

KARNATAKA • AUSTRALIA • UTTAR PRADESH • MOROCCO

A TIMES OF INDIA PUBLICATION

lonely planet
APRIL 2020 INDIA

PLAN
NOW...
TRAVEL
WHEN IT'S
TIME!

The **GREAT** Outdoors

IT WILL WAIT FOR YOU

IMMERSE YOURSELF IN
THE BALKANS

₹ 150



CHOOSE YOUR FAVE FROM 60+

**US NATIONAL
PARKS**

BE INSPIRED TO

**CYCLE IN
INDIA**

GET (GOOD) GOOSEBUMPS IN

**SVALBARD,
NORWAY**

LA THE KAPOOR WAY



For jetsetters like Sonam and Rhea Kapoor, Los Angeles is a favorite global destination that is second to none.

During a recent visit, these world-famous sisters enjoyed everything the city has to offer, from boho beachfront accommodations in Venice to a sleek, modern hotel in the heart of the city; shopping for days, a colorful street art scene and a vibrant nightlife.

The Private Suite at LAX

If you're traveling in style like Sonam and Rhea, you can also experience The Private Suite. Members don't wait in lines because private security screening is done in the building and the Private Suite team also handles ticketing and luggage. When it's time to board, Private Suite members are driven across the tarmac in a BMW 7-Series sedan directly to their aircraft.

Venice Beach

People-watching in LA doesn't get much better than Venice, a creative community that boasts one of LA's most famous beaches, and The Strand bike path, in the landmark Canal District inspired by the namesake originals in Italy. A photo at the Venice Sign is a must!

Hotel Irwin

It's an endless summer in LA, and you've spent all year wishing for sun-kissed skin, gentle sea breezes and a substantially more boho existence. Thankfully, the Hotel Erwin - the cheerful, Mid-Century style boutique hotel in Venice Beach - makes for an unforgettable sunset while you sip a cocktail at High, the hotel's rooftop lounge.

Arts District

One of the most exciting neighborhoods in L.A., the Arts District attracts visitors and locals alike with global dining options, stylish boutiques and vibrant nightlife. The Arts District is also a mecca for street art aficionados.

Ciel Spa at SLS Beverly Hills

Guided by the mantra "Stimulate Life's Senses," Ciel Spa emphasizes highly intuitive and personalized service in a celestial dreamscape designed by Phillipe Starck. Guests will feel relaxed and at ease surrounded by the warm white tones and billowing curtains. Amenities include pampering at the full service salon, and; a wide range of treatments utilizing the transformative powers of Biologique Recherche products.

LVIR

Located at the Row DTLA, LVIR is a modern and natural brand that can be enjoyed by all generations. LVIR makes refined women's clothing that "represent a comfortable and stereoscopic style." As Sonam said after shopping there, "Everything here is so modern, easy to wear and comfortable! I may need help carrying all my bags."



Los Angeles EVERYONE IS WELCOME™

Plan your travel at discoverlosangeles.com



HERE'S A FORM YOU FORGOT TO FILL WHILE APPLYING FOR YOUR PASSPORT.



PUBLICATION	TERM	PRICE PER COPY (RS.)	ANNUAL RATE (RS.)	DISCOUNT (40%)	YOU PAY (RS.)
LONELY PLANET MAGAZINE INDIA	1 YEAR (12 Issues)	150	1800	40%	1200

NOTE: THE AMOUNT IS INCLUSIVE OF RS.10 PER ISSUE FOR POSTAGE AND HANDLING CHARGES

THREE EASY WAYS TO SUBSCRIBE

POST

Send the completed form to: LPMI Subscription offer, World Wide Media Pvt. Ltd., C/o. Bennett, Coleman & Co. Ltd., RMD Magazine Department, The Times of India Suburban Press, Off Akurli Road, Kandivali East, Mumbai - 401101.

CALL:

18001210005 (All India toll free number)

ONLINE

Visit mags.timesgroup.com/lonely-planet-magazine-india.html

SUBSCRIPTION FORM

TITLE	FIRST NAME	SURNAME
ADDRESS		
CITY		
PINCODE	STATE	DOB / /
PHONE NUMBER		
EMAIL*		
EXISTING SUBSCRIBER PLEASE SPECIFY CUSTOMER ID		



PAYMENT DETAILS

Cheque / DD enclosed ☐ Cheque / DD number:

Cheque Dated: Bank Details:

(PAYABLE TO WORLDWIDE MEDIA PRIVATE LIMITED)

Paytm Wallet Txn ID:

Paytm Wallet TXN Date:

Paytm Mobile NO.:

paytm
Accepted here



PAYMENT DONE THROUGH PAYTM, PLEASE ENSURE THAT THE PAYTM WALLET TXN ID AND THE PAYTM MOBILE NUMBER ARE MENTIONED IN THE SUBSCRIPTION FORM.

LONELY PLANET MAGAZINE INDIA SUBSCRIPTION OFFER, WORLD WIDE MEDIA PVT. LTD., C/O BENNETT, COLEMAN & CO. LTD., RMD MAGAZINE SUBSCRIPTION, BENNET, COLEMAN & CO. LTD., KANDIVALI SUBURBAN PRESS OFF AKURLI ROAD, KANDIVALI EAST, MUMBAI - 401101.

TERMS & CONDITIONS: •Cheques/DDs should be drawn in favour of Worldwide Media private limited. •Cheques/DDs must contain the code/address of the issuing branch. •Non MICR cheques or two separate cheques for one subscription shall not be accepted. •Payment may be made through Paytm QR code printed on the Subscription form. In case of payment done through Paytm, please ensure that the Paytm wallet Txn ID and the Paytm Mobile number are mentioned in the subscription form and the duly filled form must be sent to the above address and the subscription form shall be considered only in case of successful completion of transaction in favour of WWM. •Delivery of subscription copy/ies shall commence only on receipt of properly filled subscription form to WWM on the above mentioned address. •Incomplete or illegible forms shall not be accepted. •Merely payment of subscriber fee by using any of the permitted modes shall not entail or ensure delivery of subscription copy/ies. •Money orders shall not be accepted. •Please super scribe full name, address and signature on the reverse of the cheque/DD. •For multiple subscriptions, attach separate coupons (photocopies allowed) along with separate cheques/DDs. •Please allow a delivery period of 4 to 6 weeks for the first issue of the magazine to reach you from encashment of remittance. WWM will not be responsible for failure to deliver the magazine

if an incorrect address is supplied in the form. •WWM reserves the right to dispose-off incorrectly addressed envelopes and their content without any obligation to refund the subscription amount. •Subscription copies shall be delivered by post/courier as soon as the issue is released in the market place. However, WWM shall not be responsible for any postal or courier delays. •Avoid giving PO Box or APO addresses. In the event of an issue of the magazine is lost in transit, WWM liability is limited either to replacement of the missing issue or refund of the cost of the missing issue. •The company reserves the right to cancel or reject a subscription if it determined that delivery of the magazine is logistically difficult and not sustainable. In such circumstances, WWM will refund the balance subscription amount to the subscriber. •The validity of the subscription period is limited to the number of issues mentioned in the offer, depending on the terms subscribed for. •Magazines are also available without this offer. •This offer is non-refundable and cannot be combined with any other offer. •Offers and rates are valid in India only. All the disputes pertaining to the subscription shall be subjected to exclusive jurisdiction of competent courts in Mumbai only. •WWM reserves the right to modify, withdraw, alter, extend or discontinue the subscription terms and condition anytime.

☐ I have read the terms and conditions and I would like to avail of this offer.

Subscriber's Signature: _____



editor's note



Primrose Monteiro-D'Souza, Editor
Follow me on Twitter [@PrimroseDSouza](https://twitter.com/PrimroseDSouza)
& Instagram [@primrosedsouza](https://www.instagram.com/primrosedsouza)

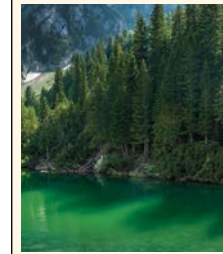
Embrace the art of armchair travel

Explore Every Day. That's the Lonely Planet tagline. Exploring every day entails sitting back and dreaming of travel for a while – which I know is one of Team LPMI's favourite activities and yours too. So much of the excitement in travel lies in planning and imagining our journeys in the future, so, for all of us right now, this is a time to plot and plan our discoveries to come.

The Great Outdoors theme this issue is perfect for little and large adventures in the making. Our big features will have you travelling across the **Austrian Alps**, walking across the **peaks of the Balkans**, getting goosebumps in **Svalbard** in Norway, and wandering through **national parks in the USA** and across **Kakadu** in Australia; little-known **Sanjay-Dubri National Park** in Madhya Pradesh gets its time in the spotlight too. Look for the theme flag-offs across the issue to give you more inspiration to get out there – you'll love that we have so many *desi* travellers hitting the road. Catch up with how four Indian women rode motorbikes on a 17,000km journey from India to the Mekong and back, and our readers' experiences with camping. Closer to us in Mumbai, **11 travel influencers took an early-morning bicycle ride** with us to promote #sustainabletravel in February. Now, a month later, they tell us how their new Kross bikes are doing, and their plans for them; bike names include Herbie, Lynee, Olive and Carlton! And, then, there are the big players: **six cycling enthusiasts in India who will inspire you** to ride in your city, take a group cycle trip, ride (slowly) from Manali to Leh, and, upping the stakes, get into competitive cycling, become a randonneur or even a triathlete!

But, until you're ready to hit the road, sit back comfortably in your favourite armchair and start planning. The Great Outdoors will wait as it always has. You'll know when it's time.

THIS MONTH'S COVER



PHOTOGRAPH: JUSTIN FOULKES
The lakes of the Balkans – like this one, the Ligeni i Drelajve on the Kosovo-Montenegro border – are bracingly cold, but still so inviting...





LONELY PLANET MAGAZINE INDIA

Chief Executive Officer
Deepak Lamba

Chief Community Officer & Editor:
Primrose Monteiro-D'Souza

Senior Assistant Editor: Amit Gaikwad
Chief Copy Editor: Samarpan Bhowmik
Senior Features Writer: Aurelia Fernandes
Travel Researcher: Aishwarya Menon
Senior Editorial Coordinator: Louisa Menezes
Art Director: Mahesh Sagari
Deputy Art Director: T. Krishna Prabakar

Head Marketing, Head Digital Solutions:
Priyadarshi Banerjee

Chief Marketing Manager: Ravi Budania
Brand Manager: Chandni Chopra
Manager - Marketing: Asha Kulkarni

Chief Financial Officer: Subramaniam S
Head Human Resource: Meghna Puthawala
Content Studio: Vidyut Patra
Experiential Marketing: Aakash Mishra
Publisher: Joji Varghese

LONELY PLANET INDIA PVT. LTD

General Manager & Director: Sesh Seshadri

LONELY PLANET GLOBAL LIMITED

International Licensing Manager: Joe Revill
Editorial Director: Tom Hall

LONELY PLANET TRAVELLER MAGAZINE UK

Editor: Peter Grunert

BUSINESS DIRECTOR

Sunil Wuthoo sunil.wuthoo@wwm.co.in

BRAND SOLUTIONS WEST

VICE PRESIDENT - Brand Solutions & Business Head - Femina Salon & Spa
Gautam Chopra gautam.chopra@wwm.co.in

Mumbai

GENERAL MANAGER

Neelam Menon neelam.menon@wwm.co.in

Jiten Shivlani jiten.shivlani@wwm.co.in

Shveta Somvanshi shveta.somvanshi@wwm.co.in

Pune

Ekta Dang ekta.dang@wwm.co.in

Ahmedabad

Kamal Rajput kamal.rajput@wwm.co.in

NORTH

VICE PRESIDENT - Brand Solutions & Sales Head - Long Form Content

Anjali Rathor anjali.rathor@wwm.co.in

Jaipur

Pushpesh Sood pushpesh.ood@wwm.co.in

SOUTH

VICE PRESIDENT SOUTH AND BUSINESS HEAD - FEMINA TAMIL

Pravin Menon pravin.menon@wwm.co.in

EAST

ASSISTANT VICE PRESIDENT

Alka Kakar alka.kakar@wwm.co.in

Bijoy Choudhary bijoy.choudhary@wwm.co.in

FOR BUSINESS AND MARKETING ENQUIRIES

Asha Kulkarni asha.kulkarni@wwm.co.in

GOT FEEDBACK?
CLICK ON THE
EMAIL ADDRESS
BELOW



NEED TO GET IN TOUCH?

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Manager, Marketing
Asha Kulkarni
asha.kulkarni@wwm.co.in

CAREERS

careers@wwm.co.in

TIMESGROUP (RMD):

Associate General Manager
Suparna Sheth
suparna.sheth@timesgroup.com

TO SUBSCRIBE

Online: mags.timesgroup.com

Mail: subscriptions.wwm@wwm.co.in

SMS: LPSUB to 58888

Call: 18001210005 (All India toll free number)

SUBSCRIPTION ENQUIRIES

Lonely Planet Magazine India, RMD (M) Dept,
Bennett, Coleman & Co Ltd, The Times of India
Building, Dr D N Road, Mumbai 400 001

Lonely Planet Magazine India is published by
Worldwide Media Pvt Ltd.

under licence from Lonely Planet Global Limited (part of the
Lonely Planet Group). The words "Lonely Planet" and the
Lonely Planet symbol are trademarks
of Lonely Planet Global Limited © Lonely Planet Global
Limited. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or part
prohibited without permission.



Lonely Planet Magazine India is edited by Primrose Monteiro-D'Souza and
printed and published by Joji Varghese for and on behalf of Worldwide
Media Pvt Ltd, The Times of India Building, 4th Floor, Dr D N Road, Mumbai
400001. Printed at Rajhans Enterprise, No 134, 4th Main Road, Industrial
Town, Rajajinagar, Bangalore 560044, India.

The publisher makes every effort to ensure that the magazine's contents
are correct. However, we accept no responsibility for any errors or
omissions. Unsolicited material, including photographs and transparencies,
is submitted entirely at the owner's risk and the publisher accepts no
responsibility for its loss or damage. Submissions to the magazine may
also be used on the publication's related platforms without prior intimation.
All maps, including those of India, used in the magazine are for illustrative
purposes only. Lonely Planet Magazine India is not responsible for any
controversies that may arise thereof.

All material published in Lonely Planet Magazine India is protected by copyright
and unauthorised reproduction in part or full is forbidden.

CIN: U22120MH2003PTC142239

ON THE ROAD!

Team LPMI has been out and about. We consolidated
our commitment to #sustainabletravel with a bike
ride with 11 travel influencers in South Mumbai
(look for their bikes and bytes in the Journal section).
A big thank you to Priya Pathiyan and Johann
Daniels for leading the way. Mahesh and Amit
travelled to Uttar Pradesh to rediscover Agra
beyond the Taj (check out our Weekend Planner
this month and the baffling pic far right), while
Primrose and Krishna spent a week in Assam
(story coming up). Stay tuned.



PRIMROSE LOVED THE GENTLE WEAVERS OF NAM PHAKE



BEYOND THE TAJ: MAHESH AND AMIT COULDN'T STAY AWAY!



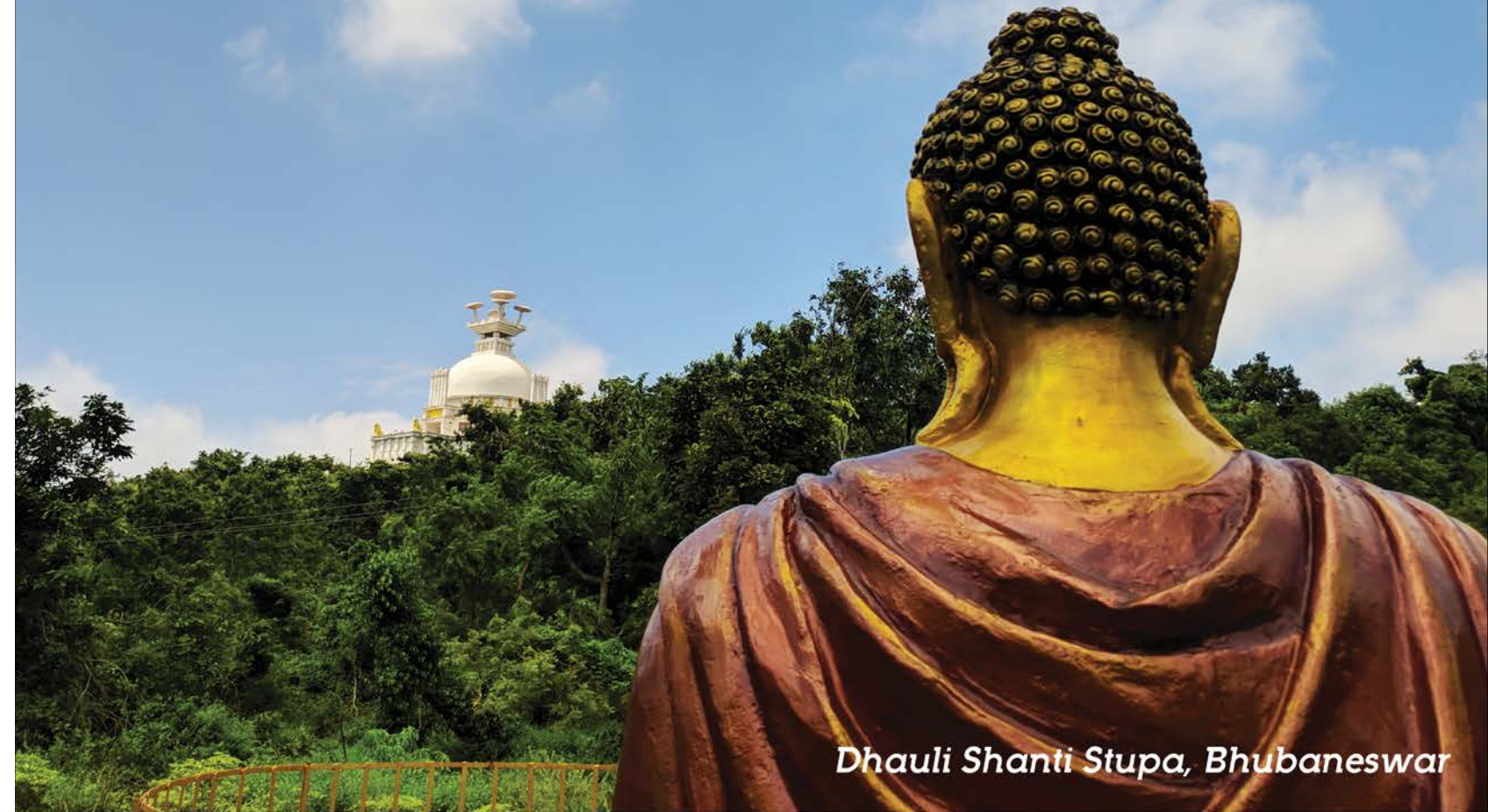
KRISHNA IS STILL GRIMACING HIS WAY
THROUGH SELFIES



FRIENDS OF LPMI AFTER A HAPPY RIDE THROUGH SOUTH MUMBAI

odishatourism.gov.in

Odisha aah!



Dhauli Shanti Stupa, Bhubaneswar

15 Buddhist sites. 6 Jain sites. 1000 temples. 15 museums...
there's a surprise at every corner.



ODISHA
INDIA'S BEST KEPT SECRET.

In this issue...

EXPLORE

Your world of new discoveries

- 14** Weekend planners: Kick back and relax in **Kundapura, Karnataka**, sip on **chai** in **Coonoor, Tamil Nadu**, make the most of a beach day in **Ganpatipule, Maharashtra**, discover, **Agra, Uttar Pradesh**, beyond the Taj, and other ways to make the most of your weekends
- 18** Culture trip: A new exhibition on **Tantra: enlightenment to revolution** opens at the British Museum
- 22** More reasons to get out there: To marvel at **Warhol's works in London**, the UK; to see the **newest national park in the USA**, to plan a **trip to Sri Lanka**, and many more
- 26** Shop **Amsterdam, The Netherlands**
- 28** The secret history of the **Easter Egg**

JOURNAL

Tales from the road

- 30** The photo story: Get up close and personal with the wild in **Sanjay-Dubri National Park, Madhya Pradesh**
- 34** Life changer: **Riding home from the Mekong**
- 38** LP on the road: **Running in Havana**
- 42** Out there: 11 travel influencers and their bikes after the **LPMI #GreenStrides**
- 45** What I've learned: In conversation with **Chef Shriya Shetty**
- 48** Your photos: Of lightening and thunder in **Puducherry**, and other snapshots from you

MINI GUIDES

Themed guides to pull out and take with you

- 125** Shop till you drop in **Marrakesh, Morocco**
- 127** Max out your weekend in **Mysore, Karnataka**
- 129** Eat your heart out in **Denver, the USA**

FOLLOW US ON



Lonely Planet Magazine India



@lonelyplanetmagazineindia



@LPMagIn

The Balkans are all about high peaks and deep valleys, pg 90



PLAN NOW... TRAVEL WHEN IT'S TIME!

explore

YOUR WORLD OF DISCOVERIES

Whatever type of trip you're planning this month, we've got the know-how to help you on your way. Our experts and locals share their recommendations and insider tips, meaning you'll have a better holiday, whether you fancy a city food trail, an active trip that will really push your boundaries, or a wildlife-watching weekend in the countryside.



p16



p18



p28

More reasons to get out there

p22

JOURNAL

TALES FROM THE ROAD

A bit of armchair travel is the best way to inspire a future trip. If you can't get away this month or simply want to drift off on a daydream for an hour or two, let our writers, photographers and travellers take you on a vicarious journey, whether to rock-cut art in Aurangabad or to vivid nights in Switzerland.



p30

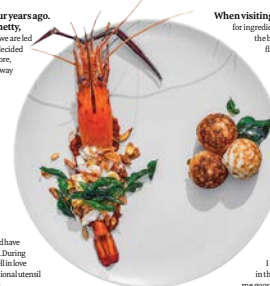


p46

p45

As a chef going back to my roots

Chef Shriya Shetty talks about her deep love for food and travel and all the culinary (and life) lessons she's learned along the way



"Travel by foot or rent a cycle to explore a neighbourhood. You discover so much more!"

My perfect comfort meal depends on my mood. But, being the true Indian that I am, nothing makes me happier than the piping-hot dal-rice-ghee-and-fish fry combo!

JOURNAL

In this issue...

VOLUME 11, ISSUE 3 | APRIL 2020

For glaciers or deserts, pick from the USA's many national parks, pg 68

FEATURES

Use your passport's power to the fullest

- 54** Gear up for a mountain adventure across the **Austrian Alps**
- 68** Towering mountains, captivating plains, unparalleled beauty and diverse terrains – all on offer across **the USA's national parks**
- 76** Experience the Arctic in all its icy glory in **Svalbard, Norway**
- 90** Take on a trekking trail like no other across the **peaks of the Balkans**
- 102** Nature and history come alive in **Kakadu, Australia**
- 114** It's all about #sustainabletravel, as **six cycling enthusiasts talk about hitting the open road**



Spend a day in Kakadu, pg 102

Chill out in Svalbard, pg 76



SONY

α9



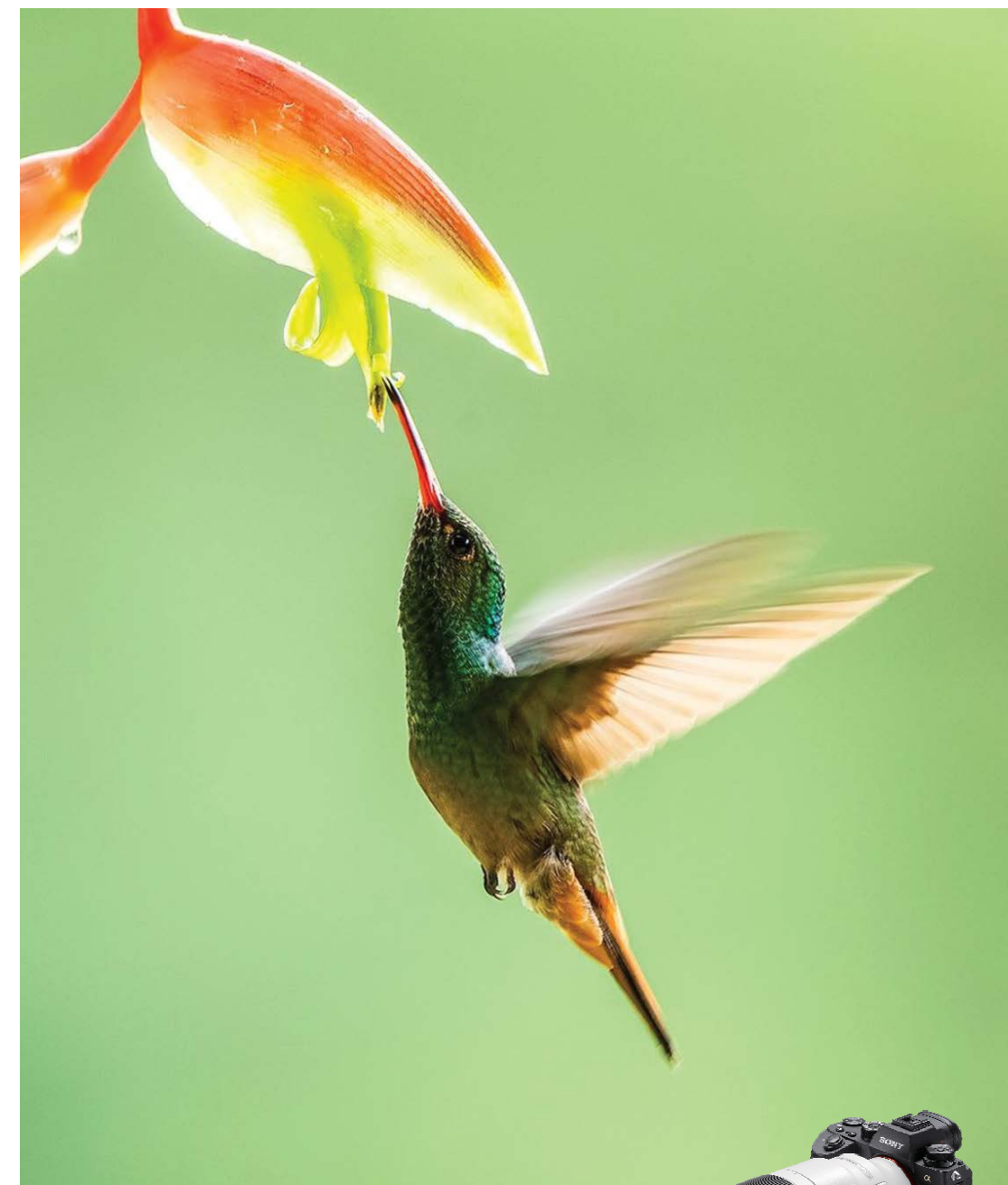
SEL200600G



Sudhir Shivaram
Wildlife Photographer

THIS IS THE REVOLUTION. THIS IS THE FUTURE

"Sony α9 - A Game changer for wildlife photography. The focus tracking capabilities of the α9 even at the edges of the frames helps me get my tight shots without compromising on my framing. Perfect for wildlife and more, this 200-600mm super-telephoto zoom can reach as far as 840mm or 1200mm with 1.4x and 2.0x teleconverters, with full G lens quality and AF performance."



THE CHOICE OF PROFESSIONALS

α
ALPHA



SPECIAL FINANCE OFFERS**

Finance with No Processing Fees through:



Rs.1/-
Downpayment*

12/4
EMI

18/4
EMI

Pine Labs

Attractive EMI offer on select Credit Cards at no extra cost through Pine Labs Terminal*

*No interest cost. No processing fee. Available only at selected stores in selected cities. Conditions apply.

**Special Finance Offers are applicable on select product and select city only. Contact Finance Co. / Banks for coverage / network area. Finance at the sole discretion of the financier.

***Down payment of Rs.1/- and rest in 9 & 12 EMI through BAJAJ Finance/ IDFC First Bank/ HDFC Bank. Valid for select products only. Check with retailer for details.

For all Digital Imaging related updates : FOLLOW US ON [instagram.com/sonyalphain](https://www.instagram.com/sonyalphain) & <https://alphacommunity.in>

For other Sony products : FOLLOW US ON [facebook.com/sonyindia](https://www.facebook.com/sonyindia) | twitter.com/sony_india | [youtube.com/sonyindia](https://www.youtube.com/sonyindia) | [instagram.com/sonyindiaofficial](https://www.instagram.com/sonyindiaofficial)

For sales and service queries, call 1800-103-7799 (Toll Free) or e-mail us at sonyindia.care@ap.sony.com. Please write to b2bindia@ap.sony.com for corporate enquiries. Visit <http://www.sony.co.in>

Registered Office: Sony India Pvt. Ltd., A-18, Mohan Co-operative Industrial Estate, Mathura Road, New Delhi - 110044. Ph: 011-6600 6600. To locate your nearest Alpha Flagship Store, visit www.sony.co.in/alphastores

EXPERIENCE

THE BEST OF TRAVEL AT
YOUR FINGERTIPS

SUBSCRIBE TO THE DIGITAL ISSUE



Scan this QR code to get the latest issue of *Lonely Planet Magazine India* on your tablet or mobile device!



AVAILABLE ON

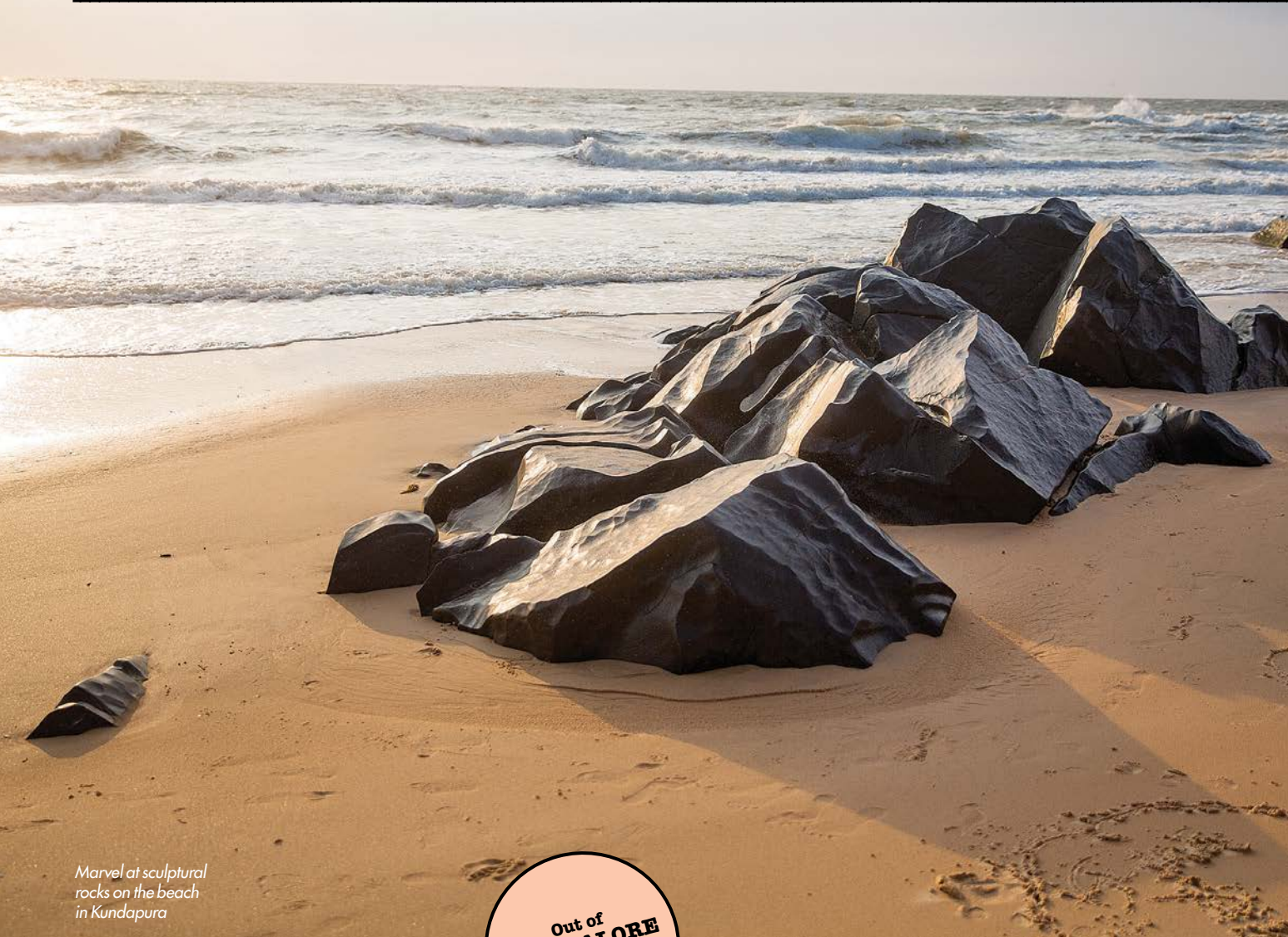


explore

THE BEST OF THE MONTH'S TIPS & TRIPS

PLAN NOW... TRAVEL WHEN IT'S TIME! INSPIRATION HAS NO EXPIRY DATE!

This month, an exhibition on Tantra opens at the British Museum in London, the UK, exploring the diverse ways that Tantric philosophy changed the practice of Hinduism and Buddhism, and even came to shape 1960s counter-culture



Marvel at sculptural rocks on the beach in Kundapura

Out of
MANGALORE
(90KM)

WEEKEND PLANNER

Get out of town

Go on a family vacation, find solace in the hills, and hit the beaches

Words Samarpan Bhowmik @sum.err.pun

Take the family along to Kundapura, Karnataka

Located on the coast of Karnataka, less than a hundred kilometres from Mangalore, Kundapura is the ideal family holiday destination. Whether you'd like to do something with your partner, want the kids to have a good time, or ensure your parents are entertained too, there's something for everybody.

There's plenty to see around town. Start off with the **Holy Rosary Church**, a 17th-century structure that has seen colourful and turbulent years (00-91-8254-230-421; Church Rd, 6am – 6pm). Head next to **Kodi Bengre**, the place where the Panchganga River meets the Arabian Sea. While the beach is clean and ideal for a peaceful walk with the family, you must head to the top of the **Kodi Lighthouse** for a breath-taking view of the surrounding countryside (Kodi Bengre; 4pm – 5.30pm; ₹10 adult, ₹3 child). If the family gets peckish, a little distance away is **Kinara Restaurant**, a lovely little beach shack and one of the very few in the area (00-91-99022-85575; Beach Rd, Koteswara; snacks from ₹40, paneer ghee roast: ₹180). Speaking of food, try the famous chicken ghee roast at **Shetty's Lunch Home** (00-91-82542-30408; Hajaj Commercial Complex; Deralakatte; 11am – 11pm; chicken ghee roast: ₹600). The fish thali (₹100) and the kane fish masala fry (₹260) are equally delicious.

Places such as Kundapura are delightful reveals, ones that only appear on your map if you travel locally. Explore our country; there are many such hidden gems just a small distance away.

STAY: *Glücklich Beach Cottages* (www.gluecklichstays.com; from ₹3,500); *Blue Waters* (www.bluewatersindia.com; from ₹2,700)



Out of
GOIMBATORE
(70KM)

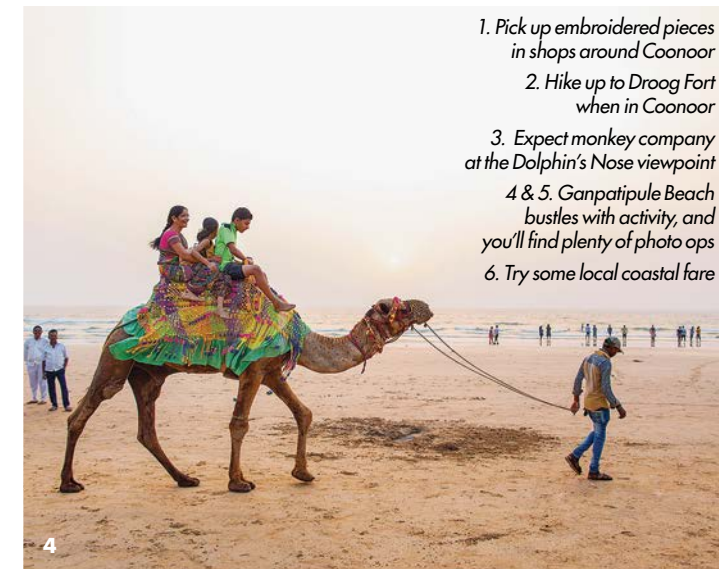
Soak up the hills in Coonoor, Tamil Nadu

Just about 20km from Ooty, one of the most popular hill stations in India, lies the lesser-known Coonoor. Here, the throngs of tourists are thinner, the air is a little fresher and the scenery just as magnificent.

Begin exploring the town at **Sim's Park**, a terraced horticultural park, home to over a thousand species of native and introduced flora – cedars, champaks, roses, and a pretty, sun-striped plant nursery (00-91-423-223-0395; Walker's Hill Rd; 7am – 6pm; ₹30 adult, ₹15 child). Around a 10-km scenic drive from town is the **Dolphin's Nose peak**, which provides a startling 360° view of these parts, with some families of rhesus monkeys for company. The peak is flanked by ravines and the **Catherine Falls** in Kotagiri, the oldest hill station in the Nilgiris. The other thing that will catch your eye here are the bright dwellings of the indigenous Kurumbar tribals that live here.

If you'd like more of a challenge, make your way to the 18th-century **Droog Fort**, thought to be Tipu Sultan's one-time military outpost (6am – 6pm). The fort is perched 6,000ft above sea level and the hike up follows a red-dirt track cutting through the **Nonsuch Tea Estate**, and finally leading to a steep ascent to the summit, known as Bakasura Malai after the demon in the *Mahabharata*. The panoramic view of the Nilgiris from here is, again, breathtaking. Soak in as much as you can on a Coonoor visit. Slow travel can be a delicious treat in these fast times.

STAY: *Neemrana Wallwood Garden* (www.neemranahotels.com/wallwood-garden-coonoor; from ₹4,500); *The Xanadu* (www.thexanadu.co; from ₹7,300)



1. Pick up embroidered pieces in shops around Coonoor
2. Hike up to Droog Fort when in Coonoor
3. Expect monkey company at the Dolphin's Nose viewpoint
- 4 & 5. Ganpatipule Beach bustles with activity, and you'll find plenty of photo ops
6. Try some local coastal fare



Out of
MUMBAI
(333KM)

While away some time in Ganpatipule, Maharashtra

One of the best things about heading to the small temple town of Ganpatipule on the Konkan coast is the drive there from Mumbai. Hugging the coast, the road has sparse traffic and the surrounding landscape is pretty. By the time you reach Ganpatipule town, you'll already be in a holiday state of mind.

