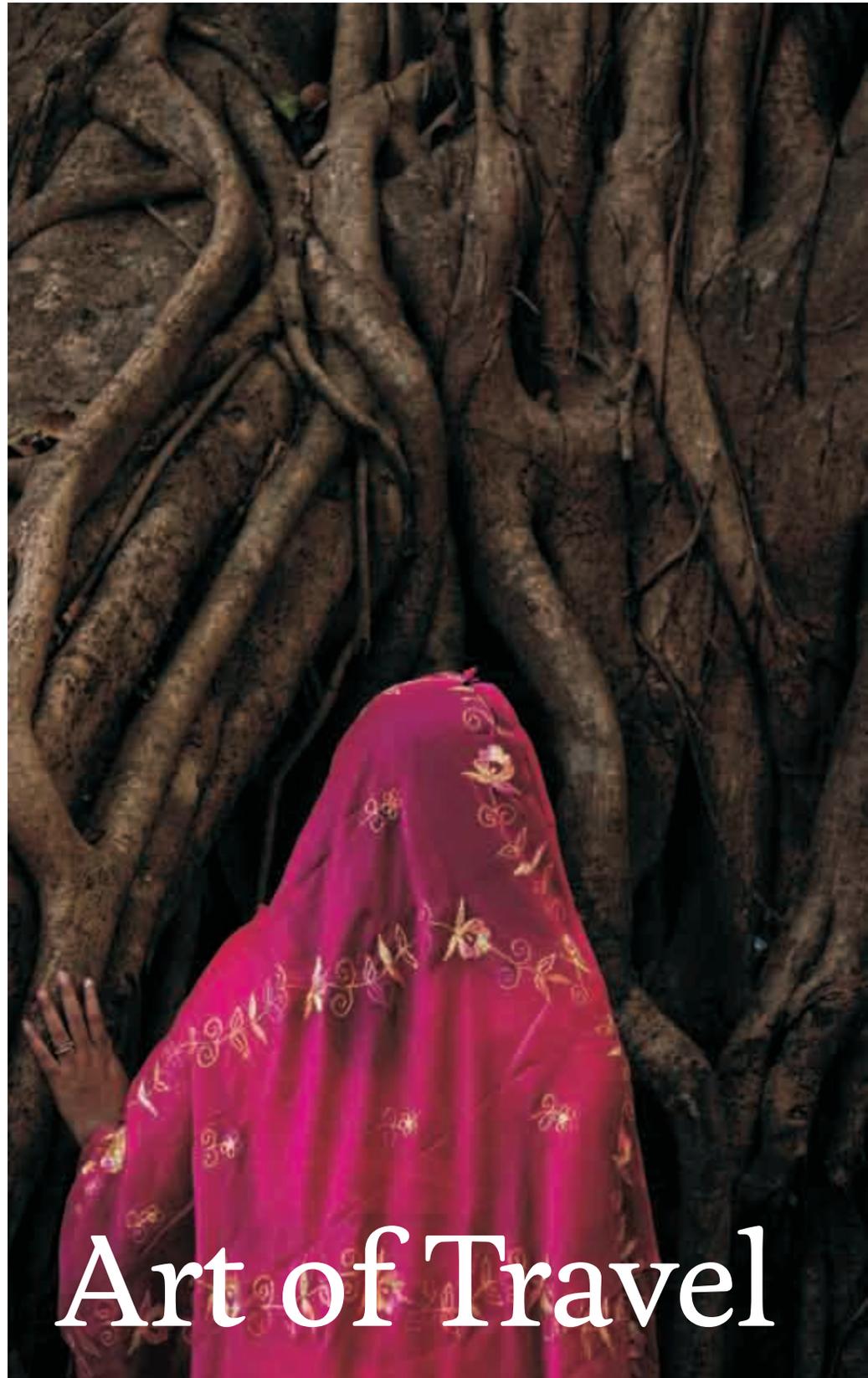


FROM THE CEO'S DESK
STAY AT
A DAY IN THE LIFE OF
LIFESTYLE
SPOTTED BY SITA
TOP CHEF RECOMMENDS
STAFF TRAVEL
DESTINATION INSIDER
6 THINGS WE LIKED ABOUT
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IMPRESSIONS



Art of Travel



From The CEO's Desk

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Season's Greetings

Dear Partners,

We have come to the end of yet another year and continue to be as passionate about what we do-destination management !!

