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DESPERATE ESCAPE
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THE LIST
BEST MONSOON GETAWAYS

IT'S NOT WHERE — IT'S HOW
Investors have shown tremendous confidence in the state leadership

The economy of Uttar Pradesh has grown by leaps and bounds under Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath’s leadership. In the financial year 2020-21, the state’s Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) rose from fifth to second place in the country. In spite of the Covid-induced lockdown, GSDP was recorded at Rs 19.48 lakh crore last year. This puts Uttar Pradesh ahead of Tamil Nadu, Gujarat and Karnataka. It is now behind Maharashtra only.

The reasons are obvious. Investor-friendly policies of the government have fuelled rapid growth of the state. Industrialists from different sectors have invested in the state. Out of the agreements worth Rs 4.68 lakh crore signed at the Investor Summit, work has started on projects worth Rs 3 lakh crore, so far. For the first time in the history of Uttar Pradesh, big industries are investing money on this scale. Indian as well as foreign investors are investing in textiles, infrastructure, food processing, electronics, real estate, power, and manufacturing sectors. Meanwhile, exports from the state have also grown by 32 per cent in the last two years.

These achievements came in spite of the fact that the state government had to grapple with multidimensional challenges posed by the pandemic. While tackling these problems, the Yogi Adityanath government decided to support the MSME sector and self-help groups in a big way. The Chief Minister says, “At the time of the pandemic, we produced sanitisers in sugar mills and distilleries not only to meet the rapidly growing needs of the state but also of many other states. Before the pandemic, we used to import PPE kits from China, but we encouraged local manufacturers to manufacture kits which were subsequently sent to other states as well. It enabled thousands of people to get work under the Atma Nirbhar Bharat schemes. Migrant laborers were provided employment in MSME units through the employment portal.”

Recently, Uttar Pradesh was declared as the leading state in employment generation during the Covid period. MSME sector has given employment to more people in Uttar Pradesh than in any other state. The performance of the state has also been excellent under the Prime Minister’s Employment Guarantee Scheme (PMEGP). Besides, the state gave subsidies and loans to industries to protect them from the adverse effects of the lockdown. Even before the pandemic-hit period, the state government was sensitive to the capital and credit needs of industries. During the past four years, the Yogi Adityanath government coordinated with banks to provide loans to 55,45,147 MSME units, which have given employment to more than 2.64 crore people.

Samsung’s shifting of its display manufacturing unit from China to NOIDA may be seen as a great example of the success of UP government’s policies. It also underlines the faith foreign investors have reposed in the leadership of the state government.
Employment Opportunities

More than Four lakh people get govt. jobs in four years

More than four lakh youth got government jobs during the four years of the Yogi Adityanath government. Of these, more than one lakh jobs have been given to women. The process of recruitment is still on to fill around 86,000 vacancies. The state government has also helped more 5 lakh youths to set up start-ups. Altogether 25 lakh employment opportunities have been created through the One-District-One-Project (ODOP). Besides, about 1.5 crore people have been linked to MNREGA.

As of now, Uttar Pradesh ranks first in the country in terms of providing employment opportunities in rural areas under the Prime Minister’s Employment Guarantee Scheme (PMEGP). With an investment of Rs 136 crore, 4,143 units have been set up enabling 43,118 people to get work. In fact, against the target of 2,572 units of UP Khadi and Village Industries Commission 1,571 more units were established due to the special efforts of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. These units were provided Rs 59 crore more than the commission’s initial target of Rs 77.16 crore.

With a view to solving the problem of unemployment, a scheme called Mukhyamantri Yuva Swarojgar Yojana was launched under which an assistance of Rs 25 lakh is given to the youth for self-employment. Under the Vishwakarma Shram Samman Yojana, people are provided training in various trades. The state government bears the entire cost of the short-duration training for them. Also, 25 per cent margin money is provided for setting up small units.

Under the Mukhyamantri Gramodyog Rozgar Yojana, capital assistance of Rs 10 lakh is provided to entrepreneurs from rural areas. Its purpose is to solve the problem of unemployment in rural areas and stop the migration of educated youth to cities.

Record purchase of wheat and paddy in the midst of the Covid crisis

In spite of facing the challenges of Covid-19, the Uttar Pradesh government led by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath made record procurement of wheat and paddy. This year, 56.41 lakh metric tonnes of wheat have been procured from 12,88,461 farmers. The procurement started in April and the state government has so far paid Rs 10,019.56 crore to them. The previous government had procured 7.97 lakh metric tonnes of wheat in 2016-17. It is eight times more this year in comparison to that year.

According to the state government data, 36.99 lakh metric tonnes of wheat was procured from 8,00,646 farmers in the Rabi season of 2017-18. In 2018-19 52.92 lakh metric tonnes of wheat were procured whereas 37.04 lakh metric tonnes were procured in 2019-20. In 2020-21, the procurement stood at 35.76 lakh metric tonnes. In the last four years, Rs 29,017.45 crore was paid to farmers against wheat procurement.

It is not only record purchase of wheat that took place in Uttar Pradesh. In 2020-21, the state government also purchased 66.84 lakh metric tonnes of paddy and paid Rs 12,438.70 crore to about 12 lakh farmers. In 2019-20, 56.57 MT of paddy was procured from 7,06,549 farmers, 48.25 lakh MT from 6,84,013 farmers in 2018-19 and 42.90 lakh MT from 4,92,038 farmers in 2017-18. Even in paddy procurement, the Yogi Adityanath government is far ahead in comparison to the previous governments in the state. It paid Rs 37,825.66 crore to 31,88,529 farmers in four years. The previous government had paid Rs 17,190.85 crore to 14,87,519 farmers during its five-year term.

To make small farmers self-reliant, the Yogi Adityanath government has chalked out a big plan for the cultivation of medicinal plants. Experts say that it will increase the income of farmers significantly in a short time. After its pilot project in Bundelkhand, the state government has intensified efforts to give its benefits to the farmers of Purvanchal. The state government is also making efforts to promote the cultivation of medicinal plants in districts like Meerut, Mathura and Firozabad.
MSME Economy gets a big boost despite lockdown

MSMEs provide employment to people having less capital as compared to big industries. One of their great features is that they go a long way towards the industrialisation of rural and underdeveloped areas. As an ancillary unit, they also help big industries. Uttar Pradesh ranks first in the country with about 90 lakh MSME units. The MSME sector has provided maximum employment after agriculture in the state. Even during the Corona lockdown last year, this sector not only made the economy dynamic but also helped millions of people retain their jobs.

The revival of lakhs of such units also took place due to the initiatives and policies of the Yogi Adityanath government. With the help of the government, the MSME units of the state have done commendable work. Last year, around 34,000 MSME units were given financial assistance during the Covid period. The Yogi Adityanath government provided a loan of Rs 2505.58 crore to 31,542 units to revive the MSMEs affected by the second wave of Corona. The loan was given on June 23 through the online Swarozgar Sangam.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath is well aware of the problem of unemployment. Therefore, his government wants to create more and more employment opportunities by increasing the pace of industrial development. The Chief Minister says, “The youth of the state are nowadays focusing on providing jobs instead of looking for jobs. The Prime Minister’s Employment Guarantee Scheme, Mukhyamantri Yuva Swarozgar Yojana, One-District-One-Product Scheme have helped the youth a lot. Women have also shown tremendous enthusiasm towards self-employment.”

The government has also given subsidies to many such units under various schemes. Last year, a subsidy of Rs 140 crore was given to 4571 MSME units employing 45,166 people.

Food Processing

Uttar Pradesh is the largest producer of fruits and vegetables in the country. Still, less than 10 per cent of fruits and vegetables are processed due to the paucity of food processing units in the state. Every year a large quantity of fruits and vegetables gets wasted due to which farmers have to suffer. Empathising with the farmers, the Yogi Adityanath government had come up with the Food Processing Policy 2017 to encourage investment in this sector. Since then, investors’ interest in the food processing sector has increased manifold.

This sector has attracted many big industries to set up their units. In the last four years, the state government received 139 proposals for investment worth Rs 9105.58 crore. Out of these, work has started in 101 food processing units. These companies have provided employment to 20,176 people. Besides, 38 units are currently in the construction process. The investment in such units is estimated to be Rs 5031.31 crore, which are expected to start production by the end of this year.

The Yogi Adityanath government’s initiative to boost the food processing industry has attracted a large number of farmers and small entrepreneurs as well. In this initiative, small businessmen are given a 35 per cent subsidy on loans to set up units worth Rs 10 lakh. After this special initiative, the Horticulture Department received many applications for modernisation of existing small units as well as the setting up of new units. They are expected to get approval soon. The government has set a target of promoting 9301 micro food processing units this year, which will provide employment to 20,000 people.

The Yogi government has also taken the initiative under the Prime Minister’s Micro Food Industries Upgradation Scheme. On one hand, it gives a better price to the farmers for their produce and on the other hand, it encourages small businessmen. The government is also ensuring easy loans to new entrepreneurs. This scheme is part of the Yogi government’s campaign to accelerate the development of the state through agriculture and agro-based industries.
The farmers are at the top of the priority list of the Uttar Pradesh government. The Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath is a firm believer in farmer welfare. It is the result of his sincere efforts to benefit the farmers that record payments have been made to sugarcane farmers in the state. The motto of the state government is: from debt relief to farmer welfare. Statistics show that Uttar Pradesh has topped in making payments to farmers. Even during the Corona period, the Yogi government has not let the various initiatives meant for farmers’ welfare stop. During the Corona period, the long-pending dues of the sugarcane farmers of Uttar Pradesh were finally cleared. On June 19, 2020, an amount of Rs 418 crore was transferred online directly into the account of sugarcane farmers. Creating a new record in the state, the Chief Minister made the payment of sugarcane price of more than Rs 1.40 lakh to the farmers during his tenure of four years. It could be possible only because of the farmer-friendly Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath who started efforts for farmer welfare since assuming office. Its results are visible at the ground level.

During 2017-20, sugarcane price payments worth over Rs 1.18 lakh crore were made to farmers. It is Rs 64,578 crore more than the total cane price of Rs 53,367 crore paid in the previous three years. Due to the efforts of the Chief Minister, Uttar Pradesh is now at the top in sugarcane and sugar production. Due to his efforts, 25 per cent of the closed sugar mills have also become operational again. The farmers have also become technically equipped through e-sugarcane app.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has also laid emphasis on procurement on minimum support price (MSP). His goal is to ensure that every farmer must get a fair price for each grain. The Chief Minister is also determined to realise the dream of Prime Minister Narendra Modi for doubling the income of farmers. In order to ensure it, the state government has continuously been increasing MSP.

The government has raised the MSP for wheat to Rs 1975 per quintal. It was Rs 1625 in 2017-18, Rs 1735 in 2018-19 and Rs 1840 in 2019-20. With the increase in support price, farmers are getting the right price for their produce. The government has also decided to increase the number of procurement centres to make it easier for the farmers to sell their produce without the hassle of travelling long distances. A sum of Rs 29,017.45 crore has been paid by the Uttar Pradesh government to wheat farmers against the procurement over the last four years.

To prevent corruption in the payment process, the Yogi government has made it quite transparent. The government believes that if the farmers are happy, it will lead to overall prosperity in the state. The Government of India has honored the Government of Uttar Pradesh with Krishi Karman Award for keeping the interest of farmers paramount.

- Online transfer of Rs 418 crore into the account of sugarcane farmers on 19 June, 2020
- Innovative use of e-sugarcane app for farmers
- More than Rs 1.40 lakh crore cane price paid to farmers between 2017-20
- Hundreds of new procurement centres opened for the purchase of farmers’ produce
- Rs 29,017.45 crore paid to wheat farmers in the last four years
- 378 lakh metric tonnes of food grains were procured by paying Rs 66,000 crore to the farmers
- This year, 66.83 lakh metric tonnes of paddy were procured at the minimum support price, which is one and a half times more than last year.
MSMEs provide employment to people having less capital as compared to big industries. One of their great features is that they go a long way towards the industrialisation of rural and underdeveloped areas. As an ancillary unit, they also help big industries. Uttar Pradesh ranks first in the country with about 90 lakh MSME units. The MSME sector has provided maximum employment after agriculture in the state. Even during the Corona lockdown last year, this sector not only made the economy dynamic but also helped millions of people retain their jobs. The revival of lakhs of such units also took place due to the initiatives and policies of the Yogi Adityanath government.

With the help of the government, the MSME units of the state have done commendable work. Last year, around 34,000 MSME units were given financial assistance during the Covid period. The Yogi Adityanath government provided a loan of Rs 2505.58 crore to 31,542 units to revive the MSMEs affected by the second wave of Corona. The loan was given on June 23 through the online Swarojgar Sangam.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath is well aware of the problem of unemployment. Therefore, his government wants to create more and more employment opportunities by increasing the pace of industrial development. The Chief Minister says, “The youth of the state are nowadays focusing on providing jobs instead of looking for jobs. The Prime Minister’s Employment Guarantee Scheme, Mukhyamantri Yuva Swarojgar Yojana, One-District-One-Product Scheme have helped the youth a lot. Women have also shown tremendous enthusiasm towards self-employment.”

