

STAY AT
A DAY IN THE LIFE OF
LIFESTYLE
BAN TIGER TOURISM ?
SPOTTED BY SITA
TOP CHEF RECOMMENDS
DESTINATION INSIDER
6 THINGS WE LIKED ABOUT
FESTIVALS
INSPIRATION LOCATOR
TRADE SHOWS



Art of Travel



Thikalna Village House



In the Himalayan state of Uttarakhand in North India, lies the pristine region of Kumaon. Kumaon offers some of the most stunning scenery of the Himalayan peaks, oak and rhododendron forests, terraced fields and fast moving rapids and rivers. Most importantly though, Kumaon region is inhabited by simple and pious people, who have been able to preserve their unique culture and traditions in spite of the onslaught of the modern. The most inspiring and rewarding way to experience the stunning region of Kumaon is on foot. Walking around in Kumaon, takes you through unspoilt remote villages, enabling your clients to experience rural Kumaon up close, where they can interact with the local communities, exchange stories over a cup of tea or help the locals in the fields. Our friend Ashish Bhatia, who runs these walks in Kumaon has spruced up a couple of stunningly located village houses, set in remote traditional Kumaoni villages, where your clients can spend their nights in comfort. These walks will take your clients from one village to another where each night is spent in a different village house. They will be accompanied by an English speaking guide, a cook and porters on these walks.

Our stay at the Thikalna Village House with its stunning location and views was a fantastic immersion into what Kumaon has to offer. The house is located at the edge of a cliff with unhindered views of the valley and a 180 degree view of the snow clad Himalayas. The path to the house is lined with evergreen oak and rhododendron trees on both the sides and is a 45 minutes' walk from the road head.

These walks also benefit the local community directly. Here's how your clients can make a difference - [click here](#)

