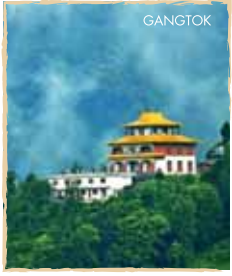


January 2020

Purple

HUES
By Sterling



GANGTOK



YELAGIRI



DARJEELING



JIM CORBETT



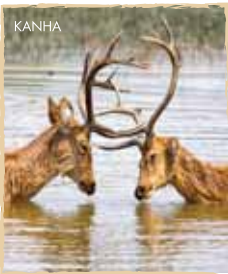
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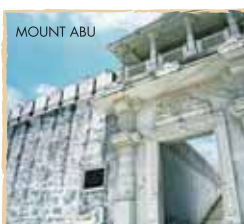
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From the CMD's Desk

Dear Members and Guests,

At Sterling, we live & practice our promise of ***Holiday Differently!*** This promise made to you, our Member & Guest & your Families, is being rolled out in different ways—by expanding the Destination network aggressively, by introducing more & more of D&Es (Discoveries & Experiences) at our resorts, by increasing the choice of our F&B offerings, by digitally upgrading the service interactions so that we understand your needs better and by ensuring that we are with you all the way—from the time you plan a holiday, through the booking, travel, stay and return—the emphasis being on delivering a level of service that “Sparks Joy”—at each interaction!

With the dawn of a new decade upon us, the year ahead looks full of hope, energy and tremendous excitement. Our recently launched properties—Sterling Guruvayur, Sterling Thekkady and Sterling Rajakkad—as well as upcoming properties in four new destinations—Godavari, Mysuru, Karjat, and Igatpuri—are testimony to our zeal to expand our footprint. Our resort expansion strategy is in line with our Brand Promise of ***Holiday Differently!*** to cater to different emerging holiday needs: from general Family holidays to Weekend drive-through getaways, Pilgrimage & Heritage and Adventure escapades across a wide plethora of destinations: mountains, beaches, jungles, riverfronts, offbeat and heritage locales. And I thank you for your continued support and patronage, which give us the strength and courage to achieve even bigger milestones.

As part of our continued effort to bring to you different Discoveries & Experiences, we have set up **D&E Impressions** at Sterling Ooty – Fern Hill—a set of creative and interactive installations designed to bring the Heritage, the Folklore, the Food, the People, the Flora and Fauna of Ooty, all brought within the resort for your convenience and pleasure—read more in the issue. We plan to do this across our resorts, and plans for Mussoorie are already on. The next time you are at Fern Hill, please do take time off to do the D&E Trail. You will enjoy it, thoroughly!

We are proud to have ended the year with a positive growth, which speaks of our high quality service and the trust our customers have reposed in us—the foundation stones of Brand Sterling.

We are also focusing on newer portfolios by facilitating **Reunions** (family, school, college) and **Destination Weddings by Sterling**. Please do enquire with us, for further details. With such diverse product offerings and world-class service, we will continue to Fuel the Joy of Discovery each time you holiday with us.

I wish you a very Happy New Year and hope to see you spend many D&E filled holidays with us at Sterling this year.

Holiday Differently!

Ramesh Ramanathan
Chairman & Managing Director



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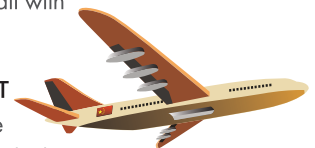
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For Purple Hues
Managing Editor
Peshwa Acharya

Co-ordinator
Kanishk Saxena

For Spenta Multimedia
Executive Publisher
Maneck Davar

Editorial
Ashutosh Gotad
Bindu Nair

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The Awadh connection

The slew of biryani versions that have been dished up over the years is proof of its immense popularity. A peek into its origins...

Shahanshah Mirza

By the early 19th century, the Mughal Empire had ceased to be an effective political power and this gave rise to new regional independent powers like Hyderabad, Awadh, Murshidabad, Lahore, and Kashmir. The founder of the Awadh dynasty was a Persian nobleman named Saadat Ali Khan.

The very mention of Awadh brings to mind the refined tastes and politeness of its highly cultured nawabs. But what perhaps appeals the most is the world-famous cuisine of Awadh—a culmination of all that was best in art, culture, and science. It had improved greatly on Mughlai food and set a sophisticated benchmark. India offers so much on its culinary platter, but the one dish we love indulging in from Kargil to Kanyakumari and from Dimapur to Daman is the mouth-watering biryani. 'Biryani' is derived from the Persian word '*beryan*' and literally means 'fried before cooking'.

There are many theories pertaining to the birth or evolution of biryani, but it is generally believed by historians and food researchers that the credit for introducing this marvellous one-dish meal goes to the fourth Nawab of Awadh, Asaf-ud-Daulah (1775-97), who built a number of monuments and developed the city of Lucknow into an architectural marvel.

In 1784, there was a terrible

famine in Awadh. The Nawab wanted to help his subjects without hurting their sentiments. He thought of constructing an *Imambara* (religious shrine) along with a labyrinth, which would be one of its kind in the world. For this mammoth

project, he employed more than 20,000 people (including commoners and noblemen). To

feed this huge army of construction workers, large cauldrons were filled with rice, meat, and vegetables, sealed with dough and cooked slowly for hours to create

a nutritious one-dish meal. This process allowed the spices and the meat to release their flavours gently and retain their natural aromas. This special, and till then unknown, style of cooking was introduced in Awadh for the first time.

One day, as Nawab Asaf-ud-Daulah was on his rounds, he caught a whiff of the aroma emanating from one of these cauldrons. As a connoisseur of food, he wanted to taste the dish. He liked the food immensely and it started gracing his *dastarkhan* frequently. He further instructed his chefs to enhance its delicacy. The talented chefs of Awadh innovated by removing vegetables and adding saffron, milk, etc. The result was heavenly taste—and the rest is history. The



One of the most basic rules of Awadhi food etiquette is that nothing should be eaten before and after biryani. It is a complete dish and should be enjoyed singly.

world was gifted with a new dish called Awadhi biryani.

Traditionally, biryanis can be classified into two categories—*pakki*, wherein cooked meat is coupled with half-cooked rice and further cooked, and *katchi*, in which raw mutton pieces, marinated in yogurt and spices, are cooked together with uncooked rice.

The addition of potato to the biryani adds a new dimension to this heavenly dish. It enhances the biryani's visual appeal; the colour of the potato merges very well with white and yellow rice. When biryani is cooked in the *dum pukht* style, the lid is sealed with dough and the steam does not escape. As a result, the aroma and fragrance of rice, meat, various spices, and saffron gets trapped within the cooking pot. All this permeates the humble potato and thereby greatly enhances its taste. When it is mixed with rice and meat, this combination further



enhances the delicacy quotient. The taste of potato in isolation is quite bland and uninteresting but when it is added to biryani, it beautifully supplements the taste of rice and meat, making this one-dish meal simply irresistible. Being a soft and seedless vegetable, it does not hinder in any way when one is having this dish.

