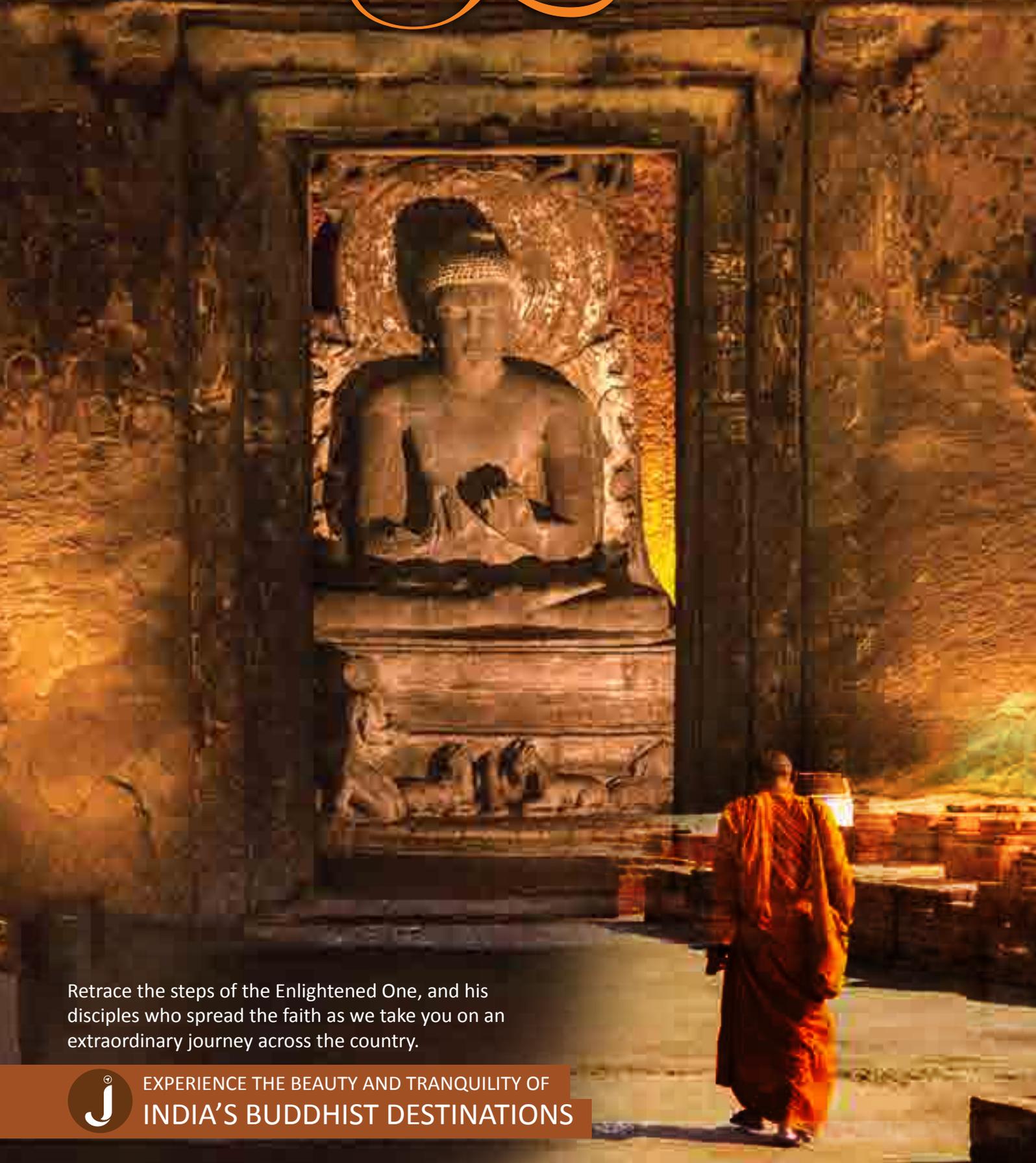


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Vol 4, Issue II, Jul – Sep 2018



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FESTIVALS

OCTOBER – DECEMBER 2018



Mysuru Dasara
Mysuru, Karnataka
October 19, 2018

Legend goes that the city of Mysuru was once ruled by a buffalo-headed demon, Mahishasura. To free the people from his reign, the Goddess Parvathi took the form of Chamundeshwari and vanquished him in a battle that lasted nine days and nine nights. The city derives its name from Mahishasura and celebrates the victory of good over evil with the nine-day Dasara Festival, a tradition started by the Vijayanagara kings in the 19th century.

The Mysuru Palace is illuminated and the streets overflow with processions of decked-up elephants carrying the idol of Chamundeshwari in the golden *howdah* – to be worshipped by the royal family and masses alike – along with colourful tableaux, groups of dancers, music bands, and horses and camels.



Pushkar Fair
Pushkar, Rajasthan
November 15 – 23, 2018

Winding their way down tracks across hills under the blazing sun and onto the yellow shifting sands arrive merchants, herders, and traders, on camels, horses, and on foot to one of the largest camel fairs in the country. Pushkar is believed to be one of the most ancient and sacred towns in India.

Horses, cows, goats, and sheep are also sold at the annual Pushkar Fair. Bedecked in bright cloth, dyed, printed, and embroidered, wearing tinkling bells, the animals look spectacular. Proud owners astride their elegant camels sashay down the runway; craftspeople, and folk dancers and musicians make for an exuberant, colourful, and resplendent five-day fair.

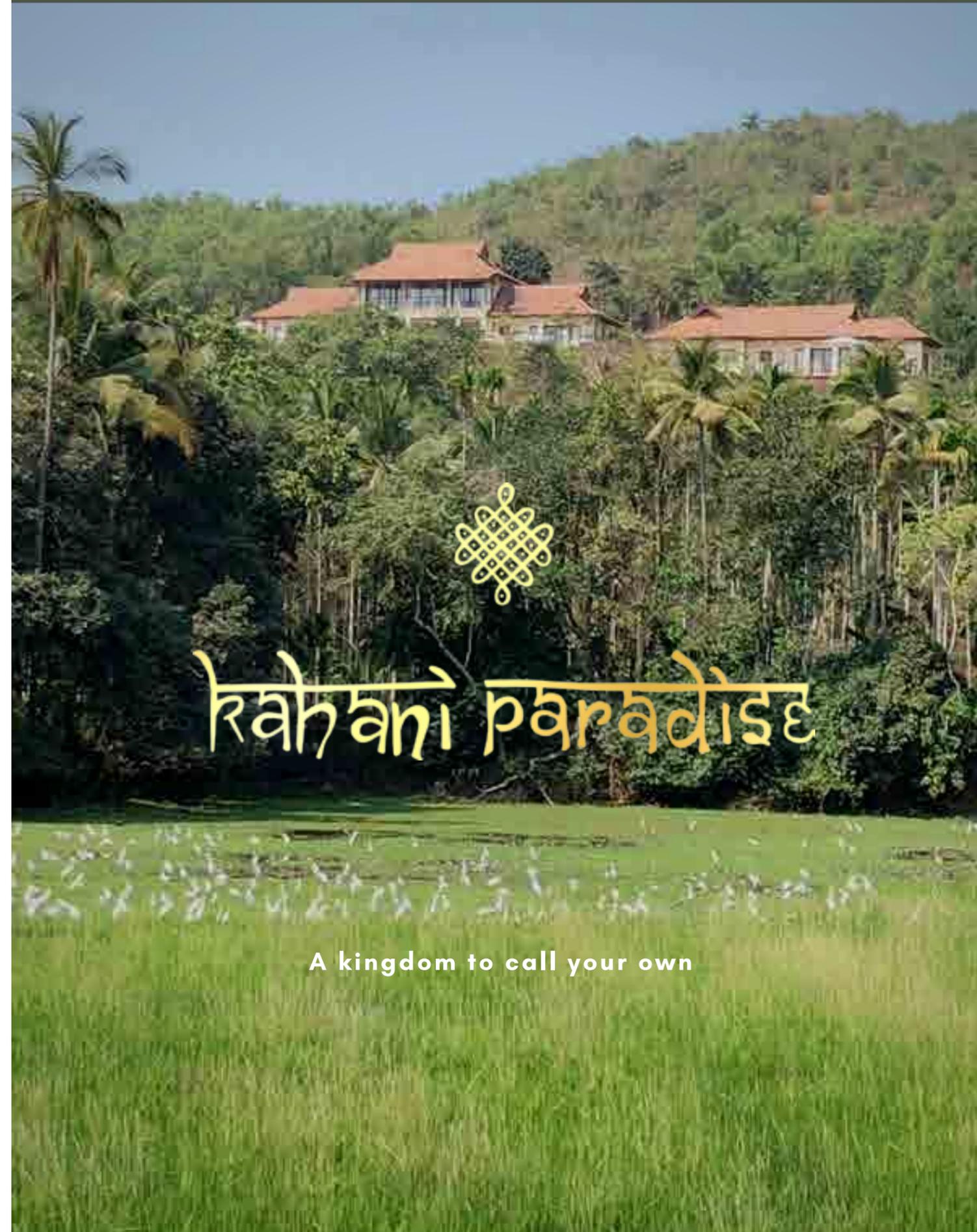


Lumbini Festival
Hyderabad, Telangana
December 14 – 16, 2018

The Buddha was born in Lumbini Grove, one of the most important Buddhist pilgrimage sites in the world.

2000 years on, the significance, and ancient heritage of Buddhism is honoured every year with the Lumbini Festival. Celebrated in Nagarjunasagar in Hyderabad, the capital of Telangana, in south India, the three-day festival takes place in December, and especially marks the importance of Buddhism in the state. The entire Nagarjunasagar Dam is specially illuminated during the Festival.

Remembering and commemorating the simple yet beautiful philosophy of the Buddha, the Festival organises activities, theatre events, plays, music; also making adequate arrangements for the innumerable tourists and pilgrims from all over India and the world. Local craftspeople showcase their exquisite works.



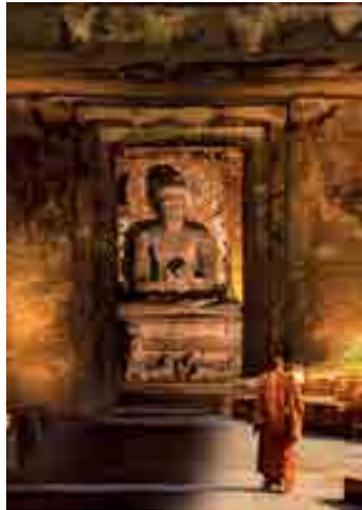
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INSPIRING JOURNEYS



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Cover Story

Experience the beauty and tranquility of India's Buddhist destinations...



