

CELEBRATING
50 YEARS OF EXCELLENCE
.....
1963-2013

STAY AT

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF

LIFESTYLE

A DAY IN THE DESERT

SPOTTED BY SITA

TOP CHEF RECOMMENDS

DESTINATION INSIDER

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Art of Travel



Jog Niwas, Jodhpur

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Stay At

Jog Niwas is built as a place where connoisseurs of high arts can come, discuss and immerse themselves in the rich, fine and decorative arts of South Asia. Located on the outskirts of the Jodhpur city, the brains behind the project are Shanane and Gagendra, whose families have for generations patroned the finest South Asian master artists for their own personal pleasure and collections. As a guest in Jog Niwas, you would have access to their salon, library and research institute for the patronage, development and preservation of the erstwhile aristocratic and royal fine and decorative arts of South Asia.

The idea was to reintroduce the traditional concept of patronage and bridge the gap between the public and the artists, so that the artisans would not have difficulty in dealing with public and at the same time they had a platform to sell their products to any clientele. There are 80 different master mediums that Jog Niwas patrons and under these processes approximately 400 members of the artisan family are involved. The mediums range from metallurgy such as silversmithing and goldsmithing and other precious metal processes as well as textiles in cotton, silk and processes like pashmina, paper mache, miniature paintings with vegetable and mineral colours, handmade paper, leather processes that are hand produced and further processes like leather applique, cutting of precious stones by hand, heartstone objects with precious gemstones.

Jog Niwas has one room where clients wanting to explore the entire range of the 80 different mediums can stay for the night. The salon caters to travellers, scholars, researchers and patron collectors. And the food is exceptional, cooked by Gagendra's mother herself. A perfect place to take your high end guest wanting to pick up something exclusive for themselves from their travels in India.





Art Patrons



I met Shanane and Gajendra in one of their salons at Jog Niwas. Both Shanane and Gajendra's families, for generations have patroned the finest South Asian master artists for their own personal pleasure and collections. I asked both of them how a typical day for them looked like. "A typical day starts because of things that were set in motion years earlier," says Shanane. "Both Gajendra and I design the fine and decorative arts we patron and as such we spend countless hours carefully designing and developing patterns, sizes, what high-quality raw materials to use on a piece and which master artisan and artisanal process should be patroned to produce the object. This process is done late in the evenings which goes on till late night or is done on days when we are able to separate ourselves and concentrate only on this task. A great deal of still and tranquillity is necessary to focus and ensure the finest designs, using rare materials and a perfected aesthetic, is created. After this process is accomplished and given to a particular master or masters, detailed instructions are given on what we prefer. Once the master or masters have understood our designs and wishes, the object is started. This process, depending on the medium and complexity of the design and size, may take anywhere from one week to 2 years to complete. On an average morning we will go down our lists of masters and see where each is in the process of creating the numerous objects. With the amount of master level artisans we work with (80) continual communication is required and in any given day we speak to 2 or 3 different artisans we patron. Every second week we travel to the various karkhanas (workshops) we patron to ensure designs and quality control are strictly being followed (the quality of craft is paramount in South Asian fine and decorative arts, fairly unique compared to other areas of the world, and with this complexity of ensuring a perfected craft, quality control must be watched painstakingly to warrant the objects symmetry, beauty and visual which should not suffer.) After communicating with artisans in the morning, different finished art objects that have recently been finished are organized, cataloged and kept in safe environments from insects and elements, in one of our specially designed storage or display areas. This labour of love takes special care as every medium must be wrapped and packed differently to ensure no accidental damage. By the mid-afternoon we discuss strategy for one to two hours on how best to educate and publicise the rarity and beauty of South Asian arts to a wider domestic and global connoisseur. [Click here](#) to read more

A Day in The Life of Shanane & Gajendra





Lifestyle



Camel Herder

I met Teju Singh and his camel fondly called Kallu when I went on a full day camel safari in Bikaner. Teju Singh has been a camel herder all his life. Riding through the desert we had a lot of time to talk. I asked him about the life of a camel herder. Teju Singh told me that most of the families he knows have been rearing camels for generations and know of nothing else to do. The Bikaner Camel according to him is one of the tallest in the Indian subcontinent and generally identified by its somewhat darker colour. Earlier families who had camels would not have a single days rest. The camel was needed for all the activity of the village life. It was the main means of ferrying goods to different locations and the demand for camel carts increased during the harvesting of crops around December, when a camel would make several trips a day from the fields to the village.

