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Photo courtesy of Chokin

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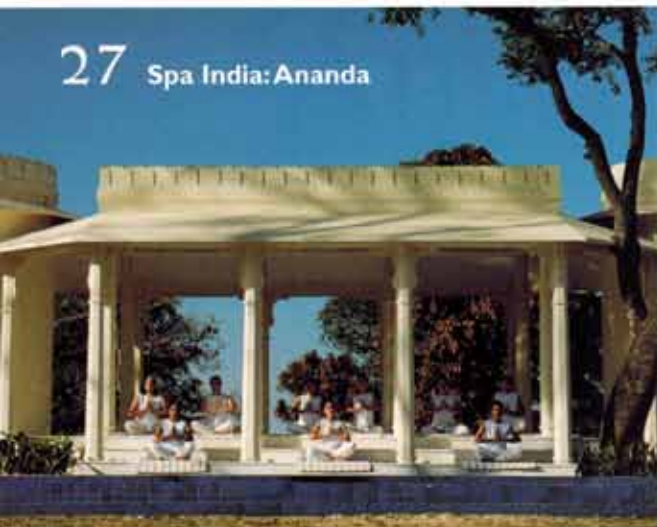
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Welcome to the issue of *Travel India*.

The cover itself tells you some of the story behind why we chose to launch this magazine. A group of visitors enjoying the high life in Rajasthan, staying in a palace and enjoying traditional camel rides, but also playing dress-up and polo. Travellers will tell you that India has a lot to offer, but one can't really get its essence till you travel there and see what makes it unique - its heart and soul. And that's what we aim to show; the fact that India offers so many chances not just to observe, but to roll your sleeves up and jump right in. The frequent travellers we spoke to corroborated that too.

Knowing this and knowing what international travellers want - not just visits, but experiences - we bring you India and its various treasures from a global perspective. We will give you all the reasons and more to visit.



Also, destination India is more than just a bunch of places on the map. Even if you are travelling on business to the metropolitan cities, there is always an experience to be had around every street corner - be it shopping for fashion or art, or the famed nightlife of the city that never sleeps, Mumbai, all of which we cover in this issue.

Again, you probably ask with a plethora of travel magazines, why one with a focus on India? We believe that with India a buzzword in many circles, the country's sights and sounds will draw more and more people.

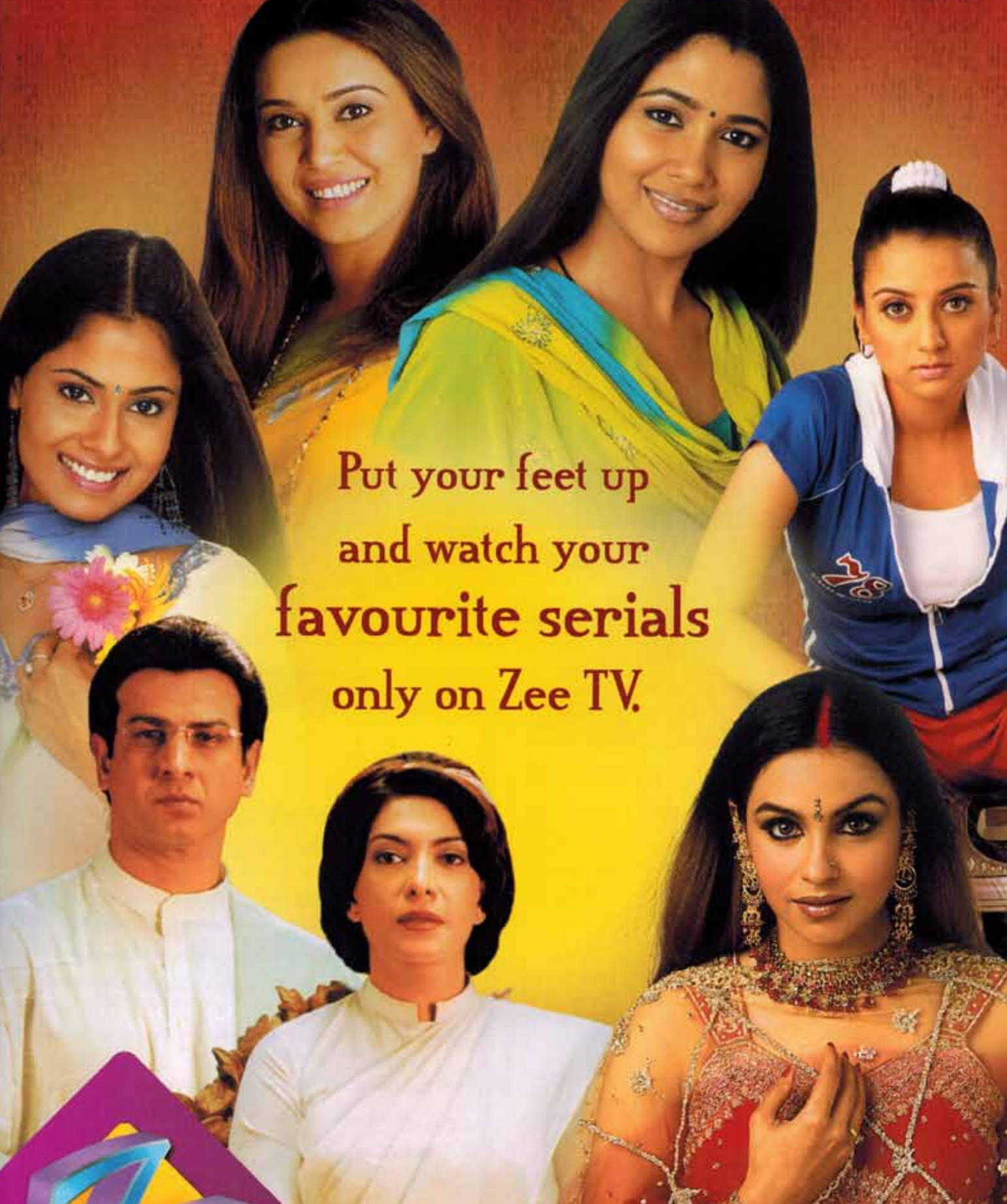
ON THE COVER:
This summer issue's Travel India featuring the chokri models frolicking in the Rajasthan sun.

If ever a country offered something new every season, it is India. It even has its own, unique monsoon season. Hence, Travel India is also seasonal, and in this issue we give you some summer escapes that are definitely less crowded than the European Alps or South Korea. Himachal, Uttaranchal and Sikkim offer the grandeur of the Himalayas along with sporty activities such as skiing, white-water rafting, trekking and rock-climbing. To rest those weary muscles, check into the world-famous Ananda Space for some well-deserved pampering.

In future issues, expect a similar mix of lifestyle and travel ideas to liven up your next visit to India

Happy travelling!

Sangeetha



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I am very happy to know that
Travel India is being launched in Singapore. I had the occasion to see some advance layouts of the publication. I am very impressed with the range of subjects covered and quality of production.

India-Singapore relations have been on a very positive upswing in recent years, covering almost all aspects of interaction. One of the very heartwarming trends has been the increase of visitors particularly from India. The increasing number of Indian professionals and their families resident in Singapore is another encouraging development. As is the increasing number of students now coming to study in Singapore.

All these developments make for a very wide ranging enriching people-to-people interaction. I have been very pleasantly surprised at the number of cultural events relating to India, concerts, theatre, art exhibitions, fashion boutiques and Bollywood related events that have taken place in just the last few months. It is therefore, a very appropriate time, for a lifestyle and travel related magazine focused on India to be launched in Singapore. I wish the publishers all success.

Alok Prasad

Alok Prasad
High Commissioner of India
Singapore



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admit that curries do not go down
well with me, even though they are
delicious and I had to make do with
sandwiches during my whole

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HEY! INDIA HERE I COME FOR MORE BUTTER CHICKEN AND NAAN, SAYS ROBERT YANG.



Say the word India to Yang and he drools. The regional sales & marketing manager, Seagate Technologies, Robert is a US citizen based in Singapore. "Originally from the US, I have been based in Singapore for the last 13 years. I travel on business

quite often and have been to India a few times. I have been to New Delhi, Mumbai and Bangalore. India has developed in a big way. The new cosmopolitan India has these huge malls mushrooming everywhere. I was there a few weeks back and the changes certainly get your attention.

I usually stay at the Oberoi Hotel or the Grand Hyatt while in India. The Oberoi is a very nice hotel and feels quite homely. The staff is efficient and service standards are quite high. I love all the Indian curries and the hotel eateries serve some good

options. I especially like butter chicken with naan. Besides the food, one 'must see' monument that I would recommend to everyone is the Taj Mahal. You just can't come back from India without having seen this marvel."



From the Traveller's

Frequent flyers to India - American citizen **Robert Yang**, **Charlotte Eke**, and editor of Style magazine, **Daniel Goh** - share their quirky impressions of India.

HOLY COW! INDIA ANYTIME FOR ME, SAYS CHARLOTTE EKE - A HOMEMAKER & MOTHER OF THREE, WHO IS INVOLVED IN CHARITY WORK.

Perhaps what strikes every visitor who comes to India, including me is Indian tuk-tuks (autorickshaws), offbeat trucks, black and yellow ambassador taxis, cows on the road and people who are always willing to help you with directions when you ask.

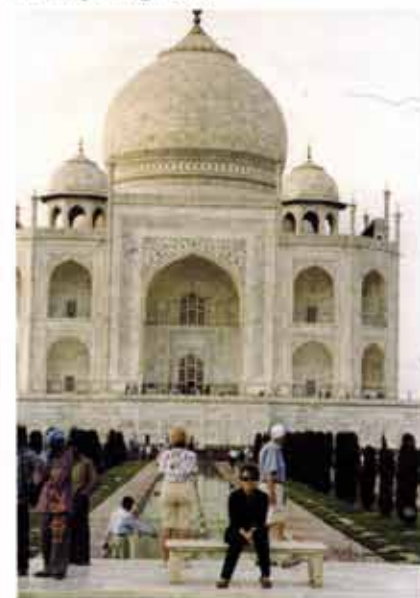
On my earlier trips, Delhi was my entry point and Rajasthan my destination, followed by my visits to Chennai and the Andaman Islands.

My love affair with India started in 2001 when I travelled to New Delhi, and hired the hotel's old and wise driver as my

personal city guide. When we passed the Parliament building and the Rashtrapati Bhavan (President's residence), I saw yet another face of India. I had heard so much about the country, but beautiful and clean were two adjectives never used to describe it. What amazed me here was many men at work, lending a hand to keep the city clean. Despite the cows and the elephants, the streets were still clean!! Delhi, the capital, is ancient yet modern, with wide roads and amazing architectural sights, each telling a story of the past.

