopal. The grand event brought together national and international travel trade professionals under one roof, providing multiple opportunities to tap the ever-growing market.

The objective of this event is to strengthen Madhya Pradesh as a world-class destination for wildlife, nature, heritage, pilgrimage, adventure and MICE, with the opportunity to meet, network, and share expertise with professionals who want to learn about various products and add to the increasing footfall.

The exhibition saw over 200 national and international buyers from over 28 countries and regions like Europe, Southeast Asia, Middle East, US, Australia, South Africa, Malaysia, China and France. About 125 representatives from distinct Indian markets including heritage hotels, conference venues, tour operators and travel enthusiasts travelled to Madhya Pradesh for the event. Additionally, the two-day exhibition was attended by media personalities from different media genres, international as well as from India. They came together to exchange views and opinions on travel initiatives across various industries.

According to Hari Ranjan Rao (IAS), Managing Director, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board, and Principal Secretary, Tourism said, "The show provides an opportunity to tap into this market by bringing a forum of exceptional one-to-one business meetings.



MPTM aims to create a platform that will offer the perfect environment for like-minded people to interact and do business together. Our goal is to ensure that each participant, whether it is buyer, visitor or exhibitor, must get the value of their investment and time spent."

Senior delegates at the event including Dr. Ilaya Raja, IAS, Managing Director, Madhya Pradesh State Tourism Development Corporation (MPSTDC), and Bhawana Walimbe, AMD, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board, were present to enlighten audiences with their knowledge and expertise.

About Madhya Pradesh Tourism For more than four decades, Madhya Pradesh Tourism has been facilitating high-standard travel services for travellers visiting central India. Madhya Pradesh is an important state with an enormous potential for tourism—covering heritage, wildlife, cultural, pilgrimage, tribal, rural tourism and more. The sincere efforts of Madhya Pradesh Tourism to manifest such aspects of tourism to the rest of the world so that tourists can come and explore destinations, trace the history, enjoy holidays and return with beautiful memories is the USP of the event. ♦

Manifesto

OPINIONS & OBSERVATIONS



SHUTTERSTOCK

Travel Experiences, Narratives & Tips From The Best

THE ART FILES

Now Satyajit Ray Fakes
Enter The Market

THE META ARCHIVES

The Mysterious Yeti Has Few
Sightings And Many Legends

THE NATURALIST

Welcoming The Changing
Winds, Colours, Smells Of Fall

THE INSIDER

The World Of Regional Indian
Cuisine—Uncovered



LEGEND OF THE YETI

Growing up, the creature I was most fascinated by was a yeti—the huge mysterious supernatural snowman-bear, living in the uninhabitable lands covered with white as far as the eye can see. I remember being snowed in a cosy hotel in Shimla and looking out of the window at night. The moon made everything silvery as fresh snow fell. If I dared open the window, I knew I would hear the whistling sound of a yeti.

One of the accounts of the legendary being describes it as an erect bipedal animal. Some stories say yetis are over six feet tall, weigh between 200 and 400 pounds, are covered with red to gray hair, smell awful, are nocturnal, secretive and make a soft whistling sound, like snow and wind.

A Sherpa I met in a Ladakh monastery whispered to me that they could see many when there were less tourists around. Yetis would come to the monastery at night and steal the yaks. "You would only see their footprints and the bones of the yak," nodded the Sherpa. Legends say, as tourists and trekkers increased, these mountain creatures moved deeper into the Himalaya, never to be seen.

Stories of sightings carry across the Himalaya, from India to Bhutan, from Nepal to China and Southern Russia. Different Himalayan tribes call them by different names—Bigfoot, Skunk Ape, Yeren, Yowie, Mande Barung, Orang Pandek, Almas and Barmanau. Throughout history, not only Himalayan inhabitants but westerners, scientists and trekkers from Europe, claim to have encountered yetis. Photographic footprints, strange hair caught on tree branches, scalp and skull relics, folk stories told by Sherpa yak herders, even genetic tests on alleged yeti body parts preserved by monks are just some of the real-life encounters which have become folklore in themselves.

One of the earlier accounts is by Pliny the Elder, a Roman

traveller who wrote a book called *Natural History*. "Among the mountainous districts of the eastern parts of India," says Pliny the Elder, "...we find an animal of extraordinary swiftness. They have also the features of a human being. On account of their swiftness, these creatures are never to be caught, except when they are either aged or sickly... These people screech in a frightful manner; their bodies are covered with hair, their eyes are of a sea-green colour, and their teeth like those of the dog."

The most famous recent encounter was in 1951, when British mountaineer Eric Shipton took his now-legendary photographs of yeti footprints on a trek through the Rolwaling Valley, in east-central Nepal. In the Nepali village of Machhermo, the trekker lore attributes a brutal murder in 1974 to a yeti. The scalp of the legendary creature is kept as a sacred relic in the monastery of Khumjung nearby. Mountaineer Reinhold Messner claimed to have met a yeti on a Sherpa trail from Dege to Lhasa in 1986 and wrote a book, *My Quest for the Yeti*, about it. Nazi zoologist Ernst Schafer chased the trails of the yeti in 1939, in hopes that the creature might prove to be of the Aryan race. Russian scientist Professor Arkady Tishkove recorded a yeti sighting in 1991 on the slopes of Mount Shishapangma.

The same year, a relic yeti hand

and skull were stolen from the glorious rhododendron forests of Pangboche.

What is it about the yeti? Why are people not normally known to fall for superstition constantly searching for this man-bear? Why are so many movies, pop culture dedicated to it? Does it have to do with the endless snow and how it whistles in the night? Perhaps a yeti could tell us the truth. ♦

Shweta is an author who tells stories of myths and magic, bringing them alive through novels, graphic novels, stories and conversations.



STEALING RAY OF SUNSHINE

Fakes of Van Goghs and Picassos. Counterfeit reproductions of Bengal School painters like Rabindranath Tagore and Abanindranath Tagore and Progressive Group artists like M F Husain and Francis Newton Souza. And, now, believe it or not, forged illustrations marketed as those created by movie maestro Satyajit Ray!

The Ray family is understandably taken aback... “We laid our hands on a fake in the shape of a Xeroxed illustration,” says Satyajit Ray’s son, Sandip. “Copies of this Xerox were being sold in various localities of Calcutta when Father was in hospital in 1992. The circulation of these Xeroxes gained ground after Father passed away in April of the same year. The ‘fakesters’ were cashing in on it. Later, it was also published in a book as Father’s final illustration,” laughs Sandip.

According to him, the Xerox showed a tree with multiple branches. Dangling from each branch were profiles of great personalities. “And, the illustration was captioned in Bengali as the last work by Satyajit Ray. Father had never created anything of the sort. What made it absolutely absurd is that he was in a coma at the Belle Vue Nursing Home at that stage. It was a downright fictitious illustration with an outrageous signature of Father,” rubbishes Sandip. “This was my first experience of a Satyajit Ray fake,” he adds.

In time, Sandip received a call from someone who said he had purchased quite a few paintings by Satyajit Ray. “He introduced himself as a collector and revealed that he had chanced upon these paintings by Father and lapped them all up. He wanted to meet me to get the works authenticated. ‘What if they turn out to be fakes?’ I asked him. He said he was dead sure the paintings were authentic. When this gentleman dropped by with these paintings, I found them to be out and out forgeries, to the extent of being inferior and weird. On learning

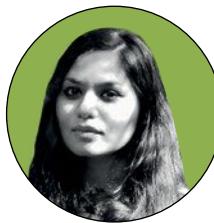
this, he slumped into the sofa in total disbelief. To start with, Father was never a painter, except in his early days at Kala Bhavan in Santiniketan. He was an illustrator. He only contributed for *Sandesh* (the family magazine), and churned out illustrations to back up his professional assignments,” stresses Sandip.

Sandip cites another occasion when he discovered ‘portraits’ displayed in the catalogue of an extremely well-known auction house which drew blood from a book of portraits sketched by Satyajit Ray. “The book is titled *Pratikriti*. But, the images in the auctioneer’s catalogue were poor images on paper sheets of the same size. The signatures below the portraits were also ridiculous. Father executed portraits on sheets of different sizes depending on the requirements. Most surprisingly, the fake portraits sold for tidy prices at the auction,” he exclaims.

**THE XEROX, SIGNED
RAY, SHOWED A TREE
WITH BRANCHES.
DANGLING FROM EACH
WERE PROFILES OF
GREAT PERSONALITIES.
“FATHER HAD NEVER
CREATED ANYTHING
OF THE SORT”**

“You see, faking can be an easy job, but one needs to be skilled enough to pull off a Satyajit Ray forgery. The forger must be equipped with that distinctive flourish,” says Sandip with justifiable pride. “In fact, the ‘fakester’ has to be armed with the know-how of Father’s methodology and temperament. No one possesses that insight more than us,” drives home Sandip. “What is going on is utterly ridiculous.” ♦

Ashoke is a reputed art writer and critic who contributed to *Discover India* in 1988, our launch year. He returns to give us insights into Indian art.



THERE'S A NIP IN THE AIR

It's finally that time of the year. When 'sweaty' turns to 'nippy'. A far cry from the Indian summer. The summer air prickles at your skin, seeps through windows to claw at you, throwing shards even in the shade. After a long tortuous hot season and a wallowingly humid monsoon, comes an achingly short fall. Always fleeting, a November nip that feels like a peck on the cheek. You can drink some rum without running for the air conditioner. You can throw open the windows in the evening for a breeze that doesn't feel like a wallop on the chin. And you wake up to morning with a gentle suggestion of winter. Winter bites, but fall nips gently.

Nature is spectacular in changing seasons. I like to feel the incoming of winter through my nose. I wait for dusk. As the sky becomes slaty grey, cars get parked in driveways and people settle for dinner, a scent makes its way through the air. That's the smell of Harsingar, also called the Parijat or Shiuli flower. The Shiuli, a small tree, has rough, dark green leaves. The flowers are just as delicate as the leaves are coarse, a perfect foil for each other. Each flower, with its slightly serrated, beautifully traced petals, is a cool, pearly white. The throat and stem of the flower are coral orange. The flower looks like a swirling pattern, like the blades of a whirring windmill. The smell is redolent on the night air—unlike many other blossoms, this flower blooms at night. This sacred flower, used in many *puja* ceremonies, also heralds the festive season, coinciding with the Navratri festival. Blooming through the night, you will find this harbinger of fall carpeting the ground in the morning—boughs emptied of buds.

If you pay attention, there is yet another delightful fragrance which accompanies the nip in the air. It's an unforgettable, heavy smell that is simultaneously sweet and intoxicating. A bit like an overripe heady mango. I would believe you if you have

smelt this fragrance but never seen the flower. The Saptaparni blossoms only at this time of the year—on a tall tree with leaves growing in clusters of seven (thus the 'sarpa' in the name). Legend says the bark of the tree was used to make slates for writing on. The Saptaparni produces tiny, light green blossoms that grow in small clusters. You may miss the flower on the dense tree, but you can't miss the fragrance.

For me, the unmistakable Saptaparni smell means Durga Puja is here. Days of worship, new clothes, mouths full of sweets and an intensely spiritual experience. The goddess rides the Asiatic Lion, looking upon you sharply. There are other

animals in the Durga cornucopia, consorts of her children. There is the stately white swan with Saraswati, Kartik's preening turquoise-blue peacock, fat Ganesha's fat bandicoot rat and Lakshmi's thoughtful owl. The worship is a homage to the season. Three-leaved sprigs of Bael, or wood-apple, are offered, which can only be plucked after dodging inch-long thorns. So is the blossoming Aparajita flower, of a rich, raw ink colour, not unlike the neck of Kartik's peacock.

Soon, migratory birds will also fill branches of trees, bends of rivers and laps of wetlands. Some have already arrived. Amur Falcons from Russia and Siberia have arrived in Nagaland. The Redstart, probably from Kashmir or beyond, has come to Delhi. They will be followed by flocks of ducks and geese from the rarefied air of the mountains, the High Himalaya, Russia and Tibet. The birds follow the nip in the air.

For a few precious days, walks are full of scents and sensory experiences that are not too hot, not too cold. The fragrant nip is to die for. Go ahead and give it an embrace. ♦

Neha is a wildlife conservationist who divides her time between Delhi, Nagaland and Madhya Pradesh, where she runs field projects.



A NIGHT TO CELEBRATE WORLD TOURISM DAY

LE MAGNIFIQUE TRAVEL BRINGS TOGETHER THE BEST IN FOOD AND TRAVEL FOR A NIGHT TO REMEMBER

On the occasion of World Tourism Day, September 27, a glamorous night of food, music and drinks was hosted by Le Magnifique Travel, a company into experiential travel, destination weddings, bespoke events and brand consultancy based in New Delhi, Dubai and Jaipur. Be it handpicked heritage accommodation, travel guides, logistics, or support staff, Le Magnifique is all about impeccable on ground service. Fio Country Kitchen & Bar, one of Delhi's landmark restaurants, was the venue and hospitality partner, along with the Jehan Numa Group of Hotels, a chain of hotels that believes in being an experience intertwined with personalised care and luxury, which was the title sponsor. Le Magnifique also marked the occasion with the Welcome Back Bash, an annual event to welcome back expats who

move back to their home countries starting June to escape the Indian summer and return to India around September.

The event was supported by Aayna, which is a premium clinic present in Delhi's two most prime locations—Mehrauli, near the Qutub Minar, and Kha Market—providing world-class treatments in anti-ageing, cosmetic dermatology, weight management, hair loss solutions and semi-permanent makeup.

The event was also supported by PetFly, which is a personal and caring service provider for relocation of pets to any place in the world. Offering a complete relocation service for any animal, they have till date serviced around 5,000 pets across the globe.

Discover India, India's premium travel and culture magazine, launched in 1988, was the media partner for the event. The liquor sponsors included

Grover Zampa Wines, one of the finest wine companies in India, Golfer's Shot Whiskey, a unique whisky matured in handcrafted oak casks, and Hite Beer, a top-selling Beer from South Korea.

As Neeraj Kumar, CEO of Le Magnifique Travel, said, "The Welcome Back Bash is a gala to celebrate and welcome expats back to our country, India. It provides a platform to expats new to India to network and socialise within their community, giving them a chance to settle into the country. The guests are primarily officials from top European and American embassies, the diplomatic community based in New Delhi and expat CXOs working in MNCs. It's a great opportunity for brands to reach out to the HNI expat community in the city. We are looking forward to hosting our first Welcome Back Bash in Mumbai next September and subsequently in Dubai." ♦



THE GLOBAL POT-POURRI

Kacchi haldi ka hakwa? Really?” I smiled in a desperate attempt to look excited as I stared blankly at the bright yellow batter bubbling in the pan. I definitely wasn’t sure if a pudding made from raw turmeric was something I wanted to try. “Wait till you take a bite,” the man behind the counter smiled back, probably having judged the dubious look on my face. My plate already heaped with the tangy *ker sangri ki sabzi*, the *bajre ki khichdi* with oodles of *desi ghee* slow-cooking in an earthen pot, numerous Indian spices placed on the slab in front and famous Haryanvi folk numbers in the background left little space for further chats. No, this wasn’t a scene from the countryside of Haryana. A colourful, lively stall at the World Heritage Cuisine Summit & Food Festival (WHCSFF) 2018 was where I had queued up to have a taste of this dessert I had never heard of. However, I knew this wasn’t the only dish I was going to try for the first time here and there was nothing to complain about.

Meanwhile, I looked around. At the adjacent stall, Chef Sleiman Khawand was cooking the classic Sayadieh—a traditional dish of rice and fish from Lebanon. Another kiosk had prawns being stir-fried in authentic Goan style. There were many similar stalls running master classes where professional chefs were tossing pans and simultaneously sharing the recipes while young aspiring students took notes. It was the second day of the summit helmed by the Indian Federation of Culinary Associations (IFCA) under the aegis of World Cultural Culinary Heritage Committee (Worldchefs). The recently restored 200-year-old Qila Gobindgarh in Amritsar was flocked by chefs from over 40 countries, food bloggers, media delegates and other culinary professionals and students.

