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The logo for The Code Org, consisting of a yellow circle with the words "THE CODE ORG" in black, stacked vertically.

**We protect  
children from  
sex tourism.**

# Art of Travel

2015 - 2016





we **live and love** travel.



# Come explore with us



Dear Friends,

With an eye to capture the imagination of our clients, the Destination Knowledge Centre (DKC) was set up in mid-2009. It has evolved over this short time and is perceived today as a pioneer in this field. The DKC creates travel experiences which act as innovative tools in the hands of our Sales Teams and in the creative minds of our overseas Product Managers.

The premise of the DKC's first exploratory trip was simple - 'Locals know the best kept secrets'. In April 2010, the DKC published its first brochure - EXPLORE : designed in-house, it was a compilation of all the 'out of the ordinary' findings in North India. The Golden Triangle had suddenly started looking very different. A month later we came out with the 'DESTINATION INSIDER' - an E-zine where all our friends from across India began sharing their travel insights.

Later that year, DKC started managing Sita India's Social Media initiative and its KNOWLEDGE WEDNESDAY sessions where guest speakers; not necessarily from the travel business are invited to share their knowledge, stories and insights with our colleagues. With the premise that "knowledge is experience, everything else is just information", the content of Sita India's monthly Newsletter - Art of Travel was completely overhauled by the DKC. The DKC was recognised as the "Best Innovative work in Marketing India as Travel and Tourism Destination" by the CNBC AWAAZ Travel Awards 2011.

In 2012 came the idea of an ANNUAL HOLIDAY REPORT which is now launched at ITB Berlin every year by the name, Art Of Travel. It includes the best of the findings of the DKC and is designed entirely in-house. The year ended on a sweet note with Sita India's new-look, new-feel Newsletter -Art of Travel being adjudged the best in Asia Pacific by PATA.

2013 was the year, when the Business Development unit of Sita India was merged with the DKC to stitch all our findings together into beautiful itineraries. It was now that that our 'creative laboratory' got a Product Manager, who now travels all over the Indian sub-continent to keep us abreast of the latest; including hotels and his take on the infrastructure of the various destinations.

In 2014, we decided to up the DKC's communication strategy a notch higher. We started thinking moving images as a part of our story telling and invested in a video camera. INDIA HANDHELD -RAW AND EXTEMPORE - a collection of no sauce, no fuss handheld videos shot during our travels was launched. The idea was to take our clients on a virtual tour of our experiences, the destinations, the monuments, hotels, restaurants, roads et al. The videos will soon be seen on Sita India's Facebook Page and will be included in our soon to be launched b2b portal, which will be a unique platform to showcase our product range.

The Destination Knowledge Centre till date has travelled over 150,000 kilometers in India and explored 152 destinations. I hope you have enjoyed your journey with our creativity so far; here is promising another year full of exciting products !

Come explore with us.

Dipak Deva  
CEO Destination Management  
India & South Asia



# Get inspired - explore





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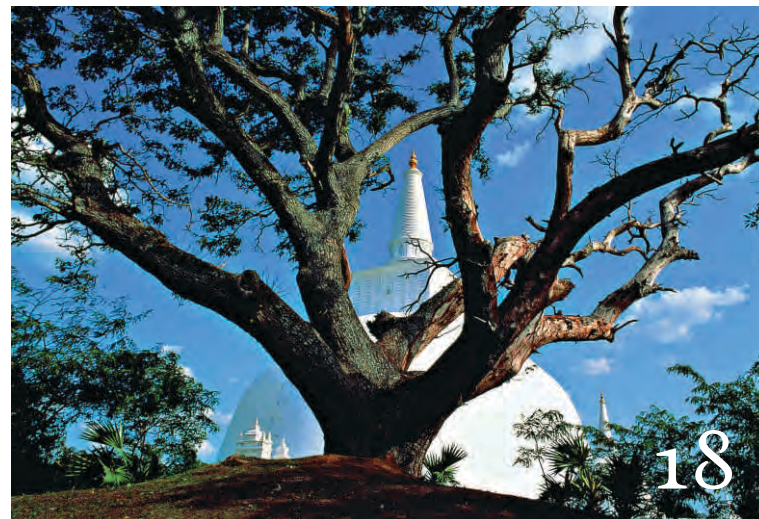
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# Cycling to Alwar

## An Active Holiday

A cycling tour that is perfect for people looking for an active holiday idea that can easily be combined with the classical north India itinerary. Contrary to the view that Indian roads are chaotic and cycling on them would be impossible, this tour gives you an introduction to the possibilities of travel by bikes through back roads and rural India. Cycling through India opens up a whole new world of adventure for you. There is a sense of freedom and excitement with no physical barrier between you and your surroundings. With a well thought of route, avoiding highways and heavy traffic, this Cycle Tour from Neemlamod (two hours' drive from Bharatpur) to Alwar is a wonderful experience.

Although, off the main highway, the roads that we ride on are paved. We ride past villages, schools and fields with the Aravalli Range visible at the backdrop. Cycling at your own pace, you see villagers going about their daily chores – women cleaning the porch of their mud houses, children walking to school (sometimes so fascinated to see you, they wave run after you and forget about school), farmers plowing their field and herders with their animals. “It's true what they say, the real India lives in its villages and cycling gives you an opportunity to see a side of Rajasthan you would normally miss. The vibrant colours of the sarees reminds you why Rajasthan is said to be the most colourful state of India,” says Soumya Mukherji from the Destination Knowledge Centre, who has experienced this tour first-hand.

The cycling tour ends at Vanaashrya, Alwar which has comfortable tents where you can relax for a few nights, before catching your international flight back home.



### TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

- An opportunity to see village life in India.
- Explore regions of Rajasthan which you would otherwise not see.
- Picnic lunch in a beautiful setting.
- See the colours of Rajasthan, and share the road with camels, cows, goats and water buffaloes.

The start time of this tour is flexible and totally depends on you.

1130 hours: Arrive at Neemla mod by car.

1130 - 1200 hours: Briefing and preparation. There is a toilet tent set up, if you need to change into clothes more suitable for cycling.

1215 hours: Start cycling. The road is narrow, single lane and smooth, passing through agriculture fields, hills and villages. We get our first glimpse of the people of this region and spot them toiling hard in their fields.

1300 hours: Arrive at Neemla Village. Pass through narrow lanes of the village. Don't be surprised if people stop working, stare and then break into smiles. Wave out to them and carry-on. (5 kms covered)

1330 hours: Arrive at Baswa crossing. This is usually where we stop for the first time under the shade of a tree. Enjoy a sip of water, wipe your face with a cold towel and admire the beautiful countryside. (8 kms covered)

1345 hours: Arrive at Devati village, turn right. Before turning, stop at a temple for a small break. Time for a picnic lunch set up, exclusively for us. (10 kms covered)

1415 hours: Arrive at Devati village. (12 kms covered)

1435 hours: After crossing Devati you will enter a wide valley. On your left there is a dry-lake. Good road ends here. (14 kms covered)

From here onwards the road is broken with potholes. However, you will be passing through a number of small villages, agriculture fields where you will stop to interact with local people.

1505 hours: Arrive at Kundla village. (21 kms covered)

Cycling terminates at the end of the road, where your car is waiting to pick you up. Drive to Vanaashrya.

1540 hours: Arrive at Vanaashrya. (29 kms covered)

Best time to travel : November to February

# Samal Village Walk

## Rustic and Rural

The village walk of Samal is also convenient for those guests going to the Ranakpur Jain Temples, which open by noon. This walk gives the guests an opportunity to stretch their legs, closely interact and observe the rural life. Samal village is located 1 hour and 30 minutes from Udaipur, the village walk here lasts for about 2 hours and Ranakpur is merely 45 minutes away.

The village walk at Samal can be easily offered to FITs and Groups travelling from Jodhpur to Udaipur via Ranakpur or those travelling from Udaipur to Jodhpur via Ranakpur.

A part of the income from this walk goes to improving public sanitation and hygiene facilities in the Samal Village.

We will explore the quaint village of Samal near Ranakpur that still stands rustic and has retained its rural character intact. The best part about this one is that it is conveniently located between Udaipur and the Ranakpur Jain Temples. It is very convenient for all guests passing through this route to stop here for a couple of hours and walk around. Especially for those guests who have not had enough time to actually stop by, to explore rural areas during their Rajasthan holiday.