The Palace-on-Wheels packages Indian culture, sights and cuisine for the well-heeled. The staff aboard the train and at all the halt points made us feel very special. With us on board were foreigners from other countries and NRIs (Non-resident Indians). We travelled to various tourist spots including Jaipur, Jaisalmer, Jodhpur, Sawai Madhopur, Chittorgarh, Udaipur, Bharatpur, Fatehpur Sikri and Agra. The countryside was varied and beautiful and

the entire journey was like a kaleidoscope. What impressed me was the diversity of the terrain that we saw and what got me thinking was that this was just a fraction of the vast Indian-subcontinent that we had seen. On my previous trip, I had gone to India with my friends. This time around I would like to enjoy the Palace-on-Wheels with my daughters.



QUIRKS & ECCENTRICITIES - INDIA APPEALS TO ME, SAYS DANIEL GOH, FASHION EDITOR, STYLE MAGAZINE

India seems full of quirks and eccentricities that appeal to me. It is really an ideal place to travel to, as I have seen myself.

One can really learn a lot of things and enjoy at the same time. I felt a certain excitement in India. I can not get enough of this excitement and to fully explore India is high on my agenda. I have been to Kerala, which is affectionately called God's Own Country. The backwaters of Kerala are an absolute bliss. I would like to go there again and do a fashion shoot incorporating the new and the old elements there. It would be amazing. My readers would be completely thrilled! I must admit that curries do not go down very well with me, even though they are delicious and I had to make do with sandwiches during my whole trip.

On my next visit to India, I would like to visit the beaches, villages and historic sites. I am also into yoga, so visit to yoga centers would be ideal too.



PICTURE PERFECT, SAYS NANCY TAN OF IKCHIN TRAVELS

India is picture perfect, especially the hill stations, the mountains and the natural beauty. I am confident, that places like Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Sikkim can bring joy to Singaporean travellers like none other. Once a tourist visits any of the hill stations, he surely wants to visit again. There is a large increase in the number of Singaporeans visiting India especially in the last few years.

SPOILT FOR CHOICE WHEN IT COMES TO INDIA, SAYS HEDY MOK OF EUROTOURS & TRAVEL PTE LTD



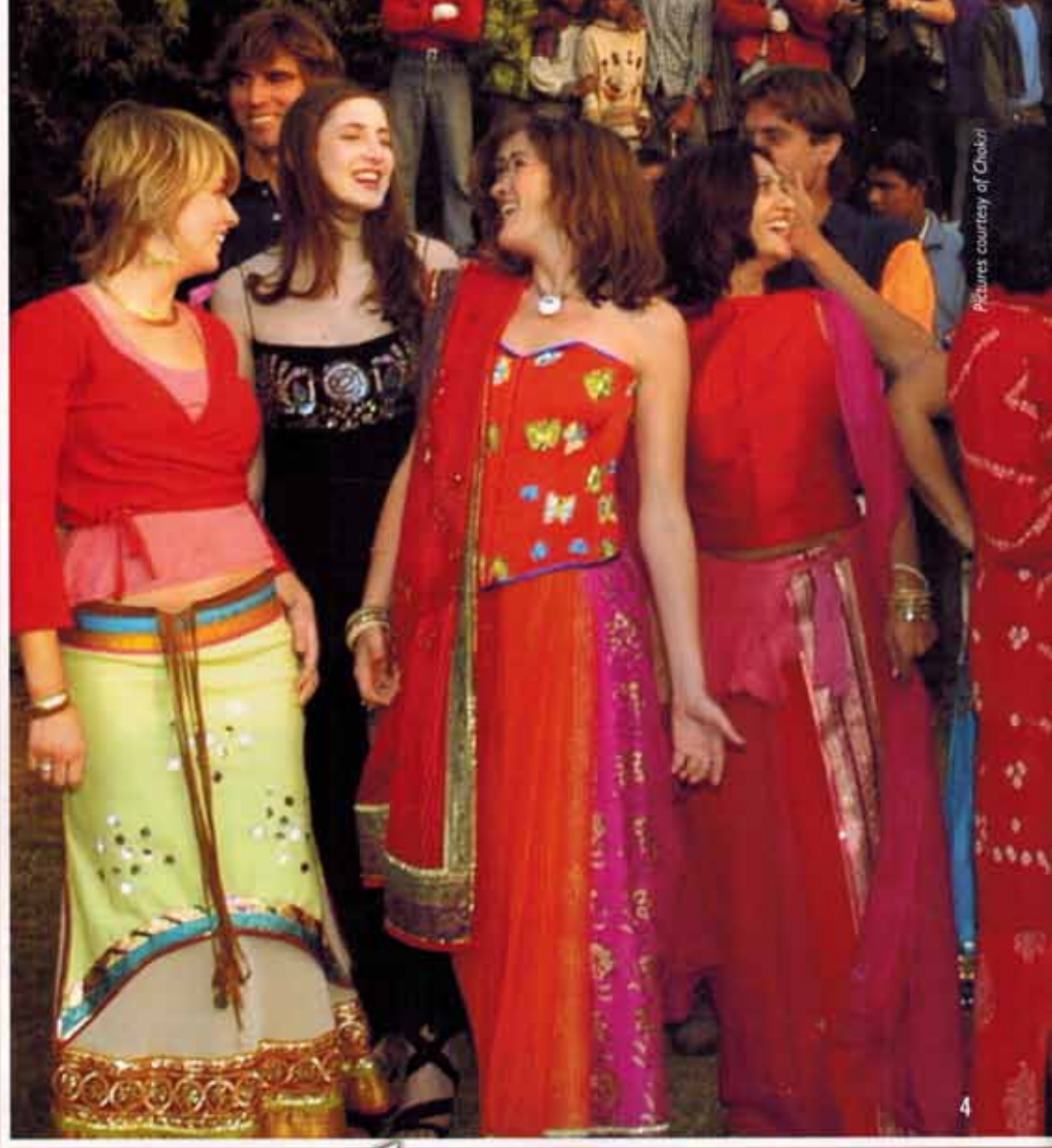
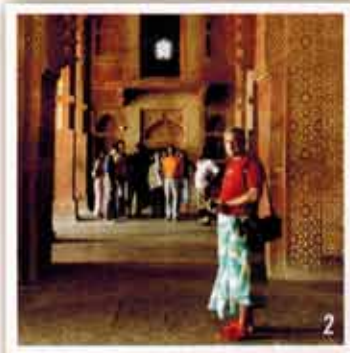
India is becoming a destination of choice for many travellers. It offers something new and different within Asia for all age groups. I have had

repeat groups going especially down to Sikkim in the past few years, says Hedy Mok. The variety of flowers in Sikkim is amazing and it is indeed a treat of colours and cool mountain air, which bring in a great experience. In the metropolitan cities these days, especially in Mumbai, many find shopping and nightlife exciting as well. Among my favourite destinations in India are Kerala, Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim and the Golden Triangle.



GETS MY ADRENALINE PUMPING, SAYS SIM TIM SUAN, ADVENTURE TRAVEL SPECIALIST

As a company providing extreme adventure, we find Sikkim very exciting and challenging for Singaporeans. Sikkim especially still retains the old world charm as it has not been commercialised like maybe Nepal. So for adventure seekers, truly Sikkim provides a great locale to have that adrenaline flow, says Founder and Chief Adventurist of BOAC, Sim Tim Suan

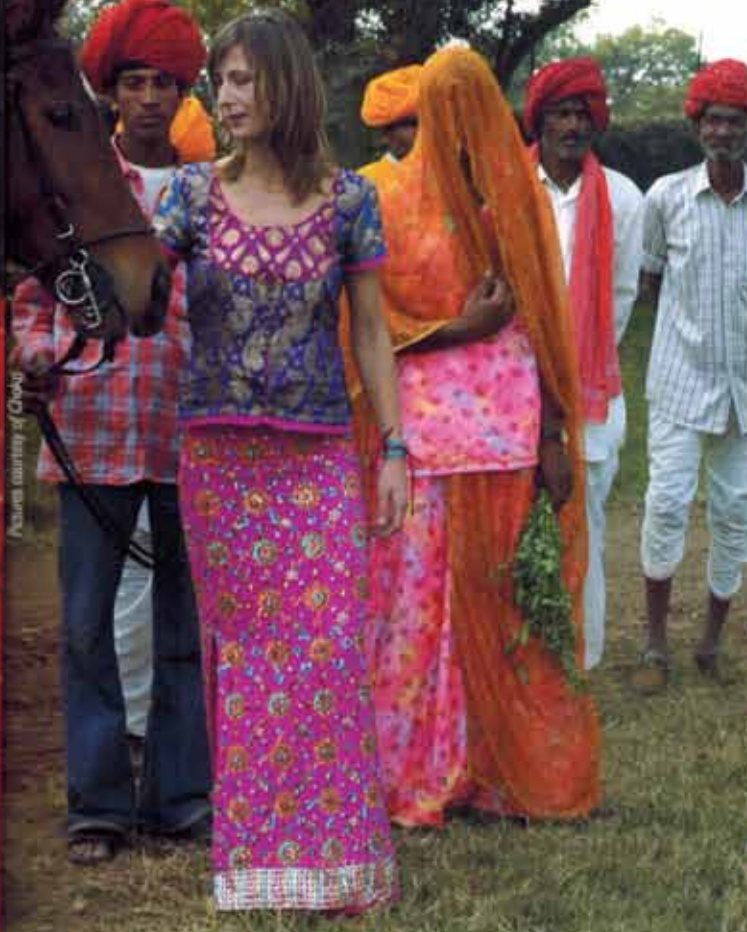


Pictures courtesy of Chokri

Rendezvous WITH INDIA

What brings travellers to India? The answers are varied - beauty, chaos, the glamour, the unexplored, the unknown - all can be experienced in inimitable India.

1 György Nanovfszky, Ambassador of Hungary in Singapore 2 World renowned photographer, Tibor Magyar 3 Maria Gerecz, Hungarian Ambassador's wife 4 French models in colourful Indian costumes at the Rambagh Palace Hotel, once home to the Maharaja of Jaipur.

