

STAY AT

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF

LIFESTYLE

SPOTTED BY SITA

TOP CHEF RECOMMENDS

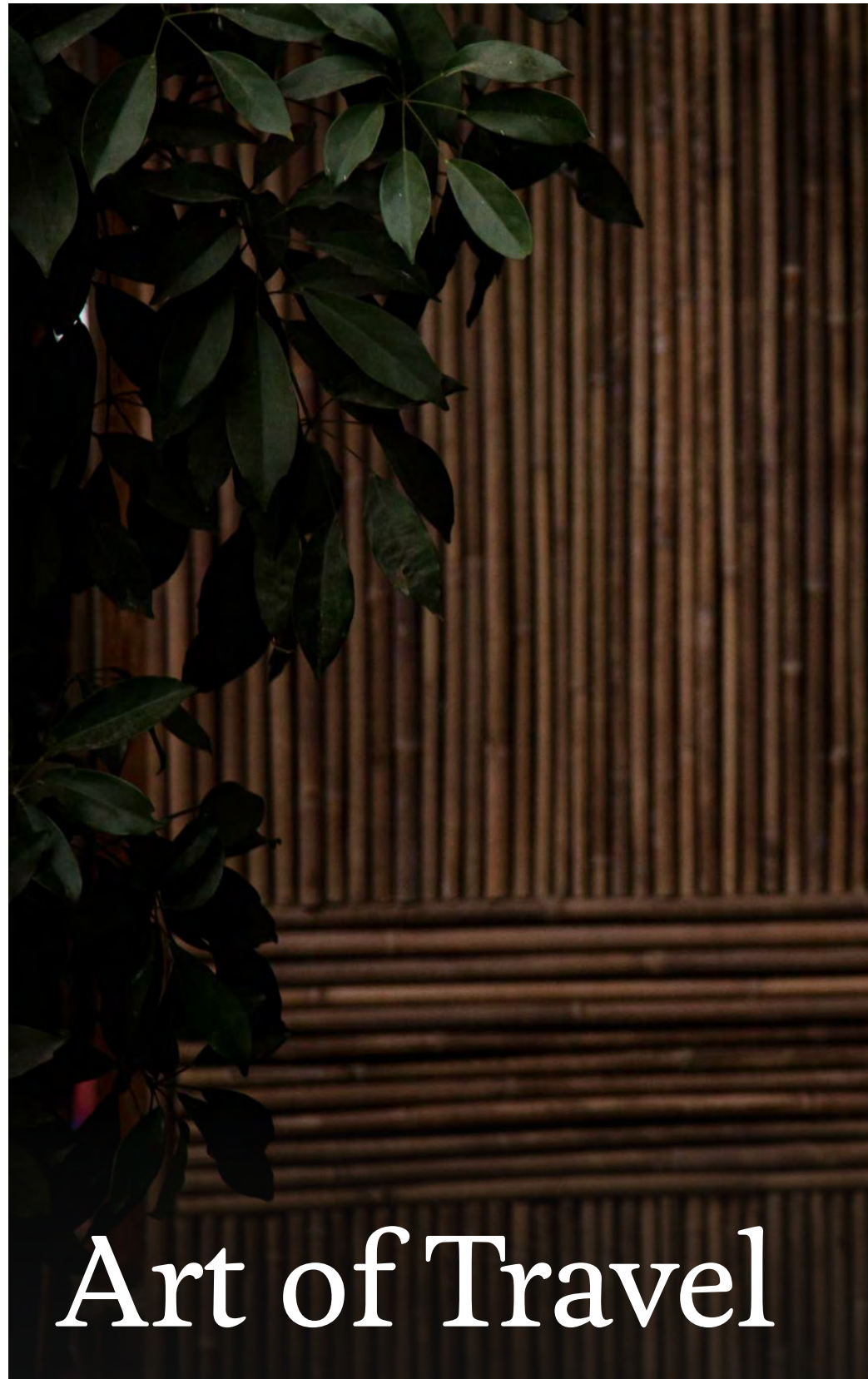
DESTINATION INSIDER

6 THINGS WE LIKED ABOUT

FESTIVALS

INSPIRATION LOCATOR

TRADE SHOWS



# Art of Travel



## The Itmenaan Estate

# Stay At

### At Peace with Self

Itmenaan Estate in Kumaon, is the first from the series of small, intimate lodges that are planned to be launched under “Itmenaan Lodges” brand. Itmenaan can variously be defined to mean ‘relaxation’, ‘at ease’ or ‘at peace’. Itmenaan Estate is set in a 10 acre farm in Kumaon Himalayas in a serene rural setting. It comprises of terraced fields, fruit orchards, forested patches and to top it all a private natural spring. The estate offers stunning views of snow capped Himalayas and lush valleys.

