

STAY AT

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF

LIFESTYLE

SPOTTED BY SITA

TOP CHEF RECOMMENDS

DESTINATION INSIDER

6 THINGS WE LIKED ABOUT

FESTIVALS

INSPIRATION LOCATOR

TRADE SHOWS



Art of Travel



Sheikhpura Kothi

Located across 72 acres of farmland, [Sheikhpura Kothi](#) in Hansi, Haryana is a 150 year old property built on the lines of a French chateau. The spacious six exuberant rooms and suites with all the modern facilities exude both charm and hauteur. Given its close proximity to Delhi international airport, the Shekhawati region of Rajasthan and Patiala in Punjab, Sheikhpura Kothi makes for a refreshing and interesting stopover after a tour of the Golden Triangle (Delhi-Agra -Jaipur) or for those guests looking at something new and want to combine the Golden Triangle with the open art galleries of the Shekhawati region and jest and effervescence of Punjab. Sheikhpura Kothi today stands on what was once the territory of the legendary and whimsical Colonel James Skinner. He was an Anglo-Indian military adventurer born of a British father and a Rajput mother. Known as Sikandar Sahib to the locals, he lived like an Indian landlord in Hansi, taking great interest in the cultivation of his estates. Many of his friends recalled the delicious Indian food, good conversation and relaxation with the hookah with Skinner. He spoke the local dialect fluently and wrote Persian more easily than English.

Adds Kuntal from our Destination Knowledge Centre who stayed at the Sheikhpura Kothi recently "From the battleground of the mythological Hindu Epic Mahabharata to Mohammed Ghauri; the first Muslim invader of Indian history to the one and only independent European King of India; an Irish mercenary who spoke chaste Haryanvi, the local dialect and built a Fort from where he ruled for 4 years, until he was defeated by a combined British, Maratha and Sikh army led by Colonel James Skinner, to a rare private collection of a villager which brings alive the stories of a 5000 year old Harrapan Mega City not so far away from the property... the Sheikhpura Kothi experience is refreshingly different. One can also choose to do nothing and simply relax with home style food cooked by a Khansama; a male cook and house steward of a noble family of the Indian sub-continent. He has been with the owners for nearly 55 years. Minimum 2 night stay."

Stay At



Early Mornings at Sheikhpura Kothi



Restaurateur

“I am a huge fan of Apple, especially the Apple iPhone. I think it is the coolest gadget of our times. And since I couldn't have named my restaurant Apple or iPhone I decided to call it California where the Apple Headquarter is located,” says 25 year old Restaurateur Amritpal Singh of Patiala. And we thought he was a fan of the American Rock Band Eagles and was inspired by their smash hit “Hotel California”. “Well, I like them too and they are from California as well,” he smiles. We met Amritpal in his California Restaurant, which he opened a year back at the typical middle class Tezbagh Colony of Patiala, where everybody seem to know each other. We were intrigued by his offering of “fat-free” food. “Fat Free” and that too in Punjab? It seemed completely out of place given that Punjabis are hearty eaters of a flavoursome rich fat diet and super consumers of desi-ghee (home made clarified butter) and hydrogenated fats. “In the olden days it was easily balanced by our folks efforts in their agricultural fields. They needed that kind of a diet given the kind of hard labour they did. But things are not the same anymore. We, Punjabis, don't do that much of physical activity these days. You will be surprised how health conscious some of my customers are,” says Amritpal who is trained as a Chef in Australia. So how did the idea of offering “fat free” food come along? “I am a health freak and when I was in Australia training as a Chef, I started experimenting with the possibilities of using water instead of oil. It turned out that the food not only tasted equally good but also made me feel lighter. So when I opened my own restaurant I knew I had to provide this option to my customers,” he tells us. Amritpal charges Rs. 5 extra from customers who want the “fat free” options from the menu and Rs. 10 should one opt for Olive Oil instead of Vegetable Oil. “The Olive Oil option has really caught on with my customers and we are the only restaurant in Patiala offering this,” says Amritpal.

