Meet the GM
Suman Nanaiah

Book Review
Every Creature Has a Story

Time Traveller
The Maharaja of Air India

Around the Block
Hazratganj

Embrace Nirvana
At Ganpatipule

Yoga Through the Ages

New Faces in Old Places: Hampi

Roadtrip Across the Different States

Undhiyu Recipe from Gujarat

Just a Little Further to Taktsang

Our Man in Europe, Nitin Chaudhary

India's No.1 Travel Magazine

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“Life is either a daring adventure, or nothing at all.”
– Helen Keller

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Cover photograph: SHUTTERSTOCK

Don’t miss the ukadiche modaks at Mehendale’s Swaad Dining 36
Long-haul holidays

W ho would have thought it but it looks like proper holidays are making a slow but steady comeback. Sooner than expected. Trends indicate that more and more families are hitting the road, heading out to a favourite cottage in the hills or exploring an entire state on a single trip, with a marked preference for scenic settings which offer easy seclusion and social distancing. And it’s likely to stay this way for a while.

Work From Home has basically become Work From Anywhere. And the kids can log into their online classes from anywhere too. Our cover story this issue explores the phenomenon and we’ve lined up some nice suggestions from across the country for you. Reminds me of the sort of holidays at least we used to take in my childhood, long group tours or vacations to the home town (nami ke ghar) which could last an entire summer.

All you foreign junkies who like to sail (or fly) across the seven seas, let’s take this as an opportunity to explore India properly. There’s a breathtaking variety of destinations and experiences here. And they need our support right now. In fact, the next wave of tourism is likely to be regenerative, not just sustainable.

In other words, you leave a destination in better shape than you found it.

My photograph accompanying this issue’s letter is from a trip to Ranthambhore last winter. There was a delicious nip in the air, and the sun shone bright in a way it seldom does on a cold winter’s day. There was music in the air (this was at the Ranthambhore Music Festival). How I miss those trips now, especially large gatherings of people, pressed into close proximity. Wonder when we can have our festivals back. And crowded streets with buskers. And food shack queues. And hugs. And handshakes. Fingers crossed...
#OTHallOffFrame
We scoured through our feed, brimming with all kinds of gems, to bring you the rarest of our finds.

Gazing at the golden spotlight as a single ray of sun emerges from behind the clouds

"Exuberant, vivid and bewitching. The cultural heritage here will leave you with a lifelong experience of pure divinity."
@siwijit1986

The man who knows Jaipur in and out

The tribal tales from the Amazon rainforest

Reminiscing the good ol’ days
I subscribed to OT for the first time when I was in school. But back then I couldn’t travel as much. So, I travelled through your magazine. Over the years many other travel magazines came but I eventually stopped reading. Recently, I rediscovered all these magazines on the Jio App but the one I specifically looked for was OT. The articles are still as good. The layout is still as amazing. Till now, I’ve just read your editorial section, but I already love it. Thank you for keeping the magazine going.
MEHSHIA CHOWDHARY, VADODARA

POLL TO PICTURE
So many travellers, so many travel styles. Here’s what you picked!

- SOUL FOOD
- FIRE DRINK
- ADVENTURE
- ESCAPE
- DELAYS
- STOPOVER
- NECK REST
- HEADPHONES
- RAINFALL
- SNOWFALL

Letter of the Month

Exploring Hidden Treasures

The travelogue on Puducherry authored by Ms Sohini Basu was a superb piece. I savoured every word of it thoroughly.
@MahajanPaul

Unseen and beautiful paradises are finally being discovered. One only needs an eye to appreciate it.

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Dishya boasts 47 Ecotour properties with about 300 accommodations (cottages, tents, treehouses, etc) across its length and breadth, in diverse ecosystems such as beaches, forests and protected areas, hill stations, tribal hinterlands, riverbanks and wetlands. Of the state’s total population, around 83 per cent resides in rural and other non-urban areas. Their role in conserving the natural ecosystems and resources is undoubtedly pivotal.

In 2016, Odisha’s Forest & Environment Department initiated its ‘Community Managed Nature Tourism’ model with the local community as prime stakeholders. Today, over 600 trained community members are directly engaged in hosting and serving visitors with unmatched simplicity and supreme quality. The project has emerged as a sustainable income generator for local communities whose lives earlier were heavily dependent on forest resources like honey, firewood, etc. In addition to those who are directly employed in the camps, five to six villages around each property now earn their livelihoods indirectly by providing daily requirements to the units by selling vegetables, handmade articles, milk, transport facilities, etc. Prominent units in Similipal and Satkosia Tiger Reserves have excelled, generating revenues of over ₹1 crore by hosting over 4,000 visitors per year. This initiative has won several awards, the most recent being India’s Best Ecotourism Initiative at FICCI’s Travel & Tourism Awards 2019. Tourists can pick their choice—those desiring to simply retreat to nature’s nest can opt for frugal retreats, while explorers with a zest for adventure may go and experience the rich nature camps. If the beach is beckoning you, choose to camp literally a few steps away from the waves at Bichitrapur, Habalikhati, Nuanai or Rajhans and Berhampura Nature Camps. If mystic highs are your calling, reach for Kandhamal’s uncharted beauty in Daringbadi, Mandasani’s Silent Valley and Phulbani or strap up your trekking gear for Saptasajya. Odisha’s waterfalls and cascades are amongst its most serendipitous surprises; visitors can book stays at Sanaghagara, Khandadhar and Barehipani. Serious wildlife buffs and shutterbugs can opt for Mangalajodi in Chilika, Ramtirtha/ Jamau/ Kumari in Similipal, Tikarpada/ Chhodrai in Satkosia, Debrigarh or Dangamala/ Gupti in Bhitarkanika National Park.

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With tariffs ranging from just over ₹2,000 for a double-bedded accommodation to ₹5,000 for a 10-bedded dormitory a night, Ecotour Odisha offers max experience at min costs. Hygienic and wholesome meals are included in the package. Tourists can enjoy their share of leisure with abandon, through a host of activities such as cycling, birding, jungle trails, boating, outdoor games or stepping to the beats with locals by the bonfire. Stays and other services can be booked through their sites odishatourism.gov.in or ecotourodisha.com.

With the focus on the future, Department of Tourism and Department of Forest & Environment has jointly initiated a training course for Ecotour Odisha staff in COVID-19 risk control and mitigation in collaboration with IHM and IITTM. The ecotourism community members are being trained on-site in 10-day batches, which are inter alia imparting soft and technical skills which will help up the experience quotient.

For those looking for a sabbatical to unwind, it’s a great idea to hit the beautiful roads that connect Odisha’s beautiful landscapes. At a time when the tourism and hospitality sector, reeling from the pandemic’s hit, is looking to spring back, Ecotour Odisha offers a vacation with a cause.
If you’re looking for the silver lining to this pandemic, it’s what the millennials have been saying all along—YOLO. We’re not about to spell that out for you, but here’s what we will spell out: 20,000 kilometres, 70 days, 18 countries, two continents, one bus ride. Sounds ludicrous? Not anymore. This reverse Hippie Trail (it does come back that route, though) is quite the Eat, Pray, Love journey. You will eat the cake and have it too in the lap of luxury, ricketing (probably not) through the Silk Route in 4 and 5 star hotels. You will pray to the ‘Old Gods and the New’ for your Central Asian escapade. And you’ll love the fact that although you’re 15 lakh poorer, you’re a European experience-of-a-lifetime richer.

20 lucky wanderers will undertake this land voyage in May 2021. The company, Adventures Overland, will offer four packages to choose from. You can Hop On-Hop Off through Southeast Asia to China, through Central Asia to Russia, and through Europe to London, individually. Or you can go all the way, taking in the sights, sounds and everything in between.

Visas, hotels, meals, guides, tours, permits, are all taken care of by the company, but it’s going to be BYOB: buy your own booze! Can’t have it all now, can we?

* Individual legs will be priced accordingly, and 5 per cent GST will be added to all costs
* bustolondon.in
on trend: Goat Yoga

A wildly popular trend circa 2017, goat yoga is quite the fun-filled, furry-footed venture. Yoga practitioners from various levels get downward and dirty with baby goats hop-skipping and jumping all over them. Re-upped by its feature on Netflix’s Indian Matchmaking, it’s the one form of yoga where it’s totally acceptable to be stuck in child’s pose while snuggling a fuzzy goatling. Don’t know about you but we certainly don’t mind holding a plank if there’s a baby goat hopping around our backs!

Word to the Wise

“During the changing season as the temperature drops suddenly, our immunity takes a hit too. To stay safe follow these simple eating rules:

1. Give the digestive system a break and avoid processed foods, too much meat, and go gluten-free.
2. Have lots of fruits and vegetables to score enough fibre and antioxidants to proactively boost immunity.”

Kavita Devgan is a renowned nutritionist, columnist, author and speaker on health and lifestyle. Grab her latest book Fix it with Food to learn more about eating simpler, and living longer.

Vrikshasana: the Tree Pose

Perhaps one of the most common asanas, Vrikshasana has a number of benefits in store for practitioners. It stretches the legs back and arms, while improving balance and concentration. The tree pose has allegedly also helped alleviate certain cases of sciatica. Practice caution while doing this pose if you suffer from migraines, insomnia, low or high blood pressure. Always consult your doctor before trying any new form of exercise.

How to do Vrikshasana

1. Stand tall with your back straight and arms by your side
2. Bend one knee at a time and place your foot flat in the inner thigh of the opposite leg
3. Once you find your balance, bring your hands to a namaste
4. Straighten your body and spine, and relax your muscles as you take deep breaths in and out
5. You can slowly raise your arms straight above your head while maintaining the namaste
6. Slowly bring your arms back to your side and your foot back on the ground
7. Repeat with the other leg

Land of Yogsis

The practice of yoga has evolved and morphed into a host of different forms across the world; some intriguing, some not. But yoga in India is different—it’s organic, and has as much to do with spirituality as physical exercise. Let’s take a look at the six basic forms of yoga in the country.

Hatha

This form aims to relax your body and mind with physical asanas and breathing exercises like pranayama. Hatha yoga is the most common type of yoga and is perfect for beginners.

Vinyasa

This form focuses on rapid and continuous movements flowing from one posture to the next. Synchronised breathing is an important aspect of Vinyasa.

Kundalini

Kundalini is said to awaken the energy at the base of the spine and bring it through the seven chakras with postures, breathing, chanting mantras and meditation.

