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TRAVEL
MAGAZINE

Outlook traveller

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YALA NATIONAL PARK

Bottoms Up

WHISKEY HIGHBALL

Around the Block

HOTSPOTS OF COLABA

Books

BOURDAIN IN
STORIES

Girls & Globe

VOLUME 22
ISSUE 1

Wondrous Wanderess



SPITI
TO SNOWCAPPED LANDS
WITH TWO CRAZY BOYS

SOUTHEAST ASIA
A JOURNEY LIKE
NEVER BEFORE

NEW ZEALAND
LAND OF THE
MĀORIS

TANZANIA
SUMMITTING
MT KILIMANJARO

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january

**Wandering
Women**

VOLUME 22
ISSUE 1

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daring adventure or
nothing”**

— Hellen Keller

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PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY INDRANIL ROY
ON BEHALF OF OUTLOOK PUBLISHING (INDIA)
PRIVATE LIMITED. **EDITOR:** ASHISH JHA.
PRINTED AT KALAJYOTHI PROCESS PVT. LTD.
SY. NO. 185, KONDAPUR,
R.R. DISTT - 500 084, TELANGANA &
PUBLISHED FROM AB-10 SAFDARJUNG
ENCLAVE, NEW DELHI 110029.

Released on 01-01-2022
Total no. of pages 72 + Covers

The Common Link



Those smart cowboy boots — two pairs of them — moved slowly but confidently to the bar. I remember that evening vividly. Fresh from the tap, they gulped down a mug each in barely the time that it took the tapster to look up, feeling victorious in having managed the right amount of head in the pour for another man. One more round of that golden fizz for them, and then one more.

That beer wasn't lame in any way, I assure you. But the ease with which they went on chugging was beyond belief. Soon it spiralled into a competition — as such things often do.

You can tell about the power in one's personality — well, two in this case — when a noisy crowd of middle-aged men go down into muted conversations. After countless beers were downed and the most conceited challengers yielded, the bar went silent. Barely seconds of that deafening noiselessness and it erupted again — to cheer for the winners! I'd witnessed one of the wildest evenings of my life. Thank you, Barcelona.

**

Perhaps not a total expert, but I do ride motorcycles quite well. On a work trip to Germany, a friend and I decided to stay back for a few days to go riding up into the Black Forest. I made a few calls and got us a couple of Aprilias — Tuono and Mana.

The roads up the Black Forest region are absolutely superb and I was settling down into a rhythm with the corners — rapid enough but not reckless. Just as I prepared to lean into a fast right-hand curve, a blue sport bike flashed past me. I was considerably younger — and foolish — so, expectedly, declared war on that blue-blur of motorcycling demon!

I had to push beyond my risk appetite to catch up with that Yamaha R6. That thing was fast, and after tailing it for a bit, I realised that the rider was effortlessly fluid. I gulped down my ego, tipped my imaginative hat and abandoned my pursuit. A few clicks down, at a cafe, I saw the same R6 parked outside. Upon scanning the space the familiar black-blue riding leathers drew me in. A great chat ensued. What a day!

**

I was considerably younger — and foolish — so, expectedly, declared war on that blue-blur of motorcycling demon!

I hope to — soon, perhaps — pen down my experience of riding all the way to the Everest base camp at Rongbuk in Tibet. It was... transcendental. And it also gave me a lifelong true friend, Rohith, whom you know from his adventures online as 'Toll Free Traveller' and from the column he writes for this magazine.

Another great thing had happened during this riding expedition to Everest. Outside the Rongbuk Monastery, a pair of tired hands — strong, but shivering — sought comfort in the warmth of a small bonfire. The hands moved — to ink the pages with the wisdom of the monks who lived there. I walked up and merged into the group silently. In that moment, there was no sense of acceptance or rejection. There was only a sense of 'being'.

**

The three wildly different instances from my life have one common link: wandering women. Those were Polish girls at the bar in Barcelona, that R6 I was chasing in the Black Forest was ridden by a Swiss woman in her 40s, and the monks at Rongbuk were telling their stories to a Brit lady in her 50s for her memoirs.

There are great many women who've broken stereotypes and redefined life for one or many. The stories of the women who've written for this special edition are a loud collective cheer to all the women in the world. We couldn't think of a better way to celebrate the birth of a fresh year than to celebrate the givers of life: women.

Wish you all a very, very Happy New Year.

Ashish Jha @AJ2eets

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THERE,
NOW &
SOON

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Back to Middle Earth

The country came alive to celebrate 20 years of the Lord of the Rings' first premier

NEW ZEALAND

Tucked away quietly in the southwestern Pacific Ocean the island country of New Zealand has time and again made headlines and for the right reasons. While travellers were busy backpacking and exploring the globe, New Zealand was sincerely observing and came to light with a bang — the Lord of the Rings Trilogy. And 2021 marks the 20th anniversary of when the first film of the trilogy premiered and put New Zealand on every globetrotters' bucket list. The movies drew the world's attention to New Zealand's unmatched serenity, untamed wilderness and mist-cloaked fjords. The country's celebrations included screenings planned in theatres at Auckland and Wellington, with people arriving to watch the same in costumes, which had been in preparation for nearly twelve months.

PHOTOGRAPH: SHUTTERSTOCK



TRAVEL PROMOTION

TRAVEL PROMOTION

RIPPLES IN THE WATER

The Eco Retreat in Konark

Concentrated efforts by the Odisha government have ensured the state's bright future in the water-based tourism front

Beaches, forests, temples - Odisha has an enviable combination of destinations that shine as beacons on the eastern state's mainland. The highlight? A striking 480km long coastline, that does not need us to wax eloquent but speaks for its own myriad wonders. The beauty of uninterrupted sunsets that even the most honest representations fail to capture, the rush of adrenaline as one dives deeper into the pristine waters of Mahanadi, and the sheer calm of seeing thousands of birds mid flight - the surreal beauty of this state will leave you spellbound.

Beach Vibes

Crimson red, peachy orange or clear blue - the skies on Odisha's beaches have many hues. What remains constant are the varied delights that each beach offers. Puri's Golden beach, a surfer's delight, is a benchmark in itself, being the first of India's beaches with the Blue Flag certification. The Government of

Odisha has taken up five more beach stretches for the coveted flag - Pir Jahania, Niladri and Muhan in Puri District, and Haripur and Pati Sonapur in Ganjam District. Chandrabhaga Beach, overlooking the iconic Konark Sun Temple, is famous for beautiful sunrises and sunsets while in the thick of watersports.

What's more, Eco Retreat, Odisha's glamping extravaganza, will also feature two beach destinations, namely Sonepur beach and Pentha beach. Ramchandi Beach will also host Eco Retreat Konark. Enthralling views of fishermen in search of their catch will greet you on Talsari beachfront, which has a quiet eclectic surf and sand life bubbling around. Popular or pristine, the golden beaches of the state offer an unmatched sense of tranquility.

Boat Clubs Open Their Sail

The mighty Mahanadi, in addition to being the lifeline of the state, is also a driver of adventure tourism business

in the arena of water sports. The Silver City Boat Club in Cuttack, revamped with an investment of approximately 2 crore rupees to promote water-based recreation in river Mahanadi, hopes to make Odisha a tourism hub in the coming years. The boat club, which had borne the brunt of Cyclone Fani, now has a floating jetty, booking counter and complex for lifeguards, toilet complex, a restaurant, adequate parking space and a park with children's play area.

A ten-seater 'floating restaurant' is now the cynosure at the boat club, where nature lovers can relish delicious local fare under a crimson sky. Jet skis, water scooters, speed boats, day cruises, banana boats and inflatable boats, kayaking, canoeing and scuba diving also make sure there is no dearth of adrenaline fuelled activities for adventure enthusiasts.

250 kms from Cuttack, Sambalpur is also being hailed as the gateway to Western Odisha's tourism prowess. A boat club, cruises and floating

Clockwise: Parasailing at the Hirakud Boat Club, Tampara Lake, Mangalajodi at Chilika Lake is called 'The Bird's Paradise'

Puri's beach affords a great picnic, a quick dip in the azure water or even a nice stroll to collect seashells

restaurants are on the agenda to make Hirakud reservoir's sparkling waters a coveted destination, not to forget waterfront hotels that provide visitors an unfettered view of the pristine blue. Visitors can also partake in water sports at the reservoir, adjacent to which, the Debrigarh Sanctuary is favourite among travellers. Stay at Eco Retreat in Hirakud for a vacation packed with adventure, wildlife, entertainment and culture in a luxurious glam camp setting.

To add to the ever-growing development projects, the recently completed Tampara Lakefront is a beautifully developed promenade

coupled with a water park that has great water sport activities.

A Sight For Sore Eyes

Once in Odisha, there is little that keeps visitors from experiencing Nature in its purest form. A way of life linked inextricably with the flora and fauna of the region, the biodiverse wetlands are a major draw for birds and people alike. Chilika lake - the most precious jewel in Odisha's reserve - is the biggest waterfowl habitat in the country, where millions of migratory birds rest their weary wings after a marathon flight. Around 1.2 million birds make Chilika their home every winter, offering a unique window to view them in splendour before they start their homeward journey as summer sets in. It is here in Odisha that bird watchers can flex their wings and put their cameras to use.

A guided jungle safari and personalised treks also make Debrigarh Sanctuary, which is poised perfectly between the Hirakud Dam and Reservoir, rank high on wildlife enthusiasts' agendas. Migratory birds and varied animals that find shade in the lush lands of Debrigarh, roam about at ease, making the area a great birding destination.

Mangroves spread as far as the eye can see! Enriched from the salts of the Bay of Bengal, Odisha's Bhitarkanika Wildlife Sanctuary is the second largest mangrove ecosystem in India, with its deep backwaters making the best breeding grounds for salt water crocodiles. The eastern boundary of the sanctuary has the Gahirmatha Beach, where an Olive Ridley sea turtle colony nests away from prying eyes. An immersive tour of the sanctuary is often the best introduction to Odisha's rich biodiversity.

Stay here:

The Ecotour Nature Camps in the state offer unmatched experiences that won't be heavy on your pocket. For more, head to <https://www.ecotourodisha.com/>

Find the sweet spot between luxury and leisure with Eco Retreat Odisha - the state's glamping festival. Read more at <https://ecoretreat.odishatourism.gov.in>



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"Colaba
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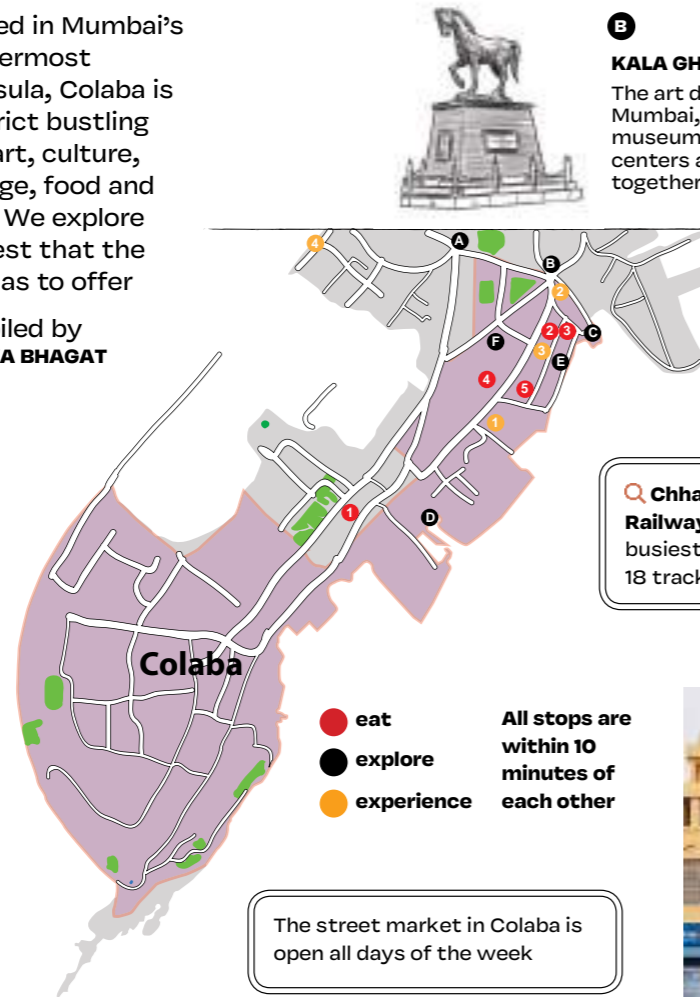
**Local
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Railway
Station

HEART OF THE CITY

Mumbai Colaba

Located in Mumbai's southernmost peninsula, Colaba is a district bustling with art, culture, heritage, food and more. We explore the best that the area has to offer

Compiled by
MALLIKA BHAGAT



1

CAFE MONDEGAR

One of Mumbai's most popular eating joints with quirky art on the walls by painter Mario Miranda
• ₹1200 for two



A

BOOKS @ FLORA FOUNTAIN

Fondly called Book Street, the five-way intersection at Flora Fountain is a haven for bibliophiles, with pavements lined with books all around
• Make sure to haggle



B

KALA GHODA

The art district of South Mumbai, where art galleries, museums, educational centers and cinemas all come together

Q

**Chhatrapati Shivaji
Railway Station** is one of the
busiest railway stations with
18 tracks of commute



Time to Eat

Indian • Chaat • French •
Mediterranean • Chinese
• Mughlai

2 **LEOPOLD CAFE** Indian
snacks & cocktails

3 **BADEMIYA** Popular
Kebab joint

4 **THEOBROMA** North Indian
Bakery and Patisserie

5 **CAFE BASILICO** European
and Mediterranean fare



So Much To Do

Shopping, movies,
art and more!

