

# Art Of Travel



KNOWLEDGE IS BASED ON EXPERIENCE  
EVERYTHING ELSE IS JUST INFORMATION

# Come explore with us



Dear Friends,

We bring to you our second edition of Art of Travel with more programmes that are sure to bring you in touch with India and South Asia with a different perspective, one that is sure to be authentic and sustainable.

We believe it is about 'living' as opposed to 'staying' at a destination. For our guests to experience the local way of life, we have created a Destination Knowledge Centre, a member of which travels throughout the year in search of compelling stories to inspire people to travel, to make a traveller feel up-close to the local life and feel that they will be better human beings for having travelled there.

We understand and appreciate the opportunity to be able to take the travellers most prized possession- his leisure time and provide unique and memorable moments - moments that last.

Get Inspired.

Come explore with us.

Dipak Deva  
CEO Destination Management  
India & South Asia

# Get inspired - explore



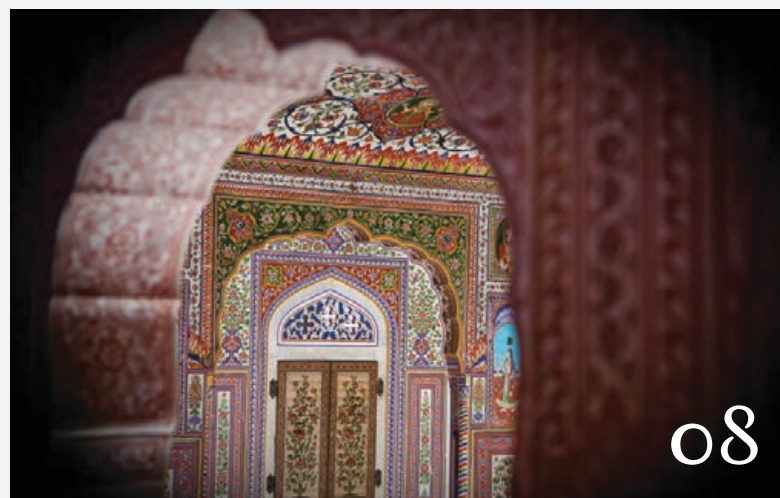


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# Sita's young India

## A unique encounter with modern day India

This is a unique encounter with modern day India, which is faced with an unprecedented demographic condition. 70 per cent of its 1 billion population is under 40 years with 600 million being under 25. History is witness that such a high ratio of young population has had far reaching impact and changed things forever; including the system; both social and political.

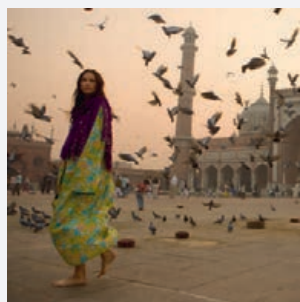
Be it America's baby boomers who led the charge in the civil rights movement and the sexual revolution, the Cultural Revolution which took China to new heights, the Arab Spring which overthrew autocratic regimes or Young India coming out to the streets against corruption in politics and very recently demanding strong anti-rape laws which led to violent clashes with the police in Delhi.

Chat up with young friends of Sita in Delhi, a community of artists; young men and women working towards creating an open and a democratic space for the study and practice of visual arts; who are actively involved in mobilising the youth for social and political change in a non-violent manner. Learn about their aspirations and inspirations, their take on the great divide between the world's youngest population and the world's oldest political class, get to see some of their art work and exchange views and thoughts in this 2 hour long informal, free flowing session.

For more details contact Destination Knowledge Centre at [dkc@sita.in](mailto:dkc@sita.in)

### EXPLORE AND CAPTURE

- For those interested in photography and visiting India for the first time, take a full day acclimatisation photography workshop in Delhi with one of these young friends of Sita. They are well versed with the surroundings of India's capital city and can foster interactions between the participants and the locals.
- Any traveller landing in India is completely overwhelmed by the sights, smells, culture and a whole lot more. Often their lack of understanding of the same, creates obstacles in taking photographs. This photography workshop designed with multiple sights and a variety of subjects, helps break the ice and bond with the surroundings; including the light conditions. Travellers walk away with valuable tips for the rest of their itinerary as our young friends are well travelled across India. And one need not have an expensive camera for this workshop. You will be surprised at what you can do with your point-and-shoots.



# A happy mix of commerce and heritage

## Night walk in Chandni Chowk

### INDIA BY NIGHT

- Delhi by night is a unique way to explore, experience and capture the many moods of Delhi at night with your camera. Your mentor for the night will take you around New Delhi at night, draped in natural darkness and man-made light. You will try to capture the play of light and shadow through your camera. Capture the various forms and shapes being formed by the interplay of these lights. Be it the crowded bazaars where you see the human patterns or the random patterns being formed with lights from the vehicles, follow his footsteps as he takes you around some of the important landmarks of Delhi and the night life surrounding it.
- Our Rituals of Death and Rebirth Night Walk in Varanasi, begins post dinner only. You will visit sacred ponds that house healing waters, visit the home of Kali, the powerful mother goddess who drinks the blood of sinners, take a step into the abode of the Aghor's, renunciants who practice Tantric death rituals, at Manikarnika burning ghat. As you hear the stories of the Bhairavas, ferocious forms of Shiva who protect the city, your experience will culminate with a visit to the temple of Sankata Devi, the Goddess of Trouble who slays demons and destroys sorrow. Varanasi, which most locals prefer to call Banaras or Kashi, has been a city for 6,000 or perhaps as long as 10,000 years.

Old Delhi is a happy mix of commerce, heritage, layers of history and built heritage from across the centuries- Mughal, British and contemporary; fantastic street food; lovely people of the walled city and their infectious joie de vivre - all weave a fascinating web for those happy to explore on foot. This walking tour has, however, no agenda but to explore the life and times of Old Delhi at night. Old Delhi continues to delight our senses at all times of the day, yet at night the magic is different, since at that time, there exists a parallel life. The walk takes you through bustling streets, provides an insight into the religious harmony of Old Delhi that quietly exists, the numerous sweets and savouries shops, glittering bazaars, eclectic mix of art deco colonial buildings and the vibrant night life. We end the walk with a sumptuous meal at a restaurant credited to have created North India's favourite dish - Butter Chicken.

The walk starts at Sisganj Gurudwara, followed by a visit to the next door Sunahri Masjid and a quick stop at the famous sweet shop, Kanwarji's. We then proceed to explore the hidden wonders that the city offers in its many by-lanes. Walking through Ballimaran's plentiful bakeries and tea shops, we wander towards Jama Masjid and revel in the glittering bazaars around the mosque that shine on till the early hours of the morning. From here, we end up at Darya Gang to have dinner at the legendary Moti Mahal restaurant and finally conclude the walk at Delhi Gate and its eclectic mix of art deco colonial buildings.

Ideal for those who don't want anything too structured, are happy soaking in the atmosphere of Old Delhi by night and have a leisurely morning the next day.

For more details contact Destination Knowledge Centre at [dkc@sita.in](mailto:dkc@sita.in)





# Make your own khad meat

A delicacy  
with a rebellious  
history

Make your own Khad Meat with your host Ram Pratap Singh Jarar at the Chambal Safari Lodge. A whole leg of lamb cooked in a 2 feet deep pit with coal fire embers at the bottom, Khad Meat is a local speciality, much refined over the years, but owes its origins to the Baghis' (rebels) turbulent existence in the much maligned behad (ravines) of Chambal. The notorious Chambal behad can proudly lay claim to this ingenious recipe for cooking meat, creating a delicacy in the most hostile environs; when no fire could be lit without fear of discovery by the police and death by the bullet, when each meal could well have been your last and when rebellion against the system was the highest mark of honour.

