Experience of the discerning traveller

Off the beaten track BONJOUR NORMAN Experiencing the land of nature, culture, cheese, countryside, and love





Experiential_{talk}

THE AGE OF EXPERIENTIAL TRAVEL

What drives evolved travellers to opt for experiential travel instead of indulging in pure relaxation or being in a state of luxury-induced numbness? What, indeed? It is possibly a primal need to make sense of everything – and in this case - to create meaning of their travels through direct experience and learning. They want their time off to also add some value to their life. They want complete immersion. They want to be part of the landscape, live like a local and reconnect with themselves. In fact, travellers voluntarily go through hardships to learn and gather experiences.

Simply seeing the sights is no longer enough for them. They want to go down the path less travelled and connect with people from other cultures and backgrounds. They want travel to be fun and interesting, not just a blur of places and faces. They want to experience cultures, languages, food and people.

This thought process is slowly gaining momentum so much so that this kind of tourism is becoming a global movement towards experiential learning. In response to this, the market is also creating offbeat and new products that fortunately don't conform to a budget type. Such products also may or may not have an element of adventure, integration with the local culture and exclusivity. Local cuisine forms a huge part of this.

The understanding of this segment has also given it strong bragging rights. Staying in a luxurious villa with a private pool in Thailand is great but have you experienced the culture by staying in a homestay there? It's less about where you've been and more about what you've done.

HAZEL JAIN

NEWS IN BRIEF

BELMOND ACQUIRES ICONIC CARIBBEAN RESORT

Belmond has acquired Cap Juluca, a 96-room luxury beach resort on the Caribbean island of Anguilla, British West Indies. It opened its doors for guests this May. Set on one of the Caribbean's most beautiful beaches, overlooking the aquamarine waters of Maundays Bay, the unspoilt setting encourages guests to unwind to the slow rhythm of Caribbean island life.



Disney magic in new resort in HK

Hong Kong Disneyland Resort has opened its Disney Explorers Lodge, a new 750- room resort hotel dedicated to the spirit of exploration. The Disney Explorers Lodge takes the experience of a hotel stay to a new level. This architectural spectacular at the waterfront of Lantau offers to guests an exploratory journey to the exotic cultures of the world, in the unique Disney style of storytelling.



Sandbar excursion at Namale Resort & Spa Fiji

Exceptional coral reefs surround the secret sandbar, offering amazing snorkeling and the chance to witness colorful tropical fish, intricate soft coral, octopus, sea snails, and even sea turtles. They can also learn to husk coconuts by hand, or cozy up under a beach umbrella. It costs \$63 FJD per person, including transportation, F&B, and snorkel gear.





Say hello to sea salt at Alila Seminyak, Bali

Seasalt opens its doors this May in Seminyak. Inspired by its spectacular oceanfront setting and the locally harvested sea salt, Seasalt is a must-go seafood destination around the Seminyak area. Seasalt marks the start of a tantalizing new seascape dining experience, with a dash of Japanese infusion, exciting palates with an enticing taste of the sea in their fresh seafood selection. Diners at Seasalt will find themselves immersed in the sensation of sailing on the ocean, thanks to its inspired design.

Christmas in July!

Catch the Gingerbread Man as he mischievously plots his escape from hungry visitors and prances his way through the Winter Wonderlights as Sovereign Hill in Australia celebrates its annual Christmas from July 1-30, 2017. The Victorian-style buildings will come alive through the magic of large-scale light projections in the dazzling 'Winter Wonderlights' show. With over 20 buildings lit up with yuletide animations, and over 10 km of fairy lights throughout Sovereign Hill's garden, this event is the largest light projection spectacle ever staged in one site anywhere in Australia. General admission for adults is AUD 59.50 and for children (5-15 years) is AUD 27.00. Concession (AUD 47.60), Family (AUD 150.00) and Single Family (AUD 107.00) passes are also available.



A train and a palace

The Al-Andalus train, considered the most luxurious and spacious in the world, takes passengers back to the Golden Age of the 'Belle Époque'. It offers beautifully decorated lounge carriages and comfortable cabins, surrounded by different landscapes every day, and constant attention of its crew. The train's four saloon cars are treasures of railway history dating from 1928 and 1930. In these charming carriages, the breakfast buffet, lunches and dinners are served. It serves rich Spanish cuisine with delicious dishes inspired by the culinary traditions of the people who have shaped its history.





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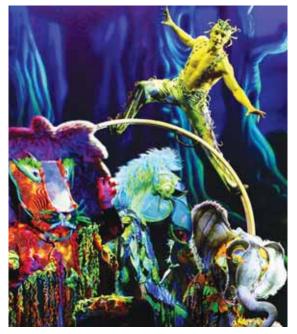
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Russian adventure with Trafalgar

Trafalgar has added a new seven-day 'Festive St Petersburg and Moscow' package starting from \$1,675 per person, based on twin sharing, excluding airfare. On this festive sojourn to visit Russia's two largest cities, travellers will discover the country's vibrant, modern culture, and hear stories of its tumultuous history. Visit the Kremlin in Moscow with a local specialist, and in St. Petersburg, see the Tsar's Winter Palace, explore the Peter and Paul Fortress and enjoy a guided tour of the Hermitage Museum, home to one of the world's largest and most valuable art collections.



Cirque Dreams on NCL

Norwegian Cruise Line is expanding the one-of-a-kind theatrical dining experience Cirque Dreams & Dinner to Norwegian Getaway for the summer season in Europe, as well as debuting a new dining format and must-see show elements of the popular Cirque Dreams and Dinner experiences on Norwegian Breakaway an on Norwegian Epic. All of the shows feature stunning acts, breathtaking costumes and rotating artistry throughout the year so guests can have a new entertainment experience no matter how many times they sail.

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'Friendly Shandong' is what people of the Shandong region in Eastern China call it, and quite literally, the place has a warmth not many destinations around the world can match. Here's a glimpse of the destination.











NISHA VERMA

trikingly different from Beijing and Shanghai, the Shandong region offers a new take on China. From scenic locales to smiling locals, the destination is truly a traveller's delight. Meant for both corporate and leisure travellers, Shandong has everything for everyone. A five-day or more itinerary to Shandong can offer insights into to the rich culture and picturesque locations, which is unlike the usual Chinese itinerary.

QUINTESSENTIAL QINGDAO

A multi-faceted city frequented by the rich and famous of China, Qingdao overlooks the East China Sea and its European architecture is reminiscent of its erstwhile German occupation. Walk past the white colonial buildings with red brick rooftops and you would forget that you are in China. Get the best panoramic view of the city as well as the beach from Xiaoyushan Hill and enjoy the multiple photo opportunities you get. A short drive from there is the Zhanqiao Pier, which is a landmark of the city. Take a long walk at this eight-pass waterfront and enjoy the changing colours of the water. Also visit the much-famed May Fourth Square, which is also one of the symbols of the city.

