



Travel Links

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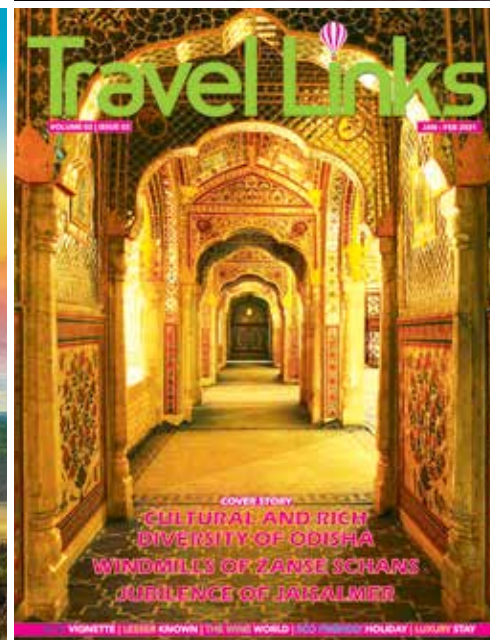
MARCH - APRIL 2021

THE RICH HERITAGE OF UZBEKISTAN

**The Bravo
spirit of Spain**

**Shaking Up
Sol Kadi, Goa's
Traditional Spirit**

LENS VIGNETTE | LESSER KNOWN | THE WINE WORLD | ECO FRIENDLY HOLIDAY | LUXURY STAY



Travel Links

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This issue of the Travel Links highlights the spirit, the hope; the need, the importance of travel and tourism industry, and the vision that will help us fulfill our travel dreams focusing on the changing times and the new norms.

Meghalaya, the jewel of the northeast, calls for a rediscovery, a chance to showcase the immeasurable charm it holds. Tura is not off-beat, nor hidden, it is known by those who understand nature, and those who dare to go out and look for it.

Uzbekistan Ambassador speaks with passion and enlightens us with the culturally rich and diverse country which has extensive experiences to offer from winter sports to pilgrimage travel to culinary food experiences and more.

The Spain Director gives us an insight into the present situation and how the country is coping up with the pandemic and slowly reviving. Spain is proud of having a vast culture, gastronomy, and heritage.

Szentendre on the other hand is a town straight out of postcard paintings. The best stories begin with food, and in Szentendre, it starts with a Serbian breakfast platter on the Main Square (F tér), tells the writer.

Greece," the honeymooners paradise" shall remain an obsession forever. The birthplace of democracy, the foundation of western civilization, the creator of the Olympics, and some extraordinary legends are just a few of the myriad feathers in the cap of this splendid land. It has never-ending tales of folklore and myth. The architecture of this place is full eye-popping visual treats of ancient buildings.

Last but not the least, a few lines will not be enough to express the grandeur, the lushness, the shikaras of the most beautiful paradise on the earth, our very own Kashmir.

Stay Tuned.

Editor

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Roaming Meghalaya: On Tura's Stunning Highlands, the Natural Grandeur Knows No Bounds

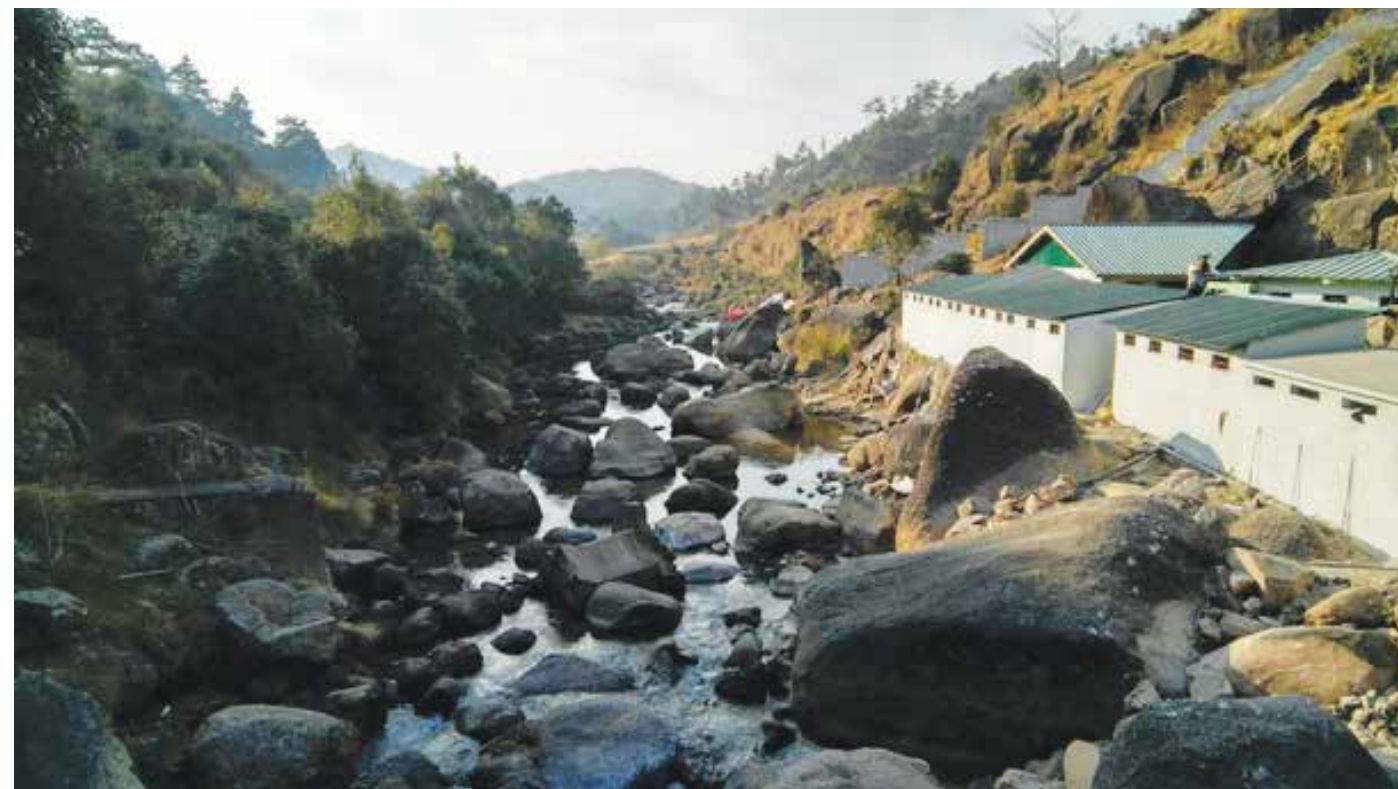
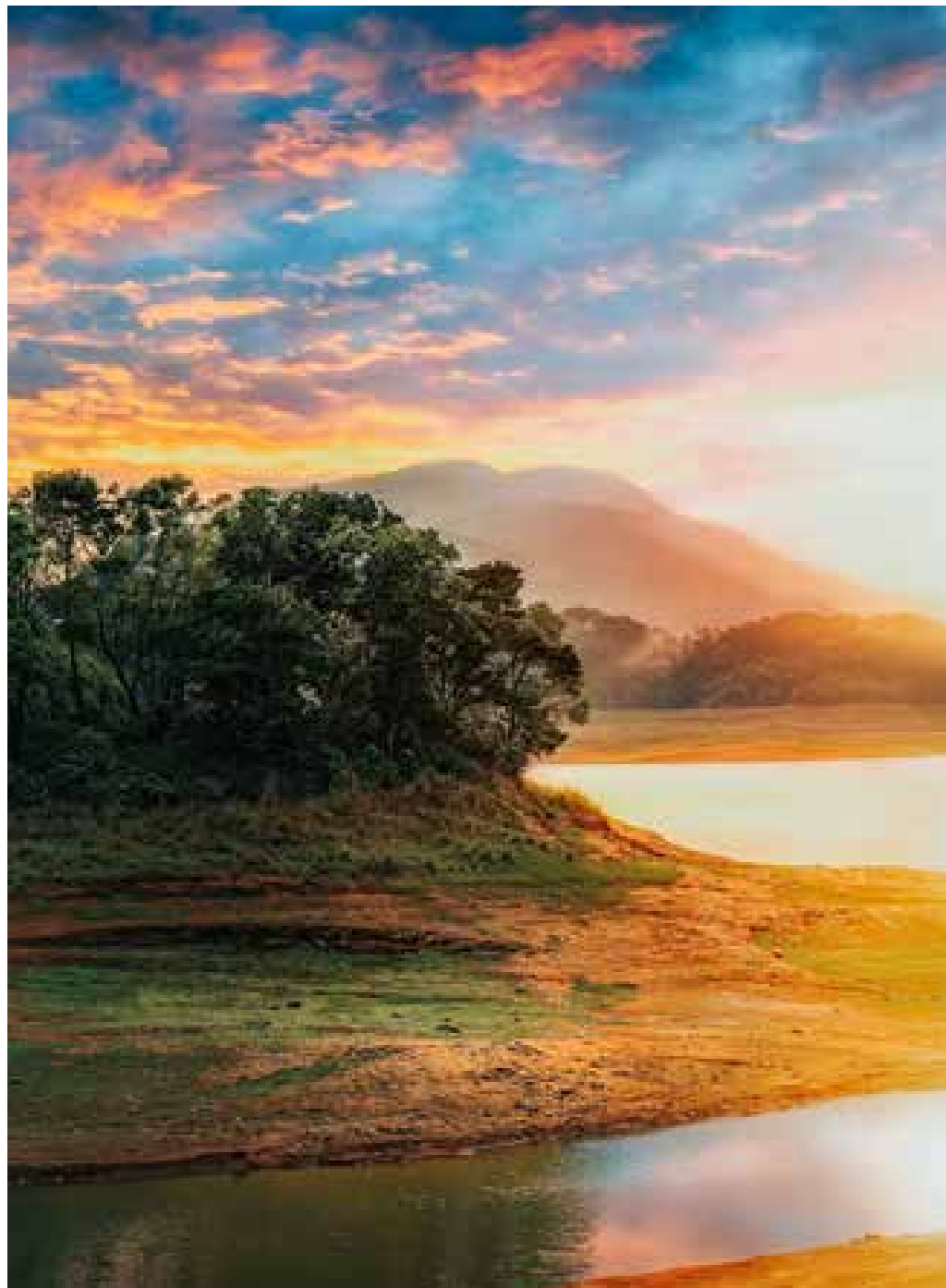
When it comes to boasting about Meghalaya, this small town has outsize options.

SNEHA CHAKRABORTY

Over the last decade, it seems, travelers have discovered the immeasurable pleasure of cultural tourism, a term that loosely defines a journey primarily of learning and exploration. What most people might not know - and what locals have long advertised - is that Meghalaya's town of Tura - an iconic reflection of east-side culture is just five hours by road from Guwahati and seven from Shillong, nestled not too far from destinations that receive the majority of tourist footfall all around the year in India. Despite the steadily growing popularity of the Garo Hills, this town is calling for a rediscovery, a chance to showcase the immeasurable charm it holds.