"I was introduced to this recipe as a child and was taught to cook it much later in life, almost as a rite of passage, in my youth. My tutors were a raucous bunch of male family members who gathered once a year at the Mela Kothi in Jarar for the family run animal fair. Amidst stories of Shikar (hunting) camps along the Chambal River and boarding school pranks, they competed with one another over a 15 day period to produce the most appetising innovation of age-old recipes," says Ram Pratap Singh Jarar who started Chambal Safari Lodge 14 years ago. "The judges were the ladies of the household. The hotly debated winner had unrestrained bragging rights till the next season of madness," adds Anu, his wife.

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## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- Go restaurant hopping in New Delhi with a husband and wife foodie couple who will tell you that understanding individuals and cultures is so much easier when you know what, how and why people eat what they eat. The couple left their corporate jobs to start taking foodies to their favourite eateries in New Delhi. While the husband believes that the best way to end all the wars in the world is to take all the leaders of the world and have them eat at some of the local eateries in each other's countries, the wife loves to plan her imaginary travels around the world based on her favourite food and historical locations.
- Take a tour of local markets and spice stores with an instructor of India's first cooking studio in Mumbai and later return to your individual work station at the studio to cook a meal of your choice.
- Chat up with 25 year old Restaurateur and trained Chef Amritpal Singh of Patiala, over lunch in his California Restaurant. We stumbled upon his restaurant while exploring Punjab. Learn the connection between the Apple iPhone and his restaurant which offers fat free food. Fat Free and that too in Punjab? It seems completely out of place, given that Punjabis are hearty eaters of a flavoursome rich fat diet and super consumers of desi-ghee (home-made clarified butter) and hydrogenated fats. Intrigued? We were too.



The largest  
Indus Valley site  
in India

# Private museum of Indus Valley

## EXPLORE UNSPOILT SPACES

- The village of Holipura is a 15 minute drive from the Chambal Safari Lodge and 60 kms South East of Agra. The village has 500 years of recorded history. Its ancestors are said to have been priests in Alexander's army, who settled in India after his retreat. The village looks like an abandoned movie set of a period film with the Havelis dating back to the late 1800's and the early 1900's. Some are still in the hands of the descendants of the original owners and retain a distinctive character and charm.
- A short detour enroute to the high octane closing ceremony at the Indo-Pakistan border during your time in Amritsar, will take you to Sarai Amanat Khan which has been recently restored. This Sarai (resting place for travellers) was built by Amanat Khan; the legendary calligrapher of the Taj Mahal in Agra. The land for the Sarai where Amanat Khan lies buried and where you can see his calligraphy work, was gifted to him by Mughal Emperor Shahjahan as an appreciation for his excellent work (so the story narrated by some Agra Guides about the hands of the workers who built Taj Mahal being chopped off, after it was completed, since Shahjahan didn't want them to replicate it elsewhere, is questionable). What makes Sarai Amanat Khan even more interesting is the fact that people are still living inside it. We met a local, who has been running a free school for children inside the Sarai for more than a decade now.

It is the largest Indus Valley site in India and that of its history rivals, the Egyptians, Mesopotamians and Mayans. It is located only 150 kms from Delhi and can be easily combined with a Golden Triangle Tour (Delhi-Agra-Jaipur) along with painted mansions of Shekhawati region of Rajasthan. Rakhighari is waiting to be discovered and only tourism can save this 5000 year old Indus Valley site spread over 235 acres of land which has been vandalised for years.

You will be taken to the site by Wazir Chand Sirohi; a local of Rakhighari with an apology on behalf of his village for the rubbish lying around and its bad state. Though the excavation site is all covered up, he will share stories through shards and pieces of ancient pottery, plates, bricks, and bones from the site. A young local history buff, who is a friend of Sita will help translate it in English and strike conversations with Wazir Chand, as he will occasionally stop to sketch for you in a notepad to show how these pieces looked 5000 year ago.

Later visit his private museum to see his fascinating collection of Indus Valley Artifacts; pottery, bangles, beads, toys, kitchen utensils and much more, which will give you an insight into the thriving ancient mega city that existed here once upon a time.

Stay in a 100 year old 7 room hotel, not so far away from Rakhigarhi, designed like a French Chateau with home style food cooked by a Khansama (a male cook and house steward of a noble family of the Indian sub-continent).

For more details contact Destination Knowledge Centre at [dkc@sita.in](mailto:dkc@sita.in)





# Textile workshop in Kolkata

## Traditional to designer wear

This 2 day Textile Workshop in Kolkata is a fascinating insight into how self-help groups of women are turning traditional weaves of West Bengal into designer wear for the international market.

In this hands-on experience, you get to see the various stages and the work that goes into creating these exquisite fabrics. The workshop begins with a brief factory tour to see all the units from block printing, screen printing, weaving, yarn and fabric dyeing and the textile library. Post tea you are guided through the first part of the workshop - block printing and contemporary applications. See the various metal, wooden, traditional and texture blocks and the block making process. Then try your hand at the printing process, rolling, hand painting, brushing, steaming, washing and much more. Next is the weaving process, where you watch the yarn dyeing and fixing, weaving, washing, softening and tasselling. Here you can try your hand at the various traditional stitches of West Bengal as well as Batik. The workshop ends with a film tracing the history of these weaves and a visit to the store to see these traditional clothes in their contemporary avatar.

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### OF TEXTILES AND MORE

- ▶ Meet a leading Indian textile designer in Delhi, get a guided tour of his studio and his in-house weaving looms. Next visit a gallery of antique textiles to get an insight into the range of textiles from Asian regions. End the tour in a textile museum to see a collection of traditional Indian textiles.
- ▶ Gurusaday Dutt Museum in Kolkata; least visited by travellers is a treasure trove of 3300 exquisite exhibits of folk art and craft of rural Bengal. During his tenure as District Collector Gurusaday Dutt developed deep admiration for the rural folk art and started collecting handicrafts and artefacts from all over Bengal.
- ▶ Our textile tour of West Bengal takes you to Phulia and Murshidabad. Phulia is a small village north of Kolkata which has become famous for its looms. With nearly 70,000 looms in this village, it is famous for 'Fulia Tangail' saris which incorporate vibrant colours and large, intricate designs woven in jacquard looms. Murshidabad on the other had is the silk production hub of West Bengal.
- ▶ Every Saturday, Shantiniketan in West Bengal, now world famous for Rabindranath Tagore's Vishwa Bharati University, is active with the Khoai Mela (Fair). All types of household items, handicrafts, artefacts, clothes and other tradable items are sold here.



## Cheer for your neighbourhood tigers

# Tiger for a day

### SIMPLE JOYS

- ▶ After prancing with the Tigers in Thrissur, head to the Marari Beach for a couple of nights. Once you have had your fill of the beach, board the 66302 Quilon (Kollam)-Ernakulam Passenger MEMU (all days except Monday) which arrives into Marari station at 10:50 hours (non-peak hours/so it is not crowded) and get down at Ezhupunna station which is a 45 minute ride from Marari. George and Sumi, who are friends of Sita stay at a 10 minute drive away from the Ezhupunna station.
- ▶ A MEMU is a Mainline Electric Multiple Unit train pulled by an electric engine.
- ▶ Visit George's prawn farms, enjoy a country canoe ride on the narrow canals and take a cooking class from Sumi. Sumi is shy and will tell you she is not an expert, with a smile. But she conducts the session beautifully with a little help from George. It is simple, informal and very enjoyable. Simple joys of life in a nice ambience with nice people.

