



# Travel Links

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LENS VIGNETTE | LESSER KNOWN | THE WINE WORLD  
ECO FRIENDLY HOLIDAY | LURE OF SITONG | LUXORY STAY





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# Travel Links

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## COVER DESIGN

Lokesh

It's the time for Christmas and the theme for this month is celebrations. Enjoy reading how Christmas and New Year is celebrated in various parts of the world be it Turkey, Seychelles, Portugal or Sochi.

For a cover story we present Hoi An- the yellow story of Vietnam which more of an experience in itself than the destination. The former port city's melting-pot history is reflected in architecture, lanterns, wooden shop houses, temples and colonial French buildings. We have a solo travel journey of warm and welcoming Sri Lanka with breathtaking experiences of South coast and stay which is full of hospitality and world class cuisines. The country is worth the visit because of Idyllic weather, decent transport, promise of safety, English Language and religious diversity.

For lesser known, we have travel inputs on the luring city of Sittong. It's only about a 3 hour drive from Siliguri, across the hills, through winding roads, orange orchards. It is undisturbed beauty apart from the hustle and bustle of the modern world and one feels good getting lost amongst the pine and the birch, in the land of bird songs. Under Eco tourism also known as sustainable tourism, we have covered Nepal's practice of responsible eco-tourism to preserve flora, fauna and cultural heritage.

The reader's friendly sections which are the key to our content cannot to be missed out, The Lens Vignette for the vision delight, the foodie-goodie Club for Chocolate lovers without which any holiday is incomplete and most of all the love for Wines is expressed in The Wine world.

Enjoy reading and travel more. Stay Tuned.

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LURE OF SITTING



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# HOI AN – The Yellow City of Vietnam

RAHUL GUPTA



Straddled almost midway between the two far-flung ends - Hoi An is unmindful of the contradictory but co-existing truths in the annals of the history of Vietnam. Once caught between the twin arms of capitalism and communism, today it lives between its well-preserved past and the vibrant present, both creating magic that leaves you spellbound.

The temptation of being there and done that makes most tourists jump headlong in the two big commercialized cities of Ho Chi Minh and Hanoi. Flying over the beaches and yellowed rice fields, few realize what treasure lies below the clouds. Hoi An one of the most well preserved and now awarded the UNESCO World Heritage city tag is drawing more tourists than before and I happen to be one of them, jostling for my own place.

Having arrived overnight from Ho Chi Minh city (though I still prefer the old name Saigon), the day begins a little lazily on the beach resort of Da Nang. Our body was crying out for rest after having been consumed with too many of people, traffic, pollution of Saigon. Eager to get to Hoi An, a rented, mildly scratched red and black automatic Honda does the trick as we ride cautiously down the chaotic roads, zipping along the palm-fringed road and negotiating with ease the heavy traffic that stayed with us for a while. Once there, I felt that I had arrived somewhere exotic. The city by far is quite small, but as it turned out, it was one great adventure, which was very exhaustive considering the innumerable treasures it had to offer.

The first thing that greets you is silence, romantically wrapped in shades of yellow as you breathe the musky scent of incense. Solitary cyclist in the otherwise empty lanes, peddling between low height houses – the present seems to cut through the middle of history. With no fear of cars running you down, this city makes every pedestrian feel safe.

It is still early and we are hungry. Amidst the flying dust and sounds of the broom on the road, young schoolchildren rush past with bells on their bicycles as one can hear the chirping of the birds. It seems like one great morning symphony.



Finding the nearest café, we leave the order to a young waitress, who in any case was finding it difficult to understand what we were saying. In a few minutes, we are served food as I relish the sight of the morning sun spilling in a bowl full of Cao La. I can taste the orient and the occident in the yellow-tinged fat rice noodles, unique to the town of Hoi An. They say this signature noodle dish is the history of a city in a bowl and I am eager to explore the unique culinary tapestry of this ancient town.

Men in ao ba ba “(street pyjamas)” peddling empty rickshaws tempt us to hitch a ride, but we decide to walk traverse the labyrinth of this ancient town on our feet.

Taking umbrage under profusely flowering bougainvillea’s in reds and purple standing in a line along the sepia-tinted lanes; I catch a few notes of music slithering past the blue windows on yellow walls. The dreamy golden facades, watermarks on the ochre walls along with weather-beaten contrasts of blue and green are coming alive with the Vietnamese sun. Housing nearly 1000 ancient buildings, Hoi an embraces you with its mixed architecture – Chinese, colonial European and the very old Japanese.

My camera is eager to be engaged, as I stand transfixed between the overwhelming juxtaposition of the magic of light playing hide and seek on the ying-yang of the terra cotta tiles on the rooftops, casting its impressions on the ground with their silhouettes. There is a story in every angle, history in every detail and poetry in every movement.

The river road of Thuo Bon is slowly awakening, opening its arms to the rising sun as it marks its prominent presence in the landscape of the town. Finding a quiet coffee café on the riverbank, I decide to sit for a while to observe the activities of late morning. My imagination gets to the better of me as I try and visualize boats laden with merchandise sailing centuries ago to and fro from China making a stopover in the today’s fishing village somewhere where I am sitting. The remnants of old days and present-day eateries make an interesting and vibrant collage.



Ordering a ca phe, I decide to try the local Vietnamese take of tiramisu. It really was not my “cup of coffee” as I settled for a simpler version of sweet black coffee with condensed milk Ca Phe Sua Non. Coffee in Vietnam is one good example of how the locals absorbed the French influence and eventually tailored the ingredients with their own to create some great culinary delights.

Intimate experiences in a historic

setting are what Hoi An is all about. Being a focal point of trade Asia and Europe, one can find many cultural influences in this small town. After the revolution of 1600 ended, the Vietnamese and Chinese rebuilt the city whilst the Japanese side remained in ruins. The French colonization of Hoi An transformed itself to “Ville de Faifo”. The French- Indochina influences can be seen clearly in its colonial structures of the villas and other buildings in the south

side of the old town Walking through the underrated alleys, I find myself in front of a small shop lined with photographs of Hoi An, mostly black and white. There are a few that show Vietnamese people with their faces obscured wearing non la, the conical hats peddling sampans and canoes in deluged and submerged lanes of Hoi An. Intrigued, I walk over and to an old man sitting behind a glass table cleaning an antique-looking camera. Asking about these floods images, he shares his experience of the great flood of 1964. He lay trapped on the first floor of the building without any food or water but with great opportunities of documenting the tragedy and spirit of survival of the town. He said, “floods waters touch our doorstep almost every year but 1964 showers of rain were probably all years merged in one “.

The young boy who had taken iconic shots on a day when “heaven fell to earth”, by now had greyed just like these photographs. I am thankful to be on dry feet. Somewhere I had read “Hoi An is three months of misery, and nine months of sunshine”. Being there in between the suffocating heat and endless rain was timed perfectly, except that warning that echoed in the city of the forthcoming storm expected next day. For now, the sun was shining and the green moss on the yellow buildings had started to smile.

Recharged and rejuvenated, I am ready for the wooden Chinese temples, Japanese merchant houses, and the yellow, which is turning mustard as the sun climbs on top of my head. The influence of sea and spice seem to come alive in the city, which was once part of the spice route and a trading stop.

Strangely I was hungry again and decided to take a break from the lemon-coloured walls and the streaking sunshine. Finding myself a café next to the old Japanese bridge, an iconic structure constructed in the 16th century, this bridge connected the Japanese community with the Chinese quarters. I decide to revisit the bridge when the lights come on.

But for now, I am hungry and tired and could do with some good food. Settling for an extended stay at the café, I decided to go slow and order a bowl of “pho”. Soon enough, a steaming bowl is sitting







before me as I close my eyes and inhale deeply the aroma of ginger, coriander and spring onions. Thick rice flat noodles lie interspersed with meat strips and dotted with the greens, the edges of red inside the bowl stand out in utter contrast. Savouring the National dish of Vietnam slowly, the tiredness seems to be ebbing away from my limbs.

It is tempting to try more of delicious French-influenced dishes and settle on “bánh mì” as the main course. The aromatic juicy stir-fried pork tossed with a handful of fresh herbs, lemongrass and fried rice is like a small culinary celebration on my table. The French got the baguettes, which carries a combination of Vietnamese penchant for green herbs and raw vegetables combined with the French influences of meat and pâté.

That is one good thing about being in Hoi An – walk – eat, walk – eat and you could go on as long as you like. This seemed to be the perfect place to do both, back to back.

I try to find my way to the main market through the banana pancake carts and swarms of tourists who seem to have suddenly swooped in the town. From the quieter sojourn, I suddenly find myself engulfed with sights, sounds and smell of endless lines of spices, raw meat and tables laden with fruits. Live ducks quacking, bargaining voices, fragrant herbs, baskets laden with yellow and orange marigolds – smiles, shouts and laughter, the soul of the town lay bare, here in the central market. Holding bags of fruits and spices, I make a quick exit from the market madness.

There is something that happens at almost every corner of the old town. I catch glimpses of girl students. They come in small swarms of white, a few walking and some cycling, their dark hair curled up under the conical hat. If I had to single out one image from the memory lane of Hoi An, it would be this young girl dressed in ao dai who slipped so silently in my camera frame. The white moving so slowly against the cracked, peeling yellow wall, the square

of her shoulders, geometric shape of her hat and the fluid line of her ao dai – all fall as a pool of reflection in the river, merging the past and present, an allegory of melancholy.

“How much”? - The almost hysterical high-pitched question breaks my reverie of thoughts as I see a young lady showing a photograph of a bridal dress inside a tailor shop. It is then it dawns on me that this city is full of talents, tailoring being a very important one. Hoi An tailors, who can replicate, stitch anything in less than two days record time at less than one fourth the price.

It is then I realize that this ancient city is a haven for couture conscious tourists. Having little interest in getting suits stitched, I take a quick bow and find myself back in a *recherche* alley where a solitary cat looks up at me questioningly.

Walking through the new streets, I duck in the blue and white ateliers those house museums, cafes and artist workshops. This section of the city offers a different glimpse of history where ancient houses open their doors and I feel as I am entering a different world. Old books, pottery, different works of art on display; one just cannot enough.

By now the darkness has started to descend as the boats light up casting their hues in the river. A few floating candles sail past me as the silk lanterns that dot the city start awakening in their own rhapsody of colours.

It feels that time has stopped except for the spiralling smoke of cigarettes, laced with the strong aroma of coffee; conversations that sound peppy start to fill the streets. Finding myself a plastic chair at a café situated amidst a row of French colonial houses, I have a cold Vietnamese beer.

By now the lanterns have begun their gypsy dance against an inking sky. The lazy rivers lined with merchant houses are all lit up. I decided to revisit the Japanese bridge to take a night shot and find myself lucky to not have tourists around. Jealous, I am for not having enough time in this city and blame myself for underrating Hoi



An and not giving it the appreciation and reverence it deserves. The stars above seduce my senses - a timeless city that has not moved on continues to celebrate its cultures and traditions. It beckons me to surrender to its poetic charm.

I also knew that the road with its dreadful traffic to Da Nang was waiting for me. In this pause, I remain and in this pause, I leave, knowing that I have to return, to honour the living history of Hoi An. 🇻🇳





# Warm and Welcoming- Sri Lanka

BY PAYAL

The terrorist attacks earlier this year in Colombo had hit The Tourism industry of Sri Lanka hard. The country is trying hard to revive it back. So I decided to support the beautiful country by revisiting there once again as a SOLO Traveller and here is my take on it.

After reaching the Airport I soon realized, is not just an airport, it's yet another pulse, yet another story, yet another tale to tell. The hustle bustle, the anxiety, the confusion, one doesn't get to see the calmness, till the time one crosses the security check.

On being landed in the Buddha's Land, the drive from the Airport till Bentota Hotel, the highway made me feel that I am in the south of India, a combination of Kerala, Coorg and Goa I guess. It was a beautiful, smooth highway, with minimal and disciplined traffic. I felt am in a very familiar 'unfamiliar Zone'.

Reached my Hotel The Centara Ceysands Resort and spa- Oh what a lovely location and such a scenic view. One needs to cross the River by a boat to reach the Hotel. The hotel's location is ideal which the Bentota beach on the other is in the middle of river on one end. It felt like a paradise.

