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TVS Emerald
Green Enclave



From the MD's Desk

Dear Members and Guests,

It's here again, the summer holiday season! The busiest, yet happiest time of the year for us, where we have the pleasure of hosting you, to help you make the most of your summer, and create truly memorable experiences with us. We thank you for your continued patronage to Sterling, year after year.

Building on our brand promise 'Holiday Differently', we now have a range of curated discoveries for you to experience, both within and outside the resort.

If you haven't already, we would love you to try these specially curated experiences next time in one of our resorts. In line with this is our recently launched television and surround campaign, which brings alive some of these delightful discoveries.

The upcoming holiday season promises to be one full of adventure, and we have a whole range of exciting surprises in store. We know how much you love capturing memories while on a holiday, and with this in mind we have developed a very special offering – 'Sterling Holidaygraphy' that allows you to take home lasting memories. Be sure to read more on page 26 and to experience this on your next holiday; I am sure you will love it.

In our endeavour to constantly improve guest experience, our spa timings have now been extended to ensure no one misses out on winding down at the end of a long day.

We now have 35 resorts in a variety of destinations. As we grow and evolve in this changing holiday landscape, we will continue to bring to you the best of holidays, with the same enthusiasm and commitment as always.

I welcome you all, your families and friends, to come and experience the warmth of Sterling hospitality.

Holiday Differently!

Ramesh Ramanathan
Managing Director

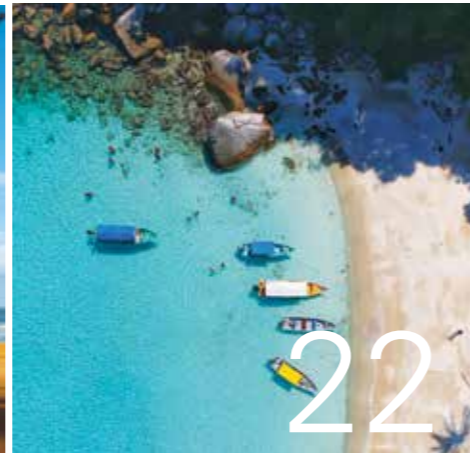


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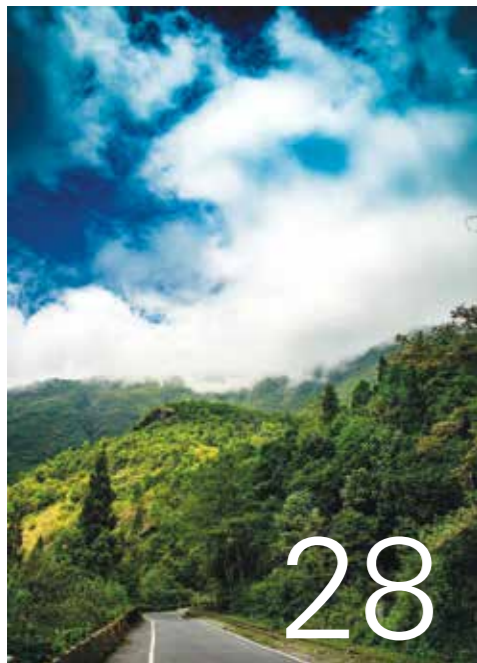
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REGIONAL CUISINE

Delightfully Sikkim

The Himalayan state of Sikkim is undoubtedly an underrated travel destination in India. But even more underrated is the local cuisine. A stay at Gangtok with Sterling will not only bring you close to the region's geography and culture, but also give you a chance to savour its unique cuisine.

Sikkim is a pure amalgam of colourful culture, rich heritage, and lip-smacking food. One can never get too much of anything here. While exploring a destination as beautiful as this, it would be a cardinal sin to miss out on its unique food. The state's cuisine is something that will amaze you with its simple, yet relishing flavours. It is a rich mixture of Nepalese, Tibetan, and home-made Sikkimese dishes. This blend of cultures results in a cuisine that soothes the taste buds and leaves one craving for more.



GYA KHO

Popularly known as the 'chimney soup', *gya kho* is a hearty meat stew served with an assortment of vegetables. Originally a Tibetan delicacy, it is now very much a part of Sikkimese cuisine. Its name comes from the bowl it is typically served in, which resembles a coal chimney. In fact, traditional *gya kho*

-serving bowls come with a place for holding coals that keep the stew warm and give it a unique taste.



SINKI

Sikkimese people are known for their fermented dishes and *sinki* is one of the most popular ones. This pickled dish of finely sliced radishes makes for a wonderful side to momos, steamed rice, or any vegetable/meat dish. It may take as long as a month for *sinki* to reach the fermentation stage after which it stays good for almost a year! It is also used as a flavour enhancer while making soups, stews, and salad dressings.

EROMBA

Another tempting accompaniment, *eromba* is made with potatoes, bamboo shoots, and fermented fish. It comes together with the addition of seasonings and a whole lot of chilli. *Eromba* is commonly served with lunch and dinner but can also be enjoyed with a

piece of bread for a simple snack.

SMOKED PORK WITH BAMBOO SHOOTS

This dish is an amalgamation of delicious local bamboo shoot and pork, which is a commonly available and key ingredient in many Sikkimese delicacies.

It is mostly made dry to be enjoyed as an appetizer or a side with local bread or sticky rice. This combo is popular because it is not only delicious but also keeps you warm when the temperature dips.