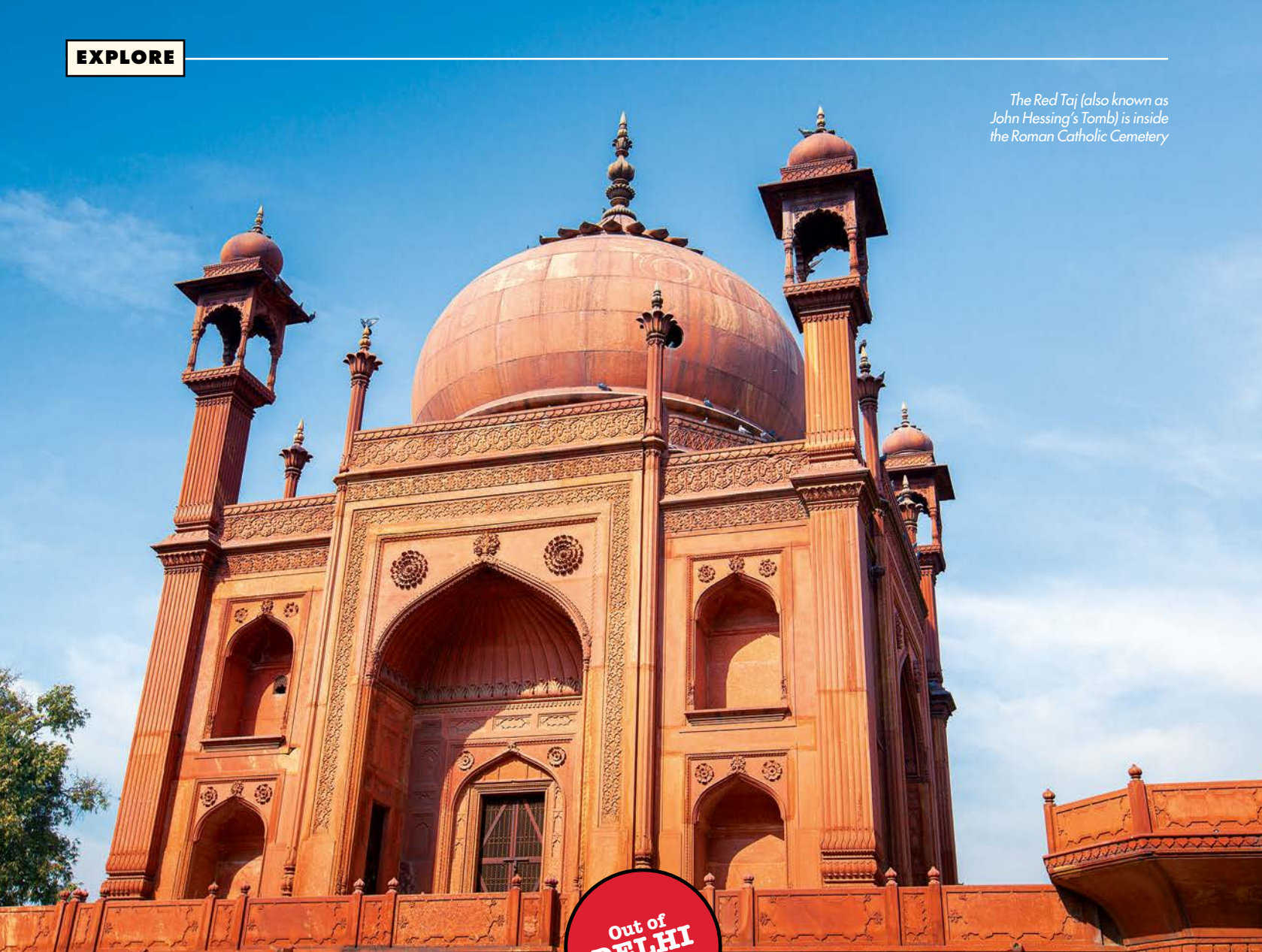
With two beaches, **Ganpatipule Beach** and **Aare Beach**, located near each other, get ready to dig your toes into the sand while the sea breeze embraces you. Aare Beach is serene and usually pretty deserted save for a few boulders that make the perfect perch from which to watch the sun set. Ganpatipule Beach, on the other hand, has a lot more going on. If you're close to the **Swayambhu Ganpati Temple**, you'll see hordes of visitors, horse carriages, dune buggies, jet skis and camels, and vendors offering a wide range of refreshments.

If you are keen on some history, head to **Jaigad Fort** around 15km away (Jaigad Coastal Rd; 9am – 6pm; free). The 17th-century fort's outer wall is all that remains today, but the view from the ramparts is easily one of the most stunning on the Konkan Coast.

Make sure you catch the sunset back in Ganpatipule from Aare Beach. The warm hues of the dying sun melting into blue waters will be etched into your mind for quite some time to come. It is a really small town with not much else to do, especially after dark. But then, pretty much nothing is what most visitors are here to do.

STAY: *Nakshatra Beach Resort* (www.nakshatrabeachresort.com; from ₹3,000); *Beachfront Villas* (www.beachfrontvillasganpatipule.in; from ₹3,200)

PHOTOGRAPHS: JYOTHI KABAT (KUNDAPURA, COONOO), SAMEER MANGTANI (GANPATIPULE)



The Red Taj (also known as John Hessing's Tomb) is inside the Roman Catholic Cemetery

Out of
DELHI
(233km.)

WEEKEND PLANNER

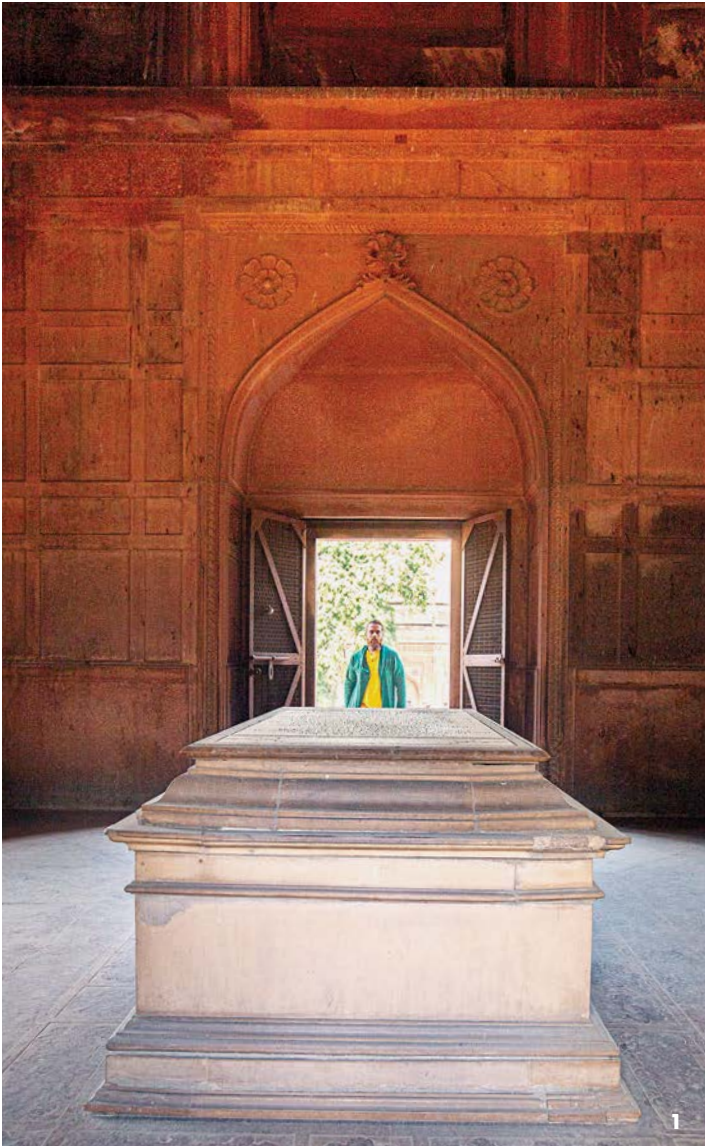
Go beyond the Taj in Agra, Uttar Pradesh

Words AMIT GAIKWAD @guiltyasframed
Photographs MAHESH SAGARI @maheshsagari

One of India's most popular tourist destinations, Agra is home to the Taj Mahal, one of the seven wonders of the world. An architectural masterpiece, it draws around 40,000 visitors daily. However, owing to the immense popularity of this great white mausoleum, the rest of this rich city is often overlooked by visitors.

Think beyond the Taj, and give yourself ample time to rediscover the ancient city at your own pace. Kick off your tour by visiting a structure popularly known as the **Red Taj** (125, Mahatma Gandhi Rd, Kripal Colony, Sanjay Nagar, Pashupati Colony, Civil Lines; entry: ₹50). Made of red sandstone, the Red Taj was commissioned by Ann Hessing in memory of her husband, John Hessing, a military officer with the Maratha troops in 1784. The monument lies deep within the **Roman Catholic Cemetery** (Nehru Nagar, Civil Lines). Believed to be one of the oldest Catholic cemeteries in North India, this site is also the final resting place of a number of European officers, soldiers and artisans. Here, you will find the tomb of another European officer, Walter Reinhardt Sombre, which was erected by his wife Farzana, famously known as Begum Samru. Not too far away is another famous tombstone that belongs to John Mildenhall, a British officer who was one of the first to journey overland to India.

Talking about graves and tombstones is exciting, but so is the



next site. The **Panchkuin Kabristan** is home to around 20,000 graves (Panchkuin, Rakabganj). What makes this burial site unique is a story that has been popularised in the 2017 Hollywood film, *Victoria & Abdul*. Here, you'll find the final resting place of Hafiz Mohammad Abdul Karim. In his twenties, Karim, the *munshi*, rose from a humble position in court to being one of Queen Victoria's closest confidantes in England. Sadly, after the queen's death, he was deported back to his hometown of Agra, where he spent the last few years of his life.

Head next to **Agra Fort**, an architectural masterpiece that served as a residence of Mughal emperors until 1638 (Rakabganj; entry: ₹40). While the fort has two main entrances – the Delhi Gate and the Lahore Gate (now rechristened the Amar Singh Gate), visitors can only enter through the latter. Once inside, check out structures such as Jahangir's Hauz, the Shah Jahani Mahal, the Diwan-i-Aam, the Diwan-i-Khas, the Khas Mahal, Sheesh Mahal, the Bengali Mahal, Akbar's Mahal and the Jahangiri Mahal.

Not too far away is the **Jama Masjid**, also known as Jami Masjid or Friday Mosque (Rakabganj; free). One of the biggest in India, this spectacular red sandstone and white marble structure was built by Shah Jahan as

- 1. The tomb of European officer Walter Reinhardt Sombre
- 2. Get the best chaat at Seth Galli
- 3. Located opposite the Red Fort, the Jama Masjid is one of the biggest mosques in Agra

a tribute to his daughter Jahanara Begum, based on the Iranian style of architecture.

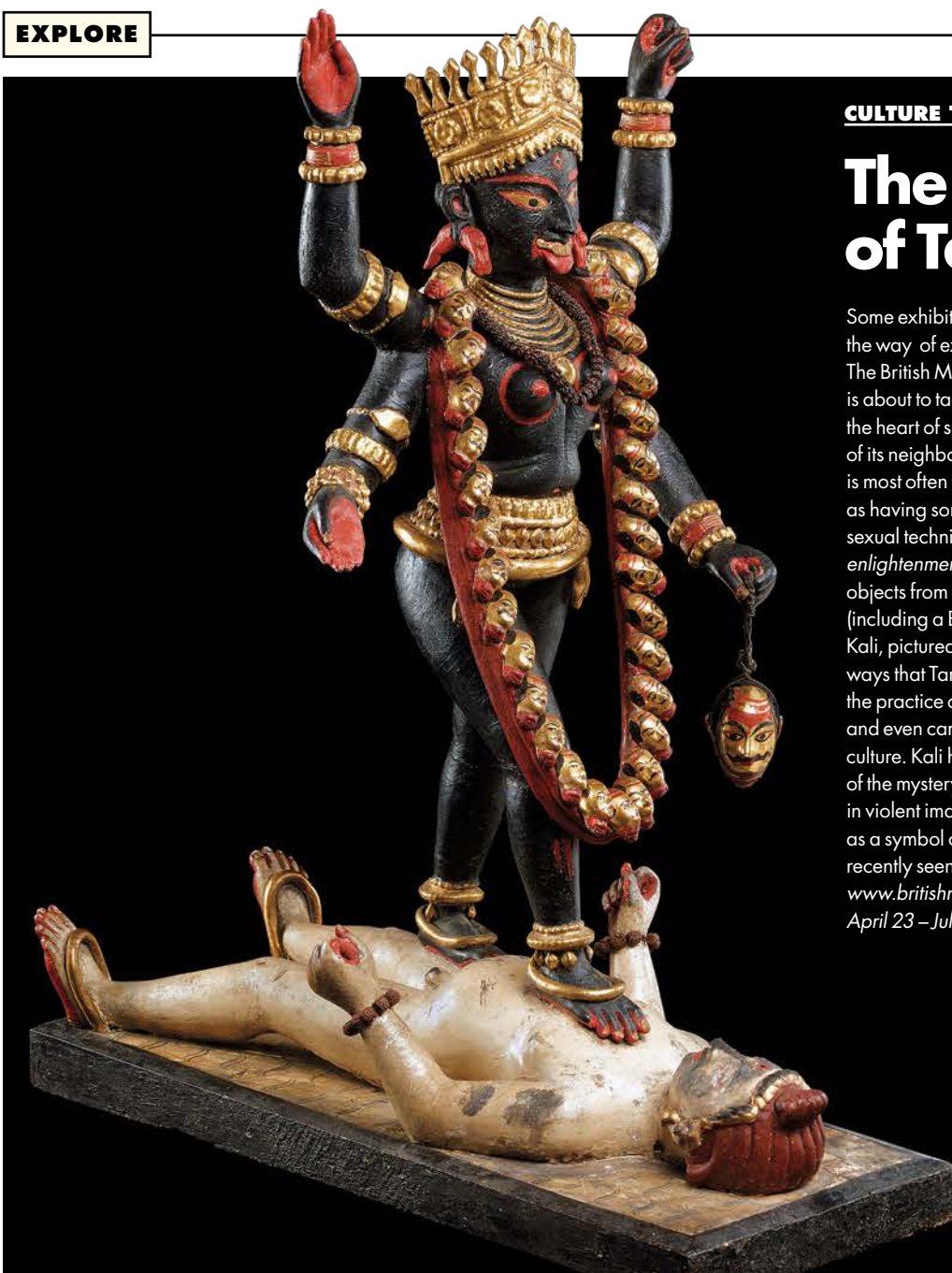
Life in the bylanes of Agra reflects the city's rich culture. Enter the lane just opposite the Jama Masjid, which begins with the wholesalers' market. Here you will find everything from traditional Indian spices to fashionable clothes. Keep walking to find yourself on **Vaidya Ramdutta Galli**, a lane named after an eponymous ayurvedic practitioner.

Next up is the **Mankameshwar Temple**, dedicated to Lord Shiva and one of the country's most ancient temples, with long queues of devotees lined up outside.

Make your way, to **Johari Galli**, where century-old *havelis* still stand proud. The Uttar Pradesh government has plans to restore these to their former glory; work has already begun on a few.

End your Agra adventures by indulging your taste buds – head to **Seth Galli**, a few lanes away from Johari Gali, known for its *chaats* and sweetmeat shops. This is where you ditch your dinner plans to go crazy over the unique flavours of Agra. 11

STAY: *ITC Mughal* (www.itchotels.in/hotels/agra; from ₹5,200); *Jaypee Palace Hotel & Convention Centre*: (www.jaypeehotels.com; from ₹5,000 with breakfast).



CULTURE TRIP

The true meaning of Tantra

Some exhibitions don't need much in the way of explanation to draw the crowds. The British Museum – on the other hand – is about to tackle a subject that's been at the heart of spiritual life in India and many of its neighbours for 1,500 years, but is most often thought of in the West as having something to do with advanced sexual techniques. This new exhibition, *Tantra: enlightenment to revolution*, brings together objects from India, Tibet, Japan and beyond (including a Bengali depiction of the Goddess Kali, pictured here), to explore the diverse ways that Tantric philosophy changed the practice of Hinduism and Buddhism, and even came to shape 1960s counter-culture. Kali herself embodies much of the mystery of Tantra: often cloaked in violent imagery, yet also worshipped as a symbol of maternal love, and more recently seen through a feminist lens. www.britishmuseum.org; April 23 – July 26; from ₹1,500

THREE TANTRIC SITES IN INDIA, CHOSEN BY EXHIBITION CURATOR DR IMMA RAMOS

1 During India's Medieval period, rulers commissioned temples that incorporated Tantric goddesses as guardians, such as the 10th-century **Hirapur Temple** in Odisha. Sixty-four goddesses known as *yoginis*, seductive yet dangerous, encircle the interior walls. Tantric masters sought to access their powers, from shape-shifting to immortality and flight.



2 Crowning a hill on the banks of the Brahmaputra River, the **temple of Kamakhya** in Assam is regarded as the most revered site of goddess worship in South Asia. Every summer, the Ambubachi Mela ('issuing forth of rain festival') celebrates the Goddess Shakti's annual menstrual flow, which is believed to nourish the earth.



3 The annual Kali Puja festival is celebrated every autumn across Bengal. Hundreds of painted clay icons of the Tantric goddess are made to adorn *pandals* for the festival. In the days leading up to Kali Puja, visitors to Kolkata can see the preparations first-hand in the backstreet workshops of **Kumartuli**, a traditional potters' quarter.

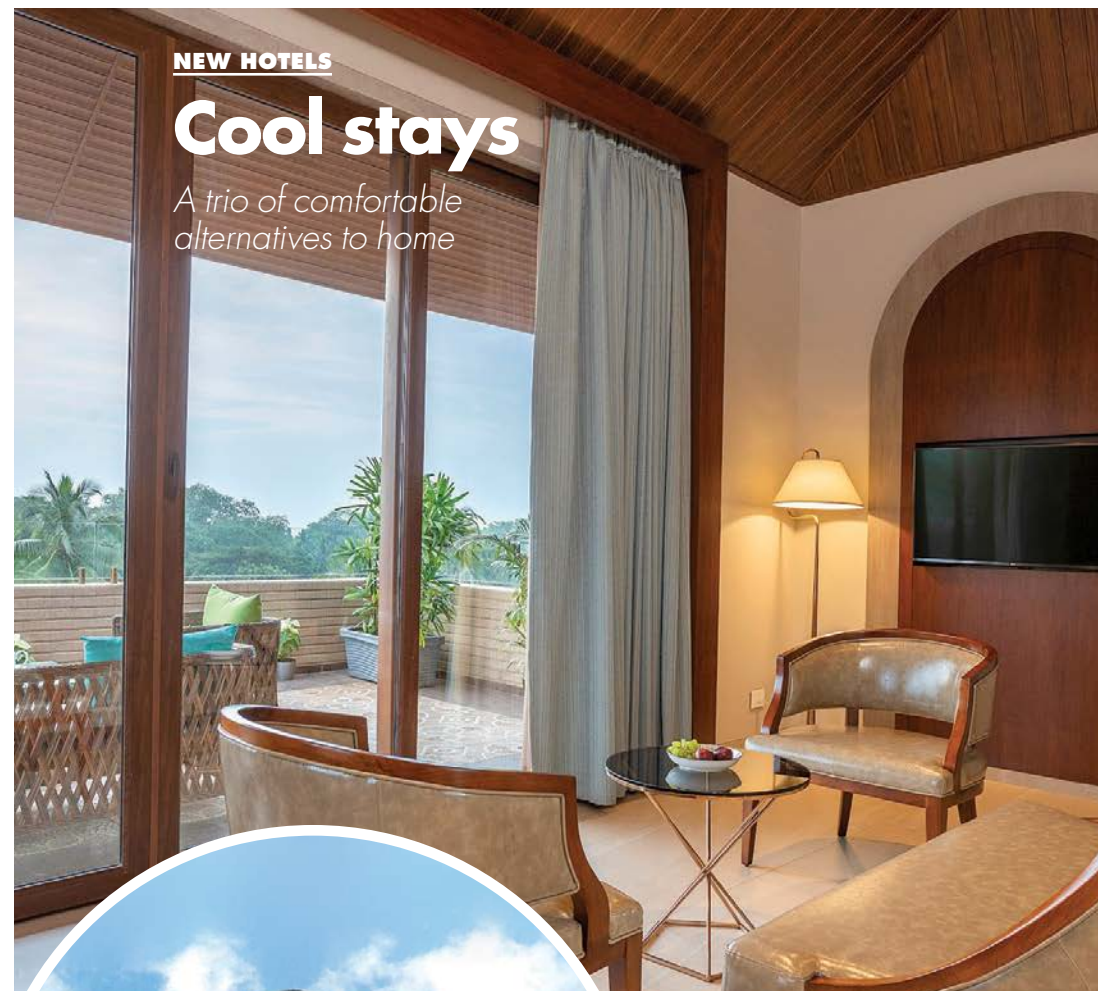


KALI STRIDING OVER SHIVA, PROBABLY KRISHNANAGAR, BENGAL, 1890S. ©THE TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM, HIRAPUR TEMPLE ©THE TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM, HIMANGSHU SEKHAR/ALAMY, DANITA DELMONT STOCK/ALAMY

NEW HOTELS

Cool stays

A trio of comfortable alternatives to home



Lemon Tree Hotel

Thimphu, Bhutan

Located on Changlam Street, the new Lemon Tree has 27 rooms, and the architecture, while based on traditional Bhutanese themes, has a modern edge too. The **Citrus Café** multi-cuisine restaurant with its **Citrus Patio** al fresco dining area, and the **Slounge Bar** offer plenty of options for guests. The property is located within easy reach of the many attractions of the city and adds an interesting international dimension to this group of hotels already present across India www.lemontreehotels.com/lemon-tree-hotel/thimphu/hotel-thimphu.aspx

Devi Ratn – IHCL SeleQtions

Jaipur, Rajasthan

Spread across a lush 20 acres, with 60 rooms and suites overlooking the Aravallis, Devi Ratn – IHCL SeleQtions is only a little distance from the city centre. Its architecture is unique, inspired by the astronomical observatory Jantar Mantar and blending in elements of Rajasthan's vibrant culture and traditions. **Vyom** the all-day dining restaurant, **Mandala** the bar, and **Jal** the poolside café will all cater to visitors' gastronomic needs. The conference room, banquet halls and sprawling greens are also ideal for occasions, be it a wedding in the family or a corporate conference. www.seleqtionshotels.com/en-in/devi-ratn-jaipur



YU Hotel

Candolim, Goa

The newest addition to the stay repertoire in India's sunshine state, this luxurious and elegant boutique hotel offers a wellness centre, gym, spa and 32 rooms to ensure guests are given ample opportunity to relax, rejuvenate and enjoy an ideal getaway. The highlight, though, would have to be the two signature restaurants **Noaa** and **Spice Mantraa**. On offer are curated menus that feature contemporary cuisine from across the world – from Scotched quail eggs to sushi. Of course, some unique creations blend a heady local influence into the food; such as Goan chorizo pizza, prawn balchao ravioli or barbequed chicken poee burger. And this would be the perfect embodiment of what the property would like to offer: a world-class stay rooted in tradition but with a surprising modern twist. www.yu-hotel.com

CITY TRAILS

Brussels & the ninth art

BRUSSELS is the European capital of the comic strip, known here as 'La Bande Dessinée' – shortened to BD and pronounced 'bay day'. Here, the medium is surreal, absurd and often political, frequently lampooning politicians and addressing issues like global warming, racism and terrorism. The city that gave the world René Magritte calls the comic strip 'The Ninth Art', and has a museum dedicated to it. Brussels is one of Europe's best short-break destinations, with great restaurants and bars, wild nightlife and brilliant shopping. A comic-strip heritage adds another dimension to this surprising city.



1. Lucky Luke mural at Rue de la Buanderie
2. Belgian Comic Strip Center
3. Jeu de Balle flea market



BRUSSELS,
BELGIUM

1 COMIC STRIP TRAIL

Launched in 1991, the Brussels Comic Strip Trail has grown into more than 50 eye-catching cartoon murals across the city centre. Tracking them down is an ideal way to explore the backstreets of Brussels, armed with the trail map that explains who each character is. Most are within walking distance of each other in the city centre. Kick off at Rue de la Buanderie, five minutes from the Grand Place, with an action scene of a bank hold-up by cowboy Lucky Luke, and don't miss the murals close to the Jeu de Balle flea market. Tintin, Snowy and Captain Haddock decorate a wall just by the famous Manneken Pis statue. www.brussels.be/aridet.cfm/5316

2 BELGIAN COMIC STRIP CENTER

Just behind La Monnaie, Brussels's grand opera house, this unique museum is housed in an old department store, designed by Victor Horta, Belgium's master of Art Nouveau. The palatial entrance is filled with fun statues of comic heroes and even a physical sculpture of Tintin's distinctive red-and-white rocket from *Destination Moon*. One gallery illustrates the history of the comic strip, from humble beginnings in late 19th-century American newspapers to the magic of Disney and cult Belgian magazines. A whole section is dedicated to Tintin, illustrating the changes over the years in Hergé's drawings and the increasing sophistication of subject matter, such as that of *Tintin in Tibet*, where the cartoonist subtly addressed geo-political issues concerning the Chinese occupation of Tibet, which is thought to have been Hergé's own favourite. www.comicscenter.net

WORDS: JOHN BRUNTON. PHOTOGRAPHY: BANDE DESSINÉE. MUR BD STRIPMAUR LUCKY LUKE © OLIVIER VAN DE KERCHOVE, DANIEL TOUSS, JEAN-PAUL RENY/© VISITBRUSSELS

3 BRÜSEL BOOKSHOP & GALLERY

Situated just off the Grand Place, Brüssel is more than a bookshop: it's a temple consecrated to the Ninth Art. Comic books are piled high all over the three-floor emporium: not just with Belgian favourites such as Le Chat – a wonderfully sardonic cat – but Japanese manga and cult books by global *bandes dessinées* authors, from Mexico to Canada. The first floor and basement double as galleries, exhibiting framed cartoon posters and original comic drawings. Nearby are top second-hand stores Little Nemo (25, Boulevard Lemonnier), named after one of the first animated cartoons, and Le Dépôt (108, Rue du Midi), which has been luring collectors since 1984. www.brusel.com

NEED TO KNOW

Brussels is the perfect city to discover on foot. Plan for a three-day weekend

4 LA BOUTIQUE DE TINTIN

On the other side of the Grand Place is an Aladdin's cave for Tintin fans. This official boutique dedicated to Hergé's young reporter stocks every gadget imaginable: think Tintin figurines and Captain Haddock keyrings, Snowy fridge magnets and even Madame Castafiore mugs. www.boutique.tintin.com

5 MOOF MUSEUM

Up the hill from the Tintin boutique sits Brussels's imperious train station, La Gare Centrale, and hidden inside is Galerie Horta, where the MOOF opened its doors in 2010. Although officially called the Museum of Original Figurines, it is better known as La BD en 3D for its 1,000 spot-lit figurines of dozens of comic-strip heroes. The entrance is marked by a striking statue of a Smurf – another inimitable Belgian cartoon creation, known here as Schtroumpfs. The first cartoon Smurfs appeared in French in 1958, but they did not become a worldwide pop-culture phenomenon until the 1980s, when the characters were turned into a hit TV animation series by an American-Belgian company. More than 300 million figurines have been sold since. www.moof-museum.be

6 JEU DE BALLE FLEA MARKET

There are always crowds walking up Rue Blaes, a street lined with tempting Art Deco stores stretching from Sablon to Place du Jeu de Balle. Nothing prepares you, though, for the sight of the hundreds of traders occupying the immense square each day. This is Europe's most authentic flea market, established a century ago, and, amid the piles of bric-à-brac, comicbook fans search for vintage copies of *Le Journal de Tintin* or its great competitor, *Spirou* magazine. Founded in 1938, *Spirou* had a host of light-hearted characters in a bid to appeal to a younger audience than aficionados of Hergé's more complex stories. Amid the lively bars and cafés that line the square is the fun Jeu de Bulles gallery (www.jeudebulles.be), specialising in BD collectors' items. www.marcheauxpuces.be



TO HAVE MORE WAYS OF GETTING TO SRI LANKA

GoAir has just launched new direct international flights to the island nation from Delhi and Bangalore. Introductory prices are currently on. The flight from Delhi will take off at 10.15am and reach Colombo at 2.10pm on all days except Wednesday, while the flight back from Colombo would take off daily (except on Wednesdays) at 3.10pm and reach Delhi by 7pm. From Bangalore, the flight will take off at 8.05pm and reach Colombo by 9.55pm on Mondays, Thursdays, Fridays and Sundays. On Saturdays, the flight would leave Bangalore at 8.20pm, while the return flights from Colombo would take off at 11pm and reach Bangalore by 12.30am on Mondays, Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays (www.goair.com).



TO TRAVEL TO VIETNAM EASIER

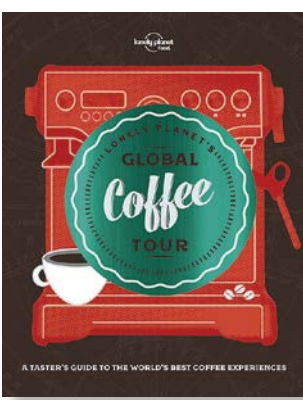
Visa services provider **VFS Global**, in partnership with the Embassy of Vietnam in India, has launched the first-ever online portal for **eVisa on arrival** for travellers to the southeast Asian country. Travellers can apply for an eVisa before departure to Vietnam. There's a more expensive option of special priority services for approval on the same day or the next day. Documents can be uploaded securely to the digital wallet on the portal and, once the online payment is made and the visa approved, eligible travellers will receive their eVisa approval letters directly into the wallet. Simple enough! (<https://vietnam.vfsevisa.com>)

WORDS: SAMARAN BHOWMIK PHOTOGRAPHS: SAKOOP / 123RF (SRI LANKA); SUNIT MUKH / 123RF (VIETNAM); DMITRY PICHUGIN / 123RF (ALGERIA); ANDY WARHOL (1928-1987) LADIES AND GENTLEMEN (H&M); HARRY MORALES / 1975 (WHITE SANDS NATIONAL PARK); 1270 X 1016 MM; ITALIAN PRIVATE COLLECTION; © 2019 THE ANDY WARHOL FOUNDATION FOR THE VISUAL ARTS, INC. / ARTISTS RIGHT SOCIETY (ARS) NEW YORK AND DACS LONDON; JUSTIN FOLKES (WHITE SANDS NATIONAL PARK); SOME PHOTOGRAPHS USED FOR REPRESENTATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY. CONTENT ON THESE PAGES IS FOR INFORMATION ONLY. LONELY PLANET MAGAZINE INDIA DOES NOT ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY FOR ANY MISHAPS ARISING FROM THE SAME.

More reasons to get out there

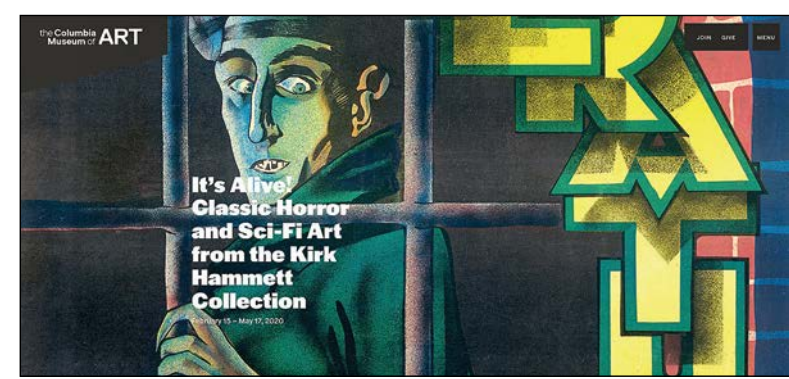
TO GET A CUPPA JOE

Something's brewing silently besides your morning cuppa. It is **Global Coffee Tour**, the newest offering from Lonely Planet. Packed with amazing photographs, this is a taster's guide to the world's best coffee experiences. The attractively-illustrated pages list over 150 amazing coffee experiences from across 37 countries. The coffee trail begins from its birthplace in East Africa, to modern-day Cuba, the United States, Australia and the UK, listing legendary espresso bars, plantation tours, urban roasteries and must-visit cafés. Drink in informative details about roasting coffee, cocktails, brewing techniques, insights into local culture and history, personalities and the passion that goes into coffee making and interesting itineraries. This is your definitive guide to coffee tasting around the world (available at most bookstores and online stores; ₹1,501).



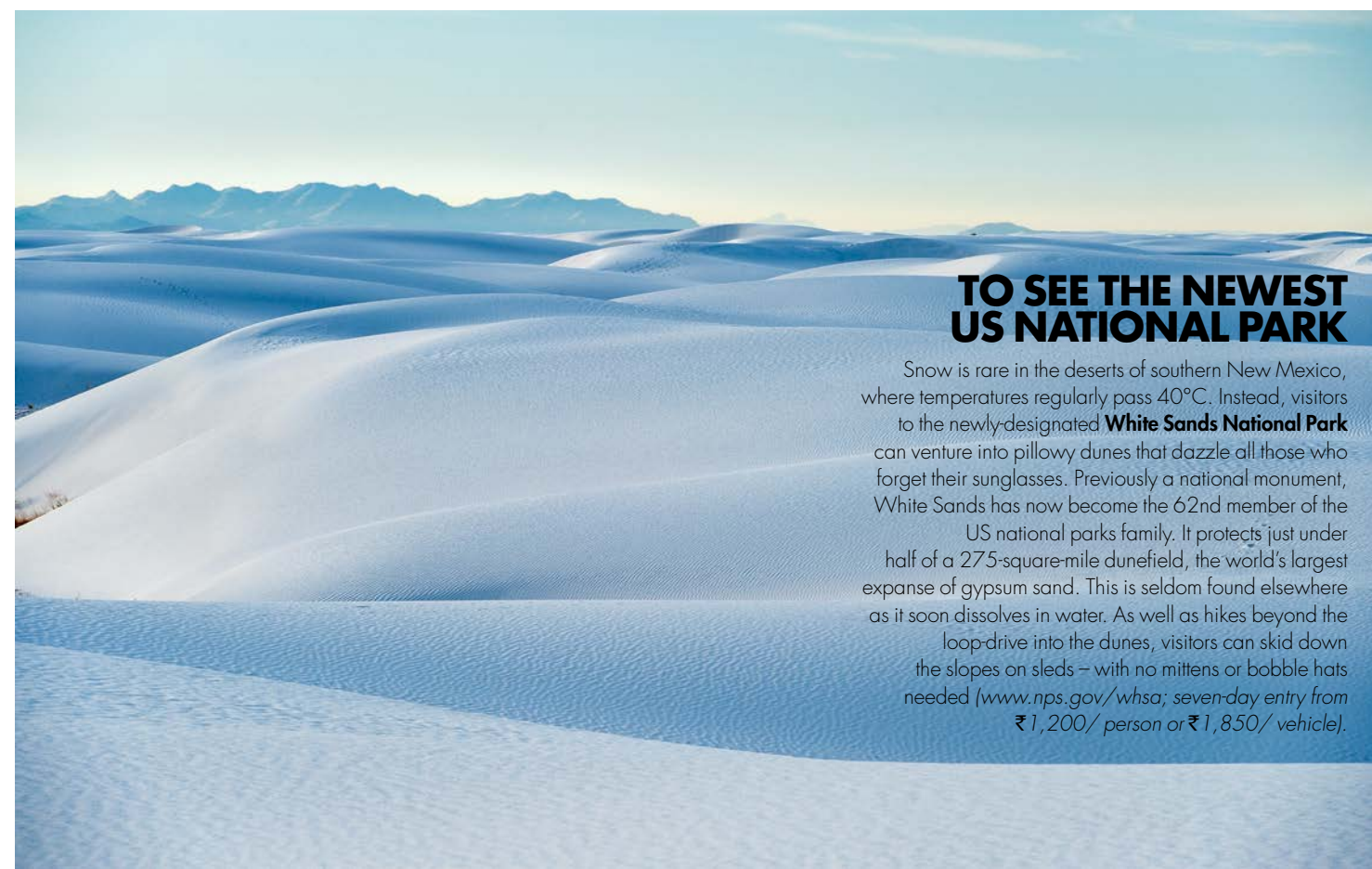
TO GET A CHILL DOWN YOUR SPINE

Kirk Hammett, legendary lead guitarist of Metallica, has always been a collector of horror and sci-fi art. It has now been organised as a travelling exhibition named **It's Alive**. Organised by the Peabody Essex Museum (PEM) in Salem, Massachusetts, the USA, it's showing at the **Columbia Museum of Art (CMA)** in Columbia, South Carolina, where it runs until May 17, and includes appearances by Hammett himself. On display are 135 works from 20th-century cinema including posters, rare art by master artists, and memorabilia such as electric guitars, lobby cards, film props and costumes (www.columbiamuseum.org/view/its-alive-classic-horror-and-sci-fi-art-kirk-hammett-collection).



TO DISCOVER ALGERIA

Algeria, with its 1600km-long coastline, ruins of the ancient Roman Empire and Saharan desert dunes, is not really on the mainstream traveller map. Probably one reason is because it can be quite challenging to access. Securing an Algerian visa has been quite the hassle. Now, all that is set to change. According to reports, the Algerian government has announced that it will soon launch a new visa system. From 3 million visitors last year, the country plans to bump up the numbers to around 5 million per year over the next five years. Although details are not clear yet, governmental intentions are expected to yield great rewards for those keen to see this beautiful country. Keep an ear out for any news on travel to Algeria; it's bound to be good.



TO SEE THE NEWEST US NATIONAL PARK

Snow is rare in the deserts of southern New Mexico, where temperatures regularly pass 40°C. Instead, visitors to the newly-designated **White Sands National Park** can venture into pillowy dunes that dazzle all those who forget their sunglasses. Previously a national monument, White Sands has now become the 62nd member of the US national parks family. It protects just under half of a 275-square-mile dunefield, the world's largest expanse of gypsum sand. This is seldom found elsewhere as it soon dissolves in water. As well as hikes beyond the loop-drive into the dunes, visitors can skid down the slopes on sleds – with no mittens or bobble hats needed (www.nps.gov/whsa; seven-day entry from ₹1,200/ person or ₹1,850/ vehicle).

NEW EXHIBITION
TO CATCH WARHOL IN LONDON

From the 1950s to the '80s, Andy Warhol reflected American life like no other artist, as a major exhibition at the **Tate Modern** shows. With more than 100 of his works displayed, it doesn't take long to see that those fame-launching Pop Art reworkings of Marilyn, Elvis and other icons were just one facet of his career. The Tate is giving a rare UK viewing to part of his 1970s *Ladies and Gentlemen* series (pictured here), which focused on New York's African-American and Hispanic drag queens and trans women. It's also the first British visit for Warhol's vast canvas and artistic swansong, *Sixty Last Suppers*, which helps to illustrate his lesser-known religious beliefs (www.tate.org; until September 6, 2020; from ₹2,000).



