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Durga Puja Touriosity

100 weekend destinations in Bengal
Durga Puja in the times of Covid 19

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The joie de vivre amidst the restrictions

*From Heaven
to earth
and back*

Exclusive

Best Durga Puja 2020 Theme
Adjudged by TOURIOSITY

Goddess Durga idol themed on migrant workers
at Barisha Club Durga Puja 2020

Architecture



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Artist's Impression of Lijiang



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Touriosity Travelmag
October 2020 Issue

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If you would like to share your memorable experiences with us, please feel free to contact us with your write ups, articles, anecdotes, photos and others. Good pictures will be acknowledged and published in the Reader's Click section. For the Travel Humour section, you can send us any travel related funny photos or sketches.

For more about us, visit our website:
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COVER PHOTO:

Idol of Goddess Durga themed on migrant mother and her children at Barisha Club, Behala.

Photo By:

Abhirup Ghosh, Kolkata

The views and opinions expressed in the articles are solely those of the writers and contributors. Touriosity Travelmag is not responsible for any personal views expressed by the authors or contributors.



Like every year, we have dedicated this October issue to the annual festivities of Bengal. During this time of the year Durga Puja dominates the life of people in this part of the country. With domestic travel restrictions being eased to a large extent, we have made an attempt to bring to our readers numerous small and big attractions of the state so that they do not have to travel too far for the much needed respite after months of lockdown. There is also a beautiful article on Durga Puja of Bengal. In the 'Artist's impression' section one finds the watercolour illustrations of Lijiang in China.

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Genting Highlands K.S Chinese Temple Batu Caves Patongjaya



The month of October is the time for annual festivities in India. Navratri, Dussehra, Diwali and Durga Puja are celebrated across the country. In Bengal it is almost a Carnival time when the big cities and towns gear up for almost a week-long celebration of fashion, food, music, 'adda' and pandal hopping. I must mention that this is preceded by two months of puja shopping which again is preceded by few months of planning. In fact, it wouldn't be wrong to say that for the people of Bengal, Durga Puja is a 'whole year' affair, a lifetime dedication. The planning for next year's puja starts on the day the current year's puja ends, and the popular slogan 'aaschhe bochhor abar hobe' that roughly translates to 'next year it will happen again', captures this eternal love for the festival quite well.

Though Durga Puja is celebrated at many places in India, being the main festival of Bengal, Kolkata remains as the Durga Puja capital of the country. The Puja fever grips the heart of everyone in the city regardless of age, caste, class or gender, during the festive days. That feeling of coming home on a holiday, the sheer happiness and sharing of fond memories with your loved ones, the jokes and incessant giggles during the festival days is what everyone looks forward to throughout the year. A remarkable aspect of the Durga Puja festival is the magical transformation a city undergoes during this time, almost becoming like a living theme park, a wonderland. The sheer opulence of the puja pandals is to be seen to be believed. So, if you haven't yet been to Kolkata, plan a trip here during Durga Puja, provided of course that the pandemic is gone by then.

This year the Durga Puja has been different though. With a heavy heart most people have tried to be content with food, music and 'adda' at home and virtual puja and 'Devi Darshan'. But then, the solace is there: aaschhe bochhor abar hobe!

To celebrate the Durga Puja, and Bengal, we decided to dedicate this issue to this annual festival and all the hidden destinations in the state. Our readers will be amazed to know about the hundreds of beautiful destinations in the state that remain still unexplored by the common tourists. There is also a beautiful article on Durga Puja and coverage of a heart-touching theme-based puja of Kolkata this year.

In India we are in the Unlock 5.0 phase and will soon be in the Unlock 6.0 phase. In the last one month, the total cases in India have increased by 25% only (80,00,000+) while total deaths have risen by 27% (1,20,000+). India remains as the second worst affected country in the world after the USA. Here's the comparative COVID19 data from my Editorial over the last few months:

Sept: 60,00,000+ total cases and 94,000+ deaths
 August: 35,00,000+ total cases and 64,000+ deaths
 July: 15,00,000+ total cases and 32,000+ deaths
 June: 5,00,000+ total cases and 15,000+ deaths.
 May: 2,50,000+ total cases and 8,000+ deaths
 April: 20,000+ total cases and 640+ deaths
 March: 1,000+ total cases and 20+ deaths.

Although the figures are high and number of deaths are discouraging, but it is evident that the spread of infection has substantially slowed down. This is indeed very encouraging. Let us cling to our hopes for a fast healing of the world from the pandemic. With lifting of restrictions on domestic travel many people are already making short trips. But in enjoying freedom of travel after many months one should not be swayed away. Abiding by the government directives and safety protocols continues to be of utmost priority. Once again here's wishing our readers good health, happiness, positivity and safety and the Travel and Tourism industry a quick recovery. Write to us at ttmag.english@gmail.com.

Rupanjana De

Rupanjana De

AN APPEAL TO TOURISTS

The annual festivities of this year are not yet over. In enjoying the holidays, it is important to remember that festivities will return with all joys and splendour, year after year, but for now it is more important to stay healthy and safe. We must take all precautions and think twice before embarking on a trip now, especially because we want to avoid a second wave. LET'S BE RESPONSIBLE HUMAN BEINGS.

To make your reading through **TOURIOSITY TRAVELMAG** better, here's presenting a quick glance at the various sections and features in the magazine.



DESTINATION

It introduces the readers to various destinations in India with an emphasis on at least one destination from each region. It provides an in-depth information on the locations. In addition, there is also handy tourist information to help our readers plan ahead of trips.



AN ARTIST'S IMPRESSION

A travelling artist makes it to faraway lands and brings memories in the form of impressive water colour paintings. This section is a visual treat and interesting to read at the same time.



FEATURE

Here we bring to our readers an article based on the theme of the issue not necessarily focusing on travelling or travel information.



MEMOIRS OF A BACKPACKER

A new adventure every time in an entirely new place across the globe by a solo female backpacker. We follow the locals she meets, the unusual things she comes across, the surprises she gets and the problems she faces in her journeys with a backpack across the world.



TRAVELOGUE

In this section we bring travel experiences of one of our readers from popular places around the world.



GLOBETROTTER'S DIARY

This section explores the world of a globetrotter, whose passion is to travel, travel and travel more. It brings to readers unique facts and information from remote corners of the world.



COUNTRYSCAPE / CITYSCAPE

Here we introduce a new country / city each time. We bring to our readers facts and photos of people, culture, locales, tourist places, food and traditions of a country / city. Our aim is to take our readers on a magical journey of an unseen land.



PHOTO TRAVELOGUE

Here we bring to our readers a travelogue in photos.



PHOTO FEATURE

In photo feature, we cover the theme of a particular issue in photographs from one of our readers.



SNAPSHOT

This section is an ideal one for quick browsing. It provides interesting information from across the globe with a focus on the theme of the issue.



AT A GLANCE

A quick look at a destination. Here, we bring to our readers locations from the lesser beaten paths in otherwise popular touristy regions.



POINT OF VIEW

Here we bring to our readers useful articles with offbeat content. The idea is to give you the stimulus for thinking. It covers important issues that are in some way connected to travel and tourism.



ADVENTURE

We present here stories of unique adventures undertaken by our readers in some part of the world with a focus on the issue theme.



MOUNTAINEERING / TREKKING

This section focuses solely on trekking and mountaineering adventures across the world.

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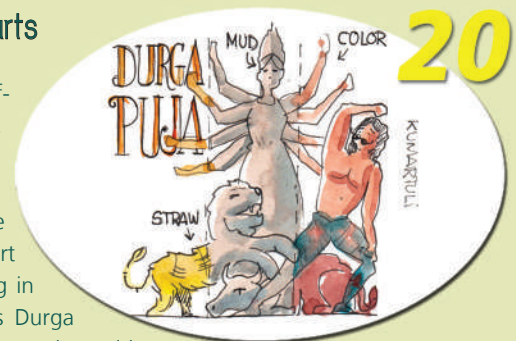


Durga Puja of Bengal

In this cover story, Abhirup Ghosh has beautifully captured the true spirit of Durga Puja in the state of Bengal both through his pen and the camera. He has perfectly elucidated the key elements of the annual festivities of the Bengali Community and elaborated on the individual rituals during these festival days. From idol-making to idol-immersion, there's every detail in the article.

A theme that won our hearts

This year's Durga Puja has been different, in that due to the pandemic, the majority of the people stayed indoors; for the few who wanted to take the risk by pandal hopping, the enthusiasm was marred by a Court order putting restraint on crowding in the pandals. Yet, one of the city's Durga Puja themes caught the attention of people worldwide, thanks to the social media. This exclusive feature on the Behala Barisha Club Durga Puja brings more information to our readers about the unique 'migrant mother' idol of Goddess Durga.



Latpanchar

Forming part of the Mahananda Wildlife Sanctuary, Latpanchar is a veritable paradise for bird watchers. Located at an altitude of 5000 ft above the sea level on the foothills of the Eastern Himalayas, Latpanchar is a newfound hidden gem of Bengal. This travelogue by Alok Ganguly brings to our readers his experience and is accompanied by beautiful captures. The article also provides detailed information for those who would like to set foot in this place.

100 weekend destinations of Bengal

With COVID19-related restrictions being lifted gradually, people have finally started to plan short weekend trips. This article is focused on Bengal and it brings to our readers 100 destinations of the state. West Bengal is blessed with mountains, forests, islands and beaches. Some of the destinations included in this list are hidden gems that are still to be explored properly. Nevertheless they need the attention of our readers.



Artist's Impression of Lijiang

Lijiang is an ancient town in China's Yunnan Province that is home to many ethnic minority groups. It has an interesting Old Town with cobblestone streets, canals and a Central Market Square. Spanish watercolour artist Joaquin had once made a trip to this place and in this article he has beautifully illustrated this ancient town with his vibrant brush strokes.

Other articles

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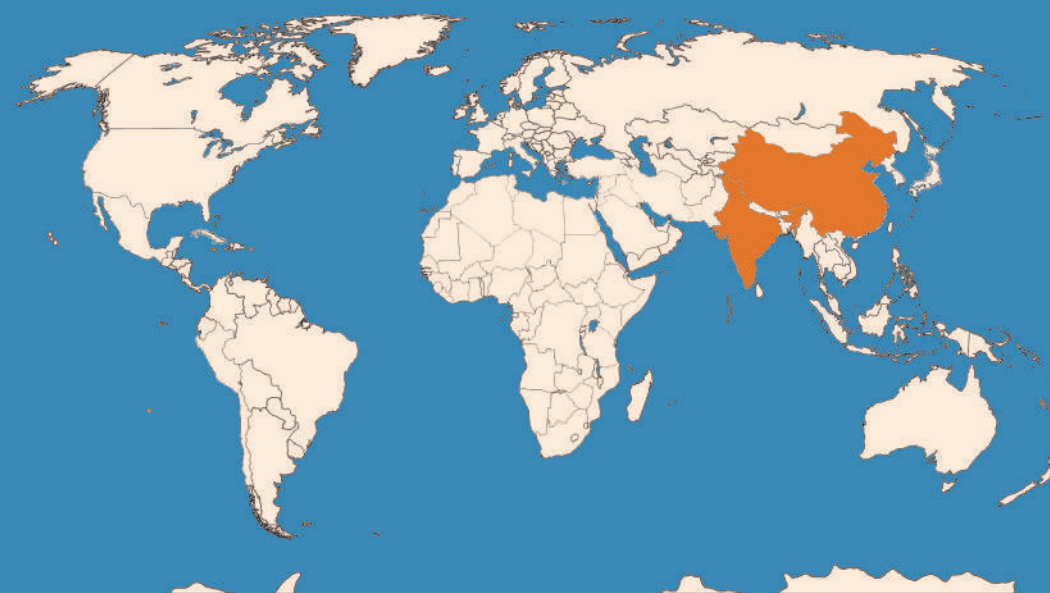
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DESTINATION **BENGAL**

How to celebrate
দুর্গা পূজা
as Bengalis do

Article and photos by
Abhirup Ghosh, Kolkata;

Photo by Supriya Paul, Shillong



Durga Puja, arguably, one of the most celebrated festivals in the world, gives you an essence of the lives of people living in Calcutta. Though it is celebrated in different forms in different parts of the country, however, none of the other forms can match the grandeur of the one celebrated in Calcutta. The festival, one of the truest reflections of the lifestyle of the people living in the city, draws a huge number of tourists from across the world.

It is said that when in Rome, do what the Romans do; so if you happen to visit the city during this time and get the essence of the festival, these are some of the experiences you should try to have.

Mahalaya – Visit Babughat to watch people pay homage to their ancestors

Mahalaya marks the beginning of the festivities in this part of the world. This is the last day of the *Pitripaksha* (a period of a Hindu month, consisting of 16 days, where Hindus pay homage to their ancestors), and the *Matripaksha* (a period of the Hindu calendar, when goddess Durga is worshipped) begins. On this day, people gather in front of the nearest water-body and pay offerings to their departed ancestors and ensure that they are resting in peace and that the current generation is blessed with prosperity. Calcutta, being on the banks of river Hooghly, has several *ghats* (a platform with stairs leading to the waterbody), and people gather at each such place. However, the biggest gathering happens at Babughat (situated near the central business district of the city, popularly known at the B.B.D

Bag, along the banks of Hooghly River). Thousands of people gather at this ghat or those surrounding it, at the break of the dawn, and perform the rituals. This sets the tone for the Durga Puja and the ritual is worth a visit. If you are a photography enthusiast, this will be quite a delight. However, you will have to start early to ensure that you don't miss most

1. A scene from 'Dhunuchi Naach' during the Durga Puja;
2. The work of idol making at Kumortuli starts with making the face of the goddess from clay;
3. The ritual drawing of the eyes of the idol on Mahalaya;
4. People making offerings to their ancestors, while a Hindu priest reads out the mantra for them to follow;
5. The idol being ready, colouring is the next step for artists at Kumortuli.



Photo by Supriya Paul, Shillong



Photo by Supriya Paul, Shillong



of the action.

Visit Kumortuli

The next stop on this day is Kumortuli, which is situated around four kilometers to the north of this place. Kumortuli is the potters' hub and that produces the maximum number of idols in the city. This place, too, is situated on the banks of the Hooghly River. If you want to witness the making of an idol, this is the place you need to be. Again, for photographers, this is an interesting place to be. Also, Mahalaya marks a special

event here; it is on this day, the eyes of the goddess Durga are drawn. Once you are done, take a walk around this place and you will get the essence of the British Calcutta.

Kolabou Chan

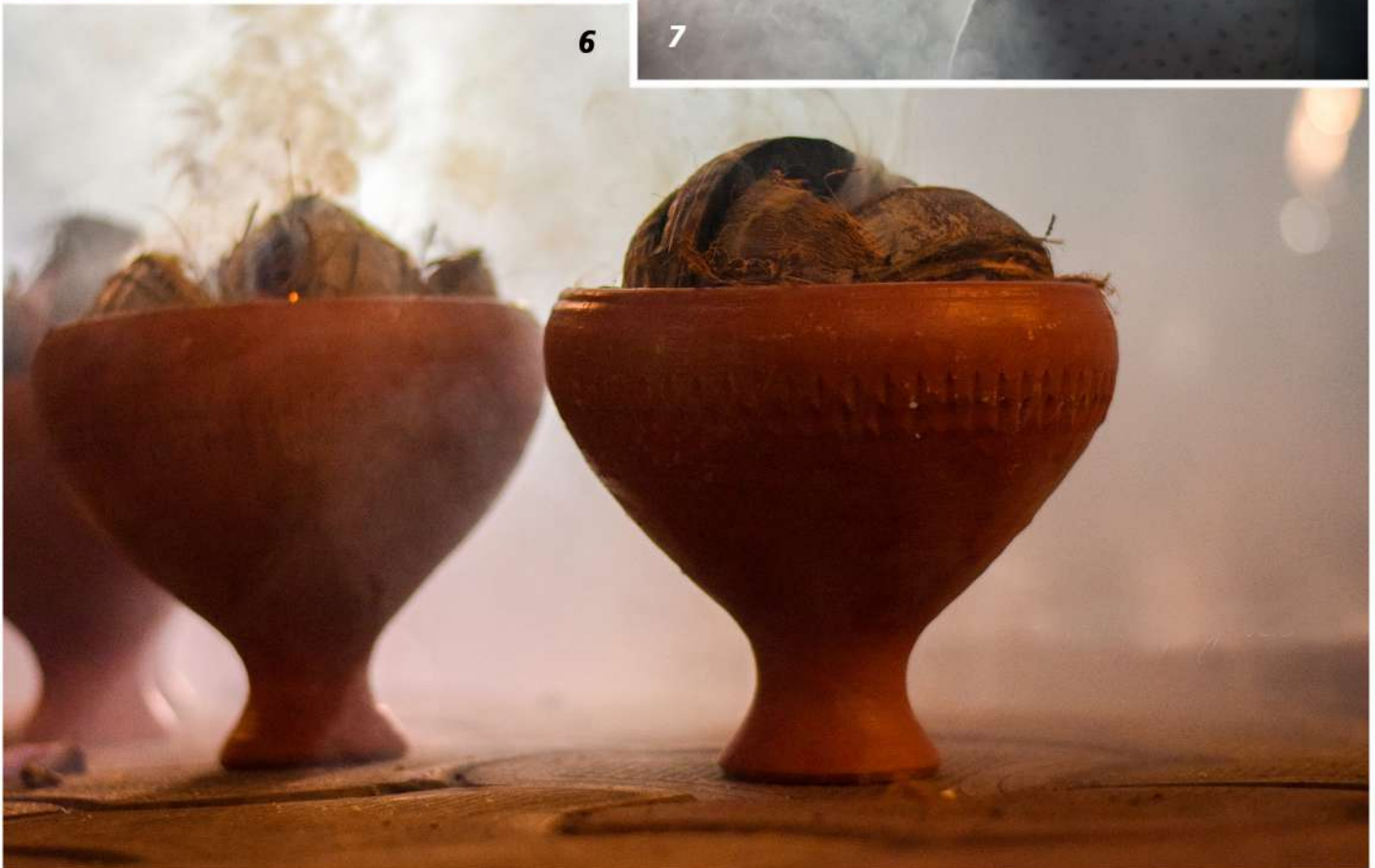
Durga Puja is primarily spread over four days – *Saptami*, *Ashtami*, *Navami*, and *Dashami*, that is, the seventh, eighth, ninth, and the tenth day of *Matripaksha*. Thus, the Puja starts at the dawn of the seventh day with an interesting ritual of bathing the Banana tree. 'Kola Bou' or the Banana Bride happens to be the wife of Goddess Durga's eldest son Ganesha. She is represented in the form of a tree and is ceremoniously transformed into a goddess. She is draped in a white and red saree with vermillion smeared on the leaves, and then taken to the river to give a bath.

