

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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Art of Travel

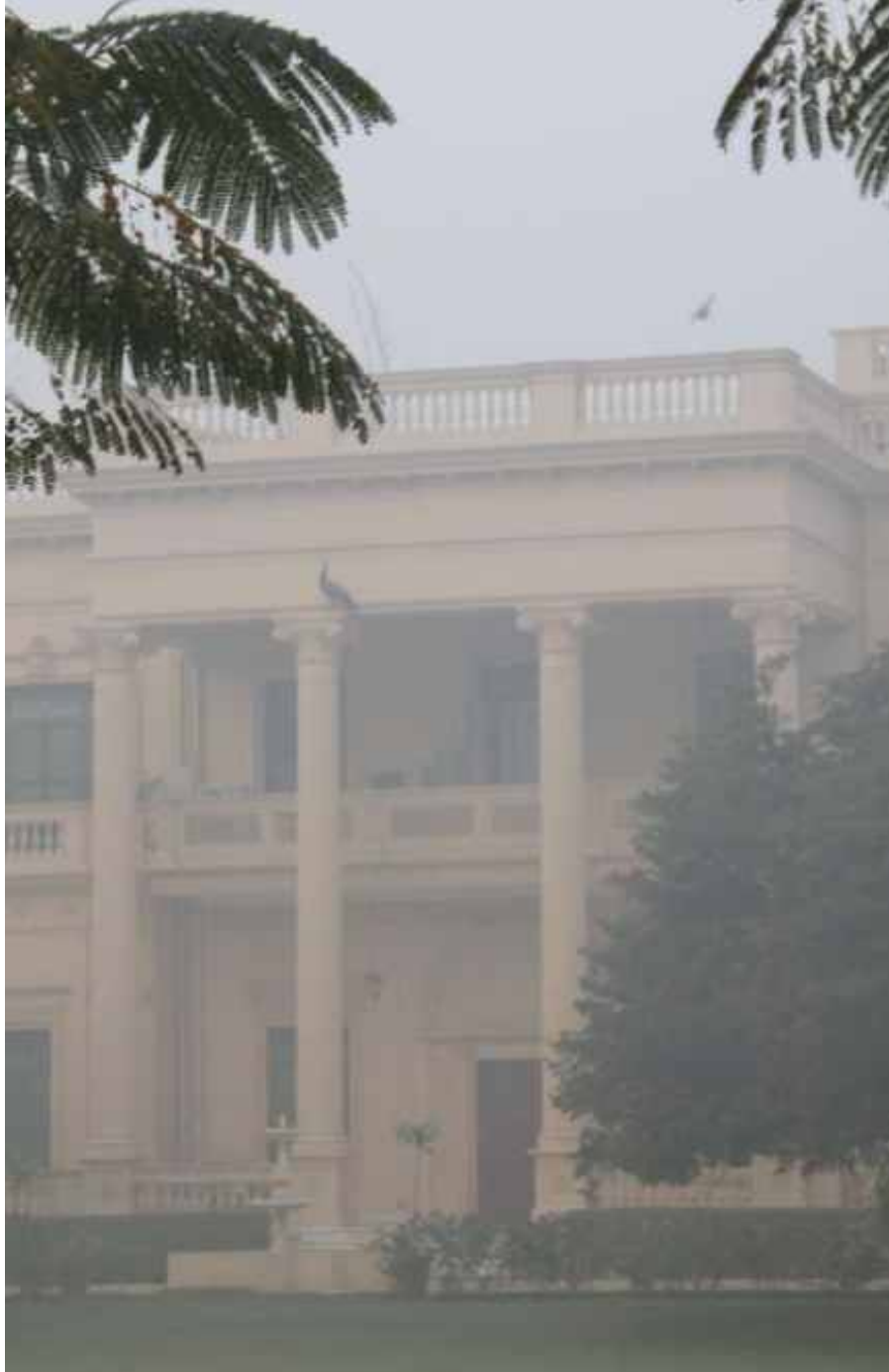


Sheikhpura Kothi

Located across 72 acres of farmland, [Sheikhpura Kothi](#) in Hansi, Haryana is a 150 year old property built on the lines of a French chateau. The spacious six exuberant rooms and suites with all the modern facilities exude both charm and hauteur. Given its close proximity to Delhi international airport, the Shekhawati region of Rajasthan and Patiala in Punjab, Sheikhpura Kothi makes for a refreshing and interesting stopover after a tour of the Golden Triangle (Delhi-Agra -Jaipur) or for those guests looking at something new and want to combine the Golden Triangle with the open art galleries of the Shekhawati region and jest and effervescence of Punjab. Sheikhpura Kothi today stands on what was once the territory of the legendary and whimsical Colonel James Skinner. He was an Anglo-Indian military adventurer born of a British father and a Rajput mother. Known as Sikandar Sahib to the locals, he lived like an Indian landlord in Hansi, taking great interest in the cultivation of his estates. Many of his friends recalled the delicious Indian food, good conversation and relaxation with the hookah with Skinner. He spoke the local dialect fluently and wrote Persian more easily than English.

Adds Kuntal from our Destination Knowledge Centre who stayed at the Sheikhpura Kothi recently “From the battleground of the mythological Hindu Epic Mahabharata to Mohammed Ghauri; the first Muslim invader of Indian history to the one and only independent European King of India; an Irish mercenary who spoke chaste Haryanvi, the local dialect and built a Fort from where he ruled for 4 years, until he was defeated by a combined British, Maratha and Sikh army led by Colonel James Skinner, to a rare private collection of a villager which brings alive the stories of a 5000 year old Harrapan Mega City not so far away from the property... the Sheikhpura Kothi experience is refreshingly different. One can also choose to do nothing and simply relax with home style food cooked by a Khansama; a male cook and house steward of a noble family of the Indian sub-continent. He has been with the owners for nearly 55 years. Minimum 2 night stay.”