Another highlight of Qingdao is the popular Tsingtao Brewery Museum, a legacy of the Germans, which takes one through its origin and how ingrained it is in the culture of this city. Take a tour of the 'drunk room' at the brewery, where you feel hammered, without actually getting drunk. Don't forget to relish the fresh beer made here. Also visit the Qingdao Olympic Sailing Center, which played host to the Beijing 2008 Olympics for the sailing competitions. Stay back to witness the sunset from the marina and

soak in the orange hues of fire melting into water. There are many restaurants offering a range of seafood and south Asian delights here, and quite a few for vegetarians as well. In fact, Qingdao also has a couple of Indian specialty restaurants for those who can't survive without their daal and roti.

CONFUCIUS' QUFU

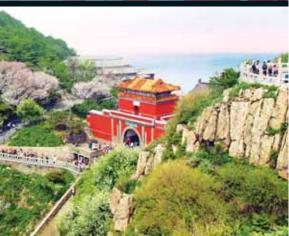
A five-hour long journey from Qingdao over the Qingdao Bay Bridge (or Jiaozhouu Bay Bridge), one of the longest over-water bridges in the world, would take you to Qufu city. Its home to the world-renowned philosopher Confucius.

Take a tour of Confucius' cemetery, his temple and his mansion, which together have been listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site. Known as San Kong (Three Confucian Sites) in Qufu, it attracts thousands of visitors every year. While the cemetery has graves of the Kong clan, or Confucius' descendants, the mansion is where one can find everything that the great saint used in his lifetime. The structure made of stone, offers a nice insight into the life of Confucius, who was also called the King of the Kings, which was the highest honour he was given.

A pilgrimage for many, streets in Qufu are lined with locals selling souvenirs dedicated not only to Confucius, but also the attractions from the entire Shandong region. One can pick up small handicrafts, keychains, engraved mirrors, miniature bone china cups, and many other trinkets from the stalls. There are also women making crispy, thin-grain pancakes on the roadside, which is a specialty in Shandong.

The next morning one can catch the opening ceremony of the ancient city, right in front of the Confucius Temple. The 20-minute performance











ZHANG MINGCHI Deputy Director General, Shandong Tourism Development Commission

Beautiful SHANDONG

Zhang Mingchi, Deputy Director General, Shandong Tourism Development Commission, shares more reasons why Indians should go and visit this destination.

HOW MANY INDIAN ARRIVALS DOES SHANDONG GET?

We received around 36,000 Indian arrivals to Shandong in 2016. While 50 per cent of this were business tourists, the remaining 50 per cent were tourists, with only a few VFR travellers.



WHAT ARE THE OTHER DESTINATIONS AND EXPERIENCES THAT WOULD ATTRACT INDIANS TO SHANDONG?

There are many other places in Shandong besides Qingdao, Qufu, Mount Tai and Jinan. The element which is very important is the difference of climates between India and Shandong. We have four demarcated seasons and visitors can have different views in different seasons. Winters are snowy, which is not as cold as China's north tip. However, tourists can enjoy skiing and other activities. In Spring, we have a variety of blooms as well as flowers. We welcome friends from India to watch the blossoms. A trip to Shandong is never an empty one.

WHAT ARE YOUR EXPECTATIONS FROM INDIA IN 2017?

We are expecting double the numbers from India this year, i.e. 70,000 Indian arrivals. I am sure with agent familiarisation trips and right promotions, we will be able to reach this number very soon.



Walk past the white colonial buildings with red

brick rooftops, and you'll forget that you are in China

ESSENTIAL FACTS

How to reach: Shandong Airlines offer direct flight from Delhi to both Qingdao and Jinan via Kunming four times in a week.

Accommodation:

- Wyndham Hotel Qingdao Xinjiang
- Shangri-La Hotel, Qufu
- Blossoms International Hotel, Tai'an
- Hyatt Regency, Jinan



is colourful, energetic and offers a glimpse into its history. Walk through the complex, which is an architectural wonder and is surrounded by trees dating back to thousands of years and 460 rooms and nine courtyards. The buildings in the courtyards have yellow tiled roofs and red walls, and are surrounded by trees dating back to thousands of years. The main temple structure follows the same architecture, but is much bigger in size and is situated on a raised platform. Called Dacheng Hall, this architectural centre of the temple is surrounded by 28

richly decorated pillars. In fact, people say that when the emperor comes here, they cover these pillars to not arouse the envy of the king.

ATOP MOUNT TAI

A one-half-hour drive from Qufu takes you to Tai'an city-home to Mount Tai, which is known as the eastern mountain of the Five Great Mountains of China. Worshipped for generations, the mountain is visited by locals and foreigners alike. As not many would be game to climb 7000 stairs leading to the top, people can take a van or bus to the Middle Heavenly Gate. After climbing



a steep set of stairs and a 10-minute walk from there, one can take the cable car, which would make you cover half the distance to the top. After that, if stamina allows, one can walk up to the summit (which is a one-half-hour journey on foot). Those taking the plunge are in for a treat of catching mesmerising views en route to the top of the mountain.

After completing the journey, one reaches the temple on top with locks tied around the peak-this is where people pray for their wishes to come true. One can stop by to take some pictures, before going down, and even stay overnight at the hotel. In the evening, catch an early dinner and head to Tianzhufeng Scenic Area for an outstanding outdoor performance of the 'Worship to the God of Mt. Tai.' It is brilliantly executed on a stage with a grand moveable staircase, which acts as a canvas for lights to weave the magic of the story, added with great performances.

JOVIAL JINAN

The capital of the Shandong region, Jinan, is also known as 'The city of springs' and is home to around 100 springs. The best amongst them is the Baotu Spring, which

has a park of the same name built around it. The typical Chinese architecture of the columns and shades around spring water would certainly please the tourists. Take a boat ride from there to the Jiaxuan Memorial wharf at Daming Lake, which is one of the biggest lakes in the city. Go for a walk around Qushuiting Street in the old town, which features a number of natural springs, and relish the local life and great views.

