

THE BEST IN TRAVEL 2017 ● JAPAN ● FRANCE ● BUDAPEST

A Times of India publication

lonely planet

MAGAZINE
INDIA

₹ 150
December 2016

BEST ^{IN} TRAVEL 2017



- * Explore a reemerging **Myanmar**
- * Find great food and wine and gorgeous outdoors in **Canada**
- * Unearth the hidden Balkan gem that is **Montenegro**



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MAGAZINE INDIA

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Lonely Planet Magazine India provides trusted, independent travel advice and information that has been gathered without fear or favour.

We aim to provide you with options that cover a range of budgets and we reveal the positive and negative of all locations we visit.

Because we believe it is important that our journalists experience first-hand what they're writing about and because you require comprehensive information from every corner of the world, at times it may be necessary for us to seek assistance from travel providers such as tourist boards, airlines, hotels, national parks, etc. However, when receiving such assistance, we ensure our editorial integrity and independence are not compromised through the following measures:

- by publishing information on all appropriate travel suppliers and not just those who provided us with assistance
- by never promising to offer anything in return, such as positive coverage.

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This Month's Cover



Novice monks in Myanmar's ancient capital of Bagan

PHOTOGRAPH: MATTEO COLOMBO/AWL IMAGES



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Vardhan Kondvikar, Editor

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The Best in Travel 2017



Wasn't it Christmas 2015 last week?

Odd, that – and I haven't even been partying much. I have been travelling a fair bit though (just in NZ, and a big shout out to everyone there – hope you're all okay), and they say time flies when you're having fun.

So, welcome to this year's **Best In Travel**: the most exciting places you could try to find yourself in in the coming year. Among them are **Canada** (couldn't happen to a nicer country), **Colombia** and **Myanmar**, as well as the daydream-like

Tuamotos Islands in **French Polynesia**. The selection ranges from the very exotic (from **Peru** to the Skellig Ring in **Ireland** to Ohrid in **Macedonia**) to the neighbourly, like a **Nepal** that's doing its best to rise up again, and needs your tourism money to make it so.

Elsewhere in the issue, we have the extremely inviting-looking **Montenegro**, an absolute treasure in the Balkans, plus a **Japan** with the colour taken out of it so you can appreciate the beauty of its forms. There's also unique and wonderful **Budapest**, the wedding-cake gorgeousness of **Chamonix**, and the hugely atmospheric coast of **New England**.

Whatever you choose as your top pick for 2017, remember to send us a postcard.

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Montenegro



Budapest



New England

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PHOTOGRAPH: HIMANSHU PANDYA (JAPAN), OFFICE DE TOURISME VALLEE DE CHAMONIX-MONT-BLANC (CHAMONIX)

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SOMETIMES, A CAMERA ONLY COMES IN THE WAY.



TRAVEL WELL

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KEY TO THIS MAGAZINE



Location:
Offers access to
the relevant map

EASYTRIPS GURUNG GUEST HOUSE, TINCHULEY, WEST BENGAL



FACT SHEET

GETTING THERE

Closest metro: Kolkata (625km)

Closest city: Darjeeling (25km)

Closest airport: Bagdogra Airport (75km) is about four hours via winding mountain roads. Air India, Go Air, Jet Airways, IndiGo, Vistara and SpiceJet fly here from Kolkata (return fares from ₹3,950).

Closest railhead: New Jalpaiguri Railway Station (NJP; 70km). Take the 13149 Kanchankanya Express from Kolkata (leaves Sealdah [SDAH]

8.30pm, arrives NJP 7.30am; ₹870 Third AC) and return by the 12378 Padatik Express (leaves NJP 9pm, arrives SDAH 6.45am; ₹915 Third AC).

GETTING AROUND

We used and liked the services of **Clubsides Tours and Travels** (Darjeeling: 00-91-354-2254646; www.clubsides.in, enquiry@clubsides.in; from ₹3,300/day by AC SUV). As the road is rough and narrow in several patches, it's safest to hire a four-wheel drive for the mountain roads leading to Darjeeling.



WHERE TO STAY

Gurung Guest House:

Opt for the wooden cottages and deluxe rooms over the double rooms. Furnished simply, they're spacious, with Tibetan carpets, clean ensuite bathrooms and balconies with views. Ask for a heater and layer up at night (00-91-9933036336; www.tinchuley.com; Tinchuley, Takdah; cottage from ₹1,350, deluxe rooms from ₹3,000).



WHERE TO EAT

The ladies of the kitchen here are exceptionally talented. Home-style meals are served hot and fresh in the dining room, which has shelves lined with homemade jams, marmalades and pickles. They also dish out *momos* and *thukpa* on request (breakfast: 8am–8.30am, lunch: 1pm–2pm; dinner: 8pm–8.30pm; ₹600/ person/ day for all meals, and morning and evening tea).



WHAT TO PACK

Warm woolly clothes, thermals, a quick-dry windcheater, towels and toiletries, a flashlight



SHOPPING

Bring home Gurung Guest House's homemade pickles, spicy chillies and tangy tamarind (from ₹100 for about 75gm). Pick up dried orange-peel powder, which makes for refreshing face pack, from the orange orchards (₹10).

SAFETY

Watch your step, the paths are not well lit at night, and slippery and jagged after a spell of rain.

Above: Tinchuley is enveloped in greenery and Tibetan prayer flags
Below: The fiery homemade pickles served at mealtimes are a must-try



MEDICAL AID

Carry your own medicines and first-aid. The nearest hospital equipped for emergencies is **Darjeeling District Hospital** (00-91-354-2254218; Hill Cart Rd, near Darjeeling Police Station).

CHILD-FRIENDLINESS

Children will enjoy the outdoors and mountain biking around the homestay. But remember, it gets very chilly during these months.

GOOD TO KNOW

* Bird nerds can ask Dipendra Gurung for a list of birds – laughing thrushes, whistling thrushes, leiothrix, babblers and warblers are commonly seen around the lodge.

* **Takdah Orchid Centre**, about a half-hour away, is a quiet garden with greenhouses of flowers (₹10).



MAP: DIPENDRA GURUNG

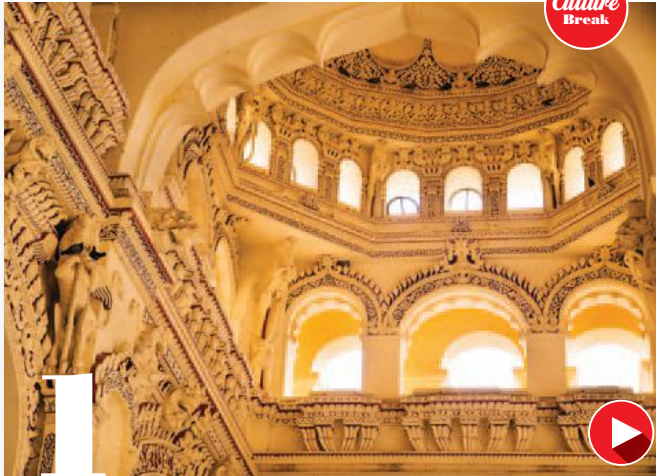


Websites:
Indicates that websites
on that page are active



Watch out for more interactivity in the magazine

Whether you've got a travel question or want to show off your stunning photos or insider knowledge of a destination, get in touch at lpmagazine@wmm.co.in.



Madurai, Tamil Nadu

TAMIL TALES

If Madurai were a book, it would be an anthology. Ruled by Pandyan kings for most of its history, it traded cotton with ancient Rome for silver and gold. Legend goes that Lord Shiva was present on the day the city was to be named, and, as some drops of nectar fell from his locks, the city came to be known as *maḍuram*, meaning sweetness in Tamil. It's not all too surprising that one of India's oldest cities is made up of stories. You'll learn some of them on the Once upon a Madurai tour by *Storytrails*, a guided walk that takes you to temples and monuments, indifferent to their intricacies and splendour, focusing instead

on their myths and fables (00-91-7373675756; www.storytrails.in; meeting point: North Entrance of Meenakshi Amman Temple, tours held twice daily: 7am–9.30am, 4pm–6.30pm; ₹1,500/ two people, ₹1,100 to join a large group). One of the pitstops on the tour is the 17th-century *Pudhu Mandapa*, a pillared hall that now functions as a tailoring and shopping arcade (East Chithirai St, 9.30am–8.30pm). It's yet to officially open for the morning tour, but come back later to see the whirring of sewing machines and boy sparkling costume jewellery and sari borders. It's full of sculptures, including that of the three-breasted goddess Meenakshi, who, according to legend, lost

Thirumalai Nayakkar Palace showcases a mixture of decorative styles in its interior architecture

her third mammary the moment she met the one who was her match in every way. Mere footsteps away is the city's pride and joy, the Meenakshi Amman Temple with its many storeys and many storied gopurams—ornate statue-adorned towers that are a typical feature of the temples in the state (www.madurameenakshi.in; Chithirai St, darshan hours: 5am–12.30pm, 4pm–5pm). Built by four dynasties over six centuries, the temple was founded by the Pandyas, taken over by the Cholas and Vijayanagaras and, completed during the Nayak reign. There's much to discover inside the labyrinthine complex, including a hall with 985 pillars, known as the Hall of a Thousand Pillars,



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GREAT FOR
History buffs and culture vultures

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For perfect sightseeing weather

which now houses a museum of sculptures, murals depicting the life of the goddess, and a monolithic statue of Lord Ganesha. Two inner sanctums are devoted to Meenakshi and her consort Shiva. Reserve a few hours to explore. Mornings are a flurry of activity, but visitors also return to see the fascinating ritual to unite the god and goddess at bedtime (8pm). After the tour, make your way to the Thirumalai Nayakkar Palace on foot to avoid traffic snafus, and also pause at famous jigerbhandis for the city's favourite drink. The glass of milk cream sharbat with almond *psin* (resin) and *namam* (sarsaparilla plant) will provide a sugar rush that will last a few hours (see *Where to Eat*). The 17th-century abode of the king, the palace is an example of Dravidian-Islamic architecture with a curious mélange of styles (9am–1pm, 1.30pm–5pm; ₹10). Partly destroyed and pillaged by Thirumalai Nayak's own grandson, only a fraction of the original

1. A procession on the streets of Madurai
2. The Vandiyur Mariamman Teppakulam
3. A god spot for people-watching
4. Devotees waiting for the Pongal festival
5. A peacock
6. A peacock

structure remains, but it's still quite grand with impressive stucco work, richly decorated archways and a dance hall that will transport you back a hundred years. It is believed that the soil for the palace was excavated from the Vandiyur Mariamman Teppakulam, a tank with a mandapa on an island. Though it only fills up in the monsoon and for the annual Pongal festival, it is a great place at which to spend the evening, digest some of the stories and contemplate this fascinating dichotomy—a rapidly-changing city steeped in history.

WORDS SHEENA DABHOLKAR
PHOTOGRAPHS VINODH NATHAN

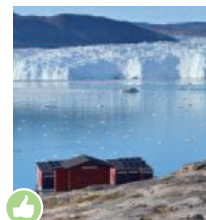
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Your Reviews

We'd love to, but we can't travel everywhere, so we want **YOU** to be part of the *Lonely Planet Magazine India* team. We invite you to send in your reviews and suggestions



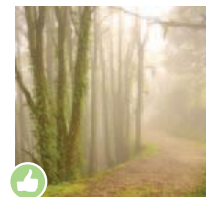
GREENLAND The birth of an iceberg

Mumbai-based **Chaitanya Sravanthi** recommends staying at the Glacier Lodge Egi at least once in a lifetime

What worked: We spent two nights at the Glacier Lodge Egi, which is situated in a remote location 80km away from Ilulissat in Greenland. The lodge, sited right opposite an active calving glacier, the Egi Sermia, offers 15 huts and a café. The cabins have large glass windows, offering a view of the glacier from the comfort of a warm bed. Egi Sermia was very active during our stay, belching out icebergs all day long. The weather was superb in summer, with 24 hours of perfect sunlight. It was a peaceful location away from human settlements—an intimate experience with the best nature has to offer. The rumbles from the calving were both loud and thrilling. We also did a spectacular day-long hike to an inland ice cap.

What didn't: The standard cabins do not have running water, electricity and flush toilets. The café was the only option for meals and it only served Greenlandic cuisine, which we did not enjoy.

MAKE IT HAPPEN
00-299-944-300; www.glacierlodgeegj.com, info@wog.gl; check directly for prices and availability



BINSAR WILDLIFE SANCTUARY, UTTARAKHAND Wild capers

Atul Singh, from Gurgaon, recommends Binsar for its peace and quiet and lack of crowds

What worked: Binsar Wildlife Sanctuary is one of the best-kept secrets of the Kumaon region in Uttarakhand. When you walk past the tall ancient trees in the sanctuary with numerous birds in the background, you might even spot leopards. If you enjoy long walks in the woods and reading your favourite book with a cup of tea, don't look any further. But, if you like hanging out at the Mall Road, and the hustle-bustle of a typical hill station, you're better off going somewhere else. What makes the sanctuary unique is the coexistence of humans and local fauna, which is one of the reasons wildlife sightings aren't very frequent here. One can also learn about Kumaoni culture by choosing to live in a homestay instead of a resort.

What didn't: Nothing really, unless you count the fact that there are hardly any people around. It's just you in harmony with nature, but that's not bad at all, is it?

MAKE IT HAPPEN
Take a bus or train to Kathgodam, and hop into a taxi from there. There are many stay options here to suit all budgets, like Binsar Forest Retreat, Mary Budden Estate, Mountain Resort Khali (aka Khali Estate) or the KVMN Tourist Rest House.

This page belongs To YOU WE'RE TAKING YOUR REVIEWS IN TWO CATEGORIES

1) A 150-word review of a city, region, hotel, restaurant or activity. These have to be open to the general public—you can't put something in that your father-in-law, the Director-General of Somethingorother, arranged by pulling some strings. If it's a hotel, restaurant or activity, we need contact details and prices. And it has to be in two parts. One: what worked for you. Two: what didn't. Don't be shy here; express yourself.

At the end of each review, please mention: phone details, website address, postal address and relevant rates of the place featured.

2) A one-line suggestion to other readers to go somewhere, see something or do something.

Rules

1) In the interests of verification, we need your full name, address, photograph and contact details (your personal as well as official ones), which we might check up on! Only entries with full details will be considered.

2) We will entertain only serious, factual reviews: this is not the place to plug your brother's swanky new resort, or rant about the horrible holiday you had last summer.

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OF THE PLACES YOU REVIEW
OR SUGGEST**

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TIROL

HEART OF THE ALPS

VISITORS to Tirol will experience a majestic and enchanting mountain landscape that's sure to touch the soul. Countless outdoor activities and a warm welcome make holidays in this stunning region an unforgettable experience. Majestic snow-capped peaks, quaint valleys, glittering mountain lakes and mighty glaciers make the Heart of the Alps a unique holiday destination that attracts visitors from all over the globe. In addition, there is a remarkable cultural menu, from historical towns to top cultural events and traditional Tyrolean evenings. Tirol's villages, towns and regions are famous for their traditional customs and celebrations as well as for their museums and other cultural attractions. The local inns are the ideal place at which to sample some of the delicious specialties and relax after a long day out and about in the fresh air. And when things heat up in summer, there are plenty of crystal clear lakes in which to cool off, let your thoughts wander and simply lose yourself in the moment.

Today, many visitors still come to Tirol to leave their worries behind, escape the stress of everyday life and be one with nature. With more than 500 peaks over 3,000m, more than 600 glaciers along the main alpine ridge, lush green meadows and charming huts, this area boasts a truly unique landscape. It is not only the striking landscape that attracts visitors, but also the excellent infrastructure – hospitable hotels and efficient transportation, thrilling sports like hiking, biking, skiing and snowboarding and a wide range of cultural activities, making this an unforgettable destination all year round.



BOLLYWOOD HITS INNSBRUCK

THE alpine city of Innsbruck in Austria was chosen as the location for the daily soap, *Pardes Mein Hai Mera Dil*, starring Arjun Bijlani and Drashti Dhami. The show is being aired on Star Plus since last month with 312 episodes, showcasing the best of what Innsbruck has to offer. The unique combination of pleasant alpine mountains and vibrant cultural city life is the reason producer Ekta Kapoor chose Innsbruck. Here are some of the highlights you shouldn't miss when you visit this destination:

Innsbruck's glittering landmark – the **Golden Roof** – stands out in the centre of the alpine city. Built by Emperor Maximilian I in the 15th century, it has shaped the image of Innsbruck ever since. He made Innsbruck the capital of an empire that stretched all over Europe. It is thanks to him that the city is home to the sumptuous **Hofburg Imperial Palace**, his artfully-designed tomb in the **Hofkirche Court Church**, with 28 larger-than-life bronze figures, the **Hofgarten Imperial Gardens**, and much more.

Innsbruck's alpine character is evident in the experiences it offers as well as the constant presence of mountains in daily city life. The **Nordkettenbahn Cable Cars** is a fine example of this, with its station directly in the old town. It can whisk you up 2,000m and even higher in just 20 minutes. This cable car was also used for the promo trailer of *Pardes Mein Hai Mera Dil*.

To the south of Innsbruck lies the **Bergisel Olympic Ski Jump Tower**, which offers you the opportunity to feel like an Olympic ski jumper! Head over to the rooftop restaurant and bar later for stunning views of the city. One of the main attractions near Innsbruck is the **Swarovski Crystal Worlds**, which is the most-visited site in Austria. The new Crystal Cloud, with 800,000 hand-mounted crystals, is just one of the new highlights here. Crystalline fairytales and a multi-faceted universe come to life in this unique space.



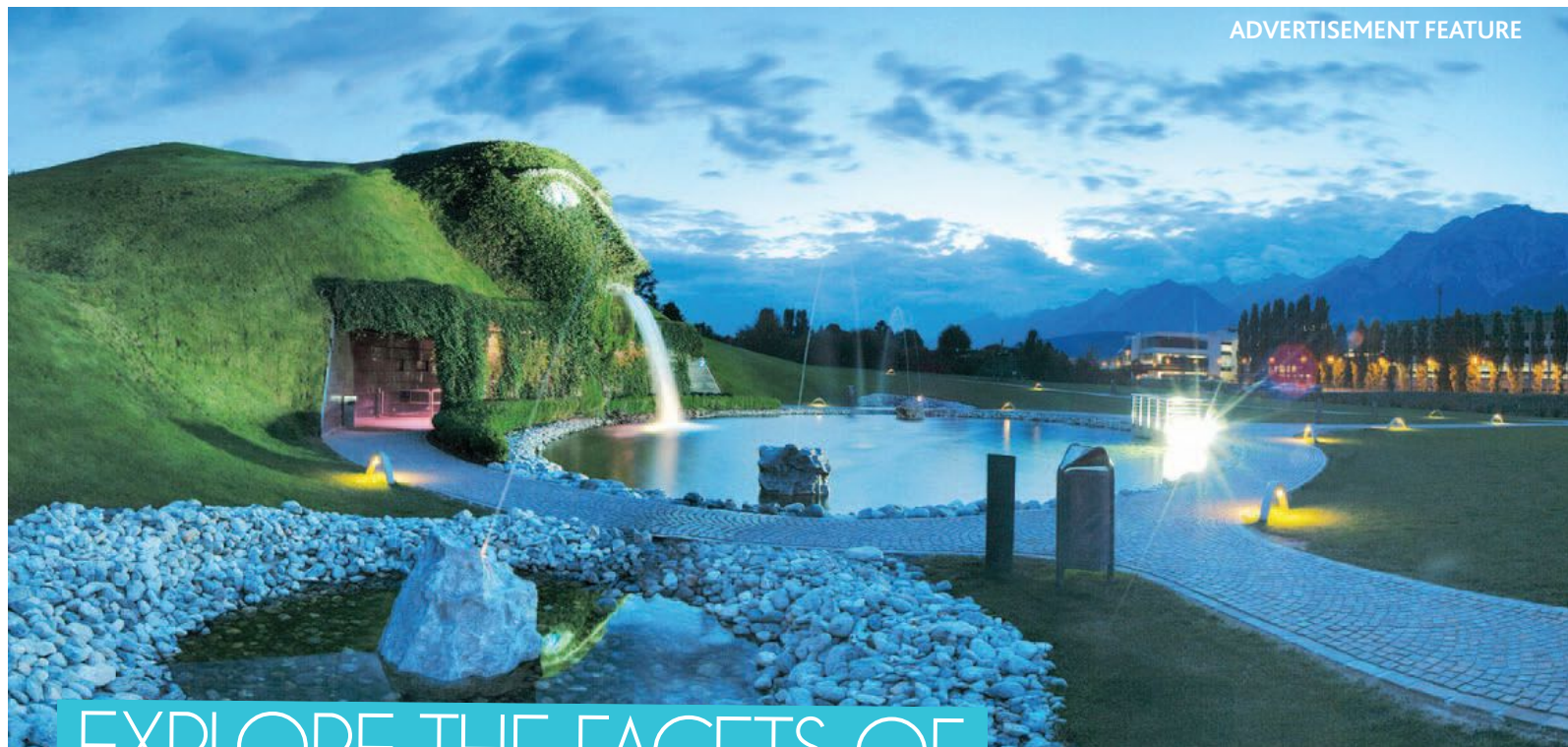
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FOR MORE INFORMATION ON INNSBRUCK, PLEASE VISIT WWW.INNSBRUCK.INFO.



EXPLORE THE FACETS OF SWAROVSKI CRYSTAL WORLDS

SWAROVSKI Crystal Worlds in Wattens/ Tyrol is one of Austria's most popular attractions and has enchanted millions of visitors since 1995. Swarovski Crystal Worlds has become famous around the world because of its singular appearance: the Head of the Giant. This unique destination, near Innsbruck, offers something for everyone.

Here you can celebrate holidays in an atmospheric environment. Swarovski Crystal Worlds is the perfect place for discovery, play, culinary delights and being together, throughout the whole year and in any weather.

In the garden around the charismatic Head of the Giant, you will find spaces of beauty, inspiration, energy, care, aesthetics – and legends. The crowning piece of the new garden is the Crystal Cloud. This monumental installation, consisting of some 800,000 hand-mounted Swarovski crystals, drifts above the black Mirror Pool, inviting visitors to pause for a moment and be inspired. With a surface of around 1,400 square metres, this mystical masterpiece is the largest work of its kind in the world.

Besides nourishment for the mind, Swarovski Crystal Worlds also offers culinary delights at Daniels Kristallwelten Café & Restaurant. Here, too, the overall architectural concept follows the crystalline parameters embedded in the garden of the Giant. Daniels Kristallwelten serves international, regional and, particularly, seasonal cuisine, and makes its own pastries.

The Store brings together almost the entire Swarovski brand portfolio, including current and classic jewellery collections, the famous figurines, Swarovski Optik and the Swarovski Crystal Worlds souvenir line.

Come and meet the Giant and experience the unique Chambers of Wonder and expansive garden!

OPENING HOURS

Daily from 8.30am to 7.30pm (last entry: 7.30pm)
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Daily from 8.30am to 10pm (instead of 7.30pm)
last entry: 9pm

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The Honourable
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of Uttar Pradesh,
Shri Akhilesh Yadav,
met the journalists
in Lucknow and flagged
off the event



The evening *aarti* at
Dasheshwamedh
Ghat in Varanasi



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enjoy Uttar
Pradesh



Journalists Philippa Kaye
and Flaminia Palaazi (right,
bottom) offer feedback at
the conclave in Varanasi



The journalists
in Agra



The mediapersons
also enjoyed
local food



Esteemed speakers of the Nature Tourism panel



The journalists in Varanasi



Padma Bhushan Pandit Chhannulal Mishraji enthral the audience in Varanasi



Esteemed speakers of the Uttar Pradesh: Surging Ahead panel

Uttar Pradesh

UTTAR PRADESH TOURISM TRAVEL WRITERS' CONCLAVE 2016

THE Uttar Pradesh Travel Writers' Conclave 2016 brought international and Indian journalists to Uttar Pradesh's Heritage Arc – Varanasi, Agra and Lucknow – to experience the diversity of the state's culture and heritage, food and textiles, landscapes and wildlife. The conclave also brought together experts in the fields of travel, conservation, planning, food, wildlife and architecture to help Uttar Pradesh build a road map to draw visitors from India and across the world.

The Honourable Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, Shri Akhilesh Yadav, flagged off the media meet at his residence, meeting journalists and releasing balloons to symbolise the colourful diversity of the state.

The visiting journalists chose from tours of Agra, Varanasi and Lucknow, as well as National Chambal Sanctuary, Aligarh, Vrindavan and Mathura, Allahabad, Sarnath, Dudhwa Tiger Reserve, Ayodhya and Faizabad.

The media meet culminated in a conclave in Varanasi, which was graced by the presence of dignitaries like Chief Guest Shri Om Prakash, Hon'ble Tourism Minister, Government of Uttar Pradesh; Guest of Honour Professor Abhishek Mishra, Minister for Vocational Education and Skill Development, Government of Uttar Pradesh; Shri Alok Ranjan, IAS, Chief Advisor to the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh; and Shri Navneet Sehgal, IAS, Principal Secretary Tourism, Government of Uttar Pradesh.

By evening, the guests and journalists were treated to a spectacular Ganga *aarti* at Dasheshwamedh Ghat, and a striking cultural performance by Padma Bhushan Pandit Chhannulal Mishraji, as well as *kathak* and *tandav* dance recitals and a fusion music performance.



Postcards

WHERE YOU'VE BEEN AND WHAT YOU'VE SEEN





Kumartoli is one of the leading centres for sculpture in India, and is famous for statues of the Goddess Durga, which are sent across the world

KOLKATA, WEST BENGAL

Come clay with me

Kumartoli, in north Kolkata, holds a special place in the hearts of Kolkatans. I was wandering through its narrow lanes when I saw this incomplete sculpture. I took a few photos, but wasn't satisfied, and moved on. I was drawn back to this sculpture-in-progress though, and returned at the end of the day to take a few more photographs. It was then that I realised that the frame I was looking for was only the lion's mouth, with the muscular hand seemingly punching it. This visual tells a compelling story to me, one of power versus power.



Shubhra Sau, a field researcher in animal behaviour, considers himself an enthusiastic traveller. lives in Courbevoie in France



An ibis's nostrils are located at the base of its bill – this allows it to breathe even if the bill is submerged in water

MANGALAJODI, ORISSA

Frogmouth

Thousands of birds visit the shores of Lake Chilika in Orissa every winter in search of feeding grounds on their migrations. I visit Mangalajodi every year to watch the spectacle. I was on a boat when I spotted this ibis; the first time I've seen one with its prey. Ibis are big birds, and they generally feed on snakes and frogs. At first, I was confused by the shape of the bird's mouth, before realising that it had a frog's legs sticking out! It was a breathtaking moment.



Sandeep Sarkar is a fashion designer by training, who believes his schooling has taught him to push his creative limits.

OOTY, TAMIL NADU

Almost heaven

Sometimes, beautiful things happen when you least expect them – just like this moment I was lucky to capture. I was in a car early one morning going from Ooty to Gudalur. As I wasn't driving, I spent my time looking out the window. Suddenly, clouds started to cover the entire valley, making it look like my idea of heaven.



Arjun Krishna studied photography in Ooty.



The UNESCO-listed Nilgiri Mountain Railway makes the steepest climb in Asia, and is also India's slowest train



Why not get involved? We'd love to include your best new travel photos (at 300dpi) and the inspiring stories behind them. Send them with a pic of yourself to lpmagazine@www.co.in



POSTCARDS



Celebrated in Orissa's Kalahandi District Chatar Yatra involves performances of *ghumura*, a local folk dance, and animal sacrifice

BHAWANIPATNA, ORISSA

Face off

The Chatar Yatra is an annual celebration of the Goddess Ma Manikeshwari held in Bhawanipatna, close to where I live. At this time, people paint themselves and congregate on the streets in a procession.



Rohan Sachdeva is an amateur photographer from Kesinga, Orissa.



Shlokas and *mantras* are both types of poetry written in couplets, but have different connotations. While *mantras* have a religious significance, *shlokas* are secular

BARSANA, UTTAR PRADESH

The holy book

I took this photograph at Holi celebrations in Barsana, a town in the Mathura District of Uttar Pradesh. The book stood out amid the colour that showered down, seemingly from everywhere. My eye was caught by the *shlokas*, and I was almost on top of the villagers in my enthusiasm to take the photo.



Commander Pooja Rajput

is an Indian Naval Officer, super biker and adventure enthusiast.

KOLSAI LAKE, KAZAKHSTAN

Lake a virgin

I visited Kazakhstan in the summer of 2016, and was mesmerised by the country's pristine natural beauty. One of our stops was the serene Kolsai Lake, accessed from the city of Almaty. The lake's water is crystal clear, and the restaurant up the hill serves delicious trout fresh from the water!



Travel enthusiast **Sanjay Podder** is a regular contributor to Postcards.



Kazakhstan has a naval force, even though it's a landlocked country



**YOGYAKARTA,
INDONESIA**

Stupa troopers

The beautiful Borobudur Temple, about 30km outside Yogyakarta in Indonesia, is a beautiful slice of history and culture. The temple itself is designed to represent a *mandala*, a Buddhist diagram of the universe. I love the serenity in this moment.



Sirsendu Gayen is an Assistant Professor in chemistry at the Vivekananda College in Kolkata.

There is no written record of who built Borobudur and why, in spite of it being one of the most complex buildings in the world

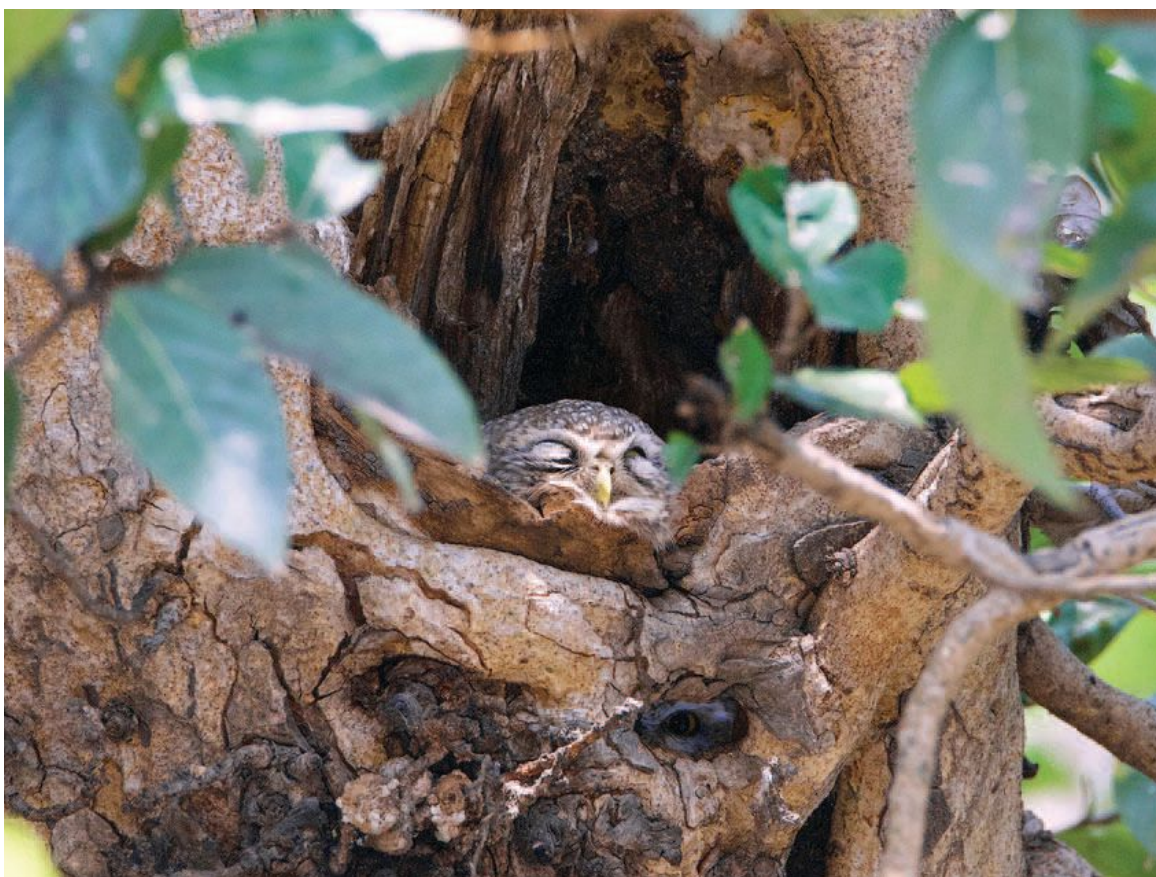
NEW DELHI, NCR

Owl-ook who's there!

On weekends, my father and I often go on photography walks through the ancient Lodi Gardens, Delhi. The garden is rich in flora and fauna, with many different species of trees and birds making it their home. We spotted an owl in a tree, and I was lucky to get a picture. It was only after I uploaded the picture that I saw the second owl peeping out of a hole below the first!



Maahi Jain is a student in New Delhi.



A group of owls is called a parliament



The mother of Mughal Emperor Akbar, Hamida Banu Begum, built Humayun's Tomb for her husband, just like Emperor Shah Jahan then did for his wife Mumtaz with the Taj Mahal

NEW DELHI, NCR

Shadow play

I went on a tour of Humayun's Tomb in New Delhi, and was awed by the dramatic shadows making patterns on the floor within the mausoleum. The sunlight streamed through the latticed *jaali* window, casting beautiful shadows that looked to me like a symbol in a dream.



Kolkata resident **Arghya Kundu** is passionate about photography.



ILULISSAT, GREENLAND It was a fluke!

My husband and I visited Ilulissat this summer, and we went on boat ride past icebergs. A loud noise and spray of mist drew our attention to a couple of humpback whales swimming right in front of us. Apparently, the plankton beneath the icebergs attracts schools of small fish, a rich source of food for the whales. We patiently waited for the whales to dive back into the water and got this photo of a fluke.



Chaitanya Sravanthi is a software professional from Mumbai who loves to explore our planet.

The underside of the fluke of a humpback whale is like its 'fingerprint' – a unique identifier of an individual

GLASGOW, SCOTLAND

Bar bar dekho

The city of Glasgow is famous for many things, but, most perhaps for its love for a 'bevvy' – a good drink. Becoming familiar with Glasgow's pub culture is a big part of getting to know this city itself. In the middle of the Football World Cup this June, I stumbled upon this pair out for a break, while, inside, the people in the pub were raucous.



An architect by profession, **Kumaar Mangwani** loves to travel at every opportunity he gets.



Although Scotland is the land of whisky, Glasgow has strict liquor licensing laws. The last call in pubs is at 11pm!

November 2016 lonely planet



Thimphu is the only capital city that has no traffic lights

THIMPHU, BHUTAN Lost in time

I came across a monastery while travelling through Bhutan. There were many people praying inside, but, when I asked if I could join, I was told that they were mourning the loss of a relative. You could sense the sadness in the air, especially in this lone man seated outside. I tried to be as discreet as possible while taking this photograph.



Prateek Sharma moved out of the corporate world to live his life behind a camera.

MOUNT PENANJAKAN, INDONESIA Trailblazer

It was 3am, and I was waiting for sunrise at Mount Penanjakan. I saw that the sky was filled with stars, with the Magellanic Clouds (two dwarf galaxies) over Mount Bromo. The lights that you see at the bottom of the photograph are from jeeps crossing the Sea of Sand on the Bromo caldera.



Chandra Sekar is an avid photographer and landscape enthusiast who is exploring travel as a lifestyle.



Mount Bromo is Indonesia's most iconic trek and one of the most active volcanos in the world



Each idol of the Goddess Durga must contain the soil from the threshold of a sex worker's house. It is believed that those who visit sex workers leave their virtues outside the door, and thus, this soil is full of virtue

DELHI, NCR

Eye-dol worship

In an annual act of migration, hundreds of artisans from all over Bengal travel to Delhi to prepare idols for the Durga Puja festivities. I spotted an artisan painting on the eye of an idol, and couldn't resist capturing the moment.



Manish Jaisi is a Delhi-based freelance photographer.

ZÜRICH, SWITZERLAND

Gull-ible

It was January and freezing in Switzerland. I was exploring the streets of Zürich when I came across this lady near Lake Zürich feeding seagulls. She seemed friendly and the birds were not scared of her. Surprisingly, a lot of them were eating straight from her hands. What made this picture more interesting was the colour of her jacket and scarf. The red added a beautiful contrast to the bridge and buildings behind.



Bangalore-based **Siddharth Raghuvanshi** spent two days in Zürich.



Zürich has been given the prestigious title of having the best quality of life in the world



In the summer, Dal Lake features floating gardens in the wetland areas, while, in the winter, the lake freezes over, and you can ski and skate on its surface

SRINAGAR, JAMMU & KASHMIR **Dal-icious**

I was in Kashmir this April, answering the call of the mountains and the drive to get that one perfect picture. I was strolling around the famous Dal Lake with this thought in mind, but the cloudy weather, though perfect for romantics, wasn't great for my task. Suddenly, at the close of day, the sky turned into a dramatic mix of beautiful colours. The shimmering waters, vibrant houseboats and *shikaras* and the settlements in the distance all looked magical.



Abhishek Maitra is a hotel-cum-hospitality management student who's fallen in love with photography.