The government has also given subsidies to many such units under various schemes. Last year, a subsidy of Rs 140 crore was given to 4571 MSME units employing 45,166 people.

The State government is set to bring about a new bio-energy policy to promote agro-based bio-energy enterprises. This policy will generate additional income for the farmers and create new employment opportunities in rural areas. It will also become a means for setting up bio-energy enterprises. It will also be effective in stopping the burning of stubble in the fields, which will reduce air pollution.

On the instructions of the Chief Minister, the Additional Energy Resources Department has prepared a draft of the new State Bio-Energy Policy. Soon the new State Bio-Energy Policy will be approved. The Yogi Adityanath government also implemented the State Bio-Enterprises Promotion Programme in 2018 to promote bio-energy enterprises. Under this, the facility of capital subsidy to bio-energy enterprises, full reimbursement from state GST for ten years, and complete exemption in stamp duty on the purchase of land for setting up these enterprises were also provided.

Under this policy, in addition to the one-time expenditure by the state government, additional expenses of about Rs 257.40 crore are expected to be incurred against it every year. Due to this policy, urban solid waste, waste from agricultural produce markets and sugar mills will be used and the option to generate bio-energy from livestock will open. The policy also includes a strategy for setting up haystack-based power projects, production and utilisation of compressed biogas (CBG), bio-coal, bio-ethanol and bio-diesel. The policy also proposes a number of discounts and incentives.
The Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, says that the new Uttar Pradesh manifests the hard work of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and today it represents a strong state. Recently when he visited Varanasi for the first time after the Corona period, Narendra Modi said, "In Uttar Pradesh, people are getting direct benefit of various schemes because Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath is working hard round the clock. Today, there is a rule of law in Uttar Pradesh." Expressing satisfaction over the progress made by Uttar Pradesh in general and Varanasi in particular, he said that the government of Uttar Pradesh was free from nepotism and working for development.

**An Investment Destination**

Laying the foundation stones of 205 development projects worth Rs 839 crore and inaugurating 78 projects worth Rs 744 crore, the Prime Minister specifically pointed out that the world’s biggest investors are joining the great initiative of Atmanirbhar Bharat and Uttar Pradesh is emerging as the country’s leading investment destination. The only reason for it, he explained, is the focus of the Yogi government on development of infrastructure and the creation of industrial clusters. Till a few years ago, it was considered difficult to do business in Uttar Pradesh but now it is becoming a favorite place for ‘Make in India’. He said that the list of development works done in Uttar Pradesh is so long that all of those could not be discussed in a short period.

**Commendable Health Services**

Lauding the health services of Uttar Pradesh, he said that there was an unprecedented improvement in healthcare facilities across the state, be it village health centres or medical colleges or AIIMS. Uttar Pradesh is the state, where the maximum Corona tests and vaccinations have been done. Recalling the hardships of the last few months, the Prime minister said that the changed and dangerous form of the coronavirus had attacked with full force. But Uttar Pradesh faced the crisis with all its might. The population of Uttar Pradesh is more than many big countries of the world, but the state handled the second wave of corona in a better way. Talking about the horrific scenes of encephalitis in the past, he said that now even during the Corona period, Kashi has shown that it does not stop. He said that under the ‘Vaccine for all, free vaccine’ campaign, free vaccines are being provided to the poor, middle class, farmers, youth, etc. The number of medical colleges in Uttar Pradesh used to be about a dozen four years ago, whereas now their number has quadrupled. More than 550 oxygen plants are also being set up in the state. Out of these, 14 plants have started in Varanasi itself. Recently, the Centre has announced a special package of Rs 23,000 crore for the construction of new Corona-related health facilities. Uttar Pradesh will also benefit from this package.

The Prime Minister said that
infrastructure related to cleanliness and health is also being developed fast in UP, which will prove to be helpful in the fight against diseases in the future. Kashi has emerged as a big medical hub of Purvanchal and people of Purvanchal would not have to go to distant cities like Delhi and Mumbai for advanced medical treatment. Kashi is also getting new hospitals for women and children. Also, additional capacities of 100 and 50 beds are being added to BHU and the district hospital respectively.

Kashi, The Role Model

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said that Kashi has created a new identity in the country and the world due to the constant guidance, leadership and inspiration of the Prime Minister. The new Kashi has become a model for the state, country and the world in the form of Smart Kashi. The Chief Minister says that projects worth Rs 10,300 crore have already been completed in Kashi during the last 7 years and work on projects worth about Rs 10,284 crore is currently underway.

From Mafia Raj to the Raj of Law

The Prime Minister lauded the new UP for the law and order situation. He said that now there is no mafia raj and terrorism here. Now, the rule of the law prevails. By establishing the rule of law, Yogi Adityanath has restored the confidence of the parents who lived in constant fear about the safety of sisters and daughters earlier.

Farmers' Interest Supreme

The Prime Minister did not forget to highlight the important contribution of Uttar Pradesh in the field of agriculture under the Atma Nirbhar Bharat campaign. He underlined the bigger role of infrastructure and agro-based industries in helping achieve its goal. He said that the central government has taken a big decision for the development of agricultural infrastructure. A special fund of Rs 1 lakh crore has been created for modern agricultural infrastructure in the country, which will be used to facilitate the system of agricultural markets of the country for procurement, which will benefit the farmers.

Apart from the Perishable Cargo Centre and the International Rice Centre located in Varanasi, many modern services are also available in the interest of the farmers. He said that the upcoming Mango and Vegetable Integrated Packed House will help in developing the region as an agricultural export hub. Due to such efforts, Varanasi Langda mango is being exported from Europe to Gulf countries. It will especially benefit the small farmers who grow fruits and vegetables.

Kashi Equipped With All Facilities

The Prime Minister was also overwhelmed to see the progress made in Varanasi. He expressed happiness over the fact that LED screens and advanced surveillance cameras are being installed at more than 700 places in the city. Besides, information boards are being installed on the ghats, which will prove to be helpful for the tourists. Live telecast of aarti at Ganga Ghat and Shri Kashi Vishwanath Temple will also be done through big screens. Showcasing Kashi’s history, architecture, crafts, art and every other information in an attractive way through advanced technology will give a new experience to the devotees.

Kashi Incomplete Without 'Rudraksh'

During the Kashi Yatra, Prime Minister Modi gave a unique gift of 'Rudraksh' to the people of Kashi. He handed over the convention centre named ‘Rudraksh’ where the artists of Kashi would get a platform to showcase their art. He called the development of Varanasi the blessings of Mahadev. As of now, work on various projects is going in Kashi. New projects and institutions are rewriting the growth story of Kashi. He said, “Cleanliness and beauty of Kashi and Maa Ganga are the aspiration and priority of all of us. For this, work is being done on every front.”

- Investment worth Rs 8715.16 crore in 152 textile units
- New factories to provide employment to 5,25,087 people
- 4,143 units set up under PMEGP scheme

Four years of development

- Rs 250 crore allocated this year under One-District-One-Product scheme.
- Under the Mukhyamantri Yuva Swarozgar Yojana, 10,774 people benefited, 60052 jobs created, Rs 100 crore allocated this year.
- Assistance to 68,412 people under Vishwakarma Shram Samman Yojana. Rs 30 crore given this year.
- Under the Prime Minister's Employment Generation Scheme, 10,656 people benefited and 80,339 jobs were created in the last 4 years.
- Loan up to 10 lakh at 4 per cent interest for women and Scheduled Caste-Scheduled Tribe beneficiaries under the Gramodyog Rozgar Yojana.

One-District-One-Product Scheme

- 13 Common Facility Centres are running under this scheme, 22 centres are in various stages of approval.
- 15 types of products under ODP has been given GI tag, 10 others are under consideration
- Under the scheme, about 80,000 artisans have been registered, 41000 artisans trained and 40000 tool kits distributed
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Imagine getting ready to jump off a plane and ticking off sky diving from your bucket list or for trekking or mountain climbing at that much sought after destination. And the first thing you have to do? Either defog your spectacles, or constantly keep wiping off water from them, or put them aside for the fear of losing them.

These situations aren’t other worldly or unheard off. People with prescription glasses constantly have to hold back on many activities owing to the restrictions posed by eyeglasses. Apart from the restrictions, carrying and managing spectacles is a huge task, just for the simple fear of breaking them and not being able to enjoy the sights.

In an attempt to bridge this gap between spectacled and non-spectacled travellers, Bausch+Lomb offers their range of Bio True ONEday contact lenses making it possible to travel beyond the restriction of eyeglasses. These can be worn through the day and disposed off at the end of the day and hence, provide a hassle-free experience to spectacled travellers.

These contact lenses are suited for users who are looking forward to a fuss-free contact lens experience. Offering a fresh set of lenses every day, they can be used for specific occasions or sports activities giving the users the freedom to shift from glasses to lenses and vice-versa, whenever they want to.

The Bio True ONEday contact lenses offer protection against UV rays and are built to give long hours of comfort, the contact lenses enable people to truly immerse themselves in their travel experience without having to constantly worry about a certain weight on their eyes for a better vision. Infact the brand also has an option for travellers who need glasses for both far and near vision in the form of their multifocal lenses.

Spectacled travellers often face problems while participating in any sort of adrenaline fuelled activities too. While in some cases the spectacles keep slipping from the eyes, many other activities require wearing safety gear — such as helmets for biking or goggles for scuba diving — thereby making the travellers question whether they would be able to get the desired experience while participating in such activities.

In some cases, eyeglasses may also restrict the ability to look and feel confident. Most spectacled travellers tend to take two pictures of themselves — one with and the other without the glasses. And for photographers, it may be another hassle altogether — trying to look through the viewfinder with spectacles for that perfect shot.

Contact lenses give a sense of freedom, while lending more to your travel. So, you may want to slide in a contact lens pack along with your spectacles for your next adventure — a small thing that would give a lot more to the experience.

Bausch+Lomb’s Bio True ONEday Contact lenses would be convenient to carry, use and dispose, and the lenses provide greater flexibility, confidence and motivation to travellers.

The best part about it all? One can go paragliding in the middle of the day without worrying about leaving the prescription glasses back at home.

Note: Please consult with an eyecare practitioner before switching from eyeglasses to contact lenses. Data on file Bausch & Lomb Incorporated.
Please visit www.bauschandlomb.in for more details on the product.
Most alive at the ragged edge of life

If you enjoy adventures on two-wheels, slushy conditions aren’t painful experiences; they’re joyous instead! The repeated falls, the endless skids, mud coatings all over the bike and the rider — they lend a weird sense of satisfaction. It’s a strange and fulfilling fetish. But it can also be dangerous.

“GO, GO, GO...”

It’s been nine years but I still remember shouting crazily to my friend ahead. We were filled with dread, piercing focus, and the regret that we’d not even be able to leave a loving note for our families if we got consumed by the landslide. With the throttle maxed out, we rode relentlessly for a couple of kilometres before coming to an equally rapid stop with the rears sliding, and reflected on the horror that we’d escaped — only just.

The slush was unimaginable — the worst I’d seen in years. It was near Marhi en-route Rohtang Pass that the roads were non-existent and the monsoon had wreaked havoc with incessant downpour for a couple of nights in the entire region.

We trundled along; carefully negotiating the waterfalls that got formed out of nowhere, surging down in anger on the already perilous road. Barely a few metres after yet another fording, a rock the size of a tennis ball hit my helmet and I almost lost balance on the bike and suggested we stop to measure the damage to my fancy headgear. But we both knew deep inside that it wasn’t for that; it was to stop and breathe, ease up the chill in the spine and gather our senses. Once my legs had stopped shaking, we carried on.

There was something about that stretch — both of us felt uneasy riding it. We’d stopped once again due to exhaustion, and just then we could feel the ground under our feet shake...
Hiwatari Matsuri, Japan
It involves burning of prayer sticks called ‘goma’ with Shugendo priests walking over the burning embers.

Tar Barrel, England
Participants light barrels outside pubs and hoist them on their backs and run through the streets.

Las Fallas, Spain
It involves burning of the fire-cracker stuffed ‘ninots’ or effigies made of wood and other combustible products.

La Quema del Diablo, Guatemala
It began with lighting bonfires to mark special occasions, and later got linked to the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.

Up Helly Aa, Scotland
People are in period costumes, carrying torches and burning a replica of a Viking galley.