This year was hands on with the new products we launched after our Destination Knowledge Centre travelled an extra mile for us in search of compelling stories for our clients. We managed so many stories and an award for our efforts too. Recognition came to us in the form of several awards, some for our financial figures, the number of clients we catered to and of course for our corporate social responsibility initiatives. We did take our corporate responsibility initiative a step further, especially since it remains a cornerstone of our business strategy.

Have you ever attended a Knowledge Wednesday, well if you come to our office on a Wednesday you'll experience a knowledge sharing platform with an external speaker, every session has a different speaker. This was something we launched this year and it has gone down well with our employees. After all our employees are our asset, there so much more we can do for them. They are the face of the company and a medium for you to reach to us.

As we come to an end of this year, I invite you on a journey with us and our favourite souvenirs. Follow [this link](#) and enjoy our short movie "Souvenirs from around the World".

Thank you for your trust and confidence. I wish you and your loved ones Happy Holidays and many precious moments in the coming year.

Season's Greetings

Regards

Dipak Deva





Stay At

Bagh Tola, Kanha



Bagh Tola, which literally means the Tiger's village, is spread over 44 acres of wooded forest. This wonderful lodge comes complete with 44 lithographs and antique furniture gleaned from old houses around India. To minimize the impact on the natural surroundings and to cause minimal footprint on the ground Bagh Tola is designed around a courtyard reminiscent of the Anglo-Indian railway colonies that central India was famous for. The eight bedrooms, two in each corner of the courtyard are wonderfully spacious and elegant in their colonial design. The resort team comprises of a naturalist manager, kitchen crew trained in delighting with both European and Indian cuisine and designated attendant for each room to handle all the guest requirements. Evenings are spent in the open courtyard with evening grills around the bonfire. While relaxing under the star-lit sky the guest are free to help themselves to spirits of their choice, whilst chatting about the on-going conservation efforts, as well as the day's sightings in the park.

Bagh Tola is managed by Eric D'Cunha who comes with 30 years of Wildlife experience across the Indian sub-continent covering various national parks from Point Calimere to Leh - Ladakh. He has also worked as a Biologist with the Bombay Natural History Society for 6 years under the legendary Ornithologist Dr. Salim Ali. Eric has been closely working with Kanha National Park since 1986 and has under his belt a list of publications covering birds of Kanha and several other notes on the wildlife of Kanha in Journals of Bombay Natural History Society. When not preoccupied with spotting birds, butterflies, reptiles and mammals, one would find Eric engrossed in books in his personal library which is perhaps one of the most comprehensive ones on the natural history of the Indian subcontinent. Eric is assisted by an experienced team of naturalists comprising of Margaret Watt-Carter and Sarvana Kumar, both of whom have spent a long time in Central India Forests.