# Agra Colonial Walk

## Days of the British Raj

In India, cantonments (the word derived from the French word 'canton' meaning corner or district) are self-sustaining quarters from the days of the British Raj which housed their military and families. And now post 15th August, 1947, the Indian Army and their families. Most of the cantonments, 63 in total across India, are also some of country's most beautiful pedestrian friendly spaces with wide tree lined impeccable roads and charming colonial buildings with distinct architectural style; be it Victorian, Gothic or the home grown Indo-Saracenic, which is a synthesis of Hindu, Islamic and European elements. But there is a problem. Most of these cantonments are “high-security” zones and off-limits to foreigners. In some cantonments, even Indians are not allowed to click photographs without permission. So then why are we talking about cantonments here? It is because the cantonment in Agra (every Sita client, whilst visiting Agra drives past the area on their way to the hotels) is totally different. The 952.55 acres of the Agra cantonment (out of the total 1157 hectares) is a 'civilian area' without any restriction on movement or clicking photographs and has some of the most beautiful and charming Indo-Saracenic colonial buildings; bungalows, churches, post office et al. The best part is that no two buildings look alike. Our Colonial Tour of Agra, not only gives your clients an insight into the life and times of a cantonment during the days of the British Raj but also allows them to admire some of North India's most beautiful Indo-Saracenic architecture. It is a 3 hour easy paced tour which can be experienced either by car, coach or battery operated rickshaws. Short walks in between are involved. The tour covers 4 kms within the Agra cantonment. It is led by an Agra local, who is a History Graduate, studied law and stays in a 19th century colonial bungalow in the Agra cantonment with his wife, two teenage children and his mother. The tour starts from his Bungalow. He inherited the property from his grandfather, who served as a Major in the British Army.

TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

- ▶ North India's most beautiful Indo-Saracenic architecture.
- ▶ Interaction over a cup of tea with a local family inside a colonial bungalow.

Best time to travel : October - April

Ideal for : 1 - 25 pax



# Create your own Warli Art

## Celebrate local Folklore

TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

- ▶ Display of indigenous art forms of India - Warli, Gond, Madhubani, Patachitra and Rajasthani Miniature.
- ▶ An hour long interactive session with a Warli painter who will teach you how to draw your own.
- ▶ Your own Warli painting to carry home as a souvenir.

Best time to travel : October - April

Ideal for : 1 - 8 pax

India is a land of diverse eclecticism, be it the people, the landscape, the language, the culture or tradition. This diversity and variation have led to the birth of many diverse tribal art forms. Most of these art forms celebrate local folklore, venerate local heroes and revere local Gods, Goddesses and deities. In this specially curated itinerary in Mumbai which is a Sita exclusive and not available to competition, you will get to learn about Maharashtra's Warli art in detail, which dates back to 2500-3000 BC. Get ready to 'easel' in and be amazed! Warli uses very basic vocabulary – a circle, triangle and a square, as a basis of dialogue. The creativity though, lies in making a Warli that represents human life, customs and traditions indigenous to the region. We will visit an art studio which has been in the forefront of promoting the lost tribal art forms and artists. Enjoy a display of tribal art from across India, followed by a brief presentation given by a Professor from a reputed Arts college. The presentation will cover the insights – cultural and artistic – of tribal art in India. Then comes the exciting part, where you will interact and have an hour long workshop with a Warli Painter, especially called from his home in rural Maharashtra. He will teach you all the nuances of Warli Painting and help you to draw your own. Draw your own Warli and take it home as a souvenir.

This tour is a great insight into art forms that are slowly dying. We hope, through this initiative the world will take notice of these talented artists.





# Learn new skills in Jaipur

## Of Fabrics, Jewellery and Crafts

If you are working on a Rajasthan itinerary for a small intimate group (not more than 8 pax) and plan to offer fun hands-on experience, we recommend Jaipur. You will be amazed at some of the learning experiences on offer for your clients who love beautiful fabrics, jewellery or their crafts. The best part being all these experiences are of half-day duration. So they can be easily included with the main sights of Jaipur. There is no pressure to buy anything at any point of time during these learning experiences. And yes!! Your clients get to carry their creation as souvenirs. You may want to include our Meenakari jewellery enameling workshop, a great insight into one of India's oldest and most sophisticated jewellery making techniques. An ancient art form of decorating metal with enamel, Meenakari travelled to Jaipur from Persia. Your clients will be introduced to extremely talented Meenakari artists, with whom they will work in traditional jewellery workshops, learn how to make designs on paper and create their own piece of Meenakari jewellery. Another fun learning experience in Jaipur is our miniature painting workshop. Jaipur has some remarkable artists who will introduce your clients to a timeless world, where men and women, birds and animals, trees and flowers are depicted in an impossibly small scale. The detailing is incredibly. The session starts with a live demonstration of the different styles and aspects of Jaipur's miniature style of painting. Your clients will be briefed about colours, brushes, paper and other material which will be provided before they start their "do-it-yourself" session. For those of your clients who love beautiful fabrics, we recommend you include our block printing workshop in Bagru which is on the outskirts of Jaipur. In Bagru, before your clients start creating their own fabric we will visit over 5-7 local houses to learn about this 300-year old Textile art. Our friends in Jaipur who are passionate locals and enjoy a great rapport with these artisans will be with your clients during these workshops and help strike conversation.

TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

- ▶ Hand's on "Do it Yourself" sessions under the supervision of some of Jaipur's most talented artists of traditional art forms.
- ▶ Orientation on the history of these traditional arts and getting to know them from the a local perspective.
- ▶ Meeting artisans in their traditional workplaces.
- ▶ Getting to know about materials used in these art forms and to handle tools used by the artisans.

Best time to travel : October to March

Ideal for : Minimum 2 - Maximum 8 pax



# Sustainability Index

## DKC Tours

- ▶ Another criteria, 'Are the excursions respectful in encounters with local traditions by making sure that food consumed reflects a region's cuisine and includes local specialties' - Most of our experts/friends do that already by taking clients to sample local cuisine for lunch/dinner at the end of the experience. By identifying local houses who can host our clients for lunches and dinners after the tour, we can hugely add to the experience and also support the local community. We have also developed a culinary tour of Mumbai which takes in the regional cuisine of India's West Coast including Mumbai. The restaurants are owned by locals and we also have meals in local homes as a part of the tour.
- ▶ Developing a rating system to accurately throw results to help us in assessing all our products is what we are working at. One of the early challenges was to make sure that everyone within the team is on the same page when interpreting the various parameters. Others being include; how to judge what is the group size which decides the carrying capacity of a visited site. "Bring it in, Bring it out" is a concept which is not there in most of our city excursions. Our goal is to have all our tours rated according to the guidelines and then start the processes of talking to the experience providers to make improvements accordingly. There might be tough choices (having financial implications) to make regarding taking products off the shelf which perform below par.
- ▶ The road ahead is challenging but at the same time we are all very excited about it.

With Sita recently releasing its Guidelines for Sustainable Excursions, we at the Destination Knowledge Centre thought it would be a good idea to see how our experiences stack up against the set criterions. It's a daunting task to say the least, as the purpose of the guidelines will be to support teams when selecting/assessing excursions and to help define, whether the products we source and offer take environmental, social and economic impacts into account.

I think the easiest way to go about rating any excursion is whether, I would be proud to offer it to any family member or a friend who comes to me for tour ideas. When I look at some of the guidelines like, 'Does the excursion give an opportunity for customers to meet with the local population in authentic settings and experience authentic music or dance and visit cultural, religious or heritage sites?' I think we are on the right track. As my colleague Kuntal aptly puts it that is the Raison d'être of the Destination Knowledge Centre. Products which are easy on the environment such as hiking, cycling tours and walking tours are very much a part of our offering. Of course we will keep striving to do better.





# The Heritage Trail of Tamangs

## A Photography Tour

The more things change in the world, the more they remain the same for the Tamangs of the Langtang region. About 150 years ago, Nepal fought Tibet over salt and some of the largest areas where this war took place was in the Langtang Region of Nepal. The Tamang Heritage Trail is one of the off the beaten tracks, which highlights an ancient lifestyle combining it with picturesque scenery. The present inhabitants of this region are mostly Tibetans who came after crossing over from Kerung in Tibet and settled in Nepal. In the earlier days, Nepalese citizenship was not offered to Tibetans, so they changed their ethnicity to Tamang, which is what they still write till date. The culture and traditions of these people are similar to the Tibetan across the border. Besides, Langtang is a land of magic, meditation with ancient Tibetan monasteries, rhododendron and bamboo forests, majestic waterfalls, snow-capped Himalayas and many sacred lakes, making this an unforgettable expedition.

TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

- ▶ Variety of experiences from Tamang rituals, Tibetan culture, festivals, traditional architecture and costumes, to local Syabru dances make this exposure to Tamang culture very unique.
- ▶ Awe inspiring views of the Langtang valley and Kerung (Tibet) from Goljung Pass.
- ▶ Opportunity to interact with villagers and see exclusive handicraft items.
- ▶ Visit to Parvati Kunda, the 'Sacred Lake' and visit to the traditional cheese factory.



Day 1 - Your tour leader will meet you a day prior to brief you about your journey. Next morning post breakfast we would be covering close to 127 kms in 6-7 hours by road. Stopping frequently for tea breaks, for stretching our legs and of course for photography, the journey will be done at ease. The road is uneventful except for a stretch of 8 kms midway, which is unpaved and adventurous. Our first overnight stop is at Syabrubesi, a small town, where the Langtang region begins. Spend the rest of the day at leisure.

Day 2 - Today we will be driving up to Goljung Village (1962 metres), 18 kms from Syarubesi. Lalita and her friends from the Village Women's Group will be waiting to welcome us in a traditional way, by offering Khada; a Buddhist silk scarf and butter tea. Lalita who is a friend of Sita will take us around the neighbouring villages to interact with the villagers. Afterwards we will drive to the next village called Gatlang which will take you back in time. Our lunch today is at a local homestay. Simple yet delicious food, fresh from the villagers' garden. Here we get a glimpse into the lifestyle of Tamang's living in remote Nepal. We will be spending the night in a local homestay at Gatlang.

Day 3 - After an early breakfast, we drive to Parvati Kunda, a 'Sacred Lake' steeped in legend and un-spoilt by man. After admiring the breath-taking beauty of the lake we head to a cheese factory to observe the traditional way of processing cheese from yak milk. From here it's time for us to head back to Kathmandu (4-5 hour drive).

Best time to travel : March to June



# Discovering Hidden Trails

## Cycling in Kathmandu

BIKING DETAILS

Nagarkot - Changunarayan Temple - Gamchha Organic Farm, Thimi  
Total time : 2- 3 hours  
Difficulty level : Intermediate

TOUR HIGHLIGHTS

- ▶ Majestic view of Himalayan ranges.
- ▶ A ride through a mix of jeep tracks and single tracks.
- ▶ Interaction with local farmers and working class Nepalese people.
- ▶ Observe the traditional ways of farming; tools and technologies used.
- ▶ Wholesome meal (lunch) at Gamchha organic farm.
- ▶ Observe the traditional occupation of the locals of Bhaktapur.

Shyam meets us at Nagarkot, a hill station 30 kms away from Kathmandu. We start biking from Nagarkot to Changu Narayan, oldest temple of Kathmandu valley which dates back to 325 AD. On the way we meet locals and enjoy interacting with them when we stop at local tea shops in between our rides. After visiting the temple we carry on cycling to Gamchha Organic farm. Here, we have the opportunity to stretch our legs, walk around the organic farm and enjoy a delicious organic lunch. We would have ridden for nearly 3 hours.

Post lunch we continue to Bhaktapur city on bikes. By now we have left the countryside behind and find ourselves riding in and out through allies and narrow roads. Shyam takes us to observe tradition pottery workshop. You are free to participate and learn if you wish. The tour end here.



Besides bruised arms and shins, a dented helmet gives away his profession. Former national downhill champion Shyam Limbu is now preoccupied organising racing events, training young female cyclists, organising guided cycling tours but at the same time, equally determined to get back on the podium.

Shyam is so passionate about biking that he can just go on and on about it and you know how much he loves cycling when you head out with him on these hidden trails of Kathmandu.

"It's funny how people tend to think that just by buying a fancy bike you can become a professional rider. It took me countless training hours, never mind crashes upon crashes, to accomplish what little I have till now." Nonetheless, within four months of hard training on his new Commencal Bike, Shyam bagged fourth position in the Chain DH Championship in 2011 and eventually mastered his trade to become a part of the national cycling team in 2013.

Shyam is living his dream job. "I get to travel to amazing places on my bicycle, my favourite fix being Lubra Valley near Manang. The bumpy trails are fabulous for all-mountain bikes with just the right section of climb and a ton of downhill sections crisscrossing through surreal desert landscape." Limbu cautions that proper stamina, fitness and skill is required to enjoy downhill rides.





# Experience Pettah

## Frantic, yet charming

Take a stroll through the streets of Pettah and experience the cultural diversity of Colombo first hand. This vibrant neighbourhood is enclosed by the harbor, the Colombo Fort and the Fort Railway Station.

“Pettah is Colombo's largest, most functional market place. It is loud, crowded and indefinitely full of interesting things. The maze of Pettah streets are filled with all kinds of goods, ranging from colourful fabrics, gold, electronic devices to vegetable and spices with every street named for its own speciality. You can visit the market a million times, yet it will never cease to be interesting. At a first glance, the place seems chaotic and bordering on the mad, with the streets being packed inch to inch by trishaws, hawkers and wooden wagons. But if you know Pettah and you know where to hunt, you can walk away with some very cool stuff at ridiculous prices,” says Denise Lanz who is a Swiss national and heads the Sita office in Sri Lanka. She has experienced this tour first hand.

Upon experiencing the frantic mix of commerce and chaos, continue to stroll down to the Dutch Museum located in the ever crowded second cross street. This unique museum was originally the 17th century residence of the Dutch governor and has been used as a Catholic Seminary, a Military Hospital and a Post Office. Even though the exhibit is modest by nature, it includes Dutch Colonial furniture and other artifacts resembling the life back then. The lovely courtyard has nice a pastel feel which invites you to rest and relax.

Don't miss the Sea Street, an area symbolising the cultural diversity and religious harmony of Colombo. One can find the Jami Ul-Alfar Mosque, a Hindu Temple and the St. Anthony's Church peacefully co-existing here. If you want to relax at a quieter place, continue walking till you reach Colombo Fort. Here we take a peek into the former Presidential House and the former post office. This area has recently opened up for the public since the change of government in January 2015.

Finally we end our exploration with a meal or just a cup of tea at the Dutch Hospital. The former hospital, from the 17th century has been tastefully restored and you find now restaurants, shops and the Ceylon Spa. Tired Feet by now? Why not relax with a foot massage!

TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

- ▶ Pettah Market.
- ▶ Dutch Museum.
- ▶ Colombo Fort.

Best time to travel : October to April

Ideal for : 1 - 6 pax



# Himalayan Buddhism Simplified

## A Sita Exclusive

Before participating in this interactive session, your clients will have the option of visiting the Buddha Dordenma statue sitting on top of a hill overlooking Thimphu to catch the sunrise over a cup of tea. The Statue of the Buddha is one of the tallest in Asia (51.5 m). The site of Buddha Dordenma offers unobstructed views over the capital town and as you gaze down towards the valley, you are overcome with a feeling of peace and serenity - the stillness and quietness of the morning calms your mind. Watch the luminous rays of the morning sun flood the valley and wake its inhabitants from the night's slumber. We will then take a morning walk in the nearby nature park. The park covers about 943 acres of land around the Buddha statue. A few walking trails have been built around the statue and can be covered in about 2-3 hours. However, we will walk for about an hour - just enough to enjoy the wilderness and get some fresh air, before returning to the hotel for breakfast and then attend the Himalayan Buddhism Simplified session.

TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

- ▶ The utterly complex Himalayan Buddhism explained in a very simple way, in laymen language.
- ▶ Understanding and learning how to draw a Mandala.
- ▶ Visit to the Memorial Chorten at Thimphu.
- ▶ Visit to the Buddha Dordenma statue to catch the sunrise over a cup of Tea - optional.

