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DISCOVER INDIA

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2019 | ₹100



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“
If I were asked under what sky
the human mind has most fully
developed some of its choicest
gifts, has most deeply pondered
on the greatest problems of
life, and has found solutions,
I should point to India.”
—Max Müller



THE LAND OF EPICURES

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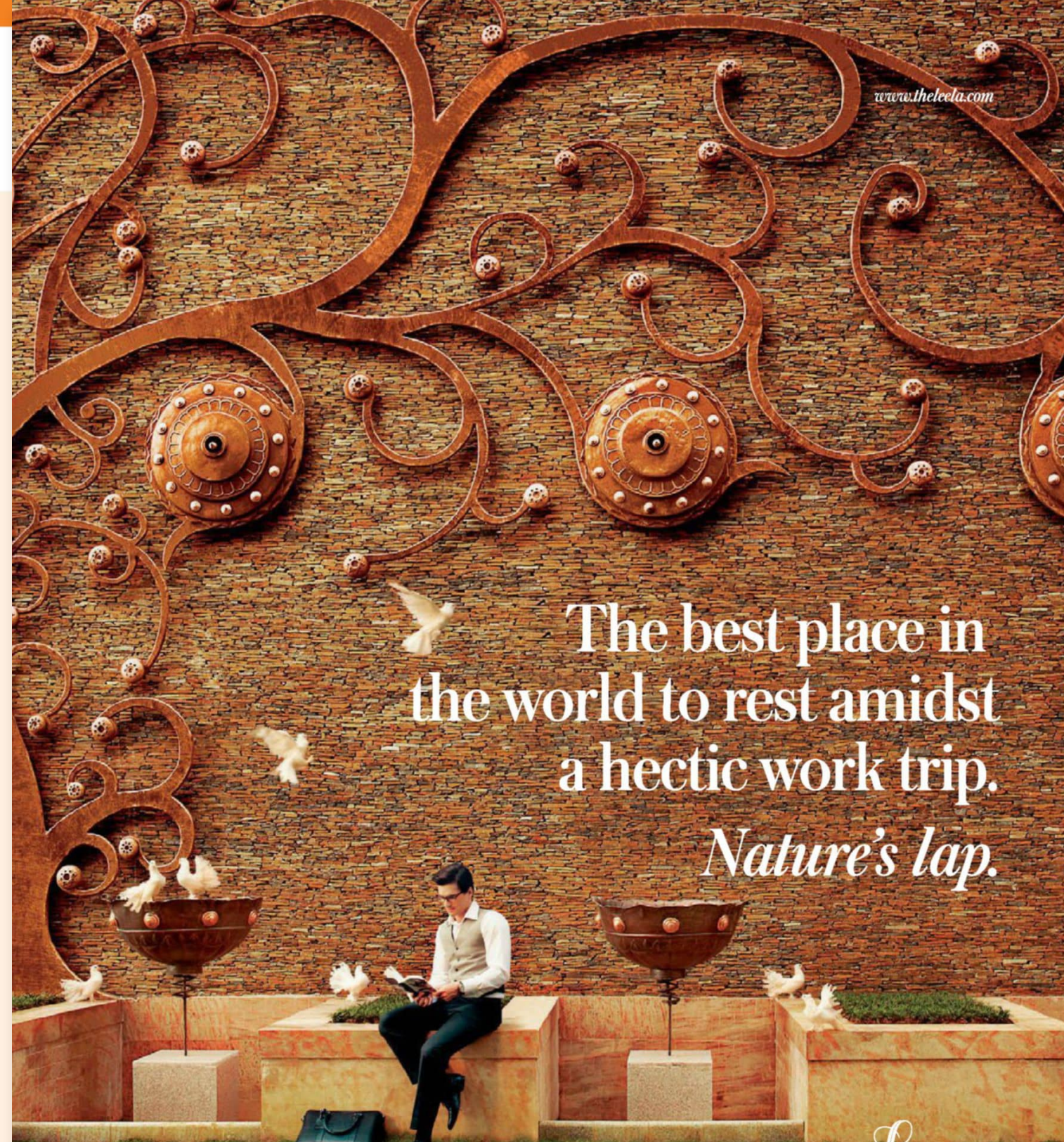
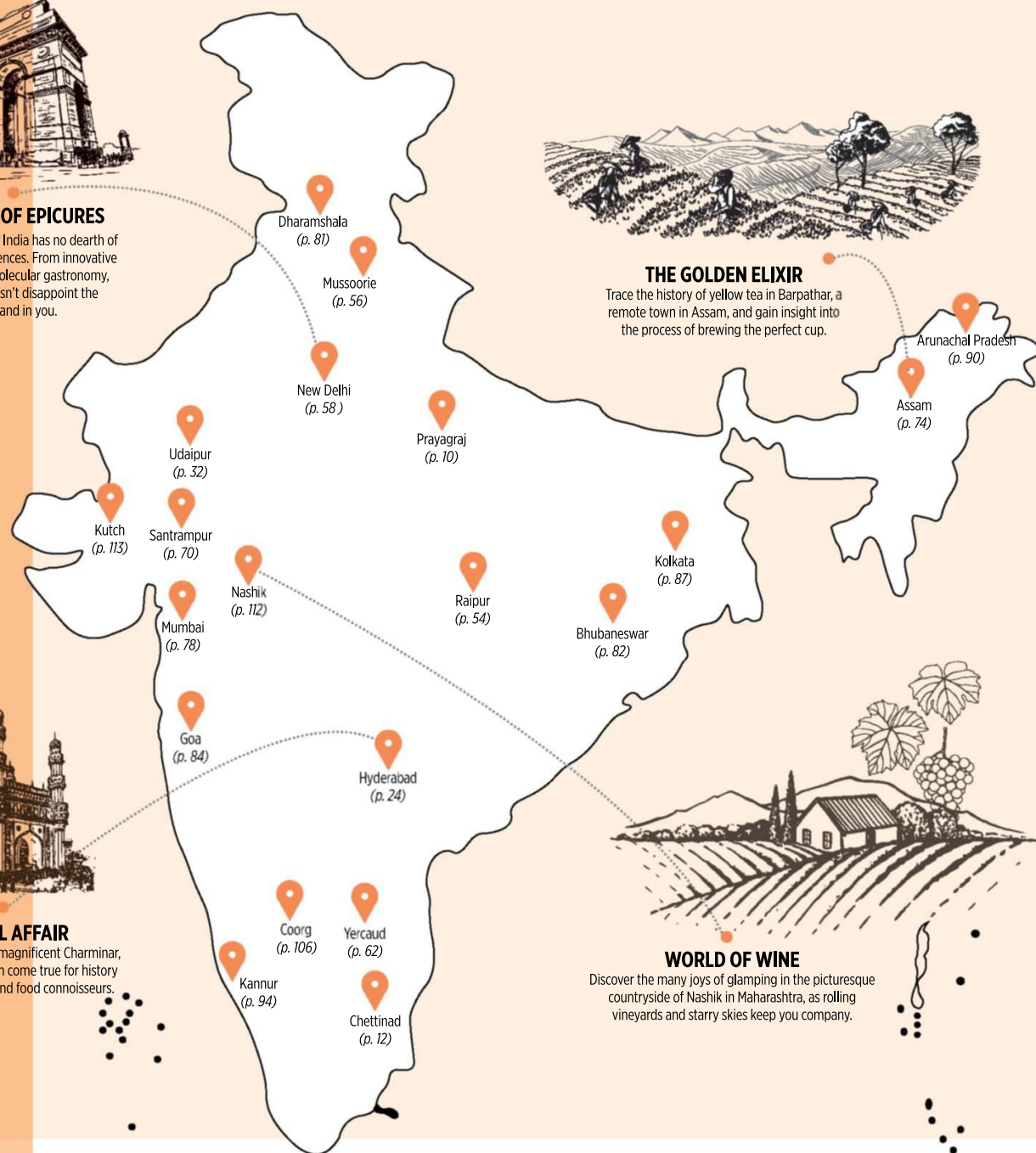
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Note: All prices in the magazine are approximate values and subject to change.

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ON THE COVER
Courtesy: backpackdiaries
Models: Camille and Jean
Location: Jodhpur, Rajasthan

*‘One cannot think well, love well,
sleep well, if one has not dined well.’*

This famous line from *A Room of One's Own* by Virginia Woolf poetically describes the necessity of fine gastronomic experiences in everyday life. Food is an integral part of any Indian sojourn. The year-end issue of *Discover India* focusses on the element that should find a place in your itinerary of the country, regardless of the direction you tread in. Whether it's the many innovative flavours of the authentic *rosogulla* of West Bengal, or a spice trail in Kerala, our cover story takes you on a culinary journey through the various regions of India. I promise you a delicious voyage, to say the least! If you're a fan of South Indian cuisine, then our deep dive into Kodava food will have you packing your bags.

In this issue, we also explore the lesser-known but beautiful corners of India—the royal getaway of Santrampur in Gujarat; the marvels of Ahmednagar in Maharashtra; the origins of yellow tea in a remote nook of Assam, and more. Drifting away from the run-of-the-mill road trip, we travel to Arunachal Pradesh for a journey that begins and ends with surreal scenes, and involves immersive rural experiences en route. If you love the outdoors, our feature story on camping trails across India is just the guide you need, to help that glamping plan see the light of day.

There's no better time to travel to India, and this issue is the best way to whet your appetite! So, what are you waiting for?

IN THIS ISSUE...



TOP 10 HOTELS

We round up the 10 best luxurious hotels in Chennai, the vibrant capital of Tamil Nadu.



IN SHOTS

Experience the Hornbill Festival of Nagaland through these striking photographs.



COVER STORY

Your guide to the most tempting food trails across the country.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: HEMANT KHEMDILWAL; SHUTTERSTOCK: SAYAN HAZRA; INTERCONTINENTAL CHENNAI MAHABALIPURAM RESORT



JOURNEY TO YOUR NEXT STORY!

A path fringed with palm fronds and Frangipani blossoms leads you to the golden sands of the Bay of Bengal, a picturesque backdrop to the opulent Intercontinental Chennai Mahabalipuram Resort, a blend of world class luxury with a renascent Coromandel style that oozes Indian culture.

Outside the gates of the Resort lies a constellation of cultural experiences, for the History Aficionado, a visit to the UNESCO World Heritage Site, Mahabalipuram Shore Temple, for the Art Lover, a trip to the village artisan and sculptor's, for the Water Baby, learn to Surf, Kayak or Scuba Dive at the International Surfing School and for the nature enthusiast a boat ride that leads to Dolphin spotting on the Bay of Bengal and a visit to the The Madras Crocodile Bank. The InterContinental Insider Collection guides any kind of traveller though brand new experiences that lead them to their next story.

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Incredible India

The sand is exactly as white as shown in this picture.
The ocean of white sand stands out stark and pristine in its
colourlessness, interrupted only by passing hoards of camels.
On moonlit nights, the desert reveals another colour.
Something that can hardly be described in words.

Which colour of Kutch will catch your eye?
Maybe one that I couldn't find!



Amitabh Bachchan
Amitabh Bachchan

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Prayagraj Uttar Pradesh

One of the most popular Hindu pilgrimage sites in India, Prayagraj (formerly Allahabad), is famous for the grand Kumbh Mela, and Sangam, the confluence of the rivers Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati. But this holy land is also popular for its lip-smacking food that brings together nostalgia, taste, and tradition. Especially during the month of Ramadan, the lanes of Prayagraj come alive with the aroma of festive food like *meethi seviya* (a pudding dish of vermicelli slow-cooked in sweetened milk).

GETTING THERE The airport in Prayagraj has daily connecting flights from Delhi via Varanasi and Lucknow.

Chettinad Tamil Nadu

Extraordinarily rich when it comes to culinary culture, Chettinad has always been in the spotlight for its fiery flavours. Locals love it and ardent gourmands swear by the food from this corner of South India that offers a glimpse of the culture and traditions of the Chettiar community. Here, a few Chettiar women are seen preparing Chettinad festive food as temple offering.

GETTING THERE

The nearest airport is in Tiruchirappalli (20 km) with direct flights from Chennai and Delhi.



SUPERSTOCK/ALAMY

Kolkata West Bengal

No other place in India loves its food as much as Kolkata. The 'City of Joy' is a constant celebration of food, knowledge, and culture, and hence, proudly calls itself the intellectual, artistic, and cultural capital of India. From simple snacks to elaborate meals to sweet dishes—the culinary diversity here never ceases to amaze. Be it the famous *roshegulla*, *sondesh*, *kosha mangsho*, the juicy kebabs, *puchka*, *ghugni* or plates of *aam papad* (mango pulp dried up into fruit leather), no trip to Kolkata is complete without its food.

GETTING THERE

Kolkata airport is well-connected to all major Indian and international destinations.



SHUTTERSTOCK

The Holiday Calendar

As the year draws to a close, here's a list of unmissable events from around the country that will pep up your holiday. By **KUMAR SHREE**

Hornbill Festival NAGALAND

Dec 1-10

Every year the Kisama Heritage Village in Kohima transforms into a visual spectacle that celebrates the rich heritage and culture of Nagaland. Learn more about this northeastern state of India, while enjoying colourful dance performances, arts and crafts, music, food, sports, fashion shows and wrestling matches.

WHERE

Kohima, Nagaland.

GETTING THERE

Dimapur is the closest airport (68 km) as well as railway station (75 km) to Kisama. There are direct flights from Kolkata and connecting services available from most cities. hornbillfestival.com



Magnetic Fields Festival RAJASTHAN

Dec 13-15



A unique marriage of contemporary culture and Rajasthani heritage, Magnetic Fields is one of the most awaited music festivals of the country. This three-day cultural extravaganza is held annually at the glorious Alsisar Mahal. From jazz and folk music to storytelling and wellness spaces, this festival has got it all.

WHERE

Alsisar Mahal, Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan.

GETTING THERE

The festival venue is six hours from Delhi and four hours from Jaipur. magneticfields.in

Jazz India Circuit HARYANA

Dec 6

A one-stop destination for the best of contemporary jazz, this festival brings together the best of international and local jazz artistes. The lineup includes the likes of Scottish musician Simon Thacker and Canadian jazz fusion band, The Shuffle Demons. This year, the festival will also sport a flea market and a food court.

WHERE

One Horizon Center, Gurugram.

GETTING THERE

Delhi is the closest airport and it is well connected to all major international airports.

Jashn-e-Rekhta NEW DELHI

Dec 13-15

A three-day event celebrating the best of the Hindustani literature and cultural heritage, Jashn-e-Rekhta is organised by Rekhta Foundation. The festival attracts not only poets and writers, but also eminent personalities from the world of film, television, and music. Drop by for melodious ghazals and qawwalis, and stimulating conversations.

WHERE

Major Dhyan Chand National Stadium, India Gate, New Delhi.

GETTING THERE

The stadium is a 30-minute drive from Delhi airport. jashnerekhta.org

Food For Thought Fest NEW DELHI

Dec 14-15

Food for Thought Fest celebrates the diverse culinary heritage of South Asia. In its fifth edition, the festival is a meeting ground for food connoisseurs, critics, bloggers, and chefs. Apart from an extensive food court, the event will also feature cookery workshops and demonstrations, as well as a bazaar and live entertainment.

WHERE

GMR Square, Aerocity, New Delhi.

GETTING THERE

Aerocity is just five minutes away from the Delhi airport. foodforthoughtfest.com



FROM LEFT: SHUTTERSTOCK; COURTESY OF MAGNETIC FIELDS FESTIVAL; COURTESY OF FOOD FOR THOUGHT FEST

To go with the flow, along slow-moving canals, to find deep journeys in little country boats, to catch the drift of conversations under quaint log bridges, and discover close-knit lives on distant islands.

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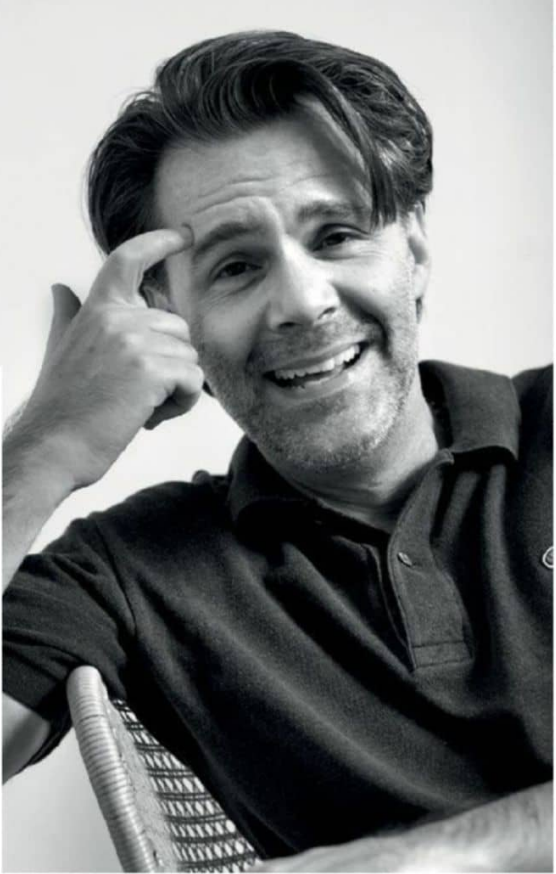
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PETER NAGY
Artist & Curator

“Tamil culture is so sophisticated it almost feels like Japan.”

Connecticut-born artist Peter Nagy’s love affair with India began in the 1990s, a few years after his first trip to the country. Nagy saw immense potential in the contemporary art scene of India and opened Gallery Nature Morte in New Delhi in 1997. More than a decade later, Nagy stays on and so does the gallery, which has become synonymous with contemporary artists who represent Indian art on a global platform. By **ADILA MATRA**



Tell us about your first visit to India and what made you stay?

My first trip to India was in 1990 as a tourist. It was the standard three-week trip to Delhi, Agra, Jaipur, Udaipur, and Bombay. I saw cows fornicating in the middle of a traffic jam at a roundabout in Jaipur in 42°C and I was just hooked!

What were your first impressions of India?

I was very jet-lagged, and it was very hot. It was almost like a fever dream.

What inspired you to open an art gallery in India?

I was running Nature Morte in New York’s East Village from 1982 to 1988. I closed it in 1988 to concentrate on my career as an artist, but knew I would open a gallery again someday, somewhere else.

After living in India for one year, I felt opening a gallery here might be a possibility. I met a generation of very smart and talented artists whom I connected with, so things just came together.

Tell us about your memorable experiences in India.

One memorable experience was in Ahmedabad during my first year in the country. I was at a roadside chai stall at 7 pm, that time of the day when there are bottlenecks

everywhere. I noticed a very large brick in the centre of the road and thought it might be a hazard. Five minutes later, along came a family of five on a scooty and from the opposite direction, another scooty with around 30 tiffin boxes. Bam! The two collided and the boxes flew, spilling their contents on the street. The traffic came to a halt, and everyone helped gather up the now empty tiffin boxes. After about 15 minutes, everyone

went on their way and traffic resumed, but the brick was still left on the road.

What are your travel essentials while going around the country?

A sense of humour, patience, curiosity, and a handkerchief.


Which is your favourite city in India and why?

One of the great things about India is that all the big cities are all different and have their own personalities. It’s hard to choose a favourite, but I love Chennai as I find the Tamil culture to be sophisticated so that it almost feels like Japan.

What’s your most favourite cuisine here?

I’m a big fan of Gujarati food, but also love South Indian cuisine, particularly seafood. The most memorable meals here are in people’s homes, where one is usually surprised and overwhelmed by the hospitality.

What is your advice to foreign travellers visiting India?

Rule #1: Everything is difficult.
Rule #2: It’s all about *maya*.
Rule #3: Always carry something to read! 



Clockwise from top: Peter Nagy; Nagy is in love with Chennai for its sophisticated Tamil culture; one of the art exhibitions at Nature Morte in New Delhi.



Enjoy Living Abroad: 3 Essential Tips for Expats

WANT TO FEEL AT HOME QUICKLY IN INDIA? HERE’S WHAT YOU CAN DO.

Living abroad can be challenging — especially at first. You probably won’t know many people when you arrive, which makes things even harder. Joining an expat community can make a huge difference.

Build a Strong Network

In the difficult moments of adjusting to life abroad, having a network of contacts is key. Becoming a member of a global expat community is the fastest way to find those essential contacts, so you don’t have to navigate everything alone. InterNations, the world’s largest expat community, makes it easy to connect with other people just like you. There are eight InterNations Communities throughout India.

Meet People That Share Your Interests

Making new connections online is important, but nothing can replace quality face-to-face interactions when you live in a new place. InterNations offers regular opportunities to meet people from all over the world who moved to India for different reasons, but who want to make new friends and have a memorable experience. In addition to large networking events in each community, InterNations also offers opportunities to interact and mingle in a smaller setting while pursuing a certain hobby. Some popular groups include the New Delhi Food Group, the Calcutta Explorer’s Group, or the Chennai Sports & Leisure Group.

Find & Exchange Information

Sometimes, what you really need is information. You might have questions like: What’s the best neighborhood to live in? Where can I find a doctor that speaks my language? Or what restaurants are great for families in my city? Access to InterNations’ lively and friendly forum can help you find whatever information you need.

Join InterNations

InterNations is about helping you make each day of expat life amazing. In a country like India, with so much to explore, you’ll enjoy it more if you have someone to share it with. Whether it’s your first day living abroad here or your fifth year, you’ll find what you need to make the most of every stage.



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Satya Paul, ₹3,495/
US\$49, satypaul.com



Cracker Earrings,
Dhora, ₹3,000/US\$42,
dhoraindia.in

Devanagri Pink Watch,
Kassa, ₹6,309/US\$89,
studiokassa.com



Rose & White Musk Hand
& Nail Crème, **Nykaa**,
₹275/US\$4, nykaa.com



Himalayan Saffron Body
Butter Cream, **Ecotique**,
₹799/US\$11, ecotique.in



Intensive Hair Repair Masque
- Japapatti & Brahmi, **Forest
Essentials**, ₹1,525/US\$21,
forestessentialsindia.com



Run Away-Bootie,
Papa Don't Preach
By Shubhika,
₹15,390/US\$217,
papadontpreach.com



Winter Wonders

Stay warm and stylish this winter with
these fashion essentials from Indian labels.

By **SUSHMITA SRIVASTAV**

Ensemble, **Kanella
collection**, **Kanika Jain**,
price on request,
notjustlabel.com



Rocco, **Nova Eyewear**,
₹7,990/US\$113,
novaeyewear.com

Bio BXL Repair Lip Balm,
Biotique, ₹499/US\$7,
biotique.com



Bloom Ivory Shirt
Studs, **AZGA**,
₹2,150/US\$30, azga.in



Mid Way Belt -
Black, **Nappa Dori**,
₹3,400/US\$48,
nappadori.com

Reversible Fine Wool
Stole, **Pashtush**, ₹2,999/
US\$42, pashtush.com



Beat The Chill

These must-haves from Indian brands
will make your winter vacay more chic
than ever. By **SUSHMITA SRIVASTAV**

Ensemble, **SHEY
collection**, **TISA**, price
on request, tisa.co.in



Oudh Wood Hydrating
After-Shave Balm, **Ayca**,
₹800/US\$11, ayca.in



Black Genuine Leather
Kiltie Monkstrap Shoes,
Escaro Royalé, ₹6,499/
US\$92, escaro.in

Upgraded Journeys

Nothing makes your trip more gratifying than good planning and great photographs. Here are a few gadgets that ensure both.

By **VAIBHAV SHARMA**



DJI OSMO MOBILE 3

The latest crop of smartphones might have an amped-up camera game, but here's a quick way to get even better results—the DJI Osmo Mobile 3 smartphone stabiliser. It's compact, foldable, and comes with a three-axis gimbal that can help even the neophyte churn out pro-grade videos. DJI's video-editing app also offers templates, effects, and music to turn your vacation videos into masterpieces. Just don't spam the family WhatsApp group!
₹8,442/\$119; dji.com

PackPoint



Avid hikers could cut down on a lot of planning with this app. From 75,000 hiking and mountain biking trails, progress recording, offline and printable custom maps, to alerts that warn you if you stray off your route, environmental information overlays, and options to share your hike with chosen contacts, it's got all the essential features. Serious hikers can subscribe to the premium plan, and there's also a website for anyone who prefers the comfort of a laptop to plan their hike.
Available on Google Play and Apple Store.



MOTO ONE ACTION

The Moto One Action has an AI-powered triple-camera system at the back, including an action camera with a 117° field of view. Expect better stabilised video while shooting fast-moving objects, and a whopping 128GB storage that can accommodate a vacation's worth of photos and videos. There's also the IPX2 water resistance, and a 3500mAh battery.
₹13,999 /US\$199; motorola.in



APPLE WATCH SERIES 5

Easily the best smartwatch around, the Apple Watch Series 5 is good enough to force a switch to an iPhone. With class-leading features like a noise meter, ECG, advanced health tracking, GPS, water resistance, and LTE connectivity, this smartwatch is everything you'd need in a wearable.
Starts from ₹40,900/US\$577; apple.com



BOSE FRAMES ALTO

Replace your headphones with Bose's Frames Alto. These 'smart sunglasses' sport retro-inspired angular frames with speakers enhanced by patented acoustic chambers, eliminating the need for earbuds. Up to 3.5 hours of playback time, integrated mic, and voice assistance make them extremely futuristic. As sunglasses, they are scratch resistant and block up to 99 per cent of UVA and UVB rays.
₹21,900/US\$309; boseindia.com

SONY WI-XB400

Weighing just 21g, Sony's WI-XB400 in-ear neckband-style headset is perfect for anyone who believes in travelling light. Surprisingly punchy despite the compact dimensions, this Extra Bass headset features Bluetooth 5 connectivity, a tangle-resistant neckband, and buds that snap together magnetically for easy storage. We also love the USB-C quick charging (three hours until full charge). But the icing on the cake has to be the 15-hour battery life.
₹4,999/US\$70; sony.co.in



Blending Business and Leisure

The idea of 'bleisure' travel might be picking up among modern travellers, but the iconic hotel, **The Lodhi**, in New Delhi has been offering unique experiences that combine business with leisure for years. By **SUSHMITA SRIVASTAV**

POST A HECTIC day of meetings and conferences in the capital, The Lodhi is probably the best place to unwind at. An uber luxurious space set amidst lush greenery right in the heart of New Delhi, it lets you say goodbye to all your work woes as you check into one of the plush rooms or suites featuring private plunge pools and expansive balconies.

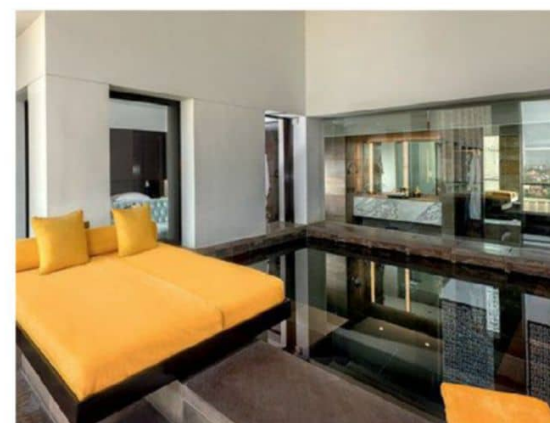
To make sure all your business needs are attended to, the hotel has a boardroom and a business centre with state-of-the-art facilities. The in-house laundry here operates round the clock, offering an express suit-ironing service in 25 minutes and a dry-cleaning service in just three hours. From local specialities to international spreads, The Lodhi's culinary scene is counted amongst the finest in the country. Feel free to pick any of the restaurants and lounges for a business meeting as all of them are popular social hubs. Let the celebrated chefs curate meals as per your taste, required calorie count, and dietary specifications. At the recently launched Italian restaurant, Perbacco, Michelin star chef Adriano Baldassarre has curated an expedited 20-minute executive lunch priced at ₹2,000/US\$28.



Clockwise from top left: A stylish porte cochere welcomes you into The Lodhi; the newly opened Italian restaurant, Perbacco; all the rooms and suites at The Lodhi sport a plush contemporary look; take a dip in your private plunge pool at the end of a long day.

Give yourself a break in between meetings as you head for a relaxing massage at the world-class spa with hammam that remains open until midnight. There's also a stylist-curated salon, state-of-the-art gym, a 50-metre lap pool, yoga on-call service, a spinning studio, three tennis courts, and two squash courts with dedicated trainers. If leaving the room for fitness doesn't cut it for you, work out at your own pace in your room with the newly introduced Gymbox, an innovative system for total body workout.

The Lodhi's Les Clefs d'Or Concierges helps in organising day-long trips to Agra, shopping with a 24-hour delivery option, and even chartering a private jet. Make the most of your stay as you drive past some of the iconic landmarks of Delhi—including the Rashtrapati Bhawan and India Gate—on your way to the hotel from the airport. thelodhi.com



COURTESY OF THE LODHI NEW DELHI

Hyderabad

India's fourth largest city by population, Hyderabad may be best known for its exquisite monuments, rich cuisine, the finest pearls, and lately, for being a start-up hub. However, 400 years of history and a multitude of influences shape its unique character. Founded in 1591 CE by Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah of the Qutb Shahi Dynasty, Hyderabad was built around the magnificent Charminar. After a brief period under Mughal rule, the city came under the occupation of the first Nizam of Hyderabad in 1724. After Independence, it was annexed by the Indian Army in 1948, and divided on the basis of linguistic differences, with the city of Hyderabad becoming the capital of Andhra Pradesh, and more recently, also the capital of Telangana. With much to offer, in terms of history, heritage, culture, food, architecture, and shopping, Hyderabad makes for a regal discovery.

By SATARUPA PAUL

Hyderabad was built around Charminar, which is now an important landmark in the city.



Local Buzz

Hyderabad brims with serene lakes and gardens, museums displaying impressive collections, and other unique attractions.

Museum Trail

One of the three National Museums of India, the **1 Salar Jung Museum** was originally a private art collection of the Salar Jung family, which was gifted to the nation after the death of Salar Jung III. The biggest individual collection of antiques on the planet, it has 43,000 art objects, over

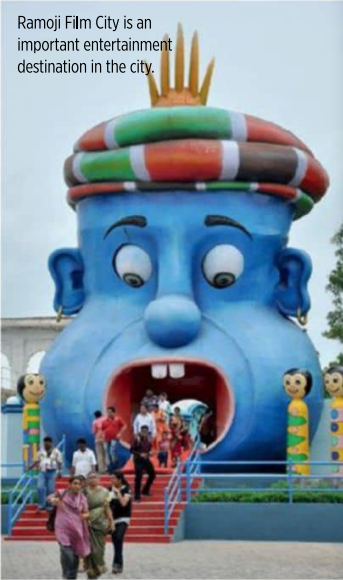
8,000 manuscripts, and more than 60,000 books. Built in 2010, the **2 Sudha Cars Museum** displays handmade cars by Kanyaboniya Sudhakar. Designed to look like everyday objects, the cars can be driven around, but are not for sale. Located at **3 Purani Haveli**, the **4 Nizam’s Museum** is a repository of

souvenirs, gifts, and mementoes presented by dignitaries to the last Nizam on his silver jubilee celebrations.

Timeless Lakes

Once, it boasted a staggering 7,000 lakes and other water bodies; today, only 185 remain. Of these, the heart-shaped **5 Hussain Sagar** is one of the largest manmade lakes in India. Spread across an area of 5.7 square kilometres, it is renowned for the monolithic statue of Lord Buddha that stands in the centre on the Gibraltar Rock. Named after the seventh Nizam of Hyderabad, **6 Osman Sagar** is a serene lake spread over 46 square kilometres. The dam over this waterbody serves as the main reservoir for the twin cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad. Straddling the border between two districts

in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, the Nagarjuna Sagar Dam across the River Krishna is one of India’s oldest and largest infrastructure projects, and makes for a popular getaway from the city. **Parks & Gardens** **7 NTR Gardens** is a lovely landscaped park, dotted with ornate lamp posts, water fountains, tall trees, and colourful flowering plants. Barely a minute’s walk from here, **8 Lumbini Park** offers boating facilities for tourists to reach the statue of Lord Buddha in the middle of Hussain Sagar. It also plays a fantastic multimedia fountain show that recreates the historical and cultural aspects of the city daily. **9 Indira Park** sprawls over 76 acres and is one of the best maintained green spaces in the city.