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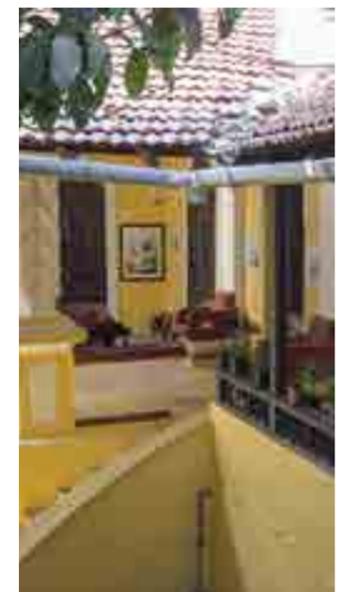
Evoking nostalgia and affording great visual experiences, India's ancestral homes are magnificent and distinct...



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Message from the MD

Dear Partners

The ways we travel or holiday – how, why, and where – are perhaps as distinct and varied as the destinations themselves. Our intended and continuing 'theme', therefore, is to not stick to any particular theme; rather, to present a compass of elements that represent a novel kind of journeying – the kind that steer you to destinations that give you a genuine sense of place, culture, food, history, people, sustainability, and experience rather than mere sightseeing. Some are destinations that will reward the traveller. Some are places that we love most yet are deeply threatened – and we try to preserve them through these pages.

What we offer in *Inspiring Journeys* is what, we hope, sets it apart.

It is in the subcontinent of India where the Buddha's final journey around the wheel of life took shape. And it is here that his earliest relics still lie, here where the memories of his first sermons still resound. Retrace the steps of the Enlightened One, and his disciples who spread the faith as we take you on an extraordinary journey, spanning time and place, across the country.

Odisha, an eastern state bordering the Bay of Bengal, has a splendid secret – a magnificent riverine gorge that waited patiently for 30 years to be declared a tiger reserve. Here, you can hear the roar of the big cat in the forests straddling the gorge, and watch endangered crocodiles fishing in the River Mahanadi.

Against the spectacular backdrop of ancient carved temples in Central India, the country's finest artistes set the stage afire in a week-long celebration of classical dance and music.

On the stunning Konkan Coast bordering the Arabian Sea on India's west, tiny Goa bursts with flavours redolent of its 450-year old Latin legacy – a cuisine that stands out for its seamless mosaic of culinary styles, techniques, ingredients, and eating habits.

India's incredible diversity can be seen in the rich cultural and architectural heritage of its splendid ancestral homes. Come home to serene, glorious living spaces where the walls hide history and time seems to stand still.

A stay at one of Goa's baroque Portuguese-era casas promises to be a unique and unforgettable holiday experience. A sojourn of discovery of Goa's remarkable history and architecture.

Writing our Guest Column this edition is a young entrepreneur turned voyager whose love of travel translates into curated experiential explorations of India through the many hidden or forgotten alleys of its sprawling cities.

We have chosen locations of character – unique, compelling, and integral to the splendid tapestry that is India. You may know some of these but take a look again through our eyes! Others, we hope, will surprise and delight you enough to entice you to explore them.

Here's to the sheer joy of travel.

With warm regards

Mario Habig
Managing Director
Le Passage to India Journeys

It's not what you look at that matters. It's what you see.

– Henry David Thoreau

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THE TRAIL OF THE BUDDHA

Born into affluence – literally a prince among men – he searched for answers to the eternal questions, “What is it all about? What is the meaning of life?” The answers he found have resounded with billions of people over the last 2500 years. Of course the prince was Siddhartha Gautama, later to be recognised as The Buddha, The Enlightened One.

His teachings on compassion and the impermanent interdependence of all phenomena, spread from Egypt to China before the first century BCE, yet were so obliterated in India by the end of the Medieval period that scholar/administrators of the British Empire first thought that the Buddha was born in Africa, based on his curly top knot, seen in South and Southeast Asian sculptures.



Lumbini, Nepal

“You are too concerned with what was and what will be. There is a saying: Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery but, today is a gift...that is why it is called the present.**”**

– Master Oogway to Po in *Kung Fu Panda*

LUMBINI (NEPAL)

This Indian prince was actually born in what is now Nepal. His mother, Queen Mayadevi, was en route to her parental kingdom in 563 BCE and gave birth to this great being in Lumbini. According to tradition, earlier Buddhas were also born and achieved ultimate Enlightenment in the region. Lumbini has ruins of ancient monasteries, a sacred Bodhi tree, and an ancient bathing pond where the Buddha's mother presumably took the ritual dip prior to his birth, and where he had his first bath. The Mayadevi temple is visited by thousands of Hindus during the full moon of Baisakh (April–May) to worship Queen Mayadevi as Rupa Devi, the mother of an incarnation of Vishnu, Preserver of the Universe.

Asoka, emperor of the Mauryan Empire, visited the Buddha's birthplace in the 3rd century BCE; and you can still see the pillar declaring the village tax free. In 2001, a Peace Pagoda was built by the Nipponzan Myohoji. The entire holy site of Lumbini is bordered by a large monastic zone in which only monasteries can be built; no shops, hotels or restaurants. One can take a boat tour in the canal between the various monasteries on either side of this UNESCO World Heritage Site.



Lumbini, NEPAL

BODH GAYA (BIHAR)

Bodh Gaya is the most important of the main four Buddhist pilgrimage sites related to the life of Gautama Buddha, along with Lumbini, Sarnath and Kushinagar. It is a moving experience to sit under the same Bodhi tree where he meditated until he attained enlightenment. If you are lucky, an auspicious leaf may fall in your lap!

After mastering the highly evolved meditation practices available in first millennium BCE India culminating in six years of extreme asceticism, the Buddha came to the realisation that such extremes could not release him from the bonds of existence. Following a middle path between austerities and luxury, the prince – prophesied to become either the greatest king or the greatest teacher the world would know – became a guide to relieve the suffering of existence.

The town of Bodh Gaya buzzes with visitors from across the globe. Every variety of Buddhist practice from Myanmar, Nepal, Sikkim, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand, Tibet, and Vietnam have centres for monks, nuns, laity, and guests built to reflect the architectural style and decor of their respective countries. There are



Bodh Gaya, Bihar

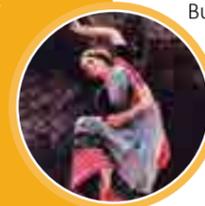
“Asoka, emperor of the Mauryan Empire, visited the Buddha's birthplace in the 3rd century BCE; and you can still see the pillar declaring the village tax free.**”**

also innumerable hotels, guest houses, restaurants, and shops open late into the evening with treasures to take home. If you have time to stay, there is an International Meditation Centre offering Vipassana and the Root Institute's frequent Mahayana short courses, among others.

Even a day's visit will leave images etched in memory of the magnificent Mahabodhi temple, built under the Gupta Empire, 6th century CE after the first by Emperor Asoka when he visited in 250 BCE. The 50-metre temple adjoining the Bodhi Tree is protected by inner, middle, and outer

SHARON LOWEN

Sharon Lowen first travelled to India as a Fulbright Scholar to study classical Indian dance as a cultural sojourn; 45 years on, she is an internationally acclaimed and respected leading exponent of the Odissi, Chhau, and Manipuri dance forms.

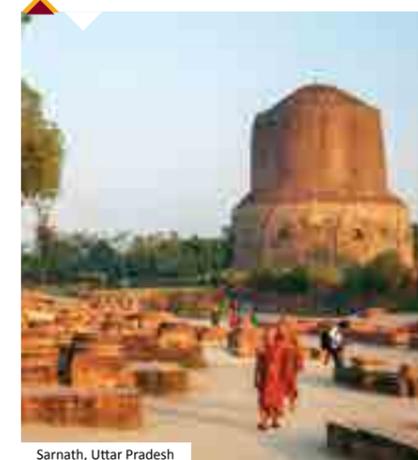


As Founder of the NGO Manasa – Art without Frontiers, Sharon has dedicated her life to the appreciation and understanding of the Indian performing arts and culture.

circular boundaries. Within the complex are six other sacred sites related to the Buddha's enlightenment, numerous ancient votive stupas, and the sacred Lotus Pond. There is a sense of peace and beauty as one circulates at two or three levels, stopping to contemplate or meditate at will. Congregations of various schools of Buddhist practice are given scheduled weeks for offering teachings directly in front of the Bodhi Tree. There is a super museum for those interested in knowing more of the history of this UNESCO World Heritage Site.

SARNATH (UTTAR PRADESH)

The Deer Park, Sarnath is where Gautama Buddha taught the First Turning of the Wheel of Dharma to his disciples, the five fellow ascetics who realised he had not given up but found a truer path. Located close to Varanasi in the state of Uttar Pradesh, the Deer Park is also where the Buddhist Sangha came into existence. If you are here on the Buddha's birthday, Buddha Purnima (the full moon of May), there is a once-a-year-only opportunity to see the relics of the Buddha



Sarnath, Uttar Pradesh

in a procession that accompanies a splendid fair. Any time of the year you can see the surviving Dhamekh Stupa covered in stone engravings of many scripts, the pillar of Emperor Asoka who visited and founded many institutions here, ruins of various ancient branches of Buddhism as well as gorgeous temples built by many nations.

NALANDA, RAJGIR (BIHAR)

H.H. the Dalai Lama refers to himself as a son of India in gratitude for the profound Buddhist teachings transmitted to Tibet by scholar/translators from Nalanda University.



Nalanda, Bihar

“The final journey of Buddha’s life, which ended with the mahaparinirvana at Kushinagar, began at Rajgir.”

One has to see this vast archeological site in Rajgir to imagine the thousands of students from across Asia studying philosophy and other subjects from the 5th century on. There is a museum that exhibits the Nalanda University seal, sculptures, and other remains found on the site.

VULTURE PEAK, RAJGIR (BIHAR)

Rajgir is the place where the Buddha taught the Transcendent Perfection of Wisdom (Prajna paramita), at the Vulture Peak, 16 years after his enlightenment, to an assembly of 5,000 monks, nuns, and laity, as well as innumerable bodhisattvas. This teaching is known as the second turning of the Wheel of Dhamma and focuses on understanding the meaning of ‘emptiness’, sunyata, which is the ultimate nature of phenomena. This is also the place where Buddha Shakyamuni tamed the wild elephant unleashed by his jealous cousin Devadatta. In Rajgir, King Bimbisara offered the Veluvana Bamboo Grove to the followers of the Buddha. The site was



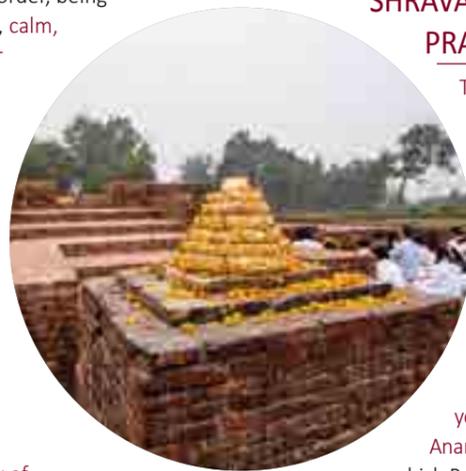
Sanchi, Madhya Pradesh



Sanchi, Madhya Pradesh

ideal for a monastic order, being not too near the city, calm, and enjoying mild air and cool water. Thus it was suited to the practice of meditation, and here Shakyamuni passed the first rainy season retreat following his enlightenment. He was to return to this place for several rainy season retreats later in his life. The final journey of Buddha’s life, which ended with the mahaparinirvana at Kushinagar, began at Rajgir.

