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**City Special**

**VOLUME 20 ISSUE 5**

**august**

"Oh, the places you'll go."
– Dr Seuss

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“Everybody has a story about every creature they’ve crossed off their list.”

Janaki Lenin

Janaki Lenin’s engrossing book in my interview with the author on p. 78

CROSSED OFF MY READING LIST
Every Creature: A Love Story
Janaki Lenin

Learn more about this engrossing book in my interview with the author on p. 78

UP NEXT
Full TRI: Ireland to India WITH A BICYCLE
Dervla Murphy

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Booted and spurred, Odisha is all geared up for a safe and sustainable tourist season

When it comes to tourist offerings, Odisha puts forth an abundant platter with palm-fringed silver beaches, paddy fields, rivers, waterfalls, the temples of Bhubaneswar and Puri, and the famous Sun Temple of Konark. With its glorious history and indigenous tribes, Odisha is a window to Incredible India’s soul. As the monsoon season approaches its end, the Department of Tourism, Government of Odisha, is anticipating that all tourist activities will resume with aplomb. The state aims to gradually bring its tourists back with heightened safety and sustainability protocols.

In its quest to leave no leaf unturned in ensuring supreme standards of hygiene and tourist safety, the department is working in collaboration with the state’s tourism and hospitality sector through advocacy groups like the Hotels & Restaurants Association of Odisha (HRAO).

As compared to the national average of 954 cases of COVID-19 per million, Odisha fares well with less than 493 cases per million. Successfully organising the world famous annual chariot festival of Puri, the Jagannath Rath Yatra, the Government of Odisha kept a strict check and surveillance over the comprehensive preventive measures, including screening of over 2,000 servitors and about 30 police platoons for COVID-19 before deployment. Additionally, a curfew was also imposed across the city of Puri to prevent crowding.

"Every external turmoil is an opportunity for a system to recuperate, rejuvenate and evolve internally, to a better state. The tourism and hospitality sector was operationally down to zero during the lockdown, arguably the worst affected by the looming pandemic. Meanwhile, nature is at work rejuvenating its flora, fauna and diverse elements. We too strive to make the best of this silver lining by expediting the development of infrastructure on one hand, and boosting sector skills and entrepreneurship on the other. Continuous consultations with sector stakeholders are being used as a dynamic feedback system to prepare the framework for the coming years; with a view to making the sector more aesthetic in appearance, richer in experience and more resilient in functioning,” said Jyoti Prakash Panigrahi, Minister of Tourism, Odia Language Literature and Culture, Government of Odisha.

Taking a holistic approach towards COVID preparedness, management, employees and service providers working across the tourism spectrum are being familiarised with COVID-19 Preparedness Protocols for Tourist Destinations issued by the Department of Tourism. Prime hotels and resorts in the state have also put in place exhaustive and technology-leveraged sanitisation mechanisms to implement Safety & Hygiene Protocols and Operational Recommendations for Tourism Service Providers issued in May 2020 by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India.

"Given our almost seamless working mechanisms vis-à-vis Department of Tourism, we at OTDC were among the early adapters to these protocols. The practices that we put in place while servicing the lodging, boarding and transport requirements of healthcare service providers, tourists, etc. have been maintained diligently over these months. We are committed to providing a hospitable and worry-free environment to our guests”, said Shreemayee Mishra, Chairperson of Odisha Tourism Development Corporation (OTDC).

Odisha’s bounty of nature and wildlife also make it an ecotourism hotspot. Ecotourism Odisha is renowned for its acclaimed game-changing model of community managed ecotourism camps across protected areas of the state in order to protect the diversity and ethnicity. Committed to responsible tourism and motivated to ensure the trust of visitors, the workforce of Ecotourism has also been specially trained. According to Anshu Pragyan Das, OFS, DCF (Ecotourism), Forest and Environment Department, Government of Odisha, reputed institutions such as Institute of Hotel Management Catering Technology and Applied Nutrition (IHM) and Indian Institute of Tourism and Travel Management (IITTM) Bhubaneswar have been looped in by Ecotourism Odisha.

The culturally and historically rich Odisha is now ready to welcome tourists with open arms while being mindful of safety and sustainability.

See odishatourism.gov.in for more.
TIPS FROM OUR TRAVELLERS

Clever travel hacks that we swear by!

Many museums and heritage walks have free entry for a limited period of time or on special days. If you rent a hanbok (traditional Korean dress), you get free entry to the Gyeongbokgung Palace in Seoul. Try it out!

- Uttara Gangopadhyay

Always carry a wrinkle-free jacket. I use this jacket as a stop-gap arrangement if struck by work urgency where I need to look presentable.

- Manish Hathiramani

Expensive airline tickets discouraging you from booking a flight? Consider switching to private browsing so that airline companies can’t track your cookies and show you a higher price when you repeatedly search for a particular destination.

- Aroshi Handu

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TRAVEL PROMOTION

UTSAV CAMP

Designed for complete privacy our nine stone cabins and ten tents spread over 11 acres of land offering panoramic views and outdoor patios to make you feel like you are living in nature’s lap. Immerse yourself in rustic luxury with various indoor and outdoor areas. Our rooftop lounge and bar area offer breathtaking panoramic views of the surrounding mountains and the vast expanse of sky.

Our private jungle safaris into the unexplored wilderness of Satskia National Park is an experience that is at once intimate and reveals the boundless expanse of nature. One can even enjoy a private dinner, high tea or sundowner in the midst of wilderness for a uniquely breathtaking experience.

We are committed to supporting the environment and local ecosystems with mindful and sustainable business practices. We’ve also planted over 3,000 trees and flora on the property which attracts more than 42 different species of birds. You will awaken to a symphony of chirps and calls you’ve never experienced before!

With just 3 hours drive from Garugram, one does not require an E-Pass to visit us. Apart from this no minimum quarantine days required as our property is secluded and our district has reported zero cases till now. We have missed you all dearly and we are now ready to serve you again in a clean, healthy, hygienic and safe environment.

Contact us at +91-1141197100 or visit our website www.utsavcampaurskia.com for more information.

KAUDIA ESTATE

Kaudia Estate, a private estate just 8 hours drive from Delhi is spread over 4 acres of land, cradled by the mighty Himalayas, amidst the evergreen Kaudia forest having three tastefully designed private villas. Located in a quaint little hamlet in Uttarakhand state, Kaudia Estate is perfect for a family getaway with social distancing in a private luxury villa.

With a range of activities, indulge in a board game with your family or simply pick a book from our library for reading at leisure. For the adventurous soul, one can go on a private trek in and around the estate or go up to Sukhanda Devi temple and even enjoy a picnic in the Kaudia forest with the panoramic view of the Himalayas.

Our menus comprise a range of cuisines - from interesting local fare to European dishes making full use of herbs and salad leaves which are grown in our kitchen garden. One can even plan their own meal based on what’s in season and available at our estate. Keeping in mind the current scenarios, all meals are served inside the comfort of your villas.

All safety measures are being followed as per the government guidelines in and around the property. The safety of our guests is our priority and we ensure a proper sanitization rule is being followed by the staff to make Kaudia Estate your home away from home.

TRAVEL GUIDELINES:
- Quarantine rules: For tourists, no quarantine period is required.
- Documents required: COVID19 negative test report. A valid E-Pass is also required.

One has to travel within 72 hours of getting their report.

Call us at 8448448596, 9811506717 or visit our website www.kaudiaestate.com for more information.
The Chatter

#OTHallOfFrame

We scoured through our feed, brimming with all kinds of gems, to bring you the rarest of our finds.

Travel with the flip of a page

These books will transport you to a new world in just a few pages.

In a Sunburned Country
Bill Bryson - A cleverly written travelogue about Australia, which takes the readers on a rollicking ride far beyond the beaten trail.

The Geography of Bliss
Eric Weiner - A fascinating tale of psychology, geopolitics, science, travel and humour, it offers a provocative perspective on what happiness is.

The Beach
Alex Garland - Revolving around a young British backpacker on a quest to find a secret beach in Thailand, the book is a window into the world of travel literature.

These are just a handful to flip of a page.

Virtual reality is transforming travel, one step at a time

Google Arts & Culture is a valuable tool to explore culture from home, or even discover and gain new appreciation for art around you. Simon Rein, Program Manager Google Arts and Culture, told Outlook Traveller, "Virtual reality is transforming travel, one step at a time. With our platform, we allow users to immerse themselves in a virtual reality experience, allowing them to explore museums, galleries and historical sites from the comfort of their own home."

On the web

Travel with us real-time on outlooktraveller.com

Souvenir Trail
Author and journalist Taran Khan shares time capsules from her experiences around the world.

Where royalty reigns

Relive Rajasthan’s royal heritage, equal parts history and glory, with a glimpse into the opulent palaces that have made this region famous.

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POLL TO PICTURE
So many travellers, so many travel styles. Here’s what you picked!

ISLAND CRUISE
SWISS ALPS AURORA
SAFARI SCUBA DIVING
FENI TODDY
WINI LED ROOM

Letter of the month

Back to work

Finally, things are looking up! It was a pleasure to see O’bounce back in these tough times. I loved the new design. The tiny factoids make the pages pop out. The Puducherry story (With all My Love) stood out for me. Having spent my formative years there, skimming through the writer’s experience in the city was nothing less than a nostalgic ride. The French influence on Puducherry cuisine is very strong. Being a foodie myself, reading about coq au vin, baguettes, croque monsieur and, of course, the delectable seafood and crêpes was enough to put me in foodie heaven.

Samreen Siddique, Delhi

"Simply wow! I don’t really believe in zodiac signs, but I really enjoyed this. Kudos to the writer! Mine is true! Thank you!" @TRAVELWITH_DEV

“Where to travel based on your Zodiac Sign”

Based on your Zodiac Sign

We love mail! Write in to letters@outlooktraveller.com

Where to travel based on your Zodiac Sign

The beach
Alex Garland

A stringently humorous, it’s a tale of psychology, geopolitics, science, travel and humour, it offers a provocative perspective on what happiness is.

Venice
Jan Morris

Dotted with astringent humour, it’s a peak into Venetian life.

The Beach
Alex Garland

Revolving around a young British backpacker on a quest to find a secret beach in Thailand, the book is a window into the world of travel literature.

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Author and journalist Taran Khan shares time capsules from her experiences around the world.

Where royalty reigns

Relive Rajasthan’s royal heritage, equal parts history and glory, with a glimpse into the opulent palaces that have made this region famous.
The pandemic led to the world locking itself down, leaving humankind silent. Like the sunflower that bloomed in the radio-active furnace of Chernobyl, artists around the world are forced to find ways to adapt and overcome the situation. Finding creative alternatives, the apprentices have begun to master their sorcery. Local artists in India have used this opportunity to rejuvenate lost art forms and publicise local folklore.

