

# इश्वरनाल

AN SCMC CHRONICLE MAGAZINE

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(FOR INTERNAL CIRCULATION ONLY)



संयुक्त संस्थान





# EDITOR'S NOTE

Every year, the Journalism students of SCMC produce several magazines. These include magazines with special feature stories on Environment, Health, Science & Technology, Business, Industry, Entertainment and Sports.

So far, the students had not produced any special issue on travel and tourism. This year's enterprising bunch of Journalism students decided to produce one. The matter was discussed in class. A consensus evolved. And it was resolved that a special issue will be brought out on Travel and Tourism. It also agreed that the issue would be largely anecdotal. This made editorial sense. Personal experiences shared through features are significantly credible.

The result is a happy mix of occurrences, incidents, encounters, discoveries, fears and exuberant instances. Stories range from awe-inspiring natural wonders like one of the highest waterfalls in the world in India to the amazing Northern Lights; from historic fortresses to exotic island destinations; from breath-taking hills to scenic beaches; from hair-raising adventures to enchanted cities.

The title Safarnama was also chosen democratically, having being put to vote along with other suggestions. It's an Urdu word – safar means travel and nama is an account. That is what this issue is about – accounts of travels by the writers.

Having successfully brought out this issue, we intend to continue the practice and make Safarnama an annual publication by the Journalism batches every year.



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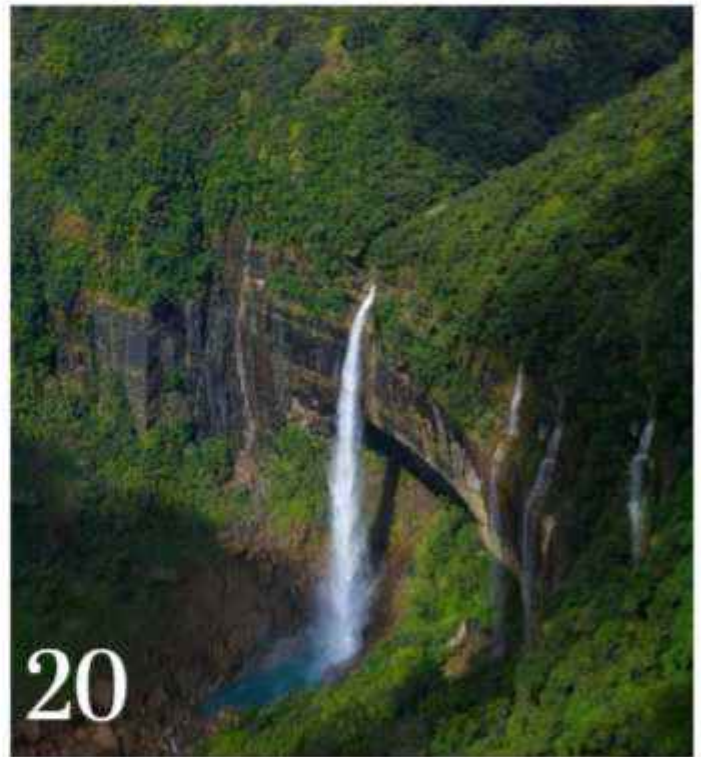
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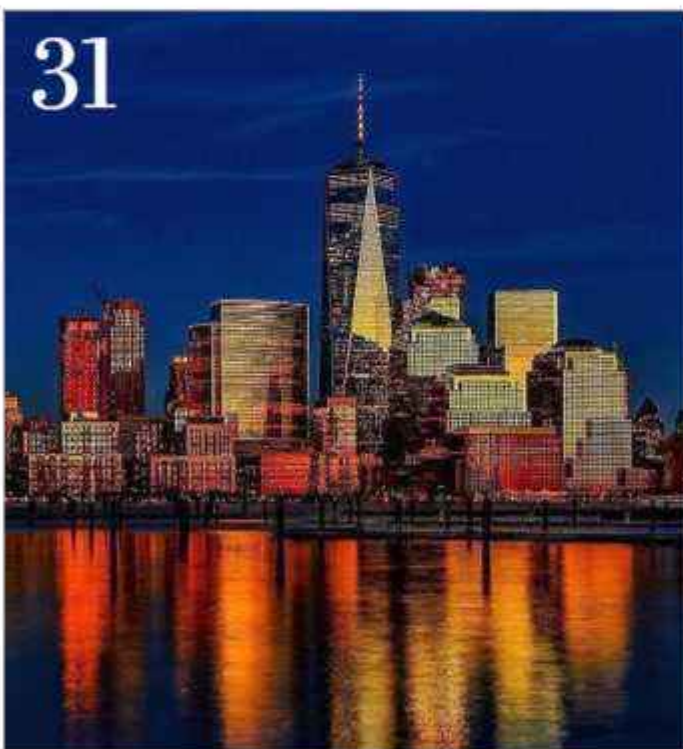
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# A Day In The City Of Ruins

By Paridhi Maheshwari

**F**ive years ago, keeping aside all the usual family clashes and hundred tantrums, we as a family of 5 decided to go on a historical tour of Karnataka by car. One car, five people, a worn out state tourism map, and 700 kilometers of traveling through time - that's when we reached Hampi.

We had one day in our hand to cover this city and planned to make the most of it. We asked Mr. Ravi, a Karnataka state tourism guide to accompany us throughout the day. Starting from the musically magical Vijaya Vittala temple till the only functioning temple in the city - the Virupaksha.

I could go on for pages about the historical significance of each monument but nothing can beat hearing musical sounds from pillars built as long as 6 centuries ago! You can still find the two pillars which were cut by Britishers to check the science behind them. The most popular stone chariot stands tall in the courtyard of this temple and is absolutely marvelous to look at. Walking a little further, my sister and I couldn't stop talking about the 15th century King's balance.

Yes, the same balance we've watched in movies where the king is weighed against the royal jewels.

Situated right in the middle of the Royal Centre is the stunning Hazara Ram Temple, the story of Ramayana carefully carved in chronological order all along its walls. We couldn't take our eyes off how perfect each carving was.

Walking a little further along the local bustling bazaars of Hampi, we stopped by the monolithic Ganesha and Bull - massive statues made out of a single stone! It was my first time looking at a monolithic structure and I could not stop wondering how they would have been made over 400 years ago. Before we went on to see the Queen's quarters, we stopped by a small restaurant called the Mango Tree. The restaurant was typically designed like a hut with a quaint dhaba-like set-up inside. My father had to stop me from ogling at the second serving of thaali that we ordered. Rich authentic South Indian food never goes amiss!



*All smiles at a temple near the Zenana Enclosure*

Going around the Zenana Enclosure and queen's bath was fun. I do not recall anything that the guide had mentioned because I was too busy pretending to be a queen. If only I could go back in time and watch how everyone lived in the royal enclosure! The Royal Elephant stables close by left me beyond shocked at how royal they looked. It was already 4 by the time we had ticked off almost all significant temples and all I wanted to do was eat that thaali again. Unfortunately, my grandmother had come with the sole purpose of visiting the monkey temple - Anjani Parvat.

A little far from Hampi, and 600 steps on a hill, lies this temple famously known as the birthplace of Lord Hanuman. The climb was easy but the monkeys did not fail to make me cry, the sunset from the hill was definitely worth the climb! Before we could go back to our hotel in Hospet, we visited the grand Virupaksha temple of Hampi. I was 15 back then who had just learned the word atheist but I will never forget how calm that temple made me feel. Despite the sound of puja and people, I remember taking in every moment right from Laxmi - the elephant to me losing my chappals.

Temples, shrines, a stepped bath, boulders and the royal Tungabhadra River. You just have to make-believe that you are a time traveler lost in their voyage at this beautiful late-medieval era Indian city.







*The Anjani Parvat*



*The Virupaksha Temple  
at night*





# From Maafushi, With Love

By Maansi Anand

*Welcome to the world's leading tourist destination. We hope you fall in love.*

From a plane window, the Maldives looks like a map. The nation of islands is surrounded by the bright blue ocean, boasting of water huts lined along beautiful resorts. The minute one touches down at the capital city of Male, the air feels lighter with the irresistible smell of sea salt. The islands make you feel insignificant amidst oceans spread indefinitely. From all ends, the islands remind you that here's all the space you have access to, but at the same time, this is all you have.

The five-day trip commenced with a quick scan of Maafushi, which mainly comprised various beaches on all sides, tiny souvenir stores, water sports hubs, beach kiosks where locals would often relax with a hookah, and homestays and resorts that catered to the many international tourists. The fascinating thing about the islands was the functioning of its economy: while the men of the family had become experts at water sports, the women ran beachside restaurants where authentic Maldivian cuisine and fresh seafood were served. Conversations with locals revealed that all islands part of the Maldives follow a similar process, which makes them quite self-sufficient.

## Colourful homes in Maafushi

There's a lot to take away from the Maldives: while the colourful homes and mosques remain etched in your memory, it is also the homemade banana bread from a corner bakery that adds flavour to your vacation. The waves of the tremendous ocean rise and fall, reflecting the colour of the sky as an indication of the rapidly-changing weather. The islands are also a welcoming home for families of tiny cats and kittens, who surround humans wherever they can spot some.

As the economy that thrives solely on tourism and hospitality, the Maafushi Islands maintain some level of flexibility in their regulations owing to their Islamic traditions and beliefs. Beaches wherein nudity/shorter clothing are allowed are marked so, while those that restrict the same often levy heavy fines on tourists in case of any violations. Be it a pizzeria or a traditional Maldivian restaurant located on a beach, each experience is accompanied by a warm story shared by an owner, chef, or water sports expert.

From the surface of the seas, you can see coral reefs sway from each side. In the off-season, turtles, starfish, and stingrays can be spotted peacefully traveling along their path, while dolphins hop in excitement when the temperature is just right for them. Water sports guides, seated on jet skis or strapped into their paragliding gear, admire the expansive waters as if they've seen them for the first time. In their admiration, they share a lens of the islands that bring you calmness and hope.

The sunset looks astonishing on Maafushi waters. At the end of the day, each wave wishes the other goodbye with love.



*Colourful homes in Maafushi*

## FUN FACT

The world's first underwater cabinet meeting was held in Maldives in 2009 to hold international attention regarding the issue of global warming in the island nation due to the rising sea levels.





*The sea changes  
colours with  
the sky*

*Watersports with  
the sunset in the  
background*





# A Chaotic 12th Birthday

By Soham Shah

First trip outside India, a comedy of errors, and confused Malaysian officials; these are the things my 12th birthday consisted of. Rewinding a bit, it was around January in 2014 that my parents announced that we were going to Singapore, and that the dates happened to coincide with my birthday.

I, obviously, was aghast. I did not want to spend my birthday far away from home and without my friends. These were the days of mom-thrown family-friendly house parties with pav-bhaji, custard, and budhani chips, and 30 of your friends. Some of these, you spoke to twice a year i.e. on their birthday and on yours. But my veto powers were non-existent and the idea was bulldozed through.

Forward to the end of April and I find myself in Singapore. The first thing I noticed was that the house floor was wet due to the extremely high humidity on the equator. This was the weirdest and unexpected cultural shock I had ever imagined. I've been told on multiple separate occasions recently that floors in Singapore are not wet and my memory is failing me, but I am going to let this happy illusion remain.