In the nearby Saptarni Cave, also known as Shaptaparna Cave, the First Council—an assembly of 500 monks presided over by Buddha’s great disciple and spiritual heir Mahakashyapa—met under the patronage of King Ajatasatru and compiled all the Buddha’s teachings from memory.



Shravasti, Uttar Pradesh

SHRAVASTI (UTTAR PRADESH)

This ancient capital city hosted many sanghas, or gathering of the Buddhist congregation where the Buddha both taught and performed legendary miracles. It is believed that you will be blessed if you meditate under the Ananda Bodhi tree under which Buddha himself passed

a night. Peaceful Jetavana is one of the most famous of the ancient Buddhist monasteries or vihara where the Buddha passed 19 of 45 monsoon seasons.

PATALIPUTRA (NOW PATNA) (BIHAR)

During the reign of Emperor Asoka in the 3rd century BCE, Pataliputra was one of the world’s largest cities, with a population of 150,000–400,000. Asoka’s brutal expansionism culminated in his victory over Kalinga (modern day Odisha), with 100,000

killed, 150,000 deported, and many times more dying later of injury and starvation. A guilty conscience was the turning point that pushed him to embrace the fairly new philosophy of Buddhism, promote it throughout his empire, and lead the dissemination far beyond South Asia.

SANCHI (MADHYA PRADESH)

Some of the finest early Buddhist art awaits you at Sanchi in Madhya Pradesh, known for its stupas, monasteries, temples, and pillars dating from the 3rd century BCE to the 12th century CE. The famous Sanchi Stupa may be the oldest stone structure in India and was originally built by Emperor Asoka. Its design was copied for the dome of the Imperial Presidential Palace in New Delhi. The four exquisitely carved gateways encircling the Stupa depict the stories and teaching of the Buddha, including various previous incarnations, miracles, and symbols: the lotus representing his birth and aspiration, the tree his enlightenment, the wheel derived from the Wheel of Dharma taught at his first sermon, and the footprints and throne marking his presence.

The Asoka Pillar near the southern gateway is known for its aesthetic proportions and balance. Even the 5th century CE Gupta temple is appreciated as one of the earliest known exiles of temple architecture in India. There is even a mammoth Buddha SL carved out of a single block of stone that contained all the food distributed amongst the monks. One should not miss the Sanchi museum which houses the lion capital of the Asoka Pillar that is India’s national emblem. If time permits, the sacred relics of the Satdhara



Ajanta cave painting, Aurangabad, Maharashtra

Stupa are enshrined in a glass casket of a modern monastery a few kilometres away.

AJANTA AND ELLORA CAVES (MAHARASHTRA)

From Sanchi, just outside of Madhya Pradesh’s capital Bhopal, one travels onward to the Ajanta and Ellora Caves near Aurangabad in Maharashtra. The legendary Ajanta rock-cut caves date from the 2nd century BCE to the 7th century CE. Imagine the amazement of the British officer chancing upon them at a time when few colonialists believed India had any verifiable ancient culture. Please give a full day to explore the lifelike frescos vividly painted in some of the 30 caves; while others impress with their stone carving and architectural design. The Ellora rock-cut cave temples date back to the 10th and 11th centuries and are frankly mind boggling as you try to figure out how one could possibly carve a huge temple complex from the top down!

“Nagarjuna was one of the most important Buddhist philosophers teaching at the Nalanda University and founder of the Madhyamaka school of Mahayana Buddhism.”



Ellora Caves, Aurangabad, Maharashtra



Nagarjunakonda, Telangana

NAGARJUNAKONDA, AMARAVATHI, AND SALIHUNDAM (TELANGANA/ANDHRA PRADESH)

Travelling southeast toward Telangana/ Andhra Pradesh reveals a treasure house of Buddhist sites. Nagarjuna, one of the most important Buddhist philosophers teaching at the Nalanda University and founder of the Madhyamaka school of Mahayana Buddhism, was responsible for a great deal of Buddhist activity in his place of origin. The archaeological relics at Nagarjunakonda (Nagarjuna Hill) were excavated and transferred to this island hill when the Nagarjuna Sagar Dam in Guntur District was constructed. The great stupa at Amaravati, built in phases between the 3rd century BCE and around 250 CE has wonderful sculptures, many in museum collections in India and abroad. The stupa and adjoining museum offer breathtaking examples of this pre-eminent art form that flourished over six centuries and is considered one of the three major schools of ancient Indian art, along with Mathura and Gandharan. Atop a hill on the bank of the River



Bylakuppe, Karnataka

Vamsadhara one can explore Salihundam, one of the main Buddhist excavation sites in India showing remains of the Mahayana, Theravada, and Vajrayan Buddhism stupas, relic caskets, and shrines built between the 2nd and 12th centuries. Buddhism thrived in coastal India for centuries and was exported along the trade routes from Odisha and Andhra Pradesh to Ceylon, Southeast and East Asia.



Dhauri, Odisha

NAMDROLING NYINGMAPA MONASTERY, BYLAKUPPE (KARNATAKA)

Today in South India you can visit the second largest Tibetan settlement in the world outside of Tibet after Dharmashala in a place called Bylakuppe in the Mysuru district of Karnataka. 3000 acres (12 sq. km) were generously given by the government in 1960 to create the first ever Tibetan exile settlement. Four more settlements make Karnataka the state with the largest Tibetan refugee population, continuing a millennia long tradition of welcoming refugees. Among the many splendid monasteries, don't miss visiting the Namdroling Nyingmapa Monastery, home to 5000 monks and nuns, a junior high school, and religious college along with a hospital. It is the largest teaching centre of the Nyingma lineage of Tibetan Buddhism in the world.

DHAULI (ODISHA)

Moving up the east coast of India to Odisha opens another world of ancient and modern Buddhist monuments. Dhauri is believed to be the location of the devastating Kalinga

“Today in South India you can visit the second largest Tibetan settlement in the world outside of Tibet after Dharmashala in a place called Bylakuppe in Karnataka.”

(Odisha) War that motivated Emperor Asoka to embrace Buddhist philosophy. Here you find the earliest Buddhist sculpture of Odisha, a rock-cut elephant above Asoka's edicts expressing his concern for the welfare of the world. A stunning white marble Japanese peace pagoda crowns the hill, built in the 1970s by the Japan Budha Sangha and the Kalinga Nippon Buddha Sangha.

RATNAGIRI, UDAIGIRI, AND LALITGIRI HILLS (ODISHA)

The ancient Chinese traveller to India, Hiuen Tsang or Xuanzang, referred to Pusipokili, the location of the Pushpagiri University which he compared to Nalanda in Bihar. This ancient university site includes Ratnagiri, Udaigiri, and Lalitgiri hills revealing monasteries, stupas, relics, seals, stone tablets, and statues with more under excavation. Ratnagiri is called the hill of precious gems while Lalitgiri is the red hill and Udaigiri, the hill of the rising sun. Ratnagiri was established by the Gupta kings in the 5th century CE and you can see two monasteries, a large stupa and many small votive stupas built till the 13th century. In Ratnagiri's main ancient monastery you can easily see the architectural style of Odisha that later inspired the stupas of Borobudur in Indonesia. The larger excavation site of Udaigiri reveals glimpses of what was once a prominent centre of Buddhism between the 7th-12th centuries CE: a massive stone Buddha, stepwell, stone carved gates and a large round Chaitya Griha (prayer hall) flanked by smaller stupas.

The most sacred of the three hills is Lalitgiri as a tooth relic of the Buddha was found in a casket filled with gold and precious stones



Tawang Monastery, Arunachal Pradesh

“There is no other deity in the Hindu pantheon except Odisha's Lord Jagannath, Ruler of the World, who is treated as the Buddha's incarnation.”

during the excavation of the Chaitya Griha and four monasteries. The casket can be seen in the site museum. All three of these Buddhist sites that were part of a huge university community can be seen in one long day before returning to Bhubaneswar. Odisha is rightly called the land of temples and the entire region was once filled with Buddhist temples, stupas, and monasteries. There is no other deity in the Hindu pantheon except Odisha's Lord Jagannath, Ruler of the World, who is treated as the Buddha's incarnation.

TAWANG (ARUNACHAL PRADESH)

Visiting the second largest monastery in the world in the 3000-metre high town of Tawang in India's Northeast state of Arunachal Pradesh was on my bucket list for years. Getting there is a challenge, first flying to Assam and then another day over land to enter Arunachal Pradesh and

start the journey upward. As I followed the land route taken by HH the Dalai Lama a week earlier, exploring old and new monasteries along the way, I treasured every breathtaking view driving through the clouds.

The Tawang Monastery was established in 1680 at the request of the 5th Dalai Lama. There are 65 residential buildings



Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh



Rumtek Monastery, Sikkim

for the Gelug monks with a 282-metre long compound wall around the whole three storied complex. Visiting the Dukhang, the assembly hall, your eyes rise toward the second floor to see the top of the 18-foot high gilded Buddha, seated in the lotus position. Next to the Buddha image there is a silver casket that holds a special thangka of the goddess Palden Lhamo, which is the guardian deity of the monastery. A building that had escaped fire and damage over time adjoins the 2002 renovated main temple revealing the life and art of earlier times. The monastery has a huge library and its own printing press, where wooden blocks and local paper are used to print Buddhist texts. The young monks, mostly from the Monpa community, are taught English, Hindi, Math, and Buddhist teachings in their school. Not to be missed is the museum with fascinating and precious temple and traditional artifacts.

RUMTEK (SIKKIM)

The largest monastery in the state of Sikkim in India's Northeast, Rumtek is easy to reach from the state capital Gangtok. It was originally built by the 12th Karmapa Lama in the mid-1700s and the ruins were

completely rebuilt by the 16th Karmapa when he fled Tibet in 1959. Here, he installed the sacred items and relics brought from his monastery in Tibet. It is a magnificent temple and publications clearly explaining details of iconography and symbols used in paintings are unavailable elsewhere.

