

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



Maranat Mana, Nilambur

“Your stay at the 160 year old [Maranat Mana](#) is a step back in time. For starters there aren't too many homestays in India which have a live temple or shrine within its premises. In [Devra Homestay](#) at Udaipur there is a Tribal Shrine which does this very interesting service to the deity every Saturday. But at the [Ganesha Temple](#) located within Maranat Mana, close to 300 devotees turn up every day to pray,” says Kuntil Baruwa from our Destination Knowledge Centre who stayed here recently. Maranat Mana which has only 3 airy rooms is a fascinating insight into the lifestyle of the Namboothiri Brahmins; the indigenous elite priestly class of Kerala who are custodians of some of the oldest rituals known to mankind; one of which may predate human speech ([click here to see the video and know more](#)). It is managed in a rather unique way, where one of the brothers stays in the house for 5 years to maintain the house before the next brother takes on.

“It is very informal out here and you eat what is being cooked; only vegetarian yet delicious, in the family kitchen. But your host Praveen and his wife Vidya who have lovingly restored the guesthouse of this traditional Namboothiri household into a homestay, welcome you warmly and take very good care of you,” says Kuntil. For those interested in traditional elite architecture of Kerala, Maranat Mana is very special as it is one of the last few surviving pathinaru kettu (four courtyards) Namboothiri households. “The house is huge. Praveen is happy to take you on a visit of the sprawling house which seems to be caught in a relentless time wrap, yet it is not a museum. Every nook and corner is very much alive with the present. He gently introduces you to the customs and traditions of the house with stories, which is a very interesting sneak peek into the life of this Namboothiri Household, their culture and beliefs,” says Kuntil. The Maranat Mana family also runs a school and has their own rubber plantations which Praveen is happy to take you to visit.

“Maranat Mana however, is not for everyone. To begin with the 3 rooms are basic, neat and clean and the bathrooms very simple. And they are accessed only by a narrow steep flight of wooden steps. No meat. Not even eggs and no alcohol. Recommend it only to those of your clients who take joy in the authentic, like to immerse themselves in culture and share knowledge and stories in good company,” says Kuntil.

Stay At



The family pond of Maranat Mana. It's here the secrets of some of the oldest rituals known to mankind are passed on from father to son.



The ancient ritual of Kalamvarichipat of Nilambur. Oracles draw the mural of the deity with their bare hands which they later invite to possess their body.

Here are some recommendations by Kuntil for your clients to pick and choose during their stay at Maranat Mana - [Click here for the itinerary](#)



Seasoned Off-Roaders

“We believe that the true essence of a holiday lies in the journey, not just the destination.” This is the principle behind [Overlander India](#). Uday Bhan Singh and Ajit Rana are co-founders of Overlander India, a 4x4 self-drive, off-roading company that takes you for an off-road adventure of a lifetime across various regions of India. Overlander India provides the jeep, the fuel, the route, the stay, the food, and the experience; and all the customers (called Overlanders) have to do, is to drive to their heart's content. Overlanders get to drive and experience a unique side of India that is rarely seen - the rural, pure, simple, village life. “In our first season, we have started with the desert area of western Rajasthan, but by next year we plan to cover Ladakh, the Rann of Kutch in Gujarat, and the coffee & tea growing area of Karnataka”, says Uday.

For these car enthusiasts, their day starts after an early breakfast when they pick up the Overlanders from their hotel and transport them to a location outside the city where the jeeps are parked. Then begins the exciting off-road journey. And by journey they mean traversing across the countryside through dirt tracks, camel cart tracks and even riverbeds. You don't have to be an experienced off-road driver as both Uday and Ajit are seasoned off roaders who will show you the techniques of this form of driving.

By afternoon the Overlanders stop for a picnic lunch at a scenic spot. This spot could be nestled in the sand dunes of Jaisalmer or overlooking a small lake in the vicinity of Jodhpur. After a lazy picnic lunch, they get back in the jeeps and once again traverse the “road less travelled.” Road travel is minimized to an absolute minimum, which is ideal for foreigners who get uncomfortable on our highways.