Despite being a huge fan of the Apple iPhone, Amritpal hates to carry one while at work. It took us almost two weeks to connect with Amritpal and fix this meeting over lunch. “It is a needless distraction. I leave my iPhone with my mother when I am at work. I am hands-on with the day to day running of the restaurant. My mother and father have been a huge support. You cannot deliver quality in a small set-up like this if you depend on a manager,” he tells us. Amritpal starts his day late and wakes up at about 09:30 in the morning since he calls it a day only by 1 at night. “We take our

A Day in The Life of Amritpal Singh



last order by 22:30 hrs. But we can't refuse orders if they come a bit later as most of our customers are neighbours and friends.” Amritpal tells us that his house, just above his restaurant, doesn't have space for dogs so he has kept a bunch of baby chicks which he feeds everyday after he gets up from bed. Morning is the time to supervise the cleaning of the kitchen and utensils and take stock for the requirements of the day. “Everything is washed with hot water,” he tells us. Amritpal likes to personally go to the market and pick up vegetables, milk, meat and other products required in the kitchen for the day. “I don't like them delivered as you have no control on the quality then. The ingredients have to be fresh” Once he is back from the market he attends to phone calls and party orders, if any. “My business is mostly take-away from the neighbourhood.” Evenings, he tells us are particularly crucial especially on Saturdays and Sundays, where he spends his time in the kitchen to ensure smooth and fast delivery. Amritpal does the dressing of the food himself in the kitchen. “The food has to look equally good and when it is too busy I go on the delivery myself which gives me an opportunity to interact with my customers,” he tells us with a smile. Once the last order has been delivered, Amritpal waits for the staff to eat their food and shut shop. He calls it a day at around 1 at night after checking his emails and updating the Facebook page of his restaurant. [Click here to read more](#)



Necklace for a King

Jewellery of India's royalty is what legends are made of. There are many fascinating stories like this one we like from Hyderabad in South India. One morning the Nizam of Hyderabad woke up with the idea of grading the Pearls in the royal treasury. Buckets and buckets of Pearls of all shapes and sizes were washed, graded and left to dry on huge sheets which covered the entire roof of the Nizam's Palace. What a sight it must have been. Or the sheer impunity with which the Nizam used a 162-carat Jacob Diamond mounted on a gold base as a paperweight. In the 1930's the Nizam was said to have £ 100 million worth of gold and silver and a further £ 400 million worth of jewels. In Rajasthan, the Jaipur royal family was said to have some of the finest jewels in India, guarded zealously by the indigenous Minas of Amber from whom they wrested power. The jewels of the Jaipur's royal house were shrouded in secrecy and the story goes that the King of Jaipur himself was allowed access to it only thrice during his entire lifetime. There are unconfirmed reports that the treasury; gold, silver and jewels, were ultimately found in Amber after a 5 month long search in 1976 and was swiftly carried away by army trucks under the direct orders of a highly placed politician from New Delhi. The royal family of Patiala in Punjab too, had some outstanding jewellery; the pièce de résistance being the iconic Patiala necklace. This ceremonial necklace was commissioned to Cartier by Patiala's dashing, stylish, globetrotting Maharaja Bhupinder Singh (1891-1938) who loved collecting cars, horses, watches and paintings. But his real passion was jewels. Bhupinder Singh who was a talented Polo player and captained the India XI cricket team that toured England in 1911 loved being decked up with ornaments and wore exotic jewel studded headgears.

In 1926, Maharaja Bhupinder Singh landed in Paris with several chests of jewels and wanted Cartier to make a ceremonial necklace worthy of a King. He personally sat down and selected the design. It took Cartier nearly 3 years to complete the necklace which was the largest single commission that it has ever executed. The necklace made of platinum covered almost three quarters of the chest and contained 2,930 diamonds weighing almost 1,000 carats, the largest being a 234 carat De Beers diamond, the size of a golf ball, the seventh largest in the world. It was last seen on Maharaja Yadavindra Singh; the son of Maharaja Bhupinder Singh. [click here to read more](#)



Maharaja Yadavinder Singh; son of Maharaja Bhupinder Singh seen wearing the Patiala Necklace



Quirky Shrine, Holy Book's Bedroom, Indus Valley Toy

We spotted this quirky shrine where faithfuls from both Hindu and Sikh religion offer liquor, pray for their wishes to come true and return with some more, when their wishes are granted. It is in the premises of the Kali Temple of Patiala built in 1936 by its Maharaja Bhupinder Singh ([read more](#) about Maharaja Bhupinder Singh in our Lifestyle section). The Maharaja, during his travel to Kolkata was so charmed by the Kali Temple at Kalighat that he brought a similar six-foot idol of the Goddess and the “Pawan Jyoti” (sacred flame) from the Kalighat Temple. One can still see the sacred flame burning in the sanctum sanctorum of the Kali Temple of Patiala, where people from all religions are welcome.

