

STAY AT

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF

LIFESTYLE

SPOTTED BY SITA

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# Art of Travel



## Chandra Mahal Haveli, Bharatpur

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Passing through the dusty town of Bharatpur, [Chandra Mahal Haveli](#) was the last place I expected to find myself surrounded by an Indian village. For me the village setting is the main draw of the place apart from the history of the haveli itself. Paharsar, the name of the village comes from folktales which tells the story of how Sher Shah Suri captured the village in a 'pahar' or three hours in battle.

Chandra Mahal is a small, intimate property with an extremely motivated and helpful staff. The village and the hotel is accessed by a narrow, partially-paved road from the main highway, in a quiet farming area. Built in 1840 by Muslim nobles the property has witnessed many generations of multi-cultural and multi-ethnic past. Having kept most of the original architecture intact, the haveli retains its erstwhile charm. “ Suites which are located on the first floor have their own private terrace with a Jacuzzi. The room are cosy and the bathroom fit for a king. The glass partition which separates the terrace area and your suite rooms, looks a bit odd, but you get used to it” say Soumya Mukherji from the Destination Knowledge Centre, who stayed here recently.

You will love the peaceful surrounding and walking around the village of Peharsar, lined by small homes, many of which have dirt floors and no doors. The village is well-populated with animals, such as goats, dogs, cows, peacocks and camels, that roam freely within the small compounds and through the village. Although the haveli is located some 25 kms away from the main town of Bharatpur on the Jaipur-Agra highway, the time taken to reach the Bharatpur Bird Sanctuary (which is the main draw of Bharatpur) is the same as is from any other city hotel.

# Stay At







## The Coral Tree Homestay, Agra

While talking to Angie, an American student who is doing a research project on the waste management system of Agra, our conversation turn to [Coral Tree Homestay](#). She tells me how thankful she is to have found this place through a friend. Angie has just had a tough day trying to get a hold of the luxury hotels in Agra to show her how they handle their waste. We are sitting around the bonfire enjoying a drink before heading for dinner with Gopal & Vandana, the owners of Coral Tree Homestay. I ask Gopal what made them start a homestay. “It was an ultimate expression of Vandana’s creativity” says Gopal. “She became self-sufficient. Being ardent travellers we have stayed at countless lodges and homestays. Coral Tree is a synthesis of the best we saw in these lodges. From our travels over the years, we have a decent collection of curios, purchased all over the world. We added five rooms to our house and Coral Tree provided a niche to these art objects gathering dust” says Gopal. “Vandana is the soul of Coral Tree” he adds smiling at Vandana.

“Each day for us is like peak season, whether it’s a full house or just one room being occupied. But yes, sometimes it can get really hectic for me, when we have full occupancy,” says Vandana. “A typical day for me starts early in the morning getting my daughter ready for school. By the time I see her off, it’s nearly time for breakfast and the early birds are popping into the dining room for a cup of tea or heading out with a newspaper to enjoy the pleasant morning sun out in the garden. We offer clients a simple breakfast, something which I would normally prepare for my family. But for long staying guest I do make sure that the menu doesn’t get too monotonous for them. Post breakfast most of the guests head out for sightseeing and it’s then, I have some personal time to myself. By five o’clock in the evening I make sure that everything for the bon fire is ready. It’s one of the highlights of everyone’s stay here. In winters the temperature can really dip as soon as the sun goes down. Some clients also like to have their dinner with us. By the time I see the last guest off it’s nearly eleven o’clock and time to hit the bed,” says Vandana.

When I ask them both about the highlight of each day, both agree that it’s the time when everyone sits around the bon fire sharing life stories and stories from their travels. Sanjay, Gopal’s brother drops in the evening to interact with the guests and is an excellent storyteller. “Traveling is our passion and in summers we pack our

# A Day in The Life of Gopal & Vandana



bags and set out to explore the world,” Gopal tells me.

Gopal tells me, before deciding to take it easy, he was a licensed tour guide, leading travel groups all over the Indian sub-continent. “We are two families in Coral Tree; My family, Vandana and our daughter, Jaisal and my younger brother Sanjay’s family (his wife Pratibha and daughter Purvi). Sanjay worked for a long time as manager of jungle lodges in tiger reserves of Jim Corbett and Bandhavgarh. Sanjay shares his knowledge about flora and fauna of India with our guests and is an excellent story teller as well,” says Gopal. Before heading out for dinner, I ask the couple what is their favourite place to snack out in Agra. “It has to be Chaat Gali in Sadar Bazaar and Gopal Das Petha wala on M.G.Road,” says Vandana with an infectious laugh.





