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1963-2013

STAY AT

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF

LIFESTYLE

SPOTTED BY SITA

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# Art of Travel



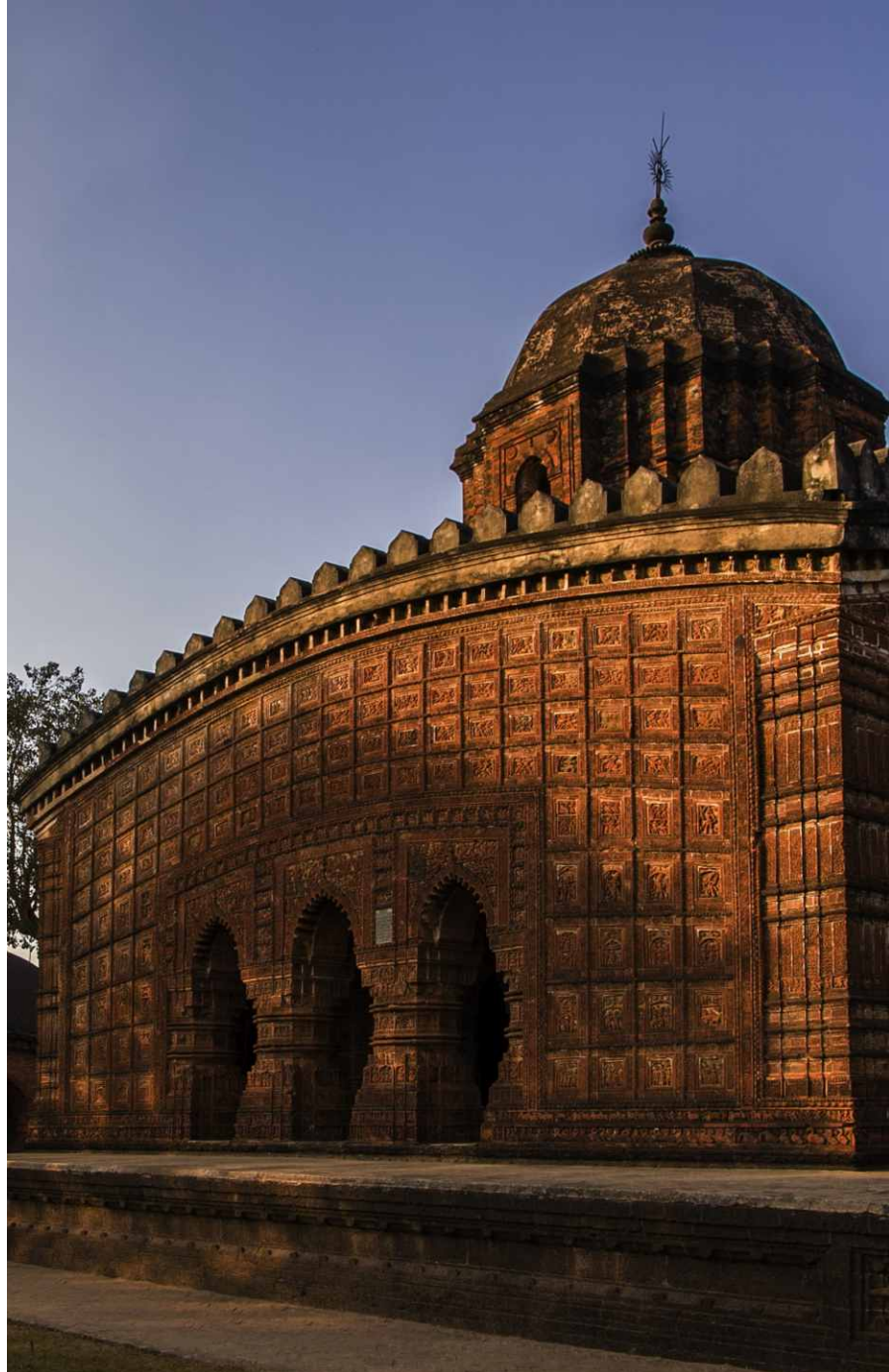
## Bishnupur Tourist Lodge

The government run [Tourist Lodge](#) is the best available option in Bishnupur with the best location in town to enjoy its many terracotta temples all within a walking distance. There are 18 rooms in total. We recommend the recently renovated 6 rooms on the ground floor facing an inner courtyard. The rooms are basic, neat and clean with room service. There is hot and cold running water in the bathrooms and a well-stocked bar. “But it’s their staff which is the best. From the kitchen staff to those serving guests to the manager to the housekeeping; all courteous and helpful,” says Soumya Mukherji of our Destination Knowledge Centre who stayed there recently. They serve mostly Bengali cuisine and the food here is excellent. “Try their Postor Bora. Posto are tiny beige seeds of Indian Poppy (without any narcotic effect if you were wondering). The recipe is quite simple. After washing and soaking the poppy seeds, they are ground into a coarse paste. To this some finely chopped onions and garlic is added. Finally the mixture is flattened by hand into small cakes and shallow fried. Posto is very popular in this part of Bengal and eaten in some form or another, almost daily by the locals.” says Soumya.

