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TourCert Check
committed to responsible tourism



art of travel

2017 - 2018



Knowledge
is based on experience

Everything
else is just information

Come explore with us

Dear Friends,

We continue to innovate and explore in order to bring you interesting yet unique product ideas for the coming year.

Our Explorers from the Destination Knowledge Centre continue to travel in search of out of the ordinary experiences across the Indian Subcontinent and this edition of Art of Travel has some new experiences in Kerala, Sri Lanka and Nepal.

I am also delighted to introduce Tejashri Simha, our newest explorer, based in Bangalore. She will bring you more stories and ideas from the South of India. Do look out for her stories in our monthly Art of Travel.

Our love for moving images continues and this time we have integrated some videos in our brochure, scanning the QR code given on some pages will give you a glimpse of the experience. We hope you enjoy it.

We are proud to announce that our Nepal CSR project has also been completed after almost a year. It is a platform to inspire, experience and interact - as part of our commitment to support traveling that seeks to create a positive impact on the lives of local hosting communities.

On the anvil is our Explore brochure, a compilation of a series of detailed programmes across the Subcontinent with jewels of information and tips integrated to help guide the reader to a more in-depth information on the destination.

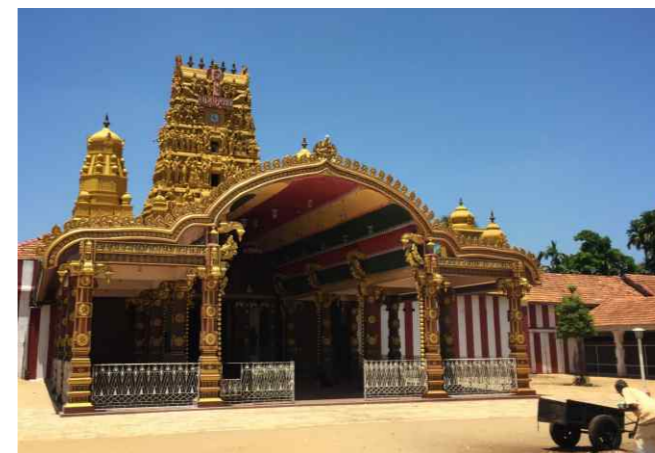
Happy reading!

Come explore with us[®]

Dipak Deva
Managing Director



19 Jaffna



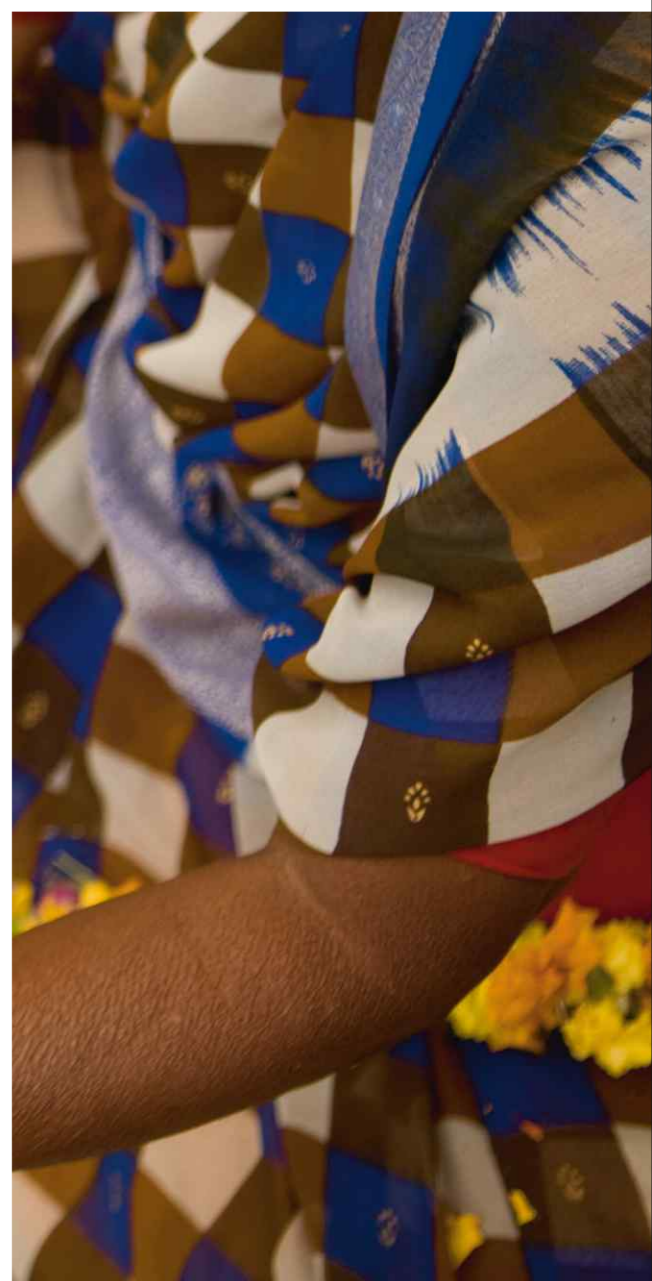
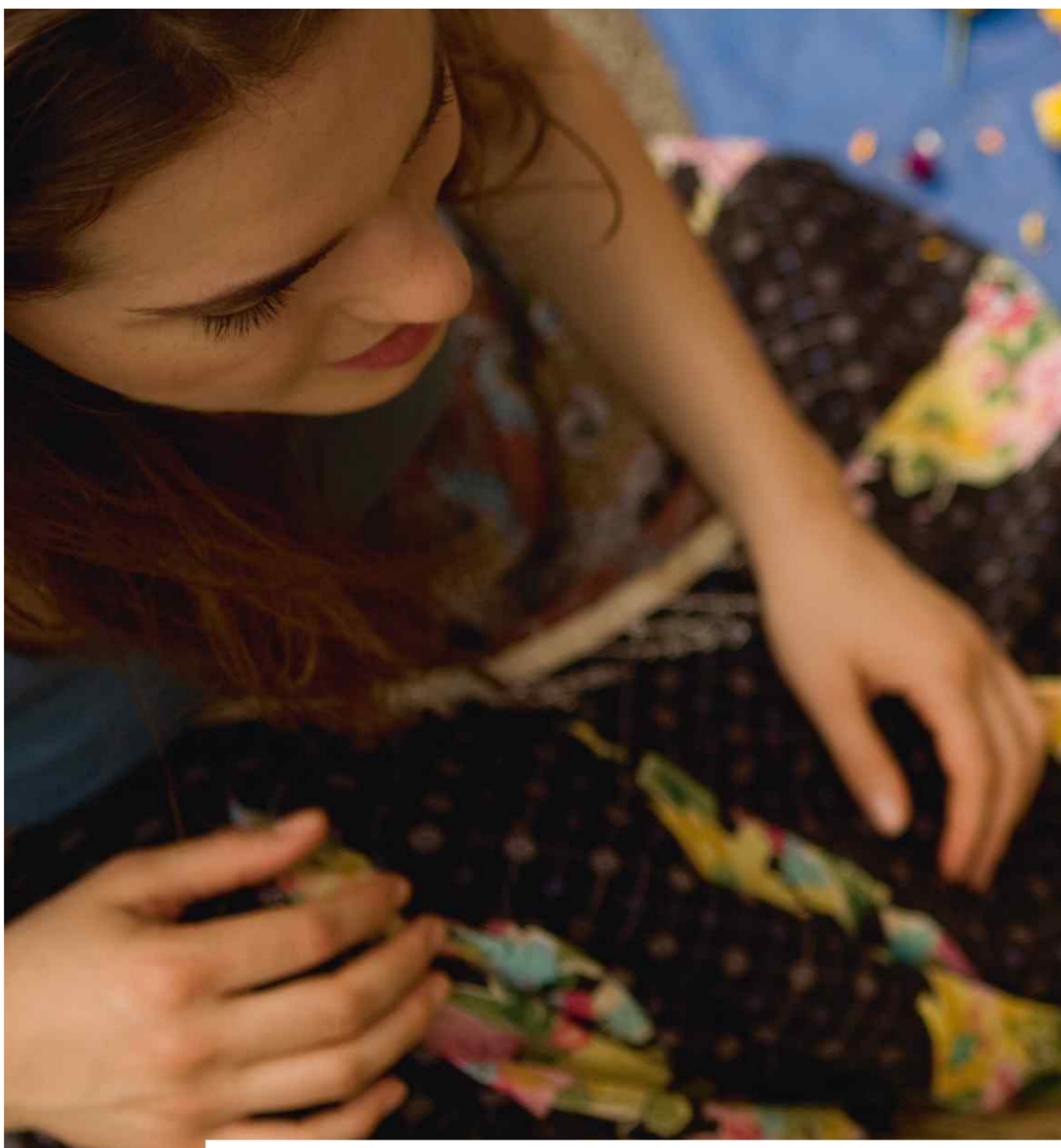
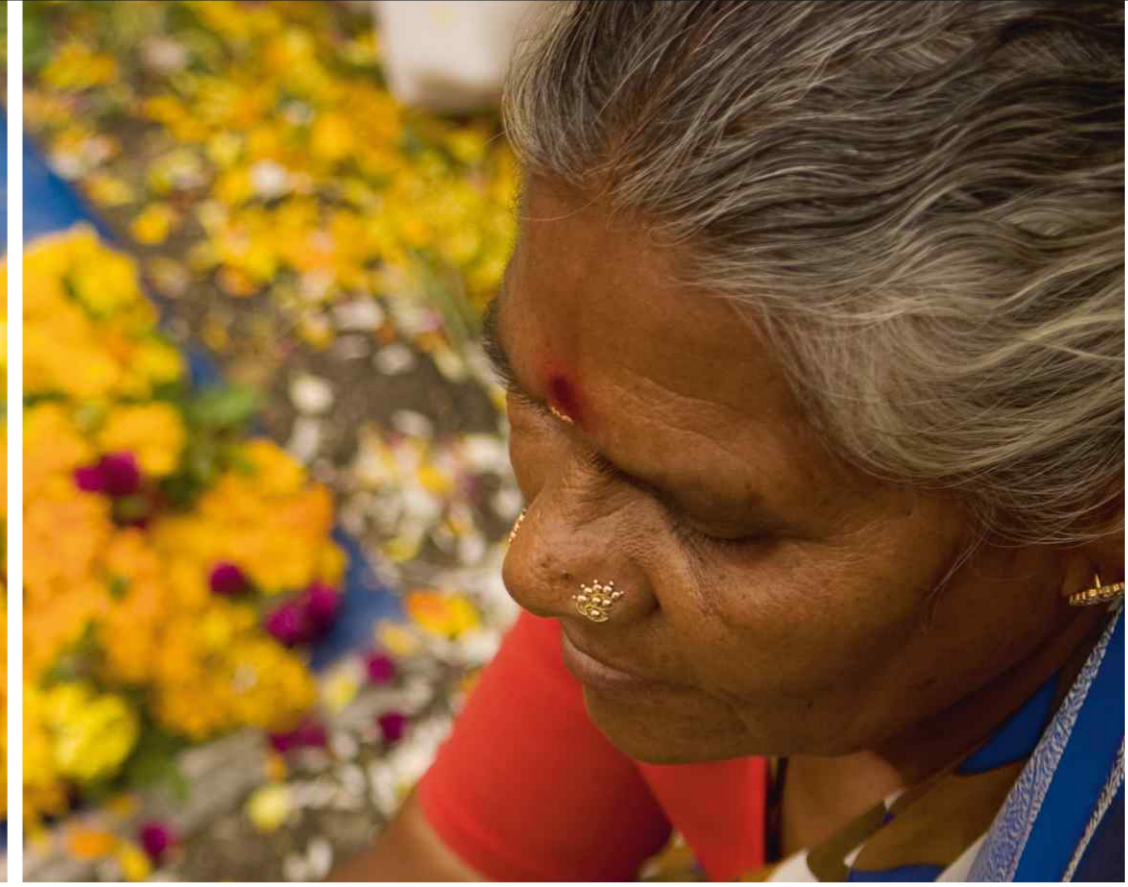
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Get inspired - explore

Sita's product line for leisure travellers, features out-of-the-ordinary tours for everyone. Sita helps the guest explore the great outdoors, local customs and charming hospitality, flavourful traditional cooking, stimulating art, intriguing architecture.

Cycling around the plains of Tamil Nadu

A Tribute to Pennycuick Sahib



Part done by car and part on bicycles this is a great choice for clients with 2 nights in Thekaddy. This tour is a tribute to John Pennycuick, the British Engineer (born in Pune/ died in England) who built the 175-foot high Mullaperiyar Dam in 1895.

The background of this tour: THEN & NOW

THEN: The plains of Tamil Nadu which your clients will explore on this tour saw a great famine in the year 1876 that lasted for 2 years. It left 10 million people dead in the Madras Province (when present day Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Southern Karnataka, Southern Andhra Pradesh, Telengana and Southern Orissa were all together, before being divided into states on linguistic lines post India's independence in 1947). The Great Madras Famine had people such as Florence Nightingale questioning Britain for failing to provide relief. The political fall out of this tragic event, even that went largely unnoticed, to which Allan Octavian Hume – a retired outspoken member of the Imperial Civil Service (later the Indian Civil Service, now Indian Administrative Service) - denouncing Britain, said it had lost all moral rights over India, who went on to form the Indian National Congress in 1885. Quietly entered John Pennycuick, who after much trials, tribulations and disruption built the Mullaperiyar Dam – an engineering marvel that took him 8 years to complete. The dam fed the parched plains of Tamil Nadu with water from the Periyar River in Kerala, made them forever fertile and ensured that future generations don't die because of the want of water.

NOW: Today food grown in the plains of Tamil Nadu watered by the Mullaperiyar Dam is sold in

Kerala mainly. For the Tamil farmers that have benefited from the Mullaperiyar Dam, John Pennycuick is no less than God. During the harvest festival of Pongal (one of the most important in Tamil Nadu) they offer a "Pennycuick Pongal" as a thanksgiving for the dam he built that changed their lives. There is even a memorial built in his honour, where you have to remove your footwear to enter. Children here are named Pennycuick and his photo is kept together with the Gods and Goddesses in the shrines of Tamil farmers.

