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1963-2013

STAY AT

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LIFESTYLE

SPOTTED BY SITA

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Art of Travel



Fairmont Jaipur



Stay At

Fairmont Jaipur is a meticulous re-imagining of a traditional Mughal fort. Nestled amongst the majestic Aravalli hills, rooms at Fairmont Jaipur are elegantly done up in perfect blend of the traditional Rajasthani décor and modern luxury. The Fairmont Gold Floor, the brand's exclusive 'hotel within a hotel' introduces guests to an exclusive lifestyle experience. Fairmont Jaipur has an eclectic array of fine dining options offering authentic cuisines from around the world. Zoya, the all-day dining restaurant, boasts of a world cuisine menu with a dedicated section of Rajasthani fare, highlighting heritage dishes from the royal households. Serving authentic, high quality teas, Fairmont Jaipur's lobby lounge Anjum offers a local twist to the long standing Fairmont tradition of afternoon teas. At the regency style library bar, Aza, guests can sample an impressive selection of wines and malt whisky with old world oak display cabinets and bespoke cocktails. With a mix of high and lounge seating, Fairmont Jaipur's Cigar Diwan, is a classic smoking room, perfect after dinner space.

Fairmont Jaipur offers a multitude of experiences accompanied with a host of excursions and unique services for guests. Ranging from hot air ballooning, mountaineering at the Aravalli hills, to elephant rides, to picnics and a stroll through the nearby village. The magnificent lighting ceremony in the evenings is something not to be missed. Guests can also explore the ancient art of falconry with hands-on lessons by a local falconer present at the hotel.





Rajasthan's only Les Clefs d'Or

Gungun Girish, Head Concierge of [Fairmont Jaipur](#) is Rajasthan's only [Les Clefs d'Or](#) and one of the 5 women Clefs d'Or of India. A Jaipur local, Gungun began her career in 2005 as a front office executive in Delhi but shifted to concierge because of her passion "to do impossible things." "Post my duty hours I roamed around Delhi educating myself about the various happenings in town and would be offering tips to the concierge. This was purely out of my passion and interest. Soon I realised this is what I am good at and this is what I wanted to do. And that's how I shifted to concierge," says Gungun. So what is that one "impossible thing" that she has done so far? "This was perhaps the most challenging in my entire career till now. A client wanted to be a part of an Indian wedding in the month of July. It was monsoon and weddings in Delhi don't happen then. I organised a fake wedding for the client where the bride, the groom, their families, relatives were all fake. They were hired actors," says Gungun with a smile. So did she tell the client that it was a fake wedding? "Yes I did explain at the end. But the client really enjoyed the experience and appreciated the effort." Gungun also recalls how she got an in-flight announcement done on the request of a client who wanted to propose to his partner onboard a flight to Udaipur. "That was easier," she tells us.

However Gungun rues the fact that hotels are yet to evolve as far as concierge is considered. "Concierge is a very important link between the hotel and guests. It can add so much more to a client's stay and the overall experience of the hotel brand. Yet if you look at some of the top luxury hotels of Jaipur it is the front office staff which doubles up as concierge on rotation. She also tells us that concierge is not taken seriously in the institutes imparting training on hospitality in India. "During my stay at the Fairmont I saw Gungun doubling up as a front office manager in the morning. I mentioned that to her and joked that she must be super efficient in multitasking," says Kuntal Baruwa from our Destination Knowledge Centre. "More than efficiency it is the knowledge about the hotel and the city," says Gungun, who also organised a 2000 km long road trip in Rajasthan for Executive Chef Anurag Bali and his team, where they did cooking sessions with aristocratic families and handpicked a few such family recipes for the menu. So what's a typical day like for her? [Click here to read more](#)

A Day in The Life of Gungun Girish





Lifestyle



Wanderlust

Kuntil Baruwa from our Destination Knowledge Centre who was at the Maha Kumbh Mela in Allahabad earlier this month met 63 year old Om Prakash Mundra, who is a Nagpur based steel businessman. Om Prakash has returned to Allahabad and the Maha Kumbh Mela every 12 years for 4 times now. He has been to 6 Olympics, 9 Cricket World Cups of various formats and 3 FIFA World Cups. Om Prakash has also volunteered for various sporting events such as the FIFA World Cup of 2010, 2 Asian Games and the Torino and Vancouver Winter Olympics. His wife Premlata and him have traveled to 70 countries across the globe since 1992. "I am here at the Maha Kumbh Mela to say thank you to the Almighty for the good fortunes and good health. Without the blessings of the Almighty it wouldn't have been possible for us to travel all over the world," he tells us. (Keep a watch out for the Maha Kumbh Special issue of Art of Travel which we will launch shortly.)