Ramoji Film City is an important entertainment destination in the city.

UNIQUE SIGHTS

Certified by Guinness World Records as the largest studio complex in the world, the **15 Ramoji Film City** spreads across a whopping 2,000 acres and is an entertainment destination, attracting over 1.5 million tourists every year. Guided tours of the film sets cover a London street, the Hollywood sign, Japanese gardens, railway stations, temples, and more. There are 47 sound stages, two hotels, theme parks, and amusement rides inside the film city, as well. **16 Shilparamam**, a traditional crafts village, is set amidst cascading waterfalls and lush greenery. Besides aiming to preserve traditional arts and crafts of the state through displays and shops, it also houses a cultural museum, workshops, and research and design centres. Situated on the banks of Osman Sagar, **17 Chikur Balaji Temple** is unlike any other. Housed inside is the figurine of Visa Balaji, a deity worshipped by US-Visa aspirants!

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: HEMIS/ALAMY; SHUTTERSTOCK; MAURO_GRIGOLLO/GETTY IMAGES; SHUTTERSTOCK



Clockwise from above: The grand pillared Khilwat or the Durbar Hall at Chowmahalla Palace, looks like a royal dream even today; Mecca Masjid is one of the oldest and largest mosques in the country.

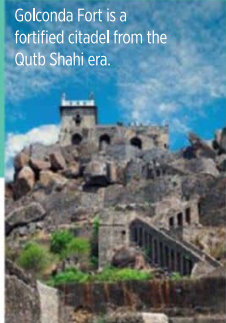


FROM TOP: ALEXANDER BELOKUROV/GETTY IMAGES; SHUTTERSTOCK

MONUMENTAL LOVE

No trip to Hyderabad is complete without a visit to these architectural masterpieces.

The centrepiece of the royal city, **10 Charminar**, is the most iconic landmark of Hyderabad. Constructed in 1591 by Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah, this square structure of granite, limestone,



Golconda Fort is a fortified citadel from the Qutb Shahi era.

and pulverised marble features four grand arches and 149 winding steps leading to a mosque built over 400 years ago. A fortified citadel and former capital of the Qutb Shahi Dynasty, the **11 Golconda Fort** is an archaeological treasure with four distinct forts featuring 87 bastions, eight gateways, four drawbridges, temples, mosques, and more. It flourished as a trade



The Qutb Shahi Tombs of Hyderabad.

centre for the famous Golconda Diamonds, including the world’s most famous one, the Koh-i-Noor. One of the largest mosques in the country, with a capacity to host 20,000 worshippers at once, the **12 Mecca Masjid** in the heart of the city

was built with bricks made with soil brought from Mecca, the holiest site of Islam. Other most revered heritage sites include the **13 Qutb Shahi Tombs** and the **14 Chowmahalla Palace**—the official residence of the Nizams of Hyderabad.



Getting Around

Rajiv Gandhi International Airport serves Hyderabad with flights from all major cities, while the Hyderabad Deccan Railway Station located in Nampally has numerous trains operating from important destinations around India. Auto rickshaws are aplenty, however, they may not always charge by the metre. Hyderabad offers good connectivity through local bus services, and radio taxis including Uber and Ola are readily available. The metro network currently includes three lines, and self-drive cars can be hired from the airport and many hotels in the city.

Wine & Dine

Hyderabad is a foodie's haven, with iconic eateries dishing out local delights, upscale establishments serving world cuisine, and stylish pubs offering innovative potions.

Legendary Recipes

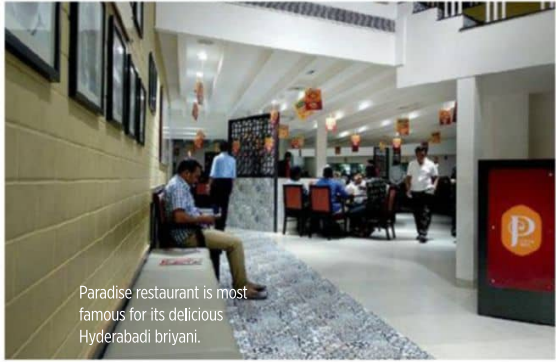
The narrow bylanes around Charminar, Secunderabad, and Nampally are replete with old stalls selling mouthwatering Nizami fare, including *haleem*, biryani, kebabs, and *luqmi* (a variant of mutton samosas). Try buttery-soft Osmania biscuits with Irani chai at a tea stall. If, however, you wish to

savour the finest biryani that the state has to offer, head to the iconic **18 Paradise Restaurant** (paradisefoodcourt.in). **19 Bawarchi** is another chain of restaurants that locals swear by for many variants of biryani (44, RTC Cross Road, Jawahar Nagar, New Nallakunta). **20 Chutneys** is your best bet for South Indian staples (Shilpa

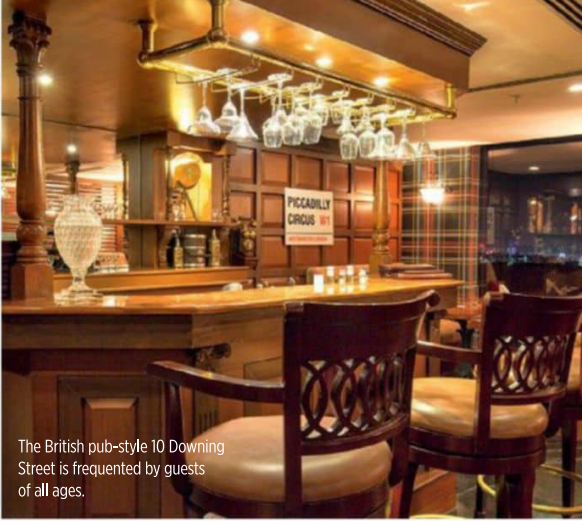
Arcade, Road No. 3, Banjara Hills).

Fine Dining

Boasting a fantastic Mediterranean menu, **21 Olive Bistro & Bar** is a chic outpost with a romantic vibe (olivebarandkitchen.com). Set in a waterfront property, **22 Ohri's Tansen** offers classical live music to serenade you, while you tuck into a delectable choice of Mughal and North Indian dishes (ohris.com). The Hyderabad chapter of Goa's famous **23 Fisherman's Wharf** is for those who love great seafood coupled with live music (thefishermanswharf.in). **24 Prego** at The Westin offers a lovely poolside setup to enjoy a bottle of vino over some hand-tossed pizzas and freshly-rolled pastas (marriott.com).



Paradise restaurant is most famous for its delicious Hyderabad biryani.



The British pub-style 10 Downing Street is frequented by guests of all ages.

AFTER HOURS

There is no dearth of places in the City of Nizams where you can let your hair down, enjoy a few tipples, and dance the night away. Spread over four levels of a retro-cool building, **25 Zero40 Brewing** transforms from a co-working space to a brewpub, as the night progresses (zero40.com). It offers six fresh brews and a selection of beer cocktails, which go down perfectly with their awesome thin crust pizzas and an exhaustive menu of bar nibbles. Also located in the same neighbourhood,

26 Room Two is an exclusive speakeasy bar serving interesting cocktails and hosting stand-up comic shows and live jazz music (room-two.business.site). Located in the Park Hotel Hyderabad, Aqua is a glitzy bar lounge with an infinity pool and a good selection of wines, spirits, and cocktails (theparkhotels.com). The British pub-style **27 10 Downing Street**, with cosy interiors, wooden furniture, and antique artwork, is popular for karaoke nights, themed parties, ladies nights, and engaging gigs (10ds.in).

RETAIL THERAPY

The glitz and glam of malls and high-fashion brands may have pervaded the shopping landscape here, but the charm of old bazaars still linger.

All That Glitters

Packed with 350 shops selling a dazzling array of colourful bangles, **28 Laad Bazaar** has been in business for 200 years—from the time of the Nizams. Besides its speciality lacquer bangles, you can find semi-precious stones, pearls, jewellery, *kalamkari* paintings, silverware, bidri-ware products, handwoven silk, and embroidered fabrics. **29 Sultan Bazaar** is another old market from the Nizams' era. Visit this market for silver junk jewellery, precious

stones, and other sparkly treasures. At **30 Pot Market**, you can find a variety of pots, utensils, and jewellery in stylish modern designs.

Mixed Bag

For some serious street shopping action, visit the **31 Nampally Market**, where you can score great bargains on clothes, footwear, and bags. **32 Begum Bazaar** is one of Hyderabad's grandest markets, known for tobacco, household goods, decor, kitchen essentials, toiletries,

cosmetics, gold, silver, and even fresh fish! Once a market selling exotic fruits, **33 Moazzam Jahi Market** is today a buzzing bazaar of fresh produce and its coveted ice cream. The area around Charminar bustles with shops selling saris, Hyderabad *khada dupattas*, *sherwanis*, and the renowned Basra Pearl, embellished with gold and silver.

Other Indulgences

The Perfume Market is famous for its century-



Laad Bazaar has 350 shops selling different types of bangles.

old businesses of luxuriously-scented ittars sold in pretty vials. Besides antiques, you can also find exquisite metal crafts with intricate inlay work on silver sheets or zinc and copper

alloys at the Antique Market. Bibliophiles love visiting the **34 Sunday Book Bazaar** for its rare out-of-print books, old editions, and second-hand bargains on famous volumes.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: SHUTTERSTOCK; COURTESY OF 10 DOWNING STREET; HEMIS/ALAMY

ILLUSTRATED BY MEGHNA PATWAL

Smart Stays

Be it a heritage stay or a modern hotel that you seek, the City of Nizams doesn't disappoint.



35 Taj Falaknuma Palace

Experience royal grandeur in all its glory at this former palace of the Nizam of Hyderabad. Perched 2,000 feet above the city, the Taj Falaknuma Palace serves uber luxury with a dose of regal nostalgia. Arrive at the doors in a horse-drawn carriage, let the palace butlers treat you like royalty, enjoy an indulgent stay in one of their 60 rooms and suites beautifully refurbished by the Nizam's Turkish wife, and take numerous gastronomic journeys at its many dining outposts! Try Aadaa for luscious Indian fare in a fine-dining setup, Celeste for global cuisine, and Gol Bungalow for a regal dinner. The treatments at the in-house Jiva Spa are rooted in the traditional Indian wellness philosophy. Guided tours to the art, culture, and shopping destinations in the city are also arranged by the hotel.

Address: Engine Bowli, Falaknuma; starts from ₹40,000/US\$560; tajhotels.com

36 Park Hyatt Hyderabad

Located in the upscale area of Banjara Hills, Park Hyatt Hyderabad offers unique architectural features and an attentive service. Stunning art and exquisite sculptures adorn the lobby, while its 185 rooms and 24 suites are spacious and stylishly designed. This is also the first luxury business hotel in the city to offer 41 fully-serviced luxury apartments, with 24-hour concierge, a private butler, and all modern amenities. The hotel offers one of the finest buffets—at The Dining Room. While Rika does Modern Asian, Tre-Forni serves homestyle Italian over an extensive list of Italian aperitifs, cocktails, and wines. A temperature-controlled pool with cosy cabanas, a lavish spa, and curated tours on request are other facilities available here.

Address: Road 2, Banjara Hills; starts from ₹8,300/US\$116; hyatt.com



37 ITC Kohenur

Located in the business district of HITEC City and overlooking the Durgam Lake, ITC Kohenur offers a priceless stay experience. The design elements of the hotel are inspired by the Koh-i-Noor—the famed jewel—and features a crystal-clear glass façade in the lobby, cut glass chandeliers, and local arts of bidri and zardozi everywhere. The 271 rooms, suites, and service apartments are some of the largest and most premium in the city. There are six distinct dining experiences on offer including the Dum Pukht Begum's that serve authentic flavours of India; Ottimo that serves homely Italian; and two bars—the Peacock Bar and Skypoint.

Address: Hyderabad Knowledge City, Madhapur (HITEC City); starts from ₹15,000/US\$210; itchotels.in



38 Novotel Hyderabad Convention Centre

Conveniently located adjacent to the Hyderabad International Convention Centre and next to HITEC City, this contemporary business hotel sprawls across 15 acres of manicured lawns and features 288 plush rooms. Its close proximity to IT and pharma giants, while being adjacent to India's most trusted MICE venue, makes it a preferred stay for business travellers. It's also ideal for anyone who wishes to experience the bustle of

the metropolis and then retreat to a peaceful haven. Food Exchange is a casual multi-cuisine dining destination, while La Cantina serves authentic Pan Asian in a beautiful al fresco setting. Enjoy a tippie at The Bar and a pampering session at the spa to round off a day of business or sightseeing.

Address: Novotel & HICC Complex, PO Bag 1101, Cyberabad; starts from ₹6,500/US\$91; novotelhyderabad.com

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY OF TAJ FALAKNUMA PALACE; COURTESY OF ITC KOHENUR; COURTESY OF NOVOTEL HYDERABAD CONVENTION CENTRE; COURTESY OF PARK HYATT HYDERABAD



Test The WATERS

Gliding on the emerald backwaters of Kerala, **The Oberoi Vrinda** promises you a luxurious and memorable cruise stay in India. By **KUMAR SHREE**

IMAGINE SAILING through azure waters, past golden beaches, lush rice paddies, and lofty mountain ranges, all the while immersing yourself in luxury. If the idea of exploring the backwaters of Kerala lures you, The Oberoi Vrinda, Luxury Kerala Cruiser is the perfect pick.

Get ready to unwind as you drift on the serene backwaters of Lake Vembanad—a self-supporting eco-system of water highways that meander through green fields, swaying palms, and villages. The Oberoi Vrinda features eight deluxe air-conditioned cabins with king-size beds, polished teak flooring, and windows that offer breathtaking backwater views and ample natural light. The complimentary on-board services, attention to privacy, and the option of a 24-hour private butler take the experience a notch higher.

Once on board, be ready to be smitten by the impeccable hospitality and delightful culinary offerings. The Restaurant on the cruise serves a wide range of global and local delicacies, freshly whipped up by the chef on board. It is the only luxury cruiser in the country with an on-board kitchen that offers international and regional cuisines.

Pick from a two or three-night itinerary that includes luxury accommodation, sightseeing excursions with a dedicated guide, evening entertainment, and transfers to and from Cochin International Airport.

The first day of the three-night itinerary starts with a trip from Vembanad Lake to Alleppey. On the way, meet local fishermen competing with each other for the biggest catch,



The air-conditioned cabins on board The Oberoi Vrinda offer sweeping views of Lake Vembanad; (above) The Oberoi Vrinda, Luxury Kerala Cruiser is an ideal option to explore the backwaters of Kerala.

and end the day with a traditional dinner accompanied by an authentic Kathakali performance that depicts stories from Hindu epics of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. The second day begins with a rice boat excursion along narrow winding rural waterways where you witness local life, followed by a visit to the Karumadi Kuttan—a statue of Lord Buddha that dates back to the 10th Century AD, and a traditional Kerala family residence known as *tharavad*. The evening entertainment includes a traditional Vrindavadyam performance—a musical fusion of classical instruments. On the last day, the cruise takes you to the 18th-century St. Mary's Church, Sree Bhagavathy Kshetram—a 100 year old temple, and the 130-foot long snake boat, Chambakulam. A breathtaking Mohiniattam classical dance performance and a spread of local delicacies make for a befitting finale.

The two-night itinerary lets you choose between the boat excursion and a visit to the church and temple. Either way, the picturesque backdrop of backwaters and the right blend of luxury and service, will transport you to another world. **D**



The Restaurant on the vessel serves a wide range of global and local delicacies.

COURTESY OF THE OBEROI VRINDA

UDAIPUR

Nestled in the cosy embrace of the Aravalli mountains and Lake Pichola, Udaipur's ubiquitous charm persuades even the most cynical traveller. Gorgeous palaces, heritage hotels, alleyways abounding in antiquity, awe-inspiring architecture, a rich arts and crafts scene, culinary delights—all of these topped with Rajput regalia make the erstwhile capital of the Mewar Kingdom a treasure trove. Udaipur is where travellers from across the world gather, giving the city a vibrant and multicultural vibe. The city's unique location ensures that it's as much of a delight during the monsoons as it is in winter, and that is why the City of Lakes warrants more than one visit. By **ANANYA BAHL**

CHAYUN DAMKAEW/GETTY IMAGES

The City Palace rises like a regal dream with the Lake Pichola by its side, in the heart of Udaipur.

Local Buzz

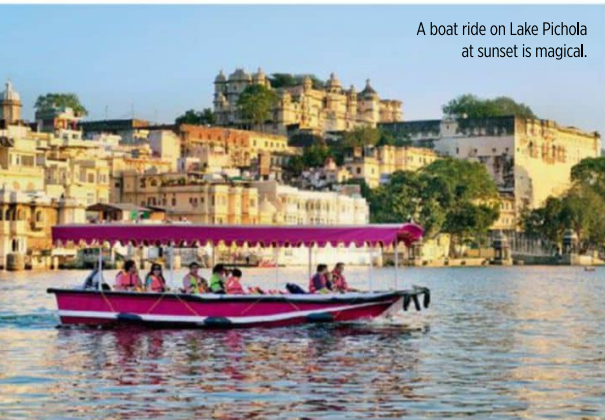
Peppered with tranquil lakes, manicured gardens, and majestic monuments, Udaipur is a dream come true for the discerning traveller.

Lake Vistas
When a destination is given monikers like 'City of Lakes' and 'Venice of the East', you have to check out its lakes. The pièce de résistance of Udaipur's landscape is the sprawling **1 Lake Pichola**, an artificial freshwater lake, which is surrounded by palaces and heritage hotels. A boat tour on its waters is mandatory. Next, explore the **2 Fateh Sagar Lake**, which is also an artificial lake and is home to Nehru Park and Udaipur Solar Observatory. Other

waterbodies to visit here are Doodh Talai Lake, Swaroop Sagar Lake, Rang Sagar, and Govardhan Sagar Lake.
Heritage Calls
Located on the banks of Lake Pichola, the sprawling **3 City Palace** complex is home to heritage hotels, cafes, and a museum. Maharana Udai Singh II began construction of this complex, which was then expanded over the course of 400 years by his descendants. Visit **4 Saheliyon ki Bari**, with

its manicured gardens, fountains, a lotus pool, and marble elephant statues. It was built for Maharana Sangram Singh's queen and her 48 maidens. The **5 Jagmandir Island** on Lake Pichola was built by Maharana Karan Singh II in 1620. Today, it is a hotel with delightful restaurants and can be accessed by boat from the Rameshwar Ghat. The **6 Ahar Archaeological Museum** is home to cenotaphs of more than 200 maharajas of Mewar. The **7 Monsoon Palace**, or the Sajjan Garh Palace, is a great place to catch a sunset.

What's More
8 Sajjagarh Biological Park is a zoological centre which is a great tourist attraction for kids. Head here to see tigers, sambars, hyenas, lions, Indian porcupines, ostriches, and more. Those who would like to finish their Udaipur itinerary with a prayer can head to the **9 Jagdish Temple** in the city centre or the **10 Karni Mata Temple** at Doodh Talai Lake.



A boat ride on Lake Pichola at sunset is magical.

CULTURAL SHOWCASE

A multitude of museums in Udaipur showcase the Rajputana culture of the erstwhile Kingdom of Mewar.

The City Palace Museum should be your first stop to understand the history of Udaipur. Built by Maharana Bhagwat Singh, it showcases miniature paintings, silver artefacts, personal

belongings of royal families, swords, artillery, and antiques. For connoisseurs of the finer things in life, **11 The Vintage and Classic Car Museum** is a veritable pitstop. More than 20 vintage cars

are exhibited at this venue that is located close to the Garden Hotel. The museum at **12 Bagore Ki Haveli** is where you can explore the history of the haveli architecture in Udaipur. Step into this restored home to see the way the rich once lived—chambers of royal ladies, dressing rooms, bathrooms,



The museum at Bagore Ki Haveli.

living areas, bedrooms, worship spaces, and recreation rooms are still preserved here. The lifestyles of Bhil, Mina, Garasia, Kathodi, and Saharia tribes have

been showcased at tribal museum of **13 Shilpgram**. For a dose of history that goes beyond the Rajput rule, visit the Ahar Archaeological Museum.



The Vintage and Classic Car Museum.



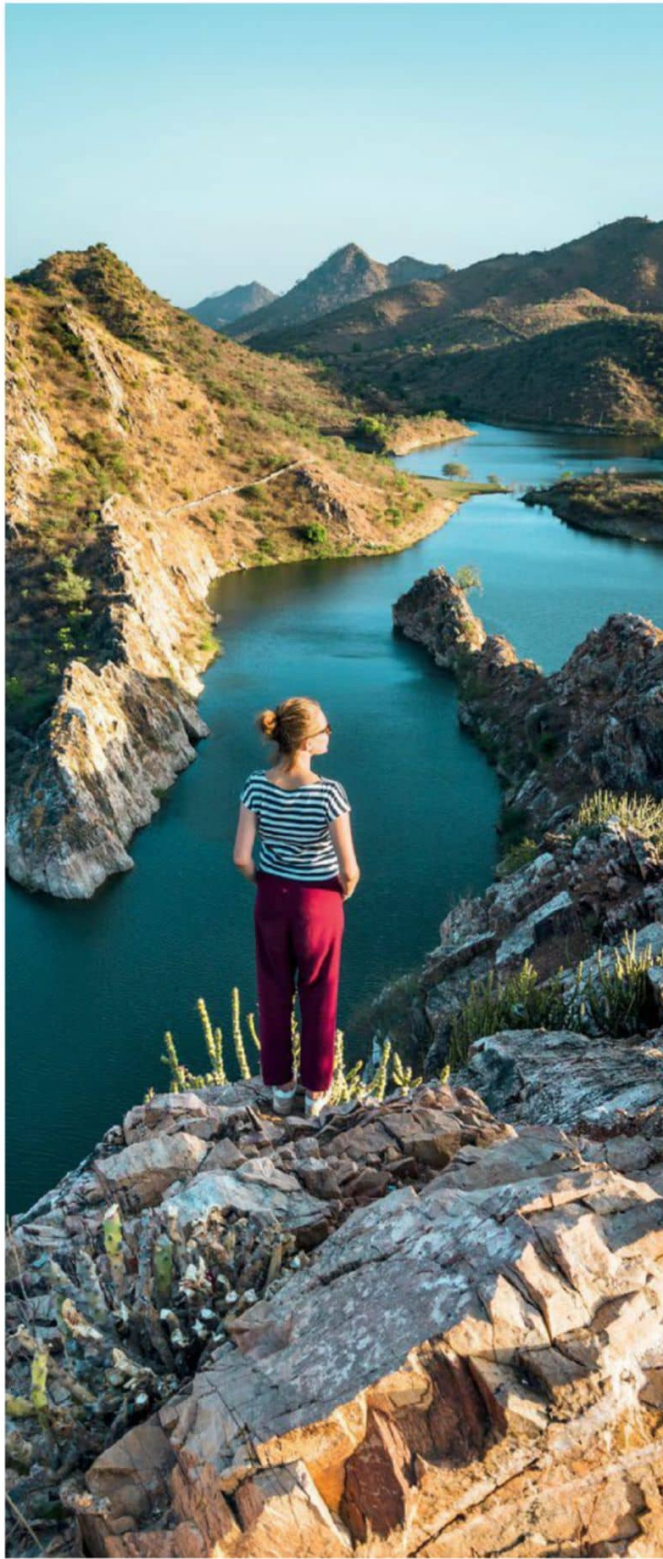
The Udaipur World Music Festival hosts contemporary and classical artistes from across India.

FESTIVE TRAIL

Udaipur's cultural ethos—both classic and contemporary—is kept alive by a calendar of lively events throughout the year. The **Udaipur Polo Festival**, held annually at the Chunda Polo Club, is a carnival with a fierce game of polo that sees some of North India's best players. The **Udaipur Light Festival** (udaipurlightfestival.com) has been celebrated every year since 2012. It is an initiative to bring together locals and visitors to celebrate Diwali, and has witnessed performances by famous musicians. The **Udaipur World Music Festival** (udaipurworldmusicfestival.com) hosts classical and contemporary musicians from across India and countries like Spain, Israel, Switzerland, Iran, Indonesia, South Africa, and Portugal. It is usually held in February across multiple venues like Hotel Amet Haveli, Fateh Sagar Lake, and the Gandhi Ground. The **Mewar Festival** is celebrated annually in March to welcome the spring season. The whole city is bathed in colour, and cultural processions and events are held. It coincides with the **Gangaur Festival** that is celebrated by the city's women.

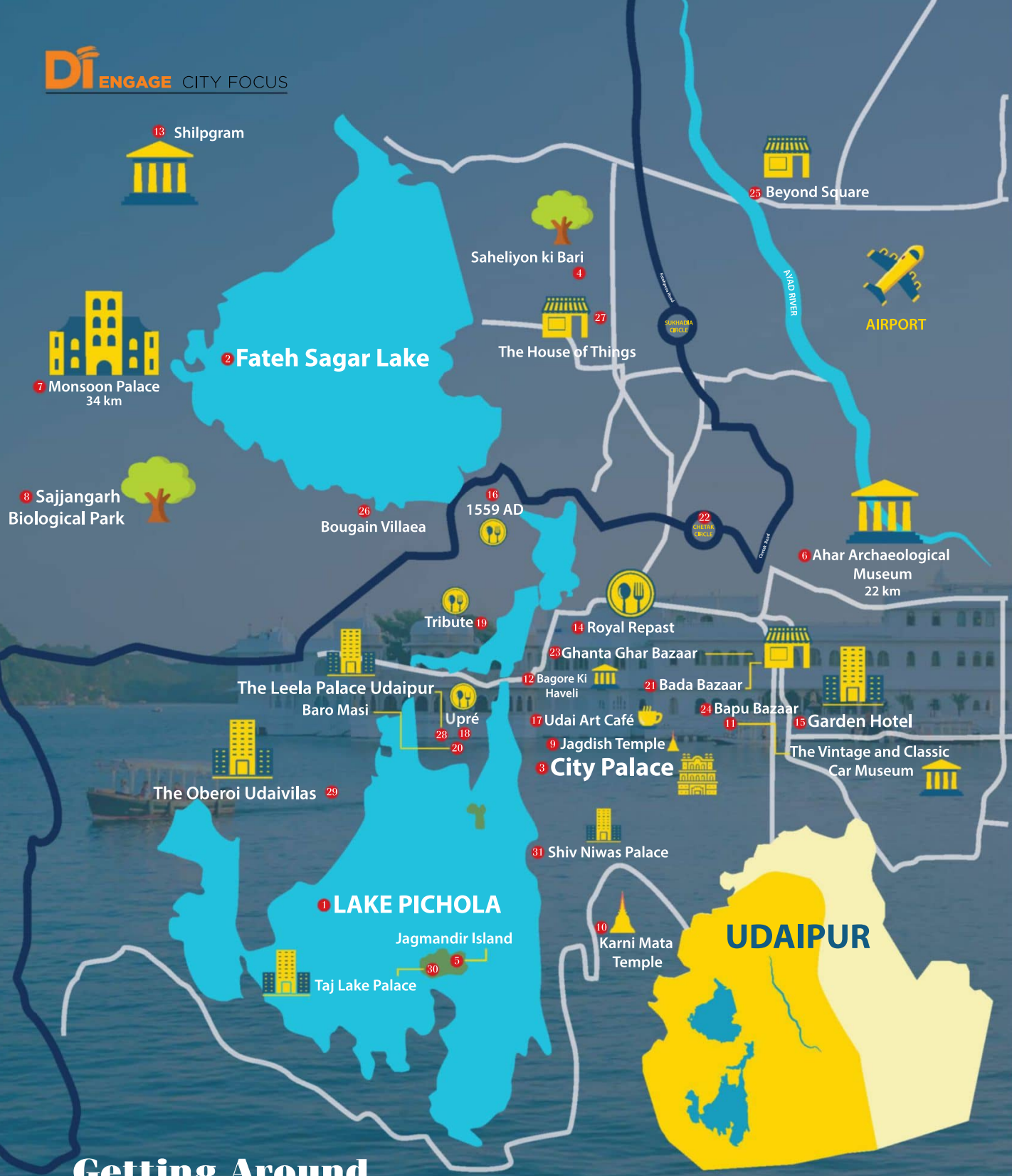


FROM LEFT: SHUTTERSTOCK; ANDRII LUTSYK/ASCENT XMEDIA/GETTY IMAGES



From Left: A traditional Rajasthani dance performance; overhead view of Lake Badi, located 12 km from the city of Udaipur.

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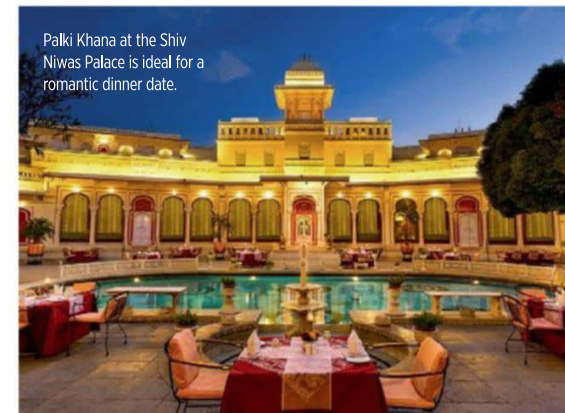
Getting Around

Udaipur's Maharana Pratap Airport is connected to Mumbai, New Delhi, and Jaipur via daily direct flights. It is located about 23 km away from the centre of the city. The Udaipur City Railway Station, situated merely three kilometres from the city centre, is connected to most major Indian cities. The city's main bus stand is located 1.5 km east of the City Palace, and several government and private buses ply here. Auto rickshaws, private taxis, and app-based cab services are easily available in the city.

ILLUSTRATED BY MEGHNA PATWAL

Wine & Dine

Whether it is a traditional thali, a meal with a lakeside view, or a good cuppa in a contemporary setting that you crave, Udaipur has you covered.



Palki Khana at the Shiv Niwas Palace is ideal for a romantic dinner date.

Traditional Treats

The Bedla family runs **14 Royal Repast** (royalrepast.com) and leverages its expertise in hosting royal events to serve up sumptuous Rajasthani fare. Think flavourful mutton gravies, chicken cooked in mildly spiced yogurt, and sinful desserts. For a wholesome thali, look no

further than the restaurant at the **15 Garden Hotel** (hrhotels.com).

Cafe Date

A must-stop is Palki Khana (hrhotels.com), a lovely Art Nouveau cafe located at the Shiv Niwas Palace in the City Palace Complex. Have a delicious dinner here post the Mewar Light and Sound Show at the

City Palace. A vintage villa that also works as a cafe is what you get at **16 1559 AD** (1559ad.com). Inspired by the year Udaipur was founded, it is the favourite hangout of locals who flock here for its fresh bakes and coffee. The quirky **17 Udai Art Café** (udaiartcafe.com) is perfect for coffee and crêpes along with a dose of art.

Meals With A View

For a gorgeous meal with waterfront vistas, head to **18 Upré** (lakepicholahotel.com). It is located in the Lake Pichola Hotel and serves up delectable kebabs and Rajasthani delicacies. Make sure to reserve a table on the private terrace. Designed as a tribute to Chetak, the horse of Maharana Pratap, is **19 Tribute** (tributeudaipur.com), a restaurant that overlooks the Rang Sagar Islands. Not only is it ideal for a delicious meal but also for birdwatching.



The Picholi Bar at Jagmandir Island Palace serves drinks along with views of Lake Pichola.

AFTER HOURS

The Library Bar (theleela.com) is a haven for lovers of whiskies, vintage wines, and time-refined cognacs. Designed like a den with fine art, books, and collectibles, it also has an inner courtyard where Rajasthani folk music and dance performances are showcased every evening. Head to Udai Kothi's **20 Baro Masi** (baromasi.com), which is a rooftop bar with panoramic views of Lake Pichola, a super tapas menu, and signature drinks like the Kothi Cup and No Hangover Mojito. The Picholi Bar (hrhotels.com) at Jagmandir Island Palace is a historic venue serving a variety of drinks along with views of Lake Pichola and the City Palace.

RETAIL THERAPY

Udaipur serves as an artist's canvas as well as muse, offering plenty to take back home.