For accommodation, a 100 year old Kumoani house on the estate has been restored to a high standard of comfort and luxury. There are three tastefully decorated bedrooms each with an en- suite bathroom. The architecture is local with elegant slate, wood and mud roofs and walls constructed with local stone using “dry stack” technique without any cementing material. The mud plastering on the walls in the room provides that much needed insulation against the cold during the wintry nights of the Himalayas. The linen and mattresses in the room and the fittings in the bathrooms are of very high quality to ensure a comfortable stay. Each bedroom can be hired individually or one can book the entire house.

The food is an excellent mix of continental and Indian fare. It is hard to believe that one could savour some of the finest home baked cookies, breads and cakes in such a remote location. Each meal can be had on a different location on the estate.

The staff members on the property are from the local villages and have been trained in the ways of modern hospitality. Some of the villagers who helped in the renovation of the house have now become full time staff members. Many of the staff members on the estate are trained in first aid delivery. The estate has two stretchers and access to transport to be able to respond to any medical emergency in time. The nearest hospital is approximately an one hour’s drive away.







## Rural Tourism Entrepreneur

“Banjaar is one of the greenest valleys in the Western Himalayas and a fantastic place to enjoy a slice of unspoilt village life,” says Sumit Vashisht. He is visibly excited about his recent venture of the [Village Walks](#), which he leads himself. Sumit's day begins at 06:30 hrs, irrespective of which walk, with the sound of tinkling of bells worn by the domestic cattle in the village. Every morning a person is given the responsibility of taking the cattle of the village to graze in the meadows. Sumit comes out from his tent and asks his cook to send a cup of tea to his guests in their respective tents. Guests are given hot water to wash and get ready, after which they meet in the dinning tent at around 07:30 hrs, where a table for breakfast waits them. After breakfast the tents are wrapped, the kitchen equipment and the utensils, packed to be carried away by the porters.

Sumit leads his guests through the lanes of the village. The village temple, a marvel example of hill architecture, constructed of wood and stone, which is open for the visitors at times. The morning sun casts its light on the village houses and locals can be seen going to their fields. After capturing some of the glimpses of these hardworking mountain folks by means of photography, his guest walk to the next village. These Village Walks bring you close to nature and is a perfect exercise to get yourself rejuvenated. Here, nature plays with you, touches you and makes you her own baby and teaches you how to remain confident and fresh. Vast valleys, tranquility of the forests and soothing sounds of the wind, nourish your soul. You may chose to slow down for a while, find a place on a rock and close your eyes to listen to the sound of nature.

A pleasant walk of four to five hours, is what it takes to reach the next village. The team of porters and the cook is already there and have set up the camp for their guests. Lunch is ready; they are allotted their respective tents and then are welcome to the dining tent. Lunch is followed by a brief nap, after which it is time to visit to the village. Villagers are happy to see the guests. Children ask them to click photos; they are invited to have a cup of tea with them. Ladies are shy but are keen to interact.

By now Sumit has already sent a message about their arrival to the ‘Gram Pardhan’ – the village chief, elected by the villagers after every five years. After a round of

# A Day in The Life Of Sumit Vashisht



the village, guests are taken to the community centre where the villagers has already gathered. The villagers get together, sing folk songs and perform ‘Naati’ – a folk dance to entertain their guests. Tea is served with local snacks and then guests are given a chance to interact with their hosts. They ask many question about their life, profession, their simplicity and of course their culture, Sumit does the translation for this interactive session. Musicians arrive with their drums and trumpets; sing some more songs and the guests join in the dancing. The guests click some photographs to remember this interaction with the villagers. Sumit returns to the campsite with his guests by 18:30 hrs. Dinner is served at around 19:30 hrs. As per Sumit, the best part of the day is the chatting session he has with his guests, post dinner. “It gets really interesting , sometime we don’t even realize how late it is and that we should now go and sleep,” he says.