In the afternoon, Ajit and Uday take the Overlanders to visit the actual homes of members of different communities that inhabit this region. These are villages or Dhanis, that are completely off the beaten path and give the Overlanders an authentic rural feel of India that exists in harmony with nature. This terrain is also a photographer's paradise as there are numerous species of migratory birds and wildlife like the black buck, chinkara and blue bull.

By evening, they arrive at the campsite, in time to enjoy a sundowner, watching the sun fade over the dunes. For night halts, luxury Swiss tents are provided, complete

A Day in The Life Of Ajit & Uday



with an inviting bed and modern bathrooms. The setting of these campsites are magical in their solitude and remoteness. Alternatively, family-run Heritage Hotels that are steeped in history and romance welcome the Overlanders with traditional Rajput hospitality.

As the evening's activities unfold around a campfire, the tantalizing aroma of a delicious barbeque beckons them. Melodious tunes fill the night and the rhythmic beat of the “dhol” accompanies the folk dancers from the neighbouring villages. The Overlanders are invited to participate in most activities including entertainment, cooking and prepping the vehicle for the next day's drive. This is however completely voluntary for the guests, as there is of course the option of having this taken care of by the staff.

With this, a day ends for Uday and Ajit as they prepare themselves for the next day. “After all tomorrow is another day...”



Lifestyle



Laughter Yoga

Inner Jogging

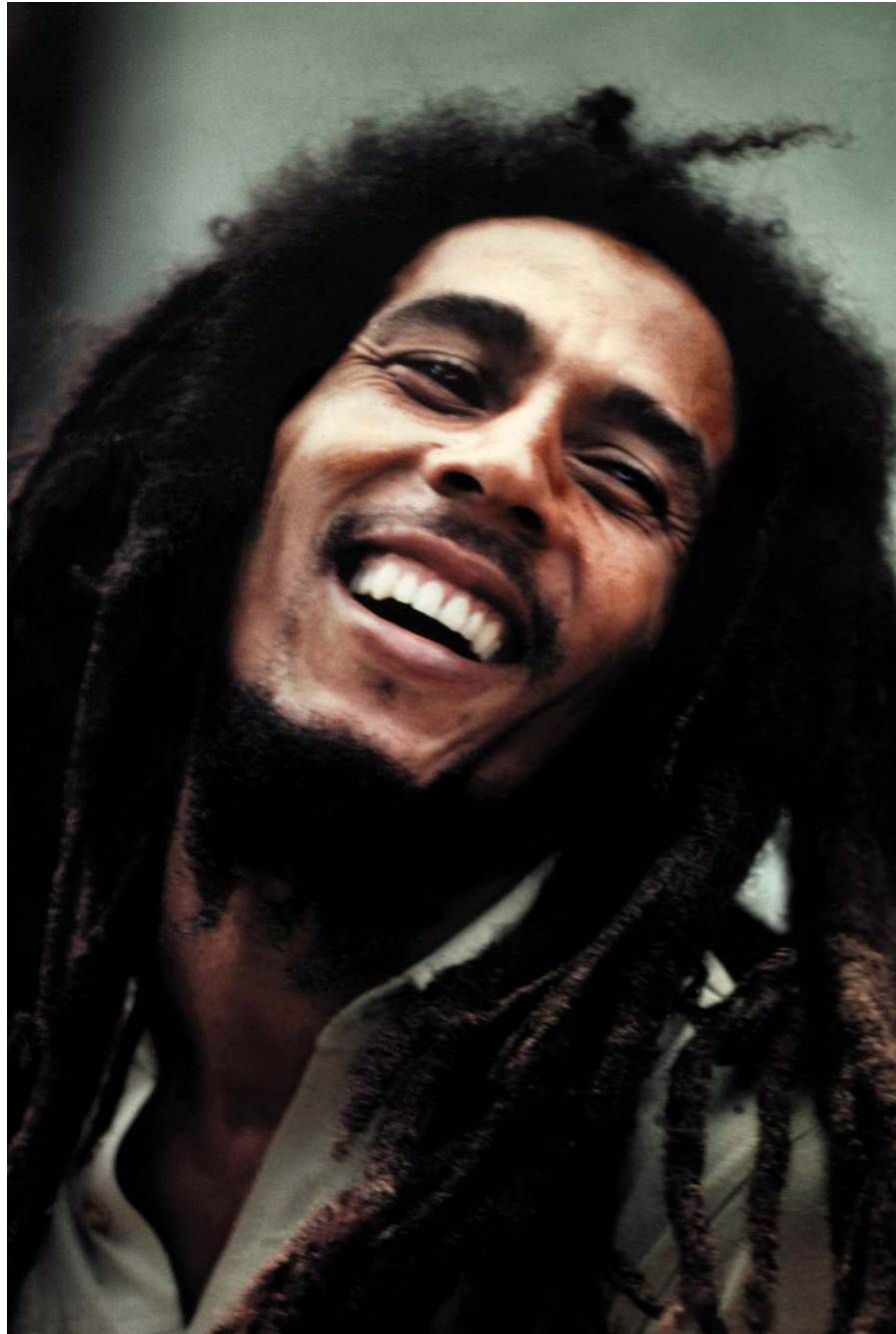
We all know that laughter is the best medicine, but this pure and simple act is fast fading away from our life.