The magnificent terracotta temples of Bishnupur which date back to the 17th and 18th centuries and the markets with local handicrafts (silk, wood, metal) make Bishnupur interesting. All these are within a walking distance from the Tourist Lodge. “The people are friendly and welcoming. If you don’t feel like walking, ask for Vivek (+91 9932851256) one of the many rickshaw pullers parked outside the Tourist Lodge to take you around for a tour of the temples and the markets. A three to four hour rickshaw tour costs about Rs 300.

[Click here for the picture gallery of the Terracotta Temples of Bishnupur](#)

# Stay At







## Terracotta Potter

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Standing at the doorway I was admiring the nimble hands at work on the soft clay. Sanjay Karmakar turned around and invited me inside his house to have a closer look. I was in this small village of potters called Panchmura, a 30 minute drive from Bishnupur known for its Textiles and Terracotta Temples,” says Soumya Mukherji from our Destination Knowledge Centre. This village in the Bankura district of West Bengal is famous all across India for its Terracotta Horses. These Terracotta Horses have an unusually long neck in contrast to its short and compact body. “I have been a potter all my life. This is my family business,” says Sanjay when asked about how long he has been making these Terracotta Horses. So why does the Bankura Horse have such a long neck? Sanjay tells us the story, of a person who was on his death bed. The lady of the house prayed to God and promised an offering no less than her height if he got cured. The trouble came when the person got cured. Since she was poor she had nothing that she could offer. Finally she went to a potter and asked him to make a horse as tall as her. Realising that a full size horse would be too big to carry, the potter made one keeping the body small while elongating the neck of the horse. “Slowly the news spread about this miracle and since then these horses were made as offerings to the local deities,” says Sanjay.

So how long does he take to complete a Terracotta Horse? “It depends. Sometimes we keep making the horses and then fire them on the kiln one day. Usually the entire process takes six to seven days depending on the heat of the sun and the drying process,” replies Sanjay. The different parts of Terracotta Horses are made separately on the potter's wheel. The four legs, the full neck in two parts and the face (there are seven pieces in all). They are then joined and kept in the sun to dry. Once dry and after a few finishing touches, it's given a glaze with water and a mud mixture before firing it in a traditional village kiln. The villagers get the right to dig in a piece of land in the nearby farm lands from where they buy soil.

Making these Terracotta Horses is a family affair, where Sanjay's wife also joins in. He wakes up at the break of dawn to take the horses out to dry in the sun...[click here to read more](#)

# A Day in The Life of Sanjay Karmakar





## The Bauls

They are unique to Bengal and you can't miss them on these 9 days in West Bengal which Soumya Mukherji from our Destination Knowledge Centre recently did. Uncut, often coiled hair, long, usually with a flowing beard, their saffron robe with a necklace of beads made of basil stems, crooning about love and compassion in ecstasy. "It was straight from the heart and there was a hint of melancholy as well. The first time I heard a Baul singing was at Shantineketan. I was there at the weekly fair held every Saturday. Although there were many things, all vying for my attention, I was rooted in that spot listening to him," says Soumya.

There is a soul connection between the musical Bauls and the soil of Bengal. Baul roots are not only deep, they are ancient. Baul is an oral tradition passed on by a mentor to his disciple to be remembered as in storytelling. In the olden days Bauls used to roam from village to village and were offered alms for passing on the knowledge through song and dance to villagers about spirituality, art and science of life, how to be in deep love with nature and remove the shackles that bind us. Begging for alms is a way Bauls enforce the fact that they should be happy with whatever comes to them. In each village there was a special house set aside for them to stay in and they would stay as long as they pleased. The language of their music is often called the 'Twilight language'; the time of the day when boundaries blur with their songs having multiple interpretations with metaphors, codes and signs. Just like the sacred texts of Vajrayana Buddhism of the Tibetan tradition. But Bauls are non-conformists. Their simple, natural and direct approach to God has elements from devotional Hinduism, Tantric Buddhism and Sufi Islam.

