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– William Langewiesche
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82 TIME TRAVELLER

우리가 읽는 자연에서 같은 식으로.

The leather dual camera strap comes with adjustable loops and the crab-hook mechanism allows easy release 80
I’m tapping out this dispatch from a forested wellness retreat at the foothills of the Himalaya. Every morning, the sun peeks out from behind the hills and sunlight floods my room. There’s bird call at dawn and a symphony of insects at night. In between, there’s healing in myriad forms—yoga and chanting, healthful eating and exercise, music and silence. And the transformative power of touch, rendered through a range of therapies. There are some massive cobwebs and their even more impressive residents keeping us company, for this retreat treasures peaceful coexistence.

All the guests had to get tested twice for COVID-19: the RT-PCR test prior to arrival and then the Rapid Antigen Detection Test before checking in. The staff doesn’t leave the premises. This has created a safe, Covid-free bubble, where we are finally free to unfurl our wings. Cocooned in the edenic embrace of our environs, for a moment, all feels well with the world. We’re still cautious, but much more relaxed...almost the way things used to be.

It’s made me think about testing for Covid and the stigma attached to it. I don’t think wellness retreats—where therapists work so closely with guests and some level of intimacy is unavoidable—have much option in the matter anyway. Maybe rapid and copious testing is the way forward for all travel and tourism, and we should willingly embrace it. This could also be the shot in the arm that the beleaguered aviation industry needs. (International air travel is down a whopping 92% from 2019 levels.) The IATA has called for systematic COVID-19 testing prior to departure, specifically “for the development and deployment of rapid, accurate, affordable, easy-to-operate, scalable and systematic COVID-19 testing for all passengers before departure as an alternative to quarantine measures in order to re-establish global air connectivity.” This could well be the immediate future of travel, but it’s better than no future at all.

Amit Dixit
@omitdixit

Maybe rapid and copious testing is the way forward for all travel and tourism, and we should willingly embrace it.
TIPS FROM OUR TRAVELLERS

Travel essentials for a wildlife safari

If you’re in the deep, dark woods spotting animals hiding in the shadows, there’s a song that goes, “I’m stuck in the dark but you’re my flashlight, you’re getting me through the night!”

→ Labanya Maitra
Andamans, p. 42

I advise carrying a mosquito repellent and respecting the jungle to have a seamless experience.

→ Sohinee Basu
Andamans, p. 42

A safari vest looks great anytime of the year. The multi-pocketed jacket is perfect to hold your sunblock, binoculars, camera lens and flashlight.

→ Roshni Subramanian
Karnataka, p. 36

Leave your camera or phone behind and don a good pair of binoculars instead.

→ Ahtushi Deshpande
Kashmir, p. 50

Carry a pair of sunglasses, a well-fitted hat, and a fanny pack for keeping essentials like sunscreen, basic first-aid, a mask and glucose powder.

→ Karan Kaushik
Rajasthan, p. 16
INDIAN RESPONSIBLE TOURISM AWARDS 2021

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Saif Omar • The show encapsulates the diversity that India offers in terms of travel and culture

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Let’s Get Travel Done Right
The very basic core of a man’s living spirit is his passion for adventure. The joy in life comes from our encounters and new experiences...

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

#OTHallOfFrame
So many travellers, so many travel styles. Here’s what you picked!

- Hiking
- Fishing
- Zoo
- Safari
- Savanna
- Arctic
- T-Rex
- Mammoth

The Konkan Delight
I’ve always been an ardent follower of OT. Shoutout to the team for bringing us an escape even during these unprecedented times. Also, may I just add how refreshing the new design looks, each element defining the newer, finer look. I can’t wait to get my hands on the next issue.

Vamsi Naidu, Hosur

LETTER OF THE MONTH
The Konkan Delight
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Vamsi Naidu, Hosur

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

CORRIGENDUM
In the September ‘20 issue of Outlook Traveller, the feature under the EAT section titled ‘The French Connection’ was authored by Pallavi Govil and not by Pallavi Goyal, as mentioned. The error was inadvertent and is regretted.
On the web
Travel with us real-time on outlooktraveller.com

UFO Trail
Science, conspiracy theories, and pop culture collide in these extraterrestrial places

1 San Clemente
Chile
According to the researchers working here, UFO sightings average nearly one every week.

2 Wycliffe Well
Australia
The reports of UFOs started popping up ever since WWI.

3 Joshua Tree National Park
California
It was once home to 300 mines including a unique white crystal quartz hill behind Giant Rock.

4 Roswell
New Mexico
Conspiracy theorists claim the remains of a flying saucer, and dead aliens being secretly taken into storage here.

5 Area 51
Nevada
Theories state that it is a storage facility of a crashed alien spacecraft along with its occupants, both living and dead.

Beach Away
For the post-pandemic, socially-distanced vacay

1 Kondura Beach
Maharashtra
With rocky shores and white sand, it has a cave in a hillock named Kond.

2 Kaup Beach
Karnataka
Check out the lighthouse and a small fort while here.

3 Cola Beach
Goa
Engage in kayaking or wade through a little island that appears once in a while during high tide.

4 Modhva Beach
Gujarat
Catch the moonrise here with seagulls and flamingos for company.

5 Ottinene Beach
Karnataka
The Sumana River merges with the Arabian Sea at this serene coconut-palm lined beach.

Wheels on the Go
Thanks to the pandemic-induced lockdown and safety concerns about the virus, self-driving holidays are trending again. Before heading out on the road, make sure you follow a thorough checklist. Begin prepping by sanitisation and move along to check if all necessary and updated documents are in place. Make sure to get the vehicle serviced well in advance, and check wheel alignment, suspension and wipers along with headlights, horn, bonnets and tyres. Also, keep your car company’s helpline number and a basic tool kit handy.
RIDE THE WIND

The quiet of the road, the sheer peace of mind and some quality ‘me time’. Here’s why you’ll crave that solo bike ride more and more

With close to three months of isolation and aeons of hopelessness about future travel, everyone has been hoping for newer avenues to emerge #PostLockDown. Solo motorcycling could be an effective way to travel in the coming era. Hear it straight from the experts.

Solo Travel With Lois Pryce
British adventurer, travel writer and founder of the Adventure Travel Film Festival, Lois Pryce has motorcycled from Alaska to Argentina, through the Sahara and Congo and Angola in Africa, and journeyed from Britain to Iran twice. Ask her how she hopes to go back to being an intrepid explorer after the pandemic, and Pryce asserts that the only way out is to be patient. She is relieved that many of the activities she enjoys about travelling—being outdoors and communing with nature—are still available to her in her native Britain.

The 47-year-old states that she has always believed in travelling in a lo-fi way, since it forces one to connect with people and places more. Lois says, “For women, it is a truly liberating mode of transport. You do whatever the hell you like! It is small and light enough to explore almost anywhere and fast enough to get away from a situation if you need to.”

Pryce, who recalls riding an Enfield in Goa for a bit at one point of time, agrees that solo biking trips could become much more common now in India. “There are increasing numbers of rental companies and tours in the Himalayas that are proving very popular. Motorcycle travel is growing in popularity all over the world so I envisage riding in India to be part of the boom. And with the fears surrounding the novel coronavirus, overland travel, especially solo might be more appealing to people than travelling on crowded buses and trains.”

Easy Rider
Starting off solo can be challenging and even overwhelming. But it is certainly not out of your reach. Renowned
motorcyclist and world record-holder Deepak Kamath, the first Indian to have ridden in six continents and the first Asian to do so in Antarctica, suggests that one should hit the road at daybreak or even slightly earlier and wind up the day by sunset.

Learning the ropes of long-distance biking is done in the short daily trips you do within the bounds of your city. Teach yourself to stick to lanes, determine the right speed and when and how to overtake—all these are essential skills. Riding at regular intervals also helps you become proficient at staying in control of the bike when the traffic is high, or slow-moving.

**A First-Timer’s Guide**

What to consider before buying a bike for long-distance riding? Kamath recommends a 200-250cc bike, and if one’s budget permits, it could go up to 400cc. The reason? “Our roads are not equipped to handle 120-130km/h of speed at a stretch. The minute you accelerate, there is someone right in front of you crossing the road.” For those concerned about having to spend too much, as a long-distance motorcyclist, Kamath says it’s all about planning and budgeting carefully, and not falling into the trap of needing to flaunt our travel. Set aside a daily budget for fuel and lodging and buffer in a little portion for any other unexpected expenses that might occur.

When it comes to motorcycle maintenance, Kamath advises getting the routine check-up done before each ride. Head to the service centre, meet a service advisor and have him refer you to a technician. Learning to fix a flat is an essential skill.

**Across The Bay**

Vishakha Fulsunge is the first female rider to cross the Bay of Bengal and ride across the Andaman Islands. She is rewriting the standards of the motovlogging industry with her unique take on solo female travelling across the subcontinent. From being the fastest girl on the KTM Circuit Race at Vroom 2016 to covering difficult terrains of Leh, Ladakh, Vishakha is redefining challenges at every step.

Through her trailblazing journey, she aims to turn the tables of gender discrimination. “I continue to face a lot of stigma. I do not get accommodation in a hotel just because I’m a single female on a ride, and that’s just one example. My suggestion to all the women here is—always develop a thick skin towards all negativity and focus like a horse’s vision, stay with blinkers on.”

In order to counter the after-effects of the pandemic, Vishakha, who as an active moto-vlogger, needs to constantly be outdoors, decided to do something different—visiting nearby non-crowded places locally. “Safety and hygiene protocols were the priority before I started on this ride,” shares Vishakha, who is now planning to travel to the underexplored corners of Maharashtra.
radar

EKA PADA GALAVASANA 14

SEARCHING FOR SILENCE 18

TRAILING SOLO 22

HERE, THERE, NOW & SOON
THE NEW inhabitants

This former prison island is a treasure trove of howler monkeys, pheasants, and other rich wildlife.

**PUNTARENAS, COSTA RICA**

When life gives you lemons, Costa Rica makes national parks. Once home to a notorious prison, the San Lucas Island has been designated the country’s 30th national park. Just off the Pacific Coast of the Gulf of Nicoya, this newly-recognised wildlife refuge covers 4.6 sq km of land and coast.

San Lucas is nearly 100 kilometres from the capital city of San José. The new designation aims to encourage sustainable tourism in the region, and also to promote the socio-economic development of the area.

New hiking trails have been marked and the island has had a facelift with 24-hour surveillance, running water, electricity, and toilets. Visitors can enjoy spotting howler monkeys, spiders, snakes, deer, and pheasants. San Lucas has also put its past on display at the former prison buildings created by the dictator Tomás Miguel Guardia Gutiérrez. There are over 50 guides who are trained to help guests learn about the history of the brutal prison, now a cultural heritage site.