EXPLORE: REASONS TO TRAVEL

NEW FIND

TO ADMIRE – IN TIME – THE REINFORCEMENTS

There's no hurry to see them (they've waited a long time to be discovered) but, when you're ready: the **Terracotta Army of China's** first emperor Qin Shi Huang is on its way to adding another battalion with the unearthing of 200 more clay warriors, along with a dozen horse figures (www.bmy.com.cn).



TO EXPLORE MADHYA PRADESH FROM HOME

There's a new, fun way to plan your trip to the heart of India. **Madhya Pradesh Tourism** has recently launched **RunCation**, an app that has detailed information about various destinations across the state, alongside 360° panorama photos, travel tips and itineraries. You can not only explore the sights and sounds of these places but even book hotels. This isn't your run-of-the-mill app though; there are activities such as quizzes and GPS treasure hunts to keep things interesting. Currently, there are seven destinations listed on the app – Bhopal, Khajuraho, Gwalior, Mandu, Orchha, Pachmarhi and Pench, but more are expected to be added soon (download from the Play Store and App Store).



LONELY PLANET'S BEST IN TRAVEL 2020 IN BHUTAN

Lonely Planet's **Best in Travel 2020** is the definitive guide to travel across the globe, and Bhutan topped the list of the best countries to visit in 2020 by Lonely Planet. The Hon'ble Minister for the Ministry of Economic Affairs, Bhutan, Lyonpo Loknath Sharma, formally released **Best in Travel 2020** along with Lonely Planet India's Director Sesh Seshadri and the Director General TCB, Droji Dhradhul, at a grand event in the country's capital, Thimphu.

Best in Travel is the gold standard of global travel bucket lists, announcing the planet's most exciting destinations for the forthcoming year. Lonely Planet's staff and wider expert community select a fascinating group of the top 10 countries, 10 cities, 10 regions, and 10 best value destinations to form this inspiring look at travel in the year ahead.



TO CATCH A UNIQUE EXHIBIT IN SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

The **Happy Place** pop-up is an immersive experience founded by entertainment manager and event producer Jared Paul. After runaway successes in Los Angeles, New York City, and Las Vegas in the USA, and Toronto in Canada, the pop-up, with its multi-sensory themed rooms and larger-than-life installations, is now showing at Broadway in Ultimo. What kind of experiences can you expect? A 20-foot-tall double rainbow, a bathtub filled with rubber ducks, a room scented with the aroma of freshly-baked chocolate chip cookies, and an upside-down room that defies gravity, among others. Sounds like fun? You bet. And it'll enrich your social media a long way (www.happyplace.me; until May 3).

More reasons to get out there

TO WALK THE WORLD'S LONGEST ROAD

The **England Coast Path**, stretching over 4,500km to connect the entire English coastline through a network of public trails, is the world's longest continuous path and will be completed this year. The initiative first saw light of day a decade ago; since then, Natural England and local walking charities have worked to make the coastline accessible. The initiative connects and improves existing routes, and also opens new routes with access to beaches, dunes and cliffs. The year 2021 will be the 'Year of the English Coast' with a packed programme of events lined up. People can register for beach clean-ups, seafood feasts, and art trail walks, all with a big focus on sustainability (www.nationaltrail.co.uk/england-coast-path).



PHOTOGRAPHS: ©ANTON IVANOV/SHUTTERSTOCK (TERRACOTTA ARMY); ANDREW ROLAND/123RF (ENGLISH COAST)



PHOTOGRAPHS: ANDBEYOND.COM (NGALA TREEHOUSE); GETTY IMAGES (GERMAN RAIL)

TO SLEEP UNDER THE STARS

If you've always wanted to go back to the cradle of civilization, Africa, there's a new experience on offer. The **Ngala Treehouse** is an overnight retreat that offers visitors a chance to sleep under the open sky and witness an entirely magical side of the South African bush. Located inside the Ngala Private Game Reserve, at the borders of South Africa's Kruger National Park, the treehouse is surrounded by a variety of animal species, including the Big Five.

The reserve supports several large lion prides – if you're lucky, you might even catch a glimpse of these big cats wandering around the fence surrounding the treehouse. The Ngala Treehouse stands 12 metres above ground and is composed of two sleeping areas – one inside and one on the roof – under a retractable cover. There's also a bathroom with shower and an open dining area. Sounds like a once-in-a-lifetime experience? Indeed it does (www.andBeyond.com).



#SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL

TO TRAVEL ECO-FRIENDLY ON GERMAN TRAINS

German rail operator **Deutsche Bahn** is helping to make lower-carbon travel that bit cheaper by offering a 10% discount on fares for passengers going more than 50km (31 miles) on its Intercity Express trains (www.bahn.com).



SHOP THE CITY

Amsterdam, The Netherlands

1

CREB

Keep your bearings among Amsterdam's 60-odd miles of canals with this map pendant. The medieval-era tangle of waterways in the centre is partly encircled by three parallel canals from the city's 17th-century expansion.

www.c-r-e-8.nl



3

OTTEN EN ZOON

Time was when wooden shoes did their sturdy duty in many European and Asian countries, but, somehow, the Dutch made clogs their own. Traditional *klompen* were carved from poplar, willow or alder, and used as firewood when worn out. Otten en Zoon, a webstore once based at the famous Albert Cuyp Markt, makes a variety of more modern styles.

www.ottenenzoon.nl

4

BOLS

Though it's the ancestor of gin, genever or *jenever* is not an exact taste match, but a malty spirit whose namesake juniper flavour was added to mask the harsh taste imparted by early stills. Locals pour it to the brim, then sip until they can safely pick up the glass.

www.bols.com



PHOTOGRAPH: ALAMY



5

SPIEGEL

Typically skinny canal houses are traced around this paper cover that turns a glass into a vase, dreamt up by Pepe Heykoop and stocked at Dutch design store Spiegel. Find your way to Oude Hoogstraat 22, and you'll see one house that's only 2.02 metres wide.

www.spiegelamsterdam.com

**OLD AMSTERDAM**

Could Netherlands' dairy fixation help to explain why they are the tallest people on Earth? Old Amsterdam is a Gouda-type cheese aged for around eight months. Connoisseurs often pick out a butterscotch flavour in it.

www.old.amsterdam

PHOTOGRAPH: ALAMY

7

HET OUD-HOLLANDSCH**SNOEPWINKELTJE**

The Dutch are the world's supreme liquorice lovers, scoffing around 2kg per person annually. 'Drop', as it's called here, can be *zoet* (sweet) or *zout* (salty) – far too similar sounding for the uninitiated.

www.snoepwinkelje.com



8

I AMSTERDAM STORE

In many countries, fine art catered to the tastes of kings and the church, but the paintings of the Dutch Golden Age (at its height 1640–1672) were more democratic. Special edition Playmobil honours two classics – *The Night Watch* by Rembrandt and Vermeer's *The Milkmaid*.

www.iamsterdam.com

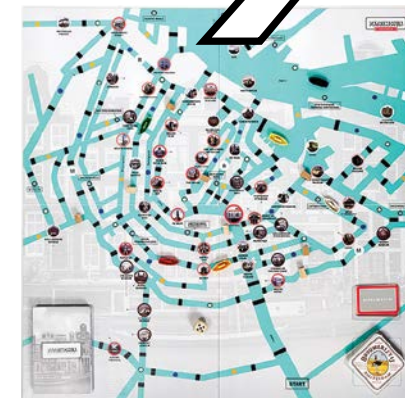


9

PATRIMONIA

Amsterdam's trading heritage inspired this board game, which should perhaps come infused with the scents of herring, coffee and other goods from near and far. The pieces are made from fallen local trees and, originally, plastic fished from Amsterdam's canals, although any recycled plastic is used now.

www.patrimonia.nl



THE SECRET HISTORY OF

The Easter egg

Unscrambling the origins of an ancient springtime tradition

A FRAGILE CONTAINER FOR A NEW

LIFE, the egg was always going to be the perfect emblem of Spring returning. Engravings on 60,000-year-old remains of ostrich eggs in South Africa, probably used as water carriers, show that egg decoration is more than 30 times older than Easter itself. The Christian tradition is thought to have grown with the religion's earliest following in the Middle East and Egypt, where eggs had a symbolic importance that easily transferred to the story of the Resurrection.

Much of the history of Easter eggs – as well as the name 'Easter' itself – is sketchy. An Anglo-Saxon goddess of the dawn called Eostre is often said to be the source of the holiday's English name, but she is mentioned only once in records. The biologically dubious Easter pairing of eggs with furry, hopping creatures has a firmer basis in tradition. Hares have long been a spring symbol, thanks to their heroic breeding abilities. The idea of them dispensing eggs from baskets, or hiding them for children to find, came from Germany. Easter bunnies aren't universally liked: in Australia, campaigners want to replace this representative of an introduced pest with an endangered native lookalike, the Easter bilby.

THE FABERGÉ EGG

No one was more lavish in their Easter celebrations than the Romanov family. The last two Russian tsars commissioned the House of Fabergé to create annual gifts for their wives and mothers, until the revolution of 1917 deprived the jewellery firm of its best customers. There were 50 of these Easter eggs made in all, and they typically concealed a surprise. The 1900 Trans-Siberian Railway egg (*right*) has a miniature clockwork locomotive with a diamond headlight. It is displayed with nine other Fabergé eggs in the **Kremlin Armoury** in Moscow (www.kreml.ru/en-Us/museums-moscow-kremlin). There's another good collection at the **Fabergé Museum** in St Petersburg (www.fabergemuseum.ru).



THE PAINTED EGG

The Easter eggs of early Mesopotamian Christians were dyed red to symbolise the blood of Christ. More intricate designs have persisted among the Slavic cultures of central and eastern Europe. In Ukraine, the art of *pysanky* – decorating eggs using wax, in a technique like *batik* – has a museum dedicated to it (www.hutsul.museum/pysanka [in Ukrainian]). Around the Spreewald region of Germany, you can see and buy examples (*above*) made by the Sorbian minority (www.spreewald.de).



THE CHOCOLATE EGG

Chocolate was taken exclusively as a drink until the middle of the 19th century. Once the technique to give it solid form was perfected, it didn't take long for chocolatiers to try their ideas out on Easter eggs. Early examples were usually solid all the way through, until advances in moulding came along. Cadbury's pioneered the new hollow style in Britain from 1875. The world's record-setting chocolate Easter egg was a 10.39-metre-high, 7,200kg behemoth made in Lombardy, Italy, in 2011.

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF SPREEWALD TOURIST BOARD / REISESERVICE@SPREEWALD.DE / PH. PETER BECKER, INCAMERASTOCK / ALAMY, FINE ART IMAGES / AGE FOTOSTOCK

JOURNAL

TALES FROM THE ROAD

PLAN NOW... TRAVEL WHEN IT'S TIME! INSPIRATION HAS NO EXPIRY DATE!

Spring is around the corner and our Instagram Challenge this issue celebrates just that. This photograph by Instagrammer Kaushik Ghelani (@aaranyakwild) has us feeling hopeful for what lies ahead

PHOTOGRAPH: READER KAUSHIK GHELANI (INSTAGRAM: @AARANYAKWILD)



THE PHOTO STORY

On the Prowl

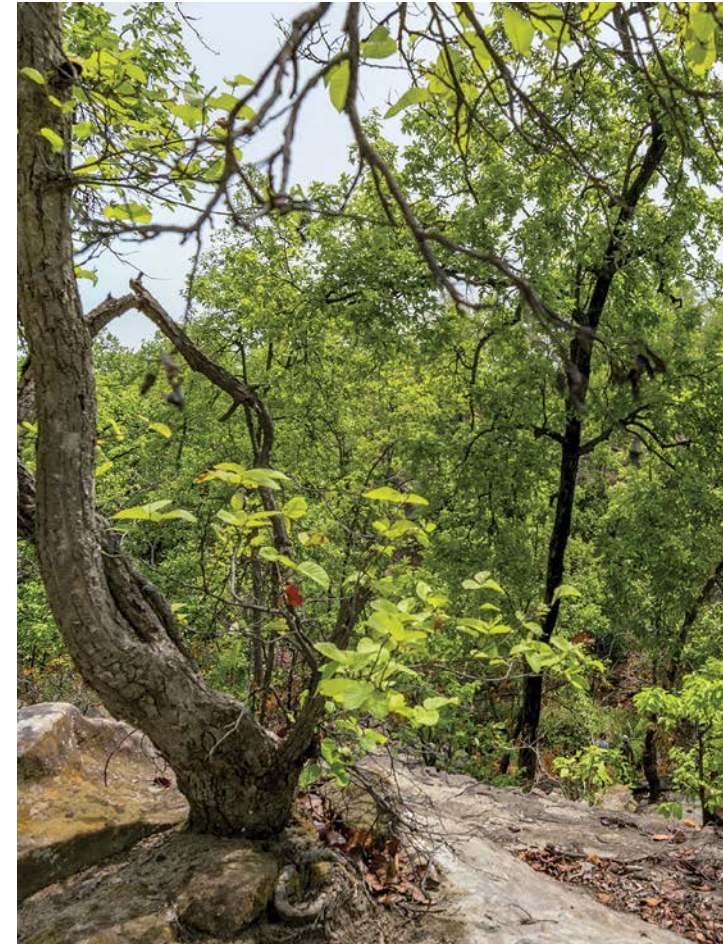
For a bit of nature, peace and the chance of seeing a tiger (without an audience), make your way to the lesser-explored Sanjay-Dubri National Park in Madhya Pradesh

Photographs & words: Parth Jha @photo.theek.lela.hai





DISCLAIMER: ALL CONTENT IS FROM THE AUTHOR. LPWI CANNOT BE HELD LIABLE FOR ANY MISHAPS ARISING THEREOF.



I HAVE BEEN PHOTOGRAPHING TIGERS

and wildlife habitats for 10 years now. Being a nature and wildlife enthusiast, it isn't always easy to find a place that is blessed with exceptional biodiversity but also not completely overrun by tourists.

India has many tiger reserves, but reality hits you once you start planning a trip to one of these places. Safaris at Bandhavgarh National Park, for example, get booked months in advance and an impromptu jungle trip is just not possible. This holds true for almost every mainstream tiger reserve in the country. You might find a tiger, but you won't find tranquillity.

So, in search of a combination of tranquillity and nature, I started exploring lesser-known wildlife locations. This search led me to a forest nestled along the borders of Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh – the Sanjay-Dubri National Park. This place is the perfect blend of rich wildlife, unexplored jungles and an authentic wildlife experience. Interestingly, Sanjay-Dubri is where the first white tiger in the world was discovered in 1951. All white Bengal tigers in the world are related to this very tiger, who came to be known as Mohan.

Sanjay-Dubri National Park is around 250km from Jabalpur. One can stay at the MPT Parsili Resort, located on the banks of the Banas river (from ₹ 1,900). You can pre-book a safari online, or at the counter near the entrance (www.forest.mponline.gov.in).



LIFE CHANGER

Riding the Long Road



Four women left their 'regular lives' in India to ride 17,000km across six countries on their motorbikes. It took 56 days and changed their lives. **Piya Bahadur**, author of *Road to Mekong*, offers a glimpse into the why and how

It wasn't that I was a stranger to adventure.

I had the good fortune of being born into a family that enjoys the road. I was weaned on road trips. In 1989, my parents bought a car in Delhi, a fire engine-red Maruti van, and we drove it back home to Jamshedpur. We followed the Ganga east through India's lush plains. Stopping at *dhabas* and watching my dad talk to truckers and *dhaba* owners seemed wildly romantic to the 16-year-old me. Papa had been an avid traveller himself. In 1979, he and six of his friends rode to Europe on four Yezdis and on an unbelievably shoestring budget. They shipped their bikes to Kuwait, drove 18,000km to Paris, went around the Eiffel Tower, drove back to the shores of the Persian Gulf and came back by sea to (then) Bombay. Years later, when asked why they had decided to do that, he said they had wanted to explore Europe and it was the cheapest way possible – a simple explanation indeed.

Almost 40 years later, I found myself standing under a moon rising over the Burmese mountains, wondering what had got me there. Perhaps it was the wanderlust I had inherited from my father or perhaps it was the niggling need to explore the world and see it for myself, rather than believe everything they said on the nine-o'clock news.

"There's a certain ease of being around the other, a playfulness, and a deceptive nonchalance about the others' wellbeing. We took turns at being vigilant, helpful, difficult, bindass..."

Our adventure had started when the four of us took off from Hyderabad on motorcycles, hoping to make our way to the Mekong, riding across Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam and back. Our team was an unlikely one – a biker, a police constable, an architect and I, a freshly-out-of-work professional – brought together only by our common love of the road. The expedition had come to pass after months of planning and visits to countless government offices for sponsorships and visas. I had steeled myself for bad roads, the lack of familiar food and interminable paperwork. What I had not expected was the unadulterated joy of watching the sun rise over villages just rousing to life, and glorious sunsets that changed the sky in a million different ways. I had not expected the long conversations with myself while thundering over several hundred kilometres every day. I caught a better glimpse of the real me while losing myself in the emerald green paddy fields lining the highway.

While motorcycle riding is a rather solitary activity, like almost all travel is, being part of a group of riders is different. There is something that prompts you to look out for each other, to be aware of whether your teammate's helmet strap is fastened properly or not, to watch to make sure that, when you stop, the person behind has enough room. There's camaraderie, a certain ease of being around the other, a playfulness, and a deceptive nonchalance about the others' wellbeing. We, too, settled into our saddles, taking turns at being vigilant, helpful, difficult, *bindass*.

Over the 17,000km of highways and back roads, I found myself looking at the world around me with new eyes, re-examining truths and realities I had so far taken as gospel. Ultimately, I realised that all I needed was a glass of tea at a small shop, seated alongside truck drivers, to be at peace with myself and the world.

Travellers across time and across cultures have known this – that a long-distance expedition is not a show of grit or an attempt to see if I have what it takes.



It is, in fact, a labour of love where you leave yourself vulnerable to new experiences.

Road to Mekong: Pan Macmillan India; ₹350



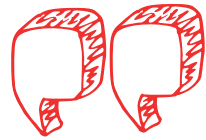
GO ON, RIDE!

- Make sure you have the right gear (helmets, armoured jackets, etc).
- Wear your heart on your sleeve.
- Welcome whatever comes your way. Let the world, in turn, welcome you.

IN YOUR WORDS

Under the Stars

From camping on the beach to spending the night in a snowy forest, Lonely Planet Magazine India readers talk about their camping experiences

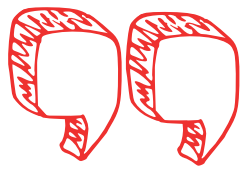


Desperate to escape the city over a long weekend, a colleague and I began to look at options. After endless research and rejection of each other's choices, she left for Pune,

leaving me to plan my own weekend. I booked and paid for a beach camping adventure at Revdanda Beach, Alibaug, much to my friend's dismay (she texted me through the trip to find out what she had missed!). Travelling to Alibaug was exciting, thanks to the ferry ride, and the private vehicle transfer to the campsite was great. The sight of beautiful tents in various colours left me awestruck. Though the organisers had advised rest, most of us could not resist heading to the beach.

ENDLESS SELFIES, CANDID PHOTOS, AND ROUNDS OF BEACH VOLLEYBALL DID NOT SEEM TO EXHAUST ANYONE. A DELICIOUS DINNER WAS PREPARED AND SERVED TO US BY LOCAL COOKS. FAIRY LIGHTS ILLUMINATED A COMMUNAL TENT THAT SERVED AS A MINI DANCE ROOM FOR THE NIGHT.

We played games like *antakshari* and charades and danced, socialising all the while. Later, we all settled down to watch a movie, *Stree*, on the beach – it was a first for many of us. The cool, gentle breeze, combined with the sound of waves crashing on the shore, made it an unforgettable experience. A few people called it a night, while we continued to chill on the beach, right till 8am, with the sun beating down on us. We went on to play water games, after which we packed up to head back home. We left the camp sadly, but with a backpack of memories.



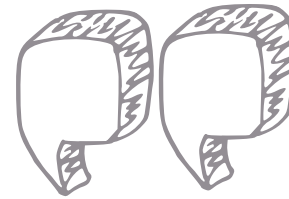
Sea, sand and stars by MDS Prabhu

AT 5PM, AS THE SUN SANK LOWER INTO THE SKYLINE, AND THE LIGHT OF THE DAY DRAINED AWAY, 12 OF US MADE OUR WAY TO OUR HOMESTAY. THE TREES, THICK AND OLD, WITH TWISTED ROOTS, THE SOUND OF BIRDS CHIRPING SWEETLY, THE SCENT OF WILDFLOWERS AND FALLEN LEAVES IN THE DENSE FOREST OF CHIKMAGALUR, KARNATAKA, WELCOMED US – BEFORE WE WERE GIVEN SOME HEARTBREAKING NEWS: THE HOMESTAY OWNERS INFORMED US THAT THEY WERE OVERBOOKED. BUT, THEY REASSURED US, THERE'S ANOTHER HOMESTAY 7KM AWAY. OUR HUGE VAN MADE ITS WAY FURTHER INTO THE THICK FOREST, TAKING US DOWN A NARROW BROKEN ROAD. A SUDDEN DOWNPOUR ADDED TO THE CHAOS, MAKING THE ROAD DAMP AND STEEP. OUR VAN GOT STUCK IN A POTHOLE, FORCING US TO BRAVE THE RAIN AND PUSH IT. OUR NEXT HURDLE WAS A HUGE TREE TRUNK BLOCKING OUR WAY. ONCE AGAIN, WE HAD TO PUT OUR STRENGTH TO THE TEST. EVERYONE PRAYED THAT WE WOULD REACH SAFELY. BUT THERE ARE MORE SURPRISES AHEAD.

OUR NEW HOMESTAY WAS IN THE MIDDLE OF A DENSE FOREST, WITH NO SIGN OF ANY HUMANS, ELECTRICITY, FOOD, WATER, MOBILE NETWORK; THE RAIN BEAT DOWN ON OUR PLAN OF STARTING A BONFIRE. WE WERE LEFT IN A DARK, EMPTY HOME, WHOSE ONLY OTHER OCCUPANT WAS A CAT WHOSE CRIES SOUNDED LIKE A LITTLE GIRL SOBBING. THE CHERRY ON THE CAKE WAS WHEN WE FOUND OUT OUR VAN WAS OUT OF PETROL, SO WE WERE TRAPPED, LITERALLY. EVERYTHING IN AND ABOUT THIS HOUSE SEEMED TO BE HAUNTED.

BUT, WHY WORRY WHEN YOUR FRIENDS ARE CHEERFUL! AFTER AN HOUR, THE OWNER SENT US FOOD AND WATER AND ARRANGED PETROL FOR OUR VAN. USING OUR POWER BANKS, WE SWITCHED ON FAIRY LIGHTS. WE HOOKED UP A PHONE TO A BLUETOOTH SPEAKER AND, SOON, HAD A MINI PARTY GOING. THE TWINKLING LIGHTS, THE SOOTHING MUSIC, THE GOOD FOOD AND WARM DRINKS HAD US SINGING AND DANCING IN NO TIME. NO PLACE IS HELL WHEN YOU'RE WITH FRIENDS!

Of forests and friends
by Sharvani Musandi



Camping next to the alpine lakes in Kashmir is one of the most memorable experiences of my life. On a tiring day, I close my eyes and relive those magnificent moments – it always brings a smile to my face. I had earlier visited Srinagar, Pahalgam and Gulmarg. Almost five years later, I was fortunate to go on the Great Lakes Kashmir trek. We stumbled upon lush green meadows in forests, came across wild horses grazing with their manes blowing in the gentle breeze. Apart from my trek mates, the only other humans I met were a few villagers, army men and shepherds who ran up and down the slopes, tending their flocks of sheep. These bleating sheep had a mind of their own and wandered off in every possible direction, keeping their shepherds on their toes. Across seven days, we saw seven pristine lakes, often changing colour – from turquoise to emerald and even dark navy blue – depending on the weather and time of day. I half expected to see a mythical creature emerge out of the azure waters nestled between the mighty Himalayas, such was the serenity of these lands. Every day, after our trek, we would reach our campsite, pitch our tents, play games, catch up on the day's updates over dinner and stay up to gaze at the Milky Way in the night. Camping here reminded me of how brief my life was, and that I must live every moment to the fullest. I feel blessed to have experienced such sheer beauty and will always cherish the Great Lakes camping memories.

Timeless beauty by Sangeeta Som

Have you ever experienced the sound of silence? It's addictive, soulful and calming.

It is a sound so beautiful that you'll make it your favourite song. I experienced the magic of silence, literally, as I sat on a snow-mobile bike that raged at 60kmph through knee-deep snow – guided only by the light of twinkling stars and a bright

moon. IT WAS –15 DEGREES AND FINLAND CLASPED ME IN ITS WARM, LOVING ARMS. SAYING THAT MY SNOW-MOBILE RIDE AND THE CAMPING OUT IN THE SNOW

was magical would be an understatement – it was much more than that. It is a memory that is etched in my mind, one that I can still feel every time I talk about it. Covered from head to toe, we were escorted to a bus that drove us to the starting point, from where we hopped onto our snow-mobiles. We were given some basic rules, we memorised commands from our guide, and put on our helmets. Then, off we went, breezing through cold winds, zooming down snow-forests, taking a moon-lit path carved by the mobile in front of us, as we made our way to the campsite.

With adrenaline pumping through our veins, we got off our snow-mobiles in the middle of a thick forest and were escorted to a small tent-like structure, complete with damp wooden benches and a camp-fire setting. We spoke about the Sami tribe (natives of the area), learned about the local culture, shared experiences of our home country, sipped on hot berry juice, gorged on chunky chocolate cookies, and laughed to our heart's content.

We marvelled at reindeer crossing by with their young ones, adding to our realisation of how beautiful Mother Nature can be. We did not check our cell phones, nor care about how we looked. All we did was purely live the best 'camping experience' ever!

Let it snow by Kirti Panchal

Taking on the Chadar Trek had always been a dream of mine. Having completed Indrahara, Brahmatal, Pangarchulla, Goechala and KGL, I was looking for a trek that would test my strength next. Chadar seemed the right step forward. Little did I know of the life-altering experience that awaited me in one of nature's extremes. While returning from the summit, a frozen section of the river had broken off. We were stuck on a small island for the night, with no way forward. People from other trekking groups were camping there as well. **AND ALL OF US WERE HOPING THE RIVER WOULD FREEZE AGAIN OVERNIGHT. BUT THE ICE DID NOT FORM THE NEXT MORNING. SO IT WAS DECIDED THAT THE RIVER WOULD BE CROSSED ON FOOT.**

And thus began our adventure. We held onto ropes for support and stepped into the icy cold waters of the Zaskar River. With each step forward, the water levels rose steadily, seeping slowly into our gumboots, gradually rising all the way up to our waists, sending our bodies into a state of shock. I could hear shrieks and yelps from behind me as I crossed the river.

Once we stepped onto frozen ice, we were instructed to quickly change into dry clothes and drain our boots. I sat down on the icy floor and tried to remove my gum boots, only to realise that they were stuck! The boots were frozen. My trek leader asked me to warm myself up by moving around continuously to get the boots off. But the challenge wasn't over yet. After a few kilometres, we realised we couldn't continue on the trail and had to climb a mountain to return. The climb was particularly difficult, due to the narrow trail – you could only put one foot forward at a time and had to bend while doing so, or else you'd fall back into the river. It was an experience that was both terrifying, yet exciting. People say it's easier said than done – that was the Chadar trek for me. We fell down, we rose again, and we made it.


Ain't no mountain high enough
by Deep Shah

DISCLAIMER: ALL CONTENT IS FROM READERS. LPWI CANNOT BE HELD LIABLE FOR ANY MISHAPS ARISING THEREOF. ENTRIES MIGHT BE EDITED.

LP ON THE ROAD

Run this town

There are few better ways to see what makes Havana tick than jogging its seafront promenade. Writer of *Lonely Planet Cuba* guidebook Brendan Sainsbury pulls on his trainers and takes us running

Words Brendan Sainsbury  @sainsburyb

AS HEAVY DROPS OF SALT-water hit my face, the distinctive aroma of tobacco leaf drifts from the houses opposite and mixes with that of diesel fumes. A lone trumpeter sits on the seawall, unperturbed by the crashing waves, diligently practising *arpeggios*. I couldn't be running anywhere in the world but Havana.

Buoyed by an unusual burst of early morning energy, I hasten steadily in the direction of the iconic Hotel Nacional de Cuba, my eyes fixed on the road ahead. In front of me, the **Malecón**, Havana's evocative 4.3-mile-long sea drive, curls

round the city's northern shoreline in a protective embrace. Long a favoured meeting place for courting couples, wandering musicians, amateur fishers, daring divers, day-dreaming Florida-gazers and assorted tourists in Che Guevara T-shirts, this is the city's most expressive and typically Cuban thoroughfare. *Habaneros* (Havana locals) like to call it the world's longest sofa, a potent slice of open-air theatre, where half the city shows up at sunset to meet, greet, date and debate.

For me, it will always be Cuba's most entertaining running route, the first place

I visit when returning to Havana after a lengthy break. Here, amid the crashing waves and mildewed buildings, I feel I can reconnect with the city and quickly work out what has changed since I was last in town. In less than an hour, I've got a primer on the city's mood and a visceral reintroduction to its sights, smells and sounds.

There have been many changes over the years. Back in the 1990s, Cuba's cash-strapped "Special Period", I used to run along the Malecón in the pitch dark during the crippling *apagones* (power outages). It was rare to see a car here in those days, let alone a tourist bus. These days, the traffic is a little thicker, but the sights are no less unique.

The starting and finishing posts, historical bookends of my Malecón runs, are two Spanish-built forts. The 16th-17th-century **Castillo de San Salvador de la Punta** guards the jaws

of Havana harbour. The 17th-century **Torreón de la Chorrera** overlooks the mouth of the Río Almendares to the west. In between are gallant equestrian statues depicting heroes of Cuba's independence wars.

Cruising westward, I get distracted by a dazzling new sculpture outside the Hotel Deauville. Unconsciously, I veer dangerously close to the kerb to get a better view, but a honking motorbike-and-sidecar quickly snaps me back to awareness. Running the Malecón isn't just a test of fitness, it's a full-on obstacle course. I continue through the tightly-packed residential quarter of **Centro Habana** towards Vedado, battling loose paving stones, slippery seaweed, gusts of ocean spray, tangled fishing twine and belching Buicks. By far the biggest obstacle is the sea itself. Even today's mild swell in the Straits of Florida is enough to send huge waves crashing over the Malecón's battered ocean →



THE MARABANA

The increasingly-popular **Havana marathon** – aka Marabana – happens every November and draws more than 3,000 competitors, many from around the globe. It's a two-lap standard 42km (there's also a one-lap half-marathon, plus events of 5km and 10km). The race makes the most of the city's Malecón (pictured), running the entire length of the sea-drive – twice!

defences. On one occasion, I swear I was stung by a jellyfish.

The fabulously eclectic **Hotel Nacional**, visible along most of the route, is probably the Malecón's most famous landmark. Running beneath its manicured gardens is a wide section of pavement where, in the evenings, bottles of rum are passed around, *puros* (cigars) are lit, and asthmatic Chevys glide past. This morning, a few scattered survivors of the previous night's festivities are engaged in a half-hearted after-party.

I hear a guitar being quietly strummed, and a tentative roll on the bongos. The sounds serve to revive me as I forge on towards the concrete façade of the US Embassy. Marking the halfway point, the building has always been the least gregarious part of the route. Due to security concerns, loitering is strictly prohibited. There have been times when I've merely bent to retie my shoelace and an officious Cuban policeman has blown his whistle and ushered me on.

Today, the embassy is eerily quiet as I run past, looking out for any new political billboards that might have sprung up since my last visit. My favourite is the cartoonish depiction of a Cuban revolutionary facing off against a bearded Uncle Sam. "Mr Imperialist, we have absolutely no fear of you!" it proclaims, cockily.

The Malecón becomes more modern beyond the embassy, the weathered house-fronts of Centro Habana giving way to the wider avenues of **Vedado**. I run past a line of plush-looking private restaurants that testify to Cuba's recent economic defrosting.

A bevy of leather-faced fishermen stands on the seawall by the **Torreón de la Chorrera**, their rods aimed towards Florida. Once, in tougher economic times, I stopped for a short rest here. Taking off my shoes to air my toes, I fell into a pleasant lunchtime siesta. When I awoke 20 minutes later, my shoes were gone. With a mixture of embarrassment and annoyance, I tiptoed the frying-pan hot sidewalk to Habana Vieja in search of a shoe shop – not an easy thing to find in Fidel Castro's Cuba.

The memory of my comical robbery makes me smile as I turn and head with fresh vigour back to my accommodation. Havana is a vibrant, complex and endlessly riveting city, but it can be maddeningly frustrating at times. But, stoked with a runner's high on this ridiculously seductive sea-drive, I can't help but love it. The tempestuous waves, the tangerine sunsets, the sauntering lovers, the petulant billboards and the weather-beaten buildings crying out for a face-lift – there is nowhere else in the world I'd rather go running. 🏃



The Hotel Nacional de Cuba, with its Italianate towers, overlooks Havana's sea wall. Facing Page: A 1950s Pontiac cruises the Malecón



MAKE IT HAPPEN

START Castillo de San Salvador de la Punta

END Torreón de la Chorrera

DISTANCE 8.7 miles

GETTING THERE José Martí International Airport

is Cuba's main entry point.

To get to the eastern end of the Malecón (starting point for this run), get a taxi into the city centre.

WHEN TO GO November to March.

WHERE TO STAY Julio Roque is a pediatrician who, along with his wife Elsa, has expanded his former two-room *casa particular* into a growing web of accommodations. His HQ, **Hostal Peregrino**, offers five rooms and three attached apartments a block from Paseo de Martí (Prado) and is one of the most professionally-run private houses in Cuba. It's convenient for the Malecón (www.hostalperegrino.com; from ₹2,370).

WHAT TO WEAR Light, breathable running gear – it's hot and humid even in the winter.

NEED TO KNOW

The Malecón is a long out-and-back run. If you're still acclimatising to the heat and humidity, take it easy on the first day and turn back near the US embassy.

● For more ideas on exploring the world in your trainers, pick up a copy of Lonely Planet's book, *Epic Runs of the World* (www.lonelyplanet.com; from ₹1,370).

OUT THERE



Under their Own Power

The LPMI #GreenStrides ride in February saw 11 travel influencers hit the streets of South Mumbai on Kross bikes. Here's how the bicycles have ridden into their lives

#GREENSTRIDES

DIMPI SANGHVI

@dimpisanghvi_ws

"Cycling with Lonely Planet Magazine India brought back so many memories from my college days, when, every summer, my friends and I used to go to Nariman Point, Mumbai, to ride our bicycles. I've ridden Free Bird (that's what I've named this bike) on Worli Seaface a couple of times on weekends. **Free Bird looks really attractive, and, with no complicated features, it's really simple to ride.** Riding a bike gives me the feeling of freedom and the opportunity to admire what exists in front of my eyes but which might not otherwise come to my attention. I'm planning to cycle more often on my trips as well, as I really support being a sustainable traveller."



TRISHITA BHATTACHARYA

@overrated_outcast

"I've ridden this bike multiple times after that first ride. **I've loved cycling since my childhood.** It's fun and a great form of exercise: so a win-win actually! After getting this new and bumped-up version from the rest of my cycles, I really want to go cycling to the hills close to my house with my buddies."

TUSHAR PANCHAL

@bombayiger

"I love the bike, and I'm going to name it soon. It's very comfortable, though I will need to get the seat adjusted to better suit me. **I'm planning to take the bike on a midnight ride in South Mumbai.** I've ridden the 25km stretch from Colaba to Worli Seaface before, but it will be good to do it again; I'll burn a lot of calories too."



KEYA KHANVTE

@whereis_k

"I've called my bike Amarilo (yellow in Spanish) since my first bike as a child was yellow and I learned to cycle on it; it was really special! I've cycled around the countryside and wine regions, so riding in my own city has been a very unique experience. I was always sceptical about riding a bike in city traffic, but the Kross bike was so comfortable that I had a fabulous city riding experience. It didn't feel like the Mumbai I know at all! **I hope to join one of the midnight cycling tours in the city for another perspective on Mumbai.** I'm also looking forward to bonding over more Sunday morning cycle rides with



SAMEER (& PARIMITA) NAGORI

@mumbaifoodtrail

"We've named our bike Olive, as we have been riding out to buy our favourite Kalamata olives since we got her. **It has become a morning ritual to take Olive for a spin;** we've been ditching our car and riding short distances in our vicinity. In a city like Mumbai, the best part about cycling is beating the traffic and saving on travel time. Parking the bicycle is easy, too. Also, cycling helps us burn the extra calories we consume as food bloggers; Olive lets us do it almost effortlessly. Since our workplace is a mere 6km from home, we are going to ditch our car and pedal to work on Saturdays."



KARISHMA SAKHRANI

@karishma_sakhrani

"I've named my bike Herbie, 'cause it sounds green! I've been enjoying cycling down Marine Drive on Sunday mornings, and I'm going to start using it to run errands and reach nearby places. Cycling is very relaxing while being a great workout. I care deeply about making small changes in my daily habits toward being environmentally responsible, and, with cycling, I achieve that and so much more. **I want to get more of my friends into cycling,** and perhaps join a cycling crew soon!"



FORUM SHAH

@forum_

thedowntownwoman

"Lynee is the newest addition to the family; she's named after my first bike, Lynette – they're basically sisters! Post the LPMI bicycle ride, I've taken Lynee quite often to the gym and to run errands. **It gives me the feels of Julia Roberts in Eat Pray Love.** This bicycle has made me dream of taking a road trip in the Ladakh region, or even of living in Bali like a local and riding in the fields like Julia Roberts. Cycling makes me more carefree; I have more creative ideas when I ride a bike. I love that cycling brings you calm and peace and lets you live a slower life, while also helping you shed extra pounds; I mean, who wouldn't want that!" →



KAUSHAL KARKHANIS

@exoticgringo

"Cycling is perhaps the best way to explore the world around you in a sustainable, fun and easy way. As a slow traveller, I find it, hands down, the best means of transport. I love the Kross K60's design and handling. I'm recovering from an injury, but I can't wait to ride more often. Besides making it my preferred companion for city travel, I definitely want to take my bike to Goa once the monsoons arrive! Shivaji Park, BKC, Aarey Milk Colony, Ballard Estate, Vashi and Bandra are some of the areas I plan to bike around regularly. I want to make cycling a part of my lifestyle towards a fitter me and a reduced carbon footprint."