GYUMA

The Sikkimese version of chorizo sausage, *gyuma*, is made from minced beef, fat, beef blood, and spices. Yes, you read that right!

Gyuma is a blood sausage with its origins in Tibet. The final product has a dark reddish or black colour that may look ominous, but it is known to be very delicious. This is

undoubtedly a must-try for those who are not afraid to try new things!



SAEL ROTI

What better way to end a meal in Sikkim than with a local dessert! The *sael roti* is a close cousin of the usual ring-shaped doughnuts but made of fermented rice batter. It is typically deep-fried and then dusted with sugar for sweetness. *Sael roti* is a common and popular sweet served during festivals and other occasions, and is loved by the locals. Pair these dishes with some *jaanr*, *chaang*, or *tongba*, the local fermented alcoholic beverages and get ready for a good time in Sikkim.

Explore these while staying at Sterling's newest resort in Gangtok, Sterling Gangtok – Orange Village.

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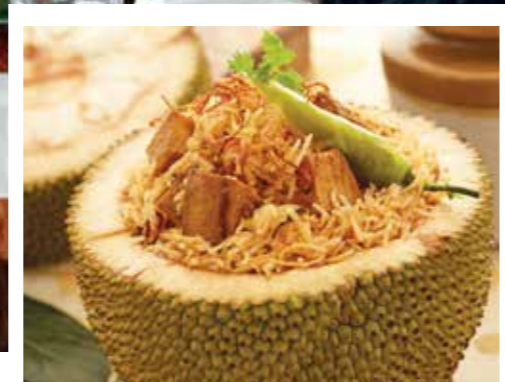
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Holiday Differently!

Indulge in varied offbeat activities and enjoy immersive local experiences with Sterling's unique offerings.

Melissa Nazareth



Jackfruit Biryani – An Exotic Feast

Picture this, you are dining al fresco with your family or even a bunch of close friends. The surrounding view is a vast, endless expanse of green, meeting the blue sky at the horizon. A cool breeze caresses your face, relaxing you further, and putting you in the right mood for a tranquil holiday. As you are enjoying the breathtaking view, the chef brings a large, green jackfruit to the table. Lifting the cut-

off top, he exposes an aromatic rice dish—food to die for! Now, that is how one dines Sterling-style.

A delightful vegetarian twist on the world-famous one-pot meal, this biryani is made using raw jackfruit. The pieces are marinated in a delicious blend of spices that tenderise this ingredient, sometimes referred to as 'vegetarian meat', making them melt in your mouth as you dig in. You can sample this at a range of Sterling resorts, including Ooty, Kodai, Wayanad, Munnar, and Thekkady.

Culture Trail – Explore the Local Heritage

They say the best way to discover a place is by interacting with the locals. Sterling ensures you enjoy a complete holiday experience, meeting and talking to people from the town or city, having an enriching emotional exchange with them, and learning about indigenous crafts and occupations.

It is interesting to note that tender jackfruit is not just tasty but packed with nutrition. Rich in flavonoids, antioxidants, phytonutrients, and vitamin C, it boosts the body's immune system. Its high potassium levels help lower blood pressure, aiding in the prevention of strokes and heart disease. Moreover, raw jackfruit has a much lower glycaemic load than rice and wheat; so, you can indulge in some guilt-free feasting on your next holiday.

Sterling's resorts, including Darjeeling, Kufri, Mussoorie, Ooty, Manali, Munnar, Mount Abu, Jaipur, Wayanad, Kodai, Puri, Thekkady, Goa, Lonavala, and Nainital, have exciting packages for exploring local heritage offerings. From Mussoorie's Himalayan weaves and Mount Abu's Kota sarees to Nainital's bamboo fabric and Wayanad's weaving wonders, there is so much to discover. Guests can visit the local weavers and get a first-hand experience or even buy woven products from the craftsmen. Sterling Wayanad, for instance, organises tours to Thrikkaipetta, also known as 'Bamboo Village' where you can watch skilled artisans weave magic with indigenous bamboo.

For the days when you just do not feel like getting out of the resort, Sterling brings the local experience at your doorstep by organising performances by local troupes around a bonfire. What is even better is that you can join them and learn some new moves on your next holiday! Sit around a bonfire at Sterling's resort in Manali and enjoy Himachali folk music. Many indigenous tribal communities

Travel as a concept is evolving. Gone are the days when vacationers sought purely a getaway from the humdrum of life. Today's discerning holidayer wants that and something more; from learning about local art and crafts and tasting local flavours and visiting interesting, unconventional sites to experiencing fun and thrilling adventure activities.

In keeping with its vision to offer something different, Sterling curates a range of entertaining and enriching

experiences at each of its 35 plus destinations.

No holiday is complete without sampling a destination's culinary staples. Made using local ingredients, the food of a particular place is a window to its culture; the cooking style, for instance—how combinations of the same Indian spices differ from region to region. One truly local food experience Sterling offers is the chance to tuck into a plate of steamy and spicy jackfruit biryani.



inhabit the areas in and around Manali. The various folk dances here showcase the rich cultural traditions of the aboriginal tribes. Accompanied by proper musical instruments and folk songs, these dance forms reflect the creative imagination and artistic calibre of the locals.

Since Darjeeling is well-known for its range of aromatic teas and picturesque, endless tea estates, Sterling organises tea trails for its guests. Pluck tea leaves in the traditional style with a basket hoisted on your forehead and then, enjoy the fruits of your

labour; sip on the world-famous Darjeeling tea.

