

October 2015

Sterling



A Sterling Holidays Magazine

WORLD

It's a wonderful world!



A whiff of *freshness*

Experience the renewed, uplifted, and modernised versions of our resorts.



Destination

Admire the breathtaking scenery whilst exploring the quaint city of Darjeeling.

Road Trips

Longing for an offbeat adventure?
Drive down to Goa!

The facade of the newly upgraded Darjeeling - Khush Alaya.

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From MD's Office



Namaste!

Creating exciting vacation experiences for our members is core to all activities we undertake. And in line with this, we have upgraded six of our flagship resorts—Darjeeling - Khush Alaya, Kodai - By The Valley, Ooty - Elk Hill, Manali - White Mist, Mussoorie - Dancing Leaves and Yercaud - Rock Perch—with best-in-class facilities, allowing you to choose from 24 holidaying options. A sneak preview of what's in store has been presented in this issue; we believe that guests who vacation at these properties will enjoy newer, fresher experiences. So now you have six more new reasons to celebrate this festive season!

Each region in this vast nation has its own unique way of celebrating a festival—the feature on Dussehra illustrates this aspect. We at Sterling Holidays understand these nuances and have made special arrangements for our guests to explore and experience these windows of cultural extravagance. We welcome you to spend this festive season at our resorts and take home memories that you will cherish for life.

To enhance the indigenous experience at the resorts, we have introduced 'Flavours of the Land'—delectable local cuisine options that present you with a choice of authentic mouth-watering dishes. So give your taste buds a treat the next time you holiday with us.

And adding a dash of adventure, a range of activities that include the Burma bridge, Sloth walk, jumpering, rapelling, zip line and many more have been launched at Munnar - Terrace Greens, Ooty - Fern Hill and Yelagiri - MariGold Ridge. Go ahead, give your holiday that extra dose of excitement.

It is a wonderful world out there, and we invite you to explore it with us at our resorts.

Happy Holidays!

Ramesh Ramanathan

“Travelling—it leaves you speechless, then turns you into a storyteller.”

– Ibn Battuta

A whiff of *freshness*

“And suddenly you know: It’s time to start something new and trust the magic of beginnings.” - Meister Eckhart



Kodai - By The Valley

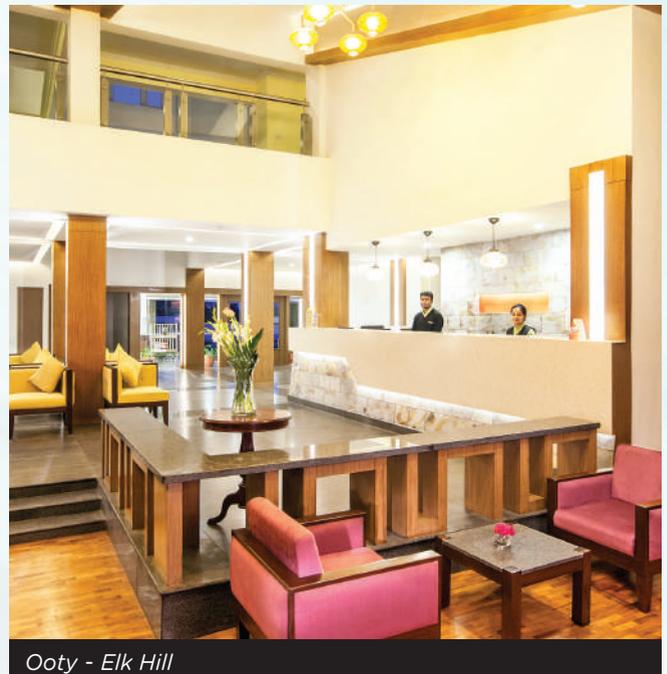
Sterling Holidays calls out to you to join in our new beginnings. A totally upgraded experience awaits you at six of our resorts—at Darjeeling, Kodaikanal, Manali, Mussoorie, Ooty and Yercaud. Soak in the newness and weave exciting holiday stories.

KODAI
By The Valley 

▶▶ Planning a holiday at a picturesque hill station? Then Kodai – By The Valley should be your choice. The resort has a unique architectural pattern—the entire hotel resembles a ship; the accommodation block is leaf-shaped and the business block takes the form of a lotus. The living spaces have been done up tastefully to exude an earthy elegance. Kodai – By The Valley definitely stands out amidst the misty hills. Come, soak in the picture-perfect splendour of Kodai.

OOTY
Elk Hill 

▶▶ As its blue and green curly leaf logo indicates, Ooty – Elk Hill captures the magnificence of the Nilgiri



Ooty - Elk Hill

peaks as well as the eucalyptus expanse that guide the winding roads of Ooty. An organic vegetable garden allows guests to hand-pick their food and our chef to prepare an interesting dish that is guaranteed to delight the senses.

Elk Hill has always been an enchanting holiday resort location, but now there's much more to enhance the sense of warmth. The décor exudes a contemporary charm; the furniture is classic, and the aesthetically chosen lighting lends depth to the interiors. Beat the summer heat; relax in the cool climes at Ooty - Elk Hill.

MANALI White Mist

►► As its name indicates, White Mist is all about the aura of romance and adventure that engulfs the terrain of mountains and valleys. The misty environment and cool, pristine air wafting across the Himalayas is sure to put you in a trance.

The rooms here offer a picture of comfort and luxury—you can choose to bask in the reflected glory of the mountains, or go on adventure-filled excursions. White Mist makes you feel one with the idyllic splendour Manali is blessed with.



