



# Travel Links

VOLUME 02 | ISSUE 06

JULY - AUGUST 2021

All about the Dominican  
*Experience*

INDIAN  
HERITAGE

MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM  
**SWEDEN**

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





# Travel Links

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Every issue of Travel Links brings forth unforeseen challenges as far as after-effects of the pandemic are concerned. Never the less it is only because of the appreciation shown for the content, love, and support of each one of you that I could think of bringing new stories and renewed perspective.

The issue is backed with interesting cohesive articles ranging from the top bars in Mumbai, things to do in Mysore and jungle lodges of Karnataka to name a few.

Get set for this journey spanning centuries of Indian architectural gloriousness, expertise, and legends that have made us who we are. History has lent us numerous stories, no less than fairy tales that continue to inspire us and give us goosebumps at their resplendence.

The review of Le Meridien Jaipur Resort & Spa uncovers the in-depth facilities this property has to offer, which is indeed a perfect hideaway destination.

From the international range, the write-up on Sweden will transport you to their world of sustainable living. In Sweden, the appreciation for life and nature is strongly interlinked. You can enjoy Fika at home, or go into the forest to forage food. Swedes know how to enjoy the weather and celebrate life as it comes. They are strongly looking out for their future generations through sustainable living.

Interview with Qatar COO brings insights about the development and vision for Qatar.

The Ambassador of Dominican Republic to India, shares about the places to explore, the Caribbean culture, languages spoken, food to eat but also talk about the sustainable initiatives of the country.

Belarus is a country with an ancient history and rich traditions, beautiful nature and amazing architecture, industrial giants and well-developed agriculture, unique cuisine, and hospitable people.

Enjoy reading this issue, till then we stay tuned to bring on the next issue which will be our 2nd-anniversary issue. **Stay Tuned.**

**Editor**

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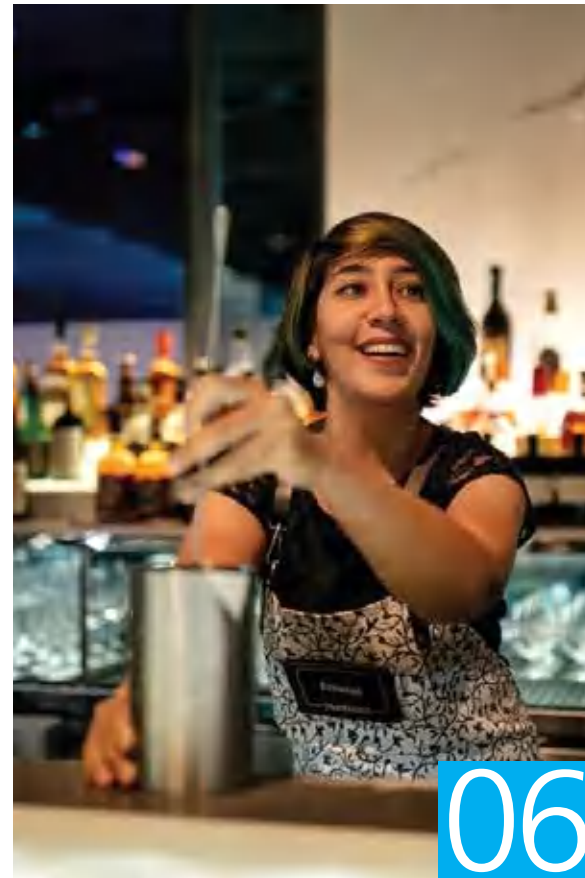
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# CONTENT

THE BEST ROOFTOP BARS  
IN MUMBAI

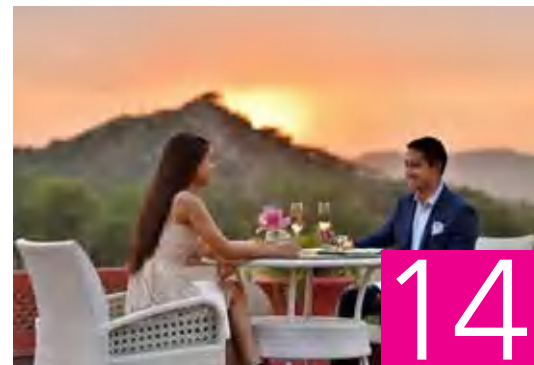


06

JUNGLE LODGES &  
RESORTS IN KARNATAKA

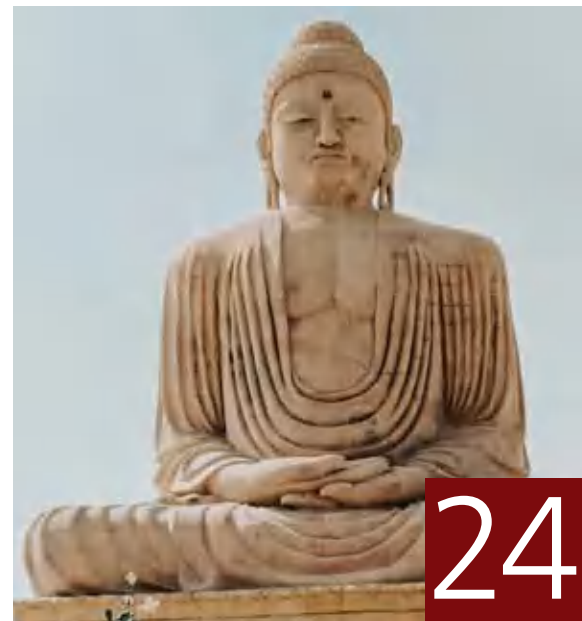


20



14

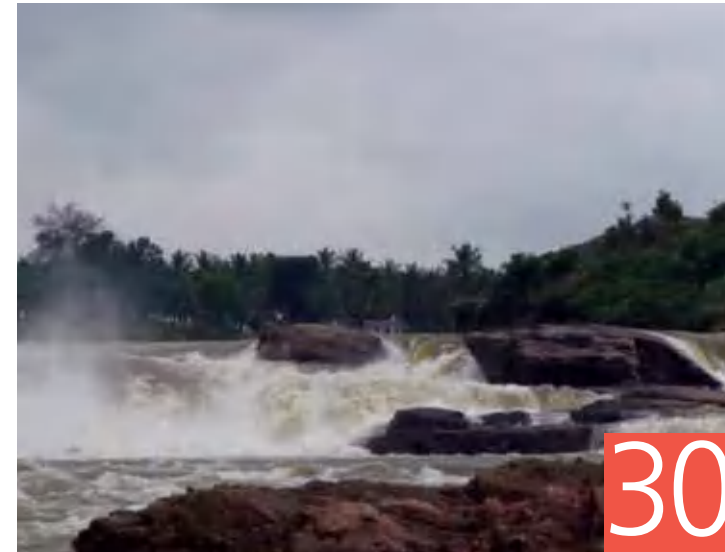
THE GRANDEUR OF LE MERIDIEN  
JAIPUR RESORT & SPA



24

OUR HERITAGE, OUR PRIDE  
AN ARTICLE SERIES

MYSORE  
THE CITY OF PALACES



30

ALL ABOUT THE  
DOMINICAN EXPERIENCE



36



34

5 THINGS YOU HAVE  
TO DO IN PHUKET



42

QATAR TOURISM



64

MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S  
DREAM SWEDEN



52

PHILIPPINES AN ISLAND-HOPPING  
ADVENTURE OF A LIFETIME



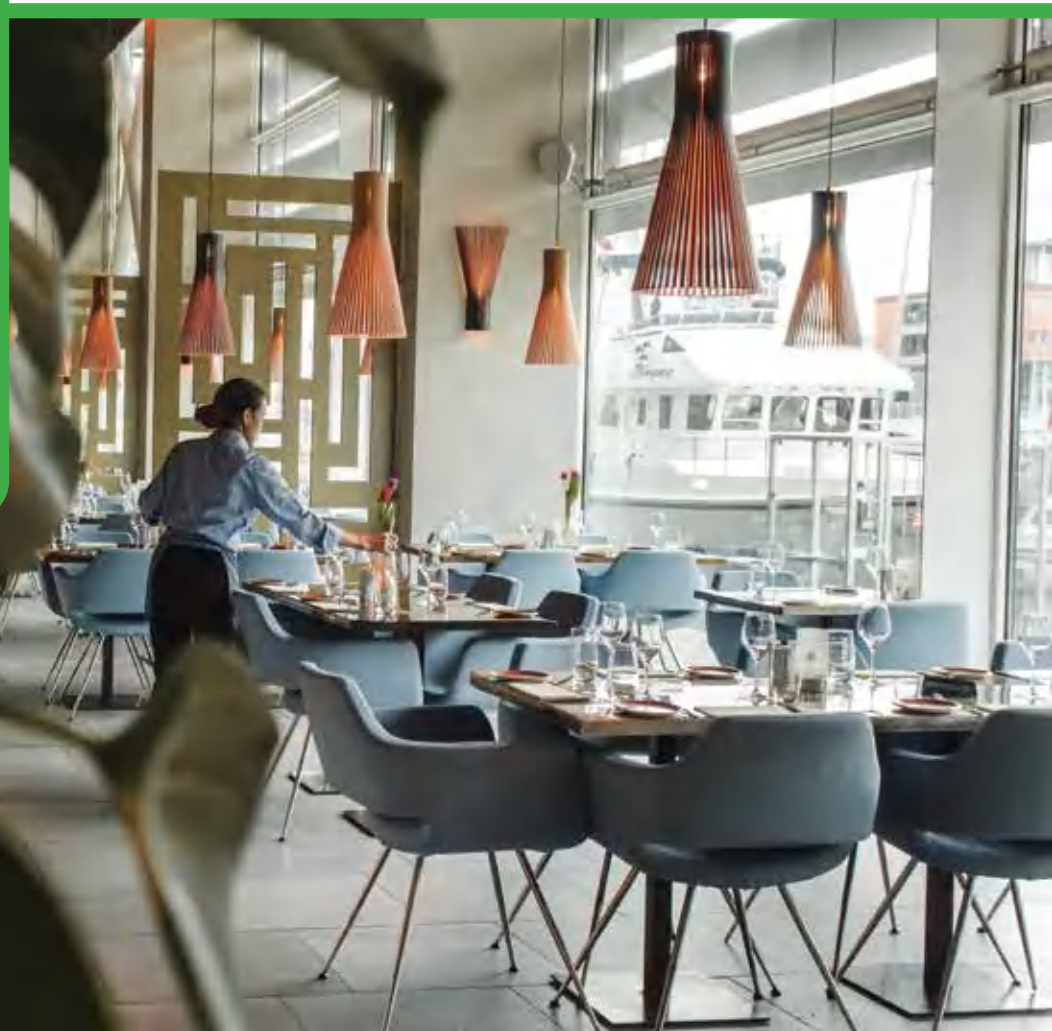
# The Best Rooftop Bars IN MUMBAI

SNEHA CHAKRABORTY

## Standfirst

In a city like Mumbai, swanky hotel residences in skyscrapers are perched on every street corner, so it comes as no surprise that the city's best rooftop watering holes happen to be inside them. From elegant, uncomplicated lounges frequented by the illustrious to rooftop aeries with fiery cocktail menus, these places are raising the bar—literally.

While many of Mumbai's terrace hangouts are perched atop hotel establishments along the Marine Drive, during summer, in-the-know locals head up to the city's most buzzing rooftops. Here is where to find the best bars in Mumbai with sky-high views for a good time.



## The Dome, Marine Drive

Always one step ahead of the curve, Dome - InterContinental attracts the city's in-crowd. Assuming you can get a reservation (especially during the weekend), you will find fashion designers and chefs, artists, and tech entrepreneurs, drinking Sirocco with artisanal pizza squares and lounge next to the pool that glows with a luminous aura after sundown.

Address: 135, Marine Dr, Churchgate, Mumbai, Maharashtra 400020  
Website: [www.ihg.com/intercontinental/hotels/us/en/reservation](http://www.ihg.com/intercontinental/hotels/us/en/reservation)



## Asilo, Lower Parel

The St. Regis Hotel bills the Asilo as an open sky sanctuary with a European twist, complete with Champagne cocktails, a noteworthy grill menu and an all-white decor that repaints a postcard scene from Santorini. Guests lets loose to the live music and a view encompassing all Marine drive, Haji Ali, the sea-link, and the skyscrapers of South Mumbai. Toast to the good life with a melon-spiced martini, a blend of Ketel-1 vodka, French wine, and imported Louis Roederer Cristal.  
Address: Level 37, 462, Senapati Bapat Marg, Lower Parel, Mumbai, Maharashtra 400013  
Website: [www.jsmcpr.in](http://www.jsmcpr.in)







## Aer, Worli

The very chic AER Bar and Lounge has the futuristic appeal of an air lounge: a neon-lit circular bar perched on an elevated top, with rounded elements that are very reminiscent of Bangkok's Sirocco restaurant, one of the most famous establishments in the world. With arches framing dramatic views of the Mumbai skyline, the contemporary and minimal decor is true to Four Season's standards. Unwind and indulge in their signature Passionistas with zero-proof cocktails like Fantasy Island and 13 Botanicals & tonic.

Address: 1/136, 34th Floor, Dr E Moses Rd, Worli, Mumbai, Maharashtra 400018

Website: [www.fourseasons.com/mumbai/dining/lounges/aer](http://www.fourseasons.com/mumbai/dining/lounges/aer)

## Cafe Terra, Bandra West

Set on the 7th floor of The Executive Enclave, Cafe Terra is an innovative hideout and alfresco lounge that can easily become your favourite summer hangout. Crisp interiors, elegant-minimalistic decor and a terrace that overlooks one of Bandra's most vibrant neighbourhood. What the location lacks in sea breeze it makes up with cocktails like the English Garden, a tropical mix of Saint Elder's elderflower, apple, and lemon extracts.

Address: Nargis Dutt Rd, Pali Pathar, Pali Village, Bandra West, Mumbai, Maharashtra 400050

Website: [www.fourseasons.com/mumbai/dining/lounges/aer](http://www.fourseasons.com/mumbai/dining/lounges/aer)



## Rude Lounge, Powai

An easy-going, unpretentious spot for a cosmopolitan crowd, Rude Lounge checks all the boxes with nonchalant ease. As you make your way to the bar counter, the edgy red-neon glow from the lined interiors makes for a captivating surprise, while the rustic wooden seating perfect balances the bold theme perfectly. Instead of asking for the menu, hail your server to bring the most popular cocktails followed by a tasting from their spirits menu, and make sure they keep on coming.

Address: B-Wing, Supreme Business Park, 8th Floor, South Avenue, Hiranandani Gardens, Powai, Mumbai, Maharashtra 400076

## Skky – Ramada, Powai

The rooftop bar of the up-and-coming Ramada Hotel is an underrated gem that is steadily climbing up the charts as an unmissable buzzworthy nook where you can kick back after a busy day. The food menu, crafted to accommodate diverse range of pan-Asian delicacies is straightforward with a traditional edge: classics include Charsiew bao chicken, duck spring rolls, chicken satay, and grilled salmon with black bean sauce. Cocktails are whimsically named and creatively mixed: there's Madiest Bomb Jager, Skky cruiser, and a well-recommended order of Cafe vodkainis.

Address: Ramada Hotel, Saki Vihar Rd, Murarji Nagar, Mayur Nagar, Passpoli, Powai, Mumbai, Maharashtra 400087



— 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.



# CONTOURS OF WILD ADVENTURES

Arvind Passey

Most of us believe that travel and lively conversations go together. But have you noticed how silence sweeps over even a bus full of people once the landscape outside changes and how an elated sense of excited yearnings cuts off the continuous titter of meaningless words? I've seen this happen hundreds of times. And I'm not just talking about going into the sparse wilderness of Spiti or navigating the treacherous twists of mountain roads being the only catalysts. Even a drive on that long coastal road between Chennai and Puducherry or along the gently undulating slopes in Meghalaya or the sensual charm of wavy froth on the Goa coastline merge with speechless desire. Even train rides on the Pamban bridge or slowly greeting tunnel after tunnel on the Kalka-Simla rail or any other that you can think of is equally capable of replacing the cacophony of chatter with a rhythm-infused echo of expected contours of wild adventures.