Be prepared
to haggle
when
shopping
at **Colaba
Market**

1 COLABA MARKET

A narrow street flea market which has everything – from trendy shirts, purses to handicrafts and home décor. Also keep an eye out for accessories, junk, and boho jewellery

2 REGAL CINEMA

The holy grail for cinema lovers in the city, Regal was Mumbai's first air-conditioned theatre and is one of the few single-screen theatres in the state capital

3 GALERIE MIRCHANDANI + STEINRUECKE

A gallery for modern and contemporary art

4 MARINE DRIVE

An iconic promenade and landmark of Mumbai



Street photography and Mumbai architecture



C GATEWAY OF INDIA

Erected to commemorate the landing of King-Emperor George V

E TAJ MAHAL PALACE HOTEL

An iconic hotel opposite the Gateway of India

D SASOON DOCKS

Western India's first 'wet' dock, it is a lively sea food market



F HOLY NAME CATHEDRAL

Roman Catholic cathedral which is the seat of the Archbishop of Bombay





NITIN CHAUDHARY

Travel in the New Normal

I LOVE AIRPORTS. I ESPECIALLY ADMIRE THE NEAT EFFICIENCY that they run with. Everyone is laced with a purpose: be it the flight crew, the travellers, or the shop assistants. There isn't anyone loafing around here. Despite the culture of the land that they are placed in, airports across the world seem to follow the same format – luxury outlets line the pathways, which are equally well-punctuated with restaurants and cafes. Invariably, there's a lonely bookshop around a less-frequented corner.

The clockwork precision with which these man-made mini cities run (except delayed flights, of course) serves as a reminder that when put to task, we can organise ourselves into a neatly run world. A badly run airport is more an exception than a rule.

After more than a year, I took a flight for the first time. I started with my favourite airport, Kastrup, in Copenhagen. It's a small airport, yet it offers a range of options for everyone – from budget shopping to big brands. I prefer this airport primarily for the efficiency it runs with, and the cafes that serve excellent coffee and Danish pastries.

My eyes were keen to sense the changes that had occurred during the pandemic while I had stayed out of the airports. Clearly observable were the obvious ones first – protective glasses in front of the customer-facing counters, hand sanitising stations, and everyone wearing masks while standing at a safe distance in the queues.

What I sensed, in addition, was the hesitation that evidenced itself in people avoiding conversations, both while standing in the queue waiting for their coffee and in the flight where, despite sitting next to one another, there was a

reluctance to make eye contact. The face masks didn't help the cause, for it hid the expressions. One couldn't tell whether the other person was smiling or frowning.

It felt like my favourite airport had lost its verve. Without the exchange of smiles and impromptu pointless conversations, the airport felt a transit hub – a joyless but much-needed stopover.

Doha airport wore a contrasting shade to Copenhagen. It's massive, and, despite the size, seemed to be bursting at its seams with travellers. Here, the conversations flowed more easily, and smiles were easy to decipher when masks slipped off the



↑ A watercolour scene at Doha airport
ILLUSTRATION: NITIN CHAUDHARY

faces often and with much willingness. A little more chaotic than its well-managed Danish counterpart, Doha airport seems almost back on its feet, both in terms of the number of travellers and also in regaining its pre-Covid vivacity.

While I waited at the airport for my connecting flight, hesitatingly removing my mask to sip coffee, I saw a neat file of travellers covered from head to toe, except the eyes, in white overalls, pass by. These were the unfortunate ones who had failed

their RT-PCR tests and were earmarked for isolation. A fear arose in me, and I wondered if I was sitting too close to this faction in white. I left my coffee unfinished as I wrapped my face again and headed for safety. I realised that fear has become an unwelcome companion in these travels; I wished for it to not be this way for too long.

Finally, I landed at Delhi airport. It was after two years that I came to India and to this airport. I was full of expectations and eagerly looked forward to stepping out into the city that I grew up in. It was not to be so quick, so I was reminded, while lining up for yet another test at the airport. As I waited for the test results to come out, I saw two individuals dressed in white overalls being scouted to an isolation area. My mind raced to wonder whether they had been in the same flight that I had been in. I couldn't be sure, for I could not make out their faces from behind the masks. Fear, a dreaded companion in this journey, showed up again. But little could I have done than to wait for it to subside.

There I was, close to midnight, eyes drooping, while I waited for my test results to come. These test results were the new visa, the entry ticket to normal life. While I waited, a

thought crossed my mind – what if this new normal is here to stay? What if I will always travel with my face covered, and what if the commutes of the future become as bromide as this one? Would I still look forward to travelling? Would I still willingly explore new destinations, overcoming the anxiety and challenges of commuting to the destination?

In short, would I, post-pandemic, become less of a traveller than I have imagined myself to be thus far? 🤖

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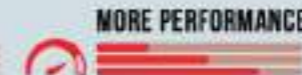
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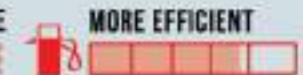
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ROHITH ASHOK

A Modern Traveller's Dilemma

PHOTOGRAPH: SHUTTERSTOCK

IMAGINE THAT YOU'RE AT A BEAUTIFUL BEACH ON A TROPICAL ISLAND. It's the crack of dawn, and a spectacular sunrise is unveiled before your eyes - a dance of colours and sun rays amidst a sky of slowly drifting clouds. Would you grab your camera and capture the spectacle? Or should this privilege be reserved for your eyes only?

We are blessed to be living in a time when it is so easy to document memories. Most of us now carry a camera, in some shape or form, wherever we go. But finding the 'right' way to embrace travel experiences is a challenge that I often find myself grappling with. To click, or not to click - that is the question!

Whether at a music concert or a popular tourist spot, I often find myself surrounded by a sea of mobile phones and cameras clicking and recording with seemingly reckless abandon. Which is, while sometimes strange, entirely understandable - since these are the little bits and pieces of life's journey that can bring immense joy, especially when retrieved from a long-forgotten folder many years later. The real challenge is that it's just as easy to be so glued to a screen, focused on recording everything, that you might entirely miss out on the real experience itself.

I'm not judging anyone here. In fact, as a digital content creator, I tend to fall closer to the benchmark to be avoided. It's my 'job' to be distracted by my technology wherever I go. It is not unusual to find me juggling multiple cameras whilst preoccupied by an inspired 'content idea'. That's probably why I even stopped to think about this conundrum in the first place.

While many people I've met have had strong opinions on the subject, I don't think it's actually entirely black and white. There isn't a right or a wrong way to go about any



Most of us now carry a camera, in some shape or form, wherever we go

of this. It's extremely subjective and based on personal priorities. However, for me, it's crucial to find a balance that helps address the conflict between the real and the reel.

To achieve this, I do what feels right at that time and place - with an awareness that regretting my choices at a later point is quite futile. Over time, I've found a pattern that works for me, but it is still impossible

There's no denying that the purest experience, in any context, is that which is free from distraction or dilution

to always get it right. So, whenever I can't make up my mind, I use stop-gap measures that allow me the best of both worlds. Sometimes, it's as simple as leaving my camera on time-lapse on a tripod while I sit somewhere nearby. That way I'm able to enjoy the experience uninterrupted and still have something to relive the memories by, in the future.

There's no denying that the purest experience, in any context, is that which is free from distraction or dilution. But, it would be foolish to assume that anything that doesn't meet that standard is necessarily inferior. As long as you find your balance, your way is the right way! 🎧

HIDESIGN



ZEN
Less is more

JUST BACK

16

IN THE PREDATOR'S Spotted LAIR

Deep in the heart of Sri Lanka's Yala National Park, **Mallika Bhagat** comes close to nature's unfathomable diversity

WE HAD BEEN WAITING FOR 15 MINUTES, OUR TEETH TIGHTLY CLENCHED, HEARTBEATS RACING. Just as I was about to close my eyes to find respite from the peaking sun, my eyes collided with Strawberry. She was shy, almost reticent, but unfazed by the dozens of eyes that were on her. Her cub, however, seemed bemused and nudged her to leave. He didn't like us, I thought. And for good measure. Humans have rarely done right by wildlife, and for two beautiful leopards in the prime of their lives, 50-odd humans gawking at them was naturally disturbing.

With a brief stretch and a glance towards us, Strawberry jumped off the rock, with the surefootedness of a ballerina and the



strength that befits Yala's apex predator, and disappeared into the bushes, with her cub at her tail. I realised I had been holding my breath for far too long.

From the height of a customised safari vehicle, the monsoon greenery of Yala is a sight for sore eyes. Yala is both a nature reserve and a national park, situated in the south-east of the island nation Sri Lanka, edged beautifully on the Indian Ocean.

"Yala as an area was used to keep prisoners at one point in time, and later, was a hunting ground under British rule. It was designated as a national park in 1938," Keith, our verbose ranger, tells our crew. I'm as enamoured by Keith's stories as I am by the beautiful majestic elephants, sambars, deer and peacocks that call this place home. Leopards are the glory of Sri Lanka, which has the world's highest per-square-mile

With a brief stretch and a glance towards us, Strawberry jumped off the rock, with the surefootedness of a ballerina and the strength that befits Yala's apex predator, and disappeared into the bushes, with her cub at her tail

concentration of *Panthera pardus kotiya*, a majestic leopard endemic to the country.

In spite of the statistics being in your corner, there are odd days when no one spots a leopard. Still, there's plenty more to see at Yala. We came across a herd of elephants (lovingly called bush ninjas by rangers here) munching peacefully by the

PHOTOGRAPHS: SHUTTERSTOCK



← The lush green of Yala National Park

↑ Leopards are the apex predators in Sri Lanka

↓ A wild buffalo lounges in the water



roadside, and by the time we came to a halt, a bunch of cackling human visitors had already descended upon the scene.

We continued our drive inside the sanctuary, spotting hornbills, butterflies and wild buffaloes. In the heart of the forest is the monastic settlement of Sithulpawwa, which features a collection of rocky outcrops and caves that are believed to have been home to thousands of inhabitants, a civilisation dating back to the days of the Sri Lankan kings. Many of the tanks here are now a lifeline to the animals in the wild. "We are trying to be more conscious of our efforts here. But every rock here has a history and their disintegration provided the fertile ground for this forest to rise from the ashes. So next time you see an old rock, go give it a warm tight hug," Keith says, much to our amusement.

As the sun peaked, we realised it was 11 am, and it was time to head back. The ride home was spent exchanging our own stories from the wild as Yala National Park unfolded in cinematic splendour in front of us. A monitor lizard basking in the sun on the ride of the road now provided us a chance to regale Keith with stories of Indian kings who used them in warfare. Closer to the gate, our driver stopped his vehicle next to another cocky young ranger. "We saw a leopard, let's see if you do too," he says, with a mischievous grin. A game of classic one-upmanship was afoot - and boy, am I thankful we were on the other side. 🐾

LIFE IS SHORT,
AND THE WORLD
IS WIDE

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INTO THE WILDERNESS 50

Known for its rich biodiversity, Jim Corbett National Park and Tiger Reserve is one of the most sought-after destinations in the country. With a sizeable population of the Royal Bengal tigers, the reserve is an oasis to observe the wild cat roam freely. Divided into different zones, the reserve boasts of a lush landscape with the Kosi river meandering through various safari zones. Dawn and dusk in the reserve are a delightful spectacle, with the sun rays breaking in through the leaves – or sometimes, even better – merging into the horizon behind the river

IN SERVICE OF THE GANGA



The famous Har Ki Pauri ghat on the banks of Ganga

Saving the Ganga requires selfless service, and Haridwar displays this in copious amounts

The Ganga enters the great Indian plains at Haridwar — the starting point of the Char Dham Yatra and the place thousands of Hindus travel to, in order to set the remains and ashes of the deceased afloat and to pray for the salvation of their souls. If there's one quality that redeems and defines this holy city, it's that of selfless service to others. Langars operate across

the city, offering food and shelter to visitors, saints and the poor, while keeping their doors open to any and all volunteers who may want to lend a hand in their efforts. The story goes that these langars always served the saints, visitors and the impoverished whenever they were stuck in the city.

This sense of selfless service has also been evident in the way the city and its residents have come together to help improve the state of the Ganga. Under the National Mission for Clean Ganga's (NMCG's) Namami Gange Project, local artists have taken it upon themselves to paint scenes from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata on the city's walls, especially the ones that feature rivers and waterbodies, in an effort to educate people on mythology and the need for conserving the Ganga. Sewage treatment plants in and

around Haridwar have more than doubled their capacities in the past five years. Two new plants have also been inaugurated in the last two years.

Even more impressive is the makeover that ghats and riverfronts such as the Chandi Ghat have

When in Haridwar, plan a visit to the Siddh Strot Ashram on its outskirts. This is no ordinary place of worship. Here, cows, ailing and healthy, are taken care of in a most inspiring way. In keeping with the beliefs of the founder, the milk taken from the cows is not for human consumption; instead, it is fed to the feeble, young cows who most need and deserve it.

received. These have been rescued from their state of disrepair and have been extensively and meticulously renovated. Today, they constitute some of the most excellent and aesthetically pleasing viewing spaces from where you can view the Ganga's uninterrupted, untainted flow. The Chandi Ghat is also home to the Ganga Avalokan Museum, the first Indian museum dedicated to the river, which is an exhaustive, interactive repository of facts regarding the Ganga and its biodiversity, and all efforts that are being taken to save the river. And while the sight and the experience of artis on ghats such as Har ki Pauri remains as magical and divine as ever, what's more encouraging is the fact that local children make rounds of these riverfronts often enacting little skits and dramas telling people not to throw

trash into the river.

A great example of an initiative to strengthen the people-river connection is the 'Smriti Van' (Forest of Memories) project on the outskirts of Haridwar. The project, launched by the forest department in 2019, reaches out to pilgrims asking them to plant saplings in memory of their loved ones, along the Ganga's banks in specifically designated areas. A unique feature of this scheme is that people can track the growth of their planted trees on an app. Not only has the project turned the landscape greener, it has also led to a significant strengthening of the riverbanks in the areas covered over the last two years.

Of course, the Ganga rejuvenation efforts would not be so effective if it were not for the concerted efforts of different organisations from diverse



spheres under the Namami Gange banner.