Shiva Temple of Taj Ganj

Sita spotted this Shiva temple in the Taj Ganj area of Agra, established by the community who lived near the very site where the Taj Mahal was built and was relocated here as it was getting built.

This temple, deeply revered by the locals is a starting point of the newly proposed community based walk of [CURE](#), where they are focusing on linking communities of Taj Ganj (south of the Taj Mahal) to their heritage, enabling them to derive livelihoods from tourism. This is on similar lines of their now very popular Kachpura Village Walk right behind the Taj Mahal.

“CURE is running trial runs of this new walk and I did experience it in December last year. The walk; a mélange of communities, crafts and living traditions has several highpoints with interesting stories which predates the Taj Mahal. But a lot of work needs to go in before we can offer this walk to our clients. We will have to wait and see,” says Kuntal Baruwa from our Destination Knowledge Centre.

“But what was really heartening was meeting Radhamohan, who is now training locals in the Taj Ganj area. I met him after 2 years. Radhamohan is the facilitator of the Kachpura Village Walk by CURE since its inception in 2009. When I first met him in 2009, while on a reece trip, Radhamohan was stuttering, translating sentences from Hindi to English mentally, while he was speaking. 3 years down the line Radhamohan is a different person. He is not only confident but his command over English is much better and is comfortable with the language. Radhamohan is also studying accountancy in the morning and is an inspiring example of how tourism can change lives,” adds Kuntal.

Spotted By Sita





Khad Meat



The Jarar family of [Chambal Safari Lodge](#) recommends the Khad Meat as a must try during your stay there.

A whole leg of lamb cooked in a 2 feet deep pit with coal fire embers at the bottom, Khad meat is a local specialty, much refined over the years, but owes its origin to the Baghis' (rebels) turbulent existence in the behad (ravines) of Chambal. The much maligned and notorious Chambal behad can proudly lay claim to this ingenious recipe for cooking meat, creating a delicacy in the most hostile environs. When a fire could not be lit without fear of discovery by the police and death by the bullet, when each meal could well be your last and when rebellion against the system was the highest mark of honour.

"I was introduced to this recipe as a child and much later was taught to cook it, almost as a rite of passage, in my youth. My tutors were a raucous bunch of male family members who gathered once a year at the Mela Kothi in Jarar for the family run animal fair. Amidst stories of Shikar (hunting) camps along the Chambal and boarding school pranks, they competed with one another over a 15 day period to produce the most appetising innovation of age-old recipes," says Ram Pratap Sing Jarar who started Chambal Safari Lodge 14 years ago. "The judges were the ladies of the household sequestered within the Haveli in Jarar. The hotly debated winner had unrestrained bragging rights till the next season of madness," adds Anu, his wife.

Recipe available on request - [click here](#)

Top Chef Recommends





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Challo Allahabad!!

Hello Friends,

By the time this issue of Art of Travel is in your inbox, I would have visited the Maha Kumbh Mela in Allahabad. Once in every 12 years, Sadhus engrossed in deep Sadhna (spiritual practice) in the caves of the Himalayas, well-heeled international spiritual gurus and also frauds, filmmakers, journalists, tourists, celebrities, devouts, faithfuls and heretics alike draw the largest gathering of humanity in the world by the banks of the River Ganga in Allahabad. It is believed that if you bathe in the Ganga; India's most venerated River, during the Kumbh days, your sins will be purified. I have many friends, colleagues and business associates who said and still say that this is nothing but India's obsession with anything religious, but never before have such contrasts co-existed in complete harmony. That's what blew me away when 8 of us traveled from Mumbai to the Maha Kumbh Mela in January 2001. And it changed my life forever. On my return I left Mumbai for good; a city, I realised, I was needlessly clinging onto in my self-imposed anxiety to be a "somebody" and ended up for 3 months in Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh in North-east India, where I saw everybody was happy being a "nobody".

The Maha Kumbh of 2001 was special. It was the first of the millennia and was happening at a time where there was this unique combination of cosmic energies and constellations that happens only once in 144 years. The 8 of us were among the 80 million people who had congregated in Allahabad that year within the makeshift city built by the River Ganga in an area of 1,400 hectares. To put it in perspective, the 2001 population of the entire United Kingdom was estimated at a little more than 62 million. And we landed in Kumbh Mela with our rucksacks, a guitar and a djembe, with no clue about what to expect. We had no idea where we were going to stay. As we walked around the sea of humanity, trying to figure out things, we bumped into a friend from Mumbai who invited us to stay with him. His father was an official in the telecom department which had set up a couple of tents for their employees and their families. Huddled around a tiny heater inside the tent in the freezing cold of January, we jammed till late night singing songs. My favourite song was one taught by some friends who traveled with us. It was a peace song which called for an end to the conflict in the middle-east. We sang it everyday at the Kumbh Mela - [click here to listen](#).