Adventures Galore – Visit Mussoorie’s Haunted Mines

Sterling scours each of its destinations for offbeat adventures. One such experience is a visit to Lambi Dehar. Listed as one of the top ten most haunted sites in India, these mines are the stark opposite of the rest of this postcard hill station.

Sterling Mussoorie organises trips to

Lambi Dehar, a once-bustling limestone quarry where 50,000 workers are said to have earned their living. Unfortunately, they met a sad, gory end in a mine accident but their souls are whispered to have lived on. Known as ‘the mine of death’ Lambi Dehar is said to be inhabited by a witch whose shrieks can be heard along with the cries of the deceased in the middle of the night. Dare to visit these haunted mines and embark on an adventure of a lifetime, on your next holiday!

Sterling presents its all-new film that reflects its essence of fuelling the ‘Joy of discovery’. Shot across diverse destinations, it is a cinematic montage of various extraordinary experiences. Modern-day holidayers look for immersive experiential holidays that include much more than just food and accommodation. We promise to help you ‘Holiday differently’ by offering you a chance to explore myriad destinations and indulge in curated unique experiences. When you holiday differently with Sterling, you do not just explore a new destination but also discover your unknown self.

You can watch the film on Sterling’s YouTube channel. Also, subscribe to this channel to watch more amazing videos.



www.youtube.com/user/sterlingholidays

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Bollywood & Goa

A Match Made in Heaven

Goa's golden beaches, magnificent churches, and historic architecture have been featured in a number of Hindi films. A testament to their love affair, here are five picturesque locations in the state Bollywood loves.

The song, *Hum Bane Tum Bane* from the movie, *Ek Duje Ke Liye* shot at various sites including Dona Paula jetty in the suburbs of Panaji could well be describing the eternal relationship between Goa and Bollywood. In fact, everything about this coastal paradise, from its rustic forts to its palm-fringed shores, seems to elevate the romance in the movies.

CALANGUTE BEACH – KABHI HAAN KABHI NAA

Located about 15 km from the capital, Calangute Beach is the largest in North Goa and instantly brings back memories of the Shah Rukh Khan and Suchitra Krishnamurthy starrer, *Kabhi Haan Kabhi Naa*. The popular, finger-snapping song, *Anna Mere Pyaar Ko Na* was extensively shot here and showcased the vibrant local culture with its colours and music. Every year, thousands of tourists visit this beautiful beach. Though the peak season is the week between Christmas and

New Year, the summer months of April and May are also a great time to soak in the sun on its sands. Dotted with food shacks and side-by-side sun lounges, it is the ideal place to unwind with seafood and chilled beer. Whether you are the laid-back traveller who prefers watching the sun set or the adrenaline junkie who seeks the thrill of water sports, you are sure to have a memorable time here.

CHAPORA FORT – DIL CHAHTA HAI

Farhan Akhtar's directorial debut, the popular coming-of-age movie about three friends, *Dil Chahta Hai*, beautifully captures the expanse and enigma of this rustic structure. When the movie released in 2001, this instantly became the favourite photo spot especially with the younger generation; so much so that Chapora Fort is often referred to as '*Dil Chahta Hai Fort*'. Perched atop a hill about 700 metres from Vagator Beach, it offers breathtaking views of the sunset.



Facing page: Chapora Fort is built at a prominent location and boasts amazing, never-ending views of Arabian Sea.

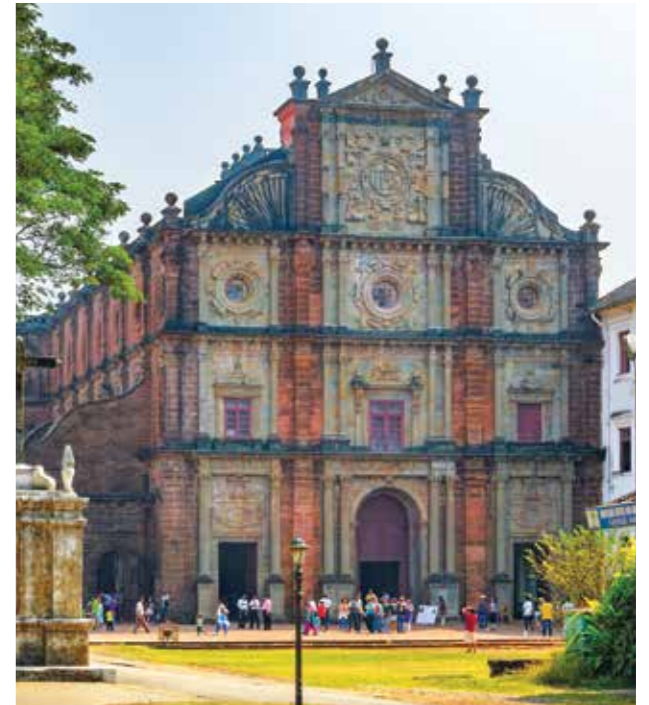
Top: Calangute Beach has been the go-to location for many a Bollywood film shot in Goa. It sees one of the highest footfalls among all beaches in Goa.

Above right: Basilica of Bom Jesus is one of the most recognisable structures in Goa. It houses the remains of St. Francis Xavier.