You laugh best when you laugh like a small child. ..when you laugh for no reason. A healthy person should laugh at least 15 to 20 minutes daily. While laughing, our body produces positive hormones which diminish all negativity. There is no fixed time or limit to laugh, but you should laugh freely and continuously with short intervals for 10-15 minutes every day, in order to allow your body to resonate with your soul. Our lungs get enough oxygen, blood circulation becomes smoother and the most important thing is the positivity which is generated deep inside. My students tell me that Laughter Yoga has brought about a positive mental attitude in them, that it brings openness and generosity, enhances team spirit and a willingness to help others.

And when you love people you work for peace. So let's join the Laughter party. Shall we?

Jiten Kohi is a friend of Sita and a certified Laughter Yoga expert who is based in New Delhi. Should your clients want to know more about Laughter Yoga during their India holiday and want a session with him, we will be more than happy to organise it.

To know more - [Click here](#)



Reggae Artist Bob Marley was known for many things but somehow this photo captured the emotion behind those things, a happy man contented with his music. This iconic photo was taken by Kim Gotlieb during the 1975 and 1976 tour. Over two years of historic trips to Jamaica and exclusive meetings in Los Angeles, Kim took iconic photographs of Marley who would go on to define the genre and captivate a generation.



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Ashwathi Mess, Wayanad

Sita spotted this small thatched shack, while coasting down the steep approach road to the [Kuruva Islands](#) in Wayanad. It is easy to miss the little non-descript house, with a board declaring “Ashwathi Mess.” But on our return after our Kuruva adventure with a ravenous appetite, this is where we went. At the Ashwathi Mess, Umesh and Lizy welcomed us with a huge smile, a hearty greeting and escorted us to the benches and tables, now smooth, after being used for so long. And you begin to suspect this indeed is a special place. Their kitchen would have been humming since morning, once orders are received from resorts all over Wayanad. A plantain leaf plate materializes and starts getting adorned with a dozen delicacies in a specific order and finally the rice arrives to complete an elaborate Kerala ela-sadya (sadya means banquet in the local language). The rigours of the forest and river crossings at Kuruva are quickly forgotten whilst you surrender to the food. And Umesh or Lizy will be at hand with yet another helping, a word of encouragement or a helpful description of the bewildering array of dishes.

If you chat up with Umesh, you will wonder if you are being told a Bollywood pot-boiler. As the story goes, Umesh met Lizy twenty years back. Like a proper Bollywood movie, the Hindu boy and the Christian belle fell in love and decided to elope. What good is a script in a Bollywood movie without the cops? The families stayed true to the script by calling the police who promptly tracked down the intrepid couple. The scene moved to the local police station, where the lovers professed their undying love for each other (...and their proof of age, we presume), and the inspector finally decided to get the couple married.

But the story is only at the intermission stage. The second half finds the hero running a thriving watch repair shop in Coorg and the heroine wisely deciding to open a small chaaya-kadi (tea and snacks) shop on the Kuruva river bank. Over time the snacks evolved into a basic meal.

