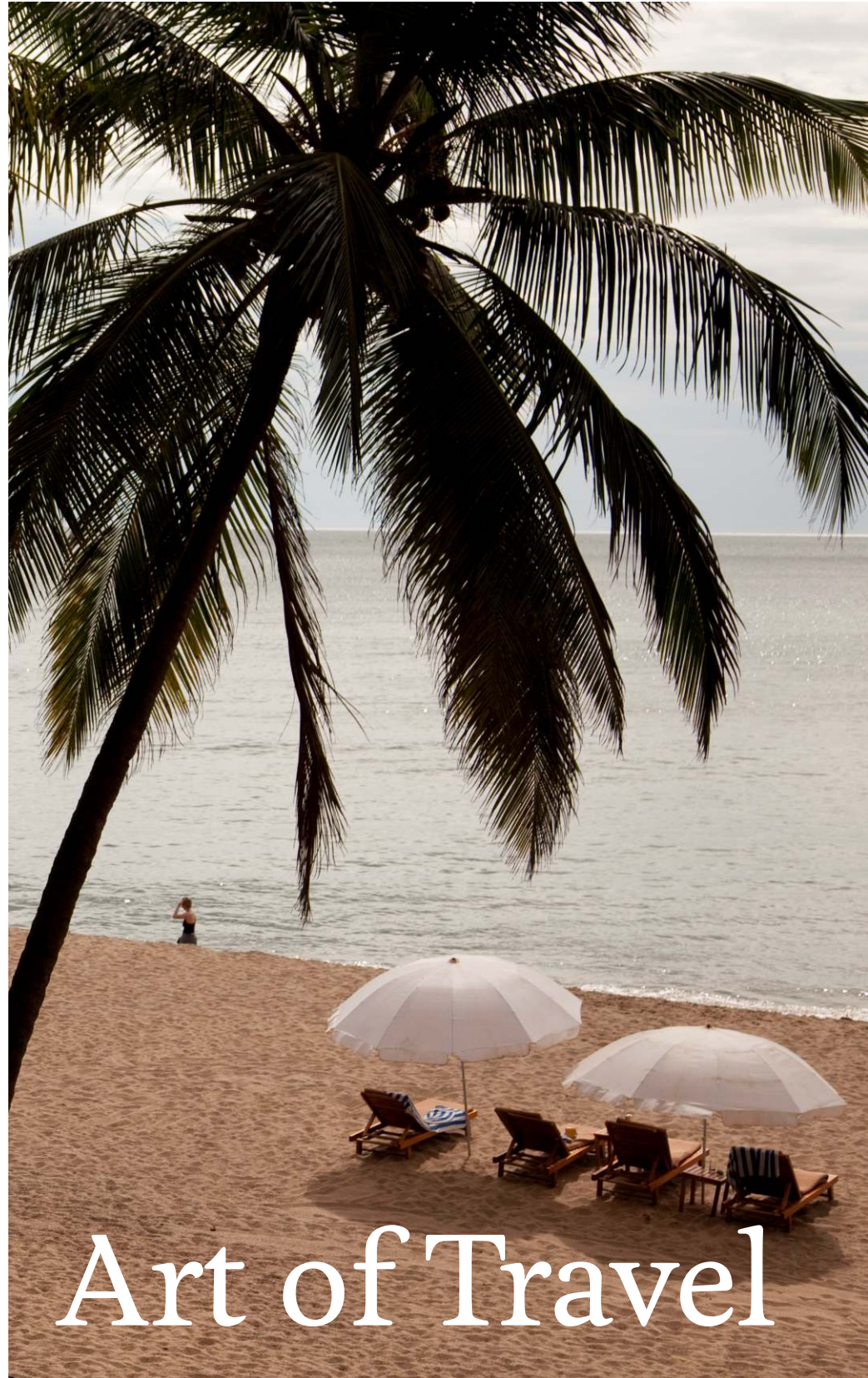


- STAY AT
- A DAY IN THE LIFE OF
- LIFESTYLE
- SPOTTED BY SITA
- TOP CHEF RECOMMENDS
- DESTINATION INSIDER
- 6 THINGS WE LIKED ABOUT
- FESTIVALS
- INSPIRATION LOCATOR
- TRADE SHOWS