Crucial studies are being done in the small but interesting town of Roorkee. Back in the day, Roorkee was a small village with mud huts, but with the construction of the Ganga Canal, it developed into a planned township. It's a curious bit of trivia that Roorkee was home to the first telegraphic office in the country and the first ever aqueduct of India was constructed here over the Solani River. Actor Rameev Khandelwal went to Roorkee to find that IIT Roorkee, especially its hydrology and earth sciences departments and their state-of-the-art laboratories, has contributed significantly by providing innovative and effective technologies in the multipronged fight to save the Ganga and those dependent on it.

The core idea at the heart of these incredible programmes? To selflessly and unselfishly serve the Ganga, just as the river has done for centuries.



Left: The impressive Chandi Ghat in Haridwar has been developed as a tourist attraction

Below: The impressive facade of IIT Roorkee



The ghats have been rescued from their state of despair and are now among the most aesthetically pleasing viewing spaces to admire the flow of Ganga from

Into Lands Unknown

✧ Rio Singh gazes at the beautiful mountains

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VIJAY AND I WAITED NERVOUSLY FOR THE CT SCAN REPORT TO ARRIVE.

Rio Singh, our eleven-year-old labrador retriever was diagnosed with a tumour in the jaw. Dr Vaibhav, who has been Rio's doctor from the time he was born, recommended that we do a full-body scan to investigate if the tumour had spread to any other area. The report, when it finally arrived, did not bring the news we hoped for. A tennis ball-sized mass was discovered in the spleen.

Our choices were to either remove the entire spleen, a procedure that would put tremendous strain on an older canine or we let it be and let the illness run its course. No parent should be put in a position to make such a choice. As we pondered over the decision to be made, we noticed Rio run excitedly towards our truck. Nothing makes him happier than a car ride.

It was at this moment that I remembered a promise that I had made to Rio Singh a long time ago. We would go together in search of snow. It was mid-September and, perhaps, the Kunzum Pass might have a bit of snow. On our drive back home, we decided to drive to Spiti Valley the following week.

THE NIGHT before we

were to depart, I made four sandwiches which would serve as a mid-drive meal. Our plan was to be on the road no later than 5 am. After all, we had 500 kms to cover from Gurugram to Narkanda. As we were loading the truck, I noticed that Rio Singh was nowhere to be found. A foil paper trail, however, was left behind which led to a very content labrador hiding behind the sofa and enjoying what seemed to be his third sandwich. We decided to eat something on the way. After making Rio Singh comfortable on the back seat, our journey began. It was uneventful until we were welcomed by a heavy spell of rain at Shimla. The rain sabotaged our plan to stop for a meal. Vijay

Two humans, one furry friend and an adventure of a lifetime

Words & Photography:
Niharika Singh Dalal

began to get a bad bout of acidity and was in a fair amount of discomfort. I took the wheel from him and had to drive a sick husband and an overexcited labrador for the next two hours, in very poor visibility, to get us to the homestay we had booked at Narkanda. It was one of the hardest two hours of my life.

Vijay was fine post the home-cooked meal made by the family whose property we were staying at. And Rio did his best to teach Casper, the family's beautiful golden retriever, a few tricks. But Casper was in no mood to let Rio Singh have his way. It was only when we were leaving the next day that we realised that a bond had been formed between the two retrievers. Casper

ran behind our car and refused to let us leave. It took five grown men and a tight leash before we could be on our way. Rio Singh kept his gaze on Casper until the road curved away.

THE SECOND DAY'S drive

was to Kalpa. Apart from a three-hour delay due to a landslide, it was a beautiful drive with large pine trees giving us company all the way. We reached the Grand Shamba-La at Kalpa by late evening. A sumptuous dinner was quickly polished off and we called it a night. The real excitement was to begin the next day.

We rolled out of the hotel at 7am and, within an hour, the terrain began to change — trees began to disappear and soft soil mountainsides were replaced by hard rocky surfaces. Soon the roads turned to just gravel and the mountains began to get taller and taller. Just when I thought that I'd end up doing the entire stretch with the 4X4 engaged, we were welcomed with a freshly laid tarmac road that was a joy to drive on. The air began to taste crisp and clean and a smiling Rio Singh was stretching his head as far out of the window as he possibly could.

OUR AIM WAS TO reach

Kaza for a late lunch at the Deyzor Hotel. For the first time in three days, we made it on time. As I parked the truck, Vijay noticed a lot of local dogs around the property. He went to ask Karan, the owner, if it was safe to get Rio Singh inside. Karan asked us to be careful of Azizam, the St. Bernard who was seemingly resting peacefully outside the door. As Rio Singh alighted from the truck, the local dogs and Azizam got agitated. They charged towards Rio Singh. Instinctively, I stood in front of Rio Singh and Vijay tried to hold on to Azizam, who was not in the mood to give in. Vijay got a free bite on the knee from Azizam before Karan could harness him and get the situation under control.

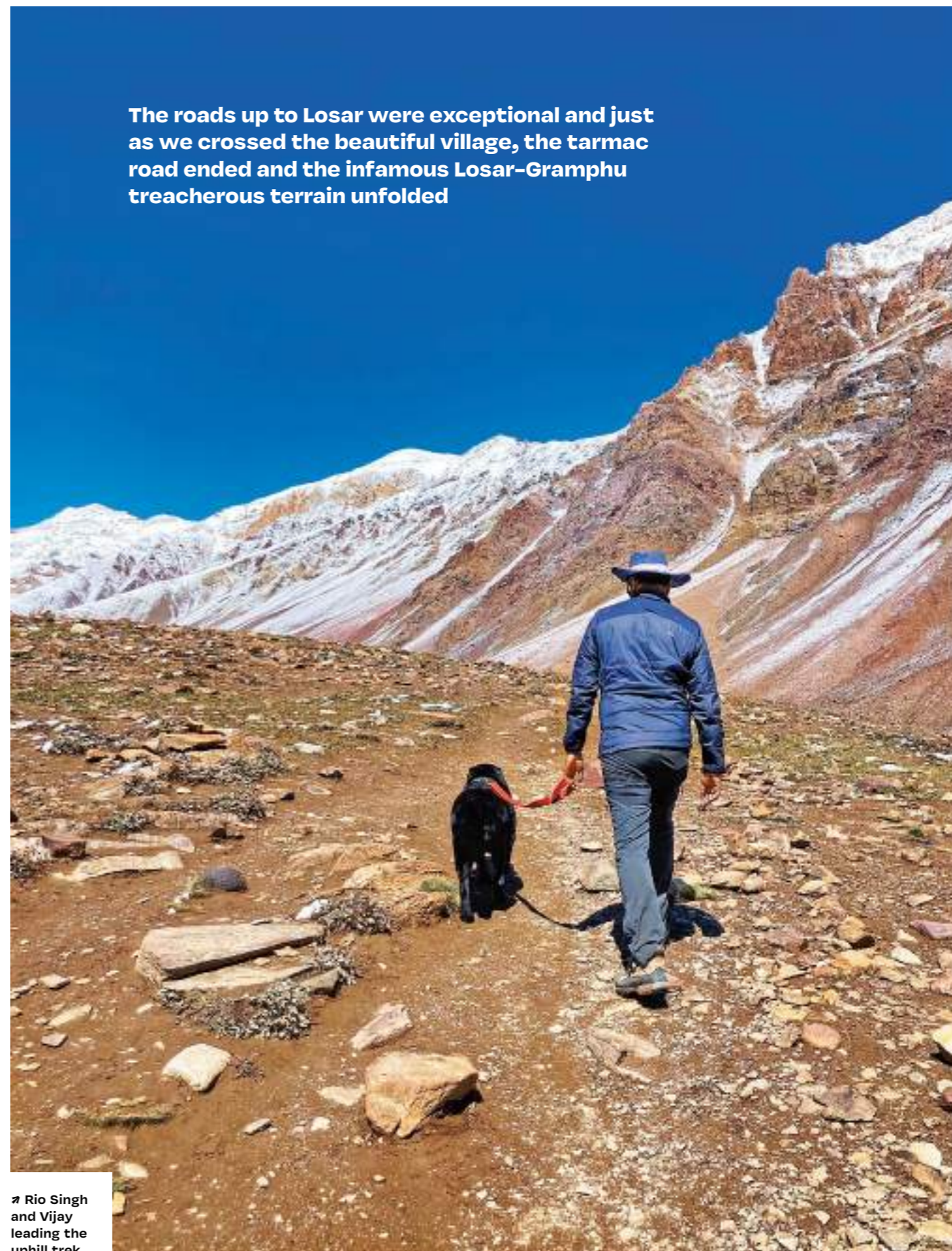
We rolled out of the hotel at 7 am and, within an hour, the terrain began to change — trees began to disappear and soft soil mountain sides were replaced by hard rocky surfaces. Soon the roads turned to just gravel

With our bellies now full, we continued our drive towards Chicham, eventually arriving at the legendary bridge claimed to be the highest in Asia. Once we crossed over, Chicham Village was close by. Narrow lanes separated the cottages that were all built keeping one consistent design — flat boxy homes painted in white with large brown windows. The Nomad's Cottage was the last



➤ Rio always found the best spot to unwind after a long day

The roads up to Losar were exceptional and just as we crossed the beautiful village, the tarmac road ended and the infamous Losar–Gramphu treacherous terrain unfolded



➤ Rio Singh and Vijay leading the uphill trek

Vijay and I just stood there with a heavy heart watching our boy roll around the snow playfully. Big chunky bites were taken out only to realise that there was an unlimited supply of the white stuff. Rio Singh was in heaven



➤ The breathtaking Chandratal Lake

building in the lane. We were apprehensive about the other guests' reaction to Rio Singh. We tentatively entered the property and ran into two young ladies who seemed like they were guests at the property too. I gripped hard on Rio's leash and that's when the ladies noticed him. For a brief moment there was an uncomfortable pause, and then all hell broke loose. The ladies shrieked in joy, dashing towards Rio Singh, who lovingly danced his way towards them. It felt as if three long lost friends were reuniting.

AFTER A LONG **dinner**

which was garnished with Rio being the dining-room star, we retired for the night. I was excited about the next day as we had planned to camp at the world's highest village, Komic. The truck was packed with our camping gear and, without Vijay's knowledge, I had packed all the ingredients to conjure up a breakfast fit for a queen. We drove all the way to the top and found a wonderful, open mountaintop to pitch our tent. While Vijay was busy setting up the tent, Rio Singh lay down on the dirt ground to bask in the sun.

A beautiful night under the stars later, we were back on the road towards Chandratal. The roads up to Losar were exceptional and, just as we crossed the beautiful village, the tarmac road ended and the infamous, treacherous Losar-Gramphu terrain unfolded. The road was filled with gravel and all sizes of boulders; certain places had sleet rocks with razor-sharp edges and Vijay kept reminding me not to go too close to them for fear of a tire sidewall tear.

An hour and a half later, we arrived at Kunzum Pass and to our total joy, it had fresh snow strewn all over it. I turned back to see Rio Singh's head stretched far out of the car, his tail wagging furiously. Vijay quickly got out of the truck, opened the rear door and Rio Singh made a glorious jump right from the truck into the snow.

What followed was a display of unabated joy and excitement. Vijay and I just stood there with a heavy heart watching our boy roll around the snow playfully. Big chunky bites were taken out only to realise that there was an unlimited supply of the white stuff. Rio Singh was in heaven.

➤ The open sky and icy-blue Spiti river in perfect contrast with the barren brown peaks



Eventually, we had to move on and, under protest, Rio Singh got back inside the truck as we made our way to Chandratal. The route progressively got worse - and more than once, we considered if the trip to the lake was even worth it. But we soldiered on and finally arrived at the parking lot, from where we hiked up the lake.

WE WERE BARELY a few

hundred metres from the lake when our water-obsessed labrador retriever began to show signs of severe excitement. At one point, he broke out of his harness and dashed towards the water flowing out of Chandratal, making a mighty jump right into the middle of the stream. Vijay and I were relieved that Rio Singh chose the stream, and not the lake, as neither of us had the will to jump into the freezing waters after him.

After drinking the icy blues of Chandratal to his belly's content, and resembling a very wet turkey towel, Rio Singh had to be

cajoled to walk back to the truck. It took a fair bit of effort to dry Rio. We were now famished. Very close to the parking lot was a small dhaba that served the most delicious

Maggi I had ever eaten, or maybe, I was just that hungry.

Vijay was nervous and at the same time excited about the Losar-to-Grampu stretch



➤ Rio Singh relishes a meal at Nomad's Cottage



➤ On the way to Kunzum Pass

I turned around to check on Rio Singh - and for the first time in over six days, it warmed my heart to see Rio Singh curled up on the rear seat, sleeping peacefully. He had an adventure of a lifetime

➤ Rio Singh (left) with his best friend, Casper (right)



of road. Every story he had read about this route had emphatically claimed it to be one of the harshest routes in the country.

The terrain lived upto its reputation - there were no roads at all, just the mountains and us. We had to find our own routes in most places. Often, for long periods of time, there was not a single person in sight. It was terrifying - and at the same time, humbling - to be reminded of how insignificant we were compared to the might of the Himalayas. After what seemed like eternity, we crawled over onto the fine tarmac roads of Gramphu. A few kilometres later, we were inside the dimly-lit Atal Tunnel.

I turned around to check on Rio Singh - and for the first time in over six days, it warmed my heart to see Rio Singh curled up on the rear seat, sleeping peacefully. He had an adventure of a lifetime. Not once during the trip did he give up and ask for help. Looking back, I couldn't help but remember Mark Twain's words.

"It's not the size of a dog in a fight. It's the size of the fight in a dog." 🐾

☛ The large
convoy winding
through the
roads

WINDING ACROSS Borders

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The first-ever SAARC rally brought with itself a series of many firsts. Our author revisits some of them

Words: **Renuka Kriplani**

Photography: **Autocar India Archive**

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SOUTH-EAST ASIA

ERE WAS PALPABLE TENSION IN THE AIR;
120 PEOPLE GETTING INTO 30 CARS.