Manali - White Mist

PLACES TO VISIT



MUSSOORIE - DANCING LEAVES

- **Kempty Falls**
An ideal picnic spot located at a height of 4,500 feet and is surrounded by high mountain ranges
- **Yamuna Bridge**
A spot to go fishing for trout
- **Lake Mussoorie**
Experience the beautiful view of the Doon Valley, waterfalls and paddle boating activity



OOTY - ELK HILL

- **Avalanche Sanctuary**
A place filled with thick shola forests, wild flora and fauna, and the still blue lake
- **Needle Rock**
Witness the conical-shaped rock formation and breathtaking panoramic view of the lush green plains and grasslands



KODAI - BY THE VALLEY

- **Solar Physical Observatory**
Explore the very unique collections of recorded solar activity available in the world
- **Elephant Valley**
A picturesque location with streams, river and waterfalls



Mussoorie - Dancing Leaves

MUSOORIE

Dancing Leaves

►► Mussoorie - Dancing Leaves, situated amidst the dense foliage of the deodar trees on a five-acre stretch of hillside land, offers an idyllic break from the humdrum of city life. Sit and enjoy the beauty of the alluring Doon Valley from your balcony. The long dancing leaves in the logo of the resort is drawn in the form of the leaf of the deodar that grows abundantly in the region, infusing the air with its pleasant aroma.

The renewed landscape includes beautiful flower gardens and for those who choose to holiday with us, it is a chance to catch nature at its best and capture these rare, fleeting moments on camera. If you are looking for a break from a fast-paced routine, then Dancing Leaves is the best answer.

DARJEELING

Khush Alaya

►► 'Endless knots' forms the core of the theme at Darjeeling - Khush Alaya, symbolising harmony and continuity of design. The resort brings you close to one of the most predominant facets of Darjeeling's topography—the terraced gardens. The sprawling expanse follows the pattern of graduated terrace steps, interspersed with well-manicured flower pockets. Situated next to the Ghoom monastery, which is one of



Darjeeling - Khush Alaya

the oldest in Darjeeling, the interiors of the resort are rich in Tibetan symbols; a recurrent motif here is the lotus that symbolises the progress of the soul. *Mandala* and *chakra* patterns, that mark spiritual transformation, can be found embellished on the rugs, and *vajra*, a symbol of *dharma*, adorns the pillars.

With stunning views of the Kangchenjunga Valley and the snow-capped Himalayas in the background, Khush Alaya is in perfect tune with the mystique of the surrounding mountains.



Yercaud - Rock Perch

YERCAUD Rock Perch

►► Luxury amidst the hills—that's the promise Yercaud - Rock Perch holds for a weary traveller. Its logo, inspired by leaves of the ever-green orange trees, speaks volumes of the green cover here. The landscape abounds in teak, sandalwood, and silver oak trees, coffee,

cardamom and black pepper plantations, and orchards of oranges and guavas. Nestled at the very edge of a cliff in the Servarayan Hills, the resort offers a sweeping view of Salem, which lights up like a jewel box at night. Plush interiors, sophisticated colour tones and stunning views make Yercaud - Rock Perch a much-preferred holiday destination.



MANALI - WHITE MIST

- **Jana Falls**
A beautiful waterfall and an enjoyable trekking destination
- **Rohtang Pass**
A pass offering adventure activities like skiing and snowmobiling
- **Bijli Mahadev Temple**
A temple dedicated to Lord Shiva that sits atop a hill at a height of approximately 2,500 m



DARJEELING - KHUSH ALAYA

- **Batasia Loop and War Memorial**
The War Memorial constructed in the memory of the brave sons of Darjeeling who died in battles since 1947
- **Barbotey Rock Garden**
A famous picnic spot with natural waterfalls
- **Tiger Hill**
Experience panoramic views of the Himalayan range, which includes Mt Everest and Kangchenjunga



YERCAUD - ROCK PERCH

- **Kiliyur Falls**
A 300-ft high waterfall and a secluded getaway
- **Yercaud Lake**
A spot offering stunning panoramic views of the hills
- **Pagoda Point**
A place with a pleasant climate and scenic views of the entire hill station

BE REWARDED WHILE YOU SLOUCH ON THE COUCH.

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02

Refer a friend to our representative who will return your call

03

If your friend/s sign up for a vacation ownership membership we will reward you with a HDFC Gift Plus Card worth ₹21,000*.

A Great Holiday Adventure

A holiday is not complete without an adventure. Are you one of those who love it when you feel the adrenaline rush? Well, look no more! Sterling Holidays presents the perfect opportunity for you and your family to participate in thrilling adventure activities.



10

Brace yourself, for we have a unique holiday plan in store for you at our Ooty - Fern Hill, Yelagiri - MariGold Ridge and Munnar - Terrace Greens resorts. Yelagiri - MariGold Ridge recently introduced activities ranging from trekking to paintball within close proximity of the resort. Following this, Ooty and Munnar have introduced many activities in their respective resorts as well! There is a treasure-trove of adventure for the entire family to unlock.

A PEEK INTO SOME OF THE ADVENTURES WE OFFER YOU...

 **Ooty - Fern Hill** presents you with the opportunity to discover yourself through a range of activities. Risk your steps with a simulated earthquake feel as you aim to complete the Earthquake Walk. Draw on all your reserves to hop from one rope to another while crossing the Burma Bridge.

