

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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# Stay At

## Rajakkad, Lakeside and Villa Shanti



Rajakkad Estate, Palani Hills

It came to me as quite a surprise that such a beautiful place existed so close to the hustle and bustle of city life in the plains. And it is literally off the map. There are no signboards to indicate the location of [Rajakkad Estate](#) in Dindigul district. About an hour and a half before you reach Rajakkad, the landscape becomes dotted with little hills on the horizon. It is a little later that you realise your adobe is hidden high up on one of the hills. From the time you start your ascent you can feel the climate change, the rays of the sun becoming diffused being filtered through canopies of tall tree. Be sure to pass on the drivers number, so that Robesh or Nisha who look after the property can coordinate once you have started the ascent of Palani hills.

Rajakkad sits in the heart of the plantation country, surrounded by forest, amidst undulating fields of pepper, coffee, lime and avocado. The house is a reminder of traditional Kerala architecture - wooden panels and carved beams, which has been dismantled, transported and placed on this hill top. Rajakkad has seven rooms and each room has a sliding panel (instead of a wall) with an unobstructed view of the surrounding garden and landscaping. The rooms are luxurious and the bed is perfect to doze off with a book in hand. None of the rooms have air-conditioning but the climate is pleasant enough at this altitude. Just to add, they don't have a pool. The food is garden fresh and organic. There is a main dining area but more cosy intimate tables can be arranged if you desire. WiFi is available in the public places and not in the rooms.

Rajakkad is a place that offers the chance to sit still and take in all that the place has to offer. Don't go, if you expect an activity filled stay. The most you can do and should be doing, is walking and trekking in the forest. But don't worry, I will not tell anyone if you just decide to pick up a book ( they have an excellent library) and relax in a hammock!

[Click here](#) to read more.





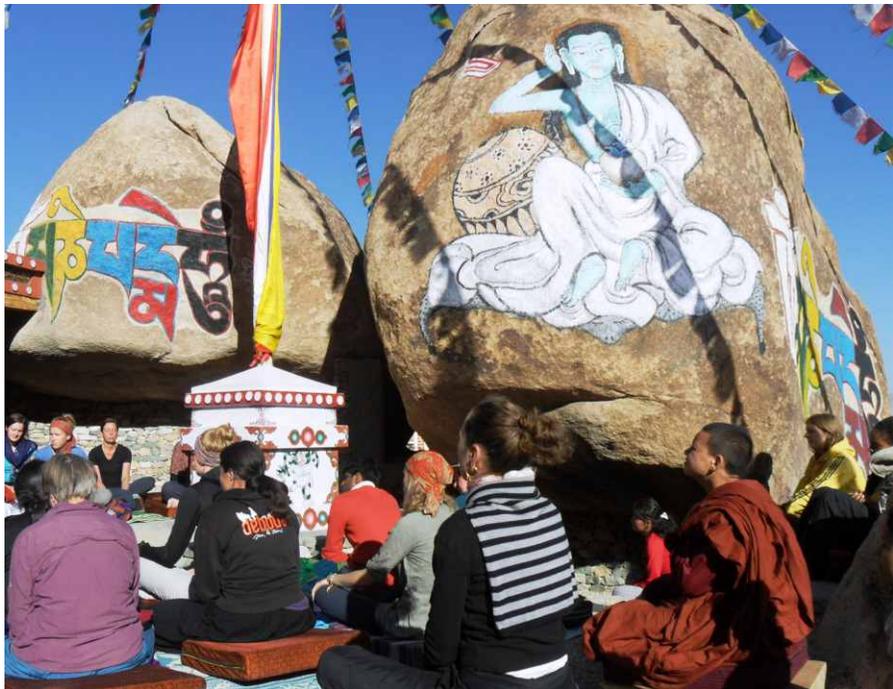
Yoga Teacher

# A Day in The Life of Kunzang Dechen

Walking away from the touristy city centre of Leh, past the Moravian Mission School I came across Mahabodhi Meditation Centre. It's five o'clock in the evening and the staff tells me that they are about to start the evening session of meditation and yoga. Kunzang Dechen, our teacher is a young Ladakhi lady. She gives out an aura of a person who is completely at peace with herself. At the end of the class, I told her that this was the first time that I have tried meditation. She was very keen to know how my experience was and we start talking.