In room dining experience was one of the best as lovely and extremely delicious plate of food arrived when I was down and out with the long travel. The chef took care my personal choices and I had one of the best coconut Panna-cotta with a poached peach which reminded me of master chef Australia. The taste of deliciousness will remain with me for a long time.

Next day I went out to explore the south coast and I took the Matara highway. My first stop was The Mirissa Island. It is a very popular beach with deep blue waters and blue whales, often called a blue beach. My eyes were gazed for a long time at the waving shore saying hello to me. I remember I stood still for a long



time trying to capture the beauty in heart forever. I could not peel my eyes away from dreamy thick palms. It's an Island spoilt for places to eat and grab a drink. The Island is a good host to a vibrant and active night life with beach parties that go on from dusk till dawn. With a golden sandy stretches meeting the shoreline, the seaside activities are for everyone, both young and old. After spending some time there I headed for the Weligama bay beach which is very famous for surfing between the sparkling seas, smiling locals, sweeping palms and abundant ocean life there are spectacular surf breaks that range from punchy reef breaks and rolling barrels to flowing beginner waves. Weligama bay is known by many as a beach for beginners'. Many locals and visitors have begun their surfing career right amongst these gentle beach breaks. After spending some time there I made my way to the lively beaches of Hikkaduwa and Unawatuna, the latter being voted as one of the best 10 beaches in the world by Discovery Channel and National geographic too. The entire beach experience was enough to keep my soul fulfilled for a long time.

As hungry as I was to let my feet ache for more, my eyes searching for more, I headed for The Galle Road.

What actually stole my heart was The Hotel Amangalla on Galle Road, No it was not a luxury, it was beyond the Luxury, it was a royalty. I could feel, touch relive the moments of extravagance of Dutch times. The property still holds the same antique furniture which is more than 150 years old made from teak wood. The reins of the Dutch culture, the Dutch Church (built in 1755), the Museum. Galle is a vibrant city that embraces its ancient culture and colonial past. Galle is famous for its fortifications. Perhaps the best example of the South Asian fortified city built by Europeans, the fort is remarkable collection of structures and culture which date back though the centuries. The city was the main port for over 200 years following the construction of fort in the 17th century.

The driver then took me the famous Buddha statue which was made in memory







for the loss of lives when the country was hit with the cyclone in 2004. Before that the country did not hear the word cyclone as told by the locals there. I did get a lot of opportunity to have conversations with the locals there who I felt majorly were humble, polite, low level of income group yet very peaceful and hopeful and happy with the new govt. being formed.

I very much wanted to enjoy my stay in the Resort which in one of the most ideal locations as the name Centara suggests 'central water'. It is a Thai chain of hotels with interiors of Sri Lankan articulate Batik decoration. Entwining of the heritage can be seen in the resort with the focus on maintaining the natural green surroundings.

My room was river facing view and the Morning sun shining through the ripples of the water as if the water is shining through is enough to keep you calm peaceful, happy and sums up the reason for a Solo Journey. Chirpy sound of birds, occasional sound of





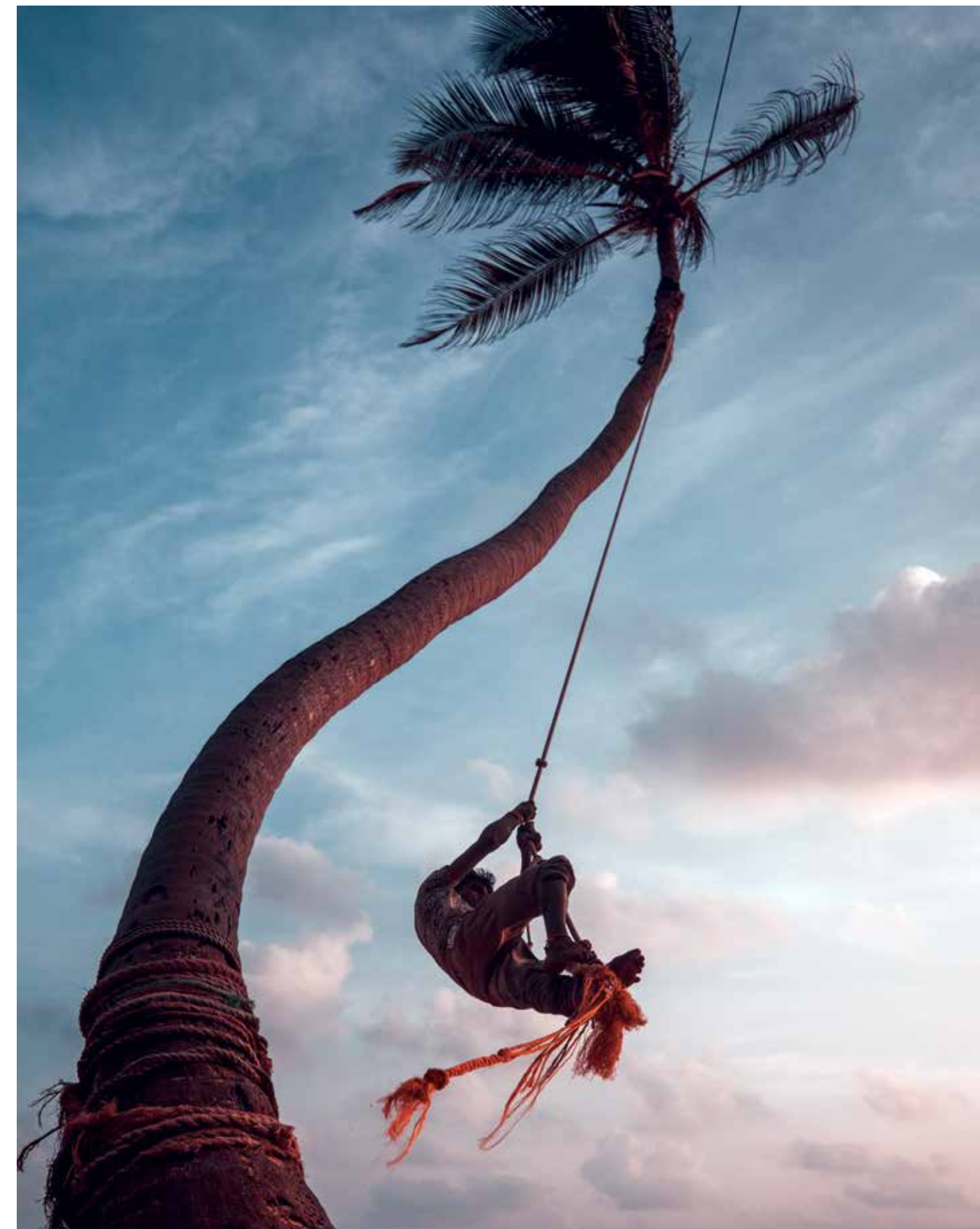


the boat engine, flute humming somewhere far away reminds us of the moving life. The silent sound of the ripples had long conversations with me.

The evenings in the resort were filled with enjoying live music, the local bear, all kinds of cuisines, swim, spa, activities if interested. It is enough to keep one occupied the way one wants to be.

My beach walk on the Bentota beach just outside the hotel was very memorable one as the waters were crystal clear, I being an early riser gave me a chance to experience the sunrise and the sunshine colours merging with waves gave me the imagination of the orange waves far away, an amalgamation of colours of the sky. The dancing waves gave the glimpses of occasional whales dancing somewhere far away. It is a no disturbing beach where no sellers, no commercialization, just plain and simple ocean to sink in and soak yourself in the wet sand.

The local cuisine journey began with Thambili which is the orange coconut often







called the king coconut to quench one's thirst. Sri Lanka also boasts of around 22 varieties of bananas, local cuisines, one could enjoy the string hoppers which is the compressed rice noodles, hoppers which is similar to our very own dosa. Since the country is a global tourist destination, there is a very wide variety of food culture and choices from one of the best sea foods, Mediterranean, Thai, Japanese, Europeans, Grilled cuisines, Asian cuisines and also Indian. The food choices spoil you to the core and palate perpetual hungry.

The country also boasts of some of the best semiprecious stones the very special blue moon stone which the locals tell me are to be found only in their country. Got the glimpse of the mine factory and how the stones are extracted was the experience worth noticing and remembering.

The Brief Garden- Geoffrey Mannin Bawa's work, really motivated me to look closely. I was told by the caretaker that Bawa was blind for the last 10 years of his life. He explored modernism and its cultural implications, created a unique

style of design which had a lasting impact on architects across the world. He was one of the original proponents of Tropical Modernization. Some of the best architectural photographs in Sri Lanka and around the world have created iconic images of Bawa's buildings.

#### COLOMBO-

The Hotel Kingsbury was a good one, upgraded me to the executive lounge, gave me a concierge and had a special lounge for personal morning breakfast, personal check in, check out facility, unlimited

access to the evening snacks with the wide choices of drinks to choose from. Another personal attention to the details the Hotel provides are the description pillows to suits your needs. They have the Organic, hug, latex and Kapok pillows to choose from. The hotel has a good spa centre and I enjoyed my Thai spa there with well trained staff. Despite my continuous cultural hunger, Colombo is vibrant and full of ideas. I asked the local to show their Colombo. From a home cooked meal to vintage jewelers, Colpetty Market





to a seaside bar and the journeys that accompany you are second to none. My most preferred watch out was the Dutch hospital which is now a shopping complex however the Dutch architecture is still maintained. Also took time to visit a few temples and the independent square which is symbol of country's freedom in 1948.

### ***The summary about Sri Lanka and reasons to visit the place:***

**Idyllic weather**

**Decent transport**

**Promise of safety**

**English Language**

**Religious diversity**

I would say people of the country are warm and humble, economy poor yet hopeful and developing at peace and happy, good highways, very positive for the new government and hopes high. Last but not the least, if you are a casino lover, there is pliant to offer to get your adreline

pumping. The magic is different for everyone, so wild, so pristine, so spiritual, so loving, so delicious, so magical, so fierce, so bold so unforgettable all at the same time. So Sri Lanka. 🇱🇰

### ***Tips***

Solo travel doesn't mean a stupid traveler, be connected with your family and friends by having a local SIM. Be aware of the maps and the routes taken. Stay connected.

Easy wardrobe, easy dry clothes, comfortable shoes, the less is more. Travel light. It is safe and sound, and one can travel without any inhibitions and fear. Colombo has taken full measures on the security front too.

***By and large, a safe country to be on your own. 🇱🇰***





# The Essential SOLO TRIP TO THE LAND OF MERLION

SRISHTI VERMA

Have you watched the movie ‘Love, Actually’? The opening scene at Heathrow Airport had stayed in my mind, and I expected a similar experience when I returned, only to come back to a rainy Monday morning, with an exam scheduled three hours after the landing, sleep-deprived, and carrying new skills in my arsenal.

Singapore. A crazy, terrific, and unforgettable trip. As it happened, I travelled to the city-state located at Malay Peninsula’s southern tip in April. The equatorial climate meant humidity and high temperatures all day long, with frequent bouts of rain throughout the day. One of the busiest ports in the world owing to its proximity to the Strait of Malacca, Singapore became an independent state in 1965. It has a history of British colonisation, and on August 09, 1965, it seceded the Federation of Malaysia to become independent. The population today comprises of Chinese, Malays, and Indians.

I had a morning flight. Wide awake throughout the fly time, I read my novel, watched a few episodes of a TV show, and could not resist being in awe of the relief features underneath. The mountains with their snow caps, rivers meandering like a child’s painting and the Sun playing hide and seek with the clouds, isn’t the nature full of beauty? After the immigration at Changi Airport, I went to the hotel on Nanson Road, a short cab-ride away. With the Singapore River at the front and Mass Rapid Transit station close by, the Nanson Road houses many hotels and restaurants,

and a 7-Eleven convenience store.

The next day was exciting. I went to Sentosa Island. Children, their parents, and an old couple from Canada were running inside the premises to reach Universal Studios. I was transported to a different world as Transformers, Minions, Elmo from Sesame Street, Shrek and Princess Fiona took my breath away. Universal Studios Singapore opened in 2011 and has been a significant centre of attraction for one and all. The tickets are priced dearly but are indeed worth the experience.