PEMAYANGTSE MONASTERY (SIKKIM)

The Pemayangtse Monastery is part of the Buddhist religious pilgrimage circuit starting with the first monastery at Yuksom known as the Dubdi Monastery, followed by Norbugang Chorten, Tashiding Monastery, the Rabdentse ruins, the Sanga Choeling Monastery, and the Khecheopalri Lake. Founded in 1705, Pemayangtse is one of the oldest and finest monasteries of Sikkim. The monks are chosen from the Bhutias of pure Tibetan lineage and the Head Lama had the unique privilege of anointing the Chogyal monarchs when Sikkim was still an independent kingdom. This Nyingma order (established in the 8th century CE by Padmasambhava) monastery at 2000m stands amidst a view of snow-capped

mountains; it has a notable collection of ancient Buddhist statues, scriptures, and paintings.

DHARAMSHALA (HIMACHAL PRADESH)

Dharamshala, actually nearby McLeod Ganj, became world famous as the first settlement in India for HH the Dalai Lama and Tibetans in exile. You can attend scheduled teachings by His Holiness and translations in multiple languages are available on FM radios available locally. The Kalachakra temple monastery of the Dalai Lama is directly in front of his residence and he generally teaches there surrounded by beautiful thangkas and statues. Don't skip the Tibet Museum with a capsule view of Tibetan people and history. It's easy to cover all of McLeod Ganj by foot to visit the Tibetan Library, Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts, and myriad shops and cafes. The Tibetan Children's Village is a bit out of town but, well worth a visit and supporting by buying from their handicrafts store in town.

Chonor House is the best place to stay, almost adjacent to HH the Dalai Lama's residence. It is a branch of the Norbulingka Institute which trains craftsmen in museum quality techniques of Tibetan art so each room is decorated according to a unique Tibetan theme with coordinated murals, appliquéd fabrics, hand-knotted carpets, and carved and decorated wooden furniture. The institute outside of town is an elegant and peaceful place to stay to escape the backpacker bustle of McLeod Ganj.



His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Dharamshala

TABO MONASTERY (HIMACHAL PRADESH)

Tabo Monastery, at an altitude of 3280m can be discovered in the secluded Spiti Valley of Himachal Pradesh, higher than Lahaul to the west and Kinnaur to the south. Founded in 996 CE, it is the oldest continuously operating Buddhist enclave in both India and the Himalayas blending Indian and Central Asian characteristics. Mesmerising frescos of the Buddhist pantheon cover every wall along with priceless thangka paintings and sculptures. Above the monastery there are a number of caves carved into the cliff face and used by monks for meditation. HH the Dalai Lama held Kalachakra ceremonies here in 1983 and 1996.

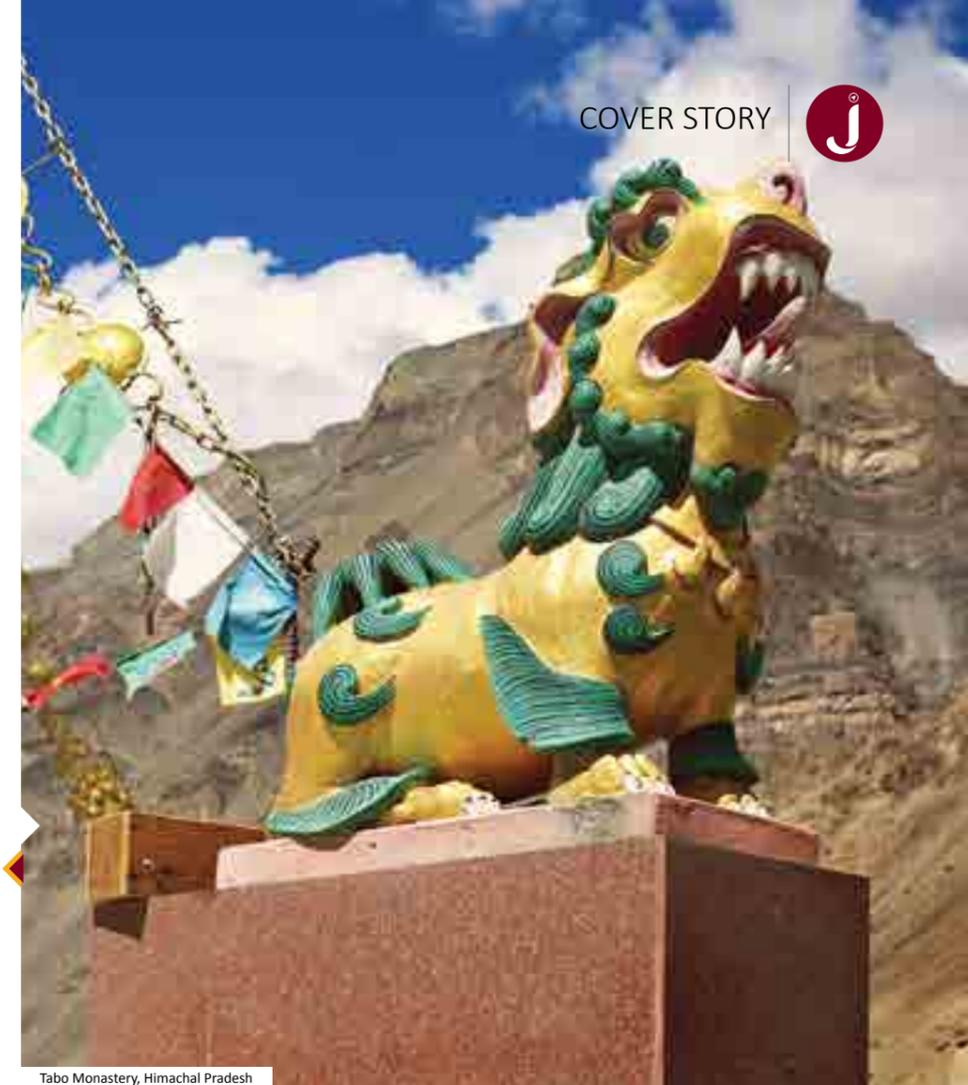
LADAKH

Last, and definitely not least in our overview of Buddhist sites in India, is the high-altitude desert region of Ladakh, referred to as a mini Tibet. Buddhism reached Tibet from India via Ladakh and there are ancient Buddhist carvings all over the region. Mani walls, chest high structures of engraved

Built in the middle of the 12th century by the Tibetan translator Rinchen Zangpo, Alchi is renowned as the oldest centre of Buddhist learning in Ladakh and for its amazing artistic treasures.

stones bearing the six-syllabled Sanskrit mantra *Om Mani Padme Hum*, mark the approach to Buddhist villages usually crowned with a large monastery or tiny hermitage.

Hemis is one of the largest and most famous as well as one of the richest monasteries in Ladakh belonging to the Drukpa order. Its annual festival celebrating the birthday of Guru Padmasambhava coincides with summer tourist season



Tabo Monastery, Himachal Pradesh

features the colourful masked Chham dance meditation practice by monks. The Thiksey Gompa resembles the Potala Palace in Lhasa. There is a 40-foot high Maitreya Buddha (future Buddha) seated on a lotus, rare statues, and swords displayed in the 10 temples of the 12-storied monastery. Its annual festival is celebrated in October-November.

The Alchi Monastery is built on the banks of the River Indus on flat ground instead of on a hilltop. Built in the middle of the 12th century by the Tibetan translator Rinchen Zangpo, it is renowned both as the oldest centre of Buddhist learning in Ladakh and for its amazing artistic treasures. In one of its three main structures, the Sum-tsek, a four-armed Bodhisattva rises to a height of two stories with the Maitreya Buddha, Avalokiteshvara, and Manjushri on the ground floor. A couple of Bollywood movies have also been shot at Alchi.

They was built as a palace in the capital city in 1655 and later transformed into a monastery with a three-story high gilded copper statue of the Shakyamuni Buddha. A continuously lit wax bowl burns in front of the statue to inspire and motivate

visitors to value integrity and spirituality. Shey is en route to Thiksey and Hemis. The Stok Monastery was founded in the 14th century and has a notable library including all 108 volumes of the Kangyur. Around two kilometres from the monastery is the Stok Palace, built in 1820 and still the summer home of the Ladakh royals from the Namgyal dynasty of Ladakh.

Historical and living sites of Buddhism connect the spiritual geography of what is now called India. Indians now flock to 'Nalanda Shiksha' teachings in Hindi and English by HH the Dalai Lama just as he offers focused teachings for Buddhists from other national and linguistic groups. Followers from across the world also visit India to hear the 17th Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje, head of the Karma Kagyu, the largest sub-school of the Kagyu, when he is in Bodh Gaya, Dharamshala and elsewhere.

Daily direct flights bring Buddhists from Southeast Asia to the best known sites. Going beyond these to explore the archeological, artistic, and spiritual heritage across the country will provide you with experiences to treasure for a lifetime – or more! 📌



WILD AND GORGE-OUS!

THE SATKOSIA GORGE SANCTUARY & TIGER RESERVE, ODISHA

On its ceaseless course toward the Bay of Bengal on India's south-eastern coast, the mighty River Mahanadi crashes through the hills of Central Odisha, carving a spectacular 22 kilometre-long crevasse – the Satkosia Gorge – before it emerges into the coastal plains.

A sanctuary that is also a gorge, Satkosia derives its name from the words sat meaning seven and kos meaning two miles, indicating the length of the gorge as 14 miles or 22 km.



Gharial

“Only when the last tree is cut, only when the last river is polluted, only when the last fish is caught, will Men realise that they can't eat money.”

– Henry David Thoreau

The Mahanadi cuts across the magnificently wooded mountains of the Eastern Ghats (lying to the south of the gorge), which in turn meet the Chhota Nagpur Plateau (lying to its north), to create a biotic province here of rare beauty, diversity, and immense geomorphological distinction.

The gorge has the appearance of a place where time stands still but don't be deceived. For there is danger lurking in the form of crocodiles!

The forests that clothe both banks of the Mahanadi are a stronghold of elephant, gaur, leopard, sambar, chital, barking deer, mouse deer, chousingha, sloth bear, wild pig, langur, porcupine, pangolin, and dhole or wild dog pack. And of course, one of Odisha's last remaining tiger populations. This is also the southernmost range of the highly-endangered long-snouted gharial (crocodile species); as also home to the muggor or marsh crocodile that fishes in the

“This is the southernmost range of the highly-endangered long-snouted gharial and also home to the muggor or marsh crocodile.”

crystal waters of the Mahanadi. Reptile fauna include the king cobra, banded krait, python, gecko, freshwater turtle, terrapin etc.

The gorgeous sal forests mixed with luxuriant bamboo, teak, and fruiting trees form a dense green canopy here and harbour splendid birdlife – both resident and migratory – including Alexandrine, Rose-

ringed and Plum-headed Parakeets, lorikeets, Verditer, Monarch, Fantail and other flycatchers, nuthatches, mynahs, tits, Crested Serpent Eagles, Blackheaded Bulbuls, and Brown Cheeked Fulvetta; as also populations of the endangered Hill Mynah and Malabar Pied Hornbills. The forests are a good place to sight giant and flying squirrels too.