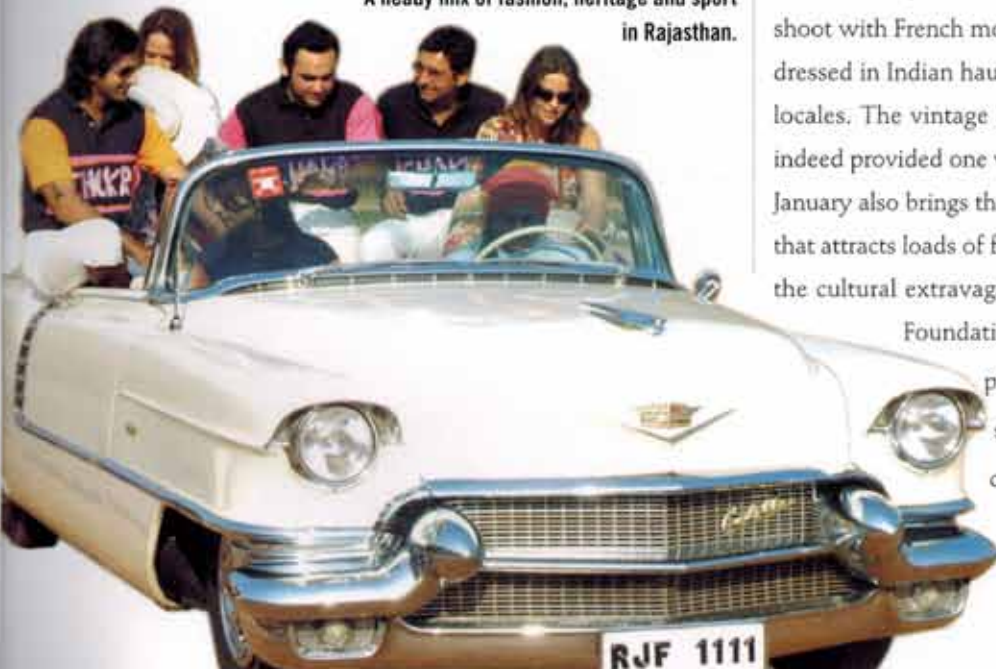


French models at The Taj Raffles Polo Cup held in Jaipur in January 2005.

ROYAL RHAPSODY

Today, modern India is probably the best example of how trends and traditions can go hand in hand. While foreign luxury brands are now available aplenty in India, homegrown Indian designers have made their mark on the international fashion scene. Earlier this year, Singapore-based upmarket designer boutique Chokri organized a fashion extravaganza in association with the Taj Hotels & Resorts and Raffles Hotel of Singapore. The two big hotel conglomerates came together

A heady mix of fashion, heritage and sport in Rajasthan.



to sponsor the Taj Raffles Polo Cup at the polo grounds of the legendary Rambagh Palace Hotel - once home to the Maharaja of Jaipur and now the playground of the rich and famous.

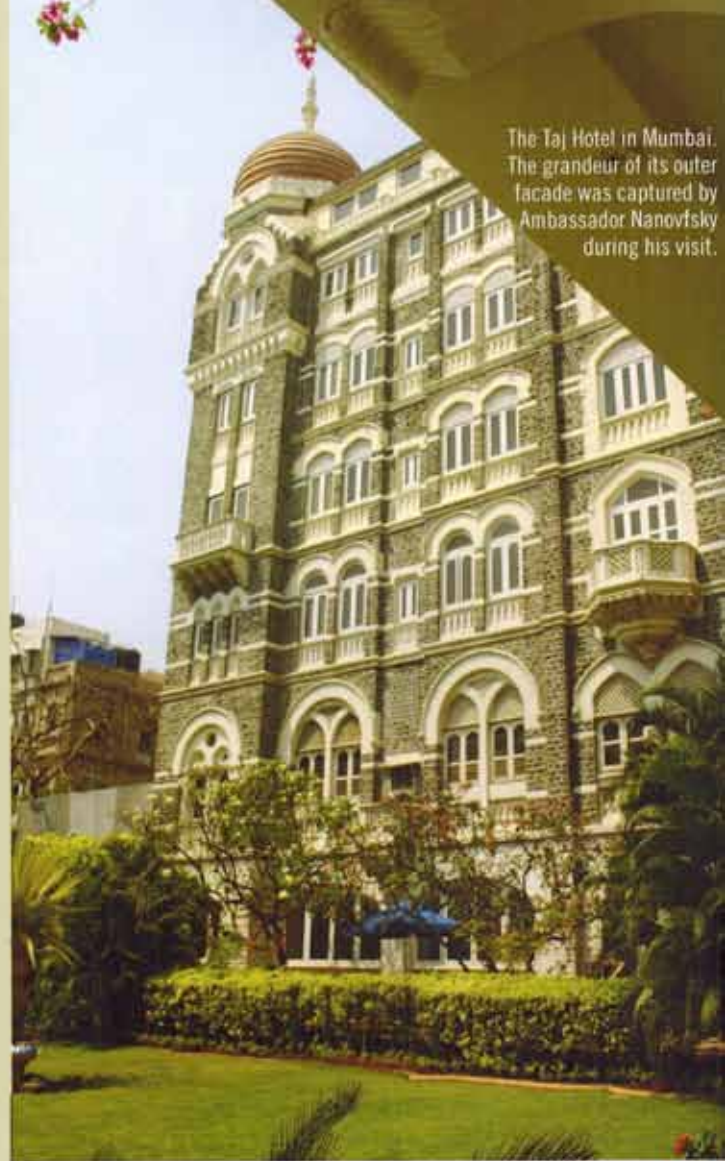
The event saw international polo players, along with top French models (see cover picture) troop down to Jaipur city. The 10,000 strong crowd of spectators, dressed in the latest fashions, sat hypnotized till the last minute of the match. For the select few, another visual feast awaited - the fashion photo-shoot with French models. These gorgeous men and women dressed in Indian haute couture complimented the beautiful locales. The vintage cars, decked-up elephants and horses, indeed provided one with all the inspiration for a regal affair. January also brings the world-famous Jaipur Heritage Festival that attracts loads of foreign tourists who come to experience the cultural extravaganza. Organized by the Jaipur Virasat

Foundation, this festival aims to showcase and preserve the culture of Rajasthan, a desert state but undoubtedly one of the most colourful place in the world. ■

INDIA IMPRESSIONS

Mr. György Nanovszky, the Hungarian Ambassador to Singapore, was in India early spring along with his spouse Dr. Maria Gerecz, to attend the World Trade Center Association Meet in Mumbai. Having been to India four times prior to the recent visit, Mr. Nanovszky says: "In 1967, I visited India for the first time due to my interest in its culture and history. This time it was the openness and the changes that attracted me and what I experienced was indeed pulsating. Organizations are more structured, rules are more relaxed and the younger generation is more IT savvy and forward-looking."

They stayed at the Taj Mahal Hotel in Mumbai, and travelled around to find real treasures of colonial architecture. "The people of India are helpful and warm, the youngsters are trendy and fashion-conscious. You can see international brands all around, and India's traditional fabrics - their colours and textures are really inviting," says Dr. Maria Gerecz. Shopping in India was "fantastic". On her trip to Mumbai, Jaipur and Delhi, she picked up Indian outfits and exquisite porcelain wares. "The feel of the fabric and the vibrant colours are a sensory delight, and to my surprise, the comfort factor with Indian outfits is amazing. I would love to wear one of these made-to-measure (salwar kameez) ensembles to an event soon along with my husband who bought an ethnic outfit (kurta pyjama) complete with a headgear (pagri), which we thought was very regal," she adds.

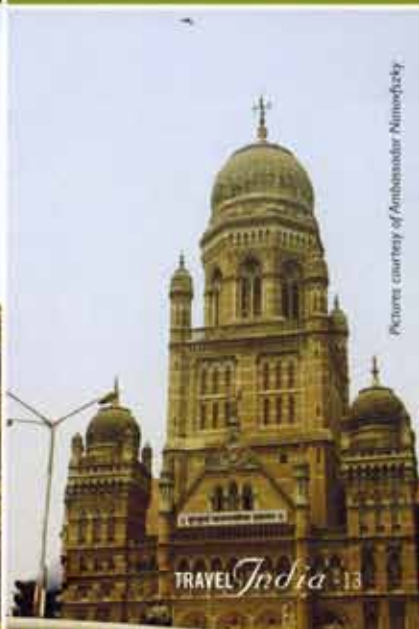


The Taj Hotel in Mumbai. The grandeur of its outer facade was captured by Ambassador Nanovszky during his visit.





A mélange of British and Indian styles of architecture marks many buildings around Mumbai.



Pictures courtesy of Ambassador Nimrodzky.

BEYOND THE LENS |



Tombstones within the Taj Mahal.



Handcrafted *jali* or latticework



'India is an out-of-body experience', goes a saying among savvy travellers. Internationally acclaimed photographer Tibor Magyar felt the same while visiting the Taj Mahal in Agra. "I have seen the Taj Mahal in pictures and movies but what penetrated my soul was not just the architecture and the age of the monument,

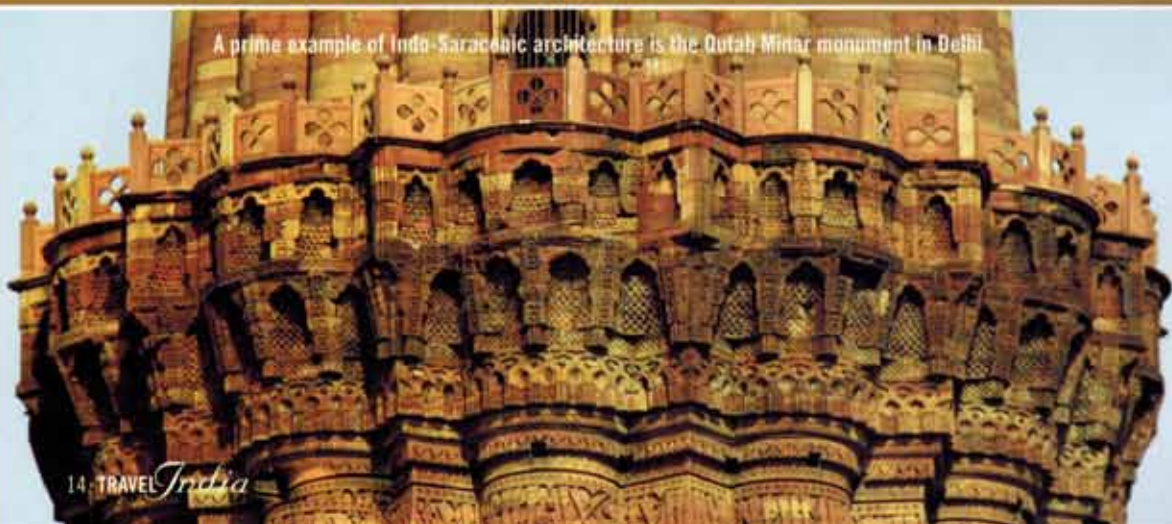
but the love story of the two eternal lovers that it epitomizes," says Magyar. This cameraman, for once, could not capture the emotions, he felt in his lenses that ran through him while he was there, looking at the tombstone of Shahjahan and Mumtaz Mahal lying side-by-side. However, what Magyar could capture though his lens were a whole range of

architectural styles, ranging from Moghul, Persian, Victorian, Rajputana and contemporary styles in Delhi, Agra and Jaipur, popularly known as the Golden Triangle. To him, the range is 'mind-boggling'. The craftsmanship in the intricate motifs and inlays in the Qutab Minar, Fatehpur Sikri, Hawa Mahal, Taj Mahal and Agra Fort weave a story of India's glorious past and artistic traditions.