Of the roller coasters featured here, the one on ‘Revenge of Mummy’ is the most thrilling. The Transformers themed rides are visible as you enter, and are a must-do for all adrenaline rush lovers. Meet and Greet your favourite characters when here, in addition to attending live shows. You can meet Marilyn Monroe, Charlie Chaplin, Minions, Frankenstein’s monster, Betty Boop, Master Ping Xiao Po from Kung Fu Panda, and so many others. I loved the water show hosted in The Lost World zone, where gravity-defying stunts were performed along with occasional drenching. I hope you remember Jurassic Park; you can get up, close and personal with the dinos in Jurassic Park Rapids Adventure in a white-water circular raft. Then there’s Madagascar zone and Steven Spielberg’s ‘Lights Camera Action’ show, not to be missed attractions. And, do keep your schedule flexible to attend the street parade, it is unforgettably fun.

If you are at Sentosa, visit the S.E.A. Aquarium. It houses over 100,000 marine animals, and you can get experience



of diving too. It is tranquil to get lost in admiring the magnificence that the sea holds for us. Heads up, literally and figuratively, as one looks at sharks crossing overhead. It is exhilarating; it is one of its kind. What else, Sentosa has the Palawan Beach, which has the famed ‘Southernmost

point of continental Asia.’ You need to cross a suspension bridge from Palawan Beach to reach Palawan Island, and click pictures next to the signage. The sign is beautiful, the place around is charming, and the factual matter is debated, giving Tanjung Piai in Malaysia ‘the southernmost point

of Asia’ tag. There is Fort Siloso close by, which has World War 2 memorabilia- there are guns, tunnels, military structures, and video documentaries. There is a skywalk too. It is a military museum open to the public for free.

Then there’s the Trick Eye Museum. Before you reach here, download the official app to your phone and then march in to click 3D pictures on your device- you could be dancing in the rain with a handsome gentleman, or in the company of a polar bear out to hunt and satiate thirst. Do not miss the floor either, for the Trick Eye Museum has many tricks up its sleeve. From bridge crossings to alligators, and rooms which shift upside down, the museum is an interestingly designed space.

It was dark when I exited the museum, and a helpful official suggested that I stay a few more minutes to attend the ‘crane dance.’ Machines turn into birds in love

as the spectacular performance is put up by the cranes. A light and water show, depicting how two machines meet and ascend into real birds, I am glad I did not miss it. Arrive 20-30 minutes before the show begins to secure a seat with a clear view. It is a daily performance at 2000 hrs.

The next day, I visited The Merlion, official mascot of Singapore, located at the Merlion Park. Walk to the park from the Raffles Place MRT station, and get ready to pose and click as you stand atop the bridge on Singapore River, with Marina Bay Sands Hotel, the Float (floating football ground) and Singapore flyer at front, and hotels and office buildings on the side. The 8.6m tall statue has the form of half a lion, half a fish, and sprouts water from its mouth. There is one smaller statue present behind the original one.

That was followed by shopping on Orchard Street, accessible by the MRT. There’s Burberry, Bulgari, Chanel, Louis Vuitton, Hermès, and many other upscale stores here, in addition to departmental stores and food outlets. A short walk away was the Far East Plaza, where I went shopping and lunch. Thanks to the ladies I met in the elevator who suggested Puncak Restaurant, I could eat to my heart’s delight. A Malaysian mother and her two little kids sat next to me, and when I told her about the kind of food I wanted to eat, she suggested me to go with curry chicken. Delicious beyond words, the meal was complete with the restaurant owners’ sweet words and generous guide to travel. Uncle, aunty, their daughter, all talked to me and suggested where to travel, how to reach there, our families et al. When the spices hit the right note, and I started coughing, aunty quickly offered me her beer to soothe, which I humbly denied being a teetotaler. She gave me some lime water then and fed me too. I video called my mumma, who back home was worried if her puttar had eaten something, and was glad to know that I had my tummy full. Mothers, they never stop worrying about the food, right?

Next on the itinerary was the Night Safari, the world’s first nocturnal zoo. It is an open-air zoo set amidst a tropical forest, where animals roam free and can be observed in their habitat. There are 7





geographical zones present within which can be explored on foot or in a tram. The lights are dim enough not to disturb the behaviour of the animals. From tigers and Indian rhinoceros to Asian elephants and pangolins, over a thousand animals from 120 species are present here, separated from humans by natural barriers instead of cages. ‘Creatures of the Night’ show is a must-attend, spanning about 30 minutes. There are civets, otters, snakes, and owls, among many other animals. Do not use the flashlight of your cameras here, it disturbs the animals. Yet another show I attended was the Thumbuakar Performance at the entrance. It’s a fire show, attuned to the beats of jungle drum, as one gets wowed by the fire-throwing skills of the pyro warriors.

I reached the hotel at around 2300 hrs, and was glad to see the place lively and peppy. There are designated places to drink and smoke. As a solo traveler, I had my concerns which vanished into thin air as I helped myself to some sea food while my watch struck midnight. I talked to other travellers who suggested that I try the Singapore Cruise and Jurong Bird Park. I

walked to the Clarke Quay; mesmerising lights danced on the waters as a river cruise was being conducted on it.

The next morning’s clear sky altered the plan a little. So, I hopped into a capsule of the giant observatory wheel for a 360-degree view from Singapore Flyer. It felt slow at first, but that thought swiftly transformed into a relaxed “ooh” as my eyes and mind eased over the splendid panoramic views. 28 capsules, with a maximum capacity of 28 persons, is a good luck charm in Feng Shui. The giant wheel is 165 m high and soothes your senses like no other. It is enchanting how simple things feel when close to us, and are a marvel when we look at them from a height. The atrium below houses a rainforest, where a pond and cascading waters fuse to give a lush green appearance.

Walk out of the flyer towards the Marina Bay Sands Hotel, and be greeted by the Gardens by the Bay. A nature park, it comprises of 3 waterfront gardens- Bay South, Bay East, and Bay Central. The world’s largest glass greenhouse is here at Flower Dome. There are two cooled conservatories- Flower Dome and Cloud

Forest. Rainwater is collected from the surface and circulated in the cooling system connected to the Supertrees. The latter is used to vent hot air and cool the circulated water. These Supertrees are home to another aspect, which I shall talk about later. The Lost World, the Cloud Mountain, Children’s Garden, and various Horticultural themed gardens are present



here. Take a full day to explore the gardens well; there’s so much learn and admire, not to forget, the architectural marvel that the place is.

Back to the Supertrees. You remember Super Mario and its theme song? Dear reader, walk the OCBC Skyway, take in the views around, enjoy that feeling. Come down and lay on the grass. It’s evening, it’s growing dark, and you are all set for an experience you won’t forget. “When the night falls, be enchanted as the vertical gardens come alive,” says the host. At 1945 hrs and 2045 hrs each night, the Supertrees tell a different story. There is a light and sound show, called the ‘Garden Rhapsody,’ to the tunes of Super Mario and other popular music. If you do not want to pay for the Skyway, you can still enjoy the light and sound show. Walk into the gardens timely and take a seat on the ground, it’s free. I remember being spellbound during the first show, so I attended the second one as well to make a video. I lay under the star-studded sky, letting go of every fragment of worry, and enjoyed the show to the fullest.

I had to visit the Buddha Tooth Relic Temple and Museum the next morning. The temple is 5 storeyed, and the Buddha Mandala has inspired the building’s design. The third floor has revered artefacts, bone and tongue relics, and the fourth floor has the tooth. These relics have been recovered from the funeral pyre of Buddha in Kushinagar, India. There are a hundred



Buddha statues in the Hundred Dragon Hall. Close to the temple is Singapore’s Chinatown. Chinatown has a rich heritage displayed proudly. Beautiful lanterns sway overhead, as souvenirs, clothes, postcards, fridge stamps, food items, among many other things, can be bought from the street market. Sri Mariamman Temple is present in Chinatown, too, made in reverence of Goddess Mariamman, the deity of health and protection.

I had my flight scheduled late into the night and was yet to tick off a suggested place- Bugis Street. Name something you want to buy, and you will find it here. What more, you can bargain for the prices. Do keep your valuables safe here, essentially. The walking had made me hungry, so I ate some sausages at a food stall. Delicious food for a dollar! I wanted to buy something from Orchard Street, so I went there again. A bout of shopping later, and evening drawing close, I went to Puncak restaurant again, and this time, aunty and her daughter were present. They asked me to sit close to them and suggested I eat Honeydew chicken. Good food is marvellous! We talked, we ate, and they taught me how to eat chicken with chopsticks. I also had sweet and sour chicken; they packed me some as a goodwill gesture. God bless those welcoming souls!

I landed in Delhi on Monday, a rainy morning, and had my exam in three hours. Dad had come to pick me up at the airport. I expected something like a ‘Love, Actually’ moment, only to be welcomed much more warmly and lovingly. And how would I forget my dad hugging me tight and asking if I had a good time! I am grateful, that was one of the best weeks I have spent. I learnt a lot about Singapore, the culture, communicated with individuals from various nations, explored the place, and had a gastronomical adventure. People were helpful, and they tried to put me at ease. Visit Singapore, for the culture, the food, the architecture, and, most of all, people. Happy travelling to you! 🇮🇳



**SRISHTI VERMA**





# Switzerland

as **India's** top snow destination of choice  
among **59%** of Indian **Snow Holiday Goers**

Indian travellers are getting more diverse, adventurous, experimental and are increasingly looking at snow holidays in addition to summer vacations. Switzerland is an aspirational and preferred destination for Indian tourists owing to a plethora of options available across seasons and for varied age groups. Winter sports has witnessed a rise in demand among younger segments with travellers including snow activities in their itineraries. Club Med has unveiled interesting travel patterns of Indians who usually prefer vacationing with family and are highly influenced by friends' and family's recommendations when deciding on a snow holiday destination.

Below are India specific key findings from the APAC Snow Brand Study 2019:

***India holds the highest percentage of snow holiday goers in APAC who enjoy snow sports***

Snowboarding and skiing in India are fairly popular winter sports; Saint-Moritz Roi Soleil in Switzerland, Cervinia in Italy and Les Deux Alpes in France are few destinations that attract skiers of all cadre or learn a lesson or two at the world class Club Med resorts here. The survey revealed that snow holiday goers from India are serious about snow sports, with India holding the highest percentage i.e. 75% of snow holiday vacationers in APAC that enjoy skiing and snowboarding.

***India tops the list in travellers who are highly influenced by friends and family when selecting a snow holiday destination***

Friends and relatives have been identified as organic image formation agents and word-of-mouth information is one of the most relied upon sources for destination selection. The study indicates that India has the highest number of travellers at 55% who are influenced by friends' and family's recommendations when deciding on a snow holiday destination.

***Switzerland reigns as India's snow holiday destination of choice***



The survey shows that snow holiday goers from India prefer a European snow vacation as compared to staying in the region. Over 90% of travellers from India (96%), Indonesia (97%), Thailand (93%) and China (90%) are looking to plan a European snow holiday in the next three years. Switzerland has emerged as the top destination of choice for Indians with 59% of Indian snow holiday goers indicating Switzerland as their next preferred snow holiday country. Winter or summer, the Swiss Alps are ideal for family holidays be they for winter sports or a summer experience.

***Indian snow holiday goers prefer travelling with a larger family circle as compared to other APAC regions***

When it comes to travelling, Indians are the most family-oriented globally and select destinations that offer fun activities for all age groups. The preference leans towards exploring new destinations as a group or with family and not as much as a solo traveller. According to the study, 27% of Indian snow holiday goers prefer travelling with a larger family circle comprising of three generations, much higher than the APAC average of 18%.

***Snow holiday goers are chic and affluent, and prioritize creating family moments***

About three-quarters of snow holiday goers prefer to travel in style, with 80% willing to pay a premium for comfort. With the target audience being millennial-dominated and 92% of them were found to be family-oriented.