MAASAI MARA, KENYA **Simba-iotic**

While looking for a sunset subject near the Little Mara Bush Camp, we came across a wildebeest's carcass being feasted on by a lioness and her cubs who were hidden in the dense bush. We couldn't see much, until the energetic cubs emerged from the cover and began playing on the carcass. We watched them at play for 45 minutes, until this moment when they both looked right at me. It was one of the finest moments of my time in Kenya.



Amit Vyas is an avid wildlife and nature photographer and writer.



When multiple lionesses give birth at the same time of year, the cubs are usually raised communally by the pride



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Your Reviews

We'd love to, but we can't travel everywhere, so we want **YOU** to be part of the *Lonely Planet Magazine India* team. We invite you to send in your reviews and suggestions



GREENLAND

The birth of an iceberg



Mumbai-based **Chaitanya Sravanthi** recommends staying at the Glacier Lodge Egi at least once in a lifetime

What worked: We spent two nights at the Glacier Lodge Egi, which is situated in a remote location 80km away from Ilulissat in Greenland. The lodge, sited right opposite an active calving glacier, the Egi Sermia, offers 15 huts and a café. The cabins have large glass windows, offering a view of the glacier from the comfort of a warm bed. Egi Sermia was very active during our stay, belching out icebergs all day long. The weather was superb in summer, with 24 hours of perfect sunlight. It was a peaceful location away from human settlements – an intimate experience with the best nature has to offer. The rumbles from the calving were both loud and thrilling. We also did a spectacular day-long hike to an inland ice cap.

What didn't: The standard cabins do not have running water, electricity and flush toilets. The café was the only option for meals and it only served Greenlandic cuisine, which we did not enjoy.

MAKE IT HAPPEN

00-299-944-300; www.glacierlodgeeqi.com, info@wog.gl; check directly for prices and availability



BINSAR WILDLIFE SANCTUARY, UTTARAKHAND

Wild capers



Atul Singh, from Gurgaon, recommends Binsar for its peace and quiet and lack of crowds

What worked: Binsar Wildlife Sanctuary is one of the best-kept secrets of the Kumaon region in Uttarakhand. When you walk past the tall ancient trees in the sanctuary with numerous birds in the background, you might even spot leopards. If you enjoy long walks in the woods and reading your favourite book with a cup of tea, don't look any further. But, if you like hanging out at the Mall Road, and the hustle-bustle of a typical hill station, you're better off going somewhere else. What makes the sanctuary unique is the coexistence of humans and local fauna, which is one of the reasons wildlife sightings aren't very frequent here. One can also learn about Kumaoni culture by choosing to live in a homestay instead of a resort.

What didn't: Nothing really, unless you count the fact that there are hardly any people around. It's just you in harmony with nature, but that's not bad at all, is it?

MAKE IT HAPPEN

Take a bus or train to Kathgodam, and hop into a taxi from there. There are many stay options here to suit all budgets, like Binsar Forest Retreat, Mary Budden Estate, Mountain Resort Khali (aka Khali Estate) or the KMVN Tourist Rest House.

This page belongs To YOU

WE'RE TAKING YOUR REVIEWS IN TWO CATEGORIES

1) A 150-word review of a city, region, hotel, restaurant or activity. These have to be open to the general public – you can't put something in that your father-in-law, the Director-General of Somethingorother, arranged by pulling some strings. If it's a hotel, restaurant or activity, we need contact details and prices. And it has to be in two parts. One: what worked for you. Two: what didn't. Don't be shy here; express yourself.

At the end of each review, please mention: phone details, website address, postal address and relevant rates of the place featured.

2) A one-line suggestion to other readers to go somewhere, see something or do something.

Rules

1) In the interests of verification, we need your full name, address, photograph and contact details (your personal as well as official ones), which we might check up on! Only entries with full details will be considered.

2) We will entertain only serious, factual reviews: this is not the place to plug your brother's swanky new resort, or rant about the horrible holiday you had last summer.

PLEASE SEND US PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE PLACES YOU REVIEW OR SUGGEST

Mail in your reviews and suggestions to lpmagazine@wmm.co.in



Letters

Here are your reactions and responses to *Lonely Planet Magazine India*: thank you!

Letter
of the
month



The power of print

I have been an ardent reader of this wonderful magazine and I would like to highlight something. In a world taken over by social media, with all age groups investing more time to remain socially relevant and connected, *Lonely Planet Magazine India* is actually doing the unthinkable. We're a family of three and we get together to read both current and old issues, and deliberate on what our next holiday

destination will be. While I like wildlife safaris, my wife prefers Europe, and my adult son comes up with exotic destinations. In the end, it becomes a test of one's negotiation and persuasion skills to see who gets two votes to make the winning bid. It's interesting to note that at a time when fewer people are reading print publications and, instead, getting information directly from e-platforms, this magazine continues to command a strong and loyal fan following with its fantastic content duly supplemented with stunning photographs. You guys are true stress-busters and your issues help us transcend our day-to-day issues and reflect on moments of happiness, and the joys of travelling. Keep up the great work!

– Colonel Harendra Bana, via email

of your many readers, when I read the magazine, I feel like a part of the team. I also enjoy going through old issues from my collection, which are meticulously and chronologically stacked since 2012, and reading about the places featured in there.

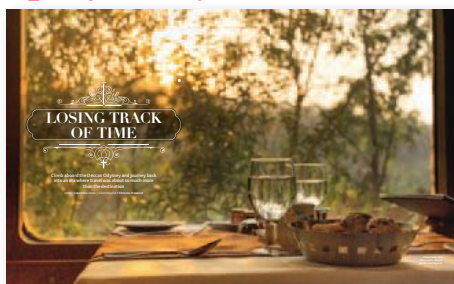
– Sirsanya Bandopadhyay, Kolkata

Travel hacks

Your Last-Minute Winter Getaways issue (November 2016) reminded me of a trip I made to Norway last winter to see the Northern Lights (we had fair sightings). When my friends and I got there, we realised we were woefully unprepared for the extreme cold, and the warm clothes we'd bought from India couldn't even begin to win the battle against the elements. I was hoping you could, in the upcoming issues, make an effort to publish ways in which travellers can prepare for severe weather conditions, particularly, for those of us who are unused to extreme climates. Helpful tips such as best types of warm clothing, ideal footwear, and other winter gear would be wonderful.

– Damini Kane, Mumbai

Epic journeys



I'm a huge fan of your magazine, and have been a loyal reader for years. In the November 2016 issue, the Losing Track of Time feature on the Deccan Odyssey was magnificent – loved the visuals! It really makes me want to go on a trip on this train. It would be great to see more great train journeys across destinations in the future.

– Zinobia Patel, via email

An ode to wanderlust

I must admit, it was the glittering, ever-so-riveting cover of *LPMI*'s October 2016 issue that made me feel wanderlust that very moment. Beautiful job! I particularly loved this month's issue too. I would like to make a special mention of the Staycation segment (*Easy Trips*) – it is a highly-needed and clock-friendly vacation alternative. But it was the Great Value Indian Stays story (*'Penny Wise, Pounding Value Hotels'*) that totally stole the show. It was a goldmine of pocket-friendly options that rouse your inner spirit to travel. The photographs were beautiful, too.

– Stuti Nabazza, Mumbai

Mini treats

I'm a new subscriber and a big fan of your Mini Guides, which I find tremendously helpful and informative. I like the style and the fact that you can cut each out, fold it and take it with you – really smart design! I would like to see more Mini Guides about lesser-known places such as Kavaratti in Lakshadweep. Thank you, Team *LPMI*, and keep up the good work!

– Shreyas S, via email

Giving back



I recently made a small trip to Puducherry. Before and during the trip, *Lonely Planet Magazine India*'s August (*'Food Trail through Puducherry', 'Easy Trips'*) and December 2015 (*'Great stays*

in Puducherry', 'Easy Trips') issues were of great help to me. The suggestions for Café des Arts and the all-time favourite Villa Shanti were great. Though I missed a few spots like Sri Kamatchi and Zuka, as suggested, I wandered around, discovering new ones, like Le Club and The Indian Kaffe Express, both of which are on Dumas Street. Dreamer's Cafe, too, in Auroville was a good French café with outdoor seating. At the end of the day there is as much fun in trying *LPMI*'s recommendations as is in finding new places to suggest to Team *LPMI*. Though I am just one

CAMPER BAG

The Camper Bag is an innovative creation from the design house Bombay Trooper. This multi-purpose rainproof backpack transforms as per your needs. What's unique about it is that it's a waterproof bag that's not all plastic. Made from 100 per cent cotton canvas with special water-repelling treatment, it has a 15-inch laptop sleeve inside. Featuring a roll-top design, you can conveniently alter the bag's height to use it on a daily basis or on overnight trips. The Camper is also a perfect trekking companion, thanks to the D-brackets at the base to hold stuff like windcheaters, sleeping bags and even muddy shoes. Step out and be carefree while carrying your laptop even in the most unforgiving storms with this slick and stylish backpack (www.bombaytrooper.com). The writer of this issue's Letter of the Month wins this Trooper Bag. To write in to the magazine, email us at lpmagazine@wwm.co.in.



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Globetrotter

A WORLD OF TRAVEL NEWS AND DISCOVERIES

Pg 32 The Photo Story: Atmospheric Roman ruins, century-old mosques, sunshine-flecked beaches, beautiful gold-domed churches – enjoy **Bulgaria** in photos

Pg 38 World on your Plate: A Cuban-style eggnog, *crème de vie* is most apt for year-end celebrations

Pg 42 Arrivals: Great views, great food and great places to stay – find the world right here!

We bring the world
to you to experience –
like in Bulgaria (pg 32)





A panoramic view of
Veliko Tarnovo from
the Tsarevets Fortress



The Photo Story

JEREMIAH CHRISTANAND RAO



By the Black Sea

Road tripping though Bulgaria in a minivan cramped with journalists, I put on my headphones and let my mind wander as I soak in the landscape, always changing, yet always scenic. Leaving the capital Sofia behind, we climb past rolling hills and bucolic countryside, higher and deeper into the Rhodope Mountains, a burst of fiery autumn colours. Toward the top, the towering Asen's Fortress hanging over the cliffs is breathtaking – the first of many such moments as we make our way from tombs to fortresses and monasteries; living testaments to this country's rich history, all transporting us to eras bygone.

Vastly different from any European country I've been to, Bulgaria is far removed from the bustling, grid-like streets of London or even the pristine sheep-dotted hillsides of Switzerland. A post-Communist footprint still lies like a shadow across most of the country. The town of Veliko Tarnovo is a vivid memory. In the mammoth, Communist-styled Interhotel Veliko Tarnovo, our rooms, sited down long, vacant, dull-carpeted corridors lit using age-old motion sensors, had balconies jutting out like diving boards over an Olympic swimming pool. Getting to bed after dinner was often a game of hide-and-seek.

While a lot of the country's architecture and the older generation (given to growling at you in suspicion) clearly have a Soviet hangover, the rustic charm of the countryside and the idyllic small towns never fails to impress. Strolling through the cobblestoned, winding alleys of Nessebar, fringed by shops brimming with souvenirs and rose oil (the national pride), we can't help but linger over lunch at a café at the edge of the Black Sea.

Bulgaria may not be a first-world country, but, steeped in history and culture, it is unforgettable: a country of atmospheric Roman ruins, quaint cafés, century-old mosques, sunshine-flecked beaches, beautiful gold-domed churches and far-flung monasteries with murals that stay forever burned in your mind's eye. →

Jeremiah Christanand Rao spent two weeks in Bulgaria.



Kids running the promenade at Varna, a popular seaside resort on the Black Sea



The medieval Asen's Fortress is perched on a cliff in the Rhodope Mountain range



The very unconventional Dzhumaya Mosque in Plovdiv: prayers first, a cuppa later →



Old Nessebar has tiny cobblestoned lanes lined with souvenir shops and sellers of rose oil



Charismatic trams running through the streets of the capital, Sofia →



Bulgaria's many green spaces are perfect for quiet contemplation



Beautiful glass lamps for sale on Nessebar's streets



Lunch with a view at a café at the edge of the Black Sea in Nessebar's Old Town ©

World on your Plate

Crème de vie

Cuba

A Cuban-style eggnog, *crème de vie* translates to “cream of life” – making it most apt to drink during Christmas and New Year’s Eve celebrations.

Serves six

- * 2 cups sugar
- * 1 cup water
- * 6 egg yolks
- * 350 ml condensed milk
- * 350 ml thickened milk
- * 1 tsp vanilla
- * 1 to 2 cups rum (to taste)
- * Cinnamon stick to garnish (optional)

1. Simmer together the sugar and water for three minutes to make a syrup. Allow to cool to room temperature.

2. In a large bowl, beat the yolks until light yellow. Add the condensed and thickened milks, the vanilla and rum to taste.

3. Stir in the sugar syrup.

Note: *Crème de vie* tastes better after a few days of making.

If you are worried about using raw egg yolks, cook the yolks with a little water and sugar till gently heated; do not allow to scramble



PHOTOGRAPH: D. HURST/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO PHOTOGRAPH USED FOR REPRESENTATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY

10 things to do in...

Tallinn, Estonia



See

1 Rich with a times-gone by atmosphere, **St Olav's Church** (above) has been the spiritual core of the city for almost a millennium, and its history is nothing short of an epic tale. Struck by lightning at least eight times and burned to the ground thrice, the church's tower, once the tallest structure in the world, seems to have survived its many misfortunes only to give you a breathtaking view of the city from above (00-372-641-2241; www.visitestonia.com; Lai 50; 10am–6pm; church entry free, tower: ₹150 adult, ₹75 child).

2 Travel back in time at the **Estonian Open-Air Museum** (below), a life-sized reconstruction of a traditional village, where you can stroll around historic buildings and relax under the branches of old trees as you watch the staff dressed in traditional costumes busy with farming or fishing among the wooden farmhouses and windmills. Just 15 minutes away from Tallinn, you can get a glimpse of the rural way of life, buy handicrafts and ride horses (00-372-654-9101; www.evm.ee; Vabaõhumuuseumi tee 12; 10am–6pm; summer: ₹600, winter: ₹450).



Free

3 Wander around **Telliskivi Creative City** (Telliskivi Loomelinnak, above), the city's old industrial complex, now the heart of the most fashionable ateliers, artists' offices and NGOs. Home to trendy cafés and restaurants, exhibitions and design stores, Telliskivi will give you all the inspiration you need to kick-start your artistic career (00-372-661-0223; www.telliskivi.eu/en; Telliskivi 60A).

4 Have a cup of tea or a pint of beer as you people-watch in one of the typical outdoor cafés on **Raekoja Plats** (Town Hall Square, below), Tallinn's pulsing heart since the Middle Ages. With pastel-coloured heritage buildings on one side and the Gothic town hall on the other, the square, always bustling with life, festivals and outdoor markets, will delight you with its beauty throughout the year, whether covered in snow in the winters or bathed in sunlight during the fresh Estonian springs (www.visitestonia.com; Raekoja Plats, Kesklinna linnaosa; 24 X 7).

5 Join one of Tallinn's **Free Tours** and let a bunch of youngsters guide you through the streets of the city to hear stories about its history and its people. You will waste no time aimlessly roaming around as the guides lead you straight to the city's secret spots while cracking some jokes and making the tour not only an insightful but also a fun experience (00-372-5837-4800; www.traveller.ee; in front of the city tourist information at Niguliste 2; 12pm daily, also 3pm from Jun to Sept).



Do

6 Built in 1928, **Kalma Saun** was the first public sauna in Tallinn, and is the ideal place for a break, or to chill all day. Perfect for those who are seeking a typical Estonian experience, this historic building, with its old-fashioned, Russian-style atmosphere, will let you plunge into a cultural yet rejuvenating spa session. Just brace yourself for communal nudity! (00-372-627-1811; www.kalmasaun.ee; Vana-Kalamaja 9a; 11am–10am Mon–Fri, 10am–11pm Sat & Sun; men: ₹650 Mon–Thur, ₹725 Fri–Sun, women: ₹550 Mon–Thur, ₹650 Fri–Sun)

7 Although swimming in the Baltic Sea can be a little challenging, **Pirita Beach** is worth the 10-minute road trip, if nothing else, for its enchanting seafront and romantic sunsets. During the summers, the windswept location offers plenty of opportunities for kite surfing – or to simply observe the brave ones grappling with the sport, while you enjoy a drink at one of the many laid-back cafés and kiosks on the shore (00-372-547-424; www.visitestonia.com/en/pirita-beach; Merivälja tee 5, Pirita linnaosa; 24 X 7; free).



Eat

8 **Leib** is the Estonian homemade wholegrain bread, which accompanies almost every dish in the eponymous restaurant. **Leib** (above) is famous for its impeccable service, pretty location and simple but soulful food. The busts of 007's Sean Connery and Robert Burns at the entrance are oddities you cannot miss! (00-372-611-9026; www.leibresto.ee/en; Uus 31; 12pm–3pm, 6pm–11pm Mon–Fri, 12pm–11pm Sat, Sun closed; mains from ₹950)

9 To quench your thirst and discover Estonian culture at the same time, join a **beer-tasting tour** and follow a guide through historic pubs to sample traditional home-brewed ale. Beer lovers will fall in love with Vormsi Õlu, a craft beer made by a village of only 11 people (00-372-5826-2457; www.discoverestonia.com; Raekoja 1; tours: 10am–10pm; ₹1,460).

Shop

10 At **Kalev Chocolate Shop**, you can observe the masters at work on your favourite sweets, and even pick up some in their freshest form. You even have the chance to learn how to make chocolate and marzipan at the store (00-372-5452-5829; www.kalev.eu; Roseni tänav 7, Kesklinna linnaosa; 10am–8pm Mon–Sat, 11am–6pm Sun; marzipan: ₹1,100, chocolate-making workshop from ₹2,000/person).

DISCOVER GREAT ARCHITECTURE IN *Madhya Pradesh*

The heart of India is a treasure of beautiful architecture

GWALIOR

They say that chewing the leaves of the tamarind trees at the **Tansen Memorial** in Gwalior can enrich your voice. As it stands, magical qualities or not, the resting place of one of the Nine Jewels (*navaratna*) of Akbar's court has a nostalgic quality to it.

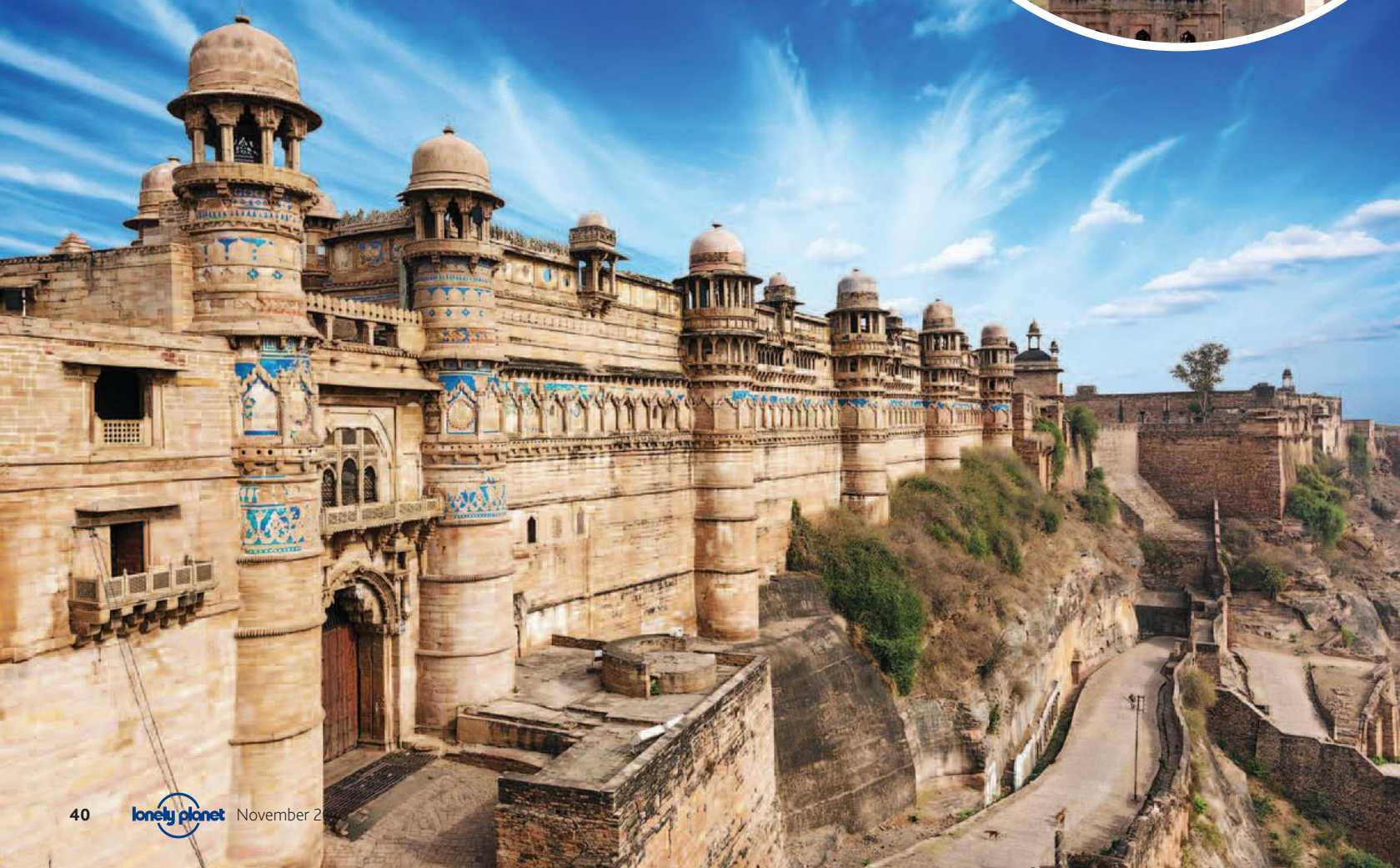
Gwalior is so steeped in history that it may take you weeks to soak in. **Gwalior Fort** (*sunrise – sunset*) towers over the dwellings of the city, reminding its inhabitants of the distant dangers it once staved off. "The pearl among fortresses in the empire," is what the

Mughal emperor Babar once called it. It has certainly been coveted like one, being fought over for possession from dynasty to dynasty. From its inception in the 8th century AD, this beautiful architectural jewel has been attacked several times, and makes for an interesting visit. It was briefly used as a prison, and yet, in an odd juxtaposition, also served as a luxurious palace for presiding royalty.

The **Scindia Museum** here is a sight to behold (*10am – 5.30pm Thur – Tues*). Its ornate gold-leaf decor and crystal chandeliers are a throwback to a time of unimaginable opulence and luxury.

NOW'S A
GOOD TIME

*Wonderful
weather awaits*



This city of music is the origin of most of the classical Hindustani styles we hear today, and the serene chimes of its temple bells reverberate through its palaces. The old Scindia summer capital of **Shivpuri** is a day-trip away, and has wonderful temples and picnic spots (117km).

ORCHHA

Perched on the River Batwa, the town of Orchha is a study in history and culture. Its graceful *chhatris* stand sentinel against the sky, welcoming visitors.

The nights in Orchha are quiet. They bring with them a refreshing feeling of calm. The hull and hubbub of the city falls away in this sparsely populated town, leaving only excitement for the day to come. In the bright morning light, historic sights await, ruins highlighted; fallen buildings spilling their insides like stories bursting free, tales that now whisper out from the shattered monuments.

Rai Parveen Mahal, for example, was built by a king so taken by a poetess that he built her a palace to immortalise her memory. Beautiful, lush gardens once surrounded this touching memorial.

As you wander through the famous **Orchha Fort**, more such enthralling stories emerge.

Your guide will regale you as they usher you into the **Ram Raja Temple** (8am – 12pm, 8pm – 10pm) within the fort. If his voice takes on a hushed tone of reverence while speaking, it is nothing unusual; this is believed to be where King Rama himself is worshipped with fervour. There is also the **Chaturbhuj Temple**, with exquisite architecture designed by a Rajput king.

BHIND

Those with a yearning for adventure will see in Bhind an interesting challenge. While many visit for its historic battlements, it is Bhind's ravines that give it a very distinctive nature. Once a lair for dacoits, these ravines now make for an interesting trek. The rivers **Chambal, Kali** and **Sind** surround it on all sides, and the narrow patches of land created

by the ravines mean the town also has dense and flourishing forests around it.

Bhind is also blessed with the beautiful **Sanakua Waterfall**, where the milky water gushes over rocks with extreme force. There are also 108 temples on the banks of the River Sindh, supposedly built by genies in one night. Situated 74km from Bhind is the **Rawatpura Sarkar**, a Hanuman temple spread over 25 hectares, with a pond, prayer hall, market, hotel, park, a number of smaller temples and a priest who is said to be able to communicate with Lord Hanuman himself (8am – 7.30pm). Another temple that must be visited here is the **Vakhandeswar Temple**, situated on the banks of a lake and built 800 years ago by Prithviraj Chauhan. It is said that the two lamps Chauhan lit at the temple's inauguration still burn bright. A shining

WHY GO
To uncover
architectural
marvels

star in Bhind, **Ater Fort** (30km) is located deep inside the ravines of the River Chambal. It has structures with fascinating names such as the **Khooni Darwaza**, **Badan Singh Ka Mahal**, **Hathiapor** and more tucked within its walls.

First-time visitors would do well to visit **Sadar Shopping Bazar**, which bursts with colour and offers all the local knick-knacks a visitor could desire.

With its mix of untouched natural beauty, ancient temples and intriguing history, Bhind definitely deserves to be explored at length.



The heart of
Incredible India

FIND OUT MORE: WWW.MPTOURISM.COM



Arrivals



Coffee dreams come true in Brooklyn

Tiny **Glass Hour** in NYC charges you by the hour instead of by the drink. \$6 (about ₹400) gets you unlimited coffee, sweets, wi-fi, video games and board games for the first hour; every extra minute is charged at 5c. The comfy couches, board games and PS4 make it an offer you will find very hard to resist (www.glasshour.com).



5 Minutes with Chef Ranveer Brar

The globe-trotting, award-winning chef has most recently been seen on *The Global Menu* on the Living Foodz channel

My first exposure to amazing food was in Lucknow when I was growing up. Lucknow has a lot of small neighbourhoods that offer history, diverse culture and splendid cuisine.

Each time I return to Lucknow, I seek out good *chaat*, especially at Akbari Gate, I love the street food around it. I also long for meals at my friends' homes in Old Lucknow, because they still have the old *haveli* cuisine – it's almost royal.

Travel has a strong influence on my food. A chef evolves by experiencing different things while travelling. Food is an offshoot of culture; it represents and symbolises the culture it stems from. Travel helps you mature as a chef. **Italian food has influenced my repertoire.** As a young chef, I had the opportunity of training under Antonio Carluccio, the godfather of Italian food, a stint that had a significant influence on my life. I'm also fond of Japanese cuisine; I love its simplicity.

My most recent brush with international

cuisines has been with *The Global Menu*, my show on the Living Foodz channel. The Indian palate has evolved significantly in the past few years and has moved away from the conventional idea of international cuisine. With this show, I delved into the culinary cultures of Peru, Argentina, Sri Lanka, the Middle East and Iceland, among others, and indulged my love for trying out new recipes such as the Hungarian goulash, *watalappam* from Sri Lanka and Egyptian *sherkaseya*. **The best way to understand any culture is through its street food.** Farmers, small producers and chefs help me gain access to local produce and foods abroad. **In India, dining-in is a big food trend that's here to stay.** Dining at home, cooking at home, pride in cooking at home, these trends are here to stay. People will also experiment with South American flavours and cuisines, and dishes with quinoa... **I'd love to open my next restaurant in Madrid.** Spain is my new fascination. I love the simple, yet robust flavours and flavour combinations of Spanish food.

If I could choose one restaurant in the world to eat at, it would be Jiro's in Japan!



A Grandmother to cook for you

There's something about grandma's cooking that sets the world to rights.

Which explains why Jody Scaravella of **ENOTECA MARIA** in New York City invites grandmothers with origins from around the world to cook *their* dishes for guests to enjoy at the restaurant. There's even a recipe book *Nonna's House: Cooking and Reminiscing With the Italian Grandmothers of Enoteca Maria*, so you can tap into their collective culinary wisdom (www.enotecamaria.com).

WITH INPUTS FROM PRIMROSE MONTEIRO-D'SOUSA, HARDIKA PANCHAL, ALISHA WADIA & FRIYAN DRIVER
PHOTOGRAPHS: JULY SNOOZE (INZ PODS), VLADIMIR SILVERSTOV/123RF (ANTARCTICA), ROMAN PSYCHYK/123RF (COFFEE)
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Pods away

A first in New Zealand, the **JUCY SNOOZE CHRISTCHURCH** offers budget-friendly pod-style accommodation minutes from Christchurch's airport. There are storage lockers, power supply and wi-fi, and even special rooms for families and baby boomers (www.jucyhotel.com/locations/snooze-christchurch/pod.aspx; from ₹ 1,900).

News in Brief



The dates for the much-awaited cruise from Mumbai to the Maldives are out! **Costa Cruises' Costa neoClassica** will sail weekly from December 16, 2016, to March 18, 2017. Bon voyage!

Delta Air Lines, Virgin Atlantic and Jet Airways are now a super-team of travel to North America.

This means that Jet Airways passengers flying between India and North America can connect through London Heathrow on to nine destinations in the USA operated by Delta. Delta and Virgin Atlantic passengers flying between North America and India can connect with Delta codeshare onto Jet Airways' flights to Mumbai and Delhi via London and onward to 20 destinations within India.



New Book

New from Lonely Planet: 2017 awaits!

Lonely Planet's Best in Travel 2017, the eagerly-anticipated annual collection of global destinations, travel trends and experiences, is out. The bestselling, inspirational travel yearbook lists the top 10 countries, cities, regions and best value destinations for travellers in 2017. It is a list selected by Lonely Planet's writers and experts who spend time on the road and take into account many factors to come up with the final selection. Why wait, then? Start planning your travel for next year now! (available at all prominent book stores and online stores; ₹ 1,057)

ANTARCTICA GETS THE WORLD'S LARGEST MARINE RESERVE

Comprising 598,000sqm (around twice the size of Texas), the world's largest marine protected area has been declared in the **ROSS SEA**, off **Antarctica**. Close to 16,000 species call these waters home and, now, 24 countries have come together in a landmark decision to defend them from mining and oil extraction for the next 35 years. Hoorah for the penguins and whales and everything in between!



MAX OUT BANGALORE AIRPORT

The **Bangalore Airport App** is a nifty little thing that takes the stress out of air travel, especially the time you spend at the airport. Features include flight tracking, one-touch wi-fi connect, flight and gate updates, retail and F&B offers, and, best of all, Google Indoor Maps so that you can stop running around like a headless chicken looking for your gate (available on iOS and Android versions).



GO FOOD- MAD IN MELBOURNE

Melbourne is known for its food scene, and also for upping the gluttony stakes every once in a while. New on the menu is a new **Chocolate, Queen Victoria Market, Doughnut and Coffee Tour** with **CHOCOHOOLIC TOURS**. You meander down mysterious lanes, sample tasty treats and scarf down a coveted hot jam doughnut from the American Doughnut Kitchen. There will be just 12 people on your two-and-a-half-hour tour and you'll indulge in eight (yes, eight!) chocolate tastings, a hot doughnut, a tasting bag to fill along the way, a morning tea pastry and a tea or coffee to keep your engine running (www.chocoholictours.com).



SINGAPORE CELEBRATES

The Singapore Tourism Board and Singapore Airlines have joined hands to throw one heck of a party especially for Indian visitors, in the festive season spanning Christmas and Chinese New Year (Jan 28 & 29, 2017).

Those flying into the island nation on Singapore Airlines and SilkAir until December 2016 will gain exclusive access to the '**SINGAPORE 241 PASSPORT**' smartphone app (compatible with Android and iOS), which is bursting with value-for-money two-for-one deals and offers worth up to ` 48,000 across 24 participating outlets in Singapore, including restaurants and spas. Apart from this, visitors to the Lion City can also soak in the festive atmosphere at Little India, Orchard Road (Christmas on a Great Street) and Chinatown, which will be dolled up in pretty lights (www.stb.gov.sg, www.yoursingapore.com).

TRENDALERT: BIKEPACKING

Travel on two wheels and camp out while you're at it! A fun adventure that combines mountain biking, off-road riding, cycle touring and sleeping in the wild, bikepacking is the cool new way to holiday, getting you as close to nature as you can bear.



The bicycle was invented in 1817; it's time to celebrate 200 years of your childhood wheelie buddy by plotting your spinning trips across stunning terrains like Cairngorms in Scotland, Spain's Basque country, Dartmouth in England and the Alps 2 Ocean trail in New Zealand. We just hope you don't get too tired.

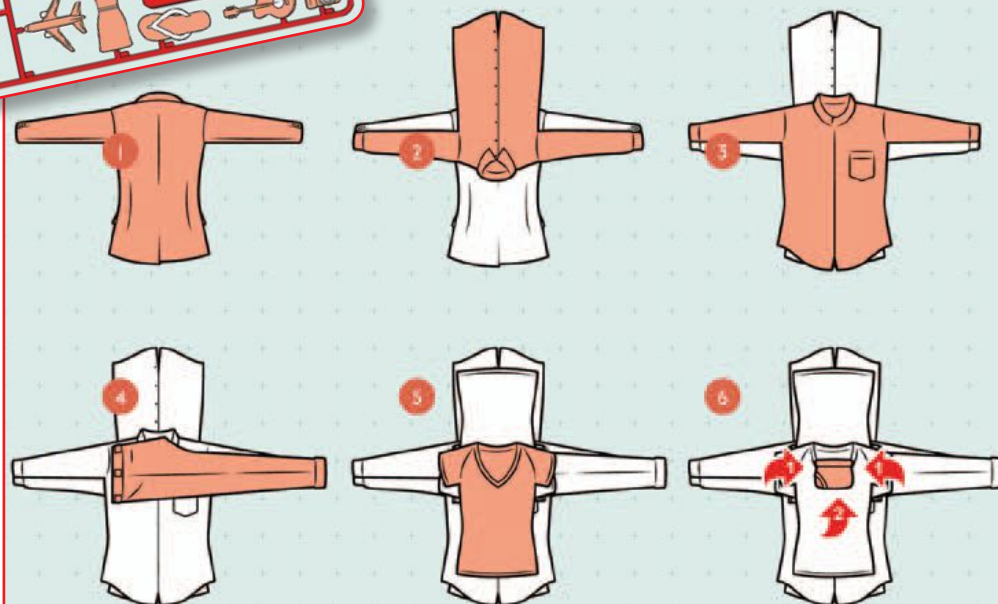


PHOTOGRAPH: MIKALAI MANY SHAU / T23RF (BIKEPACKING)



BAG IT UP

Make this year the one you totally nail packing. **How to Pack for Any Trip** from Lonely Planet is full of practical tips – steering you clear of excess baggage fees while maintaining a capsule wardrobe, whether for a city break or a trip to the tropics. It includes pictorial guides to crucial packing methods such as bundling, ensuring clothes remain crease-free (www.shop.lonelyplanet.com).



Mark your calendars

DECEMBER 3 & 4, 2016

WHAT: Jazz Yatra

WHERE: New Delhi, NCR

Part of the Jazz India Circuit, this festival sees a return of the iconic styles that dominated the 1970s and '80s. While the first event of the circuit, held in Goa, experimented with fusing other genres with jazz, Jazz Yatra in New Delhi will offer a more nostalgic experience with a bunch of great performances by Indian as well as international artistes, including renowned American jazz/ jazz fusion guitarist and pianist, Stanley Jordan, who will be headlining the event.

MORE: Buy tickets online at www.insider.in

Book Now



Jazz Yatra



Québec Winter Carnival

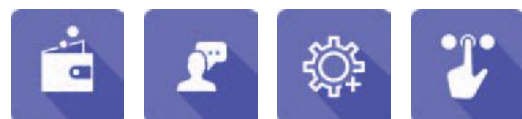
JANUARY 27 – FEBRUARY 12, 2017

WHAT: Québec Winter Carnival

WHERE: Québec City, Canada

Since it first began in 1955, the event has grown to be the largest winter carnival in the world. Winter sports, snow sculptures, and activities based on the traditional Québec lifestyle, such as canoe races and dogsled races, are all on the menu. Want to really get into the experience? Zipline high above the historic Plains of Abraham to watch the festivities, ride a traditional dogsled, taste warm maple taffy cooled on a bed of snow at a sugar shack, or take an outdoor "snow bath" by tumbling in snow – dressed only in a bathing suit.

MORE: www.carnaval.qc.ca



GO FROTH & TRAVEL

Aiming to be a "one-stop travel planner," **GoFro** lets you plan and customise your entire trip – by choosing

the flight tickets, stay, transfers and activities you want and when you want them, even intelligently recommending you buy tickets to concerts and sports events that might be happening when you're travelling. There's also visas, travel insurance, SIM cards – a battery of services designed to let you plan your holiday with just clicks of a mouse. Human agents not required. The site currently offers choose-your-itinerary packages for 14 destinations – Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Bali, Mauritius, Cambodia, Dubai, Sri Lanka, Australia, Vietnam, France, Greece, Switzerland and South Africa (www.gofro.com).