Yes, we cut out the noise when we are one with nature. And this is how I would define friendly overtures with our environment or what is now known as eco-tourism. It begins with our finding the way to our souls. **Alisha Priti Kriplani**, a writer who has just published her book on ghost stories, believes that “till sustainable travel

*I remember an incident while I was trekking up to a bugyal or a meadow on top of a mountain, that also had caves where the Pandavas spent a part of their exile. On our way back I noticed a young college student simply swing her arms and throw an empty bottle of packaged water down the steep slope. I'm sure the pines trees must have groaned and some place down below must be fast becoming another garbage hill. This is certainly not done.*

*aligns the needs of the tourist with the needs of the environment, it is going to remain an uphill battle.”*

And yet. A lot of us pull ourselves away from our sublime silence avatar and plunge into the ‘fill the world with noise’ mode and we quickly roll down hungry slopes of ‘the usual’ and end up promoting every little action that we are escaping from. The outcome is that we encourage clones of disruptive development to invade every aspect of every wonderful adventure.

To travel is a beautiful verb that is forever helping us grow our vocabulary of experiences and is powerful enough to initiate us to the benefits of sanity. However, the past decades have shown us that we have collectively allowed a malevolent syntax to creep into the narrative. Those of us who now raise our hands in horror as we read about coastal erosion, depleted forests, disoriented wildlife, barren hillsides, too many landslides, overwhelming floods, the rise of ugly constructions in quaint and exotic locales, the decline of regional culture, and a negative influence in everything else that helped us escape the monotony of our urban existence must also understand that this isn't as sudden as it sounds. The signs were all over but we chose not to see them.

If things do not change, travel is not going to represent the contours of wild adventures anymore but risks being

renamed a 'vacation in rage' or a 'journey into sameness'. Shameful, isn't it? So before it is too late, let us look into a few important features of eco-tourism and turn the concept from being just another selling phrase in travel brochures and government memorandums into becoming an actionable set of practical steps. This is obviously impossible without each of us willing to become participating partners.

We are fortunate to be living in a country where the environment or our eco-system has been painstakingly and nurtured and nourished with a high degree of personal involvement and losing this well-earned heritage to a bunch of people who take them all lightly is not going to benefit anyone. We know how much we have struggled to keep our population of Gir lions or the count of tigers in the country. We know of tribes who have saved the population of chitals or those who have initiated the Chipko movement in the hills to save our trees. These are not trivial steps that can be undone by hordes of unruly tourists whose presence catalyses

**Yes, we cut out the noise when we are one with nature. And this is how I would define friendly overtures with our environment or what is now known as eco-tourism. It begins with our finding the way to our souls. Alisha Priti Kriplani, a writer who has just published her book on ghost stories, believes that “till sustainable travel aligns the needs of the tourist with the needs of the environment, it is going to remain an uphill battle.”**

nothing but a rather devastating spurt of development that results in nothing but the erosion of soil, poaching of wild animals, the unaccounted loss of natural resources, and the menace of garbage piling up at sites that have been known for their environmentally pristine profile.

**We need to minimise the negative impact of unaware tourism ethics.**

I remember an incident while I was trekking up to a bugyal or a meadow on top of a mountain, that also had caves where the Pandavas spent a part of their exile. On our way back I noticed a young college student simply swing her arms and throw an empty bottle of packaged water down the steep slope. I'm sure the pines trees must have groaned and some place down below must be fast becoming another garbage hill. This is certainly not done.

The way I see things is that every tourist needs to carry his own used disposable garbage back to the where he has come from and then get rid of it the right way.



This is because garbage disposal in the hills is a major task that is cost intensive and sometimes nearly impossible to carry out. It is much easier to for every individual to help the environment and keep nature preserved. Ravi Dhingra, a professional photographer, told me that every “photographer has to act more responsibly, by not just providing space but also help people, conservationists, who are actively involved in bringing nature back to its glory. The camera has to present to the world the reality, how the greed of humanity is destroying the nature, this may not be beautiful to look at but will appeal in an altogether different manner.”

Kulpreet Yadav, a well-known writer of thrillers, goes a step beyond and wrote to me that “sustainable travel is right now something that travelers are not serious about. The reason is simple. They don't see any requirement to alter their accustomed way of travel & enjoyment. The concept of sustainable travel will take root when global warming and pollution will become a more serious problem, like say, a pandemic like covid. Let's see an example. Till the time a person has money, he doesn't bother to control his expenditure for anything, including travel and holiday. But once the money starts reducing, he's more careful in spending. And when the money gets over, he stops travelling altogether.” I certainly wish things do not come to a state where the earning capacity of a person dictates his innate urge to go on adventures that nourish his soul. I'm hopeful of people understanding the need to be travel-wise without being forced into it.

**We must contribute in more than one way towards conservation.**

If we go back a few decades, we had absolutely charming hill-stations which then went down the road of destruction because of mistaken notion that attracting more tourists isn't as harmful as not being able to afford the latest technology! Let me cite the case of Mussoorie. I was a Gentleman Cadet at the Indian Military Academy in the late seventies and the hills smiled. There was this menace of limestone quarrying that was talked about by a few bold local reporters but then there were cases where such voices were simply crushed under the profit-orientation of the operators. Some called it the Gattu mindset (Gattus were snub-nosed small truck specially made to go

up narrow hilly paths to carry limestones down tp Dehradun) as this quarrying simply led to the deforestation of the slopes and the right incentive for mid-way and mid-midway resorts and water parks. Just a few years later the entire profile of the sonnet-like journey from Dehradun to Mussoorie changed into a constant honking mela of tourists and, I believe, even the wild animals thought it better to move away quietly. Now just imagine the terrible loss that mother nature had to endure. It is a similar situation on the Kalka-Shimla, the Jammu-Srinagar, and umpteen other highways all over the country. Our hills have become hawker heavens and nothing else. Mention of contribution does not mean just the means to bring in the power of money

*It is a well-known fact that even what goes on in the name of eco-tourism is actually targeted “to take away livelihoods from the locals, and in return leave them with low-paying subordinate positions in resorts etc that have been established.” It is, therefore, necessary to make sure that viable long-lasting employment opportunities with scope for growth are provided to the locals.*

to announce to the world that you have done your bit and that now you are free to go ahead and add to the destruction. Money is not going to undo the devastation of our environment. What matters more than anything else is the enhanced awareness of people who pack their bags and move out to travel.

Let us take the case of travel just after the lockdown has been lifted. We have all seen pictures of irresponsible tourists without masks and unbothered about social distancing. We have all heard of how the RTPCR test results have been fudged people pay extra money to get certificates that aren't reflecting the truth. We know how unruly crowding has ended up to spurts

in the infection. All these are not helping the locals in any way and neither are any efforts directed towards conservation being promoted. These actions are simply adding to the woes of those who are spending sleepless nights in bringing some life to the devastation that has already created enough trouble for all. The point here is that all forms of conservation get paused when the pandemic holocaust resurfaces and in this case it is irresponsible tourism that will be contributed heavily.

We need to understand that forests are our natural healers and help in destressing, they oxygenate the lungs and refresh the soul even as the ecosystem teaches life lessons like patience, teamwork, and helps us stay in touch with your body clock. The new revolution needs to be centered around the notion of educating those who seem to have forgotten that nature is there to help us all reach-out to a better time.

**We must protect the local residents from sinking deeper into their cycle of poverty.** One long weekend in July 2021 tells the entire story of traveller apathy rather well. With over 32,000 tourists visiting Nainital, nearly 20,000 of them in Mussoorie, and a disorienting number in Manali, Dharamshala, and every other place that you can think of, the pandemic-protective bandobast is destined to collapse. A similar situation exists when it comes to environment-friendly travel attitude –because when the numbers go up exponentially it is the ability of the administration to monitor maverick behaviour cannot possibly sustain. The painful fact is that no one benefits in such a case. The locals replace their traditions to customised displays that are tourism-centered, they lose their peace of mind to the constant cacophony of buying-selling-buying cycles of hordes of tourists, meaningful development of infrastructure gets over-run by everything getting converted to resorts, hotels, and guest houses. This goes on escalating until the charm of the place completely disappears.

Alisha is convinced that “to create an environment suitable for travellers, with reference to lodging, boarding and hospitable living conditions, there is bound to be a negative impact. This defeats the very purpose” and told me that “many travellers are wired to get their money's

worth. The cost is borne by the tourist in the bid to be profitable. Hence there is a resistance to the concept wherein one is sacrificing luxury for sustainability and paying a price for it too.” Well, this too is true and so even the tourist isn't gaining much. We have seen how over-tourism over-burdens the infrastructure of towns and small hamlets in the hills or even on the coasts and unwarranted upgradation of luxuries contributes to the problems.

What appears as fiscal benefits to the locals easily transforms into a noose that strangles the soul of a place because every paisa earned must necessarily be reinvested into putting things right. The taxes are raised, the living cost quotient for the locals escalates, and the tourists simply comes in, has his dose of fun-filled days, and leaves without bothering to turn back and see the ways he has managed to deform everything from mental health of the people to the physical health of the site. If this isn't alarming enough, then what is?

It is a well-known fact that even what goes on in the name of eco-tourism is actually targeted “to take away livelihoods from the locals, and in return leave them with low-paying subordinate positions in resorts etc that have been established.” It is, therefore, necessary to make sure that viable long-lasting employment opportunities with scope for growth are provided to the locals.

**We must respect every action that seeks to preserve traditions, local culture, and the personal needs of the local population.**

I am sure every reader of this article will have come across incidents that have only ended up either demeaning and making fun of the local customs or forced on them concepts that they hardly understand. I recollect my time on a river cruise in Goa where there was a dance troupe performing local dances and some of the tourists got up and literally hijacked the performance. They insisted that they were there to have fun and not to see local dance forms and so they forced the organisers to put on some raucus Bollywood numbers and the entire event degenerated into a wild meaningless party that obviously troubled those who were enjoying some peaceful moments that were filled with a bit of local culture.

There have been incidents where rowdy tourists demand to be permitted to drink

*The photographer has to stop acting as a traveler who is more interested in highlighting the beautiful side of nature. Thanks to social media and likes being generated on posts, everyone wants to click beautiful images but it may turn out to be a destructive process. The rat race to get a better angle, better picture has ‘disturbed the peace’ of the place and has resulted in invasion of privacy of other species” says Ravi Dhingra, a photographer who has made his mark on the national level.*

alcohol even in places where they should not be drinking. These are the sorts who deface monuments, laugh at those who are selling hand-made artifacts by calling their work shabby. Is this the kind of tourism that any of us likes? No. But when we are face-to-face with a larger group with aggression built-in, we silently watch and fret. If rowdiness is the new face of tourism, we are better off without it.

**We cannot do without supporting any form of freedom of speech, rights to live peacefully, and the needs for other rights involved during travel. And thus, how can professionals help?**

“The photographer has to stop acting as a traveler who is more interested in highlighting the beautiful side of nature. Thanks to social media and likes being generated on posts, everyone wants to click beautiful images but it may turn out to be a destructive process. The rat race to get a better angle, better picture has ‘disturbed the peace’ of the place and has resulted in invasion of privacy of other species” says Ravi Dhingra, a photographer who has made his mark on the national level. Aman Chotani, who sees himself in the role of a responsible photographer, and is involved with documenting the culture of the

people of Laddakh, believes that “the most important aspect today is the knowledge that is going to vanish with the last tribes. Although there is a lot of information out there, We want to create an digital library of our old age practices and traditions so that even a lay man could benefit from our database in the future.” He adds that “the only way to do so is by keeping our roots alive.” Aman has been working to photo-document the Drokpa Tribe is a Tribe in the region of Ladakh who are distinct from the rest of the Tibeto-Burman population there, in terms of appearance, culture, language, and religious beliefs, and they have upheld the purity of their race for centuries.

So yes, professionals can certainly help, more so in the wake of this ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and the recent surge of cases in India, where the health and social infrastructure of the country found itself under pressure. As such the world witnessed many tearful and mournful scenes and international help was mobilized for the victims with first necessities and hospital materials. Professionals can easily donate earnings from their photo-or-art-exhibitions to the upkeep of the environment in their places of choice. Writers can write about the need for tourists to be aware of their responsibilities and can even donate their earnings from their published works to help the causes of the locals. There are also those who can take up causes worth high-lighting to tweet and blog about them. Believe me, every little step helps. Publishers (and even those who publish TravelLinks) can organise workshops and webinars to spread the cause of responsible tourism. In short, every creative person can and must come forward to be influencers for sustainable travel.

As I have mentioned before, the wild contours of adventures have to be understood in the right perspective. To be in love with the word ‘wild’ is not to be wild but mindful. To appreciate wilderness, one must be civilised to the core. Only then shall we really feel and be one with the contours of real adventure. <http://www.passeyinfo>

→ ARVIND PASSEY ←  
Only writing is on his mind. Travel writing, tech writing, book reviews, and political satire besides hundreds of poems, short stories, and essays. His stories and poems have been published in around a dozen readable anthologies of repute and in publications like The Education Post, Huffington Post, Business Insider, HT, TOI, MarketingBuzzar, and others. His blog: <http://www.passeyinfo>



# The Grandeur of Le Meridien Jaipur Resort & SPA

**Payal Sahni**

The second wave of COVID had again put entire India to a halt and even more cautious than before. We were quite skeptical in being invited to review Le Meridien Resort & Spa Jaipur, however, all our anxieties were put to rest on entering the property primarily because A. the rush had not yet set in, B. It's a vast open green and luxurious green area with natural

surroundings, C. all the protocol and sanitization were followed to the T. Location: The Resort property is an extravagantly regal palace-style that depicts the grandeur of Indian Architecture. It is located on the tranquil mountainside of kukas, away from the hustle-bustle and the crowd of the city. It is near Amber palace and a comfortable drive of approx. four hours from south Delhi. About The Property: The entrance is

all about the Chaupar surrounded by 120 trees and knee height fountains. One is luxuriously spoilt for a wide variety of choices, ample facilities and hideouts, personalized experiences in every nook and corner, their spice gardens, rooftop restaurants, poolside views, open walking tracks to name a few. It's a privilege to get lost and hide yourself if you love being connected to the solo self. It is a perfect hideaway from the hustle and bustle of the







***One is luxuriously spoilt for a wide variety of choices, ample facilities and hideouts, personalized experiences in every nook and corner, their spice gardens, rooftop restaurants, poolside views, open walking tracks to name a few. It's is a privilege to get lost and hide yourself if you love being connected to the solo self. It is a perfect hideaway from the hustle and bustle of the city and a classy gateway for adventure, romance, wildlife, arts & history related experiences.***

city and a classy gateway for adventure, romance, wildlife, arts & history related experiences.

## Food and drinks

We have visited many nooks and corners of Jaipur, but Le Meridien is one of the best when it comes to and tantalizing your taste buds. It is very well connected to its roots and we had the pleasure of tasting the most authentic Rajasthani cuisines like “ker sangri, gatta curry, Mirchi vadas, and dal kachoris” to name a few.

Their latest recipe is all about interactive sessions, culinary showmanship, Asian cuisines which can be personalized to your whims and fancies, and it about friendly conversations, building a bond in the casual yet elite dining area to be. The liveliness of the staff can be felt here.

## Soulholm Private Dining

At Soulholm, local flavors, homegrown produce, and age-old practices meet innovation and technique, overcoming an often-homogenized definition of “Indian food” to re-imagine a new wave of modern Indian cuisine. A dining experience here is like no other where you connect to the roots in a serene ambiance and delicacies that are inspired by the locally grown ingredients. One can take a farm tour and pluck what you would like on your plate. Enjoy the enchanting ambiance, earthy-rich colors and golden lighting combine to create a comfortable environment and opulent warm glow. Earn the undying love of any health connoisseur with a Chef special menu and cocktails to wow you.