Kalyan Joshi, a veteran Phad artist from Bhilwara, Rajasthan, added a twist to the 700-year-old traditional storytelling technique by narrating the story of the novel coronavirus with art. As folk artists are getting creative in depicting social situations, characters in Madhubani paintings or those in miniature art can be spotted wearing face masks or following social distancing. Some artists have gone the extra mile, designing masks with folk designs and embroideries.

Amateur artisans and craftspeople from across the country have even taken it to social media platforms to popularise and sell their work.
Known for its wide variety of street food, it is one of the oldest localities.

**Try the stew at Chitto Babu’s Dokan**

Ghoum and Sons

The Jewish bakery has been serving its classic cakes for over a century.

**Try their iconic fruit cakes and puffs**

Shops generally pull the shutters by 7:30pm

**Central Kolkata Near Dharmatala Bus Terminus**

**Grand Hotel** in maps

Metro: Esplanade Metro Station

**Esplanade**

Packed with stately buildings, hole-in-the-wall eateries and nostalgia-filled bars, you can find all the flavours of Kolkata right here.

**Shopper’s Delight**

**NEW MARKET**

From saffron to silver, there is nothing you can’t find in this 146-year-old market.

**Metro Gali**

Cameras and camera accessories

**Maidan Market**

Largest sports goods market in India

**Grand Footpath**

Budget shopping for knick-knacks

**Chamba Lama**

One-stop shop for silver jewellery and curios

**Simpark Mall**

An underground shopping complex

**Tipu Sultan Mosque**

Architectural and cultural relic of Kolkata

**Shaheed Minar**

Built to mark the British victory over the Gurkhas

**The Oberoi Grand**

One of the iconic colonial-era buildings

**Indian Museum**

Established in 1814, oldest and largest museum in India

**Lindsay Street**

One of Kolkata’s most iconic streets and home to some timeless brands like Bata and Sreeleathers

**Street Photography and Colonial Architecture**

**Grand Parade**

One of Kolkata’s iconic eateries

**Vintage Cinemas**

Walk through history

**Street Food Heaven**

**It’s almost a steal**

Anything and everything!

Be prepared to haggle when shopping in Maidan Market and Grand Footpath.

**Look for “Grand Hotel” in maps**

Metro: Esplanade Metro Station

**Hot Spot**

Eats and itinerary:

1. **Esplanade Cafe**
   - Mughlai parathas
   - Rolls
   - Bakeries

2. **Anadi Cabin**
   - Mughlai/Awadhi dishes
   - Authentic Bengali cuisine

3. **Amina Qeetabala**
   - Mughlai/Awadhi dishes
   - Galauti Kebabs

4. **Badshah Bar & Restaurant**
   - Kathi rolls

5. **Simpark Mall**
   - An underground shopping complex

6. **Esplanade Shopping Complex**
   - Everything you can imagine

7. **Aruna Cabin**
   - Mughlai parathas
   - Rolls
   - Bakeries

8. **Amini Qeetabala**
   - Mughlai/Awadhi dishes
   - Galauti Kebabs

9. **A Mini Qeetabala**
   - Mughlai/Awadhi dishes
   - Galauti Kebabs

10. **Bada Shah Bar & Restaurant**
    - Kathi rolls

11. **Simpark Mall**
    - An underground shopping complex

12. **Esplanade Shopping Complex**
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    - Galauti Kebabs

46. **Bada Shah Bar & Restaurant**
    - Kathi rolls

47. **Simpark Mall**
    - An underground shopping complex

48. **Esplanade Shopping Complex**
    - Everything you can imagine

49. **Aruna Cabin**
    - Mughlai parathas
    - Rolls
    - Bakeries

50. **Amini Qeetabala**
    - Mughlai/Awadhi dishes
    - Galauti Kebabs

51. **A Mini Qeetabala**
    - Mughlai/Awadhi dishes
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Compiled and Illustrated by RANGEE GHOSH
When I was in my second year of college, a hostel wing mate handed me his heavily earmarked copy of The Pillars of the Earth by Ken Follet. I sat reading that book late into the night, and on many others that followed. It told the story of Tom, the master builder, whose only dream was to build the greatest Gothic cathedral the world has ever known.

At that time, I didn’t know exactly what a cathedral was, and how it was different from a church. Years flowed, events happened, and myriad experiences layered over one another, burying my awe of Tom’s passion for cathedral-building deep into my memory.

Till last week, that is, when dusting off my old books while searching for something to read, I found the book again. They say what you search for is at times beneath the very earth where you stand.

Thirty kilometres from the Swedish city of Malmö where I live, in the small university town of Lund, is Scandinavia’s most famous cathedral—the Lund cathedral.

I walked down the cobbled streets from Lund Central Station towards the cathedral, pulled towards it by its gothic dark towers that loomed against the blue skyline. The cathedral, called Domkyrkan, emerged rather abruptly. Its dark-stoned exterior and formidable towers that reached for the skies made one stop in one’s tracks and stare in wonder. This 12th-century cathedral was constructed under the rule of the Danes, before it passed hands to Sweden in one of the most gruesome battles ever.

I was just in time to see a newly-wed couple walk out of the cathedral. Once inside, the feeling of space, of standing beneath open skies, remained with me. The impressive columns on both sides arched on the top to support the dome, on which was etched a fresco of Jesus overlooking us all. I walked down to the crypt, beneath the cathedral’s eastern end. This was the oldest part of the building, and enclosed several stone altars and a famed granite statue of Finn, the giant, wrapped around one of the columns.

Upstairs on the altar, preparations were ongoing for a christening. This was a private affair, so I retired to the seating area. I settled in one of the empty chairs and closed my eyes. My senses began to merge: the smell of the wax fused with the rhythmic chimes from the organ, punctuated with the sound of muffled steps.

This cathedral had weathered snow and rain, winter and summer, wars and peacetime alike, untouched by all the event. My thoughts went to the thousands of Tom Builders who must have spent their blood and sweat to construct this cathedral. Many might not have lived to witness the outcome of their work. But here we were, almost a thousand years later, still deriving tranquility from their craftsmanship.

The Tale of Cities
Striking contrasts, chaotic streets and a buzz like no other, these images capture unique slices of city life.
Why haven’t you explored this island before? Aakash Malhotra spills the beans on experiences you can have only in this shutterbug’s paradise

Be it temple hopping in Taipei or bathing in the thermal waters of Beitou, climbing the snow-capped peaks of Yushan or riding a glass floor gondola over tea fields, Taiwan will hit you with a wave of euphoria every time you set foot in it. Mountains, canyons, beaches and culinary delights—the tiny island has it all and yet very rarely does it feature on our bucket lists. Steeped in culture and history, Taiwan is renowned for its fascinating blend of traditional and modern practices. The island nation never fails to charm you with its cultural diversity, heritage and inclusivity often leaving you with the question “why had you not explored this island before?”

Taipei
Taipei, the capital of Taiwan, is a modern metropolis with Japanese colonial lanes, busy shopping streets and contemporary buildings. The skyline is crowned by the 509 metre-tall, bamboo-shaped Taipei 101 Skyscraper, once the tallest building in the world filled with upscale shops at the base and an elevator that takes visitors to the observatory deck. As the sun begins to set, Taipei’s nightlife comes alive, with mouth watering street-food stalls and lively night markets, including the renowned Shilin Market.

Bathing in the thermal waters of Beitou
Head to the Thermal ‘Hell’ Valley for an unparalleled hot springs experience. Located on the foothills of Yangmingshan National Park in Beitou District, the sulphur-rich boiling hot water often reaches a temperature of 100°C. It is the only metro-accessible hot spring in Taiwan, thanks to the two station lines connecting Xinbeitou to Beitou station on the Danshui line. You can smell the area’s hot springs while you are making the transfer.

Taichung
Taichung is the gateway to exploring the island’s mountainous interiors, as well as prominent tourist spots like the Sun Moon Lake, popular for boating and hiking, and the Ci’en Pagoda to catch a glimpse of the Taiwanese wilderness.

Lihpao Land
Those with an adventurous streak can also head to Lihpao Land, home to the world’s first tilt roller coaster. The Gravity Max hangs riders over a 13-storey vertical drop at 90° and sends them off on a ride of a lifetime. From thrilling rides to an inhouse water park, there is something for everyone.

Rainbow Village
Packed with Instagram-worthy locations, a visit to the Rainbow Village in Taichung is worth every penny. Easily topping the list of the most ‘Instagrammable’ places, it is quickly becoming one of the hottest new destinations to check out when in Taichung.

Minced Pork Rice
Taiwanese style rice dish consisting of ground pork and stir fried with shallots, soy sauce and seasonings

Stinky Tofu
A traditional Taiwanese snack made of fermented bean curd. The pungent odour may lurk in your nostrils, but nonetheless it’s a crowd favourite

Deep-Fried Chicken Cutlet
The Taiwanese fried chicken, also known as G-Pie is pretty much a fixture at all night markets

Bubble Tea
A beloved Taiwanese classic, it blends the unique flavours of milk, tea leaves, fruit and tapioca balls

Shaved Ice
The best way to beat the heat is with some Taiwanese-style shaved ice. Try out the Mango Shaved Ice available at many night markets

The writer was invited to be a guest at The Presidential Office Building to experience a guided tour, high tea session and meeting with President Tsai. Usual visiting hours vary for the public

Advertisement by Taiwan Tourism Bureau
Taiwan. With colourful walls and vibrant designs, it’s definitely a paradise for selfie seekers around the world.

Kaohsiung

Kaohsiung, a massive port city in southern Taiwan, is home to many skyscrapers, such as the 341 metre-tall Tuntex Sky Tower, and a wide variety of parks. The main attraction here is the Love River, with walking paths and cafés along its banks, and cruise boats navigating through the waters. No trip to Kaohsiung is complete without paying a visit to the city’s nightmarkets. From high-end malls to the Liuhe and Ruifeng nightmarkets, the city is a shopper’s paradise.

The Lotus Lake, a famous scenic area on the northern outskirts of Kaohsiung City offers a profusion of temples, with the Confucius Temple at its northern edge, and the Dragon and Tiger Pagodas and Spring and Autumn Pavilions in the south. The lake is a sight to behold in the evening as the setting sun creates a magical streak of glittering light across the water. Nearby are the ruins of the Fengshan County walls and gates, which have been designated as an iconic historic landmark.

Kenting

Away from the chaos of the city life, Kenting is a breath of fresh air with its white sand and rocky beaches. Situated at the southern tip of Taiwan, Kenting owes its popularity to the novel-turned-film Life Of Pi. Often considered the pulse of Taiwan’s beach scene, it offers a ton of water activities. Right from jet skiing, tube rides to even floating around on a banana boat, it’s a slice of paradise for the beach bums. Kenting is also a popular snorkelling and diving spot. A close second to the beach experience is exploring the Kenting National Park, located on the south coast. The centrepiece of Hengchun Peninsula, it is the only tropical national park in Taiwan. It gives you a glimpse into the traditional Taiwanese rural life. The park also includes mountains, forests, pastures, and coral reefs, offering an opportunity to nurture your bond with nature. Rent a scooter to explore the town and the National Park. Evenings at Kenting are made even more special with roadside food stalls and locally made cocktails.