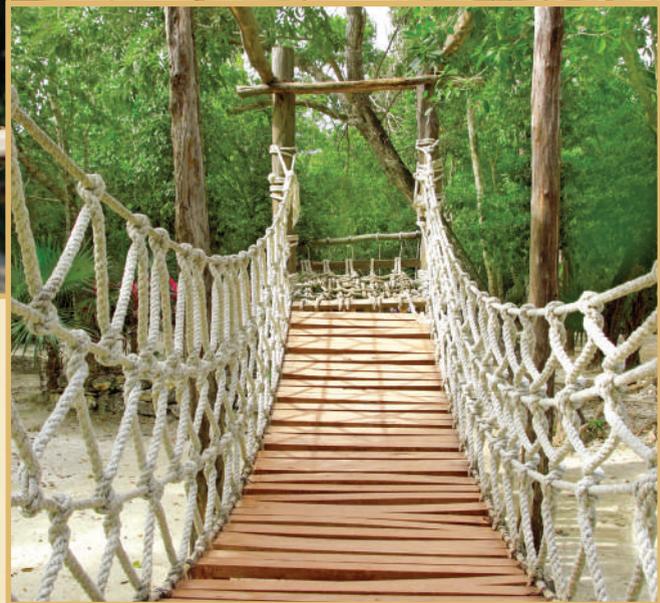
And if you are game for some more, give Sloth Walk a try—walk on a rope line while holding onto another above you for support. Find the elusive balance—try crossing the Swinging Bridge in one go. These rope activities will test your endurance, so don't give up till you reach the end.



Our Tower Climbing activity is equally thrilling and so is the Wall Climbing activity, a fun yet challenging climb that needs grit and determination. Challenge your willpower and body strength through these tasks.

 **Munnar - Terrace Greens** offers rappelling and jumpering activities! You can trek and climb real hills with rope devices. In addition to spicing up your holiday at Sterling, these activities are great for memorable photos too—so capture them, share them and these memories are sure to bring a smile to your face.

Munnar offers high and low rope activities as well, like the Burma Bridge, Zip Line, Valley Crossing, Step Across, Free Fall and Web Climbing. Let the adrenaline rush take over as you let go with the Free Fall. Use your body strength to cross valleys and walk on shaky rope lines. Get rid of your fear of heights with the Valley Crossing activity. Try every activity to determine your strength while also making new memories by watching your family overcome these obstacles!



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Make the most of what our resorts have to offer you. Redefine fun and relive happiness by taking part in a host of extreme adventure activities organised for you at Ooty - Fern Hill and Munnar - Terrace Greens.



The Mountains Are Calling...

Darjeeling is considered a magical place thanks to its mountains and valleys—touched by the delicateness of clouds—painting beautiful landscapes.

Text: Husena Vadnagarwala

I hit the road earlier this year to explore the countless possibilities this world has in store. The top of my travel wish-list had Darjeeling written all over it; not a big surprise to those who are aware that I am a sucker for mountains. The mist, the weather, the greens and the blues—they not only make me feel rejuvenated but almost give me a new lease on life! I knew the mountains were calling when I was asked to travel to Darjeeling and explore Sterling Holidays' resort, Darjeeling - Khush Alaya. The resort is situated in Ghoom, which is at an altitude higher than Darjeeling, making it one of the best locations for someone who loves the mountains.

My week-long sojourn got off to a good start with a flight to Bagdogra airport and then a trip uphill. The journey was quite pleasant. We took short breaks, mostly for coffee, and reached the resort in about four hours. I checked into my room; a room so warm and cosy with a bed that had me falling asleep in no time.



The interior of the Darjeeling - Khush Alaya resort

One thing we have learned from cinema is that every journey into the hills is accompanied by that dramatic moment in the morning where we wake up and rush to the window, drawing open the curtains to a beautiful view. Keeping up with this tradition, I opened the curtains of my room and was greeted by a breathtaking landscape! I gasped and exclaimed, 'Wow!', as I looked out to see the incredible mountain ranges, but it wouldn't be fair to claim that I could capture my amazement in just one word. I etched the amazing view of the Himalayas into my memory for it was very special to me—my very first tryst with the Himalayas. As it turns out, the evenings in Darjeeling are just as spectacular. I caught the most beautiful sunset I'd ever experienced as I looked at the far end of the sky, the horizon playing with shades of red and orange. Though I had my camera with me, I didn't quite feel like taking a picture for it was one of those moments where soaking in the experience was far more imperative than capturing it all. Instead, I stood there breathing in the fresh air, with the mist surrounding me. It was truly magical!

The temptation to get out and bask in the natural beauty of Darjeeling was so strong that I spent the next day of my stay exploring the town. We began by visiting the Batasia Loop, a war memorial for Gorkha soldiers who lost their lives in the line of duty. Batasia Loop is also where you board the Darjeeling Himalayan toy train and it chugs away on the loop, with the majestic Kangchenjunga mountain



The Darjeeling Himalayan toy train moving along its trail on the Batasia Loop

range in the backdrop. This was followed by a visit to the famous tea gardens of Darjeeling. Before we departed, a kind lady at a stall asked if we wanted some tea prepared with freshly plucked tea leaves. Though I am not a seer, it doesn't take special powers to realise that turning down her offer would be a mistake. The tea was definitely one of the best of its kind that I have ever had.

If shopping is on your mind after a day spent exploring, the Tibetan Refugee Self-Help Centre is the right place to go, especially for beautiful carpets and Tibetan souvenirs. The best part of shopping here is that the money you spend goes towards the rehabilitation of Tibetan refugees. Not only do you get to understand and experience a part of the Tibetan culture through these souvenirs, but also contribute towards a good deed! Our sightseeing trip ended with having lunch at Glenary's, a charming restaurant on Mall Road, and some tea shopping at Golden Tips (I highly recommend the Makaibari tea). We were also lucky enough to witness a traditional Tibetan procession as we walked back to the car.