Dubrovnik on Show

"Winter is coming" to Dubrovnik, and the city's tourism board has a treat in store for you. Explore the worlds of Westeros in Dubrovnik, one of the major filming locations for *Game of Thrones*.

Every Saturday till March 2017, travellers can embark on a free tour of the old city that also includes a traditional folk music and dance performance (www.tzdubrovnik.hr).



FREE TRANSIT VISA ALERT!

Got an overly-long layover?

The next time you're transiting through Singapore, get soused in Clarke Quay or eat your way through the city's hawker stands; if Doha's on your itinerary, haggle through the Souq Waqif, or stroll through the fabulous Museum of Islamic Art.

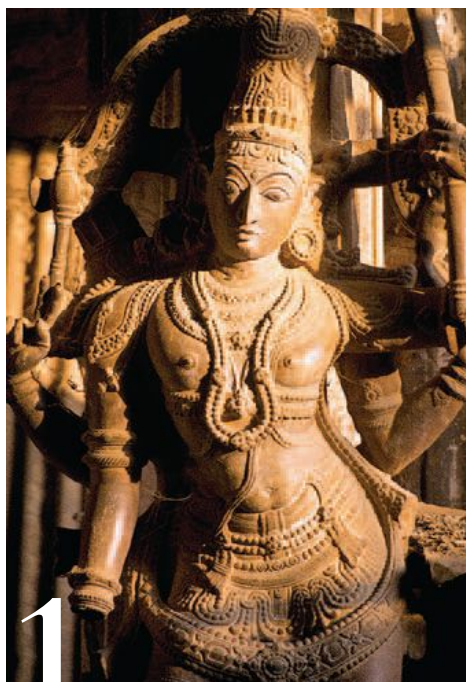
Indian nationals with a confirmed onward ticket and a valid visa for Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, United Kingdom, the US, Germany or Switzerland are eligible for a free 96-hour transit visa for **SINGAPORE**.

Passengers with a layover of more than five hours can avail of a free 96-hour transit visa at Hamad International Airport for **QATAR**; show a confirmed ticket for a journey into Qatar and a confirmed onward journey out on a Qatar Airways-operated flight.



Easy Trips

you can do now



1



2



3



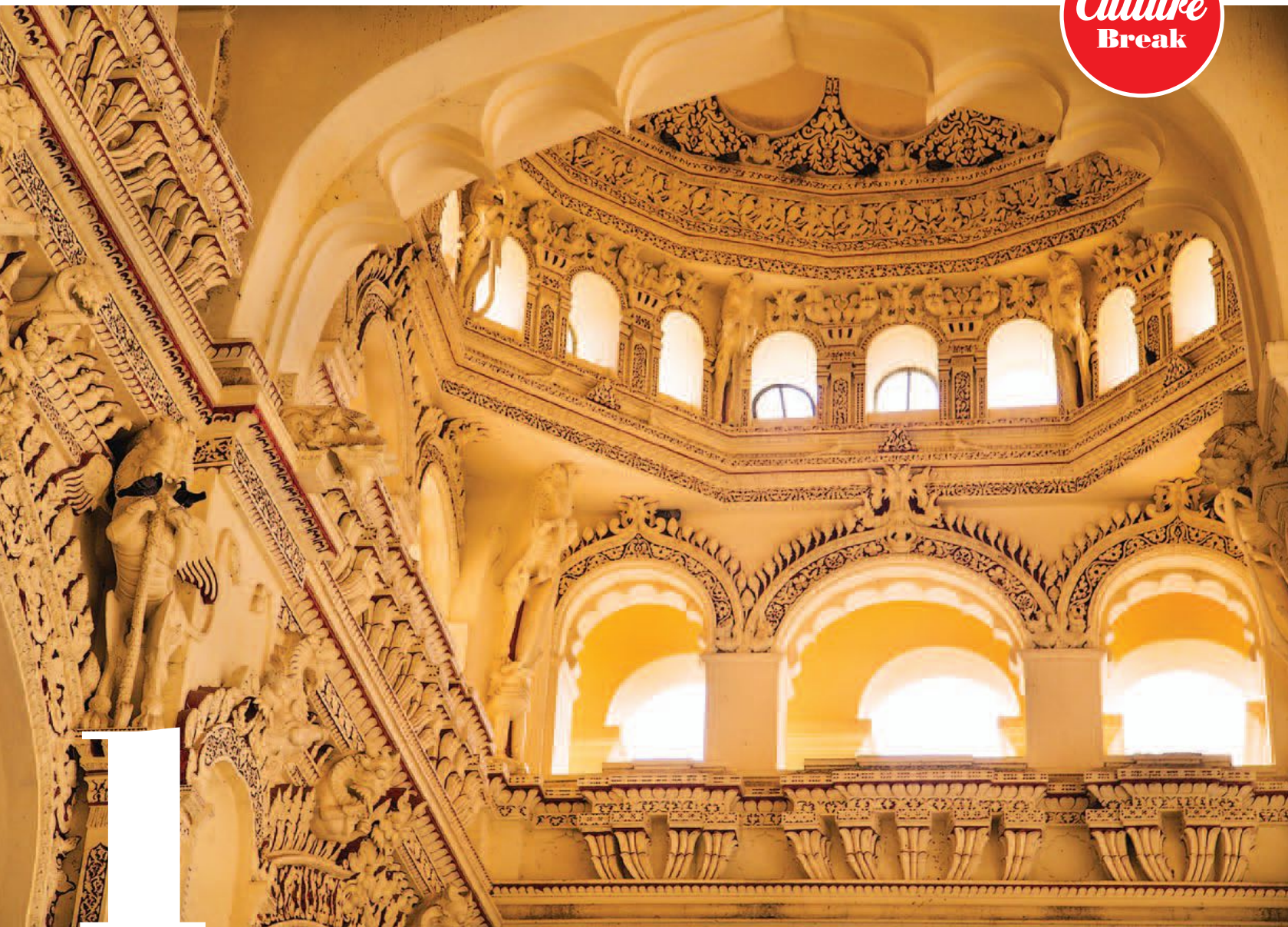
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5

inside

1. **MADURAI, Tamil Nadu**
Unearth the stories behind the sculptures on a culture break in the temple city
2. **HASSAN, Karnataka**
Get back to your 'roots' in this eco-camp set in an untamed *shola* forest
3. **TINCHULEY, West Bengal**
Spend a weekend amid oranges and friendly faces in this tiny village near Darjeeling
4. **DUDHWA TIGER RESERVE, Uttar Pradesh**
Bed down in a luxurious resort set in a wildlife reserve untouched by tourism (yet)
5. **MUMBAI, Maharashtra**
Ditch the fork and dig into *thalis* from various states in the Maximum City



Madurai, Tamil Nadu

TAMIL TALES

If Madurai were a book, it would be an anthology. Ruled by Pandyan kings for most of its history, it traded cotton with ancient Rome for silver and gold. Legend goes that Lord Shiva was present on the day the city was to be named, and, as some drops of nectar fell from his locks, the city came to be known as *mathuram*, meaning sweetness in Tamil.

It's not all too surprising that one of India's oldest cities is made up of stories. You'll learn some of them on the Once upon a Madurai tour by [Storytrails](#), a guided walk that takes you to temples and monuments, indifferent to their intricacies and splendour, focusing instead

on their myths and fables (00-91-7373675756; [www.storytrails.in](#); meeting point: North Entrance of Meenakshi Amman Temple; tours held twice daily: 7am–9.30am, 4pm–6.30pm; ₹5,500/two people, ₹1,100 to join a large group).

One of the pitstops on the tour is the 17th-century [Pudhu Mandapa](#), a pillared hall that now functions as a tailoring and shopping arcade (East Chithirai St; 9.30am–8.30pm). It's yet to officially open for the morning tour, but come back later to see the whirring of sewing machines and buy sparkling costume jewellery and sari borders. It's full of sculptures, including that of the three-breasted goddess Meenakshi, who, according to legend, lost

Thirumalai Nayakkar Palace showcases a mixture of decorative styles in its interior architecture

her third mammary the moment she met the one who was her match in every way.

Mere footsteps away is the city's pride and joy, the [Meenakshi Amman Temple](#) with its many storeys and many storied *gopurams* – ornate statue-adorned towers that are a typical feature of the temples in the state ([www.madurameenakshi.tnhrce.in](#); Chithirai St; darshan hours: 5am–12.30pm, 4pm–9pm). Built by four dynasties over six centuries, the temple was founded by the Pandyas, taken over by the Cholas and Vijayanagaras and, completed during the Nayak reign. There's much to discover inside the labyrinthine complex, including a hall with 985 pillars, known as the Hall of a Thousand Pillars,

MAIN PHOTOGRAPH: T. KRISHNA PRABAKAR



GREAT FROM

Chennai, Bangalore, Thanjavur

GREAT FOR

History buffs and culture vultures

GO NOW

For perfect sightseeing weather.

which now houses a museum of sculptures, murals depicting the life of the goddess, and a monolithic statue of Lord Ganesha. Two inner sanctums are devoted to Meenakshi and her consort Shiva. Reserve a few hours to explore. Mornings are a flurry of activity, but visitors also

return to see the fascinating ritual to unite the god and goddess at bedtime (9pm).

After the tour, make your way to the **Thirumalai Nayakkar Palace** on foot to avoid traffic snarls, and also pause at **Famous Jigarthanda** for the city's favourite drink. The glass of milk cream *sharbat* with almond *pisin* (resin) and *nannari* (sarsaparilla plant) will provide a sugar rush that will last a few hours (see *Where to Eat*). The 17th-century abode of the king, the palace is an example of Dravidian-Islamic architecture with a curious melange of styles (9am–1pm, 1.30pm–5pm; ₹10). Partly destroyed and pillaged by Thirumalai Nayak's own grandson, only a fraction of the original

1. A procession on the streets of Madurai

2. The Vandiyur Mariamman Teppakulam is a good spot for people-watching

3. Madurai *malli*, found all over the city, is a famous variety of jasmine

4. Devotees wanting children tie mini cradles to the trees around the Meenakshi Amman Temple

5. Peacocks roam the grounds of the Gateway Hotel Pasumalai Madurai

structure remains, but it's still quite grand with impressive stucco work, richly-decorated archways and a dance hall that will transport you back a hundred years.

It is believed that the soil for the palace was excavated from the **Vandiyur Mariamman Teppakulam**, a tank with a *mandapa* on an island. Though it only fills up in the monsoon and for the annual Float Festival, it is a great place at which to spend the evening, digest some of the stories and contemplate this fascinating dichotomy – a rapidly-changing city steeped in history.

WORDS SHEENA DABHOLKAR
PHOTOGRAPHS VINOBHA NATHAN

**FACT SHEET****GETTING THERE**

Closest metro: Chennai (464km)

Closest airport: Madurai Airport (13km)

is connected to most Indian metros with one stop. SpiceJet, Jet Airways, Air Carnival and Air India have direct flights from Chennai (return fares from ₹ 2,200).

Closest railhead: Madurai Junction (MDU)

Take the **12637 Pandian Express** (leaves Chennai Egmore [MS] 9.20pm, arrives MDU 6.10am; ₹ 810

Third AC), and return by the **12632 Nellai Express** (leaves MDU 10.10pm, arrives MS 6.55am; ₹ 810 Third AC).

GETTING AROUND

Auto rickshaws are available locally but do not run by meter, so agree on a price beforehand. If you would like your own transport, we recommend the services of **Travel Cart**, which can also organise guides (00-91-9447169933; www.travelcartindia.com; ₹ 3,000/ day for an AC car).

**WHERE TO STAY**

Royal Court: This well-located, no-frills hotel offers clean and spacious rooms that won't break the bank, and a rooftop restaurant with incredible vistas of the city (00-91-452-4356666; www.royalcourtindia.com, booking@royalcourtindia.com; 4, West Veli St, opp Railway Stn; from ₹ 4,200 with breakfast).

Heritage Madurai: This boutique property occupies the former Madurai Club, designed by renowned architect Geoffrey Bawa, and residences of the staff of Madura Mills. It offers beautifully-furnished rooms and old bungalows sectioned into luxurious suites with plunge pools. A much larger Olympic-sized pool, inspired by the design of a temple tank, is the resort's pièce de résistance (00-91-452-2385455; www.heritagemadurai.com, reservations@heritagemadurai.com; 11, Melakkal Main Rd, Kochadai; plunge pool villas from ₹ 7,200 with breakfast).

The Gateway Hotel Pasumalai

Madurai: Tucked away on the hill, this secluded hotel offers fabulous views of the city and the Kodai Hills. Set in a converted Colonial residence, it offers amenities such as a pool, spa, tennis courts and, unusually, a portrait artist on its sprawling property (00-91-452-6633000; www.thegatewayhotels.com/pasumalai-madurai/overview.html, gateway.madurai@tajhotels.com; 40, TPK Rd; from ₹ 9,720).

A frothy filter kaapi is the city's other beverage of choice

**WHERE TO EAT**

Drop in at **Murugan Idli Shop**, one of a humble Tamil chain, for a breakfast of the fluffiest idlis and crispiest vada, or medu vada (00-91-452-2341379; www.muruganidlishop.com; 196, West Masi St; 7am – 11pm; ₹12/ idli). During your



temple visit, step out to **Gopu Iyengar Tiffin Center**, an 86-year-old establishment outside the north-west corner of the temple, for a glistening podi dosa washed down with piping-hot filter coffee (00-91-9788730887; www.gopuiyengars.com; 1, West Chithrai St; 7am – 11pm, 4pm – 8pm; Mon closed; podi dosa: ₹ 42). Meat enthusiasts, you're in luck. Mop up the mutton kari dosa with lashings of spicy gravy at **Simakal Konar Kadai** (00-91-452-4230383; North Veli St, near Railway Stn, Simmakal; 12pm – 3.30pm, 6.30pm – 11.30pm; mutton kari dosa: ₹ 150). If you like your snacks or iced coffee with a side of wonderful cityscapes, spend the late afternoon on the rooftop of **Hotel Supreme** (00-91-452-2343151; 110, West Perumal Maistry St; 4pm – 12am; vadai: ₹ 10). A Madurai original, **Famous Jigarthanda** is not named that for nothing (00-91-9843054186; www.famousjigarthanda.com; 94, East Marret St; 10.30am – 10.30pm, closed Fri lunchtime; ₹ 25/ glass).

**WHAT TO PACK**

Pack light, loose clothing as Madurai is hot but conservative.

**SHOPPING**

If you're in the market for fabrics or saris, try **Rajmahal** (00-91-452-2666666; 37, Vengalakadai St; 9.30am – 9.30pm; silk saris from ₹ 3,000).

**CLEAN LOO GUIDE**

Most restaurants have usable loos and handwash facilities.

**MEDICAL AID**

Meenakshi Mission Hospital and Research Centre is well equipped for emergencies (00-91-452-2581212; www.mmhrc.in; Lake Area, Melur Rd).

GOOD TO KNOW

- * Devotees can (slightly) bypass the lengthy queues by paying a ₹ 100 entrance fee that allows quicker access to both shrines.
- * Only mobile photography (₹ 50) is allowed inside the temple and only in select parts. Leave cameras and valuables behind.
- * You will also have to check in your socks and footwear beforehand and enter the complex barefoot. Arms and knees need to be covered.

THE SEASONS. THE TIDES. YOUR BODY CLOCK. YOU MAKE THE CONNECTION.



TRAVEL WELL

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Huli Vana Rainforest Retreat, Hassan, Karnataka

VANA COME?

It's a curious feeling to have a cicada as a bedfellow, its beady black eyes peering at you as it rests on your pillow, alarmingly close to your face. But if the occasional creepy-crawly (and a civet with an affinity for soap) is the price to pay for a secluded, rustic cottage overlooking a gurgling stream where deer sometimes come to drink, so be it.

Eleven kilometres from any human habitation and on the border of the Kabin Hulla Reserve Forest, Huli Vana Rainforest Retreat (meaning 'the place where tigers congregate') is an escapist's dream come true. Margunda Village is your last contact with civilisation – you'll soon find

yourself bumping down a (very) rough, barely-there road to get to the retreat. Once there, you're cut off from everything, and it feels pretty darn good.

Owner Sunil Roy is happy to show visitors around. What started out as an experimental project to help environmental researchers get closer to their subject matter has slowly evolved into a cocooned getaway. This means no wi-fi, no phone signal, and no other pesky people.

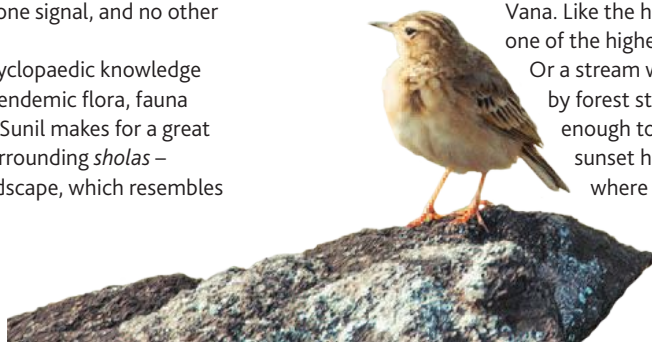
With an encyclopaedic knowledge of the region's endemic flora, fauna and insect life, Sunil makes for a great guide to the surrounding *sholas* – the unique landscape, which resembles

Above: There's nothing better than a four-hour hike through the rainforest to get your blood pumping

Below: There's a rich population of avifauna that flocks to the rainforest around Huli Vana

lumps of broccoli, sitting next to smooth, rolling Teletubby-esque hills. "Have you ever heard of zombie caterpillars?" he asks, casually holding up a green vine snake he's just picked up off the ground. "Their brains get taken over by wasp larvae, who then make the caterpillar do their bidding." He will regale you with charming stories like these on the multiple treks you can do around Huli Vana. Like the half-day one to [Jenukallu](#), one of the highest peaks in Hassan.

Or a stream walk that will take you by forest streams with water pure enough to drink, or even the short sunset hike to [Halsingudda](#) from where you can see Chikmagalur,





GREAT FROM

Bangalore, Mangalore, Mysore

GREAT FOR

Getting up close and personal with Mother Nature

GO NOW

While the hills are green after the rains.

Hassan and Sakleshpur all in one sweeping glance.

But, apart from treks and bird-watching walks, the camp offers a bunch of other activities, too, like mountain biking (*free*) or kite-flying (*free*). The more specialised

ones include lepidoptera – that's butterflies for laymen (*from ₹ 1,500; book at least two weeks in advance*), herp-watching to scout for endemic reptiles and amphibians (*from ₹ 1,500; book in advance*), and bee-keeping in the property's very own apiary (*free*). In the past, he has also made arrangements for canopy researchers, who camp out in suspended tents to observe all things arboreal. The retreat also hosts workshops on various topics related to the natural world, and anyone who's interested can sign up.

If you haven't already figured it out, this place is all about nature (reinforced by the bugs in your room, the late-night

1. Creepy-crawlies will become familiar friends by the end of your trip

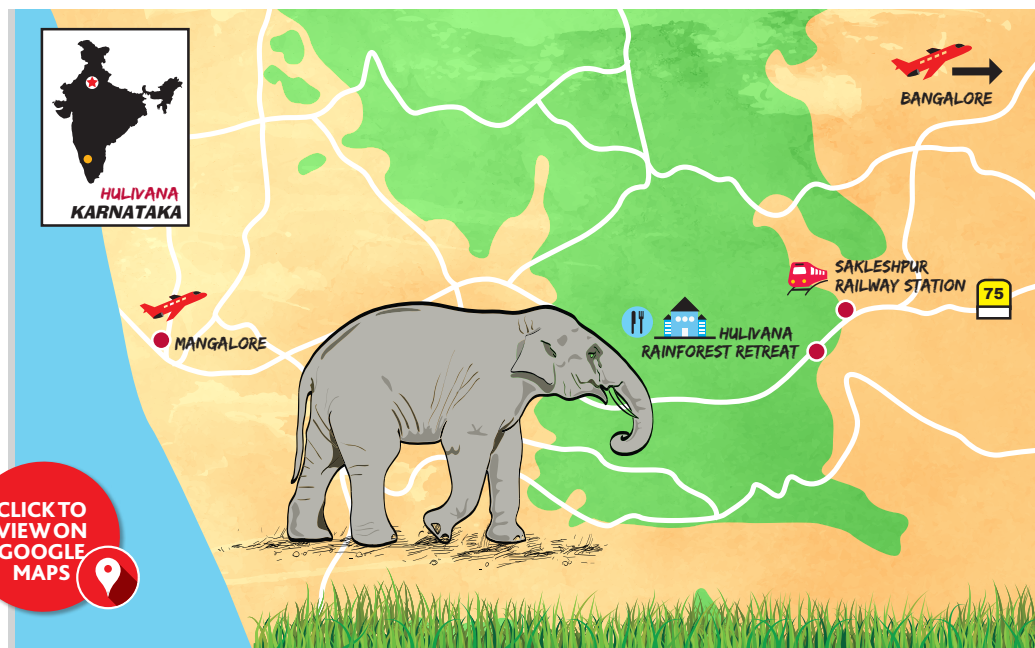
2. It's a Zen-like experience walking through the forest with the sound of a gurgling stream as your soundtrack

3. Now you know where the honey they serve you at breakfast comes from

4. Simple but cosy, the rooms at Huli Vana are your little cocoon of warmth in the wild

critter visits and the all-round simplicity of the place). But that doesn't mean you have to make a wild adventure out of it. The great thing about Huli Vana is that it's also the perfect place at which to unwind. If trekking and poking about bushes for snakes doesn't interest you, you can lie in a hammock with a book from the library, get a massage by a stream from a certified masseur (₹ 1,000), gorge on snacks by the evening bonfire (*veg starters from ₹ 75, non-veg starters from ₹ 200*) or stargaze in the impossibly clear night sky. Mother Nature is quite forgiving, that way.

WORDS SHARMEEN HUSSAIN
PHOTOGRAPHS VINOBHA NATHAN

**FACT SHEET****GETTING THERE**

Closest metro: Bangalore (232km)

Closest city: Mangalore (120km)

Closest airport: Mangalore International

Airport (126km) is the closest, but Bangalore's **Kempegowda International Airport** (256km) is better connected to most cities.

Closest Railhead: Sakleshpur Railway Station (11km; SKLR). There are trains from Bangalore to Sakleshpur, but the options are limited and most of the trains arrive in the middle of the night.

Take the **16515 Yesvantpur Karwar Express**, which runs only on Monday, Wednesday and Friday (leaves Yesvantpur Junction Railway Station [YPR] 7am, arrives SKLR 12pm; ₹ 385 AC Chair Car) and, on your way back, take the **16518 Bangalore**

Express (leaves SKLR 1.35am, arrives Bangalore City Railway Station [SBC] 8.20am; ₹ 545 Third AC).

GETTING AROUND

If you are driving to Huli Vana, you can only take your car as far as Margunda in Sakleshpur (parking is available here). A jeep from Huli Vana will pick you up from there (₹ 500/ person). Alternatively, hire a cab from Bangalore or Mangalore airport to take you to Margunda. We used and liked **Travel Zone** (00-91 9980222022; anthony.travelzone@gmail.com; from ₹ 3,400/ day for an AC sedan). If you're arriving by train, Huli Vana can arrange to have you picked up from the station for an extra fee (autorickshaw: ₹ 650, taxi/ jeep: ₹ 900).

**WHERE TO STAY****Huli Vana Rainforest Retreat:**

There are just two cottages that sleep two people each, and additional tents for larger groups. The cottages are rustic and simple but comfortable, with wooden interiors and large glass windows that overlook a stream. At this eco-conscious camp, electricity is generated by a hydro turbine. There is minimal lighting in the rooms, so if you wish to read or need extra light, carry a torch. On chilly nights, you can ask for the fireplace to be lit (00-91-9108671755, 00-91-9845439017; www.hulivana.com, reservations@hulivana.com; Survey No 23, Hodchalli, Hanbal Hobli, Sakleshpur Taluk, Hassan; cottages from ₹ 3,500, tents from ₹ 2,750

with meals, trekking, mountain biking, lawn golf, archery, kite-flying, and bee-keeping).

**WHERE TO EAT**

Meal times at Huli Vana are an elaborate affair, with everything from North and South Indian cuisine, to continental and local Malnad food. Meals are served in the dining hall, an arduous walk away from the rooms. Expect signature Malnad dishes like *akki roti* – a thick *roti* made from rice flour, *kadubu* – balls of rice flour and coconut usually eaten with *kalile* – a spicy bamboo shoot curry, or the local favourite, pork curry. Don't miss the *urulu gadbu* – a delicious mix of white jaggery and sesame seeds rolled in a *ragi* pancake.

**WHAT TO PACK**

Carry a pair of sturdy sneakers, preferably hiking shoes, a light jacket for the evening, and a torch, as there is minimal lighting around the camp

**CLEAN LOO GUIDE**

Hotel Mayura is a good place to stop, as it's about halfway on your five-and-a-half-hour-drive from Bangalore's airport. The toilets are relatively clean and the restaurant serves decent fare (00-91-8234290943; Bellur Cross Rd, Nagamangala Taluk, Mandya; 11.30am – 10.30pm; from ₹ 40).

SAFETY

Plan to arrive at or leave Huli Vana well before sunset, and don't venture too far from the camp at night as you're in the wild. If you choose to go trekking, remember that there are leeches in this area. Ask for lime powder or salt to keep them at bay. Keep an eye out for snakes.

**MEDICAL AID**

Huli Vana offers basic first-aid for minor injuries, ailments and snake bites. For more serious medical emergencies, the nearest big hospital is **NDRK Hospital** in Hassan, 53km away (00-91-8172266022; Bangalore-Mangalore Rd, next to Bhanu Theatre; open 24 x 7).

CHILD FRIENDLINESS

Huli Vana might not appeal to younger kids as there isn't a whole lot for them to do here. While there are activities such as biking and lawn golf on offer, these are more suitable for teenagers and adults.

**SHOPPING**

Huli Vana sells fresh honey harvested from its own apiary (₹ 700/ large jar). It also grows and harvests cardamom (₹ 200/ 200g). Sakleshpur has plenty of shops that sell local produce like coffee (from ₹ 500/ kg) and pepper (from ₹ 80/ 100g).

GOOD TO KNOW

- * Make sure you arrive at the Margunda parking lot before 5pm for the jeep transfer to Huli Vana. Entry into the forest is prohibited post 5pm.
- * Huli Vana is closed from July to September.
- * The property also offers jeep safaris to nearby waterfalls at an extra cost (from ₹ 2,500/ jeep [accommodates six people]).

YOU DON'T COME HERE TO CATCH UP ON YOUR SLEEP.



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3



Gurung Guest House, Tinchuley, West Bengal

HILL-SEEKERS

At some 5,800ft, tucked high and above Darjeeling, on a strip of a road snaking past tea gardens wearing a foggy white cloak and trailing off somewhere near a forest infused with the sweet smell of pine, Tinchuley makes for a pretty picture in winter, despite the blistering cold. And Gurung Guest House is a shade better, with sniffers of brandy (or rum) and friendly guitar-playing locals for company, while you sit curled around a bonfire and blow white puffs of air just for fun. This place has all the fixings of a very promising weekend in the hills.

Tinchuley, or The Three Ovens (so called for the three oven-shaped hills,

or *teen chulla*), is a wee hamlet that seems like it popped out of Enid Blyton's *The Faraway Tree*. It's home to barely 20 families – an enterprising bunch, too, learning the ropes of organic farming from the World Wide Federation and throwing their homes open to travellers. Among these, Gurung Guest House, run by the Gurung family, is a standout homestay. Brightly-coloured wooden cottages are perched amid a profusion of green, while the garden spills over with orchids and tall trees. For those of you not too keen on roughing it, think 'homestay' in bold, black capital letters or like one of those blinking neon signs. It's rustic and perfectly ordinary, no frills attached.

Sel roti, a festive Nepalese specialty made from rice flour, is sweet fried goodness that goes exceptionally well with tea at Gurung Guest House

Yet, it's the just Gurung family treating you like long-lost family, which is the heart and soul of this homestay.

They'll start by stuffing you with rich, home-cooked dishes, urging you with great enthusiasm to take that third helping. While it's mostly simple North Indian fare like fiery meat curries, hearty dals and steaming veggies, be prepared for copious quantities to disappear in minutes.

Walk it off; the woods are lovely, dark and deep and scented pine-fresh, rather like a great man once said (*guide: ₹ 300/ half-day, ₹ 500/ full-day for walks, treks and tea estate visits*). Just a hop, skip and a jump or ride away (*mountain bike hire: ₹ 100/ hour*), the **Gumbadara viewpoint**



GREAT FROM

Kolkata, Darjeeling, Gangtok

GREAT FOR

Vanishing under a fat blanket of fog

GO NOW

While the weather's nippy.

throws up immense views of far-off mountains and nearby tea estates with wispy bits of mist floating about. While you're out and about, do see the sights, there are more tea gardens and orange orchards than you can count here.

Green Lawns, an organic farm and orange

orchard, is lovely for a stroll (*ask the homestay to arrange this; 10am – 4pm; ₹ 30*). It's less farm, and more forest with dense foliage, overgrown herbs and oranges so fresh and juicy they stain your hands deep amber when you peel them. Spread along the hill slopes, the **Rangli Rangliot Tea Estate** makes for a peaceful drive.

Take a break from tea plantations and spend some quiet time at a sweet little monastery in Tinchuley. Legend goes that a monk meditated here for years on end, emerging one day with no regard for his growing toenails or unruly hair. If nature's in a particularly good mood – all beaming sun and powder-blue skies –

1. The cottages and deluxe rooms are bright and traditional

2 & 4. Walks through local organic orchards throw up pretty views

3. Spin Tinchuley monastery's multi-coloured prayer wheels and erase some bad karma

5. Momos and Maggi make happy companions at the Triveni viewpoint at the confluence of the Rangeet and Teesta rivers

gasp away at the views of the peaks – except Kalimpong, which is just a blot on the landscape.

Return to some piping-hot tea, a cacophony of cicadas and views of the valley from your balcony at the homestay. Fog gathers thick and fast as the evening grows dark and chilly. And, very soon, the Gurungs will be strumming guitars like rockstars, bursting into song and regaling you with wild tales around a crackling bonfire. And, before you know it, they'll have you dancing and singing the night away like it's a family celebration.

WORDS ALISHA WADIA

PHOTOGRAPHS VAIBHAV MEHTA

**FACT SHEET****GETTING THERE**

Closest metro: Kolkata (625km)

Closest city: Darjeeling (25km)

Closest airport: Bagdogra Airport (75km) is about four hours via winding mountain roads. Air India, Go Air, Jet Airways, IndiGo, Vistara and SpiceJet fly here from Kolkata (return fares from ₹ 3,950).

Closest railhead: New Jalpaiguri Railway Station (NJP; 70km). Take the 13149 Kanchankanya Express from Kolkata (leaves Sealdah [SDAH]

8.30pm, arrives NJP 7.30am; ₹ 870 Third AC) and return by the 12378 Padatik Express (leaves NJP 9pm, arrives SDAH 6.45am; ₹ 915 Third AC).

GETTING AROUND

We used and liked the services of **Clubsides Tours and Travels** (Darjeeling: 00-91-354-2254646; www.clubsides.in, enquiry@clubsides.in; from ₹ 3,300/day by AC SUV). As the road is rough and narrow in several patches, it's safest to hire a four-wheel drive for the mountain roads leading to Darjeeling.

WHERE TO STAY **Gurung Guest House:**

Opt for the wooden cottages and deluxe rooms over the double rooms. Furnished simply, they're spacious, with Tibetan carpets, clean ensuite bathrooms and balconies with views. Ask for a heater and layer up at night (00-91-9933036336; www.tinchuley.com; Tinchuley, Takdah; cottage from ₹ 1,350, deluxe rooms from ₹ 3,000).

WHERE TO EAT

The ladies of the kitchen here are exceptionally talented. Home-style meals are served hot and fresh in the dining room, which has shelves lined with homemade jams, marmalades and pickles. They also dish out *momos* and *thukpa* on request (breakfast: 8am – 8.30am, lunch: 1pm – 2pm; dinner: 8pm – 8.30pm; ₹ 600/ person/ day for all meals, and morning and evening tea).

WHAT TO PACK Warm woolly clothes, thermals, a quick-dry windcheater, towels and toiletries, a flashlight

SHOPPING Bring home Gurung Guest House's homemade pickles, spicy chillies and tangy tamarind (from ₹ 100 for about 75gm). Pick up dried orange-peel powder, which makes for refreshing face pack, from the orange orchards (₹ 10).

SAFETY

Watch your step, the paths are not well lit at night, and slippery and jagged after a spell of rain.



Above: Tinchuley is enveloped in greenery and Tibetan prayer flags
Below: The fiery homemade pickles served at mealtimes are a must-try

MEDICAL AID

Carry your own medicines and first-aid. The nearest hospital equipped for emergencies is **Darjeeling District Hospital** (00-91-354-2254218; Hill Cart Rd, near Darjeeling Police Station).

CHILD-FRIENDLINESS

Children will enjoy the outdoors and mountain biking around the homestay. But remember, it gets very chilly during these months.

GOOD TO KNOW

- * Bird nerds can ask Dipendra Gurung for a list of birds – laughing thrushes, whistling thrushes, leiothrix, babblers and warblers are commonly seen around the lodge.
- * Takdah Orchid Centre, about a half-hour away, is a quiet garden with greenhouses of flowers (₹ 10).

3 DAYS BECOME A WEEK. A WEEK BECOMES A MONTH.



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Jaagir Lodge, Dudhwa Tiger Reserve, UP

TALES FROM THE WILD

A visit to a forest usually means a schedule that ensures maximum time in the wilderness – through safari, nature walks, visits to nearby villages. It is unusual, then, to come across a lodge that makes you want to spend a little more time indoors.

Jaagir Lodge, a Tree of Life Resorts & Hotels' property, at Dudhwa Tiger Reserve, is unique enough for you to feel a twinge of sadness when leaving every morning. Built in the 1940s, it was once used – unfortunately so – as a hunting lodge by the British government. Despite restorations, the lodge retains its old-world charm and it is this design

aesthetic, and the attention to detail to the tiniest element that is the property's biggest win. The other being that it sits close to one of the most beautiful wildlife parks in the country.

Spend your mornings at [Dudhwa Tiger Reserve](#) (45-minute drive from the lodge), a forest that is as yet untouched by the circus that is today's tiger tourism. Drive through the early morning mist in the forest, under tall canopies of teak and sal, and spot raptors like the changeable hawk eagle, the fish owl, or other birds like the great Indian hornbill and sarus cranes. Winter brings the chance to see migratory birds, while summer is the breeding season for the

A bathtub sits in the middle of a jhalla, evidently stocked to cater to visitors in need of a luxury stay

Bengal florican. The highlights of the park include the tiger, the swamp deer (the barasingha), the wild elephant and, of course, the one-horned rhino, which was introduced here in 1984. The rhino enclosure can be navigated only on elephant back and is truly the wild, untamed heart of the forest (see *Good to Know*).

Return to the lodge for lunch, where the outdoor seating at the restaurant, located in a mango grove, yields sightings of birds like the black drongo, racket-tailed drongo, rufous treepie, hoopoe and lapwings.

Split your time between the different parts of the Dudhwa Tiger Reserve,



GREAT FROM

Lucknow, New Delhi

GREAT FOR

A luxurious holiday in the wilderness

GO NOW

As it's the best time of year for migratory bird-watching and for misty mornings.

a protected forest that is home to the Dudhwa National Park, Kishanpur Wildlife Sanctuary and Katarniaghat Wildlife Sanctuary. While the former are jungles with dirt tracks for safaris,

Katarniaghat offers sightings of gharials, muggers and Gangetic dolphins from a boat on the Girwa River.

You can do all of these as day-trips from the lodge and, if you're not inclined to venture too far, choose a walk along the property with a naturalist for some butterfly- and bird-watching (*free*). India shares a forested border with Nepal in this region, and, if you drive 40km from the lodge, you'll be at the immigration point.

The owner of the five-acre property, New Delhi-based architect Kamaljit Singh, has put his years of experience and obvious passion into the creation of this resort. Each room (three Luxury

1. Each room showcases a unique design, thought through to the tiniest detail

2. Dudhwa Tiger Reserve is home to the one-horned rhino, introduced in the park in 1984

3. A drive through a forest untouched by manic tiger tourism is a treat

4. The lodge facilitates day-trips based on your interest

Rooms, three Luxury Suites, six Luxury *Jhallas* [villas]) has a different layout and design, from colourful Bikaneri tiles in the bathrooms to vintage storage boxes to teak dressers that belong to the colonial era and couches with tapestry with gorgeous animal illustrations. Winters are best experienced in its seating areas with stone fireplaces, hot cups of tea and stories from the wild.

Now that you know all this, here's something you can do for us in return. There is a wall in room five that is filled with the most beautiful bird illustrations. Bring us back that wall. We won't tell.

WORDS SEJAL MEHTA

TURN OVER FOR ALL YOU NEED TO GET THERE

**FACT SHEET****GETTING THERE**

Closest metro: New Delhi (431km) is a nine-hour drive away.