Crowds were thronging and pushing at barricades because the locals wanted a glimpse of the top three film stars and a very popular radio jockey from Bangladesh who were also a part of this journey. In another corner, a Myanmarese film actress was talking excitedly into a camera about the adventure soon to begin. Others from Bhutan, Nepal, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and the Maldives were excitedly packing things into their cars, smiling and introducing themselves to whoever was parked next to them. As part of the organising group, I tried to get people into their vehicles in a flurry. Suddenly, police sirens wailed, and there was a hush as the senior-most politician in Bangladesh, Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed, Chief Adviser, arrived to flag off the first-ever SAARC rally.

This is the story of an epic journey of over 9,000kms across seven countries over 30 days with 120 people. And here's the thing about it - I did it without stopping at a single red light and breezing past international borders.

The SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) rally was an initiative of the government of India in association with the CII. With Autocar India being the logistic partner, I had been entrusted to help get this mammoth rally together - entailing eight months of

planning, meetings and route surveys. Crossing 't's and dotting 'i's, with so many countries' governments involved, had all culminated to this moment. At the flag-off at Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh, the air was ripe with anticipation and chatter amongst celebrities, media people, rally enthusiasts and officials from seven SAARC countries – Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and the Maldives. Our mission was to spread the message of people-to-people contact and help strengthen ties between the SAARC nations by driving through them.

As the rally was flagged off, crowds of people lined the roads while we drove out to Chittagong. As we passed the lush, green paddy fields, small towns and busy cities, a never-ending chain of locals and schoolchildren waving flags and showering love on this convoy of 30 cars gave rise to the term that would often be used in this rally – human tunnel. With people stopping to shake hands, collect and give souvenirs, the 175 km journey to Chittagong took seven hours instead of four despite an official escort car trying to pave the way and clear the crowds. While some celebrities

were used to this, the rest of us were dazed and left feeling like royalty. Radios in each car kept the participants connected, and the chatter was beginning to flow. The three days in Bangladesh flew by, with the participants settling into the rhythm of the early mornings and long driving days. The convoy traversed the endless expanse of green, often broken by small towns where cycle rickshaws jostled for space with people. Cultural events were organised at every halt, and we visited Buddhist stupas, war memorials and even revisited a cavalry escort. Bangladesh had imprinted our memories with some pretty unforgettable moments.

Exiting

BANGLADESH WAS

an event in itself. We had special permissions to cross over an old rail bridge with no road into India at the northern border of Bangladesh. The bridge was a sea of people waving us goodbye that we had to part – like Moses – inching our way through.

The first stop in India was a fuel station. After three days on the road, camaraderie within the teams was forming, with everyone wanting to stretch their legs and chat at every break. My job was contradictory, trying to get to places on time, so I announced that no one should get out of their cars; this would be splash-and-dash. As I got back in and gave the order to move on the radio, "Yes, Marshall," came the response from some of the cars followed by a little laughter. With all the orders I had been dishing out, the participants had given me a nickname that has stuck till today. Most of the wonderful people I met at that rally still address me by this name.

This entry into India was just a transit to Bhutan. As the sun was softly sinking into the horizon, the convoy cut through

As the rally was flagged off, crowds of people lined the roads and a never-ending chain of locals and school children were waving flags and showering love on this convoy of 30 cars



↑ Children cheering in a field in Bangladesh

↓ The landscape of Punakha during broad daylight



PHOTOGRAPHS: SHUTTERSTOCK

the beautiful tea estates of north-eastern India into the forest for a one-night halt in Jalpaiguri. As we crossed into Bhutan the following day, it felt like the entire population of six million people had arrived to greet us, cheering in their *Ghos* and *Kiras*. After dancing with the locals, we set off on the climb to Thimphu. The weather was excellent, and as we climbed higher, the temperature kept dropping. We arrived in Thimphu at sunset – at a very chilly two degrees. But the warm welcome ensured we never felt it. Bhutan is a country that will steal your heart instantly, with its gorgeous landscape, peaceful charm, hospitable people and unique traditions.

On a frosty morning, there was a warm reception and flag-off by the country's Prime Minister Lyonpo Khandu. We set off for Dochu La, the highest pass in Bhutan with sights of rosy-cheeked schoolchildren screaming. Dochu La, just about 25 km

↑ A foggy morning in Bhutan

↓ Bhutanese women on a sunny morning



from Thimphu, is a photographer's delight, with the snow-capped Himalayas and the 108 chortens forming a superb backdrop. The convoy swooped down the hills after a flurry of group photos. The roads in Bhutan are an adrenaline rush for any enthusiast. With smoothly paved surfaces that snake along the hills, long switchbacks, barely any traffic, and absolutely no traffic lights, one can barrel down them. Soon we arrived at the exit town, Gelephu.

I must explain here that my friendship with the team leader of Bhutan, Karma, began in the organisational stage. When I had re-entered Bhutan a day ago, astounded by its beauty again, I had asked over the radio, "Karma, how can people buy land in Bhutan?" Pat, the reply came in his deep baritone, "You have to marry a Bhutanese, Marshall. Shall I arrange for someone?" Laughter had broken across all the radios.

The Bhutanese had organised a fun



➤ The interiors of a Khewra salt mine

PHOTOGRAPH: SHUTTERSTOCK

night of dancing and music in Gelephu. At one point in the night, my crew pulled me out, and a line of kneeling Bhutanese men in their traditional garb smiled at me outside. I was a bit stumped. Karma said, “Okay Marshall, pick,” with a cheeky grin on his face, “This guy who controls border immigration, you will get in and out easily. That guy is from customs, he is in the police.” All of these officials had joined in to play this prank. My face reddened by now - and everyone was outside, cheering this joke on. I cannot imagine officials in any other country ever being so casual.

FROM BHUTAN, THE convoy

crossed to India once again to enter Nepal. This time we drove on the east-west corridor from Assam. The road had been

cleared for us with no oncoming traffic - and with the official escort car, we flew down the 200 kms, only stopping for tea at the Jaldapara sanctuary. A troupe of Totos - the region’s earliest inhabitants with only 276 surviving members - entertained us. Upon meeting them, we were reminded that we need to keep our ecology and indigenous tribes in mind when we march forward with development.

The country has 14 zones, and we passed through each of them travelling along the Mahendra Highway that passes from the eastern border to the western-most point. The landscape changed from deciduous forests and lush green fields to mountains, and winding roads brought us to Pokhara. The following day we rose to the view of the white peaks of the Annapurna range of the Himalayas and the sun kissing the top of the Machhapuchchhre mountain - or Fishtail, as it is commonly known. Later,

We zipped along the Mahendra Highway, a flat straight stretch, with sag trees on either side. We crossed through wildlife sanctuaries and crossed over Asia’s largest cable-stayed bridge

we gave up the wheels for oars, and the participants all partook in a boat race.

From Pokhara, we drove to Kathmandu, the capital with its dusty crowded streets, where a group of Beetles escorted us through the city. The homes had pots with water and flowers placed all along the route to wish us a safe journey - a touching gesture. After a ceremonial flag-off from Basantpur, the old capital of Nepal, we descended from the hills into the plains,

following the Trishul and Narayani rivers in succession. As evening fell, we arrived at the Lumbini Sacred Garden, stopping to appreciate monuments dedicated to Lord Buddha at his birthplace.

Leaving Nepal, we zipped along the Mahendra Highway again. It was a flat straight stretch, with sag trees on either side. We crossed through wildlife sanctuaries and crossed over Asia’s largest cable-stayed bridge at that time.

We crossed over into India in the famous Kumaon region and halted for the night in Corbett. The next day, the convoy drove flat out on a 455km run to Chandigarh.

THE CROSS-OVER INTO Pakistan

was an event that will remain etched in my memory forever. The atmosphere on the Indian side was serious, with checks and counterchecks of the people and passports counted and matched, and the cars being checked. This was the only border in this entire rally that we didn’t fly across. It had become customary for team leaders and rally officials in my car to walk across borders holding the country flags. The gates opened on our side and I was alone at the wheel, driving the first-ever car with an Indian number plate that would cross over into Pakistan since the Partition. My hands were already shaking as the gates opened to the other side. The drums were beating a joyous rhythm and rose petals flew in the air. It was historical - mine was the first car after the group walking ahead. The moment was so emotionally charged, tears were streaming down my face, my voice broke and I barely uttered a few words before breaking down. Hugs and handshakes came my way, and I rushed to gather myself before parking the rest of the cars. But as I got out and turned around, I saw the same height of emotion through the convoy. The Indian team leader and Pakistan leader were atop a car, flags crossed. Hugging each other, people were waving their country’s flags, and the feeling all around was one of years of history and tension being washed away.

Pakistani locals gave all of us a warm welcome and the evening visit to the Lahore market made us realise how close



↑ Cultural programmess were organised at every halt

↓ The road journey into Pakistan





➤ The St. Clair's waterfall in Sri Lanka

we are as people. Vendors were asking us about Bollywood stars and whether we'd met them, while feeding us chai and samosa and offering us massive discounts. It was a heartwarming experience.

From Lahore to Islamabad, we travelled on Pakistan's finest expressway, touching speeds beyond 120 km/hr on the vast, six-lane, autobahn-like surface crossing through the pink 'Salt Mountains'. By this time, the Pakistani team leader, Ehtesham, had been nicknamed 'reverse gear'. He was always running in the opposite direction to people, having forgotten things or needing something from his bag last minute. We circled back to Lahore on the Grand Trunk Road, built initially by Sher Shah Suri in the 1500s. The narrow two-lane highway was a more colourful and historical journey. We also experienced the art and history of Pakistan in the luminous monuments built out of coloured blocks of salt that one can see in Khewra salt mines and the ruins of the 2,300-year-old city of Taxila. In Pakistan, the Afghanistan team joined the convoy.

OUR ARRIVAL TO Delhi

was one fit for a king - the congested city-roads closed off for us, and traffic held aside.

The chatter on the radio was about how hard we were all going to find it to get back to driving in our everyday lives without escorts or closed roads and having to stop at lights. The leaders of all the SAARC



➤ Cherishing street food at Lahore



➤ Over 8,500kms and counting

countries who had assembled for the summit waved off the rally on April 3, 2007.

The long, straight run to Mumbai gave everyone a chance to savour the experiences and wind down the adrenalin. Mumbai

traffic refused to move aside, and the escort bike could not keep the convoy together. Still, great work from the security team lead, Iqbal and Sandeep ensured every car made it to the Gateway of India. The driving

culminated with pomp and celebration.

From Mumbai, the cars were shipped on a naval vessel to Sri Lanka, where we drove the country's length - from capital Colombo to the seaside of Galle and onto the tea estates of Nuwara Eliya before returning back to Colombo. Special aartis at the temple, chanting session at a Buddhist stupa, and a visit to a mosque - all in one place - at Lanka's most cosmopolitan religious site, Katargama, was unique, as were the picturesque waterfalls and botanical gardens. Sadly, beautiful Lanka was where the driving officially ended, and most participants bid goodbye to one another. The last gala dinner was filled with recollections of great moments, exchanging numbers, hugs and tearful goodbyes.

Only a select few participants headed to the Maldives for a ceremonial end, with the small island accommodating only a few. One hundred and twenty strangers had become like family over the last thirty days, sharing experiences they would carry forever. This epic journey is the one I keep going back to in my head. 📍

➤ The Indian leg ends at the Gateway of India



Land Of the White Cloud

Maori heritage of New Zealand reflects in the Kiwi culture, ancient forest rituals and even the afterlife

Words : **Ambika Gupta**

NORTHLAND NZ

⚡ The Cape
Reinga
Lighthouse

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HEAVY MIST COVERING THE LUSH
MEADOWS, THUNDERING WATERFALLS

and pristine landscapes and an absolute lack of human population, give this far away land the appeal of an Impressionist painting in green and blue. With no insects or predators roaming the land and crystal clear lakes defining the geography, this land is where surviving species were fairly few, until some sea-faring voyagers stumbled upon it.

They witnessed it from a distance, this island of mist, and named it Aotearoa, or the land of the long white cloud. These settlers were the Maoris, the indigenous tribe of New Zealand, whose careful stewardship of their land has preserved its natural beauty, and have ensured its purity and pristinity till date.

Since that time — approximately the 1200s — New Zealand has remained verdant as ever, though the mist has cleared considerably, and the land has now been occupied. According to popular belief, when the Europeans arrived, they named it Nieu Zeeland, after New Sealand in Holland, another paradise of blue-green lakes and fields.

Even though it has become a full fledged country with a remarkable presence on the global tourism map, the imprint of the Maori culture remains strong, and weaves its way through myths and legends, ancient forest rituals, tattoo art, and even the afterlife.

The Maoris felt a strong spiritual connection with the land and tended to it with devotion and by worshipping nature and all its elements. The Maori heritage is reflected everywhere — in the local cuisine, folklore, and even the bioluminescent paua shell jewelry — but nowhere more visible than at the Waitangi Treaty Grounds. This historic site is where the eponymous agreement between Maori Chiefs and the British Crown was signed, leading to the birth of New Zealand as a nation.

The sprawling estate is beautifully landscaped and the place is prided to be home to a massive



Lake Marian
in Fiordland
National Park

New Zealand has remained verdant as ever, though the mist has cleared considerably, and the land has now been occupied. According to popular belief, when the Europeans arrived, they named it Nieu Zeeland, after New Sealand in Holland, another paradise of blue-green lakes and fields

PHOTOGRAPH: SHUTTERSTOCK



➤ Mataatua Whareniui is the Maori meeting house

MATAATUA

116 feet long waka or canoe, exemplifying and reminiscing of the one in which the first Maoris arrived, led by their Chief Kupe. The wood-carving studio, state-of-the-art museum, and maori pou (carved wooden posts) pay silent homage to the rich indigenous culture.

HOWEVER, THE TRUE MAORI SPIRIT SPRINGS forth

in the fiery welcome ceremony that feels more like a war dance with guttural cries, threatening looks, and brandishing of weapons. Once you enter the traditional hut or a whareniui, you can relax and enjoy a lively cultural performance, click photos with the dancers, and enjoy a mouth watering meal cooked on a hangi or the earthen stove.