As the time to leave came closer, we tried to see and explore as much as we possibly could. We definitely didn't want to leave without visiting the Ghoom Monastery, the oldest monastery in Darjeeling. It shares its boundary wall with Sterling Holidays' resort. This was my first visit to a monastery and it was a wonderful and spiritual experience. We also got to stop at Zero Point at the Indo-Nepal border for some more tea and wrapped up our visit with a trip to the quaint town of Mirik, which is absolutely scenic.

Every destination you visit leaves you with stories and memories, and Darjeeling was no exception. It gave me many precious moments and memories to take back home; memories that make me pause and reunite with the world. I hope the mountains call me back again.



The breathtaking view of Darjeeling from the resort



The intricately structured Ghoom Monastery



Capture the

Dussehra spirit



If the battle is that between good and evil, and the victor is good, then the celebrations have to be with a bang. Let's dive into the vibrant variations of Dussehra in India.

Come January and one of the most-awaited emails in everybody's inbox is the list of holidays for the year. Travel magazines come up with special supplements on the best places to visit during long weekends and holidays. Rising disposable incomes, increasing penetration of the Internet, and changing lifestyles—all these are steadily transforming the way festivals are celebrated in India. Earlier, festivals meant prayer services at home, a visit to the temple, lip-smacking delicacies, and visits from near and dear ones. However, for Gen Y and increasingly the older generation too, festivals have now led to travelling to unwind.

India, with its innumerable festivals, cultures, and cuisine offers great getaways to people wanting to experience a different rhythm each occasion. Gustasp and Jerroo Irani, renowned travel writers, say, "The beauty of living in a country as culturally diverse as India is that at almost any given time, someone, somewhere, is celebrating something. What makes it even more special is when the same festival is celebrated in different ways around the country— Dussehra being just one example. Then there are those festivals that are celebrated throughout the country, but are just done bigger and better in certain parts, like the ten days of the Ganesh Chaturthi in Mumbai, Janmashtami in Mathura, and of course Durga Puja in Kolkata. There are also places that are especially well-known as the central point of certain festivals and pilgrimages, like the Rath Yatra in Puri, the Camel Fair (though not really a festival, it definitely has a celebratory vibe) in Pushkar, and Varanasi's Ganga Mahotsav. There can be no better

way to experience India than to do it when she's at her most colourful—and she's positively resplendent when she's celebrating a festival." Dance to the beat of the *dhak* (traditional drums), be enthralled by arrays of dolls, spectacular pageantry, enactment of a Battle of Yore, and age-old ethnic celebrations—travel across India and soak in the many hues of the Dussehra festival.

DUSSEHRA Kullu

It is during Dussehra one understands why Kullu is often known as the 'Valley of Gods'. This quaint hill station in Himachal Pradesh celebrates Dussehra in an unconventional manner. Hinduism interacts with local traditions as the day assumes a syncretic flavour—more than 250 of the deities' native to the district are paid obeisance to. Idols of these deities arrive from all over



A procession on its way to Dhalpur Maidan, Kullu

the district and beyond as a mark of respect to the presiding deity, Lord Raghunatha. The Dhalpur Maidan, where these idols are placed, looks like a *mela* of Gods come down to join in the festivities. This abides by the tradition set up in 1637 CE by Raja Jagat Singh when the local King Jaganand installed an idol of Lord Raghunatha on his throne as an act of penance, after which the idol came to be known as the ruling deity of the valley. Following this, the Raja of Kullu becomes the charioteer of Lord Raghunatha, playing a central role in the festival and thus leading the Rath Yatra.

“What makes the Kullu Dussehra special is the congregation of deities from across the valley. As has been the tradition for four centuries, they are brought in processions on foot to Kullu, where they reside throughout the week-long celebrations. As in any rural fair, the vibe is friendly and everyone’s high on festivities,” says Simar Preet Kaur, well-known travel writer. Comparable to the Parvati Valley festival, Dussehra takes on an air of multiculturalism in Kullu: the Himachal Pradesh State Government declared it an international festival in 1972. Ever since, the jubilations have garnered the attention of tourists from all around the world.

DURGA PUJA

West Bengal

Durga Puja, which signifies the power of *shakti* embodied in Goddess Durga, is Bengal's version of Navaratri. Although celebrated for ten days, it is only from the sixth to the ninth day that community marquees (*pandals*)



An intricately decorated statue of the Goddess Durga

Image © Dhiman Chatterjee



A grand presentation of the Goddess Durga with the other idols by her side

Image © www.shutterstock.com

become home to idols of the Mother Goddess and her children—Lakshmi, Saraswati, Ganesh, and Karthikeya.

The four-day annual festival is a spectacular melange of piety and extravaganza, religious and social. Communities compete to create marquees that showcase art and architecture and artisans fashion idols using innovative materials and styles. The recitation of *slokas* and mantras, the offerings and *aaratis*, the beat of the *dhak* and the *dhunuchi* (earthen pots with smoking dried coconut shells) dance add up to an extraordinary spectacle.

Often called the 'Rio Carnival' of the East, Durga Puja is marked by flavourful food, lively fairs, and cultural programmes. On Maha Saptami, Maha Ashtami, and Maha Nabami, the streets are filled with *pandal*-hoppers who throng to view the idols and impressive lighting. Durga Puja is not really a religious festival limited to any one community. It's more like a five-day carnival, a riot of culinary and sartorial adventures.