It was fascinating for us to experience and see how the Guru Granth Sahib, the Holy Book in Sikh religion is considered a living religious master who needs rest at night. We spotted the resting place of the Holy Book during a night visit to the Golden Temple. Every night there is an elaborate ceremony where the Guru Granth Sahib is carried to bed from the prayer hall. And every morning the Holy Book is carried back from the resting place to the prayer hall of the Golden Temple amidst showering of rose petals. The Guru Granth Sahib is then opened randomly and the teachings from that very page become the thought for the day to guide your actions, which is then written on a board with its English translation for people to see.

We spotted this ancient Indus Valley Toy in a private museum of a villager in Hissar; Haryana who loves and is passionate about his heritage ([read more](#) in our Day in a Life of section). One of the many from his fascinating collection that tells us how his village was once a thriving mega city of the ancient Indus Valley Civilization with an approximate area of 130 hectares. It was sad to see the site in a very poor condition after excavation work got over in 2001. We were taken to the site by the owner of the museum with an apology on behalf of his village for the rubbish around and its bad state. Though the excavation site is all covered up, the owner shared stories through shards and pieces of ancient pottery, plates, bricks and bones etc from the site. A young local history buff who is a friend of Sita helped translate it in English and strike conversations with owner of the Museum, he even sketched for us in a notepad to show how these pieces looked like 5000

Spotted By Sita



year ago. He thinks tourism is the only way to make the villagers aware of their heritage and save this ancient site which has been vandalised for years.

[Click here](#) for the video of the ancient Indus Valley Toy



Makki ki Roti & Sarso ka Saag

Saab at the [Punjabiyat](#) highly recommends Makki ki Roti and Sarso ka Saag, as a must try during your stay here. Till March this year Saab; a local, was one of the manual labourers who built Punjabiyat. Given his passion for cooking, he was retained along with a couple of his friends from the village who worked at the site by its responsible owners. Saab is being trained under the watchful eyes of a Chef as the second-in-command in the kitchen and specialises in local cuisine of Punjab (read more in our 6 Things We liked About section).

“A visit to Punjab is incomplete without sampling Makki ki Roti and Sarso ka Saag,” says Saab. While Makki ki Roti is a flat unleavened bread made out of corn flour, Sarso ka Saag are mustard leaves cooked in slow wood fire for several hours in a hearth. This simple combination is a favourite in Punjab during the winter season. “The Sarso ka Saag is cooked by my mother at home to ensure that the flavour is authentic. I make the Makki ki Rotis here at Punjabiyat,” smiles Saab.” Its is incredibly tasty. Saab’s mother gets paid each time she cooks Sarson ka Saag for guests staying at the Punjabiyat. It was great to know about how the culinary offerings of a property can support the local community and members of its staff. No wonder Saab came across as someone hugely motivated. And don’t forget to add a dollop of white butter sourced locally on your Makki ki Roti while trying this signature combination of Punjab,” says Kuntil from our Destination Knowledge Centre.

Top Chef Recommends





Explore 2012-13

Hello Friends,

I hope you had an eventful 2012. We at the Destination Knowledge Centre started a bit late. I personally had to take it easy at the beginning of 2012 after I fell off a horse and broke my leg in the cold desert of Spiti in the Himalayas just before the winters in 2011. But we managed quite a lot this year and have set what we plan to do in 2013-14 in motion. We started in August where I have had the opportunity to lead our CSR project where 5 of us traveled to Spiti to build a solar bath for a local Buddhist nunnery in collaboration with Ecosphere; a local NGO (read about it in our October issue). Soumya Mukerji, the newest member in the Destination Knowledge Centre traveled to the blue waters and cold desert of Ladakh in September and has since returned to attend the RIFF Music Festival in Jodhpur, Rajasthan ([download the report here](#)). He has also done some interesting walks in Delhi as well. I liked the one he did at night at Chandi Chowk in Old Delhi which should go down well with the intrepid traveler, who is not looking at anything too structured and wants to soak in the ambience of Old Delhi at night ([download the report here](#)). After the CSR project in Spiti, I headed out to Kerala in August last week to first experience the Pullikalli Tiger Dance festival with friends and then to Munnar and Thekkady ending in the Backwaters of Kerala. Stayed in some really charming places, met some very interesting people, ate some really good food and came back with exciting possibilities (read more in our November issue).