Stay At



Early Mornings at Sheikhpura Kothi



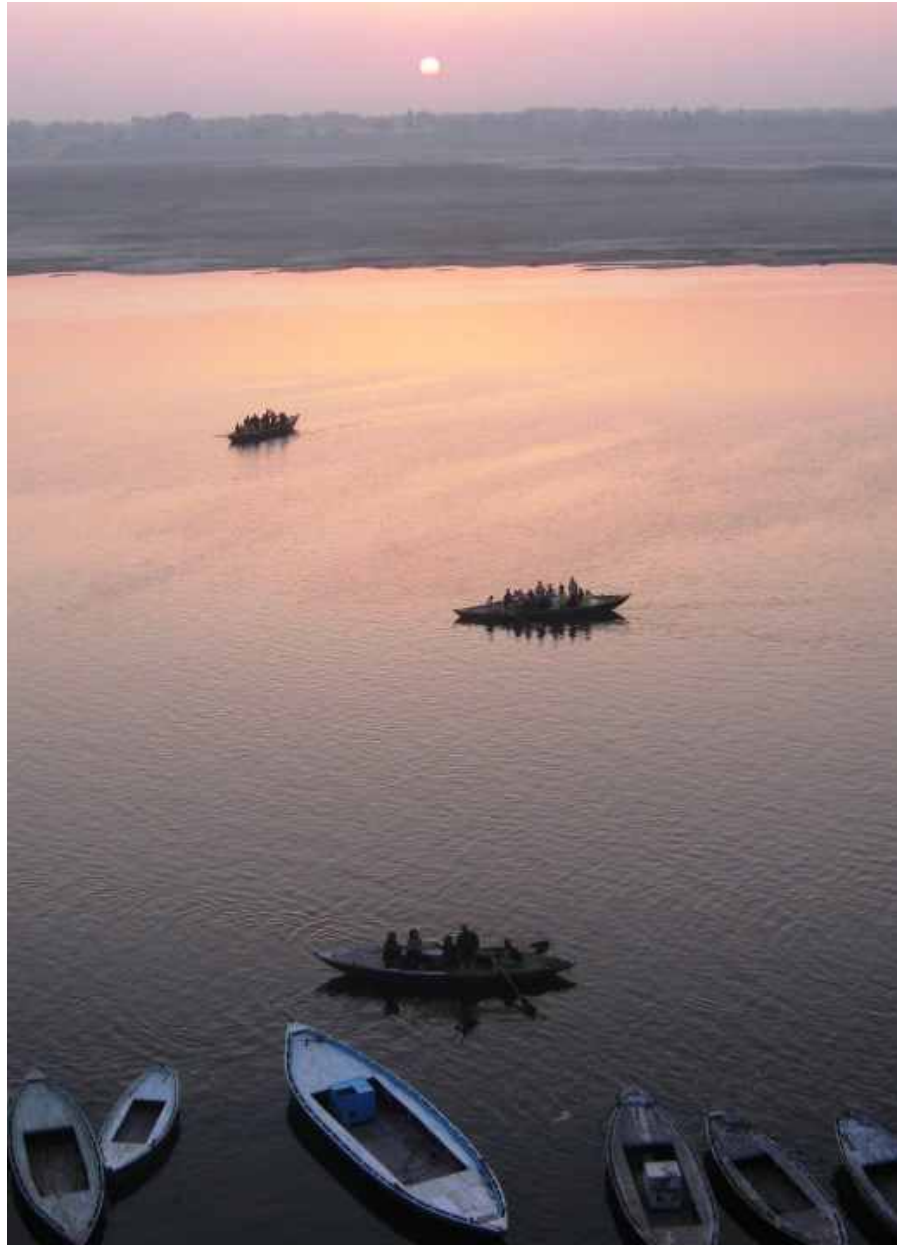
The Boat Man from Varanasi

Prakash wakes up at the crack of dawn and leaves for Dashaswamedh Ghat where his boat is anchored. Listening to the gentle sound of the water lapping against the shores, he gets his boat ready for our guests. The sounds of soul stirring hymns float across the water mingled with the incense filled in the air. "I watch Varanasi get up from its slumber and pray that the day goes well," he tells us. Prakash has been living in Varanasi all his life and started helping his father, Motilal to row a boat, when he was just 10 years old. At around 05:30 hrs Prakash escorts our guests from the ghat to his boat. After making sure that everyone is comfortable, he starts the one hour boat journey south from Dasaswamedh Ghat to Harishchandra Ghat. "I love the morning boat ride. Watching the early morning sun rays shimmering across the Ganges fills me with an immense sense of peace. It's a truly spiritual experience which mostly all guests enjoy," he smiles.

What about the burning ghat where Hindus cremate their dead? How do our guests react? Prakash tells us that, while some guest's request to linger on at the burning ghats, such as Harishchandra and Manikarnika a little longer; others want to go away quickly. "Varanasi is that one destination in India which offers a mind boggling combination of vitality of life and the finality of death. Perhaps this is what makes Varanasi unique. People either love it or hate it," he tells us. Prakash gets back home at around 08:30 hrs. He has his food, finishes his daily chores and rests a while. Later in the day he meets his friends, mostly fellow boatmen and catches up with all the latest gossip by the banks of the Ganga over a cup of hot steaming chai (tea). Afternoon is the time to relax.