## Perfect Date Night at Madeira Bar

Although we did not expect this, but the candle light dinner here surprised us and evoked the long-lost romanticism in us, I must admit.

At Madeira Bar one can indulge in memorable candlelight dinner by the Aravali ranges, complete with a delicious 4-course meal! We were pleasantly surprised and they served us with the most delicate authentic regional Rajistani Thali in silver utensils. Not only was it great in taste

but also very inspiring and fulfilling to the soul as the chef explains as and every item on the plate with lots of love and affection. The ambiance not only sets the mood, but it also clears the air for an honest heart-to-heart conversations. With the soothing music, moon gazing and delicious food, it's a night to remember!

## About our stay

We stayed in private villas. The Villas are like your own personal apartment with the private garden in your backyard. It also comes with sunken bathtubs and natural surroundings and personalized butler service. The room décor and furnishing have antique regal touch to it.

I must admit that I am a big fan of monsoon Travel and this place is the perfect gateway for it primarily because in monsoons the whole place gets romantic vibe to it, the aristocratic ambiance, lush green grass, vast sky with stars shining and one gets plenty of time to gaze at them with birds flocking and a live folk performance to indulge yourselves in the rain.

## About the excursions Live like Locals

The royal state of Rajasthan is known as the most popular center to appreciate the culture and heritage of the Indian past and what will be better than Rajasthan's village tours to experience the majestic state alternately. This side of Rajasthan can only be explored by stepping out of the urban lifestyle and exploring the life that resides cheerfully in the villages of this state. These villages will bring out another interesting flavor to the sightseeing tour on your vacation. It is highly recommended to pay a visit to this fascinating village to behold the rustic charm of this state with your own eyes.

## Sariska Tiger Safari

Explore scenic beauty with the natural landscape, wildlife, animals, and rare and migrated birds away from the chaotic life of the metro. Situated around 107 kilometers far from Jaipur, this national park covers an unfathomable span of 800 sq. kilometers territory and is overseen by the Government of Rajasthan. The sanctuary also houses the ruins of ancient temples of Garh-Rajor







that date back to the 11th century. Also, a 17th-century fort on the hilltop at Kankwari grants a picturesque view of soaring vultures and eagles.

#### Recommended Attire: Comfortable clothes and shoes

#### ***Unlock Art Experience***

We were very fortunate to be a part of this. UNLOCK Art s designed to provide our guests with a unique check-in that evolves a functional process into an emotive experience. The programme is designed to play on the guest's senses by providing them with a clean check-in experience. The experience should be quick and straight to the point, while showcasing Le Méridien Signature programme, UNLOCK ArtTM.

I would suggest, immerse in an inquisitive and one of the biggest fusion art galleries in India located inside the famous Amber Fort- Artchill Gallery since 2008 which is a prestigious art space inside Amber Fort of Jaipur, a famous Heritage monument. This is primarily responsible for introducing the concept of Contemporary Art in Rajasthan. The



Vinay Singh

Gallery takes part in International Art Affairs to boost Indian art awareness abroad & is keen to establish an Art Exchange Program to introduce art across the borders & initiate art exchange between different countries.



Apeksha Sharma with Pankaj Sahni

#### **About The Explore SPA**

**I am big Spa gluten and found myself getting indulged in it.** I must admit that the staff is extremely well trained and courteous. The way they understand your body; their hands move like magic as if they

understand every nerve of your system. They have various therapies to indulge in. I would advise to book the services in advance and go for their specialized therapies.

#### **About The GM Vinay Singh:**

A trail-blazer in the field of hospitality, with over 18 years of experience in leading Indian and International hotel brands, Vinay Singh is a dynamic and charismatic presence. Defined by more than just his passion and commitment to the field, he has been a beacon of purpose, innovation and energy during his tenure in the hospitality sector. With a Bachelor's Degree in Science and a Master's Degree in Management Studies, Vinay has worked with several globally renowned brands. As a leader, he possesses the vision and capability to see the big picture and make decisions accordingly. Last but not the least, I would like to extend our special mention about 'Apeksha Sharma', who is a dedicated, focused, intelligent and an indispensable part of the Le Meridien team and did everything possible to make our stay meaningful and memorable. [\[1\]](#)



# JUNGLE LODGES & RESORTS IN KARNATAKA

NEHA SHARMA

Located in the southern half of the Indian subcontinent, Karnataka is a state that boasts of numerous sights of natural beauty along with an impressive amount of flora and fauna. Charming grasslands, dense forests, and glistening rivers are a common sight in the state. Due to the presence of an ocean in the vicinity, Karnataka enjoys maritime weather, with summer and mild winters. October through the month of April is the best time to visit if you want to witness exquisite flora and fauna. If you want to explore the magnificent forests of Karnataka, nothing is better than staying at a jungle resort or camp

## Devbagh Beach Resort By Jungle Lodges & Resorts:

Devbagh is a beautiful coastal location in Karnataka. The seafront in this region is tranquil and gorgeous, the privacy of tourists is intact and this beach is mesmerizing. Devbagh is a quick and quiet escape from the busy city life in Karnataka. The stunning Arabian Sea enhances the beauty of this beach with its mysterious dark-hued water contrasting the bright lush green palm trees in the distance. The peaceful sea coupled with a clear, blue sky is a sight for sore eyes, and you can spend hours on this beach admiring the overwhelming allure of nature, making sandcastles, or just enjoying the fresh sea breeze.

Devbagh offers the perfect combination of adventure and serenity. For those who love exploring, sports like snorkeling, parasailing, speedboat cruises, and banana boat rides are available. Tourists have the freedom to engage in these activities. All safety measures are maintained while conducting the activities.

The Devbagh resort has a nice, relaxed vibe with a beachy theme. All the essential amenities are available at the resort, the rooms are very comfortable, and the service is extraordinary. Every room has a



hammock that allows tourists to rest and relax, and there are bonfires every night to soak in the essence of the forest along with the serene sound of the sea. This resort is an excellent place for capturing amazing pictures. The view is terrific and perfect for photography. You can also hear the refreshing sound of waves from the sea nearby. The whole environment at the Devbagh resort makes the whole travel experience better and memorable.

I especially enjoyed the quintessential coastal cuisine in Devbagh. The resort serves delicious meals with incredible starters,

as well as a great barbeque. River Kali is another huge attraction near the region. My experience was more than fascinating when I followed the river to where it met the sea in a boat ride. Dolphins can be spotted riding through the waves in the sea if you are lucky. Devbagh resort jungle lodges are truly something you should not miss out on, the perfect coastal region for beach lovers. The sunset and the sunrises visible from Devbagh is an absolute stunner. This beach-side location is magnificent and extremely charming, an experience that has enriched my trip.

## OVERVIEW GUIDE

### How To Reach

Goa International Airport is the closest airport located 86 Kms away. There are trains connecting Mumbai, Pune, Bangalore, and Mangalore to Karwar, which is the nearest railway station. One can drive from Bangalore to Devbagh Beach Resort which is about 527 Kms.

### Water Sports:

- Banana Ride ● Speed Boat
- Kayaking ● Jet Ski Ride

- Snorkeling ● Bump Ride

### Best Season To Visit

October - May. Summer is the best time for water sports

### Travel Tips

- Do carry your hat, sunscreen, sunglasses, torch.
- Pets are not allowed
- Avoid Plastics
- Carry comfortable walking shoes.



# SHARAVATHI ADVENTURE CAMP BY JUNGLE LODGES & RESORTS

The Sharavathi Adventure Camp is located among the magnificent mountains and serene forests. It is not difficult to see how wonderful nature is from this lodge since tourists can witness numerous species of plants and animals, wild creatures in their natural habitat and observe the ecosystem of the forest. At a distance of about 6 km from Jog Falls, Sharavathi Adventure Camp is an ideal place for enjoying the lush green forests of Karnataka that boast of impressive wildlife.

The region in and around Sharavathi Adventure Camp blossoms during monsoon, a time when the south-western rain clouds drench the Western Ghats. The beautiful combination of mountains in the distance with their summit peeking from above a blanket of fog, the freshly bathed tall trees, and the clear blue sky is almost like a dream. The weather in this area is always comfortable, even though the rain showers enhance the beauty, Sharavathi Adventure Camp and Jog falls are quite interesting to explore.

The Sharavathi Valley Wildlife Sanctuary is located a few km away from the Camp and houses several different species of trees, bushes, and plants. An extraordinary sight for nature lovers. You can also see numerous varieties of butterflies and uncommon birds like pond Herons, Grey-headed bulbuls, Hornbills, Indian Peafowls,



and Kingfishers. Animals like a black-napped hare, langurs, and squirrels can also be spotted within the dense forests of the Sanctuary. A boat ride to the nearby Jain Padmavati Temple is also a mesmerizing experience.

Sharavathi Adventure Camp is a place of discovery, be it outside or within. The endless silence along with calls of the jungle and coupled with the scents of the forest carried by the mellow breeze is the perfect atmosphere to relax to. The Camp is comfortable and contains all the necessary amenities and the food is delicious. It allows visitors to experience the wilderness closely and become one with the forest.

## OVERVIEW GUIDE

### Best Season To Visit

October To March is the best time to experience the water based activities.

### Travel Tips

- Wear comfortable walking shoes
- Avoid smoking
- Do carry your hat, sunscreen, sunglasses and torch
- Avoid Plastics.
- Pets are not allowed

### How To Reach

Bajpe International Airport in Mangalore is the nearest airport located 212 Kms

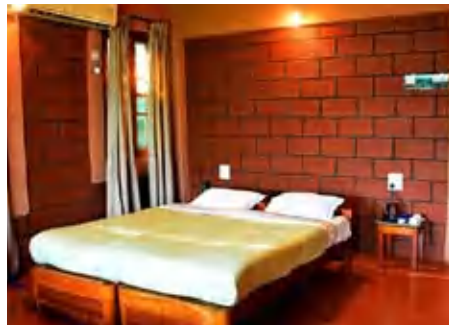
away from the resort.

The nearest railway station is at Talaguppa, which connects Bengaluru and other major cities. One can drive from Bengaluru to Sharavathi Adventure Camp which is around 409 Kms.

### Things To Do:

- Coracle Ride
- Kayaking
- Joy Fishing
- Bird Watching/p>
- Nature Walk
- Guided Trekking
- Jeep Safari





# RIVER TERN LODGES BY JUNGLE LODGES & RESORTS

RiverTernLodge is a beautiful property located in Tarikere, Chikmagalur. Known for its tremendously gorgeous mountains and picturesque landscapes, this place is the perfect spot for wildlife enthusiasts. Surrounded by the magnificent Western Ghats, River Tern Lodge is an ideal place for relaxation, a few days away from the cacophony of the city. The stay offers a beautiful concoction of nature and wildlife, with several wild animals frequenting this amazing region.

River Tern Lodge has a curious name and I wondered why it does. However, little did I know that the location of the lodge would completely justify its name. The backwaters and islands in the vicinity attract numerous river terns during the mating season. The lodge is a brilliant place to spot these beautiful birds. River terns fly in and out of the place constantly during their breeding period.

There is much more to this lodge than river terns. The Bhadra Tiger Reserve is located at a distance of about 4 km, a great place to encounter exquisite wild animals in their natural habitat. The experience is unique, thrilling, and quite enjoyable. A safari ride in a jeep may also lead to chance encounters with Tigers, Elephants, Gaur's, leopards, Crocodiles, Boars, and Deer. Rare birds like brown fish Owl, Malabar pied Hornbills, white-bellied Sea Eagle, Serpent Eagle, Osprey, and crested hawk Eagle may also be spotted in this

region.

The camp also allows visitors to experience sports like kayaking, boating, and swimming. If you want to experience jungle life at its best, a trip to River Tern Lodge is a must. The extraordinary

jungle with its mysterious creatures and majestic mountains as the backdrop is an experience you will not want to miss out on. The rooms are very comfortable, the food is delicious and the services provided are extraordinary. [Read more](#)

## OVERVIEW GUIDE

### Best Season To Visit

June To September is the best time to experience the Sanctuary as it is lush and green from the monsoon season.

### Travel Tips

- Wear comfortable walking shoes
- Avoid smoking
- Do carry your hat, sunscreen, sunglasses and torch
- Avoid Plastics.
- Pets are not allowed

### How To Reach

Bajpe International Airport in Mangalore is the nearest airport located 195 Kms away from the resort.

The nearest railway station is at Tarikere and Shimoga, which connects Bengaluru and other major cities

One can drive from Bengaluru to River Tern Lodge which is around 283 Kms.

### Resort Contact Information:

Behind Ranganathaswamy Temple, Bhadra Project, Lakkavalli, Around Chikmagalur, Karnataka, India - 577115  
Reservation: 08040554055  
Email Id: [info@junglelodges.com](mailto:info@junglelodges.com)

### Things To Do:

- Jeep Safari
- Boat Safari
- Kayak



# BHEEMESHWARI NATURE CAMP BY JUNGLE LODGES & RESORTS

Bheemeshwari Nature and Adventure Camp is a magnificent place for nature lovers. Tucked away in the beautiful jungles in Karnataka, it is an absolute paradise for adventurers. Located extremely close to River Kaveri, the Camp offers an exquisite experience to people who want to be closer to nature. The light breeze coupled with the soothing sound of rippling water provides the ultimate ambience and inspires adventurers to explore the world of wildlife.

Exciting adventure sports like Zip Line, Kayaking, and Rope walking are some of the activities travelers can try out while staying at the Bheemeshwari Nature Camp. These activities can offer you several new experiences that will be cherished throughout life. The camp also offers an amazing opportunity to witness majestic animals like Elephants, Deer, Crocodiles, Snakes, and Turtles. You may also be able to meet at least two hundred different species of unique Birds. This camp is located right in the middle of the Jungle and helps you observe animals in their natural habitat without disturbing or annoying the beautiful creatures.

It is ideal to visit the Bheemeshwari nature camp between the months of August and February which are right after monsoons. River Kaveri is alive from the monsoon showers and the forest is lush green, dense, and thick. Different Birds like Fishing Eagles, Kingfishers, Woodpeckers, and River Terns can be spotted in the region during this time. Due to the pleasant

### Best Season To Visit

August - February

### Travel Tips

- Do carry your hat, sunscreen, sunglasses, torch.
- Pets are not allowed
- Avoid Plastics
- Carry comfortable walking shoes.

### How To Reach

Bengaluru International Airport is the closest airport located 145 Kms away.

## OVERVIEW GUIDE

The nearest Railway Station is Bengaluru Railway Station located 101 Kms Away.

One can drive from Bangalore to Bheemeshwari Adventure And Nature Camp which is about 105 Kms.

### Resort Contact Information:

Bheemeshwari, Byadarahalli  
Post Halgur Hobli, Malavalli Taluk, Mandya District,  
Around Bangalore - 571 421  
Land-line: 08382-221603, Karnataka, India  
**Email Id:** [info@junglelodges.com](mailto:info@junglelodges.com)  
**Website:** [junglelodges.com](http://junglelodges.com)

environment around autumn and winter, different species of Turtles and Snakes can also be observed.

Bheemeshwari nature camp has all the necessary amenities that travelers would

require while staying in the middle of a forest. The rooms are comfortable, clean and spacious. The camp has the perfect environment for travelers to enjoy nature at its best. The food is delicious and fresh. Bheemeshwari nature camp offers a unique experience to travelers who want to spend some time with nature and wildlife.

Vibrant bonfires are lit every night that enriches the whole experience of living in the wild. Along with the bonfire, you can also enjoy a fun barbecue session. The Camp has swings and hammocks outside several rooms that allow tourists to sit and collect their thoughts while gazing at picturesque views. There are also different types of rooms as well as cottages that offer distinct experiences. [Read more](#)

NEHA SHARMA

She is currently working with Karnatka State Tourism and likes to blog and document her travel experiences.





