

A man with a grey beard and a colorful Rastafarian-style beanie (red, yellow, and green) is smiling and playing a drum. He is wearing a black shirt with a colorful Rastafarian-style stripe (red, yellow, and green) on the sleeve. The background is a blurred outdoor setting.

# Travel Links

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**T**he journey of Kanha Shanti Vanam took me on a spiritual serene path that is memorable and at the same engrained in memory for the infinite time. This spiritual journey is also effortless and comes naturally as a way of life. I went there as a traveler but came back as a seeker.

The road trip to Agra was about discovering Agra 'beyond the Taj Mahal' and also about the local cuisines of the city. The experience of this culinary delight and the hospitality is the courtesy of Courtyard by Marriott, Agra.

Yet another gateway destination is a story of holidaying with your pet in Heritage Village Resort and Spa, Manesar.

Gwalior Smart City project is helping the city reclaim its glory and boost tourism. Smart Cities Mission and has been ever since working on projects to better the quality of living.

With a vision of "Virasaton ka Sanrakshan, Vikas ka Darpan" translated to preserving heritage and reflecting development, the organization has delivered exceptional projects under the heritage module.

Travel Links also presents UNESCO world heritage sites of Eastern and Southern India.

The journey of Antarctica, the last region of the earth gives you insights into planning and preparing a trip. It is an opportunity which one should get at least once in their lifetime.

Glad to present the interview of the Tunisia Ambassador.

We sincerely hope that our readers will enjoy reading this issue, will travel more consciously and share their memorable journeys with us.

## Editor

**Payal Sahni**

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# REJUVENATING RELAXATION RETREAT- THE KANHA SHANTI VANAM

I cannot somehow begin to sum up my experience here. For me, I was visioning it as one of the holiday destinations that we usually head for. I went as a traveler but came back as a seeker.

**By Payal Sahni**

Living in Delhi, I have always craved silence, there I got that in every nook and corner, both in the external atmosphere and internal.

Kanha Shanti Vanam is approximately a 30 km drive from the Hyderabad Airport. KSV is an important center of Heartfulness, situated on the outskirts of Hyderabad in the State of Telangana. The campus is also being developed as a resplendent Green Space, hosting a wide variety of herbs, shrubs, and trees.

Reaching there, I settled in their five-star rated hotel retreat called Pearl, where the stay was peaceful and comfortable.

For me, it was the beginning of the spiritual journey where I was taught the "Heartfulness" meditation.

Heartfulness meditation is a set of practices for self-development that help us find inner calm and stillness in our extremely fast-paced world. Heartfulness is offered at no cost. There is no dogma. The easily adopted practices are appropriate for people from all walks of life, cultures, religious beliefs, and economic statuses over the age of 15. The only qualification to practice Heartfulness is the willingness to improve and lead a balanced life.

During my stay there I got to know about the growth, development, sustainable projects, rain harvesting plants, and Water Reservoirs. Every aspect, helped me understand the true meaning of auto

sustainable living which is the need of an hour at the global level.

A few pointer briefs about the place: Kanha Shanti Vanam, the International Center of Heartfulness, is the world's largest meditation center. Kanha majestically covers 388 acres with world-class infrastructure amidst lush greenery. Located only 30 Kms from RGI airport Hyderabad, Kanha is a full-fledged village panchayat in Nandigam Mandal, Ranga Reddy District of Telangana State.

## Total area

Kanha has been planned to be an integrated township in over 1400 acres having a Spiritual Retreat Centre at its heart surrounded by residential colonies and relevant social infrastructure (including educational institutions, multi-specialty hospitals, sports arenas, etc.). The vision is to actively bring about peace and harmony in the world and create a home for many future generations.

## Information about the natural ponds

Developing Kanha Shanti Vanam meant a magical transformation of a drought-prone region into a Green Oasis.

There are six natural lakes and two manmade lakes covering a total of 22.28 acres which have further been widened and deepened. Rainwater is collected and

redirected to these water bodies and the needs of the society are met thereon.

## Kanha Initiatives

Blue Kanha initiative, which is a water conservation campaign, complements the Green Kanha initiative where THE CONSTRUCTED WETLANDS METHODOLOGY is used to treat the wastewater of the facility in a natural and eco-friendly way with zero power consumption. A RAINWATER HARVESTING SYSTEM is used for which storage tanks and reservoirs are prepared at multiple locations before the onset of the monsoon rains. AN ADVANCED DRIP IRRIGATION SYSTEM is in place to support organic farming and afforestation. There are two water reservoirs - one having a capacity of 96 lakh liters, while the other of 40 lakh liters. Both are constructed below ground level, open to the sky with geotextile liners at the bottom to prevent water seepage.

Daaji is overseeing large-scale plantation programs in and around Kanha Shanti Vanam, and the dry and barren landscape of Chegur Village, Telangana, is already being transformed into a lush green landscape.

More than 5 Lakh trees have already been planted and it is a continuous endeavor of the mission to increase this plantation manifold. Some of the species under threat include plants that are considered sacred and are of immense benefit to human beings and the environment. Under the



Green Kanha Initiative, the emphasis is given to ecologically, economically, and socio-culturally important native tree species. More than 300 hundred trees that were marked for felling in different parts of Hyderabad and adjoining areas (for the widening of existing roads and other developmental works) were taken and transplanted at Kanha ShantiVanam and those old trees are getting back to their resplendent form. About 100 coconut trees that were marked for felling in the Krishnagiri district of Tamil Nadu are also being transplanted at the Kanha ShantiVanam.

## Brief about nursery

Kanha has developed a full-fledged nursery covering 5.7 acres with a stock of over 6 lac saplings. Today the Heartyculture Nursery is home to more than 739 different species belonging to 113 families. More than 256 rare, endangered and endemic species of the Deccan Plateau and 137 native



species are conserved here. The Hearty culture Nursery also provides plants and supplies for indoors and home gardens at [www.heartyculturenursery.com](http://www.heartyculturenursery.com)

## Brief about the growth of birds

The theme-based gardens and freshwater ecosystems of Kanha have attracted a wide variety of birds over time.



While about 30 species have been recorded and photographed in Kanha over 70 species have been spotted. Avid bird watchers can find the likes of Peacock, Spotted eagles, Shikra falcons, black-winged kites, etc, or the little ground birds like tailoring birds, sunbirds, Red-wattled Lapwing, booted warbler, bulbuls and the weavers, etc.

By the many natural ponds and lakes, one can find water-loving birds like ducks, cormorants, |egrets, and herons rejuvenating themselves.

## Facilities

Today Kanha's meditation center can host

50,000 people, serve 100,000 meals using steam via a mechanized kitchen, and host thousands of visitors in various dormitories at any given time.

Kanha also hosts facilities such as International School, multi-specialty hospital with emergency care, Training Centers, Yoga School, AYUSH wellness center, Book Store, Green Kanha Nursery, The Pearl Hotel, Canteen, Restaurants, Pottery workshop, Themed gardens, spiritual monuments, Goshala, etc.

A tour to the Yatra Graden was yet another beauty which I saw. The garden has been designed to keep the chakras in mind.

**Let me take you to the Man behind this initiative, Sri Kamlesh Desabhai Patel, fondly known as Daaji (means the elder brother). As we get to know him better, through the question answer series:**

### 1. Could you briefly tell us about your initial childhood days?

I was born in a small village named Kalla, in Bharuch District, in Gujarat into an ordinary agricultural family. I had an elder brother and three sisters. After I finished primary school, I went to the nearby town and stayed in a hostel there while I pursued my higher education. I had a very joyful childhood and a good, loving family. My



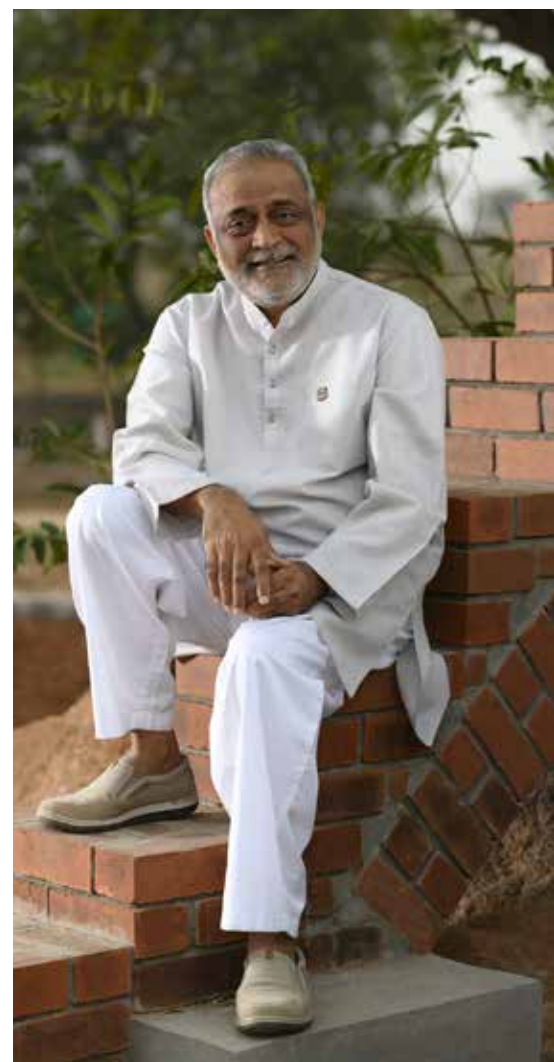
father had medical knowledge of many Ayurvedic treatments.

## 2. What were the key challenges that you recall when you started the spiritual journey?

In India, the notion that to attain the highest spiritual states one must undergo hardships was widely perpetuated. I too had the same opinion initially. As a teenager, I was inspired by Swami Vivekananda. When I was 19 years old, I decided to follow in his footsteps and left home not knowing what spirituality was. I wanted to become a monk or a wandering sannyasi. I soon met a monk on the banks of the River Narmada.

He told me that I cannot find God that way. He regretted the choice he had made, but it was too late for him to correct his mistake. He considered returning home many years earlier but was afraid to face his family. Now he did not know what became of his wife and family and children. He also was dejected that he did not find God as a sannyasi. He was disillusioned and advised me not to follow that path and sent me back home.

**I continued Pharmacy College and stayed in a hostel where I tried to meditate on my own by ruminating on profound**



**thoughts. I did not know what to do. That is when my friend took me to a trainer of Heartfulness meditation with whom I had a Heartfulness session. I received Pranahuti or Yogic transmission of divine energy. The trainer told me, "If God is everywhere, He is also inside you. Why not look for him in your own heart during meditation?"**

For the following sessions, she requested me to approach another Heartfulness trainer. These sessions were also very deep and energetic. The experience of these meditations convinced me that this is what I was waiting for.

And, anytime I wanted to have a Heartfulness session, I would go to one of my trainer's homes. Not only did they offer me a meditation session, but we had tea, snacks, and sometimes lunch too. They were like family. And they extended this courtesy







and hospitality to my friends and professors too who wanted to try meditation. It was a very beautiful period of my life.

