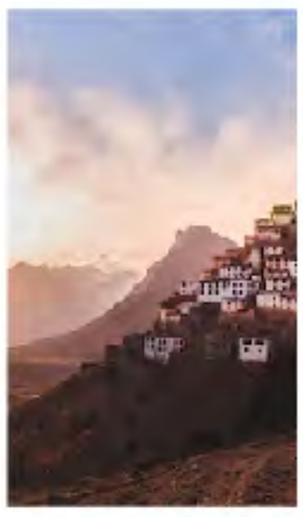
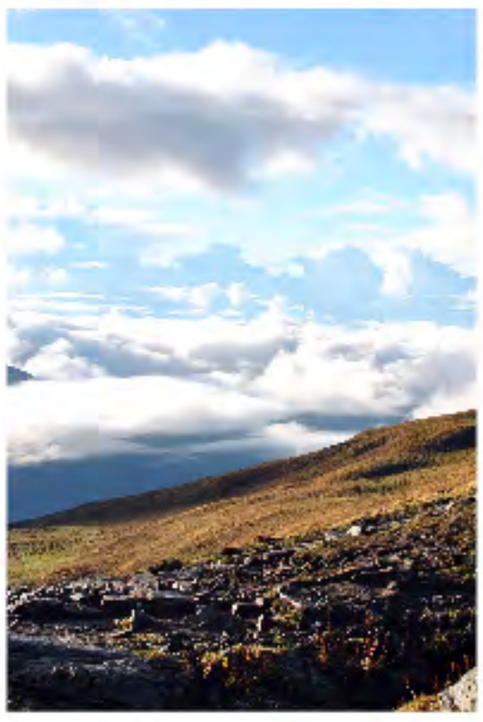
THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED

LITTLE KNOWN TRAVEL TALES FROM INDIA





SAVAARI

Edition 2022

With the pandemic firmly behind us, **2023 represents a year of opportunities**. Travel, it seems, is at the forefront of all our hedonistic pursuits. The mysterious joys of discovering a new place, and soaking in all its dimensions, brings out the curious child in all of us.

India's appeal needs no introduction, but its kaleidoscopic riches need a nuanced introspection. Travel destinations in the country are extremely multi-layered, and **the more one thinks they have explored India, the more India reveals itself to them**.

We firmly believe that **India is best explored by road**. The happy butterflies in one's stomach when a car hits fifth gear on an open highway is an exhilarating feeling of expectancy. When you travel by road, you witness the imperceptible shift in culture, cuisine, climate, and scenery. You see incredible uniqueness and diversity, but you also see the underlying continuity.

Titled '**The Road Less Travelled**', this magazine aims to take the reader on a journey of lesser known travel tales from the country. From rituals connecting with the after-life to magnificent architectural relics, we cover a diverse oeuvre. We hope that the stories and their colourful allure will inspire you to travel to these quirky destinations.

The roads are calling, where are you?

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Chandratal Lake

A lake shrouded with folklore and mysteries

Surrounded by eerie cold air, breathtaking views, and fluttering Buddhist prayer flags, Chandratal Lake is an arcanum locus far away from civilization. The drops of heaven that sparkle through the infinite sky of Lahaul Valley break up the monotony of the rugged, rocky mountain. Lahaul and Spiti's surreal yet magical topography reveals its secrets here. The crescent-shaped moon lake, as its name implies, is associated with numerous intriguing legends, folklore, and a mystery straight out of The X-Files that pique the interest of adventurers.

A snowman swaying in the night sky

Chandratal has frequently been in the news due to reports of UFO sightings. Many tourists and adventurers from across the globe have claimed to have seen UFOs or other mystical objects while camping in Chandratal. 27th September 2004 was the final day of a week-long expedition led by ISRO's Ahmedabad-based Space Application Centre (SAC). Three SAC scientists and two geologists made up the team, who set up camp in the valley 17,000 feet above sea level. The research was carried out on the Chandra basin glacier using satellite data. When the scientists were about to leave their tents, one of the porters noticed a white object on the far reaches of an adjacent mountain ridge and exclaimed, "Sir, the snowman is coming!"

The white spot indicates a UFO sighting

Amit Kulkarni, a senior ISRO scientist who has been mapping glaciers for many years, and his team members noticed something that looked like a robot floating a few inches above the ground and rapidly approaching the camp. Kulkarni and his colleague, geologist Sunil Dhar, took out their cameras and began photographing the object as the team raced towards the mountain to get a better look.

> *"It possessed a cylindrical head with two balloon-like attachments, a body, hands, and two legs. It appeared to be walking and pacing its steps like a human."*

The oblong object, which stood between 3 and 4 feet tall, continued to move down the slope towards the team. It possessed a cylindrical head with two balloon-like attachments, a body, hands, and two legs.

It appeared to be walking and pacing its steps like a human. The object became alarmed when it reached the lower edge of the hill, 50 metres away from the scientists. After a few seconds of standing still, it began a steep 70-degree ascent towards the ridge top.

It hovered above the camp for five minutes before disappearing into the sky. Without the scientists, it would have been easy to dismiss the sighting as an unintentional aerial phenomenon. After reviewing the photographs, the UFO appeared to be a cluster of balloons, but its manoeuvrability and flight path were unlike any balloon or human-crewed flying vehicle.

Scientists are still looking for answers to that strange occurrence, adding more fuel to the mystifying lake. Locals and travellers have reported numerous sightings of UFOs and other supernatural phenomena here. But does it all add up, or is it all a trick of the light?