It is imperative to mention the role of Awadh's last ruler, Nawab Wajid Ali Shah. He came to Calcutta (now Kolkata) in 1856 after his kingdom was annexed by the British, on a false charge of maladministration. The nawab was accompanied by a large retinue, which included some of his favourite chefs. These were master chefs patronised and pampered by the Awadh nawabs, and their experimentation and innovation with ingredients to prepare food was encouraged. It was during one of these experiments that a chef added

potato to biryani and it appealed greatly to the nawab. Potatoes in those days were considered exotic and expensive because of short supply. The Shah ordered that in all future cooking, potato should be added; this additional supplement became an instant hit. The popular story is that the deposed Wajid Ali Shah could not afford meat after losing the revenue-rich kingdom of Awadh; so he directed his chefs to replace it with potato. This is nothing but a figment of fertile imagination. Nothing can be further from the truth. On the contrary, even after losing his kingdom, he got an annual pension of ₹ 12 lakh in Calcutta. Out of this, he spent 25 per cent on the upkeep of animals and maintenance of his zoo. A man who could spend so much on animals could certainly afford meat in his meals.

Biryani has successfully braved all the challenges thrown at it by



The unique cooking style and judicious blend of spices lend Awadhi biryani its exquisite flavour and aroma.

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Shahanshah Mirza is the great-great-grandson of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah and a senior GST officer.

COVER STORY

TOURISM'S OWN COUNTRY



India's diverse tourist attractions are unmatched and should be on every Indian's vacation list.

Anita Rao Kashi

India saw a staggering number of domestic tourists in 2018, touching more than 180 crore. This points to a sort of reversal of the recent Indian travel trend of foreign holidays. But there is still scope for a much higher footfall. Perhaps why Prime Minister Narendra Modi has urged every Indian to visit 15 domestic destinations by 2022 instead of going abroad—perhaps a visit to Darjeeling in lieu of Switzerland or Wayanad instead of Brazil. Taking this sentiment forward, here's a list of some of the country's most stunning places.





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Jim Corbett



🏠 Located at the foothills of the Himalayas in Uttarakhand, Jim Corbett National Park—named after the famous naturalist—is among the oldest national parks and possibly the most beautiful in India. Its topography varies between 1000 ft to 4000 ft and the serene Ramganga flows through it. It is known for its tiger population, besides the rich flora and fauna; visit from November to January. Sterling Corbett, on the banks of Ramganga with views of the park, is the ideal place to stay.

🔍 **OFFBEAT:** Do the relatively unknown 3.5 km Corbett Heritage Walk through Kaladhungi and Chhoti Haldwani, managed by the villagers, which provides an insight into much of Corbett’s conservation work, including the 5 km Corbett Wall and the model village he set up.

❤️ **INCREDIBLE INDIA:** Experience the thrills of Masai Mara while staying close to home. You do not have to travel all the way to Africa to see elephants, deers, and leopards. Jim Corbett is home to an impressive array of wildlife, some of which cannot be found anywhere else in the world.



Jaipur



🏠 Rajasthan’s capital is like the whole state in a nutshell. But the Pink City, named so because of the abundance of pink stucco buildings, is a history and heritage buff’s paradise. Do not miss the City Palace, Amber Fort, Nahargarh Fort, Jantar Mantar, and Hawa Mahal, to name a few. Make sure to visit the famous bazaars which offer a mindboggling array of colourful garments and jewellery, check out Jaipur’s famous blue pottery, and relish Rajasthani delicacies. Time your visit between October and February. Sterling Atharva is apt for a luxurious and peaceful stay.

🔍 **OFFBEAT:** Head west for about 80 km to reach Sambhar Salt Lake, an elliptical salt pan with striking colours, considered to be the country’s largest inland salt lake formed through a saline wetland. It is a Ramsar site and key area for thousands of migratory birds such as flamingos.

❤️ **INCREDIBLE INDIA:** Bolivia’s Salar De Uyuni offers out-of-the-world views of stunning salt flats and pink flamingos. Not to be outdone, India’s Pink City has its own Sambhar Salt Lake to offer the same views, plus exotic wildlife in the forests nearby.



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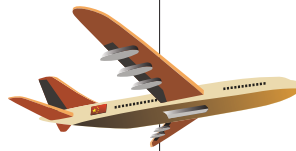
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COVER STORY



Kufri



Home Gangtok, capital of the northeastern state of Sikkim, is charmingly located on a hill and has a cosy vibe that is endearing. Surrounded by towering Himalayan peaks, the city is close to many Buddhist monasteries, some of them sprawling and located spectacularly amidst mountains. For the adventurous, Gangtok is the starting point for many trekking and hiking trips. It can be visited year round, but winter is the time to enjoy snowfall. Sterling Gangtok – Orange Village is on a vantage point and provides stunning views.

Q **OFFBEAT:** Cross hanging bridges across rushing rivers, gaze at waterfalls, walk on a dried lake bed, and go trekking to the Buddha cave at the hidden gem of Rolep, a tiny village about 65 km southeast of Gangtok.

Heart **INCREDIBLE INDIA:** Chiang Mai in Thailand is not the only temple town around. Gangtok boasts several beautiful monasteries of its own, and offers a more diverse experience.

Home Surrounded by lofty Himalayan mountains, Kufri, near Shimla in Himachal Pradesh, is a winter destination and known as a skiers' paradise. The best time to visit is between November and February. Though adventure sports is the mainstay, other things to do include dropping by the zoo and Nature Park, hiking and trekking in the surrounding areas, or just indulging in a laidback holiday. Kufri summers, between April and June, are very pleasant as well. Sterling Kufri sits amidst snow-clad mountains, offering a surreal abode.

Q **OFFBEAT:** Arki village is surrounded by rustic atmosphere and beautiful landscapes; time your visit for mid-June in time for Bari Jatra during which five palanquins of the Pandavas are taken out in procession and worshipped.

Heart **INCREDIBLE INDIA:** Kufri has everything Switzerland has to offer, with bonus yak rides!



Gangtok





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Goa



Tucked away in the Western Ghats, Wayanad in Kerala is an endless series of picture-perfect mountains, dense forests, lush green valleys, rivers and streams, hill stations, and tea plantations. It is ideal for both long walks amidst the greenery and fresh mountain air, or vigorous treks and hikes to peaks such as Chembra and waterfalls such as Athirapally. Time your visit between November and March. Sterling Wayanad is located at the edge of the Muthanga Wildlife Sanctuary, making it an ideal spot to reconnect with Nature. The resort's special birdwatch trail and pottery lessons are can't-miss activities.



OFFBEAT: Go bamboo rafting around and to the uninhabited island of Kuruvadweep, an island formed within the Kabini river with thick wooded vegetation.



INCREDIBLE INDIA: Thinking of crossing the ocean to Sri Lanka to explore colourful wildlife, pristine forests, and tea trails? Wayanad offers all this, and more.



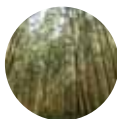
Blessed with sun, sand, and surf, Goa is proof that pint-sized places can sometimes pack a punch. In this case, it is a surfeit of beaches. From the popular Calangute and Anjuna to lesser known ones in South and North Goa, there is much to choose from. Chill in the evenings with music and fabulous Goan food. Goa is a year-round destination, and for those who would like to enjoy Goa in the rains, the monsoon (July to September) is the ideal time to visit. For the intrepid, there is white water rafting and jungle trekking. Choose between Sterling Goa – Varca or Sterling Goa – Bardez for a lovely beachside holiday.



OFFBEAT: Away from the beaches, there are such gems as whitewater rafting, spice plantation walks, or soaking in the intangible heritage of Goa at Big Foot. But for a truly offbeat experience, visit Valpoi for cashew apple harvesting and watch feni being made.



INCREDIBLE INDIA: A journey to Portugal is not necessary to soak in its culture and indulge in its food. Goa's culture and cuisine is heavily influenced by its Portuguese history and Indian roots, offering the best of both worlds.