Best time to travel : October to April

Ideal for : 2 - 25 pax

In this interactive session in Thimphu, Bhutan's capital city, a local expert will shed light and simplify Himalayan Buddhism for your clients. It is a Sita exclusive not available to competition. Himalayan Buddhism is notorious for its allusions and hidden symbolism in its rituals, deities, statues, paintings and could be exasperating for your clients. But it is actually very simple. For example - all the fierce looking deities that your clients will get to see in the monasteries in Bhutan are actually depiction of a particular teaching or spiritual tradition of Himalayan Buddhism. They are not physical entities in anyway. Think E= MC2, the Malthus Theory of Demand and Supply or Boyle's Law being translated into a painting for better understanding of the laymen. The session will end with clients learning how to draw a Mandala; a cosmic diagram used as an aid to meditation in Himalayan Buddhism. Mandala means circle or centre in the ancient Sanskrit language of India. A mandala is more than an image seen with our eyes, drawn with our hand. It is an opportunity to connect with what's within and around us. It is an actual moment in time and a gateway to explore our own inner self, our inherent wisdom and knowledge. Something which in our fast paced modern lives we have very conveniently outsourced to books, spiritual gurus and motivational speakers. To help your clients understand better, we will end the session at the Memorial Chorten of Thimphu. This site is an excellent introduction to Himalayan Buddhism in all its complexity depicted through the paintings and statues. A large white structure with a golden spire, it has been built following the basic structures of a Mandala. During the mornings and evenings, it is a bustling place where people of all ages circumambulate the Chorten and pray at the shrine.







# Destination insider

Sita is back in Sri Lanka after 5 years. Denise Lanz who heads Sita Sri Lanka tells us that, whilst she began with a few challenges, the vitality and positive energy of its people made her feel at home in no time. Denise comes with a wealth of experience and expertise having worked as a Managing Director at Intens Travel, Switzerland.

## Sita in Sri Lanka

### Upclose and Personal

She has done quite a fair bit of travelling in Sri Lanka till now and here are two from her list of favourites.

#### LIPTON'S SEAT

Lipton's seat is one of the best kept secrets in Sri Lanka, hidden in the misty hills of Haputale. The journey is not that easy but it's well worth an effort. The place is located 1970 metres above sea level near Dambatenne Tea Factory and its breath taking view might only be matched with the famous 'Worlds End in the Horton Plains'. The story behind Lipton's Seat is that the Scottish Tea Baron Thomas Lipton bought the estate to survey his flourishing empire which later was named after him following his death. Take the narrow paved road through the Tea Factory and walk through the lush green blankets of tea bushes. During the hike the cold air is mixed with refreshing mist and the lush greenery over the mountain tops will give you a special feeling about nature. From the Tea Factory it will take approximately two and a half hours to cover the 7 kms ascent to the top. It is recommended to start early morning to catch the beauty before the mist seeps in, once on top you can grab a hot cup of tea.

#### UDAWATTAKELE

Udawattakele is a historic forest reserve on a hill ridge in the heart of Kandy. The lush greenery that you see all around you will keep you mesmerised for hours. Spanning across 257 acres, it is considered as a vital bio-reserve for the much populated Kandy. Take a walk along the beaten track and you won't even realise when you left the concrete jungle to find yourself surrounded by nature. Udawattakele is a paradise for bird lovers and houses three monasteries. A great place to relax and unwind.







# 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.

## Best of Art of Travel

### Some of our favourites

#### 6 THINGS WE LIKED ABOUT ARCO IRIS

- ▶ The Hosts -Bennita (Beni), Ganesh (Gani) and their daughters Trusha and Trikaya (T&T), are your hosts at Arco Iris, who reside on the premises. Fenni and Scooty, the two dogs are the latest addition.
- ▶ The Location -Arco Iris is quietly located in Curtorim village, 7 kms from Margao in South Goa set amongst verdant fields and wooded areas on a sloping 1.5 acres of land. The front edge of the property overlooks a seasonal lake which supplements the water requirements of the surrounding paddy fields.
- ▶ The House -Loved the way the owners have restored the 200 year old Portuguese home. Nothing jars. It is a perfect blend of the traditional and the modern.
- ▶ The Rooms - Arco Iris is built on a high plinth, with its imposing columns, high ceilings and offers excellent year-round natural ventilation. The colours of the bedrooms have been picked keeping in mind the colours of the rainbow.
- ▶ In and around -Arco Iris is a perfect place not to do anything and perhaps just see the grass grow. One can cycle down to the Rachol Cemetery crossing the Curtorim and Maina lakes. It is one of the oldest seminary in Asia.
- ▶ Birding - I thought Birding was boring and not for me. But after the short birding trip, my first, which Gani organised with an Ornithologist close by to Arco Iris, changed my mind.

#### A DAY IN THE LIFE OF

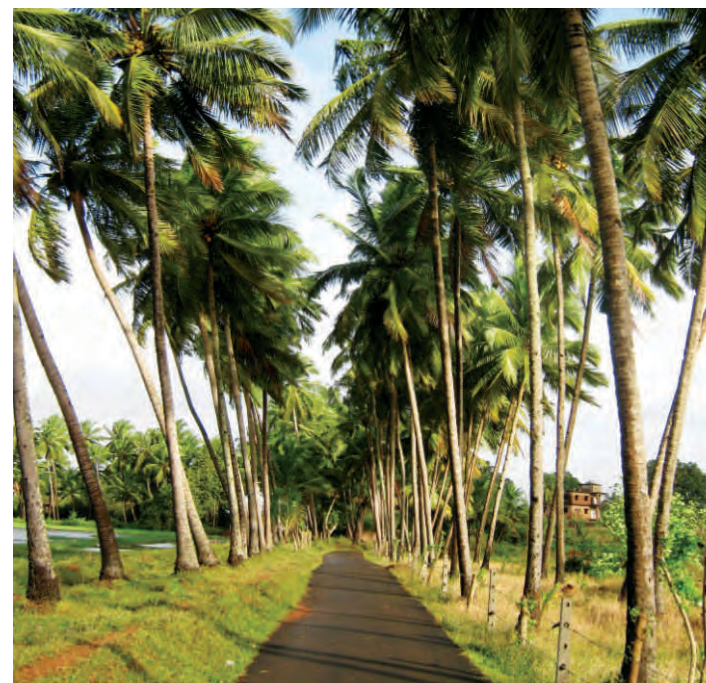
Uday Bhan Singh and Ajit Rana are co-founders of Overlander India, a 4x4 self-drive, off-roading company that takes you for an off-road adventure of a lifetime across various regions of India. Overlander India provides the jeep, the fuel, the route, the stay, the food, and the experience; and all the customers (called Overlanders) have to do, is to drive to their heart's content.

#### SPOTTED BY SITA

The menfolk of the indigenous Baiga tribe of Central India are distinguished by their long hair. I wondered what kept it flowing and shining, says Kuntal Baruwa from our Destination Knowledge Centre who was in Central India recently where he had the opportunity to experience a slice of life and times of the Baigas, one of the oldest aboriginal tribes of the country. Instead they use a particular sticky black soil from the forest which I saw when I went to a Baiga village. And since they consider themselves as guardians of the forest and the soil, a prayer is said in apology before the soil is dug. The Baigas believe that to dig is to hurt the bosom of Mother Earth, says Kuntal.

#### TOP CHEF RECOMMENDS

Joylet D'Cunha in Bagh Tola recommends the Mutton Green Masala which she cooks herself as a must try during your stay here. Joylet is a native of Mangalore in India's West Coast, which is known for its fine cuisine and food loving people. The Mutton Green Masala is a Manglorean classic cooked in every household back home, says Joylet. A must try!







# 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.

## Celebration of Delhi

### Little Black Book

Suchita Salwan was just 22 years old when she founded Little Black Book Delhi, a site which has quickly become the go-to place for a Delhi cultural fix. In the last couple of years, the site has grown to incorporate events, curated city tours and the most trusted Weekend Checklist in the city. A businesswoman, editor and a creative thinker, Suchita credits the fantastic set of connections she's developed across Delhi for the strength of Little Black Book's success.



Little Black Book Delhi is a celebration of all the things we love about our City.

The people, places, art, culture, food and lifestyle of this dynamic city are what inspire us to uncover and discover it for what it truly is, and has been. Little Black Book manifests itself as a curated guide to Delhi, a hub for events, and a way to connect with like-minded people and explore Delhi and beyond.

We share and curate experiences. We believe that the best stories are those that are real. We feature writings by individuals who offer their own, unique perspective.

We support communities and enterprises. The artists, bookstores, cafes and shops we speak about are those we recommend. We know the heart and drive that it takes to create something of your own, and we want our readers to come be a part of these exciting and soulful endeavours.

We want you to log in and step out. Don't be confined to your office space or computer screen. There's something waiting to be explored in any and every nook of the city if you look close enough. Explore Delhi and its surroundings.





# In our opinion

## My Buddha Takeaways

### 7 Spots at Mahabodhi Temple

Inderjeet Rathod stitches all our findings together into beautiful itineraries, prepares reference documents for the operations team and designs special interest products on demand at the Destination Knowledge Centre.

