

Art Of Travel



KNOWLEDGE IS BASED ON EXPERIENCE
EVERYTHING ELSE IS JUST INFORMATION

Come explore with us



Dear Friends,

We bring to you this annual edition of Art of Travel, a compilation of the best we have explored and written over the year, interesting products that have inspired us and our partners around the globe to sell with a passion.

This compilation is dedicated to our people, who make us proud in our collective knowledge. We have an international, cosmopolitan and multilingual staff of diverse backgrounds. Collectively we represent 21 Indian states, we speak 26 Indian languages and dialects, 9 foreign languages, and we represent people from most faiths including Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Jainism, & Sikhism.

Our professionals share absolute passion for the destination. There are over hundred professional Post Graduates in Travel & Tourism, thirty MBAs, over fifteen post graduates in subjects ranging from philosophy, history, art-history, and geography to science, commerce, journalism and even engineering in Metallurgy.

The collective knowledge and experience of our people is second to none. Our passion and understanding of travel in India means that we can hear your ideas, sincerely evaluate them and plan the ideal holiday.

I hope this annual edition inspires you to plan a journey with the people who know their land!

Warm regards,
Dipak Deva
CEO Destination Management
India and South Asia



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Get inspired – explore

Explore, Sita's product line for leisure travellers, features out-of-the-ordinary tours for everyone. Individuals and small group tours seeking a truly authentic and sustainable travel experience are shown a different angle when it comes to travel. Sita helps the guest explore the great outdoors, local customs and charming hospitality, flavourful traditional cooking, stimulating art, intriguing architecture – and much more – in a unique yet easily accessible manner. This specifically designed selection of new programs requires extensive local know-how and expertise. The basic concept of the product range is to explore a place with one's heart.



Temples, Poets and Ponds



A walk through the mystical landscape of poets, sacred temples and holy ponds near Assi Ghat and Tulsi Ghat, the southernmost embankments of the Ganga in the footsteps of 16th century Varanasi poet and mystic Pandit Tulsi Das who was the author of the Ram Charit Manas, the sacred Ramayana in Hindi. You will hear about the history and special culture of Varanasi while visiting the Southern temple established by him and the location of his traditional home! A special darshan, meaning 'taking sight' of a hidden sun temple behind his home is mesmerizing. Maybe you too will get the urge to write some sacred verse on the riverside after the walk!

Ideal for FITs and Small Groups (8-10 pax)

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Legend has it that Varanasi is 10,000 years old

Only in India

- › A bull visits this particular textile shop in Varanasi everyday in the afternoon and stays there in front of the Shiva idol till they shut shop. Business goes on as usual. He is fourth from a succession of bulls who have been visiting this textile shop for the past 25 years. Don't miss it while on your way back from the evening Aarti ceremony. The shop is very close to the cinema hall where your vehicle will be parked.
- › Right next to the highway in Chotila village, around 20 km away from Pali when you drive from Jodhpur to Udaipur faithfuls come from far and wide to pay respect to, believe it or not, a 350 CC Royal Enfield motorbike. The story goes that Om Bana, the son of a local feudal lord died in an accident while driving this 350 CC Royal Enfield motorbike 20 years ago. Locals will tell you the stories of the “miracles” of Om Bana who helped and “continues to help” people in distress on this particular highway. For us, it was amazing to see undiluted faith in motion and that the shrine is sustaining a whole lot of people and their livelihoods. Please include a stopover here in all itineraries of your Deogarh/Udaipur bound clients from Jodhpur. It's an oddity your clients will treasure.

For more contact Destination Knowledge Centre at dkc@sita.in

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Colours in Rajasthan are deep seated and reflects in every aspect of its livelihood

United Colours of Rajasthan

- › Even today colours are used to identify communities and social status of individuals
- › Different months have different colours dedicated to them. Even festivals have their own dedicated colours
- › Most of the knowledge of colours in Rajasthan is passed over from father to son and mother to daughter. There are a very few documented facts.

For more contact Destination Knowledge Centre at dkc@sita.in

The bandhanis of jodhpur

Visit a Muslim family living in a small double storied lime house. They live on the first floor and work on the ground. As you climb the tiny flight of steep stairs, you will find a brass pot half filled with coloured, boiling water and pieces of cloth being steered by a man with his hands protected by rubber gloves. This is the last step of dyeing. On your left will be a rectangular well lit room. In the midst of coloured bundles of cloth you will see women sitting on the floor, their heads covered with colourful scarves and thick surma (homemade kohl) gracefully put along the lower eyelid, seriously engrossed in framing, marking and tying the cloth. The men do the dyeing part. There are about 700 to 800 Muslim families in Jodhpur who practice the technique of tie and dye, on a daily basis and have been catering to merchants and whole sellers for centuries.

Ideal for FITs and Small Groups (8-10 pax)



Street photography with vicky roy



Vicky Roy is an extraordinary story of an ordinary man from the streets of Delhi. Vicky was a former rag picker and a homeless street child who went on to study photography, sponsored by Salam Balaak Trust, a local not-for-profit organisation which works with street children of Delhi. Spend a day with Vicky, while he takes you on an exciting walk through the streets of Paharganj and the New Delhi railway Station area. Hear Vicky narrate how he survived the streets of Delhi, the deals he struck to survive, where he slept and where he hid to escape from abusive policemen. Also get to know about the lure of the street life and the 'freedom' it promises, despite all odds. And why it is so difficult to give it up. Vicky's work has been extensively exhibited in India, England and South Africa.

Ideal for FITs and Small Groups (6-8 pax)

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Discover hidden
cultural practices

Changing lives one
click at a time

- The Blind with the Camera Project was started in Mumbai in 2006 by photographer Partho Bhowmick. The project aims to provide training in photography as a vocational subject at special schools for the visually impaired. Interestingly, they conduct 'blindfold' photography workshops for abled people where they can learn how to use non-visual senses (touch, sound, warmth of light) and intuitive senses.
- Photography tours started by Grass Routes which promotes rural tourism in Maharashtra enable visitors to stay in villages, work with farmers in their fields, chop wood, milk cattle, swim in clear waters of a river, take part in their festivals and eat meals cooked on wood fire in the dim light of their rustic homes. All proceeds of these photography tours are pushed back to the villages in creating sustainable livelihoods.

For more contact Destination
Knowledge Centre at dkc@sita.in

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Explore living
traditions

In Conversation with Hari Das:
the Dancer of Kannur

- Kuntil: How is life post Nine Lives?

Hari Das: I am very happy that Nine Lives has put Theyyam on the world map. Post Nine Lives, I have had the opportunity to perform in Australia and America and will do so in Turkey very soon.

- Kuntil: In Nine Lives you had talked about the great caste divide in Kerala. You had mentioned about how high caste Hindus touch your feet during Theyyam but once it is over they go back to treating you like they have been treating your community for centuries now - as untouchables... Has that changed post Nine Lives?

Hari Das: (Smiles) When I went abroad to perform, the local Kerala community welcomed and embraced me irrespective of their caste and class. But it is different back home. However post Nine Lives I can feel that there has been a change... a slight change... the way people from high castes now treat me. People now know who Hari Das is. But you see, you don't expect a thing that has been a part of our social fabric for centuries to change overnight. Isn't it?

- Kuntil: What if I tell you I do not believe in this mumbo-jumbo of Gods coming down to earth?

Hari Das: (Pause) In a Theyyam you put forward your case directly before God and get solutions. This has a huge psychological effect on the people and I would say a very positive one. Maybe it gives them the courage and strength to work towards that solution & no matter where they are, people will travel to their family kavus (shrines) whenever there is a Theyyam.