## United Colours of Rajasthan

The spirit of colours in Rajasthan is deep seated and reflects in every aspect of its daily life; attire, ornaments, paintings, homes et all. If you know the colours of Rajasthan you will be able to identify communities and the social status of an individual. Most of the knowledge on colours in Rajasthan is handed down over generations and it has been rarely documented locally.

The colours that we see in Rajasthan are primarily divided into two categories Kachcha Rang which is temporary colour and, Pakka Rang which is permanent colour. Kachcha rang are worn by the married and unmarried, while the widows only wear Pakka rang. Red, Parrot Green, Yellow and Saffron fall under temporary colour or Kachcha rang and Maroon, Brown Dark Blue, Dark Green and Grey are permanent or Pakka rang. Nevertheless, in Jodhpur Dark Blue and Purple, which are otherwise Pakka Rangs and only for widows are worn by the married women during the Diwali festival.

Did you know in Rajasthan there is a certain colour and design dedicated for every month or festival? The month of Chaitra in Rajasthan (March-April) is all about Orange and Golden. Basant Panchami or the season of harvesting (January and February) is welcomed with lemon yellow and light orange. In the month of Fagun (March), women wear red and white or magenta and white. Saawan or the Monsoon (July and August) is greeted with the colours of the rainbow, green being the dominating colour. Red is worn during the Teej Festival in the month of August when Rajasthani women fast and pray for the long life of their husbands.

The stories behind the turbans men wear in Rajasthan is equally fascinating. Known as Paag, Safa or Pagri the turban is a long scarf wrapped around the head. The style of turbans in Rajasthan changes with every 15 kms.

Know the turbans of Rajasthan and you will know the community the person belongs to and his social status. While the turbans of the Rajput community are made out of soft cotton known as malmal; communities such as the Rabaris wear red turbans made out of thick cotton. While Ochre is the colour of the mendicants of Rajasthan, the Bishnoi community; the original conservationist of India, wear white turbans. The



indigenous Bhils and Garasias wear printed white turbans. Turbans in Rajasthan also have other fascinating uses such as; it is used like a rope to take water out of a well, used for protection from the sun in the fields and tying cattle on halt.

Rajasthani men wear yellow turbans during Basant Panchami or the harvest festival (January and February). Between the month of February and March and Holi; the festival of colours, the Rajputs of Rajasthan wear turbans with the combination of red and white. In the month of July, they wear light pink. A green and pink striped or yellow and red striped turban is worn during the monsoon. Black tie and dyed turbans with red borders is ought to be worn at the time of Diwali; the festival of lights while Saffron turbans are worn just before Diwali. Light pink turbans are also worn in the month of October and at the time of Sharad Poornima or the full moon night.





## Pavilion of thunder and rainfall

One of the must-see monuments inside the [Deeg Palace](#), near Bharatpur is the Keshav Bhavan. The building originally included an elaborate device to reproduce the effects of monsoon. There were stone balls in the ceiling which could be agitated by piped running water to create the noise of thunder and the water was released through spouts above the arches to fall as rain in sheets around the open hall. A broad canal ran round the edge of the pavilion. It is said that when the Jat kings enjoyed cultural programmes, a curtain of water all around kept the temperature down as well as prevented outsiders from peeping inside.

Deeg Palace was a fantasy 'Water Palace' which was the capital of the eighteenth-century Jat kingdom. A brief history of the place is as follows -Maharaja Badan Singh was a small Chieftain who wanted to become the Ruler and sought the favour from the Kings of Jaipur, under whose jurisdiction the area was demarcated, but was refused the honor. Peeved on being denied, the Chieftain started looting the plundering government treasuries, which compelled the Mughals to direct the Maharaja of Jaipur to cede to his demands and thus, he was declared a King of the State of Bharatpur. His son Maharaja Suraj Mal united the fiercely martial Jat peasants and went on to become very powerful. He was the one who built the Deeg Palace.

The outstanding feature of the Palace is its 2000 odd fountains that spew coloured water. The flow of coloured water in the fountains was an ingenious design. Burnt clay pipes were inserted with wooden poles to close the pipes feeding the fountains and when water was required to be released cloth bags containing coloured vegetable dyes were stuck at the exit end and as the water flowed through them, the water absorbed the colours and thus, created an aura of colour and fragrance.

# Spotted By Sita





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## Cottage Cheese Steak with Barbeque Sauce

Having had buffet dinners and Laal Maas (a spicy meat dish staple of Rajasthan ) throughout my trip in Rajasthan, it was a pleasure when Chef Dinesh Mehra from [Chandra Mahal Heveli](#), Bharatpur asked me if I wanted to try his recommendations. I cheerfully agreed and as it turned out, the meal was a continental affair. “ We started with vegetable cannelloni and ended with gajar ka halwa (an Indian Carrot Confection). The vegetables were fresh and flavoursome, not surprising since I had picked them up from the farms surrounding the haveli, when I went for a walk in the afternoon.