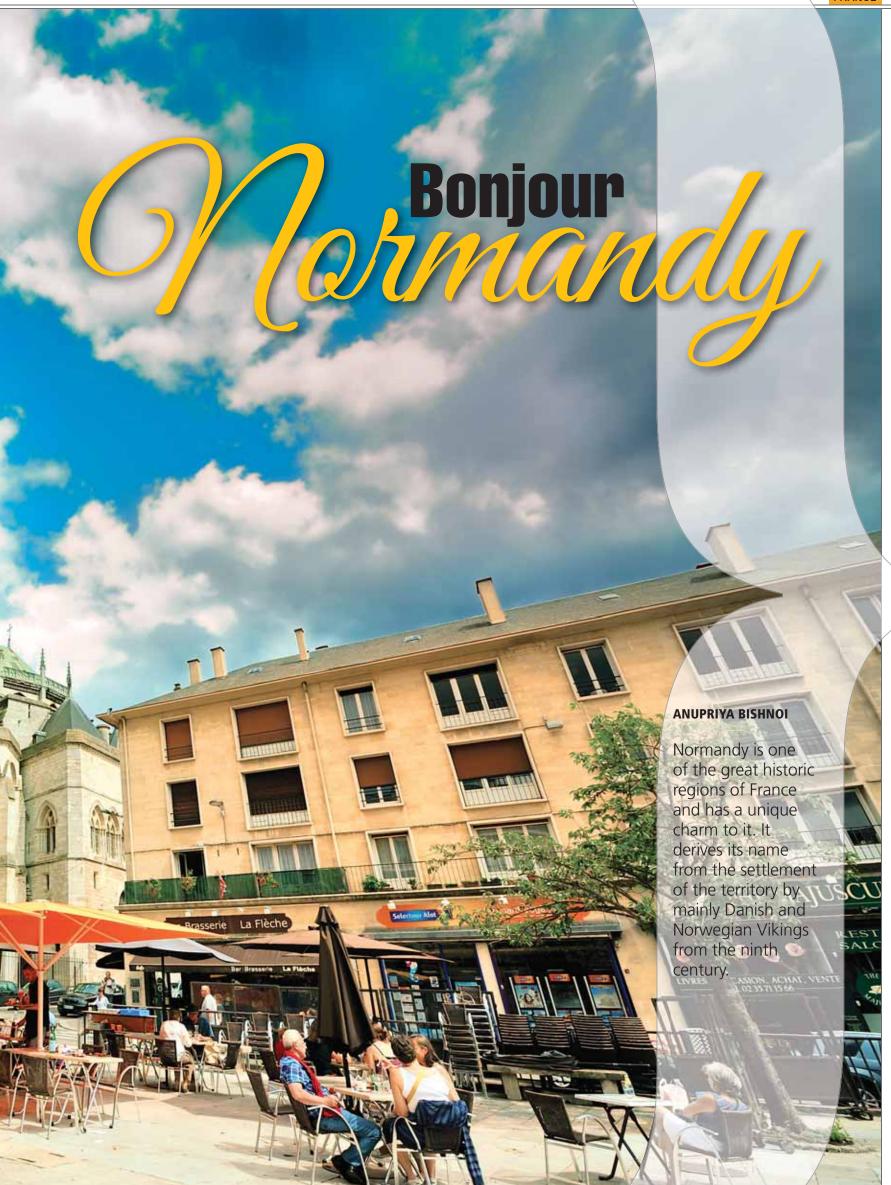
The city has great shopping options with high street malls as well as night markets, where tourists can splurge on fashionable clothes as well as knick-knacks for home. Those who love trying different types of dried seafood and fries should also get into one of the supermarkets, as they have a huge variety of packed seafood, crispies, noodles, cakes and what not.

With pleasing weather throughout the year, Shandong offers everything, from beaches to mountains, as well as history for discerning travellers. The best part is that the region is very well connected to India through Shandong Airlines, which offers flights from Delhi to all the major cities in Shandong.





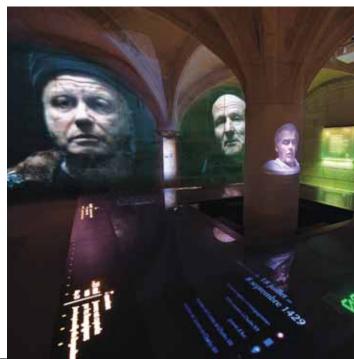
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The Christian Dior Museum organises two temporary exhibitions each year where haute couture dresses, shoes, hats and other accessories are displayed. The panoramic view of the sea from the villa is purely breathtaking.





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rance continues to be a popular destination in Europe for Indians but travellers forget that the majestic land is not just restricted to Paris. While Paris is constantly reinvented, Normandy, on the other hand, is a land of nature and culture, beach and countryside, cheese and love. From Mont Saint-Michel to Giverny, from Étretat to Caen, from Deauville to Rouen, from Eu to Cherbourg, Normandy is quite diverse. These iconic places in the region haven't been explored as much and visitors must experience this majestic little empire in all its glory.

MUSÉE CHRISTIAN DIOR (GRANVILLE)

Located in the Mont-Saint-Michel Bay, the most iconic part of Granville is Musee Christian Dior. Perched atop a cliff overlooking the sea, this villa stands in the middle of a garden designed by Christian Dior and his mother Madeleine. This villa was his childhood home and features two of his favourite colours – pink and grey. It is also the only museum in France devoted to a fashion designer.

The Christian Dior museum organises two temporary exhibitions each year where haute couture dresses, shoes, hats and other accessories are displayed. The panoramic view of the sea from the villa is just breathtaking. While the building inside has gone through a renovation, few things like closets and attic have been kept intact. The grandeur of the villa, inside and out, reflects the source of Dior's inspiration. Speaking about the importance of this villa, Christian Dior once wrote, "The house of my childhood... I keep the most tender and amazing memory. My life, my style, I owe almost everything to its site and its architecture." Musée Christian Dior will indeed take visitors back in time of the biggest fashion icon's days of youth.

BAYEUX TAPESTRY (BAYEUX)

With its narrow cobbled streets and cathedral at its heart, Bayeux is a perfect example of a medieval Norman town. If you have an interest in Norman history, this place will captivate you with its old-world charm. Bayeux Tapestry, which is also a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is a unique document which tells the story of the Norman conquest of England in 1066 by William the Conqueror, Duke of Normandy. The Tapestry of Bayeux invites you to discover the conquest of the throne of England by William the Conqueror, from 1064 until the end of the Battle of Hastings. The Bayeux Tapestry is 70 metres long and 50 centimetres high. Visitors are given an audio tape at the beginning which is available in multiple languages. The entire story is beautifully embroidered on linen with coloured woolen yarns. The duration of the trip is about 30-40 minutes.

PANORAMA XXL (ROUEN)

The Panorama is located in Rouen on the right bank of the Seine, along avenue Pasteur. It is also next to Rouen's historic centre and its famous monuments. Panorama XXL is a unique and spectacular cultural site which offers a view of the best 360-degree artworks in the world, open to the public since December 2014. Skillfully mixing drawing, painting, photography and computer-generated images, the canvasses in the Panorama XXL combine gripping realism in stunning proportions. The audio and the visuals combined together will enchant you with its rich history. Panorama XXL that has



The Joan of Arc History Museum is one of its kinds. With beautiful, Original displays using audio visuals, sound effects and 3D projections, the history plunges you in the midst of a criminal investigation of the most famous judicial investigation in Rouen's history.







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three different venues – the auditorium, the patio and the rotunda – can also be rented out.

JOAN OF ARC HISTORICAL EXHIBITION (ROUEN)

The Joan of Arc History Museum is one of its kinds. With beautiful original displays using audio-visuals, sound effects and 3D projections, the history plunges you in the midst of a criminal investigation in the most famous judicial investigation in Rouen's history. Witnesses, reconstructions and audio-visual effects will take you on an unusual experience which dives into the heart of the fifteenth century.

From her military actions to retake the French throne to her ordeal at the stake, the epic and captivating story can be experienced through the medieval rooms of a monument previously closed to the pub. The first part of the visit consists of a film projected along the length of the six halls of the palace. This is followed by a number of multimedia displays telling how the legend came to be created and how it was subsequently politicised over the centuries. The Historial, the largest site dedicated to the memory of Joan of Arc, is located within the Rouen Archbishop's Palace.