***Travellers are looking to longer stays and more frequent visits***

Snow holiday goers prefer longer stays to fully enjoy the snow holiday experience, with close to 70% agreeing that at least one week is needed to fully experience all that snow holidays have to offer. The evergreen appeal of snow holidays also keeps travellers coming back for more, with 75% going on a snow holiday at least once every two years. 🇮🇳





# Explore **Europe's** hidden holiday destination of **Costa Brava** in Spain with V.R. Costa Brava



**T**he Costa Brava is a coastal region of Catalonia in northeastern Spain known for its virgin beaches and bays against the scenic backdrop of heavily wooded hills. One of the most stunning coastlines in the country, this unexplored region is only a 2-hour drive from Catalonia's culture-soaked capital of Barcelona and just a short distance away from some incredible ski resorts. Here's what you must see with V.R. Costa Brava, a destination management firm that provides immersive local and bespoke experiences in Costa Brava:

**Girona** - the Largest city of Northern Catalonia region, Girona has museums, galleries, Gothic churches, and 16 restaurants which have a total of 20 Michelin stars making it the highest Michelin star per capita ratio in the world, ahead of Paris, Rome or London. Walk along its ancient fortress walls with breathtaking views, lose yourself in the splendor of the wonderfully preserved Jewish Quarter and marvel at the Arab baths dating back to the 11th and 12th centuries. The impressive Cathedral of Girona is a key attraction with Games of Thrones being filmed here!

**Empuriabrava** - Empuriabrava, the Venice of Spain is located on the coast of the Bay of Roses. Sporting nearly 24 km of canals surrounded by beautiful mansions

and villas and 5,000 private jetties, Empuriabrava is the largest residential marina in the world. One of the best skydiving zones in the world, opt for a sunset skydive ticking off the most scenic experience of a lifetime!

**Peralada** - The village of Peralada is one of the historical centers of Costa Brava known for its architectural heritage coupled with tourist-friendly activities like golf, casino, horse riding, cycle touring and world-class gastronomy. V.R. Costa Brava offers an opportunity to stay at the 11th century Peralada Castle wherein couples can enjoy the grandeur and soak in the romance of medieval luxury!

**Roses** - The greatest attraction of Roses is the high number and quality of beaches, the hiking routes and picturesque hidden coves in its surroundings. Water lovers can enjoy kayaking, diving, snorkeling, kitesurfing or sailing. The town also has a rich historical heritage which can be found in La Ciudadela military fortress and Trinidad Castle built in the 16th century. Explore the natural beauty in the two important parks of Catalonia around Roses - the Cabo de Creus park and Aiguamolls del Empordà (Marismas del Ampurdán) and dine at the Michelin starred restaurants, La Llar and Els Brancs

**Cadaques** - A picturesque coastal town with a bohemian ambiance, Cadaques is

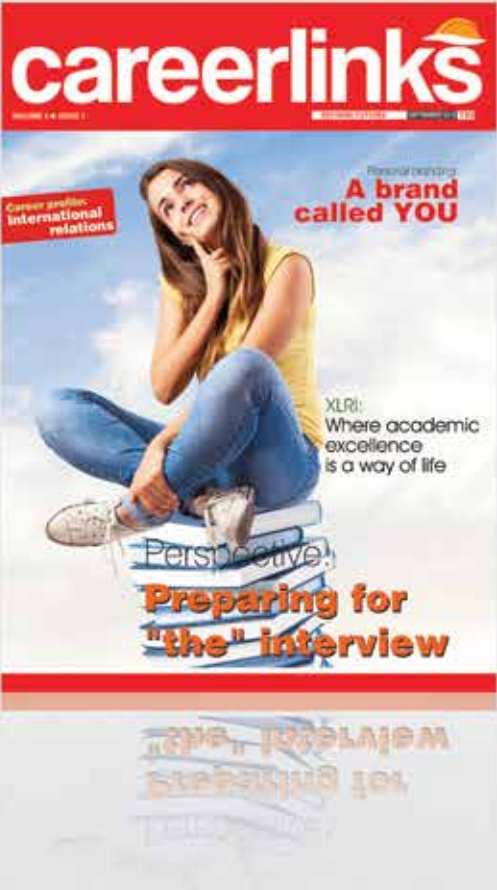
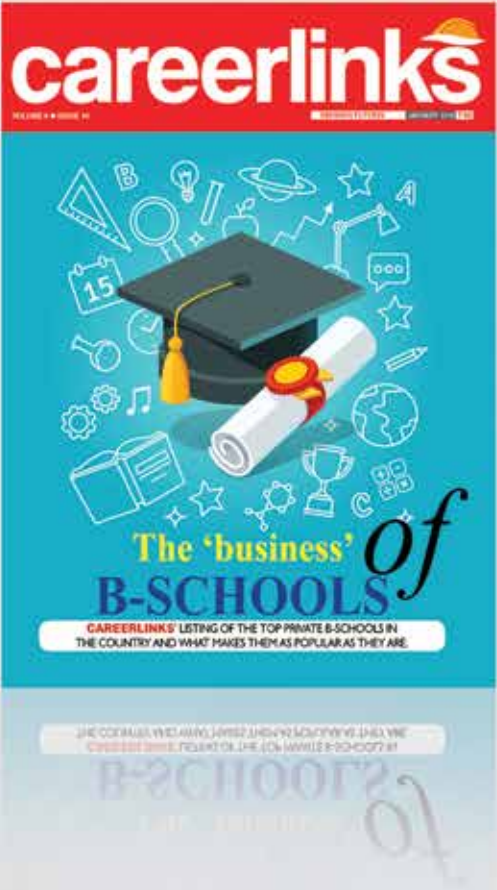


home to the magical beaches of Cabo de Creus, meandering lanes and a gorgeous harbor. Discover the best art by Salvador Dalí at the famous Casa-Museo de Salvador Dali and the vibrant nightlife of Cadaques that never sleeps. With a unique mix of French and Catalan cultures, one can indulge in its laid back vibe and rich culture over a Sangria on the pristine waterfront!

**Figueres** – The traditional Spanish town of Figueres is famous due to Dali’s legacy, one of the main tourist attractions of this area. The streets are filled with a traditional yet avant-garde atmosphere and are home to some of the best museums including the Dali Theatre-Museum while the coast of Figueres has some of the best beaches along the Costa Brava

**Pals** – There is a famous saying that goes like ‘Pals shouldn’t only be visited once, it should be visited one hundred times!’ This holds true as the medieval village of Pals has a remarkable historic heritage with the main attraction being the 15metre Torre de Les Hores (clock tower). Wander through its winding narrow streets up to the gothic church of Sant Pere, to soak up the 360-degree panoramic view of the distant Pyrennes at one end of the valley and the sea with its jagged peaks of the Medes Islands at the other

**Begur** – Begur’s lovely climate, spectacular coastal scenery, narrow streets, and enticing restaurants is one among the many treasures of the glorious Costa Brava. Catalunya is home to several major wine zones in addition to being renowned for its sparkling wine, called Cava. Closer to Begur is the region of Emporda, wherein a wealth of wines are made including rose, Cava, and robust reds and aromatic whites. On your visit here, the Castle of Begur is a must-visit! 📍



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# Seychelles Trip

Seychelles Tourism Board conducted a familiarization trip for Indian tour operators to showcase the beauty of its three main islands- Mahe, Praslin, and La Digue. This week-long educational trip gave the tour operators an opportunity to experience the paradise islands, partake in various activities and get inspired by the local culture and cuisine.

While Seychelles is popular for honeymoon travel, the focus has been slowly moving towards other segments like family holidays, adventure travel and celebrations. The familiarization trip aimed to showcase various aspects that cater to the requirements of these segments. Senior Management from Madhura Travel Service, Flamingo Transworld, Travel Triangle, FCM Travel Solutions, Ambition Travels and Orion Holidays were a part of this educational trip and the entire experience helped to enhance their knowledge to better promote and sell the destination. During their visit, these Indian travel agents received a warm Seychellois welcome from various three-star, four-star, and five-star hotel partners. They also experienced services of the main destination management companies along with Air Seychelles who came on board as an airline partner. The group also got a chance to interact with the Seychelles Tourism Board team to learn about the changing trends and positioning of Seychelles in the India market. 🇯🇵



# Sun Soaked SEVILLE



**ALAANA:** Alaana is a student. She is a keen singer and writer, a passionate foodie and a travel enthusiast, always on the lookout for adventure.

Standing on top of the famous Metro Parasol, the city of Seville seemed to have been invaded by an army of terracotta. The morning sun was writing its own poetry in shades of pink, red and orange.

The city of Seville is famous worldwide for its culture, monuments, traditions and artistic heritage. This is the birthplace of Flamenco and the city where the most amazing Easter processions take place. It is also the neuralgic center of the South of Spain, a city full of life and possibilities. Seville's rich history has left the city stuffed with innumerable monuments like the mesmerizing cathedral, third largest in the world, the Giralda tower, the wonderful palace of the Reales Alcázares, the magical Barrio of Santa Cruz with its narrow streets, the Maestranza bullfighting ring and the perfume of orange blossoms around every corner.

Being in the Bijou city where gypsy heroine Carmen was created; I was already intoxicated in the heady cocktail of diverse architecture, exotic food and sensual flamenco rhythms that dotted every corner. The adventures of Seville were waiting to be explored and a young teenager like me was already engulfed in the madness of multitude of emotions.

Having been in Spain for a week now,



I was learning and experiencing new things every day. Each day seemed like an adventure in itself. Although my entire journey had been tremendous, today was unequivocally the best. The architecture of the sweet and simple town took me right back to the medieval times. Gothic and Renaissance buildings stood shoulder to shoulder with abundant orange trees. I walked on the bright pavements feeling carefree and young. Seville and I were fast becoming soul mates!

During my little escapade, I came across a lady selling tickets for a "Segway tour into the city of Seville". My heart raced just at the mere thought of exploring lanes of Santa Cruz.

Being a quick learner, within minutes I learned to ride it, and gleefully followed our tour guide into the quaint streets. This experience was enthralling. It felt straight out of a movie, where the protagonist rushes past the town crowds and everybody cheers for him. Minus the cheering, it felt exactly the same.

Here onwards, time flew. Like it does in all times when we feel we are on top of the world. All exuberant feelings come to an end and soon it is time to say goodbye to the euphoria and step back into reality. It was my turn now. So goodbye euphoria and hello Seville!

Pondering for hours on what to eat, the unexpected burgers came to the

rescue. They were unlike any burgers I had ever eaten. There was this dressing, bacon jam (whose existence was not in my knowledge), which was scrumptious. Then we went on to devour "the world famous Spanish specialty", churros, which did its title justice.

Walking around, I came across this sweet looking store, which sold the most adorable things one could purchase like cartoon mugs and dazzling stationary. Like any other little teenager, I lost my conscience and went bizarre. I believe I spent most of my money there. (Hahaha).

A small trivia fact, the world famous movie 'Knight and Day' was shot in Seville. Definitely we went to visit some of those sites. One was the 'Maestranza Bullfighting Rink'. It was immense. The blazing colours of the golden sand and the rustic terracotta walls were prominent. The place did not seem as if it was real and its description did not do it justice. The audio prepared to inform us all about it was more interesting than any history chapters we study in school. The structure, vibrancy and beauty of the rink left everyone astounded. And so my day went on and little experiences kept getting downloaded into my memory box. This day was ideal. It was the kind of day most people wish to live. And my experiences may seem trivial or I may not even remember it in the foreseeable future, but I will always remember how it made me feel.

When I was writing this, a lot of questions popped up, especially from other people. Why Seville? Weren't Barcelona or Madrid or even Marbella for that matter better? Well, all places were stunning, but if I were to describe Seville as a person, she would be beautiful far more alluring than the rest. Her voice would be mellifluous, heart as pure as gold and eyes a sparkling shade of brown. Everything about her would be radiant. She would have a knack for history and art on one hand. On the other, she wouldn't be afraid to take risks. But apart from all this, there would be an aura of purity around her; which could hypnotize anyone brave enough to take a chance to get to know her.

Seems to me I am one of the few people who took that chance. And I strongly urge you to do so as well. 🍷



# The resort City of Eilat



The locals refer to it as the most cosmopolitan city in Israel, Israelis who live in the northern parts of Israel see it as the perfect city for holidays and shopping. Tourists see it as an eternal sunshine city. The truth is that in Eilat, everyone can find what they are looking for. The southern tax-free city of Israel located on the Red Sea offers a winning combination of sea and desert, and most importantly – ideal weather all year long and water temperature of 21C in the winters! Looking for fun in the sun? Here are a few suggestions you don't want to miss.

**Hiking in the Red Canyon:** About 20 kilometers north of Eilat and at 700 meters above sea level, you will find the stunning Red Canyon, named after its reddish-colored walls. The trails are set in between the red sandstone walls, that vary in color, shape, and size. The twists and turns of the trails also include a visit to a second creek and spectacular waterfalls that flow along the way. Highly recommended for families and hiking enthusiasts.

