



A FAIRFAX COMPANY

Tower B, Delta Square, M.G. Road,  
Sector 25, Gurgaon 122001, India

Tel: +91 124 4703400 | Fax: +91 124 4563100

info@sita.in | www.sita.in  
info@distantfrontiers.in | www.distantfrontiers.in  
info@tci.co.in | www.tci.co.in

art of travel  
2022 - 2023



**Knowledge** is based on experience, **Everything** else is just information

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UNTOLD STORIES





Photo Credit: Bourne & Shepherd

## THE BEGUMS OF BHOPAL

By Soma Paul, Product Development, Gurgaon

During the third wave of the pandemic, I returned to Bhopal where I was born and raised after spending more than a decade away from my family. It is a city which I had so long seen but never experienced. This time around I put on my mask and decided to discover Bhopal on foot.

Bhopal is the capital city of Madhya Pradesh in Central India. It is also the second-largest Indian state by area. In the lanes and by-lanes of Bhopal, I came across exciting stories from the past and many fascinating sites. While discovering the city's different monuments, including the tomb of the city's founder, an exclusive bazaar for women, and crumbling French monuments, I found myself fascinated by the firebrand Begums, the women rulers who defied patriarchy and ruled Bhopal with an iron hand for over 150 years, out of the kingdom's 240-year-old existence.

Qudsia Begum, who set the template for the ideal ruler, showed that Islam does not exclude women from gaining political power. Sikandar Begum was trained in martial arts and, like her mother, never observed purdah as she believed it was a voluntary act. Under the rule of Shahjahan Begum, the princely state of Bhopal became a cultural and literary centre. She even patronised several female poets. The last Begum of Bhopal was Nawab Sultan Jahan Begum. Her carpet, lungi, and blanket-making workshops for prisoners resulted in the crime rate in the kingdom coming down. These women embodied feminism long before it became a part of the zeitgeist.

I find it astonishing that history taught at schools makes no mention of these women who defied gender binaries, challenged patriarchy, and were far ahead of their times.

If you want to know more about the Begums of Bhopal, I would highly recommend the "Waterhouse Albums: Central Indian Provinces", a coffee table book dedicated to the journey of the remarkable photographer James Waterhouse in 1862. He spent almost an entire year photographing and documenting the people of Central India. The book has a stunning series of rare extraordinary portraits of the Begums of Bhopal, accompanied by detailed notes from the legendary photographer himself.



## A LESSER KNOWN ONAM TRADITION

By Dipu Nair, Logistics and Operations, Alappuzha

Every year, during the festival of Onam in Kerala, the brightly coloured hand-painted ceremonial bows called Onavillus are crafted by a particular artisan family in Thiruvananthapuram, my hometown. These bows are then offered to the deity of the iconic Sree Padmanabhaswamy Temple. The original design was created by artisans from Kancheepuram and Thanjavur in Tamil Nadu and was brought here especially by the then kings, back in the 17th century.

The Onavillu boasts of the sheer craftsmanship and dedication of the artisans of the Vilayil Veedu family. They are the only family in Kerala entrusted with the task of making the Onavillu. The Onavillu is made using only five colours - white, green, red, yellow, and black - with magnificent paintings depicting the incarnations of Lord Vishnu, the deity of Sree Padmanabhaswamy Temple. The bows are decorated with red tassels made by the convicts of the Thiruvananthapuram Central Jail.

The Onavillu is 3.5 - 4.5 feet long and 4-6 inches wide, and mahogany wood is traditionally used to make these bows. From the making of the bow to the time of offering it at the temple, the artisans follow a set of strict rules, and the bow is subjected to a host of rituals. The Onavillu is regarded as a divine handicraft, and these bows are worshipped at the homes of the devout.

The Vilayil Veedu family has been making these ceremonial bows for the past 400 years. The family members observe a 41-day penance prior to the commencement of the work. Earlier the family would make the Onavillus only during the Onam season but now with people buying them for their homes, they work throughout the year.

A visit to the workshop of the Vilayil Veedu family can be organised for guests during their stay at Thiruvananthapuram or Kovalam.





Photo Credit: Deccan Herald

## WHEN THE GODDESS DESCENDS ON EARTH

By Deepika V, Operations and Logistics, Bengaluru

At the heart of the cosmopolitan Bengaluru lies the bustling neighbourhood of Pete which is reminiscent of the humble beginnings of the city. With over 20 communities sharing this packed space since its inception, it is an epi-centre of the cultural and traditional practices of many communities. Every year in the month of April, the Dharmaraya Temple, comes alive with the Karaga festival to celebrate the homecoming of their beloved female deity, Droupadmma. Celebrated by the Tigala community for an uninterrupted 800 years, the Bengaluru Karaga festival is rich with the theme of gender transformation and duality.

On the last day of the grand festival of Dussehra in October, the head priest of Dharmaraya Temple moves into the temple premises to prepare for a role that requires him to perform several purification rituals and rigorous physical exercises. He stays away from his family for six months and his wife plays the role of a widow during this period. On his road to the transformation from man to Goddess, the priest grows long hair, wears the sacred mangalsutra (a thread worn by women that signifies marriage), and is always clean-shaven. On the main day of the festival, swaying and dancing as though in a trance, the priest steps out of the temple clad in a yellow sari all decked up in jewellery and a jasmine headdress with no support which weighs 11 kgs.

On this sacred journey through the neighbourhood of Pete, the dancing priest is accompanied by sword-bearing members of the Tigala community who protect the procession and perform the traditional sword dance accompanied by chants and the burning of camphor at every stop. A little before the crack of dawn, the procession makes its way to the shrine of a Muslim Sufi saint where the priest performs the ritual dance and goes around the Dargah thrice before returning to the Dharmaraya temple. The festival culminates in a grand marriage of the deities for people to witness and the priest is also finally reunited with his wife after performing his sacred duty.



## SUSTAINABILITY AND US





## THE ROAD TO SUSTAINABILITY

During the pandemic, the world came to a grinding halt. But on the positive side, people across countries experienced the joy of breathing clean air and the sight of blissful clear blue skies. This dramatic shift gave further impetus to the idea of making conscious decisions to help the earth heal. This has led to innovation in the field of sustainable solutions all over the world. Since then, large and small enterprises have established units to guide them towards making their businesses sustainable.

The organisation had committed to sustainability as early as 2016 with the publication of the sustainability measuring criteria for excursions and tours. The Sustainability Action Plan, the next logical progression, was unveiled in November 2020 with a dedicated Sustainability Committee. It comprises of two committee heads and six members who spearhead the efforts in this area.

The Sustainability Committee's key accomplishments from December 2020 to March 2022

- January 2021 - 13 training sessions held with 397 participants
- January 2021 – Survey to measure the sustainability quotient of service providers
- April 2021 - Sustainability conference for overseas representatives held
- July 2021 - Comprehensive Responsible Traveller Guide launched

- November 2021 - Won the Gold Award for Sustaining Employees and Communities through the Pandemic – 2021 at WTM, London
- March 2022 - Became a signatory of the Glasgow Declaration

In collaboration with the Destination Knowledge Centre, which has hosted over 200 webinars till date under its “Knowledge Without Borders” series, 10% of the webinars were dedicated to sustainability. These webinars, under the Sustainability Series, covered a wide range of topics from recycling and upcycling, to rural tourism, expeditions to bring electricity to remote villages in Leh and Ladakh, efforts of social enterprises supporting underprivileged communities, to adopting a sustainable lifestyle.

The webinars saw the participation of noted key speakers such as Jose Dominic - a pioneer of sustainable and responsible tourism in India, Ratish Nanda - a distinguished Indian conservation architect and the Projects Director of Aga Khan Trust for Culture, K Rupesh Kumar - the Coordinator for State Responsible Tourism Mission, Kerala Tourism, and Pia Sethi – Senior Fellow, Cedar Centre for Ecology and Research who is well known for her research on the sustainable practices of indigenous tribes of Northeast India.

With the knowledge that we have amassed over these two years, we are now equipped as a team to provide solutions and have





meaningful dialogues on sustainability with travel partners.

With the awareness campaign on autopilot, the committee had time to debate on avenues that would make the service offerings lean towards sustainability. In the past year, the committee has been working on creating a database of NGOs that guests can engage with. The committee is also working on a project to support the native artisans and promote local handicrafts from all over India.

The largest undertaking of the committee is to eliminate single-use plastic in the daily operations of the business, over the course of a few years. This will include consumption within the office premises as well as consumption by guests on tour. The committee also aims to invite travel partners to be part of this process through joint workshops which are in the works. A sub-task of this project is to offer the option of reusable bottles to guests to reduce the

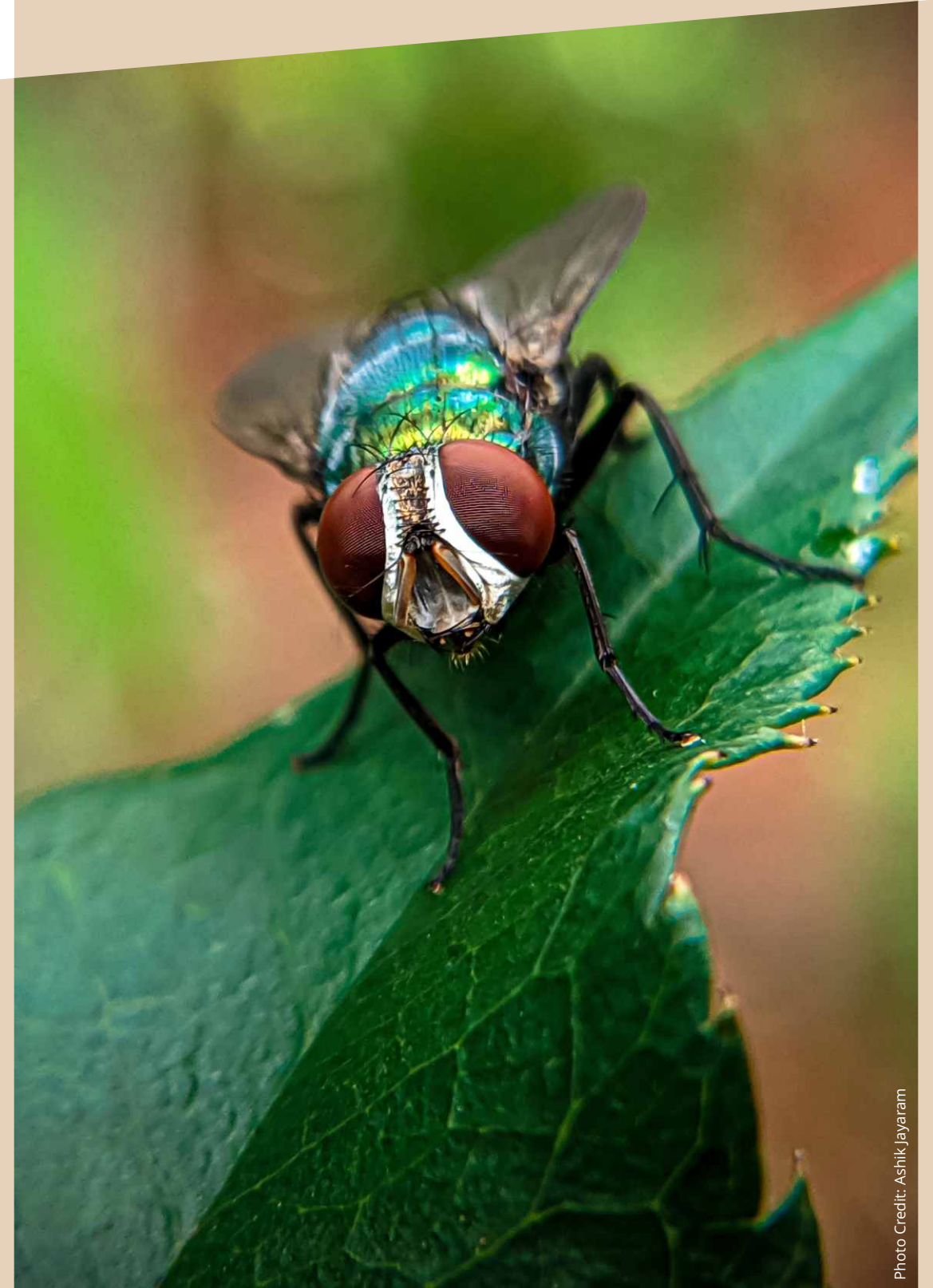
carbon footprint from the usage of plastic. Internally, there will be efforts to curb wastage arising from business operations.

