

STAY AT

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF

LIFESTYLE

SPOTTED BY SITA

TOP CHEF RECOMMENDS

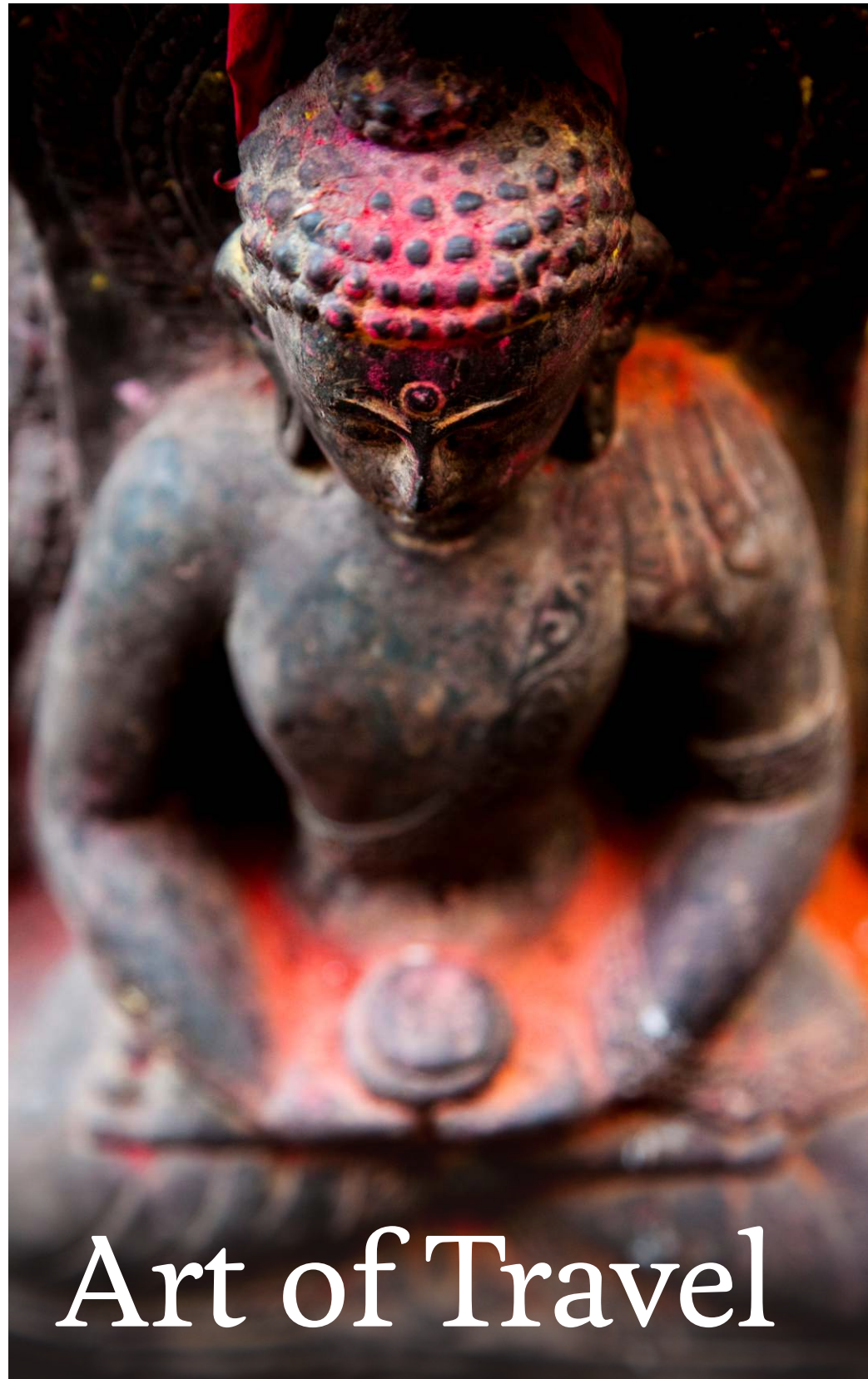
DESTINATION INSIDER

6 THINGS WE LIKED ABOUT

FESTIVALS

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TRADE SHOWS



# Art of Travel



## Stok Palace Heritage Guesthouse, Leh

# Stay At

Standing four storeys tall, Stok Palace is the official residence of the royal family of Ladakh and was constructed in 1814 by Ladakh's last ruler. This elegant 4 storey palace atop a huge moraine of pebbles swept down from the mountains, has ancient and modern styles blending amid beautiful gardens and lovely panoramic views. Expect rooms (4 in total) in red, creme or lapis lazuli blue with Ladakhi motifs, rugs, woodcarvings with balconies overlooking the Indus Valley. All the rooms are very cozy and vey tastefully decorated. "Only few people known to the family and their friends are allowed to stay at the palace guest house. So let us know well in advance for us to make the arrangements for your clients wishing to stay here" says Soumya Mukherji from our Destination Knowledge Centre.

"Two nights is a must to enjoy your stay here in this beautiful accommodation within Stok Palace," adds Soumya. Spend one day soaking in the tranquility of the place - stroll around the palace, listening to the soothing sound of monks deep in prayers. Later enjoy the eccentric family museum with jewels, armor and 'thangka' collection - painted, embroidered ceremonial scrolls found in Buddhist monasteries. The thangkas, kept inside the museum are from the 16th century and depict the life and teachings of Buddha." In the museum I saw the royal crowns, jewellery, royal artefacts, precious stones, prayer instruments and other heirlooms. This is one of the better preserved meusems that I came across" says Soumya. Next morning go walking to the village nearby and see the village life up close. Enjoy a picnic lunch with the locals and get invited into the homes of the friendly villagers for a cup of Gur Gur Cha (butter tea).