# Art of Travel





# Stay At

## Seetalvan Orchard



Seetalvan Orchard, nestled in the tiny village-town of Kotgarh in Thanedar, Himachal Pradesh, invites its guests to share a stunning panorama of the majestic western Himalayas. Labelled as the 'Apple Country' of India, it was in the soil of Kotgarh that Samuel Stokes planted the first ever apple seed in 1916 and today Kotgarh produces the best variety of apples in its vast orchards. It's a mere 2 hours' drive from the crowds at Shimla. Seetalvan offers charming cottages that are an ideal blend of warmth, rustic appeal and luxury. There are two cottages; one a 4 bedroom and the other a 2 bed with kitchen, dining and living room and veranda. There is a separate cottage for the kitchen and dining below and the living room is on top. One has the option to dine in informal, yet elegant surroundings of the Main House, or on the outdoor deck of the cottage. Every effort is made to locally source ingredients from their farms, especially fruits, vegetables and milk.

On arrival, spend the day visiting the many orchards nearby. Once rejuvenated by the mountain air, go on a short forest walk the next day to Tanijubbal Lake. A picnic lunch can be organised for you here, in the midst of nature. In the evening visit St. Mary's church, which is one of the oldest churches in the country built in 1843. On day three trek or drive up to Hattu Peak and on the way back stop for lunch at a cherry orchard owned by Seetalvan.







## Botanical Illustrator, Kalimpong

# A Day in The Life of Hemlata

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



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



## I am an Animist

Bon-choe, the Bhutanese name for Animism predates Buddhism. In simple terms Animism means worship of nature. However, Bon-choe draws some negative undertones, whenever, mentioned since the extreme primitive practice involved elements of blood sacrifice called Mar-choe. With the onset of Buddhism in the 7th century in Bhutan, effigy rituals called Kar-choe replaced the bloody sacrifices. The Bhutanese way of life is deeply rooted in animist rituals and have always been a prerequisite to Bhutan's social and cultural heritage. It should not be lightly brushed aside. While I view them as a communion with the unseen, a rationalist may see it as an ecological necessity. It can be anyone's choice.

In Bhutan, the animist tradition helped a lot in the preservation of the environment and culture. A core animist belief is that human beings are just visitors on this planet and that the permanent owners, are the guardian spirits. To live in harmony on this planet, the humans must pay their respects to these guardians. To name a few; Tso-mems (water spirits) rule the water world and Dra-tsens (cliff spirits) own the rocky cliffs. Likewise, Jomo is the guardian of the fauna and Mems of flora; Gang-tsens are the spirits of the ridges and Lhung-tsens are wind spirits. There are others as well, such as the Gyalpos (kings), Nyelpos (hosts) and subterranean guardians like Lu, Drelpo, Sa-dhag and many more.

In Bhutan Dralha Solnee is primarily an animist ritual, where the spirit (Dralha) is propitiated. Some Dralha verses are filled with earthly wisdom that delves into understanding the formation of life itself. One such verse explains the fundamental understanding of the origin of life: the belief that the primordial body was formed from the fusion of Fire, Wind, Water and Earth. Once the body was created, the soul (dralha as per animist belief) took refuge in it. Such is the animist wisdom from ancient times, that it still runs in parallel with the modern scientific perceptives.

From several centuries, there have been attempts to eradicate animism from Bhutan. But today's younger generation is lucky, as they can choose to view animism as a spiritual union or as an ecological bond. This seems interesting because it is a global philosophy. My own journey into understanding animism within the frontiers of ecology has been great. I call this my Journey into deep ecology. I look at all the



animist rituals as a communicative tool for understanding the soul of Mother Earth and to create harmony and balance on this planet. Comprehending animism this way has helped me preserve this ancient belief system in this electronic world. Just like Buddhism has become a way of life for many of my friends, animism has become, one for me. It is an individual's realization and my understanding on this has opened a new chapter in my life which I am documenting in a private journal titled "The Dawn of my Realization". I am happy to share more with anyone who may be interested.

**About the author:** Born and brought up in rural Bhutan, 23 year old Ugen Tenzin has lived with Bhutan's age-old animist tradition with his joint family. He now finds a deep connection between the ancient animist tradition and the conservation of the environment. Ugen is strong advocate of experiential travel and sees it as an opportunity, where all such quaint, but meaningful traditions could be witnessed and kept alive. Ugen is a friend of Sita and works in Thimphu.



## One from the Road

Road journeys in India are full of wonderful stories replete with legends, tales of bravado and plain old yarns. All you need is an attentive ear. The most common while on a road journey, is a particular spot on the highway which is said to be notorious for road accidents. It is believed that an evil spirit causes these accidents. However, the accidents stop after a temple is built in the same location. Numerous such temples dot the highways across India.