AISHWARYA SHARMA

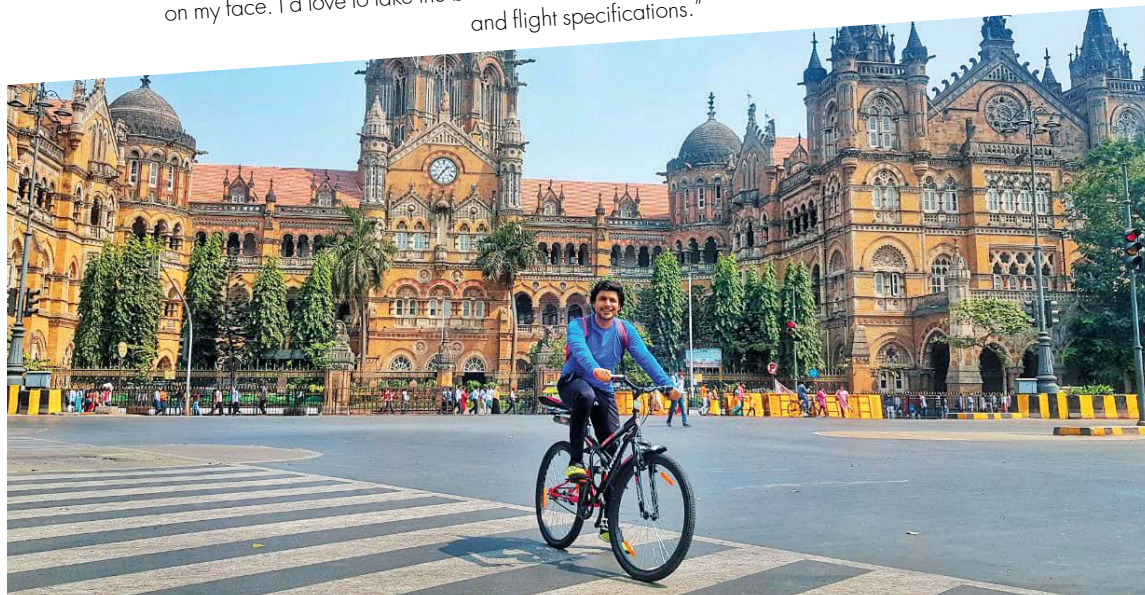
@sassyaish

"I go cycling in the early morning when I don't feel like working out at the gym. I put my music on and go out on the bike; it's such a stress buster. Cycling is a healthy, low-impact exercise that can be enjoyed by people of all ages, from young children to older adults. It is also fun, cheap and good for the environment. And it provides such a good muscle workout; it uses all of the major muscle groups as you pedal. I want to make cycling a habit, and go on a ride every morning for at least 30 minutes. I'm also going to work at cycling rather than taking a cab or auto to nearby places."

MARADONA REBELLO

@maradonarebello

"I've named my bike Carlton, after my mischievous best friend, and have taken it to Uttan, Bhayandar, where there's a shrine up high. My profession demands that I stay fit, and cycling is a workout for me. I like the feel of the breeze hitting my face and, after an uphill climb, getting back down puts a smile on my face. I'd love to take the bike to Indonesia on my next trip, but will have to check rules and flight specifications."



SHASHANK SANGHVI

@iamshashh

"The best part about the bike is that you can ride it freely, easily. I've cycled a couple of times since I got it. It's gearless and very comfortable for going to nearby places where there are issues with parking; you can just drop off your cycle. And, in today's stressful life, the health benefits are many. Just a half-hour cycling in the early morning, breathing the fresh air, gives you that perfect start to the day. On the environmental front, every individual (who can) should opt to cycle as part of their regular commute. This will reduce emissions and make for a healthier planet and a more toxin-free world."

FIND MORE INSPIRATION TO CYCLE IN OUR FEATURES SECTION

WHAT I'VE LEARNED...

As a chef going back to my roots

Chef Shriya Shetty talks about her deep love for food and travel and all the culinary (and life) lessons she's learned along the way



My culinary travels began four years ago.

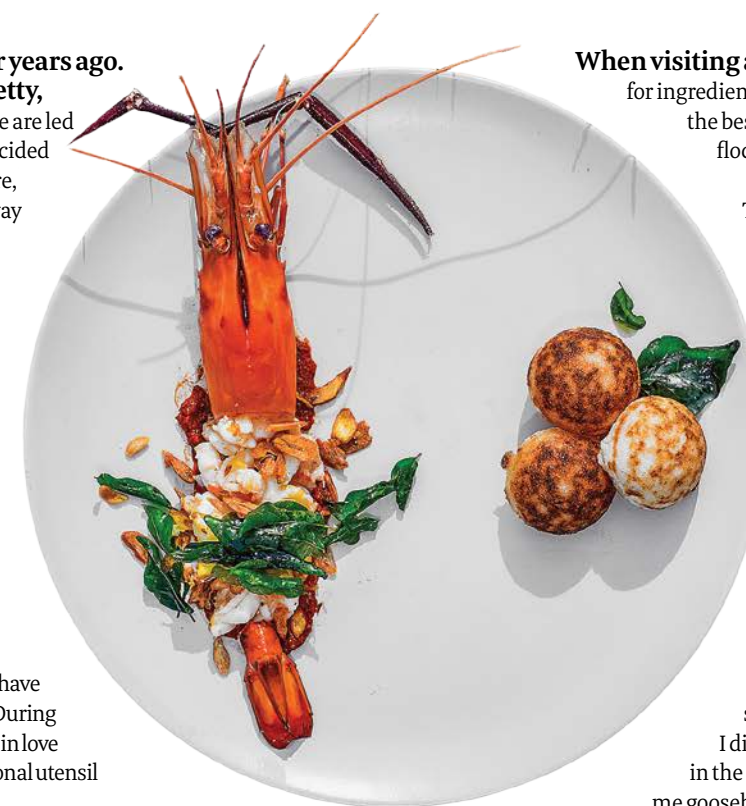
My travel partner, Varun Shetty, and I go where the food is – we are led by our noses! That's also how we decided to move from Mumbai to Mangalore, Karnataka, to explore and eat our way through the lost recipes of our beautiful culinary heritage. Our food "research" is showcased via our 'Mangalorean Oota' pop-ups around the country.

I don't remember the first dish I cooked, but, for some reason, **I remember the first time I marinated chicken.** I was four or five years old and helping my father; I loved doing it then and still do.

The most interesting souvenir I've brought back would have to be my very first *uruli* from Kerala. During one of our pop-ups in Fort Kochi, I fell in love with the vessel and, being the traditional utensil junkie that I am, I really wanted one. A friend helped me pick out a beautiful traditional brass *uruli*, complete with a brass spoon. I didn't realise how much it weighs! But, where there is a will, there is a way and, somehow, I managed to lug it back to Mangalore.

The most unusual ingredient I've cooked with is Kadaknath chicken! There's so much hype around it for its medicinal value, and I was extremely excited to try it. Flavour wise, it wasn't great. I am not a fan.

When cooking with unfamiliar ingredients, first work with a small batch – raw, boiled and lightly sauteed to find the best way it cooks. And, remember, we are blessed with Google!



When visiting a new place, visit the local market for ingredients and go where the locals go to find the best food. Remember this: if the locals are flocking to a place, 99%, it will be good!

There are so many interesting places to discover in Karnataka, but **I'll always remember my trek up the Kodachadri mountain.** The trek itself was a nightmare – I wasn't quite fit back then and we were trekking at night. But, once we reached the peak, it was worth all the effort. I had never witnessed a sky full of stars until then, and, that night, camping under the stars, I couldn't stop staring at the sky. When you go into the countryside, you see a whole lot of stars due to the lack of pollution – on the peak that night, I saw what seemed triple the usual amount! I didn't even know so many could fit in the sky. Just thinking about it gives me goosebumps!

"Travel by foot or rent a cycle to explore a neighbourhood. You discover so much more!"

When exploring a place through food, keep an open mind. Don't just go to places that are listed as the "top 10". Speak to locals and find out what's good, they are the best guides. And, travel by foot or rent a cycle to explore a neighbourhood. You discover so much more! You miss out

on 70% of a place when you're in the car, so carry your walking shoes and make the most of it!

My perfect comfort meal depends on my mood. But, being the true Indian that I am, nothing makes me happier than the piping-hot *dal-rice-ghee* and *fish-fry* combo!

DISCLAIMER: ALL VIEWS, THOUGHTS AND OPINIONS EXPRESSED IN THE TEXT BELONG SOLELY TO THE AUTHORS

AS TOLD TO AURELIA FERNANDES. PHOTOGRAPHS: VARUN SHETTY. ALL VIEWS ARE THE SUBJECT'S OWN

BOOK EXCERPT

Saharan Encounters

Jay Kannaiyan spent three years and three months on the road, riding from the USA to India. As he made his way through Cairo, he braved it all, from the unforgiving heat of the Sahara to camping under the stars

“

I left the cacophony of Cairo's traffic behind and soon found myself out on the open road headed southwest to the oasis of Bahariya. The landscape was devoid of form besides the gently rolling sand and rocks of the desert. The only objects punctuating the landscape were mobile phone towers, powered by solar panels, providing low cost internet access far into the Sahara desert. It was a comforting feeling to some and annoying for others who were trying to get away from it all. I teetered between both sides at various times. After I had my fill of the internet in Cairo, I was back in my get-away-from-it-all state of mind.

The dry heat of the desert was intense. Even though it was hot under my Kevlar mesh riding suit, I preferred the slight warmth of it in comparison to the burning of my exposed skin to the sun. The 400km (248 miles) ride from Cairo to Bahariya was easy riding on the flat highway, but I stopped frequently to hydrate, downing

my home-made rehydration solution (1 tablespoon of sugar, half a teaspoon of salt and some concentrated lime juice in 1 litre of water). Water on its own just wouldn't have cut it in the heat, evident in the salt and sweat-stained clothing I would peel off at night.

Near the oasis of Bahariya, greenery returned to the landscape. I called up my next CouchSurfing contact, Hamada, and he directed me to his house. Arriving at a simple mud-brick structure next to a newly-constructed concrete house, the first thing we did was have some sweet mint tea. For those who have not experienced tea brewed over an open flame in a pot crammed with mint and sugar, few things are more refreshing on a hot, sun-blasted, desert day. It was revitalising and delicious. Hamada, short-haired and spectacled in trousers and a polo shirt, exuded a sense of professionalism about him. He came from a Bedouin family and was a professional tour guide, leading tourists on desert safaris. He had recently settled in the town of Bahariya for economic reasons, a common trend among many nomadic peoples in the Middle East.

Sitting there with our tea, we were soon joined by Hamada's friend, Taheer, just as Hamada's mother brought out lunch for us. There are no individual plates in the Bedouin habit of communal eating. It breeds a sense of trust and creates strong bonds. And so we sat there, eating with our hands from the plate of fried fish, beans, aubergine, fresh tomato and pepper salad, with lots of rice and *lafa* (Egyptian flat bread). It was a civilised and delicious opening to the Saharan desert.

After a short nap through the hottest part of the day, we headed out in Taheer's old Toyota Land Cruiser for a tour around the oasis. Deep under the parched surface of the Sahara lay a vast quantity of groundwater aquifers. Most of it was fossil water, meaning that it had reached

“After I had my fill of the internet in Cairo, I was back in my get-away-from-it-all state of mind”

the aquifers millions of years ago and was not being recharged by rainwater, so it remains a non-renewable resource, much like oil. With the rate of extraction far exceeding renewal rates, the sustainability of such water sources is not guaranteed. We stopped at a spring where surprisingly tall pine trees grew strong in this desert soil, beside a tank built around the spring feeding water to the nearby area. As with most springs in the desert, the cool waters are almost impossible to resist, so we jumped in to cool off with the fresh water flowing from aquifers deep underground.

This was probably a common pastime for those in the area. After an enjoyable swim, we settled down again around an open fire to brew more mint tea. Known as the 'juice of the desert', it helps the body absorb more water than just drinking it plain, Hamada explained; as I sucked down three cups. Fortunately, my Indian heritage had blessed me with a sweet tooth to enjoy the two heaped spoons of sugar that went in with every small cup of tea there.

Around me, water from the spring was being channelled to feed the giant pine trees and surrounding alfalfa fields, but the desert reappeared quite suddenly as soon as the channels stopped. Away from water, life quickly reverted to the desert environment, albeit speckled with occasional date and olive plantations that tracked the aquifers.

Just beyond the greenery of the oasis, we turned off to the loose sand of the desert and pulled into a small property that was fenced off with thatched date palm leaves. Hamada and Taheer had recently acquired that piece of land and were in the process of building an ecolodge. There was a rudimentary structure made with date palm trunks and thatched leaves, but I was more excited to climb the nearby mound and take in the grand view of the desert all around us. It wasn't all sand in the Sahara. There were rocky mountains and plateaus as well. Up on the mound was a small plateau where Taheer laid a thin carpet and we sat in the cool of dusk, taking in the expansive view. I asked Hamada if we could sleep there and a smile appeared on his face as he understood my love for the desert too. Taheer headed back into town for supplies and returned with sleeping bags, food and water. We ate and talked freely as darkness settled in. It wasn't all that dark as my eyes were able to adjust, with the starlight allowing me to make out all the landforms that I had seen earlier in the daylight. It was still and calm. While it reminded me of nights spent camping under the stars in the salt flats of South America, it is important to note that every land has its own signature and the Saharan desert's was spellbinding.



To find out more about the author's exhilarating journey, pick up a copy of Riding Towards Me: A Thousand-Day Journey from Chicago To Delhi (HarperCollins India)

Your Photos

*Your travel photos and
the stories behind them*

THUNDERSTRUCK Puducherry, India

One evening, it rained quite a bit in Puducherry, India. Later, the rain subsided, but the lightning was persistent. I wanted to create a dream-like frame, in order to capture the drama in the sky. I set the camera at f/16 aperture and shot a few long-exposure frames at 16mm. This particular frame was made using a three-and-a-half-minute exposure. Since I was creating a single exposure shot, I had to balance the manual exposure duration and the amount of lightning I wanted. The orange glow is from nearby street lights.



Pune-based **Sandip Dey** is a software architect and an avid traveller.

DISCLAIMER: ALL CONTENT IS FROM READERS. IPWI CANNOT BE HELD LIABLE FOR ANY MISHAPS ARISING THEREOF

HUNGRY HIPPOS

Talek River, Masai Mara

On one of my numerous trips to the Masai Mara, I stayed at a beautiful place called Rekeru Camp, on the banks of the Talek River. I left at 5.30am from the camp on my last morning there, in order to go to the nearby hippo pool. The light just before sunrise was especially interesting, and, combined with fog, created a moody setting. I got down to the eye level of the hippos, wanting to line them up, in order to capture the tightness of the pod.



Bangalore-based **Amartya Mukherjee** is an award-winning photographer.

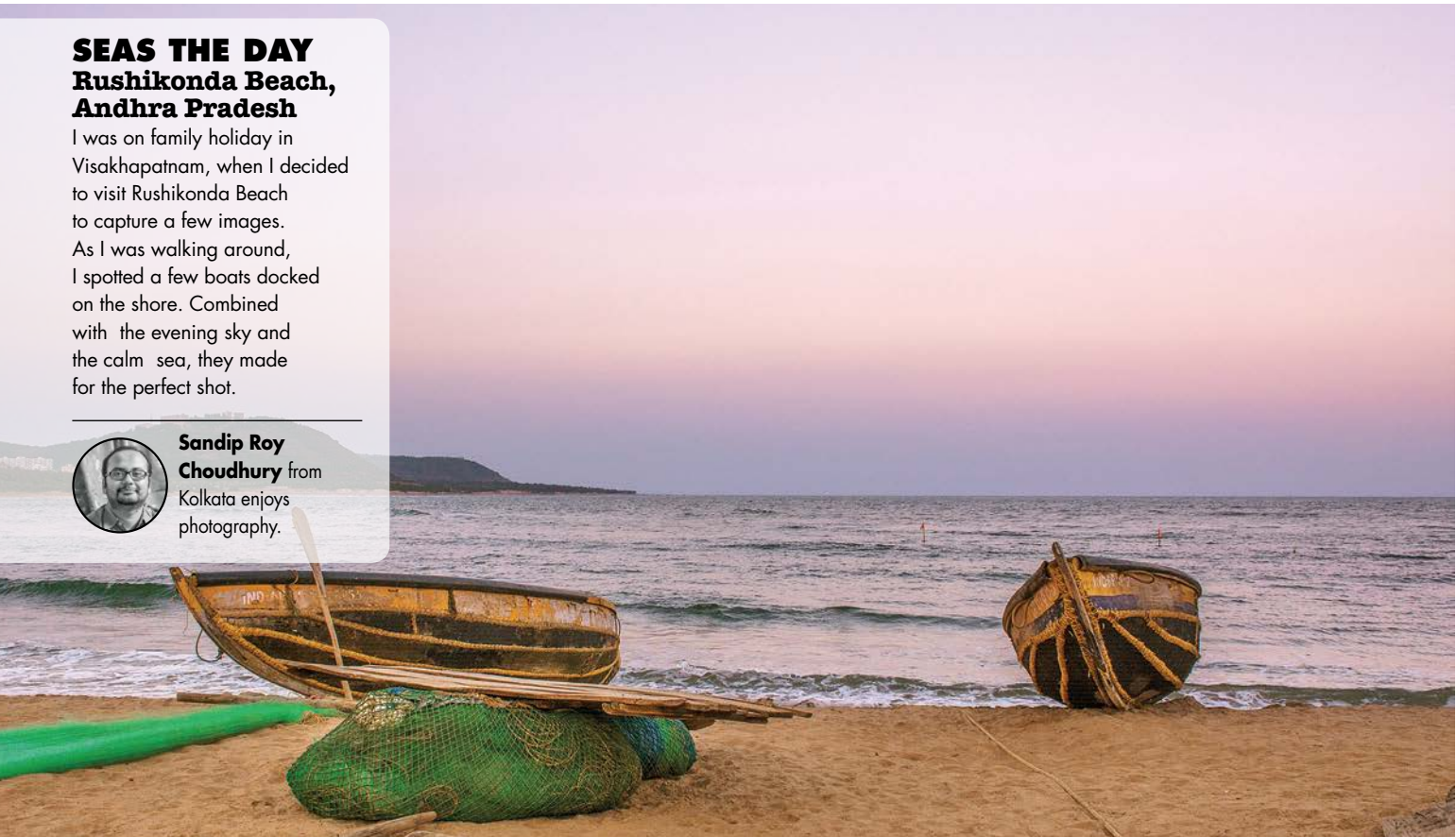


SEAS THE DAY
Rushikonda Beach, Andhra Pradesh

I was on family holiday in Visakhapatnam, when I decided to visit Rushikonda Beach to capture a few images. As I was walking around, I spotted a few boats docked on the shore. Combined with the evening sky and the calm sea, they made for the perfect shot.



Sandip Roy Choudhury from Kolkata enjoys photography.



MAKING HISTORY

Rome, Italy

Rome – the eternal city and the centre of civilization for centuries. It houses the epicentre of Christianity – the Vatican City, whose focal point, the remarkable St Peter’s Basilica is the world largest and most important church. This towering structure can be spotted for miles around. I was lucky enough to find a perfect spot on one of the several bridges on the River Tiber, and shot this just after the sun had set and the lights of the eternal city had come on.



Kunal Gupta is a marketing professional who enjoys travel and photography.

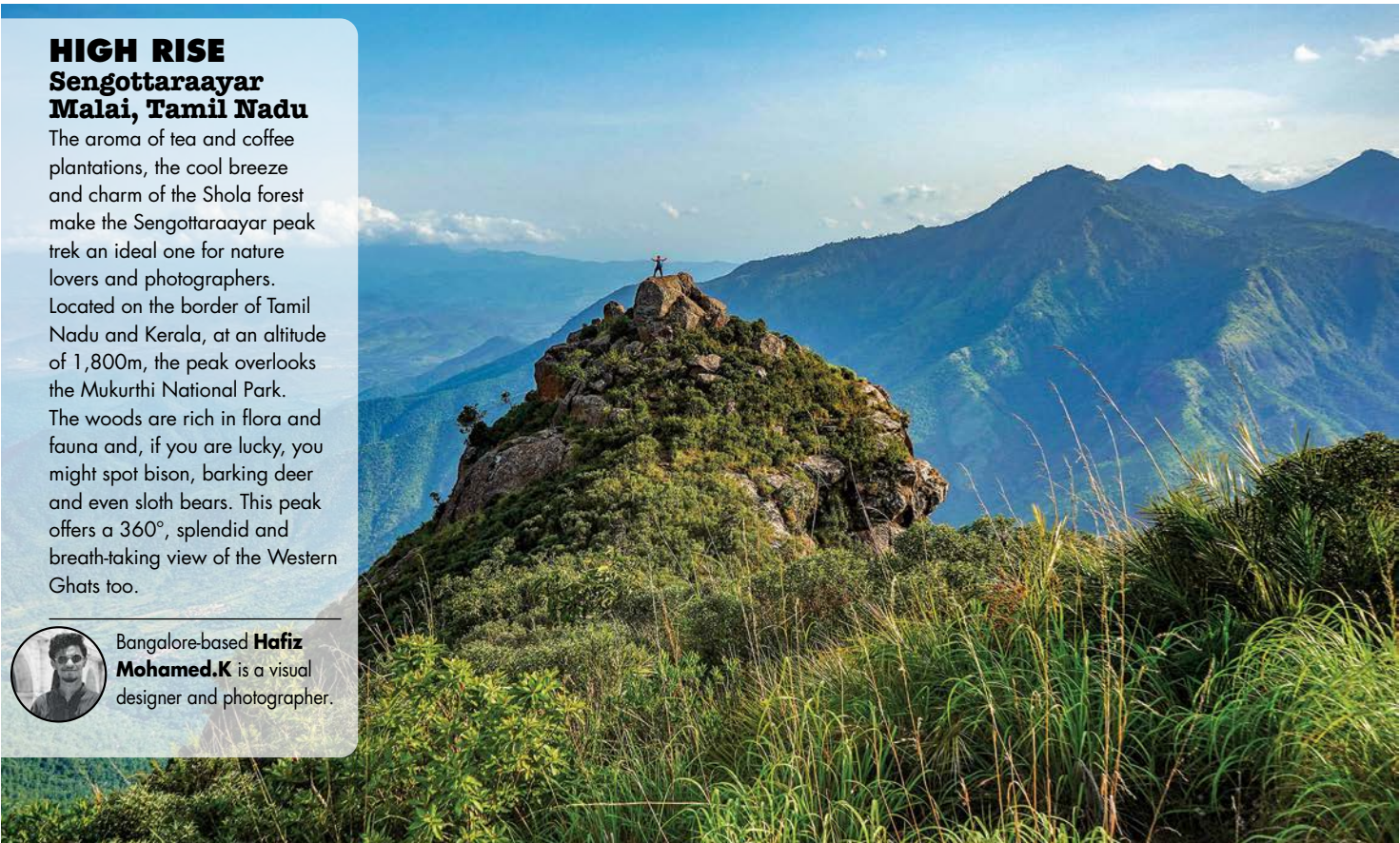


HIGH RISE
Sengottaraayar Malai, Tamil Nadu

The aroma of tea and coffee plantations, the cool breeze and charm of the Shola forest make the Sengottaraayar peak trek an ideal one for nature lovers and photographers. Located on the border of Tamil Nadu and Kerala, at an altitude of 1,800m, the peak overlooks the Mukurthi National Park. The woods are rich in flora and fauna and, if you are lucky, you might spot bison, barking deer and even sloth bears. This peak offers a 360°, splendid and breath-taking view of the Western Ghats too.



Bangalore-based **Hafiz Mohamed.K** is a visual designer and photographer.





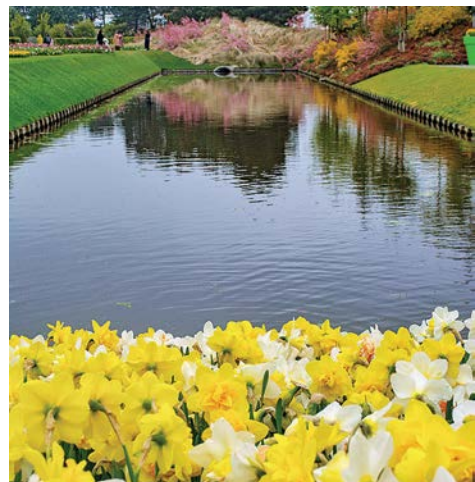
A splash of colour in **Barsana**,
Uttar Pradesh
@aaranyakwild



Shades of sunshine, North Cascades
National Park, **Washington**, The USA
@avijitsharma1987



Festive hustle, **Mumbai**, Maharashtra
@kanishka_klicks



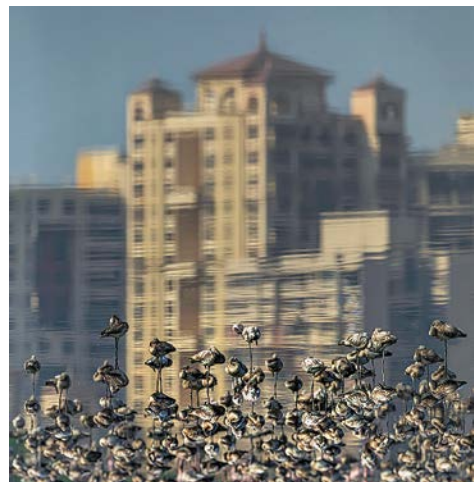
The Garden of Europe – Keukenhof,
The Netherlands
@diamond_divya

PHOTO CHALLENGE

Spring

Each month, we set a new
challenge for our Instagram
followers – to submit photos
on a specific travel theme.
Here we reveal the winning
images for 'Spring'

@lonelyplanetmagazineindia



Birds of a feather, **Navi Mumbai**,
Maharashtra
@ketanvikamsey



A rosy day in **Mumbai**, Maharashtra
@sarsharsayyed



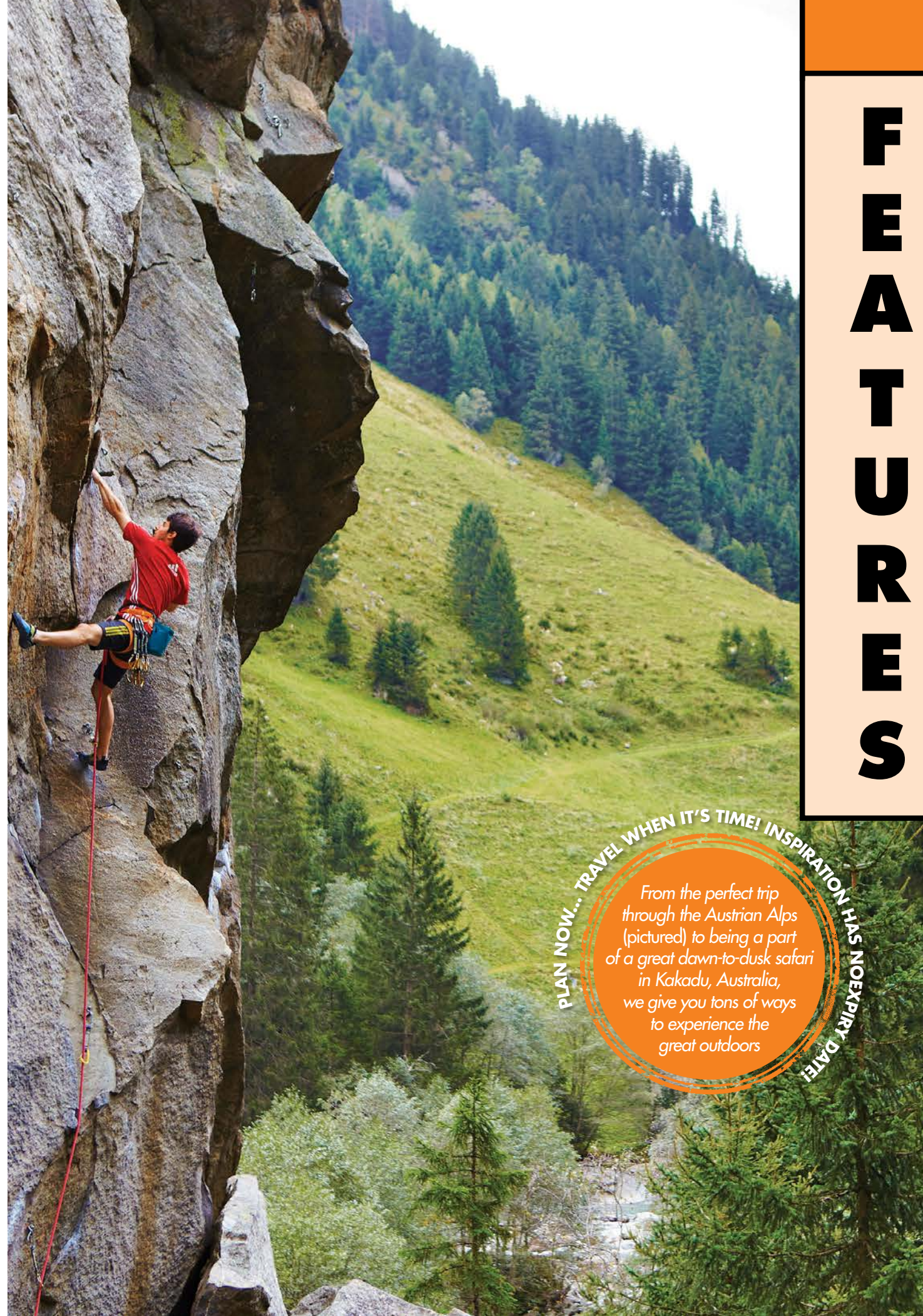
The mountains are calling, **Nilgiri Hills**,
Tamil Nadu
@raghavanmj



In bloom, Indira Gandhi Memorial Tulip
Garden, **Srinagar**, Jammu & Kashmir
@closet_travelers

DISCLAIMER: ALL CONTENT IS FROM READERS. IPWI CANNOT BE HELD LIABLE FOR ANY MISHAPS ARISING THEREOF.

PHOTOGRAPH: MATT MUNRO



FEATURES

PLAN NOW... TRAVEL WHEN IT'S TIME! INSPIRATION HAS NO EXPIRY DATE!

From the perfect trip
through the Austrian Alps
(pictured) to being a part
of a great dawn-to-dusk safari
in Kakadu, Australia,
we give you tons of ways
to experience the
great outdoors

Hohenwerfen Castle in Salzburg Province (Salzburgerland) dates back more than 900 years – within the mountain behind it are the ice caves of Eisriesenwelt

PLAN
NOW...
TRAVEL
WHEN IT'S
TIME!

Breathe in pure mountain air...

On this Perfect Trip through the **Austrian Alps**, begin your mountain adventure with a wander through the Baroque old town of Innsbruck. Then don your hiking boots to explore the Zillertal, before taking a high Alpine road trip and a tour deep into the natural wonders of Salzburgerland. Round things off with some sailing in the Austrian Lake District

Words OLIVER BERRY | [@olivetomberry](#) | Photographs MATT MUNRO

1. Innsbruck

A waypoint across the Alps since ancient times, the stately city of Innsbruck is steeped in imperial history, yet also serves as a launchpad for mountain activities

SHADOWS SLANT OVER Innsbruck’s cobbles as the city shakes off its slumber and wakes for another day. In its cafés, locals gather for their morning constitutional – a cup of black coffee and a slice of apple strudel, baked at dawn and served piping hot. As they tuck into breakfast, sunlight creeps along pavements and onto façades painted in pastel pinks, mustard yellows and duck-egg blues. North of the **Altstadt** (Old Town), cable cars buzz up the hillsides, ferrying walkers to an early start among the spiked summits of the Nordkette range.

More than 200 miles west of the Austrian capital Vienna, Innsbruck is a city where life is framed by the mountains. Hedged north and south by peaks, it guards one of the most ancient trading routes over the Alps, the Brenner Pass. For centuries, pilgrims, pedlars, traders and troopers have travelled through here on their way across the mountains, using Innsbruck’s namesake bridge to cross the Inn River en route to Italy and the Mediterranean beyond.

Innsbruck grew rich by controlling the flow of trans-mountain traffic. As capital of Tyrol, it served until 1665 as an alternative seat of power to Vienna for the Habsburg dynasty. Even now,

long after its imperial star has waned, the town still cheekily bills itself as the ‘Capital of the Alps’.

Habsburg influence dominates the elegant Altstadt. Boulevards lined by mansions and merchants’ townhouses radiate from the city’s heart, and many buildings are richly decorated: swashes, scrolls and curlicues embellish their Baroque façades, like flourishes on a wedding cake. Often, the architecture contains echoes of old glories: the imperial double-headed eagle is a common motif, adorning everything from shop signs to door knockers.

Inevitably, it’s the city’s royal buildings that impress most. The hallways of the **Hofburg Palace** are lined with Old Master paintings and *objets d’art*, and its ceilings emblazoned with frescoes that play games with the eye – conjuring curves where none exist, or seeming to open into the heavens. Nearby, on Herzog-Friedrich-Strasse, stands the **Goldenes Dachl** (Golden Roof), built for Emperor Maximilian I in 1500 as a royal box from which to watch festivities in the square below. Crowned with 2,657 copper tiles that flash and shimmer like fish scales in the sunlight, it’s a striking reminder of Innsbruck’s glorious past.

One man who has an unusual insight into the city’s history is Peter Grassmayr, whose family owns Austria’s oldest bell foundry, founded in 1599, just south of the city centre. Grassmayr bells have been chiming out from the city’s church towers for four centuries, and are now shipped to temples, chapels and sanctuaries across the globe.

“We make bells for eight different religions and 50 countries,” Peter explains, as he strolls around the foundry’s bell garden, where a collection of the company’s historic bells now reside in hushed retirement. “We might be in the middle of the mountains, but our bells can be heard as far away as Jerusalem, Australia and Japan!”

For all its architectural pomp, these days, Innsbruck is a place that’s more popular for the outdoor pursuits that take place beyond its urban core. It has hosted the Winter Olympics twice – in 1964 and 1976 – and few cities have such a main line to the mountains. A futuristic funicular, designed by star architect Zaha Hadid, joins up with two cable cars to whisk hikers, skiers and snowboarders from the Altstadt’s squares into the heart of the **Nordkette** range at more than 2,000m, taking 20 minutes in all.

At the top, a viewing platform overlooks the city’s rooftops – a sea of spires, domes and terracotta tiles, backed by black peaks. But there is a price for such a view: as the cable car glides to a halt and its doors whoosh open, a blast of wind whips up from the valley below, sending hats and gloves flying as it howls across the summits. Most people are prepared, tightening hoods and zipping up fleeces as they begin the trek back down towards the city. In an hour or two, they will be rewarding themselves with mugs of hot chocolate and slices of *torte* in one of the Altstadt’s old-world cafés. →

Left: Peter Grassmayr on the floor of his family’s historic bell foundry


Facing page:

1. The view across the River Inn from the top of the Stadtturm in the Altstadt
2. The heraldry-laden Goldenes Dachl
3. The Baroque belltower of the Spitalskirche
4. A townhouse façade on Herzog-Friedrich-Strasse

ESSENTIALS

 The **Grand Hotel Europa** was built in 1869. Its bedrooms are modern, with neutral colour schemes and spacious bathrooms, though some suites have a more Alpine feel, with rustic furniture and wood-panelled walls. Reminders of the hotel’s 19th-century heyday remain – ask at reception to have a peek into the grand ballroom, glittering with antique chandeliers (www.grandhoteleuropa.at; from €8,800).



 Find more tips at www.innsbruck.info. Pick up an **Innsbruck card**, which covers admission to most museums, and includes travel on buses and cable cars (€3,300/ €3,800/ €4,500 for 24/48/ 72 hours).



2. Zillertal

Generations of climbers and hikers have tested their mettle around these valleys, where mountain traditions remain strong – from Alpine hospitality to after-dinner yodelling

“TAKE UP THE SLACK,” shouts Matthias Schiestl, as he dangles by one arm from a sheer granite face, clips his rope into a carabiner and dips his hand into a bag of chalk hanging from his belt. Thirty feet below, his girlfriend Nina braces her legs against the rock and leans backwards so the rope tightens against the piton, in case Matthias’s grip should slip.

It seems an unnecessary precaution. In a sequence of graceful steps and lunges using clefts and ledges in the rock, he ascends the last part without as much as a missed step. At the top, he takes a break and surveys the green meadows of the **Ewige Jagdgründe** crag. Other climbers are tackling pitches around the valley, and Matthias watches them with an experienced eye, assessing lines, critiquing routes, evaluating moves for style and panache. Having caught his breath, he scrambles back onto the rock face and abseils to the bottom, where Nina is waiting with a flask of coffee and a chocolate bar.

Now 31, Matthias is one of Austria’s most promising young climbers. Born and bred in the Zillertal, he’s been exploring the valley since he began climbing as a teenager. A senior member of the Austrian climbing team, he’s competed all over the globe, but, for him, there’s nowhere quite like home.

“I’ve completed most of the main routes in the Zillertal,” Matthias says, “but there’s always a new place or a better line to find.

That’s what keeps me exploring.” Slinging his ropes over his shoulder, he sets off in search of the next spot. Meadows hatch either side of the trail, where a few cows munch lazily. Cascades tumble like threads of silver off the valley walls, and the loamy scent of earth and tree sap hangs in the air.

The Zillertal is hiking country, with some of the wildest scenery in the Alps: lakes, plateaus, ridges and pastures awash with wildflowers. Cable cars allow easy access to the trailheads, and mountain huts provide hikers on longer routes with a hot meal and a place to stay overnight. These refuges are a cornerstone of Alpine life and hospitality: most have kept their rustic atmosphere, with pot-bellied stoves, gingham tablecloths and ibex horns on the walls.

One of the most aged of these hostelries is the **Klausenalm**, near the Ewige Jagdgründe in the wild web of valleys southwest of the main town of Mayrhofen. At this cabin, long wooden tables are loaded with mountain specialties: cheese soup, dried sausage, crusty bread and meaty stew. As his guests eat, owner Karl Geisler emerges from the kitchen, discarding his apron for an accordion before trilling and parping for an accordion before trilling and parping his way through a folk song. Everyone links arms and joins in for the chorus, but Karl’s impeccable yodelling steals the show.

After lunch, a band of hikers heads up into the remote **Oberböden** area, deserted save for a few farmhouses and tumbledown barns. The group climbs steeply through the forest;

by late afternoon, they’ve reached their goal: a junction between two valleys. Sharp and sheer as a pair of crossed swords, it was carved out long ago by mighty glaciers that once sliced through the Zillertal.

