

INDIA'S No.1
TRAVEL
MAGAZINE

Outlook traveller

DECEMBER 2020 • ₹150

www.outlooktraveller.com

THE PLANTER'S LIFE

MANCOTTA CHANG



TIGERS, TIGERS EVERYWHERE RANTHAMBHORE



Siddharth Dhanvant Shanghvi on his latest book

**Open For
Business**
KASHMIR

Secluded Spots

VOLUME 20
ISSUE 9

20 YEAR-END HOLIDAYS

TO SAY GOODBYE TO 2020



SPIRITUAL SOJOURN
SADHGURU JAGGI VASUDEV

PICTURE PERFECT
UMED BHAWAN, KOTA

WELLNESS BREAK
VANA, DEHRADUN

CHEF OF THE MONTH
MEGHA JHUNJHUNWALA

IT'S NOT WHERE — IT'S HOW

Resorts in Chhattisgarh
are OPEN to Welcome you
with utmost care

Kurdar Hill Eco Resort
Kurdar, Dist Bilaspur

60 km from Bilaspur
90 km from Amarkantak
175 km from Raipur

Chhattisgarh

The Cleanest State in India

- ◆ Chhattisgarh is endowed with a rich culture, heritage and attractive natural diversity. It is a land 'Full of Surprises' that attracts tourists who look forward to experience the pristine.
- ◆ Chhattisgarh is a home to the country's widest waterfalls, caves, lush green forests, ancient monuments, rare wild life, exquisitely curved temples, Buddhist sites and hill plateaus.
- ◆ Chhattisgarh offers experiences to the discerning traveller - art & architecture, heritage, handicrafts, cuisine, fairs & festivals and tribal lifestyle.
- ◆ Chhattisgarh figures in numerous tales that form part of the two great Indian epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata.
- ◆ This state presents a curious mixture of modern & traditional ways of life.

Special Packages
& Discounts
for Tourist

Full of Surprises

Dandami Luxury Resort,
Chitrakote, Bastar

Satrenga Resort & Boat Club
Satrenga, Hadeo Bango
Korba

Call or visit Website
for bookings & other information

Call on : **1-800-102-6415** From 8 am to 8pm

Website : <http://www.chhattisgarhtourism.in> | Follow us on :    

We are following all the COVID-19 protocols issued by the government.

december

Year-end
Holidays

VOLUME 20
ISSUE 9

explore

20 The List

Our pick of year-end holiday destinations to scrub the old year blues away

36 Kashmir

Amit Dixit

An autumn affair in the vale of Kashmir



Don't miss the authentic Kashmiri kahwa, prepared in a samovar **36**

46 United States of America

Karan Kaushik

Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev's motorcycle journey through North America

50 Ranthambhore

Arjun Anand

A bitter-sweet tale of the fallen prince

radar

14 YOGA PAGE Warrior pose, SUP yoga, Ayurvedic eating

16 OUR MAN IN EUROPE An escape to the Danish coast

17 INSTA TRAVEL This month's pick of all things festive

"Blessed are the curious for they shall have adventures"

— Lovelle Drachman

december



Al fresco dining at Vana, Dehradun 72

stay

68 MANCOTTA

CHANG A 157-year-old heritage bungalow with sprawling tea gardens

71 INTERVIEW A sneak peek into the life of Neemrana Fort Palace's Vivek Shukla

eat

62 LONDON CALLING

Connaught named the world's best bar

64 INTERVIEW What's new with Chef MJ

65 MEAL OF THE MONTH

Heritage Aarah

posh

72 VANA A Dehradun-based wellness retreat aimed at providing a spiritual and holistic experience

back

78 BOOKS

81 GEARBOX

82 TIME TRAVELLER



↑ Made using the age-old knowledge of the vedas, these products suit all skin types **81**

WHAT WE COVERED THIS MONTH

AUSTRALIA 10	TAWANG 22	SATPURAS 27	NETARHAT 34
NEPAL 12	DAPOLI 23	PELLING 29	KASHMIR 36
MYSURU 12	MARAVANTHE 24	SOUTH GOA 29	RAJASTHAN 50
PARIS 13	THE DOOARS 25	DARINGBADI 30	MALDIVES 65
DENMARK 16	KHIMSAR 26	KASARGOD 32	ASSAM 68
SAINJ VALLEY 21	PALAKKAD 27	KALSJ VILLAGE 33	DEHRADUN 72

Outlook traveller



EDITOR
AMIT DIXIT

SENIOR SUB EDITOR
ROSHNI SUBRAMANIAN

PHOTO EDITOR
SHRUTI SINGH

DEPUTY ART DIRECTOR
REHANA FARHAN SHAIKH

SENIOR DESIGNER
RANGEET GHOSH

Outlooktraveller.com

SENIOR FEATURES WRITER
SIMRRAN GILL

SENIOR CONTRIBUTING WRITER
UTTARA GANGOPADHYAY

CONSULTING EDITOR
ANURADHA SENGUPTA

LIBRARIAN
ALKA GUPTA

Business Office

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
INDRANIL ROY

PUBLISHER
MEENAKSHI AKASH

MARKETING DIRECTOR
SHRUTIKA DEWAN

DIGITAL TEAM
AMIT MISHRA

CIRCULATION & SUBSCRIPTION
GAGAN KOHLI

ASST. GENERAL MANAGER
G. RAMESH (SOUTH)

REGIONAL MANAGER
KAPIL DHAL (NORTH)

ZONAL SALES MANAGERS
ARUN KUMAR JHA (EAST)
MANOJ KAMBLE (WEST)

Production

GENERAL MANAGER
SHASHANK DIXIT

MANAGER
SUDHA SHARMA

ASSOCIATE MANAGER
GAURAV SHRIVAS

DEPUTY MANAGER
GANESH SAH

Accounts

VICE PRESIDENT
DIWAN SINGH BISHT

COMPANY SECRETARY & LAW OFFICER
ANKIT MANGAL

Head Office

AB-10, S.J. ENCLAVE, NEW DELHI 110029
TEL: (011) 71280400; FAX: (011) 26191420

CUSTOMER CARE HELPLINE:
(011) 71280433, 71280400

E-MAIL: OUTLOOK@OUTLOOKINDIA.COM

FOR SUBSCRIPTION HELPLINE:
yourhelpline@outlookindia.com

Other Office

MUMBAI TEL: (022) 50990990

PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY INDRANIL ROY
ON BEHALF OF OUTLOOK PUBLISHING (INDIA)
PRIVATE LIMITED. EDITOR: AMIT DIXIT.
PRINTED AT KALAJYOTHI PROCESS PVT. LTD.
SV, NO. 185, KONDAPUR,
R.R. DISTT - 500 084, TELENGANA &
PUBLISHED FROM AB-10 SAFDARJUNG
ENCLAVE, NEW DELHI 110029.

Released on 01-12-2020
Total no. of pages 80 + Covers



SKYVIEW PATNITOP

by EMPYREAN



YOUR DESTINATION FOR FESTIVE CELEBRATIONS

23RD DECEMBER - 3RD JANUARY

Feast your eyes on our snow-laden slopes and revel in our winter
wonderland with our 12 days **winter carnival.**

11:00 am - 4:00 pm

- KIDS ZONE ● WORLD STREET FOOD ● LIVE MUSIC AND DANCE
- LOCAL ART EXHIBITION ● UNLIMITED RIDES ON THE GONDOLA
- DAILY BARBEQUE FROM 6:00 PM - 10:00 PM AT SKYVIEW PATNITOP
- GALA CELEBRATIONS ON 25TH/31ST DECEMBER

2 NIGHTS AND 3 DAYS STAY PACKAGES, STARTING FROM ₹ 12,499*

FOR BOOKINGS, VISIT WWW.SKYVIEWPATNITOP.COM OR CALL US AT +91 95608 07999

*Terms and conditions apply. Accommodation on twin sharing basis.

Cold Comforts



In keeping with my recent policy of sending these dispatches from ever-new and exotic locations—with only the noble intention of inspiring you to travel without fear, dear reader—this one comes to you from a houseboat on the Dal Lake in Srinagar. It doesn't get any better than this, at least in times of peace. Being a tourist in what is perceived by the outside world to be a war zone can definitely be

awkward. But when you realise people have been out of work in Kashmir for a year and a half, you wish for normalcy to return at the earliest. The least we can do is show up. And lots of Indians are showing up, as one short boat ride on the Dal established. It's still a trickle compared to the good old days, but it's something. Perhaps it's only an uneasy peace that reigns, but, on the ground, it seemed like business as usual to me. Kashmir is one of my favourite places in the

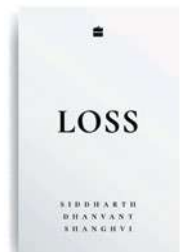
I went to capture the colours of autumn, and ended up getting a taste of winter too. What an unexpected treat

world, and one whose pain I feel instinctively. It's well connected, offers excellent trekking options if you love that sort of thing, the food is to die for and it has several unique experiences like the houseboats. Also, it's perfect in any season.

This turned out to be one of my best trips ever, buoyed along by the company of friends and the extraordinary generosity of strangers. I went to capture the colours of autumn, and ended up getting a taste of winter too. What an unexpected treat. That's me in Gulmarg, where snow had fallen but a few days before my arrival. I was in full touristy mode there, happily doing all things my guides instructed me to do. Sometimes one just has to let one's hair down and go with the flow. And there's no better place to do that in than that paradise on earth called Kashmir.

Amit Dixit

Amit Dixit @omitdixit



CROSSED OFF MY READING LIST

Loss
Siddharth Dhanvant Shanghvi

A moving memoir about the loss of loved ones, I enjoyed chatting with the writer about this (see p. 78).

UP NEXT
Baudolino
Umberto Eco

3 things I did this month

↓ Attended a virtual cooking class with the legendary Nancy Silverton



↑ Posted a letter from India's first and only floating post office



← Caught up with my friend Marifan Gul at the Chai Jaai tea room in Srinagar

Something I cooked

I returned from Kashmir with a stash of their autumn harvest—collard greens, a garland of chillies, quince, and tangy apples—and turned them all, barring the apples, into delicious dishes



The Chatter

FACEBOOK / INSTAGRAM / YOUTUBE
@outlooktraveller
TWITTER @oltraveller

#0THallOfFrame

We scoured through our feed, brimming with all kinds of gems, to bring you the rarest of our finds

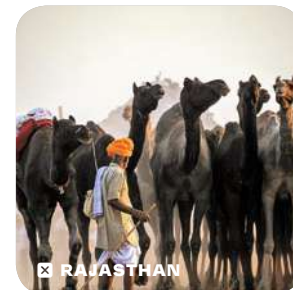


@iamriturajphotography Cultural fabric of the wandering gypsies clad in black



@anandrituraj We've got all hands on wheel

With untold stories hidden in every nook and corner, the Balpakram National Park has lured ghostbusters and paranormal experts for years together



@_2ghumakkar_ The one with the herd



VIDEO Tales of the Dark Woods | Meghalaya



POLL TO PICTURE

The holiday season is finally here! And it's time to make some tough choices!

- HANNUKAH XMAS
- SKIING SNOWBOARDING
- ELVES REINDEER
- EGGNOG HOT CHOCOLATE
- GINGERBREAD PUDDING

LETTER OF THE MONTH

A Wave of Nostalgia

I want to thank team 07 for making travel possible through their magazine and Insta feed. Even the places that I haven't been to yet invoke a sense of déjà vu because of how beautifully and vividly they are described. In the Nov'20 issue, I loved how Goa was seen by the writer from a different eye rather than the usual beach shacks and party hub. Similarly, I was transported back to my college days with Koregaon Park in Pune. It definitely brought back a lot of memories. Hope to live and relive both new and old destinations, with the upcoming issue.

FAIZA AHMED, NAGPUR

We love mail! Write in to letters@outlooktraveller.com

Bingeing in Quarantine

Most of our travel plans might have been thwarted for now, courtesy the global pandemic. However, these shows offer the ideal virtual escape we are longing for.

Parts Unknown

Anthony Bourdain • Follows the world-renowned chef's journey across lesser-known cultures and cuisines

The Kindness Diaries

Leon Logothetis • The host travels across the world with only a vintage motorcycle and dependent on strangers' kindness

An Idiot Abroad

Ricky Gervais • A British travel and comedy series centred around the hosts' visit to the seven wonders of the world

Departures

Scott Wilson & Justin Lukach • A series revolving around the hosts' backpacking journey across some epic landscapes around the world

For more such TV recommendations head to our website

Treasures of the Past

@laxmishukla15

An early morning heritage walk around the old town of Vizag is enough to give you a glimpse into its rich history

@thejoeabraham

A medieval legend has it that dragons with divine healing powers resided on Switzerland's Mount Pilatus. A song of ice and fire?

ECO RETREAT ODISHA GLAMPING IN INDIA'S BEST-KEPT SECRET

After garnering immense popularity with its debut Marine Drive Eco Retreat, a year ago, Odisha Tourism's flagship three-month glamping festival—Eco Retreat Odisha—is back, this time multiplied by five! The glamp camp hopes to attract travel bugs from across India, yearning to pack their bags for a much-needed break—from 8 December, 2020 to 28 February, 2021.

The glamp camps offer guests facilities like camping in luxury tents, along with a wide array of experiences ranging from jungle trails to water sports, camp fires to boat rides, cycling tours to adrenaline-pumping games, and lip-smacking food. Odisha Tourism has set up the Eco Retreats at five unique locations with a view to offer tourists the best of Odisha's diverse environs—Bhitarkanika, Daringbadi, Hirakud, Konark and Satkosia.



The Eco Retreat model is leveraged with technology, which marries luxury with eco-friendliness, incorporating the best practices like zero plastic use and integrated solid waste management to ensure the wellbeing of each pristine environment, be it India's second largest mangrove ecosystem, mystical hill-station, majestic reservoir, idyllic beach or the mesmerising gorge cut by the

mighty Mahanadi.

All this comes with Odisha's stamp of safety assurance, backed by its stellar record in Covid management. The synergised application of SOPs like contactless check-in and check-out, PPE kits for staff, safe procurement of consumables, regular disinfection of all rooms, facilities and contact surfaces, thermal screening, provision of a comprehensive sanitation package for each checked-in guest, luggage sanitisation, social distancing norms are all aimed at enhancing tourists' experience at each of their Eco Retreats.

For more, visit
ecoretreat.odishatourism.gov.in



Eco Retreat ODISHA

8TH DEC '20 - 28TH FEB '21

Discover
Secrets at every corner



Luxurious Stay
Bar & Restaurant
Water Sports
Adventure Activities
Guided Tours
Cultural Evenings

For Konark, Hirakud, Satkosia, Daringbadi: 1800 891 8118,
For Bhitarkanika: 78488 38848

ecoretreat.odishatourism.gov.in



radar

HERE,
THERE,
NOW &
SOON

~~~~~  
VIRABHADRASANA 14

•  
IF YOU BUILD IT,  
THEY WILL COME 16

•  
IN A LIGHT SPOT 17  
~~~~~

BENEATH the Blue

A mountain-like reef taller than the Empire State Building has been discovered in the Great Barrier Reef

✕ AUSTRALIA

Is a lifetime enough to explore the colourful coral realm of the Great Barrier Reef? Perhaps not. The vast oceans and seas have hidden treasures of beauty safely tucked away in the depths of their waters. The spiralling kaleidoscope of neon corals protect the coastlines and are home to a wide array of ecosystems. The blue waters and hue of the Great Barrier Reef are among the world's most beautiful underwater attractions. Said to be about 20 million years old, it is the only living thing on Earth visible from space. In a recent remarkable discovery, a coral reef taller than the Eiffel Tower and the Empire State Building has been found at the northern tip of the Great Barrier Reef. Believed to be the first finding of its kind in the last 120 years, the detached coral reef is over 1,640ft tall and the result of a 12-month long mission involving 3D mapping of the sea floor. The Schmidt Ocean Institute, the foundation facilitating the expedition, used an underwater robot to explore the reef and live stream its discovery.

» Stretching over 2,000 kilometres, the Great Barrier Reef was declared a World Heritage Site in 1981



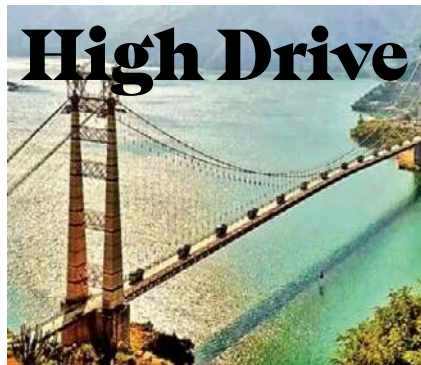
ACTION PEAKED

Nepal

The Nepal government has reopened its peaks for the trekking season

After seven months, Nepal has finally allowed trekkers to resume mountaineering activities. Visitors need to provide the details of their itinerary and have a health insurance that covers COVID-19 treatment. Trekkers are required to take a COVID-19 test before leaving their home country, quarantine in Kathmandu for a week and take another test before heading to the mountains.

» Nepal is home to eight of the 14 highest mountain peaks in the world



High Drive

Drive on India's longest motorable suspension bridge over Tehri Lake

India's longest single-lane motorable suspension bridge was recently opened in the Tehri Garhwal district. The 725m-long Dobra-Chanti bridge, constructed over the Tehri Lake, aims to reduce the travel time between Pratapnagar town and Tehri. Built at a cost of ₹2.95 crores, it took nearly 14 years to complete the construction of the bridge.

» Tehri Lake offers a variety of watersports including jet skiing, scuba diving and canoeing



A FRAGRANT TALE

Mysuru

Mysuru to get India's first sandalwood museum

The country's first sandalwood museum is expected to come up in the 'cultural capital' of Karnataka, a city renowned for its sandalwood soaps, oils, and incense sticks. The museum has been conceptualised to spread awareness about the history and cultivation of sandalwood products in Karnataka.

» Set up at the Sandalwood Depot in Aranya Bhavan, the museum might be shifted to the Mysuru Palace



NOT IN GOOD BOOKS

Paris

The iconic Parisian bookstore Shakespeare & Company appeals for help amid the pandemic

Time has not faded the love between literature and Paris' elite circuit. Shakespeare and Company is a testament to that affair. However, the new lockdown triggered by a spike in the COVID-19 cases has prompted the legendary bookstore to appeal to its readers for financial support. The English-language bookstore on Paris' Left Bank sent an email to its readers telling them about the realities of the 'hard times' and encouraged them to buy a book. Within a week the store received an overwhelming response of nearly 5,000 orders online, including one from former French president Francois Hollande.

» Shakespeare and Company was started by George Whitman in 1951

PHOTOGRAPHS: SHUTTERSTOCK

Virabhadrasana: Warrior II Pose

Named after a warrior, Virabhadra, created by Lord Shiva, *Virabhadrasana* or the Warrior Pose is one of the most graceful postures in yoga. Celebrating the achievements of a mythical warrior, the fiery power of *Virabhadrasana* takes form in three different poses. This is the second pose in the series of three. The pose helps in expanding the chest and relieves stiff shoulders and back. More than just a physical posture, the Warrior II pose increases one's ability to concentrate and focus. A great *asana* for balancing and stability, it is best to practice it early in the morning.

Getting into Warrior II Pose

1. Start by standing straight, preferably in *Tadasana* or the mountain pose, with your legs hip-distance apart and arms on the side. Now spread your legs wide apart.
2. Actively reach out to the sides, drawing your shoulder blades apart. Inhale and raise both your hands parallel to the ground and turn your head to the right. Do not twist your body. Keep it in the centre.
3. While exhaling, slowly turn your right foot 90° to the right and turn your left foot inwards by about 15°. Slowly bend your right knee. Make sure your knee doesn't cross over the toe and the heel of the right foot is perfectly aligned to the centre of the left foot.
4. Keep in mind that the right thigh should be parallel to the ground. Stretch your arms and gently push your pelvis down. Stay in this position for some time.
5. To come out of the pose press into your feet and straighten your legs as you inhale. Drop your arms as you exhale.
6. Repeat the pose with your left leg by turning your left foot outwards by 90° and your right foot inwards by 45°.

Experts recommend a few preparatory poses for *Virabhadrasana* including *Gomukhasana*, *Trikonasana* and *Vrikshasana*.



