

STAY AT

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF

LIFESTYLE

SPOTTED BY SITA

TOP CHEF RECOMMENDS

6 THINGS WE LIKED ABOUT

FESTIVALS

INSPIRATION LOCATOR

TRADE SHOWS



Art of Travel



Chhotaram Prajapat's Homestay, Jodhpur

A wonderfully authentic experience for clients who want to understand the concept of an Indian joint family, up close and personal. Chhotaram's family, 13 members in total including his brothers, their wives and children decided to open their homes a few years back when friends from England started promoting his place for their friends coming to India. The homestay has 6 very small, simple and clean huts (air-cooler, power-back up, comfortable mattresses), built in the traditional way with mud, surrounding the main house of the family. Everything is simple in terms of comfort, but you are completely involved in the daily life of the place. As the family is involved in weaving you can learn about the traditional weaving methods right at your doorstep in addition to cooking demonstration with the family and leisurely walks in the village.

For more visit <http://www.salawashomestay.com/>

Stay At





Mahout, Amber Fort

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“There are guests whose faces echo pure joy when they themselves wash and feed Champa; my Elephant. They tell me, that this has been the most memorable experience of their holiday. It feels good to be able to give so much joy to someone” says Salim who is a Mahout and takes our guests on joy rides to the Amber Fort in Jaipur. It was 5 in the morning and we were sipping our cup of steaming hot chai (tea) at the Haati Gaon (Elephant village) of Jaipur, where nearly 150 Elephants are kept and taken care of. “I spend my entire day with Champa and I love it,” says Salim. Champa was gifted to him by one of his relatives.

“The first thing I do in the morning is feed Champa with sugarcane and millet husk, before giving her a bath.” Seeing Champa being washed was so fascinating. This is where you get to watch, understand and appreciate the relationship between a Mahout and this regal giant. Salim would keep on uttering strange sounds, which would prompt Champa to lift her leg or turn in a particular direction during her wash. Champa was totally enjoying being washed and scrubbed for the day's work at Amber Fort. Where did he learn to talk to Elephants? “From my father and he from his father,” Salim tells us with a smile.

We gently broached the subject of animal rights activists, who want the government to ban the joy rides as it is cruel to the elephants. “Listen, it is very easy to say ban it. What happens after we ban it? What is the alternative? No one has an answer to that. Sustaining an elephant is not easy. It costs me nearly 2000 rupees daily on food itself. I would have no option but to go begging on the streets of Jaipur with Champa for food. Would that not be cruel and humiliating? You tell me,” asks Salim. A one way ride up the Amber Fort with guests takes around 20 minutes and in winters a single elephant does five such trips. In the summers the number of rides are restricted to around three. All the elephants are back to their sheds by afternoon.

“Once Champa is back from her day's work, I have to wait till the perspiration dries off, before I can give her some food. We are lucky that there is no shortage of water here. She needs 200-250 litres of water daily,” Salim continues. In the evening Salim feeds her Rotis (bread made from stoneground wholemeal flour) and jaggery. “In summers, because of the extreme temperatures she also has to be washed in the evening to cool down.” He stays with Champa till dusk,

A Day in The Life Of Salim



cleaning the shed and generally checking if she is alright and comfortable. “During the winters, the evenings are busy for us because of weddings where they would want an elephant to welcome guests or a game of Elephant Polo which has become quite popular over the years,” Salim tells us.

So is he training his son to be a Mahout too? “Well he is in school now and sometimes lends a helping hand. But its upto him. I am happy even if he doesn't become one. Elephants have long lives and I am confident that we will be together till I die,” Salim tells us as he gets ready to leave for Amber Fort. “Is it true that elephants have a brilliant memory?” “Oh Yes!” smiles Salim. “They remember everyone they have ever come in touch with.”



Lifestyle



All that Raj

"Isn't it strange to dine in silk stockings in such a place, to drink a bottle of hock and champagne every evening, to have delicious moccha coffee and receive Calcutta Journals, every morning?" wrote Frenchman Jacques Mont sometime in the early 19th century. He was in Shimla, then a settlement of no more than fifteen hamlets, as a guest of Captain Charles Pratt Kennedy, the British Political Agent. The Gurkhas of Nepal who brutalised the locals were defeated and driven out. Peace had returned. Shimla was declared the Summer Capital of colonial India and rose in prominence nearly half a century after Jacques Mont's visit, but Captain Kennedy was already living a life that would characterise the bubbling and decadent ways, the British Raj would escape to every summer, thereafter.