» The island is a 40-minute boat ride from Puntarenas city. It’s the second national park in the region after Coco Island National Park.
Eka Pada Galavasana: Flying Crow Pose

Also known as the Flying Pigeon Pose, this highly advanced asana is a part of Ashtanga yoga in its third series. The idea isn’t to nail the pose as much as it is to enjoy the process. The sequence leads to physical strengthening of the core, arms and hips, along with an improvement in balance. The journey to the final asana sharpens mental focus and boosts confidence. If carpe diem was an asana, this would be it.

The sequence to the Flying Crow

1. Begin with Utkatasana, or the Chair Pose. Bring your arms together in a namaskar. Slowly lift your right leg off the ground and rest the ankle on your left knee. Extend the spine, take deep breaths, flex your standing foot and extend your arms above your head. Hold your pose and breathe.

2. Lower your fingertips to the ground, tighten your core, lower your hips and bend your elbows. Shift your weight forward until your elbows reach your left shin. Lock your right foot around the left upper arm, and shift your weight to the ball of your left foot.

3. Keep shifting your weight forward until your left foot is off the ground. It might help to guide your left heel towards your butt. Beginners can use a block.

4. Extend your left leg back and up until your body is a straight line from head to toe, keep your core tight and don’t forget to breathe. You’ve reached the Flying Crow.

5. To come out of the pose, bring your left leg back in and on the balls of your feet. Slowly relax your core and straighten your back until your fingertips are off the ground. Put the right leg down back into an Utkatasana, and slowly stand up straight.

6. Take a few deep breaths and try with the other leg.

Wise Men Say

“A well-rounded, holistic approach to one’s well being is the need of the hour. Most of us end up following healthy practices in silos, which do not have any impact in the long run. Eating clean without exercising regularly, or meditating but not sleeping on time, will not be of much consequence.

The right routine or Dinacharya, well-balanced nutritious meals, a robust fitness routine and mindfulness must all come together to ensure that the body, mind and spirit are in balance, and that we are more at one with ourselves and the universe.”

— Manoj Khetan, co-founder of Naad Wellness, a retreat that offers holistic living experiences deep-rooted in Ayurveda, yoga and naturopathy.
On Trend: Aerial Yoga

Although aerial dances and stunts have been around forever, aerial yoga was popularised in 2018, and was all the rage all through 2019 and beyond. It became another high for the new-age yogis, if we may. People are suspended in mid-air by hammocks or ropes hanging from the ceiling, and trained to move gracefully while shifting to a different support structure. Aerial yoga improves strength, especially core, and takes some pressure off your joints. It’s great for balance and posture, and it’s tailor-made for the ‘gram!

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How Badly Has the Coronavirus Pandemic Affected the Tourism Industry in Rajasthan?

The impact of the pandemic has been widespread and has affected all sectors of the economy adversely. The tourism sector had to bear the maximum brunt as activities related to it such as hotels, restaurants, handicrafts purchases, airlines and rail services all came to a grinding halt. As we have to learn to live with this, the state government has issued SOPs for hotels, restaurants and film shootings, as a result of which we are witnessing a return of traction in the tourism industry. The inflow of tourists is gradually picking up, especially on weekends for destinations which are easily accessible by personal vehicles. As operations of airlines and railways expand, I expect tourist movement to increase further.

How Does the Rajasthan Government Plan to Revive Tourism in the State?

Since Rajasthan is one of the most visited places in India, our government was proactive in extending a helping hand to the tourism industry almost immediately after the pandemic outbreak in March. We announced reimbursement of State GST (SGST) to hotels and restaurants. We provided relief in terms of waiver of road tax. We have also included tourism as one of the thrust areas under the Rajasthan Investment Promotion Scheme. Recently, the state’s new tourism policy was announced and we are hopeful that with its timely implementation, the tourism industry will revive and stand back on its feet.

Can You Tell Us About the New Tourism Policy 2020 Announced by the State?

We had given a mandate for preparing the new tourism policy in our manifesto. I am glad that Rajasthan Tourism Policy, 2020 has been announced with a vision to reposition Rajasthan as a preferred tourism destination for both domestic as well as international tourists. We plan to achieve this by offering tourists a high quality experience, and through responsible and sustainable policies ensuring conservation of the natural, historical and cultural heritage of the state. We also want to accelerate socioeconomic development by improving livelihood opportunities for the local population.

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How Can Adventure Sports in the Desert Regions Help in Boosting Tourism in Rajasthan?

As you know, we have one of the most beautiful stretches of a very lively and kaleidoscopic desert landscape in the world. We all know that the desert landscape provides ample opportunity for various sports activities such as quad biking, ATVs and dirt racing, etc. The
objective behind promoting adventure sports is to create new attractions in this region and attract not only repeat tourists but also target youth and millennials. This will also help local youth in getting employment in a climatically harsh region with low industrialisation and farming.

**TELL US ABOUT THE ADOPT-A-MONUMENT SCHEME BEING INTRODUCED UNDER THE REVISED POLICY.**

Rajasthan is richly endowed with grand forts, palaces, temples and other heritage properties. Our government intends to conserve and develop these heritage properties with the support of private stakeholders. The State Archaeology and Museum Department will bring out guidelines for Monument Mitra (private stakeholders). Post conservation and development, these monuments will be promoted as a new tourist product.

**HOW HAS THE RESPONSE BEEN EVER SINCE TOURISM SPOTS IN RAJASTHAN WERE REOPENED AFTER THE LOCKDOWN? WHAT HAVE BEEN SOME OF THE MAJOR EMERGING TRENDS?**

The response has been very encouraging to say the least. Our monuments and tourist places have been receiving steady numbers since we opened up in June. Border towns and areas, especially Mount Abu and Udaipur, have witnessed good numbers. Hotels outside main cities are seeing good business. This is also due to the fact that the state government has been able to contain the pandemic to a large extent.

**WHICH IS YOUR PERSONAL FAVOURITE DESTINATION TO TRAVEL TO IN RAJASTHAN?**

This is not a fair question to ask me. For me, all of Rajasthan is my favourite destination and I find equal joy in going to any place in the state.

*For a longer version of the interview, visit outlooktraveller.com*
A FEW YEARS BACK, I enrolled in a meditation course where I was taught that opposite values are complementary. Joy is valued when one has experienced the troughs of sadness. The hero becomes a hero when there is a villain. Darkness precedes light, and a night of rest balances the busyness of the bygone day. All the elements of nature maintain this equilibrium of sorts.

I reflected on my life, and realised that the balance was beginning to tip towards one end. I hardly took breaks between travels, incessantly rushed from one city to another—a week in New York followed another in Spain—till impressions and images began to merge and it became taxing to separate one from the other. I needed a touch of contrast. I needed to limit my exposure, lessen the stimulants that kept me in a permanent excitable state, questing after adventures. That’s when I decided to experiment with silence. Sometimes you need to travel first to stand still. Seeking silence, I headed to a retreat located in the Black Forest in Germany. In the retreat, I signed up for a ten-day silence programme with an equal mix of trepidation and excitement. I wanted to follow through, but feared if I would make it. Would I lose interest in the sylvan charms around me? Would the urge to escape the quietness possibly get the better of me?

My basic needs were met—I got a simply furnished room, my meal times were fixed, and I just needed to show up for the meditations. The rest of the time, I could explore the surroundings and take long walks in the nearby hills. I should try to refrain from speaking, I was told.

Over the next few days, I started guided meditations when it was still dark outside. Just when the morning light suffused the meditation hall, I would follow it out. I would walk past the farmers, dressed in lederhosen and working in their fields since daybreak, up the roads through the snaking hills where they broke into dust trails curling and disappearing into the forest. Activity complements rest. I would walk for hours through the forests, counter-balancing my hours of sitting in meditation. First few days, I was interested in what I saw around me. I missed my camera to capture this paradisal rustic beauty. As days passed through, the urge to capture every view and the restlessness to share it with the world diluted. For once, the separateness with the scenery began to disappear. I looked around me not with the thought of capturing this beauty and nestling it deep in my memory, but to experience it. As boundaries blurred, the seer became the scenery.

When the tenth day came, I was told I could speak again. I could switch on my phone and call those who I had missed. Somehow though the craving to look back at my phone, the thirst to reconnect and find out what had happened in the world in the past ten days, had evaporated. It would appear again I was sure, and so will return the lust to be on the road again, the pining to hop from one city to another.

For the time being though, I kept my phone tucked away safely, and headed out to walk yet another trail in the forest.
KERALA We know why stolen kisses require an accomplice
@nagarajchindanur

AJMER When team building is high on the agenda
@mainak.ray

SRIRANGAPATNA Testing the waters before taking the plunge
@sachin_rai_photography

ODIYUR LAKE Birds of a feather flock together indeed
@rajography

Spotted in the Wild
Head into the wilderness through these shots as we discover nature’s drama amid majestic landscapes and incredible wildlife
@suresh_rathod_clicks

ODIYUR LAKE
CHENNAI, TAMIL NADU
To gaze into uncertainty with undimmed eyes

WEST BENGAL Shouldn’t it be a felony to be such a great catch?
@dr.ayan_guin.photography

DARJEELING The trust is not on the branch but on the wings
@wings_wild_and_wilderness

BENGALURU Rub-a-dub-dub, many birds in the tub
@gaurav.rayal
NESTLED COMFORTABLY in the lap of the Himalaya, Uttarakhand is where myth and history walk hand in hand. With rivers, ravines and natural ecosystems, it ranks high on the mountainscapes list. Equal parts adventure and divinity, the state, less than two decades old, is heavily dependent on tourism, thanks to the favourable climate that it offers throughout the year.

The new protocols permit travellers to travel without a negative COVID-19 test to Uttarakhand, and the minimum two-day stay requirement in a hotel or homestay has also been removed. However, a mandatory transport registration is required on the state’s Smart City web portal at smartcitydehradun.uk.gov.in.

“It is our collective efforts at Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board (UTDB) to constantly be in touch with all the stakeholders and to thoughtfully and mutually come up with apt guidelines, in order to support the industries at every step during these difficult times,” said Dilip Jawalkar, Tourism Secretary & CEO, UTDB.

ADRENALINE-FUELED GETAWAY
Nature is always at play in Uttarakhand. Its dramatic terrain and topography seem to be tailor-made for adventure activities. Here are some adventure activities that you can engage in while in the state:

WHITENWATER RIVER RAFTING
Home to a number of rivers, Uttarakhand boasts of some of the best river rapids. Either a half-day trip or a longer one, each brush with the rapids is equally fulfilling.