"We sing songs of joy, love and longing for mystical union with the divine and believe love for humankind leads to love for God," says Anand Gopal Das Baul. Soumya met him at his ashram in Shantineketan; a small place with a central courtyard where he tells us he had a good long conversation with Anand Gopal Das Baul. "Bauls are simple but it is not simple to be a true Baul. You have to do years and years of sadhana (spiritual practice) under a Guru, who has the gift or the key to pass it on to you so that you can pass it on to others," says Anand Gopal Das Baul. He led a life of an ascetic with his Guru for 10 years where 5000 songs were passed on orally as seeds of higher philosophy. "Speaking to him I sensed that he was at peace and



someone who had infinite patience. Leaving the ashram I thought if only there were more Bauls in the world, there would be less hatred and more peace all around," says Soumya.





## Weavers Studio, Sasha

### Weavers Studio

The Weavers Studio in South Kolkata which displays and sells high quality Indian handcrafted textiles believes in “use as many hands as possible.” They encourage labour intensive traditional handloom weaves rather than mechanised looms to ensure that the weavers and craftsperson’s at the grass root gets a good price for their produce. For their weaving unit called Rangeen they procure the raw materials from the Nadia and Murshidabad area of West Bengal. The workers also belong to the same area. “In Murshidabad I saw silk thread being extracted from the cocoons and woven into gorgeous sarees. You must definitely check out their shawls which include block prints on tussar silk, Shibori (Japanese technique of tie and dye) and multi-coloured batik work. A must visit while in Kolkata,” says Soumya from our Destination Knowledge Centre.

For your clients who are interested in textiles we can organise a full day workshop with Weavers Studio, where they can learn block printing, tie and dye and screen printing.

For more visit [www.weaversstudio.in](http://www.weaversstudio.in)

### Sasha

Sasha is a contemporary Fair Trade lifestyle store at Park Street, Kolkata selling handicrafts, textile, home and lifestyle products, a definite must stop to grab a few souvenirs from your trip to West Bengal. Unlike Weavers Studio who has a large set-up, Sasha works with a smaller unit of women artisans spread all over Bengal. If your clients are interested, it is possible to go and see the ladies at work at one such unit in Kolkata. “At Sasha pick something traditional such as the Kantha stitch work. I saw it in Bolpur and it is the most popular form of embroidery of the rural womenfolk in West Bengal,” says Soumya. Kantha originally was a poor man’s wrap consisting of old clothes patched up and sewn into a single garment. The idea was to utilize torn cloths and rags by sewing them together with close stitches and embroidering them for household purpose, so that not a single piece of cloth in the house was wasted. But later it was the natural genius of women of West Bengal who created simple and lovely designs in primary colours which transformed Kantha from its original avatar of household patched up rags into wonderful beautiful creations.

# Spotted By Sita



If your clients are interested in Kantha work, we can visit the Gurusaday Dutt Museum in Kolkata to see his amazing collection of Kantha from rural West Bengal. During his tenure as a District Collector, Gurusaday Dutt developed a deep admiration, understanding and interest for the rural folk and art. To preserve, revive and revitalize the dying folk art traditions he collected about 2300 exquisite specimens including several heirlooms, between 1929 and 1941.

For more visit [www.sashaworld.com](http://www.sashaworld.com)



## Bengali Thali & Prawn Paturi

Kanon Mashhi of Vanalakshmi recommends the Bengali Thali and Prawn Paturi as a must try while visiting Shantiniketan. Shantiniketan located around 180kms north of Kolkata was made popular by Bengali Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore and is considered the place of Bengali cultural evolution. His Visva Bharati is now a centre for both academics as well as cultural studies including music, dance and other fine arts and has been given the status of an independent university. Shantiniketan is also home to Amartya Sen, the 1998 Nobel Prize winner in Economics.

Kanon Mashhi is one of the many ladies who works at Vanalakshmi; a small farm just outside Shantiniketan, where they use traditional methods to grow their produce. It also has an organic food store, a nursery, two independent mud houses for stay with basic amenities and a restaurant. Drop in for their homemade preserves, local craftwork and home cooked Bengali meals in a campus sprawling with plants and trees.

"I was fortunate enough to land on a day when they had prepared prawn paturi (finely chopped prawns wrapped in a leaf), hilsa fish, the favourite fish of the fish crazy Bengali nation, shukto (mixed vegetables and green banana with a slight bitter taste) and 'misti' dahi (sweet curd)," says Soumya Mukherji from our Destination Knowledge Centre. A Bengali meal usually starts with a bitter dish (shukto which acts as an appetizer), vegetables, followed by fish or meat, a sweet and sour chutney and finally some Indian sweet or sweet curd for dessert.