# OUR HERITAGE, OUR PRIDE

An Article Series by Srishti Verma

## SRISHTI VERMA

We are back with part 2 of the travel series "Our Heritage, Our Pride". We are talking about UNESCO World Heritage sites in India and are celebrating the marvels in our country in this series.

Part 1 of the series had talked about the heritage sites in north India, and this part will go southwards, focussing on the West and Central regions of the country.

Get set for this journey spanning centuries of architectural gloriousness, expertise, and legends that have made us who we are. History has lent us numerous stories, no less than fairy tales that continue to inspire us and give us goosebumps at their resplendence. We will traverse through Rajasthan in the West and move eastwards

towards Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, ending at Bihar in this part.

### Hill Forts of Rajasthan

Rajputs were known for their grandeur and bravery. The hill forts they constructed were centres of immense power in the region, included sacred grounds and were designed with urban settlements. Out of hundreds of forts present in Rajasthan, six were selected as the UNESCO World Heritage Sites. They are:

**Amer Fort and Jaipur**

**Ranthambore Fort at Sawai Madhopur**

**Gagron Fort at Jhalawar**

**Chittor Fort at Chittorgarh**

**Kumbhalgarh Fort at Kumbhalgarh**

**Jaisalmer Fort at Jaisalmer**

These forts were built between the 8th and 18th centuries by Rajput kings. Urban centres around them continue to survive, and

the water harvesting mechanisms are still in use. The walls of these majestic forts are massive, some up to 20 km in circumference.

These forts have seen it all—from the Rajput princely states that flourished to the present-day urbanisation. But what remains deep within the walls of these forts is the history and stories told untold. Testimony to the workmanship and design, these forts are unfortunately vulnerable today and are thus protected under various acts.

### Jaipur City, Rajasthan

Sawai Jai Singh II founded the city of Jaipur in 1727. The city depicts the intermingling of ancient Hindu, early Mughal and Western cultures. Jaipur was designed to be a commercial capital and continues to maintain its artisanal and cooperative traditions. In 2019, Jaipur was added to the list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites. If you are up for some

spicy food, do try the chilli fritters here. Signature dishes Dal Bati Churma, Gatte, and Ker Sangri are a must-try in Jaipur. How about buying some souvenirs? Head to Bapu Bazar and let your eyes twinkle brighter than stars as you shop for traditional Rajasthani footwear (Mojari), lacquerware jewellery, handicrafts and puppets. Jaipur welcomes you with the grand Amer fort at the entrance. Hawa Mahal, Jaigarh Fort, Nahargarh Fort, City Palace, Jantar Mantar and Jal Mahal are few places that you would not want to miss.

The festivals here are bright and vibrant.

If you visit Jaipur in March, you can enjoy the Elephant festival. Gangaur festival during March and April is an 18-day celebration full of songs, dance, fairs, and devotion, followed by the colourful festival of Teej.

### The Jantar Mantar at Jaipur, Rajasthan

This astronomical site built in the early 18th



century includes 20 main fixed instruments. They are monumental examples of the masonry and innovation of the time. The Jantar Mantar of Jaipur is one of India's best-preserved observatories and expresses the astronomical and cosmological concepts of the Rajput king Sawai Jai Singh II.

Jantar Mantar was designed for observing astronomical positions with the naked eye and is a part of a tradition of Ptolemaic positional astronomy. It also helped in the completion of Zij astronomical tables.

Jantar Mantar is witness to the ancient traditions shared by major religions over 15 centuries. The instruments present here are comprehensive and impressive, some being the largest ever built.

### Agra Fort, Uttar Pradesh

Situated near the Taj Mahal, Agra Fort is an important 16th-century monument built by the Mughal emperor Akbar. Made of red sandstone, Agra Fort comprises Jahangir Palace, Khas Mahal, Diwan-i-Khas, and the

exquisite mosques, Moti Masjid and Mina Masjid.

Agra Fort acted as a military base and a royal residence. It housed the renowned peacock throne, which was shifted to Delhi when the capital was moved.

The 2.5 km long walls of the fort have Delhi Gate and Amar Singh Gate. When you enter through the original grand entrance Delhi Gate, you are led to the inner portal called the Hathi Pol. These days, entry is open only from the Amar Singh Gate.





Agra Fort was also the place where Shah Jahan breathed his last. He would look at the Taj Mahal from the windows of the Musamman Burj.

Today, Agra Fort, Fatehpur Sikri, and Taj Mahal comprise the Taj Trapezium Zone, built to protect these monuments as well as 37 others.

### Taj Mahal, Uttar Pradesh

Taj Mahal needs no introduction. One of the seven wonders of the world, it is flocked by thousands of visitors each year from across the globe. The Mughal emperor Shah Jahan built it between 1631 and 1648 in loving memory of his wife Mumtaz Mahal.

Taj Mahal is built on the right bank of

the Yamuna River. The main architect Ustad Ahmad Lahori had built the Taj on ideas from Quran. Craftsmen from as far as Central Asia and Iran were called upon to work on this beautiful monument. The uniqueness of the Taj Mahal lies in the remarkable innovations by horticulture planners and architects. For instance, placing the tomb at one end of the quadripartite garden instead of being in the centre adds depth and perspective. Indo-Islamic architectural ideas spun together to design the Taj Mahal are reflected in its balance, symmetry and harmony.

### Fatehpur Sikri, Uttar Pradesh

Built by the Mughal emperor Akbar, Fatehpur Sikri was the capital of the mighty Mughal empire for about ten years. Jama Masjid, one of the largest mosques in India, is built in the complex. Fatehpur Sikri is constructed in red sandstone and exhibits the fusion of Indo-Islamic architectural styles. It also houses Diwan-i-Khas and Diwan-i-Aam.

Khwabgah, the palace of Jodha Bai, Birbal's house, and Panch Mahal are some of the many important structures in the Fatehpur Sikri complex. You will also find the lofty Buland Darwaza here. It was built after the victory of Gujarat in 1572.

Fatehpur Sikri is also known for the tomb of Shaikh Salim Chisti. Akbar had built it for the Sufi Saint Salim Chisti who foretold the



birth of Akbar's son. Devotees often tie a thread on the tomb and seek the blessings of the saint.

### Buddhist Monuments at Sanchi, Madhya Pradesh

Sanchi has been witness to the changing times across various dynasties in history. With the monolithic Ashokan pillar, palaces, monasteries and temples in its complex, Sanchi is an expansive historical site.

The Buddhist monuments at Sanchi are of massive importance, built between the 3rd century BC to the 1st century AD. It was lying abandoned until General Taylor discovered it in 1818. Sanchi remains the oldest surviving Buddhist sanctuary. Let's dive into what this historical marvel holds deep within it.

Stupa 1 houses the remains of Shariputra. He was a disciple of Shakyamuni (Gautam Buddha) who passed away six months before Buddha. The sculptures at Sanchi do not contain Buddha's image in human form. He is shown through inanimate symbols such as wheels, thrones and footprints. One of the best-preserved stupas is the Great Stupa with its four ornamental torans/gateways. The Mauryan ruler Ashoka is credited for laying the foundation of a typical Buddhist monastery (Vihara) at Sanchi. When you





descend from the Stupas site, you will come across a white building—ASI Museum for Sanchi. There are four galleries in the museum which house the treasured relics from Sanchi's Buddhist heritage.

### Khajuraho Group of Monuments, Madhya Pradesh

Chandella dynasty built the world-renowned Khajuraho temples between 950 AD and 1050 AD. Through 22 temples that remain today of the 85 built, they continue to strike a balance between architecture and sculpture.

Hindu and Jain temples are present here, with the grandest being the Kandariya Mahadev Temple. The temples' top symbolises Mount Kailash. When you enter the temples, you would be led through an entrance porch (ardhamandapa) and go into the main hall (mandapa). The stone surfaces



of the Khajuraho monuments are extensively carved. The sculptures here depict acts of worship, clans, domestic scenes, amorous couples, teachers and disciples, and many others which portray social life.

### Rock Shelters of Bhimbetka, Madhya Pradesh

In the foothills of the Vindhyas lie these natural rock shelters. They depict paintings from the Mesolithic period and give an insight into the culture and traditions of the people from that time.

Bhimbetka strongly reflects the interaction between people and their

landscape. Hunting and gathering are demonstrated in the rock art of this site. This is a group of five clusters of rock shelters is surrounded by the Ratapani Wildlife Sanctuary. The rock paintings found in these caves provide a rare glimpse into the cultural development of people from the lives of nomadic hunter-gatherers to cultivators and their spirituality. Dancing, collecting honey, animal drawings and domestic scenes constitute the drawings on the walls. It is also interesting to note that Bhimbetka is known as Bhima's lounge referring to the second of the 5 Pandav princes.

### Mahabodhi Temple Complex at Bodh Gaya, Bihar

One of the four holy Buddhist sites, Bodh Gaya is known for Buddha's enlightenment. The first temple built by the emperor Ashoka is one of the earliest Buddhist temples built in brick in India.

The present-day Mahabodhi Temple Complex houses a 50m high temple, Vajrasana (diamond throne), sacred Bodhi tree and six other sites. You will also find a Lotus Pond located outside the entrance. When you visit the temple complex, you will find that the most sacred space is the Bodhi tree under which Buddha attained enlightenment. He spent his first week here. Walk further and you are led to the Animeshlochan Chaitya, which is the prayer hall where Buddha spent his second week. During his third week, Buddha walked 18 paces back and forth in Ratnachakrama. Do not miss the stone lotuses carved on the platform—these mark his steps. You would next visit the Ratnagar Chaitya where Buddha spent his fourth week and the Ajapala Nigrodh Tree under which he meditated for the fifth week. Pilgrims from all over the world visit Bodh Gaya to offer prayers and meditate.

### Archaeological Site of Nalanda Mahavira at Nalanda, Bihar

The most ancient university of the Indian subcontinent is Nalanda. It comprises many stupas, shrines, Viharas, and artworks of historical importance. Nalanda developed into a residential and educational complex that witnessed Buddhism flourishing in the subcontinent. For 800 years, the university was a leading centre of knowledge.

Nalanda Mahavihara marks the apex in Sangharam (monastic establishment) evolution. It taught contemporary subjects as well as those practised in the Indian subcontinent. Buddha is said to have visited Nalanda several times during his lifetime. The Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang was at Nalanda University for 12 years.

In addition to this, there are beautiful temples that represent the illustrious past of Nalanda.

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.



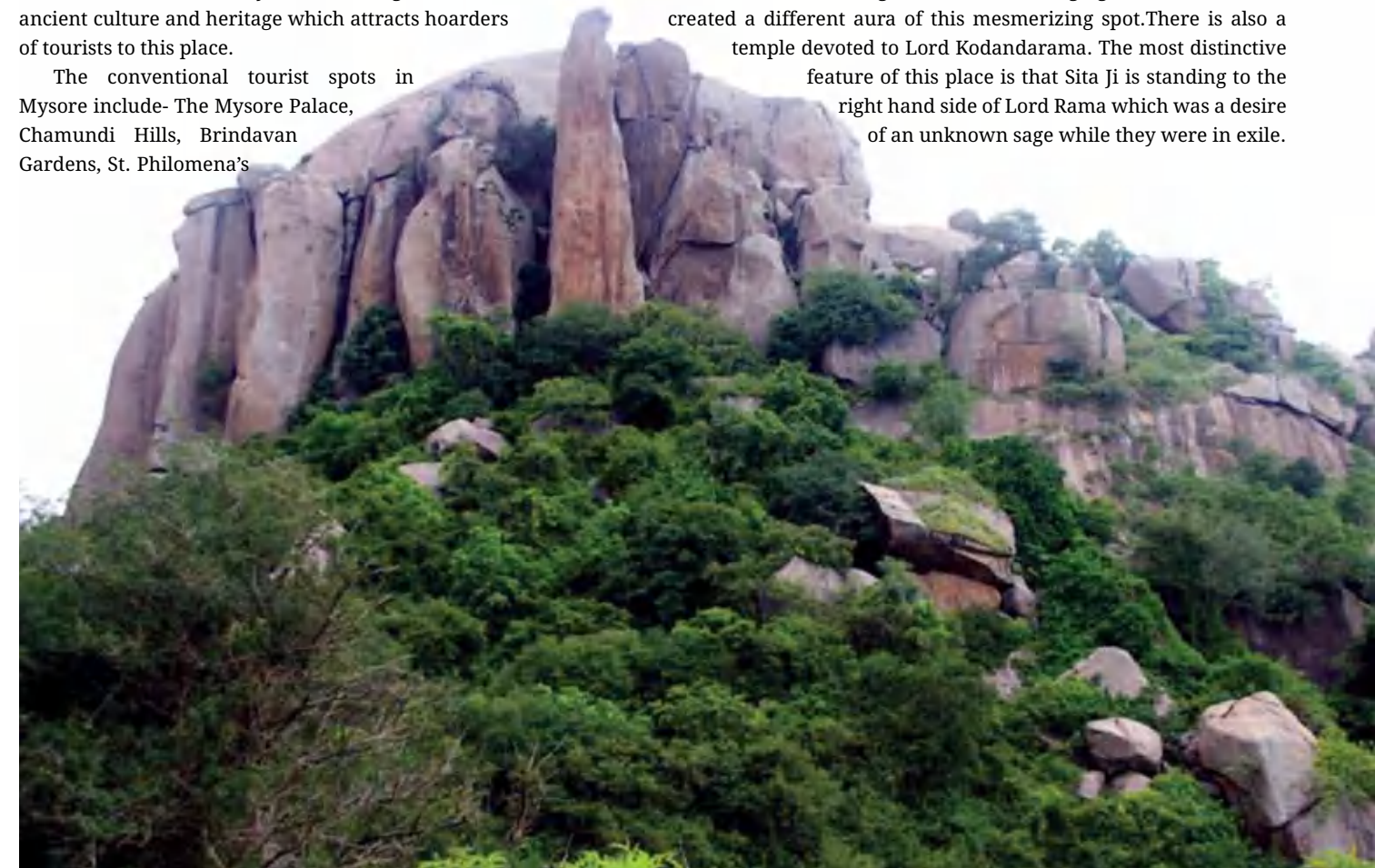
# Mysore

## The city of palaces

ASHNA MEHRA

Mysore, known as the city of palaces, is one of the most exuberant places in the southern part of India with the reflection of its magnificent history. Mysore is a mythological place which got its title from Mahishasur, a buffalo headed demon. It is believed that Mahisashur was assassinated at the Chamundi hills by the goddess Chamundeshwari. It is famous for elegant silk sarees, sandele wood and yoga. Despite the impact of modernization on the city, it has managed to retain the ancient culture and heritage which attracts hoarders of tourists to this place.

The conventional tourist spots in Mysore include- The Mysore Palace, Chamundi Hills, Brindavan Gardens, St. Philomena's



Church and Krishna Raja Sagara Dam amongst others. The focus here has been on the outlandish places which one should visit in and around Mysore.

### *Chunchanakatte Falls*

These falls are situated in a small town of Chunchanakatte in the Mysore district of Karnataka. The crystal clear water cascades from approximately 20 meters of height and according to my perspective this place is a must visit if an individual plans to visit Mysore. The noise of the falling water and crashing against the rocks has created a different aura of this mesmerizing spot. There is also a temple devoted to Lord Kodandarama. The most distinctive feature of this place is that Sita Ji is standing to the right hand side of Lord Rama which was a desire of an unknown sage while they were in exile.



### *Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary*

The place is a famous spot to visit in Srirangapatna and is spread across an area of 67 km<sup>2</sup>. There are a total of eight islets which were formed during the construction of the dam on the banks of river Kaveri.

This site is spectacular for the bird lovers as it is a homeland for many species of birds such as kingfishers, herons, painted storks, open billed storks, spoon billed storks and terns amongst others. The bird sanctuary is a breeding place for an ample number of migratory birds.