Getting Around

One aspect that left me quite impressed was the ease of planning and getting around the country. Most of the cities in Taiwan have well-established metro networks, as well as taxi services. Taiwan High Speed Rail (THSR) is the most preferred mode of transit for travellers to cross the island. If you don’t have much time, I would recommend the high-speed rail and shuttle between the major cities in the western half of Taiwan to enjoy the convenience and city exploration.

For travellers who wish to roam in a slow paced manner, visit the eastern half of Taiwan via Taiwan Railway Administration (TRA) as there are plenty of mountain and sea views to be explored. Kenting is a popular snorkelling and diving spot. A close second to the beach experience is exploring the Kenting National Park, located on the south coast. The centrepiece of Hengchun Peninsula, it is the only tropical national park in Taiwan. It gives you a glimpse into the traditional Taiwanese rural life. The park also includes mountains, forests, pastures, and coral reefs, offering an opportunity to nurture your bond with nature. Rent a scooter to explore the town and the National Park. Evenings at Kenting are made even more special with roadside food stalls and locally made cocktails.

PRO TIPS

HOW TO REACH

There are a number of flights that fly to Taiwan. China Airlines was my airline of choice as it is one of the more economical and direct flights available to Taipei. It’s a five hours journey from New Delhi. Taipei is approximately 35 minutes away from Taoyuan Airport MRT.

Visiting a night market is quintessential to the Taiwan experience. Lively hubs of food and pop culture, these markets have attracted locals and tourists alike. Probably the biggest market in southern Taiwan, the Kenting Night Market is home to some exotic culinary delights. Stalls run the gamut from freshly grilled scallops and squid to fried noodles, stinky tofu, deep-fried milk and heaps of fruity cocktails.

For more information see eng.taiwan.net.tw
For VISA Application visit niaspeedy.immigration.gov.tw
Chandigarh’s famous Rock Garden started as a hobby when Nek Chand Saini began collecting rocks behind a government building during the 1960s, using them to create sculptures with found rocks. Among other elements from Le Corbusier’s construction of Chandigarh.
You can call a place home for decades, but all it takes is some skillful navigation to see beneath the façade of this modern-day metropolis, discovers LABANYA MAITRA

**NEW WHEELS, OLD CITY**

I was trying to park between two poles.

With the entirety of my focus on the breaks, I kept inching closer to one of them. And suddenly, a jerk, a shudder, and then silence.

“What did I hit?” I looked around.

“Nothing,” my friend Aarushi was also holding on to the hand brake. “The car stalled.”

“Oh.” That was as close to the pole as I was willing to risk. I turned off the car.

I’d learnt how to drive fresh out of school, but was almost immediately shipped off to lands near and far chasing those pesky degrees. And now that I had a little extra downtime (thanks, COVID), I thought I’d practice driving again. Maybe get my license this time around!

I don’t venture far. My lack of faith in my own skills is only part of the reason, the remaining has something to do with trusting only South Delhi roads. Yes, I know, I’m that girl. But driving around my neighbourhood—I guess we’ll call it that—has made me notice a lot of details I’d missed in the 17 years of living here. Speed breakers are only one of them.

There’s a rhythm to it, it’s almost like a dance. Step one is to grab one of three unlucky license-wielding friends willing to risk their lives for me. I’m kidding, it’s probably safest to be inside the car when I drive. Step two is navigating out of my ridiculously over-parked colony and hitting the road towards Greater Kailash (GK) Part II.

**MARKET PLACES**
Seating spots and poisonous cocktails

**HERITAGE**
Bahá’í meets the tughlaqs

**WILDERNESS**
Peacocks, trails and discoveries

***

**First dates and phuchkas***

**Wilderness***

**Heritage***

GK II M-Block market holds quite a few fond memories for me. The bars and restaurants keep changing, but there are a few solid ones I always recommend. Most first dates for me are at Uber Lounge, a broody restaurant with a hookah bar in the basement. I know the staff,

**Time for a Snack**

The time for a snack.THE NEW WHEELS, OLD CITY

**Full aerial view of the Lotus Temple Complex**

PHOTOGRAPH: Shutterstock
and it’s an easy escape if things go south. If things are looking up, I usually move to one of the brighter places around like Big Fat Sandwich & Pizza, or Nik Baker’s. Fig & Maple is great for a rooftop brunch (pre-COVID19), followed by an assortment of ice cream sandwiches to share at Pearl’s. All these places are now open for take-aways and delivery. On Sundays, I like splurging on a chia bowl at Nut & Bowls, partly for the conditioning. But there’s no way you can think I spoke the language quite fluently, though. The fort is stunning in the early evenings with the right weather. There’s a path leading off the Mehrauli–Badarpur Road, which you can take to hike around the ruins. The monument is open for visitors and is best explored on foot. Make sure you go in a group, however, as the fort is sprawling with numerous underground rooms to discover. Tughlaqabad Fort is also a paradox in the way that it’s well known, but also forgotten in Delhi’s maelstrom of monuments.

TRAILS OF THE CITY

On the other side of the fort, away from Faridabad, you can see the expansive Jahanpanah City Forest. It is, quite literally, my backyard. Incidentally, Jahanpanah was the fourth city of Delhi, built by Ghiyasuddin’s son, Mohammed bin Tughlaq. The Mad King, if you will. I drive homeward through Alaknanda Market, where I stop at least once a month to pick up an extra copy of OT. There’s also a chaat stall inside with mouthwatering alloki. But I’ve managed to not indulge myself just yet. Instead, I head on home and walk down to the entrance of the Jahanpanah City Forest. The 800-acre wilderness is set right in the middle of the otherwise bustling in-city Delhi, and covers Greater Kailash II, Alaknanda, Chirag Delhi and Tughlaqabad, among other neighbourhoods. Although it has an origin steeped in history, the forest today has no remnants of the old city of Jahanpanah. Very little of it remains today anyway. The forest, however, is a welcome escape. I walk past the gardens and playgrounds manicured by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) and into the proverbial wild. There’s a roughly four-mile-long tarred track around the circumference of the forest, with dozens of little trails making through the constant cacophony of peacocks calling out to each other, crickets chirping,

Believed to be a Manakarnna Siddha Peeth, the ancient Kalkaji Mandir can miraculously satisfy the desires of those who pray to the deity Kalka, they say. Legend has it that the temple has existed in some form since the times of the Mahabharata, and the Kaurava and Pandavas worshipped at this shrine.

SAUNTERING THROUGH TIME

Just across the Outer Ring Road, a little ways from the now-desolate Epicuria andINOX in Nehru Place, there’s a sudden and drastic shift in the energy. I’m not one to talk about vibes, but as you approach the Lotus Temple Complex, the trees aren’t the only things that glow green. Do places have aura? I guess this one does. This Bahai House of Worship was built in 1986 and sits in the midst of 26 acres of gardens, pools and walkways. Designed by Iranian-Canadian architect Fariborz Sahba, this lotus-shaped marvel oozes tranquility. But there is a visitor’s centre talking about the Bahai faith, the temple itself is meant for people of all faiths to worship in harmony. It has, however, remained shut ever since the lockdown.

I don’t think I had ever driven further down the road, but to my surprise, it quickly changes into a cobblestone street. Quaint and quiet—the latter due to the pandemic, perhaps—it leads you straight to the Kalkaji Mandir Metro Station. As you turn in, however, years of tyres and rain haven’t fared the stones well. Make sure your car is used to some roughing up before driving through.

Legend has it, this 14th-century fort was cursed when Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq poached workers from the Sufi saint Nizamuddin to build his city. A mere 15 years later, it was abandoned.

From here, the way to the Mehrauli–Badarpur Road is pretty straightforward. I drive through there for a very special reason: monkeys. More specifically, packed troops of infant-carrying rhesus macaques. They line the woods and the walls holding up the Air Force Station to the right, and the Tughlaqabad Fort to the left. Tughlaqabhad was the third avatar of modern-day Delhi. Legend has it, this 14th-century fort was cursed when Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq—the first ruler of the Tughlaq dynasty in 1320—poached numerous underground rooms to discover. Tughlaqabad Fort is also a paradox in the way that it’s well known, but also forgotten in Delhi’s maelstrom of monuments.

There are stories of djinns floating around, but it could also have been the water shortage. I guess we’ll never know. The fort is stunning in the early evenings with the right weather. There’s a path leading off the Mehrauli–Badarpur Road, which you can take to hike around the ruins. The monument is open for visitors and is best explored on foot. Make sure you go in a group, however, as the fort is sprawling with numerous underground rooms to discover. Tughlaqabad Fort is also a paradox in the way that it’s well known, but also forgotten in Delhi’s maelstrom of monuments.

I’m not a “real” Bengali, my mother likes to say. I don’t like fish, I can survive on butter chicken for years, and while I thought I spoke the language quite fluently, my colleagues tend to disagree. Real or not, my love for phuchkas transcends all conditioning. But there’s no way you can stop at just phuchkas at Market No. 1. The ‘Hot Kathi Roll’ stall is my favourite. When I was younger, my father used to bring me here for the paratha rolls. I remember his disdain when I once brought back rumali rolls—the kind I preferred—for him. Here, however, I bee-line to the Chinese Chaat counter. It’s probably terrible for you, but I’ll have another one, please.

My mother often does her guests-are-coming sweet shopping at Kamala Sweets, and I use that time to munch on some jhaal muri. You can try Kolkata-style biriyani, Mughlai food, momos, cutlets and chops, and the works. There’s of course the fish market, but that’s usually where the not-a-real Bengali in me draws the line.

No, thank you.

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City of Cities

The number of times modern-day New Delhi has been ravaged and rebuilt through the course of its bloody history ranges from eight to nine, to 12 or even 14. Here’s a quick glimpse at some of the ancient Delhis you can experience in the modern one today!

Siri (1290 AD)
- Siri Fort
  - Built by Ala-ud-din Khilji, on a few of the 14 walls remain
- Haiz Khas Lake
  - The reservoir once covered 28 hectares and lasted the city of Siri through the dry season

Sher Garh (1540 AD)
- Purana Qila
  - Built by Sher Shah Suri, it was here that Humayun met his end after reclaiming his throne
- Humayun’s Tomb
  - Humayun’s Persian-born wife, Haji Begum built this tomb, which supposedly inspired the Taj

Shahjahanabad (1638 AD)
- Red Fort
  - Founded by Shah Jahan, it took 10 years to build and once overlooked the Yamuna River
- Jama Masjid
  - The city’s largest mosque, located in Old Delhi

Qila Rai Pithora (1180 AD)
- Qutb Minar
  - Afghan-style minaret erected by Qutb-ud-din Aibak
- Mehrauli Archaeological Park
  - Dotted with relics, holds Delhi’s finest stepwell, Rajon ki Baoli

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The 800-acre wilderness is set right in the middle of the otherwise bustling South Delhi, and covers Greater Kailash II, Alaknanda, Chirag Delhi and Tughlaqabad, among other neighbourhoods.