On Trend: SUP Yoga

Stand-up paddleboard yoga is growing as a challenging new practice. Most of us take up the paddleboard to experience a sense of liberation. If you're at it, why not give the good ol' stretch a shot? The two practices seem like an odd pairing, but it's a great way to improve your core strength and immerse yourself in nature. SUP Yoga can be enjoyed even if you're a complete novice to paddleboarding and the world of yoga.

Eating à la Ayurveda

Ayurveda involves the process of internal purification and places great emphasis on the balance of mind, body and soul. This balance can be achieved through food in the following ways:

1. **Eat according to your digestive performance:** Follow the mantra of 'We are what we digest'.
2. **Eat slowly and chew your food thoroughly:** Mindful eating involving all your senses is vital to proper assimilation of food. Bloating, heaviness, lethargy are all signals to reconsider how you eat your food.
3. **Avoid incompatible combinations:** Incompatible combinations or *Virudha Ahara* aggravates all *doshas*. Certain examples of incompatible combos are mango milk shakes, honey mixed with hot foods or liquids, combining seafood with dairy/alcohol, etc.
4. **Avoid drinking too much water around meal time:** For proper digestion have sips of warm water along with your meal.
5. **Try to include all six tastes:** Each one of the six tastes in Ayurveda (sweet, sour, salty, bitter, pungent and astringent) produce more strength than the one that follows it.

—Dr Vishnu, a member of the wellness team at Vana, a Dehradun-based nature retreat



NITIN CHAUDHARY

If You Build It, They Will Come

WHAT IS IT TO CREATE a world out of nothing? With your own raw hands, and in a country that is not yours.

"If you build it, they will come" is the line from the classic 1989 American film, *Field of Dreams* in which a corn farmer in Iowa, Ray Kinsella (played by Kevin Costner) hears a mysterious voice asking him to build a baseball field in his cornfield. Ray sacrifices all his savings to build one, and guess what, they do come.

Years passed since I watched that movie, and the memory of it faded away as I got caught up with life. Overwhelmed by all

the practicalities, I waved off the movie as a sweet, but unworkable dream.

That was till I met Lars and Anna Norrman last month.

Given the current pandemic, I had shelved plans to discover far-off exotic places. Instead, I scouted for local charms and unexplored destinations. That's when I started studying the southern coast of Denmark, which I had never explored despite living next to it for the past 12 years.

This region is fast gaining traction in the tourist circles because of Stevens Klint, a Unesco World Heritage Geological Site that contains evidence of the impact of the Chicxulub asteroid that crashed into Earth some 65 million years ago. However, what caught my attention was the place where I spent the nights. It's a boutique bed and breakfast place run by the Norrmans that I stumbled across on the way.

The Norrmans are from Sweden. Anna is an interior designer, and Lars was once an insurance agent. They left their flourishing careers to start this charming design-decorated B&B in the middle of nowhere in Denmark. An orangerie leads the way to the eight uniquely designed rooms. "Each room looks different, and you may find it difficult to find a straight

✂ **The Norrmans, an escape to the Danish countryside**

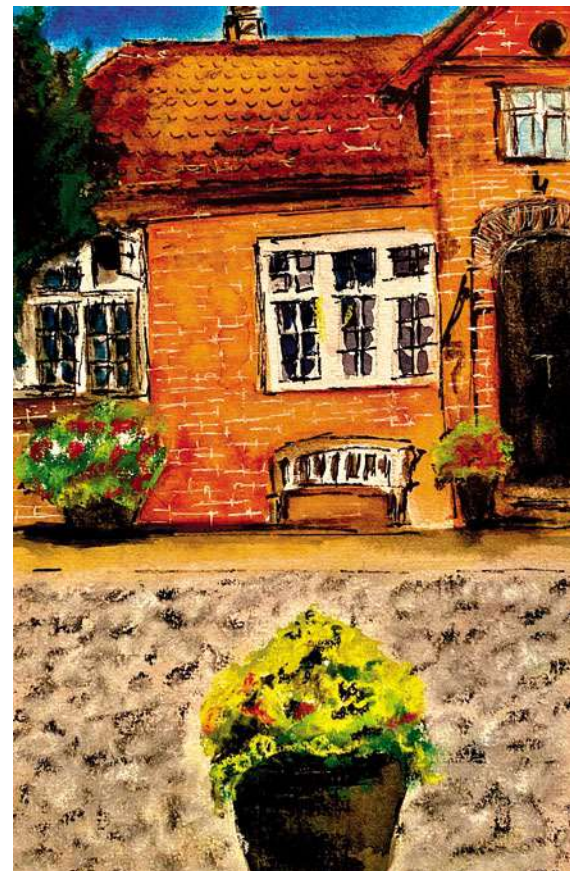
ILLUSTRATION: NITIN CHAUDHARY

Why leave your job? My logical mind was countering all these questions. But then I saw the expression on Lars' face and it reminded me of Ray Kinsella

line anywhere," explained Lars while walking us to our rooms, "I built the rooms myself and Anna decorated them. Took us over six months." The rooms were furnished with items and furniture that the couple had picked from their travels. But how did you know you will get people to discover this place? What if it had not worked out? Why leave your job? My logical mind was countering all these questions. But then I saw the expression on Lars' face and it reminded me of Ray Kinsella.

Have we not all had dreams of quitting our day job to travel around the world? We mostly see these influencers, who travel and capture and monetise their travel via social media. Here, the Norrmans have found an alternative model. They open the B&B for six months, and save enough to travel the rest of the year. Not only does the revenue from the property fund their travels, but also the Norrmans collect items from their travels that add more uniqueness to their property. They sell these items in a boutique, which is a part of the property, thus creating an additional revenue stream.

I moonlight as a travel writer, perched on the cusp of deciding whether to leave my corporate job and jump headlong into travel writing. So far, I never had the courage, but meeting Anna and Lars and after spending time at the property they had built to fuel their travels has certainly given me one more gentle nudge.



✂ **SILIGURI** When the joy of light brings the little ones together

@sanni.dhya



✂ **MUMBAI** Tinseltown soaking in the holiday spirit

@ompsyram



✂ **CHENNAI** Feeling a hint of yellow amid the blush

@alchemyofordinarythings



✂ **KUMORTULI** Looking straight into the eyes of divinity

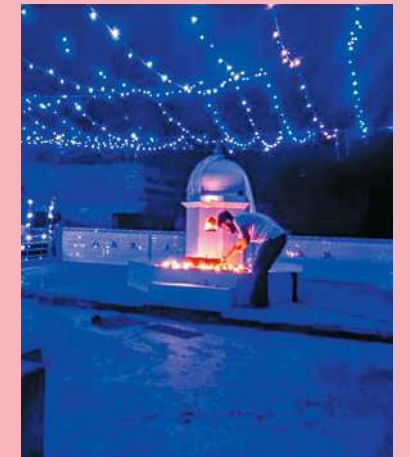
@siddharth.clicks

In a Light Spot

Colours, sparkles, tinsel and a lot more. It's that time of the year again when we immerse ourselves in the extravagance of festivities

@luckygurjar_official

DHANANA, HARAYANA
Beyond the blue horizon lies a new ray of light



✂ **MUNDRA** Holding on to the last of the bunch

@arrogant.artist



✂ **NAVI MUMBAI** Lighting your own path to glory

@Visual_outcomes



✂ **SINGAPORE** Driving under the shade of a thousand lights

@sgpoonie

THE HILLS ARE
ALWAYS A
GOOD IDEA

explore

~~~~~  
YEAR-END HOLIDAYS 20

•  
AUTUMN IN KASHMIR 36

•  
TO THE LANDS FAR AND WIDE 46

•  
CALL OF THE WILD 50  
~~~~~

Almost every photographer's dream is to capture the vastness of the Milky Way in their 24 frames per second. And what better place than the unfiltered night sky in the mountains. With bare minimum light and noise pollution, photographers—both amateurs and professionals—are always trailing the Orion or Ursa Major constellations.

History and Culture
Halebeedu, Khimsar and Palakkad

Mountain Retreat
Haflong, Netarhat and Tawang

Coastal Escape
Kasargod, South Goa and Maravanthe

20 YEAR-END Holidays

PHOTOGRAPHS: SHUTTERSTOCK

* Those looking to go further remote should explore Shanshar, where you will also find the Manu Rishi Temples

Sainj Valley

The unexplored sibling of the Tirthan Valley, Sainj Valley is quieter and better for multiple reasons

✗ **HEAD TO THE VALLEY IF YOU'RE BORED OF KHAJJIAR AND CAN'T VISIT KASHMIR YET**

Even the most experienced trekkers treat a foray into the Great Himalayan National Park as a luxury. Walk through the vast, rolling verdure of Sainj Valley, the least-known of the four valleys of the national park, and witness its magic unfold. The verdant meadows and hirsute pine clusters stretching across the horizon in every way remind you of Kashmir—more so in the winter when the whole valley is cloaked in snow. While in the valley, undertake hikes of varying length, visit the stunning temples and godly lakes, camp at the inspection huts and watch the birds conquer the sky at dawn and dusk.

» Don't miss the day hikes to the scenic villages of Deori, Upper Neahi and Shangarh

2020 is drawing to a close, and we are starting to feel the itch of the travel bug again. History, culture, beaches and mountains, here is Team OT laying down the best options for the perfect year-end holiday



Do not miss out on the traditional food of the Monpas, liberally spiced with copious amounts of chillies.

Tawang

Surrounded by Tibet and Bhutan, the quaint little town is suffused with the scent of spirituality

✕ **VISIT BETWEEN DECEMBER AND JANUARY TO WITNESS HEAVY SNOWFALL**

Set in a remote corner of Arunachal Pradesh, Tawang is an important centre of Buddhism. Its dense valleys, frozen lakes and snow-covered conifers are every traveller's dream. Also known as 'Mon-Yul', Tawang was originally inhabited by the Monpa tribe, who still happen to occupy a major portion of the region. Scattered with beautiful monasteries, you can always find Buddhist chants and mystical monks here. Tawang is also home to the 4,000-year-old Tawang Monastery, one of the oldest and largest monasteries in India.

» Visitors to Arunachal require a special Inner Line Permit (ILP) issued by the state government

✱ **Don't miss the Unhavare hot water springs in the Ratnagiri district in Maharashtra**

Dapoli

Lying on the Konkan coast, it is home to several virgin beaches and the Suvarnadurga and Kanakdurga forts

✕ **IT IS APPROXIMATELY 230KMS AND 186KMS, RESPECTIVELY, FROM MUMBAI AND PUNE**

The north may be cold right now but if there's one place in India off the top of our head where you and your folks could have your own dramatic *Roma* moment at a virgin beach, it is the sweeping expanse of the Konkan coast at Kelshi, Anjarle and Palande. Known as Mini Mahabaleshwar, Dapoli (approximately a 5.5hr drive from Mumbai) is unmatched in terms of the sheer number of views of the sea that the snaking coastal roads of Maharashtra offer. And if that's not enough, check-in to one of the many seafront homestays overlooking the frisky waves.

» The dolphin safari at the Murud beach is a must

Maravanthe

A scenic getaway from the urban chaos, this beach town dons the guise of a wonderland

✗ **BEST TIME TO VISIT IS BETWEEN SEPTEMBER AND MARCH**

Considered one of the most beautiful beach towns of Karnataka, Maravanthe is a picturesque locale on the Konkan coast. Set against the backdrop of the Kodachadri Hills and flanked by the Souparnika River on one side and the Arabian Sea on the other, drive along NH 66 to catch a glimpse of the river and sea together. Being a coastal town, it offers a wide variety of watersports including swimming, snorkelling and scuba diving. The nearby Kodachadri Hills offer a number of trekking trails, best suited for professionals and experienced trekkers.

» Plan a visit to the fascinating villages nearby including Trasi, Padukone and Bijadi



For a small fee, the fishermen at the Gangoli village port will let you hop on their ride and accompany them on their fishing expeditions

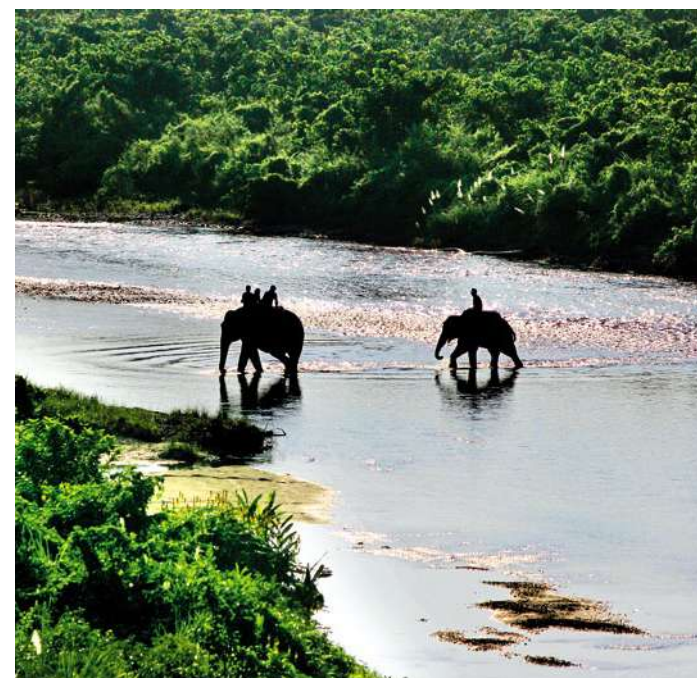
Unakoti

Famous for its stunning rock carvings, Unakoti is steeped in myths and legends

✗ **AGARTALA (180KMS), IS CONNECTED TO DELHI, KOLKATA AND GUWAHATI BY AIR**

Unakoti is Tripura's best-kept secret. Encompassed by dense forests, it is home to the largest bas relief sculptures in India. Thanks to the presence of the ruins of age-old temples, the place also serves as a Shaivite pilgrimage. A popular legend also suggests that the rock carvings here were done by an artist called Kallu Kumhar, who was a great devotee of Goddess Parvati. According to some archaeologists, Unakoti may also have served as a Buddhist meditation centre. Once you're done marvelling at the fine specimens of rock carving at Unakoti, take a small detour to Jampui Hills, famous as Tripura's highest hill. Visit the nearby villages and interact with the people of Lushai and Reang tribes for a wholesome experience.

» According to legends, Lord Shiva stayed here for a night on his way to Varanasi along with 99,99,999 deities



The Dooars

Located in the foothills of the Himalaya, the Dooars are streaked by sparkling rivers

✗ **IT IS RENOWNED FOR THE JALDAPARA NATIONAL PARK AND THE BUXA TIGER RESERVE**

For captivating views and thrilling encounters with nature, head east, this time to the Dooars, the lower-lying Himalayan region—in northern Bengal and Assam—famous for being the portal (or 'door') further into the seven northeastern states and Bhutan. From the dense forest and rich animal life of Chilapata and Gorumara to the lush, rolling tea estate of Samsing—natural beneficence is brewed into the air here. Hike to scenic hamlets that even the most seasoned hikers know little about or drive to the 'Land of the Thunder Dragon', or just listen to the call of the wild from inside your forest rest house.

» First-timers should book an experienced travel operator

Khimsar

Located at the edge of the great Thar Desert, this little hamlet is straight out of the Arabian Nights

✕ IT LIES ON THE JODHPUR-NAGAU-R-BIKANER HIGHWAY AND IS EASILY ACCESSIBLE

If a luxurious mud-thatched cottage right in the middle of the desert, surrounded by a beautiful oasis and little shrubs on a full moon night is your idea of spending your winters, look no further than Khimsar. An erstwhile fiefdom, Khimsar paid allegiance to the kingdom of Marwar in the bygone era. Today, it serves as a rewarding getaway with the Khimsar Fort being run as a heritage hotel. Blessed with a charming ambience, the property has opulence written all over it. When done soaking in the winter sun at Khimsar, visit nearby Nagaur, known for its forts and red chillies.

» If not the Fort, stay at the equally compelling Khimsar Sand Dunes Village

Don't forget to take a walk at dusk on the golden sand dunes.

Palakkad

Palakkad represents the laidback best of Kerala and plenty of green havens

✕ DON'T MISS THE DRIVE ON THE ROUTE CONNECTING KAVA AND ANAKKAL

Mannarkkad is where the Silent Valley National Park—believed by the British to lack the cicada, hence the silence—thrives. The Neliyampathy Hills are a two-hour drive away. The Palakkad Gap, a low-lying pass in the Western Ghats, is a gateway into Kerala. The name itself means forest of the 'pala' tree and its interesting confluence of several cultures is a strong reason to visit. Sightseeing spots include the 18th-century Palakkad Fort, the Malampuzha Dam, and the Parambikulam Tiger Reserve. Oh, and the food is to die for—savour *pazham pori*, *mutta bhaji* and *porottas* in between breaks as you shop in the busy wholesale markets.

» Noorjehan, MHR Biriyan House and Menma are three of the best places to eat at here



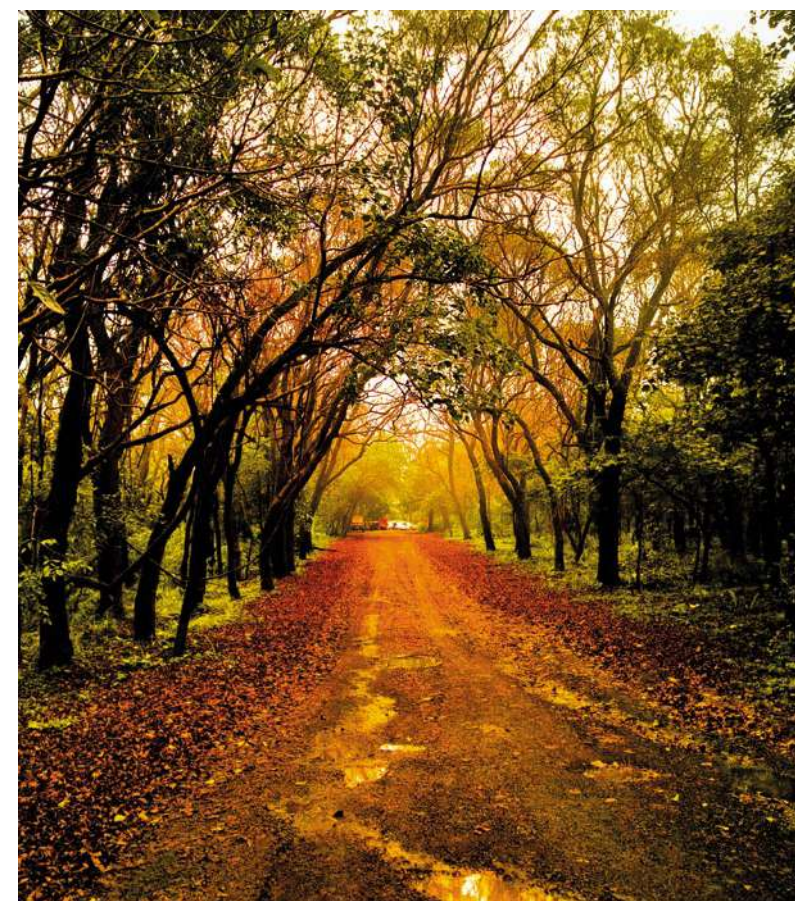
Satpuras

Soak in the tremulous beauty of the lush green forests of central India

✕ THE IDEAL TIME TO VISIT IS OCTOBER TO APRIL

The highest mountain range in central India, the Satpuras, a part of the Deccan Plateau, lure thousands of visitors every year. Literally translating to 'seven folds', it forms the watershed between the Narmada and Tapi rivers. Enveloped by dense green foliage, the Satpura Range is home to numerous tiger reserves and national parks, including the Satpura National Park. Teeming with an exotic variety of flora and fauna, the Satpura National Park is an integral part of the Satpura Tiger Reserve along with the Bori Sanctuary and Pachmarhi Sanctuary. Plan a visit to Pachmarhi, also known as the 'Queen of Satpuras'. It is the only hill station in the region and a part of a Unesco Biosphere Reserve. Believed to be older than the Himalaya, the Satpuras hold centuries of mysteries and folklores.

» You can opt for a jeep safari at the Satpura National Park for a cost of ₹3,800





Pelling

Pelling, famous for its historic monasteries, recently saw the opening of India's first skywalk

✕ **PELLING IS AN APPROXIMATELY 4.5HR DRIVE DUE WEST OF GANGTOK**

The Sikkim town may have got India's first skywalk recently but we're thankful that we're finally talking about Pelling. The historic monasteries of Pemayangtse Gumpa and Sanghak Choeling are the major tourist draws. Set time aside for the lesser-known Rabdentse Ruins and dig into some palate-pleasing grub at the tin-roofed Lotus Bakery. Ravangla is two hours away, so head to the pristine Darap village that is just 8km away. At this time of the year, the western Sikkim town may also be a great option to witness snow.