The NGOs list, sustainable souvenir project, the plastic reduction project, along with internal changes to curb wastage, make up the carbon reduction program which aims to reduce the overall carbon footprints generated by the organisation.

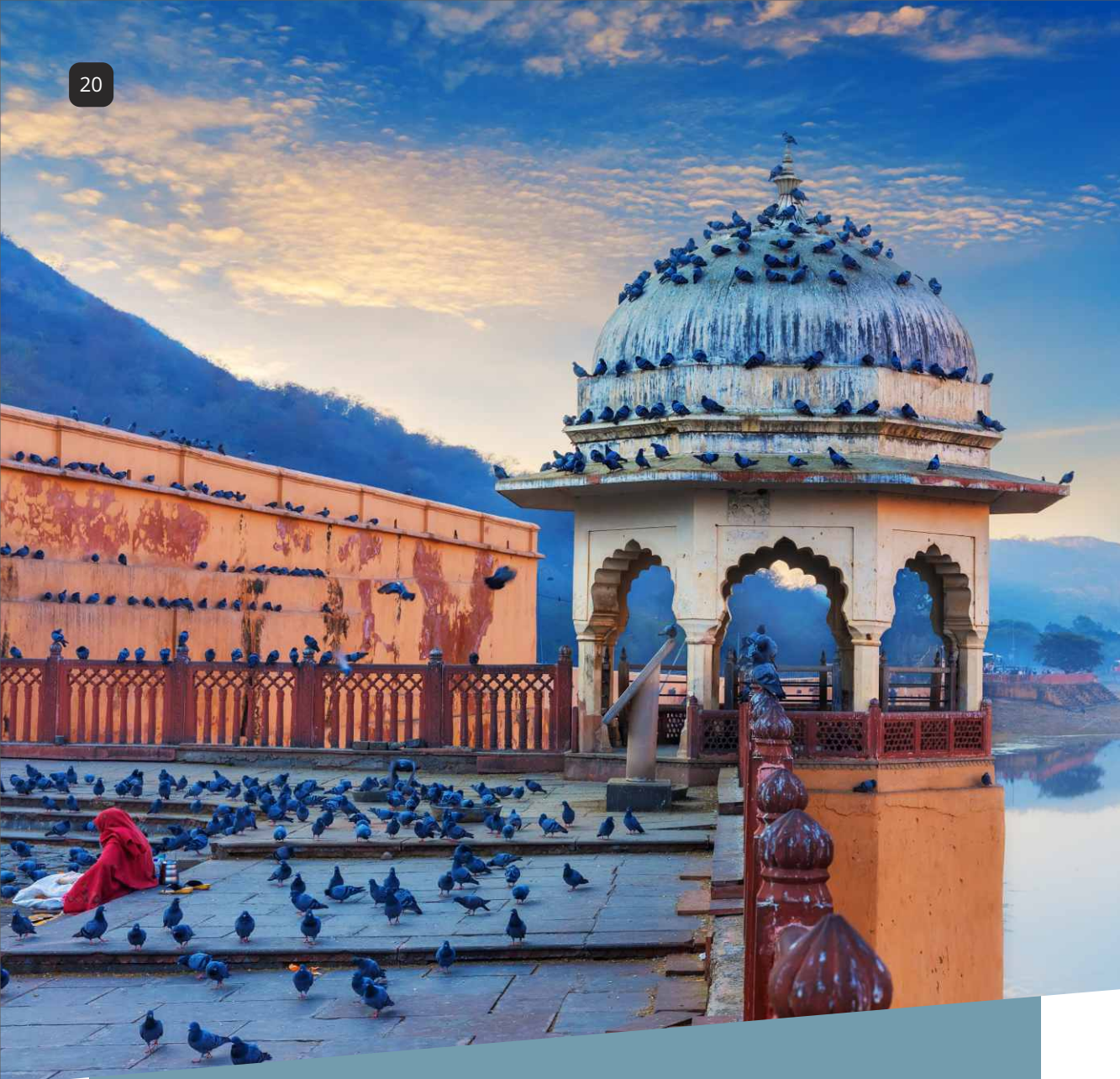
By signing the Glasgow Declaration, the organisation has further committed to align and unite with other stakeholders in transforming tourism to deliver effective climate action.

With all of these efforts, we hope to give our guests the best experiences of the Indian sub-continent with limited carbon footprints.

At present, we offer two sustainable itineraries and hope to add more soon.







## SUSTAINABLE INDIA

While big crowds and plenty of sightseeing attractions gave big cities of a destination their edge, it is likely that post-pandemic, travelers will become wary of crowded urban centers. They will instead seek out less crowded but vibrant second-tier towns/cities and areas with natural beauty which are not too far away from the main sights. These findings also dovetail with sustainable tourism where travelers can have transformative experiences while feeling rest assured that it doesn't come at the expense of damaging fragile ecosystems or threatening the livelihood of local communities.

### SUSTAINABLE RAJASTHAN



#### Sketch Itinerary

Day 01 : Arrive Delhi  
 Day 02 : In Delhi  
 Day 03 : In Delhi  
 Day 04 : Delhi to Agra  
 Day 05 : Agra to Jaipur  
 Day 06 : In Jaipur  
 Day 07 : Jaipur to Jodhpur  
 Day 08, 09, 10 : In Jodhpur

Day 11 : Jodhpur to Udaipur  
 Day 12 : In Udaipur  
 Day 13 : Udaipur to Delhi  
 Day 14 : Depart Delhi

#### What makes this itinerary Sustainable?

- It makes a positive impact on the environment, society, and local economy
- Guests will be using battery-operated, green fuel-run-vehicles and public transport throughout the itinerary to minimise their travel emissions.
- Guests will be working and interacting with women from the local community in a 4-day volunteering workshop in Jodhpur where they will be introduced to the local traditions of Rajasthan.
- Guests will get an opportunity to attend the RIFF Music Festival at Jodhpur which is a not-for-profit roots music festival endorsed by UNESCO as a "Peoples Platform for Creativity and Sustainable Development"

#### Tour highlights

- This itinerary is designed around one of the most popular tourist circuits in India – The Golden Triangle (Delhi, Agra, and



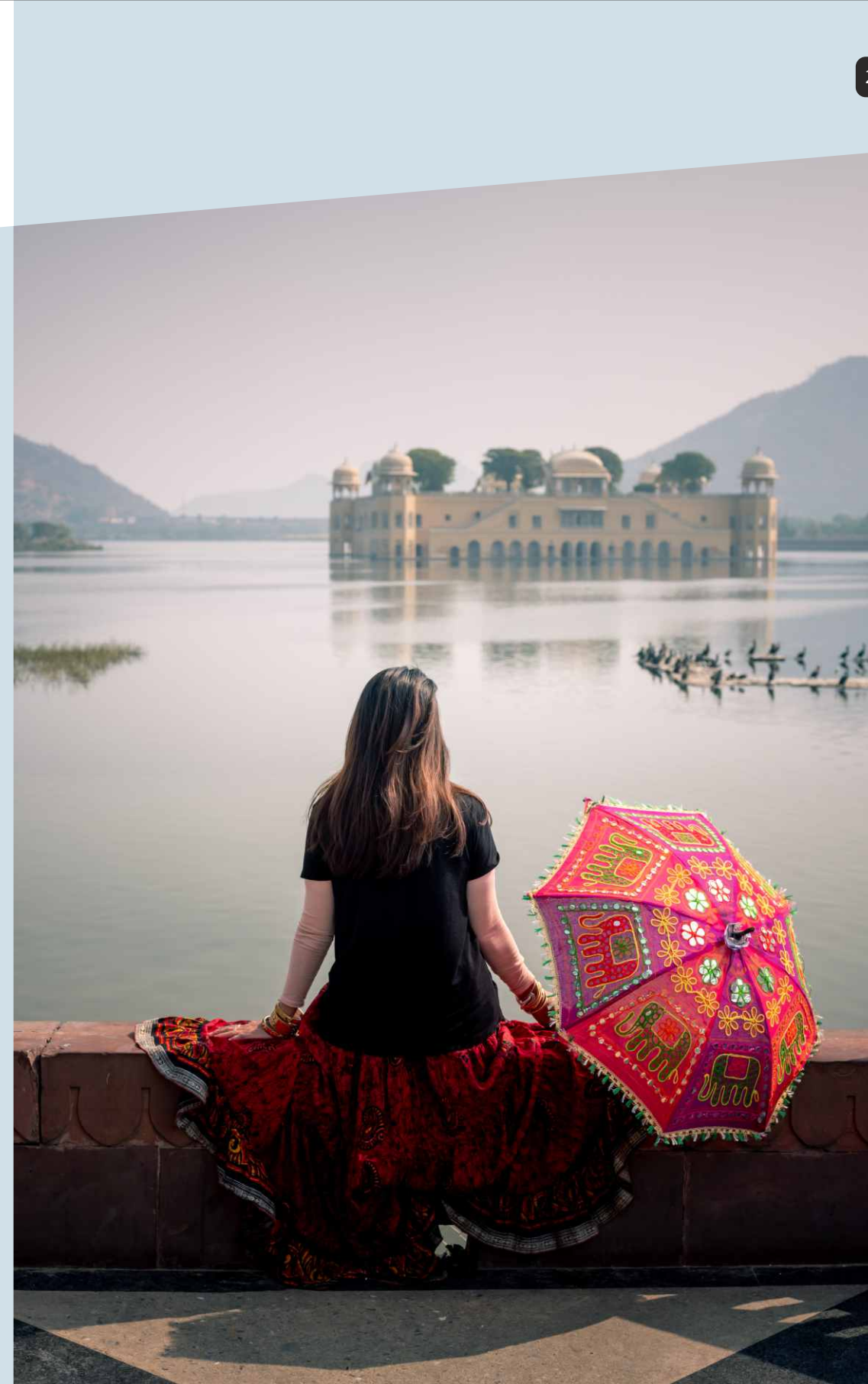


Jaipur) and a couple of the other main cities of Rajasthan (Jodhpur and Udaipur). It includes all the highlights in each city which will be covered using eco-friendly modes of travel such as bicycles, local transport, and leisurely walks.

- The itinerary includes a 4-Day volunteering workshop in Jodhpur with a local not-for-profit that focuses on women empowerment.
- A visit to the 16th-century heritage park complex in Delhi is included which has been re-developed by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture renowned for their sustainable projects worldwide.
- Guests get to interact with local

craftsmen practicing different forms of arts and crafts in Delhi, Jaipur, Jodhpur, and Udaipur. The itinerary also includes an attar (perfume) making workshop in Delhi and a hands-on block printing workshop in Jodhpur in an effort to promote traditional handmade crafts and give a boost to the local economy.

- Guests get to visit the villages belonging to the Bishnoi community on the outskirts of Jodhpur. Bishnois are considered to be India's original eco-warriors. They are staunch environmentalists and protect all animals and trees in their villages. The highly endangered Black Buck thrives in the Bishnoi villages.







## KERALA UNHURRIEDLY



### Sketch itinerary

Day 01 : Arrive Kochi.  
 Continue to Kumbhalangi  
 Day 02, 03 : In Kumbhalangi  
 Day 04 : Kumbhalangi to Neriamangalam  
 Day 05, 06 : In Neriamangalam  
 Day 07 : Neriamangalam to Kuttikkanam  
 Day 08, 09 : In Kuttikkanam  
 Day 10 : Kuttikkanam to Kottayam  
 Day 11, 12 : In Kottayam  
 Day 13 : Kottayam to Mararikulam  
 Day 14, 15, 16 : In Mararikulam  
 Day 17 : Mararikulam to Kochi for onward journey

### What makes this itinerary Sustainable?

Kerala Unhurriedly is based on the ethos of Slow Travel. During the tour, there is a conscious effort to offer slow, often non-

motorised forms of transport with the idea of reducing carbon footprints. The destinations have been chosen carefully keeping in mind the carrying capacity of the already more popular ones which are not too far away. The unhurried pace of the itinerary ensures a deeper cultural exchange, a more meaningful connection with the locals, and provides opportunities for guests to support local businesses and entrepreneurial ventures in newer destinations of Kerala. The intimate and eco-conscious accommodations hand-picked for this itinerary deliver a wholesome sustainable experience.