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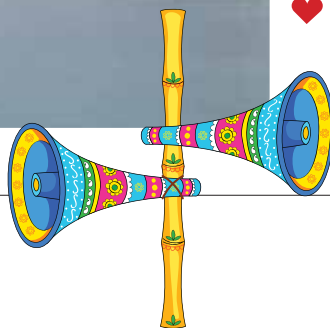
Dharamshala



🏠 Nestled in Himachal Pradesh's Kangra Valley, Dharamshala is home to the largest Tibetan settlement and abode of the Dalai Lama. Upper McLeodganj is popular for its breathtaking views of the snow-capped Dhauladhar mountains. While it is pleasant all year round, winter is the time for the most stunning views. For a bit of adventure, head to Kangra valley and attempt a glacier walk. Sterling Dharamshala is near the Dhauladhar mountains and is the perfect base to experience the place.

🔍 OFFBEAT: Bring out your inner creative self and try your hand at Tibetan-style wood carving, especially the Tashi Targye, or design your own handmade jewellery at Ali's Crystal House and Handicrafts.

❤️ INCREDIBLE INDIA: Bhutan is known for its Buddhist temples, but for the spiritually inclined, Dharamshala occupies a special place as the home of the Dalai Lama.



Agra



🏠 Possibly the country's biggest attribute, Agra is undeniably synonymous with the magnificent Taj Mahal, the marble edifice that speaks of love, beauty, and architectural excellence. But there is much else to see and do, such as the equally beautiful Agra Fort and several Mughal-era monuments like Fatehpur Sikri, Akbar's Tomb in Sikandra, Jama Masjid, and Itimad-ud-Daulah or the Baby Taj. November-March is the best time to visit Agra. Sterling Agra, with its Mughal-era splendour, is the best accompaniment for your holiday.

🔍 OFFBEAT: Visit Sheroes, a thoughtful and sensitive cafe run by an NGO to help acid attack victims, where you can 'pay what you like.'

❤️ INCREDIBLE INDIA: Agra is arguably one of the few cities in the world that can match the old-world charm of Istanbul, Turkey.



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Mussoorie



Home: Known as the Queen of Hills, Mussoorie is at an altitude of over 2000 m and makes for a year-round visit. But for those who love snow, head there during winter. Its biggest attraction is the stunning views of the snowy Himalayas as well as the lush green forests and serene atmosphere which makes it ideal for long walks. The lake, almost in the middle of town, is surrounded by lovely gardens. Perched on a cliff, Sterling Mussoorie cocoons guests in warmth while offering unmatched views.

Q Offbeat: Walk through the surreal village of Sainji, about 18 km northwest of Mussoorie, also known as corn village. The whole village seems golden, as houses throughout the hamlet have clumps of corn hanging from roofs, both in front of the houses and inside as well.

Heart Incredible India: The rolling hills and colonial architecture of Christchurch, New Zealand find their match in Mussoorie, but only the Queen of Hills has spooky attractions like the Savoy Hotel, Mullingar Mansion, and Lambi Dehar mines to make a shiver run down your spine.



Sariska



Home: Sariska in Rajasthan was the seat of the Alwar royalty but is more famous for the Sariska Tiger Reserve. Its arid, dry deciduous forests are beautiful and home to several wildlife species such as leopards, golden jackals, and wild boar, but it is sighting the big cat that outranks everything. Other places to visit include the Sariska Palace, forts and temples. The ideal time to visit is from October to March. Sterling Sariska has luxury tented accommodations, located at the edge of the park.

Q Offbeat: Talvriksha, about 30 km to the northwest of Sariska near Narayanpur, is a temple with a rare hot spring whose sulphur content is known to have incredible medicinal properties. Watch out for the hordes of monkeys, though.

Heart Incredible India: The rugged Australian Outback is a close cousin to Sariska's wildlife bounty, but its harsh living conditions may prove to be a challenge to most. Sariska offers numerous options in accommodation and food.

Anita Rao Kashi is a Bangalore-based journalist and travel and food writer who loves her city to bits, but is always looking for an excuse to travel. When not travelling, she can be found writing, cooking, or eating—and not necessarily in that order!



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Don't leave home without these must-have travel gadgets for your next holiday.

Ashwin Rajagopalan

All set for your next vacation? Make sure you have packed the right gear to make the most of your holiday. From a versatile smartphone camera to headphones that filter external sounds to an action cam that keeps up with your adventures, we have rounded up the best tech for your travels.

NOISE CANCELLATION HEADPHONES

A good pair of headphones is possibly the first thing you will throw into your backpack. Noise cancellation is becoming a priority feature for headphone users as it helps them enjoy seamless music without external noises, such as in traffic, at the airport, and so on. When buying, a useful detail to check is the amount of noise (in terms of decibels) the product claims to cancel. Some premium brands that do a decent job are Sony, Bose, Sennheiser, and Jabra.



E-READERS

Be it a long, boring flight or a relaxed afternoon by the pool or at the beach, there is no better companion than an e-reader. With a bigger screen size, eye-friendly display, and long-lasting battery, the e-reader is fast becoming 'man's new best friend'—overtaking the traditional book. The fact that an e-reader can store thousands of books only adds to its user-friendliness. Though Amazon's Kindle has reigned supreme in this category, it now faces competition from brands such as Sony and Kobo.





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ACTION CAMERA

We live in an age where satisfaction comes not just from doing or experiencing something, but also posting it on social media. And when it comes to capturing action—be it parasailing or white water rafting—your phone’s camera just won’t cut it. Enter the action camera—a digital camera specifically made for recording action. Action cameras of today can do everything from taking photos in burst and time-lapse modes to recording high-definition, 4K videos, and from capturing slow motion to shooting high-quality videos underwater. GoPro’s Hero series is the go-to brand for many who are looking for premium quality. Though, other options such as DJI Osmo Series, SJCAM, Sony’s RX series, and Olympus are available too.



BLUETOOTH SPEAKERS

For those who are ‘the life of a party’, taking their music along with them is a must. And nothing does the job better than a pair of good, portable bluetooth speakers. These come in all shapes and sizes, are portable, and the sound quality is literally music to ears. So the next time you throw a party, go camping, or are sitting alone in your hotel room, do remember to carry a fancy-looking Ultimate Ears Wonderboom or the ever-dependable JBL Flip/JBL Charge. Of course, there are many other brands to choose from—Bose, Sony, and more.



WIRELESS POWER BANK

You are at a stunning location. You take out your phone to click the perfect Instagram shot. Just as your finger presses the button, your phone dies. If this is your worst nightmare, fear not, because all you need to do to prevent this from happening is a reliable powerbank. Today, powerbanks are available with wireless charging technology, so one can charge two phones—one wirelessly and the other with the cord—simultaneously. Portable, waterproof, and monstrous capacity (to charge) are just some of the other features of these ‘lifesavers’.



Ashwin Rajagopalan is one of India’s leading lifestyle writers. Smartphones and consumer tech are foremost among his areas of interest.

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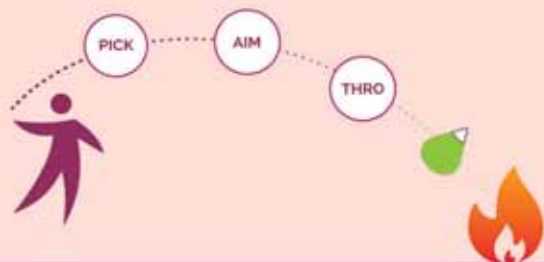


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JOURNEY TO THE UNKNOWN

From haunted churches to cursed mines, these spooky destinations are not for the faint of heart.