» Carry enough cash since like most secluded havens, Pelling has just one ATM



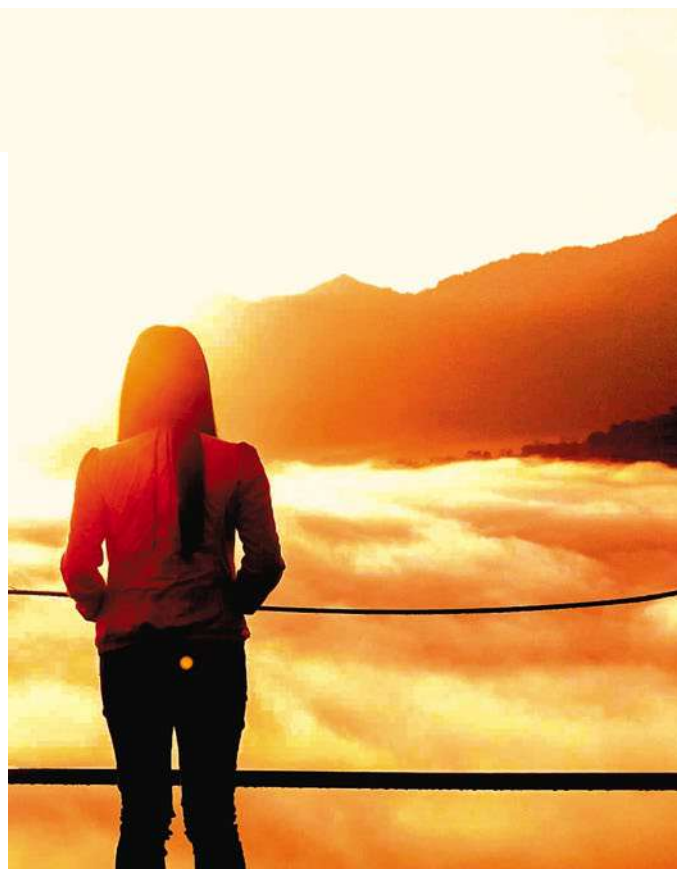
Haflong

Assam's only hill station is more than just sprawling vistas

✕ **IT IS ALSO KNOWN AS THE 'MINI SWITZERLAND OF THE NORTHEAST'**

Located in the Dima Haso district of Assam, Haflong is where you could possibly touch the clouds. Being the only hill station in Assam, Haflong enjoys a surreal mist and comfortable weather all year round. The untapped beauty of the hills beckons the intrepid and slow traveller alike, as they can engage in camping and trekking, or soak in the naturoscapes. The town also offers multiple short drive routes, each more promising than the other. Food lovers and architecture geeks are in for a treat as you can sample local horticulture produce and catch a glimpse of the British colonial past.

» Visit the waterfalls in the area by undertaking easy-moderate treks that take upto 4-5 hours



South Goa

No rowdy tourists, no loud parties, explore the 'other' Goa

✕ **IDEAL TIME TO VISIT IS NOVEMBER TO FEBRUARY**

With a vibe that echoes a laid-back attitude, South Goa is starkly different from its northern counterpart. Doing away with the constant conundrum and an overdose of neon, South Goa is home to palm-lined beaches such as Palolem, Bogmalo and Varca. Layered history is also what makes South Goa an unparalleled experience. Quiet and soulful, its rich heritage in the form of cathedrals, temples, Portuguese culture, tiny villages, fortified ruins and lip-smacking seafood do the talking here.

» Head to the famous Dudhsagar falls, a two-hour drive from South Goa



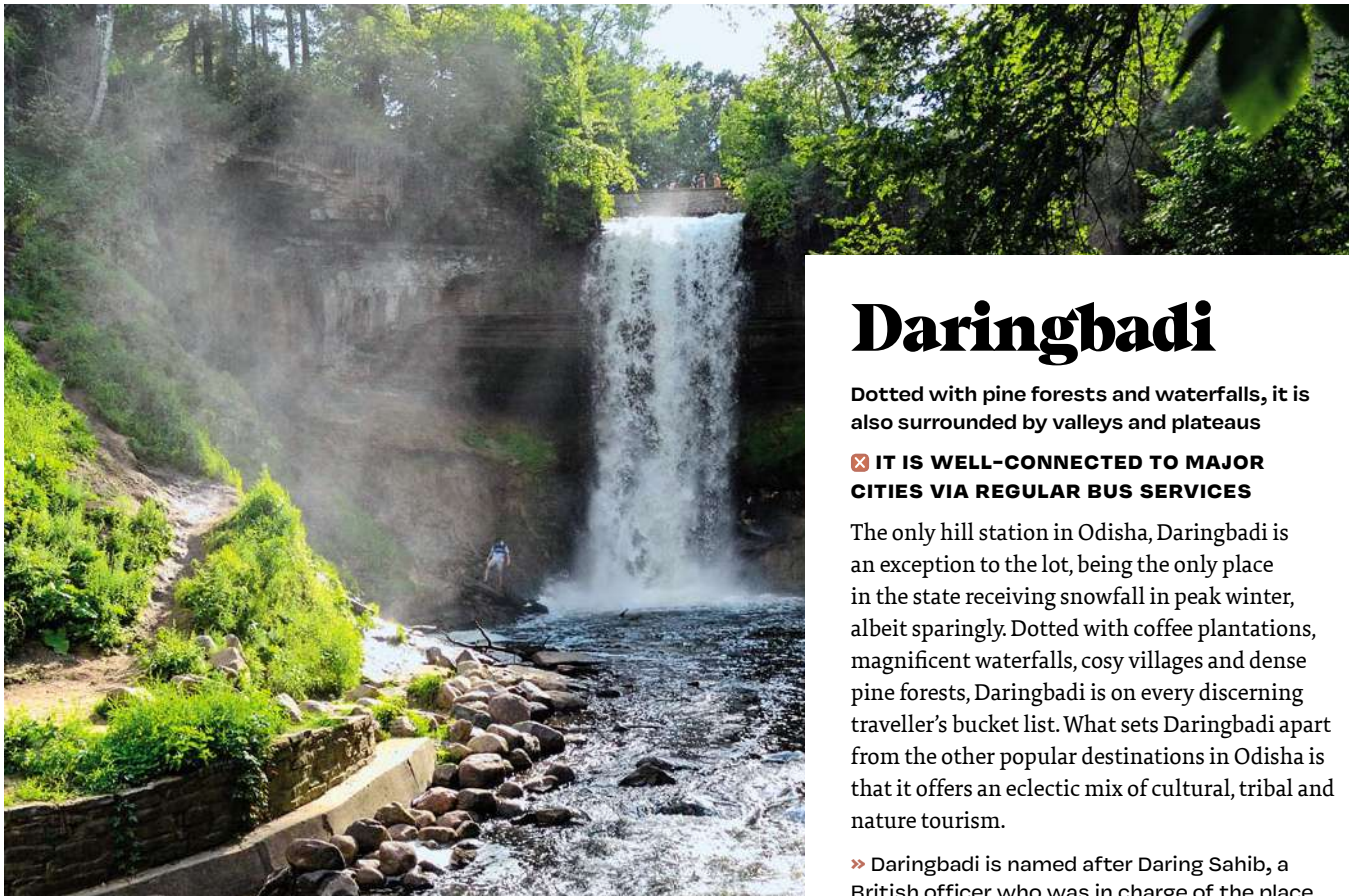
Munsiyari

The picturesque town set along the banks of the Giriganga River lures many nature lovers throughout the year

✕ PANCHACHULI IS THE STAR ATTRACTION HERE

A tiny hamlet situated in the Pithoragarh district of Uttarakhand, Munsiyari serves as the base for various treks into the interiors of the Himalaya. Perched at an altitude of 2,298 metres above sea level, the hill station is often referred to as 'Little Kashmir'. It is nestled between the borders of India, Tibet and Nepal and serves as the base for three glaciers namely Namik, Milam and Ralam. It is also the starting point of Johar Valley and falls on the ancient salt route between India and Tibet. Surrounded by snow-capped peaks, it is a fast-growing adventure hub with the key attraction being the trekking route to the Khalia Top.

» Legend has it that the Pandavas set out for their final journey to heaven from here



Daringbadi

Dotted with pine forests and waterfalls, it is also surrounded by valleys and plateaus

✕ IT IS WELL-CONNECTED TO MAJOR CITIES VIA REGULAR BUS SERVICES

The only hill station in Odisha, Daringbadi is an exception to the lot, being the only place in the state receiving snowfall in peak winter, albeit sparingly. Dotted with coffee plantations, magnificent waterfalls, cosy villages and dense pine forests, Daringbadi is on every discerning traveller's bucket list. What sets Daringbadi apart from the other popular destinations in Odisha is that it offers an eclectic mix of cultural, tribal and nature tourism.

» Daringbadi is named after Daring Sahib, a British officer who was in charge of the place

Gulmarg

Nestled amid the Pir Panjal Range, the hill station has been endowed with nature's bounty

✕ HEAD TO APHARWAT PEAK TO SKI THROUGH THE STEEP GRADIENTS

Pine-fringed hillocks, deep ravines, forested valleys and the lofty, snow-covered Himalaya define Gulmarg. The rugged beauty of the rocky terrain and the lush green meadows in summer peeping out are also a popular choice among filmmakers to rekindle the old romance with the place. Right now, it's a white wonderland though. Home to the world's second-highest gondola ride, Gulmarg has a reputation for winter sports, offering activities like skiing, snowboarding and trekking.

» Attracting wildlife enthusiasts, the Gulmarg Biosphere Reserve boasts of a rich avifauna population that one should keep an eye out for





Kasargod

Unwind by the coast, while soaking in the scenic sunset hues

✕ **OCTOBER TO FEBRUARY IS THE BEST TIME TO VISIT, WHEN THE WEATHER IS BALMY**

Known as the land of seven languages and several cultures, Kasargod—Kerala's northernmost town—is almost otherworldly. Home to an expansive coastline, forts, rivers and hills, it's neither touristy nor overbuilt and hence makes for a perfect secluded escape. With an excellent network of roads, legends pertaining to various districts here will keep you hooked at every turn. For those invested in culture and arts, Kasargod also has a handloom industry along with ancient temples beelining the streets. A visit here is incomplete without an evening at the majestic and well-maintained Bekal Fort, flanked on the shore of the eponymous beach.

» One can hear the echoes of Kannada, Tulu and Malayalam alike here



Kalsi Village

Located at the confluence of the Tons and Yamuna rivers, Kalsi is a lesser-known village near Paonta Sahib

✕ **KALSI AND ITS SURROUNDINGS ARE GREAT FOR TREKKING AND BIRDING**

Pass over hyper-touristy Mussoorie and Nainital, and drive along to discover the offbeat hamlet of Kalsi in Uttarakhand. The hilly retreat is a great hideaway for those seeking some solitude. Walking trails, river rafting and hiking, Kalsi does not fall short of options. Nestled amid the picturesque landscape of the Doon Valley, it is also home to a 2,200-year-old rock edict of Emperor Ashok, discovered by an Englishman, Forrest, in 1860.

» It's best to set base in Chakrata, from where you can embark on exciting treks, and birding and botanical adventures

Netarhat

Fondly nicknamed 'the Queen of Chotanagpur', Netarhat has probably spawned dozens of poets

✗ **THE BEST WAY TO GET TO NETARHAT IS TO HIRE A CAB FROM RANCHI**

Drenched in an old-world colonial charm, Netarhat is lined with narrow roads and forests, offers rejuvenating walks and is known for its beautiful sunrises and sunsets. Walk up to the light-orange hue at dawn at Sunrise Point or cherish the sunset at Magnolia Point—named after a young British girl who had fallen for a tribal shepherd boy. Also worth visiting are Netarhat Dam, Koel Viewpoint, Upper Ghagri Falls and Lower Ghagri Falls.

» Visit the nearby Taher village, home to the Birjia tribe and observe and interact with the tribal communities up and close



Horsley Hills

These hills attract travellers from all walks of life

✗ **DECEMBER TO MARCH IS THE IDEAL TIME TO VISIT**

Rustic and cosy, the Horsley Hills make for a refreshing escape along the Eastern Ghats. These idyllic hills, in the Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh, are named after a British collector, W.D. Horsley, who turned the hills into his summer home. Birdwatchers and adventure junkies feel equally at home here owing to the rich biodiversity and adrenaline-fuelled activities.

» Visit Kalyani—the over 150-year-old eucalyptus tree—planted by Horsley himself



Halebeedu

Travel back in time through architectural abundance

✗ **OCTOBER TO MARCH IS THE IDEAL TIME TO VISIT**

During their 200-year-rule, the Hoysala dynasty built various temples here that retain their regal charm even today. Located in the Hassan district, it is primarily known for the magnificent twin temples—Hoysaleswara and Kedareshwara. The walls of these temples feature intricate carvings of Hindu deities and the complex makes way for as many as 108 pillars within the premises of the temple. Travellers should also make a pit-stop at the Jain temples located in the vicinity.

» The archaeological museum inside the complex houses over 1,500 sculptures and artefacts



Ivy
Green
NATURE. LIVENATURE.

IVY GREENS

A Stairway to your Dreams



Nestled in the pristine and salubrious landscapes of Garhwal Hills, IVY Green promises to leave you with indelible memories of your often-ignored relation with nature.

As you spend your special moments with us, you would experience serenity as well as rejuvenation.



Get In Touch

For Information

+91 9674392794

For Reservations

+91 8171464445, +917452034376,

Website- www.ivygreenlansdowne.com

Address

IVY Green Nature Resort, A Unit of
Charlie Four Hotels & Resorts, Tarkeshwar
Road, Deriyakhal, Lansdowne

36

KASHMIR

**Dishes to
die for**

Tabak maaz,
harissa, rogan josh

**Edenic
Charm**

The formal Mughal
gardens are a hit

Out of Town

Pahalgam and
Gulmarg are great
day trips

ODE TO Autumn

*We adore Kashmir in spring, summer and winter,
but could autumn be its loveliest season? Text
and photographs by*

AMIT DIXIT

Chinar
leaves line
the ground,
Nishat Bagh

SAW MY FIRST FADED CHINAR LEAVES WITHOUT WARNING,

although it wasn't unexpected, heading out of Srinagar's Sheikh ul-Alam Airport, gazing up absentmindedly from the shiny world of my smartphone. It was a solitary tree, not even a particularly large one, on Airport Road, but striking nevertheless, an amuse-bouche, hinting at the russet riches to come. Having experienced Kashmir in every season bar one, I was keen to set the record straight by taking in the valley's autumn hues and flavours.

I was staying at my favourite Srinagar haunt, the Sukoon Houseboat, a short boat



ride across the Dal Lake from Ghat 19A. There were organic cotton masks, a temperature gun and copious quantities of sanitiser.

Otherwise, I was grateful to note, it was pretty much business as usual, down to the beaming smiles. My friend Altaf Chapri has elevated the houseboat experience with a sunkissed upper deck—great for meals and yoga lessons when the weather is nice—full service, gourmet meals, stylish décor and, most important, running hot water.

Altaf is a man with a big heart. Combine that with the Kashmiri compulsion for hospitality and you have the predicament I was in within an hour of landing on the boat: neck deep in a trami platter, Kashmiri wedding food, laden with more meat than us wusses eat in a year. There was the famed tabak maaz (lamb ribs fried to a crisp and



The pheran may be the quintessential Kashmiri garment of choice but, according to some sources, it was introduced in Kashmir by Akbar in the 16th century. The traditional pheran extended to the feet; the modern version typically ends below the knees. Summer ones are lighter and the version women wear tends to be embroidered.

dripping with fat), seekh kabab, methi maaz, spicy lahabi kabab, a chicken dish I was too intoxicated by the taste to note the name of, and rista *and* gushtaba, meatball gravies to die for. There was haq, the beloved collard greens of the Kashmiris, on the side. We were dining on the upper deck, neglecting the gorgeous vista of the Dal Lake right in front of us. No less a personage than Emperor Jahangir had called Kashmir 'paradise on earth'. But, above all, Kashmir is a foodie's paradise.

NEVER A DULL

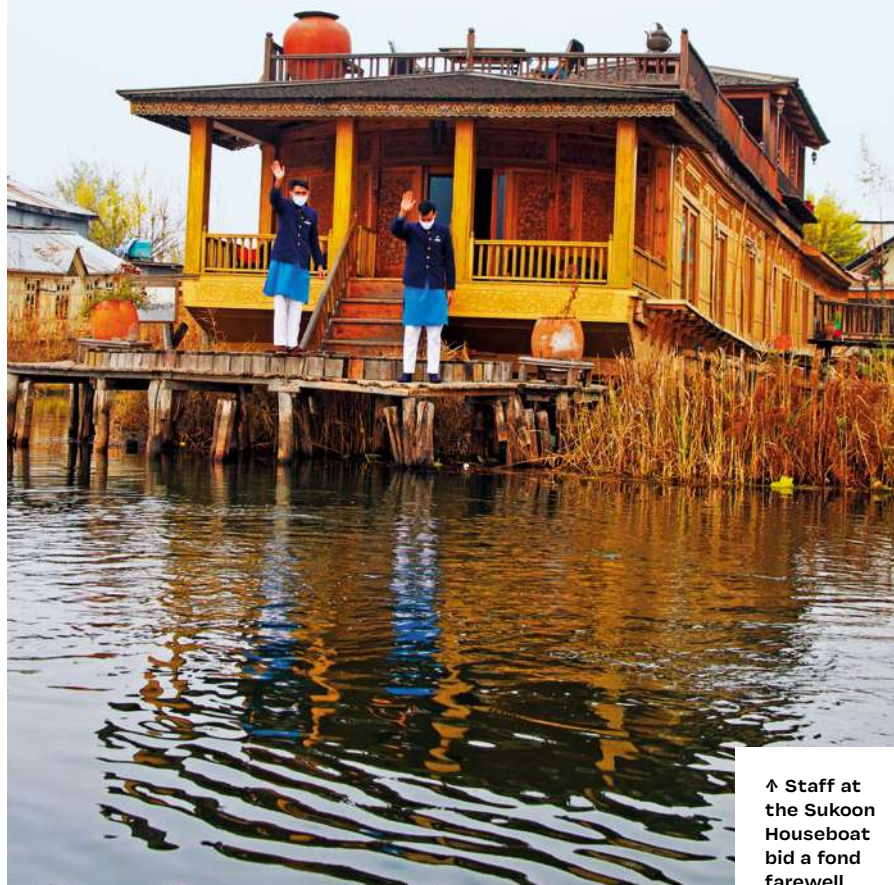
Moment

In the late afternoon, I took a shikara ride on the Dal. Because, well, every visitor to Srinagar must. And, after all, what better way to work off that monstrous feast than let someone else do all the hard work of paddling! It was cold—more than a nip, but not quite winter—but there was a flask of kahwa at hand, so I wasn't worried.

✱ **The Dal Lake—referred to in ancient Sanskrit texts as Mahasarit—covers an area of 18 sq km with a 16km-long shoreline that is lined with gardens dating from the Mughal era. The lake has floating gardens known as *rad*, where lotuses bloom**

The Dal's beauty is not seen so much as felt. You have to take it in gradually. It's a sprawling, unwieldy waterbody, not neat or possible to encompass in a single glance. But it commands you to relax. Maybe it's the sluggish ripples made by the paan-shaped paddle. Maybe it's the gentle motion of the shikara. Maybe it's the periodic nuggets of information imparted by the boatman in his sweet Kashmiri accent. ("Haider was shot in this house... boats are only built with deodar, they're very expensive these days but can last 30-40

Sukoon has elevated the houseboat experience with a sunkissed upper deck, full service, gourmet meals, stylish décor and running hot water



↑ Staff at the Sukoon Houseboat bid a fond farewell



↓ A relaxing shikara ride on the Dal Lake



↑ The living area in the Sukoon Houseboat

↓ Harissa, a seasonal breakfast delicacy

⇒ A dashing youth on the road to Pahalgam





Srinagar is a city of fine gardens, many of them built by the Mughals in the formal style they are so famous for, hundreds of years ago. It's in these resplendent gardens that the passing of the seasons is best observed

Naseem Bagh has the most magnificent chinars

years...those are lotus farms, nadru is being harvested right now..."