### Highlights of the tour

#### KUMBHALANGHI

##### Sherly's Ente Kumbhalangi (3 nights)

Sherly's Ente Kumbhalangi is located on a secluded backwater island. A single key property, Sherly's Ente Kumbhalangi has 6 airy and minimally furnished rooms that exude serenity making it an ideal place to recover after a long haul. Take a stroll in the vast gardens, laze around in the swimming pool or find a nook to read a book. Locally sourced ingredients are used to cook delightful meals.

#### NERIAMANGALAM

##### Windermere River House (3 nights)

Windermere River House is located by the Periyar River with 5 airy rooms looking over a lush garden and a rubber plantation. An





oasis of calm and solitude, this cosy property sits amidst a patch of evergreen forest. The restaurant follows the farm to fork concept where fresh produce is sourced from farmers directly. Spend the days here lazing by the pool, dining by the riverside, fishing, or enjoying a canoe ride on the river. One can also head out on cycles to explore the neighbourhood scattered with rubber plantations, tea shops, village schools, churches, and temples. On the day trip to Munnar (2 hrs one way) walk around in a tea garden and interact with an expert during a private tea tasting session. Visit the tea museum before returning to the Windermere River House.

#### KUTTIKANAM 1, Hill House (3 nights)

1, Hill House with 3 rooms is located on a 600-acre estate where tea, coffee, and spices are grown. Spend the days here exploring the tranquil surroundings of the property. A morning visit to the Silk Mountain to enjoy its scenic beauty or the Velankanni Matha Church made entirely out of granite in Gothic style is highly recommended. On the day trip to Thekkady (1 hr one way) learn from local farmers about the spices they grow, the local agrarian economy, enjoy a spectacular aerial view of Kumily, and end the tour with a cup of spice tea and homemade chocolates at a spice farmer's home before

returning to 1, Hill House for dinner with hosts Rani and Johnny. Johnny has an unusual hobby of collecting junk and he has very cleverly upcycled everything that he had collected on the property itself. Serving tables, for example, are discarded sewing machines fitted with hand-painted tiles by Ajulejo artists of Goa. The bar has a confession box among other things collected from a church while it was being pulled down to make way for a new construction.

#### KOTTAYAM Philipkutty's Farm (3 nights)

Philipkutty's Farm is a family-run working farm that grows a variety of fruits including bananas, vegetables, spices, and coconut using organic and sustainable methods. While at Philipkutty's Farm, there is much to do. One can go on a bird-watching trip to the Kumarakom Bird Sanctuary early morning, enjoy the magical sunset during a canoe ride on the canals, try the local tippie – toddy, watch a private Kathakali dance performance by local artists, and learn to cook with the host family. A day cruise on a rice barge in the backwaters is a must when here. One can also opt for a day trip to Kottayam (40 mins one way) famous for its historical churches and mosques. A visit to the pretty backwater village of Aymanem (15 minutes from Kottayam/40 minutes from Philipkutty's Farm), the backdrop of Arundhati Roy's award-winning novel "God of Small Things" is highly recommended during the day trip to Kottayam.

#### MARARIKULAM Marari Beach Resort (4 nights)

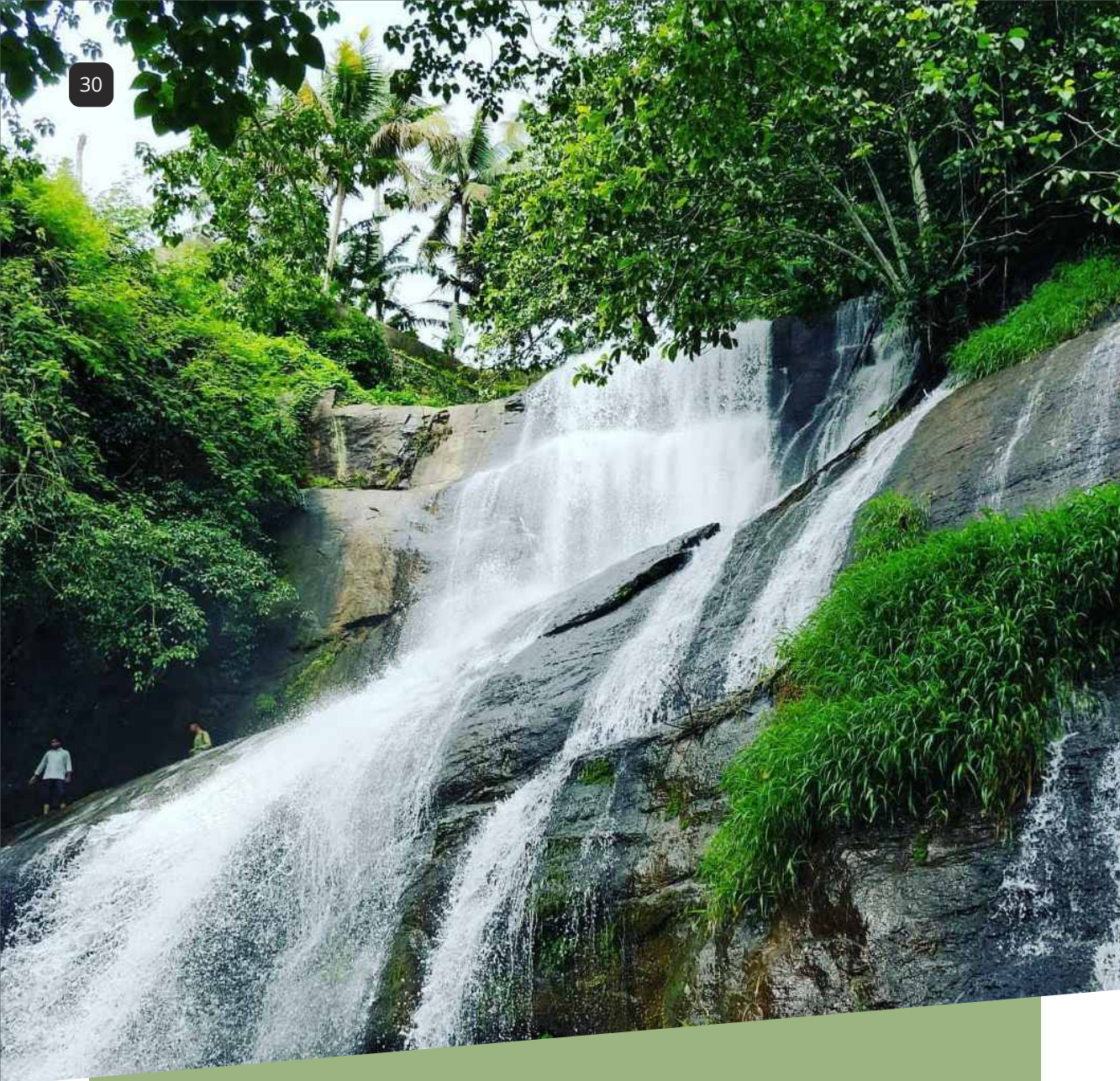
The Marari Beach Resort takes inspiration from the simple and gentle ways of the fishermen folk. Everything in the resort is made to blend in with the natural surroundings that echo simplicity, beauty, and harmony. From the humble thatched roofs of the cottages to the complex ecosystem created within the property that is native to this region, it is an experience that is culturally and naturally rich. While at the resort, swim in the sea, rise early for a walk on the beach and to see the local fishermen return from the sea with their catch, explore the neighbourhood of Mararikulam on cycles, or take an Ayurveda massage in the spa. Go on a day trip to Fort Kochi and Matancherry (1 hr one way) which is a wonderful mix of Dutch, Portuguese, British, and Jewish history and influences. A part of the journey can be done on a local train from Mararikulam (except on Mondays).



THROUGH THE EYES OF A LOCAL







## RAMAMANGALAM

By: Jestin Thomas James, Logistics and Operations, Cochin

I was born in the beautiful village of Ramamangalam which is located between Cochin and Munnar. The Muvattupuzha River flowing next door is the life and spirit of our village. Enormous natural beauty makes our village special and it has the potential of becoming an excellent tourist destination for FITs.

We live in total harmony in our village. Our village is blessed to have many churches and temples. Ramamangalam is also the birthplace of Sri Shadkala Govinda Maraar. He was one of Kerala's greatest classical singers who lived in the 19th century and received patronage from the Royal court of Travancore. Our village also has schools which offer training in classical arts.

Agriculture is the main source of income for us. Ramamangalam is famous for its vanilla cultivation and has been selected by the Spice Board of Kerala as a model village. In addition to vanilla, rubber, coconut, pepper, nutmeg, areca, and paddy are cultivated in our village.

### WHAT TO SEE

Visit the Ramamangalam Perumthrikkovil Temple

The historic Ramamangalam Perumthrikkovil Temple is a brilliant example of vernacular architecture. The temple comes alive during the Vishu Villaku

Festival in the month of April where everybody from the village participates.

### Visit the Knanaya Church

The majority of the population of Ramamangalam belongs to the Knanaya Christian community. There are two Knanaya churches in Ramamangalam. One is catholic and another one is Jacobite Church. May 13th and 14th are annual feast days where thousands of people from different parts of Kerala come and attend.

### Interact with a local Knanaya family

Interaction with this joint family can be a great insight into the history of the community, their culture, and their lifestyle. There is excellent home-cooked food and the opportunity to actively participate in the food preparation in the kitchen as a bonus.

We can use this as a homestay for up to 4 guests, which will be a really engaging local experience.

### Other activities on offer during a stay here:

- Paddy field visit
- Pappadam making
- Fishing
- Cycling through the village
- Market visit
- Visit to a Pineapple Farm
- Interaction with the local priest
- A Tuk-Tuk ride
- A boat ride
- Visit a one-of-its-kind Donkey farm





#### Visit the Donkey farm of Aby Baby

Aby Baby is the owner of the one-of-its-kind donkey farm in our village. He was the first person in Ramamangalam to introduce us to the benefits of donkey's milk. Aby Baby manufactures cosmetics made out of donkey's milk and exports them worldwide from our village. He has around 30 Donkeys of different breeds on his farm. Aby Baby is happy to share his story with visitors to his farm.

#### The Muvattupuzha River

Swimming in the Muvattupuzha River which flows next door can be great fun. It is absolutely safe and it has been an integral part of everyone's life in our village. Fishing activities can also be organised along with a boat ride on the river.

#### Visit Areekkal waterfall

The Areekkal waterfall is another attraction that is 6 km away from Ramamangalam.

Visitors to Ramamangalam can visit this waterfall and have an alfresco bath here.

#### WHERE TO STAY

##### Jhula - River view Villa

Apart from the homestay of the local Knanaya family (4 guests), a boutique river view villa is also available in Ramamangalam which can accommodate 2 guests. Direct access to the river is the highlight of this villa. The host lives nearby and serves home-cooked food.