Shini Shreedharan



THREE KINGS CHURCH: SOUTH GOA

The Three Kings Church in Cansaulim, South Goa, has a tale of unrest that is in contrast to its beautiful view of hills and a glimmer of the Arabian Sea beyond. In the era of Portuguese rule, there lived three kings who desired to rule alone. King Holger Alvunger decided to end the competition and fed poisoned food to the other two. After their deaths, Holger declared himself the

king. However, followers of the dead kings suspected foul play and moved to capture him. To avoid being killed by a mob, he too consumed poisoned food.

All three kings were buried in the same land and upon it sits the Three Kings Church. While no sightings have been reported, visitors and locals have experienced a paranormal presence among them when they visit the church area after dark.

Sterling Varca to Cansaulim
24 minutes/14.4 km



AGRASEN KI BAOLI: DELHI

This is a beautiful step well that has an unknown origin but is speculated to be built by King Agrasen of Agroha. Protected by the Archaeological Survey of India, it has 108 steps and three levels to the bottom. Many visitors have claimed a paranormal presence here. The eeriness factor builds up as one goes further down and no other sound exists except one's own breathing and footsteps. Rumours claim this Baoli contained black water in the past, which coaxed people to end their lives. The mystery of this place is as intriguing as its beauty.



NAHARGARH FORT: RAJASTHAN

The stunningly beautiful Aravalli Range in Rajasthan is also home to a haunted fort called Nahargarh Fort. While less popular than Bhangarh Fort, Nahargarh is equally rife with tales of curses and paranormal presence. It is believed that the construction of the fort disturbed the resting spirit of Nahar Singh. In order to appease the spirit, the king building the fort renamed it from 'Sudarshangarh' to its present name. However, the upset spirit remained inconsolable; locals believe it caused the death of an engineer responsible for renovating the fort. Take in a majestic view of the city from this fort, and also the tale of a haunted palace that it holds.

Sterling Jaipur to Nahargarh Fort:
1 hour 10 minutes/43 km



LAMBI DEHAR MINES: MUSSOORIE

Amidst the calm and serene atmosphere of this hill station lies a tale of a paranormally active mine area. The Lambi Dehar mines were functional until the 1990s. Poor working conditions resulted in the deaths of several workers. Added to this is the tale of a witch who haunted the mines and caused these deaths. There are also legends of an army man who was killed here by his wife and her lover, and can still be heard groaning in pain. Together, these stories are given as the reason why cries are heard from this area. Locals also report random accidents as well as sightings of a witch near the mines, and caution visitors not to venture here at nightfall.

Sterling Mussoorie to Lambi Dehar mines:
21 minutes/7.9 km



JATINGA: ASSAM

It is unsettling to imagine birds simply dropping dead from the sky on moonless nights. This is what the village of Jatinga has experienced every single year. On new moon nights in September and October, a one-mile stretch of land suffers unexplained bird deaths between 6 pm and 10 pm. Hence the name 'bird suicide village' came about. Even scientific reasoning that birds fly towards the city lights and then get confused cannot fully justify their deaths. To add to the misfortune, a majority of these birds seem to be migratory ones. For a century now, neither the villagers nor experts have demystified this phenomena, and there has not been a year when this occurrence ceased.



Shini first moved from science to arts, in pursuit of creativity. After 12 years of being a creative writer in advertising, she moved to a different medium of storytelling, to write on the history of literature, food, and culture. She hopes to retire as either a book curator or a stationery geek.

DISCOVERIES & EXPERIENCES

Ooty inside

Stay at Sterling Ooty – Fern Hill and capture vivid impressions of the 'Queen of the Nilgiris' within the resort itself.

Anitha Moosath

Travel, to me, means veering off the traditional and assuming new meanings.

When I visit new locales, I seek out new vistas of experience and the time and space to make some of the best discoveries in life—tumbling upon a not-so-known piece of history, a peek into the nuances of local culture, getting to buy an antique artefact, or something as mundane as learning a new local recipe.

The moment I stepped into Sterling Ooty – Fern Hill, the installations on the premises promised an experience of a different kind. The uniqueness of the land's tribal culture, its native flora and fauna,

and its historical facets have been brought alive in custom-made installations and artefacts in wood, stone, metal, and so on.

I had a lot of fun exploring this 'little Ooty', which Sterling has created with so much care under its D&E Impressions (Discoveries & Experiences) initiative. The staff was more than happy to show me around. The tour began with a visit to a striking 3D representation of the local flower,



thatha poo or dandelion, at the lobby entrance. Out on the grounds, we saw a life-sized Toda hut with a 'wedding stone', which traditionally men of the tribal community would lift to impress the prospective bride. A stone table laid with local spices greeted me inside, providing an insight into Toda cuisine. I was then taken to the Toda embroidery mural to admire their distinctive weaves—each stitch and pattern tells a story. Sterling has also put together a lovely tribal artefact wall to help guests gain a deeper understanding of the daily life of the Toda, Kota, Badaga, and Paniya tribals, among others. Along the way, I saw my fellow guests pose for selfies with sculptures of Kota tribals and spin the 'Wheel of Nostalgia' that offers glimpses of the Nilgiris from 300





Facing page, top: Mural depicting Toda embroidery at the reception lobby.

Facing page, bottom: A guest turns the Wheel of Nostalgia to discover more about the history of the Nilgiris.

This page, top: A Toda couple in traditional attire outside the life-sized Toda hut on the resort premises.

This page, bottom: The dandelions of the Nilgiris have been brought to life in a realistic 3D installation.

BC to the 19th century. I saw excited children play choo-choo at a cute mini version of the Nilgiris Mountain Railway track and try to fit the pieces of a huge Ooty map jigsaw puzzle together. Many kids made a beeline for the animal footpath where they could step on tiles and listen to the calls of native birds and animals. 'Did You Know' frames on the resort walls taught lesser-known facts about Ooty to adults and children alike.

All the creative expressions at Sterling Ooty – Fern Hill blend beautifully with the design and



Sterling D&E Impressions

landscape in and around the resort. And for creating these, Sterling joined hands with National Institute of Fashion Technology, Chennai, and roped in the services of local artisans and sculptors.

This initiative of Sterling is the first of its kind in India, and it plans to curate D&E Impressions at other properties such as Sterling Mussoorie soon—bringing customers the 'assurance of the expected' and 'the joy of the unexpected'. Sterling D&E Impressions is one major step by Sterling to achieve its vision to become India's No. 1 Experiential Holiday Brand.

Anitha Moosath is a journalist and editor based in New Delhi. Her work has appeared in numerous publications across India.

Sweet Corner

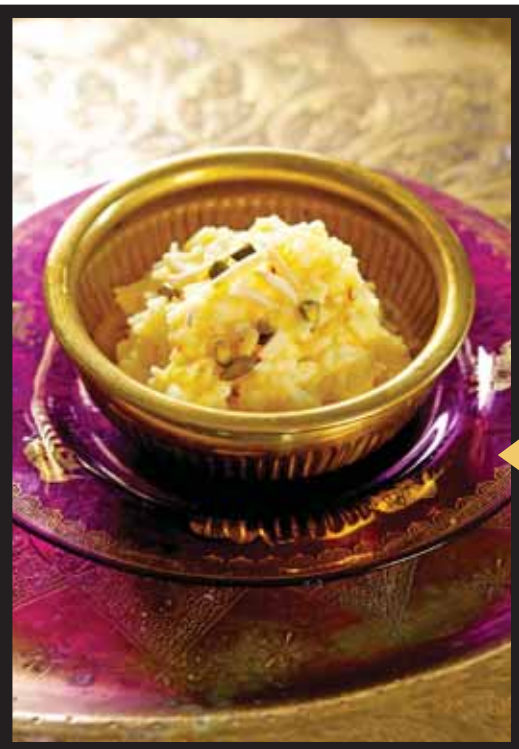
Indian sweets occupy a special place in the hearts and stomachs of every Indian, reflecting the regional diversity of the country and its culture.

