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and the

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May 2018 A high-end monthly magazine



**Rise of the** Indian Backpackers

Of Kumarakom and Toddy

Helping the Himalayas

**Picturesque Handers** Paradise on Earth



May 2018

Hiking is a bit like life: The journey only requires you to put one foot in front of the other...again and again and again. And if you allow yourself the opportunity to be present throughout the entirety of the trek, you will witness beauty every step of the way, not just at the summit -Unknown How impressive is this! Embarking upon a trek to discover the beauty of that place is such an ideal way to get in touch with the nature. As you start trekking, the hills covered with greenery lure you to go further to catch up with the breathtaking view from the summit that makes you feel like you're the Gulliver of the Lilliput town called the world.

Summer and trekking to hill station is a beautiful combination. You get to say bye to the urban Sun, which is way more aggressive. The cool breeze at the height is pure magic. And the bonus point for those looking for family outing is - there is a summer vacation for kids. Are you wondering which place to go for? Here we present the details of Chopta-Tungnath-Chandrashila trek that are both thrilling and adventurous.

If you're not so much on adventurous side, we have a list of destinations - from beaches to wildlife parks, some good places to take kids in the summer break. And if comfort of the home is what holding you back from travelling, just leaf through the story of Indian backpackers and their exciting journeys that are sure to fuel the desire of exploring new destinations.

Read on!

May 2018

Editor Paraskumar M. Patel

**Editorial Team** Drumil Patel Prolina Barada Priyanka Desai

**Design Team** Mahesh Patel Yagnesh Bhavsar Vipul Gadhavi

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## Far Far Away

Picturesque Flanders: Paradise on Earth ...pg 30



School vacations are the time when you start looking for trips that are both educational and enjoyable for kids. We look at some of the must-visit trips you should take with your family this vacation.

> Peacock at Pavana Dam Park

onavala!

Most easily accessible hill stations from Mumbai, Lonavala and Khandala are a pair of hill stations about 2,041 ft above sea level in the Sahyadri ranges. There are many lakes, dams, waterfalls, scenic viewpoints and historic forts. Why go with kids Lonavala is a fun place for the entire family with many parks and activities. It makes a base to visit the Karla and Bhaja Caves, the fine works of architecture.



## ADLABS IMAGICA

This 130-acre theme park can be visited on

the way from Mumbai to Lonavala. It has roller coasters and other rides, a snow park, a waterpark and facilities to stay and eat.

## WAX MUSEUM

This museum has a collection of wax sculptures of famous people exhibited in lifelike poses. The museum also has a number of shows for children.

## KARLA CAVE

An architectural masterpiece, Karla Cave is one of the earliest of the large Chaitya Caves built around 80BC. With a huge vaulted hall, the cave has magnificent Buddhist sculpture.

## **BHAJA CAVES**

These ancient caves have a green and tranquil location.



Panorama of tiger point in lonavala

Chaitya arches, Karla Caves





ahabaleshwar

Mahabaleshwar is one of the premier hill stations of Maharashtra. With evergreen forests, a lake and great mountain views, this is deservedly one of the most popular holiday destinations in western India.

### Vena Lake Elephant Point





Pratapgarh





apgarh A scenic view of mountains and river

Why go with kids Children will enjoy Mahabaleshwar.

which has many activities like boating and horse riding. Strawberries and other fruits with cream or ice-cream are among the top attractions for kids.



## **BRITISH BUILDINGS**

Mahableshwar has many colonial buildings

like impressive Government House on Mount Malcolm, the Anglican Christchurch behind the Makharia Garden, the Holy Cross Church where services are still held and the Mahableshwar Club.

## **OLD MAHABLESHWAR**

Outside the British hill station -Mahabaleshwar is a pre-colonial village with historic temples built from local stone, one of them with a natural lingam. Behind the medieval Krishnabai Temple is a tank built in the 13th century by Yadav dynastic ruler Singhan. This tank is the source of one of the streams that forms the Krishna River. Take a taxi tour of Arthur's Seat, Wilson Point, Elphinstone Point, Kate's Point and other viewpoints along the plateau that offer panoramic views of the rivers, dams and forested slopes around the town.

## PRATAPGARH

Built by Shivaji in 1656, the fort of Pratapgarh is famous as his meeting place with Afzal Khan. It offers a spectacular view.

## PANCHGANI

The twin hill station to Mahabaleshwar, Panchgani has some pretty British period houses. It is popular for paragliding.

## Balasinor

The town of Balasinor in Gujarat was ruled by the Babi Nawabs. It has become famous because of the dinosaur park located at Raioli outside the town.



DINOSAUR FOSSIL PARK

This park at Raioli contains the area, where a large number of dinosaur fossils and fossilized eggs were found. Nearby is an interpretation centre with dinosaur models and information about prehistoric fauna.



Why go

many parks and

gardens, including one

of India's best zoologi-

with kids

cal parks.

This

city has



Why go The dinosaur with kids site of Raioli makes it a good educational destination.



Mysore, now renamed Mysuru, was one of India's three largest princely states. It is famous for its grand palaces and other royal heritage buildings.



Mysuru Palace





Sri Chamarajendra Zoological Gardens



Rail Museum

Must See

**MUSEUMS OF BENGALURU (BANGALORE)** India's technology capital, Bangalore has the Visvesvaraya

Industrial and Technological Museum, which offers children an insight into various aspects of science and technology. The HL Aerospace Museum and Heritage Centre is another wonderful museum with interesting aircraft models.

## **MYSURU PALACE**

One of the grandest palaces in India, it is worth visiting to see the superb sculptures, carved doors, paintings and artifacts.

## SRI CHAMARAJENDRA ZOOLOGICAL GARDENS

A 157-acre zoo is one of the most popular zoological parks in India with giraffe, zebra, cheetah, white rhinoceros, baboon and anaconda among its many animals.

## RAIL MUSEUM

This museum has an interesting collection of engines and locomotives and also the beautiful saloons of the Maharaja.



1111



Kovalam

Kovalam is one of Kerala's top tourist destinations famous for its beaches, hotels, resorts and restaurants.

