Mukteshwar
SOUL STIRRING

Arunachal
IT'S THE PEOPLE

Kashmir
Great Lakes Trek

HILL HOLIDAYS

KONARK
ECO RETREAT

VARR
FOOD OF THE GODS

WILD WEEKEND
MARY BUDDEN ESTATE

BOOK OF THE MONTH
JUNGLE NAMA

IT’S NOT WHERE — IT’S HOW
Healthy Women Happy Families

“Better health of girls and women is one of the top priorities of the Uttar Pradesh government.”

Yogi Adityanath, Chief Minister, Uttar Pradesh

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has taken important initiatives to ensure healthcare services for the common people, including women’s health, which tops his agenda. On his watch, the Centre has launched Pradhanmantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan, Rashtriya Teekakaran Abhiyan, Pradhanmantri Jan Arogya Yojana and more such schemes that have proved to be milestones. Apart from implementing all the Central schemes, the Uttar Pradesh government led by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has also taken landmark steps in healthcare. From organising Mukhyamantri Jan Arogya Mela in different districts to extending ambulance services on an unprecedented scale, the government has made sure that people, especially those from underprivileged sections have easy and better access to adequate medicare facilities. During his tenure, 30 new medical colleges, including two AIIMS and super specialty medical blocks have been set up in the state to bring about infrastructural changes. Quality generic medicines are now easily available to the common people at lower prices. The Chief Minister’s efforts have turned Uttar Pradesh into a veritable hub of health services in about four years.
Safe motherhood for 24 lakh women
Pradhanmantri Surakshit Matritivta Abhiyan

Under this project, a safe maternity clinic is operated on the 9th of every month in every block and district, where pregnant women are provided check-ups, at least once during the second-third month of pregnancy under the supervision of a gynaecologist. It helps identify the high-risk pregnancy cases and bring down the mother and infant mortality rate considerably. Besides routine blood and urine tests, ultrasound tests are conducted too. As of now, 772 private doctors are contributing towards this campaign.

Under the Pradhanmantri Surakshit Matritvta Abhiyan, health check-ups and treatment were provided to 1,08,505 pregnant women at 1,449 centres in November. Altogether 60,622 pregnant women availed of pre-natal screening for the first time during the second and third trimesters of pregnancy. Among them, 11,546 high-risk pregnant women were identified and treated.

Ujjwala Scheme
Freedom from smoke, increase in self-esteem

For years, no one in the country had thought of housewives falling ill from stove smoke. Since the formation of the Central government under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2014, a discussion started on this health hazard. The Prime Minister decided that by giving gas cylinders to millions of women across the country, they can stay away from hazardous stove smoke, which will also have a positive effect in bringing down air pollution. The Prime Minister’s idea fructified into the Pradhanmantri Ujjwala Yojana, launched in 2016 with the target of providing 8 crore cooking gas connections at the national level.

At present, the number of Ujjwala scheme beneficiaries in Uttar Pradesh is more than 1.47 crore. Besides, under the Pradhanmantri Garib Kalyan Yojana, more than 1.45 crore Ujjwala beneficiaries took the LPG cylinder provided free. The important thing in this scheme is that 1.03 lakh people did not take/gave up their quota of free cylinder. The plan has been locked due to the completion of the target.
Under the Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram, children aged 10 to 14 and 15 to 19 years are covered. It includes urban and rural schoolgoers, and out-of-school married and unmarried as well as vulnerable, hitherto uncovered, teenagers.

A Sathiya Kendra (Adolescent Health Clinic) has been set up at hospitals and community health centers in 51 districts to provide counselling to adolescent boys and girls on health education. At present, counselling and remedial services are provided by trained doctors at 344 adolescent health clinics.

**Sathiya (Peer Education) programme**

A total of four peer educators (aged 15 to 17), two school-going and two out-of-school have been selected by ASHA workers for conducting this programme at the panchayat level for a the population of 1,000. As of now, 34,629 peer educators have been trained at the block level; out of 71,476 in 172 blocks 55,882 Sathiyas were selected.

**Weekly Iron and Folic Acid Supplement Programme**

Under this programme, pink iron tablets consisting of 45 mg of elemental iron and 400 microgram of folic acid are given to students from class 1 to 5 and large blue iron tablets, comprising 100 mg of elemental iron and 500 microgram of folic acid, are given to all students from classes 6 to class 12. In all the government and government-aided schools, blue iron tablets are given under the supervision of the teachers.

Besides, all 10-to-19-year-old school-going girls are provided iron pills every week through Anganwadi workers. More than 2 crore students and out-of-school adolescents are benefitting from the programme.

**School Health Programme**

It has been planned to train two nodal teachers from 19,537 secondary and high schools of the 23 selected districts and nominate them as Swasthya Doot (health ambassadors).

It aims at training boys and girls to disseminate health messages to bring about changes in society.

**Pre-natal Safety Initiative**

Under the Janani Suraksha Yojana, registration of pregnant women, four pre-natal check-ups and identification and treatment of pregnant women with high risks are being done. To motivate institutional delivery, cash incentives are given to ASHA workers and beneficiaries.

Under the programme, Rs 11,27,01,005 were spent in the past three-and-a-half years. Besides, Rs 8,69,06,017 were spent under the Janani Suraksha Yojana.

**Free services for rural women**

**Janani Shishu Suraksha Programme**

The Janani Shishu Suraksha programme under the National Rural Health Mission is running at all districts. The main objective is to provide free and complete medical
care and delivery-related services to pregnant women. Under the scheme, five free services, including facilities for transport, food, check-ups, treatment, medicines and blood transfusions, are provided to each pregnant woman.

Financial benefits on first maternity

The Pradhan Mantri Matri Vandana Yojana is helping reduce the health and nutritional problems of pregnant women and lactating mothers. It is being implemented by the State

Innovations in Family Planning Services Project Agency (SIFSA) under the direction of the Department of Medical Health and Family Welfare. In the scheme, 33,15,009 beneficiaries have been registered against the target of 35,87,514 as of October 31, 2020, which is 92.40 per cent of the goal. An amount of Rs.126834.81 lakh has been paid under the scheme.

Dr Abdul Kalam Gaurav Path Scheme: Honour of meritorious daughters

Daughters of Uttar Pradesh have proved that they are no less than sons. This year too, daughters have excelled in the UP Board, CBSE and ICSE Board exams. The credit for it goes to the schemes of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, who has made his agenda of empowering women clear after he took charge the state. He not only made the lives of women easy with many schemes but also made efforts to keep their spirits up. All his schemes are providing opportunities to girls to move ahead in life.

Salient features

- The Prime Minister Matri Vandana Yojana is being implemented from January 1, 2017, in all districts of the state.
- Under the scheme, financial benefits are provided to women and nursing mothers on these first pregnancies from any family in Uttar Pradesh.

Women get health shield

- Health services made available to 1.17 crore women through health and wellness centres
- 26,82,255 antenatal check-ups conducted till September 2020
- Target of vaccination of 4.96 lakh pregnant women
- Target to immunise children of 3.96 lakh
- 102 ambulance services provided to 1.70 lakh pregnant women
- 2.30 lakh pregnant obstetricians have been given post-natal dropback service
- 6.86 lakh women have been screened for breast cancer
- More than 2 crore adolescent girls benefited from the National Adolescent Health Programme

Happy family

Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana

- 1.18 crore families benefited from the scheme
- More than 1.01 lakh golden cards issued

The government has decided to build/renovate roads to homes/schools of top-20 students of not only Uttar Pradesh Secondary Education Council but also ICSE and CBSE.

The Uttar Pradesh government has started the Dr Abdul Kalam Gaurav Path Yojana to honour meritorious girls. Since the implementation of this scheme, the percentage of girls passing the examination has been increasing steadily and continuously. So far, 210 km of roads have been built to connect villages and schools of the exam toppers over the past three years.

It has been decided by the Yogi government to construct roads to homes of a total of 288 meritorious students from the year 2017 to 2019, including 130 girls. The construction/repairs of 100.76 km of roads from homes to schools of 42 girl students at a cost of Rs 3928.68 lakh had been done.

In 2020, it has been decided to build/repair roads up to a total of 210 girl students’ homes/schools, out of which roads have been constructed/repaired up to 142 students’ homes/schools, including 98 girls.
Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath launched the scheme on March 1, 2019 intending to make the eligible people avail of the benefits of Ayushman Bharat Yojana, with special attention to the deprived and poor. The scheme has proved to be successful in fulfilling its purpose in the state. According to statistics, at present, 10,11,980 families are benefitting from this scheme.

So far, 5,32,629 golden cards have been issued and 2,655 hospitals are functioning under this scheme. These include 1,102 government hospitals and 1,553 private hospitals. The total number of beneficiaries treated in these hospitals are 5,14,621. Among them, the number of beneficiaries treated in government hospitals are 1,17,616 while the number of beneficiaries treated in private hospitals are 3,97,005.

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### Statistics of main activities related to maternal and child health in Uttar Pradesh under National Health Mission:

- Rs 2,13,34,363 spent on ANC activities
- Rs 1,96,25,639 spent under iron folic acid scheme
- Rs 1,17,18,153 spent on free check-up under Janani Shishu Suraksha karyakram
- Rs 51,45,254 spent on providing free food under Shishu Suraksha karyakram
- Rs 23,95,776 spent under Prime Minister's Safe Motherhood Campaign for a check-up of pregnant women
- 12,15,229 pregnant women registered in the second and third quarter under the Prime Minister's Safe Motherhood Campaign

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### Clean India Mission

**Protection and respect to women by giving them "Izzat Ghar"**:

The Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen) Abhiyan was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on October 2, 2014. Under this campaign, 29,32,687 toilets were constructed in Uttar Pradesh from October 2014 to March 2017. Understanding the importance of this scheme, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's government launched the campaign on a serious note after coming to power in the state.

Making this campaign a top priority, on October 2, 2018, the government achieved this goal as the entire state was declared Open Defecation Free. Keeping in mind the safety and respect of the women, individual toilets have been named 'Izzat Ghar'. The Prime Minister also praised this initiative on his All India Radio programme, Mann Ki Baat. From 2017-2018 to November 12, 2020, 1.90 crore 'Izzat Ghars' were constructed under the Swachh Mission Bharat (Grameen) Abhiyan in the state.

Over 1.70 crore individual toilets have been built in Uttar Pradesh over the years. This was possible only due to the formation of a government under the leadership of Yogi Adityanath in the state. As a result, 99.97% of families now have toilets of their own.

**Toilet construction exceeds target**

According to a 2012 survey, the total number of families in the villages of the state was 2,49,77,202. There was a target to construct 8,87,906 individual toilets in urban areas, against which a total of 8,91,202 individual toilets have been built. Similarly, there was a target of constructing 63,451 community/public toilets and more than 66,853 toilets have been built. In 2018, three local bodies of the state were given national awards for Swachh Survekshan. The following year, 14 were awarded.

Keeping in view the convenience of women, social security and respect under the Swachh Bharat Mission, the state government had decided to make Pink Woman Public Toilets. These community toilets are designed for women and are kitted out with sanitary napkin vending machines. Besides, a separate room has been constructed for breastfeeding mothers. The location of such toilets has been integrated to the Smart City FC to help women know the distance to a Pink Toilet.
Successful strategy slows down the speed of Coronavirus

While the state government has conducted maximum tests to contain COVID-19, a surge in cases at the beginning of the pandemic made it take prompt action to set up adequate clinics, with beds, equipment and necessary resources for treatment of patients. Today, facilities of better treatment and hospitals are available in all districts.

At present, there are approximately 300 COVID-19 hospitals, while the number of beds for patients is 1,75,000 in the state. There are 11,446 beds equipped with oxygen and 2,615 beds with ventilators for critical patients. Apart from the availability of medicines for infected patients in all hospitals, 860 ambulances of 108 and 170 ALS ambulances are running.