“Looking at the very start, it was food that brought people together...” I remembered Chef Manjit Gill, president of IFCA

and chairman of Worldchefs, telling me in a conversation earlier, “...food led to hunting and cooking together, which later turned into gatherings, leading to building cultures and finally the development of heritage. And I believe, despite being so rich in these legacies, India has still not been completely discovered when it comes to food. Hence, this summit helps us, the culinary experts and students, know of its roots, connect to it better and communicate it well to the rest of the world.”

While Gill believed taking Indian food to the world was the need of the hour, Chef Thomas A Gugler, president of Worldchefs and guest-of-honour at the event, was happiest to see international chefs coming to India.

“It’s amazing to see how people in India are so emotionally connected with their food and its origin. Also, the diversity in cultures gives space for endless experiences and variations. There’s so much for the chefs from all around to learn here and take back.”

Gugler was right. Forget India, there was so much happening at the event itself. Live cooking sessions, mocktails-in-making, panel discussions, food displays, master classes, cultural performances like Gatka (traditional martial art from Punjab),

Giddha, Bhangra and more—I could barely hold my gaze to one thing. Starting from opening the event with *langar* at the world’s largest community kitchen at Golden Temple, to hosting it at the historic complex of Qila Gobindgarh where the coveted Koh-i-Noor was once housed, the festival already gave each of us so many stories to tell. But there was still a day left. There were still many stories to make and much left to taste. And so, I waited for the *kacchi haldi ka hakwa* and dived in as soon as it was served on my plate, piping hot. My first bite. Divine. ♦

Sushmita is a senior sub-editor with *Discover India*. Travel keeps her going and nothing excites her more than an adventure.

Anchor

GREAT IDEAS FOR THE TRAVELLER



BEHZAD J. LARRY

This Winter Take The Country Roads

IN THE MIGHTY JUNGLE

The Dudhwa Tiger Reserve Offers More Than Big Cats

MUMBAI MASALA

Exploring The City Of Dreams With A Hungry Stomach

HIDDEN IN HISTORY

Thanjavur Is An Architectural & Cultural Paradise

A DATE TO REMEMBER

Why Go West? Udaipur Is The Perfect Lovers' Escape

The Swadeshi Experience





Words & Photography HIMMAT RANA

The soul of India lives in its villages—this statement is as true today as when the Mahatma said it close to a century ago. With nearly 70 percent of India still residing in the rural areas, it's anyone's guess where one must head to get an authentic experience of this mysterious and diverse land.

And so, I started my journey of exploring and experiencing the unabridged version of India, its villages, where the water is as sweet as its people and life as colourful and spicy as its food. It's a decision I made over two years ago and one that turned my theoretical and media fuelled perceptions about this country and people on their head. Having trekked to the remotest corners and lived closely alongside the most absorbing, hardworking and compassionate human beings, it's only now that I begin to fathom its depth of diversity and piece together the true meaning of the word 'India'.

The people and this magical land are too complex and diverse to ever be comprehended through mere virtual experiences. This pursuit demands an involved and immersive experience that goes much beyond just witnessing. So roll up your pants and get ready to jump knee-deep into 10 must-do experiences across India's fascinating countryside.

The search for fresh soft grass for their pashmina goats to graze on can take the shepherds of Ladakh on long hikes, from dawn to dusk, and the winter only makes it tougher

Be The Good Shepherd

Kanji Village, Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir

Being a shepherd seemed like a relaxed affair. Sitting under a tree, playing the flute, while the innocent sheep graze in the meadows by the river. Not many jobs could compete with the perks of the world's oldest profession. And so, when the opportunity presented itself at Kanji village in Ladakh, it was hard to turn down. Packed a nice lunch and off I went along with the shepherd and his flock at the crack of dawn. Trailing over 300 goats, sheep and yaks with a vigilant sheepdog leading the herd, we very soon hit nowhere. And nowhere was beautiful. It was just us, the mountains, the river and the occasional bleat of a lamb looking for its mother.

Unlike the green pastoral valleys of Kashmir and Himachal, Ladakh is a high altitude desert with minimal vegetation. And so I learnt firsthand, that taking the herd out for their daily grazing expeditions from dawn to dusk was more like a hike than an extended siesta like I had earlier imagined. But with the breathtaking views and the great company on offer, I wasn't complaining.

We picked the prettiest spot in the valley to sit down for lunch. Looking over, I witnessed the reason for the permanent smile planted on Dorji's (my shepherd friend) face. There is nothing more serene and picturesque than watching sheep with their heads down nibbling on sweet grass with fluffy lambs by their side, along a mountain slope. Our hour-long break gave the herd a free hand. The goat and sheep scattered all across the valley, huddled in small groups comprising of their friends, while the yaks had climbed up mountain passes all around for reasons only they knew best. It was time to round them up. And out of nowhere the shepherd in me took over. Like a seasoned herdsman, without even a word being exchanged, I took the left flank as Dorji took the right. We leaped up the mountains and had the herd huddled down in the valley in under an hour. It was time to head back, and having picked up a few whistle commands, I took over the herd with Dorji gladly taking the back seat.

Reaching home, just as I was about to hang up my boots for the day, Dorji asked me if I wanted to comb pashmina off a goat. I was as excited as a kid in an amusement park. The next thing I remember is a pashmina goat lying on my lap as I tenderly stroked its hair with a wide steel comb and collected the soft and prized inner fleece. Looking back, I think there is a little bit of shepherd in all of us.

Cultivation Of Opium For Medicine

Alori village, Madhya Pradesh

It almost felt like the start of a race. I, being the novice, was allotted the outside lane in true championship fashion.

My five-minute training in the art of making the perfect incision on a poppy pod to extract opium gum had just concluded. A few millimetres too deep or too shallow an incision meant no or very little opium gum oozing out. I could feel the tension growing inside me as I stood alongside my competition of four farm hardened kids. All of us, armed with a homemade five-edged concave blade, began lancing the poppy pods. They shot out like bullets, grabbing pod after pod and making surgical incisions with a lightning swipe of the wrist. These guys were like the Kenyans of long-distance running. I was still on my 10th pod when I heard the kids yell out from the other side of the field that they were done, signalling me to join them for a cup of tea. It was my first shot at harvesting opium and I gave it my best, I told myself reassuringly as I began the long walk towards the makeshift mud stove where an eager and excited crowd awaited me.

One associates people in the business of narcotics with being hostile, hardened criminals and addicts. And here I was surrounded by the friendliest vegetarian teetotallers to be found anywhere. I was in Alori, a quaint village in Neemuch district of Madhya Pradesh, learning the age-old art of extracting and processing opium from poppy plants. Alori is one of the few villages across India where the Central Government permits and regulates cultivation of opium poppy for medical purposes.

The week-long stay at the village *sarpanch*'s house was nothing short of an education, going way beyond just harvesting opium. And probably the only time I found vegetarian food this tasty.

Bathing The Gentle Giants

Kodanad, Kerala

Nothing could have prepared me enough to be standing beside an elephant, the biggest land animal on earth. Your sense of scale suddenly abandons you for a moment as you stand beside this living giant. The earth trembled with its every step as it casually passed me by to gleefully head into the river.

I was in the small riverside village town of Kodanad, about 42 kilometres east of Kochi, at the elephant rescue and

(Above) Lead pashmina goats, sheep and yaks on their daily 12-hour grazing expedition across the serene and barren mountains of Ladakh; legal opium farming is carried out in just three states of India—Madhya Pradesh being the largest of the three. Visit during the harvest season in February to witness and try your hand at the age-old extraction technique from the white poppy pods





care centre. It was early morning and time for the elephants to be bathed. One by one, the elephants, mounted by their mahouts, started to flood the river. Once inside they went down on their legs and, as gently as they could manage, flopped over to one side. The mahouts then dismounted and purposefully rolled up their *lungis*, tying them around their waists, getting ready for a task of mammoth proportions. Armed with stones and coconut husks they began scrubbing the elephants and splashing water. The elephants were clearly loving every second of this as they calmly lay with their snouts popping out of the water like a periscope. I spent more than half an hour observing this bathing ritual, smiling at the joy one perceives in the eyes of these animals. They were as happy as a toddler in a bathtub. After a lot of thinking, I gathered some courage, took permission of the mahout, and entered the shallow water to give these gentle giants a bath with my own hands. The elephant couldn't care less, but I was ecstatic. It was by far one of the most humbling experiences of my life and one I recommend everyone try.

Survival In The Jungle

Along the Poma river, Arunachal Pradesh

We often gaze in awe at the survival and improvisation of Bear Grylls on television. Well, I used to too, but no longer. Not since I accompanied my Nyshi friends on a two-day trek along the Poma river, flowing through the state capital of Itanagar.

Arunachal Pradesh, with 26 major tribes and over three-quarters of its land area still under forest cover, is hands down one of the most diverse, wild and exciting states of India. The state, lacking in connectivity and its derived benefits, primarily leads a tribal life. A majority of the inhabitants still depend on the forests for wood and a good part of their daily nourishment. It's this forced dependence that has ensured a passing down of generational wisdom and skills to not just survive off the forests but thrive.

The three teenage boys, each equipped with just a *dao* (long straight knife), strode confidently into the jungle as if strolling in their backyard. All we carried for the two-day long trek was a kilo of rice, a matchbox and some salt. I begged them to carry more and even offered to buy and carry it myself. They chuckled and completely ignored my anxiety. And rightly so as I would soon realise. These young boys, all of 15 to 16, knew every pulse of the forest. From building a temporary shelter out of bamboos and banana leaves, to feasting on wild bananas, pineapples and berries, catching fish with bamboo arrows and then cooking them in bamboo stems, I was introduced to a new world and skill set that was so effortless and elegant that it made jungle survival seem like a cakewalk.

Thanks to this one outing, I picked up some vital survival skills and have since mastered the art of building a mean fire and skilfully wielding a *dao*.



(Previous page) Jump knee-deep into the water at Kodanad, Kerala, to scrub an elephant clean; (this page) go camping and fishing with the Nyshi tribe of Arunachal Pradesh along the Poma river and into the dense jungles to learn first-hand how to survive in the forest



Build Bridges, Not Walls

Nongblai village, Meghalaya

Living in a remote and unconnected hamlet surrounded by rivers and streams can be challenging, but not for the industrious people of Nongblai, a tiny village in the East Khasi Hills district of Meghalaya. This village boasts of the highest density of living root bridges in the world. A total of 16 living root bridges in under a two-km radius is proof enough of where one must head to learn this dying art of intertwining roots to build majestic eco-friendly marvels.

A one-and-a-half-hour trek from Wahkhen village introduces you to a grand and characterful living root bridge that marks the entrance to this lesser-frequented gem. Living root bridges are an ingenious architectural marvel, developed and mastered by the Khasi tribe of Meghalaya. Built from nothing but the hanging roots of the rubber fig trees, these organic beauties, like wine, only get better with age. They are constructed by tying and guiding the aerial roots through the hollowed-out trunks of an Areca Nut Palm (beetle nut tree), across the two ends of a stream. Once connected they can last up to 500 years, which is way longer than any modern-day bridge, and only grow stronger with time, proving to be a perfect solution to the excessive rainfall in Meghalaya.

While the modern-day structures may be winning the day with their load bearing capacity and construction lead time, a walk over these living miracles will most definitely win over your hearts.

The Dangal Experience

Sonipat, Haryana

Wrestling has singlehandedly put Haryana on the world map. Here, in this part of the world, it isn't just a sport but a way of life. Wrestling or *kushṭi*, as it is locally known, is intimately woven with the culture and forms a comprehensive education system where knowledge is passed down generations, through the '*Guru-Shishya parampara*'.

A mere day spent at the minimalist Bajrag Akhara in Sonipat revealed the finer side of this rough sport. It is four in the morning and pitch-dark outside as the first batch of kids starts to trickle into the *akhara*. They all line up to take the *guruji's* blessings who pats them with a *shabaash*. Pointing at the kids as they change into their training gear, he proudly exclaims, "They may or may not become great wrestlers when they grow up, but the discipline and humility that this sport instils will definitely ensure that they become good human beings."



(Left) Get trained as a root bridge engineer in the hamlet of Nongblai, Meghalaya which has the highest density of root bridges; row along the pristine Barak river in a canoe, passing through dense forests, spotting numerous waterfalls and unconnected villages of Manipur

Having observed keenly from the sidelines all day, it was now time to try my hand at the oldest sport in the world. I started with the traditional warm-up exercises of *dand* and *bethak*, and once done, expectantly looked at the *guruji* who was busy screaming out instructions. Removing his white cotton stole, he pointed towards the *akhara*, inviting me to join him. I giggled sheepishly and weakly announced that I hadn't yet completely warmed up. He chuckled, sensing my fear, and in typical wry Haryanvi fashion remarked, "*Dar na, shaadi na kara raha*" (Don't worry, I am not going to get you married). The next half an hour was spent learning the tricks of the trade from the master himself. At the end of the day, my perception about this sport and the people practising it was transformed. I realised that this sport is not merely about a strong body, but also about a strong mind and soul.

The Land Of Legend And Myths

Villages of Tamenglong district, Manipur

Rowing a narrow and rickety wooden canoe carved out of a tree trunk, through an impenetrable tropical rain forest stretching out as far as the eye can see with the sounds of wild animals constantly floating in the moist air, would have most people turn tail. But not when you are accompanied

by a local jungle hardened ex-army man. We were on our way to visit and experience life in the four remote jungle villages of Saramba, Vanchengphai, Ntaijjijeng and Zeiladjeng; lying along the pristine Barak river, in Tamenglong district of Manipur. Every day brought forth a new village and the unimaginable with it. From witnessing ginormous pigs who were overfed to such limits that they could no longer carry their own weight, to catching crabs by using meat as bait in the local streams and eating two-inch-long crispy fried hornets, the list just goes on and on.

Manipur is often referred to as the land of myths. Returning from the four-day village-hopping expedition, I couldn't agree more. Most experiences here are so unique that they practically fit into the fictional category. Every village, river, lake, stone, tree had a fascinating legend attached to it. Add to this the customary local wine tasting and the intensity of the narration, one is instantly transported into a make-believe world where anything seems possible. Suddenly rowing back into civilisation didn't feel as interesting.

In a nutshell, if you have the appetite, they have the meat. Not to forget that the flora is as amazing as the fauna here. Your taste buds will thank you for the flavours and eyes for the spectacular views.