### *Ramanagara*

The location is known as the Silk town due to the availability of the authentic silk sarees in the markets. Ramanagara gives a picturesque view as it is surrounded by seven hills namely Yeti Rajagiri, Somagiri, Shivaramagiri, Krishnagiri, Jala Siddeshwara hill, Revana Siddeshwara hill and Sidilakallu hill. This place is one of the most famous trekking spots with highest elevation more than 3000 feet.

### *Bheemeshwari*

This place is located in between the Mekedatu on the river Cauvery and Shivanasamudra Falls (literally meaning Shiva's sea). The people looking for thrilling adventures such as trekking can definitely include this in their itinerary. The environment of Bheemeshwari is very calm and is a perfect point for eco-tourism. It is the natural habitat of the Mahseer fish which is present in the Kaveri river.

The cuisine of Mysore includes a combination of numerous spices which have always enhanced the taste. The food served in Mysore mostly belongs to the Udupi Cuisine which has rice as the fundamental ingredient with numerous additives such as beans, grains, vegetables and fruits. The





must try dishes when visiting to Mysore are:

### ***Huli or Saaru***

A dish usually served for lunch which is a thick broth made up of coconut, vegetables and lintels. The major spices used for the preparation include tamarind and chillies.



### ***Uppittu***

Uppittu , also known as Upma is one of the most served breakfast in this district of Karnataka. The uppitt is initially roasted and then cooked after adding spicy sooji along with the curry leaves so as to give it an authentic taste.

The use of these spices elevate both the spicy and the tangy flavour in the dish.

### ***Shavige Bath***

This is the variety of upma which is cooked in the rice noodles, known as vermicelli. This tasty dish is majorly tangy and spicy which is accompanied by a coconut chutney or poha avalakki.



### ***Rasam and Papad***

The combination of rasam and papad is very famous in the southern part of the country. Rasam is like an eruption of flavors when tasted. It is a spicy soup with tomatoes, tamarind and herbs as the major ingredients. Cumin, fenugreek, mustard and black pepper are added so as to enhance the flavour. It is really good for health as it contains all the primary vitamins and minerals required for the human body.



### ***Mysore Pak***

Apart from the curry spiced up with tamarind and chillies, the place is also renowned for its exclusive Mysore Pak. This is a gram flour (besan) sweet prepared in ghee which melts as soon as a person takes a bite of it. This dish resembles in appearance to the Milk Cake found in the northern parts of India.[iii](#)

ASHNA MEHRA

I'm an undergraduate from the field of civil engineering who aspires to travel and share my experiences. Travelling taught me to easily connect with people and also helped me to develop an outspoken personality.

**The painting depicts the classical dance of India. The medium used is soft pastel pencils on a sanded paper.**  
by

Badal Tyagi, He is a software engineer in the USA and painting is his childhood passion







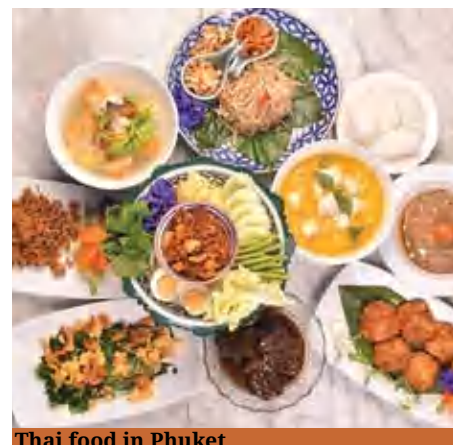
Surin Beach



Spa Experience

# 5 THINGS YOU HAVE TO DO IN PHUKET

The biggest Thai island, Phuket, is on every traveller's list. With its magnificent beaches and food, it comes as no surprise that it is a popular destination among tourists. But Phuket isn't all about nightlife and parties! Read on to find out more about this island drawing tourists from the world over



Thai food in Phuket

## Wellness and Relaxation

**Y**ou can experience world-class spas and wellness centres in Phuket. Rejuvenate your senses and dive into your health reserves in this busy province with the traditional Thai massage. Several centres offer relaxation services such as massages, meditation, facials and scrubs. We won't blame you if you are picturing yourself calm and relaxed!

If you are looking for natural Thai wellness programs, head to Sukko Wellness & Spa Resort. Fully certified by Thailand's Ministry of Public Health,

you can curate special packages at Suuko that suit your requirements. They offer traditional and novel programs for wellness, beauty and vitality. You can opt for their sessions lasting an hour to 2 hours, or check in for their 2 to 6 days individualised plans. These are full-board programs including your accommodation, exercise, and cuisine. You can also take massage lessons at Suuko.

Other well-known resorts include the Chivitr Wellness Resort with its services tailored to your needs, and the Amatara Wellness Resort for an active holiday centred around holistic treatments and fitness activities. You can also learn Muay Thai, water exercise, pilates, mountain biking, and traditional yoga at Amatra. The daily fitness classes are excellent for boosting your energy and vitality during your stay at this resort.

## History With the Views

Phuket has a historical charm to it that is reflected in its culture, architecture, and food. Stroll around the old town and you would come across the Sino-Portuguese houses



Phuket Thai Hua Museum



Phuket

constructed here. Many buildings have been converted into museums, like the Phuket Thai Hua Museum, while others have been built into restaurants, coffee shops, and accommodations. You should definitely try the local food at the Sunday market fair, "Lat Yai". We suggest that you take a walk and explore the town. Along the narrow streets, you will be able to admire the Buddhist temples, quaint little printing shops, impressive art galleries, and a variety of local food to fuel you for the day.



Walk and Explore



Phuket Old Town

## The City of Gastronomy

UNESCO has awarded Phuket with a "City of Gastronomy" certificate. One of 18 cities in the world to have been awarded this certificate, you can be sure to have a finger-licking good experience at this gastronomic destination. Phuket prides itself on the blend and balance between traditional dishes and new influences on the food culture. When in Phuket, even salads are yummy! You can find vegan, vegetarian, and non-vegetarian food items, and have a wonderful time treating your taste buds to the delicacies which have made Phuket the "City of Gastronomy".

## Adventure & Attraction Activities

Phuket thrives among tourists as a destination for water sports and adventure. You can dive into the sea and discover life underwater, or try surfing during the 'Phuket Surf Fest' held from June to September. You can also rent a bike and explore Phuket while you pedal across the town and hop markets, restaurants, and temples. You can indulge in

kiteboarding and wakeboarding at Phuket too, and have fun in the sun and waves!

How about a fun place for your family where the little ones enjoy and learn too? We are talking about the Phuket Aquarium. A joyful place to spend time together and learn about Thailand's coasts and sea resources, you can head to a nature trail at the Cape Panwa Beach in Phuket Aquarium area.

## Temples in Phuket

Wat Chalong in Phuket is a centre of faith



Phuket Street Art



Big Buddha

for the people carrying the history of the legendary Luangpho Chaem. He was a monk expert in Vipassana meditation and traditional medicine. You should also visit the island's revered landmark, Big Buddha. Easily seen from far away, the lofty destination offers breath-taking views of Phuket Town, Kata, and Chalong Bay. A half-buried golden Buddha image can be found at Wat Phra Thong. King Rama VI in 1909 gave it its official name. Legend has it that when a little boy tied his buffalo to a post and fell ill, his father went to check the post and found it to be part of a buried image of Buddha. Wat Suwan Khuha or Wat Tham is the cave temple that you must visit in Phuket. It is located inside a limestone cave, and houses a reclining Buddha image.

Tourists thrive in Phuket in huge numbers, and the province is bustling with visitors throughout the year. Phuket is one of the best places to experience and embrace yourself with Thai culture. Explore the island and let its serenity, history, and calmness wash over you! [Read more](#)





H.E. David Puig, Ambassador of the Dominican Republic to India

In our meeting with His Excellency David Puig, The Ambassador of Dominican Republic to India, our inquisitiveness led us in knowing more about the country. His Excellency gladly puts all our queries to rest and passionately answers and gives his inputs which are presented here. He not only shares about the places to explore, the Caribbean culture, languages spoken, food to eat but also talk about the sustainable initiatives of the country. We also loved the fact when he quotes “Explore. Be curious. Meet people. Travel with all your senses”



# All about the Dominican

*Experience*



PHOTOS COURTESY BY: DOMINICAN REPUBLIC



## PAYAL SAHNI

**Q** Dominican Republic is often synonymous with beaches and relaxation. What does the country mean to you?

I grew up in Santo Domingo, the capital of the Dominican Republic. My school was by the Caribbean Sea and from the classrooms, you could see its vast blue horizon and feel it's changing energy. To come from an island like the Dominican Republic is to live in close contact with the sea and to be able to enjoy the beaches permanently. But the country is much more than that. Nature and landscapes are exciting and diverse. Before

coming to India, last February, I did some hiking in the Dominican Republic and what you encounter there in the countryside is gorgeous: green mountains and valleys with lush tropical vegetation and pristine rivers. Other than that, when I think of the Dominican Republic, it is history and culture that come to my mind. For example, the Taino, our indigenous ancestors, the Spanish presence which lasted four centuries and left, amongst other things, a marvelous architectural heritage; the tragic reality of slavery that connected Africa and the Caribbean and enriched us. All those encounters contributed to shaping a multicultural, dynamic, open, and





welcoming society. Travelers fall in love with the country and its beaches but also with our people.

**Q As the official language is Spanish, would you suggest a tourist keep a Spanish dictionary handy, or can they expect some English-speaking people?**

I have been studying Hindi for a couple of years and I can only encourage Indians to learn Spanish. Language is the main access point to any culture. I am pleasantly surprised to see that Spanish has become, at least in Delhi, one of the most sought-after foreign languages, with an increasing number of students enrolled at the Instituto

Cervantes. Learning Spanish will not only open the doors to the Dominican culture, it is also the key to the soul of the majority of the countries of the American continent. Having said that, as a traveler there's nothing to worry about if you don't speak Spanish or you are not carrying in your luggage a small bilingual pocket dictionary. In the touristic areas of the Dominican Republic, you will always find people who are comfortable with English.

**Q Which Dominican dishes would you suggest a tourist visiting the country?**

Rice with red beans, fried plantain, and fish in coconut sauce has to be tried! As you can



The roadmap sets ambitious targets for the tourism sector in our country. Amongst them, to reduce by 25 percent greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, reduce food waste by half, a 25 percent of reduction in non-renewable energy use, and the complete elimination of single-use plastics.

see some of our food is not that far from the cuisine of Kerala. If you eat meat, you must try "sancocho", a stew with different kinds of meats and vegetables, cooked for special occasions. In tourist destinations and the main cities, a growing number of restaurants offer vegetarian (and vegan) options. As for Indian food, I just learned that a chef from Hyderabad is running a restaurant called "Pranama" in Punta Cana, the most famous beach resort area of the country.

**Q What activities and places would you suggest a tourist visiting the country to have a complete Dominican experience?**

A place I have been visiting for more



than twenty years, with the same sense of excitement, is the peninsula of Samaná in the northeast of the country. The combination of unspoiled nature and beautiful beaches can be enjoyed in laid-back spots like Las Terrenas or Las Galeras. Every year, in February, the migration of whales from the cold waters of the northern hemisphere becomes an experience enjoyed by thousands of visitors in the Samaná Bay. Around the country, there are plenty of wonderful trails in natural reserves and mountains. There are some nice routes recommendations here: <https://www.godominicanrepublic.com/hiking/>

As for cities, I would suggest taking the time to wander in a place like Puerto Plata, a small city that has managed to preserve its old town charm and the distinctive Caribbean Victorian built environment, and of course, Santo Domingo, the capital, with its combination of old and new. While you discover the sixteenth-century Spanish colonial city, with majestic churches and mansions, you will also be able to experience the most modern aspects of the Dominican Republic and get a feeling of the energies that are pushing the country through the 21st century.

**Q How can a tourist truly experience the Caribbean culture in the Dominican Republic?**

Explore. Be curious. Meet people. Travel with all your senses. Follow the sounds and the rhythms of our music. Dance. Try the local cuisine, sample our rum, and don't forget to bring back to India some of the finest handmade cigars in the world from the region of Santiago.

**Q Going forward please let us know the importance of slow and sustainable travel and are there any initiatives that are in place to promote**

**the same?**

As the world is looking to overcome the Covid-19 pandemic, one of the main challenges that the tourism industry is facing is how to ensure the safety of travelers. The Dominican Republic has been recognized by the Secretary-General of the World Tourism Organization, Mr. Zurab Pololikashvili, as a country that has managed to implement protocols that guarantee the safety of its visitor. While us thinking of how to rebuild our economies and make them more resilient, the question of the future of the planet and of sustainable development has also gained more urgency in the tourism sector. Before the pandemic, plenty of initiatives that take into consideration sustainable travel were already on the way

in our country. In 2019, we launched the "Roadmap for Low Carbon and Resource Efficient Accommodation in the Dominican Republic" written in collaboration with UN Environment. The roadmap sets ambitious targets for the tourism sector in our country. Amongst them, to reduce by 25 percent greenhouse gas emissions by 2030,

reduce food waste by half, a 25 percent of reduction in non-renewable energy use, and the complete elimination of single-use plastics. At the grassroots level, the growth of eco-lodges, the development of nature trails and rural tourism are also a reflection of the growing concern with sustainability. [\[1\]](#)





# QATAR TOURISM

**Q** Please let us know about the current travelling opportunities of the country now post COVID . Please let us know the safety initiatives taken by the country to ensure safe travel post pandemic.

Following the closure of our borders in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Qatar has been at the forefront of implementing world-leading health and safety measures and this month, re-opened borders for fully vaccinated GCC citizens.

Ahead of Qatar re-opening to travellers around the world, the country continues with its successful vaccination programme that has seen 72.4% of the eligible population vaccinated with at least one inoculation – putting Qatar in the global top 10 of vaccinated countries with more than one million residents.

To maximize safety for our citizens, residents, and visitors, Qatar Tourism has rolled out the “Qatar Clean” programme, in partnership with Ministry of Public Health



COO of Qatar Tourism, Berthold Trenkel

(MOPH), in all hotels and sectors across the country. This best-in-class hygiene and safety scheme covers social distancing, frequent sanitisation of surfaces, touchless payments and more, to ensure a safe experience in hotels, shopping malls, health clubs and salons.

Passengers arriving at Hamad International Airport (HIA) undergo thermal screening, temperature checks and potentially a COVID-19 PCR test. HIA was also the first airport in the Middle East and Asia to be awarded a 5-Star COVID-19 Airport Safety Rating by Skytrax, following an on-site audit.

While the decision to re-open borders is currently under evaluation by a strategic task force that includes many entities, such as MOPH, MOI, MOFA, Qatar Airways and Qatar Tourism, and is dependent on many factors including the global vaccine roll-out, we can't wait to welcome back the world to Qatar and are ready to provide visitors with a seamless and safe experience.





**Q** Would you like to throw some light on the special preparations for the world cup which the country is hosting?

We are expecting to welcome around 1.5 million visitors for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022.

We have recently appointed a brand new international markets team which will cover 20 key countries for us, including India. We are looking to enhance our communication with Indian visitors, tour operators and online travel agencies to ensure the experience of visiting Qatar is

unforgettable.

Large fan zones for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 will offer a wide variety of food and beverages. The zones will be situated in locations around the country, including a dedicated fan zone opening as part of the new West Bay North Beach project.

The project includes 13 new beaches, a multitude of exciting leisure and entertainment facilities and range of kiosks. Located in Qatar's business district of West Bay, the project will become one of Qatar's leading tourist destinations for leisure, dining and entertainment.

As the host of the World Cup, Qatar is investing in exceptional sports stadiums and facilities, such as the new Education City Stadium and Al Rayyan Stadium, as well as constantly evolving the tourism offering to ensure visitors have a seamless and memorable trip. Advances include the development of a host of new hotels and hotel apartments, professionalisation of the Holiday Homes sector and improved transport facilities that make getting to and around Qatar easy, safe and convenient.