Your soul has to be in complete slumber if you do not feel the positive vibrations at the Mahabodhi Temple in Bodh Gaya. It was here that the Buddha attained enlightenment. One tends not to be judgmental at all here. I saw a monk picking up a dead leaf from the fig tree, under which Buddha meditated and gained enlightenment. He looked at it with great devotion. Touched it. Contemplated. And dropped it. He let it go. A young woman from an Indian family picked up the same leaf. The entire family did what the Monk did. Looked at it with great devotion. Touched it. Contemplated. But didn't let it go. She closed her eyes, muttered something with great devotion and put the leaf in her purse. Was the Monk right? And the young woman wrong?. No. They were both correct. At the Mahabodhi Temple Buddha's Middle Path unfolds right in front of you. But Buddha didn't leave immediately after his enlightenment. Buddha spent 7 weeks here meditating and contemplating at 7 different spots. Buddha was planning, he was preparing to share his knowledge with the world. The hotel I stayed at is named after the maiden Sujata, who gave a bowl of rice pudding to Buddha, weak and frail after years of severe austerities. The Buddha realised that severe austerities and harming the body in the process is not the way to enlightenment. And there dawned the idea of the Middle Path. "Neither my life of luxury in a palace -nor- my life as ascetic in the forest were ways to enlightenment," the Buddha later told his followers.

MY BUDDHA TAKEAWAYS FROM THE 7 SPOTS AT THE MAHABODHI TEMPLE WHICH CAN BE APPLIED TO OUR DAILY LIVES :

What is fascinating about these 7 spots at Maha Bodhi Temple is what the Buddha did over 7 weeks before he left for Sarnath in Varanasi for his first sermon. These 7 spots and Buddha's doings are notoriously sealed with allusions, hidden symbolism and legends and super human acts. The take-aways from this 7 different spots at the end of my morning tour of the Mahabodhi temple were amazing.

FIRST SPOT: We went to the Mucalinda Lake (The Abode of the Snake King). Here one can see a statue of the Buddha in meditation protected by the hood of a giant Cobra. The story goes that a severe thunder storm broke out while the Buddha was meditating and Mucalinda, the Snake King protected him from the elements until the great storm cleared. My Buddha takeaway: You can't consider yourself successful in life unless you have contributed towards the success of others.

SECOND SPOT: The most pious spot in the Mahabodhi Temple, the Mahabodhi (Fig) Tree. This is where Buddha meditated and gained enlightenment. I saw a gentleman from Bangladesh with his family members performing rituals. He was to be ordained as a monk that evening. It was

his big day and he was all smiles. I complimented him. My Buddha takeaway: There are no shortcuts in life.

THIRD SPOT: From the Mahabodhi Tree we went to Cankamana, where Buddha spent a week walking up and down. There is a raised platform with lotuses engraved on it. The lotuses indicate the places the Buddha's feet rested while walking. Right next to Cankamana, I saw a Vietnamese nun and a Monk from Ladakh sweating from the rigorous prostrations that they were doing. My Buddha takeaway: Walk, Jog, do Yoga, go to the Gym if you want to. Whatever maybe your choice. Have an active, healthy life.

FOURTH SPOT: Ratanaghara or the Jewel House Shrine where the Buddha spent a week in meditation reflecting on Patthana or Casual Law, which is one of the fundamental doctrines of Buddhism. That all things in the universe are interdependent, impermanent and constantly changing. It is said that blue, yellow, red, white and orange rays emanated from his body while the Buddha was meditating here. These colours are used in the present day Buddhist flag. My Buddha takeaway: In this constantly changing world count your blessings and your good fortunes. You are lucky. Not everyone is. Be prepared and embrace change.

FIFTH SPOT: Animisa Lokana was our next stop. It is said that from here Buddha spent a week gazing at the Mahabodhi Tree where he gained enlightenment without blinking his eyes. My Buddha takeaway: Always be grateful. Show your gratitude. Don't forget to say Thank You.

SIXTH SPOT: Ajapala Banyan Tree. When entering the main gate and descending the stairs towards Mahabodhi Temple, there is a stone pillar marking the Ajapala-Banyan tree which is no longer there. It is also here Lord Buddha, while responding to a question raised by a Brahmin (the priestly and highest class in the Indian caste system) that it is good karma(action) alone and not birth which makes one a Brahmin. My Buddha takeaway: Touch the lives of people in a positive way and know that actions speak louder than words.

SEVENTH SPOT: Rajayatana is where we ended our tour of the Mahabodhi Temple. It is here under a Banyan tree that Buddha meditated for a week. At the end of his meditation two merchants from Myanmar offered rice cake and honey to Buddha. In return he gave them eight strands of his hair and the gem of all Buddhist sermons, "Buddham saranam gacchami and Dhammam saranam gacchami" (I go to the Buddha for refuge/I go to the Dhamma for refuge). These eight strands of hair are believed to be placed as relics inside the Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon. My Buddha takeaway: Be a good listener. Be receptive to new ideas. Recognise and promote good people, ideas and work. Leave behind a legacy. And the Buddha also said "Believe nothing, no matter where you read it, or who said it, no matter if I have said it, unless it agrees with your own reasons and your own common sense."





# A Few Good Men

## Operation Flood

Philip Thomas is responsible for Operations and Business Development at Sita, he always has an interesting story which none of us have ever heard, here is an interesting insight into something which is Utterly Butterly Delicious!!

Little is known by India's younger generation (much less by the outside world!) which constitutes the biggest percentage of the 1.3 billion population about how it became the world's largest producer of milk in a short span of 30 years from a milk deficient country. Therein lies the tale of a "few good men" and Operation Flood, the world's largest rural cooperative movement that led to the billion dollar brand "Amul" and transformed the lives of thousands upon thousands of farmers in India.

The seeds of this movement were sown in 1949 in Kaira, Gujarat when Dr. Varghese Kurien, a young and dedicated Engineer, student of Animal Husbandry and Dairying joined the Cooperative in Kaira under the Chairmanship of his "guru", Tribuvandas Patel. The institute was set up by Sardar Vallabhai Patel, one of the giants of India's independence.

Fortunately for millions of farmers, these young men were supported by a group of enlightened politicians and bureaucrats, quite rare in the country for that period of history! This "revolution" was set in motion by H.M. Dalaya, Kurien's buddy and an eminent dairy specialist who invented the technique of making skim milk powder from buffalo milk against the established practice of making it from cow's milk, in which the Swiss Multinational Nestle was a world leader. This success led in 1965, the then Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri to create the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) headed by Kurien for the next 30 years!

The Amul model was replicated in all of Gujarat and eventually spread all over the country. The IRMA (Institute of Rural Management Anand) was set up and India's cooperative moment was on a roll that would never stop! From being a Milk importer, India quickly became self-sufficient in Milk and then began to export Milk and its products overseas.

A few good men dedicated their lives to being some of the finest social entrepreneurs. Varghese Kurien's first award was the Ramon Magsaysay Award way back in 1963. In 1999 he was awarded the Padma Vibushan Award by the Government of India and a lifetime of dedicated work ended with his death in 2012. Curiously, he himself did not like milk and never drank it!

Interestingly, veteran film maker Shyam Benegal, then an advertising executive with the firm Lintas produced a film Manthan (The Churning) set in Anand, Gujarat about the milk cooperative movement of India. Not able to finance the film, Kurien stepped in to get the half a million farmers of the cooperatives to contribute to the film with a sum of two rupees each, which they willingly did and the film was made

with national actors like Naseeruddin Shah, Smita Patil, Dr Girish Karnad, Kulbhusan Kharbanda, Anant Nag, Sadhu Meher, Amrish Puri and a host of the country's best theater artists.

The film was a box office hit then in 1976 and its success with the audience in Gujarat led to a nationwide distribution. The rest, as the cliché goes, is history. The film helped Kurien spread the word of cooperatives in other parts of India who quickly joined to form part of the movement of "Operation Flood". Perhaps no other idea has caught the imagination of rural India as much as the "Amul" model did. Utterly Butterly Delicious!!

Just for the records, India surpassed the USA as the world's largest milk producer in 1998 and contributes 17% of the world's milk production today!!

A few good men, a lot of passion, perseverance and patience, and outstanding team work are what it takes to make transformational change for others. In rural India, generations of farmers will remain indebted to a small group of technocrats, administrators, visionaries, Prime Ministers and their teams for having believed in themselves. Leading them all, Varghese Kurien set up more than 30 institutions, dedicating his entire life to ensuring the Indian farmers remain empowered forever.