Closest city: Lucknow (206km)

Closest airport: Lucknow Airport (236km)

It's best to fly to Lucknow and drive to the lodge. The roads are good to drive on and delays, if any, would only be on account of traffic getting in or out of Lucknow. Air India, GoAir, Jet Airways and Vistara fly to Lucknow from New Delhi (return fares from ₹ 3,000 when booked in advance). Jaagir Lodge can arrange for airport transfers (₹ 8,000/ one way).

Closest railhead: Shahjahanpur Railway Station (SPN; 96km). Take the **15910 Avadh Assam Express** (leaves Delhi Railway Station [DLI] 7.45am, arrives SPN 2.17pm; ₹ 570 Third AC) and return by the **15909 Avadh Assam Express** (leaves SPN 8.15am, arrives DLI 3.05pm; ₹ 570 Third AC). The lodge can organise station transfers (₹ 3,500/ one way).

GETTING AROUND

Once at the lodge, you will be taking the lodge's vehicle for all the sightseeing you want to do (prices depend on the excursion you choose).

**WHERE TO STAY****Tree of Life Jaagir Lodge:**

There is a range of stay options to choose from here. The suites have outdoor porches with seating, while the *jhallas* (villas) are luxurious with a loft room. Meals are served at the restaurant. The grounds are lovely to walk around in, and the lodge also has a pool with recycled water (00-91-9602091000, 00-91-9602092000; www.treeofliferesorts.com, unwind@treeofliferesorts.com; Bikram Ban Farms, Pallia Kalan, District Lakhimpur Kheri; from ₹ 12,000 with breakfast).

**WHERE TO EAT**

Chefs at the in-house restaurant, **The Pavilion**, serve freshly-prepared meals according to what you have decided in advance. There is no buffet system here – all the food is made to suit individual requirements. You can

choose from vegetarian or non-vegetarian Indian and continental meals (7am – 11pm; three-course meal: ₹ 1,500/ person).

**WHAT TO PACK**

Carry a pair of sturdy walking shoes, mosquito repellent, binoculars – if you're interested in birding and – warm clothes for the morning/ evening safaris (cover your ears, neck and feet and you'll be able to enjoy sightings without freezing). You'll be going through dense jungle during the elephant safari, so ensure your hands and feet are covered to prevent insect bites.

SAFETY

The lodge is well-lit and the staff hospitable. You shouldn't leave the lodge after dark as you're close to the forest. There isn't much to do in the area anyway, and you'd be happier in the library bar with a nightcap.

**MEDICAL AID**

The nearest town is Palia (15km), and, while there is a government hospital there, it would be best to drive to Lucknow for a major medical emergency. The lodge has a doctor on call and a first-aid kit.

CHILD-FRIENDLINESS

The lodge has no activities specially geared towards children, as the idea is to spend time on safaris and walks. The property is pretty large so there's enough place to run around and play. There's also a friendly dog on the grounds, if that helps.

**CLEAN LOO GUIDE**

You can't really go anywhere inside the national parks save for the designated rest areas, where the loos are, at best, usable. Carry your own toilet paper and hand sanitiser. Between Lucknow and the lodge, your best bet would be Indian Oil's Service Station in Hargaoon (125km from Lucknow Airport, next to Hargaoon Police Station, SH 21).

GOOD TO KNOW

- * **Dudhwa Tiger Reserve** is open from November 15 to June 15. The lodge is only open during these dates.
- * To increase your chances of animal sightings, wear earth tones like green and brown, don't use strong perfumes, and, more importantly, keep your mobiles (and voices) on silent.
- * There are several watchtowers on safari from which to spot wildlife. In the winter, you can see one of the largest congregation of swamp deer in the country gathering to feed in the marshland.
- * Jaagir Lodge can organise safaris into **Dudhwa National Park** (₹ 2,800/ person including naturalist's fee, park entrance fee, elephant-back safari in the park and vehicle entrance fees), **Kishanpur Wildlife Sanctuary** (₹ 2,200/ person including naturalist's fee, park entrance fee and vehicle entrance fee) and **Katarniaghat Wildlife Sanctuary** (₹ 3,500/ person with a naturalist, park entrance fee and vehicle entrance fee).
- * If you plan to do the safari at Katarniaghat, ensure you reach early in the morning for the boat ride for better chances of sightings.

SOMETIMES, A CAMERA ONLY COMES IN THE WAY.



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Thali trail through Mumbai, Maharashtra

STATE YOUR PREFERENCE

River fish in a velvety mustard sauce. Served with a side of pride. The *Illish Sorso* is part of an Oriya *thali* at the [Odisha Bhavan Canteen](#) in Mumbai's satellite city, Vashi (see *Where to Eat for all details*). You eat it in silence in a spartan dining hall till the cook arrives to take a look at you. It might be because you're different from the other diners, but it's more probably because you're so obviously enjoying the food that it warrants attention. So he'll tell you how the *chinguri* (small, soft-shell prawns) are cooked in a piquant tomato-based gravy, or how Oriya and Bengali food are similar but different. Don't stop eating

to listen – he'd rather you didn't allow your side of oh-so-fresh pomfret with its shell of fried-on masala to get cold.

Mumbai is a mecca for food lovers. Almost every world cuisine finds a plate or hot plate here. But, beyond the international, the food of the lesser-eaten states can often be secrets known only to people from those states. Few know that many of the states have their *bhavans* in Navi Mumbai, that these serve as temporary residences for visiting officials and sometimes visiting *aam janta*, and that they come with a dining hall that serves up a taste of home.

Close to the Oriya *thalis* is [Bhogdoi](#), where Assam awaits you. Make your

Above: The unlimited meal at A Rama Nayak's, served on a banana leaf, is simple home cooking at its best

Below: One of the many maxims at A Rama Nayak's

way through the dramatic Lachit Duar of Assam Bhavan to the airy first-floor eatery. The Mutton *Jeera Zaluk* delivers a fiery pepper-and-cumin kick (perhaps only for spice seekers?), while the Katla Fish *Kaliya thali* is a surprise, blanketing the freshwater carp in a creamy gravy of ground dry fruits.

Away from the *bhavans*, [Gonguura](#), in Juhu, serves up a taste of Andhra Pradesh but without the usual fierce spice. Yummy veg dishes, *puris*, chutney, flavoured rice, *rasam*, *sambar* and *payasam* make up the Good Old Andhra Meal. It's all Telugu Brahmin veg, but so *ghee*-drizzled good that many an avowed carnivore parcels a meal to take back home.



1



2



3



4



5



6

GREAT FROM

Mumbai, Pune, Nashik

GREAT FOR

Tasting home-style food from different states

GO NOW

To expand your regional food repertoire.

If waiting in queue is not your thing, get your butt on a bench at **A Rama Nayak's** before 12.30pm. Sasanth Nayak is the third generation of the Goud Saraswat Brahmin (GSB) family from Mangalore that's been feeding

Mumbaikars since 1942. Served on a banana leaf, each unlimited *thali* here comes with an *upkari* (vegetable with coconut), a dish of pulses and a mixed vegetable, a GSB *dal*, *rasam*, *sambar*, hot *chapatis* (*puris* for dinner), rice, buttermilk, and *payasam*. Regulars joke that they can tell the day of the week from the *payasam* served. Give in to the temptation to try any of the off-thali sweets, too – the *doodhi halwa* is excellent.

Don't be put off by the odd spelling of the name on the sign over busy Kalbadevi, or the rundown building. **Friends Union Joshi Club** has been serving up its iconic *thali* for over a hundred years! Yogesh Purohit,

1 & 3. *The thali at Friends Union Joshi Club is one of the most generous we've eaten*

2. *The Illish Sorso thali at Odisha Bhavan Canteen*

4. *You will want to parcel an Andhra thali from Gonguura*

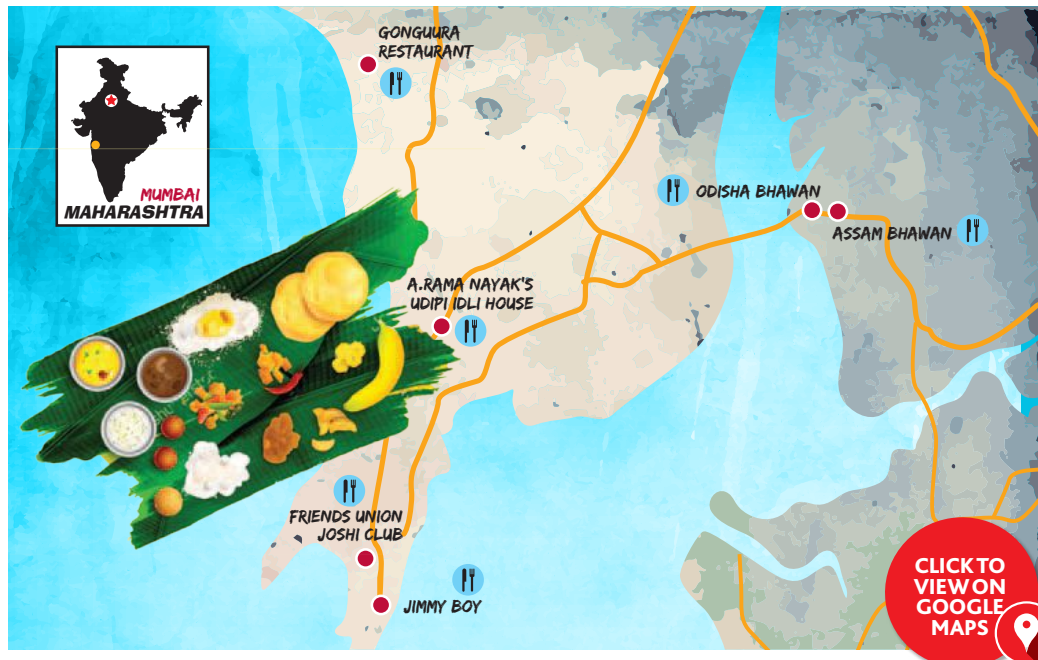
5 & 6. *Cheerful service and red-hot chillies are on the menu at Bhogdoi*

from the family that took over about 30 years ago, might gently bemoan the fact that no one eats healthy any more, that he has had to add spicier Marwari touches to the earlier sweet Gujarati *thali*, and that there is less demand for the food in this area; the fact remains that this eatery is a classic among *thali* aficionados – a place to which visitors and bachelors unerringly gravitate. Each *thali* is a mini feast – four veggies, two types of *dal* (one sweeter than the other), and a whole lot more. Each *thali* is a taste of (someone's) home food.

WORDS PRIMROSE MONTEIRO-D'SOUZA

PHOTOGRAPHS HASHIM BADANI

TURN OVER FOR ALL YOU NEED TO GET THERE



FACT SHEET

GETTING THERE

Closest metro: Mumbai

Closest city: Pune (148km)

Closest airport: Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji International Airport is well connected to the other Indian cities.

Closest railhead: Mumbai's main stations, Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus (CSMT)

and Mumbai Central (BCT), are very well served by trains from across India.

GETTING AROUND

Mumbai boasts an impressive public transport network of trains, buses and the metro. Cabs (*fares from ₹ 22*) and rickshaws (*fares from ₹ 18*) can be flagged down on the street, while radio cab services are available via their respective apps.



WHERE TO STAY

Hotel Residency: Set on the arterial Dr DN Road in South Mumbai, this is a great value option from which to absorb the SoBo atmosphere (00-91-22-66670555; www.residencyhotel.com, reservations@residencyhotel.com; 26, Gunbow St, corner of Dr DN Rd and Rustom Sidhwa Marg, Fort; from ₹ 3,960).

Abode: Close to the Gateway of India in downtown Mumbai, this boutique stay comes with atmospheric rooms, Art Deco furniture and a great vibe (00-91-8080234066; www.abodeboutiquehotels.com; First Floor, Lansdowne House, MB Marg, near Regal Cinema, Apollo Bunder, Colaba; from ₹ 4,000 with breakfast and shared bathroom, from ₹ 8,000 with breakfast and ensuite bathroom).

Le Sutra – the Indian Art Hotel:

A funky base in the Mumbai suburb of Khar, this art hotel is close to great eating establishments even beyond the ones featured here (00-91-22-

26492995; www.lesutra.in, info@lesutra.in; 14, Union Park, Khar West; ₹ 6,220 with breakfast and wi-fi).



WHERE TO EAT

Odisha Bhavan Canteen: Odisha Bhavan, opp Vashi Railway Station, Vashi; lunch: 12.30pm – 3pm, dinner: 8pm – 10pm; *Illish Sorso thali*: ₹ 450, *chinguri thali*: ₹ 200, fried pomfret: ₹ 400

Bhogdoi: 00-91-9930503714 (Prabhash); 1st Floor, Assam Bhavan, opp Centre One Mall, near Vashi Railway Station, Vashi; 11.30am – 3.30pm, 7pm – 11pm; Katla Fish Kaliya *thali*: ₹ 135, Mutton Jeera Zaluk *thali*: ₹ 160

Gonguura: 00-91-22-26233052; Juhu Ekta CHS, Juhu-Versova Link Rd, Andheri West; 11am – 11pm; Good Old Andhra Meal: ₹ 385, *Ragi Cooler*: ₹ 85

A Rama Nayak's: 00-91-22-24142422; Udipi Sri Krishna Boarding, 1st Flr, LBS Market Bldg, next to Matunga Stn East; Mon closed; 10.30am – 3pm, 7pm – 10pm; unlimited *thali*: ₹ 190; off-*thali* sweet: ₹ 25

Friends Union Joshi Club: 00-91-22-22058089; 381, 1st Flr, A Wing, Narottamwadi, Kalbadevi Rd, Kalbadevi; 11am – 3pm, 7pm – 10pm; *thali*: ₹ 200



SHOPPING

Bhogdoi sells its superb chilli-in-mustard pickle (₹ 40/ 200g), and **Gonguura** sells *idli podi* (₹ 167/ 200g) and *avakaya*, or sweet mango pickle (₹ 280/ 250g) in convenient bottles.



CLEAN LOO GUIDE

Don't count on finding good loos at these eateries. Only Odisha Bhavan had a clean Indian toilet when we visited.



MEDICAL AID

Saifee Hospital in South Mumbai is well-equipped to handle all medical emergencies (00-91-22-67570111; www.saifeehospital.com; 15/ 17, Maharshi Karve Road, opp Charni Rd Station), while **Lilavati Hospital & Research Centre** is good for emergencies in the suburbs (00-91-22-26568063; www.lilavati.hospital.com; A-791, Bandra Reclamation, Bandra West).

GOOD TO KNOW

- * Timing is everything with *thalis*. It's best to go before 12.30pm or after 2pm to beat the queues.
- * Most of the *thalis* cannot be shared; don't eat too much beforehand to give them your full attention – and stomach.
- * Fit in a bit of shopping at Vashi's bevy of impressive malls between *thalis* at **Odisha Bhavan Canteen** and **Bhogdoi**.
- * At **Bhogdoi**, you have the privilege of sharing your dining space with cancer survivors from Assam fighting their battles at the Tata Memorial Hospital in Parel. A smile goes a long way.
- * The name "**Friends Union Joshi Club**" comes from the time 20 members could come together to get a food establishment licence; one of those 20 friends was Mr Joshi.
- * At **A Rama Nayak's**, you have a standing invitation to watch the food being prepared – Sasanth says his grandfather had vowed to never put a door on the kitchen, and it is something that the family has followed ever since.
- * The *thali* at **Gonguura**, though limited, is very filling, but make sure you also try a refreshing *Ragi Cooler* – it's healthy (if calorific) and comes dotted with dry fruit.

Features

Pg 68 Where you need to be next year – **Lonely Planet's Best in Travel for 2017**

Pg 80 Discover a Europe you didn't know existed with our Perfect Trip through **Montenegro** | **Pg 94** Strip the bright colours away to discover the soul of **Japan** | **Pg 104** Snowy days in **Chamonix, France** | **Pg 114** Two perfect days in **Budapest, Hungary**

BONUS FEATURE Pg 122 Driving down the **New England coastline**

There's plenty
more to Chamonix
than Mont Blanc, pg
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BEST IN TRAVEL 2017

Strike out across the planet in the coming year
for pink sand beaches, underground trampoline parks,
solar eclipses and much, much more

Glacial runoff colours
the waters of Peyto Lake
in western Canada's Banff
National Park an icy blue

CANADA

1

» DON'T MISS

The best way to experience Canada's wilderness is via its impressive national parks system. (*Banff National Park is pictured here.*) Admission to all 47 parks is free in 2017.

Bolstered by the wave of positivity unleashed by its energetic new prime minister, Justin Trudeau, and with dynamic cities that dominate global livability indexes – plus its reputation for inclusiveness and impeccable politeness – the world's second-largest country will usher in its sesquicentennial in 2017 in rollicking good health. Marking 150 years since confederation, the birthday party promises to be heavy on bonhomie and highly welcoming to international gate-crashers. The weak Canadian dollar means visitors should have plenty of pocket money to spend on Canada's exciting fusion food and mysteriously underrated wine. →

CLICK ON THE
LINK TO FIND
OUT MORE!



2. COLOMBIA

» **DON'T MISS**
Wander the walled Old Town of Cartagena, with its sun-soaked streets, Spanish-built churches and bougainvillea-draped courtyards.

Decades of civil war and violent crime meant Colombian passport stamps were once for hardcore travellers only. Fast-forward to the present day, and the lost years seem but a dust speck in Colombia's rear-view mirror. There are no world wonders here, but the country's mix of vibrant culture, nature and hospitality is a rich tapestry woven by welcoming arms. More than a decade into its dramatic about-face, this South American jewel is even expecting a visit from the world's No 1 Catholic. When Pope Francis kisses Colombian soil in 2017, it will mark the Andean nation's first papal visit in 30 years.



1. The historic church of San Pedro Claver in Cartagena, Colombia
2. Blueberry-picking in Finland
3. A beach near Portsmouth, Dominica

4. DOMINICA

» **DON'T MISS**
Feel the mist from a pounding waterfall on a rainforest walk along the 185km Waitukubuli Trail; each of its 14 segments is designed to be done in a day.

Locals joke that if Christopher Columbus rose from the grave and returned to the Caribbean, Dominica is the only island he would still recognise. One glimpse of its prehistoric ferns and deserted shores, and you'll see what they mean. For decades, an absence of shiny white beaches has helped keep at bay the resort development that has swept through other parts of the Caribbean. Coconut palms are the only skyscrapers you'll see here. Visit before Dominica gets its first large-scale chain resorts in 2018, which will pave the way for a new era of tourism.

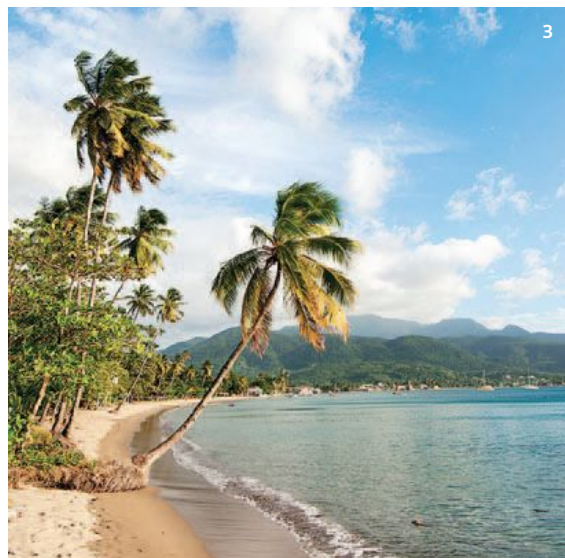
3. FINLAND

» **DON'T MISS**
The Finnish summer brings a bonanza of the world's tastiest blueberries, cranberries, wild strawberries and highly-prized cloudberries.

“Forward-thinking cities and vast unspoilt forests and lakeland – Finland enriches the soul.”

Gemma Graham,
Destination Editor,
Northern Europe

Long fought over by Russia and Sweden, Finland finally gained independence in 1917. The Finns will celebrate their centenary with gusto: expect everything from outdoor concerts and communal culinary experiences to sauna evenings and vintage travel poster exhibitions. There's even a new national park: 27,000 acres around the village of Hossa, studded with pine forests and crisscrossed with rivers. With the country also playing host to the World Figure Skating Championships and the Nordic World Ski Championships in 2017, there's never been a better time to discover Finland's proudly unique culture and landscapes.



PHOTOGRAPHS: CULTURALAURIE CASTELLU/GETTY IMAGES, JUSTIN FOULKES, ANTON JANKOVY/GETTY IMAGES, WOLFGANG KAEHLER/LIGHTROCKET/GETTY, SITIKKA/GETTY IMAGES

5 NEPAL

» **DON'T MISS**
View the Himalayas from the rim of the Kathmandu Valley or see the mountain peaks up close and personal on treks to Annapurna, Kanchendzonga and Everest Base Camp.

Even natural disasters can't keep Nepal down for long. The 2015 earthquakes caused devastation, but what is most striking from a traveller's perspective is not how much was lost but how much remains. Landmark temples crumbled, but others came through with just the odd tile out of place, and whole swathes of the country escaped serious damage, including most of the popular hiking trails. Nepal has all the skills required to repair monuments and infrastructure, but what it does need is income. By visiting Nepal now and supporting local culture and people, you could help a nation rebuild and bounce back even stronger.



1. Nepal's Himalayan terrain makes for exciting roads
2. Pink sand between the rocks at the edge of Bermuda's Horseshoe Bay

6 BERMUDA

» **DON'T MISS**
Bermuda's pink-sand beaches – made from a mix of crushed coral, calcium carbonate and the shells of single-celled organisms called foraminifera – are a huge draw.

The British territory of Bermuda is often mistaken for a Caribbean island, and those in the know might not correct the misunderstanding, in order to keep the place to themselves a little longer. About 1,045km off the coast of North Carolina, Bermuda is a bit of Britain mixed with island flair. In June, Bermuda will host the America's Cup, where the United States will defend its title. Temperate climates and favourable winds make Bermuda the perfect location for this historic sailing race – and for your next trip.

“History, beaches, water sports – Bermuda wraps all your holiday dreams into a single package.”

Bailey Johnson, Destination Editor, Central America & Caribbean



7 MONGOLIA

» **DON'T MISS**
Giant wrestlers, thundering horses and sharp-shooting arches make Naadam festivals Mongolia's most visually spectacular events.

In 2017, Mongolia will raise the curtain on a brand-new capital-city airport, a state-of-the-art facility that symbolises the rapid modernisation of this country of steppe nomads. Ulaanbaatar has been the biggest beneficiary of an economic boom – the capital's transformed skyline bristles with glass and steel towers. At the centre of this development is a £380 million Shangri-La hotel complex, to be completed by 2017. Beyond the city lies Mongolia's stunning and sparsely-populated countryside. Lake Khövsgöl, known as the Blue Pearl of Asia, is an undoubted highlight. In 2015 the lake was connected to Ulaanbaatar by paved road, cutting driving time by 10 hours. →

The mid-17th-century Nizwa Fort stands at the heart of the city of the same name in Oman's interior

8

OMAN

» **DON'T MISS**
The rarely-visited Musandam Peninsula is called the 'Norway of Oman' thanks to its *khors* (fjord-like inlets) that teem with marine life.

Oman has been Arabia's ace in the hole for a while, but with more flights than ever before and high-end hotels popping up, the sultanate looks ready to raise its game again. Luxury accommodation, including the award-winning duo of Six Senses on the remote Musandam Peninsula and Alila in Nizwa, has long had a foothold in Oman. Now, glitzy properties from Anantara, Kempinski and other luxury names are slated to open soon. The burst of construction doesn't stop there, though: the £100 million Majarat Oman, a futuristic indoor theme park to the west of the capital Muscat, is scheduled to open in 2017.

9 MYANMAR

» DON'T MISS

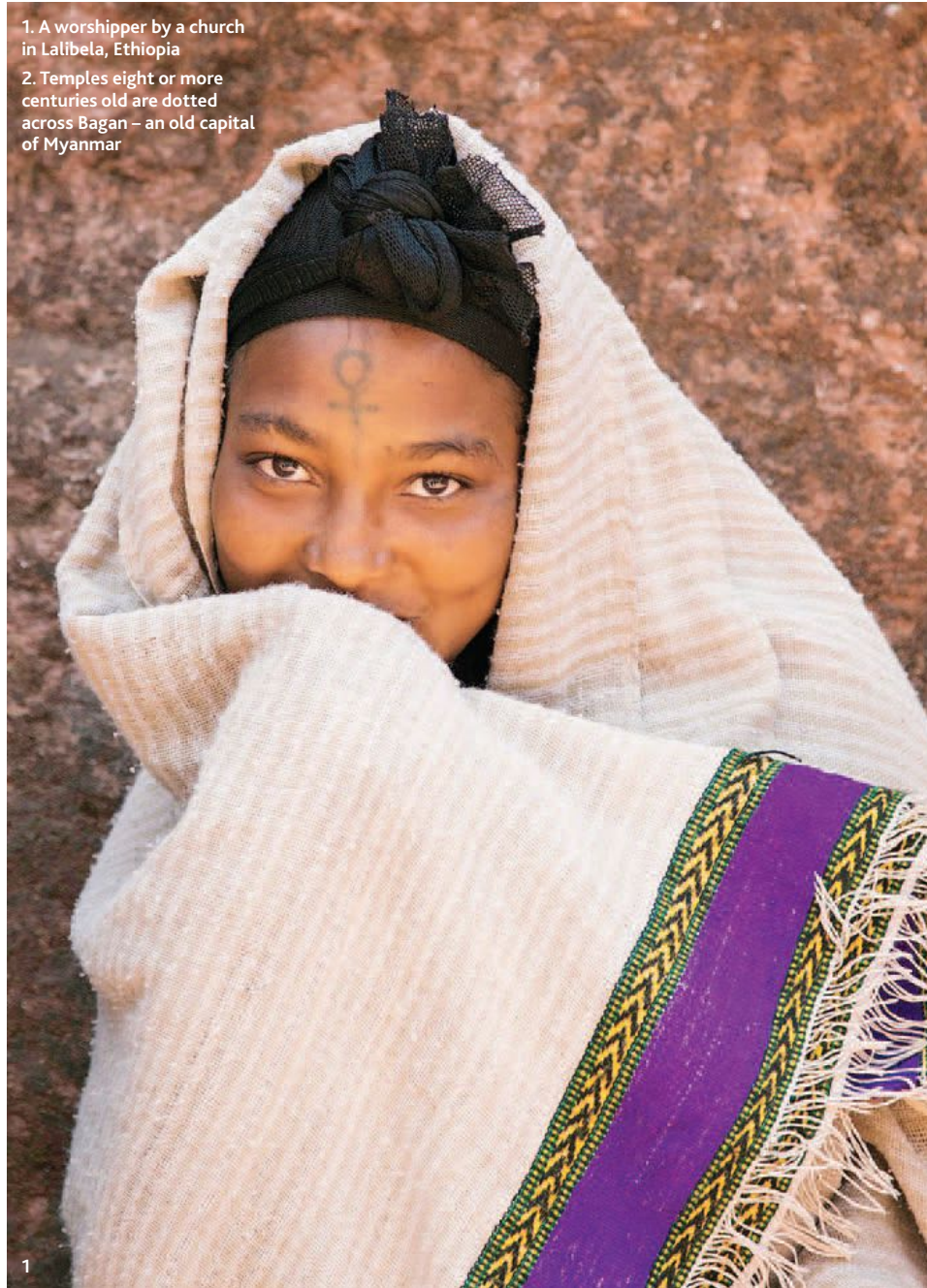
The ancient city of Bagan was a contemporary to Cambodia's Angkor – come here to see temples poking out from the plains in every direction you look.

“What curious traveller isn't tempted by the chance to explore newly-opened areas where few tourists have been?”

Laura Crawford,
Destination Editor,
Japan, Vietnam, Cambodia,
Laos, Myanmar &
the Philippines

Change has been a long time coming in the nation also known as Burma, but the election of the first civilian government in half a century has all eyes on the future. No one is pretending that all of Myanmar's problems have gone away, but things are moving in the right direction, and Southeast Asia's most secretive country is now poised to receive an influx of travellers. Visiting comes with challenges, but the reward is a window onto a vanishing Asia, where the difficulties of travel are part of the appeal. You'll find a land with more *stupas* than office towers, where life moves to the timeless rhythms of chanting monks and monastery bells.

1. A worshipper by a church in Lalibela, Ethiopia
2. Temples eight or more centuries old are dotted across Bagan – an old capital of Myanmar



10 ETHIOPIA

» DON'T MISS

Enjoy a multi-day hike through the heights of Ethiopia's Simien Mountains National Park, where you'll walk amid hundred-strong troops of baboon-sized grass-eating gelada monkeys.

With its own calendar (where else can you get 13 months of sunshine?), timekeeping, script, language, cuisine, church and coffee, Ethiopia is as exotic as countries come. And whether you're hiking through the Simien Mountains to see wildlife that roams nowhere else on Earth, climbing to a church carved into a remote cliff face in Tigray, or boating across the waters of Lake Tana to visit an age-old monastery, you'll be overwhelmed by the beauty of the landscape. In 2017, new airline links will make the country more accessible than ever; be one of the first to get on board. →



1 CHOQUEQUIRAO, PERU

» **DON'T MISS**
Unique to Choquequirao are the stone *llama blanca* (white llama) figures. The designs are inlaid into the lower terraces, forming a pattern of animals across the slopes.

Choquequirao, hidden across the deep Apurimac Valley, was the last Inca refuge from the Spanish *conquistadors*. There's a growing traveller buzz to see it. A cable car will whirl into life in 2017 (or possibly later; bureaucratic feet are dragging), gliding as many as 3,000 visitors a day to the ruins in just 15 minutes. Visit in the early days, or take the four-day trek in Inca footsteps, and have a taste of how Machu Picchu was before the crowds. You'll encounter only a couple of visitors – plus the archaeologists who continue to peel back the jungle, which still cloaks two-thirds of the spectacular site.



1. Llamas are a mainstay of rural life in Peru and other Andean countries

2. At 2,351m, Montanha do Pico is the highest point in the Azores

1

2 TARANAKI, NEW ZEALAND

» **DON'T MISS**
The Pouakai Crossing is a day hike sidling around Mount Taranaki volcano, with panoramic views.

The joke goes that most travellers who reach Taranaki have just taken a wrong turn, a gag backed by statistics showing that just two per cent of New Zealand's international visitors venture out this way. But a new motto – “A Little Bit Out There” – offsets the region's remote location in the south-west corner of the North Island with a deliciously offbeat new gallery dedicated to effervescent kinetic artist, filmmaker, painter and poet Len Lye. In nearby Egmont National Park, meanwhile, a fantastic hiking trail is emerging from the shadows to challenge the famous Tongariro Alpine Crossing as the country's finest one-day walk.

PHOTOGRAPHS: ENRICO VILIA/500PX, VOLANTHEVIST/GETTY
PHOTOGRAPHS: CHERYL CHAN, PHILIP LEE HARVEY, KHORSHKOV/GETTY, ALBERTO LOYO/GETTY IMAGES

3 THE AZORES, PORTUGAL

» **DON'T MISS**
Paddle Sete Cidades, São Miguel's twin crater lakes; one is a deep blue, the other a brilliant turquoise.

“For spectacular landscapes and chances to experience adventure without the crowds, there are few better places to go.”

Tom Stainer,
Destination Editor,
Iberian Peninsula & Turkey

Blending volcanic green landscapes and cool Iberian culture, the nine islands of the Azores offer easy access from North America and Europe without the abundance of travellers who have discovered Iceland as a cross-the-pond pit stop. The archipelago's natural assets resemble an array of superlative sights pulled from other destinations: Hawai'ian volcanoes, medieval Portuguese villages, gurgling Scandinavian hot springs, towering Irish cliffs and rugged Patagonian craters. But the secret won't last: the Azores saw a 31 percent increase in tourism over the past year, so visit before things take off.



2

4

NORTH WALES, UNITED KINGDOM

» **DON'T MISS**
Blaenau Ffestiniog's Llechwedd Slate Caverns has a new deep-mine tour into the Stygian depths of the Snowdonia region. The caverns are North Wales's most popular attraction.

On the site of an aluminium factory in the Conwy Valley, Surf Snowdonia wave pool, featuring the longest man-made waves, is the most headline-stealing example of the region's current reinvention. Meanwhile, Zip World at Penrhyn Quarry has the world's fastest zip line, and Bounce Below offers giant trampolines in the caverns beneath the old slate-mining town of Blaenau Ffestiniog. Capping things off, Snowdonia National Park has been named a 'dark-sky reserve' – telescopes out, people.



Trampolining below ground at Snowdonia's Bounce Below

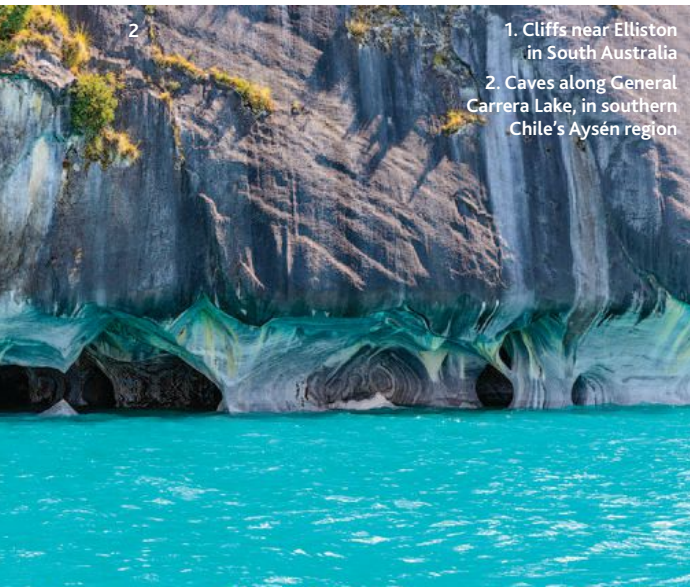


5

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

» **DON'T MISS**
Visit at least a couple of the 13 distinct wine-growing regions that help make South Australia responsible for nearly half of the continent's total wine output.

Its climate may be hot, but South Australia offers the coolest mix of world-class wine country, abundant produce festivals, stark and stunning tracts of picturesque outback, and crowd-free beaches that could be the envy of the Caribbean. The *Queen Mary 2* transatlantic ocean liner is putting South Australia on her travel list in 2017, choosing to dock not only in the state's artistic capital, Adelaide, but also taking in the rustic charms of Kangaroo Island.



1. Cliffs near Elliston in South Australia
2. Caves along General Carrera Lake, in southern Chile's Aysén region

6

AYSÉN, CHILE

» **DON'T MISS**
The Calluqueo and San Rafael Glaciers are more accessible than ever thanks to newly-developed tour routes. Visit these cities of blue ice before it's too late.

There's only one road into the Aysén region of Chilean Patagonia. If you follow its unpaved contours from start to finish, you'll experience a kaleidoscopic journey where foggy fjords give way to brooding rainforests, bone-dry grasslands and powder-blue lagoons. Shaped by the forces of the Patagonian Ice Field, Aysén is an extreme landscape in constant flux. But, with fresh routes to glaciers, a booming craft-beer scene in remote hamlets, and the massive new Parque Patagonia nature reserve, green-lit for national park status, Patagonia's last frontier has never been such a delight to explore. →

7

THE TUAMOTUS, FRENCH POLYNÉSIA

» **DON'T MISS**
Tumakohua Pass, off Fakarava
atoll, has a fabulous array
of fish life – especially
its concentration of grey
sharks at incoming tide.
Go nose to nose with them
on a dive.

Close your eyes, and imagine this: you land on a strip of coral, surrounding a glinting lagoon of every hue of blue from lapis lazuli to turquoise – a perfect ring of islets edged with sandbars and breeze-ruffled coconut trees. Remember that tropical paradise that appears in countless advertisements? Here's the real thing. As if that weren't enough, the Tuamotu islands rank among the world's best scuba diving destinations, and that reputation has never been so justified: the number of dive areas is growing, and Master Liveaboards is launching a new dive boat for the archipelago in 2017.

“Divers adore the Tuamotus’ underwater menagerie of darting fish, sharks and rays.”

Lauren Keith, Multi-region Destination Editor



1. Cockspur Island Light, north of Georgia's Tybee Island
2. Burps & Giggles in the Malaysian city of Ipoh

9

PERAK, MALAYSIA

» **DON'T MISS**
Ipoh's signature dish
ayam tague (chicken
and bean sprouts) reigns
supreme here. Locals
love Restaurant Lou
Wong for its version.

Perak's capital, Ipoh, is nurturing a bloom of vintage-style cafés and boutiques. The nucleus of this old-meets-new makeover is Kong Heng Block, surrounding the imaginative Sekeping Kong Heng hotel. Here, cheerful joints like Roquette Café, Burps & Giggles and Bits & Bobs pull a vibrant crowd to shop, dawdle and slurp *ais kepal* (ice balls) in this historic neighbourhood. Meanwhile, guesthouse owners and tour guides on Pangkor Island are starting to lead sustainable nature walks and village tours. In this sunbather's paradise, an emerging focus on wildlife is a breath of fresh sea air.



8

COASTAL GEORGIA, THE UNITED STATES

» **DON'T MISS**
Cumberland Island
is a slice of unspoiled paradise,
with a mix of beaches, forests,
marshes, mudflats and tidal
creeks. Stay the night
if you can (the Greyfield Inn
is a great option –
also the only one).