TREKKING
The vast and splendid mountain ranges across the state offer some unparalleled routes for trekking and hiking enthusiasts. Some of the most popular ones include Kakbhusandi, Chandrashila, Deoria Tal, Roopkund, Valley of Flowers and the Pindari Glacier.

Adventure Sports
The Tehri district in Garhwal stretches all the way from the snow-clad Himalayan peaks to the foothills of Rishikesh, overlooking the Tehri lake and the dam. As per a recent MoU between the UTDB and the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), the Rajiv Gandhi Adventure Sports Academy in Tehri Lake will soon have adventure sports facilities. Each year, over 200 candidates will be selected and trained free of cost.

BUNGEE JUMPING
An extreme sport that can be found on most adventure junkies’ bucket lists, bungee jumping has also found a home here. The highest bungee jumping spot in the country is in Mohan Chatti, Rishikesh. It is
also the only place in India where bungee jumping can be done from a fixed platform.

**PARAGLIDING**  
Uttarakhand offers a number of state-of-the-art paragliding opportunities suitable for both novice and experienced adventure seekers. One can also opt for cross-country paragliding to cover long distances.

**WILDLIFE SAFARIS**  
Corbett and Rajaji National Parks in Uttarakhand are best known for their exhilarating wildlife safaris. Carried out tactfully in several zones, they take travellers around in authorised jeeps to offer the best wildlife views and sightings.

**SKIING**  
Snow-covered Auli is known for its world-class skiing facilities. These natural slopes host several skiing events such as slalom and cross-country.

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**KAUDIA ESTATE**

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I used to go running every evening at sunset from my lodge at Bandhavgarh to a village nearby. One evening, as I was walking back, I heard langur alarm calls. They were excited and frantic, and I knew what that meant—a big cat. After about 45 minutes, I saw something come out of the bushes, look at me, and charge. Almost instinctively, I jumped up and yelled back, and the leopard ran away. The female came out of the bushes next, and simply walked away. I guess I won the alpha-off.”

Suyash Keshari is a young wildlife photographer and presenter who produced his first web-series, Safari with Suyash, which released on Dec 6, 2019, in collaboration with WWF International. Keshari spent his childhood in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh exploring the wild with his father. “I remember I was at the zoo when a tiger snarled at me,” says Keshari. “I was so excited! But my nanaji asked me a simple question: do you like seeing animals in cages? That really hit home. The natural world should not be caged for human entertainment. And it set me on a path about learning more about wildlife.”

* WHAT’S THE STORY BEHIND SAFARI WITH SUYASH?
I chose Bandhavgarh because I knew so many tigers there. Cubs, parents, siblings, I knew the people, I spoke the local
language—Bagheli. I set out to connect people to tigers, and also show how people are already connected to them. We filmed for two months, put together a draft and pitched it to different organisations. WWF liked my concept of taking people who don’t really care much for wildlife, and igniting a spark in them.

**WHEN DID YOU FIRST MEET SOLO, WHAT’S THE STORY BEHIND THAT?**

Rajbehra, Solo’s mother, was the first tigress I ever saw in Bandhavgarh. She was trying to establish her territory 12 years ago. Solo had two sisters—Kankati Jr and Dhamokhar Female—and one brother. One by one, the siblings were either poached, or they left, and Solo took over her mother’s territory. I’ve known Solo since she was a cub, we almost grew up together. And she’s had a tough life. Her first litter was killed by a male tiger, she had to fight another tigress for territory, and I actually watched her have a run in with another male tiger when her second litter was young. Her chest was ripped open, she was bleeding, and yet she drove off a male twice her size. I caught it on camera, but soon realised I was shaking.

Usually, a tigress’ territory is overlapped by one or two males. But because of loss of habitat, Solo’s territory is overlapped by nine male tigers.

**HOW DO YOU THINK OTHER YOUNG PROFESSIONALS CAN GET INVOLVED WITH CONSERVATION?**

Start exploring, go to the park in your city, see how nature thrives. There are hundreds of national parks and reserves in the country, understand how important people are in these ecosystems. Stop being armchair conservationists! Protecting the wildlife is not the responsibility of just those in power, it rests equally among us.

What we can see, we can love. And what we love, we will fight to protect.

—LABANYA MAITRA

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Did you know that you can tell a tiger’s age by looking at their nose? Cubs are born with pink noses and black spots appear as they age. When tigers get old, their noses turn completely black.

**PHOTOGRAPHS BY SUYASH KESHARI**
-explore-

TO ROAM THE LANDS REMOTE

INTO THE JUNGLE 28

THE ISLANDS OF THE EAST 42

MOUNTAIN TRAILS OF KASHMIR 50

SACRED SANDS OF MOJAVE 58
The lakes of Tarsar and Marsar, located deep in the Lidder Valley, are a delight for trekkers. The alpine lakes are surrounded by meadows dotted with conifer trees, mountains and snow-capped peaks. The Tarsar Lake changes colours when viewed lengthwise. From turquoise to green to grey, these colours are reflected in the sunlight.
WHERE THE WILDERNESS THRIVES
**Wildlife Trails**
Periyar Tiger Reserve, Gir National Park

**Exotic Species**
Hemis National Park, Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve

**Birding Haven**
Keoladeo Ghana and Neora Valley National Parks

Visit the several gompas and chortens located within the park, including the 400-year-old Hemis Monastery

Hemis National Park

One of the largest national parks in South Asia, it is a hotspot for exotic Himalayan wildlife

THE PARK ENCOMPASSES AN AREA OF SIX VILLAGES

Situated amid the picturesque mountains of Ladakh, Hemis National Park is home to exotic wildlife, native to the landscape and climate. Apart from snow leopards, it is the only habitat of shapu or the Ladakhi urial in India. The protected national park is also home to many other mammals like the Himalayan marmot, mountain weasel and Himalayan mouse hare. Bird watchers here also find themselves mesmerised with the vast diversity of birds including the golden eagle, lammergeier vulture and the Himalayan griffon vulture along with brown accentor, robin accentor, tickell’s leaf warbler, streaked rosefinch, Tibetan snowfinch, chukar, fork-tailed swift, red-billed chough, Himalayan snowcock, and the fire-fronted serin. The serene atmosphere, the pollution-free skies and noise-free environs make the national park a natural habitat for species that thrive in freezing temperatures.

» Eating options are extremely limited at the park. It is advisable to carry your own dry food and water bottle

Answer the call of the wild as seasons transition and wildlife sanctuaries and national parks across the country open their gates for an escape in nature. Here is Team OT’s handy guide to spotting the rarest of the rare!
A 45-minute trek is the best way to see the whole park. Ask your guide to show the Bhutan border, which is about 16kms from the place.

Neora Valley National Park

With its boundaries touching other wilderness retreats, it is a wildlife paradise in north Bengal

THE PERMIT IS AVAILABLE AT THE FOREST RANGE OFFICE IN LAVA

Located in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal, Neora Valley National Park is not only home to some stunning beasts but also an ecological hub where numerous exotic plants and floral vegetation thrive. The Khangchendzonga in the backdrop renders a unique natural landscape to the park. It also serves as the abode of exotic animals such as the red panda, Himalayan tahr, Himalayan black bear, sambar, barking deer, serow, goral, dhole, gaur, tiger, clouded leopard, marbled cat, Indian pangolin and Malayan giant squirrel, amid others. The park, sharing its borders with Chapramari Wildlife Sanctuary and the Gorumara National Park, also boasts of some of the rarest plants and flowers such as the rhododendrons, which can be seen in full bloom during the summers. The wild orchids here also form a canopy. The forest vegetation also includes sal trees, ferns and bamboo groves, yews, hemlocks and wild strawberries.

Avail the state tourism board’s offer of a tented accommodation within the park premises for an offbeat experience.
Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve

Consisting of a number of national parks and wildlife sanctuaries, the reserve is a wildlife hotspot.

The safaris for the parks range from ₹1,000-₹5,000.

Declared a Unesco World Heritage Site in 2012, the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve is India’s first International Biosphere Reserve located in the Western Ghats in southern India. Sharing its boundaries with Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, the reserve is home to a number of endangered species. The steep cliffs within the vicinity of Mukurthi National Park are home to the threatened Nilgiri tahr. Head to Mudumalai National Park and find yourself amid the endangered Bengal tiger, Indian elephant and the Asiatic wild dog. Further along the Silent Valley National Park exists the largest population of the lion-tailed macaque. Additionally, the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary is a haven for bird-watchers with the presence of spot white-rumped vultures, white-breasted kingfishers and brown hawk owls. A boat safari at the Nagarhole National Park offers views of aquatic fauna such as crocodiles and water birds. Your chances of catching a tiger on camera are high at Sathyamangalam Wildlife Sanctuary. End the wilderness trail with a jeep safari at the Bandipur National Park, the last national park inside the reserve.

Mudumalai National Park has 13 per cent of all mammal species of India.

The lion-tailed macaque (Macaca silenus) with its silver–white mane is endemic to the Western Ghats of south India.
Periyar Tiger Reserve

Explore the lush green forests and embark on trekking trails while sharing grounds with majestic cats.

**The Tiger Trail Package Costs ₹6,000 per person**

Surrounded by an endless chain of hills and scenic landscapes, Periyar Tiger Reserve in Thekkady is one of the oldest protected areas in the country. Hit the trekking trails here to enjoy sights of the endangered white tigers or rare flora, including the only south Indian conifer—*Podocarpus wallichianus*. Roam the wild whilst sharing grounds with a few of the many inhabitants—royal Bengal tigers, Indian bisons, sambar deer, and Nilgiri langurs—of this lush tropical forest. The best way to explore the reserve is to hop on a boat ride. For the intrepid traveller, bamboo rafting is a rather adventurous alternative. Slowly rowing through the waters while watching herds of elephants taking a bath is a sight to behold. Travellers can also choose to camp inside the bamboo thickets within the premises. For those eager to embrace the wild, embark on a trail to spot the majestic cats or stay inside your tents, listening to the cacophony of the wilderness in solitude.

*Thekkady is also home to some of the finest spice plantations in the country. Make some time to visit one*
Keep an eye out for the endangered lion-tailed macaques
Gir National Park

Keeping the Asiatic lions aside, the national park has plenty of wildlife for your nature fix.