We went around the city, covering the usual touristy spots like Universal Studios and the Merlion fountain. My birthday, on the 5th of May, was to be celebrated on a grand cruise ship *Star Cruise*, which we were to board on the 3rd of May. We got to the dockyard on the morning of 3rd at 10 AM sharp, only to see the cruise sailing away in front of our eyes. Dumbfounded, we asked them what was going on. They said you're a couple of hours late. Dumbfounded again, we checked the ticket, and obviously, the departure time was 10 AM and the arrival time was 8 AM.

We gave up all hope, because the cruise only halted in Malaysia, and we did not have a Malaysian visa. A relative, hearing about our ordeal, called us and said that he remembered reading about Malaysia recently starting visa-on-arrival facilities for Indian nationals. As soon as we could confirm this, and as soon as our booking agent confirmed that he would get us on the cruise if we managed to get to the stop

in time, we boarded a flight to Kuala Lumpur. Landing there, the Malaysian officials greeted us like one would greet monkeys in a wedding. We were made to sit for over 4 hours while they figured out what to do with Indians asking for visa-on-arrival. This makes me fairly certain that we were the first Indians to avail this facility in Malaysia. The last hurdle to get over was that we had landed on the opposite side of the country, so we had to drive through the breadth of the nation (which takes 4 hours only) to get to the cruise ship halt.

As promised, our agent got us on the cruise and a special induction drill, complete with safety instructions and cruise tour, was organised only for the 4 of us. Finally, the on-ship band sang to me and the restaurant gave me a barbeque nation type cake. Worth the hassle and the money, I guess.

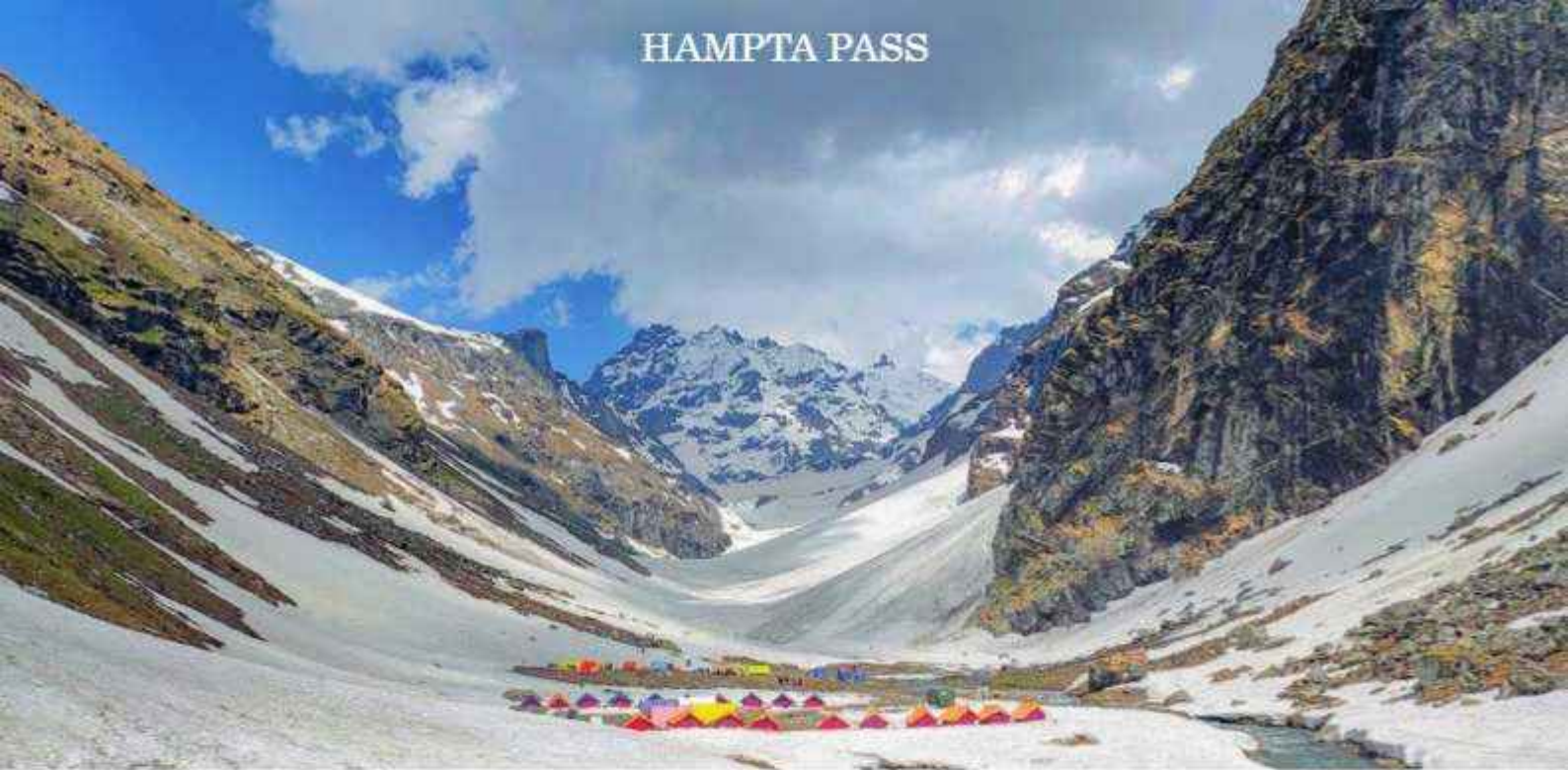


*Changi airport, from where we took off for Malaysia*



*The cruise ship that was missed*





*The breath-taking view of the Hampta Pass mountains*

# First Unpleasant Tryst With Mr. Snow

BY PRANOTI ABHIYANKAR

All 'firsts' are meant to be memorable. But the time I went on a long and tedious trek to see snow for the first time will always stick with me. We walked, we rock-climbed, we rappelled on the crude terrain of Hampta Pass to reach its peak. After hours of treading through mushy lands and muddy streams, some of us met snow for the first time in our lives. I prefer to call this tryst 'interesting' with mixed feelings.

It was a mellow morning. My alarm buzzed beside the sleeping bag at 5am. Unzipping the tent, I stepped out and met some of the campers for workout. In the shiver-generating valleys of Himachal, you tend to wake up with stiff joints and muscles. So, we were asked to do warm-up activities before having food.

Post exercise, soaked oats, omelets and chai were kept ready for us at the table. After brushing and taking a quick jog around the camp, I joined the group of campers sharing morning blues over breakfast.

Minutes later, we gathered at the common area to prepare for our trek to the Hampta Pass. From our camp, I could see the snow-clad mountains, popping up from the horizon at a distance. I had never been in snow, did not know how it felt.

We reached at the base of the mountain around 8am, and started our journey uphill. "After noon, the weather gets misty and cold at a high altitude like this. Watch your step and be careful," our mountaineering instructor warned. He instructed us to climb in a zigzag pattern on sides which are dangerously steep. "Although this technique increases the

distance you are climbing, it helps you stay firm on the ground and reduce the risk of slipping," he said.

Pre-trek training lessons in mountaineering activities were proven to be essential. A few parts of the mountain were too steep to climb and did not have enough ridges for trekkers to place their feet. In these cases, we had to take out our ropes, hooks and harnesses and rock-climb our way ahead. However, to cross the high elevated cliffs, we had to rappel our way down the slope.

Halfway to the mountain peak, my height had increased by two inches, there were thick blobs of mud holding onto the ridges under our trekking shoes. It had been four hours since the trek started, and our energy levels were drained down to four percent. "A few more minutes to go. Come on. Keep going for the snow," the instructor encouraged me since he knew this was about to be my first snow experience. Surprisingly, this motivation was working. It kept me going until I felt the snow for the first time and realized how 'romanticized' it was. It all went downhill (pun intended) after taking that first glance at snow.

As a kid, my idea of snow was built by reading graphic story books and watching movies like Frozen. The snow in it always looked lush white and soft. On the contrary, this snow was flaky, hard, kind of polluted and extremely cold to handle. Apparently, snow ball fights aren't as 'piece of cake' as they look in movies.



Seven out of ten people in our team had their first encounters with snow that day, including me. Driven by curiosity and adventure, we scaled the mountain for five hours straight. "If it takes this much effort to see the snow, we'd rather not see it again anytime soon," we agreed unanimously as our bones cracked, joints ached and stomachs growled with hunger on our way downhill.

*Streams amidst misty mountains*





# The Forgotten Tower Of Jaipur

BY ATHARV UNHALE

*In Jaipur's Tripolia Bazaar, lies a tower of victory, now forgotten in plain sight.*

Amidst the cacophony of auto rickshaws, camels, bikes, buses and the many wallahs, you cannot help but marvel at Jaipur's splendid beauty. As you wander through the pink lanes of Tripolia Bazaar, you pause and hope this moment stays with you as a vivid memory. In this Bazaar, unlike the pink that adorns its feet, a tower of white rises to the heavens. This is the story of Isarlat Sargasooli, once an imposing symbol of victory, now languishing and forgotten.

The tower was erected in the year 1749. It was a symbol of victory after a war between two brothers over the crown of Jaipur. The founder of Jaipur, Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh II, had two sons - Sawai Ishwari Singh and Sawai Madho Singh. It was the understanding that Madho Singh, who was the nephew of the King of Mewar, would ascend to the throne. However, Jai Singh wanted Ishwari Singh to be the heir.

A civil war ensued between the brothers in 1744. Ishwari Singh was backed by the Mughals. Madho Singh had the support of the forces of Mewar, Bundi, Kota, and Marathas. The civil war finally ended in 1748, when Ishwari Singh defeated Madho Singh at the Battle of Rajmahal.

It was to celebrate this victory that he commissioned Isarlat Sargasooli, a pristine white tower that was the tallest building in the city for a long time.

Today, Sargasooli only registers as an afterthought in the memory of an average tourist. It is the tall white tower you notice, but never visit. After all, world-famous monuments like Hawa Mahal, City Palace, and Tripolia Gate are just a few steps away and more worthy of your limited time.

To miss Sargasooli, is to miss the opportunity of a lifetime. The tower, maintained by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), is one of the very few towers in the country that tourists can still climb right to the top.

To get to the tower, one has to explore the Bazaar the old-school way. Google Maps will not take you to the entrance. After taking directions from the extremely helpful locals, you will find yourself lost in a hardware market, surrounded by piles of sand and stacks of tiles and bathroom furnishings. There, tucked between two unassuming hardware stores, lies the small entrance to Sargasooli.

As you walk in with hesitation, a huge courtyard with familiar Mughal architecture and motifs opens up. The magnificent Sargasooli rises to the skies, lost and forgotten in the silent gullies of Tripolia Bazaar.

