

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



# Art of Travel



## Acres Wild, Coonoor

Acres Wild is a 22 acre, family-run organic cheese making farm and a farm stay in Coonoor. Your host will be Mansoor Khan, one of Bollywood's most celebrated directors of the 90's, who retreated to the hills of Coonoor in search of an eco-friendly, holistic and self-sustaining lifestyle. The farm stay is located on a hillside and has three levels. Be prepared to do a fair bit of walking up and down the slopes, for when you decide to stay there. The owners live on the middle level and the common dining area is next to them. Haloumi House and Colby Cottage are close to each other and are at the upper level. Cheddar House is at the lower level. There are 2 rooms in Cheddar and 2 rooms in Haloumi House and one in the Colby cottage. Rooms have bay-windows, wooden floors, solar water heating and attached bathrooms. There are 2 natural ponds on the property that have fish, ducks and geese. Acres Wild also conducts cheesemaking courses for in-house guests with prior notice. Ideal for family holidays and for those who want to participate in the various farm activities of Acres Wild.

# Stay At







## Mahout, Amber Fort

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“There are guests whose faces echo pure joy when they themselves wash and feed Champa; my Elephant. They tell me, that this has been the most memorable experience of their holiday. It feels good to be able to give so much joy to someone” says Salim who is a Mahout and takes our guests on joy rides to the Amber Fort in Jaipur. It was 5 in the morning and we were sipping our cup of steaming hot chai (tea) at the Haati Gaon (Elephant village) of Jaipur, where nearly 150 Elephants are kept and taken care of. “I spend my entire day with Champa and I love it,” says Salim. Champa was gifted to him by one of his relatives.

“The first thing I do in the morning is feed Champa with sugarcane and millet husk, before giving her a bath.” Seeing Champa being washed was so fascinating. This is where you get to watch, understand and appreciate the relationship between a Mahout and this regal giant. Salim would keep on uttering strange sounds, which would prompt Champa to lift her leg or turn in a particular direction during her wash. Champa was totally enjoying being washed and scrubbed for the day's work at Amber Fort. Where did he learn to talk to Elephants? “From my father and he from his father,” Salim tells us with a smile.

We gently broached the subject of animal rights activists, who want the government to ban the joy rides as it is cruel to the elephants. “Listen, it is very easy to say ban it. What happens after we ban it? What is the alternative? No one has an answer to that. Sustaining an elephant is not easy. It costs me nearly 2000 rupees daily on food itself. I would have no option but to go begging on the streets of Jaipur with Champa for food. Would that not be cruel and humiliating? You tell me,” asks Salim. A one way ride up the Amber Fort with guests takes around 20 minutes and in winters a single elephant does five such trips. In the summers the number of rides are restricted to around three. All the elephants are back to their sheds by afternoon.

“Once Champa is back from her day's work, I have to wait till the perspiration dries off, before I can give her some food. We are lucky that there is no shortage of water here. She needs 200-250 litres of water daily,” Salim continues. In the evening Salim feeds her Rotis (bread made from stoneground wholemeal flour) and jaggery. “In summers, because of the extreme temperatures she also has to be washed in the evening to cool down.” He stays with Champa till dusk, cleaning the shed and generally checking if she is

# A Day in The Life Of Salim



alright and comfortable. “During the winters, the evenings are busy for us because of weddings where they would want an elephant to welcome guests or a game of Elephant Polo which has become quite popular over the years,” Salim tells us.

So is he training his son to be a Mahout too? “Well he is in school now and sometimes lends a helping hand. But its upto him. I am happy even if he doesn't become one. Elephants have long lives and I am confident that we will be together till I die,” Salim tells us as he gets ready to leave for Amber Fort. “Is it true that elephants have a brilliant memory?” “Oh Yes!” smiles Salim. “They remember everyone they have ever come in touch with.”





# Lifestyle



## All that Raj

"Isn't it strange to dine in silk stockings in such a place, to drink a bottle of hock and champagne every evening, to have delicious moccha coffee and receive Calcutta Journals, every morning?" wrote Frenchman Jacques Mont sometime in the early 19th century. He was in Shimla, then a settlement of no more than fifteen hamlets, as a guest of Captain Charles Pratt Kennedy, the British Political Agent. The Gurkhas of Nepal who brutalised the locals were defeated and driven out. Peace had returned. Shimla was declared the Summer Capital of colonial India and rose in prominence nearly half a century after Jacques Mont's visit, but Captain Kennedy was already living a life that would characterise the bubbling and decadent ways, the British Raj would escape to every summer, thereafter.