You've probably heard of Savannah – that Southern belle with a stellar restaurant scene and gorgeous 19th-century mansions framed by oaks dripping with Spanish moss. But most visitors never know what lies just beyond: a coastline with quirky towns, historic treasures and wilderness-covered islands. Hollywood has taken notice and started filming major movies here, including the *Baywatch* reboot, due out in spring. If you're seeking a coastal getaway of uncommon beauty without the crowds, go now.

10

THE SKELLIG RING, IRELAND

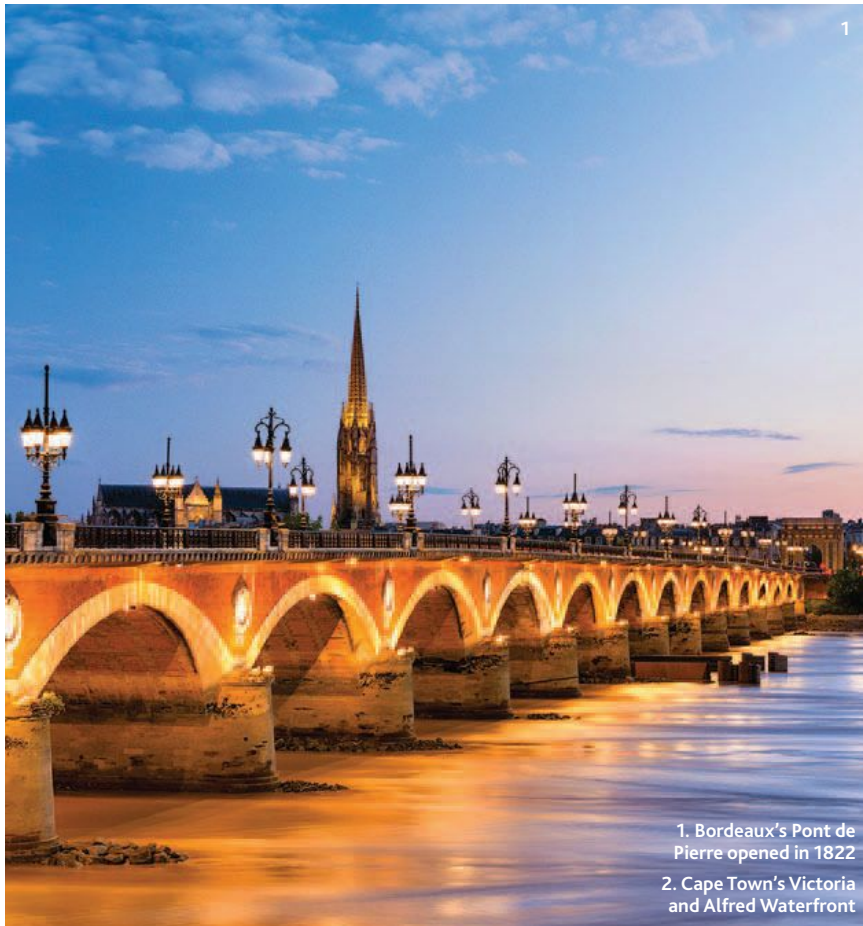
» **DON'T MISS**
Nothing beats landing on
Skellig Michael, the larger
of the two Skellig Islands,
and climbing the 600
treacherously steep stone
steps to reach the chambers
left by the monks.

A long time ago, far, far away... a small band of monks established a hidden base on a remote, wave-pounded hunk of rock rising out of the Atlantic like a giant triangle. With a setting like this, it's no wonder the island, Skellig Michael, made the new *Star Wars* location list. To get to this far-flung isle, you'll have to take a boat trip from the Skellig Ring in the west of County Kerry, perhaps Ireland's most charismatically wild and emerald stretch of coastline.

1 BORDEAUX, FRANCE

» **DON'T MISS**
The Gironde riverfront is Bordeaux's new focal point. At its epicentre is the Miroir d'Eau, a vast reflecting pool; in summer, its picturesque, cooling mist is a magnet for Bordeaux's citizens.

They used to call her the 'Sleeping Beauty,' but – though she's hit the snooze button a few times – Bordeaux is now wide awake and ready for action. The new LGV Sud-Ouest high-speed railway line, due for completion in mid-2017, connects the city with Europe's high-speed train network and cuts travel time from Paris to just two hours. Its timing is perfect. The recently opened Cité du Vin continues the impressive redevelopment of the Garonne riverfront with a state-of-the-art wine-themed experience, and the city's gastronomic revolution keeps building on its own success.



1. Bordeaux's Pont de Pierre opened in 1822

2. Cape Town's Victoria and Alfred Waterfront

3 LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA, THE USA

» **DON'T MISS**
Save a day for the beaches. Whether you head to Venice to see street performers or to Santa Monica pier, you'll see why the West Coast has become such a big draw.

Despite its reputation as a land of celebrities, health fanatics and all-round superficiality, LA has been gaining steam as a cultural destination, and it's more accessible than ever. The 2016 Metro expansion has made getting from Downtown to Santa Monica and everywhere in between much easier; city initiative Car Free L.A. helps tourists navigate without wheels; and almost 50 new hotels are in the works. This isn't just a beach town, either; it's also a commerce capital, where movie producers mingle over *sashimi* and kale salads. →

2 CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA

» **DON'T MISS**
To reach Table Mountain's 1,000-metre-high plateau, you can ride the revolving cable car or hike up one of the many rewarding trails such as Skeleton Gorge.

"At I Love My Laundry, one of many hybrid businesses in Cape Town, you can sip wine, eat Korean dumplings and shop for art – all during one spin cycle."

Matt Phillips,
Destination Editor,
Sub-Saharan Africa

Cape Town's deceptively laid-back folk have been working hard to add cultural and culinary cred to the Mother City's famous natural charms, cementing its reputation as an African city with a global outlook. Local gastronomy is as impressive as the flat-topped mass of Table Mountain, with historic wine estates in every direction, markets selling the fruits of the Cape's fertile terrain, and inventive restaurants winning global plaudits. The art and design scene will be given a boost in September 2017 by the opening of the Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa, the world's largest museum of contemporary African art and a post-industrial architectural triumph occupying a century-old grain silo.



4. MÉRIDA, MEXICO

» **DON'T MISS**
The secret to visiting the popular Maya site of Chichén Itzá, featuring astounding pre-Hispanic structures 120km east of Mérida, is getting there around 8am, before the crowds arrive.

Mérida's cultural offering is like no other on the Yucatán Peninsula (sorry, Cancún, you've got pretty beaches, but party culture doesn't count). On any given day, you'll find a dizzying array of live music, art shows and dance performances, and the booming culinary scene is hotter than a *habañero* pepper. Mérida has been designated the American Capital of Culture, meaning visitors can expect a colossal cultural extravaganza as organisers stage a series of large-scale events throughout 2017. And here's the kicker: the beautiful town ranks among the safest places in Mexico nowadays.



2

1. The Church of St John at Kaneo overlooks Lake Ohrid
2. Fiesta time in Mérida

6. PISTOIA, ITALY

» **DON'T MISS**
The beating heart of Pistoia is Piazza della Sala, a market square since medieval times. Come evening, the piazza transforms into an outdoor lounge bar.

Pistoia is sometimes referred to as 'little Florence' for its concentration of art and architecture. But despite its charms, this Tuscan town sees just a fraction of Florence's tourists. That's set to change in 2017, when the city will take its turn as Italy's Capital of Culture. Pistoia earned the title in recognition of its impressive cultural credentials and devotion to grassroots ideas and local entrepreneurship. The award offers the city a chance to showcase an alternative to Tuscany: one that eschews grand-slam sights in favour of small towns full of personality and dynamic, living culture.



5. OHRID, MACEDONIA

» **DON'T MISS**
Crossing the over-water walkway past Lake Ohrid's cliffs takes you from the old town to the small sandy cove of Kaneo, perhaps Ohrid's most idyllic place.

"A sense of spirituality permeates both the historic quarter and the sublime lake."

Brana Vladislavjevic,
Destination Editor,
Southeastern &
Eastern Europe

Overlooking the extraordinarily blue waters of its eponymous lake, Ohrid enjoys a stunning position that is best viewed from a boat. From the water, you'll see the town's terracotta roofs broken up by centuries-old church spires (the city claims to have once had 365) and overlooked by the turreted walls of Czar Samuel's castle. Ohrid has transformed itself from Macedonia's religious centre into a popular holiday focus, and its beaches are the best by far in this otherwise landlocked nation. However, a planned new lakeshore development will likely change this sleepy town forever, making now a great time to go.

7. SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA

» **DON'T MISS**
Join a tour at Seoul's former royal Changdeokgung Palace for access to the 'secret garden' of Huwon.

The Korean capital is striving to become a more attractive and user-friendly metropolis. Following successful projects such as the Cheonggyecheon, where an ageing and unsightly elevated highway was replaced with a park and waterway, the city will unveil in late 2017 the Seoul Skygarden. This time, the old highway in question – a 938-metre-long, 17-metre-tall overpass – will become the platform on which trees, shrubs and flowers will be planted to create an arboretum of local species.

9

MOSCOW, RUSSIA

» **DON'T MISS**
Moscow's revamped green spaces, Gorky Park and Hermitage Gardens, are now centres of urban life, with art exhibitions, music festivals, street food, dance classes and public bike paths.

Russia may not have revealed all its plans for the centennial of the 1917 revolutions, but it's clear that there will be radical changes in Moscow. The city will host football matches in the 2017 Confederations Cup and the 2018 FIFA World Cup, so the race is on to bring an inkling of the ultra-modern to a metropolis renowned for bombastic architecture. The upgraded Zhukovsky Airport and a new metro line will mean an all-time high in connectivity, and Moscow will gain a blockbuster attraction in the Polytechnic Museum and Educational Centre, a science museum being relocated to a striking building in the Vorobyovy Gory Hills.

“Vast and venerable, Moscow is a city as layered as a Russian doll.”

Oliver Smith, Senior Features Writer



1

8

LISBON, PORTUGAL

» **DON'T MISS**
The Miradouro de Santa Catarina (a viewpoint in boho Santa Catarina) offers fantastic views of Lisbon. Reach it via the Elevador da Bica funicular.

It has sights, culture and cuisine, yet Lisbon is rarely mentioned alongside southern European heavyweights such as Barcelona and Rome. If this mystifying lack of recognition is what helps the Portuguese capital remain a bargain, long may it continue. If you need more persuasion, consider the museums: from Egyptian artefacts at the Calouste Gulbenkian Museum to pop art at the Berardo Collection Museum, Lisbon has plenty, and one devoted to Portugal's Jewish history is coming to the Alfama district in 2017.

1. Sweet-toothed Lisboetas flock to the Confeitaria Nacional

2. A distant Mount Hood towers over Portland



2

10

PORTLAND, OREGON, THE USA

» **DON'T MISS**
Portland is a city of gardens, most famously the International Rose Test Garden, which will celebrate its centennial in 2017.

Portland is America's city of the future: a friendly, sustainable and ethical place that values good living and leisure over acquisitiveness and ambition. Bisected by the Willamette River and surrounded by peaks, it is also a preternaturally attractive place. What better spot could there be for viewing one of nature's great spectacles: the total solar eclipse on August 21, 2017. Although the eclipse will be partial in Portland, if you drive a few miles south into the Willamette Valley or hike up Mount Hood, 80km to the east, you'll be cast in the moon's deep umbra between 9.06am and 11.38am. ®



For more on the hottest destinations, trends and travel experiences, including further themed lists, see Lonely Planet's *Best in Travel 2017* book and www.lonelyplanet.com/best-in-travel.

CLICK ON THE
LINKS TO FIND
OUT MORE!



Kayakers traverse
Lake Skadar, the Balkans'
largest lake, which lies
on the border between
Montenegro and Albania

Montenegro

THE PERFECT TRIP

Journey across one of the most affordable pockets of Europe,
through a country full of spectacular landscapes, adorable towns
and beautiful monasteries

WORDS OLIVER BERRY | PHOTOGRAPHS JULIAN LOVE



Your trip mapped out

Discover a miniature Venice in the Bay of Kotor, before joining pilgrims visiting the cliff-hewn Ostrog Monastery, hikers tackling the lake-strewn mountain ranges of Durmitor National Park and kayakers exploring the islands of Lake Skadar, ending your tour in the millionaires' playground of Budva

At a Glance



YOUR DESTINATION

Capital: Podgorica
How far away is it? Flying from New Delhi to Podgorica takes about 12 hours (not including stopover time), depending on the airline you choose.
Languages spoken: Montenegrin

There's plenty of sunshine and the water isn't too cold. However, some beach bars and restaurants are closed and some activities might be harder to arrange. If you travel in peak season (Jul–Aug), book your stay well in advance.

Who is it good for?

Intrepid travellers
Highlights: Baroque towns, a beautiful monastery, dramatic landscapes, happy parties

YOUR TRIP

Cost: \$\$\$\$

Ideal number of days: 14 days

Visa: The Serbian Embassy in New Delhi handles Montenegrin visa applications. Apply well in advance.

When to go: The shoulder seasons (May–Jun, Sept–Oct) are the best times to visit Montenegro.

KEY PHRASES (PHONETICALLY):

Hello: Zdrah-vo

Thank you: Hvah-lah vahm

Where's the toilet?: Gee-deh yeh twah-leht?

- 1** Explore elegant Venice-inspired Baroque towns nestled beneath looming mountains on the **Bay of Kotor**.
- 2** Find peace at the wondrous, gleaming **Ostrog Monastery**, improbably hewn out of a sheer mountain wall.
- 3** Glistening lakes, dramatic peaks and tales of partisan heroics abound in the wilds of **Durmitor National Park**.
- 4** Sip homemade brandy and commandeer a kayak in search of pelicans and forested isles in the quiet surrounds of **Lake Skadar**.
- 5** Cocktails, yachts, music, beaches and parties – **Budva** is your final port of call for luxury and exuberant nights out.





1. Kotor endured a tough time in the 16th and 17th centuries, surviving two Ottoman sieges, two major earthquakes and the plague

2. Nevenka Šarčević, curator at the Our-Lady-of-the-Rocks island chapel

1



2

1 BAY OF KOTOR

A gateway to the Adriatic for thousands of years, this majestic natural harbour is rich with history

DAYS INTO YOUR TRIP: 1–3

It's early evening in the honey-coloured town of **Perast**. Boats are chugging home to port, and fishermen are casting their lines into the water, chatting and joking as they compare their catches before dropping them into baskets at their feet. A breeze blows over the bay, but the water is as still as a mirror, its surface reflecting white clouds scudding across a china-blue sky. Twilight bathes the town's narrow, shady streets, picking out rooftops in golden tones.

"This is the best time of day. It's always so peaceful," says Nevenka Šarčević, as she watches the evening ferries ply the channel between Perast's quayside and **Our-Lady-of-the-Rocks**, the island chapel where she works as a curator. Inside, the chapel's little museum is filled with centuries of flotsam and jetsam. Along one wall, there's a collection of Greek amphoras and Roman headstones; on another, medieval muskets sit beside barnacle-encrusted anchors and a rusty gramophone. "Kotor has been home to many cultures,"

says Nevenka. "We have even found prehistoric artefacts like arrowheads and cave paintings."

There's a reason that Kotor – or Boka Kotorska, as the bay is known to locals – is so steeped in history. Accessed via a narrow channel leading from the Adriatic Sea, it's been a port for more than 2,000 years. Cradled by steep, scrub-cloaked cliffs plunging into cobalt-blue waters, it's often mistakenly called Europe's southernmost fjord – but it's actually a ria: an inlet formed by a flooded coastal valley.

Unsurprisingly, the bay's sheltered topography and strategic location made it an object of desire for many rival empires. The Romans first claimed it, founding the city of Acrvium here in 168 BC. Other civilisations followed: Illyrians, Saracens, Bulgarians, Serbs, Ottomans, Habsburgs and Venetians; the latter overseeing the bay's golden age between the 15th and 18th centuries. During the 400-year reign, communities of artists and stonemasons created a fabulous legacy of mansions, palaces, churches and civic buildings.

Thirteen kilometres south-east of Perast, the walled town of Kotor bears the clearest reminders of its Venetian past. Within its castellated ramparts and stout sea gates, a maze of alleyways snakes through the **Stari Grad**, or old town. Now hidden under cobbles, these winding lanes were originally canals, allowing residents to float →

Perast, on the shores
of the Bay of Kotor,
was the last city to remain
loyal to the Republic
of Venice, before finally
surrendering to the French
in 1797



right up to the doors of one of the elegant, balconied *palazzi* lining the backstreets.

Today, the town's squares are occupied by cafés and restaurants, but many still bear names that hint at their medieval past: there are squares for flour, milk, butter and butchery, as well as a gossipers' square, where housewives would have gathered to exchange news. High above, a battlement leads up the sheer hillside to **St John's Fortress**, where a watchtower offers a wraparound panorama over the entire bay – and would once have provided a vital early-warning system against seaborne raids. These days, corsairs have been replaced by yachts and cruise ships, and Kotor's residents fear a different threat: earthquakes have levelled the town several times during its history, most recently in 1979, and no one is sure when or where the next big one might strike.

Not that it seems to be playing too much on anyone's mind tonight. As the sun sets behind Kotor's town walls, the main thoroughfare of **Trg od Oružja** – Arms Square – fills with drinkers sipping cups of black coffee and glasses of *vranac* wine at one of the busy street-side cafés. An accordion player sets up beside the old clocktower, and cranks out wheezy melodies as dusk falls. Above the town, the parapets of St John's Fortress turn amber in the evening light, and village lights flicker into life in the darkening hills. →

Essentials



WHERE TO STAY

Hotel Conte is a smart hotel inside a *palazzo* on Perast's waterfront. It's been refurbished to make the most of the building's period character, with exposed rafters and shuttered windows looking out on to the bay. The family apartments are huge – one even has its own private patio – and there's a good restaurant with a waterside terrace (00-382-32-373-687; www.hotelconte.me; *Obala Kapetana Marka Martinovića* BB, Perast; from ₹ 4,800 with breakfast, apartments from ₹ 7,000 with breakfast).

FURTHER INFORMATION

- A coast road leads through all the bay's main towns and villages, including Perast and Kotor. Regular foot ferries run over to Our-Lady-of-the-Rocks (Gospa od Škrpjela) from the quayside in Perast (from ₹ 350), or you can charter your own boat for longer trips.

The small town of Perast
on the Bay of Kotor



1. Ostrog Monastery's Brother Sergei
2. Ostrog's Upper Monastery
3. A mosaic-decorated fountain



2 OSTROG MONASTERY

Join the pilgrims on the trek up to Montenegro's holiest – and highest – monastery

DAYS INTO YOUR TRIP: 4 – 6

BEAR NORTHEAST, TO THE OSTROG MONASTERY, AFTER HEADING SOUTH INITIALLY FOR SPECTACULAR MOUNTAIN VIEWS OVER THE BAY. THE ROUTE SKIRTS THE WILD, ROCKY LOVCÉN NATIONAL PARK BEFORE MEANDERING INLAND.

Brother Sergei's black robes billow as he strides across the church courtyard. "Welcome!" he booms. "It is a great joy to have you here." Stepping inside the **Holy Trinity Church**, the chapel for Ostrog's Lower Monastery, he traces a cross on his chest. The sweet smell of incense hangs in the air and beeswax candles flicker in the gloom.

Frescoes in the nave depict stories from the life of St Vasilije, or St Basil, founder of the first monastery here in the mid-1600s. "People come from all over the world to learn about his life," says Sergei. He is one of 25 monks who live at Ostrog – most reside in the Lower Monastery, but the Upper Monastery is the main site of pilgrimage. Hollowed out from the cliff face 900m above the valley floor, with plastered white walls shining against the pink rock, it's an astonishing feat of engineering.

At the entrance, pilgrims wait to touch the reliquary containing the bones of St Basil, believed to have healing powers.

From here, a stone staircase spirals up to the belfry, winding past alcoves filled with gilded icons, and narrow windows spilling sunlight on to the stone floor. At the top, a chapel burrows into the cliff. The monastery's belfry teeters above the wooded valley below. Nearby, a gnarled vine is said to have miraculously sprouted from the rock face after Basil's death; its fruits are believed to help childless women conceive.

Every year, more than a million make the pilgrimage – not just Orthodox Christians, but Catholics, Muslims and tourists, too. "Montenegro has always been a meeting point between East and West," says Sergei. "Visitors from all faiths are welcome here." Most pilgrims arrive in cars or minibuses, but the truly devout trek the 2.5km up, following paths worn smooth by generations of penitents. Some stay overnight, sleeping on bare mattresses in one of the monastery's dormitories, and praying with the monks.

As afternoon fades into evening, the crowds begin to thin and the terraces around the Upper Monastery fall quiet. Clouds of swallows flock home to roost, darting and diving around the cliff face. Shadows lengthen across the courtyard, and the clang of bells calls the faithful to evening mass. →

Essentials



WHERE TO STAY

- Only a few minutes' drive from the monastery, the **Kolibe Bungalows** motel offers simple, two-bedroom A-frame chalets, clad in wood inside and out. The restaurant is a great place to try traditional Montenegrin food – baked trout, charcoal-baked lamb, grilled sausages and *cicvara* (cornmeal mash) all feature on the menu, and the terrace offers fine valley views (00-382-67-888-189; www.kolibe.me; 5km from Ostrog Monastery; from ₹ 3,150 with breakfast).

FURTHER INFORMATION

- Entry to Ostrog is free, but it's customary to donate a few euros at the entrance. It costs about ₹ 400 to stay overnight in one of the dorms; a mattress and simple evening meal are provided.

3 DURMITOR

From wild valleys to crystal-clear lakes, this national park promises epic mountain scenery around every bend in the trail



DAYS INTO YOUR TRIP: 7 – 9

HEAD NORTH THROUGH INCREASINGLY WILD COUNTRYSIDE TO SPECTACULAR DURMITOR NATIONAL PARK, ABOUT 190KM AWAY. THE SMALL SKI TOWN OF ŽABLJAK MAKES A USEFUL BASE FOR EXPLORING THE PARK.

Somewhere among the snow-dusted mountains of the Durmitor range, a band of hikers is picking its way down a forest trail. It's a cool, overcast day; a steady drizzle is falling, and threads of mist curl through the trees, the silence broken only by the crunch of boots on leaves and the steady drip-drip of rain falling to the forest floor. The sharp scent of pine sap hangs in the air, and banks of cloud clag the horizon, shrouding the peaks ahead. At the base of the valley, a mountain lake glimmers like a sheet of green steel. There's not another soul in sight.

With a population of 644,578, Montenegro rarely feels crowded, but it's in the mountains of Durmitor where things get truly wild.

Sprawling across about 390sqkm of Montenegro's north along the Bosnian border, it's the country's largest national park, encompassing a serrated chain of *karst* mountains, 20 of which top out at more than 2,200m.

Apart from the ski town of **Žabljak** and the odd isolated hamlet, villages are few and far between. Much of the park is still cloaked in forest. Between the peaks, the landscape is pockmarked by canyons and plateaux, harbouring rare wildlife such as chamois, lynx, wolf packs and even a few brown bears. It's an ancient landscape, little changed in centuries; some of Durmitor's virgin black pines are thought to be remnants of the great forest that once stretched all the way from the Russian steppes to the Atlantic coast.

Hiking guide Slavko Gusak drops his pack and takes a breather beside a *katun*, a traditional shepherd's hut, characterised

by steep, A-frame sides and a sturdy timber frame. "Every time I return here, I am reminded how precious it is, and how hard we must work to protect it," he says.

Historically, Durmitor's people were farmers, raising livestock in the hills, growing crops of wheat, corn and barley in the lowland pastures, stockpiling supplies to endure the long, bitter winters. It was a tough life, requiring ingenuity and fortitude to survive, not to mention an intimate understanding of the land. It was this local expertise that made Durmitor a stronghold of partisan resistance during WWII; the park's trails are littered with memorials to the many guerrilla fighters who gave their lives resisting the Nazi invasion, and they are still considered national heroes. Their commander, Marshal Josip Broz Tito – Yugoslavia's brutal dictator between 1953 and 1980 – commemorated their sacrifice

MONTENEGRO

Durmitor National Park's dramatic, undulating landscape was formed by glaciers, and its diverse flora and fauna are the result of Mediterranean and alpine microclimates



Essentials



WHERE TO STAY

The comfy alpine-style **Hotel Soa** is near the main town of Žabljak, not far from the Black Lake. Rooms have a slightly 1970s feel, with leather sofas, wood cladding and plush carpets; the larger suites are worth the extra bucks. The hotel restaurant offers fine fuel for walkers, such as lamb baked in milk, and potatoes stuffed with cream cheese and prosciutto (00-382-52-360-110; www.hotelsoa.com; from ₹ 4,400 with breakfast).

FURTHER INFORMATION

- There is a small park information office in Žabljak.

Durmitor National Park: www.nparkovi.me/sajt/np-durmitor; ₹ 260/ person/ day, plus ₹ 160/ car

by making Durmitor the country's first national park in 1952.

Today, it's hard to imagine Durmitor as a battleground. Nowadays, this is hikers' country. Hundreds of paths twist among the park's valleys and peaks, including the three-hour trek to the top of one of Montenegro's highest mountains, **Bobotov Kuk**, at 2,523m. From the summit, the views unfold all the way to the Bosnian border. Despite the grand scenery, the park receives just a fraction of the visitors of southern Europe's better-known mountain ranges, such as the Dolomites – making it perfect for hikers who prefer their trails wild and empty. In recent years, Durmitor has also become popular with white-water rafters, who congregate around the foaming swells of the **Tara River Gorge**, a 1,300m ravine that slices its way along the park's eastern edge. Locals joke that it's Montenegro's Grand Canyon.

“In Durmitor, we call our lakes ‘gorske oči’ – the eyes of the mountain,” Slavko says, as he emerges from the forest beside the turquoise lake, ringed by a circle of pines. “Sometimes, it does feel like the mountains are watching you, not the other way round.”

He skims a stone over the water, sending ripples across its surface, as mayflies buzz among the reeds. Higher up the valley, a hawk wheels over the treetops, circling in search of unseen prey. Just for a moment, the canopy of cloud splits, and chutes of sunlight beam down on the water like searchlights. On the far shore, a phalanx of mountains materialises from the gloom, like a fleet of battleships looming out of a sea fog. Then, as quickly as they appeared, they're gone again, swallowed up by another wall of cloud.

Elated, Slavko lets out a whoop of appreciation, pursued by the echo as he sets off down the trail for home. →

4 LAKE SKADAR

Grab a paddle and pilot a kayak across Montenegro's largest lake, where centuries-old traditions endure at the peaceful water's edge

DAYS INTO YOUR TRIP: 10 – 11

THE ROUTE SOUTH TO LAKE SKADAR PASSES THROUGH SOME OF THE COUNTRY'S MOST EPIC SCENERY – INCLUDING THE TARA GORGE AND THE BIOGRADSKA GORA NATIONAL PARK. YOU'LL REACH THE LAKE AND ITS MAIN TOWN, VIRPAZAR, AFTER ABOUT 170KM.

It's brandy brewing day at the Dabanović farm. In the garden, a homemade batch still bubbles above a fire. Andrei Dabanović empties in a mush of pulped grapes; coils and pipes cool the vapour, and a stream of clear alcohol appears. "Ah, *rakija*," says Andrei, breathing in the boozy fumes. He checks the alcohol level: 50 per cent. Satisfied, he fills shot glasses and hands them round to his family, waiting with plates of cheese, sausage and ham to try this year's brew.

Brewing *rakija* is one of many customs that still thrive in the little villages of Lake Skadar. A communal process, it's a way of using up grapes deemed too inferior for wine-making, and most families have their own secret recipe – flavoured with plums and cherries, or herbs that grow nearby.

Vida Dabanović casts a watchful eye over her son Andrei's work. She is in her eighties, her silver hair shrouded by a shawl, and insists on stoking the fire while offering a running commentary on Andrei's technique. "It's important we keep the old ways alive,"

she says. "They make us what we are." A grin reveals gold teeth that glint in the sunlight.

Though just a half-hour drive from the capital of **Podgorica**, this is a quiet corner of Montenegro. Many of the villages that ring the lakeshore are only accessible by boat, or via one of the dusty backroads that snake through the heath-covered hills.

Sleepy and sunbaked, these traditional villages offer a window into Montenegro's pastoral past. Clusters of pink-roofed houses cling to the rocky slopes, linked by steep, narrow lanes. Most are built from stone, but some are clad in brightly-coloured plaster, peeling away in patches to reveal the timber and bricks beneath. Cows and goats wander through the back gardens, nibbling on olive and pomegranate trees.

Crammed together with no apparent regard for town planning, these are tiny, tight-knit communities. Andrei and Vida's village is dwarfed by Lake Skadar itself – 44km long and 15km wide at its broadest, it is also a national park, home to around 270 bird species, including the rare Dalmatian pelican. Sightseeing boats chug out from the main town of **Virpazar**, but exploring by kayak allows visitors to creep up on the wildlife dwelling in the maze of little-visited lagoons and marshlands at the lake's edge. Undisturbed

by the gentle splash of the paddle, carp and eels slither through the shallows here, and white egrets and cormorants strut through the reeds, drying their feathers in the sunshine.

Essentials



WHERE TO STAY

Restored by an English couple, the stylish hillside **Villa Miela** sits above Virpazar, and most rooms have views over Lake Skadar. It's self-catering, with a kitchen for guests' use (www.undiscoveredmontenegro.com; Bb Virpazar; from ₹12,500 with a welcome dinner and four standard activities, some including lunch and use of mountain bikes).

FURTHER INFORMATION

• The owners also offer visits to local vineyards, hiking trips, kayak trips, and a lake cruise (www.undiscoveredmontenegro.com; lake cruise: ₹1,250/person).



In the summer, Budva's marina is dominated by luxury yachts – come winter, only local fishing boats remain

Facing page: The southwest side of Lake Skadar is littered with small islands, including Beška Island, home to two churches



5 BUDVA

Bask on the beaches or party till dawn in this coastal town, once a favourite haunt of Europe's glitterati

DAYS INTO YOUR TRIP: 12 – 13

TAKE THE SCENIC ROUTE NORTH TO SEASIDE BUDVA, VIA THE VILLAGE OF RIJEKA CRNOJEVIĆA AND THE VIEWPOINT OF PAVLOVA STRANA, BEFORE LINKING UP WITH THE MAIN HIGHWAY BETWEEN PODGORICA AND BUDVA.

Night is falling over Budva's walled old town. Bar owner Mariche Bosheska is rushed off her feet – a group of friends has arrived for cocktails at **Café Caspar**, and she's busy fixing their orders, crushing ice, wielding shakers, brandishing bottles filled with vividly-coloured liqueurs. As she works, crowds meander along the cobbled streets of the old town; a busker serenades them with Balkan folk tunes, smiling as they drop change into his upturned hat.

"Budva is an old city with a young heart," Mariche says, pouring out shots of *pelinkovac*, a bitter amber-coloured liqueur. "Some people come here for the beaches, other people come here to party. It gets a bit crazy in summer, but it's never boring."

Cradled in a curve of the Adriatic coast, framed by red mountains and sandy bays, Budva is Montenegro's answer to Monaco. At the turn of the 20th century, it was just one of many small fishing villages dotted along the Adriatic coastline, but everything changed

after WWII, when the small island village of **Sveti Stefan** was bought by the Yugoslav government and transformed into a luxurious hotel. Between the 1960s and '80s, the island became a playground for the rich and beautiful: Orson Welles, Kirk Douglas, Elizabeth Taylor, Marilyn Monroe and Princess Margaret all stayed here, transforming the once sleepy port into Montenegro's premier party town. Now a luxurious Aman resort, Sveti Stefan's terracotta roofs still provide the region's most outstanding view. Non-millionaires wishing to get closer might want to plump for a dinner reservation over a room.

Budva's **Riviera** is a stark contrast to the rest of rural Montenegro: along the harbourfront, multimillion-pound yachts jostle for space with fishing smacks and sightseeing boats, and the quayside is lined with bars and bistros serving freshly-caught lobster and mountains of other seafood.

Outside the high season, glimpses of the town's older character emerge: the streets of the **Stari Grad** fall quiet, and many of the town's beaches are deserted, frequented only by hardy winter swimmers and fishermen. But, when summer's in full swing, there's always a party getting started in the old town. It's going to be another busy night. ☺

Essentials



WHERE TO STAY

Built into the walls of the Stari Grad, smart **Hotel Astoria** has 12 rooms with monochrome schemes, and there are several suites. In summer there's a rooftop bar (above) with views over the citadel and Adriatic (00-382-33-451-110; www.astoria-montenegro.com; Old Town, Njegoševa 4; from ₹ 8,450 with breakfast).

Aman Sveti Stefan offers 50 luxurious rooms, cottages and suites; non-guests can dine at several Aman restaurants and cafés on the mainland, offering spectacular views over the island (00-382-33-420-000; www.aman.com; Sveti Stefan; from ₹ 60,700 with breakfast).

Essentials

BEST TIME TO VISIT

The shoulder months (May–Jun, Sept–Oct) are the best times to visit Montenegro, as there's plenty of sunshine and decent water temperatures. However, some beach bars and restaurants are closed, and certain activities are harder to arrange. July and August are peak season, and accommodation needs to be booked in advance.

GETTING THERE

Lufthansa, Qatar Airways, Air France and Turkish Airlines fly to Podgorica from Mumbai and New Delhi with one or two stopovers (return fares from ₹ 61,555).

GETTING AROUND

Hiring a car is by far the best way to explore Montenegro. Being a small country, driving distances are relatively short, and main roads are mostly well maintained and signposted. Away from the major towns, roads are often narrow, rough and winding, and GPS trackers are notoriously unreliable, so a decent road map is essential (www.hertz.com; from ₹ 3,000/day).

HOW LONG TO SPEND

With your own wheels, you could cover the highlights of Montenegro in 10 days, with a couple of nights each at Kotor, Ostrog, Durmitor, Lake Skadar and Budva. Two weeks would also allow some side-trips for rafting in the Tara River Gorge, hiking in Biogradska Gora forest, and exploring the little-visited area around Lovćen National Park.

WHAT TO BUDGET

Montenegro is an affordable

country to travel around in, especially compared to neighbouring Croatia. Meals in small, local restaurants generally cost between ₹ 800 and ₹ 1,700, while a double room in a mid-range hotel will set you back between ₹ 5,000 and ₹ 6,800 a night, or upwards of ₹ 10,000 in heavily touristed areas such as Budva.

FURTHER READING

See Lonely Planet's *Montenegro* and the tourism board's website, www.visitmontenegro.com, which provides plenty of information on sights, accommodation, and seasonal activities.

VISA

The Serbian Embassy in New Delhi manages visa procedures for India; account for at least a month to get your visa (<http://montenegroindia-consulate.com/visa.php>). A valid Schengen or US visa permits you entry to Montenegro for up to seven days.

EMBASSY ALERT

Embassy of India to Austria and Montenegro, Vienna: www.indianembassy.at

CURRENCY

€ 1 = ₹ 74.75

VEG OUT/ FANCY A CURRY?

The Montenegrin capital of Podgorica is home to **Mantra**, which is possibly the only place in the country where you'll find decent Indian food. Be sure to ask for your food to be made 'spicy' if you want even a bit of a kick! (00-382-20-242-888; Ivana Milutinovića 21, Podgorica; 8am–1am; mains from ₹ 600).

WAYS TO DO PODGORICA

Here's how to make the most of your time in the Montenegrin capital

	Budget	Mid-range	Luxury
STAY / EAT	<p>Hotel Aurel is a new hotel by the city centre that offers a great breakfast and comfortable rooms (00-382-78-11-3333; www.hotel-aurel.com; info@hotel-aurel.com; Josip Broz Tito Blvd nn; from ₹ 5,600).</p> <p>Vegetarians and meat-lovers alike will be happy with the hearty offerings at Dali, one of the most popular eateries in the city (00-382-67-76-5300; Bul Džordža Vašingtona 87).</p>	<p>The chic Hotel Hemera is an atmospheric choice – the rooms are bedecked in art, and the attached restaurant serves great food (00-382-20-22-1650; www.hotelhemera.com; Njegoševa 17; from ₹ 7,000 with breakfast).</p> <p>Discover Montenegrin food in all its fattening glory at Pod Volat. Locals swear by its massive mixed grill (00-382-69-61-8633; 1, Trg Vojvode Beca Osmanagic; 7am–12am; mains from ₹ 600).</p>	<p>Enjoy the impressive architecture and comfortable rooms at the highly-rated Hotel Podgorica. It's within walking distance of most of Podgorica's sights, and offers great views over the River Morača (00-382-20-40-2500; www.hotelpodgorica.co.me; hotelpodgorica@t-com.me; Street Svetlana Kane Radević; from ₹ 8,600 with breakfast).</p>

MONTENEGRO IN A NUTSHELL

Don't leave the country without ticking these experiences off your list

Sip



Montenegro's wine-making dates back to Roman times. The best reds are made with vranac grapes, which produce dark, dry, fruity wines packed with spice and berry flavours; if you prefer white, look out for *krstač*.