On the other hand, the new India beckons everyone with a promise to enthrall and to provide a sensory experience like no other. To the Hungarian Ambassador, it is the transition that makes him want to visit India again. To his wife, it is the colours and the comfort and to Magyar, it is love that entices him to revisit. How about **you?** ■

Picture courtesy of Tibor Magyar

A prime example of Indo-Saracenic architecture is the Qutab Minar monument in Delhi.



Fatehpur Sikri





India: The Raj Revisited,
Singapore Fashion Festival 2005

Indian Accents

Think exquisite silver artifacts, brocade and silk furnishings and haute couture, magnificent jewellery. Homes and wardrobes the world over are being invaded by Indian art, crafts and fashion. Undoubtedly, Indian mystique and influence is the hottest fad of the season.



Silver figurine of Lord Ganesha



Indian couture can be seen in stores worldwide

Pictures courtesy/Mumbai 56 & Ananda Spa



Cozy velvet cushions



Embellish your home with objets d'art



Intricate silver craftsmanship makes for unusual homeware



SUMMER SOJOURN

Summer is here again and the temperature charts indicate soaring temperatures that show no mercy. To beat the heat, the European Alps or South Korea are not the only obvious destinations. In this issue, we bring you summer holiday options closer home that you can escape to from sultry Singapore.

BY SHWETA PARIDA



Trek through the valleys and passes of Himachal.

Himachal Experience

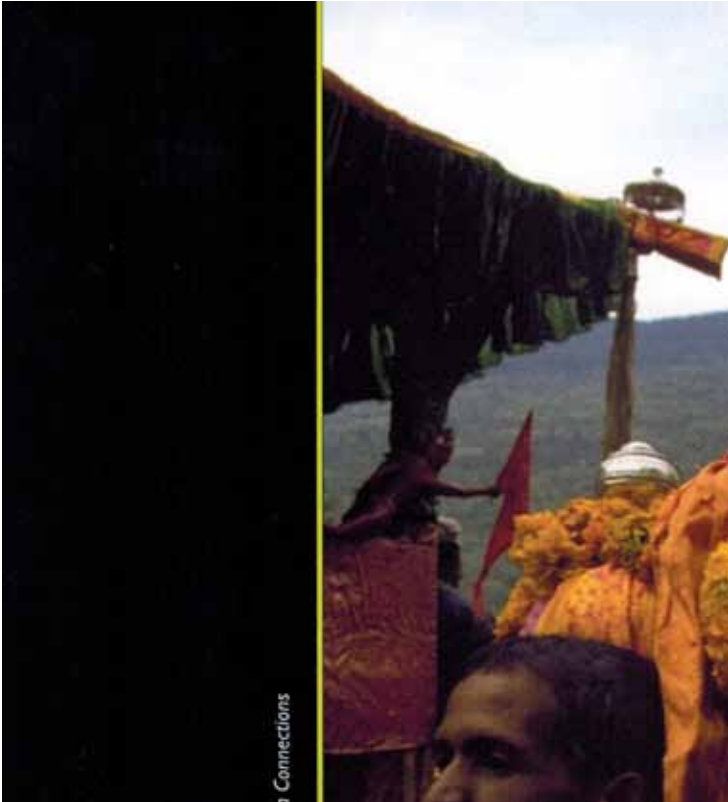
This hilly option in the Northern India is set amidst the high mountain ranges of Dauladhar, Pirpenjar and the Great Himalayas. Literally meaning 'in the lap of snow', the Himachal experience promises spectacular landscapes, snow-capped peaks, deep gorges, beautiful green valleys and as an added bonus, sulphur spring baths with proven medicinal properties. A visit to Himachal offers beauty that leaves one breathless, cool mountain air, fresh fruits and solace. This mountainous region has four seasons and each season comes with a set of experiences special to that period of the year.

Our visit to Himachal was in the month of May and the weather was perfect. In Manali we went on daytreks, enjoyed paragliding at Sulam and went on a whitewater rafting trip in the River Beas. We also visited Rohtang Pass, at a height of about 4,000m, the gateway to the Lahaul region from Manali and an adventurer's dream destination. We were awestruck by the scenic snow point as well as the majestic

peaks, mountains and glaciers of the Chandra-Bhagar Range. Most of the peaks in this range are about 5,000m and are covered with snow all around the year.

From Manali, a 6-hour drive is Dharamsala. Located on a hilltop in the Dauladhar range of mountains, Dharamsala is the headquarters of the Tibetan Government in exile headed by His Holiness, the Dalai Lama. Dharamsala is a quiet town that commands views of the mighty Dhauladhar ranges above, and the Kangra Valley below. A walk through the narrow streets of McLeodganj is a unique experience, with Tibetan monasteries, colourful handicraft shops and small restaurants dotting the place. A great place to carry back home some souvenirs which are very affordable.

The Shivatri Festival in the Kullu Valley is celebrated with great pomp and splendour during the winter months. However for us to experience it, it calls for yet another trip to Himachal.





Shivratri Festival

QUICKFACTS

Look beyond the supermarkets for your supply of fresh fruits. The state of Himachal is also known as the fruit bowl of India. Visitors are spoilt for choice with different varieties of apples, plums, kiwi fruits, olives, cherries, apricots, lychees and oranges. During summer, travellers can visit apple orchards, and pick some to take home.

▶ **GOVERNMENT WEBSITE:** www.himachaltourism.nic.in

▶ **CAPITAL:** Shimla, 368km from Delhi

▶ **AIR TRAVEL:** The airport at Shimla, 22 km from the main city, has connecting flights to Delhi and Kullu. The nearby Chandigarh airport is, however, more handy as it is connected to all the major airports in India.

▶ **RAILWAY TRAVEL:** Only train plying between Shimla and Kalka joins them through railways network.

▶ **ROAD:** Shimla is well connected by road to most towns within the state and to all major towns in Punjab and Haryana. It is linked by bus and coach to Delhi and Chandigarh as well. Borders the states of Punjab, Haryana, Uttaranchal and Jammu & Kashmir

▶ **BEST TIME TO VISIT:** Mid May to Mid October and late December to March (for winter sports)

▶ **HIGHEST POINT IN THE STATE:** Leo Pargial mountain (6791m) in Kinnaur.

There are a number of interesting places to visit in Himachal Pradesh like Kalatope Wildlife sanctuary, Kangra art museum, Dharamsala - home to Dalai Lama and the Tibetan community in India, Manikaran hot sulphur springs and Rohtang Pass in Manali.

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Scenic and Spiritual Sikkim

By SHWETA PARIDA

*Monasteries on hilltops, yak cheese to eat,
Prayer flags waving in the breeze,
Paintings on silk and pagoda-like roofs,
Mountain lakes, and orchids too,
That's the state of Sikkim, for you!*

Steep slopes and storybook towns clinging to craggy cliffs, all of them shrouded in mist, make Sikkim another Shangri-la high in the Himalayas. The northeastern Indian state is nestled in the foothills of Mount Kanchendzonga, the third highest mountain in the world.

Just getting there is half the adventure. We flew down to Bagdogra in West Bengal and then drove our way up to Sikkim's capital, Gangtok. The drive is spectacularly beautiful; once out of the plains and the rice paddies of West Bengal, the road becomes very wooded, and zigzags its way up into the mountains,

hugging the Teesta river valley. Along the way, monkeys sit by bends on the road: they know exactly where the cars have to slow down - with any luck, they'll get a biscuit or a banana.

We begin scaling the sheer ridges above the Tibetan plateau, darting in and out of clouds to marvel at breathtaking Himalayan views. That is, when we dare look up from a succession of hairpin switchbacks, each steeper and sharper than the last, all with dizzying drops down both sides of the razor-thin mountain track.



Sikkim, wedged in between Bhutan, Tibet and Nepal, may be the most vertical place on the planet. We went on for kilometers through the countryside without any signs of habitation, but suddenly, on a grassy ledge at the edge of a vast gorge, there are people and a surreal scene unfolds. An old Buddhist monk intones prayers in a haze of incense. Maroon-robed disciples bang drums, shake bells and toss rice into the wind. While we stop for sweet cardamom tea, a group of women walking up the hill with heavy bamboo baskets on their backs, serenade us with folk songs in haunting voices. Small cherubic toddlers with angelic smiles peeped out from the baskets. Our guide translated the folk songs sung by the women and also shared interesting folklores including the abominable snowman, in a rapturous mix of Tibetan, Hindi and English.

Hypnotized with the nature's magnificent display all around us, we moved on to explore this mystical wonderland. The town careers wildly and very steeply up and down the hillside, and no matter how you plan, you'll always end up at the top of the hill when you want to visit the little restaurant at the foot of the hill, or you'll be at the bottom of the town, and remember you have to do some shopping at Cottage Industries, right at the top. It's best to resign yourself to lots of steep climbs, and being a lot trimmer at the end of your stay!

Sikkim has more than 250 monasteries, but no trip to Sikkim is complete without a trip to the famous Rumtek Monastery. It is the seat of the Gywala Karmapa, the supreme head of the Kagyupa order of Tibetan Buddhism. We began our journey through thick bamboo groves and cardamom shrubs, winding our way up amidst lush paddy fields. There were lamas (monks) all over the place. We went through the sanatorium that houses the huge, golden statue of Buddha. All round the walls were rolled ancient scriptures and smaller idols of Buddha. Thousand in all, I was told by a passing lama. The hall was filled with rows of scriptures tied in ribbons. The monks sat on long and narrow carpets with exquisitely designed local motifs. Red was the dominant color everywhere.

Sikkim is an ecological hotspot. Wrapped in mists and clouds, the garden state offers an incredible variety of orchids, rhododendrons, gladioli and a host of other flowers. In spring, rhododendron colour Sikkim's slopes, while its gardens are abloom with hundreds of varieties of orchids in spring and fall. It is a nature lover's paradise with many wild life sanctuaries



Pemayangtse Monastery, Sikkim

and parks as well. Expect to find species unique to the Himalayan eco-system, some of which are even endangered.