Cheer for your neighbourhood Tigers at the Pulikali Tiger Dance held in Thrissur, Kerala on the 4th day of Onam every year. The pantomime-cum-parade dance, where potbellied men dance with tiger faces painted on their rotund bellies to rustic drumbeats, marks an end to Kerala's Harvest Festival.

Get a ringside view of the preparations of this spectacular event of colour, sound and movement, right behind your hotel at Thrissur. Interact with the "Tigers" and get to know first-hand the painstaking efforts of the performers before they take to the streets. If you are adventurous the painters will be happy to paint a tiger face on your belly and learn a few Pulikali moves too from the performers. Remember, the bigger the belly the cooler it is.

The Pulikali Tiger Dance is said to be a 200 year old tradition. But no one knows how it all began at Thrissur. While some locals say that Pulikali was brought to Kerala by Muslims who performed the dance during their mourning festival of Muharram; some say the local Maharaja wanted a new dance, something macho, as a part of the Onam celebrations with steps that mime hunting moves and tactics.

For more details contact Destination Knowledge Centre at [dkc@sita.in](mailto:dkc@sita.in)





# Spiti initiative

## Making a difference

At the core of Sita's vision to be the world's first choice as a Travel and Destination Management Company is its commitment towards making a positive impact on its surroundings and the people that it encompasses. And not necessarily in context to our best-selling destinations.

In August 2012, Sita took up a Corporate Responsibility Initiative in the high altitude cold desert of Spiti in the Himalayas to build a Solar Bath for a local Buddhist nunnery. A team of 5 volunteers from Sita spent two weeks in Spiti to build the Solar Bath. They traveled by public transport to minimize the carbon footprints of their travel. The Solar Bath was built in collaboration with Ecosphere, a local social enterprise supported by eco-tourism.

Women in Spiti don't have a designated bathing area in their homes. During the 6 month long winter and the sub-zero temperatures, large quantities of fuel wood are burned to keep the houses warm and to heat water leading to high carbon emissions. But there is an abundance of sunny days, where Solar Baths play a positive role. Solar Baths, not only ensure hot water in the most eco-friendly manner by cutting down carbon emissions and fuel wood consumption, but also enhance the personal hygiene of the womenfolk.

The beneficiary of this initiative is the Pangmo Nunnery of Spiti which houses 40 nuns pursuing their studies in Buddhist philosophy. It is located in the village of Pangmo that has about 25 homes with 150 people and a primary school.

For more details contact Destination Knowledge Centre at [dkc@sita.in](mailto:dkc@sita.in)

### AWARE AND FAIR TRAVEL

- From January 2013 Sita has started welcoming all guests with a Mouli Ritual. It is a cotton red thread, considered to be very sacred and used in religious ceremonies in India. This red thread is believed to protect the person who wears it from all evil. The Mouli for our guests is accessorised with three wooden beads for ease of tying it around the wrist and adjusting it accordingly. These Moulis are made by underprivileged women at Literacy India, a not-for-profit, that the company supports.
- Post your Spice Walk with our friend in Thekaddy, plant a tree at any of the houses of the neighborhood which will be taken care of by the owner. This is one of the local eco-initiatives of the neighborhood which you can support. Our friend in Thekaddy is a small scale Spice Farmer, runs a Homestay and is the convener of the local eco-initiatives which includes a herbarium of Ayurveda plants and a children park. It's a 30 minute drive from our preferred properties in Thekaddy and in a very interesting location where you can also enjoy a bird's eye view of the plains of Tamil Nadu.



# Chasing the demons in Nepal

## Tiji festival, Mustang

### MUSIC, MEDITATION & WATCHES

- Enjoy a wonderful performance by Indira Machimasyus, one of the first lady drummers of Bhaktapur, Nepal. Before her, drumming was exclusively a male occupation in the Newari Culture. She learnt drumming from a German musician and ethnomusicologist Gert-Matthias. Indira coming-out as a drummer, caused quite a sensation in Nepal and has given courage to many women to follow their dreams. Nowadays it's not uncommon to find a lady drummer in Nepal.
- Take an hours session with a singing bowl master in Patan, Nepal. When the rims of these uniquely shaped ritual bowls are struck, it produces a long, reverberating sound wave that soothes the senses. Deep, subtle and powerful - these sound waves are believed to penetrate the mind of the listener leaving the person relaxed and tranquil.
- In 2009, Sir Ranulph Fiennes, the renowned English adventurer, became the oldest Briton to climb Mount Everest. He approached his friend, Michael Kobold, a watchmaker, with the idea to train the two Sherpa men who were the guides on his expedition, to become watchmakers. He thought if Thundu and Namgel didn't have to climb this mountain anymore, their families surely would be happy. Michael Kobold, the founder of Kobold Watch Company, agreed. Now, they run a shop in Kathmandu, at Baber Mahal Revisited.

Trek to the Himalayan Kingdom of Mustang which lies on a windswept plateau between Nepal and Tibet in one of the most remote regions of the world to witness the ancient and colourful festival of Tiji.

Isolated both by geography and politics, Mustang is culturally and ethnically Tibetan, though politically it is part of Nepal. To travel here, is to journey into the past, where one can witness the ancient ways of life.

One of the most sacred and colourful festivals in this whole region, Tiji features a three day ritual known as the 'chasing of demons'. Monks donning masks and colourful costumes enact the story of Dorje Jono, who fought against his demon father to save the Kingdom of Mustang from falling apart. Held annually at the onset of spring season in the walled city of Lo Manthang, the capital of Mustang, the Tiji Festival symbolises regeneration, revival and affirmation of life.

A vast high valley, arid and dry, Mustang has a barren desert-like appearance similar to the Tibetan Plateau and is characterised by eroded canyons and colourful stratified rock formations. Mustang was once an important route for crossing the Himalayas between Tibet and Nepal, many of the old salt caravans passed through Mustang.

For more details contact Destination Knowledge Centre at [dkc@sita.in](mailto:dkc@sita.in)





# The green path railing art market

## Cool Colombo

This quirky open air Art Market which can be seen only on Sundays, was started by Art Students of Colombo University about 6 years ago.

The Art Students of the Colombo University create their pieces during the week and bring them for sale on Sundays at this market, which helps them pay their University Fees. Pass-outs from the University and upcoming artists who cannot afford Exhibitions and Art Galleries also bring their work of art here.

This works out very well for the art buyer at the end of the day. Students sell their art, cheap and the lack of overhead costs and commissions to galleries, not to mention the need to make some money to be able to pay through college, makes for good art deals here. Prices start at 500 Sri Lankan Rupees - that's USD 5 for a painting!

The Green Path Railing Art Market is visited by adventurous local and expat art enthusiasts and those who know, what they buy now for almost nothing might end up being priceless when these young artists become famous.