Rupali Dean



If there is one thing that arrests the Indian gastronomic psyche, it is sweetmeats. Tiny pieces are eaten during the day, on their own, with tea, or as part of a meal together with salty items. Most sweets are made with some amalgamation of nuts, legumes, flour, sugar, and milk or khoya, and then habitually heightened with cardamom, saffron or even rose water. Most are either dry or semi-hard, and soaked in either sugar syrup or milk. While there

are a few characteristic forms, regional disparities and nods to indigenous penchant abound. From Jammu chocolate, Kashmiri sweet pulao, *angoori rabdi* in the North to *mysore pak*, *boondi ladoo*, *unni appam* in the South onto *puran poli*, *shrikhand*, *mohan thal* from the West, *sandesh*, *mishti doi*, *rajbhog* from the East and *malpua*, *khopra pak* from the central part of India, sweets have never been more tempting.



PAL BUN And you thought gulab jamun was the eventual delight? Try *pal bun* from Madurai. Little balls of curd and flour are seasoned with sugar and cardamom, raised with baking powder, and then deep fried. The taste will unquestionably stay with you for a long time. These delicious treats can be popped in your mouth at Sterling Kodai Lake.

MITTHA BHAAT Uttarakhand's creamy *mittha bhaat* can give any rice pudding a run for its money. Red rice is flavoured with fenugreek and cardamom, which is then sweetened with sugar and generously laced with saffron and dry fruits. You can add in some more cinnamon and milk if you like, for additional nutrition. When at Sterling Mussoorie and Sterling Nainital, do not forget to ask for this.

PATOLEO

Not unlike the unique culture of Goa itself, *patoleo* is a sweet dish with a difference. *Patoleo* is a unique, soft, fragrant and steamed sweet made by dispersing rice paste over a turmeric leaf and stuffing it with jaggery, freshly grated coconut, and cardamom powder; this is one of the best desserts you will sample. Typically prepared on occasions such as the Feast of the Assumption of Mary and Ganesh Chaturthi, it is also a must-have at Sterling Varca.





THINAI LADOO

The *thinai ladoo* aka fox tail millet ball from Tamil Nadu is comparable in grain to a no-bake energy ball; these bite-sized treats are made with foxtail millet, cashewuts, and coconut. Fuel up on these sweet nuggets at Sterling Ooty – Elk Hill.

MALAIYO

An effervescent and bubbling winter sweet that gladdens the heart of every Varanasi local with its decadence, *malaiyo* is precisely what dreams are made of. Very few sweet makers in Varanasi are knowledgeable and skilled enough to use raw milk, dew drops, and cardamom seasoning to make this pillowy soft dessert.

NAAP NAANG

This is an extremely exceptional and delightful sweet from Nagaland. Excellently nutritious *naap naang* is made from black sticky rice and delicately spiced with sweet nuts, is rich in fibre and can be consumed even by diabetics, owing to black sticky rice being a multifaceted carbohydrate that gradually discharges sugar during digestion.



GHEVAR

An old-style sweet native to Rajasthan, *ghevar* is decadent to the core. Prepared especially during Teej, it is made from flour and milk and set in a mould, then speedily dunked in sugar syrup and served cold. Take a bite of history at Sterling Atharva – Jaipur.

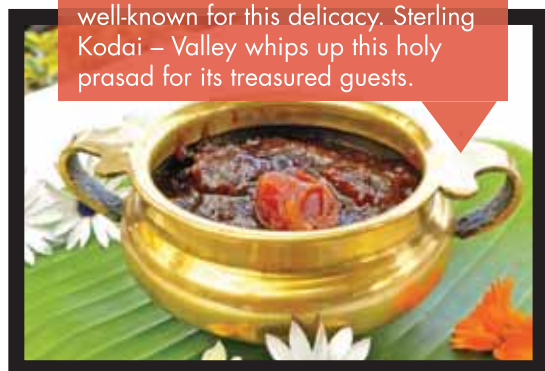


ADA PRADHAMAN

Onam celebrations in Kerala are unfinished without this hearteningly rich dessert. Made with homespun rice flakes and tapioca pearls, and prepared in a delectable combination of jaggery syrup and coconut milk. This is one traditional dessert not to be missed. Head on down to Sterling Wayanad to enjoy this scoop of tradition.

PANCHAMRITHAM

A blend of five natural substances viz. jaggery, banana, honey, cardamom, and cow ghee makes this temple sweet. Normally, dates are added to this for additional taste and savour. Palani, near Kodaikanal, is well-known for this delicacy. Sterling Kodai – Valley whips up this holy prasad for its treasured guests.



KHAJA

Exclusive to Bihar, this dessert is basically encrusted fritters of dough that have been soaked in sugar syrup. Also popularly known as Indian Baklava.

Rupali Dean has been recognised as the 'best food writer in the country' by the Indian culinary forum, WACS, and the Ministry of Tourism. A trained hospitality professional, nutritionist, and an ex-chef, she has also won the best travel writer in India by Spain Tourism.

A Vow Affair

Home to the historic Sree Krishna Temple, Guruvayur's vibes are perfectly aligned with the sanctity of an intimate wedding. With God as your witness and Sterling as your hospitality partner, your nuptials will be nothing less than wow.

Mukul and Shilpa Gupta



Close your eyes and take a moment to imagine. Thousands of *deepams* (oil lamps) sparkling in celebration around you. The chants of Sanskrit *shlokas* and the sacred oaths of commitment ringing out clearly as the smoke rises in whorls. You and your special someone circumnavigating the holy fire and performing the *saptapadi* in front of God. Now, imagine if a genie promised that this could all come

true. Open your eyes, and get ready to turn this into a reality. At the temple town of Guruvayur—it is possible.

The holy tranquillity of Guruvayur is almost tangible. The main temple, said to be 5,000 years old, is considered to be *bhoolokavaikunta*—heaven on earth. It has apparently been bestowed with extraordinary healing powers. No wonder it attracts more than 5 million devotees annually. Legend goes that the





idol was originally in Dwarka, Lord Krishna’s home in present-day Gujarat, which was carried to a Kerala town by two saints, Guru (teacher of the Gods) and Vayu (Lord of the Winds). However, a Shiva temple already existed there. A benevolent Lord Shiva agreed to move his temple from the sacred place to make way for the Krishna idol. As Guru and Vayu had erected the temple, the place came to be known as Guruvayur.

The Guruvayurappan Temple has two *gopurams* (towers). *Deepastambhams*, pillars of light, abound, of which the most striking one is 24-ft-high with 13 levels, making for a sight to behold when lit with oil lamps. There is also a *dhwajastambha*, a 70-ft-high flag-staff covered with gold. The temple is renowned for its traditional weddings and it is believed that couples who tie the knot here are forever blessed by Lord Vishnu. Also famous are its *thulabharam* ceremonies, an offering to the Lord represented with items (coconut, sweets, bananas, et cetera) equal to the devotee’s weight. On most nights, you can witness the magical Krishnanattam, a riveting dance

Facing page: There is no facet of Guruvayur Temple that does not hold an attraction—be it the legend it is steeped in, its architecture, or its rituals. Perhaps the reason that makes it one of the most-visited shrines in India.