Thousands of helpdesks have been set up by the health department. In all, 76 control rooms have been built for continuous assistance. Helpline number 1800 180 5145 is also operational to provide round-the-clock consultation and assistance.

The Yogi government made available PPE kits, gloves, masks, testing kits, while a large number of paramedics were trained to contain the pandemic and stop its spread. Besides, the option of home isolation to patients with mild symptoms was provided. Initially, there was no lab in the state to check the infection. The state government got the patients’ tests done at laboratories in Pune and Delhi. Test labs were then created at Sanjay Gandhi Postgraduate Institute (PGI) and King George Medical University (Medical College) in Lucknow. The state government made the test facility available to each district by continuously increasing the capacity of the labs. Today, 46 RTPCR, 18 TRUNET and antigen test facilities are functional in all 75 districts.

More than 1.5 lakh tests a day
The capacity to conduct more than 1.5 lakh tests for COVID-19 a day has been developed in the state. Today, a complete change in health and medical education is visible in the state.

Over the past three-and-a-half years, AIIMS, medical colleges and super specialty medical blocks have been established. The state is well-equipped to face upcoming challenges. The government has provided necessary equipment to all districts for treating COVID-19 cases. Now, a strong infrastructure of cold chain will be required to store vaccines in the state.
Since 2017, five new government medical colleges have come up in Uttar Pradesh, whereas construction of nine medical colleges is underway. In the first phase, five district hospitals in Ayodhya, Bahraich, Basti, Firozabad and Shahjahanpur have been upgraded and converted into autonomous state medical colleges. Teaching in each of these colleges started in the 2019-20 academic session, following the admission of 100 students in the MBBS course. Similarly, in the second phase, eight district hospitals in Etah, Hardoi, Pratapgarh, Fatehpur, Siddharthnagar, Deoria, Ghazipur and Mirzapur are being upgraded and converted into autonomous state medical colleges. Construction is on in these. Admission of 100 MBBS students will be taken in each of these colleges. All these colleges will be operational from the 2021-22 session.

Besides, the under-construction medical college in Jaunpur, which has 100 seats, will also be made operational in 2021-22. In the third phase, district hospitals and referral hospitals will be upgraded in Chandauli, Sonbhadra, Sultanpur, Gonda, Kanpur Dehat, Kaushambi, Lakhimpur Kheri, Bulandshahar, Pilibhit, Lalitpur, Auraiya, Bijnor, Kushinagar and Amethi.

Till 2017, the state had government medical colleges in only 15 districts, while such colleges have come up in 45 districts now. From 2017 onwards, four new private medical colleges have opened in the state. Besides, during the academic session 2019-20, 100 students have started studying in the MBBS course at Government Medical College, Badaun, and Government Medical Institute in Greater Noida.

**Increase in MBBS seats**
A total of 700 (500 + 200) MBBS seats have been added in 2019-20—the highest in the country. From 2017 till now, there has been an increase of 938 MBBS seats and 127 PG seats in government medical colleges. Also, there has been an increase of 461 seats in diploma and 1,550 UGC and PG in the private sector.

It has been decided to establish the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Medical University to bring uniformity in syllabus and examinations of medical education in the state, as also to provide affiliation under the central academic guidance for conducting courses. This university was notified on December 22, 2018. A total of 356 degree colleges have been affiliated with this university, including 22 government medical colleges, 18 private medical colleges, 17 private dental colleges, 12 government nursing degree courses, 198 private nursing degree colleges and 89 private paramedical degree courses.

Two All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) have been established in Gorakhpur and Rae Bareli, where OPD services have started. The MBBS course has also started in both AIIMS with 100 students each for the 2019-20 academic session.

**New Dimensions in Super Specialty Medicine, SGPGI, Lucknow**
- First robotic surgery in Uttar Pradesh was performed. Also, the first stem cell department has been established.
- Separate building being constructed for emergency medicine renal transplant.
- Separate building has been built for liver transplant.

**RML Institute of Medical Sciences, Lucknow**
- MBBS course started in 2017 with 150 students. Currently, its capacity is 200 students a year.
- Decision to build a Neurosciences Centre under the Department of Neuro-surgery and Neurology.
अद्वृत हिमाचल
dेखें हिमाचल की अनघुई राहें

एक चरण से नहीं, एक चरण नहीं।
महाराणा प्रताप सागर झील (कांगड़ा)

तत्तापानी (मण्डी)
चौंचल (शिमला)
जंजीरहली (मण्डी)
बीह-विलिंग (कांगड़ा)

FOLLOW COVID-19 SAFETY GUIDELINES:

- Wear a Mask
- Use Sanitisers
- Maintain Social Distancing

Department of Tourism & Civil Aviation, Block No. 28, SDA Complex, Kasumpti, Shimla, Himachal Pradesh.
Email: tourismmin-hp@nic.in, website: www.himachaltourism.gov.in
For accommodation and packages, visit: www.hptdc.in
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A quaint getaway in the lap of lush green trails and narrow paths in true mountain style

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NATURE BITES BACK

POLLUTION IS LINKED TO CANCER.
SO IS CHROME IN CHEMICAL TANNERIES.

THAT'S WHY WE TAN OUR LEATHERS WITH SEEDS, BARKS & OILS;
SAFE FOR YOUR SKIN & FOR OUR RIVERS.
The Coast is Clear

What took me so long to get to Visakhapatnam, I wonder. This sprawling city by the sea may well be eastern India’s best-kept secret. It enjoys a blessed location, sandwiched between the necklace-shaped beaches of the Bay of Bengal and the mountains of the Eastern Ghats, where lie the wonders of the Araku Valley and the Borra Caves. The food is to die for and there’s much to explore, from the fishing harbour (you might need a nose clip for that one) to the museums and hilltop viewpoints. The Sri Varaha Lakshmi Narasimha Temple at Simhachalam, over a thousand years old, will leave you spellbound. On my way north out of Vizag, I stopped at Thotlakonda, a 2,000-year-old Buddhist vihara whose showcase central stupa collapsed a few years ago. But the numerous dormitories, a prayer hall and the large kitchen can still be admired. You will sense the power of the land, infused with centuries of prayer. I was heading to Bheemunipatnam, a sleepy coastal town, where I stayed at the excellent Bheemli Resort. Where the beaches of Vizag are lively and atmospheric, Bheemli beach is all about quietude and healing seclusion. Remnants of the town’s Dutch heritage can be seen. Note to foodies: you cannot come back from Vizag without some pootharekulu—a sweet unique to Andhra (I’d recommend the version with dry fruits).

February was a travel-crazy month, even by my standards. Before I visited Vizag, I was basking in sub-zero temperatures in Mukteshwar, deep in the Kumaon Himalaya. The contrast could not have been starker. After I’d had my fill of being a beach bum, I headed back to the mountains, to the salubrious environs of Rishikesh, before making a second appearance at the beach—Konark this time—for the Outlook Responsible Tourism Summit and Awards 2021. Seneca said: “Travel and change of place impart new vigour to the mind.” I couldn’t agree more.

Amit Dixit
@omitdixit

3 things I did this month
† Bit the bullet and adopted an indie dog. Please say hello to Bruno!
† Checked into the INS Kursura submarine museum. Weird but fun
† Celebrated Chinese New Year virtually, with Hong Kong Tourism Board

CROSSED OFF MY READING LIST
The Last Gathering Munshi Faizuddin
A vivid portrait of life in the decadent court of Bahadur Shah Zafar, the last Mughal emperor in the Red Fort.

UP NEXT
The Rana Cookbook Rohini Rana

Something I ate
Shepherd’s pie for brunch at the Imperial, New Delhi. Those people know how to do a classic properly. Thank god, their brunch has made a comeback

Celebrated Chinese New Year virtually, with Hong Kong Tourism Board
Fit the Hill
Heading to the hills for some climbing, trekking hiking? What’s playing on the stereo? We’ve got some suggestions!

The Cascades
Fleet Foxes • An instrumental and dreamy tune that invokes the urge to travel

Landslide
Fleetwood Mac • A tale of love and life artfully woven behind the metaphor of a snowy mountain avalanche

Kodachrome
Paul Simon • Subtly rebellious and powerful, this uplifting song invokes the colours of nature

Here Comes The Sun
The Beatles • A song that’s upbeat and can certainly hit the spot in the wilderness

Take Me Home, Country Roads
John Denver • Offers up a theme of getting off the beaten path and connecting with the natural world

For more such recommendations head to our website

Unmapped Corners

@LoveleenArun
Thank you for featuring the very unique cruise to the Sunderbans. It has been a passionate project to design it and put it together.

@dulwichdik
Coming to the west coast, Devbag is nothing less than a paradise. I visited it in 2019. I was the only person on this beach!
Rich heritage, diverse culture and remarkable flavours, the cuisine of Odisha is a colourful tapestry of spices and variety. Yet, Odia cuisine rarely features among the popular (or known) Indian food cultures today. With traditional recipes getting passed on from one generation to the other, the state is fast emerging as a favoured destination for avid foodies.

Head to the land of exotic beaches and temples to celebrate the joys of Odia food in a way you have never experienced before. The flavours and ingredients will bring all your cravings to a halt and offer a slice of home. A typical Odia fare is a fine balance of piquancy and pungency. It is usually cooked in mustard oil and characterised by the addition of besara, a mixture of garlic pounded with mustard, ambula or what is also known as fermented dry mango and copious amounts of curd.

An underrated culinary power house, the glory of Odisha’s coastal delicacies is yet to be explored. From tangy dal to sweetmeats, catch a glimpse of some of the most popular dishes that this coastal state has to offer.

Khaja
A traditional Odia dessert. Khaja is an ancient sweet pastry relished during the festive season. This crispy sugar-coated, layered delicacy is one of the chappan bhog offered to Lord Jagannath in Puri. Essentially, a flour, sugar and ghee-based dough that is deep fried to make a flaky, sweet dessert with spiraling layers, it is sometimes soaked in sugar syrup, depending on the regional variation of the recipe.

Dalma
Enjoyed as a main course with steamed rice, this traditional dish is great in taste and healthy too. It is made with toor dal, chana dal, potato, pumpkin, brinjal and other nutritious vegetables. A special
spicy seasoning made with roasted cumin and red chili powder is added to dalma which gives it its characteristic flavour. It is garnished with coconut shavings and fresh coriander leaves.

**Pakhalas**
Summers in the region are often incomplete without this Odia staple. Pakhalas is a fermented rice-based delicacy, prepared by soaking leftover rice overnight. It is accompanied by a variety of side dishes like shallow-fried vegetables, aloo bharta (mashed potato), fish, papad, condiments, and onion salad. This dish is known to be a preventive for heat stroke—prevalent in the region. In order to keep the saga of pakhala love alive, Odias celebrate the Pakhala Dibasa every year on March 20, when the summer takes a sneak peek in Odisha.

**Chenna Poda**
An extremely popular smoky-flavored sweet delicacy, chenna poda literally means roasted cheesecake in Odia. It is made using sweetened cottage cheese baked in a traditional wood fire oven. This scrumptious cake-like dessert is unique in taste owing to the caramelisation of sugar/jaggery present in the cheese. Usually served during festivals, you can find this traditional sweet in roadside stalls and confectioneries all across the state of Odisha.

**Pithas**
These sweet delicacies form an integral part of the festivities in every Odia household. Steamed, baked, roasted or fried, there are numerous pitha variants. The most common base for pitha is rice flour although semolina, wheat flour, and lentils are also used. Most varieties of pitha are prepared as small cookies or dumplings that are filled with spices, nuts, or different vegetables, in either sweet or savory versions.