Another major attraction in Sikkim is a host of adventure sports like trekking, white water rafting, mountaineering and the exotic yak safari. We decided to go on a jeep safari to Yuksam in the mostly virgin West Sikkim. As we went deeper into the wilderness, nature unfolded itself to our awestruck eyes. Bereft of any speech, everybody soaked in the sights and sounds of the calm beauty.

The people of Sikkim, who are of Chinese and Mongol descent, are warm, simple and friendly with a natural gaiety. In Sikkim, tradition, hospitality and ceremony are some of the values that people live by on this fabled "rooftop of the world."

Despite the fact that Sikkim is much less commercialized and explored than other tourism destinations in India, we must warn you that it isn't uncommon to hear Western music blaring from the houses in the countryside.

But still, near the top of the world, one cannot help but feel like you were someplace special. This is as close to paradise as one can get! ■

QUICKFACTS

- ▶ **GOVERNMENT WEBSITE:** www.sikkim.nic.in
- ▶ **CAPITAL:** Gangtok
- ▶ **HIGHEST POINT:** Mt. Kangchendzonga- 8534 mts
Borders Tibet, Bhutan, Nepal and the Indian state of West Bengal
- ▶ **BEST TIME TO VISIT:** Mid February to late May and October to December
- ▶ **WEATHER:** Temperate with snowfall during the winters, heavy rainfall during monsoon and pleasant summers.
- ▶ **AIR:** Nearest airport is Bagdogra in North Bengal, which is 124 kms and approximately 5 hrs. drive from Gangtok. Bagdora has regular Indian Airlines Services from Calcutta and Delhi and also the North East.
- ▶ **RAIL:** The two closest railway stations are Siliguri (114 km) and Newjalpaiguri (125 km) connecting Calcutta, Delhi, Guwahati, Lucknow & other important cities in India.
- ▶ **ROAD:** Gangtok is connected by road with Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Siliguri and other centres and also with all the District Headquarters within Sikkim.
- ▶ **PLACES OF INTEREST:** Besides the sacred Buddhist monasteries, the most famous being the Rumtek Monastery, visit the handloom and handicraft center (closed on Sundays and public holidays), Singhik for a panoramic view of Mt Kangchendzonga, Tsogmo lake, Nathula pass and many more. Foreigners need permits to visit some of the restricted areas in Sikkim, which can be obtained from all India High commissions abroad or Sikkim tourism offices at Delhi, Calcutta, Siliguri and Gangtok, with requisite documents.



Adventure Inc. UTTARANCHAL

THE HILLS OF UTTARANCHAL HAVE ALL THE INGREDIENTS FOR ADVENTURE, PACKED WITH EXCITEMENT AND THRILLS. THE REGION PROVIDES IMMENSE OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADVENTURE SPORTS LIKE SKIING AND THRILLING WATER SPORTS.

BY SHWETA PARIDA



Peak Chaukhamba, Uttarakhand



The grand slopes of Uttarakhand, with

their wide-open spaces and vast tract of snow offer the exciting possibility of skiing among the glaciers, away from criss-crossing streams of skiers that overtake the slopes of the European Alps.

Because of their height and spread, Garhwal and Kumaon, like other sectors of the Himalayas, offer the thrills of exploratory long-distance skiing all year round.

For the avid skier, cross-country runs of 10-20 kms are available, with the added advantage of fresh powder snow and few crowds.

Skiing for a Novice

Skiing has gained incredible popularity in the world of Himalayan Adventure, and many come back to glide over pristine Himalayan snow.

I had hoped to do a lot more sightseeing and less sports in Uttarakhand, but the lure of the snow-filled mountains was

such that skiing became an integral part of my visit to Uttarakhand.

Having been briefed by our guide Mansher that Auli was the best place to ski, we headed there. Situated amidst snowy mountains and flanked by conifers and oak forests, Auli is situated 16 km from Joshimath on the Badrinath route. An 800m long chairlift connects the lower slopes with the upper slopes in Auli making it easy for skiers to get going within moments of getting to the top.

There are coaching institutes that conduct classes to teach the tourists new to the sport. While more skiers come to Auli in winter, it is not exactly quiet in the summer either. Still, I was quite impressed that urbanization had not done much damage to the spot's scenic beauty.

Valley of flowers

Mansher suggested that we enroll for an on-going mountaineering course. Initially, we weren't too inclined towards this physically challenging sport but the trainers at the institute convinced us to give it a try. What convinced me was a chance to see views of the valley abloom in flowers of all shapes, sizes and colors. We ended up having a great time while trekking through the floral landscape of the Valley of Flowers. The land was ablaze in colour, flowers fluttering in the gentle breeze carrying their fragrance across the snow-clad countryside.

Making your way in the water

The challenge of the turbulent rivers is no less than that of the rugged mountains. The icy heights of the Himalayas are the




source of some of India's mighty rivers. There are numerous rivers in the 3,200 kilometers stretch of Himalayas that are perennial. This abundance of mountainous rivers makes India a world-class white water rafting destination.

Fed by innumerable streams, they race along tortuous boulder-strewn beds, cutting deep gorges, breaking into silvery white rapids. With the intricate network of mountainous rivers flowing through myriad rocky gorges, forests, flowers and high mountain villages, the Garhwal and Kumaon hills provide ideal locales for the perfect water adventure. The frothing and foaming Ganges River throws up a challenge that no rafter worth their salt can look away from. We, however, headed to the Tons River at the border of the Uttarakhand – Himachal region, which also offers some of the best white water rafting in the region.

White water rafting calls for a triumph over the swift, swirling river as it gushes past spectacular mountains. It is practiced mainly in the upper reaches where the wild and milky water crashes against narrow gorges, rocky out-crops and falls at deep gradients. The slopes on either side are covered with oak, pine, spruce and fir, with the occasional village and its terraced fields



dotting the landscape. If the sport doesn't pump your adrenalin, maybe the wildlife you pass by will. Spotted deer, monkeys and leopards are not uncommon sightings, while multi-hued butterflies flit among flowering bushes.

While the thrills and spills of river rafting and skiing keep its devotees coming back, Uttarakhand adventures are a heady mix of spectacular nature and sports. Till the next vacation! 

QUICKFACTS

▶ **GOVERNMENT WEBSITE:** www.ua.nic.in/uttarakhandtourism

▶ **CAPITAL:** Dehra Dun, 235 kilometres from New Delhi

Borders Nepal, Tibet

Over 90 percent is hilly terrain (Extends from the Shivalik range to the lower Himalayas)

▶ **HIGHEST POINT IN THE STATE:** Nanda Devi peak (7,817 m above sea level) in Chamoli district

▶ **WEATHER:** Alpine conditions characterized by cold winters with snowfall for quite a long time, good rainfall in the monsoon, and mild summers.

▶ **BEST TIME TO VISIT:** April to June (summer) & September-October (start of winter)

There are several interesting places to see in and around the important destinations like Haridwar, Rishikesh, Dehradun, Mussoorie, Almora, Jim Corbett National Park, Nainital, Ranikhet, Pithoragarh

▶ **FOUR MOST SACRED AND REVERED HINDU TEMPLES:** Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri and Yamunotri

Haridwar is one of the venues of the Kumbha Mela that takes place once every 12 years and the Ardh (half) Kumbha Mela, which comes once every six years.

Yummy Biryani

Did you know that there are over 26 varieties of biryani made in India? Or that biryani comes from the Persian word 'birian' which means 'fried before cooking'? Or that, though it is considered a royal dish of the Nizams and the Nawabs it was never ever served to the royal guests?



Biryani is believed to have been brought to India by Taimur Lang, or Taimur, the lame. Ghosht Dum Biryani or Kutche Ghosht ki Biryani is well done basmati rice cooked with succulent pieces of meat laced with saffron and pure ghee, fresh out of the clay handi (cooking pot). It is presented with great flair in the clay pot itself, which is sealed with dough - in a technique called dum - and flicked open expertly in front of you to reveal the insides.

The two major variations in the biryani are *kacchi* and *pucci* biryani, the difference being the preparation and pre-cooking respectively. The secret of making the perfect biryani lies in marination and dum.

The *kacchi biryani* is made with uncooked meat marinated for up to four hours. The marinade includes raw papaya peel, hung curd, spices and condiments. Some chefs use pepper instead of red chilly powder. The parboiled rice and the marinated meat are then arranged in layers with mint leaves, fried onions and saffron as garnish between the layers; the handi is then sealed and allowed to steam between layers of live embers. The seal of the handi is broken only during mealtime and the delicious smell of biryani is allowed to waft through the dastor khan (dining room) to whet the appetite of the diners.

For the *pucci biryani*, the meat is cooked with all accompanying spices and the rice simmered with the resultant gravy redolent of mace, ittar and kewra, in a sealed handi with saffron and cardamom. However, the meat is pre-cooked before being arranged in layers for the dum. The vegetable biryani was originally made for the cashiers and financiers of the Nawabs, who were Mahajan Hindus.

Every community has its own version of biryani: the Memoni is spicy, the Bohri version uses tomatoes and the Calicut biryani, served with vinegar pickles and poppadams fried in coconut oil, is a softer variety and light on the stomach, vastly in terms of taste to the other biryanis in the country. ■

Dessert from the Kashmiri Kitchen



PHIRUN
Creamy Rice Pudding
BY NALINI SADHU

For 4 portions, you will need:

- ▶ 150g rice
- ▶ 1 litre milk (5 cups / 1 litre)
- ▶ 1 cup sugar (1 cups / 250g)
- ▶ A pinch saffron (kesar)
- ▶ 50g almonds (badam), blanched, slivered (4 tbsp / 50g)
- ▶ 5 green cardamoms (choti ilaichi), crushed
- ▶ 4 silver leaves (chandi vark)

Method:

1. Wash the rice. Soak it in water for 2 to 3 hours. Drain the water and let the rice dry. When dry, either crumble it or grind coarsely for few seconds.