One of my guests from England was kind enough to share some old letters that her maternal grandfather had written from Shimla to his mother. "...Last night I went to a ball given by the German Consul who is the richest man in Simla and gives the best entertainments. The narrowness of the space rather prevented me from showing off my fine stride but I did not get very much bored which is generally the best I can say of a ball. Thursdays I am going to Viceroy's for a dance and I am afraid I shall get entrapped for several others..." he wrote.

There are various tales as to how the town drew its name. According to a legend, the town got its name from Shyamala, the dark Goddess of power, widely worshipped in these hills. The story of the Gerad Brothers is also talked about. They were on their way on an official survey, when they saw a fakir (ascetic) near Jakhoo Hills, the highest amongst the seven hills of Shimla. The fakir, who it seems could understand the language of the animals, provided drinking water to weary travellers. The thatched cottage he lived in, was named as Shyamala. It is also said that it was a British officer, who accidentally stumbled upon Shimla while moving his troops. On the way he stopped in a dense cedar forest that was full of hyenas and bears. He was so struck by its cooler clime, that he decided to pitch tents for the night. Later, when he returned to the plains, he recommended that army outposts be set up in that area, which was so much like England.

Shimla remained the summer capital for the British Raj from 1822 to 1947. The British brought here everything. They built here everything that was necessarily required to lead a comfortable life. They



constructed roads to Shimla and even got it connected to the plains through railways. They introduced the best of schools and brought medical facilities for the natives and the European population of the town. They introduced club culture to Shimla and built some of the most beautiful buildings. I think that there is no other shopping street in India that is more beautiful than the Mall Road of Shimla. The Tudor Style structures make it look like an old English Town. The Norman Gothic building of Gaiety theatre adds another jewel in Shimla's crown.

Here are two of my favourite walks in Shimla that I love to take my guests out on - [click here](#)



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## The Bhuchens Lamas of Spiti

Sita witnessed one of the key rituals of Bhuchens Lamas of Pin Valley in Spiti, where they drive evil spirits away by breaking a rock placed on the abdomen of the person, who is possessed by the spirit.

The Bhuchens are a unique and rare sect of Tibetan Buddhists, theatrical artists that preach religious, social and ecological morals to the locals through a set of diverse performances. This art form flourished in Tibet, Ladakh and Spiti for many centuries, but gradually died a slow death in all the regions except the Pin valley in Spiti, which is the only place where the Bhuchens are now found. In the late 90's, this art form was virtually on its death bed with only 2 groups remaining. However [Tourism](#); thanks to our friends in Spiti, played a pivotal role in reviving the Bhuchen art form which is now thriving in the region.

# Spotted By Sita







## Tea at The Windamere Hotel

Baker Chef Bhagawati of [The Windamere Hotel](#) tells us that the Afternoon tea here is not to be missed during your stay in Darjeeling. Afternoon Tea at the Windamere Hotel is a world-renowned affair. The hotel is already known by many as a “truly authentic Colonial Hotel of India in the Himalayas.” Some say the “only one of its kind – not only in the Hills, but also in India.” The 'Sunday Times of London' called it: “one of the best Colonial Hotels in the World.” This authenticity also applies to their tea offering. Everything is home-baked and mouth wateringly fresh! They serve: scones, with cream and jam; finger sized sandwiches (water cress, cucumber, cheese and chutney, tuna...to name but a few); lemon drizzle cake; Victoria sponge cake; melt in your mouth shortbread biscuits; bath buns; bake well tarts and much more. All of this is accompanied by the 'champagne of beverages' - Darjeeling Tea! What is known as 'Darjeeling Tea' in the west, cannot hope to compare with the real thing - drunk on its own and from the top tea gardens in the Darjeeling Hills - it is pure and in the west could cost a small fortune to buy.

Afternoon Tea is served by their Windamere maid - dressed appropriately in old English tea maid attire. The actual “tea” is served in real silver pots, complete with a silver tray and silver accoutrements. For people who long for “the real, untarnished event” this is the place. Apparently, they have many outside guests who also enjoy their Afternoon Tea. They are invited to sit in the 'Bearparks Parlour' (named after Windamere's first housekeeper....this was her flat in the old days).

By the way - many people call tea served between 4 - 6 p.m as 'High Tea'. The English will tell you that 'High Tea' is mostly an Americanised name for 'Afternoon Tea' - the latter consisting of 'a low meal offering' such as scones, biscuits, cake, etc. 'High Tea' would refer to the old working classes in England who came home from work to such delicious food as 'Steak & Kidney Pie' and other hot meals (usually served around 6 p.m. and known simply as 'Tea').