**Dahibara Aloodum**
Considered as the lifeline of Cuttack, this street food delicacy can be had for breakfast, lunch, evening snack or dinner. It is prepared by soaking vadas in watered down dahi and topped with aloodum and ghugni while serving.

**Mati Handi Mutton**
A classic favourite among locals, mati handi mutton is a unique preparation, native to the region. Marinated in spices and slow cooked in earthen pots over wood fire, the elaborate process lends a delicious earthy taste to the mutton. The meat when cooked acquires a deep brownish tint while retaining individual aromas of the spices added. This mutton curry can be had with rice, roti or even chaltul pitha.

**Macha Besara**
A typical Odia coastal dish cooked in mustard gravy, macha besara is a simple delicacy cooked with basic and minimal ingredients. Ambula or sun dried mango is the magic ingredient in this recipe that lends a tangy flavour and goes really well with mustard-based dishes.

For more, visit odishatourism.gov.in
HERE, THERE, NOW & SOON

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Manas National Park has introduced cycle safaris for tourists

If there is any state in northeast India which harbours the best of natural beauties, then it is certainly Assam. A land with unearthly wonders, it won’t be too far fetched to say that a lifetime may not be enough to discover its colourful magic and charming scenic treasures. From frenetic urban vistas to picturesque natural beauty, all incorporating a mix of culture, religions and a knack for beautiful crafts, Assam has an eclectic variety to offer. And tourists to the region now have another reason to rejoice. Manas National Park, the only wildlife sanctuary distinguished as a biosphere reserve, a natural heritage site, Project Tiger Reserve, and Project Elephant Reserve all at the same time, has become the first in the country to introduce cycle safaris to its tourists. In the first phase, the national park will arrange for 12 cycles for the tourists to explore the dense forest. The initiative is an attempt to draw more and more tourists into the region after the pandemic-induced lockdown. Spread over 2,837 sq km, Manas National Park opened its gates to tourists on October 2, 2020 after six months of being shut due to the nationwide lockdown.

The best time of the day to visit Manas National Park is between 9am to 12pm and 2pm to 5pm.
St Patrick’s Day goes virtual again
This year, a special TV channel called SPF TV will be launched for people to celebrate virtually. Hundreds of artists, performers, musicians, creators and community organisations across Ireland have come together to create a rich and dynamic programme in honour of Ireland’s traditional heritage. The national parade will be brought to life through storytelling, poetry, tours, street and building lighting, art installations and much more.
» The festival will run from March 12 till March 17, 2021

Maharashtra
The Maharashtra Tourism Department is organising 20 mini festivals between February and March to boost tourism
The tourism department of Maharashtra is all set to host 20 mini festivals across six districts–Konkan, Nashik, Aurangabad, Amravati, Nagpur and Pune. The aim is to allow tourists to experience authentic Maharashtrian culture and heritage. Grape harvesting, Nandur Madhyameshwar, Bhandardara in Ahmednagar and Laling Fort Festival in Dhule are some of the widely celebrated festivals that will be organised in Nagpur. The Konkan district will play host to festivals like Vengurla, Shrivardhan Festival, Katal Shilpa Festival and Anjarle Festival in Ratnagiri. Notable festivals like Ter Festival, Kapildhara Festival and Hottal Festival will be organised in Aurangabad.
» The festivals will be organised by the Regional Offices of the Directorate of Tourism with the help of the local district administration

Bihar
Bihar Museum to host India’s first-ever museum biennale
Located in Patna, the museum is one of the largest in India. The galleries will chronologically showcase the history of Bihar, along with cultural narratives from various parts of the world. Although the Biennale was initially conceived as a physical event, virtual tours of the Bihar Museum and some of the other national and international museums will be streamed online.
» The Museum Biennale will be held from March 22 to March 28
The passport will serve as proof that an individual has undergone inoculation. A vaccine passport application might soon accompany travellers to various venues in the near future. The passport will testify to the fact that the individual has received their vaccination against COVID-19. According to the World Health Organisation, “at this point in the pandemic, there is not enough evidence of the effectiveness of antibody-mediated immunity to guarantee the accuracy of an immunity passport or risk-free certificate.”

Denmark is likely to produce these passports in the coming months.
Adho Mukha Svanasana: Inverted V Pose

Frequently used as a transition pose, the adho mukha svanasana is an integral part of ashtanga and vinyasa yoga series. Though it can be challenging initially, over time, as one’s practice advances, it often turns into a favourite ‘relaxation’ pose between other, more strenuous postures. Since the pose replicates a dog bending forward, it is also known as the downward-facing dog pose.

Steps to master Adho Mukha Svanasana

1. Start with table pose, with your knees under your hips and palms aligned with your shoulders. Move your hands about one palm length forward.

2. Curl your toes under and press into the pads at the base of your fingers. While exhaling, press down through the hands and lift up your hips to come into the pose.

3. Initially, keep the knees bent to find a neutral spine. Find the length of your spine by pressing back from your hands.

4. Slowly begin to straighten the legs, bringing the upper part of the thighs towards the back of the room.

5. Breathe deeply. Press your belly and chest towards your thighs and press out through your sitz bones and crown.

6. Press the hands into the ground. Pull the shoulder blades apart and down.

7. To release, exhale. Bend the knees and return to the initial table pose. Relax.
### All About Self-Love

Yoga is the practice of spending time with yourself, getting to know your breath and who you truly are. Facing challenges on the mat can do wonders for our inner landscape as we can be ourselves without having to compete. It’s a space where we all come undone and learn to love ourselves irrespective of how we look, as yoga takes us past appearances into a place that is more real and the one that matters. It is through consistent practice of yoga that we can develop the inner strength to face not only the outside world but also our own fears, shortcomings and preconceived notions about ourselves.

— A professional dancer and certified yoga trainer, Tanvi Mehra is the founder of Tangerine Arts Studio

### On Trend: Slackline Yoga

Experts say slackline yoga is less about doing asana on the line, and more about bringing that yoga mindset to slacklining or more like ‘distilling the art of yogic concentration’. To balance on a 1” piece of webbing lightly tensioned between two trees is not easy, and doing yoga poses on it is even more challenging. Originally invented 20 years ago as a way for climbers to pass the time and improve their balance when not scrambling up rock walls, it is today actively used by yogis. The practice has many layers—developing focus, dynamic balance, power, breath, core integration, flexibility and confidence.
You feel it before you see it… That harmonised thrum of a hundred heartbeats. The swish of the berry red skirts. The sun glinting off constellations of silver ornaments. And laughter — abundant, unguarded laughter — that can change seasons at will!

Namsai, the beating heart of the Tai-Khampti and Singpho tribes, celebrates its cultural heritage throughout the year. Every fair, every festival here is an explosion of colour and sound. The reds are redder, the greens, greener, and the music, joyous and bright.

In this land, where centuries-old stories are still told over and over again through scriptures and song, traditional games and ‘cockfight’ dances, fish steamed in banana leaves and handwoven textiles, travellers are invited to immerse themselves in a beautiful, hyperreal kaleidoscope called life.
NAMSAI &
ITS RAINBOW SPELLS

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Outlook RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

Discover Namsai!
Left no place to go, given the Covid-induced lockdown, lately I have acquired the strange habit of staring at the walls. Allow me to explain.

Adjoining the alley next to which I live in the city of Malmö in Sweden is the outer wall of a parking building. Every day I pass it, and every other day it changes colour and form. Well, it’s one of the walls reserved by the city for graffiti artists. They come and spray paint this wall with their creations, and never do any of these creations stay for more than a day. It’s lifted up and painted all over again, and yet again by a number of graffiti artists.

Sometimes, I stop and see them shaping their art. Spray cans in hand, a light mask covering the face, they go about doing their work with the devoutness of whirling dervishes—unmindful of the world unfolding around them, they spray the walls with deft hand movements. Within minutes, shapes begin to emerge from nothingness—a human figurine, orphan letters possibly of a word signifying underground culture, or at times simple streaks of movements crafting illegible and possibly meaningless signs.

The more I see them practicing their craft, the more I wonder at the futility of their pursuit. Isn’t art supposed to stay forever, serving us a reminder each day that there is more to life than chasing goals? Unable to contain my desperation to seek a reason, last week I tapped one of the graffiti artists on the shoulder. I appreciated his art, and told him how much I enjoyed it, and how the ever-evolving amalgamation of colours, and proclamations, and figurines inspired me—however, what’s the point in it for him of painting and repainting the wall every few days?

“Well, would you notice this wall had it been like this for the last ten years,” asked the anonymous painter. No, I wouldn’t have, treating it like any other wall with colour chipping off it after so many years. “Then that’s what we do—we paint it for you to come and see something new everyday, take inspiration, and even look forward to crossing this street,” he said, “and, as far as protecting the art is concerned, these days protection is about saving it online. Once it’s on your Instagram page, then be rest assured it’s saved forever!”

Intrigued by the discovery, I have started looking around my city more curiously. It turns out that Malmö is one of the cities in Sweden that has the largest amount of street art. Two blocks away, I found two murals by a Polish muralist Natalia Rak. Inspired, I took to searching for more and came across the whole side of a building that was painted in graffiti art of a British artist who goes by the name of Phlegm.

Street art is mainstreet art now. Not hidden from public sight but out in the open for people to take inspiration from. And for once, I am thankful to Covid as it has opened a channel for me to explore my surroundings deeply and become more curious about what always lay around me.
GOA A hidden land of adventure with a dose of calmness
@saoorabh

JAISALMER Amid the desert of shifting sand dunes
@mahifreefly

Kochi In the midst of canopies lies nature’s heart
@jithindavid

Gujarat The riders upon the galloping horses
@chefyash

Meghalaya Plunging into the shimmering blues
@themeghalayandream

Suraj Tal Taking the longer, winding route to rule the waves
@prtzy

Indore When water falls, it flies—wild, beautiful and free
@bharatbaswani

A Shade of Green
A nature escape away from the urban hustle, these visuals will help you see nature in a whole new way and unlock its power to refresh, revitalise and rejuvenate
@navaneeth_unkrishnan

Gandikota When the canyon meets the river
Like the curling wisps of smoke from joss sticks, the chanting rises at dawn every day from the Golden Pagoda at Tengapani village. Birds, even those that come all the way from the high Himalayas to nest in the summer in Namsai, join in emphatically. Down by the Noa Dihing river, fishermen cast their nets, and wait patiently for a plop and a shuffle. Even the butterflies, flitting from blade to blade on dew drenched grass, break into a silent song…

For travellers who care to listen, to tune into the universal music of nature and culture and the slow adventures of life, Namsai offers rare, unheard of melodies.
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For travellers who care to listen, to tune into the universal music of nature and culture and the slow adventures of life, Namsai offers rare, unheard of melodies.
we don’t travel to escape life, but for life not to escape us
Resting on the banks of the river Teang, the Golden Pagoda of Namsei, built in the Burmese architectural style, speaks volumes about the state’s rich Buddhist heritage. Thousands of devotees, monks and followers throng the temple complex during the Kathina Festival, the biggest annual festival of the Kongmu Kham or Golden Pagoda.
Mukteshwar is a quiet corner of Kumaon, away from the hustle and bustle of the bigger hill stations. Text and photographs by

AMIT DIXIT
MUKTESHWAR

OCCASIONALLY, THE SHARP CALL OF A BIRD FLOATS ACROSS THE VALLEY.

Fluffy mountain dogs let out a friendly bark or two. Apart from that there is complete silence in this neck of the Kumaon Himalaya. If you prefer peace over pep, Mukteshwar is for you. It’s also for those hungry for adventure and keen to commune with the great outdoors. There’s plenty for them to do here. Then there’s the view of the legendary peaks of the high Himalaya on a clear day, a sight for sore city eyes.