We occasionally sent families of Eurasian coots—who'd come all the way from China to winter here; no visa required—flying off. Or skittering, to be exact. They have a peculiar way of half-flying across the water, wings flapping wildly, conveying the impression of running on the water.

Scenes of quotidian life are made magical when played out on a beautiful body of water. A wizened old granny steps into her canoe and goes off on some errands. A grandfather-grandson duo overtakes us, grandson paddling enthusiastically in the lead. A shop in the middle of the lake accepts a boring consignment of goods. Bengali tourists drive a hard bargain at the crafts market in the middle of the Dal. The autumn sun is soft, and will soon be a gentle, orange orb.

GARDENS FIT FOR

Kings

Srinagar is a city of gardens, many of them built by the Mughals in the formal style they are so famous for, hundreds of years ago. It's in these resplendent gardens that the passing of the seasons is best noted. Before we hit the well-trodden garden trail though, Altaf took me to Naseem Bagh, part of the Kashmir University campus, which boasts glorious stands of chinara—and no tourists. You wouldn't know it, but it's one of the oldest Mughal gardens in Kashmir, established by the emperor Akbar in 1586. A hundred years later, Shah Jahan planted over 1,200 chinars here. Around 700 remain today, interspersed with university departments as diverse as development studies and sculptural art.

Also known as Old World Sycamore or Oriental Plane, the chinara may have been introduced into Kashmir by the Mughals, who were avid gardeners. Today, it is a symbol of the, well, union territory, giving close competition to that other popular icon—the shikara. The

The chinara or *Platanus orientalis* is a deciduous tree that can grow to a height of 30m or more and is noted for its longevity. It's a popular landscape tree in Kashmir and Srinagar's gardens are full of it. It can be easily recognised by its palmate leaves.

chinars are graceful giants and you can spend hours staring at them, awed by their majesty.

From Naseem, we headed to Shalimar, everyone's favourite bagh, its centrepiece the famed pavilion made of black marble. The water channels were dry, in preparation for winter. The last time I had visited, there had been children frolicking in the waters. Even now the gardens were brimming with visitors: lovers and photographers, picnicking children, tourists all the way from South India... There were peals of laughter and friendly banter everywhere. The sun had graced us with its company. All in all, a lovely day to be outdoors.

Kashmir's autumn colours are predominantly brown, dominated by chinara leaves. There are other trees going through their fall transformation—maple, for instance—but the chinara is dominant. At

Nishat Bagh, that magical garden of the 12 terraces on the banks of the Dal, the ground is carpeted in chinara leaves, which crunch softly under one's feet.

We romanticise autumn. But, in Kashmir, where probably trillions of chinara leaves fall to the ground each year, they meet a prosaic end, burnt to create a fine charcoal powder which is used as the top layer in the kangri, a portable brazier that Kashmiris tuck under their pherans for warmth in winter.

A climb up and down Chashme Shahi and I'm tired. We relax by an open fire at Qayaam Gah, a cosy retreat Altaf is building in the Zabarwan hills. There are kababs, to be pulled straight off the skewers with paper-thin lavasa bread, washed down with noon chai. We roast chestnuts in the dying embers. The evening is cold and there are whispers of the mercury dipping below

An icon of Kashmir, no trip here is complete without a (often) romantic ride by shikara on the Dal Lake in Srinagar. They're designed in a way to provide complete privacy. The boatman might as well not be there. Just be wary of the salespersons who'll sidle their boat next to yours and try to sell you overpriced souvenirs.

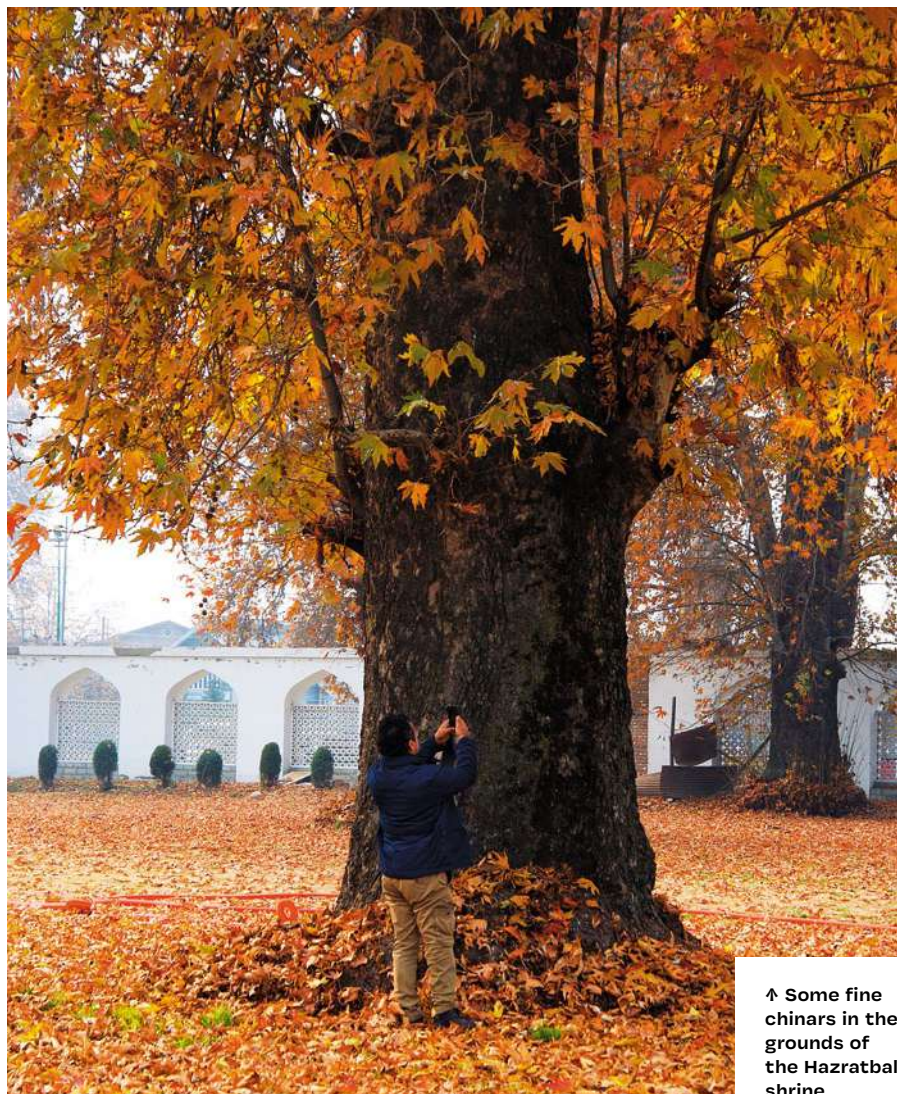


zero that night. Thankfully, there's heart-warming rajma-chawal for dinner and a bathtub with piping hot water to soak into back at Sukoon. They don't call it 'solace' for nothing. Next morning, I awake to the loud and melodious call of Himalayan bulbuls.

SONG OF Fire & Ice

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness, Keats called it. One of the mellow fruits of the Kashmiri autumn is harissa—cousin of the Armenian harees and the Hyderabad haleem—a slow-cooked grain-and-meat gruel that is a popular autumn-winter breakfast in downtown Srinagar. Next morning, we drove through the mist to Kong Posh in Nawa Kadal—one of the few authentic harissa joints still surviving—to experience it, quite literally, in the flesh. There was a beeline of hungry customers when we arrived. Inside, the muscular proprietor sat on the stove, extracting portions of harissa from a pot built into the hearth, tempering them with mustard oil in a display that would put the finest flambé to shame. In Kashmir, harissa is made with rice and leg of lamb. The meat and rice mixture is stirred over a slow fire overnight, and mashed with a wooden pestle till it becomes a glutinous paste—not a bone shard in sight—as soft as rose petals.

We sat around the hearth, which was still warm from last night's labours, and tucked into the harissa with pieces of crisp tsot (an encyclopaedia could be written on the different breads of Kashmir). I'll be honest here—I've never tasted anything like it. Aromatic and satisfying, purists swear by the traditional method of making harissa, and I can see why. Then, I ordered a second



↑ Some fine chinars in the grounds of the Hazratbal shrine



← Chochwor, preferred bread for afternoon tea

↓ Shikara on the Dal Lake, an iconic sight in Srinagar

⇒ A tree in Shalimar Bagh in all its fall glory



← Two gentlemen we met en route to Pahalgam

↓ Maple leaves turn a delicious red in autumn

⇒ Harissa being tempered at Kong Posh in Nawa Kadal



← Mural on a wall, Black Pavilion, Shalimar Bagh

↓ A cosy bedroom on the Sukoon Houseboat

⇒ Fine wood carving inside the houseboat



portion. Artery-clogging eventually, but I wouldn't have missed it for the world.

The rich and warming repast can keep you sated for the entire day. Which was just as well, because I was heading to Gulmarg. There was news of snowfall there, so I simply had to squeeze it into my itinerary. After all, if autumn is here, can winter be far behind? And two seasons for the price of one? No contest.

Gulmarg, carpeted in a thick layer of powdery snow, lived up to its promise. I had last been here as a child, so it was nostalgic. I had every intention of rebuffing the guides who descended on me like vultures, but after I slipped and landed hard on my bum, the deal was sealed. So I was sledded, photographed, and temple-visited in double-quick time, as requested. I couldn't have done it without you, Sahil and Imtiaz.

Rain rang in the next day, but we stuck to our guns and drove out to Pahalgam as planned, on an excellent highway not more than a year old. On the drive, I couldn't help noting the unseasonable number of pregnant women in the valley, until I realised the kangris were already out. Where Gulmarg is compact, Pahalgam is a sprawl, with the merry Lidder flowing by, with lots of camping and trekking options.

↓ A chilly yet playful Lidder River at Pahalgam



← Sledge riding in Gulmarg is not for the faint hearted

Snow fell in gentle drifts as we lunched on trout at the grand ol' Pahalgam Hotel.

Then it is time. I prepare to bid another teary-eyed farewell to Kashmir, gathering up my chinar-leaf souvenirs into a fatal, crushing embrace. Over our nth cup of kahwa, Altaf is matter of fact in his assessment of Kashmir's tourism potential. No other destination in the country has a lake like the Dal, he proffers. Within a couple of hours of landing at the airport you could be skiing. Or setting off on a

scenic trek. Or enjoying a boat ride on the Dal. All this a short flight from Delhi. Other places in the Himalaya take longer to get to, often entailing long drives. With foreign travel at a standstill, domestic destinations, including Kashmir, are getting a lot of attention from Indians. All those avid skiers who used to escape to Europe in the winters are lining up at the ski slopes of Gulmarg, for instance. It's a flawless proposition.

Kashmir is safe. And it's open for business. Was paradise ever so accessible? 📍

↗ Altaf Chapri on the sun deck of his houseboat



traveller KASHMIR

How to Reach Srinagar airport is well connected by flights with Indian metros. At the time of writing, rapid COVID tests were being conducted for all passengers arriving at Srinagar airport.

Where to Stay

☒ **Sukoon Houseboat** The houseboat experience doesn't get better than this

☒ **RK Sarovar Portico** The perfect city hotel, this well-located property boasts cosy rooms (there's even a spa but it's currently closed due to the pandemic)

☒ **The Khyber Himalayan Resort & Spa** In Gulmarg, the grand Khyber has set a new benchmark for hotels in Kashmir

☒ **Pahalgam Hotel** As old as the resort town itself, this hotel has featured in several Bollywood movies



What to Do

☒ Take a walk around the Old City, which has charming shrines, vibrant bazaars and lots of atmosphere.

☒ Explore the Dal Lake by boat. Great for birding too. If you can wake up early, there is a floating vegetable market on the Dal.

☒ The gardens—Shalimar, Nishat and Chashme Shahi among them—are justly famous and the best spots to catch autumn colours. In



spring, the Tulip Garden is a huge attraction.

☒ Srinagar is also a city of shrines and mosques. The Jamia Masjid (*pic above*) with its towering deodar pillars is a sight to behold as is the

Khanqah-e-Moula, a fine example of Kashmiri wooden architecture. The mesmerising Hazratbal, on the banks of the Dal, is believed to hold a hair of the Prophet Muhammad.

☒ Have tea at Chai Jaai (*pic above*), a café in the erstwhile Mahattas Studio.

☒ The Dachigam National Park is nearby, where you can see the endangered hangul.

☒ The Harwan Monastery is a Buddhist archaeological site that has been restored beautifully.



What to Eat

☒ Kahwa, green tea, infused with cardamom, cinnamon and/or saffron, is a Kashmiri staple best had from a samovar.

☒ You can try the salty noon chai too—it has a distinctive pink colour—but it's definitely an acquired taste.

☒ Have a Kashmiri wazwan. Sukoon can organise it for you, but there are restaurants in Srinagar serving it as well.

☒ Harissa, a winter delicacy cooked overnight over a slow fire and available in only a few shops in downtown Srinagar, is a must-try.

RIDER ON THE storm

↳ Sadhguru
swaps his
bike for a
horse

W

WHAT DO I CALL HIM?

A spiritual leader? A yogi? A *New York Times* bestselling author? Or should I call him a mystic who loves to ride bikes? The world may know him as one of India's most revered spiritual leaders but not many are aware that Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev is an avid traveller with an undying love for motorbikes. Sadhguru was on a motorcycle journey across North America recently, where he met Native Americans and explored their spirituality and mysticism.

During the 36-day-long adventure-packed journey, Sadhguru and his convoy of 16 fellow travellers rode through 19 states and covered a staggering 9,477 miles. The journey was an attempt to delve deeper into the lives of the indigenous population of North America, who have captured the imagination of people around the world. Known for their intimate connection with the natural elements, Native Americans have an intuitive understanding and a heightened sense of perception that governs every aspect of this unique culture.

From the scenic views of the Zion National Park in Utah and the Mississippi River in Missouri, to iconic monuments like the Mato Tipila in Wyoming and Crazy Horse in South Dakota, Sadhguru explored the picturesque landscapes and witnessed the profundity of the Native cultures. He also traversed through the majestic Meramec Caverns (Missouri), Old Faithful Geyser (Wyoming), Eternal Flame (Cherokee Nation) and other notable landmarks.

The spiritual leader also spent Indigenous Peoples' Day in conversation with Black Eyed Peas' Taboo, a rapper of Mexican-Native American origin. Sadhguru also met Hollywood star Will Smith and his family at his home and interacted with the legendary boxer Mike Tyson a little ahead of his much-anticipated return to boxing.

What fascinated him about the Native Americans? It was almost 20 years ago, when Sadhguru was staying in the Center Hill Lake area in the US and writing a book at a cottage. "One day, I was walking into the forests and I encountered something very strange and painful. What I saw was a frozen Native American spirit and I had never seen any being in

36 Days, 9,500 miles and 19 states.

**SADHGURU JAGGI
VASUDEV** tells

KARAN KAUSHIK

about exploring spiritual America



* More than 10 million indigenous people lived in the United States at one time. But they were subject to enslavement and subjugation for centuries. Today, there are about 4.5 million Native Americans, which makes for about 1.5 per cent of the population

↻ Traversing the length of North America on his BMW K1600 GT

that kind of pain and filled with so much anger and resentment. It was the most painful experience of my life,” Sadhguru tells me.

He started inquiring about it and found out that the place was called the Trail of Tears in the Cherokee nation. It was, in fact, removed as part of the Indian Removal Act and the Native Americans were made to walk to Oklahoma in terrible weather conditions. “Thousands of them died and that’s why this place came to be known as the Trail of Tears.”

This was also the reason why he started the Isha Institute of Inner-Sciences, a 4,000-acre centre, which is located at the head of

the Trail of Tears. “It’s not the beauty but it’s the pain that drew me to the place.

Since then, I have been looking at their culture and learning about various native tribes,” he says. Most people, Sadhguru says, wouldn’t know that there used to be around 500 Native American nations in the United States itself. Today, they are all there in a nominal way.

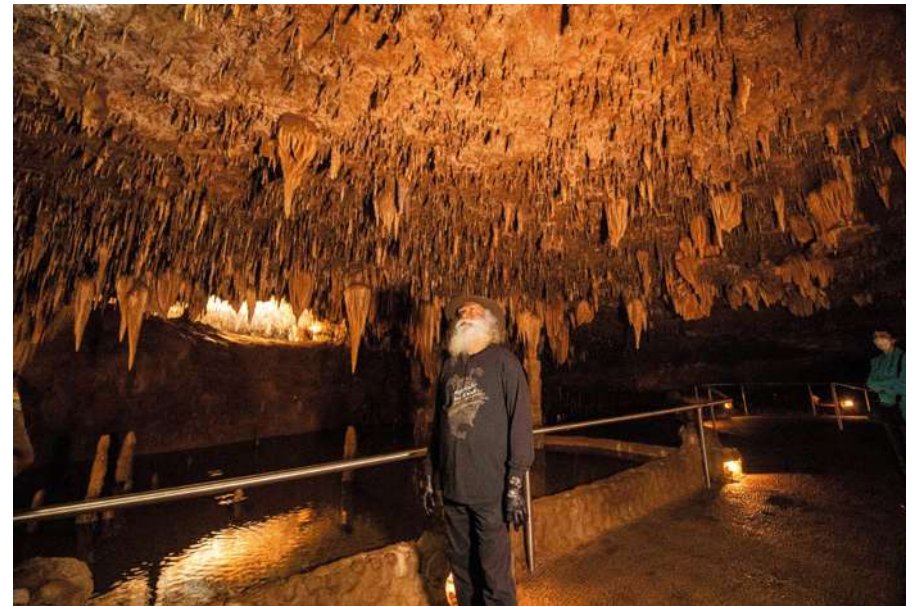
Elaborating on his ride, he says that the terrain was absolutely incredible. “Riding through Wyoming, Dakota, Nevada, New Mexico, Arizona and other states, I must say it’s a motorcyclist’s dream to ride a good surface with swift turns into the mountains taking you through exciting terrains. Even

most Americans would not have seen the terrain in these areas. It’s the grandest terrain especially in terms of dry rocks and mountains. The roads are fantastic for a bike enthusiast.”

When asked about his experience of meeting the Native Americans, Sadhguru was quick to respond. “They are simple, and wonderful but nonetheless deeply pained. They indulge in too much alcohol and drugs and are in a state they shouldn’t be. I’m glad they are making serious efforts to come back, so I am also working towards giving them a positive exposure. Most people don’t know about them yet. Their idea of a Native American person is from the wild west

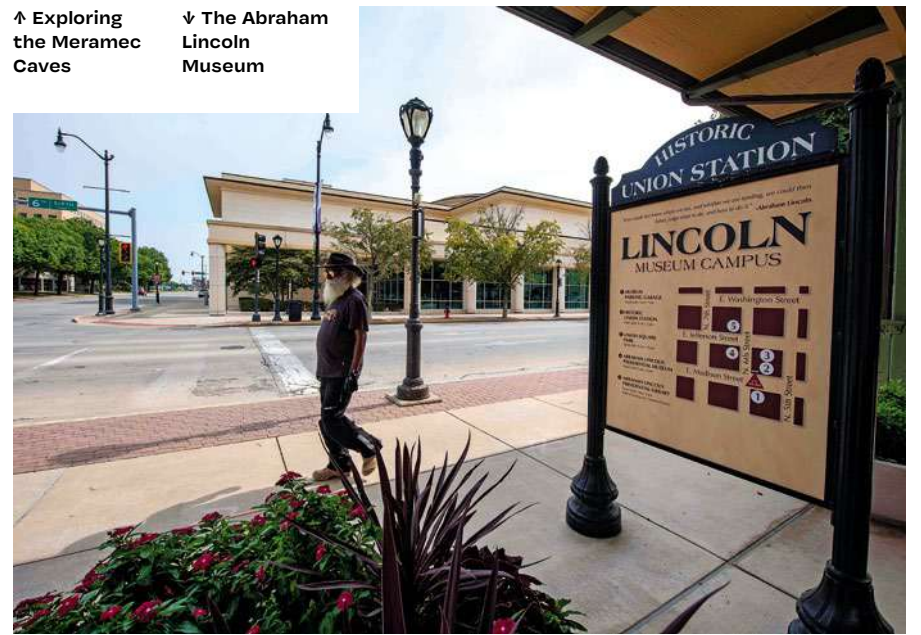
movies and they think they are people who will point a gun at whoever they see. But that’s not who they are.”