The lake is not only home to the UFO mystery. As strange as it may sound, the mythical Chandratal lake is associated with many other legends.

Tracing the Pandavas' footprints

The famous lake of Chandratal is widely assumed to be the place where the final journey was made by the five Pandava brothers after defeating the Kauravas in the Mahabharatha battle at Kurukshetra. It is said that after the great battle, as the Pandavas began to

walk towards heaven, they all died. Only Yudhishthir survived, and he was picked up by God Indra here.

Views of the Chandratal Lake

The shepherd who fell in love with a fairy

The locals believe that Chandratal Lake is blessed and that fairies visit it at night. One such story involves a shepherd from a nearby village named Hansa, who visited the lake and noticed a fairy, and they instantly fell in love. According to legend, the shepherd was already married but did not tell the fairy because he was afraid she would leave him if she found out. One day, he inadvertently revealed to her that he was married, and it was his last encounter with her. The fairy never returned, and the shepherd went insane waiting for her, eventually dying by the lake. It is said that if you visit the lake at night, you can still see the

shepherd’s spirit walking by the banks, calling out to his long-lost love.

Trek to the Chandratal lake

When the Sun married the Moon

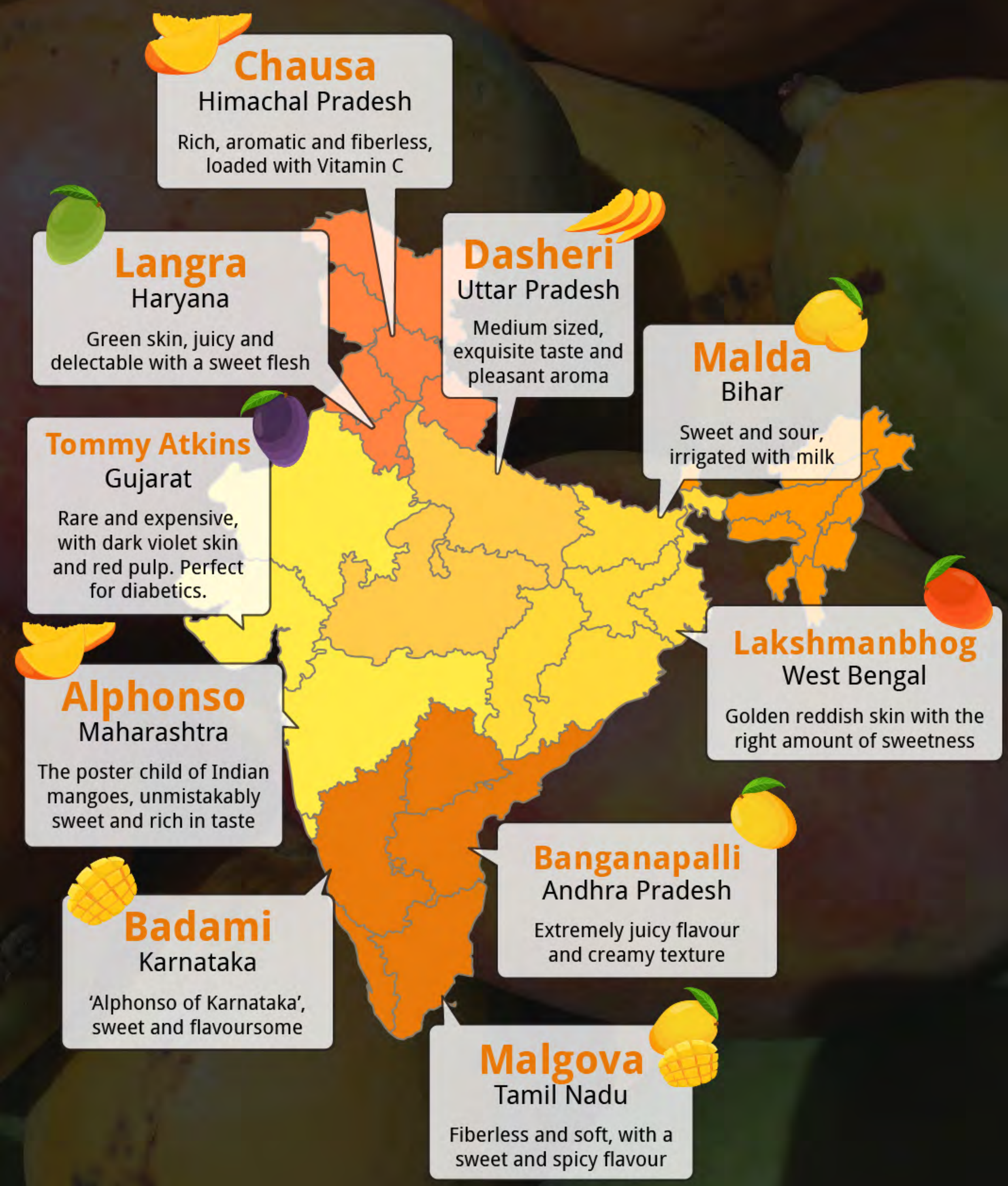
The most famous folklore revolves around two lovebirds named Chandra, the Moon God’s daughter, and Bhaga, the Sun God’s son. Both fell madly in love, but fate had it that their parents disapproved of their union. So they decided to elope to the effervescent Chandrabhaga River, where their heavenly alliance took place. They created the lakes Surajtal and Chandratal, which still reverberate with the mystery of their romance.