Sumit calls it a day at around 22:00 hrs, having checked that everything is in order for the next day.



## The Bauls

They are unique to Bengal and you can't miss them on these 9 days in West Bengal which Soumya Mukherji from our Destination Knowledge Centre recently did. Uncut, often coiled hair, long, usually with a flowing beard, their saffron robe with a necklace of beads made of basil stems, crooning about love and compassion in ecstasy. "It was straight from the heart and there was a hint of melancholy as well. The first time I heard a Baul singing was at Shantineketan. I was there at the weekly fair held every Saturday. Although there were many things, all vying for my attention, I was rooted in that spot listening to him," says Soumya.

There is a soul connection between the musical Bauls and the soil of Bengal. Baul roots are not only deep, they are ancient. Baul is an oral tradition passed on by a mentor to his disciple to be remembered as in storytelling. In the olden days Bauls used to roam from village to village and were offered alms for passing on the knowledge through song and dance to villagers about spirituality, art and science of life, how to be in deep love with nature and remove the shackles that bind us. Begging for alms is a way Bauls enforce the fact that they should be happy with whatever comes to them. In each village there was a special house set aside for them to stay in and they would stay as long as they pleased. The language of their music is often called the 'Twilight language'; the time of the day when boundaries blur with their songs having multiple interpretations with metaphors, codes and signs. Just like the sacred texts of Vajrayana Buddhism of the Tibetan tradition. But Bauls are non-conformists. Their simple, natural and direct approach to God has elements from devotional Hinduism, Tantric Buddhism and Sufi Islam.

"We sing songs of joy, love and longing for mystical union with the divine and believe love for humankind leads to love for God," says Anand Gopal Das Baul. Soumya met him at his ashram in Shantineketan; a small place with a central courtyard where he tells us he had a good long conversation with Anand Gopal Das Baul. "Bauls are simple but it is not simple to be a true Baul. You have to do years and years of sadhana (spiritual practice) under a Guru, who has the gift or the key to pass it on to you so that you can pass it on to others," says Anand Gopal Das Baul. He led a life of an ascetic with his Guru for 10 years where 5000 songs were passed on orally as seeds of higher philosophy. "Speaking to him I sensed that he was at peace and



someone who had infinite patience. Leaving the ashram I thought if only there were more Bauls in the world, there would be less hatred and more peace all around," says Soumya

We leave you with a song by Paban Das Baul ([Click here to listen to the song](#)) who was initiated into the fold of the Bauls by his mentor at the age of 14. Paban Das Baul has given a modern sensibility to the Baul tradition and this song is from his live performance at the Satellit Café, Paris accompanied by some of the finest Afro- Jazz musicians of France.





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## India Tailors: Jodhpur in Jodhpurs

Head to India Tailors in Jodhpur for your best Jodhpurs. “I am 82 years old and whatever I know about making breeches I owe it to my mentor and master, Arjun Lalji, the personal tailor of the late Maharaja of Jodhpur Umaid Singh and his family. My family has been in the business for five generations and the art of making breeches has been handed down from father to son. I am a proud man today as I see my great grand son showing the same level of enthusiasm and passion in learning from me, as I did when I was a young boy,” says Moolraj ji who is the patron of India Tailors in Jodhpur. Moolraj ji has over six decades of experience in making breeches for not only the royal family of Jodhpur but also for whosoever wants to wear a pair fit to him right.

Sohanlal Goojar, Moolraj ji's son, runs the show with his son and a team of tailors personally trained by his father and him. “It's a pleasure to make a pair of breeches when you know you are the man behind somebody's fashion ego,” says Sohanlal. Speaking to the father-son duo about Jodhpurs it didn't take us time to realize that they were hugely passionate and proud of their art.

“It's my meditation, my mantra to feel blessed and it all begins the minute someone enters my shop, seven measurements from ankle to waist, I can feel myself enter the first level of trance when I touch the ankle of the costumer to take the measurement. Moving to size the calf, knee and behind the knee, hip, waist and the length, I find my self driven with immense passion. The next thing I want to do is grab the cloth chosen and cut it into the specified requirements, by this time the urge to sit and sew is such that I forget to eat and drink;” says Sohanlal.