Sadhguru asserts that the indigenous people of America have very evolved cultures and some of the members are highly educated. “The youth is trying to join universities and at the same time sticking to their roots and culture. Enough has been said about their history but I was mainly looking at the nature of spiritual practices and their sense of mysticism. That’s what we explored during our trip,” he says. One thing that every person can learn from indigenous people, Sadhguru says, is their love and concern for the environment.



↑ Exploring the Meramec Caves

↓ The Abraham Lincoln Museum



PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY: ISHA FOUNDATION

Talking about his love for motorcycles, the great outdoors and road trips, he says that he used to ride a Yezdi for decades together but for 28 years he didn’t ride motorcycles at all. “It’s not about the love for motorcycles, it’s just that I am in love with life. It was only three years ago that I rode one during the Rally for Rivers. On this trip, I drove a BMW K1600 GT. It’s great on highways but it’s very bad off-road.”

Speaking about how travelling enriches a person, Sadhguru further states that the lives of human beings are dependent to a large extent on what sort of exposure they have. “When you travel like me and not travel from airport to airport and from

hotel to hotel, that’s when you really get to see things. Whenever I travel on the road, the experience is extremely enriching.”

The mystic says he has seen India by being on the road and in a way that most Indians might not have even thought of. “I think today, everyone is travelling on their cell phone. That’s not travel, that is just information and information doesn’t do anything. It just gives you a make-belief conclusion about life. If you think that you know a lot about travelling because you have seen it on your mobile or computer screen, you are mistaken. Travelling is a very different experience. It’s life altering,” he exclaims. 📍

Arrowhead (T84) on
a routine patrol

50
RANTHAMBHORE

INTO THE lair

**Nature's
Call**
Jungle safari and
rare sightings

**Through
the Lens**
A photographer's
delight

**Tryst with
Royalty**
Majestic tigers in
their natural habitat

*A childhood tradition, a touch and go
with nostalgia, learning and unlearning
and eschewing convention. Text and
photographs by*

ARJUN ANAND

M

MY DAY AT RANTHAMBHORE
STARTS AT 4AM

I wake up, usually before the alarm goes off. I still keep it, though. You never know when it will come in handy. It's dark outside, but you can faintly hear the hustle and bustle of everyone's morning pre-safari ritual. Sometimes I play some light music as I get ready. I like jazz. I put on my lucky cap and check to see if all my gear is in place. As I pack each piece of equipment carefully into my camera case, I think about ways to challenge myself. Might carry a different set of lenses, perhaps something wider to include some of the habitat in the image. I think my 35mm and 58mm Nikon lenses would be a good choice.

LIKE MANY, I WAS SMITTEN by the camera at the first go, and the desire to capture mystical portraits of tigers in their full glory took me into the woods. But the jungle soon cast its spell upon me, and what started as an art project became the story of Hamir. The anger in his snarl and the innocence of his stare soon emancipated me from the boundaries of an artist and catapulted me into the realm of devotion, storytelling and, to be honest, love.

In my journey as a photographer, Hamir has taught me a lot. A perfect photograph is a story in itself; it starts with an idea, builds into vivid imagination but soon takes a life of its own. The subject, dead or living, speaks to the photographer and the result is a child of this union, literally breathing and alive. *Hamir—The Fallen Prince of Ranthambore* is a form of art that betrays a lot of conventions. 🐾



↑ A portrait of Noor (T39) while raising her cubs

↓ Spotted deer become aware of a tiger's presence



↑ JAM (T112) quenching his thirst during the summers



↓ Noor's cubs take a nap while the mother is away arranging supper

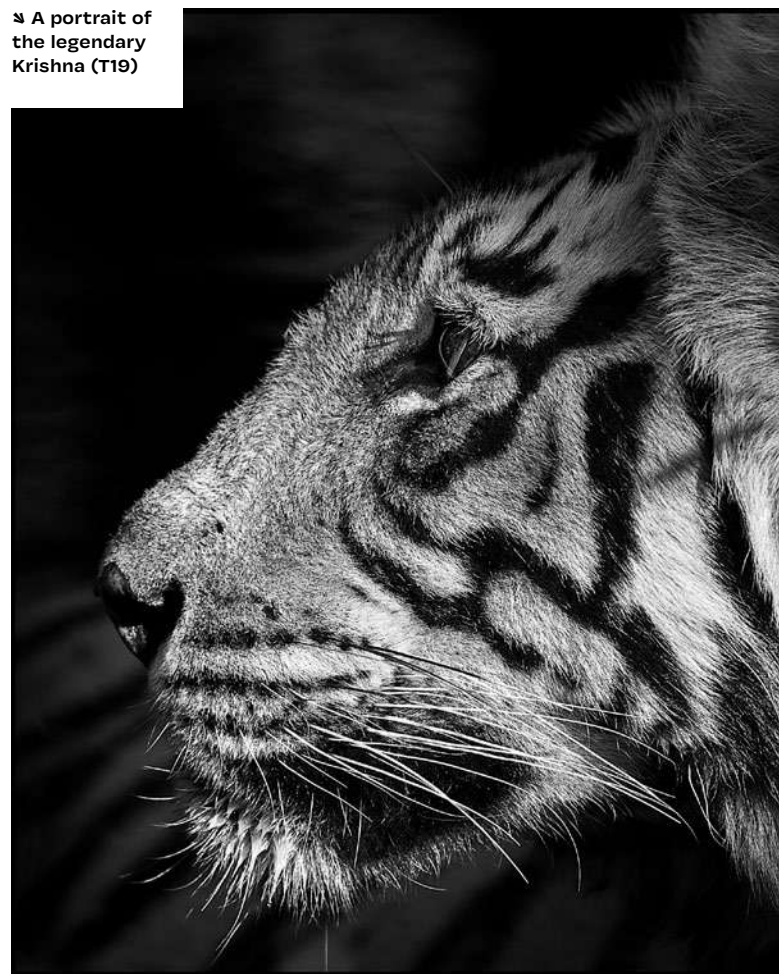
A perfect photograph is a story in itself; it starts with an idea, builds into vivid imagination but soon takes a life of its own



The anger in his snarl and the innocence of his stare soon emancipated me from the boundaries of an artist and catapulted me into the realm of devotion, storytelling and, to be honest, love

➤ Shakti (T11) roaming freely in the wild

➤ A portrait of the legendary Krishna (T19)





↓ Arrowhead approaching an unsuspecting herd of deer



↗ Arrowhead and Noor after a round of mating



← Hamir (T104)
before he was
banished by
his parents



**HAMIR: THE FALLEN PRINCE OF
RANTHAMBORE**
by ARJUN ANAND
PIRATES INDIA ₹3,999

The background image shows the interior of a classic London pub. In the foreground, there are dark leather armchairs and small round tables. In the background, a well-stocked bar is visible through an arched doorway, with various bottles and glasses on the shelves. The lighting is warm and ambient, with pendant lights hanging from the ceiling.

eat

TRAVEL ONE
BITE AT A TIME

MEGHA JHUNJHUNWALA 64

HERITANCE AARAH 65

GINGERBREAD COOKIES 67

PHOTOGRAPH: SHUTTERSTOCK

RAISE THE BAR London

Love your cocktails and bar? Take a bite of Britain at London's iconic Connaught Bar

It's hard to put a finger on what is so quintessentially charming about a British pub. These bars sometimes seem to be there just to get you hammered first and foremost, with social interaction being an occasional or, rather, an accidental by-product. Honestly, there's nothing quite like sitting by the blazing fire sipping on a pint of real ale. Most British bars owe their charm to the old buildings that they are housed in. While it's often said that no two bars are ever the same, the low ceilings, wooden beams, log fireplaces and a stream of regular patrons weave a different tale altogether.

But before we wax lyrical about these bars, it's imperative to mention the world leader in nightlife. The winners of this year's World's Best Bars have been announced and the crown has been taken by London's Connaught Bar. Set inside the Mayfair Hotel, the Connaught with its elegant décor, textured silver-leaf walls, plasterwork ceiling and dimmed lighting is probably the most typically English setting you'll ever come across. Run by Italian mixologist Ago Perrone, it's rather infamous 'martini trolley', made just to your liking, is sure to even impress those who have no intention of drinking.

» Connaught unseated Dante, the century-old NYC bar that has been ranked second on the list now

Megha Jhunjhunwala's Journey From the West



ILLUSTRATION: CHITVAN PATEL

A firm believer of 'We are what we eat', **Chef MJ's Hearth and i** has revolutionised the way people eat and enjoy food at home with her curated menu

» What piqued your interest in cooking?

Fire. I love being close to fire on a daily basis, it soothes me. Plus, my family has always enjoyed great food and constantly encouraged me.

» How would you describe your journey from Le Cordon Bleu, Paris to the stage of *Masterchef India*?

Honestly, it has been extremely rewarding so far. I actually started cooking at the age of seven and post my schooling in Kolkata I went to study fashion designing in London. Gradually, I enrolled myself for a course in cuisine and patisserie at Le Cordon Bleu in Paris in 2010. After coming back, I've had many exciting experiences including working at restaurant kitchens, running cafés, teaching at a hospitality institute and my first food venture, Pepperstar. Participating in *Masterchef India* (Season 2) was also one of them.

» Hearth & i specialises in sit-down 3-7 course meals at home. How did the idea come by?

A sit-down meal allows me to be experimental. It's customisable and personalised. It allows me to travel and serve great flavours from across the globe.

» How has the response been, especially during the lockdown?

During the lockdown a lot of people ordered DIY, sit-down 7-course meals which I

» How have your travels influenced your menu?

Travel and cooking go hand in hand for me. I'm a wanderer, sharing, learning, unlearning and carrying different cultures from around the world, through food. I have been blessed to have inter-generational friends, giving me deeper insights into traditional cooking. I always bring back authentic produce and novel ingredients to infuse them with local ones. It instills the confidence in me to set authentic flavours apart, thus, enriching my own experience while cooking for my patrons.



↑ A traditional Swiss cheese fondue is a melted cheese dish served in a communal pot

delivered to their homes. Now the tables have become smaller and groups more closely knit, which always has been an absolute delight to cater to.

» Could you tell us more about the organic produce you use?

The fresh produce used in the food is harvested and served on your plates within 15 hours. I also constantly work on reducing our carbon footprint. We compost all the organic waste and segregate the rest for disposal, reusing or recycling. The vision is to build a more sustainable and environmentally-conscious company.

» One meal/cuisine that you personally love cooking?

It totally depends on my mood. Currently, it is Italian and Swiss.

—SIMRRAN GILL

CHEF RECOMMENDS

MJ'S MUST-HAVE PICKS FROM HER MENU

Fresh Pasta

All the fresh pasta is a true labour of love. And once you eat this, there is no going back to the packed, store-bought pasta.



Ashta Fingers

This Middle Eastern delicacy is one of the signature dishes. It is a dessert that will please the ones with a sweet tooth and is a must-try.



The floating breakfast at Heritance Aarah is a great start to the day



BREAKFAST WITH A VIEW OUT OF THE BLUE

IS IT WORTH GIVING the much-hyped 'floating breakfast' at Heritance Aarah a shot? The answer can only be in the affirmative. Making the good ol' breakfast in bed an obsolete concept, Heritance Aarah's latest offering is for the select few. Set amid the cool waters of the infinity pool with a gorgeous view of the sylvan surroundings, the floating breakfast at Heritance Aarah is the ultimate indulgence. The credit for the lavish spread mainly goes to the kitchen and service staff. The large floating tray is packed with spectacular breakfast delicacies including the likes of papaya, lime and chia seed smoothies, egg white

omelette, frothy cappuccino, pancakes topped with cherries and waffles dunked in sinful chocolate sauce. However, the showstopper was undoubtedly the crisp, fresh salad. A perfect accompaniment with pretty much everything, the flavour and textures incorporated are quite refreshing. A combination of lettuce, edamame, tomatoes and light vinaigrette, I honestly cannot wait get to indulge in this beautiful creation again. The liquid gold latte is a great way to end the meal. The turmeric-infused immunity booster simply jazzes up your breakfast and serves as a much-needed morning jolt.

—RUPALI DEAN



Heritance Aarah

✕ Maldives

The enormous floating tray packed with the finest spread makes for an exceptional culinary experience

Heritance Aarah, Raa Atoll, Republic of Maldives

• 7am-11am; open till 11pm for aperitif

* Try the pancakes doused in maple syrup and topped with fresh bananas, berries and honeycomb butter. It's light, fluffy and almost melts in your mouth

What's hot in the food world?

FROM STREET FOOD TO GOURMET MEALS, TRY IT ALL!

Virtual Culinary Bonanza

✕ HONG KONG

The annual culinary festival hosted by Hong Kong Tourism Board is taking place online this year owing to the pandemic. Over 500 restaurants have participated in the festival so far, including Michelin-starred establishments that are serving up menus at half the price. The festival's 'Gourmet at Home' menu has recipes curated by top-rated restaurants. Patrons also have the opportunity to connect with Hong Kong's leading chefs, restaurants and industry leaders through virtual pairings, workshops and classes.

» The festival began on 11 November and will run till 15 December



Green on the Go

✕ UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

We've got a whole new reason to fall in love with America's favourite fast food chain. McDonald's is all set to offer plant-based burgers, chicken substitutes and breakfast sandwiches. The new line of meat alternatives—called McPlant—will be launched in 2021. The aim of the new meat-free menu is to cater to the ever-increasing vegan client base. This move has also been driven by concerns over effects on health, the environment and animal welfare.

» The trials of the new menu were conducted in collaboration with Beyond Meat



Zing of the Hing

✕ HIMACHAL PRADESH

A smelly acrid spice beloved by Indians, *hing* or asafoetida has a special place in the desi kitchen. After spending millions of dollars on importing this spice, India is finally growing its first batch of indigenous *hing*. The Institute of Himalayan Bioresource Technology in Palampur, Himachal Pradesh recently announced that they had planted 800 saplings of *Ferula asafoetida* in the cold desert of Lahaul and Spiti. Mostly used to add umami to an array of savoury dishes, *hing*'s pungent-flavoured odour mellows to a more leek-and-garlic-like flavour, when cooked properly.

» *Hing* was once called the 'devil's dung'



PHOTOGRAPH: SHUTTERSTOCK

Made in moulds of all shapes and sizes, the gingerbread man is easily the most loved of all

What is Christmas without the aroma of sugar and cinnamon taking over the entire kitchen? Well, 'tis the season of gingerbread again. While the origins of this holiday visitor might be a little murky, it is nevertheless a festive classic. You can bake it up to be as soft or crispy as you'd like. Usually made in moulds of all shapes and sizes, the gingerbread man is easily the most loved of all. In fact, the big gingerbread traditions come from Germany, France, the Netherlands and the British Isles. These ginger and spice flavoured cookies can be served with fresh sliced peaches or peach crumble. Today, the traditional gingerbread houses have become a global phenomenon.

Gingerbread Cookies

Gingerbread House

The tradition of making gingerbread houses is said to have emerged in Germany in the 1800s.

Layered with candies and lollies, it makes for the perfect Christmas centrepiece



RECIPE FOR GINGERBREAD CHRISTMAS COOKIES

- ➔ In a large bowl, sift together 6 cups all-purpose flour, 1 tsp baking soda, 1/2 tsp baking powder
- ➔ In another bowl, beat 1 cup unsalted butter and 1 cup sugar until light and fluffy
- ➔ Mix in 4 tsp ground ginger, 4 tsp ground cinnamon, 1 1/2 tsp ground cloves, 1 tsp finely ground pepper and some salt

- ➔ Add 2 eggs and 1 cup unsulfured molasses to this batter
- ➔ While stirring, gradually add the flour mixture to the batter and beat until combined
- ➔ Divide the dough in thirds and wrap each piece in plastic

* A pure white icing that dries to a matte finish, it's made using egg whites, icing sugar and lime.

- ➔ Preheat oven to 350 degree Fahrenheit and line your baking tray with parchment paper
- ➔ On a floured surface, roll out the dough to 1/8 inch thickness. Use cookie moulds to cut the dough into desired shapes
- ➔ Bake the cookies for about 20 minutes till they are crisp but not darkened. Transfer to a wire rack and let it cool
- ➔ Decorate using royal icing*

PHOTOGRAPH: SHUTTERSTOCK

stay

HOTELS,
HOSTELS AND
NOTHING LIKE
HOME



Once you've settled into your bungalow, it's time to plan some excursions. Luckily, the Jalans, who are passionate travellers, run a renowned tour company—Purvi Discovery—with tours all over the Northeast. From Mancotta, your options include trips to nearby Kaziranga (for the one-horned rhinoceros) and Dibru-Saikhowa (for a spot of birding) national parks, and Majuli (the biggest river island in the world) and Rukmini islands. Those of a more historical bent can see the Ahom monuments at Sibsagar or the World War II cemetery at Digboi

CUP OF Solace

If you want an indulgent taste of the planter's life, check into the Mancotta Chang Heritage Bungalow

✕ DIBRUGARH, ASSAM

The 'chang' in the name alludes to the stilts on which these bungalows—also called 'chang ghars'—were built, to protect against the flood waters of the Brahmaputra and to keep wild animals, especially creepy crawlies, out. More than a century old, Mancotta Chang served as the superintending manager's bungalow before the owners—Manoj and Vineeta Jalan, who belong to one of the oldest tea-growing families in Assam—converted it into a heritage stay about two decades ago. It has been spoiling guests with old-world service since then. A glorious rain tree overlooks the colonial-style bungalow, while across a gate lie sprawling tea gardens. Rooms have been added on the ground floor but, if you can, choose one of the upper floor rooms. The food is excellent and, for at least one meal, opt for the Assamese thali. Sunsets are best savoured with a nice G&T or a cuppa of full-bodied Assam. The accompaniment of choice at Mancotta Chang? Tea-leaf fritters!

—AMIT DIXIT

UMED BHAWAN 70

•

VIVEK SHUKLA 71

↓ The façade of the property



✕ KOTA, RAJASTHAN

Drenched in Grandeur

UMED BHAWAN PALACE

AMID THE CHAOS OF high-end hotels in Kota, WelcomHeritage Umed Bhawan Palace—in pink sandstone—is an escape into the heyday of royalty. Designed by Sir Swinton Jacob on the orders of Maharaja Umed Singh, it is a fine blend of Victorian and Rajput architecture. Its lush lawns, sprawling courtyards, picturesque ceilings, and marble corridors are as though living a regal dream. Look out for the hunting trophies along with exquisite royal heirlooms on display here.

Escape

Nerd it out at the **Brij Vilas Palace Government Museum**, which displays an exquisite range of rare and ancient sculptures, miniature paintings and arms.

Stroll around the **Kishore Sagar Lake** and explore the **Seven Wonders Park** at dusk.



Visit the nearby Ratan Sev in Nayapura to savour piping **hot kachoris**.

Stroke it like Reyes

Unwind at the billiards room with some good ol' jazz, while the animal trophies from a bygone era serve as a loyal audience.

» A mini-bar can be set up in the room upon request



PHOTOGRAPHS: KARAN KAUSHIK

* Your first hospitality job?

Executive housekeeper at Jehan Numa Palace, Bhopal in 1999.

* At what age did you become a General Manager?

At 43 for Neemrana's Tijara Fort-Palace.

* Favourite corner of the hotel?

The Shatranj Terrace, where you can bask in the beauty of the entire fort-palace, especially when it's lit up post sundown.

* 5 words you think sum up a successful hotel?

Passion, guest satisfaction, team work, upgradation and humanity.

* What's your property's philosophy?

Every Neemrana property has its own unique style, architecture and history. Hence, the guest experience is always unique at each property. Known as 'non-hotel hotels', Neemrana gives a holistic experience. Our focus is on everything local, whether it's craftsmanship, food or even the staff, who are recruited from nearby places and trained right from scratch.

* Which department is your pride?

Although housekeeping is at the core of any property and is called the 'backbone' of the hotel, all other departments are equally important and have to work closely to produce a great show.

* Who inspires you?

I am extremely inspired by our chairman, Mr Aman Nath. His vision, passion, simplicity and appreciation for good work always motivate me to do more—innovatively and continuously.