The Singing Ape

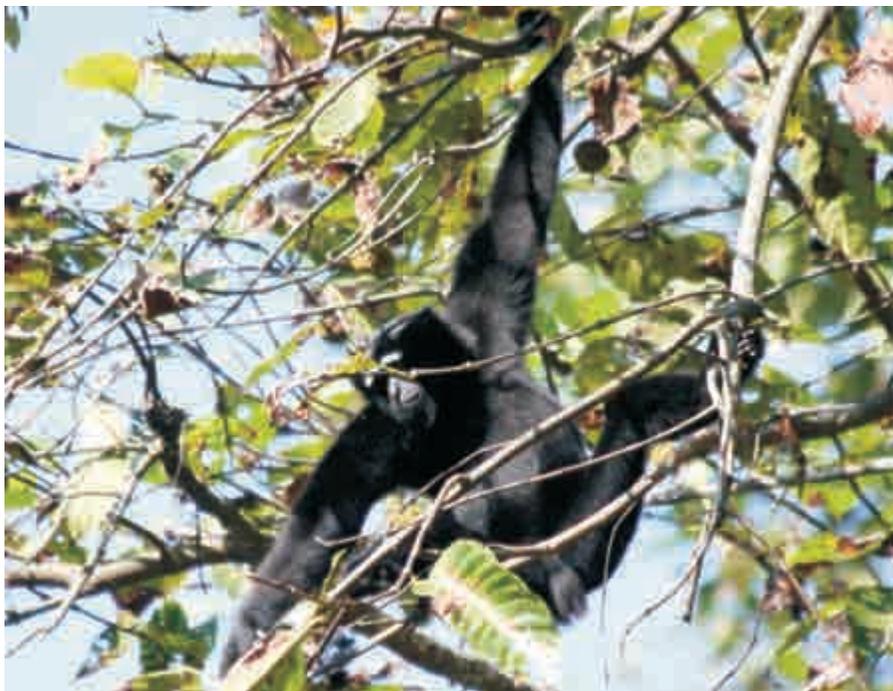
A Day in The Life Of Hoolock Gibbon

The Hoolock Gibbon is the only representative of the Ape family in India. Infact it is the only Ape in India. Hoolocks not only resemble human beings in various aspects but also share 95% of its genetic material with us. Hoolock Gibbons are unique, they have one male, one female type of social system, where one adult male pairs with an adult female and stays together for the rest of their lives. It is characterised by long forearms, no tail and white eyebrows. Hoolocks are the only primate, whose male and female breeds are distinct from each other. Adult males are black with white eyebrows that turn up at the end, while the adult female is tanned copper in colour with a whitish eyebrow band. Another special characteristic of the Hoolock Gibbon is their call, for which they are fondly called as the Singing Ape. An adult Hoolock Gibbon pair produces a loud and distinctive call (sound) in the form of a duet which is most interesting and can be heard from a distance of one mile. Both the male and female sit close together and break into vigorous swinging forms while performing this duet. Also Hoolocks spend the night on pre-selected trees only. No matter how far they venture during the day, they have to spend the night in one of these pre-selected trees known as "Lodging Trees."

A typical Hoolock Day Out, would begin with the adult female making her first movement after waking up at day break in one of the Lodging Trees. Others follow her as she then moves towards the nearest fruit tree. However, in winters the Gibbons would first like to bask in the sun for an hour and a half, instead of feeding themselves. After one or two bouts of feeding, they start moving and singing their duet. In summers the Gibbons engage in a long resting bout after the morning session to escape the mid-day temperature. In between 13:00 hrs to 15:00 hrs, they start feeding again, the last session for the day and once they have done that, the adult female leads the way to the Lodging Tree where they call it a day. An adult Hoolock Gibbon pair, on a given day can traverse an area of anything between 22 to 35 hectares.

The Singing Apes - [Click here to see the video](#)

Where to go Hoolock spotting in India: At the Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary in Assam in Northeast India. There is no other place... [Click here to continue reading](#)





Lifestyle



Painted Houses of Hazaribagh

Rhythms of the Earth

The Hazaribagh district in northern Jharkhand is the homeland of Khovar (marriage art) and Sohrai (harvest art) mural painting traditions done exclusively by tribal women artists tracing its origin to the regions pre-historic rock art (10,000 B.C) in sandstone rock shelters in the hills. It is done twice a year and intrinsically connected with the repair of the mud house walls.