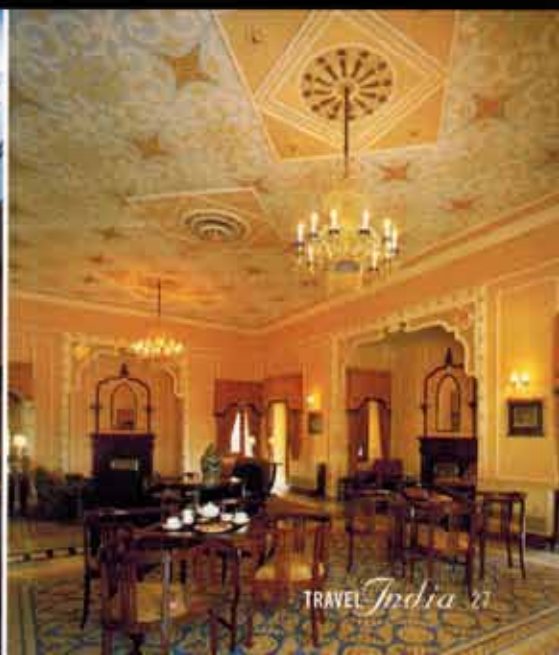
2. In a heavy-bottomed stainless steel pot, heat the milk and bring to a boil; add the rice, green cardamoms and almonds to it. Stir frequently.
3. Cook on a low flame till the rice softens and the milk thickens. Stir frequently to ensure that it doesn't stick to the bottom.
4. Crush the saffron and soak in a few spoons of hot milk. Add to the pot, followed by the sugar. Stir for a few minutes and remove from the flame.
5. When the Phirun is ready, pour in the bowls. Decorate with silver leaves and serve chilled.



Spa India

Escapism. INCREASINGLY, THE SPA EXPERIENCE IS ABOUT TAKING A FLIGHT AND ENTERING A TEMPORARY IDYLL IN SPACE AND TIME. ONCE A SPA WAS A DINGY TWO-ROOM ADJUNCT TO A HOTEL OR SALON; NOW IT'S AN ADULT THEME PARK, ALLOWING YOU TO TRAVERSE THE TRADITIONS OF DIFFERENT CONTINENTS. IN THIS CASE MY ESCAPE DESTINATION WAS FIVE HOURS AWAY FROM NEW DELHI, THE ETHEREAL ANANDA SPA.

BY SHWETA PARIDA



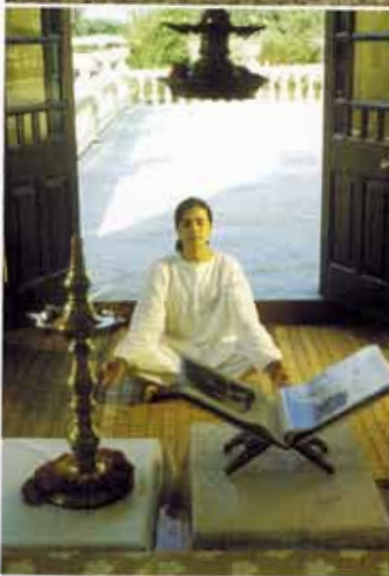


Nestled at the foothills of the majestic Himalayas, in the picturesque Uttarakhand state of India, voted one of the world's best spas by the Conde Nast Traveller, Ananda now happens to be one of the hottest spa destinations for world-weary travellers.

As the car approached what I would call the driveway to heaven, I realised that we were now climbing in a blur of Sal trees. The air was suddenly a lot cooler, and perfumed with a mountain smell, and the intriguing yellow highway signs now far more frequent: 'Don't try to fly or your family will cry!' No doubt, we were ascending into the mystical embrace of the Himalayas.

Ananda came about when the Maharaja of Tehri Garhwal leased a chunk of his palace and his sloping, wooded estate in the hills above Rishikesh to a consortium of hospitality industry heavy-hitters; they put together something extremely posh, something up-in-the-hills and upmarket. A 'destination spa,' to differentiate it from other run-of-the-mill health spas. Something they were positioning as 'the quintessential health and wellness choice'.

So far, the whole place was quite unreal and impressive. The car had dropped me at the reception area of the old palace, which looked very nice as old palaces go: nothing overstated in the architecture, just your normal, cream-yellow, politely proportioned little Indian palace.





From the driveway onwards, no cars are allowed into the grounds, for the sake of air purity. So I hopped into an electric golf-cart down to be driven down the steep slope to the new buildings, which included the rooms, the restaurant and the spa itself.

By the time I checked into my room, it was sunset, and for a moment the window in my room was picture postcard perfect, with a red ball of fire slipping away into oblivion but not before highlighting snow-peaked mountain caps in their full glory. I couldn't wait to see the sunrise the next morning.

But it was time for dinner and I headed to the restaurant to check out the 'spa menu'. The 'rejuvenation cuisine' was scrumptious, and the unmistakable flavour of fresh vegetables and herbs made it indeed quite healthy. After a satisfying meal, I retired to bed early, dreaming of all the spa treatments I had traveled 3000 miles to experience.

I awoke up to witness the most beautiful sunrise ever the next morning. Gleaming snow provided a breathtaking backdrop to the cascading waters of the River Ganges, miles of lush greenery with tall conical trees lining pathways like soldiers guarding

treasure. It is very easy to think that you were in paradise.

After that initial visual feast, I started my day with soul food – yoga, that is. The sessions at Ananda are conducted by certified gurus on the sprawling green lawns of the hotel. The combination of fresh air and yoga whipped up quite an appetite, which was quelled by feasting on a breakfast of only high-fibre, whole-grain carbs and fresh fruits.

And now for my first spa experience, the moment I had anticipated for so long. My masseuse Tirtha (how apt a name, meaning pilgrimage, since this place is a popular Hindu pilgrimage city), her flawless complexion glowing, asked me if I would like to get into my massage 'gear', while handing me the tiniest piece of sarong-like garment to tie around my waist, taking no notice of my embarrassment.

The Ancient Indian Honey and Sandalwood Rub was the choice of treatment of ancient Indian bridegrooms, explained Tirtha. It felt like being rubbed over by scented sandpaper, but quite pleasant nevertheless to be exfoliated with a mixture of local indigenous honey, sandalwood, valerian, globe thistle and vetiver. I could feel her words fading away as my eyelids felt

heavy. Tirtha gently woke me up from my blissful sleep state to cover me with a dry wrap around my body. She then proceeded to give me a nourishing scalp massage, but before I could doze off again, she led me to the invigorating Himalayan Spring Water Shower. I came out of the shower feeling as fresh as a daisy and my skin as smooth as silk- I was ready to impress people in my new avatar!

More nutritious food followed in the afternoon, which culminated in the evening's cultural performances organized by the hotel. It was magical to hear the amphitheatre, resound to the tinkling of ankle bells and the melodious strains of the sitar amidst the gorgeous mountain setting and against backdrop of the magnificent Himalayas. I could get used to this lifestyle!

My rendezvous with Tirtha began next day after lunch, with the luxurious Himalayan Honey and Rose Facial, supposedly Ananda's most nourishing and hydrating facial. By now a friend, Tirtha applied a mixture of indigenous raw honey and pure Himalayan rose water on my face. She then covered my face and neck with cooling cucumber slices. In the meantime, she pampered me with a hand and foot massage. Hot and cool facial compresses completed the therapy leaving me totally revitalized. I was won over, and promised Tirtha that I'd return for more spa treatments. She just smiled graciously.

The next day I ventured into the town of Rishikesh to explore it and buy a few souvenirs. But my mind kept going back to the spa treatments and I wondered what was next on the 'menu'. I promptly made a booking for a massage the next day, upon my return to the hotel that evening for the *Abhyanga* massage from Kerala. The masseuse works you over using oil and synchronized strokes, working deep into your body. I obviously needed the *Abhyanga*, it was rhythmic, wonderful and reached parts that other massages did not reach, like a sophisticated carwash for the body. After this, I felt like I couldn't take any more caring and I happily took the rest of the day off, canceling the evening's Swedish massage.

The next day – unfortunately my last – I was taken in for the Ancient Indian Body Wrap, where Tirtha first painted me over with a thick mixture of clay and various Indian herbs and spices. Then, and I'll admit this was slightly scary for me, she took a great big plastic sheet and wrapped me in it. I felt like a chicken about to be cooked by Dinesh – the chef at the restaurant – in

some special anti-Doshaa recipe. More to the point, for the first time in days, I wondered how all this caring was affecting my wallet.

Though a trifle sad at my first spa vacation coming to an end, I was going back with wonderful memories and new friends – including Tirtha, of course – and a promise to myself to return for more Himalayan magic. Revivification, rejuvenation and rediscovery - this is the new holistic mantra offered at this wonderful spa.

Who says the finer things in life are always sinful? We will vouch; a spa experience at Ananda isn't one of them. I'd say it was absolutely necessary – well okay, maybe once in a while! ■



GETTING THERE

Ananda is located close to the holy town of Rishikesh, around 260 kilometers north of New Delhi in the state of Uttaranchal. Should you choose to fly, it is a short 45-minute flight from Delhi to Dehradun's Jolly Grant airport followed by a one-hour drive. Alternatively, a four-hour train journey from New Delhi will take you to Haridwar railway station, from where the resort is an hour's drive. The driving time from Delhi to Ananda is approximately five and a half hours.

Ananda - In The Himalayas

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indian fashion GOES GLOBAL

BY SHWETA PARIDA

India has a rich and varied textile heritage, with each region boasting unique native costumes and traditional attire. While traditional clothes are still worn in rural areas, urban india is changing rapidly, with international fashion trends reflected by the young and glamorous, in the cosmopolitan metros. Fashion in India is a vibrant scene, a nascent industry and a colorful and glamorous world where designers and models start new trends every day.



Think Pink by Satya Paul

INDIAN FASHION has come a long way. Gone are the days when Indian 'kurtas' and 'OM shirts' were seen only on the hippies of the 60s and 70s. Fast-forward to La Semaine de la Haute Couture, Paris, in January 2000, where Indian fashion's golden girl, Ritu Beri presents her Summer collection. Or Wendell Rodricks and Anita Dongre, having the honour of being the first Indian designers to present their creations at the world's largest prêt-a-porter fair, IGEDO, Germany.

Young urban Indians can choose from the best of East and West as Indian fashion designers are inspired by both Indian and western styles. This fusion of fashion can be seen on the streets and ramps of the fashionable cities of India. Fashion in India has become a growing industry with international events such as the India Fashion Week and annual shows by fashion designers in the major cities.

Celebrity endorsements from stars like Nicole Kidman and Elizabeth Hurley has put Indian fashion under the global spotlight. Fashion designers such as Ritu Kumar, Ritu Beri,

IT IS A WELL KNOWN FACT THAT FASHION HOUSES LIKE THAT OF GIORGIO ARMANI, GIANFRANCO FERRE, VALENTINO, OSCAR DE LA RENTA, CHRISTIAN LACROIX, EMMANUEL UNGARO, JEAN PAUL GAULTIER, ETC CONTRACT VARIOUS INDIAN ARTISANS AND DESIGNERS TO HAND-EMBROIDER THEIR CREATIONS.

Rohit Bal, Rina Dhaka, Muzaffar Ali, Satya Paul, Abraham and Thakore, Tarun Tahilliani, JJ Valaya and Manish Malhotra are some of the names going global.