After significant restoration work, this building – classified as a historic monument – has been open to the public since March 2015. The aim of the Historial is to not only: to present the era of Joan of Arc but also to discover the myth, using the most advanced multimedia technologies along with spectacular scenography.

ST. JOSEPH CHURCH (LE HAVRE)

Le Havre is a major European port that combines the attractions of a modern, vibrant city with the charm of a seaside resort and a great nightlife with its casinos. The city was rebuilt after World War II in modernistic style and is now recognised by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site.

St. Joseph Church was designed by Auguste Perret. It is a 107-metre-high tower, containing 12,768 panes of coloured glass, and is a spiritual beacon and landmark of the city. The church is often referred to as a lighthouse because of its octagonal tower, which lights up at night. This concrete Catholic Church was built as a memorial to the 5,000 people of Le Havre who died during World War II. The vibe of the city remains modern as more than 70 per cent of it has been reconstructed post the War. The city of Le Havre has sports activities, nature, history and contemporary cafes. From the party-goers to history lovers to the sport fanatics, the town is a true landmark. Le Havre has an important place in the twentieth century and post your visit, you will realise, it has a special place in your heart too.

MAISON ET JARDINS DE CLAUDE MONET (GIVERNY)

Home to Claude Monet, a leading figure in the Impressionist movement, Maison et jardins de Claude Monet is a pink house where Monet lived from 1883 to 1926. Everything has been kept the way it was when Monet used to live there. From the utensils in the

kitchen, to the attic and the bed, the beauty of Monet's house has been truly maintained over the years. Visitors can admire the master's collection of Japanese prints and the Nympheas studio, which now houses the Foundation's shop. Giverny has become famous the world over, thanks to Claude Monet, who painted his series of water lilies there, among other works.

Monet's enormous house comprises the blue sitting room where Alice Hoschedé-Monet sat with the children. The next room is Monet's entrance, fitted into a small pantry. It was not heated and was therefore used to store food, especially eggs and tea. From the pantry comes Monet's first studio, that later became a room where the painter welcomed his visitors, art dealers, critics and collectors.

A very steep staircase leads from the pantry to the upper floor where one can find Monet's bedroom. He died in this room in December 1926. Then comes Alice's bedroom as Claude and his wife Alice didn't share the same bedroom. Her bedroom is decorated with Japanese woodblocks featuring female characters. Then comes the most dramatic aspect of the house, which is Monet's dining room. Painted in two tones of yellow, the walls are packed with Japanese engravings. The dining room is connected to the kitchen where all the utensils are kept the way they were during Monet's time.

Another famous aspect of the house is its garden where he used to sit, get inspired and paint. The water garden with the famous Japanese bridge, wisteria, azalea and pond and the unique combination of sky and water used to inspire the artists' water lily canvas. From admiring few original works by Monet to taking a stroll in the garden that remained his muse, a visitor will truly find the mansion to be one of the highlights of Normandy.

CHÂTEAU GUILLAUME LE CONQUÉRANT (FALAISE)

William-the conqueror was born in Falaise in 1027 and accomplished his first feat of arms at the castle. His victory was the founding act of his powerbase with Normandy. His destiny would lead him to England where he would be crowned king and the keeps of Falaise castle bear witness to this conquest, which would profoundly change the course of history of Europe. Today, the context of this long history is illustrated using new technology, with enhanced reality bringing the daily surroundings of dukes and kings back to life with the brightness of the colours and the opulence of the furnishings.

Touch tablets are handed out to visitors at the start of the visit show the interiors of the castle rooms in stunning virtual reconstructions. Apart from this, the animated scenes make the daily life of civilians and soldiers in medieval times come alive. The best part of this experience is, once you locate the tablet at a particular thing, it will show you how it looked like in the eleventh century. Climb up the top of the castle to find the entire glimpse of the city Falaise. So while the interiors of the castle have been restored, technology has made sure that the visitors don't miss the old world charm.



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CRUISING is an experience

PETER KOLLAR, Head of International Training & Development, Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA), feels that cruising allows travellers multiple experiences, all in a single vacation.

HAZEL JAIN

WHAT ACCORDING TO YOU IS 'EXPERIENTIAL TRAVEL'?

It's about immersion, having an opportunity to delve deep into a region's culture and history, mainly through direct engagement with the locals with hands-on experiences that foster a feeling of uniqueness and oneness with what is around you. It's normally in a small group

as this allows all participants to be involved and feel they are part of the experience, rather than standing at the back of a crowd.

HOW DOES CRUISING FIGURE IN THIS?

This type of tour experience has actually been around for a while in cruising. Not only is it the essence of small ship cruising, river cruising and expedition cruising, I have done these tours for years while working for Crystal Cruises over a decade ago when we would visit remote communities and partake in volunteering activities, or into homes of hill-tribes and learn

how they live. Even with small groups of 18 walking through the Sistine Chapel afterhours in the Vatican can be viewed as an immersive experience. These bespoke options have been adopted by larger cruise lines who now include a small range of these excursions with limits on group sizes. Though the 'highlights' tours of getting on busses and driving around taking photos is still a popular introduction' to a region for many passengers, more travellers are seeking these immersive opportunities that are now weaved into most cruise programmes.



CRUISING IN INDIA

- CLIA has just started to engage with the cruising market in India
- It aims to offer travel agents an education programme that results in proficiency in selling cruise
- Once the agent market grows, it will allow CLIA help cultivate cruise awareness in the region

WHY SHOULD EXPERIENCE-SEEKING TRAVELLERS OPT FOR CRUISING?

For Indians who want to engage in this type of experience, cruising is a great option, as once you select the right product and destination for your level of interest, cruising allows multiple experiences in the one vacation, whether it would