If you are adventurous you can try eating with your hands like the locals. Soumya spoke to these French ladies at Vanalakshmi who said that eating with your hands is an art. However, they haven't mastered it as yet. One of the ladies told Soumya that they are still struggling with the right amount of rice and sauce to make the small sticky ball required to neatly pop the food into the mouth. So they end up with a bit of a mess with grains of rice falling here and there.

You need to pre-book your meals at Vanalakshmi at least one day prior. They prepare only the order for the day in order to avoid wasting food. (Monday Closed/ Mobile number +91 9434233376)

# Top Chef Recommends







## Jaipur, Agra & Chambal Trip

Hello Friends,

Hope you are back from your holidays and having an exciting start to 2013. Soumya and I were busy putting this January issue of Art of Travel over Christmas and New Years. He had gone on his leave after his trip of West Bengal and we had quite a few email exchanges while finalising content. I hope you are enjoying this West Bengal special. We did an Explore Bengal flyer which will give you a sneak peak into the exciting possibilities for your clients - [download it here](#). A very interesting part of India about which we all knew very little till now. We are happy to share the West Bengal itinerary with you which Soumya did. Drop us an email at [info@sita.in](mailto:info@sita.in). Accommodation is basic but that's the charm of it, I guess. Soumya has just returned and we will let you know shortly about the possibilities of combining his road journey which can be otherwise done independently with the 7 day [river cruise on the Hooghly](#).

I was back in Delhi on December 21, having traveled to Jaipur, Agra and the [Chambal Safari Lodge](#). The construction work on the Delhi-Jaipur highway seems nowhere in sight of completion. The bottlenecks exist particularly in this stretch near the town of Bilaspur, notorious for traffic jams leading to inordinate delays. I was stuck there for nearly 45 minutes during my trip to Punjab through the Shekhawati region of Rajasthan and Haryana earlier in November. My Schumacher of a driver, Lakha drove in the opposite lane to cut across the traffic and we barely managed to escape the nasty jam that lasted for several hours. I was fortunate not to have faced anything major this time on the highway but if I was on a holiday I would have taken the early morning train from Delhi to Jaipur.

In Jaipur I visited [Elefantastic](#), a new enterprise by a former Mahout, Rahul Chaudhary. We have been receiving good feedback about it from our clients. Rahul had started Elefantastic in February this year and has already become very popular with people traveling to Jaipur. How does it compare to [Dera Amer](#) that we have been selling to clients, with great feedback too? Frankly speaking there is no comparison. They aren't even competition. While the quietly sophisticated private camp of Dera Amer with its lovely home-style food and its affable owner Udaijeet, who goes out of his way to make guests happy will have its own clientele, Elefantastic is a no fuss, no sauce kind

# Destination Insider



of a place in the Elephant Village close to Amber Fort with about 14 Elephants, well taken care of. No chains. While Elefantastic is a shared experience Dera Amer is private. Though each client at Elefantastic will have an Elephant assigned to them with a Mahout. Rahul doesn't take more than 8-10 pax on a given day. Elefantastic will work very well with those of your clients who want an up-close and personal encounter with these noble giants in a natural setting of an Elephant Village and are happy to interact with fellow travelers who share the same passion for Elephants. Time spent at Elefantastic is flexible in a manner where one can spend time with the Elephants as per their interest. If one is interested in painting the Elephants, then its okay to spend more time painting them or if interested in bathing or swimming with them (only in the warmer months), Elefantastic is more than happy to let you spend more time doing that. If somebody wants to spend more of their time riding the Elephant bareback they are most welcome to do that as well. Or even cook lunch or dinner for the Elephants if clients have time and interest. [click here to read more](#)



## Mon Chasha

1. Nilanjan & Debjani - The husband and wife team are your hosts at [Mon Chasha](#) and the heart and soul of the place. After working in the travel trade for more than 15 years, it was Debjani's dream to build a place where people could come and escape from the rigmarole of daily lives and reconnect with their family and traditions. She believes that travel should be a time to relax and enjoy, not come back from a holiday and take a day off because your trip proved hectic. The term 'Mon Chasha' means 'cultivator of the mind'. Mon Chasha is for the inquisitive savvy traveller interested in rural India and wants to know more about the traditional way of life, local art and craft. "Don't come here looking for luxury but it's the attention to detail and the warmth of your hosts that makes this place special," says Soumya from our Destination Knowledge Centre who stayed there recently. One day she hopes to hand over Mon Chasha to the local community, which is a part and parcel of the project and move on to start a similar project elsewhere in West Bengal.