During one of our journeys in Himachal Pradesh, our chauffeur stopped at a temple to pray for a safe journey. The Mata Taranda Devi's Temple was built by the Indian Army in 1968 and is very interestingly managed by its jawaans (soldiers). This particular point had seen many accidents, but the locals told us that once the Army built the temple, the accidents stopped.

# Spotted By Sita







## Himachali Thali at Wildflower Hall

Executive Chef Mohan Gyani of [Wildflower Hall Shimla](#) strongly recommends the Himachali Thali as a must try during your stay here. The Himachali Thali consists of ten carefully selected local specialties from various regions of Himachal Pradesh. "A glass of Himachali fruit or flower based wine pairs perfectly with the subtle flavours of the each dish, giving a different dimension to the experience," he adds.

The former residence of British Viceroy Lord Kitchener, rebuilt to a new magnificence, Wildflower Hall recreates the grand style of the colonial era. It is a fantastic place in Shimla; once the summer capital of the British Raj, to immerse in the breathtaking natural surroundings and enjoy a beautiful view of the mountains and valleys from the restaurants, outdoor Jacuzzi and the heated swimming pool.

# Top Chef Recommends





## Shangri-La

# Destination Insider

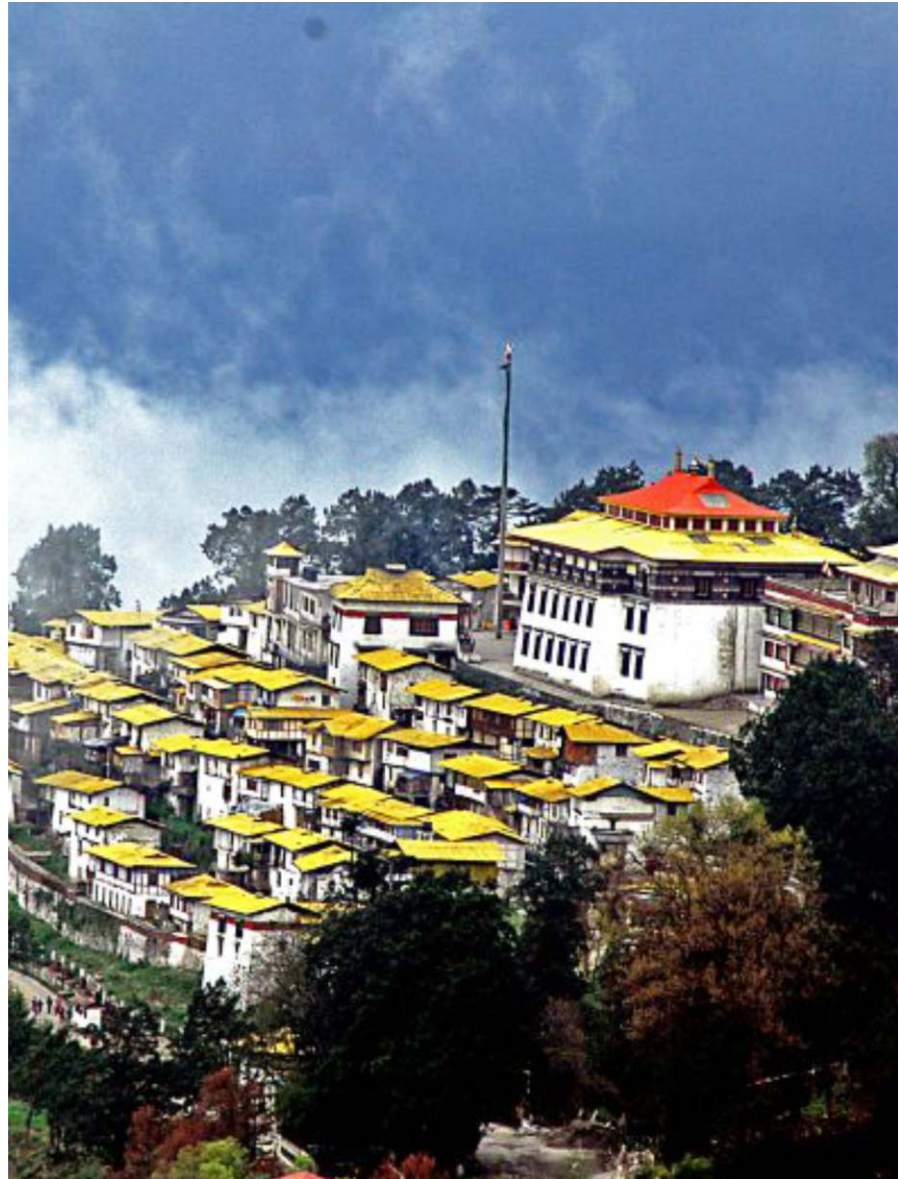
Dear Friends,

I am leading a team comprising of colleagues from our Gurgaon and Mumbai office to the Himalayas this August. We will be volunteering for two weeks as a part of our Corporate Responsibility initiative (more in the August issue).