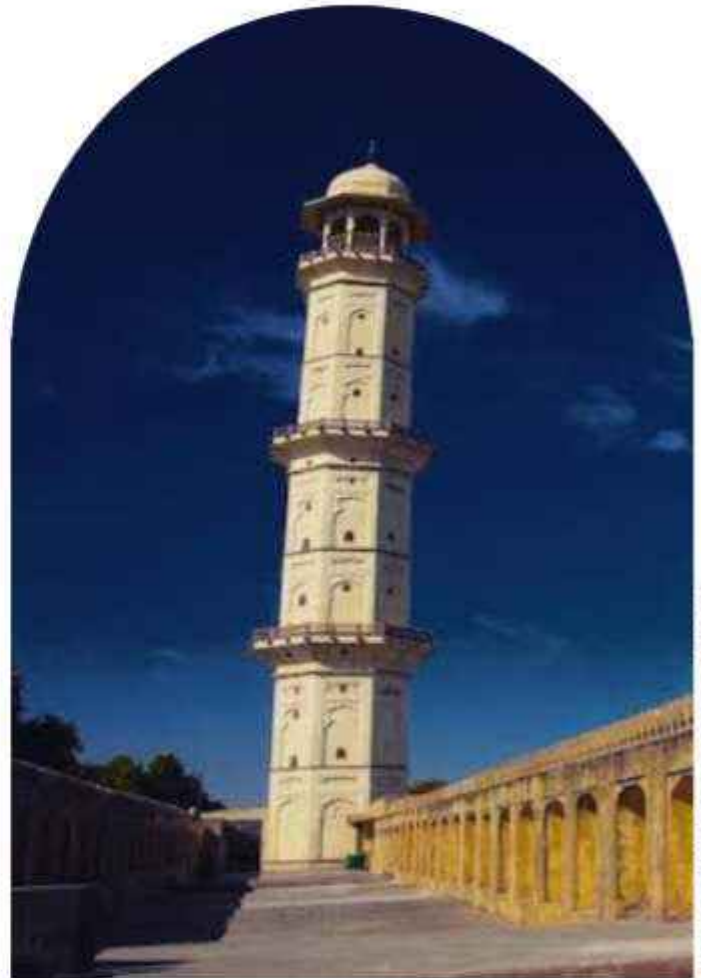


IMAGE COURTESY: Atharv Unhale

*Isarlat Sargasooli Tower in Jaipur*

Inside the tower, is a circular ascent that continues for seven stories and finally opens up to a small platform that can barely accommodate ten people at once. The views from this spot are unparalleled, perhaps the best in the city. If you look straight, you can see the light dancing off the rainbow-coloured glass panels at Hawa Mahal. To your left, lies Jantar Mantar and its iconic sundial. Just next to it is the famous pink courtyard of the City Palace. To your right, you can spot the Nahargarh fort standing tall on the hills.

As you take in the birds-eye view of this beautiful city, you are filled with an unexplainable emotion that only helps you understand why Ishwari Singh built this tower as a symbol of victory. Maybe he felt the same way as you did, right at this spot.

The tower is also a chilling reminder of how victories can be easily forgotten, and how symbols lose their meaning, as history makes its way. Only Shakespeare can describe this best in words,

*Not marble nor the gilded monuments  
Of princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme.*





UNESCO World Heritage Site and undiscovered Rajput treasure, Kumbhalgarh

# Mewari Majesty Lights Up The Night Sky

By Ananyanarayan Dhanabalan

The magnificent palaces and formidable forts in Rajasthan are testimony to the legendary tales of Rajput honour and martial prowess. While the stories of hal-  
lowed sites like Chittorgarh, Jodhpur, Jaisalmer, and Jaipur are well-known, nestled within the Aravalli hills lies a hidden gem of Mewari splendour, Kumbhalgarh Fort.

Located just over 80 kilometres from Udaipur, the Kumbhalgarh Fort is a sight to behold. It is one of the largest fort complexes in the world, with the longest wall fortification in India. However, its rich history comes alive at night during the light and sound show.

## Magical Mewari Might

Kumbhalgarh's impenetrable wall stands tall, with its thickness ranging from 15-25 feet. One can enter the complex through one of the seven imposing Pals (gates), flanked by the fort's intimidating ramparts. If this doesn't dissuade potential invaders, the ramp leading up to the hill is filled with sharp turns to dissuade charging elephants and cavalry.

One would need at least a day to fully appreciate the might of this Rajput creation; Ram Pol, the complex's main entrance, is itself a structure of strength and beauty.

Kumbhalgarh houses several palaces and over 360 temples; prominent structures within the complex include the Kumbha Palace, Badal Mahal, Ganesha temple, and Parsva Natha temple. The Neel Kanth Mahadeva temple, in particular, draws a lot of visitors; its five-foot-high Shivling, and intricately carved domed ceiling, held aloft by 24 pillars, are exceptional examples of Rajput architecture.

However, Kumbhalgarh's main attraction is the light and sound show that happens each night, the entire complex is bathed in an orange and yellow glow, and the fort's rich history is laid out through stories and dramatic voice re-enactments.

## Sight of the lights at night

The show begins with stories about Rana Kumbha, the Mewari ruler who built the massive structure we see today. Legendary tales of his valour and battle prowess are recounted as the Kumbhalgarh lights up the crisp night sky.

The story then progresses to an infant Udai Singh, Kumbha's descendant and the crown prince who had to be hidden within the fort when Chittorgarh was under siege. Udai Singh eventually ascended the throne, and his eldest son was born in Kumbhalgarh, the most famous Rajput ruler, Maharana Pratap.



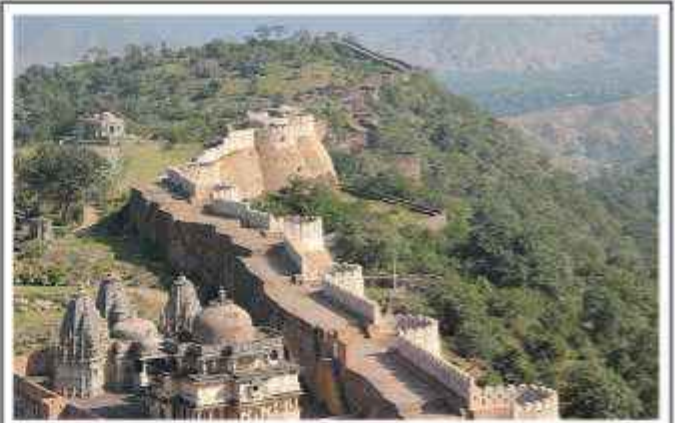
The story follows Rana Pratap's life with dramatic re-enactments of key moments. The scenes showing his separation from his brother Shakti Singh and Kumbhalgarh's fall to Mughal invaders are masterfully done. However, the scene depicting Pratap's defeat at Haldighati is exceptionally compelling, with the fort bathed in blue and green light.

The show reaches its crescendo as Rana Pratap makes a triumphant return to his birthplace a few years later, the music swells, and Kumbhalgarh regains its orange hue once more.

The entire performance finally winds down as Rana Pratap breathes his last. The entire complex is lit up as the narrator tells the audience that according to legend, Mughal emperor Akbar had cried when the news of Pratap's demise had reached his ears.

The show then closes with live music from the local music group, and the fort walls are lit, adorning the entire hill in a bejeweled necklace.

While the imposing complex is indeed impressive at all times, it is only after the show does on truly begin to comprehend the significance of the fort in Indian history and appreciate its story.



#### FUN FACT

At 36 kilometres, the Kumbhalgarh fort wall is the second-longest continuous wall in the world after the Great Wall of China. Hence, the structure has been called the Great Wall of India.

*The temples at Kumbhalgarh*





# A Sky Full Of Stars

By Pranith Yasa

Chikmagalur, an idyllic hill station in Karnataka, is the perfect spot for a weekend getaway for the residents of the southern states. It boasts spectacular views, lush forests and soothing temperatures. When my school proposed a trip to the summer retreat, students and teachers alike were overjoyed. However, in a matter of a month, everyone was cursing themselves.

The trip began with a short journey from Hyderabad to Bangalore via overnight train. Spirits were high, as most of us were embarking on our first trip without our families. After reaching Bangalore, we transferred to a bus which would take us to our destination. Over the next few hours, the bus traversed treacherous ghat roads while passing scenic photo spots and humble tea stalls. We reached our destination – a picturesque coffee estate situated on the outskirts of Chikmagalur – around eight at night. Exhausted by the strenuous journey, everyone seemed desperate to get much-needed rest. After choosing spots in the central bungalow in the estate, we settled in for the night.

The following day, we were woken up by our host, a close friend of our school's principal. She guided everyone to a table outside, laden with steaming cups of Bournvita and stacks of biscuits. After everyone had their fill, we were introduced to the estate's groundskeeper, who described their work on the estate and the process behind coffee production. He took us on a guided walk through the rows of coffee bushes, talking about the various stages of coffee cultivation. Soon after, we reached a clearing, where the estate workers were waiting with baskets. All of us looked around in confusion, until our teachers informed us that we would be collecting coffee berries for the rest of the day.

There are no words to describe the emotion we collectively felt in that moment. Distress? Anger? Bewilderment? Or a combination of them? Lacking any options, we proceeded to take a basket and start our assignment for the day. The cool and crisp weather started to turn dry and hot under the midday sun, as we picked berries and organized them under the supervision of the estate workers. We groaned and grumbled and muttered, but we stayed focused on our work. The combined efforts of a hundred-odd adolescents helped us clear the coffee plants in that section of the estate within two hours.



*Ripe coffee berries, nestled together in a lush bush.*

Heaving a sigh of relief, we returned to the bungalow with lunch on our mind. However, we were disappointed to learn that our compensation was only a big bowl of sweet kesari. Soon after completing our small lunch, we were asked by our teachers to board the buses waiting outside. I personally hoped that they would take us to a quiet spot nearby for a photo opportunity, but I was dismayed when we arrived at our destination – the starting point of a trekking trail. In all their wisdom, the school had organized a trek at 3 in the afternoon. We proceeded to walk a distance of 3 kilometres under the hot noon sun. We took a short break and trekked back to our buses, hoping for some respite after the incredibly long day we had so far.

Upon returning to the estate, everyone slowly shuffled back to the bungalow, hoping for a short meal and a full night's rest. However, before we could do so, our teachers asked us to come outside. There was a collective groan as we massaged our aching limbs on our way out. As we waited in the courtyard outside, someone shut down the power supply. We were completely lost as to what was going on, until the groundskeeper laughed and asked us to look above us. I tilted my head upwards, and saw a sky full of stars. The glittering carpet seemed to cover the entire sky, and extended as far as the eye could see. It was the single most beautiful sight I have ever seen, and I will forever be grateful for that eventful day.





# Madayipara: Quaint History



White and blue blooms dot the meadows of Madayipara in the month of August, captivating all who visit this hillock

By Raniya Ashraf Ali

My grandmother used to say that the dark depths of the dry well near the fort hid a tunnel which led to the banks of Kuppam River. Soldiers stationed at the fort would use this tunnel to make a quick escape if things ever turned sour. As I peeked through the roots of the tree that covered this well, I hoped to see signs of this fabled tunnel. However, no matter how much I scoured the grounds of Madayi Fort, any such vestiges evaded my sight, seemingly washed away by the tides of time.

Built by the Vallabha king of the Kolathu dynasty and later occupied by Tipu Sultan, all that remains of this ancient fort are its four watchtowers, a perfect spot for visitors looking to enjoy a sunset in all its glory. After an hour or so of watching boats lazily float down the river in the afternoon sun, I made my way down from where I'd sat on one of the watchtowers. Doubling back the way I came, I set about to explore the rest of the flat-topped hillock this fort is perched on, Madayipara.