A NEW dawn

The pandemic has turned the world upside down, but it’s heartening to see Delhi rebuilding itself. If there’s anything my explorations have taught me, it’s that you would be hard-pressed to find a city as resilient as this one. From Lajpat Rai to Siri, Tughlaqabad to Jahangirpur, the city has rebuilt itself into Firozabad, Sher Garh, Jahanpanah, the city has rebuilt itself into Firozabad, Sher Garh, Jahanpanah, and New Delhi. The spirit of the city doesn’t stall, quite unlike my car.

What will we call it next?

DELHI

explore

and kids, for professional and personal use. It provides front and lateral protection and an anti-contagion barrier for ocular transmissibility. The 100 per cent clear protective face shields and eyewear are also comfortable, even when worn for long hours.

Unlike other uncomfortable products, Polaroid’s range is tailor-made for the new normal with style, sans the worry. The gear is well-fitted, comfortable and aims for people to stay stress free.

The Stay Safe collection is anti-fog, anti-scratch, splash proof, and UV shielded with ultra-clear visibility. Additionally, the equipment also has adjustable strings for a safe and perfect fit while driving or while doing any heavy-duty work. It provides full face coverage, is long-lasting with a reusability of upto 10,000 times, and has a warranty of two years. The 4 cm distance between the visor and face allows one to wear it with glasses too. The adjustable band

WITH COMFORT AND STYLE

Choose durability, safety and reliability with the Polaroid Stay Safe Collection

As the world battles a pandemic, an innate fear of contracting the virus has comfortably nestled into the average traveller’s mind. In a situation like this, ‘safety’, ‘protection’ and ‘contagion’ are the most searched words on the internet.

Furthermore, there’s also a confusion regarding the correct safety equipment. Travellers fear flimsy protective gear, unreliable information related to safety gear, and not getting the right protective equipment for a carefree journey. In such unprecedented times, the Stay Safe collection, the latest offering from the house of Polaroid aims to provide new protective gear.

About the Collection

Polaroid Stay Safe collection is the latest from the house of Polaroid, the world’s second largest eyewear manufacturer, manufacturing sunglasses and eyewear frames since 1878. The curated range of safety equipments are trusted worldwide. Known for its strength-in-performance eyewear, Polaroid had launched this collection only for medical professionals, but it’s now available for retail.

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The residential locality of Greater Kailash II also houses the Embassy of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, the Royal Cambodia Embassy, and the Embassy of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, or North Korea.

A true Bengali knows their fish

The more you know.

CR Park Market No. 1 is bustling

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DeLhI

exploRE

30 A U G U S T 2 0 2 0

Photograph Shutterstock

The panoramic views of Ferozabad, Sher Garh, Shahjahanabad, and New Delhi.
It is only when the whiff of kathi rolls surrounds the street corners and the neighbourhood phuchkawala plops a fresh phuchka in my folded sal leaf platter, will I know that Kolkata is back to normal, muses.

UTTARA GANGOPADHYAY
Photographs by SANDIPAN CHATTERJEE
of the Old Currency Building—a landmark office located at one end of Kolkata’s business district Benoy Badal Dinesh Bag (Dalhousie Square)—one of the two security guards proffered a bottle of sanitiser while her colleague waited with the thermal gun. All of us were wearing the mandatory face masks. My temperature was noted, normal, and I was allowed inside. So this was what life was going to be like, I mused, in a world battered by COVID-19. Since 1868, the Old Currency Building was the Office of Issue and Exchange of Government Currency from where it derived its name. For a while, the building also housed the Reserve Bank of India.

It was already the third week of July, the oppressive heat now replaced by cool monsoon showers. The kadamb trees had started flowering, their sweet scent permeating the air. What better time to find out how the city I call home is adjusting to the new normal?

WHERE WOULD I start?

I began with a visit to the Kalighat temple, abode of Kolkata’s guardian deity, Maa Kali. Shops selling puja offerings, small idols, or household items, had opened, but takers were few. “We’ve opened more out of habit rather than expecting sales,” said one of the shopkeepers. The famous temple is currently open for limited hours and allows only 10 visitors at a time. Priests at the other famous Kali Temple in Dakshineswar have even donned PPE, I was informed by a friend.

The metro services are yet to resume, so I hopped on to my next viable option, a bus, to Dalhousie Square. On the unusually short ride, I couldn’t help but catch glimpses of the city from the window only to see Kolkata like never before. Most of the hawker stalls shut, fewer than before hackney carriages in front of the Victoria Memorial, and the the green lungs of the city—the Maidan—bearing marks of the rampaging super cyclone, Amphan, with fallen branches piled high on the side.

A JAUNT DOWN party hub

Park Street revealed that most restaurants and shops were open but seemed bereft of their usual crowds. Physical distancing was partly to blame for the deserted look. However, there has been a steady increase in the number of visitors, confirmed Flurys and Peter Cat, reflecting diners are slowly growing confident about eating out. The haunt of Kolkata’s intellectual brigade, the Indian Coffee House, was re-embracing its proverbial ‘adda’, along with Paramount and its syrupy invites in the College Square neighbourhood of central Kolkata.

Alighting at Dalhousie Square, I found the business hub yet to awaken to its noisy, crowded self. Most offices appeared shut or running on skeleton staff, while the pedestrians seemed intent on hurrying indoors. The hawkers peddling office stationery and other sundry offerings were also few and far between. The rows of food vendors, usually crowding office buildings, were also missing in action. Even the famous khao gully Dacres Lane was quiet.

Maybe this was the right time for photographers to explore Dalhousie Square.
with its 19th and 20th century buildings sporting Gothic architecture, I wondered. However, the heritage churches and other places which allowed public entry were yet to open. Luckily for me, the exhibition—‘Ghare Baire: The World, The Home and Beyond’—at the restored Old Currency Building was open. I spent my afternoon roaming through the galleries, displaying 18th to 20th century art in Bengal. These included Kalighat Pat, print-making, works of European artists in Bengal and six artists from Bengal whose works have been recognised as National Treasures of India.

After an artsy afternoon

I decided to take a walk down to one of my favourite spots in the city—the river bank. I managed to sneak a peek into the Metcalfe Hall on the way. Displaying an ongoing art exhibition on the cosmopolitan culture of the city, titled ‘Ami Kolkata: I am Kolkata’, it was open to visitors as well.

In the final phase of its journey to the Bay of Bengal, the Ganga, more colloquially the Hooghly, flows sluggishly past the western boundary of Kolkata. You may take a walk along the Strand to enjoy the breeze, and watch the two towering bridges—Rabindra Setu (Howrah Bridge) and Vidyasagar Setu—spanning across the breadth of the water.

Since the Millennium Park along the bank was shut and the tourist boats non-operational, I decided to take a ride in the passenger ferry that operates between the Park and Howrah Railway Station on the other bank. The short journey paved the way for a panoramic view of the city’s skyline from the river, a view of the bridges spanning like giant birds’ wings, and the many ghats along both the banks.

If you are lucky you may also see the rare Gangetic dolphin, I was told. Though not the dolphin, I was lucky enough to witness a kaleidoscopic view of the river bathed in the orange glow of the setting sun. My heart filled with joy, I turned homeward.

Do not miss the energy boosting Dab Sharbat at Paramount—a sweet syrupy drink made from a special variety of green coconuts, served with the white tender flesh.

Effectively blind, the endangered Gangetic dolphin is India’s National Aquatic Animal.
A unique mix of history, modern living and unending charm, Hyderabad is where the Irani chai is more of a legend than in Iran, says AROSHI HANDU
entertainment to keep them busy. With a small backpack slung over our shoulders and a cap fitted snugly on our heads, we would excitedly make our way from the gates of the school, clamber on noisily to the yellow school buses and off we went, to explore forts, museums and palaces. As a kid, those trips to Ramoji Film City were also always charged with palpable excitement. A renowned name in the showbiz of India, Ramoji Film City is an alternate universe in itself. The place is like Disneyland, but filmy. There is a significant possibility that you will spot a street that you saw on your own journey.

The regal magnetism of Hyderabad can only be experienced by immersing yourself in magnificent landmarks like Charminar and Chowmahalla Palace and forts like the impressive Golkonda Fort. The Charminar Bazaar area will have you lost in a sea of street wares and narrow lanes that seem never ending. If you find yourself truly lost in Hyderabad, the locals are very friendly and will go out of their way to help you.

When younger, I was never really interested in visiting bazaars. My mother spent what seemed like hours, going through everything but barely making a purchase at the end of it. But as an adult, I can now appreciate the charm of the city’s vibrant, age-old bazaars which makes my inner shopaholic prance about in glee at its numerous assortment of shops. If you want to do something offbeat head to Lamakaan, a progressive space for anyone with an open mind. Lamakaan is

in the year 1591 when Muhammad Quli Qutub Shah, an aesthete and a dyed-in-the-wool romantic, spots Bhagmati, a village girl on the opposite bank of the River Musi. Her lovely singing voice caused the young prince to fall head over heels for her and after a brief courtship, they got married. A master craftsman from Iran was hired to design a new city akin to the garden of Eden. Bhagmati received two gifts – Bhagnagar, the city and Hyder Mahal, her new moniker. Their love only grew, along with the city and its new improvements over the years. Palaces, mosques, markets, and hospitals were routinely added and then the people poured in as well, enamoured by the grandeur of this promising new city.

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Literally a makan dedicated to indulgent art and culture with the casualness of a regular outing with friends or colleagues, but also the seriousness of respecting people’s choice to a quiet space to read and relax. It provides scope for an open expression be it through plays, workshops, informal meetings, storytelling sessions, film screenings, book launches or chit-chats with the regulars who throng there for a nice evening. The snacks offered in the quaint little café are pocket-friendly and delicious whether it is the lightly fried samosas or a glass of cool and soothing nimbu pani. Oh, and did I mention they have free WiFi?

Hyderabad, one of the fastest growing cities in India, is a melting pot of various languages, cultures, foods and people; so it’s no wonder that the city’s ancient architecture coexists along with newer areas which are as exciting to the people visiting this city as they are to the residents. Apart from the Nizami grandeur that underpins the fabric of this city, swanky, new-age outlets like IKEA, the Swedish furniture company, is this city, swanky, new-age outlets like IKEA, the Swedish furniture company, is.

