

STAY AT

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF

LIFESTYLE

SPOTTED BY SITA

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Art of Travel



Dev Shree Deogarh



Surrounded by woods, Dev Shree is a seven-room homestay, where the hosts welcome you with open arms. The house is situated on the edge of the Ragho Sagar lake with the Gokul Fort at the far end, perched on a hill. Deogarh is the perfect stop-over, well connected to all the regular hops in an itinerary (Udaipur, Jodhpur and Jaipur)—and yet, far enough from these destinations so that you feel a sense of peace. The interiors of Dev Shree are as pretty as what's outside. The tastefully furnished rooms, tiled with Makrana marble, open out to bright verandas. The hosts involvement is what makes the place so special. The family will happily take you on walking tours or drives. You can explore Deogarh village and picnic by the lake (the area attracts many migratory birds) or at the nearby Gokul Garh Fort.

Stay At





Tattoo Artist



A Day in The Life of Mangala

“It’s only the women from the Baiga community who get tattooed. Not men. But it doesn’t matter. It is my small contribution towards preserving an ancient art form that goes back to thousands of years and is fast vanishing. And very interestingly if I was a Baiga man, I would have been forbidden from witnessing a woman getting tattooed, because it is believed that if a Baiga man sees it, he would lose all his hunting skills. The only job for men, while the women get tattooed is to sing, to play the drums and of course get horribly drunk in the process,” says Kuntal Baruwa from our Destination Knowledge Centre who got a traditional Baiga (more about the Baiga tribe in our Spotted By and Lifestyle section) tattoo done by Mangala during his recent trip to Central India. Mangala has been a tattoo artist since she was 10 and learnt the art from her parents.

“A Baiga woman isn’t considered a Baiga unless her entire body is tattooed,” says Mangala. At a base level, their tattoos are considered to be a form of sexual expression and a powerful sexual stimulant. But Baiga women also consider their tattoos as a gift to be carried to the Gods when they die. “They believe that tattoos are Amar Gehna (immortal jewellery). Even when they die, their clothes and body is burnt in funeral pyre, but the tattoos remain with them and beyond the fire,” adds Mangala. Interestingly Mangala isn’t a Baiga. She is from the Badna community of Central India who has retained one of the most important Baiga traditions, Godna (art of full body tattoo). Baiga girls get their first tattoo at the age of seven. “A V” mark is tattooed in the center of her forehead. Three dots and a vertical and horizontal line are also tattooed. It’s a symbol of the hearth or the fireplace in a Baiga home. By the time she is 16 her entire body is tattooed except for the chest which is marked after her marriage or motherhood,” says Mangala

Baiga villages adopt Godnahanarins (tattoo artists) like Mangala for a fortnight or more so that all eligible women in the village can get tattooed at one go. “Godnahanarins like me travel from village to village where the villagers take care of us and provide us food and shelter,” says Mangala. That’s when Mangala is really, really busy. She wakes up at the crack of dawn, takes a bath and prepares breakfast before her clients arrive. [Click here to read more](#)





The Mahua Tree

“The Baigas of Central India believe that the Gods themselves said to their ancestors that if you drink a little of it, you repeat things like a parrot does. If you drink a little more of it, you start roaring like a tiger, until finally when you have drunk a lot of it, you lounge around on the floor like a boar. And I have had the experience of being all 3 - a parrot, a tiger and a boar, during my recent trip to Central India when I spent time with the Baigas there,” says Kuntal Baruwa from our Destination Knowledge Centre. Kuntal is referring to the fiery local tippie of Central India called Mahua, made from the flowers of a tree of the same name. Distilled in earthen pots and exclusively under Indian law by the Baigas of Central India; Mahua for them is what Nectar was to the ancient Greeks - Drink of the Gods!!.

But the story of the Mahua Tree is not just about the local hooch prepared from its flower which is drunk in plentiful at almost every occasion by the Baigas. If your clients are visiting Central India and its Tiger Parks anytime between Mid-March to May, many itinerary planners will tell you that this is the best time to spot a Tiger with all the water bodies inside the forest drying up, forcing the thirsty Big Cats out, but very few will tell you that this is also the time when the flowers of the Mahua tree bloom, its green leaves now red, adding a heady fragrance to the arid air of the forests of Central India. At the crack of dawn you will hear hushed footsteps of the Baigas out to collect the Mahua flowers from the forest floor, wary and mindful of encountering Sloth Bears, who love to eat the flowers as well. Mahua flowers bloom at night and they fall at dawn.