On Dashami, the final day, women rub *sindoor* (crimson powder) on each other and afterwards grand processions are taken out to immerse the Goddess and her pantheon in the river Ganga or other water bodies, accompanied by music, dance, and crackers. Soaking in this atmosphere of devotion and festivity can be a heady experience.



DISCOVER THE FACETS OF DUSSEHRA

Celebrations of Dussehra take a whole new form in Maharashtra—people celebrate by exchanging sweets and *apta* leaves. In villages, people would create a heap of the leaves, as they believe it signifies good wishes and prosperity. As per tradition, the elders thrash the heap of leaves before distributing them to the young ones as gold.

Dussehra is a time of celebration, music, and dance in Gujarat. Women in *lehenga cholis* and men in traditional *kedias* set out on festive evenings to perform *garba* and *dandiya rasa*, the most popular folk dances of the State.



Image © www.shutterstock.com



Last year's Dussehra celebrations at our resort in Kodaikanal



The devotees light lamps and chant mantras

VIJAYA DASAMI

South India

In Tamil Nadu, and to a lesser extent in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Karnataka, the nine-day Navaratri festival culminates on Vijaya Dasami. The central piece of the festivities is a display of mud and wooden dolls on a set of decorated steps—Bomma Kolu, Bombe Habba, or Bommala Kolu.

Kolu or *Golu* in Tamil means a sovereign sitting in *darbar*; here, Goddess Durga is supposed to be sitting in her *Kolu*, prior to the slaying of demon Mahishasura. The tradition is supposed to be in existence for at least 500 years, from the time of the Vijayanagar kings. Another popular legend related to Kolu is that since Goddess Durga needed tremendous power, all other gods and goddesses transferred their power to Her and stood still as statues. To respect this sacrifice, Hindus revere small statues in the shape of gods and goddesses during the festival.

The first dolls to be placed on the steps (usually in odd numbers of 3, 5, 7, 9) after the *kalash*, is the *marapachi* or wooden dolls. The number of steps depends on the variety of dolls available for display. Typically, the first dolls are gifted to a woman by her parents at the time of her wedding. Then on, she starts her own collection and keeps adding to it every year. Most of these dolls made of clay—recently Plaster of Paris has also made an appearance—depict mythological characters. Popular ones are *Ashtalakshmis*, *Dashavatar*, *Krishna Leela*, and *Ramayana*. There are also collections depicting everyday life—village scenes, temple processions, wedding rituals, a game of cricket, etc. Women and children visit homes that have dolls on display, and exchange pleasantries. The ninth day or *navami* is celebrated as Saraswathi Puja or Ayudha



Celebrating Kolu in Tamil Nadu

Puja (worship of books and tools of craftsmen). And the last day, Vijaya Dasami, is when all auspicious things are begun—education, new entrepreneurial ventures, or business alliances.

It may have different names: Dussehra, Dasara, Durga Puja, Vijaya Dasami, Bijoya, Bijoya Dasami; different meanings: battle that was won on the tenth day, the day the ten-headed one was vanquished; and different legends: Durga's victory over Mahishasura, Ram's victory over Raavan. But the festival has in its core the celebration of the victory of good over evil.

Connecting Travellers

The Sterling Holidays family strives hard to enrich your holiday experience. Making your trip worth remembering is our primary goal. Here is what one such family member had to say...



*Barun Nayak, Holiday Activities Manager,
Kodai - By The Lake, Kodaikanal*

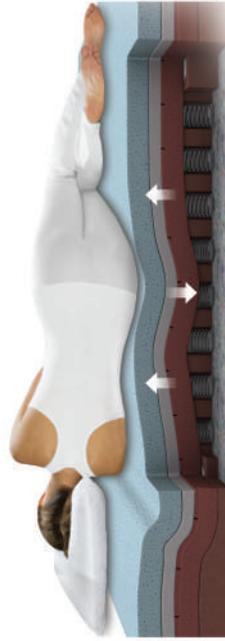
I joined Sterling Holidays in 2010 and it's been an incredible journey thus far. For the last five years that I have been here, I have actually seen us grow from strength to strength. Anybody can provide a neat room and good, hygienic food but what makes us special is our Holiday Activities team; it is our USP (unique selling proposition). People love getting together and meeting other people so we bring families holidaying with us together and help them connect. Especially during festivals, when people come to our resorts, they expect that there will be something wonderful in store for them. We make sure that we do not let them down by putting up a good festive themed show with various acts so that they don't miss their homes. We ensure that our guests feel comfortable and being in a new place does not make them feel homesick. You'll always approach a person who smiles at you and acknowledges you, right? So this is what we believe in—being friendly, being approachable so that our guests eventually recognise us. We get to learn their interests and preferences, which helps us serve them better. Like I now share a special bond with Mr Rao; whenever he comes with his family, the first thing he does is ask for me and that feels so nice. It is a great employee-guest relationship! I simply love what I do as my efforts help hundreds of families have great holidays.