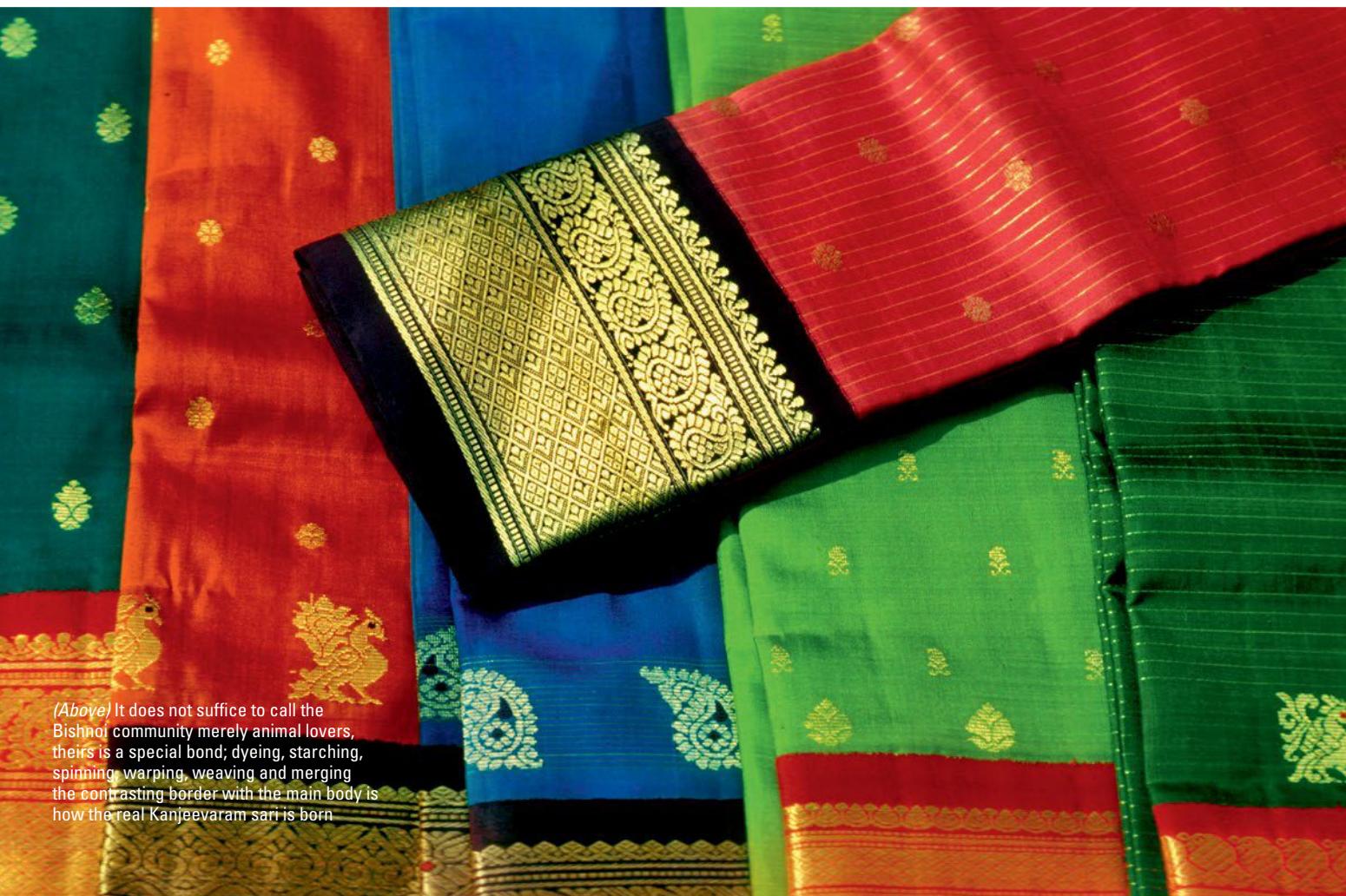




The people of Punjab are all heart—even as they go about their daily rigour of farming. Hop onto a tractor, get your hands dirty in the fields, reeling in the *maati ki khushboo*, before sitting down for a meal of *saag* and *roti* with *desi ghee* and *lassi*



Photography BEHZAD J. LARRY



(Above) It does not suffice to call the Bishnoi community merely animal lovers, theirs is a special bond; dyeing, starching, spinning, warping, weaving and merging the contrasting border with the main body is how the real Kanjeevaram sari is born

Back To The Farm

Punjab

One of the first things that struck me as I entered the wide open expanse of Punjab's countryside is the crisp and clean air that effortlessly sank deep into my lungs. Refreshed and a little over excited to be in a farm, I committed to ploughing the whole field with the farm help on a tractor. Sitting sideways on the organ shaking rear wheel arc for over two hours, eagerly awaiting my turn to drive the last few lengths of the field, I hopped off all muddied and with a sore backside. I learnt later that the only suspension on the entire tractor conveniently lies beneath the driver's seat. Well, like they say, 'there are no good or bad experiences, only learnings'. Luckily for me, the farm stay had the perfect antidote, a bore well. Sitting underneath its blasting flow of cold and sweet tasting water, I was back on the blocks in no time.

Waking up to the soothing sounds of the *Gurbani*, strolling through the fields, watching the sun set with birds chirping in the background and falling asleep under the open starry sky, here every day is filled with life's simple pleasures. The highly engaging and soul satisfying activities of harvesting crops, milking cows, riding a tractor, making pickle and my all-time favourite, riding a bullock cart around the village offering the locals a lift, offers a great insight into this magical land and its vibrant people.

Punjabis are full of life and their food reflects their liveliness. Farm fresh food cooked in homemade *desi ghee*, with milk and *lassi* to wash it down; life most certainly doesn't get better than this.

Deer-O-Deer

Bishnoi village Rohet, Rajasthan

Feeding and petting the fearless wild Chinkara deer on the outskirts of the Bishnoi village of Rohet was the closest I had been to a wild animal. The loosely used statement, "Feeling connected with the universe", suddenly made a lot more sense. Reaping the rewards of the selfless service of the Bishnois, I hoped more people witnessed and followed their lead.

To label the Bishnoi community mere animal lovers would be grossly unfair. This tiny community, sparsely spread out in the dry and arid western regions of Rajasthan, has been passionately practising sustainable living way before it turned fashionable. I was floored and humbled, having learnt the extremes to which these simpletons follow the 29 principles passed on by Guru Jambheshwar, the founder of their sect. The most shocking by far was the incredible act of kindness on the part of the Bishnoi women who breastfeed the orphaned fauns (that don't take to the bottle) until they

grow old and strong enough to be released into the wild. It's no surprise then that the Bishnois who wean, protect and raise these deer as their own get excessively agitated if any harm is done to them.

Simplicity with substance permeates every aspect of Bishnoi life and the local cuisine is no different. Evolved over centuries to suit the harsh climatic conditions of the region, it is sourced locally, is nutritious and has a long shelf life. My recommendations—*bajre ki roti* drenched in homemade *desi ghee* with *sangari ki sabzi* on the side.

Create Exquisite Kanjeevaram Saris

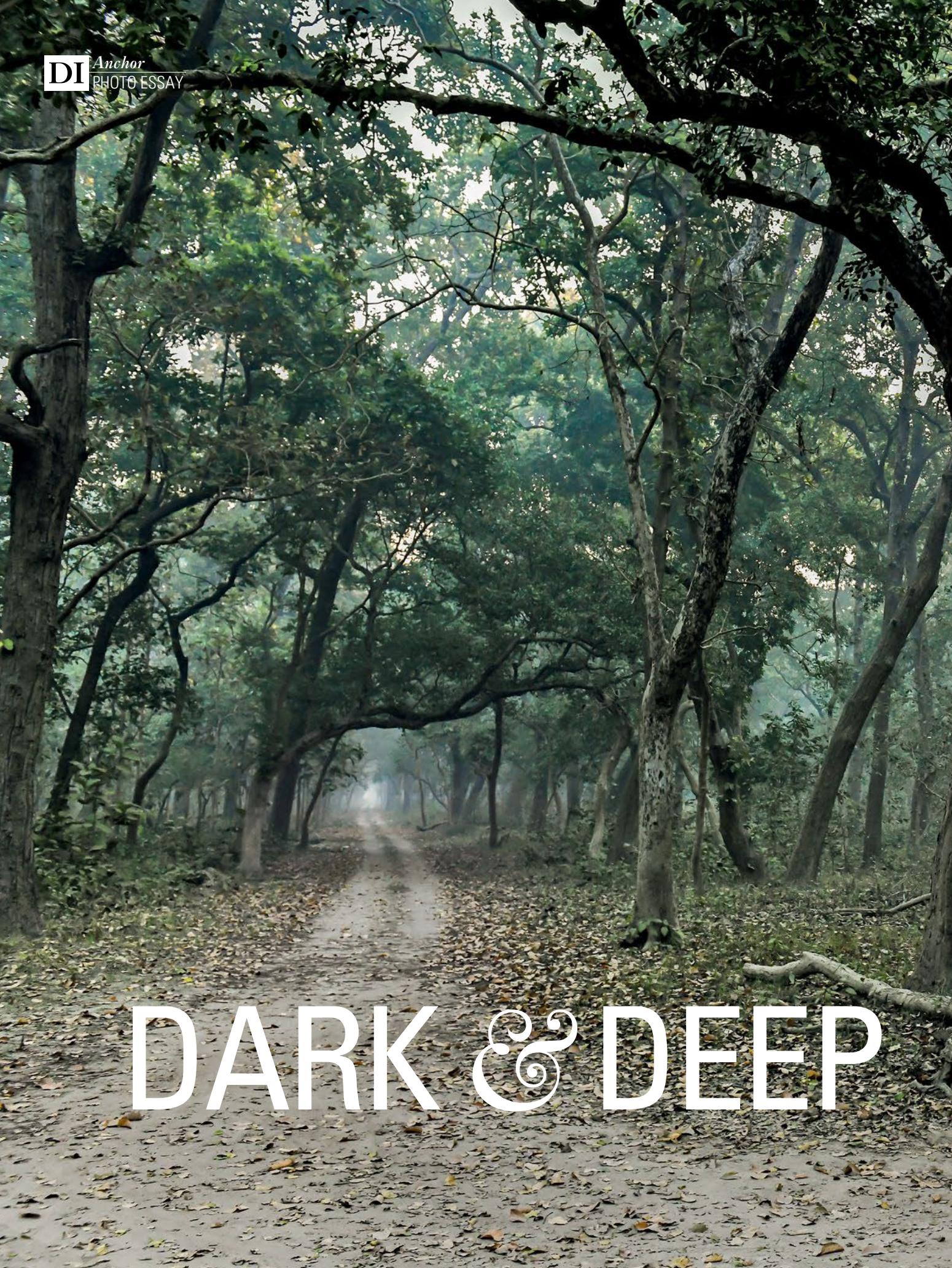
Hasanamapet village, Tamil Nadu

My fashion sense starts and ends with a white tee and a pair of blue denims. Searching for something traditional to gift a friend had me running in circles until I stumbled upon the world of Kanjeevaram saris. The initial scepticism regarding the exorbitantly high pricing gradually gave way to intrigue.

Made from mulberry silk, silver and gold, the handwoven Kanjeevaram sari is an ancient art that traces its origin to the temple town of Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu. Legend has it that the Kanchi silk weavers are descendants of Sage Markanda who was considered to be the master weaver for the gods themselves. Fascinated, I decided to head to the very source, and in the process, possibly draw a good bargain. This brought me to the small and colourful weavers' village of Hasanamapet, 25 km from Kanchipuram.

Life in nearly every household revolved around the imposing central feature set up in the middle of the living space, a four to five-metre-long wooden silk loom. The weavers, mostly older men and women, were master craftsmen refining their skills since childhood. They painstakingly took me through the complex art of creating a true Kanjeevaram sari in its entirety. This elaborate and unaltered process, passed down generations, starts with the dyeing of the fine silk yarn followed by starching, spinning, warping, weaving and then finally merging the contrasting border and *pallu* with the main body of the sari through an intricate and exhaustive process. Anything else and it's not a true Kanji, I was proudly told.

Further sharing tips on how to tell apart a genuine Kanjeevaram, I was warned against the machine-made soulless imposters which were flooding the market and lacked both the design and durability of a true Kanjeevaram sari passed down generations. Witnessing the creation of art through the skilful intertwining of silk and gold *zari* threads has a mesmerising effect. Suddenly the exorbitant prices appeared rather nominal as I picked up three stunning saris instead of one. ♦



A photograph of a forest path. The path is covered in fallen leaves and leads into the distance, framed by large trees with intricate branch patterns. Sunlight filters through the canopy, creating a dappled light effect on the ground.

DARK & DEEP



On the edge of the Indo-Nepal border in Uttar Pradesh, in the Terai belt, is the Dudhwa Tiger Reserve that should be your call of the wild this winter. It is home to many endangered animals and over 500 species of rare birds.

Photography SUMAN KUMAR RAJU RUDRARAJU Words STUTI AGARWAL



With the morning sun, the elephants too
are ready to slip into the depths of the
Dudhwa forests, man astride, in a bid to
seek out the Royal Bengal Tiger



Barasingha—meaning twelve (*bara*) antlered (*singha*)—also known as the swamp deer because of its marshy habitat, enjoy a life of isolation, except in the mating season, when herds come together and the males duel to win over the females





Dense woody thickets lead into fine sal forests. Large patches of sal trees open into magnificent grasslands, marshes and wetlands—the Dudhwa Tiger Reserve rustles and whispers, the chirping of the birds revealing its best-kept secrets







Spanning the Dudhwa National Park, Krishanpur Wildlife Sanctuary and Katarniaghata Wildlife Sanctuary, the Dudhwa Tiger Reserve is mesmerising with its mammoth list of wildlife—the endangered one-horned rhino, leopard, tiger, hispid hare, red-crowned roofed turtle, and much more