Usually a camel herder in a village keeps only one camel at a time. According to Teju Singh the life expectancy for a camel is around 30 years. It costs a minimum of Rs 250 a day to feed a camel. Camels were an intrinsic part of life in the olden days. With modernity both, camel and many village traditions are disappearing. Earlier when entering a village, one used to get down from his camel or camel cart as a mark of respect as on a camel, one could see inside of houses and their private spaces.

Teju Singh tells me that he sometimes wonders what will happen to their families a few years from now. With modern means of transportation entering the villages and changing cultivation pattern in the villages, especially cash crop cultivation through tube well, soon people will not need camels anymore. That's why he tells me, many of the camel herders have taken ferrying tourists out for desert safaris as an alternative means of earning. He hopes that they too don't become an extinct breed in the near future with their camels.

The next time you are in Bikaner and want to listen to the stories of the desert, why not meet Teju Singh (Mobile number - +918107032787)





In Bikaner

A Day in the Desert

The desert has always held a somewhat magical place in people's heart, as a terrain which is inhospitable by day and surreal at night. Watching movies like Lawrence of Arabia and Black God, White Devil, I have always had a fascination for the desert. On my recent trip to Rajasthan I got the opportunity to spend a night in the deserts of Bikaner.

Ashok, from the Charkha organisation and I, reached the camel herder's house early to see Teju Singh all set to go. The camel cart had all sorts of bags dumped at the back. My only concern was water. Did we have enough of it? Teju Singh assured me that we had enough water to last us the entire trip. I felt more confident thinking, what they didn't know was that I had two bottles in my bag as well, in case of emergency.

Initially the path we took seemed to be a path which the villagers took everyday to take their animals to graze. We ramble passed village houses with people busy cleaning or offering prayer. Then after about an hour we left all signs of habitation and entered the semi-arid deserts. What is surprising is that although a desert, it is still dotted with greenery. During our ride we kept spotting the Indian Gazelle. Once away from man-made structures, there was complete silence in the desert, broken occasionally by a bird call or the sound that the camel cart made cutting through the sand.

I guess riding in the desert alone must get very boring, since Teju Singh would start humming songs quite often. The songs would be generally have words of wisdom, like not to be greedy in life since you came into the world empty handed and will leave this world empty handed. Or the song where a sister laments to her brother that she has been married to a family so far off that she can never hope to see them as often as she would like. Teju Singh was full of interesting stories as well. Teju Singh told me that once there was a foreigner with him and while riding in the middle of the desert the foreigner spotted a traditional village house. He jumped off the camel cart and said he wanted to spend the night in this house. I got very worried since I didn't know whose house it was said Teju Singh. I called the village head and he managed to track down the owner. The owner was very happy to let my guest spend the night in his house. So in the end everything worked out just fine.

[Click here](#) to read more





Village Idols & Best Views

Village Idols

Throughout your travels in Rajasthan, you will come across instances where idols that people worship are not necessarily of gods. Be it the shrine of '[Bullet Baba](#)' or in villages where statues are erected for bull worship. I came across this statue built in remembrance of two brothers who had protected the villager's livestock from wild animals and other dangers.

Best Views in Town

When in Jodhpur climb on the terrace of the blue houses to get the best view of Mehrangarh Fort. Traditionally all the houses had such man-made seats as part of the architecture, where the family could come out and sit in an otherwise compact locality, where every house shares a common wall to the house next door.

Spotted By Sita





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Rajasthani Food at Jog Niwas

When you have clients visiting Jog Niwas to explore about the rich tradition of the fine and decorative arts of South Asia, make sure that you stay on for lunch. Jogpal Singh, the mother of Gajendra Singh the owner of the place, makes some of the best Rajasthani local dishes typical to the Chauhan community. When I was there for lunch, she made 'Pithod' a spicy gravy dish, 'Keri' prepared from un-ripened green mangoes to be had with Indian flat bread and to finished off with 'Lopsi' a local dessert made from oats, clarified butter and dried coconut.