Brave

The Tara River Gorge, which is the highest and longest canyon in Montenegro at 1,300m high and 82km long. It's a popular spot for white-water rafting, with more than 50 rapids to tackle, and there are dizzying views from the top of the 365-metre-high Đurđevića Tara Bridge.



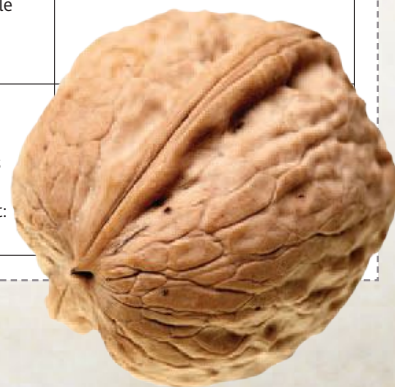
Drive

A Volkswagen Golf Mark II; these classic '80s hatchbacks are everywhere in Montenegro, as they were one of the first mass-produced cars available in the former Yugoslavia.

Quote

Endear yourself to the locals by quoting the old proverb: "Montenegro is like a walnut: small and hard to crack."

Say
"Zdravo" is the Montenegrin word for "Hello," but you'll sound more local if you say "Gobar dan" ("Good day").



Our-Lady-of-the-Rocks in the Bay of Kotor



Eat

The classic dish of *jagnjetina ispod sača* (above) epitomises Montenegro's rustic, hearty cuisine, consisting of a joint of lamb baked in an iron pot, traditionally served with root vegetables such as potato, and cornmeal mash.

AND FOR THAT ONE MOMENT YOU ARE ONE WITH THE UNIVERSE.



TRAVEL WELL

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Art and soul

Japan is a fascinating subject for photographers – we tackle it in black and white



WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHS: HIMANSHU PANDYA

IT'S important to prepare yourself for the unexpected before you begin exploring Japan. It will challenge and upend your perceptions, and perplex the hell out of you. The Japanese have their own take on everything. Japan is known for its neon, eccentric vibes, but, once you go beyond the frills and the fanfare, its inherent history and quiet personality shine through. Once I realised this, I could only see Japan in black and white. In fact, black and white photography, according to the Japanese, is 'two-colour photography', as black and white are considered the 'genuine' colours, while colour photography is called 'natural photography'. From designer toilet seats to *wabi-sabi* (a Zen concept that reflects an appreciation of beauty in impermanence) and everything in between, Japan is as unique as unique can be.

I think it is this perspective that gives a brilliant dimension to Japanese art, which has had a strong influence on every aspect of local lives for centuries. Whether it's about something as seemingly mundane as drinking tea (a ceremony that's actually considered as one the highest forms of art in Japan) or high-tech modern architecture, Japanese art has always been highly-regarded across the world. It is perhaps the only country where you can see yesterday and today co-exist in such harmony; a place where deep-rooted culture and tradition fuels cutting edge technology and makes this tiny island nation the third-largest economy in the world.

Himanshu Pandya is a travel and automobile photographer who has been shooting for *Lonely Planet Magazine India* for seven years. He has intrigued by all things Japan for about as long, and was there on assignment for *LPMI*.



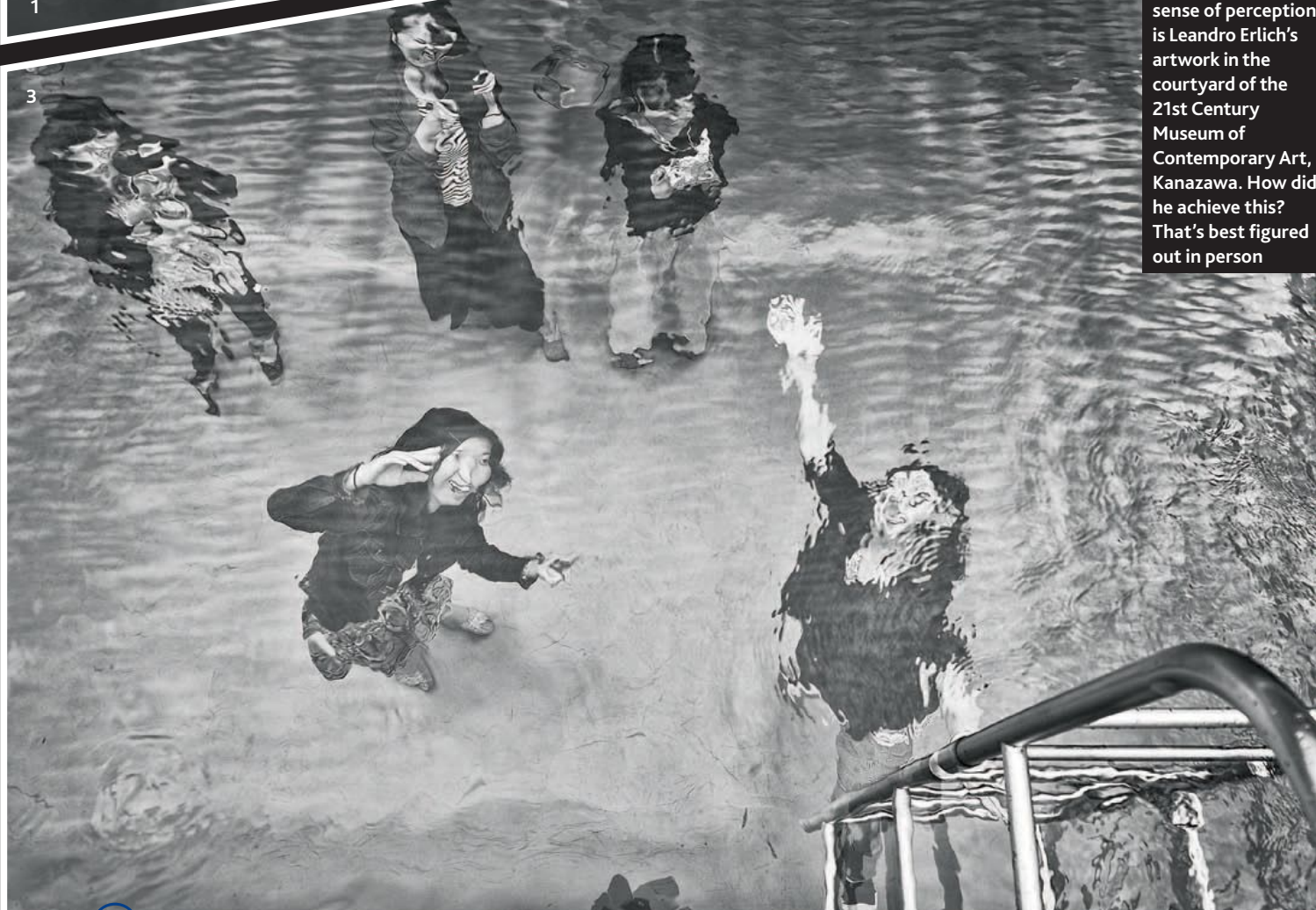
"Everything that is solid, melts" – this is one of the most thought-provoking exhibits in the year-long exhibition titled *The Liquid State*, housed at the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa. A perfect cube of asphalt, measuring exactly 84.74cm in length, breadth, and height, is kept in a huge petri dish to melt over the period of a year. Asphalt is supposed to be the slowest-flowing liquid on Earth, and 84.74 happens to be the average lifespan of a Japanese citizen →

1. Gold-leaf artwork is one of the oldest forms of traditional art in Kanazawa. This nerve-racking craft involves working with gold sheets an astonishing 0.1 microns thin

2. At the Atsuta Shrine at Nagoya, you're almost guaranteed to witness a traditional Shinto wedding. Being able to capture unbridled joy through your lens is priceless



3. Another installation that challenges one's sense of perception is Leandro Erlich's artwork in the courtyard of the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa. How did he achieve this? That's best figured out in person



A black and white aerial photograph of a dense urban landscape in Tokyo. The foreground shows a wide river, likely the Arakawa River, with a large, arched steel truss bridge spanning across it. Several multi-lane elevated highways (expressways) are visible, with cars and trucks traveling on them. The middle ground is filled with a tightly packed collection of buildings of various heights and architectural styles, including many residential apartment blocks. A prominent, taller building with a grid-like facade stands out on the left. The background continues the dense cityscape with more high-rise buildings. In the bottom left corner, there is a small, faint date stamp that reads "05 | 05 | 05".


The Tokyo Skytree was primarily built to broadcast radio and television signal, but the tallest free-standing broadcast tower in the world offers unparalleled views of the city as well →



1. Although the views from the upper observation deck of Tokyo Skytree are fabulous, the deck itself makes for quite a pretty picture

2. "What's a stack of sake barrels doing in the shrine of the sacred sword?" That was the first question that came to my mind when I chanced upon it at the Atsuta Shrine in Nagoya. But, as I soon found out, sake has traditionally been revered as the conduit bringing the gods and people together. *Kanpai!*

3. I'm not a big fan of gardens as photography subjects. But that was before I visited the Kenrokuen Garden in Kanazawa and ended up spending the better part of a day here. One of the three great gardens of Japan, Kenrokuen is an absolute visual treat, with treasures around every corner. The teahouse with a stone lantern in the foreground is my favourite



It was a cramped seat in the bus. I had but a fraction of a second before the light turned green, and Nagoya's Mode Gakuen Spiral Towers wasn't on my itinerary. So, this was literally the only chance I had. Perhaps years of training kicked in, or maybe it was just an inherently photographable structure. Whatever it was, I'm not complaining one bit. →

JAPAN IN PHOTOS

The Japanese might have revolutionised the manufacturing world with 'The Toyota Way', but a visit to the Toyota Commemorative Museum of Industry and Technology in Nagoya is about a lot more than just the 5S and *kaizen*. The process of car building using a wooden mould, for example, is a fascinating peek into history, and the geometric symmetry is mesmerising





1. Attired in a *jōe* robe of white silk, a *tate-eboshi* hat, a *shaku* ritual baton, and with a ramrod posture, Shinto priests cut quite the figure. The Atsuta Shrine in Nagoya provides the perfect setting in which to see them in action

2. 4,10,000sqm seems like a bit of overkill for a train station, right? Not if you're Japanese. The JR Central Towers in Nagoya is by far the largest train station in the world and a great example of precision architecture. A case in point being the viewing deck. I ended up spending almost all my time photographing the interiors, rather than the views from it →



1




2

1. "It is the visitors to the gallery that'll help transform this exhibit into the final form the artists envisaged." The Fermentation Act is the third experimental device in The Liquid State exhibition in Kanazawa, where the CO2 and moisture that visitors introduce into the gallery is essential to transform tea in the jars into *kombucha*, a fermented Mongolian beverage. Talk about living art!

2. The Nagoya Castle is the finest example of a Samurai castle, with white curved walls and jade green roof tiles. Set at least half a day aside if you intend on really exploring the place



In Ginza, I chanced upon a novice monk performing the centuries-old tradition of collecting alms, which was visually fascinating enough. But the bizarre location, right in the middle of a busy, upscale shopping district, was what gave the act a completely different dimension



It was in Kanazawa that I realised how much the Japanese loved their train stations. Another magnificent edifice, this one is a marvellous amalgamation of the ultramodern and the traditional: a high, steel-and-glass dome juxtaposed against a wooden gate inspired by a traditional Japanese *tsuzumi* drum 🥁

Essentials

📅 BEST TIME TO VISIT

All three cities are great between September and November for autumn foliage, and spring (Mar – May) for cherry-blossom season.

📅 GETTING THERE

ANA NIPPON has daily direct flights to Tokyo and Nagoya from Mumbai and New Delhi (return fares from ₹ 39,750). Many other airlines also fly from New Delhi or Mumbai (from ₹ 40,000).

From Tokyo, take a *shinkansen* to Nagoya and Kanazawa, covered by the Japan Rail Pass (from ₹ 18,110/ seven-day pass).

📅 GETTING AROUND

The subway is the most efficient way to explore Tokyo. Pick up a PASMO card, which can be used on all rail and bus lines (www.tokyo-metro.jp/en; from ₹ 630).

Nagoya can be explored on foot. For longer distances, buy a pass for the subway (one-day pass: ₹ 465) or for the subway and bus (₹ 375; www.nagoya-info.jp/en).

Kanazawa can be explored on foot, by bus or bicycle. Buy a one-day bus pass (www.hokutetsu.co.jp/en; ₹ 320).

📅 VISA

Apply through VFS; a temporary visa takes at least one working day to process (www.vfsglobal.com/japan/india; visa fee: ₹ 440 + ₹ 650 service charge).

📅 EMBASSY ALERT

Embassy of India, Tokyo: www.indembassy-tokyo.gov.in

📅 CURRENCY

₹ 1 = JPY 1.58

📅 WHERE TO STAY

TOKYO: We had a comfortable stay at the Keio Plaza Hotel, five minutes from Shinjuku (00-81-33-344-0111; www.keioplaza.com; from ₹ 16,500).

NAGOYA: Nagoya Tokyu Hotel is close to many attractions (00-81-52-251-2411; www.nagoya-htokyu-hotels.co.jp/en/; from ₹ 7,200).

KANAZAWA: ANA Crowne Plaza Kanazawa is 15 minutes away from major attractions (00-81-76-224-6111; www.anacrowneplaza-kanazawa.jp; from ₹ 7,535).

📅 VEG OUT/ FANCY A CURRY?

Pick up A Guide to Indian and Vegetarian Restaurants in Japan, from the Japan National Tourist Organisation (JNTO).

THE LAND OF SNOW AND NICE

Piste-ing your way down the iconic Mont Blanc massif isn't the only reason to visit Chamonix – we've got a whole host more for you

WORDS ALISHA WADIA





As morning hits,
skilled skiers line up to get
to the top of the beautiful
Vallée Blanche, only to slide
down, rinse and repeat
all day

HERE'S something elemental about mountains that reduces most of us to a dreamy-eyed, emotional, blubbing mess, or, at the very least, to a fairly stunned, awed silence. Mont Blanc stands in front of me, at a cosmic-sized 4,807m, scraping the edges of the stratosphere, the tallest in the Alps and Europe's highest. Always, *always* wearing a dazzling white cloak of snow, in absolute storybook splendour. Seeing it brings on a moment of what the French call a *coup de foudre* (or love at first sight, for the *Français*-challenged) and what the English might evocatively describe as a "crick in the neck," I drool, mesmerised.

A stone's throw from the Swiss and Italian borders it may be, but the Mont Blanc massif looms large over Chamonix, and is very much French. They will calmly clarify that this, *ma chérie*, is the Top of Europe, the roof of the world, you know. They will merely shrug and sniff in disdain at any drivel about those fairy-tale Swiss mountains taking front and centre in any conversation about the Alps, particularly that tiresome chocolate-shaped one. This is the *vrai* heart of the Alps, and the rest are obviously imposters.

Of course, they're quite right, and words like "gorgeous" and "breath-taking" fall a bit short when attempting to conjure an image of *La Dame Blanche*, or the White Lady. This is a world of great, snowy peaks, rocky spires and wicked pinnacles melting into the skies, and dramatic glaciers tumbling down to the alpine prettiness of Chamonix. A Mecca for the world's skiers and mountaineers (it's literally the birthplace of it all), this was the home of the very first Winter Olympics in 1924. Snuggled up in France's Haute Savoie region, you'd think Chamonix was a posh ski resort, with skiers strutting their stuff in Dior and Louboutin. *Mais non!* Instead, Cham, as locals call it, is also an endlessly charming town with *oh mon Dieu* views of those mountains at every corner you turn, and boulder-sized portions of heavenly cheese and wine.

Yes, this is France, and there *is* plenty of talking like your mouth is full, but there is a merciful scarcity of Parisian waiters – it's all friendly locals being tailed around the clock by their even friendlier, fluffy dogs, and those handsome skiers to ogle at. And, while these glorious, risky slopes make every daring skier's bucket list, there *is* much of the aforementioned goodies to tuck into, an astonishing amount of history, all sorts of easy adventures to be found, and other *coup de foudre*-ing to do, even if you can't quite stand right on a pair of skis.



Blow kisses at Mont Blanc

Well, you want to get the obvious things out of the way first. The **Aiguille du Midi**, part of the Mont Blanc massif, is Chamonix-Mont Blanc's headline attraction. A mean, jagged needle of a mountain, Aiguille du Midi, or Needle of the Midday (made sparkly by the sun at noon), is Chamonix's most arresting snow-laden spire. Once the highest ascent by cable car, and still holding the record for steepest ascent by cable car, the **Téléphérique de l'Aiguille de Midi** famously gets you within *bisous*-blowing distance of the Mont Blanc. No climbing equipment required.

As you're puzzling over how exactly one might say Aiguille, not one but two hair-raising cable-car rides whisk you from Chamonix, at 1,035m, over seracs and glaciers and through swirling seas of clouds first to the Plan de l'Aiguille at 2,317m, followed by another 3,777m and an elevator to the final summit at 3,842m to very thin air and very splendid views. Shiver and gasp at jaw-dropping, 360° views of the French, Swiss and Italian Alps, and the star of the show, the remarkably rounded peak of Mont Blanc. There's a heart-stopping moment when you come out of the clouds.

Majestic, ivory-coloured peaks poke through a billowing blanket of fleecy clouds, as far as your eyes can see. This is also the kick-off point for the **Vallée Blanche**, a famous off-piste ski descent over shimmering glaciers and crevasses, whooshing over powder-soft snow and a vertiginous drop of almost 2,800m over 24km that ends in Chamonix. You can see why it's on so many bucket lists.

Non-skiers **Step into the Void**, literally – a completely glass-floored, glass-walled precipice that stares a spine-freezing 1,000m down into the valley floor.

Things to look out for: The Toblerone-shaped **Matterhorn** (if you look up the map, the legendary Swiss peak is in a near-straight line with Mont Blanc), Frenchmen in the vicinity alerting you that the Aiguille du Midi is the third most visited site of natural beauty in the world, and grand views of the **Glacier des Bossons**, the **Drus**, **Aiguille Verte** and **Aiguilles de Chamonix** from the **Plan de l'Aiguille**.

Aiguille du Midi: www.compagniedumontblanc.co.uk/en; 100, Place de l'Aiguille du Midi; check timings online, closed from November 2 to December 16, 2016; Chamonix – Aiguille du Midi return ticket: ₹ 4,400 adult, ₹ 3,750 child, Lift Panoramic Terrace and Step into the Void: free

Walk around town

What do a doctor and a crystal hunter have in common?

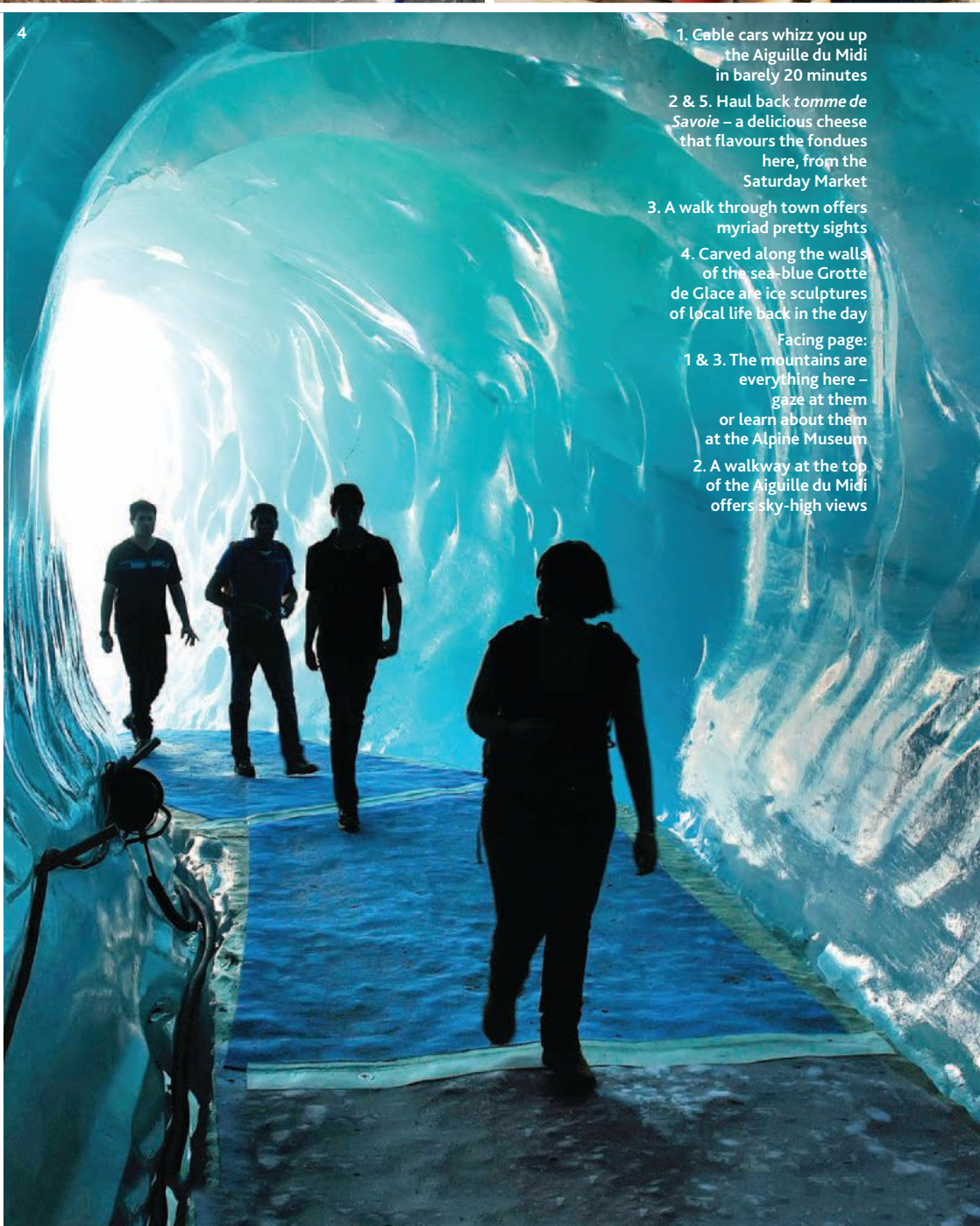
The year was 1786. Dr Michel Paccard, an avid mountain climber, and his guide Jacques Balmat, were the first climbers to ascend Mont Blanc. Fame and glory came to the valley, and the intrepid explorers even picked up a reward from H B Saussure, a Swiss geologist who'd been having a go at scaling the summit for a while.

Come upon weathered statues of Paccard and Balmat pointing the way to Saussure on a **guided heritage walk of Chamonix-Mont Blanc** that traces the stories of the valley. Like that of Max Linder and his comical short films on skiing and tobogganing, which inspired a certain Mr Chaplin and drew celebrities by the droves to this rural wonderland. Or the sad tale of Marie Paradis, the first woman to reach the summit, who, fatigued and short of breath on the final leg, needed to be hauled up by guides. There are incredible pockets of architecture, too, colourful Art Deco and lavish Belle Époque structures sitting by the gurgling River Arve, and the Baroque **Catholic Church of St Michel**, whose lovely stained-glass windows portray mountaineers and skiers hurtling down slopes, in a delightful twist →



1. Settle down for a coffee on the banks of the icy River Arve
2. Spend a few days in Chamonix, and, chances are, you'll encounter this man with his snow-hatted steed
3. The cold justifies digging into heaped platefuls of tartiflette
4. Gaze into the abyss, with a pair of special slippers that make your feet rather duck-like
5. The Mont Blanc massif is beautiful, no matter which way you look at it
6. You end up spending more than a few minutes admiring all the details on the 3D Guides of Chamonix fresco





1. Cable cars whizz you up the Aiguille du Midi in barely 20 minutes
 - 2 & 5. Haul back *tomme de Savoie* – a delicious cheese that flavours the fondues here, from the Saturday Market
 3. A walk through town offers myriad pretty sights
 4. Carved along the walls of the sea-blue Grotte de Glace are ice sculptures of local life back in the day
- Facing page:
 1 & 3. The mountains are everything here – gaze at them or learn about them at the Alpine Museum
 2. A walkway at the top of the Aiguille du Midi offers sky-high views



of rather true Alpine spirit. Even more incredible is the Guides of Chamonix fresco dominating the wall of a building on the pedestrian Rue du Docteur Paccard. Commissioned by the mayor and painted by Patrick Commecy, it's a striking *trompe de l'oeil* and colourful testament to the most noted mountaineers and guides in the history of Chamonix. Gaston Rebuffat manoeuvring a climb, Saussure peering at a barometer, Henriette d'Angeville, probably the first female Alpinist, Paccard and Balmat nonchalant on the balcony, and many more. In true French style, there is a Chanel directly opposite – you know, in case you need a landmark. And of course, those idyllic mountains loom constantly on the horizon, glowing a soft pink as the sun disappears over them.

Chamonix-Mont Blanc guided walk: 10am Thur; ₹ 600/ person/ two hours

Eat a fine French meal

The Alps may spell cheese and potatoes in vast quantities, but you're on the French side of the border now. And the French, as we know, take mealtimes very seriously. They value little more than a good, unhurried repast, putting away course upon course of staggering proportions. Chamonix dishes up fare you will want to personally award Michelin stars to. Try the elegant **Le Bistrot**, where Chef Daniele Raimondi (a pupil of Alain Ducasse, no less) creates inventive dishes with sublime flavours and textures from seasonal produce, like fresh mint and pea

veloute flecked with bacon crisps, roasted cod with polenta, basil sorbet with meringue, winding up with a beast of a cheese platter. Or Le Hameau Albert 1ER's bucolic **La Maison Carrier**, which exudes the warmth of a cosy Alpine chalet and celebrates hearty mountain cuisine with classic Savoyard dishes like *tartiflette*, a sumptuous dish of cheese, potatoes and bacon – creamy and comforting, and delicate pan-fried fillets of *fera*, straight from the Savoie lakes. Its heavenly dessert carousel, drooping under glistening tarts, pies, sinful chocolate soufflé and *île flottante* (meringue floating in a sea of *crème anglaise*) will have you shedding tears of joy.

Le Bistrot: 00-33-4-5053-5764; www.lebistrot.chamonix.com/en; 151, Avenue de l'Aiguille du Midi; 12pm – 1.30pm, 7pm – 9.30pm; fixed menus from ₹ 1,550

La Maison Carrier: 00-33-4-5053-0003; see Make it Happen for website and address; lunch: 12pm – 2pm, dinner: 7pm – 9.30pm Tues – Sat; mains from ₹ 1,100, fixed menus from ₹ 1,500

Ride a train to a glacier

It's not often you take a train to visit a sea. After Wyndham and Pococke – a couple of Brit explorers – 'discovered' Chamonix and its pristine glaciers somewhere around the 18th century, the world came in droves on mules and sedan chairs to ooh and aah. For, **Montenvers**, at 1,913m, is where you can gaze at the stunning beauty of the **Mer de Glace**, or Sea of Ice, France's largest glacier. Today, a gleaming red rack and

pinion locomotive chugs the 871 metres up past viaducts and pine-studded slopes, turning the final bend to a shimmering panorama of the tongue of the glacier, marble white and monster-sized and fenced by mammoth mountains. Take the gondola, and climb another 400 steps down toward the glacier, a bracing walk weaving past skiers returning from the Vallée Blanche.

Visit the **Grotte de Glace**, a deep blue ice cave, re-sculpted each year out of the glacial ice. Moving at a leisurely 1cm a year, the 200m-deep valley glacier is also shrinking rapidly, and signs mark the steps where the imposing glacier once stood.

Order a coffee on the terrace outside the station overlooking the Mer de Glace, the Drus and Grand Jorasses, and savour the views while you can.

Adrenaline-lovers: The **Grand Balcon Nord Hike** is one of Haute Savoie's most scenic walks. Ride the lift to the Plan de l'Aiguille and hike to the Mer de Glace glacier, before returning by the Montenvers train to Chamonix.

Montenvers and Mer de Glace: www.compagniedumontblanc.co.uk/en; 35, Place de la Mer de Glace, train departs from Gare de Chamonix; opens December 17, 2016, departures 10am – 2.30pm, last return from Montenvers 4.30pm, every 20 – 30 min; Chamonix-Montenvers return train, cable car and ice cave: ₹ 2,350 adult, ₹ 2,000 child

Drown in fondue at the Restaurant du Montenvers

Since you've come this far, hop over to the **Grand Hotel du Montenvers**, a historic →



edifice built in 1880 to shelter all those pioneering mountaineers and spirited mule-riding travellers. The restaurant is an old fashioned dining hall, a balm to aching feet and growling tummies for centuries, which rustles up the easily the best fondue this side of the Alps. Steaming hot and gooey-thick with the deliciously nutty, earthy flavour typical of Savoyard cheeses, it's served with a thankfully light salad, and a smorgasbord of smoked *charcuterie* and breads with which to mop it all up.

Dig into the reaches of your extra stomach, for dessert is a crisp tart, dripping with juicy sweet berries. Sigh.

Restaurant du Montenvers: 00-33-4-5053-8770; 35, Place de la Mer de Glace; 11.30am – 4.30pm; fondue: ₹ 1,500

Hurtle down on a luge

Fret not if you can't take to the slopes on skis. Strap in for a joyride at the **Chamonix Luge-Alpine Coaster**, a 1,300m-long track of fun for pretty much anyone. Whoosh past pine trees and meadows, and squeal in delight through sharp turns and exciting loops and spins that seem to get over all too soon. There's a whole lot of family-friendly fun to be had, with tobogganing and ski areas for children and beginners.

Chamonix Luge-Alpine Coaster: 00-33-4-5053-0897; www.chamonixparc.com; 351, Chemin du Pied du Grépon; check website for timings; from ₹ 400/ person, from ₹ 550/ two people

Go museum-hopping

As beautiful as the outdoors is here, there are some places in Chamonix that make staying indoors well worth your time. Take the **Alpine Museum**, for example. It houses a fascinating collection that takes you past the history of mountaineering, through a vast collection of photographs and videos of mind-boggling, gravity-defying ascents, which will leave you surprisingly spellbound. If peaks pique your interest, you can spend hours delving into the science and all those terrific technical details that go into the art of scaling great summits.

If, instead, shiny crystals rock your world, you should know that the Mont Blanc massif is rich in minerals, and is famed for rare pink fluor spar and smoky quartz crystal. The **Crystal Museum** displays beautiful specimens of rocks, crystals and minerals from the valley, and throws up curious stories. Like how it was the crystal prospectors such as Jacques Balmat who, in their dangerous treasure hunts for crystals, kick-started the thrill of scaling mountains for the sheer heck of it, or of the resident farmers who once braved the precarious terrain in search of crystals to trade with the watch- and chandelier-makers of Geneva.

Alpine Museum: 00-33-4-5053-2593; 89, Avenue Michel Croz; 2pm – 6pm Wed – Mon; ₹ 450 adult, child free
Crystal Museum: 00-33-4-5055-5393; 615, Allée du Recteur Payot; 2pm – 6pm; ₹ 450 adult, child free

Learn to ski like a *schusser*

The words 'bluebird powder day' are commonly known to cause the most veteran skiers to excitedly wet their pants, and the French Alps have an enviously large number of such days. With more than 90 per cent of its skiing above 2,000m on powder-fresh, near perfect tree-lined slopes, Chamonix is the grand ski indeed, perennially hosting some ski championship or the other. Skiers of course, make a beeline every chance they get, and while you're here, it would be a shame to miss out.

While the pros head for the **Vallée Blanche**, newbies can book a lesson with the **Ecole de Ski**, ski-suit up at **Sanglard** and gingerly hit the bunny slopes at **Brévent**. The instructors here are a relentlessly encouraging lot, bidding you to ignore the five-year olds whizzing expertly past as you gingerly attempt a sideways ascent or skid hopelessly about. It's actually great fun and, as you start to get the hang of it, you might hear the instructor call out, "*Tres bien!* You nailed the turn, now try with a *leetle* grace, *oui?*" Icy. Well, Eric, you can't have everything. Like some wise ass probably said, don't get too *piste* off if you're not pirouetting like a gazelle on skis. After all, even if you slide and slip, you're upside down in eye-popping (if sopping cold) prettiness. ☺

Ecole de Ski Chamonix: 00-33-4-5053-2257; www.esfchamonix.com; ski lessons: ₹ 3,250/ hour for one to two people
Sanglard: 00-33-4-5053-2470; <http://uk.rentski.com>; 199, Place du Mont Blanc; 9am – 12pm, 2.30pm – 7pm; hire of Goretex jacket and pants, skis, ski boots, poles and helmet from ₹ 6,150



1. Balmat points the way from Mont Blanc to Saussure

2. The Mer de Glace curls around the northern slopes of the Mont Blanc massif

3. Live it up in fancy farmyard digs at the Hameau Albert 1ER

4. Ibex aren't shy and you might even spot a couple on a summer trek

5. The powdery slopes of the Mont Blanc massif offer plenty of 'bluebird powder' days to enthusiastic skiers

6. Gorge on that French staple, *macarons*!

Facing page:

1. The cheerful red Montenvers train has been chugging up these slopes for nearly a century

2. Crystal hunters have been scouring Mont Blanc's slopes in search of crystals for over 200 years



Essentials

BEST TIME TO VISIT

Christmas spells high season and long queues at the ski lifts. Late winter, around January, is bone-chilling, but the slopes are empty. Buried under fresh powder, they're ideal for not only skiing but also dog-sledding, cross-country skiing and tramping about in snow shoes. Spring (May–Jun) and summer (Jul–Aug) bring a riot of colour to the Alps, and days are long and sunny (still a cool 18° C). There's great hiking and plenty of outdoor festivals in store.

GETTING THERE

Switzerland's Geneva Airport is barely an hour (100km) from Chamonix. We flew with Air France (expect perky and pleasant service in a new makeover) from Mumbai, with a halt in Paris (return fares from ₹ 63,800). Swiss, Jet Airways, Etihad, Emirates, Aeroflot and others also fly to Geneva from Mumbai and New Delhi with at least one stop (return fares from ₹ 34,000). OUIBUS has buses that ply between Geneva Airport and Chamonix (www.uk.ouibus.com; ₹ 1,400/person).

GETTING AROUND

The pocket-sized Chamonix-Mont Blanc area is very easy to explore on foot. Ask your accommodation or the local tourist office for the Carte d'Hôte pass (www.chamonix.com; free with hotel stay, ₹ 750/week) for travel on public transport in the valley, between Servoz and Vallorcine.

VISA

Apply for a short-stay Schengen visa through VFS (www.vfs-france.co.in). The visa is usually issued in three to four working days (₹ 4,412 + ₹ 1,467 service fee and ₹ 60 cash handling charge).

FURTHER READING

Download the French Alps and Jura Mountains PDF from Lonely Planet's France guide, and refer to the official tourism website, www.chamonix.com, for practical information and itinerary options.

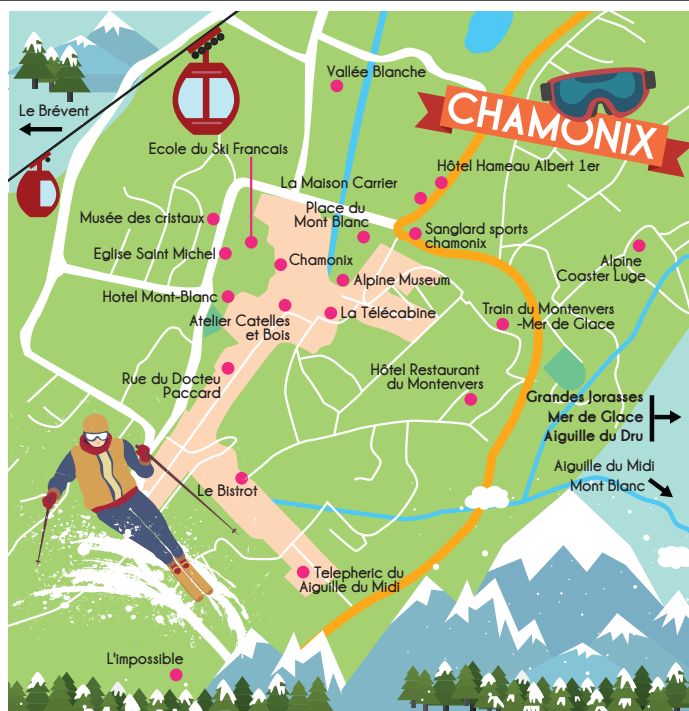
CURRENCY

€ 1 = ₹ 74.75

EMBASSY ALERT

Embassy of India, Paris: www.ambinde.fr

Make it Happen: Chamonix



WAYS TO DO CHAMONIX

STAY



The **Hameau Albert 1er** (left), reconstructed from a traditional wooden Savoyard farmhouse, is alpine chic with classy interiors, a luxurious heated indoor pool looking out onto the Alps, and two impeccable restaurants, one of which is Michelin-starred. The deluxe rooms on the top floor come with a skylight above the bathtub (00-33-4-50-53-0509; www.hameau-albert.fr/en, infos@hameau-albert.fr; 38, Route du Bouchet; from ₹ 14,450).

With modern, stylish rooms, brilliant views of the Alps, stellar service and door-to-door shuttles to ski lifts and a Clarins spa to unwind at, **Hotel Mont-Blanc** is a definite winner (00-33-4-50-53-0564; www.hotelmontblanchamonix.com/en, info@hmbchamonix.com; 62, Allée du Majestic; from ₹ 16,800).