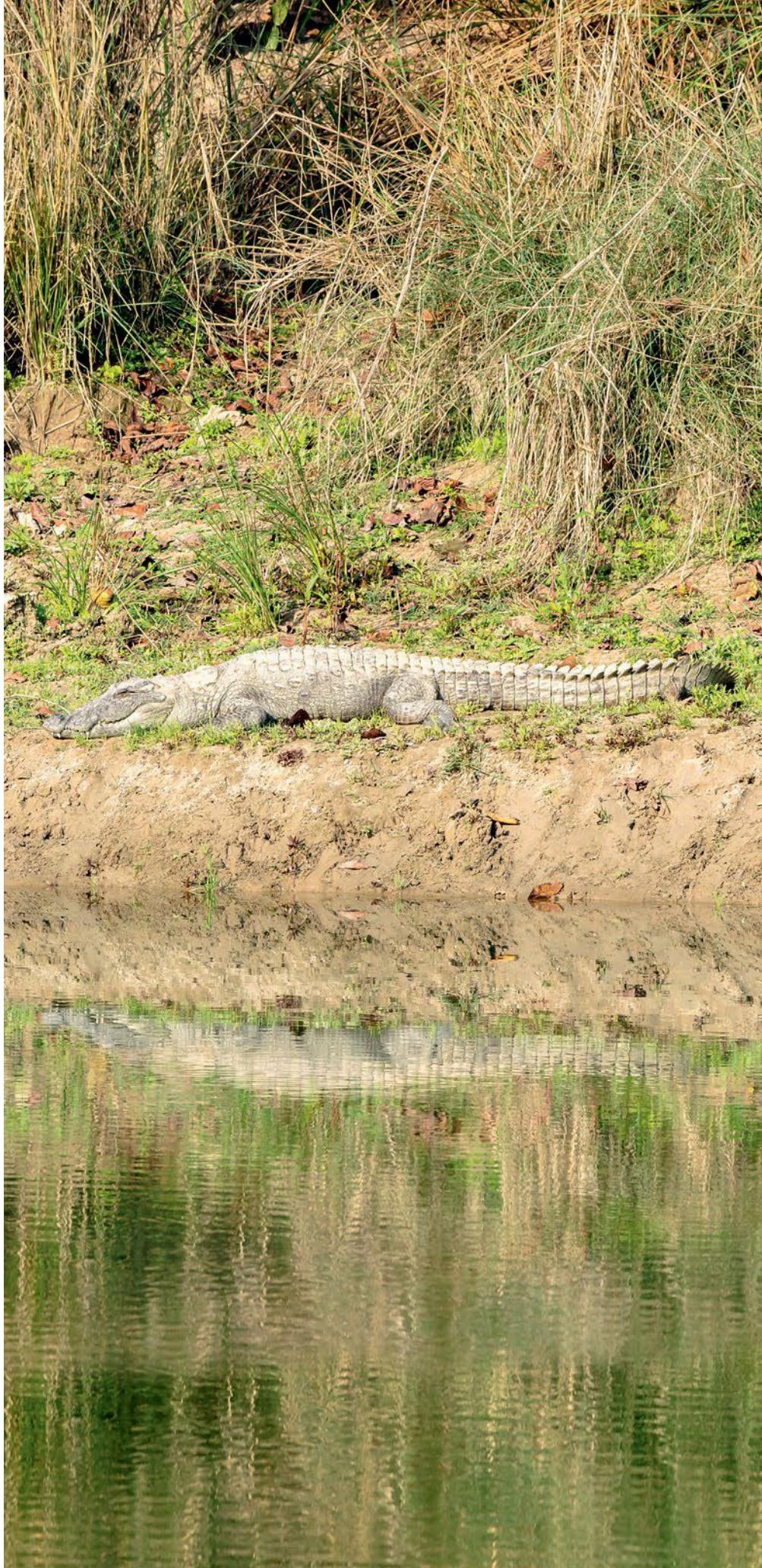




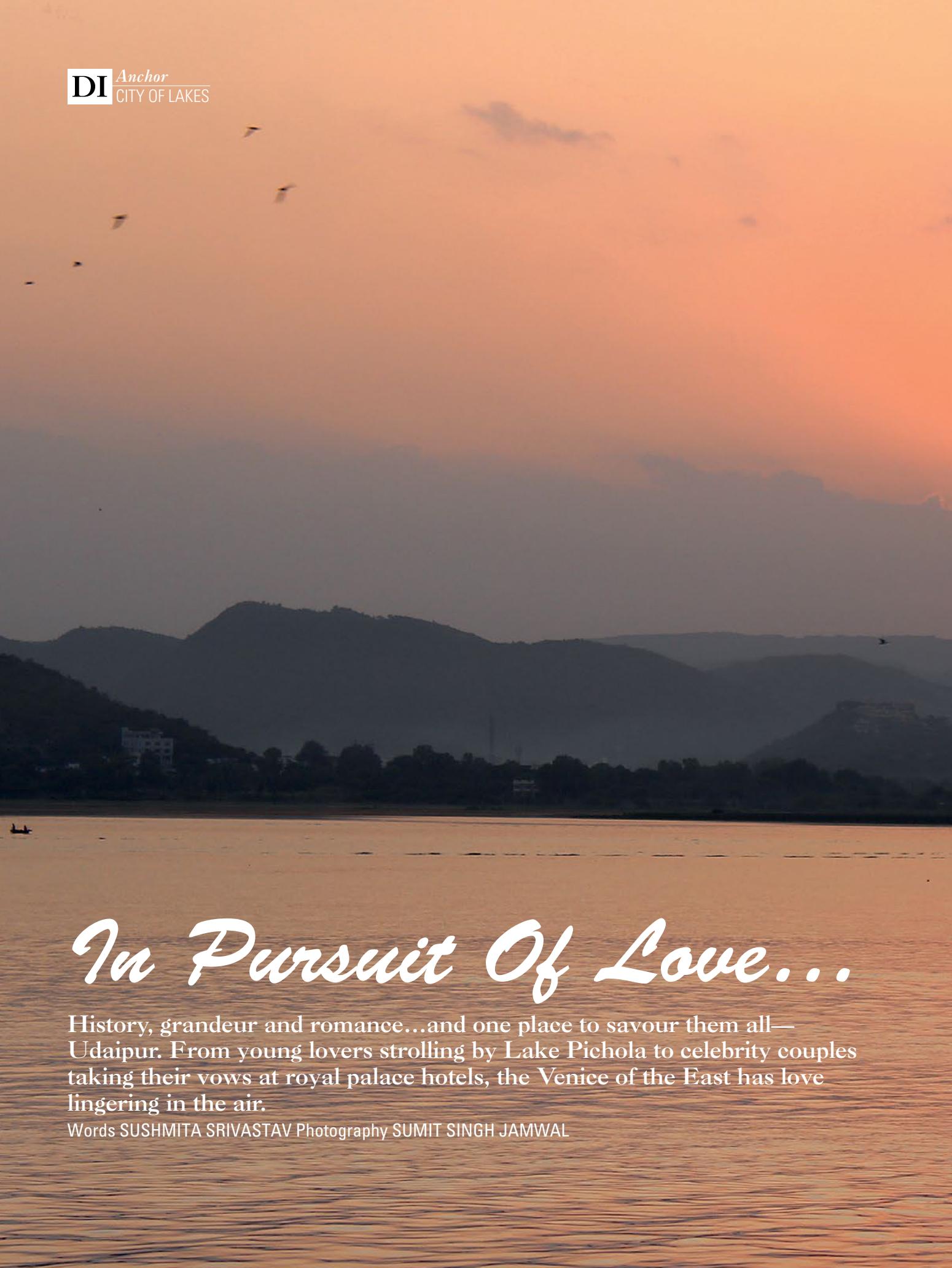
Over 700 and still counting—the Dudhwa Tiger Reserve this year witnessed along its Chambal and Gerua rivers hatchings of gharial eggs, a species of Indian crocodile declared 20 times more endangered than the tiger by the *Red Data Book*

WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHY TIPS

- Consider a mix of photographing the habitat around the wildlife and also those close-up portrait shots of animals in a forest.
- Photos with a low-angle perspective look more appealing than shots from a high angle. When on a safari vehicle, always try to sit on a seat or on the floor to get that low-angle perspective.
- Always keep the subject off-center. When the animal is moving from left to right, keep more space towards the right in your picture to show the movement of the animal in your picture.
- Follow the Rule of Thirds when photographing animals in vast forest landscapes with wide-angle lenses. When you see there is more drama in the sky, choose 70% sky and 30% foreground, and when you see there is more drama in the foreground, choose 70% foreground and 30% sky.
- When you are photographing animals from a safari vehicle in a forest, watch your shutter speed. Never shoot below 1/500 sec—it will result in a blurred image because you are not standing on stable ground. When on stable ground, you can shoot at 1/250 sec.
- Always capture images in RAW so that you have the flexibility to bring out a true white balance and adjust the exposure to bring out what you saw.
- If required, boost your ISO to 3,200 or higher and open your aperture to f2.8 or whatever is lower on your camera to get higher shutter speeds on your camera during early morning and late evening safari trips in a forest. Noise created due to high ISO in a picture is always better than a blurred picture.
- When you're out photographing birds or animals in action, be on 1/1000 sec shutter speed or higher to freeze the motion of flight. If you have good light, I recommend you shoot at 1/2000 sec shutter speed. If required, boost your ISO and open your aperture to f2.8 or whatever is lower on your camera to attain higher shutter speeds. The Continuous High shutter release mode which records a burst of images if you hold down the shutter button is great for this.
- It's recommended to photograph in either Aperture Priority or Shutter Priority modes. When shooting in Aperture Priority, keep a watch on shutter speed. If required, boost your ISO to achieve higher shutter speeds. Alternatively, you can also photograph in Shutter Priority and increase your ISO when required to get a higher f-number on your camera. A higher f-number will give you a greater depth of field.
- When photographing during the golden hour, try to underexpose by two stops. This will highlight silhouettes of animals against the orange sky and setting sun.
- Carry a zoom lens with a focal range of 50mm to 400mm to capture close-ups of animals and birds and a wide-angle lens with a focal length of 14mm to 50mm to capture forest habitat.







In Pursuit Of Love...

History, grandeur and romance...and one place to savour them all—Udaipur. From young lovers strolling by Lake Pichola to celebrity couples taking their vows at royal palace hotels, the Venice of the East has love lingering in the air.

Words SUSHMITA SRIVASTAV Photography SUMIT SINGH JAMWAL



A boat ride on Lake Pichola, a visit to the Monsoon Palace or a ropeway ride at Doodh Talai—you can never fall short on options when it comes to seeing a spellbinding sunset in Udaipur

Love, they say, can be found anywhere—it cannot be bound by the limits of worldly affairs. You can run into that special someone and discover love at the most unexpected time and place, or maybe sometimes love requires enough time to grow and an ‘experience’ to blossom. Floating in a gondola in Venice, kissing under the Eiffel Tower in Paris, sauntering on the beaches of Hawaii, experiencing the ‘Champagne climate’ in Switzerland or looking at the glorious Taj Mahal in Agra at twilight—we travel the world, move from city to city trying the things people have associated with romance over the years. And if there’s a place in India that defines romance in many ways, it is Udaipur.

The City of Lakes, the Venice of the East or the White City—called differently by different people, Udaipur has been synonymous with romance since it was founded in 1559 by Maharana Udai Singh II. So whether you are planning to pop the big question, looking for a honeymoon destination or simply want to escape with your partner for a romantic getaway, we have picked out the best experiences that will set the tone.

Stay At A Luxury Palace Hotel

Udaipur is liberally dotted with royal architectural delights. With their sprawling gardens, soaring domes, vivid wall murals, and traditional décor adding a medieval charm, many of these aristocratic palaces and *havelis*, painted in royal ochre or white, have been thoughtfully turned into luxury heritage hotels. Exuding a quaint, old-world feel, these royal stays win you over with their impeccable hospitality ethos long before you give their luxury rooms a chance to be your home. Most importantly, all these hotels know how to treat couples in love right in their own unique ways.

jüSTA Sajjangarh Resort & Spa offers a private Jacuzzi with a scenic view of the pool, lawn or Sajjangarh Palace in each of its suites. Rising out of Lake Pichola like a dream, **Taj Lake Palace** can set up an intimate date for just the two of you on the 150-year-old Royal Gangaur boat once used by Maharanas, with firework displays and folk performances on request. Head for a pampering couple massage at SPA, which is pegged as India’s only tented luxury spa, housed in **The Leela Palace Udaipur**. Once a hunting ground for the Maharana of Mewar, the 200-year-old **Oberoi Udaivilas** is popular as a venue for fairytale destination weddings. For nature lovers, there’s a 150-year-old wildlife conservatory within the premises of **Trident Udaipur** ideal for a long, romantic walk in the woods. But if the walks and horseback rides feel too mainstream and you would rather choose to go completely extravagant, **The Lalit Laxmi Vilas Palace** offers a private luxury air charter service that is sure to sweep you off your feet!



The complex of the dramatic City
Palace glows golden in the dark
with the Mewar Sound and Light
Show each night





Take A Boat Ride On Lake Pichola

The sky turns lilac with a hint of fading yellow and the blue water turns into liquid gold. As time slows down, birds start gliding into nowhere, the sun bids you adieu with a little warmth on the rather nippy evening and the absolute silence feels surreal for a change. Sure, the mornings may offer you misty vistas but there's definitely no better time than sunset to drift on a boat on the lifeline of the city—**Lake Pichola**. As you slowly soar into yawning depths, leaving the **Rameshwar Ghat** and the **City Palace** complex behind, you get to see many white-marbled mansions rising from the waters including the likes of **Taj Lake Palace** and **Lake Pichola Hotel**. And just when you start to think it cannot get any better, you arrive at **Jag Mandir** or the **Lake Garden Palace**—a true castaway-island fantasy. Shrouded in greenery and peppered with lofty domes and ornate towers, the island palace has several paved paths leading to a labyrinth of lush gardens. Make the most of your hour-long halt here by having a conversation while sipping coffee at the **Darikhana Restaurant** or standing at the edge watching the dusk fall.

Relive The Past At Forts And Palaces

The history in Udaipur is not locked away in ticketed museums and tattered monuments. One can find the glorious past of the city living and breathing right in its busy, narrow lanes, in the

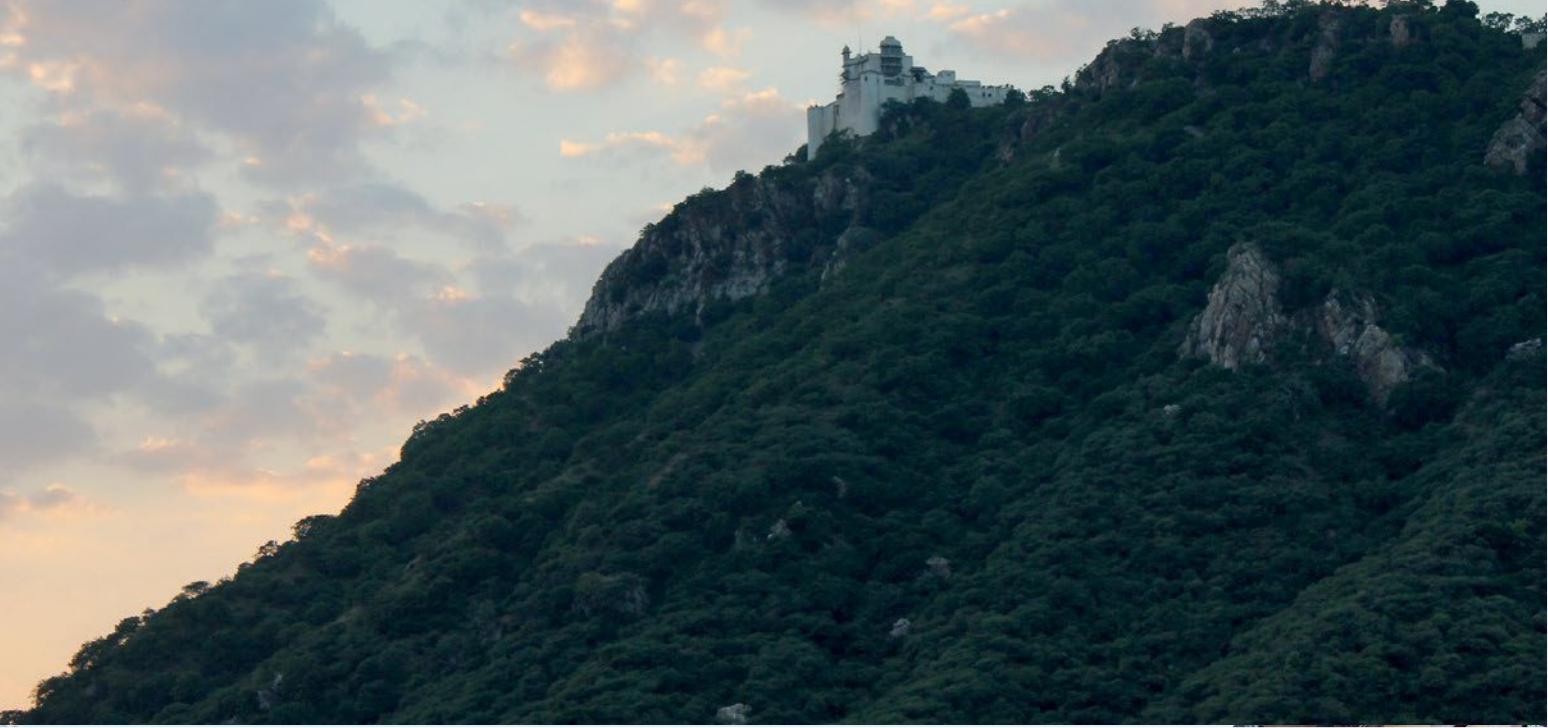
hand-painted ancestral abodes, in the chatter of locals over evening *chai* and most of all, in the age-old forts that once stood witness to the golden past.

Enter the imposing **City Palace** and you will instantly be taken back in time. The ochre citadel with its massive courtyards, graceful arches, walls adorned with intricate *thekri* or mosaic glass work, and a museum with age-old artefacts, comes alive every evening when legends of Mewar are told through a breathtaking light and sound show. It takes you from the '*jauhar*' of Rani Padmavati to the heroic act of Panna Dajji to the selfless affection shared between Humayun and his Hindu *rakhi* sister, Rani Karnavati, to many more unbelievable folklores. You can choose to sit in the courtyard of Manek Chowk or snuggle cosily in the balcony area called Hathnal ki Chandani for a better view. The restored rambling **Bagore ki Haveli** from the 18th century stands lit amidst the comely clutter of the Old City every night as it hosts the famous Dharohar Dance Show—an amalgamation of various folk performances including Ghoomar, Kathputli Nritya, Bhawaai, Gavari (a tribal ritual performed by men), Terah Taali and more. **Saheliyon ki Bari** is all about little kiosks, pretty fountains, marble mannequins and a quaint, ornamental maze of gardens. Stroll through these lush lawns or get couple tickets of any (or both) of these shows—these forts and palaces won't disappoint you.