“When I was in Chhattisgarh, my host took me to the house of a local who was his Mitān (friend for life). I was offered the fiery tippie in a cup woven out of a leaf of the Mahua Tree. Leaves of the Mahua Tree are also woven to make plates, which are used during festivals, marriages et al. As we discussed about Mitān, which is a unique tradition of establishing friendship that extends to all generations to come, I was told how the branches of the Mahua Tree plays an important role in the ritual of a Mitān between two people,” says Kuntal. While during marriages, the bride and the groom are handed small branches of the Mahua tree as a part of the rituals, during funerals the body of the departed is smeared with Mahua oil which is also used as hair-oil, cooking oil, oil to light lamps and as a natural cleanser.



At a time when plastic sachets of various brands of shampoo from Dove to Pantene have penetrated the most remotest parts of India, the Baigas still donot use shampoo or soap (more in our Spotted By section).

“During a visit to the home of an Ojha (traditional Baiga healer) I came to know how the fiery tippie from the flowers of the Mahua tree is offered and consumed by the Ojha to communicate with the higher spirits,” says Kuntal. The flower, the oil and the bark of the Mahua tree is used to treat several diseases, to heal wounds and broken bones, treat snake bites and also as aphrodisiacs. The Ojha offered me some fried Mahua flowers with salt and chillies to eat. Goes very well with the fiery tippie as a snack I must say,” says Kuntal.

And all the leftover after the myriad uses of the Mahua Tree is used as fertilizer in the fields. So next time your Naturalist points out to a Mahua Tree during a safari in the Tiger Parks, remember it isn't just a Tree, but a symbol of traditional wisdom and knowledge of the indigenous communities of our world, their intuitive science, their proximity and oneness with nature and its bounty. From birth to death.



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The Baiga Shampoo

The menfolk of the indigenous Baiga tribe of Central India are distinguished by their long hair. “I wondered what kept it flowing and shining,” says Kuntal Baruwa from our Destination Knowledge Centre who was in Central India recently where he had the opportunity to experience a slice of the life and times of the Baigas, one of the oldest aboriginal tribes of the country. At a time when plastic sachets of various brands of shampoo from Dove to Pantene have penetrated the most remotest parts of India, the Baigas do not use shampoo or soap to clean their hair. “Instead they use a particular sticky black soil from the forest which I saw when I went to a Baiga village. And since they consider themselves as guardians of the forest and the soil, a prayer is said in apology before the soil is dug. The Baigas believe that to dig is to hurt the bosom of Mother Earth,” says Kuntal.

Spotted By Sita





Drum Stick Leaves Soup

Krishnaveni who has been the cook at [Harivihar Heritage Homestead](#), since they started in 2003, recommends the Drum stick leaves soup as a must try during your stay here. “It takes just five minutes to prepare and the guests simply love it,” says Krishnaveni. The drum stick leaves soup is a simple, easy to make and highly rejuvenating soup. Harivihar, being an Ayurveda -Yoga centre, serves light vegetarian cuisine , using locally available vegetables and plants. The drum stick leaves soup , traditionally given to nurturing mothers ,uses drum stick leaves ,coconut milk ,shallots and pepper as the basic ingredients.

As easy as it may sound Krishnaveni has a challenging job in hand. Being an Ayurveda -Yoga centre, sometimes guests can have food restrictions and it may be necessary to have individual menus. “It is difficult but at the same time challenging,” smiles Krishnaveni.

The clientele at Harivihar with its fair share of single travelers, stay for seven to fourteen days for Ayurveda and yoga. They also have guests who stays for 2-3 nights to sample the life of a traditional royal Kerala House and to pause a little to reflect and to restore their inner rhythms.

Recipe available on request - [click here](#)

Top Chef Recommends





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1, Hill House, Peermade

1. Laidback with a capital L: 1, Hill House, Peermade with only 2 rooms is laidback with a capital L. “When owners Rani and John showed me photographs of 1, Hill House 2 years back, they were telling me that they plan to keep it special and exclusive as any second home could be. Maybe a few clients from select tour operators, family, friends and their friends. It looked good and I promised a visit. But when I stayed there last September, the experience exceeded my expectations,” says Kuntil from our Destination Knowledge Centre. 1, Hill House is quietly tucked away in an area which belongs to the scions of a prominent planter family of Peermade; a hill station and gateway to the high ranges and spice plantations of Kerala. “It’s not far away from the main highway. But once inside you escape into another world; laidback and totally relaxed where you couldn’t be bothered about time and space,” says Kuntil. 1, Hill House is perfect for clients who want to unwind whilst enjoying a slice of the local planter’s life and maybe a drink at the Mundakayam Club which is not too far away (more in the Lifestyle section). Ideal for 2 or 3 nights, after the hectic and dusty temple circuit of Tamilnadu and enroute to Kerala. 1, Hill House does not have a website and Rani and John plan to keep it that way. “We are too old for this technology business and are happy meeting interesting people and playing hosts,” says Rani with a smile. We agree, for that’s what they do best.