**Bicycle Hike in Timna Park:** Bicycle enthusiasts will be delighted to discover this mountainous park, which features a 14-km bicycle trail for the entire family. Along the trail, some spectacular vantage points await you, the most magical of them being the hidden lake, which is among the steep cliffs of the park. Tourists can come by bicycle or rent a bicycle in the park. We recommend stopping by the lake and sitting in one of the lovely restaurants around.

**Coral snorkeling:** Eilat beaches are a favorite among divers from Israel and all over the world. The waters are clear, the beaches are regulated and one will discover a breathtaking world of fish, coral in a variety of forms, and rocky ground that serves as a fertile cushion for marine animals of various types. The Coral Coast, located on the southern shores of Eilat, is







a nature reserve in itself. It is the only reef in Israel that is recognized as a national treasure.

**Swimming with Dolphins:** For 30 years, the Dolphin Reef in Eilat has been considered one of the most unique attractions in Israel and around the world. The ecological site is not only a natural habitat for dolphins but is also an adventurous destination for divers and families who want to enjoy daily recreation that includes guided dolphin swimming,

petting and watching dolphins being fed and taken care of.

**Shopping around the city:** No visit to the city of Eilat ends with empty hands. That's because the prices are much cheaper compared to other parts of Israel (17% VAT exempt). The spacious shopping malls and shops spread all over the promenade - all complement the city's travel experience. Israelis are familiar with the abundance of shops in Eilat, and many come there to indulge in a new smartphone or the latest fashion items at super cheap prices.

**Day trip to the Dead Sea and Jerusalem:** While tourists mainly visit sunny Eilat during the winter months, many also take the opportunity to travel north to the Dead Sea and Jerusalem. These two sites are major tourist attractions in their own right. The Dead Sea (called "Sea of Salt" in Hebrew), the lowest place on earth, attracts tourists for health and healing purposes and Jerusalem, the capital of Israel, is known for historical sites, markets and holy places for the world's three major monotheistic religions. 🇮🇱



Image:- Whirling Dervishes

## Celebrate your new beginnings with the **Ancient land of Dervishes**

**B**e it Christmas or New Year's eve, as always it is going to be one of the biggest celebrations in Turkey. You'll be able to find plenty of events going on all around the country. Whether it's a seven-course dinner at a fancy hotel in the city or a cozy night in a ski hotel in the mountains, here are some great suggestion for entering the new year:- If you are looking for a good food then as Turkey's largest city, Istanbul celebrates the new year in a big way. A great tip is to call your favorite restaurant in advance to ask if they have a special NYE menu prepared, and chances are they probably do. And much like Istanbul even Ankara, the capital of Turkey also offers NYE menu but has a really beautiful fireworks stations arranged by locals, then you can head to Kizilay where the party takes off after midnight.

If one wants to spend time with his/her loved one they can simply go to a good sundown place like a rose valley or Sunset point- Goreme town in Cappadocia or the Bosphorus strait, you can get the view of the sunset with Galata Tower. Turkey has a lot to offer, the country doesn't sleep, its beautiful streets, heritage, and culture are some of the never-ending attractions. 🇹🇷





LENS VIGNETTE



**RAJSAMAND LAKE,  
RAJSMAND, RAJASTHAN**

On a cold wintery morning, these kids jump in a lake 30 feet deep, surrounded by fishes in surprisingly warm waters. Slowly they go climbing to the highest point and take the plunge. Their courage is truly inspiring.

Photograph by **RAHUL GUPTA**



# Let’s Swirl some Wine...

SUMEET KUMAR



**The basics of pairing food & wine!**

Matching wine with different cuisines and flavor can be confusing. This article will cover some of the key facts to assist you to become a more knowledgeable judge in selecting the wines with the food you are eating.

**Focus on balance with flavors of food & wine**

Wine and food should be best buddies, with neither over powering the other.

**For example:**

The lighter foods requires there partner to be a delicate wine, so the flavors in the dish are not being overpowered. This means having lamb with a white wine would not match traditionally, with each having such distinct flavors in their own ways.

You would not have a red wine with a creamy white pasta sauce, as the flavors and taste of both wine and the dish will stand out in their own characteristics.

**WINE GRAPES & FOOD PAIRING WITH CATEGORIES**

**WITH EACH WINE MENTIONED BELOW, WE HAVE LISTED CERTAIN TYPES OF FOOD IN THAT CATEGORY. YOU WILL NOTICE, UNDER THE SHIRAZ AND PINOT GRIGIO, I HAVE NOT ADDED ANY INFORMATION, SO YOU CAN ATTEMPT TO MATCH THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THOSE WITH THE FOOD, AT YOUR LEASURE**



FATOOSH SALAD

**Pinot Noir**

*Earthy flavors like mushrooms and truffles taste great with reds like Pinot Noir, which are light-bodied wines.*

**Cheese/nuts:** goat cheese, walnuts

**Meat/poultry:** lamb, sausage, chicken

**Seafood:** ahi tuna, salmon

**Fruits and Veggies:** mushrooms, figs, strawberries

**Herbs and Spices:** truffle, nutmeg, cinnamon, clove

**Sauces:** mushroom sauces, light-medium red sauces

**Desserts:** creme brulee, white chocolate

**Shiraz (red)**

Spicy Asian cuisine goes well with a Shiraz (red), both containing black pepper and hints spice for your palate.

Cabernet Sauvignon

*Lamb chops with herbs. The firm tannins in these wines refresh the palate after each bite of meat.*

**Cheese/nuts:** cheddar, gorgonzola, walnuts

**Meat/poultry:** Lamb Chops, rib eye, beef stew

**Fruits and Veggies:** black cherries, tomatoes, broccoli

**Sauces:** brown sauce, tomato sauce

**Desserts:** bittersweet chocolate, dark chocolate

**Pinot Grigio**

*The crisp flavors of Pinot Grigio accompanies well with a Chicken salad drizzled with a vinaigrette dressing that show cases a perfect match.*

**Chardonnay**

Accompanies well with chicken in a creamy sauce or fatty fish such as salmon.

**Cheese/nuts:** mild, semi-soft cheeses, almonds and nearly any toasted nut

**Meat/poultry:** chicken, pork

**Seafood:** halibut, shrimp, lobster

**Fruits and Veggies:** potato, apple, squash, mango

**Desserts:** banana bread, vanilla pudding



SAUVIGNON BLANC

**Sauvignon Blanc**

*Fatoosh Salad, a perfect blend of the citrus flavors and the fruitiness of the salad spice ‘sumak’ with the fruity & citrus flavors in the wine*

**Cheese/nuts:** feta, goat cheese, pine nuts

**Meat/poultry:** chicken, turkey

**Seafood:** fatty white fish, scallops, sushi

**Fruits and Veggies:** citrus, green apple, asparagus

**Sauces:** citrus and light cream sauces

**Desserts:** sorbet, key lime pie

Sumak - This spice comes from the Mediterranean and Middle East, from the berries of a wild bush. Quite aromatic, they are sour, fruity and astringent in flavor

*Try an Indian Estate winery and pair the wine with Indian snacks or main dishes?*

You can start with matching the ingredients in the food and testing them with some of the mentioned characteristics of the grapes:

**Key characteristics of Wine to remember:**

**Tannins:** A wine with high tannins can be described as bitter and astringent. Tannins are derived from the skins, stems, and seeds of the grapes used to produce the wine.

**Acidity:** In wine tasting, the term “acidity” refers to the fresh, tart and sour attributes of the wine.

**Sweetness:** That sweet sugar sensation is mainly due to the sugar content in the wine. This ranges typically form 0 % to 20 % in both red & white wines. Alcohol itself is also a sweet liquid, so higher alcohol wines can give the perception of a ‘sweet’ taste.

**Bitterness:** Bitter tastes in wines should be very limited. Bitter tastes can come from extremely young wines that have not matured. 🍷

REMEMBER, YOUR PALATE IS YOUR MOST TRUST WORTHY FRIEND WHEN IT COMES TO MATCHING THE CORRECT WINE WITH THE TYPES OF FOOD YOU EAT. 🍷



## Club Med re-launches Sahoro Hokkaido Resort in December with a local Ainu influence



The premium all-inclusive operator and global snow holiday leader has confirmed the launch of the renovated Club Med Sahoro, Hokkaido resort on 29 November 2019. With over 20 ski resorts across the globe, Club Med continues to expand its leadership of the mountains with ambitious growth plans to cater to global and regional demand for snow holidays and new mountain adventures.

At the newly renovated Club Med Sahoro, Hokkaido resort, guests will learn more about the Ainu culture – the indigenous tribe from Hokkaido – through the resort’s new design and public spaces. The public spaces including the bar, theater and reception have gone through a major overhaul, featuring a fresh modern look this November. Drawing inspiration from the Ainu ornaments, stitching and embroidery, the resort interior preserves the beauty and splendor of the culture, presenting a harmonious mix with a modern twist to the traditional Ainu patterns.

Additionally, a new “Magic Carpet”, an outdoor moving walkway which will take children and adult-beginner skiers to the top of the training slope, will also be created for the launch of the new resort. Facilitated by certified Club Med instructors, the Magic Carpet provides a safe and exciting experience for first-time skiers.

***“The renovation of Sahoro, Hokkaido looks to provide our guests with a transformative mountain experience that will not only provide a fantastic snow getaway but will also leave them enriched with authentic Japanese culture and heritage” said Xavier Desaulles, Chief Executive Officer, APAC Markets Club Med.***

The new-and-improved Sahoro Hokkaido resort will also include facilities and activities to provide guests with a holistic snow holiday experience, from an open-air hot Canadian bath amidst natural surroundings, to hands-on traditional soba-making classes that are perfect for families

The resort aims to honor local Japanese traditions, while infusing the lively and convivial essence. Moreover, Hokkaido is known for the best, premium quality powder snow in Japan which is perfect for winter sports and activities.

With Japan being one of the top travel destinations in Asia, Sahoro Hokkaido is the perfect location to reconnect with loved ones and begin new traditions amongst the snow-topped peaks of the Hidaka Mountains, complete with picturesque views. 🇯🇵





## Club Med To Pioneer New Sustainable Resort In Secret Kota Kinabalu Location

Club Med, the pioneer of Premium All-Inclusive holidays, announced plans to open its first resort near Kota Kinabalu, the capital of Malaysia's Sabah state, in the northern part of Borneo island.. Located at Kuala Penyu Beach – just 90-minutes' drive from Kota Kinabalu International Airport – the premium all-inclusive resort with Exclusive Collection space (5 Tridents Space) will offer a pristine paradise where virgin jungle meets idyllic powdery white sand beaches and crystal clear waters. They are collaborating closely with owners Golden Sands Beach Resort City Sdn Bhd (GSBR) to create the brand's first large-scale sustainably-built BREEAM-certified beach resort in the Asia Pacific. This resort is Club Med's second resort in Malaysia, after Club Med Cherating Beach, an eco-nature getaway located in Pahang.

GSBRC, the owning company of the future resort, is a Sabah based company that was formed by like-minded investors purposely to bring Club Med to Borneo. The group behind GSBRC has extensive

business experience in Malaysia and abroad with a specific focus on Hospitality and Property Developments in Sabah & Kuala Lumpur.

Borneo Kota Kinabalu – an idyllic paradise surrounded by lush jungles and pristine beaches

With the international and modern millennial family in mind, Club Med Borneo Kota Kinabalu will provide a dynamic and wholesome experience that truly takes advantage of the resort's unparalleled location. 41 acres of land flanked by tropical rainforests, fronted by kilometres of pristine beach with picture-perfect white sand, Club Med Borneo Kota Kinabalu's convenient, exceptional location with unobstructed sunset views, is perfect for a destination getaway for families, friends, and couples.

The resort located next to a mangrove reserve will offer a plethora of activities that encourage guests to preserve the location's natural beauty and discover local gems, including island hopping to the beautiful Pulau Tiga, a river ride that showcases Sabah's diverse wildlife and ecosystem as well as an adrenaline-pumping white-water river rafting adventure. Guests can also immerse themselves in Borneo's rich heritage through activities like evening dance shows, traditional rug and jewellery making, and interactive culinary classes and coffee tastings.

