

FOOD STOPS: DELHI, MUMBAI & AMRITSAR

in

EXPLORE CONTEMPORARY INDIA & SOUTH ASIA
Magazine

FIVE-STAR

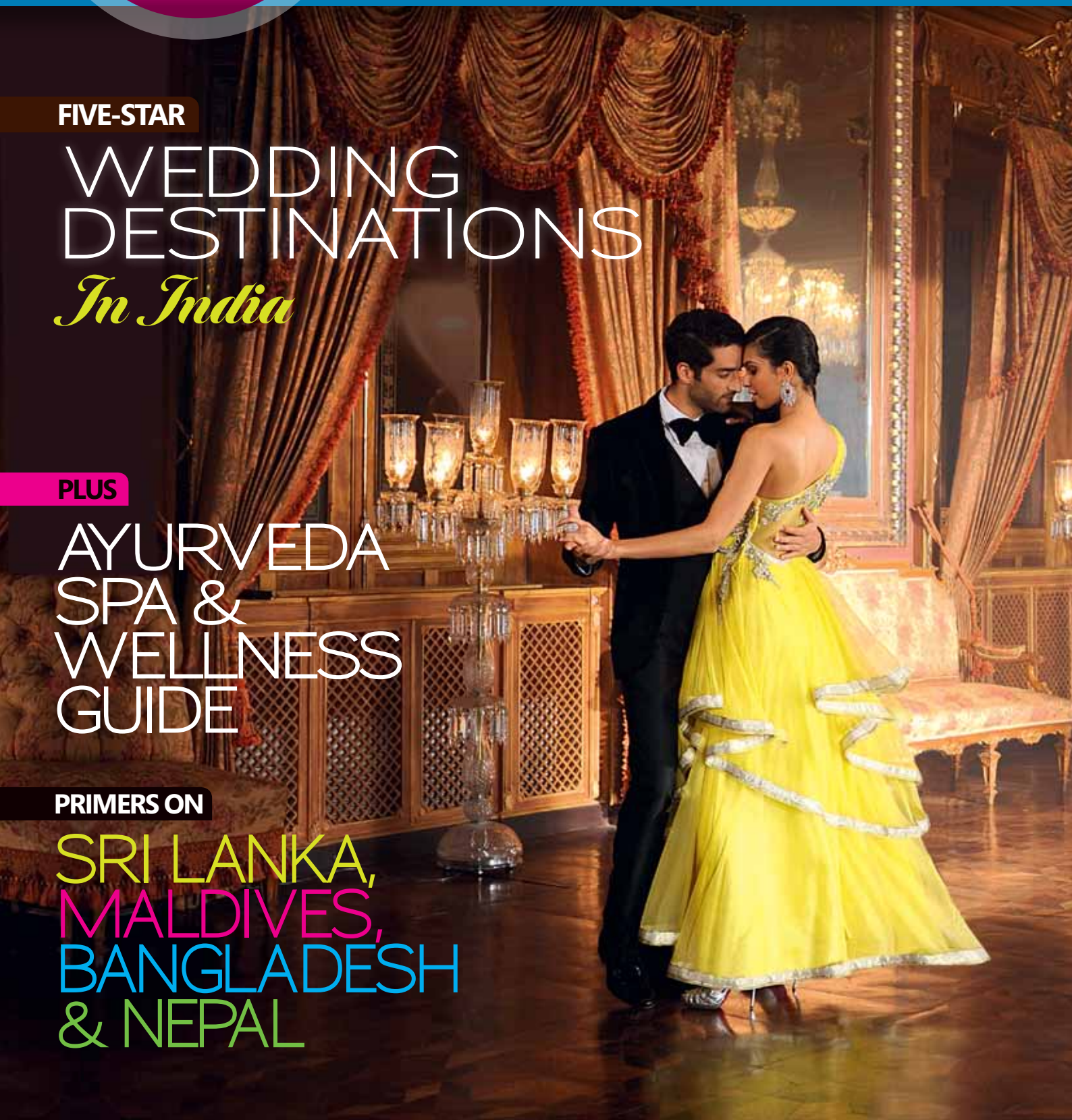
WEDDING
DESTINATIONS
In India

PLUS

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PRIMERS ON

SRI LANKA,
MALDIVES,
BANGLADESH
& NEPAL





'Radha Krishna' painting by Bharti Dayal (National awardee Madhubani artist, India). Madhubani paintings originated from a compact geographical area in Bihar India. The skills have been passed on through centuries preserving the content and the style. For this reason Madhubani has been accorded the coveted GI (Geographical Indication) status.

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Editor's Note

BRAVE NEW WORLD OF TRAVEL



Photo by Laxmi Kaul



Blogs, citizen journalism, consumer review sites, crowd sourced information, whew! The sources of our daily news and views of the world, for business to leisure, have bloomed into a garden of a thousand choices. IN Magazine is tending to one very special spot in that garden, the South

Asia bed of roses, where the brightest and biggest bloom is, of course, India. India is not just incredible but interesting too. In this issue we travel with the bloggers' and share some insights that go beyond tour itineraries. Then there is the romance of travel and opulence of the Indian kind - Luxury Options in the form of dream wedding destinations, glamorous shopping and latest 'in' eating places.

During the India Travel Roadshow in Southeast Asia (Singapore, Malaysia and Philippines) in September, we asked Singapore travel operators about the potential of India. They all agreed that 'NRI travel,' beyond their home towns, was a big potential, apart from the Southeast Asia mainstream travellers. The UN World Tourism Report of 2013 highlighted that India achieved a growth rate of 5.4 per cent and received a total of 6.65 million visitors last year. The next natural question is how to increase this further.

This is where we see IN Magazine helping stakeholders in the travel industry by providing the latest, updated news, information and options, to better acquaint them with India and South Asia and along the way be as inspired as we are about learning more about India and South Asia!

Nomita Dhar
Publisher & Editor-in-Chief

“
*in the
South
Asia bed
of roses,
where the
brightest
and biggest
bloom is,
of course,
India*

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Taj Falaknuma Palace Hyderabad
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PRIONKA RAY

The author of this issue's cover story on weddings hails from India and has lived in Switzerland and Hong Kong before settling down in Singapore 15 years ago. Having travelled widely, her favourite destinations are still Indian. She says, "I love Mumbai, but I am absolutely smitten by Benares, which is so anachronistic." On Indian weddings, she says, "Indians love to love and weddings are where the emotions go beautifully overboard. The best part of Indian weddings is that they are larger than life with rituals, dresses, food and emotional abundance."



RANEE SAHANEY

Ranee Sahaney has been Consulting Editor for 12 years to the Outlook Traveller group of publications and contributed to Discover India, BBC Good Food Guide and others. In the past 25 years, her features have been published widely. To her credit are a lavish coffee table book, Adventure Sites in the World; A GOI Tourist Department publication, A Travellers' Companion: India's North East; and others. She has also worked as Editorial Co-ordinator for Incredible India magazine.



SUSHMITA BHOWMICK

In this issue, she covered the reel destinations of India and the pulse of the Indian medical tourism industry. Professionally, she has covered news, features and lifestyle supplements for Sun Media's stable of magazines. She feels that the best thing about travelling in India is the warmth of the people, "Wherever you go, across the country, the very fact that you are a visitor makes you feel welcome."



FOO YONG HAN

He loves action whether it is on screen (watching movies or playing video games) or for real - sky diving or white-water river rafting. Sun Media's youngest editorial correspondent also loves to ride words and transport readers into the now of the moment. He spent the last 10 years writing and editing for a variety of print and online magazines in Singapore.



SHWETA PARIDA

She is a Singapore-based design journalist and a cultural nomad rolled into one. She has travelled extensively through Asia and Europe, interviewing several acclaimed personalities and covering important cultural events. Having been there and done that, she is currently daydreaming about the little writer's cabin she will retire to somewhere in the Himalayas.



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He is a Director of RS Legal and Taxation Consultants Pvt. Ltd. He consults on Taxation, Law, Finance and Real-Estate for both domestic and foreign companies. He is also a knowledge partner with the Overseas Indian Facilitation Centre, (an initiative by the CII and the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs). In this issue, he shares his thoughts on property buying in India.



PICTURES

PHOTO TANTRA

New Delhi based Photo Tantra was started in 2009 by the husband-wife team of Vinayak Das and Snigdha Sheel. With a photographic style that is a mix of photojournalism and glamour photography, they started shooting Indian weddings. They were chosen by Conde Nast Traveler as one of the dream wedding photographers in India! Photo Tantra contact no.: +91 8860636552. E-mail: vinayak@phototantra.com, snigdha@phototantra.com. Website: www.phototantra.com

SURESH ESWARAN

An avid traveller and self-taught photographer, he has been seriously pursuing photography by capturing special moments in his travels over the last 13 years. He is an 'IT Architect' by profession; just as he had captured the moods of Taj Mahal and presented a passionate glimpse of Jaipur, you can see more of what he calls his 'candid moments' at www.candid-moments.net



LUCKY MALHOTRA

Based in Bangalore, Lucky Malhotra's passion lies in fashion and wedding photography; he combines his expertise as a fashion photographer with spontaneity. He also has done editorial shoots and has an impressive portfolio that includes Elle, Hi Blitz, Hello, Hi Living etc. Lucky Malhotra Photography contact no.: +91 9945000119. E-mail: luckymalhotra78@gmail.com. Website: www.luckymalhotra.com

India



THE 5-STAR WEDDING *Destination*

BY **Prionka Ray**

Imagine your anklets tinkling as you step out of the tasseled palanquin, the rose petals fluttering at your feet and the gold zardozi work of your lehanga catching the lights of the chandelier above. While you exchange your vows against the palatial backdrop, your family and friends clink their champagne flutes and the entire palace grounds

erupt in a joyous and extravagant celebration. Imagine a wedding as special as that!

For a rising number of couples marrying at Udaipur, Rajasthan, this imagined fairy tale wedding morphs into a reality, replete with folk dancers, royal butlers and a lake, gleaming silver in the night. Many of these weddings are held at not one, but two royal palaces like the **Taj Lake Palace** and the **Jag**

Mandir Palace, where the guests are ferried over the lake's pristine waters to attend the dazzling events. For couples like Tim and Sasha from New Zealand or Edna and Jurgen from Austria, their destination wedding at Udaipur, India has been nothing short of 'magical.' Eventually, when the newly weds like them return home, they carry with them, treasure load of memories of a splendid royal wedding— theirs!

The Goan Twist

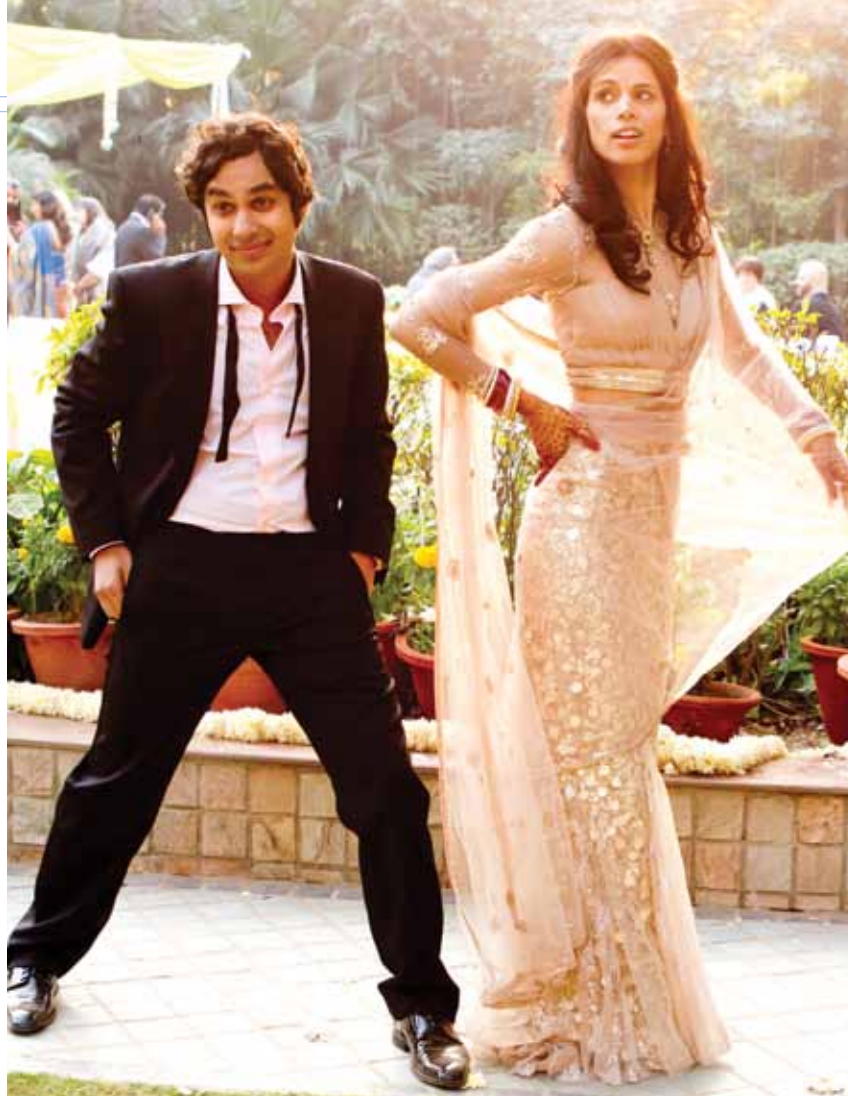
Located in the western coast of India, Goa with its sea, sand and rich cultural heritage is a destination as delightful as it is diverse. Whether it's a quiet beach wedding that you are looking for or a flamboyant bonanza, Goa spoils you for choice. While its secluded beaches, lush fields and the Portuguese- inspired cathedrals provide the perfect backdrop for a memorable wedding, the trendy lounges, cozy cabanas and the jazz concerts ensure that the party never stops. Goa is scintillating in its ability to morph from serene to sensuous and peaceful to pulsating according to your taste although the question is, why choose when you can have it all? Some popular wedding venues resorts there: **Taj Exotica, Goa Marriott Resort & Spa, The Sol, InterContinental The Lalit Goa Resort, Alila Diwa Goa, The Leela Kempinski Goa, Cidade de Goa, Park Hyatt Goa, The Zuri White Sands, Goa Resorts & Casino and Vivanta by Taj - Fort Aguada.**



As discerning and well-heeled travellers look to India for exclusive wedding experiences, the US\$38 billion wedding market in India is all set to welcome these new arrivals. Apart from the foreigners who are attracted by the history, romance and the exotic locations, the NRIs too find themselves drawn to their roots, when its time to wed. According to Sunil Prabhakar, Head (Marketing) at the Leela, the hotel hosts almost 12 mega weddings a year and he estimates an annual growth of 35 per cent in the number of weddings at the luxury hotels of the country. Most of them, he says are the NRI weddings. Sujay Pathak, co-founder of the Mumbai-based Elite Wedding Planner shares the same upbeat sentiment. India, as a wedding destination is fast gaining momentum and the NRIs are leading the way.

Trends

Though most Indian weddings are known to be ostentatious, the current trend is to keep it cultural yet classy. In line with the trend are the top wedding designers, who are using lighter fabrics to provide more comfort without compromising on the quality. The brides, therefore get to show more skin, look gorgeous and yet are able to move without being weighed down. Top designer Sabyasachi Mukherjee's silver zardozi embroidered lehanga (worth 1.4 million Rupees) was the first piece to be sold at the Inaugural Vogue Wedding Show. Catering to the international taste, the Indian Bridal Fashion Week also showcased gold and nude palettes



Candid moment from *the* celebrity wedding of 2011: Kunal Nayyar of *The Big Bang Theory* fame with former Miss India Neha Kapur

and actor Sonam Kapoor, dressed in white and gold was famed designer, Rohit Bal's showstopper for the show. According to celebrity blogger Sujata Assomull Sippy, the ex-editor of Harper's Bazaar India and independent luxury fashion consultant, the Indian wedding market is huge and it is a primary driver of fashion and trends in the country, but the industry stalwarts also predict that in spite of the muted look seen at many bridal shows, the traditional look and feel of a wedding is still celebrated and is here to stay.

Celebrity Weddings

Actresses **Vidya Balan** who married **Siddharth Roy Kapur** and starlet **Esha Deol** who wed **Bharat Takhtani** recently, opted for low-key temple weddings and both the brides wore rich traditional sarees in red and gold.

CEO of Shaadi.com, **Anupam Mittal** married model **Anchal** at a grand destination wedding in Jaipur. Their sit down dinner reception had a white Victorian theme.

Bollywood stars, **Saif Ali Khan** and **Kareena Kapoor** exchanged their vows at Taj Mahal Palace hotel in Mumbai and the bride wore a traditional gharara belonging to her mother-in-law. The reception that was held at a Delhi bungalow later, had a pristine off-white and gold theme.

DISCERNING
AND WELL-HEELED
TRAVELLERS
ARE LOOKING
TOWARDS INDIA



Dream wedding settings (from left clockwise):
Ultimate luxury wedding reception; Taj Lake Palace
in Udaipur and Umaid Bhawan Palace in Jodhpur



Photos (above & left) courtesy of Taj Hotels Resorts & Palaces

Popular Wedding Destinations & themes

Indian weddings are often described as 'voluptuous, emotional and varied' and the fact that the Indians love their weddings can amply be seen in the painstakingly embroidered lehengas, the intricately designed mehendi (henna) and the multiple festivities that turn the event into an affair to remember. Enchanted, by this grandeur, celebrities such as Katy Perry chose the **Aman-e-Khas** luxury resort outside the Ranthambore National Park and Elizabeth Hurley chose the grand **Umaid Bhawan Palace**, Jodhpur as their wedding destinations.

Kerala, aptly named God's own country, remains one of the top three choices for destination weddings in India. The beautiful **Kumarakom Lake Resort** and the **Leela Kovalam** offering beach and cliff top venues, remain popular. The other choices are of course, Rajasthan with its opulent

palaces and Goa, with its reputation for being India's party capital. The **Vivanta Holiday Village** in Goa has remained a popular choice for a laid back feel to a Wedding. Agra, the city hosting the ultimate symbol of love, Taj Mahal, is also a favourite destination with hotels like The **Oberoi Amarvilas** offering a private view of the Taj. Apart from these established venues, **Sainik Farms** near Delhi and **Alibaug** in Maharashtra are now also adding their weight to this list of favourites. According to the wedding planners, Bollywood weddings, Royal weddings and the 'Picturesque but quiet' weddings are the three most requested destination wedding themes.

Singapore born, Gitu is a 28 year-old educator, heading to the land of her ancestors for a 'quiet and meaningful' wedding. She hopes to have an ethereal wedding in Kerala, surrounded by coconut trees, calm waters, boats and the food smelling of spices, especially peppercorns. Two international airports will have the fleet of cars ready to whisk the guests to the lush wedding location. The couple has planned their honeymoon in the backwaters of Kerala as well, feasting on fish and relaxing with traditional oil massages.