While you may have all these questions related to these theories, you can always visit Chandratal to experience the tranquility of the lake, admire the beauty around you, and return with your theory about what would have happened. The optimum time to visit Chandratal Lake is in June when the snow removal process is finished. An all-night camp is one of the best activities at the bank of the lake. You can enjoy the splendour of this magnificent landscape, which includes the massive Himalayan snowcaps, a crystal clear sky, a breeze that envelopes the enigma, and maybe even a cheeky UFO.

MANGOES OF INDIA

Tracing the King of Fruits

Of all the diverse bounties of tropical fruits and vegetables in India, the mango stands head and shoulders above the rest. It is therefore conferred the title of the King of Fruits. It's a fruit that can be eaten when it's ripe or raw, sweet or sour, pulpy or firm, but always a treat for your tastebuds.



In July 2022, two infants who died young, named Shobha and Chandappa were married in holy matrimony in Dakshina Kannada district of Karnataka. It was like any other South Indian wedding, except Shobha and Chandappa had been dead for 30 years. As their horoscopes were perfectly aligned, their families arranged the marriage, and auspicious garlands were exchanged to tie a sacred knot in heaven.

The holy union of the dead

The tradition arose from the belief that 'life is incomplete without marriage' and that the soul of an unmarried departed family member may wander on forever without Moksha. A 'Pretha Kalyanam' aims to prevent bad things from happening to a specific family. They say marriages are made in heaven, except that these marriages are for those who are already in heaven. It is known as pretha kalyanam (the ghost marriage) and is still practised by several communities in Dakshina Kannada and Kerala's Kasaragod district. The ceremony is conducted between a bride and a groom who died as babies or teenagers under the age of eighteen.

Often, on the advice of an astrologer the families decide to wed the souls so they can be granted salvation in the afterlife. Outsiders and city dwellers often dismiss them as superstition, but the communities here believe such marriages are a way of honouring the dead. However, the scope of the practice is unknown because posthumous marriages are not legally recognised.

Vermillion, garlands, and the spirits of the dead

The marriage takes place on a New Moon night in the groom's family home. The deceased couple is represented by effigies made of wood and hay, and their marriage ceremony will take place under a tree, which is meant to represent the wedding hall.

Families carry effigies dressed in traditional attire to represent the spirits of the dead. Mantras are recited, garlands are exchanged, and vermilion is smeared amid the bride's brow. From Saptapadhi, the seven-step Hindu marriage ritual that cements the union of husband and wife, to Kanyadhaana and the Mangalya ritual, the couple is carried by the families for each nuptial. The bride's brother walks around the wedding hall, holding the effigies.

The wedding concludes with a lavish meal served on a banana leaf to the relatives and guests. This feast includes the popular dishes found at a typical Karnataka wedding. After the feast and the guests have left, the groom's family departs with the bride's effigy. At night, the newlyweds' figurines are placed under a Sataparni tree or immersed in a body of water. Some families choose to cremate the effigies together, completing the holy ritual.

Ghost marriages from around the world

The concept of Pretha Kalyanam is not unique only to India. For example, spirit weddings are typical in China, Sudan, and France. However, different cultural traditions and legal procedures exist in every country and culture.

> *Posthumous marriage is an ancient custom in rural Shanxi, China. In France, posthumous marriages between living and deceased people are legal.*

When the living marry the dead

Posthumous marriage is an ancient custom in rural Shanxi, in China that dates back to over 3000 years. However, the practice is often dictated by tradition, and many locals consult fortune tellers who claim that if one of the family members dies unmarried, the family will be cursed. As a result, parents who lose a son frequently go to great lengths to find a supernatural daughter-in-law.

In France, posthumous marriages between living and deceased people are legal. Still, they are uncommon, with a rigorous application process and permission granted only at the discretion of the French president.