“The cottage cheese steak with barbeque sauce as well the grilled chicken in brown sauce was the highlight of my dinner,” say Soumya Mukherji from the Destination Knowledge centre.

Recipe available on [request](#)

# Top Chef Recommends







## Mainstream but Different

With the promise of continuing to bring you interesting finds from our travels, in the first issue of the New Year we would like to talk about all the exciting stuff we did towards the end of last year. Can you believe it we went back to the much flogged traditional golden triangle ? ...And came back with exciting products to spice up your traditional itinerary.

In Delhi we now have an exciting Art Walk. Our Friend of Sita who is one of the promising crop of young and brilliant contemporary artists in India takes you on an Art Walk. On the walk you will not only be taken to art galleries but also to an art residency where you have the opportunity to interact with other artist to get a sense of the vibrant art scene of India.

In Agra we came across a wonderful homestay worth recommending. I will not talk about it in detail here as I've talked about it in-depth in other sections of this newsletter. But what I will talk about is our Colonial Walk in Agra. The Colonial Tour of Agra gives your clients an insight into the life and times of a cantonment during the days of the British Raj and also allows them to admire some of North India's most beautiful [Indo-Saracenic](#) architecture unhurriedly. It is a 3 hour easy paced tour which can be experienced either by car, coach or battery operated rickshaws. Short walks in between are involved. The tour covers a distance of 4 kms in the Agra cantonment. The wide clean roads with traffic that makes you forget that you are in the raging honking friendly Agra is a huge bonus. The tour is led by Jaminder Singh, a local who is a History Graduate and studied Law, a regular on our panel of English speaking Guides and stays in a 19th century colonial Bungalow in the Agra cantonment with his wife, two teenage children and his mother. He inherited the property from his grandfather who served as a Major in the British Army. Jaminder has also authored a book titled "The Colonial Face of the United Province." United Province during the British Raj corresponds to the present-day Indian states of Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

This tour works very well for those of your clients arriving to Agra by the Shatabdi Express at 8:00 hours. They can drop their bags at the Coral Tree, use the facilities, relax a bit and then start this tour at 9:30 hours. Return to the hotel, have lunch, take a nap and later in the afternoon see the Agra Fort. Return to your hotel. Day 2 - do an early morning visit of the Taj

# Destination Insider



Mahal (barring the foggy months of end December to end January), return to the hotel for breakfast, check-out and continue to Jaipur.

For Jaipur we have the 'Create your own Souvenir' experience where we take clients to Bagru, 30 kms from Jaipur, acclaimed all over India for its natural dyes and hand block textile printing. Ask yourself when was the last time your clients created something with their own hands on a holiday? This is a hands on experience where you create your own piece of art under a mentor to take back with you as a memento of your travels to India. Be careful you might be judged for your printing proficiency and alignment.

Here is a video capsule of the experience [Click Here](#)

The Old City of Jodhpur is perhaps one of the best places to do a photo walk. Here we have come up with an interesting Photo Walk where you can explore the city on foot with our friend who is an avid photographer and Jodhpur local. You get to know the story behind the old city and take back some candid photos. Having a local with you also lets you get close and personal with people. [Click here to Read More](#)



## The Coral Tree Homestay

1. Walk to Taj Mahal - Wouldn't it be nice if you could just walk to the Taj Mahal when in Agra? That's exactly what I did during my stay at [The Coral Tree Homestay](#). Located at a walking distance from the famous monument, this new homestay made my trip back to Agra extra special. The other place of interest near the homestay is the [Taj Nature Walk](#). It's a beautiful garden, a brisk walk from the homestay. Gopal, the owner of the homestay goes to the park every morning for his morning walk and is happy to take clients along to explore the park. Apart from being a peaceful oasis in an otherwise busy city, the park shelters a lot of birds species and offers magnificent glimpses of the Taj Mahal from various vantage points.