Remains of Madayi fort, built 1200 years ago by King Vallabhan at Madayi

Fresh from a bout of monsoon rains, I was met with a breathtaking vista – blue and white flowers, locally called “Kakkapoovu”, carpeting the hill as far as the eye could see. This is far from the only ecological wonder that this hillock boasts of. A treasure trove of nature, Madayipara flaunts an array of flora and fauna with over 500 plant species, 300 flowering plants and exotic butterflies, drawing migratory

flowering plants and exotic butterflies, drawing migratory birds from far and wide. According to lore, up until around 50–60 years ago, tigers would visit Madayipara during specific times of the year to feast on the grazing cattle. Vultures swooped in to feed on the leftovers. Decades of china clay mining, however, had marred the face of the hill and the most I could spot that day were stray dogs, two of which had been friendly enough to accompany me the rest of the evening.

Each season paints the landscape a unique, vibrant hue – just as how the incessant monsoon rains turn the lands lush, so does the autumn sun, as stretches of grass cover the 700 or so acres of land in shades of gold. The Portuguese once had sovereignty over Madayippara and the adjacent regions. Many spots in Madayi still have cashew trees growing there as a reminder.

## FUN FACT

Insectivorous plants like *Drosera indica* L., *D. burmanii* Vahl, whose sticky gland tipped tentacles of the plant trap the numerous butterflies and insects, scatter the flat-topped hillock.



I went further west, tramping across rivulets of water flowing through the laterite rocks until I reached a pond shaped like a hand-held mirror named Joothakkolam, as it is believed to be constructed by one of the first Jewish migrants in India. A similar attraction in Madayipara is the Vadukunda Siva Temple, rebuilt in the 1970s after it was purported to be destroyed by Tipu Sultan, and the nearby lake, which extends for roughly an acre. Even during the sweltering summer, the lake close to the temple will stay full, providing food for the local life forms.

Despite these glimpses into the past, Madayikavu, one of Kerala's oldest Bhagavathi temples which date back over a millennium ago, is what brings visitors flocking to Madayipara. Streams of pilgrims arrive at the holy site in buses, autos and cars, led by their faith in Kali Amma, hoping to get her blessings against all evil intentions. The solemn surroundings was the perfect end to the evening, lending a calmness to my spirit as I bid the hillock adieu.



# Where Not To Stop By: Chorla Ghats

*The view from one of the clearings in Chorla ghat, somewhere between Goa and Karnataka borders*

By Poorvi Ammanagi

*If you are traveling to Goa by road, you'll probably travel through the thick forests that surround Chorla.*

At first glance the forests might seem scary; and they are, but if you are lucky, you might stumble upon truly fascinating things here. Although, I can not tell you where to look because even if I were to point you to the exact locations of these things, you shall never find them; everything in the jungle is constantly shifting. Every journey is unique here and only if you choose to observe, it might be even more interesting than your destination.

One unusually cold summer morning I took this journey with my two best friends. I packed sandwiches and told my parents a lie and we headed to Goa. The plan was simple, we were to take the Chorla Ghats and head to a quiet beach in North Goa and take the Amboli Ghats back and stop there for Vada Pav and chai. Goa held a special appeal to us, the legal drinking age there was lower than in Karnataka and the food somehow tastes better in a shack by the beach with Feni on the side.

The deeper we got into the ghats we came across cold spots and heard howls and cries of many animals. It is generally understood that one is not supposed to park the car anywhere outside designated areas on the side of the roads. These are just an extension of a clearing where people have been stopping for many years. That time we had to park twice in places where there was no designated clearing. Not only is it extremely dangerous to do so because of the large and steady flow of giant cargo trucks, but also because these forests are home to tigers, leopards and even elephants. We personally had spotted chital many times; crossing roads and hiding in trees.

But that time we stopped nearby the road because my friend wanted to take a picture of a few monkeys sitting in the trees and I already had a bad feeling in my gut. The minute we got down and started taking pictures, my friend saw something large move with the corner of his eyes. When we followed his gaze, we could see a large bison on the other side of the road. Quietly we sat back into the car and it was a while before we could utter even a single word.

In around an hour and half we crossed the Karnataka border and entered Goa. How after a terrifying incident like the bison one did we have guts to stop by the road again I cannot tell, but we did. My friend saw a glimpse of something in the woods, like a bamboo structure of sorts and we decided to get down and explore it. We followed a desire path a little deep into the woods and a sweet smell of rot almost suffocated us. We saw a small man dumping cashew apples into a large container. It was an illegal Feni operation. He did not look terrified to see us at all. He offered Feni bottles for us to take with and gently asked us to get out of there. We did not think it would be safe to refuse.

If you were to travel this same path, I do not promise you free, fresh, illegal Feni or chitals or even wild buffalos. What I do promise is magic. It is a sensory experience, roll down the windows and take it all in but absolutely do not stop where you are not supposed to. But if you do end up stopping in one of these places for reasons beyond your control, maybe you will have a terrifyingly great time.







IMAGE COURTESY: Mimansha Walia

# Diu: Landscape To Escape To

By Mimansha Walia

*From mesmerizing caves echoing the sound of the sea to raunchy shivlings in the underside of jutting rocks that are constantly blessed with high tides, it is the perfect religious, historical and sensual getaway all at once.*

Diu is a place with a heart of its own. You can feel it beating in the rush of the tides, the silent whispers of the air, the low chatter of the markets, and the ever-flowing visitations of tourists. Known for its clean and picturesque beaches, Diu is the holy combination of the dewy aura of Goa and the raw historical value of Udaipur. There was something earthly about it right from the moment I entered it – impromptu trips don't usually leave room for many expectations. But this was one of a kind.

## A "Holy" Surprise

It was surprising to find out that Diu is full of abandoned beautiful architectural structures which haven't been talked about much, and I discovered that in the scorching heat of 2018. We had stopped at a local market to grab some refreshments. Within the market area was an establishment that loosely resembled a hammam. Its steps led down to a naturally sourced water body where many locals were bathing; the water considered to be holy and a cure for many diseases.

Eager to touch the "holy" water, I rushed down the steps only to see half-naked old uncles and aunties knee-deep in what looked like years of clogged water in a closed area. This ironic sight of people bathing in water that can actually cause more diseases than cure one was hilarious. But despite the hilarity, it was a wonder to discover an ancient structure with rich architecture in such a feisty location and to know about local myths that always somehow rise around these old establishments.

The next few days were full of exploration. I was intrigued

by the Hindu temple, Gangeshwar Mahadev, which is one of the most unique yet minimal temples I have ever seen. There was hardly anything man-made about it. It was built out of the forces of nature, with steps leading down to a shivling

placed under a huge curvy rock on one side and the flowing ocean tides on the other. The constant ebb and flow of waves washed the worshipper's feet and cleansed the shivling from time to time. I may not be a religious person, but something about the wind caressing my neck as the waves canoodling my feet mystified my idea of existence.

## Reminiscing the Present

Our next destination was the orange-brown spectacle, Naida Caves. It was a network of numerous tunnels and chambers with perfect acoustics. Something about it made me want to keep humming and occasionally burst into songs like people do in musicals. Instead, I fondled with other activities like getting pictures clicked and exploring every nook and corner of the cave.

A kind of youthful energy took us over as we hopped from one destination to another, taking in the essence of Diu. The mouth-watering fish, the satisfying meals, the admiration of the weather, and places like the Diu Fort and Khukri memorial soon brought the day to an end. But the thrill of the place wasn't ready to let us go yet, so we went on a late-night long drive on the road by the beach, blasting songs that I still associate with Diu to this date. In all fun and games, we recalled the perfect evening by the ocean when the sky turned into perfect shades of mauve, red, and pink.

We reminisced about the trip while still in it, as a jackal leaped out of nowhere in front of our speeding car, and we almost hit an animal with the headlights on. Thankfully, the 'almost' remained an almost, and the dreamy day was saved from turning into a tragedy. In fits of shock and laughter, the shared thrill pulsed down as we found momentary solace.





Nohkalikai Falls, Cherrapunji



# The Legend Of Nohkalikai

By Aditi Krishnan

**M**isty, winding roads that lead to sights destined to leave you breathless and spellbound - the living root bridges that are natural architectural marvels, the vast, reverberating caves, the majestic waterfalls, and the beautiful streams and valleys. Even the best cameras cannot capture the essence of the intoxicating views and enticing beauty of Cherrapunji, Meghalaya. But the disturbing yet riveting legend that gave Nohkalikai Falls its name is what makes it the most intriguing and my favourite sight in Cherrapunji.

Legend has it that Likai, a widowed young mother, stayed in a village near the waterfall. To ensure her daughter had a father figure growing up, she remarried. What was supposed to be a healthy relationship between her husband and daughter didn't turn out that way. Jealous of the amount of love and attention Likai's daughter was getting from her, the husband killed her and cooked a meal from her flesh when Likai was at work one day. She feasted on the meal after returning, only to find a severed finger next to her betel leaf basket, betel leaf being a customary after-meal indulgence in Meghalaya. When she realised what had happened while she was away, she ran till she plunged to her death from the falls.

*Noh-Ka-Likai.* The name comes from this legend. When translated from Khasi, this means "The Leap of Likai". *Noh* translates to "leap", and *Ka* is a prefix given to women in Meghalaya.

The cascading waterfall is the highest plunge waterfall in the country. With a drop of about 335 m, the Nohkalikai Falls is the fourth-highest plunge waterfall in the whole world. A plunge waterfall falls vertically without making contact with the underlying bedrock surface. Because of their forceful fall, as is the case for Nohkalikai Falls, they produce lots of water spray, making their surroundings misty.

Standing atop the cliff opposite the Falls, the myriad times I've been there with my family, never failed to leave me spellbound. The cool breeze, the sound of gushing water plunging into a turquoise pool that transforms into a stream, the rays of sunlight beaming through the mountains and hitting the spray from the millions of water droplets from the waterfall to form the prettiest rainbow ever. Oh, how I wish the steps descending led right to the waterfall so I could have experienced all this up close because these little things, like the spray of tiny water droplets on your face, make it the mesmerising miracle it is.



*Amidst the mountains of Cherrapunji*



Did the gory, tragic story taint the beauty of one of the most scenic sights I've ever seen? Not one bit. If anything, it made me fall in love with the place even more. Legends are meant to make you believe in something, and this tragically beautiful one, in its own twisted way, made me believe in love and the lengths to which one can go to grieve the loss of a loved one.

### Cherrapunji Travels

The drive through the winding roads of Cherrapunji is probably capable of curing car sickness. And if it doesn't, the destinations make up for it. The town is situated atop the Shillong plateau in the East Khasi Hills. This plateau averages about 1,480 metres above sea level and lies as much as 1,000 metres above the floors of the surrounding valleys. Cherrapunji itself sits at an altitude of 1,260 metres above sea level. What once was the wettest place on Earth receives a staggering 11,430 mm of rain annually.

Besides Nohkalikai Falls, Cherrapunji is famous for its Double-decker Root Bridge, the Mawsmi Cave, the Seven Sisters Falls, Mawlynnong - Asia's cleanest village, as well as Dawki - a small town on the border of India and Bangladesh.

Even though they are all masterpieces of nature in their own way - some might even say they steal the limelight from Nohkalikai Falls - nothing for me can beat the feeling of standing where I stood the first time I understood how a rainbow is formed, knowing the legend behind the majestic Nohkalikai and watching it fall, disappearing into a mist.