This page (above): The magnificence of the temple best emerges during the twilight hour when the lamps are lit.



Sterling is the first national hospitality chain in Guruvayur.

PICK ME UP

Like the rest of Kerala, there are some pretty nifty souvenirs you can take back from Guruvayur. If the cream-and-golden kasavu sari is the first thing that pops up in your mind, it must not be the last. Colourful Kathakali masks in papier mache, wood, and metal; temple jewellery; special poppadums named after the town; *nettipattam* (the headgear of temple elephants); and coconut-shell products are the other attractive keepsakes.

CELEBRATIONS

form charting the story of Krishna's life, in the backdrop of thousands of shimmering oil lamps.

The other religious sites are the translocated Shiva temple in Mammiyur, within a kilometer from the main temple, with stunning murals, and the Palayoor Church on the outskirts. It is believed to have been built by St Thomas.

Temple elephants are integral to Guruvayur. You can revel in their antics at an exclusive sanctuary in Anakotta, 4 km from Guruvayur. Chavakkad beach, with a 100-ft-high lighthouse, and the Mural Art Institute, just minutes away from Sterling Guruvayur, are the other close-by attractions. The Chettuva backwaters are ideal for boating. Not too far from there is Blangad Beach, perfect for capturing beautiful sunsets and catching fishermen in action.

Weddings are a celebration of love and commitment. Equally, they celebrate culture, rituals, and religion. If your heart beats for a holy union in one of the holiest places, look no further than Guruvayur.

Sterling is the first national hospitality chain in Guruvayur. With 71 well-appointed rooms, a spacious banquet hall, lawns, and exquisite regional and global menu options to choose from, Sterling Guruvayur is ideal for celebrating weddings. Located at a short distance from Guruvayurappan Temple, it offers an all-veg restaurant to cater to families and pilgrims.



Guruvayur is in Thrissur district of Kerala. The nearest airports are at Calicut, 60 km, and Kochi, 64 km. Sterling Guruvayur is barely a mile away from the Guruvayurappan Temple.

GOD OF ALL THINGS

On Guruvayur Ekadashi (Nov/Dec), a grand procession of elephants is taken out. Gajarajan Guruvayur Kesavan, a temple elephant who had died on Ekadashi day and has acquired a legendary status, is honoured. The temple keeps its *garbhgriha* (sanctum) open on this day.

Guruvayur's Chembai Sangeetholsavam is a yearly Carnatic music festival which honours a titan of Carnatic classical music, Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavata. He was known to be a passionate devotee of Lord Guruvayurappan. Lasting for a fortnight and culminating on Guruvayur Ekadashi, it attracts thousands of musicians.

Top: Guruvayurappan Temple has been a dream venue for many couples across the country.

Below: A herd of elephants in caparisoned glory—a sight you would not miss on the temple premises.

Two professionals who fell in love—with each other and then, along the way, with travel—Mukul and Shilpa Gupta are incorrigible travelers. They bring back beautiful memories and priceless souvenirs from their sojourns. But doubling up as memories and souvenirs are the countless articles and photographs they have been contributing to prestigious international and national travel magazines.



When staying at Sterling Resorts, guests get a chance to discover the 'delights of India'—food, culture, heritage, wildlife, and a lot more. Take this quiz to find out interesting facts about the country as well as Sterling Holidays. Get it right and stand a chance to win exciting prizes.*



1. Staying at Sterling Mussoorie, one can enjoy breathtaking views of the picturesque _____ Valley.
2. The _____, in Puri, is one of the biggest Hindu festivals in the world.
3. One can experience the thrill of climbing the steepest rail track in Asia when aboard the _____ to Ooty.
4. Sterling Gangtok is situated close to the 200-year old _____ Monastery.
5. India's first devotional theme park, _____, can be visited during a stay at Sterling Shirdi.
6. _____, in Munnar, is the highest tea estate in the world.
7. Situated at an hour's drive from Sterling Sariska, Alwar is popular for the milk cake, _____.
8. Guests can try their hand at _____, India's oldest martial art form, when staying at Sterling Thekkady.
9. The Lord Shiva sculpture at _____, Goa lends the otherwise party destination a spiritual aura.
10. At Sterling Ooty Fern Hill, guests can literally be among and live the life of the _____ tribe.

To participate, just click a picture of the completed quiz and send it to purplehues@sterlingholidays.com. Your entries should reach us on or before 31st March 2020.

*Conditions apply

FESTIVALS OF STERLING

'Aam'azing MANGOES!

Sterling's Mango Fest whipped up a delectable mix of dishes like Mango Dosas, Mango Bonda, and Mango Kofta to celebrate everyone's favourite fruit. Feeling hungry yet?

The King of Fruits deserves a festival befitting its title. From May to July last year, Sterling decided to do just that by hosting a Mango Fest across Sterling resorts throughout the country. This wasn't any ordinary celebration with just regular fare like mango smoothies or mango ice-cream—that would be against Sterling's motto of 'Holiday Differently'. Sterling chefs across the country innovated unique twists on everyone's favourite fruit, whipping up treats like Mango Colada, Sweet Mango Pickle, Malgova Panacotta, Mango Sunrise, and Methi Malai Mangifera. Here are a few highlights from our exciting lineup of 'mangolicious' treats and activities:

Sterling Thekkady

Guests at Sterling Thekkady were greeted upon arrival with a Kissy Mango welcome drink, kicking off their journey into mango heaven. A range of traditional dishes—with a mango twist—awaited them, including Mango Bonda, Mango Puttu, and Mango Ada. Foodies could also try out Mango Poori, Katcha Aam Chutney, and Mango Delight drink combo. A few choice dishes from grandma's kitchen like Aam ka Chaas served in an Aam ka Patha, Mango Kolukattai, and Mango Pradhaman were prepared to make patrons feel at home. A fun mango cart activity was set up on the premises so that folks could dress up like street vendors in *lungis* and 'sell' mangoes. Enthusiastic guests flocked to the cart and gamely wore the traditional garments. Even the spa staff dove into the mango action with a special





Above: Guests vote for their favourite mango during Sterling Thekkady's mango election.

Facing page: Guests at Sterling Thekkady dressed up like traditional street vendors to 'sell' mangoes from a cart.



Guests partook of Mango Kheer, Mangifera Indica Cheese Cake, and Mango Yoghurt Pie.

Sterling Goa - Varca

Did you know Goa has over 82 varieties of mangoes? The sunshine-yellow fruit has a long history in the state, reaching its peak in the 16th century when Portuguese Jesuits experimented with mango crops. The following boom in mango cultivation inspired several distinctive varieties named after saints, kings, families, and landlords. A selection of these delicious fruits were served to guests at Sterling Goa-Varca, including Mankurad, Mankura, Culas, Bishop, Afons, Hilario, Mussarat, Fernandin, and Xavier.

Guests also went head-to-head in a tightly contested Mankurad Mango Eating Competition to see who could gobble up the most mangoes. When they weren't locked in battle, patrons indulged in Tortilla Rolls with Mango Salsa, Grilled Fish with Mango Reduction, Banana & Mango spring rolls with vanilla ice-cream, Ghotache Sansav, and Kairi Prawns. A Mango Chaat Corner served up snacks like Mango Dahi Puri and Mango Bhel Puri.

MANGO DAYS AHEAD...