The Satkosia Tiger Reserve, located in Angul, came about in 2007 by merging two adjoining wildlife sanctuaries that were notified decades ago – the Satkosia Gorge Sanctuary (1976) and the Baisipalli Sanctuary (1981). With a total area of 795.59 sq.km, the Satkosia Gorge Sanctuary itself spreads over four districts – Angul, Cuttack, Nayagarh, and Boudh.

Satkosia is not only a unique 'gorge ecosystem' but also a vital elephant habitat. The Satkosia-Baisipalli belt, together with adjoining Reserve Forests was declared as the Mahanadi Elephant Reserve, which harbours hundreds of the majestic

pachyderms. The entire Satkosia reserve region has an area of 963.87 sq. km with 523.61 sq. km as core area.

Several picturesque sites have been identified for trekkers, nature lovers, and visitors, of which Tikrapada, Chhotakei, Purunakote, and Badamul are especially important. Tikrapada, apart from offering stunning views of the Satkosia Gorge, is famous for the Gharial Research and Conservation Unit (1975), from where gharials have been successfully bred and released into the wild. Tikrapada also offers a host of eco-tourism activities that include nature trails and overnight camping experiences. Strategically located watchtowers and salt licks also help tourists spot animals in these forests.

The Mahanadi River Cruise is an especially delightful experience given not only the majesty of the Satkosia Gorge but also the wondrous sights on either side of the River – crocodiles, still as rocks, basking in the sun on the sandbanks; wild animals on the river banks; rare and endangered aquatic birds; a variety of amphibians and reptiles; and of course the beautiful waters of the Mahanadi.

Angul, nearest to the Satkosia Gorge Tiger Reserve, is well-connected to Odisha's capital



Freshwater Turtles

Bhubaneswar by rail and road. Summer is the best time for animal sightings, despite soaring temperatures and incredible humidity! Winter is pleasant with occasional

NAVDEEP THAKURDAS

Raised in the Himalayas, Navdeep's love for adventure sports and the mountains made him an avid skier and a qualified mountaineer. His affable temperament and strong operational and sales background help him lead a strong and dedicated team. Despite his nearly two decades in the travel industry, Navdeep still yearns incessantly to visit new places and wants to remain a traveller all his life! He can be contacted at navdeept@goindia.co.in



Indian Skimmer

rains. Satkosia's marvellous riverine location is best enjoyed staying onsite and exploring at ease.

The location of Satkosia's rich forests – in the very heart of Odisha – makes it an extremely vital biodiversity and biogeographic vault. One that has direct or indirect corridors

linking it to almost every other major forest patch in the state. It is these gloriously dense and biodiversity-rich forests that feed the Mahanadi, transforming it into the pulsating heart of India's wilderness. Protecting the forests, river, and wildlife of Satkosia means protecting not only the bounteous treasures of Odisha but also the very future of India. 1



LIVING TREASURES: INDIA'S HERITAGE HOMES



Haveli, Rajasthan

The whole difference between construction and creation is exactly this: that a thing constructed can only be loved after it is constructed; but a thing created is loved before it exists.

– Charles Dickens

India's incredible diversity can be seen in the rich cultural and architectural heritage of ancestral homes in its every region. Their value and legacy aside, India's splendid heritage homes are serene, glorious living spaces where the walls hide history and time seems to stand still.

Kerala's stunning Nalukettu houses, the elegant colonial-era bungalows of Bengaluru, Chennai, and Mumbai, the sprawling colonial-era tea estates of Coonoor, Valparai, Darjeeling, and Assam, Kolkata's rambling old villas, Chettinad's palatial mansions, Goa's colourful Portuguese-era casas, Rajasthan's lavish fresco-embellished havelis (mansions), Old Delhi's evocative havelis, Lucknow's refined Nawabi havelis...all quintessential examples of the country's many, many homes that stand testament to and offer glimpses of a bygone era and way of life. These homes are the journeys of families who have not only stayed on for generations but have also restored them to their former glory with great love and labour. Evoking nostalgia and affording great visual experiences, these are

homes that are magnificent and distinct.

More and more travellers to India are showing interest in staying on heritage properties – places that have stories to tell, and that offer intimate travel experiences and voyages of discovery in real India. Guests expect grandeur, history, and great architecture but, elements such as location, heritage, and the host living on the same property are equally significant. For they are key to deeper insights into local customs, culture, and food.

Tourists visiting the country, even seasoned India travellers, are unlikely to have heard of Murshidabad, a charming and atmospheric town in central West Bengal (a state in India's eastern region), some 200 km north of Kolkata, the capital city.

Murshidabad is a lost gem. Today, it stands as a near-forgotten story of the past.

Murshidabad was the last capital of Bengal before it came under the British rule. It was

made the capital in 1704 by Murshid Quli Khan, the Mughal governor of Bengal under Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb, and was named after him. Murshidabad is especially noted for its history, culture, architecture, food, silks, and as the home of several families of the nobility and royalty.

The drive from Behrampore – another famous colonial cantonment town – takes around 25 minutes, with the River Bhagirathi to the left and lush rural landscapes all around. The narrow streets of the old imperial area of Lalbagh project a picture of rural idyll. The natural opulence of these parts is highlighted by its lovely mango orchards and fields of crops interspersed with fruit-laden trees; and west of the Bhagirathi are mulberry groves where some of the finest silk in India is still cultivated. The Katra Masjid, Hazarduari, Imambara Mosque, Motijheel, and the Kathgola Palace and Gardens are Murshidabad's finest tourist attractions.

Bari Kothi is a unique luxury boutique Heritage Hotel in Azimganj, Murshidabad.

The Bari Kothi (literally meaning the Palace of the Elder) was built in the late 1700s by the Dudhoria family of zamindars (landowners) who moved to Azimganj from Rajasthan in western India. The sprawling ancestral home is one of the most architecturally significant houses in the region – a remarkable amalgam of Greek, Roman, and French architectural styles.

B SHANTI

Handling the French Market for the last 20 years, and with the experience of 27 years in the travel industry, B Shanti has been with Le Passage to India since its inception. Easy going yet dedicated, Shanti follows a customer centric approach and has excellent knowledge of the operations sector of the business. She loves to travel, especially in India. Shanti can be contacted at shanti@lpti.in



The nearly 300-year old mansion lies spread across three-fourth acres of land; inside you can explore the Sheesh Mahal (Hall of Mirrors), Music Room & Library, Durbar Hall (main hall/ballroom), Gaddi Ghar (work area), Strong Room (a unique locker



Kathgola Garden, Murshidabad, West Bengal

Outside, you can sit on the steps of the scenic Bari Kothi Ghaat. It stretches almost 100 feet across the length of the River Ganges, and is set against the backdrop of a beautifully earthy landscape.

For guests, a stay in Bari Kothi will go much beyond merely the comfort and pleasures of the newly launched 15 luxurious Heritage Suites. The idea is to introduce guests to unforgettable local experiences and discover the lost heritage of Murshidabad. For lovers of art, architecture, food, culture, and exploratory travel, this will be nothing short of perfect.

Guests will enjoy heritage walks, heritage tours of Azimganj's historic temples and palaces, unique boat rides on the Ganges, visit to a weaver's village and interaction with villagers, cultural programmes of the region's traditional dance and music, and delicious Sheherwali (the resident community of the region) fare.

Bari Kothi intends to involve the local community in running its day to day operations, making tourism a unique social tool for the development and empowerment of village and local communities. This will ensure additional incomes and better livelihoods; and sustain social and environmental equilibrium.



Bari Kothi, Murshidabad, West Bengal

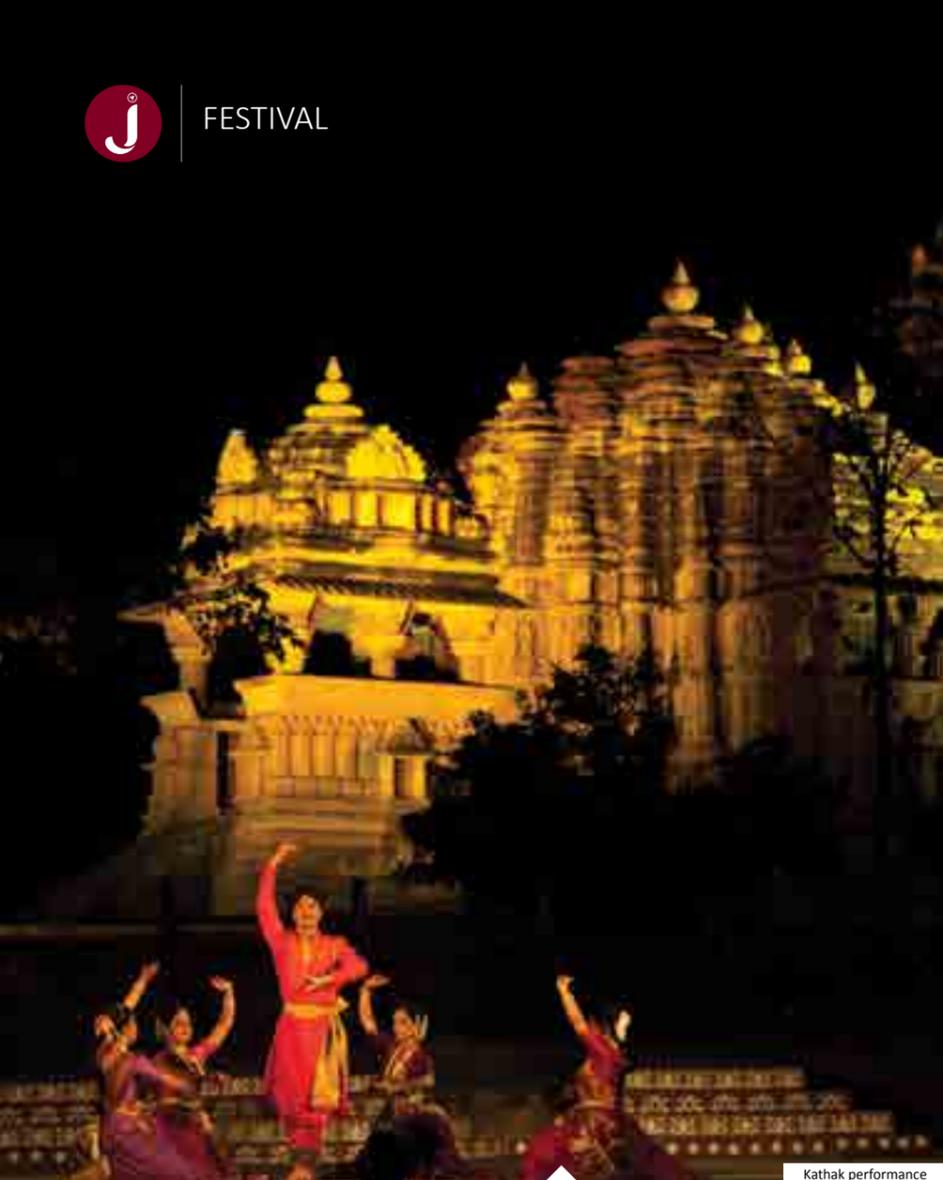
IN THE TEMPLES OF LOVE – CELEBRATING THE KHAJURAHO DANCE FESTIVAL

If you've ever puzzled over a vacation choice- are you in the mood for historical monuments or nature, cultural stimulation or wildlife- visiting Khajuraho, in the Central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh, during its annual dance festival will cover all these bases.