And why is that we asked? “Every pair of Jodhpur I stitch is so unique. Hand made and costumed just for those calves, it won't fit anyone else so beautifully the way it will fit the person who it's really meant for and that's the biggest high for me.”

Jodhpurs are not only a fashion symbol but it is every Rajput men's pride to have a snug pair. Intimidating and historic, ordering a pair won't be such a bad idea after all during your Rajasthan holiday. So if you think your visit to Jodhpur in Jodhpurs sounds very Jodhpur, take your measurements and send it to India Tailors. You will have a pair waiting for you when you arrive.

# Spotted By Sita



Call Sohanlal Goojar at India Tailors for the best Jodhpurs in Rajasthan:  
+91- 291-2547075



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## Chef's Special

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When at Villa Shanti, don't forget to try the signature prawn dishes of Chef Saravanan. Start with a prawn and pomello salad. Perfectly stemmed prawn with pomello, roasted peanuts, juliennes of ginger, coconut, shallots, cilantro based with three types of lettuce with dressing of palm sugar and tamarind dressing. For the main course try the delightful prawn wrapped fish. Dijon mustard marinated prawn with balsamic and basil marinated wrapped fish fillet grilled, served with green peas mashed potatoes, tomato and zucchini pipette and orange capers sauce. And it's only fitting to end a perfect evening with flambéed dessert crepe suzette.

Recipe available on [request](#)

# Top Chef Recommends







## Young India

After his hugely successful 1559 AD, Udaipur's coolest Restaurant Bistro Lounge, 25-year-old Arjun Shaktawat of Udaipur has now started Upre, Udaipur's most romantic Rooftop Bar and Restaurant.

Arjun has studied in the prestigious Les Roches International School of Hotel Management, Switzerland and has worked with Aspen Meadows Resort which specialises in unique meetings experiences for business travelers in Aspen, one of the most popular ski destinations in the world. When Arjun returned to Udaipur in 2009 he politely refused to join his father's business and decided to carve out a niche for himself. He took a 100-year-old dilapidated Haveli on lease from the present Maharana of Udaipur and lovingly restored it. The result being 1559 AD; a perfect blend of old and new. The name 1559 AD came naturally to Arjun. 1559 was the historical year when Udaipur was founded by Maharana Udai Singh.

When I met Arjun 2 years back in Udaipur, he was telling me that his dream was to build cool dining addresses in Udaipur. He wanted Udaipur's history and old world hospitality to merge seamlessly with the lighter, delicate and fresh ideas that he carried with him from his stint in the US. It's good to see that this young entrepreneur who is quite unlike your typical poster boy of Rajasthan; the former Royal with his handlebar moustache, sporting diamond-studded earrings, has lost none of his enthusiasm and hunger to succeed.

You must have already read in the 'Stay At' section about 31-year-old Ashish Bhatia's Itmenaan Estate in the Kumaon hills, an overnight journey from Delhi. It is his first from his ambitious project - Itmenaan Lodges - where he plans a series of small lodges all over the country. His philosophy - "Simple" is the new "Stylish"... "Unique" is the new "Luxury". Ashish is an alumnus of a top B school from India and has over 5 years of international management consulting experience.

Itmenaan Estate is a 10-acre estate with vegetable fields, fruit orchards, forested patches and a natural spring. A 100-year-old renovated and refurbished Kumaoni house amidst the estate has 3 bedrooms which can be hired individually or as an entire unit. Ashish was telling me that while building Itmenaan Estate he wanted to create something which is small, intimate

# Destination Insider



and rooted in local culture with great food and discreet service. Yet without compromising on the creature comforts but doing away with all the unnecessary gadgetry. Itmenaan Estate is ideal for someone interested... [read more](#)



## Mon Chasha

# 6 Things We Liked About

1. **Nilanjan & Debjani** - The husband and wife team are your hosts at [Mon Chasha](#) and the heart and soul of the place. After working in the travel trade for more than 15 years, it was Debjani's dream to build a place where people could come and escape from the rigmarole of daily lives and reconnect with their family and traditions. She believes that travel should be a time to relax and enjoy, not come back from a holiday and take a day off because your trip proved hectic. The term 'Mon Chasha' means 'cultivator of the mind'. Mon Chasha is for the inquisitive savvy traveller interested in rural India and wants to know more about the traditional way of life, local art and craft. "Don't come here looking for luxury but it's the attention to detail and the warmth of your hosts that makes this place special," says Soumya from our Destination Knowledge Centre who stayed there recently. One day she hopes to hand over Mon Chasha to the local community, which is a part and parcel of the project and move on to start a similar project elsewhere in West Bengal.