### **3. When did you go to the USA, please tell us about your professional years in the USA, the struggles you faced and how you handled them, the achievements you have had and at what moment did you decide to come back?**

I went to the USA with 20 USD in my pocket in the early eighties. Despite being the gold medalist in my Masters in Pharmacy from India, I had to appear for many certifications and exams before getting a license to practice pharmacy there. Initially, I worked for someone else, but slowly the idea of starting my pharmacy took shape, and eventually, I started a chain of pharmacies over the years. I had many trustworthy partners and I shared my profits generously with them. That was a wise attitude as well which I learned from my spiritual guide. Even when someone

*During my stay there I got to know about the growth, development, sustainable projects, rain harvesting plants, and Water Reservoirs. Every aspect, helped me understand the true meaning of auto sustainable living which is the need of an hour at the global level.*

was not so honest, one employee, I could convince him that it is more profitable for him to be honest and loyal, and he became trustworthy. Other businesses came my way too, and there was no looking back. I learned that if one shows up with joy and aspiration, the world shows up!

### **4. What was that moment that made you realize your inclination towards spirituality and the path of Heartfulness?**

It was so from the beginning: spirituality and god realization was the main purpose of my life and earning money was only a means to an end and not an end in itself. As I mentioned, I was drawn to spiritual pursuit even from my teenage days. And I feel all of us in some ways are drawn to a higher purpose in life, some of us sense it early on, and some of us later in life. But we all crave something more meaningful, something higher than ourselves, something deeper from the universe.

For me, Heartfulness meditation was the obvious choice because it taught the

balance between spiritual life and material life; it is an integration of both. It is the natural way to reach the goal of human life, the expansion of one's consciousness. Yogic transmission and the Cleaning process of Heartfulness, along with the bedtime deep meditation, helps to connect with the heart that helped me transcend limits of mind and that of ego. Mind and ego were no longer hindrances but became catalysts.

## 5. How did you meet your mentor?

I met my mentor a few months after I started meditation with a local trainer in Ahemdabad. I went to Shahjahanpur to meet him and learned quite a few lessons



which help me immensely even to this day. For example, he taught me the importance of connecting to the heart when you start any activity. He taught me the importance of focusing on one's mind, to achieve total success in one's efforts. There are so many life lessons he taught me, a few of which I have covered in my books like 'The Heartfulness Way' and 'Designing Destiny.'

## 6. Please let us know more about the sustainable self-efficient projects within this vicinity.

Our organization has been in existence

for 75 years in the service of humanity. Its current headquarters is located outside Hyderabad and is called Kanha Shanti Vanam. Our journey at Kanha Shanti Vanam begun in 2014 from a dry, arid land pocket of about 1000+ acres which now has grown to about 1400+ acres of abundant greenery.

There are many projects that we have implemented at Kanha and also at the other 250 Heartfulness centers all over the world. We want to enable people to improve their economic situation by farming. People can plant high-value trees like sandalwood even in small spaces of land. We started hydro-

farming, without the use of large plots of land, and everyone can raise enough vegetables in their roof garden. We are also planning a new project to increase the micro-forests throughout the country. It is not a mere increase of green cover, which by itself is very useful. We go far beyond, by planting rare, valuable herbal plants, medicinal plants, and other high-value plants, in these micro forests. At Kanha Shanti Vanam, we revived the creation of bio-char and the use of it in farming to increase the yield and shorten the growth time of various species of plants. We are now spreading knowledge



of all of these techniques to farming communities all over India.

### 7. Could you please throw some light on the development projects which are happening around?

Every bit of the land at Kanha has been paid attention to concerning all-natural elements which include soil, water, air, plantation, bio-diversity, etc.

Before our taking over this land for development, there were barely any trees or vegetation. This place being part of Mahabubnagar district was part of one of the driest areas of the state. Much of the land was barren.

We had surveyed the land for contours, water features like water bodies, covered and potential water channels, carried out geological surveys to identify

the opportunity and to apply the most appropriate methods to develop the region.

We have revived the water channels which once existed but were buried by silt. Along the paths of storm water, we have created several rainwater harvesting systems. We have re-established the Full Tank Levels (FTL) for all the water bodies and also identified and rebuilt one of the stepped wells that were buried in silt and other waste . . . Multiple check-dams were also created along the way in these storm water drains to slow down the pace of the silt runoff into the water bodies. All the weirs were cleared so the overflow from the water bodies is uninterrupted when the water body reaches its FTL. All the bunds of these water bodies have been strengthened as per irrigation standards to ensure they are robust against the sudden surge of

water volumes in the peak rainy seasons.

Every rooftop has been designed to collect and carry the rainwater through gutters to designated storm water drains. We have built covered reservoirs to store the rainwater. Provisions are made for runoff to enter the storm water drains. Special attention is paid to collecting the rainwater for reuse.

Every drop of wastewater generated on the campus is being let into the Sewage Treatment Plants set up on either side of the campus. We have deployed an Advanced Aerated Wetlands technology to treat the majority of the wastewater coming out of the various facilities on the campus. The same plant is designed to scale up to meet 8 to 10 times higher volume when large gatherings of 1 to 2 lac people happen on the campus. All the treated water is brought



***We have to be the change we want to see in the world. Let us always start with what we can do, and go on from there. Often we feel guilty about the mistakes we made, forgetting that not doing the things we could have done, or wanted to do, but deliberately failed to do, make us guilty.***

They need not all be of the same size as Kanha Shanti Vanam. They can be much smaller, mini or micro forests. At the other end of the spectrum, of course, they can be much bigger than Kanha as well.

### **9. Our readers would love to know your vision for this practice and your disciples. What can they do to fulfill your vision?**

We have to be the change we want to see in the world. Let us always start with what we can do, and go on from there. Often we feel guilty about the mistakes we made, forgetting that not doing the things we could have done, or wanted to do, but deliberately failed to do, make us guilty.

Unless every organ in the body stays



back into use for irrigating the plantation, lawns, and gardens.

We have planted over 7,00,000 plants, shrubs, and trees on our campus over the past few years. 80% of these were planted and nurtured by people from the Heartfulness community from all over the world and others who passionately supported the initiative. The outcome of all these initiatives has surpassed our expectations, and we continue to invest our time and energy, and effort in it for continuous improvement. Overall moisture content in the soil and the atmosphere has improved significantly. Groundwater level improved to the tune of 200 to 300 feet difference from where it was to where we are now. In fact, not discounting the heavy rainfall this year, we have seen the water table just about a few meters below the

natural ground level. We were able to grow coconut trees here in this once dry/arid land which is an indicator of the transformation of this place. We are committed to realizing the power of water as a lifesaving, sustaining, and nourishing resource for all species in this universe. We are committed to training thousands of farmers across India to realize its importance and learn the techniques to preserve and manage this powerful natural resource.

### **8. We can see the growth and development of Kanha Shanti Vanam. Please share your vision for the same.**

Kanha Shanti Vanam is just the beginning. There must be many more Kanha Shanti Vanam or forests of peace all over India and all over the world.

healthy and works for the health of the human being as a whole, the person cannot be very healthy for very long. As Isaac Asimov said in his science fiction novel 'Foundation and Earth' the most important attitude for survival and stability is to think in terms of "WE" instead of "I". This is essential. The sooner we start with the right attitude to living, the better. There is still time to save earth and humanity. Our Spiritual Guide told us, "Live as if you are going to die the next moment." It does not mean reckless or selfish, it means to do the best you can do, by becoming the best you can become, the best version of yourself. And then improve on it. That is evolution.

In the end I would like to extend my deep gratitude for meeting "Daaji" and the sustainable centers that are being created.<https://www.heartfulness.org/>

# Bring together your family to share unforgettable moments in Monaco!

For the past 150 years, Monaco has been the prime destination for the most selective travellers. This country nestled between sea and mountains perfectly cultivates this clever blend of a Principality that is reinventing itself, while remaining faithful to the elements that make up its DNA.

The Principality of Monaco is a place to learn, explore and enjoy with the whole family gathered together! Take advantage of the wide range of activities and events available year-round in an environment as safe as it is enchanting.

Monaco is an excellent tourist destination with a remarkable heritage and an outstanding wealth and variety of museums and excursions, which will interest people of all ages and culture. Starting from the fascinating world of the Oceanographic Museum in Monaco Ville to the prehistoric displays at the Museum of Anthropology, from the temporary exhibitions at the New National Museum of Monaco (NMNM) to the remarkable Prince's Cars Collection for youngsters, there is something to satisfy all tastes and all passions!

It is all about the family in Monaco! The Principality takes care to ensure that families are able to relax and enjoy themselves in a



high-quality environment. Monaco has many parks and gardens to discover... The Princess Grace Rose Garden, the Exotic Garden, the Zoological Gardens, the Japanese Garden are among the most favourite ones. All the gardens and green spaces are managed according to eco-friendly principles and are all distinctive in their own way, with very different atmospheres!

If you would like to discover Monaco in the wink of an eye, what could be more appropriate than a ride on the little train (Monaco Tours). You can also choose to take a Hop-on Hop-off bus tour (Monaco Le Grand Tour) too. And if your teenagers are restless for action, you can always ride a bike, don a helmet and set out for a visit of Monaco's streets and alleys.

The year here is studded with world-famous events and seasonal festivities

*The Principality of Monaco is a place to learn, explore and enjoy with the whole family gathered together! Take advantage of the wide range of activities and events available year-round in an environment as safe as it is enchanting.*





that are open to all, such as the November funfair, the circus festival in January, the winter ice-rink that transforms into a swimming-pool and many more. In Monaco, there is something for all ages and cultures, with all families treated to the facilities they need to spend their own quality time in an exceptional setting.

Later, recall all the wonderful moments of a day-well spend with your family in the beautiful Principality around a convivial table in the Michelin-starred restaurants of Monaco like the Grill, the Blue Bay, the new Yannick Allenoal'Hotel Hermitage Monte-Carlo, Yoshi or the traditional La Condamine Market.

Then, take a well-deserved rest by the lagoon at the Monte-Carlo Bay Hotel & Resort at Columbus Hotel, a hotel dedicated to visitors appreciating the local atmosphere together with the Monegasque way of life. You can also choose to stay at Le Meridien Beach Plaza which delivers comfort and relaxation with stunning views over the Mediterranean Sea or at the Hotel Metropole Monte-Carlo which exudes a warm and refined Mediterranean spirit, making it a contemporary and distinguished hotel. For a sensational experience, stay at the Fairmont Monte-Carlo, a unique luxury hotel and resort located in the heart of Monaco.

A trip to the Principality of Monaco will give you precious moments to cherish together and make happy family memories!