Why go 🗇 Kovalam is a with kids good place for children to play on the beaches. Combine a visit with an educational tour of the museums of Thiruvanthapuram.



**KERALA SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY MUSEUM** This museum in

Thiruvananthapuram has galleries dedicated to electrical, electronics, mechanical, automobile and bio-medical engineering, popular science, solar energy, mathematics, computer science and space science. It also has the Priyadarshini Planetarium and facilities for night sky observation with a fully automatic telescope.

## NAPIER MUSEUM

Local fishermen at Kovalam coast

An architecturally interesting museum with interiors worth seeing, it has a good collection of art, handicrafts and historical artifacts.

This attractive museum show cases the history, art and architecture of Kerala.

EMALIGA PALACE MUSEUM This museum has a good collection of costumes and

HOLIDAY WITH KIDS

Karwar

Karwar is situated between Sahyadri ever green forest in east, the beautiful Kali River to the north and the Arabian Sea to its west. The Rabindranath Tagore Beach, Binaga Beach, Devbagh Beach, Karwar Beach, Kurumgad island, Majali Beach and Tilmatti Beach are some of the places along the Karwar coast. The hills nearby have waterfalls and scenic points.





## Why g<mark>o</mark> ith kids

**with kids** warship museum. Apart from being an educational destination, it is good for beach activities, water sports and dolphin spotting. Karwar is just a short drive from Goa.

Karwar should be visited for its





## NAVAL AVIATION MUSEUM, GOA

Located near the Goa Airport, this museum has 13 aircrafts that served the Indian Navy. The museum has indoor rooms with military weapons that are attached to submarines and ships; uniforms worn by the members of the Indian air and naval forces over the years, rare and vintage photographs, documents that show several important periods in Naval Aviation History, massive replicas of the INS Vikrant and INS Viraat and a variety of bombs, torpedoes, sensors and cannons used by the Indian Navy.

## WARSHIP MUSEUM, KARWAR

INS Chapal (K94) was a Chamak class missile boat of the Indian Navy that is now a museum ship on Rabindranath Tagore Beach.





Kolkata is widely regarded as the "cultural capital" of India known for its literary, artistic and revolutionary heritage.

AD Birls Dianeters



If you are travelling with kids, Kolkata has some excellent parks and museums. The Science City of Kokata is the largest science city of India. Among other attractions include, Nicco Park, which has wide-ranging rides and amusements, the waterpark called Aquatica, the botanical

gardens and the zoological park at Alipore. Make base at Kolkata to visit Shantiniketan for an insight into the work of Rabindranath Tagore or the Sundarban National Park, one of the largest forests in the world.



### THE NEHRU CHILDREN'S MUSEUM

Must This museum has an outstanding See collection of dolls. It also has dioramas of clay figures depicting scenes of the Ramayana.

## THE BIRLA PLANETARIUM

One of the oldest in the world, with a presentation about the stars and a retail shop.

## THE BIRLA INDUSTRIAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL MUSEUM

This museum has models, displays and mock machines with opportunities for children to press and push to see results. It even has a mock mine tour.

## THE SCIENCE CITY

This sprawling complex has hands-on and interactive exhibits that encourage children to understand scientific principles.

## THE NEHRU MUSEUM OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Located at Kharagpur, this museum has indoor exhibits, which include technical models collected from various institutes and organisations across India. The park outside the museum contains 14 open-air demonstrations and outdoor exhibits, including a hunter plane and a steam engine. The museum has an archive room ICE showcasing documents relating to history 11 of the institute and Midnapore

district.



Sprawled over five hills, ranging in altitude from 5000ft. to 7800ft., Dalhousie is popular for its cool climate, superb views of Himalayan peaks and the Raj-era bungalows and churches set on leafy lanes.

## Why go with kids

Near Dalhousie, the saucer-shaped meadow

10

of Khajiar is good for pony riding, paragliding, zorbing and other activities.



## **THE KALATOPE WILDLIFE SANCTUARY** About 8 km from Dalhousie,

this sanctuary is excellent for nature walks, birdwatching and butterfly spotting.

## СНАМВА

This town has beautiful medieval temples, a museum exhibiting miniature paintings and other artworks and a living legacy of arts and handicrafts.

Words by ANIL MULCHANDANI











## Toran Hill Resort - Saputara

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Incredible India



## Saputara

Saputara, which literally means the abode of serpents, is a unique hill station developed after independence. The hill station is splendidly situated in the Sahyadri mountain range. The centerpiece is the Saputara Lake with picturesque gardens and amusements around it. There are many points for viewing the sunrise, sunset and panoramic mountain landscape. The hills have many old forts.

AND DESCRIPTION OF THE OWNER

egend has it that Lord Rama spent 11 years of his exile in these very forests and many sites here are associated with the epics and mythology. It also makes a base to visit tribal villages of the Bhils, Kunbis, Warlis and Gamits. For an insight into the tribal culture of the Dangs district in which Saputara falls, visit the Saputara Museum, where there are models of houses, dioramas of tribal lifestyle and examples of their pottery, utensils and weapons.



The tribal communities here celebrate "Dangs Darbar", a few days before Holi, during which tribal chieftains gather for their annual meeting.

The surrounding forests are good for trekking. A variety of wild flora including orchids, butterflies and characteristic hill forest birds can be seen in these forests. The region is also known for its bamboo.

This is also an adventure destination – paragliding and hang gliding events have been held here and there are also other adventure sports.







## Gira Falls

Located near the Mahal Bardipada Forests and Purna Wildlife Sanctuary, the Gira Falls is one of the beauty spots of South Gujarat. The waterfall is spectacular with lovely rock pools and surrounding forests.



## Shabri Dham

Shabari Dham offers visualization of the fascinating mythological characters in Ramayana. This serene temple signifies the place, where Shabari offered tasted berries to Lord Rama. The place has three stones on which Lord Rama, Lakshaman and Shabari are said to have sat. The nearby Pampa Lake, 6 km from Shabri Dham, also has religious significance of Ramayana.