The Khovar art is done by first painting the walls of the mud houses with kali maati (black earth/clay) over which the Dudhi maati (white earth/clay) is applied with cloth swabs daubed in the colour and scratched off before it dries with a broken comb or the finger, thus revealing the dark black under paint with emerging art work. The Sohrai art is the colourful painted art by using chewed toothbrush twigs (datwan) using earth colours - lal maati (red earth/clay), pila maati (yellow earth/clay), kali maati and charak / white earth/clay, to illustrate line drawings or sometimes forms filled with these earth ochre. While the painting in the hills stylishly depicts animals and birds, those in valleys are about plants, aquatic life and birds.

The rock art of Jharkhand and the Khovar & Sohrai paintings were brought to light two decades ago by my father Bulu Imam. Paintings brought onto handmade paper were widely exhibited in over four dozen exhibitions in India and abroad (Australia, UK, USA, Canada, Europe - Germany, Italy, France, Switzerland, etc.) with several documentary films, research and magazine articles to highlight this vulnerable and vanishing art tradition. Travellers have been visiting this region since then and word-to-mouth publicity has been the only means of exposing this lesser known jewel of India. To cater to travellers my family has launched Jharkhand's first Rural Tourist Village at Bhelwara in Eastern Hazaribagh, famous for hundreds of village homes painted with the Sohrai murals. It is also known for the festival Khutta Bandhan, where the village bulls are tied to a pole and taunted with a hide skin to create frenzy amongst drummer and colourful gathering of villagers.

Hazaribagh as the name denotes means Hazar = thousand, and bag = garden; or Hazar = thousand, and bagh = tiger. Therefore it refers to the Land of a thousand gardens or land of a thousand tigers. We chose to go with the later since one of India's first



National Park happens to be 30 kms North of Hazaribagh town. Hazaribagh is also the home of the hunting Manjhi Santals, the nomadic Birhor tribe and host of other tribal communities such as Oraons, Mundas- who make up for the diverse and colourful cultural heritage of Jharkhand. The region has also revealed early Palaeolithic habitation sites and stone tools continuing through the Upper Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic into Chalcolithic habitation sites (evidenced in Copper Jewellery) and Iron Age remains. The hinterland is dotted with numerous Ancient Megalithic Burial grounds, (1000 B.C) and Buddhist sites dated to 6th Century A.D. There are trekking trails which I have designed leading to the fourteen prehistoric rock art sites in the hills of the Chotanagpur plateau, through the beautiful countryside and each is a daylong adventure, worthy of a visit.

Justin Imam is a friend of Sita and his family has relentlessly worked to highlight the Khovar and Sohrai Art work of Jharkhand globally. For your clients who may be interested in experiencing this little known unspoilt gem of a destination in India, Justin and his family is happy to take them around personally.



Spotted By Sita

“”
Bibaji Churiwala,
Jodhpur

Blink and you will miss this nondescript shop, but they are 6 generations into the business now. Bibaji Churiwala's crystal bangles are a must buy and adorns the petite wrist of the ladies of every Rajasthan royal from Marwar to Mewar to Shekhawati. Cost ranges from 10 US dollars for a pair to 70 US dollars. The expensive ones are made to order. There is an interesting story about how the name Bibaji came about. During the days of the yore, men were not allowed inside the women quarters of the Royal houses. The grandfather of the current head of the family used to accompany his mother known as Bibiji when he was a kid. The women folk used to lovingly call him Bibaji and that's how the name stayed on.

Listen to many such wonderful stories as you browse through their impressive collection of bangles which they are happy to display with lots of zest and affection. We were told about why the ladies of a particular royal family of Rajasthan will never wear a green bangle. One of their ancestors committed Jauhar, voluntary death during wartime by jumping into a pyre to avoid capture and dishonor at the hands of the enemy whilst wearing a green bangle. That was sometime during the 15th century. Ever since, green bangles are forbidden in the family.