Stay At



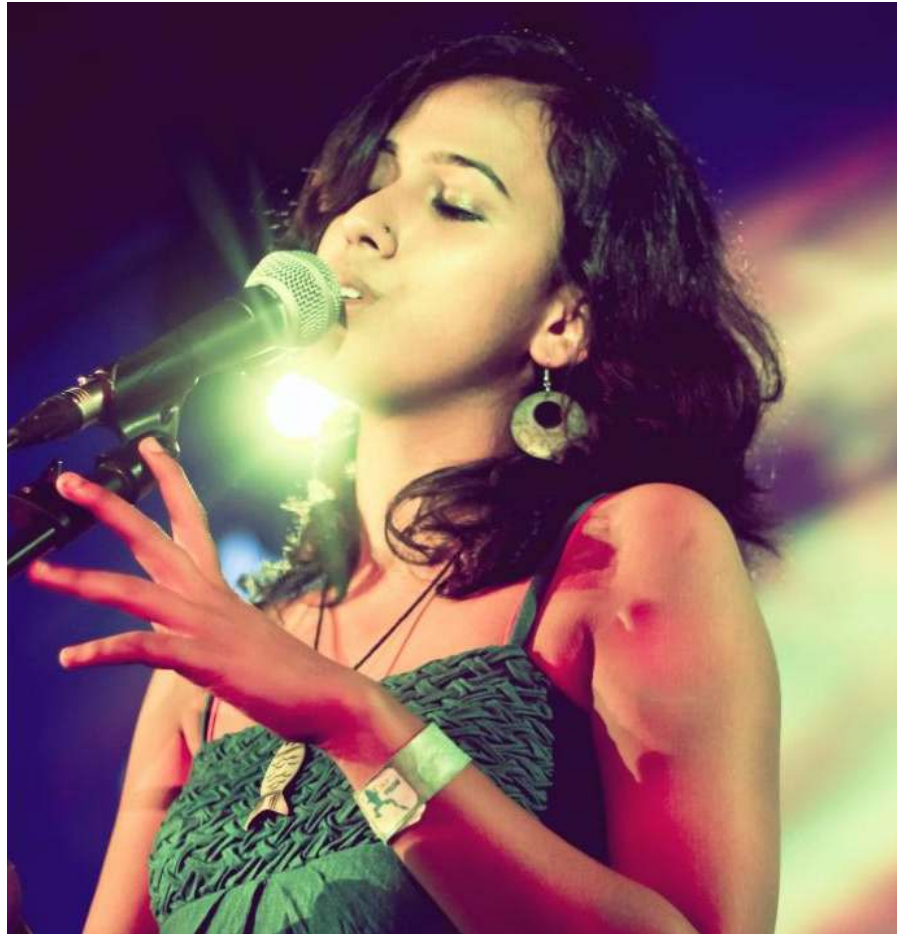


Mentor & Musician

I live two very different lives - one being that of a performer on stage and the other being a mentor to juveniles under protection. No two days are similar. So it's kind of difficult when you ask me to write something on the lines of a Day in a Life of. I work as a Program Coordinator with the [Tehelka Foundation](#), a not-for-profit organization working with young people on empowerment through art, music and theatre. I've been working full time with Tehelka Foundation for the past two years, while managing a semi professional musical career, singing for a Delhi based progressive Rock Band [Fire Exit](#) and the [Artistes Unlimited](#) for the past 5 years now. Often I've wondered what impact a few hours of my time can make on someone else's life. We all have enough to do already and a one off interaction with someone over a few hours can't really do much right? On the flipside, with each workshop we conduct, we manage to deeply impact at least a few people's lives. It could just mean giving them hope. It could mean giving them a friend to talk to or it could just be a possibility to which you opened their eyes. We have been working with children at risk- street children and juveniles in conflict with the law for over 2 years now. Each of our interventions has brought us to believe that every moment that we spend genuinely trying, is all it takes for us to be remembered by them forever! In fact, every time we've left from a session, something has always pulled us back!

Being a performing artist, connecting with these children helps to keep me incredibly grounded. Everything from what I wear, to how I talk and from wooing an audience at the Hard Rock Cafe to the hard cold reality of their lives; it is such a vast gorge that separates these two lives. What remains the same is Music. The kids we work with range from homeless children, to children heavily addicted to drugs, to those accused of rape, murder or petty thefts. The circumstances that they've grown up under haven't left them with much of an option, but to turn towards crime and drugs. And Music has always helped break barriers with these children. Each day I spend with the children has taught me something invaluable. I have gained so much more than I've given. Just the way they greet you, says a lot about the impact you've had on them. It's a very special feeling and I would hope for each one of you to be able to feel what I feel every single day!! And the high that I get being on stage performing, is absolutely unmatched. It's challenging too, having these

A Day in The Life of Subhadra



completely different lives running simultaneously. This one day, one of the boys looked at a picture of me performing on stage and exclaimed " Arre ye kaise kapde pehne hain aapne? (What are these clothes you're wearing?) and was genuinely disturbed by how amused I was by the question. But our realities and their realities are separated by a wide gap and I seem to be somewhere on the bridge connecting the two. Office, to the juvenile home to being on stage performing - there's such little time, so much to do and so much more that needs to be done. I want to see these kids on stage, performing, feeling what I feel when I sing to an appreciative audience. But there's a long journey of self exploration and healing that needs to happen before they transcend outside.

About the Author: 23-year old Subhadra Kamath juggles her time being a mentor to juveniles under protection and a Musician. She believes that though there is never enough time to do everything one wants to do in life, we can still find ways to do things that give us the most joy. Subhadra is a friend of Sita and is happy to perform for your groups who are visiting Delhi.

You can listen her at: <http://soundcloud.com/fireexitindia>



Lifestyle



Simple Living

For the indigenous Mahadeo Kolis of Maharashtra, good health starts with nutrition. All food is prepared over a traditional wood fire from organic ingredients grown locally. In fact the most accessible aspect of their culture is their food. The Mahadeo Kolis are renowned for the quality of rice they grow. Other important items in their diet include Bajra (millet) and Jowar (Sorghum). Naachni, a variety of red millet which is very rich in iron and other vitamins is used to make papads (popadoms) and rotis (breads). The brilliance of the cuisine of the Mahadeo Kolis is celebrating the seasonality of flavours. During monsoons, they cook the stems of a local creeper named Chai. Leafy vegetables growing wild such as Badedaa and Oorudo are also common during the rainy season. In winters, crabs and fish, from the nearby rivers get added to the menu. Fish such as Shingada, Chuchami, and Mure are cooked in spicy curries. Summer, on the other hand, is a season of fruits with Terun (a sweet fruit found in the jungles) being the pick of the lot. Finally, no meal is complete without a taste of the pickles that the Mahadeo Kolis are famous for.