HataHa

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**Lucknow’s Epicentre**

Hazratganj

Nawabi and British style of architecture join hands with nostalgia to bring you all things vintage.

A casual stroll around the market here is colloquially called *ganjing*.

**Royal Café**

With a legacy of 40 years, it’s known for its delectable street food.

- **£800 for two**
- Do not miss out on their signature Basket Chaat.

**Burmă Biscuit Company**

The bakery-cum-patisserie has been in business since 1944 with a loyal patronage.

- **£100 for two**
- Try their iconic cakes and muffins.

**Saujanya**

The bakery-cum-café has been in business since 1944 with a loyal patronage.

- **£100 for two**
- Try their signature basket chaat.

**J800 for two**

- Do not miss out on their signature basket chaat.

**Hazratganj Metro Station**

Hazratganj is Lucknow’s epicentre.

**GCH**

Authentic Kashmiri handicrafts from Khadi silk saris to organic skincare products, everything under one roof.

**Mayfair Building**

A former theatre, ballroom and restaurant for the British since 1932.

**Mayfair Bookshop**

An iconic bookshop.

**Sahu Cinema**

A single-screen theatre since 1932.

**General Post Office**

A Gothic-style building, formerly used for screening English films and dramas.

**Universal Bookshop**

A fourth-generation bookshop with an 80-year legacy.

**JJ Bakers**

Cakes and speciality breads.

**Moti Mahal**

A mall and hotel.

**Chowdhury Sweet House**

Iconic ice creams.

**BAJPAIYEE KACHODI BHANDAR**

Legendary breakfast joint.

**The Cherry Tree Café**

Cheesecakes, grandma’s tea cakes and choco-chip cookies.

**It’s almost a steal**

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**Kashmir Govt Arts Emporium**

Authentic Kashmiri handicrafts.

**Naaz Rana Chikan**

Chikan kurtas for a good deal.

**Love Lane**

Haggle for a good deal.

**Retail Therapy**

Explore the market post sundown for an unparalleled experience.

Keep an eye out for brick and mortar shops, selling second-hand books and unique stationary items.

Explore the market post sundown for an unparalleled experience.

Eat the world

From sweet to savoury, what’s your pick?

- **COOPERATIVE INDIAN COFFEE HOUSE**
  Old-school coffee shop in Lucknow.

- **JJ BAKERS**
  Cakes and speciality breads.

- **CHOWDHURY SWEET HOUSE**
  Iconic ice creams.

- **Saujanya**
  The bakery-cum-café.

- **BAJPAIYEE KACHODI BHANDAR**
  Legendary breakfast joint.
This summer has been an exceptional one in Scandinavia. On most days, temperature soared in the high twenties, the sun beamed unrestrained from any passing clouds, and the blue waters of the Baltic Sea shimmered underneath. On days like these, Danes, declared the happiest people in the world, pour out on the Strøget, the city’s pedestrian street.

Last week, on one such sunny afternoon, I decided to take a stroll on the Strøget. Denmark had just recently allowed people from southern Sweden in, and I didn’t want to let go of the opportunity to visit one of my favourite cities in the world.

Strøget runs from the town centre Rådhuspladsen through the shopping thoroughfare of Copenhagen to Nyhavn. Nyhavn is perhaps the most recognisable neighbourhood in all of Denmark. It is marked by old pastel-coloured buildings and a waterfront, where Danes and tourists sit in open-air cafés eating smørrebrød sandwiches.

To yet another favourite spot of mine in Copenhagen—Tivoli.

To the outsiders, Tivoli may seem like just another amusement park. To the locals, it means much more. Tivoli threw its gates open in 1841, when a Dane, Georg Carstensen, inspired by all the amusement parks that he had seen abroad, sought the Danish king’s permission to open one in Copenhagen. Such was its success that even Walt Disney took inspiration from Tivoli and tried to replicate Tivoli’s mood and atmosphere for his parks.

In normal times, I would have taken a few rides, and relished the artificially generated thrill. But today I decided to stay on the ground and watch others hop into their rides. On the bench where I sat, next to me sat a man eating ice cream. He was perhaps in his late fifties. He saw me observing him, and smiled back.

“I have been doing this for the past 40 years,” he said. “Eating ice cream here every summer.” Not everyone comes to Tivoli to take the rides. I decided to give him company and got myself an ice cream as well. There we sat, a safe two metres apart, eating ice creams at Tivoli on this warm, sunny afternoon.

Above us, the carousel twirled, and the kids in it hollered in euphoria.
BEYOND THE TEMPLE RUN

A melange of all things young and old, Tamil Nadu’s extensive platter meets every kind of traveller’s needs, often leaving you spoilt for choice.
Heritage, nature or wildlife.
What’s your pick? Occupying the bottom stretch of the Coromandel Coast, Tamil Nadu sits comfortably in the lap of nature. Supremely rich in culture and heritage, it is home to the ancient Chola Dynasty, the state has a wealth of temple architecture. A social-distancing friendly destination, especially in the hill stations, the towering mountains and charming landscape offer countless reasons as to why this southern gem should be your next vacation destination post the pandemic.

STEP BACK IN TIME
The rich history of Tamil Nadu has resulted in many notable sights across the state. Its diversity is best exemplified in the plethora of religious sites including a number of churches, mosques and even Buddhist monasteries.

The Chola dynasty that ruled the region till the 13th century is credited with the most outstanding temples that showcase the grandeur of the bygone era. During their reign of nearly 1,500 years, the Chola temples became the hub of economic, political and cultural activities. Head to the Great Living Chola Temples, a Unesco World Heritage Site, to witness their architectural brilliance. The site includes three great temples—the Brihadeeswarar Temple at Thanjavur, the Airavatesvara Temple at Darasuram and the Gangaikonda Cholapuram Temple at Jayankondam.

Located at the confluence of three seas, Kanyakumari’s tranquil aura is contrasted by the roaring tides of the sea

Many of the heritage buildings like the Chettinad mansions have now been converted into heritage hotels. Their unique architecture, peaceful ambience and delectable cuisine are great tourist attractions.

The Group of Monuments at Mahabalipuram, another Unesco World Heritage Site, is a collection of monolithic monuments built by the Pallava kings in the 7th and 8th centuries. The rock sculptures are inspired by tales from Mahabharata and are a sight to behold. Some of the prominent ones are Arjuna’s Penance, Pancha Rathas,
Situated in the Nilgiri Mountains, the little town of Ooty served as a getaway for the British in the pre-independence era.

Varaha Mandapam, Mahisha suramartini Mandapa etc. Located in the heart of Madura, the Meenakshi Temple. Built in 6th century BC. Is one of the most iconic attractions down south. Madurai situated on the banks of River Vaigai, has a rich cultural heritage passed on from the great Tamil Sangam era which is more than 2500 years old. It was the capital city of Pandya Kings. Meenakshi Temple is dedicated to Parvathi or Meenakshi – the consort of Lord Shiva. It is a splendid example of Dravidian Architecture. The temple has doors in all four directions for devotees to enter. However, it’s the Koodal Azhagar Temple here that is believed to be older than the Meenakshi Temple. Dedicated to Lord Vishnu, one can spot the three varied statues in different postures—standing, sitting and reclining.

ALONG THE COAST
With the Indian Ocean in the south and the Bay of Bengal in the east, this Tamil Nadu is the perfect destination for a beach holiday. Each beach has its own charm with resorts and tiny cafes serving delicacies as you gaze into that picture-perfect sunset. Apart from the monolithic structures, the sandy beach of Mahabalipuram also attracts hordes of tourists from all over the world. If you love swimming and windsurfing then this is the ideal spot for you. The Mahabalipuram Dance Festival held during winters every year is another reason to hit this beach town. The southernmost tip of the Indian mainland, Kanyakumari is located at the confluence of the Bay of Bengal, the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea. Its tranquil aura is contrasted by the roaring tides of the sea, making it the perfect getaway for those who prefer the solitude of a less-touristy beach. The sight of the waves striking the rocks makes for an alluring visual. While in Kanyakumari, you can pay your respects to goddess Kanya Kumari at the 3,000-year-old Kumari Amman Temple. Visit the
Padmanabhapuram Palace and the century-old lighthouse. A memorial dedicated to Swami Vivekananda, 500 meters from the main land, accessible by a ferry service and gigantic 40 meters high statue of Thiruvalluvar, a great poet – saint are major attractions.

If you’re looking to get away from the bustle of city life, then you surely need a holiday to the ‘lost town’ of Dhanushkodi at the southernmost end of Rameshwaram. Surrounded by the Bay of Bengal on one side and Indian Ocean on the other, Dhanushkodi Beach offers a chance to encounter the thrills of sea surfing. With every beach extraordinary in its own sense, it is a sweet addition to your Tamil Nadu vacation.

ENCOUNTER NATURE’S BOUNTY

There’s no doubt that Tamil Nadu is a nature lover’s paradise. With its quaint hill stations, including the likes of Ooty, Kodaikanal, Coonoor, Yelagiri and many more situated in the Western Ghats, it offers ample scope for eco-tourism. Known as the ‘Queen of Hills’, Ooty or Udhagamandalam is one of the most popular hill stations in the region. Situated in the Nilgiri Mountains, this little town served as a gateway for the British in the pre-independent era. A boat ride at Ooty Lake can be very refreshing. If a heritage ride is on your mind, then the Nilgiri Mountain Railway is just the one for you. Declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2005, it was first built by the British in 1908. The train runs from Mettupalayam to Udagamandalam via Coonoor. As the train chugs over bridges, be prepared to be awed by the vistas of mountains, valleys and tea plantations along the way.

The journey to upper Bhavani Lake located within the deep jungles is worthwhile and if you are lucky you might even spot wild cats and peacocks. You can spend the night at the forest boat house near Pykara Lake. The highest point in the Nilgiri Mountains, the Doddabetta Peak in Ooty is a real treat to the eyes, offering a breathtaking view of the city’s skyline.

Kodaikanal, nestled in the Palani Hills is perfect for those looking for something a bit more offbeat and away from the typical touristy crowd. Be it a boat ride along the star-shaped Kodaikanal Lake or capturing the ethereal beauty from the Pillar Rocks, where three vertical granite boulders play hide and seek with mists, this resort town creates the ideal setting for you to connect with nature.