MID-OCTOBER TO MID-JUNE IS THE IDEAL TIME TO VISIT

It’s only at the abode of the wild Asiatic lion that you will find yourself trying to steady your hand on the camera shutter while maintaining eye contact with the majestic beast. The best way to go around the jungle is a jeep safari. Apart from the lions, keep an eye out for leopards and other jungle cats. Additionally, Gir is also an ideal destination for bird-watching species like the paradise flycatcher and the pygmy woodpecker, especially from December to January. One can also head to the Crocodile Breeding Centre inside the park and try distinguishing the crocodiles from logs of wood. Be mindful and don’t get close to the water bodies. Situated near the main park also lies the Devalia Safari Park or Gir Interpretation Zone, a fenced area where you can spot the animals of Gir in captivity. The park is also home to the Maldhari community, exemplifying co-existence with the wild animals.

» A single jeep can accommodate only 6 people so advance booking is crucial.
The Lohagarh Fort situated near the park is a stunning architectural relic worth visiting.

Keoladeo Ghana National Park

With a dense vegetation, the park is home to hundreds of avian species and is a bird watcher’s paradise.

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

Formerly known as the Bharatpur Bird Sanctuary, the Keoladeo National Park is one of the most sought-after breeding and feeding grounds for avian species. Declared a Unesco World Heritage Site in 1985, it is home to over 370 species of birds, including demoiselle cranes and painted storks, along with other animals like striped hyenas and nilgai. On October 17 and 18 this year, the park will be a part of the Global Birding Weekend Event. The event is organised by Raj Singh, Director of the Bagh, Bharatpur, in association with the Bombay Natural History Society and Lifeline for Nature Society. The low-carbon global bird watching event aims to record the maximum number of bird sightings as the weekend is peak migration season. Encouraging the masses to spot birds across the world in their local areas or ‘patches’, it aims to raise awareness about environment and conservation at the grassroot level. For an offbeat experience at Keoladeo, hire a rickshaw to go around the park. The pullers are trained in bird watching and make for knowledgeable companions on the trail.

» See globalbirding.org

Early morning is the best time to spot the birds.
**Wildlife**
Asiatic elephants, tigers, Indian bison, spotted deer

**Scenic Route**
Channapatna, Mandya, Mysuru

**Along The Shore**
Kabini River, Moyar River and Nugu River

THE WOODS CAME CALLING
A yawn, followed by a sneeze and a crack of the knuckles, all signs of immense boredom. A wildlife safari is the last thing you’d ever associate all this with. But here I was, slouching in the passenger seat of our jeep, repeating the pattern in a loop. As blasphemous as it may sound, I have to admit that I’m not a big fan of the great outdoors. But when you’re out in the wild and a Ruddy mongoose imitates these movements, you know you’re in for an experience of unpredictability and one of constant surprise and wonder. As the little beast lifted its leg to scent mark its territory, with its tail in a peculiar twist, I knew this one was a professional poser.

I had certain preconceived notions about what a safari would be like. It was that *hakuna matata* world that Disney had painted for me and those iconic pictures of that one tree in the distance with giraffes in silhouettes. I was almost disappointed that the forested landscape of Bandipur National Park wasn’t straight out of *Lion King*. But the lush jungles do put life back into perspective. Or rather, puts the perspective back into life.

Even the experienced drivers balk at the idea of driving in Bengaluru, and for a novice like me, it was even more of a nightmare. So for my maiden trip, I decided to weave my way out of the city. Situated at the confluence of the Western Ghats and the Nilgiri Hills, Bandipur lies in the heart of an extensive forest. There was something about the green foliage that instantly soothed my city-worn soul. Driving past the skyscrapers of Bengaluru into the verdant wildlife sanctuary, one could spend hours romanticising the glories of nature.

The 213-kilometre stretch unravels little towns, temples, cuisines and scenes that are some of the best in the state. As we navigated through the concrete jungle, dodging the seemingly endless traffic of the IT hub, the hunger pangs had started to kick in. Our first stop was at Renukamba Thatte Idli in Bidadi, a 60-year-old eatery that served absurdly soft, piping hot, oversized idli with some thick spicy coconut chutney.

In addition to a number of eateries, the Bangalore-
Mysore Road features over a dozen stops worthy of your time and attention. This expressway that connects the two cities might not always make it to the list of ‘India’s Best Road Trips’, but the route is a real treat for those looking to explore the numerous facets of rural India including its art, tradition, culture and cuisine.

Unlike other cities that took their own sweet time to grow on me, Mysuru was a love at first sight. Its royal heritage and old colonial architecture have a lot of character that is easy to like. Over the past couple of years, Bengaluru and Mysuru have grown significantly. What used to be a relaxing three-hour drive is now a four-lane highway, mostly chock-a-block during peak hours. With hints of royalty, dents of the aristocracy, and dollops of majesty, the land of spices, silk and sandalwood leaves an indelible print of stately nature. As you cross city after city, the Ghat roads begin to look seemingly narrower and challenging. Try to avoid the stretch after sunset.

### In
#### THE MIGHTY JUNGLE

Bandipur was now just a little over an hour’s drive away. Endowed with a variety of flora ranging from grassy woodlands to evergreen and deciduous forests, it’s surreal to see the landscape change from human-occupied land to more quiet, remote and untouched wilderness. The riches of Bandipur are an incredible area teeming with wildlife sightings.

The deep greens of the national park were once the hunting grounds of the Maharaja of Mysuru. Covering an area of 90 sq kilometers, the sanctuary was set up in 1931. The forest was expanded as a reserve in 1974 under Project Tiger. Today, the park constitutes the vast Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve, sprawling over an area of nearly 875 sq kilometres and harbours one of the largest populations of endangered tigers in India. Although administered separately, Bandipur National Park and Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary are all part of a single ecological continuum that also takes Nagarhole National Park into its fold.

**Endowed with a wide variety of flora ranging from grassy woodlands to evergreen forests, it’s surreal to see the landscape change from human-occupied land to untouched wilderness.**

Flanked by the River Kabini in the north and Moyar in the south, the region also has two minor streams cutting through it.

### For
#### THE SHUTTERBUG

As we ventured into the denser parts of the jungle, the faint sunlight filtered through the murky clouds. Our jeep engine hummed to life and with hope in our hearts and curious eyes, we scanned the mud road for tiger pugmarks and the tree tops for evening birds. But call it bad luck or unfortunate timing, the royal predators eluded us. To make things worse, Basavraj, our guide, narrated a rather animated account of his first tiger sighting. “Footsteps rustled dead leaves, and the
The road leading to nature’s wildest secrets
drivers switched on the high beams. There sat two tigers, larger than life. These were no cubs; they were male adolescents. Camera shutters clicked. Minutes later, the animals got up and disappeared into the darkness.” I’d had enough. If I couldn’t see it, I didn’t want to hear of it.

Interestingly though, Bandipur remains a stronghold of the large-tusked elephants. We spotted a family parading through the dense interiors, shying away from us. What at first seemed like a tiger’s roar turned out to be a mother elephant aiding the calf out of the bushes. I was told that the tusker was the park’s signature offering. The lone tusker is considered to be dangerous and has the prowess to topple over a fully loaded jeep. It’s easy to provoke this giant beast in the wild, so silence is recommended when you encounter one.
There is no dearth of camera-friendly wildlings in Bandipur National Park. We were brought to a halt by a herd of deer, seemingly accustomed to the whirring of clicks, shutters and the humming of engines. We were all lined up and ready for the beauty to unfold. While the young ones did stop in their tracks to evaluate the new company, the mother doe, unperturbed by our presence, moved around nonchalantly. Although it’s rare to find a gaur venturing out on its own, don’t be startled if you do chance upon an Indian bison in these jungles. The largest and tallest in the family of wild cattle, and even bigger than the water buffalo, these massive beasts are attracted to grounds impregnated with minerals and salts. Generally found grazing in the Western Ghats, and mainly in the foothills, you are most likely to encounter them during an early morning or a late evening safari.

As we delved deeper into the woods, Basavraj reiterated, “first rule of the jungle? You hear any noise, you run!” By now I had trained my eyes and ears to shoot up at the faintest of sounds. He motioned towards a canopy of sandalwood trees, but before I could catch a glimpse of the creature he was pointing at, it was already one with the bushes. But looks like unfaltering perseverance does pay off. Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, the elegant peacock rose from behind the dense thicket, its curious eyes meeting our transfixed gaze. Eventually, it disappeared into the forest along with the last ray of light.

Our day in the wilderness was brought to a close as we headed back to our resort. A bonfire, buffet dinner, and a quaint rustic charm awaited us. Bidding farewell has never come easily to me, and coming to terms with the fact that this journey was almost over required a little more than coercion. But I’m sure Bandipur will call me back in due time. Tigers, we aren’t done yet. Perhaps the second time’s the charm?

The erstwhile capital city of the Wodeyars, Mysuru is a treasure trove of culture and heritage. Head to the Mysore Palace that still stands majestically in the heart of the city.

**The Wild Cats**

Bandipur is the finest habitat of endangered species like tigers. It was established as a tiger reserve in 1974. Head out for an early morning safari to spot them in the wild.

**How to Reach**
- Several private as well as government buses run from major cities to Bandipur
- The Bengaluru-Channapatna-Mandya-Mysuru-Bandipur route is the most opted one

**Where to Stay**
- The Mangifera *(pic)* is a boutique stay spread over 7 acres of fruit orchard, just a few minutes away from the wildlife sanctuary
- Bandipur Safari Lodges boasts of 6 special cottages. With well-appointed rooms, it can accommodate nearly 60 guests at a time
- Windflower Tusker Trails is a premium jungle resort with comfortable cottages and ethnic huts

**Drive Further Along**
- **Wayanad, 37kms** Walk through its sprawling spice plantations and prehistoric caves or relax at the comfortable homestays and resorts
- **Ooty, 41kms** Head to this hillock for its botanical gardens and the exquisite Emerald Lake, part of the Silent Valley National Park
- **Mysuru, 73kms** The culture capital of Karnataka, do not miss its well-manicured gardens and heritage mansions

**Nearest Airport:** Bengaluru (279kms, 5 hours 15 minutes)

**Drive From:** Bengaluru to Bandipur National Park; stop by the town of Channapatna for its collection of wooden handicrafts
PEEP INTO Pandora’s Box
Tracing her footsteps on seashell shores and cruising along turquoise waters,

**SOHINEE BASU**

explores the coral-fringed archipelago of the Andamans

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**Colonial past**
Cellular Jail and Ross Island

**Island hopping**
Havelock, North Bay, Neil Islands

**Wilderness trails**
Middle Andaman, Baratang

*Photographs: Shutterstock*
In Andaman's largest island, Havelock (Swaraj Dweep) is a treat for sore eyes. The emerald blue waters of the sea played peek-a-boo from behind the coconut-tree guarded entrance to the beach. After a hearty dinner of prawns cooked in a spicy South Indian masala, I remember how sleep trespassed into our dome.