For more details contact Destination Knowledge Centre at [dkc@sita.in](mailto:dkc@sita.in)

### IN AND AROUND

- Barefoot Boutique is Colombo's eternal favourite and a must visit for its beautiful hand-woven vibrantly coloured fabric and accessories. On most Sundays, there is a live Jazz Band playing at Barefoot's Garden Cafe. So If you like jazz, it is a great place to spend your Sunday afternoon over a lazy lunch.
- Admire the exquisite collection of jewellery at the Colombo National Museum which was established on 1st January 1877 by Sir William Henry Gregory, the then British Governor of Ceylon (Sri Lanka). We were particularly enamored by the 5th Century Gold Earring (Kundala), baffled by the master jeweler who created this piece of work some 1500 years ago.
- Fans go looking for Arthur C Clarke's grave, the British Science Fiction Author, Inventor and Futurist who we all remember for his 2001: A Space Odyssey. Clarke left written instructions for a funeral that stated: "Absolutely no religious rites of any kind, relating to any religious faith, should be associated with my funeral."
- Tucked away deep within the compound of Cinnamon Grand, a Luxury 5 Star Hotel, Nuga Gama lies with its 200 year old Banyan Tree. It will make you forget that you are still in the chaotic city of Colombo. Dining here is a unique experience.



# A wedding ceremony in Bhutan's religious heartland

## Renewal of vows

### EXPLORE BHUTAN

- Take our 3 and a half day cycling tour to explore some of Bhutan's most pretty nooks and corners. While this tour will have easy shorter days, there is a challenging climb to the top of a pass. One is expected to have a moderate degree of cycling experience for this tour or can continue in the support van available anytime, if tired.
- Visit a local Bhutanese family in a farmhouse in Punakha and cook a traditional Bhutanese lunch, together with your hosts. Post a delicious lunch, help your hosts with their daily chores. You will come back thrilled in the evening at this unique and up-close encounter with the Bhutanese way of life.
- Hoist a Lung Dhar (Prayer Flag) blessed in a sacred ceremony by a monk. It is considered one of the most auspicious things to do in Bhutan. The Prayer Flag consists of coloured square cloths strung together, representing the five elements - Yellow (earth), green (wood), white (iron), blue (water) and red (fire). The prayers are written on the cloth. Hoisting a prayer flags is considered a meditative act which stimulates the five senses.
- Earn good Karma by offering tea to Buddhist nuns at a local nunnery in Bhutan. Join the nuns during the prayers, reflect on your thoughts and enjoy the serenity and calmness as you listen to their chants.

The Bumthang region of Bhutan is a religious heartland with lovely temples, monasteries and forested hills. The perfect place for a renewal of vows or a wedding ceremony.

We start in the morning with the bride dressed in the finest traditional colourful Bhutanese outfit, waiting for the groom at the entrance of a traditional farmhouse. The groom dressed in Bhutanese costume will be ushered to the waiting bride by a group of singing women and men in a Chipdrel Ceremony, which is a traditional reception ceremony of Bhutan. Both the bride and groom will then join in the Merchang ceremony (offering to deities) and then proceed to the altar room/shrine of the farmhouse.

The wedding/renewal of vows ceremony will begin with red-robed monks chanting, playing bells and six foot trumpets, followed by traditional snacks, such as yak-butter tea, desi (sweetened saffron rice), rice-fermented aara (liquor). The entire event ends by mid-day.

For more details contact Destination Knowledge Centre at [dkc@sita.in](mailto:dkc@sita.in)





# Destination insider

Once in every 12 years, Sadhus engrossed in deep Sadhna (spiritual practice) in the caves of Himalayas, well-heeled international spiritual gurus and also frauds, filmmakers, journalists, tourists, celebrities, devouts, faithfuls and heretics alike draw the largest gathering of humanity in the world; the Maha Kumbh Mela, by the banks of the River Ganga in Allahabad. It is believed that if you bathe in the Ganga; India's most venerated River, during the Maha Kumbh days, your sins will be purified.

## Maha kumbh mela

## Once every twelve years

Kuntal Baruwa from our Destination Knowledge Centre was at the Maha Kumbh Mela to experience this grand spectacle, to see the way faith moves people in India in more ways than one.

The Maha Kumbh Mela is a grand spectacle, one probably which is beyond belief, even after having visited it twice in a lifetime. The last one which took place in 2001 was also special. It was the first of the millennia and was happening at a time where there was this unique combination of cosmic energies and constellations, that happens only once in 144 years. To think that this one would be less of an impact, is an error in judgment.

Millions of people are headed towards the banks of the river Ganga for a holy dip, they seem undisturbed by the people that surround them, the chaos that engulfs the surroundings, for they can only be mesmerised by the faith that moves them to take a holy dip and purify their body and soul. It is the pure intensity of their mission that moved me to see them sleep under the open sky in the cold weather conditions and then head for a dip in the morning. During the Ganga Aarti, the spirit of the old women was something to watch out, they would do their little dance and head on, as if they were moved by the spirituality of their own thoughts. I could see just people as far as I looked, the ordinary no longer seemed ordinary, they were all tied together with a belief that is greater than anything one can ever see in the world. Yet there was peace, people came and they went. The main bathing day saw close to 30 million people and some who lost each other during the process, were reunited with their families by a unique lost and found service, who united close to 9000 people with their families. I will be 50 by the time the next Maha Kumbh happens in 2025 at Allahabad. Let us wait and see.





# 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

## Best of art of travel

### 6 THINGS WE LIKED ABOUT-1, HILL HOUSE, PEERMADE

- › Laidback with a capital L: 1, Hill House, Peermade with only 2 rooms is laidback with a capital L. It is quietly tucked away in an area which belongs to the scions of a prominent planter family of Peermade; a hill station of Kerala.
- › Rani and John: Keeping 1, Hill House low profile has allowed Rani and John to host every guest personally till now, from the linen, the amenities, the cutlery, to the food, to the sun downers which John himself pours, it is very special.
- › Junk Stories: What makes 1, Hill House very special is also the way the couple has recycled the entire junk, John had bought. It blends beautifully.
- › 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.
- › Towel Warmers: When you return after a walk around the estate or after a visit in and around in the car, the feeling of a warm towel after a wash is really nice. Very thoughtful of the couple.
- › Afternoon Walks: 1, Hill House is located on a 600 acre estate where tea, coffee and spices are grown, one can enjoy lovely walks here.

### A DAY IN THE LIFE OF - THE BOAT MAN FROM VARANASI

Prakash wakes up at the crack of dawn and leaves for Dashaswamedh Ghat where his boat is anchored. Listening to the gentle sound of the water lapping against the shores, he gets his boat ready for our guests. The sounds of soul stirring hymns float across the water mingled with the incense filled in the air. "I watch Varanasi get up from its slumber and pray that the day goes well," he tells us. Prakash has been living in Varanasi all his life and started helping his father, Motilal to row a boat, when he was just 10 years old. There is more.

### SPOTTED BY SITA

Road journeys in India are full of wonderful stories replete with legends, tales of bravado and plain old yarns. The most common while on a road journey, is a particular spot on the highway which is said to be notorious for road accidents. It is believed that an evil spirit causes these accidents. However, the accidents stop after a temple is built in the same location.

### TOP CHEF RECOMMENDS

Mani and Sylvie of Periyar Reserve Bungalow, recommend Lazy Chicken; its signature dish, as a must try during your stay there. A whole chicken marinated with spices is first wrapped in a banana leaf, then covered in foil paper and finally a newspaper. After a generous application of a thick mud paste, the chicken is then put inside a furnace with the help of a shovel and left there for about 90 minutes.





# 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.

## Engineering tea

Vikram Mittal is an engineer by profession, who found that his true calling was Tea, which was his family business. Now, fully immersed into his tea business for the past 30 years, Vikram procures his tea from certified organic producers, has three shops and one large warehouse. Most of the packaging and flavouring of the tea using natural herbs, is done in-house.