Mid-February, the best time and weather to visit, a weeklong classical Indian dance is an annual draw to this UNESCO World Heritage Site. This village of fabulous Hindu and Jain Temples is surrounded by waterfalls, teak forests, a tiger preserve, and a Barisal inhabited river.



Bharatanatyam dancer



Kathak performance

“The Khajuraho Dance festival takes place under a star-studded sky against the backdrop of the towering Chitragupta temple dedicated to Surya, the Sun God from the Vedic pantheon of nature deities.”

and excursions to experience breathtaking natural beauty, wildlife, and even more temples in the hilltop fort.

The Khajuraho Dance festival takes place under a star-studded sky against the backdrop of the towering Chitragupta temple dedicated to Surya, the Sun God from the Vedic pantheon of nature deities. Also framing the open-air stage is the Vishvanatha Temple dedicated to Lord Siva. These temples of the Western group can be explored at leisure during the day.

and music by distinguished performing artists from around India. Days easily fill up with touring the three main temple groups



Odissi dancer

“There are many ways to the Divine. I have chosen the ways of song, dance, and laughter.”

– Mevlana Jalaluddin Muhammad Rumi

It was only in the mid-1800s that the British happened upon the magnificent remnants of the Chandela Dynasty’s building spree of a 1000 years or so ago. Only 25 of the approximately 85 have survived or been excavated so far.

Khajuraho takes its name from the date palm – khajura. Gates flanked by date trees provided entry to the religious capital of the Chandelas. The Chandela rulers believed in the separation of politics, and religious and cultural activities, therefore, their political capital was established 60 km away.

Visiting Khajuraho while the festival is on will fill your evening with classical dance

The upcoming 45th dance festival in February, 2019 opens on the 25th with three to four diverse dance traditions from across India presented each evening through March 03, organised by the Madhya Pradesh Kala Parishad. The opening program features the lyrical sculpturesque Odissi from Odisha, the land of temples, performed by the nationally honoured exponent Ranjana Gauhar and her group. North India’s rhythmically fast-paced Kathak performed by Shukla Rai is always a crowd pleaser. From South India, Madhuri Majumdar will charm all with the Andhra Pradesh Kuchipudi dance. This sprightly classical dance tradition was adopted by female dancers in the mid-20th century from an all-male dance drama tradition and retains the assessable drama element along with dynamic movement. The evening’s finale will be one of the finest examples of how Indian dance can evoke universal emotions as text is interpreted through the Bharatanatyam tradition of Tamil Nadu by dancer Purvadhanashree.

SHARON LOWEN

Sharon Lowen first travelled to India as a Fulbright Scholar to study classical Indian dance as a cultural sojourn; 45 years on, she is an internationally acclaimed and respected leading exponent of the Odissi, Chhau, and Manipuri dance forms.

As Founder of the NGO Manasa – Art without Frontiers, Sharon has dedicated her life to the appreciation and understanding of the Indian performing arts and culture.

The next six evenings offer an equally diverse mix dance traditions of India, classical, traditional and contemporary. Mohiniyattam – the Dance of the Enchantress – from Kerala brings to mind the swaying palm trees of

its home state; it is performed attired in stunning white costumes trimmed with gold.

Manipuri dance, from the far northeastern state bordering Myanmar, is known for its subtle elegance and the distinctive potloi hoop skirt symbolising stars and clouds as the dancers move in intricate curves, circles, and figure eights. The Manipuri Rasleela creates an ethereal vision of the charming flute-playing god Krishna dancing with his beloved Radha and the other gopikas (cowherding girls) of Brindavan. Seraikella



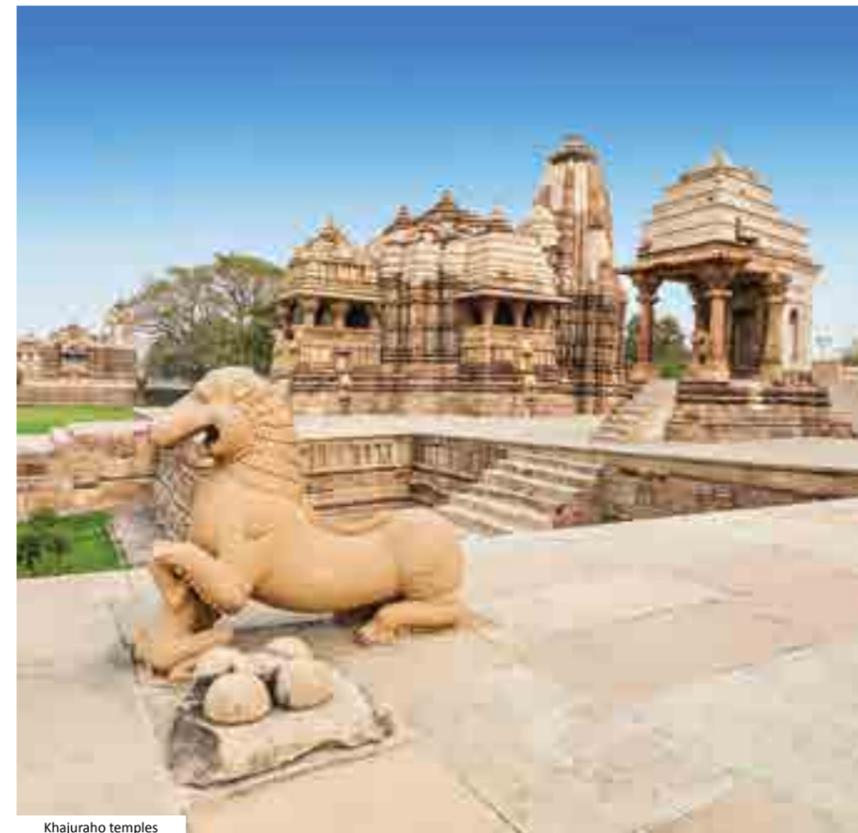
Erotic sculptures, Khajuraho temples

“Manipuri dance is known for its subtle elegance and the distinctive potloi hoop skirt symbolising stars and clouds as the dancers move in intricate curves, circles, and figure eights.”

Chhau is a masked form of martial-arts based dance from the eastern state of Jharkhand. One of three major forms of masked and non-masked Chhau from contiguous states of eastern India, Seraikella Chhau developed with both royal patronage and royal choreography and participation as performers.

This year’s festival lineup also includes two Indian contemporary dance performances and more Kathak, Odissi, Bharatanatyam, and Kuchipudi sprinkled throughout the week. Having personally performed at this festival, I can attest to the magical experience of these performances shared in front these magnificent ancient temples.

After an evening immersed in the richness of India’s performing arts, it’s a tough choice whether to head out to see nearby falls, tigers and forts or explore Khajuraho itself. I’d say give yourself time for all of it and start with the Western group of Temples followed by the Eastern, then Southern.



Khajuraho temples

The temples of Khajuraho are covered in some of the finest sculptures in the world scattered over an area of about 9 square miles. The outer walls of these temples were created to motivate the viewer to understand the levels and stages of life in order to rise from the physical to the metaphysical before entering the sanctum sanctorum. We see dancers and wrestling, royalty and meditation, women putting on makeup, musicians making music, potters, farmers, and medieval daily life as well as the famous erotic art of the Maithuna (lovemaking couples).

Erotic art comprises approximately 10 per cent of the fine sculptures of these temples and I tend to forget that this is what is featured as the main draw. Depending on your interest, you can get a guide who will only take you around to see the couples, groups, and interesting positions and permutations of how sex was enjoyed during Chandela times. Other guides will be more inclusive of the remarkable stories and sculptural finesse of the full range of human and divine experiences portrayed at this UNESCO World Heritage Site in India.

Temples dedicated to Vishnu (Vaishnavism), Siva (Saivism), and Jainism were all constructed and used at about the time and are found in pretty much equal numbers. This demonstrates the tolerance and respect for diverse systems of belief at the time. In each group you find major temples surrounded by smaller ones.

A kilometre away from the Western group of Temples is the Khajur Sagar and the old village of Khajuraho. Once I stopped at the juncture leading to either the Eastern group or the village, confused by seeing the



Kalinjar Fort, Uttar Pradesh



Panna National Park, Madhya Pradesh

“We see dancers and wrestling, royalty and meditation, women putting on makeup, musicians, potters, and farmers, as well as the famous erotic art of the Maithuna.”

nearby village temple, and was delighted to discover Pradeep Gagrelé's Poonam Arts & Crafts shop, basically the front of his home adjoining the temple, where he offered antique brass and bronze at lower prices than the reproductions sold in the main market. I always return with more precious artefacts from this tiny shop from my annual Shivaratri visits presenting a classical dance production for the thousands of local pilgrims who come to the Siva temple here.

The Jain community during the Chandela rule lived on the Eastern side of Khajuraho, which explains why more Jain temples are found in the Eastern temple complex 10 minutes away from the Western group. The Southern group includes three scattered temples, the Duladeo Temple is closest to the Eastern group, the Chaturbhuj temple has a spire far above the tree line and the third, the Beejamandal Temple, is still under the Archeological Survey of India excavation.

If you still have a taste for more temples, I strongly recommend a visit to the Ajaigarh Fort, and even the Kalinjar Fort, east of Khajuraho, which have Chandela temple remains strewn casually in an un-manicured environment, giving you the feeling of what it was like when the Khajuraho temples were

first discovered. To reach Ajaigarh, you can do what I did, leave Khajuraho early and travel 30 minutes to the elegant forest resort, The Sarai at Toria, on the banks of the River Ken adjoining the Panna National Park & Tiger Reserve, collect a guide and lunch, and travel the additional 30-40 to the amazing 11th century fortress. The 500 steps to the top of the fort are well worth it for the view, the temples, and the likely experience of discovery without others around. There is even a 1300 CE panel of yoginis meditating on corpses reflecting the tantric yogini cult flourishing at the time. If you are game for more, head to the Kalinjar Fort a bit farther east for more Chandela ruins.