## Botanical Illustrator, Kalimpong

My day in Kalimpong usually begins with the beautiful morning sun rays streaming in through the little crack on my mud brick wall and the squirrels running around on my leaky tin roof. If I'm lucky enough, I get to spend most of the day with my paper, paints, plants and music (a bliss that most people find hard to conceive), with no distractions like office work and visitors. If I am even luckier, I will get time to venture out into the nearby forests and fields to paint. What others think as 'fun' is a 25 year old journey of love, passion and meditation for me and still continues to entice and excite me as much as it did when I first started out. I get through my morning chores half-heartedly, my thoughts pre-occupied with painting. I am like a child full of anticipation, as I touch the feet of the goddess of knowledge- a 'sacred' habit that I imbibed as a child, chanting a mantra that my father taught me very early- 'Patience donkey patience donkey patience donkey.....'. It has been the biggest mantra to get me through my 'impatient' moments while I'm painting and otherwise!

Today, I have the urge to work on this particular orchid species, *Diplomeris hirsute* commonly called the Snow Orchid, due to its pure snow-white flowers. This species is found growing on rather steep and wet sandstone rocks in the Tropical Zones in Northeast India, Bhutan and Nepal and flowers during peak monsoon season. It has never been an easy task to begin a painting of a large dimension that includes habitats of the plant. I look at all the field sketches and studies spread all around the floor- they remind me of a big Jigsaw puzzle. I can spend hours just looking at and putting the pieces together, until they make a complete picture. Each one tells a story, relates the truth of the subject, time and place and situation.

I look at the sky. It is absolutely clear and everything looks clean and fresh after the monsoon rains. The day is good for some outdoor painting. As I get into our small brown van with my papers, brushes and easel, my heart does a somersault - anticipation is a beautiful feeling when it comes to nature! I am headed for the Tropical Zone, at an elevation of 300m-600m. Along the way I dare to take a peek at the Teesta Dam Project which is being built so close to the Mahananda Wildlife Sanctuary, in North Bengal. I get a painful lump in my throat every time I look at it. It has been a heart rending experience to see large areas of trees felled and unique spots of beauty being