EXPERIENCED BY KUNTIL BARUWA, EXPLORER AND SAURABH RAI, VIDEO EDITOR AT THE DESTINATION KNOWLEDGE CENTRE.

HIGHLIGHTS

- ▶ Cycling for 15 kms through the countryside.
- ▶ Insight into lowland farming in the plains of Tamil Nadu watered by the Mullaperiyar Dam built by John Pennycuick. Learn about the cycle of crops, yield, market for the produce et al.
- ▶ Tea in a Local Tea shop.
- ▶ A Farmer's Fair Trade Vegetable Market.
- ▶ Bullock cart ride.
- ▶ Visit and Lunch at a Private Farm House.

GOOD TO KNOW

- ▶ Starts 06:30 hours/Ends: 15:00 hours.
- ▶ Ideal for FITs & Small Groups (max 10 guests).

BEST TIME

- ▶ October to March 2nd week

CYCLES AND OTHER LOGISTICS

- ▶ Trek 3700 v Unisex Mountain bikes provided.
- ▶ Helmets and Reflector jackets.
- ▶ Bottled water provided.
- ▶ A back up vehicle with extra cycles, cycle racks and a mechanic provided.



Scan the QR Code to view the video

Be a Local

A Fun Tour of Cochin on Public Transport



The tour starts at 08:30 hours- the time Fort Cochin locals head out to their work places. Once inside the bus the Guide will help your clients find their seats. There are seats reserved for ladies, senior citizens and the differently abled too. The Bus Conductor will keep calling out the names of the various stops between Fort Cochin and Ernakulam, which is a 45 minute ride. Go past the Willingdon Island - much of it is claimed from the Lake of Cochin, constructed by filling in dredged soil around a natural island that existed previously. It is home to the Port of Cochin and Cochin Naval Base, as well as other government establishments. Your clients will buy the bus tickets (monies will be provided by the Guide - INR 15 per person from Cochin to Ernakulam) from the conductor. The Guide can do it too on their behalf, but we rather clients buy it from the conductor as a part of the experience. No need to go anywhere while doing so. The conductor will come near their seats. It is considered polite to offer your seat to the elderly/pregnant ladies/women with small children. I offered my seat to an elderly lady. She was hesitant as it was quite obvious that I am not a local but a tourist. But she finally agreed. Your clients may want to do so just like a local would do and take it as a part of the experience.

When they get down at Ernakulam – the business district of Cochin, your clients will be taken on a tuk-tuk to the charming Broadway Market. A walk on the Broadway is like hitching a ride in a travelling circus. A surprise lurks at every corner. You have wholesalers and retail shops – about 300 of them, some with third or fourth generation family owners - packed end to end on each street and alley leading in and out of Broadway. You'll find an entire street packed with

stores selling utensils and in another you will have many shoe stores. Others are known for oils, clothes, furniture, books, electronic parts, spices, toys, bicycles, vegetables, fruits, fish and just about everything you could possibly think of. Explore the many nooks, crannies and alleys at your own pace. Great photo opportunities too.

Later, have coffee at the Indian Coffee House which is a fascinating story of India's largest chain of employee run and employee owned restaurants. The return journey from Ernakulam to Fort Cochin is a breezy ride of 15 minutes on the public ferry and costs INR 3 per person. Your clients will stand in the queue and buy tickets for their ferry ride, just like the locals. On this ferry ride get to see the clear division and contrast between the business district of Ernakulam, Willingdon Island and Fort Cochin. On Willingdon Island stands the old Port Trust Office which is a beautiful heritage structure. Next to the old building stands the new office, which is a modern construction, yet striking in its own way. The shore of Matancherry and Fort Cochin is lined with old, colonial structures, some more majestic than the others, a few of them now heritage hotels such as the Brunton Boatyard. We will get to see some of the venues of the Kochi Muzuris Biennale - India's first ever biennial of international contemporary art- such as the Pepper House Café and Aspinwall House.

The Sita vehicle will be waiting outside the main jetty of Fort Cochin (the adjacent to the Brunton's Boatyard) or your clients may want to walk it down to their hotel.

EXPERIENCED BY KUNTIL BARUWA, EXPLORER AT THE DESTINATION KNOWLEDGE CENTRE.

GOOD TO KNOW

- ▶ Duration: 08:30 Hours to 13:00 Hours.
- ▶ Included in the cost: Bus Tickets, Ferry Tickets, Coffee at Indian Coffee House, Bottled Water and services of a Guide.
- ▶ Maximum of 15 guests.
- ▶ Not good on Sundays.



Scan the QR Code to view the video

Anglo-Indian Cooking in Fort Cochin

Bad Word Curry and Coconut Rice



The fast dwindling Anglo Indian community of Cochin are mainly descendants of the Portuguese with a sprinkling of the Dutch, the French, the German, the Swiss, the Italian and the English. Your Host for this cooking session of Anglo-Indian Cuisine is Oscar and Jeanette Rozario with Portuguese ancestry. They have a simple, yet cosy home at Santhom Colony which is a 20 minute drive from the Chinese Fishing Nets in Fort Cochin. Jeanette is a government employee and Oscar is a hospitality consultant who used to work for the CGH group during their early days. They have 2 children – their son works for a travel agency and their daughter is training to be a teacher. Anglo-Indian cuisine embraced everything that was Indian and mixed it up with all that was European. Influenced by the Portuguese, British and French cooking styles it changes from one region to another, especially when it comes to spices. So in the south, Anglo-Indian dishes tend to use pepper, cinnamon, cardamom; in the Goa-Mumbai belt, souring agents such as vinegar and kokum are popular, whereas in the east, the gravies use less of spices.

After a round of drinks, Jeanette introduced me to Saffron Coconut Rice & Mince Ball curry or 'Bad Word Curry' (the word 'Ball' was considered rude in the olden days, hence the name Bad Word Curry) – a staple during Saturday Lunch in any Anglo – Indian home. The meat for the Mince Ball Curry – either beef or mutton – was brought home fresh from the butcher shop. It was cut into pieces, washed and then minced at home. It was then mixed with the chopped ingredients – onions, chillies, spices - formed into even-sized balls to be dropped into the boiling curry that was already cooking on the stove and simmered till the mince balls were cooked to perfection and the

gravy reached the right consistency. The Coconut Rice was prepared with freshly squeezed coconut milk and butter. The rice and coconut milk was simmered with ghee (clarified Indian butter) or butter, saffron and a few whole spices of cinnamon, cardamom and cloves added till the rice was cooked perfectly. Delicious. Your clients also get to carry home recipes of the Bad Word Curry and Coconut Rice.

The cooking session was done at the family kitchen which is perfect for a couple. The mood was relaxed and casual with Oscar, who kept cracking jokes and kept a hawk's eye if I needed another drink. Jeanette, in the middle of all the cooking, kept sharing stories about how she learnt to cook these 2 dishes and many more from her aunt who would come visiting once every year, even now. I heard Jim Reeves after a long time which kept on playing in the living room. I was told about happy clients who had slow waltzed post dinner and how a dance floor was created in the living room by removing the furniture. While having dinner – simple cutlery, nothing fancy, just like an everyday, ordinary Indian home- Oscar invited me to come over and spend time with them during Christmas and New Year. "We sing, eat, drink, dance and have lots of fun. We burn the effigy of Pappanji (meaning Grandfather in Portuguese) on 31st December night - a metaphor of the passing year. Something which you will never see anywhere else in Kerala. We also have a carnival with floats every January 01. Not as fancy as Goa. But great fun. Not to be missed," said Oscar. This carnival is a yearly Portuguese tradition that has stayed on.

EXPERIENCED BY KUNTIL BARUWA, EXPLORER
AT THE DESTINATION KNOWLEDGE CENTRE.

GOOD TO KNOW

- ▶ Only for FITs.
- ▶ I would recommend this experience only during the evening (followed by dinner). Both Oscar and Jeanette have day jobs. Though, they did say that they don't mind hosting clients for lunch and have done it before, they may not be relaxed. Jeanette, though did share that she might consider taking voluntary retirement from her government job, should her cooking classes take off.
- ▶ We leave our Fort Cochin hotel just after sunset to Oscar and Jeannette's house. We should be back by 21:00 hours/21:30 hours.
- ▶ Bad Word Curry and Coconut Rice is what your clients will learn to cook. The menu will have other Anglo - Indian dishes.
- ▶ A bottle of beer / soft drink is included.
- ▶ Relay any dietary constraints much in advance.



Scan the QR Code to view the video

Rubber Contours, Koottickal Valley

Enroute Thekaddy – Backwaters



Our Rubber Contours Tour takes us to a pretty rubber growing destination of Kerala that most itinerary planners give a miss - the Koottickal valley which lies in the foothills of the Western Ghats - between Thekaddy and the Backwaters. George Abraham, a fourth generation rubber planter and a friend of Sita will facilitate this tour. He also runs a 2 room homestay-Evergreen Estate Bungalow - a curious mix of the Colonial and Art Deco with lovely verandahs. In this tour your clients will get to see the entire process of rubber production - from tapping (which involves making a cut in the bark of a rubber tree in a particular angle so that the sap drips into a container) to how the sap is filtered, treated and finally pressed into sheets in a factory once owned and started by AD Vincent - a pioneer of the Rubber Plantation industry in Kerala. Lunch at George's home, cooked by his wife Anju is included in the tour. The horse shoe shaped dining table is one of our favourites in entire India and Anju's food is outstanding.

TIMELINES

11:00 hours: Clients' vehicle will be met by George Abraham (in his vehicle) in a pre-arranged meeting point near the 100-year-old Mundakayam Club [2 hours/30 minutes from Thekkady in a Large Coach/2 hours in a Toyota Innova]

11:05 hours: Reach the 100 year old Mundakayam Club, de-board, use the washroom and settle down.

11:15 hours: An introduction to the Club's History. Clients will also be shown the rubber plantation near the club and explained about tapping, collection of latex etc.

11:45 hours: Move towards the North of the Mundakayam Club to Evergreen Estate Bungalow; George's home which is 10 Kms away.

12:15 hours: Reach Evergreen Estate Bungalow. Clients will be welcomed with fresh tropical fruit juice. George will show clients his house that sits pretty amid lush tropical greenery on their cardamom, rubber and coffee plantation.

12:45 hours: Head to your vehicle to go to the Rubber Factory once owned by AD Vincent – one of the pioneers of the Rubber Plantation industry of Kerala. It is 10 Minutes away.

13:00 hours: The Latex arrives from fields in plastic carboys, weighed and recorded against each rubber tapper for his/her weekly payment on Saturday. It is then poured into the tanks. Then move to the processing area with the milling machines and later climb up to the first floor to see the processed latex hung for drying. Super photo opportunities.

13:45 hours: Return to Evergreen Estate Bungalow.

14:00 hours: Lunch followed by a relaxed informal session on George's Family History, the journey so far and his book - "A Path to the Hills" which was launched in the British Parliament in 2012.

15:00 hours: Departure to the Backwaters [3 hours from Evergreen Estate Bungalow in a Large Coach or 2 hours 30 minutes in a Toyota Innova]

EXPERIENCED BY KUNTIL BARUWA, EXPLORER
AT THE DESTINATION KNOWLEDGE CENTRE.

GOOD TO KNOW

- ▶ Ideal for FITs & Groups (max 25 guests)

BEST TIME

- ▶ October to March 2nd week



Scan the QR Code to view the video

Walking around Fort Cochin & Matancherry

History and Daily Life



Designed by our Cochin office, this walking tour explores the old towns of Fort Cochin and Matancherry, which is a perfect combination of history and daily life. Half of the tour is dedicated to the historical sites of Fort Cochin followed by a tuk-tuk ride to Matancherry to experience its lively narrow lanes on foot.

Fort Cochin is perhaps the only fort city in the world which can claim the history of three European colonial settlements (Portuguese-Dutch-English) in succession, whereas Matancherry is buzzing with commerce and offers a completely different experience. This walking tour is an eye opener to the minute details of the Old towns.

It definitely pulls you back in time. The large rain trees, beautiful colonial buildings, streets lined with many shops, dining options, the Chinese fishing nets, the beach area, the different communities from all over India who stay here and call Cochin their home - to name a few - make this walking tour very interesting.

"The tour is very well thought of with a perfect combination of history and lively experiences. I really liked it. Shantilal's Sweet Center, the Fruit Market, the Jain family who are experts in Herbal Tattoos, the Brahmin family's house where one gets to see Kollam making and also the Jew street with its numerous antique shops.

This is not included in the tour, but here's something very interesting to do - early risers-between 0700 hours to 0800 hours - can visit the fish auction near the Chinese fishing nets. They can buy their fish, prawns, oysters or crabs and take it to a local restaurant and ask them to cook

lunch to be had after the walking tour. Trust me your clients will be very hungry. The oyster curry and a red snapper cooked in a banana leaf was a real delight after all the walking in Fort Cochin and Matancherry.

DESIGNED BY SITA COCHIN AND EXPERIENCED BY JEAN NOEL ESTEVE, PRODUCT MANAGER, DESTINATION KNOWLEDGE CENTRE.

GOOD TO KNOW

- ▶ Ideal for: FITs and Small Groups (Max 10 guests).
- ▶ Duration: Starts 08:00 hours/Ends 12:30 hours.
- ▶ Inclusions: Transport, Guide, Water, Umbrella, Tea and Snacks.
- ▶ Best Time: October - March.