**Ajanta Caves:** The first cave was built during the reign of Emperor Ashoka.

# Our Heritage, Our Pride

**BY SRISHTI VERMA**

This is part 3 of the travel series "Our Heritage, Our Pride." We have talked about sites that were named UNESCO World Heritage sites in India. Part 1 of the series focussed on heritage sites in north India, and the second part travelled southwards, focussing on the West and Central regions.

Are you ready for a bigger, bolder, brighter, and grander word-journey on the architectural gloriousness that makes India the nation that it is today?

Will it be a fairy tale? No. But it will

have stories about kings and queens, and places you can visit on your next trip.

We will travel through the eastern southern India. Get, set, travel!

## **Ajanta Caves, Maharashtra**

Coming straight from the 2nd century are the Ajanta Caves in Aurangabad, Maharashtra. The first cave was built during the reign of Emperor Ashoka. Further additions were made during the reign of Guptas in 5th and 6th centuries AD.

Unique representations of Hinduism and Buddhism art, there are 31 rock-

cut caves here. The paintings in these cave monuments express emotions using gestures, poses and forms.

When you are at the Ajanta Caves, you will come across monasteries and worship-halls, and various paintings depicting the past lives and rebirths of Buddha.

## **Ellora Caves, Maharashtra**

100 km from Ajanta Caves are the magnificent Ellora Caves. Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism blend in the 34 monasteries and temples in the Ellora Complex.

These 34 monuments extend over more than 2km, and were dug side by side. The rock-cut caves were built in phases, from the 6th century to 12th century. The renowned Kailasa temple is located in the cave 16. It is largest monolithic temple. Considering the expertise that went into rock-cutting, a monument like the Kailasa temple is unmatched in its architecture.

You should visit the Ellora Caves because they bring to life the ancient Indian civilisation, with uninterrupted monuments' sequence from 600 to 1000 AD. The complex bears witness to the characteristic tolerance of ancient India which is illustrated in the 3 religions establishing their sanctuaries in the same place.

## Elephanta Caves, Maharashtra

Situated on the Elephanta Island 10 km from the east of Mumbai are the Elephanta Caves. There are 2 groups of caves on the island—5 Hindu and 2 Buddhist caves.

Elephanta Island is located on an arm of the Arabian Sea. The Hindu Caves here represent Shaiva sect, and were built during



the 5th and 8th centuries.

When you enter cave 1, you are welcomed by a 7m high masterpiece of Sadashiva. This sculpture represents Shiv in the aspects of the Creator, Preserver, and Destroyer.

The caves are an achievement and were recognised for their aesthetics. All the

architectural components of the Elephanta Caves are preserved in their natural setting, and are a must-see.

When you are on the Elephanta Island, you can also visit several other archaeological remains which date back to the 2nd century.

## Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus, Maharashtra

Formerly known as the Victoria Terminus, Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus (CST) is an excellent example of the Victorian Gothic Revival architecture. Indian and Victorian Gothic architectural themes blend together in this building designed by F.W. Stevens. There are stone domes, turrets, arches that are pointed, and a ground plan that is similar to the Indian palaces. If Bombay, now known as Mumbai, were to become a mercantile centre, it needed this unique style. And the CST did exactly that for the city.

Today, CST is a major railway station in Mumbai and facilitates suburban and out-station tracks.



**Elephanta Caves:** All the architectural components of the Elephanta Caves are preserved in their natural setting.

**Ellora Caves:** visit the Ellora Caves because they bring to life the ancient Indian civilisation.







**Victorian Art of Mumbai:** The Bombay High Court, Eros Cinema, Rajabai Clock Tower, and the Convocation Hall and University Library of the University of Mumbai.



## Victorian Art of Mumbai, Maharashtra

Mumbai never fails to charm, doesn't it? An ambitious plan was needed for the urban centre of Mumbai. That led to the construction of public buildings around the Oval Maidan Victorian Neo-Gothic and Art Deco style.

From balconies and verandas to cinemas and residential buildings, the unique style has come to be known as Indo-Deco.

If you visit the Oval Maidan, take a moment to appreciate the spectacular ensemble of Indian and European architectural exchange.

The Bombay High Court, Eros Cinema, Rajabai Clock Tower, and the Convocation Hall and University Library of the University of Mumbai are the Indo-Deco buildings that



**Ahmadabad City:** Khakra, Fafda, Dhokla, Farsan, Dabeli and Sukhdi are a must-try.



**Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus:** Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus (CST) is an excellent example of the Victorian Gothic Revival architecture.

might make you feel like you have stepped into Europe. Hogwarts, anyone?

Even though the individual buildings have undergone modifications, their living nature and design remain authentic.

## Ahmadabad City, Gujarat

Sultan Ahmad Shah founded the city of Ahmadabad in 1411 AD. Situated on the eastern bank of Sabarmati River, Ahmadabad is home to a rich architectural heritage from the Sultanate period.

The present-day city is multicultural, and is known for its distinct havelis and pols. The wooden architecture is unique to the city, and is built to provide year-round comfort for the residents.

When Sultan Ahmad Shah founded the city, he ordered the construction of a fort,

gates at the end of Maidan-e-Shahi, and Jama Masjid.

The concept of Mahajan created the culture of a society which accepted all people regardless of their religion. Believers of Hinduism, Jainism, and Islam formed a communal harmony that eventually led to encouraging the exemplary industry and trade in the city.

While you admire the architecture in Ahmadabad, do not forget the food. Khakra, Fafda, Dhokla, Farsan, Dabeli and Sukhdi are a must-try. You can also shop for Chaniya-Choli, and rock it in the next festive season.

## Rani ki Vav, Gujarat

The Queen's Stepwell, Rani ki Vav at Patan is famous for its size. There are 7

levels of stairs of which are built more than 500 sculptures of God, devoted to Vishnu, and those of Apsaras depicting 16 styles of make-up, thus called Solah-Shringar.

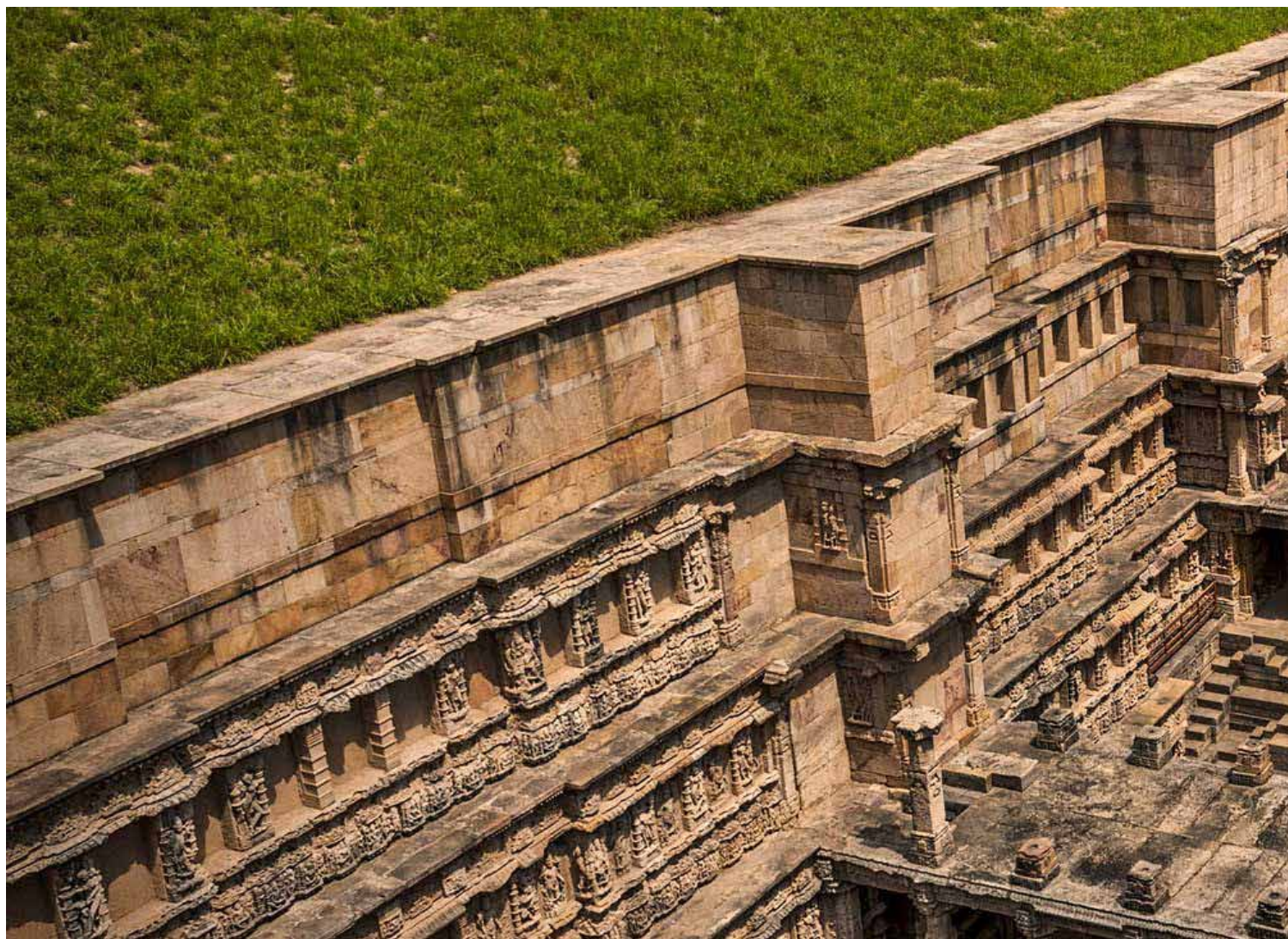
Rani ki Vav is built on the banks of river Sabarmati, and was initially a memorial for an 11th century king.

It is built in Maru-Gurjara style and reflects the mastery of this complex and intricate technique. Look closer and you will realise that Rani ki Vav is built as an inverted temple to highlight the sanctity of water.

## Champaner-Pavagadh Archaeological Park, Gujarat

If you are in Gujarat, you cannot miss the Champaner-Pavagadh Archaeological Park.

**Rani ki Vav:** Rani ki Vav is built as an inverted temple to highlight the sanctity of water.



It is located in the Panchmahal district, and features living cultural heritage in a landscape filled with natural beauty.

This Park is a wonderful example of a capital that made the best of its setting and natural features. Barring the remains of the main buildings and forts, most parts are buried and unexcavated.

The temples and water-retaining installations of Champaner-Pavagadh represent Hindu and Islamic architecture. The Jama Masjid here acted as an inspiration for the subsequent mosques in India. The temple of Kalika Mata atop the Pavagadh Hill attracts a large number of devotees from across the country.

It feels regal to walk the path that kings and queens once walked on. India has witnessed it all, and Maharashtra and Gujarat are bear testimony to this opulence.

In our last part of the world heritage



**Champaner Pavagadh Park:** Barring the remains of the main buildings and forts, most parts are buried and unexcavated.

sites recognised by UNESCO in India, we plan to share about the heritage sites from south India.