The resort design will be inspired by numerous traditional Borneo ethnic cultures while seamlessly integrating its structures with the surrounding rainforest. The resort will feature plenty of spaces that is interconnected with nature, using local and sustainably sourced natural materials.

Guests at the new resort will also be able to enjoy:

- 400 rooms – 360 spacious rooms across various categories for Club Med Premium Resort and 40 luxury suites for the Club Med Exclusive Collection space (5 Tridents Space)
- An all-day buffet restaurant serving international cuisines as well a “Gourmet Lounge”, an a la carte specialty restaurant that is included in Club Med's all-inclusive offer
- Free-flow bar with integrated

entertainment space showcasing Club Med's signature circus and musical shows as well as a pool bar dedicated to the Exclusive Collection Space.

→ Children's Club facilities and dedicated services for kids of all ages (from 4 months to 17 years old)

→ Full range of Club Med facilities, including up to 30 types of land and water sports activities, and excursions to discover Kota Kinabalu and Sabah (Romantically described as The Land Below the Wind).

Club Med has been building resorts that blend harmoniously into its exceptional locations, with a focus on minimising the environmental footprint being extremely vigilant on energy efficiency, treating and recycling water, promoting renewable energy sources and waste recycling techniques. Its partnership with the Building Research Establishment (BRE) for Club Med Borneo Kota Kinabalu from the outset will create a benchmark for Club Med to construct new resorts that meet stringent BREEAM (Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method) standards.

### About Club Med

Club Med, founded in 1950 by Gérard Blitz, invented the all-inclusive holiday club concept, adding in activities especially for children with the creation of the Mini Club in 1967. Led by its pioneering spirit, Club Med seeks out exceptional destinations and sites. Today, Club Med is the world's leading provider of upscale, all-inclusive holiday packages with a French touch for families and working couples. Club Med operates nearly 70 resorts, of which 85% are rated Premium & Exclusive Collection. Present in 30 countries around the world, the Group employs more than 23,000 Gentils Organisateurs (GOs) and Gentils Employés (GEs), representing 110 nationalities.

### About the Owners

Golden Sands Beach Resort City (GSBRC), the owning company of the upcoming Club Med Borneo Kota Kinabalu, is a Sabah based company which was formed by like-minded investors purposely to bring Club Med to Borneo. The group behind GSBRC has extensive business experience in Malaysia and abroad with specific focus on Hospitality and Property Developments in Sabah & Kuala Lumpur. 



# OLD CITY OF JERUSALEM NOW MORE ACCESSIBLE TO WHEELCHAIR USERS AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED

The Old City of Jerusalem has become more accessible for both wheelchair users and the visually impaired, thanks to improved infrastructure and audio apps to help residents and visitors better navigate the small streets and alleyways of the Old City. The accessibility of the Old City is an innovative and groundbreaking project that enables wheelchair-bound residents and visitors to enjoy the historic and cultural wealth of the city. Among other things, four kilometers of streets in the Muslim, Armenian and Christian quarters were adapted, and about 2 kilometers of handrails were installed alongside staircases. The accessibility is carried out with the cooperation of the merchants and the residents of the area.

The Old City of Jerusalem and its walls are a UNESCO World Heritage Site and therefore are subject to special preservation rules designed to present the city and its heritage to its visitors while developing and upgrading it to the benefit of its residents and employees. The Old City is the most visited place in Israel with about 10 million visitors each year.

The accessibility of the picturesque alleys of the Old City is intended to ease the congestion in the main streets and to enable wheelchair users, the users of freight carts (including strollers), and other handicapped people, to visit the city's tourist attractions with greater ease. Facilitation includes: Roads fixing; Fixing and renovation of public services (including accessible); Adding direction and explanatory signs to the main sites and spatial maps along the main tourist

routes; Upgrading the current cleaning and garbage collection system; Replacement of stone cladding; Highlighting historical or archaeological findings of public interest; Installation of infrastructure cladding for water clocks and a garbage collection point in the tourist area according to the “street language”; Renewal of business complexes, facades and facilities along the route; And the completion of promenades from Zion Gate to the Dung Gate along the northern outer wall.

In order to complete the process, the East Jerusalem Development Company also



produced a printed accessibility orientation map along with a dedicated application in 8 languages that enables real-time navigation between the alleys and sites (GPS-based, similar to Google Maps).

Visitors to the Old City are invited to download, free of charge, accessible guided tours in the “Vocal Tours of the Old City” application (in the Jewish Quarter, Via Dolorosa, Temple Mount, Jaffa Gate, and Zion Gate).

In addition, the Center for the Blind in Israel has made available an app that has made the Old City of Jerusalem accessible to the blind with special audio tours.

The Tower of David Museum, located at the gateway to the Old City, has made its flagship night show, known to all for its spectacular visual content, accessible to the blind and visually impaired with a descriptive audio accompaniment – the first of its kind in Israel. In conjunction with the Central Library for the Blind and Visually Impaired, an audio description (in Hebrew and English) narrates each scene presented in the show, which depicts each different historical period. The uniqueness of audio description is that it is embedded in the Night Experience's screening technology automatically, and is delivered through cordless headphones which are easy to use.

The Tower of David Museum also runs special tours for visitors who are visually impaired where visitors get to feel “history” by having hands-on experiences, touching the different faced stones from the time periods of the city's history from

the stone masonry from 2000 years ago and King Herod's elegant huge blocks of stones to the rougher stones from the Crusader's time period and onwards. The Museum also had models of Jerusalem that show the development of the city as well as a model of the actual citadel itself allowing visitors who may not be able to see the development of the city - feel and listen to the history of the city unravel.

The Old City accessibility project is being funded by the Jerusalem and Heritage Ministry and the Jerusalem Development Authority, together with the Ministry of Tourism, the Accessibility Department of the Jerusalem Municipality, the National Social Security Agency and the Israel Antiquities Authority, carried out by the East Jerusalem Development Company and accompanied by accessibility consultants according to local topographical restrictions, at a cost of over 20 million NIS. 🇮🇱





CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION



# Celebrate **Sochi**, wine and **Christmas**

*Sochi is a beautiful destination to go for your new year's. Local wine is one of the most favorite gifts that vacationers take with them from the south of Sochi and moreover it is always good to sit with your loved ones on the new year's eve with a glass of wine in a different city like Sochi.*





*If you are an adventurous person your new year is done. You can experience the best of Sochi which involves, skiing, kitesurfing, diving, canyoning, rock-climbing, speleo hiking, riding around in jeeps and mega troll in Sochi sky park.*







*“Timur Rasulev- Cultural and Tourism Counselor Sochi” says, we have definitely increased our marketing spends in the Indian market considering the potential it holds. India is one of the fastest-growing outbound tourism markets and we aim to create as much awareness as we cannot lose any opportunity relatively. Sochi as a destination has a lot to offer and especially for sports, leisure, and VFRs. Concerning the new upcoming flight launch, we are expecting at least 50% growth from the present traffic. We are even keen to participate in major travel trade industry events like SATTE and to study how the India market is responding. Delhi –Sochi-Delhi flight will be operated soon by the Russian Carrier called Ural Airlines. Flight duration will only be 5 hours one way with two frequencies per week. 🇷🇺*



# Christmas Attractions in Portugal



*Portugal has its own fabulous traditions and experiences that make spending Christmas in Portugal very enjoyable. Here is a round-up of what to expect during Christmas in Portugal.*

**Lisbon:** For the festive season, Lisbon sparkles with Christmas lights and decorations. The capital city center also comes alive with several Christmas markets where you can pick up some original gifts and assist to live music performances, show cooking and find some entertainment for kids. The noteworthy highlight is the 30-meter-tall Christmas tree displayed in all its glory in the riverside Praça do Comércio.

**Christmas Market at Campo Pequeno:** From books, toys, food, pottery, jewelry, knick-knacks and several activities and workshops for all family, you will find it all at The Campo Pequeno Christmas Market.

**Wonderland Parque Eduardo VII:** This is one of the biggest Christmas markets in Lisbon. There are stalls selling food, clothes, and gifts from local artisans but the main attractions are the Ferris Wheel, Santa's house, the ice rink and a stage where bands and other acts perform all day long.

**Rossio Square Christmas Market:** One of the main squares of Lisbon comes alive with the delicious smells of mulled wine being sold and the aromas of freshly baked pies and other sweet treats.

**Natalis:** Usually takes place during the first week or so of December at the Feira Internacional de Lisboa. Here, you'll find more than 180 companies and charities selling everything you could possibly need for a very Merry Christmas!

**Óbidos:** It is a small town about one hour drive north of Lisbon, and is worth seeing as it transforms itself into a Christmas village with ice-skating, an ice slide, a fairground, inflatables, face painting, and Santa's house. It truly resembles Santa's home in the North Pole.

**Funchal Christmas Market:** This market has been already classified as one of the best in Europe. In this market in the heart of the Madeira Islands capital, one can discover a wide variety of products including exotic flowers and other traditional souvenirs, while sampling some of the typical dishes and drinks of the season and listen to choirs sing Christmas Carols. Various folklore groups dance every night. It starts on 1 December and ends on 7 January 2018.

**Viseu:** A Christmas market takes place every year at Rossio square in Viseu and fills this city in the center of Portugal region with lights and magic. In this market, there are always warm drinks, regional products for sale, handicraft and chocolates.

**The arrival of Christmas:** On November 30th, Porto officially connects to Christmas. The moment is marked on its main street Avenida dos Aliados with various entertainment events such as the performances of well-known Portuguese bands. The lights and the Christmas Tree

switch on at 6 pm, with a multimedia show, produced especially for the ceremony and it will culminate with the switch on of the lights and the inauguration of the Christmas Tree. Decorated with 31,600 LED lamps, it will be 30 meters high, weighing about 16.4 tons.

**Aldeia De Natal, Vila Real De Santo António:** Vila Real de Santo António normally hosts a Christmas village at the Praça Marquês de Pombal. Expect an ice rink, a fair with handicrafts and traditional foods, live music, and a visit from Santa himself.

**A Capital do Natal:** This year Portugal will have the first Christmas Fun Park at Passeio Marítimo de Algés. This event will feature light shows, ice sculptures, a recreation of Lapland, the land of Santa Claus, made in ice, and snow. There is even an Elf Grove and an Elf School where visitors will be able to perform various family fun activities. From November 29th, 2019 to January 12th, 2020.

