

OTHERWHERE

Pulteney Bridge, built over River Avon, is only the fourth bridge in the world with shops and restaurants on it. (Below) a view of the Roman Bath

# WATER WORKS



## Ancient curses, Georgian villas, Jane Austen and tasty buns, the English city of Bath gives you a lot to chew on ■ ALAPHIA ZOYAB

**O**fall the empty seats in the world, the woman with the whooping cough had to occupy the one opposite ours. We were on an early morning train to Bath in England, eager to get near its famed hot spring and having just rid myself of flu germs, the last thing I wanted was to be bathed in hers.

If we were Romans visiting 2,000 years ago we would have inscribed a curse on a strip of pewter and tossed it into the hot water at Bath's famous location, praying to the Goddess of healing, Sulis-Minerva, to pre-empt disease. The only thing we could do really was jump off the train in relief when it pulled into the Bath Spa station.

We crossed the new shopping mall and within less than four minutes we were standing in the heart of Bath, outside the entrance to the Roman temple and spa complex. While the city centre still throbs because of what the Romans built nearly 2,000 years ago, all around it are the layers of the centuries. We

sought out the 20th century by diving into a cafe for some coffee and cake.

The doors opened at 9.30 am. I grabbed the free audio guide for its section with Bill Bryson's observations and was eventually disappointed that he didn't make any wise-cracks. Unlike many Roman towns that came up around a fort, Bath developed because of its religious and ritualistic significance thanks to the hot spring.

Today, we understand the science behind the hot water but you really have to envy the powerful grip it must've had on Roman imagination—a dark green pool of steaming water curing all kinds of aches and pains. That's why they erected a large temple and a very sophisticated spa complex around the hot spring, which continues to spout nearly a million litres every day at a toasty 46 degrees Celsius.

The most entertaining section of the complex is the little museum which houses the Roman objects that were found in the spring. The Romans wished for all sorts of favours and bless-



ings, visions of a soft bed kept floating in as well. Inscribed in Latin, these were later found at the bottom of the pool for the entertainment of future generations. One guy complained, "Dacimedes has lost two gloves. He asks that the person who has stolen them should lose his minds and his eyes in the temple where she appoints."

From the Roman baths, we hopped across to the Bath Abbey, which is much younger at about 500 years. We did a quick walk, gawking up at the pillars that merge with the ceiling by bursting into what looks like Chinese palm fans. It's really quite beautiful but having woken up at 5.30 am that morn-

ing, visions of a soft bed kept floating in as well.

We decided to pack in one more thing before we retired and sought out the Pulteney Bridge. This is only one in four bridges in the world with shops on either side of it. It makes a pretty picture but being on the bridge itself felt like being on any other road in Bath. Underwhelmed, we decided it was time to retire to our Georgian villa B&B. On Sunday morning, we left the Roman bit of Bath behind to discover its Georgian end. This is the bit with the grand, honey coloured buildings and where Jane Austen's characters flitted and flirted. At that end of Bath, you can quickly forget the Roman spa and

## FAST FACTS

### BEST TIME TO VISIT:

Summer but if you want to avoid the tourist rush you can go in winter.

### HOW TO GET THERE:

There are plenty of trains to Bath Spa station from London's Paddington station. The train ride is an hour and a half. Tickets can be booked at [www.thetrainline.com](http://www.thetrainline.com). You can even do a day trip just to see the Roman baths.

### WHERE TO STAY:

Bath is a really small town and you can get to all its attractions on foot. For weary feet, there are cheap taxis. It also means you don't really have to stay in the middle of town near the Roman baths. The hotel tariffs can be quite high. We stayed at the Grove Lodge—a B&B off the London road which is a 20 minute level walk from the Roman baths. [www.grovelodgebath.co.uk](http://www.grovelodgebath.co.uk)

realise how much Bath has constantly reinvented itself.

After the Romans left, the Middle Ages saw the spa complex go to ruins, till it was revived again in the 18th century and became the place to see and be seen for fashionable England. Jane Austen lived there briefly and rather unhappily and you can pick up fragments of her life around town as well as at the Jane Austen Centre. We just walked and walked checking out the beautiful Royal Crescent—a massive semi-circular building and the neighbouring Circus—a great big circular residential block. Bath's Georgian architecture imitated the Italian Palladian style with its strict use of symmetry. We

kept our last stop of the evening for the oldest house in Bath, home to the Sally Lunn restaurant. The story goes that Sally Lunn was a refugee from France who came to England nearly 300 years ago. She is credited with creating one of the most delicious buns I have ever tasted. Ever. When you tear off a piece, its like tearing off bits of cotton candy. Utterly and completely satisfied, we boarded the 8.30 pm train back to London with a bag full of buns, making it the oddest bit of shopping we have ever done.