## Our favourite wednesday

The history of Tea in India is very interesting. For most of North and Central India, it is the milky, sugary blend that attracts the crowd. It is only in the Northeast and the South that tea has played a vital role. Herbal and green tea have gained a lot of market now.

Every single tea is different, every tea has a different personality. And every tea has a different purpose. You might wonder why an engineer has taken to tea, well there are a whole lot of reasons including being close to the family and running the family business. Tea can be mixed and matched to make a unique custom-made blend, they each have their own set of characteristics and taste. You get a different feeling after each one.

Custom-made teas are generally made for hotels and restaurants, where they choose their leaves and combination of leaves. But for individuals, a custom-made tea is about the tea itself, as in the uniqueness of the tea and also about the person himself.

Tea needs to be appreciated and cultivated on the taste buds. Clients expect a good cup of tea when they are travelling to India and we like to take them beyond their expectations and introduce them to tastes that they can take back and cultivate on their taste buds.

I like to understand a person's exposure to tea. If I find out that they have just started drinking tea, I will give an exotic blend which they will be able to appreciate, excite them enough for more.

Remember, tea needs to sit in the boiling water for three-four minutes before it is ready for you and you are ready for it!





Delhi's  
pinniyan

## Flavours of the season

Alok Bhatia works in the Legal department in Sita. He was born in New Delhi, a city which has seen ironical developments over a period of time, where the streets are shared by a bullock cart and a super sports car at the same time. Since childhood, Alok has a never ending greed to explore places in its various shades and sides. He is an avid writer and became an author at the age of 23 with his first book "A kid to mature Z". Alok is also an active member of the Annual Youth Assembly, held at United Nations Headquarters, New York.

"And the season of chill is here," I told a friend travelling from Bangalore. "Winter has arrived." "Undoubtedly," said my friend, "because everyone waits eagerly for the sun to be out; because the morning mist is gossamer veil across the face of the city, shyly drawn aside by the rising sun; because in the parks and gardens a myriad flowers bloom in all their glory; because the northern belt has draped itself with snow; because noon becomes pleasant at the ancient stones of Delhi's archeological heritage; because the mercury sinks in the mouth of the dying day; because National Zoological Park is filled with the chirruping of the migratory birds, who have come all the way from far north; because..."

"Not really" I said, "because they have started making Pinniyan ( a traditional sweet made of dry fruits, flour and clarified butter rolled to form small circular balls) in every nook and corner of Delhi!" That's the foolproof test, the ultimate pure clarified butter winter sweet of every household in Delhi, in which lies the incontrovertible proof of winter's arrival. Flowers can bloom when their right time comes, Parliament can be summoned for its end-of-year session, the exhaust of local buses may belch forth sulphurous icicles instead of smog and the season of weddings begins with a bang. But till they start dishing out the Pinniyan, winter is not allowed to get through the clearance of the meteorological security check, no matter what strings it tries to pull.

Sitting in the air-conditioning during summers, people ask each other when winter's will arrive. Then one magical day, the first kadhui (wok) of Pinniyan debuts at the corner sweet shop, the fresh fragrance of dry fruits emanating from it evocative of winter's chilled breath.

Spotting and reporting the first Pinni of the season is the mark of distinction, bestowing an enviable cachet on the correspondent. Care,

however, must be exercised so as not to raise false alarms. Over-eager novices have been known to commit the unpardonable gaffe of mistaking a barfi or other substitute for the real thing, thus laying themselves open to charge that they are ignorant incompetents or adventurist charlatans, if not both.

There is also a contending body of opinion which asserts that it is sarson ka saag (mustard leaves puree) and Pinniyan which is the true harbinger of winter. But by dint of painstaking and thorough research and examination of authenticated primary sources, the Pinni school has convincingly refuted the claims of such heretics to the satisfaction of most serious students of the subject.

My words came as nothing less than a surprise to my friend from Bangalore. Wondering and pondering over my thought process of welcoming winters. His body language was nothing more than a big question mark. I suggested we take a stroll along the street. We hopped to the corner sweet shop and asked for 100 gms of freshly prepared smoking hot Pinniyan. As we gorged the last possible grain drenched in Doaba (located in Punjab), I said to my friend, "Now you can tell the family and friends back home that you have tasted a real Delhi winter." He nodded in acknowledgement, then asked, "But how will you know when winter's been eaten up, sorry, when it's ended and given way to summer?"

"Ah, that," I replied as we strolled on in search of Pudin Hara ( a digestive ), "is another story and another Ganne ka Juice ( sugarcane juice)."

# In our opinion





## Gharana Indian classical music

Lovleen Sagar hails from the land of five rivers, Punjab and is deeply rooted in her local history and its culture. That does not stop her from feeling privileged to have lived all over India and especially spending most of her childhood in the Himalayan towns and villages across the Indo-Tibetan border, thanks to her father's interesting job. Her childhood exposure and her fascination of the multi-cultural India, its over-lapping similarities in language, music, food and art lead her to later on study Indian history, with a focus on art. Equipped with a Masters degree in History of Art, Lovleen almost became a museum curator!!

Bollywood music and Indian films have brought Indian pop music to the world stage. What remains in the realm of a few connoisseurs is the Indian Classical music. Although, through the Beatles, Pandit Ravi Shankar has the distinction of brining in the Sitar and a bit of Classical music known to the world. There is so much treasure that still remains hidden....

Indian classical music is largely divided between the Northern Hindustani and the Southern Carnatic music. Much like the western classical music, this is a formal form of music and the performances are serious.

In this short space, I would like to share an interesting way of learning Hindustani classical music in India which is practiced even today and this concept of "Gharanas" is probably unique to India, Pakistan and Bangladesh alone.

Not too long before, Performing Arts and also many crafts in India were carried on as a family tradition, passed on from father to son (rarely daughter) for many generations. It was rare that an outsider was allowed entry, unless he became part of the family. This sociological concept was called "Gharana" and each Gharana had a distinct musicological identity, influencing the thinking, teaching, performance and appreciation of music of the people in a Gharana.

Over a period of time more women and largely people with no family background in music started taking to classical music and learning from performers or Gurus of a certain Gharana. Their ideology and ideas of music, then related to the Gharana of their teacher.

The names of each Gharana suggested the place of origin of the hereditary musicians. Even today many Gharana names refer to places, like the

Agra, Jaipur and Gwalior Gharana are famous for "khyal" genre of singing.

This hereditary type of musicianship is not confined to only vocal music, famous tabla players Allarakha and his sons Zakir Hussain and Taufik come from Patiala Gharana. Pandit Ravi Shankar who played the sitar came from Benaras Gharana.

Sometimes the Garanas are named after the founder, rather than places. For a percussion instrument older than the tabla, Pakhawaj, the Gharana Kudosingh is named after the Guru.

It is interesting to note that the concept of Gharanas became popular only in the nineteenth century as the loss of royal patronage enjoyed by the performers in the earlier periods compelled them to move to urban centres and they had to rely on their origin to retain their distinct identity.

Today Gharana are mentioned, discussed and proclaimed as indicators of certain musical ideas as well as allegiances.

Should you wish to experience Indian classical music and it's many forms, or the contemporary Indian music, which is at its peak right now, come explore with us on your next travel to India... Delhi, Chennai and Mumbai are hubs for quality performances and there are a few classical music festivals that you could participate in.

For further information, please don't hesitate to write to the Destination Knowledge Centre.



## A designated colour for every month and festival

The spirit of colours in Rajasthan is deep seated and reflects in every aspect of its daily life; attire, ornaments, paintings, homes et al. If you know the colours of Rajasthan you will be able to identify communities and the social status of an individual. Most of the knowledge on colours in Rajasthan is handed down, over generations and has rarely been documented locally.