Apart from its manicured cliffs and rolling slopes, the charming hill station is known for its mesmeric cascading waterfalls. The Bear Shola Falls and Vattakanal Falls are both sights to behold especially during the monsoons.

ENDOWED WITH ABUNDANCE OF NATURAL WEALTH

With as many as 15 wildlife and bird sanctuaries, five national parks and four tiger reserves, the sheer number of flora and fauna is incentive enough for travellers to visit the state.

Mudumalai National Park is a must-visit on a first timer’s itinerary. Established in 1940, it is an integral part of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve. Home to many endangered species like the royal Bengal tiger and the Asiatic wild dog, reports suggest that nearly 13 per cent of the mammal species in India can be found in Mudumalai. Bird watchers are in for a ride as one can spot the crested serpent eagle and the tiny-eared owl.

Catch a glimpse of the wild cats at the Anamalai Tiger Reserve. Situated in the Anamalai Hills of Coimbatore, the reserve is home to not only tigers but many other species such as spotted deer and panthers. A biodiversity hotspot in its truest sense, you can find more than 250 species of birds here.

Offering a real insight into urban wilderness, the Guindy National Park in Chennai serves as the humble abode of a large number of migratory birds, reptiles, blackbucks, jackals, pangolins and Indian civets among many others. For the adventure lovers, Mukurthi National Park in the Nilgiri Hills has some of the most beautiful trekking routes up its sleeve.

KODAIKANAL

Clockwise from here: the endangered Nilgiri tahr; ride the Nilgiri Mountain Railway; the ancient Brihadiswarar Temple; and Vedanthangal, one of the oldest bird sanctuaries in India.

Encounter Nature’s Bounty

There’s no doubt that Tamil Nadu is a nature lover’s paradise. With its quaint hill stations, including the likes of Ooty, Kodaikanal, Coonoor, Yelagiri and many more situated in the Western Ghats, it offers ample scope for eco-tourism. Known as the ‘Queen of Hills’, Ooty or Udhagamandalam is one of the most popular hill stations in the region. Situated in the Nilgiri Mountains, this little town served as a gateway for the British in the pre-independent era. A boat ride at Ooty Lake can be very refreshing. If a heritage ride is on your mind, then the Nilgiri Mountain Railway is just the one for you. Declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2005, it was first built by the British in 1908. The train runs from Mettupalayam to Udagamandalam via Coonoor. As the train chugs over bridges, be prepared to be awed by the vistas of mountains, valleys and tea plantations along the way.

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Padmasambhava, or Guru Rinpoche, is said to have meditated in about 13 small monasteries in the 8th century. He meditated for four months at the Taktsang Monastery, one of the 13 'tiger lairs', before vanquishing local demons in Paro. He is credited with the introduction of Buddhism in Bhutan.
Uttarakhand

The state boasts of some of the most spectacular driving routes through the Himalayas.

Exercise extreme patience while out in the wild

The 95-kilometre drive from Nainital to Binsar through the gorgeous Himalayas is as breathtaking as it can get. The serene route offers an unparalleled view of gorges, waterfalls, and sublime natural vistas. Escape into the Himalayan wildlife en route at the Binsar Wildlife Sanctuary in the remote, mighty mountains. An integral part of the Kumaon region, it boasts of 200 species of flora and fauna. Further along the treacherous valleys is the undiscovered, hauntingly beautiful, drive from Binsar to Pangot. Stop for a layover at Pangot’s Kilbury Bird Sanctuary to spot innumerable rare migratory birds. The town’s vast, lush expanse also includes several hiking trails and some beautiful rapids and streams. Drive through the terrain for about two hours to Ramnagar and treat your senses to an ethereal, natural escape at the Kaladhungi Waterfalls and the Jim Corbett wildlife circuit.

* Nainital is known as the lake district of India and the famous Naini Lake is surrounded by legends and myths.
**Odisha**

The land of beaches and temples, Odisha is a treasure hidden in plain sight.

BE MINDFUL OF THE RELIGIOUS SENTIMENTS AT THE TEMPLES

Embark on a journey and encounter India’s bygone era at the Udayagiri and Khandagiri Caves. These caves uncover India’s ancient secrets in the form of carvings of royal scenes and hunting parties from Ashoka’s reign. Drive further south and find yourself in the biggest salt water lagoon in Asia—Lake Chilika. You may even spot a dolphin during the sunset boat ride. The next leg of the leisure drive brings you to Puri. A soulful dip in the Bay of Bengal is sure to wipe away the city conundrum. Stroll through the town to sample some authentic and delectable Odia food. A drive along the shoreline will take you to Konark, where a guided tour of the Sun Temple is a must. Make sure to stop at the Olive Ridley Sea Turtle Reserve on the way. Drive to Bhitarkanika National Park, a RAMSAR site for its wetlands, and catch a glimpse of salt water crocodiles and rhesus monkeys.

- Visit the Jagannath Temple during dawn to get a crowd-free experience.

**Uttar Pradesh**

From the ghosts of Varanasi to the marble splendour of Taj Mahal, this drive is a delight.

NOV-FEB IS THE IDEAL TIME TO VISIT

Saffron-hued skies, echoing chants and loquacious priests. Kickstart your journey at Varanasi, and let the effervescent Ganga aarti take over your senses. Situated at the Triveni Sangam—the junction of Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati—is Prayagraj. Lined with Hindu temples, travellers often find spiritual solace at the Triveni Ghat. Situated on the banks of the Yamuna is the Prayagraj Fort, which is believed to have given the city its former name, Allahabad. To tantalize your taste buds drive further to the land of the Awadhi Nawabs—Lucknow. Separated by the majestic Rumi Darwaza, the old city of Lucknow still retains its nawabi charm. Whether you decide to gorge on the Awadhi biryani or Rahim’s kulcha-nihari, the feast will be overloaded with secrets from the royal kitchens. Transition from the Awadhi to the Mughal legacy, with a short drive to Agra and end your journey at the lovely Taj.

- Uttar Pradesh has birthed many literary legends, such as Kabir Das, Tulsidas and Premchand

**Rajasthan**

Drive through the land of kings and witness their fortified grandeur.

BEST TIME TO VISIT RAJASTHAN IS WINTERS

A 13-kilometre drive from the Pink City to the majestic Amer fort for an evening of cultural rendition of history and folk legends is a sublime way to kickstart your Rajasthan trip. If you fancy yourself an unconventional traveller, then head to Shekhawati, a major ancient caravan trade route. People often find themselves lost in the royal musings within the havelis that are filled with elaborate frescos, intricate jali carvings and legacies. Drive along to Pushkar—one of the oldest cities in India—to indulge in timeless architectural heritage, temple trails and mythology. Follow the next leg of the drive to Kumbhalgarh Fort and witness India’s very own great wall, built to ward off the invading Mughal armies. An alternate route to experience the magnificent desert state is beginning your journey from Churu, a gateway to the mighty Thar. Drive further along and find yourself in Bikaner, the city of dunes and gorgeous sunsets. Retreat while in Jaisalmer, where the fort awaits you with its countless secrets.

* Rajasthan’s capital city, Jaipur, was founded in 1727 by Jai Singh II, who was also the ruler of Amer.

**The Oscar-winning filmmaker Satyajit Ray shot his first children’s film, the iconic Sonar Kella, at the Jaisalmer Fort.**

**An hour’s drive from Varanasi is Bhadohi, a hub for handwoven rugs. This art form was brought to India by Iranian travellers.**

**Check the timings of the light and sound show at Amer Fort, as they may differ with the seasons.**

**Catch a glimpse of the intricate art installations at the Sudam Sand Art Museum while driving from Puri to Konark.**

**Visit the Jagannath Temple during dawn to get a crowd-free experience.**
Madhya Pradesh

Culture, history and wildlife thrive hand-in-hand here.

**OCT-MAR IS THE IDEAL TIME TO VISIT**

Get a wild start to your journey at the Bandhavgarh National Park with an open-jeep safari. Many might say you’re lucky if you spot a tiger, but we place our bets on the leopards and jackals. A 4-hour drive from here will take you to Bhedaghat, where myriad layers of spirituality and mythology unfold at the Chausath Yogini Temple dedicated to goddess Durga. For the intrepid traveller, the Dhuandhar Falls is also a sight to behold as the waters of the Narmada River cascade down from an altitude giving rise to a daunting mist. If your personal travel style edges towards serenity, a boat ride on the Narmada River is our pick. A further drive paves way for a Unesco Biosphere Reserve famed for its flora and fauna, Pachmarhi. Enter the last leg of your journey at Bhimbetka where the rock shelter cave paintings, a Unesco World Heritage Site, transport you 12,000 years back in time.

Bandhavgarh remains closed during the monsoons and reopens in October.

*The food preferences here change every few kilometres. Make sure to treat your taste buds to all local delicacies.*
Goa

Drive past the jaunty beach shacks to discover Goa like never before.

IDEAL TIME TO VISIT IS NOV-FEB

For those who equate Goa with booze and parties, beginning your drive the traditional way at Palolem is a promising start. With long stretches of powdery sand beaches flanked by coconut palms and beach huts, Palolem is synonymous with leisure. Leave the waves on a high and head to the Cabo de Rama fort. The view atop this forgotten gem transports you back to Goa’s yesteryears. Ride to Margao and get a taste of the local life. Further along north, find yourself amid architecturally abundant churches and cathedrals left behind by the Portuguese. Drive past them to reach Panjim and take a walk around this charming town. If walking is not your thing, take a cycling tour here and roam freely between the beaches, some more churches, and colourful streets. Re-energise and drive on to the charismatic Aguada fort. Sit on its fortifications before starting an exploratory trail of the beaches that lie ahead. Cover Candolim, Calangute, Baga, Anjuna, and Vagator one by one, and camp at your preferred one, each more astounding than the other.

> Visit the Noronha’s Corner Food Truck in Anjuna for a true Goan feast

Kerala

Serene beaches, perfectly-lined beach houses and calming long walks on the soft sand.

SEP-MAR IS THE IDEAL TIME TO VISIT

Begin the first leg of the drive at Varkala, where the crack of dawn feels otherworldly. A further drive along the charismatic shoreline up north will take you to Alappuzha. This lagoon-bound haven, famous for its backwaters, has often found global mentions for its serenity. Further along, enter the old, fort town of Kochi and quickly escape to its beaches, looking upon the azure sea, and its forgotten fortifications. Part ways with this historic town only to enter another in Kozhikode. From Kappad—believed to be where Vasco Da Gama first landed in India—to the busy Kozhikode beach, this renowned Malabar town has it all. Indulge in the mouth-watering, unique street delicacies before driving up north to Kasaragod. A gem hidden in plain sight, this is the northern-most tip of Kerala and home to the Bekal Fort. Located on the Bekal beach, this fort tells tales of its colonial past while teasing travellers with its untapped beauty.