The history of Garo hills and the surrounding regions in the north-west is opaque, and the early signs of travelers roaming these highlands come from the 18th-century colonization of the British East India Company. Despite the geographical isolation of the predominantly limestone hills from the mainland, the immeasurable curiosity to peek behind the curtain would draw rules, historians, and native pilgrims from all over the world. From little villages on the edge of rainforests to incredible landscapes that remain undimmed, Tura's lively local is a bucket-list dream in the making.

The greatest impact of Garo's metamorphosis, though, is that like the resurgence of culture in modern travel, the town of Tura is in the midst of a revivification. Descendants of heritage artists have taken up traditional arts, offering new takes on orange honey and hand-woven shawls in a way that's adaptive to 21st-century visitors. The trend of boutique stores is detailing local markets,



amplifying the souvenir hunting experience by showcasing Meghalaya in the space of a shelf. Since 2010, the once old-fashioned town of Tura has seen the opening of countless cafes, and a dozen or so resorts and restaurants, almost all of which serve Tura's culinary claim to fame — Nakham Bitchi, Dohkhlieh, and Jodoh, a thick, earthy platter of rice and pork marinated with a local spice-mix, and garnished with pieces of eggs or fried fish.

Uncovering Meghalaya's Treasure Trove: Beyond Garo Hills

More than half of Meghalaya is immersed in forest-covered tropics, which gives a sense of obviousness to greater dependency on foraging, wood-based artifacts, and being at one with the natural world.

In Sweden it's called *smultronställe* (rare moments of peaceful tranquility); in Japan, it's *Yugen* (a profound, mysterious sense of the beauty of the universe). But in India, there's no special term for it. "We don't need a special word to define our appreciation of the wildlife that surrounds us," said Zuber, our tour guide in an enchanting, cold Tura peak in the foothills of the range that seemed slowly rising above the early morning fog.

We climbed up and breathed deeply, as



golden-streaks of sunlight ruffled through the speckled treetops. "Let being in the forest relax you," said Zuber. "Listen to the sounds and sense nature around you." It felt like the forest was a spiritual place, where crusaders would come to meditate.

An Outlying Shoulder of the Garo Valley Meghalaya is one of India's greenest states. Forest covers about 76.32 percent of the geographical area, and this vast swathe of broadleaf forests – over 41,700

square kilometers of ecoregions, and more than 600 bird species. My journey into these sub-tropical terrains was a six-day tour of the Tura Valley, which West Khasi Hills landscape and some parts of eastern Meghalaya. Despite being home to the Garo tribe, Tura is characterized by its proximity with the Garo Hills and often mentioned in travel guides as a stopover town while traveling to a rather-highlighted destination such as Shillong or Cheerapunji.



"Sadly, people come so far, yet leave without learning about what Garo means. They miss out on a chance to truly experience it," says Megan, a fellow tour group member from Argentine who pledged to contribute to the tourism of this small town after going back to her home country.

Walk the streets of Tura, and it is impossible for any cultural traveler to feel perplexed. Where a string of temples and churches peek from above the low-forested hills, you can observe an indigenous community coming together as a family, chanting rituals, merrily chatting with tourists, exchanging cultural eccentricities, and creating art that preserves their culture. Although some traces of these activities can be observed throughout the state of Meghalaya, the Tura region might be the only place that is timeless and has preserved authentic experiences in their purest forms.

"It's such a shame that the travelers go on a mad rush to the hot-spots," said Shravini, an eco-activist from Mumbai, as we arrived at Chandigre, a classical resort village that is aimed to showcase the local architecture. "But things are changing – more travelers are ditching the map to get to uncharted

places."

The People, the Place, and a Perplexing Thought

The next day, after a home-styled dinner with a native family, we arrived at the Rongbangdare Waterfalls in the Rongram area. A group of birdwatchers demonstrated how they get down to enjoy a relaxing soak at the bottom every day after documenting the many species of wildlife that spawn in these vistas. Even the tea they offered us was made from the water they get from falls.

As we all sit at a perched edge near the waterfall and ponder the effects of overtourism Tura will suffer in the mainstream era, the fading sun illuminates the highland, a moment that makes us think if this town should remain hidden, or if it deserves to grow as a tourism center, even if it may bear a cost.

Sadly we had missed the Wangala season, but the highlands cradled us with Meghalaya's most alluring escapades. While we picked Sohiong - a little black fruit indigenous to the state, a family with two kids collected autumn leaves, and the group of birdwatchers made their way back to

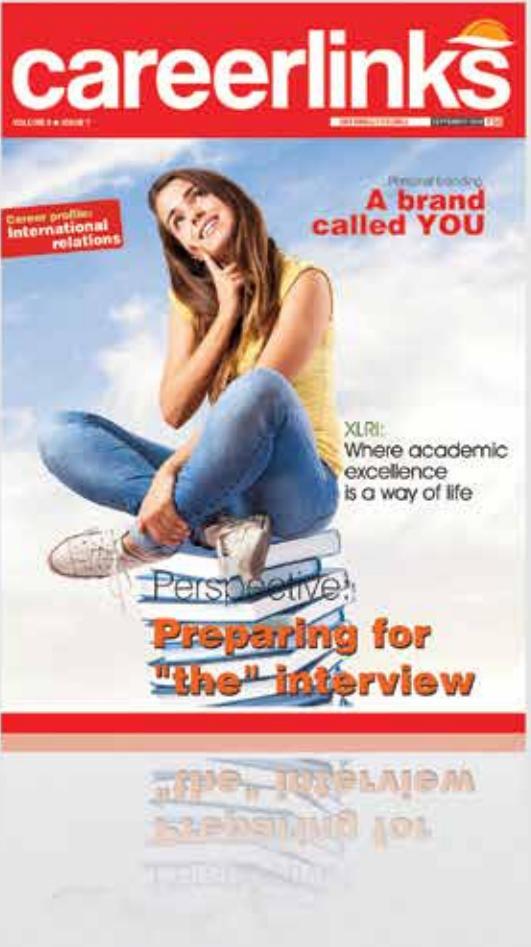
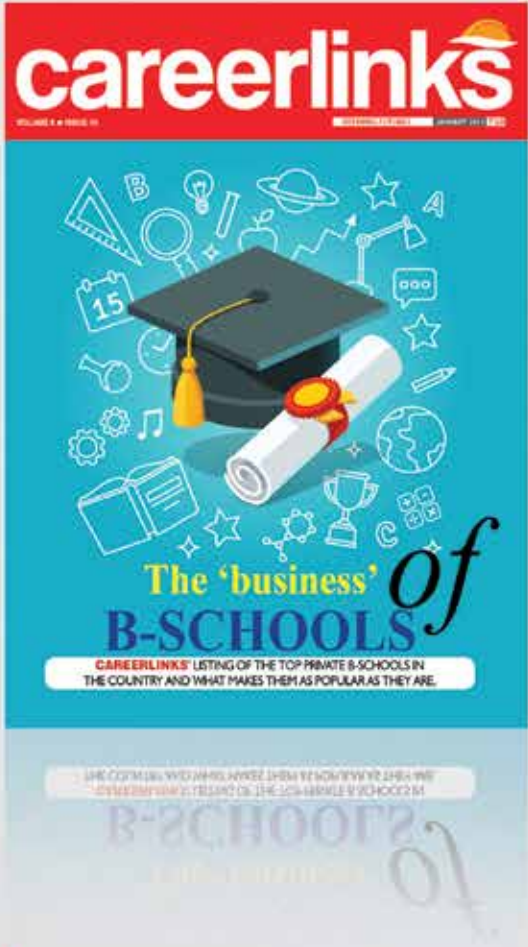
their camps after filling up on some spring water for the night. This intimacy with the forest is rooted in Tura's history: for decades the community has entrusted nature to provide them with everything they need.

That afternoon, as we explored the village settlements near Tura, the Meghalayan love of nature was holding strong and evident of their culture. "Climb up from Tura, and the views will enchant you, get back down into the town, and the classic nightlife will aid you to unwind before exploring this place all over again," a local-vendor who migrated from Tibet to build a life here.

Dani, a middle-aged taxi-diver, echoed this when he dropped us back at our hotel. "Tura is not offbeat nor hidden, it is known by those who understand nature, and those who dare to go out and look for it," he told us, as we packed our bags. "Come to Tura, and Meghalaya's best offerings will come to you."[u](#)

→ SNEHA CHAKRABORTY ←

She is a multimedia journalist and writer of essays, commentary and features, with a particular focus on travel. Based between London and Delhi, she has lived in two continents and traveled to 8 (and counting). Follow her travels on Instagram @fuzzygreysack.



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Jaipur Marriott

A thriving Business Hotel

BY PAYAL SAHNI

The invitation for the Hotel Review by Jaipur Marriott took us by surprise due to the unresting situation of the farmers' protest. Never the less the hospitality, affection, and the guest service, the moment we reached at the hotel made us forget the minor glitches which we experienced on our drive to Jaipur.

The sanitization protocols at the Hotel are to the 'T' at every step of the way. The guests are made to feel safe, relaxed and are welcomed with enthusiasm.

Nestled in the pink city of Rajasthan,

Jaipur Marriott is ideally located, about a 5-minute drive from the airport and in close proximity to the city; it makes it an ideal location for all sorts of occasions, be it MICE, weddings, private small functions or even to just catch up with family and friends.

The Hotel has 366 spacious rooms which include 17 luxurious suits. They have a wide variety of restaurants and food experiences to offer, which have dramatic and modern settings. The Lounge 18 bar pampers you with hand-crafted cocktails and has a very sleek and classy European feel to it.

Okra is their award-winning all-day

dining restaurant and has global cuisines to offer. Saffron on the other hand is a contemporary Indian cuisine restaurant with modern settings. Jaipur Baking Company boasts of handcrafted cakes and fresh produces where one can indulge in coffee and conversations. What catches the attention at the bakery is the cute graffiti's on their walls. The Hotel also offers grilled food platters by the poolside, wonderful delicacies prepared by the chefs. You name it and they have it.

Our food experience was nothing short of a fairy tale and we were pampered with the local organic meals like the Rajasthani

Thalis, Dal Kachoris to the most modern versions of Japanese, Italian, grilled food and twisted personal touch of the chefs who are skilled in creating a live experience and tantalizing food experiences.

What makes it very special and memorable is our heart-to-heart conversation with the GM, Directors, chefs, and most of the staff who were more than willing to give us very valuable inputs about the insights of the functioning of the Hotel and its daily course of actions. In my opinion, a Hotel is not just a hotel, it is a pulse that beats everymoment, it is a life in itself and a hotel is not just a property, it blooms and thrives because of its staff and the people who run the show. Here is a brief about a few of them.



Rahul Maini – GENERAL MANAGER, JAIPUR MARRIOTT HOTEL

He is an experienced hospitality professional with a passion for operational excellence and guest engagement, having over 20 years of versatile accomplishments in the hotel and food & beverage operations. He accomplished his performance objectives with his steel grit and determination. This included management, planning, and marketing, coordinating, and administering hotel services.