Riding in a boat on Lake Pichola is probably the best way to get a sweeping view of the imposing City Palace complex; (*below*) Lake Garden Palace is a labyrinth of lush lawns ideal for long, romantic walks

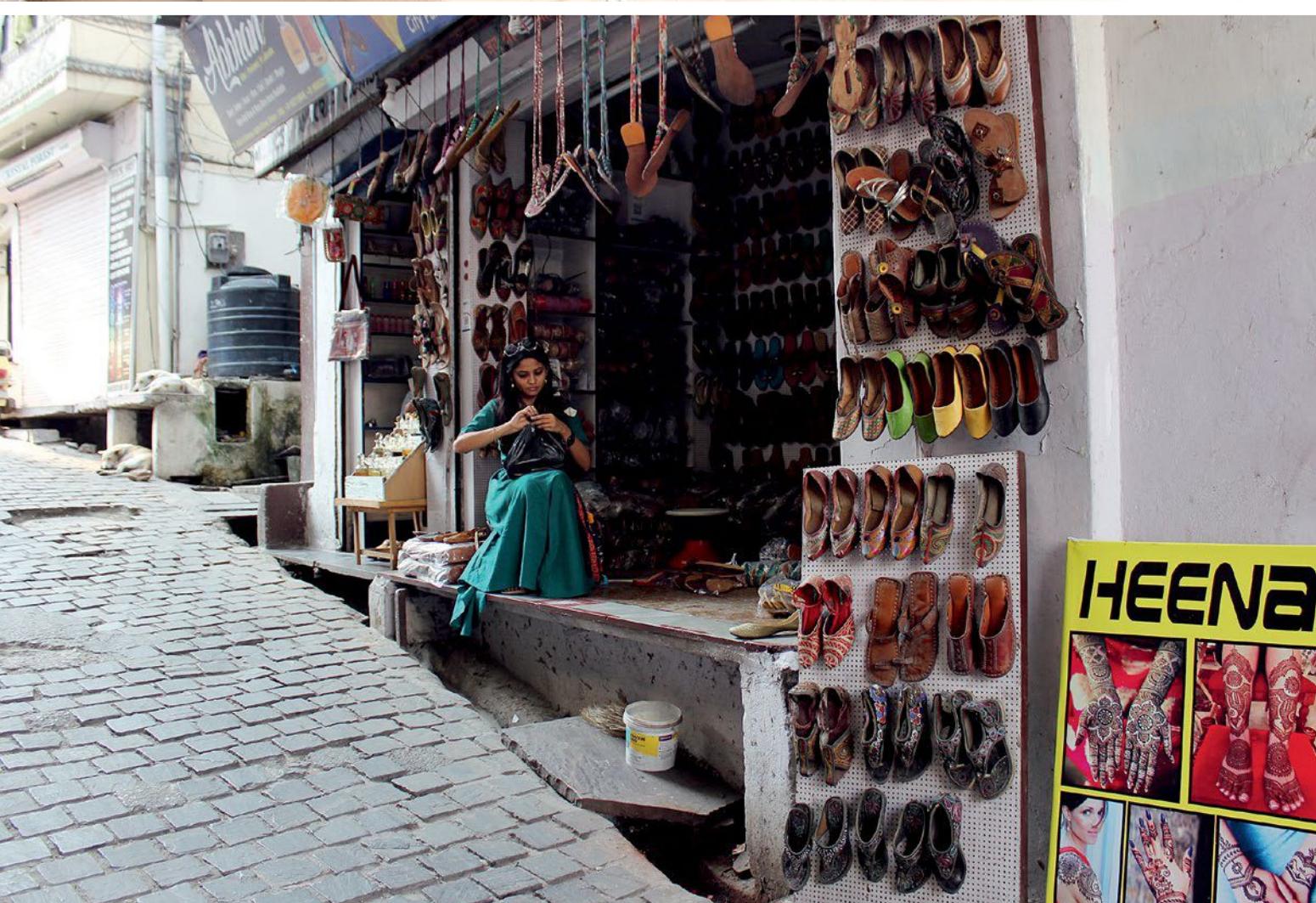


(Clockwise from left) Atop a verdant hill, the Monsoon Palace offers a panoramic view of the City of Lakes like none other; the Royal Gangaur boat of Taj Lake Palace is for perfect date nights in the midst of Lake Pichola; pick a seat at Dharohar Dance Show for traditional performances; the museum at Bagore ki Haveli showcases the patrician culture and living of Mewar





Shilpgram has beautiful mud murals and artworks placed on display at every corner; (below) the streets of the Old City offer the best buys of *juttis*, *bandhani* saris, handicrafts and more



Dine Under The Stars By A Lake

Think of a romantic date and chances are the first thing that pops into your head is a candle-lit dinner with scattered rose petals all around and soulful music playing in the background. Don't feel guilty in thinking of a cliché, for this one's a classic that can never go out of fashion. But now take this set-up and place it right next to a glittering lake, with the faint natural light of the moon illuminating the sky, a bed of a million stars keeping you company from above and a soft breeze playing with your hair. A candle-lit dinner at any of the al fresco diners by **Lake Pichola** or **Fateh Sagar Lake** with the glorious **City Palace** and **Gangaur Ghat** in the backdrop, is anything but regular. And the options are endless.

Amet Haveli boasts of the famous **Ambrai** restaurant that happily arranges a private meal under a *jharoka* in the garden looking out to the City Palace. Named after the year Udaipur was founded, **1559 AD** is built in a standalone villa famous for multi-cuisine fine dining with both indoor and al fresco sittings, while **Upre** is more of an informal, open-air setting with cabanas laid on the ground floor of the villa by the glittering lake of Fateh Sagar. In case you want to sit next to **Swaroop Sagar** that falls a little away from the hustle-bustle of the Old City, drop by **Tribute**. All of these restaurants are famous for their Rajasthani spreads of fiery *lal maas*, *kher sangri*, *dhungaar maas*, *gatte ki sabzi* and more. The lovely art nouveau café of **Palki Khana**, however, is famous for its European-influenced menu. And when you crave *tandoori* or barbecue, no place can be better than **Charcoal by Carisson**. Be sure to make prior bookings though, the restaurants here are more in demand than you'd have thought.

Watch Bond Movie Octopussy At A Café

It was in the year 1983 that Roger Moore arrived in Udaipur to shoot the 13th James Bond classic, *Octopussy*. Years later, the city continues to bring the Hollywood star alive every evening in the cafés and bistros nestled in the busy bylanes. *Octopussy* is screened at various cafés all across here for free. Offering great views of the stunning **Jagdish Temple** on one side, City Palace on the other and the bustling streets below, **Café O'Zen** has hand-painted turrets and doors, indoor plants in every nook and walls adorned with adorable art works and mirrors. You can opt to chill on the terrace with a beer and their delicious Four-Cheese Pizza or watch James Bond in action on the big screen while relaxing on a couch on the first floor. **Ashiana Café** and **Sunrise Restaurant and Café** are among many others where you can catch the famous Bond flick any given day. After all, a movie date can never be an old-world affair.

See The Sunset

Skipping a sunset view in Udaipur would be a sin. And so, while gliding in a boat ride on **Lake Pichola** to watch the sun slowly sinking into the blue tops the list, there are many more ways you can be saved from missing out on this ultimate romantic experience. The city brims with breathtaking sunset spots. Perched atop a hill like a Disney movie castle, the white-marbled forlorn structure of **Monsoon Palace** (earlier known

as **Sajjan Garh**) is thronged by many right before dusk for one main reason—the palace offers a view of the entire city glittering in the golden rays of the falling sun. The drive to the palace via a sloping, snaking road through **Sajjan Garh Wildlife Sanctuary** is equally romantic. Try taking a ride with a local and you might get to hear the tale of how Maharana Sajjan Singh built this palace to pick one of the *ranis* (all the royal ladies would dress up and stand at the windows upon the arrival of the Maharana) to make love with every night.

Take a walk on the footbridge at **Ambrai Ghat** if you wish to see the sun slowly descending with the City Palace and Lake Palace Hotel in the backdrop—there's a reason why this one's a popular hangout among local couples. Or try the ropeway—get into a cable car at **Doodh Talai** and literally glide into the sunset, making your way to the **Karni Mata Temple**. Or you can simply sit back and enjoy live music at **The Sunset Terrace** at **Fateh Prakash Palace**, overlooking the shimmering Lake Pichola with the sky turning into a riot of colours.

Try Your Hand At Pottery At Shilpgram

Think mud huts, draped and decked camels ready for a ride, puppet shows, local artisans at work, over 26 traditional village houses with craft exhibits from different states, folk performers in traditional attire and several mud murals and artworks on display at every other corner. This is **Shilpgram**—the living rural complex of art and crafts in the city. Ask a potter and they won't mind letting you both try your hand at pottery—a little messy, but fun way to learn the art together. Or try making a pair of puppets dance! Once done, explore the greens in this rolling, dusty countryside by a long walk or on the back of a camel.

Shop And Eat Like A Local

The winding alleys here are aligned with bustling shops where vendors often greet you with a smile and welcome you in with a polite '*padharo hukam*'. But don't swoon at this politeness already as there's a lot to see. Find your picks of silver and camel bone jewellery at **Bada Bazaar** or **Bapu Bazaar**. The local fabric shops here offer *batik* and *bandhani* saris at lowest rates and there's no dearth of shops selling handicrafts, souvenirs, home decor and leather items at dirt-cheap prices (you wouldn't even feel the need to bargain!).

Hathi Pole can be explored for similar options of pots, *nagra* (camel skin) items, puppets, *pichwai* handicrafts and more. Once done strolling the streets for the best bargains, try street-side shops for lip-smacking foods like the crispy *jalebi*, spicy *kachori*, *samosas*, *dal baati* dipped in *desi ghee*, and sweets like *ghewar*. ♦

■ NAVIGATOR

GETTING THERE

By Air At 22 km (approximately 30 mins) east of Udaipur, Maharana Pratap Airport is closest to the city.

By Train Udaipur City Railway Station (3 km, 10 mins) is the nearest railhead.

By Road A drive from Delhi to Udaipur (663 km) takes around 10 hours. Regular buses are available too.



Finding My Way Home

Growing up makes you forget—and then with time, you remember, the beauty and pain of the rain. Take a journey to the eastern town of Darjeeling with a local as she too rediscovers.

Words STUTI AGARWAL



From the edge of the Happy Valley Tea Estate, on the train ride around Batasia Loop, or while tracing steps in Mall Road—the Kanchenjunga range is everywhere, a permanent resident of Darjeeling



As a school kid growing up in Darjeeling, the monsoon was never a welcome time. It wasn't about the landslides that devastated nooks of the town, life in the hills always went on undisturbed, it was about having to walk to school and arriving soaking wet.

Cars were a luxury in Darjeeling, and while many schools have buses, ours didn't. Of course, here I'm missing the tiny detail that we lived very close to the school—one small hill down to be precise—and we had no choice but to walk.

As mothers often do, the Darjeeling ones have found a way for kids to have a dry day—bundled up in ankle-length raincoats with their special bag pockets and large umbrellas. Rain boots were seldom an option given that carrying them around the whole day seemed tedious, so the alternative was *chappals*. An extra bag with plastics to wrap everything that was wet, and towels to dry our feet before slipping into dry socks and shoes was a laborious addition.

Every day, for at least five months or so, the 'wet bag' was carried painstakingly to school. Let me not bother you with what happened when we had to step out into the market. And so, when I finally did go out to study, I knew that the one thing I wouldn't miss was the rains in my hometown. I stand corrected today.

I've been away for the last eight years and made it a point to avoid the rains, until this year, when all I wanted to do was sit on my writing desk, undisturbed, and finish writing my book. I went back home, the rain pouring down on my suitcase as I dragged it downhill, complaining about the bad paths; but as soon as I sat down to write, the rain drumming outside my window, I smiled, and I knew something had changed, I felt like stepping out.

For all the week that I was back, I refused to sit at home and instead walked around to all the places that made Darjeeling home to me. So far, I have always loved the winters in Darjeeling, the warm sun, chilly breeze and town

The cloud cover is synonymous with life in Darjeeling—umbrellas up and watch the puddles as you manoeuvre around town—until it clears up and lets the cold sun in, one light ray at a time, illuminating the hills a deep blue, and thus, life goes on



ASHIS GHATAK

festivities are everything one would want to visit the town for; but this time, the rains soaked me with a feeling of oneness that I haven't felt in my 18 years of living in the town—monsoon to winter.

The mornings begin early in my town, well before the sun is out; and mine began with a walk. Like any other hill resident would tell you, the best way to explore the town is on foot—walking through meandering streets and narrow trenches. As locals, we have our own paths marked out, straying away from the popular roads, but the main Mall Road remains my favourite. The walk around the hill, through the view of the Kanchenjunga range, the vibrant Chowrasta, the busy town and its quainter side—for me, this round walk defines the town in about a kilometre. Every day, my walk ended on the benches, dry under the covers of the tinned roofs, diary in hand, breathing in the misty air, dotted with shadows of tourists and locals alike, listening to the endless drone of the crickets, waiting for the winter sun to wash over

me and the live music in Chowrasta to pick me up from the intoxication induced by the incessant rain, so I could go for a long breakfast at Keventer's (our very original)—of bacon, meaty sausages, melting butter on toast, fresh salami and a mug-full of hot coco. But I await patiently, unlike before, knowing that I am in good company.

Lunches were at home, my experiments with local produce and flavours. This, for me, was the highlight of the rains in Darjeeling. How had I never sampled the local *dukku ko saag*, *dallo khursani ko aachar*, *mungta ko saag*, *teet tamatar ko chutney*? This time, I spent hours in the vegetable market, wading through the stream of rain water and muck running down the hill decorated with vendors on each side, avoiding the corner where the old lady sold dried fish, cockroaches and what not!

I'd take my pick of these vegetables of the rains and hop back home, excited to use all of these to make myself (of course, with lots of help) a grand lunch of *dal*, *bhaat* (rice)

■ NAVIGATOR

GETTING THERE

By Air Bagdogra (75 km) is the nearest airport.

By Rail New Jalpaiguri (69 km) is the closest railway station to Darjeeling.

By Road Darjeeling can be reached from Gangtok and Siliguri via NH10 to NH110.

STAY

Windamere is a luxury hotel with a full view of Kanchenjunga and with easy accessibility to Mall Road (www.windamerehotel.com). Hotel Sunflower offers affordable rooms right in the heart of the town and is walkable distance from the taxi stand (www.sunflowergroupofhotels.com). There are plenty of budget hotels to choose from in Darjeeling depending on which part of town you want to stay in. Little Tibet and RJ Resorts are two good options.

SHOPPING

If you can bargain, Darjeeling is a shopper's paradise. Shops dot all parts of town, but for quality tea, go to Golden Tips in the Rink Mall. For artefacts, Tibet Art and Habib Malik in Chowrasta have all Tibetan and Nepali arts and jewellery.

EAT

Keventer's for breakfast, Kunga's and Sonam's for lunch, Glenary's for tea and snacks, Joey's for a drink, and Gatty's for that late-night craving—Darjeeling offers plenty of choice. Also try the local momo and *thukpa* at Bhola's.





(Clockwise) Locals say you are not a resident of Darjeeling if you haven't climbed the Tenzing Rock; Chowrasta is a melting pot of business and culture and a walk on foot or a horse is a must; unwind with a pot of second flush Darjeeling tea and a scrumptious pastry at the famous Glenary's





topped with *ghee*, *saag* and *aachhaar*. I am afraid of drool slipping through my lips even as I write about it today, a good two months after.