At around 1730 hrs he goes to the Sita office to enquire about future assignments and to get his boat slips encashed. Boat slips are like vouchers to be exchanged for money later. Its time now for Prakash to get ready for the evening Aarti at Dashaswamedh Ghat which starts at around 18:30 hrs and lasts for about an hour. "It's a beautiful sight to watch these young men sway to chants, holding lamps in their hands, invoking India's holiest river. Guests really love watching the ceremony from the boat," Prakash tells us. And what is his most cherished memory as a boatman? He says that when he was young and was helping his dad row the boat, guests used to click his photo. "I found it really fascinating," he adds. So any tips for our guests? "Well, in the

A Day in The Life Of Prakash



morning as soon as we start the boat ride I have seen many guests getting busy with their cameras immediately. Many of them miss out on the magical sunrise because they are so busy clicking pictures. Maybe they should relax a bit and soak in whatever is unfolding. There is enough time and enough photo opportunity," Prakash tells us. He calls it a day at around 20:00 hrs as he has to wake up early in the morning. "I end my day with a prayer to God thanking him for a great and sometime not so great day and await eagerly for tomorrow," he tells us.



Tête-à-tête with a Polo Player

“Polo is everything to me; it’s made me what I am and given me the loveliest of friends, a wife who is as mad as me about the animal and a family where every body is a horse lover. I call my family a ‘horsey’ family. My mother understood my passion way before I did and always encouraged me, despite the fact that I was compromising on my academics,” says Polo Player Himmat Singh Bedla of Udaipur who we caught up with on the sidelines of the Jodhpur Polo season. Himmat has also played for the India Polo Team a couple of times.