## Saputara Museum

The 90% population of the Dangs, where Saputara is located, is adivasi. The museum will give you an introduction to the lifestyle, costumes, heritage and ecology of the tribal Dangs. Although the presentation lacks character, it is worth visiting to learn about many major forms of tribal expression such as a stone funerary column, grass ornaments, stuffed birds, woodcarving, clay ritual objects, body tattoos and masks used in dancedramas and musical instruments.

## **Botanical Gardens**

The Botanical Garden is situated about 2km away from Waghai on Waghai-Saputara Road. Spread over an area of 24 hectares, it has systematic pathways. The Botanical Garden is divided into different plots showcasing forest vegetation types.

## Vansda National Park

The Vansda National park consists of spectacular forest with thick foliage of the luxuriant moist deciduous forest. predominantly represented by lofty teak trees and 443 species of flowering plants, set along Ambika River. Declared as protected area in April 1979, this park is inhabited by many mammals, birds and reptiles. A symphony of melodious sounds of nature can be heard as birds, insects and frogs call in the forests. High species diversity of forest birds is the main attraction for a bird watching tourist. Leopard, fusca, rhesus macaque, wild boar, hanuman langur, common palm civet, small Indian civet, Indian porcupine, four-horned antelope, barking deer, hyena, jungle cat, porcupine and flying squirrel are among the main mammals. Indian great black woodpecker, yellow back sunbird, pompadour pigeon, malabar trogon, shama, common grey hornbill, jungle babbler and other birds of the Sahyadris are seen.



## Hatgadh Fort

Located at the height of 3,600 feet on Sahyadri ranges, Hatgadh Fort possesses prominent architectural beauty. With merely 6 km away from Saputara, the fort gives a scenic view of Sahayadri hills. The fort has in itself the enriching stories of Maratha emperor, Chattrapati Shivaji.

## Pandava Caves

As the name reveals, Pandavas are believed to have spent their time in these caves during their hideout days in forest and offered prayers to Lord Shiva. Hence, it is the best place for fans of the great mystical Mahabharat story. The road to the caves gives an amazing chance to touch the lives of local tribes of Dang. **m** 

## BEST SEASON TO VISIT

Round the year – a hill destination for summer, beautiful during the rains and attractive in winter.

## **GETTING THERE**

By Air: Surat airport (173 km)

By Rail: Valsad (129km) on the broad gauge line is a convenient railhead.

## ACCOMMODATION

Gujarat Tourism's Toran Hill Resort is a well-located facility to enjoy the hill station's many attractions like the lake, tribal museum and botanical gardens. At this beautiful location, the tourists can explore the dense forest, splendid waterfalls, tribal villages and holy places. The Resort is equipped with all the facilities for the tourists.

For booking Toran Hill Resort, you may contact: Phone: +91 2631- 237226 Email: managersaputara@gmail.com Website: http://booking.gujarattourism.com/

## Incredible India





A few months ago, the Kerala Government had informed the Supreme Court that toddy was a "very mild alcoholic beverage" full of vitamins and used in traditional dishes. The question before the Bench would now be examined whether toddy could be considered as liquor. And if so, should toddy shops selling the beverage be included in the nationwide ban? The plea was in response to the ban imposed by the Supreme Court for sale of liquor within 500 metres of National and State Highways.



recall reading that article with a more than a tinge of sadness. Would this be the end of toddy sales in Kerala? It took me back to the time (a few years ago) when a friend of mine had invited me for a drink of toddy in Kumarakom. "Why Kumarakom", I had asked? He insisted that drinking toddy in Kumarakom was a far different experience from drinking toddy in other parts of Kerala. I was intrigued and was ensnared hook, line and sinker.

Kumarakom rose into prominence when the former Prime Minister of India Atal Behari Vajpayee came to this idyllic location for a brief sojourn. Almost overnight, this sleepy hamlet was a byword among the Indophile cognoscenti, overshadowing many other traditional locations in Kerala. It was, at that time, the most sought after place on the internet. Post the PM's visit, the real estate values in and around Kumarakom registered a meteoric rise. What was so special about Kumarakom?

When I came with my friend, I too was instantly enamored with the place. Kumarakom despite its popularity had still maintained its rustic isolation. It is barely 17km from Muhamma Boat Jetty in Alleppey and about 50km from the madding crowding of Cochin.

Kumarakom is a small village on Vembanaud Lake in the backwaters of Kerala and is crisscrossed with canals.

Earlier, you had to use the services of a boatman to travel within Kumarakom. However, now bridges have been built everywhere. The advance of development had plucked away the romance of coming to Kumarakom. Today, trucks and buses hurtle down the highway.

We came to Kumarakom by bus from Alleppey. The last town before Kumarakom was Vechoor. The moment I crossed the first bridge into Kumarakom, there was a dramatic change not just in the landscape, but also in the decibel level of sounds.

It was all, from a typical bustling town in Kerala with all its cacophony, to a serene vista of swaying coconut trees planted on the bunds of paddy fields stretching as far as the eye could see. The paddy looked fresh and green. The fields were flooded with water. Men and women in ankle deep water were bent over planting fresh paddy pods. It was evening and the sun was just setting over the horizon, bringing into sharp relief. The silhouette of coconut trees spanning across the paddy fields.

Toddy is obtained from the coconut flower stalk. Before the flower opens out, the tappers bruise the unopened stalk by gently tapping it with a small piece of wood or bone. It is this tapping sound that you hear when you walk around Kumarakom. After about 3 weeks, when the stalk is ready to produce the sap, an incision is made on the stalk. The tapper slices open the stalk and the liquid oozes into a clay pot.

Toddy tapping is probably as old as man himself. There are considerable stories and fables surrounding its extraction. In the book 'Omens and Superstitions of Southern India', by Edgar Thurston, he writes, "toddydrawers believe that, if the spathe (sheath) of the palm tree is beaten with the bone of a buffalo, which has been killed by a tiger, the yield of toddy will, if the bone has not touched the ground, be greater than if an ordinary bone is used." It was probably such tales that made toddy a popular drink in Kerala.

The highway was dotted with Toddy shops or "Toddy Shappe" in the local parlance. We chose one of the shops on the banks of a canal, which had the legend 'Toddy Shap'. It was a simple longish enclosure. A paddling of ducks silently swept past us, cuddling the ducklings between them. Long winded coconut trees arched impossibly over the canal. Small fishing boats softly chugged along the canal, which led to the Vemanaud Lake and from there to the sea. I could hear the soft tapping from the coconut trees nearby.