For more contact Destination Knowledge
Centre at dkc@sita.in

Dance with the gods

In the dark of the night in North Kerala, ordinary mortals invite the Gods and Goddesses to possess their bodies and descend on Earth. In the mystical world of the ritual art of Theyyam, Gods commune with the faithful directly. This strange universe of Kerala ordered by the most strangest of rituals is least talked about and the best kept secret of God's Own Country.

Kuntil from our Destination Knowledge Centre during his travel in North Kerala had the opportunity to meet Hari Das, an accomplished Theyyam dancer. Hari Das shot to fame after he was featured in William Dalrymple's book - "Nine Lives: In Search of the Sacred in Modern India," where the acclaimed travel writer "explores the worlds of people deeply engaged with the sacred in a fast changing India." Kuntil and Hari Das chatted about life and times post Nine Lives and more. Excerpts of the interview (see left)



The biryani tour



Influences of the various dynasties that ruled this country and use of the local ingredients and spices have created a spectacular cuisine in each part of the country. The same is true even of Hyderabad, which borrowed heavily from the Persians and Mughals, added the local flavours and evolved a distinctive cuisine.

One of the most popular dishes of Hyderabadi cuisine is the Biryani. This tour explores the many regional and subtle foreign influences that make this dish so special. We will weave our way through Hyderabad's many biryani hubs and see the huge 'handis' of fragrant rice and secret combinations of meat and spices that beguile the senses. Or you could choose to get cooking lessons from experts and end the day with a meal of Biryani with one of the traditional families in Hyderabad. Biryani has been an integral part of the Indian cuisine from the palaces of the sultans to the small back alleys in the most remote villages.

Ideal for FITs and Small Groups (6-8 pax)

“” Flavours of Indian cuisine are as diverse as its many communities

Food for Thought

- › We loved the housewives of the Malvani community at Sindhudurg in Western India for their ability to prepare the most delicious fare in a jiffy. Though spicy at times, the rich aromas of freshly ground coconut and masalas permeate through the air in a Malvani kitchen. Sea food whether crab, prawns, or the local bangda (mackerel) is always a fresh catch. Succulent chicken marinated and prepared in various styles with patience such as the chicken vade saguti is also a local favorite.
- › While in Pallakad in North Kerala do not miss the delicious Ramasseri Idlis found only here. There are only four families who make them, a tradition handed over to them by their ancestors. The recipe of Ramasseri idli dates back to about one century, which again is a trade secret. Idlis are savoury steam cakes from South India and a very popular all day snack.
- › Enjoy a slice of history and good food in Old Delhi with Dhruv Gupta. He has opened up his ancestral house- Masterji kee Haveli- for visitors combining it with a walk of the Sitaram Bazaar; renowned for its street food.
- › During our forest hikes in the non touristy western Wayanad in North Kerala stop for lunch in a tribal home. It is a great insight into the life of the Kurichias, the warriors of Waynad's forests. Travellers get an opportunity to interact with the family over a delicious home cooked meal.
- › During your surface journeys in India stop a while in a Dhaba just off the highway. Here burly Indian trucker stock for meals, water to wash and to sleep on charpoys under the open sky.

For more, contact Destination Knowledge Centre at dkc@sita.in

“” Explore nature's designs

Wild India

- › Agumbe in Karnataka is a special place. Aside from being the place with probably the highest density of King Cobras in India, the place holds a large variety of species of animals which keep you spell bounded. Stay at the Agumbe Rainforest Research Station (ARRS) dedicated to environmental research from climate change to amphibians.
- › Visit the Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary, home to the only Ape in India, the Hoolock Gibbon also known as the singing ape. The sanctuary is located about 2 hours from the Kaziranga National Park, known worldwide for its one horned Rhino.
- › Goa has enchanting bird life. A diversity of 450 plus species reported from this tiny state of India makes it one of the most exciting birding destinations. The village of Curtorim in South Goa with its beautiful lakes, unending paddy fields and friendly people is a delight for birdwatchers. Stay at the Arco Iris with our friends Gani and Benny & their lovely daughters T1 and T2. They are happy to organise bird watching trips for you.
- › The Silent Valley National Park of the Nilgiri Hills in South India is one of the last remaining oasis of primeval rain forests. The valley is also one of the remaining protected sanctuaries for the critically endangered Lion Tailed Macaque. Stay at the 160 year old Maranat Mana, the home of a Namboodri Family. The Naambodris are the indigenous priestly class of Kerala and are custodians of some of the oldest rituals known to mankind; one of which may predate human speech.

For more, contact Destination Knowledge Centre at dkc@sita.in

Yoga Safari

The next big thing in wilderness experience in India - Yoga Safaris. With our friends in Kanha we have developed an itinerary which will offer traditional game drives in Kanha with a qualified Yoga teacher adding a healthy twist to the wildlife experience. Clients will also have an opportunity to participate in community projects in Kanha during the Yoga Safari tour. It could be from minimum 4 nights to 12 nights depending on your clients' interest. We are happy to customise it for guests who are advanced Yoga learners.

Your Yoga Guru is Isabelle Heini; a qualified nurse who studied alternative medicine in Switzerland and Germany. She travelled and lived in India for several years studying the ancient science of Yoga. Isabelle later opened her own Yoga school in Switzerland before deciding to build a new home in the wilderness of Kanha National Park. She believes, to make a change we have to set an example, work and learn with the local community.

Ideal for FITs and Small Groups (6-8 pax)



Literacy india

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Making a
difference



Sita has tied up with a non-profit organization, Literacy India as an extension of its Corporate Social Responsibility initiative. Literacy India is a non-profit organisation, with the objective of empowering underprivileged children and women by making them self-sufficient. They focus on bringing about a qualitative change in the lives of underprivileged children by giving a different meaning to education. This one day tour will give you an opportunity to interact with the school children and the women, getting to know their lifestyle a little better and giving them the joy of your interaction. You can purchase the handcraft and stationary items that have been made by these women as a souvenir to remember them by.

Aware and fair travel

- We have collaborated with a local NGO in the highlands of Spiti in the Himalayas to design a carbon neutral tour for the summer of 2012. The idea is to raise \$1000 to build a solar bath for an old age home in a local village. Bathing in these high altitude cold desert villages is difficult due to the limited availability of fuel wood to heat water, more so for the women as there are no designated bathing areas in the houses. Solar Baths not just cut down carbon emissions and fuel wood consumption but also enhance their personal hygiene.

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Delhi a tale of
seven cities