Himmat was 3 when he saw his first horse, one of his grandfather’s last. He was called Naughty Boy. “I become extremely close to him. So much so as I refused to go to school and wanted to spend all my time with him. He was my best friend,” he tells us. Himmat’s mother always encouraged him and used to let him go on the horse to school. The horse was tied along with his friend’s bicycles and during lunch time Himmat would eat with Naughty Boy. “My passion to ride only magnified as I grew. When I was in the 4th 5th and 6th grade I was taking part in horse competitions” Himmat used to wake up in the morning at five and cycle 12kms to Shikarbari and ride. He always got late for school and slept in the classroom tired from all the riding. “My teachers always complained about my sleeping to my folks. It didn’t make any difference to me as I know I was meant to ride,” Himmat tells us with a smile.

Mayo College was a life changer for Himmat as horses were introduced in 1994. He made it to the ridding team and soon was playing polo. His first official game was in Jodhpur was in 1997 where Mayo College played against the Jodhpur Polo Team. “The perks we guys got as riders in school were good, missing the assembly, late breakfast, and owning a polo stick, keeping it in class as we had to go ridding after that. It was cool!”

Himmat bought his first horse in college with the money meant for his motorcycle. He convinced the man who was selling the horse that he will pay him the rest when he had the money. So how did it feel to have your own horse? “Well I guess I was meant to have that horse and I got him, just like that! I called him Naughty Boy.” [click here to read more](#)





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We are a Sharing Society

India has the knack of being a “sharing” society. Cars here are usually made for 4 passengers, buses for about 60, trains for about a 1000. Yet it is common to see heavily laden vehicles everywhere in India. 10 in a 900 cc small car? No problem...100 in a bus meant for 60...no problem. Trains with rooftop traveler's since 1500 have already boarded comfortably... no problem.....sorry...had to duck....no problem. Now if that isn't a positive outlook to life what is? Accidents do occur sometimes but more people die of choking on chicken legs than on Indian roads. Some newer highways are trying to keep out two wheel drive vehicles but that's proving hard to implement. We've all shared the same roads since the wheel was invented; cows, bulls, chicken, camels, sheep, elephants, camels again, goats, trucks, bicycles, cars, sedans, delivery vans, donkeys, 24 wheelers carrying unpronounceable parts of a hydroelectric dam's main control console and gleefully crawling on the fastest lane, rickshaws, pedestrians et al. As everyone does not go in the same direction, our reflexes are usually sharp and if nothing else works, we always have our horns to blow. Understanding the traffic sense on your India visit is a futile exercise. Just enjoy the ride, even with your eyes shut wide!! We are not always proud of what we do (or don't do) while we drive. But the one thing we can reassure you about is that we love to reach our destination safely as much as you do!!

Spotted By Sita



Photo shot by - Mr Dipak Deva, CEO Destination Management, India & South Asia



Makki ki Roti & Sarso ka Saag

Saab at the [Punjabiyat](#) highly recommends Makki ki Roti and Sarso ka Saag, as a must try during your stay here. Till March this year Saab; a local, was one of the manual labourers who built Punjabiyat. Given his passion for cooking, he was retained along with a couple of his friends from the village who worked at the site by its responsible owners. Saab is being trained under the watchful eyes of a Chef as the second-in-command in the kitchen and specialises in local cuisine of Punjab (read more in our 6 Things We liked About section).

“A visit to Punjab is incomplete without sampling Makki ki Roti and Sarso ka Saag,” says Saab. While Makki ki Roti is a flat unleavened bread made out of corn flour, Sarso ka Saag are mustard leaves cooked in slow wood fire for several hours in a hearth. This simple combination is a favourite in Punjab during the winter season. “The Sarso ka Saag is cooked by my mother at home to ensure that the flavour is authentic. I make the Makki ki Rotis here at Punjabiyat,” smiles Saab.” Its is incredibly tasty. Saab’s mother gets paid each time she cooks Sarson ka Saag for guests staying at the Punjabiyat. It was great to know about how the culinary offerings of a property can support the local community and members of its staff. No wonder Saab came across as someone hugely motivated. And don’t forget to add a dollop of white butter sourced locally on your Makki ki Roti while trying this signature combination of Punjab,” says Kuntal from our Destination Knowledge Centre.

Top Chef Recommends





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The 2 Day Chola Tour, Pondicherry and more

On my recent trip to Tamil Nadu, I wanted to do a classical tour but at the same time I wanted to cover places like Mangala Heritage, Nagapattinam and Dindigul which could easily be included to make the itinerary more relaxed.