One of my guests from England was kind enough to share some old letters that her maternal grandfather had written from Shimla to his mother. "...Last night I went to a ball given by the German Consul who is the richest man in Simla and gives the best entertainments. The narrowness of the space rather prevented me from showing off my fine stride but I did not get very much bored which is generally the best I can say of a ball. Thursdays I am going to Viceroy's for a dance and I am afraid I shall get entrapped for several others..." he wrote.

There are various tales as to how the town drew its name. According to a legend, the town got its name from Shyamala, the dark Goddess of power, widely worshipped in these hills. The story of the Gerad Brothers is also talked about. They were on their way on an official survey, when they saw a fakir (ascetic) near Jakhoo Hills, the highest amongst the seven hills of Shimla. The fakir, who it seems could understand the language of the animals, provided drinking water to weary travellers. The thatched cottage he lived in, was named as Shyamala. It is also said that it was a British officer, who accidentally stumbled upon Shimla while moving his troops. On the way he stopped in a dense cedar forest that was full of hyenas and bears. He was so struck by its cooler clime, that he decided to pitch tents for the night. Later, when he returned to the plains, he recommended that army outposts be set up in that area, which was so much like England.

Shimla remained the summer capital for the British Raj from 1822 to 1947. The British brought here everything. They built here everything that was



necessarily required to lead a comfortable life. They constructed roads to Shimla and even got it connected to the plains through railways. They introduced the best of schools and brought medical facilities for the natives and the European population of the town. They introduced club culture to Shimla and built some of the most beautiful buildings. I think that there is no other shopping street in India that is more beautiful than the Mall Road of Shimla. The Tudor Style structures make it look like an old English Town. The Norman Gothic building of Gaiety theatre adds another jewel in Shimla's crown.

Here are two of my favourite walks in Shimla that I love to take my guests out on - [click here](#)



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Warli Art In Mumbai

When in Mumbai, Maharashtra, Kuntal Baruwa from the Destination Knowledge Centre got to learn about Warli Art in detail. Warli is the name of the largest tribe found on the northern outskirts of Mumbai, in Western India. Despite being in such close proximity of the largest metropolis in India, Warli tribesmen avoid all influences of modern urbanisation. Kuntal learnt that Warli Paintings date back to 2500 -3000 BCE and this rudimentary painting style uses very basic vocabulary - a circle, triangle and a square, as a basis of dialogue. The creativity though, lies in making a Warli that represents human life, customs and traditions indigenous to the region. This was the only means of transmitting folklore to a populace not acquainted with the written words.

Spotted By Sita





Tea at The Windamere Hotel

Baker Chef Bhagawati of [The Windamere Hotel](#) tells us that the Afternoon tea here is not to be missed during your stay in Darjeeling. Afternoon Tea at the Windamere Hotel is a world-renowned affair. The hotel is already known by many as a “truly authentic Colonial Hotel of India in the Himalayas.” Some say the “only one of its kind – not only in the Hills, but also in India.” The 'Sunday Times of London' called it: “one of the best Colonial Hotels in the World.” This authenticity also applies to their tea offering. Everything is home-baked and mouth wateringly fresh! They serve: scones, with cream and jam; finger sized sandwiches (water cress, cucumber, cheese and chutney, tuna...to name but a few); lemon drizzle cake; Victoria sponge cake; melt in your mouth shortbread biscuits; bath buns; bake well tarts and much more. All of this is accompanied by the 'champagne of beverages' - Darjeeling Tea! What is known as 'Darjeeling Tea' in the west, cannot hope to compare with the real thing - drunk on its own and from the top tea gardens in the Darjeeling Hills - it is pure and in the west could cost a small fortune to buy.

Afternoon Tea is served by their Windamere maid - dressed appropriately in old English tea maid attire. The actual “tea” is served in real silver pots, complete with a silver tray and silver accoutrements. For people who long for “the real, untarnished event” this is the place. Apparently, they have many outside guests who also enjoy their Afternoon Tea. They are invited to sit in the 'Bearparks Parlour' (named after Windamere's first housekeeper....this was her flat in the old days).

By the way - many people call tea served between 4 - 6 p.m as 'High Tea'. The English will tell you that 'High Tea' is mostly an Americanised name for 'Afternoon Tea' - the latter consisting of 'a low meal offering' such as scones, biscuits, cake, etc. 'High Tea' would refer to the old working classes in England who came home from work to such delicious food as 'Steak & Kidney Pie' and other hot meals (usually served around 6 p.m. and known simply as 'Tea').