My personal favorite is the meal that the Mahadeo Kolis cook during festivals. Locally it is called Puran Poli. The subtle sweetness of the Puran Poli (bread stuffed with dough made from a mixture of horse gram and jaggery) accompanied with ghee (clarified butter) and milk, the mouth watering spicy gravy (they call it Amti) made from the broth of the horse gram accompanied with locally grown rice, the crispy texture of roasted papads (popadoms) and the savoury onion fritters. This meal comes with a serious warning: once you begin, you can't stop eating. The best part of the cuisine of the Mahadeo Kolis, for me has been the company of the family, sharing their meal and their stories that live with you long after you have finished your meal.

About the Author: Inir Pinheiro is a friend of Sita and runs Grassroutes which works with the indigenous communities to create sustainable livelihoods through community based tourism and experiential learning programs. For more visit <http://grassroutes.co.in>





It is a bad idea

The Supreme Court of India has banned tourism in the core areas of national parks and sanctuaries in response to a Public Interest Litigation filed. While everyone waits for the text of the final ruling, clearly this is a case where the law has confused the current impact of tourism (negative) and the future potential of tourism for conservation (positive). Banning tourism because it is bad today is like banning cricket because there is gambling. The answer surely is to regulate tourism and make it difficult or impossible for builders and contractors to turn forests to cement. By banning tourism in the core areas the eyes and ears of non-governmental agencies have been walled out of forests where tree-cutting, illegal mining, road building, poaching and worse are rampant.

In a housing colony a visitor robs something. Would you enhance protection, or ban all visitors from entering the colony and allow only watchmen in? We are all looking for a solution. But 30 years of experience tells me that the forest departments of all states need watching too. What are we going to do when political pressure forces a Park Director to approve an illegal canal alignment through the core area of a park? That's only one possible (but very real) issue. A slew of JCBs was unleashed onto a park as vibrant and vital as Nagarhole. In truth, if all humans were removed from all forests, tigers, leopards, elephants, flowers, termites, birds, reptiles and more would be MUCH better off. But then remove them ALL!

My belief is that in phases the buffers of our tiger reserves must be restored to health and tourism will automatically shift there. [Click here to read more](#)

About the Author: Bittu Sahgal is an Environmental Activist and Writer. He is also the founding editor of Sanctuary Asia, India's premier wildlife and ecology magazine in which this article appeared. For more visit www.sanctuaryasia.com

Ban Tiger Tourism ?





Electricity Bicycle



Spotted By Sita

During our recce trip to Spiti in September last year, our local partner Ecosphere took us to the Komic Monastery. Situated at an altitude of 4580 metres above sea level, the Komic monastery is considered as one of the highest and one of the toughest inhabited villages in the world.

Sita spotted this cool bicycle in the Komic Monastery which the monks use to generate electricity for their daily use. We were told that paddling for 20 minutes produces an hour of electricity. Isn't that a cool eco-friendly way of staying fit as well?

It was a happy occasion for the monks of the Komic Monastery that day. A Wind Solar Pedal Hybrid plant had just been inaugurated and there was a grand feast. Built with the expertise facilitated by Ecosphere, it is one of the highest hybrid plant in the world to produce electricity. A unique initiative to experiment on multiple renewable technologies in some of the harshest climatic conditions on earth, the entire plant is a mix of multiple technologies. The plant has a capacity of 1.5 KW - with a 1000 W windmill, 400 W of solar power and a 100 W pedal powered generator. The plant is completely managed and run by the Komic monastery and a monthly amount is collected from all the monks here who benefit from the electricity being generated. This amount is deposited in a local bank and the funds saved are used for maintenance and future expansion of the plant.





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Konkani Thali at Swaswara

Chef Joy of [Swaswara](#) recommends the Konkani Thali as a must try during your stay here. “This meal is truly representative of the local food of North Karnataka,” says Chef Joy. We believe him. Chef Joy is one of our favourites in India for his fantastic ability to create magic with locally available ingredients.

Located 3 hrs from Goa on a fabled beach, shaped like the very first sound of creation ...Om, Swaswara is set amidst 26 acres of green lawns, gardens and rolling hills. A perfect retreat for your mind, body and soul.

Recipe available on [request](#).