The hikers stop for a breather on a rocky knoll. On the valley’s far side, fissures in the cloud rain sunlight onto the mountainsides, and the air seems charged with electricity. There’s a crack, then a rumble – in seconds, a downpour sends the hikers scurrying for cover under the pines. It’s a reminder that, though its pitches have been climbed and its paths mapped, the Zillertal is a corner of the Alps where nature still has the upper hand. →

ESSENTIALS

With its timber façade and flower-stocked balconies, Mayrhofen’s **Elisabeth Hotel** looks traditional from the outside, but surprises await within. Rooms are contemporary, with stripped wooden floors, freestanding baths, digital music systems and remote-controlled lights. Mountain views command a premium. There’s also a luxurious spa (www.elisabethhotel.com; from €34,000).

The tourist office can provide hiking maps and arrange guided climbing lessons (www.zillertal.at). For longer stays, the **Zillertal Aktivcard** includes local travel and other discounts (€4,000 for 6 days).

The Gerlostal is a side valley to the east of the main Zillertal, where wooden farm buildings dot the hillside pastures

Facing page:
1. Matthias Schiestl scales a giant boulder

2. The sound of cowbells is never far away in the Zillertal

3. Karl Geisler at Klausenalm with a platter of Alpine specialties



Emerging from the Hochtör Tunnel at the top of the Grossglockner Road, the view south into the province of Carinthia takes in a few of the route's 38 hairpin bends

Facing page:
The village of Heiligenblut marks the southern end of the road – its name means 'holy blood', a reference to a relic housed in its Gothic pilgrimage church



3. The Grossglockner Road

Buckle up for an unforgettable ride along this sky-top mountain road – just watch out for the mountain goats

FROM THE CORKSCREW corniches of the Côte d'Azur to Amalfi's cliff-top roads, Europe has its share of iconic routes, but none can match the Grossglockner High Alpine Road for mountain splendour. Winding for 30 miles through **Hohe Tauern National Park**, it's Austria's highest, most hair-raising drive. More rollercoaster than road, it veers and dips, curls and swerves. It swings round switchbacks and plunges through tunnels.

Fog, rockfalls and belligerent mountain goats are routine hazards. From November to April, the route is closed, sitting under several metres of snow. Even in summer, the weather is unpredictable: the altitude means one section can be swathed in cloud while another basks in sunshine.

For most people, it's a once-in-a-lifetime journey, but, for park ranger Konrad Mariacher, it's his daily commute. He lives in **Heiligenblut**, an old gold-mining town

near the road's southern gate. He's driven the Grossglockner in all weathers, but even he can sometimes be caught by surprise.

"The road has a mind of its own," he says, parking his truck at a viewpoint off the road, overlooking the five-mile-long **Pasterze Glacier**. Below him, a plain of shattered rock and grey ice extends along the valley. "When the cloud rolls in, one curve looks exactly like another, so you have to take care. But the real danger here is the scenery. Every year, many cars come off the road because the driver is paying more attention to the view than to the asphalt." He looks up to where the road loops through long, arcing curves towards the Hochtör, a mountain pass that's been in use since before Roman times. Beyond here, there's a spur that leads up to the Edelweiss-

Spitze, where a panorama encompasses more than 30 peaks over 3,000m, including the mighty Grossglockner itself – Austria's highest mountain at 3,798m, and the summit after which the road is named.

The road itself was the brainchild of a group of entrepreneurs who wanted to capitalise on the new-fangled pastime of motor-touring in the early 1930s. At a cost of more than 55 million euros in today's money, it seemed a madcap project, but, today, some 900,000 people pass through the Grossglockner's toll gates every year.

On this morning's ascent towards the Edelweiss-Spitze, a veil of cloud hangs over the mountain, obscuring everything but the next bend and the headlights of the car in front. But the Grossglockner gloom doesn't last long. As the road weaves upwards, the weather

unexpectedly breaks. The mist thins and dissipates. Streaks of sky appear overhead. Yellow pastures appear by the roadside. On the far side of the **Hochtör Tunnel**, it climbs over a final ridge and a chain of peaks looms along the horizon, like soldiers standing to attention along a castle's battlements. The summit of the Grossglockner itself appears, an icy spike towering above silver cloud.

Suddenly, the boom of engines cracks the silence like cannon fire, and a phalanx of leather-clad bikers races past. They're the first motorists of the day on the Grossglockner, but they certainly won't be the last. → *Double back over the Grossglockner Road (or take one of the tunneled alternatives to the east or west) to reach the heart of the Salzburgerland – the province of which Salzburg is the capital.*



ESSENTIALS



🏠 The late 19th-century **Glocknerhaus** is a hiker-friendly hostelry in a glorious location near the Pasterze Glacier. It's spartan – pine-panelled rooms come with a shower, bed and not much else, but the views make up for the basic facilities. The restaurant specialises in hearty walkers' grub like baked fish, stews and hotpots (www.dasglocknerhaus.at; private en suites from ₹4,600/ person).

📌 The standard one-way vehicle toll on the Grossglockner Road is ₹2,300.

4. Salzburgerland

Elemental forces have created marvels in the mountains of Salzburg, and the most wondrous is within the rock itself

DEEP INSIDE HOCHKOGEL mountain, cave guide Sigg Kahl is getting ready for his tour. Using a flaming taper, he lights old-fashioned carbide lamps, and hands them one by one to his guests. “These are the only lights allowed in the cave, so please, no torches or mobile phones. Also, I hope you’ve all brought a warm coat!” He takes a headcount, then heaves open a cast-iron door bolted into the rock and steps into inky blackness.

Inside, the reason for Sigg’s warning becomes obvious. Within a few steps of the cave’s entrance, the temperature plummets to within a sliver of freezing. Breath steams and fingers chill. Up ahead, a staircase disappears into the gloom, and, high above, a line of lights from another group bobs and sways like fireflies in the darkness. “Now I am afraid we must do some climbing,” Sigg says, rubbing his hands together for warmth.

After a few minutes, Sigg stops and takes

a strip of magnesium from his pocket, touching it to his lamp. It catches light with an electric-blue flash, sending shadows dancing onto the walls. “This is where you see why we call this **Eisriesenwelt**,” Sigg says, holding the sparking magnesium aloft. “Welcome to the World of the Ice Giants.”

From the gloom, a great column of blue-white ice materialises beside the staircase, its surface gleaming and glinting like crystal in the lamp-light, and its upper reaches lost in the darkness. From inside, there’s the faint sound of water trickling as the ice melts – the same process that’s carved out the cave over millions of years. “This is the largest ice formation we have here,” Sigg says, lighting another magnesium strip as the first sputters

and dies. “And it’s still growing. It’s added more than a metre this season.”

Eisriesenwelt – above the town of **Werfen** – is one of many ice-caves in this part of the Austrian Alps. They’re caused by a geological peculiarity; their chimney-like shape draws in cold air in winter but prevents the ingress of warm air in summer, meaning the water inside freezes but never fully thaws. Gradually, the ice builds up inch by inch, foot by foot, and, over millennia, accumulates into huge formations.

Though many of its structures are ancient, the ice itself is dynamic, changing with every passing year. Pillars grow and dwindle. Tunnels appear and vanish. Stalagmites and stalactites intertwine before melting into nothingness.

“The cave is closed for winter as it’s too cold inside,” Sigg says, as he passes a huge column of ice, like a wave frozen in motion. “When we reopen in spring, it’s amazing how much has changed. Often we have to move the path because the ice has altered shape or moved. It’s almost like it’s alive.”

For Sigg, the Salzburgerland is an area where it’s impossible not to be awed by nature’s power. “The cave guides here have a joke,” he says, catching a few rays of sunshine between tours. “We have the best office in the world, but the central heating needs some work.”

He grins and picks up his carbide lamp, stuffing extra rolls of magnesium into his pockets, then heads back into the icy underworld. →

ESSENTIALS



In addition to the ice caves, explore the two-mile-long **Liechtenstein-**

klamm – a gorge 20 minutes’ drive to the south, by the village of Sankt Johann im Pongau. Right opposite the entrance to the gorge is the small **Hotel Lerch-Plankenau**. It has simple, motel-style rooms, but the restaurant is good value and there’s often live music during dinner (www.lerch-plankenau.at; from ₹20,000 half-board).

i Eisriesenwelt is open from May to October (www.eisriesenwelt.at; ₹1,700/ person with cable-car access).

The cave system at Eisriesenwelt ('World of the Ice Giants') extends over more than 25 miles

Schloss Ort is one of the first sights seen when sailing out of Gmunden – the castle sits on its own tiny island in the Traunsee

Below: Manuela Kiesenhofer sails the seven-mile-long lake

5. The Austrian Lake District

Experience the tradition of sommerfrische – summer refreshment – beside the shores of Alpine lakes

NEAR THE TOWN OF BOLUO in China's Guangdong Province, there's a village by a lake. It has flower-covered houses and bubbling fountains. The squares are swept and the roofs topped with tiles, and a pointy church rises by the lakeshore. The village is called Hallstatt, and it looks too pretty to be true, as though it's been picked up from the pages of a European fairytale.

In a way, it has. In fact, it's a copy of a much older **Hallstatt**. The real one can be found on the edge of the **Hallstättersee** about 40 miles from Salzburg. The story goes that, in the early 2000s, some Chinese developers went in search of the perfect Austrian village, and they liked Hallstatt so much, they decided to build their own version.

With its cobbled squares, boathouses and timber-framed cottages, the Austrian Hallstatt looks like it's been designed from scratch to grace the cover of a tourist brochure. There's

been a village here since prehistoric times, when late Bronze Age settlers mined the surrounding mountains for salt – a valuable commodity in the days before refrigeration, and an industry that has lasted into the 21st century.

Salt made the wider Salzkammergut region rich. Stretching from the city of Salzburg eastwards into the Dachstein mountains, most of this area was once the private property of the Habsburgs, governed by its own regional administration known as the Imperial Salt Chamber, which oversaw the running of the salt mines and the vast wealth they generated.

Later, however, the Habsburgs found a different reason to love the Salzkammergut – the newly-fashionable pastime of *sommerfrische* (summer refreshment). With its crystal-clear lakes – 76 in all – the area became one of Emperor Franz Joseph's favourite spots for a break. Throughout his reign, from 1848 to 1916, he and his wife Elisabeth returned nearly every

year to boat on the lakes, stroll the shoreline and hopefully bag an ibex or two while hiking in the surrounding mountains. It sparked a local tourist boom that endures to this day.

Hallstatt still seems pickled in time. It's enjoyed UNESCO protection as a World Heritage site since 1997, and its buildings are as perfectly preserved as museum exhibits. Balconies teeter over the village's stone streets, festooned with wisteria and geraniums. Smoke puffs from chimneys leaning at improbable angles. Rowboats bob on the edge of the lake, and reflections of peaks shimmer on the glassy surface.

Alexander Scheck grew up near the Hallstättersee. He's one of only two fishermen permitted to catch the lake's native whitefish, the *reinanke* – once a delicacy reserved for emperors, but now a common sight on local menus. Every morning, Alexander chugs his barge across the lake before dawn, gathering in his nets by hand before heading back to sell his catch at the village fish shop. It's a practice unchanged in centuries, and one that Alexander maintains with pride. "We still use the old techniques to fish here," he says, heaving in his net and extracting each fish by hand, giving each its final *coup de grâce* against

the boat's gunwale. "Hallstatt is a place where nothing ever changes much."

Today, people flock to the Salzkammergut region to immerse themselves in nature and indulge in *sommerfrische* for themselves. Some lakes have become playgrounds for wealthy cityfolk from Salzburg and Vienna, while others have kept their traditional character, with cosy inns and waterfront cottages dotted along the shorelines.

Manuela Kiesenhofer works for a sailing school based on **Traunsee**, one of the largest lakes in the area. In summer, she spends every day out on the water, teaching her students the sailing basics: tacking, jibing, how to use the wind, and when to trim a sail.

"I could never sit in an office all day," she says, leaning out from the yacht's starboard side as she hauls on a rope to make the mainsail snap taut. "I'd miss the feel of the wind on my face too much." She swings behind the helm and plots a course for the town of **Gmunden**. It's late afternoon, and the sun is tinting the town's lakefront houses in ginger, ochre, yellow and auburn: it is almost exactly the same view Emperor Franz Joseph would have enjoyed, and the very essence of *sommerfrische*. ☺

ESSENTIALS

🏠 Hallstatt's hotels tend to be over-priced; it's best to visit from nearby lakes. Views don't get better than at **Das Traunsee** hotel, on the lake of the same name. Rooms are decorated in bright, beachy style, and most have balconies. Breakfast is a treat: the muesli selection puts most places to shame (www.dastraunsee.at; from ₹12,000).



📅 A day's sailing lesson starts at ₹9,000 (www.celox-sailing.eu). For more information, visit www.salzkammergut.at.



OLIVER BERRY made friends with a few marmots during his trip to the Alps, but he's still waiting for his first sighting of an ibex.





PLAN NOW... TRAVEL WHEN IT'S TIME!

Essentials

BEST TIME TO VISIT

The best time to visit is from April to May and September to October.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Air Arabia, Turkish Airlines, SWISS,

and Lufthansa, among others, fly frequently to **Vienna International Airport** from major Indian cities (return fares from ₹44,000).

VISA

Indians travelling to Vienna require a single/ double/ multiple/ transit entry visa. It generally takes around seven to 10 working day to process (depending on the

consulate you're applying at) and will cost you around ₹6,000 including service fees (www.vfsglobal.com).

CURRENCY

1 Euro = ₹82

EMBASSY ALERT

Embassy of India, Wien, Austria: www.eoivienna.gov.in

FANCY A CURRY?

Visit **Tawa Indian Restaurant** to feast on Indian meals at budget-friendly prices. The quality of the meals here is said to be at par with what you get in India! (00-43-676-3374-135; www.tawamargareten.com; Margaretstraße 102, 1050 Wien; 11am – 11pm Tues – Sun; mains from ₹800)

SUBSCRIBE TO THE STARS FILMFARE PRIORITY ORDER FORM

Mail this form along with your Cheque/DD to our postal address mentioned below.

Magazine	Term/No. of Issues	Country	Cover Price	You Pay*	Benefit
Filmfare	1 Year/12 Issues	India	₹ 720	₹ 435	40% OFF on cover price

APRIL 2020

Subscriber's Details: (All fields, including postal code and contact numbers are mandatory).

Name: (Mr/Ms) _____ Date of Birth: DD MM YY

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Postal Code: _____

Tel.No.(with STD Code) _____ Mobile: _____ E-mail ID: _____

Payment Details:

Cheque/DD Enclosed ☐ Cheque/DD No.: _____

Cheque Dated _____ Bank Name: _____

₹ _____ (Payable to Worldwide Media Pvt.Ltd.)

Existing subscribers please specify customer ID _____



Credit Cards / Debit Cars / Cash are not accepted.



Paytm Wallet Txn ID : _____

Paytm Wallet Txn.Date: _____

Paytm Mobile No.: _____

I have read the terms and conditions and I would like to avail of this offer.

Signature: _____

EASY WAYS TO SUBSCRIBE

GET 40% OFF
ON THE
COVER PRICE

Call:

North: 88007 94795 | East: 033-3989 8090
West: 84484 41090 | South: 9871934935
(10 am to 6 pm - Monday to Saturday)
Customer Care Number: 18001210005

Send the completed form to:

Filmfare Subscription Offer, Worldwide Media Pvt.Ltd. c/o. Bennett, Coleman & Co.Ltd., RMD Magazines Subscription Department, The Times of India Suburban Press, Akurli Road, Off Western Express Highway, Kandivali East, Mumbai – 400101

SMS FFSUB TO 58888, OR VISIT MAGS.TIMESGROUP.COM/FILMFARE.HTML

TERMS & CONDITIONS: By opting for the subscription you agree to the terms and conditions mentioned below:

• Cheques/ DDs should be drawn in favor of Worldwide Media Private Limited. • Cheques/DDs must contain the code/address of the issuing branch. • In case of payment done through Paytm, please ensure that the payment wallet Txn ID and the Paytm Mobile number are mentioned in the subscription form and the duly filled form is sent to the above address; Subscription form shall be considered only in case of successful completion of transaction in favour of Worldwide Media Private Limited. • Delivery of subscription copy/ies shall commence only on receipt of properly filled subscription form to Worldwide Media Private Limited on above mentioned address. Merely payment of subscriber fee by using Paytm QR code shall not entail or ensure delivery of subscription copy/ies. • Money orders shall not be accepted. • Non MICR cheques or two separate cheques for one subscription shall not be accepted. • Please super scribe full name, address and signature on the reverse of the cheque/DD. • For multiple subscriptions, attach separate coupons (photocopies allowed) along with separate cheques/ DDs. • Please allow a delivery period of 4 to 6 weeks from encashment of remittance for the first issue of Filmfare to reach you and 8 to 10 weeks for the first gift to reach you. • Subscription copies shall be delivered by post/ courier as soon as the issue is released in the market place. However, Worldwide Media Private Limited shall not be responsible for any postal or courier delays. • Avoid giving PO Box or APO addresses. • The company reserves the right to cancel a subscription if it determines that delivery of Filmfare is logistically difficult and not sustainable. In such circumstance, Company will refund the balance subscription amount to the subscriber. • This offer is valid for issues mentioned in the table depending upon the term subscribed for. • Filmfare issues are also available without this offer. • This offer is non-refundable and cannot be combined with any other offer. • Offers and rates are valid in India only. • The images of the gift are for representation purpose and the final gift may not look like the image shown above. • All the disputes pertaining to the subscription shall be subjected to exclusive jurisdiction of competent courts in Mumbai only. • Company reserves the right to modify, alter, extend or discontinue the subscriptions terms and conditions anytime. • Incomplete or illegible forms shall not be accepted. • This is a limited period offer and valid till stocks last. • Company shall not be liable for the quality of the gift/ products sent to subscriber towards remittance scheme. The subscriber shall take up any issues with regards to the gift/ products with the concerned manufacturer directly.

BIG COUNTRY

PLAN NOW...
TRAVEL
WHEN IT'S
TIME!

National parks were first created in the USA, where their peerless diversity includes Alaskan glaciers, Californian deserts, Floridan mangroves and Hawaiian volcanoes. You'll find highlights from the dedicated, updated Lonely Planet USA's National Parks guidebook on these pages. Whether you want to join the select number of visitors who try to bag every national park (Alaska's more remote ones are a real challenge), or work a couple into a great American road trip, you can start to number out your wish list right here.

US national parks in numbers

62 national parks
(49 are west of the Mississippi)

9 Are in California, the state with the highest number

29 (of 50) States, plus two territories, have national parks

91 acres Size of Gateway Arch National Park in St Louis, Missouri (the only national park entirely within a city)

13.2 MILLION ACRES
Size of Wrangell-St Elias in Alaska, the USA's biggest

"National parks are the best idea we ever had. Absolutely American, absolutely democratic, they reflect us at our best rather than our worst"

— WALLACE STEGNER, NOVELIST

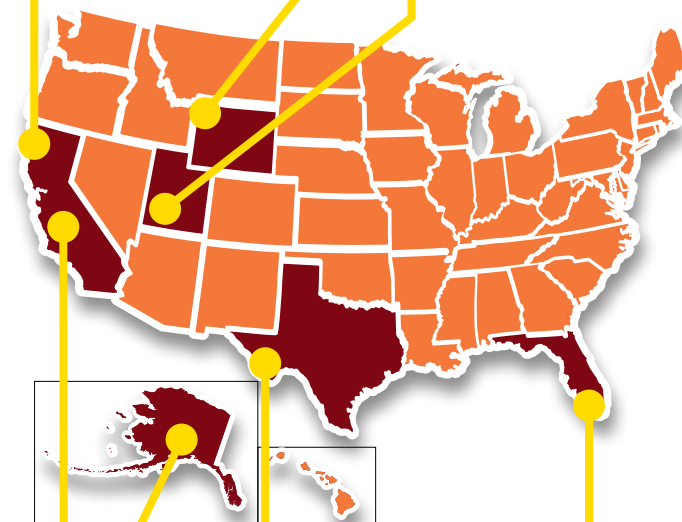
Which are best for magnificent beasts?



YELLOWSTONE
Bison

ZION
Bighorn sheep

REDWOOD
Bigfoot



BIG BEND
Dinosaurs

DENALI
Grizzly bear

PINNACLES
California condor

EVERGLADES
Manatee



Bryce Canyon in Utah is one of the smaller national parks, but it hosts the world's largest collection of hoodoos (chimney-like rock formations)

PHOTOGRAPHS: PHILIP LEE HARVEY / LONELY PLANET, UNIVERSAL IMAGES GROUP / GETTY IMAGES, ANDREA IZZOTTI / SHUTTERSTOCK

Superlative national parks



MAMMOTH CAVE

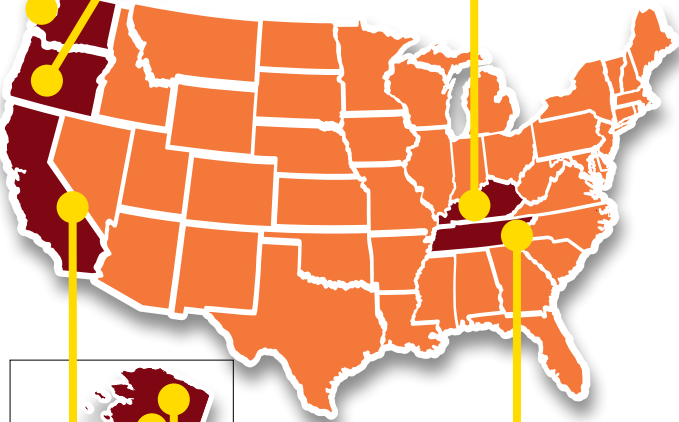
Has, at 400 miles, the longest cave system in the world

OLYMPIC

Is the wettest, with an average of 380cm of rain per year

CRATER LAKE

At 594 metres, is the deepest in the USA and fourth deepest in the world



GATES OF THE ARCTIC

Entirely in the Arctic Circle, gets the fewest visitors

DENALI

Has the highest peak in the USA, 6,190 metres above sea level

GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS

Is the most visited, with 11,388,893 visitors in 2017

DEATH VALLEY

Has the lowest point in the USA, Badwater Basin, 85 metres below sea level, and is the hottest location – once, in 1913, reaching 56.7°C

AMERICAN SAMOA

Is the southernmost national park, and is furthest from the US mainland

4,700 miles away

Lower Yellowstone Falls tumble from 94 metres (almost twice the height of Niagara Falls) in the world's first national park: Yellowstone

“Just sit back and let Mother Nature carry us toward her own”

– YOGI BEAR

Double parking

It's possible to take a brace of national parks at a gallop, if bagging's your thing, but all are well worth a longer visit

CARLSBAD CAVERNS AND GUADALUPE MOUNTAINS

An underground wonder in New Mexico, and little-visited outcrops just across the state line in Texas (right)



YELLOWSTONE AND GRAND TETON

Two parks just six miles apart, best for steaming, spouting geysers and eye-catching Rocky Mountain skylines

SEQUOIA AND KINGS CANYON

Crane your neck to see the tops of forest giants in the mountains of California in these adjacent national parks

ARCHES AND CANYONLANDS

Weird and wonderful desert landforms, around an hour's drive apart in southeastern Utah

EVERGLADES AND BISCAYNE

Southern Florida's top-billed national park, and its largely undersea, and overlooked, near-neighbour

BADLANDS AND WIND CAVE

Find Wild West landscapes above the surface in Badlands (below), and see uncommon boxwork minerals underground in Wind Cave, both in South Dakota



PHOTOGRAPHS: MATT MUNRO / LONEY PLANET, SHU PHOTOGRAPHY / SHUTTERSTOCK, MARK READ / LONEY PLANET

National parks in the movies

ARCHES *INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE*
Spot Double Arch in Utah behind River Phoenix, appearing as a teenage Indy, shortly before the action-archaeology professor first donned a fedora.

CANYONLANDS *THELMA & LOUISE*
Okay, it was technically just outside this Utah park that Susan Sarandon and Geena Davis filmed their grand finale (it's described on-screen as the Grand Canyon).

GRAND CANYON NATIONAL *LAMPOON'S VACATION*
A classic American road-trip destination marred by typical Chevy Chase mishaps, ending with a dead body tied to the roof of the car

ZION *BUTCH CASSIDY AND THE SUNDANCE KID*
Paul Newman and Robert Redford compete for screen presence with Utah's most loftily-named mountain backdrops.

DEATH VALLEY *STAR WARS*
Co-starring with Tunisia as the on-Earth location for Luke Skywalker's home planet of Tatooine, Death Valley, pictured below with C-3PO and R2-D2 on location, feels hot enough to make two suns believable.




The Everglades in southern Florida form the largest wilderness in the eastern USA, and are home to American crocodiles, manatees and the endangered Florida panther

“Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where nature may heal and give strength to body and soul.”

— JOHN MUIR, NATURALIST

National parks that do exactly what they say on the tin

CANYONLANDS
Needles, arches, domes, plateaux and canyons – this park has them all




ARCHES
2,000 of them in this Utah park

CRATER LAKE
Formed 7,700 years ago, when a volcano collapsed

ROCKY MOUNTAIN
Spans the continental divide formed by the famous range

HOT SPRINGS
Native Americans valued the curative springs 8,000 years before Europeans

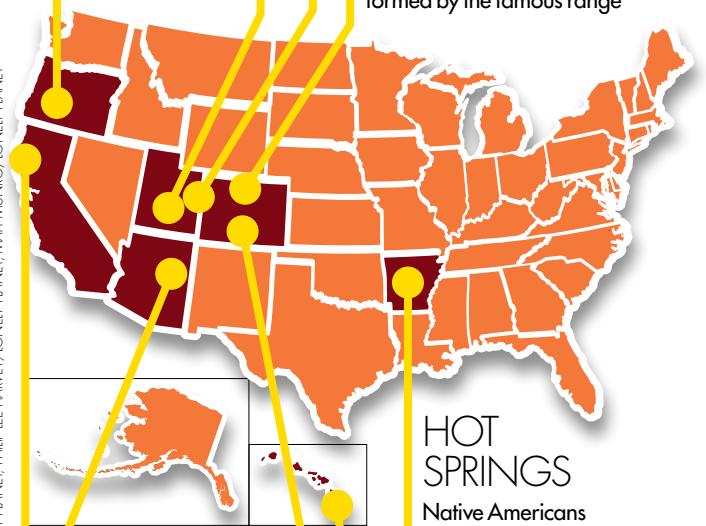


PETRIFIED FOREST
225-million-year-old trees from the Triassic period

REDWOOD
The four combined national and state parks contain 45 per cent of all remaining coast redwood old-growth forests

HAWAII VOLCANOES
Kilauea, one of the world's most active, and Mauna Loa

GREAT SAND DUNES
167.7 square miles of them



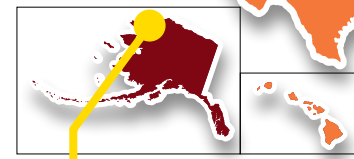
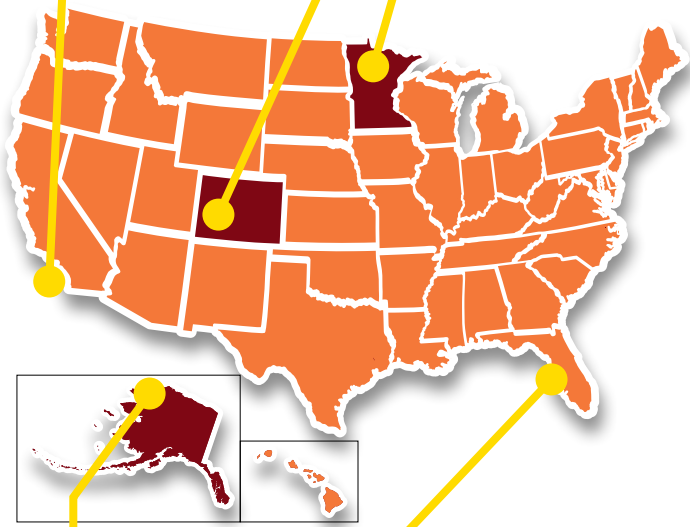
PHOTOGRAPHS: LUCASFILM/20TH CENTURY FOX USA/REXSHUTTERSTOCK, JUSTIN FOUKES/LONEY PLANET, PHILIP LEE HARVEY/LONEY PLANET, MATT MUNRO/LONEY PLANET

National parks
you've never
heard of



BLACK CANYON OF THE GUNNISON
The Gunnison River has taken 15 million years to carve this gorge, parts of which only receive 33 minutes of sunlight a day

CHANNEL ISLANDS
Consists of five of the eight Channel Islands off the coast of California



LAKE CLARK
Just south of Anchorage, you can only get to this park by air taxi or boat



VOYAGEURS
This Minnesota park is made up mostly of the Kabetogama Peninsula, which is accessible only by boat

DRY TORTUGAS
Contains Fort Jefferson and the seven Dry Tortugas islands, the westernmost of the Florida Keys

"The wilderness holds answers to questions man has not yet learned to ask"
— NANCY NEWHALL, WRITER AND CONSERVATIONIST

The 6,190-metre-high peak of Denali (formerly Mount McKinley) is the highest point in North America and the namesake for one of Alaska's eight national parks



National parks:
a timeline

- 1864

President Lincoln designates Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove a protected state park
- 1872

President Ulysses S Grant designates Yellowstone the world's first national park
- 1890

Yosemite National Park is set up, but the state of California retains control of Yosemite Valley
- 1894

After bison poaching in Yellowstone, Congress allows the park to enforce conservation laws
- 1906

Mesa Verde becomes the first US national park dedicated to protecting cultural heritage
- 1916

The National Park Service (NPS) is established
- 1923

Yosemite's Hetch Hetchy Valley is dammed, the first shot in a continuing conservation battle
- 1926

Yellowstone's last native wolves are killed as part of a federal predator control programme
- 1933

Workers in the new Civilian Conservation Corps improve infrastructure in national parks
- 1941-'49

Ansel Adams photographs every US national park except the Everglades
- 1956-'66

Mission 66 creates the first national park visitor centres
- 1980

The creation of seven new parks in Alaska doubles the land area under NPS protection
- 1995

Fourteen grey wolves are reintroduced to the Yellowstone ecosystem after nearly 70 years
- 2011

Early and much-contested efforts to ban plastic water bottles begin at the Grand Canyon
- 2013

A federal government shutdown forces all national parks to close for a 16-day period
- 2014

Park visits reach an all-time high with 292.8 million people over the course of the year
- 2016

The National Park Service celebrates the 100th anniversary of its founding
- 2019

Another government shutdown ends, and Indiana Dunes becomes the 61st national park

PHOTOGRAPHS: DOUGLAS KILG / GETTY IMAGES; MATT MUNRO / JONELY PLANET; GLEB TARRO / GETTY IMAGES



The Beckoning Arctic

*JOIN THREE CENTURIES OF ADVENTURERS AND FORTUNE-HUNTERS
BY TRAVELLING TO SVALBARD IN NORWAY AND, LIKE THEM,
EXPERIENCING THE ARCTIC WILDERNESS IN ITS PUREST FORM*



Words AMANDA CANNING [@amandacanning](#)
Photographs JONATHAN GREGSON [@jonathangregsonphotography](#)



Northern fulmars glide above
breaking waves on a boat trip from
Longyearbyen to Pyramiden
Facing page:
Some 10,000 Svalbard reindeer live
in the Norwegian archipelago –
outnumbering human inhabitants
by almost five to one

Food for Svalbard's sled dogs traditionally includes dried seal meat, as seen here at the Trapper's Station east of Longyearbyen

"No, the Arctic does not yield its secret for the price of a ship's ticket. You must live through the long night, the storms, and the destruction of human pride. You must have gazed on the deadness of all things to grasp their livingness. In the return of the light, in the magic of the ice, in the life rhythm of the animals observed in the wilderness, in the natural laws of all being, revealed here in their completeness, lies the secret of the Arctic and the overpowering beauty of its lands."

—Christiane Ritter, *A Woman in the Polar Night* (1938)



Kennels outside
the Trapper's Station
Facing page:
1. Piotr Damski tucks
into waffles with fellow
dog-handlers
2. A lantern inside
the Trapper's Station



“LEAVE EVERYTHING AS IT IS AND FOLLOW ME TO THE ARCTIC.”

– Hermann Ritter, in a letter to his wife

One roasting July day in 1934, dressed in a ski suit and hobnail boots, Christiane Ritter bid farewell to her family and servants, stepped off the dock at Hamburg and boarded a ship bound for the top of the world. She had an appointment to keep with her husband.

For the past three years, Hermann Ritter had lived as a fur trapper in Svalbard, a group of Norwegian islands that, in all regards, lies a great deal closer to the North Pole than to the couple's comfortable home in Vienna. Her voyage to him would take several weeks, but at the end was the prospect of a homely cabin, and days spent reading, writing and painting, snug and safe by the fire.

The journey today is somewhat less challenging, though the first sight of Svalbard is likely unchanged since Christiane's day. The view from the plane, three hours after leaving Oslo, is of an endless white, with triangular white peaks rising above broad white valleys all the way to the horizon. There is no sign of human life, nor even a patch of land where human life might reasonably support itself.

But still humans came. The heady whiff of money, catching in the nostrils of the brave and gung-ho across Europe, first lured them here. Since Willem Barents discovered the archipelago in his search for a northern sea passage to China in the 16th century, sailors had returned home full of tales

of a polar Eden, whose lands teemed with polar bear, Arctic fox and reindeer, and where a man only need dangle an arm into the sea to pull out a seal or walrus. It prompted a rush of hunting expeditions so successful that the waters were cleared of the Greenland right whale in a matter of decades. By the time Christiane disembarked her boat at King's Bay on the island of Spitsbergen, Svalbard's appeal had shifted: the prize no longer lay solely in the furs destined for the salons of Paris, Berlin and London, but in the adventure to be had along the way.

“YES, BUT I'M NOT GOING TO LET MYSELF BE CAUGHT BY THE ISLAND, LIKE YOU'VE ALL BEEN CAUGHT,” I SAY DEFIANTLY.

“OH, YOU'LL BE CAUGHT, TOO,” THE NORWEGIAN SAYS, SOFTLY BUT WITH CONVICTION.”

– Christiane Ritter, *A Woman in the Polar Night* (1938)

“I was not planning to come to Svalbard,” says Piotr Damski, closing the door to the wind thrashing about outside, his boots leaving a trail of snow on the rough floorboards of the cabin. “I was meant to go to Panama, scuba-diving, but I was offered a job here and changed my mind.” Working as a dog handler and sledding guide at the **Trapper's Station** six miles outside the capital Longyearbyen, Polish Piotr responded to the same impulse that carried in Christiane Ritter: the irrefutable call of the Arctic. The station is a recreation of an original cabin, built from driftwood and lined with felt. It's a convivial place, with hides on the benches, lanterns in the windows and

its wonky dining table is often submerged beneath plates of reindeer stew and waffles, in feasts designed to dispel the worst of winter.

It was rarely so pleasant for the trappers. Many died from scurvy, starved from poor hunting, disappeared into crevasses in the ice, or were attacked by polar bears. Others, worn down by the unending cold, dark and solitude, succumbed to ‘ishavet kaller’ (‘the Arctic calls’) – an irresistible urge to walk into the ocean and sink beneath the waves. Christiane, in a frozen, leaking cabin many days' travel from any other human, often felt the presence of a phantom rising noiselessly from the bay behind the hut, come to drag her back down the shore. The 12 months she spent on Svalbard, grappling with the polar night and prolonged hunger, were not quite what she had in mind when she packed her trunks in Vienna.

“It's harsh. It's a constant struggle,” says Piotr as he pours us cups of coffee, his breath forming clouds in the air despite his proximity to the station's hissing stove. “But I like that, whatever happens here, I can rely only on myself. The best experience is to test your limits, to be out in the wilderness and out in nature.”

Outside, snow piles up against the windows and races in gusts around the yard. Three seal carcasses swing from a wooden A-frame, a sort of macabre Wild West warning to other seals that might pass this way. Once dried, they'll be divided between the hundred dogs that live and work at the station, taking visitors on short scoots in the surrounding

hills, or on expeditions lasting several days.

As Piotr leads a stout Greenland husky to a sled and drops him into a harness, a merry hell is unleashed around us. Dogs strain at their chains, leap to the top of their kennels to better observe proceedings, and set about in a tremendous fit of howling, yipping and yelping. They are keen to get out. “In the trappers' days,” says Piotr, checking the reins of the final dog on his team, “the dogs were everything: their only friend, their transport, a warning system for polar bears. It's the same now – when you are out, you put all your trust in them to bring you home again.”

Beyond the gates of the yard, as a snowstorm builds, there is nothing for the eyes to cling to, just a vast blinding emptiness of sky and land, and no distinction between the two. “Look at it,” says Piotr cheerfully. “You get the feeling humans really were not meant to be here.” With that, he releases the brake. The sled lurches, and the dogs and he are off and out, rattling into the valley.

“THEN COMES UNPEOPLED LAND. THE WHOLE DAY THROUGH, MOUNTAINS, GLACIERS, BLUE ROCKS, WHITE ICE.”

– Christiane Ritter, *A Woman in the Polar Night* (1938)

Nils Ingvar Egeland is from southern Norway. He has pale blue eyes, a ginger beard, and a tall frame wrapped in a brown woollen jumper and ski trousers held up with braces. He also has the type of handshake that can break bones. →



“I’ve been here
for two years,
so I’m stuck now.
I can’t imagine
going back to
the mainland”

Snowmobile guide Nils Ingvar
Egeland pauses at the historic cabin
of fur-trapper Hilmar Nøis
Facing page:
Heterochromia (where a pair
of eyes are of different colours)
is a fairly common trait among
husky-type dogs, like this one
at the Trapper’s Station

A deserted valley seen
on a snowmobile trip
to Mohnbukta inlet

With a varied employment history that includes both trawlerman and Greenlandic trapper, he is just the sort of person you'd like in front of you on a 140-mile trip through the Arctic on a snowmobile.

The storms of the previous days have cleared. The sun, which has recently appeared to the winter-weary inhabitants of Longyearbyen for the first time in five months, is shining. Svalbard is suddenly revealed – and it is golden, gilt-edged and dazzling. We travel through a broad glacial basin, mountains swooping up on either side, their peaks crisp against the bluest of blue skies. At the top of one mountain range, another impossibly wide valley spreads out before us, and, beyond that, further mountains, further valleys.

We bump over the ridges and hollows of a frozen river delta towards tiny dots that eventually form into Svalbard reindeer, a peculiar, short-legged variant on the mainland species that looks two parts Muppet to one part real animal. They paw at the snow to nibble at clumps of brown grass, hardly bothered by our presence. “They are pretty tame,” says Nils, slowing to a stop. “They haven’t yet learnt that humans can be dangerous. They are marathon runners and polar bears are sprinters, so the bears don’t usually bother them either.”

Climbing through a moraine to the top of **Rabotbreen glacier**, we skittle across ice blushed pink and yellow by the sun and around blocks of turquoise ice as big as houses, their surface as smooth to the touch as sculpted marble. Suspended within are tiny rocks and air bubbles, souvenirs from the last Ice Age. At the frozen sea of **Mohnbukta**, the blue edge of the glacier rises six storeys, its surface scored black and white.