### Double-decker Root Bridge

The author and her mother, descending the steps to the waterfall



### RECORD RAINFALL



Mawsynram, a town not too far from Cherrapunji, is the wettest place in the world, with an average annual rainfall of 11,872 mm! According to the Guinness Book of World Records, Mawsynram received 26,000 mm of rainfall in 1985. On June 17th, 2022, Mawsynram recorded its highest single-day rainfall, receiving 1003.6 mm in 24 hours. Monsoon clouds that blow inland from the Bay of Bengal are forced to converge into a narrow zone over the Khasi Hills, leading to higher moisture concentrations over Mawsynram.

### PARADISE ON EARTH



Mawlynnong, a village near Cherrapunji, is the cleanest village in Asia! Managed entirely by its residents, it is popularly called "God's Garden" because of the cleanliness and beauty of the village.





# Bangla Sahib: The Iconic Gurudwara

By Nandini Tupe

*A visit to one of the many precious heritage sites of Delhi.*

If this city was an alphabet, it would only be written in the uppercase. Anyway, it is the capital city. Delhi, where life is amplified right from its slim streets, swollen with their scrumptious food, to a great many places of heritage, the souvenirs of a diverse history.

Much like the sound of an approaching train, the city at dawn is a blanket of stillness with its endless empty roads and smog ridden skies. However as the sun ascends, the roads throb with the honking from cars and then the sky goes unnoticed.

In early 2022, not long after everyone had concluded their celebrations in welcoming the new year, February brought an exciting journey for me. I visited Delhi NCR for the first time and got engulfed in all its beauty and chaos. I stayed in Noida at a friend's home. She was determined to introduce me to the finest and most irresistible food through out my stay and she did not fall short. The first place she took me to was the Brahmaputra Market not quite far from her house. The place was packed to its brim which in itself was testimonial to the delicious street food. We spent a generous amount of our time in trying all kinds of chaat, momos and lassi pushing our appetites to their limits.

Although our exceedingly satisfied bellies were convincing enough to call it a day after a good while of talking and catching up on each other's life, we decided otherwise. At around 4 am, my friend and I left from home, headed towards Gurudwara Bangla Sahib in Delhi. At that hour of the day, the sky is still dark, yet it shows hints of dawn. The roads are long and lonely glowing under different coloured lights, with only a few scattered vehicles, some slower than the others.

Located near the busiest neighbourhood - Connaught Place - in the city, this house of worship is splendid structure built entirely of white marble, topped with a central golden dome. The very sight of the gurudwara reflects tranquility and the chanting of hymns draws a sense of safety and composure in the devotees' minds. The complex's enormous water tank, known as the Sarovar, adds to the overall architectural appeal of the edifice.

The past that this gurudwara descends from, makes it all the more religiously significant. Originally, Gurudwara Bangla Sahib was built as a bungalow called Jaisinghpura Palace



*Bangla Sahib Gurudwara's Sarovar*

and was owned by Mirza Raja Jai Singh, ruler of the Amber kingdom (now called Jaipur) in the 17th century. Guru Har Krishan, the youngest Sikh Guru, visited Delhi in 1664 and resided at this bungalow. At the time of his stay, Delhi was suffering a cholera and small pox epidemic. The Guru, extended his hand in aid for the suffering people by offering water from the well in the bungalow's complex. However, in that same bungalow, the Guru eventually passed away after contracting the illness himself.

Raja Jai Singh dedicated his home to the beloved Guru after his passing. As a result, Gurudwara Bangla Sahib was established and became a significant Sikh temple. Irrespective of the religious significance of the temple, the very magnificence of it attracts admirers from several places to simply soak in its beauty.

The sleepless, early morning trip to this tranquil work of architecture, was truly the highlight of many beautiful moments during my visit to the national capital.



*The White Gateway To The Temple*



# A Trip To Krabi

By Ashmit Kumar

Such a sight had never been witnessed before by these eyes of mine. Endless white beaches and gigantic cliffs adorned the place I stood from one side. At the same time, majestic temples embellished the other. I stood still, gazing at the setting sun turning the sky orange, the sea a shade of liquid silver, and contemplating how beautiful a surrounding can be.

This was Krabi, the first leg of a weeklong trip to Thailand that my family and I embarked on. Since all of us had been busy in a hectic manner over the past few months in our own work, this break was something that the four of us felt we deserved. A time to relax and to be enjoyed together as a family.

Our journey got off to a rocky start when the boat that was supposed to drop us off at the shore of the island on which our resort was located instead left us 500 m away from it. As a result, we either had the choice to dip our shoes in the water and ruin them or walk barefoot on a seabed covered in sharp stones. Once that part was over, however, heaven awaited us.

The resort provided us with a fantastic view of the ocean, where we could view mesmerizing views of the sea and experience an ambiance that was filled with nothing but peace. Waves crashing across the limestone cliffs, trees waving through the cool breeze, and fellow tourists using different instruments to produce soothing music, one couldn't help but

close their eyes and get lost in a feeling of ecstasy.

The place was no stranger to fun and lively activities. Everything from rock climbing to hiking and river rafting was available for people who wanted to get their adventurous spirits out into the open. For the people not so enthusiastic about such activities, nothing is better than taking a walk along the pier and observing all the other islands around, especially one where various movies had been shot, including a James Bond movie starring Sean Connery. Different temples devoted to the local deities and surrounded with paintings and murals were located at the bottom of some of the cliffs. They could be explored only in the afternoon when some of the water receded.

The food is something that is a different experience in itself. Grown and prepared by the locals, it contained everything from other types of fruits to freshly caught seafood like crabs, lobsters, etc. Though I experimented with many different things, I didn't even try to get near to the crocodile being roasted on a live grill.

Though much time has passed, the memories of that trip continue to stay in this mind of mine. Whenever stress envelops me, I try to remember the happiness and calm I felt during those days. When the day comes wherein I would have made something of myself, I hope to return to the same spot to reminisce, reflect and be grateful for everything that life has to offer.

*A beautiful sight to gaze upon from the coast*







*Places like these  
are sought for  
Rock Climbing*

*A View of the  
Island of Krabi*





# Marble Rocks And Swirling Waters

By Ambika Bapat

The vast expanse of Narmada, her slightly greenish muddy waters, the bright blue sky with its cotton-ball clouds, and the majestic marble cliffs with their pristine white glow, all came together at Bhedaghat. There, Narmada cascades gracefully from 40 feet, swaying through the marble cliffs, creating a heavenly valley.

Colourful boats, cheerful tourists, and beautiful marble artefacts completed the charm. I bought a ticket, stepped into a boat, wore my lifejacket like my other fellow passengers, and off went our boat. *"Aa gaya marble ka sight, mai hu aap-ka guide, baithe rho tight, aur dekhte rho charo side"*

As the paddles splashed against the water, the serene environment sunk into a rhythm; the soft murmur of passengers, the ripples created by the paddles, and the slight whizz of the breeze along with the memorable commentary of the guide- *"Upar pahad, neeche jhaad, aap kr rhe h Bhedaghat me Nauka Vihar."*

Located 30 Km from Jabalpur, Bhedaghat is the perfect destination for local *Jabalpuriyas* on a one-day trip. Relatives and families, newly-weds, school and college friends; the place belonged to all. The mesmerizing experience would repeat itself every time, ensuring no one visits Bhedaghat just once. Some of my fellow passengers seemed to know the entire journey by heart and were even mumbling the guide's commentary.



Boating in the valley



Dhuandhaar falls, view from ropeway

The guide immersed us all in the surrounding by pointing to different shapes in the rocks and telling a story behind them. For those who seemed sceptical, he quickly added, 'Use your imagination.' The afternoon sun was bright, and the marble rocks bathed in its golden rays. During some special occasions, the boat ride is also available at night, when the marble rocks are illuminated by the silvery moonlight. As we moved deeper into the valley, the marble became whiter and more daunting. Below us, the water was 400 feet deep.

The paddles stopped for a second, leaving us in that pensive atmosphere.

*"Aye bacche log, haath andar!"* The guide cautioned, stressing that these calm waters were home to several crocodiles. Mothers quickly clasped their children, and people shifted their attention towards the water, staring into the endless depth. Turning slightly left, the valley had become much more organized as we travelled between two parallel marble cliffs.





IMAGE COURTESY: Ambika Bajaj



*"The cliffs seemed to have carefully arranged themselves, as families do for a photograph."*

As the boat moved forward, we could see *Dhuandhar* falls, the point where Narmada cascades. The gurgling white water seemed like foam from a distance, living up to its name from 'dhuaan' meaning 'mist'. The serene sound of the river had now become a bit menacing.

"Ab yaha se aage nahi", the guide told us; the flow would be too mighty. As we turned around, I froze to look at the picturesque before me. The scene which was the theme of so many showpieces and photographs, and artefacts, the entire marble valley visible from one frame. The cliffs seemed to have carefully arranged themselves, as families do for a photograph. We travelled towards the cliffs and soon found ourselves inside the lovely frame, ready to leave it soon.

The returning journey was quiet, calm, and swift. The paddles weren't required anymore; Narmada was taking us to the bank. The 30-minute boat ride was over in the blink of an eye. I dipped my hand in the river and felt the freshness. It was a journey through nature, its beauty, and its composure. For a while, I was away from the busy clamouring streets and the stressful environment, completely immersed in the depth of nature. I climbed out of the boat and stared endlessly at the river and the towering marble cliffs, captivated by its simple complexity.

Narmada had made her way through these giants and nothing seemed to stop her. The flow was in the opposite direction, and the boat demanded additional strength from the youngsters who were paddling.

Narmada had made her way through these giants and nothing seemed to stop her. The flow was in the opposite direction, and the boat demanded additional strength from the youngsters who were paddling.

Two young boys stood on a cliff around 30 feet high and shouted from there, their voices echoing in the valley. A dive for 20. A person in the boat agreed and, in a jiffy, one of the boys took a plunge into the river. *Splash!* A second later, a small head popped up on the surface, and the guide asked the man to put the Rs. 20 note in the river. I looked back as the boy swam back towards the rugged bank and easily climbed the intimidating block of marble. This place, the guide told us, was *bandarkoodni*. It is believed that the cliffs were so close to each other earlier that monkeys could jump across them. *'Ab koodega bandar, jayega 600 feet ke andar'.*



# A Part Of Me Will Stay In Nyanga

By Pushpangi Raina

Going to one of the African countries before graduating was on my bucket list. To experience the wilderness of the forest, feel one with nature, and spot those wild beings on the chase in their natural habitats. I mean, who wouldn't want to soak in all that? And when I did get an opportunity to witness it, I didn't miss it for the world. It led to many beautiful memories being created, many first times, many lessons learned, and many unbelievable stories to tell!

## How It All Started

It was a sunny day and a day of adventure. From the drive from Harare to Nyanga, I was in awe of everything I saw. These incredible formations - "balancing rocks" were all over. How is it possible for a small rock to balance a bigger rock on it? Well, nature!

But after a beautiful yet bumpy ride through the Nyanga National Park, we finally arrived. I felt energetic to see new faces, fresh air, and sunlight. What I initially thought was just a small trek to see the second-highest waterfall in Africa - Mutarazi Falls, to my surprise, wasn't.

It was until we reached and I read the sign, 'Mutarazi Falls Skywalk and Skyline,' that I realized I had been fooled. Forget about knowing that a breathtaking new adventure activity was introduced that gives visitors a view of this stunning cascade like never before.

They say, on a trip, always try something new; an adventure. So, I did. I faced my fear of heights. Was I ready to do it? No. But as we were approaching the skyline, I was surprised to find out that I had to do a skywalk to reach the starting point of the skyline. I wanted to get one of the two done. But all I could think about was, "TWO NEW THINGS?"