Top Chef Recommends





Corporate Responsibility in Spiti

Dear Friends,

By the time this edition of Art of Travel reaches you, I would have already left for the cold desert of Spiti in the Himalayas with my team of colleagues from our Gurgaon office. Together we will work as volunteers with the locals to build a Solar Bath for a Buddhist nunnery in Spiti. This is a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Project of our organisation and its commitment towards making a positive impact on our surroundings and people that it encompasses. We understand that this is crucial for the sustainable growth of our business. This definitely has to be the high point of my career in the Travel Trade. Not only because I am leading a very special CSR project which has resonated extremely well from Gurgaon to Zurich, but also because for the first time, my day job has given me an opportunity to positively impact a community. The beneficiary of this CSR initiative is the Pangmo Nunnery of Spiti located in a village of the same name. The village has about 25 homes which houses 150 people and also has a primary school. Usually a girl in Spiti, becomes a nun between the age of 10 and 15. In Spiti there is a tradition that the second son of the family becomes a monk. However the same does not apply for the girls. They become nuns purely out of choice. The nuns have a very busy daily schedule which starts at 5 am in the morning till late in the evening, it comprises of prayers, study and debates on Buddhist philosophy, English, Hindi and other subjects.

And why build a Solar Bath?

Bathing in the high altitude cold desert of Spiti, where temperatures dip to minus 30 degrees Celsius during winters is difficult, due to the limited availability of fuel wood to heat water. It is more so for women, as traditionally there are no designated bathing areas in the households of Spiti. During the 6 month long winter, large quantities of fuel wood are burned to keep the houses warm and to heat water leading to high carbon emissions, especially those of black carbon which causes temperature changes leading to a variety of negative environmental impacts on humans, plants and animal ecosystems. But there is an abundance of sunny days during winters here and Solar Baths, using the concept of passive solar energy, is an alternative eco-friendly option which is being developed by [Ecosphere](#), our local partner in this CSR initiative. Solar Baths, not only cut down carbon emissions and

Destination Insider



The Team of Volunteers: Sujeet, Kuntal, Sagar, Manpreet and Rekha (left to right)

fuel wood consumption but also enhance the personal hygiene of the womenfolk.

We are also excited about attending the Namkhan Festival in Demul on August 15. It is located at an altitude of 4350 mts and is one of the highest and remotest villages in Spiti. The Namkhan festival is wrapped around the agricultural practices of Demul where they appease and pray to the Gods for a good harvest. The festival, we are told, provides an interesting insight into the relationship and significance of the village deity in the day to day life of the village. We will be joining the villagers in the elaborate ceremony to appease the village deity after which the elders and those from the houses in the village will ride on horseback to an auspicious spot nearby. This auspicious spot is believed by the locals to house all the 5 monasteries of Spiti in a world which can be seen only by enlightened beings. It's a place with stunning views. But I am not sure if I want to be on horseback again in Spiti. I broke my leg last year while riding one here.

The Solar Bath at Pangmo Nunnery will be inaugurated by the Nono (title for the King of Spiti). He is such a humble man. The Nono prefers to be known as a progressive farmer, trying to experiment on cultivating a diversity of crops with new innovations. He is doing a great job in bridging the gap between preserving the traditional agro-diversity, while introducing new crops and innovations. I am looking forward to meeting him again.

Keep a watch out for the September issue of Art of Travel which will be dedicated to our CSR initiative in Spiti.

To know more about Spiti [click here](#)

Cheers

Kuntal Baruwa



Thikalna Village House

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The Approach Road: We loved the approach road to Thikalna Village House. The path to the house is lined with evergreen oak and rhododendron trees on both the sides and offers mesmerising views of the snow-clad Himalayas. Along the walk we stumbled upon a group of shy, giggling village women and girls, dressed in colourful attire, taking their goats out for grazing. We also saw a string of ponies carrying daily utilities from the road to the village. Thikalna village house is a 45 minutes' walk from the road head.

Stunning location and views: And what a stunning location and view! Thikalna Village House is located at the edge of a cliff with unhindered views of the valley and a 180 degree view of the Himalayas. You can see Nanda Devi, Maiktoli, Trishul, Panchachuli and other mountains even as far as in Garwhal. We felt as if we were spectators in a theater, where nature had put mountains, valleys, rivers and forests as the actors.

Silence, privacy and seclusion: Thikalna Village House is a place to be, one with yourself (and your beloved). The house is situated in the middle of an oak forest and provides for endearing privacy. There is no electricity and the mobile phone reception is patchy, which adds to it. During the night all we could hear was the rustling of trees amidst the gentle breeze. An ideal place for honeymooners too.

Rhododendrons: What a sight!! When we visited the Thikalna Village House, the forest was crimson red. The rhododendrons were in full bloom. February to April is the rhododendron season time. The area around the Thikalna village house has a large number of rhododendron trees and the locals even make a juice out of the rhododendron flowers. We were served locally made rhododendron juice as a welcomedrink, when we reached Thikalna Village House.