The End of the Road
Lying a little over 50kms from Pithoragarh in the Soar Valley, Askot is a tiny town. Falling on the way to Dharchula, the ridge on which it sits, skirts surviving forests and tribal habitation. As one climbs from Jauljibi — meeting point of Goriganga and Kali rivers — the thickly forested road suddenly bursts into a wide barren mountain corridor. One becomes aware of the mighty River Kali that roars into existence below, across which lies Nepal. The road from here snakes through mountains and waterfalls before gently descending to Balwakot, where one is at eye level with the mighty Kali River.

The Ancient Connect
The roots of modern day Olympics can be traced back to Much Wenlock, a small town tucked inside Shropshire in the United Kingdom. In 1850, Dr. William Penny Brookes founded the Wenlock Olympian Class, organiser of a sporting event with participants from across England. In 1890, Dr Brookes invited Baron Pierre de Coubertin where the two discussed Brookes' dream of an Olympic revival to be staged in Athens. On his return to France, de Coubertin referred to his host’s efforts to revive the Olympics and hence the modern day mega event.
Wheeling Gleefully!

With bountiful life of all kind spread across its land, every bend reveals a pleasing visual in Odisha and offers great experiences.

Road journeys afford intimate experiences and the flexibility to explore to the heart’s content. From beautifully enveloping hills to thick blanket of mangroves, from wildlife to quiet escapes — Odisha has many immersive experiences spread all across its geography. Get behind the wheel and get on the road, for you’ll discover the secrets of ‘India’s best kept secret’!

DEEP INTO THE MANGROVES
(Kolkata to Bhitarkanika via Bichitrapur and Chandipur)
This route allows pitstops you’d want to lay over at forever. Mangrove walks, boat rides, cruises, and bike rides unravel Odisha’s natural beauty in all its glory. All obscure marine ecosystems and religious edifices wait patiently to be discovered by the much intrigued tourists. A visit to Chandaneshwar Temple and Balasore’s Emami Jagannath Temple are pertinent to add to your portfolio as a burgeoning historian. Finally grab the chance to crack the classic ‘is that you?’ Joke on your sibling while witnessing wildlife in its natural habitat in the verdant thickets of Bhitarkanika National Park. Eventually, retire at quaint nature camps and saunter along the receding coastline of the Chandipur Beach.

Savour Along the way: Mudhi Mansa, seafood delicacies - fish, crabs prawns.
THE QUEST FOR ODISHA’S WILD WEST
(Raipur to Debrigarh via Hirakud)
Attending to your impulses should always be encouraged, hence the emphasis. From ex-hilarating adventure sports at Hirakud Reservoir to adrenaline packed jungle safaris at the Debrigarh and Satkosia wildlife sanctuaries, the attention on wild will never seem an over exaggeration. For those seeking a deeper, contemplative experience, go to town with scenic treks along the Gandhamardan Hills and spiritual awakenings at the Patali Srikhetra, Harishankar- Nrusinghanath, Chausath Yogini, and Indralath temples. On a comparatively sober note, unwind in a mix of luxury hotels, quiet nature camps, plush tents and rustic cottages.
Savour along the way: Chaul Bara; Ghuguni Gupchup; desi chicken; patra poda chicken

REACHING FOR THE HILLS
(Visakhapatnam to Daringbadi via Rayagada)
Satisfy the caprices of an adventurer as you make your way to the Hanging Bridge at Chekaguda followed by a drive through the verdant hills, valleys and jungles of Chatikona. All is covered as you go. From one stop to another. Hike through the coffee plantations at the serene hill station of Daringbadi before you set out to explore the Daringbadi waterfalls. The adventure continues at Mandasaru- a rich ecosystem teeming with rare medicinal plant and animal species. The trip culminates with you awkwardly holding the jet ski instructor at the Gopalpur- on-sea beach, as it provides an array of exciting water sports.
Savour along the way: South Indian meals, desi chicken, mutton

THE CASCADE TRAIL
(Ranchi to Keonjhar)
Tailored specially for nature lovers, Odisha’s scenic natural beauty is the prime focus of this road trip. Re-live the chronicle of the Pandavas at Bhimkund - believed to be the place where they stayed during their many expeditions, as you stand under the gushing waterfalls to amplify its mythological essence. The twin waterfalls of Sanaghagara and Badakuda might prove to be equally exhilarating if not more. The incredible Sitabini Fresco painting, rock inscriptions and the picturesque Kanjipani Ghati will implore the artist in you.
Savour along the way: Chhenapoda Murki, Nadia Kora, patra poda mansa
Adrenaline Rush

Settling back into the post Covid world by means of adventure tourism in Switzerland

SWITZERLAND

After almost two years of postponement and restrictions owing to Covid-19, the Adventure Travel World Summit (ATWS) is all set to be back in 2022 in Switzerland. It will be the first time ever that the summit will be returning to a host destination — previously held in Lucerne in 2012 — to celebrate its ten-year anniversary. More than just a mere gathering of stakeholders, the summit’s focus in its next edition will be on sustainable tourism with a convention around the elements of fire, water, air, and earth. Building on their long standing relationship, the Adventure Travel Trade Association and Switzerland Tourism announced a two year partnership with a collective aim to pursue, support, and encourage sustainable tourism. The opening ceremony of the event will be held at the Lugano Arts and Culture Center, preceded by a day of adventure where in all activities — such as urban swimming, stand-up paddleboarding or cooking the perfect risotto — will be based on either of the four themes, and will showcase the “swisstainability” mindset.

» The Summit will be held from 3-7 October 2022 and the registrations will open after the virtual edition this year
Mounted at a height of 69.4ft, the 5,000 tonne sandcastle placed in the small seaside town of Blokhus, Denmark, has surpassed the former largest castle of Germany by three metres. Built using 4,860 tonnes of sand, this intricate monolith is a vision of Dutchman Wilfred Stijger, and was assisted by the world’s 30 best sand sculptors. Albeit the castle’s semblance is that of a pyramid, the idea projected is that of a crown bearing coronavirus.

HOGWARIS EXPERIENCE IN New York

Harry Potter New York invites you to partake in the virtual reality experience and witness the iconic school of wizards and witches up close. All you need is a VR headset, backpack, and hand and foot trackers and voila! Visitors will have to choose between Chaos at Hogwarts and Wizards Take Flight. While the former allows you to wander through the Castle Halls, the latter will earn you a chance to soar high on your own broomstick. Tickets are available for $34.

>> Try to reach half an hour prior to the booked slot for hassle free experience

FIFA 2022 PREPARATION IN Qatar

All set to host the greatly anticipated FIFA 2022, the already exponentially developed Middle Eastern terrain is equipping itself with hotels and serviced apartments. Qatar is aiming to broaden its appeal to travellers from around the globe while rendering world class hospitality and stay services. The five-star Accor property, Pullman Doha West Bay; the JW Marriott West Bay, the Steigenberger Hotel and the Banyan Tree are among the contributors to the 105 hotels and properties that are underway.

>> This growth is being backed by Qatar National Tourism Council (QNTC)
An Intimate Affair

A brand by women; for women. The Woman’s Company was born out of the desire to provide the best personal hygiene solution to women across age brackets.

After having left her role as the COO of the Fortis La Femme hospitals due to personal reasons, Anika Parashar was clear that she wanted to continue her trajectory of two decades in women’s healthcare & wellness. Having ample experience in understanding the need gaps and the challenges that existed for women, she explored existing young businesses in the women’s health space that she could invest time and money in. However, with a few investors, she decided to create original solutions in this space.

The thought for The Woman’s Company (TWC) germinated in Anika’s mind when her daughter was hitting puberty. She wondered if there were certifiably biodegradable, organic, soft, and rash-free products which would enable her daughter to continue her level of normal activity even while she was menstruating? This question birthed TWC.

The Woman’s Company was launched on 8 March 2020 — International Woman’s Day — and faced its first setback barely a few days into operation as the lockdown was announced. Being a primarily D2C brand, TWC found customers repeating their purchases and believing more in the brand with their loyalty. Anika believes that consumer spending will be far more cautious in terms of casual purchases and also with making more educated and well thought out choices. We feel more and more confident that The Woman’s Company products are seen as valuable choices to make.

The Women’s Company (TWC) entered the women’s intimate and hygiene space with six products — Sanitary Pads, Panty Liners, Tampons, Menstrual Cup, Bamboo Razor and Urination Device. Different women of different ages need different products and services. TWC has consciously designed the products with industry differentiators in order to offer the best experience to its users. For example, the sanitary napkins and panty liners are ergonomically designed to fit the Asian-sized body type and comfortably sit under the body curves of Indian women. The pads are free from the very harmful dioxins which are mostly found in all available products of personal hygiene. The urination device are plastic-free, foldable and easy to carry. The tampons are made of 100% organic cotton and have cardboard applicators while the menstrual cups are made up of medical grade silicon. TWC even offers specially designed Teenage Pad for young girls.

TWC invested nine months in the initial phase of R&D and to identify the right ingredients that would go into making the various products. Its manufacturing base is in India and abroad but the packaging is done domestically and the company has ensured affordable pricing for its users. All its products pass through multiple quality checks before reaching the hands of women.
Taking care of our bodies has become significant, especially during the times we’re sailing through. Ira Trivedi shares what she integrates into her routine as soon as the monsoon arrives to help her well-being during the season and into the seasons that follow.

**The Magic of Monsoon**

Taking care of our bodies has become significant, especially during the times we’re sailing through. Ira Trivedi shares what she integrates into her routine as soon as the monsoon arrives to help her well-being during the season and into the seasons that follow.

Here is always something about monsoon and petrichor that invokes mystique. After a blazing summer, when the clouds burst, it is as if the Gods have blessed us with more than just water – it feels as if they have blessed us with a new lease of life.

For me the monsoon brings with it a renewed sense of well-being. I can finally turn off the drying AC and be outside without feeling as if I’m about to get a heat-stroke. This simple change can make a marked difference in personal yoga practice. But there are a few pit-falls that the monsoon brings with it as well. As per Ayurveda, this is the season to watch out for – it when infection thrives, and Ayurveda encourages us to pay special attention to self-care. In fact, Ayurveda prescribes monsoon as the best time for undergoing their signature “Panchakarma” treatment, where the body goes through an intense detox.

Here are a few things that I integrate into my routine as soon as the monsoon arrives, and over the years I have seen that these help my well-being during the monsoon and into the seasons that follow.

Let’s begin with my nightly ritual. I make my own massage oil by combining organic sesame oil with my favourite essential oils – at the moment this is lavender, which is also great for sound sleep. I rub this oil over my body for five minutes making sure to massage the joints — the area behind my neck, behind my knees, my ankles and my wrists.

Hair care can be a nightmare during the monsoon – with frizz and hair fall – so taking care of the hair is important. Firstly, I keep my hair shorter during the monsoon than any other season, and make sure to get monthly trims. I also oil or pre-condition my hair before I wash it. This doesn’t need to take more than a few minutes. I oil my scalp before I brush my teeth and wash my face,
and then I wash off the oil in the shower. A point to note — to fend off infection and negative energy, during my shower, I splash some water with pink salt dissolved in it on my body. This makes all the difference.

A lot of people experience breakouts in this season because of excess sebum production, so the skin does require a bit more care than usual. I do this by using a face mask once or twice a week. For me, clay masks work really well during monsoons. To make this process a bit more convenient, I apply a mask before shower. Sometimes

Monsoon is a time to slow down, and not to speed up. Downpours are nature’s way of asking us to remain indoors and curtail movement. It is important to maintain a daily practice of yoga, focussing on restoration and renewal.

during a short work-from-home break, I refresh by applying a face mask and taking a 20 minute power nap. Make sure to wash the face frequently using a gentle face wash. A little tip here — I like to use aloe-vera gel based in the monsoon. If you want to do the same, make sure to invest in an organic product, or better yet, grow your own aloe-vera plant.

Now, about the asanas. Though a downpour makes me want to practice invigorating and intense postures; I have understood over the years that the monsoon is a time to slow down, and not to speed up. Downpours are nature’s way of asking us to remain indoors (plus the pandemic, of course) and to curtail movement. It is important to maintain a daily practice of yoga, but also to do a gentler practice — longer holds, calmer postures focussing on restoration and renewal.

It is also crucial to make a few dietary changes. If you’re non-vegetarian, cutting down on meat is advisable, including (especially) sea-food. It is also important to cut down on dairy products, and instead eat more vegetables (not raw, but gently steamed or cooked). I tend to drink warming soups in this weather and include a lot of khichri, our very own Indian super food, in my diet as much as possible. The spices that we cook our khichri with — turmeric, black pepper, cumin — are wonderful for our immune system. It is tempting to have many cups of steaming chai in this weather, but a better beverage is hot ginger water (boiled with cinnamon for 20 minutes gives it an extra zing) and plenty of herbal, non-caffeinated, non dairy teas. Try my favorite Ayurvedic super beverage — CCF, which is cumin, coriander and fennel seeds mixed in equal proportions and boiled with water.