Destination Insider



But we were asked to leave the next day by an apologetic camp manager. The families staying in the other tents weren't amused by our jamming and didn't like the idea of boys and girls huddled inside a single tent. As we were leaving, the cook of the tent probably took pity on us and offered to help. He got us a sheet of tarpaulin torn in several places, a few bamboos and took us to a place in a far corner of the Mela. We walked for a long time; I remember. There we pitched our tent, or whatever it was. It barely managed to stand. But we were happy. We called the place Mango Hill. Don't remember why. We then, accompanied by the cook, left for the nearby village to buy firewood, knowing this is the only way to survive the cold nights. [click here to read more](#).



Lakshmi Kutir, Maha Kumbh Mela

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Kuntal Baruwa from our Destination Knowledge Centre who was at the Maha Kumbh Mela earlier this month tells us that he loved returning to his cosy tent at [Lakshmi Kutir](#) every evening (keep a watch out for the Maha Kumbh Special issue of Art of Travel, which we will launch shortly). Here's a sneak peek on why this fabulous tented property was the best at the Maha Kumbh Mela 2013 and why its post Kumbh Mela avatar; the Ultimate Travelling Camp that will follow some of India's known and lesser known festivals, is something to watch out for.

1. **Location:** Perfectly located on top of a hillock, an oasis to return to with all creature comforts after the day's exploration of the Maha Kumbh Mela; the biggest gathering of humanity in the world by the Ganga; India's most venerated river.

2. **The Tents:** Superbly comfortable and luxurious, with a lot of attention to detail, yet nothing over the top. "The blower would be on and my tent would already be warm, by the time I would come back after having dinner. I thought that was very thoughtful, since the evenings were cold by the river, though the day was pretty warm," says Kuntal.

3. **The Staff:** Super efficient, polite and flexible. "Special mention to Madho Singh; master story-teller with super positive vibes. His "Maha Kumbh for dummies" approach during the walking tour was brilliant from the clients' point of view. Just the right sprinkling of yum ingredients which made for a fantastic story of not just the Maha Kumbh but India as well. Really enjoyed it," says Kuntal.

4. **The Food:** Vegetarian, fresh and really tasty. "It's not easy to cook delicious vegetarian food. After [Shenbaga Vilasam](#) in Tamilnadu ; Lakshmi Kutir was perhaps the only place where I tasted really good home-style vegetarian food," says Kuntal.

5. **The Viewing Platform:** Lovely place with great views of the temporary city of the Maha Kumbh Mela spread over 6000 acres. Guests loved to end their day here, watching the sunset as the day turned to night, one twinkle at a time.

6. **The eclectic mix of guests:** From journalists, to filmmakers, to philosophers to Indophiles, who were more than happy to interact with each other and

6 Things We Liked About



Maha Kumbh Mela from the viewing platform of Lakshmi Kutir

exchange thoughts, Lakshmi Kutir's eclectic mix of guests really added to the Maha Kumbh Mela experience and the stay. "I was traveling solo and would be invited by one interesting person or the other to join them during the meals. I haven't seen such a positive bunch together during my travels," says Kuntal.