The colours that we see in Rajasthan are primarily divided into two categories; Kachcha Rang which is temporary colour and Pakka Rang which is permanent colour. Kachcha rang are worn by the married and unmarried, while the widows only wear Pakka rang. Red, Parrot Green, Yellow and Saffron fall under the category of temporary colours or Kachcha rang while Maroon, Brown Dark Blue, Dark Green and Grey are permanent or Pakka rang. Nevertheless, in Jodhpur Dark Blue and Purple, which are otherwise Pakka Rangs and only meant for widows are worn by the married women during the Diwali festival.

Did you know that in Rajasthan there is a certain colour and design dedicated for every month or festival?

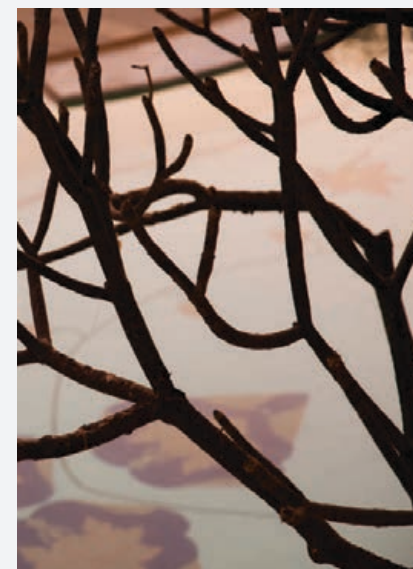
The month of Chaitra in Rajasthan (March-April) is all about Orange and Golden. Basant Panchami or the season of harvesting (January and February) is welcomed with lemon yellow and light orange. In the month of Fagun (March), women wear red and white or magenta and white. Saawan or the Monsoon (July and August) is greeted with the colours of the rainbow, green

## United colours of Rajasthan

being the dominating colour. Red is worn during the Teej Festival in the month of August when Rajasthani women fast and pray for the long life of their husbands.

The stories behind the turban men wear in Rajasthan is equally fascinating. Known as Paag, Safa or Pagri the turban is a long scarf wrapped around the head. The style of turbans in Rajasthan changes with every 15 kms. If you know the turbans of Rajasthan, you will know the community the person belongs to and his social status. While the turbans of the Rajput community are made out of soft cotton known as malmal; communities such as the Rabaris wear red turbans made out of thick cotton. While Ochre is the colour of the mendicants of Rajasthan, the Bishnoi community; the original conservationist of India, wear white turbans. The indigenous Bhils and Garasias wear printed white turbans. Turbans in Rajasthan also have other fascinating uses. It is used like a rope to take water out of a well, used for protection from the sun in the fields and tying cattle on halt.

Rajasthani men wear yellow turbans during Basant Panchami or the harvest festival (January and February). Between the month of February and March and Holi; the festival of colours, the Rajputs of Rajasthan wear turbans with the combination of red and white. In the month of July, they wear light pink. A green and pink striped or yellow and red striped turban is worn during the monsoon. Black tie and dyed turbans with red borders is ought to be worn at the time of Diwali; the festival of lights while Saffron turbans are worn during the time just before Diwali. Light pink turbans are also worn in the month of October and at the time of Sharad Poornima or the full moon night.





## Perfect moments Stays we loved

### 1 HILL HOUSE

We loved 1, Hill House, Peermade, laid back with a capital L, with its host Rani and Johnny. Johnny has an unusual hobby of collecting junk and the couple has brilliantly recycled the entire junk in the 2 room property. The wooden staircase 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 delicious snacks in the afternoon and for breakfast. The railings of the sitting area which overlooks the foothills of the Western Ghats belong to an old college building that was demolished. Lamp Stands near the fireplace were made from the Altar Rails. 1, Hill House is located on a 600 acre estate where tea, coffee and spices are grown. Walk through the beautiful surroundings which can be done at one's own pace.

### LA MAISON D'ANANDA

We loved the rustic charm of the bamboo cottages of La Maison D'Ananda in Majuli, Assam. It is a collaboration between French architect Jim Chauvin and a local guide Danny Gam. It is modeled on an ethnic hut of the indigenous Mishing tribe which builds their houses on stilts with a balcony. Manjit and his sister Junali, who run La Maison D'Ananda will serve you unusual, yet delicious combinations such as Mule-hule (radish and fish), Hahe-bahe (tender duck and bamboo) and Kukura-kumura (chicken and ash gourd).

### AANAVILASAM

We loved Aanavilasam for being a beautiful place to relax with all the comforts in complete privacy after the hectic and dusty temple circuit of Tamil Nadu. Located just 8 kms from the Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary (Thekaddy), Aanavilasam is a plantation house on 7 acres of private estate. This cosy place has only 6 rooms, surrounded by a Cardamom and Pepper plantation. We loved their Pool Villas which come with a private plunge pool. We particularly liked the idea of the glass wall in front of its superbly comfortable bed overlooking the plunge pool. Perfect place to lie down to romance the canopies and to enjoy the quiet and calm.

### MON CHASHA

A 4 hour train ride from Kolkata; we loved Mon Chasha for being laidback and simple with views of the lazy Bagda River flowing and the paddy fields. Mon Chasha with its 4 rooms is for the inquisitive savvy traveller interested in rural India who wants to know more about the traditional way of life, local art and craft. It is the attention to detail and the warmth of the hosts, Nilanjan and Debjani which makes this place special. The couple is trying very hard to revive the local forms of art by supporting local artists. The local community is at the heart of Mon Chasha. The entire structure is erected and built by local craftsmen and artisans, using locally procured bamboo, palm leaves and paddy straws. All this complimented by food that was a staple in old Bengali homes served in beautiful brass utensils. The intensity of the spices is just right and the produce straight from the kitchen garden or from the nearby farms.

# Stays we loved & Stays to watch out for





Stays we  
loved

Perfect  
moments

SHEIHKPURA KOTHI

The 100 year old Sheikhpura Kothi designed like a French Chateau is located 4 hours from Terminal 3 of the Indira Gandhi International Airport, New Delhi and can be easily combined with your Golden Triangle (Delhi-Agra-Jaipur) and the painted havelis of the Shekhawati region. One can also slip into Punjab from here traveling by surface to Amritsar. From the battleground of the Hindu Epic Mahabharata to Mohammed Ghauri; the first Muslim invader of Indian history to the one and only independent European King of India; an Irish mercenary who spoke chaste Haryanvi, the local language and built a Fort (still exists in good condition) ruling for 4 years to a rare private collection of a villager which brings alive the stories of a 5000 year old Harrapan Mega City not so far away, Sheikhpura Kothi with its 7 rooms has lots to offer to the inquisitive savvy traveller. Or one may choose to relax with home style food cooked by a Khansama (a male cook and house steward of a noble family of the Indian sub-continent) before boarding the flight back home.

PUNJABIYAT

Small, with just 4 stand alone air-conditioned cottages complete with private terraces, we loved the superbly comfortable Punjabiya’s simple, unpretentious yet stylish design, complimented by local architecture, it’s delicious food and unobtrusive service by a staff with great camaraderie. The property, a 2 hour drive from Amritsar is quietly located in the fields of rural Punjab; what we thought was really cool, the occasional thumping of Punjabi music from the speakers of a distant tractor of a local farmer on his way to the fields or back home.