I asked her when did she realise that teaching yoga is something she would end up doing. "Honestly, I never thought yoga was my cup of tea, says Kunzang. It was when I was studying Psychology and Journalism in Bangalore, that one day a Guruji (preacher) visited our institute and few students were chosen to attend a yoga course. After the course I realised the importance of yoga and meditation in our daily lives and how happy it made me feel. Completing my studies I trained at Swami Vivekananda Yoga Anusandhana Samsthana in Bangalore and also did a diploma at the Yoga Vidya Gurukul in Nashik. From that time onwards, I wanted to practice and teach yoga and spread the joy of yoga with everyone. I am honoured to be one of the first one to clear the exam at the Mahabodhi Yoga & Meditation Centre and now I am in charge of the Leh centre of Mahabodhi Yoga & Meditation Centre," tells Kunzang. How popular is yoga with the people of Ladakh? "Yoga is still not very popular amongst the locals, but foreigners and people coming from the rest of India love the peace and tranquillity they find at Mahabodhi and slowly more and more locals are getting drawn to yoga," Kunzang tells me. I realised what she said was true, since in the entire class of twenty people I had only spotted one local.

So what is a typical day for Kunzang like. "I believe the quality of the day depends on how you start your day [click here to read more](#).





# Lifestyle



## Zen and the Art of Cooking Outdoors!!

An age-old tradition amongst the women in the Rajput community of Rajasthan had led to a fine culinary practice in the region. The art of cooking meat outdoors by the Rajput men folk. "In the kitchen of every Rajput household there would be a shrine of the Goddess and a newly married woman spends a lot of time in the kitchen and is expected to do the daily rituals. It was because of this, Rajput women traditionally gave up eating meat once they get married," says Raj Rathore, a Rajput, and one of my colleagues in Distant Frontiers. "It's not that meat isn't cooked. When there are guests and meat needs to be cooked it is done in an annexe close to the kitchen where separate utensils are provided," adds Rathore. You guessed it right, it was the menfolk of the family who would do the cooking.

And the Banas, as Rajput men are lovingly called, are some of the finest cooks I have ever seen when it comes to meaty affairs. In fact I am yet to meet a Rajput man who is a bad cook. Talk about cooking and particularly meat and their eyes light up. During my stay at the 600-year old [Fort Begu](#), the 70-year-old head of the family served me a different meat dish every day and shared stories behind these dishes with a lot of passion. He even cooked me a succulent lamb dish, the recipe of which he learnt from his mother. In fact it was his father who taught her this particular recipe when she arrived in Fort Begu as a newlywed bride. "Since it was left for the menfolk to cook their meat, we Rajputs grew up watching our fathers cook, who would want us to run errands such as mixing the spices, pouring a drink while they cooked. Many a times I also accompanied our cousins who are elder to us for weekend outings, where they would cook meat outdoors in the countryside. I used to help and observe them. And as I grew up we started cooking outdoors with my group of friends," says Raj Rathore.

[Click here](#) to read more.





## Water Chestnut Pickers

While taking a stroll around the lake where Hemendra Singh from [Bhainsrorgarh](#) cooked a delicious lunch in vintage Rajput style for Kuntal Baruwa from our Destination Knowledge Centre, (more in our Lifestyle section), Kuntal spotted this water chestnut picker at work. Water chestnut is a water herb that grows in shallow lakes and ponds and produces a black four-horned nut which is sweet in taste and has a crunchy texture. It is sold in the streets of Rajasthan and you will see the salesman with a can of water to sprinkle on it as it dries out very fast in the sun. “Water chestnut is eaten mostly raw in India and is used for treating jaundice and itching. But the most interesting part is the flour made out of it. When Hindus fast during holy occasions they are allowed to have breads made only out of chestnut flour,” adds Kuntal.

# Spotted By Sita





“  
Khad Meat

# Top Chef Recommends

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](#)





## When Gods Descend on Earth

# Destination Insider

Dear Friends,

It was March end when I was in North Kerala. The Theyyam season was almost at its end in North Kerala. It was becoming more and more difficult to locate one. But that was actually fun and exciting. Travellers wanting to experience Theyyam in North Kerala during this time would invariably end up in the kavus (shrines) of local families in the countryside. It is much more genuine and authentic compared to the “peak” season (October to February) where Theyyams are happening just about everywhere. Families welcome you warmly, offer you tender coconut water and even invite you for a meal.