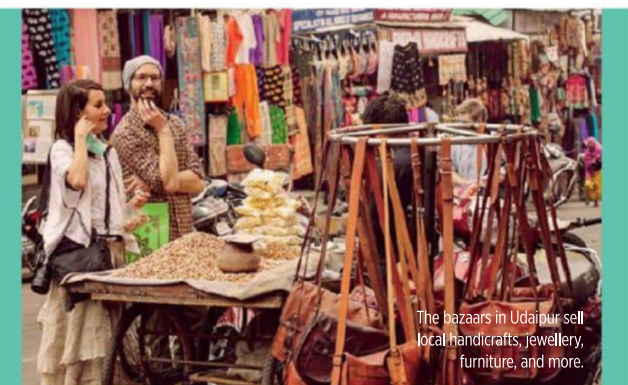
Bazaar Buys

The city's bazaars brim with local handicrafts, which are worth the haggle. Head to **21 Bada Bazaar** for silver jewellery, souvenirs, handmade *jootis*, *bandhani* saris and fabric with *batik* work. **22 Chetak Circle** brims with dancing puppets, handmade paper, pottery, traditional lanterns, and a lot of other handicrafts. **23 Ghanta Ghar Bazaar**, spread out near the Clock Tower of Udaipur, is famous for *minakari*, *kundan*, and *polki* jewellery. For

just about anything under the sun, head to **24 Bapu Bazaar**.

Decor Magic

Visit **25 Beyond Square** (beyondsquare.co.in) for tables inlaid with marble and *thekri* work, *pichvai* paintings, silver chairs, decorative art, and furniture made of agate stone. **26 Bougain Villaea** (bougainvillaea.co.in) is an art gallery comprising two floors and a bamboo garden with sculptures. Buy handicraft work by contemporary Rajasthani



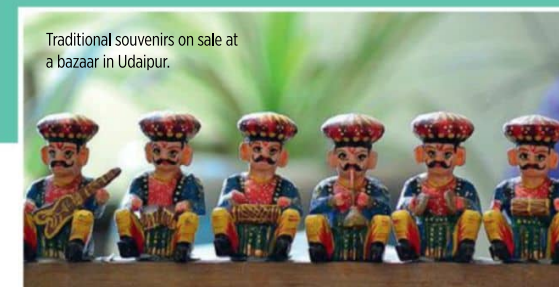
The bazaars in Udaipur sell local handicrafts, jewellery, furniture, and more.

artists here. **27 The House of Things** (thehouseofthings.com) sells handpicked home decor items such as curios, table linen, cushion covers, etc.

Handmade Treats

Shilpgram (shilpgram.in) is a crafts village where you not only buy traditional

handicrafts but also see the artisans at work. It hosts a crafts *mela* every December. The Sadhna Emporium (sadhna.org) by the Seva Mandir NGO works with the tribal people of Rajasthan, and sells handwoven bed covers, table linen, and bags.

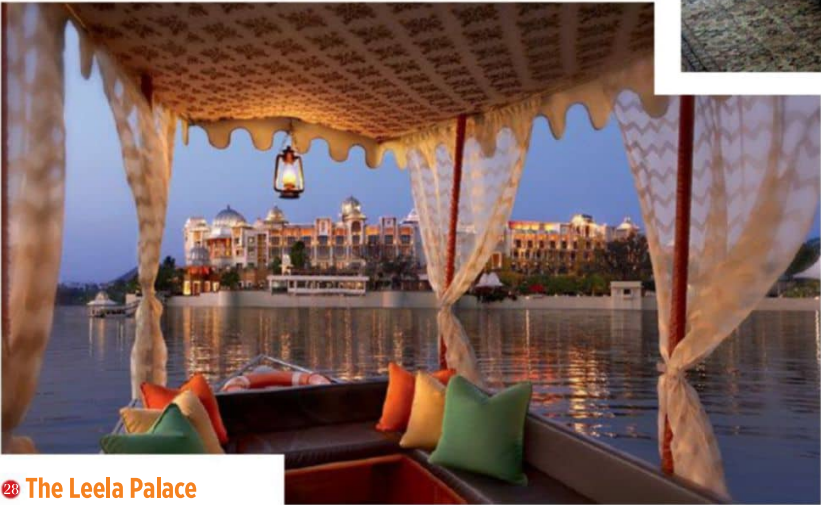


Traditional souvenirs on sale at a bazaar in Udaipur.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY OF SHIV NIWAS PALACE; COURTESY OF JAGMANDIR ISLAND PALACE; SHUTTERSTOCK; VEENA NAIR/GETTY IMAGES

Scenic Stays

The uber luxurious hospitality of Udaipur is an interesting mix of lavish purpose-built hotels and heritage palace hotels.



28 The Leela Palace Udaipur

Voted 'World's Best Hotel' by *Travel + Leisure USA Readers' Survey* in 2019, this is the city's only modern palace hotel by the banks of Lake Pichola. Stay in one of the lakeview rooms or the eight suites with butler services, be bowled over by the 5,000 square feet of banqueting space, authentic Indian fine dining at Sheesh Mahal, and world cuisine at the Dining Room. Furthermore, iconic elements from the chain's other hotels, like the Espa wellness centre and the Library Bar make their presence felt at this property.

Address: Lake Pichola, Udaipur; starts from ₹49,000/US\$687; theleela.com

29 The Oberoi Udaivilas

Drawing inspiration from Udaipur—with its narrow winding alleys and seven lakes linked by canals—this luxurious property is sprawled across 30 acres of verdant landscape and interconnected through domes and corridors on the banks of Lake Pichola. Well-being and tranquillity are the crux of the Oberoi experience, and guests can choose from the hotel's different categories of premier rooms, luxury suites with private pool, or the Kohinoor Suite with a private pool for ultimate indulgence. Most rooms at the hotel afford glorious vistas of Lake Pichola, the Aravalli Range, and City Palace. In addition to amazing food, there are also immersive experiences like sunset boat rides, lunches on Lake Pichola, private city tours, miniature-painting classes, and more.

Address: Badi-Gorela-Mulla Talai Rd, Haridas Ji Ki Magri, Pichola, Udaipur; starts from ₹47,000/US\$659; oberoihotels.com



30 Taj Lake Palace

What can you expect from a historic palace that was built solely for the purpose of pleasure? Built in the 18th century by Maharana Jagat Singh, this hotel perched on Lake Pichola served as an island palace. Flaunting a melange of 65 luxurious rooms and 18 grand suites, each with views of the City Palace, Aravalli Hills, Machla Magra Hills, and Jag Mandir, the hotel became known around the world after the James Bond film, *Octopussy*, was filmed here in the early 1980s. Enjoy delicacies from Rajasthan and the rest of India at its restaurant, Neel Kamal; sip signature cocktails at its bar, Amrit Sagar; be regaled by a royal boat dinner; head on a city tour in a vintage car; and relax at the Jiva Spa during your stay here.

Address: Pichola, Udaipur; starts from ₹37,500/US\$527; tajhotels.com



31 Shiv Niwas Palace

Original paintings of the Mewar school, antique chandeliers, and gold latticework adorn this beautiful property, which has panache and history oozing from every corner. Located within the City Palace Complex, it was built by Maharana Fateh Singh in the early 20th century. Earlier, it was open only to visiting dignitaries and guests of the House of Mewar. A collection of 19 palace rooms, nine terrace suites, six royal suites, and three

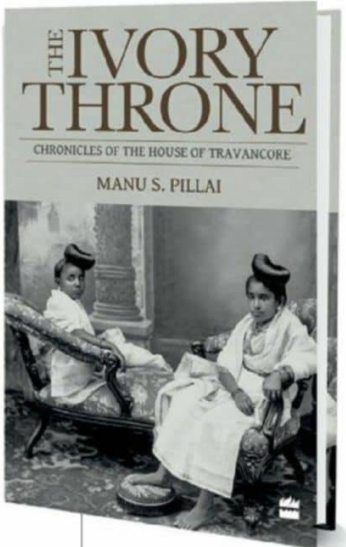
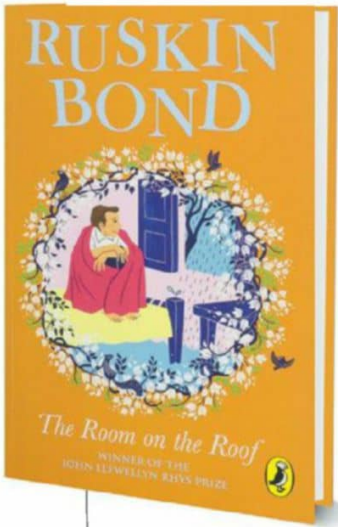
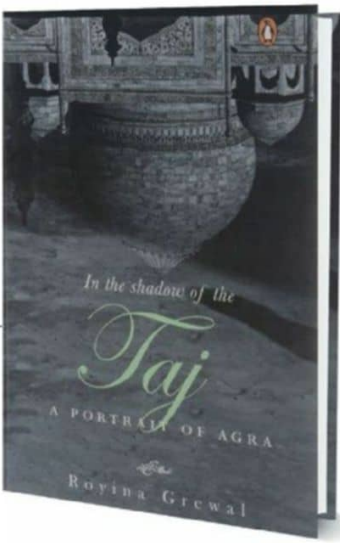
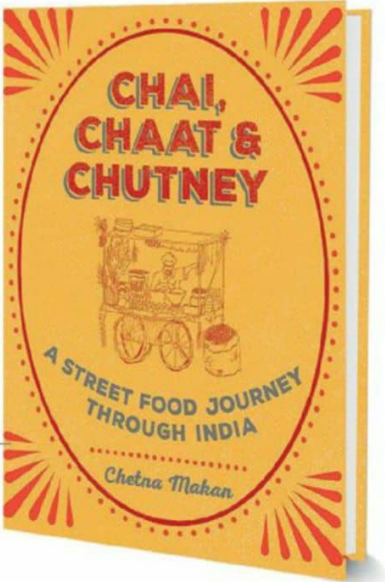
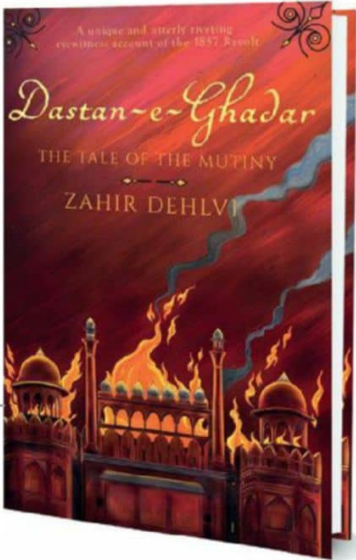
imperial suites, it is a blend of traditional design and modern amenities. The suites are decorated with paintings and furniture belonging to the royal family. Multi-cuisine restaurants, a European-style cafe, a pool deck bar, and an Ayurvedic spa add to the comforts of this hotel.

Address: Lake Pichola, The City Palace Complex, Udaipur; starts from ₹13,000/US\$184; hrhhotels.com

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY OF THE LEELA PALACE UDAIPUR; COURTESY OF TAJ LAKE PALACE; COURTESY OF SHIV NIWAS PALACE; COURTESY OF THE OBEROI UDAIVILAS

READERS' CORNER

Journey across India through these books that shed light on the intriguing history, culinary landscape, and vibrant culture of the country. By **SUSHMITA SRIVASTAV**



IN THE SHADOW OF THE TAJ: A PORTRAIT OF AGRA
Royina Grewal

The city of Agra goes beyond the Taj Mahal, and probably nothing can vouch for the fact better than this book by Royina Grewal. From how its strategic location lured all—from the Lodhis and Mughals to the British, to how it fell prey to neglect, and what could be done to restore its glory—this interesting read takes you through a fascinating journey of Agra, one lane at a time.

PRICE ₹295/US\$4
WHERE TO BUY amazon.in

DASTAN-E-GHADAR: THE TALE OF THE MUTINY
Zahir Dehlvi

Having lived through the Revolt of 1857 that ended the Mughal dominion in India, Zahir Dehlvi originally wrote this memoir of mutiny in Urdu in 1914. It was later translated to English in 2007 by historian and author, Rana Safvi. Vivid, rich, and moving—this is a compelling account that chronicles the fading glory of the Mughal court in India.

PRICE ₹599/US\$8
WHERE TO BUY amazon.in

THE ROOM ON THE ROOF
Ruskin Bond

This book tells the tale of a young Anglo-Indian orphan boy living in a European colony in Dehradun. He juggles between his strict guardian's rules and forced English values, the absolute solitude, a blurry future, and his fading Indian identity. Written by Ruskin Bond when he was just 17, this work of fiction takes you on a rollercoaster ride of emotions.

PRICE ₹250/US\$4
WHERE TO BUY flipkart.com

CHAI, CHAAT & CHUTNEY: A STREET FOOD JOURNEY THROUGH INDIA
Chetna Makan

An ode to her travels in India and the delicious food that she discovered on the way, this elaborate cookbook by Chetna Makan takes cues from dishes common on the streets of India and lends them a personal touch. It is a collection of interesting chapters that bring out authentic tastes of Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, and Chennai.

PRICE ₹1,446/US\$20
WHERE TO BUY amazon.in

THE IVORY THRONE: CHRONICLES OF THE HOUSE OF TRAVANCORE
Manu S Pillai

Painting a clear picture of Kerala's history with anecdotes, this book makes for a riveting read. The historical non-fiction is an engaging narrative of the ruling family of Travancore in the 19th century, the life story of Sethu Lakshmi Bayi—the then monarch of the province, and the slow death of the matrilineal society in the state.

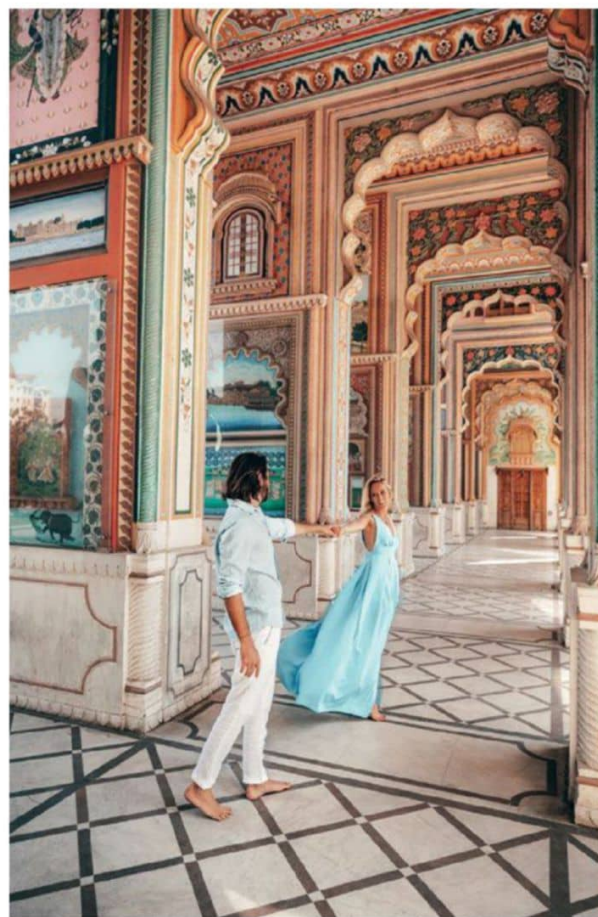
PRICE ₹750/US\$11
WHERE TO BUY flipkart.com

Living The DREAM



backpackdiariez

What started as an account of their extended honeymoon two years ago, ended up turning the Belgian couple—**Camille** and **Jean**—into full-time travellers. Today, they give major travel goals to their over 280k (and counting) followers with awe-inspiring posts from over 50 different countries. Here, the duo shares travel tales from their trip to India, and why they wish to return to the country in 2020. By **SUSHMITA SRIVASTAV**



Patrika Gate of Jawahar Circle in Jaipur is an explosion of colours.

Q. Tell us a bit about yourself and your journey.

We create content for a living, have taken up travelling as a full-time job, and have great passion for photography. It all started two years ago when we got married and decided to go on an extended honeymoon to Asia. We created a joint Instagram account to keep our family and friends updated on our travels. A couple of months into the honeymoon, we realised that we were receiving a lot of love for our travel posts, and by the end of our trip, we had hit 10k followers. We realised the potential, quit our corporate careers in London, and started travelling full-time.

Q. What prompted you to travel to India?

India was always a faraway dream. We had heard so much from travellers who would return from this fascinating country. All the pictures looked mind-blowing. So, earlier this year, we decided it was time. We packed our bags and booked two tickets to Delhi. We decided not

to book our stay as we wanted it to be flexible.

Q. What was your first impression of India?

Delhi is a very loud city, but we adjusted quickly. It was also a much cleaner place than we had expected. We had read many stories about Delhi's pollution and garbage problem, but we saw very little of that. Also, we were amazed by how friendly the people were. The locals would talk to us, offer help, and strike conversations about our country.

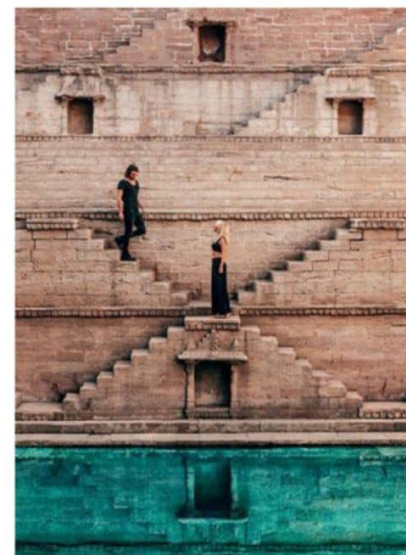
Q. What cities/places did you visit here?

We ticked off all the classics in North India—Jaipur, Jodhpur, Agra, and Delhi. If we had to pick a favourite, it would be Jodhpur. The city is so calm and quiet, with blue houses lending it a magical feel. One evening, we climbed up to a little hill in front of a fort, to watch the sun setting behind the Blue City. All the minarets began to glow, and a flock of birds flew over the blue rooftops—it was an unforgettable moment.

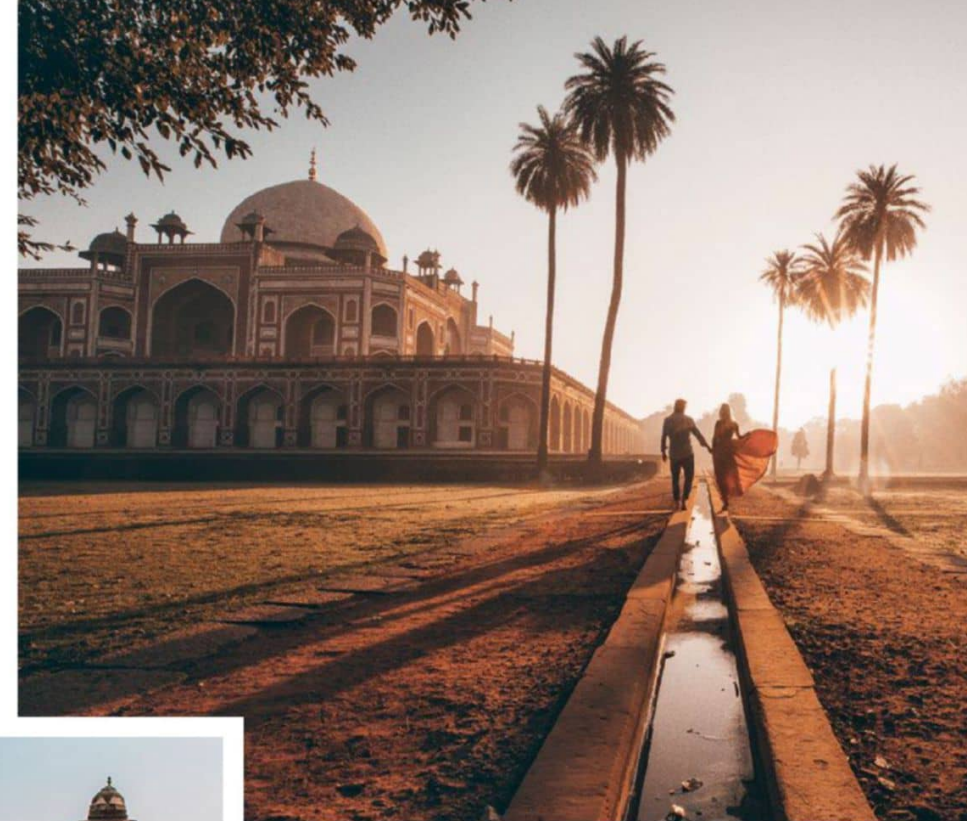
Q. What is a unique aspect about India that you did not see elsewhere?

There are animals all around on the streets—dogs, cows, horses, and even elephants! But the cows are especially striking because they walk around freely, and sometimes even

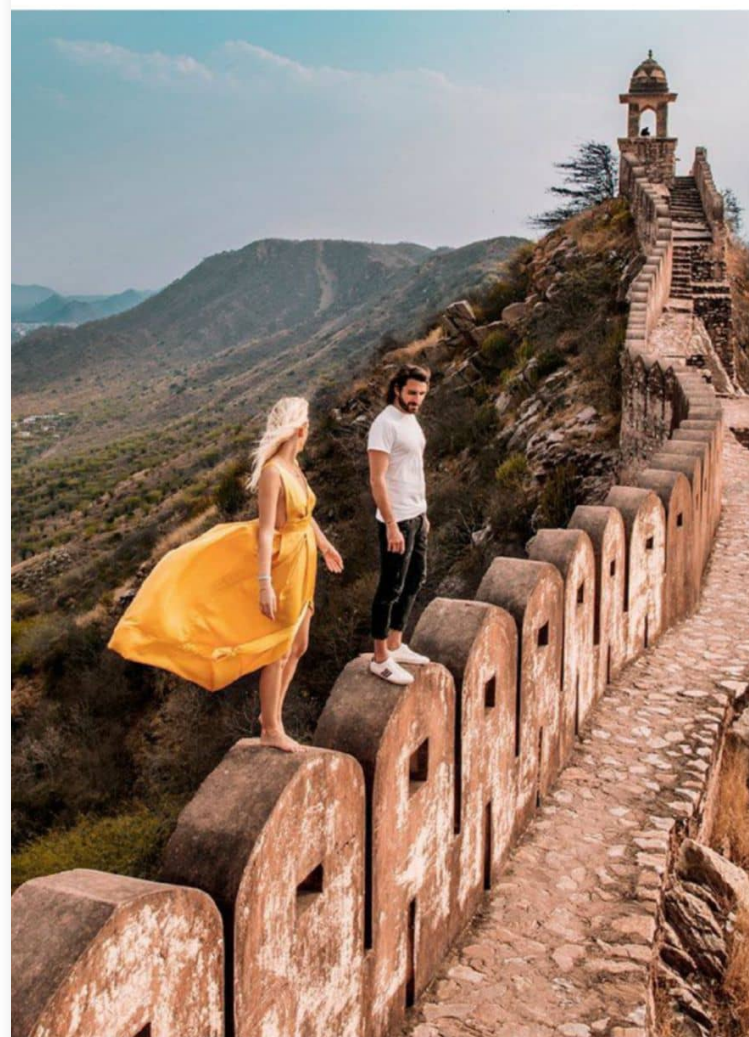
COURTESY OF BACKPACKDIARIEZ (5)



Toorji Ka Jhalra is an intricate and Insta-worthy stepwell in Jodhpur.



Humayun's Tomb in Delhi is best enjoyed at sunrise, when the monument is basked in a golden glow.



The long and winding 16th-century Amer Fort offers sweeping views of Jaipur.

hinder traffic. The cow is a holy animal in India so people just drive around it. It is a very funny thing for an outsider.

Q. A word of advice to international travellers visiting India?

Read about the country before visiting. India can be overwhelming on the first trip, so it's good to know what to expect. You can find a lot of information in guidebooks or on travel blogs, but we also think it's a good idea to read a novel or watch a movie shot in India. We loved the book *Shantaram* by Gregory David Roberts. Also, make sure you get your visa sorted in advance. Many people assume that India has a Visa On Arrival system, but this is not the case for EU citizens.

Q. How do you suggest international travellers plan their visit to India?

We think it's best not to plan too much. Every city

here is different, and there are so many places to visit that you might want to change your itinerary every now and then. It's easy to travel around India, as you can find transport options and travel agents almost everywhere. We say, go where the adventure takes you rather than following a tight schedule.

Q. Do you plan to return to India? What's next on your Indian bucket list?

That's a definite yes! We really want to visit Kerala. We have read amazing things about the backwaters of the state and are hoping to make this happen next year.

Q. Your five travel essentials while moving around in India.

Our camera, medicines for the stomach, candies and pens for the children that we meet on our way, loose change, and pairs of good shoes as you will end up walking a lot!

Live Life KING SIZE

The Gudliya Suite at City Palace Jaipur has opened its doors to tourists on Airbnb. Now you can live like a king in the royal suite and listen to glorious tales from a bygone era, while the staff spoil you silly. By **KUMAR SHREE**

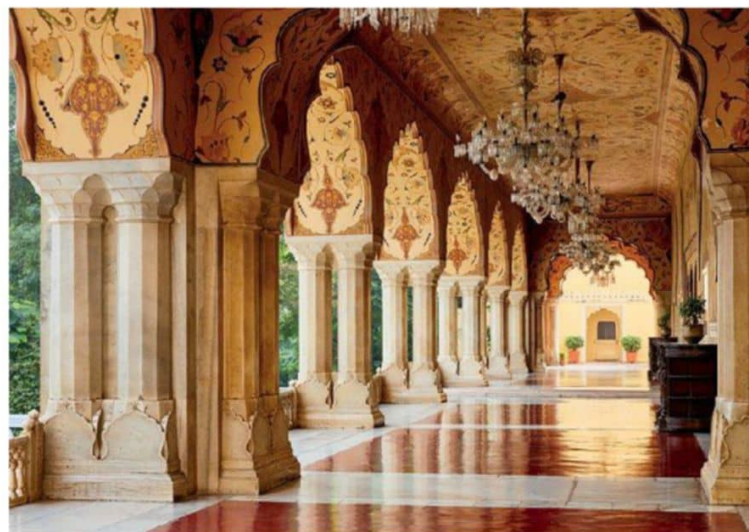


The Gudliya Suite has motifs from around the palace; (below) City Palace Jaipur exemplifies the best of 18th-century Rajput architecture.

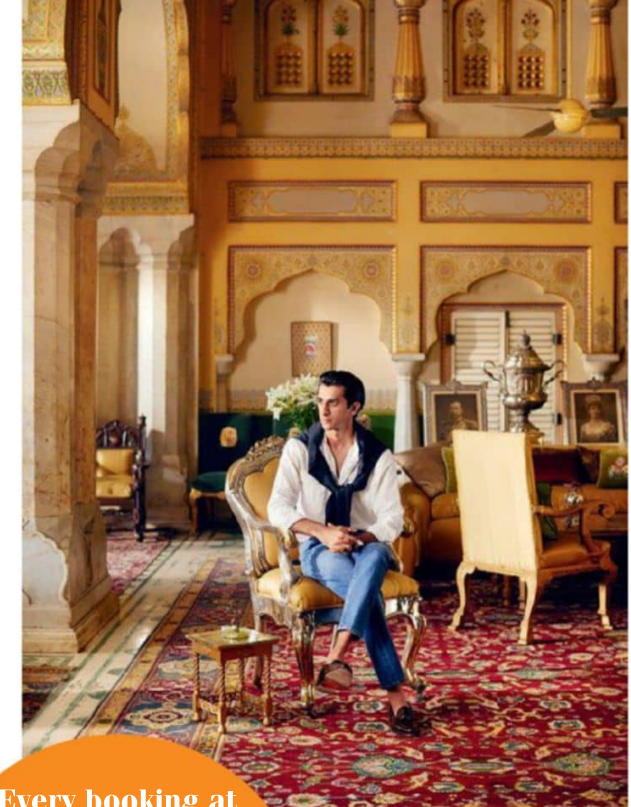
COURTESY OF CITY PALACE JAIPUR

THE 300-YEAR-OLD City Palace Jaipur, located in the heart of the capital city of Rajasthan, is the epitome of opulence. Steeped in history, every nook and cranny of this iconic landmark has a tale to regale you with. The palace exemplifies the best of 18th-century Rajput architecture with ornate chambers, large and airy reception halls, crystal chandeliers, gilded wall decorations, and intricate carvings. Home of Maharaja Sawai Padmanabh Singh—the 303rd descendant of the erstwhile royal family of Jaipur—this landmark establishment has played host to the likes of Princess Diana, Oprah Winfrey, and Bill Clinton, among others. And now, it is all set to host you.

One of the suites at City Palace Jaipur is now available to book on Airbnb. The luxurious




Every booking at the Gudliya Suite comes with a guided tour of the palatial complex, by one of the royal staff members at City Palace Jaipur.



Clockwise from left: City Palace Jaipur; Maharaja Sawai Padmanabh Singh at Sukh Niwas; decorative wall paintings inside the palace make for alluring picture backdrops.

Gudliya Suite is tucked away in one of the private corners of the City Palace Jaipur, and opened for public booking on Airbnb from November 2019. The suite has its own lounge, bedroom, luxurious bathroom, and an indoor swimming pool. The guests will also have a dedicated butler and guide at their service. A guided tour that takes you through the rich historic, cultural, and artistic heritage of the land is also part of the stay. Think guided museum tours, excursions, and shopping. Add to that an authentic Rajasthani meal on the terrace with a view of the Aravalli hills, and afternoon tea with the peacocks in the palace's gardens. Now, that's what you call a royal life!

The value from each booking of the Gudliya Suite will be diverted towards the Princess Diya Kumari Foundation (PDKF), a non-profit organisation working for the upliftment of the rural women and artisans in Rajasthan. The Gudliya Suite priced, at ₹5,74,898/ US\$8,000 per night will be available at an inaugural amount of ₹71,862/US\$1,000 for select nights, until January

1, 2020. The balance amount will come from Airbnb as a contribution to the foundation. Thereafter, guests will have to pay ₹5,74,898/US\$8,000. [airbnb.com/CityPalaceJaipur](https://www.airbnb.com/CityPalaceJaipur). 