# A Day in The Life of Hemlata



irreversibly damaged by the project. Most of the epiphytic and ground flora weren't salvaged in these operations and thousands of orchids and other plants of scientific and aesthetic were eliminated without a second thought. This was also the biggest reason why I began painting plants in habitats. It got me thinking that these wonderful sights would soon be a thing of the past, if unrestrained development like in the Teesta River Valley and other places in the Himalayas carried on. It became my passion to observe them in nature and document them as I found them. [click here to continue reading](#)



# 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>





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## Hidden Shrines along the Tungabhadra

During a Coracle ride on the river Tungabhadra in Hampi, Karnataka, Sita spotted many hidden shrines along its banks. A Coracle Ride in Hampi is a fantastic way to get cosy with its unique landscape. Domingos Paes, the Portuguese traveler who visited Hampi during the sixteenth century described the coracles as circular shaped, made of bamboo split wickerwork, covered the outside with leather and spins during the sail. They are exactly as it is today, as they were four centuries back, except probably the leather has been replaced by PVC sheets.

# Spotted By Sita





## Tea-Smoked Chicken Breast

Sanjay Sharma; the estate manager of [Glenburn Tea Estate](#), has a great passion for food and often creates new recipes for the kitchen at Glenburn.

Sanjay's Tea-smoked chicken breast with tempura tea leaves and pickled radish is a favourite with all our guests visiting Glenburn. Sanjay has created this recipe, keeping in mind the tea tradition of Glenburn, using the estate's favourite seasonal tea - the Autumn Crescendo.

The chicken breast is smoked slowly using the dry tea leaves for about an hour until the smoked tea aroma infuses right through. The breast is then finished on a hot skillet leaving the skin a crispy golden brown, before it is sliced and plated. It is served with a tea jus, which is prepared using the liquor of the same Autumnal tea leaves that were used to smoke the chicken. It is delicately spiced with star anise, peppercorns, ginger, honey and dried whole red chillies.

If you are lucky enough to make this dish whilst near a tea field, you can use the fresh green tea leaves straight off the bush to make the lightly battered crispy tempura tea leaves or this can be substituted with baby spinach leaves. The dish is completed with a chilled white radish pickle on the side that has been marinated overnight in a bath of white vinegar infused with scheswan pepper, star anise, chopped green chillies, ginger, salt and sugar.

Recipe available on [request](#)

# Top Chef Recommends





## Kathakali with a Healthy Twist

Think Kerala and this iconic image of a Kathakali dancer immediately comes to everyone's mind. The extraordinary splendour of a performer in a brilliant costume and a mask like face-do, who brings to life Gods and Goddesses, Demons and Spirits, swirling around with amazing energy in a dark and sombre stage. Accomplished Kathakali dancers can move their eyeballs in 17 different ways, their eyebrows in 8 different ways and their eyelids in another eight. For the uninitiated, Kathakali is a dance form indigenous to Kerala, colourful and dramatic in content and character. Scenes from Indian epics and mythology are the themes for the dance.

But here is the interesting twist - each Mudra (ritual hand gesture) of Kathakali has a specific health benefit. And today I am going to talk about 10 such Mudras with terrific health benefits which Sarath Kumar, a Kathakali Maestro taught me during my recent trip to Cochin. "Eat light and you would need to wear a [Mundu](#)," Sarath had warned me. Just so you are aware Kathakali has over 1000 Mudras