Picnic Lunch in the Ruins

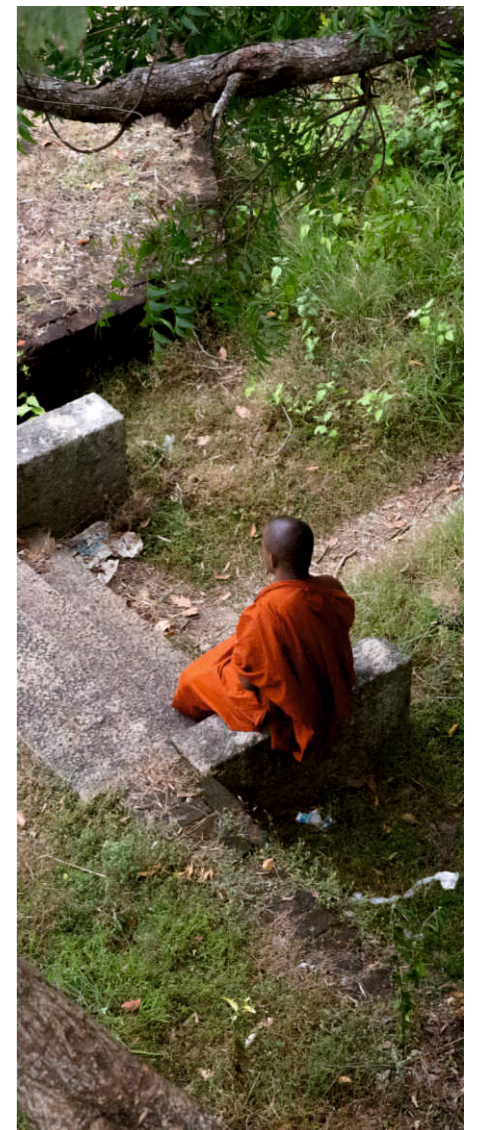
Magnificent Kaludiya Pokuna, Mihintale



The location of this picnic lunch is the Kaludiya Pokuna ruins in Mihintale, which is less frequented by tourists. It is 18kms east of the sacred city of Anuradhapura - a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The food is laid out on a comfortable woven mat in an incredible setting which was first settled in 2nd century BC. Encouraging and enabling community-based tourism is important to us and the picnic lunch here comes from a local home. This helps supplement their income and at the same time your clients get to taste home cooked Sri Lankan food. The food is served on lotus leaves along with fresh coconut water. Sitting in the shadow of these ancient ruins will take travellers back to an ancient kingdom and bygone era where the different sects of Buddhism vied for power in the world's first recorded nature reserve.

GOOD TO KNOW

- ▶ Minimum: 2 guests/ Maximum: 8 guests.
- ▶ Anytime between 11:30 hours to 15:30 hours.
- ▶ In the event of rain, the location will be moved to a local home which has a lovely view of paddy fields and Mihintale.



Be a Local

Fun Shopping in Kathmandu with a Sita staff



Someone rightly said "If shopping doesn't make you happy, then you are in the wrong shop"...

Get ready to be immersed because you will be wandering about shop to shop in the colourful and chaotic bazaars of Kathmandu with our staff today. Explore one of the busiest stretches of Kathmandu where locals shop for their daily essentials. We will make this experience rewarding and exciting by taking you to these hidden places known only to the locals. Each place has its specialty product which is unique. We will also explore some of the local eateries including the famous Momos of Ktown. We will end our day with dinner in a local home.

ITINERARY

We will pick you up from your hotel after lunch and drive to Kathmandu Durbar Square. Durbar, which means Palace, is where the Kings were once crowned and from where they ruled. Kathmandu's Durbar Square is located in the heart of the city. This UNESCO World Heritage Site is a massive complex of palaces, temples and courtyards. We will start here by checking out some of the world class Pashminas of Nepal. Pashmina is the softest delicate, weightless and finest natural insulating fibre of the world. It is extracted from the inner coat of the hardy little mountain goats "Chyangra". Nepal is famous for its hand woven Pashmina products. In the Durbar Square we will also spend time in the Nepalese tea shop while soaking up the local vibes.

From Durbar Square, through tiny alley-like streets, we will make our way to an intersection of streets called Indra Chowk. Here each stall glistens with strands of glass seed beads and it looks incredible. Most of the shops in the bazaar

are owned by Muslims, whose ancestors came here in the 16th century from India. You will see some of the finest designs of bracelets and necklaces here. You can pick your own strands and have a necklace made on the spot or opt for a pre-made one. From here we will continue to the Ason Bazar with its architectural sights and charming ambience. Wandering along the streets, we will come across rows of shops with copper, brass and bronze ware. These metal crafts hold significant importance in Kathmandu's culturescape – be it the monuments, temples, and the idols of worship in the local homes. In fact, many kitchen utensils of everyday use, until but a short while ago, used to be of these metals. Ason has been described as one of the finest example of a traditional Asian bazaar where commerce, religion and culture merge brilliantly. The bazaar attracts shoppers from all over Kathmandu because of the tremendous variety of merchandise sold here, ranging from foodstuff, spices and textiles to electronics and bullion.

Later we will take a cycle rickshaw ride (around 20 minutes) from Ason till Thamel through narrow alleys and have a leisurely stroll. Thamel becomes colourful and vibrant in the evening with shops selling handicrafts, curio, silver jewellery, adventure gears and the list goes on. Once done with our shopping we will head out for dinner with a local family.

DESIGNED BY SURAJ LAMICHHANE AND DEENAM LAMICHHANE FROM SITA NEPAL.

HIGHLIGHTS

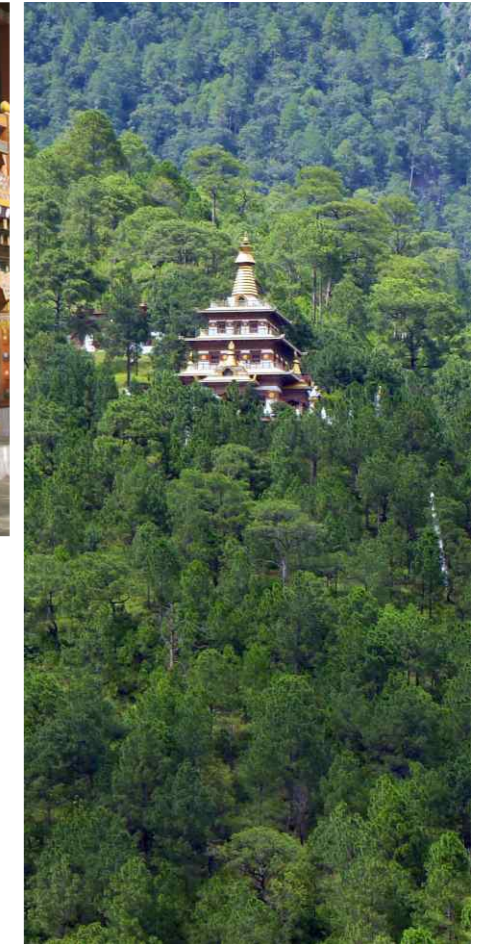
- ▶ Shopping and bargaining
- ▶ Visiting Kathmandu's centuries old markets
- ▶ Dinner with a local family

GOOD TO KNOW

- ▶ Timing : 15:00 hours to 21:00 hours
- ▶ Ideal for : Max 4 guests
- ▶ Best Time : October to March
- ▶ Included in the cost : Transport, Local snacks, Rickshaw Ride, Bottled Water, Dinner with a Local Family and services of a Sita staff.
- ▶ Not good on Saturdays, as shops are closed.

An evening with a Bhutanese Author

Escapades Awakenings



Spend the evening interacting with Doji Dhartyul, a Bhutanese author who will talk about his book "Escapades Awakenings." Published in February 2013, the 590-page novel, Doji's first, throws light on the traditional courtship custom of Night Hunting and the negative impact of such practices on rural women. "Escapades-Awakening" is a shocker because it really moves beyond the clichéd descriptions and traditional tales of the beautiful rural life in Bhutan, lifting the veil of misty romanticism and delves instead into the heart of an ugly dark truth that many women and children in the villages have had to live with.

Night Hunting is a common practice in the villages and rural areas in central and eastern Bhutan. It is a traditional Bhutanese custom of courtship. Young men go out at night to sneak into the houses of girls they fancy, who have little or no idea about the man's plans to arrive at night. Bhutan's traditional two-storey buildings make it difficult. But strategies vary from sneaking in through the door to climbing up the side of the house to enter through the window or even dropping in from the roof. If he successfully infiltrates the house, he still may be rejected by the girl. Night Hunting progresses into a public relationship when the man remains in the woman's bed till morning. This is enough to declare them as husband and wife.

Of late, this rural date has come under increasing scrutiny as the Bhutanese debate whether, it is a practice that has outlasted its time and should be ended. They cite exploitation of rural women by urban men, the increased tendency toward promiscuity, the spread of venereal diseases and the increase in the number of illegitimate

children, teenage pregnancies and single mothers as the reasons. In Bhutan, the law doesn't allow children to be registered as citizens of the country if the details of the biological father are missing. In 2004 Respect, Educate, Nurture and Empower Women (RENEW), a women's rights group was established by the Queen of Bhutan Ashi Sangay Choden Wangchuck to register fatherless children, to enable them to access basic facilities such as health and education.

Your clients will receive a copy each of "Escapades Awakenings" signed by the author, followed by drinks and dinner.

EXPERIENCED BY KUNTIL BARUWA, EXPLORER AT THE DESTINATION KNOWLEDGE CENTRE.





Corporate Social Responsibility

Our aim at Sita is to make travel a meaningful activity and experience in social, ecological and economic terms. We are convinced that our efforts here are reaping their rewards for the natural environment and the people who live in it. And in doing all this, Sita is making a vital contribution to ensuring a better travel product, a fairer tourist industry and a more sustainable world.

Nepal Relief Project

Corporate Social Responsibility



One year down the line, Sita is happy to announce that the Nepal Relief Project has been completed.

The Saraswati Secondary School at Dhulikhel, 30kms east of Kathmandu in Nepal which was damaged during the earthquake on April 25, 2015 is back on its feet to educate children in the surrounding areas.

Sita worked with Abari a socially oriented research, design and construction firm based in Nepal to rebuild a classroom block at Saraswati Secondary School at Dhulikhel as a part of its CSR Project using the Nepal Relief Fund that was generously donated by our colleagues, partners and family to support the people affected by the devastating earthquake on April 25, 2015.

Abari has a strong sustainable presence which was one of the key reasons to work with them as Sita also aim's to make travel a meaningful activity and experience in social, ecological and economic terms.

They work towards re-examining traditional materials like bamboo and earth so that they can be used in contemporary architectural practices. Abari has designed and constructed earthen and bamboo based houses in Bhutan, Ethiopia, Mongolia, India, USA and Nepal.

Sita journeyed with Abari every step of the way, from the bamboo truss for both classrooms being put up, to the lime plaster process to soling and concrete filling of the floor to bamboo cut pieces and preparatory work for metal brackets for the roof truss to classrooms rooftops being put up. It has been a journey of knowledge, understanding and has given us a deeper meaning to

sustainability. Thank you Abari.

The big day came on 26 February, 2017 when the classroom block was officially handed over to the school authorities in a ceremony at the School. The School children were treated to cake and a rare musical program where the Sita Nepal Team members performed to entertain the children! The new classroom block keys were handed over by us to the principal of the School in presence of the Executive Committee Members of the School, Children, Abari and Sita team members.

Good luck Saraswati Secondary School.



Scan the QR Code to view the video

Jaffna

A different world



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.

With towering Hindu temples, sari-clad women on bicycles and a spectacular coastline fringed with Palmyra and coconut palms, the North is a different world. Here the climate is arid for most of the year and the fields sunbaked. The light is stronger; surreal and white, hot on salt flats in the Vanni, bright and lucid on coral islands and northern beaches and soft and speckled in Jaffna's leafy suburbs and its battle-scarred centre.

And of course, there are the cultural differences. From the language to the cuisine to religion, Tamil culture has its own rhythms and people here are proud of their heritage. Inevitably, given that this region was a war zone until very recently, there's still a noticeable military presence. But the ambience is far more relaxed than you'd expect, as locals focus on healing, rebuilding and reviving the rich traditions of northern life.

NALLUR KANDASAMY TEMPLE: Nallur Kandaswamy Kovil or Nallur Murugan Kovil is one of the most significant Hindu temples in the Jaffna District of Northern Province, Sri Lanka. The temple is a socially important institution for the Sri Lankan Hindu Tamils identity and many temples have been built in Europe and North America using the same name as a cultural significance.

NALLUR KANDASAMY TEMPLE FESTIVAL: The annual Festival starts with Kodietram (flag-hoisting) on the sixth day following the New Moon in the month of Adi (August) and continues for twenty five days. The deity goes round the inner precincts at noon and the outer precincts in the evening, daily in different Vahanams (vehicles) ranging from a Silver Peacock to Silver Swan et al. The Chariot Festival is the most spectacular event of the festival where a huge and heavy chariot is pulled by thousands of devotees. Penitents can be seen piercing their bodies with hooks and spears without seeming to cause any pain or harm, as an act of faith and atonement.



Destination insider

Jaffna is situated within ten degrees of latitude to the north of the equator. It is in close proximity to the sub-continent of India and separated from it by the Palk Strait and the Bay of Bengal. The peninsula is actually almost an island; only the narrow causeway known as Elephant Pass - for once elephants did wade across the shallow lagoon here - connects Jaffna with the rest of Sri Lanka.

PHOTO CREDIT: PRATAP PARMAR



Art of Travel

Sita's monthly newsletter was redesigned with a fresh look and content last year. It brings you insights into new travel ideas and possibilities in our 'Stories from the Road' section. This section is dedicated to our Explorers -in Residence from the Destination Knowledge Centre who travel all over the Indian sub-continent to connect with local experts in search of compelling stories. Whilst Harry's corner features product updates that are good to know; the Video of the Month, shot and edited by our Destination Knowledge Centre during their travels, brings to you the Indian sub-continent in moving images. And meet our people in the Perfect Moments section, where they share the latest at Sita.

Best of Art of Travel

Some of our favourites



STAY AT

The Wilderness Camp at Dera Amer is set up in a private camp in the foothills of the Aravalis with only four well-appointed, comfortable tents with attached bathrooms. Best part it will be given to one party, be it two or eight people. Arrive at the medieval Gopal ji Temple, and receive a traditional Indian welcome before being seated on your elephant, handed a flute of sparkling wine and then transported by the gentle giant to the camp. There is time to freshen up before proceeding to witness the beautiful sunset from the rocks where sundowners are served. In the evening, take in the calm of your surroundings, and the beautiful night skies as you sit next to the crackling bonfire being served cocktails and snacks from the live barbecue. Your personal chef will prepare the evening meal and a local musician entertains you with traditional ragas, passed down to him through the generations. Dine under stars listening to the sounds of the jungle. Wake up in the morning and spend some quality time with your elephant as breakfast is prepared for you. Enjoy an early morning walk, listening to the gentle rumble of the elephant as she sashays along as you stroll to the nearest village.