One day early in the morning, I was headed to a Kavu dedicated to a Serpent Goddess to watch Theyyam. We left about 4 in the morning, lost our way a couple of times and took about two hours to reach the place which was only 15 kms from [Ayesha Manzil](#); a 18th century old colonial style mansion overlooking the blue Arabian sea, where I was staying. Here at the Kavu, I met Velliamma. She came from a family of landlords and was well to do once upon a time. But no more. Villagers told me that she and her family ignored Theyyam in their family Kavu for 20 years and invited the wrath of the Serpent Goddess. Velliamma lost all her land and her two sons died in an accident. The third one went mad and committed suicide and the fourth one lost his eyesight and had a paralytic attack. Now the villagers are helping Velliamma with money to host Theyyams in the Kavu, since the past 2 years. The son who had lost his eyesight and had a paralytic attack is now recovering. His eyesight is getting better and he can now walk. All because of, the villagers say, Theyyams happening again in her Kavu.

You may or may not want to believe in this local yarn, but I walked away with a story I will remember for a long long time.

During my time in North Kerala I also met Hari Das, an accomplished local Theyyam dancer. Hari Das shot to fame after he was featured in William Dalrymple's book - [“Nine Lives: In Search of the Sacred in Modern India”](#), where the acclaimed travel writer explores the worlds of people deeply engaged with the sacred in a fast changing India.



Velliamma and her son seeking the blessings of a Theyyam

Hari Das and I chatted about life and times post Nine Lives and more. Here is what conspired - [click here for the interview](#)



## Maranat Mana, Nilambur

# 6 Things We Liked About

1. Reaching Maranat Mana : Your clients can travel to Maranat Mana from one of the three approaches in North Kerala - either descend down the forested ghats from [Wayanad](#) driving past acres and acres of rolling tea estates, or head from [Calicut](#) through plantations, or take the slow train-ride from Shoranur near [Pallakad](#) through the verdant countryside of North Kerala which stops at many small quaint stations. "Recommended for only those who are not in a hurry this little known railway journey is one my favourites, where you can get cosy with local life in North Kerala and make new friends. The entire train journey takes about 1 hour. Get down at the quaint station of Tuvur - [click here](#) to see the video of Tuvur station - which is closest to Maranat Mana, where your car will pick you up," says Kunttil Baruwa from our Destination Knowledge Centre who stayed at Maranat Mana recently.

2. Charming and Authentic : "When we reached Maranat Mana from the Tuvur Railway Station, it felt like entering someone's home. A big ancient one at that with probably many stories waiting to be told and listened to. It had none of the tell-tale signs of a Kerala homestay which I had encountered elsewhere during my travels," says Kunttil. As you enter the Maranat Mana, depending on the time of the day your clients will see the devotees who have come from far and wide to offer their prayers in the Ganesha Temple within the premises of the house, servants going about their daily chores, visitors chatting on the huge verandah with the family members, which runs across the entire front of the house from where Praveen Maranat, your host may emerge to welcome you warmly.

3. The Live Ganesha Temple : 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. "Your clients can soak in the atmosphere while being comfortably seated in an easy chair in the veranda of the erstwhile granary of Maranat Mana, now converted into guest rooms," says Kunttil.

4. The Architecture : Maranat Mana is a fascinating insight into the traditional elite architecture of Kerala based on [Vastu Shastra](#). It is one of the last few surviving pathinaru kettu (four inner courtyards) of



Kerala occupying a plinth area of 1 acre. "Traditional Kerala homes have only one inner courtyard. Maranat Mana has four. So you can well imagine the size of the house," says Kunttil. "A tour of the house with your host Praveen will enlighten your clients on how the laws of nature affect human dwellings and why every nook and corner of Maranat Mana was built that way," says Kunttil.

5. The Family Residence : "A great way to spend the morning in Maranat Mana is acquainting yourself with the 160-year old house; the history and lore surrounding it with Praveen, your host," says Kunttil. Built largely of limestone and teak, mahogany and rosewood, the wooden walls within have traditional designs and carvings. The sprawling 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. Praveen 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. Maranat Mana 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. "My favourite place in Maranat Mana was the Family Pond where I loved spending some solitary moments with a book," says Kunttil.