✕ RAJASTHAN

Meet The General Manager

NEEMRANA FORT PALACE'S VIVEK SHUKLA

Donning more than one hat, Vivek Shukla began his career in the hospitality sector in 1999. Apart from a degree from IHM Bhopal, he has certifications in personnel management, labour laws, as well as interior designing.

With his interest lying in fields beyond just hospitality, Shukla's strength is his versatility. A multitasker and result-oriented, Shukla believes that an honest step everyday towards your goal will lead you to perfection. With a keen eye for detail, his love for restoration, renovation, interior designing, as well as bonsais keep him occupied at Neemrana. Being the nature enthusiast that he is, he's also won the JAL World Bonsai Contest, organised by Japan Airlines, three times in a row. He believes that the key to solve even the biggest problems at hand lies in being calm, polite and patient.

— RUPALI DEAN





posh

72

TRAVEL IS
LEISURE

IF YOU GET TIRED,
LEARN TO REST, NOT
TO QUIT. —BANSKY

↑ Yoga nidra
therapy is
music to our
ears

Deep Forest

Vana is a wellness retreat like no other. **Amit Dixit** undergoes a metamorphosis of sorts—of the good kind

ON A SHOWAROUND OF VANA, a super-exclusive wellness retreat bordering a forest in Dehradun, I stepped into the balcony of a suite and was shocked to find a massive cobweb, its house-proud owner giving me a nonchalant stare. “We believe in co-existence,” explained Prasoon Kumar Pandey, the property’s general manager.

It’s gestures such as these—and there are several—that define Vana’s offbeat approach, charting a unique course in the world of wellness. For one, rather than succumb to a single system of healing, Vana promotes several—Ayurveda, Sowa Rigpa (Tibetan) and yoga among them—taking the best of each with an open mind. That sort of thing takes a rare passion to pull off. In Vana’s case, its guiding light is its founder, Veer Singh, whose enthusiasm for wellness led him to create this retreat and steer it to a very high standard.

My room—which I fancied as a ‘monastic cell’—was spacious, stylishly subdued in décor, and tech-friendly. There were beautiful views of the mountains under a deep-blue Dehradun sky, but I had to keep the balcony door shut owing to our tailed relatives who love Vana nearly as much as us. Imagined as a forest, guests are referred to as Vanavasis or forest dwellers here. Certainly, we all looked the same, clad in our white Abraham & Thakore kurta-pajamas that are compulsory in the public spaces.

I was welcomed with a Tibetan Kunye massage. Vana is one of the few dedicated centres of Tibetan wellness in the world. The Dalai Lama blessed it at its opening. The therapies, I soon figured, are of the ‘serious’ kind, less ‘indulgent spa’, more ‘healing medicine’.

Any stay here begins with a wellness consultation, after which they draw up a customised programme. You just have to land up for your treatments at the appointed time. For the rest, there are retreat activities through the day and you’re free to join as many—or as few—as you please. As I flitted about my business, I could see other Vanavasis doing the same, moved by some inner compass.

The kunye was an auspicious beginning to my

wellness journey and, over the five-day retreat, I watched myself transform. I learnt to relax, became re-energised, was more aware of my surroundings. Mobiles and photography are strictly not permitted in the common areas. With no mobile, there's no option but to be mindful.

Among the many sessions of Ayurvedic massage, foot reflexology (the proper stuff), even some physiotherapy for my aching joints, two experiences stood out.

One was a consultation with the renowned 'Naadi Vaidya' Ajit Singh Yadav. For about 15 minutes, while I reclined on a couch, he felt my pulse and frowned. After that, he effectively told me the story of my life, outlining everything that was ailing me. Like Bollywood, wellness too requires 'a willing suspension of disbelief'. This flick had a happy ending. In part two of the consultation, Dr Yadav gave me the fix.

✱ **Vana is one of the few places in the world where Sowa Rigpa, Tibet's traditional system of medicine, is offered in its complete avatar.**

The other eureka moment was an acupuncture session, a first for me. Dr Dimple, the acupuncturist par excellence, gave it to me straight. "You've downloaded too many files into your system," she said. "You need to loosen up." And loosen up I did, to the point of feeling light headed. Over the next few days, there was a spring in my step. Had my energy pathways been unblocked finally? Was the chi flowing properly? And what did it? The needles she deftly jabbed into me? The genuine feeling with which she communicated?

Food is the unspoken healer at Vana. The short but eclectic menu only has superlative dishes, and the restrained portions are plated like works of art. It's all healthy, with no compromise on taste. Unusually, Vana may well be the only wellness retreat in India that has non-vegetarian food on offer. And you can ask for a glass of wine or sake.

Over the course of five days, I pretty much ran through the entire menu. So I have a few favourites. Poached eggs and pomegranate juice for breakfast, paired with oat and millet waffles. Kung bao prawns and cumin and coriander-crust sole for lunch. Spinach and lentil galette followed by grilled prawn for dinner. And,



↓ The spacious Esteva Suite, perfect for families



always, dessert, chocolate being the best (no anaemic gelatos for me, please).

Set in the grounds of a former fruit orchard, Vana has been landscaped to perfection. From a book in the retreat's carefully curated library, I learnt about forest bathing. So I went for walks in the 20-acre oasis, resisting the temptation of filching bits of the dwarf mondo grass (aka Kyoto grass) planted in the shade of old-growth trees where nothing else will grow.

Healing and wellness are so thoughtfully woven into the fabric of Vana that it is difficult to unravel the strands. There's aroma, for instance. Every area in Vana has a distinctive one. There's beautiful music, from live flute recitals to the urbane jazzy

At Vana, there is a deep sense of belonging, of being part of something wonderful. The best thing is that it's helmed by an amazing bunch of healers who appear to take the lead in its running

riffs floating down from the restaurant speakers. Nature is alive with bird call and other activity, even the occasional deer. And there's art. All of Vana is artist Siraj Saxena's canvas, where he has created the most stimulating artwork out of waste materials.

→ Getting ready for some poultice therapy

← Kila, considered a sacred space at Vana, is a mobile-free zone

↓ Another delicious dessert at Vana (yup, this is wellness too)



At Vana, there is a sense of belonging. The best thing is that it's helmed by a bunch of healers who take the lead in its running. Dr Jaya always checks in on guests at breakfast. Everyone seems genuinely concerned for your well-being—which is healing too. Arrive as a sceptic, leave as a believer.

Quite sensibly, even though Uttarakhand no longer requires it, Vana insists on an RT-PCR test three days before arrival and a rapid antigen one when you check in. This is the new normal. With therapies being conducted with obvious physical proximity, it makes sense. The staff stays on the premises, so it's a COVID-free bubble, really. When the masks can finally come off, it's therapeutic, to say the least. 🧘

back

— BOOKS —

A conversation about and an extract from **Loss**, Siddharth Dhanvant Shanghvi's latest book

LITTLE
THINGS TO
FILL IN YOUR
JOURNEY

— GEAR —

**Puffer jacket,
passport sleeve,
and gear ties**

The monthly roundup

* Emerging from the Kunzum Range, the crystal blue water of the Spiti River cuts through the white limestone landscape and almost seems otherworldly. A tributary of the Satluj, the river nourishes the areas of Tabo, Dhankar, Kaza and Rangrik. Once known as the Tethys Sea, the origins of the river date back over 200 million years. What remains today are the remnants of the past, including rich fossilised marine life. The valley is slated to reopen its doors for travellers in April 2021.

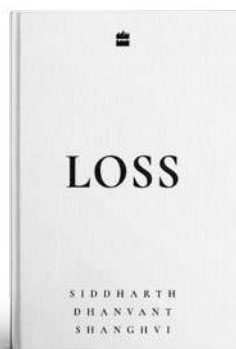


What does it mean to lose someone?

Bestselling author Siddharth Dhanvant Shanghvi draws on a string of devastating personal losses—of his mother, of his father and of his beloved dog Bruschetta—to answer this timeless question in his first non-fiction book, *Loss*. Shanghvi's first novel, *The Last Song of Dusk*, won the Betty Trask Award, the Premio Grinzane Cavour, and was nominated for the IMPAC Prize. His second book, *The Lost Flamingoes of Bombay*, was shortlisted for the Man Asian Prize. His most recent book is *The Rabbit & the Squirrel* (with illustrations by Stina Wirsén). He lives in north Goa.

LOSS

HARPERCOLLINS ₹499



In *Loss*, Siddharth Dhanvant Shanghvi crafts a moving memoir of death and grief

Was *Loss* a difficult book for you to write?

If a book is easy to write, I would not write it. A difficult book makes a better writer. I wrote the first essay, on losing my father, in a day; I remained with that piece for a year before I began to elaborate on that original draft. Time gave me space to revisit the difficult, the messy, and while time does not heal, it certainly gives pause. On another note, I wish there were more state and private sponsored residencies for younger writers to develop their work. Perhaps hotels should consider to host a 'writer-in-residence' through their off season—meaningful partnerships could emerge. The Neemrana Group had graciously hosted my stay at Barr House, Matheran where I wrote a part of *The Lost Flamingoes of Bombay*.

Loss is many books in one. It's about death and, of course, life. It's about the nature of memory. It's about narration and storytelling. Thoughts?

I want this book to be what it is for you—I wouldn't dare interfere with the privacy of your relationship with *Loss*. I wrote *Loss* as a community book, something we might read to air out the grief. Unlike a novel, which deepens interiority, a book of non-fiction might mirror the reader's own condition. They might, for instance, see that redemption is not suffering's destination; rather, the two run parallel. In India, at the time of death, ritual triumphs experience—when we lose someone we are worrying over where to host the *chautha*, or the relatives who didn't show up, instead of being mindful of this great cosmic event of final departure.

Loss illustrates how widely and deeply you've read. Did you also read specifically for the book?

I am ashamed to admit I had come to



"The pandemic is the powerful destructive face of nature the animal kingdom"

think of reading as dull or difficult—I simply didn't have the stamina of concentration of my younger days. The pandemic made me a reader again, and some of that may have found itself back to *Loss*. I tried very hard—under instruction from my nephews—to watch Netflix but I saw only *Tiger King*, and that was quite enough. I'm presently reading James Salter, Curtis Sittenfeld and Banana Yoshimoto, and it feels like I am in love.

This is a book of dog love as well...

I spent my pandemic with Kora and Lila, proof that extraordinarily good company doesn't rely on language—in that, they might be the opposite of a book, which also serves a similar purpose. Bruschetta—subject of the third essay in *Loss*—was an excellent friend, her enthusiasm for the everyday signalled her acute sophistication. No one tells you losing a dog will mean the light in your world will dim forever. I honestly don't understand the folks who take selfies with people at restaurants when they probably hate their squad or gang or whatever. The only honest friend is a dog, and people should only ever take pictures with them. If you don't have a dog and are thinking of getting one, visit your local shelter today. Wagoa.com is a wonderful animal rescue in north Goa.

— AMIT DIXIT

Extract



SIDDHARTH DHANVANT SHANGHVI

OCTOBER 2009—EIGHTEEN MONTHS

After my mother had died—I was scouting the net to buy a dresser. An odd, desperate classified: a college student, unable to care for an eight-week-old miniature dachshund puppy, had put her up for adoption. The student arrived at a friend's office in Khar with the puppy, who had the swift, elusive air of a mongoose; tan, brisk, soft, supple as if drawn out of hot wax. Under the shade of a giant rain tree, I rang my sister to say I was coming home with a puppy, she might cheer my father up—he was now cured of his cancer. In early 2008, we had shut off my mother's room after her death; now, we'd have to open it up

again, the puppy needed space. On the ride home I felt I was bringing home a baby, her large wondering eyes gazed out at me, her paws were the dearest thing. She had that biscuit smell of puppies.

Although dachshunds were originally bred to hunt badgers, they have also privileged artists and writers as muses: David Hockney's Stanley and Boodgie became subjects of his paintings, and later, a book—*Dog Days*. E.B. White wrote of his own single-minded wiener dog, Fred

"Why Bruschetta?" My sister Parul, who met us at the front door, asked. I'd spent the previous summer in Rome where, at a ristorante on the Tiber in Trastevere, a plate of bruschetta was all I could afford on a night out. "Small but delicious," I told Parul, who stroked Bruschetta's

pendant ears. Behind her, emerging through the hedge of areca palms, a black butterfly with red wing tips.

Although dachshunds were originally bred to hunt badgers, they have also privileged artists and writers as muses: David Hockney's Stanley and Boodgie became subjects of his paintings, and later, a book—*Dog Days*. E.B. White wrote

of his own wiener dog Fred, famously recalcitrant and single-minded. For *Vanity Fair* Dorothy Parker was photographed with Robinson, who exhibited a dachshund's housetraining woes at the Algonquin Hotel—their carpets never recovered. Andy Warhol often arrived at Studio 54 with Archie. Like the artist, Archie was said to stare intently at guests without further comment.

Maybe dogs know this trick, a sleight of paw as it were, they can hack into our loneliness, pry it open like a lock, decode its inner machinery, lay it bare, make us believe we were never teetering into the wrong side of alone. You are on an armchair, reading the newspaper,



SHEKHAR KARAMBELKER

soles rough from use, widowed heart, clogged veins, chemo fog, long day, longer night. Loneliness is a cave of bats that come out at you each evening, a great black musty whoosh that suggests abject isolation can be a form of purgatory. Old age is a suit of defeats; medals no longer hold—the wars blur. Then a puppy sniffs at your ankle, gingerly, auditioning for a lifetime of loyalty. A whisper from the sunny side of your heart, it all starts to make sense—why Cat Stevens wrote a song, ‘I Love My Dog’. In Homer’s *Odyssey*, transformed by his travels, their adventure, fatigue, surprise and spiritual nourishment, Odysseus is disguised and unrecognizable. Only Argos, his dog, knows who he is—he sees him as he always was. Milan Kundera believed dogs were our link to Paradise. “They don’t know evil or jealousy or discontent. To sit with a dog on a hillside on a glorious afternoon is to be back in Eden, where doing nothing was not boring—it was peace.”

My father experienced some version of this peace after Bruschetta had settled into our house. “Every morning,” he said to me, “I must say hello to her.” My father was so tall and strong; even after the rounds of chemo, he never lost his hair. “Before I have breakfast, I must give her one half of my Parle G biscuit.” Sprawled at his feet, she whimpered, recumbent from joy. Falling to his haunches, he tickled her brisket, using the length of his large tapering hands, their suffering saint’s slenderness muddling into this soft brown minx of a thing; they were at opposite spectrums of time.

My father was in the veranda when I made the first

photo of this odd duo. My father is seated on a plastic white chair, a white bib draping his knees; a barber is shaving his cheeks, his head dramatically tilted back. Bruschetta is watching him through the white metal grill doors that separate the house from the veranda. I am behind her, watching her watch him. She has the air of Tagore’s heroine Charulata, domestic, persevering, divided, ruined by love havoc. The true pleasure of a dog’s company lies in an exchange of meaningful quietness. Past the tableau of my father with his barber is a square lawn, a line of palms, one large kadam tree with its golden, insanely fragrant flowers in unseasonable blossom. The photograph fails to capture so many things, including the

My father experienced some version of this peace after Bruschetta had settled into our house. “Every morning,” he said to me, “I must say hello to her.” My father was so tall and strong; even after the rounds of chemo, he never lost his hair. “Before I have breakfast, I must give her one half of my Parle G biscuit.” Sprawled at his feet, she whimpered, recumbent from joy

here he was, so uncommonly gentle with Bruschetta, treating her with the honourable reverence usually reserved for a religious artefact. It made me wonder that a kind of diffidence lay behind my father’s anger, and that if we had gone past it, we too might have encountered this pale, delicate quality. All along, he was only trying to confirm his own awkward presence in the world and in our lives, it just came out all wrong, except for Bruschetta, who took him as he was. She was his Argos, seeing him through his disguise, the friend he never knew he might hope to have. For all the ways they humanize us, dogs commit a service that borders on alchemy. 🐾

fragrance of the kadam flowers, how my father and Bruschetta exchanged glances—everything gets away, and it’s almost always the pretty stuff. In other photos I see Bruschetta watching my father reading the newspaper, or sitting at the opposite end of the couch. Making these photographs was evidence of my father’s unusual tenderness for her, which seemed hidden behind his flashes of whiplash anger, his most striking quality from when we were children. And yet,

➔ Auravedic Skincare

Using all locally sourced, natural ingredients, Auravedic’s products are sulphate and paraben-free. Using the age-old knowledge of the Vedas, they have a range of products—including face oils, serums, masks and moisturisers, that suit all skin types.



» From ₹350 • auravedic.com

➔ Nite Ize Gear Tie

These flexible, reusable gear ties come with a tough rubber exterior for an excellent grip. They are water-proof, UV-resistant and are available in a variety of colours.

» From ₹2,263 • amazon.in



↑ Aurea Flatheads

These plimsolls come with natural bamboo uppers that are 5x cooler on your feet. Suitable for tropical climates and harsh summers, they are also anti-microbial and the flexible uppers can adjust up to half a size.

» From ₹4,995 • flatheads.in

GEARBOX December Picks

bamboo uppers, gear ties, and a sustainable passport sleeve—pack these essentials for when you need to step out in style!



Da Milano Sling Bag



☒ comes with one compartment, two pockets and a dust bag

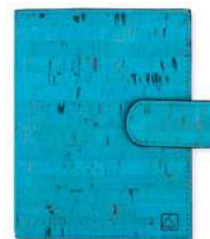
☒ comes with a push-lock

☒ adjustable shoulder strap

☒ lifetime service warranty

☒ available in 4 colours

» From ₹9,999 • damilano.com



↑ Arture Cedar Passport Sleeve

This sustainable sleeve can fit a passport, boarding pass, credit card, a pen and has a designated slot to store an extra sim. Packaged in a cotton drawstring bag, it comes with a magnetic closure.

» ₹2,080 • williampenn.net



↑ TILT

Fratelli Wines’ latest offering, TiLT—wine in a can—is proudly produced in Maharashtra with grapes from farmers in Baramati, Sholapur, Sangli and Nasik. Packed in recyclable cans that are planet-friendly, it is vegan and gluten-free and comes in varieties like red, white, bubbly rosé, and bubbly.

» ₹175 • fratelliwines.in

← Koshha Fleece-Lined Puffer Jacket

☒ eco-conscious and compact; can be packed in a pouch
☒ snow, water, wind-resistant
☒ reversible, detachable hood, ribbed cuffs and insulated fabric
☒ suitable for -20°C to 0°C
☒ one secure pocket inside and two cross pockets on the front with zippers

» ₹5,400 • kosha.co



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY: JOHN BURKE

Kabul 1879

Standing as a testimony to Kabul's war-pathed past, Bala Hissar remains a monumental structure in the southern part of the city for more reasons than one. Built in the 5th century AD, it was the royal, military and administrative hub and was originally divided into two parts. While the lower fortress housed support resources—courtyards, barracks, stables, gardens and pavilions, it was the upper fortress—with royal palaces, dungeons and an armoury—that served to fulfil the purpose and also lent the fort its colloquial name, Upper Bala Hissar. Built at a monumental height, with

an elaborate system of tunnels and underground storage bunkers, the fort overlooks the sprawling cityscape. The former seat of power in Kabul traded various hands, including the likes of Afghans and the British. Before surrendering to its current fate, the fort also served as a stationed base for the British troops during each of the 19th-century Anglo-Afghan wars. Being the biggest open space in the city, the fort is all set to be restored, and become Afghanistan's first public archaeological park. The project will be undertaken by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) and is slated to be completed by 2022. In an attempt to preserve Kabul's

historic legacy, India has also pitched in to lend some financial support—approximately \$1 million. An MoU was signed between the Indian Ambassador to Afghanistan, Vinay Kumar, and the Aga Khan Development Network in August this year. Restoration work on the 65-hectare site—which continues to remain available for military use—has already begun. The association between India and the Aga Khan Trust for Culture in Afghanistan is not unheard of. Prior to this, the two nations worked together on the restoration of the 19th-century Stor Palace, also known as the Qasre Storay, in 2016.

—SIMRRAN GILL

Power Of Ayurveda In A Teaspoon

Get healthy the natural way

Born out of the purity of nature

Asili brings the promise of good health & happiness

From our home to yours, sharing the natural goodness of turmeric, fennel, lemongrass and a whole lot more to boost your immunity, energy and fitness



17.5cm

Asili

Formulations from Asili now available on

www.asilinaturnals.in



Asili.naturals



Asili Naturals

Get online or whatsapp at:
07428305814 to order your pick

*Naturally distanced islands
to ensure maximum safety*



* Fly from India to Maldives via
Air India, Indigo, Go Air and Maldivian

REDISCOVER
Maldives ...the sunny side of life

 **Maldives**
...the sunny side of life

Outlook traveller



ODISHA
INDIA'S BEST KEPT SECRET.