EAT

Come to **La Télécabine** for generous portions of mouth-watering French food with a modern take and head-on views of the Aiguille du Midi. The deconstructed Bounty dessert and the Café Gourmand, a platter of French mini-desserts served with a coffee, are particularly good (00-33-4-50-47-0466; www.restaurant-latelecabine.fr; 27, Rue de la Tour; 12pm–11pm; fixed menus from ₹ 1,550).

L'Impossible is a snug, family-run restaurant (so much so, you may spot the dog too) that serves Italian-inspired dishes made from seasonal, organic produce. The velvety tiramisu, served in a jar under a thick bed of cocoa might make you want to kiss Auro, the chef (00-33-4-50-53-2036; www.restaurant-impossible.com/en; 9, Chemin du Cry [Route des Pelerins]; 6.30pm–10pm; mains from ₹ 1,200).

VEG OUT/ FANCY A CURRY?

Sate your *desi* hunger pangs at **Annapurna Indian Restaurant**, where friendly, English-speaking staff serve tandoori fare, *thalis* and North Indian curries with a smile (00-33-4-50-55-8139; www.annapurna-chamonix.com; 42, Ave Ravel Le Rouge; 11am–3pm, 6pm–11.30pm).



TOUR OPERATOR

For quick and hassle-free planning, get in touch with **Cox and Kings India** for customised itineraries to Chamonix (00-91-9867565599; www.coxandkings.com; three-night, four-day trip from ₹ 1.5 lakh/person).

SHOPPING

Fill your belly and bags at the **Saturday Market**, which brims with artisanal produce from the region – cheese and dried sausage, organic macarons, wild blueberries and more (Place du Mont Blanc; 7.30am–12.30pm). **Atelier Catelles et Bois** stocks traditional wooden cadeaux (gifts) or toys (00-33-4-50-53-5428; 26, Place Balmat), while **Aux Petits Gourmands** has the most decadent macarons and chocolate 4810 – a local specialty (00-33-4-50-53-0159; www.petitsgourmands.fr; 168, Rue du Dr Paccard; chocolates from ₹ 180).

3 DAYS BECOME A WEEK. A WEEK BECOMES A MONTH.



TRAVEL WELL

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Two Days in BUDAPEST

Take a couple of days to explore the atmospheric streets of Hungary's capital, finding tumbledown pubs, thermal baths and contemporary design shops nudging against grand civic buildings and the gloriously blue Danube. Wandering through, fill up on old Magyar favourites in a Soviet-style canteen or local produce from a farmers' market

WORDS AMANDA CANNING | PHOTOGRAPHS SARAH COGHILL



- | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1 The journey: Budavári Sikló | 5 The hotel: Brody House | 9 The shop: Printo |
| 2 The excursion: Margitsziget island | 6 The boat trip: Dunatéma | 10 The meal: Menza |
| 3 The sight: Hungarian Parliament | 7 The coffee: Lots Terem | 11 The local's tip: Szimpla Kert |
| 4 The night out: Kazinczy utca | 8 The swim: Rudas Baths | |

Essentials

➔ **BEST TIME TO VISIT** Budapest throws up treats no matter what time of year you visit. The city and its surrounds are beautiful in the spring and autumn, while festivals abound in the summer.

➔ **GETTING THERE** Lufthansa, Turkish Airlines, Emirates, Qatar Airways, Swiss International Air Lines, KLM Royal Dutch, Jet Airways and Air France fly to Budapest from New Delhi and Mumbai (return fares from ₹ 44,070).

➔ **GETTING AROUND** Budapest's historic centre is easily walkable, but the city also has an excellent public transport system, including the metro, streetcars and trolley buses – a three-day travelcard costs ₹ 2,375 (www.bkk.hu).

➔ **VISA** Apply through VFS for a short-stay Schengen visa. It takes close to 15 working days to process (www.vfsglobal.com/hungary/india; ₹ 4,440 + ₹ 1,503 VFS service fees).

➔ **EMBASSY ALERT** Embassy of India, Budapest: www.indianembassy.hu

➔ **CURRENCY** Hungarian Forints (HUF) 4 = ₹ 1

➔ **VEG OUT/ FANCY A CURRY?** Kashmir Indian Restaurant does an assortment of Indian and Kashmiri dishes. Devour what you can at its well-priced lunch buffet (00-36-1-354-1806; www.kashmiretterem.hu/en; Arany János utca 13; 6pm – 10pm Tues – Sun; buffet from ₹ 330).



The journey

The doors of the Margit carriage are pulled shut, its passengers huddled within, and the tiered, wooden funicular is hoisted up Castle Hill, clanking beneath two wrought-iron pedestrian bridges on its 95m journey. Opened in 1870, the **Budavári Sikló funicular** still exerts a particular pull on visitors to Budapest: you can't come and not ride at least once in its burgundy carriages. Emerging at the top, people soon disperse – some stopping to take photos with the armed sentries guarding the presidential palace, others rummaging for lace in an antiques shop or stopping for a Borsodi beer on a cobbled square. All will end up at Fisherman's Bastion, a fanciful, Neo-Gothic terrace, complete with turrets, and dragons hiding in the stonework. It's worth jostling past the inevitable crowds to peer through the bastion's open windows at the Danube and Parliament far below, before diving back into the quieter streets of Castle Hill to make your own discoveries. →

● www.bkv.hu; 7.30am – 10pm, closed Mon odd weeks; Clark Adam ter station; return journey: ₹ 430



1. The Budavári Sikló on its way up Castle Hill
2. Fisherman's Bastion, built in the early 20th century, is named after a guild of fishermen who defended the city walls in the Middle Ages

BUDAPEST

The excursion

Okay, it's not really an excursion: **Margitsziget** is very much part of Budapest. Hop across to the island plopped in the Danube though, and thoughts of the city fade very quickly. Home to religious buildings from the 12th century, it saw a change of purpose in the 20th century: this is now holiday land, Hungarian style. Families and friends hop on to all manner of contraptions – electric scooters, go-karts, canopied bicycles – and whizz through the parks, pausing to watch the dancing fountains, play a game of ping-pong or lick ice cream in the shade of a ruined convent. The daytime shrieks of kids careering down the water slides of Palatinus Strand are replaced at dusk by the drifting strains of tango: couples, frowning in concentration, dance beneath the chandeliers at Holdudvar hall. Dance finished, it's time for one last beer before heading back to the city.

● www.en.palatinusstrand.hu;
www.holdudvar.net; Apr – Oct;
water slides: ₹ 675

1. The Gothic Revival-style Hungarian Parliament on the bank of the Danube – it is the country's largest building

2. Bringo carts are a popular way to explore Margitsziget

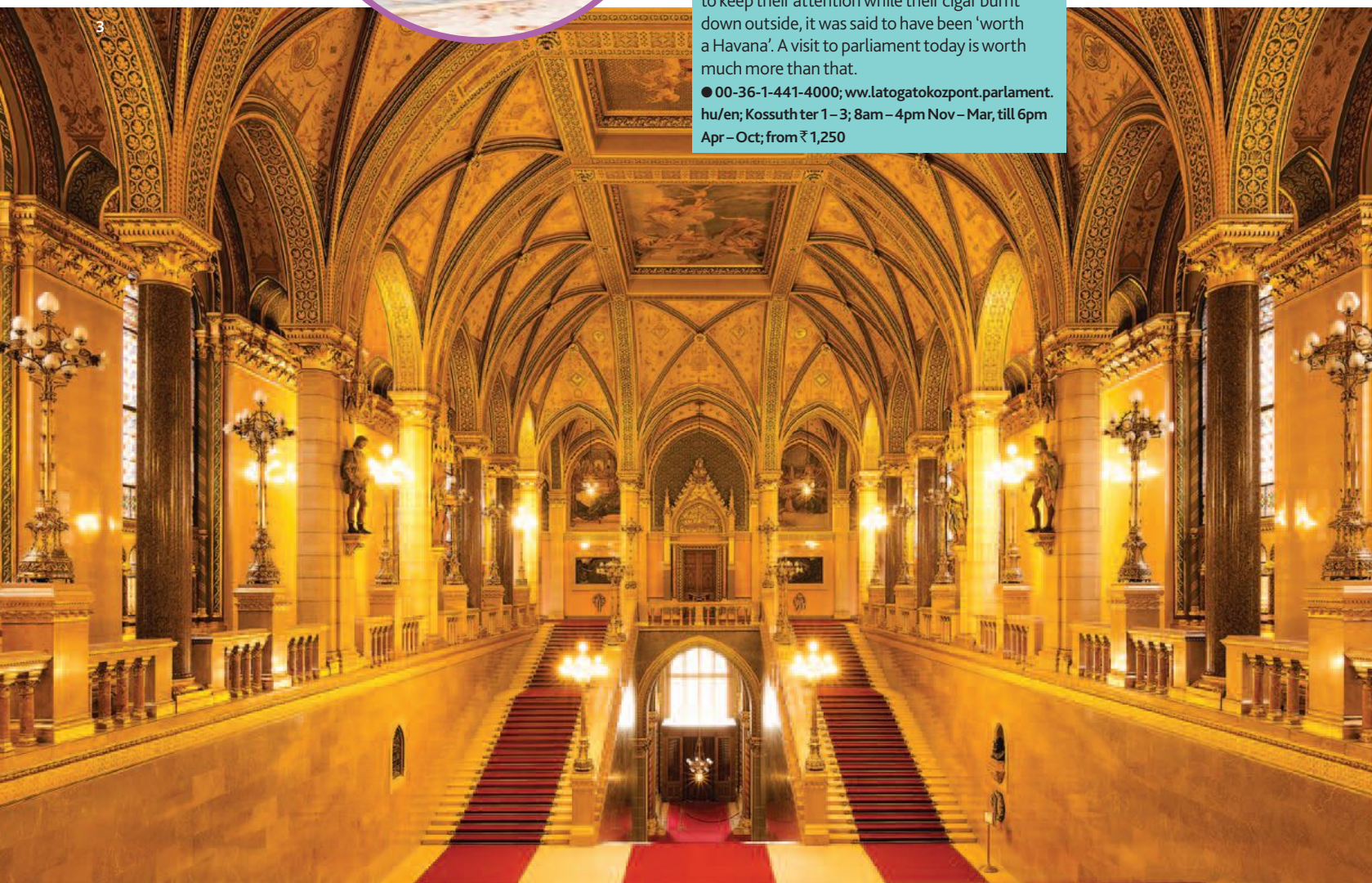
3. Parliament's ornamental Grand Staircase, complete with frescoes and royal statues



The sight

The Holy Crown of Hungary, which perched atop the heads of its monarchs for more than 900 years, sits on a red velvet cushion in a glass case, protected by sabre-twirling guards and watched over by statues of the country's most celebrated kings, queens and princes. Around it, visitors swirl, gazing into the case, up at the stained glass in the double-domed ceiling, and back out towards the grand staircase, a gilded Baroque wonder too ornate to absorb in a single glance. In **Budapest's parliament**, it's very hard to know where to look next. The building was years ahead of its time when it opened in 1904. It had electric lighting, air-conditioning, lifts and ventilation, and, in a typically egalitarian move, statues representing all the professions of Hungary at the time, from saddle-makers to shepherds (all of them elaborately moustachioed). There are more idiosyncratic designs in here too. In every corridor, brass holders are built into the walls, ready to clutch the lit cigars of members while they disappeared into the assembly hall for speeches and votes. If a speech was interesting enough to keep their attention while their cigar burnt down outside, it was said to have been 'worth a Havana'. A visit to parliament today is worth much more than that.

● 00-36-1-441-4000; www.latogatokozpont.parlament.hu/en; Kossuth ter 1–3; 8am – 4pm Nov – Mar, till 6pm Apr – Oct; from ₹ 1,250





The night out

There are more than 400 places to get drunk at in the Jewish District, and Kazinczy utca is *the* place to get to grips with them. The street is home to the warren of rooms that is **Szimpla Kert**, Budapest's original ruin pub – abandoned buildings taken over by artists early in the 21st century, and turned into unofficial galleries and bars. The concept has come a long way since, and is now used rather liberally to denote any sort of pub adopting a slightly dishevelled look. Down the road is **Mika Tivadar Mulato**, with street art splashed across the walls of the surrounding buildings, and the garden haphazardly strung with fairy lights. The prime seat in the house is within a row boat beached in the yard. **AnKERT** raises the design bar. Tables sit beneath canopies of sails, with lanterns and neon artwork hanging over the cobbled courtyard of the old factory complex.

Beneath the bar, a sign proclaims: **FINALLY ARRIVED.** With a cold pint of Dreher and a jalapeño burger on the way, it's hard to disagree.

● Szimla: 00-36-20-261-8669; www.szimla.hu; Kazinczy utca 14; beers from ₹ 100

Mika Tivadar Mulato: www.mikativadarmulato.hu
AnKERT: 00-36-30-360-3389; Paulay Ede u 3

1. Enjoy a drink aboard a rowing boat in Mika Tivadar Mulato's garden

2. One of AnKERT's open connecting courtyards

3. The Print Suite at Brody House – art comes from the adjoining Brody Artyard print studio and gallery

The hotel

When William Clothier and Peter Grundberg bought the mansion at No 10 Bródy Sándor, it had been in a state of disrepair for more than 50 years. The former doctor's house, built in Budapest's golden age at the end of the 19th century, had survived WWII and the Hungarian Uprising – but not decades of Soviet rule. The two friends lived within its dilapidated walls, hosting dinner parties and cultural gatherings, before transforming it into **Brody House**, Budapest's most creative guesthouse. It retains the feel of a private home, whose guests wander around in a state of enchantment, not quite believing their luck in scoring an invite to stay. Artful disrepair is still the name of the game: upcycled furniture on the parquet floors, the works of local artists on the distressed walls, and an air of friendly bohemian ease, as if someone might at any moment jump up to recite a poem over a glass of wine from the honesty bar in the lounge. →
● 00-36-1-266-1211; www.brodyhouse.com; Voromasty utca 38; from ₹ 8,150





1

The boat trip

It's the classic Venetian scene: crew in blue-and-white-striped T-shirts help passengers into a mahogany speedboat, and off they skim across the water, glasses of sparkling wine in hand, the sound of classical music drifting across the waves. But this is not the Grand Canal, and we are not in Italy. Inspired by a trip to Venice, Botond Eöry decided to bring a similar style of Riva boat to Budapest. Built in Hungary, his Dunarama fleet now plies the Danube on sightseeing trips, taking passengers down river, past the monastery and produce market to the edge of the city, with the promise of the Black Sea far beyond. Here, Strauss is abruptly switched for AC/DC, the boat spins, and then thunders back, bouncing over the water towards the Parliament Building and Margitsziget. The captain weaves between long tourist cruisers and cargo ships bound for Germany at every spin of the wheel, obliging passengers to follow the international seafarer's law of waving to other people also on boats.

● 00-36-70-942-2613; www.dunarama.hu;
boat trip from ₹ 1,225

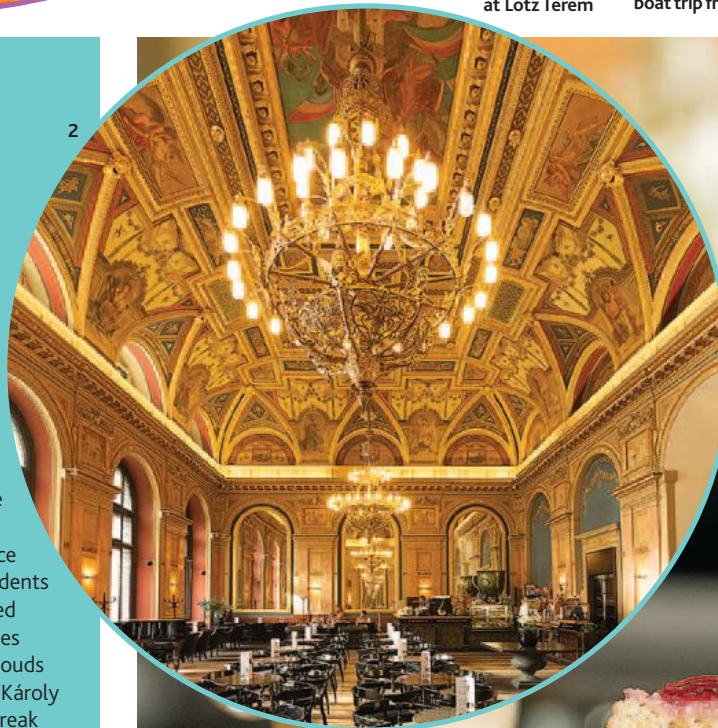
1. A Dunarama Italian-inspired boat cruise along the Danube towards the Hungarian Parliament Building
2. The murals of Károly Lotz also feature in the Hungarian State Opera House and Hungarian National Museum
3. Blueberry cheesecake at Lotz Terem

The coffee

2

Grandeur is found in the least likely places in Budapest. On a street also home to discount perfume shops and ropery fashion stores, round the corner from a Hooters bar, is the Parisi Nagy Aruhaz, five glorious floors of books discreetly announced by an Art Deco façade. Up the escalators to the first floor is another discovery: one of the finest cafés in a city not short on fine cafés. Indeed, to call **Lotz Terem** a café feels something of an insult; its Neo-Renaissance interior is more palace than coffee shop. Customers, from students to elderly friends, sit beneath the arched ceiling, sipping on espressos as gargoyles gurn overhead and angels spin in the clouds of a mural painted by Hungarian artist Károly Lotz. Most visitors spend their coffee break lost in their surroundings, finding new details in the enormous chandeliers or the frescoes that fill every patch of wall that isn't covered in gold. A trip to the pastry cabinet provides respite from a cricked neck: the blueberry cheesecake is just as distracting as all that gilding.

● 00-36-1-461-5835; www.lotzterem.hu;
10am – 8pm; espresso from ₹ 125



3



The shop

It takes a fair bit of squinting to work out what the coloured dots make up – a giant Rubik's Cube painted on the side of a building on Rumbach Sebestyén Street. Opposite, another source of national pride is celebrated in an even larger artwork: Hungary's 6-3 thrashing of England in the infamous 1953 football match. The street lies deep within Budapest's creative quarter, Erzsébetváros, more commonly known as the Jewish District. A few doors down from the murals, design shop **Printa** is right at home in these surroundings. Within, young locals perch on white bar stools drinking flat whites and tea, deciding which geometric necklace or leather bag to buy. Prints hang from crocodile clips on clothes rails, and ceramics are arranged like museum pieces on the low shelves. Much of the graphic art, printed on tote bags and T-shirts, as well as the more customary paper, is produced in the workshop at the back – among them, our favourite souvenir from the city, is a screenprinted Pest Collection map of the very district in which it was produced. →

● 00-36-30-292-0329; www.printa.hu;

Rumbach Sebestyen Utca 10, 11am – 7pm Mon – Sat;

Pest Collection map: € 1,035

The swim

The Ottomans cleared out of Hungary some 300 years ago, but they left one very important part of themselves in the capital: the Turkish bath. The **Rudas Baths** dates from the very early days of their occupation, and has been added to almost every century since. Bathers emerge from wooden changing cubicles, flip-flops slapping on the tiled floor as they make their way to the very oldest section, the 16th-century thermal bath. Light streams in from tinted stars in the domed ceiling, creating coloured ripples on the walls of the octagonal chamber. People sit at the sides, chatting with friends or reading a book, and plunge into the warm water to float on their backs, eyes shut. A stroll around the rooms leading off the central pool reveals saunas, steam rooms and the stern dispensation of various treatments by fierce-looking men clad in towels. Many visitors bypass the two-tiered 19th-century pool, and the new wellness section, and head straight to the roof. An afternoon at the baths is best rounded off here in the outdoor hot tub, watching boats slowly chug past on the Danube below.

● 00-36-1-356-1322; www.rudasfurdo.hu; Dobronter 9; women only Tues, men only Mon, Wed – Fri, mixed weekends, swimming: 6am – 10pm

1. The recently-restored Rudas Baths's octagonal, domed Ottoman pool

2. Printa uses eco-friendly materials to create fashion items and silk-screen prints



BUDAPEST



1

The meal

Twenty-eight years after the collapse of communism in Hungary, there's a certain Soviet-tinted nostalgia brewing in the capital. Entrepreneur Vidák László brought back the Tisza trainers – the Adidas of footwear behind the Iron Curtain in the 1970s – that now encircle the feet of every discerning young local, and he's also behind one of Budapest's most inventive restaurants: **Menza**. Drawing its name and inspiration from Soviet canteens, it takes its design inspiration straight from the 1970s, with an orange, green and brown colour scheme, and features involving verneer, formica and brass panels. The food is somewhat more sophisticated; this is very much a modern take on Hungarian cuisine, with tangy cucumber salads, tender beef goulashes packed with flavour, and mulberry soup elevated with red-wine ice cream. Cheerful staff happily share stories of childhood family dinners, along with post-pudding *pálinka* brandies – if this is Soviet living, we're signing up. 

●00-36-1-413-1482; www.menzaetterem.hu;
Liszt Ferenc Ter 2; 10am – 2am; mains from ₹ 600

1. Thick goulash soup at Menza

2. The restaurant interior, drawing on 20th-century design



2



The local's tip

“There are so many ruin pubs here and I like to share the local side to them. One of my favourites is Szimpla Kert. In the evenings, Szimpla is very touristy, but every Sunday morning they have a farmers' market with only local produce, from marmalade to sausages – and locals go. I love the atmosphere. I can try the food, buy the food, listen to the live jazz band playing, and just relax.”



ATTILA HÖFLE is from Budapest Flow, a small company that runs inventive, alternative walking tours through the city, including one exploring the ruin pubs, street art and history of the Jewish District (www.budapestflow.com; tours from ₹ 2,600).

YOU DON'T COME HERE TO CATCH UP ON YOUR SLEEP.



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A photograph of a harbor scene. In the foreground, the bow of a light green boat is visible, with a yellow fender and a wooden post. A person's hand is seen on the right side of the boat. In the background, a large bridge with a complex steel structure spans the water. The water is blue and calm. The text "WAITER, THERE'S A WHALE IN MY TEA" is overlaid on the image in white, bold, sans-serif font.

WAITER, THERE'S A WHALE IN MY TEA

Coastal New England is very different from the pumpkins-and-cherries interior, with a dramatic and bloody history, beautiful views and charming, energetic cities

WORDS VARDHAN KONDIKAR | PHOTOGRAPHS UNNIKRISHNAN RAVEENDRANATHIEN



Costumed players
reenact the scenes from
the Boston Tea Party –
and you can take the original
blend of tea home, too

COASTAL NEW ENGLAND

SO I'm more a coffee person, someone who only really drinks tea if my peaberry isn't available, or in the rains, when the kick of ginger really means something. Still, if you offered me tea, my first reaction would be to drink it, not tip the whole damn thing into the harbour.

But here, at the New England shoreline, that's pretty much what happened. We got the American Declaration of Independence, a pretty protracted war, a wobbly conglomerate of colonies that steadily became an industrial power, and eventually, Nicki Minaj – which makes you wonder if that all that struggle was really worth it. New England is where it all began. Typically, this region has a sweet, rural, pumpkin-pie ring to it – and, in the autumn in particular, it's hugely, wonderfully, four-generations-in-one-photograph wholesome.

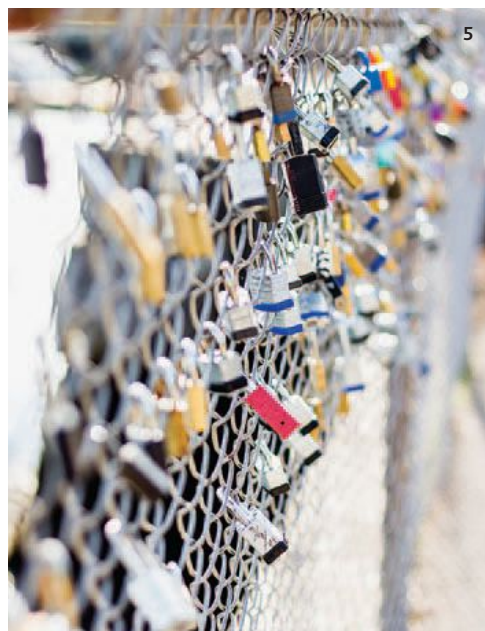
That's the interior, however. The coast has ghosts. Not the woo-woo kind (though there are plenty of those, too), but ghosts that sit beside you and

remind you of just how much history has happened here. You can sense the fury of struggle here, both against an empire and against the ocean, the weight of events that still affect us today, on the other side of the world. This is where the first American settlers landed, where the Boston Tea Party happened, where names like Chesapeake Bay, Cape Cod and Nantucket bring a whiff of salt to the mind's nose. This, adjacent to the great fishing region called the Grand Banks, is where fishermen and whalers went out, often never to return, where wives waited on terraces called widow's walks, where great wooden ships were constructed and celebrated and mourned. This is a beautiful place. **Boston**, grand dame of American cities, seems a good place to start.

On a crisp, delightfully pretty autumn day, the ghosts seem to be sulking elsewhere. Boston sounds like it should have old-money families looking down their noses at each other ("The Lowells talk only to Cabots/ And Cabots speak only to God"), but Boston is also a university town – both Harvard and MIT are here, remember – and that makes it feel →



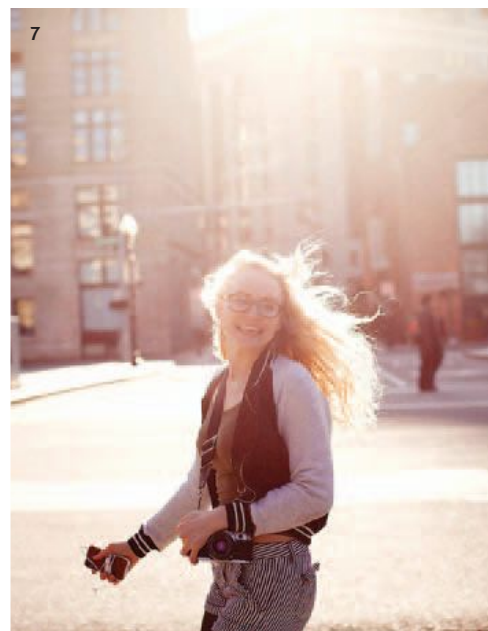
1. Cape Cod has a sweet natural elegance, enhanced by its status as playground of old money
2. Kids love the farmers' markets that spring up around New England
3. Cambridge, just outside Boston, is the leafy home to Harvard and other colleges
4. Nantucket, with its whaling (including *Moby Dick*) history, is an evocative place
5. Love locks, a fairly recent, Paris-inspired addition to Portsmouth's Prescott Park
6. Seafood, like the famous butter-poached lobster roll, is a highlight of a trip here
7. Despite its history and old architecture, coastal New England has a very young vibe



5



6



7

COASTAL NEW ENGLAND

enchantingly young and fun. Harvard Square is leafy, kooky as hell (students, remember), and a superb place at which to people-watch. I have to try tea here, naturally, and find a tiny, hipster-y place called **TeaLuxe**, which is peaceful until a pair of ladies walks in. They're well-dressed, so I smile politely when they walk in and offer me a flower (how sweet) – until they demand money for it. That's when the derangement shows in their eyes. I decline, mumbling, and they turn to a student who's just sitting there, reading, and harangue him until they're thrown out by the owners. Hey, it's America – never, ever say it's boring.

THE rest of Boston is similarly intriguing, if a little quieter. There are beautiful houses in the Waterfront district, names like Milk Street and Water Street that make you think of a horse-drawn age, and, finally, the water itself, with the **Boston Tea Party Ships and Museum** by one of the bridges. This is where historical reenactments happen – you have been warned. You will have to say “Yea!” or “Nay!” as demands are made by people in costume, but you do get to go aboard two of the ships (restored of course) that the Sons of Liberty threw tea off. The protests were about taxes in general, not, as the shorthand goes, about tea prices – in fact, taxes on tea had just been lowered, and a number of the protestors were actually tea smugglers, who stood to lose out with cheaper tea. Nevertheless, 342 boxes of tea were chucked overboard – you can do this too, though there's no tea in the boxes any more, and, incidentally, you can buy the exact blend that had come in at the time. Makes sense to me: drinking your history is better than wasting it on fish, who have no taste at all.

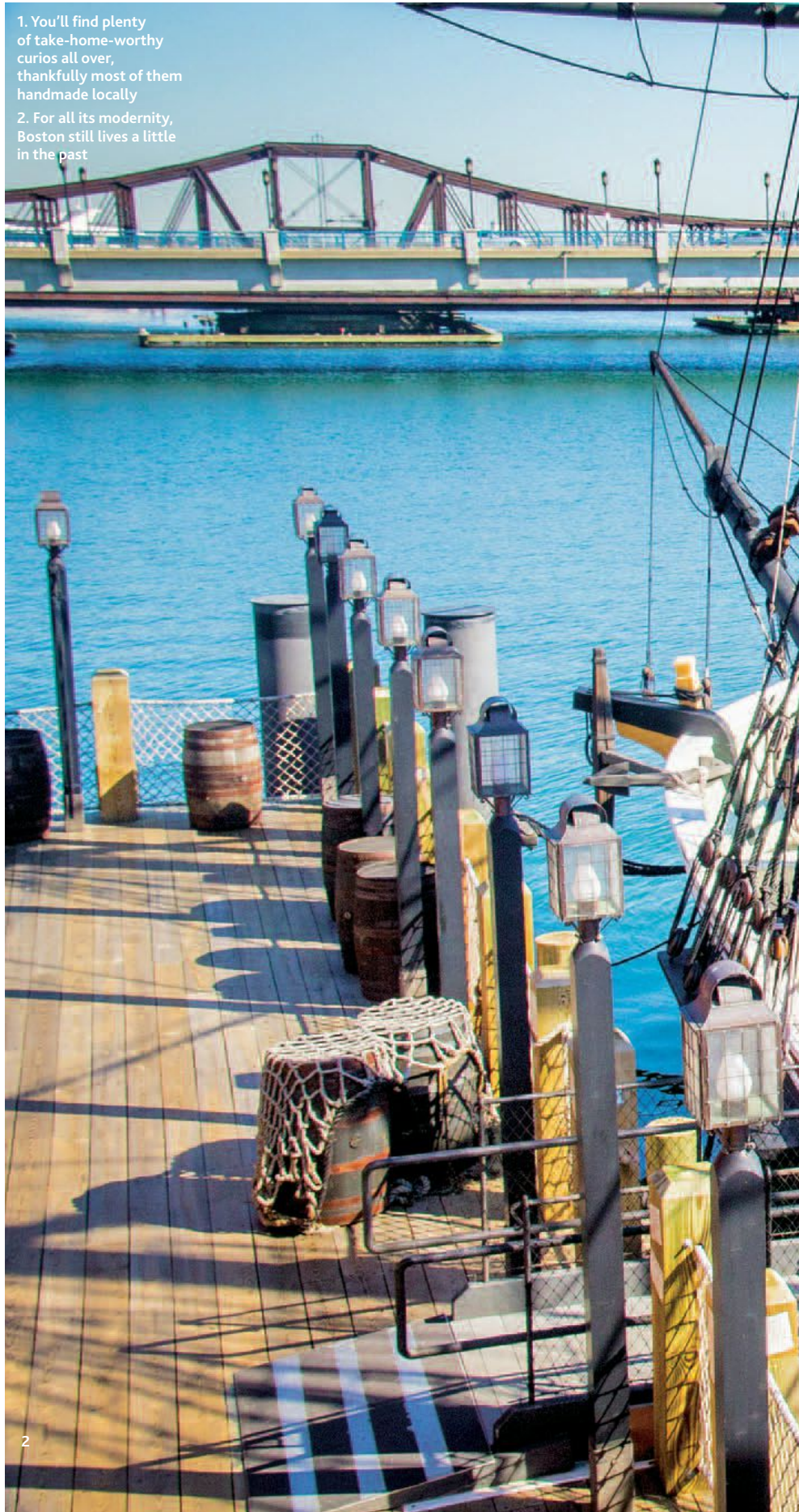
Now, though a big, big portion of the Massachusetts coast lies just up ahead, we're going to quickly dart up to **Portsmouth**, on the New Hampshire coast, a town with plenty of old architecture and a very young vibe. It's huge fun, especially after days in quiet towns, with quirky little shops and brewing companies and music. And good food: →



1

1. You'll find plenty of take-home-worthy curios all over, thankfully most of them handmade locally

2. For all its modernity, Boston still lives a little in the past



2



the **Portsmouth Gas Light** has three levels, from a pizza basement to a restaurant to a nightclub, and adds Asian and Mediterranean spices to a traditional New England menu. Don't tell anyone, but the food is better on the coast, looking to the lands across the Atlantic rather than simply at what's available on the farm. There's plenty of farm-to-table stuff as well, of course, but it's those exotic touches that bring the fish and berries and squashes to life.

PORTSMOUTH is also home to the **Strawbery Banke Museum**, a reenactment centre where volunteers dress up in period costume (this is a thriving pastime in New England, clearly), and take you through restored homes from the 17th to the 20th centuries. There's plenty of "Ho, Mr Revere, what news bring you of the Redcoats?" but my favourite is the World War-era store, which stocks food from that time (presumably still edible, given the amount of preservatives used). It's fascinating: old Mars bars and packaged bread, boxes of lard and sugar,

Nestlé chocolate in plain brown wrapping. For a nostalgia nut like me, this is heaven. I would definitely recommend a visit. But even outside the museum, Portsmouth has plenty of old buildings to explore down crooked waterfront streets, and the **Black Heritage** trail – on a sunny day, this is a wonderful place to explore.

On a less sunny day, you might find yourself at Woods Hole down in Massachusetts, taking the cold, windy ferry to the beautifully named **Martha's Vineyard**. You might find yourself huddling in the restaurant at the fantastic **Harbor View Hotel**, cuddling a drink and eating superb oysters as you listen to the wind howl outside. The big things on the New England coast are thick, warming clam chowder and the famous lobster roll, buttery and juicy and great with an autumn ale. On a sunny morning, you might remember that *Jaws's* Amity Island was actually Martha's Vineyard, and that Richard Dreyfuss's character worked at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute. It's hugely thrilling. It's also simply very much an agreeable place to live: when Obama visited →



The lovely, delicate 'gingerbread cottages' of Oak Bluffs, Martha's Vineyard, were built by 1800s Methodists, and really *do* look like they're made of spun sugar

COASTAL NEW ENGLAND

with his family, the kids, for once, could just walk and cycle around freely. It's a rich community, often a summer home to the rich and famous – Ted Kennedy, youngest brother of JFK, was involved in the notorious 'Chappaquiddick Incident', when he crashed a car into the water, leading to the death of his colleague, Mary Jo Kopechne.

In autumn, there's also an explosion of farmers' markets, and, if there's one on when you go, you'd have to be pretty stupid to not visit. Apart from the excellent food (the kind of stuff Archie Andrews's grandmother would serve at Thanksgiving), there's the sheer pleasure of being a fly on the wall in a place where ponies are petted, sweet corn cobs celebrated for size and juiciness, where children run around under trees, no electronics in sight, parents chasing them with bowls of fresh fruit. This looks like what life should be like.

When you are – regretfully – done with Martha's Vineyard, head down to **Cape Cod**, the home to Boston's upper classes during the summer. And you can see

why. On a clear day, **Nauset Beach** shimmers, the church at **Chatham** has pumpkins all round its steps, and driving here is an absolute joy. And somehow, oddly, though it is so much younger than anything we've seen in India or Europe, there's a great sense of history here, a gravitas that comes of its importance to the New England economy. What must it be like to live here, with this scorpion-tail peninsula curling around you, with names like Namequoit and Satucket, and families who have lost someone to the sea? What must it be like in the summer, taking a boat out onto a very blue Atlantic, with sunshine and cold winds and history behind you? What must it be like to go on a whale-watching boat from Provincetown in good weather, and hope you'll spot not just a whale, but a white one?