Overlooking the blue sea, the Bayview Restaurant by Sinclairs is perfect for gorging on the very best of coastal seafood (think tiger prawns and king crabs) while watching a spectacular sunset over the Indian Ocean.

While Havelock pampered me with sunsets of riotous colours, and flirted with the seafood lover in me by dishing out crunchy kokari and surmai fish fries and sumptuous king crab delicacies, it was Neil Island, just a ferry ride away from Havelock, with Laxmanpur and Bharatpur beaches that finally had me at the rims of the famous Howrah Bridge rock structure.

By the next morning, my mind had grown extremely restless as I longed for the ocean now. Having binged Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara way too many times, I was eagerly waiting for the day I could finally have my epiphany underwater. When I found myself on North Bay Island, famous for its coral reefs and marine life, my excitement overshot itself. The water here is not sapphire, rather it reflects the colour of the sea bed in myriad shades.

I found myself bravely strapping on the snorkelling gear, ready to witness life under the surface. With my eyes fixed on the sea bed below, I used my rusty skills to stay afloat as the water and majestic corals were quick to overwhelm me. Schools of colourful fish skirted by and a lone seahorse hid behind the flaming orange and fuschia of the corals.

But it isn't just North Bay that took me by surprise with its teeming marine life, further up north in the lesser explored regions of Andamans, we found ourselves at the Kalipur Beach in Diglipur, which is famous for its turtle-nesting grounds. Reaching Diglipur itself is quite an experience as it happens to be the northernmost tip of the Andamans, close to Myanmar. A little off the beaten track, the Kalipur Beach is deserted, making it perfect for the Olive Ridley turtles who come here to lay their eggs. On a trek up-beach in the middle of the night, we stumbled across a broken shell of a turtle egg, lying covered in the mica-clad sand.

The mysterious side of the Andamans fully revealed itself only when I had stepped away from the beaches and delved into the dense forest instead. We made our journey towards Middle Andaman and then further into North Andaman. Guarded by tall deciduous
A leatherback sea turtle washed on the shore

The Mud Volcano of Baratang

The thickly vegetated forests of the Andamans
forests on either side, our car trudged along the winding roads in a convoy through the Jarawa Reserve, heading towards the Nilambur Jetty. The Jarawas, who happen to be the most prominent indigenous tribe found on the Andaman Islands, live in the forests of Middle Andaman, fiercely holding on to their primitive values. Believed to have a connection with the African aboriginals, the Jarawas can often be seen on this drive through the forest, towards Baratang and then eventually, Rangat.

The fact that Andamans is also a treasure trove of other natural wonders became

The Andamans can be visited year-round but during the winter and spring months, one can also witness the rare phenomenon of turtle-nesting on the beaches. The Corbyn’s Cove Beach Festival in April is also a great time to visit.

Home to myriad forms of marine life, the beaches of Little Andaman offer nesting grounds for rare species of sea turtles, including the leatherback, which is the largest sea turtle in the world.
more apparent when I found myself inside the limestone cave at Baratang. The stalactite and stalagmite formations were breathtaking and as I watched the light change across the uneven fissures, the cave transformed into a canvas of chiaroscuro.

Clad in virginal beauty, the Andamans pulled me towards itself with its beaches and its forests, its history and its natives. The islands eagerly wait to show you and take you to places unexplored, helping you discover yourself a little more throughout the journey.

Baratang is known for its thick mangroves, limestone caves and the mud volcano. You can explore the limestone caves with permission from the forest department.
How to Reach: Direct flights are available from all major cities. Alternatively, a ship from either Kolkata, Vizag or Chennai ports is also an option.

Where to Stay
- **Port Blair** Fortune Resort Bay Island and Seashell Resort on Marine Hill overlooking the sea
- **Havelock** Barefoot Resorts is inside a tropical forest, with the Radhanagar Beach close by
- **Diglipur** Turtle Resort if you plan to witness the turtle nesting grounds

What to Eat
- Spicy Crab Masala or Prawn Curry
- Fish varieties like kokari and surmai are exclusively found in the waters of the Andamans
- Seafood at the New Lighthouse Restaurant in Port Blair
- Dakshin Restaurant by Barefoot in Havelock should be on the checklist too

What to Do
- Visit the Cellular Jail and relive its ominous past
- Take a dip in the Corbyn’s Cove or ride the tall waves at Radhanagar Beach
- Watch the sunset at Chidiya Tapu Beach
- Go scuba diving in and around Havelock Island or explore the coral reefs and marine life at Barracuda City or the Aquarium diving point
- Snorkel at the North Bay Island and Red Skin Island
- Opt for glass-bottom boat rides in Wandoor, a part of the Mahatma Gandhi Marine National Park
- Explore the forest trails in Middle Andamans
ON THE OTHER SIDE
Mountains and valleys, pirs and pandits, turquoise lakes and the great Himalaya. The sounds of Kashmir have finally come to life.

Text and photographs by

AHTUSHI DESHPANDE
I STOOD ATOP RAMII DATCH, a ridgetop cairn-dotted crossing, taking in the sweeping views of the large and brilliantly blue Tarsar Lake below. The landscape and scope of the lake was unlike anything I had witnessed in the rest of my Himalayan treks. Sheep grazed languidly along its grassy upper slopes and a deafening silence resounded as the almond-shaped lake sat mirror-like, without a ripple. The alpine lake was mesmerising, surrounded by dramatically sloped ridges descending to the lakeshore below and gullies sneaking up with remnants of glacial ice that had fed the lake over ages.

It was just the second day of our four-day hike and I was already touching close to 4,000 metres at this ridge, also the highest point in our trek. On the other side of the ridge at a short distance shimmered the edge of Marsar, another lake similar in magnitude and beauty. Numerous conversations with Sayyed Tahir, our immensely knowledgeable lead guide, and Mohammed Adil, who ran Cliffhangers India (our local and thoroughly professional trekking agency), brought the region alive as a veritable lake district with some interesting and better variations to the trek we were undertaking. To be fair our consideration had been more driven by the COVID-19 pandemic and a vague idea of a quick trek.

We had come up from Shekwas, a beautiful campsite at the junction of three valleys with shepherd camps dotting the surrounding hills and streams running on two sides of a beautiful grassy flat. The first day had been a nine-hour long yet spectacular climb as we clambered up from the postcard pretty village of Aru, through dense forests of pine and cedars to lunch at the rolling green meadows of Lidderwat. A post lunch push had got us straight up to Shekwas at 3,300 metres from where a leisurely stroll the following day had got us up to the Tarsar Lake. Led by Tahir, who had by now covered over 60 lakes in Kashmir, the three of us made it to Ramii Datch for

The alpine lake was mesmerising, surrounded by dramatically sloped ridges descending to the lakeshore below and gullies sneaking up with remnants of glacial ice that fed the lake for ages.
the grand views of the lake and beyond. We were in the Zabarwan range, which is a short sub–mountain range that lies between the Pir Panjal and the Greater Himalaya. Our short four-day hike was a traverse over this range that divided the Lidder and Sind valleys, making its way from Anantnag district into Srinagar district, through the rich biodiversity of the Dachigam National Park.

We were a ragamuffin gang of 12, a diverse group of bankers, one of them was on his very first trek, a spirited lawyer who was also an actor, a deep sea diver and proficient skier (also on her first trek), and a twelve-year-old spunky young girl, Tara (accompanied by her two doting parents) who by the end of the trail would have undertaken her most challenging hike! The rest of us were regulars, always willing to jump on a trekking bandwagon. Besides, my friend Maninder Kohli, who had got this diverse group together had done his due diligence. Mahmoud A. Shah, head of the Jammu and Kashmir Mountaineering and Hiking Club had given us the assurance that Kashmir was perfectly safe to travel. It then seemed relatively easier to take this leap of faith and venture into the valley which had been silent for almost a year.

Shah later elaborated that in spite of the upheavals the valley had faced, no tourist had been targeted in the region since the infamous kidnapping of some western tourists way back in 1995. An avid trekker himself, Shah had visited over a hundred lakes in Kashmir and a weekend trek was de rigueur for the die-hard mountain lover. “I am addicted to these mountains,” he remarked as he recounted the steps he had taken to bring more locals and youth into the ambit of trekking in the valley. His SundayTreks initiative supported by the tourism department had been a raging success as many signed up for day hikes in the surrounding mountains. In fact, it was refreshing to see so many local trekkers along the way, some of whom had planned a day hike to the lake and back!
As for COVID, the state had a clear policy for tourists and trekkers. A COVID-19 test was mandatory on arrival, the result of which will be declared within an hour. To be doubly safe, we had all undertaken the RT-PCR test in Delhi as well, 72 hours prior to our departure. We were the very first non-state tourists of the season to head for a trek in Kashmir.

Perhaps the only anomaly was the weather, which played truant with incessant rainfall, reducing our already short trek as we reached the Heevan Hotel in Pahalgam. The beautiful all-wood property sat wistfully along the raging Lidder River, fed by streams, waterfalls and glaciers of the upper valley where we were headed. Normally the state receives far less rainfall than other hill stations, with the trekking window extending from mid-June to mid-October.

After soaking in the magnificence of Tarsar Lake, we crossed the ridge into the valley of Zajimarg. The backdrop of the receding lake called for a good photo op and many social media profile shots were knocked off on the protruding ledge near the top. It also served as a great vantage point to view the peaks of Amarnath to the northeast and Muktinath to the south. The descent to the wide open expanses of Zajimarg was short and swift. It was the end of August and the main flowering season behind us, yet a plethora of alpine flowers carpeted the meadows. As we moved northwest towards Sunder Sar, hopping over a boulder gully, Kolahoi—known as Kashmir’s Matterhorn, due to its striking resemblance—came into full view. It had been playing hide and seek through clouds since Tarsar. Now looking at it in all its majesty with its sweeping sheer granite
A local nomadic Bakkarwal

The campsite at Tarsar Lake

Load carriers on the trek
walls was breathtaking. Our other guide Tauseef had been on several expeditions and had scaled it a couple of times.

We were now officially in the Sindh valley. The lake’s calm waters lapped gently across its periphery and I just sat for a while to soak in the energy.