The best time to visit is early morning or late afternoon. Like the protagonists in the movie, you can sit here in silence for hours on end, staring at the horizon where the Arabian Sea meets the sky.

BASILICA OF BOM JESUS – RANGEELA

Arguably Ram Gopal Verma's only successful romantic, light-hearted movie, *Rangeela* was shot at various locations in Goa. The popular song *Tanha Tanha* from the film was shot at Anjuna Beach, which is a short drive from Basilica of Bom Jesus (read good Jesus). Located in Old Goa and exhibiting some of India's best baroque architecture, the church is a



must-visit. One can also see the mortal remains of St. Francis Xavier, Goa's patron saint, at this shrine. Moreover, it is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and has many religious exhibits and relics such as statues of saints, pristine gold altars and artistic murals.

ANJUNA BEACH & ST. CAJETAN CHURCH – KHAMOSHI

The Sanjay Leela Bhansali musical *Khamoshi* was set and shot in Goa. One of the most heart-warming scenes in the movie is shot at Anjuna Beach; on realising that his newborn daughter can hear, unlike him and his wife, an ecstatic Nana Patekar is seen running along the

beach. One of North Goa's most popular tourist destinations, it's known for its trance parties that are held between October and April. Anjuna Beach also hosts a flea market every Saturday and Wednesday—a souvenir paradise where you can buy everything from jewellery and clothes to food items and other knick-knacks. Scenes from the film were also shot at St. Cajetan Church, which is located in Assagao village, about 6 km from Anjuna Beach. The church has a large dome with Latin inscriptions from the Bible and seven altars of which one is dedicated to St. Cajetan.

Jet Set Summer

Karen Kotikalapudi

Wondering what togs to wear this summer? We decode them for you.

Find yourself travelling ever so often either in search of wanderlust or just pure adrenaline? Us too. If you tend to reach the airport wearing sweatpants (oh the horror) or your regular jeans and tees and are looking for a summer refresh to your wardrobe, there are four trends you should absolutely know about.



BUCKET HATS

Move over berets! This '90s' staple is making a comeback—with fashion influencers sporting them in every second Instagram post. Aside from being street style bait, we have to talk practicality—it's great to protect your mane from the sun or that sudden thunderstorm. For a sophisticated, travel-appropriate look, pair a trench coat and bucket hat with those dad sneakers.



BERMUDA SHORTS

Cycling shorts might have been the rage last season, but this spring/summer, Bermuda shorts are what you need to own. Spotted at Anna Sui and Sally LaPointe these shorts need to be your summer staple. Pair them with a bikini top for a clubbing night or opt for a sleek, tailored version styled with a summer jacket for a chic brunch look.

BUM BAGS

Bum bags or fanny packs aren't the typical ones your dad carried back in the '90s; these babies have got a luxe makeover, owing to Gucci introducing them a few seasons ago. Bum bags are super convenient where you can stash your passport and boarding pass without rifling through your handbag at the gate, which leaves you with much more room in your bag for that sheet mask and facial mist.



PEARLS

These are not your grandmother's pearls. Prabal Gurung, Chanel, and Oscar de la Renta brought back pearl bijoux in their collections that was not your typical stuffy, two-strand pearl necklace. The millennial way of wearing pearls is mixed with lucite, pearl ear cuffs, or layered with different strands. The best part? You can totally get away with wearing fake pearls instead of the real deal.



Karen Kotikalapudi is a fashion and beauty writer. She loves communicating in GIFs and believes that butter chicken and fried rice is a combination that needs to be tried.



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Own Your Holidays

The concept of membership has been around for a while, and over the years, has grown in popularity. A primary reason for its success is that it holds good dividends for both, the entrepreneurial hotelier and the enthusiastic traveller.

Travel choices are a highly personal affair. But, a few things any avid traveller surely looks for are unique destinations, hassle-free travel, and varied experiences.

What if all these come to you without sweating over finding the right place to holiday and stay, scouting for local help to travel around, and the overriding concern of safety? Membership offers these comforts and much more at a price that would not burn a hole in your pocket, when you consider all the benefits it comes with.

However, there are myths surrounding membership, which influence people's decisions. Here, we bust some of those for you.



2

IT WILL COST ME MORE MONEY

If travel is your thing and you like to enjoy a good work-life balance by exploring places, making discoveries, and savouring delicacies from different regions, then memberships give you a great bargain for what you invest. You pay today for where you are going right now, next year, and for the next 25 years; what you get in return are consistent, high-quality service and a chance to experience varied destinations and cultures. Also, you need not worry about funds if you plan a sudden vacation with your family, as you would have already paid for it.

3 I WILL HAVE LIMITED OPTIONS TO CHOOSE FROM

With an ever-increasing number of properties rapidly being added to the Sterling family, members are often left spoilt for choice when it comes to selecting a resort for their next vacation. Further, they get numerous options in family-focused, spacious accommodations, ranging from studios with kitchenettes to multi-bedroom suites. The sparkling pools, poolside cafes and restaurants, activity centres and kids' camps, spa, health clubs, and concierge services ready to provide personalised insights add a touch of exclusivity. So, the resort becomes your own home with the added luxury of customised service during your stay.

Finally, it all comes down to individual choices and if a life of travel is what you yearn for, you can start planning for and investing in it right away through membership. Also, with a brand like Sterling, that has a far and wide presence in India (along with RCI affiliation), one will never run out of options to choose from. So, the next time you think of travel, think Sterling membership.