“This was a popular place for the trappers,” says Nils, rifle slung around his shoulder, alert to the possibility of a polar bear crouched behind a boulder, marking us out as lunch. “The bears seem to like it here a lot.” There are none today, which is fortunate given the spellbinding distractions of the landscape. In her diaries, Christiane wrote of ‘Spitsbergen mania’ – the creeping ability the islands have

to hold you in their grasp until you are no longer capable of leaving. On days like today, the mania rises with every mile travelled. Like Christiane, Nils has been entirely caught by it. “I’ve been here for two years, so I’m stuck now. I can’t imagine going back to the mainland,” he says, pulling on his helmet and tearing off across the ice once more.

On the other side of the island, three hours’ journey by snowmobile, lies the cabin of a fur-trapper who had such a bad case of Spitsbergen mania, he spent 38 winters in it. Hilmar Nøis built his first hut in 1912, and, shortly after, brought his wife Ellen Dorthe over from Norway. “Maybe he was big-mouthed about the living conditions here,” says Nils. “He described this place as a villa to her.”

It is little more than a very draughty shed, sitting on the banks of a wide fjord. Here, in the middle of winter, alone and in the dark, Ellen gave birth to their child. Hilmar had set off on skis for Longyearbyen to fetch a doctor to help her through labour. “Because of the bad weather,” says Nils, “it took three weeks to get back.” As soon as the ice had cleared sufficiently to allow a boat through, Ellen left for Norway and never came back.

“PERHAPS IN CENTURIES TO COME, MEN WILL GO TO THE ARCTIC AS IN BIBLICAL TIMES THEY WITHDREW TO THE DESERT, TO FIND THE TRUTH AGAIN.”
– Christiane Ritter, A Woman in the Polar Night (1938)

By the time Hilmar and Christiane eventually left, the golden age of the fur trappers, and the tales of adventure and derring-do that accompanied them, was all but over. A new wave of pioneers had come to take their place, and their interest in Svalbard lay buried deep within its mountains.

The Russian mining town of **Pyramiden** was settled a year after Christiane sailed back to Germany. A hefty old trawler now takes people from Longyearbyen, lurching across the tempestuous seas of Isfjorden before chugging into the spectrally calm water of Billefjorden Bay. Fulmars and guillemots trail behind the boat, and walrus as well as →

Svalbard is suddenly revealed – and it is golden, gilt-edged and dazzling

Nils drives his snowmobile on the frozen waters of Mohnbukta, under a tongue of glacier ice

Facing page:

- 1. Pyramiden guide Kristin Jæger Wexsahl's rifle
- 2. A bearded seal rests on drift ice
- 3. Pyramiden's welcome sign
- 4. A farm building in Pyramiden
- 5. At latitude 79°N, Pyramiden was once the planet's northernmost settlement
- 6. The town's empty basketball court
- 7. Kristin keeps a watch for polar bears
- 8. Lenin's likeness watches over abandoned Pyramiden
- 9. The boat from Longyearbyen reaches the closest point it can get to Pyramiden



ringed and bearded seals plop from drift ice into the water on our approach, round heads observing as we pass.

After several hours, Pyramiden hones into view, the conveyor belts that took equipment and workers up to the mine, and coal back down from it, rising up above a town of solid brick apartments and factories. The ship judders to a halt against the pack ice. “Welcome to Russia!” shouts a guide standing on it below. Ladders are lowered and passengers clamber overboard to join him.

The Russians ran their community here for over 60 years, before packing up and abruptly leaving in a single day in October 1998. “This is an abandoned city, a Soviet ghost town,” says Kristin Jæger Wexsahl, resplendent in goatskin trousers, as we wade through streets thigh-deep in snow. Kristin has been leading tours here since 2009 – another arrival to Svalbard who planned a short stay but found she couldn’t leave.

In its heyday, Pyramiden was home to 1,800 people from the USSR. “It was easy to annex parts of Svalbard then,” says Kristin, “And the Russians wanted to present Pyramiden as the ideal lifestyle to the Western world.” They built a library, kindergarten, sports complex, hotel, playground and canteen, and brought with them pigs, cows and chickens, and fertile soil from Ukraine. It’s a Soviet utopia transplanted to the Arctic. “It was harder for a single trapper to keep himself supplied over the winter than to keep this whole town supplied,” says Kristin.

There are no residents here now, bar Arctic fox and polar bear, and the kittiwakes that nest on the window ledges of the old dormitory blocks. It is otherwise frozen in time. On the main street, the world’s northernmost statue of Lenin still gazes down to the harbour. Children’s paintings hang in the cultural centre, next to posters of triumphant soldiers,

rifles raised ready to rush an invisible enemy. A grand piano hulks on the stage in the concert hall, its notes, still in tune, ringing out to empty seats in the auditorium. Basketballs lie on a deserted court, waiting for a match that will never start.

“If you came to Svalbard as a miner, you got a good salary, better than in Russia,” says Kristin, padlocking the doors to the centre as we traipse outside. “And everything was free. You can’t imagine living in a city in Siberia and having a heated swimming pool and ballet lessons for the kids. If you were here, you had a good life.”

As we pick our way back to the boat, Kristin points towards the mountains, in the direction of a trapper’s cabin that’s still occupied. Svalbard’s longest-term trapper, Harald Solheim, has spent the last 40 winters there, in the shadow of this strange Russian metropolis. I imagine him alone in his hut with the night kept at bay by candlelight alone, and, just a few miles away, a one-time community of men, women and children, with electric light and limitless vodka at mealtimes and free cinema in the evenings.

Standing on deck, on the return to Longyearbyen, we watch as the ghost town recedes. Other relics of adventurous lives played out on this island far from home drift past: the bones of a wooden boat long abandoned on the shore, a hillside cabin uninhabited for decades, and the last resting place of Hansine Furfjord, who fell ill and died one Christmas over a century ago and was buried in the icy ground by her husband. The black cross he planted to mark her grave remains visible some time after we pass, then is lost from sight in a fresh flurry of snow. ☹



AMANDA CANNING is sad she didn’t run into a polar bear on this trip – and also slightly relieved.

MAKE IT HAPPEN: SVALBARD, NORWAY

Essentials

BEST TIME TO VISIT

The best times to visit Svalbard are from May to September, the summer months. The weather is pleasant, and it's the best time to spot polar bears.

GETTING THERE

Lufthansa, SWISS and Air India, among others, fly frequently to Svalbard Airport from all major Indian cities (return fares from ₹92,000).

GETTING AROUND

Longyearbyen is tiny and easily navigated on foot. Note that bad weather and risk of avalanches can close roads; seek info from your hotel before venturing out. Beyond town, snowmobiles are the most common mode of transport; you can drive one if you have a car or motorbike licence, and the technique is fairly simple after guidance. On any excursion, your tour operator will provide an armed guide, in case of polar-bear encounters. You'll find an extensive safety brochure at www.sysselmannen.no for official advice on trips in and out of town.

FANCY A CURRY?

If you're craving some hot curry, head to Gruvelageret. Although, it's not an Indian restaurant, it sure does know the right way to make a delicious curry along with rice and noodles (00-47-790-220-00; www.gruvelageret.no/en; Longyearbyen; lunch set menu from ₹500).

VISA

Since India is a party to the Svalbard treaty, Indian citizens do not require a visa to enter or remain in Svalbard itself. However, you would be crossing over Norway, which requires Indian citizens to have a double entry Schengen Visa, which would cost you around ₹6,275 (www.vfsglobal.com).

EMBASSY ALERT

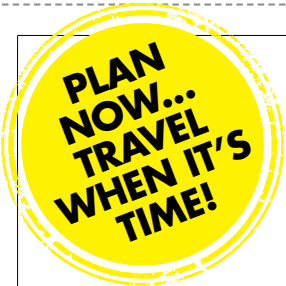
Embassy of India, Oslo, Norway: www.indianembassyoslo.gov.in

CURRENCY

1 Norwegian Krone (NOK) = ₹7.63

FURTHER INFO

Lonely Planet's Norway guide has a comprehensive chapter on Svalbard; you can download it from www.lonelyplanet.com; from ₹285). For moe information visit, www.visitnorway.com



SVALBARD'S RESIDENTS

NUMBER OF DOGS 770

NUMBER OF POLAR BEARS 975

NUMBER OF HUMANS 2,600

NUMBER OF REINDEER 10,000



LONGYEARBYEN

STAY

Longyearbyen will likely be your main base, from where you'll make excursions with a tour operator into the surrounding countryside before returning for the night. Basecamp Hotel is a wonderfully cosy place decked out as a frontier cabin, with wooden walls, exposed pipes and reindeer furs. Historical artefacts, such as prints, maps and lanterns, add to the old-time ambience. Staff here can advise on and book all manner of activities.

EAT

The styling at convivial Kroa makes it similar to that at Basecamp Hotel next door, with the addition of some spoils from Pyramiden, including a ceramic Lenin head over the bar. Dishes include elk burgers and Arctic char (www.kroa-svalbard.no; from ₹1,400). Slightly out of the main town, (take a taxi) this is one of Norway's best dining experiences. Huset serves five- and eight-course tasting menus that might include reindeer, langoustine, and Jerusalem artichoke ice cream. The restaurant has the largest wine cellar in Scandinavia, housing some 20,000 bottles (www.huset.com; from ₹13,500/ ₹8,000 with/ without wine).

EXCURSIONS

The weather means that plans can change at the last minute, so be prepared to have your itinerary altered at any moment. There are plenty of tour operators in town,

offering a range of activities from snowmobiling and dog-sledding to aurora tracking and snowshoe treks.

Basecamp Explorer, owner of the Basecamp Hotel, has operated in Svalbard for nearly 20 years and runs a wide variety of tours. It also offers accommodation outside Longyearbyen, allowing for longer, multi-night trips, such as overnight dog-sledding trips (from ₹1,07,550) and an eight-day skiing expedition (from ₹2,91,120). Among the shorter trips on offer are dinner at the Trapper's Station (₹9,860) and a three-and-a-half-hour night trip to see the northern lights (₹6,100). The boat to Pyramiden runs as soon as the ice is thin enough for the ship to get through, usually from April. The trip, with Henningsen Transport and Guiding, takes a full day, with two hours spent in the town, and includes a guided tour and lunch (www.htg.svalbard.no; from ₹17,850).

WHAT TO PACK

Your tour operator will kit you out with snowsuit, snowboots, goggles and thick gloves, but it's up to you to dress for the weather otherwise. Bring plenty of layers, including decent thermals, fleece and/or wool jumpers, and a waterproof coat and trousers. Armadillo sells Arctic-standard base and thermal layers that'll see you through many winter trips (www.armadillomerino.com; long-sleeved top from ₹3,750). There are also tonnes of clothes and outdoor-gear shops in Longyearbyen, but prices are staggeringly high.



The hut in which Hilmar Nøis's wife Ellen gave birth, on the Sassenford, can be visited on a day trip from Longyearbyen



BEHIND THE SCENES

"On Svalbard, you soon learn that the weather is in charge, not you. Our guide Nils, photographer Jonathan and I had snowmobiled out of Longyearbyen, set to travel to a remote camp for the night. I soon gave up on taking notes, with the ink in my pens freezing and my phone battery dying instantly I took them out of my pocket. Jonathan spent much of the day grappling to prevent his cameras seizing up. After driving for hours, we learned that the camp had been wrecked in the previous night's storms, and we'd have to make the long journey back to town. But we wouldn't have changed a second of that day, in which we'd raced over glaciers, had lunch on a frozen sea, and watched the sun set from a mountain top, before haring back to Longyearbyen in the dark."

- Amanda Canning



MEET A MODERN-DAY CRISTIANE RITTER

In 2008, Linda Bakken, from Longyearbyen, spent a year in a remote cabin on Spitsbergen – Svalbard's main island – experiencing the self-sufficient life of a traditional trapper. Here, she shares her story:

WHAT ATTRACTED YOU TO THE TRAPPER'S LIFE?

When I was young, I met some adventurers and they spoke about a time when they went to the Yukon and built a cabin out in the wild. I thought it would be cool to do something similar at some point in my life. Over 10 years later, I moved to Spitsbergen. During my first Easter, I went on a snowmobile trip with friends. After two days of driving, we landed at a trapping station called Mushamna. In that moment, I knew where to fulfil my dream. My boyfriend and I were given permission to use the cabin for a year. The relationship ended while I was up there and I stayed alone for quite a bit of the year. I guess doing things like this is really about having a break from the world, which is too much, sometimes: everyday routines, Facebook, sad news from all over the world, wars, terrors and crises. I think all the impressions sometimes drown us. I had a wish to stay close to nature.

HOW WAS THAT YEAR IN THE WILD?

It was somewhat unreal and, at the same time, the most 'real' year I've ever had. I had the best and worst moments of my life. It was crazy to experience a break-up when I was hundreds of miles from anybody I could talk to, with no cellphone coverage, no internet, only the Iridium phone that cost me one US dollar a minute to use. Quite often I missed friends and family. I wished there was an escape door that I could use to go home for a few hours or to invite my mother for dinner. But I only wanted short breaks – I really loved the life up there.

One of the worst things was having a Spring with hardly any visitors. The snow and ice conditions were really difficult that year. I was expecting to have a lot of friends arriving by snowmobile to join me. Instead, I was all by myself – often waiting for visitors who never came because they could not make it that far. The loneliness made the few visits even more memorable. And the experience of Spring was

tremendous – from darkness and silence to 24-hour sunshine and a world full of birds.

The polar-bear danger was an everyday threat. I could never go anywhere without my weapon. Walking outside, the gun always had to be on my shoulders. The toilet was 20 metres from the cabin and I always had to bring the gun with me inside. And, during the night, I had a shotgun next to me in my bed.

I spotted more than 400 polar bears during the year and I had to chase them away 260 times. Still, there were only two occasions when I felt really threatened – the polar-bear danger was not the main danger. I was more afraid of getting lost in the darkness, particularly in bad weather. I was also worried about falling through the sea ice or getting caught in an avalanche.

I would never have been able to spend that year in the cabin without my dogs. They were my life support, my mates and my comfort.

Descending from the
Qafa e Pejë's pass
towards the village of
Theth, Albania



FRONTIERLAND

Make your way to the remote borders of **Montenegro, Albania and Kosovo** to set foot in a once-forbidden mountain wilderness where, today, walkers are warmly welcomed

Words OLIVER SMITH  @OliSmithTravel Photographs JUSTIN FOULKES  @justinfoulkes

Setting off from Vusanje, a village in Montenegro with a substantial ethnic Albanian population

Facing page:

1. One of Theth's goats

2. The 'lock-in' tower in Theth, where blood feuds were resolved

3. Meadows beneath Maja e Rosit on the border between Albania and Montenegro

4 & 5. Guide Pavlin Polia and the Catholic church in which he was born

6. On the trail towards Theth

7. Haystacks in Valbonë

8. A five-spot burnet moth butterfly on the Albania–Montenegro border

9. A waterwheel in Theth

GO D took six days to create the earth, the sea and the sky. But, so a local legend goes, the devil took only 24 hours to create the Accursed Mountains. It was a full day's work. He would have scored deep ravines with his pointy tail. He would have sculpted spires of rock with his evil little claws. And, long after he finished the Mountains, the curse remained, for this range has always been synonymous with bandits, blood feuds, avalanches, and miscellaneous misfortunes for anyone foolish enough to visit.

Today, the Accursed Mountains straddle the borders of three nations: Montenegro, Kosovo and Albania. Setting out on a morning stroll in early summer, you suspect the Almighty would be impressed by his rival's handiwork. Because, with devilish deception, it is a place of radiant, intense loveliness.

My walk starts in the village of **Vusanje**, Montenegro, near a timber minaret carved with crescent moons and petals. Before long, I am far from settlements, walking through wildflower meadows where the ground itself seems to move with the fluttering of thousands of butterflies. There are mighty limestone mountains crumbling into wind-scourged boulder fields, and stone shepherds' huts, their chimney stacks toppled and slumped

in mimicry of the peaks above.

Most of the time, there are few hikers. It feels like a mini-Yosemite in the Balkans – a real back-of-the-wardrobe secret land that has somehow evaded the attention of the outside world. There are clues as to why. Four hours' walk from Vusanje, I cross the Montenegro-Albania border, where derelict military bunkers watch from above. Beyond them lies the village of **Theth**, Albania. It is about 14 miles from Vusanje but, until 1991, it might as well have been the far side of the moon.

"If you were caught walking in these mountains in those times, you would have gone to prison," says Pavlin Polia, leaning on a fence post in the afternoon sunshine. "Or worse." Pavlin is a mountain guide and guesthouse owner in Theth, where he was born in the nave of its tiny Catholic church. When he was a youngster, Theth was part of Communist Albania, a regime unrivalled in Europe for brutal oppression and crippling poverty. Its paranoid dictator, Enver Hoxha, built more than 1,70,000 of his bunkers across the country, partly to repel enemies – but as much to make sure citizens stayed put.

For decades, the Accursed Mountains served as Hoxha's giant geological Berlin Wall (one that conveniently brewed its own thunderstorms). Its treacherous passes became the ultimate hurdle for anyone →

IT FEELS LIKE A SECRET LAND THAT HAS EVADED THE ATTENTION OF THE OUTSIDE WORLD



“THE ACCURSED MOUNTAINS
ARE PROBABLY THE LAST TRULY
WILD PLACE IN EUROPE”



LABOUR OF LOVE

While in Kosovo, keep an ear out for youngsters by the name of ‘Tonibler’. A given name for boys, it was created in honour of former UK prime minister Tony Blair, who is seen as a hero by many, owing to his strong stance in the 1998–1999 Kosovo War.

escaping Albania to reach the relative freedom of Montenegro, then part of Yugoslavia. Over coffee in his guesthouse in Theth, Pavlin tells me about escape attempts – the 70-strong family who sneaked over the frontier on Hoxha’s birthday, when the border guards were partying and looking the other way. And nameless others who tiptoed into the beech forests after nightfall, never to be heard from again. Communism might be a memory, but only in the past few years have geopolitical developments allowed these mountains to open up to hikers. Pavlin is among the founders of the Peaks of the Balkans trail – a new 120-mile hiking route that passes through three nations in a lap of the Accursed Mountains. It is a two-week-long odyssey of which the Vusanje-to-Theth hike is just one leg. Establishing the trail meant mapping remote routes known only to shepherds, and encouraging farmers to open guesthouses. It also meant navigating sensitive politics – Pavlin worked hard to persuade police chiefs from Montenegro, Albania and Kosovo to waive passport checks for the first time. “In the end, they decided that, if you want to smuggle cigarettes, you would probably

do it in the boot of a Mercedes,” he says with a grin. “You wouldn’t put them in a backpack and set out into the mountains.”

ALBANIA is possibly the most misunderstood country in Europe. It has a language with no close relatives, full of words made of Qs and Xs that look purpose-built for high Scrabble scores. The country sits about midway between Rome and Athens, but spent the late 20th century as a European North Korea – neither a member of NATO, the Eastern Bloc nor the Non-Aligned Movement; it didn’t even enter the Eurovision Song Contest until fairly recently. It carries unhappy associations with organised crime and backwardness. Its fictional children include Borat (though he later switched to Kazakh), and the baddies from *Taken* films, who bear the brunt of Liam Neeson’s particular set of skills.

For any hiker who spends the night in villages such as Theth, Albania conjures up quite different associations. The morning thrum of beehives, the taste of honey on freshly-baked bread. Shivering cold mountain streams flowing under humpbacked Ottoman

bridges. The clink of antique china cups filled with strong Turkish coffee. The greetings of shepherds taking their flocks out to pasture. After spending a night in Theth, the Albanian leg of the Peaks of the Balkans trail leads me towards the **Valbonë Valley** over a rocky pass. Climbing higher, the view soon expands into IMAX mode: giant citadels of rock, meadows tinged blue in the heat haze, eagles riding thermals from the Adriatic. From the highest point of the pass, you see clearly how the Accursed Mountains are one of the last redoubts of wilderness in the Balkans. Somewhere on the ranges below live wolves and brown bears. And, of course, the critically-endangered Balkan lynx, barely a few dozen of which roam the rocky plateaux, their whiskers twitching in the highland wind. The habitat itself is under critical threat. In 2015, the Albanian government passed a motion to allow the construction of hydro-electric dams in the Valbonë Valley – a project that would submerge much of this landscape, drowning the forests, condemning raging rivers to become meagre trickles. The Peaks of the Balkans trail passes by the proposed dams but, more gravely, the project would block

invisible, older trails – trodden by countless species, which depend on them to survive. Despite continued legal challenges from environmental groups across Europe, we see bulldozers parked within the borders of the Valbonë National Park during our visit. “These mountains are probably the last truly wild place in Europe,” says Besi Ismajli, a guide I meet after descending the pass. He has a wolf tattooed on his calf, and an eagle on his bicep. “We have to fight a battle to protect this place. And, right now, Albania is losing it.”

WHEREVER you walk in the Accursed Mountains, borders are a constant companion. Sometimes, a border shimmies precariously along a knife-edge arête (mountain ridge). Often it plunges into a frozen lake and climbs out on the other side. Very occasionally, it ambushes you with a weatherbeaten sign proclaiming something like “Welcome to MO TE EGRO”. But, more often than not, it slips past undetected, a text message saying “Vodafone welcomes you to Albania, receive calls from 36p per minute” the only sign of an international boundary. →



A wolf watches over Besi Imajlis’ calf
Top: Facing south into the Valbonë valley, near the proposed hydroelectric project

A chapel in the Patriarchal Monastery of Péc, dating back to the 13th century

Facing page:
A Hoxha era pillbox overlooking the Albania-Montenegro border



Borders are also invisible to the cows of Isah Zymer Dresias – a farmer whose livestock regularly wanders over the Montenegro-Kosovo border, which, thanks to a territory swap, now runs directly behind his woodshed. It means he has to make repeat visits to the border police to bring them home. It is a price worth paying, he insists, to live and work in Kosovo's **Rugova Valley**.

"Life here is beautiful," he says, chopping white pine, as I cross into Kosovo. "If you spend time here, you will grow a beard to your waist, and probably live to be 120 years old. And you will never be able to live without the smell of pine trees in summer."

As the Peaks of the Balkans trail enters Kosovo, the landscape subtly changes character. Vertical peaks lapse into gently-contoured hills and broadleaf forests where wild strawberries and apricots grow by the trail. Splitting the landscape in two is the **Rugova Gorge**, where little cafés watch over a foaming river, and Kosovars come for picnics at weekends.

It looks like a picture of timeless serenity but, here again, the Accursed Mountains are deceptive. In 1998, during the last chapter of the Balkan Wars, Yugoslav forces rolled in from Montenegro and Serbia to battle the forces of the Kosovo Liberation Army. Amid the genocide of Kosovar Albanians, bloody fighting saw farmhouses torched and artillery fire breaking the hush of the Rugova forests.

Complex though political borders might be in the Accursed Mountains, they overlay an even more complicated map of ethnic and religious boundaries, of which hikers can get a tiny sense in Kosovo. In one part of the Rugova Valley, you might stop inside the **Serbian Orthodox Monastery in Peja**, and squint to see frescoed saints in the shadowy heights. In another, you can hear the thin call to prayer from the village mosques, whose minarets inch above the treetops. As well as Albanians and Serbs, there are Bosniaks, Macedonians, Roma, Egyptians. The ethnic mix has been combustible in the past. Today, most look to the path ahead.

The end of my hike comes in the village of **Rekë e Allagës**, and the home of Mustafa and Fethiye Nikqi. Mustafa rebuilt his Rugova farmhouse after it was destroyed in the war, and, more recently, opened it as **Ariu** ('Bear') **Guesthouse**, named after the creatures that harass his dog, Dora, in the small hours. Today, he welcomes a fraternity of hikers, united in the love of roaming this landscape. In small ways, he says, the Peaks of the Balkans trail encourages understanding across frontiers. Guides from all countries intermingle; guesthouses call lodges over the border to let them know a hiking group is on its way.

"If we had had this path 25 years ago, perhaps there would have been no war," says Mustafa. "The Peaks of the Balkans trail is, in some ways, like a stitch in a wound." →

BUNKER BUNKER PARTY...


The Albanian pillbox (block house/ guard post) is a wonder of architecture largely because there are some 173,350 of them – nearly 10 to every square mile. Built between 1967 and 1986 under Enver Hoxha's 'bunkerisation' strategy, they were never actually used to defend the country, but are an omnipresent feature of the Albanian landscape. They've been adapted as pizza ovens, mushroom farms and cafés. They've had other functions, too: as Lonely Planet founder Tony Wheeler put it in his 2007 book *Bad Lands*: "Albanian virginity is lost in a Hoxha bunker as often as American virginity was once lost in the back seats of cars."



1. Bridge over the Rugova canyon
2. Dora the dog at Ariu Guesthouse in Rugova, Kosovo
3. The guesthouse entrance
4. Fethiye makes fljia pancakes
5. Mustafa tends to his cows
6. A speckled yellow moth on the author's boot in the Rugova Valley

To stay the night here means experiencing a happy sense of cultural disorientation. Mustafa waxes lyrical about Fethiye's home-made Ramadan cheese, and also the wild boar he sometimes hunts – whose meat tastes like onions in autumn and pine cones in winter. Dinners come with shots of fiery *raki*, made with apples from the orchards outside, while guests sleep in dormitories where images of Mecca and Medina hang over the bunks. And there are stories, too: the old caravans Mustafa remembers from pre-Communist days, when he was young – when merchants in flowing white robes would walk for days to sell sheepskins on the Adriatic coast, huddled together for safe passage over the range. Sunset lingers on the high points of the Accursed Mountains – casting golden beams on Rekë e Allagës while the world below

is swallowed in shadows. Barely visible at the far end of the Rugova Valley is a no man's land between Kosovo and Montenegro, designated 'disputed territory' on my map. The road is currently closed here, and no one may cross. It is an unhappy relic of the Yugoslav wars. Depending on whom you ask, it might be part of Montenegro or Kosovo. Or both, or neither. At the time of my visit, its status is set to be resolved by politicians who have likely never set foot here. For now, it is the Balkan landscape as God (or the devil) left it: an immensity of mountain, forest and meadow that is nothing if not European. 🇲🇳

 **OLIVER SMITH** is our contributing (often from altitude) writer. His trip had support from Zbulo in Albania and Montenegro, and Butterfly Outdoor in Kosovo.

BEHIND THE SCENES
Lonely Planet (UK) magazine contributors Oliver Smith and Justin Foulkes are rugged men of the mountains, not shy of brisk temperatures. They met their match with a swim in the glacially-cold lake of Liqeni i Drelajve on the Kosovo-Montenegro border – stripping down to their underpants and diving in, before climbing out with a whimper, to howls of laughter from observers in both nations.



Essentials

BEST TIME TO VISIT

The Peaks of the Balkans trail is generally hiked between May and October. During winter, much of the route is impassable due to snow.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Your choice of flight depends on which country in the Balkans you plan to visit. In Albania, **Tirana Airport** has flights from Mumbai and New Delhi (return fares from ₹54,000), with a five-hour onward drive to Theth or Valbona. In Montenegro, **Podgorica Airport** is connected to Mumbai and Delhi with a layover in Istanbul (return fares from ₹61,400) followed by a five-hour onward drive to Vusanje. Kosovo's **Prishtina Airport** has flights from Mumbai and Delhi with a long layover in Istanbul (return fares from ₹51,000), which will entail a two-hour drive to Peja, close to Rekë e Allagës. Car hire is available at all locations. Be warned you might need to pay additional insurance if you plan to cross national borders in your vehicle.

VISA

Getting a multi-entry Schengen visa might be the easiest way to go around the Balkans. Depending on the most number of days you plan to spend in which country, choose the embassy for your visa application.

CURRENCY

1 euro = ₹81

EMBASSY

Embassy of India, Bucharest, Romania: Bilateral-Albania
www.eoibucharest.gov.in

Montenegro: Embassy of India, Podgorica:
www.embassyofindia.belgrade.org

WHO CAN HELP

Walking independently is an option, however considering the occasionally complicated navigation, cross-border bureaucracy

and scarce English speakers, we'd strongly recommend going with a local company. **Zbulo (Albania):** Self-guided tours and self guided itineraries in the Accursed Mountains (www.zbulo.org; eight days from ₹44,722/ person). **Butterfly Outdoors (Kosovo):** They have itineraries in the Rugova Valley as well as cycling, rock-climbing and yoga retreats in other less-visited corners of the country (www.butterflyoutdoor.com; from ₹20,000/ person).

FANCY A CURRY?

Albania: Chakra Jone in Tirana makes decent Indian food, though the prices are slightly on the steeper side because of the non-availability of spices. That being said, the food is quite good (00-355-67-200-5222; www.chakrajone.com; Tirana; mains from ₹750).

Montenegro: Masala Art in Podgorica is an amazing restaurant that offers authentic Indian food. Do give the buttery naans and chicken curry a try (00-382-20-242-665; www.masalaart.me; 13A Vasa Račkovića; mains from ₹500).

Kosovo: Owing to very few Indian restaurants in Prishtina, **Himalayan Gorkha Restaurant** comes highly recommended and is popular (00-377-44-402-265; Uck Nr 17; mains from ₹450).

LITTER IN THE ACCURSED MOUNTAINS

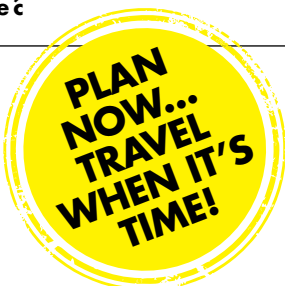
While the Accursed Mountains counts as one of the most beautiful corners of Europe, it continues to struggle with catastrophic litter problems, plastic waste clogging the streams around villages and, in particular, picnic spots in all three countries. Take a refillable water bottle, and – if you want to make a difference – take a plastic bag and gather what you can. Our team collected 10 bags of rubbish on their trek.



MAP KEY

- 1 Theth
- 2 Valbonë
- 3 Vusanje

- 4 Rekë e Allages
- 5 Rugova Valley
- 6 Peja/Peć



MODERN HISTORY CHEAT SHEET ALBANIA

From 1946 to 1992, the country was under Communist rule, led largely by the eccentric and brutal dictator Enver Hoxha. It positioned itself apart from other Eastern Bloc countries, initially allying with China, and withdrawing from the Warsaw Pact in 1968. Unrest flared in the late 1990s, partly due to the collapse of government-endorsed pyramid schemes.

MONTENEGRO

Montenegro ('Black Mountain') was briefly an independent kingdom before WWI, then later absorbed into what became Yugoslavia. Rather than seceding like other member states in the early 1990s, it remained part of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro from 2003 to 2006. Following a narrowly-won referendum, it became independent in 2006.

KOSOVO

Kosovo was an autonomous province of Serbia (itself a constituent republic of Yugoslavia) until the 1990s. In 1998, decades of tensions between Albanians and Serbs erupted into war between the Kosovo Liberation Army and Yugoslav forces, during which around 13,000 people were killed. In 2008, Kosovo declared independence, and is recognised by over 100 countries, including the UK and Montenegro.



SHORT WALKS ON THE PEAKS OF THE BALKANS

Hiking the whole trail can take up to two weeks, but it is possible to cover stages in shorter stints. Here are some of the best day walks:

Vusanje (Montenegro) to Theth (Albania), 13 miles

Said by some to be the most beautiful stretch of the trail, this easily navigable route follows the Ropojana Valley, with around 1,000m of ascent. Bearing south from Vusanje, highlights include an abandoned Yugoslav military barracks, and the steep descent from the Qafa e Pejës pass into Theth. **Guest House Ulaj** provides warm rooms and filling meals in a Vusanje farmhouse (00-382-68-871-620; rooms from ₹2,800), while **Polia Guesthouse** has modern pine-clad rooms in Theth (00-355-67-526-7526; rooms from ₹3,100). In Theth, be sure to pay a visit to the extraordinary 'lock-in' tower, a legacy of the complex blood feuds of the Accursed Mountains.

Theth (Albania) to Valbonë (Albania), 12 miles

The most well-trodden of all the Peaks of the Balkans stages, this hike affords extraordinary views from the top of the Valbonë Pass. Setting out from Theth, hikers ascend steeply through forests before crossing the saddle between the peaks of Maja Alijes and Maja e Boshit. From here, it's a steady descent towards Rragami, and a walk along a stony river bed to Valbonë. You'll find a couple of small 'cafés' lining the trail, stocking expensive drinks and snacks. Run by an enthusiastic beekeeper, **Guest House Kol Gjoni** has rooms in an Alpine-style cottage in Valbonë (00-355-67-302-2876; rooms from ₹2,800).

Rekë e Allagës (Kosovo) to Hajla (Kosovo/ Montenegro Border), 7.5 miles

Rekë e Allagës is the most suitable base for adventures in Kosovo's Rugova valley. If you're arriving from the east, it's readily accessed on tarmac roads from the town of Peja, home to an Ottoman bazaar and a beautiful Serbian Orthodox monastery. For a bracing day walk from Rekë e Allagës, follow the Peaks of the Balkans trail northwest through forests and meadows to the summit of Hajla – a rocky spine that marks the Kosovo-Montenegro border. **Ariu Guesthouse** (also known as Mustafa Guesthouse) is one of the best loved on the trail (00-386-49-867-098; rooms from ₹3,275).

A
DAY
IN
THE
LIFE
OF

KAKADU

PLAN
NOW...
TRAVEL
WHEN IT'S
TIME!

Experience a dawn-to-dusk safari in Australia's far north – a land of giant termite mounds, rock art, secret swimming holes and an ancient understanding of the power of fire

Words OLIVER BERRY | [@oliverfomberry](#) | **Photographs** CHRIS CHEN | [@chris_chen_](#)

ASK the local Bininj and Mungguy people about Kakadu, and they'll politely inform you that there's no such place. It might sprawl over 7,646 square miles of the Northern Territory, but, to these peoples, the land now known as Kakadu is a patchwork of tribal territories. Since 1979, it's been Australia's largest national park; a land of red rock, sandstone, bushland and billabongs, not to mention towering termite mounds. It's the essence of the Australian outback. Buffalo hunting, cattle farming and uranium mining have all been tried here; all have failed. For half the year, monsoons swamp the land; for the other half, it's parched. Tiny **Jabiru**, a handful of shops, a gas station, and the park's main office and rangers' HQ, is the only town. Following the rangers' advice, I stock up on essentials in Jabiru: bottled water, bug repellent, emergency food, a bushman's hat, a canister of spare petrol, and three extra cans of bug repellent in case I lose the first. Kakadu is unforgiving, and help can be hours away, so it pays to be prepared. Supplies safely stowed, I steer my 4WD south from Jabiru, heading for the remote bush camp of Cooinda. Tomorrow, my safari begins from here. →

**6.30AM****YELLOW WATER**

The orchestra strikes up at first light. At first, it's just a whine, like interference on a radio. Gradually it builds: croaks, trills, hoots, drones, booms, chatters and whirrs, reaching a crescendo as the first stripe of pink streaks the sky above Yellow Water. For river guide Greg Patterson, the sounds are more than a dawn chorus: on Yellow Water, they tell him when a croc's on the prowl.

"Crocs are devilish to spot, especially at dawn and dusk," he says. "They're perfectly adapted to the environment. And they're crafty. Often you won't see them till they're real close. Sometimes, I'll be looking out front, and there's a croc round the back looking right at me. But things always go real quiet when a croc's nearby."

Greg has been guiding tours on Yellow Water for years and remains wary of its crocs. Since hunting was outlawed in the early 1970s, Kakadu's crocodile numbers have boomed to around 10,000, well over one for every square mile.

"There," Greg says, nodding toward a hollow in the bank. To inexperienced eyes, it looks like a gnarled log floating among the water lilies – but, with Greg's guidance, I see the telltale signs: a double ridge of dinosaur-style spines, two m-shaped nostrils, and a pair of green,

reptilian eyes, fixed on the boat. As we putter past, its eyes follow us with a predator's patience. Greg estimates it at around three metres, fairly average for Kakadu – the largest crocs can easily reach four metres. Once we're downriver, the croc hauls itself onto the bank to warm in the sun. Soon, it'll get peckish.

The dawn mist burns off, and the billabong's wildlife properly wakes up. The rising sun lights up the wetlands, pan flat and acid green. White egrets flutter in the treetops; Jesus lizards skitter across the ponds, splayed feet flapping. Giant-billed jabiru birds strut the banks on gangly, stilt-like legs. As we near the jetty, a ripple breaks the water's surface, followed by a thrash of a tail, an explosion of spray, and a swift snap of jaws – then nothing but water.

"Looks like someone's just had breakfast," Greg says, gliding in alongside the dock. "Which reminds me: It's about time I had mine."

**9AM****BURRUNKUY**

Thirty miles east, under a sandstone escarpment, park ranger Adrian Buman is beginning his first tour of the day. He leads us into a forest of eucalyptus, pandanus and green plums.

After 10 minutes, we emerge from the canopy. Ahead, a fissured sandstone wall rises into the blue morning sky, like a stack of paving slabs piled 200 feet high. The sun's heat is fierce and Adrian leads our group into the shade of a rocky overhang. But shelter isn't the reason he's chosen this spot. As I step into the shadows and my eyes begin to become accustomed to the darkness, I realise the walls are emblazoned with artworks: x-ray fish, impressionistic animals and strange human-like forms, etched on the rock face in a palette of ochre-browns, yellows, oranges, crimsons and whites.

"Amazing, eh?" Adrian says, craning his neck to take in the gallery. "Many of these paintings date back long before the first white people set foot in Australia. Archaeologists believe some of them are several thousand years old." He points to a white figure with two feeler-like appendages behind his head. "This chap is Namarrgon, the Lightning Man, a creation ancestor believed to bring the monsoon storms. He made thunder and lightning by clapping together those axes behind his head."

There are thousands of rock art sites scattered across Kakadu. They were made by the Bininj people, the indigenous inhabitants of northern Kakadu. Some recount family history or mark sacred sites. Others deal with the songlines, the intricate tapestry of oral history and creation legends that indigenous people use to record their past. Often, the paintings are multi-layered, cross-generational canvases that span centuries: →

Rock art in Burrungkuy
Facing page: A crocodile
in the Yellow River –
the population has boomed
since the end of hunting
in the 1970s

"Things always go real quiet
when a croc's nearby"

the oldest in Kakadu were painted at least 20,000 years ago. Only a handful are open to *balanda*, or non-indigenous people. Most remain taboo, hidden away in a labyrinth of caves and valleys.

“Every time I come here, I see something new,” Adrian says, casting his torch over the cavern’s walls. “But I can only guess at all the meanings these places have for Bininj people. They’re mankind’s oldest artworks – and we know almost nothing about the artists who made them.”