**THE SINDH Valley**

In the grip of a white out we made the descent from Sonmus Pass into the Sonnasti Valley below where our last camp of the trek lay. We reached the Gujjar village camp by early evening where refreshments and a cheery camp instructor awaited us. We recapped our experience that evening.
with glowing tribute to the fabulous local team from Cliffhangers India who guided us throughout. The following morning I paid a visit to the summer settlement of Bakarwals from Sambal as they welcomed me into their thatched roof tenements.

Our last day was nothing less than a rollercoaster ride. Amid heavy rainfall we made the descent to Sambal in the Sindh valley, navigating rivers of mud and sludge a result of the incessant downpour. Slipping and sliding, we made our way through the numerous log bridge crossings under which ran feisty torrents. It was a meditative four hours where our eyes scarcely left the ground. The surrounding aged conifers stood witness to our awkward trespassing.

We had an early evening flight to catch but lunch awaited us at a houseboat on Nagin Lake organised by the affable Mr Shah, which we didn’t want to miss. So Tariq, our driver in true Bond style, deftly swerved his Innova like a sports car with narrow misses and thankfully no hits, through crowded lanes, all for a sampling of Kashmiri wazwan.

Amid incessant downpour we made the descent to Sambal in the Sindh Valley. Slipping and sliding, we navigated through the numerous log bridge crossings under which ran feisty torrents.

Paradise had just opened its doors and I had but sampled only one picturesque valley. Future visits were a given and the next trek already planned for. The flight took off leaving the valley veiled in clouds far below. I too sank into a reverie, reminiscing, in detail, the wilderness of Kashmir and the mesmerising turquoise depths of Tarsar. It didn’t last for long though as a polite nudge from the air hostess reminded me to don the mandatory face shield and mask. While the death stares from my co-passengers didn’t help me much, I honestly believe I should have been let off the hook, for it was the serenity of Kashmir that made me forget the unusual times we were living in and provided the most ideal escape.
Ancient Nights

AND

DESERt SKIES
“Keep your knees bent and remember, french fries to go, pizza to stop,” my instructor was next to me as I was hurtling down the slope. It wasn’t food he was offering, he was talking about the position of my feet. I was skiing for the first time. “Go steady, I’m going to go rescue her,” he said. From the corner of my eye I saw my fellow traveller Maritza about to crash into a giant mound of snow. I tried to turn my fries into a pizza, but I was simply going too fast to stop. Figured I’d give Maritza some company.

It was late February in Nevada and we were having a ski day on Charleston Peak. At 11,916 feet above sea level, Mount Charleston is the highest point in the Mojave Desert. The irony of our geography did not escape me. Spring Mountains, where we were, is the most diverse mountain range in all of Nevada, with its biodiversity categorised into six different life zones. If you were to drive through all the six zones—starting at the Las Vegas Valley all the way to the peak—you’d encounter the same amount of flora and fauna as you’d find driving from Mexico to Canada.

There are over 31 endemic species in the area, and tourists and locals often encounter bobcats, coyotes, grey foxes and mountain lions. There are wild horses, but not true mustangs, and of course, the gold rush-era burros.

The Spring Mountains are what’s called a ‘sky island’. It’s just like an island, but you have the Mojave Desert surrounding a forest, instead of the ocean. The next closest forest is all the way in Arizona, and the isolation gives the area unique biodiversity. I was expecting bears in the back country forests, but turns out, bears aren’t too fond of trudging across the Mojave all the way from Arizona. Mountain lions are the apex predators here.

We stopped by the Spring Mountains Visitor Gateway to catch a glimpse of this island. The land is sacred, and considered family by the indigenous people. The seven Southern Paiute tribes here are known as Nuwuvi—the people—and the Seven Stones Plaza, just behind the visitor’s centre, celebrates their relationship with the place of their creation.

We walked around the seven stones, each
representing one of the tribes, and our guide, Amanda, pointed at a handprint in the middle of the exhibit—Mount Charleston. “Every September, we have a pine nut festival where they come out and just celebrate and share stories,” she said. “The Nuwuvi only tell their stories in the winter.” “Some stories I can share, some I can’t,” she added. “It’s not winter yet.”

**DEAD OR Alive?**

The drive to Death Valley is a scene straight out of an old Western. The endless road goes seemingly straight up and down the mountains, the rockscape only broken by a sprinkling of little Joshua trees. Most of Death Valley is in California, but because of its sheer size—it’s the largest national park in the US outside Alaska—even the little corner that sticks into Nevada is the biggest national park in the state. Earlier, it wasn’t very heavily visited but people’s perception of Death Valley has changed with time.

The Timbisha Shoshone are the indigenous people who have always lived here. They believe that a people cannot have a culture without their land. They are a part of the land, and the land a part of them. They exist to protect the land, and this land can heal your body and soul. Their home isn’t dead, it’s alive.

For early European settlers, this land was harsh and barren. They first moved westward chasing the goldfields in the desert, the underground riches ranged from gold to silver, from copper to borax. To them, the valley was hot and dry, the extreme weather lending it its modern-day name. The remnants of their cacophonous endeavours can be found sprinkled through the gold rush-era belts. Geological evidence, however, seems
The life that survives in the valley does so with unrelenting force. Mesquite trees, for instance, survive by digging their roots hundreds of feet underground for water to side with the Timbisha Shoshone. A startling, beautiful, wild land, the Death Valley is considered one of the hottest places on the planet. Despite this, the peaks of the mountains are covered in snow through the winter months. About three million years ago, the Earth’s crust ripped the surface and two enormous blocks began to pull apart. The trough between them slowly started filling with salt, gravel and sand, which was washed down the canyon by the Amargosa River to create the flat valley floor.

This valley floor was once the bed of a vast lake, hundreds of feet deep. But the devastating summer heat dried it out over the centuries. The biodiversity that survives in the valley today does so with unrelenting force. Mesquite trees, for instance, survive by digging their roots hundreds of feet underground to find water.

Devil’s Hole is an underwater limestone cavern home to the critically endangered Devil’s Hole pupfish. These pupfish have been isolated in Devil’s Hole for nearly 10,000 to 12,000 years, ever since the valley began drying. They are considered the rarest fish in the world.

The landscape itself is also in motion with canyons, flash floods, debris, strong winds, rocks, and gravel constantly shifting. In geological time, Death Valley is alive. This fast changing environment, coupled with an alarming rate of climate change, is pushing much of the region’s biodiversity to the very edge of survival. And those that can’t adapt to contend are slowly disappearing.
There’s a sign marking the entrance of Badwater Basin, the lowest point in North America. Visitors can walk all the way to the salt flats—or pool, depending on the season—on a wooden pier. Badwater gets its name from its nearly toxic salt content.
Badwater, Good Wine

Death Valley is a place of extremes. I’ve never had the pleasure of visiting salt flats, not in the Rann of Kutch, not in Bolivia, not ever. But what I didn’t expect was to be standing in salt flats at the lowest point in all of North America. Badwater Basin is at an altitude of 282 feet under sea level. During the wet winters, this valley holds a shallow lake, which dries every spring to create the magical saltscape. It’s this combination of high heat and low elevation that plays a dominant role in making Death Valley the hottest place in the US.

If you stand at the top of the Telescope Peak—the highest point within the national park—you can look down two miles straight beneath you. It’s the only place in the country you can do so. For reference, even the Grand Canyon is only a mile down.

You need to have at least a week to even begin exploring just the Nevada part of the park, and the places to see are endless. Not even an hour from Badwater, the landscape changes dramatically yet again and transforms into the vast rolling hills of the Mesquite Flat Sand Dunes. The quintessential desert dunes are surrounded by the towering mountain peaks, painting a dramatic landscape.

There are forces constantly at play at
Death Valley. The Ubehebe Crater was created just a few hundred years ago as magma, fire and steam exploded outward to create a giant chasm. Large rocks mysteriously move around the Racetrack, leaving clear tracks with nothing driving them forward. Scientists believe that when it occasionally rains, the water under the rocks freezes and lifts them up a little, and the blowing winds use the ice to push the rocks forward like sails. But the Racetrack’s explanation changes every few years.

We ended our soirée into Death Valley at the Zabriskie Point, watching the finely-sculpted badlands of the Golden Canyon. The eroded rocks changed colours with the setting sun as the shark-finned point cast its shadow down the canyon.

The town of Pahrump awaited us for the night. It is known for two things, I was told. The first, was its fine wine. And the second, well, let’s just say the film the Best Little Whorehouse in Texas was not about Texas.

What I was looking forward to, however, was neither of the two. The park is an enormous reservoir of open wilderness, nearly three million acres of it, and human presence is few and far between. The great riches and abundant beauty of the desert have been preserved since our history used to be the future. What is also preserved is the past. Death Valley is one of the last places where the night sky can be seen as clearly as it was when the Europeans had first moved West.

All you need to do is look up.

Mountain Lions

Cougar, panther, puma, catamount, the mountain lion is known by many names around the world. These big cats are endemic to the Americas. Although they’re classified as ‘Least Concern’ on the IUCN Red List, their current population is steadily declining.

Scientific Name: Puma concolor

In the wild, a mountain lion can live up to 10 years. In captivity, they can live up to 21 years.

Average Size

Weight:
136 pounds (62 kg)

Head and body:
3.25 to 5.25 feet

Tail:
23.5 to 33.5 inches

Mountain lions like to prey on deer, though they also eat smaller animals such as coyotes, porcupines, and raccoons.

Mountain Lion Foundation believes the mountain lion population in the United States is unlikely to exceed 30,000

They span 28 countries in the Americas

Their size is smallest closer to the equator and largest closer to the poles
eat

TRAVEL ONE BITE AT A TIME

MARIKO AMEKODOMMO 68

OLIVE BAR AND KITCHEN 69

KUZHI PANIYARAM 71

PHOTOGRAPH: SHUTTERSTOCK
Red of Roses
France

The first edition is limited to only 20,000 bottles

Charismatic, classy, and with a hint of sweetness, these blush-tinted bottles have success written all over them. Award-winning actor and producer Brad Pitt is no stranger to the world of fine wines. Having first ventured into the world of pink wine in 2012 with Angelina Jolie, and backed by the success of Miraval in France, his latest bottled release—Fleur de Miraval—is in full swing. Champagne aficionado Rodolphe Peters and master winemaker Marc Perrin joined the viticultural ensemble to create the inaugural bottle of bubbly after five years of research. Produced from red grapes and raspberries, with a lingering salt finish, the rosé gets its slightly unique texture from Fleur’s 75 per cent chardonnay and 25 per cent young pinot noir blend. Aged on the lees for three years before bottling, the wine was created using the traditional saignée method. With this limited first edition of the sparkling blend, Pitt has joined a long list of celebrities who have forayed into the wine business including the likes of Drew Barrymore, Post Malone, Jon Bon Jovi, and others.