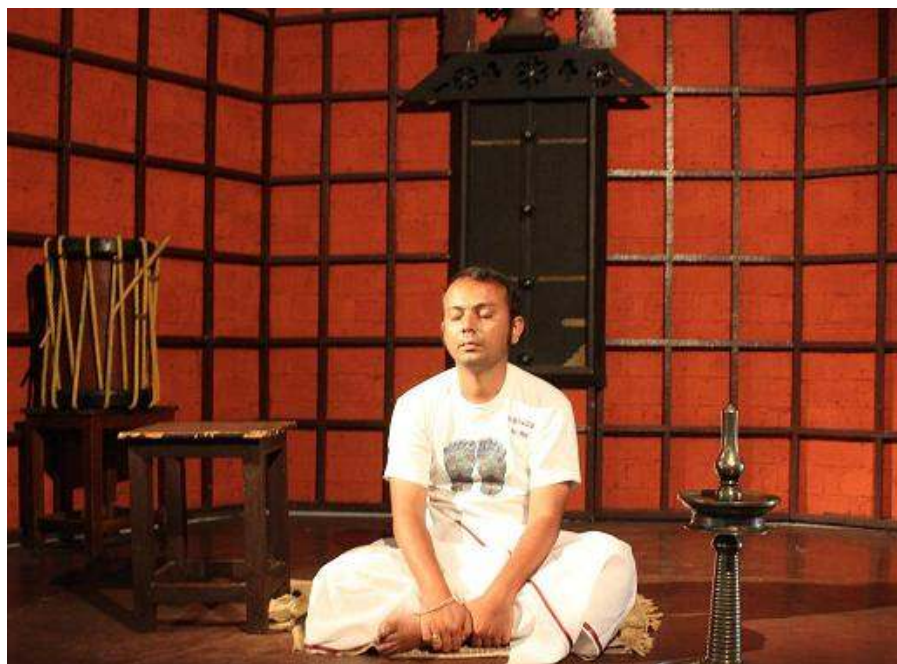
There is lot to take away from this interactive session. Your clients will be taken through the nuances of this dance form by Sarath, where he will touch upon the concepts behind the Mudras (ritual hand gestures), Eye & Facial movements as well as the colorful costumes of Kathakali and its distinctive face painting. He will then invite your clients to try out the various Mudras (ritual hand gestures), Eye & Facial movements under his watchful eyes and teach them how to combine these various elements into graceful dance steps. Should your clients so desire they can even paint their faces with colours just like a real Kathakali dancer.

I leave you with some photographs of my amazing 2 hrs with Sarath. You can also download a Power Point Presentation of the 10 Mudras that I learnt from him. The health benefits are also mentioned in the presentation.

Try it out. They are very simple and can be done by anyone, anywhere; in the bus, in the car while waiting for the traffic-light to go green, on the train to work, while on the flight, office or at home.

Kathakali with a healthy twist - [Click here for the Photo Gallery](#)

# Destination Insider



Mudras - The Ritual Gestures of Kathakali and its health benefits - [Click here to download the Power Point Presentation](#)

Cheers  
Kuntal Baruwa



## Shenbaga Vilaasam

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 check 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

# 6 Things We Liked About



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 30th - 3rd February 2015

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“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](#).