Accessibility to Ramamangalam

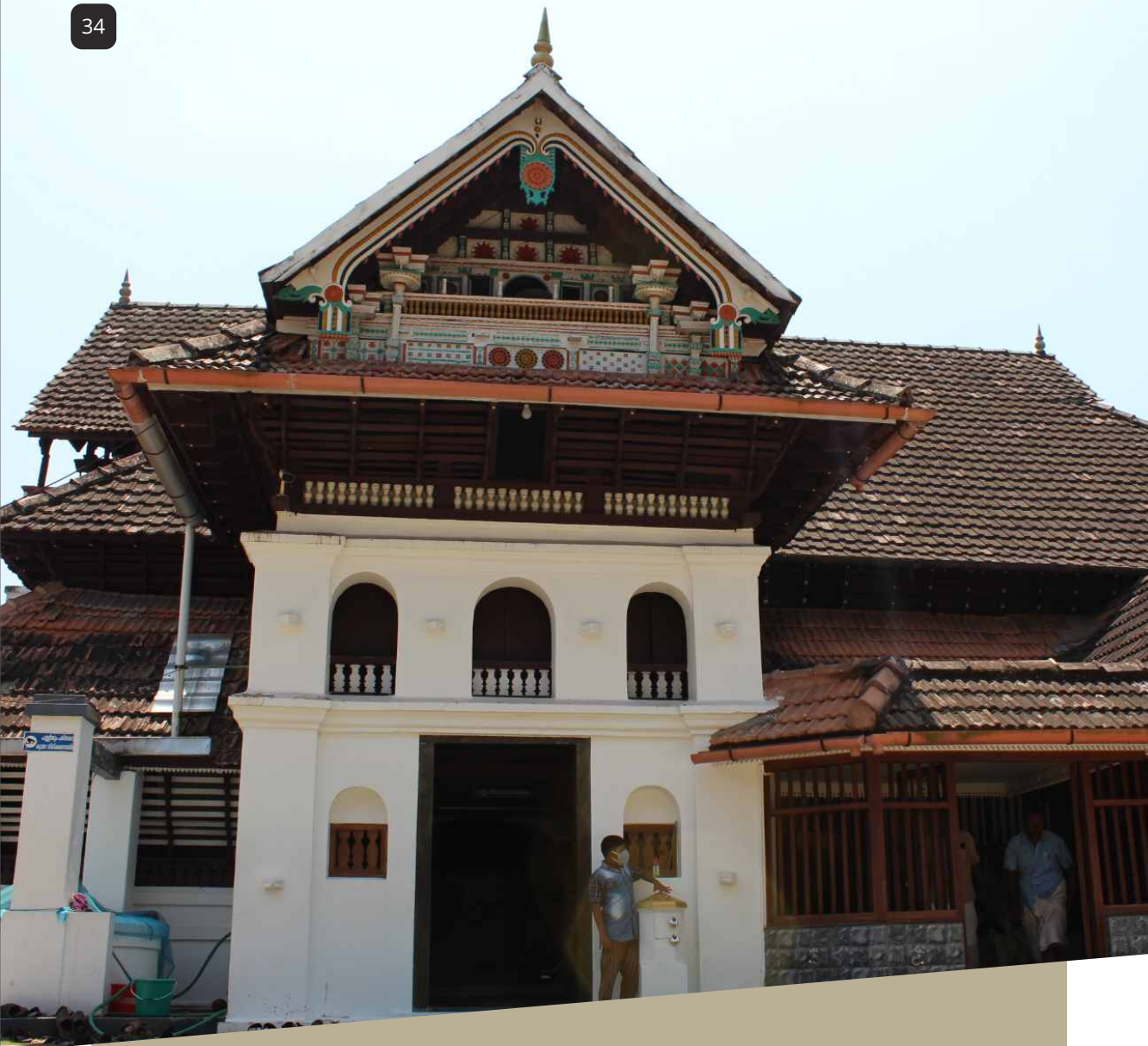
#### PLACE

Cochin International Airport  
Distance: 34 km

Fort Cochin  
Distance: 35 km







ENTE KOTTAYAM (MY KOTTAYAM)

By Avinash Kumar Prasanna, Logistics and Operations, Gurgaon

It gives me immense pleasure to write about my hometown of Kottayam which is also known as the "City of Letters". It is flanked by the Western Ghats, lakes, and boundless rice fields making it one of the prettiest destinations in Kerala. Kottayam has played an important role in the establishment and evolution of Christianity in South India. Moreover, most of India's natural rubber originates from the acres and acres of rubber plantations in Kottayam.

Why Kottayam is known as the "City of Letters"?

Kottayam is the first town in India to have achieved cent percent literacy. Ever since Rev. Benjamin Baily set up Kerala's first printing press (the Kottayam CMS press) in 1821, Kottayam has been at the forefront of the publishing industry. The first and only cooperative society of writers, authors, and publishers was set up here in 1945. One can browse through the journals at this well-kept press in Kottayam. Established in 1817, the CMS College of Kottayam was India's first Western-style college. As the college's first principal, Benjamin Bailey laid the foundation for modern secular education in Kerala. The 10th President of India, Dr. K.R. Narayanan, is a notable alumnus of this college.

## MY PERSONAL FAVOURITES

### Thazhathangadi Jama Masjid

Once a thriving trade centre of Kerala, the peaceful town of Thazhathangadi boasts elaborate houses of early pepper merchants made largely with wood exhibiting the architectural peculiarities of the time. The Thazhathangadi Jama Masjid is a stunning double-story traditional edifice in this town with intricate wooden carvings and unusual architecture. The mosque is said to be over 1000 years old.

### St. Mary's Knanaya Church

Christianity has a huge influence on Kottayam's culture. Tradition has it that Christianity came to Kerala with Saint Thomas, at the same time it went to Europe and that the first converts of Kerala who aligned themselves with the Syrian patriarch were high caste Hindu Brahmins. Built-in 1550 CE, the Velliya Palli or the Big Church is the oldest church in Kottayam. Very interestingly, the granite crosses here bear inscriptions in the Pahlavi language, once the official language of the Sassanian dynasty of Persia.

### St. Mary's Orthodox Church

Also known as the Cheria Palli or the small church, it is the second church to come up in Kottayam town. The church is a blend of Kerala, Baroque, and Portuguese-style architecture. It is also renowned for its remarkable mural art.





#### The Thaliyil Mahadeva

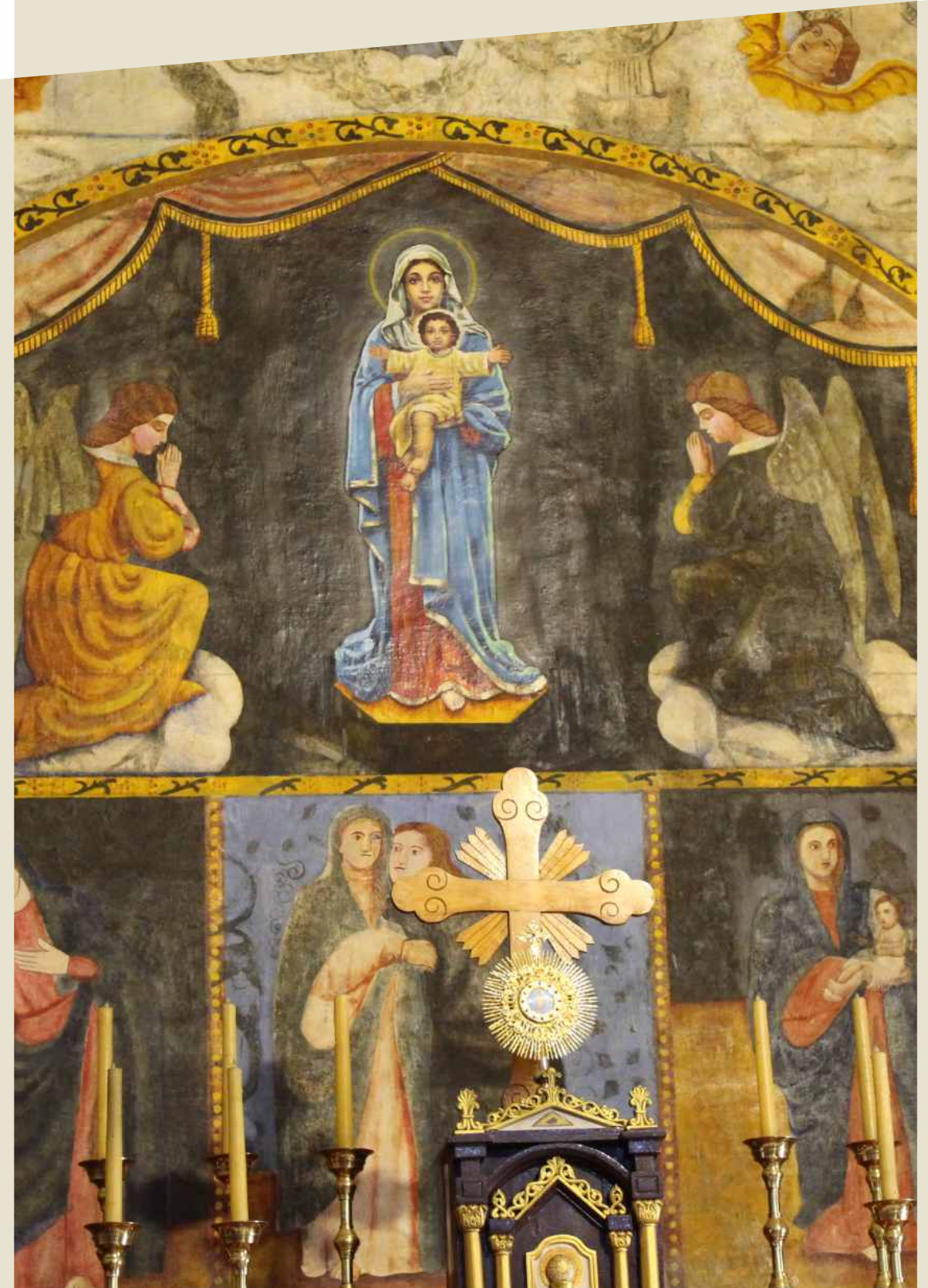
Situated in the Old Fort area at the Thaliyil hills, the Thaliyil Mahadeva temple is famous for its stunning mural paintings. It is believed that a pond outside the temple once had a secret tunnel, however, sealed now, which was connected to all four directions of the Thaliyil hills.

#### Thirunakkara Mahadeva Temple

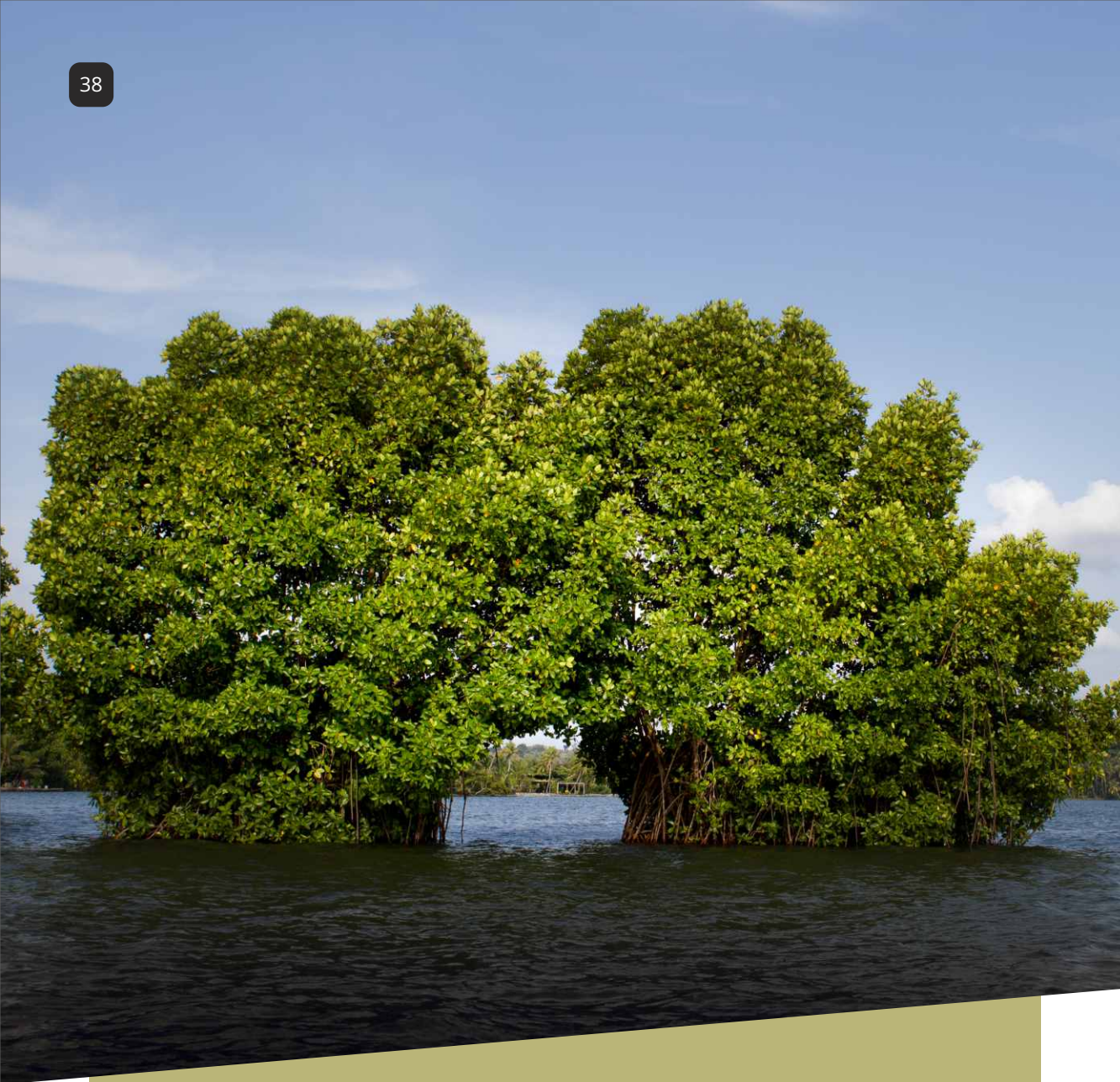
Believed to be nearly 500 years old, the highlight of this shrine is the low-roofed stage which hosts various performances. It also houses a number of unique sculptures

and murals of various Hindu deities. The Thirunakkara Arattu Festival is celebrated here in the month of March-April. A major attraction of this festival is the all-night Kathakali dance performance.