Bollywood captured the Indian wedding in its full glory and served it to the world-wide audience on a screen. From foreigners to NRIs, audiences were hooked and the Bollywood style weddings gained popularity, where fun, dance and bling were the generous additions to the wedding extravaganza. Alex, a 15-year old Singapore resident, is so enamoured by the Bollywood wedding scene that she plans to make a trip to India just to be part of one. Equally smitten is her mother, who lists Shah Rukh Khan as her favourite actor and loves all things Bollywood, including the weddings.

For many others, the romance, the culture and the history of the place is irresistible. The fact that they can marry against the backdrop of hundreds of centuries old palaces seems like a fairy tale. And who doesn't want to be a princess marrying the prince of her dreams at a royal wedding? 43-year-old Michiko, a Japanese living in Singapore has travelled twice to India in just the last six months. "Indian culture fascinates me, it's so different," she says. Michiko loves the grand costumes, the traditional sarees and the whole cultural experience.

Planning the Dream Wedding

Keeping the demand in mind, luxurious hotels and reputed wedding planners have started rolling out comprehensive wedding packages that take the stress away from weddings, leaving the bride and groom free to enjoy their special moments. Whether it's discreetly setting the stage for a perfect proposal or organising a romantic honeymoon, they aim to provide assistance seamlessly. The planners keep customer's taste and preferences in mind, whether they are suggesting the venue or selecting

THE CUISINE ON OFFER IS AS VARIED AS THEIR CUSTOMER'S PALATE

a vintage car or for that matter an elephant procession for the groom. Even the cuisine offered ranges from traditional, global to fusion. The Taj sample menu, for example, offers a diverse choice ranging from Gosht Nukti on Jeera Khasta (succulent meat served on traditional cumin puffs) and Lemon Grass Rasam (lentil soup) with air-dried berries to Scottish Smoked Salmon. From Teppanyaki to Thai, the cuisine on offer is as varied as their customers' palate.

Whether it's a sandstone palace in Jaipur or a romantic sunset in Goa; the snake charmer's act or the jasmine infused air; the pistachio flavoured kulfi or a minty after-dinner drink, India offers a heady mix of cultures and colours, that permeates a wedding and leaves its mark forever. India as a wedding destination remains charming, splendid and majestic.



Photo courtesy of Lucky Malhorta



Tips for that Perfect Wedding

- **PLANNING:** Plan your wedding 12-14 months in advance as most venues are booked early.
- **EVENT:** Hire a wedding planner for a stress free wedding.
- **FOOD TASTING:** Taste the food beforehand. Reputed caterers and hotels offer a sample menu and they cater to varied tastes.
- **CUSTOMS:** If opting for traditional wedding rituals, make sure you know what's to come.
- **WEATHER:** Keep the local weather in mind. Rainy season in India is not an ideal time to get married.
- **COMPARE:** A lavish wedding in India will cost approximately, US\$26000. Do compare charges before you choose venue or planner.
- **LEGAL:** Legal marriage for a foreigner in India may take 60 days to process so, most couples prefer to have only the wedding ceremony in India, choosing to complete the legal formalities in their home country.

INDIAN Jewellery

A MAGNIFICENT OBSESSION

Kings and commoners, village belles and sophisticated Bollywood stars, how hard it has been to resist the over 5,000 year old allure of India's jewels. In India, jewellery is not simply a decorative accessory; it is deeply rooted in the social, religious and cultural ethos of ordinary life from antiquity.

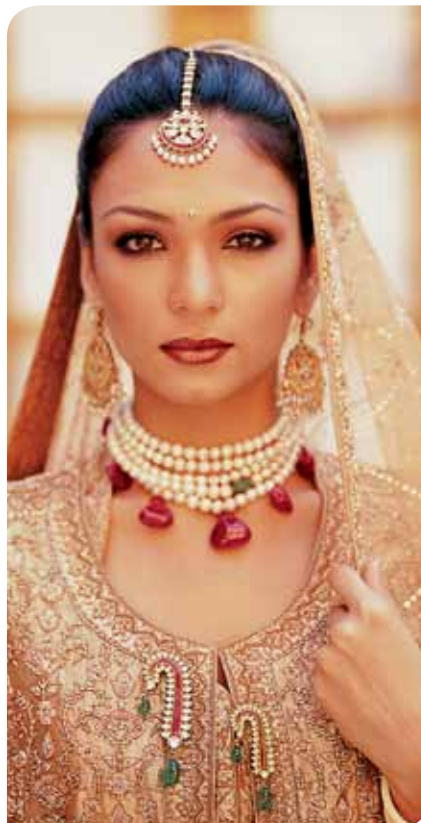
Ornamentation here has never been confined to royalty and the gods. Depicted in its ancient sculptures are ordinary men and women adorned in jewellery for the ears, neck, chest, waist, hands and feet. Gold and silver, common beads and fantastic gemstones, each has their place in this unparalleled centuries-old tradition of ornamentation, which still continues to be significant in the country's social, religious and cultural context. India's magnificent obsession with jewels is richly documented not only in her ancient treatises, scriptures, literature, travelogues and palace toshakhana (treasure houses), but also in the richly bejewelled sculptures of deities across the country.

Drawn by the legends of India's fabled cornucopia of gold and gemstones, invaders have come again and again, and carried back elephant-loads of pearls and gold coins, pigeon-egg rubies and glittering emeralds. To the western shores too they came; the Arab traders and colonial aspirants, the Portuguese and the English, to fill their ships with spices and jewels for their royals and trade houses.

It is from the Mughal period (1532) that we have a well documented

A proud tradition and heritage of jewellery making that goes back centuries – searching for the best contemporary and classic pieces

By **Ranee Sahaney**



history of Indian jewellery. The Mughal emperors' (Akbar, Jehangir, Shahjehan and even the conservative Aurangzeb) obsession with India's jewels also inspired a new impetus to the element of design and ornamentation, especially in the area of enameling that is so richly evident in the jewellery from Jaipur and Udaipur.

With some modifications, much of the jewellery style of the era survives in the craft of the goldsmith and the enameler in workshops across the country. The greatest contribution of the Mughals to India's jewellery heritage was in the art of embellishment and finishing. Under their patronage the exquisite craft of minakari and kundan reached their zenith. The Mughal period reflected a wonderful cohesion of Muslim and Hindu jewellery design.

Modern trends indicate a shift from heavier, chunkier pieces to lighter, more wearable items. Cartier's On the Road to India and Tanjore lines (see accompanying story), and Frazer and Haws' (Website: frazerandhaws.com) Golconda Collection, inspired by India's oldest diamond mines, are the perfect salute to India's jewellery traditions. However, traditional Indian ornaments and designs have survived the dictates of fashion.

From the grace and beauty of thewewa (from Partapgarh in Rajasthan) and enamel (minakari) works of Jaipur and Varanasi to the chunky silver necklaces and anklets of Gujarat; From the glowing magnificence of kundan / jadau work (gemstones set in soft thin strip as opposed to western concept of setting them in bezel sockets) from Punjab,



1



2



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4



5



6

- 1. Bracelet : gold diamond ruby and pearl with enamel work back: 19th century Mughal
- 2. Top Middle row: 18th century Rajasthan-gold, pearl and enamel necklace
- 3. Contemporary Rani Haar (PC Jewellers)
- 4. Ruby and diamond contemporary necklace (PC Jewellers)
- 5. Middle Middle row: Diamond and ruby bracelet with emerald (PC Jewellers)
- 6. Middle row bottom: Diamond and ruby contemporary cuff (PC Jewellers)

Cartier & India: Recreating Maharajah of Patiala's Necklace



(Above): Sir Yadavindra Singh, Maharajah of Patiala, wears the Cartier necklace made in 1928 for his father Sir Bhupindar Singh

In 1926, Cartier's Parisian jewellery workshops received a very special commission from the Maharajah of Patiala. This extravagant man sent a trunk full of precious stones and jewellery to be remounted in the Parisian style by the most famous of Parisian jewellers.

A unique creation was born comprising five magnificent chains in an Art Deco style, each in platinum and encrusted with diamonds. In the centre, a cascade of seven large diamonds ranging from 18 to 73 carat surmounted a pendant whose centre piece was the celebrated De Beers

diamond, a yellow stone of 234.69 carat. A tobacco-coloured diamond of 18 carats and two rubies with a total weight of 29.58 carat brought a splash of colour to the immaculate white of the whole. The finished necklace had 2,930 diamonds and weighed 962.25 carat.

In 1998, the necklace was discovered in London, in very poor condition. Only the five diamond-encrusted, platinum Art Deco chains remained. The central stones and the De Beers diamond had vanished. Cartier could not remain insensitive to the splendor of the original and embarked

on a restoration with substitutes used to recreate the brilliance and sparkle of this extraordinary piece; with cubic zirconium for the diamonds and synthetic rubies, whose colour is the nearest possible match for the original Burmese gems. The jewellers at Cartier Paris have succeeded in reproducing the imposing pendant with the same fine craftsmanship that distinguished the late-1920s platinum jewellery. They have used every possibility to recreate the necklace's original beauty till the synthetic stones can be replaced by new originals.

Delhi and Bikaner to the delicate nature-inspired gold jewellery of the south; From the lac work (filling finished hollow jewellery pieces with resin to give the form support) of West Bengal to the delectable filigree work of tarakashi from Odisha, one is spoilt for choice. And for those who adore the glittering gemstones and opalescent pearls there is Jaipur (long famed for its stone cutting techniques) and Hyderabad whose pearls may rival even those of fabled Basra. In Delhi contact PC Jewellers (www.pcjewellers.com) for kundan, gold filigree and diamond jewellery for both traditional and contemporary designs; Lawrence Road in Amritsar houses Nagi Jewellers (www.nagijewellers.in) for kundan work; in Hyderabad Mangatrai Jewellers in the Banjara Hills (www.managtraai.com) has been selling pearls to many generations of shoppers.

The portfolio of neckpieces from the Bengal jewellers includes the beautiful waist length chandrarah chain (embellished with links of gemstones or medallions) and the hansuli. With Kolkata (erstwhile Calcutta) being the seat of the British Raj, Bengal was harbinger of European design elements in native jewellery. Ornaments started sporting faceted stones rather than the native cabochon style; also introduced was the European claw setting technique for gemstones. For traditional Bengali jewellery get in touch with KPS Jewellers at 38, Burtolla street in Burra Bazaar (www.kpsjewellers.com) in Kolkata.

In the South the thali is one of the most important pieces of jewellery. The highly potent and symbolic tiger claw amulet has been worn in endless variations across the Indian sub-continent by rural, urban and tribal societies. Pearls have been the pride of Maharashtra's jewellery traditions, especially for the head and the hair. Look for variations of the chandra and surya head jewels, the agraphool (for the hair) and the nagaveni (plait ornament). Also very distinctive is the Maharashtrian nath (nose ring), which is quite large and studded with pearls, a diamond and some precious stones in both oval and circular shapes. Opt for the chumki for everyday wear. Bridal jewellery here includes the beautiful Kohlapur Saz fashioned with gold beads interspersed with images of auspicious deities. In Mumbai and Goa you can



Diamond and pearl neckpiece (PC Jewellers)

THE HIGHLY POTENT AND SYMBOLIC TIGER CLAW AMULET HAS BEEN WORN IN ENDLESS VARIATIONS ACROSS THE INDIAN SUB-CONTINENT



Antique south Indian Tali (tiger claw pendant)

Maang tika traditional



buy traditional Maharashtrian jewels at Waman Hari Pethe Jewellers who've been around from the early 1900s (www.wamanharpethejewellers.com).

There are many similarities between the jewellery of Rajasthan and Gujarat. The art of pachchikam of Gujarat replicates the regal kundan technique for the common man. Fashioned out of silver rather than the traditional gold, it is created with uncut, white semi-precious stones, which are set in a hollow silver casing lined with lac. In Ahmedabad call on Anjalee Jewellers (www.anjaleejewels.com) for traditional and contemporary Gujarati jewellery.

In the lanes of Jaipur and Udaipur seek out the cameo-like beauty of near-extinct thewa jewellery. Male members of the extended family create these exquisite pieces with the closely guarded art of delicate lacy gold leaf filigree over colored glass. One of the country's top thewa experts is Roopa Vohra, who has played a pivotal role in promoting it in urban markets across India. For appointments call the Jewellery Lounge on Juhu Tara Road in Mumbai (www.roopavohra.com). The Gem Palace (gempalacejaipur.com) in Jaipur, run by the Kasliwals, who were court jewellers to the Mughals, offers some of the finest traditional and antique jewels in all of India; there's a branch in Mumbai also. Amrapali (www.amrapalijewels.com) from Jaipur, has rich pickings in silver jewellery.

Luxury & Vanity

THE INDIA WAY

By **Ranee Sahaney**

Before they were only within the purview of maharajas, now exquisite hand-made creations are available in the exclusive luxury market.

In a small village, Kainhamal, on the outskirts of Srinagar in the Vale of Kashmir, began the story of one of the most exquisite shawls in history. The kani shawl, made by master craftsmen of astonishing skills and patience in the twill tapestry-mode of Europe (where the design is created directly on the loom itself using multiple threads), once draped the shoulders of Empress Josephine of France. It took a master craftsman a day to produce just an inch of work; thus almost 2-5 years to create an exquisite apparel. Mass production norms of the Raj-era reduced kani to a dying art. Today Kanihamal is slowly reviving this glorious tradition.

In another little village, Paithan, Gujarat, craftsmen used to laboriously weave the famous paithani sari in threads of gold, for long hours, and it took almost 2-5 years to produce even one piece; but every bride in Gujarat wants one (even if it's a poorer cousin of the original) and so it survived.



All over India there are thousands of villages, which once catered to the fancies of its royals with a range of handcrafted goods - textiles, furniture, paintings, jewellery and much more; valued all the more for their exquisite beauty and rarity. Many of these crafts, which become extinct are being revived and given the status of luxury.

India, the fabled land of maharajas, will flatter the luxury-seeking globetrotter with such traditional treasure, amidst some of the most exotic locales of the world.

Royal Journeys

Luxury trains have redefined the art of travelling in this vast land, providing an excellent opportunity to explore exotic locations. While the hugely popular Palace on Wheels opens up the romantic narratives of Rajasthan's palaces and havelis, its counterpart in the South, The Golden Chariot takes you on one of the most comfortable tours of South India, with the beaches of Goa thrown in for added allure. Other trains on the offer are the Maharaja's Express, Deccan Odyssey, Royal Rajasthan on Wheels and The Indian Maharaja.



High pre-sale activity in luxury projects like Delhi-NCR's The Grand Arch indicates the sector is growing



(Opposite page and above): Sabyasachi creations; (middle): Actress Vidya Balan wearing a Sabyasachi saree at Cannes; (right): Sabyasachi Mukherjee's Hyderabad store

Wildlife Safaris

If tiger shooting (the camera kind) is what you are keen on, then sign up for a safari at Ranthambore National Park with Aman-i- Khas (www.amanresorts.com/amanikhas/resort.aspx) or Oberoi's Vanya Vilas (www.oberoihotels.com) or Taj Safaris (www.tajsafaris.com) at Bandhavgarh National Park's Mahua Safari Lodge. Else get in touch with ace photographer Sharad Vats for an exceptional wilderness experience with a naturalist, at Chitvan Jungle Lodge (www.chitvan.com), Kanha National Park.

Dining Luxury

The foodie has a plethora of excellent restaurants to indulge in; luxury's not being defined just by the price, it's also the quality of the food, the service and the ambience. Delhi's top Italian restaurant continues to be the *Diva Restaurant*, brain child of Ritu Dalmia, while the *Bukhara* at the Maurya still reigns supreme with its Northwest Frontier delights. *Megu Restaurant*, serving Japanese food, is located at the swanky The Leela Palace Hotel, Delhi, which is also home to the New York-based *Le Circe* Restaurant. At Mumbai, presided over by master chef Masaharu Morimoto, *Wasabi by Morimoto* is gorgeous. For those who enjoy traditional Bengali delights, there is the *Oh Calcutta* in Kolkata, Delhi and Bombay.

The Ultra Chick

Stores across India's urban landscape are brimming with all kinds of allurements. If it's Indian you fancy, head for India's hottest designers such as Manish Malhotra (www.manishmalhotra.in), Manish Arora (www.manisharora.ws), Rohit Bal (www.rohitbal.com) and Tarun Tahiliani (www.taruntahiliani.com), top sellers in world markets and

Bollywood's favourites.

Sabyasachi The Kolkata-based (www.sabyasachi.com) is another hot pick who is riding high. Amongst the younger crop of designers Siddharth Tytler, Shantanu and Nikhil and Gauri Nanika have their own following. For bespoke shervanis and bundhgalahs, pick up from Raghavendra Rathore (www.rathore.com).

Realty Check

By Arjun Sabharwal, RS Legal & Taxation Consultants Pvt. Ltd (www.rsconsulting.co.in)

After returning to Gurgaon from a five-year stint in Singapore, IT professional Gaurav Mehra wanted to invest in a property that gave him easy access to office as well a location where he could unwind in the company of like-minded people and enjoy the 'good life.' High net worth individuals are making a beeline for luxury homes with easy access to work and top class amenities. There is now a new demand for luxury and ultra-luxury homes with prices ranging from 3 crore to 20 crore, driven by new offerings, an influx of non-resident Indians and changing lifestyles.

Countrywide Trend

- Mumbai luxury housing hotspots stretch from south Mumbai to Bandra; however, central Mumbai, comprising Parel Elphinston Road and Worli are getting popular. The range is between Rs 60000 to Rs 1.2 lakh per square foot.
- Pune luxury homes are moving beyond Aundh and Koregaon Park to NIBM, Pashan Bavdhan and Baner. Tycoon Donald Trump has partnered with Panchshill Realty to launch Trump Towers.
- Delhi's upmarket areas comprise Prithviraj Road, Shanti Niketan and Akbar Road. Rates in such areas are over 10 lakh per square yard. Chennai, Gurgaon, Bangalore and Noida show similar trends.



Bloggers

Tales

Travelling through the Heart of India

Bloggers, a new breed of footloose and fancy-free travellers give an 'up close and personal' account of their experiences through Ladakh, Jaisalmer, Orchha and Pudukottai.

They are taking a non-touristy approach to travelling in more ways than one: less travelled spots, backpack travel, hiking, riding and almost all things not ordinary. In places where they do use conventional travel modes, once they reach their destinations, they try to avoid the 'pop-in/ pop-out' ritual and try to immerse in the local flavour.

And they are getting to know a land where from time immemorial the spirit of 'Atithi Devo Bhava,' (guest is God) has

been followed. A land where all are welcome, where a bowl of rice will be shared if there is no more, where a stranger on the street will smile at you, where the smallest gestures will come at the least expected times. Special, don't you think?

Some of the closely followed bloggers on the Indian circuit, those perpetually in the off-beat travel mode, have shared their experience: so when you find Sankara being offered food by a total stranger, or Charukeshi chatting up green grocers on Laddakh streets, do not feel surprised.

This is India, with all its idiosyncrasies, an open-hearted, warm (yes, it's tropical too) and a friendly place. The featured places are an eclectic mix, some known, some out-of-the-way. For the later, maybe you can make a side trip?