He holds a Diploma in Hotel Management, Catering Technology and Nutrition from the National Council of Hotel





Marriott Resort & Spa in March 2016, armed with his comprehensive perspective on the intricacies of helming luxury hotels, he brought his inimitable style and extensive market knowledge to successfully open Jaisalmer Marriott Resort & Spa and positioned the hotel as the most preferred luxury desert resort in India. Before moving to Jaipur, Rahul was the General Manager of Westin Kolkata Rajarhat. His remarkable ability to nurture and grow a business while evaluating opportunities, risks and also implement innovative new solutions has been his success throughout.

Vision 2021:

Rahul's vision for 2021 is that Marriott should be 'The Favorite Hotel in the Jaipur city, offering inspiring experiences to the guests with sharp focus and commitment to the safety protocols.



Dushyant Singh Naruka DIRECTOR OF SALES

He is a self-motivated and a dynamic professional with 12 years + experience in Sales & Marketing, Business Development, Meeting Planner and Team Management, he is an enterprising person who possesses a wide range of knowledge and experience that allows him to contribute towards overall success. He believes strongly in procedures, service standards, and functional policies.

Leading with integrity, encouraging vulnerability, sharing information widely



about the company's goals and strategies, empowering people by trusting them, building relationships by bonding with the team, recognizing their team's good work, appreciating their hard work, and fairly resolve the inevitable conflicts in the team.

He started his career with Abercrombie & Kent in Luxury travel in November 2006 and in 2009 decided to move to Sales & Marketing with Luxury Boutique hotel – Suryagarh, Jaisalmer. In 2011, he got an opportunity to be part of the pre-opening Sales team for Jaipur Marriott and in a couple of years, he was promoted to Senior Sales Manager. In August 2015, He joined Jaipur Exhibition and Convention Center and Novotel Jaipur Convention Center (ACCOR) as Associate Director of Sales and was part of another pre-opening team, before he moved back to Marriott to commence Jaisalmer Marriott Resort & Spa in September 2016. March 2018 he transferred back to Jaipur as Crowne's Meeting Director at Crowne Plaza Jaipur, leading the sales and events planning team. In November 2019 he joined back Jaipur Marriott Hotel as Director of Sales.

Dushyant Singh Naruka embraces 7A's: Accessible, Adaptable, Appreciative, Assertive, Assiduous, Astute, and Attentive.

Chef Jatinder Singh Dhaliwal – EXECUTIVE CHEF

He plays the role brilliantly in managing the entire portfolio" (Please note what I admired most about him is always giving



credit and praising his team and showcasing them as front runners. Beyond just the designations or rankings, I could see a remarkable humble human being).

He says, "Kitchen is like a home for me, I spend more time in my kitchen than at home with family, so my team is my family. The team plays an important role as Kitchen is not a one-man show. Together we perform better, with Chefs from all over India and from the neighboring countries. With Chefs from different regions excelling in particular cuisines, it is a treat to work as a team with them and they are expert in their specific cooking skills".

He is managing the entire Food Production operations, which include, Okra, JBC, Banquets/Events/Also In House Cafeteria and Kitchen Stewarding Operations.



He also says that “as a leader working with the team is important, for a chef has to constantly innovate, experiment and evolve at the same time have to maintain the authenticity of recipes and taste. The key is to always keep motivating them and challenge for achieving new dimensions and striving for perfection is what it takes to the play the role brilliantly”.

Dinesh Rana- Ex.Sous Chef and what encouraged him to leave Goa and do what he loves doing the most.”

Chef Dinesh hales from Himachal Pradesh and after working in Goa forquite



some time he moved to the North. The opportunities here inspired him to join Marriott, he is a master of Italian and western cuisines, working with Expat Chefs, he has learned the authentic Italian cuisine of the region. Here at Marriott Jaipur, he got the opportunity to perform his skills and talent. Working in Rajasthan was something he always craved for, as the food he says, here is very unique, yet popular and a treat for the taste buds of the entire Indian palate.

Shubham Chopra

His journey with Marriott International started in 2019 from Marriott’s elite Voyage Program as a sales & marketing management trainee at Jaipur Marriott Hotel.While he was a management trainee, he contributed substantially to hotel's room and catering revenue. Later he also got an opportunity to explore a Marketing role at Jaipur Marriott Hotel. He graduated from one of the prestigious hotel schools in India, IHM-Ahmedabad, and has a major in hospitality & hotel administration. He is someone who has a strong inclination towards the Hospitality industry and the new immerging trends. On the personal front, he enjoys cooking, reading, and writing. He also runs a hospitality blog by the name of The Hoteliers Talk and



shares his views &insights from the rapidly changing landscape of the hospitality industry.

My Special Thanks to Shubham who was on his guard 24X7 during our stay and fulfilled all our needs and went out of the way to make us comfortable.iii

- My final verdict about the property**
- Centrally Located**
- The ideal hotel for Mice and events**
- Multi Cuisines facilities**
- Modern settings**
- Affordable Luxury**
- One of the best Business Hotels**

THE RICH HERITAGE OF UZBEKISTAN



“Dilshod Akhatov”, the Ambassador Extraordinary & Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Uzbekistan to the Republic of India, shared insights about of the country “Uzbekistan”. I was almost taken to a virtual tour, in my meeting with him, which makes me look forward to visiting the country that is rich, versatile and diverse in food, culture, history, arts and architecture. The Ambassador also throws light on the importance of winter sports travel, slow and sustainable tourism besides many other facilities the country has to offer and the economic importance of travel and tourism for the country. Here is a brief about my interaction with him.
by Payal Sahni

Q Please let us the current situation of the country now post Covid. May we also know a bit about the sentiments of the people and if they are also looking forward to travel and tourism in the country?

Large-scale measures have been taken to mitigate the negative impact of the

pandemic on the tourism industry of Uzbekistan. For instance, to ensure the safety and health of tourists, the system of sanitary and epidemiological security “Uzbekistan” Safe Travel Guaranteed” and safety standards have been approved by the World Travel and Tourism Council. The standards include international best

practice guidelines for the provision of safe services to tourists to ensure the safety of their health during their stay in Uzbekistan.

During the pandemic period, tourism suffered the most in the world. Thanks to the gradually reviving social life, great work is being done in the field. By the Decree adopted by the President



Shavkat Mirziyoyev in February, the State Committee for Tourism Development has been assigned several tasks. In particular, the Committee and the Ministry of Transport together with JSC “Uzbekistan Airports” and JSC “Uzbekistan Railways” will increase the number of flights and rail services in some regions in the development of domestic and pilgrimage

tourism. At the same time, the list of tasks of the Committee includes the reconstruction of tourism facilities, improvement of utility and road infrastructure, expansion and modernization of tourism infrastructure. Besides, many tours are organized for domestic and foreign tourists.

As of now, citizens of 86 countries can visit Uzbekistan without a visa. Work

in this direction is continuing this year. Availability of the transport system has an important role in the development of the sector. Now we are carrying out large-scale work to reduce the cost of aviation fuel and air tickets, launch additional railway routes from the regions of the Fergana Valley to the rest of the country. We continue to improve highways and roadside infrastructure in different directions. The standard projects of service objects of the categories “Service area” and “Service point” along the highways are being introduced.

Q How important is the travel and tourism industry for the country and its economic importance.

Tourism has become an important sector that has an impact on the development of a country's economy. The ability of the national economy to benefit from tourism depends on the availability of investment to develop the necessary infrastructure and on its ability to supply the needs of Tourism brings with its huge economic potential for a destination that wishes to develop their tourism industry. Tourism contributes



towards the complete growth and development of a country: one, by bringing numerous economic value and benefits; and, second, helping in build the country's brand value, image, and identity. The priority strategic goals for the development of the tourism sector for the period up to 2030 are to ensure the accelerated and dynamic development of the tourism industry, to further improve the legislative, organizational, and economic conditions for the development of the tourism industry in the Republic of Uzbekistan.

Q What are your favorite recommendations when one visits Uzbekistan and the best months to travel the country?

Tourists do not need to choose a particular

month or season to visit Uzbekistan. At present, suitable tours for all seasons are organized in our country. If tourists want to see the historical and cultural heritage of Uzbekistan, we would recommend them for the spring and autumn months, because in these seasons the air is slightly cool. The winter also attracts tourists' attention with its fresh air and blue sky. So, we would recommend those who love the cold and snow to come in winter. I would like to note that today Uzbekistan has large infrastructures and resorts for winter tourism and winter sports. For example, last year, not far from Tashkent very modern ski resort "Amirsoy" was built in cooperation with European specialists, which offers everyone a meaningful and unforgettable vacation in winter. The "Amirsoy" ski

resort offers its guests a separate territory for tubing, hiking, special snowmobile tours, an entertainment area including sledding and quad biking, and a special children's playground. This resort, located in a convenient location, is important for attracting tourists to Uzbekistan without losing the concept of seasonality.

Q Please tell us about the arts/ culture/ food/ major attractions of Uzbekistan.

The arts and crafts of Uzbekistan have enjoyed well-earned fame for centuries. The manufacturing of dolls is one of them, particularly lost and revived arts. In recent history, theatrical presentations of dolls were the favorite entertainment of both villages and town dwellers. From

the numerous genres of applied arts in Uzbekistan, decorative ceramic stands out. For example, a small town Rishtan in the south of the Fergana Valley, 50 km from the city of Fergana, is well-known and famous since ancient times as a unique center of Silk Road ceramics. In Rishtan ceramic items are made of the local red clay, while the blue glaze ishkori is produced of mineral colorants mixed with ashes obtained through the burning of certain kinds of plants (masters often keep components, proportions, and technologies secret). Rishtan ceramics will not only decorate your home but also serve as a talisman. Seeing these extremely beautiful patterns, you will be immersed in the world of the East!

The art of jewelry making in Uzbekistan







has its long traditions. Now manufacturing of carpets in Uzbekistan develops in 3 directions: homemade, state, and private companies.