My first stop was Chennai. Though it had rained continuously the week before, I was fortunate enough to get clear weather. After checking into my hotel, I proceeded for lunch at Sabita Radhakrishna's house. Sabita is a freelance writer, food columnist and broadcaster. Nowadays she also entertains clients at her house over lunch, where she cooks authentic Tamil Cuisine. The more adventurous can do a cooking class with her. She has a beautiful house, filled with knick-knacks which the husband and wife duo have collected from their travels. Sabita is also a textile activist and on request shows you her extensive and rare collection. A stop at her place for lunch or dinner makes for a good introduction to the Tamil cuisine and way of life.

To add a twist to the ordinary, imagine learning about the history of San Thome Church, its architecture and the history of the locality from the Father of the Church himself. Sounds interesting doesn't it? So the next time you are in Chennai get in touch with us to make it happen. Before proceeding to your next destination, whether it is Mahabalipuram or Pondicherry, I would recommend that you make an early morning stop at Koyembedu Flower and the Vegetable market. The sheer size of the market and the riot of colours make it a sight not to be missed.

Going back to Pondicherry after 2009, I was dreading that the juggernaut of modernisation would have changed this quaint little town. I am happy to say that the French Quarter (White Town) hasn't changed much. Pondicherry is a one of the few cities in India where walking is such a delight. I will not talk much about Villa Shanti here again, since I have already covered its excellent food and the hotel in other sections of this newsletter. Instead I will talk about Palais de Mahe. As usual CGH Earth does not disappoint. The service was excellent and the rooms are very spacious. Palais de Mahe boasts of a pool too, which is rare amongst the smaller properties in the French Quarter. The inclement weather meant, I didn't have an opportunity to swim. Over the years there have been a few Bed & Breakfast, which have mushroomed all over. Two of these which are worth mentioning;

Destination Insider



Gratitude and La Closierie Bay of Bengal. Gratitude is a lovely heritage home restored by INTACH, from a French colonial home. The owners of this chic, eight-room B&B are passionate about textiles and pottery. The property's highlight is its central courtyard and the giant mango tree which dominates it. When you enter the property a sense of calm and peace envelopes you. La Closierie on the other hand is much more contemporary. A water body in the center of the property draws your attention and (like Gratitude) has only six rooms, each having a different character and price. Both options can be looked at for the value conscious traveller. I came upon both these properties on my walk with INTACH, who not only tell you interesting stories about the town and buildings but you also step inside a few of the buildings to see the restoration project. For me the only way to enjoy Pondicherry is to stay inside the French Quarter and discover the place on foot. Get in touch with us to know more about an exclusive product that we have created - A French Day in Pondicherry; where we try to create the feel of how a French local would spend time in the city.

[Click Here](#) to read more



Punjabiyaat

6 Things We Liked About

1. **Location and Atmosphere:** [Punjabiyaat](#) quietly located in the fields of rural Punjab; save, what we thought was really cool, the occasional thumping of Punjabi music from the speakers of a distant tractor of a local farmer, relaxes you completely. Small with just 4 stand alone air-conditioned cottages, complete with private terraces. Simple, unpretentious yet stylish, complimented by local architecture, superbly comfortable with good food and unobtrusive service by a staff with great camaraderie. “Punjabiyaat was a very relaxing end to my trip, where I met some really good people and discovered the exciting possibility of combining the Golden Triangle (Delhi-Agra-Jaipur) with Punjab with a couple of very interesting stops. We are happy to share the itinerary,” says Kuntal from our Destination Knowledge Centre who stayed there recently. Punjabiyaat works very well for a couple of nights to relax at the end of the Golden Triangle trip (read more in our Destination Insider section) after spending a night in Amritsar. The night ceremony and the positive vibrations of the Golden Temple (read more in our Spotted By section) is an experience not to be missed and is best experienced by staying in Amritsar. Stay at the [Ranjit Svaasa](#). And don't forget to climb up to the Dome of the Golden Temple after the night ceremony where you can also see some amazing Sikh Temple Artwork. Have a leisurely breakfast the next day and head to Punjabiyaat which is a 2 hour drive from Amritsar. “I loved the spectacular sunsets post my afternoon siestas across the fields whose colours change with the crop of the season and as the pathway of Punjabiyaat is lit up with lanterns in the evening, Satti; a local who till 7 months back was a labour on site as the Punjabiyaat was getting ready, serves you the most delicious kebabs and wine. It has been very special,” says Kuntal