My love affair with the Himalayas began more than a decade ago in this quaint Himalayan town called [Tawang](#) in North-east India; home of the friendly Buddhist Tribe; the Monpas. I had just abandoned the city where I made a living. I was sick of the sound bytes and mega bytes of urban life. I remember two things about Tawang very clearly even now. There was no "imposed" anxiety to be "somebody" in life. Everybody was happy being a "nobody" in Tawang. And both sexes were brilliantly comfortable with each other, paying compliments on the run. The 600 year old Tawang monastery; the second largest in Asia, after the one in Lhasa loomed in the distance visible from my dormitory window, where I stayed for Rs 30 per day. In 1959, the current Dalai Lama fled to Tawang and took refuge there. The Chinese followed 3 years later in 1962 and massacred an ill prepared, ill-trained Indian Army.

Absolutely broke towards the end, I survived on free bowls of noodle soup and Ara, the heady local tippie, thanks to my pretty host who ran a restaurant in the market and who I thought I should marry. In Tawang you don't "marry," you take the permission of the elders and "settle down". But she told me that she would have considered my proposal if I was a "captain" in the Indian army. I told her to get lost and promptly went back to her restaurant for my free bowl of noodle soup the next day. But we enjoyed each others company and often ended up chatting till it was time to shut shop. I can't forget the monks of Tawang monastery, who I generally piled on for free food. I played cupid to one of the monks who was ready to give up everything for this Pretty Young Thing that managed the telephone booth in the dormitory I stayed. The penalty then for giving up your monkhood was ten thousand rupees. It is customary for the Monpas to send one of their sons to become a monk. It was the second son who went to the monastery.

I also can't forget the nuns at the Ani Gompa, perched on top of a hillock right behind Tawang monastery...the endless cups of butter tea over mindless banter



including a persistent query about the truth behind the legend of a "well endowed" monk who would slip into the nunnery at night a couple of centuries back. They would all giggle and blush. But I never got the answer for each time the toothless head Ani (nun) would shoo me off asking me not to return. Of course I returned for more cups of butter tea and to be shoed again and again. En route to the Ani Gompa, a steep climb; I would normally rest by a beautiful waterfall for a smoke. There I painted my one and only masterpiece that still hangs back home. "NONSENSE" - that's what I called it. I was a "devil" for the nuns of the Ani Gompa since I smoked. [Click here to read more](#)





## Elephant Valley Eco Farm Hotel

Great alternative to Thekkady: [Elephant Valley Eco Farm Hotel](#), is only 3 and a half hours drive from the temple town of Madurai and is a great alternative to the much flogged Thekkady. It is ideal for your clients headed to Kerala after the hectic and dusty temple circuit of Tamilnadu. An interesting itinerary for your clients heading to Elephant Valley for a couple of nights after Madurai. From Elephant Valley, one can head to [Pollachi](#) which is another 3 hours and thirty minutes away. From here your clients can continue to Cochin by surface. It takes about 5 hrs. The backwaters of Kumarakom could be your clients' next destination. For those who want a beach at the end of their holiday, they may head to Marari which is not too far away.

**Good Old Farm Life:** This 20 room property, however, is not for everyone. Definitely not for those clients who are fixated on their creature comforts; wants room service, television/newspapers in their rooms and have the habit of randomly landing in the restaurant when hungry. Elephant Valley works perfectly for those who are looking for a peaceful and relaxed time. The tranquility of the place compensates for the lack of amenities. That said, you won't be roughing it out for sure. Their rooms are cosy, mattresses are extremely comfortable and there is hot and cold water. Do request for rooms close to the restaurant and the lounge.

**No Wastage of Food:** At the Elephant Valley you have to place your meal order in advance. They cook everything fresh and just about what is required as per the orders placed. We enjoyed our discussions with Chef Shankar after each meal on what we should order for the next one. Some may find this limiting; especially on a holiday. But we liked the idea, that it ensures no wastage of food at the end of the day. Very thoughtful.