Last tip for this monsoon season is to try and include a few minutes of meditation in your daily routine — even five minutes can be enough. The monsoons are truly a meditative time that encourages all of us to move inwards. Meditation can be more powerful during this time than any other time of the year and yogis have always used the monsoon to retreat to their caves for sadhana. The pandemic has given us good reasons to take our self-care routines seriously, and there is no better time to start than during the lively monsoons.
The Monsoon

Monsoon is the writer’s season; the time to stay indoors, awed by Nature’s glorious majesty, focus on one’s own thoughts and put pen to paper or fingers to keyboard.

Writers have been savouring the monsoon for millennia. Its rains are life-giving and life-affirming, as Kalidasa’s lovely lines about the monsoon attest — “a source of fascination to amorous women, the constant friend to trees, shrubs and creepers, the very life and breath of all living beings, this season of rains”.

More than a quarter of a century ago, the Scottish writer Alexander Frater travelled to Kerala to witness the beginning of the monsoon, and then travelled north, tracing its path across the length and breadth of India. His Chasing the Monsoon remains a classic and his monsoon route well worth emulating by the intrepid traveller.

Of course, Kerala does not have the wettest place on earth – that’s in Assam – or even host the wettest place in south India (which is in Karnataka), but it offers the earliest, and arguably the most intense, onset of the monsoon. It also receives a great deal of rain, with spectacular floods causing major devastation in 1924, 2018, and 2019.

Why is the monsoon so special? As Valmiki put it in the Ramayana: “For nine months, the sky drank the ocean’s water, sucking it up through the sun’s rays, and now gives birth to a liquid offspring, the elixir of life.” That sense of release makes the monsoon the most anticipated season. The monsoon means the resumption of life, as nature, in the poet Arundhati Subramanian’s phrase, turns fluid and magical and green. One poem tells us that the rain brings with it a shining resurrection, a world freshly washed. Another lyrically describes the sprouting grass “pushing up earthen umbrellas”.

Kerala, the place of the monsoon’s arrival, looks forward to it with anticipation each year, since time immemorial. Chandrotsavam, a 14th century epic poem in Malayalam, rhapsodises about how the monsoon rain flies across the ocean to nurture Kerala, “like a mother to her child”. The rhythms of Malayalam poetry are influenced by steady drumbeat of the pouring rains.

Ancient Indian literature is redolent
with the monsoon. Sanskrit poems imagined the earth heaving to receive her lover, the rains. An ancient Tamil poem contains the brilliantly evocative image: “In love our hearts have mingled like red earth and pouring rain”.

There are references to the first uneven drops that herald an approaching storm, the great blowing wind that precedes the oncoming rain. The immortal Kalidasa, in his Meghadhutam, writes that “the vault of heaven is overly impregnated with massive clouds... they glisten like the blackened nipples of bosoms of pregnant women, ready to rain the elixir of life on the lips of her offspring”. Poets refer to its petrichor, the smell that the earth gives off just after rain, and also to the softness of the wind after a rainstorm.

The Myrccchakāṭika of Śudraka has an equally effective description: “the world slumbers, its lotus-eyes closed; the sky, liquefied by Indra’s thunderbolt, seems to be pouring down; the lightning is the slippery gold chain on Indra’s elephant.”

The monsoon also affects how people conduct their lives. As torrential rain lashes Kerala during the month known as Karkidaka maasam (usually mid-July to mid-August), most Hindu families mark it by prayer and devotion. Elders call the month Ramayanam maasam, a month to read the epic daily. For the monsoon is also a time for readers, an opportunity for quiet, for calm introspection, for the contemplation of words.

If you are not a writer, set yourself down with a good book on a sheltered porch, watch the torrents pour down, and read. Let the flow of words match the flow of water. The majesty of the monsoon demands no less.
Monsoon Mania

As the water droplets hit the ground and the air becomes moist, witness the magic of monsoon unfold across the country with these shots.

@mazha_awesome
KERALA
The joy the heavy spells bring

@subtle_elixir
KOLKATA
Colour pop and drop during a fresh spell
@prannoydutta
MUMBAI
Maximum city’s maximum rainfall
@yourstrulygoa
GOA
Reflections and the calm after the storm

@ayushmandash27
SHILLONG
Fancy a drive in the monsoon?

@ignitedlens_
DELHI
Monsoon haze and Delhi’s historical gaze
@shutterisland.india
JAIPUR
Pink city’s rendezvous with grey clouds
@neetesh_photography
CHENNAI
Navigating through familiar waters
When I first came to Scandinavia, I was curious about what makes these countries the happiest in the world. It could hardly have been on account of the weather. The winters are a long haul of misery with sometimes as little as six hours of light — not sunlight but a weak diffused greyish idea of light. Summer offers much longer days but that often translates into a curtailed sleep, for the sharp sunlight penetrates through thick curtains, however hard you try to block it.

In my short work trips to Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Norway, I couldn’t fathom the cause of this happiness. Is it a pretence, I wondered? It was only after I moved to Scandinavia in 2009 that I began to peel layer after layer of what makes these societies happier than most. These are factors which are so interwoven in the social fabric that many first-time visitors tend to miss noticing them — as did I.

One of the major contributors to this happiness factor is the work-life balance. Rarely have I seen my colleagues work over the weekends, or late on weekdays. Moreover, the concept of summer vacation, which in India seemed to me like a relic from the good old school days, is well alive and kicking here. Almost everyone takes anywhere between three to four weeks off in the peak of the summer months of July and August. The summer days are spent relaxing on the beach or walking the woods, but never too far away from home.

The idea of travelling far off to another country during these vacations is a rarity. Instead, Scandinavians prefer to go to their summer house, which could be as close as within 20 kilometres of where they live. Again, I was surprised with this arrangement for I thought the idea of vacationing was always to travel to exotic locations and not retire to a wooden house with basic necessities. “Well, distance is irrelevant. It is important to disassociate from your daily environment completely and relax in entirety,” said a good friend, Lars, when I asked him about this arrangement.

Yet another important factor contributing to better work-life balance is the gender equality that’s a given in society. The women do not have to shoulder the burden all alone. For instance, a new mother gets more than a year off on maternity leave. Six months of paternity leave for new fathers is also pretty common. Scandinavians are far more independent and do not necessarily have their parents come over for longer durations to take care of their newborns.

Apart from the work-life balance, another reason why Scandinavians thrive is the social structure that provides security. A case in point is the strong pension system that ensures that people don’t have to actively plan for their future but instead the government takes care of this need. The robust pension system is fuelled by the taxes which are quite high — as much as 60% of the monthly income. However, the peace-of-mind that comes with it makes this tax pinch worth it. The taxes also fuel the healthcare system, which in turn ensures that everyone has access to basic healthcare for free. The whole idea of stepping into a hospital, getting a timely checkup and getting out without paying anything was bewildering at first. I couldn’t quite believe it. But that’s the beauty of the Scandinavian model.

There are several factors that go into making a happy society. Size is another one. All these countries have small populations which makes the management of complex schemes (healthcare, pension) easy. Research has shown that people living in close harmony with nature are generally happier, and that’s another thing that’s true for Scandinavians.

The more years I spend in Scandinavia, the more I am learning about what makes these societies happier than the rest. While the concept of happiness is subjective, I have come to learn that it’s about security, fairness and long-term thinking. Finally, some of my initial bewilderment is melting away and after spending so many years here, I am perhaps also becoming a happier version of myself.

* A typical Scandinavian town square
Illustration: Nitin Chaudhary
I have spent a significant part of the past few years travelling solo, riding through some of the most interesting routes in India, Nepal and Tibet. As I was on a motorcycle, I expected that the question I would be asked the most was “kitna deti hai? (How much mileage do you get?), which could well be the most favourite question Indians like to ask. But many people I met along the way were more surprised by the fact that I was travelling alone. While some were curious about it, most came at it from a pre-conceived notion that it didn’t make sense—even though they had never tried it. I have, in fact, met several people, in big cities and small towns alike, who strongly believe that the entire purpose of travel is defeated if you don’t have company. After all, how can you have fun or be happy if you are all by yourself?

I think about it differently, of course, and here is why it works for me.

I like to travel by myself because it lets me remain fluid. I get to choose when I go, where I go and, most importantly, the pace at which I go. It lets me prioritise my preferences without affecting another person’s experience. It allows me the freedom to have my fill of a place (a town, a monument, a view or a particularly scenic road) before I decide to move forward, and also leaves me the option to blitz through places without even turning to look whenever I may choose to do so. I have enjoyed travelling all by myself because it is phenomenally convenient.

I have also discovered that travelling solo can often be more “social” than travelling in a group. Rather than something I do alone, I look at it as a trip that anyone can be a part of (axe murderers and the like excluded, of course). It leaves me open to meet and interact with more people than I ever would have if I were travelling with companions. When I travel with a group, most activities and interactions are restricted to the people within the group. But, as a solo traveller, I am more likely to find new people to speak to wherever I go. In fact, I have noticed that more people feel comfortable striking up a conversation with me when I am alone. It’s not a familiar conversation like one would have with a friend, but it is informative, relevant and, quite often, enjoyable. This sense of approachability has often led to meeting many new and interesting people, who have helped me in different ways—some of whom have even gone on to become dear friends.

I travel solo because this way I actually get to travel. There have been countless occasions when I have not ended up doing something simply because the schedules of my desired travel companion(s) didn’t match. This way, at least, I do go. It may not be the same as it would have been with those other people, but it’s also not the same as not going anywhere at all. Overcoming the hesitation (or fear?) of doing this alone opened up many more opportunities and possibilities for me.

There is no denying that there are periods (some long, some short) when you do things all by yourself and it can sometimes get lonely. I use these times to collect my thoughts and digest my experiences. I know I would seek out this time for myself even if I had company. I realise this is probably the part that does it in for most people. What’s important to know and remember, though, is that while you might sometimes feel lonely, you don’t ever actually have to be alone.

How you travel or who you travel with is a matter of personal preference. I certainly do not believe there is any one better way to go about it. I do, however, believe that developing an ability to do things by yourself can be hugely empowering. And my solo travel expeditions have been crucial learning experiences that have enabled me to develop a sense of independence in thought and action that reflects in many other aspects of my life too.
A nostalgic fix one gets drawn to instantly is undeniably the annual trips with the extended family. The whole coach howling in a chorus as the train passed through tunnels will always be a pleasant memory to go back to. Equipped with a diverse geographic tenacity, rail journeys through the country’s assortment of terrains and hills, are every traveller’s delight. Economic yet safe, the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) ensures beautiful and safe journeys through the spectacular routes in India. Rest assured with the impeccable services offered by the Indian Railways, one will never have to compromise on quality and security.

The Government platform has further eased the process of procuring tickets and accompanying services by going digital. It also provides SMS assistance to check PNR status. In addition to which, IRCTC offers i-tickets, which are booked online and later delivered by post. The Rolling Deposit Scheme (RDS) was also launched to allow passengers to reserve seats against an advance payment. IRCTC has launched its own payment aggregator system called the IRCTC iPay that helps million of passengers everyday to pay rail tickets in a hasslefree & in a convenient way. The exclusive digital payment gateway, IRCTC iPay aims to provide an improved online digital payment convenience to railway passengers who are availing online travel related services through the official website of IRCTC. The gateway has been launched with the aim of making it easier for travellers to book their train tickets.

Coupled with Shubh Yatra — the loyalty program for frequent travellers, Railways have posited themselves as an enticing recourse to other more expensive modes of travel. The loyalty program helps passengers avail discounts on all tickets booked round the year by paying an upfront annual fee. To add to this never ending bonanza is the flights and hotels booking facilities they’ve added to their line of online reservation services, further alleviating the several redundant tabs and portals. On 1 January 2021 IRCTC even launched its new upgraded e-ticketing website and mobile app for booking of online railway ticket.

Indian Railways runs 1 lakh passenger trains daily, on both long-distance and suburban routes, covering 7,325 stations across India. Luxury trains services, Buddhist Circuit Train and the Maharaj’s Express which runs on five routes across Northwest and Central India are also accommodated by the IRCTC as a part of the tourism packages. Another popular package for tourists on a budget is the “Bharat Darshan” which covers important tourist destinations across India. Apart from the proficiency on the technical and economic front, the hospitality and aesthetic department is also taken care of. It offers adventure tourism packages that include water sports, adventure and wildlife treks, etc. A recent development — the Rail Tourism India is an initiative launched to provide direct catering and tourism packages to users. IRCTC’s pantry cars provides passengers with freshly cooked, hygienic meals, hence, taking care of an all-encompassing pre requisite for a delightful journey. To cope with the unprecedented times, catering services have been put on halt but the energy remains the same. This is your sign to confirm that ticket you’ve long kept on hold.
explore

LIFE IS SHORT, AND THE WORLD IS WIDE

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Located in the east Khasi hills of Meghalaya, Mawsynram receives the highest rainfall in India. With its lush pasture lands, cloud filled skyline, mountain streams and moisture laden winds, it makes for an absolute visual and sensory delight. While most people enjoy the sound of rain drops falling on the ground, in Mawsynram it is a whole new experience — with the sound of the rain being deafening.
MONSOON Getaways
If looking for an offbeat experience, attend the Ali Aye Ligang festival of the Mising tribe, which takes place in February every year.