Top Chef Recommends





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Khadi, Wildlife and Meandering Lanes

My recent trip to Rajasthan turned out to be very exciting. From New Delhi I took a very comfortable overnight train to Bikaner. And can you believe it - this train always reaches before time. Anyways in Bikaner I caught up with Ashok Bishnoi who runs an organisation called [The Charkha](#). The Charkha was set up in 2001 under the society of handicrafts to promote Khadi and village handicrafts. From that time on, Ashok in his personal capacity has been going to village by village trying to convince families who were traditionally weavers but now farming, to go back to their expertise. He told me that it has been an uphill battle for him. In many of the families he had to restore their looms to working conditions even before they could start work on them again. Ashok believes in the Gandhian philosophy that the Charkha had a central place in rural economy being a source of employment and self-reliance for everyone in a village. A visit to The Charkha could be a great addition to your itinerary of Bikaner, where you spend half a day with Ashok as he takes you around to the nearby villages to see the artisans at work and finally to his organisation which is housed in one part of his residence. Have a traditional meal with the family. Later look through all the hand woven works done by the villages nearby. Bikaner has a special kind of hand embroidery called Bharat, that means to fill up. On a plain piece of cloth different motifs are embroidered with colourful threads and sparkling mirrors are fitted with them. In the evening go for a safari in the unspoiled dunes of Bikaner, with Ashok.

The other place of interest which is totally off the map is The Jalore Wildlife Sanctuary. Located just two and a half hours from Bikaner and four hours from Udaipur, this privately owned sanctuary is in a paradise for the recluse wildlifer. The accommodation is basic with two permanent cottages and six tents which can be pitched up as and when required. There is no electricity, since the property is located inside the sanctuary area and the owners wanted to put the least amount of strain on the surrounding wildlife. Jalore wildlife sanctuary has an extraordinary eco-system and wildlife. The surrounding vegetation is in parts desert, savannah and in parts that of foothills of Aravalis. It was evening by the time I reached the park and we had a sun-downer in a beautiful location inside the sanctuary. The charm of the place is the feeling of being totally alone in the middle of wilderness. Later when it was dark we went on a jeep safari to spot some wildlife. For

Destination Insider



the first half an hour, I was expecting to spot another jeep on the circuit like you do in other national parks. But here, you are the only souls, which is a nice feeling. Desert fox, Asian wild cats, Eurasian vultures, Indian Gazelle and Porcupines were few of the animals that I spotted. The sanctuary also has leopards. In the morning before proceeding to your next destination you can do a walking safari of Jalore which is also very interesting. Depending on your fitness and stamina, they have charted three routes which vary from an hour of trekking to three hours of trekking.

From Jalore I proceeded to Udaipur. In Udaipur I tried out our exclusive product which is the cycling tour. I am really happy to say that I loved it. The cycling tour covers the old city. The tour starts at a leisurely time of eight o'clock from Jagdish Temple. The bicycles are quite comfortable (no gears) and the route so chalked out that most of the time you are cycling downhill. When you come to an uphill section you get off the cycle and push it along. The tour takes you through the markets as they are slowly coming to life. We stop frequently and the guide explains what we are witnessing. There is a lot of interaction with the people. When you come to areas where people are feeding the cows you are also encouraged to feed them. Or in the vegetable market you can bargain and buy fresh vegetables. From the local market you then cycle down to the City Palace area to see the breath-taking view of Jag Mandir and Lake Palace on lake Pichola. Our tour finishes two hours later at a small bakery near Gangaur Ghat. Overall a must do experience in Udaipur.



Ranvas

6 Things We Liked About

1. **Living inside a Fort** : Have you ever dreamt about living inside a queen's palace? [Ranvas](#) was the queenly residence of the Ranis of Maharaja Bakhat Singh, the ruling Maharaja in the 18th century. Built by the Maharaja as a pleasure palace and as a refuge from the external troubles of warfare and politics, Ranvas offers the most elegant accommodation possible inside any fort of India. Unlike other forts of Rajasthan built on a precipice, the Ahhichatragarh Fort lies in the heart of the city. The walls of the fort seem to cocoon the palace from the hustle and bustle of the city. I was pleasantly surprised to see Ranvas shares the same entrance to that of the fort... Once inside the fort, a short drive takes you to your abode, discreetly tucked away in one corner of the fort to be regally welcomed into the pleasure palace.