Collapsing in my seat, I pulled out my list of 'Things to do in Bath' and found that 48 hours later, I could check them all off. ♦

# 'Human experience is based on happiness and tragedies'

## THE THIRD EYE



**NADINE KREISBERGER** is a French traveller and therapist based in India

## THE PROUST QUESTIONNAIRE

**S. H. RAZA** is an artist. He has been awarded the Padma Shri and Padma Bhushan

### What does spirituality mean to you?

It is about going beyond the visual aspect of nature. Spirituality may spring from reality, but to perceive it one must close the eyes, and when the thought process stops, you enter a different domain, a new world of your own.

How many people can come to that stage—having painted a nude, a portrait, a landscape or God knows what, then reach a point where the landscape in its visual aspect gets undermined and a different experience comes out?

Many of us who are not figurative artists emerge from the study of life and with the process of abstraction go towards the spiritual side.

You see, just a beautiful woman is not enough for a man. Her personality matters also tremendously. In painting, what do you do? If you study a landscape or a woman, you have to go beyond the obvious, you have to sublimate it and touch its essence.

### You start your work every day with a prayer, don't you?

I do. And when I finish my work, I thank God for giving me the imagination to have done so. I like going to places like temples, mosques and other so-called places of God.

### What is God for you?

It is an endless power, which we can find in our heart, mind and being and which exists despite the fact we have never seen it.

There is a strange logic which reveals itself all the time in life, proving its existence as if even a room where I work and a painting on which I work have been given to me by God. The painting would not have done well if He had not given its blessings.

I thank God both when sad and when happy. Today, at the end of my life, I am convinced about God's reality as ever.

### When you see suffering in the world, do you ask and wonder where is God?

No. I am inclined to think it is an error of humanity and a misunderstanding of life by human beings. Human beings make mistakes. See, Christ was killed. Mahatma Gandhi was killed. The whole human experience is based on happiness and tragedies.

### Do you see God's imprint in the way your life has unfolded, is there such a thing as destiny?

No, I feel God has given intelligence, heart and power to every human being. Then it is up to us to choose what use to make. And we have to take full responsibility for it.



### Was it God who gave you the tools to become a painter?

Yes, but he also gave me the freedom to use them or not. I take the responsibility for what I do and don't do. He is there to guide me.

### When you were a child, did you know you would become a painter?

Back then, I had no idea what painting was. I was a very tortured and unhappy child. I profoundly disliked school and

would often weep on my way to it. Luckily, some teachers helped me. And my drawing teacher thought I was gifted for it. So he convinced my father I should study it further. I ended up in Nagpur, then at the JJ School of Arts in Bombay, where I got a first perception of what painting could be. Still, choosing painting as a full-time activity was difficult. A scholarship then came to join the Beaux-Arts in Paris. And I stayed in France ever since.

### Was all this God's doing?

It was his doing indeed. I had kept on praying all along. But you always, always have to take responsibility for your life. You have to work. You have to be active.

### Do you think each one of us has a specific mission in life?

Yes, but it is a mission given by us, not by God. He will not say do this or do that. He has given you the gift of perception, thinking, feeling. You have to find your mission yourself.

### Having an impact on others' feelings, thoughts etc. through your painting is important?

What is more important to me are my own feelings, my own thoughts.

### If there were one question you would

### ask God, what would it be?

At this moment, I pray to Him for time and health. When I get up, I am not sure I won't fall down within a few steps.

### If there were such a thing as reincarnation, what would you choose for your next birth?

I would like to be born in India again and do things I have not been able to do in this life—paint better, write and try to see that institutions are built up to encourage the arts, giving a more prominent importance to culture than to money. So many people focus on money and forget more important things.

I have worked hard but I have no pretense beyond what I have. I hear of the prices my paintings have reached in all sorts of places. But I am so sad when I read articles about it, as I realise there is hardly a line about whatever Raza is doing in his work. Who cares about those prices. It's all sensationalism.

### What is your idea of happiness?

Having done a good human act. Having done a good painting. Using my resources in an intelligent manner, which could become an example for others. ♦

(Read the full interview on [indianexpress.com/thirdeye](http://indianexpress.com/thirdeye). Send in your comments to [thirdeye@expressindia.com](mailto:thirdeye@expressindia.com))