Delhi for the Five Senses

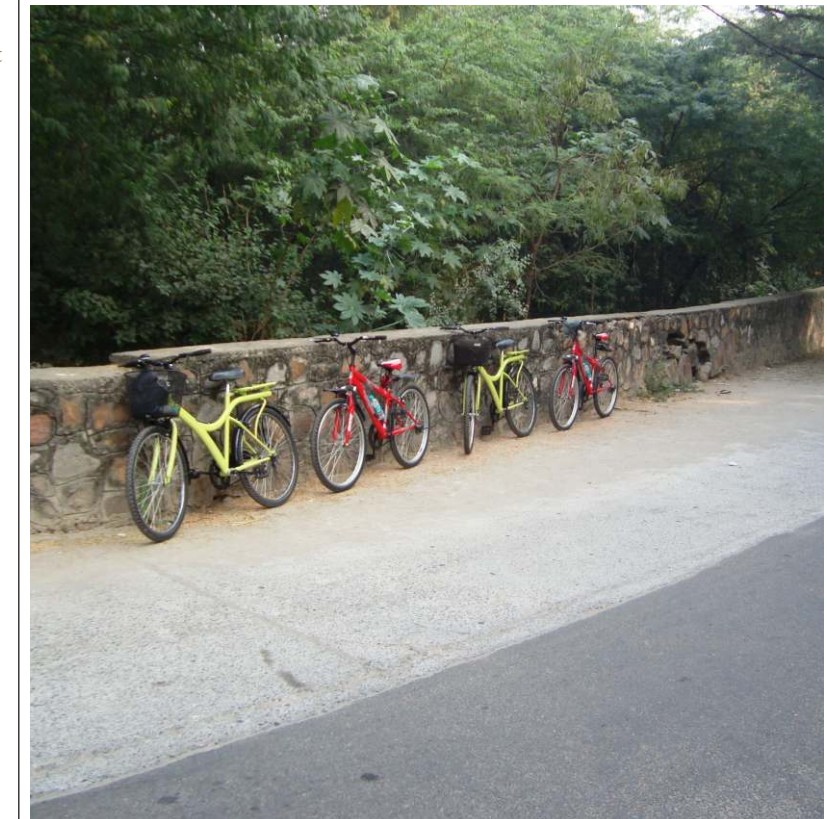
- Spend a lazy morning walking around the atmospheric alleys of Hauz Khas Village. Visit an Oriya Temple; explore 14th Century monuments, boutique shops for antiques, furniture, silver jewellery and designer clothes. Round up your visit with a sumptuous lunch followed by Champi (Indian head massage) and a cup of Masala Chai!
- Go for an early morning walk in the Lodhi Gardens with its plethora of trees, plants, and flowers. And of course to enjoy a slice of local life. Round off your morning with a Yoga session.
- Visit an Akhara (wrestling arena) in Old Delhi for an insight into the traditional Indian form of wrestling called 'kushti'. Here you will observe wrestlers go about their daily exercise and practice bouts.
- Combine your visit of Humayun Tomb with the historical Hazrat Nizamuddin Basti that grew around the shrine of the Sufi saint Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya. On Thursdays and Fridays, after the visit to the Basti, you may want to go to the shrine of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya and listen to Qawwali, which is a vibrant musical tradition that stretches back more than 700 years.

Mehrauli by cycle

The Mehrauli By Cycle tour is not just a fascinating tour but an inspirational story about the journeys of 3 former homeless street kids who lead this cycling tour. The historic area of Mehrauli is considered as one of the 7 ancient cities of Delhi.

Many rulers constructed several buildings in this area, each bringing their own aesthetics and style. Today Mehrauli is considered a great area of archeological and architectural importance. The Qutub Minar stands as its most enduring symbol. But there are several lesser known magnificent structures. Mehrauli By Cycle is an effort to familiarize inquisitive travelers with these lesser known; but historically significant monuments. The 3 hour guided tour starts at 7am when the city is just waking up and lasts for 3 hrs. It takes you through the winding lanes of Mehrauli to 10 such lesser known structures providing a slice of history that most itinerary planners and travelers give a miss.

Ideal for FITs and Small Groups (6-8 pax)



Rediscover kerala's backwaters



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There is more to Kerala backwaters than just a rice barge cruise

Our country boat rides in the fascinating Kuttanad area of Kerala backwaters allows you to sample a slice of backwater life that most travellers don't experience. Kerala backwaters are not just about life along the narrower canals. It is also about the communal harmony that quietly exists. It's about a unique cultivation pattern where agriculture is carried out below sea-level which you see up close with us. You will meet locals who are the last remaining few of a fast vanishing breed of traditional professionals. And of course, sample some amazing food cooked by housewives from the households of Kuttanad - Kerala's Rice Bowl.

Ideal for FITs and Small Groups (6-8 pax)

The Eternal Lamp of the Backwaters

- Our Destination Knowledge Centre spent a week in the picture perfect Kuttanad area exploring on a country boat. They visited a place where an eternal lamp is burning for 500 years by a Christian family. The lamp was given to their ancestors by a Hindu king.

In 1545 A.D, an entourage of the local Hindu king was passing Kuttanad with an idol of Krishna on their way to Ambalpuzha. When night set in, they were instructed by the King to take shelter at a Christian household.

The King, pleased with the love and affection shown to him by his Christian subjects, declared that henceforth, to commemorate these events, a great water carnival would be held. Thus began the 'Champakulam snake-boat race' which continues to this very day.

For more, contact Destination Knowledge Centre at dkc@sita.in

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A bagful of trivia and more

Bazaars and streets

- The Mullick Ghat Flower Market under the Howrah Bridge in Kolkata is not only one of the oldest but is also one of the most vibrant markets of the city.
- A 200 year old street in the heart of old Hyderabad; Laad Bazaar is famous for the bangles sold here.
- Mapusa is home every Friday to Goa's biggest fresh produce market. People from all over Goa come to the Friday market to sell the most authentic ingredients that Goans use in their kitchens. The market is said to date back almost five centuries.
- Blink and you will miss this nondescript shop in the Sadar Bazaar of Old Jodhpur, but they are 6 generations into the business now. Bibaji Churiwala's crystal bangles are a must buy and adorns the petite wrist of the ladies of every Rajasthan aristocratic family.
- We love Gopal Ji Ka Rasta in Old Jaipur for its jewellery shops. Many jewelers have maintained the traditional Gaddis of their ancestors. Gaddis served the purpose of a working seat in the daytime and a resting place in the evenings or at mid-day, after lunch.
- We loved spending our afternoons at Deogarh Bazaar playing Chess with Munna; the village priest.
- Head to HM Textiles located in the winding lanes of Dulli Gaddi, near Yamuna Talkies for the best Silk in Varanasi. We loved the shawls. Hasin Mohammed, the owner has an impressive clientele including his Holiness the Dalai Lama for the exquisite brocades they make; the Kinkhabs.

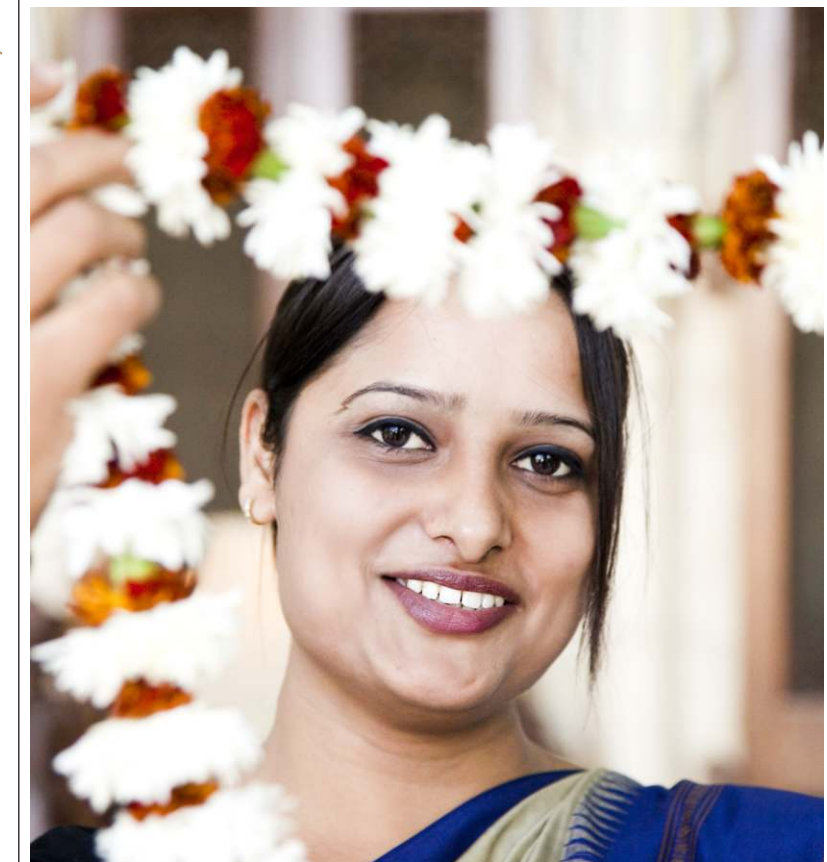
For more, contact Destination Knowledge Centre at dkc@sita.in

Mysore on foot

Did you know Hollywood's richest star during the 1940's was from Mysore? What is connection of Mysore with The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)? Why are sales people in Rolls Royce happy when they "do a Mysore"? Did you know Mysore was the first city in Asia to get electricity? What is the connection of Mysore with the iPhone?