The Chowmahalla Palace is a magnificent yet understated edifice with an imposing façade of domes, arches, windows and punctiliously carved out designs that reflect the fact that it was once a seat of power of the Asaf Jahi dynasty. The complex contains elegant fountains, verdant gardens and a clock tower.

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Chennai and my life have been inseparable. The city has added different shades to my life. I met my wife here. It is the home of my maternal grandparents, who resided there most of their lifetime. During my summer vacations here, my grandfather passed on some important learnings of Sufism to me. We also celebrated the pious occasion of Varsi wherein individuals pay homage to the guru who provides them with guidance. The Varsi of the saint Shahenshah Baba Nebraj Sahib, who inspired and influenced my grandfather, was hosted during my visits. The five days of celebration, which was attended by his children and grandchildren reverberated with happiness, enthusiasm, faith, and unuttered belief. I grew so fond of the celebration that even after my grandfather left us about six years ago, I have made it a point to visit Chennai every month and spend time at the place he resided.

Additionally, we have a temple which was built by my nanaji in the early 1970s. Over the years we have nurtured it, and today it’s a magnanimous 4,500 sq ft space. Inside its robust structure are pictures and idols of almost every god worshipped in our diverse mythology. Nanaji respected cultures and traditions across the nation; hence apart from regular prayer we even conduct regional festivities through the year. The temple is named Sufi Dar, a religious home to every visitor, irrespective of their faith. The highlight of my visit there is the abhishekam and aarti of Shahenshah Baba, which happens every Saturday. It is an ethereal experience and I hope to pass on this emotion to my son one day.

Travel adds purpose and meaning to one’s life. It provides a person with the opportunity to find perspective and look at things differently. For me, any place that resonates being close to the Almighty is my go-to destination. Whether it is the heavenly Golden Temple in Amritsar, the breathtaking Ajmer Dargah, or my very own Sufi Dar in Chennai, it imbues my journey with purpose.

Although the lockdown has put a halt on our travel plans, with the resumption of travel, the first place I plan to visit is most definitely Chennai. Sometimes, I still tend to go on travel portals to check for tickets; that is how eager I am to go there. It is a big deal for someone who visits the city 15 times a year and has not been able to travel there in these past months.
TRYST WITH Divinity

A cacophony of sights and sounds, Varanasi is flanked by endless chains of ghats.

VISIT THE DASHWAMEDH GHAT TO WITNESS THE GANGA AARTI!

Saffron-clad priests in the temple, pilgrims flooding the complex and clueless travellers staggering around. The best way to catch a glimpse of this life unravelling in Varanasi is an early morning boat ride. While a majority of the ghats serve as the centre of religious ceremonies, two are used as cremation sites. Start your day at the Assi Ghat, where locals bathe before praying to Lord Shiva. Harishchandra Ghat and Manikarnika Ghat are known as the burning ghats. As the ashes and smoke engulf you, it’s a challenging sight to witness, yet a true spectacle.

Varanasi is connected by road via NH-10.
DASH OF COLOUR

A heritage colonial quarter in the heart of Panaji, Fontainhas is a window into the Portuguese legacy that is still alive.

JOIN ORGANISED TOURS FOR AS LITTLE AS ₹500 PER PERSON

Replete with colourful lanes and colonial architecture, Fontainhas in Panaji is a treasure hidden in plain sight. Also called the Latin Quarters, it is dotted with pops of colour. A heritage walk through these narrow cobbled streets will transport you back in time. One of the most interesting aspects of the houses and cottages in Fontainhas is that they are painted every year after the monsoons. Visit the St. Sebastian Chapel that contains relics from the Goan Inquisition. Fontainhas is peppered with small eateries and bakeries that serve traditional Goan fish curry and bebinca.

* Do try the baked goods at Confetaria 31 de Janeiro

ON THE TRAIL

Biking through this coastal road means pedalling by the backwaters of Kochi, its rural fishing villages, and surreal beaches.

THE IDEAL TIME TO VISIT IS NOV–FEB

Flanked by prawn hatcheries on the right and violent waves of the sea on the left, the 25-kilometre stretch from Vypin to Munambam is a biker’s paradise. It is connected to Kochi through a series of bridges called the Goshree Bridges. Take the Njarakkal route and you will find yourself amid lush green fields of paddy. The road to Munambam takes you to the northern end of the city, which is the largest fishing harbour in Kochi. Although most of the beaches en route are relatively secluded, it’s always advisable to consult the locals before hitting the waters.

* The western coast of Vypin has the longest beaches including Cherai and Puthuvype
BEST FROM Waste

The Rock Garden is an open-air exhibition, displaying sculptures made from household and industrial waste.

**THE GARDEN OPEN FROM MONDAY TO SATURDAY, 9AM TO 7PM**

The first planned city of post-independent India, Chandigarh owes its urban cityscape to the French architect Le Corbusier. From labyrinth formations to sculptures made out of scrap, the Rock Garden here is the brainchild of Nek Chand Saini. It sprawls over an area of nearly 40 acres and is marked by colourful mosaics of art pieces. The exhibition is divided into three phases, each boasting of unique installations and embellishments. A fantasy land of art and landscape, the Rock Garden is a must on the itinerary of every visitor.

» The entry fee to the garden is ₹30 for adults and ₹10 for kids.

ROCK GARDEN

In addition to nearly 5,000 statues, the Rock Garden also houses a majestic courtyard made of chiselled rocks.

» The garden stays open on all days, however the timings may differ according to the season.

UNDER THE Stars

The movie experience in Bengaluru post lockdown has been literally ‘starry’ with the introduction of a drive-in theatre

FROM ₹1,199 per CAR

Bengaluru’s first socially-distanced drive-in theatre is here and it is the perfect post-lockdown getaway. Step in, but, known for setting up open-air movie nights are the organisers of the show. Participants can enjoy the night with zero contact and following all safety protocols. The number of cars will be restricted to 17. The movies are screened at Timbre, just two minutes away from Kempegowda International Airport from 6pm–9pm. However, traffic snarl ups have happened quite a few times in the midst of the lockdown. You might have to plan your route well in advance.

» Not more than four people are permitted in a single car.

BACK ON Track

The David Scott Trail in Meghalaya is a charming hike through India’s colonial past

**THE IDEAL TIME TO HIKE THIS TRAIL IS DURING WINTERS**

This one is for those with an adventurous streak. The four-hour trek from Mawphlang to Lad Mawphlang covers a distance of 16 kilometres. Though the trek is accessible all year round, it is advisable to avoid the monsoon season as the path can be quite slippery and infested with leeches. Though the trek is accessible all year round, it is advisable to avoid the monsoon season as the path can be quite slippery and infested with leeches. The trek also offers a mammoth view of cascading waterfalls, and the gregarious Umiam River. Stop at Ka Kor Ka Shonmai or drop by the quaint little Khasi villages to listen to their alluring folk tales.

» The trail is ideal for experienced trekkers.

Also Check out Chennai’s Prarthana Beach Drive-in Theatre, Ahmedabad’s Sunset Drive-in Cinema, and Gurgaon Talkies
**52**

**CHANGTHANG**

**ON HIGHER ground**

***Eco Tourism***
Nature-centric activities in Himalayan landscapes

***Wildlife***
Kiang, brown bharal, chukar partridges, desert wheatears

***Changpas***
Nomadic pastoralists and the few suppliers of authentic cashmere wool

On her maiden visit to Ladakh, **PIA SETHI** explores the vast and enchanting Changthang Plateau.

On the arid landscape of Changthang.
Brooding Himalayan expanses leave deep imprints on my retina. I close my eyes for a brief moment and a whirl of colour, light and texture assails me. Mountains with deep veins of white snow throb above white sands punctuated by tussocks of green. A fleeting glimpse of a red hare freezes into a nondescript white rock, whilst kiang mirages shimmer indistinctly in the afternoon haze.

The eye-piercing brightness of Brobdignagian expanses leaves deep imprints on my retina. I close my eyes for a brief moment and a whirl of colour, light and texture assails me. Mountains with deep veins of white snow throb above white sands punctuated by tussocks of green. A fleeting glimpse of a red hare freezes into a nondescript white rock, whilst kiang mirages shimmer indistinctly in the afternoon haze.

Barely have I imagined a trip to Ladakh, but the expense was daunting and so the idea was perpetually shelved. Then in the summer of 2019, a chance opportunity to understand how nature-based ecotourism could be fostered in various Himalayan landscapes, dropped into my lap. Dispatching younger teammates across the well-trodden parts of the country, I selfishly reserved the ‘land of the high passes’ for myself, and my sharp-eyed colleague Yatish.

We are soon headed to the windswept, ribong green. A fleeting glimpse of a hare by; red mushrooms sprouting on a cliff and texture assails me. Grey mountains a brief moment and a whirl of colour, light and shade of emerald, and squat, mud-brick houses. Scatterings of white and cream houses. A此时的雪山异常美丽。在太阳的照耀下，雪山的轮廓显得格外清晰，白色的雪顶与深绿色的山体形成鲜明的对比。在雪山的脚下，几座小木屋静静地矗立着，与自然环境和谐共存。

The panorama is chameleonic, transforming by the minute. In this dramatic geological theatre, human beings are blips in the tumultuous upheaval of the Himalaya that brought the bottom of a sea to the top of the world, millions of years ago. Cosmic, many-tiered vanilla and red monasteries cling precariously to razor-edged cliffs, inching nearer to god. Blooming amidst the browns is yellow-gold mustard, fringed by fields a startling swirl of green and mauve, I am roused by gashes of orange and red that slash open the darkness, and how confiding they are in a Buddhist land where all life is sacred. Flocks of more brown than blue bharal and their moiling, fluffy young skitter the cliffs. Plump, dusky-pink Chukar partridges with red bills, black masks and pin-striped flanks dart in front of our car. Magnificent golden eagles glide across the blue.

In the white glare of afternoon, we visit the salt-encrusted marsh. Olive cushions of mushy grass yield way to a vast white expanse. The snow has been slow to melt on the mountains and how easy it is to spot wildlife. Edible hares pop up by the river. Distant honks have us hurtling down the steep descents, and inching across the highest passes in the world.

Imposing, weather-beaten Ladakhi with a faraway look in his desert-brown, Nubran eyes, has us hurtling down the steep descents, and inching across the highest passes in the world. The panorama is chameleonic, transforming by the minute. In this dramatic geological theatre, human beings are blips in the tumultuous upheaval of the Himalaya that brought the bottom of a sea to the top of the world, millions of years ago. Cosmic, many-tiered vanilla and red monasteries cling precariously to razor-edged cliffs, inching nearer to god. Blooming amidst the browns is yellow-gold mustard, fringed by fields a startling swirl of green and mauve, I am roused by gashes of orange and red that slash open the darkness, and how confiding they are in a Buddhist land where all life is sacred. Flocks of more brown than blue bharal and their moiling, fluffy young skitter the cliffs. Plump, dusky-pink Chukar partridges with red bills, black masks and pin-striped flanks dart in front of our car. Magnificent golden eagles glide across the blue.