GRAEME MURRAY

➤ Whakatāne in the Bay of Plenty region

➤ A traditional dance in New Plymouth



JAMES HEREMAIA

The northwest tip of New Zealand, jutting into the Pacific, is named Cape Reinga, which holds enormous significance for the Maoris. They say that the souls of the departed ones take a leap from here to start their voyage back to the ancestral homeland of Polynesia. It was prophesied that a great light would shine here someday, and sure enough, the lighthouse that stands here now guides ships to safety. Another fascinating legend is the tale

The legend goes that Ranginui and Papatuanuku were locked in a tight embrace but their children were tired of the darkness, so Tane Mahuta pushed his parents apart

of Tane Mahuta, the forest God. It is a towering Kauri pine tree in Waipoua Rainforest that is a national treasure and is protected against insects, termites and any other possible threats. At 2,000 years it is believed to be as old as Jesus Christ himself.

The legend goes that Ranginui (Sky Father) and Papatuanuku (Earth Mother) were locked in a tight embrace for millions of years but their children were tired of the darkness, so Tane Mahuta being the strongest of them all, pushed his parents apart with his legs, thus flooding the world with light and life. When it rains, the Maori believe that it is Ranginui crying for his wife.

ELEVATED WALKWAYS lead

the way to the majestic 148-feet-tall tree. Gazing up at it will give you a crick in the



➤ The Maori tribe on large canoes

PHOTOGRAPH: SHUTTERSTOCK

The imprint of the Maori culture remains strong, and weaves its way through myths and legends, ancient forest rituals, tattoo art, and even the afterlife



➤ Tane Mahuta, the God of the Forest

DAVID KIRKLAND

neck. The indigenous forest tour guide prepares a 'Cocktail of the Forest' – made of three leaves of Kawa Kawa, a teaspoon of Manuka honey and boiling water. He then sings a stirring paean in front of the God, as members of the tour group raise a toast, and drink to his long life. It is a strange but at the same time a moving ritual.

From herbal tattoo ink; made of mountain gum, fish oil, and burnt bark, to manuka honey face packs and pounamu (jade) carvings, the Maoris' rich legacy is closely interlinked with nature. It is this ancient indigenous wisdom that lies at the core of taiki – taking care of culture – which is summed up in this saying:

He aha te mea nui o te ao?

What is the most important thing in the world?

He tangata, he tangata, he tangata
It is people, it is people, it is people. 🗨



WOMEN OF Steel

Recounting her maiden visit to Kilimanjaro, the author shares the beginning of the mountaineering bug

Words & Photography: **Rebecca Stephens**

≈ Mawenzi Peak, Mount Kilimanjaro's second highest peak

PHOTOGRAPH: SHUTTERSTOCK

K

ILIMANJARO WAS THE FIRST OF MY SEVEN SUMMITS,

the collection of mountains that comprise the highest peak on each of the world's seven continents. It marked the beginning of one of the most colourful chapters of my life that took me to the Himalayas to the virgin forests of West Papua and the icy wastelands of Antarctica. It is also the one mountain to which I have returned, time and time again - each time leading a group of international women studying for an MBA at the Rotterdam School of Management. In total, I've been privileged to accompany 70 women on the mountain - for each, it has touched them in their own special way, but more of that later.

My introduction to Kilimanjaro took place a very long time ago when, as a student, I spent three glorious months

are tricky features on the mountain, such as the Breach Wall and the jagged spire of Mawenzi that pioneering climbers have sought and scaled. But essentially, it is an oversized mound with gentle slopes running down to the sun-bleached plains of the Maasai steppe. And whether you climb it from the north, south, east or west, you can be sure of a footpath to the summit.

ENTRY TO THE
Kilimanjaro
NATIONAL PARK

is tightly controlled, so climbers pay a permit fee to enter the gate - and for each party, it is obligatory to employ a local guide and porters. Tents, sleeping bags and food are usually thrown in, and for those opting for the well-trodden tourist trail - or the Coca-Cola trail - there is bunked accommodation to boot.

Pouring over maps, we opted instead for the Machame route, which curls around from the south, and which, back

in 1991, was rarely climbed and would offer some sense of remoteness. A little more circuitous than the Coca-Cola route, it also had the advantage of taking a day or two longer, allowing us more time to acclimatise. As for the obligatory guide and the porters, we would welcome their company, of course, but we would provide our own camping equipment and food in an effort to be self-reliant as far as it was possible.

Before we set out, I spent hours on the telephone to Lucy, reading and checking lists, striking things off lists as much as adding things on, to all-importantly minimise the loads we were to carry. We decided we would carry equipment and clothing with us from home; we would buy food and fuel for our MSR stove locally. It was in Nairobi, I recall, before jumping on the bus across the border to Arusha, and then Kilimanjaro, that we wheeled a trolley around a supermarket to stock up for the climb ahead. I threw tens of chocolate bars into the trolley as fast as Lucy whisked them out again. "You will want those," I insisted. To stock fuel for the stove we left until we arrived in Moshi, a small market town at the southern foot of the mountain. Fuel in Tanzania was notoriously contaminated at that time, and I spent the best part of an afternoon sitting in the garden of our guesthouse, filtering it from one can to another through coffee filter papers. Finally, we were ready for the mountain.

Kilimanjaro, as we know, is a populated mountain, the result of which is that much of the wildlife has been frightened away - a four-striped grass mouse was the sum total of my animal spotting. Yet, the mountain retains a character that is uniquely its own, and its unusual topography continues to fascinate. When Kilimanjaro's snow-capped peak was first discovered by the missionary Johannes Rebmann in 1848, it was disregarded as mere fantasy for over a decade. The Royal Geographical Society of London held that snowfall couldn't possibly occur, let alone persist, in such latitudes and considered the Rebmann's report to be a malaria-induced hallucination. How could it be, on the equator?

It is, of course, a textbook illustration of the effects of altitude on temperature. To climb it, you walk first through banana plantations on the rich volcanic soils



↑ Walking towards the Mawenzi Peak

↓ Morning view from a tent at Kilimanjaro

→ A four-striped mouse spotted



Kilimanjaro is a dormant volcano - one of the best known in the world, in part because of Hemingway's famous story of a dying writer, "The Snows of Kilimanjaro". In Swahili, *Kilima Njaro* means 'the mountain that glitters' and its snow-capped summit is an instant symbol of East Africa. It lies 250 miles south of the equator, just inside Tanzania's border with Kenya. A quick glance at the map reveals a curious kink encircling the mountain in an otherwise ruler-strait boundary between the two countries, explained by the fact that, in 1886, Queen Victoria gave the mountain to her German grandson, Wilhelm, as a birthday present. The mountain is surrounded by the hot, dry plains of the Maasai steppe and is known for its widely contrasting vegetation. Of the Seven Summits, the highest mountain on each of the world's seven continents, it is the easiest and most accessible to climb.

working on a farm in Africa. My eyes fell upon its domed pudding shape across the savannah, or from the window of an aeroplane - always at a distance, beyond reach. But the germ of an idea was sown. It was years later when I was working as a journalist in London that a friend, Lucy, called me to seek suggestions on what she might do while on holiday in East Africa. No surprise that I answered, unreservedly, "Climb Kilimanjaro. Can I come too?"

Kilimanjaro might be the highest mountain in the African continent, but it isn't a technically arduous climb. There

Kilimanjaro might be the highest mountain in the African continent, but it isn't a technically arduous climb. There are tricky features on the mountain, such as the Breach Wall and the jagged spire of Mawenzi that pioneering climbers have sought and scaled



KATHERINE NAPIER

↑ Rebecca atop one of the mountain peaks

↓ Climbers cherishing breakfast on Mount Kilimanjaro

excessive quantities of water and resting a good deal more than we had in years.

Only our stove let us down, or rather the fuel - still clearly far from being free of grit and grime. The stove spat and spluttered and finally ended its days with a gasp of exasperation from me, and a humble acceptance of rice and beans cooked on the porters' open fire. They had seen it all before.

With the patience of angels, they stood by and watched as we struggled in the thinning air on the upper slopes. The last day is a killer - rising at midnight and climbing "*poli, poli*" on the steep, grey slopes of scree on the mountain's summit cone. There's little chance of speeding now. Here, oxygen is in radically reduced supply. Every step is an effort - lungs gasping for air, feet slipping infuriatingly on loose scree. *Poli, Poli*. Breathe deep. Regroup. Find a rhythm. "Don't fight nature but gently find a way to work with it," I whispered to myself. This is the secret to conserving energy and making progress in the upper reaches of the atmosphere (and in life generally, should we but remember).

There's little chance of speeding on the steep, grey slopes on the mountain's summit cone. Here, oxygen is in radically reduced supply. Every step is an effort - lungs gasping for air, feet slipping infuriatingly on loose scree. *Poli, Poli*. Breathe deep. Regroup. Find a rhythm

At last, there was a hint of light in the expansive African sky and we found ourselves standing on Kilimanjaro's caldera rim, looking out at a plump rising sun and far, far below, a blanket of pearly grey clouds stretching to the horizon. A slow stroll around the crater rim and we were on Uhuru Peak, the mountain's highest point, taking in the view of two further summits poking their heads above the cloud. Far in the distance was Mount Kenya, a peak I had climbed the year before and, closer to hand, Meru - a volcanic peak



of its lower slopes, then through forest, heath, high desert, and finally - when the extreme altitude results in temperatures plummeting below zero - onto a glacial summit. Parallels can be drawn with walking across the lines of latitude from the equator to the north or south geographical poles.

OUR JOURNEY was almost

without mishap. "*Poli, poli*, sister," the guide gently chastised, "slowly, slowly," mindful that it never pays to force the body's natural pace of acclimatisation. Slowly we climbed the mountain's lower slopes, drinking



↗ Aerial view of Mount Kilimanjaro

SHUTTERSTOCK



↙ The MBA group bonding atop the mountain

that stands sentry to Arusha, some 50 miles away. It felt great stamping our feet in the snow, high up there on the roof of Africa. "We can climb that one now," declared Lucy, pointing in the direction of Arusha. And in the course of the next few days, we did. The mountaineering bug, it seems, shows clear signs of being contagious.

Decades PASSED BEFORE

I returned - this time, with groups of women from every corner of the world, studying at the Rotterdam School of Management. Each had to write what their

expectations were and what lessons they had learned on the mountain. But the real learning was in the experience - with or without the written word. Most had never climbed or trekked before; many had never slept a night in a tent. The learning curves were steep, and the bonds built between the women were strong and lasting. They still gather to socialise and travel together, and network for that prized job. The mountain reflected something different for every woman: lessons on leadership, living with uncertainty, resilience, the power of pulling together, of camaraderie. But the two most profound and consistent teachings of the mountain were about confidence and a sense of purpose. One beautiful, value-led woman had been struggling with her choice of career for many years and wanted to work in humanitarian aid. The day she got home, she wrote her letter of resignation and made that call. I believe, without exception, that the women grew in confidence. One woman's words spoke for all, "This mountain reminded me that I'm made of steel!" 🧗



51
WILDLIFE

NATURE'S WITNESS

A deep dive into the best of
nature's delights
Images: National Wildlife Magazine

↖ A male
orangutan
climbs a tree to
avoid a flooded
forest floor

THE **CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC** made us look inward, and find new ways to engage with ourselves and everything around us. Many of us took recourse in nature's embrace, escaping the humdrum of a fast-paced world struggling to find sanity. Amid this chaos, 4,300 photographers from around the world chose to share the wild beauty that they captured, entering National Wildlife Federation's 50th annual photo contest in 2021.

In addition to the Grand Prize – called the Nature's Witness Award – the National Wildlife Federation announced first- and second-place awards in each of eight categories: Mammals, Birds, Baby Animals, Landscapes & Plants, People in Nature,

Other Wildlife, Young Nature photographers and Mobile. A single winner was also chosen in a new Portfolio category.

All 40,400 entries to the contest are tied by a singular thread - their love for nature. The 18 winning photos, which evoke laughter, tears, anger and every emotion all at once, offer a glimpse into the vast diversity of animals that coexist with us, and their homes.

The greatest purpose of these photographs is to inspire us into action. These seemingly obvious images raise pertinent questions on human-animal conflicts and the dangers that loom large as our planet faces its biggest challenge – to conserve the present and save the future.