# Communal Living

## Doing more with less

Kuntil Baruwa is our explorer-in-residence. He travels all over the Indian sub-continent to make friends with locals and use their recommendations to design unique experiences for the inquisitive savvy traveller.

In August 2012, I spent 3 nights at Demul, one of Asia's highest villages in the cold desert of Spiti in the Indian Himalayas which remains cut off from the rest of India for 7 months during winters. We were there as volunteers for a CSR project of Sita, building a Solar Bath for a local Buddhist nunnery.

When we reached our Project Site in Spiti, Sujeet a fellow volunteer had a question for me. "What do the locals do here for entertainment? We volunteers took a break from work and went for the Namkhan Festival at Demul. The Namkhan festival is wrapped around the agricultural practices of the village. The main objective of this small community festival is to appease and pray to the Gods for a good harvest. Namkhan provides an interesting insight into the relationship and significance of the village deity in a day to day life of the village. Hopefully Sujeet got his answer. We stayed with local families in homestays in Demul. The conversations of the experience carried on to the Project Site. "I was surprised to know that 5 people in a family can do with 50 litres of water a day," said Manpreet, a volunteer.

I realised that team work, timelines, deadlines, trust, bonding, great planning, taking more responsibility, doing more with less, delegation of work, great allocation and use of resources, having a Plan B, acknowledging people's efforts and being creative, having fun at work; whatever we touched upon in corporate training programs is a way of life in Spiti.

For these hardworking mountain folks who prepare for the long winter ahead, timelines and deadlines are a must as they stock up not only for themselves, but their livestock as well. They grow peas and use the money for spending during winters. Barley which they also grow is their staple; including barley wine which we boys liked. "Ghaas Ki Katai (cutting of grass to be stocked up) for the livestock during winters is a crucial activity I realised," said Sagar, another volunteer. Each family is given a particular time slot for ghaas ki katai and an amount of grass which they can stock up for their livestock. Nothing more. Nothing Less. And they cannot afford to miss the time that they have in hand for this. The same applies to stocking up enough food for the family which they need to balance with their daily routine. Be at work elsewhere or at the fields of Demul with the Barley and the Peas, which they also have to harvest.

When we left Demul for the Project Site, one such family who had helped us on the project went with us and we dropped them halfway to their village. "They come over when we need them and we go over when they need us," said one of the ladies from the family. Now that's trust, bonding, team work and great planning. The residents of Demul were worried as they did not have enough grass in their meadows. "So what

happens to the livestock,"? I asked. I was told that depending on the grass they have managed to stock up, some of the livestock would be sent away to a relative's village for the entire winter if it is not good enough to sustain. That was such a simple plan B and you had someone willing to take more responsibility with more or less the same resources. Not surprising from these hardy mountain folks for whom doing more with less is a way of life. What was also interesting was the composition of families who would come to help from other villages for ghaas ki katai. There would be 2-3 adult women, kids and teenage girls. I later realised that while the kids played with the kids of their host family, the teenage girls helped in the kitchen and looked after the kids while the adults went out each morning to cut grass from the meadows allotted to them. Now that's another example of planning, delegation of work, great allocation and use of resources.

During an earlier visit to Spiti, I had asked Padma from my host family, who was threshing his barley about what happens when someone misses or extends the time slot allotted to them for ghaas katai. I was told that it is not a rarity, but people try their best not to. "If they do miss or extend their time, the village imposes a fine. They are allowed to continue, but have to pay barley wine as penalty. The village has a party with whatever barley wine we have managed to collect from defaulters," I was told by Padma. Now that's being creative and having fun at work. This spirit of communal living of Spiti is something that amazed me the most. Maybe "communal living" should be made a part of corporate training programs too, along with the rest.







# Stays we loved & Stays to watch out for

## Stays we loved Mainstream, but different

### BAGH TOLA, KANHA NATIONAL PARK

The simple and stark looking Bagh Tola, which literally means 'The Tiger's Village' is almost uninviting at first sight. But as you inch closer to Bagh Tola you are likely to get curious with the sight of a Chapel with its Bell within the premises and start thinking that there is indeed something very interesting to this 8-room property, spread over 44 acres of wooded forest in Kanha National Park in Central India. "And yes indeed; my host Eric D'Cunha at Bagh Tola who has spent close to 30 years in Kanha, tells me that the property with antique furniture gleaned from old houses around India is designed around a courtyard reminiscent of the railway colonies that central India was famous for during the British Raj," says Kuntal Baruwa from our Destination Knowledge Centre, who recently stayed at Bagh Tola. The Railways during colonial India were instrumental in opening up this part of Central India, which till then had remained shrouded in mystery for thousands of years. The eight spacious bedrooms of Bagh Tola, two in each corner of the courtyard are wonderfully comfortable with ensuite bathrooms and elegant, complete with white and pink bougainvillea vines. Evenings are best spent with a drink in the open courtyard, from where one can enjoy a stunning sunset, around the bonfire chatting with Eric. "Eric is the soul of Bagh Tola. He can talk about birds, butterflies, reptiles, insects and tigers and also give you a historical and cultural perspective of Central India and its Tribes. I found this to be a very rare combination, because I have met knowledgeable naturalists in other wildlife destinations who know their birds and tigers, but are totally foxed when it comes to the culture, history and people," says Kuntal.

### TIGER MOUNTAIN POKHARA LODGE, POKHARA, NEPAL

1000 feet above Pokhara Valley and only 30 to 40 minutes drive from the city, the 18-room Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge is ideal for those of your clients who want to relax in a rural mountain setting. "Spend two or three nights here to make the most of the atmosphere and go on a day excursion to Pokhara while enjoying the wonderful views of the valley," says Jean Noel from our Destination Knowledge Centre who stayed here recently. A perfect combination of comfort in a traditional setting, this eco-lodge resembles a Nepali village. All the rooms have attached bathrooms, private verandas with Himalayan views. Built of hand-cut stone, the cottage provides welcoming, understated seclusions with cool slate and parquet floors, rich Tibetan rugs, handmade wood furniture and original artwork. Large windows and glass double doors maximize the glorious views of the amazing location. "I woke up at 5 in the morning to view the wonderful sunrise which beautifully lit up the mountain ranges. Red, pink and blue colours merged magnificently. I enjoyed this amazing sight with a mug of coffee served on the balcony of my room. The food here is excellent. They serve Nepalese food for lunch and continental for dinner. I will never forget the homemade breakfast, particularly the yoghurt mixed with home-made cereals," adds Jean. Tiger

Mountain Pokhara Lodge has a swimming pool and your clients can also opt for a hike to a nearby village, the duration of the hike completely depends on their interest and energy.

### THE INN, PATAN, NEPAL

This 150 years old Newari house in Patan is lovingly restored using carved wood, bricks, stones and local handicraft by the famous Nepali architect Rohit Ranjitkar. A perfect fusion of modern comfort in a traditional setting. It offers 10 spacious and comfortable rooms surrounded by a private courtyard and free Wi-Fi connection. "The Inn is very peaceful, especially at night. Hardly any barking dogs or honking of vehicles. Something which came as a surprise given my past experience of overnighing in Patan. Do not worry about your wake-up call. Leave that to the sound of the temple bells when the locals start their morning pujas. But trust me that's a great way to start your day," says Valerie Chalopet, our Business Support Manager who stayed here recently. The location of The Inn, few metres away from the Durbar Square, a UNESCO World Heritage site, is certainly its USP. Nima, the General Manager and her team will pamper you; get you that hot water bag or help you order breakfast which is a la carte (try the Newari bread with honey and local yogurt). Eat lunch outside but come back for a cosy dinner of local delicacies.

### GORKHA GAUN, GORKHA, NEPAL

Located at Laxmi Bazaar, 4 kms away from Gorkha, the small yet captivating Nepali town, Gorkha Gaun is perfect for those clients who want to break the journey between Pokhara and Kathmandu or vice versa. This 6 cottage eco-lodge inspired by local architecture and built with material procured from





# Stays we loved

## Mainstream, but different

in and around Gorkha was started in 2012. Salil Aryal who returned to Nepal after having stayed nearly two decades in the US, his two Nepali partners wanted to create a retreat in a small gaun (village) like environment which is easy on the environment and benefits the locals (mainly the indigenous Magar community). “I would recommend a minimum of 2 nights at the Gorkha Gaun. Salil makes it a point to spend quality time with each guest sharing his passion for eco-tourism. He would accompany you to the village, help strike conversations whilst sharing a cup of tea with the villagers, hike with guests from the Mankamna Temple to the resort plucking oranges on the way and show them interesting places in and around Gorkha and the property,” says Valerie Chalopet, our Business Support Manager who stayed here recently. Sustainability at the Gorkha Gaun is a daily commitment be it solar panels which produces 80% of their electricity, recycling or engaging with the villagers. It has a “no-plastic” policy and all waste is sent to Kathmandu for recycling. Organic food (mostly fruits and vegetables) are purchased from the village itself.