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... ethereal against the blue and rose-tinted peaks. Before too long they get down to the more mundane task of foraging. They are lifers for me, as in fact are most of Ladakh’s birds. Our cameras click mechanically, hoping to record these graceful, scarlet-crowned grey birds with shiny black tail plumes, for posterity. After all, visits to Ladakh may come just once in a lifetime; mine has happened as I reluctantly step into my fifth decade. The cranes tired of our intrusive company eventually depart, majestic winged silhouettes, frozen in mountain crystal.

STAYING AT NORBOO’S IS RAVI, A SOLITARY MATHEMATICIAN WHO HAS SPENT SEVERAL YEARS WALKING AND HITCHHIKING ACROSS INDIA TO SEE BIRDS. THIS IS HIS SECOND VISIT TO LADAKH, AND HE KNOWS EACH NOOK AND CRANNY. IN HIS COMPANY, WE DISCOVER THAT THE LITTLE OWL’S FAVOURITE HAUNT IS AN ABANDONED SHANG DONG OR WOLF TRAP. THE OWL HAS A MATE TOO, AND AFTER PEAKING CURIOUSLY AT US FOR A WHILE, HE GETS ANGRY AND HISSES US AWAY. FOR ALL WE KNOW HIS NEST IS IN THE WOLF TRAP.

RAVI HUGS HIS OTTO PFISTER GUIDE ON THE BIRDS OF LADAKH, AND HIS LEATHER-BROWN FACE ANIMATES WHEN HE TALKS OF BIRDS. HE LIVES A SPARTAN LIFESTYLE, SKIPPING MEALS, EATING AND SLEEPING WHERE HE CAN, APPARENTLY UNENCUMBERED BY THE CARES OF THIS WORLD.

Tso Kar should be on every wildlifer’s list. Local NGOs are training youngsters on bird and butterfly guiding. This will generate much needed revenue for young Changpas, many of whom are migrating to Leh. I meet one of their former trainees, a bright, young girl, who raises mushrooms, when she isn’t guiding tourists across Ladakh. I marvel at the independence of Ladakhi women, some of whom are successfully running trekking companies. A place of genuine equality with gender-neutral names. Where a Tsewang could be male…or female. But training the Changpa of Tso Kar is proving difficult. These are the only nomads of Ladakh who choose not to farm, depending solely on pashmina.
The next morning, we drop Ravi by the side of the road as he waits for a passing vehicle to take him to his next birding destination. I watch him as he walks away, unfettered as any Changpa nomad, and I envy him for his conviction. I am an ecologist, but my ecological footprint lies heavy on the land, and on my heart.

The journey to Tsomoriri, a relict lake of the ice age, takes us over rocky, boulder-strewn terrain via SkyAngchu Thang, the highest plateau in the world. Despite a throbbing migraine that has plagued me since the ascent from Delhi, I cannot take my eyes off the scenery and wildlife. A red-breasted robin accentor offers easy views. Desert wheatears and red and black redstarts are everywhere. Tiny, violet flowers sprout in little clumps, typical of desert flora, while two species of hare—the cape and woolly—stare at me, unfazed. To them humans are harmless curiosities.

We stop to share water with groups of Changpa, under the surly gaze of shaggy dogs; Rigzin interpreting for us. The geographies of their Changpa lives are etched into kindly, saddlebag-toned faces, each line and furrow telling of days spent under the merciless sun in this desolate land. Bleating, adorable, fluffy kid goats and lambs surround us, which the Changpa gently shoo away—an interlocking bond between human and animal, based on mutual trust and dependence. I remember a scene from The Shepherdess of the Glaciers, where the Changpa filmmaker Stanzin Dorji’s sister says she would gladly sacrifice her life for one of her animals. Korzok, nestled close to the sky-blue waters of Tsomoriri, is an exceedingly picturesque warren of narrow lanes flanked by mudbrick Ladakhi houses, with fringing wooden eaves. Streamers of Buddhist prayer flags festoon the houses, creating fluttering aerial arteries of messages to the gods. Looming over, and apparently dead ending the village lanes, is a mountain peak, deeply veined with snow. A gilt-beribboned monastery standing spectator to this idyllic scene for more than four hundred years is the site of the famous Korzok Gustor. I find I am charmed by this hamlet where barley grows on the world’s highest farms.

We stay at the Goose, a homestay, snug near the bukhar in the kitchen, where we chat with the other guests, a young Indonesian girl riding pillion across the Changthang, and a retired Sikh who backpacks across the world with his wife. The tourist demographic to Ladakh has changed over the years, from foreign tourists to Indian ones. The recent proliferation of large hotels and guesthouses replacing the eponymously named, wildlife homestays, caters to the new breed of tourists who want air-conditioned rooms with attached bathrooms, running water and flush toilets. This in a cold desert where water is precious! Dorjee, who recently converted the ibex homestay to a guesthouse and owns another new hotel, is unapologetic. “I was tired of being told my homestay is dirty, and with few amenities,” he says. “It hurt. Besides, there are no clear guidelines, on what a homestay really is, how many rooms are allowed.”

The Indonesian girl and I buy striped yak-hair socks from our host. The historic Hanle (Aanle) along the ancient Tibet-Ladakh trade route beckons us with whispers...
of romance, history and intrigue. And bloodshed, I remind myself as we pass miles of military bunkers semi-camouflaged in the rocks—just 20 kilometers from the Line of Actual Control with China.

The night skylines of Hanle are amongst the clearest in the world, and I dream of lying under the stars gazing at the powdery art of the Milky Way. Yatish, however, is agog with anticipation at the thought of spotting an elusive, near-threatened Pallas’s cat, a comic, grumpy, flat-browed, wide-jowled, furry creature with yellow, traffic-signal eyes and a bushy tail. So much so, that every furry creature with yellow, traffic-signal eyes and a bushy tail unfurling. He picks up cloth rags, bouncing them in the air like any carefree canine pup, oblivious to our presence. And our joy spills over. But he is a lone fox, his siblings killed by feral dogs.

As a dog mom to more than 40 rescues, it is painful to hear of the rampages of the dogs of Ladakh, spurred by lax garbage management, and sheltered by lonely defence personnel and animal-loving Buddhist folk. Mass sterilisations are impossible because of the topography, and garbage management appears to be the only solution since culling is against the law. Meanwhile, I see pictures of vicious dog kills, packs of dogs indiscriminately hunting crane young, blue sheep, ibex, red fox, et al, endangering Changthang’s precious wildlife, and possibly diluting the gene pool of Tibetan wolves with whom they breed. As we head back to the homestay, I harden my heart to a blonde, furry puppy playing just as unconcernedly as the fox kit. I remind myself he might well grow into a vicious fox killer one day.

We never do get to see the Pallas’s cat. Perhaps Yatish’s lucky mascots have deserted him on the Hanle leg of our journey. But our eyes are moist as we leave deserted him on the Hanle leg of our journey. But our eyes are moist as we leave. For it is a place like nowhere else on earth. But as I cross the world’s second-highest pass Chang La, I know that the wildlife yet to be seen, and the highest mountain pass yet to be crossed, will bring me back to this land of snows.

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The thundering Indus, a river I associate with the birthing of human civilisations, appears tame today, cordially accompanying us on our journey, as it twirls through the fields, yelling “Pallas!”

Large herds of Tibetan wild asses gallop across the floodplains, as Yatish and I carry out a car transect of kiang numbers. They turn out to be Yatish’s lucky mascots. All his wishes are fulfilled on days when they wander into view.

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Restaurants in South Delhi will soon get open-air dining spaces with increased seating capacity.

Sun-drenched patios, breezy evenings and skyline views, South Delhites can soon dine amid quaint European vibes while basking in the sun or counting the stars as authorities are gearing up to introduce open-air dining spaces in the city. The South Delhi Municipal Corporation has recognised a few restaurants and eateries that will be able to utilise their open space to expand operations. However, expecting a scene straight out of *La La Land* would be too far-fetched a dream, as the rule handed out to owners states that footpaths and walkways cannot be used to seat customers. The setup will only be possible for those restros and cafes where private open areas or terraces are already available.

The ball is in motion and the move is certain to make South Delhi a mecca for foodies across town.

*The average restaurant here could seat up to 50 diners*
A ninja in the kitchen, Chef Vikram Khatri and his team at Guppy are back on the field, pushing the culinary boundaries with their bold flavours and cutting-edge techniques.

» How did your tryst with Japanese food begin?

I started my career in 1999 with Sakura, the Japanese fine-dining restaurant at The Metropolitan Hotel. We had chefs from different backgrounds, who’d bring their own style to the table. So, I got the opportunity to catch a glimpse of different culinary influences.

» One lesson that has stuck with you from your time at Sakura and the Ocean Room?

Always make sure that your base is strong. And then you can call your food fusion or confusion, but the bottom line is you should know what you’re doing.

» Any advice for young chefs who would like to foray into Japanese cuisine?

Number one would be flavours. Number two would be how to handle ingredients. All the cuisines are better learnt when you actually start doing it. They must give themselves enough time in the kitchen. You can’t just google a recipe and learn sushi rolling or tempura making.

» What does your ideal ramen bowl look like?

Perfect al dente noodles. No over the top bullshit. Just clear broth. It has to have flavour to it. Little bit of toppings like slightly blanched or textured vegetables, but one shouldn’t go overboard with it. During my last trip to Tokyo, nearly three years ago, I had ramen every single day. They have so many varieties and each ramen was different and divine.

» How is the restaurant adapting to the new normal?

All the cuisines are better learnt when you actually start doing it. They must give themselves enough time in the kitchen. You can’t just google a recipe and learn sushi rolling or tempura making.

» What is your go-to comfort food?

I love my njama chawal and bhindi. I’m happy with home-cooked food. I’m not fussy anymore. And of course, Asian and Thai food. If I had to pick one dish then it would be the humble dal chawal.

—ROSHTYI SUBRAMANIAN

CHIEF RECOMMENDS

WHAT NOT TO MISS WHEN DINING AT GUPPY BY AI

Miso Soup

A traditional Japanese soup made primarily of miso paste, dashi and additional ingredients like vegetables, seaweed and tofu. It is enriched with umami from bonito flakes and kelp.

Pork Belly

Braised for six hours, it’s crisp on the outside and succulent inside. The signature pork belly at Guppy is glazed with soy honey and miso mustard sauce.

The Chicken Paiten Ramen is made delicately with chicken bones, and has a rich base.

Under The Neem

Top-notch cosmopolitan fare and nutritious beverages only add to the charm of the British-styled space.