ODISHA

Welcomes You Again

THE LAND OF BEACHES AND TEMPLES, OF SERENE
DRIVES AND COOL GLAMPING, SAFE AND SPECIAL

THE ROAD IS WAITING FOR YOU!

 Puri-Konark Marine Drive





Shri Naveen Patnaik,
Hon'ble Chief Minister of Odisha

FROM THE CM'S DESK

The first step to envisioning Odisha as a tourism hub of global standards is to marry its substance with a contemporary style. With breakthrough innovation in new tourism offerings, Odisha is succeeding at commanding the attention of discerning travellers.

Despite consecutive years of challenges to the tourism and hospitality sector—Cyclone Fani followed by a paralysing pandemic—recent developments are raising hopes for a stellar revival. Our conviction is founded in our zeal to build back better, as we have done repeatedly after recurrent cyclones, while progressively improving our capacity to mitigate adverse impacts.

Having set a benchmark in luxury glamping through the Marine Drive Eco Retreat at Konark last year, we have now scaled up the Eco Retreats to five unique locations—Konark, Hirakud, Bhitarkanika, Daringbadi and Satkosia. The Eco Retreats will offer tourists an excellent opportunity to discover Odisha's diverse tourism offerings, in style.

The vastness and beautiful diversity of Odisha can best be appreciated by cruising to and through the state's excellent road network. The 'Odisha By Road' campaign witnessed a great flag-off on World Tourism Day 2020—during which superbikers from across Odisha rode a narrative-changing ride to various community-managed ecotourism camps in a mark of support for the

UNWTO campaign for rural tourism.

Odisha has pioneered the community-managed model of nature camping, with several properties having earned handsomely, and with the local community retaining the revenues. It has set the template in sustainable tourism not just for the state but for India as a whole.

Lord Jagannath's blessings brought great news towards the end of 2020, with the beautiful Golden Beach at Puri receiving the Blue Flag certification by FEE Denmark by conforming to the stringent environmental norms and ensuring world-class sustainable tourist amenities. The renowned eco-label will add to the charm of the heritage city, already elevated by the Augmentation of Basic Amenities & Development of Heritage and Architecture at Puri (ABADHA).

Our guests' safety and well being are paramount to us. We have engaged with all stakeholders in the tourism and hospitality sector across the state and have provided in-depth training on safety and hygiene protocols, in a manner consistent with Odisha's stellar management of the COVID-19 pandemic.

I call upon tourists from across India to resume their quest for travel with Odisha. I wish you good health and happiness while exploring Odisha, India's best-kept secret.

Jai Jagannath!



FOREWORD

Dear Readers,

As we enter the peak tourism season of 2020 with a hope of a healthier and happier future, it is needless to re-emphasise how well-deserved a getaway is for the entire country that has pulled through this challenging year.

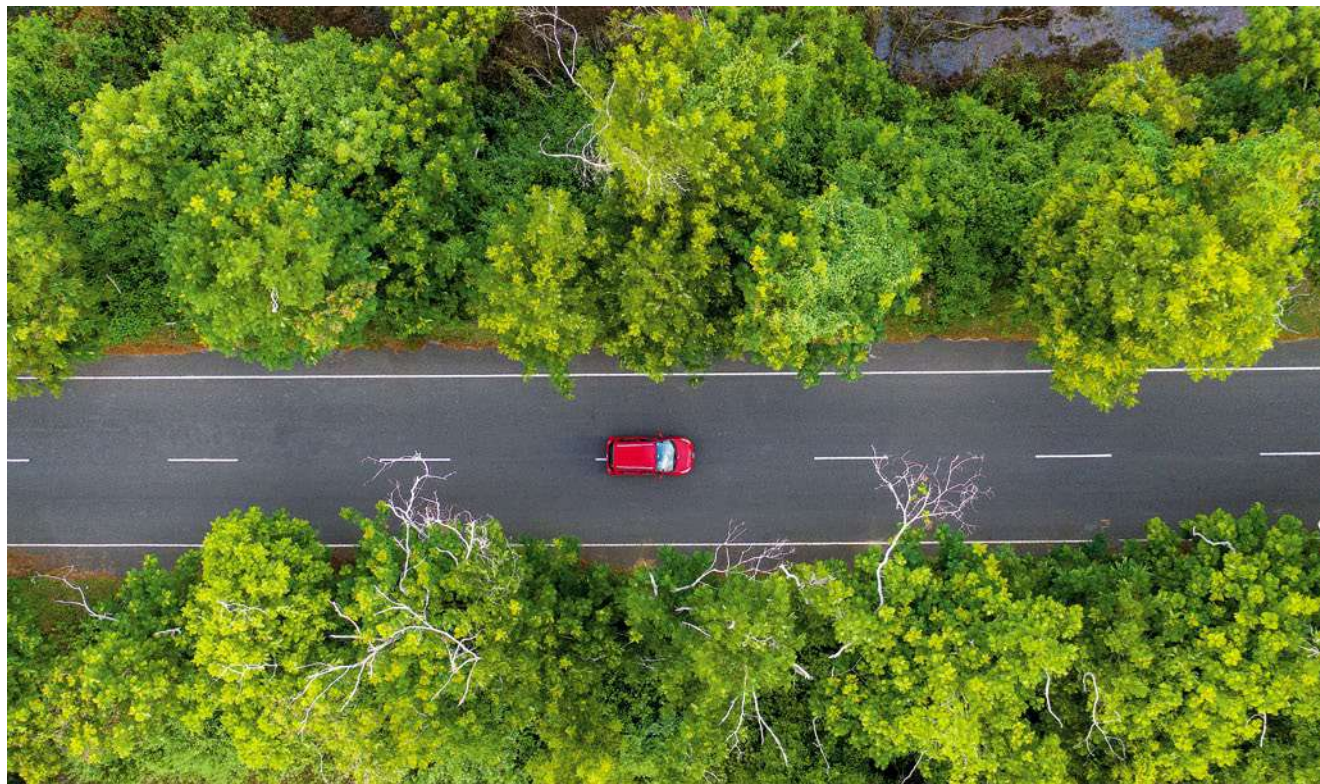
Odisha welcomes you with open arms and with the assurance of your safety and well being. Be it an adventurous rendezvous or rejuvenating leisure trips, spiritual sojourns or trails through wilderness, spontaneous road trips or gastronomic revelations—each experience of yours will be worry free, since Odisha Tourism has undertaken a vast and inclusive drive to sensitise and train service providers across the state in COVID-19 safety protocols.

I am sure that this special edition by *Outlook Traveller* will bring you closer to us. While Odisha Tourism is accessible at a mere click, through our award-winning digital initiative, it is time for you to witness the revelation of India's best-kept secret in person. Wish you safe and happy travels!

Jyoti Prakash Panigrahi
*Minister of State (IC) for Tourism,
Odia Language, Literature and Culture,
Government of Odisha*



IT'S COMPLETELY SAFE TO TRAVEL IN ODISHA



In anticipation of resumption of post-monsoon tourist activity, the Department of Tourism, Government of Odisha, has been working with the state's tourism and hospitality sector through advocacy groups such as the Hotels & Restaurants Association of Odisha (HRAO) to ensure high standards of hygiene and tourist safety. District-level teams plan to familiarise management and employees of tourist destinations and service providers across the spectrum, based on the COVID-19 Preparedness Protocols for Tourist Destinations issued by the Department of Tourism.

In organising the Jagannath Rath Yatra 2020, the Government of Odisha undertook comprehensive preventive measures, including screening of over 2,000 servitors and about 30 police platoons for COVID-19 prior to deployment, besides imposing a curfew across Puri to prevent crowding.

Prime hotels and resorts in the state have brought in technology-leveraged sanitisation mechanisms to implement safety & hygiene protocols and operational recommendations for tourism service providers issued in May 2020 by the Ministry of Tourism.

Odisha Tourism Development Corporation (OTDC) was among the early adapters to these protocols. These practices that were put in place while servicing the lodging, boarding

and transport requirements of healthcare service providers and tourists have been maintained diligently.

Ecotour Odisha, renowned for its game-changing model of community-managed ecotourism camps across the state's protected areas, has instituted specialised training for its staff, in collaboration with reputed institutions such as Institute of Hotel Management Catering Technology & Applied Nutrition (IHMT) and Indian Institute of Tourism & Travel Management (IITTM) Bhubaneswar. The ecotourism workforce has been uncompromising in its commitment to responsible tourism, and has helped preserve visitors' confidence in quality.

The Department of Tourism has also engaged with all the stakeholders and has provided training on COVID-19 protocols. Consistent with Odisha's stellar management of the pandemic, the Eco Retreats will be implemented in complete compliance with guidelines and SOPs prescribed by the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare. Even at the highly anticipated Eco Retreat Odisha the SOPs will be implemented including contactless check-in and check-out, PPE kits for staff, safe procurement of consumables, regular disinfection of all rooms, thermal screening, provision of a comprehensive sanitation package for each checked-in guest, luggage sanitisation, social distancing norms, etc.



A DESTINATION LIKE NO OTHER

Rich culture, glorious history, virgin beaches, bounty of nature and wildlife, abundance of spirituality and a hint of royalty. When in Odisha, there is no dearth of options to explore. Set on the eastern coast of India with the waters of the Bay of Bengal swirling along its boundaries and wedged between the states of West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh, the coastal state of Odisha is the one-stop destination for all kinds of travellers. With a footfall of nearly a million tourists every year, it is called the 'Soul of

India'. In its long-spanning history, Odisha has been known by several names including Kalinga and Utkala and ultimately rose to become the cultural trove of the country, as we know it today. As you delve deeper into the rich history, you can find several museums across the state that stand testament to its glorious past. Be it the lush green and hilly terrain or its coastal plains, its rich cultural festivals or the Buddhist legacy, its palm-fringed silver beaches or the numerous rivers, there's an elusive Odisha waiting to be explored.



ALONG THE HERITAGE TRAIL

Odisha is one of the country's most culturally and historically rich states. With its grand, ancient temples, rock edicts and shrines that host many a fair and festival, it beckons religious tourists, heritage buffs and those in love with grand monuments and superlative craftsmanship.

The Golden Triangle circuit connecting the bustling historical capital of Bhubaneswar, the sacred coastal town of Puri and the Unesco World Heritage Site of Konark, is a great way to experience the most iconic of the state's offerings. One may start at Bhubaneswar or Puri and head on along either arm of the triangle, witnessing light-and-sound shows (at all three), take short detours such as the one to the crafts centre of Raghurajpur.

Strewn around with monasteries, stupas, relics, seals, stone tablets and statues, the Diamond Triangle comprising Ratnagiri, Lalitgiri and Udaygiri is an integral part of India's Buddhist trail. Located in the Jajpur district, within close proximity to each other, the three sites can be part of a long day trip from Bhubaneswar. One could begin at Ratnagiri, and head further along to Udaygiri and Lalitgiri to discover a slice of history waiting to be discovered.

The periphery of the otherwise bustling city of Bhubaneswar offers the twin delights of the Udayagiri and Khandagiri caves (approximately 5kms



away) and the Dhauligiri Shanti Stupa (approximately 8kms away). The former is a collection of 30-odd **gumphas** (caves) that were chiselled out of the two hills at the behest of Mahameghavahana king Kharavela, as residential cloisters for Jain ascetics in the first century BC, and bear ornate inscriptions and sculptures on their panels. The sculptures on the inside of the caves depict episodes from King Kharavela's life.

Dhauligiri, on the banks of the river Daya, is supposedly the site of the Kalinga war and the subsequent transformation of Chanda Ashoka into Dharma Ashoka. Cradled within its lush environs is the Dhauli Shanti Stupa or Peace Pagoda, built in 1972 by the Kalinga Nippon Buddha Sangha and Japan Buddha Sangh. Worth seeing is the Ashokan edict in Brahmi along with the accompanying

elephant sculpture.

As one reaches Konark, the ruined grandiloquence of the Sun Temple, with its ornate carvings, sculptures and temple structures, comes alive with the first light of day, as the sun's rays fall on the delicately carved depictions of celestial congress. Built in granite, this Black Pagoda of yore—now a Unesco World Heritage Site—is quite literally akin to a chariot stopped in time, with originally seven horses and 12 pairs of wheels.

The highly revered 12th-century Jagannath Temple of Puri is the site of the famous annual affair of the Ratha Yatra. The structure presently has four compartments and four gates in the outer of its two concentric walls. The premises also house a lot of smaller shrines and platforms, seven wells, two gardens and a sacred banyan tree.



GET INTO THE SWING OF THINGS

Any trip to the sylvan state of Odisha will be incomplete without experiencing its popular folk dances like Odissi, Chhau and Gotipua to name a few. Archaeological evidence suggests that Odissi might be the oldest dance form of India. This ancient dance form is a beautiful depiction of mythical and religious stories and devotional poems. The themes for Odissi are usually drawn from Vaishnavism and stories surrounding various Hindu deities. You'll even see sculptures of Odissi dancers carved on the walls and pillars of the

heritage monuments across the state.

Then there's Chhau, a part of the Unesco Intangible Cultural Heritage in India and a beautiful blend of dance and martial arts. Chhau dancers can be seen decked up in attractive face masks during the performances. Try and schedule your visit around the spectacular Konark Festival, hosted by the Odisha Tourism Board. The festival invites classical dancers from all corners of the country, who perform various dance forms like Odissi, Bharatanatyam and Kathak.





Odissha is nothing less than a paradise for the tasteful shopper. When you're done marvelling at the natural and heritage sights across the state, indulge in some retail therapy. Look for the Sambalpuri Ikat saris, known for their attractive geometrical and curvilinear patterns and feathery appearance. Men can opt for Sambalpuri shirts, which are great during summer. Art lovers can head to the small artists' village of Raghurajpur and shop for traditional handicrafts. If you love appliqué work, head to Pipli for some of the best options. From bedsheets to wall hangings, appliqué handicrafts feature gorgeous floral patterns and images of Lord Jagannath and his siblings.



An aerial photograph of a winding asphalt road that snakes through a dense, vibrant green forest. The road features white dashed lines and has a few vehicles: a red car, an orange car, and a white truck. The surrounding landscape is filled with various types of trees, including some with bright yellow foliage. The overall scene is serene and scenic.

ODISHA BY ROAD

Odisha has hitherto been known primarily for its beautiful Golden Triangle of Bhubaneswar–Puri–Konark, pivoted on Lord Jagannath's seat. Several other treasures nestled in the state's hinterland are waiting to be explored. The state boasts of an excellent road network that is not being sufficiently utilised. The scenic roads of Odisha can put many states on the eastern coast to shame. Largely unexplored, these routes have secrets hidden in every corner. In order to boost tourism, the Odisha Tourism Board recently announced the launch of the 'Odisha By Road' campaign. The tourism board has mapped all the important destinations which can be explored by road and has curated driving itineraries for inter-state and intra-state tourists.

The Cascade Trail from Ranchi to Keonjhar not only takes you on a journey across a picturesque route, where you get to see miles and miles of nature on both sides of the road, but also offers a glimpse into the rich heritage and culture of the region. Make a pit-stop at Ghatagaon to pick up a few terracotta handicrafts.

The Tiger Trail beginning from Jamshedpur and Ranchi to Similipal Tiger Reserve is a delight for wildlife enthusiasts and nature lovers alike. Replete

with cascading waterfalls like Sitakund, Joranda, Devkunda, and Dudma, the drive promises to be relaxing and enriching.

Reaching for the Hills, an itinerary modelled by the tourism board starts from Visakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh and ends at Daringbadi. Set at an altitude of 3,000ft, it is the only destination in Odisha that witnesses snowfall during the winters. Dotted with pine trees, waterfalls, coffee and pepper gardens, it is the home of one of the most ancient tribes of India called 'Kuthia Kondas'. Often known as the 'Kashmir of Odisha', Daringbadi offers an eclectic mix of cultural, tribal and nature tourism. One can also head to Mandasaru from here. Often called the 'Silent Valley of Odisha' due to its frequent weather changes, mesmerising beauty and rich biodiversity, it's a trekker's paradise. The Mandasaru Gorge ecosystem is located in the eastern part of Kandhamal district of Odisha and is surrounded by dense tropical moist deciduous forest on all sides.

One could also drive up to the Hirakud Reservoir from Raipur or Bilaspur, as part of the 'Quest for Odisha's Wild West' trail. Hirakud is the world's longest earthen dam and stands across the Mahanadi River. One can make one's way to the several minarets nearby. The Gandhi Minar, a watchtower located on top of a hill, offers a bird's-eye view of the Hirakud Dam. The beauty of the Hirakud Dam is best experienced through a stunning 21-kilometre drive across the dyke.

Hit NH-26 from Visakhapatnam to head to Koraput via the Deomali Hills. This monsoon escape itinerary allows you to make a pit stop at Mangalajodi and enjoy the scenic beauty of the Araku Valley. Dotted with forests, waterfalls, terraced valleys and darting springs, Koraput is a treasure trove of nature, tribal life and history. Nestled between the Eastern Ghats and some breathtaking scenery, Koraput has some of the major rivers of Odisha passing through it, namely Machhakunda, Vamsadhara and Kolab. The district is primarily dominated by the indigenous or tribal communities.

The Puri-Konark Marine Drive is among the most popular long-drive routes in the state. While one side of the road is covered in a lush green canopy, the other side witnesses the crashing waves of the sea.

The 'Deep into the Mangroves' route from Kolkata to Bhitarkanika National Park and the 'Cruising along the Circars' from Visakhapatnam to Chilika Lake are also an integral part of the 'Odisha By Road' campaign.





GOING THE GREEN WAY

Odisha is richly endowed with nature, wildlife and biodiversity, thereby making it an ideal escape for a sustainable getaway. The ecotourism camps and corridors in the state often make it a traveller's first choice for a nature trail. One can choose from a variety of activities such as trekking, sightseeing, boating and birding when in Odisha. Some of the most preferred destinations for eco-tourism in Odisha include the Similipal Tiger and Biosphere Reserve, the Bhitarkanika National Park and the Satkosia Tiger Reserve.

Set in Mayurbhanj, Similipal is where you can experience the calmness of nature. Sprawling over an area of 2,750 sq kms, this tiger reserve is among the first nine designated tiger reserves that were established in 1973. Apart from boasting of a rich vegetation, meandering rivers and cascading waterfalls, it also holds the highest tiger population in the state.

Spread along the Satkosia Gorge along the Mahanadi River, Satkosia Tiger Reserve is a wildlife photographer's delight. The reserve comprises two wildlife sanctuaries—Satkosia Gorge Sanctuary and Baisipalli Sanctuary. Go on a river cruise to catch a glimpse of the many elusive beasts in their natural habitat.

Known for its splendour, the Chandaka-Dampara Wildlife Sanctuary is a colourful blend of semi-evergreen forests, thorny bamboo brakes and sal forests. There are two nature camps within sanctuary premises—the Deras Nature Camp and Godibari Nature Camp, located within the same vicinity and just five kilometres apart. A night stay at Chandaka-Dampara Wildlife Sanctuary, away from the chaos of city life, is precisely what one needs to tune into nature.

When it comes to birding, Chilika, without a doubt, is the ideal choice. Do not miss the annual National Chilika Bird Festival held during the winters. After the riveting success of the first two editions, the state is all set to host the 3rd edition from 8th to 10th January, 2021. Another delightful experience in store for travellers is a visit to the Nalabana Bird Sanctuary, which is open only during the National Chilika Bird Festival. For a unique experience travellers can also head to the houseboats at Chilika Lake and Bhitarkanika National Park and surrender to their serene surroundings. These houseboats are run by private operators on operation and management basis. One of the largest freshwater lakes, the Tampara Lake is also a great avenue for all kinds of watersports. This beautiful lake along with the nearby Chilika Lagoon speaks volumes about the ecological diversity of Odisha.

THE SILENT CHANGEMAKERS COMMUNITY-MANAGED ECOTOURISM IN ODISHA



Minds are powerful and inevitable, if tuned appropriately"—this is the transformational success story that the Forest Department of Odisha has set forth before the world.