KAHV SAFARI LODGE, KABINI

The journey to Kaav from the other edge of Nagarhole is a destination unto itself. Breathtaking countryside with undulating landscape, farm lands, rivers and villages, with often very good and rarely rugged roads, lies the Kaav Safari Lodge. What a find! Luxurious and understated, very tastefully done, KAAV Safari Lodge in Kabini offers an exceptional experience of quiet solitude with very friendly personalised service.

It’s a small facility but very professionally managed, comfortable spacious rooms with fantastic balcony views



over the adjoining fence into the national park. They have recently added few luxury tents which are also beautifully done. Each room has a lot of privacy. Since it shares a border wall with the national park in Kabini, you are quite likely to hear the trumpeting of elephants at close quarters or even spot some animals.

The food is nothing short of gourmet; using fresh local produce. The resident chef, all the way from Orissa is its truest treasure. It compels you to overeat! As a fellow traveller put it, “To compensate, you can always do a lap or two in the pool, take a walk around the village and of course get yourself booked for a safari. Or be entirely sedentary and lounge in the lobby or the patio or take in the sunset from the upper deck.” My daughter and I spotted birds from the upper deck, lounged and indulged in water colours while hot pakoras were served to us there!

Full marks to the efficient and friendly staff under the supervision of the knowledgeable and affable PK, as he is fondly called. Pavithra aka PK the Manager is an avid photographer. He also helps you see the skies filled with stars and spot the planets at night when he is not showing off his wildlife photography or the famous documentaries on Nagarhole.



# Stays to watch out for

## Hot Picks

STOK PALACE, STOK, LADAKH

Wouldn't it be nice to enjoy the hospitality of the Royal Family ? That's exactly what you would be doing when you stay in the beautiful accommodation within Stok Palace. The Palace complex at Stok is architecturally one of the most important landmark complexes constructed in the Ladakh region by the rulers belonging to the Namgyal Dynasty and comprises the final phase of the evolution of fortified Palace residences characteristic of this region. The six rooms at Stok Palace offer regal comfort, overlooking the Ladakh Range. In the morning you can experience the chants by the monks in the temple above. “The queens room is one of the very important rooms in the Palace, which for four generations was used by queens of Ladakh. In the early nineties it was converted to a museum room to showcase the jewellery and costumes of the queens keeping the same essence of the room. Its only recently that we have converted it into a heritage room where guests can stay and get an glimpse and feel of the past,” says owner Jigmed Wangchuk.

AMAR NIWAS HOMESTAY, AGRA

We are excited about the 2-room Amar Niwas Homestay in Agra which will open soon. Located in the Agra Cantonment which once housed the British Army during the days of the Raj, the 6-acre Amar Niwas Homestay is a 19th century colonial bungalow, built for the British Army officers. Your host at Amar Niwas Homestay is J.P Singh who inherited the Bungalow from his great-grandfather who was an officer in the British Army. JP is a lawyer who lives here along with his mother, wife and two kids. “We want to welcome every guest in the same way we welcome members of our extended family when they come visiting us. So we have only 2 rooms and we intend to keep it that way,” says JP who loves talking about India, its culture and sharing his knowledge of the British Raj. He has also authored a book titled - The Colonial Face of the United Province.

BUJERA FORT, UDAIPUR, RAJASTHAN

Bujera Fort is going to be an exciting addition to Udaipur. Richard and Trish, the owners, committed Indophiles decided to create their own 'Exotic Marigold Hotel' but with a difference – great comfort, style and sophistication, together with superb service and a wonderfully warm atmosphere. Designed from scratch on a greenfield site with views of the city palaces of Udaipur and the surrounding hills, the owners have tried to be as green as sensible. Virtually all the doors and windows are vintage salvage. Even the 86 stone columns used in construction were carved on site during the four years of construction. In Richard's own words “We aim to create a delightfully comfortable home with unobtrusive but five star service. The food served will be simple, locally sourced, wherever possible. I want it to be the first place that comes to mind when you want to recover and relax after the rigours of touring Rajasthan.” “We have sourced art, antiques

and fabrics from all over India and Europe, hoping to make it feel like a truly comfortable home,” adds Richard.

AHILYA BY THE SEA, GOA

It will open its doors to guests sometime in September 2015, but we are excited about the 8-room Ahilya by the Sea, Coco Beach, Goa. First its Location. It will be one of Goa's very few boutique properties directly on the sea. Second, Ahilya by the Sea brings to Goa the expertise and experience of Richard Holkar who owns the charming Ahilya Fort by the Narmada River in Maheshwar, Central India. “Its location is definitely the USP,” says Richard Holkar. Ahilya by the Sea will consist of 3 Portuguese style villas made of hand hewn local red laterite rock and one Tower room which will be intertwined with an ancient beachfront banyan tree. Each individual brick of the villas is shaped on site by master masons using only paper stencils, chalk and hand tools—a craft that has all but disappeared in Goa. Two swimming pools will let guests enjoy a swim in private. Located only an hour away from the Goa airport, Ahilya by the Sea is not too far away from popular Calangute, Candolim and Baga beaches. A 15 minute drive from here takes you past idyllic villages and old churches to the Panjim Bridge from where you can continue to the capital city of Goa and its historic Latin Quarters.

DEV SHREE, DEOGARH, RAJASTHAN

We are excited about the 8-room Homestay Shatrunjay Singh of Deogarh is building to host guests. It will be up and running this summer. “When we decided to build ourselves a home at Deogarh there were many discussions regarding the style and design. But a couple of things that we were sure of was that it had to have plenty of rooms for a regular flow of friends and secondly we wanted to showcase the local craftsmanship in our home,” says Shatrunjay. Built of Nimbahera stone of Chittorgarh, local artisans have been chipping away at blocks of stone for almost 2 years now, transforming them into intricately carved pillars that adorn the veranda overlooking the Ragho Sagar Lake. It will be an ideal spot to relax, read a book or watch the local migratory birds on the lake. “As Deogarh is a principality of Mewar we wanted influences of Mewar architecture to suffuse our home and so we looked towards Udaipur for ideas. We drew elements of inspiration from the charming Bagor ki Haveli and the City Palace of Udaipur. And that's how Dev Shree came to be,” adds Shatrunjay. Paintings of Chokha and Bagta, the famous miniature artists from the house of Deogarh will be seen on the walls of the guest bedrooms. Each room will have a small patio where one can sit and soak up the sun. A small kitchen garden will provide some of the vegetables and the menu will be worked around it. The dining experience will be that of farm fresh, home cooked meal; catering to suit the choice of the guest. “Being our home as well, the guests will need to put up with us, our pets and some of our eccentricities!” Noted Shatrunjay.





# 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.

## Books we loved India and its stories

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:

TRAVELLING IN, TRAVELLING OUT -  
A BOOK OF UNEXPECTED JOURNEYS BY NAMITA GOKHALE

Namita Gokhale puts together an eclectic collection of twenty five stories that take the reader on a journey that is full of surprises, poignant and sometimes mischievous. This is not a conventional travel book. The essays in this anthology are more in the nature of everyday explorations and encounters, as also cultural mappings, reflections and deliberations on the nature of travel. Stories range from Advaita Kala's intrusive American Security experience, to Ipsita Roy's Bhangarh's haunted experience. From Namita Gokhale's "Armchair Travels" to Devdutt Pattanaik's "The Idea of Travel". Urvashi Butalia narrates a moving tragic story of the partition of India, considered the largest cross-migration in history. With contributors like Marie Brenner, HM the Queen mother, Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuk, Kingdom of Bhutan, Jerry Pinto, Navtej Sarna you can expect an interestingly unusual read. The stories move from ancient India, to Rajasthan, China to Pakistan, from Himalayas to Kerala, Bengal to Bhutan, the Koyana Valley through rivers, forests and hills; traversing geographies of the past, from Surat to Shanghai to San Francisco. My six year old, observant daughter, Seher, said to me casually watching the world go by on our recent journey to Kanpur in a train, "Mama, trees are so unlucky, no? they can't travel...." This book is a tribute to the "accidental tourist".