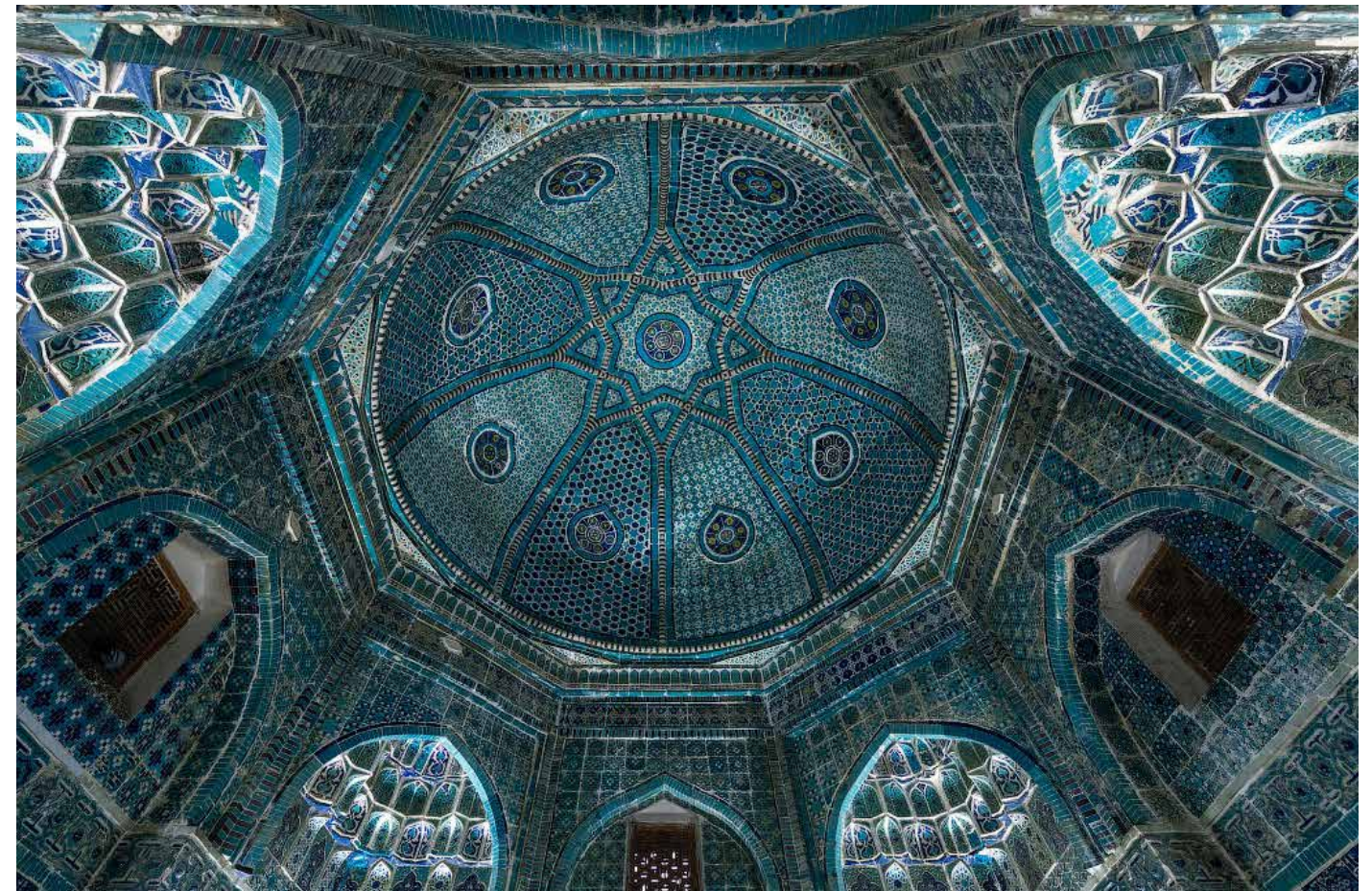
The traditions reflecting the multinational nature of Uzbekistan are omnipresent in its music, dance, painting,

applied arts, language, cuisine, and clothing. Uzbek cuisine is one of the most savory and various tastes cuisine in Central Asia. Only names of appetizing Uzbek food make one's mouth water. Palov, manti, shurpa, kebabs (shashlik), lagman, samsa have such wonderful smells that one can't

resist the temptation to taste all these dishes piping hot. Shortly, to try the best national dishes, the world-famous tasty fruits of Uzbekistan (for example melons) is a must-do thing while you visit there.

Q Please let us know more about initiatives being taken for the slow and sustainable travel and tourism in the country.

Uzbekistan is a country that combines four different climatic zones, and due to the diversity of natural and geographical characteristics, is an excellent destination for eco-tourism development, which has become one of the trendiest areas in recent times. The favorable geographical position of Uzbekistan at the intersection of the East and the West, climatic features, a unique network of protected natural areas, and a rich variety of landscapes offer great opportunities for promoting ecotourism routes, while a rich past and historical sights promise unforgettable travel experiences. Ecotourism is an important factor in the sustainable development of countries and environmental protection,



cultural and ethnographic characteristics, without disturbing the integrity of the ecosystem as a whole. Uzbekistan is one of the most dynamically developing countries in the field of ecological, conscious tourism and has a huge ecotourism potential due to its abundant natural resources. Nowadays Uzbekistan is one of the principal countries in Central Asia in the popular direction of ecotourism. Currently, the country's system of protected areas includes 8 nature reserves, 3 national parks, and a set of sanctuaries. Uzbekistan is remarkably rich in natural resources and diverse opportunities for organizing ecotourism. The nature of Uzbekistan surprises travelers with its exoticism: vast deserts, impressive mountain ranges, numerous rivers and lakes, nature reserves, and unique historical monuments, as well as many rare species of animals and plants that attract outdoor enthusiasts from all over the world. In addition to all the above, you can arrange accommodation in the mountainous villages and get acquainted with the life of the indigenous inhabitants of these lands. In these small villages amid



lush green gardens with delicious fruits, you can forget about all the benefits of civilization - here houses are built from natural stone and clay all the foodstuffs are produced or grown in an environmentally friendly way.

Q Our readers would also like to be recommended about the fewer

travel parts of the country and would it be perfectly safe for the women to solo travelers too.

Uzbekistan is a very stable, peaceful, and one of the safest countries in the world. Any traveler, be it woman or man, alone or with the family can travel very safely to any region, district, or city of Uzbekistan any time of the day.



Moreover, you can have a look that there are different rankings in the world which also shows how safe and modern Uzbekistan is. For example, in 2019 the online travel services “Wegoplaces” has released the Solo Travel Safety Report, which ranks countries on how safe they are for people traveling alone. The ranking was based on a Gallup survey of the residents of 142 countries, and other sources. Uzbekistan was in fifth place in this ranking. The top 10 safest countries also included Singapore, Norway, Iceland, Finland, Hong Kong, Switzerland, Canada, Indonesia, and Denmark.

Q We would request to know if vegan options are easily available for vegan travelers in the country.

Uzbek national cuisine is rich and fragrant dishes, thick soups with an abundance of fresh vegetables and herbs, exotic sweets, and original pastries. The peculiarities of Uzbek cuisine, as well as many other national cuisines, are due to the specifics of local agriculture. In Uzbekistan, a very well-developed grain economy, so the most important in the local cuisine are noodles and bread.

On the other side, Uzbek cuisine and Indian cuisine have lots of commonalities and similar meals. In this regard, Indian tourists who are visiting Uzbekistan feel very comfortable in terms of food.

There are lots of various options for vegans and vegetarians in our country. Almost all cities major cities of Uzbekistan have restaurants for vegetarians. Moreover, vegans can find the food they want in any Uzbek restaurant. I also would like to note that the number of such food outlets for vegetarians is increasing in all regions of Uzbekistan.

Q What would be your advice on slow and sustainable travel within the country where is one doesn't want to come there just as a short tourist but maybe would like to stay there for more than a month.

Uzbekistan, a central Asian Nation located along the Silk Road, is becoming a popular destination for visitors from the region and beyond. While cultural heritage has been a strong attraction for many travelers, Uzbekistan's environment and natural places have the potential to draw visitors. If you want to enjoy the picturesque nature

and unique protected areas of Uzbekistan, the fauna of rare animals and birds, visit the national parks and reserves of our country. Uzbekistan is not only famous for the architectural monuments included in the UNESCO Cultural Heritage List, not only for the ancient cities but also for the amazing flora and fauna, picturesque mountains, caves, deserts, and crystal-clear lakes, rivers, and waterfalls.

There are lots of must-do things for the tourists who are visiting Uzbekistan. But I will try to give you 3 of them. They are- To see the ancient world-famous cities Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khiva, to try the best national dishes, world-famous tasty fruits (for example melons) and to go shopping in traditional oriental Uzbek bazaars/markets.

Q Please share the insights into winter tourism, sports tourism, and any other specialized theme-oriented travel journeys which you would like to highlight.

As I mentioned Uzbekistan is a multi-profile tourism country that can offer a wide range of tourism directions and sites for tourists.

There are lots of historical sites 2700 old



aged ancient cities, a lot of options to visit with families, most of them under the list of UNESCO world heritage.

There are mountain areas, deserts, forests, beautiful lakes for ecotourism.

There is a wide range of national

cuisines in different regions of Uzbekistan for food lovers- culinary tourism.

At the same time winter season in Uzbekistan is the very right destination for snow lovers and winter sports lovers.

There is also a big potential for

pilgrimage or ziyorah tourism in Uzbekistan. Since historically Uzbekistan was situated in the crossroads of ancient civilizations, there were different religions, confessions, and ethnic groups which is very well preserved till our modern period also. Those sites also attract a large number of visitors to Uzbekistan every year.

It should be also noted that the locomotive in the field of tourism in Uzbekistan is the direction of pilgrimage tourism, or as we say "Ziyorah tourism", along with this come the other different directions of tourism. To develop Ziyorah tourism, the special Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On measures for the further development of domestic and pilgrimage tourism in the Republic of Uzbekistan" was issued February 9, 2021. By this document, the creation of a favorable and comfortable domestic and international pilgrimage tourist environment is provided, expanding transport routes, improving the quality of services, promoting tourism products, as well as strengthening the image of our country as a safe place for travel and recreation. 🇺🇵





Shaking Up Sol Kadi, Goa's Traditional Spirit

A new Goan discovery, Solkadi’s fight to survive in a pro-cocktail era — and more.

SNEHA CHAKRABORTY

As it happens with many regional stereotypes, the presumed cultural eccentricities about Goa might sound like clichés, but they are facts too. A state that boasts international popularity for its azure beaches, and

endless coastline celebrations? Absolutely. Portuguese-influences are architecture and cuisines, pubs overwhelmed with free-flowing ragers? Slightly exaggerated but nevertheless still accurate. Yet, in one area the stereotype doesn’t hold, and to state it simply, not all of Goa’s traditional spirits are alcoholic. Contrary

to popular beliefs, besides Feni and Urrak, there are hundreds of chilled beverages that stray far from any spirits and consumed almost every day by the residents. Across an area of 1,429 square miles where everyone appreciates a good thirst-quencher, there are countless restaurants, shacks, and distilleries, many unlicensed, that produce

hundreds of thousand litres of local non-alcoholic beverages annually. What is clear is that the vast majority of the state likes to indulge in hefty amounts of flavoured drinks, which is also a cheap variety, lacking in the looks, akin to something homemade, and typically drunk after meals or as a part of socialisation. But in Candolim, the Goan metropolis has always been of the destinations that are first on the itinerary, and last on places that risk disappointing your pleasure. The Candolim Beach is a rite of passage for all travellers, as tour-guides and historians pass-by chattering about the dynamic history, and why this coastal town gives the capital a run for its money. If you take a walk around the place, away from the blinky signboards and flashy Casino bars, there are nooks where the only among other traditional drinks, are local mixologists are honing in on the craft of making the perfect Solkadhi or Goan Sol as a connoisseur-worthy drink and as a key component of nascent culinary culture. It is highly recommended to pause, detour, take a peek inside at a few of these places and explore



more about this underrated beverage. To get a sense of the wide variety of Solkadhi's available, take a seat at the Shivers Garden Restaurant, a sprawling garden restaurant (they also offer stays, and wellness experiences) that is styled as a charming outdoor establishment nestled amidst dense shrubberies, an establishment that prides itself for one of the most diverse mocktail menus in Goa. Instead of a typical selection of a drinks menu to go along with the food, Shivers Garden Restaurant sports a combination of Russian, American and Goan, many with tasting notes. It also prides itself on creating a unique yet run-of-the-mill Solkadhi. Solkadi is originally a part of Konkan and Malvani cuisine, popular in the Konkan belt dominating many parts of Maharashtra and Goa. Made from coconut milk and kokum, which you can also find in the street markets as Aamsol or Aamsul. Not unlike your cocktails, Solkadi can be found aged and unaged (a rare form), is made from a summer fruit, expresses both cooling, and refreshing properties. However, Solkadi producers don’t limit this as a drink —



While many of the à la carte menus won't be quick to offer a selection of non-alcoholic home-favourite, you can still find a few places if you look around or you can skip the fuss and head straight to a home-shack where the drinks tab begins with Amrut, Feni, Port Wine and Solkadhi, often with lots of coriander leaves on top, at times boasting their attention to their ethnic roots



instead, they may often serve it alongside rice as a side dish. Moreover, a small avant-garde of establishments has recently started highlighting different varieties of kokum as well as releasing flavoured Sols. All of this gives the handful of places that focus solely on this drink in their menus in Goa, and a wide gamut of flavours to experiment with.