Our Explorer-in-residence Kuntal Baruwa had spent 2 wonderful days at the Dera Wilderness Camp last month.

STORIES FROM THE ROAD

Mandi - the Varanasi of the Hills - When the Explorers of our Destination Knowledge Centre travel, a part of their brief also includes checking

out interesting places enroute in your clients' itinerary. Kuntal Baruwa from our Destination Knowledge Centre, was in Mandi recently to explore, how best your clients can spend some time here, enroute while on a Himalayan Foothills itinerary (Amritsar to Shimla).

VIDEO OF THE MONTH

Old Delhi - The Walled City- Here is a video of Old Delhi or The Walled City to give you a glimpse of what we have in store for you.

All our videos have been shot and edited in-house.

HARRY'S CORNER

Harry's Corner is dedicated to Harpreet or Harry who heads our procurement team and comes to you every month with relevant product updates. Here he talks about the Semi-Luxury Train Tours - IRCTC (Indian Railway Catering & Tourism Corporation) which has been operating luxury tourist train tours like Maharajas' Express for high end clientele and budgeted train tours like Bharat Darshan and Pilgrim Special train tours for budgeted travellers.

PERFECT MOMENTS

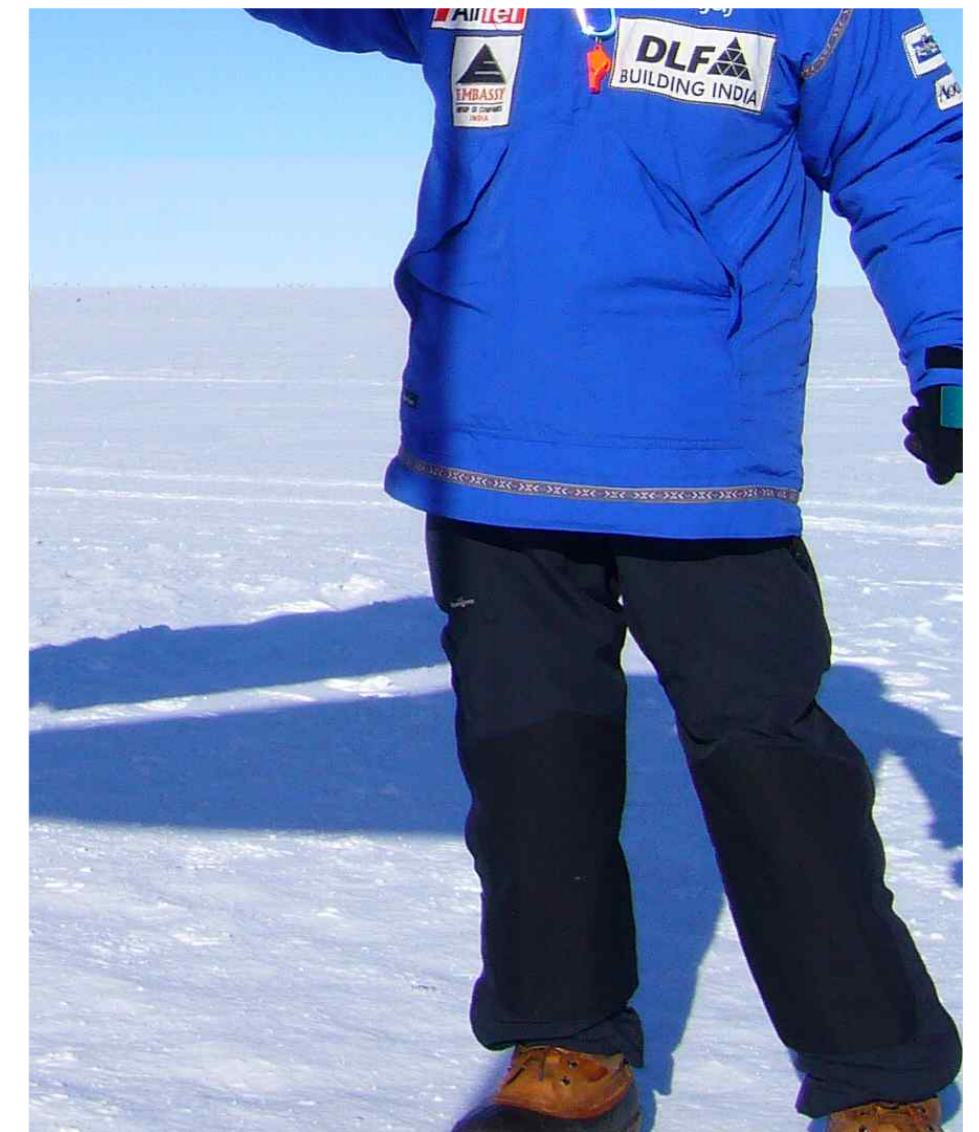
Our colleague Sitasma Michel attended the TourCert Forum in Stuttgart, Germany. The forum provided a platform for members and experts to exchange valuable suggestions and ideas for the way forward.

Sita is the first Indian DMC to be awarded the CSR Committed Seal from TourCert, a private German, non-governmental and not-for-profit organisation, for Sustainability and Corporate Responsibility in tourism.



Explore with Ajeet Bajaj

Crossing all Limits



Ajeet Bajaj is an entrepreneur, adventurer and explorer. Ajeet was conferred the Padma Shri in 2012 by the President of India, one of the highest civilian awards in India.

If there are limits to a man's capability, Ajeet Bajaj finds a way to go across them.

A modern-day explorer and adventurer, Ajeet is a living example of how to not just survive challenges but also enjoy them.

He caught the adventure bug early in life. His father introduced him to the Great Outdoors and he started mountaineering while in school. There has been no looking back.

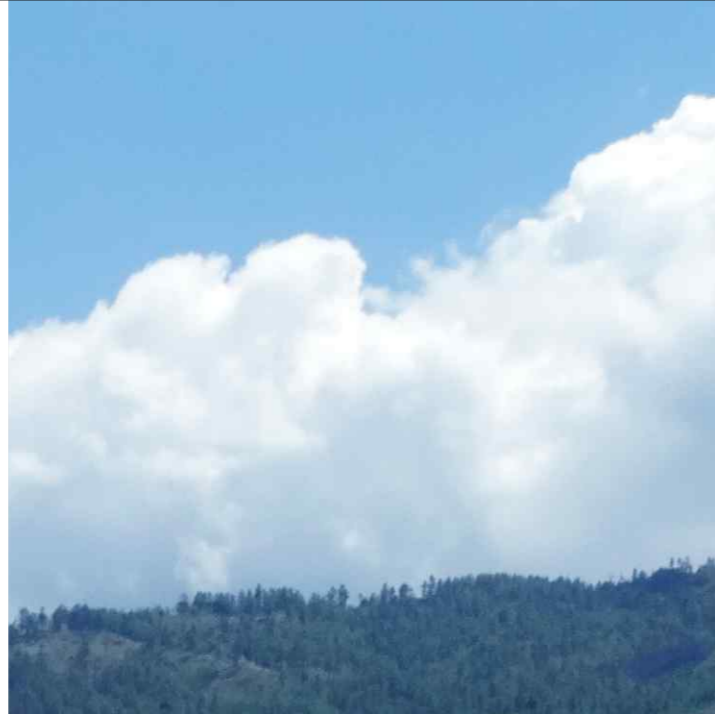
Ajeet is the first Indian to have completed the coveted Polar Trilogy—skiing to the North Pole, the South Pole and across the Greenland Icecap.

He is also the first Asian to have rafted and kayaked some of the most challenging rivers across six continents.

So when he speaks about overcoming hardships to achieve lofty goals, he speaks from experience.

Knowledge Wednesday

Guest speakers, not necessarily 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.



In our opinion



I am an Animist
Bhutan's age-old tradition



PHOTO CREDIT: UGEN TENZIN

T. Sangay Wangchuk is a friend of Sita, he loves the outdoors and has trekked every corner of Bhutan. He published his first book on Bhutan in 2006, is a columnist for a local daily and advises the Bhutan Government on creating sustainable tourism opportunities. Born and brought up in rural Bhutan, Sangay has lived with Bhutan's age-old animist tradition with his joint family. He now finds a deep connection between the ancient animist tradition and the conservation of the environment. Sangay is a strong advocate of experiential travel and sees it as an opportunity, where all such quaint, but meaningful traditions could be witnessed and kept alive.

Bon-choe, the Bhutanese name for Animism predates Buddhism. In simple terms Animism means worship of nature. However, Bon-choe draws some negative undertones whenever mentioned, since the extreme primitive practice involved elements of blood sacrifice called Mar-choe. With the onset of Buddhism in the 7th century, effigy rituals called Kar-choe replaced the bloody sacrifices. The Bhutanese way of life is deeply rooted in animist rituals which we are unaware as the Buddhist and Hindu philosophies have been high-flying in the present. The animist rituals have always been a prerequisite to Bhutan's social and cultural heritage and should not be brushed aside as some rustic mumbo jumbo. One can view them as a spiritual person revering a communion with the unseen, while a rationalist may see it as an ecological necessity. It can be anyone's choice.

In Bhutan, the animist traditions helped a lot in the preservation of the environment and culture. A core animist belief is that human beings are just visitors on this planet and that the permanent

owners are the guardian spirits. To live in harmony on this planet, the humans must pay their respect to these guardians. To name a few; Tso-mems (water spirits) rule the water world and Dra-tsens (cliff spirits) own the rocky cliffs. Likewise, Jomo is the guardian of the fauna and Mems of flora; Gang-tsens are the spirits of the ridges and Lung-tsens are wind spirits. There are others such as the Gyalpos (kings), Nyelpos (hosts) and subterranean guardians like Lu, Drelo, Sa-dhag and many more.

In Bhutan Dralha Solnee is an animist ritual where the spirit (Dralha) is propitiated. Some Dralha verses are filled with earthly wisdom that delves into understanding the formation of life itself. One of such verses explains the fundamental understanding of the origin of life: the belief that the primordial body was formed from the fusion of Fire, Wind, Water and Earth. Once the body was created, the soul (dralha as per animist belief) took refuge in it. Such is the animist wisdom from ancient times that it still runs in parallel with the modern scientific perceptive.

From several centuries there have been attempts to eradicate animism from Bhutan. But today's younger generation is lucky as they can choose to view animism as a spiritual union or as an ecological bond. This seems interesting because it is a global philosophy. My own journey into understanding animism within the frontiers of ecology has been great. I call this my journey into the deep ecology. I look at all the animist rituals as a communicative tool for understanding the soul of Mother Earth and to create harmony and balance on this planet. Comprehending animism this way has helped me preserve this ancient belief system in this electronic world. Just like

Buddhism has become a way of life for many of my friends, animism has become one for me. It is an individual's realisation and my understanding on this has opened a new chapter in my life which I am documenting in a private journal titled "The Dawn of my Realisation".

Splendour of the Orient

Art, Craft and Textile



Socialite and Art Consultant Umang Hutheesing passionately calls Ahmedabad the Splendour of the Orient built by Merchants. Umang is heir to a historic mercantile family of Ahmedabad that actively financed India at different stages of her history. His private collection of costumes and accessories of princely India is the largest such collection in the world. Umang is a friend of Sita and leads our special interest Art, Craft and Textile tours in Gujarat by appointment only.

People have historically loved to travel and discover new lands, explore new cities and experience different cultures. They have been called explorers, travellers and now tourists! The nouns change but the spirit of adventure still remains the same. Many of these travellers have documented their experiences in journals, paintings, photographs, films and now the social media, where they share their experiences with their friends and fellow citizens real time. These travelogues have become an important source of historical record for they are authentic first-hand accounts of people who have, as historians and travellers seen and experienced several places and can therefore compare and evaluate with the standards of that time.

"Look at the beautiful balconies over the Grand Canal with the romantic gondolas, it is Venice! And this magnificent villa on this graceful plaza, it is Florence!" These two historic cities are full of beautiful art and refined architecture, their squares are adorned with statues and fountains and there is sophistication in its people and vibrant culture alive in every street. After all, both these cities were built by its mighty merchants who were trading in jewellery, textiles and fine crafts. Florence and Venice are enchanting cities

and millions of tourists from around the world come here every year to imbibe their magic.

Yet, unknown to the new generations of the world exist a third city of equal historical beauty and might. A city described by the famous French traveller and jeweller Tavallier a few centuries ago "the most beautiful city in the world" comparing it to Florence and Venice. He says there is no great Palace of King of this city, yet every home is exquisite with its lace like wooden facades. There are numerous streets with large gates and plazas full of lively activity and delicately carved pagodas to feed the birds in the middle. The people are intelligent and proud of their heritage. "A beautiful city built by its citizens, patrons of art, architecture and culture, this city of Merchants! ...The city of Ahmedabad."

Metropolitan Ahmedabad is the gateway to Gujarat, it was earlier known as Ashaval and then Karnavati. Today's Ahmedabad was built by Sultan Ahmed Shah in 1411 AD on the banks of the River Sabarmati; for it was here as the legend goes that the Sultan had seen a hare hunt the hounds!

William Finch and Nicholas Withington, who stayed at Ahmedabad in 1611 AD "found fine inlay work, gold and silver brocade, velvets and taffetas". German traveller, Mandesloe in 1638 AD described it as "the headquarters of manufacturers, the greatest city in India, nothing inferior to Venice, an unsurpassed commercial emporium where merchandise form any part of Asia could be had and where foreign bills could be exchanged". Sir Thomas Roe thus writes to King James of England during Mughal Emperor Jahangir's reign, "Ahmedabad is a Godly city, as

large as London."