Worldwide, designers are impressed with the detailed craftsmanship of Indians when it comes to embroidery, weaving of fabric or unique block print styles. From beading to sequin work, rich traditional fabrics, designs and color with a modern feel give it a whole new interpretation that is appreciated all over the world. International designers come to India to seek inspiration for their designs. Jean Paul Gaultier drew up a whole collection called 'Indian Chiaroscuro' which reflected Indian textiles and design heritage beautifully. Armani has used trouser-tunic sets along the lines of "salwar kameez". With so much international

exposure in just a few years, Indian fashion is coming out of the closet.

It is a well-known fact that fashion houses like that of Giorgio Armani, Gianfranco Ferre, Valentino, Oscar de la Renta, Christian Lacroix, Emmanuel Ungaro, Jean Paul Gaultier, etc contract various Indian artisans and designers to hand-embroider their creations. Take Razia Gandhi - the embroidery doyenne who has dressed the likes of Hillary Clinton, Catherine Zeta Jones, the Princess of Wales and Sharon Stone, is behind elaborates outfits from all the biggest labels with her embroidery skills and her talented team of handpicked embroiderers.

So hot is Indian fashion right now that it has taken flight to foreign shores, and Singapore being just a 5 hour flight away, isn't untouched by this fashion migration. Indian fashion designers have been a permanent fixture at the Singapore Fashion Festival for the last few years. Due to their immense popularity, we





Pictures courtesy of Mumbai Sé

CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENTS FROM STARS LIKE NICOLE KIDMAN AND ELIZABETH HURLEY HAS PUT INDIAN FASHION UNDER THE GLOBAL SPOTLIGHT.

have seen fashion boutiques such as Mumbai Sé and Chokri specializing in upmarket Indian fashion, springing up here. Mumbai Sé opened last year to much media hype. Most of these boutiques' clients are non-Indians; Mumbai Sé admits that its clientele is mainly Singaporeans or Indonesian tourists.

Ms Charlotte Eke, a Singaporean who owns a number of exclusive ensembles from Mumbai Sé, has this to say: "Upmarket Indian designer wear is of very high quality. The embroidery is very delicately done with hands. People think that such workmanship can be seen only in the more established European brands. But one needs to go beyond clichéd fashion practices. Each of these ensembles is an original one unlike western brands, which tend to look similar. The beads and sequin work is just marvelous. Another factor is

the affordability of these garments. Although priced on the higher side, they are still more affordable than most of the European brands. The most striking aspect is the colours these ensembles come in. Indians are very natural with colours. Now Indian fashion in Singapore doesn't just mean going to little India and buying bright colored sarees and Punjabi suits. Perceptions are changing and in the west, Indian designer wear is available in exclusive boutiques and is fast gaining ground among the westerners. In Singapore too, it can't be any other way, the trend will only move forward. I once took an Aunt of mine, who wasn't much into Indian fashion, to a fashion show organized by Mumbai Sé. And since then, she got hooked onto it!" My Aunt can't wait for the next Indian fashion show now, chuckles Eke, proud of her accomplishment.



Most of these stores are located along Orchard Road and are patronised by the local glitterati, appearing in the various society magazines. OM Goddess at Tanglin Mall, Chokri at the Mandarin Hotel and Wrapture at the Paragon are already creating waves in the vibrant and cosmopolitan fashion scene in Singapore. Comfortably entrenched in the mainstream shopping malls sharing ridiculously expensive retail space with the Chanel and Louis Vuittons, these boutiques are fast becoming popular among Singaporeans.

Still, these stores only provide one with a glimpse of the enormous variety of fashion available in India. For the fashionista who will be travelling to India, we give you the lowdown on where to go. ▮

SHOPPING FOR DESIGNER WEAR IN INDIA

01

IN DELHI The **Santushti Shopping Arcade** opposite the Ashoka Hotel is a popular upmarket haunt. Located off the Race Course Road roundabout, pebbled paths lead up to the 30-odd store complex, laid out on a rolling garden, where apparel, furnishings and accessories are available. A restaurant and patisserie add to the quiet charm of the place. **Hauz Khas** is one of the many villages subsumed by the southward growth of Delhi. In the early 1980s, it began its transformation into a chic shopping area when socialite and designer Bina Ramani opened her boutique here. Several other designer outlets followed suit, and today, Hauz Khas is a patchwork of traditional Indian homes, glass showrooms and polished display windows. New Delhi's glitterati come here to buy clothes and objets d'art. Situated in the picturesque Hauz Khas Village, nestled between the greens of a deer park and a 16th-century 'madarsa', **Ogaan**, which means 'waves' in Sanskrit, is a haven for high fashion. Housing the cream of Indian design talent, Ogaan designers create with Indian sensibilities even though the range of design can swing from very Indian to very Western. In fact, it would not be wrong to call it the only complete couture house in India. Another Ogaan outlet is located in Kolkata.

Another must visit place is **Mehrauli**, near the famous Qutab Minar monument. Mehrauli is the playground of the rich and affluent of the city with exclusive boutiques and chic restaurants strewn around

in a cluster of sprawling heritage mansions. JJ Valaya, a much sought after Indian designer, was the pioneer settler in Mehrauli.

02

IN BOMBAY The shopping arcades in five-star hotels like the **Oberoï** and the **Taj Mahal** are veritable treasure troves selling authentic antiques, silks and designer wear.

Melange, situated on the posh Altamount Road, is a store for contemporary women showcasing a variety of trendy, modern yet utilitarian clothes and accessories. **Ensemble** in South Bombay is for every 'with it' fashionista. The store regularly organizes fashion shows for regular clients. Ensemble also has two stores in Delhi at Mehrauli and Santushti.

03


IN BANGALORE AND CHENNAI

At the high-end fashion forefront is **Ffolio**. It has some of the best designer collections available in India, to boast of. The juxtaposition of eastern elements with western nuances makes it a hugely popular boutique.

Get more information on Indian designers and the latest trends in Indian fashion at www.seasonsindia.com



Pictures courtesy of Mumbai Se



Party!ng in Mumbai

Times are a changin' and the nightlife in Indian metros are not untouched. When it comes to nightlife, Mumbai remains the undisputed leader among Indian metros. Its bars and clubs offer enough variety to satisfy even the most jaded palate, **says Swati Kaul.**

NIGHTLIFE IN BOMBAY (as it was known before) during the 80s meant sitting at Café Mondegar or Café Leopold frequented mostly by western tourists, and chugging beer with cheese balls on the side and playing your favorite track on the jukebox.

These days, English-style pubs are being challenged by the chic bar-restaurant formula. In recent months, a large number of such establishments have opened, offering the city's

wealthier inhabitants a dazzling choice of places in which to spend their money. Many of the best bars are located in Colaba and along Marine Drive, in the posh South Mumbai locality. The prevailing atmosphere is informal – a jacket and tie is almost never required. But Mumbaikars like to be well turned-out and the unspoken dress code of some establishments is decidedly chic. Many bars and clubs operate a couples-only policy, for members and non-members alike, and charge an entrance fee.

One of the hottest clubs in town is Insomnia, located at the Taj Mahal Hotel. It is a warren of bars and lounge areas with a huge basement dance floor, but is more of a private members club. Find someone to take you there. Of the other nightclubs in hotels, the Library in the Taj President, boasts a lively bar and live music with free entry. Not just Jazz by the Bay, in the middle of the city, is a good place for live music besides scrumptious food.

Indigo, voted among the top 60 restaurants of the world, at Mandlik Road was the original Mumbai bar-restaurant. Despite having spawned numerous imitators, its minimalist decor still attracts the smartly turned-out set. Next door, Busaba is a popular bar-cum-nightclub attached to a Southeast Asian restaurant. Celebrities can be spotted at Athena, the cigar lounge/restaurant, with low yellow sofas and opaque glass counters. And

unforgettable experience. For a fun alfresco experience not far from the Taj, wander up a few floors to the trendy rooftop Koyla, a hookah bar and restaurant, where white tents flap in the breeze amidst leafy vegetation and lots of cozy low sofas and cushioned corners - a good mix of music, mood and food. The latest fad in town is restaurant-cum-lounge bars. The Olive Bar and Kitchen,

to UK. Rain, a popular restaurant-lounge bar in Juhu, a posh suburb, also serves New World cuisine.

The new kid on the block though, is the Phoenix mills complex in the Lower Parel area, where the defunct textile mills have cleverly been converted into a nightlife haven. A cluster of nightclubs, this is most conducive for bar hopping!

“ THE LATEST FAD IN TOWN IS RESTAURANT-CUM-LOUNGE BARS. THE OLIVE BAR AND KITCHEN, IN THE FASHIONABLE NORTHERN SUBURB OF BANDRA, IS A TRENDY BAR AND RESTAURANT, WHICH SERVES FOOD UNTIL 2 A.M. ”



the star-struck gal that I am, I religiously went to Athena for three nights in a row and did plenty of stargazing.

Geoffrey's at the Hotel Marine Plaza-itself a fine example of Art Deco architecture well worth visiting - is the best-known English-style pub in Mumbai.

The latest hip bar in Mumbai is Suzie Wong, located on a boat in the middle of Back Bay. It is open until 4 a.m. and is reached by motor dinghy from the jetty at the south end of Chowpatty Beach. My host in Mumbai was going to attend a private party there one evening and asked me to tag along. Sitting propped up on cushions upon the deck and looking at the city lights over the water was indeed an

in the fashionable northern suburb of Bandra, is a trendy bar and restaurant, which serves food until 2 a.m. On any given day, you can rub shoulders with the who's who of the city. Not one to miss hobnobbing with the celebrities, I pestered my host with a maddening intensity to make a reservation there for dinner. A few days later our efforts were rewarded: we finally got in and while there, 'ran into' a lot of celebrities.

Zenzi Bar, also in Bandra, has a glass-panelled, wood-floored lounge that serves French, Thai, Japanese and Indonesian cuisine. Enigma at the JW Marriott is a must on the list for an audio and visual feast, for this is a popular place with the Bollywood stars. Aqeel, the resident DJ is world-renowned and has been burning the airwaves all the way

Well, so much to do and see, there were probably new clubs opening up, even as I sat twiddling my thumb in the plane on my way back home.

No trip to Mumbai will be complete without getting a taste of its buzzing nightlife. One cardinal injunction at these places is early reservation. So if you intend to visit any of these hip and happening places, make sure you have a prior reservation or the wait can seem like ages. In worst cases, people are just turned away. Besides an assured rollicking good time, what better incentive than a chance to rub shoulders with celebrities. ■

Check listings, addresses and telephone numbers at
www.timeout.com/travel/mumbai



K.G. Subramanyan

Buyers are all chasing the few 'masters' of Indian art like M F Husain, F N Souza, S H Raza, Jehangir Sabavala, Ram Kumar, KG Subramanyam, Krishen Khanna, Akbar Padamsee and J Swaminathan.