The champagne will retail at $390. See miraval.com
Mariko Ameekodommo’s Global Spice Route

Taking extended breaks to travel the world, international culinary expert Mariko Ameekodommo never forgets to bring back secret ingredients, techniques and a ton of recipes.

**» How has the transition been from the world of corporate finance and marketing to the culinary world?**
It was quite easy because I was going back to my roots. When I moved to Asia I accepted corporate positions to help with my visa requirements and paycheck. Given how big a travel hub Asia is, I was able to have more adventures. If I was craving noodles, I could head to Thailand for the weekend. If I wanted dim sums, Hong Kong was a few hours away. Going back to the culinary world felt like my creativity was back. I still consult in marketing though, and own an India-based company, Mariko Communications.

**» What made you take the leap from Hollywood to Bollywood?**
It was actually part of a grand love story! I was living in Vietnam and working on PR for a travel-tech conference and he was the keynote speaker brought in from Mumbai. We started chatting and a month later, I came to visit! It was my first trip to India and it instantly felt like home. A few months later, I packed up everything and here I am. This month actually is my two-year anniversary of living in Mumbai!

**» Tell us a little about your tryst with Ayurveda?**
It was completely unexpected! It’s funny, I think most foreigners either subscribe to Ayurveda or Yoga while in India. Initially, when I had moved here, I used to fall sick quite frequently. Someone referred me to an Ayurveda clinic. I began studying it more. For me it was not just a fad diet. I was able to blend international cuisines with Ayurvedic recipes. Most Ayurvedic experts and followers stick to traditional diets like khichdi, chaas, and dal. I incorporate the same principles but create unique recipes from around the world. This is what makes people more excited and committed to the Ayurvedic lifestyle and food.

**» An Indian dish that you can’t get enough of?**
It has to be either street dosa (sada or chilli cheese) or anything tandoori.

**» An iconic LA dish that you miss having in Mumbai?**
I miss the street tacos and maple bacon doughnuts. I’ve tried them in other places, but it’s never the same.

—ROSHNI SUBRAMANIAN

**Which country according to you has the best culinary offerings in terms of street food?**
I would say Vietnam. It’s a combination of flavours and techniques. Vietnamese food also incorporates traditional Ayurvedic ingredients such as ginger, star anise and tons of mint. In general, the food scene in Vietnam is incredible because you’ll find Michelin chefs from around the world opening restaurants.

**» Pineapple Fried Rice**
It is one of the most requested recipes in my ‘Flavors of Southeast Asia’ virtual culinary class. The recipe also works well with cauliflower rice and other grains like quinoa.

**CHEF RECOMMENDS**
**MARIKO’S SIGNATURE DISHES THAT YOU CAN’T MISS**

**Pineapple Fried Rice**
These tiny treats will tide you over until dinner and prevent extra snacking. Add your favorite chopped nuts for an extra protein kick.
THE BANYAN TREE seemed bigger than I remembered it. Although I’m sure it’s more to do with my imagination than any pandemic-fuelled growth spurt. The little blue door, however, was still the same. My trip here last year seemed like a lifetime ago. Today, the staff was armed with QR codes, protective gear, and pre-packaged cutlery. The warmth, however, was still intact.

The tangy summer drink with jamun, preserved in-house over the last year, and beetroot was a welcome beginning on a hot day. Chef Dhruv Oberoi’s menu borrows heavily from evolving flavours, each dish featuring an au naturel, homebound ingredient, progressing from the acetic amla to the flavourful kundru.

Next in line was the marinated beetroot and plum, placed on a flaky, crusty pastry, and topped with copious amounts of Nigella seeds. A serving of goat cheese with duck breast was an unlikely favourite. Be sure to try the stuffed artichoke and baked potato tossed in sage butter, or the braised pork belly cooked in an authentic Himachali curry for entrée. The lemon cheesecake on a graham cracker and almond crust is to die for, and don’t forget to pick up the ‘lockdown-inspired basket’. The dalgona cream, baked cookies, tiramisu, doughnut, and popcorn and coffee shot will satisfy all your midnight cravings.

—SIMRAN GILL

Olive Bar & Kitchen
MEHRAULI
While the signature dishes remain the same, the new menu emphasises on local and seasonal eating

6–8, Kalka Das Marg, Mehrauli, New Delhi

1pm-3:30pm and 7:30pm-12am; closed on Tuesday

Signature pork belly in cherry base
A New Mantra in the Kitchen

Celebrity chef and host Nigella Lawson is back with a six-part series *Nigella’s Cook, Eat, Repeat* to be aired on BBC Two. The British television star will be seen sharing some fond memories, a few old classics, and a multitude of new recipes featuring her favourite ingredients. Some of the treats announced so far include chocolate peanut butter cake, crab mac and cheese, and a fear-free fish stew. Though the series is yet to have a confirmed air date, a number of celebrity chefs are expected to grace the show.

*The six-part series will be accompanied by an hour-long Christmas special.*

No More Finger Lickin’ Good

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the fast food giant KFC has temporarily suspended the use of its iconic tagline *Finger Lickin’ Good*. It was deemed inappropriate, prompting the chain outlet to drop the words *Finger Lickin’* from the slogan and changing it to *It’s Good* by pixelation of the phrase on posters and the packaging. The tagline will be put to use again when there is some semblance of normalcy.

*Superfans were asked to come up with temporary slogans. The winning taglines included ‘It survived 2020, it’s that good’ and ‘It’s better than your grandma’s good’.*

What’s Your Butter Chicken Mood?

Your’s Truly Butter Chicken has a solution for all your butter chicken cravings. From smokey butter chicken, meat *wala* butter chicken, to the popular Pandara Road butter chicken, and even diet *wala* butter chicken, the drool-worthy list is endless. YTBC also lets the diners customise the dish according to their liking. Choose from a wide range of flavours, along with your preferred choice of meat cut (shredded, chunks or boneless) and finish it with the level of spice.

*Cost for two ₹800*
Kuzhi paniyaram is one of the most commonly eaten breakfast dishes in Karaikudi

Amid its signature dishes like meen kuzhambu, kozhi varval, and crab rasam, Chettinad cuisine’s wide repertoire of vegetarian delicacies often gets ignored. There’s no denying that most Chettiyars are meat lovers but as one delves deeper, the region unravels its plethora of deceptively delicious options. The fragrant spices, fierce curries and other locally sourced ingredients all come together, resulting in a unique culinary tradition. Kuzhi paniyaram is one of the most commonly eaten breakfast dishes in areas like Karaikudi. There are many versions of this mini doughnut but our money is on the authentic Chettinad version.

Kuzhi Paniyaram

Recipe for Chettinad Kara Kuzhi Paniyaram

- Wash and soak 1 cup raw rice, 1 cup idli rice, 1/2 cup urad dal and 1 tsp fenugreek seeds for four hours
- Grind until smooth and fluffy using water as needed. The batter needs to be thick
- Coarsely grind 2 green chillies and some curry leaves
- Add salt to the batter, whisk well and let it ferment overnight
- In a pan add 1/2 tbsp sesame oil, 1/2 tbsp mustard seeds, 1 tsp chana dal and 1 tsp urad dal
- Once the mustard splutters, add 2 finely chopped onions and some salt. Cook till it is translucent
- Take 2 cups of the fermented batter and add the chilli paste and onions
- Heat the paniyarakkal and spoon in a little oil in all the moulds
- Pour the batter and let it cook. Once done, flip it*
- Cover and cook again for a minute till crispy and golden brown
- Serve hot with coconut chutney, tomato chutney and sambar

*A paniyarakkal is essential to the preparation of these rice batter balls. You can opt for the classic cast iron pan or check out the modern copper or non-stick aluminium ones

You can check if they are cooked by inserting a toothpick.
stay

MINIMALIST 74

TAMARÁ KODAI 75

SONEVA FUSHI 75

HOTELS, HOSTELS AND NOTHING LIKE HOME
DOIWALA, DEHRADUN

I was floating in the pool, trying to trace Orion with my little fingernail, but something wasn’t right. The stars were twinkling a little too much and there were simply too many of them moving around. The pitter-patter of Marshall’s paws on the wet ground soon drew my attention away from the dancing sky to the wagging tail, when suddenly, the lights went out. And there they were, hundreds or thousands of them, on every bush and every tree. Fireflies.

The sugarcane and paddy fields stretched as far as the eye could see, broken only by herbs and vegetable patches. There was marigold to attract bugs, garlic to repel them, and the urea for fertilisers came from the resident cows. “That’s where the wild elephant stepped,” our host Ashok Singh pointed at a crater in the field. It had come looking for some hooch the local villagers were brewing.

About 40 minutes away from Dehradun city, Dudly Manor is a charming, not-so-little organic farmstay at the foothills of the Himalaya. You can drive down to Rishikesh or Haridwar for day trips, but there’s enough to do at Dudly itself. We spent a morning exploring the vast farm, and dairy unit. Ashok’s innovative farming practices are fascinating to watch. You can try your hand at pottery, go birding or for a safari, and also take a private cooking lesson with Chef Amal Kumar from Le Cordon Bleu in Sydney; we highly recommend the hand-rolled pastas!

With the Ganga on one side, and the Yamuna on the other, the old-hunting-lodge-style manor sits at the mouth of the Rajaji National Park. If you peer beyond the woods on a clear day, you can even see as far as the Shivaliks on the other side.

—LABANYA MAITRA

FOOTHILLS and Farms

The Dudly Manor Bed & Breakfast has two standalone cottages and two single rooms. There’s a common pool and two cuddle-ready labradors.
NEW DELHI

MINIMALIST
POSHTEL & SUITES

Hauz Khas Village, 11kms (20 minutes) from Indira Gandhi International Airport (DEL)
» 16 private rooms and 14 Japanese capsules
» Community-style living with hotel amenities

HYGGE STUDIO » Based on Japanese and Scandinavian design concepts, the studio apartment is a combination of a bedroom and lounge area.

UNDER THE SKY » Be it music gigs, BBQ nights or relaxed Sunday brunches, the rooftop gatherings are in sync with the scandi-bohemian vibe, art and design.

Escape

Unwind by the Hauz Khas Lake at the Deer Park nearby. Catch a glimpse of deer and peacocks, or capture the breathtaking view of the sunrise.

WABI SABI » A classic penthouse with a well-stocked kitchenette, it is centred on embracing the Japanese philosophy of the art of imperfection.