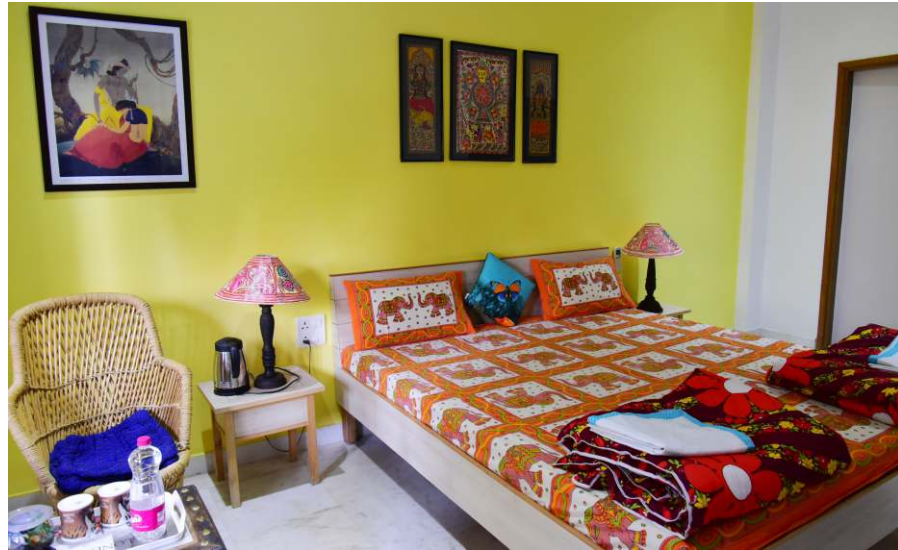
2. A Homestay - Normally when you stay at hotels, coming back from your sightseeing means the end of your days activity with you retiring to your room. But in a homestay the day doesn't end there. During the winter month, it does get quite cold in Agra. Realising this every evening, Gopal and his wife Vandana light a bonfire where clients can warm themselves up. "I love the time I spend around the fire sharing stories with other travellers. Sanjay, Gopal's brother is a voracious reader and a very good storyteller. All of them love to travel and spend the summer months traveling," says Soumya Mukherji from the Destination Knowledge Centre.

3. Your hosts - Gopal and Vandana are excellent hosts. Vandana takes special care of all her guests and her home-cooked meals are delicious. I'm sure you would have already read about the family in the, "A Day in the Life Of" section. They are full of ideas and suggestions on places to go to and what not to miss when you are in Agra. It was Gopal's idea that I should go for the Taj Nature Walk. And I must say it was worth a visit. Having been tour escorts in the past, the brothers are well aware of what client expectations are.

4. The Rooms - All the rooms at the Coral Tree Homestay are bright and the hue of blues with whites complimented by local Rajasthani décor, reminds you of Greek island houses transported to India. Coming back here after a day of sightseeing was a pleasure; a sanctuary in the otherwise busy city. The homestay is Wi-Fi enabled in the common areas.

5. Common Spaces - The nice thing about most of the rooms at The Coral Tree is the fact they open into a

# 6 Things We Liked About



common area; be it the library, the garden, the sit-out balcony or the outdoor dining space. Everywhere you look you can see the owner's personal touch from curios and trinkets to photo collages from all their travels.

6. Slow Down - The peaceful setting of the place and the unpretentious warmth of both the families at the homestay makes you want to relax and take it slow. If you are looking for modern comforts and Indian hospitality, this is the place for you. It has all of the creature comforts that most westerners miss while they are in India (like western showers and comfortable outdoor seating areas). Coming back after a long day in Agra is wonderful; it is a little sanctuary in a busy city. I cannot recommend this place enough. Once you arrive, you won't want to leave. "I can't wait to come back here again," says Soumya Mukherji from the Destination Knowledge Centre.





# Festivals

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## Rath Yatra or the Chariot Festival, Puri July 17th 2015

Rath Yatra is the annual chariot festival, where Jagannath, the Lord of Puri; a small coastal town of Orissa, goes to visit his aunt's temple with his elder brother and sister. Every year the presiding idols of the Jagannath temple are carried out of the temple premises in three richly decorated and huge chariots, resembling temple structures and pulled through the streets with much gusto and celebration. Rath Yatra is the only day when devotees ( non-Hindus and foreigners) can get a glimpse of the deities. Each year these wooden chariots are constructed anew in accordance with religious specifications. This year the festival is going to be even more special as the three existing wooden idols of the presiding deities of the Puri shrine, will be replaced with new ones.

The size of the celebration gave origin to the English word 'Juggernaut' as the British were amazed to see the endless sea of devotees who thronged the wide streets in front of the temple every year to see a glimpse of their beloved Lord and for a once in a lifetime opportunity to pull on the ropes of the juggernaut chariot.



Photo credit : ©Satya M







## 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>MITT</b> Moscow 18 - 21 March	India Tourism Booth	Deepak Sharma
<b>SITT</b> Novosibirsk 10 - 12 April	Trade Visitor	Olga Vishnevskaya
<b>Mundo Libao with Abreu</b> Lisbon 11 - 12 April	Awaited	Ganesh Shankar & Nelson Cortez
<b>Great India Travel Bazaar</b> Jaipur 20 - 21 April	Booth No 35, 36, 57 & 58	Neeraj Bhatt & Philip Thomas
<b>KITF</b> Almaty 20 - 24 April	Trade Visitor	Deepak Sharma
<b>ATM</b> Dubai 4 - 7 May	Awaited	Philip Thomas
<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