> Make an extra pit-stop at Muzhappilangad, Kerala’s only drive-in beach in Kannur

> Travellers can also choose to spend a tranquil evening watching the fishermen community working on fishing nets from Alappuzha to Kochi.
And changes hues at sunset. Though the few beaches around Ganpatipule cannot be compared to the serene backwaters that Kerala offers, they still continue to remain one of the crown jewels of Maharashtra and one of the state's most famous images. Precisely the reason why this less-explored destination (I prefer to call it less explored because it almost never makes it to the list while planning a beach holiday, with more known options like Alibaug and Goa always vying for the top spot) deserves to be seen and experienced. In the current scenario, where international travel seems a long way off and exploring destinations closer home is the most plausible option, a getaway to this coastal town is ideal for someone craving for that one quick weekend escape.

Once used to transport coconuts and spices, this sleepy town is known for its flavorful cuisine and warm hospitality today. Dotting the Konkan coastline, nearly 25 kilometres from Ratnagiri and situated towards the southern end of Maharashtra, it has ample potential to grow into a major tourist magnet of sorts. For what it probably lacks in sophistication, it more than makes up for it in its spectacular white sand beaches, archaeological marvels and tropical climate. Taking a plunge in the warm waters here and enjoying a cocktail is simply the perfect antidote to a hot sultry afternoon.

To savour authentic coastal seafood, especially the day’s fresh catch, do not forget to dine at Sameer, considered the city’s best. Seafood lovers are in for a treat and can relish a variety of fish thalis served at the local eateries. Diners from all walks of life flock to these no-frills joints to savour the lip-smacking surmai (king fish) and prawn thali. **A gem hidden in plain sight, AMEYA BUNDELLU reveals all that Ganpatipule holds in its little lap of nature**

4 The virgin beach of Ganpatipule makes for a peaceful getaway

**Beach lover**
Oceanfront, white-sand beaches, and warm waters

**Ethnic touch**
Ancient temples, old forts, and natural beauty

**Coastal flavours**
Malvani seafood, aamras, and sumptuous modaks

PHOTOGRAPHS: SHUTTERSTOCK

*60
36
*
How tourists stumbled upon Ganpatipule, Maharashtrian and Gujarati families from Mumbai and Pune have frequently been visiting Ratnagiri, and especially Ganpatipule for over a few centuries for the famed Swayambhu Ganpati Temple, believed to be around 400 years old. Two beautiful idols of Lord Ganesha can be found here, one made out of white sand and the other made of bronze. With a hill in its immediate background that resembles Lord Ganesha, most visitors make it a point to circumambulate the hillock as a mark of respect to the deity.

Though the place hasn’t changed significantly over the years, it was only a matter of time until tourists started flocking the town for its dazzling beaches and the growing number of upscale hotels and homestays. I checked into the eco-chic Blue Ocean Resort & Spa. With rooms that boast of contemporary decor and elegant artworks that adorn the walls, the beach-front villas and sea views could stop the most world-weary traveller in their tracks. Set in lush greenery opposite the crescent-shaped Malgund Beach, across Arrey Warrey Road and against the backdrop of coconut palms, the property has an idyllic setting. Enjoy the fine spa or laze around the pool side, basking in the shade. A few old traditional houses of Ganpatipule have also been converted into homestays including a number of charming waterfront cottages.

Travellers with modest budgets have long flocked here. However, Ganpatipule over the last few years has also caught the eye of vacationers with deep pockets. And while it may now seem like a versatile slice of holiday heaven with luxury villas, wellness retreats and laidback homestays, what stands out is the fact that it has still managed to retain its original ethnic and cultural vibe.

The beach town of Velneshwar is approx. 40kms away from Ganpatipule. The crescent-shaped beach with a shrine to Lord Shiva is worth visiting.

Nearest Airport: Mumbai (317kms, 10 hours to Malgund)
Drive From Mumbai to Ganpatipule; halt at Chiplun for its sandy beaches, mangroves and cashew plantations

What to eat
Alphonso mangoes of the Devgad variety, cashew nuts, kokum sherbet and local mango pickle

Traditional fish thali includes the fresh catch of the day (pomfret or mackerel—fried or made into a spicy curry), multigrain bhakri, sol kadi and rice
Wholesome Maharashtrian vegetarian thali comprises of puri, aamras (seasonal), kokum curry and steamed modaks
From its cities to its small towns and villages, Bihar is a treasure trove for travellers, who find themselves hit with a wave of euphoria here.

Monks paying respect to the place of enlightenment of the Buddha in Bodh Gaya.
Located to the east of the country, Bihar is one of the most exciting and alluring destinations with a tranquil aura to it. The culture and ancient sites here tell tales of the state, which come alive on its busy streets. Renowned for its fascinating festivals of colours and deep-rooted customs and values, this state is a treat that has been hiding in plain sight. Bihar’s long and rich history dates back centuries—the former kingdom of Magadh and home to multiple dynasties, like the Mauryas and the Guptas. To ensure the safety of travellers, the state government has also issued stringent precautionary measures. Step foot into blissful Bihar and wonder why it is often overlooked.

On a Spiritual Trail
The antiquity of this ancient land where India’s first major empires rose and fell is evident from its name, derived from the ancient word ‘Vihara’. Located about 90kms southeast of the capital Patna, is Rajgir. Originally known as Rajagriha—translating to home of the king—it was initially the ancient capital of the city of Magadh. It was in Rajgir that Gautam Buddha spent several months meditating and preaching, and Lord Mahavira spent 14 years of his life at a single place during four monsoon months. Home to rock-cut caves, forts, Buddhist ruins, shell inscriptions, Hindu and Jain temples, and Muslim tombs, it speaks the language of the soul of Bihar.

Further along in the Nalanda district, Bihar’s capital Patna—formerly Patliputra—is one of the oldest continuously inhabited places, not only in India but the world.
is one of the greatest centres of learning in ancient times. This small village in the Buddhist circuit is as serene as ancient times. The ruins of Nalanda University, constructed in the Kushana style of architecture, can also be found here. It is in Nalanda that the pristine, marbled Vishwa Shanti Stupa, or the World Peace Pagoda, atop the Ratnagiri Hill resides. Although the climb uphill may seem daunting, the views continue to amaze travellers from all walks of life. The four golden Buddha statues—depicting his birth, enlightenment, preaching and death—are flocked by the followers of Buddhism and Jainism alike. Additionally, there is also a ropeway that can take travellers uphill. This pilgrimage trail also leads one to Bodh Gaya. Dotted with temples and monasteries, this 2,500-year-old birthplace of Buddhism lets you retrace the footsteps of Lord Buddha and his path to nirvana. Soaked in saffron and maroon robes, the chants and prayers of the monks here build a cocoon of peace. The Heritage Arch Toss the two-headed coin and heritage is bound to follow history. Bihar is believed to be the only state with a history of over 3,000 years and rightly so. The presence of numerous ancient architectural relics represents the rich heritage of the state. Forts, caves, and tombs are regular topographical features here with occasional heaps of forgotten ruins. History rings loud in each sight in Bihar and travellers must follow its sound. Bihar’s delightful and longstanding relationship with history and heritage can be found at Kumhrar, where the remains of the ancient Patliputra were excavated. Ancient ruins here, along with relics also include an 80-pillared assembly hall. The site is a testimony to the state’s cultural abundance. Patliputra boasts of a glorious path and the ruins at Kumhrar today bear testimony to the fact. Excavations over the years have been a delight for the lovers of archaeology. Move on to the religious town of Buxar, also known as Vishwamitra Nagari, along the banks of river Ganga. The most noteworthy sight is clearly the high standing Buxar Fort, one of the ancient testaments erected by King Rudra Deo in 1054 AD Further in Sasaram is an awe-worthy example of Indo-Islamic architecture at the tomb of Sher Shah Suri. The exquisite tomb is regarded as one of the noblest specimens of Afghan architecture in the country. The octagonal tomb, topped by a dome standing at the centre of a lake on a square stone plinth with domed kiosks, chhatris at each of its corners, with further stone banks, connected to the mainland through a wide stone bridge, is truly a work of wonder. The tomb of Hassan Shah and his son Salim Shah are some other architectural monuments of interest here. As serenely surprising as Bihar is, the oldest surviving rock-cut caves in the country, located in the twin hills of Barabar and Nagarjuni Hills, are an
Although the state speaks multiple languages depicting varied linguistic cultures, Bhojpuri is leading amid them.

Situated in the town of Rajnagar near Madhubani, is the Navlakha palace. Built in the 17th century AD by Maharaja Rameshwar Singh of Darbhanga, the palace neighbours the Kama River that hosts a marble temple of goddess Kali. Another temple of goddess Durga forms an integral part of the palace and is still operational.

Moving on to Nalanda, the Jal Mandir—situated amid mountains, it is frequented by the young and old alike. It is believed that the horses of the kings of Rajgir used to drink water here. What also makes this escape unique is the fact that fuelled vehicles are not allowed here, engulfing visitors with an air of tranquility.

Birds have a different habitat altogether in the state at the Kanwar Lake Bird Sanctuary. One of the greenest parts in the region, it was established in 1987 to ensure the preservation of migratory birds. The Kanwar Lake is known to be the largest freshwater oxbow lake in Asia.

Wildlife Sanctuary, also known as the Ragir Wildife Sanctuary, in Nalanda. With various illustrations and auspicious existence of hammocks from the Buddha and Jain era, this sanctuary is spread across 36 sq km and has some history in itself. Enriched with dense tropical forest on the hills, the sanctuary hosts the likes of wild boars, nilgais, langurs, and pythons alongside species of large mammals, birds and reptiles, many of which are endangered.

For those looking to escape the city, Ghora Katora, a lush, nature-bound water reservoir near Ragir is a serene escape. Situated amid mountains, it is frequented by the young and old alike. It is believed that the horses of the kings of Rajgir used to drink water here. What also makes this escape unique is the fact that fuelled vehicles are not allowed here, engulfing visitors with an air of tranquility.