I was nervous and excited as I strolled across the sky bridge. Simultaneously, I was humming all the prayers I could think of. Even though I'm afraid of heights, a part of me enjoyed it as I reached the end. But to skywalk across the 772-meter-high chasm, giving a 360-degree view of the fall, was mind-blowing. I mean, it's not every day you get to see the highest waterfall in Zimbabwe this close!

Now was the part I was most afraid of - the skyline. Palms sweating, mouth all dried up. To my right, a cliff. To my left, the falls. With my sister comforting me, I was rethinking the whole trip. It took me a whole 15 minutes to finally do it. My eyes were shut initially, but I got myself to open them, and I couldn't get enough of the view of the calm waterfall.





## NYANGA, ZIMBABWE

I just captured that moment because it was one of the most beautiful views I've ever seen. But soon enough, I looked down and freaked out because I couldn't see what was down there. Luckily, it was the end. As happy as I was about getting out of those tight ropes, it almost felt like my fears just went away. I just wanted to do it all over again. But with the sun setting, we realized it was time to head back.

### The Day Wasn't Over!

You'd think the adventurous day would end there. But it doesn't. We had to cross the scenic National Park to return to the city. Tilting my head to the window, hoping to see some animals (from afar), I slept off, only to wake up to find out that we had missed a turn and were lost in the jungle. Not just that, we were low on petrol with no cell service. It was almost nightfall, and the wolves were howling. I saw a leopard run, but it was so fast I couldn't tell. Afraid to get out of the car to remove the fallen tree branch on the road, my brother and I did it. It was like a jungle safari that I was never excited about.

After almost four hours of wandering around and crossing multiple antelopes, we finally made it out. A relief! As I rolled down the window, I saw thousands of stars, breathed clean air, and laughed to myself because of the day I had.

With the adventure and beauty Zimbabwe has in store, I know I will surely come back one day.



*Mutarazi Falls and the Bridge*

### Nyanga National Park







# Going Undersea In A Goan Village

BY ALLEN JAMES

*A visit to an aquarium, especially when in Goa and surrounded by beaches makes for an interesting experience.*

The charm of Goa lies within its serenity and picturesque views. It draws you in like a bee hypnotized by the Venus flytrap. Beaches and beers are staple when youngsters arrive, but a Goa trip with family promises unfamiliar ingredients that make for an interesting tale.

Every Goa trip has visits to the churches and forts that depict the heritage and history of this lovely land once ruled by the Portuguese. Home to several UNESCO World Heritage sites, a typical Goa itinerary consists of visits to churches and forts, where several gather to appreciate the art in the history. Beaches, shacks, and parties are the heart of the appeal of Goa and the city never sleeps but when you travel with protective and caring mothers, there is no road that leads to the heart.

The idea behind the trip was to explore and witness Goa from a different point of view. Amidst all the beautiful beaches, delicious cuisine, and buzzing market the most memorable experience was our visit to Abyss – The Underworld. Located in Nagao just 20 kms away from Panjim, the aquarium is the first of its kind in Goa.

Boasting of around 60 different species of fish and marine life and a wonderfully done studio that has beautiful colors and ambient lighting to enhance the viewing experience. Watching the nasty and fierce Piranha up close and a sting-ray flail about, eels swimming around as the attendant fed them was all part of an unexpected sight. There were fish that you could hold in your hand and we could hear dozens of people shrieking or screaming with fear as the fish moved about as they held them. Written next to every fish was their name, origin, and additional information.

The attendees too were well versed with the local ecology and species within the studio and were cordial and patient with the numerous questions that were thrown their way by children and adults, who were all mesmerized and in awe of the beauty of the blue.

The Abyss is truly a telling name for the aquarium as you immerse into a land of radiant colors, mystic shapes and sizes that cast you under a spell. Not everyone gets the opportunity to experience the secrets and beauty of the deep sea! Your typical Goa itinerary is incomplete without a visit here.



A section of the aquarium





# Life In The Big Apple

By Jessica Trivedi

For someone who had been living in the Big Apple for years, I had managed to explore the city quite a bit. Whether it's the best pizza place or rooftop bar or shopping hub, New York has it all if you're really willing to look for it. New York mainly has five boroughs: The Bronx, Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens and Staten Island.

They're all separated by rivers and connected by bridges or ferries. These boroughs are then further divided into different areas, some of them are considered posh and the others not so much.

I stayed in Manhattan for the first two years and it was a surreal experience. All the notable New York tourist destinations are located here. For example: The Grand Central Station is located in mid-Manhattan. There are numerous small Manhattan neighborhoods that exist, each with a distinctive mix of residents, a different cost of living, and a different range of experiences. There is never a shortage of things to do in Manhattan, which is convenient for those who work on the island.

Manhattan is the epitome of city life because of how well-connected and populous it is. Here I made some really beautiful memories, whether it was listening to the live music played by the street artists at the grand central station or going to Central Park on Sundays for family picnics.

Life in this region is particularly fast-paced and might seem like a constant cycle of work hard and play harder. After the first two years, my family and I moved to TriBeCa. TriBeCa, which formerly housed commercial warehouses, is now the location of lofts owned by celebrities. Why is clear to see. The area features a breathtaking view of the Hudson River on its western border, a number of opulent hotels and other accommodations, as well as famous restaurants like the Odeon, which gained notoriety thanks to the book Bright Lights, Big City. The Tribeca Film Festival, which takes place in the region every year and brings world premiere films to the city, is also located there.

Since it was close to Soho, I used to visit the place often with my mother on special occasions. Living in New York for so many years has made me realize quite a few things.

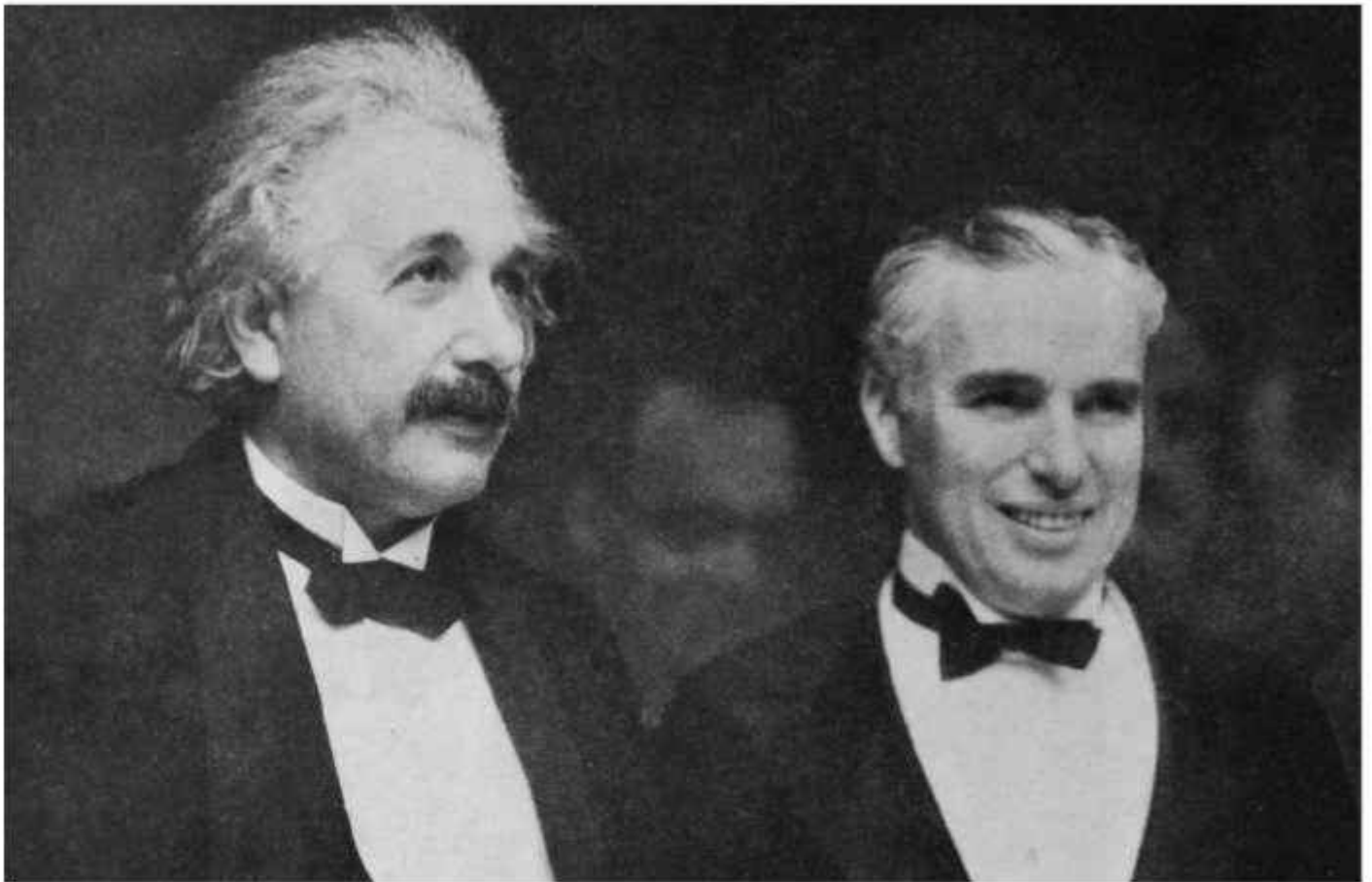


The Iconic Times Square In New York

People have all sorts of assumptions about the city and its people, most of which aren't true. My experience living there was more joyful than how people assume it would be, the people are busier but kind at heart and the city is so diverse at heart. I met people from all walks of life and it taught me about so many different cultures and traditions that people from all over the world follow. The city that never sleeps, the city that managed to take up so much space in my heart, the city housing some of the world's most renowned people and places, really shapes you as a person once you live there for a while. The incredible views, greenery, vast variety of tiny dogs and mouth-watering falafels really made my experience all the more enriching.







A picture of Elbert Einstein (L) and Charlie Chaplin from the premier of the film *City Lights*.

## Chaplin's World And Einsteinhaus

By Pratishtha Bagai

*It is great to explore Switzerland beyond its scenic beauty and visit the memorials of Charlie Chaplin and Albert Einstein, the geniuses who gave the world new perspectives, and take a closer look at their lives and works.*

“**W**hat I most admire about your art is your universality. You don't say a word, yet the world understands you!” said Einstein to Chaplin, to which he replied, “True. But your glory is even greater! The whole world admires you, even though they don't understand a word of what you say.”

A commonality between the two great men having this hilarious conversation, apart from their mutual admiration for one another and global fame, is their home, Switzerland. The legends have spent years living in the country. In honour of their lives, now, their homes have been converted into visitable museums.

### Manoir de Ban

Also referred to as Champ de Ban Estate Manor, the property was Sir Charlie Chaplin's last principal residence until his death on Christmas day of 1977.

He settled here in 1952 after being forced to leave America for his “communist sympathies” and pursued his self-imposed Swiss exile. He spent 25 “happy years” here with his wife, Lady Oona and eight children and even hosted a bunch of his friends from four corners of the globe, Marlon Brando and Truman Capote being two of them.

Located in the small wine-growing village of Corsier-sur-Vevey, on the banks of Lake Geneva, the 35-acre estate is surrounded by the mighty Swiss alps and the UNESCO world heritage site of Lavaux vineyards.