Top Chef Recommends





Mon Chasha

6 Things We Liked About

1. **Nilanjan & Debjani** - The husband and wife team are your hosts at [Mon Chasha](#) and the heart and soul of the place. After working in the travel trade for more than 15 years, it was Debjani's dream to build a place where people could come and escape from the rigmarole of daily lives and reconnect with their family and traditions. She believes that travel should be a time to relax and enjoy, not come back from a holiday and take a day off because your trip proved hectic. The term 'Mon Chasha' means 'cultivator of the mind'. Mon Chasha is for the inquisitive savvy traveller interested in rural India and wants to know more about the traditional way of life, local art and craft. "Don't come here looking for luxury but it's the attention to detail and the warmth of your hosts that makes this place special," says Soumya from our Destination Knowledge Centre who stayed there recently. One day she hopes to hand over Mon Chasha to the local community, which is a part and parcel of the project and move on to start a similar project elsewhere in West Bengal.

2. **The Cottages and the views** - Mon Chasha has 4 cottages built on an elevated platform. "My first impression after entering my room was its size. The circular room had two large king size beds, in spite of which there was ample space to walk around," says Soumya. The entire structure is erected and built by local craftsmen and artisans, using locally procured bamboo, palm leaves and paddy straws. "Even the beds are made of some of the thickest bamboos that I have ever seen," says Soumya. Towards the rear of the room a small door leads to a balcony with a sit-out with views of the lazy Bagda River flowing and the paddy fields.

3. **The Walks** - Mon Chasha is located in a village called Paushi which is a 4 hour train ride from Kolkata. Walking around the property gives you a glimpse into the unhurried rural life of West Bengal. Neatly labeled herbs and trees around the property make it great to learn about the local flora. "There is no pretence, no scripted characters or people put out of place to create an artificial environment. On my walks I encountered farmers in the fields sowing, thrashing, jaggery being made and people fishing in the ponds," says Soumya.

4. **The Food** - "Perhaps the highlight of my stay here was the food," says Soumya who by now you must have realised is huge foodie. "We try to serve food that was a staple in most Bengali families a decade back. Unfortunately, now nobody has the time for such



elaborate menus" says Nilanjan. The intensity of the spices is just right and the produce is straight from the kitchen garden or from the nearby farms. Fresh fish on your table comes from the ponds in the property fed by rain water harvesting. The food is served in beautiful brass utensils. Pallab who serves food is never far away just in case you require something. The common dining area also gives you a chance to interact with the other guests. The hammocks hung all around the central dining area are perfect for an afternoon siesta after all the good food.

5. **Art Revival** - Your stay at Mon Chasha supports the local community. Apart from giving employment to the locals, Nilanjan and Debjani are trying very hard to revive the local forms of art. Monotosh lives in the adjacent village working his magic with dry coconut shells in his small low ceiling workshop. "The detail on the coconut vases that he was filing away under a makeshift lamp was brilliant," says Soumya. Kanai was another such artist who does wonders with bamboo strips. He lives in a traditional mud house immaculately clean with the veranda serving as his airy workshop. Kanai is now quite popular and gets invited to display his art work and various fairs and festivals. At Mon Chasha they have "nabya nakshi" a room where works of such local artist are displayed to create awareness. You are free to appreciate as well as buy them. The money goes directly to the artists, some of whom are the last surviving artists of these local art forms.

6. **Peace and quiet** - Life at Mon Chasha is laid back and simple. "You are miles away from the mindless honking. The air is clean and fresh. I can't remember when was the last time I picked up a book to read. Sitting in the veranda with a book in hand after a leisurely breakfast, watching the river flowing in front will be something I will look back with fond memories," says Soumya. You may also want to use the solar lights (instead of electricity) during your stay at Mon Chasha which Soumya did.



Festivals



India Art Fair, New Delhi 28- 31 January 2016

India Art Fair is South Asia's leading platform for modern and contemporary art and portal to the region's cultural landscape. Offering a unique opportunity to discover the best galleries in the region and beyond, India Art Fair's programme includes lectures, projects and events across the capital with an emphasis on cultural experience and education.





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The administrative headquarters of Chandigarh, Haryana and Punjab are at Chandigarh.
The international boundaries between Andaman Islands, Lakshadweep Islands and the rest of India are as shown on this map as they have been shown on the Survey of India's maps.
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The names of islands and reefs in the Lakshadweep Islands, Andaman and Nicobar Islands and the rest of India are as shown on this map as they have been shown on the Survey of India's maps.
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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
ILTM Cannes 30 November - 3 December	F 144	Denise Lanz & Karan Varma
USTOA Chicago 3 - 5 December	Sita Desk	Neeraj Bhatt

Trade Shows