24 Hours in PUDUCHERRY

Formerly known as Pondicherry, this coastal town is all about sun, sand, and spirituality. Since it was a French stronghold from the 15th century until the mid-20th century, remnants of colonial architecture have an abiding presence in its cobbled streets. Explore this pocket-sized paradise in a day. By **SUPRIYA SEHGAL**



7.00 am GET INTRODUCED ON A HERITAGE WALK

Sign up for a two-hour heritage walk by Story Trails, where a local expert unravels the history of Puducherry, offering anecdotes on nooks and corners of both the French Quarter and the Tamil Quarter. This is an excellent way to get your bearings before doing a deep dive into specific spots later. Stories of remarkable buildings, tales lost to time, secret spots, and famous landmarks will make you feel like an insider. storytrails.in

9.30 am TREAT YOURSELF TO A SOUTH INDIAN BREAKFAST

A classic eatery for South Indian breakfast, Surguru Spot Restaurant is always packed and in high demand. The busy, no-frills outlet promises value for money, prompt service, and a delicious spread. The authentic South Indian flavours compete with the laid-back vibe of the restaurant, sans eye-catching decor or celeb stature. Large ochre pillars and rattan chairs make for simple yet tasteful interiors. Near Vinayagar Temple, 12, JN Street, White Town



SHUTTERSTOCK: (TOP) SANDIPAN DUTTA/ALAMY

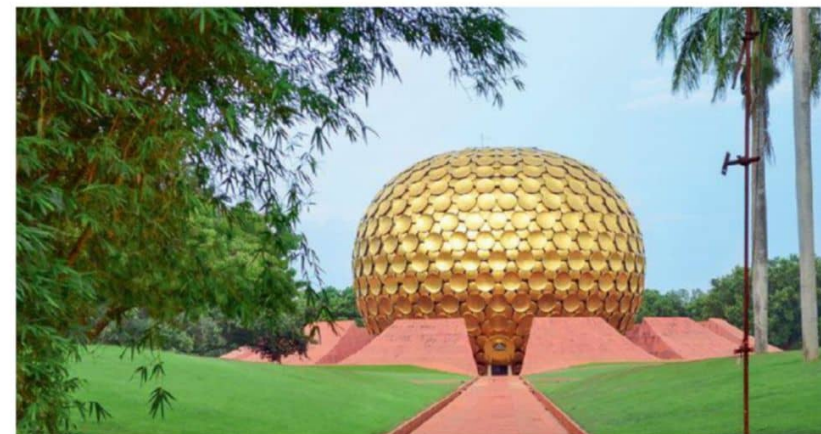


10.30 am WALK AROUND SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM

Stroll in the peaceful erstwhile home and ashram of philosophers, Sri Aurobindo and Mirra Alfassa (known as The Mother), and stop by their flower-draped *samadhis* in the courtyard. Founded in 1926, this is where the two spiritual gurus lived and spread ideas of higher spiritual consciousness. Books on the philosophy of the ashram, in international and regional languages, are available here to buy. sriurobindoashram.org

12.30 pm MEDITATE AT MATRIMANDIR

Visit the landmark symbol of Auroville (14 km from Puducherry), the Matrimandir, whose huge golden dome embodies the teachings of The Mother and Sri Aurobindo. The lotus-bud shaped marble structure stores soil from 124 countries and 23 Indian states, a symbolic gesture of Aurovillean unity. Meditation passes are given out a day in advance. The short walking route to Matrimandir from the Information Centre is dotted with an open exhibition, herbal garden, a coffee shop, and pavillions to meditate in. auroville.org



2.00 pm TIME FOR A HEARTY MEAL

Grab a light and healthy meal at one of Auroville's favourite spots that offers delicious Mediterranean cuisine. The simple but homely Naturellement Garden Cafe, set amid cool leafy surrounds, is the ideal place to unwind. *Udyogam, Auroville*



4.00 pm TAKE SURFING LESSONS

Catch the last of the four surfing sessions at Kallialay Surf School run by the enthusiastic brother duo, Juan and Samai, at Bodhi Beach (near a small fisher village called Thandirayan Kuppam). If you're here only for the day, it's best to join a beginner class, which includes sand surfing, followed by personal or group learning exercises in the shallow end of the sea. The fee includes rash vests and surfboards. surfschoolindia.com

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: SHUTTERSTOCK(2); COURTESY SURFSCHOOLINDIA.COM

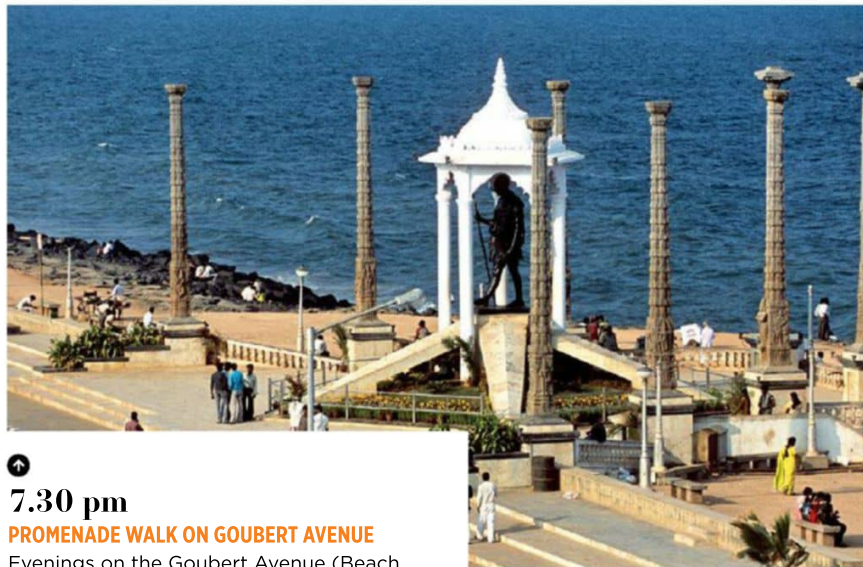


5.30 pm

COFFEE AT LE CAFÉ

A vintage address on Goubert Avenue which runs along the ocean, Le Café was originally the port office of Pondicherry. A few black and white photographs on the walls bear testimony to this. Enjoy the view of the endless ocean and the promenade beach from this 24-hour haunt as you sip on a cup of coffee. Don't forget to try the chocolate cake.

No 40, Goubert Ave, Near Gandhi Statue, White Town



7.30 pm

PROMENADE WALK ON GOUBERT AVENUE

Evenings on the Goubert Avenue (Beach Road) are alive with hawkers lining up to engage locals and tourists with snacks, and toy vendors trying to catch the attention of kids. Benches line the walkway that is closed to motorised vehicles after 6 pm. You can stroll along the wide footpath that lies along the sea. Landmark monuments on this street include a towering statue of Mahatma Gandhi, the French War Memorial, Old Lighthouse, Joan of Arc Statue, a statue of Jawaharlal Nehru, a memorial for BR Ambedkar, and a statue of Marquis Joseph Francois Dupleix, who was the Governor of Pondicherry between 1742 and 1754.

9.00 pm

SKY GARDEN FOR DINNER

A coastal holiday demands at least one meal dedicated to seafood. Enjoy excellent seafood and continental dishes with a view of the sea at Sky Garden, the rooftop restaurant that serves up delicacies from around the world. skygardenpondy.com



GETTING THERE

Puducherry airport is equipped for small planes to fly into the city, connecting Bengaluru and Hyderabad via direct flights. You can also fly to Chennai (151 km) and take a bus to the town. A coastal drive on the East Coast Road from Chennai is a popular option to get here.



STAY

Accommodation varies from home-run guesthouses such as L'escale Guest House (starts from ₹1,800/US\$25; lescalepondicherry.com), chic hotels such as Villa Shanti (starts from ₹7,650/US\$107; lavillashanti.com) and upscale options like Palais De Mahe (starts from ₹13,000/US\$182; cghearth.com).



WHEN

October to March.



IDEAL FOR

Architecture enthusiasts looking for a stress-free, easygoing holiday flavoured with surfing, scuba diving, and some time for self-discovery.



DISCOVER

The Eglise de Notre Dame des Anges (known as 'French church' among locals), Arulmigu Manakula Vinayagar Temple, the Government Museum and the Chunnambar Boat House (7 km from the city).

DINODIA PHOTOS/ALAMY; (TOP) SANDIPAN DUTTA/ALAMY



Top 10 Hotels in CHENNAI

Luxury means different things to different people and what works for one traveller might not be fulfilling for another. Whether you are travelling for business or pleasure to the Tamil capital, here are 10 hotels that will make your sojourn a seamless one. By **NIKITA CHAWLA**



ITC Grand Chola

Where history meets exclusive luxury.

With 10 dining options, an opulent spa, and a modern wellness centre, ITC Grand Chola is the third largest hotel in India and the largest standalone luxury property in the country. The best part is its picturesque location and proximity to Chennai International Airport (only 5 minutes). This multiple award-winning property is a living tribute to the Chola dynasty and fuses traditional South Indian temple architecture with state-of-the-art modern amenities. Sumptuous decor featuring Tanjore paintings and inlay marble work by skilled artisans from Mahabalipuram attracts history buffs and art connoisseurs. ITC Chola also boasts a five-star GRIHA rating (the highest award for green buildings) with a strong emphasis on personalised luxury, female-only floors, and butler services. When luxury meets history in such an exclusive destination, a journey back in time to the golden period of South Indian opulence is guaranteed.

Starts from ₹9,800/US\$138; itshotels.in

The Leela Palace Chennai

Relax with stunning sea vistas.

Satisfy your yearning for coastal living by booking a plush sea-view room at The Leela Palace Chennai. Located on the southern tip of Marina Beach, this one comes with proximity to business districts and tourist attractions. It attracts well-heeled travellers looking for a quiet getaway or those aiming to see the city in a limited time. The Santhome Basilica and the Parthasarathy and Kapaleeswarar temples are all covered with a 20-minute drive. While the architecture is traditionally Chettinad, the decor is avant-garde, with rich colonial undertones, especially in the fine dining restaurants, walkways, palatial bathrooms, and the business centre. Indulge your taste buds with delicacies ranging from pan-Asian cuisine at their gourmet Chinese restaurant, China XO, to international favourites served at the all-day buffet restaurant, Spectra.

Starts from ₹10,111/US\$142; theleela.com



Park Hyatt Chennai

Holiday with your canine companion.

With 200 indulgent rooms, including 20 lavish suites, this hotel is a silent retreat in the middle of the bustling city of Chennai. The interiors are sleek and thoughtfully done (even the most basic rooms are equipped with espresso machines and smart lighting). While most rooms are around the lily pond in the inner courtyard, the upgraded rooms overlook the picturesque Guindy National Reserve. Indulge in Middle Eastern, Southeast Asian, North Indian, Italian, and Western cuisines at the Flying Elephant or relish a customised menu at their pantry-style restaurant, the Dining Room. Park Hyatt Chennai also caters to your furry friends and pampers them through its unique Paws at the Park programme that features dedicated rooms for guests travelling with pets. The stay includes a dog bed, dog treats, a water bowl, and a toy to keep your canine friend entertained. Sumptuous dog meals are also available.

Starts from ₹12,000/US\$169; hyatt.com



Hyatt Regency Chennai

Caters to the globetrotter.

Epitomising South India's artistic traditions, this luxury hotel in Chennai exudes warmth with a dash of cosmopolitan glamour tailor-made for both business and leisure travellers. Hyatt Regency Chennai is a modern hotel located close to prime business districts, IT corridors, consulates, 230 metres from the nearest metro station, and 15 kilometres away from the Chennai International Airport. The rooms sport contemporary designs and are ergonomically styled, with modern amenities and elegant baths, all set against the stunning coastal

skyline. You can choose from an array of suite types and rooms that offer features such as the Regency Lounge, club access, complimentary airport transfers, kitchenette, powder rooms, etc. Amidst bespoke pergolas, ceramic art installations, and landscape inspired by waterfalls and green meadows, the Hyatt Regency Chennai also has a stunning outdoor pool. Bask in the glory of the sun on one of the sundeck chairs or take a dip in the azure blue water.

Starts from ₹9,000/US\$127; hyatt.com

Taj Coromandel

Rejuvenate with tailor-made wellness services.

This intimate five-star hotel has played host to famous political figures such as former US President Jimmy Carter; The Duke of York, Prince Andrew; former US President Bill Clinton; and the Emperor and Empress of Japan. It is the preferred choice of accommodation for diplomats and high-profile guests. Whether you are a busy business traveller or seek a luxurious stay, the Luxury Room, Grand Luxury, and Taj Club room with their contemporary furnishings, butler services, complimentary breakfasts, and modern amenities exceed your expectations. If you're in the mood to unwind, the Jiva Grande spa has you covered. This exquisite wellness centre spans three floors and consists of four single spa suites, a relaxation area, yoga studio, and an Ayurveda consultation and treatment room. The invigorating therapies, massages, body scrubs, wraps, and facials ensure of relaxation and rejuvenation. For those travelling with their partners, there's the couple spa suite, which earns brownie points for its lavish bathtub overlooking the stunning landscape.

Starts from ₹9,600/US\$135; tajhotels.com

FROM TOP: COURTESY OF PARK HYATT CHENNAI; COURTESY OF HYATT REGENCY CHENNAI

Sheraton Grand Chennai Resort & Spa

Think unparalleled views of the Bay of Bengal.



Other than the usual fitness centre and spa, the Sheraton Grand Chennai Resort & Spa also has an incredible infinity edge pool that extends into the horizon. Sip cocktails on the well-cushioned loungers by the poolside or dive into the shimmering blue waters that blend with the spectacular sunset in the Bay of Bengal. If the pool sets the ambience, then the food is the

undisputable showstopper. Make a reservation at the al fresco restaurant, Pelican Deck, for European grills and barbecue prepared by experts using the freshest ingredients, which go perfectly with their innovative and refreshing drinks. Share small bites at Pintail Lounge and trade stories of your day during the happy hours. You can also wine and dine

at their culinary powerhouse, The Reef—a popular choice for visiting connoisseurs. Visit this place for an authentic gastronomic experience with rich local flavours that are soundly tempered to accommodate the sensitive international palate.

Starts from ₹8,820/US\$124; marriott.com

FROM TOP: COURTESY OF INTERCONTINENTAL CHENNAI MAHABALIPURAM RESORT; COURTESY OF SHERATON GRAND CHENNAI RESORT & SPA



InterContinental Chennai Mahabalipuram Resort

For a stylish staycation.

Launched in 2016, this 105-room property is the first luxury hotel resort from the InterContinental Hotel Group (IHG) that blends world-class luxury with a renaissance Coromandel style. It is located on the pristine beach of Covelong, close to the UNESCO World Heritage Site in Mahabalipuram. Here, stylish hospitality meets contemporary amenities in a 21st-century setting—a partnership that echoes along the pillared hallways and corridors of the resort. From the moment you arrive, you'll be pampered with attentive service and unparalleled comforts. The rooms are luxe and spacious, to say the least. They provide a tranquil private retreat with a lotus pond or pool view, walk-in wardrobes, rain showers, and valet laundry services.

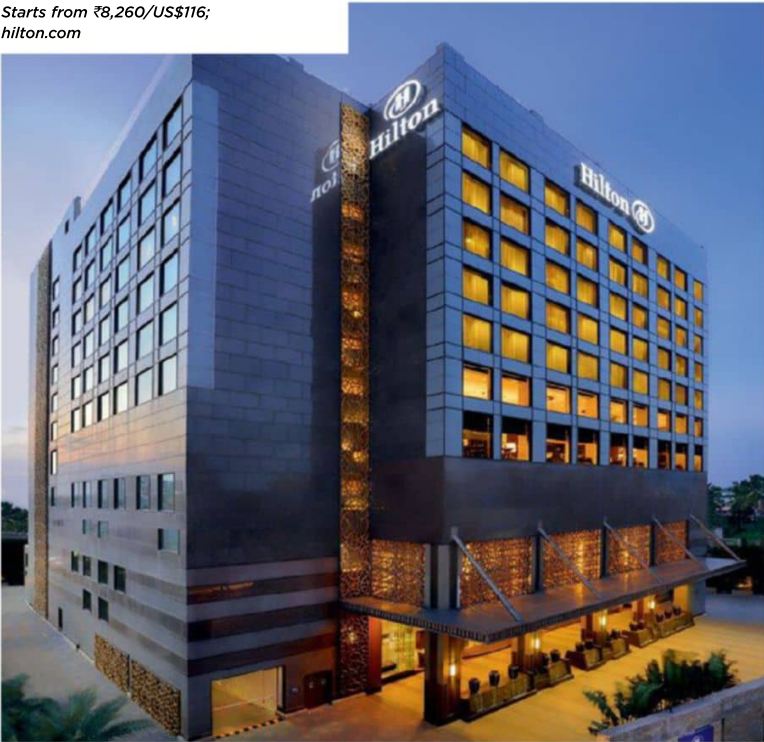
Starts from ₹7,540/US\$106; ihg.com

Hilton Chennai

An eclectic mix of everything.

Be it for business meetings, a wellness break, or some quality time with your family, Hilton Chennai offers the services you need, the amenities you expect, and the extras you deserve. It encapsulates the urban, dynamic, and metropolitan spirit of Chennai in a way few can. For one, it is 15 minutes from the Chennai International Airport and 10 minutes from the Chennai Trade Centre, with a metro station at walking distance. The other reason to stay here is the collection of five restaurants and bars including a 24-hour cafe where brunches to pre-dinner drinks and everything in between is duly taken care of. Visit Q Bar for a culinary experience under a starlit sky. Sit under the gazebos and enjoy spectacular views of the city as you sip signature cocktails and enjoy the music played by the resident DJ. Their banqueting and conferencing facilities are extensive as well, and can accommodate up to 1,000 guests at a time.

Starts from ₹8,260/US\$116; hilton.com



Radisson Blu Hotel Chennai City Centre

A break from convention.

Eclectic style coupled with minimal decor sets this one apart. Just 10 minutes (3 km) away from the airport, the Radisson Blu Hotel Chennai City Centre is an upscale property that endeavours to make your corporate meetings and private events special. The rooms come categorised in Standard, Deluxe, and Business Class. Be it a wedding or a seminar, the incredible event facilities spanning more than 1,022 square metres, capable of comfortably hosting up to 900 guests, are impressive.

Host an elegant event in the lobby-level Royal Court, which can be segmented into three separate spaces. The Royal Summit, located on the lower lobby level, can be divided into two spaces. For a smaller business event, reserve their boardroom, which offers amenities like LCD projector, remote-controlled lighting, a whiteboard, and video conferencing.

Starts from ₹5,780/US\$81; radissonhotels.com

Crowne Plaza Chennai Adyar Park

Add zing to your work trip.

Crowne Plaza Chennai Adyar Park, formerly known as the Sheraton Park Hotel & Towers, is a five-star hotel located on TTK Road in Chennai. Located in the heart of the city, the hotel is surrounded by major companies such as Barclays, Cisco, Oracle, Shell, HCL, and Microsoft. They also offer early check-ins, express check-ins, and late-night check outs so that you can make the most of your stay. The conference and meeting facilities are spread across 15,000 square feet and include 13 meeting rooms, a 24-hour business centre, facilities for outdoor and indoor activities, and high-speed Wi-Fi access. You can also indulge in the themed breaks curated by creative chefs at the property to add zing to your business trip. After the day gets done, slip into a relaxed evening at the Westminster Bar with a delicious selection of beverages.

Starts from ₹4,805/US\$68; ihg.com

FROM TOP: COURTESY OF RADISSON BLU HOTEL CHENNAI CITY CENTRE; COURTESY OF HILTON CHENNAI

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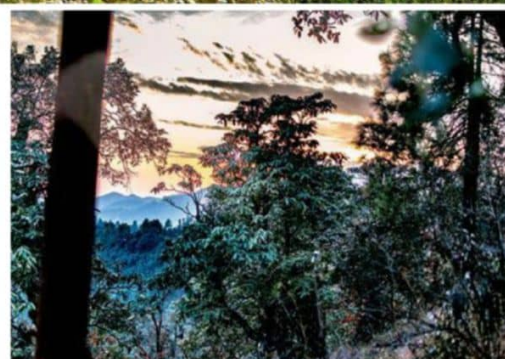


Clockwise: The White Peaks offers panoramic views of the Panchachuli peaks; catch a beautiful sunset during your stay; the cottage lets you bring your furry friends along; pair your meals with breathtaking views from the private balcony; the rooms at The White Peaks are cosy and homely.



Heavenly ABODE

The White Peaks in Gagar, Uttarakhand, is where you can slow down and enjoy the simple things in life. By **SUSHMITA SRIVASTAV**



HUGGED BY glistening silver oak groves from three sides and overlooking a breathtaking vista on the fourth, Gagar near Ramgarh in Uttarakhand is a little-known Himalayan hamlet where life is slow and the air crisp. If you walk up the winding road that takes you to the top of this little village, you find yourself at The White Peaks—a boutique homestay that will instantly charm you.

Perched atop a lush foothill, the cottage boasts unobstructed panoramic views of the snow-capped peaks of Panchachuli and opens its door to a mystical oak and rhododendron forest. Sitting at an altitude of 7,500 feet above sea level, the cottage is nothing short of a dream for those who love being away from the clamour of crowds, while staying in the comfort of a cosy cottage.

Clockwise from left: Nippy winter evenings are best spent by the fireplace in the living room; built in 1990, The White Peaks was later turned into a homestay; browse through the interesting collection of books at the cottage.

Built in the early 1990s, this old home was discovered by the host couple, Abhijit and Aparupa Ganguly, who turned it into a fairy-tale homestay. The two rooms in the cottage let you enjoy a relaxed vacation amidst oak trees that fringe the grounds. Sit by the fireplace to enjoy intimate conversations, master some yoga poses in your private balcony, or simply lounge in the sun-dappled courtyard gazing at nature's beauty. There's also a wide collection of interesting books stacked here to aid those lazy evenings spent over comforting cups of tea or hot chocolate. From delicious finger-snacks to hearty home-cooked meals and everything in between—every dish here is made of organic, locally-sourced ingredients.

The soul of the cottage is Kaali—the owners' furry friend who is always up for snuggles from the guests. Enjoy some playtime or take a guided forest walk with her. In fact, the property is pet-friendly, so make some memories with your furry babies. While you are bound to be smitten by Gagar's beauty that is a constant in all seasons, winter here is exceptionally magical. The sleepy village takes cover under a thick blanket of white that turns the entire place into a winter wonderland.

The magic extends to the thick oak forests that call for long, idle strolls. Take up a walking trail in the lush forestlands or trek to the ancient Jhandhidar Devi Mandir. Laze around in this abode, gaze at the blue skies and the endless lush expanse, and disconnect from the rest of the world. thewhitepeaks.com



COURTESY OF WHITE PEAKS

Diamond In The ROUGH



MAYFAIR Lake Resort in Naya Raipur with its verdant gardens, luminous lake, and ample tranquillity is proof that there is more to the industrial hub. By **KUMAR SHREE**

The swimming pool at MAYFAIR Lake Resort; (below) the grand lobby sets the mood for a regal vacation as soon as you check into the resort.

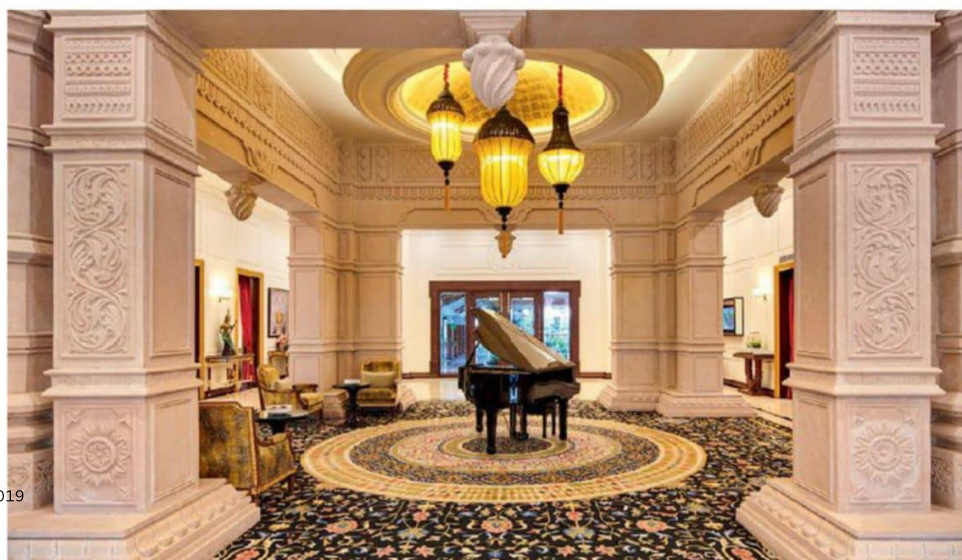
THERE IS ABSOLUTE silence even though there are 20 of us in the bus. All eyes are fixed on the dense foliage around, trying to spot a tiger that might be hiding somewhere. The wait prolongs, and most of us give up. Just then, a dark figure peeks from behind the camouflage of grass and tea trunks, and keeps us curious for a good 10 seconds before finally coming out in the open. A sudden ecstasy takes over the insides of the bus, and the big cat, as if sensing the attention, struts and poses for the many cameras.

I'm at the Nandanvan Botanical Garden in Naya Raipur for a jungle safari, as a part of my weekend sojourn at the MAYFAIR Lake Resort. A swift and scenic ride of 20 minutes from the airport takes me to the sprawling resort, the looming façade of which catches my eye from afar. The property enjoys a strategic location with

excellent connectivity from the Swami Vivekananda Airport and the railway station here. It also boasts sweeping views of the Jhangh Lake, which adds to the serene setting and gives MAYFAIR Lake Resort its name.

The warm and welcoming vibe of the property transforms into a regal

one once you cross the glass front door. The buggy navigates through the grand reception area to the Super Deluxe Suite, where I'm to spend my weekend. The MAYFAIR Lake Resort could easily qualify for a mini jungle with around one lakh trees planted across the property. The 1,440-square-foot



Clockwise from top left: Teapot, the multi-cuisine restaurant at the resort; the banquet hall is housed in a dedicated convention centre; the dedicated entrance to the spa here is a spectacle in itself.

suite is equipped to pamper you—think dedicated butler and private jacuzzi! The panoramic view of the Jhangh Lake elevates the experience further. It becomes difficult to believe that this serene property is housed right in the middle of one of the industry capitals of the country.

The 124 suites and rooms are tastefully done in muted shades of brown and white, and the walls of the bedroom sport an intricate floral pattern. The entire property is peppered with traditional Bastar art and *pata* paintings from the neighbouring state of Odisha. A golden dome-shaped structure by the lake stirs my curiosity and I ask Nawaz, my butler, about it. It is a mandap (a temporary platform for wedding ceremonies), he says. The resort is a preferred wedding destination, I learn, with its 95,000 square feet of lawn. The Mayfair Spa with the bridal make-up room, a manicure and pedicure station, a unisex salon, and a well-equipped fitness centre ensures that you look your absolute best on your big day.

The world-class restaurants here dish out delectable world cuisines. Mamma Mia serves bite-sized Italian and Mexican delicacies as well as scrumptious bakes and cakes in a quirky



setting. Tea Pot, the 24x7 diner on the other hand, spoils you silly with a bevy of options to choose from—the live stations serve up Indian, Continental, Oriental, Italian, and more cuisines. The watering holes—Baron and Baroness, which sports a Scottish theme, the Lounge Bar, and the Jungle Bar are your destinations to unwind after a busy day of travel or work. Good music, dancing, karaoke, and a fine selection of premium spirits, cocktails, and delicious finger food await you here.

A Shiva temple, which is typical to every MAYFAIR property, finds a place here, and there's also a library for those who enjoy everything from classics to contemporary reads. MAYFAIR Lake Resort, in short, indulges every kind of traveller. **D**

GETTING THERE

Raipur, the capital of Chhattisgarh, enjoys good connectivity with every major city in the country by road, air, and rail.

WHERE

MAYFAIR Lake Resort, Sector 24, Tuta, Atal Nagar, Raipur, Chhattisgarh.

TARIFF

Executive Room prices start from ₹8,450/US\$118 and Deluxe Suite prices start from ₹25,000/US\$349; mayfairhotels.com

WHEN

August to February.

IDEAL FOR

Solo and business travellers.

DISCOVER

Chitrakote Falls, Gangrel Dam, Ghatrani Waterfall, Nandanvan Jungle Safari, Naya Raipur Central Park, Urja Park, Vivekananda Sarovar, and the Champaran village are not to be missed.

Feels Like HOME

They say a place is only as good as its people. The warm hospitality of **Jaypee Residency Manor**, a celebrated property in Mussoorie, reasserts this notion. By **AMITHA AMEEN**



Jaypee Residency Manor is a luxury property located a little ahead of the Mall Road in Mussoorie.

A PICTURESQUE train journey from Delhi, through paddy fields and dense forests followed by a short car ride brings me to Mussoorie. A quaint hill station located an hour from Dehradun, Mussoorie offers rolling green slopes and snow-capped peaks. As my driver navigates through the bylanes of this town with a discernible colonial hangover, I lower the windowpane and feel the crisp mountain air.

A few kilometres away from the cacophony of the Mall Road and the main market of Mussoorie, Jaypee Residency Manor stands tall like a castle. A feeling of cosiness and

warmth envelopes me as soon as I make my way through the double glass doors—the friendly attitude and exceptional hospitality of the staff set the tone for the rest of my trip.

The high ceilings and polished wooden interiors are what catch your eye first. The palatial hotel is split between two towers—Residency and Valley View. While the rooms at Residency Tower offer cosy settings with panoramic views of the mountains, the Valley View rooms offer a more contemporary setting.

I am ushered through a maze of passageways to The Executive Room at Residency Tower—my home for the next




Clockwise from top: The lobby at Jaypee Residency Manor has polished wooden interiors and floor-to-ceiling windows; the life-size chess board at one of the court lawns; the plush Executive Room at the Residency Tower.



three days. A private balcony offering stunning views of the snow-capped Himalayas wins me over. The property also has layered terraces that offer 360° views of the Doon Valley.

After a quick nap, I head to Regency, the multicuisine restaurant, for lunch. I choose a table next to the French windows that overlook the vast courtyard of the property. The staff informs me that it has seen one too many weddings, and I am not surprised. With the stunning backdrop of the Mussoorie skyline, it would make for the perfect wedding venue in India. As recommended by the staff, I decide to try the Garhwali Thali, and it turns out to be a meal befitting a queen, made from the freshest locally-sourced ingredients. Apart from Regency, the hotel also houses the Marshall's Lounge with its well-stacked bar, the 24-hour Café Manor, and The Old Bakery that serves exquisite desserts.

Jaypee Residency Manor takes sustainable living very seriously. It boasts exotic plants, a greenhouse, compost pits for waste management, and even a banana grove. The hotel also has a private joggers' path with rolling hills on one side and lush green foliage on the other. Apart from providing a string of outdoor activities, the hotel offers indoor entertainment. From a pool table, an arcade, and a bowling alley to an indoor temperature-controlled swimming pool, an expansive spa, a basketball court, a skating rink, and even a badminton court—there's no dearth of fun things to do here. The life-size chess and snakes & ladder boards on the east and west court lawns are also striking.

At night, I decide to visit Café Manor, where a fresh-from-the-oven pizza awaits me. Post dinner, I settle down on one of the comfortable chairs in the balcony, feasting my eyes on a mesmerising view of the 'Queen Of the Hills'. 

GETTING THERE

The nearest airport is Jolly Grant Airport, Dehradun (52 km). Ask the hotel concierge for a pickup or book a taxi. Alternatively, take a taxi directly from Delhi to Mussoorie (287 km).

WHERE

Jaypee Residency Manor, Barlowganj, Mussoorie, Uttarakhand.

TARIFF

Starts from ₹8,000/US\$113; jaypeehotels.com

WHEN

September to June.

IDEAL FOR

Families, couples, nature enthusiasts, and business travellers.

DISCOVER

Visit the nearby town of Landour, home of the famous author Ruskin Bond, go on a nature walk, visit Kempty Falls, or take a casual stroll along Mall Road.

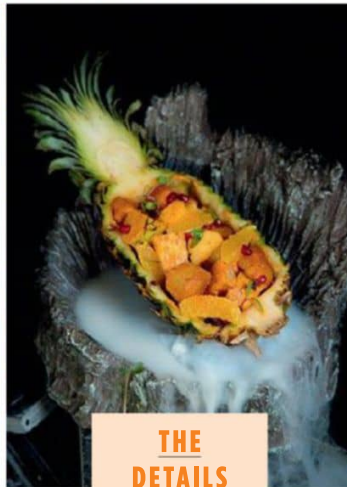
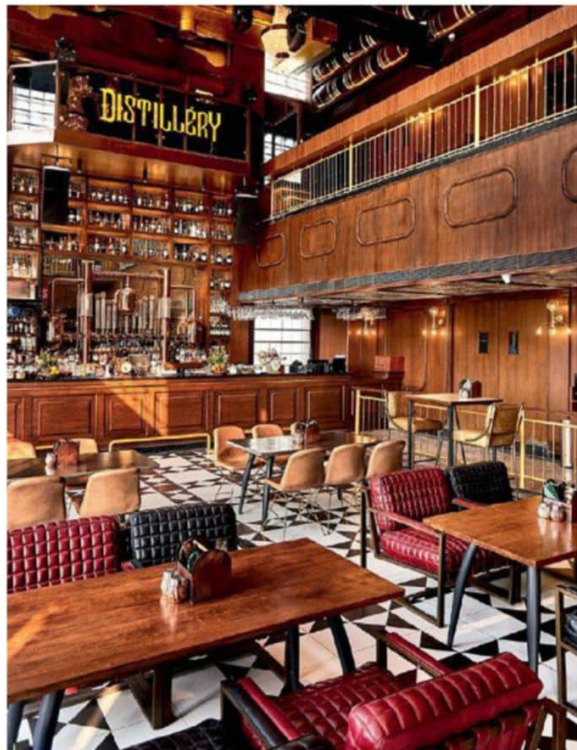
COURTESY OF JAYPEE RESIDENCY MANOR

Back To The Roaring 20s

While most of the city boasts shimmering skyscrapers and futuristic underpasses, Gurugram's **Distillery** breaks free from the norm and transports you to the 19th century, with a bar that never dries up and food that lures you back. By **BAYAR JAIN**



Clockwise: Veg California Sushi is a feast for the eyes and palate; When New York Got Burned is an assortment of tangy fruits and sweet potato chaat; Distillery sports a vintage ambience.