Charukeshi Ramadurai

Himalayan Love Story

► The splendour of mighty snow peaks never fails to mesmerise and so when freelance writer Charukeshi Ramadurai shared her 'Himalayan love story,' a travel through Ladakh, or 'Little Tibet,' we were predictably charmed. Nestled deep in the Himalayas, on the western edge of the Tibetan plateau, Ladakh of the rugged beauty and fabled views, is bashfully accepting its rise to fame. Located in the high reaches of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, Leh, the capital of Ladakh is a good 434 km from Srinagar.

Often described as the last Shangri La, Ladakh - or La-Dags, meaning 'land of high passes,' attracts travellers and spiritual seekers, who want to experience the Mahayana Buddhist culture outside of Tibet. This traditional way of life, which is still very much present in Ladakh, where you can see the locals with their prayer wheels and peaceful countenance, overwhelms you with its sheer simplicity! Charu and her husband missed the Manali-Leh road

trip as they had gone in May, when the mountain passes are still blocked with snow.

However, the flight from Srinagar to Leh, the 'top of the world feel,' as you cross the mighty Himalayas, is no less enthralling. Since this was before the peak tourist season (May to September), there was ample scope for leisurely walks; tea with yak-butter; monastery visits - Thiksey, Hemis, Lamayuru, Alchi, Spituk - with plenty of time in hand to appreciate the beautiful frescoes, murals, miniatures, prayer artefacts; the hot momos and

bowls of 'thupka,' the competing blues of the Pangong and Tso Moriri; the friendly chats with the locals - sharing life stories. Lamayuru, by the way, dates back to the 10th century and is the oldest monastery in Ladakh. "With some time in hand try out sessions of Tibetan cooking classes or get involved with the local life through farming sessions, playing sports, teaching English to the kids, and other activities. For a discourse, visit the Karmappa Monastery and if lucky you can take spiritual lessons from the Karmappa himself, through an English translator," said Charu



Mridula Dwivedi

Tryst with Jaisalmer

► Mridula Dwivedi's tryst with Jaisalmer, in Rajasthan, was a happy coincidence. In Jaipur, for a wedding, she had a couple of days free. Having watched the much-famous 'Sonar Kella,' (The Golden Fort) a film by Satyajit Ray, which builds around the historic Jaisalmer Fort, she grabbed the opportunity. She packed an overnight case, with light woollens; the deserts turn cool at night, and boarded the state transport bus. You can hire a car; the 638 km from Jaipur is worth when the golden edifice looms up, taking shape through the blazing desert haze.

If at Rajasthan's Thar Desert, go



for camel safaris on the dunes, which is not what you can do every day. It starts with 'boarding' a camel. You may decide not to get up on one, as they seem to be collapsing like Lego bricks. But gather up your wits; a camel ride, once you get into rhythm with its bumpy movement, makes you feel like a Bedouin.

Sam Dunes and Lakhmana Dunes are the popular venues for camel safaris. Any hotel in Jaisalmer will organise it for you. If you have booked yourself at a cultural night in the desert, move away from the bonfire and the electric lamp, and

look up at the sky. It is Van Gogh's 'Starry Night' brought close and real.

Mridula was glad that she had a second day in hand to visit the fort, which is a 'living fort.' The Jain temples inside the fort are exquisite in their design and details. Many of the houses have outer walls and inner courtyards painted in brilliant colours and invite you cordially to have a closer look. Climb up to the canon and get a view of the surrounding land. To watch the fort lighted up during the festival of deepawali (if you visit in November) is an amazing experience.

Priyanko Sarkar

Off the Map Orchha

► When Priyanko Sarkar wrote in with his trip to Orchha, Madhya Pradesh, claiming that 'there is a reason why some places are off the map,' we looked closer. As soon as you have made your way to this dusty little place, you will realize the truth of this statement. Orchha, the kingdom of the erstwhile Bundelkhand kings, is replete with ancient structures; the Orchha Fort on the bank of the almost dry Betwa River; Raja Mahal – a grand palace with a commanding view of Orchha from its ramparts; and the Jahangir Mahal – built by Veer Singh Deo, to appease the Mughal King.

Today, this palace is hailed as the epitome of medieval Indo-Islamic architecture. Opposite Raja Mahal



is the Chhaturbhuj Temple, built to worship Lord Vishnu. Once inside, climb the huge stone steps to reach the very top of the temple and get a bird's eye view of the city.

A short 10-minute stroll behind the temple will bring you to the outskirts of Orchha (yes, it's that compact!) where Laxmi Mandir stands. This lone structure has some amazing hand-painted pictures that describe stories from Indian epics. At the top of the

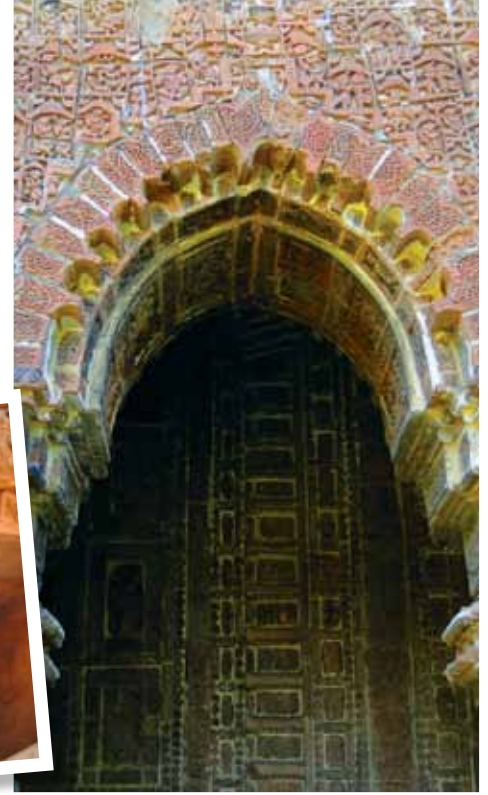
temple, you can see Orchha on one side and the spot where Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi, bravely fought the British army, on the other side. Spend time at the cenotaphs on the banks of Betwa. In the evening, there is a light and sound show at the Raja Mahal.

Orchha has also attracted Hollywood attention; director Roland Emmerich is scouring locations at the cenotaphs for his upcoming movie 'Singularity.'

► It is not a coincidence that starting with Jammu and Kashmir, India's northern tip, we have travelled to the deserts of Rajasthan (moving south and west) and then to Orchha in Madhya Pradesh (central India) and finally to Pudukkottai, in Tamil Nadu, the southernmost state of India. We were fortunate that our bloggers had travel stories across the length and breadth of the country. Bhushavali sent in her memoirs of Pudukkottai and our first thought was not to miss out on this place if you were down south, for it is just 50 km from the temple town of Tiruchirappalli.

Pudukkottai is a small land-locked town, located almost at the centre of Tamil Nadu. Not a very touristy place; it has no beaches or waterfalls or theme parks or any other regular attractions, but is definitely a place for those who love to explore the unexplored, who dare to take the road less travelled. Pudukkottai, with its Neolithic terracotta urns (the deceased were placed inside them), which are found in thousands, to the 2nd century Jain Cavern with Jain Beds, is a delight for history buffs. The burial sites are found all over the town and are huge circles of laterite blocks, with granite slabs in the centre. Ancient Tamil inscriptions can be found around the beds. One of them says 'Erumi Naatu Kumuzhuur Pirantha Kavuti Eethendru Sithuppvil Ilayaar Seitha Adhittanam,' which translates to: the beds were carved by Ilayaar of Thenku Sithuppvil. As is true with small places in India, you will find the local people willing to fill you up on history (which may be just hearsay) and guide you through their town, expecting nothing, just proud that you have come from a long way off!

Early rock-cut cave temples – Thirumayam, Kudumiyamalai and Brahadambal Temples – have amazingly beautiful relief



Bhushavali

Memoirs of Pudukkottai

sculptures in huge panels adorning the walls. To the same era belongs the Jain Cave Temple of Arivar Koil at Sittannavasal. Located on top of a hill, this too has relief sculptures of the Jain Thirthankaras. This temple is renowned for its frescoes, which you will find all over: the pillars, their cornice, the ceiling and the walls.

Located close to Pudukkottai is Narttamalai – a tropical dry evergreen forest – a haven for nature lovers. Equally enticing is

Viralimalai where there is a peacock sanctuary. Peacocks walking like hens on the street can be a profound spectacle, more so if you run behind it with your camera focussed and they just take up in a flight! Close to Narttamalai is Kadambar Malai, where temples from the 11th to the 13th century can be seen. Intriguing and captivating, to say the least, are the relief sculptures of Jain Tirthankaras, sculpted at the high altitudes.





BHAVNA BHATNAGAR'S Little Black Book

Delhi-based founder of the popular design blog, *An Indian Summer*, Bhavna shares her favourite must-visit places in and around Delhi.

By **Shweta Parida**

A Shopper's Delight

I consider Delhi as one big smouldering melting pot of India, when it comes to shopping. Armed with perseverance and a will to search, traverse, bargain through the many bazaars, chances are that you will find what you are looking for, irrespective of which corner of the country that item originated from.

Some of my favourite shopping spots in and around Delhi are:

- **Sundar Nagar market** for its big and small craft "export" houses and shops. A must visit once every two months, for you never know what treasure (most likely reproduced versions though) you will stumble upon.
- **The Embassy fairs**, which happen around Diwali and Christmas: A wide range of designers and exporters showcase their wares here.
- **The Jaipur shops:** Ah, the goodness of block print and mulmul and all that is beautiful from Rajasthan! I love shopping at places like The Soma Shop, Kilol, and The Shop.
- **The Craft fairs:** Delhi, especially from autumn to spring, hosts a variety of craft fairs, which are excellent events to source craft and art directly from craftsmen.
- **Shahpur Jat, Hauz Khas Market, Khan Market and Meher Chand Market:** The holy quadrangle of cool shopping as I like to call it (weird looking quadrangle at that, but a must-do if you have just a couple of days in Delhi and your agenda is to shop, shop and shop some more).
- **The museum craft shops:** Check out especially the shop at The National Museum, which is a good place for one of its kind products.





Next stop Jaipur

Step out of Delhi and head straight to Jaipur (a six-hour drive): The brimming bazaars and the outlets of various exporters (in the industrial area of the Pink City) will satisfy your urge for both the regular and the exclusive.

Modern Eclecticism

While the traditional art, craft and textiles from India will never (hopefully!) lose their charm, there are now some very interesting eclectic products being designed and made. These combine various craft techniques and have been 'contemporised' to fit in a modern home. Established shops such as GoodEarth, FabIndia, Anokhi have always served as one-stop shops to pick up such souvenirs, along with a whole new breed of young talented designers.

Noshing On Variety

The Attic in Delhi and IIC (India International Center) hosts interesting food events from time to time. From slow food to organic vegan to traditional Kashmiri to meals celebrating the season – it's an experience to be had if you like an interesting story or some context attached to your meal.

Great Escapes

If you would like to experience something different from the usual luxury hotels, try staying in boutique hotels such as The Rose and Apartment 3 in Haus Khas Village and The Manor in New Friends Colony in Delhi that have all the mod-cons but are extremely cosy and great places to explore the city from.

Delhi is close to the hills, and they are my favourite pick when it comes to a short getaway, but the closest hilly sojourn can still be a good seven hour drive. Some of my other favourites are: Samode Bagh and Palace for warm luxury in the middle of nowhere, The Aman Bagh at Alwar and wildlife sanctuaries such as Bharatpur, Corbett and Ranthambore. Exotic locations such as Leh and Srinagar are also just an hour away by flight.

A Foodie's JOURNEY IN DELHI, MUMBAI & AMRITSAR

From some of the best fine dining restaurants to the rousing delights of street food and the stunning variety of regional food, India offers visitors one of the world's most thrilling journeys in culinary adventures. The urban landscape of India well defines this love affair with food and it is possible now to investigate the rising interest in world cuisine from Chinese to Japanese and from Greek to Middle Eastern across the country's top metros. The rich and varied kaleidoscopic allurements of India's culinary heritage have reached mythical proportions amongst the cognoscenti....but the proof of the pudding is in the eating—and so our top picks on this gastronomic tour are national capital Delhi, Mumbai the great commercial hub and the heritage city of Amritsar.

DELHI

Treats here are galore for the foodie. Delhi has it all— a mind-boggling array of restaurants, eateries and hole-in-the wall 'snackeries.' From classical Mughlai cuisine to the hearty delights of Punjab's *makki di roti* and *sarson da saag* topped up by a blob of homemade white butter, from the spare cuisine of the Northwest Frontier's tandoori specials and amazing homemade breads, to the chaste cuisine of the Kayasth community and pure vegetarian fare of the bania community, it engages your taste buds with unremitting ease. Kebab stalls, biryani takeaways, bakeries, chocolatiers, tea bars, pizzerias, fast food outlets and coffee shops, bhelipuri and chaatwallahs

On a thrilling Indian adventure that takes you from street food to regional fare and fine dining

By **Ranee Sahaney**



Culture Gully, Gurgaon

are the supporting pillars of a pick-me-up in the dizzying round of everyday life. Explore the challenging multi-course wazwan banquet of Kashmir at **Chor Bizarre**. *Rishta* (meatballs in yogurt), *tabak maas* (lamb chops), *gucchi* (mushrooms) and *haq* (greens) get a whole new meaning here. For excellent Punjab staples *murgh makhani*, *kaali dal*, head for culinary expert Jiggs Kalra's **Punjab Grill**. For some of the best South Indian, dive into **Sagar** (Tel: 011-24333658), which has branches around

town. Ritu Dalmia's Diva continues to bring in the crowds for her amazing Italian fare.

Khan Market has a slew of favoured restaurants and cafes; amongst the top—**Market Café**, **Mamagoto**, **Khan Chacha**, **Amici**, **Big Chill** and **Choko La**. **Rajinder da Dhaba** is a South Delhi staple for kebabs, curries and roti.

The city is also home to a string of exclusive restaurants offering wonderful wining and dining experiences. One of the city's top Indian restaurants is



(Above): Kebab Festival at Chor Bizarre in Delhi (middle): Chef Manish Mehrotra of Indian Accent (below): Copper Chimney's Paneer Masala

Indian Accent (Tel: 011-43235151), in the quiet Manor Hotel set in the leafy environs of haute Friends Colony West. Gourmet contemporary Japanese experiences await you at the world-renowned **Megu Restaurant** (Tel: 39331234) at The Leela Palace Kempinski Hotel and **Wasabi by Morimoto** (Tel: 66503732) at the Taj Mahal Hotel. For Italian, Dilliwallahs who want to dress up for the evening, head for **Travertino** (Tel: 24363030) at The Oberoi. Ask for their superb cheese menu and excellent wine list.

For Mediterranean delights **Olive** (Tel: 29574444, 09810235472), in the vicinity of the UNESCO heritage site of the Qutub Complex, is Delhi's restaurant of choice. For European fare, old favourite **The Orient Express** (Tel: 66503732), at the Taj Palace Hotel continues to hold its own despite the frenzied competition. The noodle-like lanes of the **Old Quarter** (Chandni Chowk) are the streets to a flavourful culinary heaven. Kebabs, chicken curries, *rogan josh*, biryanis, *ras malais*, *kulfis*, *jalebis*, *halwas*, *lassis*, *gol gappas*, *bhallas*, *kachories* are just some of the allurements for thrilling your tastebuds. Legendary **Karim** (Tel: 2326 4981), near Jama Masjid is the place to go for biryani and curries; it has an outlet in the atmospheric market of Nizamuddin near the Dargah. Don't miss Bismillah's *nihari*, Bundu Khan's *haleem*, and *Changezi* chicken (near Jama Masjid). Top up with Bade Mian's *kheer*, and Giani's *rabri*.



For **regional fare** head for **Dilli Haat**, set up by Delhi Tourism in the mode of a rural weekly market (haat) from the states, where you can combine some hearty eating experiences with a satisfying shopping spree amongst stalls selling handicrafts from all over India. Also a hot favorite is the regional food courtyard— **Culture Gully at Kingdom of Dreams** in Gurgaon with food and shopping from the states. Step into its Nautanki Mahal for dazzling entertainment such as the hit show Zangoora.



Olive Qutub Courtyard

AMRITSAR

The spiritual sustenance and culinary favourite of Sikhs all around the world, Amritsar is a haven of street food—*kulchas*, kebabs, *chola-bhatura* and tandoori chicken are hot to go. Legendary now is that the women here rarely cook the full evening meal. Instead dishes are always called in from favourite street stalls and enjoyed with hearty gusto along with good Scotch... true Punjabi-style. Amritsar was never about five star culture where food is concerned...It's always been the street food which has been accorded the highest salute because it's clean, fresh, authentic and inexpensive. Stop by **Novelty** and **Kanha** for their yummy, *puri-channa* and *chola-bhatura*. The mind-boggling *kulchas* at **Maqbool Road** sell out by late 1.30 pm. Don't miss eating at the daily **Langar** at the Golden Temple. Devout men and women come here to do kar seva and volunteer to cook the simple yet delicious meals for the endless stream of people who arrive at the free kitchen here. **Bharavan the Dhaba** (now also air-conditioned) located near the Golden Temple and **Kesar Dhaba** near Bazaar Passian are both good for delicious pure vegetarian food. Follow the way to the best Amritsari fish in lanes of **Katra Sher Singh**—and if its chicken for you **Surjit Chicken House** hits all the right spots. **Katra Ahluwalia** has rows of the most sinful jalebis in town. **Kundan's** amazing *lassi* is hard core rural Punjab. For the fussy there are several starred hotels such as MK Hotel (Tel: 0183-2504610), Ritz Plaza Hotel (Tel: 2562836-39) and Mohun International Hotel (Tel: 2227801-08) and which have restaurants serving traditional staples such as butter chicken, *dal makhni*, *tandoori paneer*, chicken tikka with mint chutney along with tandoori roti and *lachcha paratha*. Hotel Ista Amritsar (Tel: 2708888) offers international culinary choices.

MUMBAI

A true-melting pot of culinary delights, backed by its migrant traditions, Mumbai is a foodie's heaven. Its Koli fisher folk, its Iranian migrants, its Parsi gentle folk, the Marwaris, its Muslim populace, the Jews and Armenians, Keralites and Tamilians, the Bunts of Karnataka, Punjabi Sindhis, the Chinese and the colonial conquerors and tradesmen— have all added their own culinary heritage to the world of street food, café culture, fine dining restaurants, nightclubs and starred hotels of Maharashtra's most favoured urban landscape. From the sandwich to the *vada pao*, from the Irani bun maska to the Gujarati farsan, from the Maharashtrian *missal pao* to Punjabi butter chicken... and again— From the swish Japanese restaurant to the Italian pizzeria, Mumbai is a-buzz with its allurements for the taste buds of all.

Fresh fish from the Koli fisher women, the dabbawallas feeding the office crowds lunch on the dot, and the sandwich sellers in the colonnaded corridors—that's just the tip of the iceberg of Mumbai's tryst with food.