To know more, visit www.sterlingholidays.com

1

1 I MIGHT NOT USE UP MY ALLOTTED NUMBER OF DAYS

The membership system is such that one fret not if he/she has unused days left during a particular cycle. These days can be used the way one wishes, over a long period of time, to suit changing holiday needs—be it a short jaunt, long holiday, solo trip, time with family and friends, a foray into the mountains, or unwinding on a beach expanse. The best part is: you are not forced to go on a holiday every year for fear of losing days; they can be accumulated for up to two years and used later too. And if you are inclined to go on a longer vacation, days can be borrowed from the following year too.



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At the *divya* and *bhavya* Prayagraj Kumbh 2019, the Naga sadhus who raced and plunged into the frigid waters of the holy Ganges during Shahi Snan were the cynosure of all eyes.

Kumbh Mela held in Prayagraj, Haridwar, Ujjain, and Nashik—the four places on earth where *amrit* or nectar spilled after *samudra manthan*—is a centuries-old religious congregation. Recognised by UNESCO in December 2017 as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, Kumbh Mela has grown around the belief that by bathing in the holy rivers at these four places, pilgrims can wash away their sins.

Photo credit: Ashutosh Tripathi

TESTIMONIALS

A WALK TO REMEMBER

It was an amazing walk across the dense forest area that leads to Cairn View Point.

A memorable moment was spotting a wild bison busy having breakfast. We would like to thank Sharan Acharya, Manager at Sterling Ooty – Fern Hill, for guiding us through the forest to reach the viewpoint.

Thanks to Sterling Holidays for giving such a wonderful opportunity to explore Ooty in depth.

Regards,
Nameesh N Rajamane,
Sterling Ooty – Fern Hill

OUR TIME IN PARADISE

Thank you for hosting us at Sterling Mussoorie; we really enjoyed our experience here.

We had a good room, a scenic view of the valley, and thoroughly enjoyed the food, especially the local cuisine that was served at the hotel.

The property is cut off from the city and the hustle and bustle of the market lanes, which makes for a tranquil atmosphere.

The staff here have been very courteous and have taken very good care of us. We had a really good time and will surely come back.

Regards,
Arjun and Latika,
Sterling Mussoorie



to Time TRAVEL

Caption the images below to win exciting prizes.*



To participate, just caption the images and send it to purplehues@sterlingholidays.com. The best entry will win exciting prizes. Your entries should reach us on or before 15th June 2019.


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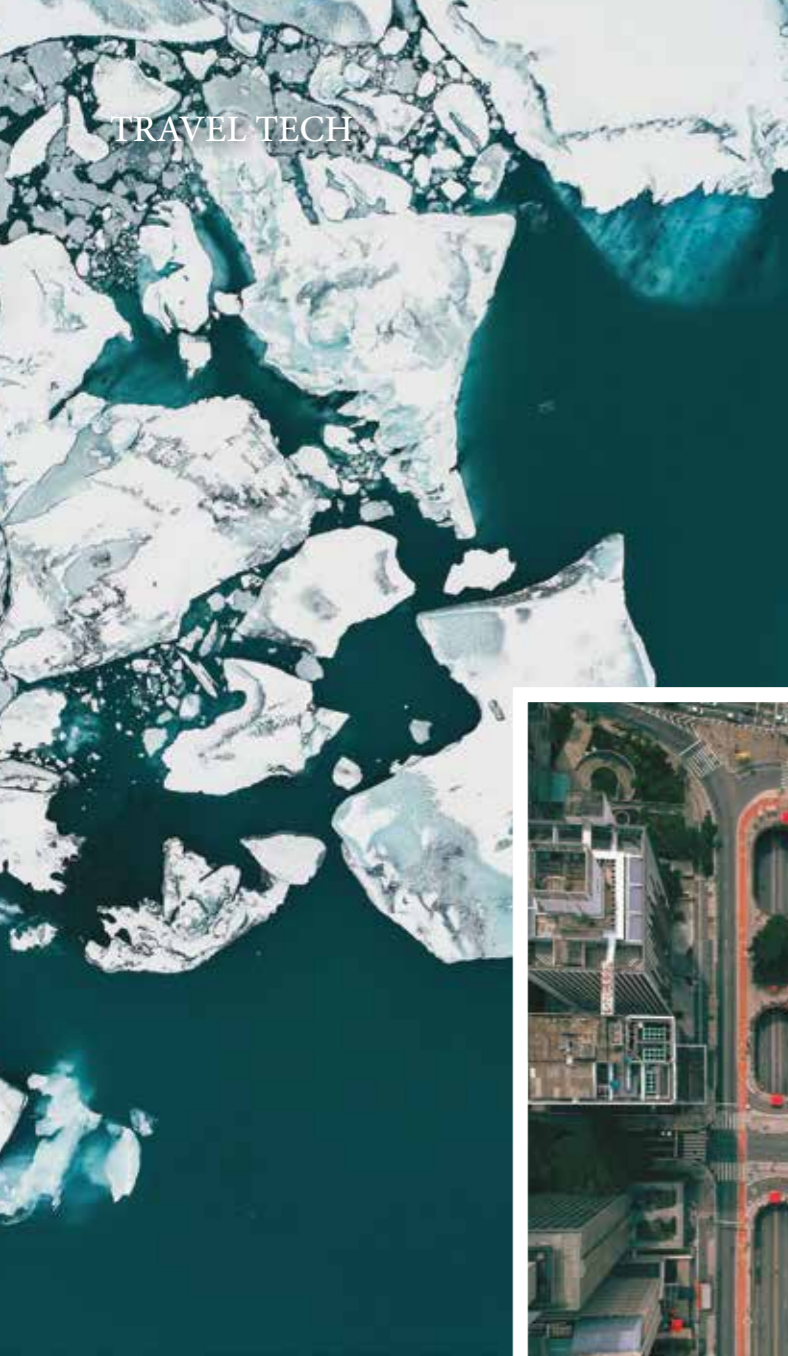
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Some of the best, recent overhead photographs admired the world over were probably snapped by a drone, as this quadcopter is able to reach places considered nigh inaccessible. Getting a drone is only the first step in capturing stunning overhead pictures and panoramas. This quick guide can offer some handy tips to help you make the most of this amazing piece of machinery that is fast becoming the go-to tool when it comes to aerial photography.