Not seasonal (thankfully), but I want to believe I also mastered the art of making *alo*, a Darjeeling snack of spicy *alo* curry, corrupted with lots of colour and then some more with fried chips, Wai Wai and some more spicy chutney. Although, I would still recommend going to Benny's for a bowl of steaming *alo*; that in the cold rains were a balm to my soul, even after I'd already had bowls-full at home.

Then there are some tourist checkposts that even as locals we want to keep going back to, rain or sun. Darjeeling, you must remember, is a town of leisure. Here, not a soul is in a hurry. Life meanders on, and unlike most people who miss appreciating where they live, people in Darjeeling often keep the tourist spots busy themselves. My early evenings back home were spent visiting these places—at least the ones I thought were truly worth the while.

The Happy Valley Tea Estate is a short walk from my home and one of the few that are visitor-friendly. Plus, it is close to this beautiful cemetery that I also make a point to visit. Before this sounds too morbid, the cemetery is an incredibly old one, the tombstones made of white stone, perched on the edge of a bushy hill, with the view of Kanchenjunga and the valley. I cannot imagine a happier view for all resting there. As for the Happy Valley Tea Estate, one is welcome to visit on any weekday for a walk-in tour of the tea-making process and tea-tasting. I usually wander out from the back and into the sprawling tea gardens sloping down into the valley. The rains made me take shelter under the cover of a pine tree and sketch the rain pour over the tea bushes and down the roots. As I sat, I watched the sky clear up and the clouds part to let the sun in, and something in me said that it was going to be the end of the rains.

Luckily too, as rains in Darjeeling can put a dampener on a Toy Train joyride. Looking out of the window and hopping on and off the train was just not as fun with the windows getting fogged up and you slipping on rain tracks! But as soon as the sun is out, a train ride to Ghoom and back is always on my to-do list. For those few hours that the train loops in and out of the hills and forests, I imagine being JK Rowling, waiting for the next Harry Potter idea to hit; letting all the inspiration from my green surroundings seep in. For anyone going for

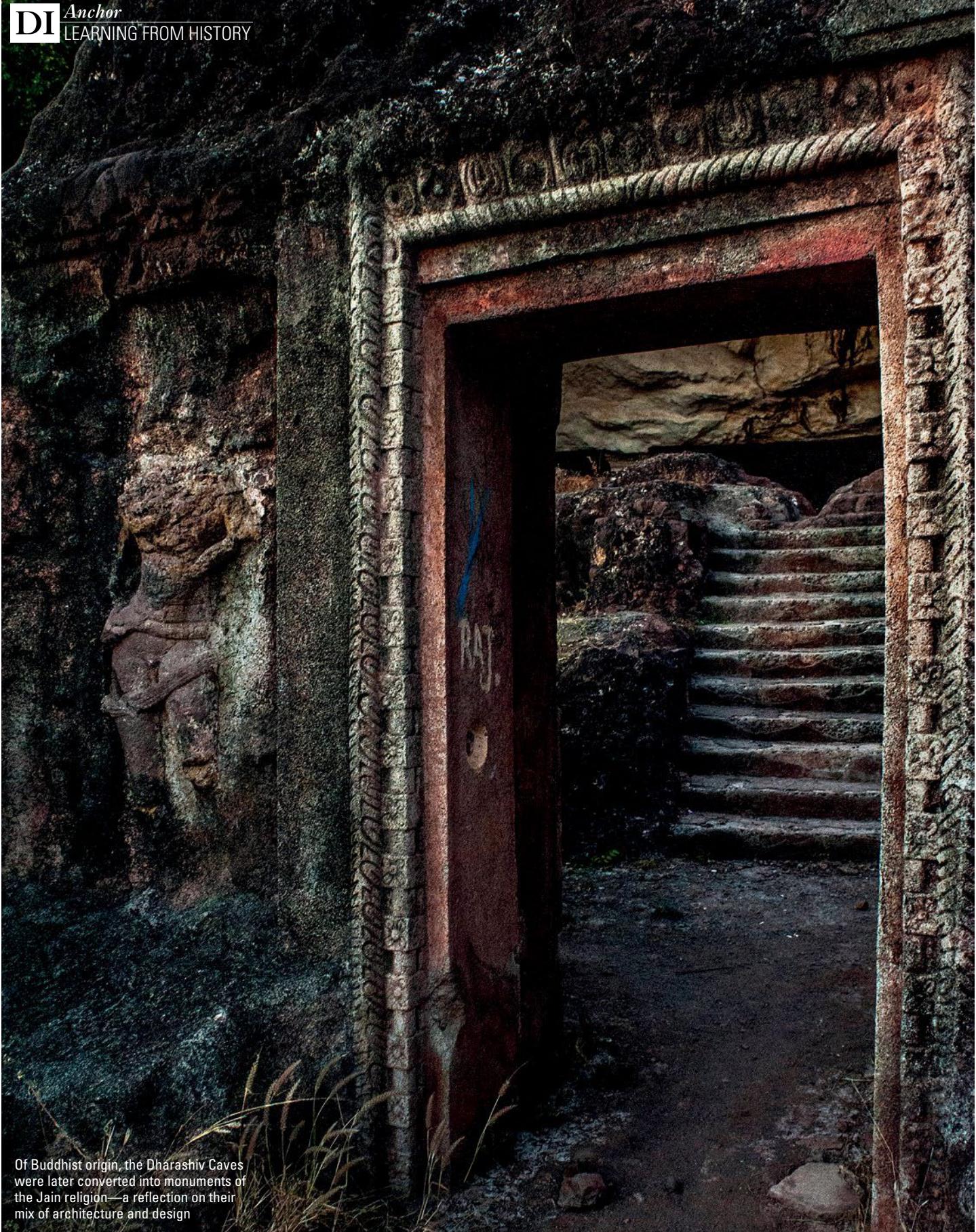
Of food, Darjeeling has plenty to offer, as long as you aren't one to be attracted by large chain stores. A tea at Nathmulls, breakfast at Keventer's, and a meal at Sonam's are only some of them.

the first time, I would recommend a visit to the Rail History Museum in the Ghoom station—a quick peek into the history of the Darjeeling Railway is just the sweet journey I would hope every museum is.

This time, the sunny days also brought with them the opportunity for me to become a climber. I must be truthful that I am not a climber, but the Tenzing Rock makes you believe you are one. Darjeeling is home to the famous Himalayan Mountaineering Institute, where every season many train in the hope to make it to the Mount Everest base camp. The Tenzing Rock is part of early training; but given its easy gradient, it is also open to anyone else who would like to try (there are always local climbers, harness in hand, ready to push you to the top). In fact, as kids we were told that you were only a "Darjeeling-ite" (for lack of a better word) if you had climbed the Tenzing Rock, and most people can climb up and down without help or harness. So, I did, after much trepidation, after 25 years of believing I'm part of the town. The climb is not too bad, but what Tenzing Rock's easy front facade does not reveal is its steep, ivy covered fall on the other end. I sat down, dizzy, refusing to get down for over an hour, until I saw the local climbers getting ready to leave me there.

The day for the locals ends as early as it begins. Businesses start closing by 7.30-8 pm on a good day, earlier if it is raining and the owners are waiting for a dry window to shut shop, and I still have a few stops to make before I call it a day. The first is a tea break at the famous Glenary's. Perhaps the most famous of all eateries in Darjeeling, Glenary's is the town's master baker. I can't claim to love the food, but their tea, a Darjeeling second flush, hits just the right spots. Nathmulls is another option, with a lot better food, but for an everyday stop it can burn a hole in your pocket. My new go-to place is Lion's Gate, also in Chowrasta. Their hot toddy is the perfect warmth on any given day, with snacks to match. For a good cup of coffee and local pizza, it's Mamta's Pizza Palace. Run by one of the cutest couples—the most gorgeous French man who fell in love with a local lady and eloped—you are ensured a great sight of pizza tossing, French Press coffee and engaging conversations. There is an *alo* maker who sits under Southfield College that is my last stop. The paper-thin chops ladled with spicy *chutney* always manage to bring the day to the happiest end.

There will be more to do the next day. A climb up to the highest point of Darjeeling, a visit to Peace Pagoda, a trek up to witness sunrise from Tiger Hill, or a meditation at the Druk Sangag Choling Monastery perhaps. For now, it was time to sit on the stairs and gaze at the starry night of which Darjeeling always has plenty or actually try and finish my book. ♦



Of Buddhist origin, the Dharashiv Caves were later converted into monuments of the Jain religion—a reflection on their mix of architecture and design

A History Lover's Guide To Osmanabad

Osmanabad is no stranger to tourists (or should I say pilgrims?) who come in huge numbers to visit the famous Tulja Bhavani Temple in Tuljapur. While the temple is definitely the most visited site here, Osmanabad has quite a few places of historical importance. A couple of years ago, as a student of archaeology at the Centre of Extra Mural Studies, Mumbai University, I travelled to Osmanabad with my professor for a field trip. Part of the Deccan region, Osmanabad has seen kingdoms right from the Satavahana dynasty of ancient India to the early Islamic rulers of the Adil Shahi period. The distinctive style of art and architecture of every period surfaces in its various monuments, each a marvel in itself.

Words SHIRIN MEHROTRA

Our field tour began with stopping at a village gateway—**Hapsingyachi Ves**, built at the entrance of Paranda village, which served as a toll booth. In southern Maharashtra, every large village had an entrance gate which was a clearing house for all sorts of information and for the government to keep an eye on what goods were moving in and out of the village; travellers would stop here and tell tales of distant lands. The economy of most medieval empires was structured around such toll gates. Like most places of historical importance, there's a legend attached to this one too; the most common one being of the thief who lived inside the gate for 40 years.

The Magnificent Land Forts Of Marathwada

The first day of the archaeology trip to Osmanabad was spent at the **Paranda Fort**. The medieval fort is said to have been built around the late 15th century by Mahmud Gawan, the *wazir* of the Bahamani Sultanate. The fort has been under the Bahamanis, Marathas, Mughals and Nizams over a period of time. The fort is surrounded by a moat, and apart from being one of the best defence forts, it houses one of the most magnificent cannons in India which is a sister of the famous Malik-e-Maidan cannon kept in the Bijapur fort.

A short distance away from Paranda, stands another architectural gem of the Bahamani period, **Jamiya Masjid** in Kati Gaon in Tuljapur *taluka* is a 16th century mosque, built in memory of a husband during the regime of Burhan Shah.

A plaque inside the mosque reveals that the foundation stone was laid by the wife of Yakub in Hijri 1012 (Gregorian calendar year 1590). The *mihrab* (that indicates the direction of the Kaaba in Mecca) with its intricate design is undoubtedly the most beautiful part of the mosque. The arcs and dome along with the shrine showcase the beauty of Mughal architecture.

While technically not in Osmanabad district, **Ausa Fort** in Latur district is worth a visit for its collection of cannons. Built during the Bahamani period, the square fort is another example of defence architecture during the early Islamic period.

Cave Dwelling

One of the oldest caves of the area, the **Dharashiv Caves** are located 8 km from Osmanabad in the Balaghat mountains. Built in the fifth century BC, these were originally Buddhist caves which were later converted into Jain monuments.

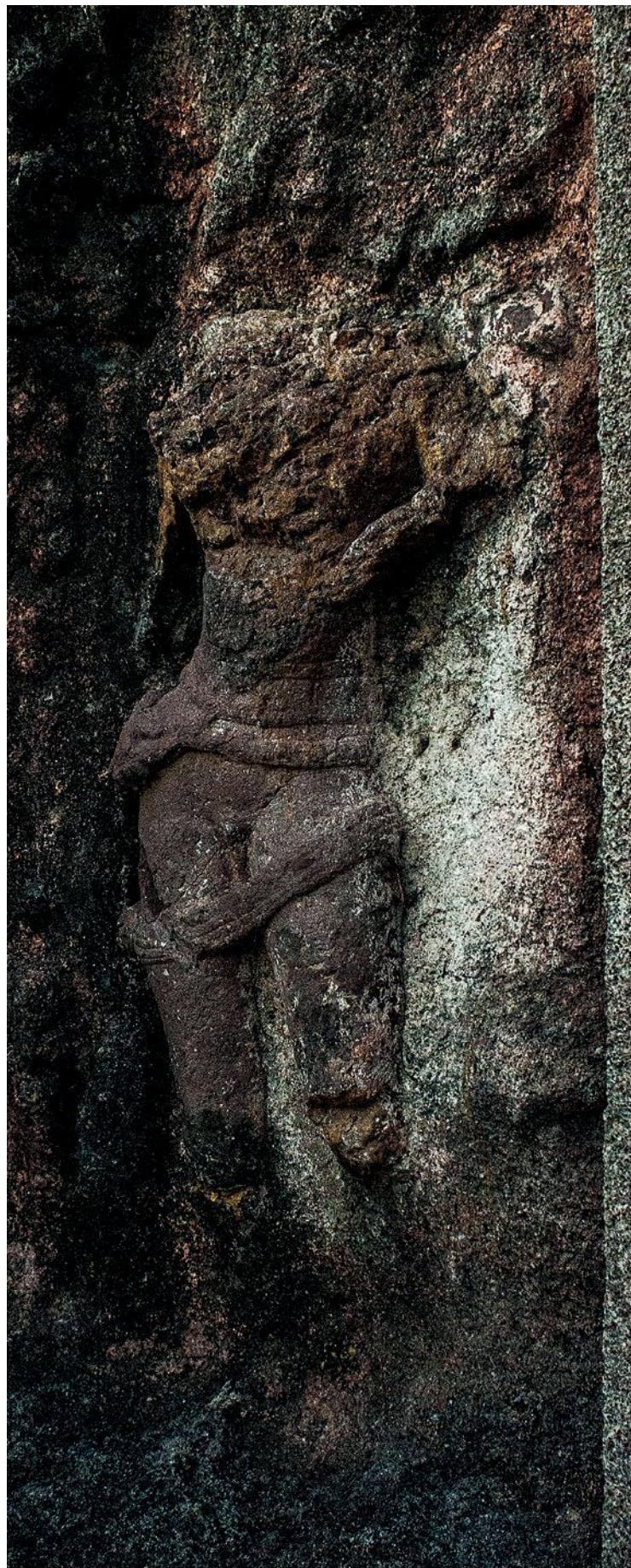
Kharosa Caves—again in Latur district and not Osmanabad—are Buddhist caves built between the sixth to eighth centuries. Cave number three, which depicts both Shaivism and Vaishnavism, is particularly interesting. While it's a Shaivite cave with a *Shivalingam*, the left wall of the cave has Shaivite sculptures and the right one is adorned with Vaishnavite sculptures; the back of the cave has Samudra Manthan on one side and scenes from the *Mahabharata* on the other.

The Village With Links To Pompeii

Just 17 km from the district headquarters of Osmanabad lies this unassuming village which at one point was as important

(Clockwise) Not only is the Paranda Fort home to the most magnificent cannons in India, it is also known to be one of the best defence forts; the sculpture in the Dharashiv caves is replete with statues dating to the Gandharva era; known to be a popular Buddhist site, there are plenty of terracotta moulds of the *stupa* that are still found in Osmanabad





to the economy then as Mumbai is for the present. **Ter**, which is associated with the Satavahana dynasty, was a huge trading centre in the seventh century. Years of research have proven that Ter had trade relations with Rome during ancient times, where textiles, beads and jute were exported. In the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, written by a Greek author, Ter has been mentioned as Tagar.

The village has quite a few sites of historical importance; a stone temple built during the Rashtrakuta period in memory of **Goroba Kaka**, poet and devotee of Vishnu during the Bhakti period. The **Uttreshwar Temple**, a temple of Lord Shiva, is another structure of architectural interest here. The temple collapsed in the 1993 earthquake but has now been restored. The **Trivikrama Temple**, considered to be the oldest standing structure in Maharashtra, dates back to the Satavahana period. The temple was based on the Buddhist apsidal structure (*chaitya-griha* with a *stupa* on one side) and a flat-roofed *mandapa* (a pillared outdoor hall for public rituals) was added later when it was converted to a Hindu temple.