SPRINGFIT
MATTRESSES & SLEEP SYSTEMS

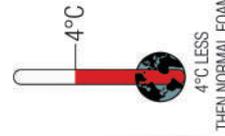
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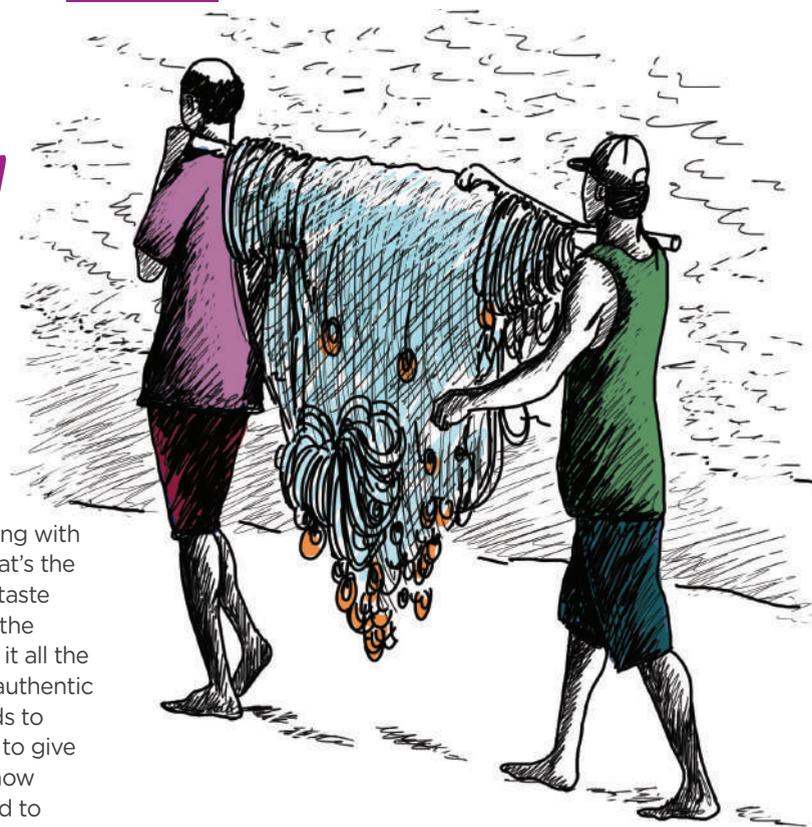


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Flavours of the Land

Relish the local flavours not just at our resorts; here's how to treat your taste buds even after you get back home.

You set out on your holiday with an extensive itinerary overflowing with places to visit; but sadly, there's no room left for the food. Yet that's the first thing we describe when asked about the holiday—how our taste buds were treated at the destination. Food is an integral part of the experience and the local cuisine that we provide is sure to make it all the more memorable. And so, we strive to serve you with the most authentic dishes savoured only by the locals. We've gone leaps and bounds to procure the rarest of ingredients and have mastered the recipes to give you a delightful experience. And for when you get back, here's how you can remind yourself how good times tasted. So get on board to experience this culinary journey and awaken the foodie in you!



Palkatti Pattani Khorma

80 gms dried green peas -
(soaked overnight)

100 gms cottage cheese

200 gms onions

100 gms tomatoes

3 green chillies

5 tbsp oil

1 tbsp mustard seeds

1 tbsp cumin seeds

6 curry leaves

1 bay leaf

1 two inches cinnamon stick

2 pods cardamom

3 pods cloves

1 tbsp turmeric powder

Half tbsp red chilli powder

Half tbsp coriander powder

Chopped cilantro for garnishing

50 gms ginger garlic paste

2 tbsp fennel seeds

50 gms coconut (grated)

20 gms whole cashew nuts

20 gms poppy seeds



Recipe by: Som Nath Bera,
Kodaikanal

Recipe:

- Soak cashew nuts and poppy seeds in water
- Cook soaked peas in a pressure cooker; add salt and turmeric powder
- Heat oil in a wide pan; add mustard seeds, cumin seeds, green chillies and curry leaves
- Add chopped onion and sprinkle some salt and sauté until translucent
- Add chilli, turmeric and coriander powder along with some salt and water to the mashed tomatoes
- Blend well and cook for 3-4 minutes
- Grind ginger garlic paste, fennel seeds, grated coconut, cashew nut and poppy seeds
- When the onion-tomato gravy is thick and boiling, add cooked peas and water
- Add the ground paste midway and keep stirring the mixture
- Sprinkle some chopped cilantro
- Serve hot with steamed rice





Prawn Peri Peri

- 2 kgs prawns
- 50 gms whole Kashmiri chillies
- 60 gms crushed garlic
- 5 pods cloves
- One inch cinnamon
- 1 heaped teaspoon cumin seeds
- 1 heaped teaspoon black pepper
- 2 inches ginger
- Half tbs sugar
- 200 ml Goan toddy vinegar
- 2 tbs oil
- Tamarind



Recipe by:
Anshu Bhatnagar,
Goa

Recipe:

- Start off by boiling the chillies without their seeds for approximately 30 minutes
- Drain the water and blend the chillies with cumin, cinnamon, cloves, black pepper, pulp of tamarind, ginger, garlic and Goan toddy vinegar until it forms a fine paste
- Stir-fry the chilli paste and add sugar and salt to taste
- Gently peel and devein the prawns
- Marinate with the chilli *masala* and keep aside for 30 minutes
- In a heavy-bottom frying pan, stir-fry the marinated prawns batch by batch
- Garnish with freshly chopped coriander and serve with bread and butter



Exhilarating Journey

The routes that connect Mumbai and Goa are breathtaking. It's about time you hit the road and experience an adventurous road trip.

Text: Pooja Raisinghani

It's common knowledge that Goa is the preferred go-to destination for travellers and party-seekers all over the country. And while most of us are guilty of taking the quick air route or overnight train to get there and get the revelry started, I was recently coaxed by friends to try the scenic drive to and from the sunshine state. I have to say that I was not thrilled in the least, but promises of acres and acres of lush green carpets, gushing waterfalls and the spicy, mouth-watering cuisine on the way was all the convincing I needed.

Another factor I had to consider was I was setting out to do this road-trip in the monsoon! But while many destinations are presumed to lose their charm after a rain or two, Goa seems inviting with its light drizzles, and of course, a drop in its otherwise high-tourist volume.