We're taking the opportunity to diversify our offering and broaden our

appeal to visitors with new and enhanced tourism experiences so there is something for all types of traveller; adventurer-seekers can enjoy the thrill of dune-buggy bashing across the desert, cultural enthusiasts can explore our world-famous museums and galleries, and fine dining can be experienced at one of the numerous restaurants, serving local and international cuisine to suit all tastes.

**Q** What do you recommend when one visits Qatar in terms of arts, history and cultural travel? Please

**We are expecting to welcome around 1.5 million visitors for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022.**

**throw some light on the tourism assets of the country.**

Qatar has a thriving arts and culture scene, with a large range of museums, natural landmarks and public art installations. For example, the Museum of Islamic Art sits upon a purpose-built island at the end of Doha's Corniche, the capital's waterfront promenade. The unique museum boasts masterpieces from across the Islamic world, and the building itself is an architectural wonder designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architect I.M. Pei, telling Qatar's story as much as the exhibits it houses.







The National Museum of Qatar was also designed by an award-winning architect, Pritzker Prize-winning Jean Nouvel, and spans 40,000 square metres. The building itself encases Sheikh Abdullah bin Jassim Al-Thani's original palace, which was the seat of government for 25 years.

After a typically authentic Qatari culture experience, a trip aboard a traditional Dhow is unmissable. These majestic wooden boats, historically used for pearl diving, line Doha's harbour and both long and short cruises are available in comfort and style. Qatar Tourism is currently undertaking a large-scale project to refurbish a fleet of over 40 traditional dhow boats, as we continue to improve amenities and activities for international and domestic travellers.

The project is part of a strategic initiative for improving Service Excellence across Qatar's hospitality. The three-phased project will include the refurbishment of the dhows, the modernisation of marinas and jetties, and health and safety training for crew members and boat drivers.

**Q Our readers would also like to be recommended about the less travelled parts of the country and would it be perfectly safe for the women solo travellers too. Please tell us something about which is not commonly known about- less travelled but unique experiences?**

Qatar is one of the safest, most cosmopolitan destinations in the Middle East, rich in art, culture and tradition. With a range of assets including world class hotels, restaurants, stunning beaches and a

bustling atmosphere, we offer the best of the Middle East all in one place and look forward to welcoming travellers to immerse themselves in the country.

For those looking for unique experiences, we'd recommend discovering the Sheikh Faisal Bin Qassim Al Thani Museum and Khor Al Adaid, the inland sea as it is known in English, which is considered a desert marvel. The beach at Khor Al Adaid features clear waters and fine sand, surrounded by miles of desert. Accessible only by 4X4, even getting to this haven is a unique adventure, as guests will pass Bedouin settlements and camels.

Lastly, in 2020 Qatar retained its position as the safest country in the world in the Numbeo Global Index. The ranking marked the third time the country was named the safest destination worldwide in the last five years. Additionally, Doha was named the second safest city in the world, in Numbeo's Crime Index by City 2021. The index, which tracks safety in 431 cities, reaffirms the country's outstanding level of safety and security, while strengthening Qatar's reputation as a welcoming and hospitable destination for all visitors and residents alike, including solo female travellers.

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

A longer stay in Qatar offers the perfect opportunity to immerse visitors in the vibrant city of

Doha. From its breadth of culinary offerings that span traditional choices to gourmet establishments, to luxury hotel stays Doha offers extensive choice for travellers. There are also many activities to choose from, such as water sports or the thrill of dune-buggy bashing across the desert for adventure seekers or a slower paced experience enjoying world-famous museums, galleries and shopping at one of the many malls including Al Hazm or Doha Festival City. Simply walking around on foot will give visitors the chance to explore Doha's unique blend of real Middle Eastern contemporary luxury and authentic tradition.

**Q What are your marketing and promotion strategies for travel and tourism for 2021 and 2022?**

Our goal at Qatar Tourism (QT) – and an important pillar of the Qatar National Vision 2030 - is to establish the country as a world-leading destination and welcome more than six million visitors a year by 2030. To achieve our mission, an extensive tourism development strategy is underway as we work to diversify and build our appeal for residents and visitors.

14 priority markets have been identified to expand the tourism proposition, with guests at the heart of the development, to grow and improve assets and attractions, enhance end to end customer experience and deploy a tailored marketing strategy.

Lastly, we will be launching our first ever international brand campaign later this year and look forward to sharing what we've been working on soon.

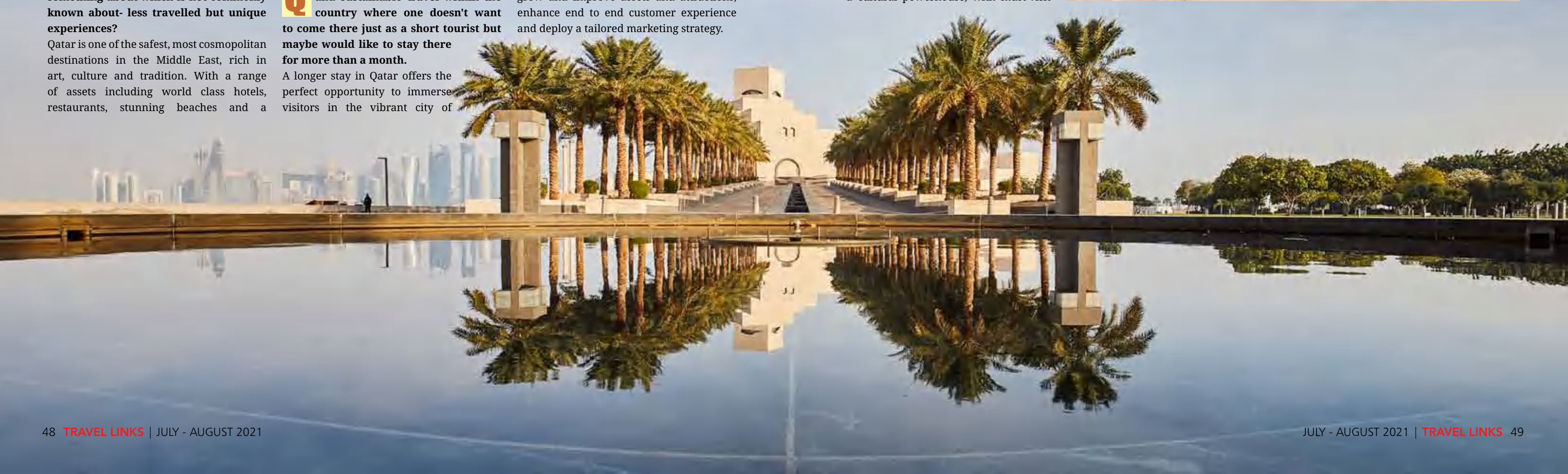
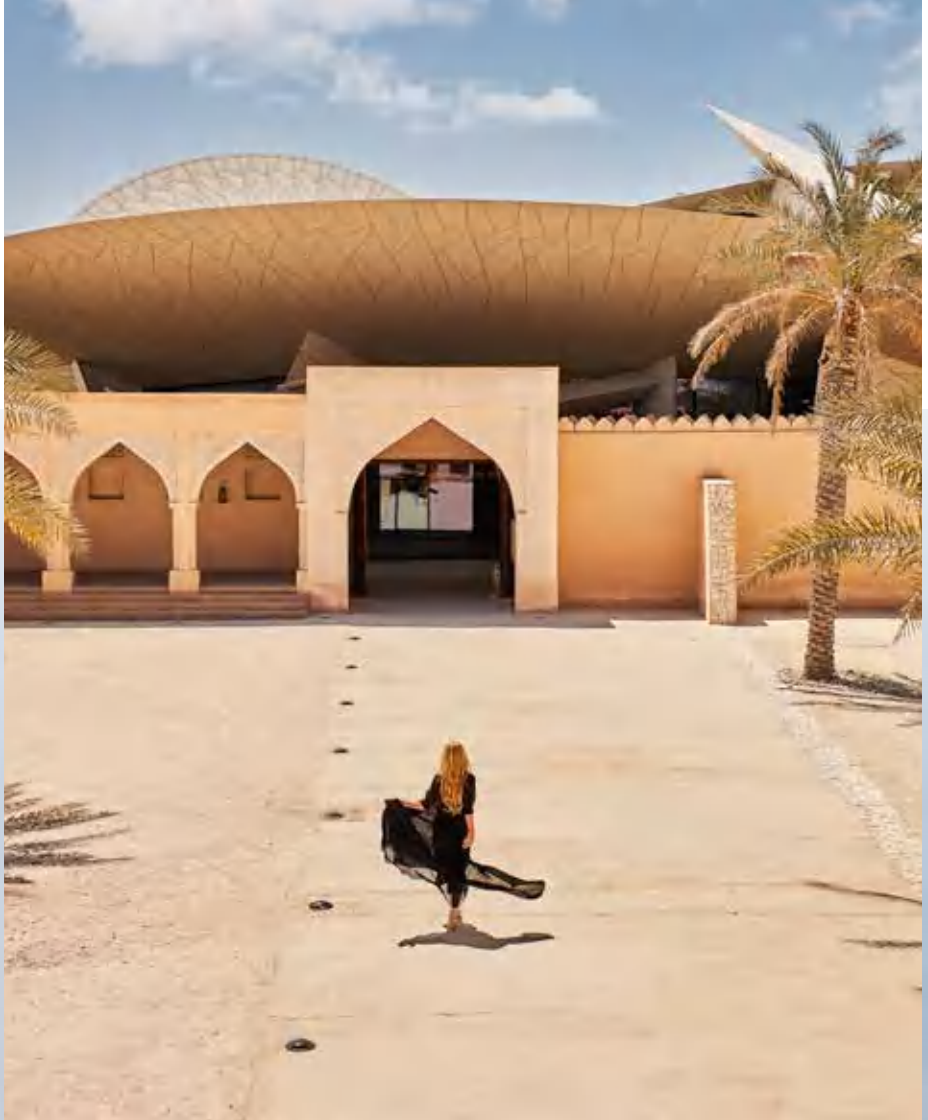
Please share the insights about adventure tourism and any other specialized theme oriented travel journeys which you would like to highlight.

Qatar is a fantastic destination for adventure holidays offering activities for every type of traveller. Nestled on the Qatari Peninsula in the Arabian Gulf, Qatar has 563 km of coastline and over 20 spectacular sandy beaches, making it a water sports paradise for travellers seeking a world of action and adventure. From scuba diving to sand boarding, those looking to step out of their comfort zone and soak up world-class outdoor activities are in for a treat with an abundance of undiscovered, action-packed adventures.

But that's not all Qatar offers guests. Our proposition covers not only beach escapes, but also city breaks, romantic getaways and incredible options for cultural enthusiasts. Qatar really does offer something for all types of travelers.

Last but not the least what would be the top 5 takes while visiting Qatar, something which can never be / should not be missed.

1. Museums – we're committed to becoming a cultural powerhouse, with must-visit







museums including the Museum of Islamic Art (MIA), National Museum of Qatar, Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art and Fire Station offering fascinating installations from world renowned artists.

2. Khor Al Adaid - The inland sea as it is known in English is considered a desert marvel. The beach at Khor Al Adaid features clear waters and fine

sand, surrounded by miles of desert. Accessible only by 4X4, even getting to this haven is an adventure, as guests will pass Bedouin settlements and camels.

3. Msbeireb Downtown Doha - Msheireb Downtown Doha is a world-class sustainable downtown regeneration project. Buildings and structures in the area create a unique fusion of modern design with traditional Qatari

architecture. With an aim to revive the old commercial district in Doha, the redevelopment utilises the latest in sustainable technologies and the highest standards in green building.

4. Souq Waqif - Take in the vibrant atmosphere of Doha by heading to Souq Waqif, a bustling marketplace. Visitors will stumble across traditional Qatari artifacts displayed throughout the scattered stalls, while exploring intricate alleyways full of local treasures.
5. Spas - There's no better way to relax than a spa treatment and Qatar has an incredible choice, offering some award-winning experiences. The Sharq Village & Spa, a Ritz Carlton is spread across 6,500 square metres and features 23 treatment rooms, hammam rooms and a sauna. Alternatively, the Zulal Wellness Resort is a haven from the bustle of the city centre, and winner of the 'World's Best New Wellness Retreat 2020' at the World Spa Awards. The resort will offer a range of treatments allowing guests to fully immerse in true serenity, surrounded by its natural and picturesque landscape. [u](#)



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# PHILIPPINES

An island-hopping adventure of a lifetime

## GAUTAM SINGH KANWAL

In the lap of the ever-rumbling waves of the sea and flanked by swaying palm trees, over 7600 islands make up this beautiful archipelagic country with a multitude of pretty beaches, lagoons, cohorts of volcanos, rice fields, diving & surfing locations and unique wildlife. A destination which offers a variety of attractions in these respects, the Philippines has become very tourist friendly over the last decade and one will definitely like the visit more than he or she

would have expected. I certainly liked it much more than I expected to. As you go around exploring the island, the cadence of thrill and excitement keeps snowballing.

There is so much to do across so many islands that it can get very confusing as to what to do and what to leave out.

From my smorgasbord of a trip to the Philippines, I have listed below some of the best places to visit / things to do there in about two weeks' time.

### **Puerto-Princesa**

One of the major attractions in the

Palawan province of the Philippines is the underground river at Puerto-Princesa. Starting your trip here can prime you up for a great vacation ahead. This underground river is listed as one of the seven natural wonders of the world and rightly so. It is the longest navigable underground river in the world. Its entire length is over 8 kilometers long out of which 4.5 kilometers are navigable. This subterranean river emerges directly into the sea and is well covered by one of the finest limestone cave systems with exquisite stalactite and stalagmite rock formations all along



the river. Rowing a canoe over this subterranean river into the caves offers a most unique experience. A personal audio guide system is issued to the visitors who can listen to the commentary on the history and geography of this cave-river system in the language of their choice. Keep your camera settings ready for dim light photography prior entering the caves otherwise you might miss out on capturing some of the best rock formations in their true appearance.

While you wait for your turn at the underground river ride, you can indulge in some ziplining nearby. The Sabang zipline is 800 meters long and you zip from one island to another over the South China Sea. Now it's one thing to just zipline and completely another to zipline from one island to another over a wide expanse of open sea and therefore this is a must try for thrill seekers.

Apart from the underground river there is also a firefly sight-seeing river cruise in Puerto-Princesa which is a sort of night time river safari. Wooden boats

**Getting to Puerto-Princesa is best by a flight from Manila which would be less than 90 minutes of flying time. As a word of caution, it is advisable to plan your air travel in Philippines with enough buffer time as flights in the Philippines are prone to frequent delays owing to the weather.**

cruise and drift along the Iwahig river which cuts through a dense mangrove forest. These fireflies at random will light up, a whole bunch of them in sync. It's as if the tiny bulbs on a Christmas tree suddenly lit up at the press of a switch, only thing is that these tiny bulbs also fly off together from one side of the river to another glowing in the dark. It was interesting to know from the boatman that the Tagalog word for firefly is 'alitaptap'. I quite liked the sound of it.

Getting to Puerto-Princesa is best by a flight from Manila which would be less than 90 minutes of flying time. As a word of caution, it is advisable to plan your air travel in Philippines with enough buffer time as flights in the Philippines are prone to frequent delays owing to the weather.

**El Nido**

El Nido in the Palawan province is probably the most penetrated part of Philippines by global tourists. Russians, Europeans, Americans, Australians, South Americans, tourists from roughly every







corner of the world through El Nido. Its beaches, lagoons, seaside restaurants get the juices flowing for any travel addict. Getting to El Nido from Puerto-Princesa is a fun ride on a tourist van or buses that ply back and forth. The journey takes up to 5 hours, but the scenic locales along the way make it an enjoyable ride, and you will go through lush green fields and occasionally be lashed by rains on the way. There are loads of options for accommodation in El Nido. Myriad resorts, guest houses and hotels to choose from and all of them are pocket friendly.