The drive into Kumaon in early February was beautiful. Once we left Bhimtal’s busy sprawl behind, there were two options: to drive via Ramgarh or Dhanachuli. We chose the latter, ostensibly shorter route, made good progress, and then ran into some snow in Dhanachuli. While fresh snow falling is a sight to behold, our attention was taken up by our car which was skidding on the ice that had hardened on the road.

There are many trekking trails in and around Mukteshwar, where the hilly terrain is punctuated with lush forests. Some of the most popular trails are Peora to Almora, Peora to Mukteshwar and Binsar to Artola.

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The rooms, all with original artwork, are stylish, while the restaurant sports a more cheerful décor. There is a full-fledged spa, which gives them an edge over the competition. I had some excellent therapies here, and the view did half the healing to be honest.

The Jüsta resort has extremely stylish rooms.

The view of snow-clad peaks from Jüsta is stunning.
The rooms, all with original artwork, are stylish, while the restaurant sports a more cheerful décor. There is a spa, which gives them an edge over the competition. I had some excellent therapies here, and the view did half the healing to be honest. But, perhaps, the centrepiece is the indoor, temperature-controlled pool with a jaw-dropping view of the mountains.

The property is in the excellent care of Sanket Singh, a General Manager who loves the region, knows more about it than most and has made it his home. He told me Jüsta Mukteshwar has been imagined as a wellness and rejuvenation space, and there are plans to conduct wellness retreats with yoga, meditation and a variety of therapies. The food is excellent, the highlight
being the Kumaoni thali. Served on a terracotta plate and bowls, with additional items arriving in copper vessels, it turned out to be a sumptuous affair. While the dishes change seasonally, the one I sampled came piled with plump madua (ragi or finger millet) rotis, to be dipped into bhatt ke dubke, a mushy preparation of black soybean unique to the region, and accompanied by jahiya aloo, mooli ki thechwani, home-style chicken curry, and bhang ki chatni. All in all, a rustic and charming affair.

Outside and about

Mukteshwar is noted for the waterfalls in its vicinity. I visited Bhalugaad. It's a pleasant trek to the fall—uphill and downhill, and then along a stream—but you can cut the distance in half by ziplining part of the way. The route is littered with enticement in the form of tea stalls and cafés. When you reach the waterfall, you’ll know it’s been worth the trouble. Even in winter, the flow is impressive, and the water’s force has created a massive pool at its base. In warmer weather, it doubtless tempts many to take the plunge.

Mukteshwar’s most remarkable natural feature—and, consequently, its most popular attraction—is the Chauli ki jaali, a rock formation that juts out from a cliff close to the Mukteshwar temple. Serendipitously, it also faces west, and tourists congregate here every evening to witness the spectacular sunset and for di rigueur masala maggi and freshly-squeezed malta juice. Rappelling and rock-climbing are also on offer. It’s a lively scene, and great to dip your toes into should the quiet start getting to you.

One morning, when the air was crisp, I went down to a stream below the property. Under a bridge, a picnic table was laid out and I had breakfast in the most tranquil of settings. It’s these little nooks and corners that make this far-from-the-madding-crowd corner of Kumaon special.

Mukteshwar reminded me what our hill stations are supposed to be like—small, not trampled by too much development or overrun with visitors. If peace was a physical space, I think it would be Mukteshwar.

Where to Stay

The brand-new Jüsta Mukteshwar Retreat & Spa is an excellent choice with a view to die for.
- Has a spa and indoor heated swimming pool.
- Offers village walks and meals at local homes, besides other excursions.

What to See & Do

- Chauli ki Jaali Mukteshwar’s most popular attraction, it’s a sight to behold
- Mukteshwar Post Office (pic left) Established in 1905, Jim Corbett sent a telegram to his mother from this charming, little post office about his safe arrival in ‘The Muktesar Man-Eater’ story
- Bhalugaad Waterfall A not-to-be-missed attraction

The View

- There’s no denying it. Mukteshwar is all about the view. The classic one of the high Himalaya has Nanda Devi, Nanda Kot, Nandaghunti, Trishul and Panchachuli in the frame
- This region is the fruit bowl of Kumaon. In summer, the trees are laden with apples, peaches and apricots, making for a pleasing sight.
Once broken, things are hard to mend. The cracks will never close. Your business edge comes from anticipating the break, and fixing things before its veins begin to show. Even if it means starting anew. That’s the only way to stay ahead.

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BEYOND THE pagodas

With untrammelled landscapes and a rich cultural heritage,

KARAN KAUSHIK

experiences Khampti and Singpho villages in Namsai and Chongkham. Photographs by

SANDIPAN CHATERJEE
As a traveller, I now find myself free from the pressure of ‘seeing everything’. Our trip across eastern Arunachal Pradesh focused on taking rare experiences everyday rather than trying to squeeze in as many places into the itinerary. Visiting Chongkham is a case in point.

There were hills, there were those grand pagodas, there was great food and there was absolute serenity but it was the people who made it special. For instance, Sukiyo Chow Mein, our driver, tour guide, man Friday and now, a dear friend. He had been a sheer delight. We first met him at Dibrugarh Airport. Almost my age, the Khampti boy with cool tattoos vibed with me and Sandipan instantly.

A smooth drive blessed with tea gardens takes us to the Golden Pagoda Eco Resort in Tengapani. By the time we reach, it’s dark but fortunately we can see the beautifully lit pagoda from our cottage. And zillions of stars. Soon, a bonfire is raised, copious amounts of homemade rice beer is served. There is wine too, followed by a wholesome Khampti dinner.

We have paasa, a soup made from raw fish and herbs. There is namson tongpuk, a curry made by fermenting yam leaves and rice, paapho or steamed fish which is prepared in banana leaf and cooked over fire and there is steamed chicken with dry bamboo shoots. But what steals the show for me is khao lam or steamed rice that has taken the shape of the bamboo it was cooked in.

The next morning we wake up at five when dawn has already set in. Soon, we are at the Golden Pagoda or the Kongmu Kham, surrounded by monks. One of the senior monks Chowsang Ombgbu, sits in a quiet corner reading Buddhist scriptures. He is kind enough to join us for a walk around the pagoda. Built on a plateau overlooking the plains and the Eastern Himalaya, the Kongmu Kham stands in all its glory as an iconic symbol of Theravada Buddhism. Inside the pagoda sits a bronze Buddha statue that was gifted by the chief monk from a temple in Thailand.
The prayer hall is reverberating with the sounds of Pali chants and spiritual fervour as monks kneel in front of a one-of-its-kind Buddha statue made of cane. After the prayer service, some monks head to their schools to receive formal education and some stay for their Dhamma classes.

We are leaving for Chongkham, when Chowsang Mojingta, who is running late for school, asks for a lift. The 17-year-old had joined the monastery last year to discipline his life. We drop him at the Momong Government School and pay a quick visit to the Momong Monastery. Constructed in 1918, this is one of the oldest Theravada monasteries and houses age-old Buddha statues that were brought from Myanmar.

**ESCAPING TO Chongkham**

Large paddy fields, traditional bamboo houses, prayer flags and shimmering pagodas mark our entry in Chongkham. We stop at the Teang Bridge and appreciate the southeast Asian-esque landscape basking in past glory. Bound in the north by the commanding snow ranges of the last fringes of the Himalayan Hump and the descending misty mountains of the Patkai range to its east, Chongkham is blessed with its share of small rivers and rivulets and tributaries of Lohit and Kamlang rivers.

It was through the numerous passes of the Patkai Range that the Tai Khamptis poured into Assam and then parts of eastern Arunachal Pradesh, from Burma. Sukiyo informs us that Chongkham was once known as the richest village of Asia, thanks to its abundant natural wealth that included timber forests and many sprawling tea estates.

Till date, every house in Chongkham owns elephants, symbolic of their wealth. Khamptis have a legendary connection with elephants and they were skilled at capturing wild elephants and training them to extract logs, plucking tea leaves and ploughing farmlands. Most households in the village had plywood factories and saw mills. It was only after the Supreme Court banned the felling of trees that Chongkham’s golden period came to an end.

**MEETING KHAMPTIS IN Empong**

We continue for Chongkham’s Empong village, where we are all set to be hosted by Chou Jigdra Lungkeing, the Gaon Bura or headman of the village. We soak in the early morning countryside vibes as we cross people opening up their shops in little markets, students cycling to their schools, thatched bamboo huts, sprawling tea plantations and unending banana, bamboo and betel nut trees. Snow-capped
Cooling off at the river island

A view of the Marwa River in Empong

Cooking with Nang Bhikuni Lungkeing
Nisana Lungkeing flaunting her dream catcher
mountains of the Manabum hill ranges battle the mist to make their presence felt.

At the Gaon Bura’s home, we are greeted by his wife Nang Bhikuni Lungkeing, who is weaving a phanoj (lungi) when we enter. Their traditional bamboo house stands by the Marwa River. Most Khampti families have looms in their homes on which they weave traditional garments for themselves. She welcomes us inside her kitchen, where rice is being cooked on a traditional hearth. She has packed the rice in tong leaves and put them in a vessel, which is placed on another vessel with boiling water.

Dotted with uriam, banana, papaya and tomar trees, Empong is a friendly Tai Khampti hamlet with a population of only 50 to 60 people. Most families are involved in the cultivation of paddy, potato, beans, peas and other vegetables. They live in traditional huts with spread-out habitations, separated by paddy fields that produce the famous Khampti sticky rice.

There’s been no electricity since last night but we don’t mind, thanks to the chilly breeze coming in from the river and the sunny rooms. We enjoy hot tea seated on a beautiful floor mat made with pong wood.

The room offers spectacular views of the gentle river lined with dense trees on both the sides. Without internet and phone networks, we simply get charmed by the serenity, one breeze at a time while bulbuls and mynahs chirp at the window. Medals belonging to Jigdra’s daughter Nisana hang on the walls of the room. The 11th grader is a marathon runner and wants to pursue medicine. At 16, she can already make medicines from local herbs. She is also a talented artist and shows us a multi-coloured dream catcher that she has made.

Their son Pesunam, who studies humanities in Tezu, serves us tea and khao puk. Made of sticky rice and sesame seeds, khao puk is a staple Khampti snack usually eaten for breakfast. The chewy and sticky rice was once used by their ancestors to defend themselves during wars and jungle expeditions. They would make a jacket from the sticky rice. It not only protected them from sharp weapons but also satiated their hunger at times when they were left deserted in the middle of nowhere.

Jigdra accompanies us to the Empong Monastery, which stands at the confluence of Tissu and Marwa rivers. One of the most
important Buddhist chongs in Arunachal Pradesh, Empong is famed for its wish-fulfilling Buddha idol, known as the Phra Sutong Pe. At the entry of the monastery, a huge mango tree with enormous growth and size, perhaps the thickest in the world, leaves us jaw dropped. It’s considered to be older than the monastery.

**LUNCH WITH Singphos**

Our next stop for the day is Piyong village, where a Singpho family has invited us for lunch. On our way to Piyong, we stop at the Chongkham Buddha Vihara. The ornate chong at Chongkham is more modern and Burmese in style than the older stilted chongs at Empong and Momung. Inside the compound are several golden pagodas or *kongmus*, with little carvings of the Buddha in their niches, and idols depicting scenes from the Buddha’s life.

We cross a steel bridge to reach the other side of the river, where stands the World Peace Pagoda. We loll around the river island under the bright afternoon sun, watching little monks being playful as they take turns to jump in the river.

In Piyong, Ningru Onnong Maio and his wife Ningru Walet Maio are waiting for us with bated breath. They have called Sukiyu a couple of times since we left Empong. We greet the couple and meet our little host baby Sansan Maio, who is all dressed up in her cute Singpho dress. Her smile is infectious and we play with her as we wait for lunch to be served.