HOW TO GET ONE

Drones come in many sizes, shapes, power capacities, and range, among other features. But the most basic segregation is those with built-in cameras and those without, which allows users to attach their own camera like a GoPro. Opt for the latter since this will give you more control over the quality of images. It is advisable to



A View From the Top

A great aerial picture that was previously inaccessible to most common folks can now be had with the use of a drone as this innovative technique is rapidly capturing the fascination of many.

Ashwin Rajagopalan

start with a cheaper drone till you master the art.

FLYING A DRONE

This will take some learning for beginners. Newbies will find lighter drones easier to control but look for one that is light, yet sturdy. Study the features to understand if they match your needs. Battery life and flying range are among the important considerations.

There are strict restrictions and regulations across India—drones are banned in most public places. Respect the law and restrict use within private confines or in zones where drones are allowed. It is the same when you travel abroad; check local laws before you start shooting with your drone.

ACCESSORISE

Make sure you have enough battery back-up. Drones typically come with 10 to 30 minutes of flight time, which can be inadequate on a day when you have much to shoot. The same goes for storage, so ensure you have adequate space on the camera’s storage, especially when you are shooting 4K videos. A thumb rule is to have spares for everything in order to avoid

disappointment later. Other useful accessories include an extra set of propellers and propeller guard.

PRE-PREP

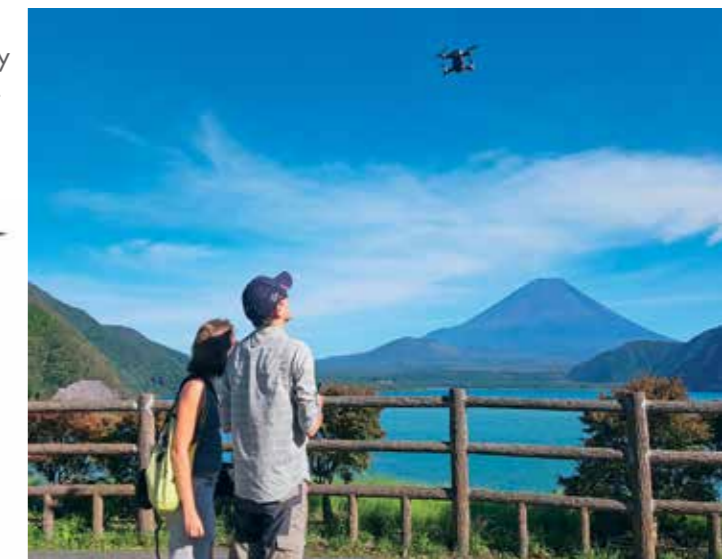
In many ways, drone photography is more dependent on external conditions. It is good to go through a thorough pre-photography checklist that can also include a test run to make sure you are good to go. You can tweak the camera settings based on the weather and the available light.

CAPTURING IMAGES

The first thing to remember is that you are not going to take breathtaking images from day one. Give yourself time to learn to shoot with a drone. Get started with the basic tools like smartphone feed that allows you to view on your phone’s screen what the drone is capturing. Remember to apply the same basic photography rules (like the rule of thirds) as you start, and then start improvising.

Overhead photography brings another set of perspectives; once you have your basics in place, start looking for these. Symmetry is one of the things to look for—you could discover wonderful patterns while shooting a large

Remember to apply the same basic photography rules as you start, and then start improvising.



Contrasting colours—like the various shades of beach sand and the blues of the sea also make for great overhead images.

garden or an open-air market. Look for dividing lines—this is something you might have noticed while flying over farms and fields that are scythed by highways or water bodies. Contrasting colours—like the various shades of beach sand and the blues of the sea also make for great overhead images. Look for unique patterns or abstract shapes and also repetitive objects (for

instance a container yard or rows of townhouses) that add up to make unique images. Just like other images, you can rely on image editing tools like Photoshop or Snapseed to add some last minute magic. And of course, do not forget to enjoy shooting; that is probably the most important rule in photography.



Ashwin Rajagopalan is one of India's leading lifestyle writers. Smartphones and consumer tech are foremost among his areas of interest. He has been clicking images exclusively on smartphones since 2006; many of these have been published in leading travel and lifestyle publications.

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Not Your Usual Venice

Venice's allure not only attracts playwrights and film directors but also thousands of tourists, every year. However, there is a lot more to this evocative city than just gondola rides and the customary crossing of the Rialto bridge. The city has its share of not-so-frequented places and not-so-common activities, all of which are worth exploring.