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The Mithila culture gained prominence as early as the Vedic period and is one of the oldest in the country.

Art and Culture

Bihar is as rich in culture, as it is in history and spirituality. Present in the region is the history of music including classical Hindustani and folk, along with dance forms such as Kathak and Khajur. Culture in Bihar is a celebration of a region and is the history of music including classical Hindustani and folk, along with dance forms such as Kathak and Khajur. Culture in Bihar is a celebration of a region. Delving into the world of art are Madhubani paintings, the most precious gift presented by the Mithila culture to the world. The Mithila culture of the Mithilans speaks gives the true essence of cultural richness. Noted to wear a ‘paag’ as a symbol of honour and respect and a significant part of the culture, these people love their art. With initial references in the Hindu epic of Ramayana, the cultural significance of Madhubani paintings is beyond doubt one of the most pristine ones in the country. The paintings illustrated the hopes, thoughts, and dreams of the women who later began making them. Traditionally made on the base of plastered mud walls, they were later replaced by handmade paper, cloth, and canvas. Often characterised by complex geometrical patterns, these paintings are exemplary sights of Bihar’s cultural history that one must explore.
Happiness is found in the unlikeliest of places, and sometimes it’s found within. The ruins of Hampi were a catalyst to this introspection. Text and photographs by RANGEET GHOSH
I will never forget Kosuke. I met him on my wanderings through the capital of the old Vijayanagara empire—Hampi. Conquered, pillaged and destroyed, Hampi has stood the assaults of invading armies and time alike. Kosuke’s story was much the same. A Japanese man, he quit his high-paying job, divorced his wife, and left his children to come to India in the pursuit of happiness. Along the way, he lost an arm, gained a pacemaker, learnt Hindi, and traversed the country doing odd jobs and singing about Shiva. He did, however, find his happiness.

But Kosuke wasn’t the only person I met in Hampi. It was like a melting pot of cultures. Lungi-clad men and women with flowers in their hair; students and backpackers from different parts of the country, speaking in different accents of Hinglish; hashish-smoking hippies from all over the world; there was even a tiny community of Rajwada people, with their kurtas with dhoti and turbans, and long red ghagras with silver jewellery.

Don’t worry,” they said. “Be Hampi.” Zipping across the lonely roads on a rented scooter, meditating with sadhus, or marvelling at the architectural masterpieces of a civilisation long gone, Hampi was quite the celluloid dream. I spent my days exploring the temple complexes—from Vitthala to Virupaksha—or simply watching Laxmi, the resident elephant of the Virupaksha Temple taking a bath in the Tungabhadra River. I spent my nights down by the Sanapur Lake, gazing up at the starlit sky.
with the Beatles and Simon and Garfunkel to keep me company.

The place had a mystic aura about it, but I couldn’t exactly pinpoint what it was. Maybe it was the tales of the fabled Vanara Kingdom of Kishkinda, where the brothers Bali and Sugriva fought. Or maybe, it was the beautiful boulder-strewn landscape intercepted by bright green paddy fields. But there was something in the air of Hampi that liberated me of all my inhibitions and made me feel small, insignificant...and free.

Conquered, pillaged and destroyed, Hampi has stood the assaults of invading armies and time alike.
Zipping across the lonely roads on a rented scooter, meditating with sadhus, or marvelling at the architectural masterpieces of a civilisation long gone, Hampi was quite the celluloid dream.
On a trek in search of the hanging monastery,

TRINETRA PAUL
finds herself scaling a mountain, her fears, and getting a new perspective.

Standing in front of Punakha dzong
Its mighty white walls, intricate red-patterned roof, wood carvings, and the calmness that enveloped the entire atmosphere of the monastic fort complex, made time stand still. It was the penultimate day of my week-long adventure in Bhutan.

After a scenic four-hour drive to Paro, my guide Sherab Dorjee greeted us with a cheerful “Kuzu zangpo la.” Braving the chilly October winds, my friends and I set off for the base of the Taktsang trek. The aura and mystery that surrounded the Taktsang—or Tiger’s Nest—Monastery had me hooked on Sherab’s narrative. In his heavy Bhutanese accent, he explained the age-old saga of how Guru Padmasambhava flew to the site on the back of a tigress from Thimphu to meditate. The monastery has been dedicated to him ever since.

Hidden behind a wall of clouds at 11,000 feet above sea level, Taktsang complemented its legend.

Armed with bamboo sticks
We set out for the 12-kilometre uphill trek. The greenery of the base was short-lived, as the barren mountainous terrain soon took over. The trail was scant, and loose soil and rolling stones marked just enough room for two people, this was also a bridle path. Occasionally, a horse or two could be seen carrying the elderly up to the cafeteria, halfway to the monastery.

The prayer flags fluttering in the wind formed a canopy of myriad colours above us as the bright sun shone down on the rolling valley of Paro beyond the edge. After an hour of trekking with no monastery in sight, the true expanse of the Himalaya began to dawn on me. You could be an adventure junkie seeking the adrenaline rush, a tourist wanting to visit the revered shrine, or a devotee on an enterprise for blessings, the journey was the same, our paths crossing each other’s.

Throughout the trek, our trusty Sherab chewed on betel nuts, never once losing his breath. We, on the other hand, were huffing and puffing away. The guides around us eventually formed a collective of sorts, encouraging each other’s patrons through the trek. It was quite easy to spot the locals amid the swarms of tourists. Men in kimono-style gho and women in wrap-around kera effortlessly made their way up the steep slopes.

Nearly two hours had passed and we had lost count of how many times we paused. “Come come, just a little bit more,” Sherab egged us on. “We’ll reach the rock there and stop,” he promised. By giving us incentives to keep walking and setting his own mini-goals, he kept us on our feet. Which was just as well because if we sat, our knees might lock and go numb. Although tired and in pain, the sun-kissed mountain views didn’t escape me. The birds were chirping, there was a faint chanting in the background, the guides were chatting around us, but it was a sublime mysticism that kept creeping over me. I had to see...
The birds were chirping, there was a faint chanting in the background, the guides were chatting around us, but it was a sublime mysticism that kept creeping over me. I had to see the hanging monastery. It was simply non-negotiable.

a photo-spot was Sherab’s next proposed mini-goal. We gave in and set out for the last leg of our climb.

A few kilometres into the trek we came across the Taktshang Zangpo Pari, or the caretaker’s house. It was where Padmasambhava’s wife—called the ‘Fairy of Wisdom’—lived. She, Yeshe Tshogyal, had founded the Mon, or the Taktshang Convent. Today, an old nun and her young apprentice act as the caretaker.

Miraculously, the path had gotten even narrower. Soon, true to his word, Sherab unveiled a breathtaking view of the monastery. Hanging from the edge of the mountain, it almost appeared to blend in with nature. We climbed a few more steps, deposited our phones and cameras, took off our shoes, and went inside the revered Taktshang Monastery.

Tending to the butter lamps or brooming the premises, they were also talking to the guests or silently praying. Essential to Buddhist custom, the butter lamps must never die out. Time stood by like an onlooker as the humdrum of the world ceased to exist atop this mountain.

Built in the typical Bhutanese style of architecture, the monastery, with its beautiful floral motifs, hung loosely from the mountain cliff. I couldn’t wrap my head around how they constructed it back in the day. Sherab told us that a massive fire broke out in 1998 that destroyed large parts of the complex. The restoration went on for two years before the monastery was reopened.

Just when we were soaking up the breathtaking view and the serenity of the holy place, Sherab took us into a cave deep inside the mountain. We considered it as the hummingbird’s nest—where Guru Padmasambhava’s tigress rested and lived. We crisscrossed down the wooden planks, more than a little scared. But after all that trekking all that way, there was no question of missing this part of my spiritual adventure.

The atmosphere was enveloped by the loud hymns of the grey-cloaked devotees. Spreading straw mats, they sat in front of the main altar and prayed with folded hands. The children, who were earlier running around, joined their parents in prayer. Devotion and spirituality mingled with nature in its purest form here.

Spreading straw mats, they sat in front of the main altar and prayed with folded hands. The children, who were earlier running around, joined their parents in prayer. Devotion and spirituality mingled with nature in its purest form here.

It was only in 1974 that Bhutan started tourism. Before that, no leisure travel was allowed.

In Paro, apart from the Taktshang Trek, you can drive to Chelela Pass and visit the National Museum of Bhutan. Bhutan is famous for its wooden souvenirs like wooden darts, wall hangings, masks and mythical figurines, and also traditional hand-painted ceramic wares. The capital city is well known for exquisite handmade gho and kira. They can range from thousands to a few lakh in price depending on the weaving, material, and detailing.
Replete with natural beauty, vibrant culture and sublime spirituality, Gujarat is a paradise for travellers of varying tastes and interests.
Be one with nature and experience wildlife at its best in the national parks, soak up the rich culture and heritage at the numerous century-old monuments and historical sites, or be a part of the legacy of Mahatma Gandhi at his birthplace and ashram, the splendour of Gujarat is abundant.

Located on the extreme west of India, the state is laced with beautiful beaches and rolling hills that make for some fun eco-tourism spots. The pristine white sands of the Rann of Kutch makes a desert of unparalleled beauty. All of this, peppered with vibrant and colourful festivals and culture, you simply cannot miss out on Gujarat.

Old World Charm
Witness the ruins of the flourishing Indus Valley civilisation unfurl before you at the towns of Lothal and Dholavira. The brilliant township planning, the ancient drainage system, granaries and many wonders of the civilisation that rose to prominence around 3300 BCE can be found here. The civilisation pushes the recorded history of India by almost 200 years. As part of one of the most advanced civilisations, the towns have seals that show the then international trade relations that were carried out from Gujarat's ports.

Ancient India boasts of some unimaginable architectural wonders, and buildings that define engineering marvels. One such specimen can be found in the city of Patan. Rani ki Vav is an ancient 11th-century seven-storeyed step well located by the Saraswati River. A Unesco World Heritage Site, the well was constructed by Queen Udayamati, wife of the Chalukya dynasty king Bhima I after his death. The well has beautiful intricate carvings of over 800 deities and is built to use the river water to supply cool air. The revered Somnath Temple is located just a few kilometres from Patan. A holy site of pilgrimage for Hindus, the temple is a

Vadodara is also home to yet another brilliant historical monument, the Laxmivilas Palace. Built in the Indo-Saracenic style, the palace dates back to 1890. Known to be the largest private dwelling property, its size is estimated to be four times that of Buckingham Palace.
magnificent example of architecture with intricate detailing and exquisite carvings.