The word 'chan' stands for 'bathing'. The Kola Bou Chan is an important part of the four-day festival and is carried out usually by the eldest male in the family. There are other theories of this ritual as well, but the one involving a marital relationship between Lord Ganesha and the Banana tree is colloquial and most widely accepted. Again, if you wish to witness this event, head on to the Babughat. This is also a morning event, so if you wish to witness the action, you will have to start early.

Pandal hopping

Undoubtedly, this should be a must on your to-do list. Several renowned Durga Puja committees in the city try to compete with each other by adopting different themes for their pandals. Visiting these pandals is commonly referred to as pandal hopping here.

- 1,2. Scenes from Puja on the day of Ashtami;
- 3. Golden Temple was the theme of one of the Pujas in South Kolkata (2019);
- 4. Kola Bou Chan at Babu Ghat;
- 5. A lotus being offered to the Goddess during the Sandhi Puja;
- 6,7. Scenes from Dhunuchi Nach at a pandal.





With more than a couple of thousand pandals spread across the city, it is almost impossible to visit them in four days, hence, you will need a bit of planning to cover these. If you wish to avoid the crowd, then you should visit during the day, however, by doing that you will miss the lighting, which is also an integral part of these installations.

Street food

If you want to taste the flavour of the city, there is no better time than this. You will find a whole buffet of options to eat, even on the streets. Starting from *phuchkas* (pani puri) to mutton curry to biriyani, you will find everything. Some of the food items you must try in Calcutta are – Phuchkas (a hollow crisp ball made of flour, with fillings of a mixture of mashed potatoes, boiled chickpeas and spices, and tamarind flavoured water), Egg Roll (which is popularly known as Frankie in the west), Mutton / Lamb Curry and Rice, and Mutton Biriyani. You won't even have to walk to a restaurant, you will find stalls laid out by famous eateries of Calcutta, in different parts of the city during the Durga Puja.

Maha Ashtami Anjali / Sandhi Puja

Maha Ashtami is the most important day of the festival; two key rituals happen on this day. First, the *Maha Ashtami Anjali*, where people shower their offerings to the Goddess standing in a queue

in front of the idol, while a Hindu Priest reads out the prayer for all to repeat. It is quite a sight. If you wish to take part in this, try to get in touch with any of the Puja Committees, they will be more than glad to host you for this.

This is followed by the *Sandhi Puja*, which again is a very important ritual of the festival.

Sandhi Puja happens at the juncture of the eighth and the ninth day of the festival. This happens over 48 minutes, the last 24 minutes of the eighth day, and the first 24 minutes of the ninth day. This period is also known as the *Sandhikhan*. This is the exact time at which the Goddess Durga is said to have slain the notorious pair of Chando and Munda. During *Sandhi Puja*, a hundred and eight lotus flowers are offered to the Goddess, and a similar number of earthen lamps are lit.

This is usually followed by *Dhunuchi Nach*, where people dance to the beats of the *Dhaak* to please the Goddess. *Dhunuchi* is a receptacle made of clay and dried. It is filled with coconut husk, camphor and *dhuno* (a kind of incense),



and which is then set on fire. Mostly, men indulge in these dances, however, these days this is becoming popular among women too.

Ashtami Bhog

As a part of offerings to the Goddess, different Bengali food delicacies are prepared during this period. This is also known as *Bhog*. While both vegetarian and non-vegetarian food items are offered to the Goddess, on each day, however, it is *Bhog* offered on the *Mahashtami* that is the most extravagant one. The *Bhog* consists *Luchi* (a flattened bread made of flour and then deep fried), *Pulao* (a flavoured rice), *Vegetable Korma*, *Sweets* and so on. Another combination of *Bhog*



...women, dressed in white saree with a red border, bid goodbye to their Goddess, by feeding her sweets and smearing vermilion on her forehead and cheeks. This is also known as Devi Boron. After this, the women engage in a game of smearing vermilion on each other. Once this is over, the idol is taken away for immersion.

includes *Khichdi* (a mixture of rice and lentils), *Labda* (a mixed vegetables curry), Tomato *chutney* (tomato paste sauteed with different spices and sugar), *Payesh* (rice and milk pudding), *Begun Bhaja* (fried brinjal) etc. Large eating areas are pre-arranged by the Puja Committees to feed the people living in the particular neighborhood. If you are visiting you may try to reach out to the nearest Puja Committee; they will be happy to host you for this extravangant feast.

Bonedi Bari Puja

All this while we have talked about Puja Committees; they are popularly known as *Barowari Pujo*. Apart from the Barowari Pujas, there are many families who have been celebrating Durga Puja at their ancestral homes for generations. These are popularly known as *Bonedi Barir Pujo*. The celebrations are not only restricted to the family members but are opened for the public at large. Some of the renowned Bonedi Bari Pujas of

Calcutta are organised by the Sovabazar Rajbari, Sabarna Roy Chowdhury Family, Pathuria Ghata Rajbari, Behala Roy Family, Bhukailash Rajbari, Purna Chandra Dhar Family, Shib Krishna Daw Family etc. Each of these families have their ways of celebrating the homecoming of their daughter, and the rituals may differ from each other. Visiting a Bonedi Bari Puja is a must when in Calcutta. Most of these family houses are located in the northern part of the city, which is easily accessible from all other parts of the city.

Sindur Khela

This happens on the last day of the festival, when women, dressed in white saree with a red border, bid goodbye to their Goddess, by feeding her sweets and smearing vermilion on her forehead and cheeks. This is also known as *Devi Boron*. After this, the women engage in a game of smearing vermilion on each other. Once this is over, the idol is taken away for immersion. Visit a nearby Pan-

dal to witness this on the last day.

Visarjan at Ganga Ghat

This is the last act of this grand festival, where idols from different parts of the city are immersed in the Hooghly River one by one. Visit a ghat nearby to witness this grand scheme of affairs. Special cruises are also arranged for people to see the immersion process from a distance. You can book a spot on such cruises as well.

Apart from the above, there are plenty of other activities you can do during this time, but the ones discussed in this article are a must.

1. A street-side vendor has put up a stall outside a pandal;
2. A woman is seen offering sweet to Goddess Durga on the final day;
3. Experiencing the Bonedi Bari Puja at Sovabazar Rajbari;
- 4-6. Scenes from Sindur Khela on the final day (photos 4-6 by Supriya Paul).

Idols have been lined up for immersion near the Ganges Ghat



On the way to the Ghat

Bidding adieu with a heavy heart



Photo by Supriya Paul, Shillong

The idol of Goddess Durga is finally being immersed



Photo by Supriya Paul, Shillong



The farewell

Photo by Supriya Paul, Shillong

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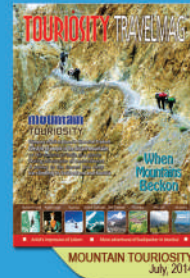
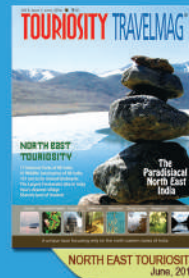
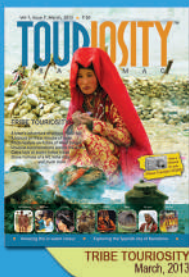
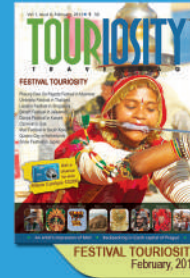
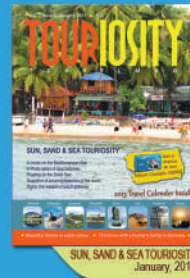
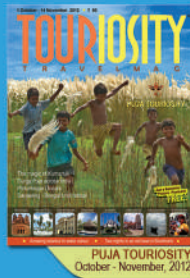
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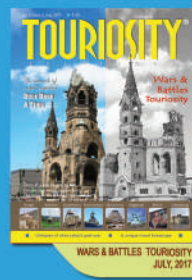
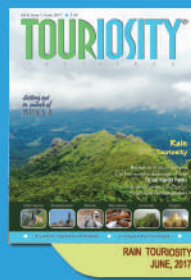
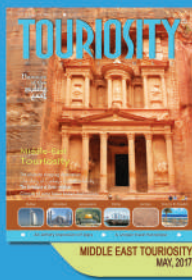
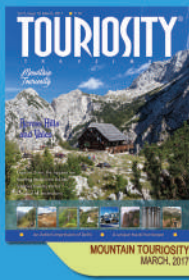
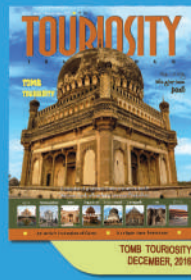
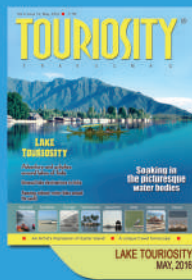
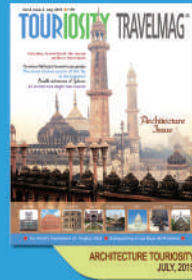
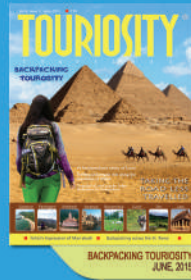
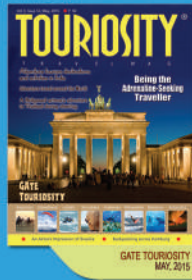
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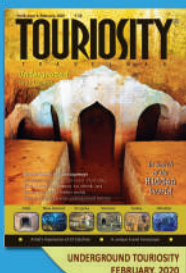
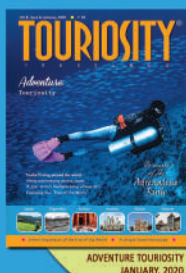
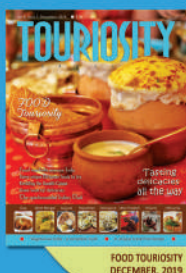
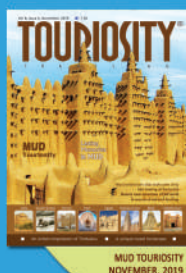
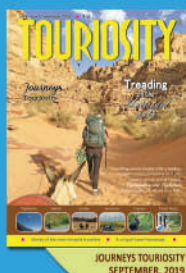
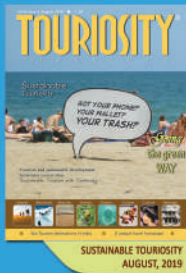
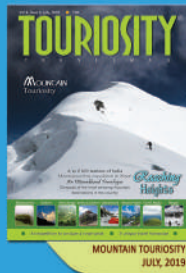
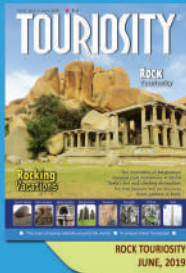
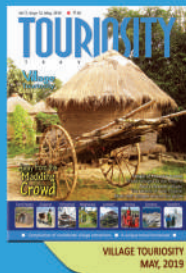
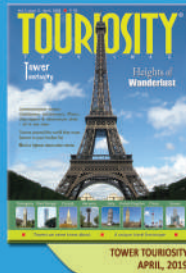
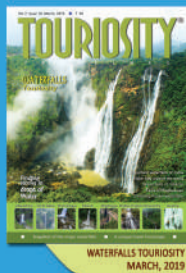
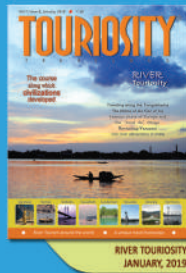
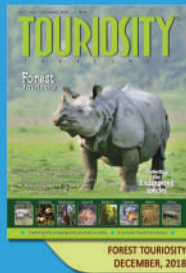
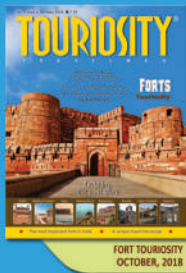
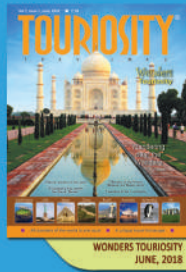
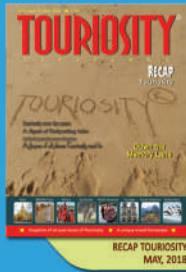
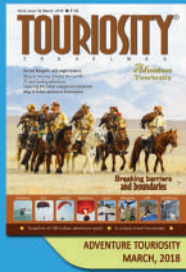
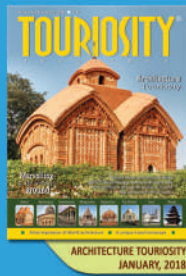
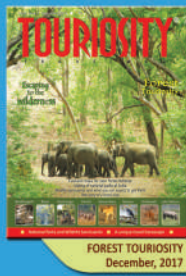
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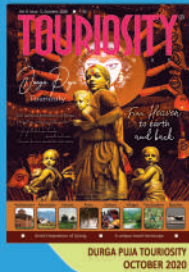
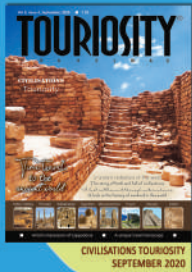
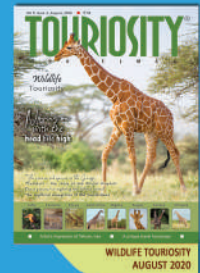
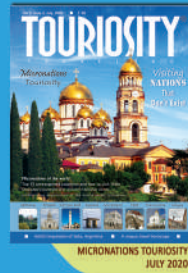
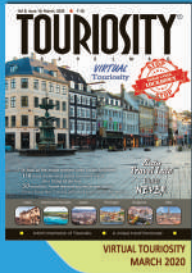
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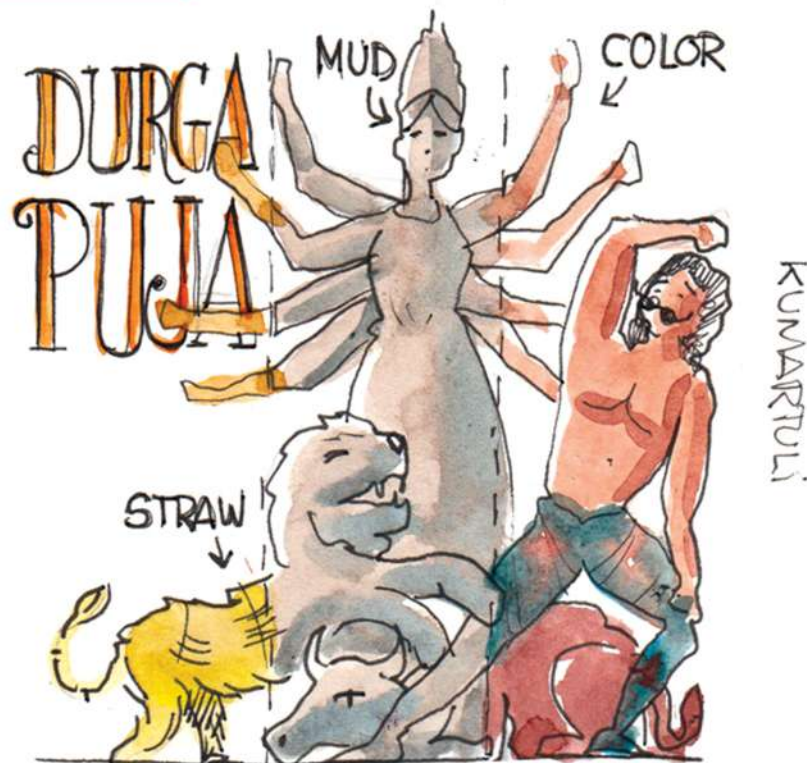
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Bengal's Biggest Carnival

The Durga Puja is like the Carnival of Bengal. People wait and plan for an entire year for these few days of the festival. But this year's Durga Puja has been different. With almost no pandal hopping, restricted crowding, limited fanfare, this annual festival was celebrated sans the quintessential pomp and gaiety. Nevertheless, the theme of one particular Durga Puja in Kolkata managed to capture the attention of people worldwide with its heartwarming message and decor. Abhirup Ghosh has beautifully captured the unique decor and a close-up shot of the much talked about idol of Goddess Durga as a migrant mother from Barisha Club, Behala and shared his experience of talking with the organisers and designers of the pandal and the artist of the idol. TOURIOSITY hails the creativity and humanitarian approach of this Puja Committee in addressing one of the burning problems of the current times. We are happy to share this exclusive coverage.

*Article and photo by Abhirup Ghosh, Kolkata
Illustration by Joaquin Gonzalez Dorao, Madrid, Spain*

DURGA PUJA HONOURING THE PLIGHT OF THE MIGRANT LABOURERS

Durga Puja, in Kolkata, is all about grandeur. It is an extravagant display of art, cut-throat competition between the different clubs in the race of supremacy. Millions of people travel from different parts of the city and the nearby districts to witness this. But with the world currently undergoing a pandemic situation, the festival will not be the same this year. Many of the big-budget Puja Committees have slashed down their budgets to hold back the extravagant celebrations this time around. Some of them have resorted to themes intending to spread the word of caution among those visiting them, given the current situation.

Bengal's

Biggest Carnival

One such Puja Committee which has tried to depict the struggle of the migrant workers during the pandemic and the nation-wide lockdown is Barisha Club (Behala) situated in the south-western part of the city of Kolkata. Here the goddess will be worshipped in the form of a mother, who happens to be a migrant worker, with a child in her arms and three other children by her side.

The toddler in the arms is shirtless while the others are modestly dressed in pale saris. The intention is to depict the harrowing sight of millions of migrants walking miles after miles without food and water for days.

“During the lockdown, when the entire nation went into a stand-still, while some had the luxury of staying indoors in the comfort of a roof over the head and food to eat, there were millions of people covering miles on foot to return to their native places, some dying on the roads due to exertion and lack of food in the process. I was convinced that this story needs to be brought out. These women

on the road walking fearlessly with their trailing children are no less than the goddess herself,” said the theme artist Rintu Das, a graduate from the Government College of Art and Craft.