The USP of El Nido is the boat tours to

various islands, lagoons and beaches in the vicinity. There are so many of them that the tourist agencies have divided these tours into 4 broad categories. Tour A - which takes you to Small Lagoon, Big Lagoon (an absolute must), Secret Lagoon, Seven Commando Beach and Shimizu Island. Tour B will guide you across Snake Island, Entalula Beach, Cudugnon caves and Pinagbuyutan Island. Tour C is one of the coolest tours comprising of trips to Helicopter Island, Matinloc Island and Matinloc Shrine, Secret Beach, Star Beach and Hidden Beach. Tour D brings you to Ipil Beach, Cadlao Lagoon, Natnat Beach,



Paradise Beach, Bukal Beach and Pasandigan beach. Now each of these tours is quite lengthy lasting from 7-8 hours. Therefore, they need to be planned on separate days. Furthermore, these tours are tiring and physically draining as some of the lagoons and beaches need to be reached by jumping off the boat and swimming a considerable distance. Hence it would be advisable to do these tours on alternate days by keeping a rest day in between each tour to rejuvenate your energy levels. Toughies can of course go ahead and do the 4 tours on consecutive days. However, if one is short on time, then I would advise on doing the Tour A and Tour C and skip Tour B and Tour D. El Nido has a plethora of restaurants by the sea side which open up during the evening during the low tide as the water recedes back into the sea after keeping the beach flooded during the day. These restaurants offer some of the best fresh sea food in great variety. Every restaurant, I repeat, every restaurant has a live band performing and it only affirms the love for music the Filipinos have. Everyone in Philippines loves singing karaoke and most of them can play an instrument.

As a word of advice, I strongly recommend keeping substantial cash at hand for your stay in El Nido as most places don't accept card payments and there is only one cash machine in all of El Nido which has a long queue in the evenings (all of them foreign tourists).

It's a great idea to drive to Nacpan beach and spend a lazy afternoon towards the end of your trip to El Nido. This is a huge beach and you could practically feel all alone as it is so quiet and peaceful during the day. ATVs are available at El Nido for getting there.

## Oslob, Cebu.

Cebu is a surprisingly big city considering the duration of the drive which took us from Cebu airport to Oslob. Oslob is located on the outskirts of Cebu and after landing at Cebu, you can get sharing cabs to get to Oslob. The one thing I was looking forward to the most during this trip was swimming with whale-sharks in Oslob. You'll need to be an early riser for this particular activity. Get to the point at 6am as the rush just keeps on increasing exponentially. It is advisable to book your tickets in advance if possible. The hotel / resort you're staying at will be able to book your tickets for you. You need to be there early as these whale-









sharks come towards the coastline early in the morning and swim back towards the deep sea during the day. So, to get the best chance to be swimming in a pod of whales you need to rise early, that's for sure. It's a one of a kind experiences here in Oslob to swim with the whale-sharks. There are 216 of them the last time they were counted and each of them is marked for identity. A fisherman on a small dinghy will be right in the middle of the pod, feeding small fish to the whales to keep them in location while visitors can jump in and swim all around the whale family. You can get tantalisingly close to these whale-sharks while you're swimming in there with them. However, the general rule by the organisers says to maintain a distance of atleast 3 feet. If you

have put on sunscreen then you must wash off the sunscreen prior to jumping into the water as the chemicals in the sunscreen can affect the hormones of the whales or the hormones of their offspring. Being in proximity of these whales can make you feel vulnerable at first and then like a child in the next instant. They are not aggressive towards humans at all. So, its super fun to be swimming with these giants all around you.

The next activity which is close by from Oslob is canyoneering at Kawasan. This is a lot more fun than I thought. It involves hiking, swimming, diving and jumping off cliffs and waterfall edges in the canyon range while exploring the canyon. Till date it has been one of the best adrenaline

moments of my life. Crawling through creeks and over the rocks, doing a series of jumps over the cliff edges into the water will make your heart race with excitement of an action-packed film. The chilled water rejuvenates you to a great extent and you happily burn a lot of calories. I would not advise this activity to older people or those with some injuries. For the rest it's an absolute must.

### Dumaguete

A short boat ride from Oslob takes you to Dumaguete. A town with a much laidback milieu and a great range of restaurants by the sea. A lot of people settle here to live their retired life peacefully. Well-made sidewalks are constructed by the seaside to enjoy

morning and evening walks. Some nice historic architecture can be sighted here like the St Catherine of Alexandria Cathedral. Dumaguete is also home to one of the most prestigious educational institutions of the Philippines - Silliman University, which is one of the most reputed universities in the country. The infrastructure of the university is a mix of medieval and modern style architecture. There is a big swimming pool, huge green trees line the walkways in the campus. It's nice to take a walk around the campus. Then there are the twin lakes of Dumaguete which are set in a very peaceful location in complete contrast to city life. A boat ride across the lake is available which is like gliding in perfect silence over still water. Dumaguete is a perfect place to get



yourself well rested and rejuvenate yourself for further action ahead.

### Siquijor

A place where you can take your action adventure trip to high octane levels is Siquijor Island. A quick boat ride from Dumaguete lands you here. Most popular for its sky diving experiences, this place is gaining more and more popularity by the day. Some of the most experienced dive masters from Europe take you for this thrilling adventure. Jumping off a plane from 10000 feet is one of the most adrenaline pumping experience one can have. Furthermore, this is quite a great location for skydiving as you get a wonderful view of the ocean as well as the coastlines of 3 different islands during your descent from the sky (Dumaguete, Cebu and Siquijor). Prior to your dive, you will be briefed and trained in some basics of the art by the dive masters and the interaction is going to be a lot of fun. Every moment is recorded in the form of video and photographs right from the time you arrive at the airfield to the time you land after making your jump. The first 45 seconds of the skydive are a freefall, the parachute doesn't open up for that duration and you fall 5000 feet freely under gravity. I couldn't explain the experience in any amount of words of any language. It is a moment to be lived and cherished. A certificate signed by the dive master will be issued along with a whole bunch of photos

and videos on a USB. The cost of skydiving here is Siquijor is quite reasonable when you compare it with other locations such as New Zealand and Dubai. It's a must try for the thrill seekers.

### Bohol

One of the most fun places in all of Philippines is the island of Bohol, and that's because of 2 things mainly. The chocolate hills and the tarsier sanctuary. The chocolate hills of Bohol are a fascinating sight and a miraculous work of mother nature. Getting there is equally fun. From Carmen, you rent an ATV and take a 9 kilometers ride along with a tour guide whose trail you follow till you reach the hiking part. Thereafter you start climbing uphill for the view which will stun you instantly. Over 1200 (and maybe many more) of these hills are spread across Carmen, Sagbayan and Batuan in Bohol island. These are limestone hills covered by grass and almost all of them are similar to each other. They all look symmetric in construction and arrangement. It is thought that they were formed as a result of tectonic upliftment of coral deposits and rain water erosion of the structures over ages. The influence of erosion and tectonic upliftment over time has resulted in giving the hills this unique shape. The grass in the dry season turns brownish and when viewed from a good vantage point, they give the appearance of the famous 'Hershey's Kisses' chocolates and thus the name.





These charming hills have been included as a national geological monument of the Philippines. There is a proposal in place to declare them in the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Upon coming back from the Chocolate Hills make sure to stop by the Tarsier Sanctuary.

If you have watched the ‘Lord of the Rings’ movies, then you can’t forget the character of Gollum. And if you take a close look at a tarsier you will be instantly reminded of Gollum. This nocturnal sloth is one of the most mysterious creatures you will ever set your eyes on. An endangered species with a lifespan of around 10 years and one that can give birth only once in its lifetime. A true wonder of nature, they are very sensitive to the environment that they live in. Displacing them to another location which maybe nearby (even the next neighbouring jungle) could be fatal for them. You can spend a lot of time just looking at them move in ultra-slow motion during the day and feel amazed at this wonder of

**This volcano is unique in its own way. Not just because of the sulphur lake in the crater of the volcano, but its entire topographical configuration. There is a lake in the crater of this volcano which is warm sulphur. The volcano is surrounded by a lake itself, so its an island volcano in the Taal lake which is a fresh water lake.**

nature. Guides are available to explain in more detail and a lot of information boards are put throughout the sanctuary giving valuable information. People who are highly interested sighting endemic wildlife are sure to feel blessed after sighting this critically endangered species in Bohol.

Balicasag island in Bohol is a great place for scuba diving and swimming with huge sea turtles, barracuda, school of jacks and sighting colourful corals. Certified coaches take you to the best locations where you sight the sea turtles and other interesting marine life. Apart from scuba diving there are sand banks at Balicasag where one can laze around on the soft sandy terrain surrounded by glistening water.

A very interesting place of historic value in the Philippines is the Blood Compact Shrine Monument at Tagbilaran, Bohol. Imagine drinking each other’s blood to seal a bond of friendship. One would normally associate drinking each other’s blood with enmity. But here it had long been considered a sacred



tradition. This particular site has been built in honour of the vow of friendships between Miguel de Legazpi of Spain and Rajah Sikatuna of Bohol. According to historic events dating back to mid 16th century, after many failed attempts on getting to the shores of Philippines due to foul weather and hostile locals, Miguel de Legazpi finally found friendly people and a warm welcome at this spot and the bond of friendship grew so strong with Sikatuna that they sealed it with a Blood Compact as per the tradition of that time. The tradition involved drawing three drops of blood from each other’s arm, mixing it in a glass of wine and drinking it up equally. A monumental shrine with such a unique

and bizarre history definitely needs to be paid a visit.

### Taal Volcano, Tagaytay

This volcano is unique in its own way. Not just because of the sulphur lake in the crater of the volcano, but its entire topographical configuration. There is a lake in the crater of this volcano which is warm sulphur. The volcano is surrounded by a lake itself, so its an island volcano in the Taal lake which is a fresh water lake. This fresh water lake is surrounded by land on all sides which forms part of the Luzon Island, and which is ofcourse surrounded by the sea. So many layers of land and water cover and converge to the Taal Volcano. To get there one can

take a bus from Manila, then rent a tuk-tuk, followed by a boat ride and finally a horse-ride up the volcano and then go about exploring the volcano and the sulphur lake on foot. Be sure to carry water as it can be quite dehydrating. It has been one of the most active volcanoes of the Philippines and has been studied very carefully by various experts. A trip to a volcano is always going to be exciting whether it’s a dormant or an active volcano, but the journey is also very tiring, yet fruitful.

The capital city of the Philippines (Manila) promises a lot of fun with its modern bars, discos and variety of restaurants in each cuisine type. It is a perfect place to party hard before signing off from the Philippines. The pubs run late into the night till early morning. If you’re in Manila for a couple of days or more, then it would be a really good idea to visit the national museum and the historic Fort Santiago. The architecture here would make you feel that you’re in 17th century Europe and your camera memory will reach its limit.

The list of places to visit or things to do in the Philippines could be ever exhaustive, but this itinerary is a pretty much a go for a traveller who wants the feel of the various islands of the Philippines.

The people of Philippines offer a warm smile to visitors from everywhere and are of very resilient nature. Many islands here take a beating by a plethora of typhoons every year destroying homes, leaving people injured and taking lives, but the people of Philippines just get up after the storm has battered them, dust themselves off and move on.

These tough islanders have a glorious maritime and seafaring history which they are very proud of. That is one of the main reasons why I had wanted to visit this country as I have had made many friends during my seafaring stints across the world and each one of them have described how great it is to visit the Philippines. And truly, I can say the same to anyone who would like to visit the fine archipelagic nation.🇵🇭

GAUTAM SINGH KANWAL

The above article is authored by Gautam Singh Kanwal (Master Mariner) who works aboard Merchant Ships and hails from Nainital, Uttarakhand. An avid for travelling, reading, learning, music, art and adventure sports, he is keen to indulge in new experiences every time.





# MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM- SWEDEN

Waffles, Fika, and Midsummer—we are talking about the home of Swedish massages! Sweden, ranked one of the highest countries in the world for happiness, is also an Edible Country! Read on to find out more about this nation as yum as cinnamon buns and waffles in part 2 of “Scandinavia on your list: plan now, plane later”.







Cross-country skiing in Sweden.

## SRISHTI VERMA

In our last issue, we had introduced the word-trip travel series on Scandinavia. Delivering as promised, here we are with another Scandinavian country, Sweden. Sweden is known for its midsummer traditions, hiking routes, and the calmness in busy Stockholm.

The unique Swedish tradition of Edible Country has inspired people to appreciate the bountiful gifts of nature in the do-it-yourself dining experience. Do you like coffee? Announce “let’s do fika” and see people around you get excited for a coffee break. And what better to pair with a coffee than cinnamon buns?

While Sweden is 97% uninhabited, the capital Stockholm is the most populous area in the Scandinavian region. It is set on an archipelago of 14 islands spread across the Baltic Sea, and is connected by 57 bridges.

## Distinct Seasons, Indistinct Joy

Spectacularly colourful skies in the autumn lead to cold and snowy winters here. People then pull up their socks (and caps and jackets), and head outside to ski. That’s right, you can ski almost anywhere during Swedish winters. There are more than 100 resorts to ensure that a ski-full time! Whether you are travelling with family or on an adventure trip, you will find ski slopes that cater to all.

But you cannot go so close to the Arctic Circle and miss Aurora Borealis! When in Sweden during winters, head to the Swedish

Lapland and experience this magnificent marvel of the nature in true blue (and multicoloured) form.

As months go by, sitting by the fireplace and sipping a hot drink gives way to blanket-wrapped spring because Sweden has a chilly spring with temperatures hovering in single-digits. The best sign of spring is the crane dance. Thousands of cranes arrive at Lake Hornborgasjön in April, and bow and circle each other as a part of mating routine. This is called the “crane dance”. Do not forget to stop by the information centre at Trandansen or at Naturum Hornborgasjön for exploring the fine footpaths of the area.

## A Midsummer Night’s Dream

Each year between June 20 and 25, Swedes adorn flowers in their hair, dance around a blue, white and yellow maypole (called “maja”), sing songs and don their traditional costumes to celebrate the longest day of the year. Traditions associated with the midsummer are intriguing (and magical).

In the old days, and even today, young women go out to the meadows and pick 7 different types of flowers in complete silence. They put these under their pillow at night, and it is said that they would dream of the man they will marry.

But the celebration shouldn’t stop at romance. You need good health and vitality for a happy life. Midsummer traditions look after this too.

To stay healthy, people would walk barefoot in the dew as the midsummer gave

**The official residence of His Majesty The King is the Royal Palace of Stockholm. The palace is a daily place of work for the royal highnesses and the various departments that constitute the Royal Court. The Royal Palace is open to visitors all year round, and is a unique blend of royal residence, workplace and culture-historical monument.**





Collect fresh strawberries for a delicious strawberry cake

way to dawn. Beautifying hair with flower wreaths symbolised rebirth and fertility. People continue to follow these traditions today. Bouquets are dried and placed in Christian bath as a sign of keeping the family healthy through the long winters to come.

## Food For Foraging in The Edible Country

Sweden prides itself on being an Edible Country. Swedes believe that food is available in abundance in their nature and they utilise it by engaging in do-it-yourself dining. All you need to bring is some butter, honey and salt.

Sweden's Right of Public Access, called Allemansrätten, entitles people to forage and set up camps anywhere they want. As they do this, they are required to be respectful of the nature and treat other's properties with respect. Edible Country tables have been set up around the country which offer local food menus.