# Top Chef Recommends





## Cruising in North Kerala

We at Sita are excited about the [Lotus Houseboat](#) in North Kerala which will be launched in October by [Neeleshwar Hermitage](#). This 2 -bedroom Houseboat will be an altogether new way to experience the unspoilt, idyllic waterways of the Kasargod area in North Kerala. Kasargod is blessed with a dozen estuaries. 14 rivers crisscross the region, nourishing the verdant landscape and networking it with shimmering waterways. Unlike the overcrowded backwaters of South Kerala, where most of your guests would do their Rice Barge Cruise, there are only a few basic houseboats plying here at present. They cater to a limited number of tourists for mostly day cruises. So it is idyllic in the real sense with unpolluted waterways.

I spent quite a few days cruising around the waters of Kasargod in a Houseboat with our friend Jagganath C, who runs a [Homestay](#) here and is a Freemason. Here's what you should know about cruising in North Kerala on a Houseboat.

Cruising in North Kerala in a Houseboat is not similar to the Rice Barge Cruise down small canals, which we offer in the backwaters of South Kerala. To begin with, this is a River Cruise. Even the landscape of a North Kerala Houseboat cruise is very different from what your guests would experience in the backwaters of South Kerala. While you cruise along in North Kerala, the coconut palms give way to rice paddies, tapioca and vegetable cultivation and further downstream there are places where the river banks are covered with cashew groves and rubber plantations. While cruising one can see coracles used by the gypsies to fish, local large open country boats, sand mining and oyster farming. Also instead of Churches, as one would see in the backwaters of South Kerala, here one can see and hear the call from Mosques and the Hindu temples located on the banks of the river. During the Theyyam season (Mid November onwards till March) one has a very good opportunity to disembark enroute to watch this ritual dance which is unique to this part of Kerala. The downside being, since there are no small canals your guests do not get to see much of the local life, as they can in South Kerala. But the Lotus Houseboat will take guests on walks to villages and temples etc on the river bank which your guests normally don't get to do in South Kerala.

All in all, it is a fantastic development in North Kerala. A good start and we should be seeing some more of these Houseboats in the coming years catering to a

# Destination Insider



wider segment of guests.

Suggested itinerary: Arrive Bangalore - drive to Mysore to spend a couple of nights walking or cycling around with Royal Mysore Walks - continue to Kabini for some wildlife spotting - drive to India's coffee country Coorg to learn how to make a few Kodava dishes with your host- continue to Neeleshwar to board the Lotus Houseboat - Cruise for 1 or 2 nights to arrive at the Neeleshwar Hermitage for a couple of nights on the beach and definitely a Theyyam performance in a local temple -drive to Mangalore to board the flight to Mumbai- spend a couple of nights in Mumbai to go on the trail of Shantaram or connect to an international flight the same day for your onward journey.

Cheers

Kuntal Baruwa





## Kalmatia Sangam

**The weather forecasting frog:** We loved the weather forecasting frog in the little fish pond of [Kalmatia Sangam](#); we are told that he is pretty accurate. Kalmatia Sangam with its 10 tastefully decorated stone cottages is your own private wild life sanctuary at an altitude of 2000m. If you are lucky you may get a glimpse of deers, pine martens, hares, jackals, civet cats, flying squirrels and even leopards!! An absolute haven for birders with a huge variety of birds.

**Breathtaking Himalayan view:** That special 'ahhhh' feeling you get, when you first arrive at Kalmatia Sangam is from the captivating and unhampered view of the Himalayan range. The most prominent being Nanda Devi, Trishul, Nanda Kot, Chaukhamba and Panchachuli. The view is absolutely magical and breathtaking, especially on a full moon night.

**Responsible:** From the soap in your shower to the veggies on your plate, Kalmatia Sangam supports local producers. Their rain water harvesting also reduces water requirements annually. We liked it, given that the Kasardevi area where Kalmatia Sangam is located has an acute shortage of water.

**Kalmatia Specialties:** The Coffee and Walnut Cake at Kalmatia Sangam is to die for! And for carnivores don't miss their Poulet Ro'ti with the accompanying entrees.

**Fascinating village walks:** Village Walks in Kumaon with stays in village houses is the flavour of the season. Options are quite a few these days with different price ranges. But it all started in Kalmatia Sangam with the current owners Geeta and Dieter Reeb starting this unique enterprise. We loved wandering through picturesque villages and terraced fields, past ancient temples, along cool babbling streams and through bird filled forests. Local villagers are smiling, curious and very welcoming. From the brightly dressed goat herders, to the ladies working in the fields, it's a colourful and uplifting experience, not to be missed. Kalmatia Sangam's experienced local guides help you get the most from your experience. Discuss with the friendly staff at Kalmatia Sangam, to see what works best for you. They have short walks to multiple day walks with overnight stays in village houses. Bring your sweet tooth along, as you're bound to be invited for tea along the way.