The idol is staring back with a shirtless child on her arms, with a sun in the background. The sun symbolises the power within her to face the reality and protect her children from the inevitable. The three children walking by her side, show that they are oblivious to the surroundings. They have a world of their own, without pain without worries.

“When I was told by the Puja Committee that the budget of this year’s Puja will have to be slashed down to the one-fifth of the original budget, I took it up as a challenge to bring out maximum creativity within the minimum budget. While the human figurine stands at the center of the theme, the other parts of the installation have been made up of bamboo, sticks, jute sacks (from the rice the local councillor distributed), and other simple objects, which are easily

available, and was completed in less than a month,” said Das.

The idol has been sculpted by Pallab Bhowmick. The idol has been made out of fiberglass, and will not be immersed. The concept is so very special that this idol needs to be preserved, hence, the use of fiberglass. The picture of the idol to a great extent is inspired by the work of the legendary artist Bikash Bhattacharya’s 1989 painting named ‘Dwarpamoyee’.

The Puja will officially start from the 22nd of October, but already this installation has received heaps and bounds of appreciation on social media and elsewhere. Work like this proves Durga Puja is not just only about worshipping the divine, but also celebrating the homecoming and safety of our family members, it is about celebrating the ordinary lives in extraordinary situations and this Puja says it all, loud and clear.





Latpanchar is a small Himalayan sleepy hamlet, primarily a popular destination for bird enthusiasts and that's why the place is also called as Birders' Paradise. It falls under the District of Darjeeling in the state of West Bengal. Latpanchar, sometimes also spelt as Latpanchor, can be reached from New Jalpaiguri Railway Station which is 44 km away, and also from Bag Dogra Airport at Siliguri which is 49 kms away. It takes less than two hours to reach Latpanchar from either of the two places. Sevoke Road from Siliguri leads to Latpanchar through Mahananda Wild Life Sanctuary, which starts from Salugara, a military base and up to Kalijhora, from where a steep road winds up to Latpanchar. The road from Kalijhora is not at all maintained though the distance is only 13 km from this place. However the surroundings are absolutely picturesque. After travelling a certain distance one can hear the chirping of the birds and if one is fortunate enough, the lovely Rufous Necked Hornbill can be seen anywhere on the trees along the road. Even during peak tourist season at Darjeeling one can hardly find any traffic movement on the road to Latpanchar. One can just sit back and relax at any of the Home stays here and enjoy the peacefulness and tranquility of the place.

Latpanchar is also known for Cinchona plantation from the bark of which chemicals are extracted for preparation of medicines for diseases like malaria. It is said that the British first started the plantation of Cinchona at Mangpo here and later it spread to Latpanchar. The Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore had once visited Mangpo

and, mesmerized by the beauty of nature here, he later penned down the song '*Kothao aamar haariye jaowaar nei maana*' meaning 'one has no bindings to get lost'. This was also the feeling I experienced once I reached Latpanchar; my mind wanted to get lost in the tranquility of this beautiful Himalayan hamlet. I have been a Himalayan traveller for many years; I have spent my childhood in Kashmir, the paradise on earth, but truly speaking I never came across such a peaceful hill resort with so nice inhabitants.

I had booked my stay at Adarsh Home Stay, belonging to Shri Bikash Gurung, who along with his wife, runs the homestay. I was provided the vehicle by Bikash only from New Jalpaiguri Railway Station. We were greeted by Bikash and his better half with a cup of hot tea and provided the best accommodation on the second floor of his house - a three bedded room with an open terrace in the front from where one can have a grand view of the valley with the Teesta flowing towards

Latpanchar: A desire to Get Lost

Article & Photos by
Alok Ganguly, Kolkata;

Gazaldoba through the Mahananda Wild Life Sanctuary. I too being a bird enthusiast, Bikash assured me of the best wild life photography in and around.

While sipping tea on his terrace I sighted a Verditer Flycatcher and a Blue Whistling Thrush on the branches of nearby trees. I was simply overjoyed and I knew there is a lot of wildlife awaiting for me. But something else was also in store for me!

On the very first day just after I had refreshed myself after a long and tiring journey and was getting ready for lunch to be served, Bikash came running in, he was excited and was pointing towards a tree where a large Rufous Necked Male Hornbill had perched itself. Bikash said that the bird was collecting fruits for the female to be fed in its nest somewhere deep inside the forest. Hornbill nesting tale is very interesting and exciting as well. All but two species of hornbills nest in tree cavities or rock crevasses that are sealed shut except for a narrow, vertical slit. In places where there are shortages of tree cavities hornbills often fight among themselves and evict other birds or even snakes or large monitor lizards to gain access to a cavity. The female is sealed inside. The slit is about a half inch wide: wide enough to pass food through but narrow enough to seal out potential predators such

monkeys, raptors and other predators that feed on eggs and young birds. If a snake tries to slither, the female inside can fight it off with her bill. The sealed nests also act as a chastity belt. Most nests are built in tree hollows. A typical one would have begun as a hole pecked by a woodpecker that is enlarged by fungus. Later a bee colony would move in and the hole would become larger after a bear scrapes it with his claws to get honey from there.

David Attenborough wrote in *The Life of Birds*, "*The female hornbill is very fussy about the nesting accommodation. To suit her, a tree hole has to be reasonably spacious. It must also have a chimney at the top that will serve as a bolt hole if attacked. Once she has selected it, she invariably improves it by plastering over any crevices or smaller holes. The material she uses varies according to her species.*"

After the female has made herself comfortable in a good nesting site the male brings lumps of soil moistened with his saliva and sometimes augmented with droppings, chewed wood, bark and other detritus. Together they build a wall of mud: he from the outside and she from the inside. The soil is applied with the side of the mouth. Among some species, the male swallows mud and regurgitates it in little balls to the female.

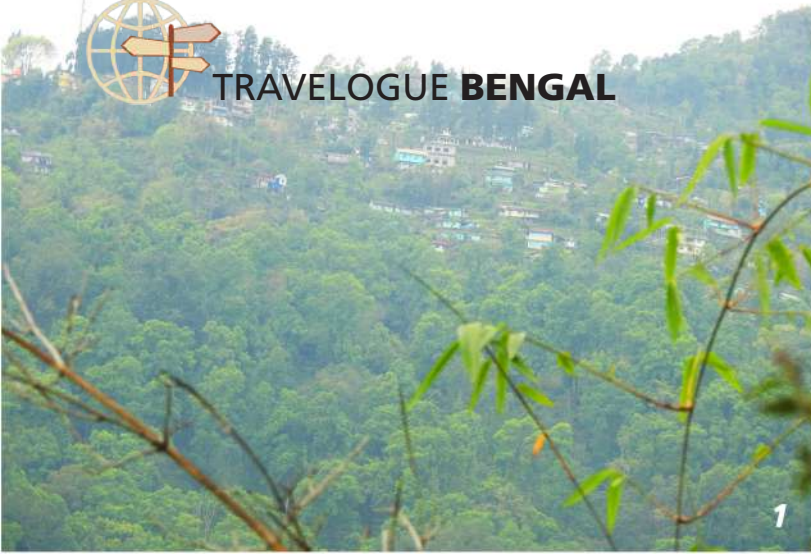
First subsidiary entrances are sealed, then the main one is changed into a slit. Much of the work is done by the female. While she is doing this the male brings her food as well as more material for the plastering. Once the wall is complete the female is trapped inside the nest with only a small hole to outside through which to get food and communicate. The female of small species lay up to six eggs and incubates them for 25 days. The female of large species lays two eggs and incubates them for 45 days. During this time and after the chicks are born the male is responsible for supplying food. After the chicks have hatched the male may make as many as 70 feeding trips a day, bringing the female and the chicks geckos, seeds, insects, frogs slugs, berries and occasionally snakes. The males of some large forest species swallow fruits and regurgitate them one at a time to the female. This is usually done by the male Rufous Necked Hornbill.

The female ejects her excrement out the opening. She does this by putting her rear end to the hole and shooting her excrement as far as possible. This is done not only to keep the nest clean,

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1. Ahaldara Tea Garden;
 2. A view of the Latpanchar Hamlet.

2





reducing the chance of disease, but also to prevent predators from locating the nest by the smell of the excrement. In most cases it takes the chicks a while to master this technique and before they do the female picks up the excrement and toss it out the slot or uses it make repairs on the wall.

Female hornbills remain trapped inside the nest for three to five months, while their eggs are incubating and the chicks grow up. They molt while in the nest, casting out their flight feather shortly before laying the eggs and re-grow them before emerging from the nest. During their time in the nesting, the female and her young are totally dependent on the male for food. If something happens to him, often the whole family perishes. Among species that form nesting groups, the entire group

gathers food for the nesting females. Among some African species, when the young chicks grow to a large size the female turns her nest into a split level with the upstairs for her and the downstairs for her chicks.

In this context I would like to inform all bird enthusiasts that photography of bird nesting could be harmful for the birds as well the chicks inside the nests. National Audobon Society for birds has already provided guidelines for do's and don'ts of bird nesting photography. The popularity of bird photography is booming, and advances in digital technology have put stunning images within ever-easier reach. But with this reach comes the critical responsibility of protecting the birds we photograph. This is never more important than during nesting season, when birds

are both doing their most important work—reproducing—and are at their most vulnerable.

Ethical bird photography requires being constantly aware of the behavior of our subjects, and on the lookout for signs of stress or fear. These may vary across species, but common distress behavior may include a stiff upright posture and a widening of the eyes (particularly with owls); attempts to look as big as possible, sometimes with wings flared out; and warning vocalizations. Do the parents fly away and not return? If they're avoiding the nest because you're close, the unprotected nestlings or eggs could be threatened by the hot sun or chilly temperatures. A photographer once set up a blind near an American White Pelican rookery, unintentionally





flushing the parents, which stayed away all day. Hundreds of chicks perished in the direct sun. Ethical bird photography requires being constantly aware of the behavior of the subjects, and on the lookout for signs of stress or fear. Telephoto lenses are a good choice, since you can shoot from a distance. But how far away does one need to be? There's really no hard-and-fast rule. Repeated visits by multiple photographers have a cumulative impact. If a nesting bird is disturbed often enough, it may abandon its nest (and eggs). Sometimes it's clear that lots of birders or other photographers have visited a nest. In that case, one should be ready to simply forego this photographic

opportunity. These cautions need to be maintained ethically while photographing birds or their nests. Latpanchar is one such place which may provide one an opportunity to come across a bird's nest all of a sudden. Though forest authorities have put up sign boards at various places strictly prohibiting photography of nesting and once caught in the act, the punishment can go up to a large fine and penalty and also imprisonment.

The first afternoon Bikash asked me to accompany him into the forest for a photographic session. We trekked through some part of the hill to reach a spot where we found various species of

bird in abundance. I was happy to find some Long Tailed Broadbills here, lovely cute birds with a loud piercing whistling sound. But to my astonishment, we also found a large Rufous Necked Male Hornbill very close to us giving me ample of opportunity to click the bird in various poses. Just then Bikash drew my attention towards something: the bird was vigorously rubbing its beak against

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1. Ahaldara Tea Garden;
 2. Coronation Bridge;
 3. A view of Latpanchar;
 4. Bikash Gurung's Homestay;
 5. The Zindagi Point;
 6. View from Ahaldara.





the branches of the tree. I asked Bikash as to why it was behaving in that way. He simply asked me to move away from that place, and so we did. Later Bikash informed me that the Hornbill's nest was somewhere nearby and he was expressing his displeasure at our presence there by rubbing his beak; it means the birds was literally angry with us. Without disturbing it anymore we abandoned the place and returned to our homestay.

That evening we stayed back in our terrace watching the lovely landscape around us, the village lower down in the hills and many other birds perched on the branches of the trees. The terrace of this homestay is so nicely constructed that one can get an eye level view of birds on the top of the trees and even inside the branches. Chances of good photography from this point could be ideal for any wildlife photographer. One can get in touch with Bikash Gurung through his portal www.adarshhomes-taylatpanchar.com.

The same evening another interesting incident took place. The Himalayan street dogs are fluffy and hence very attractive. We found one such street dog in front of our homestay. While we were spending time on the terrace, my wife and daughter saw the dog below and made a sound to attract it. The dog looked up and ran away from there. I was on the other side of the terrace, when all of sudden my wife shouted in panic; I spotted something at her feet. We were amazed to see that the dog had actually come up to us at the balcony. It looked like a Himalayan sheep dog, fluffy and innocent. It remained with us till dusk. Later Bikash's wife told us that they call him by the name 'Kutu'. The dog became very familiar with us and whenever we were in the homestay he was around almost all the time. Leaving Kutu behind staring at us while we departed

Latpanchar was awfully soul stirring.

After dusk, Bikash's wife served us hot tea along with fried potato pakoras, the memory of which still makes my mouth water. The landscape at night was also awesome from the terrace with lights blinking in the nearby villages and on mountain slopes. We preferred a vegetarian dinner that night although chicken and egg curry are also available in the homestay. Mutton or fishes are not provided here as these are not available in the local market of Latpanchar. We were already very tired and went to bed early.

We woke up to a bright sunny morning with Bikash knocking at our door for the morning tea and to fix up the schedule for the day's itinerary. We decided to go for some bird watching after having tea, after breakfast we would leave for the Namthing Lake and Ahaldara view point and return to home stay for lunch. Post lunch we planned a trip to Mahananda Wild Life Sanctuary.

Namthing Lake or Pokhari, as it is called here, is located at Shelphu Hills of Darjeeling District at an altitude of 4500 ft. above sea level. The beautiful lake is the natural habitat of a number of rare species including the endangered Himalayan Salamander (a lizard like creature). It is a unique and rare tailed amphibian (Order: Urodela / Caudata) which is endangered and protected under Schedule II Part I of the Indian Wildlife Protection Act, 1972. It is a keystone species of the lentic habitats in the eastern Himalayas. It is a member of the ancient family Salamandridae, members of which were known to exist in Europe from the Jurassic era. A barbed wire fencing has now been erected around the lake for protection of the endangered Salamanders from direct human contact. Earlier travelers used to take a plunge in the lake water and play games there, resulting in killing the little creature in large numbers. Now the forest department has put a strict vigil and anyone found coming in close proximity of the lake are punished with heavy fine or imprisonment or both.

Ahaldara view point is only few minutes drive from Namthing Lake and at a

distance of 5 kms. from Latpanchar. One has to trek about 300 metres one way to reach the top. The view is spectacular. The altitude of Ahaldara is about 5000 feet from sea level. But to my bad luck the surrounding was covered by mist that day and I could not get a clear view. Otherwise on a clear day one can get a 360° view of the surroundings. This is the viewpoint from where you can watch the sunrise over the Himalayas. One can have a view of Kurseong, Chatakpur, Namchi, Dooars, and Siliguri. You can also see the Teesta River, Kalimpong hill area, Algara, Lava, Lolegaon, Bagora, Tinchule, Takdah, Mangpo from here. However, Ahaldara proved lucky to me in other way. All my phone networks were disabled at Latpanchar and here at the top the services were available and quickly enough we were able to make contacts back at home informing them of our safe arrival and stay at Latpanchar.

A 20 minutes' drive from here will take you to the Sitong area, which has gained prominence due to its Orange orchards. The area is also a lesser-known Birding paradise, almost all the birds that can be seen at Latpanchar are also sighted there. We returned from Ahaldara completely unsatisfied because a trip to this area without the spectacular view of the snow clad mountains of Kanchenjunga is incomplete. I decided to come here later in the hope of a better luck next time. We returned to our homestay, refreshed ourselves and had a delicious lunch. Soon we were ready for our next venture to the jungle of Mahananda Wildlife Sanctuary.

Mahananda Wildlife Sanctuary is located on the foothills of the Himalayas, between the Teesta and Mahananda rivers. Situated in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal. Latpanchar actually forms the highest part of the Sanctuary, with an average

1. Long Tailed Broadbill;
2. A Maroon Oriole;
3. A Scarlet Minivet;
4. Rufous Bellied Eagle;
5. A Rufous Necked Hornbill - Male;
6. Black Bulbul;
7. Rufous Necked Hornbill - Female;
8. Verditer Flycatcher.



Ethical bird photography requires being constantly aware of the behavior of our subjects, and on the lookout for signs of stress or fear. These may vary across species, but common distress behavior may include a stiff upright posture and a widening of the eyes (particularly with owls); attempts to look as big as possible, sometimes with wings flared out; and warning vocalizations. Do the parents fly away and not return? If they're avoiding the nest because you're close, the unprotected nestlings or eggs could be threatened by the hot sun or chilly temperatures.





During their time in the nesting, the female and her young are totally dependent on the male for food. If something happens to him, often the whole family perishes. Among species that form nesting groups, the entire group gathers food for the nesting females.

altitude of 4200 ft. This part of Mahananda Wild Life Sanctuary is bit different from its other side. As this side is a hilly area visitors can find many trees which belong only to the hills and wildlife that are not often visible in the plains. Also, the view from here is fantastic.

Rang Bahadur Rai, our chauffeur for the trip was already there. About half-an-hour's drive brought us near the gateway to the sanctuary. On the way we found another Suzuki Alto stranded on the way and its driver waving at us. At first we thought he was asking for some help but when we reached near his vehicle he pointed his finger towards the top of a tree. He had a good knowledge of the bird habitat here and said that it was a Rufous Bellied Eagle, an endangered species and I was lucky this time to get a snap of this precious bird of prey. Rufous-bellied Eagles are small-sized eagles, 54–60 cm long. They have broad rounded wings, held flat while soaring, and a short broad tail. The adults have blackish upper-part and head. The foreneck and breast

are white, and the tail and flight feathers are white barred with dark. The rest of the underparts are chestnut. Males and females look alike.

As already mentioned some animals found in this hilly area are not found in the foothills. As we stepped inside the forest our guide, Praveen, a teenager who had just completed his Higher Secondary, pointed out towards some movement on a branch of tree. Soon after my wife spotted a black long tailed small animal. We could soon identify the animal as Giant (Ratufa bicolor). It is a large tree squirrel in the genus Ratufa native. It is found in the forests areas ranging from Northern Bangladesh, North East India, Eastern Nepal, Bhutan, Southern China, Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Malaysia, Cambodia, Vietnam and Western Indonesia. The Head and body length varies from 35 to 58 centimetres (14 to 23 in) in length, and the tail is up to 60 centimetres (24 in) long, with an overall length of up to 118 centimetres (46 in). The back, ears and bushy tail are deep brown to black with

a lighter buff-coloured belly. This was my prize collection. While visiting the Jaldapara forest in Dooars region I had shot an Hoary Bellied Squirrel, a smaller one like our common Palm Squirrel, but this one was outstanding.