11.00AM

EAST ALLIGATOR RIVER

There’s a jam at Cahills Crossing. A line of trucks, cars and 4WDs is queued five-deep on either side of the river. A ute has got stuck halfway, having mistimed its crossing when the water was too deep. The driver is leaning anxiously out of the window, spinning his wheels to get free of the mud. He looks on the ragged edge of panic. He should be. The river’s already

up to the wheel arches. In half an hour, it’ll be roof-height.

Cahills Crossing is the only road link between Kakadu and the autonomous, indigenous-governed region of Arnhem Land. It spans the East Alligator, the tidal river that tracks Kakadu’s eastern edge. Even in the dry season from May to October, it’s only open a few hours a day, around low tide; but, during the monsoon from November to April, the river level is too high to cross, cutting Arnhem Land off for half the year. To make matters worse, the East Alligator is notorious for crocs: every few years, there’s a tale of a driver or fisherman who’s been carried off, never to be seen again.

“My friends and I swam here when we were kids,” explains Robert Namarnyilk, a member of the Bulaja clan, who runs boat tours and fishing trips. “It’s too dangerous now.” He guides his boat towards the crossing, and nods at a vortex of deep water at the far bank. “A truck sank there last year. The driver had to swim for it. I wasn’t sure

he’d make it.” We watch from the deck of Robert’s boat. It takes 10 minutes for the ute to coax itself free. On the far side, the driver steps out and leans against the tailgate, relief etched onto his face. He knows he caught a break today.



1.00PM

GUNLOM FALLS

By lunchtime, the temperature in Kakadu has ratcheted up to 35°C, and the eucalyptus-lined track to Gunlom Falls is busy with people looking for somewhere to cool off. Sipping water from their canteens, sweat streaming from their brows, they trudge up the rocky path beside the falls until they reach their goal: the swimming pools of Gunlom.

Carved from the sandstone by natural erosion, these clam-shaped ponds were made famous by *Crocodile Dundee*, when bushman Mick Dundee takes journalist Sue Charlton to his favourite spot for an alfresco dip. Since then, →



*By lunchtime,
the temperature
in Kakadu
has ratcheted
up to 35°C*



Afternoon dips at Gunlom made famous in the film *Crocodile Dundee*.
Above: Victor Cooper of Ayal Aboriginal Tours.
Right: Hawks in Arnhem Land.





they've become one of Kakadu's most popular wild swimming spots. Throughout the afternoon, people splash around in the terraced pools, plunging into the water or wallowing in the shallows as they listen to the thunder of the falls a hundred feet below. In Kakadu, this is as close as they'll get to an infinity pool.



4.00PM
SOUTH ALLIGATOR COUNTRY

On the west side of the national park, near the banks of the South Alligator River, Victor Cooper is about to start a bush fire. "People are afraid of fire," Victor says, piling up a heap of dry grass as he gauges the wind's direction and strength. "But that's because they don't understand it. It's a part of life here. The thing is to know how to use it right."

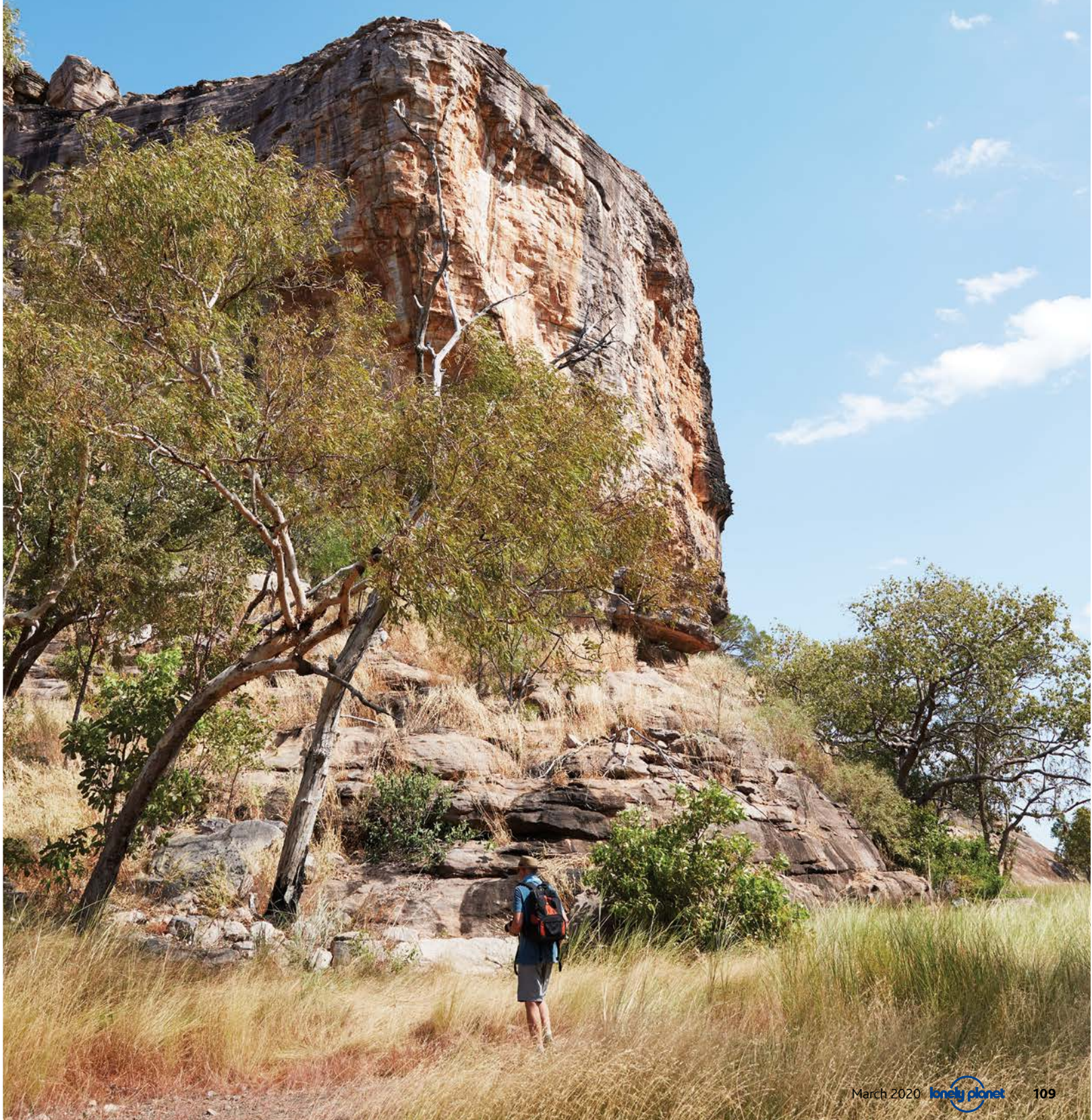
Content with his preparations, he sets light to the tinder. There's a crackle, then a whoosh: the undergrowth ignites, and, in seconds, has bloomed into a head-high wall of flame. Smoke plumes skyward, and the fire races away into the trees. But Victor's not worried: he knows he's set the fire right. It will burn till nightfall, when a combination of moisture, falling temperatures and changing wind direction will combine to snuff it out.

Victor and his family group, the Manitja, have been looking after the country around the South Alligator River for generations. As one of the first indigenous people to qualify as a national park ranger in the late 1970s, there are few individuals who understand Kakadu as intimately as he does. Since retiring, he's run tours →



Above: Back burning
Facing page:
An escarpment
in the autonomous,
indigenous-Australian-
governed Arnhem Land

"I can only guess at all the meanings these places have for Bininj people"



on his family's land to introduce visitors to indigenous culture, medicine and bushcraft – including the traditional practice of fire management.

Using small, frequent burns to clear scrub lessens the probability of a major conflagration, he explains, as we watch the fire crackle through the trees. Many endemic trees have evolved natural fire resistance: so, as long as the flames never burn too fast or fierce, they take a long time to catch light. Amazingly, some of Kakadu's plants actually rely on fire for germination. Within days of a burn, the blackened land starts to regenerate, promoting a burst of new greenery. Regular burns are now official park policy in Kakadu, with indigenous owners working alongside rangers to identify the correct areas to clear.

"No one knows this country like us," Victor explains, steering his 4WD onto Kakadu's main highway. "It's part of us. We know how to look after it. And, in return, it looks after us."

6.30PM 

NAWURLANDJA

For most of the day, Kakadu's skies are a uniform blue. Sunset brings a subtler palette of peaches and tangerines, pinks

and pukes, yellows, plums and soft burgundies. This evening, however, above Nawurlandja, a great slab of rock, the skies have a special show in store. A bank of black cloud has rolled in, bringing with it a rare rain shower, and the appearance of something very unusual indeed: a rainbow. To Kakadu's ancient inhabitants, this meteorological phenomenon carried great significance, as it meant that the rainbow serpent was on the move.

Known by many names in Kakadu – Almudj to Gundjeihmi speakers in the north, Bolung to Jawoyn speakers in the south – the rainbow serpent was among the most important creation ancestors for Aboriginal people (so significant is the legend, it was chosen to feature in the national park's official logo). Almudj was believed to have created Kakadu's valleys and waterholes, and her appearance often marked the changing of the seasons, and symbolised the life cycle of all living things. I watch the rainbow flicker and fade in the twilight, a bright crescent of colour cut out against the evening clouds, then head back down the rock, listening to the calls of kookaburras and fruit doves filling the evening skies.

The rainbow serpent was among the most important creation ancestors for Aboriginal people

9.00PM

HAWK DREAMING

Night settles in over Kakadu. Rana McChesney stokes up the campfire, then removes the lid of one of her cast-iron cooking pots. Inside, meat stew bubbles. Lifting another lid, she checks on her damper, the soda bread traditionally eaten by settlers and bushmen. She tears off a piece and chews: the perfect damper should be crusty, she explains, but doughy and yeasty on the inside. "Damper is the staple food of the outback," she explains. "Without it, the early settlers would have starved, so I think it's important that our guests get to taste it." While she cooks dinner, a wallaby ambles out of the bush, nuzzling her leg. "This is jilly," Rana says. "We rescued her when she was just a joey. She always shows up for dinner."

Along with her partner Ian, Rana runs Hawk Dreaming Wilderness Lodge, a bush camp near the remote rock outcrop of Cannon Hill. With its safari-style tents and rustic outdoor kitchen, the camp sets out to give its guests a glimpse of outback life: there's no wi-fi or mobile signal, showers are solar-powered, and back-up electricity is supplied by a rickety generator that often gives out without warning. Rana makes all the camp food from scratch, favouring old bush recipes, and after dinner, guests sit around the campfire, swapping stories just like the settlers of old.

After an hour or two, everyone goes to bed. The generator shuts off and the camp goes dark. Stars, planets and constellations carpet the black sky overhead. Crickets chitter like static, and, once, a dingo yowls in the darkness. According to the Bininj people, night was when the spirits of the ancestors walked abroad. I wait quietly by the campfire, wondering who I might meet before the new day dawns. ☺



OLIVER BERRY travelled with support from Tourism NT. In Kakadu, he ate green ants, billygoat plums, grilled barramundi, bush apples and a witchetty grub.



Rana McChesney cooking on a campfire at Hawk Dreaming Wilderness Lodge

Facing page: Sunrise seen on a Yellow Water cruise

MAKE IT HAPPEN: KAKADU, AUSTRALIA

PLAN
NOW...
TRAVEL
WHEN IT'S
TIME!

Essentials

→ BEST TIME TO VISIT

The dry season (April/ May to September/ October) brings beautiful weather to Darwin with clear blue skies, balmy nights and warm days.

→ GETTING THERE

Vistara, Singapore Airlines, Cathay Pacific, and Air India, among others, fly frequently to **Darwin International Airport** from all major Indian cities, with a layover in Singapore (return fares from ₹55,000).

→ GETTING AROUND

You'll need to hire a car to get to Kakadu, ideally a 4WD. All the major car-hire agencies can be found at Darwin International Airport (from ₹3,000/ day). It's a 157-mile drive from Darwin to Jabiru, along the Arnhem Highway. There are only a couple of places to get fuel inside the park, so make sure you fill up before you arrive.

→ VISA

Indians travelling to Darwin will need a visitor's visa (Subclass 600 visa), which comes with a validity of 12 months. The process usually takes 15 to 25 days and will cost you around ₹7,250 (www.vfsglobal.com).

→ EMBASSY ALERT

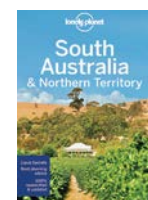
High Commission of India, Canberra, Australia: www.hciccanberra.gov.in

→ CURRENCY

1 AUD = ₹49

→ FANCY A CURRY?

Darwin Tandoor is a cosy little hidden gem for delicious home style Indian food (00-61-8-8900-7742; Shop 21/69 Mitchell St, Darwin City; 5pm – 10pm Mon – Sat; mains from ₹500).



→ FURTHER READING:

Lonely Planet's *South Australia & Northern Territory* (₹775) and *Australia* (₹975) guides have detailed information on exploring Kakadu. The websites for Kakadu National Park (www.parksaustralia.gov.au/kakadu) and Northern Territory (www.northernterritory.com) also have lots of useful information.



MAP KEY

- 1 Burrungkuy (Nourlangie)
- 2 Cahills Crossing
- 3 Gunlom Falls
- 4 Jabiru
- 5 Maguk Road
- 6 Nawurlandja
- 7 South Alligator River
- 8 Yellow Water

SLEEPING

- 9 Anbinik Resort
- 10 Cooinda Lodge
- 11 Hawk Dreaming Wilderness Lodge
- 12 Mercure Crocodile Hotel

WHERE TO STAY & EAT

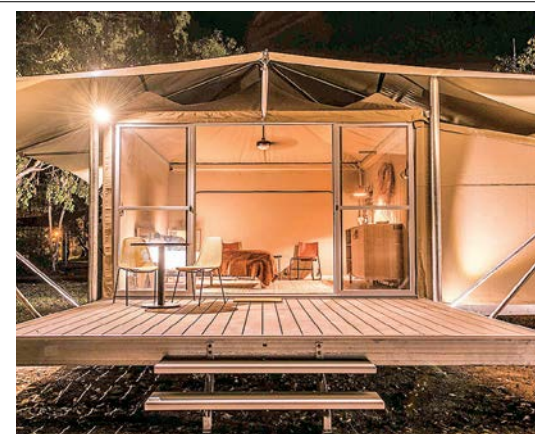


Mercure Crocodile Hotel

Located in Jabiru, this enormous, rather touristy hotel (above) is surely the only one in the world shaped like a crocodile (you have to walk through the jaws to enter the lobby). Rooms are plain and comfortable, and there's a decent restaurant on site (www.kakadutourism.com/accommodation/mercure-crocodile-hotel; from ₹7,500).

Anbinik Resort

There's something to suit everyone at this small resort just outside Jabiru: canvas-roofed bush bungalows (some with shared bathrooms), more upmarket cabins with ensuites. There are campsites at which you can park an RV. The restaurant serves Thai food like green curry, pad Thai and papaya salad (www.anbinik.com.au; bush bungalows from ₹2,650, cabins from ₹5,350).



Cooinda Lodge

This complex is 35 miles south of Jabiru. You can have a villa room or a bush-tent (above), all of which have wooden decks and local artwork. The pub and restaurant is one of the only places nearby to serve dinner, so it's lively at night. Cruises on nearby Yellow Water depart all day (www.kakadutourism.com; bush tents from ₹4,750, villas from ₹5,775).

Hawk Dreaming Wilderness Lodge

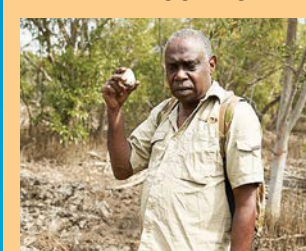
For the full outback experience, try this bush-camp on indigenous land near Cannon Hill (4WD transfers included). The tents are basic but have private loos and hot showers. Meals are served in the communal kitchen across the garden, and there are regular expeditions to see rock art and billabongs (www.kakaduculturaltours.com.au; from ₹14,000).

LEARN MORE ABOUT ABORIGINAL LIFE



The Warradjan Cultural Centre near Cooinda Lodge is one of the best places to learn about indigenous culture – from legends, lore and bushcraft to the complexities of the tribal kinship system. You can often watch displays of tribal crafts such as basket-weaving and painting (www.kakadutourism.com/trip-planning/tours-activities/warradjan-culture-centre; 9am – 5pm Mon – Sun; entry free).

BEHIND THE SCENES



I learned lots during my time with indigenous guide Victor Cooper from **Ayal Aboriginal Tours** (above). He taught me how to navigate like a bushman and the many uses of the pandanus plant, but was also something of a connoisseur when it came to bush foods. He categorised the flavour profile of the green ant as 'tasting a bit like a fresh lime' but wasn't a fan of crocodile eggs, which he described as "too rich and fishy, and not really worth the trouble of getting eaten". Sound advice. (www.ayalkakadu.com.au; half-day tour from ₹5,500/ person).

– Oliver Berry

TERMITE MOUNDS

Huge termite mounds are scattered all over Kakadu. Made of compacted mud and termite saliva and excreta, they can reach seven metres high and last up to 100 years. Kakadu's tallest can be seen along Maguk Road, in the Mary River Region.

PHOTOGRAPHS: JOE FLORIAN, COOINDA LODGE, KAKADU TOURISM

Ismail Lakdawala
cycling in Leh

OUT ON TWO WHEELS

Six cycling enthusiasts tell us how hitting the road on two wheels under their own power is such a major part of their lives. Plus: tips to inspire YOU

#GREENSTRIDES

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY ISMAIL LAKDAWALA

4002 

ISMAIL LAKDAWALA (@ismaillakdawala) loves being amid nature, travelling slow and witnessing stories. A BBA graduate from Christ University, Bangalore, he currently works full time in Rajkot, Gujarat, on a venture called XploreTheEarth.com, which he launched with his two best friends, Akshay and Saransh, to make reliable travel information easy to access.

INSPIRING YOU TO RIDE THE MANALI-LEH HIGHWAY ON YOUR FIRST BIG TRIP!

I cycled 11km to and fro to my school in Rajkot for about four years. I didn't have a bike in college, and I felt handicapped. College done, I invested in a bike and decided to make the purchase memorable by making its maiden journey one from Manali to Leh.

I cycle about six to eight hours a week. I've started using my bike to commute in the city, and I go on occasional morning rides. I'm planning more bikepacking trips in the coming weeks.

I cycle to feel the breeze on my face, to feel that power of moving a machine with my own strength, to glide through trees, on empty roads, off roads. To go wherever I want to without worrying about fuel or costs. Cycling brings calm, contentment and joy to my life. My thoughts often clear up on a ride.

My favourite bike is my first big-boy bike, the Raleigh Terrain 10. At about ₹25,000, it is the best budget buy I could find, with all the features of a beginner mountain bike and quality components. It got me through the entire Manali-Leh trip without any trouble. I didn't even have to adjust my tire pressure through the 15 days of cycling over difficult terrain!

I picked the Manali-to-Leh route because I needed a break from the ordinary. This route is one that bikepackers from across the world dream of doing. Motorbiking was too mainstream for me; bikers do in two days what we did over 12! When you live with the landscape over days, struggle to climb slopes, brace against the wind and see the darkness of the sky at night, you truly feel it.

I wanted this trip to be more than just my personal adventure. I wanted to share with people the need to travel responsibly and take care of the environment while doing it. Akshay, Saransh and I talked to travellers about travelling responsibly, we documented places along the way suffering

from over-tourism and excessive littering, we distributed garbage bags to vehicle owners, and carried a banner to remind everyone to take care of the climate.

CAN ANYONE DO IT?

Yes! It's more about mindset than physical effort. You will need to plan well, buy or rent a sturdy mountain bike, and equip yourself with spare supplies, parts and safety accessories. We broke up the 500km journey over 12 days; that's less than 50km a day with many breaks – manageable for anyone with basic or below-basic fitness. Importantly, you need to be okay with

- Disconnecting from civilisation and socialising
- Having no devices, minimum electricity, zero phone network on most days
- Sleeping in tents in the open or in *dhabas* on the highway
- Having few or no lavatory facilities (most places will have a makeshift pit or a rough cabin; if you get freezing water in a bucket, you will count yourself lucky). Expect almost no showers on the road
- Bracing yourself against rain, hail, snow, winds and cold.

You feel the weather most on a bicycle.

TOP TIPS

Take your time. Pros do the route in six days; we took 12 – it made the journey less stressful and more fun.

Pack light, then remove half of what you've packed. We carried 12 to 15kg; we should have taken six to eight kilos (our packing list is online).

Acclimatise in Manali for at least three days before the trip. Take short bike rides around Manali to avoid Acute Mountain Sickness. There is barely any civilisation on the route to get medical help. Carry Diamox and consult your doctor if you need to.

Learn to navigate thoroughly. Keep offline maps and a mapped-out document ready; plot out your route, the places you plan to stay and eat, backups (detailed itinerary on our website). The locals are honest and helpful. The route is popular, so someone *will* help you.

Plan to go in July and August; this is the ideal and probably the only time you should take this trip.

HIGH POINTS

- First snowfall when cycling towards Baralacha La Pass
- Watching the Dalai Lama pass by at Debring
- Going downhill for almost 60km straight from Taglang La Pass till Upshi, through the maroon mountains of Hemis right by the river

JOHANN DANIELS (@bombay.adventurer) is founder of Jack & Hill Adventures, and passionate about the great outdoors. He's thrilled to be able to make a living by sharing this passion with others. His Cycling the Adventurous islands of Mumbai trip is very popular.

ENABLING YOU TO GO ON A SMALL-GROUP RIDE

Even as a child growing up in Borivali, Mumbai, I cycled a lot more than most of my childhood friends; I used to venture out to explore the nearby mangrove area or ride around the suburb. I stopped cycling when I got into junior college.

Then, in February 2010, I attended Mumbai's first cyclothon. I came across a massive cyclist community I hadn't known existed, most from Bandra, Dadar, South Mumbai. I was the only 19-year-old boy from Borivali, and I was totally enamoured. The existence of this community gave me more energy to pursue my love for cycling. The highlight was the social side of cycling. I started riding from Borivali to South Mumbai to ride with the others once a week. Those were fun times.

I didn't want to have to ride all the way to Bandra or Dadar to hang out with bicycle-loving folk, so I started the Borivali Cyclists Association (BCA) in 2010. I'd organise and lead rides every Sunday with the prime focus on building a community in which cyclists could meet and ride together. Cyclists from Goregaon and Mira Road would join us. We started with four to five riders and, now, the community is 2,000+ members strong.

I cycle for a variety of reasons. The idea of gliding along a scenic road completely self-powered on my bike feels so gratifying. It definitely brings a sense of liberation and independence. I've learnt to see life passing by at a much slower pace. Cycling has taken me to so many places I wouldn't have explored otherwise. Cycling also keeps me in shape and my health in check. I don't need to visit a doctor to find out if my health or fitness has deteriorated; one ride on my bicycle will tell me that.

I have one mountain bike and one road bike. Both are entry-level imported bikes and both have their separate joys. The mountain bike (Mongoose TYAX Comp; ₹ 30,000) lets me jump over things and go wild on off-road paths, which triggers an adrenaline rush, while my road bike (Scott Speedster 60; ₹42,000) lets me push my fitness goals where I focus on speed, consistency and endurance on tarmac roads.

The Cycling the Adventurous islands of Mumbai ride allows you to see Mumbai in a whole new light. I recommend it for people who would like to escape the chaos and pollution of big-city life and scoot away for a few hours to breathe some fresh air and see nature at its simple best. Mumbai offers a lot of adventure, and much of it is in this hidden scenic portion of the city. The ride begins on roads enveloped by widespread mangroves that soon lead you to a majestic coastline. We explore

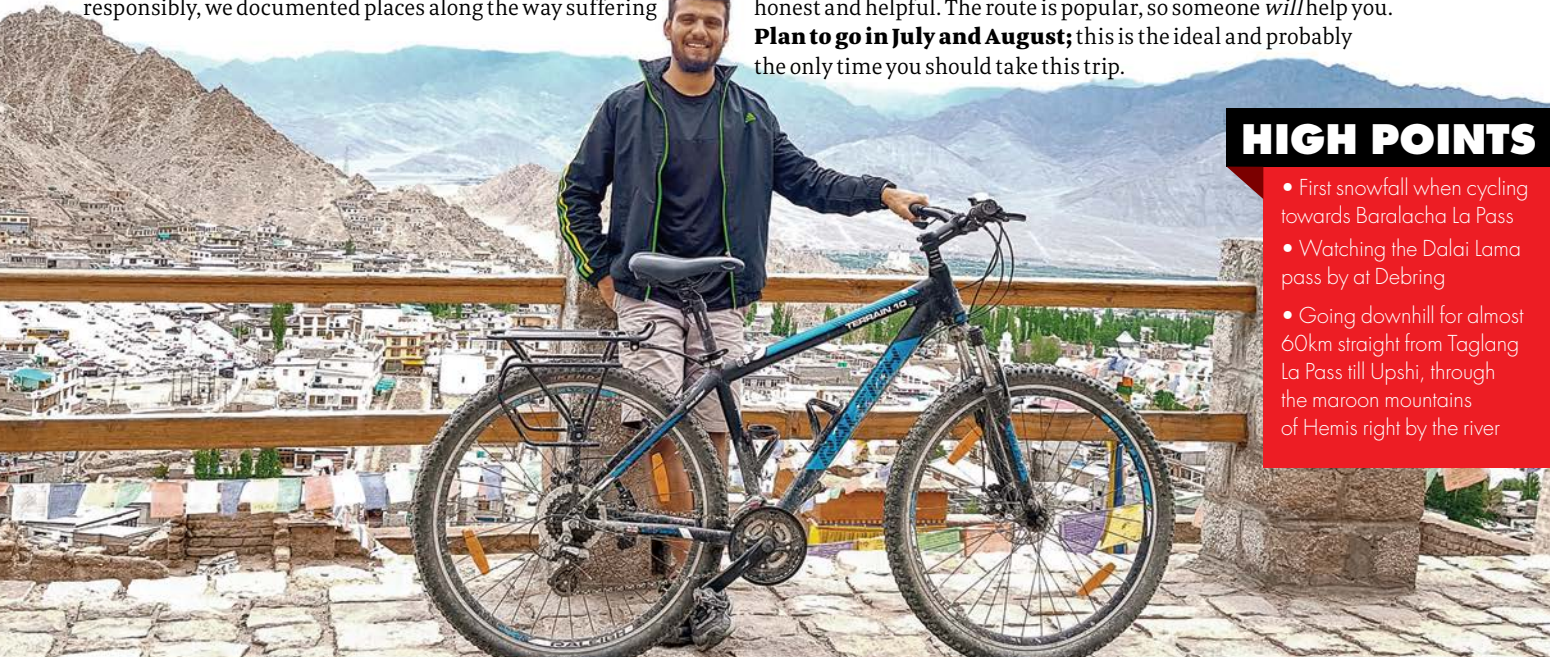
parts of this coastal area that most people are totally unaware of, places that make you wonder whether you are still in the city. We pass quaint fishing villages that remind you of Goa, and explore hill tops that offer panoramic views of the sea. The ride has two segments: on tarmac and off-road. The off-road Mountain biking bit is where things get adventurous as we make our way through forest trails; the tarmac segment tests your endurance as you ride from vantage point to vantage point in the coastal belt. Before the ride ends, we also make a quick visit to the Global Vipassana Pagoda, one of the largest meditation halls in the world.

I have found great joy in hosting these rides. Over the five years I have hosted guests on this ride, I have seen how spirit matters: even if the cyclist is not as fit as they thought they were, but is mentally strong, they can ace the ride. My guests build an enviable camaraderie among themselves over just a few hours of riding. As the ride progresses, the bond within the group gets stronger; everyone looks out for one another. And I love watching people's reactions. I have specific spots that I know people react heavily at. I'm always looking forward to seeing their expressions whenever we reach a beautiful spot. They are usually shocked that beautiful places like these exist so close to home.

CAN ANYONE DO IT?

This ride is 30km long, and you need a basic level of fitness to join this ride. If you pursue a cardio-intensive activity at least once a week, you're good to go. Be honest with the team about your physical and mental fitness when they get on a call with you before the ride. Safety is a key concern; adhere strictly to safety protocols during the ride. Bring along an awesome morning attitude, two litres of water, and a helmet. If you require a helmet, request one to be brought for you. You can bring your own bike and join the ride, too. It doesn't matter if it is geared or not, or if it has any other features. What matters is that it has two wheels, two pedals and that *you* can ride it. →

Cycling the Adventurous islands of Mumbai ride: This is a small-group ride, with just five to eight riders. Sign up soon if you are interested in joining (www.jackandhilladventures.com [or DM on Instagram at @jackandhilladventures]; every first Sunday of the month, excluding the warmer periods of March, April, May and June; from ₹2,500/person).



THE GREAT OUTDOORS CYCLING IN INDIA

CHINMAY KEWALRAMANI (@chinonwheels) is a Pune-based, 19-year-old competitive road cyclist who represents Maharashtra at the national level. He is also a student and entrepreneur.

INSPIRING YOU TO GO INTO COMPETITIVE CYCLING

I was toast after my first long ride. I was looking for a store to service my bicycle, and I found one that was organising a 20km ride that I thought would be fun. At the end, I was exhausted, but it gave me such a feeling of being free. It was then that I decided to try competitive cycling. One thing led to another, and I found my first coach, Chaitanya Velhal, who worked over three years to develop me as an athlete. I currently train under our time trial national champion, Naveen John.

I cycle about 12 to 16 hours a week, but it varies. On really long weeks, that might go up to 20 hours of riding time.

I love the bikes I currently own: my road race bike is a Merida Reacto DA LTD, and my time trial bike is an Argon 18 E117.

There's a thrill racing bicycles gives you. Win or lose, it's just so much fun. This sport has taken me to so many different and incredible places, so, for me, it's not just the racing part that is fun, it's also everything that surrounds it.

Road racing and time trialling are the two most common disciplines in competitive road cycling. Road racing involves a bunch of people starting together; whoever reaches the finish line first is the winner. Time trialling has individual riders heading out on a course; whoever clocks the least amount of time on the course is the winner. The results of both of these depend largely on the course (flat, hilly, etc), because every rider has a different capability and specialisation.

The pros of competitive racing are many: It isn't limited to a field or track; it's on the open road, which makes it so incredible. Cycling hasn't just shaped me as an athlete, but also as a human. There are so many qualities in cycling that get transferred into your daily life, making you a healthier person, both physically and mentally. Apart from the cost, I can't think of any cons.

CAN ANYONE DO IT?

Get a feel for the racing experience by registering for the community races happening in different parts of the country. If you'd like to take this sport seriously, you will need a coach to guide you with a structured training plan, mentoring, and so much more. From the performance point of view, once you get your nutrition, rest and recovery, and training in place, everything will start heading in the right direction. Your biggest expense is going to be your bicycle; a good one with racing specifications would start at ₹1,00,000, and go upto 12 lakhs. Other expenses would include nutrition and supplementation (upto ₹7,000 a month), and travel and stay for outstation races.

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

You must LOVE riding your bike. It seems silly to say, but, if that is not there, you're not likely to have a lot of success in the sport. **Nutrition and rest are very important.** You can never out-exercise a bad diet, and you become stronger when you recover. **Structure is key.** Going out every day and riding for as long as you can as fast as you can is a recipe for disaster. You need a structured training plan that encapsulates different aspects of the sport. **Patience is everything.** One cannot enter the sport of cycling and expect results to come straight away. It's a long road of hard work to winning races. The learning and improvement curve is very gradual, but the more you work, the more rewarding the result!

I was truly exposed to cycling in Ladakh; it gave me freedom from all stress and I found inner peace. Reaching the world's highest motorable road, Khardungla Pass (18600+ft), on a cycle was like a dream come true, an achievement I truly cherish. This was just the beginning of a new phase in my life. From then on, the urge to cycle continued to grow. I went from regular short night rides within the city to longer weekend rides; I participated in many events. With each ride, I am constantly surprised at how my passion for cycling seems to grow.

I upped my cycling experience. Although I had been leisure cycling for a couple of years and taking part in various endurance events, I decided to get professional guidance two years ago. That's when I got into training with Nigel Smith, my cycling coach. With his expertise and constant guidance, I do regular strength training and run to keep strong for cycling.

Serious cycling takes commitment. To be a consistent and strong racer, you have to work both on and off the bike. I train regularly at a local gym, concentrating on injury prevention, strength and cardio. I am very interested in the science, methods and nutrition aspect of my training.

I ride Mumbai's roads every morning for approximately 60km to 70km on weekdays; the rides get longer – 100km to 120km – on weekends.

I love riding in the city, because, even though the roads are the same, every day, you will be surprised by different elements.

I ride with a few riders; we call ourselves #espressoXpress. Like-minded and passionate about cycling, we encourage and push each other to do better every time.

I totally love my bikes! In the city, I use my Scott Addict road bike, and, on mountains and in the rains, I ride the Scott Aspect.

CAN ANYONE DO THIS?

Everyone should try! Cycling will be an unbelievably life-changing experience. It effortlessly keeps you fit, and it allows you to explore roads and places like no other mode of transport can. It gives you a sense of freedom, but it will also teach you to balance your life the way you balance yourself on those wheels. And the best thing: all you need is a cycle and your own pedal power to go wherever you wish to go, without paying for fuel or tolls. Take it from me: once you start cycling, you will never stop smiling. →

HITISHA MEHTA (@hitishamehta) is a Mumbai-based interior designer by profession and a cyclist by passion. To her, cycling is about meditation, dedication and a balanced lifestyle.

INSPIRING YOU TO EXPLORE YOUR CITY AND THEN HIT THE BIG LEAGUES



THE GREAT OUTDOORS CYCLING IN INDIA

SU YIN KALIA-ONG (@@suyin.syko) is an ex-offshore geophysicist-turned-pastry chef with a longing for the great outdoors, which has prompted her to trek up mountains, get into road cycling and underwater scuba diving, and also to race in triathlons around the world. When not whipping up delectable desserts, she and her husband run a chain of scuba-diving centres @DIVEIndia in the Andaman Islands, and other major cities in India. She lives in Chennai and won her age group in the Half Ironman 2019 in Goa.

INSPIRING YOU TO BE A TRIATHLETE!

I got into cycling when my then-boyfriend (now husband) suggested we cycle on the French Alps in 2014. In preparation for this ambitious trip, I had gotten a basic road bike and ridden it no more than five times before I tackled the notorious Alpe d'Huez, one of the stages in the Tour de France. The route consists of 21 switchbacks (fondly also nicknamed 21 Bends), with an elevation gain of 1135m, on a short, but extremely brutal distance of 13.8km! It was torture for a newbie like me, but the thrill of conquering the summit, and the exhilarating descent got me hooked. Being propelled into road cycling in France, a country so passionate for and respectful (cars are required to give cyclists 1.5m of space when passing) of the sport also intrigued me and encouraged me to dig deeper.

Cycling started out as a fun way to explore a country, but, when I joined a group of passionate cyclists on a cycling trip in southern Italy, I got extremely frustrated when I could not keep up with their pace. This prompted me to train harder. The good news is: cycling rewards hard work. The more time and effort you spend on cycling, the greater the gains you reap. I have seen substantial improvements in my riding since the first time I picked up a road bike (and struggled to change gears to suit the terrain!). These days, I ride very regularly as part of my training, between three to five times a week, on top of other disciplines (running, swimming, weights, and yoga).

Cycling is also a social sport. The cycling community is a friendly and enthusiastic bunch, all only too eager to get on their bikes and explore cycling



The bulk of an Ironman event is in the bike segment. Typically, one spends half the total time to complete an Ironman in cycling. Thus, a drastic improvement in cycling fitness can greatly reduce overall race timing. Someone famously referred to the Ironman race as a warm-up swim, a bike race, and a jog at the end.

One of my great rides was the fifth time on a road bike up the legendary Alpe d'Huez. For a beginner, the ride to the peak was daunting, I surprised myself by being able to finish it. This ride is one of my fondest memories and greatest achievements. Another great ride was in Bhutan. We were riding in Thimphu at an elevation of over 2,000m, oxygen levels were low, and any effort seemed to take every ounce of willpower, but the views of Alpine forests, imposing mountain ranges and raging rivers were majestic. And I will always remember riding around Lake Kawaguchi-ko, at the base of Mount Fuji, with rows of pale pink sakura blossom trees lining the roads.

CAN ANYONE DO THIS?

Short answer: YES! Cycling is rapidly gaining popularity as it is accessible to everyone. Start with a basic bike and pick up road riding skills. Reach out to the cycling community; it is usually very welcoming! Ride regularly with fellow enthusiasts – it will make you a better rider, both physically and mentally. Literally, go out on the road and ride – you'll be surprised to learn of many beautiful trails around where you live! If you live in the city, driving out of the city and then riding is also an option. Alternatively, head out early and beat the traffic; it makes for a much more pleasant experience. →

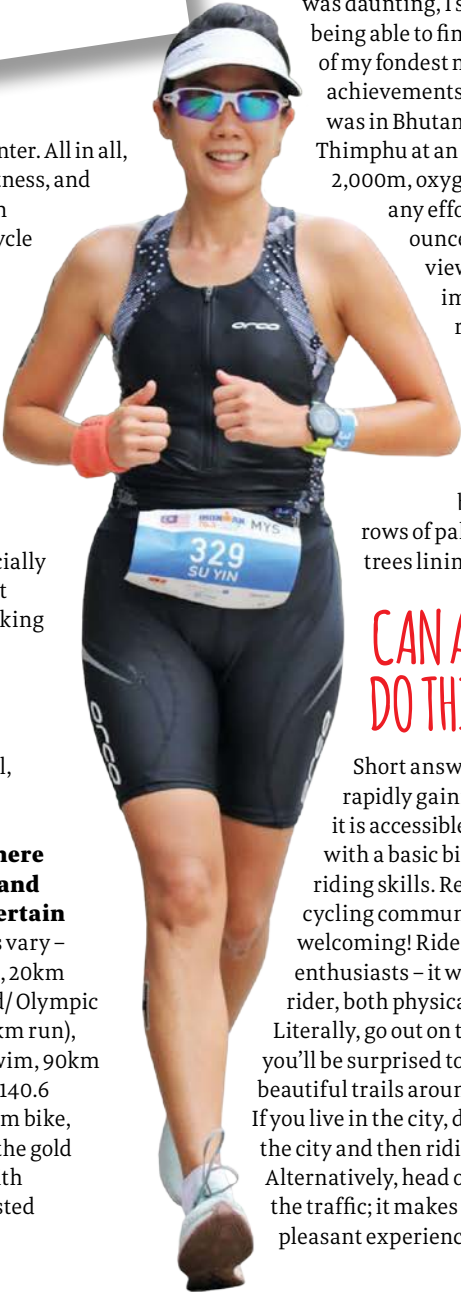
TOP TIPS

- Always be safe and visible if riding on the roads. Wear bright clothing and ensure you install front and rear lights on the bike.
- Ride predictably and responsibly on the roads. If deciding to make a turn, signal with your hands and check that the road is clear before proceeding.
- If riding in a group, do practise group riding etiquettes; ie do not brake suddenly in a paceline; warn others of potholes, obstacles; ride predictably and do not make sudden veering movements – this can endanger other cyclists in the group.
- Plan your ride and be prepared for it. If doing a long endurance ride, be sure to have enough nutrition and hydration for the entire duration. The last thing you want is to bonk and have someone rescue you! Always carry an extra tube and a portable air pump in case of a puncture.
- Be positive! The ride might be hard, the route a relentless climb, and the body battered with pain and fatigue, but, with a strong mind, the goal is within reach.

routes, while exchanging banter. All in all, it is a great way to improve fitness, and has a relatively low impact on your joints (provided the bicycle geometry fits you well!).