Enter the villain - technology! Umesh realized that the electronic age had finally reached the plantations of Coorg, with his skill as a watchmaker sidelined by a torrent of use and throw imports. He returned to join his wife and quickly discovered the extraordinary culinary skills hidden by all the clockworks. Seeing this, Ram, a friend of Sita, who escorts visitors to

Spotted By Sita



Kuruva, persuaded them to upgrade from chaaya-kadi-meals to full-course Kerala feasts, which is how we ended up having an amazing meal in this little shack called “Ashwathi Mess.”

As we said good bye we realised that the taste of the simple, hygienic home cooked food of Umesh and Lizy had lingered on. We weren't surprised at all, when we were told that people keep on returning to enjoy their undiluted hospitality with a smile which is definitely, a 5 Star from our side.



Melon Carpaccio with Iberico Ham

Chef D.N Sharma of the Orient Express, Taj Palace New Delhi recommends the Melon Carpaccio with Iberico Ham, Mint and Birds Eye Chilli Jam Jelly, as a must try during your stay there.

“We recommend this dish as a starter to guests dining at the Orient Express,” says Sharma, “because it is an excellent combination of sweet melon and salty Iberico ham that balances the taste. The Iberico ham is one of the best Spanish hams in the world, which has an excellent flavour, texture and taste. We serve it with mint and birds eye chilli jam jelly which is very refreshing.”

Orient Express at the Taj Palace New Delhi, is an award-winning restaurant - rated as one of the fifty finest hotel restaurants in the world. With its plush interiors that are resplendent of a bygone era of Lords and Ladies, Royalties and Duchesses of Agatha Christie's 'Murder on the Orient Express' and an interesting interlude with James Bond, the Orient Express is an exciting and exhilarating restaurant to dine in a quaint old fashioned grandeur. The overall ambience is understated; but sophisticated and classy. The restaurant menu is inspired by the cuisine of all the countries through which the Orient Express passes. With an extravagant menu selection, extensive wine & cigar list and impeccable service, the Orient Express is still, even after three decades, the favourite place of connoisseurs and food critics.

The average cheque for dinner at the Orient Express is ₹ 4500.

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

Top Chef Recommends





Dudhwa National Park

Most of the people I have come across have no idea about Dudhwa National Park and even fewer have ever visited it. Having heard good reviews from a few of my adventurous friends, I was quite excited when I got an invitation from a friend of the Destination Knowledge Centre, who plans to convert his farm estate into a luxury resort. Located near the Indo-Nepal border, Dudhwa National Park in Uttar Pradesh is a major wildlife conservation site and an important reserve under the Project Tiger for the conservation of Indian tigers. We had driven down from Delhi. With Bareilly as the only halt, we reached by afternoon. But the best thing to do is fly from Delhi to Lucknow and then drive for 4 hours to reach the park. Your clients on a Golden Triangle itinerary after Delhi-Jaipur and Agra, can continue to [Chambal Safari Lodge](#) and then to Dudhwa and Lucknow before taking the train or flight back to Delhi.

We had a quick lunch and were ready to head out for a game drive. After a long bumpy ride (the park gate is close to an hour's drive from the property) we reached the park. The forest is beautiful. Even in peak summers the forest canopy was green. Dudhwa National Park has moist Sal forest, unlike other parts of central India which are known for its dry Sal forest. My time inside the forest was made extra special by the fact that I had an expert birder with me. The park boasts of more than 350 species of birds and we were able to spot many interesting ones, like the Indian pitta, swamp partridge, plenty of painted storks, owls, woodpeckers and hornbills. Much of Dudhwa's avian fauna is aquatic in nature and found around lakes. Many a times when going to-and-fro we would stop at a bridge over the Sharda River to look at the huge turtles floating peacefully on the water surface and sometimes catch a glimpse of Gharials. The eco-system here which comprises of mesmerising mosaic of Sal and Teak Forest, lush green grasslands, steaming swamps and wetlands is what makes the drives very interesting. I was also surprised to learn that, this is probably the only National Park in the country where you can see tigers, swamp deer's as well as rhinos. The 24 sq km enclosure inside the park, with swamp lands and tall grass is an ideal habitat for rhinos. We went on elephant backs to spot them. The tigers once again eluded me and I am yet to see one in the wild.