NEERALAYA, RAISON

We loved the peace and quiet of quietly sophisticated Neeralaya which is just about what your clients need and will love and appreciate on their way back to Delhi after roughing it out in the cold deserts of Leh-Ladakh or Lahaul-Spiti in the Himalayas. But what makes the property very special is the river Beas flowing right next to it. Neeralaya has only 3 villas, with 7 bedrooms built with old recycled timber, stone and slates sourced locally. We loved the subtle fusion of contemporary and the local; everything is built and positioned in a manner ensuring ample privacy. Staff members of Neeralaya are mostly from the local village and they all exude the warmth of Neeralaya. The Riverside Gazebo at Neeralaya is a really special place. Perfect for lazy meals by the Beas River. Loved it too.

VIVANTA BY TAJ

We loved Vivanta by Taj, Madakeri for its stunning views of the quintessential Coorg landscape - a rainforest canopy covering rolling hills and undulating greens. Quite the place if your clients are looking for nature and luxury together.

BAGHAAN ORCHARD RESORT

Baghaan Orchard Resort with its 25 cottages could be interesting for those of your clients wanting to connect Corbett after their Golden Triangle Tour. They can break their journey here for a night and continue to Corbett the next day. Baghaan Orchard Resort also does Dolphin Safaris on the Ganga River, which is 13 kms away from the property and is a 20 minute drive. The World Wildlife Fund is very active in the area and is doing a lot of work with Dolphin conservation.

EIGHTH BASTION

It will be interesting to see what CGH does with its new property in Napier Street Fort Cochin, Kerala which is a blend of the contemporary and colonial and unlike any other property from their collection of hotels.

DERA KHAIRWA

Now break the journey between Jodhpur and Udaipur at the village of Khairwa. Dera Khairwa, a 15th century Fort Palace is now open with 18 rooms to host guests.

PALAIS DE MAHE

Palais De Mahe is CGH’s newest property in Pondicherry. It is located on Rue Bussy Street, with spacious 18 suites and rooms in distinct period French architecture, as well a pool, dining room, bar and cafe. Palais de Mahe is surrounded by quaint streets and period elegance of the French quarter. A short stroll from Rue Bussy Street brings you to the sea front.

ULTIMATE TRAVELLING CAMP

After his fabulous tented Laxmi Kutir at the Maha Kumbh Mela 2013, Dhruv Singh's Ultimate Travelling Camp will take the luxury camping experience to every part of India. Ladakh, Hampi, Pushkar are some of the places lined up. Dhruv is known for setting up some of the finest wilderness properties of recent times such as Churhat Kothi (now a Taj & Beyond Lodge in Bandavgarh) and Anant Van (now Samode Safari Lodge again in Bandavgarh).

Hot picks

Stays to watch  
out for

DALAR VILLAGE HOUSE

Within the Binsar sanctuary in the Kumaon Himalayas is the village of Dalar, where one can spend a night in a village home with 2 bedrooms. Dalar Village House has running water and electricity. The mud and stone village house inspired by the local village houses, is kept minimal yet comfortable. Meals and other services are supervised with the trained involvement of the caretaker's family living nearby. The village house looks over the valley and is a great perch for watching birds and the mountain sunsets. Electricity can sometimes be erratic, yet ample back up is provided with solar lamps and oil lanterns.

ERANDIA

The newest Yoga and Ayurveda beach property in Mararikulam, Kerala has a unique design and construction. The teak doors of Erandia, enable the sleeping and living area to be enclosed or opened up, either completely private or wide open to the outside world.

VANGHAT WILDERNESS LODGE

For those of your guests interested in angling, keep a watch out for the Vanghat Wilderness Lodge which is a Mahseer conservation lodge situated on the Ramganga River at the edge of the forests of Corbett Tiger Reserve in Kumaon.

VISMAYA

Keep a watch out for this 2 room property on the backwaters of Cherthala Backwaters, Kerala. A traditional Kerala home restored lovingly in a great location with water on 3 sides. It offers a beautiful view of the sunrise and the sunset against a backdrop of a huge pool. Can be booked on an exclusive basis for just two.





A trip to India is  
what travel stories  
are made of

## Books we loved

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

RAJNI'S PUNCHTANTRA BY P.C. BALASUBRAMANIAN  
AND RAJA KRISHNAMOORTHY

"From Bus Conductor to Cine Superstar to Cultural Icon to one of South Asia's most influential person, Tamil Cinema Actor Rajnikanth's unique mannerism and his punch lines have won him a cult status amongst movie goers in South India. And these are not just your average movie fans, but frenzied fans who are ready to die and kill for their matinee idol, who is a balding grandfather now. Published in 2011, and written by P.C. Balasubramanian and Raja Krishnamoorthy, Rajni's Punchtantra consists of 30 of Rajinikanth's famous punch lines from his various movies, their hidden messages and how they can be incorporated to businesses and in our daily lives. You thought Indian Cinema was all about Mumbai and Bollywood? Read this. Easily available at most airports in India.

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:

CHASING THE MONSOON BY ALEXANDER FRETER

Many of us wonder, why the monsoon is celebrated throughout the Indian culture? Why is the love for the monsoons centuries old? Why a lot of movies are made on the subject and why the immortal epics like "maghdoot" were ever written on the subject? Alexander Freter, in his discovery along with the monsoon from landfall at Kovalam beach in Kerala, all the way up to the North East, answers many of these questions. The classic and witty travelogue of Freter's unusual adventure with monsoon, staying sometimes behind it, sometimes in front of it, on the way establishing a relationship with the people, culture and of course the climate!

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:

SEA OF POPPIES BY AMITAVA GOSH

Ordinary lives, extraordinary tales; Sea Of Poppies is an amazing journey in the histories of people and places. Like the opium around which their lives revolve, the narrative is addictive. First of a trilogy of books by Amitava Gosh, Sea of Poppies subtly addresses colonialism through a careful study of the mid nineteenth century through Anthropology. At the heart of the epic is an enormous ship, the Ibis. Its calling is a voyage through the Indian Ocean to the Mauritius Islands. All kinds of people come on board for the journey. Most of them are going as indentured labour or coolies as they called them then to the island. All very interesting characters. No it isn't the Life of Pie! The richness of settings, from rural India of the Gangetic planes to crowded Calcutta to the overpowering Opium Factory, is historically so convincing. The variations in speech of the characters and language of the era make it come alive. Its tremendously entertaining, educative and simply un-put-downable !

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:

HOLY COW ! BY SARAH MACDONALD

Set in the last years of 20th century, the Y2K challenges and into the period post 9/11, Sarah MacDonald's, rib tickling journey of self-discovery, while based at New Delhi's Westend Colony with her journalist husband. Woven masterfully into her laconic tale are her experiences with Sikhism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Sufism, Jainism , Zoroastrianism, Mata Amritanandamayi or Amma, Sai Baba, the Dalai Lama, Preity Zinta and Bollywood!! Not to forget her neighbors, the compound's guard, her Tahitian Catholic driver and her two maids at home. From Velangani to Varanasi, from Manali to Goa and the hippies in between, Sarah recounts her amazing discovery of a country that repulsed her so the first time, 11 years prior to this book, that she vowed never to return. Destiny had ordained otherwise. India's incredible cacophony of sounds and the apparent chaos to a " scientifically" minded person, is irresistibly penned by Sarah. There are indeed a million paths to the divine as India so profoundly taught Sarah!

## Books we loved

Our Destination Knowledge Centre team provides new ways to experience travel. They have passionately searched for deep insights into different traditions and cultures and bring for our customers authentic encounters with lasting impressions. Here are some of the books they loved during their travels in the Indian sub-continent.