Kottayam is well connected to all the popular destinations in Kerala. It is located 02 ½ hours from Cochin airport and is easily accessible from Alleppey and Thekkady. An excursion to Kottayam while staying in Kumarakom is also possible. The best time to visit Kottayam is between October and March.







## THE ENCHANTING MUNROE ISLAND

By Naufal A, Operations and Logistics,  
Thiruvanthapuram

Munroe Island is situated a mere 10 kilometers away from my home. Though it is not as popular as the other backwater islands of Kerala, I love Munroe Island for the rustic, raw and simple experiences it offers. A group of 8 islets separated by meandering canals and serene lakes, this island was named after Colonel John Munroe, Dewan (Prime Minister) of the erstwhile princely state of Travancore. He played a pivotal role in setting up the first judicial system and implementing reforms that helped the Travancore state to prosper. Previously, the island was connected only by waterways but now it is accessible by rail and road.

Nestled at the confluence of two stunning waterbodies, the Ashtamudi Lake and Kallada River, Munroe Island is best explored on canoes. With most of the canals being shallow, canoe rides are the most preferred way to get around the island. The tall trees on the banks make a great canopy over the canals making the ride very scenic and enjoyable! Be prepared to duck once in a while as you come across low bridges that connect the various islands.

A canoe ride on Monroe Island also provides an intimate experience of the local life. The warm and welcoming people of the island are dependent on agriculture, aquaculture, coconut farming, and fishing

for their livelihood. A majority of the women from each household are either involved in livestock farming or manning the chayakadas.

A great way to interact with the locals is to make a stop at a chayakada – a local tea stall - where people meet every morning to indulge in a cup of sweet tea and debate about the headlines in the newspaper. While at a chayakada, one can try some of the local savouries such as the jaggery-coated banana chips, steamed rice flour stuffed with grated coconut, and the mildly spicy poppadoms with a refreshing cup of tea.

Whilst a canoe ride in the morning lets you witness children getting ready for the day, women haggling with the fish vendors who also conduct business in their canoes, and tree climbers in their very short lungi (sarong) ready to bring down the coconut and de-husk it for further use, evenings can be spent at the mangroves that dot the island. Considered to be one of the most instagrammable spots here, admiring the myriad hues that color the sky at sunset from the canopy of the mangroves is a surreal experience that must not be missed.

Apart from the natural and cultural vistas, the Dutch church is one of the few monuments on the island that is worth a visit. A confluence of Dutch-Kerala architecture, this red-brick church is considered to be one of the oldest in Kerala.

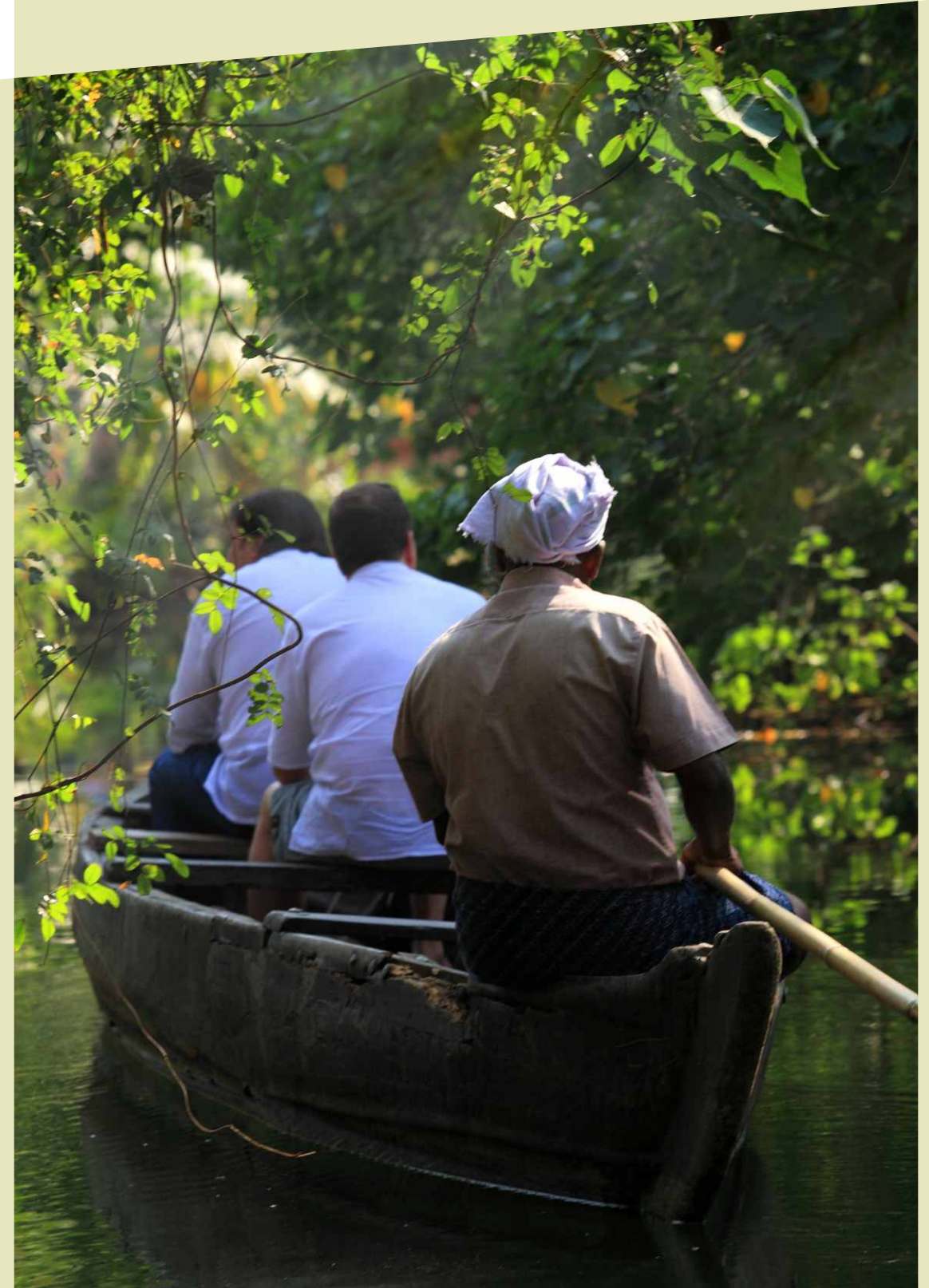




The structure of the church is still intact, however, no regular services are held. One of the most spectacular sights to witness on the island is the Kallada Boat Race held during the Onam festival which falls sometime during August or September.

The Monroe Island is a tranquil oasis which can be included as a day excursion from Kollam (50 minutes one way). There are local trains that run between Kollam

Junction and Munroe Island which can be opted to add some variety to the experience. Munroe Island can also be visited from the famous beachside town of Kovalam which is located two and a half hours away (one way). For those who ask if there is accommodation at Munroe Island, there are a few homestays and resorts which can be proposed. However, a day excursion is more than enough to revel in the splendour of this quaint island.



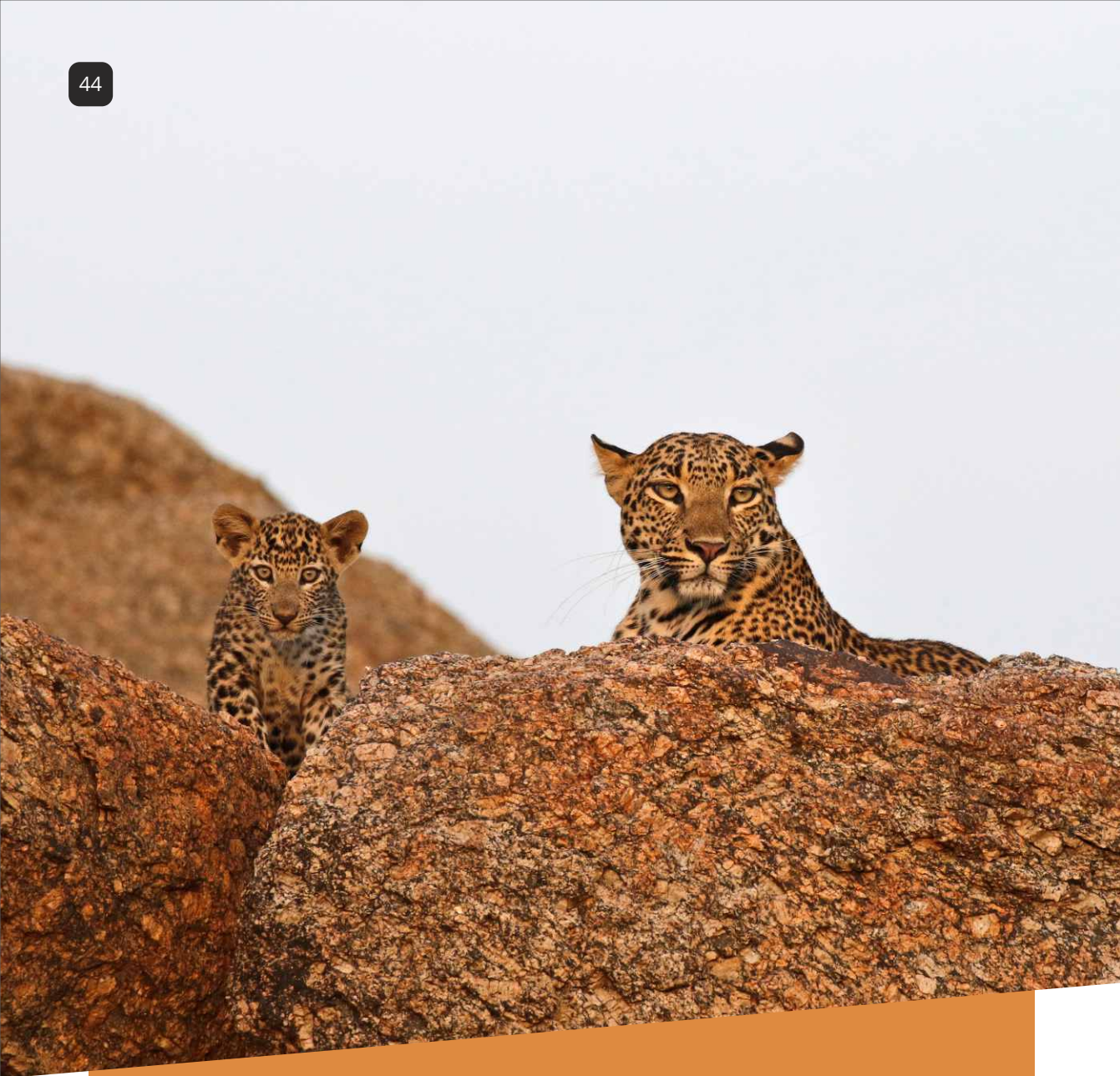


## DKC LECTURE SERIES

The Video Lecture Series of the Destination Knowledge Centre (DKC) was created with the idea of making travel more engaging through unique storytelling. Narrated by experts who are friends of the DKC, these visual guides offer unique perspectives of destinations across India.







## BIG CAT SAFARI



Yusuf Ahmad Ansari, Vice President and Director of Experiences, SUJÁN talks about Destination Jawai, the leopard county of Rajasthan where man and beast live in harmony



Jawai for Leopards



Leopards as Formidable Predators



Safaris in Jawai

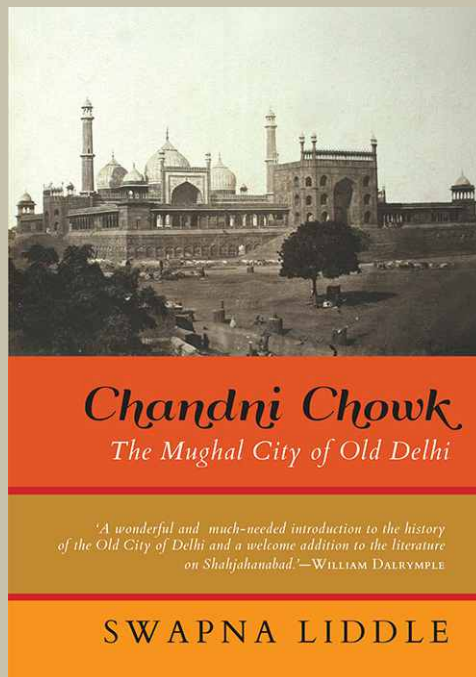


## BOOKS AND FILMS WE LOVED



## Chandni Chowk: The Mughal City of Old Delhi by Swapna Liddle

By Soma Paul,  
Destination Knowledge Centre



Chandni Chowk in Old Delhi now is a no-vehicle zone! The paved promenade, made of red sandstone with green patches, which runs from Shri Digambar Jain Temple to Fatehpur Masjid has given this nearly 400-year-old market a new face. People can now meander on foot without having to worry about the honking cars and the auto-rickshaws. Swapna Liddle, a historian and author of the book 'Chandni Chowk - The Mughal City of Old Delhi' praised the move as a significant step forward.