Later while exploring the sanctuary I could click some birds like the Maroon Oriole, Rufous Sibia, Blue Capped Thrush etc. But when the Sultan Tit arrived, it was getting dark. It perched in front of the setting sun and I could not get a very clear picture of this beauty. The Sultan Tit is called the song bird with a black head and a yellow crest which gives it an appearance of a Sultan and thus it is named so.

The day's trip was over and with some really sweet memories of wildlife we returned to our homestay. Bikash joined us at tea in the evening to hear our stories of the day. We were having a nice time over a cup of tea and hot pakoras when we heard the thundering clouds over the cliff. Cool chilling wind



started blowing along with large drops of rain. Bikash asked us to move inside while he himself went downstairs. For the next three hours it was normal rain with some wind. We quickly finished our dinner and retired to our bedrooms. Soon the electricity too went off. Bikash's inverter came handy then. As already mentioned earlier, something more was in store for me during the trip. We experienced it that night only.

So far I have travelled to many Himalayan hamlets and I adore the beautiful nature. The first time I faced a Norwester was in the Buxa Hills in 2017; it lasted for an hour and it was more or less tolerable. But in Latpanchar things turned out to be terrible from 10 PM onwards. Gusty winds along with hailstorm started hitting the metal roof of the homestay very hard. The wind speed gradually increased and to my belief it could be nearly 80-90 kms per hour. Bikash once came knocking at our door to check if we were safe. Around midnight it seemed that everything in the hills were breaking apart, from trees to houses; there were deafening sounds everywhere. We could hear the cries of

people and some of them we could see from our windows seemed to be searching for something with the help of their torches. Bikash and his wife once again came upstairs and this time they took us down and shifted us to another room. All of us stayed awake till 2.30 AM after which the storm stopped but the shower continued. We woke up to Bikash's call at around 7.30 in the morning. Looking at the bright sunshine, it seemed as if nothing had happened a few hours back. Bikash informed that roofs of some houses had blown away rendering people shelterless on that scary night. Many trees were uprooted damaging electric poles and wires but by God's grace there was no damage to life. I found the people of Latpanchar to be very hard working and with everyone's effort within no time life was restored back to normal.

Rang Bahadur Rai informed that the road to Siliguri was clear. I decided to leave Latpanchar the same day and informed Bikash about it. He was smiling, and could understand my fear. Moreover, there were polling for the elections for the Loksabha seat in Darjeeling, Siliguri the next day. I

was apprehensive about problems due to political disturbances.

I bid adieu to Latpanchar around 11AM. I left with a heavy heart and a promise to return in a few months. I will never forget the services rendered to my family by Bikash and his wife on that cursed night. Even on that scary night, he was still in all smiles, providing us the moral support we needed at that hour.

When I had arrived in Latpanchar I was so impressed with the tranquility of the place that I expressed my desire to spend the rest of my life in this peaceful Himalayan hamlet. But nature god had his own way of ordering me to go back to my roots, to where I belong. After watching the wrath of nature for almost the whole night, we were happy to be back home.

-
1. Way to Mahananda Wildlife Sanctuary;
 2. Cinchona Garden;
 3. An orange orchard;
 4. A Giant Black Squirrel;
 5. The Namthing Lake;
 6. The Mahananda Wildlife Sanctuary.



Women Travel Network

ADVERTORIAL

Women have many roles to play in various arenas. Her place in society is punctuated with many tasks. While accomplishing such tasks she compromises with her love to explore the unknown. Kayaking through seas, relishing exquisite delicacies of various countries, experiencing deep water snorkelling or just seeing the world can be any woman's dream waiting to be fulfilled. Making such dreams come true for many women are the new era all-women travel services.

Why Women Travel Network?

Many a times, when your skin thirsts for a touch of mist or dew drops and your heart yearns for an escape far from the daily life routine or the load of work in your respective jobs, you start seeking for people eager to accompany you. You try convincing your husband or children to take some time out of their busy schedules, but many times in vain. At those difficult times, the Women Travel Network (WTN) gives you the grand idea to set out alone to evaluate the passion of your. Personal safety is of great concern to you, some of these days, so maybe fearing to set sail for your

maiden venture all by yourselves. WTN takes this into account and enables you to indulge in thrilling vacations with a group of spirited women tourists of all ages all geared with the same vigour. Things can be made easy and trouble-free yet well organised by WTN as it reduces the prime inconveniences like buying tickets, booking for lodging and drawing up itinerary.

What exactly WTN does?

With WTN you have the option of getting the best possible accommodation that would not harm your budget and the discretion of staying alone in rooms or sharing with someone. WTN also ensures that a suitable poise is maintained between seeing around and resting not making someone too fatigued with consistent tours. This network looks after all the formalities giving you a chance to pack your belongings without any hesitation. The organised travel plans will help gather fruitful travelling experiences in the company of like-minded women. WTN gives you the scope of bonding, and at the same time helps you make new friends. So if you are looking for a getaway, an escapade and your husband's/son's/father's /boyfriend's/friend's dates are bothering, Woman Travel





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So what's so special about WTN?

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WTN offers to make those unfulfilled travel wishes come true for many women. With a number of national and international tour packages of WTN you can travel the world, alone, with your son (below 8 years) or your daughter (no age bar) and make unforgettable journeys. Whether you travel alone, or with a kid, friends, neighbours or relations, Women Travel Network can give you memorable trips. Absolutely hassle-free and comfortable, yet adventurous and safe fun trips are what this Network has in bag for you. A real boon for a n y woman!

If you have your own group of women

It is also possible to make your own preferred groups and Women Travel Network will take care of all the formalities of booking, ticketing and managing the tour. You just need to enjoy your trip and forget about everything else. So get geared up ladies and make your dream come true.

How to go about it?

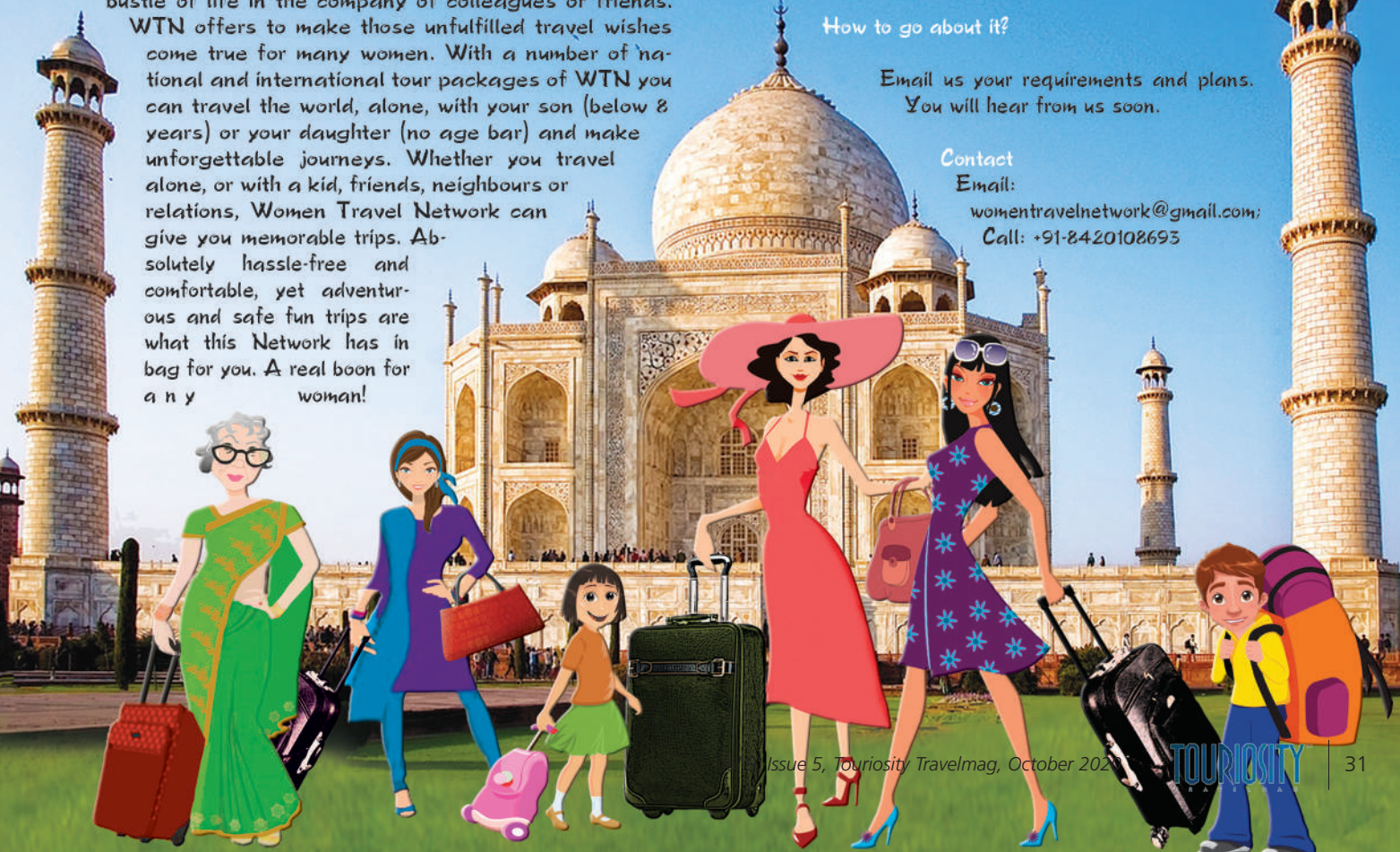
Email us your requirements and plans. You will hear from us soon.

Contact

Email:

womentravelnetwork@gmail.com;

Call: +91-8420108693





Aries
(21 March – 19 April)

This month could bring about a time for you to advance your career or make more money. It is also a time for you to find new ways to build greater financial opportunities and financial connections. You feel more daring and focused on what you want, and are willing to make it happen now.

Places to visit: St. Lucia – Lush rainforests, majestic mountains and romantic resorts are all reasons to visit this Caribbean island. It is a heaven for honeymooners.

Masinagudi – It is located on the foothills of the Nilgiri Mountains, making it completely adorned with the alluring beauties of nature.

Favorable Dates: Nov 2, 7, 11, 16, 20, 25 Favorable Colors: Blue & White

You can be more ambitious and driven, want to make sure you're going in the right direction, and can experience a high point of sorts in some part of life. You can work hard and smart for what you want, take on responsibility well, and have a more mature attitude.

Places to visit: Banff, Alberta – From hiking and white water rafting to skiing and snowboarding, Banff offers travelers an abundance of year-round outdoor activities.

Mount Abu – With home to over 80 exquisitely carved temples, most striking of which are the Jain Temples at Delwara - some of which are built over a 1000 years ago, this is a great destination to visit.

Favorable Dates: Nov 1, 2, 10, 20, 28, 29 Favorable Colors: Blue & Yellow



Taurus
(20 April – 20 May)



Gemini
(21 May – 20 June)

This is a great time for you to focus on a dream that you have and make it happen. You will experience love and have amazing relationships throughout the month. This is a new era for you and you couldn't be happier. You keep looking towards the future now on.

Places to visit: Yokohama – It is Japan's second largest metropolis, and packs considerable appeal with its bayside location, eclectic architecture, microbreweries and tasty cuisine.

Ranikhet – Ranikhet resides at a comfortable height to admire the western peaks of the Himalayas. Amidst tall pine trees the hill station retains its peaceful ambience.

Favorable Dates: Nov 3, 6, 12, 15, 21, 24 Favorable Colors: Red & Yellow

You can think more long-term, and you can make plans that you know will help you succeed. During this time you can benefit from connecting with others emotionally, opening yourself up to have better intimacy in your life, and strengthening the bonds you have with others.

Places to visit: Cape Town – Mountain's flat-topped mass, with historic wine estates in every direction, hip markets selling the fruits of the Cape's fertile terrain, and inventive restaurants winning global plaudits make it a worth visit town.

Auli – Auli in the remote regions of Uttarakhand throws its captivating effect in both the major seasons of the year.

Favorable Dates: Nov 1, 2, 10, 20, 28, 29 Favorable Colors: Blue & Yellow



Cancer
(21 June – 22 July)



Leo
(23 July – 22 August)

You could advance your career during this period but this is also a good time to make a positive first impression for a job interview or meeting. You find other people to be quite beneficial now, and they want to help you in any way.

Places to visit: Ohrid, Macedonia – Ohrid enjoys a stunning position that is best viewed from a boat. From the water you'll see the town's terracotta roofs broken up by centuries-old church spires and overlooked by the turreted walls of Car Samoil's Castle.

Mahabaleshwar – Mahabaleshwar is a hill station that offers a rejuvenating ambience where you can savour charming views of nature at its blooming best.

Favorable Dates: Nov 1, 5, 10, 14, 19, 23 Favorable Colors: White & Green

You can use this energy to have a new experience that opens your eyes and mind in a profound way, to explore new worlds and realms and pockets of your mind and soul, or to find your inner optimist.

Places to visit: Jackson Hole, Wyoming – Tucked away less than 60 miles south of Yellowstone National Park, Jackson Hole sees an influx of winter travelers looking to hit the slopes at upscale ski resorts.

Nainital – A perfect honeymoon destination in the Himalayan bounty, Nainital has a picture of forested valleys amidst which gently sails a lake.

Favorable Dates: Nov 2, 8, 11, 17, 20, 26 Favorable Colors: White & Blue



Virgo
(23 August – 22 Sept)

Manish Kumar Arora is a renowned KP Astrologer, Numerologist, Tarot Reader and Vastu Consultant. He will be with Touriosity Travelmag to bring to our readers monthly predictions based on zodiac signs with special emphasis on travel predictions. Our readers can plan their tours accordingly. He can be reached at manish@manishastrologer.com



This can be a good time to look for another job or get presented with new work opportunities. It can also be good for focusing on your health and improving your lifestyle. If in a relationship, you can make it fun, and inject some sparks into it.

Places to visit: Merida, Mexico – On any given day you'll find a dizzying array of live music, art shows and dance performances, and the booming culinary scene.

Ooty – Activities here include visiting various sunset points, botanical gardens, tea plantations, lakes and various waterfalls. Doddabetta Peak, Tiger Hill and Ooty Lake.

Favorable Dates: Nov 4, 7, 13, 16, 22, 25 Favorable Colors: Red & Blue

You have energy for financial opportunities, and you can see more of them presented to you. You have better focus, and can stick with whatever you start. You enjoy getting in touch with your body, with nature, your senses, and stimulating your senses.

Places to visit: Aalborg – The vibe in Aalborg in Denmark is laid back, informal and positive, reflecting the general mood of the people of North Jutland.

Kodaikanal – Slightly foggy and pleasant weather, meandering roads, lush forests and verdant hills are some of the prime attraction of this hill retreat.

Favorable Dates: Nov 3, 5, 12, 14, 21, 23 Favorable Colors: Green & Blue



You should be feeling youthful, energized and happy. Relationships will be magical and fun. The optimism you feel can help you in almost any venture you want to tackle. You can focus on your home and family life, spending more time with the people you see as family, and making the home you have as comfortable as possible.

Places to visit: France – Visitors are attracted by historic cities, a beautiful countryside, the castles of the Loire Valley, and Brittany and Normandy.

Munnar – Munnar is a heavenly tourist destination in Kerala, blessed with tranquility, a nice weather, various tourist attractions and splendid scenery.

Favorable Dates: Nov 3, 5, 12, 14, 21, 23 Favorable Colors: Green & Blue



You want variety in life, and you can take on lots of little projects and social activities to keep yourself busy and your mind occupied. You can identify strongly with what you say, with your ideas, and your opinions. Reaching inside of yourself and pulling out your strength is necessary now.

Places to visit: Madrid – Spain's buzzing capital city offers grand architecture, lively public plazas, a thriving culinary scene, and legendary nightlife.

Dharamshala – The place offers numerous possible hikes for the urban dwellers, giving first hand experiences of the blissful Himalayan nature.

Favorable Dates: Nov 4, 6, 13, 15, 22, 23 Favorable Colors: Green & Purple



You can benefit when you focus on your ideas and use your mind. You're more positive and enthusiastic about life and you want to communicate openly and freely with everyone.

Places to visit: Karelia – It is a republic in north-west Russia, and known as one of the country's most beautiful places. The nature here is breathtaking and more Finnish than Russian, with lakes, waterfalls and trees growing on giant rocks.

Kalimpong – The town is beautifully studded with colorful Buddhist monasteries, churches and temples which get adorned by the magical green engulfing the region.

Favorable Dates: Nov 2, 4, 11, 13, 21, 29 Favorable Colors: Green & Yellow



You can focus on your future dreams, and what you hope to do with your life. You can become more serious about your relationships with some loved ones, while you walk away from relationships with others, and become more invested in some hobbies and give up others.

Places to visit: Jakarta – Capital of the Republic of Indonesia, Jakarta is a huge, sprawling metropolis, home to 9 million people with large variety of picturesque locations.

Panchmarhi – Tourism here mainly about rock paintings, pre-historic caves, lofty peaks, forest gorges and stunning waterfalls.