Ter also houses a museum which owes its collection to **Ramalingappa Lamture**, a local merchant who started locating and collecting archaeological finds like figurines, beads, pottery, shell bangles, ivory objects, stone grinders and coins. The collection was taken over by the government in 1978 and is now housed in a private museum which boasts of 20,000 artefacts. The most fascinating find, which sadly is not kept in the museum, is the ivory statue of a female identical to the one found in Pompeii, Italy.

The Impregnable Naldurg

The most magnificent part of our study tour was a trip to **Naldurg**, one of the best land forts in Maharashtra. It is believed that the fort was built during the Kalyani Chalukyan period. It was taken over by the Bahamanis in the 14th century. In 1480, when the Bahamani kingdom was divided, the fort came to the Adil Shahi kings of Bijapur. It was Ibrahim Adil Shah II, the king of the Bijapur Sultanate known in history for his love for art, music, poetry and Sanskrit, who strengthened the defences of the fort. He built 114 bastions, each designed and styled differently and strong enough to bear heavy guns.

A river flows through the fort's centre with a dam built on it which is 90 feet high, 275 m long and 31 m wide at the top. The wall of the dam has a palace built called Pani Mahal. A small balcony juts out from the main room that's right in the centre of the two slits from where the water falls when the river overflows. Imagine water falling like a curtain as you sit on the balcony, sipping your morning tea or having an evening drink. This was probably the best luxury back in those days. The fort also houses Rani Mahal, Taylor's House, an elephants' stable, Rang Mahal, a mosque, an armoury and a court building.

And then there is the 100-foot-high Upli Buruj which has a stone turntable and cannons on the top. It's a tiring climb to the top, but once there, it gives a perfect view of the periphery of the fort along with a beautiful sunset. As a grand finale of our exploration, we climbed the bastion for one last lecture of the trip as the sun set in the background. ♦

Built in the Kalyani Chalukyan period, the Naldurg Fort changed many hands, but Ibrahim Adil Shah II gave it its signature defence style, installed 114 bastions and a three-side fortification





NAVIGATOR

GETTING THERE

By Road Osmanabad is 242 km from Aurangabad, 260 km from Pune, 316 km from Hyderabad, 411 km from Mumbai and is connected through Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC) and private bus services.

By Train Osmanabad is connected to the major cities of Maharashtra by rail.

By Air The nearest airports are at Aurangabad and Pune.

WHERE TO STAY

Osmanabad has plenty of mid-range to higher-range hotels and lodges.

IMPORTANT DATES

1556-1627 Adil Shahi period when Ibrahim Adil Shah II built the magnificent Naldurg.

Seventh century Ter being an important centre for Indo-Roman trade.

1590 The foundation stone of Jamia Masjid in Kati Gaon, Tuljapur, was laid.

Sixth to eighth centuries Estimated period to which the Kharosa Caves date.

Munch Ado About Mumbai

Ever wondered where the fast-paced city of Mumbai derives its never-ending energy from? Its delicious food, of course! Mouth-watering street food, elaborate main courses and sumptuous desserts come together to represent the city's diverse culinary landscape, which is a direct reflection of its rich legacy. Over the course of time, its various inhabitants, starting from the Kolis to the Mughals, Portuguese, British and those from all over India, left their imprint on the city—thus giving birth to a unique identity. Here are some must-try foods when in Mumbai.

Words RAMA AHUJA





There is no place like Mumbai to treat the hungry and tight-pocketed—starting with the very popular *pav bhaji*, the simple *kanda poha* and the tantalising *misal pav*

Vada Pav If there is one street food that defines Mumbai, it would have to be the humble *vada pav*. Nicknamed the “Indian burger”, it consists of a deep-fried potato dumpling that is placed inside a bread bun (*pav*). Sliced almost in half through the middle and generously lined with tamarind and coriander *chutney* along with a sprinkling of some garlic masala, *vada pav* is an instant energy booster. Loved by factory workers, corporates, students as well as Mumbai’s film industry, *vada pav* truly unites Mumbai unlike any other food.

- *Aaram Vada Pav, Fort*
- *Ashok Vada Pav, Dadar*

Egg Bhurji The egg is undoubtedly one of the most versatile foods on the planet. Its ability to be cooked in a myriad ways makes it a favourite across the world, and Mumbai is no exception. Giving scrambled eggs an Indian makeover, egg *bhurji* is prepared with onions, tomatoes and green chillies. Interestingly, when most other food joints in the city have long closed, quaint little vendors that only locals would know of transform into popular haunts. The delicious dish is a favourite with corporates who work long hours, party-goers and just about anyone craving wholesome food that is pocket-friendly. Operational until the wee hours of the morning, these stalls offer a glimpse into yet another side of the cosmopolitan city that Mumbai is.

- *Khurshid, Near Cooper Hospital, JVPD, Vile Parle West*
- *Stall outside Santa Cruz station/Mumbai Central station*

Dal Pakwan Few things compare to the joy of dunking a piece of crunchy *pakwan* into a mild but flavoursome *dal* that is topped with onions, chillies and some lip-smacking *chutney*. Its burst of colours, flavours and textures have to be relished to be understood. Originating in Sindh in Pakistan, this hearty dish is often referred to as ‘the breakfast of champions’. Do bear in mind that *dal pakwan* is typically sold in the mornings; most establishments start serving from 7.30 a.m. onwards and run out by 10 a.m. Although a tad inconvenient, the sumptuous dish is worth stepping out for early in the day.

- *Chandru's at Seven Bungalows, Andheri West*
- *Vig Refreshments, Chembur*

Frankie It’s incredible, isn’t it—what travel does to one? When Mr. Amarjit Singh Tibb tasted a Lebanese delicacy way back in 1967, it inspired him and his wife to create a unique dish—*frankie*. Today, the dish is so famous that you can find

frankie stalls all over the country—in parks, beaches, streets and even in food courts. Consisting of a crisp, hot, buttered *roti* that is generously filled with a spicy potato mixture, robust onions and sprinkled with some tangy masala, *frankie* is a very satiating snack that can be relished even on the go!

• *Tibb's Frankie, Shivaji Park*

Baida Roti A meal in itself, *baida roti* is a popular street-side snack that consists of a pan-fried *roti* that is stuffed with minced meat and beaten egg and cooked on a griddle on a low flame. Found in all parts of the city, the delicacy originated at the famous Bademiya restaurant that is situated in Colaba. The restaurant is now an institution in itself, known for its street-side kebabs and *baida roti* that attract thousands of locals as well as visitors and tourists. As it tends to get busy at Bademiya, be prepared to wait a bit. The taste shall be well worth your time.

Kheema Pav A delicious mutton mince that is cooked with onion, tomatoes, ginger, garlic and earthy spices and served with *pav* that is very generously buttered, *kheema pav* is rich, indulgent and lip-smacking. In fact, it is one of Mumbai’s most classic breakfasts. Interestingly, it has many versions such as Irani, Sindhi, Maharashtrian and even Andhra! Each of which is unique but delicious nonetheless.

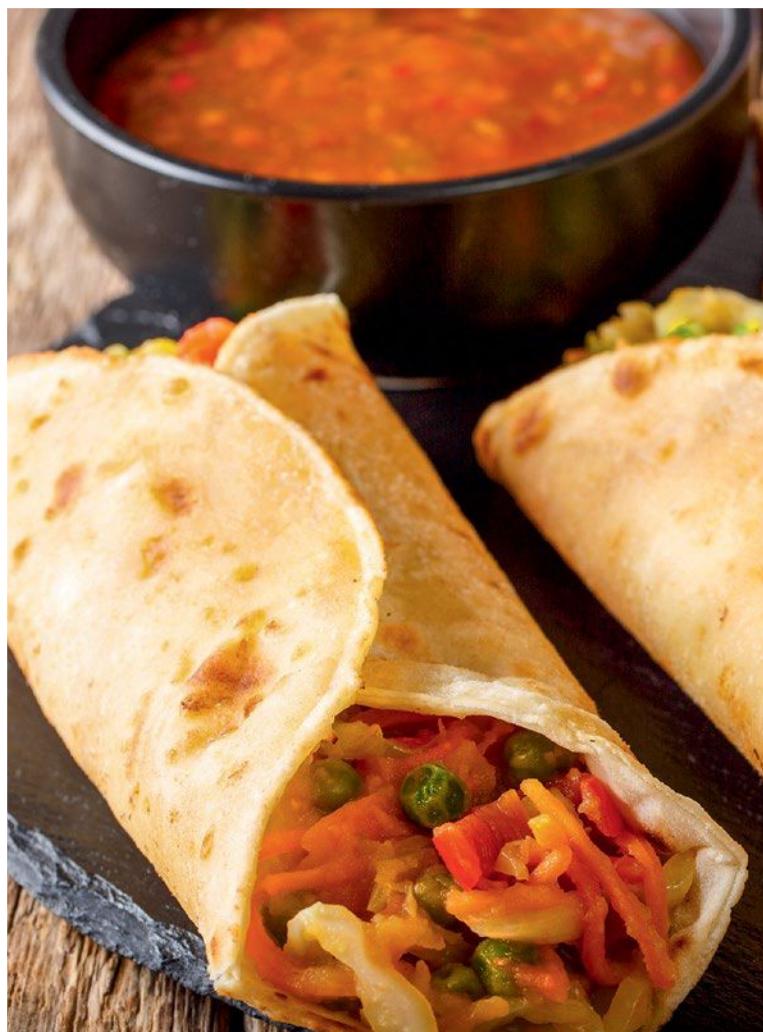
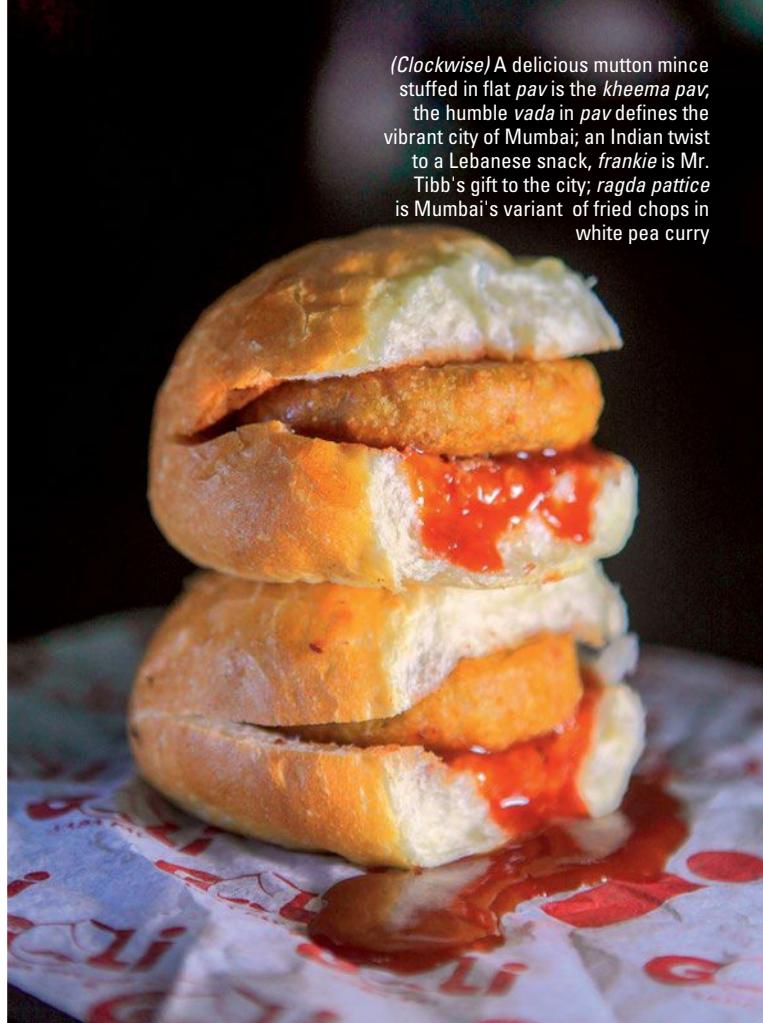
- *Kyani & Co., Marine Lines*
- *Lucky Restaurant, Bandra*

Butter Pepper Garlic Crab Given its proximity to the sea, needless to say, indulging in seafood is a given when in Mumbai. With its intriguing name that boasts of butter and pepper as well as garlic, you may wonder what cuisine this dish belongs to! Neither Chinese, nor Continental—this unique dish is a chance creation, which, thanks to its popularity, became a staple in menus across seafood restaurants. Made with a wholesome amount of butter, this dish, once eaten, is hard to forget.

- *Trishna, Fort*
- *Fresh Catch, Mahim*

Ragda Pattice A popular street-side snack that is best eaten piping hot, *ragda pattice* is aromatic, filling and delicious. It consists of golden-brown potato patties that are drowned in *ragda*, a gravy with white peas and spices. The dish is further drizzled with a tangy tamarind sauce along with some spicy coriander *chutney* and laced with finely chopped onions

(Clockwise) A delicious mutton mince stuffed in flat pav is the *kheema pav*, the humble *vada* in pav defines the vibrant city of Mumbai; an Indian twist to a Lebanese snack, *frankie* is Mr. Tibb's gift to the city; *ragda pattice* is Mumbai's variant of fried chops in white pea curry







From hearty to healthy, Mumbai offers food to satisfy all. If you're only looking for a nibble, try a small plate of the *kanda poha*, a cone of the *chana jor garam*, or a *brun maska* with *chai*. If you're tempted for some more, try a crispy Bombil Fry.

and crunchy *sev*. *Ragda patice* with its complex flavours and textures is a favourite especially during the monsoons.

- *Guru Kripa, Sion*
- *Girgaum and Juhu Chowpatty*

Mumbai Mysore Masala Dosa Mumbai has its very own version of the uber-popular Mysore Masala Dosa. It comes smeared with a spicy and tangy Mysore *chutney* and is rolled with a unique masala of chopped and grated vegetables that are cooked with the delicious *pav bhaji* masala and loads of delicious butter, giving it an unmistakable local taste. Since it comes packed with flavours, it can be eaten on its own, although it is served with some coconut *chutney* and *sambar*.

- *Anand Dosa Stall, Vile Parle West*

Chana Jor Garam This mouth-watering traditional snack is made with Bengal gram that has been flattened, fried, and seasoned with heaps of spices. It is hot, crunchy, spicy and full of zest thanks to its myriad toppings that range from onions, tomatoes, coriander, lemons and even green chillies! *Chana jor garam* is typically sold in paper cones by vendors who stroll up and down the length of Mumbai's beaches. With a name that translates from colloquial Hindi to "super-hot chickpeas", the snack is full of iron, making it a great option to munch on in between your meals.

Kanda Poha Loved by all of India, this traditional Maharashtrian snack consists of beaten rice flakes that are tossed with a traditional tempering of mustard seeds, green

chillies and lots of curry leaves. Garnished with wedges of lemon and even grated coconut at times, there is something very comforting about the dish. This breakfast staple with its beautiful contrast of soft rice flakes and the fried, crunchy peanuts strewn in them, is not only yummy but also quite nutritious.

- *Prakash Shakahari Upahaar Kendra, Dadar*
- *Aswaad, Dadar*

Brun Maska Mumbai is known for its many Irani Cafes which in turn are known for their *brun maska*. Resembling a hamburger bun, *brun* is actually very similar to a crusty French roll that is soft once you bite into it. And *maska* is a dollop of butter. Together the two get along remarkably well and are further complemented with some Irani *chai* (sweet milky tea). If you are wondering what could be so special about some butter and bread—there's only one way to find out! Sit back in a quaint little Irani café and bite into a *brun* to discover what the fuss is all about. *Brun maska* and *chai* for Mumbaikars is not just a convenient breakfast option. It is in fact a sentiment that they take immense pride in.