2. **The Cottages and the views** - Mon Chasha has 4 cottages built on an elevated platform. "My first impression after entering my room was its size. The circular room had two large king size beds, in spite of which there was ample space to walk around," says Soumya. The entire structure is erected and built by local craftsmen and artisans, using locally procured bamboo, palm leaves and paddy straws. "Even the beds are made of some of the thickest bamboos that I have ever seen," says Soumya. Towards the rear of the room a small door leads to a balcony with a sit-out with views of the lazy Bagda River flowing and the paddy fields.

3. **The Walks** - Mon Chasha is located in a village called Paushi which is a 4 hour train ride from Kolkata. Walking around the property gives you a glimpse into the unhurried rural life of West Bengal. Neatly labeled herbs and trees around the property make it great to learn about the local flora. "There is no pretence, no scripted characters or people put out of place to create an artificial environment. On my walks I encountered farmers in the fields sowing, thrashing, jaggery being made and people fishing in the ponds," says Soumya.

4. **The Food** - "Perhaps the highlight of my stay here was the food," says Soumya who by now you must have realised is huge foodie. "We try to serve food that was a staple in most Bengali families a decade back. Unfortunately, now nobody has the time for such



elaborate menus" says Nilanjan. The intensity of the spices is just right and the produce is straight from the kitchen garden or from the nearby farms. Fresh fish on your table comes from the ponds in the property fed by rain water harvesting. The food is served in beautiful brass utensils. Pallab who serves food is never far away just in case you require something. The common dining area also gives you a chance to interact with the other guests. The hammocks hung all around the central dining area are perfect for an afternoon siesta after all the good food.

5. **Art Revival** - Your stay at Mon Chasha supports the local community. Apart from giving employment to the locals, Nilanjan and Debjani are trying very hard to revive the local forms of art. Monotosh lives in the adjacent village working his magic with dry coconut shells in his small low ceiling workshop. "The detail on the coconut vases that he was filing away under a makeshift lamp was brilliant," says Soumya. Kanai was another such artist who does wonders with bamboo strips. He lives in a traditional mud house immaculately clean with the veranda serving as his airy workshop. Kanai is now quite popular and gets invited to display his art work and various fairs and festivals. At Mon Chasha they have "nabya nakshi" a room where works of such local artist are displayed to create awareness. You are free to appreciate as well as buy them. The money goes directly to the artists, some of whom are the last surviving artists of these local art forms.

6. **Peace and quiet** - Life at Mon Chasha is laid back and simple. "You are miles away from the mindless honking. The air is clean and fresh. I can't remember when was the last time I picked up a book to read. Sitting in the veranda with a book in hand after a leisurely breakfast, watching the river flowing in front will be something I will look back with fond memories," says Soumya. You may also want to use the solar lights (instead of electricity) during your stay at Mon Chasha which Soumya did.





# Festivals



## Pongal Festival, Harvest Festival of South India 14th January 2015

Pongal festivities begin days before the actual festival; new clothes are bought and the house is cleaned to perfection. The actual festival generally falls on 14th January. At dawn on this very day, families everywhere gather around a new earthen pot. As the pot of milk boils over, signifying prosperity, a shout of "Pongalo Pongal" fills the air. A dish called pongal is cooked with the new grain and jaggery. In fact, as friends and relatives greet each other on this day, they ask, "Ponga pane pongitha?" or did the pongal boil over? The excitement of an overflowing pot is considered to be a sign of a prosperous future. The third day after Pongal, is devoted to the worship of cattle.

Pongal occurs in one of the most beautiful months in Tamil Nadu. People wake up early in the morning and start the day with a song especially dedicated to the festival.