STAY

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Glassmaking in Murano

To witness the ancient Roman art of glassblowing, catch the vaporetto line 42 from Piazza San Marco that takes you to the island of Murano. The island with its beautiful sidewalk cafés presents a quieter and laid-back side of Venice. Head to a glassblowing factory and sit through a demonstration. The glass being shaped into various fascinating forms by a master artisan is an enjoyable experience. Pick up a souvenir or two at the end of your visit.



Wander the alleys

One of the top things to do in Venice is to get wonderfully lost in its back alleys. Everywhere you turn, there is a stunning photograph waiting to be captured. So put away your map, and allow the city to surprise you. This is also the best way to get a glimpse into the local life and Venice's colourful architecture. (Do not worry about getting lost; this is only an island, so you will eventually get back to where you started).



St. Mark's Square

This is Venice's main square and prime attraction. Arrive as early as you can to enjoy the square in all its grandeur, minus the crowd.

Head straight to Campanile de San Marco (The Bell Tower) to get a panoramic view of Venice. The view of St. Mark's Basilica, the Grand Canal, and Venice stretch out across small islands from the tower is a breathtaking sight. The entrance to Bell Tower costs approximately 8 euros per person.

After a good half an hour, walk into the St. Mark's Basilica where the remains of St. Mark the Apostle is buried. This ornate religious landmark stands as a testimony to the city's power and dominance of the past. This is no more evident than in the Basilica's glittering ceiling mosaics made of 24-carat gold. Its blend of Renaissance, Gothic, Romanesque, and Byzantine architectures is a treat for those who appreciate architecture styles.



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FEATURE

Sterling Holidaygraphy

Do you remember the last time while on holiday you allowed yourself to truly enjoy the moments spent with your loved ones without being glued to your camera clicking photos to capture those precious moments? Barring that awkward, oddly-angled selfie, it's difficult to capture everyone in a single frame though, isn't it?

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Taking the High Road

A road trip from Darjeeling to Gangtok satiates the desire for wonder and wanderlust.

Ananya Bahl



GOOD TO KNOW

- 4x4 SUVs work best on this route – they are sturdy enough to navigate the tough terrain
- Keep an eye out for weather conditions as pre-monsoon rains and landslides are common here
- While restaurants dot the route, these can shut due to weather conditions so, pack a contingency meal
- Pre-check all necessary permits and registrations before heading out

When one's travel diaries involve traversing from one hill station to another, there are sure to be several highs along the journey. Darjeeling and Gangtok are about 98 km away from each other and though it may not feel like a long distance, the route is marked by treacherous turns and spectacular vistas that call for slow driving and lots of savouring. Prepare to be welcomed by mist, stop for photographs, and simply get out to breathe the fresh mountain air throughout this gorgeous road trip.



work enough buffer time space into one's itinerary to ensure the onward plan in Gangtok is not compromised. There are several hamlets along the way that offer small restaurants and shops serving noodles, momos, and curry.

A WELCOME DETOUR
One can also make a small detour on the route and drive via Kalimpong. This can be done by heading eastwards from Teesta toward Kalimpong and then moving on toward Gangtok. This route treats visitors to magnificent views of the Kanchenjunga. No matter where one looks, its looming presence is felt. Make sure to stop by for some photographs with the mountain in the background. This detour will add about 45

minutes to an hour to the drive, but is well worth the extension. It also offers the opportunity to tuck into classic Tibetan fare like momos and thukpa in Kalimpong before heading back on the road.

THE RIVER RUNS WILD
Another prominent geographical element on this road trip is the roaring Teesta river. A word of caution though—at several points, the slithering road feels like it is poised to take the plunge into the waters below, so it goes without saying that one should drive carefully. The road itself is lovely and the view breathtaking. So, take the stories with a pinch of salt and drive through! Teesta Bazaar is a good place to stop over for refreshments or a meal. About 4 km from the bazaar, one can see the confluence of the Teesta and Rangeet rivers. Local cuisine along with staples like noodles and tea can be enjoyed at most places here along with views of the river.

About 4 km from the bazaar, one can see the beautiful confluence of the Teesta and Rangeet rivers.

Above: The majestic Teesta river cuts through the lofty mountains of Sikkim, making its way into the Bay of Bengal.

Tsuklakhang Palace in Gangtok houses a large depository of Buddhist scriptures and literature.

Facing page (above): Sterling Darjeeling, nestled in the charming neighbourhood of Ghoom Heritage Railway Station, offers a host of services and activities to the delight of guests.

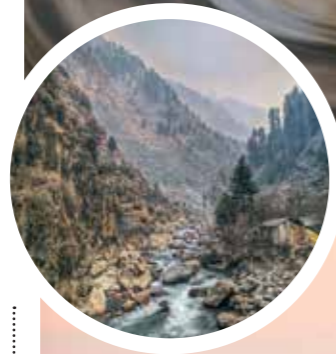
Facing page (below): The road from Darjeeling to Gangtok is beset with lush green forests and fog-covered mountains on all sides.