Whether you slice it, dice it, juice it, or pulp it, mangoes lend themselves to a variety of delicious drinks and sweet (or savoury!) dishes. This year's Mango Fest is our humble effort to highlight this versatile King of Fruits, not only as a food, but as part of India's larger cultural identity. Be part of the celebration for the next Mango Fest!

mango facial, using a blend of pure mangoes to purify skin. Inspired by the Indian general elections, the Sterling team held a one-of-its-kind mango election, asking patrons to choose their favourite mango variety (Alphonso, Banganapalli, Badami, etc.) and place their vote into a ballot box. The happy voters were rewarded with an Aam ka Thanda soup served in a coconut shell for fulfilling their 'civic mango' duties. A mango-themed dinner awaited guests at the end of the day, creating happy memories for them to take home.

Mallikai Dosas and Chargrilled Malgoa fillets with a honey chilli glaze.

Sterling Kufri

The chefs at Sterling Kufri created a feast of mango dishes and drinks, with guests indulging in mocktails like Mango Mint Spicy, Mango Sunrise, Mango Ice Tea, Mango Colada, and Mango Honey Delight to quench their thirst. Desi food like Paneer Makhani, Methi Malai Mangifera, and Kofta Curry were combined with mango to create a truly unique culinary experience. No meal is complete without a spot of dessert though, and mangoes are the perfect addition to any pastry.

Sterling Ooty - Elk Hill

Mango tea on the roof, anyone? High tea got a mango makeover at Sterling Ooty-Elk Hill with an assortment of snacks and drinks to make any mango-lover happy. The resort's rooftop tea shop was decorated with fresh mango leaves and mangoes to draw guests in with their sweet aroma. Hungry diners feasted on Mango Pakodas and Mango Sandwiches, as well as fusion delicacies like Mango

Sterling chefs across the country innovated unique twists on everyone's favourite fruit, whipping up treats.





Do you jog? Do you lunge? Do you squat? Here is a trend that combines all these and also helps keep public places clean...

Raul Dias

Plog On!

Australian actor Chris Hemsworth has made it his life's newest mission, while most recently here in India, Prime Minister Narendra Modi brought it to the fore by trying it out at a beach in Tamil Nadu's Mamallapuram to great success. We are talking about plogging, the hottest travel trend taking over the globe, wherein tourists and travellers alike can do their bit for the environment by picking up the trash and litter that they come across during their travels.

Born as both a physical activity and a means of caring for the environment, plogging—also known as 'eco running'—is a Swedish invention that helps us deal with the world's burgeoning plastic and waste problem in a creative and healthy way.

PLOGGING 101

A combination of jogging with picking up litter, the word 'plogging' is derived from the Swedish term *plocka upp* or to 'pick up'. While plogging started off as an organised activity in Sweden around 2016,





A combination of jogging with picking up litter, the word 'plogging' is derived from the Swedish term *plocka upp* or to 'pick up'.



Above: Plogging is fast catching up in India and Sterling Holidays too has taken a green leap.

it has spread to other countries over the last three years, following increased concerns and public pressure over plastic pollution.

It is estimated that annually, we produce over 300 million tons of plastic and around 8.8 million tons of it get dumped in our lakes, rivers, and oceans, threatening countless animals, many of which are on the verge of extinction. And sadly, by 2050, it is believed that there will be more plastic in the ocean than fish! In fact, Hemsworth's ambitious plogging campaign hopes to rid 100 islands around the world and the surrounding seas of plastic by the end of 2020.

HOMEBOUND ENDEAVOURS

Giving the plogging idea a very effective Indian context, in December 2017, the district administration of Dindigul and Kodaikanal Municipality in Tamil Nadu launched a programme for keeping Kodaikanal Lake's grounds free of garbage, with the support of Sterling Holidays. This entails a team that is deployed through the day to sweep the entire area of the

lake and its surrounding areas to collect and dispose waste material.

To this end, Sterling ensures the cleaning and maintenance of not just the area of the lake but also the open areas, roads, and grounds within its boundary, while also encouraging its vacationing guests to give plogging a try.

Remember, responsible travel truly begins and ends with the responsible traveller... one less piece of plastic at a time!



PLOGGING TIPS TO KEEP IN MIND

1. Remember, safety comes first. Before embarking on your plogging activity, make sure to protect yourself from unnecessary direct contact with the trash. You can do this by wearing a good, sturdy pair of running shoes along with hand gloves to avoid possible cuts and nicks. Additionally, wearing a face mask may also be a good idea in case you encounter toxic or hazardous waste.
2. Carry with you a sturdy bag to deposit the trash into, along with a hooked stick or pincer to pick it up.
3. Make sure that you have the proper authority/permission to carry out plogging on a particular piece of land that may often be private property.
4. Do not get too adventurous with heavy or dangerous items of waste. In case you feel you cannot handle such waste, it would be better to contact the municipal or civic authorities to help clear it.
5. Identify a proper, environment-friendly waste disposal site so that once you are done with your plogging activity, you can safely dispose of the accumulated trash so that it does not end up where you picked it up from.

Raul Dias is a travel-food writer, restaurant reviewer, and food consultant. Constantly on the move and having travelled to 64 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.



Tracing the THREADS

Nothing is more 'ethnic' about a holiday than catching a glimpse of wondrous weaves and tribal embroidery.

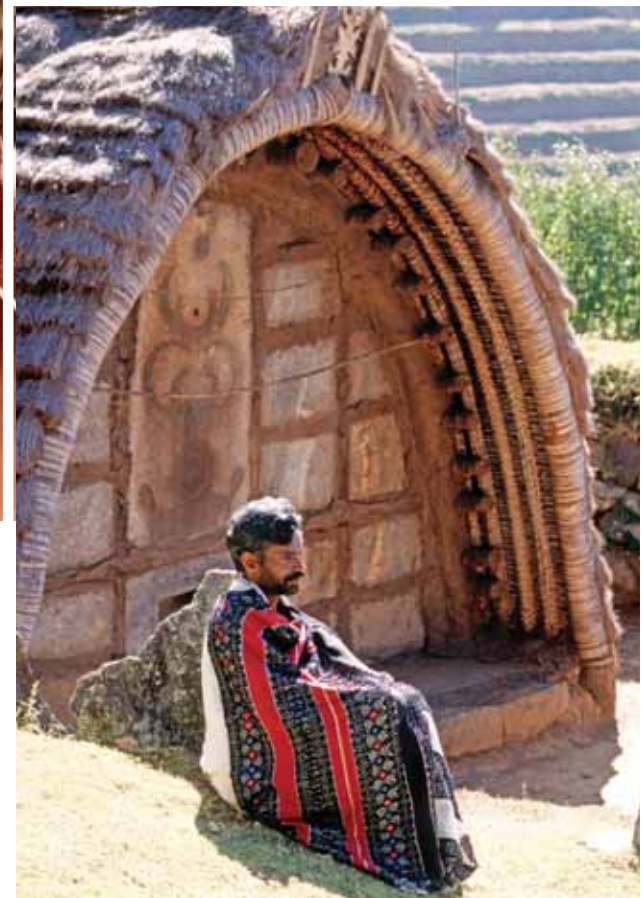
Rashmi Gopal Rao

Gone are the days when travel was just about sightseeing and ticking off those monuments, forts, and beaches on your bucket list. Travel, today, has assumed a whole new dimension—experiential and immersive travel with niche experiences topping the list. Experiences covering local culture, traditions, and customs are highly sought after as they make the whole exercise of travel more meaningful. Well, with Sterling, there can never be a dearth of insightful experiences, for when you holiday with them, it means 'holidaying differently'.