Chandni Chowk – The Mughal City of Old Delhi describes one of the world's finest medieval cities covering a time span of over three centuries. Delhi has been built, destroyed and rebuilt several times and has always held a prime position. Chandni Chowk, also known as the Moonlight Square, was part of the seventh city of Delhi established by the Mughal Emperor Shahjahan in the seventeenth century and designed by his eldest and favourite daughter Jahanara. Emperor Shahjahan chose Delhi as the seat of authority and established a new city within the city for three reasons: to visit the shrine of Nizamuddin Auliya, to visit Humayun's tomb, and to hunt in the Palam forest. The Mughal Empire was at its peak when Shahjahanabad, named after the emperor himself, was founded, as seen by the magnificence of the monuments, havelis, and markets created during that time. The book tells the tale of how the city came to be and how it influenced North Indian language and culture. It also addresses numerous questions regarding the city and its people, as well as its various tribulations, including Nadir Shah's invasion, the Revolt of 1857, the rise of British Raj, and the present state of Shahjahanabad.

Despite becoming a part of the sprawling metropolis of Delhi, the city's oldest trading centre remains a bustling place with the romantic narrow alleys lined with establishments dating back to the Mughal era including Dariba Kalan's fine jewellery, Kinari Bazaar's colourful laces, Khari Baoli's

wholesale spice market, Karim's mouth-watering kebabs, and much more. Though the lifestyles of the people who live there have changed over the years, Shahjahanabad is still a thriving part of Delhi. Many Urdu poets dedicated their works to the city they had to leave behind. Mir Taqi Mir, a prominent Urdu poet who used to live in Old Delhi's Kuchha Chelan, expressed his grief over the plundering of his beloved Delhi through these poignant words:

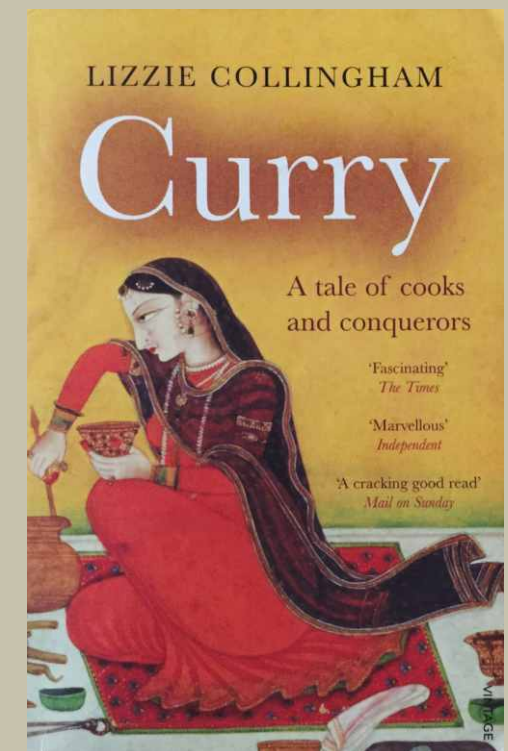
Why do you mock me and ask yourselves  
Where in the world do I come from,  
easterners? There was a city, famed  
throughout the world, Where dwelled the  
chosen spirits of the age; Delhi its name,  
fairest among the fair. Fate looted it and laid  
it desolate, And to that ravaged city I belong.

Swapna Liddle's book draws on a wide range of sources; including Mughal court chroniclers' reports, travellers' memoirs, poetry, newspapers, and government documents, to paint a vibrant and dynamic portrait of the city from its inception to the present day. Her passion for Delhi, and especially Shahjahanabad, drove her to create this meticulously researched textural and cultural portrayal of the city's historic precincts. The book contains several anecdotes, phrases, and poetry from the Mughal city of Shahjahanabad, which serve as a portal to understanding our own becoming, as well as the becoming of our past, culture, et al.

Essential reading for those in search of the glories and ignominious past of Shahjahanabad, the book can be purchased online with a kindle edition being available on Amazon

Curry – A tale of cooks and conquerors by Lizzie Collingham

By Madhubanti Rakshit,



One of the most exciting experiences of a place is tasting its food. Nothing speaks more about the culture, history, and people of a destination than the delicacies it has to offer. With its varied topography, hundreds



of cultures mingling for centuries, and penchant for spices, Indian food is something that defies definition. It is impossible to narrow it down to a single type of cuisine and many have tried and failed to decode the delicious code of Indian "curries".

Recently, I read *Curry – A tale of cooks and conquerors* by Lizzie Collingham which is an imaginative book about the history of the country and its different rulers through their food. This 318-page history lesson is sure to get you hungry, so make sure you read it with a full stomach. It follows the story of the famous Indian curry from the royal courts of India to the balti houses of Birmingham.

The "curry" is the product of India's long history of invasion and settlement by foreign powers. In the wake of the Mughal emperors came an army of cooks who brought with them Persian recipes to North India. In the south, the Portuguese spice merchants introduced vinegar marinades and chillies that they had recently discovered in the Americas.

The British too came to the sub-continent with their love for good roasted meat. They also brought with them beans and cauliflowers. The results of this melting pot of new and native ingredients are the distinctive "Indian" dishes that you cannot find anywhere else.

The book tells us the story of an array of familiar ingredients and Indian delicacies

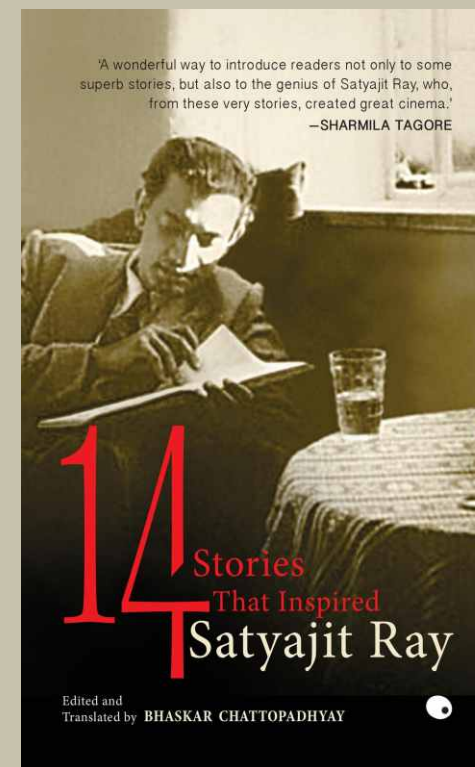
and the people who discovered, invented, cooked, and ate them. Collingham's "Curry" is as diverse in its anecdotes and character as Indian cuisine itself. I loved the photos at the end that give you a visual perspective of the dishes and especially loved the working recipes given at the end of each chapter that are used by the author herself. There are also some historical recipes that are a great way to understand what the dishes used to be like earlier. While some of the dishes can still be cooked today, there are some that are best left to posterity – especially ones such as the roasted rats.

Curry makes for a wonderful read for anyone with an interest in either the culinary arts or history. It weaves its way through India's flavourful past and brings with it the fragrance from her kitchens. The author's own encounter with Indian food and great research makes her writing personal and deeply insightful.

While I am not much of a food connoisseur myself, the book made me want to try many dishes because of their amazing history and a fear of the recipes getting lost.

14 Stories That Inspired Satyajit Ray Edited and translated by Bhaskar Chattopadhyay

By Kuntal Baruwa,  
Destination Knowledge Centre



Satyajit Ray, for me, is one of the greatest film directors of all time. The sheer joy of watching a Satyajit Ray film is not in the camera angles or the performances of the actors but in the stories he told through celluloid. The variety and range of his stories are so mindboggling that if you have watched one of his films, you can never say you have seen them all.

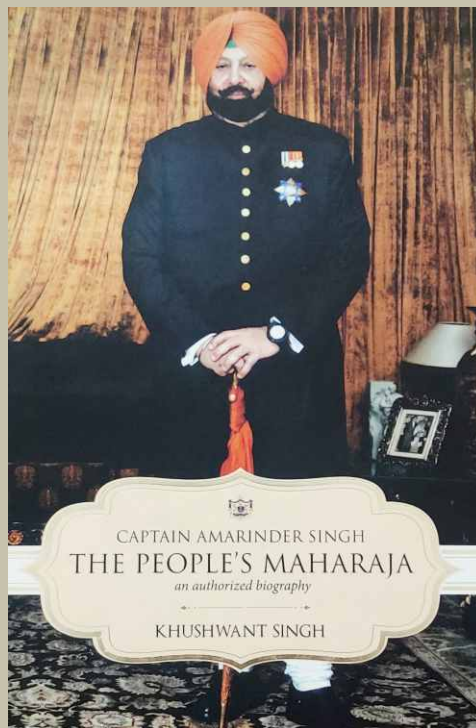
"14 Stories That Inspired Satyajit Ray" is a beautiful collection of short stories the master filmmaker had transformed into films that went on to become classics we all love and admire. Sample this: A rich zamindar has a dream that his daughter-in-law is an incarnation of Kali; a clerk's life turns upside down when he stumbles upon a magical stone that can turn any base metal into gold; a housewife steps out of her lower-middle-class household into the big city to work as a salesgirl, and is awestruck by its labyrinthine ways; blessed with three magical boons from the king of ghosts, Goopy and Bagha fight the evil plans of the king of Halla and save the kingdom of Shundi; a group of friends runs into a self-proclaimed ageless sage who claims to have been friends with Plato, Jesus, and Buddha.

"14 Stories That Inspired Satyajit Ray" makes for a very interesting read because it delves into the mind of the master filmmaker and his sheer genius in depicting these vivid stories and characters on screen. *Shatranj Ke Khiladi* (1977) is one such film of Satyajit Ray. It is based on a short story written by the Hindi literary giant Munshi Premchand and was only seven pages long. Ray made a political satire about how the noblemen of Lucknow remained engrossed with the game of chess. In the finale, the British army advances to take over the throne from Nawab Wajid Ali Shah, while the noblemen sit oblivious, contemplating how to checkmate each other.



Captain Amarinder Singh: The People's Maharaja, An Authorized Biography By Khushwant Singh

By Inderjeet Rathod,  
Destination Knowledge Centre



This book is about the life story of Captain Amarinder Singh, the current Maharaja of the erstwhile Princely State of Patiala, highlighting various roles he has played till now – of a Maharaja, an Army officer, and as one of the prominent politicians in the state of Punjab.

Beginning with a historical background of

how the Patiala kingdom came to be established and ruled over the centuries, the author moves on to describe the early years of Amarinder Singh (a scion of that kingdom). Born as the third child to Maharaja Yadvindra Singh, Amarinder's birth was a momentous occasion for the family since the crucial issue of a male heir to the throne had been resolved. Young Amarinder who was otherwise the shyest and most reserved of all the four siblings did not mind at all the attention bestowed upon him as the Yuvraj (crown prince). Adapting to the changing times, he was sent to some of the reputed boarding schools of India to get modern education. Starting with a short stint at the Loreto Convent Shimla and the Lawrence School Sanawar, a major part of his schooling was done at the Doon School Dehradun. When he was 16 years old, Amarinder appeared for the entrance exam to the National Defence Academy (NDA) and cleared it comfortably, paving the way to his stint in the Army.

The author mentions that his days at the NDA were marked by rigorous academic and physical training. Sometimes due to Amarinder's privileged background, he was singled out for far more extensive training than other cadets. All said and done NDA chiselled the young lad into a fine soldier befitting the uniform. After doing another course at Indian Military Academy (IMA) in 1963 he was commissioned into the Indian Army's 2nd Battalion of the Sikh Regiment – a battalion in which his father and grandfather had served with distinction

before him. Officer Amarinder Singh got exposed to a full-scale war at a very early stage in his career when the Indo-Pak war broke out in August – September 1965. Discharging his duties as an ADC to the topmost army commander, Lieutenant General Harbakhsh Singh, Amarinder got a ringside view of the Indo-Pak War. After having proven himself indispensable, Captain Amarinder Singh left the army for good in 1968 to take charge of his family and state affairs at Patiala.