THE FINAL CLIMB
Soon, one has to turn onto NH 31-A and cross the bridge on the Teesta river to make a steady ascent up to Gangtok. The road on this portion of the trip becomes even and wider, making the drive more leisurely. The border town of Rangpo is in stark contrast to the terrain one has seen up until now: it is extremely clean! The Sikkim check post is located here. It is considered to be the entry point to the eastern part of Sikkim and is a prominent spot on the state border between West Bengal and Sikkim. All commercial vehicles that are unregistered in Sikkim

need to obtain a Sikkim permit from this check post. From Rangpo, the climb becomes steeper. The Teesta river remains a companion almost throughout the journey. The distance between Rangpo and Gangtok is about 40 km. On the way, the route passes through the hamlets of Singtam and Ranipool. From here, the final climb into Gangtok gets steep: in about 12 km, the altitude almost doubles to about 6,000 feet above mean sea level. Now, that is exactly the high one needs before the start of an adventure in a new destination!

Ananya Bahl is a Mumbai-based travel writer. She loves exploring big cities and swears by the friends she makes on the road.

The Learning Vacation



Above: The quaint little village of Andretta is a good place to master pottery skills.

Top: Go surfing on the high waves of Puducherry beaches.

Facing top: Learn to cook the famed Thai cuisine in Chiang Mai.

Facing bottom: The forested hills of Bagno a Ripoli are home to the magical ingredient called black truffles

Travel these days is much more than simply ticking off those all-important boxes of must-visit sites and must-do activities. Enter the learning vacation where picking up a new skill or craft while immersing yourself in the culture of the place you visit is the latest buzzword in travel. We show you just how to go about that!

Raul Dias

Not content with merely sitting around sipping fruity cocktails by the beach on your next summer holiday? We hear you. For most of us these days, the idea of vacation has evolved from the one of the past where sightseeing and picking up souvenirs were all we ever wanted out of it. And one of the greatest agents of this evolution is the learning vacation. A popular trend in the West, the learning vacation is now one of the top ways we Indians travel. More and more of us are choosing this style of seeing the world, while taking back something less material and more life enriching.

Today's holiday is all about getting more bang for one's buck by partaking in more immersive (and dare we say, 'Insta-friendly') experiences while we pick up skills and hobbies that will not just be with us forever, but skills that may come in handy later. The learning vacation seeks to be the conduit to all this and much, much more.

Imagine picking up a skill like pottery while embracing Mother Nature in all her glory! You can very much do that. Regarded as India's pottery capital, the bucolic village of Andretta set against the mighty Himalayas in Himachal Pradesh is where all you pottery enthusiasts should head to. The Andretta Pottery and Craft Society in Kangra is 'the' place to get an immersive experience by staying at a potter's collective where you will participate in daily hands-on classes to make your own bowls, jugs and other earthenware under the guidance of an expert (andrettapottery.com).

For those with a sportier inclination why

not learn to surf in some of India's best beaches? Located 10 km north of the union territory of Puducherry, near the village of Tandryankupam, Serenity Beach is home to the Kallialay Surf School run by two expat Spanish brothers. Here you can channel your inner (hidden!) surfer as you learn the watersport's finer nuances by signing up for their five-day surfing course that teaches you all you need to know about cruising the waves (surfschoolindia.com).

The learning vacation should not be just limited to your domestic travel. Expand your horizons and do things you have never done before. For example, the Northern Thailand



region of Lanna is well-known as a place, not just for learning and its amazing culture, but also as a bastion of exquisite food. So, on your next Thailand vacation take some time and head up country to the arts capital of Chiang Mai to include some skill-gathering. Sign up for a four-hour long, hands-on cookery class with Chef Chanrat Karatna who will teach you to whip up from scratch local dishes like the Northern Thailand version of the ubiquitous somtamthai papaya and prawn salad and more, all served with sticky black rice that is a specialty of the Lanna region (airthaikitchen.com).

Fancy something a bit fancier? Simple. Learn all there is to truffle hunting when in Italy! A mere 15 minutes outside the Renaissance-rich city of Florence, the forested hills of Bagno a Ripoli are said to be rich with that magical, perfumed haute cuisine ingredient called black

truffles. Sign up for a day foraging for and learning about all there is to know about the delicious fungus with truffle hunting expert Giulio Benuzzi and his specially trained sniffer dog named Eda. You will explore the forest near their home and follow Eda's keen sense of smell and instincts on the track to truffles. And that's not all. Once you unearth a few delicious truffles, you will be treated to a lunch made from them (giuliothetrufflehunter.com).

While we have kept this list to a minimum, the possibilities for a learning vacation are excitingly limitless. Learn a new language or hone those salsa dancing skills. Remember that the world is your oyster and it is never too late to add value to your next vacation.

TIPS TO KEEP IN MIND

1. Choose an activity that really interests you and don't just do it because the rest of your family or travel group is enthused by it. Let's be honest; kite-boarding is not for everyone!
2. Do not feel the pressure to pack in too many learning activities into your vacation. Remember it is a holiday after all, not an offsite skills course.
3. Do ample research before signing up and make sure that the place or the person from whom you are learning from has the right credentials and is truly an expert in the field.
4. Do not be too harsh on yourself if you don't seem very good at that particular skill or craft. Give yourself some time and practice. It is worth remembering that clichéd phrase: "Rome wasn't built in a day!"

Raul Dias is a travel-food writer, restaurant reviewer, and food consultant. Constantly on the move and having travelled to 62 countries to date, he calls Mumbai home during his downtime. For the last 15 years, his bylines have appeared in numerous Indian and international publications, both in print and online.





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