Indian Art in Demand

By Sangeetha Madhavan

Shopping lists that once included a carpet, an antique or a miniature painting might now have a request for a painting by Ganesh Pyne or an Atul Dodiya. For many, apart from having something to remember the trip by, there is an added attraction in buying contemporary Indian art – prices for painted Indian art, undervalued by international standards, are skyrocketing across the globe.

While it is the odd traveller to India who goes out of the way to view the unique prehistoric rock paintings at Bhimbetka,

Madhya Pradesh, far more travellers now are visiting the major Indian metros in search of something more up to date.

In early February a VS Gaitonde oil on canvas sold for US\$215,000 at a public auction by auction house Osian in Mumbai to a Dubai-based collector. A month before that, Saffronart, a Mumbai-based company specialising in online auctions of modern Indian art, broke records by selling 140 works for US\$2.8 million. Experts say that the Indian market is growing at 30-40percent annually and all concur that demand is being fuelled by the Indian diaspora as well as an Indian public and corporations flush with cash.

Though long-time collectors include folks as diverse as Japanese tinned fish mogul Masanori Fukuoka and Hollywood director Roland Emmerich, Indian art is set to draw more fans as more eyes turn to the Indian economy's rising ascendance. Fukuoka holds the record for the highest ever price paid for an Indian painting - US\$317,500 for a Tyeb Mehta triptych at a Christie's auction in New York - and owns the largest collection of contemporary Indian art in Asia. Unsurprisingly, he is regular visitor and on first name basis with gallerists and artists such as Jogen Chowdhury.



Akbar Padamsee



Ram Kumar

Demand is also eclipsing supply. Buyers are all chasing the few 'masters' of Indian art like M F Husain, F N Souza, S H Raza, Jehangir Sabavala, Ram Kumar, KG Subramanyam, Krishen Khanna, Akbar Padamsee and J Swaminathan. While Husain remains prolific and perhaps one of the best known Indian artists the world over with forays into film and corporatisation of his art, work from the older and more established set of artists is dwindling.

The art palette is also changing. Many early artists drew from religious or folk themes for inspiration and the bulk of Indian masters do figurative work. Though artists can also be broadly classified by their origins with distinct schools from Baroda to Bengal, there have been middle of the road artists such as Gulam Muhammed Sheikh or his wife Nilima who use Indian elements, while recent entrants are doing more abstract or photo-realistic work accessible to overseas buyers.

Saffronart can probably lay claim to singlehandedly raising awareness of Indian art around the world with exhibitions of top artists in New York and London and a transparent system that appeals to many buyers. The renewed interest from Christie's and Sotheby's and the biennale planned for 2006/2007 will only raise the profile of Indian art further globally.

Singapore is seeing an onslaught too with Saffronart planning an exhibition of young artists here later this year in collaboration with Bodhi Art, which specialising in both the big and upcoming names of contemporary Indian art and has branches in Singapore and Delhi. Indigo Blue is another gallery specialising in the genre, and even mainstream galleries are sporadically showing Indian artists. Bodhi Art has numerous tieups planned with Singapore institutions over the next year.

For those who want to start collecting, do note that auction prices always include a premium. Since most major artists ally themselves with a gallery, buying direct is almost impossible. With fakes being a problem especially with deceased artists – a recent Osian auction was said to have featured a fake from Bhupen Khakhar – it becomes imperative that the person on the other side is a trustworthy, reputable gallery who can give you an authentication certificate.

THE ART PALETTE IS ALSO CHANGING. MANY EARLY ARTISTS DREW FROM RELIGIOUS OR FOLK THEMES FOR INSPIRATION AND THE BULK OF INDIAN MASTERS DO FIGURATIVE WORK.

If Mumbai is the place to be for auctions and established galleries such as Sakshi, Delhi is the other gallery centre, with Kolkata and Chennai lower in the pecking order. Unlike other countries, funding problems at museums mean that acquisitions and maintenance are lax. Although some of these hold a treasure trove of earlier Indian art.

Besides, as Renu Khilnani of Bodhi Art says, "While auctions are a good way to get a feel of the prominent names, they do not offer an in-depth understanding of underlying trends." They can't tell you who the upcoming artists are. Khilnani for instance, places her bets on Atul Dodiya, Baiju Parthan, Chitrovanu Mazumdar, Anju Dodiya, Natraj Sharma, Rameshwar Broota and Jitish Kallat.

Prices for top artists from India have surpassed those of top-range Southeast Asian artists. You'd better book your ticket now. ■

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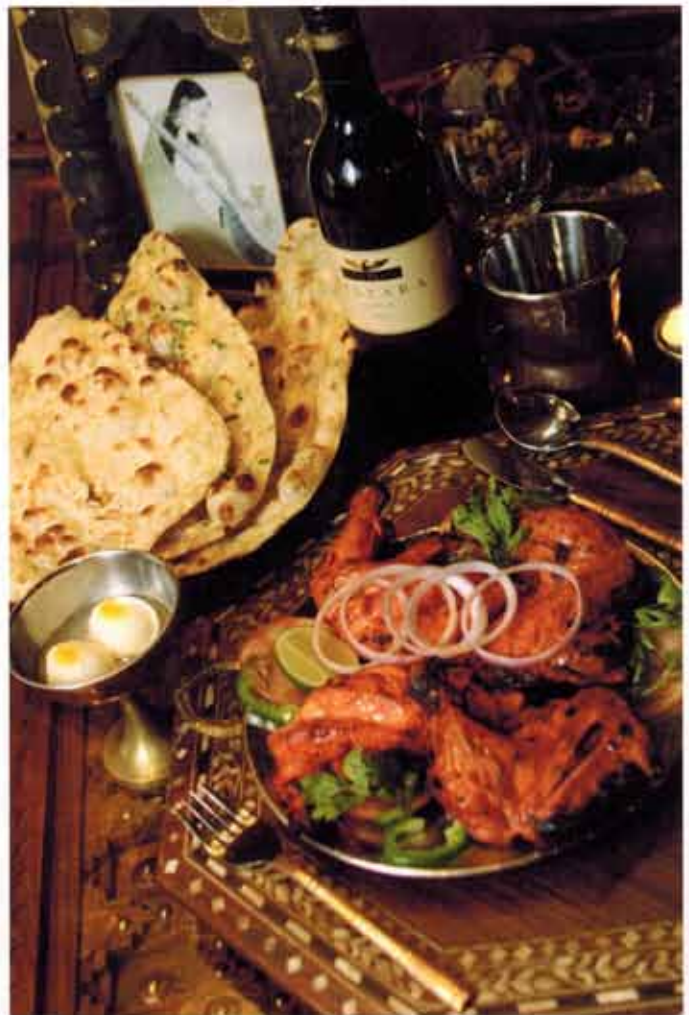
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GOURMETHAUNTS Bombay Café

How about a Mexican dosa with jalapeno peppers for stuffing? Sounds confusing? Confusing it is but a pleasant confusion. Find this and a whole lot of other innovative dishes at this newly opened eatery in the East Coast area. Stark black wallpaper with hot pink chairs and Bollywood movie posters give it a minimalist, yet modern and funky look. The youthful décor is complemented with traditional favourites on the pure vegetarian menu like Gujarati *dhoklas* and Punjabi *chaats*. An extensive drinks menu includes lattes, mochas, liqueur coffees and blended smoothies. The restaurant has an outdoor dining area as well, equipped with ceiling fans to beat the hot days. The food is authentic and with the rising popularity of everything associated with Mumbai, this place couldn't have opened at a more appropriate time. The friendly owner Rajesh tells us that more popular dishes are going to be added to the menu soon like the famous grilled Bombay sandwich. We are eagerly awaiting the changes.

Location: 332/334 Tanjong Katong Road | **Tel:** 6345 0070 | **Opening hours:** 11am-11pm daily

Haldhi

For North-Indian fine dining cuisine, we recommend Haldhi (Hindi for turmeric), located by the Singapore River at Boat Quay. Enjoy the river view from the alfresco dining area or head to the second level for a more refined dining experience amidst traditional Indian décor. The restaurant serves delectable North-Indian food and we especially recommend their tandoori dishes. If you are looking for more after-dinner entertainment options, then the music lounge at the third level is extremely convenient. The music lounge has a live Indian band playing pulsating and peppy numbers accompanied by beautiful dancers to keep you entertained.

Location: 61 Boat Quay | **Tel:** 6534 4424 | **Restaurant opening hours:** 11:30am to 2:30 pm and 5:30 pm-11:00 pm daily
Lounge opening hours: 9pm-3am daily

BOOK-IT

Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found

Suketu Mehta



Mehta's love for his 'hometown' is evident as he takes us on a journey of Bombay through the eyes of its gangsters, policemen, go-go dancers, poets, slum dwellers and the Bollywood stars who have come to this bountiful land to make it big. A poignant, yet fearless narrative of this bold and addictive city keeps you riveted through the 542 pages. As absorbing as any Bollywood movie, it is extremely moving at the same time. His sophisticated voice conveys postmodern Bombay with a carefully

calibrated balance of wit and outrage, harking back to such great Victorian urban chroniclers as Dickens and Mayhew while introducing the reader to much that is truly new and strange.

Suketu Mehta is a fiction writer and journalist based in New York. He has won the Whiting Writers Award, the O. Henry Prize, and a New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship for his fiction. Mehta's work has been published in the New York Times Magazine, Granta, Harper's magazine, Time and Condé Nast.

Visit the author's website at www.suketumehta.com



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1C855	Delhi - Singapore*	A320	Daily	0050	1015
1C855	Bangkok - Singapore	A320	Daily	0710	1015
	* Via Delhi * Via Bangkok				
1C555	Chennai - Singapore	A300	Daily	0050	0720
1C557	Chennai - Singapore	A320	Daily	1325	1955
1C957	Bangalore - Singapore	A320	Daily	0005	0700
1C561	Hyderabad- Singapore	A320	Tue/Thur/Sat	0530	1250

DEPARTURES - Singapore

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1C856	Singapore - Bangkok	A320	Daily	1145	1240
1C856	Singapore - Delhi*	A320	Daily	1145	1655
1C858	Singapore - Jaipur*	A320	Wed/Sun	1145	1825
	* Via Bangkok * Via Delhi				
1C556	Singapore - Chennai	A300	Daily	0825	0945
1C558	Singapore - Chennai	A320	Daily	2105	2225
1C958	Singapore - Bangalore	A320	Daily	0750	0940
1C562	Singapore - Hyderabad	A320	Tue/Thur/Sat	1350	1600

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