Discover many more such interesting facts and trivia during our walking tours of Mysore. There will be little quizzes in the middle of the tours, old photographs, old maps, and documents to bring the stories of Mysore alive. Self-confident and accessible, Mysore is still a laid back place...the pace and culture being that of a smaller town rooted in its heritage and strong family bonds and values. Mysore is the most pedestrian friendly city we have encountered.

Ideal for FITs and Small Groups (6-8 pax)





Destination insider

One of the driving forces behind the Explore product line is the realisation that no matter how good or wise we are, locals always know the best kept secrets that will bring long-term success to a particular destination. And while we travel from one destination to another, in search of compelling stories to inspire your clients to travel, it has been and will be our constant endeavour to listen to locals, initiate partnerships, engage them, and determine mutually beneficial alignments.

We have made several friends in the process, the very best in what they do; ready to help your clients absorb the destination like a local. They love their mythology, history, and folklore and brilliantly weave them into their narratives, the end result being, a true local experience.

We felt that it was necessary to create a platform where our friends are able to share their expert insights, wonderful stories and delightful conversations for a never before take on destination travel and knowledge sharing. The Destination Insider, which we bring to you once every two months, is a result of that.

Best of Destination Insider

Chimi Tshomo, the author of the article is a friend of Destination Knowledge Centre and works in Thimphu. She started her career in the hotel industry but found working in a travel company more thrilling and close to her heart. The warmth of the sub-tropical region of Punakha where Chimi grew up is her idea of a perfect holiday in Bhutan.

Our Friends in Bhutan

- ▶ Ugen Tenzing was born and brought up in rural Bhutan where he lived with Bhutan's age-old animist tradition with his joint family. He now finds a deep connection between the ancient animist tradition and the conservation of the environment. Ugen is strong advocate of experiential travel and sees it as an opportunity where all such quaint, but meaningful traditions could be witnessed and kept alive.
- ▶ T. Sangay Wangchuk joined the tourism business right after university in 1991. Sangay loves the outdoors and has trekked every corner of Bhutan. He published his first book on Bhutan in 2006, is a columnist for a local newspaper and advises the Bhutan Government on creating sustainable tourism opportunities
- ▶ Sonam Pemo is a foodie and knows all the cool eating joints in Thimphu, from a compact Momo outlet to grand dining options in the most up market restaurants. Pemo believes that people who are happy by nature are foodies. Her idea of a wild night out is going on a long drive with friends, firing up a barbeque and cooking a hearty meal, complete with a bottle of peach wine.

Bhutan special

Punakha, the Lord made it beautiful

Punakha district is in the east of Bhutan's capital city, Thimphu. The name has been acquired from the word Pungthan-kha which means 'the gathering ground'. The Dzong (fortress like building) stands at the confluence of the two rivers that flow through the valley. The structure does look like piles of debris gathered by the rivers. Hence the name 'gathering ground'. Officially, the Dzong here is named Punthang Dewachengi Phodrang. The crude translation would mean 'the blissful castle at the gathering ground'. The Dzong was consecrated in 1637 as the seat of spiritual power of Bhutan and it served as the capital until the 1950s. The Monastic Body of Bhutan still considers Punakha as their winter capital and every year they migrate from Thimphu to their winter residence on the 1st day of the 10th Bhutanese month. On the way, thousands of devotees wait at different places to receive their blessings. They spend six months in Punakha before moving back to Thimphu on the first day of the fourth Bhutanese month.

It takes two hours to drive to Punakha from Thimphu. Some tourists make day excursions from the capital but most like to spend at least two nights there. Punakha Valley is almost sub-tropical. The birdlife is very rich with highlight being the white-bellied heron. This heron is Asia's largest and endangered. Only few hundreds are left in the world. Many migratory aquatic birds do visit the valley in winter months. Blessed with sub-tropical vegetation, many varieties of insects thrive here. The valley does have reptiles too that includes the King cobra. Of bigger animals there are sightings of the Takin, the National Animal of Bhutan at the northern end of the region. Takins closely resemble the Musk Ox and migrate to lower pastures in winter.

Punakha is also the cultural heartland of western Bhutan. The first King of Bhutan was crowned at the Punakha Dzong in 1907. Henceforth, all crowning ceremonies are held at this Dzong. One of the most fascinating temples in Punakha is the Khamsum Yuelling and it has some exquisite wall frescoes. There are numerous temples, farmhouses and view points where one can go for day hikes. The temple of the Divine Madman is also in Punakha. Drukpa Kinley (1455- 1529) aka the Divine Madman taught radical teachings which made him popular amongst the common folks. The phallic image that adorns Bhutanese farmhouse in western Bhutan is associated with the Master. There are also numerous festivals in Punakha that one could time their visit with.



Art of travel

Sita's monthly newsletter brings out the real essence of contemporary India and influences of its past lineage that help the reader explore some more. The newsletter is an extension of what we offer, an Art of Travel with high standards and services. The design and the content have been inspired by the company's core values; Reliability, Authenticity and Passion.



Some of our
favourites

6 things we liked about - Ramgarh Frescos

Non Touristy - Ideally located to explore the non touristsy and quaint Ramgarh area in the Shekhawati region of Rajasthan and admire the beautiful frescos without the press and the clamour of the crowds.

Private Walks - We loved the Private Walks designed by Sanjay and Siddharth Khandelwal, the owners of Ramgarh Frescos. Together they have lovingly restored a beautifully painted 110 year mansion, which they run as a hotel.

Insider access - Your clients can have access to locked up mansions and beautifully painted cenotaphs which are otherwise off limits, courtesy Sanjay and Siddharth's local contacts.

Photography - Ramgarh Frescos is the only hotel in the entire Shekhawati region with an in house professional photographer and we love it for Ramgarh is a photographer's delight.

100 Gram Laddus - We loved the 100 gram Laddus (an Indian dessert) at the Ramgarh Frescos. They are sinfully delicious.

Handmade furniture - If your clients fancy handmade furniture, Ramgarh is the hub for replicas and antique. They will be delivered right to your clients' doorstep.

A day in the life of - Amchi Chundui

Chundui is an Amchi (traditional healer) from Spiti. The Amchi system is an off-shoot of Ayurveda, the knowledge is passed on to the eldest son by the father. The Amchis of Spiti never charge money from their patients. It is a compelling story of communal living. There is more.

Best of art of travel

Spotted By Sita

Sita spotted this statue at the Shri Meenakshi Temple in Madurai where pregnant women pour oil and apply butter and ghee (clarified butter) praying for a healthy pregnancy and safe delivery of the baby.

Top Chef Recommends

Ashish Ugal, Executive Chef of Taj Safaris recommends Khadd Desi Murg or Clay Country Chicken as a must try during your stay there. "It is a very unusual way of cooking country chicken in which the chicken is marinated for 12 hours and then wrapped with wet clay and thrown inside the wood fire to get roasted," says Ugal. "This tender, succulent mouth-watering chicken is a local delicacy which used to be cooked by the local tribes who staying in the jungle. The same recipe was recreated in the Safari's style. It is cooked in its own marination and juices, making it extremely flavourful and delicate and one of the most favourite and flavourful dish on the menu," he adds.