• Karma Chalet at Karma Lakelands, Sector 80, Gurugram, Haryana
• 12.30pm-7pm for non-residents & 9.30am-10pm for residents
• Potato rösti with thyme mushrooms
For The Love Of Scotch

Known among whisky lovers as one of the premium blends, Johnnie Walker is all set for a makeover. The brand with a legacy of over 200 years will release the famed scotch whisky in what's being billed as 'the world’s first 100% paper-based spirit bottle'. The bottle will be recyclable and plastic-free. The initiative is a collaboration between Diageo, and Pulpex Limited, a sustainable packaging technology company.

Coca-Cola, Absolut and L’Oreal are also designing environment-friendly packaging.

The Dabba Solution

For those dwelling under a rock, Zogam Bamboo Works, a Manipur-based start-up has created a plastic-free tiffin carrier and netizens can’t contain their excitement. Made entirely out of bamboo shoots, this eco-friendly alternative has several compartments, each secured with placeholders to prevent leakage. Currently, there are two varieties available—one to store dry ingredients and the other for storing gravies.

The outlook traveller

What’s hot in the food world?
FROM STREET FOOD TO GOURMET MEALS. TRY IT ALL!

Smoked Pork With Akhuni

A part from garnering cinematic interest, Nagaland’s most savoured ingredient, akhuni has had the food circuit buzzing with excitement. Notably, the Sema tribe in the southern part of the state is credited for the origins of the dish. An integral part of many tribal communities, akhuni or fermented soybean is known for its distinctive flavour and smell. Boiled fermented, packed in banana leaves and smoked over the kitchen fire for several days, the process lends a strong umami flavour to the beans. As much an ingredient, akhuni also doubles as a condiment and is used to make pickles, chutneys and curries. Best paired with smoked pork, it’s often used along with vegetables to prepare a stew.

Pinch Of Qmin

Taj Hotels is the latest in the hospitality industry to introduce food delivery service. After a successful stint in Mumbai, Qmin recently made its grand debut in Delhi. Guests can now order from their eight iconic restaurants. Plans are underway to expand the services to Bengaluru, Chennai and Kolkata. The Qmin mobile was also recently unveiled in Mumbai followed by the Qmin Shop, offering epicurean specialists and authentic artisanal brands. A loyalty program will also be launched in September to bring the magic of Taj cuisine to the homes of its patrons.

Akhuni Paste

The flavour of akhuni has a striking resemblance to Japanese miso. Pressure cook dried soybean seeds and wrap them in banana leaves. Place above the fireplace and let the packages ferment for four days. Pour this smoked soybean slightly. Wrap it in fresh banana leaves again and leave it for two more days. The finished soybean cake or akhuni can be added to several dishes to enhance the flavour.

Sadhna Hazong’s Recipe For Naga-Style Smoked Pork With Akhuni

Add 2 tbsp of akhuni paste, 12 red chillies and 3 cups of water to a pan
Stir and let it boil on medium flame
Uncover the pan after 10 minutes and scoop out the red chillies
Pour it into a paste and add it back to the pan along with 500 gms of smoked pork
In the absence of a fireplace, soybean cakes can be fermented under the sun.
Add salt and give it a stir
Cover the pan again and let it cook for 30 minutes
Keep stirring it continually
Separately, grind 2 inches of ginger and 10-12 garlic pods into a fine paste
Add it to the pork and let it cook for some more time
Once the gravy thickens, serve it over hot steamed rice

Photograph: Dzuko Tribal Kitchen
Social distancing comes easy at the well-spaced out cottages of Atali Ganga, an ‘activotel’ above Rishikesh

RISHIKESH, UTTARAKHAND

Well before I arrived at Atali Ganga, its owner, Vaibhav Kala, a true-blue Garhwali boy, sent me an email outlining a rigorous sanitisation plan and other measures in place to keep guests safe and corona-free. Also, there were detailed instructions on how to navigate the maze that is the Uttarakhand COVID E-Pass regime. Applying for the e-pass—currently essential for travel into the hill state—is no mean task. The e-mail said: “We will arrange a temperature check, and disinfecting of luggage upon arrival, and have sanitised toilets ready for use on arrival. Our common areas at the lobby, conference, café, poolside, evening sit-out, etc are planned to keep physical distancing in mind. Unless you are in each other’s bubble or know each other’s travel/quarantine history, it’s best practice to maintain that. We have hand sanitising available at all common areas, these are hands free so please use them before opening doors.” And so on...

While it signalled the new normal, it was also reassuring. Vaibhav—who has also run Aquaterra Adventures since 1995, leading trekking and rafting holidays across India as well as some outstanding outbound trips—has approached the problem logically and figured out workable solutions. Right from the moment we drove into the property, we could see it wasn’t mere lip service. There was a non-touch thermal scanner in the lobby, as well as an automatic sanitiser dispenser. We were served welcome drinks in glasses that were UV-sanitised under our noses. Once we were adjudged asymptomatic, we went off to our rooms.

This was my first thought: Atali Ganga is built for social distancing. The accommodation is all in cottages, set at different levels and well apart.
The interiors are quietly stylish, and I enjoyed my nice sitout, from where I saw a barking deer steal up to the mango tree early in the morning.

Under current rules, unless you have a COVID-19 negative test report (RT-PCR), Uttarakhand won’t allow you to head out of your hotel before a week. Not a problem at Atali Ganga, where there’s much to do and lots of elbow room. The property, named after the local village, was conceived as an activity-oriented space, and there’s a climbing wall as well as a large activity area towards the top complete with a giant swing. But it’s also great for unwinding and doing nothing at all. Workcations too (the Wi-Fi is great in the public areas and, if you ask nicely, they’ll lend you their dongle for the night). Currently, housekeeping is on request, and the sumptuous buffet meals in the restaurant are ladled out only by staff in gloves and face shields.

Some things, thankfully, the pandemic hasn’t changed. We are social creatures after all. In the evenings, there were engrossing conversations under the stars. And, to the tinkling of glasses, new friendships were forged.

There was a stunning view of the Ganga from the property and we gazed wistfully at the river. Wistfully enough for the village pradhan of Atali to allow us to go down to the river one morning, where we picnicked on the pristine white sands (of course, leaving them in the same state) and bravely stood in the water and shivered. Even the hike down to the river, through pristine forest and past a waterfall, was divine. And we tried our best to stay six feet apart. It was a lovely way to round off a long weekend after a long, long time.

-Amit Dixit
Remote Workcation

Ibis introduces cost-efficient and flexible co-working spaces

Ibis hotels are providing millennial-focused, alternative, remote working spaces with Work@Ibis. Ensuring high-speed internet connectivity, office essentials, a beverage station, and customised F&B offerings, the service features ready-to-move-in workspaces. Tailored to meet the needs of businesses of all sizes, they are also sanitised in adherence to the government norms.

- Additional access to hotel’s restaurants, bars and cafés will also be permitted
- ibis.com

SAFETY FIRST

Hilton launches cleanliness programme

To provide a safe experience for meetings and events, Hilton has announced EventReady with CleanStay. The program will expand on the existing sanitisation standards, address touchpoints, seal rooms for guests and meetings, and an EventReady room checklist. Regardless of the size or scale of the meeting, Hilton will also have flexible pricing and space options.

- Over 6,100 properties in 118 countries and territories
- hilton.com

Meet the General Manager

JW Marriott Juhu’s Sharad Puri

A visionary and an exemplary leader, Sharad Puri began his career with the Oberoi School of Learning and Development in 1993, as a Management Trainee. With his first job as an Inspirational Leader in 1996, he continues to retain his forte at JW Marriott, Juhu, Mumbai as the General Manager, since October 2017.

Puri’s experience and expertise is spread over 22 years of working with luxury hotels. Not only a critical thinker but also a multitasker, Puri knows how to grab an opportunity by the horns and drive it towards profitability. With a sturdy grip on finance and budgeting, his disciplined nature speaks volumes of his knowledge. Puri, along with his team, shares a vision of commitment towards a warm and personalised guest experience and intermingles with clients, suppliers and competitors tenaciously.

- Rupali Dean

Mountain Views

The property is offering a workstation in the Himalaya

Beating the work blues, The Grand Dragon Ladakh is offering a workstation at the roof of the world. The property has a premiere heritage room for INR 9,900 per night for a minimum booking of ten nights. The package includes airport transfers, meals, two bonfire evenings with snacks, laundry services, WiFi facilities and a momo making class. The safety protocols at the property are also aligned with the WHO, MoT and UT Ladakh guidelines. As a prerequisite, a negative COVID-19 test, done 48 hours prior to arrival, is necessary.

- The offer is valid from August 1, 2020
- thegranddragonladakh.com

LADAKH

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Shard Puri, General Manager JW Marriott Juhu

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The Naga Kham, or log drum, is carved out of an entire tree trunk, and has a head, body and tail. Legend has it, the village chief has a dream about the location of the new Kham when it’s time to retire the old one. The villagers then find this location and the preparations begin. The making of a new Kham is a jolly affair with singing and drinks. This photograph shows the Aoling festival, celebrating the end of the harvest season.
**The Songlines**

Bruce Chatwin stands in a long line of eccentric who can combine exploration, scholarship, intelligence, and a sense of how powerful prose can be. Capable of taking his readers to uncharted territories, Chatwin was always the best at evocation. While in Patagonia established him as a travel writer, it was The Songlines that immortalised him. The bestseller responsible for his posthumous celebrity, sets out to explore the essence of Central Australia and the nomadic culture of the Aboriginals. In his quest for the songlines, the labyrinth of intricate invisible pathways that criss-cross the continent and are often recorded in traditional songs, Chatwin traces a great deal about the Aboriginal life and reflects on how complex and distinct it is from his own, it engages the whole range of his passions—his obsession with travel, his love for the nomadic life, and his horror at the exploitative nature of the modern world. Considered his bravest work, it’s the closest we as readers have come to penetrating his mind. Woeful curiosity have remained the guiding forces behind most of his travels. Furthermore, his own desire to get displaced from his British lifestyle was one of the reasons that made him cut off. Local people were the ones that understood the Aboriginal life, the more we read, the more we realise that the written word cannot do justice to this world. And yet we continue with pleasure and fascination, learning how little we know.