My north Indian palate requests for some rotis and our thoughtful hosts oblige. I enjoy the hot and crispy rotis with dal and *phakko* or steamed mustard green—their version of the *sarro ka saag*. I also have *paa ning* or steamed fish with rice. There’s some
delicious egg curry too. For dessert, we are pleasantly surprised to see some spongy rosgullas. I enjoy the first and give in to my temptation for the second.

Onnong tells me that he is the great grandson of Ningru La Maio, who is believed to be Assam’s first tea planter. I am curious. Onnong takes us to his uncle Ningru Chau Ja Maio’s house. Adorning a traditional Singpho coat, the 70-year-old is the proud grandson of Ningru La Maio, and tells us that Ningru La was one of the many rulers of the Singpho community.

The Singphos have been using tea or phalap, as they call it, since the time it required one to be seated atop an elephant to pluck the leaves. Ningru Chau Ja tells us that Major Robert Bruce of the East India Company came to know about tea after he was served a concoction of the beverage by Singpho king Bisa Gam in the early nineteenth century.

The British sought Ningru La’s assistance in locating tea-growing areas in Assam. Ningru La produced 35 boxes of the total 95 boxes of tea that the East India Company had sent for auction to London for the first time. Following the Singpho uprising in January 1843, he was deported to Arunachal Pradesh, where he spent the rest of his life. Intrigued by the story, we say our goodbyes to the Maio family.

Later, Sukiyo takes us to the Alubari Bridge and we reach just in time to witness one of the most stunning sunsets of our lives. While Sandipan tries to capture the massive red ball of fire in his lens, I decide to enjoy the view with naked eyes. I have finally learned to live in the moment.

We cross a steel bridge to reach the World Peace Pagoda. We loll around the river island under the bright afternoon sun, watching little monks being playful in the river.
ON AN ALL-TIME HIGH

Green pines, endless pasturelands and an arena of high mountain vistas,

ADIL LANGOO

was rewarded with a palette of colours every single day as he traversed the relaxing terrain of Kashmir
Mount Harmukh rising above Nundkol Lake

*** By the campfire ***
Nundkol Camp and Gangabal Valley

*** On the wild track ***
Gadsar Valley and Satsar Valley

*** Leading the lake life ***
Kishansar Lake and Vishansar Lake
The Ascent

We started early in the morning; clad in backpacks, trekking suits, boat hats and sticks, we felt cheerful and hopeful of finishing the trek on time. The weather was pleasant; a thick line of clouds scattered about and gave way to a reluctant sunshine.

The Kashmir Great Lakes Trek starts from Naranag—a small hamlet wedged between two mountain lines. The place holds the ruins of an 8th-century temple, a disused shivling, a spring and a few stone carvings. The trail starts near this temple and winds up through pine trees ascending right from the hem of Butshiri Mountain. The steepness of Butshiri hides in its snaky trail and a patch of pine trees.

The first day of the trek was strenuous. The steepness was felt in a few metres as everyone started panting, resting after every few steps. The ponies and porters ascended the way one descends, brisk like someone in a hurry.

I was a little apprehensive to embark on this trek; a little reluctant to take on the ardent task of walking up the mountains, gasping for breath. But then a thought crossed my mind. What could transport one from the daily hustle-bustle and brooding routines to something refreshing and new? The answer was right in front of me. I joined the trek with a ‘mixed group’—men, women, Indians, Malaysians and others from different corners of the world.

First Steps

As the toll of ascending got heavier on us, some started ruing the thought of coming from afar places to this exhaustion, some thought it was better to go around tourist places, sitting in cozy hotel rooms and roaming around in cabs. But the trail turned easier after Butshiri Top. It opens itself onto Trunkhol Meadow—a beautiful patch of grassy land circled by mountains.

Our first day terminated at Nundkol Lake—a beautiful lake calmly formed under the loftiness of Mount Harmukh. Harmukh, being cloudless, was beckoning and stared exotically at us; it was from this mountain, in 1856, that Thomas Montgomerie, the British Trigonometric Surveyor discovered and sketched K2.

At Nundkol Camp, an enervated Malaysian trekker got irate. He ended up

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
reprimanding his comrades for suggesting trekking over beach visits to Goa. But a bowl of hot soup and instant noodles mollified him. It turned out that his hunger had overtaken his senses.

We spent the next two days camping in the Gangabal Valley. We visited Gangabal Lake—the largest alpine lake of Kashmir. The following days, we trekked through lush meadows of Satsar Valley and Gadsar Valley, crossed Zajbal Pass, visited the Bakerwal house made of mud and logs, and saw shepherds lazily grazing their flock of sheep. The entire meadow of Satsar is otherworldly in terms of its calmness and landscape. We forded little water-fed streams strewn with boulders and log bridges; occasionally, clumps of flowers would toss their heads in the breeze.

Excerpts:

Camper

CAMARADERIE

As we reached closer to the pass, each step became more difficult and heavier. Our backpack seemed like a lifelong encumbrance. Trekking felt debilitating, an age-old curse that was coming true in the meadows and mountains. Ascending
Butshiri Mountain felt like an overture of the Gadsar Pass.

We had no choice, the guide told us. We were in the middle of the trek and halfway to the Gadsar Pass. Both ways, ascend or descend, it was going to be arduous.

I rested near a big rock, looked up and caught a glimpse of the Malaysian trekker whom I had struck a camaraderie with. He was a tireless trekker, a fact that he didn’t fail to re-emphasise time and again. To be honest, I did envy him.

For me, reaching this pass was far more strenuous than any other day of the trek, but also equally rewarding. We spent the next two days camping in the Vishansar Valley, feeding on trout and coffee.

We finally reached Gadsar Pass after endless hours of trekking. The Gadsar Peak more than made up for all the blood and sweat. To see oneself at the top of the entire range, flanked by the Gadsar Valley on one side and two beautiful lakes—Kishansar and Vishansar—on the other, is an experience of a lifetime. For me, reaching this pass was far more strenuous than any other day of the trek, but also equally rewarding. We spent the next two days camping in the Vishansar Valley, feeding on trout and chugging down numerous cups of coffee and tea.

A Dogged Resistance

The stream that ran alongside the campsite shimmered in the sun. An afternoon with Mary Jane seemed apt. I wanted to let the hundreds of thoughts recede. But I soon dropped the idea after sometime feeling that my mind was least jumbled, the seven days of walk into the mountains, body ache and fear had left my mind a little disoriented. I wished the trek would stretch for many days, beyond Sonamarg. To travel is to find an optimum point, the point where you let go of your past and don’t contemplate the future. That’s the
Cutting through the highlands of Sonamarg, a short drive to Nichinai can also lead you to the starting point of the route to Gangabal Lake.
point where one meets oneself. For me, this point was in the Vishansar Valley. I felt unmoored, past agonies and distress. Just a blanket of calmness.

I would have been more than ecstatic if our guide had told us that we’d have to extend our stay by another week. But, unfortunately my fellow trekkers had other plans on their minds. The journey so far had satiated their wanderlust.

The day we left Vishansar, the drizzle gave way to a weak sunshine. The sun peeped through thickly scattered clouds; but then it changed, clouds turned thin, the sun became brighter and hotter.

We spent the last night camping at Table Top. We ate with gusto, danced around the bonfire and gawped at Alfa Centauri. The moon was big and looked like it hung quite near to us. The sky looked full of life and
yet quite serene. The ‘pony men’ danced around and sang their songs in which they implored their women to give them an approving glance. One fellow Malaysian trekker sang John Denver’s ‘Take Me Home, Country Roads’ to which we all chorused and the mood drifted to melancholy.

Kashmir Great Lakes Trek has no sharp precipice hanging dreadfully over deep gorges; or a pack of bears lollaping down to eat your pound of flesh. It’s a moderate walk; away from home in meadows and enticing mountains. It has a trail that rarely looks fatal; the lakes that rarely look terrifying. It has cattle that admiringly chew under the bright sun; and, of course, the shepherds who play flutes charmingly.

On the last day of the trek, I spruced up a bit, washed my hair and beard, put on an old jacket and slicked my hair backwards, getting partially ready for the world and all its doldrums. I looked back at the trek and life in general. Trekking is undoubtedly a humbling experience; it could take the arrogance and snobbishness out of us in a subtle way. It’s meant for all. And trekking, I realise, needs nothing but the willingness to trudge.

NOTE: En route, in summers mostly, you will see a couple of checkpoints in the area. Make sure to carry your ID and documents (Aadhaar card for Indians, passport for non-Indians). The army posts are at three places: Trunkhol Meadow, Satsar Meadow and Gadsar Valley.

Where to stay
- At Naranag, one can either stay in tents or guest houses. The guest house will cost around ₹1,000 per person for a night including meals. Keep a camera handy when exploring the tiny village.

Trekking Essentials
- One can arrange trekking essentials at Naranag itself. Hiring a guide along with a pony will cost you somewhere between ₹800 and ₹1,200 per day inclusive of meals. For solo trekkers, the cost is approximately ₹2,000 per day, inclusive of meals.
- Naranag has a tiny market with a couple of shops selling essentials only. Make sure to buy your stuff either at Srinagar or Kangan Market. You will not be able to find a regular hire shop selling personal trekking gear anywhere else in Kashmir. However, you can get trekking tents and sleeping bags on rent from the Jammu and Kashmir Tourism Department.

How to reach
- Naranag base camp can be reached from Srinagar by a cab or public transport. It’s a four-hour drive from Srinagar. First head to Lal Chowk (₹200), from there a local bus can take you to Soura (₹12). Hop on to a shared cab to Kangan and then to Naranag (approx. ₹100).

The best time to be on this trek is from July to September. Rest of the year, Kashmir trails are mostly buried under snow.

What to keep in mind
- Kashmir Great Lakes Trek is mostly done from Sonamarg to Naranag. However, it can be done from Naranag to Sonamarg. Don’t miss the 4,000-year-old Naranag Temple.
- Distance: approx. 75kms
- Duration: 6 days + 1 day for acclimatisation
- Difficulty Level: Moderate
- Maximum Altitude: 4,200m (Gadsar Pass)

TOURISM
Into the lands far and wide, Team OT unearths southern India’s best-kept secrets for your next offbeat getaway.
TREKKING IN Skandagiri

Surrounded by ruined forts all round, it is a must visit to witness nature in all its glory

Skandagiri is Home to Sunrise Treks

Also known as Kelawara Betta, the hills are adorned by the ruins of Tipu Sultan’s fort, demolished during the British Rule, making it even more tempting to trek on. Located in the village of Chikkaballapura, Skandigiri overlooks the beauty of Nandi Hills, often known as Kalawara Durga. At an altitude of 1,350 metres, it is famous for its night trek. The trek is safe and marked for the convenience of travellers. Set an alarm as early as 4am to witness the sunrise on the hilltop or hire a mountain bike to experience the thrill. The Samadhi Caves here will also welcome you with open arms for hospitality.

Travellers also need prior permission from the forest department and an online ticket from the Karnataka Ecotourism Board
Cacao Roasting in Idukki

The journey of the cacao bean to chocolate can be traced in Kerala’s landlocked district.

**The ideal time to visit is October to November**

Known as the ‘spice garden of Kerala,’ Idukki is fast emerging as one of the prime destinations for the production of cacao in India. Amid the lush forests and wildlife sanctuaries, villages in Idukki are also invested in cacao as an intercrop alongside coconut, rubber, and spices. These cacao-growing areas have become the centre of the bean-to-bar movement. Make your way here to witness the origin of the process that brings your favourite chocolate to the table. Unlike mass-produced chocolates, the cacao beans that are harvested here undergo the processes of fermentation and roasting to enhance the original flavour of the bean. Many organic chocolate brands, both domestic and international, source their cacao beans from Idukki.