- *Yazdani Bakery, Fort*
- *City Bakery, Worli*

Fried Bombay Duck Contrary to its fascinating name, Bombay duck is not a duck but is a fish that is found only in the waters around Mumbai. Popularly known as Bombil, when fried it is deliciously moist and succulent from the inside but crisp on the outside. Although Bombil is beloved by many

Sweet, tangy, spicy and sour—your palate dances as you sample the delicious *bhelpuri* or dip your bun into some *bhaji* and *misal*



communities, an excellent way to embark on your Bombil adventure is to hit the various Malvani restaurants flung across the city. Not only do they remove the water in the fish, they also fry it crisp with its subtle flavours remaining intact.

- *Gajalee, Vile Parle East*
- *Chaitanya, Dadar*

Pav Bhaji If there is one dish that is loved by people of all ages, it would have to be the indulgent *pav bhaji*. Originating in the 1850s as a fast lunchtime dish for textile mill workers in Mumbai, it is now found in menus across the country. An amalgamation of potatoes, tomatoes, green peas, all mashed together with spices and paired with buttery buns, it is a feast in itself. *Pav bhaji* is best eaten garnished with a dollop of butter, chopped onions and a sprinkling of lemon.

- *Amar Juice Centre*
- *Sardar, Tardeo*

Misal Pav Adding to the city's rich array of street food is the humble *misal pav*, which consists of a spicy flavourful curry that is made with a whole lot of eclectic spices, onion, garlic, ginger, chillies and moth beans. Served with *pav*, the delicious *misal* is usually topped with the likes of boiled potatoes, *chiwda*, *sev* (a vermicelli-like snack), chopped onions, coriander, green chillies and served with a dash of lemon. In fact, there are several local takes on the preparation of *misal*. While some are spicy, some are low on the chilli factor. Although traditionally *misal* is supposed to be spicy enough to make you sweat, you can ask the eatery to tone down the spice content of the mixture according to your palate.

- *Aaswad, Dadar*
- *Vinay Health Home, Charni Road*

Bhelpuri Sweet, tangy, spicy and sour, all at the same time, *bhelpuri* is an absolute delight for the taste buds. By far one of the most loved *chaats* served all over India, *bhelpuri*'s authentic taste can be quite addictive! Consisting of a delicious mixture of puffed rice, *sev*, tomato, onion, potato and a variety of chutneys, *bhelpuri* is sold via street carts throughout Mumbai and especially around its beaches. What makes *bhelpuri* so special is that not only is it economical but also low-fat and nutritious.

- *Ram and Shyam, Santa Cruz West*
- *Punjab Sweet House, Pali Naka*

Mumbai Sandwich When you are on the go and are craving a wholesome snack that is delicious and yet

economical, nothing can beat a filling Mumbai sandwich. Imagine soft white bread that is slathered with salted butter, topped with a spicy coriander chutney, masala spices and layered with thin layers of cucumber, onion, tomato, potato and beetroot along with a generous helping of cheese. The sandwich is then toasted until golden brown and served with some home-made ketchup and coriander chutney. With its unique flavours, the easily accessible Mumbai sandwich is worth every penny.

- *Jay Sandwich, Bandra*
- *Right Place, Breach Candy*

Egg Kejriwal Invented in 1960s by Devi Prasad Kejriwal, a conservative Marwari businessman who could not eat eggs at home, the delicious Egg Kejriwal has come a long way. Given Kejriwal's fondness for eggs, he would ask the staff at Willingdon Club to prepare eggs in a peculiar style. He would top a buttered toast with a slice of cheese, a fried egg and some finely chopped green chillies. This he devoured at the club after a round of golf. Over time, it gained popularity as Egg Kejriwal and turned into a hot favourite among diners at the Club.

- *The Bombay Canteen, Lower Parel*
- *SodaBottleOpenerWala, Bandra East*

Falooda Nothing like a tall glass of *falooda* to cool down with during the summer months. In fact, its refreshing flavours make it a hit all year round. Said to have originated in the royal courts of the Mughal Emperor, Jehangir, *falooda* is the coming together of rose syrup, vermicelli, sweet basil, milk, a scoop of ice-cream and a sprinkling of roasted nuts. Engaging the palate on many levels simultaneously, a tall glass of *falooda* is the perfect solution to Mumbai's sweltering heat.

- *Baba Falooda, Mahim*
- *Badshah Falooda, CST*

Gola Back in the day when exotic desserts such as gelatos, fro-yos and cold stone ice-creams were yet to find their way to India, the humble but colourful *gola* used to be the go-to summer treat. Made of crushed ice, which is clumped together in the form of a lolly, and then dipped into natural fruit flavours such as orange, raw mango and guava amongst others, a dollop of *gola* still is one of the best ways to beat the scorching heat.

- *Park Malai Gola, Shivaji Park*
- *Sagar Kala Khatta, Juhu Beach* ♦





Stone Immaculate

Architecture, it is said, should speak of its time and place and yet be timeless. The legacy bequeathed to us by the ancient rulers at Thanjavur is probably eternal.

Words SHOMA ABHYANKAR



Standing tall at 208 feet, the 11th century Brihadisvara temple is a grand coming together of a gopuram, dwarpalas, vimana and Nandi, tied together with a thread of meandering corridors

Dotted with the lush greens of paddy greeting the orange ball of fire on the Kaveri river delta is the ‘rice bowl of Tamil Nadu’, Thanjavur. Mythology attributes the town’s name to the *asura* (mythological divine being), Tanjan, slain by Lord Perumal. A predominantly agricultural region, the name being derived from ‘Than-chei-ur’ or a ‘city of cold farmlands’, however, seems more plausible.

When work required me to travel to Thanjavur, I looked it up on Google. The anglicised name ‘Tanjore’ rang a bell, reminding me of garish gold-leaved bead inlay paintings of Hindu gods and goddesses. But it was the first glimpse of the temple *shikhara* (spire on a Hindu temple) of Brihadisvara, looming large above the tall trees, that brought all the history lessons from school tumbling through foggy memory.

Thanjavur has been a hub of religious, cultural and architectural activities for centuries. A laidback town, it gained significance during the reign of Mutharaiyar in the sixth century. But it was only after the Chola kings wrested the region from Mutharaiyar to establish their sovereignty and made Thanjavur the state capital that the town became a prominent centre of art, music, dance, literature, crafts and magnificent architecture that transcends time and inspires awe even centuries later.

The Chola kingdom subsequently fell to the Nayak rulers who were later overpowered by the Marathas. The consecutive

kings respected the local sensitivities, and besides patronising cultural practices, also renovated and added their own imprint to the architectural heritage that the Cholas had left behind.

With only three days at my disposal, I set out to discover those ancient architectural marvels with Raja, a learned 65-year-old tour guide. Raja, self-taught in at least eight languages, took it upon himself to educate me about not only the tangible but also intangible heritage of Thanjavur—like Carnatic music, Bharatnatyam and traditional handicrafts of dancing dolls, Tanjore paintings, the Saraswati veena and art plates that have earned GI tags.

Braving the ravages of time for centuries, what survived were the temples constructed out of solid stone while the other ancient buildings that included public offices or inns perished owing to their construction out of mud bricks and wood. No wonder then that Thanjavur is usually referred to as a temple town, with many small ancient temples holding ground amidst the fast growing concrete cityscape.

Of these stone edifices, the 11th century granite structure of Peruvudaiyarkovil, renamed by Maratha kings as the Brihadisvara Temple, a UNESCO World Heritage site, stood the tallest at an imposing height of 208 feet.

I stepped through two colossal entrance gateways into the large rectangular courtyard. The five-storied *gopuram* (ornate entrance tower) had 15-foot mammoth sculptures of *dwarpalas* or guards flanking the opening. The stupendous 16-storied pyramid-like *vimana* (temple), also known as Dakshina Meru



One of the five temples that make the ‘Great Living Chola Temples’ collective, the Brihadisvara Temple is a fine example of Dravidian architecture and continues to see both tourists and pilgrims seeking a slice of history and a blessing from the gods



One of the popular deities down south, and in the Brihadisvara Temple, is Lord Ayyappan (also regarded as an avatar of Lord Vishnu), believed to have been born from the union of Lord Shiva and the mythical Mohini





Built partly by the Nayaks and partly by the Marathas, the Maratha Palace in its complex structure houses royal paraphernalia including over 30,000 palm leaf manuscripts; (*facing page*) as the 'rice bowl of Tamil Nadu' and a popular pilgrim spot, Thanjavur is a busy city



NAVIGATOR

GETTING THERE

Thanjavur is connected by rail and road to Chennai (346 km). The nearest airport is Tiruchirapalli (about 60 km). Regular state transport buses and private taxis ply between Tiruchirapalli and Thanjavur.

SHOPPING

Tanjore paintings are best bought from various small shops on East Main Road near the Maratha Palace entrance. The better quality dancing dolls of Thanjavur are mostly available during the Dasara festival. The shops around the Brihadisvara Temple sell these dolls throughout the year.



with stucco figurines that preserve the grandeur and pinnacle of architectural style of the time, rose up in the large temple courtyard blotting out the sun.

The other architectural features in the temple courtyard were the axially placed smaller shrines added during the reign of the Maratha kings, a circumambulatory path or *prakara* of columned corridors and a pillared portico for public gatherings.

The fort-like wall around the temple was built much later by the Nayak kings. A monolithic Nandi, about two metres tall, sat facing the sanctum in a pillared porch. With life-size sculptures of gods and goddesses embellishing the outer walls, the main shrine culminated in a cupola of 25 tonnes of granite.

The tour guide pointed out numerous inscriptions in Tamil and Sanskrit by Chola kings and successive rulers from the Nayaks to the Vijayanagara kings to the Marathas. I noticed many fading murals and frescoes depicting tales from the *Ramayana* and *Shiv Purana* adorning the ceilings and interior wall surfaces as well.

The Brihadisvara Temple at Thanjavur along with the two other exquisitely carved temples and UNESCO sites at Gangaikondacholapuram and Airavateshwaram are collectively known as 'Living Chola Temples'. The Chola kings with their artistic acumen had perfected the Dravidian architecture of their predecessors, the Pallava kings. The dam built with the purpose of diverting flood waters away from agricultural fields was another engineering marvel that left me astounded. It reiterated the fact that the Chola kings were not only master builders but also master planners.

The world's fourth oldest water rerouting dam, built on the Kaveri river by Chola king Karaikal with an elaborate irrigation system of canals, known as Grand Anicut or Kallanai Dam, lies some 45 km from Thanjavur. Constructed from unhewn stones in the second century, the 300-metre-long and 4.5-metre-high ancient dam could control and reroute required amounts of

water to the fertile lands of the delta. Still in working condition, its peculiar functional features with curved masonry and irregular slope inspired the British to build another larger dam fashioned with the same design features.

Back in town, marvelling at the vision of ancient craftsmen, I tried to comprehend all the architectural wonders of the then kings when the tour guide proudly steered me towards the former residence of the Maratha rulers, the Maratha Palace. The palace, originally constructed by Nayak rulers in 1535, came with the territory to the Marathas who renovated and added to it. The complex comprised a seven-storied bell tower, a durbar hall or king's court, open courtyards, a collection of royal paraphernalia, Chola bronze icons and stone sculptures.

The durbar hall, where the kings granted audience, housed a throne last used by the Maratha ruler. The colourful ceilings and columns were replete with iconography from Vishnu's '*Dashavataram*' (an avatar of Vishnu) besides ornate floral designs. The arched enclosure of the Saraswati Mahal Library with an exhaustive collection of manuscripts in Tamil, Telugu, Marathi, Persian, Urdu and Sanskrit on palm leaves and paper had an interesting story to tell of times gone by.

It is said that the British, having annexed the kingdom from the Marathas, had begun to discard and demolish what they considered irrelevant. It is then that the Maratha king, while handing over his royal possessions, asked the British to spare the library for posterity. The British agreed to the simple request and thus a vast storehouse of information was prevented from being lost to history.

Over the years the temples of Thanjavur have emerged as a global stage for classical music and dance performances. The festivities too take a grander turn in the courtyards of these places of worship. The larger-than-life scale of Thanjavur architecture continues to amaze and makes one believe in the capacity of human will and endeavour. ♦

Frame Work

A MOMENT IN THE LIFE OF INDIA



HEAD BOY!

This could be anywhere at first glance, a boy dabbling with a football as his friends look on—and yet this simple frame captures the essence and the pace of life of the northeastern state of Nagaland, where life is all about nature, food, music and yes, football.



PHOTOGRAPHER OF THE MONTH

ADISH BARUAH

From Assam, Adish travels across India to photograph traditions, cultures and people in their natural surroundings.



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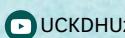
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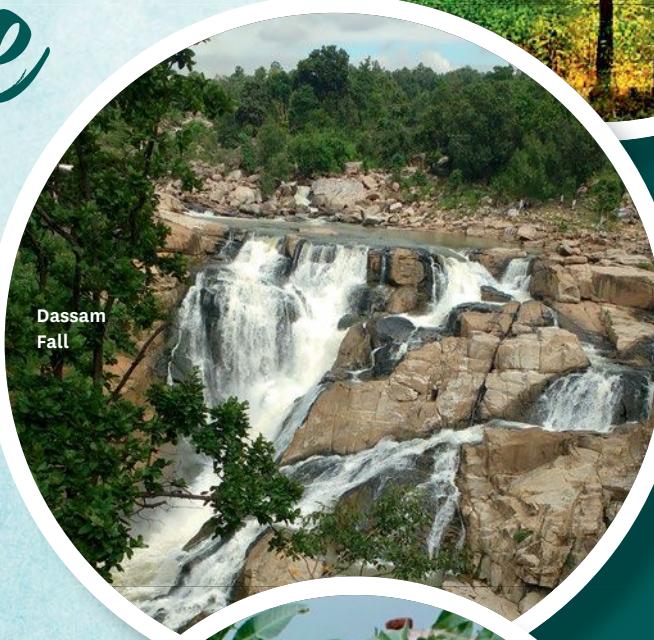
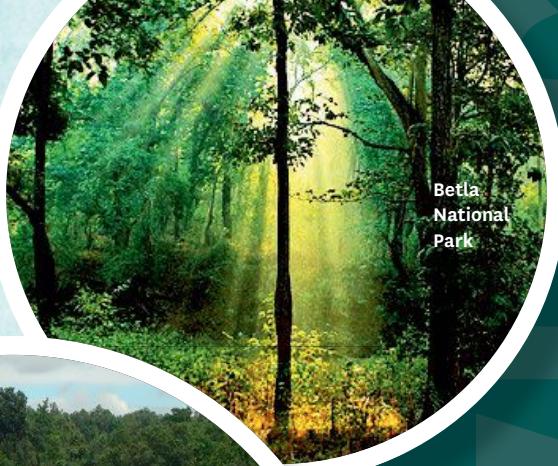
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ECO TOURISM

Lush forests, picturesque water bodies, waterfalls and dams make for perfect picnic spots for that quiet day to be spent in the arms of nature.

HERITAGE TOURISM

Jharkhand invites you to visit old mansions and buildings and many other historic sites.

RURAL TOURISM

The true beauty of the state lies in its dense forests and pristine tribal communities that dwell in those lands. As many as 30 tribal groups reside in the state.

SPIRITUAL TOURISM

The state provides a chance to spiritually revive yourself with its various temples and pilgrimage sites like Anjan Gram, which is said to be the birth place of Lord Hanuman.

ADVENTURE TOURISM

There are various adventure sports available in the state of Jharkhand, such as parasailing, hot-air balloon rides and water sports.