—UPASYA BHOWAL

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**Serenity: Seclusion and Secrets**

**I F YOU ARE THE kind of traveller who has a penchant for the remote and the mysterious, this book by Sarah Baxter might just be the key to your off-the-map explorations. From forgotten cities to remote treks, the author covers some of the world’s hidden gems that have successfully managed to conceal themselves from the clamor of everyday travellers.**

“The blue waves and soft-blond sand of the Bay of Skaiil sneak almost right up to the ancient stones of Skara Brae,” writes Baxter as she talks about this small village in Scotland. Her insightful and evocative writing, coupled with delightful hand-drawn illustrations by Amy Grimes makes the places come alive in the minds of the reader. Perhaps what helps this book surpass its competing travel guides is the innate human stories that lie at the heart of each destination. By bringing to life the people living there, Baxter successfully recreates the magic of the place in the mindscape. With a wide variety of locations ranging from England to Guatemala, Hidden Places captures Sarah Baxter’s poignant storytelling at its best. It is a gateway to the Mayan Underworld or a prehistoric village, what is most striking about this book is the author’s creative expression of her emotional connect and involvement with each place. Underwater monuments, huge sand dunes, and tales from across cultures, this work goes much beyond the general scope of travel journalism and instead offers a rare glimpse into the unexplored alleys of a traveller’s mind. Definitely one of the best in the inspired Traveller’s Guide series, if you are looking for a bewitching escape into the secret enclaves of this world, you can be rest assured that this book will not disappoint. Indeed, reading through it is an adventure in itself and the book is a treasure trove of places, which are “...out of time, where ingress is on foot, the rhythm is slow, wildlife is protected and man has made only the most minimal mark.”

—GURU RAMDEV

**Keoladeo National Park, Bharatpur: Birds in Paradise**

**I WAS 10 AND STUDYING in Pune when I decided I wanted to intern with WWF-India. Our college required us to do at least three internships in the development sector before dipping our toes in the industry. As budding journalists and filmmakers, this development sector training was the righteous muses to all of our student projects over the next couple of years in college.**

Bright-eyed and out to save the tigers, I joined the Delhi office of WWF-India as an intern under the species and habitats department. I was working on revamping the tiger conservation program, along with multiple projects on the side. I hadn’t been there two weeks when during lunch one afternoon, my department head told me of a number of instances where WWF volunteers and forest rangers were abducted, attacked, or worse. According to a 2018 Business Standard report, India has become one of the deadliest countries in the world for forest rangers. What goes into running and maintaining a National Park? What are the challenges forest rangers face? How does one protect vulnerable wildlife while being vulnerable themselves?

Sunayan Sharma’s Birds in Paradise takes a deep dive into all of these questions with respect to the famous Uenoos World Heritage Site, Keoladeo National Park, Bharatpur. Formerly known as the Keoladeo Ghana Bird Sanctuary Bharatpur, Keoladeo supports a unique and fragile ecosystem. Often dubbed a birders paradise, the national park is home to a gamut of resident and migratory birds in all shapes, sizes and colours. But birds isn’t its only offerings. There is an abundance of fish, pythons, butterflies, turtles, cranes, jacanas and even egrets.

Right off the bat, Sharma sets the tone of the book by dedicating it to Mahalaxmi Surajmal Jat, the king of Bharatpur State who is credited with the creation of Keoladeo. There’s a helpful map of the national park at the start of the book to aid the readers get their footing around the wetlands as Sharma takes you into the park.

For the uninitiated, the author takes you through the history of the national park, along with his role as Research Officer, and later Director. The park’s fragile ecosystem depended on the water supply from the nearby Ajan Dam, but this water was hot commodity and the farmers around Keoladeo needed it for their crops. While the farmers held precious votes, the animals not so much.

Eventually, the height of the Panchamla Dam was raised, which dried out the water supply to the Ajan Dam by the Gambhir River. This led to severe water shortage in Keoladeo, and consequently, a massive infestation of the perennial weed, Prosopis juliflora, which overwhelmed the park, its lakes, and grasslands. Birds in Paradise documents the struggles to bring water back into the park, the legends and folklore surrounding it, outlines the multifaceted ecology of the wetlands, and captures animal behaviour in the wild. Sharma writes about the daily disasters a forest officer has to deal with, and how they managed to clear the park of Prosopis. This book isn’t just meant for birders or wildlife enthusiasts. It also serves as an important tool to encourage future conservationists by giving them a glimpse into one of India’s most diverse and waning habitats and ecosystems. It’s also the perfect companion for a wild adventure.

—LABANYA MAITRA
Janaki Lenin brings us into the wild with her latest natural page-turner

How has the lockdown been treating you?

My family and I are lucky to live in the middle of nowhere, on a farm adjoining a forest. My regular way of life is one of self-quarantine. So the lockdown wasn’t radically different although it required a few adjustments. The only fear was that my elderly father shouldn’t come down with any medical issues that required seeing a doctor or visiting a hospital. But on the plus side, the lack of traffic noise was wonderful, and we heard the dawn chorus of birdsong in full stereophonic glory.

What is your new book all about?

Every Creature Has A Story is about some of the most amazing, bizarre, and charming things that animals do, whether it be navigating by smell, showing compassion to others, or pretending to be dead rather than have sex. We’ve seen viral videos of the antics of dogs and cats splashed all over the internet. But members of entire species out in the wild are doing crazy stuff that deserves to be in the spotlight, and I hope the book will bring these stories to life.

You’re privy to a lot of weird animal facts. Your Top 3?

This is a tough one but I’ll do my best (not to name a few).

1. Land snails use their shells to kill parasites.
2. Darwin’s bark spiders practice oral sex.
3. Palm cockatoos use tools to make music.

Will the COVID-19 pandemic teach us to be more respectful and considerate towards the animal kingdom?

Many have already commented that the pandemic is the powerful destructive face of nature showing what happens when humans aren’t considerate to the animal kingdom. But it also created the opportunity for folks to stay at home and hear the dawn chorus of birdsong, and then to battle the pesky jetlags.

What writers inspire you?

Franklin Russell (Watchers at the Pond), Diane Ackerman (The Moon by Whale Light), Bill Bryson (In a Sunburned Country), E.H. Aitken (In a Sunburned Country), and has six compartments for carrying them. Safety is the one-stop solution to battle the pesky jetlags.

GEARBOX August Picks

Nature’s Bounty Sleep Gummies

The one-stop solution to all your sleepless nights is here. One fruity, delicious gummy with 3mg of Melatonin and 200mg of L-Theanine is all you need to battle the pesky jetlags.

Mantra Herbal

All natural, organic skincare deeply rooted in Ayurveda, Mantra’s Anantam range brings the spa to your home with serums, gels, and creams for ageless skin.

Lewis N. Clark

Travel Door Alarm

Fits this nifty little alarm through the door of your college dorm, hotel, or hostel, and enjoy worry-free sleep in all your travels. It comes ready to use with two lithium button cell batteries.

The Wield UV-C Pocket Steriliser

Pocket-sized and lightweight, this UV-C steriliser can kill 99.9 per cent of germs in both everyday and hard-to-reach surfaces like phones, laptops and other touchpoints.

Modoker Vintage Laptop Backpack

A vintage look with modern amenities, this bag comes fully equipped with a USB-charging port. It can fit a 15.6-inch laptop and has six compartments for everything you’ll need.

ASOBU Pill Bottle

- 20 ounce water bottle
- 100 per cent BPA free
- dishwasher safe
- holds 21 pills
- spill proof
- Available in five vibrant colours like black, teal, red, pink and yellow from $12.99 - asobubottle.com
The crisis brought in by the COVID-19 pandemic was followed by relief packages, e-passes and coupons issued by the government to facilitate the movement of essential goods and people. In such situations, zones where people cooperate with each other fare better. Lessons can be found not too far in history. The Gosaba experiment and currency is one of such.

The majestic wilderness of the Sundarbans brings forth the racy imagery of dense mangroves filled with man-eating tigers, crocodiles, dacoits in boats and honey collectors, and more recently a major hub of eco-tourism. Yet, unknown to many travellers, Gosaba, a village in the Canning district here, remained unscathed during the 1943 Bengal famine due to a unique experiment by a Scotsman, Sir Daniel Mackinnon Hamilton (1859–1939) and his Hamilton currency notes. Considering the famine affected 60 million people, with almost 3 million deaths, this was a marvellous achievement. A philanthropist at heart, this Scottish businessman purchased 10,000 acres of land from the British Government in the Sundarbans, with the deltaic village of Gosaba being the primary settlement. Hamilton developed Gosaba as a model rural co-operative economy. In 1918 he introduced a Consumer’s Co-operative Society which promoted free schools and dispensaries and finally came up with the Gosaba Central Co-operative Bank in 1924, with his own R1 currency notes signed by himself. This removed unscrupulous middlemen and the villagers received their fair share of the farm produce, which was safely stored in the Co-operative Bhundar. The co-operative model drew many admirers, including Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore. In 1932, Hamilton received Tagore at his house built on stilts, which till today attracts the few tourists who know about it. Mahatma Gandhi on his invitation sent his secretary Madhav Desai to observe this social experiment. The Hamilton note mentions on its face: “Sir Daniel Mackinnon Hamilton promises to pay the Bearer, on demand, at the Co-operative Bhundar, in exchange for value received, One Rupee’s worth of rice, cloth, oil or other goods.” The note is passionately sought by collectors because of its rarity. The experiment with notes, which covered 12,000 people across 25 villages, ended within a few years of its introduction, but the granaries and Co-operative Bhundar thrived. During the famine, these storehouses supplied thousands of residents of Gosaba and most of the villages in the Sundarbans a fair share of ration and essentials. Throughout history, administrations have issued emergency tokens and money to enable relief for the needy. Take the case of the 1873-74 Bihar famine caused by droughts. The then British Government imported rice from Burma for distribution in their relief effort. But monitoring and ensuring equitable distribution proved to be a challenge, met by the introduction of the Famine Grain Token which could only be used to procure the essential grains. Since most of the tokens were redeemed and also used for a very short period of time, they are very rare. Even rarer are the Relief Seer tokens of the South Indian Famine of 1876. Today, contingency plans continue to exist in the form of tokens, food stamps and market coupons, and physical forms of these artefacts of crises will be sought by researchers and collectors alike as a reminder of the fight for survival out of the COVID-19 calamity.

—Aranya Dutta Choudhury
It was a time of great unrest. The US had entered World War II, Japan had moved into Burma, and the Allied Forces were well underway building the Ledo Road. The gods of war were doing what they did best. It was during this time that Clyde Waddell, a 20-something photographer with the Houston Chronicle, found himself in Southeast Asia, serving as ‘personal press photographer’ to Lord Mountbatten. Around 1943, Waddell started photographing Calcutta. And as the city is known to do, it captured his heart. Waddell’s photographs showed the sordidness in this enigmatic city caught in the brief calm between the Bengal Famine and the Partition. “Indians are the bravest commuters in the world,” Waddell described this photograph. “They hang from every handhold. The two shown here, however, are busy climbing a local bus before it fills. Ancient double-decker buses sway and clank under the strain of double overloads and trams make packed New York subways seem comfortable by comparison.”

—LABANYA MAITRA

Calcutta
1945

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY: CLYDE WADDELL/UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA
Paanion ke Dhaaro se,

Raste Pahaado se

Aaja re Duniya

Bulave Hardum

Hain Taiyaar Hum!