**Pick your own vegetable for the next meal:** If placing your meal orders in advance sounds limiting to you, here's what we advice. Ask Chef Shankar to accompany you to their organic vegetable garden after your discussion about what to order for the next meal, pick your own vegetables and ask him to make it, just the way you want it. He will be more than happy to do that. We did exactly that and even joined him in the kitchen. It was great fun. Elephant Valley is not a place where you wait for interesting things to happen. Go make them happen.

# 6 Things We Liked About



**Art work of Jérôme Mesnager:** The work of Jérôme Mesnager, the father of Street Art in Paris, in a nondescript village of Tamilnadu in South India? You guessed it right. Elephant Valley has some cool artwork of [Jérôme Mesnager](#) to match the property's unique location of being situated in an elephant migration route, that is centuries old. We particularly liked the one where Mesnager's "Man in White"; considered a symbol of light, strength and peace dancing with an elephant.

**Nature Trek & the Rock Pools:** We completely agree with Elephant Valley when they say that they will never have a swimming pool ever in the property. The Gangavar River flows right inside the property and there are many water bodies located within walking distance which are perfectly safe to splash around. Our favourite spot is the beautiful waterfall which is an easy 15 minute walk from the property. Spend your morning there, with a book and ask Chef Shankar to serve you lunch there. One can also take a longer detour of 60 minutes with an in-house guide. It's a moderate trek. Our guide Prichay; a local villager was shy. But we kept on prodding him gently. Prichay shared wonderful stories on how locals are dependent on these forests for their daily needs and their traditional wisdom. He even showed us a poisonous fruit which the local community uses to ensure an easy catch by washing them in the river. It makes the fish and the crabs go temporarily blind.





# Festivals



## Ganesh Chaturthi 19th September, 2012 & Pulikali Tiger Dance

### Ganesh Chaturthi

Celebrate Ganesh Chaturthi festival with us in the Lanes of Lalbaug, Mumbai.

Ganesh Chaturthi marks the birthday of Lord Ganesha, the elephant headed Hindu God. During the ten days festival, families install idols of the deity in their homes, while some neighbourhood and associations also get together to erect pandals (tents) where the deity is enthroned to be immersed later. The pride of place is occupied by Lalbaug cha Raja (King of Lalbaug), the largest, oldest and the most revered idol in the city...it is then that the Lanes of Lalbug come alive and we explore the area during this season. These walks run only in the month of August-September, every Saturday and Sunday.

Ganesha is the God of wisdom and prosperity and is invoked before the beginning of any auspicious work by the Hindus. It is believed that for the fulfilment of one's desires, his blessing is absolutely necessary.

### Pulikali Tiger Dance

Kuntal from our Destination Knowledge Centre will be on holiday with friends in Thrissur, Kerala to witness the Pulikali Tiger Dance this September.

The Pulikali Tiger Dance is performed during Onam; Kerala's harvest festival. Groups of three or more dancers with pastes smeared over their body, like the stripes on a tiger's body, captivate the onlookers in public places with their energetic dances, accompanied by the loud beating of traditional percussion instruments. Watch this space as we bring you a first hand account of this unique festival in our October issue.









## Meet us at the Upcoming Trade Shows

# 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>Top Resa</b> Paris 18th -21st September	Awaited	Philip Thomas & Valerie Chalopet
<b>OTDYKH Leisure Fair</b> Moscow 19th -22nd September	Awaited	Ernest Dias & Deepak Sharma
<b>FITA</b> Mexico 20th -23rd September	Trade Visitor	Neeraj Bhatt
<b>Kerala Travel Mart</b> Cochin 27th -30th September	Hall No.5, Booth No. 79 & 80	Neeraj Bhatt & Philip Thomas
<b>Deluxe Travel Mart</b> Ukraine 2nd October	Sita Desk	Deepak Sharma
<b>Luxe Travel Show Baku</b> Azerbaijan 16th October	Sita Desk	Deepak Sharma
<b>TTG</b> Rimini 18th -20th October	Awaited	Matteo Pennacchi & Philip Thomas
<b>ABAV</b> Rio de Janeiro 24th -26th October	Trade Visitor	Neeraj Bhatt
<b>TOUR Salon</b> Poland 24th -27th October	Trade Visitor	Deepak Sharma
<b>WTM</b> London 5th -8th November	Hall No S10, Booth No IN300	Neeraj Bhatt
<b>ILTM</b> Cannes 3rd -6th December	F 130	Dipak Deva & Philip Thomas
<b>USTOA</b> Hawaii 6th -8th December	Awaited	Neeraj Bhatt