## With this 100-million-acre pantry at your disposal, what will you create?

You are allowed to forage and cook your own food. Take the help of a local guide and learn about the best spots to find delicious

berries or edible mushrooms. Healthy food no longer has to be complicated and inaccessible! Step into the nature and find what you want you eat, cook it, eat it, and enjoy it. If you do not want to cook, you can book a set three-course menu. There are ready-prepared fireplaces available in plenty in the Swedish nature to prevent any accidents. Foraging for mushrooms is a common weekend activity that takes Swedes to forests. Another delicacy is seaweed — a nutrition and adventure-packed food item. Spring is the best season for harvesting seaweed.

## How about finding strawberries for the famous strawberry cake? Narrow Alleys and Metro Art

The Swedish capital of Stockholm is divided into districts, each with a unique vibe. In the old town Gamla Stan, the narrowest street is Mårten Trotzig's alley, which is only 35 inches at its narrowest point.

Stockholm is easy to explore on foot or public transport. And you cannot expect the public transport to be bland and boring here, right? Take the bus, commuter train, tram or boat—you can get around Stockholm through accessible and user-friendly transportation system. The metro



Won't you stop to smell a waffle here? March 25—Waffle Day in Sweden.





Enjoy Fika which is incomplete without buns, cookies or cakes!

stations here are feature artworks by over 150 artists, turning them into a gigantic art gallery. You can see sculptures, mosaics, paintings, art installations and inscriptions from 1950s onwards. You can also join a guided tour of four or five stations with a Metro expert.

Stockholm is the perfect blend of urbanity and centuries-old charm, and has something for everyone! Fancy a walk in the nature? Head to the Royal Djurgården – the world’s first national urban park and history stretching back to the 15th century. But then, the history of a place should not be limited to the buildings. How about the trees that witnessed the time change? Or the open-air museums that saw the city transform as it is today? When in Djurgården, visit Skansen—the world’s oldest open-air museum. In Stockholm, you can enjoy the open spaces and wander among oak trees lining the canal. These oak trees are centuries old, and deer, hares and many rare bird species thrive here.

<https://imagebank.sweden.se>

**Take the bus, commuter train, tram or boat—you can get around Stockholm through accessible and user-friendly transportation system. The metro stations here are feature artworks by over 150 artists, turning them into a gigantic art gallery. You can see sculptures, mosaics, paintings, art installations and inscriptions from 1950s onwards. You can also join a guided tour of four or five stations with a Metro expert.**

## Sustainable For the Future Generations

Sweden is known globally for being sustainable. With its wide culinary span, it is increasingly focusing on sustainable cooking methods and ingredients, as well as travel.

Gothenburg has been ranked 4 times as the world’s most sustainable destination. 97% of its transport system runs on renewable energy, and almost all hotels are eco-certified. Here, you can also find stores selling second hand and vintage clothes, as well as clothes, sports gear and outdoor equipment on rent.

Take a bicycle tour and enjoy the beautiful parks and gardens. Do not forget to indulge in some delicious ice cream here. You can also treat your taste buds to delightful waffles and popsicles.

If you are travelling with children, take them for a true nature trip around Gothenburg. You can walk along the Lärjeån river along an easy trail of 7km. If



Djurgården is an oasis for leisure and recreation



## Explore the Swedish beauty through biking



## Ski, snowboard, ice skate, or jump into the pristine snow!



<https://imagebank.sweden.se>

the walking has made you hungry, you can climb the stairs at the end of the trail and reach Lärjeån's Gardens offering food that is grown in the garden. The trail is marked in orange-coloured signs and "Lärjeleden".

You and your little ones can also paddle a canoe in the Vättlefjäll natural area, or go snorkelling in Hummerviken on the archipelago island Öckerö. You can climb the mountains, take a dip, or venture into the white anemones' valley called Vitsippsdalen where you will find forests, streams, lakes, and ocean views.

## But That Is Not All

In Swedish life, parental leave is a central part of the accepting and welcoming culture. For 480 days, parents are granted leave to be shared between them for encouraging equality and responsibility sharing. Fathers' groups are common too

**Sweden also awards the prestigious Nobel Prize every year on 10 December. The Nobel Prizes are awarded in the Stockholm Concert Hall, followed by the Nobel Banquet at City Hall. It has been awarded to people and organisations since 1901 for achievements in various fields.**

and you can find men meeting and talking about their roles as dads.

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In the far north of the country, there is a "Treehotel" that allows you to live among the tall pines and experience close to the Arctic. There are several rooms to choose from, each suspended 4-6m above the ground. You get a fantastic view of the Lule River valley, miles of forest and the powerful river from atop the Treehotel rooms.

The official residence of His Majesty The King is the Royal Palace of Stockholm. The palace is a daily place of work for the royal highnesses and the various departments that constitute the Royal Court. The Royal Palace



Midsummer Celebrations are full of life, joy, songs and dances.



Forage for natural ingredients in the 100 million acres of pantry

is open to visitors all year round, and is a unique blend of royal residence, workplace and culture-historical monument.


Takeaway

In Sweden, the appreciation for life and nature are strongly interlined. You can enjoy Fika at home, or go into the forest to forage food. You can shop trendy clothes and traditional handicrafts, or seek architectural inspiration from the country renowned for its design and heritage.

Swedes know how to enjoy the weather and celebrate life as it comes. They are strongly looking out for their future generations through sustainable living.

If you can step outside to collect food, connect with the nature, explore the wilderness and enjoy cinnamon buns, you have accepted the Swedish way of life.

The credits for all the pictures here are given to [visitsweden.com](https://visitsweden.com). Go to [visitsweden.com](https://visitsweden.com) to know more.

In the following issues of Travel Links, we would be taking you through a reader-friendly trip of the remaining Scandinavian country—Denmark. Till then, stay in, stay safe. 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.





# All about travelling to Belarus

## Ease of Visa rules

Belarus is a country with an ancient history and rich traditions, beautiful nature and amazing architecture, industrial giants and well-developed agriculture, unique cuisine, and hospitable people. Every year the country becomes more tourist-friendly. Over 11 million people visit Belarus every year.

Belarus is located in the center of Europe at the intersection of many international routes. The territory of the country spans 207,600 km². Belarus is known for its hospitality and cordiality. The country opened the doors wide open for tourists as it launched the visa-free travel program.

The visa-free travel program is meant for tourists from 74 countries who arrive in Belarus through the Minsk National Airport. It makes visiting the country as simple and easy as possible. The period of visa-free travel for tourist purposes is up to 30 days. This applies to both solo travelers and organized groups. The only exception is that foreign citizens must arrive on flights, not from the Russian Federation.

India is among these 74 countries. Indian citizens should have the following documents to travel to Belarus without applying for a visa: 1) A valid multiple-entry visa of the EU or Schengen states with a mark of entry into their territory; 2) Air ticket with confirmation of departure from the Minsk National Airport within 30 days from the date of entry.

## New COVID norms, post COVID situation

As in all countries of the world, COVID-19 has imposed certain restrictions on travel to the Republic of Belarus. For foreign citizens' entry into Belarus through the land, checkpoints are temporarily suspended. But fortunately, the entrance is still open through air checkpoints.

When arriving through air checkpoints, all tourists, who have reached the age of six, should have a negative PCR test performed no later than 3 days before crossing the border. 10-day self-isolation is mandatory only for persons arriving from the countries



included in the List of the Ministry of Health, where cases of COVID-19 infection are registered. For transit through the territory of Belarus with duration of fewer than 24 hours a PCR test and self-isolation are not necessary.

The situation with COVID-19 in Belarus is developing by global trends. The number of new infections is falling, and the vaccination campaign is being actively pursued.

It is important to note that Belarus







did not introduce a lockdown and did not suspend the activities of economic entities, which helped to avoid a significant negative economic effect. Among the current restrictions are only mask modes in transport and public places, and social distancing.

### ***Best months to plan a travel***

The climate in Belarus is moderate continental; there are no sudden temperature changes, severe frosts, and stifling heat. Rainstorms, hurricanes, and other extreme weather events are rare.

Snow usually falls in winter, rivers, and lakes are covered with ice. There are perfect conditions to go skiing or snowboarding—ski resorts even produce artificial snow if necessary, which is in no way inferior in its characteristics to natural.

In March, winter gradually disappears, begins to warm, and the Belarusian nature comes to life, rivers overflow, flooding the floodplain forests, which makes the surrounding landscapes look like the



**In autumn, the weather in the country is very changeable, cloudy days can drag on, and warm and sunny weeks can be kept – this is also called 'Indian summer'. On these sunny days, the best advice is to devote time to travel around the country and its attractions – a comfortable temperature, coupled with the amazing beauty of forests and parks with falling leaves will make your vacation unforgettable.**



Amazonian selva. By the end of April, everything turns green, birds fly in, forests and shores of lakes are filled with birdsongs. The temperature is kept comfortable and is ideal for hiking, excursions, and trips out of the city.

Summer is considered the most popular season for tourists. The days at this time are mostly warm, sunny, and calm. There are very few cloudy and cold days, and therefore in summer, the best option is to go on long trips to visit the beauties of Belarusian nature. The water in rivers and lakes also warms up to a comfortable temperature, which allows swimming to fresh up. A set of equipped beaches along the banks of rivers and lakes, both in the city limits and beyond, will provide vacationers with a tan no worse than in southern countries.

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Each of the seasons is good for visiting Belarus in its way and having visited the









country once, you will want to come back here more than once, but at a different time of the year to look at the same sights, playing with different colors and getting a different impression.

## Top 5 places to see in Belarus

### BelovezhskayaPushcha

This place, one of the most important landmarks in Belarus, is formed by the remains of the ancient forest, which used

to stretch from the Baltic Sea to the Bug River and from the Oder to the Dnieper. BelovezhskayaPushcha national park is included in the UNESCO World Heritage List. European bison, bears, deer, and lynx can be found here. The Nature Museum, located on the grounds of the park, tells the visitors about the flora and fauna of the forest, which has lived through several epochs, illustrating it with 26 expositions. The most ancient trees growing here are about 600 years. If you feel a little cold, be sure: Father Frost's residence right around the corner.

### Grodno and the Augustow Canal

Grodno is rightfully considered the most beautiful city in Belarus, which has preserved the memory of its former greatness and ancient traditions. Today it is not only a tourist 'Mecca' but also one of the largest cities in the country – about 350 thousand people live here. Grodno is often called 'the most European city in our country. This is not surprising, because not only almost all the sights have been preserved here, but also the old layout.

Monuments of architecture from different eras and different styles create a special atmosphere, seasoned with the spirit of antiquity.

The Augustow Canal is a unique hydro-technical structure of the 19th century, one of the largest canals in Europe, which passes along Poland and Belarus. Crossing the border between two countries on a kayak isn't it an adventure? And you do not need a visa for that! The Augustow Canal is a wonderful place for active leisure, water tourism, backpacking reeling. The magnificent beauty of nature attracts



thousands of guests. Festivals, concerts, and sports events are held here especially for them.

### Salt caves in Soligorsk

Come to Soligorsk– one of the most unusual Belarusian cities, where you can descend underground to an extreme depth and learn how the salt is produced. Moreover, it is possible in our country to visit a unique speleotherapy facility, which helps treat hundreds of people every day.

### BELAZ

Do you want to see how the world's largest dumping trucks, entered in the Guinness Book of Records, or tractors that are among the most popular ever are made? We'll give you this chance! The largest Belarusian enterprises open their doors for tourists and gladly share their production secrets. After visiting BelAZ or MTZ, you will know not only how legendary cars are made, but also perform a test drive of a 130-ton dumping truck, or participate in manufacturing a tractor. Don't miss your chance to take a photo near the famous quarry dumping truck with a lifting capacity of 450 tons!

### Mir and Nesvizh Castles

The lands of Belarus were previously often called the Land of Castles, and this is no coincidence because there were more than 100 of them. Two of the best-preserved and most famous are Mir Castle and the palace and castle complex in Nesvizh.



These are two unique sites included in the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage List and are some of the most valuable monuments in Belarus. These two castles keep many unsolved secrets and legends, including mystical ones.

**Arts and culture**

The cultural identity of Belarusians has been shaped by supreme spiritual values celebrating morality and humanity. For centuries these values have been passed over from generation to generation. These are high ideals of good and justice, respect for others, a strong rejection of evil and violence. These values have been materialized in architectural and artistic traditions, unique works of music, and literature.

The modern cultural life of Belarus is dynamic and diverse. The country hosts a

The most popular cultural events are Slavyansky bazaar, Alexandria Gathers Friends, Viva Braslav, The Bells of Sofia, and many-many others.

**Sports Travel**

It's safe to say that Belarus is a sports country. Special attention is paid to the promotion of the sport. Belarus is the native country of many famous sportsmen and sportswomen: Daria Domracheva, Viktoria Azarenko, Maxim Mirny Ruslan Salei, YuliaNesterenko, VitaliyScherbo, Aleksandr Medved, Yelena Belova, Olga Korbut, etc. The most popular kind of sports is football, hockey, biathlon, and tennis.

People of all ages here love sports and practice them in every corner of the country. Over 25 thousand physical culture facilities can be found in Belarus. About 26 thousand sports and entertainment events are held



lot of art exhibitions, music, theater, and film festivals. Belarus entertains its guests with all kinds of events: from classic jazz on the city street to festivals, open-airs, and raves with D.Js from different corners of the world. Here, you can visit a theatrical forum or a folk culture festival, visit a holiday dedicated to ancient crafts or national cuisine in the open, take part in a high society ball, or a medieval reconstruction. Lovers of extreme entertainment will appreciate bike fest, while amateurs of natural beauty will find a lot of interesting things in an unusual environmental holiday.

every year, many of which turn into bright and unforgettable holidays. Having come to Minsk, you can take part in the international cycling carnival 'VIVarovar' (May) or the grandiose half-marathon (September).

International sports events on a global scale are regularly held in Belarus. In 2014 Minsk host the Ice Hockey World Championships. An absolute record of attendance was set at the Championships—more than 500 thousand visitors. In 2019, the 2nd European Games took place in Minsk. It was a large-scale sports event, which gathered about 4 thousand sportsmen and



sportswomen from 50 European countries.

**Rural Tourism**

Belarus is a country where people value traditions and respect the rites of their ancestors. Do you want to see real-life, enjoy its atmosphere, feel the unmistakable village atmosphere and immerse yourself in a brand new world, filled with authentic activities, songs, and dances? Then you must visit one of the Belarusian farm stays, where the hosts will welcome you, treat you with delicious meals of the Belarusian cuisine, and teach you to gather honey and

bake bread. Here, you can fish or hunt with pleasure or even celebrate a wedding in the best Belarusian traditions.

Rural tourism is one of the most successful types of tourism in the Republic of Belarus. Thanks to the powerful preferences provided to this type of tourism, in 2021 there are 2,936 rural entities. At the beginning of 2021, the number of rural tourists amounted to 433 thousand people.

In 2016 and 2018 Belarus became the winner in the Rural tourism nomination of the National Geographic Traveler Awards rating.

In 2022, it is planned to conduct the International Forum on Tourism and Rural Development 'Ensuring a Better Life for the Local Population' in cooperation with the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO).

Thus, rural tourism in Belarus is the cradle of the national cultural heritage, it strengthens the self-consciousness of the nation and demonstrates the hospitality of the people. Rest on rural farmsteads in Belarus is an opportunity to plunge into the rural life of the country, use environmentally friendly

products, retire with nature and restore your health.

Cooks in cafes have made delicious drank, guides have prepared fascinating tours across picturesque locations, festivals have been organized in cities and villages, and the stoves in farm stays have been warmed up for tired travelers. Belarusians are ready to share the kindness and warmth of their hearts with their guests!🇧🇪

**Materials were provided by the Department of Tourism of the Ministry of Sports and Tourism of the Republic of Belarus.**



Oblique sun rays percolating threatening clouds over the Mediterranean at Pachi Island, Megara Bay, Greece.

by  
Gautam Singh Kanwal.



GAUTAM SINGH KANWAL

He works aboard merchant ships and hails from Nainital, Uttarakhand. An avid for travelling, reading, learning, music, art and adventure sports, he is keen to indulge in new experiences every time.



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