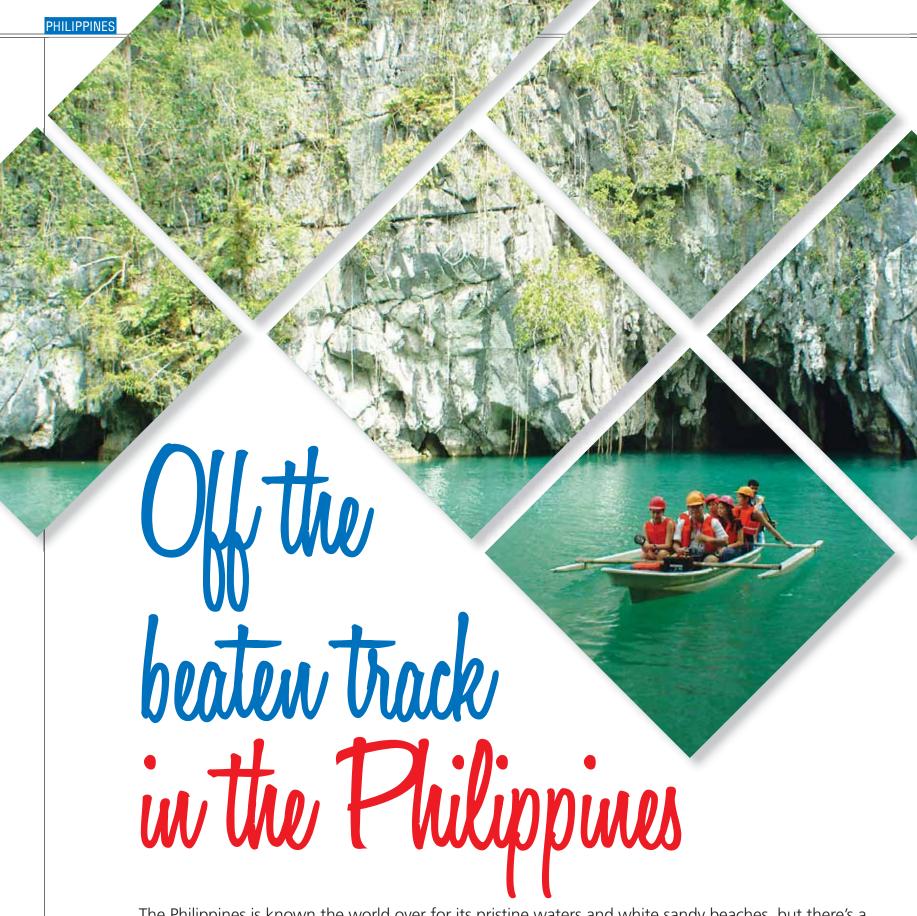
be along coastlines to different communities, or from country to country that embrace a diversity of cultural experiences.

WHAT CRUISE TRENDS DO YOU SEE EMERGE IN INDIA IN THE NEXT COUPLE OF YEARS?

India already has one of the youngest cruising demographics of all world source markets, and this will continue with the new-to-cruise market being targeted along with the technological developments in connectivity that has recently evolved onboard. The real change will be in general cruising acceptance, as we've seen shifting attitudes and mindsets in emerging markets such as India eventually open up via passenger feedback, media exposure, and most of all, educated travel agents who ultimately learn about the modern cruise experience.

HOW DO YOU SEE CRUISING GROW AND EVOLVE IN INDIA?

All cruise markets are dependent on travel agent advocacy. Direct bookings to cruise lines are only completed by customers who have already decided to cruise, so it is the agent who showcases cruising as an ideal option compared to other choices such as land and coach touring and resort stays. These recommendations are only brought forward by an agent if they believe in cruising, therefore, training and Fams are critical in getting them to understand the value of this option.



The Philippines is known the world over for its pristine waters and white sandy beaches, but there's a lot more to the nation than its aquamarine life. Whether it's being buried under a mound of volcanic sand to soak in its properties, or learning how to create fire from bamboo, the island nation brings a variety of off-beat activities to give you a break from the beach-vacation monotony.

AHANA GURUNG

had often been a spectator to my friends gushing about their trip to the Philippines, Boracay in particular, and heard nothing but stories about how clear the beaches were, or how the nights would come alive till the wee hours of the morning. So when I chanced upon the opportunity to visit the nation, I immediately drew a picture of it in my head –the food and the beach.

However, what I witnessed completely took me by surprise. A 300-year colonisation by the Spanish from the early 1500s to late 1800s, followed by the Americans and briefly by the Japanese during World War II, have left footprints that continue to shape the heritage and culture of present-day Philippines. From the names of roads and cities, to names of people, the Hispanic culture still flourishes in every nook and corner. The

fusion of foreign cultures seep through the distinct architecture, and colourful jeepneys ply the roads as taxis as reminders of a war-torn country. Agriculture is the main occupation and you will notice fields of common cash crops like rice and tobacco as you drive from one province to another, although locals say it is a fading profession. But the conviction with which the nation is trying to build itself is commendable, as the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) segment drives the growth in the economy. The rising skyline of Makati, the business centre Manila, gives the impression of a gradually developing metropolitan.

More than 7000 islands make up the Philippines, out of which Luzon is the largest. It is also home to the bustling capital Manila and for this reason, is the most important and well-visited one. The international airport in Manila is a major hub and is the gateway for frequented places like Cebu, Boracay, Bohol and Davao amongst others. The capital is like any other city – sprawling with activities and roads filled with chock-o-block traffic that never seems to slow down. But as you stray from the cityscapes towards the suburbs, the lush greenery set against the backdrop of modest mountains comes into view, and that's when you really begin to appreciate the scenic beauty.

The country boasts several
UNESCO World Heritage
Sites that will leave
you in awe,
and soon

enough you will realise that a week is not even close to being enough to explore the archipelago. As small as it may look, the Philippines in reality is expansive, and travelling from one place to another can be slightly tedious.

If you are looking for a getaway that has world-class beaches but is not limited to it, the Philippines strikes the perfect balance. Here are five unconventional and off-beat activities that you can explore if only the beaches don't cut it for you:

PUERTO PRINCESA SUBTERRANEAN RIVER NATIONAL PARK, PALAWAN

Located on the idyllic island province of Palawan, some 74 km northwest of Puerto Princesa city, the Underground River is an astounding piece of nature's work. The 8.2 km-long Cabayugan River flows through St Paul's mountain or the Sleeping Giant, right into the sea, and within its dark and eerie ecosystem, hordes of bats and pythons thrive. Visitor boats are allowed to go in as deep as 4.5 km and as you make your way into the river, the brightness and heat of the day is replaced with a cool and unnerving surrounding that gets darker as the boat silently bobs further in.

Enormous stalagmites and stalactites come into sight, the result of acid rain trickling along the crevices and fractures of the limestone mountain, which resemble various vegetables, fruits and even scenes from the Last Supper in the section aptly termed 'The Cathedral'. Water (and bat droppings) still drips from the rocks above, indicating a ceaseless process. Visitors are warned from touching the surroundings and are advised to observe silence to avoid contamination and disturbance.



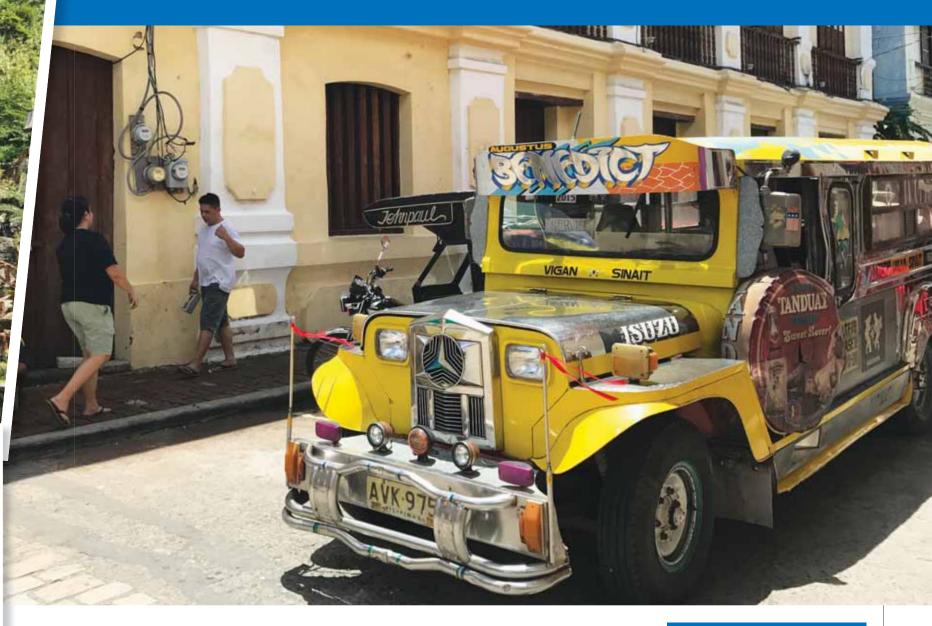
The Forest Trail in the Subic Bay area is set amidst a dense tropical forest, a three-hour trek from the village of the Aetas. The Aetas are a group of indigenous people of the mountains who, despite several foreign invasions, were not colonised and live off the bounties of the forest. Nestor, who is among the few Tagalog-speaking Aetas, takes us