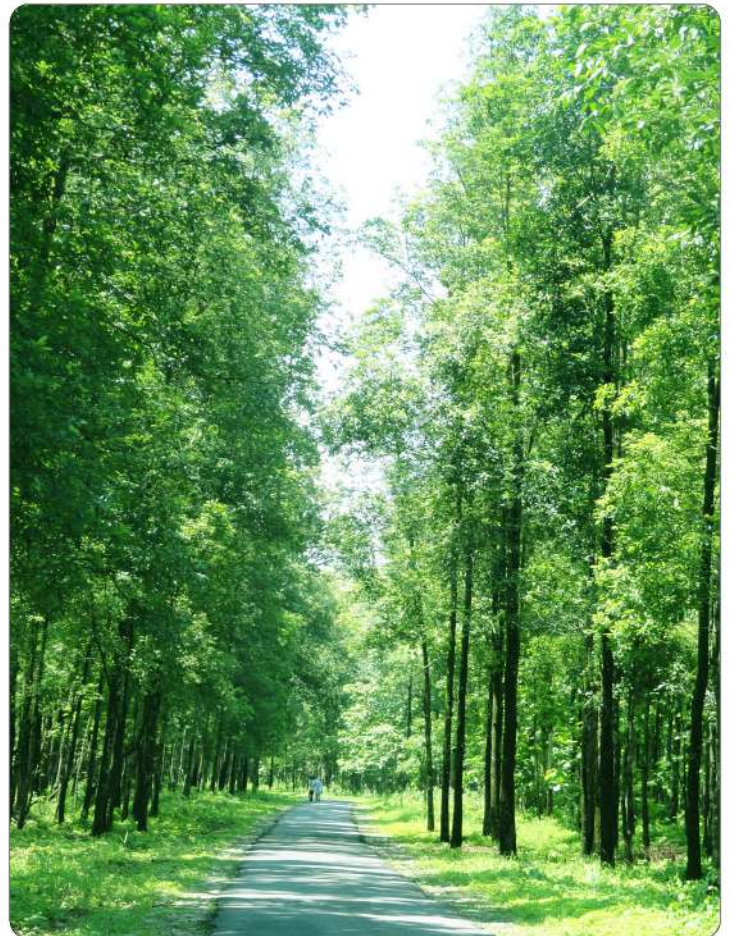
Favorable Dates: Nov 5, 7, 14, 16, 23, 30 Favorable Colors: White & Purple



100

WEEKEND DESTINATIONS

in Bengal



West Bengal is not just about literature, cultural history, or the lip-smacking food. Looking closely at the natural wealth of the state, one will be surprised to find almost all kinds of geographical features, except deserts. From rivers, to plains, deltas, mangroves, forests, hills, there is so much that the state has to offer. A major part of the state is connected to the Bay of Bengal, which automatically gives us one of the most coveted destinations – beaches! From the largest delta in the world to the border of Odisha along the Bay of Bengal, there are many beautiful beaches along the eastern coast. Similarly, from the world largest mangrove forests to the forests of the Dooars region with abundance in faunal variety, from beautiful quaint hill stations to historical places, the state has a huge diversity to offer. This article brings to readers a snapshot of weekend and short haul destinations in the state.

Kolkata

Earlier known as Calcutta, this city is the only metropolitan city in the eastern part of the country. It is also fondly referred to as the 'City of Joy'. It is known as the Cultural Capital of India due to its pioneering activities in the fields of art, theatre and literature. It is also often regarded as the Intellectual Capital of India and it is worth noting that a majority of the Nobel Laureates from India have been from this city alone. The city was the capital of British India from the year 1772 to 1911. Due to this a majority of the early British era buildings, especially the Victorian buildings are found here. It is home to a host of historical and architectural landmarks including the Victoria Memorial Palace, St. Paul's Cathedral, St. John's Church, Marble Palace, Shahid Minar, Fort William, Writers' Building, Howrah Bridge and Indian Museum. There are some famous temples including the Kalighat and Dakshineswar

temples. The city is a perfect blend of old colonial charm and modern high-rises. It is also a paradise for artists, foodies, musicians and culture lovers. The city has a vibrant night life. It has a sizeable Chinese and Armenian population, and both these communities maintain their own culture and have their own temples, schools, colleges here.

Dooars

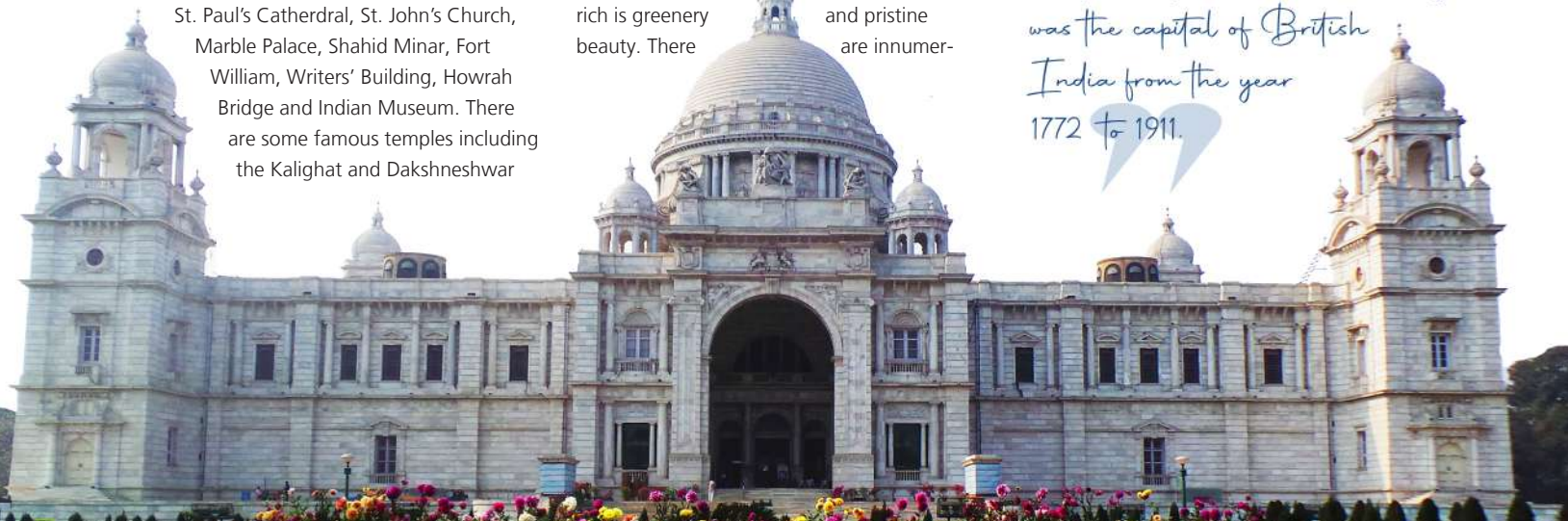
The Dooars region historically came under the Kamata Kingdom (a part of the Kamarupa Kingdom of Assam) and was ruled by the Koch Dynasty. It was later conquered by Bhutan and became a part of this country and continued to be so till middle of 19th century when the British Annexed it and put it under a Commander. Soon the whole of Dooars was divided into two parts and the eastern part was merged with Assam while the western part became part of West Bengal. The two parts also came to be known as Assam Dooars and Bengal Dooars respectively. Dooars is the gateway to Nepal and Bhutan, hence the name which means a 'door'.

Dooars lies on the southern foothills of the Himalayas and north of the mighty Brahmaputra River that flows through Assam. It forms part of the Terai-Duar Savanna and Grasslands which is home to the world's tallest grasslands. The plains of Darjeeling district, entire Jalpaiguri and Alipurduar districts and the northern part of Cooch Behar district of West Bengal and parts of the Dhubri, Kokrajhar, Barpeta, Goalpara and Bongaigaon districts of Assam constitute the Dooars region. The whole of Dooars is very rich in greenery and pristine beauty. There are innumerable



St. John's Church, Kolkata

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Victoria Memorial, Kolkata



DESTINATION BENGAL



Top: Buxa Tiger Reserve
Left: Jayanti at dawn
Below: Jaldapara National Park



able streams and rivers flowing through the region, thus making the it a perfect place to unwind. The region is home to many hill stations as well as national parks. The tea gardens here are not only the economic backbone in terms of trade, but also a thing that attracts tourists due to their sheer beauty. Tourism is another major revenue earner for the region.

Siliguri

This is a city which spans between Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri. It is located on the banks of the Mahananda River in the foothills of the Himalayas. It has a large population of Tibetans and a notable number of Bhutanese permanently settled. It is the 3rd largest city in West Bengal and the largest city in Dooars area. It is regarded as the gateway to northeast India and

to the rest of Dooars and north Bengal region. It is a picturesque town and together with its twin city Jalpaiguri (which is a major railway junction) that lies 35 km away, it forms a major metropolis of this part of India. For visit to any place in Dooars, Siliguri is the starting point.

Jaldapara

Jaldapara National Park is situated to the east of the Teesta river, also called the Dooars Region of Eastern Himalayas. The park is fed by rivers Torsa (from north to south), Malangi (from east to west), and five rivulets Hollong, Buri Torsa, Chirakhawa, Sisamara and Gorumara. This National Park has currently an area of 216.51 sq kms and is home to 250 rhinos, 6 Bengal tigers, 240 species of birds, wild elephants, eight species of turtles, gaurs (Indian

bison), deer, barking deer, wild boars, leopard, reptiles and insects. However, it is known mainly for its one-horned rhino population, next only to the Kaziranga National Park. Tiger is the only predator of rhino here. The tall trees and grass lands here are enchanting. The NP remains closed between 15th June and 15th September because of the breeding season, heavy rains and flooding of rivers. Between October to March is the best time to visit as new elephant grass grows, the animals frequently come in search of tender shoots and number of sightings are high. Summer is hot and humid, the winter is chilling.

Khayerbari

Also known as South Khairbari, it is known for a unique Tiger and Leopard Rescue Center. In this rehabilitation center and park, rescued tigers and leopards are kept in natural surroundings. The animals are rescued from smugglers and tea garden areas and rehabilitated from circuses after a ban was put on use of wild animals in circus. The injured animals are taken care of and later released back. The park has a number of birds too. Khayerbari is located only 12 km from Hashimara Railway station and 18 km from Madarihat station.

Chilapata Sanctuary

It is another dense forest near Jaldapara. Between 15th and 17th September every year an eco-tourism festival is organized here. There are eco-guides available who give guided tour in the jungle. The ruins of 5th century Nalraja Garh, a fort belonging to the Nal Kings, found here is an archeological treasure but is not well maintained. This dark dense green belt between Jaldapara and Buxa is an important corridor for the big herbivores. It is part of a bigger corridor for elephants from Mechi in Nepal to Sankosh in Assam.

Chapramari

Located close to the Gorumara NP, this is another dense forest area in Dooars. It is a continuation of Gorumara and is only separated from

Left: Dooars tea garden;
Below: Dow Hills at Kurseong



the latter by Murti River. The rail line goes through this forest resulting in big concerns for the safety of animals in the area. The most commonly sighted animals in this small sanctuary are the elephants and gaurs, while deer and reptiles are sighted on occasions.

Patlakhawa

After Jaldapara and Gorumara, Patlakhawa forest has been made the third home of the one-horned rhinos of the Dooars region of West Bengal. Three rhinos from Jaldapara are all set to be relocated here.

Totopara

While visiting the Dooars region, one must make come to Totopara, situated 30 km from Jaldapara National Park beside the Torsha River. Here one can meet the original forest people of the region, the primitive Toto tribe. Still untouched by the civilization, the vulnerable tribe is getting smaller in size with time.

Gorumara

Located 80 km from Jaldapara, this is the second most important forest area of the Dooars if one-horned rhinos are in your mind. It has a size of 80 sq km and apart from rhinos, it is also an abode to elephants, gaurs, barking deer, wild boar, reptiles and peacocks. It is situated on the banks of River Murti and River Raidhaka. Unending tea gardens on one side, this eco tourism destination has its own elephant and jeep safari rides. The watch towers here are unique and different from that in Jaldapara. The Murti River is a good picnic

spot. One can collect souvenirs and forest products here.

Buxa Duar

This is a tiger Reserve near the Bhutan Border. Hence the area is under the Army. But it is possible to view wildlife, after taking on spot permit, from watch towers. One can go till Bhutan Ghat beside river Raidhaka. Buxa is famous for the Buxa Fort and is also an important trekking destination. The fort, located at an altitude of 867 metres, is an important tourist destination today. The origin of the fort is not clear but before being taken over by the British it was a continuous point of contention between the Cooch Kings and the King of Bhutan. Under the British it was used as a detention camp for freedom fighters.

Jayanti

Jayanti is a small, picturesque forest village within the Buxa Tiger Reserve along the shores of the Jayanti River which forms a natural border with the hills of Bhutan. The 13 km trek from Buxaduar to Jayanti is especially popular as hikers can enjoy beautiful views of the surrounding landscape, wild flowers and wildlife sighting in the dense forest. The Mahakal Cave is a narrow and dark cave featuring a stalagmite dedicated to Lord Shiva located beside a waterfall. The cave is small but the splendid natural surroundings and the thrilling trek invariably draws trekkers to this place every year. The area near the Jayanti River is a remote picnic spot. The view of the Bhutan Hills on one side and the Buxa Reserve Forest on the other and the flow of the

mountain river Jayanti over rocky bed, make for a good retreat.

Jhallong

This village in Kalimpong District is only 99 km from Siliguri and 77 km from Jalpaiguri. It lies on the banks of the River Jaldhaka on the foothills of the Himalayas on the way to Bindu. This is a paradise for bird lovers as it is home to migratory birds in winter. There is a large reservoir that attracts birds like Eurasian Wryneck, Crested Kingfisher, Brown Dipper, Little Forktail etc. Just across the Jaldhaka River beyond the Hydro electric project is Indo-Bhutan border. A big attraction here is the Jhallong Market where the locals comprising of various tribes, including Bhutanese people from the nearby areas come to buy their necessities. Hence the market becomes a cultural hotpot and a sight to behold. It also has many trekking options.

Bindu

Bindu lies 105 km from Siliguri and is a valley in the Himalayan foothills encircled by the hills of Bhutan that present a picturesque sight. It has an elevation of 2,000 feet and lies on Indo-Bhutan border, River Jaldhaka being the natural border between the two countries. The Jaldhaka Dam here is one of the oldest hydro-electric projects between Indian and Bhutan. Three streams, namely Dudh Khola, Bindu Khola and Jaldhaka, meet at a place near the dam. Bindu presents a lovely view of the Jaldhaka River as it gorges down the lower Kalimpong hills. The view of Jhallong from Bindu is gor-

geous. Tourists are allowed see the dam from a distance only.

Samsing

At a distance of about 80 km from Siliguri, this is a picturesque place with an elevation of 3,000 ft. It is a nature lover's paradise. The road to Samsing presents views of beautiful tea gardens. At Samsing, one witnesses the road suddenly starting to rise and eventually getting merged with the mighty Himalayas. Lush green landscape, tea gardens and foggy weather makes it a dream getaway for city dwellers. The Neora Valley National Park is only 18 kms from here. One can see orange orchards and cardamom plantations here. It is also the place to see the spectacular view of River Murti. The Rocky Island, an eco-resort, lies very close to Samsing and even if you are not staying at this resort, you can well spend some hours enjoying the natural bliss here. Trekking among orange, tea and cardamom plantations from Samsing to Suntaleykhola is charming.

Suntaley Khola

Five kilometers away from Samsing lies Suntaley Khola, named after a stream of the same name. Here the road ends close to the stream. From here one can have views of the Bhutan hills and the Jelep La Pass between India and Tibet. It is known for its orange orchards. There is an accommodation owned by WBFDC where tourists can spend the night. For reaching this resort, one has to pass through a small hanging metal net bridge, which is another big attraction. Suntaley Khola is very close to the Neora Valley National Park.

Todey

Lying at the periphery of the Neora Valley National Park, at an elevation of 4,300 ft, Todey is a newfound jewel in the Dooars region. Tourism



is just beginning to catch up in the region. This picturesque hamlet at the Indo-Bhutan border is known for cardamom plantations and is the ideal place for tourists who want to run away from the humdrums of city life. The lush green landscape, plantations and forests and the utter lack of touristy activities increases the charm of this place.

Tangta

Just like Todey, Tangta is another picturesque hamlet situated close by at the same elevation of 4,300 feet. One can also see cardamom plantations here. Todey and Tangta are becoming very popular with trekkers.

Gorubathan

Situated at an elevation of 1,368 feet, Gorubathan lies 50 km away from Siliguri and 90 km from Kalimpong. It is famous for the Monday market, and is also locally known as Sombarey (meaning 'on Mondays') because the weekly market is organized on Mondays. Like most places in Dooars, Gorubathan is also blessed with infinite natural beauty.

Maneybhanjan

It is a small transit town in Darjeeling district, located at the gateway of the Singhalila National Park, 12 km from the Nepal border and 32 km from Darjeeling. It has an elevation of 6,600 ft above sea level and serves as the base for Sandakphu trek.

Lava

Located at an altitude of 7,016 feet 34 km from the more popular hill station of Kalimpong, Lava is a hidden gem of West Bengal. It is a forest hamlet that is home to a Buddhist monastery and is also



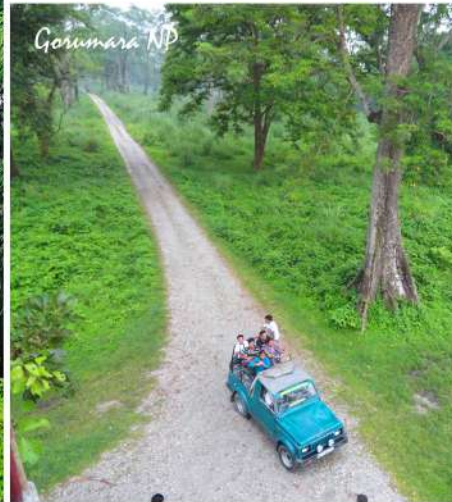
the entry point to the Neora Valley National Park and the Jelep La and Rechi La Passes. This place is also a bird watcher's paradise. It is known to receive snowfall in winter bringing respite to city dwellers from the heat and hustle and bustle.

Lepchaghat

Lepchajagat is a quaint little mountain village that lies on a hill slope amidst rhododendron trees and oak forests. Located in the wilderness at an altitude of 6967 ft above sea level 19 km from Darjeeling, this hilly village has quite miraculously been able to maintain its tranquil atmosphere. It has a world of its own. Visitors may soak in the tantalizing beauty of the amazing white Kanchenjunga. After the sun sets, the view of illuminated Darjeeling in the distance is absolutely spectacular.



Top of the page: Ghoom Monastery
Top left: The quaint hill station of Kolakham
Top right: The hanging bridge at Lolegaon



Jorepokhri

Jorepokhri is a small hilltop village, 20 km from Darjeeling. It is known for the twin lakes after which it has been named. The Jorepokhri Wildlife Sanctuary is home to the endangered species of Himalayan Salamander. There are other animals and birds as well. It lies only about 5 km from Lepchajagat. Those interested in trekking can also consider trekking to Sandakphu.