6. The Hosts : Praveen Maranat who has sailed all over the world as a Merchant Navy officer and his wife Vidya, who is a teacher in a local school run by the Maranat family are your hosts at Maranat Mana. "They both do a lovely job and make you feel at home in an unobtrusive manner," says Kunttil. It was Praveen who decided to quit his job at sea and open the doors of Maranat Mana to visitors who may be interested in knowing more about the lifestyle of the Namboothiris; the indigenous priestly class of Kerala. "He was telling me that it took a while to convince this huge family that comprises of 30 members. But they ultimately agreed with certain riders such as no meat, no alcohol, no eggs within the premises etc," says Kunttil.



# Festivals

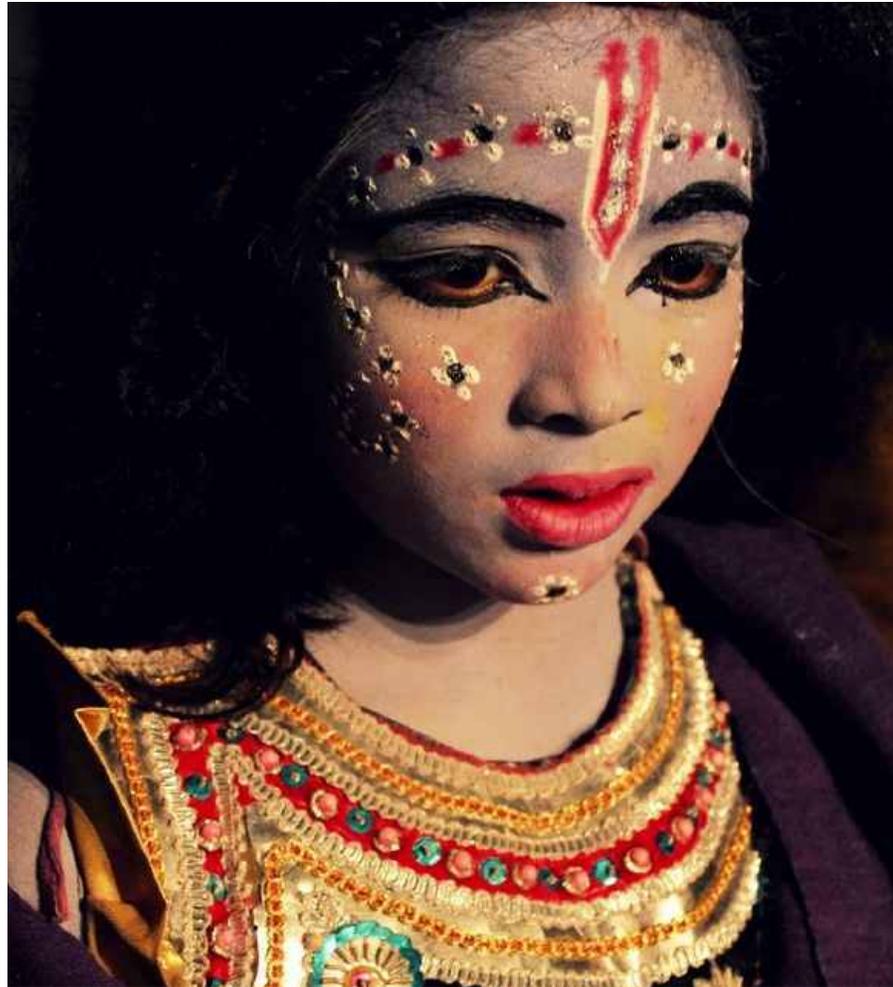


## Raas, Majuli November, 2015

“It is the best time to visit Majuli,” says Kuntil Baruwa from our Destination Knowledge Centre who has experienced the Raas Festival in Majuli many times. “People of Majuli are some of the nicest I have ever met. Honest in their hearts and great hosts. And during the Raas Festival they are even nicer. I remember staying in the homes of random strangers recommended by friends during Raas and they were more than happy to host me. For the past 200 years Majuli has been playing host to the Raas Festival during the month of Kartik (November) in the local calendar where various stages of this River Island celebrates the life and times of the Hindu God Krishna in all-night live performances that lasts for 3 days. The rehearsals of the various plays brought alive by a unique mix of indigenous dances, puppets, masks, songs and musical instruments lasts for almost a month. “And the celebrations during the Raas Festival are not only limited to the people of Majuli, flocks of Geese dance in abandon during the night in the shimmering water bodies lit by the full moon,” Kuntil adds. Legend has it that they hear and dance to the music of the flute of Lord Krishna; the master flautist.