The period thereafter, which initially began with Amarinder canvassing for his parents' political careers, eventually, led him to enter the political arena himself. From here onwards, he focused on the highly volatile arena of Punjab politics fighting numerous political and electoral battles. The manoeuvres of the politicians and others, including religious leaders, in trying to ensure their dominance over others have been described objectively by the author. The pages reveal behind-the-scenes intrigues, plots, and counter-plots even as Punjab was in the tightest grip of terrorism in the late twentieth century. The book also describes the unfortunate event, Operation Blue Star (June 1984), and the consequences on the politics of the state of Punjab. Besides tracing the political career graph of Captain Amarinder Singh, who reached his pinnacle when he became the chief minister of Punjab for the first time in February 2002, the author provides useful insights into crucial events that have had an impact on the state of Punjab and the

neighbouring areas over the past decades. The book also elaborates on Amarinder Singh's five-year tenure as chief minister (marked by both positive and negative events) and the following period, when his rival Prakash Singh Badal regained that post. The book is rounded off with an update on the political situation in Punjab when all the political parties in the state were gearing up for the assembly elections to be held in 2017.

I would recommend this book to anyone who is curious to know how a 'Maharaja' transformed into a people's man and a seasoned politician!



## WORKATION STORY



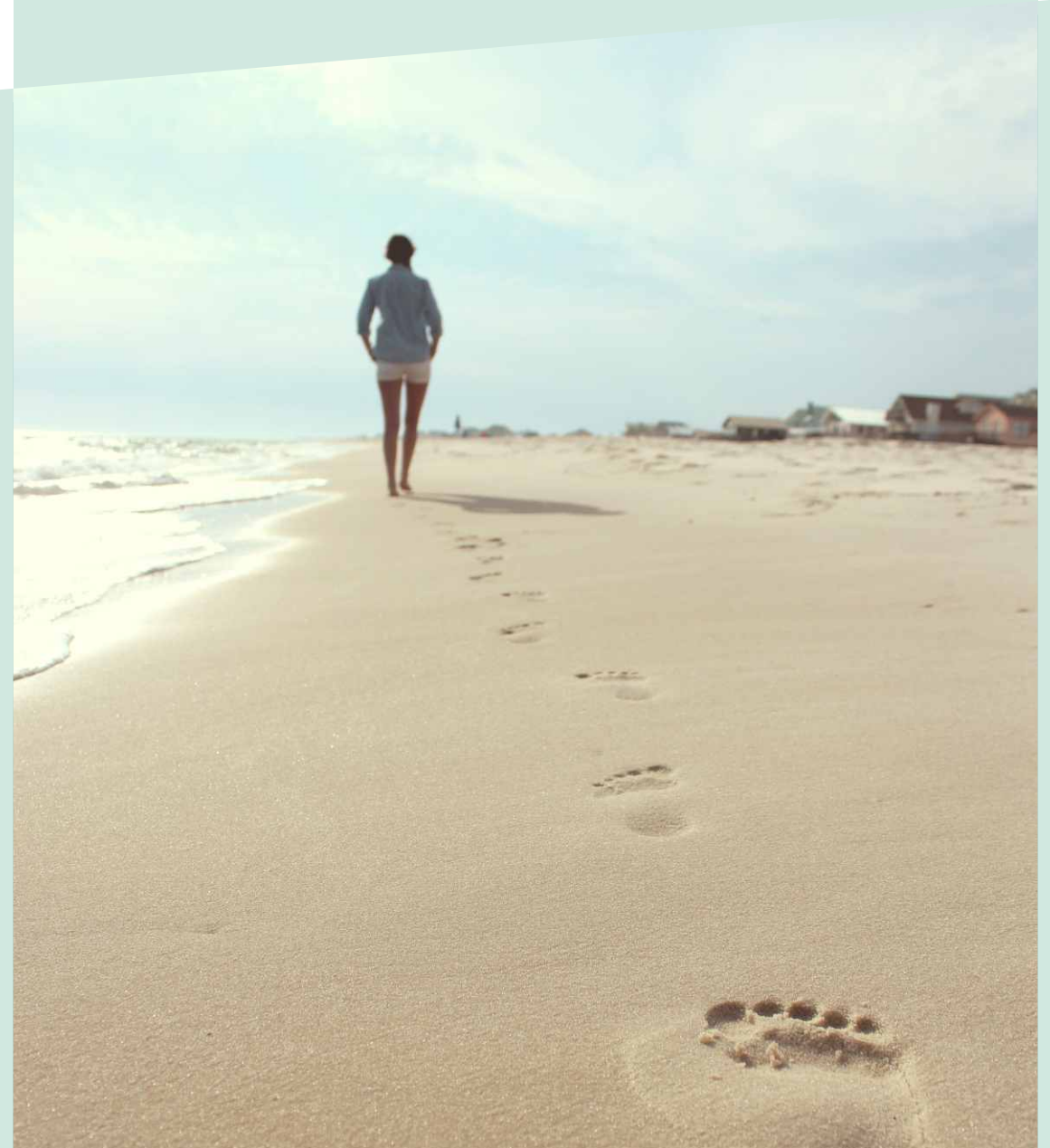




## WORKATION

Imagine having a workstation with a view of the great Himalayas or the golden sunsets on sandy beaches or being in the midst of nature's symphony in a National Park. Fulfil your holiday cravings while ensuring a

smooth Wi-Fi connection to keep you on top of your work. Spend a week or more at one destination or combine it with other easily accessible destinations for a seamless balance between your work and vacation.







## NOTES TO MYSELF



By Elisabeth Roussel, Concierge, Gurgaon

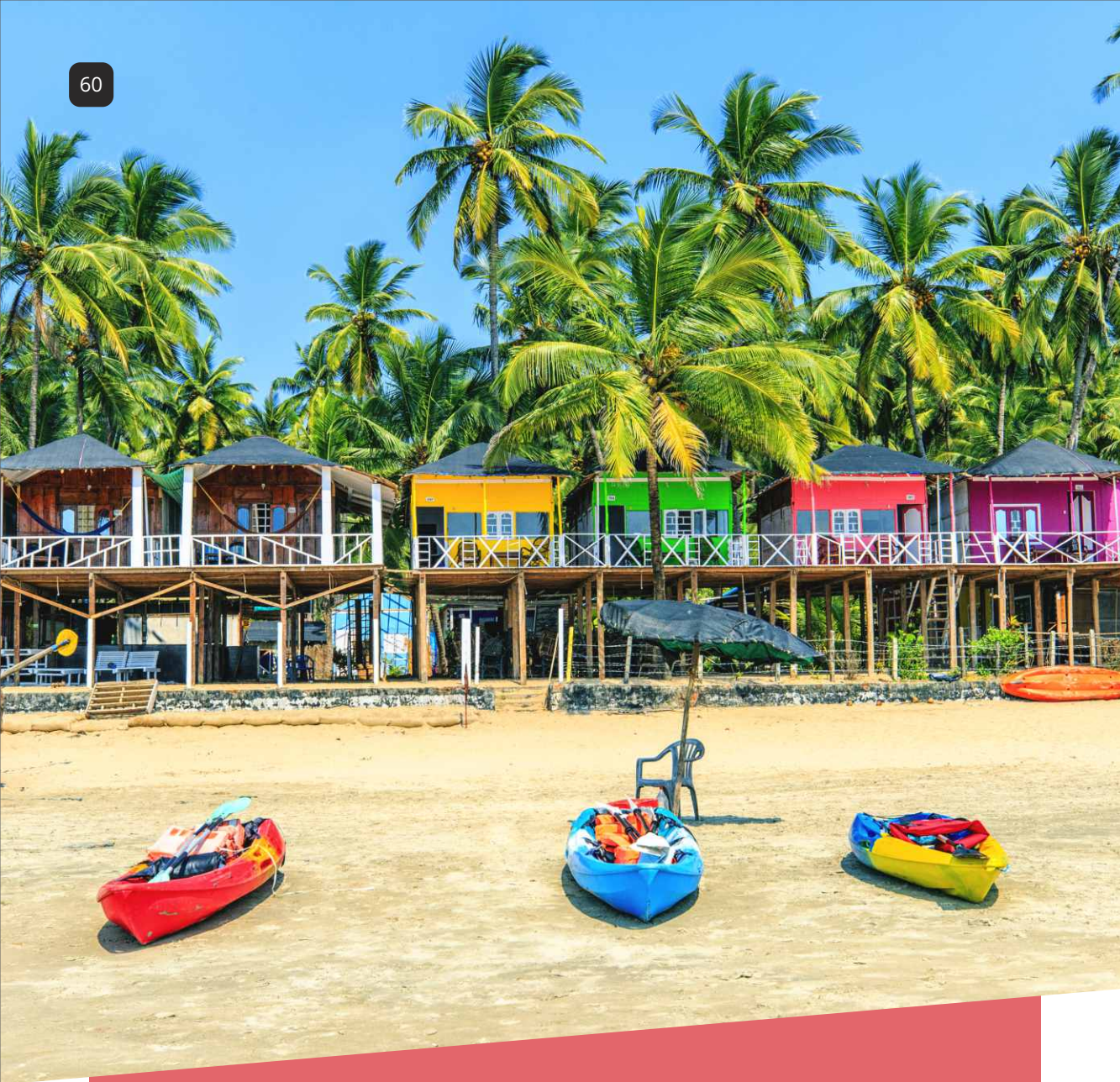
The Connected Nomad! Not just a concept. My reality during the pandemic. Working from home has always been a pleasure but working 'on site' is even better. The experience 'on the go' is enriching and embedded deeply in the passion zone!

October 2021. Hampi and Goa. 3 weeks at my workation, 2000 Kms from home. A comfortable and reasonably priced guest house at Palolem, with a perfect internet connection. Early morning and late evening walks looking into the Arabian Sea are never too long. Pristine beaches, calm fisher folk, unhurried swims and a healthy home

cooked diet allowed me to take a back seat and look at the 55 years of my life spent between France and India. Gratitude to Life!

Historical Hampi is my jewel in the South. A trip there is never short of surprises. Temples, palaces, monkeys, nature, and of course the people. Be they the welcoming locals or the curious travellers from all over India. Everyone has a story and a vision of Life. Questions without answers, silences within, exchanging smiles, acknowledging nods with kids, young ladies, the fawning mothers and the wrinkled faces of time. The rendezvous is with destiny on a 'workation' in Mother India.





IN LOVE WITH GOA ALL OVER AGAIN!



By Ichcha Dhupia, General Manager – Leisure, Gurgaon

In its wake, the pandemic made work from home, a way of life and led to Workcations. Being a beach lover, mine had to be near the sea. So, I headed to Goa, initially for a month.

Living in the lap of nature, with a splash of city life thrown in, through its bars and cafes, I fell hopelessly in love with Goa all over again. The lockdowns kept getting extended and I ended up renting a house there.

Swimming in the ocean was a given till the monsoon came. Then I was drawn to the quarries – the abandoned ones. These fill up with monsoon water from July to September. This opened up a new facet of Goa for me.