Knowledge wednesday

Guest speakers, not only from the travel industry, come and share their knowledge, experiences and of course their expertise to give an insight of what surrounds us today and what awaits us, as an opportunity, tomorrow. An interaction based forum, where employees interact with the guest speaker on a Wednesday.

Our favourite Wednesday

It was Sharad Vats' love for the Tiger and Indian Wildlife that made him quit his high paying job in a premiere hotel chain and move to the jungles of India to start his own wildlife lodge. He found complete harmony between his faith and workplace in the wilderness. Sharad is a friend of the Destination Knowledge Centre and is on our panel of Lecturers on Conservation and Wildlife for our Alumni and Affinity Travel Groups.

Do you believe in love at first sight? I do... My first love - The Tiger. Or should I say - "The Tigers" and "Wilderness".

Throughout my life I've been fascinated by Tigers. Slowly as I started spending more and more time around these magnificent beasts, I started understanding them better and with that understanding I came to know myself better as well. If you think about it, you can easily identify the traits of a Tiger with that of a CEO of a company. Let me run you through my observation and you will see my point. Let's take the most important aspect which allows the Tiger to dominate his territory- Fitness. It's a quality shared by any CEO. To run a company he has to be physically and mentally fit to handle the reigns of the company and take informed decisions.

Another characteristic is 'Adaptability'. Tiger is a predator that's perfectly adapted to various terrains- be it the swamps, grasslands, snow or water. Similarly the CEO of a company needs to adapt to the ever changing international scenario where the competitive advantage of any company can disappear overnight. 'Eating Right' is another trait which is essential for both to keep them in perfect fighting condition. The Tiger generally covers more than 10-15 miles of his territory every day.

Tigers & CEOs

A CEO also needs to keep 'Patrolling' to judge the market sentiments and ensure the company isn't losing ground. Hunting, Ambush, Concentration; all discreetly done are the traits of any predator on the top of his game. A Tigers success rate is only 10 % but it always gives its cent percent. This is what any shareholders of a company would expect from the CEO; that he gives his heart and soul in all that he does.

And remember it's always lonely at the top. You will have few friends but you will have to persevere. In the case of the Tiger I firmly believe "Looks can Kill".





In our opinion

A generous dose of patience

Philip Thomas heads the Business Unit which manages our business from Europe. He often admits daydreaming about his backpacking round the world tour he is planning when he's done with serving happy clients! Determined to put on his boots, when others have hung up theirs, he lives by his wits and gut feel and looks for the funny side of things. Says it helps him feel light. He loves to laugh a lot, mostly at himself. In between he also seeks solace within and cannot stop learning from new experiences everyday! He usually points to his ample waistline when talking about the "middle path" he advocates!! He lives and let live.

Most first time visitors to India return disappointed that the level of the petrification they expected while driving in their chauffer driven vehicles turns out to be a damp squib after their initial awe at the orderly chaos we create everyday on our roads. Much as things are "different" here, it's actually much safer than it looks. One of the reasons is that we drive "fast" only at 80 kilometers (around 50 miles) an hour. Other reasons include our determination not to bid adieu to life so beautiful while on a Golden Triangle Tour (most Indian prefer to die in Varanasi or other holier places), a mutual respect for size (the meaner and bigger and fatter the oncoming truck, the meeker we have to become) and a generous dose of patience that most of us share, all add up to making road travel in India hellish but not nightmarish!

Horn please

It does not take long for us to catch up and eventually overtake the ubiquitous Trucks, usually gaily painted, that lead the highways of India with a "Please Horn" painted, largely at eye level if you are in a popular small car. Some truck owners want to stand out of the crowd and they prefer painting "Horn Please" instead. The fact is, no matter how hard you press the horn; the trucks won't budge an inch.

Heck we are noisy but so what. If there is a horn we must use it well. Remember the" if you don't use it you'll lose it" rule?

We also have a knack of being a "sharing" society. Cars are usually made for 4 passengers, buses for about 60, trains for about a 1000. Yet it is common to see, heavily laden vehicles everywhere. 10 in a 900 cc small car? No problem...100 in a bus meant for 60...no problem. Trains with rooftop traveler's because 1500 have already boarded comfortably... no problem. Now if that isn't a positive outlook to life what is?

Accidents do occur sometimes but more people die of choking on chicken legs than on Indian roads. Some newer highways are trying to keep out two wheel drive vehicles but that's proving hard to implement. We've all shared the same roads since the wheel was invented, cows, bulls, chicken, camels, sheep, elephants, camels again, goats, trucks, bicycles, cars, sedans, delivery vans, donkeys, 24 wheelers carrying unpronounceable parts of a hydroelectric dam's main control console and gleefully crawling on the fastest lane, rickshaws and pedestrians. As everyone does not go in the same direction, our reflexes are usually sharp and if nothing else works, we always have our "horns"!

You must by now, believe that understanding the traffic sense on your India visit is a futile exercise. Just enjoy the ride, even with your eyes shut wide!! Let me add, on behalf of over half a billion of my citizens, that we are not ways proud of what we do (or don't do) while we drive. The one thing I can reassure you about, is that we love to reach our destination as much as you do!!

Horn Please you are in India!

Indian art

“”

Indian art is as old as civilization itself

Indians have always had a passion for the beautiful: the textiles, sculpture, temple architecture, music, dance and even food speak for themselves.

Art has always been defined by a specific historic period as well as the regional and religious presets that influence it. The coming of the Muslim invaders in India in particular brought new influences like repetitive geometric and floral motifs, spatial dimensions and narratives.

Miniature art too was introduced during this time leading to the emergence of major schools like Gandhara and Mathura as well as the Pahari, Kangra, Kishangarh and Rajasthan schools. Soon Indian art got more varied; religious parables, folk tales, mythology, eroticism as well as the lives of common men and women all started to find expression.

The British Era brought a completely fresh perspective into art and art forms. Constantly amazed by India's diversity, exotic flora and fauna and the country's outstanding ancient monuments and wanting to capture these marvelous images to send them home to their families, many of the Europeans posted in India hired Indian artists to paint these wonderful settings for them. These "postcards from Indian" used a combination of European motives, ideas and painting styles, which were not just a success in Europe but made way for a new Indo-European style.

The world, thus opened up with many Indian artists coming into contact with major European art works and trends. Simultaneously the east opened up too as oriental art forms from China and Japan gained expediency all coming together to give shape to what is today called Indian Art.

Kalpna Uberoi is General Manager – Business Development at our Business Unit which handles Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions. She is an avid collector of Contemporary Indian Art; particularly creations of upcoming Indian artists.

After independence as with all cultural and artistic currents that are formed around a political event, Indian art too was marked by a heavy dose of political and social consciousness. This heralded the birth of Indian contemporary art and led to the founding of a new art school in Bombay, called the "Progressive Artists Group". Founded by Francis Newton Souza, the group encouraged two types of art: at one end, artists painted bold and furious scenes of the recent political and social changes, while the Bombay art school encouraged painters to return to Indian traditions and motives, creating magical and fantastic pieces of art. Out of this came some of the biggest names in contemporary Indian art; Francis Newton Souza, Maqbool Fida Husain, Gulam Muhammed Sheikh or Sundaram, to name just a few.

The Venice Biennale, one of the world's most prestigious art exhibitions, showcased Indian art in its last show through a dedicated exhibition called "iCon: Indian Contemporary, even as large auction houses like Sotheby's and Christie's vie to develop a "bigger client base" and tap the country's vast potential.