THE DETAILS

COST FOR TWO
₹1,900/US\$27 plus taxes (with alcohol)
RECOMMENDED FOR
Friends, partygoers
ADDRESS
Plot 16-17, Sector 29, Gurugram
RESERVATION
011-71565012

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

WHAT WE LOVED

From the moment you step outside the elevator on to the fourth floor, the 21st century is left behind—it is almost as if the elevator doubles as a portal to the 1920s. A glance around is enough to prove that 'cramped' is a word unknown to the people here. The chandelier hanging from the high ceiling and colossal curtains reinforce this feeling. Spread over three floors, the ambience here is unmistakably vintage. With its wooden bookshelves, soaring windowpanes, and an alluring, almost three-storey high display bar, Distillery pays homage to the Prohibition Era, but with alcohol! Factor in the amazing city views from the open-air deck with its own dedicated bar on the third floor, a live DJ, and you've got yourself an ideal saloon that seamlessly blends the past with the present.

SIGNATURE DISHES

DI RECOMMENDS

Staying true to its name, the delicious cocktails here cannot be missed. Pair them with melt-in-your-mouth Cheese Tortellini, or the bite-sized Veg California Sushi Rolls. However, Distillery's highlight is undoubtedly the Szechuan Vegetable Dim Sums—Distillery takes the capital's favourite street food and gives it a classy twist and a purple colour! The dish thrives on spices, with pearls of pomegranate seeds lending much-needed respite. For milder flavours, go for the plate of Vegetable Treasure Dim Sums with finely diced veggies and a dab of peanut paste.

FINAL TAKE

WHY WE WOULD RETURN

The desserts here are unique. While the 999.9 Fine Gold Brick is a mango cheesecake glittering in edible 24-carat gold, the International Halwai blends hot and cold with ease. The cosy, laid-back atmosphere and the courteous staff make the place a must-visit. **D**

COURTESY OF DISTILLERY



Clockwise from left: Try the Crunchy Tempered Beets & Coconut Salad; the Chakhna Tray is the best way to start the meal; Maachis offers a fine dining experience in a snug setting.

India On Your Plate

Located on the third floor of Gurugram's luxe Ardee Mall, is a brand-new restaurant that serves up flavourful and innovative dishes in a snug setting. **Maachis-Housefull Of India** is only a couple of months old, but its menu inspired by India's regional recipes says it is here to stay. By **ADILA MATRA**

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

WHAT WE LOVED

Even though it is housed in a mall, Maachis makes sure you get the authentic fine dining experience. While the striking chandeliers and fine crockery keep your eyes busy, every dish indulges your palate. Chef Manoj Joshi is a Delhi boy, but he does justice to every cuisine on the menu. From the flakiest Malabar *parotta* (layered flatbread from Kerala) to *khoba roti* (Rajasthani flatbread made of coarse wheat flour), he gets the nuances of each regional dish right.

SIGNATURE DISHES

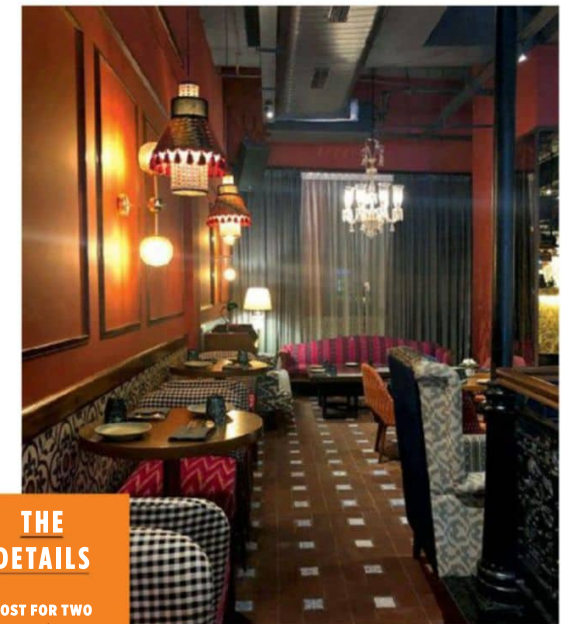
DI RECOMMENDS

Once you settle in one of their comfy couches, order a bowl of Roasted Pumpkin Soup. The pumpkin broth with a hint of garlic is topped with caramelised onions that give it zing. If you are a seafood fan, go

for the Seafood Hot Pot—an assortment of seafood, poached in a bisque of *kodumpuli* or *kokum* (a plant in the mangosteen family). From the salad section, choose the Tempered Beets & Coconut Salad. It is crunchy, savoury, and feels like something that your mom might whip up as an afternoon snack. The Anardana Mirch Paneer is a revelation. Rubbed with chilli and roasted, the dish comes with a centre of gooey cottage cheese and a crumble of dried pomegranate seeds. For the more daring guests, Maachis offers Naga Ghost Pepper Wings, where the pungent *bhoot jholakia* (one of the hottest chillis in the world, cultivated in Northeast India) will have you reaching for the Kokum Chaach (buttermilk with *kokum*, curry leaves and mustard). The desi desserts with a western twist make for the perfect finale—

THE DETAILS

COST FOR TWO
₹1,200/US\$17 plus taxes.
RECOMMENDED FOR
Families and friends.
ADDRESS
Third Floor, Ardee Mall, Sector 52, Gurugram
RESERVATION
+91 9811636555, +91 9810550381



Malpua Waffle and Chai Biscuit Crème Brûlée are my recommendations.

FINAL TAKE

WHY WE WOULD RETURN

The Railway Mutton Curry definitely warrants a second visit. So does Maachis's take on the Andhra classic, Natu Kodi (a spicy chicken curry made with a native chilli spice mix and a hint of coconut). If not these, the Irani Samosa—a Parsi favourite—with a filling of lamb keema will make you come back for sure. **D**

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Di explore

Shri Joraver Vilas in Gujarat's Santrampur is ideal for a royal staycation (p. 70).



HARSH PATEL

62
YERCAUD

Tree-lined roads and orange groves sum up this South Indian hill town.

67
AHMEDNAGAR

Listen to intriguing tales of war and love in this historic city.

70
SANTRAMPUR

A trip to this obscure town promises a royal surprise.



Yercaud is flanked by coffee plantations and towering trees; (left) visit the hill station during the rainy season when the surrounding hills are shrouded in mist.

Romancing The Hills

Keep aside a weekend from your Indian holiday for the lesser-known town of **Yercaud**. This South Indian hill retreat offers scenic drives, with pretty pitstops along the way.

By **MARY ANN ISSAC**

SHUTTERSTOCK(2)

PICTURE A WEEKEND spent traversing winding roads through rolling hills and lush green valleys. Imagine de-stressing amidst nature to the symphony of chirping birds and buzzing insects, taking early morning walks through coffee plantations and practising yoga in the wilderness. Now imagine waking up to the aroma of freshly-ground coffee, feasting your eyes on views of a night sky dotted with a million stars, and the glittering lights of the city mirroring them on Earth.

When you are perched 4,970 feet above sea level, amidst the plantations of Yercaud in the Shevaroy Hills of Tamil Nadu, this is a reality. Located just an hour away from Salem, Yercaud makes for a quick break from city life. It's known to have pleasant weather all year round, owing to its high altitude, but a visit here during monsoon is especially beautiful, when the surrounding hills are wrapped in a thick blanket of mist all day long.

Yercaud is reached via an exciting drive through the 20 hairpin bends of Loop Road, during which beautiful vistas of lush green hills whoosh past you, and red flowers bloom in every nook and cranny as if to break the monotony. Welcoming

you into their home-turf, with curious eyes and seemingly smiling faces, are troops of monkeys that await the arrival of tourists by the side of the hilly roads. It is a heartwarming sight to see the infants clinging onto the mothers, as they languorously people-watch or jump from tree to tree.

Most of the hills have been converted into coffee plantations, with some spice farms and fruit orchards in the mix. As you ascend, the vegetation changes from centuries-old wild trees to fruit trees swaddled in pepper vines and bushes of coffee plants. The drive to Cauvery Peak—one of the highest peaks in Yercaud, through narrow roads flanked by coffee plantations and towering trees leaves you wanting more.

The Cauvery Peak Estate (cauverypeakestate.com), a popular coffee plantation in Yercaud was assigned to a European planter named E Joachim, by the British in 1867. He gave the estate its name because of the view of River Kaveri (or River Cauvery) meandering below. The estate is now with the Rajes Family who took over in 1957. The tour of the plantation and factory helps visitors understand the seed-to-bean process. The tour can be done in your vehicle or on foot, and costs around ₹400/US\$6 per person. It pays to keep an eye on the trees, for the plantation is home to many rare species of birds, but it is also smart to watch your step, as reptiles hide in plain sight here.

Another drive that shouldn't be missed is through the forest and plantation roads of Shevaroy Hills, which takes you to the Shevaroy Temple, the highest point in Yercaud (5,326 ft).

A PICTURESQUE DRIVE ALONG THE 20 HAIRPIN BENDS OF LOOP ROAD LEADS YOU TO YERCAUD.

The temple offers panoramic views of the rolling hills and the city below. This 2,000-year-old cave temple has two presiding deities—Servaraya Perumal, considered God by the 67 villages of the Shevaroy Hills, and Goddess Kaveri, the divine incarnation of the River Kaveri. Legend has it that this cave extends over 400 kilometre, till Talakaveri in the neighbouring state of Karnataka—the supposed origin of the River Kaveri.

The facade of the temple is no architectural marvel, unlike most temples in Tamil Nadu, and has a low roof that requires you to bend down whilst entering. However, it's a functioning temple that is of great significance to the locals. Visitors may not be allowed inside if the temple is crowded with devotees. The temple festival here in the month of May is colourful and celebrated with gusto by devotees arriving from near and far, and can be a great initiation into the temple culture.

The Big Lake, the beating heart of Yercaud, is serene during the early hours of morning. But as the day wears on, it becomes the epicentre of activity. Pedal boats and motor boats dot the lake. Along the shore, the smell of fresh corn on the cob, omelettes, and instant noodles prepared by local vendors draw in the crowds waiting for their turn on the boats. Typical of any hill station in Tamil Nadu, horserides are also available around the lake. A beautiful mare obliges eager tourists with photo op on their way out of the boathouse. A collection of naturally-formed rocks—named Lady's Seat, Children's Seat, and Gent's Seat—shaped like seats, line the Yercaud Hills, and are popular viewpoints that afford expansive views of the city of Salem and Ghat Road. The Lady's Seat owes its name to an English woman who lived in Yercaud during the time of British rule, and spent her evenings on the rocks, admiring the stunning view.

Karadiyur Viewpoint, about 12 kilometre away, is another spot that offers a panoramic view, albeit quite different from others in Yercaud. It is definitely worth the drive, followed by the kilometre-long hike. The hike is easy, through flat but rocky terrain and an unpaved forest road. It's made all the more beautiful by the many fruit-bearing trees that line the road on either side, while hundreds of colourful butterflies flutter along, guiding you to a splendid view. Karadiyur (*karadi* means bear) was named after the many sloth bears that once inhabited the mountains around the viewpoint. Unfortunately, they are rarely seen here today. Sunset is the most beautiful time to visit, when the sky is alight with



Big Lake is secluded during early mornings and a tourist hub during the day; (right) the Sacred Heart Church is a striking landmark and overlooks the town of Yercaud.

fiery colours and the green hills are awash in a golden hue. The watchtower at the viewpoint is a comfortable spot to relax, take in the view, or catch your breath before heading back.

The Kiliyur Falls is another must-visit site; fed by the surplus waters of Yercaud Lake, it falls 300 feet into the Kiliyur Valley. The ideal time to visit the falls is during or immediately after the monsoons. But keep in mind that the hike to the falls is not easy, with steep slippery stairways and rocks, but the sight at the end makes it worthwhile.

A rather offbeat stop in Yercaud is the century-old Sacred Heart Church. The drive to the church is through residential settlements, away from the usual tourist routes. The church overlooks the town of Yercaud, and most interestingly, a primary

SHUTTERSTOCK(2)



GETTING THERE

Coimbatore airport is 185 km from Yercaud and is well-connected to major Indian cities. The closest airport is Salem, which is 47 km from Yercaud. TruJet (trujet.com) operates direct flights from Chennai to Salem.

STAY

Great Trails Yercaud by GRT Hotels offers luxury stays amidst vast stretches of coffee plantations (starts from ₹5,000/US\$70; grthotels.com). **Sterling Yercaud** is perched on a rocky ledge atop the mighty Shevaroy Hills (starts from ₹3,000/US\$42; sterlingholidays.com).

WHEN

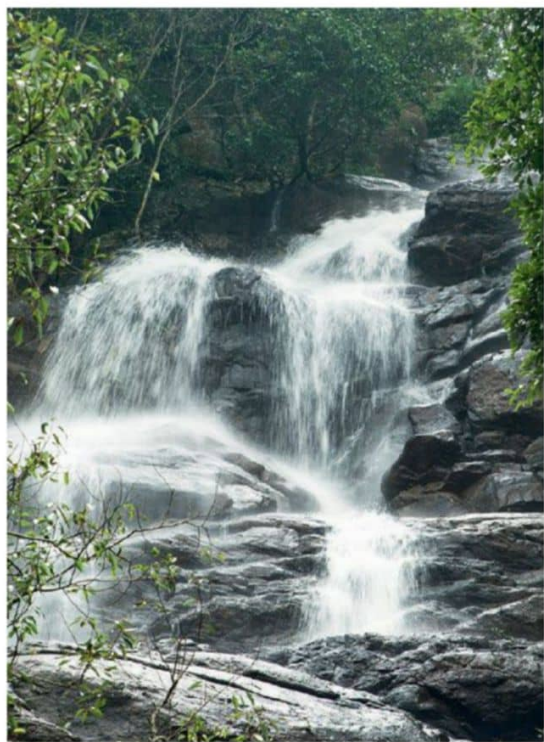
October to June.

IDEAL FOR

Families and couples who are on the lookout for a relaxing getaway.

DISCOVER


Locally-grown spices, high-quality coffee, picturesque treks, and abundant wildlife—Yercaud is full of discoveries.



From top: The watchtowers in Yercaud offer great panoramic views of the hills; Kiliyur Falls is formed by the overflowing water of Yercaud Lake, and drops into Kiliyur Valley from a height of 300 feet.

school right below it. In the quiet of the church, it's comforting to watch children play without a care in the world, and people go on about their everyday lives. The church standing tall against the backdrop of rolling hills, makes for a striking sight. The structure is stately in comparison to other buildings and places of worship in Yercaud. During the daily mass, the atmosphere is steeped in spirituality and the enchanting sound of choir.

No holiday is complete without gorging on local delicacies, and Yercaud too is no stranger to such native delights. You could start the day with *idli* (steamed rice cakes) or *dosa* (savoury pancake), served with *sambar* (a lentil soup with vegetables), and a selection of chutneys—typically made of plain coconut, coconut with coriander, and tomato. Lunch usually consists of rice with an array of vegetarian dishes. Other local delicacies are *attur nethili meen kuzhambu* (a traditional fish curry preparation) served with *vadicha sadam* (steamed rice), *navallur nattu kozhi masala* (a country chicken curry cooked in a combination of spices) served with *surul parotta* (flaky flatbread), *omalur kozhi muttai paniyaram* (a spicy chicken keema and egg preparation) served with chutney, and *vada chatti soru* (a rice preparation served with either chicken or mutton). A food coma awaits the hungry traveller in Yercaud, and the exciting flavours of the dishes are worth the calories!

Adventure seekers, too, can have their fill in Yercaud with a choice of activities such as zip lining, kayaking, trekking, driving an ATV, off-roading in a four-wheel drive, and more, courtesy of the steadily growing number of tourism providers. The drive down the hill back to real life is an adventure in itself—one that will be spent reminiscing the magical getaway that is Yercaud. 

SHUTTERSTOCK(2)



The 16th-century Damdi Mosque was built with the money pooled from labourers constructing the Ahmednagar Fort.

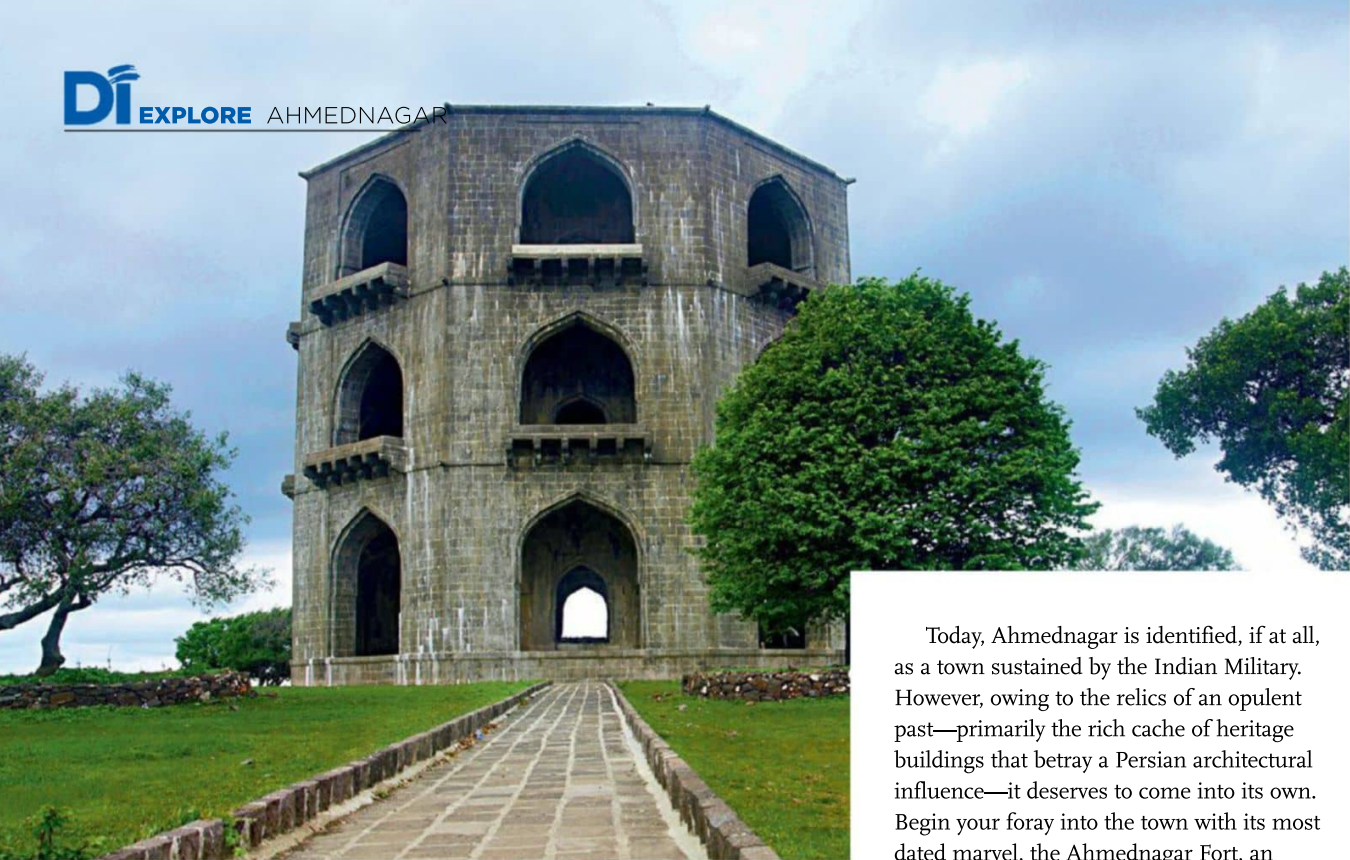
Once Upon A TIME

Intriguing tales of heroism from times long gone lurk within the forts, shrines, and battle tanks of **Ahmednagar**, a secluded town tucked deep inside Maharashtra. Explore its chequered history.

By **MUKUL & SHILPA GUPTA**

HESITANT AND an itty-bit resistant, we reach out for the prasad—unusually, a couple of lozenges and an éclair—forcing a polite smile of gratitude. The evening's bilingual *aarati* (a Hindu ritual) is over, the crowd is beginning to disperse, and the toffee is about to be popped. We, however, still don't know the godman whose photos we've been gazing at and the glory we've been hearing about. All we know is that the setting is soothing—sprawling manicured lawns and ornamental trees under a peachy-pink sky.

The man, we eventually learn, was featured more than once in the illustrious *TIME* magazine as the “long-haired, silky-moustached seer.” Countless ditties were inspired by him, including the chart-topping rock opera *Tommy* by The Who, and Bobby McFerrin's *Don't Worry, Be Happy*—the anthem of a legion. He, the self-proclaimed incarnate



Today, Ahmednagar is identified, if at all, as a town sustained by the Indian Military. However, owing to the relics of an opulent past—primarily the rich cache of heritage buildings that betray a Persian architectural influence—it deserves to come into its own. Begin your foray into the town with its most dated marvel, the Ahmednagar Fort, an imposing structure with 18-metre-high walls and 24 citadels. Built by Shah soon after he took over, it is counted among the most impregnable forts of India, with a couple of nifty drawbridges and a deep moat.

In a major blow to Shah's ego, his name is all that the fort bears today, as it is no longer synonymous with sieges, battles, or the Nizam Shahi, but with India's freedom struggle. The fort had doubled up as a royal prison and gained prominence when the British incarcerated several freedom fighters following the Quit India Movement of 1942. This is where Jawaharlal Nehru wrote his epic, *The Discovery of India*, as a detainee.

The fort and the adjacent Kot Bagh Nizam, the 'Garden of Victory' built to mark Shah's win over the Bahmani kings, signify the ascent of a new kingdom, while the Bagh Rauza marks the end of its founder. The black stone monument is Shah's tomb, and though it's in a pitiable state, the domes bear gold inscriptions, indicating the affluence of the time.

Easily the most stunning specimen of the town's nuanced architecture is Faria Bagh (or Farah Baksh), the centrepiece of what is believed to be an ornate palatial complex. The lake and the garden that surrounded Faria Bagh have been consumed by time, but mercifully, the spectacular 16th-century palace continues to stand, though ravaged. Said to be the pleasure getaway of the second Nizam,

Burhan Nizam Shah I, it is octagonal with four huge arches and several smaller arches, one above another. High ceilings and a domed roof with spectacular stucco work, make it worthy of its sobriquet of 'pleasure palace'.

On the town's periphery is a three-storey-high octagonal structure, the Salabat Khan Tomb, reached via a wonderful drive along winding roads. Perched atop a hill called Shah Dungar, it rises 75 feet into the sky, making it the most prominent sight of Ahmednagar. Buried in its basement is Salabat Khan II, a minister of Murtaza Shah I, and his first wife.

Ahmednagar has a population of less than four lakh and boasts some quaint places of worship. There's Dargah Daira, the tomb of Sufi saint Hazrat Shah Sharif, and Alamgir Dargah, where Mughal emperor Aurangzeb's last rites were performed. However, it's the small, but spectacularly carved and etched, 16th-century Damdi Mosque that attracts attention. With a ceiling that exactly mirrors the floor design, fine inlay work, and calligraphic etchings from the Quran, the mosque is unique for its antecedents. It was built with money pooled from poor labourers constructing the Ahmednagar Fort. It came to be called Damdi after the lowest-denomination currency of the time, the only thing the labourers could afford.

St John's Catholic Church was established in 1833, to satiate the spiritual quest of the many British soldiers and military units stationed in Ahmednagar at the time. Despite

the intervening years, the church has not aged, courtesy the old red tiles that provide a protective covering. Anand Dham is the shrine of Jain saint Acharya Anandrishiji Maharaj, who propagated non-violence and tolerance among all faiths. There are several Hindu temples but none compares to the draw of the pilgrimage sites of Shirdi and Shani Shingnapur.

All the history notwithstanding, it's a modern museum that has become Ahmednagar's raison d'être. The Cavalry Tank Museum, established by the Armoured Corps Centre and School, is the only one of its kind in Asia and one of only two in the world. Set amidst lush greenery, it has al fresco displays of vintage armoured vehicles from around the world, including WWI's British Mark I, nicknamed the Big Willie, and the Schemerer Panzersphah, adorned with a Nazi Swastik. The most prized exhibits are the trophy tanks from the 1965 and 1971 wars with Pakistan.

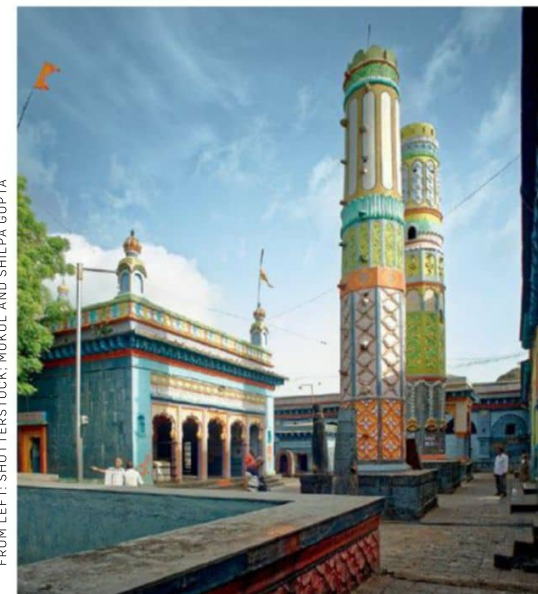
Touched by the heroism of India's war veterans and overawed by the history contained in the unique museum, we absorb the evolution of armoured vehicles in complete silence. Maybe we've been influenced by Meher Baba, the mystic who swore to complete silence for more than half his life in the conviction that "things that are real are given and received in silence." Or maybe, it's just the ghosts of Ahmednagar's past who have stunned us into silence. Either way, we're under the sway of an enchanting spell. **D**



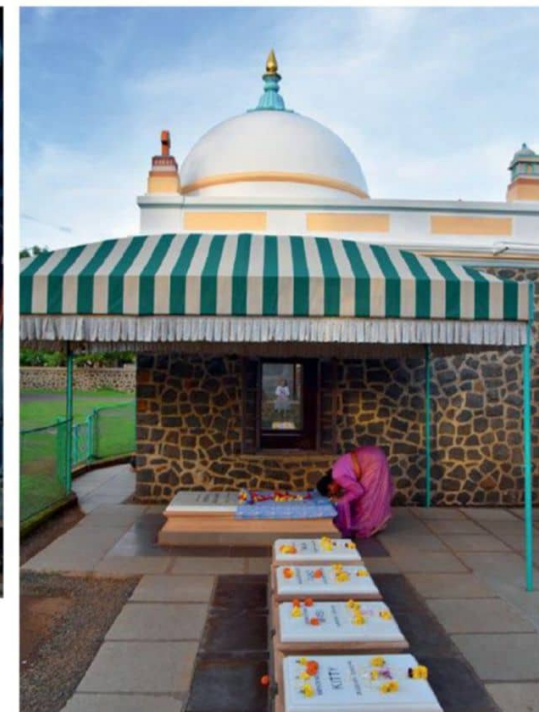
The Cavalry Tank Museum has an al fresco display of vintage armoured vehicles from around the world; (top) the tomb of Salabat Khan II is perched atop a hill called Shah Dungar.

of God, was Meher Baba. And we, the ignorant ones, are feeling a tad lost in Meherabad, Baba's picturesque ashram in Ahmednagar.

Tucked deep inside Maharashtra in the sugar-bowl district of the same name, Ahmednagar is an obscure town swaddled in 500 years of history. It bears the name of its founder, Malik Ahmad Nizam Shah I, who broke away from the Bahmani Sultanate to establish a new dynasty, the Nizam Shahi, along with a new city on the site of an ancient hamlet called Bhingar. Unfortunately, like the dynasty, the city too went asunder, as it was subsequently wrested by the Mughals, the Peshwas, the Marathas, and the British in a series of conquests.



FROM LEFT: SHUTTERSTOCK; MUKUL AND SHILPA GUPTA; (TOP) 123RF



GETTING THERE

Connected by limited flights, Shirdi (85 km) is the nearest airport. Pune airport, which is 123 km from Ahmednagar, is well connected to most major Indian cities. There is an airport at Aurangabad (110 km) too.

STAY

Sustained mostly by Indian military personnel, the town doesn't boast many hotels. However, there is enough reasonable accommodation offering a comfortable stay, including **Hotel Iris Premiere** (starts from ₹3,000/US\$44; irispremiere.in) and **Hotel Raj Palace** (starts from ₹2,700/US\$40; hotelrajpalace.co).

WHEN

June to September.

IDEAL FOR

History seekers and nature lovers.

DISCOVER

Visit the Historical Museum and Research Centre for its collection of rare coins and ancient manuscripts, including a 66m-long horoscope. Devotees of Sai Baba may want to take a short trip to the temple town of Shirdi (sai.org.in). Shani Shingnapur (40 km), known for the Shani Maharaj Temple, is a village where homes and shops have no front doors. Aurangabad (114 km) has the world-famous Ajanta-Ellora caves. Animal lovers will like Rehekuri, Maharashtra's only blackbuck sanctuary (67 km). For trekkers, there is Mt Kalsubai (153 km), the state's highest peak. Go on an excursion to Yeola (117 km) for *Paiethani* saris, stoles, and *dupattas*. You can watch award-winning artisans designing and weaving these exquisite silk items.

Meherabad in Ahmednagar is home to the ashram of the famous godman, Meher Baba; (left) Ahmednagar is home to many temples with intricate carvings and motifs.



Shri Joraver Vilas was built in 1926 by the then ruler of Santrampur, Saheb Shri Joraver Singhji.

On the ROAD TO ROYALTY

In the lap of the Aravalli Hills in Gujarat, lies the untouched town of **Santrampur**, which is riddled with ancient palaces and striking temple ruins. Text & Pictures By **HARSH PATEL**

IF YEARS OF road-tripping through Gujarat and Rajasthan have given me anything, it is an undying urge to explore their royal heritage in the form of their palaces and forts. Most of them have been converted into hotels, which gives one the added chance to experience the royalty of a bygone era. So when I chance upon Shri Joraver Vilas in Santrampur, I am surprised that such a beautiful property is so little heard of. I set out on a rainy morning in early September from my hometown, Ahmedabad, in search of this hidden paradise, nestled amid the lush lower reaches of the Aravallis.

As the commercial hubs of Ahmedabad recede in my rearview mirror, a landscape of verdant fields beneath a cloudy sky replaces it. Shri Joraver Vilas is three hours by road from Ahmedabad. First comes the lake, and then the tall gates and walls of this Art Deco palace. Far from the chaotic humdrum of our hectic urban lives, it feels like an oasis of tranquillity.

A cool, refreshing hibiscus sherbet greets me upon arrival. While waiting in their blue-walled drawing room, I gaze at the photo frames of eras long gone, taking in the history of this erstwhile kingdom.

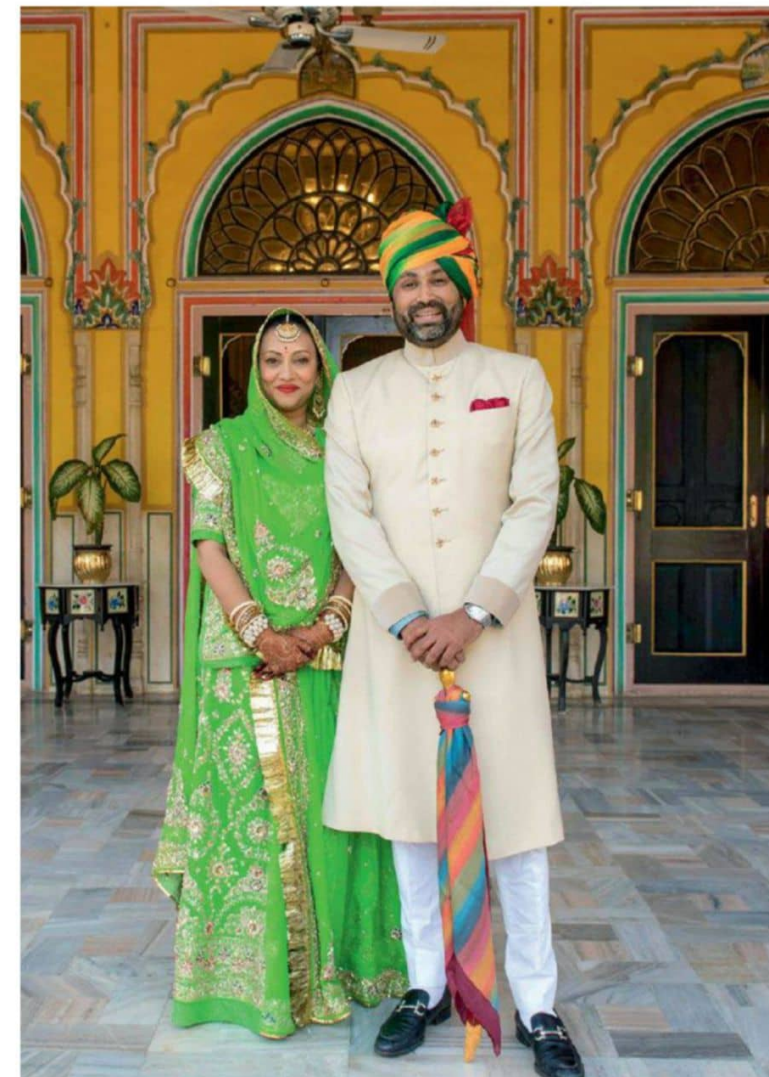
Rana Sant, the first ruler of Santrampur, and his brother Limdev carved out the kingdom of Santrampur in 1255. All of its rulers were from the Parmar clan of Rajputs, claiming a lineage to the legendary Emperor Vikramaditya of Ujjain. Shri Joraver Vilas itself was built in 1926 by Saheb Shri Joraver Singhji, who wanted a quiet getaway from the frenzy of his court. Compared to the cavernous official residence of the ruler, it was a more personal and modern place—at least by early 20th-century standards.