Toddy at the 'Shap' was stored and dispensed in beer bottles. Two bottles and two plates of duck fry were placed before us. We were the only occupants at that time. An hour and and a half sped by. The sun had disappeared over the horizon. The field workers were no longer visible. But they could be heard coming down the road talking vociferously and going into peels of laughter. The shop was beginning to fill up with them. After a hard day's work, it was time to stretch out, relax and swap

yarns.

Was the taste of toddy any different from any other part of Kerala? No, it was not, but the experience of guzzling that liquor in those serene surroundings was indeed far different. In 'Gods own country', there were still alcoves of paradise, where the Gods themselves would not hesitate to come down to loosen up after a hard day's work.



Mords by VIJAY KURUP

## HERALAYS





Mcleodganj found fame on the tourist map of Himachal Pradesh as a scenic wonder that would provide a change of weather and lifestyle unlike a majority of other destinations. The visitors who initially came here found the rising Buddhist culture fascinating. It slowly became an abode to the Tibetan refugees who settled here after fleeing their country. Lovely views of

the lush green mountains turned Mcleodganj and the nearby villages of Bhagsu and Dharamkot into backpacker friendly destinations.



ith that, this quaint part of Kangra region came into the notice of the thriving tourism industry. The travellers who were bored of Manali and Shimla's overdose found an offbeat option for their weekend escape. In no time, every travel company was selling tour packages, which highlighted Dharamshala as a primary attraction. The cheap guest houses and stay homes were replaced by high profile resorts and 5-star hotels. And with increasing tourist inflow, Dharamshala became a victim of the same demon that devoured Manali, Shimla and most famous tourist destinations in India - the issue of waste management.

Today, no corner of Dharamshala is spared because of the growing garbage problem. There are heaps of plastic





bottles lying around every corner. The trek route to Triund itself generates tons of waste on a weekly basis. It is impossible to climb the stairs of Bhagsu Nag Waterfall without missing upon the sight of alcohol bottles.

"The average weekly waste collected during clean-ups is 130kg. This is excluding the waste collection data from Triund as those bags are transported down and segregated collectively", says Chirag Mahajan who is a Volunteer at Waste Warriors. The NGO has been fighting against the ever-growing garbage problem.

The 7-km trekking trail at Triund Hill is visited by more than 2000 tourists on a daily basis. Volunteers at





Waste Warriors take up weekly cleaning drives at the trekking trails. A volunteer mentions about the challenges, "Topography of the trek trails and transportation of the garbage have been the biggest hurdle we have faced during the clean-up programs. Occasional rainfall often prevents us from visiting the trails, which results in the amount of waste doubling and increasing our work."

Apart from Triund, the beautiful Bhagsu Nag Waterfall also suffers from the same issue. The garbage often goes into the waterfall and contaminates it. A cleaning drive similar to Triund takes the permanent members and volunteers around the waterfall in order to remove any plastic garbage in existence.

Murals and graffiti are great ways to connect with travellers and catch their attention. Observing its impact, artists who often volunteer at the NGO have created Dalai Lama's mural along with many informative artworks on Dharamshala bus stand. Apart from spreading knowledge, these lovely designs bring a nice change from the same old boring brick walls.

Education and awareness programs are also organized to raise awareness among the locals of Dharamshala. The tourists are an important part of their program. Waste Warriors have several programs under this initiative. Members of the NGO visit local schools and educate the kids about the value of environmental conservation. The teams also visit local households, hotels and restaurants and tell them about the value of garbage disposal and segregation. As an impact, the local hotels have started dumping their dry and wet waste in designated dustbins. They have also started asking the tourists to do the same. "Tourists need to leave their selfish behaviour aside and help us as volunteer, even if it is for a day. This will help us in spreading the knowledge about the importance of supporting and preserving her (nature). Small contributions will help the future generations enjoying the resources like we do right now", says one of the volunteers.

It is our responsibility to look after the precious natural resources we have been given; to nurture, preserve them and give back at least in part what we take out of it. 🚥





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## PHOTO OF THE WEEK

LensMagic,

the Facebook group dedicated to providing networking platform to the photographers, organizes PHOTO OF THE WEEK CONTEST on weekly basis. For more information, visit

f /groups/LensMagicPhotographyClub/



presents

## PHOTO OF THE WEEK 31st March-6th April, 2018



The image, clicked at Gopalpur Beach, Odisha, captured the quintessential mood of monsoon season. Amidst the cold breeze and imminent rainstorm, the wooden boats parked on the beach created an unmissable photo opportunity.



## About the photographer

Sukrit Biswas is an amateur photographer, traveller and an engineer by profession. Wildlife photography is what excites him the most. Having started photography late in the year 2015, it is his dream to follow his passion.



presents

## **PHOTO OF THE WEEK**

7th April - 13th April, 2018



The photo "My Eiffel Tower" was captured during a train ride from Howrah to Digha. The speciality of the photo is - it resembles Eiffel Tower from a different angle.



## About the photographer

Pritish Roy is an Assistant Professor in Journalism and Mass Communication in a Kolkata-based College. His favourite genres of photography are Illusion, Street, Wild Life, Travel and People. He has made various documentaries on different social issues.



presents

## PHOTO OF THE WEEK 14th April - 20th April, 2018

<image>

The picture was clicked at the Ladies Park, Paddapukur in Kolkata during the celebration of Gajan Festival. Titled "Bhagawan Nextgen", the photo plays with our imagination of "What if the God decides to take a tour of earth in present days?"



## About the photographer

Palash Pratim Das is a photographer who is always looking to capture beautiful moments of life in his frame to make them live forever.

KAI

## Picturesque Flanders

## **PARADISE ON EARTH**

Located in the heart of Europe, covering the majority of the north of Belgium, Flanders is an unexplored wonder. The place stores in it the fabulous medieval city centres, picturesque town squares, mesmerizing countryside and extensive sandy beaches, among many other attractions.