2. The Cottages and the views - Mon Chasha has 4 cottages built on an elevated platform. "My first impression after entering my room was its size. The circular room had two large king size beds, in spite of which there was ample space to walk around," says Soumya. The entire structure is erected and built by local craftsmen and artisans, using locally procured bamboo, palm leaves and paddy straws. "Even the beds are made of some of the thickest bamboos that I have ever seen," says Soumya. Towards the rear of the room a small door leads to a balcony with a sit-out with views of the lazy Bagda River flowing and the paddy fields.

3. The Walks - Mon Chasha is located in a village called Paushi which is a 4 hour train ride from Kolkata. Walking around the property gives you a glimpse into the unhurried rural life of West Bengal. Neatly labeled herbs and trees around the property make it great to learn about the local flora. "There is no pretence, no scripted characters or people put out of place to create an artificial environment. On my walks I encountered farmers in the fields sowing, thrashing, jaggery being made and people fishing in the ponds," says Soumya.

4. The Food - "Perhaps the highlight of my stay here was the food," says Soumya who by now you must have realised is huge foodie. "We try to serve food that was a staple in most Bengali families a decade back. Unfortunately, now nobody has the time for such

# 6 Things We Liked About



elaborate menus" says Nilanjan. The intensity of the spices is just right and the produce is straight from the kitchen garden or from the nearby farms. Fresh fish on your table comes from the ponds in the property fed by rain water harvesting. The food is served in beautiful brass utensils. Pallab who serves food is never far away just in case you require something. The common dining area also gives you a chance to interact with the other guests. The hammocks hung all around the central dining area are perfect for an afternoon siesta after all the good food.

5. Art Revival - Your stay at Mon Chasha supports the local community. Apart from giving employment to the locals, Nilanjan and Debjani are trying very hard to revive the local forms of art. Monotosh lives in the adjacent village working his magic with dry coconut shells in his small low ceiling workshop. "The detail on the coconut vases that he was filing away under a makeshift lamp was brilliant," says Soumya. Kanai was another such artist who does wonders with bamboo strips. He lives in a traditional mud house immaculately clean with the veranda serving as his airy workshop. Kanai is now quite popular and gets invited to display his art work and various fairs and festivals. At Mon Chasha they have "nabya nakshi" a room where works of such local artist are displayed to create awareness. You are free to appreciate as well as buy them. The money goes directly to the artists, some of whom are the last surviving artists of these local art forms.

6. Peace and quiet - Life at Mon Chasha is laid back and simple. "You are miles away from the mindless honking. The air is clean and fresh. I can't remember when was the last time I picked up a book to read. Sitting in the veranda with a book in hand after a leisurely breakfast, watching the river flowing in front will be something I will look back with fond memories," says Soumya. You may also want to use the solar lights (instead of electricity) during your stay at Mon Chasha which Soumya did.





# Festivals

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## Dol Jatra, Shantiniketan 26th March 2013

The Dol Jatra or Holi as it is popularly known in North India is celebrated on the full moon day of the month of Falgun (mid February to mid March). The festival signals the onset of spring. The ruggedness of winter gives way to leaves, flowers and fresh crops.

Rabindranath Tagore was so inspired by the concept of joy and brotherhood of Holi that he decided to introduce it as Dol Jatra in Shantiniketan to bring together students of different nationalities and religions studying at Visva Bharti. On this day the women look dazzling in their colourful cotton saris and garlands of fragrant flowers; the men also sport traditional dresses — dhotis and kurtas. Yellow dominates the attire, denoting energy, intellect and awakening of new blooms in spring. The herbal colours made from flowers and leaves are called Abir and are used to play Holi.

In Shantineketan Dol Jatra is observed in a very dignified manner as per the tradition of Rabindranath Tagore. The students of Visva Bharati take part in singing and dancing to the tunes of Rabindra sangeet and apply abir on each other's face. But no, you will not be forced to play Holi if you choose not to. The students sit in open-air fields to continue their music sessions or visit houses of their teachers for impromptu soirees of song and dance, sharing mishti (sweets) and food. As per tradition the young ones apply abir on the feet of elders and receive their blessings. In the evening, as the full moon etches a silver landscape, hundreds of people gather to watch one of Tagore's many dance dramas, enacted by the students.



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](mailto:info@sita.in)

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

# Trade Shows