2. **Staff:** We liked Punjabiyaat's courteous staff who had a great sense of camaraderie. Labour working on site as the Punjabiyaat was built were retained by its responsible owners and trained to serve guests. One of them is training to be a Chef. “You could see they are connected to the place. And why not? It was something they themselves built with their hands. It's amazing how fast they learnt and do such a great job. I never felt the necessity to lock my door during my entire stay in Punjabiyaat” says Kuntal. It was a smart move too. Prince; for example was a plumber on site and now couples up serving guests at the Punjabiyaat. He exactly knows what



he did and any plumbing works gets done much faster when there is any. Tips from guests are equally shared by the staff which also includes Gama, the night watchman of Punjabiyaat who took Kuntal to his cousin's dairy farm for a glass of buffalo milk. One can cycle down with Gama to the dairy farm enjoying the countryside if not the buffalo milk. Punjabiyaat provides helmets too on request.

3. **Architecture:** Punjabiyaat which is only into its first season has inquisitive locals from in and around the area landing there occasionally on Sunday afternoons after their prayers in the village Sikh temple. “We had many landing up just as it got ready. Punjabiyaat's traditional architecture is fast fading these days, very rare to see and it is from our grandfathers' times,” says Jagdeep Singh, Punjabiyaat's soft-spoken yet very helpful manager. If there are no guests, the locals are allowed in and they return happy after clicking a few pictures. Punjabiyaat is built entirely by mud and mud bricks by a vanishing breed of indigenous construction experts. The mud used for plastering was scooped out from the site where Punjabiyaat stands. The layer of mud bricks placed on the roof are made out of wood beams interspersed with smaller wooden frames insulated with a thick layer of mud which keeps the interiors cool when it is hot outside and warm when it is cold outside. “I stayed there in November when we had great sunny days and it was pleasantly cool inside where I didn't feel the need for air-conditioning. It was just beginning to get a little cold at night and I remember going back to the cosy warmth of my room after dinner. Punjabiyaat's traditional style of construction would have retained the warmth of the sunny day,” says Kuntal. [Click here to read more](#)



Festivals



Kali Puja, Kolkata 23th October 2014

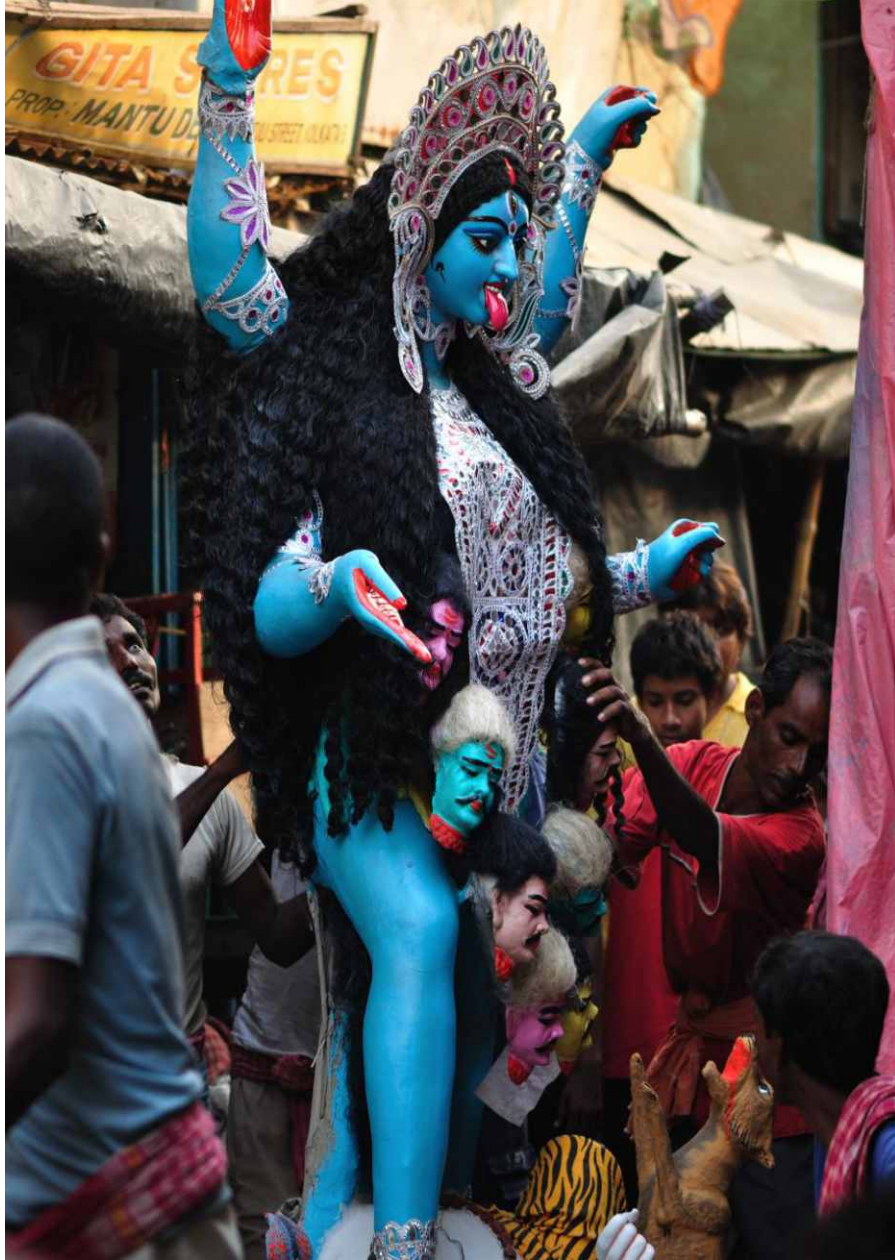
'Baro mashe, tero porbo' the Bengali saying, which means 12 months, 13 festivals, epitomises the spirit of Kolkata. Diwali, the festival of lights in Kolkata, coincides with the worship of Goddess Kali by Bengali households. Kali is worshipped as the Mother Goddess who protects all from evil. The actual prayer takes place at midnight on the day of the new moon. Most families clean their houses and light candles all over their houses. Children and adults set off firecrackers throughout the night. It is a night of sheer revelry. While it is easy to misinterpret her terrifying iconography, in Hinduism Kali is considered the Goddess who kills the ego and liberates the soul from the cycle of birth and death.