**Crank Ridge:** The Beatles may have written some of their best songs in Rishikesh in the late 60's, but

# 6 Things We Liked About



Kasardevi was the original haunt for bohemian artists, writers and spiritual seekers in the 1920s and 30s. The pine-covered ridge area, just outside Kasardevi attracted the likes of the Tibetan Buddhists Lama Anagarika Govinda and his wife Li Gotami who were close friends of the current owner's parents. Anthropologist & Writer Walter Y. Evans Wentz, Indian Mystics Anandamayi Ma and Neem Karoli Baba have all also made pilgrimages to this area including Vivekananda; the great Indian philosopher and Freemason, who introduced Yoga to the western world. Later known as the Cranks Ridge in the 60's and 70s, it became a cult destination for luminaries of counter-culture such as musicians Bob Dylan and Cat Stevens, psychologist & writer Timothy Leary who wrote much of his *Psychedelic Prayers* on the Crank Ridge and poets Allan Ginsberg and D.H. Lawrence, to name a few. Hollywood actress Uma Thurman's parents were completely captivated by Kasardevi and in fact, Uma used to run around the estate as a child!!





# Festivals



## Mango Festival Delhi, 7th - 8th July, 2012

Summers and mangoes go hand in hand in India, as this fruit makes our sultry summers extremely succulent. One of Delhi's most popular events is the International Mango Festival, which is a celebration of the King of all tropical fruits, the 'Mango'. The festival is held every year at the Talkatora Stadium in Delhi. Hosted by Delhi Tourism in alliance with the Delhi Government, this festival showcases the specialities of mangoes from different states of India. One gets to many varieties of mangoes and some rare species of the sumptuous fruit. Some of the traditional and exceptional mango varieties are Langda, Dasheri, Alphonso, Fasli, Bombay Green, Chausa and Sindheri.

Most of the Festival dates are decided by Solar / Lunar calendars practiced in India, due to which the dates are subject to change.

You may plan some special departure based on these festivals. For any assistance please contact us.





# Staff Travel

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## Volunteering with the Tiger Census Team

I think it's a dream for any wildlife enthusiast to be able to spend a night inside the forest. After writing to the Divisional forest officer ( DFO) stating my interest to volunteer for the Tiger Census, I was fortunate enough to be chosen as one of the volunteers for the Ranthambore Animal Censuses on 6th May, 2012. This was the first time, I was going for a census and in my mind, I had imagined that I could scour across the forest with a core team of tiger specialist, tracking the beast and measuring paw marks; I was completely wrong.

The volunteer census happens on a full moon night. Each volunteer spends 24 hours on a machaan (a platform created on a tree, used for observation of tigers) in a core forest area. The census starts at 1000hrs and finishes the next day at 1000hrs. Everyone is handed a sheet with names of animals and you are expected to tick what you see against the appropriate time slot. Next morning once the time is up -you dismantle the machaan and make sure that you don't leave any human traces like empty bottles and litter behind, before leaving your post.

All volunteers reported at the DFO's office at 0800hrs in the morning. The first order of the day, was to find out the outpost assigned to you. There was complete chaos before everybody settled in to find their post. Finally once everything was sorted out, everyone gathered around for a briefing by the DFO and Chief Conservator of Forests (CCF). We were told the serious nature of the task that we were undertaking and the responsibility that each one of us shouldered to accurately record the data.