James Forbes in his Oriental Memoirs published in 1813 AD described the city of Ahmedabad, "Until this visit to Ahmedabad, I had no conception of the extent of oriental magnificence, the palaces and splendid chambers described in the Arabian Nights Entertainments, appear no longer over charged or fabulous." Lock wood de Forest, noted American Artist and Decorator, was so impressed with "the exquisite taste and beauty of Ahmedabad's Havelis that he and Louis Tiffany of Tiffany & Co, USA started a partnership with the Hutheesing Family in 1881 AD. Together they created architectural and interior marvels of Ahmedabad's Splendour, winning nine international gold medals in the World Expos in Paris and London. They proceeded to do the interior of The White House, The Kensington Palace and several other landmark buildings in America and Europe; this, when the world was imitating Imperial Europe in art and design.

Modern Ahmedabad is a city raised not by imperial powers, but by its mercantile community, it's 'Mahajans'! The Mahajans contribution to the building of our nation is exemplary. Their culture of enterprise brought significant wealth and prosperity through trade and industry. Ahmedabad became the Manchester of the East with maximum number of textile mills. This culture of enterprise and entrepreneurship continues till this date. The Mahajans were renowned for their culture of philanthropy and patronage building educational and cultural institutes, temples, museums, hospitals and several other community welfare trusts and endowments. They invited leading

architects of the time like Le Corbusier, Louis Khan, and Claude Bathey to build institutions. Ahmedabad's unique culture of enterprise and philanthropy made it the epicentre of Mahatma Gandhi's Swaraj Movement. It was here Gandhi ji established the Sabarmati Ashram, from where he orchestrated India's Freedom Movement, the rest is history.

Ahmedabad's legendary wealth produced magnificent Haveli's of artistic and cultural splendour, bringing to life the fact that India is an ancient living tradition alive and vibrant in its homes, not necessarily fossilised in the museum and is a land of colour, each having its own significance and iconography, a land of 'more' rather than 'less'; a seamless union of the classical and the contemporary!

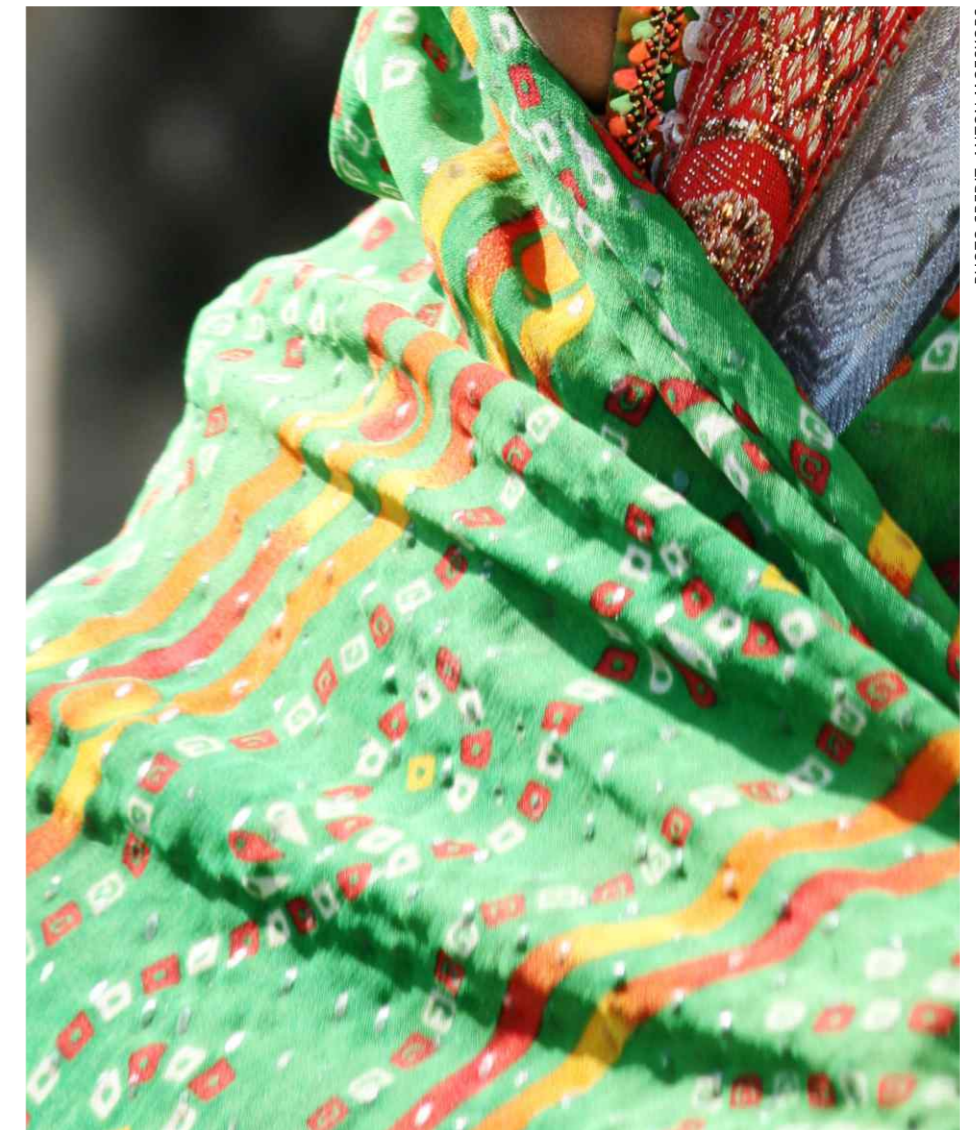


PHOTO CREDIT: ANTON MOESKOP

On a Tattoo Trail in Nagaland

Inking its revival



Tattoo artist Mo Naga's quest to understand the traditional Naga tattoo and ink its revival. As told to Kishore Seram who is a friend of Sita and Editor of the magazine - Discover India's Northeast.

It started in 2004, in my first year of college at the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) in Hyderabad. As students, we were exploring different mediums of art; when one of my friends saw a tattoo artist, he was immediately fascinated, to the point of convincing me to purchase a tattoo machine. We pooled together some money and bought a Chinese-made machine, which was commonly used for cosmetic tattoos. The news somehow spread and soon, there were three guys who turned up to get their first tattoos. My friend was enthusiastic: "Mo, let's start," he said. So I drew the illustration of a woman with a pen and made my very first tattoo. That's how I began tattooing. Prior to that incident, a tattoo had never been on my mind, even though I had seen tattoos that were done in Burma—a cousin of mine, after completing a martial arts course there, returned with some tattoos on his back and arms. After that incident, I started inking tattoos for people every now and then. This went on for three years. I had already been tattooing most of my college mates, and soon people started coming from beyond this group as well. In my last year in college, Lee (the denim company) approached me to become their official tattoo artist in the Delhi-NCR region. In 2008, I came to Delhi and I worked as a tattoo artist for the brand for a couple of months. Even then I was not thinking of picking up tattooing as a serious profession. I was just doing it for pocket money.

After that I went back home and was researching

on Naga textiles for a project, when I came across a traditional form of tattoos in Nagaland—the tattoos of the Konyak Nagas who were headhunters during the days of the yore. I was blown away. That's when I started my research about the traditional versions of this art form. Tattoo art was not really mainstream at that time, but nonetheless, when I went back to Delhi in 2009, Lee wanted me back. After two months I opened my own studio 'Mo Tattoos' in Hauz Khas Village. In 2012 September, I decided it was time for me to go back and start my field work. Whatever I could find out from the internet, I had already learned. So, I moved to Guwahati and opened my school—'Headhunters Ink'—which is not just about inking traditional tattoos but is a platform to educate the younger generation about our culture as well. Using Guwahati as a base, I began to visit Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur on a regular basis. I started inking traditional tattoos only in 2013. Since there were not many books on the subject, I had to physically travel to the villages and learn about them instead. I went to Mon district of Nagaland first; that is the region which is mostly written about when it comes to Konyak tribe's headhunting days and tattoos. The experience was overwhelming. The group of elders I met—mostly in their eighties and some even crossing a hundred years—had been headhunters once. Some spoke of having taken as many as twenty heads, some as few as five... I got sucked into this completely different world.

WHAT THE TATTOOS SYMBOLISE

From what I gathered from the elders, people could not just get a tattoo to suit their whims and fancies. Every tattoo is special. In some villages, they are used to mark the transition of child from

a girl to a woman. Later, for when she gets engaged, there is another tattoo and yet another for when she has a child, to indicate that now she is a 'complete' woman. For men, it is slightly different; men get their first tattoo when they take part in a headhunting raid or into an initiation in a headhunting raid. It is difficult to just say that there is a 'standard' to this process, because how they do a tattoo differs from village to village and even the eligibility of getting a tattoo changes from village to village. In some communities one cannot have a facial tattoo if he has not taken a head. In some Konyak communities they don't do face tattoos at all. One cannot speak in generalities about the tattoo traditions of the Konyak tribe. For me, making a pattern of this kind is a complicated issue. For example, I would never copy the tattoo that a Konyak man is honoured with for taking a head. That would be disrespecting the tribe, and it is important for me that I show respect to this tradition. Naga tattoos are not limited to a certain area of the body—they are drawn on the face, chest, back, arm, fore arm, neck, abdomen, thigh, calf...everywhere. The patterns are mostly symmetric and geometric. From what I understand, there is no pattern in a society which is meant for just one person. Every pattern is predetermined and passed on from generations to generation. Of course, the pattern must have originated from a trial and error method. And there came a point when a group agreed that a particular tattoo aesthetically suited them and they kept it as their identity. After a point, the tattoo did not change.

FUTURE OF TATTOO TRADITION

Western anthropologists and historians have written that this tradition will be extinct in the



PHOTO CREDIT: MO NAGA

next 10 to 15 years, when the last elder who has these tattoos passes away. That's where I come in. My plan is to train talented youths in Nagaland, to groom them into professional artists for the revival of tattoo art. And through these tattoos we spread our culture. The tattoo revival has already begun. These days, I find that more and more people are asking for and getting traditional tattoos from me. My responsibility is also to tell my clients about our culture and what the pattern they are getting inked means. I can say with confidence that in the next decade or so, the tattoos that we wear on our body will not only mark our identity, our character, or how we want to be perceived, but the clothes that we wear will be made in such a way to accommodate your tattoo on your body. I want to introduce the Indian art, the Naga art, to the rest of the tattoo world. I want people all across the world to wear these patterns with pride. And tattoos will become one of the biggest cultural ambassadors of the world very soon. People have travelled from England and Germany to get tattoos from me and that says a lot. Indians are getting Japanese and American style tattoos, so why not flaunt patterns that are Indian and which even outsiders are wearing? And for those who want to go on a tattoo trail to Mon district in Nagaland, I can assure you the experience will be worthwhile. There are guest houses, though basic where tourists can be part of our culture. The villages are very welcoming, but one cannot expect luxury here. Those passionate people who want to know about a culture and experience the traditional way of living in Nagaland are very welcome.





Stays we loved
&
Stays to watch out for

Stays we loved
Mainstream, but different



AHILYA BY THE SEA, NORTH GOA

A gem of a place in North Goa with three villas and a total of seven rooms facing the sea. "Ahilya by the Sea re-creates the charming laid back vibe of Old Goa but with more modern, comfortable amenities. It is a place where your guests will experience an authentic, artistic, rich Goan connection and feel pampered. The atmosphere here is relaxed and friendly. If there is one address to propose in Goa, it is definitely this one! For me definitely the best one," says our Product Manager, Jean Noel Esteve who stayed here recently.

CHAMPAKALI, NORTH GOA

A charming two villa property of three bedrooms each, in Old Goa for a stylish and restful experience. "This place, hidden on a hill by a river and nestled in a green environment is far away from the beaches, but close enough to enjoy the nightlife of North Goa. Managed by a French gentleman, Mathieu and his professional and warm staff, the quality of the service here is excellent. The food, homemade and local, is a delight. One of my favorite places in all of Goa," says our Product Manager, Jean Noel Esteve who stayed here recently.

ARCO IRIS HOMESTAY, SOUTH GOA

An amazingly warm and comfortable 5 room homestay in South Goa located in the village of Curtorim, which is also known for its prolific birdlife. Arco Iris is a 200 year old Portuguese mansion lovingly restored by its owners who stay there with their two daughters. At the entrance, directly on the left is a living room with books and comfortable sofas where guests can sit and chat. The living room opens to an airy and colourful patio. The bathrooms are simple but functional.

Arco Iris is situated about forty-five minutes from the nearest beach of South Goa. "I have been completely charmed by the warm welcome of the hosts and the house itself which makes you want stay here forever. Should you want an immersion of rural Goa and make the most of the countryside experience, Arco Iris is the place to be," says our Product Manager, Jean Noel Esteve who stayed here recently.

RANGER'S LODGE, CORBETT NATIONAL PARK

A homely and comfortable 4 room stay located at the edge of the Corbett National Park. Ranger's Lodge is the home of Imran Khan, a naturalist and wildlifer, who has spent nearly two decades in the park. Expect interesting stories right from your morning cuppa to the late night conversations by the fire on the terrace over drinks. The rooms are simple yet spacious and cosy with sit-outs facing the jungle. Bathrooms are functional, neat and clean. Food cooked by his wife is absolutely delicious with most vegetables fresh from their garden. "A safari with Imran is a delight with nuggets of information that comes only with years of experience. We saw a Tigress during our afternoon safari, but there is so much more I learnt from him about the forest and the park. Its Imran's exhaustive knowledge on wildlife, his passion for Corbett National Park and his personalised attention is what makes a stay at Ranger's Lodge special," says our Explorer-in-Residence Kuntal Baruwa who stayed here recently.



Stays to watch out for

Hot Picks



VILLA VERDE, NORTH GOA

"Located between Vagator and Anjuna, the property is very charming and stylish with a nice pool. Four rooms (three on the ground floor and one on the first floor) which have their own unique style are promoted as one single private villa," says Jean Noel Esteve, our Product Manager. Hidden from the road, it is a perfect place for those of your clients who want to stay close to the beach but also want a peaceful environment to relax.