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Chicken with Pomegranate and Crispy Potatoes

Shailish Shekhar, Executive Chef at the Devi Ratn, Jaipur recommends Chicken with Pomegranate and Crispy Potatoes as a must try during your stay there. “Chicken cooked with pomegranates, it is a best seller in Vajra, our specialty restaurant of contemporary Indian and European cuisine,” says Shekhar. “People love it and return for its fine balance of sweet and sour taste and contrasting texture of succulent chicken morsels with crispy potatoes,” he adds. Chicken with Pomegranate and Crispy Potatoes at the Vajra is priced at ₹ 650 + taxes.

Top Chef Recommends





Staff Travel

Exploring Rajasthan on Bicycle with Digvijay

Digvijay Singh Kandari, from our team recently accompanied a group of 17 German travellers to Rajasthan on a bicycle tour. A cycling enthusiast himself, Digvijay highly recommends this route for travellers who want to see Rajasthan up close.

Covering a distance of 406 kms on bicycle, the 12 days tour was in itself a wonderful experience for Digvijay but even more uplifting was the response of the group, they loved every bit of it.

“Exploring Rajasthan on bicycle not only lets travellers up close to the destination but also provides an opportunity for them to interact with the local people in villages, spend time with them and their children, enabling authentic encounters that make for lasting impressions. The pace is one that can be modified to enjoy the surroundings, after all there is a lot to take in,” says Digvijay.

Starting at Delhi, a vehicle carrying the travellers and the bicycles headed to North Rajasthan, from where began the comfortable cycling route in the midst of beautifully painted houses.

From Mandawa, to Khimsar, Jodhpur and Rohet, which is located in the rocky barren part of Rajasthan, via Osian, an oasis of sand. The cycling continued further exploring the holy town of Pushkar leaving the barren rocky landscape behind. Then to the pink city Jaipur, Bharatpur- the bird sanctuary - ending at the Taj Mahal.

“The best part about the cycling tour is that one can enjoy a cup of local tea at small tea shops around the country side, it is made to perfection with the right amount of tea spices. And of course, our fruit lunch breaks, are completely healthy and full of energy for the trip onwards. The highlight would of course, be cycling inside the bird sanctuary along with a naturalist to lead the way at Bharatpur, it is a rare experience, especially for bird watchers.”

After long bicycle rides the group had the luxury of indulging in typical Indian royal hospitality at the best of the heritage hotels in the region, Mandawa Castle, Khimsar Fort, Rohet Garh and Samode Palace.

As for Digvijay, he is all set to explore some more on yet another bicycle tour.



If you would like some more information do send an email at info@sita.in.



By Invitation Only

During our travels we have had the opportunity to interact with many members of erstwhile aristocracy of India, staying in the cities with day jobs. But they still have forts, castles and havelis in their ancestral place, which is mostly not on the tourist map. While most are dilapidated, locked or in ruins, many disputed in court of law; some of these are still being inhabited by members of their family. With us you have the opportunity to stay in some of these forts, castles and havelis for an undiluted experience of India that is fast vanishing. These are neither hotels nor homestays, but actual homes with gracious hosts who are willing to open their doors to equally gracious guests who may be interested in knowing about their way of life. This is not for everyone. And it is By Invitation Only. The Royal Balunda Castle is located 115 Kms from Jodhpur and 260 Kms from Jaipur. With a history going back to 350 years, the modest castle has 10 well maintained basic neat and clean rooms. Your host will be Raghvendra Rathore and his family; an aristocratic of Rajasthan who trace back their lineage to Rao Jodha; the founder of Jodhpur.

Things to do in Balunda

Visit Cenotaphs of the Balunda family, Mansions of the merchants of Balunda, Stepwells, Temples, villages of the indigenous Rabari community who are semi-nomadic grazers and cooking with your host in the family kitchen.