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Made with kokum, coconut milk and some garnish, also included salt and natural flavours and was tempered with cumin, red chillies, garlic and a pinch of asafoetida, known commonly as Heeng — a nod, popular among the drink makers, to the country's incredible botanical richness.

In Goa's more urban regions, where bars and boutique beverage stores take a more creative turn with their homage to native recipes, Solkadhi, or similar drinks take an aesthetic turn with servings in design glassware, and pop-flavourings. Pro tip: If you are looking for a drink but stumble across its sorbet or popsicles of the same, don't hesitate to try it.

Overall, the culinary influencers say they are eager to bring such indigenous flavours for the mainstream that are distinctly regional. However, there are some challenges and the overcoming of Goa's image as a cocktail-capital that are inherent to promoting these drinks.

In working with Solkadhi, Christiana, a small-business owner who exports kokum said, she also must confront perceptions by tourists that the beverage and the post-meal drinks are a detour far from their tastebuds, are uncomfortable and unsophisticated.

Nonetheless, it takes a quick swipe at some of the most popular menus,

where vodka martinis and cosmopolitans vastly outnumber the more customary, to understand how the modern culinary revolution would influence age-old conventions before it swipes beneath the up and coming.

But don't mistake it for a drink that would make you feel any less of an explorer, or will take away any of the fun that convinced you to visit this state in the first place. Far from a heavy effort or a difficult experience that you would rather not experience, when approached like a cultural adventure, tasting Solkadhi can capture the true essence of tropical produces, being both distinctly offbeat and an opportunity to help some local small businesses.[iii](#)

— SNEHA CHAKRABORTY —

She is an independent writer and multimedia journalist based between London and Delhi. With a focus on long-form stories at the intersection of travel and culture, she writes about ethical travel, backpacking, tech-on-the-road for publications across the globe.

The Bravo spirit of Spain

Conversation with **Ms. Elisa Robles Fraga**, the Director of Tourism, Spain in India gave me a lot of insights about Post COVID situation and travel and tourism hope in the near future. She throws light on the wide range of memorable experiences which the country has to offer and the importance of slow and sustainable travel.

By Payal Sahni



Elisa Robles Fraga

Q How is Spain now post Covid (may discuss the mood and the sentiments of the people there).

Spanish people are aware of the sanitary crisis the country is going through. As in many other countries in the world, there are still some restrictions applied in order to contain the spread of the virus. Spanish people are well known for their social lifestyle, which nowadays, with limited gathering restrictions, is almost not happening. Nevertheless, we do know the only way of returning to normality is following the rules

and sanitary recommendations. We do look forward going back to the streets, squares, bars, theaters and beaches, but first, it is important to control the pandemic.

Q How has Spain recovered now, the controlled COVID situation. Is life back to normal?

Spain just passed the 3rd wave of the pandemic. Each region applies different restrictions, but mobility, gathering and curfew restrictions are applied all around Spain.

Q When do you think the borders will open both internationally and from India.

We are hopeful that borders reopening will resume in 2021 since people have dreamed of travelling this year and they cannot wait to pack their bags and discover a new destination. The positive signs of world-wide vaccination drives, following of hygiene and safety protocols at all kinds of establishments, increased demand of destinations adopting responsible and sustainable tourism measures like the ones

in Spain are some of the most motivational signs for outbound travel to resume from India.

Q How important is the travel and tourism industry for Spain. Travel and tourism is a vital industry for Spain.

Tourism was the sector that contributed the most wealth to the Spanish economy in 2019, with a total of 176,000 million euros per year representing 14.6% of GDP. In addition it created 2.8 million of direct and indirect jobs.

Q Has the economy been impacted? if yes how do we plan to overcome it? Yes, like most countries in the world the economy have been impacted by the pandemic.

The coronavirus crisis led the Spanish economy to register a clear GDP decline in 2020. With this setback, the economy breaks with six consecutive years of growth. The positive note within this catastrophe scenario is in the fourth quarter of the year when GDP maintains positive figures, with quarterly growth of 0.4%.

In the tourism field, a plan to boost the tourism sector was approved in July, endowed with an important budget in the National Budget this year 2021. The Plan includes development of a wide range of measures that range from health security protocols at an international level to implementation of measures to improve competitiveness of tourist destinations, tourism knowledge and intelligence model and marketing in order to position tourism in Spain as a safe destination. This will promote recovery and growth of the tourist attractions within Spain – urban establishments that offer modern solutions as well as rural areas and villages closer to nature offering tranquility and caring for the environment. Initiatives have been launched with the objective to advance and transform our model towards sustainable, digital, accessible, inclusive and safe tourism to improve competitiveness of Spanish tourism sector from a comprehensive perspective.

Q What are your favourite recommendations when one visits Spain.

Spain can offer a huge variety of attractions

to Indian tourists. Just as India, we are a country full on contrast and diversity. It's gastronomy, landscapes, weather, heritage and culture varies from one point to another. Something we have in common though, no matter where in Spain, is it's hospitality and charming welcome to the foreign visitor. It doesn't matter what is the motivation for the traveling to Spain: culture, gastronomy, sports, shopping, nature here you will find them all. Besides, this year we celebrate The Xacobeo Holy Year. The way of St. James is an incredible experience that will delight all tourist, a date that is eagerly awaited by pilgrims from all over the world. The well-known Jacobean pilgrimage routes of the Camino de Santiago (the Way of St. James) will be full of events throughout the year.

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Q Please tell us about the arts/ culture/ food/ major attractions of Spain. Please feel free to speak and add whatever you would like to.

As mentioned before, Spain is proud of having a vast culture, gastronomy and heritage. When visiting Spain, you cannot miss some of the best art galleries in Europe like the Prado Museum or Reina Sofia Museum. It doesn't matter if you are veg or not veg, you will find the best kind of paella (seafood, veg, meat) that suits your tastes everywhere by the Mediterranean shore. Travelling alone, in a couple or in a group, you will always find many activities in our most lively cities like Barcelona,

Málaga, Sevilla, Valencia or Bilbao.

Q What would be your advice on slow and sustainable travel within Spain where is one doesn't want to come there just as a short tourist but maybe would like to stay there for more than a month; which places would you suggest to stay and your inputs regarding expenditures for a traveler.

If looking for a slow and sustainable travel within Spain, I would recommend to take a taste of all geographical corners of Spain. Either by train or on a road trip, Spanish infrastructures will allow the traveler to move around the country easily. Besides, Spain counts with 15 national parks distributed throughout Spain (10 are on the peninsula, four in the Canary Islands and one in the Balearic Islands). You will find everything from mountainous areas in National Parks such as Picos de Europa or Ordesa and Monte Perdido to over 200 lakes in Aigüestores i Estany de Sant Maurici National Park; marshes that are a refuge for thousands of birds such as Doñana National Park and volcanic landscapes in Teide National Park.

In addition, 2021 and 2022 are Xacobeo Years. The way of St. James is an incredible experience that will delight all tourist, a date that is eagerly awaited by pilgrims from all over the world. The well-known Jacobean pilgrimage routes of the Camino de Santiago (the Way of St. James) will be full of events throughout the year.

Q What are your marketing and promotion strategies for the same.

Initiatives have been launched with the objective to advance and transform our model towards sustainable, digital, accessible, inclusive and safe tourism to improve competitiveness of Spanish tourism sector from a comprehensive perspective. Destination Sustainability Plans have been developed with a strong investment effort, creation of a tourist intelligence platform-DATAESTUR, to reinforce Spain with a new Travel Safe communication tool. Moreover, work is being done on development of Sustainable Tourism Strategy 2030, which constitutes the roadmap to maintain leadership position that Spain has in the tourism field, modernizing tourism model based on sustainability and implementation of tourism intelligence and digitization. 

Why India and Antarctica might be long-lost siblings

SRISHTI VERMA

When we were almost four feet tall, we were taught that there are seven continents. A common favourite was the one where we lived, and the one where we would find penguins. Now that fascination may have stemmed from the Pingu cartoon, or, from a theory which is believed by scientists. Let's delve deeper into that theory to see how India and Antarctica could be related (Kumbh Mela from Bollywood, anyone?).

This continent, dry, frozen and with no trees in sight, has not always been such. When we travel back in time to 225 million years ago, the Earth was budding with life and was growing into a young teen. It was called the Permian period. Blue waters surrounded the landmass. Like a lump of clay in a child's palm, the land was held

together, almost together, with its ends and corners rough, no oceans where we see them now and was called Pangaea.

This child then grew and 25 million years later (that is a short time in geological years), Pangaea broke into two pieces: Laurasia and Gondwanaland. Present-day North America, Europe and Asia formed Laurasia, while South America, Africa, Antarctica, Australia and Indian subcontinent became part of the Gondwanaland. Laurasia and Gondwanaland were separated by the Tethys Sea between them.

As time flew by, dinosaurs came to inhabit the Earth. At this time, 150 million years ago, the Gondwanaland started breaking up too, which led to a continental drift. This drifting apart led to Africa separating from South America, with the South Atlantic Ocean forming in between. Following in close lead was





the Indian subcontinent which broke off and moved towards the north to join Asia, and Antarctica moved towards south. The movement of the plates was heightened and led to volcanic activity. Many continents were covered by shallow seaways and fossils were deposited.

Most fossils from this period were found in the Jura mountains, thus the name Jurassic period. These fossils have been found to contain coal, petroleum, gold and many other natural resources. The continent, now frozen and penguin abode was once lush and green with forests and vegetation covering the area. There were conifers, ginkgo and ferns which made the landmass green and eventually gave way to flowering plants by the end of the late Jurassic period.

Now over the course of years, as the fossils were discovered, a peculiarity was observed.

The rocks that have been researched upon and the fossils that were found in

Antarctica are quite similar to the ones that have been found in the Indian subcontinent.