I hope you are enjoying going through this issue on Punjab. In 2013-14 the Destination Knowledge Centre is planning to explore "off the beaten" and we have already set that in motion from November when I traveled for 10 days through Rajasthan, Haryana and Punjab and discovered the exciting possibilities of combining Punjab with the Golden Triangle (Delhi-Agra-Jaipur) with interesting stops. In case you missed the initial flyer we did on this interesting journey you can [download it here](#). The Destination Knowledge Centre is happy to share the itinerary too. Just drop us an email at info@sita.in. Soumya; in the meanwhile is in West Bengal exploring the possibilities of how one can combine the week long cruise on the Hooghly River with an interesting 7 day road journey back to Kolkata. Valerie Chalopet from our extended team has already done the Hooghly cruise and we are waiting for Soumya to see what he has discovered when he is back

Destination Insider



in January (keep a watch out for the January issue which is a West Bengal special)

In 2013-14 we will continue to engage with local communities to bring back stories about their lives and the flavours of the places they call home. From festival celebrations with a local family near Goa to festivals in one of the most remote corners of Nepal to a lush post monsoon treat in Rajasthan to a unique tourism project in rural Orissa... it looks like an interesting year ahead. Stay tuned and do like us on [Facebook](#) where we keep on sharing interesting tid bits of our travels and stories from India.

I am heading out to Agra and Jaipur this weekend to check out a few things which sound good. Some newly introduced and some where we have had good feedback from guests. I will end my journey at [Chambal Safari Lodge](#) where I will sail on the Chambal River for 2 nights. It is home to the Gharial, the Gangetic Dolphin and a paradise for birders. I am really excited about finally seeing the unique ravines of Chambal which always remind me of "Sholay"; my favourite Bollywood movie from the 70's, often described as India's best "Curry Western." Hopefully I will have interesting things to share when you get back from your holidays.

Last but not the least, a big Thank You to mentors Lovleen Sagar, Philip, Thomas, Ravi Bhandari for their support, the extended team of the Destination Knowledge Centre for their inputs and colleagues at our Design Competence Centre for the lovely collaterals.

Merry Christmas and have a great year ahead everyone.

Cheers

Kuntal Baruwa



Punjabiyaat

6 Things We Liked About

1. **Location and Atmosphere:** [Punjabiyaat](#) quietly located in the fields of rural Punjab; save; what we thought was really cool, the occasional thumping of Punjabi music from the speakers of a distant tractor of a local farmer, relaxes you completely. Small with just 4 stand alone air-conditioned cottages, complete with private terraces. Simple, unpretentious yet stylish, complimented by local architecture, superbly comfortable with good food and unobtrusive service by a staff with great camaraderie. “Punjabiyaat was a very relaxing end to my trip, where I met some really good people and discovered the exciting possibility of combining the Golden Triangle (Delhi-Agra-Jaipur) with Punjab with a couple of very interesting stops. We are happy to share the itinerary,” says Kuntal from our Destination Knowledge Centre who stayed there recently. Punjabiyaat works very well for a couple of nights to relax at the end of the Golden Triangle trip (read more in our Destination Insider section) after spending a night in Amritsar. The night ceremony and the positive vibrations of the Golden Temple (read more in our Spotted By section) is an experience not to be missed and is best experienced by staying in Amritsar. Stay at the [Ranjit Svaasa](#). And don't forget to climb up to the Dome of the Golden Temple after the night ceremony where you can also see some amazing Sikh Temple Artwork. Have a leisurely breakfast the next day and head to Punjabiyaat which is a 2 hour drive from Amritsar. “I loved the spectacular sunsets post my afternoon siestas across the fields whose colours change with the crop of the season and as the pathway of Punjabiyaat is lit up with lanterns in the evening, Satti; a local who till 7 months back was a labour on site as the Punjabiyaat was getting ready, serves you the most delicious kebabs and wine. It has been very special,” says Kuntal