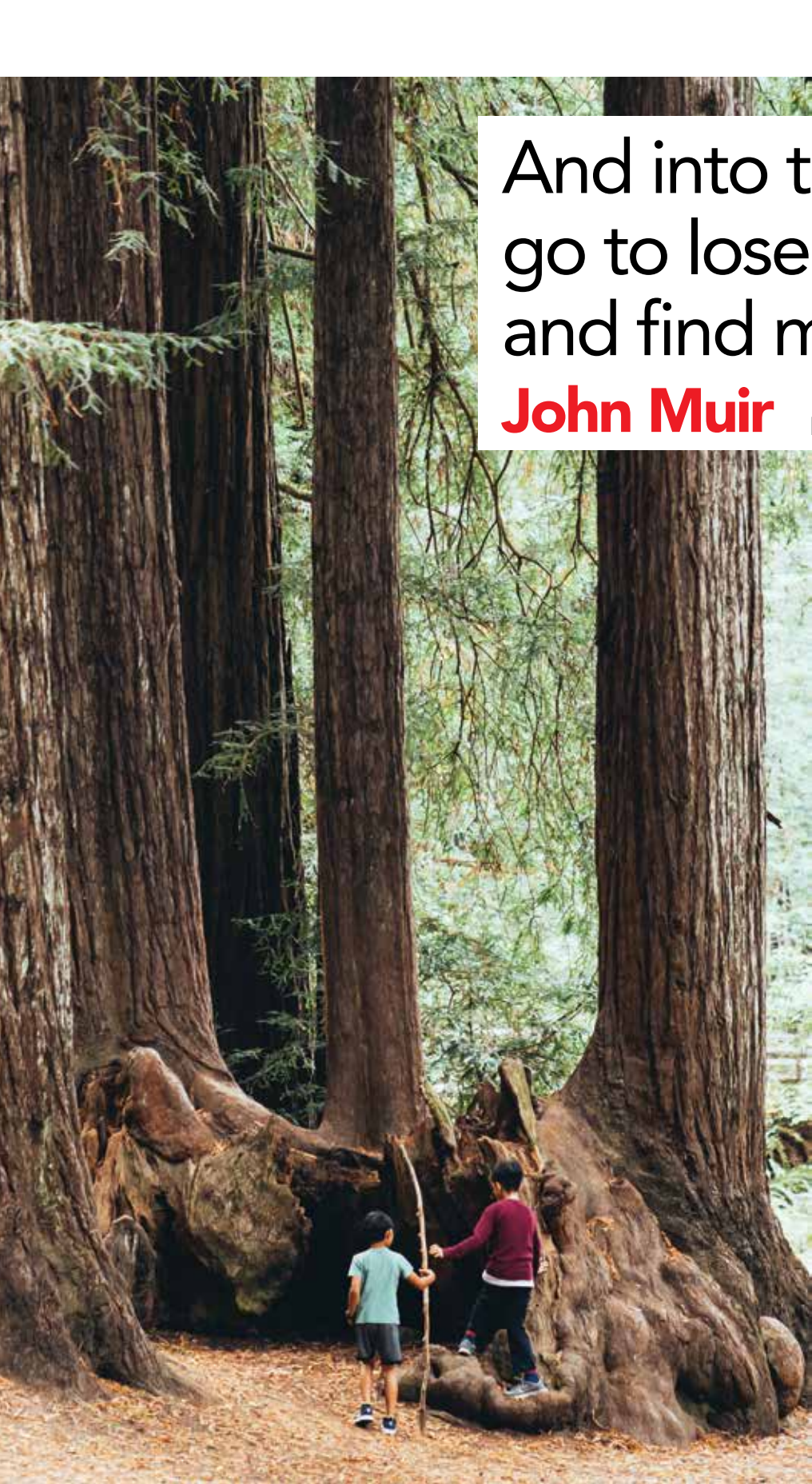
**Vale Do Lobo Charity Christmas Market:** This usually takes place at the beginning of December in the Vale do Lobo Parque do Golfe complex with stalls selling Christmas trees, books, cakes, jewelry, and other great Christmas gifts and stocking stuffers. It combines a luxury lifestyle Christmas gift market with a food and wine fair. 🍷



## ABOUT PORTUGAL

*Portugal was founded in 1143, making it one of the oldest nations in Europe. Portugal is named after its 2nd largest city, Porto. There are 22 UNESCO World Heritage classifications in Portugal, and each year more than 20 million tourists visit the country. With the longest bridge in Europe, Portugal is also a very popular destination from India for those looking for a Euro break and an extension to their Spain and Morocco itineraries. The total flight duration from Portugal to India is 10 hours, 42 minutes and India is 5:30 hours ahead of Portugal.*





# And into the forest I go to lose my mind and find my soul” –

**John Muir**

NICOLA MAHAPATRA

**S**hinrin-yoku – the Japanese practice of forest bathing has evolved around the world as a therapeutic practice that is good for both physical and mental wellbeing. Forest bathing has been proven to reduce the stress hormone production, improve feelings of calm and a sense of oneness with nature, as well as lower heart rate and blood pressure. It helps in boosting the immune system and accelerates recovery from illness. It is believed that even 30 minutes spent in a forest can have a profound effect on your body. It is also a soulful practice of connecting to oneself.

Shinrin-yoku was developed in the 1980s in Japan. Although people had been taking walks in the forests for centuries all over the world. A chemical released by trees and plants, called phytoncides, was found to boost the immune system. As more research highlighted the benefits of shinrin-yoku, the Japanese government incorporated it into the country's health programme.

A better way to frame forest bathing is, “mindful time spent under the canopy of trees for health and wellbeing purposes.” In the 1990s, researchers began studying the physiological benefits of forest bathing, providing the science to support what we innately know: time spent immersed in nature is good for us. While Japan is credited with the term shinrin-yoku, the concept at the heart of the practice is not new. Many cultures have long recognized the importance of the natural world to human health.

Forest bathing is not just for the wilderness-lover; the practice can be as simple as walking in any natural



environment and consciously connecting with what's around you. For a more structured experience, you can join trained guides for a meditative two to three hour eco-therapy excursion.

Some of the best places on this planet to practice Forest bathing are Adirondack Mountains in New York, Costa Rica, Kenya, Hawaii and New Zealand.

New Zealand has some jewels such as the beautiful Waipoua forest in the North Island where the oldest and largest Kauri trees in the world live. Sacred to Māori people, Kauri is considered “protectors of the forest.” Footprints Waipoua organizes walks among the kauri trees including the Twilight Encounter, led by Māori guides.

However to experience forest bathing from a bird's eye perspective, you can come and experience Redwoods Treewalk in Rotorua, New Zealand. This suspended ecological walk captures the beauty and ambience of the forest and is a beautiful destination for nature lovers and soul searchers.

This jewel is just 5 minutes away from the City Centre in Rotorua. It is open 7

days from 9 am till late, rain or shine and covers 700 meters, 28 suspension bridges, 27 platforms to create a beautiful suspended experience a must do for all age groups. This award winning eco-tourism treewalk offers a Daytime and an iconic Redwood Nightlife Treewalk (Redwoods Treewalk and David Trubridge Design have partnered to create an iconic nocturnal tourism experience: the Redwoods Nightlights.). Walk high among the majestic 118-year-old Redwood trees during a day-time or night-time treewalk and breathe in the forests. Nurture your mind, body and soul while you bathe in the lush green settings offered by Mother Nature.

The Daytime treewalk is an immersive, breathtaking and extraordinary 40 min trail on suspended bridges open to families and all that can walk unaided. The bridges range from heights of 9 to 20 meters giving extraordinary views of New Zealand's silver fern and exotic forests. This tranquil and serene walk caters to all fitness levels.

The Redwood Nightlife is a mesmerizing, magical and enchanting experience that offers a world class design



led tourism by illuminating the entire tree walk with 30 lanterns exquisitely crafted from wood echoing back the design of the forest to create a wonderland and an out worldly experience.

The Redwoods Treewalk is situated within the majestic and magical Whakarewarewa Forest. The forest covers around 5600 hectares and is home to towering trees with a mix of different species including the Californian Redwood. The forest's proximity to thermal areas and lakes builds up for some breathtaking panoramic views. It offers a lot of recreational activities like mountain biking, walks, dog walks, strolls, tree walks etc.

Only until the 1970's was the forest opened for public recreational activities and since then it has become the soul of the city attracting nearly 60,000 visitors a year.

I an avid forest lover myself have visited this attraction a couple of times and will give it a 5 star rating. It's a must do when in Rotorua, New Zealand. 🌟

***“May your time in Nature lead you to yourself” - Shikoba***



## The Belgadia Palace, Mayurbhanj Odisha

**T**he Belgadia Palace is a 200-year-old renovated property in the erstwhile princely state of Mayurbhanj, India which opened earlier this year as a boutique homestay to build sustainable communities an initiative of the Bhanj Deo family.

The district of Mayurbhanj is very rich in its arts and culture - from endangered crafts such as Dokra (ancient wax casting art form) to Mayurbhanj Chhau (martial arts dance form) and the palace itself has art from renowned artists such as Hemendranath Majumdar and architecture nearby from the 8th and 14th century. Mayurbhanj and The Belgadia Palace are a hidden artists treasure trove and has housed many famous personalities as it was the erstwhile home to the royal family and built to house foreign dignitaries from Annie Beasant, Mark Shand (Late brother of Camilla Parker Bowles) Gyandendra Shah, the last King of Nepal, to J.N. Tata and Keshab Chandra Sen (Bengal Renaissance Reformer) among other famous personalities.

### Introduction

Nestled amidst a lush green backdrop of rolling hills and sparkling waterfalls of the rich and diverse Eastern-Indian countryside is The Belgadia Palace. An 18th century victorian brick-built double-storey structure in the classical Western style of Doric-Corinthian column, a mixture of Greek and Victorian architecture. Home to the erstwhile royal family of Mayurbhanj,





this boutique homestay invites guests to take a trip down memory lane and introduces the idea of purposeful travel by engaging with the local tribal community and through curated tours to truly explore the state of Odisha, the soul of incredible India. This unique blend of old and new is encapsulated at this offbeat location which is an adventure-lovers paradise a few hours from the Simlipal, an Elephant and Tiger UNESCO Biosphere, the second largest national park in India.

**History**

The Belgadia Palace’s construction began on the orders of Maharani Sumitra Devi Bhanj Deo in 1804, who ruled the state from 1796 to 1810. In phased development, the palace gets its aura of majesty with intricate designs being added during the rule of her descendents who used it as a royal guest house for state visitors. The present interiors are designed on the orders of the Bhanja dynasties most famous ruler Sri Ram Chandra Bhanj Deo, popularly known as ‘The Philosopher King’ for his second wife Maharani Sucharu Devi, daughter of Keshab Chandra Sen, founder of the Brahmo Samaj movement famous during the Bengal Renaissance.

The palace sits on a raised hill overlooking sprawling lawns on either side, with the entrance highlighted by a long drive-in with indigenous flora and fauna dotting either side and ending at the Elephant Porch or “Hathi Baramdah”, which is a high arched porch built to accommodate the ruler when he would mount the howdah on an elephant for ceremonial processions. The double-storied mansion with turrets flanked on either side has rooms envisioned for work and leisure with the Maharajah and Maharani wing having black and white checkered marble verandahs overlooking the sprawling lawns, with the royal insignia embossed along with the glass windows. A natural lake is situated at one border and a manicured walking path criss crosses the entire estate. The open verandahs were meant to be viewing parlors for the women of the family to watch the chhau performances at the main lawn, a martial arts dance form that was practiced by the state military and flourished under the patronage of the erstwhile rulers.



The present renovation echoes the golden era of the state with furniture and upholstery being repurposed from the original palace. The original palace’s (which is now a college) exterior was built to be a replica of The Buckingham Palace. The annals of history come alive with vintage vinyl records, persian carpets, old world chandeliers and century old oil paintings placed along the halls and porches of the estate. The paintings and art around the palace juxtapose the untamed and ethereal beauty of the district. Nothing like the smell of monsoons hitting the red laterite soil as you lounge in the verandah enjoying the natural landscape!


The suites offer hints and whispers of a royal era with the dark winding mahogany staircase at the lobby draped with a red carpet used for receiving the Maharajah, connecting the first floor rooms to the upper chambers. With each step into the palace the jewel toned colors have a soothing effect with soft wooden finishes transporting you to a bygone era.

**The Belgadia Palace**

The palace’s restoration to its former glory included landscaping of its surrounding, fruit and flower orchards and

an organic farm for a fresh array of local cuisines served on embossed cutlery. The careful restoration of its interiors was done in stages keeping in mind the unique pieces of furniture and furnishings handcrafted for the family. Additionally, the rooms have antiques and collections of artwork belonging to the royal family from their travels around the world. The modern and lux design of its interior contrasts the ancient and ornate architecture of its exterior making the property and its surroundings a walk through the annals of history.

The present-day occupants of the palace, apart from the Maharajah, include the present Queen mother and the Queen of Mayurbhanj who belongs to the royal families of Nepal and Jaisalmer respectively. Each of them brings their own aesthetic to the unique interiors which include 10 rooms, each designed to highlight the numerous personalities who have either visited the Palace or have connections to the erstwhile royal family of Mayurbhanj.

Belgadia Palace is 3.5 hours from Kolkata Belgadia Palace is 3.5 hours from Bhubaneshwar 





# Eco-Tourism in Nepal

STORY CREDIT : MR. BHUSAL

Eco tourism also known as sustainable tourism is one of the new dimensions of travel practices. Being an eco-tourist, you are allowed to respect the nature without degradation. According to International Eco Tourism Society: ‘Eco tourism is now defined as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people and involves interpretation and education” (TIES, 2015). Education is meant to be inclusive of both staff and guests. “

Eco tourism offers the adventures of travelling in fragile, pristine and relatively undistributed natural areas. Eco tourism is responsible travel to natural areas, within the conservation of environment and improving the well-beings of the local peoples. Major travel destination of eco-tourism are where flora, fauna and cultural heritage are the primary attractions. The major aim of eco-tourism is to minimize the negative dimension of traditional tourism and preserve and enhance the cultural and natural integrity.