Let's go back to that clay lump we talked about. From that lump broke off Laurasia and Gondwanaland. Then the latter broke off into separate pieces. However, as the parent material remained the same, Antarctica and India came to have a similar set of fossils and rocks. Thus, the organisms, however big and small, the plants, the rocks, everything was buried under the surface for a very long time, waiting to be discovered. It seems that not only Antarctica, but Madagascar, Australia and the eastern parts of present-day Africa have similar rocks and fossils in them as India thus.

Can India and Antarctica be long lost siblings then? Going by the popularly accepted theory of plate motion as discussed above, they can very well be. But for more discoveries to take place, Antarctica needs to be preserved. Though it is the only continent which no country can lay claims upon, Antarctica is being adversely

affected by our activities. Antarctic food web is in danger because of the increased amount of carbon dioxide which increases acidity of the waters, leading to changes in the productivity of marine microbes. Global warming can reduce the Antarctic Bottom Water formation, which would happen if the coasts of Antarctica become warmer. The Bottom Water carries oxygen from surface to the deep, deep depths of the ocean for the communities to survive there. It is high time we focus on and limit the destruction we are doing to the planet for this penguin-abode and beautifully frozen continent to survive. Let's save the planet; we need it, animals and plants need it, and our future generations need it. [u](#)

SRISHTI VERMA

She is a Delhi-based freelance writer. She loves reading and travelling, with a special place for lofty mountains in her heart. When not writing, she can be found working on her book and looking at pictures from when she was 2 feet tall.

The Green 'Spirit'

Behind this hardcore corporate shell is a soft-spoken down to earth humble soul who is trying to make her mark in the field of making the surroundings green. The project is very close to her heart and evokes fire in her. This also keeps her sane and de-clutters her mind, she says. We at Travel Links have always propagated the importance of going vegan/ green/sustainable which is going to be the way forward for all of us. Here is a brief about my interaction with Ranjita, who currently heads the Public Relations and Marketing communications for Roseate Hotels and Resorts India & UK (Bird Group).

Ranjita Shaw – Founder, My Green Barn



BY PAYAL SAHNI

Q What ignited you to start this?

I have always been close to nature. I used to see my parents grow vegetables and the most gorgeous varieties of roses in our garden while growing up. It then struck me then and I realized how nature and greenery stimulate my mind. I feel de-cluttered, think well and creativity and ideas flow naturally.

We live in a concrete jungle today - mostly apartments where space is a constraint and we are in a constant race to achieve our goals and prove ourselves. In all this, we forget that we are an integral part of this planet and its custodians too. Adding a dash of green to our homes not only soothes our senses and keeps us close to nature but makes us more productive too. When you nurture plants and trees whether at home or outside, you feel grounded and take ownership of this planet which is everyone's responsibility. I had for long wanted to start something on these lines where I could do my bit and thus did. Along with that am also working on simple chic home and living ideas that complement the theme.

Q The meaning behind the name “My Green Barn”.

My green barn – Green because it is the need of the hour, for our planet, climate as well as for ourselves. Barn because if you flashback in olden days and even now in many villages, farms would have barns used to store grains and all essential goods necessary for our living. Today trees, plants, and greens are

imperative for our survival. We need to go back to leading simple lives with a serious thought of keeping sustainability in mind.

Q Let us know about its importance and its compelling need.

With the felling of trees, ozone



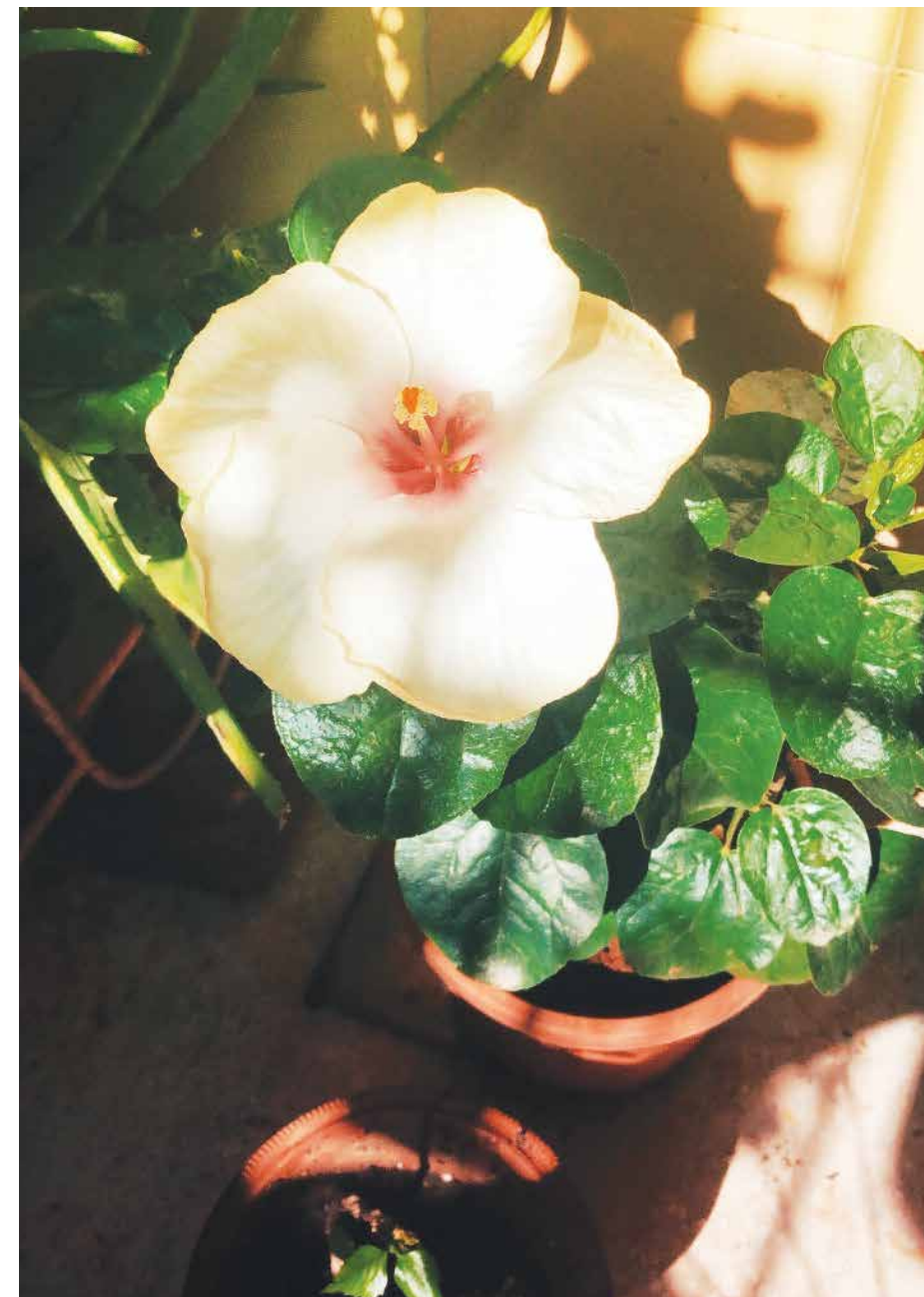
depletion, water crisis, waste increase, pollution and the like critical conditions we need to add more vertical gardens, more plants, and trees in our cities and households to add longevity to our race and all the living beings on this planet. Plus they are the most economical decorative components one can find and add oomph to every room!

Q Please let us know about sustaining the project and the vision for it.

My vision is to have plants in every household first for our tribe to understand the change it brings about in us and eventually have it in every corner of this planet, especially fast-growing cities where forests are being replaced with roads, buildings, and concrete.

With plants, I also want to focus on and promote sustainability, recycling, and reuse of domestic goods which we don't think twice before getting rid of, and finally, simple chic home and living ideas. To start, I have been taking projects of my family and friends to uplift their homes with as many plants and greens as possible be it independent houses or tiny apartments. I also ensure this is done in the society I live in to bring about a greener and cleaner environment.

Q What is your POA to achieve it?



This is the hardest bit. My first POA is to change the mindset first and have people love and embrace plants, not take them for granted.

My project is in its naissance stage, as I only started towards the second half of last year. I am taking one step at a time - first building content on social media that stresses sprucing up homes with a wide variety of plants and connecting it with the happiness quotient they bring about in our life and taking us close to nature. Additionally, I also share tips to maintain them amidst our daily chores and fast-paced life.

The Ancient and Amazing Acropolis of Athens

GAUTAM SING KANWAL

Anyone who visits Greece is surely going to remain obsessed with it forever. The birthplace of democracy, the foundation of western civilisation, the creator of the Olympics and some extraordinary legends are just a few of the myriad feathers in the cap of this splendid land. If you love history, this is a place where you will find it in abundance. If you love mythology, this is the place where you can immerse yourself in never ending tales of folklore and myth. And if you love architecture this is the place for the eye-popping visual treats of ancient buildings. I need not mention the natural beauty of the various Greek islands, which is forgone knowledge. There are lots of places all over

the country that are worthy of repeated visits and bringing back long-lasting memories. And in my own experience I have great reminiscences from Acropolis and Athens (the capital city of Greece overlooked by Acropolis).

Being a short drive from the Skaramanga dock (where my ship had docked for servicing and repairs) it is easily accessible by local cabs and in roughly 20 minutes the bustling area of Monastiraki welcomes you at the heart of the Greek capital. A popular spot for shopping and leisure, it has been the centre of tourist attraction with live bands and street artists performing for the visitors. The Monastiraki square has a great variety of souvenir shopping and loads of clothing stores. Some food stalls around the area sell delicious and fresh Mediterranean cuisine.

A lot of variety entertainment is sprawled across the beautifully tiled flooring of the Monastiraki square. Without any doubt, Monastiraki is great for eating and shopping. One can spend a good amount of time without realizing it.

Having spent some time at Monastiraki I decided to grab a quick bite before walking up to the Acropolis. A scrumptious meal of souvlaki and shawarma got us pumped up for the uphill walk to the most historic site in Greece (Souvlaki is the most popular snack which is widely available everywhere at a reasonable price). The walk can be a bit tiring so it is advisable to carry a bottle of water for the hike and to wear a pair of comfy shoes.

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At the entrance you're to purchase your tickets for visiting the Parthenon, the museum and other attractions around. The tickets are valid for about a week which is a fair deal as a detailed tour of the Acropolis would definitely take around 3 days. Every site at the Acropolis will be covered in the ticket and each of those can be visited just once during the validity period of the ticket.

As you enter the premises you will be spellbound by the magnificence and the artistic expertise of the ancient Greeks. Standing atop the Acropolis you know you're at the highest point in Athens, overlooking the skyline of the Greek capital. The mighty Acropolis served as a perfect

vantage point as well as an effective citadel, and it is still commanding the Athens skyline even after 2500 years. The Acropolis (meaning fortified hilltop) is a limestone hill which is adorned by some marvellous classical architecture of the ancient Greeks.