Suggested itinerary

After Delhi-Agra-Jaipur, we head out to Pushkar for 1 night and then to Balunda. We stay at the Royal Balunda Castle for 2 nights and then proceed to Jodhpur. Balunda is 120 kms from Pushkar. There is a direct route from Pushkar to Balunda. But it is more of a country road. So from Pushkar we head back to Ajmer and then take the state highway to Jodhpur. From Ajmer, about 100 kms ahead, there is a place called Jaitaran. From here we will take the Merta road to reach Balunda which is about 15 kms from here.

We start from Pushkar after breakfast at around 10:00 hrs and reach Balunda by lunch time. Post lunch and after settling down a bit, we can explore a few places in Balunda such as the Cenotaphs of the family; some of

Destination Insider



which are three centuries old and fabulous examples of Rajput Architecture. Maybe take some cooking lessons with your host in the evening. Next morning we can further explore Balunda by foot, seeing local art work, handicraft and the village life. We can travel to Jaitaran, close by to visit the Jain Temple and have lunch at the [Nimaj Palace](#). Or spend our time with the indigenous Rabari community in their villages. In the evening you will be entertained by local musicians, whilst a sumptuous home cooked Rajasthani dinner awaits you. Next day after breakfast we leave for Jodhpur to continue with the rest of your Rajasthan itinerary.

Have a great Christmas and a Super New Year.

Cheers

Kuntal Baruwa



Shenbaga Vilaasam

6 Things We Liked About

Ideal stopover after the hectic Temple circuit of Tamil Nadu: [Shenbaga Vilaasam](#) is the perfect antidote for those looking for a relaxing time after the hectic and dusty temple circuit of Tamil Nadu. With only 4 rooms; each named after the women of the Vanavarayar family who owns it, Shenbaga is wonderfully private. Its 4 and half hours from Madurai and an ideal stopover on your way to Kerala. Built in the 1900's we loved its old world charm and rustic setting in the midst of a working farm. Life here moves at a typical slow pace; and we thoroughly enjoyed whiling away our time sipping coffee in its airy verandah watching the villagers going about their daily chores. By the way, Shenbaga is the local name of a flower which is considered as one of the favourites of the Hindu God, Vishnu.

Welcome and Farewell Ceremony: We loved the staff of Shenbaga for being so helpful, polite and attentive. One of the highlights was the undiluted welcome and farewell ceremony by its staff. When you reach the property, they stop your vehicle under a Banyan tree which has a small shrine. They perform a brief prayer ceremony and welcome you to Shenbaga. And the best part is the person performing the prayer ceremony could be anyone; from the bullock cart driver of the farm to the cook, to the person who does room service. They even break a coconut in front of the vehicle praying for a safe journey when guests checks out. Offering a coconut in Hindu religion is considered the purest act that one can do since the water and the white kernel inside the coconut is unpolluted as it remains covered by the hard outer shell. We were touched by their simple warmth.

The Food: Outstanding. Shenbaga serves only vegetarian food and eggs. Our 5 star to Chef Aarmugham (means Eight Faces we were told) who comes from a family of cooks that has served the Vanavarayar family for generations. Aarmugham doesn't speak a word of English and is shy; but he serves some of the most delicious vegetarian home cooked food in the entire of South India. He has a surprise up his sleeve for every guest, the night before you check out. We are not talking about it here. But we loved it and you will love it too.

Vesti Tying: And we recommend you dress up for the occasion of the surprise planned by Aarmugham and the staff of Shenbaga. For Gentlemen we recommend the quintessential white Vesti. Vesti is a rectangular piece of unstitched cloth, wrapped around the waist



and the legs and knotted at the waist. Quite like a Sarong. Ladies can try the traditional orange sari which women wear here during special occasions. A great fun way of doing it, is going to the local market with one of the staff members and buying it from Amma's shop; the affable lady whose company we thoroughly enjoyed. All this for less than ₹ 200. Murugan, who is a staff member, is the Vesti tying expert here, while the ladies who help Aarmugham in the kitchen, are also ever ready to lend a helping hand when it comes to the Sari. Dressed up, you go to the private temple of the Vanavarayar family where you get blessed by the family priest and when you return...you will be surprised!!!