So I planned to set out, exploring both the major routes that connected the two states of Maharashtra and Goa—one that pierced through most of the major cities and the other that hugged the picturesque coastline.

Starting off on the NH-4 Pune-Kolhapur route, my vehicle raced through the rapidly changing landscapes, almost mirrored by awkward transitioning of radio channels on the speakers. After a drive uphill, I reached Amboli. I'd always heard thrilling stories about zero visibility but never experienced it. Here, crawling at snail's pace, my car followed the sound of water gushing a short distance away. And there it was—the Amboli waterfall, in all its glory! I joined in the upbeat throngs of fellow travellers enjoying the fall, the chilly mist and the curtain of fog cast over the nearby valley.

Back on the road with the sun setting, there was no real view to enjoy and I began daydreaming of my destination and the resort that awaited me. Charting my route to the luxurious Goa - Club Estadia in Alto Porvorim, I arrived after sundown and was welcomed by a comfy bed in a toasty room and a relaxing bath. Ah, I couldn't have asked for more!



The simplistic Goan lifestyle intrigues the travellers



The misty waterfall amuses the crowds at Amboli



Goa stages multiple elegant churches



I took a couple of ferry rides and explored the neighbouring islands of Chorão and Divar, perfect for observing the tranquil Goan lifestyle and exquisite Portuguese villas adorned with intricate sculptures, a stark contrast to the simplicity of the village and its people.

Chorão Island is also home to the Dr. Salim Ali Bird Sanctuary, full of dense mangroves, which can be navigated via canoe.

On Divar Island, I made my way uphill to reach a stunning church that caught my gaze while I was on my ferry ride. It was in Piedade, a small, typical Goan village that this church, The Church of Our Lady of Compassion, also known as Our Lady of Piety, stood gracefully, overlooking the sea and the nearby islands. With not a single soul in sight, I captured the memory of that moment filled with serenity.

How I wish I could have stayed longer!



Ferry ride to the hidden islands



The magnificent Mãe De Deus Church located near Baga Beach

Images © Pooja Raisinghani

The next morning, feeling a bit adventurous, I decided to start off by checking out the lesser known sights of Goa rather than the usual tourist haunts. I explored islands and rustic Goan villages. A highlight of this adventurous rambling was the multiple ferry rides I took and the almost-hidden islands they led me to! Next on my list was Old Goa, home to some of the oldest sights and churches in the state. I spent the rest of the day exploring the well-known Basilica of Bom Jesus and other stunning, historic churches and monuments in the vicinity.

Thankfully, my resort was also well located and not far from some of the liveliest beaches in North Goa. On my way to Baga Beach, I stumbled upon the magnificent and serene, painted in all-white, Mãe De Deus Church in Saligao. This lovely church holds a wonderful wooden altar and statue of Mãe De Deus (Mother of God), flaunting the Goan workmanship, painted in a vibrant gold colour. I was told that in the evenings, the church has a divine charm as it is illuminated with the glow of yellow lights. I promised myself that I'd come back, but now it was time to hit the tourist favourites. In Baga, I met fellow travellers, shared some interesting conversations over lip-smacking seafood, clinked glasses and finished it all off with a walk down the tourist-filled shore. This is how Goa slyly mesmerises me with its charming ways, time and again.

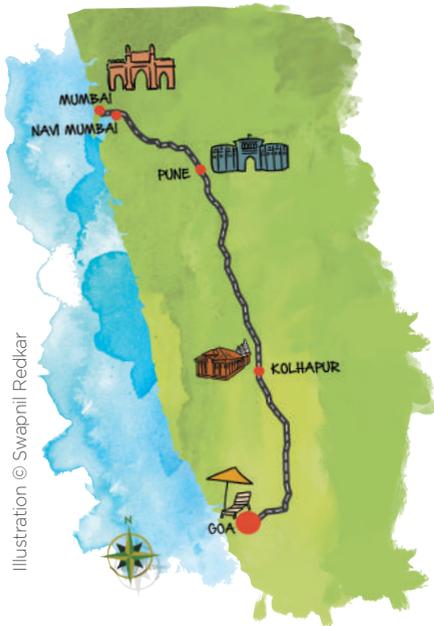


Illustration © Swapnil Redkar

NH-4 Pune - Kolhapur route



The Ganpatipule Beach near the majestic temple attracts devotees from all over



The coastal route flaunts its glorious virgin beaches

It was time to head back home, but I looked forward to the scenic drive that lay ahead. So the all-new quest via NH 66, the Chiplun-Ratnagiri Konkan route began. My first stop was Tarkarli, known for its tranquil beach and also, scuba diving and snorkelling. I also passed via Malvan, drooling at the sight of the food there. I made my way to the Tarkarli beach and stared out at the waves and the setting, allowing it to be etched in my memory. It was like I was waiting for an epiphany, and it did come. I realised I couldn't leave without sampling the spicy Malvani food. I made my way back to savour what was easily the best seafood I had ever had in my life! The thing about road trips is that you can always turn around, isn't it?

Now you'd think that I was probably done with beaches. Wrong! A four-hour drive took me through the most stunning route with sights of pristine, virgin beaches. My next pit stop was the obvious, but oh-so striking, Ganpatipule. I reached the crowded Ganpatipule Beach just before sunset, perfect timing, I thought. This beach

Detours:

- Lonavala (hill station)
- Khandala (hill station)
- Alibaug (beach)
- Katraj (wildlife sanctuary)
- Kolhapur (fort)
- Amboli (waterfall)
- Tarkarli Beach (scuba diving and snorkelling)
- Malvan (village life and Malvani food)
- Ganpatipule Beach (temple and beach)
- Harihareshwar (beach)
- Murud-Janjira (fort)

Distance:

- 590* kms

*Approximate estimation. The time and distance may vary as per the detours

stands apart with its beautiful red stone Ganpati temple. This stopover, coupled with the sunset, marked the end of my detours but other stops lay ahead temptingly, like Harihareshwar, Murud-Janjira and Alibaug. Next time, I thought to myself.