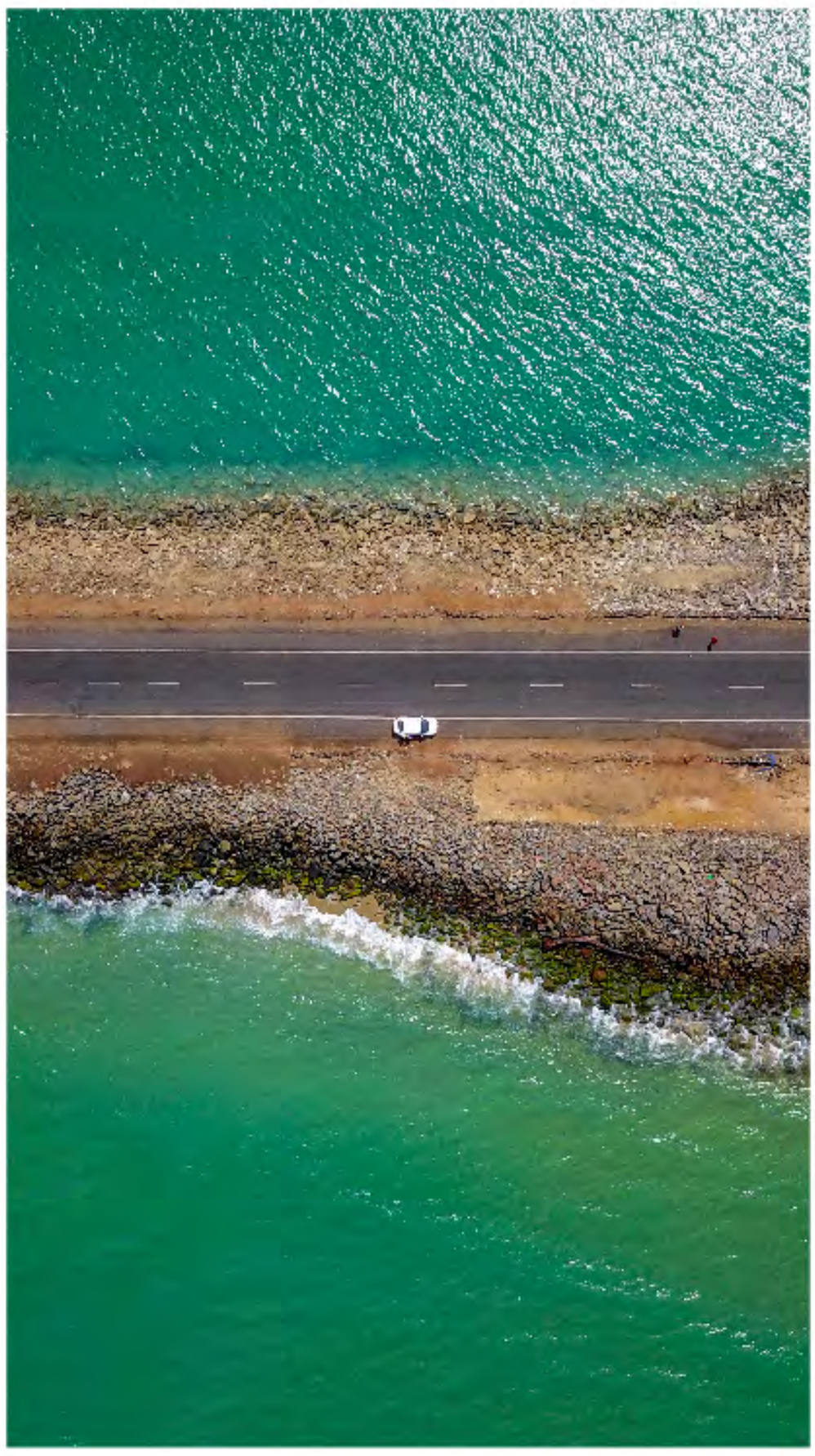
In the Nuer tribe of South Sudan, the groom's brother was commonly used as a stand-in for the deceased fiancé in the wedding ceremony and any children born from the union of the deceased groom's brother and the wife would be considered the offspring of the dead man rather than the living brother. For many Sudanese women, ghost marriages are a way to keep their wealth rather than share it with a man or lose it entirely.

Ghost weddings across the world

While ghost marriages are conducted differently around the world, they encompass a broad spectrum of cultural practices. This type of alliance could range from securing property to ensuring a lineage's legacy. Yet, at the heart of these marriages is the universal predicament of human grief.

Tamil Nadu time travel lores

The Moonchasers, a collective comprising travel enthusiasts Chandreyi and Joy, embarked on a unique road trip exploring the culturally rich towns of Tamil Nadu with Savaari. They travelled on the gorgeous roads from Madurai to Dhanuskodi whilst exploring the culture, heritage and charm of these historic towns. These sites witness the Dravidian craftsmanship skills and take you back in time to the glorious eras of the Cholas and Pandyas.



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2022
THE YEAR THAT WAS

We thank you from the bottom of our hearts for making 2022 an epic year for Savaari! This is a snapshot of the key milestones, achievements and successes of 2022. We are sure 2023 will be bigger, louder and better and the only question in our minds is 'Where is your next roadtrip?'

2.4 lakh roadtrips

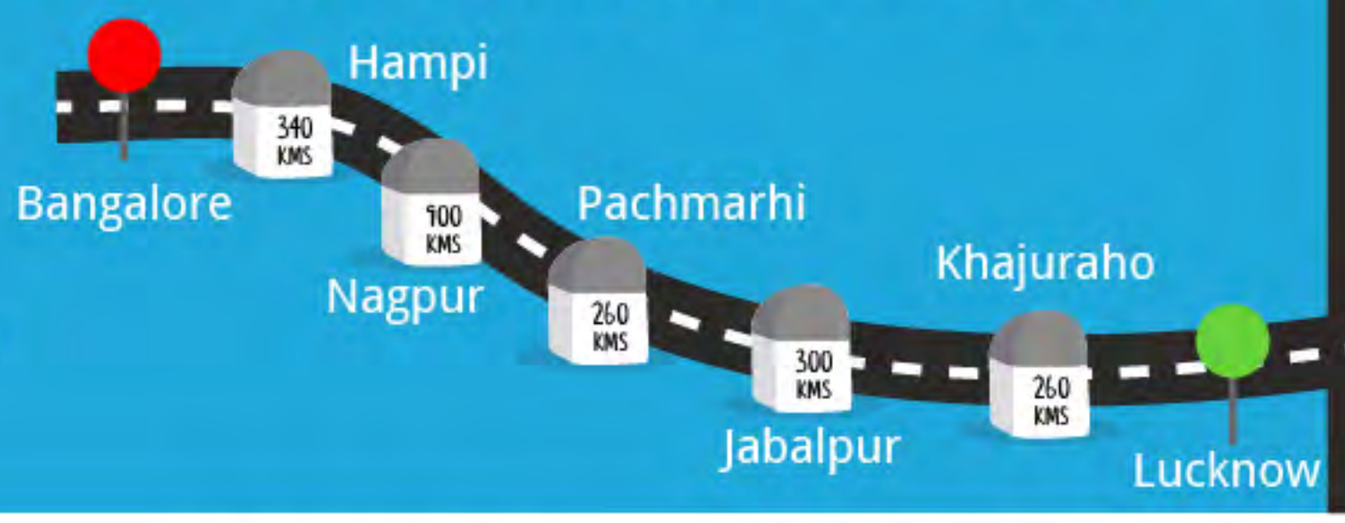
7.8 lakh passengers

3200 destinations

24,978 chauffeurs

OUR LONGEST ITINERARY

93,500 lakh kilometres



OUR STAR DRIVER PARTNER

Padmaranga H L
442 trips in 2022

Where did India Travel?