**Majuli**

Witness the vibrant culture, charismatic nature and warm hospitality here

**FERRIES ARE THE ONLY MODE OF TRANSPORTATION TO REACH MAJULI**

Surrounded by the mighty Brahmaputra and its tributaries, Majuli is the world’s largest river island, in close proximity to the Jorhat district of Assam. Continuous floods and an earthquake three centuries ago led to the formation of this island. The island is culturally rich and home to various tribes such as Ahoms, Sonowal Kachori, Deories. During the monsoon season, the island becomes a birding haven. Migratory birds like sandpiper, falcon, pintail, dalmatian pelican can be spotted here, along with a variety of residential birds. For the lovers of horizon, sunsets at the seashore of Brahmaputra await to make the experience immemorable.

» Majuli is also known for its mask making culture. Considered a sacred practice, it is now conducted only by the devotees of Chamogri satra.

As the country experiences rainfall across its length and breadth here is Team OT’s guide for the perfect getaway to experience the season in all its glory.
Mawsynram

A haven for the quintessential antiquarians, it is crowded with mystical caves and elaborate megaliths

**BEST TIME TO VISIT IS BETWEEN SEPTEMBER AND NOVEMBER**

Located in the East Khasi Hills district of Meghalaya, Mawsynram is the wettest place on Earth and is known for its huge formation of a stalagmite, emulating the shape of a ‘Shivling’.

Home to the 150 metre-long holy caves of the Khasis, the Mawsmai village makes an ideal site for cave explorers. The fourth highest waterfall of India — the 1,035 ft long Mawsmai falls — are situated just a few kilometres from Mawsynram city centre. And about 25km away is Mawlyngbna, a natural geyser inundated with rich fossils. One should also be certain to experience one of the living bridges made from roots of rubber trees; locally known as Jingkieng Deingjris. The roots of rubber trees harness strength over two decades and are often used by locals to cross turbulent streams during the monsoon.

Angling in the ponds around the village is another leisure activity at your disposal.

Due to the condition of intense and persistent rainfall, the villagers use thick grass to soundproof their huts from the deafening rain.
Meghamalai

This unexplored paradise lies in the Western Ghats in Tamil Nadu

**AUGUST IS THE BEST TIME TO VISIT**

Also known as the high wavy mountains, Meghamalai is shrouded in tea and cardamom plantations in the Western Ghats in the Theni district of Tamil Nadu. Situated at the height of 1,500m, this quaint little hill station is perfect for a getaway to not only beat the heat but also enjoy peacefully in the cradle of nature. There are several attractions in the area — including Suruli Falls, Vellimalai and dams such as Suruli Theertham and Manakar. The region is also an eco-hotspot with several wildlife sanctuaries catering to the rich flora and fauna of the region. While here give the coffee and tea estates a chance to keep you occupied. The Meghamalai mountain range is accessible from Theni via Chinnamanur and through Andipatti via Gandamanayakanur.

> The locals renamed the mountain Meghamalai because the peak is always covered with clouds
Valley Of Flowers

Rare exotic Himalayan flora are peacefully snuggled in the west Himalayan region here

**BEST TIME TO VISIT IS JULY TO SEPTEMBER**

Known for its meadows filled with endemic alpine flowers, the Valley of Flowers is located in North Chamoli and Pithoragarh. A part of the Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve, the area lies on the Zanskar range of the Himalayas with the highest point in the national park being Gauri Parbat. A 17km trek leads to the valley. During monsoons, the valley lights up with natural blooms of around 600 species including orchids, poppies, primulas, marigolds, daisies and anemones. The trek to the valley also offers mesmerizing views of cascading waterfalls and wild streams.

Three British mountaineers, who lost their way back after a summit on Mt Kamet, accidently stumbled upon this valley and named it Valley of Flowers.
Bhandardara

Often referred to as the Queen of the Sahyadri Range, this Valley Of Treasures is a repository of natural landscapes.

**IT IS WELL CONNECTED BY ROAD AND BUS SERVICES ARE ALSO AVAILABLE FROM CITIES**

This village situated in Ahmednagar has everything one could possibly want for an ideal detour. A dam, a waterfall, a lake, hill tops, forts and an entire civilisation thriving on a utopian synergy — seldom witnessed amidst the hustle bustle of Mumbai — in perfect reclusion. The largest Earthen Dam in India — the Wilson Dam built on Pravara River, and the Umbrella Falls that form under it are popular sites to visit. Bhandardara houses the Randha Falls of the Pravara River as well, however this shower looks most appealing in the monsoon season.

The stagnant yet picturesque Arthur Lake is surrounded by verdant forests of Sahyadri hills rendering it as an archetypal spot for family picnics. Bhandardara is not just confined to nature’s bounty but is also well endowed culturally and historically. Connected by ferry across Lake Arthur is the Ratangar Fort — rumoured to be a favourite of King Shivaji, it is situated in the latter end of the ghats and accommodates a number of water cisterns and caves. Another hiking top of historical significance is the Harishchandragad Fort. The panoramic views coupled with the ever-pleasant climate here serves as a respite for the adventure seeking fraternity.

» Bhandardara is home to the Everest Of Maharashtra. The Highest Peak of the Sahyadri Ranges — Mt. Kalsubai — persists to be a sight of paramount importance in Bhandardara.
**Agumbe**

With an average rainfall of 8,000mm, experience the rich biodiversity here

**BEST TIME TO VISIT IS NOVEMBER TO FEBRUARY**

Known as Cherrapunji of the south, Agumbe lies in the Shimoga district of Karnataka. Nestled in the beautiful mountain ranges of the Western Ghats, this place is densely covered with lush green rainforests, which are home to rich flora and fauna. Endangered plants like adenia, dysoxylum and animals such as leopard, gaur, lion-tailed macaque can be found here. As soon as the monsoon approaches, waterfalls in Agumbe — such as Jogi Gundi, Onake Abbi and Barkana come alive. Travellers can also make their way to various viewpoints that offer mesmerising sunsets over the Western Ghats.

» Various episodes of popular 90’s show, Malgudi Days, based on RK Narayan’s novel, were shot here
DOORSTEP OF THE Gods
Denouncing the confines of his home

MICHAEL HENRY

heads for a great Himalayan escape
Our house is your gulag — that’s what the pandemic did to us since March last year, keeping us indoors, and redefining our interpersonal relationships to the extent that the season’s greeting became “stay safe and stay away”. From the crowd that is. But calls of the hiking boots swelled like the monsoon clouds, waiting impatiently to dunk all below.

By autumn 2020, it was impossible for me and my girlfriend, Mallika, to not heed the call — of the mountains or the jungle or someplace other than Delhi. The long lockdown had ended, Covid cases were declining, and Uttarakhand offered a window. We knew we had to go. Now, Covid hasn’t entirely gone away and the protocols such as social distancing and avoiding crowded spaces were very much there.

Our travel plan must agree with the rules and so we cottoned onto the idea of going deep into the Himalayas and giving our pins their long-pined-for exercise. Of all the options, trekking ticked the most boxes. And why not? A solitary walk in the woods is perhaps the perfect pandemic activity, tailor-made for social distancing. Even a guided trekking tour on popular trails up there is a lot safer than travelling in a city. Besides, it brings much-needed money to remote communities dependent on tourism, which is ravaged by the pandemic. There couldn’t have been a better time to explore and enjoy solitude. This year, after the second wave of Covid and when the Himalayas open up again, the post-monsoon season will hopefully offer an incredible opportunity for trekkers.

The following days, we trekked through lush meadows of Satsar and Gadsar Valley, crossed Zajbal Pass, visited the Bakerwal house made of mud and logs, and saw shepherds lazily grazing their flock of sheep.

You can trek to Nundkol Lake and Gangabal Lake via Koulsar Lake, which lies at the base of the sacred Harmukh Peak, one of the highest in the valley.

Last October, Mallika and I visited Gangotri for two separate three-day treks. The first took us to Gomukh, a source of the Ganga at the yawning mouth of the Gangotri glacier, and then to the stunning Tapovan meadow. Returning to town, we set off for the second hike to the awe-inspiring...
lake of Kedartal. Easy access to these high mountains is a lucky byproduct of military activity and the flood of religious pilgrims to Gangotri. A trekker can drive on a paved road to Gangotri, at 3,100m, and hike in a single day to the foot of the mountains above 6,000m. Few places in the world offer such powerful mountains so accessibly. The mountains of Gangotri have a deep-seated spirituality.

THE ROAD TO Gangotri

Mallika and I got our PCR tests and hopped on a flight from Delhi to Dehradun. A taxi took us up the long, spectacular route into the Himalayas, through Uttarkashi to Gangotri. The unending ridges were hypnotic, full of hill villages and terraced fields. We bought fresh local fruits and vegetables as snacks. By the time we reached Gangotri, darkness and cold had enveloped the land. Dawn revealed Gangotri as a stunning town squeezed between vertically forested ridges, above the glacial Bhagirathi river. We finalised our permits, hired local guide Rakesh Rao and hit the trail on our first hike to Gomukh.

HIKE 1: TO GOMUKH AND Tapovan

The trail climbed into a picturesque valley bursting in all pigments of colour. Autumn has touched the land, painting the leaves orange and gold. The Bhagirathi raged milky-blue through chaotically strewn boulders, below textured granite slopes. Rugged wooden bridges lay high across streams. When the stunning pyramid of Bhagirathi peak appeared in the afternoon, we used its snowy promises to pull us forward as the challenge of altitude increased. We planned to sleep at the 3,775m Bhojwasa camp, but had not yet acclimatised. Our packs felt like lead. Only a herd of wild Bharal, Himalayan Blue Sheep, provided some relief from the uphill grind.

Finally, we crested a ridge to a view beyond belief: the whole Bhagirathi mountain in front of us, immense yet graceful, catching the orange glow of the setting sun on its snowy summit. Before dawn, we were hanging in a welded metal box on a cable above the roaring Bhagirathi. We were the first to cross that morning. The trail continued up the widening valley, arriving in a tremendous boulder-field. This brutal no man’s land, left behind by the glacier retreating at 25m a year, made for a surreal hike.

TAPOVAN AND THE Mouni Baba

The glacier’s famous mouth loomed ahead at Gomukh. Instead of visiting it right away, we scrambled up a rocky slope to the high meadow called Tapovan. It lies far above the great buckling form of the glacier, right at the foot of stupendous summits. We pulled ourselves over the last boulders onto Tapovan and saw a full panorama of rock and ice. The beauty of Mount Shivling smacked us in the face as its perfectly proportioned ridges sliced into the sky above 6,500m.

We continued to the small, rock-built ashram that houses Tapovan’s lone hermit—Mouni Baba, the quiet one, because he took a decade-long vow of silence. He has lived alone in this remote abode for 14 years. He is proof of willpower, enduring through the winters at such an altitude. Luckily, Mouni Baba has opened up to the world. He was happy to receive us, and we found him surprisingly young, witty, and urbane. His voice was barely audible, but the glint in his eye exuded warmth. When Mallika told him that she had grown up in Bombay but now lived in Delhi, he joked about the idiocy of such a manoeuvre. He was happy to hear an
unending flow of town gossip from Rakesh.

The time at Tapovan was golden. We wandered the gentle meadow, took in the spectacular peaks from every angle, and noshed down tasty dal served by the Baba.

THE HOLY WATER OF Gomukh

With night approaching, we scrambled back down the boulder slope to Gomukh. The cave lived up to its name, looking like a yawning mouth dropping chunks of ice the size of tennis balls. Mallika scooped up some sacred water to bring back to her grandparents. It is fascinating to realise that the Ganga, central to the lives of so many people, begins right here.

The walk back down to Gangotri town the next day felt like a victory lap. The October weather delivered, and we cruised under deep blue skies. We were much more used to the altitude than the groups coming up the trail towards us. Some were geared-up trekkers, but others were families in jeans and with walking sticks. It was inspiring to see people of different ages and fitness levels pushing themselves higher and higher.

Each minute of the hike demonstrated why we go through the efforts of permits, transport, and planning to reach such heights: a glorious combination of natural beauty, physical health, and the satisfaction of a goal well achieved. After so many months indoors in Delhi, this was utter bliss. We coasted into town with sore feet and high spirits.