Check out our suggestions to discover the best views of Flanders...

## 1 Linkeroever, Antwerp

For relaxed time, make your way to the Linkeroever. At the Saint Anna Beach, you will come across die-hard sun-worshippers with the phenomenal skyline of Antwerp in the background. There is also the Cathedral of Our Lady, the Boerentoren or Farmers' Tower known for being Europe's very first skyscraper that are the eye-catching sights in that view.

One can reach Linkeroever via the magnificent St. Annas Tunnel for cyclists and pedestrians, which runs under the Scheldt River. The tunnel, with its rustic porcelain tiles and authentic wooden escalators from 1933, is well worth a photograph.



## 2 Het Zwin

Flanders is a home to Nature Park nicknamed "the international airport for migratory birds". Het Zwin is a must-see for every photographer. Nature lovers can spot tree frogs, marsh rabbits and other animals amongst the various breeds of birds that fly across to this beautiful park. The stork breeding station is another perfect location for nature photography. Even without animals, the rolling dunes, mud flats and salt marshes, the coastline and especially the main point where the horizon and the North Sea merge make for a breathtaking view.





## **3 Hallerbos**

Only 20km away from the capital city of Brussels, Hallerbos is paradise on earth. Every year in April, a myriad of bluebells bloom in this magical forest, creating a violet and periwinkle flower carpet. When the sun sets between the trees, the view becomes even more magnificent. This phenomenon that is a must on every photographer's bucket list takes place only for three weeks every year, nowhere else in the world does the wood hyacinth bloom as exuberantly.



## Connecterra

Connecterra is a tribute to Limburg's mining past and the main gateway to the Hoge Kempen National Park. The nature park offers a dazzling landscape of mountains and lakes, mind-blowing panoramas that are worth writing about. On top of that, there are the mining spoil piles and head frames that look like spacecraft have fallen onto the rolling plains of Limburg. For adventure lovers, the terrain is blessed with a spectacular downhill route perfect for mountain biking.



## 5 Koppenberg

A photographer's delight, Koppenberg gives you a fantastic view of the Flemish Ardennes, where every year the Tour of Flanders takes place. As you prep your waffle iron and refine your beer selection in preparation for witnessing a spring classic, it's worth a quick refresher on what all the excitement is about.


## 6 Lommel Sahara

In the middle of a large bright green pine forest, you suddenly find yourself in the heart of a desert landscape of the Lommel Sahara. Just to give it more of a fairy-tale character, one can find a small azure blue lake there, which may look like a mirage but it's not.

## 7 Forest Park

Brussels undoubtedly is the beating heart of Europe. While it is fantastic to walk through the city, it's just as beautiful to look at from afar. One of the must-visit places here is the Forest Park. The S-shaped undulating park is the size of about 26 football pitches and is highly popular for giving a beautiful view of the city. For a picture perfect view of the city of Brussels, this is the place to be.



This park boasts the presence of a host of cultural pearls filled with museums. From the Royal Museums of Art and History to the Great Mosque of Brussels, you will come across numerous pavilions, sculptures and works of art. ■



#### Stuti Bhadauria

Stuti visited **Binsar** in 2009 and instantly fell in love with this quaint little hill town of Uttarakhand. She credits her defence background for the love for travelling. For her,

every traveller out there is an inspiration. It is the nature, stories and culture, which push her to travel. Keeping a balance between travelling and having a full time job has been a challenge and she has learned how to manage both parts of her life without compromising either of them.



n the past, the backpacking scene in India was primarily dominated by the visitors from Europe, America and Israel. The term once reserved only for those who would wander in Asia with a huge backpack, slowly expanded and Indian travelling community became an important part of the trend.

It is observed that Indians between the age of 21 to 35 choose backpacking and often go on long trips, treks and even volunteer with NGOs or schools. Some travel around India while many explore Europe, South East Asia and even Africa. These travellers have made India the centre of new age travelling culture.

Let's meet some travellers who have challenged the norms and have become an integral part of Indian travelling community:

## Himani Chhabra

Himani travels with the mission of encouraging the Indian women to take a leap of faith and break the societal norms. She has been wandering around India for the last 4 years. She has striked out a number of destinations from her list thus far. When asked about her favourite destination among all,

she recalls *Sikkim* as a state where women run everything from hotels to restaurants and even travel agencies. Himani finds Sikkim extremely gorgeous and believes that its aura has made her a calmer person. Apart from Sikkim, she loves the natural charms of Hampi and the astonishing Spiti Valley.

#### **Rubhen D'sa**

This 21 year old Goan believes that travelling is a great medium to bring the art community together. Rubhen has travelled 21 states in the last two years and has overcome the problem of lack of funds that a backpacker usually faces. For him, the best part of travelling is the joy of meeting strangers



and learning more about their lives. Rubhen loves Havelock Islands for its beautiful beaches and *Shillong*, where he found himself literally breathing inside a cloud.



### Sahil Singh

For Sahil, travelling is a therapy. Two years ago, when Sahil trekked to Triund with 20 strangers, he found himself stepping out of his comfort zone and finding a way to happiness. Bbrigu Lake and the royal city of Jaisalmer are his favourite destinations. Sahil believes that responsible travelling is the key to save the natural ecology.



#### Ankita Singh

A vagabond for 7 years, Ankita Singh calls travelling an addiction. During her extensive journey across India, she has felt that the diversity of India's food culture is extremely fascinating. According to her, if you travel across

India just to experience food, you'll get to know this country a lot better. Ankita prefers solo travelling in *Uttarakhand* and *Himachal* 

because these places are comparatively safer than the others. As a solo woman traveller, she has faced the problems of harassment and eve teasing. However, she fought through those situations only to come out as a stronger person than before.



### **Suman Doogar**

A teacher by profession, Suman often finds herself exploring and trekking in the untouched parts of *Arunachal Pradesb* or working at a pottery farm in

*Himachal Pradesb* whenever she is free. Her first tryst with solo travelling was at Ladakh as her friends cancelled the plan at the last moment. Like most of the female travellers, safety is always the primary concern when she is travelling. Although, she believes that with the use of technology, one can find ways to stay safe. With her travel experience, this Delhi-based psychology teacher keeps her students engaged.