After the havoc of recurring floods, Raas is the time when people of Majuli forget the pain of loss and celebrate. In that sense the Raas Festival is also Majuli’s way of healing itself. “What I like most about the Raas Festival is how every community of the island would participate and involve themselves,” says Kuntil. While children are cast as young Krishnas, the handsome shopkeeper round the corner could be your adult Krishna slaying demons played by the friendly bank manager or the doctor of the local hospital or the teacher of the village school. In the past couple of years, Majuli has also seen many foreigners, particularly young girls from France, playing the role of Krishna’s Xokhi (buddies) at the various stages during the Raas Festival thanks to the effort of French writer-traveller Nadine Delpech and her Paris based [Préservé Majuli](#) “This goes on to show that despite its strong religious roots, Raas is a very liberal festival where everyone is welcome not only to watch it but also participate,” says Kuntil.

If you want to promote the Raas Festival but wary that the basic Me:Po Okum may not be up to your clients’ standard, how about we work on a special Group Departure where we charter a superbly comfortable [River Boat](#) (check the photo gallery) and anchor in



Majuli has been celebrating the Raas Festival for the past 200 years.

Photo Courtesy: Arun J Bharali

For more of Arun’s photos visit - <http://www.flickr.com/photos/44971586@No4/>

Majuli for 4 nights during the Raas Festival? A team from Sita was on a week long cruise on this boat recently and has experienced it first hand. There are 14 spacious twin bedded fully air conditioned cabins and your guests will be accompanied by a brother-sister duo who owns it. The sister is a super Chef. And here are some insider tips from Kuntil of our Destination Knowledge Centre for inspiration... “For an insight into a more traditional performance during the Raas Festival, head to the Dakshinpat Xatra (monastery) where all roles are played by the Monks; even those of the women characters. The Natun Samagauri Xatra celebrates Raas entirely with Masks for which they are world famous in Majuli. And don’t miss the one in Garamur where organisers invite film stars from the Assamese Film Industry to play various roles. It’s the latest and has added a glamour quotient to this medieval Festival. Great fun”



# Tourist Map of INDIA

Scale: 1:7,200,000 (1 Centimetre = 72 Kilometres)  
Kilometres 400 300  
Miles

## LEGEND

- National Capital
- State Headquarters
- Other Town
- Places of Tourist Interest
- ✈ International Airport
- ✈ Domestic Airport
- 🌳 Wildlife Sanctuary / National Park
- International Boundary
- National Highway
- Major Road

**A DAY IN THE LIFE OF Leh**

**LIFESTYLE Rajasthan**

**TOP CHEF RECOMMENDS Chambal**

**SPOTTED BY SITA Bhainsrorgarh**

**FESTIVALS Majuli**

**DESTINATION INSIDER Tellicherry**

**STAY AT Pondicherry**

**6 THINGS WE LIKED ABOUT Nilambur**

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 The responsibility for the correctness of internal details rests with the publisher.  
 The territorial waters of India extend into the sea to a distance of twelve nautical miles measured from the appropriate baseline.  
 The administrative headquarters of Chandigarh, Haryana and Punjab are at Chandigarh.  
 The international boundaries between Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Meghalaya shown on this map are as interpreted from the Border Security Force (Registration) Act, 1971 but have yet to be verified.  
 The internal boundaries are also considered of India, agree with the Record Master Copy certified by Survey of India.  
 The scale boundaries between Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh have not been verified by the Government.



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>IATO Convention</b> New Delhi Awaited	Trade Visitor	Dipak Deva
<b>OTDYKH Leisure Fair</b> Moscow 15 - 18 September	Awaited	Ernest Dias & Deepak Sharma
<b>Top Resa</b> Paris 29 September - 2 October	Awaited	Carole Gallo
<b>TTG</b> Rimini 8 - 10 October	Awaited	Matteo Pennacchi & Philip Thomas
<b>WTM</b> London 2 - 5 November	Hall No S8, Booth No. IN200	Dipak Deva & Neeraj Bhatt
<b>USTOA</b> Chicago 3 - 5 December	Sita Desk	Neeraj Bhatt

# Trade Shows