Happy travelling to you! 🇮🇳

SRISHTI VERMA

She is a Delhi-based writer. She loves reading and travelling, with a special place for lofty mountains in her heart. She can often be found eating ice creams and looking at pictures from when she was 2 feet tall and wore cute goggles.



# Culinary Journey

## An initiative of Courtyard by Marriott Agra

By Payal Sahni

If you are looking for a weekend gateway and a comfortable drive, then Agra is the destination for you to head out. Yamuna Express highway is one of the good Highways we have seen here and one can reach Agra from Delhi within 3 to 4 hours. The city of Agra is not only about 'The

TajMahal ' which is always there and will remain for countless generations to come. It is also about Agra beyond the Taj and that is what courtyard by Marriott, Agra helped us discover.

### About the property

Lobby miniature work design inspiration: Courtyard by Marriott Agra's lobby work and the beautiful wall murals called as Jharaokas takes its inspiration from the style of Mughal painting which is a particular style of South Asian, particularly North Indian style of art. As a perfect ode to the rich

Mughal architectural history of Agra as a destination, one can indulge in the artistic brilliance illustrated across the property which keeps the local art form alive and in everyone's mind. It traditionally emerged from the Persian miniature painting and further developed intrinsically in the grand courts of the Mughal Empire of the 16th to 18th centuries.

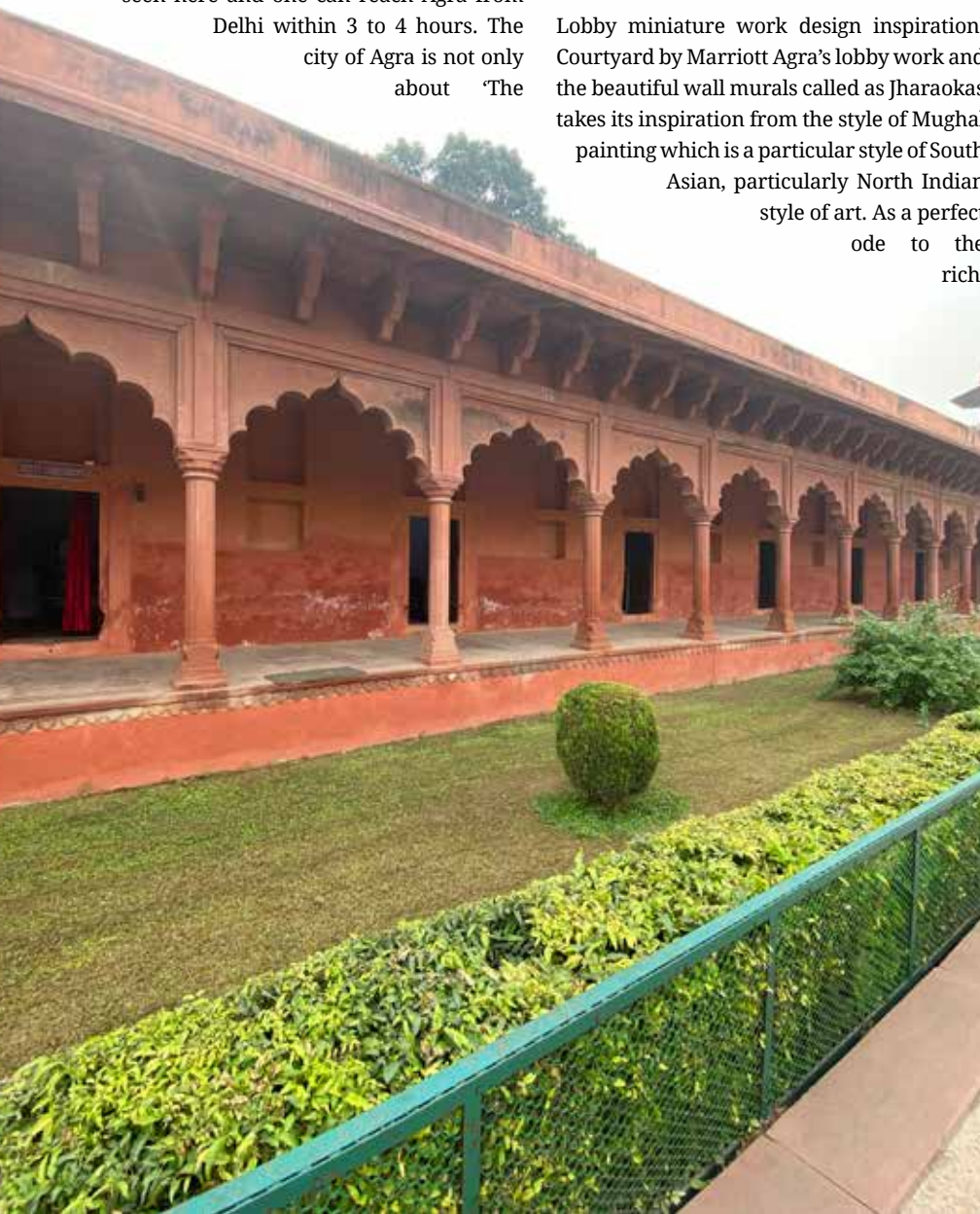
### The culinary experience

The Chef Mr. Sanjay Rawat, who comes with more than 18 years of vast experience, presented us with the Ayurvedic lunch in copper utensils which is synonym with the food culture of Agra. This was the detoxifying and vegan indulgence. The chapattis were made of rajgiri flour and all the vegetables were sourced locally. The sweet dish was also vegan made from coconut milk. All in all the pure soul satisfying experience. The dishes were inspired by the popular cuisines of Uttar Pradesh.

In contrast to the afternoon lunch, the dinner was dreamy and romantic in the open settings by the pool side. Table setting on the water bed with candle lights was breathtaking. Cocktails with live music were organized by the team. We had a grilled snacks with hand crafted menu, theri ( it is a vegetable rice with a bit of gravy inside), Lal Nallihari for the meat lovers, Khamiri Roti ( special prepared dough after fermentation) and laccha parantha(chapati's with multi layers). The sweet dish we opted for was khevar which is again the spatiality for that region. It has a crunchy base with syrup and rabri on top.

We retreated for the night after enjoying the live music and good food.

Our breakfast, next day reminded us of



our granny's making us eat with love and affection. We had the Bedwi pooris ( dal stuffed popped poori 's heated in oil) and heeng zeera allo (potatoes cooked on slow fire with herbs).

Besides that there were many more options like sandwiches, bakeries, south Indian Platters, Eggs to binge on. It was a contactless breakfast at MOMO café for entire stay, where food is served on the table. What caught our attention was the 'khullar chai' and the 'kadha'(warm drink made with herbs) announcing and welcoming the winters, again the USP of Agra.

We headed out for a city tour. I would like to mention here that Marriott has one of the best services when it comes to city guides and our guide Mr. Ravi Prasad Chaurasia comes with more than 15 years of experience and he is an 'encyclopedia' in himself. The itinerary was made super comfortable because of him, the way he got us through the tickets and tours, and also explained every aspect with Priscian. The Car and driver provided by the hotel was also class apart with all the amenities in the car and also a sanitized with partition for the back seat. The driver was well versed with both Hindi and English and guide could speak couple of international languages too. We would always recommend using Marriott's services for the city tour. We headed out to see the TajMahal, post which we went to see the Agra Fort, Mehtab Bagh and then the very famous leather market. There is so much in Agra for all segments of society; there are enough of arts, culture, heritage, history and lots to shop for shopping lovers.

We headed back to the Hotel after a very busy day. Our evening was well taken care of by giving us our Dilli Vala Chai (on our special demand). Unless one experiences the street food of UP, the food experience is not complete. The chef had arranged high tea experience with the specialties of Sadar Bazar Market. The street food comprised of matar kulcha, papdi chaat,( this is a little more crispy and little more masale dar than the Delhi Chaat) and dal muradabadi. We indulged in dal Muradabadi, It is slow cooked dal on angiti which almost becomes mashed and soupy with butter topping and tadka.

What was ahead of this was a mind blowing experience. What is the trip to Agra if you haven't had the Mughlai cuisine in open décor settings? The euphoria and excitement





of 'Anise', the Mughlai restaurant of Marriott is unmatched. It just relaunched a few days before our visit and after two years of shut down because of COVID.

The open setting restaurant has Mashals (long stick torch with burning fire at one end) when you enter, The décor is synonym with the Mughal architecture and setting is colorful, lit with diyas, open setting bar, candle light table settings with cutwork cutlery which transports you to the royal dinings. There is a live gazal session with remarkable singers and tabla players. The open barbeque and efficient team will spoil you with mouth water delicacies. We tried some of the signature dishes.

Starters were the Paya Shorba, Hummus Bui ( Jawahar roti with Ker sangri stuffing), Jafrani Paneer, vegetable sizzlers and mouth

**The open setting restaurant has Mashals (long stick torch with burning fire at one end) when you enter, The décor is synonym with the Mughal architecture and setting is colorful, lit with diyas, open setting bar, candle light table settings with cutwork cutlery which transports you to the royal dinings. There is a live gazal session with remarkable singers and tabla players. The open barbeque and efficient team will spoil you with mouth water delicacies. We tried some of the signature dishes.**



watering gauloti kebabs. For the Main course, we had Varqui Parantha (dough kneaded in milk and ghee), nargassi kofta, dal makahni with special tadka of anise herb in it, bhuna saag and makhmali murg as a non vegetarian dish.

For sweet dish we had salivating jalebi s with rabris and baked rasgullas in syrup which is again their specialty. The next day was the relaxation theme for us and we headed for the Tatva Spa, in-house Spa in the property itself. I went for the Ayurvedic treatment massage with therapy oil where the moments of hand is soft, firm and opens your pores and helps in detoxification, post which I had steam, hot shower and herbal tea. My husband went in for Swedish Vishram massage (resting) which is more like thumb stroke movement and is for relaxation of mind and body. We totally felt nourished, rejuvenated and rested. The most exclusive experience by Marriott is organizing breakfast, picnic, high teas in the settings of an open garden just besides The TajMahal at sunrise and sunsets. One can gaze the lushness of open garden, the view of Taj and can indulge in peaceful location. It is a perfect setting to get your



photo shoots done. One can keep on gazing at The TajMahal without the hustle and bustle. We would highly recommend this to be experienced.

After trying for local cuisines for two three days, we wanted to cut the monotony and I asked for my most favorite dishes i.e. the Ravioli. Here I would specially like to mention that I had one of best Raviolis of all times made in truffle oil, very delicate, precise, hand crafted, mouth watering and asking for more. I wanted a double dose of it I guess. It was a much needed break which we wanted in terms of our

delicacies experience. You name it and Marriott is totally skilled to do it. Post which we confined ourselves to the comfort of our suite room. At night we enjoyed a few cocktails in cozy atmosphere room and made to do order of Chinese delicacies presented by the Chef.