#### **Devang Sethi**

On his trip to *Kazakhstan*, Devang found himself practically on a mute mode because no one understood his language. On a trek, he lost the



connection to Google Translator and had to resort to sign language for communication. For him, the chances of meeting and becoming friends with new people are higher when he is solo travelling. The trips have earned him a huge friend circle in every corner of the world. The young filmmaker believes that videos are the best way to promote local tourism as the audience is able to connect with films faster than any other medium. With travelling becoming a part of the lifestyle, more people will follow the trend and create their own inspiring travel stories.

### Siddharth Soni

With a solo travel experience of more than 15 years, Siddharth is one of the old school nomads and have seen the changes in Indian travel scenario. He did his first solo trip at the age of 18 and he thanks his father for inspiring him to do so. The Delhi-



based architect has now taken full time corporate job, but that hasn't stopped him from embarking upon trips. He recalls about his recent *Annapurna Circuit* trekking experience and shares that the trails used to be clear, the mountains were less crowded earlier. Today, with commercialization of trekking, even the highest mountains have been desecrated. According to Siddharth, if every mountaineer starts bringing back their waste, the problem of garbage collection will find a small solution.

#### Johann Kuruvilla

Johann's love for travelling grew after watching a movie Neelakasham Pachakadal Chuvannabhumi, which means Blue skies, Green Seas and Red Earth. The story revolves around a young man who rides his bike out to Nagaland in

search of love and more about life. This story inspired him to start travelling. As a solo traveller, he is always on a guard because a small mistake can cause a huge problem. For solo travellers, getting cheated in the name of cheap accommodation is a very common issue. Johann is based in *Kochi*, a city he finds extremely fascinating because of its history. Johann frequently organizes heritage walks in the city with the aim of helping people to get familiar with the rich history of the town.

#### Poorna Banerjee

Grown up in Kolkata, Poorna's fascination with travel started with the nearby destinations like Darjeeling, Puri and Gopalpur. She took her first solo trip at the age of 21 and since then, she has continued to find

ways to explore new places. *Vietnam* is one of her favourite destinations. She finds Halong Bay extremely beautiful. One of the major aims of her travel is to promote the works of local artisans. She believes in the importance of preserving indigenous weaves because it is the form of art that will die and vanish the moment we stop caring. Promoting them is another way to preserve heritage. It also encourages artists to bring out the best.



## Incredible India

Climbingthe shrine ofthe moonmountain





It is said that after the battle of Kurukshetra, the Pandavas attempted to escape Shiva's wrath. They arrived on a mountain and started constructing a temple. Lord Shiva was pleased with their labour and the God didn't only forgive them but also blessed them to attain salvation.



he holy temple of Tungnath is located amidst the scenic views of the Panchchuli, Nanda Devi, Dunagiri, Nilkanth, Kedarnath and Bandarpoonch ranges. At a height of 3680 meters, Tungnath is revered as the highest Shiva Temple of the world. In Panch Kedar belief, Tungnath is considered as Shiva's Bahu (arm) along with with Kedarnath (hump), Rudranath (face), Madhameshwar (naval) and Kalpeshwar (hair).

A majority of destinations in Uttarakhand are very much unexplored. The travellers, who come here, find themselves lost in the beauty of charming Himalayan landscapes.



The trek to Tungath starts from the scenic Chopta. Often deemed as Mini Switzerland, Chopta is a part of famous Daoriatal-Chopta-Chandrashila trek route. Chopta is nothing but a small station with a few campsites. Surrounded with dense Rhododendron Forests, the place offers amazing clear views of the mighty Panchauli Peaks. While those looking for a relaxed vacation choose to spend the time admiring the splendid nature, those looking to add adventure to their trip go for trekking.

While the walk to Tungnath is simple and planned, it is the mighty Chandrashilla that proves to be more challenging. Shrouded in myth, it is said that Lord Rama spent his time here after his battle with Ravana. According to the other myth, this is where Chandra, the Moon God, spent his time serving



#### CLIMBING THE SHRINE OF THE MOON MOUNTAIN

penance. The trek to Tungnath and Chandrashilla is hardly 5km but the height ascends straight to 4000 ft. The route is filled with the gorgeous views of lovely Rhododendron forests, chirping birds and green meadows. The higher you climb, the more you feel like you are walking on the clouds. The trek does become steeper, but the encompassing views keep you motivated to walk further.

Tungnath and Chandrashilla will make you feel as if the entire landscape was created by a master designer with an eye for detail. The views from the top of Tungnath are exhilarating. But it is the 360 degree views of the Himalayan peaks and Garwal Valley from the top of Chandrashilla, which will amplify that feeling several levels higher.

While most of the pilgrims return to Chopta, some spend the night for a glimpse of the amazing sunrise from Chandrashila Peak. The starry night over the majestic Himalayan Mountains adds to the charm of this pristine destination.

#### THE BEST TIME TO VISIT CHOPTA

Best time to travel to Chopta is in summers (April – June) and winters (Oct - Dec). Winter treks are also conducted in Chopta.

#### HOW TO REACH TUNGNATH

The best way to reach Chopta is via Rishikesh. From Rishikesh, drive towards Rudraprayag and finally Ukhimath. Regular buses and shared jeeps run between this route but are limited in number. From Chopta, you can start your trek towards Tungath and Chandrashilla.

#### ACCOMMODATION

Chopta offers a number of camping sites. These camps vary in terms of amenities and activities and so does their prices. Tungnath has some very basic accommodations and you can also carry your tent and stay overnight.





# The Jewel of the Southern India

Nestled in the Shevaroy range of hills in the Eastern Ghats, Yercaud is a beauty that is like a soothing balm for the aching and tired city dwellers. Yercaud is situated at an altitude of 4970ft from the sea level, at a distance of around 215km from Bengaluru in the Salem district of Tamil Nadu. Well- connected by road, the place has become a popular weekend destination in the southern part of India.

#### PRAVEG'S TOURISM ONE



he bus we took from Bengaluru started at around 9 am and dropped us at Salem at 12.30 pm. After a quick lunch, we took a cab that traversed the hill having 20 hair-pin bends. The up-hill journey itself was a great visual treat as it passed through the thick lush green vegetation.