PURONI BHETI LODGE, JORHAT

"Located in the 116 years old Haroocharai Tea Estate in Jorhat, Northeast India, this family run 3 room BnB is simple and yet stylish with terrific home cooked food. Your clients will be hosted by Rajib Barooah and Indrani Barooah, owners of the Haroocharai Tea Estate, who stay in the same compound in a huge colonial Bungalow. Go on a day trip to Majuli, Asia's largest freshwater river island accessible only by a 2 hour long ferry ride, walk or cycle around the Tea Estate, visit the Tea factory or head out with your host to the Members only Gymkhana Club for a round of gin and tonic," says Kuntal Baruwa, our Explorer-in-Residence

YOG NIKETAN BY SANSKRITI, RISHIKESH

"While breakfast is limited and food is just about okay, what works for Yog Niketan by Sanskriti is its absolutely superb location. Located a stone throw away from the Ram Jhula, the Ashrams, the markets and restaurants, the views are killer from the Ganga facing rooms. I would say the best in entire Rishikesh - beautiful at sunrise and in the evening, one can see the Aarti at the Parmarth Niketan across the river from the balcony. A little gate in Yog Niketan provides access to the ghat

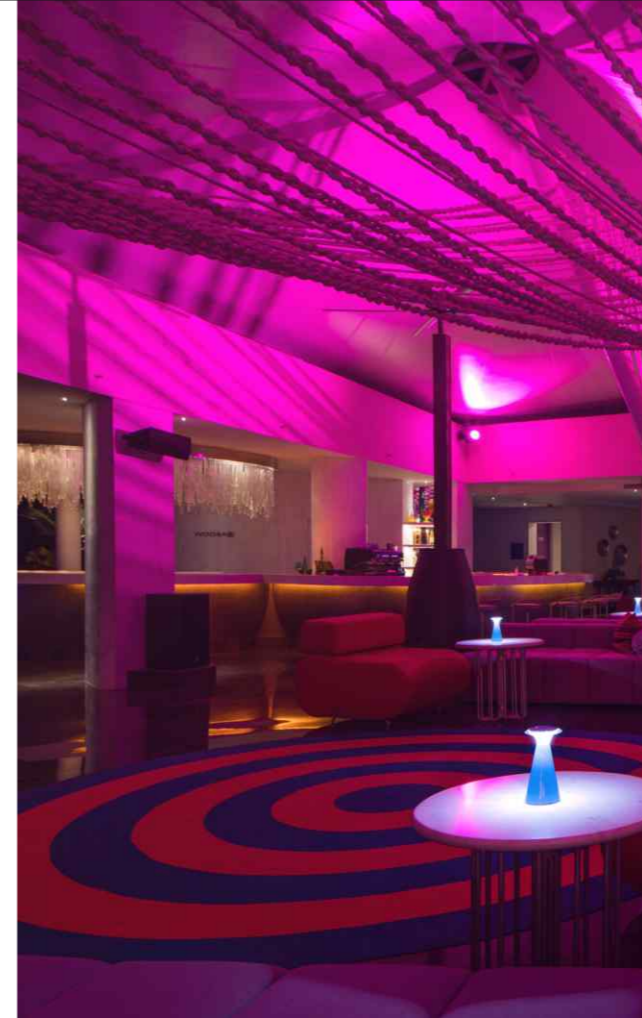
area which is clean. Take a leisurely stroll, cross the Ram Jhula and continue walking through the market area and Parmarth Niketan to the Beatles Ashram. Return to witness the evening Aarti at Parmarth and walk back to Yog Niketan. It has a decent sized Yoga hall which can easily accommodate a group of 20-25 people and offers free Yoga classes. There is a Spa too offering Ayurveda therapies," says Kuntal Baruwa, our Explorer-in-Residence

OBEROI SUKHVILAS, CHANDIGARH

The latest in Oberoi chain, Sukhvilas Resort & Spa is surrounded by over 8,000 acres of protected natural forest. It is located thirty minutes from Chandigarh city. Accommodation ranges from the palatial Kohinoor Villa, to Luxury Villas with Private Pools, Royal Forest Tents with Private Pools, Royal Tents and Premier Rooms, with design elements inspired by Rajput and Mughal architecture, with all modern conveniences.

ANDAZ, NEW DELHI

Andaz is indeed the "rebel brother" of the Hyatt hotel chain challenging the status quo of the hospitality industry with each Andaz being unique in its design, amenities and cuisine whilst imbibing the cultural and social life of its location. "The art installation with 3 different types of bricks from 3 different eras of Delhi, or the one showcasing the 10 Gates of Delhi from the yore or even a 401 page book on "reasons to love Delhi" - one page dedicated to each of its 401 rooms- is brilliant. But what impressed me the most is the way Andaz has stuck true to its cool quotient, the staff uniform and the airport transfers in Ambassadors included, of breaking down barriers that guests often face in traditional hospitality. For example - it is absolutely cool and ok to pick



up a bottle of gin made in-house from their Juniper Bar and treat yourself or your friend to a gin and tonic. Like you would do at your own home. Their entire recruitment process was again about breaking barriers where they had made a conscious decision to pick up staff from smaller towns and cities from humble backgrounds. The walk-in interview was organised at a Delhi Café which is an open work space by day and buzzing drinking spot by night, very popular with the youth. Back in their restaurant Annamaya, all ingredients are sourced from individuals and collectives with the idea of contributing towards their wellbeing. The garlic pickle, for example, is from a collective of housewives who got together and wanted to be independent from their alcoholic spouses and the almond chutney from another collective of women from Uttarakhand in the Himalayas. I am yet to meet their General Manager Heddo Siebs who, I am told, speaks Hindi and loves to explore Delhi on his Royal Enfield motorcycle. I couldn't see the rooms (base category and a category above) that I would have ideally liked to see and use for our clients. It was sold out. I would definitely like to go back once they have everything in place - complete all the rooms (240 rooms now open out of 401), open their Hong Kong Club where they promise authentic Cantonese food and a bar which will remain open from 4pm to 4am," says Kuntal Baruwa from our Destination Knowledge Centre.

NARENDRA BHAWAN, BIKANER

Narendra Bhawan is a depiction of the last reigning Maharaja of Bikaner, His Highness Narendra Singhji. Unconventionally curated, it is composed of Narendra Singhji's memories from his travels to destinations near and far. Experiences at Narendra Bhawan, tap into the

memories of its original incumbent and takes its guests on a journey through his past wherein the best moments of his life are translated into an array of curious options - some interestingly epicurean, others fantastically novel and everything always enchanting. In the Guest Rooms the theme of India prevails - past and present as a tribute to Narendra Singhji's eclectic tastes. Elaborate ceilings, Bikaner terrazzo floors and traditional crafts sit in harmony with Portuguese tiles and a distinctly vivid colour palette.

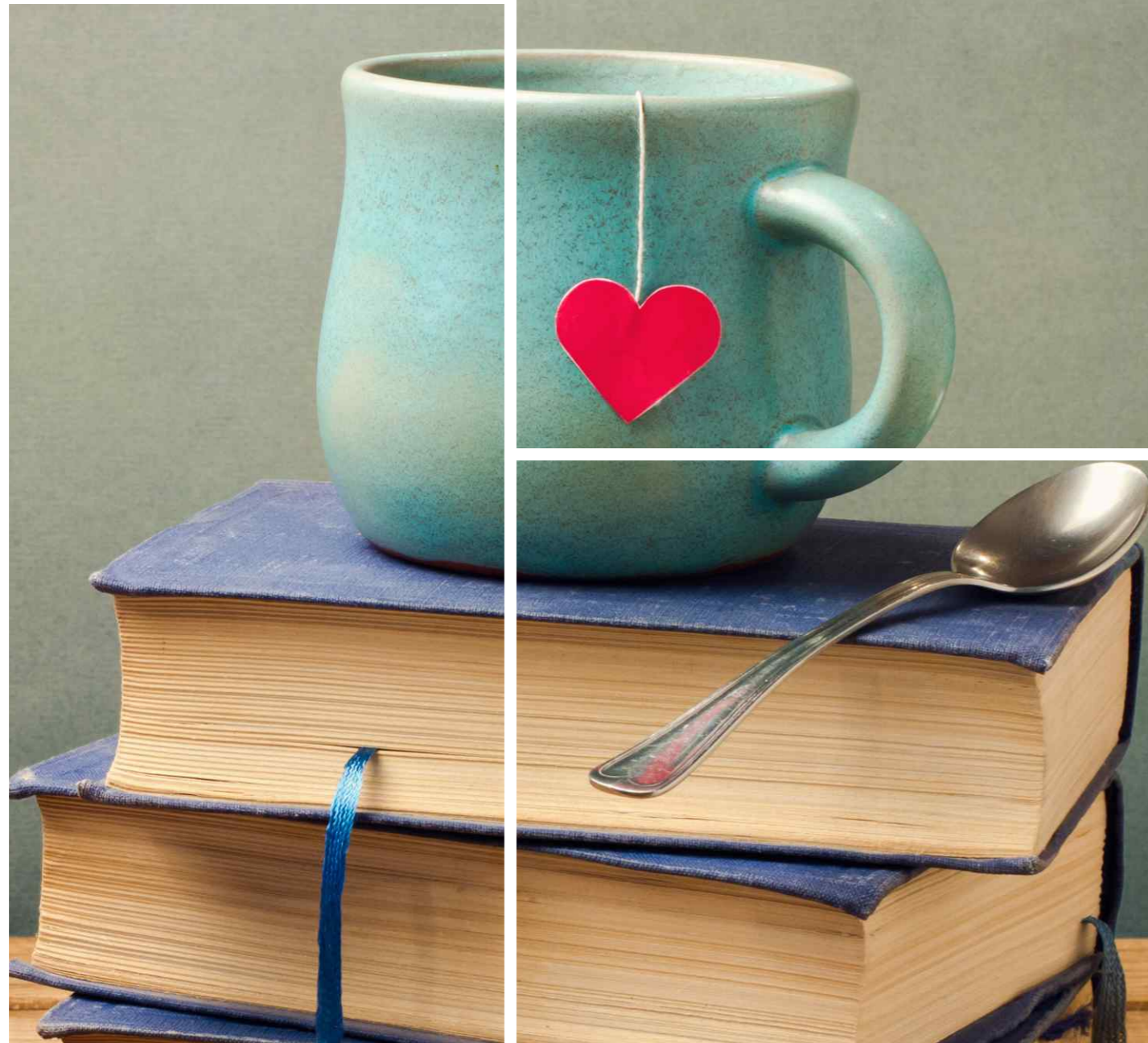
W, NORTH GOA

The first W hotel in India. "I must say that I have been completely impressed by this property situated in Vagator overlooking the Chapora Fort. True to the spirit of the W brand, it is fresh and new. Their rock-pool overlooking the beach of Vagator will be "the place to be" very soon in Goa. The rooms/villas are aptly named to match with the spirit of the place: Marvelous Suite, Fabulous room, Spectacular room... they are!" says Jean Noel Esteve, our Product Manager.

WAYANAD WILD, WAYANAD

The newest property of CGH Earth, Wayanad Wild is an experiential nature resort in Lakkidi area of Wayanad, North Kerala. The spacious rooms are well-equipped with modern amenities. The outdoor pool offers a stunning view of the forest, while the restaurant dishes out food made from local produce. You may also take a guided tour with the naturalist or be adventurous and trek on your own into the wilderness. Visit the canopy for some bird watching or meander along the streams. If you are a photography enthusiast, there's a treasure trove of beauty to capture.





Books & Films 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 and Films we loved

India and its stories



THE DARJEELING LIMITED Directed by Wes Anderson

Reviewed by Tejashri Simha, Explorer-in-Residence, Destination Knowledge Centre.

The Darjeeling Limited is a comedy drama which encompasses everything quintessentially Indian with a foreign twist. Whimsical, funny and quirky, the movie captures everything that is India - Organised Chaos. The plot revolves around three brothers - each suffering from depression - who meet for a train trip across India a year after the accidental death of their father. Planned by the eldest brother, the final stop on the itinerary is a somewhat disturbing surprise for his siblings. Set against the backdrop of the picturesque and historical towns of Jodhpur and Udaipur, their journey sees them not only mingling with the locals, but experiencing each place as natives. Elephant motifs on the train, Classical Indian music playing in the background, a bus ride, visit to a temple, a funeral in a village, meditation and a hilltop ritual recommended by a Guru are some of the captivating glimpses into the western take on the paradoxes of this country. The camera beautifully captures the essence of India ranging from the diversity of landscape, people, beliefs and customs. A recommended watch to get to know a teensy bit about this part of the world, aptly recognised as the land of many contradictions and organised chaos.

LION Directed by Garth Davis

Reviewed by Dick Sakahara, a logo artist and a friend of Sita based in Los Angeles, California.