Staying at the best five star hotel in Khajuraho itself, the Lalit Temple View is a short walk to the Dance Festival and a great base for daily excursions. Another great option amidst nature would be to stay at The Sarai at Toria, created by one of India's finest wildlife conservationists, Dr Raghu Chundawat and his photographer wife, Joanna Van Gruisen to support their conservation efforts. It is a destination in itself and the peace and serenity of floating on the River Ken is justifiably called “a Zen experience”. One can see so many birds, an occasional Ghariyal, the riverbed itself; and



Raneh Waterfalls, Madhya Pradesh



Raneh Waterfalls, Madhya Pradesh

this boat ride is one of the most treasured memories of my Khajuraho visits. Since this is adjoining the Panna Tiger Reserve it is a perfect location to go into Khajuraho for the dance festival, east to the forts and other excursions, or simply to chill elegantly in nature.

Among the animals found at Panna are the tiger, leopard, chital, chinkara, nilgai, sambhar, and sloth bear. The park is also home to over 200 species of birds including the bar-headed goose, honey buzzard, king vulture, blossom-headed parakeet, changeable hawk-eagle, and Indian vulture. It is also a Biosphere Reserve where the continuity of the tropical and subtropical forests belt of South India is broken and the great Indo-Gangetic Plain begins.

A little know fact of a visit to Khajuraho is that Asia's biggest and only active diamond mine is in the Panna district, in Majhagaon, about 55km away from Khajuraho. You can take a tour to witness firsthand the process of extraction of diamonds from crushed ore through screening and discovery.

Not to be missed are the Raneh and Pandava waterfalls. The Raneh waterfalls, on the River Ken near Panna, were formed by a

“A little know fact of a visit to Khajuraho is that Asia's biggest and only active diamond mine is in the Panna district, in Majhagaon, about 55km away from Khajuraho.”

volcanic eruption that created a 250-foot deep crater. During the monsoon there are gushing waterfalls; and in the dry season, you can enjoy the beautiful pink, yellow, red, black, white, and grey granite, dolomite, jasper, basalt, and quartz rock formations. An interesting detail is that it is said to be the only place in Asia which has all the five types of igneous rocks at one place.

About 30 km from Khajuraho and 25 km from Panna, but well by road, the Pandava falls and caves are believed to be where the Pandavas (from the Indian epic Mahabharata) stayed during their Agyaatwas (secret stay). The entrance of the caves has water flowing from above which makes a drizzle curtain for the entrance and the source of this water is a mystery. You might like to take a local guide for a small payment as you have a bit of a walk and a few hundred steps to reach the caves situated in the middle of hills, the beautiful heart shaped Draupadi Kund, and the small waterfall surrounded by a mineral rich pond. Note that the fall closes at noon on Wednesdays. Since the Pandava falls and caves are inside the Panna Reserve, you would do well to club these visits together.

The Khajuraho Dance Festival is a wonderful opportunity to dive into the treasury of India's performing arts, architecture, sculpture, medieval history, and bountiful natural beauty and peace. Have a great trip! 🎉



Tiny Goa lies on the splendid Konkan Coast, bordered by the sparkling Arabian Sea on its west and flanked by the magnificent Western Ghats on its east. Forests, waterfalls, mangroves, and wildlife are the hidden natural riches of Goa's rugged, mountainous interior. Such astounding natural beauty assembled together in such a short spit of land and such a wild exuberance for life...colour and calm and celebration – that's Goa.

Centuries ago, the Portuguese were in search of a sea route to India. Portuguese navigator and explorer Vasco da Gama was the first European to reach India by sea on May 20, 1498, landing in Calicut (now Kozhikode) in Kerala. In 1510, Goa became one of the Portuguese holdings in India and was later the capital of the Portuguese Estado da India (State of India). 16th century Goa was a magnificent Portuguese enclave – their province for over 450 years until it was annexed by India in 1961.



A Portuguese casa, Goa

“You can’t just eat good food. You’ve got to talk about it too. And you’ve got to talk about it to somebody who understands that kind of food.”

– Kurt Vonnegut

Portuguese heritage still runs strong in this erstwhile Latin headquarters – especially in Fontainhas and Old Goa or Velha Goa – and is evident in the atmospheric colonial architecture of its elegant casas, crumbling forts, white-washed churches and chapels, and buildings in their traditional coat of pale yellow, ochre, green or blue. In soulful *fado* music and rich Catholic ceremonies. Even today, many among the older Goans speak Portuguese.

The legacy of the Portuguese lives on beautifully in Goa’s unique food as well. Eclectic and continuously evolving, this is a cuisine that is piquant, sweet, hot, pungent, spice-rich, fresh, and multi-flavoured...all at once. You only have to taste it once to know why! All thanks to the Portuguese who introduced gastronomic treasures such as vinegar marinades, Piri-Piri chillies, potatoes, tomatoes, pineapples, cashew fruit, mangoes, fennel, guavas and more when they landed on India’s coast.

In style and techniques, Goan cuisine is a distinctive amalgam of Portuguese, Indian, and even British influences. As Goa was a Portuguese colony for four centuries, the

Goan Catholic cuisine imaginatively absorbed the local culinary influence and ingeniously adapted recipes by adding *kokum* (a sour/astringent fruit native to the western coastal regions of southern India), *coriander leaves*, *green chillies*, *ginger*, and *garlic*.

“Baking is a Goan specialty. And yet another Portuguese legacy that rules the Goan table. For it was the Portuguese who introduced oven-baked bread to India.”

A traditional Goan meal would be incomplete without rice and fish curry. And we doff our hats to fresh fish, a serious fetish with Goans! Seafood, coconut, coconut milk, spices, cashew, fruit are also Goan staples; and meat plays an important role, significantly beef,

chicken, and pork. Classic Portuguese dishes such as *chorizo* (garlicky pork sausage), *caldo verde* (a chicken and spinach soup flavoured with black pepper and ginger), pork pie, pork assad (pan-roasted meat), pork sausages, and *sopa de camrao* (shrimp soup) are lifted by aromatic spices.

Hotter and spicier dishes include favourites such as *vindaloo* (the Portuguese word ‘*vindalho*’ originates from *vin* (wine) and *alho* (garlic); ‘*vindaloo*’ is a sweet-sour fiery pork curry made with coconut, vinegar, sugar, spices, and red chillies), *sorpotel* (a savoury pork stew flavoured with spices, vinegar, ginger, onions, garlic, and red chillies), chicken *xacuti* (chicken pieces are sautéed in a paste of roasted coconut, spices, poppy seeds, peanuts, ginger, garlic, and onions, simmered in water; vinegar added finally).

All washed down with local cashew brew, *feni*.

Baking is a Goan specialty. And yet another Portuguese legacy that rules the Goan table. For it was the Portuguese who introduced oven-baked bread to India; in fact, it was the Portuguese Jesuit missionaries who taught bread baking to locals in the villages

of Salcete in South Goa in the 16th century. Even today *poders*—as bakers skilled in bread-making are known locally – operate out of holes in the walls with traditional coal or wood-fired ovens. Since the bread needed toddy for fermentation, the locals also learnt the art of distilling of alcohol from the Portuguese. Traditional village bakeries make up to five varieties of bread: the *pao*, *undo*, *poe* or *polie*, *katricho pao*, and *kankon*.

Slow cooking and freshness of spices are key to Goan cuisine; and whole spices are best when freshly ground. Because it is dishes such as these that are redolent of the real flavours of Goa.

SAMEER V. MITBANDER

Sameer began his career with the Taj Group of Hotels and then went on to handle Tour Operations with international brands and home-grown entrepreneurs, in a journey lasting over 25 years. Sameer has been with Le Passage since 2013, in charge of operations at Goa, and feels his time here has been an exciting learning experience. Away from work, he enjoys sports; and believes in contributing to the empowerment of the underprivileged. He can be contacted at sameer@lepassagetoindia.net



Goan breads

Here are some recipes of classic favourites for you to try:

BACALHAU À BRÁS

PREPARATION TIME: 20 minutes

COOKING TIME: 20 minutes

SERVES: 4

Ingredients

- Salt cod 400 gm
- Potato 500 gm
- Onion 1 large
- Garlic head 1
- Eggs 6
- Pepper to taste
- Parsley to taste
- Oil to taste
- Salt To taste
- Black olives to taste

To prepare the Portuguese Bacalhau à bras recipe, start with having soaked the salt cod, then remove the skin and bones, and break it apart with your hands. Meanwhile, chop the potatoes into matchsticks and the onion into fine rings. Fry the potatoes in a pan and set them to a side, drying them on kitchen paper. At the same time, in a deep pan, sweat the onions and garlic until golden, then add the pieces of salt cod, and cook for a few minutes, until they soak up the oil. At this stage, add the potatoes and stir whilst adding the lightly beaten eggs with salt and pepper. Stir for a few minutes, turning off the heat before the eggs solidify and become an omelette!

The Bacalhau à bras has to be served hot, with parsley and black olives.



Bacalhau à Brás

BALCHAO

80 minutes
PREPARATION: 20 minutes
COOK: 60 minutes
YIELD: Serves 4

What You'll Need

- 2 pounds (1 kg) small to medium-sized prawns (cleaned and deveined)
- 4 tablespoons vegetable/canola/sunflower cooking oil
- 2 large onions chopped fine
- 3 large tomatoes chopped fine
- 2 tablespoons garlic paste or 7-10 garlic cloves, chopped
- 1 tablespoon ginger paste or a 1-inch piece of ginger, chopped.
- 10 to 12 dried red chillies
- 1 tablespoon cumin seeds
- 1 tsp mustard seeds
- 2-inch stick of cinnamon
- 8 to 10 cloves
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 1/2 cup vinegar
- Salt to taste

How to Make It

Clean and devein the prawns. Put the prawns in a large bowl and sprinkle salt on them. Set them aside.

Using a dry pan over medium heat, roast the dried red chillies, cumin seeds, mustard seeds, cloves, and cinnamon till they begin to release their aroma. Take off from the heat and cool.

Grind the ginger, garlic, and roasted spices into a smooth

paste using the vinegar. You

can do this with a small food processor or a mortar and pestle.

Heat the oil on a medium flame in a wok-style pan. Add the prawns and stir fry till opaque. Remove from pan and set aside.

In the same pan, fry the onions till light brown. Add the tomato and fry till soft. Now add the spice-vinegar paste, sugar, and salt to taste and fry till the oil begins to separate from the masala.

Add the prawns to this masala, mix well and cook for 2 to 3 minutes.

Serve with piping hot, plain boiled rice.

You can enjoy this prawn pickle immediately or refrigerate it to enjoy the next day as all of the spices mingle and blossom. It can keep for a long time in the refrigerator, so if you can resist eating it all at once, you can enjoy it with meals for days to come.

You can adjust the amount of heat in this dish by varying the amount of the red chillies, which is the only hot spicy element. If you have a source of fresh curry leaves, add a few with the tomatoes to fry with the onions. They add a wonderful pungent element.