2. **The Rooms** : Since the palace was built for the queens, no room intrudes or overlooks the other. Ranvas has 10 Havelis and each Haveli has three rooms each. Stepping inside the room is a pleasure. All rooms have been lovingly restored to its former glory, which you can learn about on the private museum tour that the staff is happy to arrange for you. The rooms feel rich but not overdone and the colour palette is excellent. I have always had this problem in many restored palace hotels, where the room is too big for the air conditioning. Happy to say Ranvas had no such issues. Also I could charge all my electronic gadgets simultaneously in my room. Such small details have been kept in mind.

3. **Morning Walk** : When is the last time you took a morning walk on the ramparts of a fort? The Ahhichatragarh Fort is built on close to 32 acres of land. It was a very nice experience to walk along the fort wall in the morning and look out into the surrounding town as it slowly came to life. It took me a good half an hour to circumnavigate the fort. The town outside the fort is also most interesting- so un-touristic and real. The hotel staff accompanies you to help interpret and discover the colourful daily market.

4. **Relaxation & Food** : Ranvas is the perfect place to relax undisturbed in peace. Grab yourself a book and curl up in one of the sun loungers kept under the canopy. The pool at Ranvas is one of the best that I have seen in Rajasthan. The staff in general, very professional and attentive. The food was simply delicious with plenty of varieties and tastes to choose



from. Chef Peter made me Chicken 1000, a Thai dish which was light and full of favour, especially since I told him that I wanted to have something non-rajasthani.

5. **The Private Tour** : Don't miss the private tour of the fort and the museum. See how water was used to enhance the aesthetic qualities of indoor spaces, the courtyard where musical performances used to take place, illuminated by thousands of oil lamps, the royal gardens and other places of interest inside the fort.

6. **Sufi Festival at Ranvas** : Every year during February, Ranvas comes alive with the Sufi Festival. The four days of Sufi Festival is sheer bliss! An eclectic mix of music, dance, lectures and walking tours, accompanied by the finest cuisine from the maharani's kitchen. The festival is held at different locations that give you breath-taking views of the fort, lit up with hundreds of oil lamps every night. I would be there next year to enjoy one of the best music festivals to be held in India. Why don't you join me for the same?