The Champaner-Pavagadh Archaeological Park, another Unesco World Heritage Site, is home to magnificent forts, mosques, temples and exquisite architecture, which is bound to leave you astounded. Located around 45 kilometres from Vadodara, the city of Champaner, founded in the 8th century, was forgotten during the colonial times. Today, the lush forests surrounding the fort and the various monuments make it a treat for travellers wanting a peek into the ancient times.

When in Gujarat, one cannot miss the city of Vadodara. The recently-built Statue of Unity—a mammoth 182-metre-tall statue of Sardar Vallabhai Patel—is a major attraction here. Built over five years and completed in 2018, the statue is a huge symbol of unity, peace and strength that symbolises the country.

The birthplace of Mahatma Gandhi, the cradle of the Dandi March, Gujarat breathes in the essence and principles left by the Father of the Nation. His ashram at Sabarmati and his home in Porbandar are places that will take you down the yesteryears, which saw the rise of Indian freedom struggle. Even today the Sabarmati Ashram continues to follow his teachings and serve the nation in their own way.

TIME FOR ADVENTURE
If you are looking for something fun and challenging, Gujarat has everything you need. From forests to beaches, hill stations to deserts, the state has it all.

The Rann of Kutch is, undoubtedly, a must visit. Boundless stretches of white salt pans make up the largest salt marshes in India. The salt desert is home to a number of endangered animals, like the nilgai. If you are looking for some fun try the golf cart, ATV ride, camel cart excursion and paramotoring while you soak up the rich Gujarati culture. Visit during the winter months—November to February—to witness the grand carnival and revelry that is the Rann Utsav. Bright colourful traditional performances, musicals, shows, dances and many other activities unfurl throughout these four months. Try to stay overnight during a full moon to catch the Rann in its glittering glory.

Situated in northern Gujarat and tucked away amidst some dense forests is the Polo Monument in Vijaynagar. Don’t be taken aback by the word, the name derives from a Marwari word ‘Pol’ meaning gate. A hike to the monument through the forest would take you to the Gujarat-Rajasthan border, a region marked by extreme conditions. Right next to the Thar desert, you might think Gujarat has nothing ‘cool’ to offer. Hold that thought. The pristine hill station of Saputara is the quaint getaway that you might be looking for. Flanked by the Sahyadri Hills, Saputara offers some beautiful hiking trails, rapid waterfalls, as well as a wide range of flora and fauna. So, if you’re the one looking for adventure and fun along with relaxation, head to the hills for the right kind of rejuvenation.

One of the longest and pivotal dams in India, the Sardar Sarovar Dam is a major spot for eco-tourism. Built across the Narmada River, the place is visited by millions to experience the scenic beauty from the top of the dam. The gallons of water stored on one side and the incredible roar when the barges are lifted make for a splendid sight.

With one of the longest coastlines in India, Gujarat is home to a number of pristine beaches. A beautiful azure sea, loose white sands and a plethora of activities, Mandvi is one of the most prominent ones.
Boundless stretches of white salt pans make up the largest salt marshes in India. The salt desert is home to a number of endangered animals, including the nilgai.

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Moving over historical places, natural beauty and eco-tourism, the bounty of exotic wildlife that the state has to offer will leave you speechless. For all the wildlife enthusiasts and shutterbugs, you have just entered the land of the Asiatic lion.

Gir National Park is the home to the largest population of Asiatic lions in India. Spread over an area of 1,412 sq km, it is home to over 20 lions, nilgais, deer, large numbers of birds and other animals. You can book safaris and enter the core area for splendid sightings of the royal beasts.

A haven for bird lovers, the Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary is located just about 65 kilometres off the capital city of Ahmedabad. It receives hundreds of migratory birds like Siberian cranes, pelicans, herons, and flamingoes. Native to the sanctuary are about 250 species of birds and mammals, along with various flora species. Walk around the entire area for a wholesome experience and be surrounded by incessant chirping of birds.

Located off the coast of Dwarka, the Marine National Park is a repository of some intriguing marine animals, corals and plants. Filled with sea sponges, anemones, fish, turtles, andurchins, the Marine National Park is a must-visit for all nature lovers.

Coming to Gujarat and not trying the local fare is like missing half the experience. Indulge in some traditional Gujarati snacks like thepla, handvo, khakra, fafda, dhokla and many others while sipping on some cool and refreshing masala chaas or buttermilk. One of the prominent shops to buy these snacks is Annadiben Shop, which has outlets all over the state. Also don’t forget to try the traditional Gujarati thali. It comes with a couple of fried or steamed snacks called farsans, a green vegetable dish, a tuber or gourd dish, a braised pulse or bean dish called kathol, among others. Gujarati kadhi is a yogurt-based lentil soup, which is common with the rotla and will be accompanied by chutti dal, vaal, or mag ni dal.

The thali also comes with breads like thick bajra rotla, thin wheat rotlis, crispy whole wheat flour rotlis known as bathins, parathas, savoury spiced breads called thepla, and deep-fried puris. There are also variations like methi thepla or masala puri in these. The thali comes with sweet, sour and spicy chutneys, pickles, ghee and chopped vegetable salad served raw or steamed with spices. Dry sweets and those made from coconut, jaggery and mangoes like doodhpak, mohanthal, shrikhand and laddoos are a staple. Most of these are made during special festivals and occasions but can be easily found in any restaurant.

With the palate changing every few kilometres, Gujarat has a wide-spread buffet to spoil travellers and visitors in every way.
These cakes are everything you’d expect from a beach vacation—for a fraction of the price. Modern cakes continue to stir our imagination and just when you think you’ve seen it all, there’s an all-new fad on the feed. The latest to join the list of viral food trends is the jelly island cake. Bakers from around the world have been sharing photos of cakes that look like tropical islands. While the ocean is made of gelatin, the island is made of sponge cake. For some it looked yum, while for others, it was feeding their wanderlust with colourful corals and sandy beaches. This little edible paradise—baked in a cylindrical shape and carved with intricate detail to mirror the looks and vibe of the beachside—boasts of multiple layers of chocolate. While the blue ocean is recreated with a jelly mix, crumbled cookies, and nuts, chocolate ganache makes the corals, plants, and ruins on the edible seabed, adding a slice of marine life to this miniature island.

Add the corals, shells and other finer details to the cake before the jelly hardens.
Sabyasachi Gorai
Cooks American Birds

With chicken, duck, and turkey from the US, Chef Sabyasachi Gorai has been cooking up a feathery storm at his Deli for a select few. We got a taste

What was the experience of cooking with American poultry meats like? It was amazing. Not only is the quality of the meat great, the packaging is also hygienic and tamper-proof. Upon thawing, the meat smelled exactly like fresh meat. Not a single meat is of a much superior quality. Not only does it have a gamey flavour, it’s meatier, and gives a very high yield.

How familiar are you with these ingredients? I have been working with US poultry for the last three years and so am very familiar with the ingredients. We have done the turkey challenge previously. We have worked with the chicken at Byg Brewski, Bengaluru and currently at Saby’s Deli we only use US chicken. Being the brand ambassador for the Great Indian Turkey Challenge, I did a lot of work with turkey. Last year, I did a poultry programme in Atlanta with Chef Chris and created a lot of Indian recipes. So I am also pouring in all of that experience into this.

Are turkey and duck amenable to Indian cuisine? Both duck and turkey work beautifully with Indian cuisine. Once deboned, turkey meat can be used for boneless dishes, and also made into a keema. The boneless pieces can be turned into nice boti pieces that most Indians like to use. The great quality of duck breast lends itself to mild Indian curries, especially southern and eastern ones. The duck leg works for classic dishes such as the duck biryani we prepare at Saby’s Deli.

How is American chicken different from our good ol’ broiler? The meat is of a much superior quality. Not only does it have a gamey flavour, it’s meatier, and gives a very high yield.

Even the desserts were special. Not only did the chocolate mouse with Old Monk pack a punch, it heaved with nostalgia. How important is memory for you as a chef? Storytelling is an important part of my food. Without that, I feel the food is incomplete. One cannot experience the food 100% or, let’s say, the way it needs to be, without a story.

What spirits or wines would you suggest pairing the menu with? For the kababs and keema ahtri I strongly suggest cocktails—something along the lines of the jamun cocktail, a part of ‘Savour the Flavour: US Poultry & Eggs with Desi Taakda’. The jungle masala works great with white wine or white spirits. Our duck mussalmon biryani and chicken ghee roast are best paired with matured red wines, whiskies and malts.

For Duckshin Delight (Kerala duck breast stew) I would suggest dry white wine

What is your take on the sometimes intense and very creative US-American fusion cuisine? I do not miss the mutton achari meatball, when I used to do the Akbari chicken. This had a very good kick to it. It somehow got lost in translation. I think the ‘How is this USA chicken different from our good ol’ broiler?’ question is a very old question. Industry standards have changed a lot. It’s all about how much you care about what goes into your body and what you put out. It all comes down to how serious you are. It is a lot of work to craft the right ingredients.

How is your approach to food different? In the US, we had a lot of influence from the Jewish culture, the Italian culture, and the African culture. We grew up with the ingredients and the culture, and that is how we approached the food. We did that without any thought of cooking outside of our background. I feel that’s the way to approach cooking. It’s all about the ingredients. We are not going to latch on to other ingredients just because it’s trendy. This is how the world has got too predictable. Comorin’s brilliance leaves you poring over a selection of unusual flavours. Just when you think Indian cuisine is getting too predictable, Comorin’s brilliance leaves you poring over a selection of unusual flavours.

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It is no surprise that Gujaratis are known for their love for travel and exceptional quest for food. With something to please everyone’s palate, the state lives up to the proverb ‘variety is the spice of life’. Unlike other Indian cuisines, where spices play a dominant role, Gujarati cuisine is known for its subtlety. An eclectic blend of flavours, the crown jewel of a Gujarati thali, undhiyu is the ultimate miscellany of vegetables. The dish derives its name from the Gujarati word ‘undhu’ meaning inverse, owing to its preparation in an inverted clay pot. Cooked to perfection on a gentle flame, it is best enjoyed with puri and aamras.