Spiritual Sojourn
- Ujjain
- Srisailam
- Ajmer Sharif
- Namsai Pagoda
- Bhimashankar

A splash in the beach
- Varkala
- Diu
- Ashwem
- Dhanushkodi
- Gopalpur

For some adrenaline rush
- Imagica Theme Park
- Hogenakkal Falls
- Kaziranga National Park
- Ramoji Film city
- Jim Corbett National Park

The hills are calling
- Sakleshpur
- Saputara
- Mandu
- Pahalgam
- Kalimpong

Unmissable experiences
- Cherry Blossom in Shillong
- Snake boat race in Punnamada lake
- Rann Utsav in Kutch
- Khajuraho dance festival

★★★★★

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Breathing heritage and crafts at Raghurajpur

In Odisha's rural heartland lies a visual gallery, rich in art, craft, and cultural heritage. Upon entering the village, there's a signboard welcoming you, which says 'Heritage Village Raghurajpur', and they truly do live up to that. With neat rows of houses adorned with wall paintings, the town is the epitome of Odia heritage.

Raghurajpur has been a settlement of artisans that dates back to the 13th century, after the establishment of the Jagannath temple of Puri. The name of the town is derived from 'Raghuraj' which means King Raghu, a synonym for Lord Rama in Hindu mythology. According to popular lore, people believe that Lord Rama stayed here for a short while during his fourteen years of exile.

Folklores of Odisha, preserved in art

At Raghurajpur, art and worship are inextricably linked and it's a treat for the senses. With a village population of 140 families, Raghurajpur is possibly India's only village where every household produces handicrafts. In 2000, the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) declared Raghurajpur as a 'heritage village', which has helped the artists explore other traditional art forms as well. Let's dive deeper into the various forms of art present in this village. Each house in Raghurajpur has a chitrakar, a painter who breathes life into the soulless canvas.

Chitrakars of Raghurajpur

Pattachitra - Revering the Gods with art

Raghurajpur is best known for its vibrant Pattachitra, or cloth-based scroll paintings which date back to the 12th Century. Pattachitra is derived from the Sanskrit words Patt and Chitra which mean canvas and painting, respectively. It depicts intricate details from Hindu mythological narratives and folktales. It is tradition to pass the paintings as heirlooms to future generations. According to Hindu mythology, Lord Brahma, the creator of the universe, drew the figures of Lord Jagannath, Balarama, and Subhadra with charcoal on a piece of cloth. Since then, Odisha's Pattachitra artists have used cloth as their spiritual canvas.

Steeped in ancient culture, portraying scenes from mythology with natural colours, exquisite craftsmanship, and simplicity in design, the Pattachitra has captured the imagination of artists.

Pattachitra depicting tales from the Mahabharata

Talapatra - Art etched in time

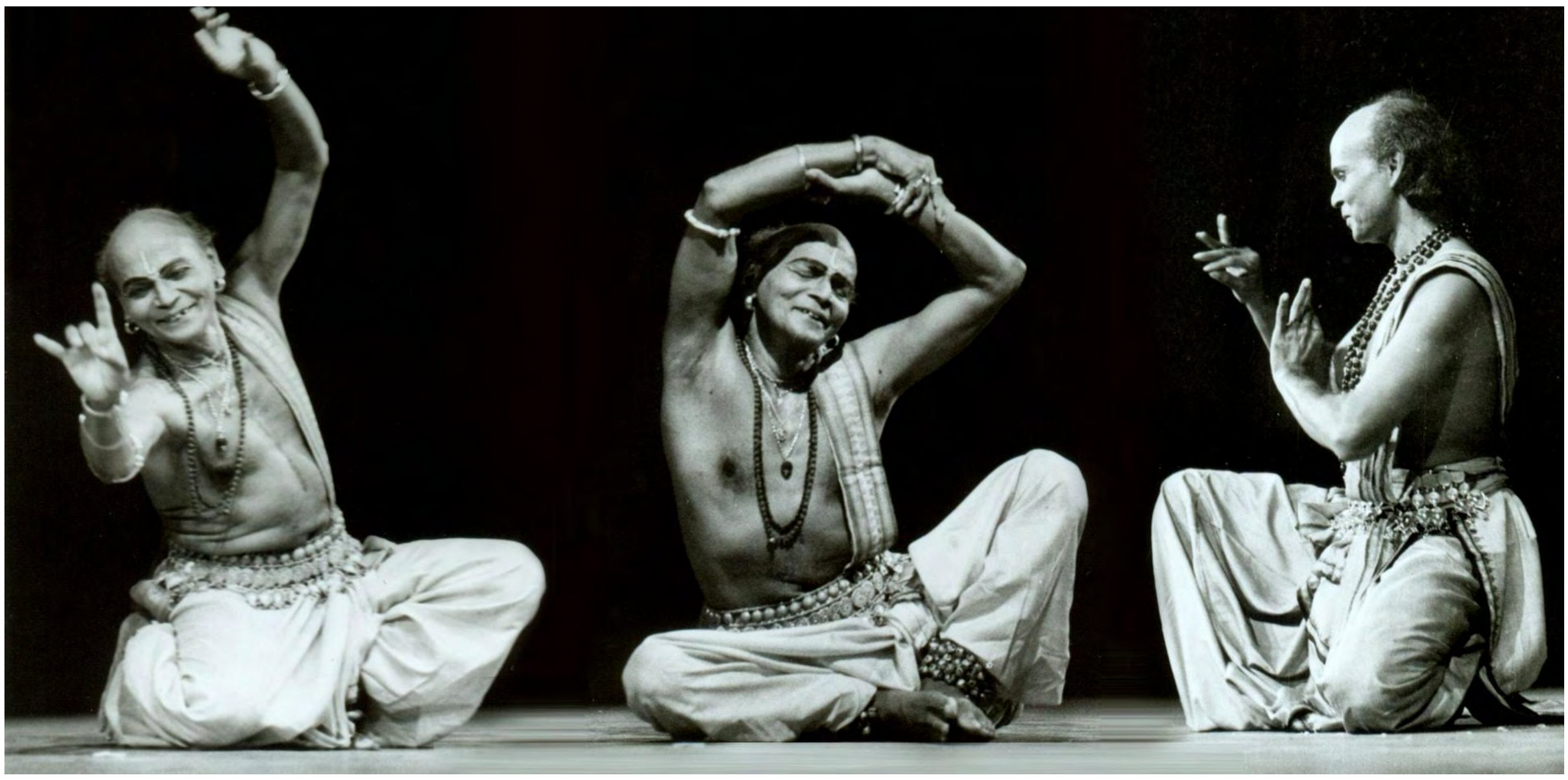
Talapatra of Odisha is pin-tip thin paintings etched on a string of palm leaves and highlighted with the black of lampblack or kohl. Fine line drawings in black, sometimes with daubs of colours, are made on interlocked strips of palm leaves. Usually, each drawing is like a tapestry narrating a story inspired by the Mahabharatha, Ramayana and the tales of Lord Jagannath. The artists also produce souvenirs like painted palm leaf bookmarks.