A picture of Manoir de Ban from the outside



Canadian museologist Yves Durand from Québec City, turned the estate into a hands-on testimonial to Chaplin's genius, called the Chaplin's World Museum. The museum opened on 17 April 2016 and incorporates over 4,000 square metres of exhibition space dedicated to the public life and career of Charlie Chaplin, as well as gives insights into his personal life.

Chaplin and Lady Oona still rest in Switzerland, buried in Vevey Cemetery.



*The grave of Chaplin and his wife Lady Oona in Vevey*

### Fun Fact

Visitors are surprised by a bathroom dedicated to Albert Einstein's statue sticking his tongue out in front of what appears to be a mirror and with formulas including  $E=mc^2$  written on the wall at the back. This recent addition to the museum on Charlie Chaplin's 40th death anniversary commemorates the great friendship the two contemporaries shared. In reality though, the mirror is only an illusion, a reflective glass conceals another statue and a wall with the formulas inverted (right side left) as a mirror image.



*Einstein's life size statue at the Chaplin's World*

### Einsteinhaus

Einstein's stay in Switzerland was shorter than Chaplin's but very productive. He lived on the second floor of a three-floor apartment in Bern with his wife Meliva Marić and their first son Hans Albert between 1903 to 1905 while working as a technical officer at the Federal Patent Office. The great physicist revolutionized our understanding of space and time as he wrote his theory of relativity here. Today, furnished in the style of Einstein's time, the apartment is open to tourists and documents young Einstein's life during his years in Bern while still working on his dissertation, holding a full-time job and helping to raise a family. The museum also highlights the most creative period of Einstein's scientific discovery, the year 1905.



*Exterior of Einsteinhaus in Bern*



*Author standing next to a statue of Einstein in Bern*



*Interior of Einsteinhaus in Bern*



# The Peculiar Winchester Mansion

BY EESHA JAVADEKAR

*The Winchester Mystery House, located around six miles (10 km) outside the city center, is visited by a large number of curious people practically every day of the year.*

The unofficial epicenter of Silicon Valley is San Jose, roughly an hour's drive south of San Francisco. San Jose is home to a large number of technology enterprises, and almost every one of my hundreds of visits there has been for a specialized technology conference. It's a lovely little city with great museums, green spaces, and dining options. However, the city's most popular landmark predates the impact of computers on San Jose's economy.

## The Winchester Mansion is an architectural wonder

In the year 1886, an eccentric woman by the name of Sarah Winchester left New Haven, Connecticut, and headed west to San Jose, California, in the hopes of beginning a new life. She started a minor remodeling job that would take 36 years and cost \$5.5 million, and the only reason it came to an end was because she passed away in 1922. She bought a little eight-room farmhouse and began the project.

The structure looks like a huge Victorian house from the exterior, complete with manicured gardens, fountains, and a steady stream of tour buses. It's lovely, but it won't blow your mind. However, the odd history of the building's construction and its peculiar interior are interesting.

By the time she was through, the Winchester Mansion had been transformed into a contemporary wonder, complete with indoor plumbing, several elevators, a warm shower, and central heating. It included approximately 160 rooms, including 40 beds, 10,000 windows, and even two basements in addition to the rest of its amenities. Obviously, this is not the only thing that sets the property apart from others on the market.

One of the 2,000 doors has a drop of eight feet to a kitchen sink, while another door has a drop of fifteen feet into shrubs in the garden below. Only few of the doors may be stepped through. There are more hidden tunnels than in the Chronicles of Narnia, there are staircases that ascend directly to the ceiling, and costly Tiffany stained-glass windows have been erected in locations where they will not get any natural light. A cabinet that, when opened, stretches across 30 different rooms in the home is a very peculiar and delightful treat.

When you first enter the House, the overwhelming sense of space that greets you will be the first thing that strikes you. However, it is not even close to being the most astonishing aspect of this attraction. Nobody really knows the reason



why Mrs. Winchester insisted on continuous renovations being made to her very big mansion. There are tales, it goes without saying.

## Narratives surrounding the house

The narrative that Mrs. Winchester was being tormented by the ghosts of people who had been slain by the Winchester rifle, which her late husband's firm had created, is the one that circulates the most. After the death of her husband, she saw a psychic who advised her that in order to dodge the ghosts, she would need to go to the west coast, purchase a property, and continue to construct continuously.

Some theories suggest that she believed that as soon as construction came to fruition, she would die, while other theories suggest that she built the house like a labyrinth in order to keep her supernatural tormentors at bay and lost in the many complexities of the building.

Both of these theories are speculative at best. According to this notion, in order to remain one stage ahead of them, she would switch bedrooms every night and navigate her own house in a way that was almost impossible to follow.



# Kashmir: Heartland For Scenic Beauty, Cinephiles



By Roshni Kumar

It was the end of spring in the year 2013 when my family decided to take their annual vacation to the scenic Kashmir Valley. This was going to be my first trip to Kashmir. I was filled with excitement to be visiting this paradise on earth. My family of four, comprising me at age of 11, my father, mother and my elder brother. We decided to make this trip to Kashmir by road.

The road trip was my mother's idea because she wanted to expose me to the outskirts and lush fields that the city could never offer. On the day of our trip we loaded our baggage in the car that mostly comprised of snacks, flasks filled with chai and other beverages as well as my mother's homemade stuffed parathas.

As the trip progressed me and my brother squabbled over the rights to use the aux cord. He obviously won due to his elder sibling privileges and I had to gracefully concede. As I looked out of the car window I noticed the landscape changing from a concrete jungle to lush soothing fields' clad with light yellow and bright orange flowers. The landscape became even more picturesque once we arrived at our destination. Here I could see the light and dark green hued hills that formed the valley. After reaching the hotel I stepped out of the car and felt the fresh air filling my lungs which was a welcome change from the city's polluted air.



The author on the bank of Lidder River in Pahalgam

The next day we started exploring the city and its popular touristy spots. En route we stopped at a small bakery for our breakfast. My mother, who is a Kashmiri, quickly connected with the locals and started conversing with them in Kashmiri. While relishing on my Kahwa tea and munching on their local bread called Girda I was mesmerized by the view that the Dal lake offered. We then proceeded to visit Budgam which is a famous tourist spot for its meadows and spring flowers.

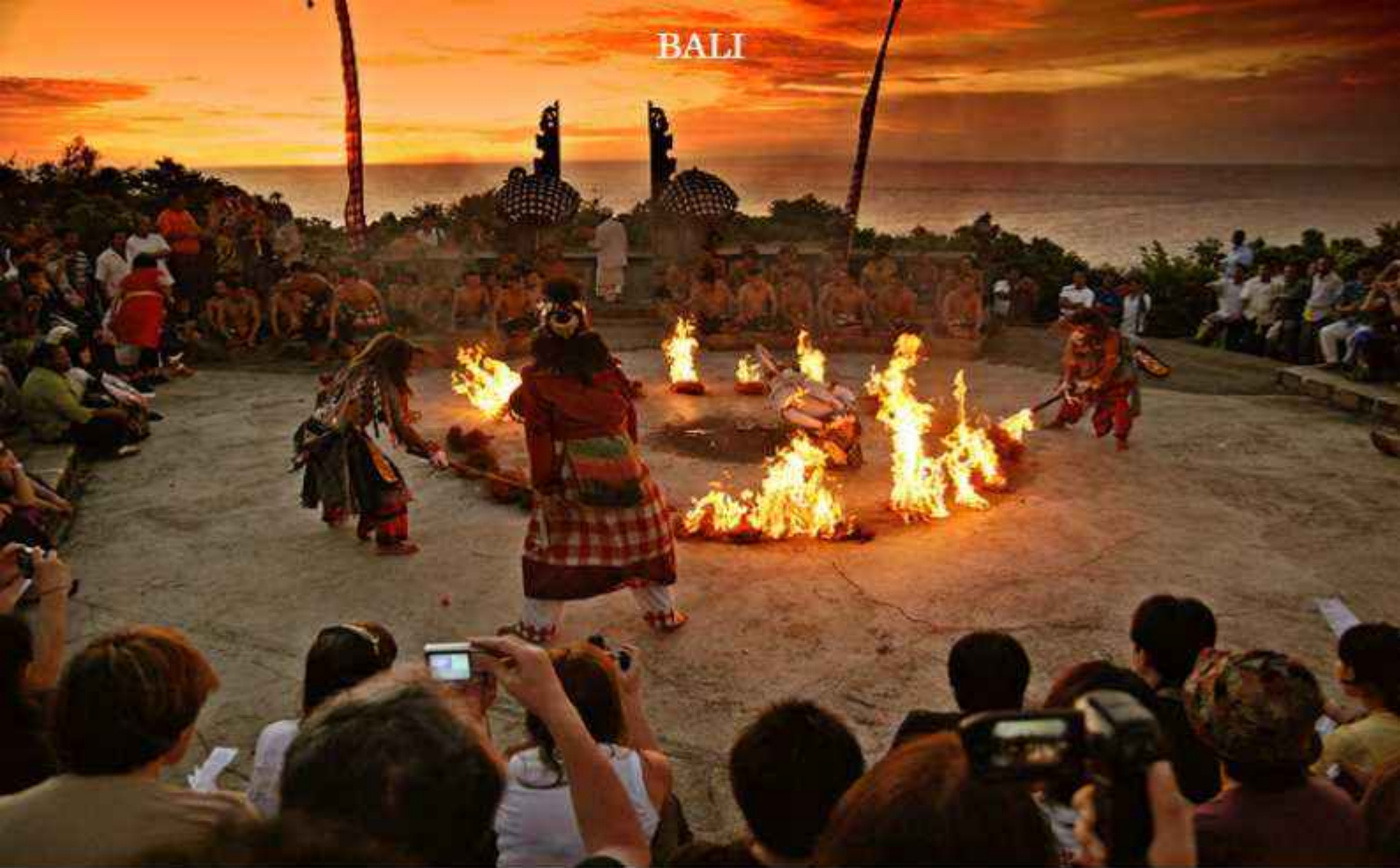
It was here that I met a bunch of inquisitive school children who took interest in me and called me over for a chat. On seeing them I was most impressed by their flushed rosy cheeks and fair skin. During the chat they were very interested to know about my way of life and clothes that I wore and why my head was not covered. In my interaction with them I inquired about the latest film that they had seen. They took a long pause and replied that *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* was the only film they had ever seen, as access to films in their households were generally restricted.



The author at Mansabal Lake with Kashmiri Students

They also asked me which was the latest film which I had watched and I responded by saying 'Yeh Jawani Hai Deewani'. They were confused as they had never even heard of it. They mentioned that watching films was never encouraged in their household. As an 11-year old this concept was not understood by me. However as I grew up I could understand and empathize with these girls. They also said they liked watching films and were waiting for the day cinema houses to be reopened in Srinagar so that they could see movies again.





# Selamat Datang di Bali (Welcome To Bali)

BY ARYA ZADE

*The petrichor of the rice terraces, diverse cultures, intense aroma of Kopi Luwak and exquisite scenery will make you fall in love as you explore the many elements of Bali, Indonesia.*

Bali, the renowned "Island of the Gods," stakes a serious claim to be paradise on earth with its rugged coastlines and sandy beaches, diverse landscape of hills and mountains, lush rice terraces, a magnificent backdrop of volcanic slopes and vibrant, intensely spiritual, and distinctive culture and draws visitors with its breath-taking natural splendour.