JAPANESE CAPSULE » These ultra-modern pods cater to those looking for a sense of shared community.
**KODAIKANAL**

**Placid Payment**

The property is offering a range of traveller-friendly packages.

Ensuring the highest standards of safety and hygiene with the *Raksha* initiative, the Tamara Kodai reopened its doors on September 1. The property has various packages for travellers, including the No-Cost EMI offer. This first-of-its kind initiative allows guests to cherish a holiday and pay for it over the next six months by only paying EMIs over the tenure equal to the package with no interest component.

All additional costs will be borne by the resort directly.

» The *Raksha* initiative guidelines are aligned with directives issued by WHO, the MoH, GoI, and the state government.

**MALDIVES**

**Sea Side-Up**

The new water retreats are the largest in the world.

Soneva Fushi is now adding eight new water retreats to the property. Designed to ensure privacy, they boast of rustic décor and are set high above the ocean to prevent waves breaking against the underside, thus reducing noise and vibrations. The facilities range from retractable roof slides, villas with sunset and sunrise views to a sunken seating area, catamaran nets and a 19-metre slide plunging into the waves from the upper floor.

» These retreats are accessible by a curving jetty at the opposite end of the island.

**KERALA**

**COASTAL ESCAPE**

The property will reopen in two phases in October.

The Neeleshwar Hermitage Kerala is set to welcome visitors in two phases beginning this month. Post a heavy monsoon and simultaneous sprucing up of the site, all sea-view cottages and the infinity pool can be accessed by travellers from October 1. In the second phase, all garden view cottages along with Meenakshi, the open beachside restaurant, will be available for travellers.

» Complimentary immunity drinks, created by consulting Ayurveda specialists are available at all times.
ReguLaR bAcK

Jikoni
Ravinder Bhogal’s recipes from an immigrant kitchen

Travel Classic
Heinrich Harrer’s tryst with spirituality and mysticism in Tibet

Land of the Dawn-lit Mountains
Antonia Bolingbroke-Kent’s adventure through Arunachal

— BOOKS —

— HOW TO —
Wildlife
Tips on being a responsible traveller

— GEAR —
Immunity kits, camera straps, and face masks
The monthly roundup

— LITTLE THINGS TO FILL IN YOUR JOURNEY —
Hidden deep in the high-altitude alpine meadows of Ladakh, Tso Kar is a haven for wildlife. Bounded by small hillocks, this alpine lake is a breeding ground for birds like the great crested grebe, brahminy duck, bar-headed goose, brown-headed gull and common tern. If you’re lucky, you might be able to spot the Tibetan wild ass, Tibetan gazelles, Himalayan yaks, and even a Tibetan wolf.
Mistress of Spices

Ravinder Bhogal is an immigrant twice over. Her grandfather moved to Kenya from his native Punjab in the 1940s in search of better prospects. When Bhogal was seven, her family moved to England. Her memories of the small jikoni (Swahili for kitchen) in Nairobi—full of women bustling about, working their magic with their pots and pans and melange of masalas, speaking in a variety of inherited tongues—are sharply etched, and steeped in the aching twang of nostalgia. Bhogal is a former journalist who started writing about food, eventually moving into private catering and then opening her own restaurant in London’s Marylebone, thus fulfilling a long-nurtured dream.

Of course, it’s called jikoni.

A good cookbook is like a cosy hearth, which you turn to for inspiration and warmth. Bhogal embraces her culinary influences, modifying traditional recipes to ingredients available in the new land, and welcomes hitherto alien dishes into the family fold. But she makes them her own. The stodgy British kedgeree, for instance, metamorphoses into pea and mint-stuffed fishcakes served with a curry hollandaise, essentially relaying the same flavour.

Who would have thought?

It’s also a deeply personal book, laced with private memories. Every recipe is accompanied by a delicious nugget of history or a sharp observation, if not a full-course tale. The recipes themselves are part home cook, part cheffy, everything from pork scratchings to pomegranate quail and tahini ice cream.

Bhogal writes with felicity: “Our recipes displayed a rebellious spirit, lawless concoctions that drew their influences from one nation and then another. We took the traditions of our ancestors and their regional home cooking and overlaid them with the reality of our new home and whatever its various food markets, delis, canteens and multicultural supermarkets had to offer on any given day. This is what I suppose could be loosely termed ‘immigrant cuisine’, proudly inauthentic recipes that span geography, ethnicity and history.” This is a cookbook you can actually read.

—Amit Dixit

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Seven Years in Tibet: My life before, during and after
by Heinrich Harrer

At the outset, we know little to nothing about the early life of the Dalai Lama, the spiritual leader of Tibet. And much less about the forbidden city of Lhasa. But as the narrative unfolds, we get an insight into a closed and traditional feudal nation. Heinrich Harrer’s Seven Years in Tibet serves as a testimony to a culture and lifestyle that’s slowly forgotten. Harrer’s escapades are a blend of personal adventures and interpretation of the mysticism of a strange land. Unlike the romanticised celluloid version, the book stays true to the author’s painful journey and the hardships and perils faced enroute. An Austrian by birth, Harrer was a tough mountain climber who escaped the British POW camp to flee to neutral Tibet. Harsh weather, foreign invasions, all were overcome to forge a rare relationship with one of the highest dignitaries—the Dalai Lama. The vivid memoir is not only considered a landmark in travel writing but also subtly presents a journey of spiritual transformation of an egotistical westerner tempered by his contact with Tibetan Buddhism.

» Rupert Hart-Davis ₹499
On an unseasonably warm October morning in Delhi that made me pine for the jungle encrusted hills of the northeast, I received a Facebook message from a British journalist and travel writer, Antonia Bolingbroke-Kent. Antonia was planning to travel through Nagaland and wanted to make a stop at the Tizu Valley, where I worked with local communities on a conservation project. I was intrigued when she mentioned she had written a book on her motorbike journey through Arunachal Pradesh—a land lately forgotten by the outside world, still bewilderingly wild and peopled by tribes with fascinating cultural and folkloric traditions, beliefs and practices. Whose origins remain shrouded in mystery.

But Arunachal for me was a remembered land, one whose hills and trails I had wandered more than a decade ago, listening to tales of little people who left their footprints on the tops of mountains. Of unforgiving snakes, slithering across hills and valleys in search of those who had wronged them. Of the dawn-lit mountains against the horizon. Riding with her through the ‘opium-addled Mishmi hills’ which a former tiger hunter tells her is the fault of the English who gave it to them! Searching with her for Shangri-la and lost portals and mourning the disappearing Igu-shamans. As I listened to her witty, unflinchingly honest, and occasionally lyrical descriptions of the land and its people, I felt I had discovered a kindred spirit.

After Singapore, Malaysia and Burma fell to Japan during World War II, their troops marched towards the northeast of India. To keep China supplied with fuel and ammunition to stave off the Japanese advance, American soldiers and ‘coolies’ worked to build an ill-fated supply road connecting Assam with China through the dense jungles of Burma. Apart from peppering the book with such tales of the Great War, Antonia weaves the expeditions and writing of many a British explorer and administrator within her narrative. Their experiences act as a barometer of the many changes Antonia witnesses on her odyssey. Land of the Dawn-lit Mountains is an honest and incisive portrayal of a land and people in transition, buffeted by winds of change. The book is a tribute to a fragile and vanishing ecology and culture.

It is a must read for the adventurer, the explorer, or simply the curious armchair traveller in us all, for few will be lucky enough to experience Arunachal as it is today. It is also for the birdwatcher. A book like this helps clear the misconceptions that still abound of the northeast—as an unwelcoming, insurgent-infested region, where the beauty of a bird is restricted to its flavour! For this book captures, the very spirit of Arunachal, which, to use Antonia’s metaphor for solo travel, “is like a drug—it has its risks, but it also has the potential to unlock rare feelings of euphoria.”

—PIA SETHI
October 2020

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Vocal for Local
Support local businesses in the communities you’re visiting to help develop the micro economy. Make sustainable choices along your journey, which are often rooted in traditional practices.

DON’T!
- Feed wildlife
- Chase wildlife
- Pet wildlife
- Bring single-use plastics
- Leave anything behind
- Cuddle the animals
- Be loud

Ethical Destinations
Be well-researched in your choice of destination to make sure that you’re not participating in anything that’s harmful to the native habitat.

Call of the Wild
Leaving a place better than you found it is where it’s at for wildlife travellers

Zero-Waste Camping
Minimise non-biodegradable waste, and carry your own bag or box to collect trash. It might also be helpful to have a separate composting bin. Remember the 5R's!

Make a difference
Contact local NGOs or wildlife protection organisations to see how you can help the ecosystem thrive. Donate your time, money and resources to ethical causes.

Wildlife Photography Tips & Tricks

1. Make sure you have the right equipment for the kind of wildlife you’re hoping to capture. As a general rule of thumb, SLRs and mirrorless cameras which can be set manually and even accept different types of lenses are ideal. You must have a good telephoto lens, along with a basic wide lens, and a sturdy tripod. Shoot on manual!

2. Be well researched about your chosen habitat and the animal behaviour native to it. The fewer surprises you have, the better the odds of a great shot.

3. Dress for the occasion. No, put your faux leather back, we mean be prepared for harsh weather conditions—sun, rain, snow, all of it. Carry dry foods and a reusable water bottle. A vest with lots of pockets comes handy to store batteries, lenses, cameras, memory cards, clothes, and a first-aid kit.

4. Do. Not. Move. Patience is a virtue for a reason, and here is where you put it to test. Stay absolutely still, and very quiet so that you don’t spook the animals.

5. Practice, practice, and practice some more!

Compiled by LABANYA MAITRA
White as pearl and full of radiance, that is the Taj we’ve always known and loved. Displayed endlessly on travel brochures, and one of the most instantly recognised silhouettes in the world, the fame of India’s crown rests not only on its architectural beauty but also in its romantic associations. But we’ve come a long way since. In an era where a potential match is just a swipe away, the millennial resistance to such a long-term commitment is understandable, if not justified. But it is not only the Gen-Z mindset that has evolved over the years, but also the Taj brandscape. It has appeared in countless advertisements in recent years, having carved a niche for itself. Interestingly, the Taj even went on to define the Indian way of having chai. While brands were keen to pounce on the legacy of the Taj, our good ol’ Bollywood found a way to immortalise this epitome of love on celluloid. The eponymous 1963 film harks back to the golden era of the industry.

Now, that the mausoleum is finally reopening after more than six months, we can’t help but reminisce about the journey from Ah Taj! to Woh Taj.

—ROSHNI SUBRAMANIAN
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