The place has derived its name from "yer" meaning lake and "caud" meaning forest in Tamil. It symbolizes a sprawling natural lake, popularly known as "Emerald Lake", surrounded by some couldpeaked hills with thick forests and a wellpreserved garden on its bank in one side. The scenic beauty of lake is inexplicable. Boating through the lake or paseo during the sunset in the garden is quite a refreshing experience. Opposite to the lake, there is a small park called "Anna Park", which houses wide varieties of natural flora. Numerous road-side eateries offer mouth-watering bhajjis





(evening snack) during the evening that are bound to tinkle your taste-buds.

Next day morning, we headed towards the Shevaroyan Temple, the highest point in Yercaud at an altitude of 5326 ft from the sea level, which offers an exhilarating view of the surrounding hill range and the plains in between. The temple is built out of a narrow and dark cave, where God Shevaroyan and Goddess Kaveri are worshiped. Every year during May, the native tribal gathers in large numbers at this temple premises and celebrate their annual festival. There is a watch tower adjacent to the temple that offers a panoramic view of the hills and the valleys.

From the Shevaroyan temple, the driver took us through some narrow serpentine hill roads enriched with the odors of wild flowers. The chirping of a variety of birds would take you in a totally different world where our ears would get its desired relief from all kind of harsh, high-pitched and painstaking urban noises. The car came to a halt at a place called Karadiyur village, which is around 12 km from Yercaud and I found a numerous tourist buses and small vehicles parked there. From that point, a trek of around 800 meters through a muddy way would take you to a view point called "Karadiyur View Point", which offers a jaw-dropping view of the Shevaroyan hill ranges, the lush green valley and Mettur Dam. Karadiyur is a vertical cliff that earned its name for having numerous sloth bear earlier, but unfortunately none can be found now. It is, undoubtedly, one of the best viewpoints in Yercaud and is a must-watch. Though this place can be visited anytime of the day, the sunrise and sunset provide the visitors with a unique experience.



#### **PRAVEG'S TOURISM ONE**



We then came to the Eastern Yercaud hill, where there is another view point called the "Pagoda Point". This place was so named as it is believed that the local tribes had built this place arranging four piles of stones in a pyramid structure, which resembles the temple tower. There is a Sri Rama Temple located in vicinity that plays as an important pilgrimage site for the locals and tribes. The surrounding view from the watch tower embraces the mind with solace and tranquility. One can view the Salem district and the villages at the foot-hill. This point is also recommended for watching beautiful sunrise and sunset. Close to the Pagoda Point is a place called Lady's Seat, which is a cluster of rocks formed naturally with a shape of a seat. The place derived its name as locals believe a British lady used to come and sit on these rocks to watch the mesmerizing panoramic view of the Shevaroy hills and the serpentine Ghat roads. The watch tower also has a telescope to view the Salem town and the Mettur Dam.

Within 1 km from Lady's Seat, there are a few other seats like Gent's Seat and Children's Seat. One needs to climb up few stairs to reach the Gent's Seat tower and from there, Children's Seat is a short walk. These places have wellmaintained watch towers that offer a breathtaking views of the surrounding hills and Ghat roads.

The best time to visit Yercaud is November to March. The weather is quite cold at Yercaud during the Christmas time, so it is advised to check the weather condition beforehand and pack warm clothes as required. **@** 



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## Incredible India



# JUNAGADH AND ITS EXPERIENTIAL HONESTAYS

Junagadh is one of Gujarat's most historical cities. The city has vivid associations with the Mauryan, the Kshtrapa and the Chudasama dynasties, the Gujarat Sultanate and the Babi Nawabs. A wide range of monuments of Emperor Ashoka to buildings commissioned by the Nawabs stand testimony to Junagadh's illustrious past.





## Ashoka's rock edicts

Junagadh has the 3rd century BC rock inscriptions of Emperor Ashoka. The rock is housed in a building with the English translations of each edict displayed on the walls for the benefit of the visitor. These edicts in the Brahmi alphabet using the Prakrit dialect read: "To foster one's sect, depreciating the others out of affection for one's own, to exalt its merit, is to do the worst harm to one's own sect". In these edicts, Ashoka preaches the mastery of the senses, purity of thought, gratitude and steadfastness in devotion, good deeds, kindness, liberality, truthfulness and tolerance of all religions. The edicts tell subjects to give up ambitions of glory and to replace superstition with respect for elders, courtesy to servants and other virtues. The edicts also proclaim changes in the lifestyle of the courts of Ashoka like the reduction in number of animals killed for food, the creation of teams to preach virtues and dharma tours visiting monks and philosophers.

## **Uparkot Fort**

This is one of Gujarat's oldest forts. The only major standing structure inside is the palace of Rani Ranak Devi with ornate jarokha balconies. The residence of Ranakdevi was converted into mosque by Muhammad Begada after his conquest of Junagadh. The 11th century Adi Charan Vav has a spectacular staircase of 120 steps going down to the bottom. The Navghan Kuva is another spectacular well, dated from 1060 AD, with flights of spiralling steps leading 120 ft. to the water source through a 10ft wide passage. The Nilam canon has bronze inscriptions in Arabic stating that "the canon was cast in 1531 AD to fight the Portuguese who are infidel enemies of state and religion" and there is also a smaller Ottoman canon.





- 1 View from Uparkot Fort
- 2 Uparkot Fort
- 3 Navghan Kuva
- 4 The Neelam and Manek Guns
- 5 Adi Kadi Vav







## PRAVEG'S TOURISM ONE









## **Buddhist Caves**

The Buddhist Caves in the Uparkot Fort at Junagadh have three storeys of cell-like rooms set around a rain water tank. The caves reflect the advanced system of drainage and water utilisation prevailing in the period and the cells are wellventilated to get light and cool air.

The steps lead down to the tank. The water is channelled through a pipe down the wall along the seat before entering a filtering cistern. The bath is open but there is a covered veranda on three sides and a southern corridor with a column that has floral ornamented capitals. The apartment in the northeast corner has a large chamber supported by six columns.