along the trail along with his friendly four-legged friend Whitey and points out the uses of various tree barks. The tribe obtains their daily resources from the land they live on. They use the bark of trees for medicinal purposes, to make essentials like ropes and even acquire water. We are then introduced to Tata Kasui (or 'cashew'), a 67-year-old Aeta who takes pride in his roots and gleefully shows us how the

modest bamboo can be used as a weapon, as utensils and to cook his favourite chicken, and also to create fire from the shavings. Kasui makes sure to mention that every morsel cooked is always offered to the gods as a sign of respect. Since the area has been developed as a tourist attraction, several Aeta ladies try their luck at entrepreneurship and sell bottles of organic honey and small bamboo souvenirs by the road. Away from the concrete jungle and in the presence of simple inhabitants who live a humble yet fulfilling life, I sense echoes from the woods that say money can't buy happiness.

PUNING HOT SPRING AND SPA, PAMPANGAS

If you are one for unconventional wellness therapies, this is definitely a must. The thermal springs are situated in the province of Pampangas, which is approximately a four-hour drive from Manila. Hot springs are a common occurrence in



areas of volcanic activity and the Philippines is replete with 23 active ones.

After a change of clothes, a 4x4 takes you on a dirt track which you later realise is a dried riverbed, and a rough 30-minute ride later, you arrive at the hot springs. While I had imagined a slightly more rustic set-up, I was pleasantly surprised at the modern infrastructure encasing the springs that were made to look like mini swimming pools complete with cabanas. After a dip in three different pools of varying temperatures, we soaked up enough minerals and headed to the spa. Little did we know what awaited us.

The exclusive treatment at the Puning Spa uses the goodness of volcanic ashes and sand to replenish the body. Buried neck-deep in the warm-to-hot sand, I began to relax and closed my eyes only to realise a man was actually walking all over me. After getting over the initial shock, we are told that the spa employs the local inhabitants of the land called Negritos or the Bushmen, who are generally small in stature and that the activity is a part of the whole wellness process. The sand is then dusted off and a mud-paste of the volcano ashes is applied, al fresco style. However strange the process may sound, the natural resources do make a huge difference to your skin and leaves you with a soft, dewy glow.

VIGAN HERITAGE TOWN, ILOCOS SUR

Imagine driving past fields of tobacco and little huts with coconut flower pots popping up by the road every now and then. You kind of get used to this sight

so when a quaint vintage European town comes into the picture, the experience is nothing less than remarkable. Cobbled streets stretch out on Calle Crisologo with antique houses from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries on both sides of the roads, like an ode to the Spanish-Mexican-Chinese heritage, filling the air with olden-day charm.

Here, even eating in modern franchises like McDonald's and the local McDonald's-style JolliBee will feel like a fine-dining experience while taking a trip to Watsons will take you back into the days of yore. Kalesas or horse-drawn carriages are aplenty in every nook and corner to give you a tour of the little heritage town.

TEST YOUR GAG REFLEX

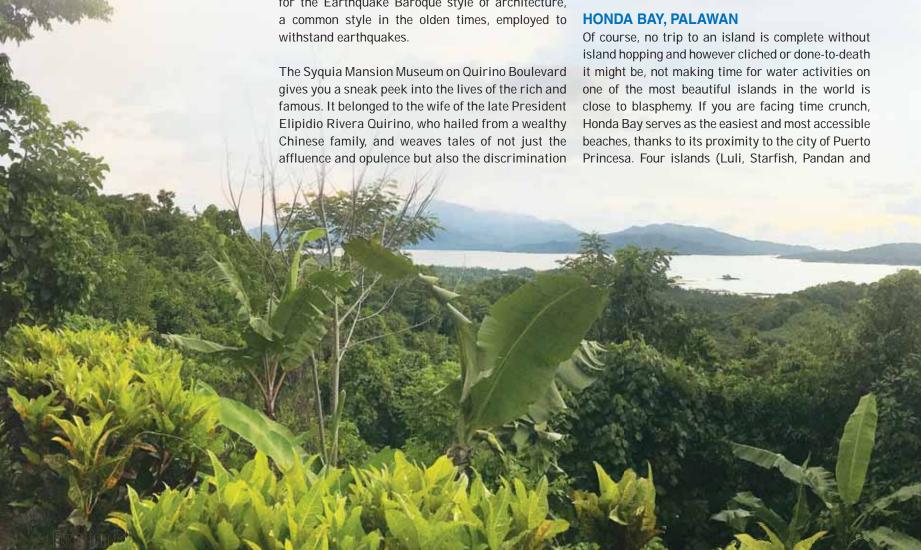
Balut is a local delicacy and essentially a 14 to 21-day-old boiled duck embryo. It can be found in local markets and is eaten whole, after adding condiments like vinegar and salt. If you are truly adventurous with your food, balut will be right up your street.

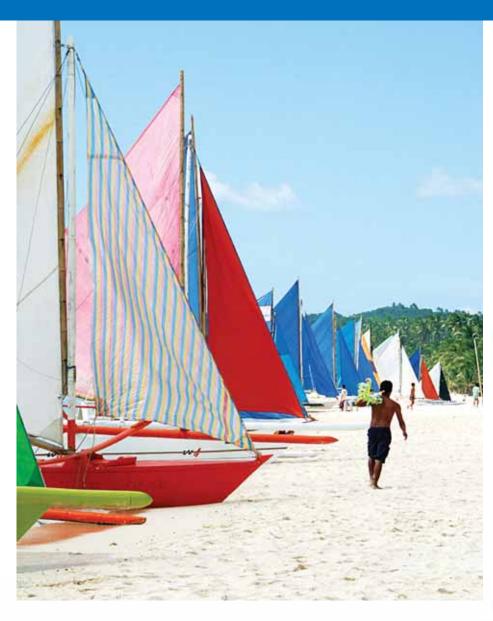




The Vigan Cathedral or St Paul's Cathedral is the biggest landmark in the area, and along with three other churches in the country, it is collectively called the Baroque Churches. These churches are known for the Earthquake Baroque style of architecture, a common style in the olden times, employed to withstand earthquakes.

between the rich and the poor. The Vigan Heritage Village as well as the Baroque Churches are well-acclaimed attractions and are a part of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites.