Follow the food trail from market stalls to landmark cafes and restaurants (both old and new) to get under the surface of culinary Mumbai. From the terrace of the posh **Harbour View Rooftop Restaurant**, soak up the views of a brilliant sunset slipping into Mumbai harbour over sundowners. Behind the Taj Mahal Hotel stop for succulent kebabs at **Bade Miya**. Feel like splurging, head for **Zodiac Grill** at The Taj the city's best especially for special occasions. Chinese fare of the finest quality awaits at the **Golden Dragon** here. For excellent seafood pop into **Trishna** at Kala Ghoda. **Khyber** still draws the crowds for its *raan*. **Copper Chimney**, an old favourite is for the best frontier fare *seekhs*, biryanis are the way to go here. For Parsi fare **Jimmy Boy** has been a magnet for the crowds since Independence times. Another hot favourite is **Café Mondegar** with its walls festooned by cartoonist Mario's work. At **Mahesh Lunch Home** at Fort tuck into *surmai*, prawns, pomfret and



Mumbai picks (top): Cream Centre's original Channa Bhatura; (above): the Michelin starred Hakkasan food is matched with red-stained oak panels and blue glass cool ambience

FRESH FISH
FROM THE
KOLI FISHER
WOMEN, THE
DABBAWALLAS
FEEDING
THE OFFICE
CROWDS
LUNCH ON
THE DOT – IT'S
MUMBAI

bangda fish fare. **Gaylord Restaurant**, an old favourite at Nariman Point still enjoys a great fan following. If its *channa-bhatara* you yearn for, **Cream Centre** at Chowpatty is legendary. For Pan-Asian fare, **China Garden** at Kemp's Corner has been having a good run. The **Oh! Calcutta** branch at Tardeo is doing roaring business with its Bengali specials; Andheri West is home to the **Oh! Calcutta Express**. A traditional halt is the **Haji Ali Juice Centre**. At Bandra West check out the sandwich menu at **Café Moshe**. A favoured watering hole is the **Salt Water Café** near Mount Carmel Church. At **Hakkasan**, the Michelin-starred eatery, ask for the crispy duck salad, and keep your eyes peeled for Bollywood celebs. For Burmese, Japanese, Vietnamese and Malaysian favourites pop into **Lemon Grass** at the Turner Road-Pali Junction.

Kashmir!

Paradise on Earth

By **Sushmita Bhowmick**

When Amir Khusrau wrote, "**Gar Firdaus røy-e zamin ast, hamin ast-o hamin ast-o hamin ast,**" which translates to "If there is a paradise on earth, it is this, it is this, it is this," he was speaking about Kashmir, the crowning glory of the Himalayas.

Kashmir changes its hues with the changing seasons - extravagantly beautiful through them all.

Stunning highland scenery and a houseboat stay are just some of the highlights of an immersive tour of Kashmir. Two major Himalayan ranges - the Great Himalayan Range and the Pir Panjal, surround the landscape from the north and south respectively. These high mountains are the source of great rivers, which flow down into the valleys, forested with orchards and dotted with lily-laden lakes. Kashmir is enticingly beautiful and visits to the Dal Lake, Jama Masjid, Pir Panjal, Mughal Gardens, Hazratbal Mosque, Charar-i-Sharief, Kheer Bhavani Temple and Shiv Khori, comprise just a few of your activities here.

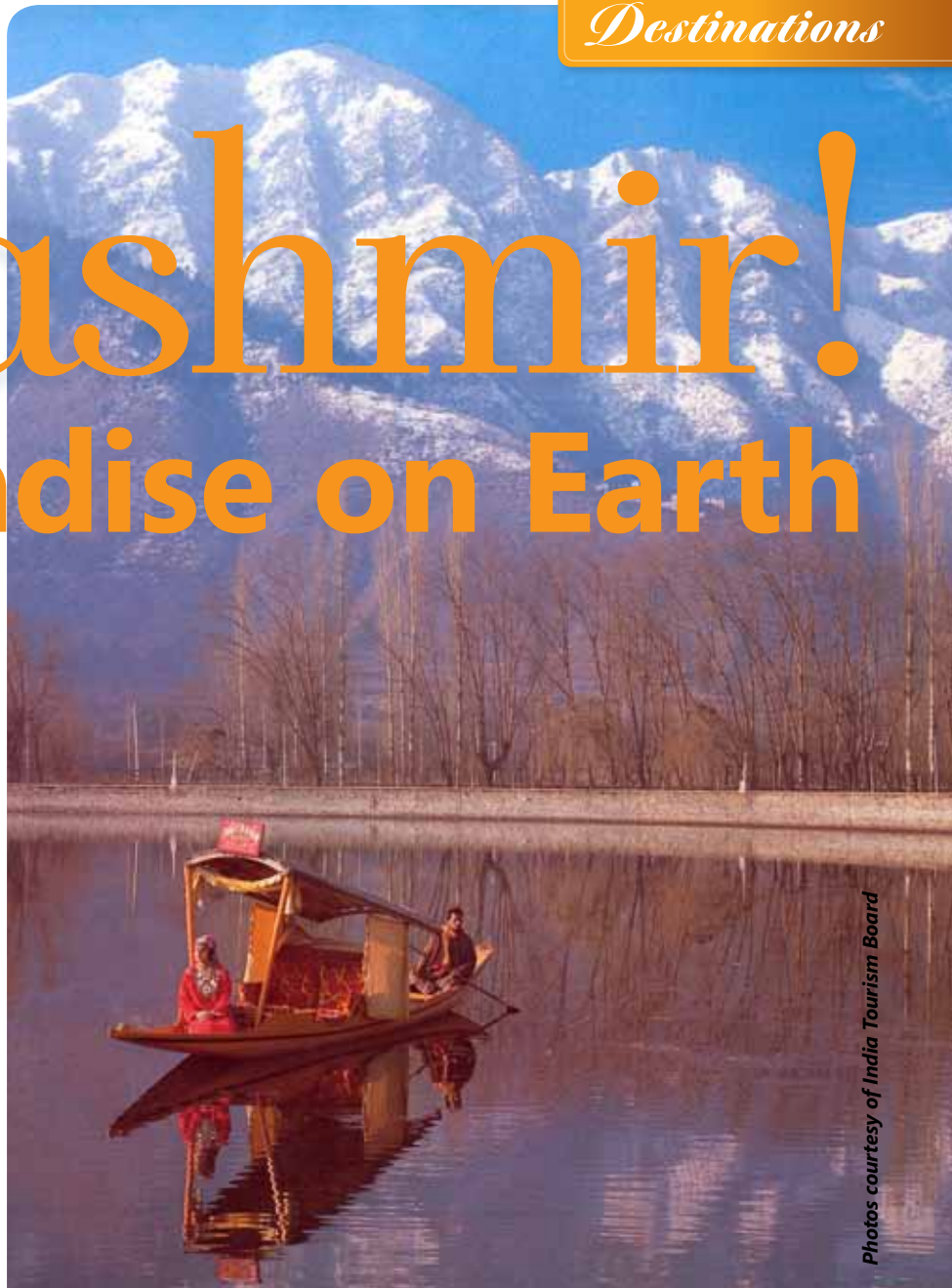
Kashmir's claim to fame is not hyped. Ms Nabila Tyebally, 35, is from Singapore, and visited Kashmir very recently in April 2013. Absolutely enthralled by her visit she said, "Kashmir is a wonderful departure from the crowded spaces in Bombay and Delhi. Scenic and unspoilt, it is like a place from another world when compared to the increasingly urbanised environment most people reside in. One of the enjoyable things we did was pony trekking through the valleys in Pahalgam. Just gazing at the snow-capped mountains can soothe your soul."

THE
MOUNTAINS
ARE THE
SOURCE OF
GREAT RIVERS,
WHICH FLOW
DOWN INTO
THE VALLEYS,
FORESTED WITH
ORCHARDS AND
DOTTED WITH
LILY-LADEN
LAKES

All Year Round Attraction

Kashmir welcomes you through the year. Typically beautiful through each of its well-defined seasons; spring, summer, autumn and winter, it provides travellers with opportunities to enjoy the scenic vista in its seasonal hue as well as enjoy activities tailor-made for that time of the year.

Winter sports such as skiing, tobogganing and sledge-riding over snow-carpeted mountains or apple-picking in the over-laden orchards in October, romantic shikara-rides on the blue-green Dal Lake in summer, or the burst of colour donning the vales in spring, Kashmir has it all.



Photos courtesy of India Tourism Board

Kashmir has four distinct seasons, each with its own character and distinctive charm

SPRING extends roughly from March to early May and is the time when a million blossoms carpet the ground. The weather during this time can be gloriously pleasant at 23°C or chilly and windy at 6°C. This is the season when Srinagar experiences rains, but the showers are brief.

SUMMER is from May until the end of August. Light woollens may be required for Srinagar. In higher altitudes night temperatures drop slightly. Srinagar at this time experiences day temperatures of 25 to 35°C. The whole valley is a mosaic of varying shades of green rice fields, meadows, trees, etc. and Srinagar with its lakes and waterways is heavenly relief after the scorching heat of the Indian plains.

AUTUMN sets in from September and the colours of fall; the gold, russet and red mesmerises. The highest day temperatures are around 23°C and night temperatures dip to 10°C by October and further drop by November, when heavy woollens are essential.

WINTER chill starts from December and the biting cold continues till the beginning of March. The bare, snow-covered white landscapes, the warmth of an open fire, the mug of 'kahwa' between your palms and the flakes of snow silently falling outside the glass window. It is the 'bliss of solitude.' Some houseboats and hotels remain open in winter. These are either centrally heated or heated with 'bukharis,' a typically Kashmiri stove kept alight with embers of wood; quite effective in winter.



USEFUL INFO

STD Code: Jammu 0191, Srinagar 0194

Spring: March to May

Summer: June to August

Autumn: September to November

Winter: December to January

Severe Winter: January to February

Main Languages:

Kashmiri, Dogri, Ladakhi, Urdu and Hindi.

Jammu & Kashmir Government

Tourist Reception Centre:

Jammu-180 001,

Tel: 0191 2520409, 2548172

Fax: 0191 2548358.

Email: dtj@jktourism.org

Website: www.jktourism.org

TRC Assistance: 0191 2544527

City Police Station: 0191-2543688

Tourist Reception Centre

Srinagar-190 001,

Tel: 0194 2572449, 2479545

Getting There

Srinagar, the summer capital of the state has domestic daily flights operated by Air India, Jet Airways, Jet Lite, Spice Jet, Indigo and Go Air. There are direct flights from Delhi, Mumbai and Jammu to Srinagar.

Jammu-Tawi is the nearest rail head for the travellers to Srinagar. There are overnight trains operating from Delhi to Jammu as well as day trains. Jammu is also connected by train with Mumbai, Kolkatta, Chennai and other cities in the country.

National Highway 1-A, connecting Srinagar with Jammu, is a good, all-weather road with several sharp inclines and hairpin bends. It is maintained by the Border Roads Organization (BRO), which clears the road of any obstructions resulting from natural causes such as landslides and heavy snowfall. Daily super deluxe sleeper buses run from Delhi to Srinagar.



Opposite page (top): Nishat Garden; (below): Luxurious houseboat living

This page (clockwise from far left): A visitor from Singapore tries out a traditional costume; one of the several mountain lakes in Kashmir and the Meadow of Gold

Recommended Side Trips

GULMARG - HILL RESORT

Gulmarg's legendary beauty, prime location and proximity to Srinagar naturally make it one of the premier hill resorts in the country. Today Gulmarg is not merely a mountain resort of exceptional beauty, it also has the highest green golf course in the world, at an altitude of 2,650 m, and is the country's premier winter ski resort.

PAHALGAM - THE VALLEY OF SHEPHERDS

Pahalgam is situated at the confluence

of the streams flowing from Sheshnag Lake and the Lidder River. Pahalgam at 2,130 m, was once a humble shepherd's village with breathtaking views. Now it is Kashmir's premier resort. Around Pahalgam are many places of interest, and because the resort is set between fairly steep hills, it is worth hiring a pony rather than walking.

SONAMARG - THE MEADOW OF GOLD

The drive to Sonamarg is through the Sindh Valley, which presents yet another spectacular facet of countryside in Kashmir. Situated at an altitude of 2730 m, Sonamarg (which means the meadow of gold) has, as its backdrop,

snowy mountains against a cerulean sky. Sonamarg is the base for a major trek route that passes along several mountain lakes – Vishansar, Kishansar, Gadsar, Satsar and Gangabal. Sonamarg is also the take-off station for the drive to Ladakh across the Zojila, a major pass in the Great Himalayan Range, through which the Srinagar-Leh road passes.

Accommodation

In Srinagar there are hotels to suit every requirement in terms of price, location and facilities. The Boulevard, which overlooks the Dal Lake, is a favoured location. Dalgate, which is fairly central for shopping and nearest to the Tourist Reception Centre (TRC), has mostly budget accommodation. Some good hotels are also located in Sonawar and Rajbagh, which are largely residential areas within 2 km of the TRC. Also there are several hotels on Residency Road, which is right in the middle of a shopping centre, very close to the TRC. Lal Chowk, in the city's centre, has several medium category hotels.

KASHMIR SPECIAL

Houseboats

Houseboats in Kashmir are a preferred accommodation. Many tourists are attracted to Srinagar by the charm of staying in a houseboat, which combines the unique experience of living on the water in a cedar-panelled elegant bedroom, with all the conveniences of a luxury hotel.

Srinagar's thousand or so houseboats are moored along sections of the Dal and Nagin Lakes and river Jhelum, each decorated fancifully and named romantically, even whimsically. Like hotels, houseboats vary in degree of luxury and have been accordingly graded by the Department of Tourism.

When IN Magazine spoke to Ms Joan Chin, 31, a Singaporean Senior

Product Executive, who visited Kashmir for a week in September, they found that she had stayed on a luxury houseboat listed by Bostan Gulistan (www.luxehouseboatskashmir.com)

She had booked her accommodation online (email: guru1@sancharnet.in or sshalimar.travels@gmail.com).

"The Kashmir boathouse we stayed in was like a mini-hotel partitioned into five units and located on the lake. Each unit was spacious and had a living room, bathroom and dining room. The food served was traditional India fare such as mutton curry. We had to travel to the mainland on a shikara – a wooden boat – and the five- to



seven-minute ride was a treat in itself."

There are also smaller houseboats comprising 3 units, which can be booked fully, if you are travelling in a small group. Apart from the shikaras that ferry the houseboat residents, there are numerous ones that are floating flower and fruit markets or selling household items and utilities; it is a parallel water-world when you stay in the houseboats.

Ministry news

FINANCE ASSISTANCE FOR NORTH-EAST STATES

Union Tourism Minister Dr K Chiranjeevi has approved Central Finance Assistance (CFA) to various tourism development projects in the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim and Nagaland. Financial aid of Rs 89.10 lakhs will be provided for development of tourist infrastructure at Bura-Nilkantha at Legship in West Sikkim, Rs 160 lakhs has been earmarked for strengthening of wayside tourism facilities along with the national highway in Sikkim Circuit. In Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh, a mega tourist destination will be developed at a cost of Rs 463.34 lakhs. In Nagaland, Kuhuboto, a virgin tourist destination which is rich in natural beauty, will be developed as an Eco-Adventure and culture destination at a cost of Rs 100 lakhs. (Source: PIB 7 Sep).

TOURIST FACILITY OPENED AT AJANTA

Twin tourist facility centres at Aurangabad's UNESCO World Heritage Sites, Ajanta and Ellora, were inaugurated on 16 September. Both centres will offer audio-visual presentations on Buddhism, an introduction to Ajanta, the significance of World Heritage Sites, murals, the Jataka tales and games to facilitate e-learning. The Ajanta Ellora Conservation and Tourism Development Project is the world's largest single monolithic excavation with replicas of four exquisitely painted caves at Ajanta, the 2nd century BC World Heritage Site of 300 Buddhist caves and a replica of the 750AD Kailash temple at Ellora.



TOURIST VISA ON ARRIVAL (VOA) SCHEME GETTING POPULAR

The number of tourists using the tourist Visa on Arrival (VoA) Scheme has grown by 29.4 per cent during the period January to August, 2013. A total number of 12,176 VoAs have been issued in this period as compared to 9,412 VoAs during the same period of 2012. Under this scheme, Japan, New Zealand and Indonesia saw the maximum number of tourists being issued VoAs. The highest number of VoAs were issued at New Delhi (6,906) followed by Mumbai (2,549), Chennai (1,832) and Kolkata (846) among the top metros.

The VoAs are valid for 30 days and is extended to the citizens of Finland, Japan, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Singapore, Cambodia, Vietnam, Indonesia, Philippines, Laos and Myanmar with entry points at Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, Delhi, Kochi, Bangalore, Hyderabad and Thiruvanthapuram airports. The fee for a tourist VOA is US\$60 or equivalent in INR per person (includes children).

RS. 25.04 CRORE SANCTIONED FOR MEGA CIRCUITS IN ANDHRA PRADESH

Union Minister for Tourism Dr K Chiranjeevi has sanctioned Rs 25.04 crore for the ongoing tourism mega circuit projects at Tirupati and Kadapa district in Andhra Pradesh. This project involves the development of tourism facilities at various temples in Chittoor District such as the Sri Kalyana Venkateshwara Swamy Temple, Sri Vedanaryana Swamy Temple, Srivari Mettu, Chandragiri Fort, Sri Kalahasteeshwara Temple and Sri Varasidhi Vinayaka Temple.

These funds have been sanctioned for the construction of tourist arrival centres and tourist information centres, mini cultural auditoriums, children parks and renovation of Dwaja Stambham at various temples. (Source: PIB 10 Sep)

12TH FIVE YEAR PLAN TO TACKLE TOURISM ISSUES

The Indian Government's Ministry of Tourism, during the 12th Five-Year Plan Period, aims to tackle various issues related to the development and promotion of tourism in the country. India currently has a 0.64 per cent share in the international tourist arrivals. The plan is to increase this to one per cent. An Inter-Ministerial Coordination Committee (IMCCTS) has been constituted under the Chairmanship of the Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, to tackle various issues related to tourism. The target is also to create 2.5 crore employment in the tourism sector. (Source: PIB).

Ministry news

MINISTRY SUPPORTS KERALA BOAT RACE

Ministry of Tourism will support the Kerala Boat Race that is held annually in the backwaters of Alleppy and surrounding areas. This was announced by Dr K Chiranjeevi on 10 August at the start of the 61st Nehru Boat Race in Alappuzha. The State Government of Kerala will contribute Rs 17.50 lakhs for the annual event while Union Tourism Ministry will contribute a matching amount.

TOURISM PROMOTION CAMPAIGN SHOWS RESULTS

The Ministry of Tourism uses the 'Incredible India' brand to campaign for India's various tourist destinations in the domestic and international market. The international campaigns are released in the Asia Pacific, Africa, Europe, Middle East and American regions. The campaigns have made a huge difference in the tourist arrivals to India from 2.38 million in 2002, when the 'Incredible India' campaigns started, to 6.58 million (provisional) in 2012.