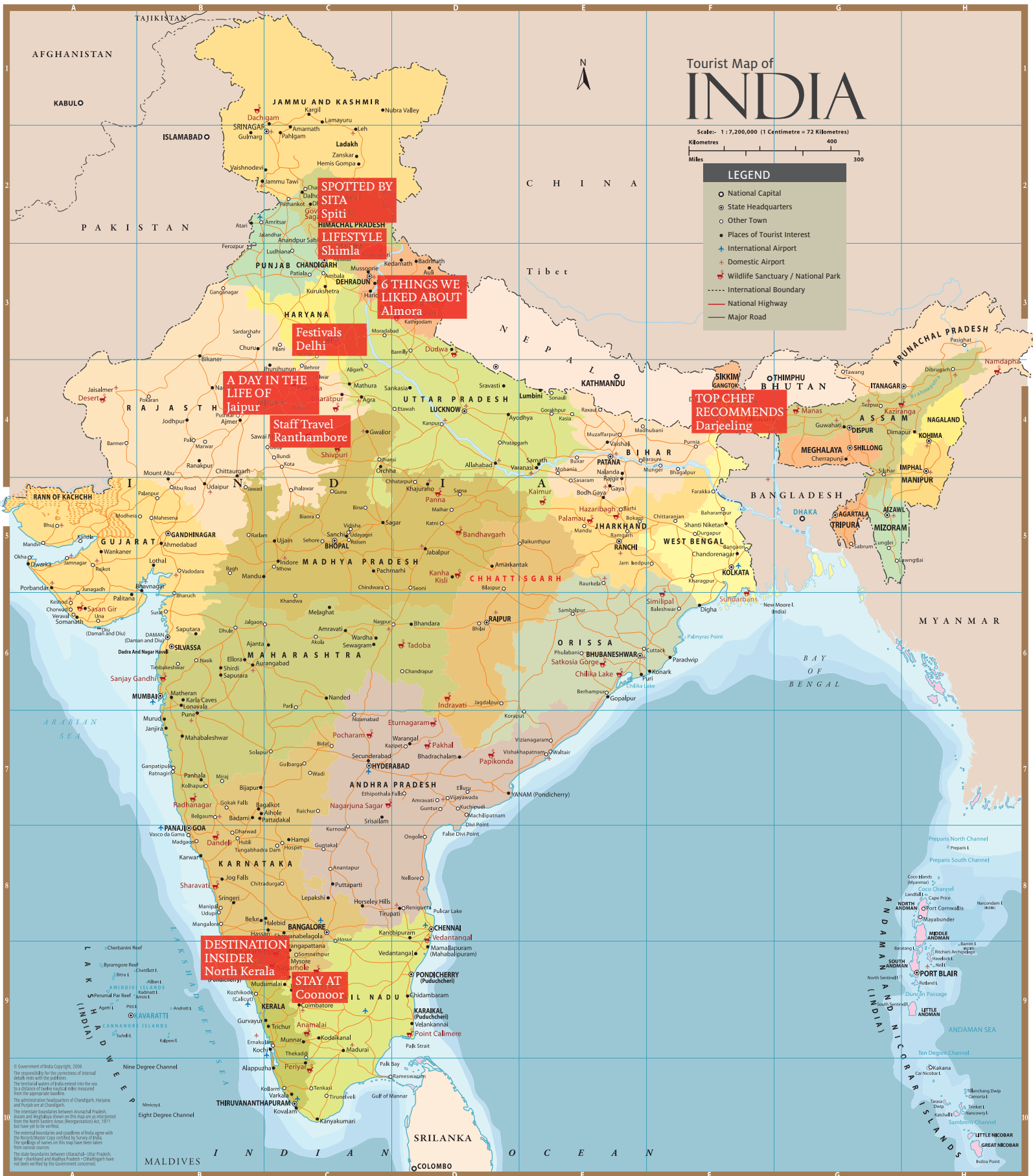
Once briefed, we climbed into our vehicles and headed into the forest. I could see the excitement of the first timers, whereas the veterans were dropping names of the famous tigers that they had seen like T-9, T- 24 and recalling stories of fights between tigers and bears they had witnessed.

As we approached the machaan assigned to me, the vehicle dropped me at the road head and I walked the rest of the way with a forest guard. Every forest guard has 5-6 machaans assigned to him to keep a tab on. Seeing the machaan, where I was supposed to spend the night, came as a bit of a rude shock. I had expected it to be basic but this was just a handful of dead branches thrown across a forked branch on a tree. I was carrying two bags and a can of water provided by the forest



officials. I don't remember the last time I climbed a tree, but I quickly need to remember because I didn't want to spend the night on the ground with Tigers around.....[click here to continue reading](#)





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The territorial waters of India extend into the sea to a distance of twelve nautical miles measured from the appropriate baseline.  
The international boundaries between Andhra Pradesh, Assam and Meghalaya shown on this map are as interpreted from the Boundary Waters (Disputes) Act, 1971 and have yet to be verified.  
The external boundaries and coordinates of India agree with the Boundary Waters (Disputes) Act, 1971 and have yet to be verified.  
The place boundaries between Lakshadweep, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh (Chhattisgarh) have not been verified by the Government concerned.



## 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>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	Awaited	Neeraj Bhatt & Philip Thomas
<b>Deluxe Travel Mart</b> Ukraine 4th 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 IN100	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

# Trade Shows