With the Eight highest mountains, rolling hills, diverse wildlife and vegetation Nepal is a popular tourist destination and perfect country for eco-tourism. Apart from the capital city Kathmandu and some historical sites eco-tourism is one of the great feature of tourism sector in Nepal. Ranging from hike vacations, to white-water rafting, wildlife viewing and camping eco-tourism in Nepal is flourishing.

Practice of responsible eco-tourism to preserve flora, fauna and cultural



heritage is increasing in Nepal. The National Tourism Board and other private organizations related to tourism are promoting eco-tourism with the promotional camping of recycling, energy efficiency, and reuse of water along with the creation of economic opportunities for local communities.

With the goal of preserving nature and flourishing education about the natural, cultural and historical characteristics of unique environment across the Himalayas, Nepal is stepping forward in eco-tourism. Within the efforts to promote the preservation of entire ecosystems, economic activity, increasing sensitivity of

nature, reducing Carbon footprint, Nepal promote eco-tourism. Upcoming much anticipated year of tourism known as “Visit Nepal 2020” aims to promote eco-tourism in different parts of Nepal with the following principles:

- Minimize physical, social, behavioral and psychological impacts,
- Build environmental and cultural awareness and respect,
- Provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts,
- Provide direct financial benefits for both local people and private industry,
- Deliver memorable interpretative experiences to visitors that help raise



sensitivity to host countries political, environmental, and social climates,

- Design, construct and operate low-impact facilities,
- Recognize the rights and spiritual beliefs of the indigenous people in community and work in partnership with them to create empowerment.

The Government of Nepal, Nepal Tourism Board and other private organizations are promoting and making Nepal a major eco-tourist hub in the world. Major eco-tourism destination in Nepal is Phulchowki Eco Trail, Sailung Trekking, Timal Trek, Tsum Valley Exploration Trek, Bholung Village Eco Tour and Trek, Budhanilkantha to Goasikunda Trekking, Kalinchowk Trek, Milke Danda Trekking and Api Himal Trek and so forth.

Being an eco-tourist in Nepal will completely challenges you to open mind in different ways of thoughts and thinking. Enjoying the Nepali culture in different parts, interactions with multi-cultural societies, local hospitality with organic foods will simply blow your mind away. Hiking, ziping, water cannoning with undisturbed nature is the key feature of eco-tourism in Nepal. Knowledge of unique geographical, historical and religious knowledge will enhance your understanding of Nepal. Your dream destination of eco-tourist is no far away from Himalayan country Nepal where you can make your wildest dreams come true.

(Mr. Bhusal is the correspondent of Nepal based online news channel- Nepal Niti) 🇳🇵



# CHOCOLATES



India is a country where majority of people have a sweet tooth. Everyone loves chocolates, but do people know the difference between a real and a fake chocolate? Can a chocolate also be fake? Fake chocolate is termed as ‘compound chocolate’ whereas real chocolate is termed as ‘couverture chocolate’.

Let us look into it deeper and see where chocolate comes from and how it is made. Chocolate comes from cacao pods. Cacao pods contain cocoa beans. Cocoa beans are cleaned properly and then roasted. This step removes moisture, adds flavor and also adds color. After the beans are roasted, they are broken down into pieces. This process is known as Micronizing. Micronizing the cocoa beans permits the next step which is Winnowing. Winnowing helps to separate shells from the nibs. After the shells are separated, the nibs are ground and the mass that we get is known as cocoa liquor. Sugar, milk solids, vanilla, cocoa butter etc. are mixed at this stage. Before the ‘real’ chocolate is delivered to the customer there are 4 more steps until the chocolate is ready to consume. As you can see, making couverture chocolate is very expensive. It is very difficult for any company to sell it at an affordable price point unless they have a huge production setup. In order to sell cheap chocolates at an affordable price, compound chocolate was introduced.

What makes this chocolate cheap? It is the substitution of cocoa butter. Cocoa butter is extracted from the cocoa liquor and it is substituted with cheaper fats-like Vegetable fats. This cuts down the cost of the chocolate to approximately one third. Hydrogenated Vegetable fat may sound like a very fancy word to you but that only means ‘Dalda ghee’ which takes years to get flushed from our system. Not only is

chocolate this cheap, it is also easy to use. The real or couverture chocolate contains cocoa butter which is first melted carefully on a double boiler and then tempered. Whereas compound chocolate does not need any tempering. One can straight away melt in a microwave or double boiler and use it.

How can you tell if the chocolate you are eating is compound or couverture? Compound chocolate won’t melt in your mouth instantly due to the absence of Cocoa Butter whereas couverture chocolate will melt in your mouth- as cocoa butter melts at body temperature. Also, after eating compound chocolate you may feel that your mouth got coated with a layer of fat. This just because of the cheaper version of fat which is used in that chocolate. However, in couverture chocolate one won’t feel this due to the presence of cocoa butter.

The percentage on the chocolate indicates the ratio of cocoa solids to cocoa butter present in the chocolate. For example, 70% dark chocolate consists of 30% sugar and 55% dark chocolate consists of 45% sugar. The higher the percentage the less sweet and more intense the chocolate will be. Even if two different chocolates have the same percentage, they can differ in sweetness, flavor, and intensity. The bean varieties vary in sweetness and flavor, but different chocolate makers add different amounts of cocoa butter to their chocolate, which affects sweetness and intensity. My advice for the readers would be to always go for a 70%-80% dark chocolate if you want to have a good quality chocolate. Even Milk Chocolate contains hidden sugars, flavorings, preservatives etc. The are all added in the mixing stage of chocolate. 🍫



# A Wellness Experience of a Lifetime- **Osho Meditation Resort, Pune.**

SHRUTHI SINGH



An upsurge of energy in my whole body pumped in as I kept swirling, jumping, thumping to the trance like drum beats and mesmerising flute. A part of my mind was still sneaking out to check if someone was looking at me from the throng of mediators in the huge pyramid hall. We were all looking like possessed people shaking ourselves off, releasing the built up stress within our body stored from a long time out of chaotic busy lifestyle. I was experiencing my first enigmatic kundalini meditation program at Osho Meditation Resort, Pune.

The gigantic pyramid shaped meditation hall starts with the entrance of a ramp midway on either sides of the

water pool. As I step ahead to close to the hallway, I could literally feel a sense of enigmatic zone of wonder and curiosity. The meditation hall is constructed in the shape of a pyramid as it absorbs energy. It supposed to attract divine power. No wonder I did experience new thoughts and change in my perspective about myself, the way I treat my mind body and soul. It indeed made me aware of the divinity within each of us.

Osho Mediation Resort is situated about 120 kms south east of Mumbai, India and set on a beautiful campus of 124 acres in Pune. Its a lush green garden landscape with water fountains, daunting stone carvings of Buddha surrounded with peacock. A serene campus. I and my



mother visited this place early monsoon in April where it slightly rains often; the sun would clear through the clouds. Warm and humid. It's a quite time of the year to visit this resort.

I being a book lover and voracious reader from childhood, as my days were spent all alone with my small family in secluded farm house, the only company I had were books. I did stumble upon the book of Osho titled "Courage – The Joy of Living Life Dangerously". This instantly caught my eye and till today I have been a great follower of Osho's teachings which has a blend of practical realities for living with a sense of humour attached to it. This is one of the reasons I was pulled to make this wellness getaway with my mother



which seemed unusual to others. His ideas are not influenced by any culture, religion or communities. No wonder this resort is filled with ninety percent foreigners from all over the world residing as guest for months together and ten percent of casual local visitors.

I got to chat with a charming young man in his 30s who had come from US, who introduced himself as a techie in software firm. He did make up his mind to come here to get himself off from the daily demands of work life and madness. By the way cell phones and laptops are restricted in the meditation resort campus unless there is an emergency and can be used in the guesthouse or the room you are residing in. There is no TV or other entertainment in the room as it is supposed to carry the theme of silence, stillness and serenity. Well, I and my mother didn't know what to expect from this unwind getaway but we were totally filled with curiosity to dive in and experience the bliss it promised us.

There are certain hiccups you sense in the beginning while entering this resort but definitely after a day of getting attuned to the campus rules, regulations and programs, I promise you that you would not want to come back to your routine life. I did notice in my mother who was initially cribbing with the few things and then she didn't have the heart to leave this



place after two nights of stay. I must be honest here. Planning a unwind program to this place is luxurious costly affair as it does come with extra cost each and every step you enter the campus. Be prepared to make some good savings before you plan this trip. Be open minded to undergo AIDS medical test examination at the beginning of registration and tedious long hour of induction as soon as you arrive. Be prepared to buy and wear the maroon and white robes uniform inside the campus during the working hours other than in the guesthouse. But you get to choose some sexy robes of various designs in the campus shop with other meditation accessories. Trust me this definitely enhances the mood and decorum in the campus. I also urge you to book a room in the campus guesthouse to stay rather than booking a hotel outside. This will get you involved with the surroundings and experience the resort to the maximum. The meditative spirit you feel is quite different when involved totally day and night in the campus.

The best and happy news for the first timers planning to this resort is that, resides are not forced to attend all the programmes happening on a particular day. One can check the schedule at the hall and choose what suits their time and body clock. This place is definitely a blend of pleasure cum purpose. It is very much in

line with philosophy of Osho as he believes underlying spirit of Zorba the Buddha - place for someone whose feet are firmly on the ground and yet whose hands can touch the stars.

This place is a wellness experience of a lifetime with addition of spa with pool, Jacuzzi, gym and tennis court and a vibrant nightlife. There is a healthy nutritious spread of food buffet for both vegetarians and eggatarians with 24/7 café house in the campus.

To conclude, I want to write my honest review to the readers based on my personal experience. This is a place to be visited alone! Do not worry as you get to make lot of new friends with the same mind set. This is a place ideal to get reconnected with yourself and just being you without any pretensions. This is a place to set yourself free from the demands of the worlds. it's about surrendering to the joy of being. I enjoyed most of the meditation techniques as it all starts with freestyle grooving, moving your body to the music before you sit still for breathing exercises.

That's not all. Evenings after prayer you renounce your sanyasan status and get ready to hit the dance floor with wine and smoke.

I learnt how to make friends in a strange place as you get to see the cocktail of world culture. 🌍



LESSER KNOWN

# Lure of Sittong

STORY CREDIT : KAUSTAV CHATTERJEE

PHOTO CREDIT : SUZANNA ROY



On the gentle slopes of the Himalayas, in the heart of the orange country, where the air wafting carries with it the scent of ripe fruit, the cloying fragrance of wild flowers; wisps of white clouds settle on the rolling blue hills beyond. And above all of them towers the mighty Kanchendzonga.

That's Sittong for you. Sittong or Sitong is a village in the Kurseong division of Darjeeling district. It is not a village, but a cluster of villages in a large area known locally as Sittong Khasmahal. The place has become famous among tourists as it is the heart of the orange growing countryside of Darjeeling hills. The area is not very touristic yet and visitors can enjoy the beauty of nature unaffected by the vices of modern tourism.

The Valley is located on the hill cart road connecting Darjeeling with the plains, and Teesta river, the lifeline of the region, geographically can be considered as almost two parallel lines.

You have to get up early, and step out onto the terrace. For it is now that the







magnificent Mount K takes a bath in the warm glow of the rising sun. And, as the cold morning air caresses your face, the clump of flowers in the bush sways to greet you; the birds will start a chorus, heralding the advent of a glorious morning.

The Darjeeling tea would never be more refreshing as the aroma haunts your senses. Mount K is draped in a pure white now. It is a perfect place to do famously nothing. There are quite a few very comfortable places to stay, easy on the pockets too, where you can explore yourself. Let your feet up. Dream.

Mongpoo is nearby, where you can visit the cottage where Rabindranath had penned some of his immortal works. Ahaldara is also a short distance away. A hilltop which offers exciting views of the Teesta valley, Latpanchor could also be a destination. And a charming old Monastery nearby is certainly worth a visit.

If you are looking for a comfortable perch, Bishesh Homestay could be your answer. Large well ventilated rooms, hot & cold water, home cooked tasty food. And the owner, Vikram Rai is always present with a smile!

Sittong is only about a 3 hour drive from Siliguri, across the hills, through winding roads, orange orchards. You will know how wonderful it feels when you loose yourself among the pine and the birch, in the land of bird songs. 🇮🇳







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