Lolegaon

Located at an altitude of 1,675m at the extreme end of a Himalayan ridge, about 24 km from the more popular hill station of Lava, Lolegaon is a small picturesque village. It is famous for sunrise views. From here one can have beautiful views of the Singalila Range, the Kanchenjunga and Tiger Hill. A combined day trip of Lava and Lolegaon is very popular with tourists.

Lepchakha

It is a small village of the Drukpa tribe that lies on a hill top inside the Buxa Tiger Reserve at a height of 3500 feet, only about 3 km away from Bhutan border. However, the tininess of the village does not prevent you from enjoying nature's abundance here. From here one can have the panoramic view of as many as

twelve rivers snaking through Dooars. Its surreal beauty makes it a favoured destination amongst tourists. Lepchakha can be reached after a trek through breathtaking landscape amidst the incessant chirping of birds.

Neora Valley

Located in the Kalimpong District of West Bengal, the Neora Valley National Park that spreads over an area of 88 sq km is rich in biodiversity. The rugged mountainous forest has diverse flora and fauna and is the natural habitat of the red panda. Apart from the red panda, the other mammals found in this forest are leopard, various species of civets, barking deer, black bear, sloth bear, golden cat, wild boar, leopard cats, clouded leopards, goral, serow, sambar and Himalayan flying squirrel. The park is also rich in avifauna, and especially during winter it is a birders' paradise. The rare combination of hill and

forest makes it all the more special. The forest lies on the foothills of the hills of Bhutan, Nepal and India and varies in altitude between 1000 and 3,600 metres, the topmost point being at Rachel Danda, at the border of Sikkim and Bhutan. Thick forest of ferns, oak and sal trees, dense bamboo groves, colourful rhododendron and orchids, lush green valley, meandering rivers and streams, zigzagging roads, snow-capped mountains in the backdrop form a picturesque landscape here. The thick growth of flora in the hilly terrain inside the park makes it difficult for even sunlight to penetrate, thus making it dark, damp and cold all throughout the year. For the same reason a large area of the national park remains still inaccessible and this makes it a sought after destination for trekkers and adventure seekers. The tiredness of steep climbs and descends weans away by the sounds of birds and beautiful landscape. The dense forest cover is brimming with wildlife. One horned Rhinos, Elephants, Deer, bison, wild boars are mostly seen. Leopards and tigers are there but are deeper inside the forest and are rarely seen.

Darjeeling

Darjeeling, the beautiful hill station, is surrounded by Nepal in the west, Sikkim in the north and Bhutan in the east. It is located in the Lesser Himalayas at an average height of 2,050 meters. It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. East India Company took it on lease from the Chogyal Monarch of Sikkim in the 19th century and established a military depot here. The climate was apt for the establishment of a sanatorium for British soldiers. Later, its scenic beauty and pleasant climate led to it being developed as a hill station. A number of schools, based on the structure of British Public Schools like Eton, Rug-



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by and Harrow came up for the education of children of British officers. Even today, Darjeeling is well known for its remarkable residential schools. The colonial influence is also evident in the Gothic and Tudor architecture of some churches and schools. The hill station has some famous tea plantations which produces world renowned Darjeeling Tea. The Himalayan Railways' Toy Train ride, a UNESCO World Heritage project, is restricted between Kurseong and Darjeeling and is a 'must do' thing. The heart and soul of Darjeeling, commonly known as the Mall, is in the centre of the town. A lively place with lots of shops, lined beside each other, make for an attractive place to start one's stay. The Batasia Loop memorial park, the view of Mt. Kanchenjunga from Tiger Hill at sunrise, Tea plantations, Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park, the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute etc. are some of the important tourist attractions.

Ghoom

This is a hill side resort at an altitude of 2,400 mts, located 3 km from Darjeeling. Apart from the breathtaking scenic beauty it is also home to Ghoom Gumpa, a monastery believed to be the largest in this region. It has a large collection of well preserved, rare Buddhist manuscripts and colourful paintings. The railway station of Ghoom is supposed to be the highest railway station (2,258 mts) in India.

Mirik

One of the many hilly jewels of West Bengal, Mirik is all about natural beauty and splendour. Located mystically amongst the hills of Darjeeling at an elevation of 1767m 49 km from Darjeeling and 52 km from Siliguri, this small hill town offers a tranquil holiday experience ornamented with prismatic views of the Mt. Kanchenjunga.



Surrounded by lush and evergreen pine forests and exotic gardens, the Sumendu Lake is the main attraction of Mirik. The long glistening lake captures the mystical reflection of the Kanchenjunga which is quite overwhelming. In the slopes there are well manicured tea and spice plantations adding cream to the beauty. A long wooden bridge called Indreni Pull (Rainbow Bridge) around the lake gives enrapturing views of surrounding landscapes. The bridge leads to the verdant pine woods situated on the other bank of the lake. There is also a thin strip of roadway encircling the lake and a walk through it gives striking visuals of the mighty Kanchenjunga.

Pedong

Pedong is a town in Kalimpong on the way to Lava. The town is located on a ridge with a splendid panoramic view of the Kanchenjunga and the Himalayan mountains. Pedong lies on the historic Silk Road that connects India to Lhasa via the Jelep-la Pass.

Sandakphu

Set at an elevation of about 11,930 ft above the sea level, Sandakphu is located 650 kms from the state capital of Kolkata. It is the highest point of Singalila range in Darjeeling on the border of Nepal and West Bengal. This

destination is mainly popular with trekkers, mountaineers and ski enthusiasts. It is the highest point in the entire state, and also provides view of four of the highest peaks of the world being the Mount Everest, Kanchenjunga, Makalu and Lhotse.

Kalimpong

Perched atop a ridge above the Teesta River at an elevation of 1,250m on the Himalayan foothills 67 km from Siliguri and 50 km from Darjeeling, Kalimpong is a delightful experience. Dotted with colonial era buildings, churches, monasteries and parks, this hill station has a lot to offer to tourists. Kalimpong is also known for its educational institutions built during the British colonial

period. It provides a panoramic view of the Himalayas. Kalimpong is also popular for its vast collection of orchids and nurseries of Himalayan flowers.

Kurseong

Located 32 km from Darjeeling at an elevation of 1,450m, Kurseong is the land of 'White Orchids'. It has pleasant climate all year through and is a sought after hill resort in the state. Kurseong is known for its beautiful tea plantations, lush green forests, British Raj architectural buildings, churches and boarding schools and a number of tourist spots such as Eagle's Craig, Rock Garden, Kettle Valley etc., but is equally famous for the spooky Dow Hills which is said to be the most haunted place in India. The natural beauty of this hill station is breathtaking. Every spring, the town comes alive with bright white Kurson-rip orchids. Castleton, Makaibarie, Ambotia and Goomtee are some of the popular and big tea gardens that must be visited. There are also





Left: Sandakphu
Below: Tonglu



trekking trails across forests and vegetation on the slopes of the mountains.

Chitrey

This is a hidden gem, a small mountain village on the way to Sandakphu. Located in the Singalila National Park, it has an elevation of 8,340 ft. Trekkers generally make a halt here on the way to Sandakphu.

Dhotrey

Another hidden gem, this is a mountain village at an altitude of 8,550 ft located in the buffer zone of the Singalila National Park. It is 105 km from New Jalpaiguri and can be reached by road after a steep climb. There is a Buddhist monastery worth visiting here.

Tonglu

Tonglu Peak, one of the higher peaks (10,070 ft) of the Singalila National Park near the Indo-Nepal border is home to a small community. It is the place where you find colourful orchids and a garden full of varieties of Rhododendron. One can even get a view of the picturesque Kanchenjunga from here. To reach this place one needs to hire a vehicle from New Jalpaiguri Railway station or Bag Dogra Airport.

Mongpong

Located on the outskirts of the

Mahananda Wildlife Sanctuary, Mongpong is a scenic spot on the banks of River Teesta. The nearby forests and the meandering river are its biggest attractions.

Paren

Paren is a heaven for nature lovers. It is hill station with an elevation of 6,200 ft surrounded by lush green forest of conifer and pine trees. Located close to the Indo-Bhutan border in Doars region, it is a newfound getaway for city dwellers. The forests are home to many Himalayan birds and there are many trekking routes nearby.

Raimatang

Located within the lush green forests of the Buxa Tiger Reserve, 45 km from Alipurduar, Raimatang is a quaint forest village. The scenic beauty here comprises of the Raimatang river, dense forests and surrounding hills. It is also blessed with unique flora and fauna.

Kolakham

This is a newfound wonder located in the Kalimpong district, only 8 km from Lava. Nestled on the hills and surrounded by thick vegetation and tall trees, Kolakham is a village that is very close to the Neora Valley National Park. The famous Changey Falls is also nearby. But the best attraction of Kolakham is the

excellent view of that visitors can have of the Mt. Kanchenjunga even sitting at their hotel rooms.

Rishyap

Rishyap or Rishop is a hill station in Kalimpong district that is well known for views of the Kanchenjunga. It is home to local Sherpa and Lepcha tribes. 1 km from Rishop is Tiffindara, a sunrise-viewing spot.

Digha

Located just 187 km to the south west of Kolkata, Digha has become a household name with Kolkatans. Because of its proximity to the metro city this tourist destination makes a great quick weekend getaway and is a famous picnic spot. From Kolkata it can be reached by car, train or bus. Described as 'Brighton of the East' by Warren Hastings, this sea beach stretches up to about 7 km. Digha has a shallow sand beach and the long beach shifts its shoreline through the day, depending on the tides. The sea has gentle waves. The greenery along the beach not only enhances the beauty of the location it also helps reduce the sea coast erosion. Since some of the areas in the Digha shore are prone to quick sand, one should not attempt to go beyond the designated swim point. Today, there are two beaches at Digha, the older one

is called Old Digha beach and the new one is the New Digha. And apart from the beaches, one can also visit the Science Centre, Marine Aquarium and Research Centre, Amravati Lake with boating facilities, the snake farm, Chandaneshwar Temple, Kapal Kundala Temple and Lankeshwar Temple. Digha is a heaven for food lovers. The beach is lined with small thatched roof shacks which dish out various sea food delicacies. One can also buy raw meat or fish or vegetables from the local market and get them cooked by the shopkeepers. From tiger prawns, crabs, crispy fried shrimps to fishes, everything is available in small food stalls on the beach.

Mandarmani

Mandarmani has comparatively lower waves than Digha. The beach, situated in east Midnapore district on the Bay of Bengal, has its own charm that is tranquility. It is only 180 km from Kolkata. It is famous for its beach resorts and a 13 km-long drivable beach which is supposedly the longest motor-able beach in India. In Mandarmani one also gets a glimpse of various sea birds wheeling over the sea and stretches of sand and swimmers striking out to the sea. The beach can be quite rough during the high tide and the surf can be

irregular. Mandarmani is a heaven for food lovers. As the sun sets upon the horizon, the beach turns into a one stop food station with small thatched roof shacks standing at every half a meter that dish out various sea food delicacies. Be it tiger prawns, crabs, crispy fried shrimps and fishes, you name it and it's ready for you. One can also try *thapla*, a local cuisine.

Tajpur

A beautiful beach with hardly any crowds, Tajpur is a good option for a day-trip from Digha. The undulating terrain and seclusion offered by the scenic beach is gradually gaining popularity among weekenders. The few accommodation options in the area are located far inland and the absence of vendors ensures the tranquility of the area is maintained. Not privileged by street lighting, Tajpur, after sunset, has its own sights and sounds. Plunged into darkness except for the lights glimmering out of hotels, the place assumes a somber yet pleasant mood. The continuous chirping of the cicada and the distant notes of the local *yatra* (traditional theatrical performances) fill the air.

Bakkhali

Situated on one of the many deltaic islands of southern Bengal, this southfacing crescent or half moon shaped beach is one of the rare ones in the world where you can enjoy views of both sunrise and sunsets. The 8kms-long, usually sparsely populated beach with gently rolling waves extends from Bakkhali to Frasergunj. On one side is the mangrove forest of Sunderbans and on the other is the sea. The hard beach is suitable for cycling, walking or even driving. Bakkhali is located about 125kms away from Joka on the south-western fringes of Kolkata. One can also visit the Benfish Harbour, Frasergunj beach, Crocodile Park or simply enjoy the magnificent expanse of the mangrove forests spreading out in all directions. Since the water of the Ganga meets the ocean here, the water here may appear muddy. The water is rich in aquatic animals. Even beautiful birds are seen here.



Shankarpur

14kms to the east of Digha and about 185kms from Kolkata, Shankarpur is a virgin beach town and offers an isolated beach experience. Local fishing boats dotting the coastline and the morning sun reflecting on the calm waves make for excellent photographic opportunities. After a pleasant sunrise, the fishermen can be seen hauling their nets out of the sea filled with fish! Fringed by casuarina and eucalyptus trees, the secluded Shankarpur beach is a welcome relief from the teeming crowds of Digha; the tranquillity broken only during weekends or major state holidays. Friendly villagers are often seen selling beautiful trinkets made of sea-shells at surprisingly cheap rates. Locals claim the beach is safe yet it wouldn't hurt to keep as close to the shore as possible as there are no lifeguards here.

Frazerganj

Located near Bakkhali, Frazerganj has a very long and quite beach. It is often combined with a trip to Bakkhali and Henry Island. Apart from the beach here one can also visit the ruins of the office of Andrew Fraser, from the early 1900s. The place is named after him. There is also a Wind Energy Farm here worth visiting.

Sagardweep

Also known as Ganga Sagar or Sagar Island, this island is a part of the Sundarbans, but popular in its own right. It is situated at the confluence of the Ganges and the Bay of Bengal. It is the famous venue of the annual Ganga Sagar Mela held on Makar Sankranti day (14th January) when lakhs of Hindu

pilgrims come here to take a holy dip in the Ganges at the break of dawn. The beach is at the tip of the island where the Bay of Bengal starts. For the spiritual, Kapil Muni Temple and Onkarnath Temple will be of importance. There is a pilot station of the Kolkata Port Trust. The Sagar Lighthouse and Bharat Seva Ashram are other places to visit. The island is located about 100 km from Kolkata and can be reached by a combination of road and ferry trip. The state tourism department is also promoting the island as a beach destination.

Junput

It is a small fishing village about 40kms away from Digha and only 145 km from Kolkata. Don't go by its tiny size, it has a lot to offer. It is almost a virgin beach with less tourist interference. The beach is important as the State Government Fisheries Department does brackish water fish cultivation and research here. The pretty turquoise water against the lush greenery looks very pristine. Junput is known for a centre for studies in marine biology. Apart from a serene beach lined by casuarinas and eucalyptus, there is a lighthouse at the confluence of the sea and river here and the famous temple of Kapalkundala which served as the background of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's famous novel of the same name.

Udaipur

Situated some two kilometers from Digha on the Bengal-Orrisa border, this is a comparatively new beach that has been developed recently. This is another virgin





Left Top: Mandarmani Beach
Left Bottom: Tajpur Beach
Below: Glittering sunrays at Bakkhali Sea Beach



beach surrounded by casuarina trees and lies between Digha in Bengal and Talsari in Odisha. Although only 2 km away from Digha, the seclusion and serenity of the beach makes it appear like miles away from the hustle and bustle of the crowded Digha beach. There is a host of water sports options like banana boat and speed boats. There are a number of makeshift stalls on the beach where fresh fish are cooked and sold, which is a local delicacy.

Bankiput

A quick weekend getaway for

urban dwellers, Bankiput is serene and has a virgin beach. Compared to the crowd and chaos at Digha and Mandarmoni, it is calm and relaxing here. It is located very close to Junput and 40 km from Digha. The sea here is visible only during the high tide, which is essentially during the early afternoon. The other major attractions here are the Dariapur Lighthouse and the fishing harbour where the Rasulpur River meets the Bay of Bengal.

Gopalpur

Gopalpur is a quaint fishing

village with a virgin beach, and should not be confused with the more popular Gopalpur Beach of Odisha. A very common sight on this beach is of red crabs. The Dariapur lighthouse is a short distance away.

Haripur

This quaint beach has beautiful sandy stretches teeming with crimson crabs and lined with casuarina trees. It is a perfect weekend destination from Kolkata.

Chandpur

This is another virgin beach, still

much unknown in the tourist circles. This beach is said to be the cleanest in West Bengal. On full moon nights the sea turns silver and the beach looks golden making it a sight to remember.

Jambudwip

Located close to Bakkhali, this is a small uninhabited, forested island. One can take motorised country boats called bhutbhuti to reach here from Bakkhali. The best thing to do here is crab-spotting on the clean, glassy beach.

Khejuri

This is a virgin beach that is getting popular as a picnic spot. The location of this beach is opposite the Sagar Island. Fallen trees, sound of the forest and incessant view of big ships in the distance makes this place memorable.

Henry's Island

Strolling on the pristine beach and gazing at and admiring the



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sunset could be an ideal stress buster, capable of soothing the nerves of jaded urban dwellers. An enchanting place, the Henry Island, over the years, is turning out to be a much sought after destination for those who wish to opt for a quiet, secluded holiday, completely cut away from the cacophonies of the crowded city. The serene surroundings are overwhelming, as are the miles of empty beach, placid sea and the clear skies. The local food, excellent and fresh, is an added attraction. The beach is sprawling and deserted. Lazing around on such a secluded beach is altogether a different kind of experience. With active assistance from the state forest and tourism departments, the fisheries department has recently set up a couple of resorts for the travellers to this island. One of the common views at the Henry Island is that of innumerable red fiddler crabs dotting the beaches. These crabs dominate the empty beaches and shy away when human beings approach them. They are a photographers' delight. While at Henry Island, it is worthwhile to be there also at the Kiron Sea Beach.

Falta Beach

Falta Beach is one of the many beaches of Bengal which is frequented by localites. The river Damodar and the Hooghly river confluence near the Falta beach. An interesting fact about the beach is that the name of the beach has been derived from a ship of the same name that was damaged here, back in the 17th century.

Bishnupur

This is the fabled town lined with exquisite terracotta temples and famous for Baluchari sarees. Some of the famous temples here out of the hundreds present are Lalji, Madam Mohan, Radhey Shyam, Keshto Raya or Jor Bangla and Shyam Rai temples. The



West Bengal is not just about its literature, cultural history, or the lip-smacking food. If one looks close into the natural wealth of the state, one will be surprised to find almost all kinds of geographical features! Except deserts maybe! From rivers, to plains, deltas, mangroves, forests, hills, there is so much that the state has to offer.