Given that India is a land synonymous with diversity, it is truly a treasure trove when it comes to native arts and crafts too. And this includes its rich heritage of handlooms that are indigenous and spread across the country. Here is a look at some unique Indian weaves and crafts.

BANDARULANKA AND UPPADA WEAVES

Weaving is a rich tradition in Andhra Pradesh and while Pochampally, Mangalagiri, and Kalamkari weaves are popular, the handlooms



of Bandarulanka and Uppada are hidden gems—crafts passed down through generations.

Located in the East Godavari district, Bandarulanka is a small town known for its handloom cotton sarees. It is home to several weaver families who manufacture some of the finest cotton sarees on looms, locally called *maggam*.

The sarees are made using 80-count yarn, and it takes a minimum of 7-14 days to complete one.

Uppada is another village in East Godavari famous for its supersoft sarees that are hand woven. Their designs are unique, and while the cotton sarees are made from cotton warp and weft, their silk range known as Uppada *pattu* is made using the traditional *jamdani* technique.

TODA TRIBAL EMBROIDERY

A pastoral tribe endemic to the Nilgiris in South India, Todas are known for their art work that is a form of intricate embroidery. Done in signature colours of red and black, the work is so fine that it appears like a weave. It is done on a white background

and the products include shawls, stoles, cushion covers, and runners. The Todas are indeed proud of their tradition and it is a great experience to just be able to see the tribals do the needlework and also buy some of their products to support them—an ideal offbeat offering by Sterling Ooty.

KULLU SHAWLS

Do not forget to take a trip to the picturesque valley of Kullu when in Sterling Manali. Intrinsicly associated with this beautiful landscape are their lovely shawls with the characteristic geometric patterns. They are made from a wide variety of wool and can have up to eight colours. Produced by hand using pit looms, most of these shawls are woven in a twill weave.



Above left: Traditional and classy, Bandarulanka and Uppada saris exude the dexterity of the weavers who spent hours on end perfecting their craft.

Above right: Blending colours is an art and the Toda tribe of the Nilgiris seems to know it all. They embroider red and black patterns onto a white background, presenting a pure play of contrast.

A THREAD THAT LASTS

Clothes represent the living, breathing history of a region. Each stitch and pattern chronicle the shifting culture of its people and their surroundings. You become part of this narrative when you travel to different parts of the country and feel the fabric for yourself. Whether it is a shawl, a sari, or a scarf, that piece of fabric will not just be a little token of your holiday, but a continuation of a rich cultural history that ties the past to the future.

Given that India is a land synonymous with diversity, it is truly a treasure trove when it comes to native arts and crafts too.

A freelance writer and travel-lifestyle blogger, Rashmi Gopal Rao is a strong advocate and supporter of responsible and sustainable tourism.

A Culinary Melting Pot

Kerala has had lavish helpings of multiple cultures, making its platter one of the most diverse in the world.

Arundhati Hazra



Kerala has always been a melting pot of cultures, with Muziris on the Malabar coast being a key port for ancient Greek, Roman, and Persian vessels since the 3rd century BC. Kerala's cuisine has thus uniquely evolved, incorporating its diverse influences.

The Nadars, a trading community of Kerala, were among the earliest to incorporate elements of global cuisines into their cooking. They popularised the use of jaggery, plantains, and desiccated coconut, epitomised in dishes like *pazham pori* (plantain fritters) and *kaalan* (made with coconut, yam, and

yogurt), and leveraged Kerala's position in the spice route to introduce new spices like chillies, and dry fruits like cashews, into the local cuisine.

The *sadya*, most commonly served during Onam, is a typical example of Vedic influences at play. The composition and presentation of the *sadya*, with rice and *parippu* at the centre, surrounded by small helpings of vegetables in various forms like *avial* and *thoran*, culminating in *payasam* and buttermilk, exemplifies the sattvic principles of harmony and balance in food.

North Kerala's Mappila cuisine developed as a result of the arrival of Arab traders to Kerala's shores. The *mandi*, a biryani-like dish influenced by its Yemen counterpart, is popular in many Malabari homes, while the Thalassery biryani has developed distinctly



Right: A traditional *sadya* feast laid out on a banana leaf.

Facing page, top: A delicious plate of homemade chicken biryani laid atop a banana leaf, accompanied by papad, raita, and salan.

Facing page, bottom left: A bowl of *avial* filled with traditional Kerala vegetables such as drumstick, yams, and plantain.

Facing page, bottom right: *Semiya* (vermicelli) *payasam* cooked in ghee and milk and topped with cashews and raisins.





These mouth-watering regional cuisines are available at Sterling Resorts in Wayanad, Munnar, Thekkady, and Anaikatti.

from its Mughal counterpart, with its accompaniments of raita and coconut chutney demonstrating the merging of cultures.

The arrival of Syrian Christians to India from Persia, starting in the 3rd century, added yet another layer to Kerala's food. The vegetarian thoran got a meaty twist, while chicken stew was enhanced with coconut milk to create the beloved *mappas*. Later,



CELEBRATIONS

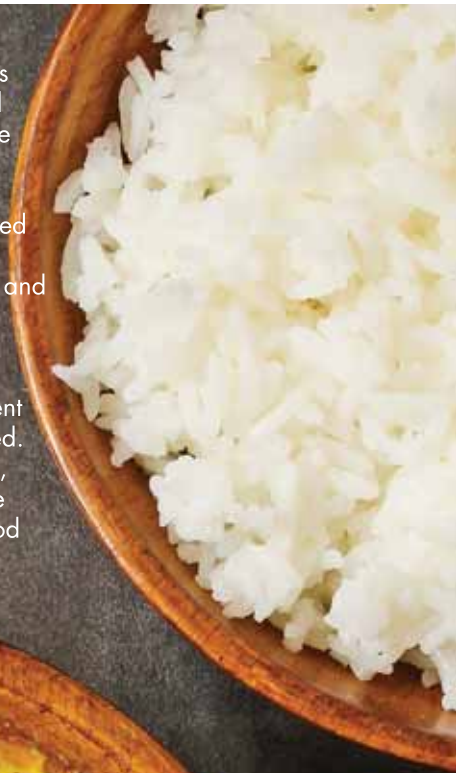
Portuguese influences gave rise to dishes like *sardinha assada*, made with sardines favoured by the Portuguese.

Seafood is an integral component of Kerala cuisine, with common fish being pomfret, king fish, and mackerel. Fish curry, or *meen vevichathu*, is traditionally made in earthen pots, while *meen pollichathu*, fried fish with coconut, is made in banana leaves, and will leave you licking your fingers.

There are differences in preparation styles within Kerala as well. For example, in North Kerala, coconut is an integral part of fish curry and sambar, while in

the southern parts, especially in Kottayam, fish curry is sometimes made without coconut. Tamarind is a common souring agent in the north while *kudampuli* is used in the south. Biryani also differs by region—all ingredients are cooked together in Kozhikodan biryani, while in Thalassery biryani, rice and meat are cooked separately.

Today, the centuries-old multiculturalism means that the culinary barriers between different communities in Kerala are blurred. The diversity in flavours, textures, and cooking techniques all serve to add richness to the shared food culture of the state.



Meen molee (fish stew) prepared with coconut milk, curry leaves, ginger, and black pepper, accompanied by a bowl of rice.

Arundhati Hazra works a 9-to-9 job so that she can indulge in her three key vices—travelling, eating, and buying lots of books. Her dream is to explore every country in the world, and write about it.




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