Philip Thomas is a Delhi born Keralite. 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:

KORMA KHEER KISMET BY PAMELA TIMMS

Pamela Timms is Scottish but lives in Delhi with her husband and three children. This is an excellent food memoir which writes about five seasons in Old Delhi. Yes we often forget that Delhi does get five seasons each year!! These gastronomic adventures in the medieval gullies of the old city provide Pamela her best escapes where she discovers and enjoys "Old and Famous" Jalebis, Mutton Kormas, Kheer and Old Delhi's elusive winter treat daulat ki chaat. If you are a foodie, love history, humour and some stoic moments in seemingly chaotic India, this is a must read book. Pamela Timms' easy to read narrative, with a touch of hilarity. An Insight into living amongst us Indian, celebrating our Festivals, meeting astrologers and dealing with colony security guards, taxi drivers and the wandering ladies who peddle, 'stainless steel' wares in exchange for old clothes, this book does take the reader deeper into the heart of Delhi than most authors. Highly recommended!

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:

MAN-EATERS OF KUMAON - JIM CORBETT

When I was 14-years old, my curriculum had a chapter called 'Mohan Man-eater'. It was from the book 'Man-eaters of Kumaon' written by Jim Corbett, the legendary British hunter turned conservationist, author and naturalist from colonial India.

A gripping tale of Corbett tracking down Mohan, a man-eating Tiger in the jungles of Kumaon, ended in an anti-climax when he shot a sleeping Mohan from five feet away. After killing Mohan, Corbett wrote, "it occurs to me that possibly you also might think it was not cricket". Cricket? I had then asked my teacher. What has the game of cricket, which we used to play in the paddy fields got to do anything with Corbett shooting a sleeping man-eating Tiger. "Cricket after all is a game which is meant to be fair and played by gentlemen. So shooting a sleeping Tiger without giving the animal a chance to defend itself is not cricket and not being a gentleman. Right?" I remember her smiling. Well T-20 cricket came much later. My teacher later went on to explain how cricket, polo and hunting was a favourite pastime of the British during Colonial India.

But it will be wrong to put Jim Corbett in the same league as the happy white sahibs of the British Raj who would hunt just for pleasure. Corbett would painstakingly justify his killings of the man-eaters. Corbett ends the chapter of 'Mohan Man-eater' by telling his readers "but the regret remains that I did not awaken the sleeping animal and give him a sporting chance".

'Man-eaters of Kumaon' has 10 stories written in very simple language. The book details not only Jim Corbett's solitary hunting adventure in pursuit of man-eaters from the 1900's-1930's but also talks about the rural life of Kumaon, which is a very pretty part of India but rarely promoted by tour operators.

An itinerary that I would love to promote is MUMBAI - JAIPUR- AGRA -DELHI - HARIDWAR (a much gentler introduction to Hinduism compared to a super intense Varanasi, one can also visit the Rajaji National Park)- CORBETT NATIONAL PARK-KUMAON (the village walks there are an outstanding insight into rural Kumaon which is still non-touristy) - and back to DELHI (there is a flight now from Pant Nagar in Kumaon).



# 3 Days in Delhi

## Day 1 - 3 pm to 7 pm

### Hauz Khas Design Walk

The Hauz Khas Village complex is a lovely example of many historic cities that breathe together to make Delhi one of the most fascinating cities of the world. Historic monuments from the 13th and 14th centuries, reign tall over Hauz Khas – the royal tank; and 21st century markets, art and design enterprises, bookshops and hubs of activity and recreation spring up in the vicinity. Come explore this meeting of times in the heart of Delhi.

Some design stores we will visit in Hauz Khas:

- ▶ THE GREY GARDEN: a multi functional space, a meeting space, a union of fashion and food; culture and commerce.
- ▶ BODICE: a contemporary label that believes in making timeless classics with a modern twist by adding unexpected details and quirky embellishments.
- ▶ KRISHNA AT CHAUPAL: A gallery dealing with antique textiles, will involve a talk on a range of textiles from Asian regions like Indonesia, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and India by seeing actual specimens. Guests will get a chance to see the growth of a particular genre of textiles like the Kalamkari, over centuries and understand the evolution of styles and stylistic designs.

And much more (time permitting).

### Shahpur Jat Design Walk

Located amidst the ruins of Siri, the second city of Delhi (14th century), Shahpur Jat village has emerged as a design hub supporting creative enterprise in different design mediums: textiles, fashion, home décor, furniture and much more...

Some Places we will visit:

- ▶ LES PARISIENNES: Housed in a beautiful haveli, Les Parisiennes is a vintage chic boudoir, a unique concept store offering carefully selected women's wear, menswear, a lovely children corner, home accessories and its very own French Café.
- ▶ THE WISHING CHAIR: A whimsical store that curates quirky, unique and wonderful lifestyle products that add a spark of magic to your home.
- ▶ THE SECOND FLOOR STUDIO: A hotbed of creative daring-do and eccentric design collaborations displayed with a queer eye from floor to floor.
- ▶ ANAND PRAKASH: A self-taught designer who creates visually appealing merchandise that is handcrafted from environmentally responsible and sustainable materials for a global audience. He primarily works with 100% recycled and wood-free handmade paper and metal.

And much more (time permitting).

## The New New Delhi

New Delhi has clearly moved beyond the historical and tree-lined area of the plush Lutyens Delhi, its colonial era monuments, its “heritage” or “capital of the world's largest democracy” tag. It is breathing art, design, fashion, music and cuisine et al thanks to some of India's most vibrant and enterprising young entrepreneurs who call the city their home. It is buzzing with creative energy and celebrating the coming together of different creative disciplines and the many magical ways of looking at the world. This 3-day tour which is our take on the Young, Contemporary New Delhi is a heady mix of Art, Design and Fashion as we visit fledging market places, quirky design stores, museums, art galleries and meet creative mavericks injecting New Delhi with new ideas and outré thinking. Where art thou?



## Day 2 - 11 am to 7 pm

### Sanskriti Textile Museum, Anandgram

The textile museum at Sanskriti Kendra is a personal collection of a range of traditional Indian textiles – from Phulkari, Ikats to Indian brocades. Your clients will be given an over-arching view of textiles from different regions of India, along with their sociocultural contexts.

### Khan Market

We make our way to one of the most exciting and contemporary market places in Delhi, Khan Market. We will enjoy exploring this plush market, which is also ranked by Cushman & Wakefield as the 21st most expensive shopping street! Established in 1951, the U-shaped, double-storey market complex originally had 154 shops and 74 flats on the first floor for shopkeepers. Today, it's a tangible repository of some of the largest locally grown boutiques including Fabindia, Anokhi, Good Earth, Amrapali, and Kama Ayurveda.

### National Gallery of Modern Art

The official art museum of the country, a repository of Indian art history, with collections ranging from 18th century to contemporary art. Take a crash course in Indian art today.



## Day 3 - 10 am to 4 pm

### Tour of Art Galleries in Lado Sarai and South Delhi

Yet another urban village, Lado Sarai has emerged as the art hub of Delhi with several contemporary and traditional art galleries concentrated in its streets.

### In Lado Sarai

- ▶ EXHIBIT 320: a contemporary art gallery dealing in new media.
- ▶ ARTS OF THE EARTH INDIA: a gallery dealing in folk and tribal art from India.
- ▶ AKAARO - The proprietor of Akaaro Studio who is leading Indian textile designer will give a guided tour of the studio which has in-house weaving looms.

### Elsewhere in the city

- ▶ NATURE MORTE: One of the country's most avant-garde art gallery.
- ▶ KHOJ WORKSHOP: An experimental art / project space.
- ▶ GALLERY ESPACE: one of India's leading art galleries with a cutting-edge three-level viewing space designed to appropriately showcase Contemporary Indian art that features a range of approaches in form and content.
- ▶ DELHI ART GALLERY: Its museum-like collections range from the early-moderns to the moderns, including all the masters and senior artists of the movement all the way to more recent contemporary art.

NOTE: Depending on what exhibitions are on at that time, we may choose to visit some more galleries or replace some of the above with other options.

## Day 4

Proceed to your onward destination.





# Festivals of India

A 400-year old tradition of Sindoor Khela, where married Bengali Hindu women celebrate with Sindoor or vermillion every year on the last day of Durga Puja, the Festival of the Mother Goddess.

Photo Credit- This photograph has been shot by Aveek Das, a Sita team member.