The Parthenon stands out as the most prominent structure on the Acropolis hill. This architectural marvel that has served as a temple dedicated to Athena (Goddess of wisdom in Greek mythology), a treasury, a citadel and for other purposes for the ancient Greeks is a sight to behold and a camera feast for the shutterbugs. Not only is it a treat for the eyes, the techniques and ingenuity in methods used to build this structure is something to marvel at. The standout feature of the Parthenon are the pillars or columns which are towering and imposing in nature. The interesting part is that these are not complete pillars, but drum shaped pieces piled one over the other to form the column. Each drum piece getting narrower as the column is

tapering towards the top. Each drum is precisely constructed to match the sizes to give the column a look of a single structure. Furthermore, we learnt that the columns are not parallel as they appear to the naked eye, but converge at a very slight angle. If they were to continue their vertical extent they would meet atop to form a pyramid around 2 kilometres in height. The marble quarry excavated for construction of the Parthenon is still existing and is about 15 kilometres east of Athens.

This mighty structure does prove to be a robust structure after having survived for so long weathering the climate, effects of pollution and barbarian attacks and still managing to stand tall as the most iconic symbol of Greece.

Facing the Parthenon on the northern side of the Acropolis is a sacred temple, the Erechtheion. It is said to have housed a precious statue of Athena and one of Zeus as well.

The Erechtheion also served as a church

as well as an entertainment house for the Ottomans at different points of time in history. This building is believed to have been built on the spot where the great ruler Erechtheus had been killed and his grave could be in proximity of this structure (Archaeologists have discovered many grave sites on the Acropolis Hill). Erechtheus is said to have rescued the entire Acropolis from invaders in a critical war for the Greeks thus avoiding an unwanted major watershed moment for them. Erechtheion finds mention in the writings of Homer (Iliad as well as Odyssey). Walking around the Erechtheion can give you an eerie feeling as on side of the building is particularly higher than its opposite side owing to the sloping hillside upon which it is built. However, the sloping side of the Erechtheion flaunts the beautiful sculpture referred to as 'Porch of the Maidens'. These are six female statues which are a monolithic piece. Each statue is over life size and carved from a single rock. The most ironic thing about these maidens is that they have less to do as myth figures and are actually used as support pillars

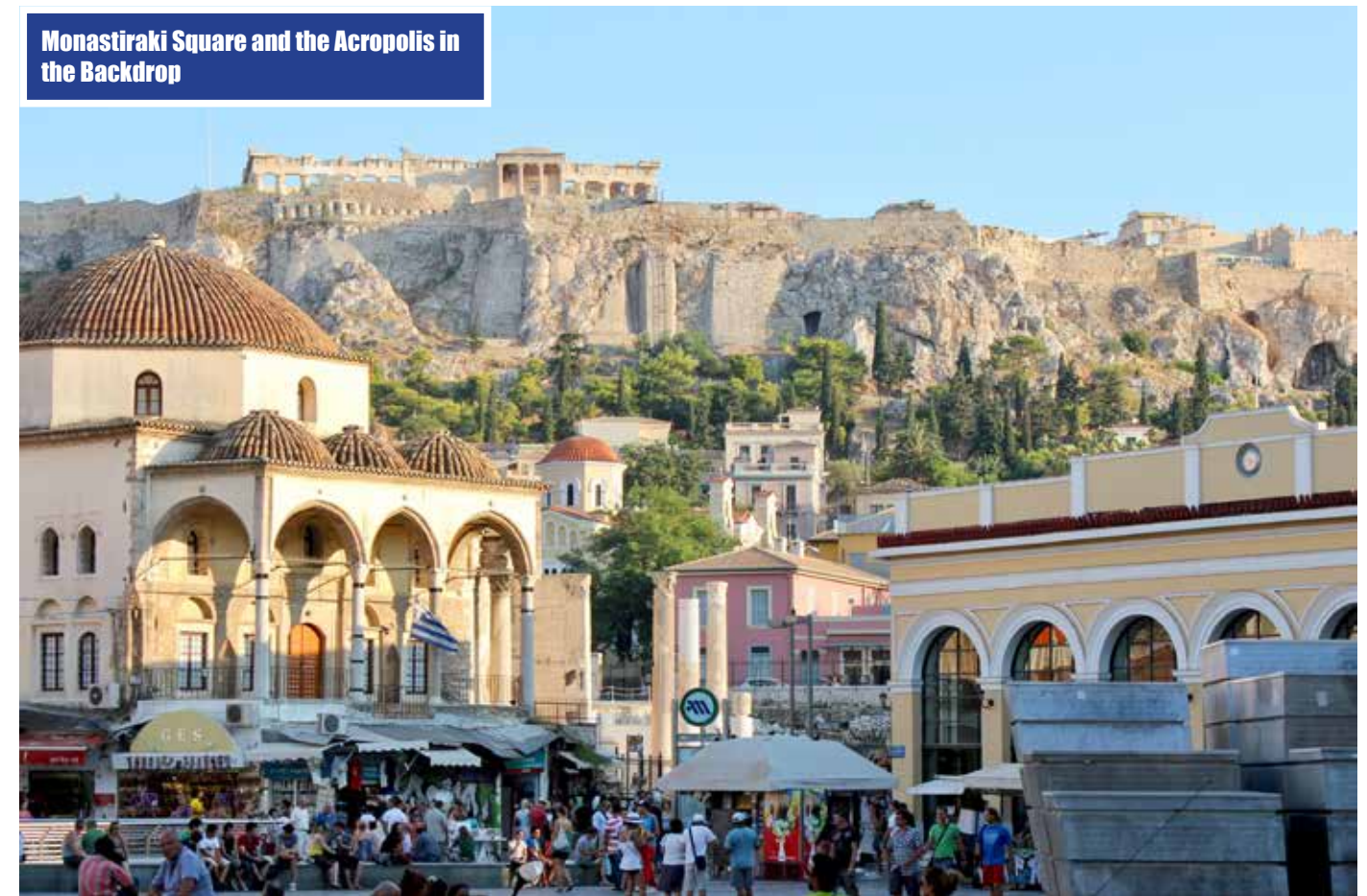
for overhead beams. But the detailed, sophisticated carvings and their layout orientation do give them a look of some important mythological characters. Myths of monsters, devils, heroes and Gods have been at the heart of Greek culture and much of it is evident in the many other sculpture pieces across the Acropolis.

The fact that these elegant structures (which are actually in ruins) have retained a decent share of their beauty even after violent attacks over centuries from Venetians, Persians, Ottomans and others does make us wonder what a majestic beauty they would have been in their pristine form.

Another stunning architectural piece at the Acropolis is the open-air theatre, The Odeon of Herodes Atticus (Named after Greek-Roman Politician who had it built in his wife's memory). This theatre is built along the southern slope of Acropolis, so the seating arrangement of the audience is getting its natural shape from the hill side until the base of the Acropolis where the stage is. The theatre had been built with

perfect acoustic specifications as sound waves reflect very well along the rock structures of the theatre.

The sloping arrangement of the steps were well used with calculated geometric alignment to get the sound from the centre stage to spread and reflect equally in all directions with similar magnitude. This incredible technical feat in acoustics must have been a ground-breaking achievement some 2000 years ago. Many such theatres existed all over Greek and Roman empires and some of their acoustics are so perfect that a coin dropped at the centre of the stage can be clearly heard at the rear most row of the audience seats. The Odeon of Herodes Atticus is probably one of the most beautiful of such theatres in Greece. It has been restored a great deal since the 1950s and has even seen performances from the greatest musicians and singers (including Yanni and Pavarotti) to packed audiences. Walking across and around this semi-circular amphitheatre I couldn't help but imagine the extraordinary feeling that would be experienced here while watching





Odeon of Herodes Atticus

a play or a music concert under the night sky. That's something I would definitely want to do sometime in the future.

Towards the western edge of the Acropolis is a towering flag post where a huge Greek national flag flies and is flanked by tourists all around it. This is a perfect viewing spot as it provides a panoramic view of the entire city of Athens. You spot buildings and houses clustered all around as far as the eye can see and this is the most popular selfie spot at the Acropolis. Here you could easily spend an entire hour

without realising it, just gazing all around, relishing commanding views of the Greek capital.

The Acropolis museum has some exquisite artefacts on display. There are statues of Zeus, some original sculpture pieces from the Parthenon frieze, a statue of The Kritios boy among other sculptures as well as pottery and bronze artefacts. A guide at the museum explained to us that there are archaeological studies and findings which suggest that the Parthenon contained a massive statue

of Athena which was made of ivory and adorned with gold. That statue was much more valuable than the entire Parthenon itself. A replica of the statue is made by local artisans and sold all over the city of Athens as a souvenir and I made it a point to buy one which was made of the same marble used to build the Parthenon.

The museum makes a good display of the early sculptures which depict Greek mythological characters. Some of these are restored and partly restored sculptures which have been deformed / damaged

over the centuries. The museum's extensive collection from the ancient ruins make for an insightful and educative trip.

Walking back from the Acropolis to Monastiraki square, you can take a tour of the famous Hadrian's Library. This was the largest library in all of Athens back in its time built more than 2000 years ago. It is believed to have held the greatest literary works of the time and also stored the government documents and archives. The library is believed to have flaunted a hundred marble columns around it and



The Parthenon



Entertainment at the Monastiraki Square

was a very beautiful building in its original form.

The flamboyance of the columns that remain in the present day are a good indicator of the same. Many architectural signs of ancient churches are still there to be seen in the courtyard of the library including some fragments of mosaic flooring. The Hadrian's Library though not in the main premises of the Acropolis, but is included in the ticket and shouldn't be missed out.

Not very far from the Monastiraki

square is the Panathenaic Stadium. This is the original Modern Olympics stadium which was built way back in 330 BC. Just a 10-minute drive from Monastiraki, but if one is excited enough, he can walk and get there in 20 minutes. That way you get to explore the lanes of Athens where you are likely to spot some unique graffiti on the walls and shutters.

Upon getting there you will definitely want to take a lap of the stadium as most tourists do. It's a beautiful stadium made entirely of marble. Anyone who

The Acropolis (A Limestone Hill which had been fortified by ancient Greeks)



A viewpoint at The Acropolis offering panoramic view of Athens.



is interested in sports and history (and most people are, atleast in one of the two) would definitely not want to miss out on visiting this place. The views here are very impressive to say the least. There is a tunnel at one end through which athletes walked into the stadium for their events. The seats for the Greek Rulers / chief guests is still in place. This is not just simply a sports stadium, but a window

into the colourful history of competitive sports. A good place to eat at Monastiraki square is the Antica café. That's where we decided to have a meal. A pretty looking place with seating indoors as well as outdoors. A great menu for continental food. We had some Greek platters, souvlaki (again) and pizzas over there in the evening. Rest of the times we had been

eating from the road side stalls. It turned out to be a good eating joint which was recommended by a colleague and I would recommend it to others as well, though there are a great many other popular restaurants around the area. One can enjoy the performance of street artists and music bands while munching down Greek cuisines. Before leaving from Monastiraki

square you can't help looking back at the Acropolis hilltop in the distance once again and start feeling nostalgic. The lighting on the Acropolis at night creates a gilded glow all over the Parthenon giving it a sacred appearance. Sacred indeed as it holds many stories of Greek history, legend and mythology. It might well be the place where Pheidippides fell and died after having run about 25 miles all the way from the



A lit up Acropolis viewed at Night from Monastiraki

town of Marathon only to give news of victory over a bigger Persian army in the battle of Marathon. All in all I would conclude by saying that though Greece is definitely a bucket list destination as travellers have marked many dream destinations such as Santorini, Mykonos, Corfu, Crete and Zakynthos in their bucket list, however, in my own opinion, one could never feel the

Greek experience without making a trip to the Acropolis of Athens. [u](#)

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Around Szentendre, Exploring a Hungarian Coastal Town

Szentendre is not the lesser-known destination it was once but situated a few miles from the capital of Hungary, many sure miss it even today.