» During the 18th century, the British East India Company planted the first cacao beans from Indonesia here.

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Sakleshpur Railway Trek

Nestled in the Western Ghats it is a perfect escape from the city grind.

**Witness waterfalls, mountain tunnels and bridges along the way**

Situated about 130 kilometres from Mangaluru and 225 kilometres from Bengaluru, Sakleshpur is home to the famous railway track trek. This 56-kilometre stretch has over 100 bridges, 25 waterfalls, and several tunnels, and promises trekkers a mesmerising experience. The trek is also lined with dense flora and fauna. While the monsoon offers a lush view, be careful of the slippery routes. Travellers should also halt at the Bisle Reserve Forest, Mallalli Waterfalls, and Jenukal Gudda—the second-highest mountain peak in Karnataka.

» The town has abundant coffee, tea, cardamom and pepper plantations.
INSIDE THE
Borra Caves

Preserved for their history and gigantic structure, these caves are located in the Araku Valley.

**The ideal time to visit is from September to May.**

Nestled in the Ananthagiri Mandal Range of Visakhapatnam district, the Borra Caves were first discovered by William King George, who headed the Geological Survey of India. The history of these caves goes back to 150 million years when the Gosthani River in the area meandered over the limestone deposits and formed a cluster of uniquely designed caves. Located at an elevation of 1,400 metres, the caves extend to a depth of 80 metres and are home to an age-old Shiva temple. Adorned with exquisite patterns, the place is best experienced through its natural skylights and colourful artificial lights.

> Travellers can also spot bats and golden geckos inside these caves.
Don’t forget to visit the famous treehouse tower for its scenic views near Ponmudi.
Ponmudi is also known as the ‘Golden Peak of the Western Ghats’
The railway line consists of unearthly views of rivers, bridges, valleys and grasslands. It covers 16 tunnels, 208 curves and 250 bridges.

Bedecked with tunnels, forests, valleys and grasslands, this mountain-bound train voyage passes through Mettupalayam curves, and spirals into Ooty while scaling an elevation from 326 metres to 2,203 metres within a span of five hours. Dubbed as the steepest railway system in Asia, and labelled a Unesco World Heritage Site, the toy train halts at four stations during its voyage, and offers travellers splendid views of cascading waters, extensive bridges, and mist-riddled hilltops for one to marvel at. Try landing a seat to the right when on the Mettupalayam-Coonoor-Ooty route, and one on the left while travelling through Ooty-Coonoor-Mettupalayam.

Along the Coonoor and Ooty route, the toy train’s fleet of steam locomotives are substituted with diesel locomotives.
RISE AND FALL IN OOTY

Waterfalls nestled in unsullied nature are a treat to sore eyes

**THE IDEAL TIME TO VISIT IS SEPTEMBER TO JUNE**

The *Song of the Brook* by Tennyson will fall short to explain the serenity of the cascading water as it curves through the cliffs and bounces across the river. Just 16 kilometres away from Ooty at Mettupalayam Road lies the beauty of Catherine Waterfalls, for which you must trail up the Dolphin’s Nose viewpoint to enjoy the twin waterfall gushing down. Go boating to visit the Pykara Falls or to the idyllic Law Falls carved in the thick of the Coonoor forest range, the lushest of Ooty. Home to exotic flora and fauna, Kalhatti offers the thrill of wildlife adventure. For the best of Ooty, the Halasana, Kolakambai and Katary waterfalls have a lot to offer with the Elk Falls being a must visit.

» Visit the European house constructed by a British collector in 1819 near Elk Falls which is now preserved as a historic building.
GLIMPSE OF MINI TIBET
Bylakuppe

A Tibetan nook, Bylakuppe is an amalgamation of Tibetan serenity and south Indian culture.

Bylakuppe was a Tibetan refugee camp that came into existence post 1959.

Rows of fluttering prayer flags, 12 monasteries and 13 Tibetan settlements strewn across, Bylakuppe is an experience like no other. Namdroling Monastery here is a must visit with its Golden Temple towering with three golden statues of Lord Buddha. The best time to visit this mystical place is around the Tibetan New Year celebrated for two weeks in the month of February-March. The town has a rustic charm during the festival with monks in traditional costumes, and music and dance filling the air. Try the local Tibetan culinary fare here—fresh momos, thukpa, phing or shalpta, the choices are endless.

Bylakuppe is only 40km or roughly an hour away from Coorg.

Karnataka’s ginger and corn are all sourced from the fields of Bylakuppe spread over thousands of acres over the hill.
WINTER PARADISE
Lambasingi

It is a fine blend of snowfall, tall deciduous trees lining the sidewalk and charming tea plantations.

For an offbeat experience consider camping here.

Also known as the ‘Kashmir of South India’, Lambasingi is a small village in the state of Andhra Pradesh. This winter wonderland is the coldest place in Andhra, with occasional snowfall and temperature dropping as low as sub-zero levels, during the winter months. With a blanket of cold air due to its elevation of 1,000 metres above sea level, and a lush green cover formed by deciduous forests enveloping it, Lambasingi has a plethora of must-visit places ranging from the Kothapalli Waterfalls, the Thajangi Reservoir, Yerravaram Waterfalls, to Susan Garden and many more. For bird watchers, the Kondakarla Bird Sanctuary is quite a delight. You can also take a stroll on the Ghat Road at Lambasingi, with a visual panorama around and a light breeze waving by.

The village of Lambasingi is called karra bayalu in the local language, meaning ‘if one stays outdoors at night, they will freeze like a stick’.

When visiting Lambasingi, don’t miss out on Bojjannakonda. It is home to one of the oldest Buddhist establishments in India, with monoliths dating back to the 4th century.
A new restaurant from the Ganga Kinare folks serves temple food from across the length and breadth of the country.

What better place to have food fit for gods than in the holy town of Rishikesh? The boutique hotel Ganga Kinare recently opened a new property, Holywater by Ganga Kinare, and with it, Varr—meaning ‘boon’—a restaurant dedicated to the temple foods of India. Served in a shining brass thali, the dishes have been sourced from and inspired by holy places across India. Some of these are served in the temple kitchens or offered to the gods as ‘bhog’, some are popular in those regions. The meal begins with achanam, a ritual purification of the hands, followed by panchamrit, a holy elixir consisting of five ingredients—in this case, milk, ghee, honey, gangajal and tulsi. There are four thalis, which are rotated on a daily basis, all under the watchful eye of Chef Deepak Bhatt. The one we sampled included arbi ke gutke, a popular staple on the Char Dham circuit, alu wadi from the langar at the Golden Temple in Amritsar, tamatar-wala paneer from the Bade Mandir in Delhi, Vaishno Devi ke channe, Brajbhoomi ki khichdi and Mathura ka peda. It’s a delicious mélange of dishes and, including the condiments, there are as many as 22 items in the thali. On other days, the thali can include dalma from Puri’s Jagannath Temple, kayuppu kanai kathirikai kozhambu from the temple kitchens of Tamil Nadu, paruppu sorakkai kootu from Madurai’s Meenakshi Temple, Badrinath ki khichdi, and so on. To sample it all, you’ll have to dine here for at least four days in a row. The cheerful and eclectic interiors look good enough to eat too, and there’s even a photo corner for all our Instagrammers.

The signature drink, dhuaan chaas—smoke and ghee-infused buttermilk—makes a dramatic entrance at the table.

—AMIT DIXIT
Chef Prem Kumar Pogakula may relish whipping up all-time French classics, but he's still mastering his mom’s country-style chicken curry.

**What's one signature dish of yours that you would use to impress a special someone?**
Whenever I’ll get a chance to cook my favourite dish to impress someone, I would never miss a chance to cook Lobster Thermidor. It is very easy to make, always wins the table and can brighten any occasion. Whenever I see a fresh lobster, the one thing I can imagine is brandy flambéed lobster.

**Which do you think is the most versatile cuisine?**
In India, our own cuisine changes every 200km. In this way when the entire cooking techniques, ingredients and concept change occurs, it’s very hard to unite the county with one single cuisine. So I believe, Indian cuisine is the most diverse and versatile cuisine ever. We have lots to learn, explore and discover. For instance, a simple biryani recipe changes in all states and also within the states.

**One dish or recipe you’re desperate to master?**
It is my mom’s naatu kodi pulusu (country chicken curry). I have been eating this curry from my childhood but still can’t make it perfectly. Sometimes, I come close but can’t match up to my mom’s. It is a very easy recipe but the secret lies in understanding the exact details.

—PRANNAY PATHAK

### Chef Recommends

**Coq Au Vin**
A classic French chicken stew, braised slowly in red wine and a little brandy with bacon, mushrooms and pearl onions. Finish it off with butter for the most perfect sauce.

**Truffle-Scented Parmesan Riso Soup**
A comforting soup with a flavourful punch of truffle with chicken stock, cream, milk and cheese.
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32ND AVENUE IN GURUGRAM’S SECTOR 15 has grown up since I last went there (for one, it was called Milestone then, not Avenue). Today, this lively F&B precinct could well give DLF Cyberhub a run for its money. The reigning star of the moment is The House of Celeste (THC), a purveyor of ‘Modern Indian’ fare, which seems to have become established—and rightly so—as a cuisine in its own right. THC opened just before the lockdown, had to shut shop, and is back with an all-new menu conjured up by Chef Valice Francis and Chef Ishan Ahluwalia, both of whom have done stints at Indian Accent. It’s an eclectic pan-Indian menu, offering dishes as diverse as Mangalore Chicken Ghee Roast, Dilli 6 Nalli Nehari and Goan Prawn Balchao.

The plating is stylish, but there are no pointless frills here. Instead, the chefs have chosen to focus on the quality of the food. This is not to say there isn’t some well-meaning mischief—and magic—here. Take, for instance, the Puchka Pebbles, the very first item on the menu. They look rock hard all right, but the chilli-chocolate shell yields easily in the mouth to deliver a burst of intensely flavourful tamarind water. Even someone from Kolkata will not be able to fault the flavour. Standouts include the Ladakhi veg dumplings served in a thukpa broth with crispy noodles, butter chicken with in-house ‘makkhan’ and the chicken changezi tikka. The ‘meetha’ features four excellent options, but we’d like to see more. A snacks menu is expected to launch soon.

-AMIT DIXIT

THE HOUSE OF CELESTE

GURUGRAM

Signature cocktails include Coffee Colada, Plum & Kokum Martini and Celeste G&T

» Unit No. 8, 32nd Avenue, NH8, Sector 15
Part 2, Gurugram, Haryana 122022
• 12 noon–11pm

» Must Try: Puchka Pebbles, Calcutta Beet Balls, Nilgiri Fish Tikka, Traditional Butter Chicken

↑ mushroom galawati kabab
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Vin Over

Château Mouton Rothschild 2018 emerges victorious in the 2021 ‘Best Wines of the World’ competition

Helmed by Tastingbook.com, one of the largest wine information services, the competition observed the convergence of 3 million votes, and awarded the Château Mouton Rothschild 2018, Bordeaux, France the winning title. The top 100 wines advanced to a round of blind tasting. Rothschild received the highest scores, and was awarded the title of ‘Best Wine’ and ‘Best Red’. Designed by Chinese artist Xu Bing, the wine boasts of an intense black colour, and comprises notes of spiced fruit and nutmegs woven into a delicious aroma that reigns supreme over its counterparts.

The wine comprises Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Cabernet Franc

Up For Waffles + Mochi?

Michelle Obama to feature in Netflix’s latest children’s cooking show

In a new venture with Netflix, Michelle Obama, the former first lady is releasing a children-centric cooking show, which aims at encouraging kids to eat healthily. The series will star two puppets named Waffles and Mochi. The project is one of the many initiatives taken up by Obama to promote healthy living. The 10-episodes-long series is said to be launching on 16 March on Netflix. The show has been described as “the culinary adventure of a lifetime,” as it is about discovering new ingredients from across the world and learning new things every day. Waffles + Mochi will have several guests making cameos from A-list celebrities, famous chefs to home cooks.