Artist painting a Talapatra

Other handicraft items produced by the villagers include stone carvings, paper mache toys and masks, wood carvings, wooden toys, and cow-dung toys.
One of the special products of this village is also the Sambalpuri Saree, which is a Tussar saree with various mythological scenes painted about Mathura Vijay, Raslila, and more.

Gotipua - The dance that freed devadasis

Apart from these incredible art forms, Raghurajpur has also preserved the tradition of Gotipua, a performing art that is thought to be the precursor of Odissi. Gotipua, a 17th-century solo dance performed at temples and monasteries during festivals, has been adapted as a group dance for the modern stage. ‘Goti’ means single in Odiya, and ‘Pua’ means boy. Sri Kelucharan Mohapatra, the legendary Indian classical dancer, was born in this village and received his Gotipua training here.



Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra

During the Mughal era, temples had dedicated female artists who served the temple by cleaning, serving and dancing for their whole lives were called Devadasis. Many considered it to be a very exploitative system and it was banned in 1988. To carry on the legacy, young boys dressed as girls perform this folk dance form in praise of Lord Jagannath and Lord Vishnu. They start to learn the dance at a young age and continue until their adolescence when their androgynous looks fade.

Every street and home in Raghurajpur breathes art

The grandeur of Odisha's artists and craftsmen can be seen here. It is a great place to indulge in a unique experience of connecting with the local craftsmen while shopping away. To reach Raghurajpur, travellers have to get down at Chandanpur, which is 10 km from Puri and about 55 km from Bhubaneswar on NH-203, connecting Puri and Bhubaneswar. If you want to go back in time and spend time with traditional dancers and artisans, the heritage village of Raghurajpur is an ideal relic of timelessness.

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Kuldhara

A village with many mysterious tales

The dilapidated town of Kuldhara lies in Jaisalmer, which was prosperous back in he day, but now is in ruins. The settlement has been abandoned since the early nineteenth century and carries an eerie history to it. About 300 years ago, the inhabitants of Kuldhara disappeared overnight. Are you wondering why?

Mysteries surrounding the ghost village for aeons

It was previously a prosperous community inhabited by Paliwal Brahmins, established during the thirteenth century. The majority of the inhabitants were agricultural traders, bankers, and farmers. It was abandoned by the early nineteenth century for reasons unknown. It may be due to depleting water supplies, an earthquake, or as a local folklore states. Let’s explore the various possibilities that led to the haunting mysteries of Kuldhara.

A marriage proposal that went south

According to the local legend, Salim Singh, a minister from Jaisalmer, was head over heels for the daughter of the Village. He desired to marry by force and kill everyone but the villagers did not adhere to his wishes. Instead of submitting to the tyrant, people from 84 villages had a council and decided to leave their ancestral homes. Although this was not all, they cursed that no one will ever be able to settle in Kuldhara.

> *The curse appears to still stand as anyone who attempted to settle in the community left in hurry, after encountering strange occurrences.*

He dispatched messengers to notify everyone, and that night, all the inhabitants fled their land with bitter hearts and left a curse behind as per which no one will be able to settle there ever. No one knew where so many people had disappeared. Since that day, the village lies abandoned, and over the years, it has not failed to uphold the level of fear and horror. To this day, it's still a mystery as to how and why so many villagers vanished in one night. Although, the curse appears to still stand as anyone who attempted to settle in the community left in hurry, after encountering strange occurrences. Many visitors who came on a trip to Kuldhara, had odd experiences that sent shivers down their spines.