## Initiatives

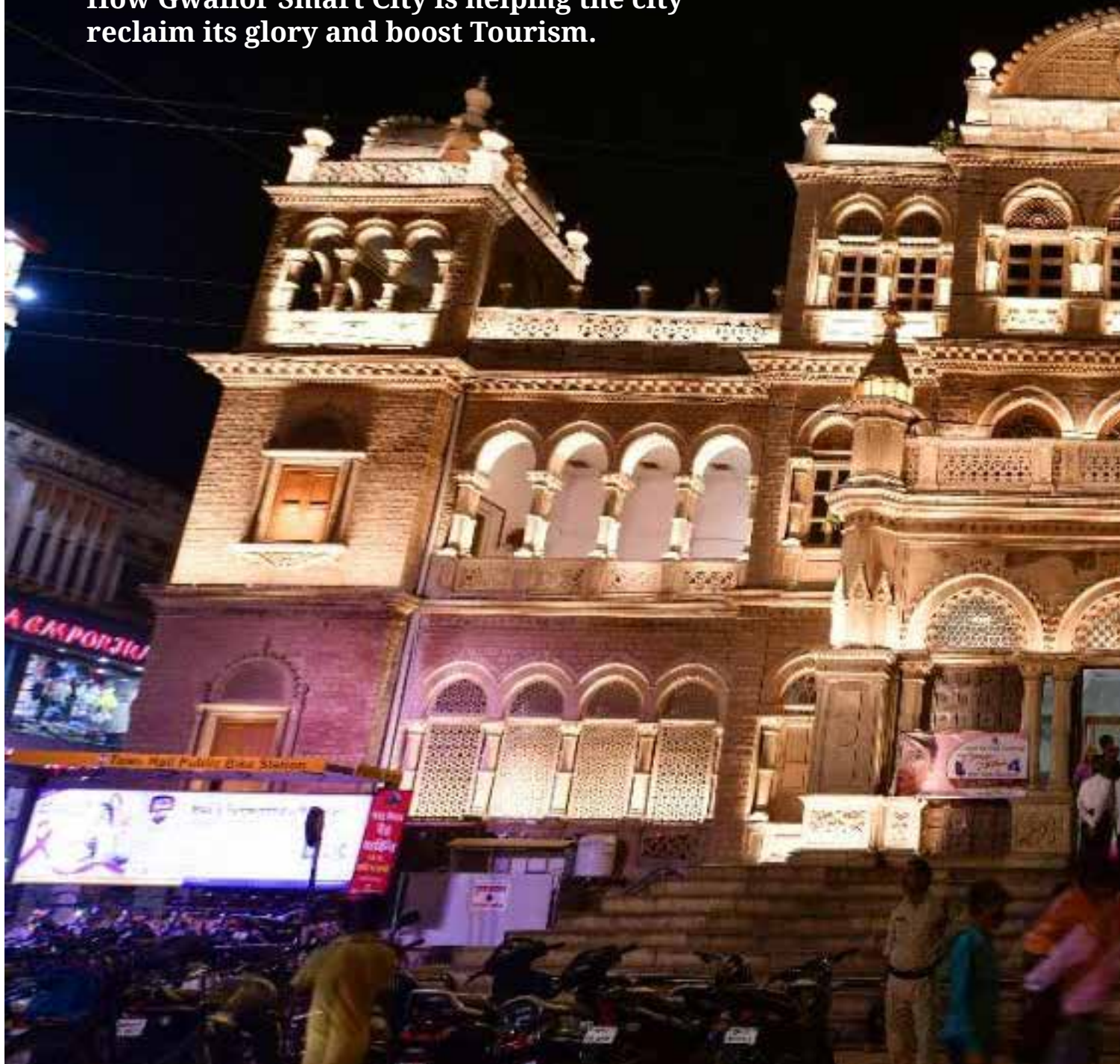
The Courtyard by Marriott has been actively participating in CSR initiatives. All the employees are fully vaccinated. They have often participated in 'save the planet drive' by planting trees. Marriott has given employment opportunities the locals and promoting arts and talent by organizing events and musical nights. [\[1\]](#)

Last but not the least here is our take on Courtyard Marriott Agra: An apt staycation experience for the upper middle class Perfect weekend gateway and very close to the express way, easily accessible. Anise is their world class Mughlai cuisine experience which everyone should indulge in. This break is much recommended during the winters and spring when the weather is pleasing. Rediscover Agra with Marriott is what we would highly recommend.

# Gwalior

## The Glorious City

How Gwalior Smart City is helping the city reclaim its glory and boost Tourism.



**G**walior Smart City was selected in Round 2 of the Smart Cities Mission and has been ever since working on projects to better the quality of living and ensure convenience in everyday life. With a vision of "Virasaton ka Sanrakshan, Vikas ka Darpan" translated to Preserving Heritage and Reflecting development, the organization has delivered exceptional projects under the Heritage module.

One of the most attractive projects has been the

Development of Digital Museum and Planetarium. Between the years 1796-1808 Daulat Rao Scindia established Lashkar as a new town on the southern side of the Gwalior fort and also moved the capital of the Scindia clan from Ujjain, where they had been ruling since 1731, to Gwalior.

Daulat Rao thus started the construction of the Maharaj Bada palace complex (presently called Gorkhi complex).

Last usage of this building was as a Scout and Guide office building and the building had been declared unfit for use. Gwalior Smart City then pitched in with a plan that involved Preservation, Retrofitting, Restoration and Adaptive

Reuse using Traditional construction techniques. Simultaneously, the reuse was planned to develop the complex as a Museum with the usage of modern day kiosks, interactive screens, Online and offline content.

Digital Museum was inaugurated in September 2020 and has been an attraction since its opening date. The project made it to the prestigious ISAC award in the culture category and got third position.

Another project that has come up well is the Central Library that has now been redeveloped as a Digital Library. The heritage building has a rich inventory of more than 80,000 books including the original copy of Indian Constitution. Valuable books are now being digitized so that generations can read them and pass them on.

Besides Digital Museum, other projects that have caught the eyes of Tourists and Locals alike are Facade Lighting of





Heritage monuments. The majestic Gwalior Fort can now be viewed in its full splendor even during nights. Further, Baijatal

(known as a Floating Stage), Maharaja Bada buildings like Post Office, Victoria Market, Town Hall, Gorakhi, Krishna, Nadi, Ladhedi

and Moti Mahal gates are a treat to the eyes.

Visitors can also avail the Public Bike Sharing Facility and the Smart City Bus service facility while they are at Gwalior.

Gwalior Smart City CEO, Mrs. Jayati Singh, IAS, told that "Gwalior Smart City has done some incredible work in Heritage Conservation and specially the Adaptive Reuse. Digital Museum, Digital Library and Integrated Command and Control Centers are some fine examples of how Heritage can be put to use with modern technology. Gwalior Smart City now aims at building "Brand Gwalior" to showcase the splendid heritage on the global map. The city has rich culture in the fields of Music, Crafts, Stone Work, Performing arts and a lot more. As an organization, GSCDCL is leaving no stone unturned to amplify the assets that Gwalior has and marking it prominently on the global Tourist map" [\[1\]](#)



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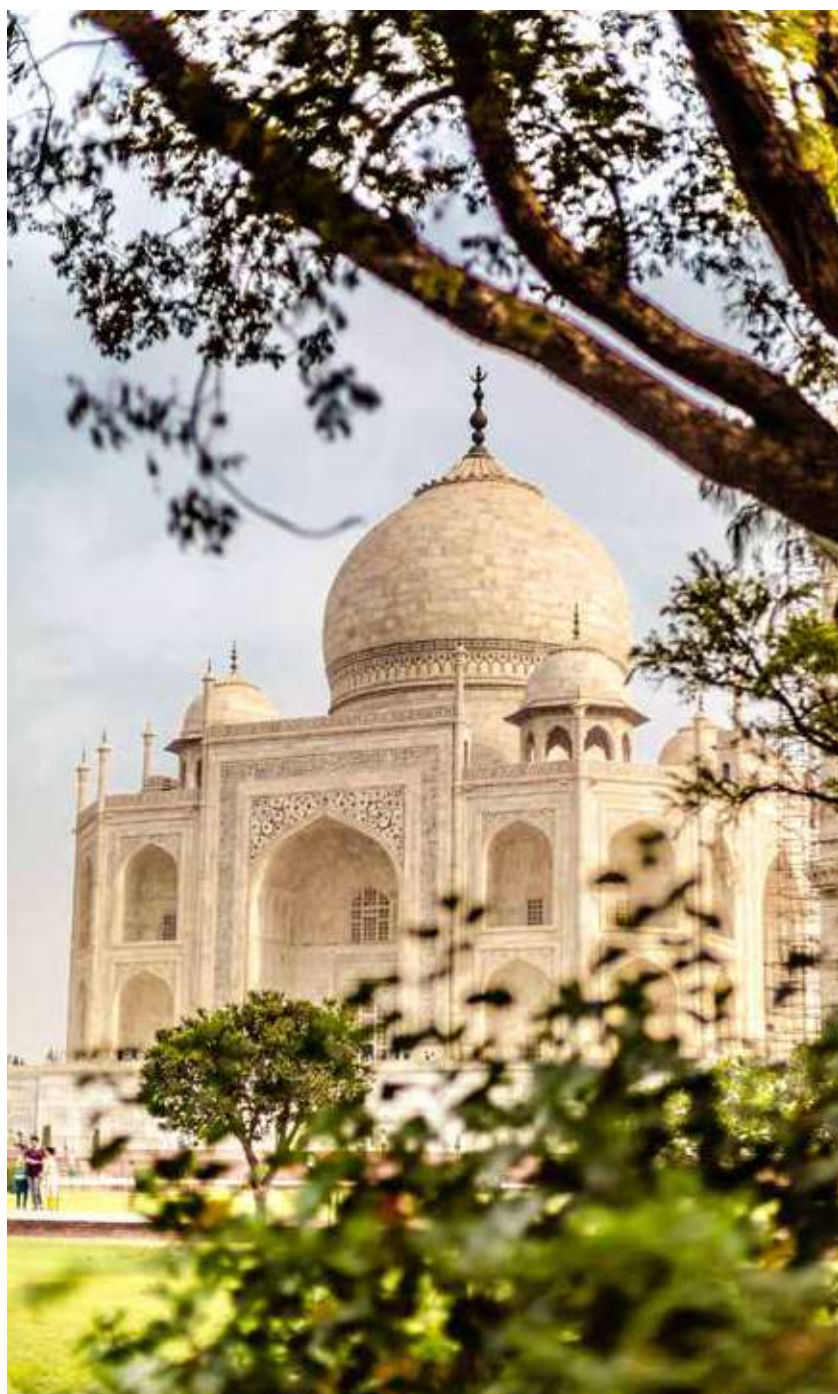
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# TUNISIA

**I had the opportunity to meet Ms. Hayet Talebi Bilel, the Amabassador of the Embassy of Tunisia. Here is what she shares about her country with Travel Links Magazine.**

**By Payal Sahni**

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

To prepare the resumption of tourism sector activity in Tunisia after the COVID 19 pandemic, which has impacted the whole world, the Tunisian National Tourist Office (T.N.T.O) has been mobilized to develop a manual of heath procedures entitled : « Anti-COVID Health Protocol for Tunisian Tourism» (H.P.T.T Anti COVID 19), (a copy attached).