The Staff: Our 5 star tag, to the staff members of Thikalna Village House for their undiluted hospitality with a smile. The staff members at the village house are all local villagers. Some of them were even involved in the renovation of the house as day workers. They do not have much formal education but have made excellent use of the hospitality training given to them. It is heartening to see how well they do their job without any formal degree. There are very few employment opportunities in the area and the

6 Things We Liked About



employment at the village house has meant, that they do not have to leave their houses in search of jobs in cities.

Walk to Jageshwar temple: The staff at the Thikalna Village House is very eager to show you their area; they proudly call their home. We opted for a 3 hour walk to Jageshwar. This walk through terraced fields and forests offers an immersion into the life of the locals. We stumbled upon local villagers tending to their fields, small village temples and even a small deer on this walk. Located in a gorgeous valley surrounded by Oaks and Deodars, the ancient Jageshwar Temple Complex dates back to the 8th century AD and is one of the most revered by the locals. The head priest of the Jageshwar Temple blessed us in a private ceremony that was organised for us and we ended our day with a cup of tea with his family in their house located not so far away.



Festivals



Kali Puja, Kolkata 13th November

'Baro mashe, tero porbo' the Bengali saying, which means 12 months, 13 festivals, epitomises the spirit of Kolkata. Diwali, the festival of lights in Kolkata, coincides with the worship of Goddess Kali by Bengali households. Kali is worshipped as the Mother Goddess who protects all from evil. The actual prayer takes place at midnight on the day of the new moon. Most families clean their houses and light candles all over their houses. Children and adults set off firecrackers throughout the night. It is a night of sheer revelry. While it is easy to misinterpret her terrifying iconography, in Hinduism Kali is considered the Goddess who kills the ego and liberates the soul from the cycle of birth and death.

To immerse in the festivities of Kali Puja on November 13, Sita have divided the day into 2 half days for your clients.

First half: Post breakfast we will visit the Kumartoli area where the idols of Goddess Kali Puja are made. There are about 450 of them; run by families that have been into idol-making and pottery for generations. Kumartoli means potters' quarter. On Diwali day, Kumartoli is a bee hive of activities of locals collecting the idols of Goddess Kali, which they have ordered to worship in their homes. The potters of Kumartoli have still kept a lot of old traditions alive. The idol makers still use water from the Hooghly River to mix the clay and make the idols. It is not the easiest thing to do, since they have to hire water carriers, but most of the artists still follow this tradition. Kumartoli streets are narrow and there are lanes and by lanes; that is what lends Kumartoli a character. It is not a typical studio, where potters do their clay modeling, these streets are as old as Kolkata itself.

We will return to the hotel after your tour of Kumartoli. On our way back, we will buy a Kurta Pyjama for the gentleman and a traditional Lal Paari Bengali Sari for the women, to be worn in the evening. This is, with our compliments.