The great grandson of Joraver Singhji, Paranjayaditya, and his wife Mandakini live at Shri Joraver Vilas at present, and have opened the doors of their stately home to tourists. The palace interiors are reminiscent of the Art Deco era it was built in, and aspires to recreate the regal hospitality of the past. Five contemporary rooms and suites occupy the ground floor of the villa, surrounding a magnificent central courtyard. Inside the suite and out, a confluence of royal aesthetics adorns the walls, the bathrooms, the tables, the door knockers, and the furniture.

My room, aptly named the Lake Suite, overlooks the lake by which this property is located. From a little nook that is ideal to read a book in, to the warm pink-hued walls and the Art Deco bathroom with a view of the garden courtyard, this is a magnificent suite. I refresh myself and set out for a stroll in the sprawling gardens, where I am greeted by Vrishankaditya, the son of Paranjayaditya and Mandakini. Over a hearty breakfast, we plan the day—the highlight being a high tea in a boat, and a show-around of the other palaces owned by the family.

At 4 pm, I make my way to the lake where my boat is ready with a lavish spread of local and western delicacies. From French toast, cookies, and black coffee, to juices and Gujarati snacks like sweet *chikkis* made of peanuts and jaggery, and pakoras—everything is laid out on a beautiful white embroidered tablecloth, and looks fit for a king.

I can't help but take my camera out to capture this setting, and while I am at it, the boat sails from its lotus-filled moorings to the opposite shore. From here,



The palace's interiors are reminiscent of the Art Deco era; (top) the great grandson of Joraver Singhji, Paranjayaditya, and his wife Mandakini live at Shri Joraver Vilas now.



the villa looks dreamy. In the distance, I see migratory birds along with a few buffaloes taking a dip in the lake. Meanwhile, I sip herbal tea from the Santrampur Field and Flower collection. The forests and fields around are abundant in indigenous flowers, fruits, and local grains. Santrampur Field and Flower (picpanzee.com/santrampurfieldandflower) is a local brand started with the purpose of using this produce to make tea, jams, sherbet, and chutneys.

We sail back to the shores of the villa after 45 minutes out on the lake, and then comes my favourite part of the day. The 1970s vintage jeep is ready as Vrishankaditya and I drive towards Raj Mahal, up a steep hill, waving at the kids who recognise the roar of the machine. Santrampur comprises two townships, Sant and Rampur. While Rampur is the commercial town or the 'city centre', Sant was reserved for the palaces.

From left: Take in the lush greenery of Sant and Rampur from the Hawa Mahal palace that sits on top of a hill; Raj Mahal, though derelict, boasts intricately carved wooden pillars and Gothic architecture.

Apart from Shri Joraver Vilas, Sant has two other palaces owned by the royal family, Raj Mahal and Hawa Mahal. Raj Mahal is in a derelict condition but retains the beauty of its Gothic architecture, with intricately carved wooden pillars and beautiful detailing. While Raj Mahal sits at the bottom of the hill, Hawa Mahal lies strategically on top, overlooking Rampur on the east and Sant on the west. The 360° view from Hawa Mahal, with the River Sukhi meandering below, the neighbouring villages and the backwaters of the Kadana Dam, is breathtaking. I am in awe of the beauty as I listen to Vrishankaditya talk about the family's plans to develop this palace into another hotel in the future.

As we take in the lush greenery of Sant and Rampur from the Hawa Mahal, the setting sun paints orange strokes on a grey sky. On one side, Shri Joraver Vilas is visible in the distance, while on the other is a small temple on a hill that Vrishankaditya plans to explore after the monsoon. On our way back, we stop by the ruins of a Shiva and Vishnu temple in the village. This complex

of four temples, dating back to the 14th century, has been identified by the Archaeological Survey of India as a protected heritage monument.

If breakfast and high tea are royal affairs, the dinner defies description. I walk down the courtyard to my favourite room in the villa. It is decorated in colourful, intricate mirror-work (known as *kapchi*), and this is where dinner is laid out. Since Santrampur is located near the Gujarat border, with Rajasthan on the northern side and Madhya Pradesh on the eastern, the cuisine is also greatly influenced by these areas. The family also has close ties with Parsi families residing in Santrampur, which means various Parsi dishes find their way to the dining table, such as, *patra ni machchi* (steamed fish wrapped in banana leaves) and *keema par endu* (spicy minced mutton topped with eggs).

Santrampur and its neighbouring areas are predominantly inhabited by tribals, who grow maize. The maize *baati* or *paaniya* (a hard dumpling of maize flour wrapped in leaves of the rubber bush, called *akda* locally, cooked on a wood fire, and then doused with a generous helping of ghee), along with desi *murghi* (country-bred chicken) and *hara chana bhaji* (a dish made of green gram), is a delicious addition to the royal cuisine. Of course, vegetarian Gujarati fare is an integral part of the menu as well, with delicacies like *meethi dal* (sweet lentils), *khandvi* (soft, spicy rolls made of gram flour), *undhiyu* (one pot vegetable casserole dish), and *mohan thaal* (sweet made of dry fruits). The in-house speciality, however,

is the *meethi murghi*. The secret recipe has been carried down through generations. This chicken preparation is cooked with dry fruits, milk and milk solids, saffron, and whole red chillies. The sweetness brought about by the dry fruits and the heat of the red chillies make it mouthwatering.

The saying 'everything sparkles under a chandelier' comes alive in the drawing room. The huge golden chandelier here blends with the floral upholstery, carved tables, and lamps. As I sit here after a delectable dinner, the reality to which I will return tomorrow feels like a different world. 📍



The Shiva and Vishnu temple complex in Santrampur dates back to the 14th century.

🚗 GETTING THERE

The nearest airport is Vadodara (140 km), which is well-connected to major Indian cities. Buses and trains are also available from Ahmedabad (186 km), Dungarpur (90 km), and Indore (250 km).

🏠 STAY

Shri Joraver Vilas has five suites (starts from ₹9,000/US\$135; royalsantrampur.com)

☀️ WHEN

Monsoon (July to September) and winter (November to February).

👨‍👩‍👧 IDEAL FOR

Nature and history lovers, offbeat weekend getaways, solitary getaways, and pre-wedding events and shoots.

📷 DISCOVER

Go on a guided nature trail across Santrampur. The Panchratan Temple is 1 km from the centre. You can also request a boat ride on the lake, and visit a rural farm and/or tribal home. The Tribal *haat* (market) at Santrampur comes alive every Tuesday.

Breakfast at Shri Joraver Vilas is served in the garden that overlooks the lake.

The Royal Brew

The story of the new miracle drink that is yellow tea, and how a lady in the remote town of **Barpathar** in Assam, is growing it with love and popularising it among tea drinkers and health enthusiasts.

By **MONALISA BORKAKOTY**

TRAVEL IS FULL of surprises, and exploring a new place never ceases to amaze. While travelling across Northeast India, and sourcing some of the most authentic produce for Tea Amo—a Goa-based curating company that works towards popularising tea from the Northeast, I met quite a few like-minded individuals doing some amazing work with the tea shrub. One of the most revered products from the Northeast, tea is also the most celebrated. However, more than 50 per cent of the tea grown in the region is exported, and the rest is distributed without any proper mechanism, thus failing to create the impact that it is capable of. To see the reinvention that is taking place for the revival of the industry, hence, is heartwarming.

Amongst all, Rakhi Saikia commands special mention. Apart from being a successful entrepreneur, her efforts are not limited towards just producing quality tea. In 2011, her family acquired the Pabhojan Tea Estate (estd. in 1913) at Barpathar in upper Assam, at a time when it was in need of extreme care and nurturing. Saikia did not leave any stone unturned in its restoration. Four years since she began, the estate is fully organic—using manure like cow dung, cow urine, manure from weeds, and organic waste. Together, she and her family are working towards the upliftment of tea culture.

An unexpected opportunity led her into researching about yellow tea, and subsequently to China, where she understood the regality of it. During her visit, she realised that not too many Chinese connoisseurs know about it either. Called *huangcha* in China, yellow tea is only drunk by royals. Upon her return, she did her own

SHUTTERSTOCK



THE PERFECT CUP

- Use plain water free of iron content. It should be boiled to about 70-75 °C.
- Pour water into the cups. Add the yellow tea leaves to a strainer and let it steep in the hot water for a minute or two.
- A proper steep will give you a golden yellow brew.
- Remove the strainer with the tea leaves, and enjoy your cup of good health. It may taste like plain water, before the sweet aftertaste kicks in.



The highly coveted yellow tea is grown in the Barpathar region of Assam; (left) more than 50 per cent of the tea grown in Northeast India is exported.

experiments and came up with a version that has no caffeine and is full of health benefits. Saikia's variant of yellow tea is now in the process of being patented.

Her yellow tea variant comes from the processed leaves of the plant, *camellia sinensis*, and is processed in almost the same way as green tea, except for an additional step of encasing and steaming the tea leaves, which gives it a smoother feel. It also has a mellower taste than other variants. It takes up to five days to process, while green tea takes just one.

There are quite a few health benefits of yellow tea. It helps in weight loss, as it boosts metabolism due to the polyphenols and catechins present in it. The polyphenols are also good for the liver, and help in the treatment of hepatitis. Yellow tea can help prevent Type 1 diabetes, and has anti-ageing properties to give you flawless skin. If consumed an hour before a meal, it can even increase your appetite.

Saikia's tea events during winter are hearty affairs—she organises high teas and serves

GETTING THERE

The nearest airport to Barpathar is in Guwahati. You can book a taxi, or take a bus from Guwahati Airport to Golaghat (302 km), from where Barpathar is one hour away.

STAY

The Pabhojan Tea Estate rents out two rooms (starts from ₹1,500/US\$20) and a cottage (priced at ₹3,000/US\$40), including breakfast; arinteapvtltd.com

WHEN

Avoid monsoons. Other months are pleasant.

IDEAL FOR

Tea lovers and solo travellers.

DISCOVER

Visit the tea factory and take an early morning walk amidst the tea gardens. Sign up for a four-day tea course at Pabhojan Tea Estate any time between March 25 to October 25, 2020. It will be presided over by faculty from Assam Agricultural University, and expert tea tasters.

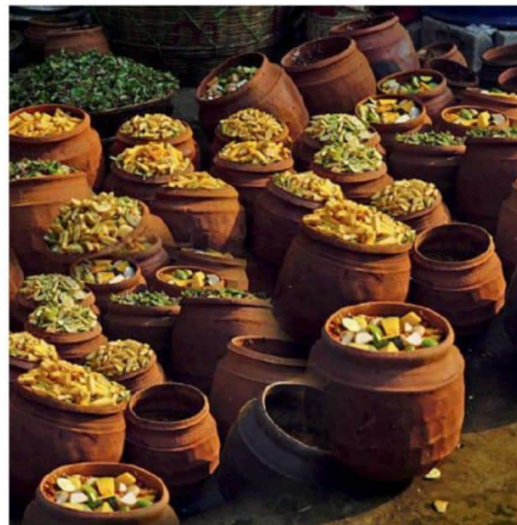
the beverage in traditional bell metal cups, reviving conventional tea rituals along the way. Her packaging is eco-friendly, and the usage of tin, jute, and other classic packaging makes it all the more alluring. Reading her book, *Assamica*, gave me valuable information about the beverage; for instance, the fact that except for black, white, green, orthodox, and oolong, other varieties cannot actually be treated as tea, and that only the variants of the beverage that originate in India and China are regarded as actual tea. Saikia also runs a cafe that gives you the entire tea experience and a taste of all the other variants the factory produces, apart from the yellow tea. White, green, oolong, black, and *camellia* blossom tea can all be tasted and bought here.

The family home is right across from the cafe, and one can even rent the house on stilts that they have converted into a homestay for travellers. Set amidst lush greenery, the estate has two rooms and one cottage to give you the feel of the tea estate life. **D**

Eat Your Way THROUGH INDIA

India is not only home to diverse cultures and contrasting topography. It is also where long-lost recipes meet fusion food, and fine dining experiences go hand in hand with street-side stalls.

Indulge in familiar dishes like butter chicken or discover lesser-known gems like the blue cheese naan on these 10 food trails. By **TANVI JAIN & RASHIMA NAGPAL**



Clockwise from top left: A bowl of Goan prawns curry; a Tibetan stall sell steamed momos in McLeod Ganj, Dharamshala; Mumbai teems with stalls of pav bhaji; temple food in Odisha is cooked in single-use earthen pots. Opposite: No celebration in Kolkata is complete without rosogulla.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: SIMON REDDY/ALAMY; PEP ROIG/ALAMY; BOAZ ROTTEM/ALAMY; COURTESY OF DETOUR ODISHA



EPHOTO/ALAMY



STREET FOOD ADVENTURE

Mumbai



Pav bhaji and sev puri (inset) are popular street snacks in Mumbai.

FROM TOP: LLOYD VAS/ALAMY; SHUTTERSTOCK; COURTESY OF THE PARK MUMBAI

AS MODERN AND SOPHISTICATED as Mumbai is, Mumbaikars cannot do without its dynamic street food culture. Nothing beats a serving of *vada pav* (deep fried potato dumpling placed inside a bread bun sliced in half through the middle) and cutting chai after a long day. The countless idli-sambar joints scattered across the city continue to be breakfast hubs for locals who hustle to work every morning. South Indian fare can be found easily in the suburbs of Mumbai, but Café Madras takes the cake in this category. Much like its overarching cosmopolitan character, the street food scene in Mumbai also draws from several cultures. One of the other popular street snacks, the *pav bhaji*, is said to have its origins in the US. Food historians trace

its history back to the 1840s, when Mumbai merchants trading cotton made fortunes, thanks to the global shortage caused by the American Civil War. These businessmen started work early and finished late, so local hawkers created a fast-food snack of curried vegetables and mashed potatoes, with a side of buttery bread roll, for traders to munch at the end of a long day. Cannon Pav Bhaji, opposite Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus, which opens as early as 7 am, is a popular joint that serves up a mean plate of this snack. Roadside sandwich stalls are likely to catch your fancy if you're visiting for the first time. Save some space for this bestselling snack at the Sai Ganesh Sandwich Stall near St Xavier's College that offers over 50 freshly-made varieties.



The Park Mumbai is a comfortable stay option in Mumbai.

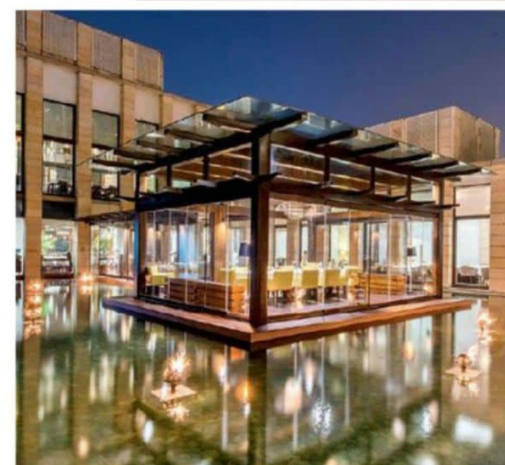
GETTING THERE

Almost all major international airlines operate direct flights to Mumbai.

STAY

From sleek properties, such as the 60-room **The Park Mumbai** (starts from

₹9,000/US\$126; theparkhotels.com), to some of the most iconic hotels in the country, such as **Taj Mahal Palace, Mumbai** (starts from ₹29,000/US\$405; tajhotels.com), Mumbai has no dearth of stay options.



FROM TOP: COURTESY OF INDIAN ACCENT (2); COURTESY OF THE OBEROI, NEW DELHI

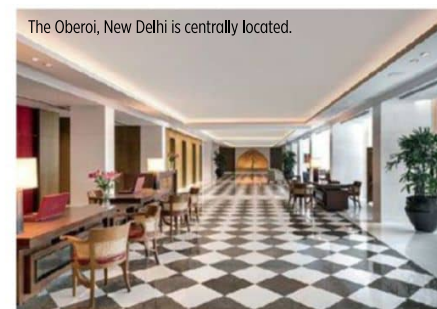


Indian Accent (*inset*) is known for fusion food such as Meetha Achaar Canadian Spare Ribs, with Sun Dried Mango and Toasted Kalonji Seeds.

FINE DINING

Delhi

ONCE YOU'VE HAD your fill of the cultural riches of the national capital, spend some time on its impeccable gastronomic experiences—those that are marked by the clink of glasses and cutlery, where lavish upholstery and luxurious decor ushers you in, and secret recipes and marvellous presentation take over. A trip to Delhi is incomplete without a meal at Indian Accent (indianaccent.com)—the first Indian-origin restaurant to have made it to the prestigious World's 50 Best Restaurants list. Helmed by the extraordinary Chef Manish Mehrotra, Indian Accent is known for its innovative take on Indian cuisine (think blue cheese naan and *galautis* stuffed with foie gras among other things). From *The New York Times* columnists to Michelin star chefs, the restaurant has a long list of admirers. At Masala Library by Jiggs Kalra (masalalibrary.co.in), regional Indian cuisine dons a modern avatar, but the keyword at this elegant restaurant is molecular gastronomy. One of the corridors of Roseate House (roseatehotels.com) leads to Kheer, a glorious 250-seater restaurant that brings to life flavours of India's regal past.



The Oberoi, New Delhi is centrally located.

GETTING THERE

Delhi is well connected to most domestic and international airports.

STAY

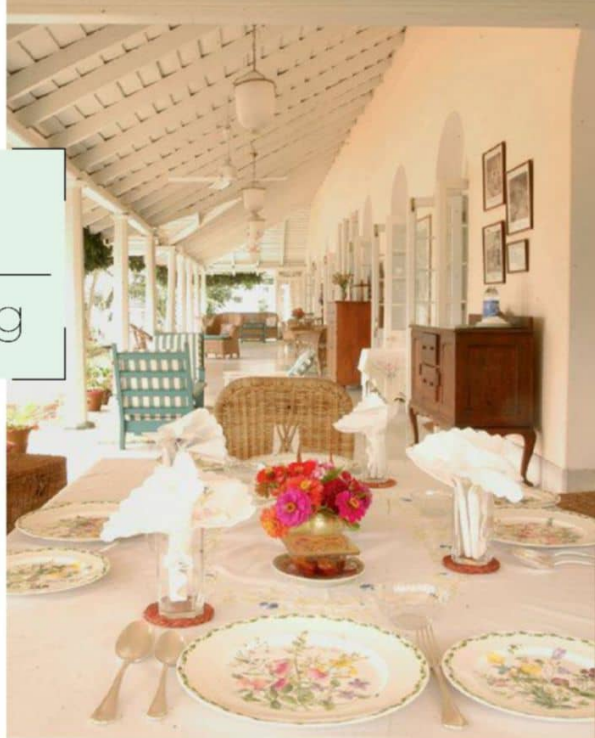
For easy access, it is suggested that you stay at a

centrally located hotel, such as **The Oberoi, New Delhi** (starts from ₹22,500/US\$314; oberoihotels.com) or **The Lodhi, New Delhi** (starts from ₹20,000/US\$279; thelodhi.com).



TEA TIME

Darjeeling



Clockwise: Tea-leaf fritters served at the Glenburn Tea Estate located in the Kurseong Valley of Darjeeling; the interiors of Glenburn Tea Estate; a tea plantation in Darjeeling; a tea seller recharges with a sip of her own brew.



DARJEELING TEA IS A variety used widely across the world. It makes sense then, for tea enthusiasts, to embark on a journey through the estates that grow these tea leaves of global repute. At present, close to 46,000 acres of Darjeeling are covered with tea gardens. Black and oolong, China and Assam, green and white—there are many varieties that come out of the 80-odd tea estates in and around the city. While many estates have adopted the Crush, Tear, Curl (CTC) method of producing

tea, some continue to charm with their traditional processes. For an immersive experience, stay at one of the residential tea gardens where the process is demonstrated. They also offer insight into the life of tea workers who carefully nurture the delicate plants and hand-pluck the shoots at the time of harvest. Enjoy the variety of bird life, butterflies, and flora that make up a tea estate's ecosystem. Relax by the rivers in the vicinity and paddle in the rock pools, as you enjoy a cuppa fresh from the farms.

GETTING THERE

The Bagdogra International Airport in Siliguri is the closest one to Darjeeling (70.4 km) and is well connected to major Indian cities. **Druk Air** (drukaair.com) operates international flights to Bagdogra.

STAY

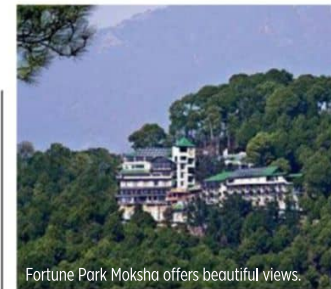
Age-old residential tea gardens such as **Glenburg Tea Estate** (starts from ₹42,160/US\$588; glenburnteaestate.com) and **Makaibari Tea Estate** (tariff on request; makaibari.com) make for immersive experiences in the region.

TIBETAN TRYST

Dharamshala

IN 1959, WHEN the 14th Dalai Lama went into exile and moved to India, many a civilian Tibetan followed him and found refuge in different parts of the country. This marked the beginning of the Tibetan settlement in India. Gradually, the hill station of Dharamshala in Himachal Pradesh became the official hometown of the Dalai Lama. Ever since, Dharamshala and its suburb of McLeod Ganj has become a hub of Tibetan population. Hence, you find the most authentic flavours of

soul-stirring Tibetan cuisine here. Think home-style *tingmo* breads, *thenthuks* and *thukpas* (vegetable or meat broths with noodles), yogurt infused curries, sinful deep-fried *shabhalay* (deep fried stuffed mince pockets), and much more. Many restaurants such as the Tibet Kitchen at Jogiwara Road serve these delicacies. Owing to the welcoming nature of the region, people from all over the world have come to call Dharamshala home. And so, unsurprisingly, multi-cultural cafes have added to its enticing culinary landscape. Some of the popular names include Illiterati (illiteratibooksandcoffee.wordpress.com), Namgyal Café, Woeseer Bakery, and Jimmy's Italian Kitchen.



Fortune Park Moksha offers beautiful views.

GETTING THERE

The nearest airport to Dharamshala is in the city of Pathankot (88 km). Regular flights connect major Indian cities to Pathankot.

STAY

Fortune Park Moksha boasts beautiful views of the snow-capped Dhauladhar mountain range (starts from ₹5,949/US\$83; fortunehotels.in) and **The Exotica** offers luxury cottages and deluxe rooms (starts from ₹8,000/US\$111; exoticaresorts.com).



A nun cooking in the Geden Choeling Nunnery in McLeod Ganj, Dharamshala.

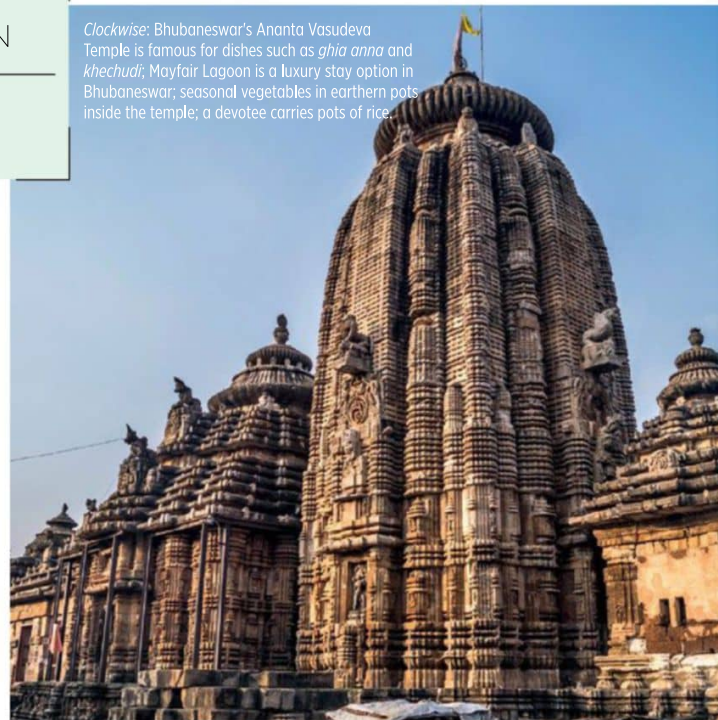
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: BANDEEP SINGH/THE INDIA TODAY GROUP/GETTYIMAGES (2); SHUTTERSTOCK; NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC IMAGE COLLECTION/ALAMY

TEMPLE RUN

Odisha



Clockwise: Bhubaneswar's Ananta Vasudeva Temple is famous for dishes such as *ghia anna* and *khechudi*; Mayfair Lagoon is a luxury stay option in Bhubaneswar; seasonal vegetables in earthen pots inside the temple; a devotee carries pots of rice.



COURTESY OF DETOUR ODISHA (3); BOTTOM RIGHT: COURTESY OF MAYFAIR LAGOON

ODISHA'S FOOD IS unlike any other. A potpourri of cultures, flavours, and cooking techniques, it fascinates you. And in the cities of Bhubaneswar and Puri, the experience goes well beyond flavour. Famous for their age-old temples, both cities are replete with folklore and tradition. For instance, it is said that Lord Jagannath appeased his wife with a rasgulla, at the Jagannath Temple in Puri, after he returned from a nine-day pilgrimage. A dozen other tales will crop up as you sit down to eat a 56-course meal in its corridors. It takes no less than 752 wood-fired stoves and over 600 cooks to prepare these holy dishes,

collectively called *mahaprasad*, for the thousands of pilgrims visiting each day. Likewise, in Bhubaneswar's Ananta Vasudeva Temple, a similar platter that includes dishes such as plain rice, *ghia anna* (lemon spiced ghee rice), *khechudi* (asafoetida-laced khichdi), *kanika* (sweet rice with warm spices), *dalma* (dal cooked with indigenous seasonal vegetables like plantain, gourds, eggplant, and drumstick), *mitha dali* (sweet dal), *saaga* (lightly seasoned, braised leafy greens with coconut), accompanies the centuries-old temple rituals.

GETTING THERE

Bhubaneswar's Biju Patnaik Airport is well connected to major Indian cities. Puri is 60 km from Bhubaneswar.

STAY

State-of-the-art hotels like **Mayfair Lagoon** (starts from ₹75,000/US\$1,046; mayfairhotels.com) and **Trident, Bhubaneswar** (starts from approx ₹10,000/US\$139; tridenthotels.com) make for comfortable stay options in the capital.

SPICE ROUTE

Thekkady



The spice plantations of Thekkady entice you with their colours and heady aroma.



A TRIP TO KERALA IS NOT complete until you go on a full-fledged spice trail. It helps you understand where the state's penchant for aromatic and pungent gravies comes from. For a better perspective, we need to go back a few thousand years when the state's fame as the land of spices fascinated many explorers who chanced upon its shores, including Vasco Da Gama whose love for Kerala's pepper resulted in new trade routes. There are spice warehouses scattered across Mattancherry, the old Jewish town in Kochi that tempts you with the fragrance of the finest ginger, turmeric, cardamom, pepper, and more. In Thekkady, a town that literally smells like a heady mix of spices, most of the resorts come with a spice garden of their own. Spice Village (cghearth.com), modelled on the dwellings of the native Manan tribe offers cooking classes that revolve around local spices. Walk around Abraham's Spice Garden (abrahamspice.com) in Spring Valley, Thekkady, and stock up on fresh cardamom, vanilla, pepper, cinnamon, clove, and nutmeg.

GETTING THERE

Madurai airport is the nearest airport to Thekkady (150 km) and is well connected with major cities of India. The nearest railway station to Thekkady is in Kottayam, located 107 km away. The railway station in Kottayam is well connected to major cities across India. You can hire a cab from Kottayam to get to Thekkady.

STAY

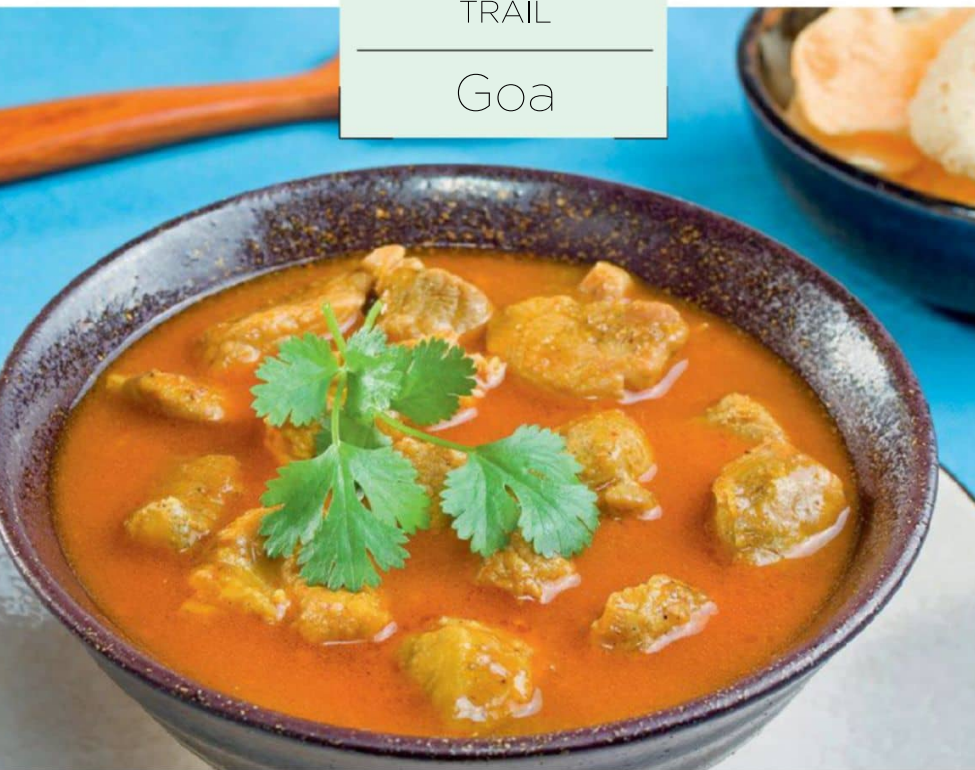
Quaint cottages surrounded by waterfalls and spice scented plantations make **Cardamom County** an ideal stay option in Thekkady (starts from ₹13,500/US\$188; xandari.com). You can also choose to stay in the rustic-chic quarters of **Spice Village** (starts from approx ₹18,840/US\$263; cghearth.com).



Spice Village is modelled on the dwellings of the native Manan tribe.

PORTUGUESE
TRAIL

Goa



Clockwise: Pork vindaloo curry is a famous Portuguese preparation; arroz doce is a dessert made of rice and milk; ITC Grand Goa Resort & Spa offers a luxurious stay.

STARTING WITH THE bread called *pao*, the Portuguese influence in Goan food is undisputable. This tiny coastal state was under Portuguese rule until 1961, decades after the rest of the country received independence. So, every lane, house, and dish in this party capital boasts a dash of Portuguese flavour. Potatoes, tomatoes, pineapples, guavas, cashews—Portuguese have contributed significantly to Goan cuisine, and their spicy peri-peri chilli is as important as any other condiment in the country.