Indeed, over the past two to three years, both the volumes and prices of Indian art on world markets have soared dramatically. Works of senior artists like Francis Newton Souza, Husain, Syed Haider Raza, Tyeb Mehta, Akbar Padamsee, Ram Kumar, and Vasudeo Gaitonde have reached impressive levels even as younger artists like Subodh Gupta, Jagdish Swaminathan, Bhupen Khakar and Arpita Singh catch up in prices and recognition.

It seems that Indian art has finally found its rightful place in the world.





Now that's what
i call a smart deal

Harpreet Bhatia is General Manager of our Product and Procurement India. He was born in Jalandhar in Punjab, best known for its sports industry (besides of course a thriving Non Resident Indian community) but never had a chance to live there. It was only when he wanted to pursue a Master Degree in Business Administration, that he realised that one could specialise in Tourism. Art is another passion that Harpreet holds close to his heart. Few paints and a canvas in a quiet hill side bungalow – is his idea of an ideal holiday.

In my years of experience with the Procurement division of one of the leading Travel companies, that has to offer a variety of Products to the ever changing environment and scattered segments of business, we often wonder – What's a SMART DEAL after all? Is it always the best negotiated price, extensive market research that an organization can invest or great publicity through paper and web?

No doubt, customers today are spoilt for choice, they have access to almost every information they seek.

We all get to hear this phrase VALUE FOR MONEY, ...What is this value? Is this an emotional connect that you are seeking every time you are traveling to a new destination? Isn't that a VALUE that you can carry back as a memory and recommend to friends and family.

Now, let's come back to this Value quotient. Who will decide that for the client? The client by himself or we as a Indian counterpart.....How many of us as an Indian partners (except a few) spend so much time and energy just exploring these new experiences and products, including accommodation.

Flavour of the season

I recall a few owners who went to the extent of sharing ideas on a blue print with our Product and Procurement team – just to be sure that they were moving in the right direction to meet the changing requirement of evolving clients. We are of a strong opinion that the properties that are usually single owned (individual, non branded) if projected correctly have the right set of elements that appeals today's clients.

I think this has to do more with the partnership that Indian counterparts do with local investors when they design their Products. There has to be a long term association where both partners come together on thoughts and bring up a product that's closer to the client's expectations.

Majority of the mushrooming single owner companies procure the cheapest deal of the season and push it through to their overseas counterparts. It's like the "flavor of the season"..... A few of them oversell this accommodation option and then move on to another one... dumping the earlier one, for a few years!

A friend of mine had a very correct observation when he remarked – "I hate mammoth hotels with huge inventory boasting of personal attention and warmth to the clients". Placing a recycled note pad on the writing table doesn't bring in social responsibility. There has to be more to this. Every small element in the hotel or corner of your room should invite questions about India or its tradition. This will lead to an interesting interaction between two individuals and that's what creates a bond to remember and revisit a place.

Today, the most successful hotels in the world (to name a few in India too) ...are non branded individual hotels.

Look at Samode Palace in Rajasthan, the Samode Safari Lodge in Bandhavgarh, Ranjit Svaasa in Amritsar, Casino in South, Plazzio is Gurgaon, Flame of Forest in Kanha, Home stays in South, Heritage Retreat in Jaipurthe list is endless! There are many more that are at a Project stage and will be ready for offering in the coming years. Products like these are the ones that stay and survive longer – they are very Indian and always ready to adapt to the global traveller.

What you sell is what you will have in years to come. At the end of the day, if the guest goes back happy; has fond memories of destination India, you as a travel Manager have done well (because you had something unique to offer); the hotelier is looking forward to a long term partnership with you because you participated in his passion and let him grow – NOW THAT'S WHAT I CALL – A SMART DEAL!!!!



Stays we loved & Stays to watch out for



Perfect moments

Flameback Lodges

We loved this Lodge in Chikmagalur, Karnataka for its simple warmth and flexibility. There are no timings for breakfast, lunch or dinner. You want breakfast at 12 noon? No problem. Lunch at 4 in the afternoon? Sure. Dinner past midnight? Why not? “You are on a holiday, not on a military precision training. Just chill out and do things the way you want to,” says one its staff member.

Nelpura Homestay

We loved Nelpura for the country canoe ride which guests take whilst accessing this cosy 3 room homestay through a narrow canal in the backwaters of Kuttanad, the rice bowl of Kerala.

Oberoi Gurgaon

We loved the Oberoi Gurgaon for the sheer amount of space it offers to guests. Undoubtedly the largest base category rooms in India's capital city and the National Capital Region (NCR) combined, starting at 620 square feet.

Falaknuma Palace

We loved the Taj Falaknuma Palace in Hyderabad for being caught in a constant time wrap. Built by Nizam Mehboob Ali Pasha Nizam VI in the 19th century, the Falaknuma Palace was the royal guesthouse for visiting dignitaries to Hyderabad.

Stays we loved

The LaLiT Resort & Spa

We loved the LaLiT Resort & Spa Bekal for acknowledging the fact that each guest is unique and the services, hence, need to be adapted accordingly. The holiday host assigned to each room is just about that. Available at the push of a button (irrespective of the room category booked), your holiday host (your one point contact during your entire stay) will check you in, drive you to the restaurant, take your order, ensure that you have a word with the Chef, pour you drinks, serve you food, wait on you, take your plates back once you are done eating and drive you back to your room. Your holiday host is happy to plan your local sightseeing as well.

Shenbaga Vilaasam

We loved this delightful cosy property in Northwestern Tamilnadu enroute to Kerala for the undiluted welcome and farewell ceremony by its staff. They even break a coconut in front of the vehicle praying for a safe journey when guests checks out. Offering a coconut in Hindu religion is considered the purest act that one can do since the water and the white kernel inside the coconut is unpolluted as it remains covered by the hard outer shell.



Stays we loved

Perfect moments

Arco Iris

We loved this delightful homestay in Curtorim Village in South Goa with its beautiful lakes, unending paddy fields and friendly people. Curtorim is a paradise for bird watchers. Owners Gani and Benny & their lovely daughters T1 and T2 will personally take you in and around Curtorim including their favourite places to eat.

Samode Safari Lodge

The Samode magic has finally arrived in the wildlife space. We loved this plush wildlife lodge of the Samode group in the Bandhavgarh National Park for its exceptional service and quality of naturalist.

Chitoor Palace

We loved this quaint one key heritage mansion for making us forget that we are still in the raging city of Kochi. A perfect getaway for travellers looking for exclusivity. Outstanding food too.



Stays to watch out for

Hot picks

1, Hill House

1, Hill House is located 35 km from Periyar National Park in Kerala on a 600 acre estate where tea, coffee and spices are grown. It overlooks the foothills of the Western Ghats and on a clear day the glimmer of the backwaters can be seen in the distance. You will enjoy its cooler climes (1, Hill House is located 3500 metres above sea level), the beautiful view and surroundings, the walks through a working estate, meeting the family and getting an insight into their way of life.

Glenburn Penthouse

Eight Suites in an intimate haven of sophisticated luxury, the Glenburn Penthouse in Kolkata is where you can savour the culture, history and cuisine of Bengal against the magnificent backdrop of the British Raj.

The Rose

The Rose is located in Hauz Khas Village, in the heart of South Delhi. Dating back to the 13th century Hauz Khas Village is fantastic mélange of rural setting and urban chic, with medieval ruins as backdrop. It has abundant greenery, birdlife, and ancient monuments. It also has a jumble of art galleries, furniture stores, fabulous restaurants, boutiques, antique furniture and private houses.

The Rose has 11 rooms, each with a view of Hauz Khas Village Rose Garden. It has a restaurant on the ground floor overlooking the park, and a rooftop terrace floating over a canopy of trees.