HIKE2: TO KEDARTAL

Lake

The next hike promised different challenges than the route up to Gomukh and Tapovan. The goal was a legendary lake called Kedartal, in a steep, narrow, and wild valley above Gangotri town. There are no pilgrims or lodges, and only a few places flat enough even to pitch a tent. The route started aggressively, switchbacking up a near-vertical pine forest. We were well-acclimatised from the first hike, though, and churned uphill easily. With the steepest part behind us, we fell into a smooth rhythm through stunning, healthy forests and waterfalls. The wild aspect of this trail unfolded with scrambles across rocky slopes.

As we lugged our packs up the valley, Rakesh told us stories from his village in the Garhwal region. He said, before 1991, few people in the village had seen money. His family used
only two jugs of water a day because they had to walk long down to the river to collect it. In 1991, the combination of economic liberalisation and a disastrous earthquake transformed the village. The quake destroyed most houses, but families received a government payout to rebuild. That improved lives. He said people now keep their cows in buildings better than their own houses in 1991.

By late afternoon, we broke through the last trees into a sloping scrubland above 13,000 feet. The autumn’s paintbrush on grasses and flowers made every patch of ground complex and beautiful.

The massive form of Mount Thalay Sagar muscled into view. The highest mountain of the trip at 6,904m, its conical form and snow-capped snout made it look like a massive spaceship ready to take off. Walking right towards the spaceship, with clouds swirling around it like exhaust fumes, it felt like humanity had selected us for a mission to the stars. We were taking our final walk on our native Earth. And what a walk it was: the valley ridges were topped with sharp spires, the glacial river rushed far below, and green life strived through every crack in the rock.

We reached camp dog tired from the heavy packs and relentless uphill. Camp was a small platform on a steep hill, utterly exposed, but with spectacular mountain views in every direction. Light flakes announced a snowstorm as we closed the tents for the night.

The air was crystal clear when we opened the tents the next morning, revealing Thalay Sagar in all its glory. We soon passed through a rockfall zone, the trail’s most dangerous section, where a rogue boulder could mean disaster. We moved quickly, and got through fine.

THANKING THE MOUNTAIN GODS, WE
ascended to a meadow at 4,400m, then a tortuous boulder field. Each step required jumping from rock to rock, aiming for the stable ones. Progress was slow but we strained forward to the dream of Kedartal. We crested a final ridge and there it was.

Even among the long list of impressive mountain lakes, Kedartal stands alone. It is marvelously deep blue, and sits right at the base of sheer cliffs that top out 2,000m above. The lake's soft curves provide a stunning contrast to the harsh rock and ice all around. Seeing this with our own eyes made the whole trip easily worth it. Perfect afternoon lighting highlighted the complexity of the Himalayan landscape, with deep ridges and fissures spreading through the rocks like braided rivers through sand.

DOWN TO THE Lowlands

We made it back to camp in time for a dazzling sunset on the immense form of Thalay Sagar. The snow peak turned gold, then pink, then a deep purple. We marvelled at it endlessly as the air chilled and cleared, seeming to bring the mountain closer and closer. Far better entertainment than any TV show can provide.

The last day on the trail flew by, all downhill. Lower altitude, and the fragrant pine and birch forests, brought a feeling of easy contentment. We reached Gangotri, and said goodbye to the gorgeous pilgrimage town with its shops full of brass urns for Gomukh water. The local autumn rhythms entertained us on the long drive down. At Dharali village, famous for its orchards, succulent apples overflowed the tables of street-side markets. Past Harsil, a rowdy flock of sheep flowed like a river down the road, making their yearly migration downhill.

We reached Uttarkashi in the dark and saw the lights of at least seven different weddings strung out across the hills. Dusshera had coincided with the relaxing of Covid restrictions to allow these joyous gatherings. After a week in the wild, it was deeply comforting to return to a panorama of human happiness, strung out in flashing bulbs and blasting music down the valley. It was clear that the pandemic had not wiped out the hill country's unique charms. The trek had proved good medicine for our lockdown blues, and we vowed to hit a new trail every single year.

The hike to Kedartal has no lodges, so you need to bring a tent, food, and cooking gear. You can rent them all from trekking companies in Uttarkashi. There are lodges with food on the hike to Gomukh and Tapovan.

The park office in Gangotri cannot provide permits for the Tapovan or Kedartal hikes. You need to get those permits at the park office in Uttarkashi, which is closed on Sundays. You can also email a trekking company in Uttarkashi in advance to get you the permits.

A guide is required to trek to Tapovan or Kedartal. You can go alone to Gomukh.

You can hire an independent guide easily in Gangotri town, or hire one from one of the many trekking companies in Uttarkashi. The salary should be about Rs 2000 per day, plus paying for guide's food, lodging, and tip.

If you want help carrying loads, you can hire porters easily in Gangotri town.

Sleeping bags are necessary for all of Gomukh, Tapovan, or Kedartal. I recommend bringing one with a -20C rating. You can rent one from a trekking company in Uttarkashi too. You may be able to rent in Gangotri town itself, but it will be more expensive.

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If you want help carrying loads, you can hire porters easily in Gangotri town.
Monsoon and the Art of Motorcycle Adventure
The Western Ghats are famed for their lush green cover. But there lie many more secrets.

ROHITH ASHOK
finds out
MOTORCYCLES AND THE MONSOON?

‘No, not the right pairing’ will be the obvious chorus. It does stand to logic too. It can be dangerous, the roads will be slippery, visibility will be poor. But imagine the flip side. Vrooming through all that slush, feeling the pierce of the water pellets on your chest, the engine falling in step to the rhythm of the rain. And in any case when has logic or reason ever come in the way of a great adventure?

So in September 2020, when a few friends invited me to join them on a week-long motorcycle trip in the Western Ghats in Karnataka, I readily agreed. Santosh, Abi and Adi are seasoned travellers and the most passionate motorcyclists that I’ve met yet. They are also the brains, sweat and muscle behind The Great Indian Trail — a carefully curated and mapped route across the whole of India that uses village roads and trails instead of highways to enable a more immersive and scenic travel experience. When they offered to show me some of their favourite routes of the Great Indian Trail near Bisle and Chikkamagaluru, deep in the Western Ghats of Karnataka, I didn’t have to think twice before saying yes.

Like everyone else, my brain too had been slow cooking for months thanks to the lockdowns and movement restrictions. The chance of being back on two wheels, seeing new places and hanging out with good friends was just the change I needed. We scheduled this ride for October, on the assumption that the South-Westerly Monsoon would have run its course by then and left behind a beautiful and blindingly green landscape. Mother Nature, however, had different plans for us.

STAYING DRY IS wishful THINKING

The day before I set off from Chennai to join the gang in Bengaluru, I got a message that read “… we might have some rain along the way. Carry your rain gear.” Sure enough, I was welcomed into Bengaluru by cloudy skies, and by the time we started riding out of the city the next morning, we were in the midst of a full-blown downpour. Over the week that followed, the rain was a constant companion irrespective of where we went. It would let up for a few hours, we would begin to wonder if we had seen the worst of the weather, only to come down pelting more fiercely to shatter any ray of hope (or sunlight).

This was not my first time riding in the monsoon, and I had arrived at the scene well prepared — waterproof liners, waterproof boots and fully-waterproof luggage too. Throughout day 1, I took the trouble to make sure that every layer was worn properly and every flap, zip, clip and buckle was secured correctly so as to form the necessary weather seals.

But a couple of days into the ride, my priorities changed. I realised that trying to keep dry on the motorcycle was a losing battle and went against one of the things that I love the most about being on a bike — the direct exposure to the elements. Since the Western Ghats offer a tropical climate, I could afford to get wet without the risk of completely freezing. And so, by day 3, my rain jacket and waterproof gloves were tucked away and forgotten deep inside one of my bags.

Now, this did mean that I almost always had to go through the painful task of wearing wet and cold gear every morning — the wet gloves and boots were particularly irksome. But once we got moving that initial misery was easily forgotten and replaced with a childish excitement, reminiscent of times spent splashing through puddles as kids.

The real thrill of a monsoon cannot be experienced without getting wet — if you go out to play in the rain, why would you want to come back dry, right? The sooner you make peace with it, the more fun it is.

But this approach only worked because I made sure to always have dry and cleanish clothes to change into at the end of the day. No matter what else happened, the luggage had to be kept 100% waterproof!
The real thrill of a monsoon cannot be experienced without getting wet — if you go out to play in the rain, why would you want to come back dry, right? The sooner you make peace with it, the more fun it is.
While I was making up my mind about keeping dry (or not), my motorcycle was dealing with the challenge of finding and holding traction on wet surfaces. The good news was that my Hero Xpulse 200 with its mixed-use tyres seemed quite adept at this and made riding on tarmac easy and steady even when it was raining heavily. The real fun, however, began when we decided to go trail-hunting.

We met a friend’s friend who knew the trails around the hills near Kudremukh (meaning ‘horse-face’ in Kannada) very well and we decided to ride up a nearly 15-kilometre long route that he promised would take us higher up the hills and into complete solitude. When we started the ascent around 8 in the morning, the sun was out and the day held some promise of being relatively dry. The terrain and climb were not easy to tackle, but fortunately we had shown up with the right kind of motorcycles, and company for the task. Riding up a route like this alone may not have been possible, but by working together, we were able to reach the top a few hours later. What awaited us was simply out of this world.

Really, it was heaven up there. There was not a soul around and wherever you looked nature had painted the most spectacular scenes. Every hill, as far as the eyes could see, was covered in a fresh coat of lush greenery. A silence fell upon us, we quietly took in the mesmerizing views, with a clear intention of staying there for as long as possible.

By the time we were done napping, snacking and chilling a few rounds of rain had come and gone. The path we had ridden to the top had now effectively become a slide. Just the kind of thing that gets your adrenaline pumping. Every single one of us ended up dropping our motorcycles at some point or the other on the way back down, some in such a spectacular fashion that it would make everyone behind burst out in laughter. My heart was in my mouth on several occasions, but underneath my helmet I was beaming and having the time of my life.

Riding this trail would have probably been easier in dry weather, but we would not have been able to witness the natural beauty and splendour of the Western Ghats in the rains. The richness of the monsoon, in terms of colour and life-affirming quality, is something that cannot be matched. It’s a pay-off that definitely justifies the risk.
EVERYTHING TASTES better when you’re wet

Things are always better when it rains. One of the unexpected highlights of this entire trip was the food that we found along the way. My personal favourites were the traditional home-cooked Kodagu-style meals at our homestay near Bisle, the piping hot Mangaluru buns at a shop on the route to Chikamagaluru and a delicious fish thali at a restaurant in Kalasa.

Many of these meals were phenomenal in their own right. But the frequency with which food seemed to achieve this lofty standard led me to believe that there may have been something more at play. It took me some time, but I eventually joined the dots — everything tastes better when you’re wet and cold. It was almost like my taste buds had found a life of their own that caused every flavour to linger longer.

Anyone who has cherished a cup of chai and some pakoras on a rainy day would relate to this easily. It is not just about taste, but also the sense of comfort and satisfaction that comes with it.

I enjoy the slower pace of travel and the unpredictable weather. I’m more likely to find quiet places because most other people are at home, hiding from the rain. I can’t wait to go back to see more of the lush landscapes and to find new routes to explore.

IT CAN BE A BLOODY affair

Having sufficiently romanticised the idea of riding a motorcycle in the rains, I must also speak about some of the harsh realities of this kind of travel. The first involves the infamous leeches of the Western Ghats.

I’d heard many horror stories about the monsoon menace of leeches in the Western Ghats but hadn’t experienced it on previous journeys in the region. This time, however,
the leeches seemed keen to make up for all the lost opportunities. Even though we were a group of 5 people, I seemed to be the primary (and often the only) target of the leeches. Every time we stopped, I would need to find and extract leeches of various sizes from different parts of my body — I even found one buried into my moustache!

Despite all my efforts to avoid them, I would often have 20 or more blood-thirsty hitchhikers tagging along for the ride. I’m just glad that we ditched all plans to do any outdoor camping, these slimy creatures may have sucked all the blood out of me.

The other draw-back was the clouds would often limit or completely cut out the scenic views. There were a few times when we rode to the top of a hill hoping to find a view point, but instead ended up being engulfed by the clouds leaving only a few metres of visibility. The excitement of being in the clouds wears out quickly, especially when you know that you’re missing out on a majestic view. But the silver lining was the dramatic dance of the monsoon clouds as they moved across the sky. The way they change shape and colour depending on the time of day, dark black ones suddenly turning a purple hue when they catch a few sunrays. It takes some patience, and luck, but if you’re fortunate enough to be at the right place at the right time you could be in for a pretty spectacular show.

Would I do it again?