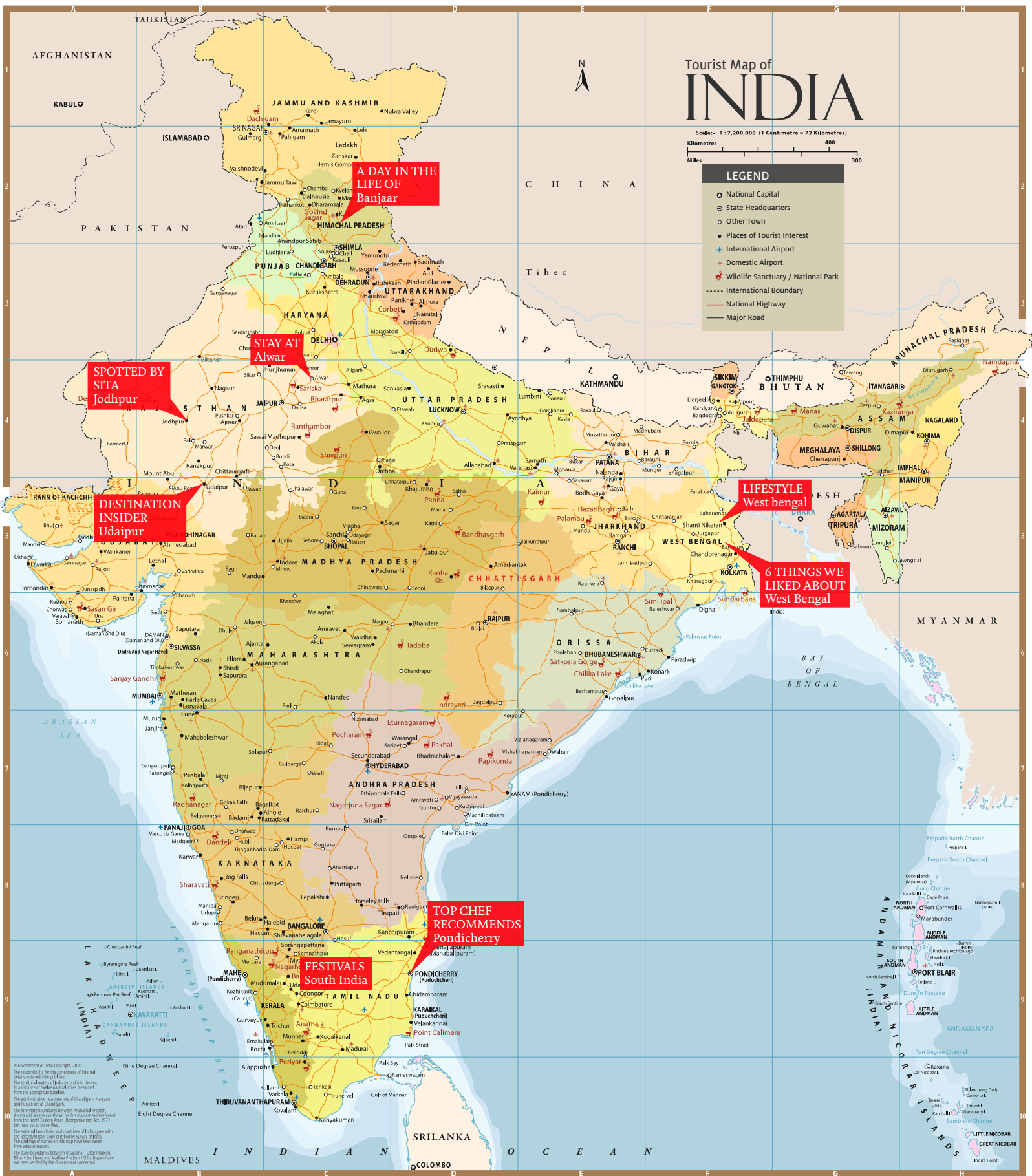
Every temple and almost every household follows this tradition.

Celebrate Pongal with Sita - [Click Here](#)

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.





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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 district and headquarters of Chandigarh, Haryana and Punjab are at Chandigarh.  
The interstate boundaries between Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Meghalaya shown on this map are as interpreted from the recent Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act, 1971.  
The external border is and coasts of India agree with the Record/Master Copy certified by Survey of India.  
The spellings of names on this map have been taken from various sources.  
The state boundaries between Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, 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>USTOA</b> Boca Raton, Florida 5th - 7th December	Sita Desk	Neeraj Bhatt

# Trade Shows