Punjabiyat

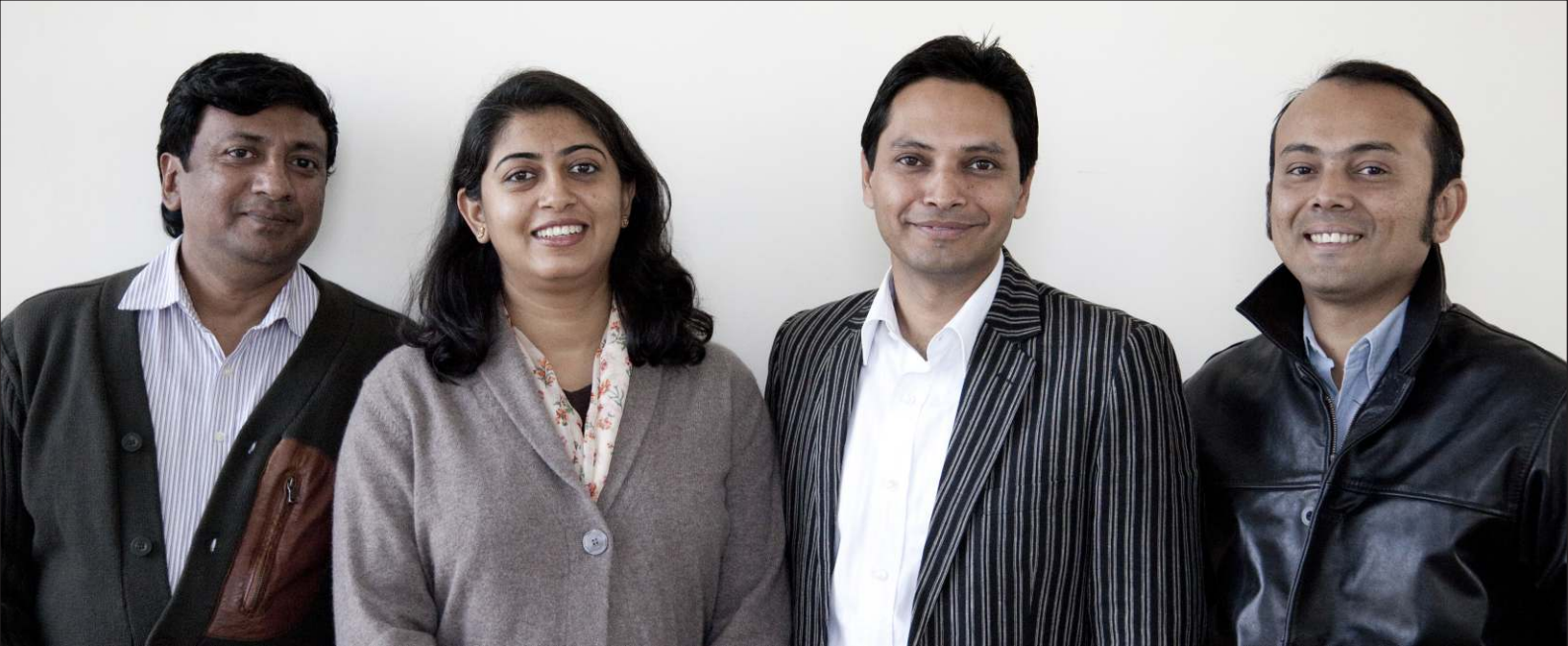
Punjabiyat, pronounced panjab-i-yat, means 'essence of Punjab'. The lodge, located one hour from the holy city of Amritsar, is meant to be an expression of the jest and effervescence of the Punjabi culture and its large heartedness. It comprises of four stand alone cottages and a lounge set amidst the lush green fields, for which Punjab is known for. From participating in farming, visiting nearby dairy farm, taking a bath in a tube well, sleeping on the terrace, praying at the local Gurudwara (Sikh Temple) to simply relaxing in the peaceful surroundings guests will have an opportunity to experience the lifestyle of Punjab from close quarters.

Bagh Tola

Bagh Tola, which literally means the Tiger's village, is spread over 44 acres of wooded forest in Kanha National Park in Central India. This wonderful lodge comes complete with 44 lithographs and antique furniture gleaned from old houses around India. To minimize the impact on the natural surroundings and to cause minimal footprint on the ground Bagh Tola is designed around a courtyard reminiscent of the Anglo-Indian railway colonies that central India was famous for.

Tanjore Hi

Tanjore Hi is a heritage boutique hotel located in the heart of the legendary city of Tanjavur in Tamil Nadu. All the 14 rooms are all unique, elegantly designed in a contemporary style with high level of comfort. The food served is a rich fusion of traditional Indian and Continental recipes made using fresh organic products from their farm. The rooftop restaurant is a perfect place to relax and have a leisurely meal.



Books we loved

Somewhere between the ripples are a million stories, hidden in the folds of time... In case there is another such soul, who having wandered across from somewhere, ponder this: how about a cup of tea--or maybe coffee --and some small talk with the river dolphin that bobs up and down in these waters, on her way, they say, to a faraway land, where blind though she may be, she will dance to the music of the evening, for what she doesn't see, she hears and she feels... (is it a her....? never mind, she must be)... But tell me this... would you like some tea or perhaps coffee?



“”
A trip to India is
what travel stories
are made of

Kuntal Baruwa is an Explorer and travels all over the Indian subcontinent to make friends with locals and in search of compelling stories to inspire destination travel. He recommends:

Twilight in Delhi by Ahmed Ali

“Forget Lonely Planet. Twilight in Delhi by Ahmed Ali is your original guidebook to Old Delhi or should I say Shahjahanabad. Published in 1940, Twilight in Delhi makes for an Intense reading as Ahmed Ali traces for you the turmoil and decline of the once magnificent Shahjahanabad. Should you visit Old Delhi armed with a copy of this classic you are bound to slip into the world of Ali's Shahjahanabad that still quietly exist amidst the din and chaos.”

Ravi Bhandari is a passionate advocate of slow travel and believes that one needs to slow down and spend more time in a destination. At home, Ravi loves restoring antique furniture and recently restored his grandmother's almirah and converted it into a bar. He recommends:

Eating India by Chitrita Banerji

“Eating India by Chitrita Banerji is an odyssey of Indian food with a sizable coverage to its inception, evolution, assimilation and interesting facts of indigenous traditions and foreign influences. In this travelogue, she covered more than a dozen regions to pick some unique flavours, interesting stories of both past and modern culinary landscape of India. Even, she humorously unfolded the roadside shacks, eateries, the temple kitchens without subduing their spices.”

Books we loved

Lovleen Sagar loves to discover small things on her travels and how cultures across the world are somehow connected; how each one has influenced the other over centuries of history. She is a self-proclaimed Queen of Trivia on the subject! She recommends:

Empires of the Indus - The story of a river by Alice Albinia

“Empires of the Indus - The story of a river” by Alice Albinia takes you on a voyage through two thousand miles of geography and more than five thousand years of history...covering Pakistan, India and Tibet...the writer traces the journey up-stream and writes about small villages, towns, cities, mountains, people, cultures, food, religion, mythology, mysticism, traditions, society...everything that it touches and passes by; going back in time on occasion and coming to the present; it makes a very interesting read for people who want to understand the sub-continent in its entirety through the story of a river.”

Philip Thomas is a Delhi born Keralite who lived all his life in the Capital city except for a 13 year period when he did a stint in Tourism in Arabia; The Sultanate of Oman to be more precise and briefly in Dubai. He regrets that Love and Compassion are not subjects taught in any curriculum anywhere in the world and thinks that we are not alone in this universe! He recommends:

Gem in the Lotus - The Seeding of Indian Civilisation by Abraham Eraly

“Life along the Jhelum during Alexander's conquest, his personaliy, the Vedic Age, the Golden Age of the Guptas and the Mauryas, the Gem in the Lotus recounts all this and more in grippingly fluent fashion. A must read for those who dont know much about India's ancient histroy. Not for the the faint hearted!!”