Raashmancha is perhaps the most photographed structure here. Apart from temples, there are other attractions like a cannon, lakes etc. Among the temples of Bishnupur, the 'ratna style' is very common. It is markedly different from the other style prevalent in this part – the 'chala style'. Although both have similar rectangular base structure, the sloping roof of the chala style becomes more flat and boast one or more churas or ratnas which are turrets constructed as small temples. Depending on the number of churas the structures are named as ekratna, panchratna, nabaratna etc. However, according to many, this idea of installing a cylindrical spire with semi-spherical dome on top of the temple was a direct influence of Muslim architecture. The practice of decorating Hindu temples with miniature shrines common in other parts of India was also prevalent here.

Shantiniketan

A small town in Bolpur, Shantiniketan was envisioned by poet Rabindranath Tagore. The place exudes a certain subtlety and charm that cannot be defined by words. Located not very far from Kolkata, it boasts the world famous university Viswa Bharati,

where thousands come to study every year from all across the globe. The place was originally called Bhubandanga and was gifted to the Tagores by the Sinha family. Tagore's father, Maharshi Debendranath, impressed by the serenity of the place, named it Shantiniketan, meaning abode (niketan) of peace (shanti). Two of the biggest festivals held here are *Boshonto Utshob* (on the festive occasion of Holi) and the *Poush Mela*, held in the last week of December. For those who enjoy festivities and cultural programmes, both these times are ideal for visiting, of course if one does not mind the crowd. During the rest of the year, serenity prevails. Apart from the various places associated with Rabindranath Tagore, one may also visit Kankalitala, one of the sacred Satipithas, located on the bank of the river Kopai and the deer park.

Sundarban

Where the land meets the sea at the southern tip of West Bengal lies the Indian heritage jungle, the Sundarbans, a stretch of impenetrable mangrove forest of great size and bio-diversity. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Sundarbans is a vast area covering approximately 1,330 square km in India alone

while a much larger area lies in Bangladesh. The Indian Sundarbans forms the largest Tiger Reserve and National Park in the country. A paradise for birdwatchers, the list includes such rarities as the Masked Finfoot, Mangrove Pitta and the Mangrove Whistler. Sundarbans is named after the ubiquitous Sundari trees found here in large numbers. It is the largest single block of tidal halophytic mangrove forest in the world. The Sundarbans are a part of the world's largest delta formed by the mighty rivers the Ganges, the Brahmaputra and Meghna. It is criss-crossed by hundreds of creeks and tributaries. It is home to more than 250 tigers. Among other species found here are crocodiles, monitor lizards, spotted deer, many varieties of birds, tortoises and reptiles. Sajnekhali, Sudhanyakhali, Dobanki, Netidhopani, Burirdabri, Kumarmari and Jhingakhali are the main watchtowers at the Sundarbans. At Sajnekhali, there is also a mangrove interpretation center which throws light on the flora, fauna and the village life of the Sundarbans. There are numerous rivers, rivulets and canals in Sundarban and innumerable islands of all sizes and shapes. The mangrove forests is spread across the banks of tidal estuarine rivers like Muriganga, Saptamukhi, Thakuran, Matla, Vidya, Gonna, Jhilla, Raimangal and Harinbanga in Sundarban.

Murshidabad

It was the last capital city of the Independent Bengal before the British took over the place. Murshidabad served as the capital of Bengal from 1717 AD to 1773 AD when the East India Company decided to shift the capital to Kolkata. The famous Battle of Plassey was fought in 1757 in a place called Palashi, 40 km from Murshidabad. The city is therefore a storehouse of his-

tory and historical architecture. It is also known for its silk and handicrafts. The main landmark to visit here is the Hazarduari Palace, the palace of the last independent Bengal ruler Siraj-Ud-Daulah which was built in Italian style by Duncan McLeod in 1837 for Nazim Humayun Jah. It is famous for having a thousand doors, although only 900 are real and rest fake. Today it has been turned into a museum displaying many things including weapons with which the perilous Battle of Plassey was fought. The Nizamat Imambara located close to the palace was built in 1847 and is said to be the largest imambara not only in Bengal but all of India. In front of Imambara lies a canon known as Bacchawali Tope and Siraj's Madina. It is said that Bacchawali tope was fired only once. The reverberant sound travelled a distance of 10 miles causing a loss in pregnancy to many women. Futi Masjid built by Sarfaraj Kha in a single night, Katara Masjid with the grave of Murshid Quli Khan outside the mosque because he wished that people would walk over his grave so that his sins could be forgiven, Jahankosh Canon brought by Murshid Quli Khan while transferring his capital from Dhaka to Murshidabad, Nasipur Palace, Khosh Bagh, Motijheel, Kathgola bagan, Jagat Seth's Palace and Ajimunnesa's Samadhi are the other places to check out. Each one of them has a lot of history behind, some being totally grim.

Bandel

For the city dwellers of Kolkata, a destination just outside the city limits provides unparalleled architectural diversity. With marvelous historical structures of Hindu, Islamic and Christian religious institutions dotting the town, Bandel is a wonderful short getaway from the din and bustle of the metropolis – a true day

tripper's delight. The basilica of the Holy-Rosary, popularly known as the Bandel Church dating back to 1599 AD is one of the oldest churches in India. It is a memorial of the Portuguese settlement in Chinsurah, Bengal. The next important landmark here is the beautiful Imambara built during the mid 19th century. The early 19th century's Hansheshwari temple at Basberia with 13 Minars (Ratnas), each built as a blooming lotus bud, is an impressive structure. The Ananta Basudeb Temple built by Raja Rameswar Datta in 1679 AD in the traditional ek-ratna style has exquisite terracotta works on its walls.

Susunia

Susunia hills in Bankura, West Bengal has a number of hills that are good for rock climbing. There is also a gigantic waterfall here which adds to the beauty of the place.

Ajodhya Hills

Ajodhya Hills are located in the Purulia district and is a part of the Dalma Hills which is an extended part of the Eastern Ghats range. The highest peak of Ajodhya Hills is Chemtaburu. The most nearby populated town here is Bagmundi which offers mountaineers basic courses in

rock climbing. Ajodhya Hills can be reached by Jhalda or by Sirkabad. Gorgaburu, Mayuri etc. are some of the peaks of Ajodhya hills range. The area forms the lowest step of the Chota Nagpur Plateau. The general scenario is undulating land with scattered hills.

Tilaboni

Tilaboni is a rock climbing spot in Purulia district of West Bengal which is gaining more and more popularity with time and is being visited by numerous adventure enthusiasts from different areas. There are rocks for everyone - both beginners as well as the most seasoned of rock climbers can venture out at Tilaboni.

Itachuna

The more than 250 years old Itachuna Rajbari is also known as Bargee Danga, 'bargee' being a name given to the Maratha warriors by the Bengalis. The Maratha attacked Bengal repeatedly to collect Chauth which was a tax to be paid by the Nawab of Bengal. After the attacks stopped, many of the Marathas stayed back in Bengal and amassed a lot of wealth from trade. The Kundans were one such sect of the Marathas who later came to be known as

'Kundu'. The Itachuna Rajbari was built by the ancestors of the Kundus in the mid 18th century. Currently the palace belongs jointly to the Kundus and an organization that has restored the glory of the Rajbari. It has been turned into a homestays for visitors, sort of a heritage hotel. There are numerous reports that claim this palace to be haunted, however it has not yet been confirmed officially. So if you do not mind being at a spooky place, must check this out.

Moghalmari

Moghalmari is a small village with a population of less than 2000. The village has 381 houses covering an area of 200 hectares. The nearest town is Burdwan, 18 km away. Recent excavations at Moghalmari in the district of West Midnapore have unearthed an ancient Buddhist monastery thus taking the state archaeology department by a big surprise. This monastery is believed to be dating back to the 5th and 6th century BC in the site called Sashi Sena. Till now about 40 bronze artefacts and statues have been unearthed here and more are expected to be found. Of the statuettes that were unearthed, majority were of the Buddha, while some were of Hindu deities like Saraswati and Avalokiteshwara. The discovery of the ancient site has raised hopes of development of Buddhist Tourism in the state of West Bengal. Moghalmari is situated near Dantanand lies very close to the Odisha border.

Fort William

A modern day fort, Fort William was built by the British in the pre-independence era. It was built in Calcutta in the early years of Bengal presidency. The famous Maidan, the largest park of Calcutta in the heart of the city is built opposite Fort William. One of the guard rooms in the



From the largest delta in the world to the border of Odisha along the Bay of Bengal, there are many beautiful beaches along the eastern coast. Similarly, from the world largest mangrove forests to the forests of the Dooars region with abundance in faunal variety, from beautiful quaint hill stations to historical places, the state deserves a lot of your time.





DESTINATION BENGAL

fort became the Black Hole of Calcutta. The Fort was named after King William III. The Hooghly River is also close by. It is possible to visit this fort after taking a Special permit since it is under the control of Indian Army.

Jhargram

Located in the Jhargram district, this town is known for its royal palaces, ancient temples, forests and tribes. The Chilkigarh Palace, the ancient Kanak Durga Temple and Kendua are some of the places worth visiting in the outskirts of Jhargram. For the most authentic tribal cultural performances also this is the place to visit.

Kalna

This town is situated on the bank of the Bhagirathi River 100 km from Kolkata. It is famous for its 108 Shiva temples. In 1809, the temples were constructed by the then King of Burdwan, Tejchandra Bahadur. The Aat-chala (eight sloped roofs) styled temples were built in two concentric circles – the outer circle consists of 74 temples with black and white Shivlingas alternately and the inner circle has 34 temples, all with white Shivlingas. Right in the middle of the inner circle there is a covered well. Due to its ingenious planning, all the Shivlingas can be seen from the centre of the temple complex. It is said that these 108 temples symbolically represent 108 beads of a rosary. Opposite to this temple complex is the Palace Complex which also houses many temples, a Rasmancha and a cannon.

Krishnanagar

Named after Zamindar Krishna Chandra Roy, this town in Nadia district was one of the first municipalities to be established in the state (1864). The palace belonging to the zamindar,

called 'Rajbari', is one of the biggest tourist attractions here. Anandamoyi Tola Kali Bari and Siddheshwari Kalibari Mandir are two prominent temples. There are a few churches with interesting architecture as well. But by far the biggest attraction of the town today is the Ghurni neighbourhood, which is home to the traditional clay artists and their workshops.

Kurumbera Fort

It is a very old fort, located in the village of Gaganeshwar in Keshiari, close to Kharagpur. It is an ASI protected monument. The fort has many temples and beautiful old world charm about it. It was built in the 15th century by king of Odisha, Gajapati Kapilendra Dev. There are many inscriptions in Odiya in the fort.

Garh Panchakot

Located on the banks of the Panchet Lake and on the foothills of the Panchet Hill in Purulia district, this is a ruined fort and a testimony to the brutal attacks of the Marathas (locally called the Bargi) on Bengal during the 18th century. Once this place was covered in fortifications, but today it is under a thick cover of forest. As you drive past the forest, from time to time you come across little clearings where a ruined structure seems to have sprung up from nowhere. The ruins seem to be crying aloud telling the tales of their misery. The architectural style followed here is beautiful, to say the least. There are luxury resorts with beautiful pools as well as luxury tent accommodations for the increasing number of tourists to the place.

Serampore

Located just 24 km from Kolkata in the Hooghly district, is an old colonial town. Under the Danish rule (1755 – 1845) it was known as Frederiksnagore. It was once

well known for its advanced education system. This place is also known for Bengal's first College University and the first Bengali newspaper. Remnants of the former Danish colony in Serampore are the St. Olav's Church, the main gate, Serampore College, a jail, Danish cemetery and the Danish Government House.

Chandannagore

Located 21 km from Serampore and 48 km from Kolkata, Chandannagore is a former French colony (1696 - 1952). Because of the admixture of Bengali and French cultures, this town presents a very unique culture. There are many colonial structures with Indo-French architectural influence. The museum displays an interesting collection of French antiques, war weapons, furniture etc. The Sacred Heart Church, the French Cemetery, Gate, underground house and the Chandannagore Strand are some of the memoirs the French colonists left behind. There are also a host of temples in the town.

Belur, Howrah

It is an area in the city of Howrah which is famous for a complex of temples. The Belur Math is the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Math, a monastic order and the Ramakrishna Mission, both founded by Swami Vivekananda. It is situated on the bank of River Hooghly. On the opposite bank of the Hooghly River sits the famous Dakshineswar Temple of Kolkata.

Mayapur

Located 130 km from Kolkata in the Nadia district at the confluence of the rivers Jalangi and Hooghly, this is a place of tremendous religious importance for the Hindus. It currently houses the headquarters of ISKCON, the international religious organization.

Nabadwip

Also situated in the Nadia district this place is the birthplace of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, a 15th and 16th century saint from Bengal. Founded way back in 1063 AD, it was once the capital of the Sena Dynasty. It was a centre of learning in medieval India and is known for its traditional Sanskrit schools. The Gaur Purnima, Dol Yatra and Rasa Purnima are famous festivals here during which pilgrims throng this place.

Gongoni

Famously known as Bengal's own Grand Canyon, this is a relatively lesser known attraction but worth a visit. Located near the town of Garbeta in Paschim Midnapore district, Gongoni, or Gangani is a village through which the Shilabati River passes. The ravines, gorges and creases on the bank of river formed after thousands of years of soil erosion give rise to interesting land formations. The orangish red colour of the soil makes these formations look all the more spectacular. This has resulted in the comparison with the Grand Canyon, although this is nothing close to it, but beautiful in its own right. This place is goo for a day trip.

Apart from the above 80, the following 20 lesser known places may also be visited for a memorable weekend trip from Kolkata:

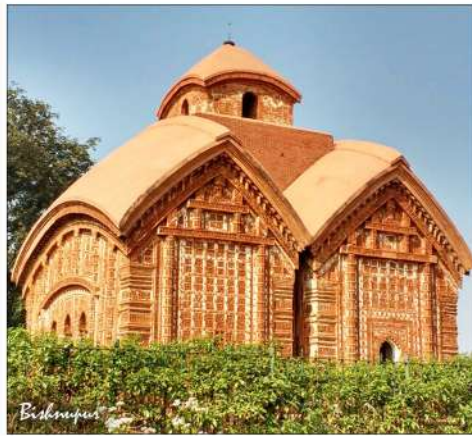
Beaches, lakes etc.: **Mousuni, Baguran, Mukutmanipur and Murugama**

North Bengal Hill stations and tea gardens: **Latpanchar, Chukhim, Rangaroon, Bagora, Bhalukhop, Makaibari, Bijanbari, Dawaipani, Tarkhola, Charkhole, Ichhey Gaon, Lingsey, Rangbull and Uttarey**

Tribal villages: **Roopark and Sonajhuri**



Darjeeling



Bishnupur



Garh Panchakot



Chiligharh Palace



The Sunderbans



Shantiniketan



Kurumbura Fort



Mozhalmari



Krishnanagar



Hazarduari Palace at Murshidabad

MY TRIP TO

LIJIANG

TRAVEL JOURNAL

This is the journal of the trip I did to Lijiang, in China. It doesn't intend to be a complete guide of the place, but an extract of my personal impressions in this unique place.

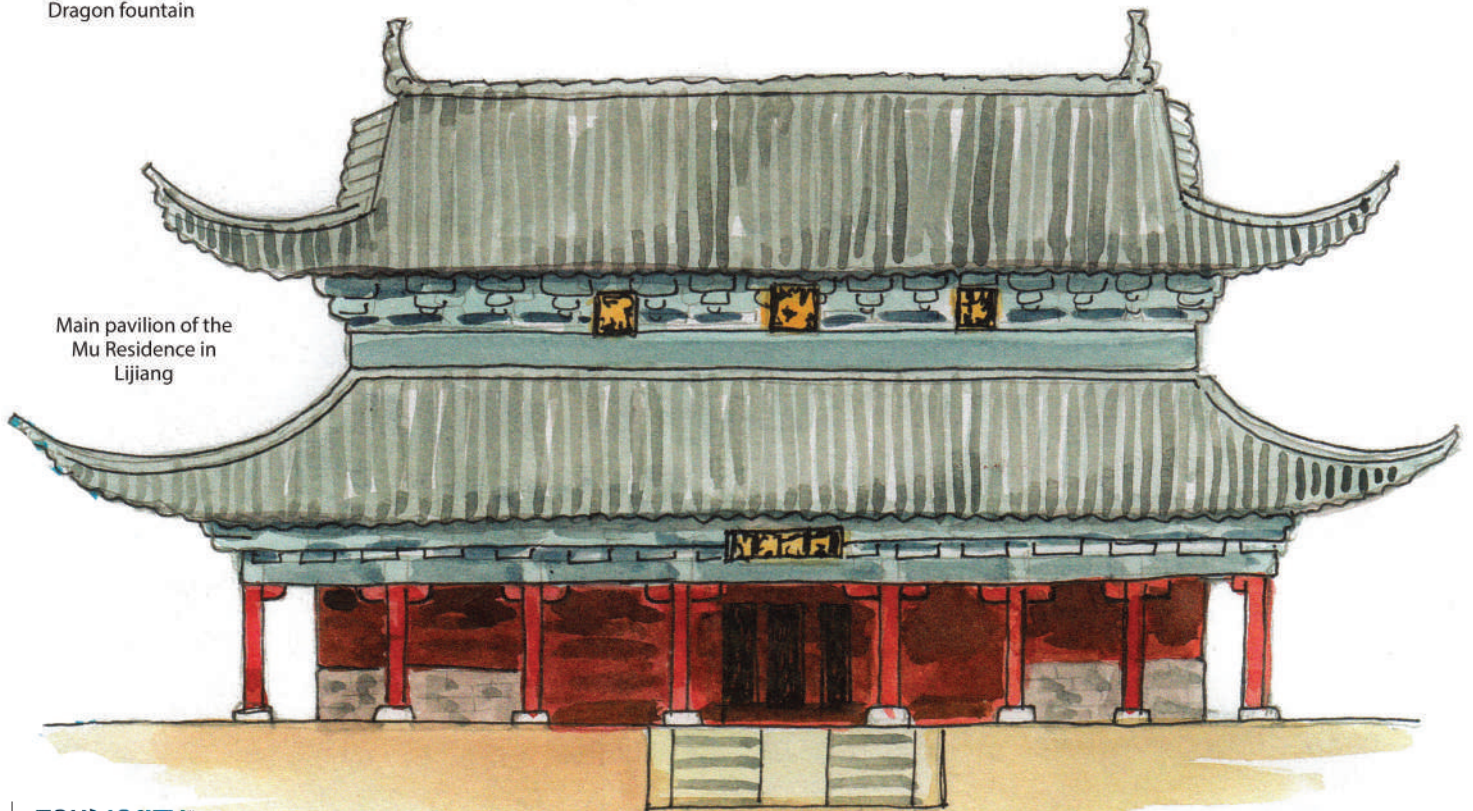
Text & illustrations:
Joaquín Dorao

Lijiang is an ancient Chinese city whose main temples and buildings were built during the Ming and Qing dynasties (16th to 19th centuries). It is famous for its hundreds of narrow canals and bridges which have given Lijiang the nickname of 'the Venice of the East'. The houses here are built of wood and brick, oriented towards the four cardinal points according to the ancient rules of feng-shui.