Let me tell you a little bit about my host's property. He is confident that the property would be up and running by the coming season. The Haveli which was built in the 50's has a colonial feel to it. The approach to the property is pleasant with litchi plantations and

Destination Insider



sugarcane fields flanking either side. Space is not a constraint here with acres of private cultivation land surrounding the property which is free to be explored by clients. Kamaljeet (the owner) plans to keep bikes and all-terrain vehicles at the client's disposal for them to explore their surroundings. At the moment there are seven rooms which will be decorated with British campaign furniture. The food served here will be famous [Awadhi Cuisine](#), including family recipes handed down through generations. A wonderful sit out is an ideal place for evening get together after a tiring game drive. Apart from Kamaljeet's property, there is nothing else noteworthy here to stay at. Ultimate Travelling Camp plans to open [Suheli Camp, Dudhwa](#), to give clients the luxury tent experience sometime soon.

Before leaving Dudhwa I made a visit to 'Billy' Arjan Singh's land, an Indian hunter turned conservationist who made Dudhwa famous by successfully hand-rearing and reintroducing zoo-born tigers and leopards in the wilds of Dudhwa. His house has a dreary, lost look to it as if forgotten by time, same as Dudhwa. It is hard to imagine that only fifteen years ago this park was once as famous as Corbett National Park.

Positives:

- Located in close proximity to Lucknow, makes it easily accessible
- Unique eco-system of Sal forest, swamps and tall grasslands
- An opportunity to see rare avian species like the Bengal Florican, Swamp Partridge as well as tigers, rhinos and elephants.
- No pollution since there are not many resorts, thus avoiding a strain on the forest

On the down-side:

- The distance from the property to the forest gate is a long 1 hour drive. There is a plan to access the park through another gate, which if it goes through would reduce the drive time to 20 minutes.
- Weekends attract the local domestic tourist which sometimes leads to many vehicles in the park. At the moment no rule exists about the number of vehicles to be allowed inside the park

To view the picture gallery please [click here](#)



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1, Hill House, Peermade

1. Laidback with a capital L: 1, Hill House, Peermade with only 2 rooms is laidback with a capital L. “When owners Rani and John showed me photographs of 1, Hill House 2 years back, they were telling me that they plan to keep it special and exclusive as any second home could be. Maybe a few clients from select tour operators, family, friends and their friends. It looked good and I promised a visit. But when I stayed there last September, the experience exceeded my expectations,” says Kuntil from our Destination Knowledge Centre. 1, Hill House is quietly tucked away in an area which belongs to the scions of a prominent planter family of Peermade; a hill station and gateway to the high ranges and spice plantations of Kerala. “It’s not far away from the main highway. But once inside you escape into another world; laidback and totally relaxed where you couldn’t be bothered about time and space,” says Kuntil. 1, Hill House is perfect for clients who want to unwind whilst enjoying a slice of the local planter’s life and maybe a drink at the Mundakayam Club which is not too far away (more in the Lifestyle section). Ideal for 2 or 3 nights, after the hectic and dusty temple circuit of Tamilnadu and enroute to Kerala. 1, Hill House does not have a website and Rani and John plan to keep it that way. “We are too old for this technology business and are happy meeting interesting people and playing hosts,” says Rani with a smile. We agree, for that’s what they do best.

2. Rani and John: Keeping 1, Hill House low profile had allowed Rani and John to host every guest till now, though they don’t stay at the property. They stay at Alleppey and travel to Peermade every time there are guests. “And once the guests have left we also relax in our second home which works out real good for us,” says Rani. “At the 1, Hill House I loved the attention to detail by Rani and John. From the linen, the amenities, the cutlery, to the food, to the difficult choice between evening tea with the most amazing snacks which Rani recalled having as a child and the sun downers which John himself pours, it has been very special,” says Kuntil. John; who is retired, has an unusual hobby apart from collecting antiques. Every time they pull down a church, an old building or a choir factory he would be there to buy the doors, windows, gables railings, wooden stair cases et al and store it in his Alleppey House. They gradually made it to Peermade and were restored as the 1, Hill House was getting built. The pièce de résistance would be the Confession Box in the Bar. It had a small tin plate which said “Raise your Spirits”.