Of the total population of Odisha, around 83 per cent live in rural areas and their role in preserving and conserving the natural resources of the state is vital. Realising their role in forest and wildlife conservation, during the year 2016, the Forest and Environment Department launched

an innovative scheme called 'Community Managed Nature Tourism' for providing alternative livelihood to the forest-dependent communities. The new scheme has proven to be beneficial for the rural economy of the state. More than 600 locals in different regions of Odisha are employed in 42 ecotourism nature camps and a majority of them are women. This has been an alternative income for them, as earlier they used to rely on forest produce for their survival by poaching, smuggling, fishing, collecting honey, mahua, firewood, etc.

The local folks have raised the revenue of state ecotourism from 47 lakhs during 2015-16 to 6.85 crores during 2019-20. More than 46,000 visitors from different parts of the world have visited the nature camps during 2019-20. Even during the difficult times of COVID-19, they have displayed an enterprising spirit by performing all their duties and following all the guidelines as issued by the government for the pandemic.

It is praiseworthy that Odisha is the only state to have

adopted the innovative model of community-based ecotourism, where 80 per cent of the share of revenue goes back to the community. Nature tourism has not only reduced the pressure on forest resources but is also an important tool for converting every tourist into a guardian of nature. It has combined experiences from the wild with responsible travel and sustainability and has increased awareness among tourists about the conservation efforts.

For bookings visit ecotourodish.com

EMERGING BIRDING SITES OF ODISHA, A BIRDWATCHER'S PARADISE

Birdwatching is an activity reserved only for the well seasoned; for enthusiasts who can practice utmost patience and perseverance. If you are a wildlife photographer, or simply love spotting new types of species, there's no better place than Odisha. The state is home to over 400 unique avian species, making it one of the best birding places to visit worldwide.

MANGALAJODI: HAVEN FOR BIRDERS

The Chilika Lake Sanctuary near Puri, has Asia's largest inland seawater lagoon. It is a pear-shaped lake, spread over an area of 1,100 sq km and serves as the largest wintering ground for migratory birds in India. Birdwatchers keep coming back to this destination as it is home to some of the most unique species like sea eagles, greylag geese, and purple moorhen. Chilika proudly hosts the world's largest breeding colonies of flamingoes as well. The lake has many marshlands, of which Mangalajodi is labelled 'birder's haven' and is a must-visit for a spectacular view of some beautiful winged guests.

Until over a decade ago, the primary livelihood of nearly a hundred families in Mangalajodi was based on killing, selling and eating birds—many of them migratory. However, eventually the poachers assembled in a local temple motivated by a local gentleman and pledged against killing their winged guests. Several organisations joined hands to train the poachers to become birding guides and impart knowledge about the ways of the hospitality industry. Madhu Behera, one of the guides, is known widely in the birding circle of India.

KULDIHA WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

Located in the southwestern part of Balasore district, the sanctuary covers an area of 272 sq km. The topography of the region supports deciduous, thick sal forests. This area is home to a wide variety of wildlife species including Indian elephants, tiger, leopards, Indian bison, sambar deer, spotted deer, mouse deer, nilgai, **chousingha**, sloth bear, etc. The sanctuary also serves as the abode to a variety of avifauna. Mr Manoranjan Das, a guide and resort owner from Kuldiha, is a well-known snake rescuer and an avid birdwatcher. He has recorded 253 species of birds including Malabar trogon, Indian heart-spotted woodpecker and yellow-rumped flycatcher.

MUNDALI DAM, CUTTACK

The Mahanadi River is about 900 kilometres long and flows through Chhattisgarh and Odisha. From Chhattisgarh, the river first flows eastward and reaches Odisha. In Odisha, it first reaches Sambalpur, then the Satkosia Gorge, finally entering Mundali on the Cuttack-Athgarh Road. Every year Mundali lures thousands of migratory birds, including many diving ducks. Almost 71 species of birds have been identified from this place. The most important species found here are the rare Indian skimmers. Flocks of endangered Indian skimmers have been also found nesting along the sands of the Mahanadi riverbed in Mundali during the summers. After the Cyclone Phailin, which hit the coast of Odisha in 2013,

three species of oceanic birds from the Atlantic region were spotted here, which was a rare sight.

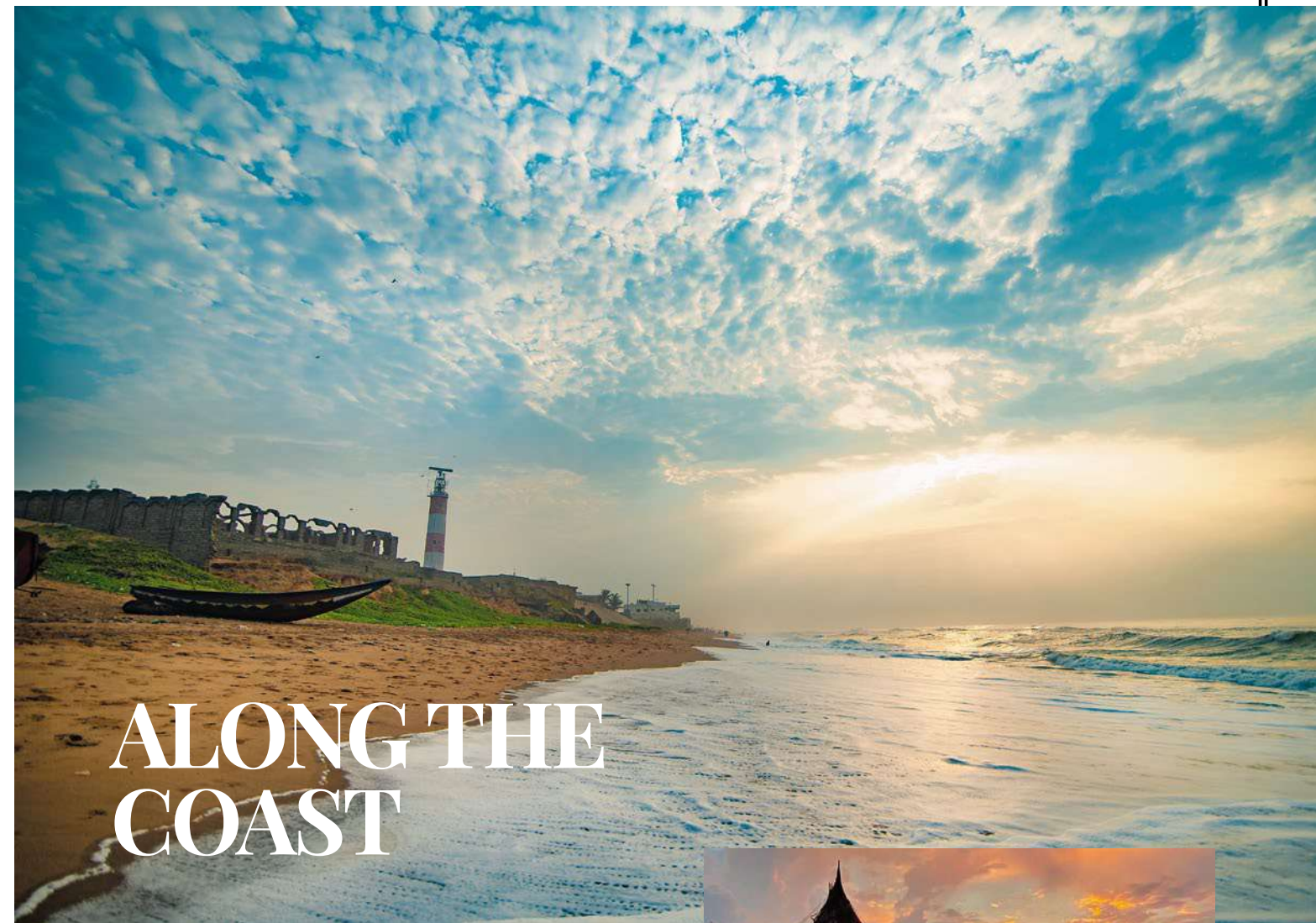
BHITARKANIKA NATIONAL PARK

The Bhitarkanika National Park is one of India's biggest estuarine crocodile habitats and a major coastal ecosystem. It was declared as a national park because of its ecological, faunal, floral, geomorphological, zoological association and conservation efforts in 1998. In August 2002, it was designated as the second Ramsar site. Besides the mass nesting of Olive Ridley turtles and saltwater crocodiles, Bhitarkanika is also known for residential and migratory species of birds. Till now, 320 species of birds have been identified. Mr Bijay Kumar Das, an ex-forest employee, and an avid wildlife expert, with his own homestay facilities, has been observing these avian species for a few years now.

HIRAKUD RESERVOIR

Hirakud is the longest earthen dam in the world and stands across the Mahanadi River in Sambalpur. It was the first major multipurpose river valley project after India's independence in 1947. This man-made structure is located 15 kilometres north of Sambalpur. Every year, thousands of birds migrate to the reservoir, which spans over an area of 746 sq km and has a shoreline of over 640 km, for four months. Migratory birds like common pochard, red-crested pochard, great crested grebe and pond heron can be spotted here during the winter season.

—SUBHENDU BHATTACHARYA



ALONG THE COAST

Clear blue sky, a warm bright sunny day, silvery sand and the boisterous roar of the mighty Bay of Bengal. With an expansive coastline, Odisha is home to some of the most pristine beaches in the country. These exotic beaches are also the venue for the Indian Surf Festival and the Beach Festival. On one hand is the spiritually significant Chandrabhaga Beach, which is set on the Konark coast and is the hub for a variety of cultural activities. On the other hand is the Gopalpur Beach characterised by soft breeze and its old-world maritime charm. It is here that the lighthouse offers a glimpse into the city's sprawling landscape. Considered to be one of the finest resorts, Gopalpur-On-Sea till date remains an undiscovered haven. Once a bustling sea port, today, it serves

as the ideal abode for those looking for some solitude. However, the latest to steal the limelight in the state is the Blue Flag Certified Puri Beach, or more commonly, the Golden Beach. The certified beach now has a secure and safe, differently-abled friendly bathing zone, pedestrian track, deck chairs, beach huts, proper sanitisation and a solid waste management system for a holistic travel experience. Bestowed with a spectacular panorama, the Talasari beach is a fisherman's paradise. Located nearly 10 kilometres from Digha, this lesser-known virgin

beach has sand dunes, calmer waves and is flanked by coconut and cashew trees on each side. Head to the Chandipur coast for a magical experience. It owes its popularity to the 'vanishing sea' phenomenon. One can literally see the sea recede by as much as five kilometres everyday during low tide.



An aerial photograph of a wide beach at sunset. The sky is a mix of orange, pink, and blue. The ocean waves are breaking onto the shore, creating white foam. A long, straight line of white, peaked tents stretches along the beach, receding into the distance. People are scattered along the beach, some near the water's edge. The overall scene is serene and festive.

ECO RETREATS IN ODISHA

Odisha's eco retreats are nothing less than a veritable carnival. A celebration of culture, adventure and food, the eco retreats offer travellers an opportunity to explore the state's diverse tourism offerings. After the success of the first edition of Eco Retreats, which was held last year between December 15 and February 15, the Odisha government is all set to organise the second edition during the winters. The tourism department will introduce glamping events at five destinations, namely Konark, Bhitarkanika,

Hirakud, Satkosia and Daringbadi.

The Eco Retreat glamping site at the idyllic Konark Beach, overlooking the Sun Temple continues to leave many spellbound. There are several eco-friendly yet luxurious camps installed in various national parks of the state. The Bhitarkanika National Park, perhaps the most well known of the lot, boasts of quite a few camps. The River Brahmani and Kharasrota meet at Nalitapatia in Bhitarkanika National Park, making the site spellbinding and ideal for glamping adventures.



Other luxury camping sites include Dangamal, Habalikhashi, Gupti nature camps in this sanctuary. One could also head to the Hirakud Dam in Sambalpur, which holds a unique significance. The luxury camps here offer all the five-star facilities along with the serenity of nature. Many of the camp sites are set in

picturesque locales such as the Satkosia River bed and the hill station of Daringbadi. While the Satkosia Sand Resort serves as the ideal escape for nature lovers and those seeking solitude, Daringbadi with its verdant valleys and plateaus is a pleasant break from the otherwise humid climate of Odisha.



LIVING THE ROYAL LIFE

A state with glorious history and myriad wonders, Odisha's tryst with royalty dates back centuries. Nothing encapsulates the state's old-world charm more impeccably than its royal palaces. The 18th-century Belgadia Palace is a fine example of Victorian architecture in the state. Built by Maharaja Ram Chandra Bhanjdeo, the palace today has been converted into a boutique property, inviting guests to take a trip down memory lane.

Established by Raja Ram Chandra Deva in 1590 AD on the bank of the river Kharasrota, the Killa Aul Palace bears stories of Odisha during Afghan, Mughal and British rule. In 2018, a wing of the palace was turned into a heritage hotel, a project initiated by the members of the Aul family.

A pioneer heritage homestay in Odisha,

Dhenkanal Palace is a large complex of apartments, courts, and gardens nestled on the gentle slopes of the Garhjat Hills of the Eastern Ghat. With 13 restored rooms, decked with an eclectic mix of antiques and heritage souvenirs, the property can accommodate upto 24 guests.

Set in the heart of a dense forest, for those looking to relax in the lap of nature, the Gajlaxmi Palace is a great option. One can also make a day-long trip to Parikud Palace, also known as Krushna Prasad Palace, set on an island surrounded by the largest brackish water lake, Chilika on one side and the Bay of Bengal on the other. Even the Kila Dalijoda Palace, tucked away in a remote corner, close to Bhubaneswar and Cuttack, is ideal for those looking for a short weekend getaway.



THE TASTE OF ODISHA

Odisha always conjures up grand visuals of the Rath Yatra, the Puri Beach, and the holy Jagannath Temple. However, it's the traditional and authentic local cuisine of the region that remains unexplored. Those of you who live for the love of food, Odisha will not disappoint you. From popular seafood offerings like fish curry and crab curry to vegetarian delicacies like **dalma** (an assortment of vegetables and spices) to the ever-popular sweet dish **chhena poda**, your palate will be on an absolute joy ride during your trip to the beautiful state. Don't forget to try some prawns while visiting the Chilika Lake. Another must-try delicacy is the traditional **pakhala**. Prepared with rice, curd, cucumber, cumin, onions and mint leaves, it's mostly served with dry roasted vegetables. Needless to say, the remarkable flavours and spices of Odia cuisine are a culinary powerhouse.

EXPERIENCE DESIGN À LA ODISHA

When it came to reimagining tourism in Odisha, we needed to revisit the basic instinct of an explorer. With the natural and cultural diversity that Odisha boasts of, any exercise in synergising destination planning and promotion requires to be founded in clarity of objectives and unbiased assessment of challenges.

At the core of the mission to 'reveal India's best-kept secret' is to enrich the experience, towards which each of our initiatives is oriented.

While our strategic focus on integrated destination development through professionally prepared masterplans progresses with full gusto, our experiments with innovative models such as the Eco Retreat—conceived and executed in a span of 150 days—has brought rich dividends. This model has emerged as our key strategy to get tourists to visit these beautiful destinations set deep in the hinterlands of Odisha.

Guided by a passionate research of tourism possibilities and limitations in the post-COVID era, Odisha Tourism initiated a set of concurrent campaigns to boost regional tourism. The 'Odisha By Road' campaign offers eager travellers diverse itineraries covering the state's length and breadth. It capitalises on the excellent road connectivity between landscapes—beaches, forests, hill—stations, tribal hinterlands, and cities—while offering unique experiences in cuisine, heritage, adventure, ethnic encounters, arts and handicrafts and wildlife.

The most outstanding narrative that this campaign carries was reflected in 2020's World Tourism Day theme—Tourism and Rural Development. Our award-winning model of community-managed ecotourism offers not just India, but the world a template, in safe and sustainable tourism. 47 nature camps across over 19 protected areas and diverse landscapes are managed by trained local community members—a revolution of sorts through which properties at destinations such as Similipal and Satkosia have earned annual revenues of

over INR 1 crore, of which over 80% is retained by the local community.

This initiative comes with the promise of safety, which builds on Odisha's stellar record in tackling the pandemic through inter alia intelligent management of containment zones and measured opening up, further fortified by excellent surge capacity management of institutional healthcare.

We are simply emulating the pragmatic but ambitious vision of our Chief Minister Shri Naveen Patnaik, whose vision is epitomised by transformative projects such as the Blue Flag Certified Golden Beach at Puri, whose turnaround is to be seen to be believed. The leader's vision has been sanctified by Lord Jagannath himself, manifesting through the Puri Transformation Project, which is a textbook transformation of a religious tourism hub.

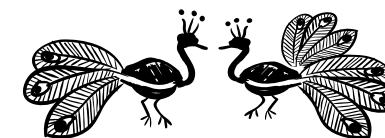
Additionally, a number of new and innovative products are being planned and will be rolled out in phases. Our plans to introduce cruise and houseboat operations in promising locations such as Chilika Lake, Hirakud Reservoir, Bhitarkanika backwaters and viable stretches of River Mahanadi are progressing well.

Most importantly, our policy initiatives are aimed at encouraging entrepreneurial initiatives in homestay operations and offer tourists Odia hospitality up close and personal. Similarly, we are working collaboratively with stakeholders such as families of erstwhile royals to operationalise heritage hotels offering regal experiences in Odia royalty—a facet hitherto unknown.

Experience design is all about transforming existing assets through inclusive innovations, and Odisha Tourism is convincingly mastering this art.

VISHAL KUMAR DEV, IAS

*Commissioner-cum-Secretary to Government of Odisha,
Department of Tourism*



IN THE FESTIVE SPIRIT

A land of varied cultures and traditions, Odisha is decked in the festive lights throughout the year. From colourful processions to rich customs, the state proudly revels in the festive spirit. Conducted in the first week of December, the **Konark Dance Festival** celebrates the cultural heritage of the region through dance, music and art. The festival not only serves as a platform for classical dancers all across the country to showcase their culture, but is also a tribute to the ancient beauty of the Konark Temple. The **International Sand Art Festival** held at the Chandrabhaga Beach is another crowd puller. Coinciding with the Konark Festival, globally reputed artists are invited to display their sand skills here. Another cultural extravaganza, the **Mukteswar Dance Festival** celebrates the

beauty of Odissi dance. Held each year between January 14-16 in Bhubaneswar, luminaries like Sujata Mohapatra, Aruna Mohanty, Ratikant Mohapatra, and Madhvi Mudgal have graced the festival till date. For the music lovers, the **Rajarani Music Festival** is a must-visit. The three-day annual festival is set against the backdrop of magnificent temples and pays ode to mellifluous genres of vocals including Hindustani, Carnatic, Sufi and Odissi music. There's also a lot in store for the birding enthusiast as well. In an attempt to promote ecotourism, the **Chilika Bird Festival**, an annual event conducted at Mangalajodi, is organised by the state tourism department. The three-day event this year will be held between January 8 and 10 and will host 10 lakh winged visitors of over 200 species.



KONARK FESTIVAL

01 - 05 Dec 2020



INTERNATIONAL SAND ART FESTIVAL

01 - 05 Dec 2020

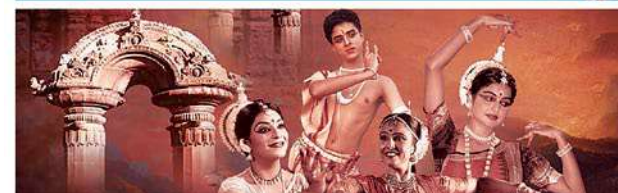
National Chilika Bird Festival

08 - 10 Jan 2021



Mukteswar Dance Festival

14 - 16 Jan 2021



Rajarani Music Festival

18 - 20 Jan 2021



Dhauki-Kalinga Mahotsav

08 - 10 Feb 2021



Vrindaban Mahotsav

28 March 2021



odishatourism.gov.in



ODISHA
INDIA'S BEST KEPT SECRET.



*Discover
Secrets at every corner*

Eco Retreat ODISHA

8TH DEC '20 - 28TH FEB '21

Luxurious Stay

Bar & Restaurant

Water Sports

Adventure Activities

Guided Tours

Cultural Evenings



For Konark, Hirakud, Satkosia, Daringbadi: 1800 891 8118,
For Bhitarkanika: 78488 38848

ecoretreat.odishatourism.gov.in