2. Rani and John: Keeping 1, Hill House low profile had allowed Rani and John to host every guest till now, though they don’t stay at the property. They stay at Alleppey and travel to Peermade every time there are guests. “And once the guests have left we also relax in our second home which works out real good for us,” says Rani. “At the 1, Hill House I loved the attention to detail by Rani and John. From the linen, the amenities, the cutlery, to the food, to the difficult choice between evening tea with the most amazing snacks which Rani recalled having as a child and the sun downers which John himself pours, it has been very special,” says Kuntil. John; who is retired, has an unusual hobby apart from collecting antiques. Every time they pull down a church, an old building or a choir factory he would be there to buy the doors, windows, gables railings, wooden stair cases et al and store it in his Alleppey House. They gradually made it to Peermade and were restored as the 1, Hill House was getting built. The pièce de résistance would be the Confession Box in the Bar. It had a small tin plate which said “Raise your Spirits”.

6 Things We Liked About



The chairs of the Bar are from a Bank where the Cashier used to sit and go about his daily work. And by the way , if you have guests passing by Alleppey after the Rice Barge Cruise we can ask Rani to take them out on her [“Alleppey on Foot” Tour](#), given sufficient lead time. She serves a good lunch at the end of the tour in her home.

3. Junk Stories: What makes 1 Hill House very special is also the way the couple had recycled the entire junk, John had bought. “It blends beautifully. You could see that they were not trying hard. Nothing sticks out,” says Kuntil. The wooden staircase which leads to the room that Rani and John keep for themselves while hosting guests, had one of India’s Prime Minister walking on it. Old Sewing Machines were fitted with tiles hand painted by Ajulejo Artists of Goa as serving tables, where we had some amazingly delicious snacks in the afternoon and breakfast. The railings of the sitting area which overlooks the foothills of the Western Ghats were from an old college building that was demolished. Lamp Stands near the fireplace were made from the Altar Rails. John even had a wooden trolley in working condition which was used to transport goods to the ships when Alleppey was a thriving port before Cochin. Every piece of junk John had bought, had a story to it which he happily shares with his guests.

4. Food: We really liked the idea of Rani and John keeping the food at 1, Hill House from their family kitchens with the staff having trained there, who do an exceptional job. They served food which the couple eat on a daily basis at home and had grown up eating. “That meant more stories to be shared over delicious Kerala meals,” says Kuntil. Whether it was the Vattayappam - Kerala’s queen of steamed rice cakes for breakfast which melts in your mouth, the delicious combo of fresh fish, prawns and squids for dinner, or the Egg Appam Hoppers, Banana Fritters and home made Chocolate Mousse for dessert, everything was shared over hearty conversations, where great stories were recalled. Rani is happy to do a cooking class for your guests if they take fancy to the home food. [Click here to read more](#)