Cowrie) are open for hopping throughout the year and are just a 30-minute drive from the city and an additional 20 minutes by a speed boat. Most are privately owned.

Luli Island is one of the private islands and the name has been coined from 'lulibog' and 'lilytaw' which means rise and sink – it is the only island that descends and rises above the water according to the tide. Try being an early-bird and reach the island before anyone else does as the remoteness can truly give a spectacular swimming experience. Pandan Island offers more water sport options like kayaking and snorkelling. The

of dancing sea weed, sea urchins, starfish and fascinating corals. One benefit of shallow waters is that you can observe the marine life, unlike other places where it's just too dark and deep to see anything clearly. Honda Bay is especially a good place to make your debut snorkelling trip since a guide is present to chaperon you. A good time in the water always builds up an appetite and the restaurant on the island serves fresh abalone, crabs and clams upon order but the buffet with local sea food and fruits is a treat on its own.

Photo Gredite Department of Tourism Philippines/Ahana Gurung

waters are extremely clear and as it gets deeper,

life underwater manifests into a parallel universe

Castle Sof ands

Sands Resorts Cotai Strip Macao, with its seven hotels, offers myriad experiences and entertainment options.

ENTERTAINMENT BIBAP

Blending martial arts, singing, street dance and hip-hop, BIBAP at The Parisian Macao was created to celebrate Bibimbap – the unofficial national dish of spicy rice, vegetables and beef – and to promote Korean food culture worldwide, incorporating a cappella singing, beatbox sounds, b-boying (breakdancing) and acrobatics.

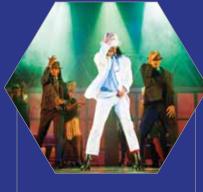
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Monkey King

The large-scale fantasy
Chinese stage play, Monkey
King, by Beijing Hua Yan
Group takes place at the
new Sands Cotai Theatre at
Sands Cotai Central. Viewers
will be enthralled by the
sheer scale of the acrobatics,
drama, martial arts, magic



combined with the most advanced 3D effects, LED screen projections, video mapping and full surround sound, together with creative lighting effects, choreography, music and spectacular and colourful costumes.



Thriller Live

The debut show at The Parisian Theatre, Thriller Live, is a stunning theatrical concert created to commemorate the world's greatest ever entertainer, Michael Jackson. A 90-minute, high-energy explosion of pop, rock, soul and disco takes the audience on a magical audio-visual journey through Michael Jackson's astonishing 45-year musical legacy.

Kung Fu Panda Adventure Ice World

Asia's largest annual indoor frozen wonderland, Kung Fu Panda Adventure Ice World with the DreamWorks All-Stars, takes place at The Venetian Macao's Cotai Expo for a limited time from March 16-July 9, 2017. It includes a host of colourful new **DreamWorks Animation** characters from 'Kung Fu Panda', 'Madagascar', 'Shrek', 'How To Train Your Dragon', 'The Croods' and 'Trolls', vibrantly brought to life with dazzling lights and stunning sound effects.



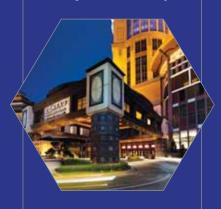


SHOPPING

With its addition of nearly 150 intimate boutiques and galleries, Shoppes at Cotai Central, as part of Shoppes, Macao's ultimate luxury duty-free shopping experience, joins Shoppes at Venetian, Shoppes at Four Seasons and Shoppes at Parisian to offer a staggering 850 stores to choose from – the most in any one single location in all of Macao! This shopper's paradise includes some exciting new first-to-market brands in Macao. Shoppes at Cotai Central caters to every shopper's needs – the luxury-minded, savvy shoppers, or those just looking for a nice day out with friends and family.

STAY

Conrad Macao, Cotai
Central is a stylish hotel
choice where you can relax
and be energized whilst
enjoying the adventure,
fun and fortune of Sands
Cotai Central. Offering 654
guestrooms and suites in a
40-floor tower overlooking
the Cotai Strip, the hotel is
part of an innovative, fully
integrated resort city.



Holiday Inn Macao
Cotai Central, with 1224
guestrooms, including 65
suites, is the only Holiday
Inn in the world to receive
an official Star Rating by
Forbes for four consecutive
years. It features all the
benefits of an integrated
resort destination at Sands
Cotai Central, including
an extensive array of
dining, retail, leisure and
entertainment options.





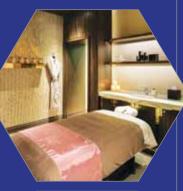
The Venetian® Macao – the largest integrated resort of its kind in Asia – marked the beginning of a visionary new development of luxury, leisure and entertainment resorts, as well as B2B facilities inspired by the legendary Las Vegas Strip. The 3000-suite integrated resort features replicas of the famous canals and architectural icons of Venice.



The Parisian Macao is an integrated resort inspired by the magic and wonder of the famed "City of Light." The Parisian Macao offers a full array of integrated resort facilities, including approximately 3000 guestrooms and suites, convention and meeting space, 1200-seat theatre and entertainment. The Parisian Macao has linked walkways to The Venetian® Macao.

SPA

The Parisian Macao is complete with 12 treatment rooms, male/ female Vitality Lounge with sauna, steam room, experience showers, vitality pool, relaxation lounges, barber shop for men, hair boutique for ladies and a retail store. The spa, spread across 1264 square metres, takes its inspiration from the 'La Belle Époque', or 'beautiful era' of Paris of the elegant 1800s, and the essence of old Shanghai in a classical Chinese styled ambience.







EIFFEL TOWER

Visitors to the Cotai Strip will be mesmerised by the breath taking half-scale authentic recreation of the famed Eiffel Tower that sits majestically at the hotel's entrance. With two observation decks offering views to mainland China, as well as unparalleled panoramic views of the Cotai Strip, the Eiffel Tower is set to be Macao's must-see landmark and an ideal backdrop for visitors. The height of The Parisian Macao's Eiffel Tower is roughly equivalent to a 38-storey building and is approximately one half the height of the 324-metre-tall Paris tower. Of all the replicas, The Parisian Macao's Eiffel Tower is the tallest and most realistic.

A throwback to Jung le Book

The Kipling Lodge in Ranthambore promises guests a fantastic adventure that will take them back to the beautiful world of Mowgli amidst boundless nature.