The manual is essentially focused on observing the rules of hygiene and health safety through the itinerary of customers from their arrival at the border points to their departure, as well as the staff of tourist establishments. The approach adopted for the development of these instructions and hygiene rules is based on a risk assessment using the 5 M method (Man, Machine, Medium, Mission, Management) over the entire tourism chain of the customer's itinerary. It is worth noting that this H.P.T.T anti-Covid 19 , inspired by the experiences of other destinations on the basis of a benchmarking with about twenty countries, has been enriched, in addition to the efforts of the TNTO executives, by the guidelines of the World Health Organization, the World Tourism Organization, professional magazines and experts in the field.

The major objectives of the HPTT Anti Covid 19 program are:

Controlling the spread of this pandemic



in tourist establishments. Ensuring the safety of both; staff members of the tourist establishments and guests. Restoring the trust and confidence of sales networks and Tour Operators as soon as possible. The offer of a healthy and safety-controlled product.

Tunisia is now ready as safe destination in full respect of health protocols to further ensure your protection, including the following measures:

All overseas visitors, above the age of 12, Including Passengers who have been vaccinated and those who have a recovery certificate, must present evidence of a negative PCR test carried out no more than



**Ms. Hayet Talebi Bilel**

72 hours before departure (120 hours before arriving in Tunisia). It should have a QR code or be issued by a competent authority. The test date should be clearly shown, and the certificate can be in Arabic, English, or French. All Passengers are required to complete an online Health Declaration Form for Tunisia before departure. After submitting the "E7MI" form for Tunisia, travelers receive an email containing a QR code. This is checked before boarding and by health officials on arrival in Tunisia.

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





Over its history, Tunisia has always walked the fine line between Africa, the East and the West. Medinas, fortresses, Roman remains seven sites and monuments are UNESCO World Heritage sites, thanks to their cultural value: Carthage, Dougga, El Djem and Kerkouane and the medinas of Tunis, Kairouan and Sousse.

Tunisia has managed to maintain a wonderful balance between its many different influences. Refugees from Andalusia, craftsmen from Italy and Turkish commanders have all left their mark. That's why Testour's minarets remind us of Spanish architecture, the ceramics in Kairouan include Ottoman motifs and the tombs of the Beys – the rulers of Tunis – are decorated with marble in the style of the Italians. Similarly, emancipated African slaves are behind a specific musical style known as “stambali”. This cultural richness can also be found in the food, with Berber, Andalusian, Jewish and Italian roots

Depending on what time of year you visit, one of the most exciting things to do in Tunisia is enjoying the country's wide range of festivals. If you're visiting at the beginning of July, buy tickets for the Tabarka International Jazz Festival, while over July and August, you'll be able to enjoy live music at the International Festival of Carthage in the incredible surroundings of Carthage's Roman Amphitheatre.

Another festival worth travelling is the International Festival Hammamet, which takes place over July and August,

and features music performances by stars from all over the world. There's also the International Music Festival of Carthage, which takes place in October and showcases music from local and international artists, and the winter Tozeur International Oasis Festival, in which everything from traditional music and dancing to camel and horse racing takes place in the middle of the desert.

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

Tourism is one of Tunisia's largest generators of foreign currency income and the second largest employer behind agriculture. It represents about 7% of the gross national income (GNI) and employs 350,000 people. Tunisian tourism is engaging into the 21st

***Tunisia is a small land with a lot to offer, countless surprises and unique experiences are waiting for you***

century with a number of assets in order to be among the biggest world tourism market.

The development of tourism in Tunisia represents an economic opportunity, a choice and also a basic future requirement. It favors the loyalty of possible customers and the creation of innovative services pertaining to Tourism. The quality of services for tourism has improved through the introduction of a new classification system for hotels and hotel training programs. The rooming capacity in Tunisia has considerably developed; increasing from 100.000 beds in 1987 to 226.000 beds in 2004 and shall reach 300.000 beds by 2025.

**Our readers would also like to be recommended about the less travel parts of the country and would it be perfectly safe for the women solo travelers too?**

Since Tunisia is well known as a country with a very well-developed women rights, so it is totally safe for women solo travelers,



they can wear whatever they want like in any European country. Tunisia is one of the safest countries in the region with very friendly helpful and welcoming people.

Tunisia is a small land with a lot to offer, countless surprises and unique experiences are waiting for you:

The beaches : Tunisia has more than 1300 kilometers of beautiful beaches that start from Tabarka in the north to Djerba in the south. Many hotels have their own private beaches in addition to uninhabited coastline where you can enjoy your own private stretch of paradise. If you are

looking for some extraordinary experience, there are 20 diving clubs to take you out on some memorable adventures.

**The Sahara:** If you head south, you can enjoy a night in the heart of the Tunisian desert; enjoy the sunset and oasis scenes, in a unique experience that makes you feel the true sense of freedom in the extended desert. Eco tourism culture: it is a good choice for lovers of wild life and fresh air. In Tabarka, Ain Draham or Zaghouan you can feel the real countryside life, meet with the local people, share their daily life activities and spend a night in an eco-friendly farm









house.

Universal heritage: Over its history, Tunisia has always walked the fine line between Africa, the East and the West. Seven sites and monuments are UNESCO World Heritage sites, thanks to their cultural value: Carthage, Dougga, El Djem and Kerkouane and the medinas of Tunis, Kairouan and Sousse.

**Please let us know something about the gastronomical delights of your country.**

Tunisia is a land of olives, a place where the olive tree over the millennia has become infused with the nation's culture, economy, cuisine, habits, rhythms, and seasons. Some Tunisians even anoint newborns with olive oil. Indeed, Tunisia is one of the world's biggest producers of olive oil; there are about 1.8 million hectares of olive groves with 82 million trees, with a total harvest that reached 350.000 tonnes in 2019.

Dates, as well, are a very important for



Tunisians from ancient times. Tunisia is home of about 5.4 million palm trees with dates spread over the oasis zone of southern Tunisia. Deglet Nour is the main type of dates, it is sweet and has a translucent look and accounts for 75% of total production in Tunisia. A significant production percentage comes from Kebili, Gabes, and Touzer. Total production of dates was 288.000 tonnes in 2019, exported to more than 85 destination including India.

Centuries of foreign occupation has incorporated French, Roman and Ottoman influences, leading to a culinary confluence that brings something to the table for everyone: from the French bread to the Turkish sweets and Italian pasta, all made in the Tunisian way. Tunisian food is spicy, sometimes Indian-level spicy, with a use of seafood, olive oil, and Harissa a hot chili paste served with most meals as a dip and is often used as an ingredient in stews and soups. It is sometimes described as "Tunisia's main condiment".



“Couscous” is very well known Tunisian food which can be prepared by lamb, fish, of vegetables. “Lablabi” the perfect plate for winter consists of bread, eggs, harissa and spices all mixed with olive oil. “Brik” pastry and “salad mechouia” with tomatoes and peppers are appetizing starters, as are fresh bread and sauces, tuna, olives, roast green peppers and harissa.

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

Since the corona virus crisis, the country has been trying to control the damage and provide support to this vital sector.

Tunisian authorities believe the country's successful control of the pandemic makes a full-fledged reopening of the sector possible. The Government has been working on a number of measures to strengthen an expected revival of the tourism industry in 2021-22.

“Ready and Safe” is the slogan chosen by Tunisia for its tourism re-launch campaign. After the last wave during the last January, and thanks to rigorously targeted anticipatory measures, especially a wide vaccination campaign, Tunisia has managed to contain the spread of the virus and to record low contamination rates during the last two months. The vaccination campaign is going smoothly so far, more than

8.885.559 doses have been administered till now out of total population of 11 million. 7. Last but not the least, top 5 takes while visit Tunisia, something which can never be / should not be missed. Travelers usually seek to buy something authentic and special to the region or country they visit. In Tunisia, the choice of local specialties is very wide! Tunisia is known for its numerous handicrafts, which enjoy great support from the government and provide employment to over 120,000 people. Each region of the country specializes in a certain trade;

**Carpets/Kilim:** A historic crossroads of many civilizations, Tunisia has long been famous for its woven wares. Back in the 5th



Century AD, Greek poets already praised the “embroidered carpets and pillows of Carthage,” and during the first centuries of Islam, the Aghlabite emirate of Kairouan paid dues to the Caliph of Baghdad partially in carpets. Thanks to Kairouan, the ancient art of tapestry weaving has flourished through the ages and continues to thrive today. Since Kairouan is the oldest and most famous carpet center in Tunisia, the selection of Kairouanese carpets is enormous. The carpets of Kairouan are entirely handmade, starting with the shearing of the sheep, progressing through the selection and washing of the wools, spinning of the thread, and ending with



the weaving and knotting of the carpets themselves. With a good reason to be proud of the excellent quality of their carpets, Tapis la Tunisie (Tunisian Carpets) has established an extremely rigorous system of quality control, and only those carpets that satisfy the high standards of the board are blessed with the coveted tag that reads “First Choice” (premier choix), delivered by the Tunisian National Office of Artisans. The tag is found on the underside of the carpet, and also describes the exact quality, texture, measurements, type, and production date of the carpet. This is a guarantee of excellence to the buyer. [\[1\]](#)





# ANTARCTICA

## THE LAST CONTINENT



**By Lt Col Sudeep Vijai (Retd)**

**Y**ou don't turn 50 every year! A momentous occasion like this demanded an equally momentous trip which led me to plan one to Antarctica.

Would YOU also think of undertaking the adventure of your lifetime? It's arduous but doable if you're ready to deal with all the complexities, planning & preparation related to undertaking a journey to the remotest & most inhospitable corner of our planet!

I'll try to break it down & make it simpler for you so even if you actually don't end up going, this should make an interesting reading.

### **When To Go**

The first question that comes to mind is when do you travel to Antarctica. The Antarctica visit season lies roughly between Nov end to Apr first week which happens to be summers there at that time (Southern Hemisphere!) allowing ships a passage in between the



Antarctica landmass. For the rest of the year, the continent is frozen rock solid.

You can choose to travel at any time in between this period but the wildlife that you can expect to see changes with each month. The beginning of the season allows views of the icebergs in their most pristine & unspoilt shapes. You also get to see the penguin rookeries with freshly hatched chicks. The later part of the season gets you better sightings of the whales & the orcas while the icebergs have by now begun to melt & shores have probably become muddy with the visit of the thousands of

tourists before you. So take your pick accordingly.