An earthquake of magnitude 7 on the Richter scale, that shook the city in 1996, killed some 200 people and destroyed more than 186,000 homes. The Chinese government, with the help of the World Bank, rebuilt Lijiang keeping all the traditional architecture, but also maintaining the most modern anti-seismic standards and measures.



White Horse
Dragon fountain

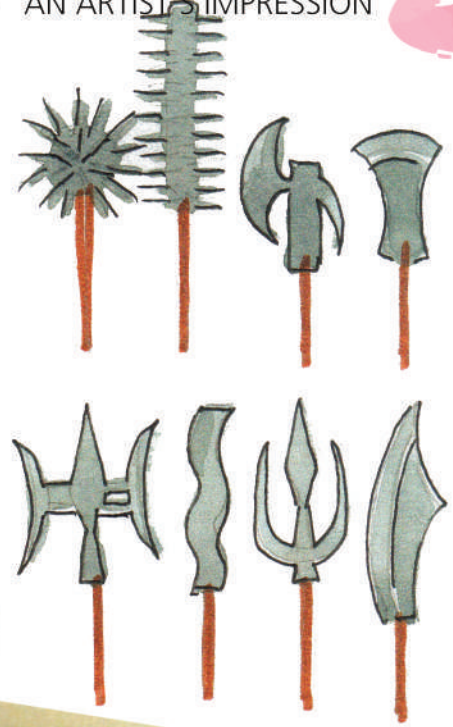


Main pavilion of the
Mu Residence in
Lijiang

AN ARTIST'S IMPRESSION



Defensive weapons of the lord of the Mu House, exposed in the Reception Hall of the house



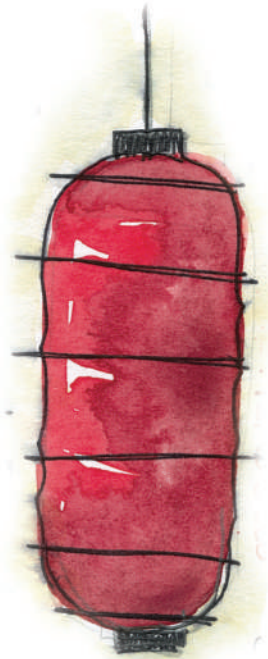
The reconstruction was so amazing, that in 1997 UNESCO declared the old city of Lijiang a World Heritage Site. Since then it has experienced an exponential growth in tourism, especially national, which today also reminds one of Venice for the hordes of tourists that cram its narrow streets day and night. While almost all the buildings in the center of the old city are bars, restaurants or souvenir shops, this saturation of visitors does not take away the charm of the alleys, canals and bridges.

At the bus station I took a taxi to the old city. As I had not yet booked any accommodation I took a walk to see what I could find and discovered countless small hotels and pensions in the narrow streets, almost all old houses with their patio, a labyrinthine distribution and very small rooms, prices well above the average. After seeing several places, I decided on the Mu Shi Guest House, on the edge of a very quiet canal. My room had tiny proportions, it fit the bed and little else, but it had a large window from where I could see the roofs of the old city.

I left my things there and went to have lunch at a restaurant specializing in all kinds

of mushrooms next door - in China they love mushrooms. Although the lettering was only in Chinese, as the genre was displayed at the entrance, I could choose a couple of varieties that looked very tasty, although extremely spicy. Fortunately, on leaving I found a stall selling yak milk yogurts that helped me relieve the burning caused by the spicy mushrooms. The sky was covering quickly and I took the opportunity to return to the pension to take a nap.

After a short nap and a shower, I went for a walk in the old town. Despite having a map obtained at the tourist office, five minutes later I was lost in the labyrinth of narrow streets, all similar and full of people and tourist establishments. I entered a book and craft store of the Naxi, the predominant ethnic minority in the city, descended from the nomadic Qiang tribe, an ethnic group that inhabited the Tibetan plains. They have their own dresses, music, language and even their own hieroglyphic type alphabet, one of the last of this type still in use worldwide. The religion of the majority of people of the





东巴宫民间艺术团

A Naxi old man

AN ARTIST'S IMPRESSION

四	一	四	...	丫	么	四	日	至	保	工	文
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四	一	四	...	丫	么	四	日	至	保	工	文

Hieroglyphic alphabet



Naxi words

place is Dongba, a variant of Tibetan Buddhism, based on the relationship between man and nature. Both the Naxi and Dongba were known in the West at the beginning of the 20th century thanks largely to the reports published in National Geographic by Joseph Rock, an American botanist, linguist, explorer and geographer of Austrian origin who lived many years in the mountains of Yunnan. His reports introduced this area of China to the world inspiring novels like James Hilton's 'Lost Horizon', which described the mythical Himalayan community of Shangri-La. Today the memories of Rock are still alive in some museums and the houses where he lived, and you can even find people who say they met him in person. After a while of wandering aimlessly, I requested a person in a store to indicate my current location on the map. It turned out that I was at the opposite end of what I had been assuming, so I chose to take a taxi to reach my pension. Since almost

Joseph Rock



冬 晒 普 洱
冬晒普洱



夏 晒 龙 井
夏晒龙井



普 洱 府
普洱府

"普洱茶"是因普洱府而得名。





AN ARTIST'S IMPRESSION

Pond of the Black Dragon (Lijiang). In the background is the snowy mountain Yulong





Black Dragon pond



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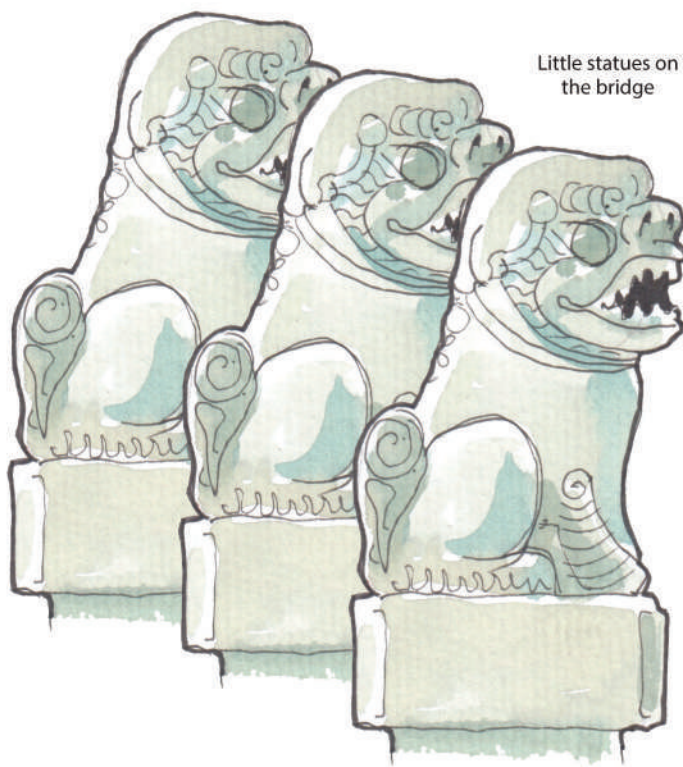
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Little statues on the bridge



AN ARTIST'S IMPRESSION

Mu Shi boarding house in the center of Lijiang. On the first floor, the window of my room, #205



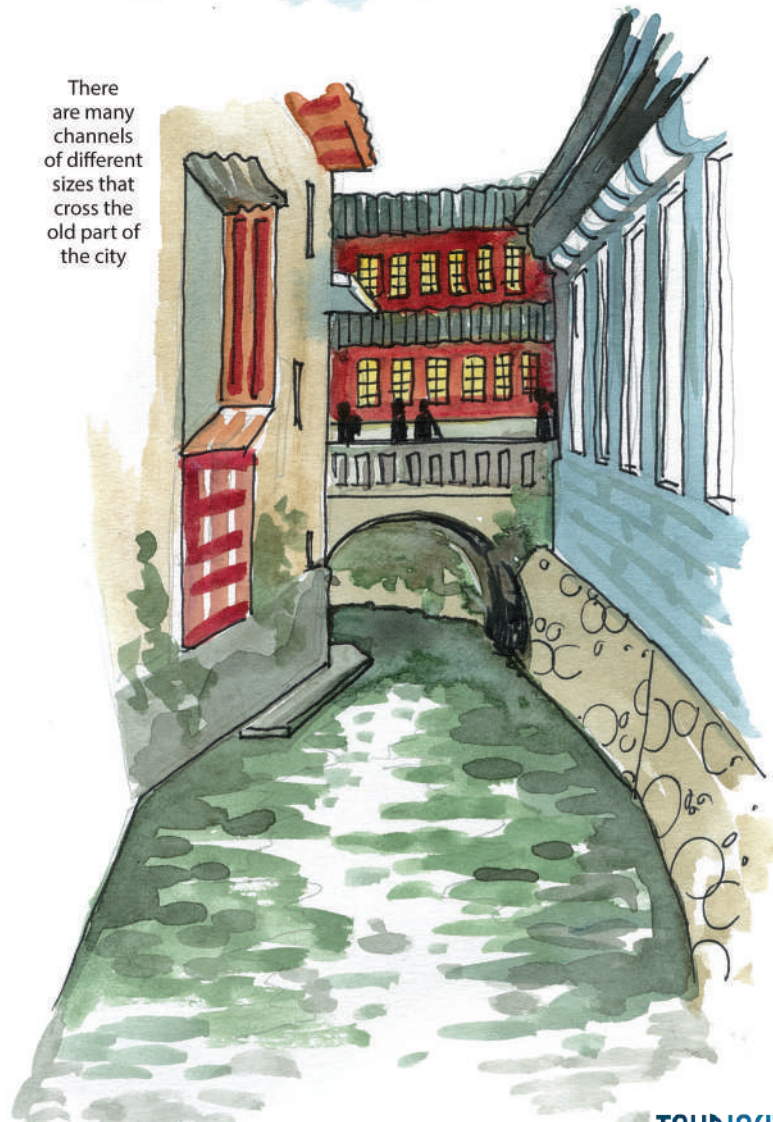
all of Lijiang's ancient city is 'pedestrian only', the vehicle left me in a place from which another long walk awaited me to the guest house. Along the way I found a backpackers restaurant that served Western dishes and instead of Chinese food I chose to eat a four-season pizza and a brownie.

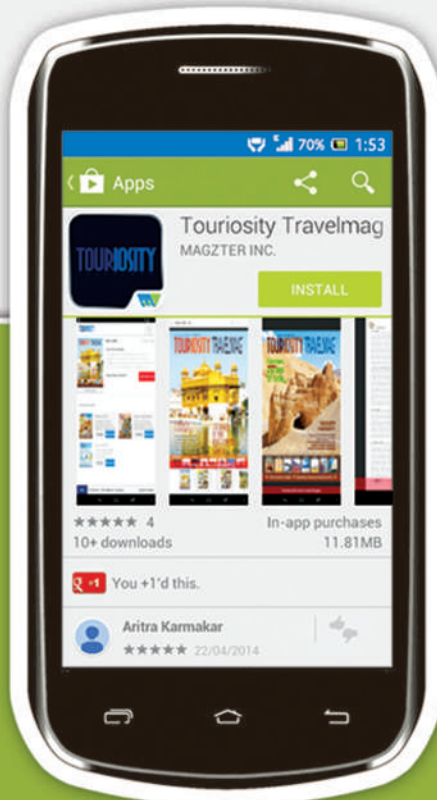
On the next day I visited the Mu Mansion, the former residence of a Naxi leader, destroyed by the 1996 earthquake and rebuilt as a museum with the help of the World Bank. It is a small-scale replica of the Forbidden City of Beijing, with several pavilions that separate patios with canals and gardens. The first buildings correspond to the old public area, where the lord received the presidents and resolved labour issues, and behind are the private areas of the house, which was meant for his family.

Then I took a taxi to the Black Dragon Pond Park. The view of the lake with a temple in the center and the Jade Mountains in the background is one of the most famous in Lijiang.

I walked for a while at dusk in the old city. It rained but the streets were still full of people. Most terraces were under wooden porches or in covered areas, so I guess that rain is common there. I had a tea with spices, to raise a toast to my visit to this traditional city in southeast China.

There are many channels of different sizes that cross the old part of the city

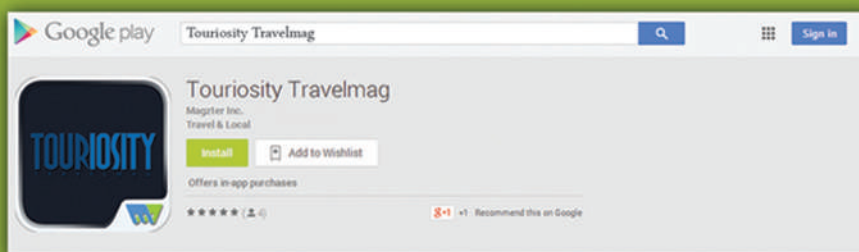




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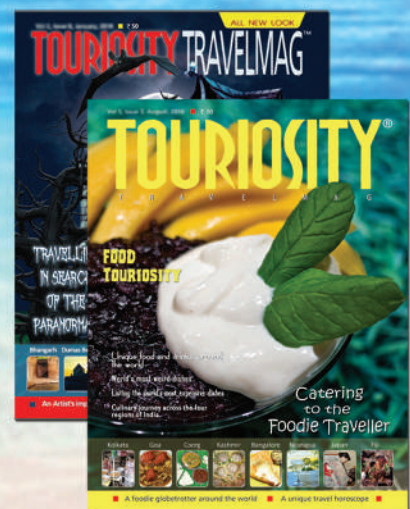
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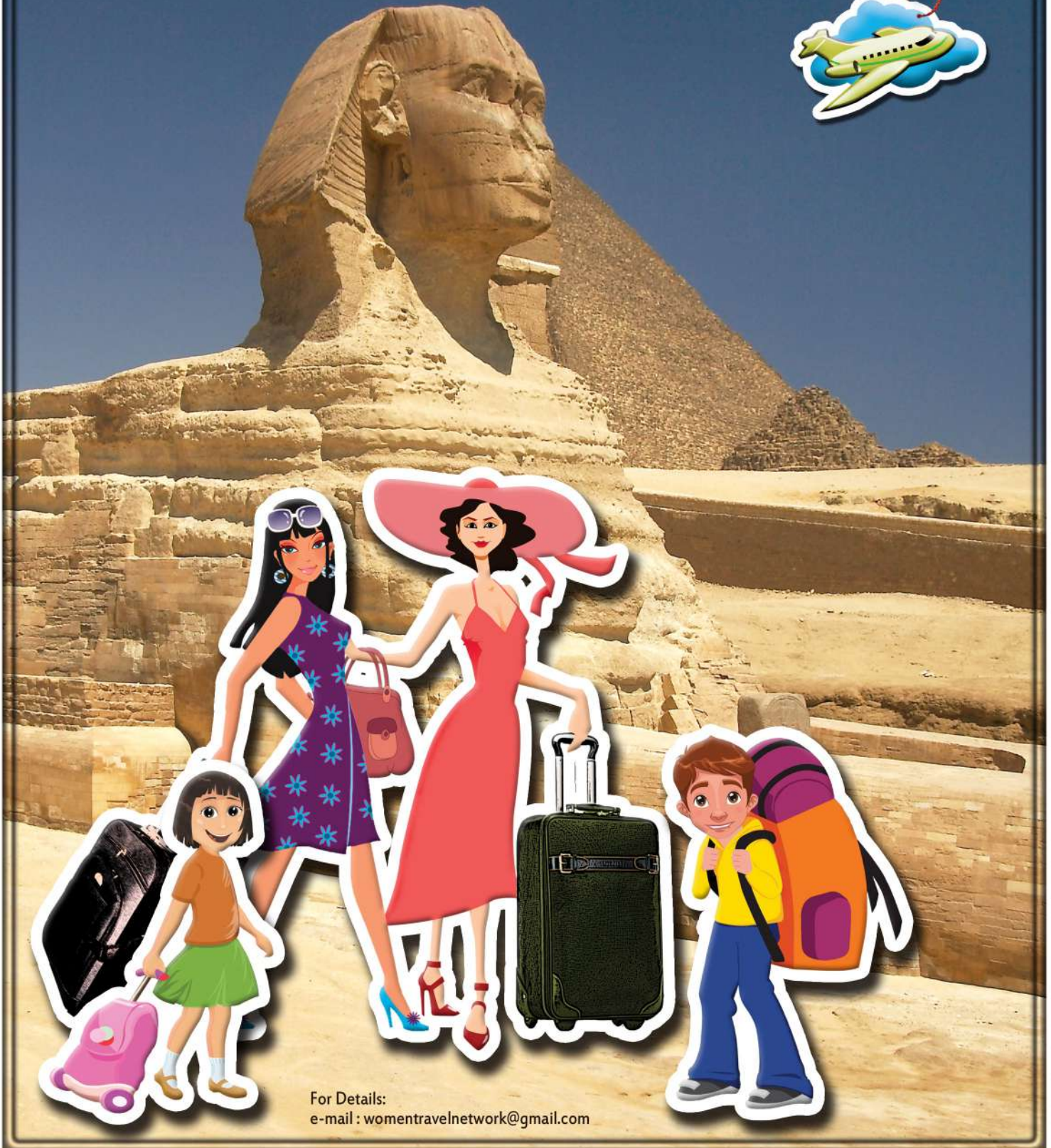
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