LISA LUCKENBACH, 2021 NATIONAL WILDLIFE@PHOTO CONTEST



↻ A colourful sea anemone in a tide pool



↻ A green bottle fly explores the remains of a groundhog

ALEXANDRE LAUZIER, 2021 NATIONAL WILDLIFE@PHOTO CONTEST



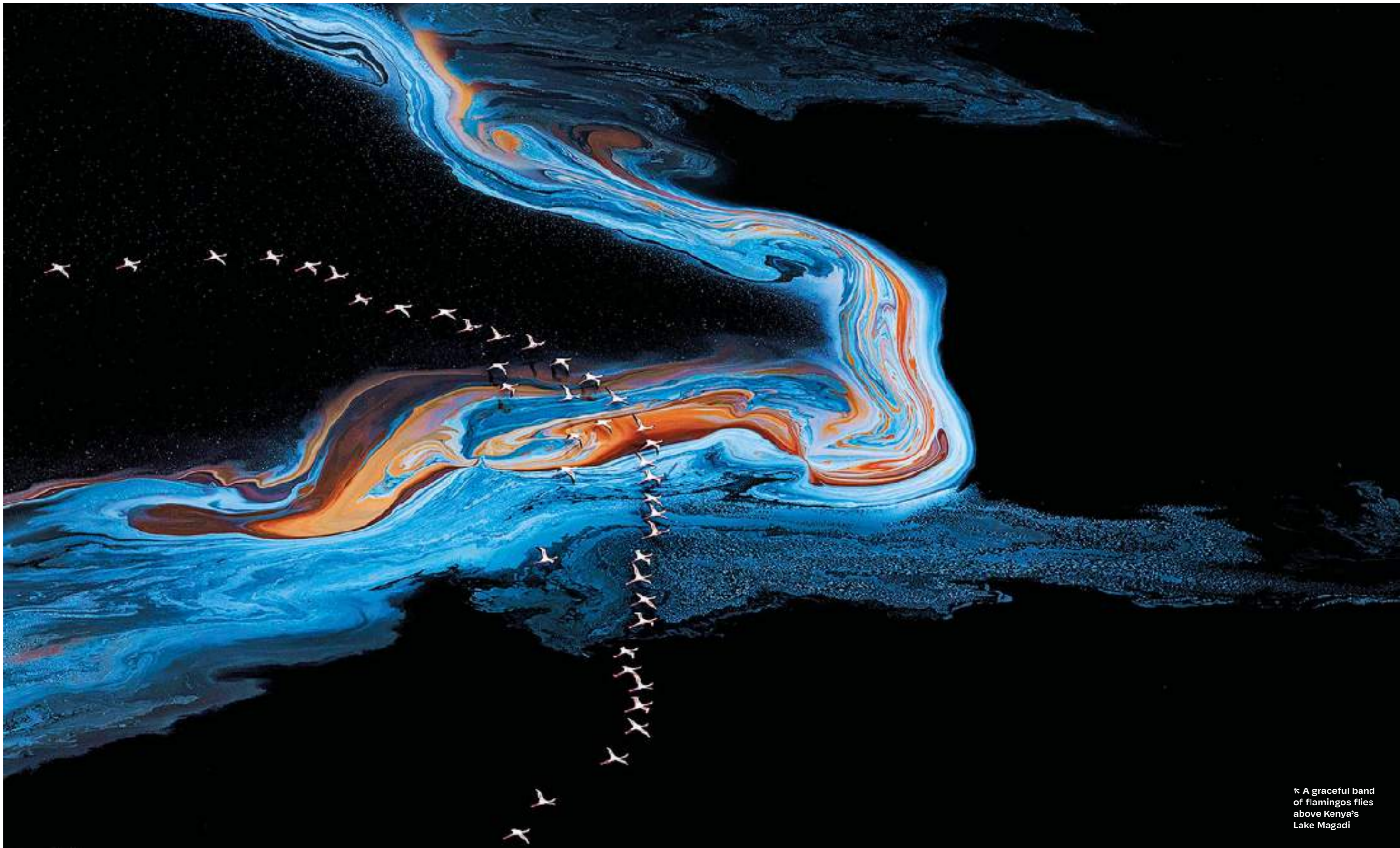
SHANYUAN LI, 2021 NATIONAL WILDLIFE@PHOTO CONTEST

↓ Two bighorn rams lock horns in a fight for dominance

↑ Tibetan antelopes look for food in Kumukuli Desert



JAMES ANDERSON, 2021 NATIONAL WILDLIFE@PHOTO CONTEST



κ A graceful band of flamingos flies above Kenya's Lake Magadi

JIE FISCHER, 2021 NATIONAL WILDLIFE@PHOTO CONTEST



MANOJ SHAH, 2021 NATIONAL WILDLIFE@PHOTO CONTEST

DOUGLAS CROFT, 2021 NATIONAL WILDLIFE@PHOTO CONTEST

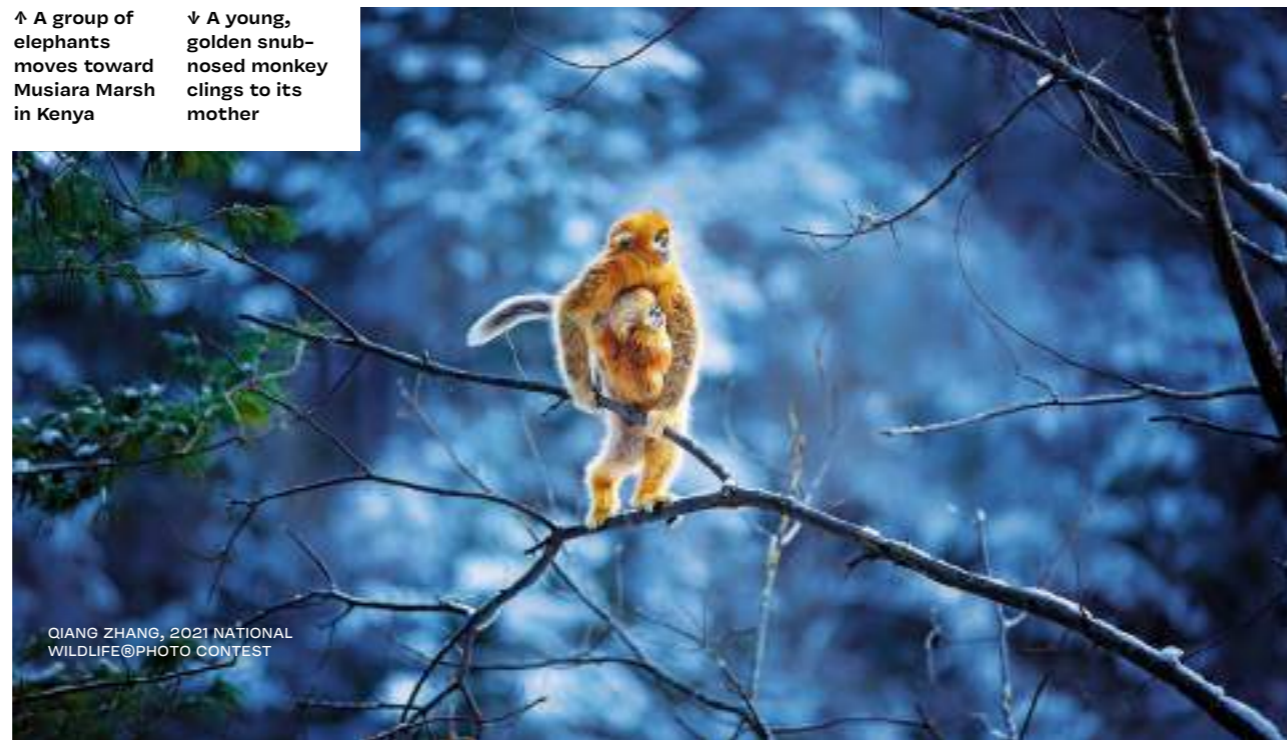


A brown belted bumble bee

NANCY SZOSTAK WRIGHT, 2021 NATIONAL WILDLIFE@PHOTO CONTEST

↑ A group of elephants moves toward Musiara Marsh in Kenya

↓ A young, golden snub-nosed monkey clings to its mother



QIANG ZHANG, 2021 NATIONAL WILDLIFE@PHOTO CONTEST

↗ A newspaper covers the face of a macaque

↖ A massive humpback whale breaches off a boat's stern



WEI FU, 2021 NATIONAL WILDLIFE@PHOTO CONTEST



58
SRI LANKA

posh

↑ ON THE SHORES OF
THE EMERALD ISLAND

A Trail Like No Other

Tucked away in the lap of nature, **Mallika Bhagat** experiences true luxury and bliss on a unique Sri Lankan journey

I HAD BEEN TRYING TO KEEP MY EYES OPEN FOR A LONG TIME. After an exhausting journey from Delhi to Mumbai, I was still a few hours away from my flight to Sri Lanka. The anticipation of revisiting the island nation, the outpost of my last vacation before the pandemic, gave me a bout of restlessness. A short flight and the accompanying jetlag didn't help.

But a view of the plane from the glass windows near the boarding gate elevated my excitement by a few notches. With every step taking me through the aerobridge to my window seat (yes, I'm a sucker for those!), my heart was beginning to fill with glee and suspense in equal measure. This was my first time flying business class, and well, I couldn't help but feel elated at the idea of finally not having to jostle for space - and space there was. SriLankan Airlines left little room for complaint, right from the ever-smiling attendants to the *really* generous wine. Flight food is a sore spot everywhere, but it is here that Sri Lanka's flag carrier really stood out; the food was perfect, the legroom enviable and after a heady drink, I woke up to the azure blue kissing the Sri Lankan coastline.

I stood on a beach where the land meets the Indian Ocean, nibbling on my mango and basil sorbet ice cream and the honeyflower iced tea. At the edge of the Yala National Park stood Wild Coast Tented Lodge, a luxury resort by Resplendent Ceylon which is the brainchild of the Fernando family. They are the founders of the world-renowned Dilmah Ceylon Tea.

I was ushered to a cocoon pod that was to be my home for two days. I was as surprised by the idea of the pod as you must be while reading it. These 28 cocoon



↑ Ocean Terrace restaurant at Cape Weligama

→ The bright garden in front of the grand ocean villa

← Standalone copper tub with a view of the wilderness



tents, scattered across the property, take on the shape and colour of the rocks and boulders to merge with the surroundings. Wild Coast is a free-movement zone for animals, with Yala's most famous predator, the leopard, coming in the area for an occasional stroll. The only sound that disturbs your sleep is a really loud frog, or waves crashing on the sand. Boy, was I happy!

There is much to soak in at the resort - I was guided by a genial concierge to the main building - the vaulted bamboo Ten Tuskens bar and dining pavilion, nestled adjacent to a free-flowing infinity pool. A Sri Lankan spread, with offerings like fish curry and hoppers, accompanied by the most delicious *arrack* cocktails, kept us buzzing. At Wild Coast, each experience is a carefully constructed delight that seamlessly packages ecological sustainability and luxury. From solar power to use of hyperlocal ingredients, everything

reminds me that I am part of the land. A dip in the pool, with water that is desalinated from the ocean and later recycled into waterholes for animals, left me feeling refreshed enough to take on a safari into the Yala National Park. The icing on the cake? We spotted the elusive leopard.

The next day, after a property showaround, we were treated to a special high tea by a rocky outcrop overlooking a lake, a mere 10-minute walk from the lodge. The cliffs, hanging precariously over a roaring ocean, our naturalist guide, and a couple of friendly dogs, made for great evening company. On our walk back to Wild Coast, the path was lit up by hurricane lamps and a small bonfire. In front of us, near the beach, was a makeshift bar with the mixologist serving the best of Sri Lankan delights for what became our favourite part of the day - Sundowner Cocktail Hour.

With dusk came complete darkness.

At Wild Coast, there are no night lights, keeping in mind the wildlife, and one has to call for an escort to roam inside the property after 6pm. Back in my cocoon, after a quick bath in a standalone copper tub that called to mind a bygone era, I fell asleep to the sight of fireflies dancing outside.

From the rugged heart of the forest to manicured lawns atop a rocky cliff, our view changed dramatically in a matter of two hours, as we drove from Yala to Weligama. What remained constant was the blue of the ocean, but with a small addition - rowdy surfers tamed the waves while my heart palpitated at the mere sight of them. The town, Sri Lanka's surfing paradise, boasts of Cape Weligama, another jewel in Resplendent Ceylon's collection, that charmed me by its simplicity, only to sweep me off my feet by its luxurious offerings.

We walked around the property, which



↑ The infinity pool at Wild Coast

is laid out like a village, to our first destination - a mangrove-laden path led us to Lookout Blue point, where the silver overcast sky offers unfettered views of the ocean. A golf-cart saved us the walk to our premier ocean villa, Samuel Baker (every villa is named after an explorer). Its pristine privacy and gardens enticed me to walk a little before putting up my feet with a book, under the shaded terrace. Cape Weligama offers bespoke but subtle luxury; our villa had a steam room and mossy cobblestones led us from a garden to a semi-private pool.

Food is the holy grail at Cape. Fish caught fresh from the bay makes its way to an elaborate menu with both Sri Lankan and international cuisine on offer. Exquisite dining spots are aplenty, but my default spot at the resort was the Ocean Terrace, where a hearty breakfast helped me kick-start the day with a tour of the city. After a heady mix of history, surf and sand, I was

back at the resort, where the cedar-soaked rooms of Sanctuary Spa treated my sore feet with homegrown spices.

It is easy to get lost in the meandering lanes of the property, but each wrong turn affords you a beautiful experience, the most delightful being the moon pool - a crescent-shaped infinity pool which gives the illusion of its water almost merging with the ocean. Nearby, the play area, with a chess set that almost matched my height, doubled up as our cocktail bar, where we engaged in a friendly (and exhausting!) game of chess before retiring for lunch.

Much like its sister properties at Yala and

From the rugged heart of the forest to manicured lawns atop a rocky cliff, our view changed dramatically in a matter of two hours

Hatton, Cape Weligama is also a member of Relais & Châteaux, with sustainability and community welfare at the heart of all operations. "The staff at the resort contributes regularly to welfare projects, including cleanliness drives at the beach," our host, Chamindra, tells us over a round of chess and drinks.

Sri Lankan hospitality is almost peerless - at the Tableau, over a decadent Chef's Table experience with Chef Vinnol, we had a crash course in Sri Lankan history and food (and a quick conversation in Hindi, much to our surprise!). It was almost a sigh with which we culminated our last day on the wondrous island. We set out on a sailing expedition from the boat harbour in Mirissa; even though our sail almost snapped in a show of might by the ocean winds. We watched, over mangoes and music, the glimmering ocean swallow the golden orb, drawing a curtain on an unparalleled Sri Lankan trail. 🌿

eat

TRAVEL ONE
BITE AT A TIME

HESTON BLUMENTHAL'S QUANTUM
GASTRONOMY 64

CHOCOLATE STRAWBERRY GATEAU 65

WHISKY HIGHBALL 66

ORIENT EXPRESS 67

Art of Sharing

Embarking on a culinary journey with Heston Blumenthal

✕ WORLDWIDE

The culture of sharing in the culinary world has been a long-standing one. Whether passed down from generation to generation or simply from one culinary enthusiast to another, this tradition embodies the spirit of cooking. Quite a few times, it is about carrying a legacy forward.

Holding on to this spirit and culture of sharing is Michelin star chef Heston Blumenthal's latest collaboration with Black & White, from the house of Diageo. The collaboration is aimed at inspiring people — with Blumenthal's culinary innovations — to create and share their food and cocktail recipes to be featured in a unique Journal of Sharing. In this one-of-a-kind shared space with Blumenthal, contributors can contribute their personal recipes, experiences and experiments with food.