## How do you travel to Antarctica

There are three ways of travelling to Antarctica - by sea alone, by air alone or a combination of a sea + air option. If you want to take a sea cruise then there are two main areas from where you can set sail. The most popular & economical (??) is from Ushuaia in Argentina or Punta Arenas in Chile. This option offers you the widest



range of ships, itineraries & budgets. The second option is to board a ship from New Zealand or Australia. These turn out to be more expensive (the ones on the other side aren't so cheap either!) but they take you to a more untouched & virgin part of Antarctica where you have much fewer tourists to interfere with your experience.

If you have deeper pockets or are a man (or woman) in a hurry, then there are a variety of flight or flight + ship options also available from both these areas plus from Cape Town in South Africa. These of course come at a much higher cost.

## When to Start Planning

Even with all the exorbitant pricing, trips to Antarctica fly off the shelf like hot cakes! So you have to give yourself a lead period of AT LEAST 6-8 months to carry out all the research, select your trip, ship, cabin class & make the booking. Most operators will ask you to pay up 50% of the total cost immediately & the rest in 2-3 time bound installments.

## Itineraries

The itineraries can range from as less

as 8 days to a couple of months with proportionate costs. Longer than 15 days cruises from Argentina also take in the Falklands Islands & South Georgia which offer a more intimate experience of wildlife sighting than Antarctica itself.

## The Ship

Once you have decided to visit Antarctica, the next step is to look for a suitable operator. In most cases, the operators are only agents who match the customers with their ships. You also have an option of

making your bookings directly with the ship owning companies. The ships are classified by their size. The bigger ships offer more luxury but are restricted by their size to enter deeper between the islands & icebergs. The smaller ships are more basic in their amenities but are able to offer a more intimate experience. The current rules in force allow only 100 people to go ashore at any one time. So on bigger ships with more than a 100 passengers, one would have to wait for his/her turn to do a shore landing. That would also translate into a fewer number of such landings in a day for the entire ship. In comparison, on smaller ships with less than a 100 people, everyone can go ashore at the same time which means that the ship can then move forward & plan more number of such landings per day.

## Cabin Classes

The accommodation ranges from personal suites to shared cabins with the latter having a choice of sharing with 2,3 or more cabin-mates. Of course the costs go up with each level of privacy that you may seek, starting from USD 4000-5000 to upwards of USD 15000! Yes you heard that right! Antarctica doesn't come cheap!

## Flights

So after having figured everything else out,

you now have to make your flight bookings. Assuming that you have decided to board the cruise from Ushuaia in Argentina, you have to work out suitable flight connections. There are no direct flights to Ushuaia from India. So you have to first reach Buenos Aires (Argentina's capital) & then take a 3 hour

***While on board the ship you can expect to wear comfortable lounge clothing with protection from cold. For shore landings, add an extra layer of parka or a heavy jacket. In short, dress as you may for a high altitude trek - layer up with inner, middle & outer layers.***

domestic flight further south to Ushuaia. For us, the best connections to Buenos Aires are available through 1 or 2 stopovers in Europe or the Middle East. You obviously want to keep a day's buffer on arrival & departure just to cater for uncertainties.

## Visa

All this done, you now have to take

care of the Argentine visa. For Indian passport holders, Argentina has extended an online e-visa facility (called the Electronic Travel Authorisation or ETA) available at a cost of USD 50. Of course if you don't want to pay anything, you can also submit your visa documents in person at the Argentine embassy in Delhi (for those living in the north) & at the consulate in Mumbai (for those living in Maharashtra & select southern states), go through the interview process & expect to have your visa approved in about 8-10 days.

## Clothing

Contrary to what you may think, the temperatures in Antarctica aren't that low & may range from +5 to -5 degrees celsius during the summer season. The windchill factor of course makes it feel colder especially when out on the zodiacs for shore landings or just gallivanting around the beautiful Bays.

While on board the ship you can expect to wear comfortable lounge clothing with protection from cold. For shore landings, add an extra layer of parka or a heavy jacket. In short, dress as you may for a high altitude trek - layer up with inner, middle & outer layers.





## Currency

You may need some money for spending in Argentina. Peso is the official Argentine currency though US dollars & Euros are also widely accepted. At most establishments you can also pay using your credit cards so you actually need the Pesos mostly just to pay for the taxis. For expenditures onboard, keep your credit card handy if you aren't carrying enough USD/Euros. The gratuity to the staff of course has to be paid in cash at the end of the trip. I had lots of apprehensions before I finally managed to make it to Antarctica. Multiple flights, a hugely different time zone, an unfamiliar language, my first cruise with all its question marks, the cold & weather the list is endless! But I'm happy to say that I came out tops. The key lies in thorough research & advance planning & preparation. Antarctica is not just next door or in anyone's backyard. It is one of the most inhospitable places on the Earth. You have to be very meticulous with everything. That said, it is also if not the most, at least one of the most beautiful

places on this planet. The play of sunlight over the rough seas, calm bays & glittering icebergs changing with every hour of the day will leave you mesmerised. The cold would force you inside the warm confines of the ship while the sights of penguins, seals & occasional whales will want you to stand guard out on the deck ready with your binoculars. The number of cruise ships & visitors are increasing year on year & endangering the fragile ecology of this sensitive environment. So go while you still can, but be a responsible tourist & comply with all the directions given by your Expedition team. With this I hope I would have addressed most of the general queries about planning an Antarctic holiday. For more details you may refer to my series of blogs on the trip at [www.ghumakkarindian.com/antarctica](http://www.ghumakkarindian.com/antarctica). 🇵🇪

### SUDEEP

He is an ex Army officer & a Commercial Helicopter Pilot. He likes to call himself a 'part time flier & a full time adventurer'. His work takes him to exotic places & in his spare time he is always seeking out new destinations to travel to & explore. Accounts of his travels can be found at [www.ghumakkarindian.com](http://www.ghumakkarindian.com)



# JAMAICA, THE HOME OF RHYTHM AND SWAY!

**The beat of reggae, the searing smell of jerk over the fire, the swizzle of rum in your glass, no place on earth provides the range of attractions and the cultural diversity that can be found in Jamaica! In this inputs by Trac Representations**

**F**rom each morning's glorious sunrise until the sea swallows the sun at night, Jamaica presents a magnificent palette of experiences, a kaleidoscope of colours and sounds that make this island the most precious jewel in the Caribbean. We are a land of unique culture, engaging activities, breath-taking landscapes, and a warm, welcoming people.

## About Jamaica's Parishes

Jamaica's 14 parishes are designated among 6 resort areas, each with their own unique vibe, signature attractions and diverse amenities. Discover them all and explore Jamaica from one end to the next.

Kingston is the capital and largest city of Jamaica, and is the cultural mecca of the island. The place to be if you want to experience the mesmerizing music and heady nightlife as you vibrate to the beat of the drums.

Negril, a small town in Jamaica, is a beautiful vacation spot, the beaches are sublime and the sunsets are like nothing else on earth. It is the epitome of relaxation. Negril is known for its 7-mile stretch of bright white sandy beach and picturesque cliffs overlooking the emerald green sea. This is the place for you to come and soothe your soul. Enjoy the slow pace of life here with the freshest seafood caught daily and the most amazing beachside sunsets you'll ever see.

Montego Bay is a marvellous melting pot of cultures, buzzing with locals, visitors, and expats who've made Jamaica their home. Montego Bay is the main tourist hub for Jamaica and also its second largest city. Enjoy the exuberant pubs and clubs, the wide array of eateries, the glistening beaches, the incredible artistry and



a gift shop that carries exclusive Brand Bolt merchandise! Fresh, local ingredients are used to create dynamic menu items that are sure to leave you wanting more! The drink menu with its delicious and exciting cocktails are sure to satisfy everyone's taste buds.

## **Cafe Blue Irish Town, Kingston**

Cafe Blue brings together a serene and







the mist, you may be moved to take on the full hike to the peak (7,402 feet high), a challenging 7-mile trek.

The Blue and John Crow Mountains National Park is one of the largest migratory bird sites in the Caribbean. What this means is that more than 120 species of birds escape to Jamaica's tropical rainforest to escape the harsh winter. Look closely and you may be able to see one of Jamaica's 28 endemic birds in the National Park, along with 100 native species.

Jamaican coffee is as indigenous to the island as Red Stripe Beer and Appleton Rum. Perhaps even more so. And the Blue Mountain range delivers the finest.

Another way to enjoy breath-taking views of the island, is by way of the Rainforest Sky Explorer in Ocho Rios, at the family-friendly attraction, Mystic Mountain. This state-of-the-art chair lift carries visitors 700 feet above the treetops for unforgettable vistas. Zip back down to Earth on one of the custom-designed bobsleds, or through the trees on the zip line.

From the mountain tops to the depths of the earth, Jamaica's underground caves and sinkholes offer an adventure of a different kind. The caves hold the historical and cultural heart of the island and Jamaicans still cherish and protect the cultural heritage of the country's early people — crafts, food, music, art, and oral stories are kept alive here.

Kingston offers the real Jamaican experience. The cacophony of city sounds, intertwined with the smoky essences of street food delivers a barrage on the senses, and it is here that the soul of the country finds its beat. And that beat is reggae music. Mento, ska, rocksteady, dub, dancehall, reggae. Music that has helped to define the direction of global popular music for over 50 years. And the man who helped put reggae music on the map — Bob Marley.

A visit to Downtown Kingston, to Jamaica's National Gallery, takes visitors on a journey through the island's cultural and visual heritage. Established in 1974, it is the oldest and largest public art museum in the English-speaking Caribbean. Its permanent collection speaks to the storied, sometimes painful, yet always an emotive journey of Jamaica's history.

Jamaica is the land of wood and water. From cliff-diving beaches to hidden waterfalls, winding and roaring rivers,



bottomless lagoons, and magical mineral-infused pools. There is a plethora of activities to do like rafting in the Martha Brae River, cliff jumping at Ricks Café, a cruise to the Luminous Lagoon, exploring the Dunn's River Falls, water adventure activities, Horseback rides at the beaches, swimming with the dolphins at Dolphin Cove, ATV Tours to the craggy hills and sandy shores of the island and much more.

The Jamaican calendar is ripe with festivals year-round — an excellent way to experience the vibrant culture and warm people, with sumptuous cuisine.

Stepping beyond the beaches enables visitors to explore that which truly defines Jamaica's diversity as a travel destination. There is no doubt that the beaches are among the world's most beautiful, but Jamaica is so much more.

From the top of the mountains to the bottom of valleys, and everything in between, Jamaica is a destination that invites you to come, and stay for a while! 🇯🇲



**Ganesha Zentangle art :** This serene art of Ganesha who symbolizes wisdom and endurance, is lovingly made with intricate Zentangle patterns using fine liner pens, on yellow handmade textured paper. The bright red hibiscus flower made using brush pens curled in his trunk pops out as it contrasts the black and white delicate



**Mountain Landscape Zenatngle art :** The majestic piece of snow clad mountain, set under the starry night sky, using black and white with a dash of green takes one to a happy place. The overarching crescent that's filled with Zentangle patterns using fine liner pens, only enhances the beauty of the art.