To find out, we take another ferry to the most nautical of the places here, **Nantucket**. In *Moby Dick*, The Pequod sails out of Nantucket, and this was the very centre of the whaling industry. This is where Ishmael meets Captain Ahab and Queequeg and Starbuck, where he starts his journey to the South →



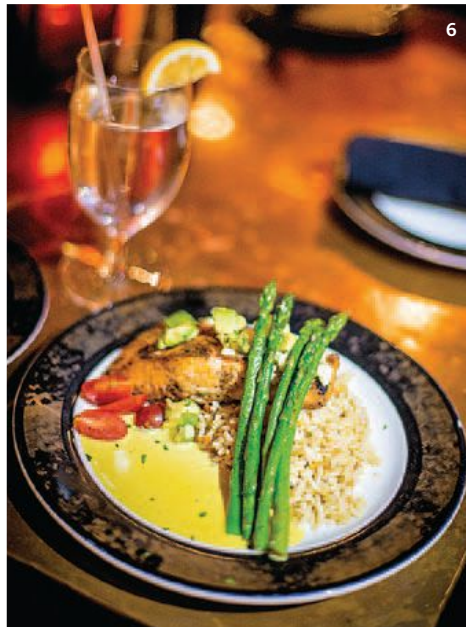
1 & 7. World War-era goodies and costumed dramatics at the Strawberry Banke Museum, Portsmouth – relics of a less garish time

2 & 6. Portsmouth is a fun place to explore at leisure, with good food, handsome streets, and a quirky sense of humour

3. Portsmouth's pretty town centre – a joy to walk around in the evenings (preferably between pubs)

4. Beautiful Nauset Beach is extremely inviting – though the water is never exactly warm

5. The church in lovely Chatham, Cape Cod, all decked up to celebrate the fall



COASTAL NEW ENGLAND

Pacific. And, even in bright sunlight, even though it's actually beautiful and hugely charming, Nantucket has the eerie, otherworldly feel of that book. There's just something dark about this place that no amount of jaunty convertibles and rental scooters and salt-water taffy can dispel. It comes from the stories around Nantucket and the New England coast in general, and possibly from the fact that my history guides were the Hardy Boys, in a collection of ghost stories, where they're trapped aboard a ghost ship from this island. Most of all, though, it's from the **Nantucket Whaling Museum**, which evokes both the danger and the adventure of whaling, but leaves me saddened that it doesn't touch at all upon the consequences of whaling, doesn't mention any conservation efforts. There's a beautiful mounted skeleton of a sperm whale, but mounted in a posture to show you how dangerous it was to the whalers, and that, at least, is true, but if, like me, you've felt an inexplicable joy and a big lump in your throat on a whale-watching excursion, you'll know what I mean when I say the whales have been left out of Nantucket. Did you watch *In The Heart Of The Sea*? That story is what inspired *Moby Dick*, the true (ish) tale of a 'white' whale who attacked and wrecked the whaling ship Essex. Again, I don't know about you, but, while I got a sense of the danger from the wonderful images, I felt much more for the animals.

PERHAPS it's that this is the end of my journey. Or, perhaps, it's the milling crowds, giggling and chattering in what somehow feels like it should be a place for reflection. People left here and died, children were orphaned, families torn apart – both human and cetacean. It should feel different, not like just another tourist spot. There's a weight that I cannot explain. It's a funny feeling after the lightheartedness of Boston and Portsmouth, after the thrill of butternut squash soup and blackberry pie, after the spectacle of white church spires poking out above red-gold trees. It's a very complete journey, and one of the most beautiful you could take. But, more importantly (to me, at least), a drive through New England isn't just a tourist trail. You leave something behind here, and take back an inexplicable ache in exchange. ¹²





1. The Nantucket Whaling Museum presents plenty of opportunity for quiet introspection

2. Being on the water at Nantucket is hugely evocative: with a sparkling sea, sunshine and a cold breeze, you feel like you're in the company of sailors long gone

Essentials

BEST TIME TO VISIT

Late September and early October are best to catch the blazing fall colours.

GETTING THERE

Swiss, United Airlines, American Airlines, Lufthansa, Air France and Air India fly with one stopover to Boston's Logan International Airport (return fares from ₹ 60,500).

If you're flying in and out of NYC, the Acela train is a nice option, letting you see more of the country on the four-hour journey from a very comfortable seat, with prices starting at ₹ 5,900 one-way for business class (www.amtrak.com).

GETTING AROUND

There are plenty of car rental options at Boston's airport. We used and liked Alamo (www.alamo.com; from ₹ 14,675/ week).

The Martha's Vineyard ferry departs from Woods Hole (www.vineyardferries.com; ₹ 575/ adult/ one-way), while, for Nantucket, the ferry leaves from Hyannis (₹ 1,255 one-way).

VISA

Apply for a B1/ B2 visa from your closest embassy. Approximate processing time is at least two working days after your appointment (www.ustraveldocs.com/in, <http://newdelhi.usembassy.gov>; from ₹ 11,200).

EMBASSY ALERT

Consulate General of India, New York: www.indiacgny.org

CURRENCY

USD 1 = ₹ 67

VEG OUT/ FANCY A CURRY?

An elegant little place in Boston, Mela dishes up North India fare, Goan and South Indian curries as well as marinated meats you can grill at your table. The weekend brunch is the real crowd puller (00-1-617-859-4805; www.melaboston.com; 578, Tremont St; 11.30am – 11pm; mains from ₹ 930).

FURTHER READING

Try Lonely Planet's New England and New England's Best Trips, which has 32 road trips in the region. Look up the official tourism websites for more on what to see and eat and events in Boston (www.boston.gov/visiting-boston), Portsmouth (www.goportsmouthnh.com), Martha's Vineyard (<http://mvol.com>) and Cape Cod (www.capecodchamber.org).

“The New England coast has ghosts. Not the woo-woo kind (though there are plenty of those, too), but ghosts that sit beside you and remind you of just how much history has happened here.”

3

WAYS TO DO NEW ENGLAND



CLICK TO VIEW ON GOOGLE MAPS

STAY

Boston
Omni Parker House is a beautiful Boston landmark dating back to 1855, with great atmosphere and hearty food, where you can pretend to be an old Yankee in Baws-tuhn (00-1-617-227-8600; www.omnihotels.com; 60, School St; from ₹ 13,150).
A swanky option by the water, the **InterContinental Boston** is luxurious and convenient (1866-344-8769; www.intercontinentalboston.com/, icboston@ihg.com; 510, Atlantic Ave; from ₹ 18,000).

Portsmouth
Once a brewery for the Portsmouth Brewing Company, the **Ale House Inn** has contemporary, loft-like rooms within its historic brick warehouse walls (00-1-603-431-7760; www.alehouseinn.com; 121, Bow St; from ₹ 8,600 with wi-fi, snacks and welcome beer).

Martha's Vineyard
The glorious **Harbor View Hotel** has an appropriately nautical theme, and feels like a great place for a couple to hole up in, with its cosy rooms and lovely view toward the sea (00-1-508-627-7000; www.harbor-view.com, reservations@harbor-view.com; 131, North Water St, Edgartown; from ₹ 7,270).

Cape Cod
The Ship's Knees Inn is something out of a storybook: tiny rooms under the sloping roof, bright quilts, rag dolls everywhere and a location a minute away from a lovely beach (00-1-508-255-1312; www.shipskneesinn.com, info@shipskneesinn.com; 186, Beach Rd, East Orleans; from ₹ 13,350 with breakfast).

EAT

The Daily Catch Seaport offers huge and massively tasty Italian seafood dishes – it has a very home-cooking style, with all the comforting feel and full-belly groaning that implies (00-1-617-772-4400; <http://thedadailycatch.com>; 2, Northern Ave; check website for timings; mains from ₹ 800).

The Portsmouth Gas Light Co has multiple personalities: a casual-dining restaurant, bar, pizza basement or event hall, depending on which level you're on. We recommend the restaurant, which does great things to seafood (00-1-603-430-8582; www.portsmouthgaslight.com; 64, Market St; check website for timings; pizzas from ₹ 930).

The food is good too, and the bar does terrific whiskey cocktails at the **Lighthouse Grill**, part of the Harbor View Hotel (00-1-508-627-3761; 7am – 10.30am, dinner from 5.30pm June onwards; mains from ₹ 1,665).

Grab a seat at the picnic tables inches from the water and dig into scrumptious, fresh-off-the-boat lobster rolls at **Sesuit Harbor Café**, a classic Cape Cod clam shack (00-1-508-385-6134; <http://sesuit-harbor-cafe.com>; 36, Hope Ln, Dennis; 7am – 2.30pm; from ₹ 930).

Good to Know

★ The **Discover New England** website has fall foliage maps (www.discovernewengland.org/fall-foliage-maps).

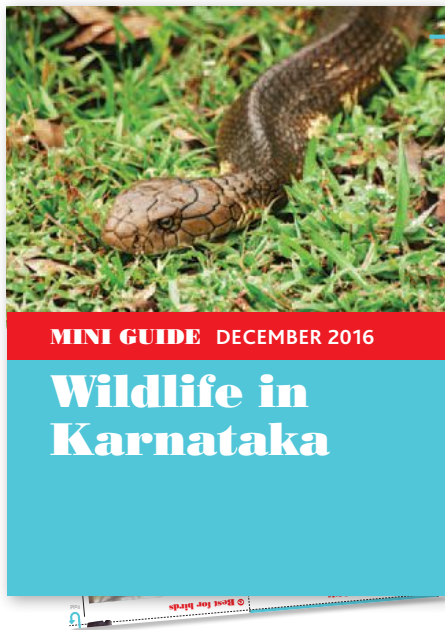
★ Make sure you have an international driving permit [IDP] or a legible license written in English if you plan on driving
★ In case of an emergency, you can call

the police at 911.

★ Make hotel reservations well in advance especially if you plan on visiting during the fall.

DECEMBER 2016

Mini Guides



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.



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MINI GUIDE DECEMBER 2016

Culture in Venice, Italy

Venetians have been in love with art, music and theatre for centuries, and, today, Italy's most watery city shouts its creativity and artistry from its opulent canalside rooftops.

WHY GO?

The city on water, with a confection of architectural masterpieces on that famous Grand Canal, Venice is timeless and enchanting.

WHAT IS THERE TO DO?

Gondola rides on Venice's signature waterway, feasting on *cicheti* (Venetian *tapas*) and sipping *prosecco* at canalside bistros are all simple pleasures to expect.

Left: A corner of the Doge's Palace overlooking the Venetian Lagoon

Right: The island of Murano, a 10-minute ferry ride away, is known for its jewel-bright glass



Art

GALLERIE DELL'ACCADEMIA ①

Bellini, Titian, Tintoretto, Veronese and Canaletto... all the great local masters are represented at this historic gallery. The old convent complex makes a fitting home for staggering works of Venetian art ranging from the 14th to the 18th centuries (00-39-41-520-0345; www.gallerieaccademia.org; Campo della Carità 1050; 8.15am – 7.15pm, to 2pm Mon; ₹ 985, first Sun of the month free).

PEGGY GUGGENHEIM COLLECTION ②

The palatial canalside home of the eccentric American heiress Peggy Guggenheim now shows off her stockpile of Surrealist, Futurist and Abstract Expressionist art, with works by up to 200 artists, including Jackson Pollock, Picasso, Henry Moore, Giacometti, Salvador Dalí and her ex-husband Max Ernst (00-39-41-240-5411; www.guggenheim-venice.it; 10am – 6pm Wed – Mon; Palazzo Venier dei Leoni; ₹ 1,100).



See Venice's more modern side at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection

PUNTA DELLA DOGANA ③

Built in 1677, Venice's old customs house has been transformed under architect Tadao Ando into a dramatic space to house works belonging to art collector François Pinault, as well as rotating exhibitions of contemporary art from some of the world's most prolific and provocative creative minds (00-39-41-200-1057; www.palazzograssi.it/museo/punta-della-dogana; Dorsoduro 2; 10am – 7pm Wed – Mon; ₹ 1,100).

Architecture

ST MARK'S BASILICA ④

With its Byzantine domes and glittering mosaics, the Basilica di San Marco is an unforgettable sight. This 11th-century building reflects Venice's cosmopolitan image, with a Greek cross layout and walls clad in imported marble (00-39-41-270-8311; www.basilicasanmarco.it; Piazza San Marco; 9.45am – 5pm Mon – Sat, from 2pm Sun, closes 4pm Sun Mar – April [Easter] – Nov; free).



Cover up knees and shoulders to enter St Mark's Basilica

DOGE'S PALACE ⑤

The Gothic Palazzo Ducale was the official residence of the *Doge* (the mostly ceremonial leader of the Venetian Republic) and seat of the government until 1797. On the first floor, roaring lions and world maps grace the walls of the *Doge's* Apartments; from there, a golden staircase ascends to the lavish Grand Council Hall (00-39-41-271-5911; www.palazzoducale.visitmuve.it; San Marco 1; 8.30am – 7pm, to 5.30pm Nov – Mar; ₹ 1,385).

SANTA MARIA DEI MIRACOLI ⑥

This chapel was built around 1480 to house Niccolò di Pietro's Madonna painting, which started miraculously weeping in its outdoor shrine. The lofty vaulted interior and domed apse seem effortless but they're marvels of early Renaissance engineering, achieved without the Gothic gimmick of buttressing. Angels and mermaids are carved right into the railings of the chancel staircase (Campo dei Miracoli; 10am – 5pm Mon – Sat; ₹ 180).

TURN OVER FOR MAP AND NUMBER LOCATIONS

MINI GUIDE

Culture in Venice, Italy

Getting around

See Eat & drink Sleep



Essentials

GETTING THERE

Alitalia, Emirates, Etihad, Turkish Airlines and Jet Airways fly to Venice Marco Polo Airport from Mumbai and New Delhi with a layover (return fares from ₹42,000). Ferries reach most places in Venice (www.alilaguna.it; ₹1,095). Buses depart from the airport every 30 minutes (www.atvo.it; ₹490 one-way).

The main mode of public transport is the *vaporetto* (water bus). Single rides cost ₹465 (www.actv.it); get a timed pass for more frequent use.

THE COST



DIFFICULTY OF TRAVEL



WHEN TO GO

Fall (Sept–Nov) sees fewer crowds (think shorter queues) and near-deserted canals, all quite magical.

Performance

TEATRO LA FENICE 7

When it opened in the late 18th century, La Fenice was the envy of Europe. Rossini and Bellini staged operas here, and Verdi premiered *Rigoletto* and *La Traviata*. Tragedy befell the opulent theatre in 1996, when it was destroyed by fire; it took a faithful reconstruction to resurrect it (00-39-41-786-6672; www.teatrolafenice.it; Campo San Fantin; tours: 9.30am–6pm; theatre tours: ₹725, opera tickets from around ₹2,500).



A performance of the ballet *La Bayadère* at La Fenice

TEATRO GOLDONI 8

Named after the great Venetian playwright Carlo Goldoni, Venice's main theatre has an impressive dramatic range that runs from comedy to Shakespearean tragedy (mostly in Italian), plus ballets and concerts. The stark post-WWII façade is dominated by huge bronze doors, but the theatre was first built in 1622, and its jewel-box interior seats just 800 (00-39-41-240-2014; www.teatrostabileveneto.it; Calle del Teatro; tickets from around ₹875).

INTERPRETI VENEZIANI 9

Once you've heard Interpreti Veneziani's classical musicians perform Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*, it'll forever remind you of summer storms erupting over the lagoon and snow-muffled footsteps hurrying over footbridges in winter's-night intrigues. Concerts are staged in an atmospheric old church (00-39-41-277-0561; www.interpretiveneziani.com; Chiesa San Vidal, Campiello di San Vidal; doors open 8.30pm; ₹2,045).

Sleep

B&B Corte Vecchia 10 is a stylish steal a stone's throw from the Peggy Guggenheim Collection. The three rooms are simple yet cool, with contemporary and vintage objects (00-39-335-744-9238; www.cortevecchia.net; Dorsoduro 462; from ₹7,290).

In glitzy San Marco, **Hotel Flora 11** is a classy, ivy-covered retreat with a courtyard garden. Rooms feature antique mirrors, fluffy duvets and carved beds (00-39-41-520-5844; www.hotel.flora.it; San Marco; from ₹7,500).

Hotel Palazzo Barbarigo 12 has 18 plush rooms combining modern elegance and masquerade intrigue. Junior suites overlook the Grand Canal (00-39-41-740-172; www.palazzobarbarigo.com; Calle Corner 2765; from ₹15,100).

Visa

Apply for a Schengen short-stay visa; it takes about 15 working days (www.vfs-italy.co.in; ₹4,490 + ₹1,015 service tax).



Hotel Flora is hidden in Venetian style down a narrow backstreet

Fancy a curry?

A canalside restaurant, **Ganesh Ji** dishes up good, well-priced Indian on its terrace, and has a veg menu too (00-39-41-719-084; San Polo, 2426, Fondamenta Rio Mari; lunch and dinner Fri–Tues, dinner Thurs; mains from around ₹1,100, cover charge: ₹365).

Embassy alert

Embassy of India, Rome
www.indianembassyrome.in

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



MINI GUIDE DECEMBER 2016

Wildlife in Karnataka

Blessed with a long list of national parks and sanctuaries, Karnataka is one of those Indian states that offers visitors scores of wildlife and bird-spotting opportunities in varied habitats.

WHY GO?

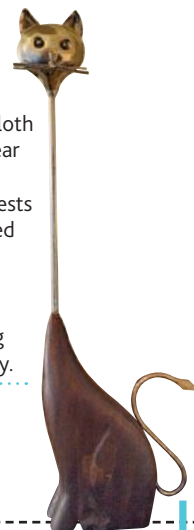
If you're lucky, you might get to gawk at an elusive tiger – but, even without the stripes, there's more than enough to satisfy your wild side. On the menu are also stays in luxury tents offering breathtaking views, trekking through the jungles or enjoying the calls of the jungle under starry skies.

WHAT IS THERE TO DO?

Gape at majestic Asiatic elephants in Nagarahole National Park, peer through your binoculars at the sloth bears from atop a watchtower at the Daroji Sloth Bear Sanctuary, or be awestruck at the magnificence of a king cobra and other slithery reptiles in the thick forests of Agumbe. The bird-watcher in you will be fascinated by the wide variety of bird species to be spotted at Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary, while you can marvel at the wingspan of a pelican as it takes flight at Kokkrellur, or make a trip in time for the mating season of the river terns at Bhadra Wildlife Sanctuary.

Left: The magnificent king cobra at Agumbe

Right: Animal-themed artefacts are a frequent theme in Karnataka



Best for wildlife

OTTERS AND ELEPHANTS ①

Part of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve, **Nagarahole National Park** boasts rich wildlife, dense jungle and open sightlines along the banks of the Kabini River, ideal for sighting Asiatic elephants and the common otter. Recognised as a tiger reserve, its lush forests are also home to leopards (*Karnataka Forest Department: 1800-425-1314; www.aranya.gov.in; regulated by the forest department, jeep safaris and boat trips can be booked at Bison Resort [see Stay & Eat]; 6.30am – 9am, 3.30pm – 6pm*).



Look for the common otter at Nagarhole National Park

₹ 25/ person, ₹ 500/ private vehicle, ₹ 200/ government vehicle [can be arranged by your Stay option].

BEARS ②

Visit the **Darji Sloth Bear Sanctuary** in Hampi to spot sloth bears in the late afternoon from the watchtower. The open scrub forest is also perfect for sighting jackals, black-naped hares, mongoose, wild boar and leopard (*Karnataka Forest Department: 1800-425-1314; www.aranya.gov.in; Range Forest Officer: 00-91-8394-242869; www.bellary.nic.in; 6am – 6pm*).

REPTILES ③

Referred to as king cobra country, **Agumbe** rainforest near Shimoga is the place at which to see these little-understood beauties, with a dozen leeches keeping you company. Other creatures to look out for are Malabar pit vipers, common kraits, vine snakes, flying dracos, giant squirrels, scorpions, bull frogs and flying squirrels (*Surahalla; 10am – 5pm*).

Best for birds

KOKKREBELLUR ④

Though not a reserve, the tiny village of Kokkrellur is the ideal place at which to gape at spot-billed pelicans and painted storks nesting in groups of 10 to 15. Wander the area on foot to spot these large birds take flight. Also look out for cormorants, egrets, herons and ibis (*Maddur taluk of Mandya District, about 87km south-west of Bangalore*).



Karnataka is a bird-watcher's paradise

RANGANATHITTU BIRD SANCTUARY ⑤

Located near Mysore on the banks of the Kauveri River, this sanctuary is great for spotting both resident and migratory birds: three types of cormorant, four of egret, white ibis, spoonbills, herons, partridges, and painted and open-billed storks. You may also spot a crocodile on your 20-minute boat ride (*Mandya District, 18km from Mysore; 9am – 6pm; entry: ₹ 50 adult, ₹ 25 child, boating: ₹ 50 adult, ₹ 25 child, parking: ₹ 30/ car*).

BHADRA RESERVOIR ⑥

Located at the edge of the Bhadra Wildlife Sanctuary, the reservoir is home to hundreds of river terns. You can also spot pratincoles, ospreys, cormorants, darters and peacocks on your boat ride, while a jeep safari into the dense jungle is ideal for sighting spotted deer and sambar, wild boar, brown fish owls and racket-tailed drongos (*00-91-80-65590271; see Stay; boat/ jeep safari: 6.30am – 8.30am and 4.30pm – 6.30pm; ₹ 1,200/ person [minimum five persons]*).

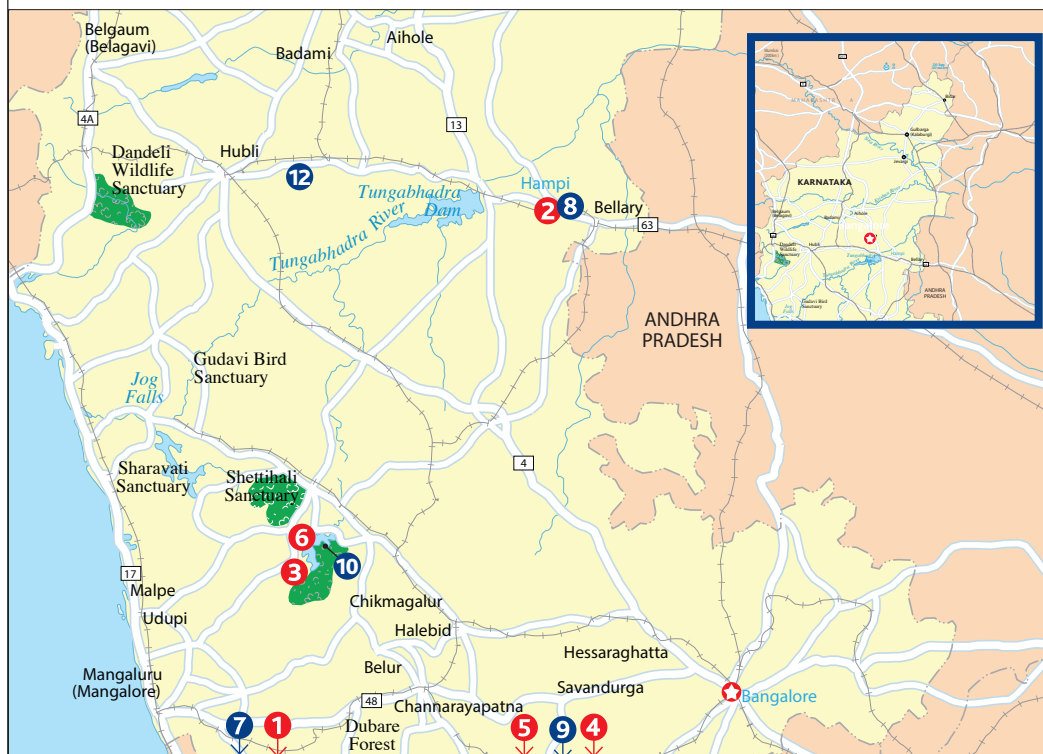
TURN OVER FOR MAP AND NUMBER LOCATIONS

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Wildlife in Karnataka

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Essentials

GETTING THERE

From Bangalore International Airport, Nagarhole is 265km, Daroji Sloth Bear Sanctuary is 340km, Agumbe is 377km, Kokkrellur is 127km, and Ranganathittu is 170km (as well as 29km from Mysore's Mandakalli Airport). The Bhadra Wildlife Sanctuary is 202km from Mangalore Airport.

THE COST



DIFFICULTY OF TRAVEL



WHEN TO GO

Nagarhole: Apr – May, Nov – Feb
Daroji: Aug – Apr
Agumbe: Sept (post-monsoon)
Kokkrellur: Nov – May
Ranganathittu: Nov – May
Bhadra: Feb (start of mating season)

Stay & Eat

With waterfront luxury tents, **The Bison Resort** 7, located on the banks of the Kabini River, affords sprawling river views and overlooks the Nagarhole National Park. The property can arrange safaris into the jungle; you get the added benefit of being accompanied by the resident naturalist, Shaaz Jung. It also arranges a range of other activities like village treks, boat rides under the stars, backwater breakfasts and camping (reservations: 00-91-80-41278708; www.thebisonresort.com; info@thebisonresort.com; Gundathur Village, Karapura-Kabini; ₹ 7,800/ person with all meals and activities like trekking, coracle rides, and bird-watching; jungle safari: ₹ 1,650/ person/ safari).

The perfect base from which to visit the Daroji Sloth Bear Sanctuary as well as Hampi's architectural wonders, **Hampi Heritage and Wilderness Resort** 8 is an eco-friendly property from Jungle Lodges & Resorts. It offers 22 air-



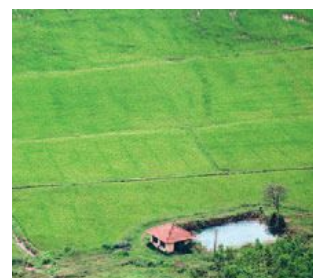
The Bison Resort offers luxury tents on the banks of Kabini River

conditioned cottages, and activities showcasing nature and architecture. Your afternoons and early mornings should be spent at the sanctuary and in bird-watching respectively, while the day is ideal for visiting Hampi's heritage monuments, palaces and temples (00-91-9482053354; resort: 00-91-9620903133; www.junglelodges.com; info@junglelodges.com; near Kannada University, PK Halli Rd, Kamalapura, Hospet; cottages from ₹ 4,120/ person/ night on twin-sharing basis, with all meals, a tour of Hampi's sights and a visit to the sanctuary; day-visit:

[10.30am – 6.30pm]: ₹ 1,425 with a tour of Hampi's sights, buffet lunch, a sanctuary visit and late tea and coffee).

If you're visiting Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary, Mysore is the ideal base. Located in the restored Chittaranjan Palace, **The Green Hotel** 9 is a beautiful property with pretty lawns on which to stroll, shaded alcoves to enjoy, and 31 charming and spacious rooms (00-91-821-4255000; www.greenhotelindia.com; booking@greenhotelindia.com; 2270, Vinoba Rd, Jayalakshimpuram; from ₹ 6,450 with breakfast).

The **River Tern Lodge** 10 at Bhadra is a Jungle Lodges & Resorts property nestled in the Western Ghats and close to an island that attracts hundreds of river terns during the breeding season. Located close to the Bhadra Tiger Reserve, it has log huts and cottages overlooking the Bhadra Reservoir (00-91-9449599780, 00-91-8261-215425; www.junglelodges.com; rivertern@junglelodges.com; behind Ranganathaswamy Temple,



Agumbe promises a great back-to-nature experience

Bhadra Project, Lakkavalli, near Chikmagalur; ₹ 7,300/ person/ night on twin-sharing basis, with all meals, jeep safari into the reserve and bird-watching).

GOOD TO KNOW

If you want to increase your chances of animal sightings, wear earth tones like green and brown, and avoid strong perfumes. Keep your mobile on silent in the forest. Do not touch or disturb any animals or nests in the forest.

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

COMPILED BY NADEENA SIGANPORIA, WITH INPUTS FROM LALITHA LUKE
PHOTOGRAPHS: MAYANK SONI (KING COBRA & AGUMBE), JYOTHI KARAT (ARTIFACT, OTTERS, BIRD & BISON RESORT)



MINI GUIDE DECEMBER 2016

Museums in Washington DC, the USA

Largely thanks to the heavy-hitting and multi-branched Smithsonian Institution, America's capital has become synonymous with world-class museums worth planning a trip around.

WHY GO?

To museum hop in the US capital

WHAT IS THERE TO DO?

There's more to Washington than the White House and political power. Apart from museums, DC is also the USA's memorial capital. Don't miss the memorials to Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King and Franklin Delano Roosevelt, as well as the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the Marine Corps War Memorial.



Left: An elephantine welcome at the National Museum of Natural History

Right: Abraham Lincoln gazes peacefully along the Mall from his Doric temple

History

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN HISTORY 1

The centrepiece at this popular Smithsonian member is the flag that inspired *The Star-Spangled Banner*, the US national anthem. Other highlights include Abraham Lincoln's top hat and Dorothy's slippers from *The Wizard of Oz* (00-1-202-633-1000; www.americanhistory.si.edu; Constitution Ave, NW, between 12th & 14th Sts; 10am – 5.30pm, see website for extended hours calendar; free).



The ruby slippers at the National Museum of American History

US HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM 2

This harrowing museum deepens your understanding of the Holocaust – its victims, perpetrators and bystanders. The galleries use artefacts, historic film footage and witness testimonies. Between March and August, you will need a museum pass to see the permanent exhibition: book well ahead online (www.ushmm.org); 100, Raoul Wallenberg Pl, SW; 10am – 5.20pm; free, museum pass: ₹ 66).

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE 3

Across the road from the National Museum of American History, the newest Smithsonian museum covers the diverse experience of African Americans with exhibits that include the iconic Louis Armstrong's trumpet (00-1-844-750-3012; www.nmaahc.si.edu; 1400, Constitution Ave, NW, between Madison Drive & Constitution Ave and 14th & 15th Sts; 10am – 5.30pm; free).

Kid-friendly

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY 4

Egyptian mummies, a giant squid, and tarantula feedings thrill young minds at this universally-loved venue. Don't miss the 45-carat Hope Diamond (a rare blue type), the Easter Island head and the enormous stuffed creatures in the Mammal Hall (00-1-202-633-1000; www.mnh.si.edu; cnr 10th St & Constitution Ave, NW; 10am – 5.30pm, see website for extended hours calendar; free).



See milestones of flight at the National Air and Space Museum

NATIONAL AIR AND SPACE MUSEUM 5

This museum inspires kids with moon rocks, spaceships and wild simulator rides. Everyone flocks to see the Wright brothers' flyer, Amelia Earhart's natty red plane, and the Apollo 11 Lunar Module. There's also an on-site IMAX cinema and planetarium (00-1-202-633-2214; www.airandspace.si.edu; Independence Ave at 6th St, SW; 10am – 5.30pm, see website for extended hours calendar; free).

NEWSEUM 6

Budding journos will love that this museum, charting the history of news and journalism, offers the chance to report 'live from the White House' via the TV studio (and take home a video to prove it). The rest is impressive for kids and adults, with Pulitzer Prize-winning photojournalism, and footage of historic events (00-1-202-292-6100; www.newseum.org; 555, Pennsylvania Ave, NW; 9am – 5pm; ₹ 1,550 adult, ₹ 950 [seven – 18 years], child under six free).

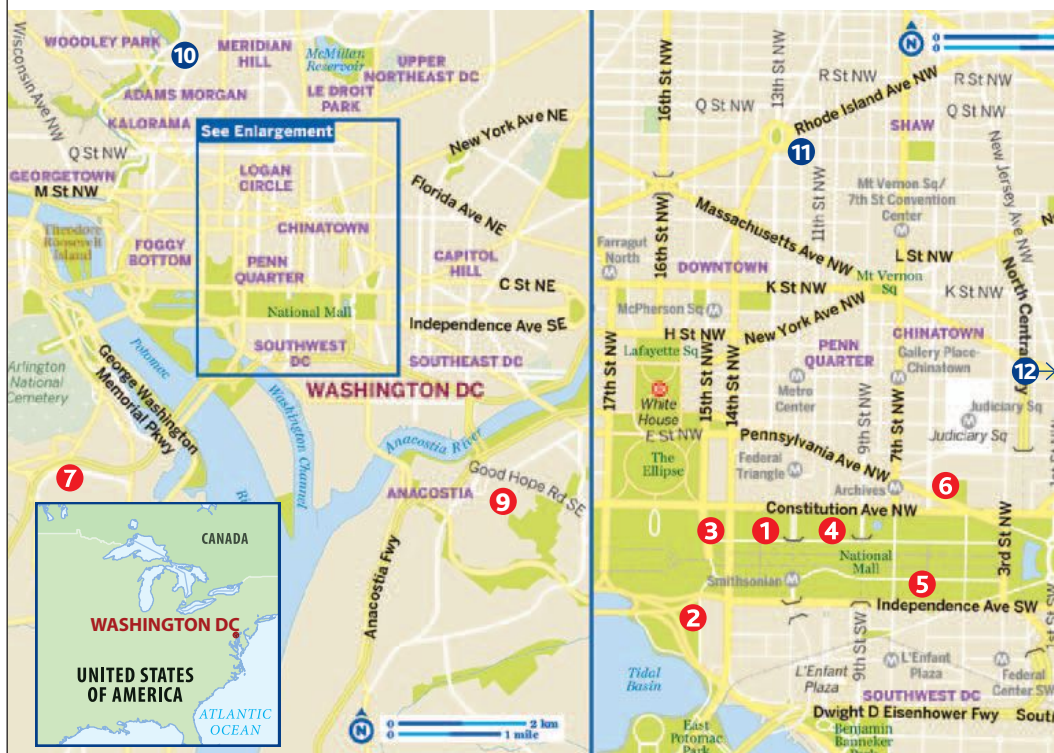
TURN OVER FOR MAP AND NUMBER LOCATIONS

MINI GUIDE

Museums in Washington DC, the USA

Getting around

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Essentials

GETTING THERE

Washington Dulles Airport is 39km west of central DC. Jet Airways, Lufthansa, Etihad Airways, Air Canada, United Airlines and more fly to DC from Mumbai and New Delhi (return fares from ₹ 60,000). From Dulles, take the silver line express bus to Wiehle-Reston East metro rail station (www.flydulles.com; ₹ 350), then a train to the centre (www.wmata.com; ₹ 500). A taxi from the airport is approx ₹ 3,850. Metro system fares start at ₹ 150.

THE COST



DIFFICULTY OF TRAVEL



WHEN TO GO

Enjoy DC without the hordes from September to November. Avoid peak season (March – May).

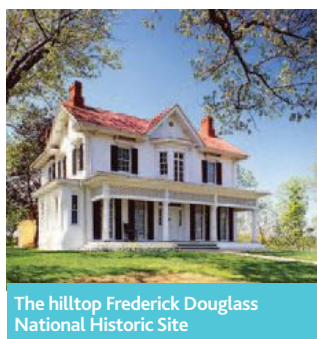
Off the beaten track

DEA MUSEUM 7

Nuance is not on the agenda at this museum that showcases the War on Drugs, brought to you by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). Exhibits cover the last century-and-a-half of drug use, including Nancy Reagan's 'Just Say No' commercials from the 1980s, and relics from old opium dens (00-1-202-307-3463; www.deamuseum.org; 700, Army Navy Dr, Arlington; 10am – 4pm Tues – Fri; free).

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF WOMEN IN THE ARTS 8

The only US museum exclusively devoted to women's artwork fills this Renaissance Revival mansion. Its collection – more than 4,000 works – moves from Renaissance artists such as Lavinia Fontana to 20th-century pieces by Frida Kahlo, Georgia O'Keeffe and Helen Frankenthaler (00-1-202-783-5000; www.nmwa.org; 1250, New York Ave, NW; 10am – 5pm Mon – Sat, from 12pm Sun; ₹660 adult, under 18 free, free first Sun of month).



The hilltop Frederick Douglass National Historic Site

FREDERICK DOUGLASS NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE 9

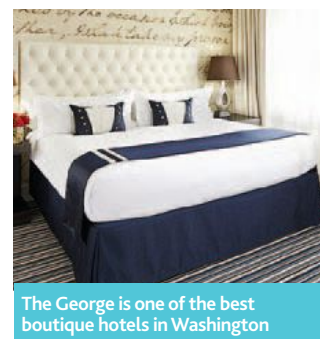
Escaped slave, abolitionist, author and statesman Frederick Douglass occupied this beautifully-sited house from 1877 until his death in 1895. Original furnishings, books, photographs and other personal belongings paint a compelling portrait of this great man. The museum is a bus ride from the city centre, and visits are by guided tour (00-1-202-426-5961; www.nps.gov/frdo; 1411, W St, SE; check website for timings; free, online booking: ₹ 100).

Sleep

On a shady residential street in the suburb of Adams Morgan, **Adam's Inn 10** has inviting rooms in two townhouses and a carriage house, plus a patio (00-1-202-745-3600; www.adamsinn.com; 1746, Lanier Pl; from ₹ 5,300).

Chester A Arthur House 11 offers four rooms in a beautiful row house. The 1883 abode is full of crystal chandeliers, antique oil paintings and oriental rugs (00-1-877-893-3233; www.chesterarthurhouse.com; Logan Circle NW; from ₹ 9,000).

Chrome-and-glass furniture and modern art frame the bold interiors of **The George 12**. Its Capitol Hill location is perfect for museum sightseeing (00-1-202-347-4200; www.hotelgeorge.com; 15, E St, NW; from ₹ 22,000).



The George is one of the best boutique hotels in Washington

Fancy a curry?

Named one of America's top 20 restaurants, **Rasika** will give *desi* grub back home a run for its money. The menu has plenty of veg options too (00-1-202-637-1222; www.rasikarestaurant.com; 633 D St, NW; check website for timings; dal makhani: ₹ 660).

Embassy alert

Embassy of India, Washington DC:
www.indianembassy.org

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

Visa

A B1/ B2 visitor's visa is usually processed within two days of your appointment (www.ustraveldocs.com/in; ₹ 11,200).

COMPILED BY LORNA PARKES. WITH CONTRIBUTIONS FROM KARLA ZIMMERMAN, REGIS ST LOUIS & FRIVAN DRIVER. PHOTOGRAPHS: JOE VOGAN/ALAMY, JAMES DILLORETO/SMITHSONIAN, ERIC LONG/NATIONAL AIR AND SPACE MUSEUM, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION, RON BLUNT/SMITH COLLECTION/GETTY IMAGES. CURRENCY AT THE TIME OF GOING TO PRINT: 1 US\$ = ₹ 66.47

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