The show was previously titled as Listen to Your Vegetables & Eat Your Parents

Dining at Dank

Chef Saby makes his Chennai debut through a collaborative menu

Popularly known as Saby, the chef has curated a special menu for the T. Nagar–based restaurant and bar. From ponchiki (a custard-filled Armenian doughnut) to arancini (an Italian rice dumpling), diners can experience a variety of European and Mediterranean–origin dishes. At Dank, global cuisines and local ingredients will be merged to celebrate regional ingredients and tastes. For the classic Spanish brunch—paella—local seeraga sami rice will be used along with a range of fish items. Spice blends have been added to podis to make black sesame podi, curry leaves podi, and red chilli podi. The new menu also features dishes such as ‘Tribute to Madras,’ and desserts like the pineapple upside-down cake, made with jaggery toffee sauce.

Dank Restobar is trying to promote sustainability and slow food
Nearly every region in Japan has its own variation of ramen, such as tonkotsu ramen of Kyushu and miso ramen of Hokkaido.

The spicy chicken ramen is the perfect hybrid of heat and flavour. The popularity of ramen as a traditional Japanese dish has been skyrocketing and now you can find ramen restaurants almost anywhere in the world. Use chicken, noodles, spinach, sweetcorn and eggs to make this moreish Japanese noodle soup, for when you crave something comforting yet light and wholesome. Nearly every region in Japan has its own variation of ramen, such as the tonkotsu (pork bone broth) ramen of Kyushu and the miso ramen of Hokkaido. Mazemen is a ramen dish that is not served in a soup, but rather with a sauce (such as tare), like noodles that are served with a sweet and sour sauce. If you’re craving the thick creamy broth of tonkotsu ramen, but don’t eat pork, this chicken alternative is just as rich and delicious.

Spicy Chicken Ramen

**RECIPE FOR SPICY CHICKEN RAMEN**

- Half boil or soft boil an egg for around five minutes
- Wash and dice 20gms button mushrooms, 20gms baby bok choy, 18gms red bell peppers, 18gms yellow bell peppers, 10gms garlic, and 10gms ginger
- Boil 160gms wheat noodles in a separate pan
- In another pan, boil 300ml chicken stock and add 2 tsp shiro miso paste, 1 tsp kikkoman soy sauce, 1 tsp tobanjan paste, 1 tsp red chilli paste, 1 tsp sake cooking wine, 1 tsp mirin, 1/2 tsp fresh ginger paste and salt to prepare the broth *
- Dice 100gms chicken in small pieces and stir fry it
- You can add a touch of brown sugar for a hint of sweetness.
- Stir fry the diced vegetables with 1/2 tsp light soy sauce and 1 tsp oyster sauce
- Start assembling the ramen by adding the boiled wheat noodles to a bowl and pour the hot broth over it
- Add the stir-fried vegetables and chicken to the preparation
- Top it up with boiled egg cut in half and garnish with microgreens and spring onions

*Edo kibashi is the speciality chopsticks used for ramen noodles, created for eating ramen without the noodles actually slipping down between them.*
stay

HOTELS, HOSTELS AND NOTHING LIKE HOME

GRACE: CITY OF JOY 76

ECO RETREAT KONARK 77
Away from the mad city rush, it is an escape you didn’t know you needed

**BINSAR**

“We’re nearly there,” said Hemu ji, my naturalist-cum-trek guide for the day. Even though I didn’t quite bug him with how much longer, I think my flushed face and slower pace gave it away.

While my city lungs continued to be amazed by the fresh mountain air they were being exposed to, my trekking partner and also my gracious host at the Mary Budden Estate, Siddharth, seemed quite unperturbed by the hike and quietly continued his mountain quest for all the ingredients that could be sourced from the jungle right to the kitchen. After all, Chef Ram needs magic Kumaoni ingredients to cook up a storm for us.

Located in the confines of the Binsar Wildlife Sanctuary, Mary Budden Estate is a rustic wooden retreat, with accommodation units in the form of British-styled log cabins characterised by a warm fire always up and running. The estate is also supremely conscious about being in harmony with nature, and it can be seen in the little things—no plastic bottles, solar-powered panels, and a tiny hand-held bell for whenever you need assistance.

While time seems to be a luxury in Delhi, at Mary Budden Estate it’s all that you have, along with dramatic mountain weather changes, of course. It is here that I could slow the day down, witness my life’s first ever snowfall, cherish the sunset everyday, disconnect from the outside world and still feel whole(some).

—SIMRRAN GILL

The meals at Mary Budden are detail oriented and have been very thoughtfully created, using all local ingredients and immense precision. Make sure to ask what’s on your plate to continue being amazed.
WEST BENGAL

GRACE: CITY OF JOY

Kolkata, approx. 24km from Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose International Airport
» 2 ornately furnished bedrooms

MARVEL » The Victorian heritage-inspired property’s charm lingers in its nooks and corners. An amalgamation of traditional ideas and modern amenities, it exemplifies the prowess of the erstwhile capital of the British in India

SOJOURN » The traditionally designed rooms are tastefully done up with rustic furniture including a vintage four-poster bed and exude an old-world vibe

Escape

Unwind by the Rabindra Sarovar Lake, home to various migratory birds, which is only a 10-minute drive away or pay your respects at the Kalighat Temple nearby

TÊTE-À-TÊTE » A horticulturist by profession but a connoisseur and a perfectionist by passion, the host, Debjani is a sheer delight. With a keen interest in art and design, her elegant sensibility is evident in the interiors and décor

PHOTOGRAPHS: SANDIPAN CHATTERJEE
Leave Only Footprints
ECO RETREAT ODISHA

By the time you read this, this regal tent pitched on Konark’s serene Ramachandi Beach will be gone, like a true-blue ‘eco retreat’. But, come December, it’ll be back, to repeat the success of two seasons. It’s a one-of-a-kind glamping experience, with en-suite toilets and all meals and most activities taken care of, allowing a deep immersion in nature in offbeat places where no concrete structure would be possible or desirable. Eco Retreat Konark offers unfettered access to the sea, on a litter-free private beach. Odisha has also set up Eco Retreats at Hirakud, Satkosia and Daringbadi.

Things To Do

There is a busy schedule at Eco Retreat Konark, should you wish to partake. Activities include yoga, Zumba, beach volleyball, star-gazing, cycling, etc.

- Basic surfing lessons
- Visit to Konark Sun Temple
- Nature trail in the Balukhand Sanctuary
- 1N/2D and 2N/3D itineraries
Namsai woke up on a bright winter morning to welcome change... At the Discover Namsai: Outlook Responsible Tourism Future Forum, held on February 6, 2021, in collaboration with the Department of Tourism, Arunachal Pradesh, leading Indian voices in the space of sustainable travel arrived in this beautiful eastern corner of the state from New Delhi, Ladakh, Maharashtra, Kerala and Karnataka to spark new ideas and empower local communities. From farmstays and wellness experiences to soft adventures and gastronomy holidays, the experts urged the audience, especially the future travel entrepreneurs in the area, to adopt (and adapt) low-impact models of tourism that truly celebrate the beauty of the land and its social and cultural heritage.
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ArunachalTsm ArunachalTsm
outlook_responsibletourism

Nakap Nalo, Honorable Tourism Minister, pledged the State’s commitment to inclusive growth in the region.

Meenakshi Sharma, Director General, Ministry of Tourism, GOI, urged Namsai to become a ledester for slow travel.

Indranil Roy, CEO, Outlook Group, underlined the power of storytelling to attract the right kind of travellers.

Highlighting Eastern Arunachal Pradesh’s incredible potential as a sustainable tourism hub, Honourable Deputy Chief Minister, Chowna Mein, drew the audience’s attention to the immense mythological and spiritual significance of Namsai and Parshuram Kund nearby, as well as the historical importance of Stilwell Road. The most spectacular sunsets, said he, await travellers at the Alubari Bridge over the Lohit river. Mr Mein thanked the Ministry of Tourism GOI, and the Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana, which is enabling and empowering youth in the region to leverage tourism as an instrument for change and progress.

The local Tai-Khamti community have a distinct, rich and unparalleled cultural heritage. The dancers performed the Water Dance of the Sanken Festival at the Future Forum.

After the yearlong disruption due to Covid-19, the local community as well as key policymakers and administrators from Namsai and nearby districts were eager to explore new ways of creating livelihoods and offering meaningful, low-impact travel experiences.

Director General, Ministry of Tourism, GOI, Meenakshi Sharma, spoke from her heart, as a senior representative of the government, and as an avid traveller herself. She said that we all need to be travellers, not tourists, when we come to explore peaceful destinations like Namsai, and preserve its identity by changing as little as possible. The Honourable Minister of Tourism, Nakap Nalo, highlighted the fact that Arunachal Pradesh is distinct from other states, and has enormous biodiversity, making it ideal for eco-tourism. Hopeful about the future, he congratulated the tourism fraternity in the state on the slow yet steady return of travellers in the new year.

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Sadhana Deori, Secretary Tourism, Arunachal Pradesh, extended heartfelt gratitude to the honourable members of the government, senior administration and the local communities for their commitment to making Namsai a future-forward destination.

Dr. Tsewang Namgail, Director, Snow Leopard Conservancy India Trust, underscored the unique location of Namsai as a gateway to many wildlife sanctuaries and biodiversity hotspots, such as Kamlang, Mishmi Hills and Namdapha.

Sandeep Sangaru, Owner, Sangaru Design Studio, highlighted the versatility of bamboo as a material. He spoke about the need for true collaborations between designers and craftspeople, who were repositories of both traditional skills and knowledge.

Soity Banerjee, Project Editor, Outlook Responsible Tourism Initiative, mapped the landscape of post-pandemic travel in India, and Arunachal Pradesh's place in it. She also shared inspiring models of tourism from across the country.

Inir Pinheiro, Co-Founder and Managing Director, Grassroutes, surmised that in a post-pandemic world, homestays are the way forward. Not only do they represent the unique heritage and culture of a region, but they also have a multiplier effect on the local economy.

In sync with several of the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the experts and dignitaries at the Discover Namsai: Outlook Responsible Tourism Future Forum charted a new path for tourism in the region… In one voice, they all outlined the need to focus on quality over quantity, and attracting travellers who will genuinely value what already exists here. Protecting the interests of the local communities and empowering them to share incredible experiences that can only be found here (away from the humdrum routines of urban life), is now a priority for local stakeholders.

Young ladies ring in laughter and sunshine in their traditional Singpho attire, as they take a breather during the daylong ‘Discover Namsai: Outlook Responsible Tourism Future Forum 2021’ event.
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Together, Michael Dominic, Managing Director, CGH Earth Hotels (left), and Varun Sood, Vice President, Invest India (right), spoke of building a strong foundation for emerging destinations like Namsai. While Mr Dominic insisted on targeting the Alert, Independent Traveller (AIT), Mr Sood encouraged budding travel entrepreneurs to learn from existing models.

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In the post-pandemic world, when travellers seek out more remote, undiscovered corners of the country, when they gravitate towards rare, meaningful experiences, Namsai shall offer its own unique cocoon of culture, craft, culinary depth and diversity, history, natural beauty, and spiritual comfort. Think farmstays and seasonal river camps, gastronomy and butterfly trails, kayaking and caravan trips... All this without disrupting its rhythms of everyday life, or its deep-rooted identity. This was the hope and prayer of every speaker, every dignitary at the Discover Namsai: Outlook Responsible Tourism Future Forum 2021.
Sadhna Deori, Secretary, Department of Tourism, Arunachal Pradesh, gifts a traditional handmade Mishmi bag to a delegate.