The number of foreign tourists visiting the country has increased from 194.97 lakh in 2011 and 179.10 lakh in 2010 to 207.31 lakh in 2012. The Foreign Exchange Earnings (FEEs) has increased from Rs.77,591 crores in 2011 and Rs.64,889 crores in 2010 to Rs.94,487 crores in 2012. (Source: PIB 23 & 26 Aug)

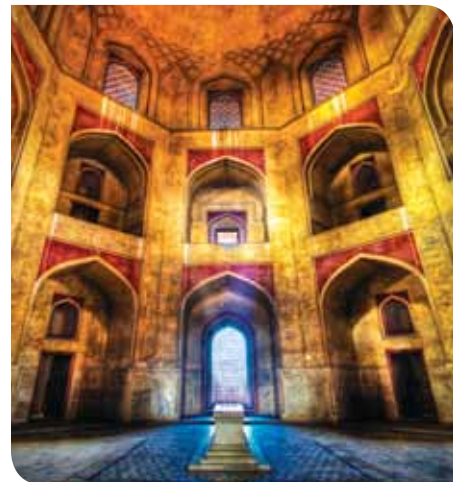
SAFETY OF WOMEN TOURISTS

According to a press note given by Tourism Minister Dr. K Chiranjeevi, the Tourism Ministry on 24 August 2013 has launched a sensitization campaign called 'I respect women.' The government ministries are proactively coordinating to raise awareness about the need for more sensitive behaviour towards women and to provide greater security to women in the country.



MAJOR PILGRIMAGE CENTRES AMENITIES AND FACILITIES TO BE ENHANCED

Tourism Minister Dr K Chiranjeevi chairing a meeting of the National Tourism Advisory Council (NTAC) on 15 July 2013, said there is a need to enhance amenities and facilities at major pilgrimage centres. Uttarakhand, which is visited by a large number of pilgrims, has witnessed widespread damage in recent floods. He said, "Ministry of Tourism has sanctioned a special financial package of Rs. 100 crore for restoration and reconstruction of the affected Government tourist facilities in Uttarakhand. This will be in addition to the central fund."



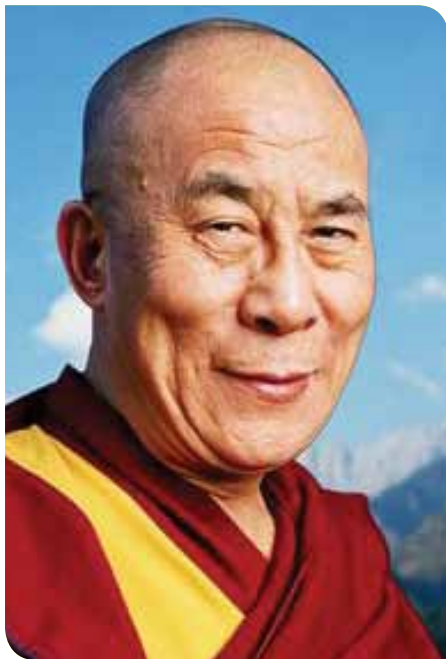
HUMAYUN'S TOMB RE-OPENED AFTER SIX YEARS BY PM

The mausoleum that inspired the Taj Mahal, the famous Humayun's Tomb was officially unveiled on 19 September by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh after six years of meticulous restoration work by Aga Khan Trust for Culture in partnership with Archaeological Survey of India. Over 1000 artisans worked on the monument to restore its original shape lost due to damage and repairs carried out over the years. A world heritage site, it was built in 1565.

SPECIAL TOURIST POLICE STATIONS

To ensure safety and security of tourists, domestic and foreign, the Ministry of Tourism has asked the State Governments and Union Territory administrations to institute special Tourist Police. The Ministry has also posted an advisory on its website www.incredibleindia.org.

Travel news



DALAI LAMA KEYNOTE SPEAKER AT GLOBAL SPA & WELLNESS SUMMIT 2013

His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, will be gracing the 2013 Global Spa & Wellness Summit as a keynote speaker. The event which will be held in New Delhi, India, from 5-7 October will bring together ministers of tourism and thought leaders to shape the best strategies to promote this fast-emerging travel category. The conference is being held for the first time in India since its inception seven years back. "There is no other conference that gives wellness and spa industry executives and leaders from around the world the opportunity to come together at one location," said Susie Ellis, chairman and CEO of the Summit. "We are deeply honoured that His Holiness will be a keynote speaker."

WEAK RUPEE BOOSTS MEDICAL TOURISM IN INDIA

The weakening rupee against foreign currencies has brought some cheer to India's medical tourism sector. The number of medical tourists to India has jumped by 40 per cent in the past six months, according to a study conducted by the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM). "Fall of rupee versus dollar has proved to be advantageous to the patients from Middle East, Africa and SAARC countries to the extent of 35 to 45 per cent on complex surgeries," said D S Rawat, Secretary General, ASSOCHAM.

FIRST EVER INDIA-JAPAN TRAVEL EXPO TO BE HELD IN JANUARY 2014

In a first, a joint India-Japan tourism expo will be organised in New Delhi on 21-22 January 2014, with the backing of the Japan Tourism Authority (JTA) and the Indian tourism ministry. Groups such as Taj Hotels, Oberoi, ITC, Lalit, Leela Kempinski and travel operators such as Cox & Kings, Mercury Travels, SOTC and Kuoni will participate in the expo. Indian carriers such as Air India, SpiceJet, Jet Airways, Indigo, Go Air and Japanese carriers, apart from tourism ministry officials, will also be at the expo. Dr K Chiranjeevi, Union Tourism Minister will be the chief guest while Japan's senior vice minister for Tourism, Hiroshi Kajiyama is expected to be the guest of honour.



HORNBILL FESTIVAL 2013 TO BE HELD FROM DEC 1-10

The Government of Nagaland will be hosting the annual Hornbill Festival this year over ten days, starting from 1-10 December. Until now the Festival was held for five days in Kohima, Nagaland. This was done in order to promote inflow of more tourists and to commemorate the 50 years Celebration of Nagaland Statehood Day, to be inaugurated by the President of India on 1 December.

TATA & SIA PLANS FOR NEW FULL- SERVICE AIRLINE

For the third time, SIA and Indian conglomerate Tata will ask for approval to launch a new full-service airline based in Delhi. Industry observers said the probability of an official approval by the Indian government is higher this time round. Previously, the country did not allow foreign carriers to have a stake in local airlines but changes in the law last year allowed holdings up to 40 per cent. The move by Tata and SIA is in the wake of Abu Dhabi's Etihad Airways plans to purchase a stake in Indian private carrier Jet Airways. Tata is also a partnering with AirAsia to launch a new budget airline.

Travel news



INCREDIBLE INDIA B2B TRAVEL ROADSHOW IN S'PORE, M'SIA AND PHILIPPINES IN SEPT

The Ministry of Tourism, India, had organised a series of roadshows in Southeast Asia beginning in Singapore on 23 September, followed by Kuala Lumpur and Manila on 25 and 27 September respectively. A delegation of 20 stakeholders from India comprising State Tourism Departments, Tour Operators and Hoteliers participated in the event. The presentations covered Visa Procedures detailed by the Indian Mission and B2B meetings with buyers and sellers. In Singapore, H.E. Mrs Vijay Thakur Singh, India's High Commissioner for Singapore welcomed over 50 members of the island's travel agents to the event and host Mrs Madhu Dubey, Regional Director of Indian tourism provided highlights of Indian attractions. She highlighted how many travellers from this region are continually amazed by the diversity of India and how there are many niche marketing opportunities that exist in wildlife tourism, adventure tours, medical tourism, and many others.



Travel news

CII TOURISM FEST TO FOCUS ON MAHARASHTRA, HIMACHAL PRADESH AND UTTARAKHAND

The tourism boards of Maharashtra, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand are all set to woo domestic and international tourists as 'Focus States' at the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) Tourism Fest, which will be held from 5-7 December, 2013 at Chandigarh. Supported by the Ministry of Tourism, it is a first-of-its-kind mega tourism event organised by CII, to promote India as an attractive tourist destination. It will see a large participation from domestic and international tourism boards, hotels and resorts, airlines, financial institutions, tour operators and travel agents. Punjab will be the Principal Partner State for the event.

INCREDIBLE INDIA WEEK AT SIAM PARAGON

The Incredible India Week was held at Siam Paragon, a leading Bangkok shopping destination, from 15 to 18 August. The focus was on Indian travel, food, fashion and culture. On the opening day, the traditional lion and yak dance 'Tawang Snow Lions' from Arunachal Pradesh was performed to bring luck and prosperity. H.E. Mr Anil Wadhwa, the Ambassador of India, Thailand, officiated at the event. Also on offer were travel packages and best deals from airlines to destinations such as Odisha, Sikkim and Uttar Pradesh.

NEW CAMPAIGN LAUNCHED TO PROMOTE HIMALAYAS

A new campaign to promote adventure tours to the Himalayas is called 777 Days of the Indian Himalayas. It is targeted to attract international tourists to India during the summer months and remind the world that 73 per cent of the Himalayan region is in India. It was launched on 27 September 2013. The Adventure Tour Operators Association of India (ATOAI) is working with the Ministry of Tourism to offer attractive discounts during the period of the campaign and ATOAI is organising trekking, river rafting, Himalayan run, as well as mountain and bike events for the campaign.



NATIONAL TOURISM AWARDS: ANDHRA PRADESH WINS BEST STATE AWARD

For 2011-12, Andhra Pradesh bagged the best state award for comprehensive development of tourism in the country as well as the 'Best State: Campaign Clean India.' The Best Heritage City award went to Warangal City, which is also in Andhra Pradesh. For the full list of winners: <http://www.pibailc.in/archieve/others/2013/mar/d2013031802.pdf>

Attaining Moksh at Kumbh Mela

By **R Silva**

Brazilians, R Silva and her husband live in Singapore and took an extended trip to India to visit Hindu and Buddhist pilgrimage sites. She describes the highpoint as the Maha Kumbh at Allahabad this year.

"To write about the largest gathering of human beings in the world, for a single purpose, beyond the barriers of caste, creed, colour, is intimidating. The 2013 Kumbh Mela at Allahabad (in the state of Uttar Pradesh) was attended by 120 million people this year. For the 55 days, from 14 January to 10 March, an area of two hectares along the river (Allahabad is at the confluence of the holy Ganga, Yamuna and the mythical Saraswati) was converted into camps. The Kumbh Mela is held in Allahabad every 12 years, and it is the oldest and largest spiritual gathering in the world. The 2013 event was even more special as it was the Maha Kumbh Mela, which only happens every 144 years.

The holy confluence is known as 'sangam.' Standing on the banks, we experienced not just a religious event, where Hindus believe a dip can wash away their sins and cleanse their 'karma,' or a cultural event,



where tourists and devotees immerse themselves in the fragrance of flowers and incense and the chanting of hymns, but a kaleidoscopic presentation of India's essence. We renewed our faith in the divine presence.

We took the flight from Singapore to Bangalore (India) and then to Varanasi. Then we took a train from Varanasi to Allahabad, a distance of about 130 km. At Allahabad we stayed at a hotel rather than the camp site. Next day, it was 27 January and we took an auto rickshaw (motorised local conveyance) from outside our hotel but it took us only a little way. Thereafter, it was a two km walk along with pilgrims – families, sadhus (holy men), tourists and locals – that overwhelms and before you realise you are at the sangam by the river. Seeing people bathing, kids playing in the water, smiles everywhere, makes you wonder how you can achieve such inner peace when you are surrounded

by millions of people, noise, and visual stimulation. But that's India for you.

I took my shoes off and stood in the shallow part of the river, feeling the sun on my skin, looking around, receiving the blessings of a thousand smiles. At one point, I wanted to sit down and looked around for a dry patch of sand. A man nearby, spread the newspaper he was reading on the floor, looked at me and at the paper, indicating that it was for me to sit. We experienced such generosity everywhere.

Standing in that sea of humanity I could not help feeling that I was one with the crowd, with the river and that you are not yourself any more. You are part of humanity, pure and simple. I wouldn't have missed it for anything."

ED NOTE: Literal Indian meaning of 'moksh' is to be released or liberated. In Hinduism (and even Buddhism), it refers to release from samsara, the cycle of life and death.



South India Popular with Malaysians

Interview with Suresh Babu by **Foo Yong Han**



Kuala Lumpur-based Biosphere Garden Sdn Bhd specialises in tours to India and shares some of the destinations Malaysians like to visit

"In the past five years, Malaysian tourists signing up with our tour packages to India have gone up by almost 80 per cent compared to the years before that," said Suresh Babu, the General Manager with Biosphere Garden Sdn Bhd, a travel agency that specialises in tours to India.

According to Suresh, a majority of his clients choose South India as their favourite destination with the remainder going to North India. Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala are the South India states with the most visits from Malaysian tourists.

"The weather in those Indian states is pleasant, a mix of warmth and cooling rainfalls. Another popular destination with Malaysian tourists is the Tirumala Venkateswara Temple, a Hindu temple in the Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh. It is said to be the most visited place of worship in the world,"

discloses Suresh.

Christian Tour Groups

Christian tours are also popular in the Malaysian market, with many people travelling to Goa, on the west coast, either for pilgrimage or to view the relics of Christianity. Goa, the smallest state in India is home to two World Heritage Sites, Basilica of Bom Jesus and the churches and convents of Old Goa. The remains of St Francis Xavier, regarded by many Catholics as the patron saint of Goa, are found in the Basilica. Goa also has the Sanctuary of Blessed Joseph Vaz at Pilar monastery in the Goan town of Sancoale. The monastery holds the novenas of Venerable Padre Agnelo Gustavo de Souza from 10 to 20 November every year.



(Left) Tirumala Venkateswara Temple



Phone snapshots (left) Pachimsawat (standing extreme right); (above) hubby and son against scenic 'Alps' of Nagaland

Getting High on Nagaland

Interview with V. Pachimsawat by **Foo Yong Han**

Vararom Pachimsawat, a dance instructor from Bangkok, visited Nagaland with her family and recalls its scenic beauty and warm, helpful inhabitants.

"While I always had plans to travel to India, this trip was prompted by a family friend, a native of Nagaland, inviting us over to celebrate her 60th birthday. I along with my husband and son took the opportunity to plan an extended tour of Nagaland," said Vararom.

Nagaland brought back memories of rural Thailand as it was three to four decades ago. "But I was surprised to see the modern concrete and brick houses rather than the wood-log-straw that you expect to see in villages," said Vararom. Though mostly they are one-storey affairs, you can see quite a few that are two- three-storey high. Most houses sported the tell-tale signs of satellite connection and yes you could see mobile phones in the hands of many, said Vararom.

The main draw in Nagaland for Vararom was the towering mountain ranges. "A large number

of the villages are located on the mountains. There are even a few high-rise condominiums on some of the mountain tops! These dwellings, with craggy peaks looming over them, make for an awe-inspiring, picturesque sight. The landscape is somewhat reminiscent of the Swiss Alps," says Vararom. Despite the Indian summer being on full swing, the high grounds of Nagaland ensured a cool climate.

Vararom and her family rented a car for the two weeks that they were there, leaving them with the choice of stopping at places they found interesting. "And since the roads are paved and spacious, we never faced the difficulties of mountain driving," adds Vararom.

She recollects with fondness the warmth and hospitality of her friends and the people in general. "Everywhere we went, people are smiling and ready to help. They have high civic sense, disposing of trash at designated rubbish collection points and frequently clearing the ground of fallen leaves and branches. As a result, the villages and roads are extremely clean. Very

impressive for a supposedly rural community," elaborates Vararom.

When they checked in at hotels, they found the service and utilities comparable to good city hotels in India. "Their standards are the equivalent of four- to five-star hotels, with Wi-Fi connectivity and the works, you will be surprised!"

Ask her about shopping opportunities and watch the big smile spread, as she recollects the adorable local hand-crafted souvenirs that she carried back. Though departmental stores stock mid-range brands, the street-side stalls had more appeal for her.

Food at the hotels were no different from the Indian cuisine found in Bangkok, however, Vararom remembered the lovely smoked pork stew, bamboo steamed fish and the eel chilli sauce, that they savoured as house guests. "Some districts ban alcohol, so we had to keep that in mind."

Vararom says in parting, "Nagaland is stunning and you must visit to enjoy the rustic charm; an Indian visa and customs clearance is a breeze."

Travel Trade Fairs & Events

India

INDIA TRAVEL MART JAIPUR

DATE: 18 – 20 October

VENUE: BM Birla Auditorium, Jaipur, India
India Travel Mart (ITM) aims to gather tourism, hospitality, aviation industry, inbound, outbound, domestic and specialised tour operators, travel agents and all professionals related to other industries from all over the world into a single arena. ITM participants include travel agents, tour operators, tour organisers, business and corporate houses, excursion makers, professionals, food craft institutes and educational institutes among others.

3RD HOSPITALITY BUSINESS FAIR

DATE: 15 - 17 November 2013

VENUE: Hitex Exhibition Centre, Hyderabad, India
5,000 hospitality professionals are expected to come and build business relationships through personal interactions, product demonstrations, seminars, conferences and sponsorship opportunities. Also a platform to launch new products and find sales agents or distributors to existing and newer markets.

IITT EXHIBITION

DATE: 16 - 18 January 2014

VENUE: Bandra Kurla Complex, Mumbai, India
Asian Business Exhibitions and Conferences (ABEC) partners with the world's fifth largest travel exhibition, MITT, to bring the India International Travel & Tourism Exhibition (IITT).



SATTE NEW DELHI

DATE: 28 January - 30 January 2014

VENUE: Pragati Maidan, New Delhi, India

Last 20 years, SATTE has been promoting India's tourism and has evolved as a global exhibition in India. Participants include decision makers from travel agencies, tour operator companies, MICE planners serving Indian inbound, outbound and domestic tourism all under one roof.

Asia

TAIPEI INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL FAIR (ITF)

DATE: 18 - 21 October 2013

VENUE: Taipei World Trade Center, Taiwan

Attracting 60 countries and 850 organisations to network and create business opportunities in the tourism industry in the Asia Pacific region. In addition to the exhibition, there will be trade conferences, product information sessions, industry seminars, and various special country cultural performances.

ITB ASIA

DATE: 23 - 25 October 2013

VENUE: Suntec City, Singapore
All sectors of the travel-value chain, Asia Pacific's leading travel companies and emerging small and medium-sized enterprises meet with top international buyers from the MICE, Leisure and Corporate Travel markets.

CHINA INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL MART (CITM)

DATE: 24 - 27 October 2013

VENUE: Kunming International Convention & Exhibition Center, Yunnan, China, billed as the largest professional travel mart in Asia, jointly organised by China National Tourism Administration, Yunnan Provincial People's Government and Civil Aviation Administration of China.



Festivals OF INDIA

CELEBRATING LIFE

India is at her boisterous best between October and January. For October starts with Navratri in the West (Gujarat, Maharashtra), Durga Puja in the East (West Bengal, Orissa, Bihar, Assam), while November celebrates Deepawali across the country and December is all about yuletide. The crossover to the New Year is celebrated with gusto, and then Sankrant, in mid-January, celebrates the Winter Solstice.