Planning your journey, speckled with doubts of whether or not you'd be able to accomplish all that you set out for can be quite exhilarating. You may be able to chart out every turn, every stop, but it still is in those few places that you stumble upon unknowingly, that make for a great adventure. Anything less than that and you just might miss that much-needed dose of adrenaline. So get hold of your loved ones, ditch those flights and take a drive for an unforgettable vacation!



NH 66 Chiplun - Ratnagiri Konkan route

Duration:



Sterling Updates



You thought you would have forgotten it by now but you surprise yourself each time you effortlessly pedal your way forward. We understand the value of connecting with people, with the place and, most importantly, with yourself. We have launched Sterling GO Cycle in association with TI Cycles (a Murugappa Group brand) at our resort Kodai - By The Lake. So this time when you arrive at the resort, you will find a fleet of bicycles waiting for you to make your stay more adventurous and thrilling.

There is something about riding through a bumpy hilly region, the challenging trail that makes you feel like a true explorer, an experience that is so simplistic yet so rich. Feel the wind in your hair and reminisce all your childhood memories. This will be one of those precious moments where you feel like a kid again instead of just imagining it, for you are as bright-eyed as your little loved ones who ride alongside you. So either head out all by yourself or pick up the tandem and ride the mountains with your family!



ADVANTAGES OF CYCLING



CREATE NEW IDEA
Instigate your brain cells.



STOP GLOBAL WARMING
Save our earth.



ENHANCE NUTRITION INTAKE
Advantages are galore.



SAVE OIL
4,785 KM/LITER
Become more energy efficient.



BURN CALORIES
MAKE YOU STRONG
Staying fit is the new mantra.



HAVE A GOOD HEART RATE
As health is wealth.



REDUCE CARBON DIOXIDE
Reduce the risk of ever more extreme weather.



SPEED UP!!!
PRACTICE YOURSELF
There is so much to explore!



MEET NEW FRIENDS
Become diverse.
It's such a beautiful feeling.



The Yummies



Jus 4 Kids

We understand how your lives revolve around your little ones. Usually, you pick a destination based on the potential of a place to keep them entertained. This arrangement is to let you relax and have your share of stress-free times. From fun outdoor activities to joyful rooms, Sterling Holidays has taken care of it all. And how can we miss out on that one thing kids fuss about the most—food. Well, you needn't worry one bit for we now have a special menu for our little guests. With cute options that are sure to intrigue their little minds and food so yummy, you'd probably want to steal a bite too. You'll be left to have delightful conversations as the fun table mat would keep them occupied. You could maybe join them later to make some more fun memories. Our journey only gets better with time. So start planning for your next fun vacation!



Super Duper SOUPS



Collecting Stories

We are flattered by the love and admiration showered by our valued members and guests. Here are some of their kind words...

→ **RAJA KRISHNAMOORTHY** a.k.a. Kitty, director, producer, screenwriter and actor has charmed the Tamil film industry. Apart from acting, he is the director HRD of Talent Maximus India Ltd., as well. Kitty has also authored a renowned book called 'Rajini Punctantra: Business and Life Management'. We are privileged for having served such a prominent personality. Here's what Kitty had to say about us:

"We have been customers and fans of Sterling Holidays for years now. It has always been one of those 'travel far away, but feel at home' experiences for us. Like our last trip to Kodai, we had a good package, thanks to the personal interest shown by the Customer Care team. Our pick-up and travel to Kodai was comfortable and when we reached the reception, we were welcomed and our rooms were ready in no time. We had a compact studio for the two of us and it was clean and well-provided on all the days. The food was consistently very good. On all those six days, I was amazed by the kind of attention given by the restaurant staff to provide variety, taste and sumptuousness to the buffet. The staff took care to check what we liked and made sure that our personal needs were met. Our daily, long morning walks would be followed by a well-spread breakfast, followed by selective trips, or hanging around the resort and engaged in some soulful reflective discussions. We celebrated our 38th wedding anniversary there; the music by Sandeep and Shibu blew our minds; we sang along, and had new friends from Bengaluru, Mumbai and other places join us. It was a special day for us. We really didn't want the holiday to end. This is precisely why we love Sterling!"



→ **RAGHU RAI**, a prominent photographer and photojournalist in the industry has glorified renowned publications like 'The Statesman' and 'India Today' with his work. Having accounted his life's experience in his book 'Raghu Rai's India: Reflections in Colour and Reflections in Black and White', he's also known to have served the jury for World Press Photo and UNESCO's International Photo Contest. On his recent stay at our Darjeeling - Khush Alaya resort, he shared his experience:

"Ghoom is a small hill town; the journey is like any other. But as you take a left turn, within five minutes you arrive at Darjeeling - Khush Alaya and suddenly a beautiful view of the Himalayas unfolds. Clouds playing with small settlements down there and high peaks including part of Kangchenjunga have their own romance going on with the clouds. The view from my room was a delight, though the property was undergoing upgradation. The staff was caring, the food was presented well and they made sure that we were looked after at all times. The property is coming up really well and I wish Sterling Holidays the very best!"



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