Festivals



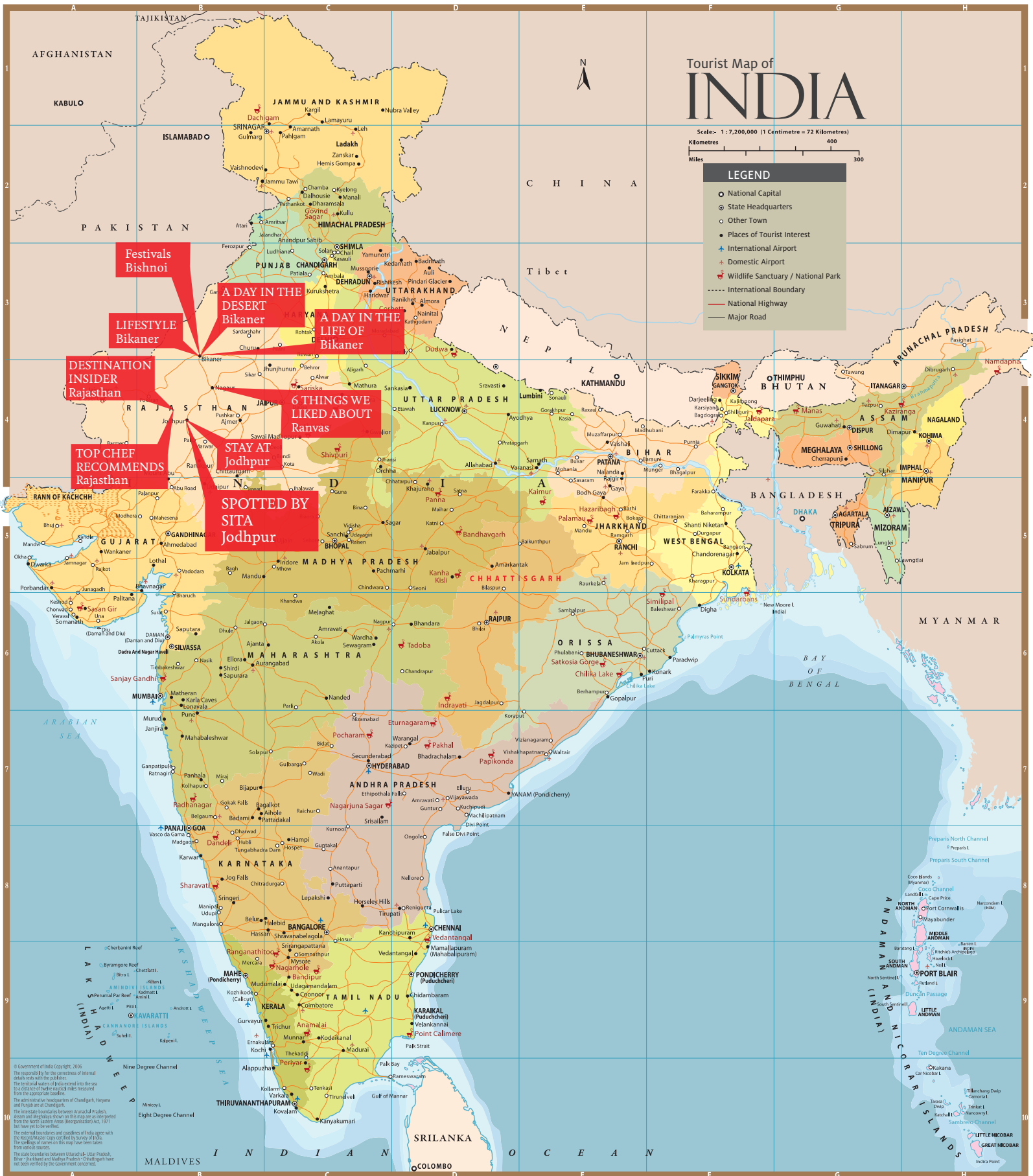
Bishnoi Festival, 4- 5 October 2013 & 28 February - 1 March 2014

Bishnoi Festival is celebrated at Mukam, 30 kms in the east of Nokha which is 70 kms from Bikaner on the Nagaur road. Twice a year Mukam becomes a place of worship and socio-religious gathering. Upto 500,000 pilgrims come to the place where their guru Jambhoji founded the Bishnoi community and died in 1534 AD. During the Jamba festival, pilgrims take sand from the lower areas to enlarge the pond and build huge sand dunes near the temple as their guru told them, "build dunes to break the wind."

At Mukam Bishnoi Festival, clients shall be able to see huge gatherings of Bishnois, their costumes and ornaments, chantings and night prayers. Beside this clients would see deers, peacocks and other birds roaming nearby the temple being offered grains by Bishnois. It's amazing to see Gou-Shalas (cow shelters) nearby, where thousands of deaf and blind cows are given food and care by the society. They will also be able to see the big bazaar at the festival ground where all household articles are sold and purchased.

Tents can be pitched in the festival ground for clients and they can see the festival from close. They can also visit nearby Bishnoi villages to see their day to day life and culture.







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
OTDYKH Leisure Fair Moscow 17th -20th September	2C301	Ernest Dias & Deepak Sharma
TOP RESA Paris 24th -27th September	India Tourism booth - C43	Philip Thomas & Valerie Chalopet
FITA Mexico 26th -29th September	Trade Visitor	Neeraj Bhatt
IATO Convention India 8th -11th September	Trade Visitor	Harpreet Bhatia & Ayappa Somaiah
ABAV São Paulo 4th -8th September	Trade Visitor	Neeraj Bhatt
UITM Kiev 16th -18th October	Awaited	Deepak Sharma
TTG Rimini 17th -19th October	Trade Visitor	Matteo Pennacchi & Philip Thomas
WTM London 4th -7th November	Hall No S8, Booth No IN200	Neeraj Bhatt
USTOA Scottsdale 5th -7th December	Awaited	Neeraj Bhatt

Trade Shows