By **Sushmita Bhowmick**



Navratri

WHEN: 5 - 13 Oct 2013

WHERE: Mumbai, Maharashtra and Ahmedabad, Gujarat

Navratri (literally translates into nine nights) is a nine-day festival in celebration of the Mother Goddess; she is worshipped in various names and forms such as Durga, Chamunda and Sherawali. While days have ritualistic ceremonies, the nights are for festivities – feasting, dancing and music.

The main night attraction during this time is the 'garba' dance, which is performed at community gatherings. Huge concentric circles of dancers, women and men, in the most colourful of traditional dresses, dance with sticks that are called 'dandiyas.'

Durga Puja

WHEN: 9 – 13 October (this year)

WHERE: Kolkata, West Bengal

Durga Puja in Kolkata is celebrated with much pomp and grandeur. Unlike Navratri, it is celebrated for five days and culminates in the Dussehra festivals. Worshipping the Mother Goddess in the form of Durga, the impenetrable, is typical in the eastern part of the country. Kolkata with her innumerable Durga 'pandals' (temporary bamboo and cloth structures), the dazzling lights and the colourfully dressed devotees, is incomparable. If in the city during the festivals, do visit 'Kumartuli,' where the deities are sculpted out of clay and ornamented with exquisite decorations.

Deepawali

WHEN: 3 November (this year)

WHERE: All over India

According to the Ramayana, this is the day Lord Ram returned to Ayodhya after 14 years of exile. The city welcomed back its beloved King with lighting of earthen lamps, bursting of fire crackers, distribution of sweets. Deepawali, the festival of lights (and sound) is celebrated across the country. People decorate their homes; for certain parts of the country this also ushers in the New Year; and of course the sweetmeats and snacks are just too mouth watering putting all thoughts of healthy eating to the wind!

Christmas

WHEN: 25 December

WHERE: All over India

Come December and there is joy in the air; though the country has a sizeable Christian population, when it comes to Christmas, religious demarcations is the last thing on anyone's mind. Mid night masses, carols, the beautiful church lightings, the stars twinkling and bells shining on Christmas trees, Santa dressed up ringing his bell outside shops and in the malls, and who can miss the Christmas pudding and roast turkey.

Sankrant

WHEN: 14 January

WHERE: All over India

'Makar Sankrant' or 'Sankrant' is celebrated each year on 14 January and is one of the most auspicious days in the Hindu calendar. Regarded as the beginning of the harvesting season, this festival is celebrated by various names all over the country; Pongal in Tamil Nadu, Bhogali Bihu in Assam, Maghi in Haryana, Shishur Saenkraat in the Kashmir Valley and Poush Pithey in West Bengal. Music, dance, festivities and food mark the occasion, when the winter harvest is brought home.





Talking about his experience in India, Ang Lee, the director of 'Life of Pi' said, "I have friends in America who told me it will be difficult to shoot in India. I must say I like the culture here. I had a great time. People here are so warm and friendly." An increasing number of foreign films, mostly Hollywood, are being shot in various destinations across this hugely diverse and hauntingly beautiful country. In 2011, India's travel and tourism industry contributed US\$1.7 trillion (or 2.8 per cent of the global GDP) to the economy; this is expected to rise to 4.2 per cent (US\$2.9 trillion) by 2021. Indian destinations, courtesy Hollywood's (and world cinema's) growing fascination with the exotic orient, is playing a big part in boosting tourism earnings.

A Growing Player

The Indian travel and tourism industry has emerged as one of the fastest-growing sectors; it is diverse and has untapped potential. It is increasingly being seen as a key driver of socio-economic progress, providing large-scale employment, promoting infrastructure development and serving as a key source of foreign exchange earnings. Globally too, the trend is similar. Investments in the global travel and tourism industry are expected to grow at a CAGR of 5.4 per cent to reach US\$1.5 trillion by 2021 from US\$0.6 trillion in 2010.

INDIA'S REEL Adventures

By **Sushmita Bhowmick**

When Life of Pi won Oscars, the world came to know about Puducherry and Munnar. India is being introduced to the world by movies

In India, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and the Ministry of Tourism have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to provide strong support to film tourism in a bid to give a fillip to the 'Incredible India' campaign. Cinema is being viewed as a sub-brand at various international film festivals and markets abroad. According to the MoU, Ministry of Tourism will provide budgetary support for identified film festivals and offer single-window clearance permission to shoot films. This is expected to create a film tourism vertical that will promote India as a filming destination for domestic and foreign film producers.

Typically, most countries offer tax rebates in the form of VAT refund ranging from 10–20 per cent, depending on the location and budget. Film production companies are eligible for such refunds, if they spend a certain percentage of their entire budget filming in a particular country and use local talent. Cash rebates, tax credits, encashable credits – the incentives are various.





Locations Made Popular *Incredibly India*

Indian locations such as Rajasthan, Goa and Mumbai are known internationally. However, smaller but equally fascinating places are getting recent focus. When 'Dark Knight Rises' needed desert sequences, director Christopher Nolan zeroed down on Mehrangarh Fort, in Jodhpur. For 'Singularity,' a time-travel epic, Roland Joffé chose Orchha in Madhya Pradesh. Kathryn Bigelow, Academy Award-winning director of 'Zero Dark Thirty,' chose Chandigarh – the premises of Punjab Engineering and DAV College, to be precise. For the very popular 'Eat, Pray, Love,' Julia Roberts goes through her self-realisation journey and finds peace in India and Hinduism; this was shot in Ashram Hari Mandir in Pataudi, Haryana.

When Karachi had to be shown for 'A Mighty Heart,' Michael Winterbottom shot in Mumbai and Pune. The movie generated a lot of curiosity about Mumbai, thanks to the fact that Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt stayed in Mumbai for a while with their children. This list can go on; Slumdog Millionaire, Mission Impossible 4, Life of Pi, Trishna and others. What these internationally acclaimed movies have done from the tourism perspective is incredible. Not only have they raised the travel industry's foreign exchange earnings but also succeeded in creating movies as a sub-brand for the Indian Travel and Tourism industry.

John Madden's 'The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel' was shot in India. Madden when asked had this to say, "We selected Rajasthan as the place to film because the terrain felt right, most particularly the colours felt right. It's just an incredibly rich colour palette you find in that part of India."

For English actress Penelope Wilton, who played Jean Ainslie, a disgruntled character in the movie, "India was the most exotic place I've traveled to, and it's probably the farthest. I've never been as far east and experienced such a completely different culture as India. From the moment you go out in the street, you're taken by everything. The people—I'll never forget how many people there were. I walked down Regent Street in London when I came back, which has always seemed to

me to be very busy, and it seemed empty compared to India. We were in India during the wedding season, which is in November, and everyone seemed to be getting married. There were wonderful weddings going on all around us, with elephants taking the bride, and horses dressed up, and the bride and groom dressed in the most wonderful garments with yellows and greens and blues, and incense flying, and flowers—it was all extraordinary. It is interesting how the Indian people have such joie de vivre; their saying yes to life, whatever their background. They seem to have festivals and celebrations all the time and I found all of that very fascinating."



Speaking at the Cannes International Film Festival, this year, Indian Tourism Minister Shri K Chiranjeevi said, "We are creating new opportunities for international filmmakers, so that they can access diverse Indian locations. We also try to provide them with state-

of-the-art production and post-production facilities." According to him, India is a complete 'film making destination.' The Ministry of Tourism also organised the 'Incredible India' promotional events to promote India as an 'incredible filming destination.'

Films Starring



Indian cinemagoers already know this - Bollywood's splendid cinematography is augmented by India's inherent scenic beauty. International film production companies are also discovering this and here are some famous movies showing India:

GANDHI

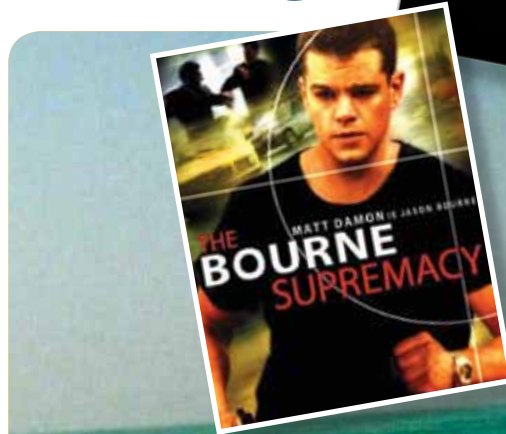
- New Delhi ● Gujarat
- Mumbai ● Bihar ● Rajasthan

A co-production between British film companies and the National Film Development Corporation of India about India's greatest and well-known political activist, it is only natural for the movie to be filmed almost entirely in India. The diversity of India's landscape meant that the country also doubled for South Africa settings. The key moment of the movie, Gandhi's assassination, was filmed at the location in New Delhi where Gandhi was assassinated, the Gandhi Smriti – formerly known as the Birla House (named after an Indian tycoon family) – which is also a national monument for Gandhi. Other filming spots include Gujarat, Mumbai, Bihar and Rajasthan.

THE BOURNE SUPREMACY

- Goa

Like any spy movie, the protagonists and antagonists usually globe trot and the amnesia-stricken Jason Bourne and his pursuers are no different. A substantial part of the second instalment of the Bourne franchise was shot in India. Most of the Indian action centred on Goa, where Bourne had to fend off a hired killer. Highlights of the shoot in Goa include Bourne laying low in the picturesque Palolem Beach and a car chase through the streets of Candolim followed by one of the vehicles plunging into the Nerul River.



The Dark Knight Rises

The Bourne Supremacy



THE DARK KNIGHT RISES

- Jodhpur

Regarded as probably the best Batman movie adaptation, Bruce Wayne finds himself incapacitated and imprisoned in a vast subterranean prison. While the scenes of the dungeon were not filmed in India, the external shots featuring the towering Mehrangarh Fort atop of a cliff four hundred metres above the skyline of Jodhpur, the second largest city in the Indian state of Rajasthan, were shot on location.

LIFE OF PI

- Puducherry ● Munnar

A critical and commercial success, this adventure drama follows Pi Patel, an Indian teenager and the dangers he and his companion, a Bengal tiger, faced. The early part of the movie was set in India and filmed in the coastal town of Puducherry, which is notable for its colonial French buildings, as well as the panoramic hill station of Munnar in the state of Kerala.

JOBS

- Delhi ● Vrindavan

India played a part in shaping Steve Jobs' life and this fact was not lost on the filmmakers who devoted part of the biopic on the Apple founder's journey to India in 1974. Most of the location shooting took place at Delhi landmarks such as the Jama Masjid, Hauz Khas Complex, Tomb of Safdarjung and Chandni Chowk. Filming was also done in the town of Vrindavan in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh.



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Medical tourism is progressively being seen as 'medical health care value travel' ensuring double benefits

World class treatment at affordable prices; India is slowly capitalising on this USP to fast become a popular destination for medical tourism.

With its repertory of traditional and natural healing and wellness processes, India has always been part of the 'exotic east,' the land of ayurveda, yoga, meditation, et al.

To this has been added the entire contingent of world-class private hospitals, highly qualified and experienced physicians and surgeons and an efficient and caring hospital staff. The result - a burgeoning medical tourism industry with immense potential. Yes Bank, which has recently done a study on health and wellness tourism in India along with apex chamber of commerce FICCI, ranks India fifth after Panama, Brazil, Malaysia and Costa Rica, as a medical tourism destination.

Why India

Dr Devi Shetty, one of India's most renowned cardiac surgeons and Chairman of Narayana Hrudayalaya, said, "We (Indian institutes) produce the largest number of doctors, nurses and medical technicians in the world. Also, we have been traditionally linked with western health care because of the British influence on our medical education and the ability to speak English. This is extremely important for developing global health care. We also have the largest number of USFDA (U.S. Food and Drugs Administration)-approved drug manufacturing units outside of the U.S."

OF Cure & Care



THE PROS

World-class Quality

Indian doctors are widely recognised as being some of the best in the world. Now with hospitals providing the latest medical technology and infrastructure, treatment is comparable to the finest in the world.

Low cost

Costs in India can be as low as one-fifth or one sixth of the cost in the US or UK. It is even more difficult, if one is not covered by insurance in these countries. A treatment in India is much lighter on the pocket.

Short waiting Period

Surgery such as a hip replacement can take six month to a year's wait in Britain and parts of North America, while in India a patient can get operated within days of getting admitted, all other physical conditions being stable.

Outstanding Service

India has a large number of trained personnel in the hospitality industry that ensures high-level of service. Added to this is the concept of 'athithi devo bhavha' (Guest is God) that ensures that guest is treated with utmost warmth and respect and is provided the best of services.

Spoken English

The wide use of English as a mode of communication (written and spoken) makes it much easier for foreign tourists to communicate.

Where Tourism Fits In

Medical tourism is otherwise called 'medical health care value travel.' If a medical visit can be combined with sight-seeing, shopping, exploring and wellness programmes, then the travel to India ensures double benefit.

India in its vast expanse, diversity of culture, natural beauty, exotic food, colourful festivals is an 'all eggs in one basket' situation for tourists. Add to this, the cost-effective world-class medical treatment across speciality areas such as neurology, neurosurgery, oncology, ophthalmology, plastic

surgery, gynaecology, general medicine, general surgery, cosmetology, and convalescence programmes that incorporate traditional yoga, ayurvedic massage, meditation retreats and spa techniques, and the basket literally overflows. The cherry(s) on the cake are low cost stay and travel, English-speaking service providers and the natural warmth and caring attitude of the people.

High cost of operations in developed countries, especially in the USA and UK, and the shortage of quality health treatment in African, Middle Eastern and different SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) nations has accentuated the scope of medical tourism in India.

Future Potential

India's medical tourism industry is currently poised at around Rs 4,500 crore and is likely to be worth Rs 10,800 crore by 2015. Growing at a compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of 40 per cent, the inflow of medical tourists in India is likely to cross 32 lakh by 2015 from the current level of 8.5 lakh, according to The Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM).

An ASSOCHAM study also marks Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, West Bengal and Union Territory of New Delhi as the fast emerging spots of India's medical tourism industry.

ASSOCHAM has proposed setting up of 'Multi-Specialty Health City' on public-private partnership at Ahmedabad, Bangalore, Chandigarh, Chennai, Hyderabad, Jaipur, Kochi, New Delhi, Puducherry and Pune.

In the 2012 British comedy drama, *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*, Maggie Smith plays Muriel Donnelly, a retired housekeeper who finds herself in India for a hip-replacement operation. The operation outsourced to India will be cheaper and she could jump the six-month

queue in Britain. When Smith's Muriel in the movie begrudgingly admits that her hip is feeling well (the doctors must have got lucky- is what she says), the India doctor says, "It's strange; the more operations they perform, the luckier they get." The hint being that in India, health care is not only at its best in quality but the volume is increasing.

Accredited Hospitals

It is always advisable to select an accredited hospital, when you do your preliminary search. There are numerous hospitals accredited to Joint Commission International (JCI), USA and National Accreditation Board for Hospitals and Healthcare Providers (NABH), India. For more information log on to the website: www.indianmedicaltravelassociation.com/Accredited-Indian-Hospital.php.



M & MX Visa Reminders

- You need a Medical (M) Visa for entering India, if you are coming for treatment.
- The initial period for such a visa may be up to a period of one year or the period of treatment, whichever is less, and can be extended for a further period of one year by the State Government/ Foreigner Regional Registration Offices (FRROs) on the production of medical certificate/ advice from the reputed/ recognised/ specialised hospitals in the country.
- Any further extension will be granted by the Ministry of Home Affairs only on the recommendations of the State Government/ FRROs supported by appropriate medical documents.

Such visa will be valid for maximum three entries during one year. State Government/ FRROs may permit one additional entry in emergency situations.

- Attendant or family members need to get a Medical Attendant (MX) Visa. Such visa may be granted to the spouse/ children or those who have blood relations with the patient. However, not more than two attendants may be allowed, at a time, for grant of MX Visa.
- Entrants with Medical Visa (M) or Medical Attendant (MX) Visa are required to get themselves registered with concerned FRRO/ FRO within 14 days of first arrival, irrespective of the duration of their stay.



From Sarah Ferguson, Duchess of York, to Camilla Parker Bowles, Duchess of Cornwall and the goodly spouse of Prince Charles, from Goldie Hawn to Madonna, international celebrities have taken time out from their hectic lives to sink into the calm and restorative confines of India's most well known holistic spas.

One of India's most important contributions in the field of healing and wellness is the over 500-year old tradition of ayurveda. Ayur (life) and ved (knowledge); Thus the ayurveda system focuses with great precision on not only the healing of the mind, body and spirit of man but also the prevention of illness and preserving life through holistic means.

Lord Brahma, the creator himself, legend says, taught this amazing art of healing to Prajapati Dkasha, his son who was born from his thumb. Prajapati passed it on to the celestial twins Ashvini Kumaras, the healers of the gods. They are the devas (deities) of ayurveda, a science the knowledge of which has been handed down from generation to generation. A holistic healing and preventive medical system, it addresses various aspects of the medical processes.

Ayurveda

WELLNESS TREASURE TROVE

Primer on ayurveda and guide to some of India's most important and best known spas

By **Ranee Sahaney**

Ashtang Ayurveda or the eight Ayurvedic processes are:

- **Kaya Chikitsa** (internal medicine) healing and detoxifying measures
 - **Shalya Chikitsa** (surgical procedures) in extraction of foreign bodies
 - **Shalakyia Chikitsa** (ear, nose & throat & Ophthalmology) dealing with disease of supra-clavicular region
 - **Agad Tantra** (toxicology) dealing with alleviation of poison, artificial poison and toxic symptoms due to intake of antagonistic substances
 - **Kaumar Bhritya** (paediatrics & obs) deals with pregnant women & babies
 - **Bhoot Vidya** (psychiatry and bacteriology)
 - **Rasayana-** (geriatrics and rejuvenation)
 - **Bajikarna dealing with aphrodisiacs**
- While Rasayana and Bajikarana help promote health and prevent diseases, the rest are used in aiming to cure different diseases.**

The cornerstone of ayurvedic belief is the deep relationship between the body, the mind, the soul and the panchamabhutas or the five elements: Akash (ether), agni/teja (fire), jala (water), vayu (air) and prithvi (earth). Ayurvedic believes that all things in the universe are made up of the panchabhutas and tridosha - vata, pitta and kapha – three fundamental universal energies that govern our health and determine our physical constitution (prakrati).

The elements of ether and air are in vata, fire and water in pitta and water and earth elements in kapha. The characteristics of the vata dosha are light, dry, cold, minute, mobile, rough, penetrating; of pitta dosha hot, penetrating, oily, liquid, sour, sharp, pungent and kapha heavy, cold, soft, oily, sweet, static, slimy. Individuals have a predominant dosha which defines their body type (prakrati) of which there are seven types: vata (vata-pitta, vatta-pitta-kapha); pitta (Vata – Kapha); kapha: (kapha-pitta). In ayurvedic, each person's constitutional type and the imbalances of the doshas is diagnosed by a skilled physician and treatment meted out accordingly. Ayurvedic treatments run the full gamut of therapies conducted since ancient times in India.