What’s hot in the food world? GLOBAL ADVENTURES FOR THE DESI PALATE

Uncharted Territories

INDIA

As the second season of the National Geographic series Uncharted hits the small screens, it has left the multi-Michelin Star chef Gordon Ramsay’s loyal fanbase in a frenzy. According to curators of the India episode, Anurag Mallick and Priya Ganapathy, the challenge was to see how India would measure up against an expansive global ensemble. In the latest season, Ramsay can be seen unlocking the complex flavours of South India, one spice at a time.

Catch all the episodes of Gordon Ramsay: Uncharted on disney+hotstar

Ellora in the Gulf

DUBAI

Michelin Star chef Vikas Khanna launched his new restaurant Ellora by Vikas Khanna’ at the JA Beach Hotel, Dubai, and it’s all set to replace his signature restaurant ‘Kinara by Vikas Khanna’. The latter will remain temporarily closed.

This collaboration with the UAE-based hospitality giant is being labelled as a ‘seasonal culinary experience’, inspired by the traditional flavours of India. The latest venture is all about rustic, earthy tastes and offers a gourmet experience. The new menu will feature seasonal star ingredients like green mango, passionfruit and watermelon.

reservation@jaresorts.com

This traditional Gujarati curry is an absolute must-have during festivals

RECIPE FOR SURTI UNDHHIYU

For the muthias, soak fenugreek leaves in water with a pinch of salt
- Add 1/4 cup whole wheat flour, gram flour, 1 tsp chilli powder, 2 1/2 tsp turmeric powder, sugar, baking soda, 1 1/2 tsp olive oil and water
- Knead this mixture into a dough. Divide into equal parts and roll them into balls

Fry the muthias in a kadhai till golden brown
- Take 1/2 cup peeled baby potatoes, an unripe banana, 2 eggplants and make a vertical slit
- Prepare a coconut-coriander masala by adding chilli powder, sugar, grated coconut, coriander leaves, green garlic, cumin and coriander powder, green chilli and ginger paste and salt
- Mix well and use it to fill the slits
- In a large bowl prepare a mixture of Surti aam, yam, tuver dal and the remaining coconut-coriander masala
- Heat oil in a pressure cooker, add 1/4 tsp carom seeds and sauté until they crackle. Add a pinch of asafetida, baking soda and potatoes and eggplants
- Cover it with the lid and let the vegetables cook
- Add the bananas and fried muthias and cook till the bananas are tender. Stir occasionally
- Garnish with coriander leaves
- Switch off after two whistles and allow the steam to release

COURTESY: ANURAG MALLICK

CoCo Curry

GURUGRAM

If you’re craving for a bit of tonkatsu then maybe a pit-stop at Gurugram is all you need for now. Japanese curry restaurant CoCo kibhanaya recently opened its first outlet in India. While the ultimate curry battle between the Japanese and Indian variations seems to be never ending, Ichibanya is adapting to the Indian culture, whereby their beef and pork dishes will be replaced with chicken and seafood. The menu also caters to vegetarians. Patrons have the option to customise their toppings and spice level.

Cost for two ₹800

OUTLOOK TRAVELLER
The French Connection

The interminable lockdowns and work from home have spawned myriad chefs all over the world. Social media is flooded with pictures of delicacies prepared by these budding chefs. Getting your cookbook out, and dishing up something fancy is a great way to beat the lockdown blues, nevermind the waistline. Just like visual and performing artists need an appreciative audience, food artists need connoisseur patrons. Not being blessed by the muse either in performing or culinary arts, I try to redeem myself by being a good patron. The problem these days is, it is much harder to beat the blues by the memory of comfort food. Be that as it may, that is what I must do—remember good food times, and derive my comfort from that warm memory.

Every culture celebrates its food with enthusiasm and vigour. Actually, food is culture. I sometimes get the opportunity to take out some time during my travels, from my work engagements, and sample what the host state or country has to offer. My only (some might say, huge) limitation is that I am a ‘pure vegetarian’, which limits my sampling to a large extent. Folks, everywhere that I have been in the world, have made special efforts to tweak their native cuisine offering to accommodate my food preferences. Purists may laugh at me, saying I have not tasted the real thing. Maybe so. But I have succeeded in accumulating a treasure trove of memories, both for my taste buds, and my affable soul.

One such sweet memory is from a trip to the city of Lyon. The historical city was a visual delight. We were treated to a dinner made and presented beautifully by celebrated chef Christian Tetedoie. While his signature dishes involved lobsters and heads of calves, I was happy with the asparagus and mushroom creation he artfully presented as our entrée. The restaurant itself was perched on a hill, and provided a magnificent view of the entire city at night. The chef’s fame was such that the ‘gastronomique’ restaurant itself was named ‘Tetedoie’. The greatest indulgence of the evening for us was the chef himself, who came and chatted with us. He mourned the loss of his guide and mentor, Paul. He searched my face when he mentioned the name. I expressed my condolences, but had the sneaky feeling that I am supposed to know of Paul, and about Paul, and I am just not getting it.

The next day, after our official engagements were over, we rushed to the train station, our host urging us to make haste, as the town was shut due to the demise of some celebrity. We managed to catch the train, just in time. After I settled down in my seat, I courteously nodded at my neighbour. He was a distinguished gentleman, dressed in a flamboyant grey suit of the highest quality. His leather-trimmed fedora, resting casually on his knee, and his checkered green scarf seemed to have been homed, recently until then, in a high end store on the Champs-Élysées. As the train sped smoothly towards Paris, we struck up a conversation. He was in Lyon, he told me, to attend the funeral of the celebrity chef, Paul Bocuse. “Ah! Tetedoie’s Paul,” I realised. “Are you in the food business yourself?” I asked. “No,” he replied, a little taken aback. Turned out, he was a successful businessman.

My neighbour pointed to the colourful pin he was sporting on his lapel. The pin had the figure of the chef himself and the French colours on a banner in the backdrop. By now, I was intrigued. I asked him if Bocuse could be the same person who Tetedoie was alluding to. Of course, he said, the whole nation is in mourning. The whole country was mourning the passing away of a chef? He then handed me a small booklet. It was the schedule of the funeral service of Paul Bocuse, with an obituary published by the Unesco, with tributes from heads of states, distinguished personalities from all walks of life, and chefs from all over the world. I realised that our visit coincided with a truly momentous occasion in French history. The restaurant where he exhibited his art, and the culinary institute founded by him serve as a pilgrimage site for lovers of food from all over the world.

I left the country with a deep appreciation for a culture where food, and its creators are accorded the same reverence and appreciation as those in the performing and visual arts. To be celebrated, replicated with due credit, not plagiarised, and cherished for generations.
Long after being abandoned to ruin and vandalism, the fort was eventually restored to its former glory, and beyond, in a remarkable transformation that took almost 10 years to plan and complete. Alila Fort Bishangarh, with 59 stately rooms and suites, was fully opened in July 2019.

**Luxury on the Rocks**

Just six kilometres off the Delhi-Jaipur Highway, Alila Fort Bishangarh is easily accessible—while offering all the isolation we need currently. The heritage property reopens September 30.

**Bishangarh, Rajasthan**

Social distancing comes naturally to me. As an introvert, I’ve practiced it all my life. That’s why, on my birthday this year—this was just before the lockdown—I found myself enjoying the blissful seclusion that only a 230-year-old war fort in Rajasthan can provide. Writing about it in a world that has changed, perhaps forever, I can tell the property will thrive.

Before Alila Fort Bishangarh, all the forts I’d stayed in had belonged decidedly to the ‘heritage’ category. You know what I mean; old and impressive, but a little squishy around the edges. While Bishangarh is as authentic as they come, it’s also a notch above: very plush, with no mod cons missing. It’s an impressive fort, rising like a tall confection above its surroundings, and lurches into view well before you reach it.

On arrival, there’s a canopied reception pavilion below the fort, surrounded by soothing water features. From here you have the option of walking up (I’d suggest you leave it for later, when you’re rested) or being driven to the fort and your rooms.

The rooms are ‘heritage chic’, extremely stylish. Luxuriating in their sprawling embrace, who would think this was once a war fort, meant as a lookout for armies approaching Jaipur from the north. When battles were fought at nearby Amarsar, the fort served as a watch, providing advance warning of invaders. Many parts of it remain rugged and unfinished, reminders of its military past. The lovingly reconstructed residential parts are truly royal, a faithful recreation of the flavours of Shahpura royalty.

If the fort is a sight to behold, the views from it are equally stunning. Especially from Nazaara, the open-air restaurant on top, which is all about the view and dining under the stars. The cuisine at this restaurant is local and seasonal, featuring Shekhawati and Bishangarh specialities. The restaurant also serves hunter cuisine, which...
Rajasthan is famed for, featuring live sandpit and fire-pit cooking in mud pots. I visited in winter, so quilts were provided to counter the chilly, gale-force winds.

The meals at Fort Bishangarh, without exception, are superb, much of the produce coming from their own extensive kitchen gardens. Unsurprisingly, my most memorable meal was lunch at the farm under a tree, preceded by a tour of the organic garden. The meal, which began with a simple bhuna aloo chaat, moved on to interesting rotlas and curries, all to be washed down with buttermilk in brass tumblers. A repast rustic and sophisticated in equal measure.

The luxurious pleasures of Bishangarh are guilt free, as the property has a deep commitment to sustainability. The restoration, which took several years, made use of traditional Rajasthani construction techniques and local stone, combined with the newest architectural trends to create a comfortable environment, but with a sense of place. Operationally too, the environmental impact has been contained. According to the property: “Our commitments include minimising greenhouse gas emissions, energy consumption and pollution; an in-house waste recycling programme; the use of indigenous low-water-use plants; as well as a wastewater management system that recycles wastewater for irrigation making us trailblazers among eco-friendly hotels in India. The passive solar design of the buildings and the active solar systems for water heating further the resort’s goal of a minimal carbon footprint. Inside the fort, rocks are integrated into the walls and roof to improve insulation. Beyond environmental responsibilities, Fort Bishangarh also supports the local community.

Experiences offered here include interactions with local artisans, walks in the Aravali hills, camel cart rides and riverbed horse riding. And they make the perfect cup of Americano. That pretty much seals it for me.

— Amit Dixit

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Niraamaya
RETREATS BACKWATERS & BEYOND
Kumarakom, 74 kms (2 hours) from Cochin International Airport
27 luxury villas

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SOJOURN ➤ The waterfront retreat lies on the banks of Lake Vembanad, amid breezy coconut palms and tropical foliage.