Kolam Making: If you like to use your time in hand to explore, experiment and learn in the process, Shenbaga is the perfect place to dig into interesting stories behind local customs. Ever wondered why people in Tamil Nadu draw those exotic patterns in front of their homes. We were taken to a local home by one of the staff members where 16 year old Divya Bharati taught us how to make Kollam; the exotic patterns women draw in front of their homes every morning. "It's a good exercise for women," Divya Bharati told us and "the rice powder used serves as food for the ants," she adds. Divya Bharati's mother served us tea while we shared our stories and had a great conversation. The staff member of Shenbaga who accompanied us complimented and added to it occasionally.

In-house Activities: There are plenty. But we loved the way Shenbaga would ask and offer you options. All in a flexible manner. When we wanted to know about coconut plantations our time was planned in a manner that we saw how workers arrived at work, offering a quick prayer in the shrine inside the plantation. We got to interact with workers at the coconut plantation and had the opportunity to use their tools to try our hands at picking our own coconut from the tree. We even got a low-down on bull racing (most of the workers on the plantation are expert bull racers too) and ended up watching a bull race later, which was happening close to Shenbaga that day.



Festivals



Baneshwar Fair, Dungarpur, Rajasthan 3rd -7th February 2012

“Baneshwar” means the ‘Master of the Delta’ and the Baneshwar Fair is dedicated to Lord Shiva; the Destroyer, from the [Hindu Trinity](#). It takes place at a small delta formed by two rivers for five days in Dungarpur, 75 miles from Udaipur in Southern Rajasthan. Baneshwar Fair is greatly revered by the indigenous communities and comprises of many religious events and rituals. A number of shops are set up which display fine handicraft items.

Here is a beautiful photo essay of Baneshwar by New York based photographer Tewfic El-Sawy aka “The Travel Photographer,” to read [click here](#).

To see more of Tewfic El-Sawy’s fantastic work here - [click here](#)

Where to stay in Dungarpur during the Baneshwar Fair: (Udai Bilas Palace) - [click here](#)

Most of the Festival dates are decided by Solar / Lunar calendars practiced in India, due to which the dates are subject to change.

You may plan some special departure based on these festivals. For any assistance please contact us.





Tourist Map of INDIA

Scale: 1:7,200,000 (1 Centimetre = 72 Kilometres)
Kilometres 400 300
Miles

LEGEND

- National Capital
- State Headquarters
- Other Town
- Places of Tourist Interest
- ✈ International Airport
- ✈ Domestic Airport
- 🌳 Wildlife Sanctuary / National Park
- International Boundary
- National Highway
- Major Road

SPOTTED BY DESTINATION
SITA
Jodhpur

INSIDER
Balunda

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Jaipur

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Kanha

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Hazariabagh

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF
Hoolock Gibbon

6 THINGS WE LIKED ABOUT
Tamilnadu

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The responsibility for the correctness of internal details rests with the publisher.
The territorial waters of India extend into the sea to a distance of twelve nautical miles measured from the appropriate baseline.
The administrative headquarters of Chandigarh, Haryana and Punjab are at Chandigarh.
The international boundaries between Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Meghalaya shown on this map are as interpreted from the Border Security Force (BSF) Operational Act, 1971 but have yet to be verified.
The external boundaries and coastline of India, agree with the Revised Major Copy certified by Survey of India.
The spelling of names on this map have been taken from various sources.
The state boundaries between Uttarakhand - Uttar Pradesh, Bihar - Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh - Chhattisgarh have not been verified by the Government.



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
Matka Expo Helsinki 19th -22nd January	Trade visitor	Vikram Trivedi
ETC Florida 19th -22nd January	Sita Desk	Neeraj Bhatt

Trade Shows