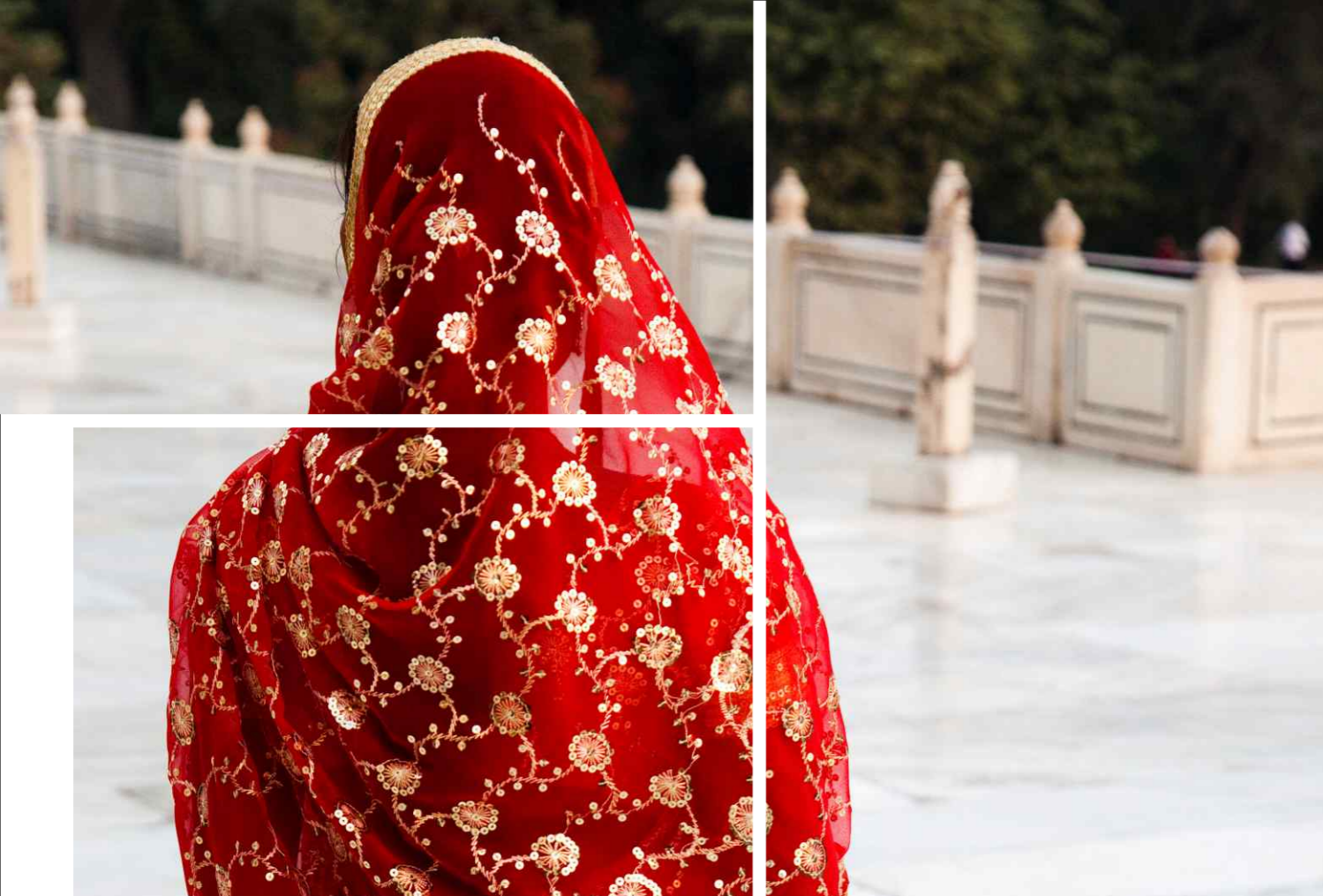
With eager anticipation we went to see "Lion", hoping the movie would be as good as Saroo Brierley's book "A Long Way Home" based on his true story. And we were not disappointed. Several years ago we had read an article about Saroo Brierley - who as a child became lost after traveling by train with his brother in rural India and as an adult eventually found his family after years of searching on Google Earth. When his book "A Long Way Home" was published, we read it immediately and loved it! Having traveled to India many times over the past 35 years and having explored Kolkata, numerous rural villages and traveled by train, we could visualize and connect with what Saroo described in his book. The movie presented a visual, sensory and emotional experience based on his true story. It captures the colour, the grittiness, the chaos of Kolkata and Saroo's desperate search for his brother. Dev Patel did an excellent job portraying adult Saroo. We felt the movie hit all the right notes and did not dwell unnecessarily on the Brierley family turmoil but gave just enough of the family dynamics and the clips showing Saroo and his real mother which gave a nice closure to the story. We felt "A Long Way Home" was an exceptional book and we feel "Lion" is an exceptional movie based on this amazing story. One we'll see again and again.

THE GREAT DERANGEMENT: CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE UNTHINKABLE Written by Amitav Ghosh

Reviewed by Lovleen Sagar, Head, Destination Knowledge Centre.

The Great Derangement - Amitav Gosh

While Amitav Gosh's Ibis trilogy traces human greed and how supposedly "advanced" nations through industrialisation, under the garb of trade, spread exploitative colonialism; this book takes it to its logical conclusion calling it "The Great Derangement" where human greed far precedes in proportion to what earth can offer without destroying itself. Looking at the destiny of mankind, this amazing book on Climate Change takes the debate out of the constricted and limited path of science to a much wider perspective of how we are conditioned to live under the current social, cultural, political and economic realm. The author takes us through the history of Climate Change and how politics, power and greed have not let it become a mainstream agenda. He traces personal stories through the Indian sub-continent of how generations have observed change and yet nobody is alarmed enough. It makes us think in an entirely new way to live! A very thought provoking book, must read for those interested in the long term survival of our planet and the legacy we will leave behind for our children's children.

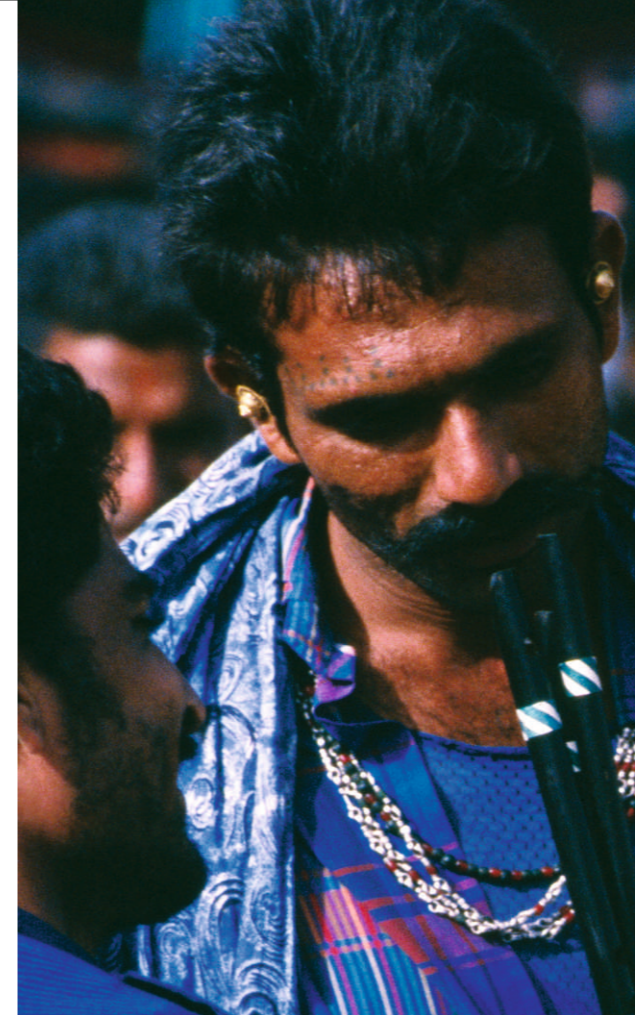


EL SARI ROJO (THE RED SARI)
Written by Javier Moro

Reviewed by Natalia Sánchez-Infantes who represents Sita in Spain.

India has always been my passion, so when I first learnt of a book whose title was "Indian Passion" by the Spanish writer Javier Moro, I automatically went to the closest bookshop and bought it. At that time I had already read several novels and books about India - best sellers like "Holy Cow" by an Australian, "The God of small things" by Indian writer and activist Arundhati Roy, but never by a Spaniard and this was the main reason I found it interesting. The story was very appealing as it was mainly based on the character of Anita Delgado the Spanish Maharani of Kapurthala in Punjab. A good introduction to Javier's image of India. Many years later and after having visited this country a good number of times, my passion has grown with and within me and this brought me more curiosity. So, when I went to this Travel Shop and saw the cover: "The Red Sari, when Life is the Price for Power", I couldn't resist. The book was published 9 years ago and apparently there was a bit of a controversy in India when it saw the light. Quite unavoidable when you mix love, power, the love for power and politics. To me as a foreigner eager to learn more about the Indian culture, the book is a simple and easy way to get into details without having to ask some "difficult questions". It is a love story, a story of passion and power that I see from "outside" dispassionately; from the distance of time as I am from a different generation, different country and from a different world. This is the story of a India's most talked about political dynasty -the Nehru/Gandhi family. Starting in 1991 with

former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's cremation, the narrative goes back and forth in time from Rajiv's wife Sonia Gandhi's childhood in Italy to her responsibility as the head of the family. It is also a love story tinged with some drama as well as some anecdotes which give a human touch to some episodes of the recent Indian history. Along the 600 pages, the author introduces key personalities that we all know by name such as Mahatma Gandhi as well as the whole Nehru family from Motilal Nehru to Rahul and Priyanka with special emphasis on Jawaharlal Nehru and his daughter Indira, mostly seen and analysed through the eyes of the main character, Sonia Gandhi. Entertaining and precise when it comes to describing such a wide range of things as the Delhi and the India of the 60's, the cremation process, Indian weddings or topics as controversial as the caste system or child marriages, this book has showed me once again, another face from the thousand faces of my beloved India and how much I still have to learn and discover about this incredible country.



CHAI CHAI: TRAVELS IN PLACES WHERE YOU STOP BUT NEVER GET OFF
Written by Bishwanath Ghosh

Reviewed by Inderjeet Rathod, Explorer-in-Residence, Destination Knowledge Centre.

If I were to list 10 things that have helped integrate India as a nation, Tea and Indian Railways - the largest civil employer in the world with 1.4 million employees - would be on top of it! Both of these are entwined so closely around each other. Tea is available at each and every Railway Station of India. "Chai Chai" (Tea, Tea) is one of the usual sounds heard on any of the Railway platforms apart from the loud hooting of the locomotives and the rumbling of the trains on the tracks. Author Bishwanath Ghosh, once enjoying a cup of tea at one of the transit Railway stations, Itarsi, heard the announcements of trains arriving and departing from there. He noticed that nearly all the trains running across the length and breadth of the country pass through this station. The travellers in these long distance trains are quite familiar with Itarsi railway station but are completely unaware of what lies beyond the premises in that town. Having struck with the idea of exploring what lies beyond, he decides to visit some of the famous transit Railway Stations such as Mughal Sarai, Jhansi, Itarsi, Shoranur, Arakkonam, Guktakal and Jolarpettai - all these are places that are transit stopovers during a train journey but never a destination. It's an interesting book in which the Author makes the readers 'experience' the activities that happen in these laid back small towns on account of interactions he has with the local people out there. The scene is familiar all across - cycle rickshaw rides, small run down

'hotels' near the Railway stations, dingy bars next to the wine-shops serving as the meeting point of the local people, friendships over drinking sessions, interesting street food and so much more.



2 nights in Alleppey

Come Explore with us

Alleppey town is sandwiched between the Arabian Sea and the Vembanad Lake on a splinter of land barely four kms wide. It still retains the vibe of a chilled out, small neighbourhood-town perhaps because 90% of visitors give it a miss and are taken straight to the Houseboat for an overnight cruise. Our Destination Knowledge Centre (DKC) has developed a 2 nights programme in Alleppey to explore and experience this beautiful backwater town known for its rich culture, heritage and warm friendly people.



GET TO KNOW ABOUT

- ▶ The golden days of Alleppey, when it was a major port of India in the 18th century, second only to Mumbai.
- ▶ How people from all over India were invited to Alleppey (just like the Maharaja of Jaipur did when he built his new city in the 18th century) to settle down and trade, what all was done to promote trade and how the decedents of these various communities from Gujarat, Rajasthan, Maharashtra et al stayed on in the backwater town.
- ▶ Alleppey – the Coir Capital of the world. The Coir industry driven by the golden coloured thread made from coconut husk employs nearly 7,00,00 people. It all began in 1859 when James Darragh, an Irish born American set up the first coir manufacturing industry to produce and export coir products, such as coir mats and floor coverings etc. Enterprising Indians followed James Darragh in the next one hundred years. Just so you know Pollachi in Northwestern Tamil Nadu along with Alleppey and Cherthala in Kerala produces 60% of the world's coir. Include Sri Lanka who is competition and that will make it 96% of the entire supply of coir and coir products worldwide.

HOSTED BY LOCALS

Alex and Rani Alex who are Alleppey locals will be your host. Their homestay is located bang in the centre of Alleppey Town. "Built in the 60s on an acre of land, it has 3 Simple; yet comfortable rooms – air-conditioned, well lit, spacious and airy with big windows and bathrooms. We loved the airy verandah with its perforated wall where we had our pre-dinner drinks in complete privacy," says Kuntil Baruwa from our Destination Knowledge Centre who stayed here, whilst designing this 2 night Alleppey programme.



DAY 1

Deboard from the Houseboat after your overnight cruise. Drive from the jetty and check –in to your homestay in Alleppey Town. Get to know your hosts. Relax. Lunch. Visit the Coir Museum and the Coir Factory with Alex who is now three generations into the coir business. He and his extended family owns a couple of coir factories in and around Alleppey. Alex will accompany your clients to the Coir Museum and also to one of his Coir factories. He will show your clients around personally.