Khaopok, fried dumplings made of rice and sesame, is one of the many culinary specialties Namsai is known for in Eastern Arunachal Pradesh, basketry and other bamboo handicrafts are an integral part of everyday life. A young girl weaves a Khampti lungi on a traditional loom placed under the stilts of a house built entirely out of bamboo.

The food at Namsai celebrates local produce. At the Manang family home — built using several local species of bamboo — in the neighboring village of Mime. In the post-pandemic world, when travellers seek out more remote, undiscovered corners of the country, when they gravitate towards rare, meaningful experiences, Namsai shall offer its own unique cocoon of culture, craft, culinary depth and diversity, history, natural beauty, and spiritual comfort. Think farmstays and seasonal river camps, gastronomy and butterfly trails, kayaking and caravan trips… All this without disrupting its rhythms of everyday life, or its deep-rooted identity. This was the hope and prayer of every speaker, every dignitary at the Discover Namsai: Outlook Responsible Tourism Future Forum 2021.

Dignitaries share ideas and inspirations on stage and off stage to lay down the foundations of a strong, sustainable Destination Namsai!

Whether it’s at a small prayer hall at Empong village or in the singular Golden Pagoda at Tengapani, the area around Namsai is steeped in the essence of Theravada Buddhism.
One of the distributaries of the Ganga, the Hooghly quietly enters the plains in West Bengal and forms an integral part of the bustling city of Kolkata. Meandering through the city, it is not only a delight for city dwellers and travellers alike but also a source of livelihood for many. The river bank is home to families of fisherfolk whose primary source of income is the fresh catch at dawn and dusk. The Hooghly River also has a deep-seated impact on the culinary scene of the city, owing to the availability of the fresh catch and a different variety each day. Even though winter is a hint of touch and go in Kolkata, certain misty days like this one make it a ‘December to Remember’.
— BOOKS —

The Other Side of the Divide
Khatlani’s journey across the border

Travel Classic
Mayle’s slow and simple living in Provence

Jungle Nama: A Story of the Sundarban
Beyond the usual tiger-meets-boy narrative

— GEAR —

Little things to fill in your journey

Travel mug, smart wallet and a drop-sized bag
The monthly roundup
Reaching for the Severed Arm

The practice of asking those who don’t think like us or those who express disappointment with the state of affairs in the country, to go to Pakistan, must have started sometime during the middle of the past decade. It was a little after that, that journalist Sameer Arshad Khatlani actually travelled to the country and ended up writing a travelogue about it, now called The Other Side of the Divide.

Khatlani’s book about his week-long visit to Lahore is a fascinating undertaking on many levels. A Kashmiri Muslim who was once hassled by the police at Jaipur’s Sawai Man Singh Stadium, where he had gone to watch a cricket match, Khatlani writes unapologetically and with clarity, shattering all our conveniently held suppositions about our neighbour. As a Kashmiri, his status as a go-between, an interlocutor extraordinaire, is undisputed. He does exceptionally well at debunking the charitable template, the inevitable superior-brother gaze people often assume when they describe their travels to Pakistan in any form. The research is immaculate and the book benefits from the interviews and sketches of prominent personalities. With its inclusion of actual, human voices such as those living in the border villages as well as opinion-makers, Khatlani deconstructs the strange chimera of the enemy country.

For sports lovers like myself and for those who send love from India and Pakistan on the comment sections of Coke Studio videos on YouTube, the book strikes a chord especially tenderly at moments such as when Khatlani recalls hiding his collection of posters that also had those of Pakistani cricket stars, with remarkable alacrity during a search operation at his house in Kashmir. Or when he raves about the superior motorways of the country, a fact that not many might acknowledge, but which has quite an underground following in India too. The Other Side of the Divide does the thankless job of giving an objective correlative to feelings of admiration birthed by envy.

—Prannay Pathak

A Year In Provence
by Peter Mayle

Expressed in the form of a vivid description, A Year In Provence unravels the excitement wrapped in local market visits, goat races, vineyard experiences and a verbal taste of Provençal cuisine. British author Mayle’s account, that starts with the episode of a New Year’s lunch goes on to create an entirely new travel genre for readers. Amusement and insight blend easily in this timeless account and slow and simple living lies at the heart of this narrative. Mayle and his wife, Jennie left England and moved to the land of baguettes in the year 1987, to live on a 200-year-old stone farmhouse in the village of Menerbes, southern France. More than just a reading experience, it plays like a visual reel that carries you through the streets of Luberon and leaves you with a memory of a regional food palette. Personally documented and detailed, the story comes with a basket case of wine, cheese and bread, the jostling of a competitive busy local market, traditional recipe of homemade marmalade, and raising dogs and cats simultaneously. A half-hearted diary that carved itself into fully-fleshed interesting chapters, Mayle’s book, packed with style and witty remarks, inspired a whole new genre of travel literature.

—Penguin Classics ₹475
The Sundarbans covers 10,000 sq km of land and water in the Ganges delta and contains the world’s largest spread of mangrove forests. Its beauty lies in the thousands of meandering streams, creeks, rivers and estuaries that enhance its charm and in the birds and animals that live there. The ‘beautiful forest’ is the natural habitat of the Royal Bengal Tiger and its rivers are combed by the 18 tides or atharo bhati that rule the lives of all those who live here. This tiger-haunted place is protected by Bon Bibi, the goddess with a Muslim name who with her brother Shah Jongoli were sent from Mecca to guard the forests against Dokkhin Rai, the demon spirit who ruled in the form of a tiger.

This is the terrain against which Amitav Ghosh set his Hungry Tide, Gun Island and now Jungle Nama. Ghosh takes as his text the well-known story of Dukhey, the ‘sad lad’ who was taken by his rich merchant uncle to serve as prey for Dokkhin Rai.

How long has it been since human flesh came my way
What bliss to find a victim like this sad Dukhey

There are many versions of this story and it links to the Bon Bibi johuranamas, since it highlights Bon Bibi’s role as protector of the Sundarbans and bears testimony to the inclusive quality of belief in the region. The johuranamas—there are two of them composed by Munshi Mohammed Khator and Abdur Rahim Sahib in Bengali with Arabic and Persian words—are written in the poya metre, 24 syllabic rhyming couplets. Following in this trend, Ghosh writes his Jungle Nama in couplets, using a freer version of the metre.

The beauty of the Sundarbans lies in the thousands of meandering streams, creeks, rivers and estuaries that enhance its charm and in the birds and animals that live there. The ‘beautiful forest’ is the natural habitat of the Royal Bengal Tiger.

The story of Dokhey was obviously used as part of a folk narrative for children in what Ghosh refers to rather preciously as ‘Before Times’. However, he insists this has nothing to do with children at all, since the narrative covers the complexity of relationships, communities and the climate of the Sundarbans. Be that as it may, the story would have appealed to adults and children alike in evenings without light or television when the storyteller provided the only entertainment and people huddled together for safety against the forests of the night.

Jungle Nama is a story of faith, forgiveness and closure and people, complemented by the mystic black and white illustrations of Salman Toor which create their own sense of disorientation—an effect that Ghosh wanted so that his poem would stand apart instead of being the usual tiger meets boy narrative with childish illustrations. Possibly a greater balance of illustrations and text would have been welcome, but one cannot expect everything from an already unexpected book.

—ANJANA BASU
Raveena Tandon’s love for the hills and taking the road less travelled

» What do you look for in a destination before you start planning your trip?
Different places have different vibes. Some places are known for the cuisine, some for their historic culture and some have beautiful sights. It all depends on what the place has to offer. I make sure that when I plan a trip, it is wholesome for the kids.

» What is it like travelling with your kids?
Luckily the kids are as passionate as I am and they don’t mind roughing it out either—whether it is camping in the Himalaya or staying in government lodges. We love that old rustic feel, it’s not always a luxury trip. As long as there is a bed to sleep in and early morning we are in the forest again, we are fine. And yes, with all the creepy crawlies in the bathrooms and on the bed! That’s the fun of jungle life and we enjoy it.

» Any foodie recommendations from your recent Himachal trip?
The dhabas there serve the most amazing bajre and makki ki roti, saag, vegetables, and gur. The hot ghee and gur in that snow is to die for! Their locally made bread, siddu, with walnut stuffing and masala is also great.

» What’s your favourite shoot location and why?
Till now it’s been Switzerland. But after seeing Kullu-Manali and exploring the different locales here, I think my vote will go to Kullu-Manali any day.

» Your favourite winter destinations?
My top choice would be Kullu-Manali. And if you love to ski then definitely Verbier and St Moritz.

—KARAN KAUSHIK

“Everyone is going through the pandemic and is on the low, economically. But the people of Himachal don’t make you feel that. They are warm, friendly, giving and I think that is the magic of Himachal”

“The forests and mountains are stunning and everytime I leave a bit of my heart there and wait to go back”
**GEARBOX March Picks**

Limited-edition buds, smart wallet, and a travel-themed mug set, pack these essentials when you want to carry a little bit of home on your next vacay!

**Matte Disposable Camera**

The camera comes pre-loaded with 17 exposures of 35mm colour analogue film and built-in flash. You can also recycle your disposable camera.

✈ From $18
• urbanoutfitters.com

**Droplet Packable Dry Bag**

This drawstring droplet sized bag has 3L storage. It is waterproof and leak resistant and comes with a silicone droplet shell keychain carrying case.

✈ $14.99
• matadorup.com

**Cashew Smart Wallet**

- comes with fingerprint authentication
- connect it to your smartphone via Bluetooth
- buzzer option to ‘ring’ your lost wallet
- battery lasts up to 4 months without charging

✈ ₹1,999
• williampenn.net

**OnePlus Buds Z x Steven Harrington**

These psychedelic pop-themed buds are limited edition and come with Dolby Atmos, bass boost technology and 20-hour-long battery life and offer water and sweat resistance. Look cool too!

✈ ₹3,699
• oneplus.in

**Enamel Travel Mug and Coaster Set**

This travel-inspired mug is made of steel with a glass enamel coating and can be kept on the stove for direct reheating. With a 3” diameter, it is lightweight and durable.

✈ From ₹799
• bombaytrooper.com

**Aman Fine Fragrance Collection**

This collection of scents reflects its association with the Aman Resorts brand they are based upon, both current and upcoming. Each of the five gender-neutral fragrances strengthen the notion of memory recall through the subtle use of colour.

✈ From $286
• shop.aman.com

**Crocs Classic Tie-Dye Graphic Clog**

- lightweight and flexible with foam cushioning
- heel straps for roomy, secure fit
- customisable with charms
- comes with easy clean technique using soap and water

✈ $44.99
• crocs.com
Streets are the arteries that course through Indian cities and navigating them is an art and science that very few manage to master. In fact, the 3C’s—chaos, conflict, and confusion—sum up life on Indian streets quite aptly. From the plight of pedestrians to the pothole-riddled paths, chaos seems to be the underlying theme throughout. As the sun rises, city life slowly unfolds—and the start of the day can be seen in various forms on these very streets. Long before cars, scooters and buses dominated the Indian streets, it was cattle-oriented mode of transportation that could be witnessed here.

But what often seems to evade public knowledge is that the streets of India weave a completely different tale post sundown; there’s a certain character to each of the bylanes. It won’t be too far-fetched to assume that in its heydays the streets were flanked with mansions. Today, the landscape has transformed beyond recognition. The lustre seems to have faded away and what remains is just a vague idea of the glorious past.

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

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

As you spend your special moments with us, you would experience serenity as well as rejuvenation.
Kedarnath is a holy temple dedicated to Lord Shiva. It is set amid the stunning mountainscape of Garhwal Himalayas at the head of the Mandakini River.