The short answer is a resounding yes. As I said, this was not my first experience of riding in the Western Ghats in the monsoon and it definitely won’t be my last. I enjoy the slower pace of travel and the unpredictable weather. I’m more likely to find quiet places because most other people are at home, hiding from the rain. I can’t wait to go back to see more of the lush landscapes and to find new routes to explore. Having tackled many of my fears and hesitations of riding in the rain, I feel more in sync with the sense of freedom many of us associate with motorcycle journeys. I can’t say that this kind of travel experience will be easy, safe or even pleasant to all, but for me it was enriching and deeply satisfying. The call of the rains will always beckon me.
Chasing Memories
Reminiscing experiences from the years past,

SHAHWAR HUSSAIN

sets off to relive the stories that inspired in his youth

are the deeds of a man in his prime... — so goes the lines of a famous Pink Floyd song. Well, I am not really an 'old man' yet, but I do have some wonderful memories of my prime. One cherished memory is of my numerous journeys on the incredible, century-old railway route that connected Silchar to Guwahati. It was an engineering marvel.

The train passed through numerous tunnels, long and high bridges, climbed steep inclines and dove into long drops. I would sit by the window and watch the lush green jungles, the blue mountains yonder, deep valleys shrouded in white clouds, cascading waterfalls and dimly-lit, small stations that looked very old England. My absolute favourites were the 37 dark tunnels and one particularly long, curved bridge along the route. I would wait to catch a glimpse of the whole train on that curve of the bridge and the two steam engines spewing smoke into the blue sky—one to pull, and one to push the meter gauge train as it chugged its way up the steep incline.

In September 2014, the 05697 Hill Queen Express pulled out of the Lower Halflong railway station for the last time, thus bringing the curtains down on this historic, century-old railway line. The broad gauge follows a slightly different route...the old tunnels, bridges and stations lie forgotten.

I have been meaning to visit Halflong, the only hill station of Assam, and the adjoining areas, for a while now—possibly just to see some of the old tunnels! So, when my friend Pranjal Baruah suggested we do a short motorcycle trip to Halflong during the receding monsoon last year, I jumped in.

The monsoon lasted rather long last year. It poured heavily for a fair bit of the way when I rode down to the tea town of Jorhat in late October to join Pranjal and his three riding buddies, Gaurav Bhagawati, Monu Hazarika and Uttam Saikia for the trip.

Halflong is the district headquarters of the Dima Hasao district—formerly known as NC Hills or the North Cachar Hills. Though many breathtakingly scenic places are nestled in the NC Hills, the area sees very little tourist traffic (not that I am complaining!). Perhaps for that reason, it is still relatively unspoilt.
Start early, finish early: This has been my motto in all these years of riding long distances; the mantra has served me well. We started out at 6 am; the destination for the day was Umrangso, the second biggest town in Assam’s Dima Hasao district. After a couple of hours of riding on good open roads, the rain gods decided to open the floodgates—very, very wide.

The rain forced us to stop a number of times and it was a little past midday when we reached Panimur Falls on the border of Nagaon and Dima Hasao districts. The rains swelled the Panimur Falls enormously—I wonder if anyone has ever bothered doing the gallons per minute calculation of the water cascading down its craggy edge. In the dry season, the water of the Panimur Falls is clear and blue, but the monsoon muddied the water, besides adding to the volume. The forests beyond the falls grow rapidly during the rains and by now had a rich, gleaming hue of greens. The raw beauty of the Panimur Falls in its untamed state had a captivating effect on us, and we spent a couple of hours there. However, angry, lowering clouds presaged a furious downpour and prevented a longer stay. At Umrangso, our final stop for the day, we stayed at a cozy little place called Sneha Lodge.

NEEPCO (North East Electric Power Corporation) has a major presence at Umrangso. The corporation has built a dam across the Kopili River to generate electricity and in the process has created the picturesque Umrangso lake. The large lake and its surrounding forests attract the migrating Amur Falcons—a midway stop on their long journey from Siberia to South Africa.

We woke up to the constant drumming of rain; when it stopped we made our way to the Kopili Dam. The rains filled up the reservoir and they had to open the sluice gates to let the water out. The gushing water, frothy and foamy, is a sight to behold. A young man, brimming with information, led us to the lake and as we sat and sipped black tea, we saw a few Amur Falcons. “The first batch came in, stayed for some days and left,” he said. The next batch was due in early November. The greenery on the banks grew luxuriantly, and it seemed to be a favourite place for the Falcons to roost.

Halflong was a long way off and the intermittent rains slowed us down a bit. It was a little after sundown that we reached our destination—Nohshiring Guest House. Its owner, Mr. Balabhadra Hagjer, welcomed us with a bottle of Judima, the traditional drink of the Dimasa people.

Halflong has changed a lot over the years. Good roads, nice markets, better hotels, nicely kept parks...but it has still retained the character of a small hill town, and that’s what I love. It has been 30 years or so since I spent some time at Halflong, but I am glad that it has preserved its laidback style. Unfortunately, the Lower Halflong train station has changed irrevocably, and has completely lost its quaint, old-world character. It’s clean, but very cold and uninviting. The warmth is missing and not wanting to further dilute its old image in my memory, I left in a very short time.

Close to Halflong, Jatinga lies along the old railway line. Jatinga was in the news some years back about a rather strange phenomenon in some of its villages—Amur Falcons used to die there mysteriously. Towards the end of the year, when the Falcons start coming in, there are pockets that are covered by a thick blanket of mist. According to experts, the Falcons get disoriented by the thick mist and fly towards any light that shines through it. As they dive towards the sources of light, they hit electric poles, houses and whatever is near them. The villagers also contributed toward the death of the Falcons. Now, different NGOs and the forest department have been working with the villagers towards protecting the Falcons. It has yielded very positive results.

To understand the Falcon mystery a little better, we were told to go to Gorkhali village that sprawls on the top of the hill and talk to the headman. Reaching the village is an adventure in itself. In the days of yore,
A rail track leading to a tunnel in Haflong
↑ The expansive Baral Range in Jatinga
there weren’t any motorable roads to the village. People used to walk up from the old Jatinga railway station. The station is gone and so are the tracks that ran alongside. Once it fell into disuse, the jungle reclaimed a large portion of the tracks. We rode our bike on the very track, into the longest tunnel through which the iconic Hill Queen Express ran not many years back. I could have never imagined that I would be riding a motorcycle through the very railway tunnel that I crossed many times in my youth!

Water still seeps through the walls of the tunnel, its moist contours flashing by as the headlight beams lit it up. On the bend, it also threw up some eerie shadows! A century after it was built, the tunnel stands strong and proud. There are many legends about these tunnels and bridges, but that is another story!

The headman, Bijoy Kumar, a retired army man, filled us with information. The village had seen precious few visitors over the years and none on bikes! As evening fell, another round of Judima was drunk, to the accompaniment of more stories from Mr Hagjer at the guest house.

The skies held firm in the morning and we headed out to Kaziranga—a rather long way, but the roads were good. Along the way, we stopped at Maibong. I had stayed at Maibong in the early ‘80s with my father. I remember it as a place with lots of forests infested with leopards. Things have changed now and I will not say it’s all for the
better. We went to see an archaeological site that has a house carved out of a huge stone. There are different legends, with minor variations, about this stone house, but all of them say it was carved out in a single night!

There were few interruptions along the way and we reached Kaziranga rather late. Last year, the authorities had decided to open the Kaziranga National Park almost a month ahead of its scheduled opening date of November 1. It didn’t serve the purpose, I guess. The rains didn’t stop and the flood waters didn’t recede completely, which meant that only a small portion of the park was open for the safari. But we could still see rhinos and elephants, and a few exotic birds as well.

We went on our separate ways from Kaziranga—I took another five hours or so to reach Guwahati, while Pranjal and his friends reached home much earlier.

Sure, riding becomes a little difficult, uncomfortable and dangerous in the rains but the overflowing waterfalls, the lush greenery and the freshness of it all compensates for all the teething troubles—well, almost. Riding long hours in a wet undergarment remains a pain!
KAREN MARTIN
PRESERVING CULINARY CULTURE 66

KHEER AND POODA 67
Heady Wonder

Gin has experienced a resurgence over the past few years and one Indian gin is making headlines

Gin — a fairly recent growth phenomenon and statement of cool in India among the roisterers. It is an absolute classic which I tried reluctantly back in my youth when emptying the gut on the sidewalks was routine. But that reluctance turned into enthusiasm.

I never liked vodka much, and most certainly wasn’t suave enough to carry off wine in style. So, I kept to my beers and whiskeys of the blended, and on the rare occasions, single-malt kind. That was when we were a bunch of binge-drinking idiots in college and didn’t care for the complexities or the chemistries of whatever spirits we consumed. But as maturity settled in and curiosity for alcohol started poking my brain cells, I read literature on the different spirits. Of them, gin fascinated me.

It is made from 96 percent ABV (alcohol by volume) neutral grain spirit — like vodka — but the magic is done by juniper, specifically the fully grown but unripe cones. You could go on and experiment with any botanical for added layers of flavour; but to be classified as gin, the spirit must be infused with juniper.

I always wondered why gin was called a ‘dry’ drink, and that’s technically because it does not contain any artificial flavours. But if you’ve ever tasted juniper in isolation, you’d have felt your tongue drying out and that was always the reason in my head about gin being called a dry drink.

In India, the excitement around alcoholic beverages has seen stages. There was (still is?) a time when beer simply exploded in popularity, and now it’s gin that is taking the centrestage. Several folks out there are trying to create special flavours of gin and there’s one Indian brand that stands out on the global stage — Hapusa.

A product of Nao Spirits, Hapusa won gold at the International Wines & Spirits Competition (IWSC) 2021. Its founder, Anand Viramani, explained that while it is a contemporary gin, it is the botanicals like raw mango, turmeric and Gondhoraj that lend the Hapusa a unique Indian texture. Been a while since I sipped gin, so this comes in as a perfect primer to pour some and settle down with earthy music in the background.

— Ashish Jha
Karen Martin’s
culinary magic at House of Anglo

Karen’s venture aims to preserve the Anglo-Indian heritage and culture via food.

**How would you describe your journey from the media to the culinary world?**

I’d describe it as a beautiful adventurous one. Culinary art was always my passion and today when I see it turn into my profession, it is very fulfilling.

**How would you describe Anglo-Indian food?**

To me it is perfect comfort food — loaded with flavour and very addictive. It is very easy to make and yet bursts with flavour. It is also the kind of food that uses simple ingredients that are readily available.

**How did the idea of House of Anglo come about?**

It started in August 2020, when I couldn’t go out and eat. I began to cherish home food and also realised that Anglo-Indian food was not easily available in Bangalore. I began in depth research on the Anglo-Indian cuisine and understood that it was a dying cuisine and I wanted to do everything I could to preserve it because it’s a major part of the Anglo-Indian history and culture. The whole idea of House of Anglo came about when I decided that I wanted to expose my culinary roots and the Anglo-Indian food to Bangalore and eventually the world.

**How has your heritage and lineage influenced your menu?**

Growing up I was always a meat loving child and was one for all the steaks, roasts and chicken dishes so my menu is mostly filled with a whole lot of non-vegetarian dishes. I designed my menu based on how I would eat at home and also got ideas from stories about how my great great grandmother would eat, which was described as more meat-oriented and vegetarian food as a side dish. The Anglo-Indian community is a meat loving one and at the table there is always more meat than vegetarian food. I guess I’ve stuck to tradition.

**What does a typical day in the HoA kitchen look like?**

The day starts as early as 6:00 am. It begins with us procuring the fresh ingredients from our local farmers and our fresh meat/fish gets delivered from our suppliers. We don’t believe in using frozen or bottled ingredients hence preparation takes up the morning. We also ensure an almost farm to table concept. In the case of roasts, steaks, chops and bread, our marination and kneading begins well before serving time. After the prep, the order list is rechecked and the cooking begins. Most of our sauces for the roasts and even sandwiches are made the night before because we believe in the marination time and development of flavours with time. Our day usually ends at 7:30 pm with our last dinner order being sent out.

**Chef Recommends**

**Karen’s Personal Recommendations From Her Menu:**

**Anglo-Burmese Khao Suey**

Made with fresh coconut milk, noodles, meat, fried onions and roasted peanuts, it is a fusion centrepiece.

**English Lemon Curd Tart**

Made from Meyer Lemon Curd, the English lemon curd tart is sweet, buttery and lemony.

↑ Work at the House of Anglo kitchen starts early to begin the preparations for orders throughout the day.
Some monsoon and some variation of kheer-pooda will be made in almost all Punjabi homes. While some prefer it deep fried like malpuas, many actually prefer to make it in a crepe-like style pan fried with ghee. The idea of eating deep-fried or pan-fried food when it rains finds its logic in making up for the loss of serotonin levels that is caused in this weather and to adjust to this our body craves carbohydrates and the deep fried carbs do that job fairly well. No wonder we all bring out our kadhis and start frying pakodas the moment it rains. In Punjab every season is welcomed with a sweet dish and this one is a monsoon favourite.