Festivals

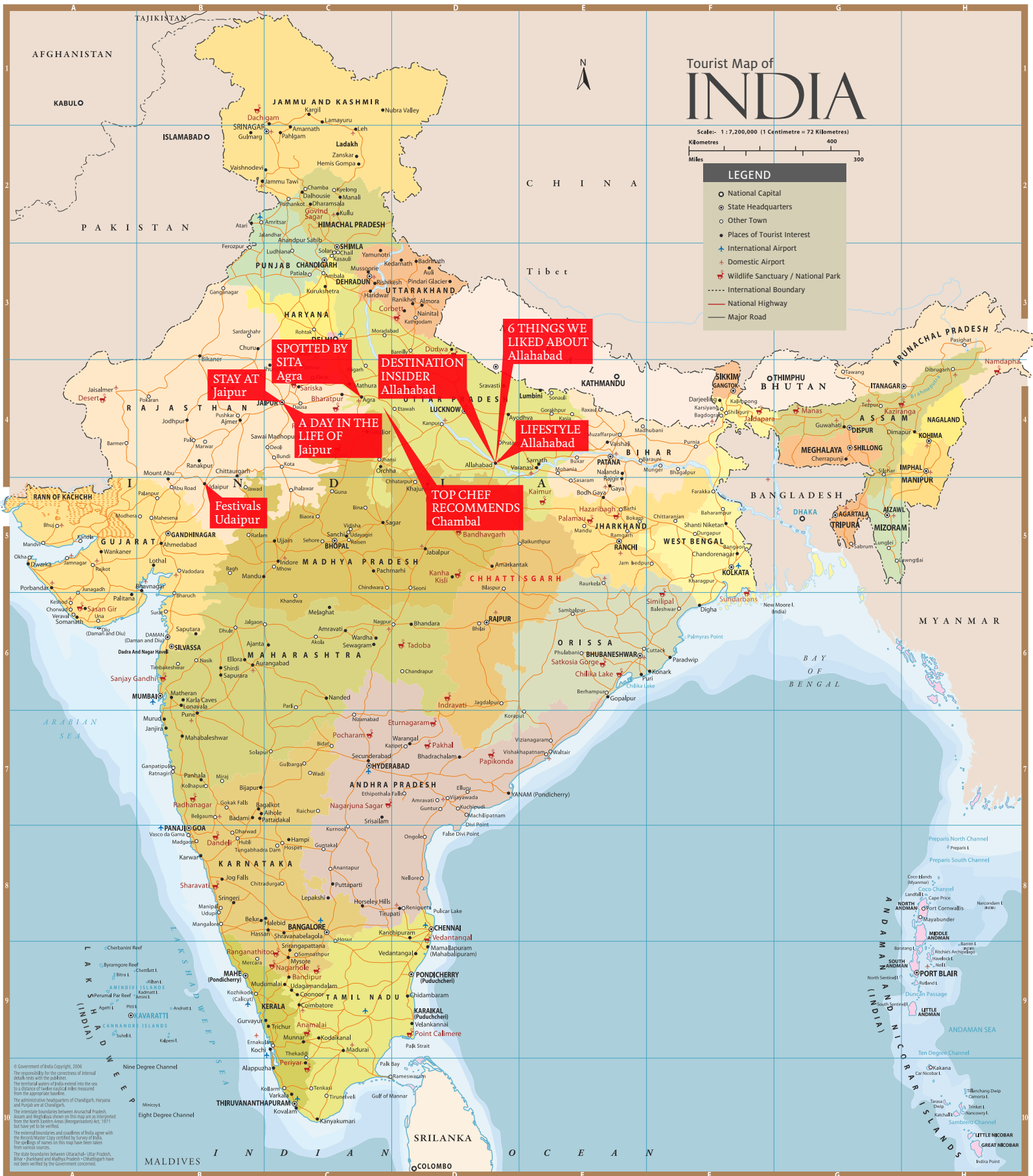


Gangaur, Udaipur April 13-14

Gangaur is a festival of spring, harvest and marital fidelity celebrated all over Rajasthan. But it is particularly impressive in Udaipur with the Lake Pichola as the backdrop of the festival. It is a time for women in Rajasthan to dress up in their best clothes and participate in the festival dedicated to the divine couple of Lord Shiva and Goddess Gauri. A vow is observed by married women for marital bliss and young girls for ideal husband. Women carry clay idols of Lord Isar (Shiva) and Goddess Gauri (Parvati) in a ceremonial procession singing Gangaur songs, starting at Jagdish Chowk and ending in Gangaur Ghat by the Lake Pichola, where they place the idols on boats. The festival culminates with traditional artists performing folk dances and impressive fireworks.



Photo Credit - Amitayu Roy





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 |
|--|-------------------------------|---|
| 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 | Trade Visitor | Vikram Trivedi |
| UITT Kiev 27th - 29th March | Trade Visitor | Deepak Sharma |
| MUNDO LIBAO WITH ABREU Lisbon 6th - 7th April | 695 | Ganesh Shankar, Sunil Dangwal & Nelson Cortez |
| Great Indian Travel Bazaar Jaipur 14th - 16th April | Booth No 44 & 45 | Neeraj Bhatt & Philip Thomas |
| WTM Latin America Sao Paulo 23rd - 25th April | Booth No K14 | Dipak Deva & Neeraj Bhatt |
| KITF Almaty 24th - 26th April | Trade Visitor | Deepak Sharma |
| ATM Dubai 6th - 9th May | AS 6174 | Philip Thomas |

Trade Shows