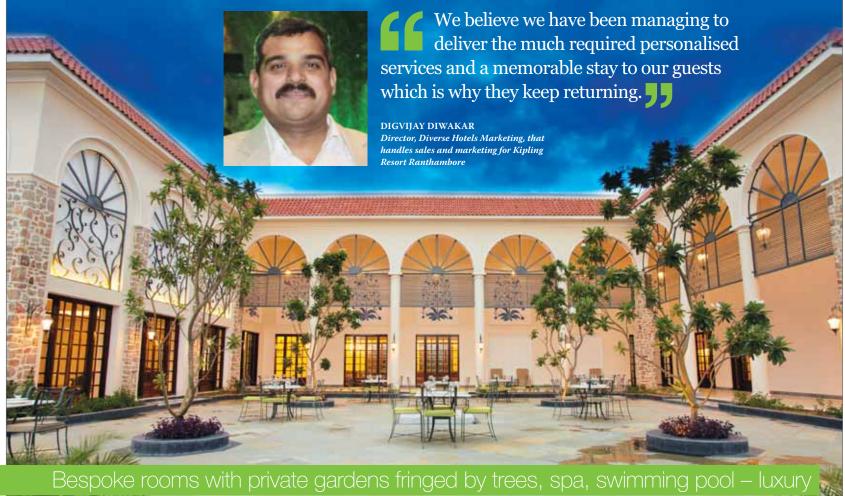
warm throwback to the colonial age and hunting lodges that inspired Rudyard Kipling to pen his magnum opus, Kipling Lodge is located on the boundary of Ranthambore's famous national park, one of India's largest tiger reserves and nature conservatories, overlooking the idyllic Aravalli hills.

The old-world charm is hard to miss. Starting with the distinctly Victorian rosewood book match furniture, hospitality that is reminiscent of the Raj, or a library bar where guests can pick up a well-loved classic and enjoy it over a glass of whisky by a fireplace. Bespoke rooms with private gardens fringed by trees, spa, swimming pool – luxury is bookmarked, whether one is a reader or not. It's not just opulence though. Exciting safari adventures, hikes to the Ranthambore fort, village excursions and a lot more awaits guests here.

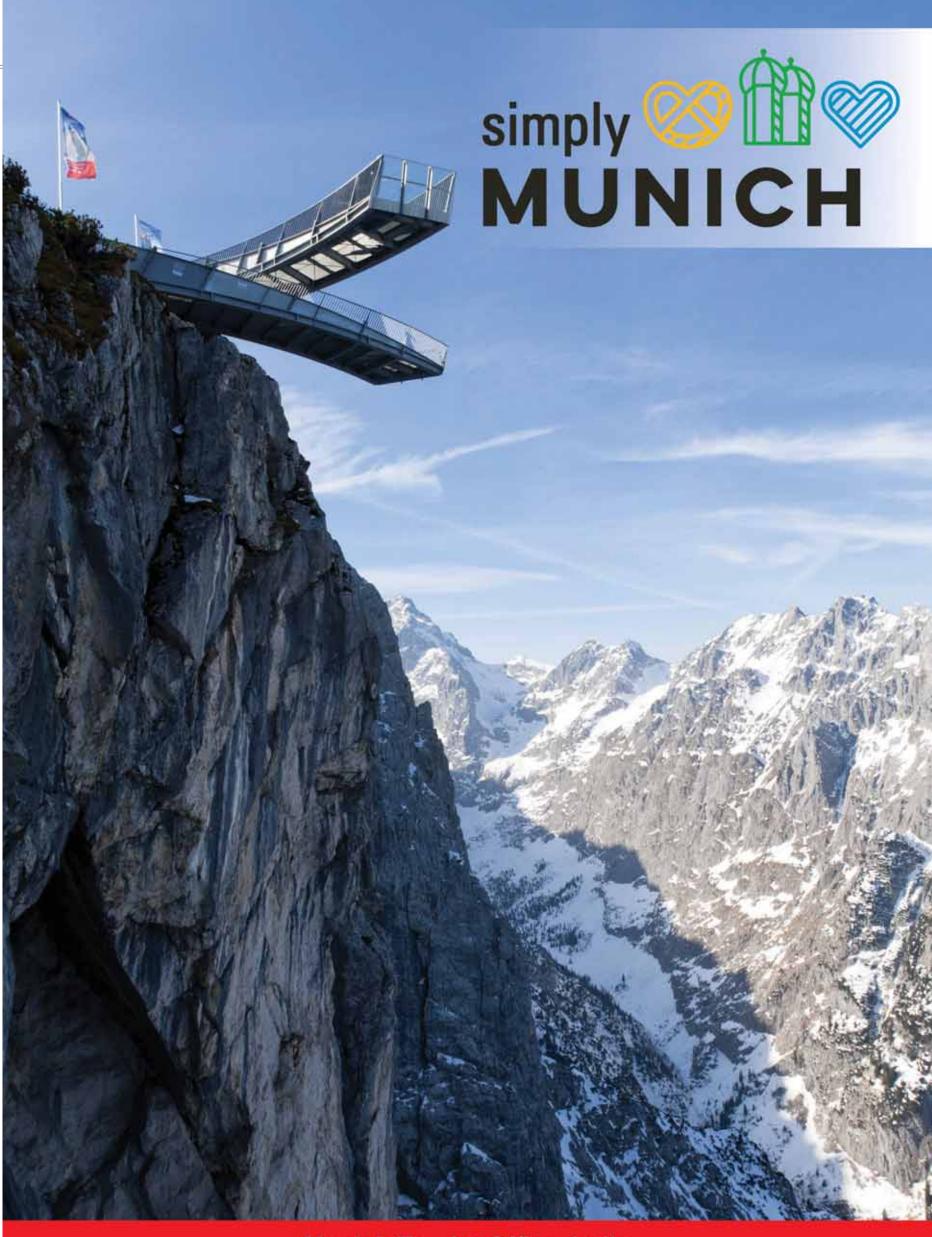
Kipling Lodge is spread over five acres of land and has only 16 rooms. This makes the property

exclusive. Even when the hotel is fully packed, one never gets the feeling of privacy being invaded at any point of time. It has three categories of rooms: Superior Garden Rooms, Terrace Rooms and Theme Suites. Despite having huge common spaces, each and every room has personal sit-outs, for romantic private evenings. A well-equipped library bar gives the traveller a perfect 'me time'. Kipling Lodge also boasts of one of the finest dining facility in Sawai Madhopur. Here, the chefs take extra care in preparing the dishes that match the palate of each and every guest at the hotel.

A few hours away from Delhi and Jaipur, the Kipling Lodge Ranthambore is a perfect getaway for two to three days for those who value luxury and quality time. The main attraction however remains the famed Ranthambore National Park safari. Guests can take both morning and evening safaris and be prepared to sight the magnificent Indian tiger. There are 10 trails around the park.

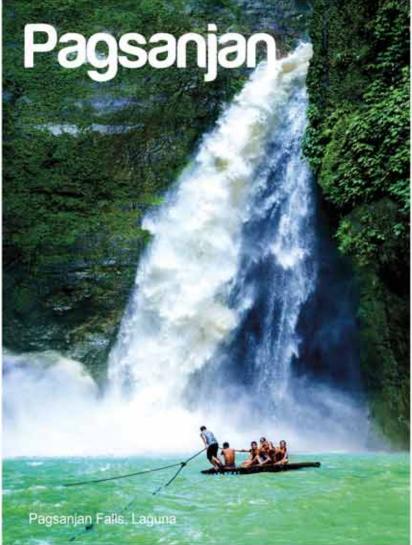


is bookmarked, whether one is a reader or not. It's not just opulence though.



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IT'S MORE FUN IN THE

PHILIPPINES

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