6 Things We Liked About



The chairs of the Bar are from a Bank where the Cashier used to sit and go about his daily work. And by the way , if you have guests passing by Alleppey after the Rice Barge Cruise we can ask Rani to take them out on her [“Alleppey on Foot” Tour](#), given sufficient lead time. She serves a good lunch at the end of the tour in her home.

3. Junk Stories: What makes 1 Hill House very special is also the way the couple had recycled the entire junk, John had bought. “It blends beautifully. You could see that they were not trying hard. Nothing sticks out,” says Kuntil. The wooden staircase which leads to the room that Rani and John keep for themselves while hosting guests, had one of India’s Prime Minister walking on it. Old Sewing Machines were fitted with tiles hand painted by Ajulejo Artists of Goa as serving tables, where we had some amazingly delicious snacks in the afternoon and breakfast. The railings of the sitting area which overlooks the foothills of the Western Ghats were from an old college building that was demolished. Lamp Stands near the fireplace were made from the Altar Rails. John even had a wooden trolley in working condition which was used to transport goods to the ships when Alleppey was a thriving port before Cochin. Every piece of junk John had bought, had a story to it which he happily shares with his guests.

4. Food: We really liked the idea of Rani and John keeping the food at 1, Hill House from their family kitchens with the staff having trained there, who do an exceptional job. They served food which the couple eat on a daily basis at home and had grown up eating. “That meant more stories to be shared over delicious Kerala meals,” says Kuntil. Whether it was the Vattayappam - Kerala’s queen of steamed rice cakes for breakfast which melts in your mouth, the delicious combo of fresh fish, prawns and squids for dinner, or the Egg Appam Hoppers, Banana Fritters and home made Chocolate Mousse for dessert, everything was shared over hearty conversations, where great stories were recalled. Rani is happy to do a cooking class for your guests if they take fancy to the home food. [Click here to read more](#)