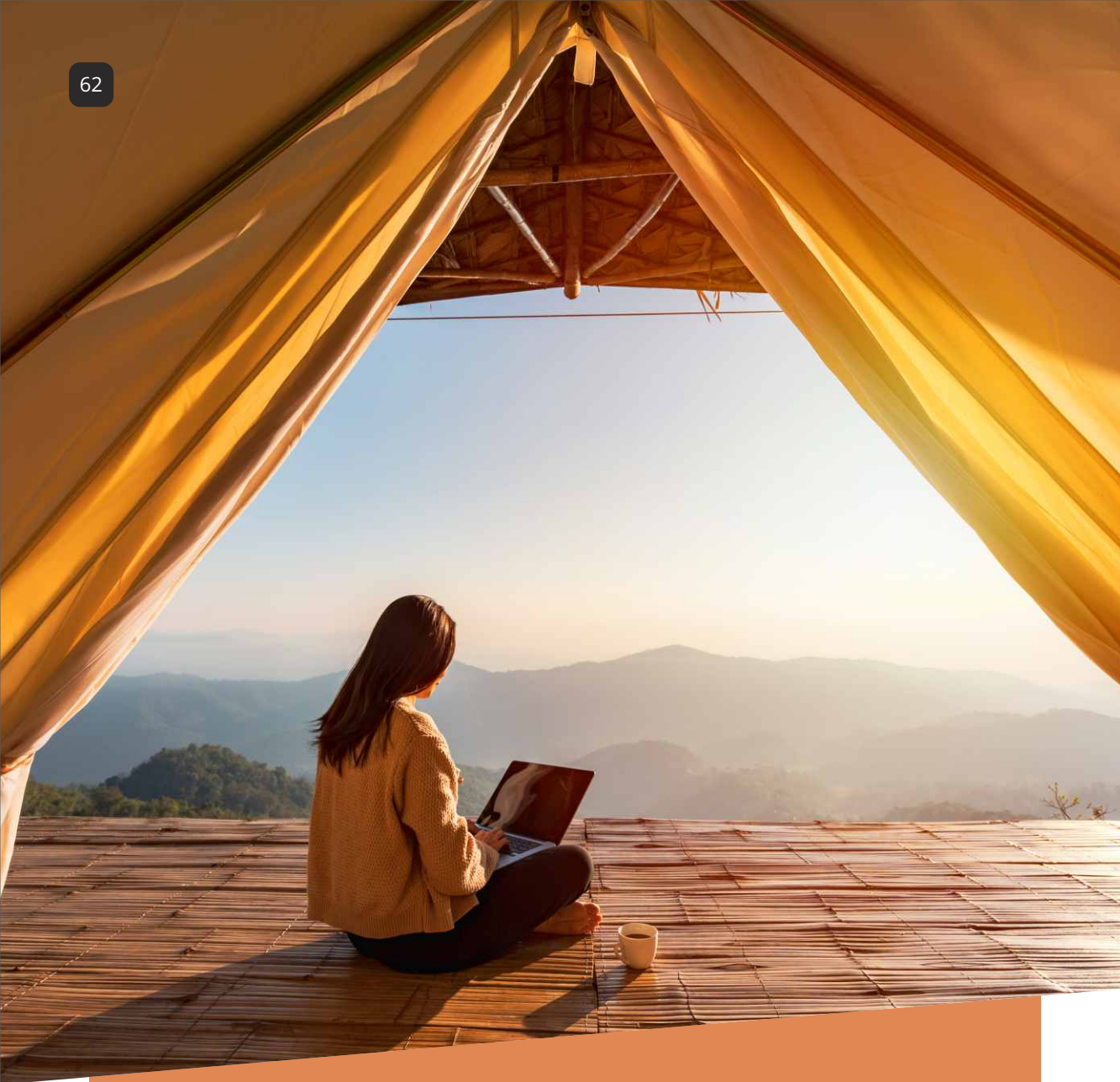
I continued exploring and started enjoying every adventure, climb, or trek through the woods. The most exciting and beautiful trek

was to a waterfall called Tambli Surla. Starting as an easy trek it became harsh and challenging because of the heavy rainfall. However, uncomfortable, cold, and wet, the very experience of being subjected to the unpredictability of nature and seeking shelter in elements like a rocky outcrop to save oneself from getting drenched was an experience. The view from the top was magical and was well worth the pain and sweat.

And what does one say about the people that I met. Goa's multi-dimensional transient population kept the excitement going. These people come to Goa for 8 months in a year and every year. My immediate circle comprised of people from around the world. I felt at home as it was a continuation of my pre-pandemic work culture where my forte has been to market India and interact with the international traveller.

Cut to the present -Stuck in city traffic, I miss my life in flip flops!!





## OUR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A WORKATION



### SPIRITUALITY & RELIGION VARANASI

Varanasi or Banaras or Kashi is one of the oldest continually inhabited cities in the world. Ash-smeared sadhus, cows and bulls, rickshaws zigzagging through the narrow alleys, and thousands of pilgrims making their way to the riverfront or the many temples are sights that are permanent fixtures here. To die or to be cremated here is the ultimate goal of every Hindu, as they believe it will liberate them from the endless cycle of death and rebirth.

#### Suggested Activities:

- Go for a sightseeing tour visiting the sprawling campus of Benares Hindu University (BHU), the Bharat Kala Bhavan – a museum with an exquisite collection of antiques, sculptures,

miniature paintings etc, and Sarnath – where the Buddha gave his first sermon.

- Enjoy an early morning boat ride on the River Ganges to witness the ancient city coming to life.
- Witness the Aarti ceremony in the evening.
- Do Yoga by the River Ganges.
- Attend a private lecture on Hinduism.
- Choose from our list of interesting guided walks led by Varanasi locals.
- Witness the Dev Deepawali festival held during the month of November (15 days after the festival of Diwali). Locals and pilgrims alike take a holy dip in the Ganges on this auspicious day and light earthen lamps in the evening. When the dusk sets in, the riverfront is lit with millions of earthen lamps making it a breathtaking sight to behold.





## SUN, SEA AND SAND GOA

Goa's picturesque landscape, sun-drenched beaches, historic monuments, pleasant climate, culinary heritage, and above all hospitable people make it a perfect destination to work, relax and unwind.

### Suggested Activities:

- Go for a sightseeing tour visiting Dona Paula for a view of Mormugao, India's largest natural harbour, the imposing Basilica of Bom Jesus and Se Cathedral in Old Goa and the Shri Mangueshi

Temple located on a hillock surrounded by lush green hills.

- Enjoy a sunset cruise on the River Mandovi.
- Visit the historic Portuguese forts and the atmospheric markets
- Visit the charming Portuguese homes
- Visit a museum of Christian art
- Visit the Museum of Alcohol
- Spend the night on the beach in a beautiful hand-made tent.
- The Goa Carnival held in the month of February or March is a 3-day non-stop festival of dance, song, music, and lots more.



## THE CITY OF DREAMS MUMBAI

Mumbai is a city of dreams and is home to Bollywood, the largest film industry in the world that produces 1000 films every year. According to an estimate, each day about 2000 aspiring actors land up in Mumbai to chase their dream in Bollywood. Mumbai is a bustling cosmopolitan city, which is a melting pot of diverse cultures. However, most of all it is a city of stories. Everybody in Mumbai has a story to tell.

### Suggested Activities:

- Go for a sightseeing tour visiting the Elephanta Caves, dating back to the mid-5th to 6th century CE and designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Later

explore the other historic and cultural sites of Mumbai such as the Gateway of India, the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya, the Dhobi Ghat, Mani Bhawan, the Kala Ghoda art district, St Thomas Cathedral and the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus earlier called the Victoria Terminus. During the tour meet the Dabbawallahs –Mumbai's logistical wonder men.

- Choose from our list of interesting guided tours and walks led by Mumbai locals.
- Witness the Ganesh Chaturthi Festival in the month of August/September. The 10-day festival celebrates the birth of Lord Ganesha; the elephant headed Hindu deity.





## THE QUEEN OF THE ARABIAN SEA KOCHI

**INTRO:** The port city of Kochi played a key role in the historic maritime trade of spices. Arab, Greek, Jewish, Chinese and Roman traders would frequent the sea route to Kochi in search of spices. At Kochi, you still see a myriad of cultures and traditions co-existing with harmony.

### Suggested Activities:

- Go for a sightseeing tour visiting the Matancherry Palace built by the Portuguese, the Jewish Synagogue, the Chinese Fishing Nets, the St. Francis

Church where Vasco da Gama was originally buried and the nearby Santa Cruz Basilica. In the evening enjoy a performance of the 300-year-old, now a classical dance form of India, called 'Kathakali'.

- Enjoy a private boat cruise on the backwaters of Kerala, a chain of interconnected canals, rivers, lakes and inlets.
- Choose from our list of interesting tours and walks led by Kochi locals.
- Enjoy a Temple Festival at Thrissur, the cultural capital of Kerala, not too far away from Kochi.



## IN SEARCH OF THE ROYAL BENGAL TIGER – RANTHAMBORE

Located close to the non-descript town of Sawai Madhopur in Rajasthan, the Ranthambore National Park, once the private hunting ground of the Maharaja of Jaipur, is home to the magnificent Royal Bengal Tiger. The Ranthambore Fort, a UNESCO World Heritage Site that overlooks the park dates back to a thousand years.

### Suggested Activities:

- Go on a Jeep Safari in search of the Royal Bengal Tiger.
- Visit the 10th century Ranthambore Fort

– a UNESCO World Heritage Site

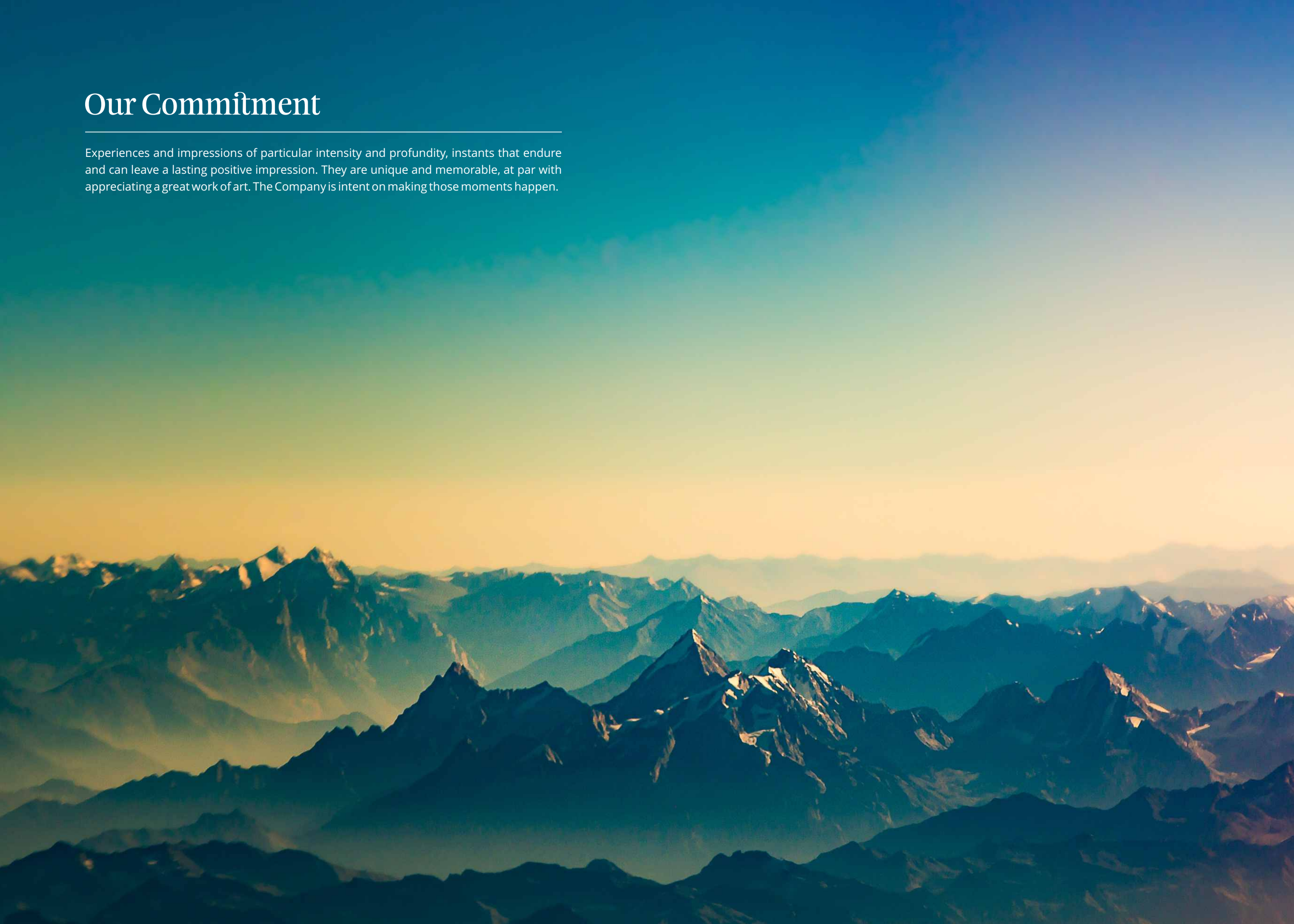
- Go on a birding tour in the periphery of the park.
- Go on a River Safari to spot the critically endangered Gharials.
- Learn to cook authentic Indian curries with the hotel chefs.
- Try your hand at block printing on fabric with vegetables, fruits, leaves and spices.



# Our Commitment

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





Come explore with us<sup>®</sup>