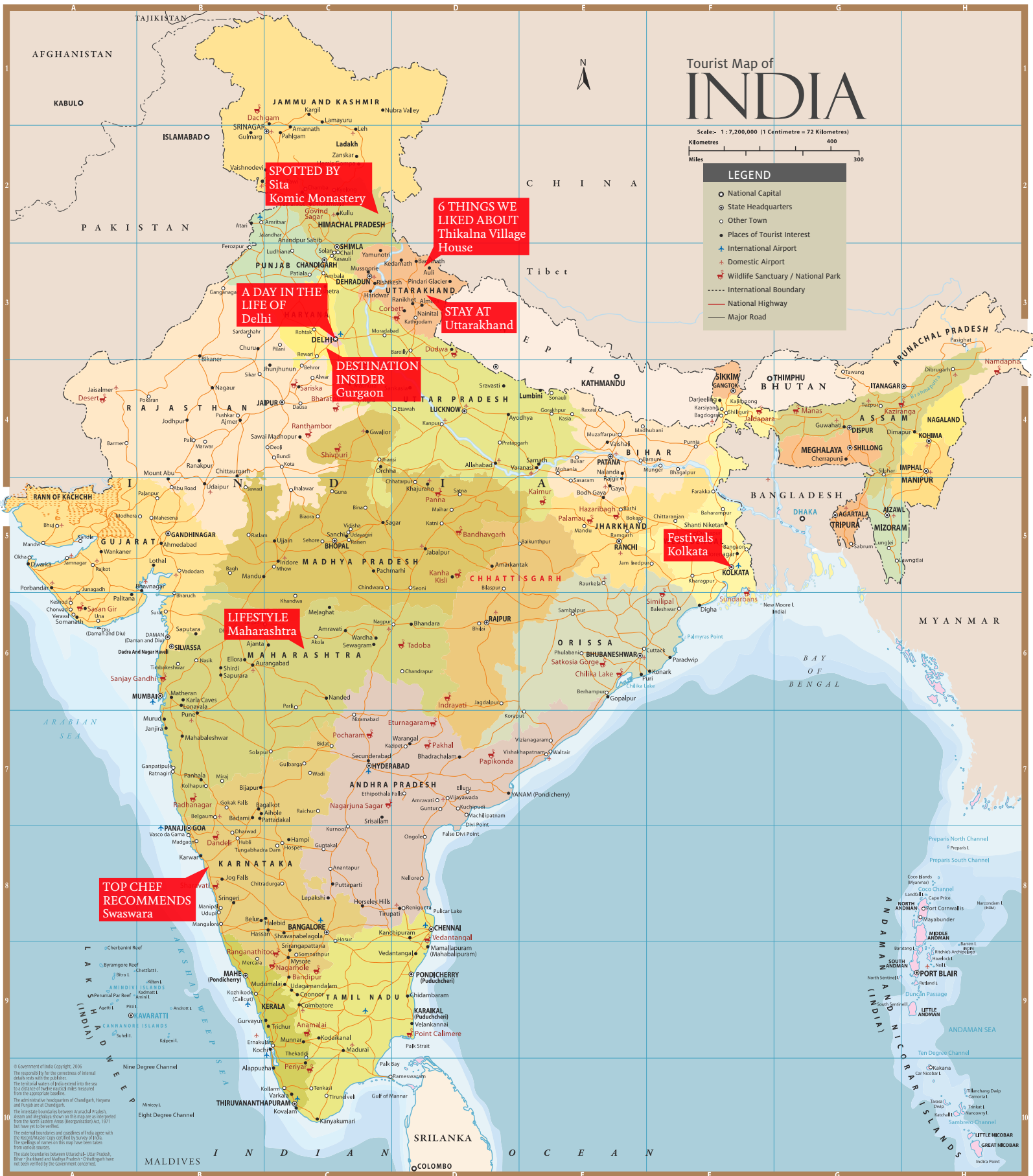
Second half: In the evening, dressed up in traditional Bengali clothes, we will go Puja Pandal hopping in the city to immerse ourselves in the Kali Puja celebration. In Hinduism, Puja Pandal is a temporary structure set up by various neighbourhoods to venerate Gods and



Kolkata locals collecting an idol of Goddess Kali from Kumartoli

Goddesses. After our Pandal hopping, we will visit the home of a local Bengali family who are friends of Sita, to participate in a private Kali Puja celebration.

For more details email us at info@sita.in





Meet us at the Upcoming Trade Shows

If you wish to schedule a meeting, do e-mail us at info@sita.in

Trade Shows	Booth No.	Whom to Meet
Top Resa Paris 18th -21st September	India Tourism Pavilion 7.2, Stand No: N 091	Philip Thomas & Valerie Chalopet
OTDYKH Leisure Fair Moscow 19th -22nd September	Awaited	Ernest Dias & Deepak Sharma
FITA Mexico 20th -23rd September	Trade Visitor	Neeraj Bhatt
Kerala Travel Mart Cochin 27th -30th September	Hall No.5, Booth No. 79 & 80	Neeraj Bhatt & Philip Thomas
Deluxe Travel Mart Ukraine 2nd October	Sita Desk	Deepak Sharma
Luxe Travel Show Baku Azerbaijan 16th October	Sita Desk	Deepak Sharma
TTG Rimini 18th -20th October	Awaited	Matteo Pennacchi & Philip Thomas
ABAV Rio de Janeiro 24th -26th October	Trade Visitor	Neeraj Bhatt
TOUR Salon Poland 24th -27th October	Trade Visitor	Deepak Sharma
WTM London 5th -8th November	Hall No S10, Booth No IN300	Neeraj Bhatt
ILTM Cannes 3rd -6th December	F 130	Dipak Deva & Philip Thomas
USTOA Hawaii 6th -8th December	Awaited	Neeraj Bhatt

Trade Shows