2. **Staff:** We liked Punjabiyaat's courteous staff who had a great sense of camaraderie. Labour working on site as the Punjabiyaat was built were retained by its responsible owners and trained to serve guests. One of them is training to be a Chef. “You could see they are connected to the place. And why not? It was something they themselves built with their hands. It's amazing how fast they learnt and do such a great job. I never felt the necessity to lock my door during my entire stay in Punjabiyaat” says Kuntal. It was a smart move too. Prince; for example was a plumber on site and now couples up serving guests at the Punjabiyaat. He exactly knows what



he did and any plumbing works gets done much faster when there is any. Tips from guests are equally shared by the staff which also includes Gama, the night watchman of Punjabiyaat who took Kuntal to his cousin's dairy farm for a glass of buffalo milk. One can cycle down with Gama to the dairy farm enjoying the countryside if not the buffalo milk. Punjabiyaat provides helmets too on request.

3. **Architecture:** Punjabiyaat which is only into its first season has inquisitive locals from in and around the area landing there occasionally on Sunday afternoons after their prayers in the village Sikh temple. “We had many landing up just as it got ready. Punjabiyaat's traditional architecture is fast fading these days, very rare to see and it is from our grandfathers' times,” says Jagdeep Singh, Punjabiyaat's soft-spoken yet very helpful manager. If there are no guests, the locals are allowed in and they return happy after clicking a few pictures. Punjabiyaat is built entirely by mud and mud bricks by a vanishing breed of indigenous construction experts. The mud used for plastering was scooped out from the site where Punjabiyaat stands. The layer of mud bricks placed on the roof are made out of wood beams interspersed with smaller wooden frames insulated with a thick layer of mud which keeps the interiors cool when it is hot outside and warm when it is cold outside. “I stayed there in November when we had great sunny days and it was pleasantly cool inside where I didn't feel the need for air-conditioning. It was just beginning to get a little cold at night and I remember going back to the cosy warmth of my room after dinner. Punjabiyaat's traditional style of construction would have retained the warmth of the sunny day,” says Kuntal. [Click here to read more](#)



Festivals



Hola Mohalla 28 March, 2013

The ancient Sikh festival of Hola Mohalla is celebrated in Anandpur Sahib, Punjab the day after Holi, the festival of colours. Hola Mohalla was started by the tenth Sikh Guru, Gobind Singh, as a gathering of Sikhs for military exercises and mock battles, who at that time was battling the Mughal Empire. It is considered a time for Sikhs to reaffirm their commitment to the community and involve everyone.

Adds Sunil Kumar from Tour Operations who has been escorting guests to the Hola Mohalla Festival since the past two years: "Starting from the huge crowd we meet on the road while going to Anandpur Sahib, thousands and thousands people on carriages, trucks, vans, forming an incredible procession to the pilgrimage centre.....men, women, children...old and young....everybody in colourful dresses... the joyful atmosphere..... Unbelievable! ...The vibe at the Anandapur Sahib Sikh Temple is unique: pilgrims praying, singing and welcoming all in a friendly way!! I really enjoy the impressive and colourful procession of the Sikh warriors; the Nihangs, with their huge headgears and weapons, accompanied by war drums and horses followed by the demonstration of traditional martial arts and simulated battle scenes in the open ground. Holla Mohalla is a timeless experience from another world..... not to be missed."







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 Heilsinki 17th -20th January	Trade Visitor	Vikram Trivedi
ETC Orlando 23rd -27th January	Sita Desk	Neeraj Bhatt
Kerala Tourism Road Show Lyon 24th January	Sita Desk	Carole Gallo
Kerala Tourism Road Show Rome 25th January	Sita Desk	Matteo Pennacchi
BIT Milan 14th -17th February	Awaited	Matteo Pennacchi & Philip Thomas
Vivattur Vilnius 22nd -24th February	Trade Visitor	Deepak Sharma
ITB Berlin 6th -10th March	Booth No 208, Hall No 5.2b	Philip Thomas
MITT Moscow 20th -23rd March	Awaited	Deepak Sharma
TUR Gothenburg 21st -24th March	Awaited	Vikram Trivedi
UITT Kiev 27th -29th March	Trade Visitor	Deepak Sharma

Trade Shows