Festivals



Ganesh Chaturthi & Pulikali Tiger Dance

Ganesh Chaturthi - 29th August, 2014

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

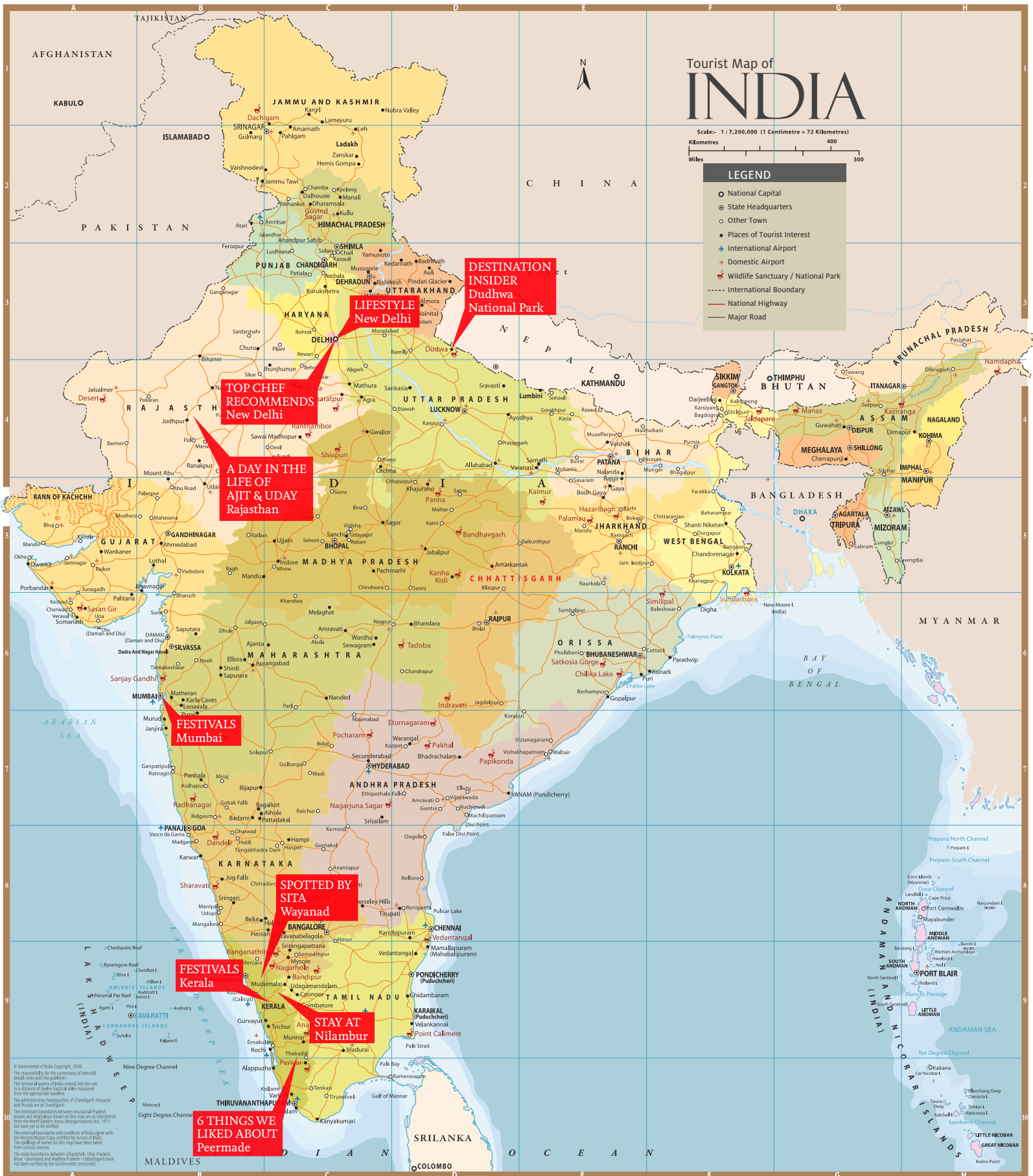
Ganesh Chaturthi marks the birthday of Lord Ganesha, the elephant headed Hindu God. During the ten days festival, families install idols of the deity in their homes, while some neighbourhood and associations also get together to erect pandals (tents) where the deity is enthroned to be immersed later. 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 Lalbaug 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 - 9th September, 2014

The Onam celebration starts with Maveli Puja or prayer to Mahabali and continue over the next few days in form of Pulikali or Tiger dance processions. The tiger dance usually performed by groups of three or more dancers with pastes smeared over their body like the stripes on tiger's body, captivate the onlookers in public places with their energetic dances during festive seasons. The Pulikali once performed all over the State, is now seen mostly in Thrissur and Palakkad districts. The scenes enacted include the tiger catching a goat, being hunted down and so on, accompanied by the loud beating of traditional percussion instruments like the udukku, thakil and chenda. Later on designated human hunters turn the predator into prey thereby ending with a moral message for the public. The dance celebrates the might & courage of a forest tiger.







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
IATO Convention India Awaited	Trade Visitor	Dipak Deva
FITA Mexico 4th - 7th September	Trade Visitor	Neeraj Bhatt
OTDYKH Leisure Fair Moscow 16th - 19th September	Awaited	Ernest Dias & Deepak Sharma
Kerala Travel Mart Cochin, India 18th - 20th September	Booth No A 32	Philip Thomas
Top Resa Paris 23rd - 26th September	Awaited	Carole Gallo
UITM Kiev 1st - 3rd October	Sita Desk	Deepak Sharma
TTG Rimini 9th - 11th October	Awaited	Matteo Pennacchi
WTM London 3rd - 6th November	Hall No S8, Booth No IN200	Dipak Deva & Neeraj Bhatt
USTOA Scottsdale 5th - 7th December	Sita Desk	Neeraj Bhatt

Trade Shows