Bali is among the most visited island destinations and one that routinely wins travel accolades thanks to its world-class surfing and diving facilities, a sizable number of cultural, historical, and archaeological sites, and an immense selection of lodgings.

## White Water Rafting

Bali is known for its numerous adventure spots, but one of the most visited is the white water rafting along the Ayung river. The adventure started with a trek in the lush green forest of Ubud, where we had to climb down 500 steps. The

steps were a bit tiring and slippery, but the beautiful view around us made up for it.

While rafting along the river, the water currents were quite strong, but that elevated the fun. Along the Ayung river, there are many cave paintings and rock sculptures of the Ramayana. Along with the beautiful scenery and adrenaline-filled ride along the river, one could take the time to admire the immaculate artwork.

## Uluwatu Monkey Temple

One of the most well-known locations for those embarking on a cultural journey of the area is the Uluwatu temple, which offers a genuine glimpse into Balinese culture. It provides the most stunning background at sunset, perched atop a rocky outcrop about 70 metres above the roaring waves.

Balinese Hindus believe that Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva's combined powers merge here. Siva Rudra, the Balinese Hindu deity of all elements and facets of life in the world, is worshipped in Uluwatu Temple due to this belief. The temple is filled with monkeys. One such activity that emphasises Bali's close ties to India is the trance-inducing Indo-Balinese ritual dance known as Kecak. Kecak hypnotizes you with its strange sounds, and every time you think back on the experience, an excellent memory of the beats come to mind.



When you first enter the Batubulan dance stadium, you probably anticipate seeing yet another musical presentation of the well-known Hindu epic Ramayana. One has no clue how quickly this relatively straightforward dancing form can develop its own type of mesmerism.

Balinese culture is comparable to classical India's, but experiencing a live Kecak performance is a whole other experience. Behind an impenetrable curtain, a magnificent spectacle is revealed. On the stage, a circle of more than fifty men wearing traditional attire are seated. This chanting march is supposed to be led by as many as 150 men.



One performer narrates the story in both Balinese and Sanskrit throughout the performance. This theatrical play is based on The Ramayana, which is performed in some of Bali's most well-known temples. The story is also known as the Ramayana monkey chant. For instance, trance rites come to mind when Hanuman burns the stronghold. Hanuman receives a priest's benediction before beginning the fire dance.



Ritual chanting is heard in the background as this epic story is being told. The Kecak dance comes to a dramatic end when the sun sets, and the sky grows ominous in the background, showing the cheeky monkey setting the palace on fire. The event comes to a close as smouldering orange and crimson red flames burn in the stage's centre.

Kecak is an exorcism that induces trance and originated in Sanghyang in the early nineteenth century. It is a dance that embodies beauty, bravery, battle strategies, and a clear moral lesson.

It is beautiful to learn about Indian and Balinese cultures through this cultural event and to see a country's traditional dance. One will be amazed by the beautiful work of art that is in this Indo-Balinese dancing form. Every component, including the makeup, the artists, the writing, and the portrayal, conveys a story.



Hinduism is viewed from a distinctive perspective that combines traditional Balinese cultures' vibrant animism with ancient India's gods. When I was in Bali, this resulted in tremendous celebrations nearly every day, complete with continuous decoration, parading, and dancing that was publicly displayed to paying tourists. The villagers genuinely believed in the beliefs, and the festivities were much more extravagant when no tourists were around, as I realised when I ventured outside the visitor centres. Moreover, as I paused to look, I saw that at the northeast corner of every other house was a temple, roughly three metres square. It was there, adorned with well-carved geometric ornaments.

Kopi Luwak is one of the world's most expensive coffee and it's formed in feces. Or rather, it's created from coffee beans that the civet, a cat-like animal, partially digests and then excretes. The price of a cup can reach \$80 in the US.







# Bukhara: A Jewel On The Silk Route

By Ikshaa Dhodi

The Silk Route is a very prominent part of world history, and one of the stop locations on this route is Bukhara, Uzbekistan. It is also a centre for Islamic culture, it has multiple active and in-active mosques. Uzbekistan tourism is working very hard to promote tourism in Bukhara by introducing bullet trains and tours.

It is famous in recent years for its Bazaars, Madrassas and the food. The entire city is made of historical buildings, forts and stone roads. I, fortunately had the chance to explore Bukhara multiple times.

I lived in Uzbekistan for four years of my life, I had the opportunity to travel to smaller cities in Uzbekistan like Samarkant and Bukhara. No matter where I went, I always found myself comparing the beauty of Bukhara to everything. The city was home to the Emirate of Bukhara, Khanate of Bukhara, and Samanid Empire. The roads were made of stone, every building has a historic significance and all one could see were forts.

The Uzbek people are extremely engrossed in their culture. From their food to their clothes, everything is extremely beautiful. Considering the fact that Bukhara has become a tourist spot, they have a fashion show every night in one of the forts. Tourists can enjoy the Uzbek fashion show with authentic Uzbek food. (picture of me at the Uzbek fashion show) The fashion show has small stalls for shopping.

The Ark of Bukhara is the biggest fort in Bukhara, the fort is mostly empty from the inside beside from some shops and some tombs. Every road here has a story and there is a certain area in the fort where there are all the tombs, while no one can see the real tomb because they are underground, we can see the top and read the stories of the people who used to rule the area a few centuries ago.

Bukhara is also a centre for Islamic culture, they have many active and inactive mosques. People can enter the mosques that are inactive and see the structures that were made by rulers of Bukhara. There are multiple geomatically placed pillars inside the mosques, and there are beautiful wall sculptures everywhere. Mosques that are active, can only be visited by Muslim people who go and pray there.

They also have shops called "Bazor" under domes and inside the forts. People can buy authentic Uzbek clothes and other wooden toys from there. There are so many stories that are hidden behind these walls and behind the stone roads. People of Bukhara are very welcoming, they are very happy to tell the stories of Bukhara to the tourists and invite you to their house to have authentic Uzbek green tea and Bread. The stories of people staying here and the people before them is often left unheard and I feel grateful that I got to visit Bukhara multiple times, and I heard these unheard stories because they are indeed very beautiful and adds to the beauty of Bukhara.





# An Alaskan Excursion

By Aditi Iyer

*Alaska is a popular spot for seeing the breathtaking phenomenon of the Northern Lights or the Aurora Borealis.*

Crowds of people flock to the state during the summer, which is precisely what my sisters, friends, and I did, enriching my trip to America. We planned an impromptu 5-day trip to see the northern lights, as all of them were sick of their jobs. On the other hand, I was delighted to go on a fun trip. The monotony of attending online lectures (conducted back in India) in the middle of the night did not do wonders for my entertainment.

## The journey begins

We took a flight to Anchorage, the largest city in the state. We would've liked to travel by boat to Alaska as you can catch some of the most magnificent sites in the world. But our time crunch compelled us to catch the cheapest flight on the nightmare that is Spirit Airlines. A bumpy ride later, we were seated in the car we rented, a mammoth the size of a pickup truck and set on our journey to explore the pristine state.

We started towards our final destination, Fairbanks, a popular site for seeing the Northern Lights. Driving along the icy roads was much riskier than we had imagined. I lost control of the car for a few seconds but could safely manoeuvre the car to a rest stop just ahead. We all thanked our lucky stars and my obscure YouTube knowledge. My sister took over, and we continued on.

The drive was filled with incredible views, no matter where you looked. Majestic mountains were covered in a light powder of fresh snow in the distance, and lush green trees lined

the two-lane highway. We stopped by a lodge in the city of Juneau. We enjoyed various dishes, including the famous Alaskan salmon, freshly caught and grilled to perfection.

We wandered into a local park and observed grizzly bears from a distance, shouting and clamouring. Hence, they knew about our presence and didn't attack us. We passed by the Denali National Park, with clear blue water stretching out as far as the eye could see. The road to Fairbanks also took us through the city of North Pole, with Christmas decorations hung all year long. Grabbing festive-themed coffees, we continued on our journey.

## Reaching Fairbanks

Upon reaching Fairbanks, we took a short break and set off to see the one thing we came for the Northern Lights. It was well into the night, the clock striking 12 when we came by a cosy wooden lodge with large magnificent windows overlooking the valley. Many locals had mentioned that this was the perfect place to observe the phenomenon, with the KP index showing an activity level of 6- very high.

We were about to leave the lodge, satisfied by the beautiful star-studded skies and the lovely snippets of the northern lights, when my cousin exclaimed that the lights were dancing. We immediately returned to the viewing spot and saw a trail along which the lights moved, ebbing and flowing along the sky. It was beautiful enough to move us all to tears. After watching the fading wisps of the aurora borealis, we returned to our motel, reaching in time for breakfast.

The journey was filled with sights, a bump in the road, and delicious food- I had the Alaska trip I had hoped for. I even got to tick off one thing from my bucket list- seeing the beautiful Northern Lights with my own eyes.





# The Chocolate Hills

By Uzma Afreen

*The first picture that comes to mind while reminiscing about this place is a thick stack of dark chocolate bricks layered with crunchy roasted almonds.*

**S**piralling streets, green meadows hiding behind white clouds, lakes, lush pine forests, the strong aroma of natural oils and, of course, troops of monkeys flocking around, Kodaikanal has it all. Etymologically interpreted as "the gift of the forest", this place has much more to offer than the quintessential cool weather and scenic beauty.

The first picture that comes to mind while reminiscing about my trip to this place is a thick stack of dark chocolate bricks layered with crunchy roasted almonds.

## Sites to Visit

I visited the "Princess of Hills" in the summer of 2012. Ten years is way too long to remember the details however, the mystifying aromas and the addictive tastes of the place were too strong to fade.

We started our sightseeing by walking along the Coakers Walk, a kilometre long walkway, on the edge of the hill. The panoramic view of the vast stretch of valleys covered by a blanket of white clouds was breathtaking.

We spent the first day of our two-day long trip visiting the most recommended sites like the Kodaikanal Lake, spread across a huge circumference of almost five kilometres, the Pillars Rock, a pair of rocks standing tall like pillars and the

Guna Caves, named after the popular Kamal Hasan starrer film in 1991. Since entry to these caves is prohibited due to accidents, we just took a look at it from far. We saved the last day for the most exciting part- chocolates!

Walking through piles of chocolates, smelling the strong aroma of the beans was surreal.

Kodaikanal is one of the pioneers of chocolate manufacturing in India. Historically, the place was developed originally by the Americans. Apart from providing them refuge from the sweltering heat, it also attracted them due to the variety of plant species found here.

The cocoa plant was one such discovery that was unknown in India before. As a result, the cacao bean gained value in Kodaikanal even before the revolutionising of chocolate began. Thus, giving this hill station a seeming head start in the chocolate industry.

Today, the place is home to some of the biggest chocolate producing factories in India, namely the SV and SG cottage industries, and the Kodai chocolate factory. It is also home to a large number of small homemade chocolate factories that act as a huge tourist attraction. From the aromatic coffee beans to the refreshing fruity flavour to the crunchy nuts hidden beneath the thick layers of smooth chocolate, Kodaikanal gives you all.

You can end your trip with the multifaceted scent of the forest- a small bottle of eucalyptus oil.

IMAGE COURTESY: Silvershocky and Thomas Palle











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