Festivals

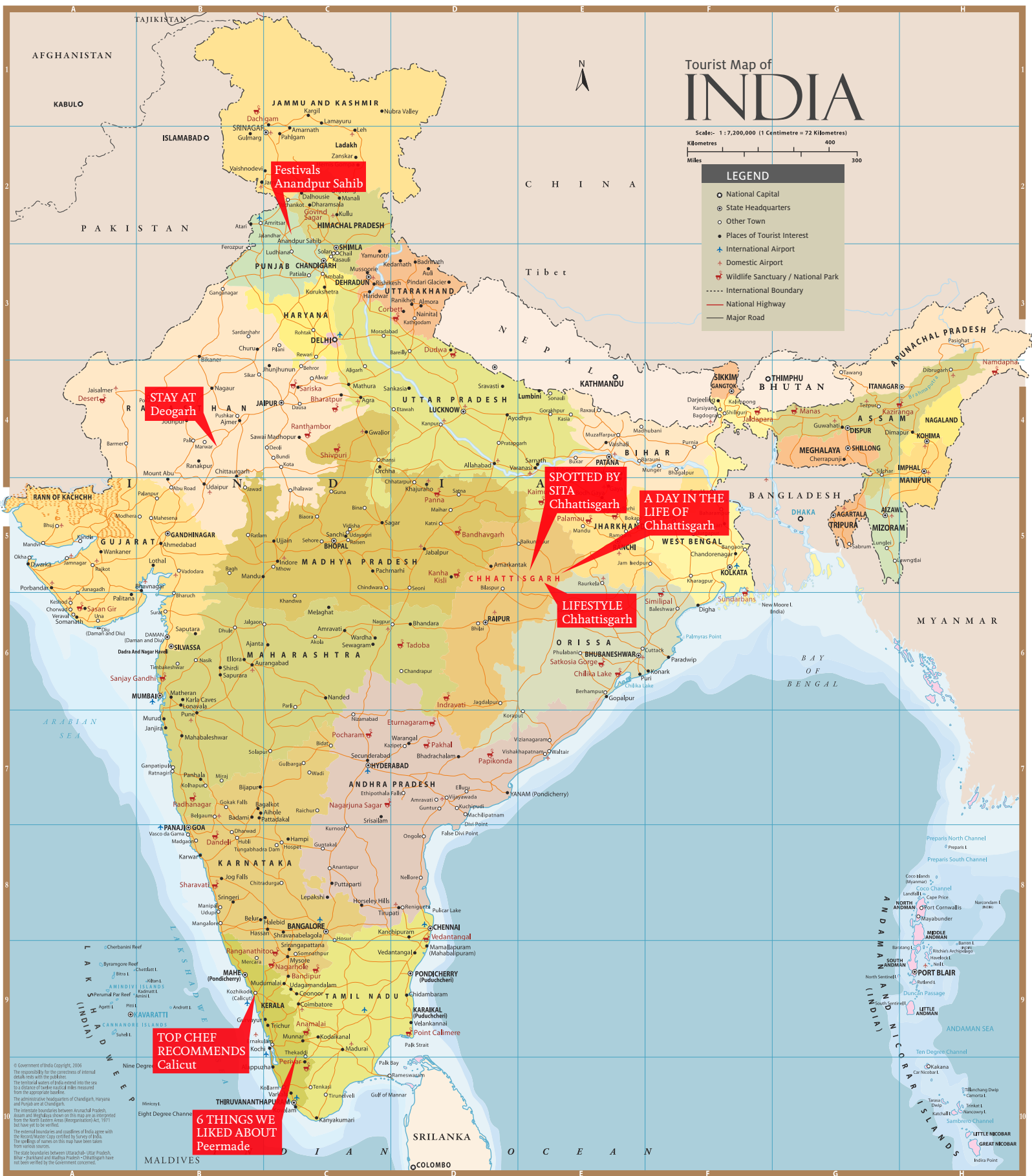


Hola Mohalla 25th to 27th March

The ancient Sikh festival of Hola Mohalla is celebrated in Anandpur Sahib, Punjab the day after Holi, the festival of colours. Hola Mohalla was started by the tenth Sikh Guru, Gobind Singh, as a gathering of Sikhs for military exercises and mock battles, who at that time was battling the Mughal Empire. It is considered a time for Sikhs to reaffirm their commitment to the community and involve everyone.

Adds Sunil Kumar from Tour Operations who has been escorting guests to the Hola Mohalla Festival since the past two years: "Starting from the huge crowd we meet on the road while going to Anandpur Sahib, thousands and thousands people on carriages, trucks, vans, forming an incredible procession to the pilgrimage centre.....men, women, children...old and young....everybody in colourful dresses... the joyful atmosphere..... Unbelievable! ...The vibe at the Anandapur Sahib Sikh Temple is unique: pilgrims praying, singing and welcoming all in a friendly way!! I really enjoy the impressive and colourful procession of the Sikh warriors; the Nihangs, with their huge headgears and weapons, accompanied by war drums and horses followed by the demonstration of traditional martial arts and simulated battle scenes in the open ground. Holla Mohalla is a timeless experience from another world..... not to be missed."







Meet us at the
Upcoming
Trade Shows

If you wish to schedule a meeting, do e-mail us at
info@sita.in

Trade Shows	Booth No.	Whom to Meet
Fitur Madrid 20 - 24 January	Awaited	Natalia Sánchez-Infantes
ETC St. Louis 24 - 27 January	Sita Desk	Neeraj Bhatt
NTA Annual Conference Atlanta 31 January - 4 February	Sita Desk	Renate Graham
UP Travel Mart Agra, India 21 - 23 February	Awaited	Sunit Bhaumik
ITB Berlin 9 - 13 March	Booth No.209, Hall No 5,2b	Dipak Deva
MITT Moscow 23 - 26 March	Awaited	Ernest Dias & Deepak Sharma
AITF Azerbaijan 7 - 9 April	Trade Visitor	Deepak Sharma
Great Indian Travel Bazaar 18 -19 April	Booth No. 55 - 58	Neeraj Bhatt
KITF Almaty Kazakhstan 20 - 22 April	Trade Visitor	Deepak Sharma
ATM Dubai with India Tourism 25 - 28 April	Awaited	Philip Thomas

Trade Shows