# ALL ABOUT AZERBAIJAN

## Important Festivals:

**A**zerbaijan hosts a wide variety of festivals throughout the year. Some of the key events include: Zhara Music Festival in July takes place on the coast of the Caspian Sea in Baku every summer. The four-day event combines lively music, indispensable fashion, celebrities and VIP guests on the red carpet, unforgettable parties, and film premieres.

Baku Jazz Festival in October is a

celebration of music and our deep ties to jazz. The best artists of the jazz world come to Baku, representing a wide stylistic range of musical trends. Across the city, there are seminars, workshops, art and photo competitions and exhibitions, jam sessions, jazz film days, and jazz concerts.

Novruz Festival in March represents the change in season. The tone of the country is celebratory and it's a great time to soak in the Azerbaijani culture. Visitors will find unique miniature art scattered

on the streets along with candles and conscientiously painted eggs across mirrors to usher in good luck.

## For Beach Lovers

For those looking for beach rest or adrenaline on the water, Amburan Beach Club is one of the best resorts and beaches in the area. Visitors can relax with a splendid view of the Caspian from the comfort of a poolside lounge. Close to Baku, water

sport-lovers will find perfect conditions to learn and enjoy kitesurfing at the flat-water lagoon at Shurabaad.

## For Ski Lovers:

Azerbaijan's ski-friendly regions host luxury ski resorts atop the mountain range with first-class amenities and well-prepared slopes. Shahdag Mountain Resort offers an extraordinary experience for visitors. Best quality is ensured by state-of-the-art snow guns and accessed by a brand-new network of world-class cable cars and ski-lifts.

Chenot Palace Health Wellness Hotel is an idyllic location to unwind in the ancient region of Gabala. Situated on the historical Silk Road the hotel is surrounded by high mountains and deep canyons, rivers and lakes, hot springs, and waterfalls. Chenot stays true to the brand's renowned international service, exclusivity, and world-class wellness packages.

## About Baku- The Capital

The capital Baku offers not only the taste of local dishes but also the cuisine of other nationalities and countries. With a variety of dishes to suit all dietary preferences and lifestyles, visitors will find international franchises, authentic cafés, luxurious

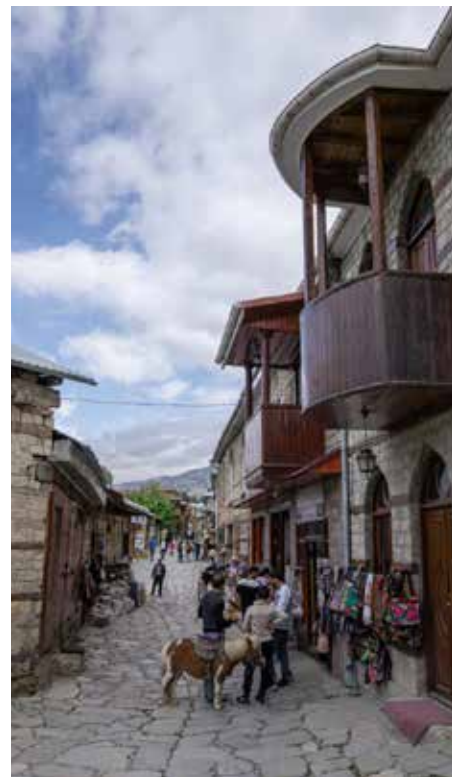


restaurants along other locations to suit any craving. Our most popular dishes such as plov, gutab, kebab, and dolma can be easily found and enjoyed across the country.

## Lesser known in Baku

A lesser-known, but high-potential destination in Azerbaijan is the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. The dynamic

location is a 1.5-hour flight from Baku, offering breathtaking landscapes, unique cuisine, ancient monuments, and quaint villages nestling in scenic valleys. A new winter resort will soon be complete to attract tourists to its pristine slopes. The towns and cities of this region also boast a host of historical and cultural sites, tidy squares, and matchless hospitality. Over the years, there is a shift with an increasing amount





of families with children, young couples, individual travelers, and honeymooners visiting the country. City tours and shopping dominate as preferred activities when traveling and as the most family-oriented travelers globally, destinations that offer fun activities enjoyable for both seniors and children are sought out.

## Unique features

Despite its small size Azerbaijan is a multicultural country where about 30 nations live in peace. Once being a stopover on the Great Silk Road, our culture and traditions have been influenced by many ancient cultures, which help people to feel at home while traveling in Azerbaijan.

## Best months to travel

Azerbaijan welcomes travelers throughout the year to enjoy an array of activities during all four seasons. Home to nine distinct climatic zones, the landscape has





almost every kind of geography one could think of. From mountains, forests, beaches, and everything in-between, its natural terrains welcome tourists looking for the most diverse and memorable experiences. With hundreds of kilometers of coastline, one can enjoy a splendid view of the

Caspian Sea from the comfort of a poolside lounge. Azerbaijan is almost surrounded by mountains, creating the perfect landscape for hikes in the summer, spring, and autumn. During the winter, mountains transform into the perfect location for ski-lovers and snowboarders.

The natural terrains welcome tourists looking for diverse scenic beauty and the best landscapes for adventure.

## Cost of Traveling:

Approximate expenditure to experience Azerbaijan offers authentic on-site activities, unique dining venues, hotels, and shopping experiences for those seeking luxury experiences. The average expenditure of accommodation for a 3-day holiday would average around 22,300 (\$310 approx). Getting around in Baku is incredibly cheap with taxis costing around 167 (\$2 approx) per trip.

## Safety Concerns

Azerbaijan is one of the safest countries in the region. The nation is extremely safe for solo female travelers with a very open-minded and hospitable culture. They are an open, inclusive, and modern nation that prioritizes the safety and comfort of all visitors, with more than 3.2 million travelers visiting our country in 2019 (before the Pandemic). [\[1\]](#)





# Heritage Village Resort and SPA Manesar

by Payal Sahni



Of all the holidays over the last one month, this one would remain closest to heart because we could travel without a worry in the world, whether it was long hours of journey or thinking about our pet. We could take out a pet with us and this became even his most memorable holiday and perhaps the last one too keeping in consideration his old age. With our furry dog 'Chester' we headed to 'Heritage Village Resort and Spa, Manesar'. Reaching there is very comfortable and from Delhi, one can reach approximately within an hour by a car.

## About the property

The entrance gate reminded us of landing in a palace with staff in their traditional

outfits and warm greetings. The aura was full of fun, flora, and glitter with pepped-up energy of even the guests keeping in mind the very busy wedding season. It was electrifying as was seen post-COVID. Must say the property is well equipped and apt to handle more than one event/ function at any given point in time.

The resort is built around thirteen acres of land. The Rajasthani style architecture with manicured gardens and open spaces also made us wonder; how well they have maintained the newness, neatness, the charm of the entire place even after so many years of inception, it still shines as good as new. The whole resort property has lots of open space to just wander around, designated play areas for the furry friends to run and have a good time. Even the pet area has been well planned and thought of.

Every corner of the property is picturesque quality to it and a very apt place to get the photo shoots done. The resort gives the vibe of being in royal places of Rajasthan with jharokha style windows, lanterns and flower decorations, wood

carvings, and furnishings. **We noticed the smallest possible details where even the drainage stopper jail was with carvings rather than the simple ones.** It is bound to make one feel like being on a bollywood movie set

The rooms of the property are also furnished articulately and meticulously. The furnishings and the fabrics are well coordinated with one another and everything has symmetry.

**The 'Aruna' Spa in the property has been done aesthetically with soft tones of chimes and chants along with subtle fragrance which would want one to dwell in the spa treatments instantly.** The facilities, décor, ambiance and even the therapists are of high standards and they are well trained and well informed about the various forms of therapies and massages. Their hands indeed move like magic on your body where one does not tell them the ailing parts, they touch it and they know it and will heal and relax you to no end. I would definitely recommend the SPA experience in the resort.





Our Cuisine experiences presented by ‘Chef Jaswant Sigh’, the executive chef, and ‘Chef John Stone’, executive corporate chef were wide from the buffet experiences to the thought of personalized cuisines accordingly to one’s wishes and desires that included even taking care of the pet’s needs. We had a lunch buffet, where my favorite pick was the mushroom bao, and the baos just melted in our mouths. The Chefs and their team treated us with excellent service and vegan dishes along with the smallest detail and fondness for the perfection of plates being taken care of. The experience of fine dining by the poolside in a romantic setup with exquisite continental delicacies was memorable and world-class.

We also met Mr. Shekar V Sawant, who is the Senior Vice President and the General Manager. He comes with more than two decades of experience and must say a very renowned, well-read, soft-spoken, and humble person we have come across.

**All said and done what touched my heart was the ‘parting gift toys’ and pet-friendly bag which they give for Chester.**

**This gesture of love finally stole our hearts more than anything else.** A very special moment of a pleasant surprise, which brought smile our faces.

Heritage village resort and Spa is multi Dimensional:

Want to have a good time with your family and friends? Definitely go for it.

Want to travel with a pet? A big yes, and

one of the best.

**Are you sports junky? They have well-equipped sports facilities and golf to be indulged in. Nature lovers have stargazing activities. Planning an event, function or a wedding? They have everything under one roof and can be planned accordingly to your taste and budget. 🇮🇳**

SPECIAL FEATURE

# A SOULFUL SOJOURN

Nestled amidst cedar forests of the magnificent Dhauladhar range in Kangra, Himachal Pradesh, Hyatt Regency Dharamshala Resort offers a perfect setting for a truly immersive experience in tranquil surroundings



With more and more people seeking to get away from the humdrum of city life, the idea of taking a wellness vacation to detox and heal has seen an upswing in recent times. And, if you are looking for a therapeutic getaway that combines luxury, safety, and comfort, nothing comes close to the experience at Hyatt Regency Dharamshala Resort. Ensnconed in the sprawling 6.5-acre verdant Dhauladhar range in Kangra, Himachal Pradesh, Hyatt Regency Dharamshala Resort introduces you to the old-world charm of the hill station, whilst offering new adventures.

With a scenic setting amidst nature's bounty and plush accommodations designed to indulge your need for comfort and privacy, the upper-upscale resort offers a slew of exceptional experiences tailored to foster a sense of familial bonding. Whether it is

experiencing the wilderness with a rustic picnic in the outdoors amidst the pine trees, guided day treks or nature walks; sampling global cuisines or a humble organic farm-to-table meal; a relaxing session at Shanti Spa or a rejuvenating yoga class—the plethora of unique experiences at Hyatt Regency Dharamshala Resort will stay with you forever.



**HYATT  
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**For more information, visit  
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