It is impossible to land in Goa and not come across these dishes—*arroz doce* (a Portuguese derivative of kheer), *feijoada* (pork and beans stew), *vindaloo*—a spicy curry whose name is derived from the Portuguese term for garlic and wine marinade (*vinho e alho*)—and chorizo sausage.

Horse Shoe Bar and Restaurant, located in Rua de Ourém, is a bistro where a single chef prepares all the classic Luso-Indian dishes and offers you the best version of *bacalhau* (dried and salted cod) and bean-and-pork *feijoada*. For a plate of scrumptious and budget-friendly *vindaloo*, head to Viva Panjim, a small eatery inside an old Portuguese-style house at Rua 31 de Janerio.



GETTING THERE

Goa airport is well connected to most major cities in India. Many buses ply from Goa to towns and cities in neighbouring states, such as Mumbai, Pune, Belgaum, Hubli, Bengaluru, Mangaluru, etc.

STAY

While **The Postcard Velha** is a modernist colonial hideout (starts from ₹17,000/US\$237; postcardresorts.com), **ITC Grand Goa Resort & Spa** offers direct access to Arossim beach (starts from ₹13,500/US\$188; marriott.com).

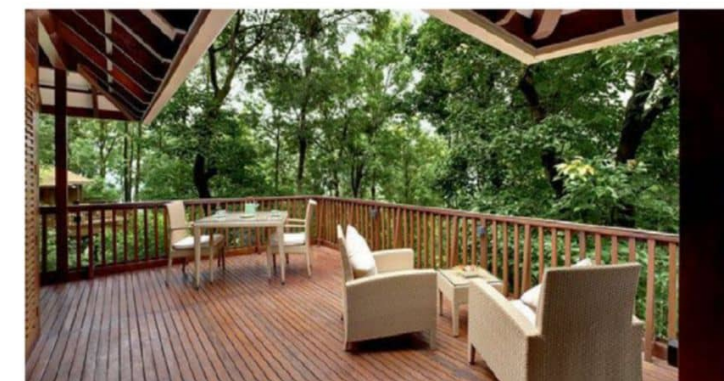
COFFEE BREAK

Coorg



Clockwise: Ripe coffee berries are a sight to behold; the outdoor dining area at Tamara Coorg; most estates have in-house breweries.

THIS MISTY SOUTH INDIAN HILL station is a paradise for bean lovers. Beautifully manicured coffee gardens await you here. There's a local saying in Coorg that a planter not only puts a lot of hard work into growing coffee, but also dedicates his entire lifetime to it, as the beverage needs to be taken care of like a child. Drop by any of the plantations here to get a peek into the stages of coffee production—pruning, picking, drying, and so on. Coorg is home to the world's best mild java and is the leading producer of mainly two types—Arabica and Robusta. You can stock up on both these varieties at any shop in the town. February marks the beginning of the coffee season here, and by November, the white blossoms turn into ripe red coffee cherries. At just ₹5●●/US\$7, you can enjoy a tour of a plantation. At Ama Plantations Trail (amaplantationtrails.com), sip on a cup of hot coffee while the guide takes you around the beautiful estate, which has well-appointed heritage bungalows, some over a hundred years old.



GETTING THERE

Mangaluru (137.8 km) and Bengaluru (248.5 km) are the two nearest airports to Coorg. Both are well-connected to the rest of the country.

STAY

The Windflower Resort and Spa is situated amidst

25 acres of coffee estate (starts from ₹12,600/US\$176; thewindflower.com). **The Tamara Coorg** is home to the most aromatic coffee, cardamom and pepper plantations, beautiful streams, and gushing waterfalls (starts from ₹14,000/US\$196; thetamara.com).

FROM TOP: SEEMAL KARTHIK; COURTESY OF THE TAMARA COORG; COURTESY OF THE FLYING SQUIRREL MICRO-ROASTERY & CAFE, BANGALORE. OPPOSITE: CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: COLIN & LINDA MCKIE/GETTY IMAGES; SIMON REDDY/ALAMY; COURTESY OF ITC GRAND GOA RESORT & SPA

COASTAL CIRCUIT

Kochi

QUEEN OF THE ARABIAN SEA, Kochi, is the ideal destination for a beach vacation. Be it sunbathing at Cherai beach or enjoying lush greenery at Fort Kochi beach, the city has much to offer beach lovers. One of these offerings is its coastal cuisine that will have you coming back for more. From prawns and lobsters to local favourites like *karimeen* (pearl spot), *ayala* (mackerel), and *mathi* (sardines)—Kochi serves up a wide variety of seafood. *Karimeen pollichathu* is one of the star dishes, where marinated pearl spot fish is wrapped in banana leaf and grilled

to perfection. The Grand Pavilion (grandhotelkerala.com) located at MG Road, Ernakulam is famous for its authentic Kerala cuisine, especially the pearl spot preparations. In fish *molly*, the catch of the day is cooked in a coconut milk-based gravy. Mary's Kitchen located at KB Jacob Rd, Fort Kochi, serves the best fish *molly* in the city. Apart from enjoying the delicacy, visitors can also enrol for Mary's cooking classes, and learn to make some authentic Kerala dishes. Don't forget to sample a plate of fish *peera*, where sardines are cooked in grated coconut.

GETTING THERE

The nearest Cochin International Airport is located 30 km from the city and is connected to major cities in India.

STAY

At **Grand Hyatt Kochi Bolgatty**, you can book suites and villas facing the backwaters (*starts from ₹10,000/US\$139; hyatt.com*). **Taj Malabar Resort & Spa**, situated on the Willingdon Island, provides a magnificent view of Cochin Harbour (*starts from ₹8,500/US\$118; tajhotels.com*).



Grand Hyatt Kochi Bolgatty faces the backwaters of Kochi.

Pearl spot fish curry is a coastal delicacy.



FROM TOP: COURTESY OF RAMADA BY WYNDHAM; SHUTTERSTOCK

DESSERT SAFARI

Kolkata



TO END YOUR CULINARY journey across India on a sweet note, head to Kolkata—the City of Joy will definitely give you a sugar high. Start off with *rosogolla* (a syrupy dessert of ball-shaped dumplings of cheese curds and semolina dough). If you are daring enough, sample the dish in other interesting flavours—green chilli, lemon barley, cappuccino coffee, *gundi* paan or sweet paan, and sizzler. When in town don't forget to visit the Mishti Hub in Eco Park to try some of these varieties. Next, get your hands on the winter dessert in Kolkata—*nolen gur* (jaggery extracted from date palm trees). This delicacy becomes

a part of everything, from cocktails to puddings and even chicken. Sandesh, a dessert made of milk and sugar, is one of the most widely known and appreciated sweet recipes of Bengali cuisine, and no household ever runs out of it. During the rice-harvest festival in Bengal, you can catch the whiff of *patishapta* everywhere. It is the Bengali variant of crêpe, with a filling of jaggery and grated coconut, served with or without milk. Every sweet shop in Kolkata also boasts the famous *lobong lotika*, a crispy dessert in which dry fruits and grated coconut are enclosed like an envelope and sealed with a single clove.



Rosogolla is the quintessential Bengali dessert; (above) sandesh is a dessert made of milk and sugar.

FROM TOP: SHUTTERSTOCK (2); COURTESY OF THE OBEROI GRAND



The Oberoi Grand is close to major landmarks in Kolkata.

GETTING THERE

Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose International airport is around 17 km from the heart of the city. Kolkata is connected to Delhi and other major cities by superfast trains like Rajdhani and Shatabdi as well.

STAY

The Oberoi Grand Kolkata is situated in the heart of Kolkata and is close to major landmarks (*starts from ₹12,500/US\$174; oberoihotels.com*). **ITC Royal Bengal** offers the elegance of a noble home (*starts from ₹14,500/US\$201; marriott.com*).



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Diexperience

90
ROAD TRIP

Live the adventurous life and be one with nature in Arunachal Pradesh.

94
CULTURE

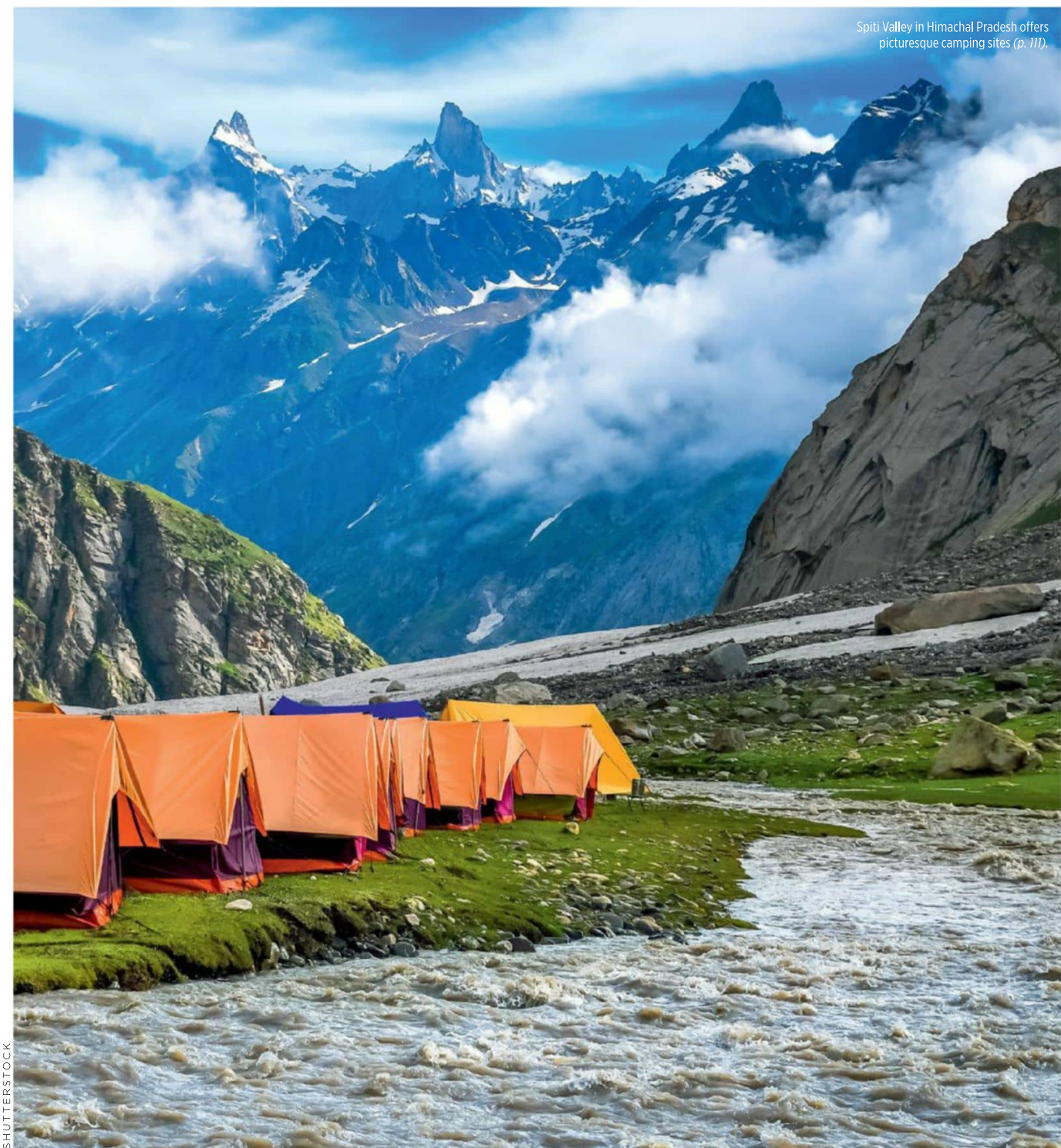
Age-old dance forms and pristine beaches welcome you in Kannur.

100
PHOTO ESSAY

Get a glimpse of the Naga way of life at the vibrant Hornbill Festival.

110
CAMPING

We map out the most exciting camping trails in the country.



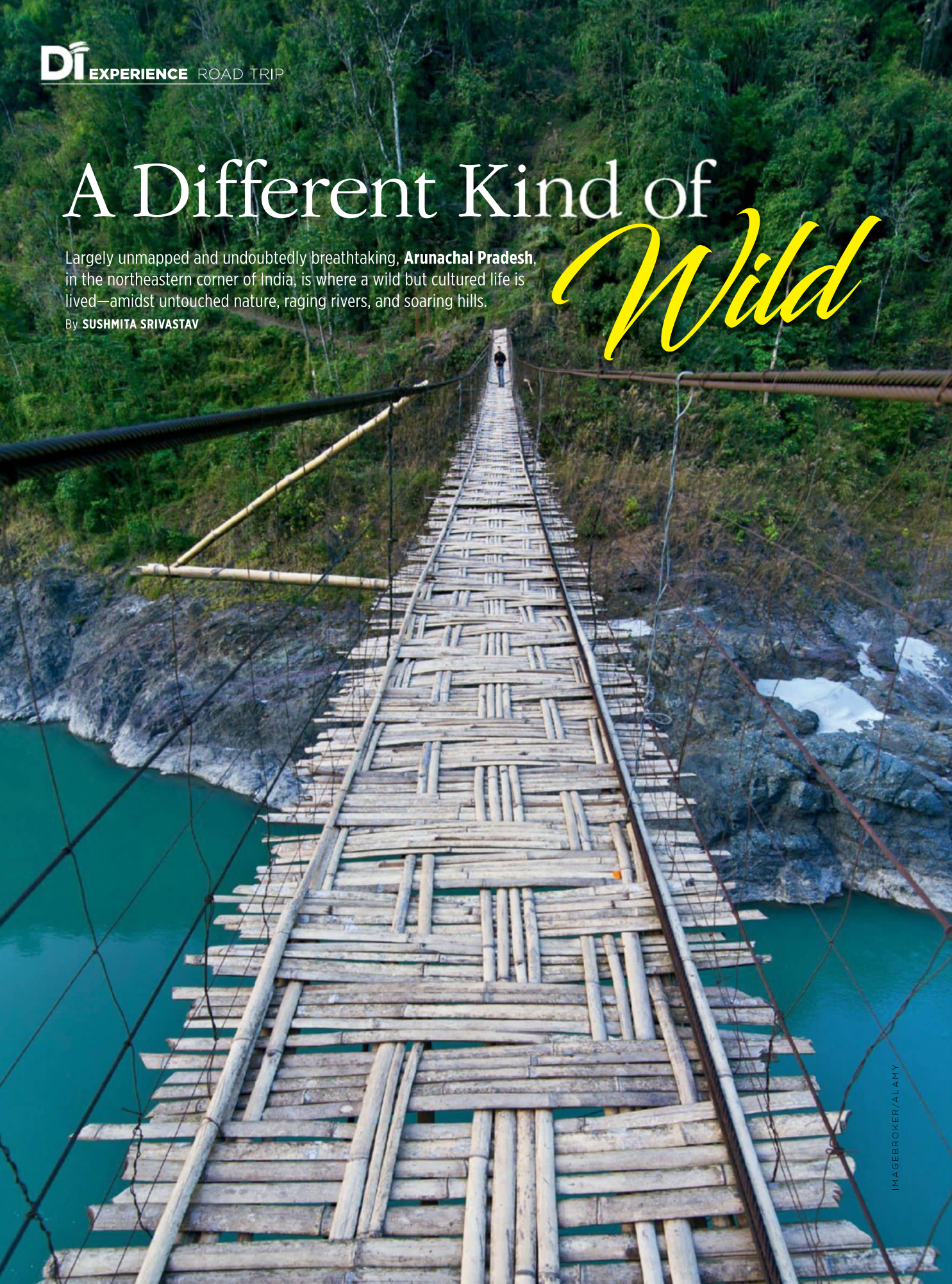
Spiti Valley in Himachal Pradesh offers picturesque camping sites (p. 111).

SHUTTERSTOCK

A Different Kind of Wild

Largely unmapped and undoubtedly breathtaking, **Arunachal Pradesh**, in the northeastern corner of India, is where a wild but cultured life is lived—amidst untouched nature, raging rivers, and soaring hills.

By **SUSHMITA SRIVASTAV**



IMAGEBROKER/ALAMY

The Golden Pagoda in Namsai is home to Buddhist monks of all ages; (left) a hanging bridge over the River Siang.



BLAME IT ON exhaustion from the day-long travel, but it doesn't look real at first. Rubbing my eyes, I sit up straight as our jeep screeches to a halt right in front of the Golden Pagoda at Tengapani in Namsai, Arunachal Pradesh. Shimmering under the inky blue sky, the aureate monument looks like a dream. John, the man behind the wheel and my very first friend here, chuckles at the look on my face, but doesn't seem surprised. "That happens to everybody," he tells me. I am assured that I will be wearing the stunned look many a time over the next three days of my Arunachal expedition—from Namsai to Roing to the Abor Country River Camp at Pasighat.

The sobriquet of 'the land of dawn-lit mountains' suits Arunachal Pradesh—the sun rises early in this part of the world, as does everyone who calls it home. I, too, decide to swap the comfort of my room at the Golden Pagoda Eco Resort, for a morning stroll. The young *bhikkus* or Buddhist monks are prepping for the

upcoming Sangken Festival at the Golden Pagoda. Popularly known as Kongmu Kham in Khamti language, it sits atop a plateau overlooking the Patkai Hills and is the centre of Theravada Buddhism (one of the two major offshoots of Buddhism). Across the road, there's Noi Cheynam Meditation Centre with the highest bamboo statue of Buddha in the world. There's absolute calm in the air, and I settle down to meditate almost on an instinct.

Chowkham is the first stop, as we set off in our 4x4 vehicle soon after. A tiny village with not more than 20 huts, bamboo fields, and a crystal-clear lake—this surreal countryside settlement in Chowkham is just like any other village here, I am told. The gates of all the houses are wide open, and I enter one of them to find Mikta Namchoom, a grey-haired woman with the warmest smile, busy on a traditional loin loom. Handloom weaving is one of the indigenous skills passed down through generations by the women in Arunachal, and Mikta, who belongs to the Khampti tribe, is keeping this tradition alive. I spot Avole, her granddaughter, listening intently as Mikta explains the nuances of looming. *Phanoe* (sarong for men), *langwat* (skirt), and *fambai* (sari-like drape for women) are among the common weaves. Outside, grandpa Namchoom is binding pieces of long bamboo wood together to mend the roof of the house. The fact that the entire village will join the Namchooms in the tedious task warms my heart. It is common here, I am told again.

Whooshing past thick broadleaf forests, tiny streams, lush fields, orange orchards, and tall oaks lining the silken roads, the road to Roing is anything but ordinary. We decide to take a little detour to stop by the Riwatch Tribal Museum. Satya Narayanam, the academic advisor at the museum, moved from Kerala around 15 years ago to settle down in Roing, and volunteers at the museum. Narayanam begins the tour with the history of Tapu—the

SUSHMITA SRIVASTAV



war dance of Adi community, walks us through tales of peace and harmony between different tribes, and then delves into architecture, describing unique long huts with three fireplaces that are common to the Idu Mishmi tribe. As I step out, a wild gecko finds its way to the slippery floor of the museum, and struggles to crawl back. Narayanam picks it up and releases it into the woods. I gawk in amazement, while John and Narayanam smile as if it is common here! We stop at a roadside shack for a hearty dinner of *pasa* (soup of fresh fish), spicy bamboo shoots, *pettu* (boiled mustard leaves), *chura sabzi* (local vegetables cooked in yak's milk), and *dal* served with *pinup* (steamed rice that comes wrapped in leaves). As we sit for a round of chilled *apong* (local rice beer) in the hut-style dining area of the Mishmi Hill Camp in Roing later that night, I gaze at the sky laden with a thousand stars and then at the sprawling ground ahead that is alight with scores of fireflies.

The next day, I am woken up by a fellow traveller, who asks me to hurry up for the Sangken Festival. Mia, who is here on a backpacking trip from Thailand, is excited about this cultural extravaganza that is held in all Buddhist temples of the area. We arrive at one in Empong to find almost everyone, from kids to the elderly, dressed in colourful traditional sarongs, throwing water on each other. There are women singing and swaying in circles to the rhythm of drums, and kids running around with buckets of water. Celebrated by the Khampti, Singpho, Tai Khamyang, and Tangsa tribes of Arunachal Pradesh to mark the traditional New Year, Sangken involves a lot of fun, apart from traditional rituals. Feeling a tad like an outsider, I stand in a corner, observing all the merry-making, as a bunch of young girls drench me from head to toe. Amused, I join them.

We leave Empong wishing 'Happy Sangken' and waving at everybody, and as the warm sun dries us up, we hit the road again.

Clockwise from top: Arunachal Pradesh teems with snow-clad hills and dense forests; Chowkham is a quaint village en route from Namsai to Roing; brave the rapids at the Siang Rush rafting expedition; Abor Country River Camp offers luxury camping in the thick woods of Pasighat; buy dried fish pickles and bhut jolokia (ghost peppers) at the Pasighat Market.



GETTING THERE

The Dibrugarh Airport in Assam has regular flights from Delhi and Kolkata. Pasighat is just a three-hour drive away from the airport (158 km). But if you wish to take the route via Namsai and Roing, the drive will take six to seven hours (291 km).

STAY

Abor Country River Camp offers an unbelievable view of the mountains and the River Siang (*starts from ₹6,000/US\$84; aborcountrytravels.com*) **Golden Pagoda Eco Resort** is the best place to enjoy some quiet time (*starts from ₹2,000/US\$28; goldenpagodaecoresort.com*)

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Adventure enthusiasts and nature lovers.

DISCOVER

The next Siang Rush rafting expedition is scheduled to be held on March 15-17, 2020. Abor Country Travels & Expeditions (*aborcountrytravels.com*) also curates experiences in and around Arunachal Pradesh, like visits to tribal villages, birding sessions, trip to Pemako Pilgrimage, and more.




CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: ANKUR VERMA/ALAMY; SUSHMITA SRIVASTAV; ARUNACHAL PHOTOGRAPHY CLUB(2); SUSHMITA SRIVASTAV; SHUTTERSTOCK

After off-roading for two hours, meandering through bucolic routes, passing by many hanging bridges, and meeting shy semi-feral *mithuns* (bovines found in northeastern India) and short-tailed Arunachal macaques on our way, we finally reach Pasighat. The Pasighat Market has on offer everything from *bhut jolokia* (ghost peppers), bamboo shoots, and *siye* (rice flour pebbles) to dried fish pickles, betel nuts, and even silkworms, which are enjoyed as a snack!

Driving for another hour through absolute wilderness, we finally arrive at the Abor Country River Camp, and the eco-friendly riverside site welcomes us with a sudden downpour. After exchanging pleasantries with Oken Tayeng, the founder of Abor Country Travels & Expeditions, and Bengia Bully, the adventure expert, I rush to my luxury tent pitched right in the middle of the tropical forest. While the River Siang gushes in its full glory below, my abode is warm, quiet, and well-equipped. The water is drawn from a freshwater spring using traditional tribal construction methods, and there are solar panels installed for electricity. There's a deck overlooking the Siang where you can sit and sip on a hot cuppa.

Traversing more than 2,●●● kilometres from its source in the Tibetan plateau, River Tsang Po enters India through Gelling, and for the next 3●● kilometres, it is known as the River Siang. Later, cutting through the higher Himalayas, and joining other rivers, Yamne, Lohit, and Dibang, it finally flows into the mighty Brahmaputra. Just the thought of living next to Siang is exciting. During Abor Country's annual rafting expedition called Siang Rush, you can experience the thrill of braving the Siang's raging rapids in a raft, while navigating deep gorges. It is the real deal for adventure lovers.

As the rain keeps pouring, I wait in anticipation for dawn. I wait to face the rapids of the Siang, to take a day hike to the Ponging Village that is connected to the mainland only through a hanging bridge running over the River Yamne, and to look for exotic birds in the woods. But that's a story for another time. 

The Land *of* Legends

The little-known coastal town of **Kannur** is home to intriguing history, mystical dance forms, and delectable food. By **SUGATO TRIPATHY**



Theyyam, a ritual art popular in North Kerala, celebrates warriors and ancestral spirits.



St Angelo is a massive triangular laterite fort built by the Portuguese viceroy Don Francisco de Almada in 1505.

WAITING TO BUY a ticket at Muzhappilangad Beach—the longest drive-in beach in Asia, located in Kannur, a little-known coastal city in Kerala—I felt like a child impatient for his turn on the carousel. The ocean roared in front of me and car tyres ripped the sand, leaving furrows for the sea to fill. This impressive 5.5-kilometre stretch of sand, with the majestic Arabian Sea on one side, offers a picturesque ride. I gleefully manoeuvred the car to the rhythm of the incoming waves, occasionally glancing in the side mirror to catch the receding waves.

Formerly called Cannanore, Kannur was once a bustling port for British, Portuguese, and Dutch traders. One of the earliest Portuguese settlements on the Malabar Coast, St Angelo is a massive triangular laterite fort built by the Portuguese viceroy Don Francisco de Almada in 1505 with the permission of the Kolathiri, the then king of Kannur. The structure is flanked by majestic bastions, and has a wall protecting it from the rough seas and inland waters. In 1663, Dutch colonisers, who also had a fair share of trade interests in peninsular India, captured the fort from the Portuguese. They sold it in 1772 to the Ali kings of Kannur before it was finally seized by the British 18 years later and turned into a military establishment. Some of the canons still face the Arabian Sea like sentinels.

The fort is a unique amalgamation of Portuguese, Dutch, and British architecture. The Portuguese built the

Central Prison, chapels, offices, and many other amenities; the Dutch constructed the stables and ammunition house; and the British renovated it and made it their chief military station until India's independence in 1947. The fort walls look out across the Arabian Sea. It's a good spot to regard the erstwhile colonial powers and their legacy of appropriation scattered around the world.

FEAST LIKE KINGS

Vestiges of the past intrude into the languid present. The cuisine of Kannur bears testimony to this. North Kerala's centuries-old association with the Arab, Portuguese, and Dutch has permeated into the state's culinary culture. I heard the word Moplah for the first time from my cab driver, Paramesh. "The taste and flavour [of Moplah cuisine] are unlike any other cuisines. It smells of the history of our region," he told me during one of my rides through the coastal town. I invited Paramesh to have lunch with me at a local restaurant, where he and the waiter giggled as I tried to pronounce the names of the

DISCOVER

- **Thalassery Chicken Biryani:** Considered to be the best biryani dish in Kerala, it is quite unlike the traditional one. Instead of the usual long-grain basmati rice, this one has a smaller variant known as the *jeerakasala* rice. The dish is a mishmash of rice, chicken, and spices cooked together in a pot.
- **Bekal Fort:** The largest and the best preserved fort of Kerala is a three-hour drive from Kannur. Shaped like a massive keyhole, it has several underground passages and offers spectacular views of the Arabian Sea from its many watchtowers.
- **Kannur Lighthouse and Museum:** The 75-ft lighthouse on Payyambalam Beach was built in 1903, and provides breathtaking views of Kannur town and the Arabian Sea. The museum houses exhibits related to the history of lighthouses, ancient lights, lenses, ships, and much more.



The Thalassery chicken biryani is a mishmash of rice, chicken, and spices; (below) Kannur is also home to many training centres of *kalaripayattu*—the traditional martial art form of Kerala.



HERVE BRUHAT/GETTYIMAGES (TOP) SHUTTERSTOCK

dishes. Going by their recommendations, I tried *ari pathiri* (pancakes made of boiled rice flour, served with meat or fish curry) and *kunjurotti* (steamed rice dumplings coated with spicy chicken or beef). Next came some heavenly *erachi puttu* (steamed cylinders of ground rice layered with coconut) with mutton stew. Paramesh and I shared a *chatti pathiri* (layers of pastry with sweet custard filling, topped with sesame seeds)—a quintessential Malabari dessert.

Each dish stood out for its style of cooking and the ingredients used. The curries were quite spicy, pepper being a star ingredient in most of them. "We never use anything artificial to enhance flavours in our dishes. We allow the natural ingredients to sing," said the waiter. I marvelled at his choice of words.

However, Kannur is specifically known for its eclectic breakfasts. Introduced by the king of Travancore, *kappa* (tapioca) has been a part of the daily diet for centuries. Served with mutton *chaap* (spicy curry), the dish is a crowd-pleaser. *Puttu* (steamed rice and coconut cake) is to be savoured with spicy *meen* (fish) curry, *kadala* (black chickpeas) curry, or simply with sugar and banana during breakfasts. Kannur also

boasts the best version of Malabar *parotta* (multi-layered flat bread). I remembered reading somewhere that one’s bond with a place grows stronger once you taste its food. In Kannur, I could relate to it like never before.

DANCE OF GODS

When Paramesh announced that he would take me to a *theyyam* performance the next day, I had no clue that he was referring to one of the most ancient art forms of Kerala. *Theyyam*, I learned later, is specific to Kannur and the nearby town of Bekal in Kasargod. Performed before shrines, it is a quirky dance form where the artiste portrays a powerful hero. The socio-religious ritual is meant to glorify warriors and ancestral spirits. The performers wear heavy makeup and elaborate costumes. Their expansive head gear and flashy ornaments stun spectators who assemble in large numbers to witness the show. Kannur and Bekal hold many performances from December through April. Asking a local is the best way to gather information about times and venues. Seek the wisdom of The Kerala Folklore Academy set up by the state government to promote the traditional art forms of North Kerala, for a deeper insight into not just *theyyam* but also other art

Clockwise, from right: Thottada Beach is a secluded haven, with a small river at one end that drains into the sea; fishermen return to the coast with the catch of the day; Bekal Fort is the largest fort of Kerala, and is a three-hour drive from Kannur.



forms, including the traditional martial art called *kalaripayattu*.

Kannur’s vibrant weaving industry finds a mention in the travelogues of Ibn Batuta, the 14th-century Moroccan traveller. The handloom products of this coastal town are also exported and much sought after around the world. The mid-20th century witnessed social reform movements in the weaving industry, which lent it a much-needed organised structure and brought handloom weavers into the fold of cooperative societies. Shop for printed cotton saris, cloth pieces, bedsheets, towels, and dhotis (traditional lower wear) while here.

A PAGE IN HISTORY

The Arakkal Museum is another important piece of history that Kannur owns. Housed in the durbar hall of the residence of the sole royal Muslim dynasty of Kerala, the museum oozes grandeur and transports you to the 1600s, when the Arakkal Ali kings once ruled not just the Malabar region but also the islands of

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT: SHUTTERSTOCK(2); DANIEL J.RAO/ALAMY



Lakshadweep and Maldives. In 1792, the family ceded power to the British. The museum is a reminder of their past, and houses royal furniture, weapons, seals, copies of the *Quran*, old telephones, telescope, cookware, and more.

The beaches of Kannur stray a little from the usual seaside sights. In place of clamouring vendors and buzzing bars, pristine waters and singing waves welcome you. The sands are free of plastic bottles and polythene bags. They are yet to be ravaged by the monster of commercialisation. Thottada Beach, in particular, is a secluded haven, with a small river at one end that drains into the sea. Walk further south to get to Kizhunna Beach, flanked by gorgeous green bushes and coconut trees. At one end of the beach is a small rocky outcrop that protrudes into the sea, separating this beach from the nearby Ezhara Beach. Known as Chera Rocks, these provide a beautiful vantage point to admire the entire stretch of Kizhunna Beach on one side and the Ezhara Beach on the other. These two, unlike the more popular Payyambalam Beach, are less crowded, and have many homestay, and bed and breakfast options.

Walking along the pristine sands, with nothing but the euphony of the waves for company, makes you want to hit pause on your life for a little bit. And that was exactly what this coastal holiday was all about.

GETTING THERE

There are daily flights from Chennai, Hyderabad, and Bengaluru to Kannur airport. You can also drive to the city from Bengaluru (six hours).

WHEN

November to March.

STAY

Malabar Beach Resort is a beautiful homely resort on Thottada Beach (starts from ₹3,500/US\$49; themalabarbeach.com). Chera Rock Beach Resort is nestled behind dense coconut trees, on Kizhunna Beach (starts from ₹3,500/US\$49; cherarocks.com).

IDEAL FOR

Families, beach lovers, foodies, and shutterbugs.