On the opposite side of Uparkot Fort is another three storey cave complex with 13 cells cut into the rock face called 'Baba Pyara' or 'Bawa Pyara'. The caves are arranged in three rows with the first line in the north facing southward, featuring the largest cave on its west. The second line of caves has the Chaitya-Griha facing an open courtyard. The veranda in front of the Chaitya-Griha has a winged lion at each end and six pillars with lion capitals. The southern cave in this line has a sunken courtyard, a veranda and two cells. It is marked with Buddhist symbols and figures. The third line has five caves, each of which has a hall with a central pillar supporting its roof.

A third cave cluster is called Khapara Khodiya with cells set in an L-shape and a rain-water reservoir. It is unique in having many water tanks.

#### PRAVEG'S TOURISM ONE

## The Durbarhall Museum

Housed in a palace of the Nawabs of Junagadh, this museum has a chandelier-lit hall with silver plated thrones and chairs, richly decorated howdahs and palanquins, valuable silk carpets embellished with gems and gold thread, Nepalese Kukris, armour, turtle shell shields, swords, daggers, medieval weapons, rifles and hand guns, portraits and paintings.









## The Maqbara

Construction of this mausoleum complex was started by His Highness Mahabat Khanji in 1878 and completed in 1892 by his successor, HH Bahadur Khanji. Also enshrined here was His Highness Rasul Khanji in 1911 AD. The complex includes the mausoleom of Baha-ud-din, Minister of Nawab Rasul Khanji, which has 4 minarets with pirouetting spiral staircases, a facade rich in stone carvings, beautiful silver doors and massive domes. Next to the complex is the Jumma Mosque, dated to 1886-97 which has geometric rows of variously coloured pillars leading to a cool marble minbar and an Islamic religious school.

#### PRAVEG'S TOURISM ONE

## Baha-ud-din College

The Baha-ud-din College has a massive façade and a huge central dome. The piece de resistance is the 160 sq.ft. Assembly Hall with intricate wooden ceilings and brackets.

## **Gir National Park**

In Gir you touch the history of India before humanity itself. Before monuments, temples, mosques and palaces. Or rather, a history as humanity was emerging, when humans coexisted with lions, before the former had overrun the continent (and the world) and pushed the latter to the brink of extinction.

Many come to Gir because, outside of Africa, it is the only place with wild lions. But to truly experience Gir and the lions, you must explore their natural habitat, with everything from tiny wild birds, not easily seen, but heard singing in the forest canopy, to crocodiles floating in the marsh waters.



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## Junagadh Museum

Housed in Sakkarbagh, which also has the famous zoological park of Junagadh, the museum has a good collection of pre-historic and proto-historic implements made from stone and bone, stone sculpture, including the 9th century Vishnu, bronze sculpture of the medieval period, copper inscriptions and manuscripts, silverware, glass, porcelain, wood carvings, carpets and costumes. traditional textiles. folk art and miniature paintings.



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- Mr. Savadasbhai Bhikhabhai Lakhnotra
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  Contact: 9427547560, 9904126836

- Mr. Sureshbhai Nanjibhai Vekariya PO: Malanka, Ta: Mendarda, Junagadh Contact: 9375085049
- Mr. Vinubhai Ravajibhai Busa Survey No. 234, PO: Kenedipur, Ta: Mendarda, Dist. Junagadh Contact: 9426206311
- 7. Mr. Vishalbhai Rudabhai Bharwad Survey-45/P 1/P 1, Vibhuvan Farm, PO: Bhojade, Ta: Talala, Dist: Gir Somnath Contact: 9825050647
- 8. Mrs. Dhanbaiben Keshubhai Dangar PO: Kenedipur, Ta: Mendarda, Dist. Junagadh Contact: 8140444461, 9879696662

#### **GETTING THERE**

Junagadh is well-connected by road and railway networks. Rajkot Airport is the nearest, at a distance of 108km from Junagdh.

For more information on Junagadh tourist places and booking the package, please contact: 079-23977200, 1800 200 5080 or Email : info@gujarattourism.com

## Interview



"The biggest factor confronting J&K is the negative perception. And we are constantly trying to address this by organizing various events like TAAI Convention, Gulmarg Festival, among many others"

Mr. Mahmood Ahmad Shah (KAS) Director Tourism, Kashmir

## **Q.** What has been the trend in tourist arrival post 2016?

A. After the 2016 unrest in Kashmir, Tourism industry faced problems, especially during the third and fourth quarters. 2017 was the year of revival. However, we started on very positive note in 2018. And we have had good tourist arrival this year.

#### Q. How would you like to position Kashmir on a global tourism map?

A. As far as the foreign tourist arrival is concerned, the first 4 months of the year have been great. We have witnessed 100% increase in foreign tourist arrival. Thankfully, tourist arrivals from the countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand and Bangladesh have gone up.

#### Q. What is the USP of Kashmir that attracts maximum tourists?

- A. The biggest attribute of the State is its hospitality. Other than that, it is weather. Right now, when the country is experiencing heat wave, places like Gulmarg in Kashmir have experienced snowfall. Of course, the State is also popular for its culture, heritage, handicrafts, among many other tourism products.
- Q. According to you, which other states are using the most effective branding strategy to promote their tourism?
- A. Kerala, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu have sizable budget, so we can't compare with them. Within the allocated resources, we try to promote our State. We are aggressive on social media. The first-ever campaign "Warmest Place on Earth" has crossed more than 4 crore views thus far. So we are in the process of highlighting various interesting aspects of the destination.

#### What are the significant initiatives of Kashmir Tourism?

We started the year by organizing the Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) Convention. It has helped us to dilute the negative perception about Jammu and Kashmir. The biggest factor confronting J&K is the negative perception. And we are constantly trying to address this by organizing various events like TAAI Convention, Gulmarg Festival, among many others. There are other festivals in the pipeline that are directed towards realizing the same objective. Kashmir is a perfect destination for film shooting. Presently, Abhishek Bachchan and Salman Khan are shooting for their films in Kashmir. The message we are trying to give is - Kashmir is not a war scene... tourists are coming and enjoying.





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