"The aim is to take the audience on a sensory voyage of flavours, memories, and emotions," says Heston, whose select signature recipes — along with the creations of renowned Indian chefs and enthusiasts — will be seen in the Journal of Sharing.

While the journal will be an online one, patrons will also have a chance to get their hands on a limited edition package — Chef Heston Blumenthal's Secret Recipe Journal — entailing his curation of exclusive cocktail recipes and food masterpieces along with a bottle of Black & White Scotch whisky. Scanning the QR code on the package will extend the experience onto the website and will eventually enable patrons to upload their photo and recipe contributions.

» The journal can be accessed at socialgoat.in/BlackAndWhiteJournalOfSharing

Heston Blumenthal's Quantum Gastronomy



ILLUSTRATION: SAAHIL

Changing the culinary landscape by engaging all senses in a dining room, Blumenthal has taken the world by storm

» Where and how did your culinary journey begin?

When I was sixteen I went to L'Oustau De Baumaniere, a restaurant in the town of Les Baux-De-Provence. Back then, in the early '80s, it had 3 Michelin stars and was the first restaurant like that I had ever been to. Here they parked the car for you and you walked up these huge steps to the courtyard. There was crunching gravel and the smell of rosemary ... I can still remember it vividly. It was like an enchanted woodland. It was incredible and just blew me away. So many sights, smells and sounds - I thought it was wonderful and I knew then I wanted to do that. I had fallen down a rabbit hole into a multisensory wonderland. At the time I couldn't even cook but it set me on my way.

» What do you find the most interesting about Indian cuisine?

The many varied flavours and regional differences. Colours and textures too. It's so different from British and French cuisines. Also, there are so many vegetable dishes which I love. I enjoy exploring all the wonderful and delicious ways Indian cooks

use and present them. I also love the *tandoor* as a cooking device. I once made one in the car park in Bray using a road digger. It was quite something and made quite a mess but the *naans* we made were incredible. That heat and smoke make such a delicious result. I must have my *naan* as fresh as possible from the oven. At my favourite restaurant in Cookham, called Maliks, near The Fat Duck, they know me so well that my *naans* are always hot and fresh - just the way I want them!

» What, according to you, is common across the globe when it comes to food?

I think what we share globally is an understanding of the importance of sharing food and eating/cooking together. This was the idea behind the Black and White Journal of Sharing. We wanted a place for people to connect and come together through the joy of food and drink. The recipes we have

» What's your favourite meal to cook for your family?

I don't have a favourite, but I do like sharing so I like large dishes that people can help themselves to. At home, I cook things like ratatouille or sharing joints of meat. I also love to barbecue and cook outside. I also make tarte Tatin, a dish with very few ingredients (five or so) which just requires your attention and skill to bring together.



↑ The tarte Tatin is one of Heston's favourite recipes to cook

created - and the cocktails too - are there to inspire and help others begin a journey of their own.

» What's the most peculiar thing you've cooked or eaten so far?

Well, I have cooked almost everything and anything the world has to offer - from fermented shark to crocodiles to turtles. I've also eaten insects and live mackerel all in the name of curiosity and research. Most recently, I tried the canned, fermented fish from Sweden called Surströmming. It wasn't pleasant, but I do believe that no food is inherently disgusting; otherwise it simply wouldn't be food. Somebody must have liked it enough for others to try it.

- Simrran Gill

CHEF RECOMMENDS

BLUMENTHAL'S PICK OF WHAT YOU SHOULD NOT MISS AT HIS RESTAURANT



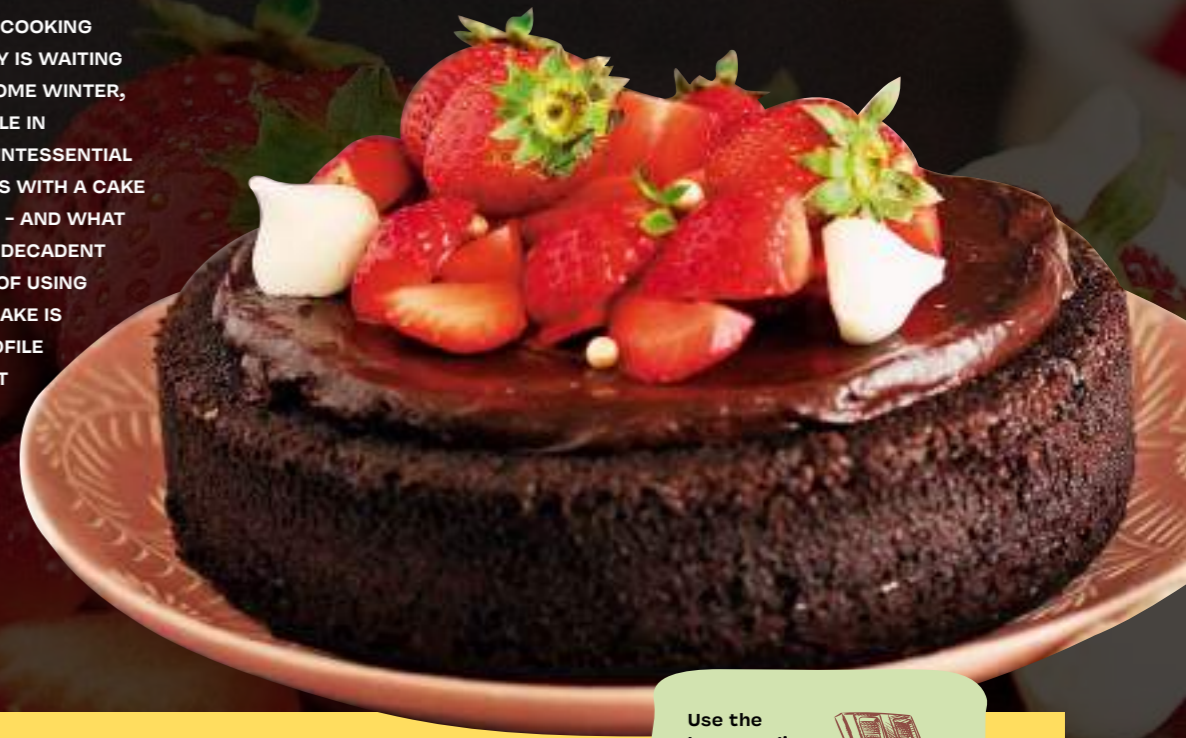
Triple Cooked Chips at Hind's Head in Bray

The chips were the very first recipe I ever created, even before I opened a restaurant. They are special not just to me but also to the team. They are uniquely crispy and show that an understanding of science can totally change and improve something we all feel we know everything about. So, if you want to know what they really are, then I recommend you head to The Hind's Head to try them there.

Chocolate Strawberry Wholewheat Gateau

It's that time of the year when, officially, calories don't count

THE BEST THING ABOUT COOKING OR BAKING SEASONALLY IS WAITING FOR THOSE FRESH FRUITS. COME WINTER, STRAWBERRIES ARE AVAILABLE IN ABUNDANCE. ONE OF THE QUINTESSENTIAL WAYS TO PAIR STRAWBERRIES WITH A CAKE IS ALWAYS WITH CHOCOLATE - AND WHAT BETTER INDULGENCE THAN A DECADENT CHOCOLATE CAKE! THE IDEA OF USING FRESH-FRUIT PUREE IN THE CAKE IS TO AMP UP THE FLAVOUR PROFILE AS WELL AS ALLOW THE FRUIT TO SOAK IN COMPLETELY INTO THE CAKE.



RECIPE BY RUCHIRA HOON

- ➔ Puree $\frac{1}{2}$ cup strawberries and keep it aside.
- ➔ Melt 50ml butter and 100 grams dark chocolate together. Add sugar to it and whisk well.
- ➔ Take 3 eggs and separate the egg white and yolk. Add the three egg yolks to the butter chocolate mixture. Whisk until smooth.
- ➔ Add pureed strawberries and 1 tsp vanilla extract to this mix and whisk until smooth.
- ➔ Separately, take $\frac{1}{2}$ cup wholewheat flour, $\frac{1}{4}$ cup cocoa

powder and 1 tsp baking powder. Fold until well combined. ➔ Now whisk the egg whites until it forms stiff peaks. Fold this into the chocolate mixture.

➔ Prepare an 8-inch tin by lining it with butter paper and pour the batter into it.

* Remove and cool. The cake will collapse a bit but that's okay.

➔ Bake for 45 minutes in a preheated oven at 180 degree centigrade or till it is firm to touch.

Use the best-quality chocolate you can find to make the cake just that much better



➔ Meanwhile, make the frosting, by heating 100 ml fresh cream and pouring over 75 grams of dark chocolate, let it sit and then whisk until smooth.

➔ Pour this over the chocolate gâteau.

➔ Cut some strawberries and arrange on top.

1

Ginger Ale or Ginger Beer

Ginger is the perfect sidekick for whiskey, as its complexity of flavour ranges from sweet to hot, medicinal and earthy, depending on its context and concentration. A simple bourbon and ginger ale is a classic entry-level combination, while a spicier ginger beer and a smoky whisky play well in the mule-style cocktail. For a taste of the fiery kick fresh ginger can provide, mix up a smoky, Scotch-based penicillin cocktail.



2

Soda, Seltzers and Bitters

If you prefer your whiskey chilled and with bubbles, you're lucky. The humble whisky-and-soda highball is having something of a renaissance right now, thanks in large part to the Indian whisky drinking trend and the Japanese influence of highballs. The addition of bracingly fizzy seltzer works best with boldly flavoured whiskies, if they're on the sweeter side. Be sure to add a squeeze of lemon to your highball for a citrus kick — or better yet, fill the glass with ice cubes.

Pricier whiskies, like aged single malts or rare bourbons, are often prized for their specific flavour profiles, so you may want to reserve those for sipping and opt for a less expensive blend for cocktails.



3

Fizzy Colas

There's no denying this is the drink equivalent of comfort food. Jack and Cola may get all the attention, for better and for worse, but Cola's sweet earthiness pairs particularly well with any bourbon-style whisky. Our advice: stick to an inexpensive whisky and add a squeeze of lime to temper the sweetness.

Whisky Highball



Known for its complex depth of flavour, whisky can always be enjoyed neat. But when paired with other ingredients, its versatility really comes out. It can be sweet, spicy, savoury, or smoky. Here are a few ways to pair your whisky

4

Citrus

Lemon, orange, grapefruit, lime pair nicely with whisky. The backbone of a Whisky Sour, lemon juice, adds a sweet tinge that can disarm a whisky's booziness. In summer, whisky and lemonade is refreshing. Come winter, no hot Toddy is complete without a wheel of lemon mingling



with mulling spices. With honey and ginger, grapefruit and blended Scotch combine for a bittersweet Grapefruit Penicillin. Balance out lime's sharpness with a gingery Whisky Mule. And don't forget to add an orange zest to a classic Old Fashioned.



5

Tonic

Want a light, bubbly cocktail starring whisky or bourbon? Mix it with tonic water for a Whisky Tonic. You might first think of a Gin-and-Tonic or Vodka Tonic when it comes to tonic water. But the sweet, bubbly carbonation pairs perfectly with oaky, spicy whisky. In fact, we love toning down whisky this way, especially in the summer. With the range of tonics available in the market, ranging from low cal to flavoured, this can be your go-to whisky combination.



↑
START
HERE



For those who prefer to do away with the creamy sauce, the Galette of artichoke, tomato coulis is the ideal choice

CLASSIC EUROPEAN A Journey to Remember

THE HISTORY ENTHUSIAST IN US WOULD KNOW ABOUT THE LEGENDARY TRAIN CALLED THE ORIENT EXPRESS. Although over the years the train changed its course several times, its legacy continued, just not on the international tracks anymore. Rather, Orient Express — or the namesake — found a new home at the Taj Palace hotel in the capital city.

The Orient Express completes 38 legendary years this year — that's almost four decades of legacy, impeccable service and culinary prowess. And one evening, we experienced it all first-hand.

For the hors d'oeuvres, was the signature Camembert cheese soufflé, paprika sauce which, to say the least, was liquid gold. Its simple presentation but rich taste stole the show. And a side of the bubbly was just enough to get us started for the night.

Next in line was the green asparagus potage along with a small portion of truffle cappuccino, both perfect accompaniments on a cold winter night like this one. For the mains, we chose the walnut and gorgonzola cappelletti, tomato cream sauce. The cappelletti — small pasta pockets — were fastidiously laid down in a creamy tomato sauce flavored with the veined blue Italian cheese.

To end it all, we opted for the warm chocolate pudding, whose chocolate-filled centre required only a gentle touch for anyone to get lost into a scene from *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. It's safe to say we ended the night in the real world. 🍷

— SIMRRAN GILL

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◀ The Butterflied Champagne prawns



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— BOOKS —

Bourdain in Stories

Laurie Woolever on the
legacy of Anthony Bourdain

LITTLE
THINGS TO
FILL IN YOUR
JOURNEY

— FELLOW TRAVELLER —

Sara Ali Khan

And her love for
Kedarnath



As we ring in the New Year, there are traditions galore from around the world that bring people together. One such tradition, in Ecuador, involves burning dolls in a fire at midnight on the eve of New Year. Representing everything that they wish to let go, Ecuadorians burn effigies called *monigotes*, that are traditionally stuffed with sawdust or newspaper. This doll signifies the *año viejo*, or the old year, and communities come together to celebrate the coming of a new year, which, they hope, will bring them happiness and peace.

PHOTOGRAPH: SHUTTERSTOCK



“It’s Not Often That You Meet People Who Are Funny, Clever, and Kind. And He Was”

Nigella Lawson as told to Laurie Woolever

I MET TONY AT DINNER, A LONG TIME AGO, the late nineties, probably with the food critic A. A. [Adrian] Gill, in London. He didn’t frighten me at first, but I found him daunting, because he was quite manic. He had his silver thumb ring, and [was] wearing black leather.

I didn’t feel we got to know each other very much, but he was very much being Tony, many stories. From that dinner, he told everyone that I’d eaten aborted lamb, which is an embellished story. I was saying there were practices in France where they take the lamb out before it’s born and eat it. So he embellished that into a story about how that’s what I had done. I can’t tell you what trouble that got me into.