INDULGE ➤ The all-day dining café, Samsara, serves authentic Kuttanad cuisine along with fresh made-to-order breakfast.

UNWIND ➤ The spa’s wellness offerings include traditional Ayurveda therapies as well as tailored immersions and yoga.

REJUVENATE ➤ The plush villas offer stunning vistas of the backwaters with amenities such as open-air baths and private balconies.

Kerala

- 27 luxury villas
- Retreats Backwaters & Beyond

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**Delhi**

**Fresh Sheet**

Hotels in non-containment zones to resume services

The Delhi Disaster Management Authority gave a nod to hotels in Delhi to resume functions. Properties have aligned their health and safety protocols with government guidelines, along with stringent sanitisation measures in place. In lieu of the improving COVID-19 situation in Delhi, hotels which were earlier linked to COVID-19 hospitals are no longer so.

**Kolkata**

**Expansion Spree**

The hospitality giant will begin operations in India in 2022

Thailand-based Dusit International will venture into the Indian market with Dusit Princess Serviced Suites Kolkata. The property will comprise 42 three-bedroom units, a swimming pool and an all-day dining restaurant amidst other facilities. The planned expansion includes exquisite palace conversions with an aim to combine Thai-inspired hospitality with local customs and traditions to deliver sustainable values.

**Paris**

**Bespoke Elegance**

The latest additions focus on elegance, sophistication and traditional artistry

Le Bristol Paris now has a contemporary touch to its rooms and suites. The refurbishments range from embroidered draperies at the French doors, to an en-suite private bar, naturally illuminated walk-in closet and a private outdoor spa. This marks the completion of the property’s multi-phase renewal. The renovated garden with plush drawing rooms and a colonnade with blossoming orange trees, focuses on environmental consciousness and sustainability.

**Mysuru**

Meet The General Manager

Royal Orchid Hotels Mysuru’s Suman Nanaiah

Embracing challenges as they come, Suman Nanaiah prides herself in curating out-of-the-box personalised experiences for her guests. She started her career in 1996 and is now the Area General Manager of the Royal Orchid Group of Hotels in Mysuru.

Hailing from a family of coffee planters from Coorg, she embraced hospitality early on as a part of her culture. Crediting the same for her successful career in the industry, Suman has never looked back. Apart from involving her team in challenging projects, she also strives to recognise each team member’s strengths and weaknesses, and aims to help them streamline their efforts to achieve their goals. Keeping a sharp focus on the inputs provided by her team and taking into consideration their feedback, she is also a thorough decision maker. On days she is not busy tending to guests, she can be found in the jungles of South India with her son tracking big cats or pampering her taste buds while spending time with her family.

*Simran Gill*
There’s a 300-year-old Mutharamman Temple in the little coastal town of Kulasai, in the Tuticorin district of Tamil Nadu. Each year, the residents of the town celebrate Dassara at the Mutharamman Temple in a very unique way: devotees transform themselves into avatars of goddess Kali and collect alms as an offering to the temple’s presiding deity.

PHOTOGRAPH: UDAyAN SANKAR PAL
The Ways of the World

EverYbody loves a fun book. And fun in a weird way. Like a compendium of the grossest fratholes normal people have. Or the coupling (or tripling) positions that we never knew our more primitive ancestors to have tried. Or the daily objects that you come in intimate contact with that have more microbes than your toilet seat.

None of these books presumably exist, but Janaki Lenin’s Every Creature Has a Story does. No, it’s not just gross things, though it does concern glassfrog pening on their eggs and spiders and octopuses engaging in wild—even mortal—sex. It’s a relief to slowly realise that human standards of weird don’t mean much in the larger, delightfully complex animal world. That anthropomorphic systems and binaries of civilisation collapse in favour of altogether new hierarchies in the minutest lifeforms.

Lenin, who is a veteran of the genre, writes with both amusement and adoration about dragonflies that fake being dead to opt out of sex and African wild dogs that bark to reach a consensus on whether to hunt or nap. The book, culled from a batch of 90 essays from her online column, is a 101 of sorts, to the vastness and the wondrous inscrutability of the animal world.

Some of the explorations that Lenin undertakes touch upon questions that have reached an unprecedented pertinence in our present lives. Perhaps the conjecture that bees are born vaccinated could kindle hope for the coming times? That chimpanzees mourn for their dead could reassure our existential crisis-stricken selves? Perhaps we could learn empathy this way, from prairie voles—who, also known to be monogamous—everlasting might soon outstrip humans in the spectrum of consciousness.

If you’re the kind of person who grew up on a steady diet of Animal Planet, the memories will come rushing back. You’ll be dreaming about soaring in the sky—much like frigate birds bound for distant land and taking mid-flight naps. It will be worth risking triggering your catarophobia—you might even have nightmares about killer whales, sinking ships or firehawks arousing the forests of Australia.

Fun comes at a cost.

—PRANAY PATHAK

City of Djinns

by WILLIAM DALRYMPLE

When people talk about the magic of a city, hyperbole seems to be the running theme. But when it comes to the enigmatic city of Delhi, there simply has to be a driving force behind its rich, and rather violent, history.

In his timeless travelogue, City of Djinns, William Dalrymple gives a—if not factual, definitely romantic—explanation, of sorts. Dalrymple met his first Sufi—Pir Sadr-ud-Din—in the citadel of Feroz Shah Kotla, who told him about the city’s magic. “Djinns,” writes Dalrymple, “was a city of djinns.”

“Though it had been burned by invaders time and time again, millennium after millennium, still the city was rebuilt; each time it rose like a phoenix from the fire.”

Dalrymple peels back Delhi’s layers of history like an onion. He starts with the Silk routes of 8064, through the partition, the British, Mughals, the Sultana, all the way to the Pandavas’ indistinguishable, weaving in his own experiences along the way. He makes you fall in and out of love with the city but never ignoring the mysticist surrounding it.

“Could you not see them,” he writes of the djinns. “But if you concentrated, you’d feel warm hear their whisperings, and even sense their warm breath on your face.”

—BLOOMSBURY £14.99

India: The World Vegetarian

by ROOPA GULATI

India: The World Vegetarian is quite a far cry from all of that.

Older readers may remember Roopa Gulati as the once-upon-a-time bubbly anchor of the cooking show on NDTV’s Good Morning India show. She grew up inCambria, honed her culinary skills at the Cordon Bleu Cooking School in London, then spent some years in India where she worked as a consultant for Taj Hotels and did the TV show, eventually moving back to the UK. Gulati has developed a lot of restaurant-style dishes that have unfortunately been the face of Indian food around the world, and a veritable minefield of factual inaccuracies and cultural boo-boos. Yup, I don’t like them. Thankfully, Roopa Gulati’s latest, book—sensible, practical and rooted in reality—is quite a far cry from all of that.

The recipes themselves are sane and clutter-free, pared down to the essentials. And they’ve clearly been tested. Innovative and often personal, they’ve been gathered from trusted sources over the years. But Gulati makes them her own with little twists and touches, and her wealth of culinary experience. We call it andaz, an amorphous measure of measure, which will be familiar to Indian cooks but is almost impossible to translate.

The dishes featured range from heart-warming home standards like dal malkhan and palak paneer to the more cheesy gnatnash and fig rikiki (this one is courtesy Karunesh Khanna, head chef at Tamardin in London) or the red chilli-stuffed mushrooms. Even lefties are the bulgur wheat and cardamom rikiki with their creamy saffron filling, straight out of the decadence of a Mughal palace kitchen.

When you least expect it, you run into Punjabi anda bhujia or that classic—chilli cheese toast—so emblematic of how India deftly absorbs eclectic influences into its (in this case, quite literally) melting pot. It’s this high and low approach that lends the book a song-and-dance quality a culmination of its own. We could call it Raga Roopa, I suppose. Full marks for a fair, pan-Indian distribution to the selection. This must have been a challenge, given that Indian cuisine, even just its vegetarian aspect, is quite impossible to encompass in a single volume of any size.

Additionally, there are bunches of useful tips, like how to go about making your own Indian spice mixes (always better than store bought, and fresher) and even on making the perfect portion of basmati rice or your own homemade paneer. I’m so glad this did not turn out to be the NRI cookbook of my nightmares. And I intend to make good use of it in my kitchen. Fellow diners, beware.

—AMIT DIXIT
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2. Remove the nuts, switch out the flat tyre, put the nuts back on and tighten by hand
3. Put the jack under the car on the rocker panel, raise until the wheel is off the ground
4. Remove the jack and tighten the nuts further with the spanner

**Keep This Page Handy**
- Flashlights, portable charger, sanitiser, blankets, umbrella, extra towels, bug spray, sunscreen, first-aid kit and travel-sized toiletries.

**Get Smart Travel**
- Keep your belongings for easy access. Roll your clothes to fit more in a tighter space.
- Pack your belongings in categories so you don’t have to unpack your whole bag trying to find that buried sock.

**Clothing Hack**
Use packing cubes to aggregate your belongings for easy access. Roll your clothes to fit more in a tighter space. Pack your belongings in categories so you don’t have to unpack your whole bag trying to find that buried sock.

**Munchies**
Carry lots of water, and then some more. Dry snacks are a great idea, and don’t forget your mugs, plates, cutlery and glasses. Keep a garbage bag handy so that you don’t leave a trail of trash behind you.

**Compiled by Labanya Maitra**
There’s an unlikely alliance between art and Air India. Turns out, the turban-crested, moustache-twirling Maharaja was quite the connoisseur, and the airline has created an attractive collection of Indian art through the years. Jal B. Cowasji, the airline’s publicity officer, curated works by established and upcoming artists. He also commissioned students from Mumbai’s JJ College of Art to paint murals at the international booking offices. As these artists established themselves, the value of Air India’s collection rose.

This vintage poster from the airline’s heydays is a reflection of the Maharaja’s growing prosperity. Although anatomically skewed to benefit the male gaze, this poster is part of a larger collection showcasing Indian culture in multicultural settings. Perhaps, they just needed a second to get with the swinging ‘60s.

This year, the ‘Maharaja of the Skies’ collection was showcased in Mumbai. The man himself, we imagine, would be proudly twirling his enviable ‘stache.

—Labanya Maitra
Glittering like diamonds in the setting sun, Gujarat’s salt marshes hold some beautiful secrets. Welcome to the Rann!

A Desert in White

Heritage * Wildlife * Cuisine * Adventure