# 7 days in West Bengal

## Day 1

### Catch the thread of rural Bengal

Soumya recommends that you stop at Phulia, perhaps the most renowned sari weaving centre of West Bengal. It's fascinating to see looms in almost every house and listen to the lulling sound of wooden shuttles catapulting between the threads. There are 70,000 looms in this village itself. Weavers here trace their lineage to the great Bengal handloom saree weaving centre of Tangail near Dhaka, Bangladesh. They have evolved their own weaving style called Fulia Tangail. The Fulia Tangail incorporates vibrant colours and large, intricate designs woven in double jacquard. These saris are also being woven in mulberry and tussar silk apart from cotton.



## Day 2

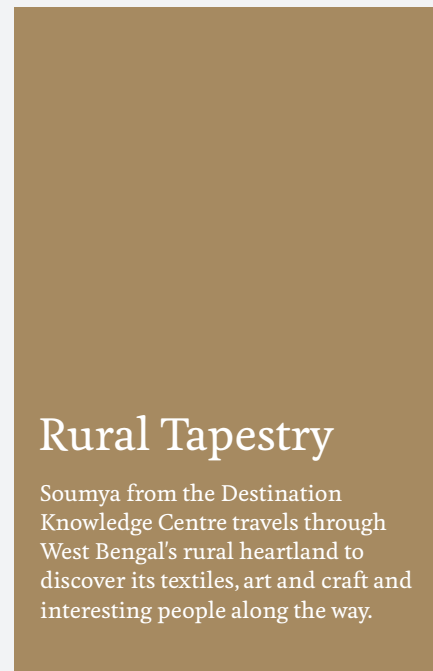
### Silk Extraction at Murshidabad

Spend time watching silk being extracted from silkworm cocoons and spun into fine thread for weaving in Murshidabad. The fields of yellow cocoons drying in the sun are a sight worth seeing. If you feel up for the challenge, try your hand at finding the end of the silk thread from the cocoon which is then spun by deft hands. Later visit a palace of 1000 Doors of the Nawabs of Murshidabad; a treasure trove of valuable historical exhibits.

## Day 3

### Delicious Bengali Food and Shantiniketan

Relish a delicious home cooked Bengali meal at Vanalakshmi - a small farm just outside Shantiniketan where they use traditional methods to grow their produce. Later visit Visva Bharati - Rabindranath Tagore's experiment with the open-air system of education as opposed to being cloistered in the four walls of a classroom. Rabindranath Tagore was a poet, writer, musician and playwright and the first non-European to win the Nobel Prize for Literature. His Visva Bharati is now a centre for both academics as well as cultural studies including music, dance and other fine



## Rural Tapestry

Soumya from the Destination Knowledge Centre travels through West Bengal's rural heartland to discover its textiles, art and craft and interesting people along the way.



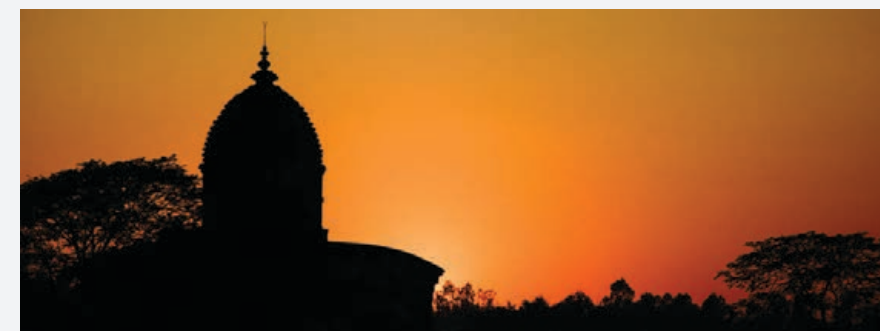
arts, has been given the status of an independent university. Visit the wonderful open air art installation around Kala Bhavan (Art Faculty) of Ramkinkar the pioneer of modern Indian sculpture, experimenting with abstract sculptural forms.



## Day 5

### Rickshaw Tour - Stories in Terracotta

Take a rickshaw tour of the stunning Terracotta Temples in the sleepy town of Bishnupur. Art in West Bengal was mainly religious in nature and was expressed through the medium of temples. Local materials, bricks and terracotta and features like the curved "Bengali" roof blended with the Muslim domes and Islamic multi-lobed arches. This distinctive architecture also assimilated styles from the neighbouring regions. Spot interesting carvings on bricks. The motifs vary from scenes from Hindu epics and scriptures to secular themes such as warriors, hunters, musicians, tradesman, birds and animals.



## Day 7

### When was the last time you created something?

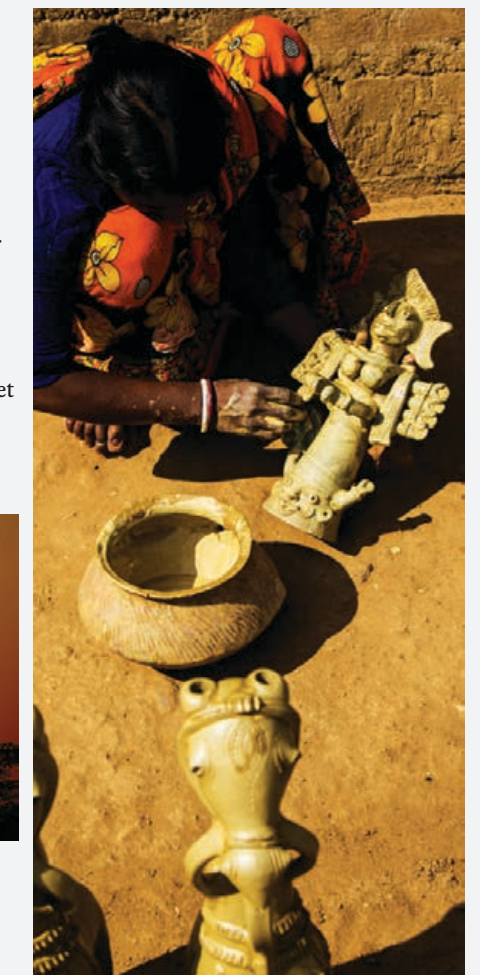
End your tour with a 2 day textile workshop in Kolkata for insight into how self-help groups of women are turning the traditional weaves of West Bengal into designer wear for the international

market. See a film tracing the history of these weaves. Try your hand at Kantha embroidery and block printing. Print your own scarves, shawls or stoles to carry back home.

## Day 4

### The ladies of Amar Kutir and Saturday Fair of Shantiniketan

Amar Kutir in Shantiniketan is an instance of self-sufficiency based on Rabindranath Tagore's ideals. Spend time with the ladies of Amar Kutir who are busy stitching Kanta. Learn from them about this traditional wrap which was originally attributed to the poor man. Kantha stitch basically meant utilising torn cloths and rags by sewing them together with close stitches and embroidering them for household purpose, so that not a single piece of cloth in the house was wasted. Every Saturday, Shantiniketan is host to a weekly fair selling beautiful handmade products. The fair also attracts 'Bauls' a music unique to West Bengal where the songs are of joy, love and longing for mystical union with the divine.



## Day 6

### The Bankura Horse

Visit a potter's village close to Bishnupur to chat with the potters to know more about the world famous Bankura horses with its elongated neck. Unique to this area, there are close to fifty families creating Bankura horses. You can even get your hands dirty playing with clay if you are willing to explore.

For more details contact Destination Knowledge Centre at [dkc@sita.in](mailto: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.