My dream bike is without a doubt, the Cervélo P5X, a time trial (TT) bike, a wickedly mean machine that looks like a futuristic time machine (so fast you could time travel!). TT bikes have always captivated me, especially the research and testing that goes into every aspect of making the bikes and wheels as aerodynamic as possible. It is still a dream bike, as the price tag is a whopping ₹8,00,000 to ₹11,00,000. Still, one can fantasise!

A triathlon is an event where participants swim, bike and run consecutively over certain distances. These distances vary – from the Sprint (750m swim, 20km bike, 5km run) and Standard/Olympic (1.5km swim, 40km bike, 10km run), Half/70.3 Ironman (1.9km swim, 90km bike, 21km run), to the Full/140.6 Ironman (3.8km swim, 180km bike, 42km run). The Ironman is the gold standard of the triathlon, with the 70.3 and 140.6 events hosted all over the world.



PHOTOGRAPH: VANDIT KALIA

PHOTOGRAPH: TERENCE MONIZ / CYCLING

GRINSHINA KARTIK (@grinshina) is a Bangalore-based engineer and a former senior project manager with a top technology company. She is now a yoga trainer-turned-endurance cyclist. She completed her first 100k in 2017, and her first successful brevet in November 2018.

INSPIRING YOU TO RIDE INTO
ENDURANCE CYCLING

Cycling was initially an escape from all the concrete around us. A friend who attended my yoga class introduced me to cycling in 2015. We became a small group of working professionals who'd set out on a two-hour early-morning ride every weekend, just agenda-less exploring. I try hard to cultivate that agendaless riding.

Cycling sets me free. I love the conversations I have with myself while riding, the breakdown of fear and negativity that happens. I'm always blown away by how far my body and mind takes me. I'm no more the scared woman who would not dare to ride alone outside the comfort zone of where I live. No matter what the end result is, each ride makes me feel invincible.

Each ride brings me closer to the person I truly am. Going from being a high-strung type A who wanted to control everything to being able to let go, to allow things to happen by chance has been a fascinating journey.

My favourite bike currently is Miles, my endurance bike, a Cannondale Synapse Alloy Shimano 105 Groupset (₹80,000). Miles has taken me on 16,000 kilometres of pure adventure.

Randonneuring is a long-distance cycling sport in which riders attempt courses of 200km or more. A brevet is a timed, long-distance road cycling event. For a randonneur, a typical brevet ride starts with a properly set-up bike with your rider number displayed prominently. Safety first, so you wear a helmet and reflective vest, and check that your front and back lights are working and bright. The bike is checked at the start by the organisers. If all is okay, you are handed the all-important brevet card, which has critical information about the ride control points (see below). This card needs to be with the rider at all times, and must be submitted at the end in proper condition. No brevet card, no ride.

There are different cut-off times for various distances: 13.5 hours to finish a 200km ride, 20 hours for 300km, 27 hours for 400km, 40 hours for 600km, 90 hours for 1,200km, and so on. There are intermediate check points along the route called "controls", which might or might not be manned by the organisers. Each control is opened and closed during a certain period of time. The randonneur is expected to be there within the cut-off time. At unmanned control points, a selfie time stamp is taken as proof of passing through.

Riders must support themselves with food, nutrition and hydration. They are expected to be self-reliant on the bike – fixing punctures and handling other bike issues. Help from other riders in the brevet is okay, but no external support

TOP TIPS

- **Build core strength.** Include a good strengthening and stretching routine for your muscles if you want to recover quickly and keep coming back.
- **Tune into your body to understand your hydration needs.** An electrolyte imbalance can show up as swollen fingers, or body parts. Overhydration with low sodium will result in a dangerous condition called hyponatremia. For every sip of water, take a sip from your electrolyte bottle. I don't use fancy gels and electrolyte products, just table salt.
- **Understand your nutrition needs.** Feeling dizzy and tired could be because of low sugar. Eating sugars and easily digestible carbs is good if you are gunning for speed. Meat and eggs are great; proteins keep you full for longer.
- **No climb is more important than your life.** Randonneuring is not a race or a competitive sport; take your time and do it safely. I never push myself when my heart rate spikes up – I get off the bike and push it.

is allowed. You must make it through all controls within the specified time limits and collect stamps on your brevet card at manned CPs, as if you're in a game. At the end control, you are celebrated like a superhuman – if you make it in time!

I ride with the Bangalore Randonneurs, a close-knit community of around 200 cyclists and counting. Our main organiser Mohan Subramaniam has been instrumental in shaping us as endurance athletes. Some of the toughest rides in India are designed and executed in and around the city. It's great being part of a group of people who think riding long distances is fun.

My first successful brevet was a 600km ride in Ranebennur, Karnataka, in November 2018. I signed up for it without finishing even a 200km ride on time! Before the ride, I had taken months to recover from a sickness that was the most painful in my adult life. I had been literally bedridden, and I was desperate to go out and ride. I had had a late finish on the Anchetty 200km earlier that year, and I had to see if I could still ride. I rode comfortably through the night with an amazing group of riders; at the 400km mark, I was not tired or sleepy, just curious and excited to see if I could make it. The last 200km was challenging, with rain and Bangalore's night traffic. I rode with someone I've never met before; we became supportive teammates, pushing through, completely drenched, to reach a half-hour before end control closed. When your first successful brevet is a tough 600km, you've broken down the challenge not just for yourself but others too.

CAN ANYONE DO IT?

Yes, anyone at any age can get into endurance cycling. You will need to build a good foundation of mileage; it's called base building. After that, once you can do a few 100km rides comfortably and a couple of 125km+ rides, you are ready for randonneuring. ¹⁰

CATCH MORE RIDERS IN OUR JOURNAL SECTION



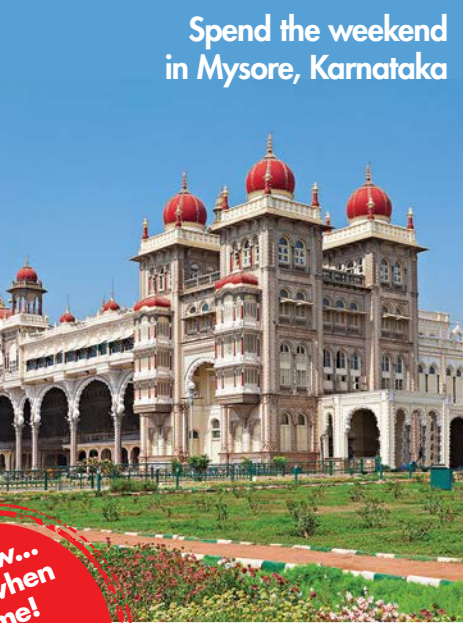
APRIL 2020

Mini Guides

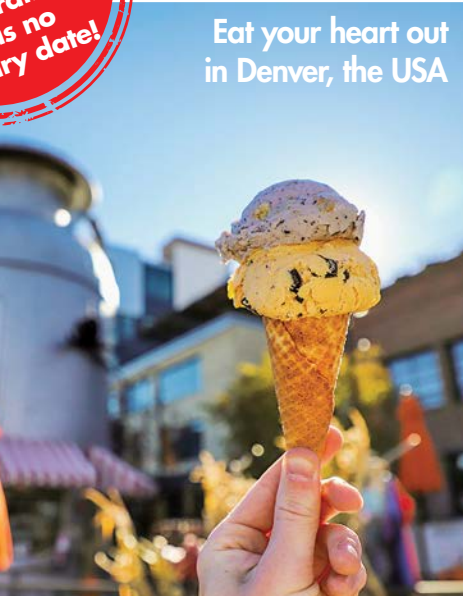


Shop till you drop in Marrakesh, Morocco

Plan now... Travel when it's time! Inspiration has no expiry date!



Spend the weekend in Mysore, Karnataka



Eat your heart out in Denver, the USA

FROM YOUR MAGAZINE TO YOUR POCKET...



1 **TEAR** the guide out along the perforations...



2 **FOLD** the guide along the first dotted lines...



3 **FOLD** again to make a handy, pocket-size guide.

Send us your recommendations!

Tell us which city you would like a Mini Guide for at lpmagazine@wvm.co.in and it could appear in our next issues

Bhutan

The number ONE country
to visit in 2020



Lonely Planet's Best in Travel 2020 presents Bhutan as the number one country to visit due to its rich culture and tradition, festivals, and sustainable practices. Bhutan has a vision to become the first fully organic nation and has already become the only carbon negative nation in the world.

Available at all leading bookshops, online stores

Distributed by HarperCollins Publishers India



MINI GUIDE **APRIL 2020**

SHOPPING IN MARRAKESH, MOROCCO

FASHION

MAX & JAN ①

Brace yourself for the future of Marrakesh: a Belgian-Swiss design duo has taken over multiple premises to create this giant temple to contemporary Moroccan design. One side is all about quirky jewellery, colour-pop ceramics, posters and cheeky slogan T-shirts, while the other features jazzy kaftans and embellished jackets (00-21-25243-36406; www.maxandjan.com; 14, Rue Amsefah, Sidi Abdelaziz, Route Sidi Abdelaziz; 9am – 11pm).

SISSI MOROCCO ②

This Marrakesh brand has taken old sepia photos of Amazigh tribal women and incorporated them into hand-embroidered and printed bolster cushions, tote bags, purses and T-shirts. Quality is top notch. The main boutique is in Sidi Ghanem, but the branch in Rahba Kedima is more conveniently located (00-21-26152-26520; www.sissimorocco.com; 9am – 6pm Mon – Fri).



Be sure to take back a kaftan or two

33 RUE MAJORELLE ③

More than 60 designers, mostly from Morocco, are represented in this two-floor emporium, and co-owner Yehia Abdelnour is dedicated to sourcing local talent. Quality is high and so can the prices be, but it's still easy to find lovely threads for less. Star buys include silk harem pants, cotton children's smocks and billowing kaftans. There's also a small menswear corner (00-21-25243-14195; www.33ruemajorelle.com; 33, Rue Yves St Laurent; 9.30am – 7pm).

WELLNESS

L'ART DU BAIN SAVONNERIE ARTISANALE ④

Art du Bain's biodegradable, pure olive oil soaps carry the scent of Marrakesh in them: honey, orange blossom, jasmine, eucalyptus – there's even a chamomile milk version for children – plus scrubs and ghassoul clay for the hammam (00-21-26684-45942; www.artdubain.fr; El Badine souk shop).

LES SENS DE MARRAKECH ⑤

A brand that prides itself on ethical practices and promoting the work of Moroccan craftsmen, Les Sens de Marrakech's products range from bath and body products, to skincare and perfumes. Made from locally-sourced ingredients, this brand is truly as conscious as it gets, allowing you to opt for refills for certain products as opposed to having to buy a new bottle. Talk about a win-win (00-21-25243-36991; www.lessensdemarrakech.fr; multiple locations; 8.30am – 6pm).



Ghassoul clay makes a great souvenir

Mon – Fri, 8.30am – 4pm Sat).

NATUROM ⑥

Naturom's neatly-packaged and keenly-priced argan, verbena and orange-blossom beauty products are all 100% certified organic, using pure essences and essential oils to ensure everything is hypo-allergenic. The range includes anti-ageing prickly pear oil and hammam gommage (exfoliating scrub) (00-21-25243-83784; www.naturom.business.site; 213, Riad Zitoune Jdid; 9am – 8pm).

TURN OVER FOR MAP AND NUMBER LOCATIONS

Fold 2

IN MARRAKESH, LIFE IS A PERFORMANCE, BUT, MORE THAN THAT, IT'S A MAGICAL EVOCATION OF AN ARABIAN NIGHTS-STYLE CITY OF INTRIGUING SCENTS, ANCIENT CRIES OF COMMERCE, AND ELEGANT ARCHITECTURE FROM THE GOLDEN ERA OF ISLAMIC CIVILISATION.

WHY GO?

To indulge in some retail therapy

WHAT IS THERE TO DO?

Check out fun designs at Max & Jan, stock up on Moroccan skincare essentials, and give yourself a makeover while you're at it

Left: Modern Moroccan design at Max & Jan

Right: The quaint sunken gardens of the Badi Palace provide respite after a long day out shopping

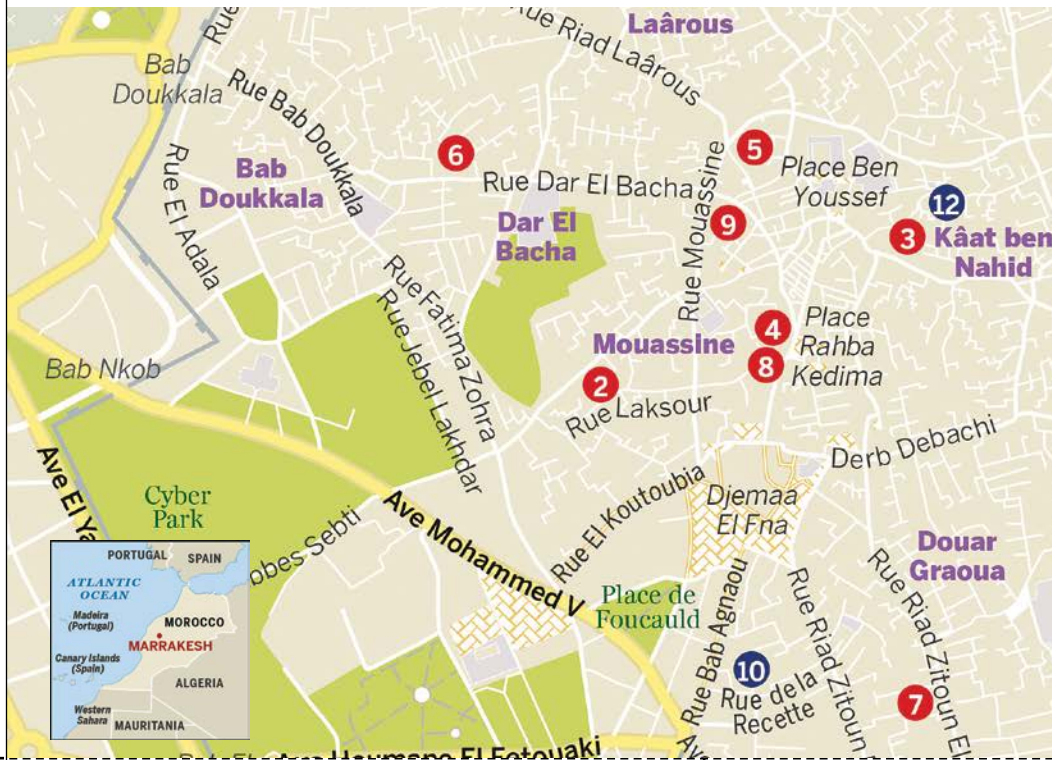


Fold 1

MINI GUIDE
Shopping in Marrakesh, Morocco

GETTING AROUND

👁 See 🍴 Eat & drink 🛌 Sleep



ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE

Qatar Airways, KLM, Etihad and British Airways, among others, fly frequently to **Marrakech Menara Airport** from all major Indian metros (return fares from ₹39,300).

THE COST



DIFFICULTY OF TRAVEL



WHEN TO GO

The best times to visit Marrakech is from March to May and from September to November. However, make sure you check COVID-19 advisories before travelling.

SOUVENIRS

SOUQ CHERIFIA 7

Short-circuit souq fatigue and head straight for this converted *funduq* (inn used by caravans) where younger local designers congregate on the first floor in the Carré Créateurs (Artisan Sq). Pick up hand-embroidered hessian accessories from Khmissa, snazzy Berber-design *babouches* (leather slippers) from Tilila, and top-quality *amlou* (argan-nut butter) and beauty products at Arganino – be sure to stock up on souvenirs and then some (00-21-26617-05993; DS Abdelaziz, Souq Kchachbia; 10.30am – 7.30pm).

MUSTAPHA BLAQUI 8

Treasure hunters rejoice: lanterns drip from the ceilings of this grand emporium of well-made homewares. Concealed behind an inconspicuous wooden door with no sign, the large space offers a relaxed shopping experience (00-21-25243-85240;



Stock up on amlou at Arganino

www.mustaphablaoui.com; Arset Aouzal Rd).

ANAMIL 9

If you're looking for a unique Moroccan woollen rug or high-quality local souvenirs, Abdess Anamil can help. His small shop is crammed with beautiful things, some cherry-picked from workshops and antiques shops, while the dishwasher-safe ceramics and textiles are his own designs. Good shipping rates are available (48, Derb Sidi Ishak, Rue Azbezi).

SLEEP

For air of calm and grace with clean-as-a-whistle rooms, stay at **Le Gallia** 10 (00-21-25244-45913; www.hotellegallia.com; Recette Riad El Mokha, 30, Rue de La Kasbah; from ₹3,600).

Besides having one of the most romantic garden courtyards in the medina, **Rias Berbere** 11 also has great service (00-21-26512-84473; www.leriadberbere.com; info@riadberbere.com; 23, Derb Sidi Ahmed Ben Nasser Kaat Benahid; from ₹8,300).

The restoration of this 200-year-old mansion, **Riad Azoulay** 10, was a labour of love for Italian owner Sandro. Meals mix Moroccan and Italian influences (00-21-25243-83729; www.riad-azoulay.com; info@riad-azoulay.com; 3, Derb Jamaa El Kbir, Hay Essalam; from ₹11,220).

EMBASSY ALERT

Embassy of India, Rabat, Morocco
www.indianembassyrabat.gov.in



Les Jardins de Bala offers a mix of Indian and pan-Asian dishes

FANCY A CURRY?

Les Jardins de Bala has great food at a reasonable price, complete with a view of a mosque (00-21-25243-88800; www.lesjardinsdelakoutoubia.com; commercial@jardinskoutoubia.com; Rue Koutoubia; 12pm – 3.30pm, 7pm – 10.30pm; mains from ₹900).

VISA

A single-entry visa to Morocco takes approximately eight to 10 days to process (www.ma.ckgs.in; ₹2,320).

For more details, log on to www.lonelyplanet.com

WITH CONTRIBUTIONS FROM JESSICA LEE AND AISHWARYA MENON. PHOTOGRAPH: MARC VAN WAEK, AUBRIAN O'ROURKE, BERNA NAMOGU, LUISA PUCCINI PHOTOREE / 123RF. PHOTOS ARE FOR REPRESENTATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY. CURRENCY AT THE TIME OF GOING TO PRINT: 1 MOROCCAN DIRHAM = ₹5.7

Tear out page here then fold along the dotted lines



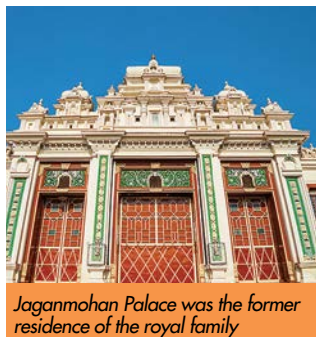
MINI GUIDE APRIL 2020

WEEKEND IN
MYSORE,
KARNATAKA

CULTURE

MYSURU PALACE 1

The royal Mysuru Palace, or Maharaja's Palace, has luxurious interiors complete with frescoes and also houses some of Raja Ravi Varma's paintings. Designed by Henry Irwin, the palace boasts Indo-Saracenic architecture, seamlessly combining Rajput, Muslim and Gothic aesthetics (00-91-82-1242-1051; www.mysorepalace.gov.in; dd@mysorepalace.gov.in; Sayyaji Rao Rd, Aghahara, Chamrajnagar; 10am – 5.30pm daily; ₹40 adult).



Jaganmohan Palace was the former residence of the royal family

₹15 adult, ₹10 child).

JAYACHAMARAJENDRA
ART GALLERY 3

Located in the Jaganmohan Palace, the Jayachamarajendra Art Gallery was named in honour of Sri Jaya Chamarajendra Wodeyar Bahadur, the 25th maharaja of Mysore. It currently houses rare musical instruments and traditional Mysore gold-leaf paintings (00-91-82-1242-3693; Deshika Rd, opp City Bus Stand, Devaraja Mohalla, Chamrajnagar; 8.30am – 5.30pm; ₹20 adult, ₹10 child).

THE RAIL MUSEUM 2

Established in 1979 by the Indian Railways, Mysore's Rail Museum has a rich collection of photographs and two royal locomotives on display. The 'Rail Story' exhibit tells of how the royals rode the railways in the past. The main attraction is the Maharani's saloon, built in 1899 (00-91-82-1286-6955; KRS Rd, opp CFTRI, Medar Block, Yadavagiri; 9.30am – 5.30pm Tues – Sun;

Fold 2

THE FORMER WODEYAR KINGDOM IS HOME TO FANTASTIC EATS, RICH HISTORY AND VIBRANT WILDLIFE, MAKING IT JUST THE PLACE TO ESCAPE TO OVER THE WEEKEND.

WHY GO?

To treat yourself to a simple, fuss-free getaway

WHAT IS THERE TO DO?

Learn about Mysore's rich history, check out its abundant wildlife, and treat yourself to copious amounts of Mysore pak.



Left: The outer façade of the Mysuru Palace

Right: A trip to Mysore is incomplete without stocking up on Mysore pak, the sweet that shares its name with the city

OUTDOORS

CHAMUNDI HILLS 4

Located 13km away from the city, Chamundi Hills towers over Mysore. Take the time to visit the Chamundeshwari Temple – dedicated to Goddess Chamundeshwari, the deity of the Mysore royal family. Driving is the best way to get to the hills, but you can also opt for the Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) buses, which run regularly throughout the day.



Visit the giant stone bull at Chamundi Hills

SRI CHAMARAJENDRA
ZOOLOGICAL GARDEN 5

Swing by to check out some of Mysore's most interesting residents – tigers, lions, jaguars, leopards, sloth bears, wallabies and more. The zoo also has an adoption programme, which allows you to "adopt" an animal by contributing towards feeding them for a year or a selected period (00-91-82-1252-0302; www.mysorezoo.info; zoomysore@gmail.com; Zoo Main Rd, Indira Nagar, Ittige Gudu; 8.30am – 5.30pm; ₹80 adult, ₹40 child [5 – 12 years]).

RANGANATHITTU BIRD
SANCTUARY 6

Located 19km away from Mysore, the Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary is a great place for bird watching. The best time to see the storks, spoonbills, cormorants, egrets and ibises is either early in the morning or late afternoon. Also look for crocodiles here (00-94-3501-5419; near Brindavan gardens, Krishnarajasagar Dam Rd, Mandya; 9am – 6pm; entry: ₹50 adult, ₹25 child).

TURN OVER FOR MAP AND NUMBER LOCATIONS

MINI GUIDE
Weekend in Mysore, Karnataka

GETTING AROUND



ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE
Air Asia, SpiceJet, GoAir and IndiGo, among other, fly directly to Bangalore's **Kempegowda International Airport** from all major Indian metros. From there, you can opt for a bus, taxi or a train to Mysore (143km) (return fares from ₹3,200).



WHEN TO GO
October to February – when the weather is pleasant – is the best time to visit the city.

FOOD

ORIGINAL VINAYAKA MYLARI 7
The no-fuss food at Original Vinayaka Mylari makes up for its lack of space and ambience. Get the *benne masala dosa*, topped with a dollop of butter (*benne*) and thank us later (00-91-94-4860-8710; Shop No, 79, Nazarbad Main Rd, near Police Station, Doora; 6am – 1.30pm, 3pm – 9pm, Wed closed; dosa from ₹50).



The Mysore dosa is thicker and features a coarser masala

GURU SWEETS MART 8
Mysore pak, a combination of gram flour, ghee, sugar and love, is a crowd favourite across the country. Sink your teeth into the best the city has to offer at Guru Sweets Mart, which is over 75 years old. It's run by the great grandsons of Kakasura Madappa, the royal chef credited with creating this sweet dish, and you know you're in for a treat here (00-91-82-1244-3495; 1743, Sayyaji Rao Rd, Devaraja Mohalla, Yadavagiri; 8am – 10.30pm Sun – Mon, 8am – 3pm Tues,

8am – 10.30pm Wed – Sat).
JAI BHUVANESWARI MILITARY HOTEL 9
Although it's not exactly centrally located, the food here is worth the drive. The restaurant has a large fan following, which includes Kannada movie stars too. Get the mutton chops and *bheja fry* with *ragi mudde* – millet balls (00-91-91-0806-7774; near HP Petrol Bunk, T Narasipura – Sriangapatna Rd, Baburayanakoppal; 8am – 11pm).

SLEEP

Originally built as a residence for British visitors of the Maharaja in 1920, **the Royal Orchid Metropole 10** is a four-star hotel that allows you to experience the heritage of the city (00-91-821-4255566; www.royalorchidhotels.com; rooms@royalorchidhotels.com; No 5, Jhansi Lakshimbai Rd; from ₹4,200).
Located within the city, **The Wind Flower Mysore 11** has large rooms, views of the Chamundi Hill, and a fantastic spa (00-91-821-2522500, 00-91-80-4114 2408; www.thewindflower.com; reservations@thewindflower.com; Maharana Pratap Rd, Nazarbad; from ₹4,200).
If you're looking to escape the city, book a stay at **Gitanjali Homestay 12**, complete with lush lawns and comfortable rooms. With home-made food and a relaxed vibe, it's the perfect place at which to unwind (00-91-98861-17919; www.gitanjalihomestay.com, gitanjali homestays@gmail.com; Lalitadripura Rd, KC Layout; from ₹5,500).



Chai at Getanjali Homestay is best enjoyed on the patio

GOOD TO KNOW
Explore a completely different side of Mysore, on a cycle. Gully Tours, which offers a **Vintage Mysore Tour** takes you around the city early in the morning, allowing you to discover the old city and meet locals over a cup of *chai* (00-91-96320-44188; https://gully.tours, explore@gully.tours; 66, Hospital Rd, 4th Block, Jayalakshampuram; ₹1,400 adult, ₹1,000 child [10 – 15 yrs, min height 4ft, 10in] cycle and safety gear included).
For more details, log on to www.lonelyplanet.com

COURTESY: AURELIA FERNANDES WITH CONTRIBUTIONS FROM ASHWARYA MENON PHOTOGRAPHS: HASHIM BADANI, VINODHARSHAN, SAIKOP, MULTIMEDIA / 123RF PHOTOS ARE FOR REPRESENTATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY.

Tear out page here then fold along the dotted lines



MINI GUIDE APRIL 2020

FOOD AND DRINK
IN DENVER,
THE USA

VEGETARIAN

CITY O'CITY 1
This popular vegetarian restaurant mixes retro decor with an innovative spin on greens, grains and *seitan*. The menu has a wide offering of items such as *kimchi* pancakes, pumpkin curry pasta and fried cauliflower with waffles. More traditional offerings include big salads and the best vegan pizza pie in town (00-1-303-831-6443; www.citycitydenver.com; 206 E, 13th Ave; 7am – 2am; mains from ₹1,000).



Get yourself a vegan pizza at City O'City

LITTLE MAN ICE CREAM 2
You can't miss the eight-metre-high dairy jug outside. From the shop window, cones of handmade ice cream, including vegan options, are doled out from morning until night. Flavours change daily: expect everything from chunky chocolate to Earl Grey tea and cookies. Rest assured, one scoop won't cut it (00-1-303-455-3811; www.littlemanicecream.com; 2620, 16th St; 12pm – 10pm Mon – Thur, 1am – 11pm Fri – Sat, 11am – 10pm Sun; ice cream from ₹150)

CIVIC CENTER EATS 3
When it gets warmer, head to Civic Center Park for lunch or a picnic. A huge variety of food trucks – everything from BBQ and pizza to sushi and Indian – roll into the park and serve up hearty meals. Tables are set up, live bands play, office workers picnic on the grass. It's Denver at its best (00-1-303-861-4633; www.civiccenterpark.org; 144 W, Colfax Ave; 11am – 2pm, Tues – Thur).

LOCAL FAVOURITES

ACORN 4
The oak-red oven and grill are the shining stars of this superb restaurant, where small plates of innovative and shareable eats make up meals. The menu changes seasonally, and dishes such as oak-grilled broccolini and smoked-pork *posole* are hits (00-1-720-542-3721; www.denveracorn.com, www.opentable.com; 3350, Brighton Blvd; 5.30pm – 10pm Mon, 11.30am – 10pm Tues – Sun).



Comfort food is what you get at Hop Alley

HOP ALLEY 5
Hop Alley was a slur used for Denver's hardscrabble Chinatown in the 1880s, until a race riot and anti-Chinese legislation scattered the community. The moniker was reclaimed for this small bustling restaurant located in a former soy-sauce plant. Come for authentic yet inventive Chinese dishes and creative cocktails, named after the signs of the Chinese zodiac (00-1-303-820-2282; www.rioadenver.com; 1431, Larimer St; 5pm – 10pm Mon – Tues, 11.30am – 2.30pm, 5pm – 10pm Wed – Fri, 10am – 2.30pm, 5 – 11pm Sat, 10am – 2.30pm, 5pm – 10pm Sun; mains from ₹1,110).

RIOJA 6
This is one of Denver's most innovative restaurants. Smart, busy and upscale, yet relaxed and casual, Rioja features modern cuisine inspired by Italian and Spanish traditions and powered by modern culinary techniques (00-1-303-820-2282; www.rioadenver.com; 1431, Larimer St; 5pm – 10pm Mon – Tues, 11.30am – 2.30pm, 5pm – 10pm Wed – Fri, 10am – 2.30pm, 5 – 11pm Sat, 10am – 2.30pm, 5pm – 10pm Sun; mains from ₹650).

TURN OVER FOR MAP AND NUMBER LOCATIONS

Fold 2

COLORADO'S COSMOPOLITAN STATE CAPITAL HAS COME A LONG WAY AS A CENTRE OF FOOD AND DRINK. THIS GATEWAY TO THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS NOW DELIGHTS WITH AN ARRAY OF EXCELLENT RESTAURANTS, BREWPUBS AND BARS.

WHY GO?
To eat your way through Denver

WHAT IS THERE TO DO?
Try a flavour, two, or all 30 at Little Man Ice Cream, plan a picnic at Civic Center Park, grab a meal at Hop Alley, and end it all with a wine slushy at Infinite Monkey Theorem

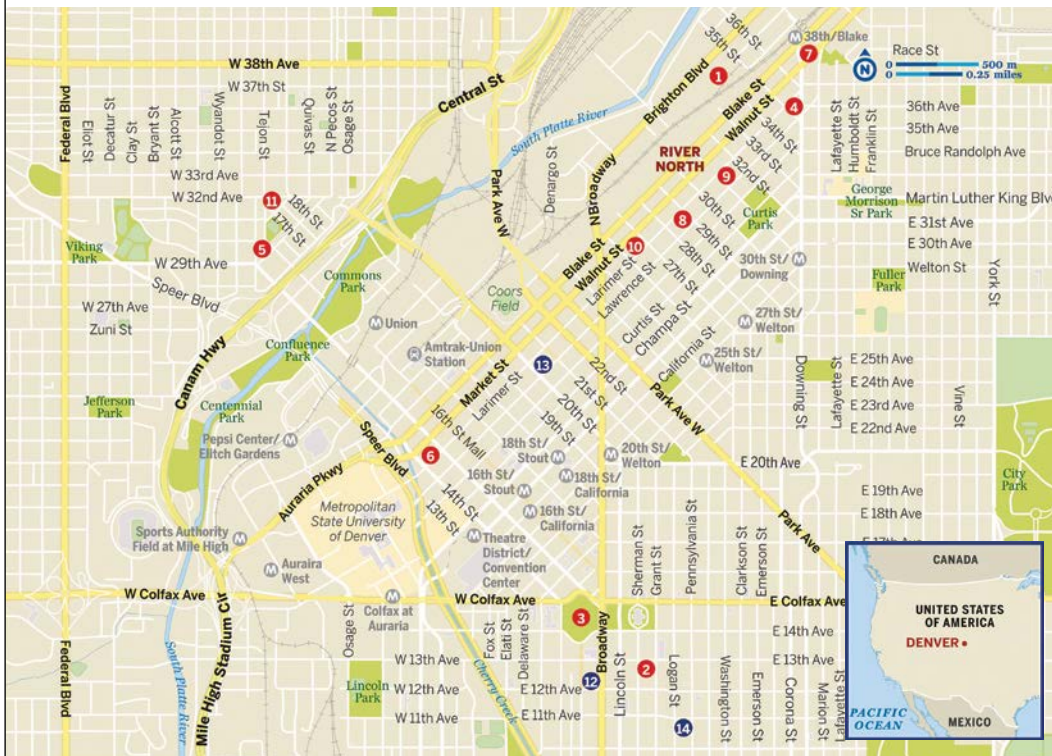
Left: Treat yourself at Little Man Ice Cream
Right: Gorgeously restored, Union Station has swanky restaurants, boutiques and bars, and on summer Saturdays, a farmers market sets up outside (www.unionstationinddenver.com)



Fold 1

MINI GUIDE
Food and Drink in Denver, The USA

GETTING AROUND



ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE
United, Air France, Delta, Lufthansa and other airlines fly frequently with one or more layover to Denver International Airport from all major Indian metros (return fares from ₹55,000).

THE COST



DIFFICULTY OF TRAVEL



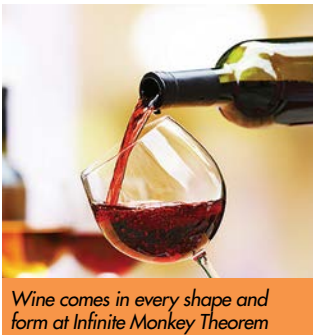
WHEN TO GO

The best time to visit Denver is from April to May and from September to October. However, make sure you check COVID-19 advisories before travelling.

DRINKS

BLACK SHIRT BREWING CO 7

Artisanal brewers create the all-red-ale menu at the popular BSB. The ales take anywhere from two months to three years to brew. So careful are they with the handcrafted beers, the brewers developed lopsided glasses to showcase the aromas. Live music is part of the culture here, as is good food (00-1-303-993-2799; www.blackshirtbrewingco.com; 3719, Walnut St; 11am - 10pm Sun - Thur, 11am - 12am Fri - Sat; drinks from ₹700).



Wine comes in every shape and form at Infinite Monkey Theorem

INFINITE MONKEY THEOREM 8

Infinite Monkey surprises with its sophisticated wines, made on site using mostly grapes from Colorado's western slope. It surprises again by serving them by the can, as slushies and as a Popsicle. Seating is in a cool-cat lounge with a 1960s ambience, and outdoors on a spacious patio (00-1-512-271-6807; www.theinfinitemonkeytheorem.com; 3200, Larimer St; 2pm - 10pm Tues - Sat, 2pm - 8pm Sun, 4pm - 8pm Mon; wine

WILLIAMS & GRAHAM 9

What looks like a bookstore from the old West is, in fact, a speakeasy; ask for a seat and the cashier will push aside a wall of books to give you entry to the bar. Polished wood, gleaming brass, antique lamps, tin ceilings and mixologists in aprons await. Cocktails are creative, artfully prepared and almost too beautiful to drink (00-1-303-997-8886; www.williamsandgraham.com; 3160, Tejon St; 5pm - 1am).

SLEEP

Hostel Fish 10

A swanky hostel, Hostel Fish is stylish, modern and squeaky-clean. Dorms have themes (Aspen, Graffiti, Vintage Biker) and sleep five to 10 people in bunks (00-1-303-954-0962; www.hostelfish.com; stay@hostelfish.com; 1217, 20th St; from ₹6,200).

Famous for its artwork in the guest rooms, Art - a Hotel has a lovely patio, perfect for happy-hour cocktails (00-1-303-572-8000; www.thearthotel.com; 1201, Broadway; from ₹18,000).

Patterson Historic Inn 12

The 1891 grande dame, Patterson Historic Inn was once a senator's home. The gardens are small but pretty, and the Victorian charm, sumptuous breakfasts and well-appointed chambers in the nine-room chateau will delight (00-1-303-955-5142; www.pattersoninn.com/en-us; scott@pattersoninn.com; 420 E, 11th Ave; from ₹18,400).

EMBASSY ALERT
Embassy of India, Washington DC, The USA
www.indianembassy.org



Binge on desi food at Little India Bar and Restaurant

FANCY A CURRY?

Tandoori specials, assorted Indian favourites and an all-you-can-eat lunch buffet - that's what you're in for at Little India Bar and Restaurant (00-1-303-871-9777; www.littleindiaofdenver.com; 330 E, 6th Ave; 11am - 11pm; mains from ₹900).

VISA

Apply for a type B1 tourist visa, which takes three to five weeks to process (www.ustraveldocs.com; ₹11,200).

For more details, log on to www.lonelyplanet.com

COMPILED BY CATRIONA GREW WITH CONTRIBUTIONS FROM BENEDICT WALKER, IIZA PRADO AND ASHAWARYA MENON. PHOTOGRAPHS: COURTESY OF LITTLE MAN ICE CREAM, JAY ABADSCHEFF/SOOPX, ARNABABICI, SEREZNIT, FERU, SZEFEI / 123RF. PHOTOS ARE FOR REPRESENTATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY. CURRENCY AT THE TIME OF GOING TO PRINT: 1 USD = ₹72INR



DO BUSINESS EVERYWHERE.
DON'T EXCHANGE ANYWHERE.

Use SBI Foreign Travel Card.



Chip & PIN protection for premium security



Global Emergency Assistance



Global acceptance - over 2 million ATMs



Available in 9 currencies

Available on

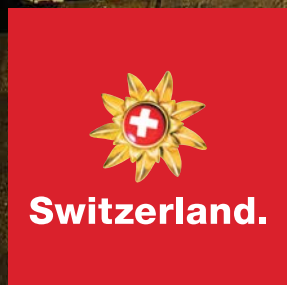


VISA

Visit: https://prepaid.onlinesbi.com or https://www.sbitravelcard.com/



I need music.



I need Switzerland.

Montreux, the venue of the famous jazz festival has a long-standing musical history of hosting poets and musicians like Lord Byron, Freddie Mercury and even been the inspiration for Deep Purple's "Smoke on the Water." To know more visit www.MySwitzerland.com/Vaud