**Kheer and Pooda**

**Recipe for Kheer-Pooda**

- Rinse 1/4 cup broken basmati rice till the starch runs out of it. Once done, soak the rice for 20 minutes.
- Meanwhile, in a heavy based saucepan, add 1 litre full fat milk and 3-4 crushed cardamoms. On low heat bring the milk to a boil.
- Once the milk has boiled, add the soaked rice to it and mix well. Simmer this and cook it on low heat and stir in intervals to ensure it doesn’t stick to the base of the pot.
- Once the rice is half cooked, add 5 tbsp jaggery powder to it and mix well.
- At this point you can also add almond and cashew shavings to the mixture and cook it, so that they soften a little.
- Simmer and cook the kheer till the rice is fully cooked and the milk has been absorbed partially.
- Keep this aside to cool down for 30 minutes.
- Once done, you can garnish it with more almond, pistachio and cashew shavings.
- In the meantime to make the pooda, in a bowl add the flour and to that add fennel seeds and a pinch of salt. Mix this well.
- Once properly mixed, add powdered jaggery to it, followed by water. Don’t add too much water at one go. The batter needs to be slightly runny.
- Mix this well and keep it aside for 20 minutes.
- Later, heat a cast iron pan or kadhai (if frying) and smear it with a little ghee.
- Then spread the batter, like for a dosa, and cook well on both sides.
- Serve hot with kheer.

*To attain a nice creamy texture, make sure that the kheer is not too liquid and is semi dry.*
stay

THE JOHRI AT LAL HAVELI 70

DOUBLETREE BY HILTON BAANI SQUARE 71

HOTELS, HOSTELS AND NOTHING LIKE HOME
In the past the property has been home to royals, such as Louis XIV. In an attempt to restore the historical aspects of the property to its former glory, Ultima is also working with local experts.

**ROYAL Legacy**

This luxury estate is synonymous with vacationing in isolation.

**EUROPE**

Manifesting luxury with a pinch of history and ample amount of privacy, Ultima Cannes Le Grand Jardin is all set to open its doors for travellers next year. The only private property on the island of Sainte-Marguerite, it will be exclusively accessible by boat and helicopter.

The walled estate with its state-of-the-art decor also comprises the main Governor’s House, a turreted watchtower with a roof terrace and a third ‘guest house’ building, all collectively dating back as far as the 13th century.

With 11 bedrooms and expansive suites in the Governor’s House and The Tower; there will be both indoor and outdoor dining areas, an organically filtered heated outdoor pool, and an open-air cinema and a spa.

Famed for its untouched, serene landscape, the island of Sainte-Marguerite — about half a mile off the French Mediterranean coast — will be home to the secluded property.

In the past, the island has also served as an inspiration to artists such as Picasso, Lee Mi.

This 13th century property is also home to a 14,000 sq mt botanical park and is engulfed by a stone fort built by Richelieu.

Guests here can enjoy the idyllic scenes — with cypresses, olive trees, stroll the landscaped walkways — leading to the botanical gardens, and tailor-made farm to table dining experience.
THE JOHRI
Jaipur, approximately 12kms (23 mins) from Jaipur International Airport
5 suites

Escape
The Hawa Mahal is barely a kilometre away. In case a drive is on your mind, visit the Amber Palace, a little over 8kms away (20 mins).

SOJOURN » The suites, overlooking an inner courtyard, involve use of pattern, texture and artwork and showcase a blend of heritage and craftsmanship

ENGAGE » The restaurant serves organic vegetarian Indian dishes focused on farm-fresh produce with inventive flavours, defined by the seasons

MARVEL » This restored 19th century haveli captures the essence of the bygone era with contemporary and traditional aesthetics with an understated elegance
Much above the conundrum — that Gurugram is usually associated with — I peered through the frosted 8th floor glass window into the cloudy, yet endless, skyline. Come monsoons and a strange sense of calm takes over, especially when you’re seven floors above the hustle. All of this paired with DoubleTree by Hilton’s welcome drink — the cookie shake. After a series of upgrades and reconfigurations, the hotel is all set to enhance travellers’ — whether leisure or business — experience. All 201 rooms now feature contemporary design touches while exuding a modern-chic vibe. And the best part you ask? The staff’s hospitality and warmth measures up to a familiar comfort and makes for a memorable stay.
back

— BOOKS —

Road to Nowhere
Anjali Joseph’s one of a kind experience in Assam

— GEAR —

Zero waste tools, travel cork mat and BBQ grill
The monthly roundup
With a mere 13,000 inhabitants residing across 7,60,000 hectares, the Spiti Valley is one of the least populated regions across the globe and has continued to serve as a bridge between India and Tibet. The culture in the valley is heavily influenced by Buddhism and houses over 30 monasteries with the oldest dating back more than a millennium — the Tabo monastery from 996 CE. Situated in the rain shadow area, to the north of the Pir Panjal range is also the seasonally accessible cold desert — Lahaul. Lying to the north of Kullu and south of Ladakh, the cold desert shares its borders with Pangi and Churah on the west and Tibet on the eastern front.
I first heard of Dhudor Ali, the Lazy Man’s Road, while living in Guwahati, and reading a history of Assam by Dr Swarna Lata Baruah. I read about the Ahom period, which began in 1228 when Sukapha, a chieftain from Mong Mao (somewhere around the present day boundaries of Assam, Myanmar, China’s Yunnan region, and Arunachal Pradesh) crossed the Patkai mountains with several thousand soldiers and settled in upper Assam. He and his successors would rule Assam for six hundred years, influencing and being influenced by the tribes who already lived in the fertile Brahmaputra valley. One of the later Ahom kings, Gadadhar Singha, decided to take a group of his subjects in hand; these were the dhuds, or lazy men. (They were probably also opium smokers.) The king decided that the dhuds would build a road from Golaghat to Joypur in upper Assam. The road was built, but very slowly.

I was writing, reading, and travelling while working on the novel that would turn into Keeping in Touch. A road trip up Dhudor Ali seemed like a great idea. My friend Veda came from Calcutta; we hired a car, and set off one summer morning towards upper Assam. The journey towards Golaghat was largely uneventful. We stopped somewhere for pokori, and at one point I roused from a doze to realise Veda was so bored on the straight highway that she was playing chicken with oncoming lorries while overtaking other cars. After night fell, we passed the Numaligarh refinery, and...
about the book:
Anjali Joseph is an award-winning writer. Her latest novel titled ‘Keeping in Touch’ talks about the intricate and transformative dance in relationships, of characters navigating great changes in their lives, and of the place they find their way to: Assam.
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The Best Views Comes After The Hardest Climb

“Success is a beautiful thing, but Mt. Makalu taught me how to deal with my failures.”

Lachmi Deb Roy INTERVIEWS
Arjun Vajpai
Mountaineer, Arjun Vajpai (28) from Nida has been climbing 8000 plus meter mountains for the past 11 years. In 2010, he became the youngest person in the world to climb Mt. Everest at the age of 16. He has done over 13 expeditions to the mountains. Vajpai took mountaineering as a profession so that he could climb the mountains within himself. He believes mountaineering teaches one to cross all hurdles in life no matter how big it is. Every time he goes for a climb, he comes back learning a new lesson which makes him strong and look at things with a different perspective. Excerpts:

» Latest travel experience...
In 2021 I went back to Mt. Everest where I started my first journey but this time only to scale it without oxygen. Unfortunately, I had to return from the camp due to a back injury. But the clock has been reset and I have already started training and looking forward to completing my oxygen less climb on Mt. Everest next year. In the mean while in September I will be attempting Mt. Dhaulagiri which is world’s seventh highest mountain.
One of the major difficulties I faced while climbing Mt. Everest was taking all the permissions, doing all the logistic in the time of lockdown, procuring all the equipment’s as there are many equipment’s which you cannot buy in India. It struck
us the most at base camp as half of our team Sherpas tested positive. There were set protocols, but I would say COVID got the better of us. At base camp we could everyday see around four to five helicopters just coming into to take away the corona positive people. There were multiple cases of corona positive climbers and even with light symptoms it was getting difficult for them at that altitude.

» Near to death experience...
It was during my climb to Mt. Cho Oyu in 2012. The experience just made me more determined and made me believe that being a mountaineer I just need to have belief in myself. I remember the winds at Mt. Cho Oyu were hostile and the temperature was 60 degrees! On the second day at the camp, I woke up with my left side paralyzed. The two Sherpas who were with me, couldn’t carry me down, so they left me in the tent to summon help. I crawled for 17 hours coming down but I only remembered four hours of that journey. Luckily, I was immediately shifted to a hospital and after recovering fully, I could successfully climb Mt. Cho Oyu.

“it’s a feeling of achievement and calm when you reach the top. It brings out the best version of yourself. My dream is to have a climbing wall in every school in India”

» Mountain Vs Sea...
I find mountains and seas both equally wonderful and beautiful. I have related to both of them in many ways over a period of time. If it is about adventure, then there is no question for me, it will always be mountains first because it is a more
familiar territory and I can experiment and move around more comfortably.

» What were the precautions one must take in travelling to the mountains during Covid times?
The most important thing before stepping out is to get vaccinated as quickly as possible. One must also be on a good healthy diet every single day regardless of where you are and not just during COVID times. Take precautions even if you are vaccinated, especially when you are travelling abroad or using a public transport as it might not be fatal for you, but we could be carriers and affect other people.

“After several attempts I was able to climb both the mountains, Mt Makalu and Mt. Kangchenjunga. Mt. Makalu made me into the person, I am today and designed me into the mountaineer”

This year while we were climbing Mt. Everest, COVID struck us, there were a lot of Sherpas in our team who tested COVID positive. Due to this the manpower was down and it did affect our expeditions a bit. One must take care and be extremely careful when planning any expedition during these tough times.

» Your favourite mountaineering experience...
My favourite mountaineering experience would definitely be Mt. Kangchenjunga and Mt. Makalu, these are the two technically challenging mountains to climb. There aren’t a lot of climbers who attempt these mountains every season, I have been on these mountains with six to seven members. There have been years when across the world there were just six climbers who were attempting to scale these mountains. Being out there with minimalistic manpower you do feel very tiny and humble in front of nature.

Mt. Makalu is the fifth highest mountain in the world and Mt. Kangchenjunga is the world’s third highest and India’s highest mountain. After several attempts I was able to climb both the mountains. Mt. Makalu made me into the person, I am today and designed me into the mountaineer. I never went to college, but that is the university which I went to because we were stuck on that mountain for four years. My first attempt on this mountain was in 2013, second attempt was in 2014,
third attempt was in 2015 and finally in our fourth attempt in 2017, I was able to make it to the top. It was a very emotional four-year-long journey for me. Success is a beautiful thing, but Makalu taught me how to deal with my failures. Mt. Makalu taught me that importance of failure.

What is the feeling like when you reach the mountain top?
It’s a feeling of achievement and calm when you reach the mountain top. Every time I am out there, every time I am carving my way through the waist deep snow and every time I am chartering new places, it gives you a feeling of achievement. Being a mountaineer takes out the best version of yourself. I would want more and more youngsters to feel this wonderful experience. Hence, we are running our adventure program in various schools. Through our company 'Climb Up', we are trying to increase the number of climbing walls in India. My dream is to have a climbing wall in every school and institute in India.

Precautions one should taking when travelling to the mountains during monsoon...
During monsoon there is a very big chance of landslide, so make sure you are chalking out the route well. Make sure when you are travelling in the mountains during monsoon you have alternative routes which you can take. Do your research before the expedition and carry a map with you. Mountains have changing environment everyday so one must always stay up to date with what is happening around them. Lastly wear proper hiking shoes which will protect your ankles and carry good rain jackets.
At a time when the world is adhering to a fad of going dairy free, there comes a long lasting nostalgic feeling with milk in Indian households. Whether it’s the early morning wake me up chai or the subtle put me to sleep warm cup at night, a day in Indian households seems to begin and end with milk.

Milk’s long standing association with India is not only due to its culinary significance but also cultural and religious. Many mythological tales involve an active mention of the drink. Coming back to its household usage, the consumption of milk might be an adult’s preference, but it sure had its fair share of struggles with the younger ones. And the only way out for that calcium dosage was a malt flavoured milk. Ringing a familiar bell is Horlick’s malted milk. Developed originally as an infant formula, it soon appealed to the taste buds of all age groups alike and gradually became a hot favourite.

Whether a hot cuppa or a dewy, cold milkshake, Horlick’s seemed to be the flavour all year round. And since then there has been no looking back. This calendar from 1928 just reinforces and reiterates a culinary and cultural belief system revolving around milk in the country.

— SIMRRAN GILL

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