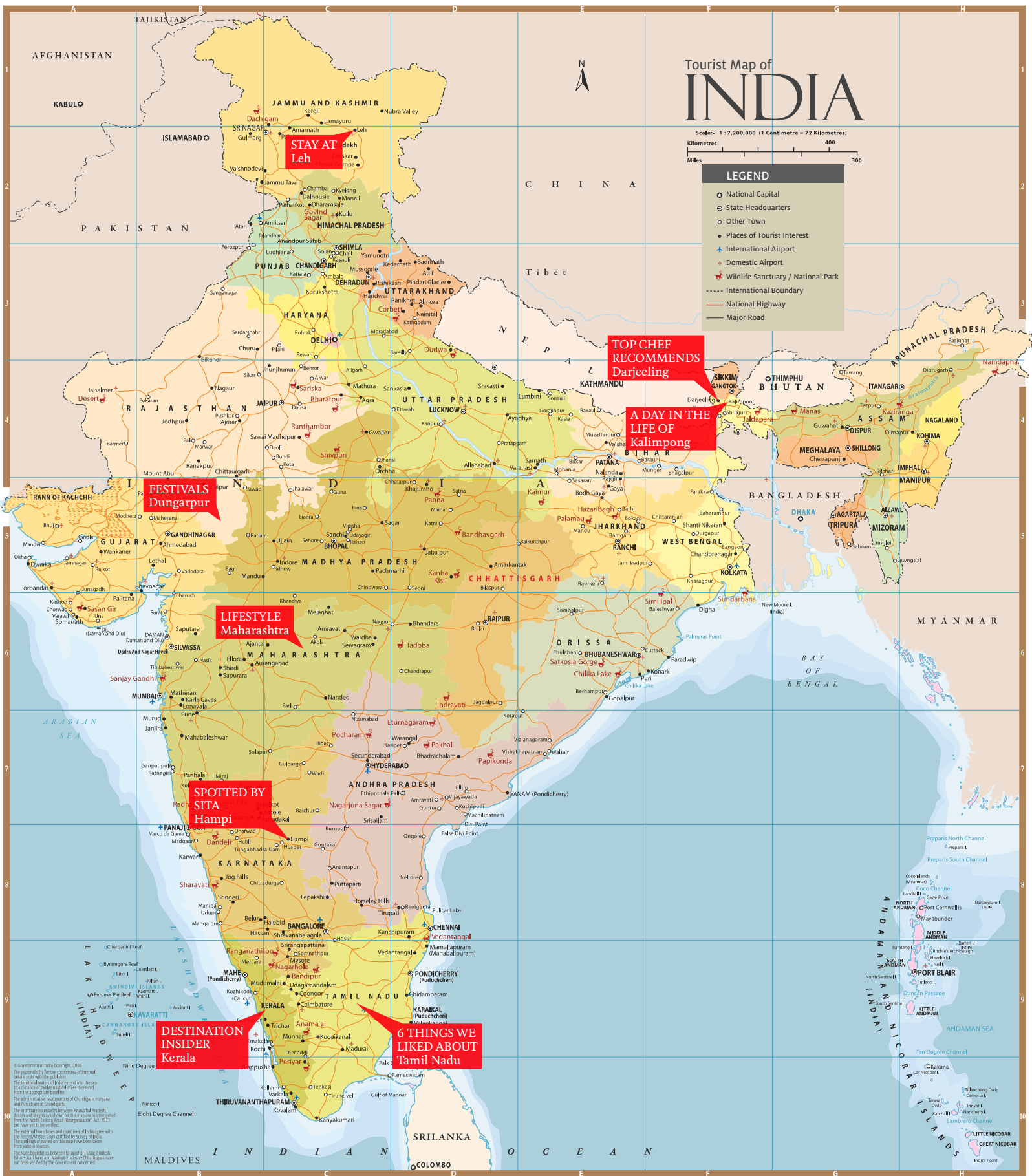
To see more of Tewfic El-Sawy’s fantastic work here - [click here](#)

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.







## Meet us at the Upcoming Trade Shows

If you wish to schedule a meeting, do e-mail us at  
[info@sita.in](mailto:info@sita.in)

Trade Shows	Booth No.	Whom to Meet
<b>USTOA</b> Boca Raton, Florida 5 - 7 December	Sita Desk	Neeraj Bhatt
<b>NTA Annual Conference</b> New Orleans 18 - 22 January	Sita Desk	Renate Graham
<b>BIT</b> Milan 12 - 14 February	Awaited	Matteo Pennacchi & Philip Thomas
<b>ETC</b> Boston 17 - 20 February	Sita Desk	Neeraj Bhatt
<b>ITB</b> Berlin 4 - 8 March	Booth No 209, Hall No 5.2b	Philip Thomas
<b>MITT</b> Moscow 18 - 21 March	Awaited	Deepak Sharma
<b>TUR</b> Gothenburg 19 - 22 March	Trade Visitor	Deepak Sharma
<b>AITF</b> Azerbaijan 2 - 4 April	Trade Visitor	Deepak Sharma
<b>SITT</b> Novosibirsk 10 - 12 April	Trade Visitor	Olga Vishnevskaya
<b>Great India Travel Bazaar</b> Jaipur 20 - 21 April	Booth No 35, 36, 57 & 58	Neeraj Bhatt & Philip Thomas
<b>KITF</b> Almaty 20 - 24 April	Trade Visitor	Deepak Sharma

# Trade Shows