7 days in Goa

“”
Susegado!!!

Day 1

Kuntil from our Destination Knowledge Centre moves inward into Goa's hinterland - to its quaint villages and spends a week to encounter another Goa.

Find yourself a pretty village to stay

Kuntil recommends the pretty village of Aldona. This is a perfect place for someone who can't get enough of Goa's scenic beauty or the angler on the lookout for good fishing. Aldona is located by the Mandovi River and is about 20 mins drive from Mapusa. All popular beaches of North Goa is within 30 to 40 minute drive from Aldona.

Stay at The Only Olive - a charming Portuguese style villa that gets its name from the olive tree in the garden which is hundred years old and the only one in entire North Goa - like the house itself. The property has been lovingly refurbished by its responsible owners who have ensured that the villa was restored to reflect its former glory whilst retaining its inherent Portuguese influences. Round the day off at Brittos; Goa's oldest restaurant. The best seats are the sea facing ones.

Day 2

The Mango House

Spend time with the children at the Mango House of Children Walking Tall; a registered UK charity based in Mapusa. They provide food, shelter, medical care and education to some of the most disadvantaged children in Mapusa. Enjoy lunch at the river deck of Casa Colvale while enjoying the sweeping views of lush tropical landscapes with the meandering Shapora River. Go for a leisurely stroll in Aldona village to enjoy its peaceful and unhurried lifestyle. Dinner at Bomra's at Candolim for some divine Burmese cuisine under the open sky.

Day 3

Book Worming in Calangute

Literati is the best book café in North Goa. Read or browse or buy secondhand as well as newly published works, while enjoying a delicious brownie or a tall glass of chilled kokum (fruit drink). You wouldn't want to miss out on the Kerkar Art Complex if you are in Calangute, 10 minute walk from the Literati Book Café. The Kerkar Art Complex has all the nuances of its creator Dr Subodh Kerkar, Goa's foremost installation Artist and sculptor. Enjoy dinner at Lloyd's Steak and Grill in Candolim. There is no fixed menu. Everything is fresh catch of the day and prepared by Lloyd's mother.

Day 4

Fishing under the Corjuem Bridge

Sit on a chair or stand below the Corjuem Bridge, throw bait and relax; while overlooking the open sky, lush green trees and some old boats. Later at the Only Olive fire up the Barbe Que, cook your catch for lunch, enjoy a beer or a bottle of wine followed by a hearty afternoon siesta. Cheer for the Village Football team in the afternoon.

Day 5

Shopping at Mapusa Market

Take a local bus ride from just outside the Only Olive to the Friday Market of Mapusa, Goa's biggest fresh produce market. Shoppers come here to shop, to bond, have a drink and to refill the exhausted stocks back home. Once you are done with your shopping at the Mapusa Friday Market, a visit to a local bar is a must. We recommend you settle down with a chilled beer at Café Aurora in the market.

Day 6

Invite a local for lunch

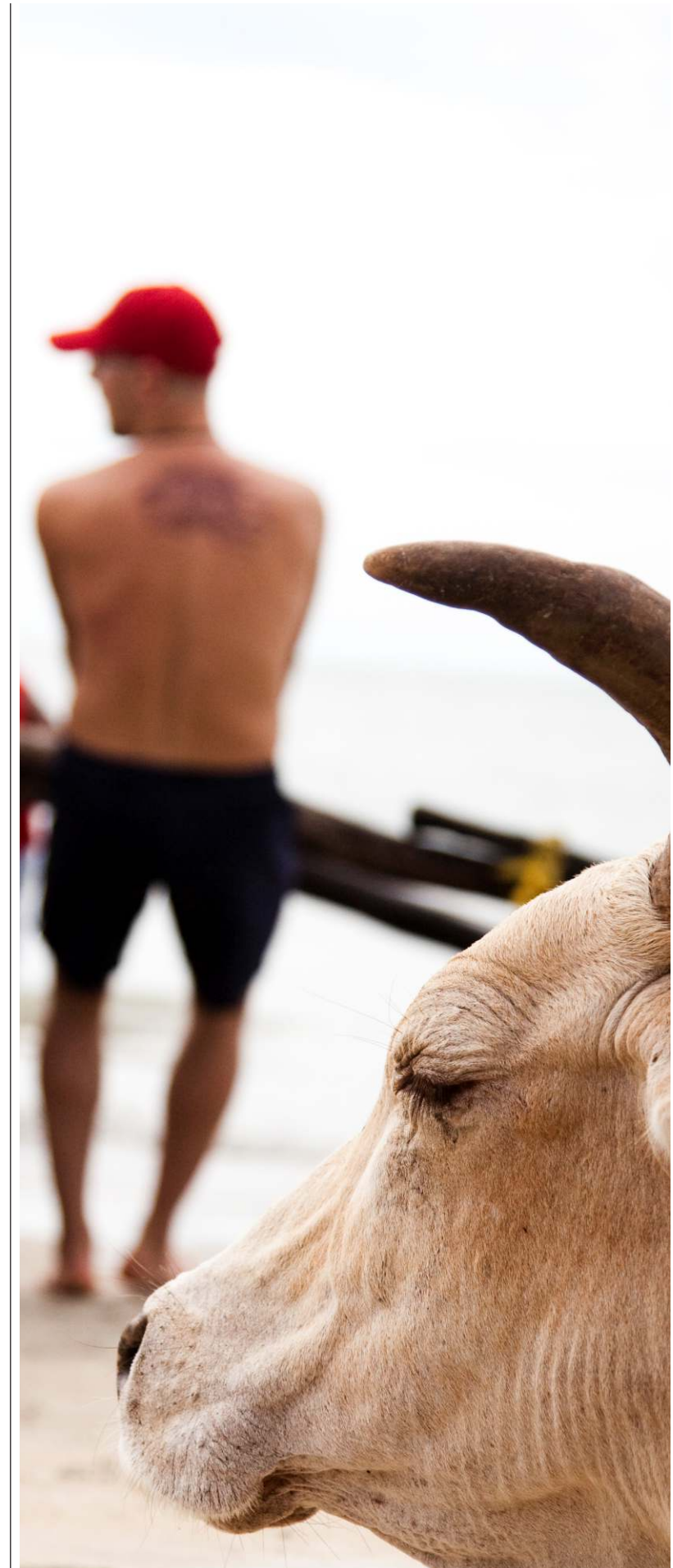
To discover Goa one must discover its stomach. Food forms the strongest bond of the Goan culture. So inviting a local for lunch is actually a fantastic idea. Stick to simple Fish Curry and Rice for Lunch as it symbolises Goan hospitality. Kuntil invited Fredrik Noronha for Lunch while at the Only Olive. Fredrik is a journalist and has his own publishing house Goa 1556. The name is symbolic of the year when the first printing press in Asia came into operation in Goa.

Day 7

Sunday Mass at the Local Church

Sunday mornings in Aldona is a very relaxed affair. Attend the morning mass with the locals in the village church. If it's a Sunday, most Goans would have lunch with their family outside of their homes. Kuntil recommends you head to La Plage for lunch today after the Sunday mass. La Plage is a beach shack in Asvem Beach and serves outstanding French cuisine.

For more details contact the Destination Knowledge Centre at dkc@sita.in



Our Commitment

Experiences and impressions of particular intensity and profundity, instants that endure and can leave a lasting positive impression. They are unique and memorable, at par with appreciating a great work of art. Sita is intent on making those moments happen.