SNEHA CHAKRABORTY

Bequeathed with more art galleries than any other town in the country, cobblestone streets that disappear into multi-coloured alleyways, and blooming flower boxes almost everywhere, Szentendre is a town straight out of postcard paintings. Located 15 miles from the centre of Budapest, the city is a juxtaposition of cultures. There's modern glass cafes, digital art establishments and e-gift shops which perfectly balance the old souvenir boutiques, roadside churros and artists who make portraits on the sidewalk to make money. With a majority population of native Serbian families, there is a church on every road of the town. From its orthodox religious history to a southern adventure on the Pest-side of the Danube river, this town offers something for every traveller.

The best stories begin with food, and in Szentendre, it starts with a Serbian breakfast platter on the Main Square (Ftér). It popularly consists of an assorted range of pastries filled with either meat or jam, bread, bacon, sausages and sour cream to accompany the coal baked eggs. If, hungry for more, head to Álom Lángos, and order the dish the bakery is named after, Langos. The aroma of this deep-fried dough bread can be sensed from miles away, and the bustle of the crowd on its door speaks for its reputation. On the glass window, there is a tiny notation that says, “ask for a magic

trick when you order,” and if you follow the note, your Langosh will be tossed onto your plate with a spin.

Descend from the culinary centre straight into the 18th century with a detour to the Hungarian Open Air Museum.

Take the local bus from Szamos Museum to the Greek-orthodox Blagovestenska Church. It offers a spectacle for art lovers with paintings by artist Mihailo Zivkovic.

Locals praise it for the platform that it has been for the past decade to help native artists showcase their work.

The stage inside the church is named “visszaverdés” which is Hungarian for reflection.

Established in 1967, it is one of Hungary's largest outdoor monuments inspired by Carpathian folk architecture. The non-profit organisation is open to the public and doesn't take more than an hour to tour with audio-visual guides available to visitors for free. From the topmost floor, gazing down upon the bend of the Danube and the churches that surround it, the importance of the river can be realised

almost instantly. Before heading back, make your way to Szamos Marzipan Museum, a decadent museum that displays hundreds of Marzipans in glass cases for confectionary enthusiasts.

Take the local bus from Szamos Museum to the Greek-orthodox Blagovestenska Church. It offers a spectacle for art lovers with paintings by artist Mihailo Zivkovic. Locals praise it for the platform that it has been for the past decade to help native artists showcase their work. The stage inside the church is named “visszaverdés” which is Hungarian for reflection. “Our children see this church as a reflection of

As the sunlight gradually extinguishes itself, people sit there watching the day fade. Tiny lights twinkle inside the bar, and the endlessly flowing conversations remind one of their own homes as they sit among people of such a close-knit community.

their heritage, their faith and their abilities to prosper in the world outside,” says pastor Agnes Akos who has been with the church and its community for the past two decades. “Not many people visit Szentendre until they do, and then they come back. This city accepts all kinds of people, painters looking for inspiration, artists who need a place to practice their craft and a glimpse of Europe in a more traditional way.”

Continuing north of the town, the sunset calls for a high viewpoint and bottomless Pálinkas, an exclusive Hungarian alcoholic beverage. Folt kávézó offers both along with bottomless ale for 12. Across the





road, a homey BnB sits there with a neon signboard that claims to offer tipsy travellers a free stay if they can't go back home. "It's true. People are really helping here," yells the bartender to an already intoxicated group of backpackers.

As the sunlight gradually extinguishes itself, people sit there watching the day fade. Tiny lights twinkle inside the bar, and the endlessly flowing conversations remind one of their own homes as they sit among people of such a close-knit community.

Now hiking through the backyard forests of Szentendre, a narrow and rocky pathway that leads to the city of Budapest, the chaos of the city settles into the sound of peaceful Danube. A favourite stop, Teddy Bear offers more than 100 varieties of beer with 22 on tap and weekend house parties that invite the whole town, especially visitors. The caramel wooden bar counter

Lined on the coastal edge, pastel cottages are the most preferred accommodation by travellers. The porch opens up to a seaside view with food stalls and marketplaces just around the corner. Inside, wooden floors made of teak and sal perfectly complements the 18th-century decor. The rhythmic sound of waves can be enjoyed with a Persian-style open barbeque at night.

is covered in brochure, offering a free pint of beer if you order their Oriental Pork burger and finish it in under five minutes.

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Szentendre is one of the few destinations where the perfect way to end your journey is set in stone, literally. A few miles from the town square, a dark grey limestone states, "Visit us again. Take the boat to say goodbye," in Hungarian. The local authorities of the town built this sign to encourage more people to use the waterways instead of buses and trains



in the early 20s. Today, it has become an instruction almost every visitor obliges to. The tranquil boat ride from the town to Budapest cost 10 and takes less than an hour to reach the Buda side of Danube. The leisurely trip is a great opportunity for sightseeing around the river. From fishermen to market vendors, Danube serves as an important connection for trade between the many small towns and the capital. "We live on the coast only for this river. We worship it, take care of the water and in return, it provides us with everything we can ask for," says Maken, a helmsman who takes travellers to and from Szentendre as a part-time job.

Silently sailing to the capital city for a new adventure or to catch a flight back home, watch the coast light up after sundown. Szentendre, with its undeniable beauty and charm, will become a destination you might just come back to explore again. [\[1\]](#)

• SNEHA CHAKRABORTY •

She is a multimedia journalist and writer of essays, commentary and features, with a particular focus on travel. Based between London and Delhi, she has lived in two continents and traveled to 8 (and counting). Follow her travels on Instagram @fuzzygreysack.



Jammu And Kashmir Because We Needed a Paradise on Earth

Gar firdaus, ruhe zamin ast, hamin asto, hamin asto, hamin ast.

BY SRISHTI VERMA

Translated roughly to English from Persian, this means, “If there is a heaven on Earth, it is here, it is here, it is here”.

Kashmir. The name comes with different memories flooding everyone’s minds. To some, it is the land of Dal lake, Mughal gardens for others, and to my 13-year-old cousin, “chappu”. We had visited Kashmir in 2009. As I write this a bit over a decade later, I am overwhelmed with the feelings that Kashmir brought forth in all of us.

A long drive from Delhi to Pathankot took us to Patnitop where we had halted for the night, before hitting the road again to reach Srinagar the next day. We had reached the day after Christmas, to a milestone which read “First view of Kashmir Valley” following Banihal tunnel. Candles add up on my birthday cake each year that day and we had managed to put a “Happy Birthday” note on it (yes, we remembered to remove it). The road right after the tunnel was lined with snow and our hearts were full of excitement and joy about what the Valley held for us.

Kashmir had been kind enough to us, ensuring we had beautiful views to capture in minds forever. Srinagar, the capital, is dotted with tourist hotspots. There are Shalimar and Nishat gardens,



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Around the same circumference is the Shankaracharya temple. The highest elevated point in the city, it rewards you with extensive, expansive and breathtaking panoramas of Srinagar after a steep line of over 250 steps. Not to miss is the Hazratbal mosque located at the northern bank of Dal. It houses Muhammad’s hair strands and is one of the holiest sites in Kashmir.

close to each other on the right side of the Dal lake. Often touted to be similar in how they look, each has its own charm and you would be witness to various flowers, in variety of colours, shapes and sizes that the mind can imagine.

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Then there is Chashmeshahi. Another Mughal creation with a freshwater source, Chashmeshahi is said to have supplied for drinking water to the India’s first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru- fable or truth, we would let it be for the for the readers to research and share it with us. Drive a few kilometres ahead on the same road, and you would reach Pari Mahal. Pari Mahal was Dara Shikoh’s creation, now left in ruins and protected by Archeological Survey of India.

Before we go further, let’s not forget



the beautiful lake that Srinagar is based around. Dal lake is a natural beauty, dotted with houseboats, shikaras, a floating vegetable garden and 2 islands in the lake (Char Chinar and Sona Lank). The lake freezes in the winters and is indeed a sight to behold. On our visit, my cousin learnt from the gentle shikara rider that the oars are called chappu, and he let the youngest in our family to hold and play with them.

Now going further from Srinagar, there are hill stations at a driving distance. Gulmarg, Khilanmarg and Sonmarg provide the mountain-feeling we crave and are brilliant for a day or two’s overnight stay. Sonmarg leads one from Srinagar to Kargil, eventually going towards Leh. Gulmarg has a cable car to ferry





passengers to the top where they are led into excellent skiing slopes. My family had a wonderful time, slipping and sliding in the snow and throwing snowballs at each other. We were glad that our and shoes were not wet and could enjoy even more. Gulmarg in summers was an altogether different sight with horses, mules and green pastures soothing our souls.

Not to miss in Kashmir are the nature's bountiful blessings on us. These have been conserved in Dachigam National Park, about 22 km from Srinagar. Then, about a 30 minutes' drive from Srinagar towards West leads us to the Hokera wetland. This is a Ramsar site which was previously discussed in our post on Ramsar sites in November-December 2020 issue.

Kashmir, as unbounded as this valley's beauty is, is unfortunately marred with a painful history. Following independence in 1947, the valley has been subjected to repeated episodes of disturbances and a mass exodus of Kashmiri Pandits in 1990. Almost 6,00,000 people were displaced






from the land they called their own, from the neighbourhoods they grew up in, from the homes they built with love and affection, and from the place they deeply cherished. A neighbour of mine is brought to tears each time she talks about leaving Kashmir and wishes for her daughter to see the valley once. We had seen innumerable houses burnt and shattered on our way to Srinagar. They could settle themselves elsewhere, but how could their hearts and minds ever come to peace!

The valley of Kashmir has seen enough violence and pain, lost enough children, and has seen enough families living there broken apart. It is time we let Kashmir be what it was meant for- the heaven that

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nobody could their souls away from.

Let the rustic charm of the valley remain. Let the old lanes of Lal Chowk smell of fresh bread. Let there be more appreciators of the exquisite art of walnut wood-carving. Let a child roam free, singing and dancing. Let phirans and kangris keep us warm in winters. Let love be the single thread binding us all, like the single long stitch of Kashida embroidery.

Happy travelling to you! 

— SRISHTI VERMA —

She is a Delhi-based freelance writer. She loves reading and travelling, with a special place for lofty mountains in her heart. When not writing, she can be found working on her book and looking at pictures from when she was 2 feet tall.



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