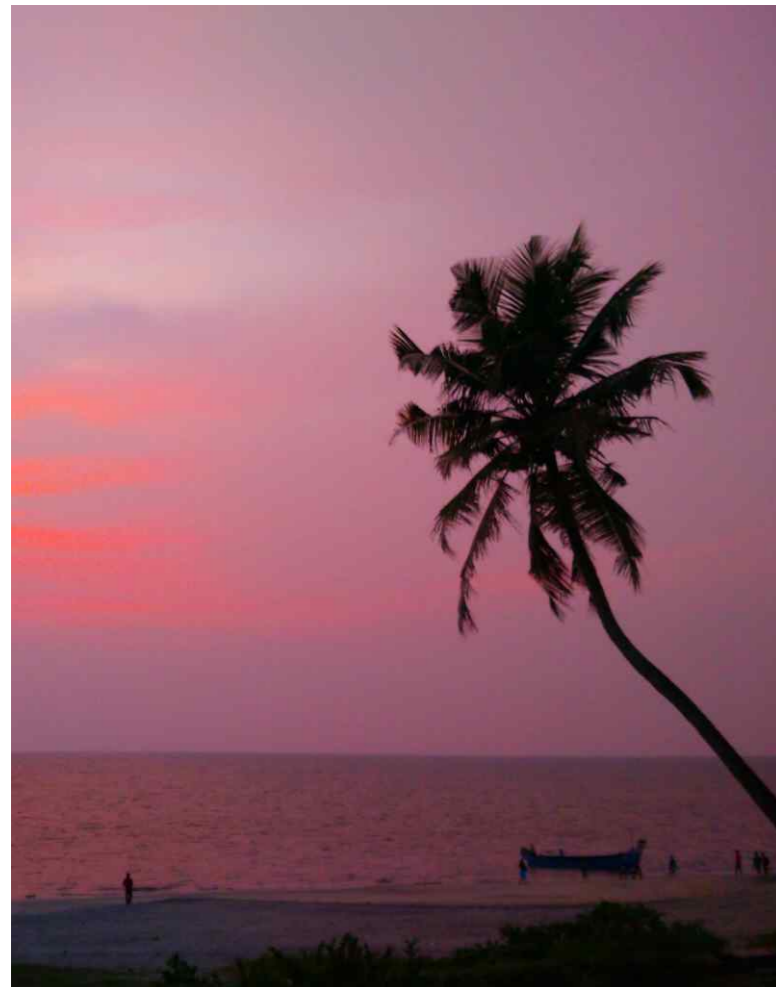
THE COIR MUSEUM- the first of its kind in the world - is brilliant both in terms of display and aesthetics. The lounge, as you enter, is so pretty with an idol of Ganesha, the elephant headed Hindu God made entirely out of coir. The galleries are very well thought out, the lighting is perfect, the labeling neat providing a vast range of information on the various milestones of the coir industry and the many stages of production. On display are various machines, traditional looms

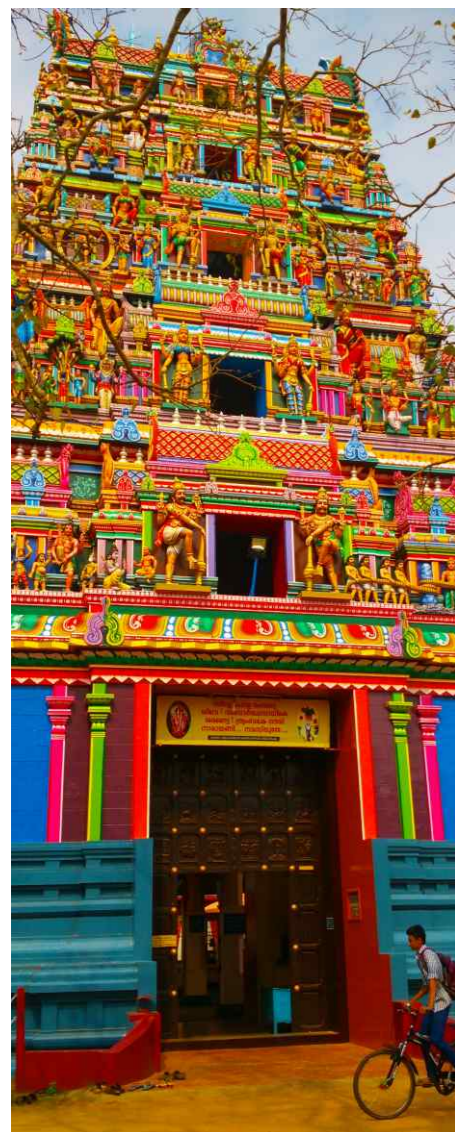
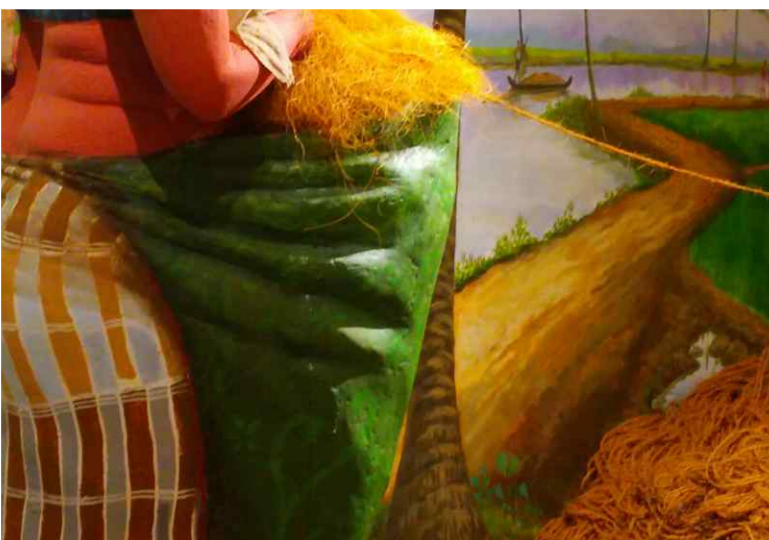
and coir products. The Coir Museum plays the perfect foil to the Coir Factory visit. Whilst your clients get to see the traditional looms at the Coir Museum, THE COIR FACTORY owned by Alex and family, to begin with, is a great insight into the rapid strides that the golden thread made from coconut husk, in terms of modernisation. Alex will take your clients through the entire production process – from the spinning of coir yarn to finished products ready for shipment. Your clients will also get to know how Alex and family have diversified their business and will be introduced to other products such as Sisal fiber which grows in Brazil and East Africa. They source the finest quality fibers which are dyed, spun and woven into premium products in their factories and sold overseas.

EVENING WALK OF THE MULAKKAL STREET- downtown Alleppey - with a Sita Guide. We will head to Mullakkal Street on a Vellimonga or the Silver Owl – a local mode of transport. At the entrance of the Mullakkal Street is a Ganesha Temple. It is buzzing with devotees, both in the

evenings and mornings. There is a dedicated space where the devotees break coconuts which they buy from the many coconut sellers close to the temple. A great insight into how religion and local businesses intertwines. Ahead of the Ganesha Temple are shops lined up on both sides of the street selling spices, grocery, clothes, books & stationery and gold jewellery. We will stop at the 500 year old Mulakkal Raja Rajeswari Temple (open 17:00 -20:00 hours in the evening/7 days a week) after which the street is named to soak in its serene atmosphere. It is one of the few temples in Kerala where non-Hindus are welcome inside. The architecture of the temple is simple yet enchanting. Later we will break for Coffee at the India Coffee House, a fascinating story of India's largest chain of employee run and employee owned restaurants. Here your clients can decide if they want to continue walking or head back to their homestay.

Dinner. Overnight in your Homestay.





DAY 2

MORNING WALK/CYCLING TOUR OF ALLEPPEY TOWN WITH A SITA GUIDE. Breakfast. Relax.

Your clients will be driven on a Sita vehicle/or they can cycle to the Alleppey Beach. This is where the tour starts and this is where your clients will get to hear the story of Alleppey during its heydays, when it was a bustling port with tea and spices from the high ranges arriving via the Vembanad Lake. Labourers worked overtime to shift the goods from the country boats to the bigger boats to be carried to the ships anchored in the middle of the sea. From the Beach, we will start walking/cycling towards the Lighthouse and onto the streets of Alleppey which was once a bustling waterway, with shops, factories and commercial establishments springing up on either side of the canal. The early settlers of Alleppey, notably businessmen from Gujarat, have left their architectural legacy in the form of huge mansions and trading houses with wooden balconies making for beautiful facades. We will listen to the stories and experience it all at a leisurely pace. Our next stop is the vegetable and fish market of Alleppey. We will walk on the narrow street with shops lined up on both sides – selling vegetables, spices, household articles, dry marine products to arrive at the fish market buzzing with activity and the vendors calling out to buy. Each trying to outdo the other. We will buy fish and take it back for Rani to cook us a wonderful meal.

LEARN TO COOK FISH MOLEE with Rani, Alex's better half, followed by Lunch. Your clients will learn how to cook the delightful mildly spiced Fish Molee (Fish Stew) from Rani. It is an eternal

favourite of Kerala cooked in oodles of coconut milk and native spices such as cardamom and black pepper. The fish molee whose recipe varies from family to family, has a rich cultural heritage traced back to the trade connection between Kerala and Portugal. The dish is believed to be a variation of the Portuguese Fish Stew Caldeirada. It is said that the word "Molee" comes from the Spanish word "Mole" which means Stew. The kitchen where Rani conducts her cooking class is bright, spacious and airy. The mood is casual. Your clients may want to sit or stand. They can bring in their drinks to the session. Alex will join in, so will his mother and kids, if they are around. Your clients will also get a printed recipe to take home. A relaxing enjoyable experience.

Later in the afternoon VISIT THE MEMBERS ONLY ALLEPPEY UNITED CLUB - on the Alleppey Beach with Alex to watch the sunset. It was started in the year 1933 by the prominent citizens of Alleppey to socialise. Alex's grandfather was once the secretary of the club. It is bang on the Alleppey Beach but minus the crowd that flocks here every day to watch the sunset. Go for a leisurely walk on the beach and returned to the terrace - which has great views- just after sunset for a cup of tea.

Dinner. Overnight in your Homestay.

DAY 3

Drive to Marari Beach/onward Destination.



Scan the QR Code to view the video



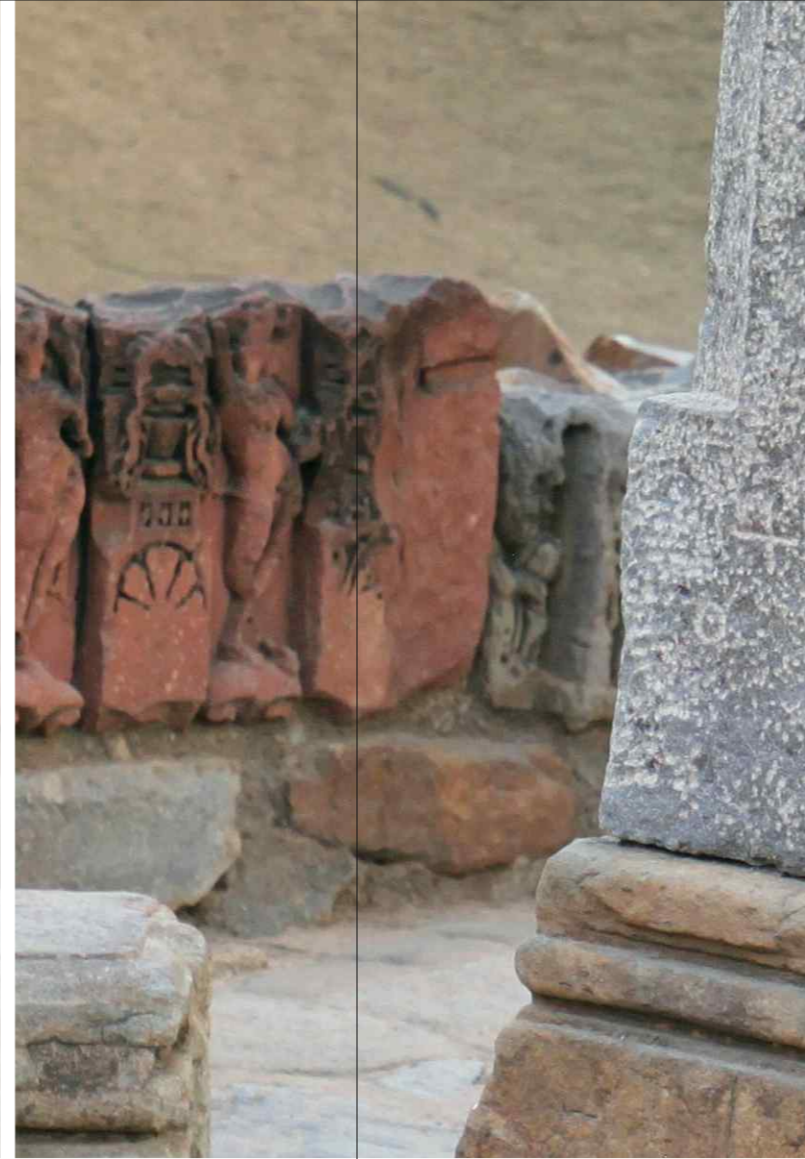
GOOD TO KNOW

- ▶ Ideal for: FITs/Families (Max 6 guests on twin sharing/ The homestay has only 3 rooms).
- ▶ Best done after the Houseboat Cruise.
- ▶ Best time: 2nd week of October till April 2nd week.
- ▶ If there is a buyer's audit, the coir factory is out of bounds even for the owner. But no worries we have 2 nights in Alleppey and your clients can visit the coir factory the next day. Back to back buyer's audit do not happen.
- ▶ There are 3 Guides (English speaking) on our panel – all Alleppey locals- for this 2 night Alleppey programme.
- ▶ Avoid offering this 2 night Alleppey programme on Mondays, Sundays and Public Holidays because -
 - The Coir Museum is closed on Mondays and Public Holidays.
 - The Mullakkal Street Walk is not good on Sundays and Public Holidays as shops are shut.
 - The Coir Factory is shut on Sundays and Public Holidays.
- ▶ Please do not take bits and pieces of this 2 night tour and ask your relationship manager in Sita to offer it to your clients passing by Alleppey after their Houseboat cruise. A great deal of research work has gone into timing the various visits. For your understanding Alleppey Beach is lively early in the morning, its dull during the day time and super crowded by sunset. Likewise, the Mullakkal Street is buzzing in the evening. On a given day there could be cultural programmes in the temple. A walk during the day time has none of that and the temple is

- closed. Any dilution of this 2 night programme could lead to complaints from clients.
- ▶ Your clients can never ever get inside a coir factory unless accompanied by the owner: After the Houseboat cruise, I have seen both FITs/Groups being taken to these so called "traditional coir factories" in the Cherthala area as an enroute sightseeing. I have seen them in 2010 and saw them again during my recent trip to Kerala. These are NOT coir factories in any way. These are small village units making ONLY coir ropes and they are passed on to clients as "traditional coir factories". You can never ever enter a coir factory unless accompanied by the owner because their designs are a closely guarded secret and they manufacture a lot more than just ropes.
- ▶ Cycles: Decathlon Btwin Cycles (no gears).
- ▶ Prices include: Stay, All Meals, Local Guide, Transportation and activities as per the itinerary-including Decathlon Btwin Cycles, Helmets and Reflector Jackets for those opting to Cycle around Alleppey Town on Day 2.

Useful Information and Insider tips by Kuntal Baruwa, Explorer-in-Residence, Destination Knowledge Centre who has designed this programme.





Love in the Ruins

The Qutub Complex offers a lot more than just India's tallest minaret, Qutub Minar. There are lots of monuments, admirable structures and art-pieces around the premise, each with a story of its own.

Photo Credit: Winner of the Annual Sita Photo Contest 2016 – Ekaterina Belova, Sita team member. She is a second time winner of the contest.