AYURVEDA CENTRES

From Soukya, a short drive out of Bangalore to Kerlaeeyam in the Kerala, to Ananda in the Himalaya in Uttarakhand and Six Senses near Delhi, wearied visitors can enjoy some of the most effective healing therapies and treatments to rejuvenate them. Manned by professionals in the fields of Ayurveda and holistic measures, India's spa services are backed by organic meals and the ancient principles of yoga and meditation. Many offer day packages and long term treatments.

Stores across the urban landscape of the major metros now stock beautifully packaged Ayurvedic products ranging from soaps to shampoos. One of the most popular ones is the award-winning Kama series which is used the world over in top-end spas.

Keraleeyam Ayurvedic Resort

Located in the heartland of Kerala's gorgeous backwater environs in Alleppy, Keraleeyam Ayurvedic Resort is a haven of caring and healing in the most authentic Ayurvedic traditions. It offers a wide range of holistic packages for rejuvenation, stress management and detoxification apart from dealing with serious illnesses and ailments. Keraleeyam Ayurvedic Resort, Thathampally, Alappuzha, Kerala. Tel: 0477-2231468 (www.keraleeyam.com).



Soukya

The focus at Soukya, located at Somanthalli near Whitefield on the outskirts of Bangalore, is to arrive at one's 'well-being,' through a slew of holistic measures taken to restore the body's natural balance with a combination of medical treatments and individual therapies. Heading the 24-room facility (claimed to be the world's first holistic health centre) is Dr Isaac Mathai, a homeopathic doctor, who oversees the care of each visitor after indepth consultation of their needs. Soukya's clientele, most of it international, zoom into avail of its authentic and genuine ayurvedic treatments, monitored by a flurry of medically qualified doctors, backed by trained therapists. Not only does the spa offer ayurvedic treatments it also has options for naturopathy, homeopathy and reflexology; yoga and meditation and organic meals add to the great experience here. Soukya International Holistic Centre, Samenthanahalli, Whitefield, Bangalore. Tel: 080-25318405 (www.soukya.com).



Ananda In The Himalaya

One of India's most luxurious health spas, Ananda is located in the serene foothills of the Garhwal Himalaya, a short distance from Rishikesh. This award-winning spa, which is dedicated 'to restoring balance and harmonising energy, through a holistic approach, incorporating the healing principles of the East and the West' focuses especially on the restorative powers of a unique blend of therapeutic treatments based on traditional Indian practices of ayurveda, yoga and meditation.

Ananda's ayurvedic treatments

are appropriate for their suitability to Himalayan conditions. These are customized for each individual. Less oil and slow synchronised massages are used to break up the morbid doshas. Expert therapists, supervised by a qualified physician, conduct these therapies. The aftercare programme for the guest provides an excellent follow-through to ensure the maximum benefit of the ayurvedic treatments.

The spa resort is a destination in itself for the well-heeled and celebrity clientele it attracts. Surrounded by

acres of verdure around the palace estate of the Maharaja of Tehri, Ananda's 75 villas, suites and deluxe rooms serve up some of the most sumptuous views of the Ganga River and the Himalayas. Enviably luxury is furthered by the serene accommodations, innovative menus and excellent service. Spread over 24,000 sq ft the spa offers an extensive selection of therapies in the 24 treatment rooms. The Palace Estate Narendra Nagar, Dist. Tehri-Garhwal, Uttarakhand, Tel: 01378-227500 (www.anandaspa.com).



Six Senses Spa

The Six Senses Spa in Noida, located at the Jaypee Greens Gold and Spa Resort are spread over 60 acres of lush verdure, is one of the busiest spas in the country. A unit of the globally renowned Six Senses Spa (Thailand) it is powered by a deep sense of serenity and care. The holistic ayurveda treatments at Six Senses focus on the healing and preventive measures for the mind, body and spirit through individual processes in terms of the type of spa treatment, herbs, oils and the type of massage. Ayur Nidra aims at improving the overall quality of sleep. It involves a 'meditative sequence of purification, body therapies and bathing with special ayurvedic ingredients according to your body constitution.' Abhyang is a full body treatment with signature blends used for head and face. Six Senses Spa, Noida. Tel: 0120 2339900 (www.jaypeehotels.com/spa/index.aspx).

From Rome to China, England to Constantinople and Egypt to Portugal, India, from ancient times, has caught the attention of consumers and traders across the world, with its stunning array of goods and exotica. Add to that a crafting heritage that goes back over 5,000 years. From time immemorial, travelers and traders have come into peninsular India's western and eastern ports, to trade in spices, gems, pearls and textiles. The old caravan routes passing through the northern passes of the Himalayas linked to the legendary Silk Route and opened up fresh markets.

Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai, spread across the four compass points of the country, offer the visitor a veritable treasure trove of goodies to indulge in. Plunge into the bustling bazaars, local 'haats,' the old town lanes with their dinky shops, the glitzy shopping malls with their local and branded goods sourced from international markets. Find an amazing banquet of regional crafts, marked by a rich heritage of artistry, from across the Indian heartland. The flavor of the Indian 'bazaars' and the heady feeling of striking a bargain add that extra spice to shopping.

DELHI

You can literally shop till you drop and after a reviving cup of tea or a glass of lassi, start all over again. To combine a meal with a shopping spree, Tony Khan Market is the place to go. It's a magnet for the diplomatic crowd, the well-heeled and the wannabes. Its cobbled lanes and courtyard is home to some of Delhi's most popular designer boutiques selling clothes, cosmetics, home décor goods, bookstores, patisseries, electronic goods, music shops et al —and the restaurants are booked to capacity.



Photo courtesy of Delhi Tourism

Shopping at Dilli Haat, Delhi for regional textiles, arts and crafts

THE Joys OF Shopping

The 'IN' list for top shopping spots of Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai

By **Ranee Sahaney**

Dilli Haat, opposite INA (the popular wet market, which also stores consumables from home and abroad) replicates a rural weekly market (haat) with stalls showcasing India's stunning heritage of regional textiles, arts and crafts. Explore shelves of handcrafted textiles, sculptures, terracotta work, pottery, carpets and dures, jewellery, artefacts, lacquerware, brassware, bamboo and cane work, herbal products and paintings. Break away to savour regional culinary fare (from Nagaland's momos to Kashmir's kahwa, from Bengali fish fry to Punjab's makki ki roti and saag) at the open air bistro-like stalls at the far end. Another excellent initiative by Delhi Tourism is the Nature Bazaar set up in bustling Mehrauli. In Connaught Place the state emporia are good for handcrafted gifts and souvenirs at reasonable prices. Take a look at Cottage Emporium (opposite the Imperial Hotel on Janpath), Crafts Bazaar at Pragati Maidan and Tribes at Mahadev Road.

For real bargains on international designer brands hit the stalls in Sarojini Market. Tiny boutiques line Hauz Khas Village and Shahpur Jat, while Greater Kailash I Market has all kinds of allurements for young and old. Stock up on your favourite international brands (Armani, Bottega Veneta, Canali, Ferragamo, Jimmy Choo, Louboutin, Paul Smith, Clinique, Colorbar, DKNY Perfumes, Estee Lauder, L'Oreal, Bvlgari, Chopard, Piaget and Tom Ford) at the swanky malls. Have your platinum card handy to shop at Emporio.

The lanes of Old Quarter, Chandni Chowk, offer textiles, saris, jewels, pashminas, brocades, spices, teas, incense and ittars.

MUMBAI

A kaleidoscopic variety of shopping experiences awaits the visitor in India's busiest commercial hub. If the Colaba area fans your greed for trendy bags and shoes and even kitschy stuff sold on its pavement stalls, the dashing stores at High Street Phoenix-Palladium Complex (Lower Parel) will lure your wallet. Pick up artisanal paper items from Chimanlal's at Colaba.

At Dadar head for Lazaree, famed for their fabulous Paithani saris; if you are fussy you can even order online. Crawford Market, which used to be rocking with sales of fruits, vegetables and meat, now stocks imported cold stores, coffees, imported cosmetics and the like. For jewels it has to be Zaveri Bazaar. For traditional crafts, step into Central Cottage Emporium and for Bastar art, Avante Cottage Crafts of India.

Fashion Street is Mumbai's answer to Delhi's Sarojini Nagar Market. Just bargain hard. Popular haunts continue to be Nepean Sea Road, Kemp's Corner and Peddar Road, Breach Candy and Warden Road, Bandra and Juhu.

Plunge into wily lanes of Bhendi Bazaar, rich with allurements available at second hand rates. Chor Bazaar here throws up treasured antiques.



Welcome to (top) Dilli Haat and (bottom) Nature Bazaar; (middle): a stall in bustling Mehrauli (Photos courtesy of Delhi Tourism)

KOLKATA

Its colonial heritage brought western trends in everything from cooking to clothing, which amalgamated seamlessly with the culture of the 'bhadraloks' (gentleman) Bengali. Park Street has auction houses that are legendary in the stocks they keep. Plunge into the tight lanes of New Market to stock up on old favourites such as barley sugar, Bandel cheese and tea, fresh from the gardens up-country. You'll also find traditional Bengali 'tant' cotton saris, Murshidabad silks and bolts of khadi for kurtas and pyjamas, jewellery and leather goods. AC Market and Vardhan Market are good for the latest fashion clothes at reasonable rates.

Mahatma Gandhi Road has scores of stores (such as Adi Mohini Mohan Kanjilal) selling Bengal's traditional saris such as the Tant Tangail cottons (originating in Bangladesh), Dhoniakhali saris and Tant Jamdani Dhakais; this is the place to look for the delectable balucharis (from Murshidabad) with their weaves of Hindu mythological tales and the beautiful Katan Swarnachuri Benarasis. Bara Bazaar stocks bridal saris.

Good Companions on Russell St. (Tel. 033-3292-9612) famed for its hand-embroidered items from Bengal villages continues to hold its own. Also worth visiting is Women's Friendly Society, on Park Lane (Tel. 033-2229-5285) and ethnic wear promoter Shamlu Dudeja's workshop (near Taj Bengal) for the lovely and much sought out kantha embroidery work.

CHENNAI

Chennai is an excellent base for stocking up the finest in terms of saris, fabric, jewellery, spices, incense and costly timber bric-a-brac and arts and craft goods. Hit the shopping streets of Egmore, Nungambakkam, Thyagaraya Nagar and Vadapalani to discover the sizzling south in all its vibrant moods. For good buys of saris, silk fabric and jewellery visit Kumbakonam; Tanjore paintings from Thanjavur; stone craft from Mamallapuram; and Palmyra-fiber handicrafts from Tirunellveli. For saris Nallis and Pothys are de rigueur. Jewels are a plenty at Vummidi Bangaru Jewellers, GRT Jewelers and Prince Jewellers. Georgetown has hosts of retail outlets, probably cheaper than malls such as Spencer Plaza. Look for Kanchipuram silks at the Handloom House here.

The Multi-brand boutique Luxe Box at Royapettah is stocked with big-label stars such as Canali, Paul Smith and Etro. Step into Collage for haute designer Sabyasachi Mukherjee's creations.



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Agra, Taj Mahal

POEM IN MARBLE

Photos by **Suresh Eswaran**

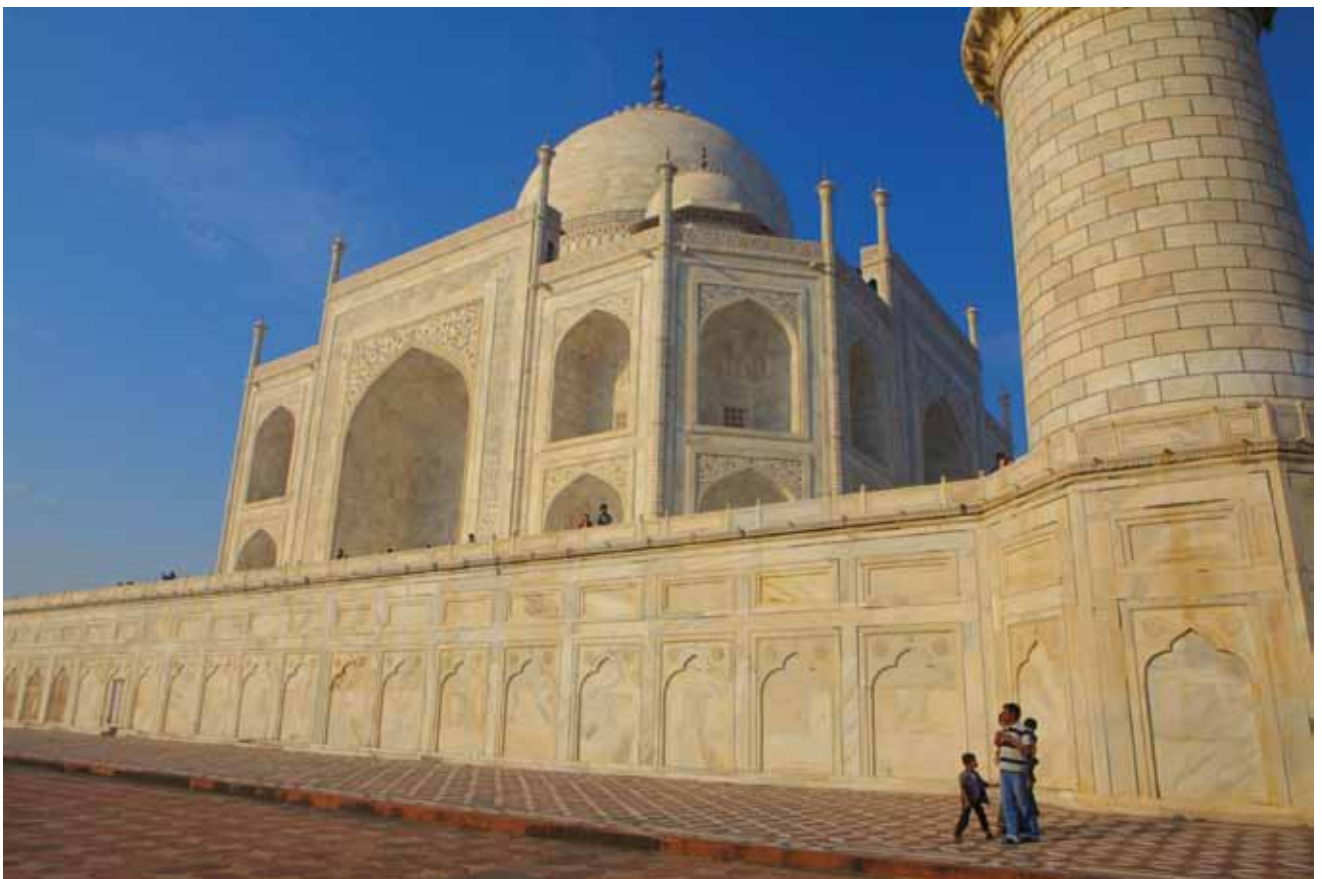
The **Taj Mahal** is a spectacle in white marble, embedded with precious and semi-precious stones. Unparalleled in grandeur and opulence, this fabled monument of love could be eulogized thus. Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan built the Taj as a tribute of his love for his wife Mumtaz Mahal. The poetry and romance that shrouds the Taj cannot be better described than by Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore, who compares it to "a teardrop on the cheeks of time."



The Taj in Sunrise Hue



Agra's other Taj a.k.a. Chhotta Taj



The Poem in Marble



Agra Fort - A Walled City



View of the Taj from Agra Fort

Rajasthan

JAIPUR - CITY IN PINK

Photos by **Suresh Eswaran**

Jaipur, also known as the Pink City because of its extensive use of the local pink stone. But above all, it is a city rich in history, culture, forts and palaces. It is also home to exquisite handicrafts, beautiful textiles, delicate jewellery and precious/semi-precious stones. Shopping and sightseeing here is a must as the city, the capital of Rajasthan, is full of the most exotic palaces, gardens and museums.



The Royal Elephants of Amer or Amber Fort



Nahargarh Fort



Decorated camels outside City Palace



Rich artistry - Johari Bazaar



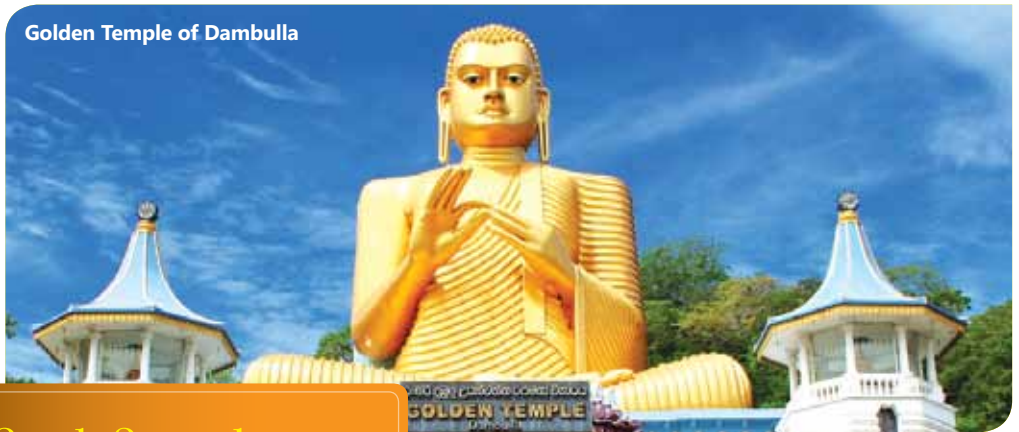
Amer Fort overlooking the Maota Lake

The *in* Magazine Primer onSRI LANKA, MALDIVES,
NEPAL & BANGLADESH

▶ South Asia is slowly graduating from the 'less travelled' to the 'best travelled' list. In this issue, apart from India, we picked four choices from this region: a Himalayan country – Nepal; two island countries – Maldives and Sri Lanka and one mainland destination – Bangladesh.

We start with Sri Lanka which is simply tropical exotica in a capsule! Sri Lanka has made it to the Lonely Planet's top of the list for a 2013 holiday. Those who have just married (or even those who are much married) look no further than Maldives; it's tailor-made for celebrating love. Nepal is a mountaineer's delight or better still to say that if a holiday needs to excite you, get that adrenalin flowing, and test the fitness of body and mind, then this is the place to be. If you need just one reason to visit Bangladesh, there's no better than the Sunderbans; well, we can make it two – the Royal Bengal Tiger; or actually three with the Bengali sweets.

Golden Temple of Dambulla

Soul-Searching in
SRI LANKA

An island with pristine beaches that is waiting to be re-discovered! Affordable and beautiful, the natural wilderness provides the perfect setting for trekking, kayaking, canoeing, hot air balloon ride, wave riding, paragliding – the list is long!

GOOD TO KNOW

Currency: Rupee

Visa: Get your 30-day visa before going; for stays beyond that contact the Department of Immigration and Emigration (www.immigration.gov.lk).

Immunisation: Go by the WHO recommended list of vaccines for S Asia.

Others: You must have a travel (medical) insurance even if you are healthy and fit.

GETTING THERE

Sri Lanka is well served by major Asian carriers. Sri Lankan Airlines

and Emirates fly between Colombo and Malé. You arrive at the Bandaranaike International Airport at Katunayake.