A Naga Feast

One of the most anticipated festivals in India, the **Hornbill Festival** is an annual celebration of Nagaland's 16 tribes and their rich cultural heritage. Partake in the merrymaking with the locals, and discover the nightlife of the Nagas. By **SAYAN HAZRA**



Tribal men in traditional attire perform a local dance during the Hornbill Festival in Kisama.



Clockwise from left: Log drums, fashioned out of huge tree trunks and decorated with human motifs, are integral to Naga festivities; traditional Konyak Naga necklaces are made with skulls, beads, and animal teeth; the Naga Heritage Village in Kisama is home to traditional houses and morungs for each tribe; warrior ensembles are an integral part of the performances.



GETTING THERE

Dimapur is the closest airport (68 km) as well as railway station (75 km) to Kisama. There are direct flights from Kolkata and connecting services available from most cities. From Guwahati, Kisama is a 10-hour drive.

STAY

Perfectly aligned with the Hornbill Festival, a luxury pop-up camp by TUTC—merely 20 minutes from the festival venue in Kohima—offers an enriching experience of the Naga way of life. It is operational from November 29 to December 12, 2019. Starts from ₹1,44,000/US\$2,006; tutc.com

WHEN

December 1 to 10, 2019

DISCOVER

Located 38 km from the TUTC campsite, at the foot of the famous Dzukuo Valley, is the picturesque Angami Naga tribal village of Khonoma, surrounded by forests of alder trees and farming terraces carved out of its hilly slopes. The village lends an interesting insight into the natives' famous resilience against the British Raj.



Clockwise from above:
The Naga Heritage Village, Kisama, is situated around 12 km from Kohima. It offers a panorama of natural vistas, and is infused with the cheerful hospitality of its people; a Chakhesang Naga man wears a bird-feather earring; fermented soybean, locally known as *akhuni* or *axone*, is the main ingredient in Naga curries. *Akhuni* comes in powdered or cake form, and is used commonly in stews along with other vegetables; Naga men and women sing tribal folk songs to the tune of traditional instruments as other members perform dances.



THE TASTE of COORG

The distinctive flavours of Kodava cuisine will leave you richer in more ways than one. By ABHINANDA BHATTACHARYA

THE LOWER HALF of the Indian peninsula is flanked by the Western and Eastern Ghats. These stretches of mountains running along the coasts are unperturbed by their lack of height as they are of incredible ecological significance. The Western Ghats have earned a place in the UNESCO World Heritage Centre as one of the eight 'hottest hotspots' for biodiversity. Also called Sahyadri, meaning 'benevolent mountain', these western ranges are suspected to be older than the Himalaya. On the inner slopes of this massif, in southwest Karnataka, is a hilly district called Kodagu or Coorg.

Kodagu is the land of Kodava, the umbrella term for the language, culture, and people here. The native Kodava inhabitants were the dominant people of the region, and even today every child has a Kodava first or middle name. Many Kodava girls are also named Kaveri after the

auspicious river that originates at Talakaveri in the mountains of Coorg. Agriculturists by profession, the Kodavas were also warriors, with their own chieftains and weapons, and the patrilineal tradition of handing down weapons from one generation to the next is still prevalent. At present, the inhabitants of Kodagu thrive on forestry and agriculture, most having homes in sprawling coffee plantations.

The Simpler, The Better

The word Kodava means indigenous people. This ethos comes out in all their life practices. It sets them apart from the rest of Indian sites lending a sense of wonder and curiosity towards the community. The cuisine of the people of Coorg, too, is unique to this region. I would recommend a homestay as an ideal option to sample authentic dishes marked by the region's history and culture. School Estate (schoolestate.in), Kabbe Holidays (kabbeholidays.com) and Nova Woods (novawoodscorg.com) are some notable homestays.

On the way to Madikeri, stop at the Tibetan Buddhist Monastery of

Namdroling. It is the world's largest Nyingma Buddhism learning centre, with over 5,000 lamas in residence. Beautiful *thangka* wall hangings are displayed inside the shrine, and the monastery has its own humble canteen right across, where authentic vegetarian Tibetan food is served. Try the steamed and pan-fried momos with mild buttery vegetable fillings.

If you've opted for a homestay, be sure to request an authentic breakfast of *akki otti* (flatbread made from leftover rice) with *kumbala* (pumpkin curry) and *ellu paaji* (nutty sesame chutney) drizzled with honey, papayas and *bella* coffee (black coffee with local jaggery). In case you need to set out early from your accommodation, stop for breakfast at East End Hotel right behind the petrol pump on Stuart Hill. It is also worth stopping by between 4 pm and 7 pm, when their kitchen dishes out *keema dosas* (savoury crepes with minced mutton). The service is also warm and friendly.

The staple in these fertile slopes is rice. Every family owns wooden paddy bins called *pathayas* that store rice for the entire year, until the next harvest season. Rice *puttus* (rolls of steamed rice flour and grated coconut) like *nooputtu* (with a twine-



MUST-TRY

Akki Otti
Keema Dosa
Nooputtu
Pandi Curry
Baimbale Curry
Kummu Curry
Kootu Curry
Kachampuli Pork Fry
Bamboo Shoot Pickle
Njende Curry
Gummi-Gutta
Bella Coffee

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM: SANTOSH SALIGRAM/ALAMY, DINODIA PHOTOS/ALAMY, SHUTTERSTOCK

SHUTTERSTOCK



Clockwise from top left: Coorg is often called the 'coffee cup of India'; a serving of rice puttus with kadala curry; Coorg is surrounded by rolling hills, forests, and rivulets; ripe coffee berries ready for harvest in a plantation in Madikeri.



(Left) Bamboo shoot pickle is a Kodava speciality; (below) spicy *njende* curry made from fresh crabs.



EVERY FAMILY IN COORG OWNS WOODEN PADDY BINS KNOWN

AS *PATHAYA* THAT STORE RICE UNTIL THE NEXT HARVEST.

like appearance), *paputtu* (made of coconut and milk), *adikeputtu* (made of roasted rice and jaggery) and *kulaeputtu* (rice steamed with jackfruit in banana leaves) are eaten with a variety of curries.

Keeping It Authentic

The Kodavas were gamers as much as agriculturists. In earlier times, the men would take their guns and head to the jungles to hunt wild boar, though today that has been replaced by pork. If you are looking for an incredible culinary experience, pop into Coorg Cuisine in Madikeri, opposite the bus stop, and order their *nooputtu* and *pandi* curry (Kodava pork curry). Sip on passion fruit juice while you wait, and finish off your meal with beetroot *halwa*.

Moving to some unique vegetarian dishes, *baimbale* curry (fermented fresh bamboo shoot gravy) is a must-have. Horsegram gravy, Coorg mango curry made from small jungle mangoes, raw banana fry, *kummu* curry (roasted mushroom curry), and *kootu* curry (mixed vegetable medley) are unique vegetarian offerings to be paired with the *puttu*, *akki otti*, or rice.

Papera in Madikeri is great for food connoisseurs. Local kitchen implements, and harvest and hunting equipment made from wood, metal, rattan, wicker, copper, brass, and shells adorn every wall. Large and small storage devices from old homes make quite a spectacle. Vegetarian gravies, traditional chicken curry, and dry pork dishes are cooked from historic recipes; the staff is warm and eager to please.

If you find time to eat in Tiger Tiger, a hole-in-the-wall on Raja's Seat in Madikeri, order the combo meal with pork fry seasoned with *kachampuli* (Coorg vinegar) and some Coorg pickle, preferably the bamboo shoot one.

Back at the homestay, remind your host to make you a plate of stir-fried dry fish, which is as delicious as it is smelly, eaten with soft wheat flatbread. In the monsoon months, when it rains incessantly, making streams overflow and paddy fields fill up, you can hear the drip, trickle, and roar of water everywhere. Crabs and

Nooputtu is best enjoyed with a bowl of *pandi* or Kodava pork curry.



prawns gather in the paddy field burrows. Freshwater crabs are handpicked to make *njende* curry using whole coriander. This is a Coorg delicacy to be had with rice. Simple freshwater fish curries are a home speciality too. The sweetness of fresh fish is best enjoyed at a homestay after a morning walk through a coffee plantation interspersed with cardamom and avocado trees. After your walk, if you are lucky, you will be welcomed with fresh honey wax—sweet and with hints of the coffee flower on which the bees have thrived.

Take Back Home

Pickles and chutneys are as innate to Coorg homes as are lace and bone china. Bamboo shoot pickle, dry fish pickle, bitter orange chutney, pork pickles, wild mango or local lime pickles, wrinkled hog plum chutney, and more are made in earthenware crockpots and exchanged as gifts between neighbouring plantation owners in a long-standing gifting tradition. You are sure

to be served one pickle or the other at all meals, so indulge yourself.

The *gummi-gutta* also deserves a mention here. It is a local fruit that is fermented and its juice extracted. It is then treated and strained as it changes colour from amber to a fruity purple, to reduce to the Kodava vinegar found in every Coorg kitchen and also retailed in stores. Called *kachampuli*, this vinegar creates magic in meat and fish dishes when added towards the end of the cooking process.

If you are looking for the *masala* that is used for this *pandi* curry, hop across to Made in Coorg (madeincoorg.com) and pick up a packet; if you are looking for organic jaggery, you will get that here too. Remember to pick up organic Coorg honey too. For other food souvenirs, drive on College Road to Ainmane (ainmane.com), where you can procure authentic spices, coffee, and chocolates.

The alluring mysteries and unfamiliar fragrances of Coorg translate into some delectable, original cuisine. Your life will be richer for having traversed this food trail. **D**

GETTING THERE

The nearest airports to Coorg are Bengaluru (5 hours away), and Mangaluru (3 hours away).

STAY

Orange County Resort (starts from ₹20,000/US\$277; evolveback.com) if you are looking for palace suites and jacuzzis. **Nova Woods** (starts from ₹4,500/US\$62; novawoodscoorg.com) is a good homestay option.

WHEN

Apart from July and August, Coorg is beautiful most of the year. October to March is the best time for trekking.

IDEAL FOR

Photographers, trekkers, writers, and nature lovers.

DISCOVER

Namdroling Monastery, Raja's Seat, Abbey Falls, Talakaveri, Honnamana Kere Lake, Omkareshwara Temple and Nagarhole National Park.

The Perfect Pitch

Experience a romantic royal dinner under the stars or marvel at the sight of moonlight bouncing off the salt desert of Kutch, on these camping holidays. By **MEENU**



Spiti Valley in Himachal Pradesh is your best bet for adventure camping in India; (left) camping under the stars is a great way to spend a night in the Dharma Valley of Uttarakhand.

EVERYBODY HAS a favourite holiday memory. Mine is camping by the River Baspa, 9,000 feet above sea level at Sangla in Himachal Pradesh, in a four-person tent with my family. One part of the river was our refrigerator, keeping our drinks cool, while the gushing river on the other side was our infinite bathtub. At night, we searched for constellations in the star-studded sky, sharing stories and songs, and sometimes just listening to the silence of the hills and the gurgling of the river. Baspa has since dried up, my children have flown the nest, and I have gone around the country for many more camping experiences.

Fortunately, tent tourism in India has seen a massive surge since my Sangla days. Adventure, green travel, communion with nature, religious immersions, spiritual

shopping, wellness seeking, luxury living, royal pursuits—there is a camping holiday for every kind of traveller in this country. You can camp at the music festival at Sula Vineyards in Nashik, or in the salt desert of Rann of Kutch, try adventure camping in Spiti Valley in Himachal Pradesh, spend a night in the middle of nowhere in Dharma Valley in Uttarakhand, wash your sins in the Ganga at a Kumbh Mela camp in Prayagraj, behold India's tallest statue in the campgrounds by the Narmada in Gujarat, have tea with Deogarh's erstwhile royals at Khayyam camp, have a taste of royalty at the Serai Relais & Chateaux in Bherwa, Jaisalmer, or chat with lamas at the Chamba Camp in Thiksay, Ladakh. From basic camping to glamping—you can take your pick of holidays depending on the size of your wallet, the adrenaline in your veins, and the secret desires of your heart.



A fine blend of classic wines, great music, and good food, SulaFest in Nashik is one of the best camping destinations in the country. (below) a dreamy setting at the festival venue.

DETAILS

GETTING THERE

Sula Vineyards is a four-hour drive from Mumbai (170 km).

TARIFF

Starts from ₹2,500/US\$35 per person; letscampout.com

WHEN

February 1-3, 2020

The gathering here is intimate, the spirit joyful, and the stargazing magical.

The camps are not luxurious. They are basic, with shared toilets. But if you are in for some musical bonding, yoga, local wines, tandem biking, and having a roaring time with friends, camping at SulaFest is an absolute delight.

UNDER THE STARS

I start my three-legged tent trail by camping at the SulaFest in Maharashtra's Nashik. The occasion is a heady mix of wine, music, and food, creating a spirit of bonhomie and carefree abandon. Wine tastings, grape stomping, gourmet food stalls, Indian and international musicians—the festival is a huge crowd-puller. The crowds are huge, swaying you into a spirit of sisterhood, kindled under the flash of neon lights, showers of confetti, and the symphony of drums, trombones, trumpets, *dhols*, and violins.

Once the performances wind down, the spirit carries forth to the tent city in the vineyard, set up by Let's Camp Out, where you gather around the bonfire with musicians and singers, crooning under the stars until the wee hours of the morning.



FROM TOP: ROGER PARKES/ALAMY; MEENU

MOONLIT SERENDIPITY

Switching from a music and wine aficionado in Nashik to a selenophile in the salt desert of the Rann of Kutch can be surreal. When we land in Bhuj, we have no idea about the amazing experience that awaits us. We are among the many travellers who have signed up for Rann Utsav. Run by Gujarat Tourism, this festival is very well-organised, but how the white desert manages to touch the soul amidst a sea of people is surprising.

Rann Utsav buses take you to your destination, that is the tent city, your home for the next two or three days. Golf carts and e-rickshaws take you around, from your tent lodgings, to the community dining area, entertainment areas (including in-house game halls, skyzilla pendulum, paintball area) to the stage where cultural performances are held, handicrafts market, the art gallery, and the spa. Tandem biking, ATV riding in the desert, and para-motoring are some of the other activities on offer here.

But it is in your pitched tent where you experience the peace and beauty of the desert. The tents are aesthetically decorated in an off-white hue, with motifs in rust and

brown, and the interiors are soothing and cosy. The bathrooms are well appointed, with 24-hour hot and cold water. The silence takes over, as you catch the first glimpse of sunset. As the amber glow of the setting sun lights up the salt crystals, you experience the desert like never before. Every experience from here on is more surreal than the last. The sunrise the next day has the ethereal quality of the beginning of a new world. And yet it doesn't compare to the almost magical sight of the moon visiting you in the night. Moonlight writes elusive stories on the vast expanse of salt, as all around you spirits soar, the breeze whispers, the stars glide, and the clouds dance. After such an experience, it is only natural that a tent, rather than concrete walls, is your abode for the night.

(Right) From art galleries to handicraft stalls, Rann Utsav offers it all in the middle of nowhere; (below) take a camel cart ride through the salt desert of Rann of Kutch.



FROM TOP: SHUTTERSTOCK; SCHITA/GETTY IMAGES

DETAILS

GETTING THERE

Rann Utsav organises pickups for guests from Bhuj airport (3.1 km) and railway station (80 km).

TARIFF

The three-day package starts from ₹14,000/US\$197 per person; rannutsav.com

WHEN

October 28, 2019 to February 23, 2020



DETAILS

GETTING THERE

Deogarh Palace is 137 km away from the Udaipur airport. Taxis are available but you can also request the palace for a pickup from the airport.

TARIFF

₹60,000/US\$845 per night;
deogarhmahal.com

WHEN

October to March

ROYAL ROMANCE

From the white salt desert to golden sands, from celebrating the sun and the moon to experiencing the wilderness of sand dunes, from colourful Kutch to regal Rajasthan, the Khayyam campground at the royal estate of Deogarh lets you live like a royal for a weekend. Set up six kilometres from the magnificent Deogarh Palace, among rocks and bushes, Khayyam has an irresistible old-world charm. The waterproof tents are luxurious, in strong contrast to the barren landscape. The interiors borrow from ancient motifs and designs. The service is impeccable and heartwarming. As you settle down for a drink under the stars, you might be joined by the hosts, who regale you with stories of a glorious past.

When you are tucked in after an eventful day, you can effortlessly imagine



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: MEENU; PHILIP JONES/ALAMY; ROBERT HARDING/ALAMY




Clockwise from top: The tent city of Rann Utsav; the royal estate of Deogarh Palace looms over the Khayyam campground; the interiors of Deogarh Palace ooze royalty.

the kings and queens of yore riding through the jungles from the camp to Fort Seengh Sagar, with the grand palace in the background.

The next day, go on a rural ramble through the fields in an open jeep, past a cave temple of Shiva, amid black volcanic rocks, to a lakeside alive with sarus cranes, white-throated kingfishers, black-headed ibises, and geese. A traditional Rajasthani lunch is served by the lake. As the relaxed afternoon stretches into a languid birdwatching evening against the backdrop of the setting sun, the world you routinely inhabit seems far, far away.

An early morning walk the next day leads you to Fort Seengh Sagar or the Deogarh Palace. After breakfast, you can head to the Aravalli Hills in a metre-gauge train, which takes you over 17 U-shaped bridges and through two tunnels. The journey back in a vintage royal car is just as charming. Cap the day off with a romantic dinner under the stars at Khayyam's tents or a traditional dinner on the palace terrace with the host family. The drive back to your tents in an open jeep through the rugged terrain, with the stars hanging low, is ethereal.

Music, wine, sun, moon, stars, lakes, birds, and royal histories—a camping holiday gives you memories to cherish forever. 

THE SHOWSTOPPERS

On **October 23, 2019**, asiaSpa India honoured and commemorated the best in the ever-growing health, wellness, fitness, hospitality, and beauty industries of the world with yet another glitzy edition of the **asiaSpa India Awards 2019** at the **ITC Grand Central, Mumbai**. Bollywood stars and key opinion leaders from these industries graced the red carpet, while some of the world's high fliers got together to celebrate the winners as voted by our readers. With this year's focus revolving around the concept of responsible luxury, a sentiment shared by both asiaSpa India and the venue partner, ITC Grand Central, Mumbai—the evening celebrated the wellness way of life. The awards ceremony also witnessed felicitation of some of the biggest stalwarts from Bollywood like Star of the Year, Kiara Advani; Game Changer of the Year, Rajkummar Rao; asiaSpa Star Personality, Aditi Rao Hydari; and Woman of Substance, Dia Mirza among others.



Team Jiva Spa, Taj Bekal, Resort & Spa, Kerala receives award for Best Hydrotherapy from Editor-In-Chief, Travel + Leisure India & South Asia Aindrila Mitra and Burda Media India CEO Björn Rettig.



Amit Kumar, General Manager of ITC Grand Central, Mumbai, receives the Best Indigenous Luxury Spa Chain award for Kaya Kalp-The Royal Spa, ITC Hotels, from actor Sayani Gupta.



asiaSpa India Editor Priyanka Chakrabarti poses with Just Herbs' CEO and co-founder Arush Chopra who won the award for Best Natural Organic Product.



Jean Claude Bernard from Spa Marie de Bourgogne Hotel Le Cep- Beaune, France at asiaSpa India Awards 2019.



Krishna Swaroop of Andaz Spa, Andaz Delhi receives award for Most Luxurious Spa Treatment (India) from Sushmita Gupta, Business Director, Burda Media India.



Shayamal Vallabhjee receives award for Best Wellness Guru from Vivek Pareek, Editorial Director, Burda Media India.



(L-R) Simmi Sood of The Spa, Radisson Blu Plaza Delhi Airport, receives award for Best Couples' Treatment (India), from Aindrila Mitra along with ace photographer Dabboo Ratnani.



Ritu Sharma of Switzerland Tourism poses with ITC Hotels' General Manager Amit Kumar and supermodel Elena Fernandes as the country is awarded Best Wellness Destination (International).



Vibha Rastogi of Sawadhee Traditional Thai Spa, New Delhi receives award for Best Day Spa from Aindrila Mitra.



Team Organic Tattva receives award for Best Health Food Brand from Sushmita Gupta.



Ritika Bawa of Club Olympus Fitness Centre and Spa at Hyatt Regency Delhi receives award from Björn Rettig for Best Spalon.



Sanjiv Bisaria, Director- Global Advertising Partnerships, Burda Media India, presents award to team Kaya Kalp-The Royal Spa, ITC Grand Bharat, Gurugram for Best Destinationa Spa (India).

India Survival Guide

Planning a trip to India? Look no further. Here's everything you need to know when you're travelling to this incredible country.



CURRENCY EXCHANGE RATE*

(Indian Rupees)
USD \$1 = ₹71.84
Euro €1 = ₹79.52
Pound £1 = ₹93.06

FOREX

bookmyforex.com
currencykart.com



TEMPERATURE (NOVEMBER-DECEMBER)

Delhi
High: 25°C, Low: 11°C

Mumbai
High: 32°C, Low: 23°C

Bengaluru
High: 27°C, Low: 16°C

Kolkata
High: 28°C, Low: 16°C

Chennai
High: 30°C, Low: 26°C



TIME

Indian Standard Time
(GMT/UTC + 5 ½ hours)



USEFUL APPS/WEBSITES

- Uber/Ola (for cabs)
- Zoomcar (for car rentals)
- IRCTC Connect (for train ticketing)
- redBus (for bus ticketing)
- MakeMyTrip (for air ticketing)
- AudioCompass (for audio tour guide)
- Google Translate (for language translation)
- Zomato/Swiggy (for ordering food)
- BookMyShow (for movies/events)
- Justdial (for search info)
- AccuWeather (for weather info)



PHONE CODES

Country Code: 91
International
Access Code: 00

EMERGENCY CONTACTS

National Emergency
Number: 112
Police Control Room: 100
Fire Control: 101
Ambulance: 102
Women's Helpline: 1091
Disaster Control: 108
Traffic Police: 1095
Anti-Terror Helpline: 1090
Road Accident
Emergency: 1073
Railway Accident
Emergency: 1072

EMBASSY CONTACTS

United States
(011) 2419-8000
United Kingdom
(011) 2419-2100
Australia
(011) 4139-9900
Canada
(011) 4178-2000
Germany
(011) 4419-9199
France
(011) 4319-6100
United Arab Emirates
(011) 2611-1111
China
(011) 2611-2345
Spain
(011) 4129-3000
Turkey
(011) 2688-9053
Israel
(011) 3041-4500

COMMON LINGO

Out of 22 official languages spoken in India, Hindi is the official and most commonly used language.

- Yes: *Haan*
- No: *Nahi*
- May be: *Shayad*
- Hello: *Namastey*
- Thank you: *Shukriya*
- Can you help me: *Kya aap meri madad karenge*
- Where is...: *...kahan hai*
- How much does this cost: *Yeh kitne ka hai*
- I don't know Hindi: *Mujhe Hindi nahi aati*
- I didn't understand: *Mujhe samajh nahi aaya*
- I am lost: *Main kho gaya* (male)/*gayi* (female) *hoon*

(NUMBERS)

- 1: *Ek*
- 2: *Do*
- 3: *Teen*
- 4: *Chaar*
- 5: *Paanch*
- 6: *Chhay*
- 7: *Saat*
- 8: *Aath*
- 9: *Nau*
- 10: *Das*
- 100: *Sau*
- 500: *Paanch Sau*
- 1,000: *Hazaar*
- 2,000: *Do Hazaar*

DRY DAYS

- | | | |
|---------------|---------------|----------------|
| • January 15 | • May 1 | • September 28 |
| • January 26 | • May 18 | • October 2 |
| • January 30 | • June 5 | • October 8 |
| • February 19 | • July 16 | • October 13 |
| • March 4 | • August 12 | • October 27 |
| • March 20 | • August 15 | • November 9 |
| • April 14 | • August 24 | • November 12 |
| • April 17 | • September 2 | • December 25 |

LEGAL DRINKING AGE

The average drinking age as per the law in India is between 18 and 25 years. Alcohol consumption is completely banned in Bihar, Gujarat, Lakshadweep, and Nagaland.

SCAMS TO AVOID



CAB SERVICE

Always book yourself a cab from an authorised car service like the legitimate prepaid booth at airports and stations, or by using an app. Else, ask your hotel for a pick-up prior to your arrival.



LOCAL SIM

Getting a SIM card in India requires you to fill out a form, and submit a copy of your identity proof and a photograph. If the detailed procedure isn't carried out, chances are you will be handed over an expired or used SIM card.



TRAIN TICKETS

Buy train tickets online from reputable travel agents or from the booth at the train station. Do not trust anybody (even dressed in a uniform, wearing an ID) offering you a ticket at the station who is not behind the booth.



TOUR GUIDES

Beware of the unofficial guides lurking at popular tourist spots, who are most likely to be unaware of the real information, and charge you exorbitantly. Inquire about hiring an official guide at the ticket counter.



HOTELS

Do not trust a local driver/ anyone telling you that your hotel has been shut down or is completely booked due to some festival. You might be offered to stay at the only 'cheaper' alternative available. Call your hotel, and confirm yourself.



FOOD & HYGIENE

Avoid having food or water at shabby or unhygienic restaurants. Always carry your bottled water and packed food while travelling. While trying street food, be careful with the condition of the shops.

MAJOR AIRPORTS



GOA

Goa International Airport
(goanairport.com)

BENGALURU

Kempegowda International Airport
(bengaluruairport.com)

JAIPUR

Jaipur International Airport
(jaipurairport.com)

NEW DELHI

Indira Gandhi International Airport
(newdelhiaairport.in)

MUMBAI

Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport
(csia.in)

KOCHI

Cochin International Airport
(cial.aero)

CHENNAI

Chennai International Airport
(chennaiairport.com)

NATIONAL HOLIDAYS

January 1:

New Year's Day

January 15:

Makar Sankranti/
Pongal

January 26:

Republic Day

March 4:

Maha Shivaratri

March 21:

Holi

April 17:

Mahavir Jayanti

April 19:

Good Friday

May 18:

Buddha Purnima

June 5:

Eid-ul- Fitr

August 12:

Eid-ul-Zuha

(Bakri Eid)

August 15:

Independence Day

August 24:

Janmashtami

September 10:

Muharram

October 2:

Gandhi Jayanti

October 8:

Dussehra

October 27:

Diwali (Deepavali)

November 10:

Eid-ul-Milad

November 12:

Guru Nanak's birthday

December 25:

Christmas Day

THINGS TO CARRY & PACK

- Get travel insurance before arrival
- Carry a pouch with passport and visa at all times
- Portable water filter
- Air mask
- Power adapter for Indian sockets
- Electrolyte or charcoal tablets (for diarrhea and dysentery)
- Probiotics (to improve digestion and immunity)
- Mosquito repellent/bug spray
- Sunscreen lotion of SPF 50 or above
- UV protected sunglasses
- Silk scarf and woollen shawl
- Hand sanitiser, toilet rolls, and wet wipes
- A padlock/chain (for luggage in trains)





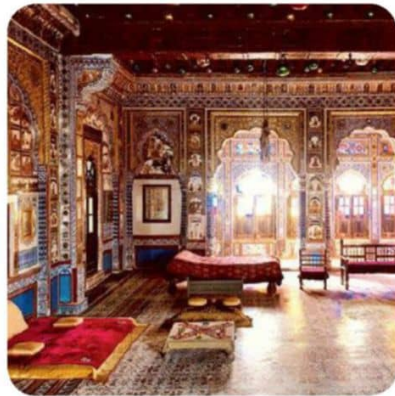
#Insta inspire!

Use #indiainframes while sharing your travel photographs with @discoverindia.magazine on Instagram, and get featured here!



@anoop_desai

A sense of achievement atop Goecha La Viewpoint 1 at Sikkim's Kanchenjunga National Park.



@janinalorelai

The Mehrangarh Fort in Jodhpur, Rajasthan boasts rooms with intricate designs.



@nikhilbharti_photography

The Ranakpur Jain Temple, with its marble architecture, stands tall near Pali in Rajasthan.



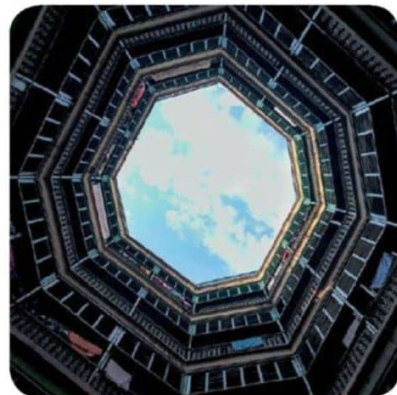
@sankets.photo

An early morning dip in the Rankala Lake in Kolhapur, Maharashtra.



@saurabhphoto

The vast Kaas Plateau in Satara, Maharashtra is a UNESCO World Natural Heritage Site.



@shutter_humor

A glimpse of the sky through the octagonal Madho Bhawan in Kolkata, West Bengal.



@the.roving.guy

Boats are a preferred means of transport for pilgrims at the Assi Ghat in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh.



@travelwithchirag

Spread over 90 acres, the Lodhi Gardens in Delhi is a 15th-century architectural marvel.



@arun_freezer

A smiling fisherman proud of his catch at the Kovalam Beach in Chennai, Tamil Nadu.



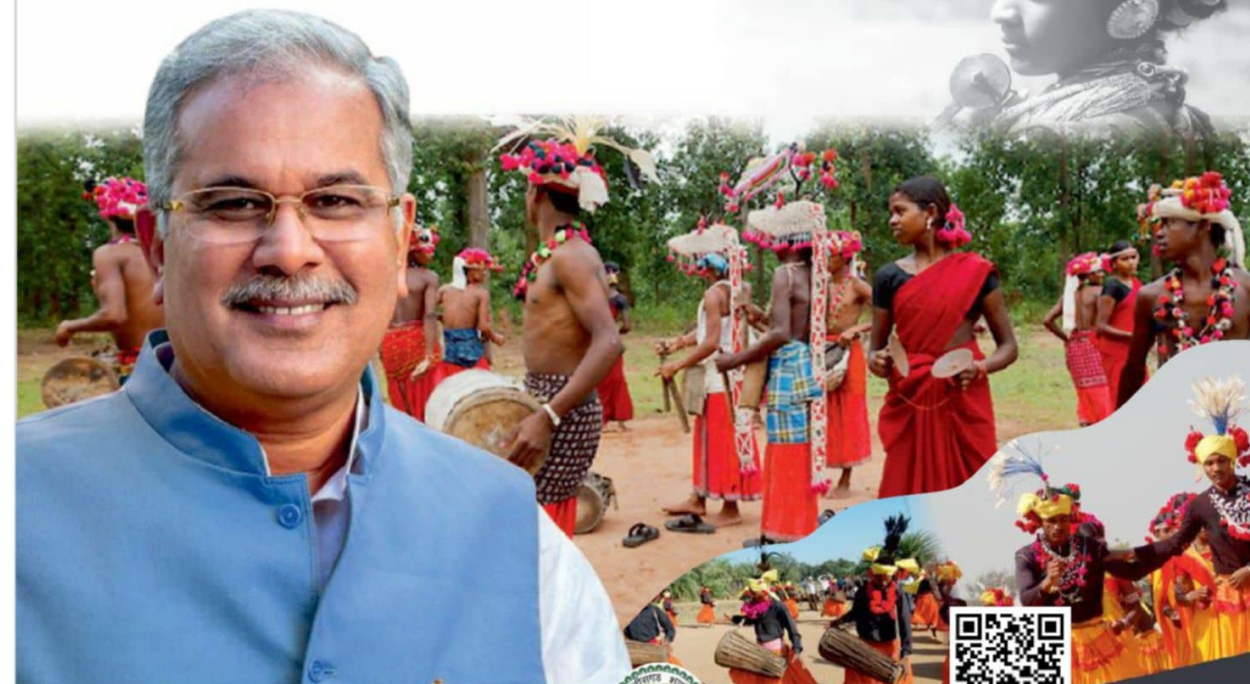
Chhattisgarh

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to the beat of your heart
with distinctive
Tribal Dance forms
of different Indian states

NATIONAL TRIBAL DANCE FESTIVAL
RAIPUR - CHHATTISGARH
27, 28, 29 DECEMBER 2019

An event organised by Chhattisgarh Government for tribal Heritage, art and culture



Shri Bhupesh Baghel
Hon'ble Chief Minister, Chhattisgarh



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