A team of paranormal researchers visited the village and stayed overnight with high-tech gear to track the presence and activity of supernatural powers. A team member stated that he discovered scratches on his car in the morning, which is impossible to believe given that no one else around saved them. Another member had a similar unusual experience of being touched from behind and finding no one staring back. They also followed some moving shadows and quiet sounds calling and chatting.

Spirits guarding a buried treasure chest

Another well-known legend claims that the Paliwal Brahmins decided to leave the country overnight one fine night after paying a heavy tax to the king out of concern for their wealth.

They buried their life savings as a community, intending to return and take the money with them someday. As they never returned, some believe that they died far from their homes and wealth after living as nomads. As a result, it is assumed that their spirits inhabit their home, which they loved but could not dwell in. Some claim that no one could ever dwell in that village because their spirits guard their wealth.

The drought that forced everyone to flee

Kuldhara had a river that ran through the village, however, it gradually began to dry over time, and groundwater levels began to fall dramatically. As a result, the residents were obliged to seek alternative residences. They couldn't exist without a reliable water source close to their home. Thus, some feel that the village of Kuldhara is not truly haunted but rather a place that gradually became an abandoned community due to a lack of water.

An earthquake that left the village in the rubble

Some scientists claimed that a sizable earthquake was to blame for forcing the residents to relocate. According to them, the way the buildings collapsed and the roofs of every building indicate that a significant earthquake was the only possible cause. Due to extensive damage from the earthquake, some even consider that the inhabitants began a new life elsewhere rather than rebuilding everything from ruins.

The horror continues

The village is one of the most enigmatic places in India due to the countless ghostly encounters it has witnessed and the terrifying paranormal tales that have been told there. In the middle of the golden dunes, the settlement still appears deserted. At present, the village is under the purview of the Archaeological Survey of India and is open to tourists for exploration from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

The village's mystery remains unsolved and tangled even after numerous detailed studies. The most convenient way to travel to Kuldhara Village is by car. It is around 20 kilometres from Jaisalmer and takes about half an hour to get there. There is also the Khaba Fort, which is a historic ruins and the Desert National Park for wildlife lovers, within an hour's drive from Kuldhara.

the ramayana journey

Tracing its footsteps in Modern India

India is home to many mythological tales, but the Ramayana is an epic that by deeply rooted in Hindu culture and tradition. A chronicle that has withstood the test of time, we explore the legendary Ramayana journey in context of Modern India.

Ayodhya

Birthplace of Lord Ram and his Kingdom

Places to visit
- Ram Mandir
- Hanumangarhi's temple
- Dasrath Bhavan
- Kanak Bhawan
- Sita ki Rasoi

Prayagraj

Ram, Sita, and Lakshman spent some time here before proceeding to Chitrakoot.

Places to visit
- Bade Hanumanji Temple
- Khusro Bagh
- Anand Bhawan Museum
- Allahabad Fort

Chitrakoot

The site of 'Bharat Milap'. Lord Ram performed the Shuddhi ritual in honour of his father.

Places to visit
- Gupt Godavari Cave
- Valmiki Ashram
- Sphatik Shilam
- Ram Ghat
- Hanuman Dhara

Nashik

Lakshman sliced Shurpankha's nose and later where Sita was abducted by the demon king Ravana.

Places to visit
- The Kala Ram Mandir
- Ram Kund
- Sita Gufa
- Kapaleshwar Mandir

Dandakaranya Forest

This is where Surpanakha met Lord Rama and fell in love with him and got rejected by Rama.

Places to visit
- The Bastar Palace
- Danteshwari Temple
- Tirathgarh Falls
- Kanger Dhara
- Tamada Ghumar

Hampi

Ram met Hanuman and formed an army known as the Vanarsena, with the assistance of Sugriva.

Places to visit
- Shri Virupaksha Temple
- Lotus Mahal
- Kings Court
- Shivalaya Rameswaram