BEST TIME TO GO

December through March.

DO THE USUAL

Although Buddhist relics constitute the usual, it is something you cannot miss. Do the Kelaniya Raja Maha Vihara, the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic and Adisham Monastery; for Hindu temples keep a day for Seetha Amman Temple and the 15th century Nallur Kandaswamy Kovil. Sri Lanka has numerous World Heritage Sites: the super bio-diversity of Central Highlands; the best-preserved sea-fort of

South Asia – the Dutch Fort at Galle; the first century BC Golden Temple of Dambulla – with exquisite 2,000 year-old murals; the sacred Temple of the Tooth in the historic city of Kandy and many more.

DO THE UNUSUAL

At World's End, you can walk your own jungle trail; try to reach by seven in the morning. Go for a hike in the Horton Plains in the shadows of the country's two highest peaks and a safari at Uda Walawe rivaling the savannahs of Africa.

LOCAL FARE

This is another fish-eating country. Taste the Ambulthiyal prepared with thick gamboges or 'Goraka' paste. The tangy 'lunu dehi' and pickled fish 'jaadi' are must haves. Sri Lankan sweets made from rice flour, palm treacle, jiggery, are just yummy.



MALDIVES Magic Moments

The reason is crystal clear why its coral atolls attract beach, snorkel and dive enthusiasts from around the world; with rich marine life under the waves and world-class resorts above them, Maldives is perfect! The country has over 1000 coral islands, only 200 are inhabited and 80 are leased to international resorts. Island-living in the vast Indian Ocean has never been so good.

GOOD TO KNOW

Currency: Rufiyaa

Visa: No-cost 30-day visa on arrival stamped on your passport which can be extended up to 90 days

Immunisation: If travelling from a yellow fever infected country, a current immunisation certificate is needed.

Others: You have to have US\$100 + US\$50 per day at your disposal, if you do not have a hotel reservation and there is a departure tax, which can also be included in your ticket

GETTING THERE

Maldives is connected by air and you arrive at the Ibrahim Nasir Male' International Airport.

BEST TIME TO GO

January through March is best but other times are as good as the rains just add to the beauty of the place. Humidity is high and temperatures rarely drop below 26 degree centigrade; loose light wear is suggested. Modest dressing keeping in mind that it is a Muslim country. Carry sandals and flip flops.

FUN @ MALDIVES

Since it is more sea than land, it's inevitable you have fun in the water; whether it is snorkelling among colourful marine life and rich coral reefs or surfing the massive swells brought by the southwest monsoons or playing water polo!

DO THE USUAL

Experience the Maldivian way of life by travelling to one of the many inhabited islands. Some are quite modern while others are quiet fishing villages with lots of tree-shade, swings and the traditional wooden holhuashi. A holhuashi is like an island-version of a gazebo, built with hollow wooden trunks tied together forming the large, bench-like seat, and often with a thatched roof. They are conveniently set up on beaches, often where the boats come in, and are a place where islanders wind down after a day's work.

Source: Conrad Maldives Rangali Island

DO THE UNUSUAL

Book a night fishing trip to the reefs. Your boat will leave before sunset to find a good spot near a reef. The boat crew will show you how to use the lines, hooks and sinkers. You will catch enough, to quench your touristy thirst for fishing.

It is possible to own an island for a day in Maldives. You just land on one of the numerous uninhabited spots. While the fish you caught gets grilled over red hot ambers, lie down on your back and look on the stars shining just for you. A day-time trip to a desert island is an experience of its own. The raw, virgin vegetation surrounded by blinding beaches will bring out your inner Crusoe!

LOCAL FARE

Tender coconut water, variety of tea(s) and 'raa,' toddy tapped from palm trees, are the local beverages. Tourist resorts serve alcohol. The local staple is fish, usually combined with coconut and rice. Capsicum, chilli, onions, curry leaves and lemon juice are used liberally. Many Maldivian cuisine are derived from Kerala (India) and Sri Lanka; hot and spicy is the ruling flavour. Though international food catering to all tastes is available, trying out the local fare adds to the experience.

Kathmandu



Mountain Kingdom NEPAL

Culturally-rich, ethnically-diverse and bestowed with the breath-taking beauty of the majestic Himalayas

The ethereal beauty of Nepal can be savoured by the breathtaking vistas of the snow-covered Himalayas, green forests and cascading waterfalls. Eight of the 10 world's highest peaks are found here and it is paradise for adventure seekers and mountaineers.

Travellers from across the world can also experience its rich culture and religion. In the Valley of Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal, seven groups of monuments and buildings showcase the entire range of historic and architectural achievements for which the valley is famous. The seven include the Durbar Squares of Hanuman Dhoka (Kathmandu), Patan and Bhaktapur, the Buddhist stupas of Swayambhu and Bauddhanath and the famous pilgrim temples of Hindus, Pashupatinath temple and Changu Narayan. These temples are protected UNESCO heritage sites.

GOOD TO KNOW

Currency: Nepalese Rupee

Visa: Visa on arrival is available for many countries. However, several countries from Africa and Asia will need to apply for visa prior arrival. Indian passport holders need not apply for visa.

Immunisation: Consult with your physician regarding special immunizing against any tropical disease.

Trekking Permit: Special trekking permit must be acquired from the Department of Immigration, Kalikasthan, Kathmandu, for trekking to areas that fall under the Restricted Zone.

GETTING THERE

Nepal Airlines is the national flag carrier with flights from and to Delhi, Kuala Lumpur, Dubai, Bangkok, Doha and Hong Kong. Other International airlines operating from and to Kathmandu are Air Arabia (Sharjah), AirAsia (Kuala Lumpur), Air China (Lhasa, Chengdu), ArkeFly (Amsterdam), Bahrain Air (Bahrain), Biman Bangladesh (Dhaka), Dragon Air (Hong Kong), Etihad Airways (Abu Dhabi), Air India (Delhi, Kolkata, Varanasi), Qatar Airways (Doha), RAK Air (Ras al- Khaimah), Silk Air (Singapore), Thai Airways (Bangkok) and United Airways (Dhaka).

BEST TIME TO GO

Between October and April.

DO THE USUAL

Close to the capital city of Kathmandu is the very popular tourist destination Nagarkot. It is set in the backdrop of snow-capped Himalayas and peak of Everest. Visit the Himalayan villages on the 'rooftop of the world' and get a glimpse of the lives of Nepalese inhabitants of this mountainous region. Another must visit spot is the Langtang National Park. This is Mother Nature at her most extreme. You'll find tropical rainforests to ice-covered pine forests, rare wild life such as red panda, musk deer, rhesus monkey, it is unlike any

other place in the world. You can also pay your respects at the birth place of Gautama Buddha at Lumbini. A small town in southwestern Nepal, marvel at the ancient stupas and monasteries and soak in the pilgrimage atmosphere of the village.

DO THE UNUSUAL

Trek through the Sherpa homeland of Solu Khumbu from where you can observe the resplendent Mount Everest, highest mountain in the world. If you can't trek, take a helicopter tour and catch the morning sun rising from behind Everest!

For a country famous for its mountains, the Gangetic flat land of the Terai that stretches across the southern part of Nepal provides a unique experience for tourists. The Chitwan National Park with its rich flora and rare wild life is another offbeat location where tourists can see a different face of Nepal.

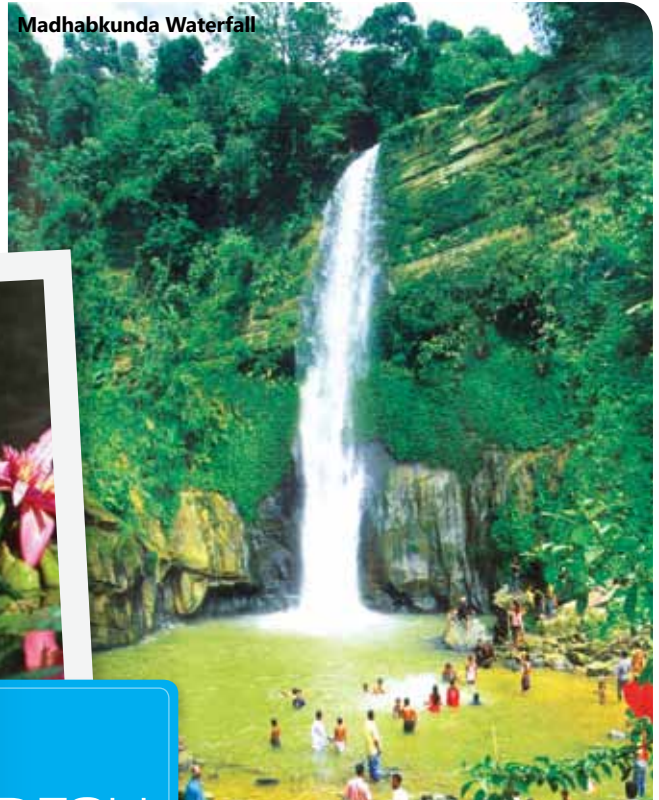
LOCAL FARE

Due to its close proximity, Nepalese cuisine is influenced by Indian, Tibetan and Chinese cooking styles. Dal-bhat-tarkari is a popular dish across all the regions; cooked with lentils and spices and served with rice and vegetable curry. Meat eaten in Nepal is usually of chicken, goat or buffalo.





Ancient Bengali mausoleum, Dhaka



Madhabkunda Waterfall

Source: Balaram Mahalder



Royal Bengal Tiger

Bountiful BANGLADESH

Rupomoy Bangladesh or 'Beautiful Bangladesh' is the new tourism tag given to define the varied beauty of the land

It's true, Bangladesh does not spring immediately to mind when thinking of a holiday break but it does boast of a few tourism treasures. For example, you can walk along Cox Bazaar, the world's longest beach; if you love nature, the stunning Sundarbans is not just where you can find the rare Royal Bengal Tiger, it is also the home of one of the world's largest mangrove eco systems.

GOOD TO KNOW

Currency: Taka

Visa: Get your visa before going; extensions up to a total stay of three months can be obtained.

Immunisation: The World Health Organisation recommends certain vaccines for South Asia. Go by the list.

Others: You must have a travel (medical) insurance even if you are healthy and fit.

GETTING THERE

Getting to Bangladesh through India, whether by air or land, is much easier. The Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation has buses running from Kolkata (West Bengal, India) to Bangladesh. You can also fly from Kolkata to Dhaka or to Agartala (Tripura, India), from where the Bangladesh border is just about 150 km.

BEST TIME TO GO

Between October and February when the weather is yet not too humid.

DO THE USUAL

Dhaka is the capital of Bangladesh; the centre of industrial commercial, cultural, educational and political activity. Motijheel is the main commercial area while Sadarghat on the bank of the river Buriganga, presents the water front.

Chittagong of green hills, lakes and beaches is a tropical delight. Rangamati on the western bank of the Kaptai Lake has a scenic beauty all its own and is particularly favoured for the indigenous Chakma, Marma and other tribes.

Sylhet Highlands, the country's most popular hilly terrain, is a major tourist destination. This quaint little valley tucked between winding pair of rivers the Surma and the Kushiara, is Bangladesh's tea capital. Sylhet breaks the monotony of the ubiquitous flat riverine plains.

Sundarbans (deriving its name from the 'sundari' tree) is the home of the Royal Bengal Tiger and is one of the major mangrove forests of the world.

DO THE UNUSUAL

Situated about 18 km north of Bogra town, Mahasthangarh is the oldest

archaeological site of Bangladesh on the western bank of river Karatoa. If the past mesmerises you, then this is one of the places to be at. Another is Paharpur, a small village five km west of Jamalganj, now famous as the excavation site of the biggest known Buddhist monastery south of the Himalayas.

Mainamati is an area with several important Buddhist archeological sites in Bangladesh. Another off beat place is Teknaf, a romantic old-world border township in the southern tip of Bangladesh, looking up to the Myanmar high hills. And as only Bangladesh can bring you back to the sea - St. Martin, Coral Island, a small island in the northeast of the Bay of Bengal, about nine km south of the Cox's Bazar.

LOCAL FARE

Each district of Bangladesh has its typically representative food. Though fish and rice is eaten across the land, the preparation is widely different; try out the shutki (dried fish) from Chittagong, the fresh water fish of Sylhet with satkorhai and the Awadhi cuisine of Dhaka. Sweets are mouth watering: rasgollas, mishit doi, firni, one can just go on. The seven-layer rainbow tea is an innovation that you cannot miss. The country is a shopper's paradise; the Dhakai Jamdani and Naksi Kantha make for fabulous gifts.

India has a Licence to Thrill

Die-hard
adventure
seekers need
dive no further!

By Foo Yong Han

I did not start as an adventure seeking traveller, being more inclined to 'regular' sports such as football, running and swimming. Also my island city of Singapore does not have much scope for adventure sports. However, I have always wondered what it would be like to get a shot of adrenaline by going to far-off places such as the US, Australia, New Zealand and Europe to paraglide, traverse rapids and climb mountains.

I would jump at an opportunity to go skydiving and white-water rafting any day. It is just that Singapore does not have the terrain or facilities to host the spectrum of adventure sports we are so used to watching on television.

I had my first brush with adventure sports while river rafting in Bali. Being plunged down and thrust up by choppy, fast flowing rapids and swerving past craggy river bends is just pure adrenaline rush. One wrong move and me and my fellow rowers will steer right into jagged rocks. That was in 2006. My next chance happened this August, when I travelled to Brisbane, which is also well known for adventure sports. I grabbed the chance to sign up for the skydiving tour. I chose this particular activity because I have a fear of heights. What better way to conquer it, right? And then what a boost it is to your morale!

Then last month, voilà! I discovered India. The friendly folks at ITB (India Tourism Board) lent us their Incredible India Adventure Sports video and I found out India offers more than white-water rafting and skydiving. The variety



(Top) Paragliding in Yelagiri , (above) River rafting in Rishikesh (Photos courtesy of India Tourism Board)

is mindboggling and irresistible to adventure travel junkies. What is more, India is so close to home.

From the video I found out the plethora of options that one can pick from; skiing and mountaineering activities available on the scenic, snowy Himalayas along with white-water rafting and kayaking in the Ganges, Teesta and Indus Rivers. These rivers are reputed to have some

of the choppiest rapids in the world! Then there is sand dune bashing in the great desert of Thar in Rajasthan with four-wheeled drive jeep. Yup, I am saving up for Incredible India as my next adventure destination but in the meantime, at IN Magazine, there may be options of India adventure travel anytime on the card. One never knows when fortune can shine.

A Taste of Regal Splendour at Shahi Maharani

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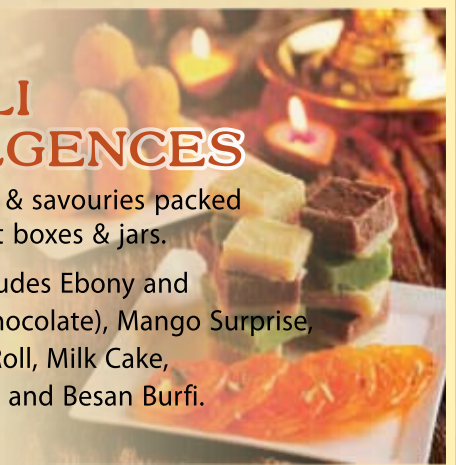


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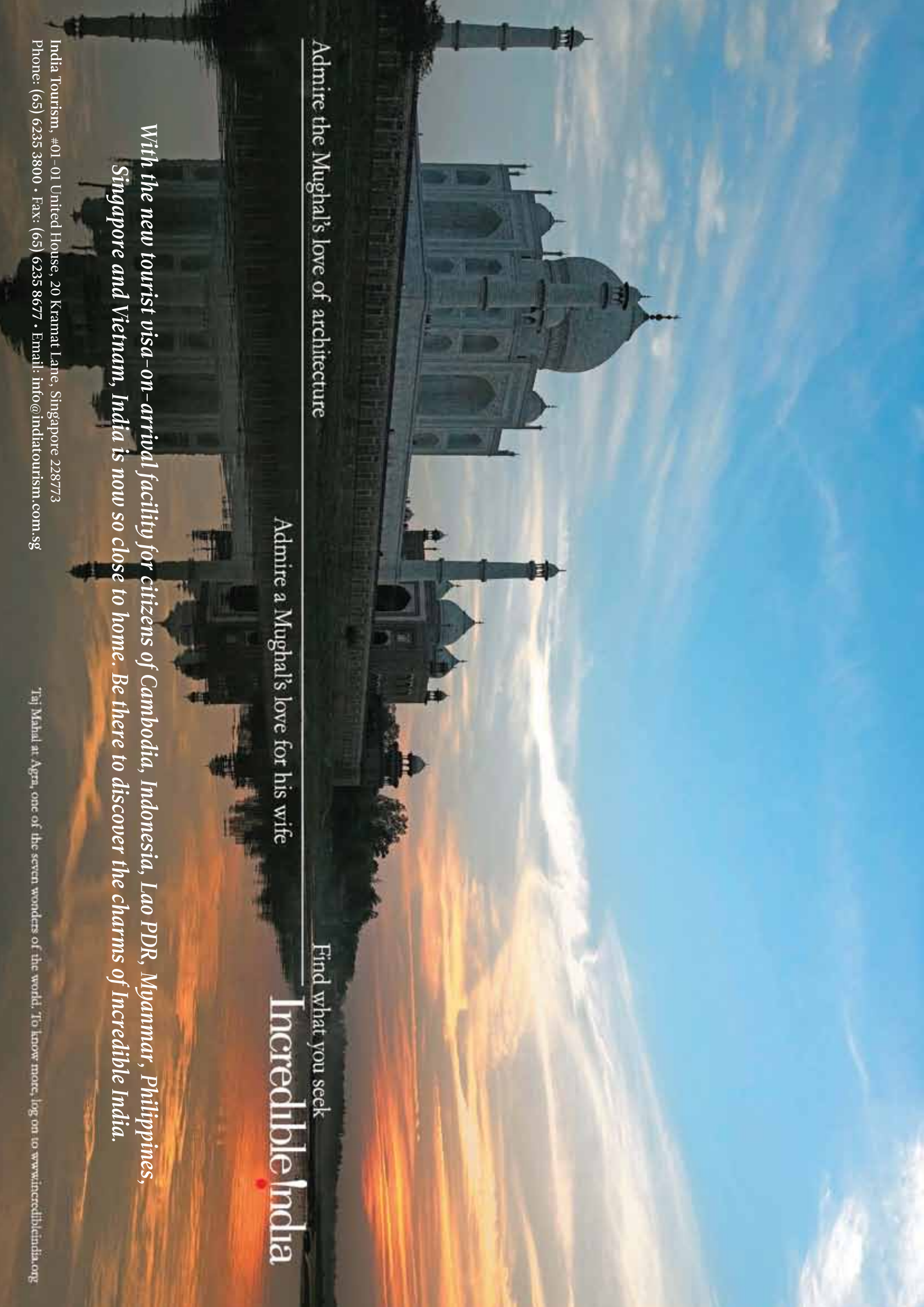


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