Balchao



Serradura

SERRADURA (EASY GOAN DESSERT)

RECIPE TYPE: Dessert
SERVES: 2-3

Ingredients

- Marie Biscuits – 10-12
- Roasted cashew nuts/Peanuts – a handful
- Whipped cream – ½ cup
- Vanilla essence – ½ tsp
- Powdered sugar – 2 tablespoons
- Condensed milk – 6 tablespoons
- Chocolate shavings/Cherry – to garnish

Instructions

Roughly break the Marie Biscuits and put in a blender.

Add roasted nuts to the broken biscuit bits and now coarsely grind.

To make the fresh cream, keep the steel bowl, whisk of the hand mixer and whipped cream in the freezer for 20 minutes.

Just before you begin, remove from the freezer and pour the whipped cream in the cold bowl.

Start the hand mixer at medium speed first, then slowly increase the speed.

When the cream starts to increase in volume, add vanilla essence and powdered sugar and continue to whisk.

Continue to whisk until it almost doubles in volume and soft peaks are formed. Now the cream is ready.

Add condensed milk to this and gently fold in the fresh cream with the condensed milk.

Take 2-3 small glasses and pour a good layer of biscuit nut powder.

On top of this layer pour a layer of the whipped cream and condensed milk mixture. Repeat the above 2 steps till the glass is filled to the top.

Garnish with chocolate shavings and cherry and serve immediately or chilled.

PORTUGUESE FEIJOADA

PREPARATION: 20 minutes
COOK TIME: 4 hours
TOTAL TIME: 4 hours 20 minutes
SERVES: 8 people

Ingredients

- 2 pounds white beans or Canario yellow beans
- 1 ham hock or smoked turkey leg
- 2 pounds Linguiça sausage
- 2 pounds pork shoulder or chopped heart, or shanks, cut into large chunks
- 1 pig's trotter (optional)
- 2 large carrots, sliced into rounds
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 1 head garlic, peeled but otherwise whole
- 1 tablespoon hot sauce or chilli paste
- 1 tablespoon ground coriander seed
- 3 bay leaves
- 1/2 cup crushed tomatoes
- Black pepper and chopped parsley to garnish
- Salt
- 2 quarts pork broth or water

Instructions

Soak beans for at least 8 hours. If you don't have 8 hours, soak repeatedly in the hottest

water you can get from the tap, replacing it when it cools. This second method should take about 3 hours.

In a large pot or Dutch oven, gently brown the pork shoulder in a tablespoon or two of olive oil. Do this in batches and don't crowd the pot. While you are doing this, preheat oven to 300°F. Hack at the trotter with a cleaver or heavy chef's knife to open it up in many places – this is to infuse the stew with collagen and fat.

When the pork shoulder has browned, remove it for the moment and add the onions. Cook until translucent. Add back the browned pork shoulder, the trotter, ham hock, coriander, bay leaves and a healthy sprinkling of salt, then add the beans and mix it all together.

Cover by 1 inch with pork broth or water. Ideally you are making this as an adjunct to making stock, such as when you have large pieces of a hog, like, say, a head. The feijoada will be better with pork broth, but don't despair if you don't have any. Use water or vegetable broth. Do not substitute

beef or chicken broth. Bring to a simmer and cover. Put in the oven for 90 minutes.

Remove from oven and test the beans. If they are somewhat tender, you're good. If they are still rocks, return to the oven for another 20 minutes. If the beans are getting tender, add the carrots, garlic cloves, chilli paste, and tomatoes. Cover and return to the oven for 30 minutes.

Check to see how the carrots are doing. The beans should be tender by now. Once the carrots are soft but not falling apart, add the sausage. Pull out the shanks and trotter if you are using them and pull off all the meat and fat etc. Chop as coarsely as you like and put back in the stew. Return to the oven for 10 minutes.

Remove and, still covered, leave the pot on top of the stove for up to 20 minutes, although you can serve immediately. Slice the sausages into disks before you serve. Ladle into bowls, garnish with chopped parsley and black pepper, and serve with crusty bread and a lusty Portuguese wine, such as Touriga Nacional. 🍷



Feijoada

WALK INTO THE PAST – AT HOME IN GOA

Splendid architecture, the love of your life, an old friend... they can all go drifting by unseen if you're not careful.

– Ian Mckellen

CASA MENEZES HERITAGE HOMESTAY

One of the finest Portuguese heritage homestays in Goa, the Casa Menezes Heritage Homestay is an experience like no other. The Casa stands amidst the rustic lush greens of Batim village in Goa Velha, located just 13 km away from Panjim, Goa's capital.

Picturesque, tranquil, and peaceful, Batim is home to emerald fields, salt pans, and coconut groves; and the air is fresh, pure. Time seems to stand still in the little village – thankfully a quality that its people have no intention of changing.

Situated in the valley of the Pilar and Santa Ana hillocks, the Casa Menezes overlooks

paddy fields bordered with tall coconut palm trees. The 300-year old heritage mansion is the ancestral home of the Menezes family, who live here as well.

The typical Portuguese-era mansion is filled with rooms that lead one into the other. There are eight bedrooms in all; and each one is elegantly designed with wooden floors and wooden fixtures such as the doors and window shutters. There are four rooms on the upper level, reached by a short staircase; the other four rooms are on the lower level. All the rooms look out to a beautiful, lush garden. Replete with teak, oak, and rosewood carved antique furniture, original art, and virtuoso regal interiors, the Casa Menezes is a wonderfully authentic example of Goa's rich heritage and culture.

The house also boasts an art gallery called Sala de Kala where local artists are encouraged to display their work.



The Casa Menezes Heritage Homestay also has its very own restaurant, situated just opposite the gates of this wonderful home. Called 304 Kitchen & Tavern, the restaurant serves breakfast, lunch, and dinner to homestay guests as well as walk-in customers and friends alike.

You can cycle around the village, try your hand at salt harvesting at the local salt pans or walk up to the famous miraculous St Simon and Jude Church in Maina if you are spiritually inclined. You can also drive to the Santa Ana church – believed to be one of the oldest churches in Asia – or down to Siridao beach to bask on the glorious sands and watch the calm waves of the splendid Arabian Sea. Don't miss a trip to the Batim Lake. This bird watcher's paradise attracts

several stunning migratory birds. Some of the birds you might get to spot at the lake are the Whistling Duck, Cotton Pygmy-goose, Malabar Grey Hornbill, Garganey, Pintail, Shoveler, Kingfishers, Purple Swamphen and both jacanas, Comb Duck, Spot-billed Duck and Darter.

The family of Casa Menezes believe in letting their home speak for itself, and assure you of the warmest and finest hospitality. Staying at the Casa Menezes will prove to be a unique and unforgettable holiday experience. For your sojourn will not only be a discovery of Goa's remarkable history, architecture, cuisine, and customs but also a rare opportunity to meet the local people and get deeper insights into the place. And support local business. [1](#)

FORGOTTEN LANES – ON FOOT IN INDIA

“ I only went out for a walk and finally concluded to stay out till sundown, for going out, I found, was really going in. ”

– John Muir

I got to travel across the country from early childhood with my travel loving family; hence, I was bitten by the travel bug at quite a young age. My engineering education led me to work in Singapore as a Software Engineer; and also gave me an opportunity to travel across Southeast Asia. I was extremely impressed by how well the travel & tourism space had evolved in this region. What surprised me even more was that Singapore, as a city-country which has a mere 50 years of history as compared to India's 5000 years, receives more tourist footfalls than the entire country of India. To put this into further perspective, the country Singapore is smaller than Bengaluru city in size.

Whilst in Singapore, I had the opportunity to go on a walking tour and I absolutely enjoyed the experience! It appealed to me on three levels – Travel, Trivia, and People. That is the moment when I decided to come back to India, quit my job, and start an experiential tour company. Named Gully Tours (formerly known as Royal Mysore Walks), the tour aimed to explore India through the many hidden or little explored alleys of its sprawling, buzzing cities.

My journey started in Mysuru, where we initially offered just walking tours. This, though, very quickly expanded to cycle tours, open jeep tours, and a series of bespoke tours, where we now have over 25 curated tours in Mysuru itself.



We love curating unique travel experiences. From an extremely interactive culinary tour where you shop for ingredients, learn to cook like a local, and share a meal at a local's home to a Yoga tour where you not only discover and understand why Mysuru has become the world capital of Ashtanga Yoga but also get to practice Yoga at a local *shala* (centre) and enjoy a healthy treat at a Yoga Café after, our aim is always to provide authentic, meaningful, and immersive local experiences.



At Gully Tours there has always been a strong focus on responsible tourism. The idea is, not only to ensure that travellers and locals experience the best that India's cities have to offer but to also do **our** part in preserving the country's ancient, rich, diverse, and vast culture and heritage. We therefore work with local craftsperson communities to help preserve fast vanishing art and craft, by showcasing their skills and helping them market or sell their expertise and products to travellers. We also organise free tours for the under-privileged; and are actively involved in many such initiatives which have always been important to us.

Having done fairly well in Mysuru, I asked myself, what next? I had enjoyed building

the business in Mysuru but, was unsure of the next step, just yet. This led me to pursue an MBA from the University of Oxford, with a special focus on entrepreneurship. After finishing Business school I decided to work with a couple of travel ventures in London to understand that space better, and give me clearer insights into the future of our company. All the while, I had a strong team that kept the business running back in Mysuru.

At Gully Tours, we love exploring the unexplored and unfolding stories that

Images Courtesy: gully.tours

VINAY PARAMESWARAPPA

Vinay Parameswarappa is the founder of gully.tours (formerly Royal Mysore Walks) who enjoys creating immersive experiential tours that help travellers and locals alike to explore a destination.

Vinay has worked in the field of travel & technology in India, Singapore, and the UK. His work has been featured on Netflix, The Guardian, National Geographic Magazine, and Conde Nast Traveler.



haven't been told. You are definitely not bound to hear the same stories you may have read in guide books or heard multiple times about India. We research, speak to plenty of patrons, dig really deep into the culture of every area that we explore, and find myriad fascinating stories and threads of history. Having done all this, our success is only if the story is just as passionately retold and recreated by my team for our guests. So, on my return to India, I set up an academy



to train young adults in the art of storytelling so that these passionate youngsters can lead invigorating tours.

With a focus on broadening our base we have now expanded to newer destinations such as Coorg where we offer a coffee trail; in Bengaluru, a city known both as the 'start-up' capital and pub capital of India, we offer a start-up tour and a pub crawl. In Kochi, we offer a spice trail, tracing the 3000-year old spice trade, as well as a toddy trail where you meet multigenerational toddy tappers and learn the art of tapping toddy from them.

In 2009, when I started my entrepreneurial journey in a country that hadn't yet accepted experiential tours, it was just I – a one-man show offering a walking tour in Mysuru. Today, we are a team of more than 20 passionate storytellers, offering more than 50 different tours in four destinations – Bengaluru, Mysuru, Coorg, and Kochi. It has been an exciting journey so far but I believe we have only scratched the tip of the iceberg when it comes to experiential travel in India.





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