I really got to know Tony while doing *The Taste*. Such an unlikely program for him to be involved in. Knowing that he was doing it, as far as I was concerned, guaranteed that it would have integrity.

I wasn’t particularly comfortable doing it, but I loved doing it, because I liked hanging out with Tony and Ludo [Lefebvre]. We’d often go out eating in between times, but Tony really needed to be alone and in his trailer a lot. [...] You’d be filming and there’d be a relight, and he’d be editing a book or finishing something, writing something. He didn’t give himself that much time off, on purpose.

He was a very introverted person, which people misunderstood in a way, because of his facility with people, but he was always a slightly detached presence. Enormously friendly; he would look at you in a terribly warm way. And when he needed to pull



back, I just felt there was something, like many introverts, he just needed a bit of space around him. He was such a strange mixture between an extraordinarily measured person and sort of a manically obsessive person. I think that’s why he was always so fascinating. I always used to describe him [as] something like Gary Cooper mixed with Keith Richards.

He—as I did—liked being in the Chateau Marmont [hotel, in Los Angeles, where *The Taste* was filmed] for a month. I think it gave him a certain sense of stillness, but he was busy all the time; we had very early starts. I love being busy and not having time to think about myself or life. It’s actually quite rare that you can do it away from home, but in a fixed place, for a month. It was quite a treat.

Everyone felt they knew him. That’s what television does to you, and his particular form of television. I think it’s very difficult, because you’re

dealing with a lot of people who need something from you, emotionally—they’re coming to hear him speak, and for someone who was quite turned in on himself, as an introvert, he was, more than a lot of men, quite porous in the sense of feeling people’s needs.

I’ve experienced living through people’s illness, and then dying, and it takes you a long time afterward to remember them not ill. And when you remember [them] at last as not ill, you feel something’s been given to you. And I find it hard now to think of Tony in a way that isn’t really very focused



on the end. I feel the shock has slightly taken the other pictures away.

The excerpt is from Bourdain in Stories by Laurie Woolever

“I found the process of creating this book to be hugely cathartic”

A close associate of chef extraordinaire Anthony Bourdain, Laurie Woolever talks to **Mallika Bhagat** about what went into writing *Bourdain in Stories*, which offers a glimpse into his life through the eyes of his closest friends and colleagues

» **What prompted this book? Was it an effort to know Anthony Bourdain better?**

This book was conceived very shortly after Tony’s death in June 2018, and it came out of a conversation between myself, Tony’s longtime US editor Daniel Halpern, and his longtime literary agent, Kimberly Witherspoon. We had been fielding all manner of pitches and queries from people wanting to write about Tony, people wanting to make films about him, and people hoping to audition to replace him on television. It was overwhelming, and there was a shared desire to create something that came from a place of already knowing him, as a way to tell the rest of his story, as accurately as possible, and with the permission of his estate.

» **You spoke to people who knew Tony through different periods of his life. What were your favourite conversations?**

I worked closely with him for nearly a decade, and I’d known him for almost 20 years, but each conversation I had for this book revealed something that I hadn’t previously known. I especially enjoyed talking with Tony’s first wife, Nancy, who had known him since they were young teenagers, and had been with him through high school, college, cooking school and his long career as a chef. I also very much enjoyed speaking with CNN anchor Anderson Cooper, who has spent as much time on the road as Tony did, and understands how that can isolate and change a person. He was also quite forthcoming about the loss of a family member by suicide.

» **How did you decide what**

aspects of his life should make it into the narrative?

Tony was unsparingly honest in writing about himself, especially in *Kitchen Confidential*, the memoir that kick-started his career as a travel television host and producer – and I felt strongly that I wanted to continue that spirit of honesty in this book. There were so many loving tributes in the immediate aftermath of his death, and I don’t think there’s any doubt that he did a lot of good for the world, but to show only the positive sides of him would not be an honest portrayal of a complex person; it was not how he presented himself, as a saint.

» **Hopeless romantic, narcissistic, drug addict, charming – these are some of the many ways in which Bourdain has been described in the book. How would you describe him?**

I would agree with all of these assessments, and I would add that he was very good at reading a person or a situation and knowing how to respond, to get the result he was after. With some members of his kitchen and TV crews and some network executives, he knew that he had to be very tough in order to get the best work out of them, or to get his way. There were others whom he treated very gently. He was also somewhat shy and socially awkward, which might surprise people who only saw the brash, swaggering side of him on television. He was extraordinarily generous with opportunities. And I don’t think it would surprise anyone to hear that he was extraordinarily intelligent and well-read.



» **What is it about Anthony Bourdain that you want the readers to walk away with?**

I hope that people who read this book will have a better understanding of how a person like Tony, who seemed to have everything he ever wanted, could still get to a place where he decided to end his own life. And, I hope that readers will recognise that there was a lot of hard work, a number of dead ends, and a lot of luck and good timing that contributed to the unlikely story of his success.

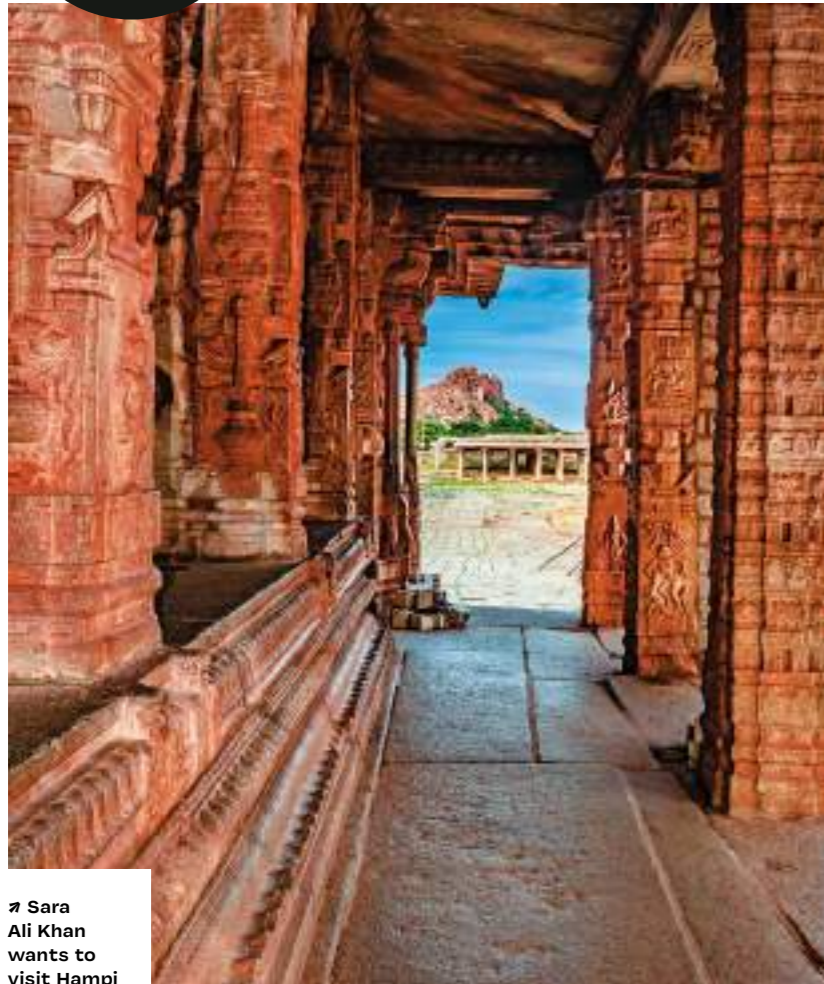
» **Is the book, *Bourdain in Stories*, a form of catharsis?**

Yes, I found the process of creating this book to be hugely cathartic, as someone who was directly affected by his death. It was quite useful and comforting to have so many conversations about Tony, with people on whom he had made such a huge impact – from his brother Christopher, his late mother Gladys and his daughter Ariane, to various classmates, colleagues, ex-girlfriends, and the various fascinating friends he picked up along the way. And it’s my hope that readers who have felt some pain, anguish, confusion or anger at Tony’s death can find some peace and understanding in reading about the long and fascinating arc of his life.



Sara Ali Khan's Love For Kedarnath

While promoting her film *Atrangi Re*, **Sara Ali Khan** talks to Outlook Traveller about her favourite travel destinations



➤ Sara Ali Khan wants to visit Hampi

PHOTOGRAPH: SHUTTERSTOCK

» What is travelling for you?

For me, travelling and exploring new places is all about spending time with yourself. The time I spend while travelling is something very dear to me.

» Your favourite Indian travel destination and your favourite place abroad

When it comes to India, my absolute favourite travel destination is Kedarnath. Outside India, I love spending time in the Big Apple, that is New York, in the US.

» What do you pack while travelling but never use?

It has got to be my collection of sunglasses (*laughs*). I always pack them, thinking I'll use them, but somehow, I never do!

» As an actor, you travel to different locations for work too. What has been your favourite travel experience/adventure?

I think Madurai (Tamil Nadu) was outstanding. We shot the song "Chakachak" from my film there, and



it was a great experience. Shooting for the movie *Kedarnath* in the city was also a unique experience that I will always cherish.

» Your most treasured souvenir from a vacation

Not a souvenir as such, but whenever I travel to Ajmer Sharif or the Golden Temple or Bangla Sahib, I always bring back *prasad*. I like that.

» Did you travel during or after the pandemic? How was it as an experience for you?

I went to Goa during the pandemic. It was very different; we just stayed in the villa. I also travelled to Kedarnath recently, which is and will always be, I am sure, beautiful. I actually travelled quite a lot during the pandemic (*smiles*).

What's next on your list of places to visit?

I really want to go to Hampi. That's one of the places I have always wanted to visit, and I really can't wait to get some time off, or get an opportunity to go there.

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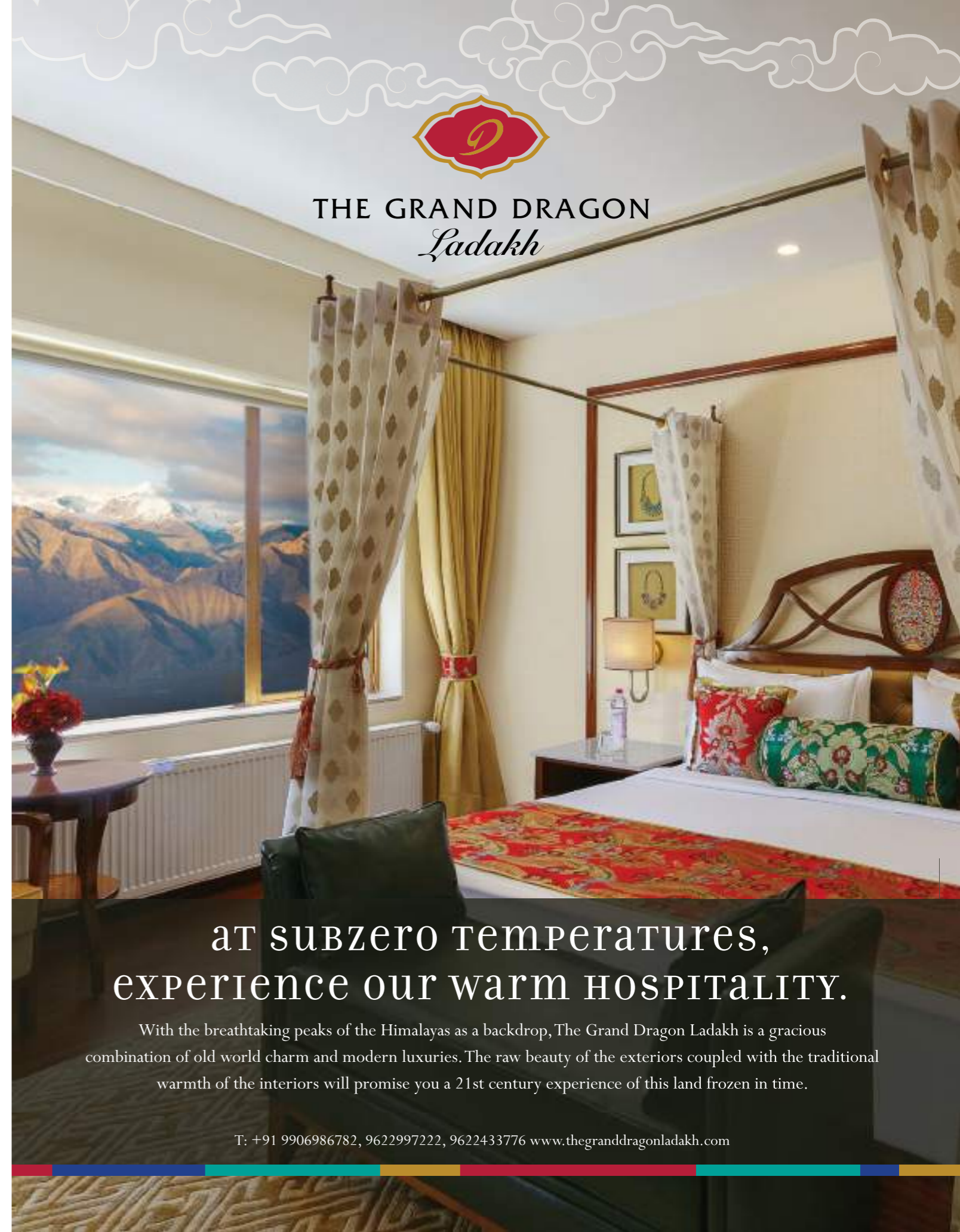


PHOTOGRAPH: SHUTTERSTOCK

The Cumbre Vieja volcano on the Canary Island of La Palma had been sending rivers of molten lava down its slopes, since the eruption began on

September 19, 2021. The eruption – the longest recorded on the Spanish Canary Island since 1500 – forced thousands to flee from their homes, destroyed buildings

and spewed volcanic ash over 5,500 hectares. Banana plantations, the island's economically important business, were also affected severely.



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— KAHLIL GIBRAN



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