To immerse in the festivities of Kali Puja on October 23, Sita have divided the day into 2 half days for your clients.

First half: Post breakfast we will visit the Kumartoli area where the idols of Goddess Kali Puja are made. There are about 450 of them; run by families that have been into idol-making and pottery for generations. Kumartoli means potters' quarter. On Diwali day, Kumartoli is a bee hive of activities of locals collecting the idols of Goddess Kali, which they have ordered to worship in their homes. The potters of Kumartoli have still kept a lot of old traditions alive. The idol makers still use water from the Hooghly River to mix the clay and make the idols. It is not the easiest thing to do, since they have to hire water carriers, but most of the artists still follow this tradition. Kumartoli streets are narrow and there are lanes and by lanes; that is what lends Kumartoli a character. It is not a typical studio, where potters do their clay modeling, these streets are as old as Kolkata itself.

We will return to the hotel after your tour of Kumartoli. On our way back, we will buy a Kurta Pyjama for the gentleman and a traditional Lal Paari Bengali Sari for the women, to be worn in the evening. This is, with our compliments.

Second half: In the evening, dressed up in traditional Bengali clothes, we will go Puja Pandal hopping in the city to immerse ourselves in the Kali Puja celebration. In Hinduism, Puja Pandal is a temporary structure set up by various neighbourhoods to venerate Gods and



Kolkata locals collecting an idol of Goddess Kali from Kumartoli

Goddesses. After our Pandal hopping, we will visit the home of a local Bengali family who are friends of Sita, to participate in a private Kali Puja celebration.

For more details email us at info@sita.in





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
OTDYKH Leisure Fair Moscow 16th - 19th September	Booth No 3E502	Ernest Dias & Deepak Sharma
Kerala Travel Mart Cochin, India 18th - 20th September	Booth No A 32	Philip Thomas
Top Resa Paris 23rd - 26th September	India Tourism Stand No: H 15	Carole Gallo
UITM Kiev 1st - 3rd October	Sita Desk	Deepak Sharma
TTG Rimini 9th - 11th October	India Tourism Pavilion C3 Booth No. 021-025/036-040	Matteo Pennacchi
WTM London 3rd - 6th November	Hall No S8, Booth No IN200	Dipak Deva & Neeraj Bhatt
USTOA Boca Raton, Florida 5th - 7th December	Sita Desk	Neeraj Bhatt

Trade Shows