Rameshwaram

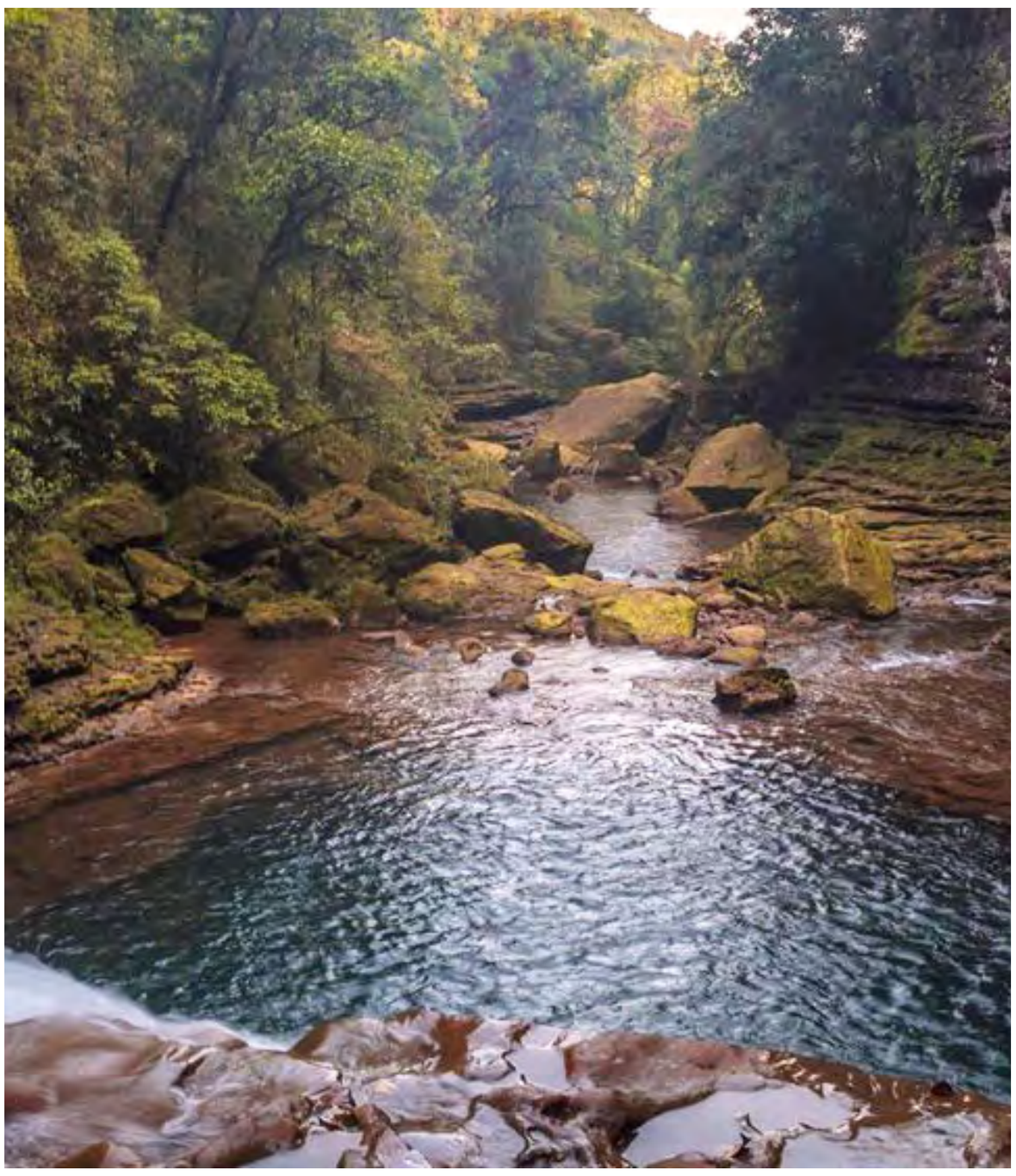
Ram commissioned the Vanarsena to begin the construction of a bridge to Lanka from Dhanushkodi.

Places to visit
- Ramanathaswamy Temple
- Jada Tirtham
- Pamban Bridge
- Panchamukhi Hanuman Temple
- Gandhamadhana Parvatham

Lepakshi

Ram met the dying Jatayu and helped him reach salvation.

Places to visit
- Veerabhadra Temple
- Papanatheswara
- Raghunatha
- Srirama



Kongthong

The Whistling Village

“What’s in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.”
-William Shakespeare, Romeo & Juliet

As a result of having the most unusual names in the world and taking great pride in them, Kongthong village in Meghalaya undoubtedly skipped their Shakespeare class. Kongthong village is located in the East Khasi Hills district, about 2 hours from Shillong, the state capital of Meghalaya. Civilization is sparse in these parts, and the village is surrounded by magnificent high ridges and dizzyingly deep gorges. The ‘whistling village’ is the one place in India where one can often hear people whistling melodious tunes for a strangely quirky reason.

Melody or Name - What do the locals go by?

One would often hear curious whistles and chirrups echoing through the jungles in Kongthong. A closer inspection reveals that it is not birdsong, but rather people singing to each other. ‘Jingrwai Iawbei ‘ translates as “song of the clan’s first woman,” referring to the Khasi people’s mythical original mother.

The residents of the Khasi tribe call out to their friends and family members in music accompanied by whistles and chirrups. As part of the Kongthong village tradition, each person has a distinct tune for calling each other, and this custom has been passed down through generations. When a child is born in the Kongthong village, the mother composes a lullaby that becomes that person's identity for the rest of their life.

They don't say each other's names or use common interjections like *Oye*, *Hey*, or even *Hello*. The villagers sing the melody for more than 30 seconds to communicate with one another while in the forest. Although the residents have names, they are rarely used to communicate. The origin of addressing each other with music as an element is unknown, but villagers believe it has been practised for over five centuries. Although, when someone is angry with someone else, they tend to address them by name.

Views from the Kongthong village

Besides the lullaby composed, the mother must come up with a different tune than the existing ones to ensure that the child's identity remains his own. The lullaby has no words because it is only a hum that the villagers can understand. The practice of tunes or songs as names is rooted in their cultural ethos and passed down orally. It is also a manifestation of their matrilineal principles, which are deep-seated into the system and orally handed down over generations.

Another intriguing aspect is that the villagers are accustomed to communicating through music. The villagers have two names: a regular name like *Pyndaplin Shabong* or *Phlimsibon Khogjee*, and a song name like Eeooow or Ooeeo, with the song name having two variations: a short song and a long song. The shorter one is their pet name, and the longer one is used to ward off evil spirits in the forest. In the past, the melodies were used to keep track of one another in the forest while hunting and to ward off evil spirits. It is believed that bad spirits that dwell in the forests cannot distinguish tunes from each other or animal calls. Hence, no harm comes when people are called by their tunes in the forest.

When the village composed a melody for PM Modi

Conrad Sangma, Chief Minister of Meghalaya, shared a video featuring a special tune sung by a woman in appreciation of the Centre's efforts to promote Kongthong village as a prime tourist destination. Prime Minister Narendra Modi retweeted the video and thanked the villagers. The Ministry of Tourism recommended Kongthong Village for the United Nations World Tourism Organization's 'Best Tourism Villages' competition.

Villagers whistle to call each other

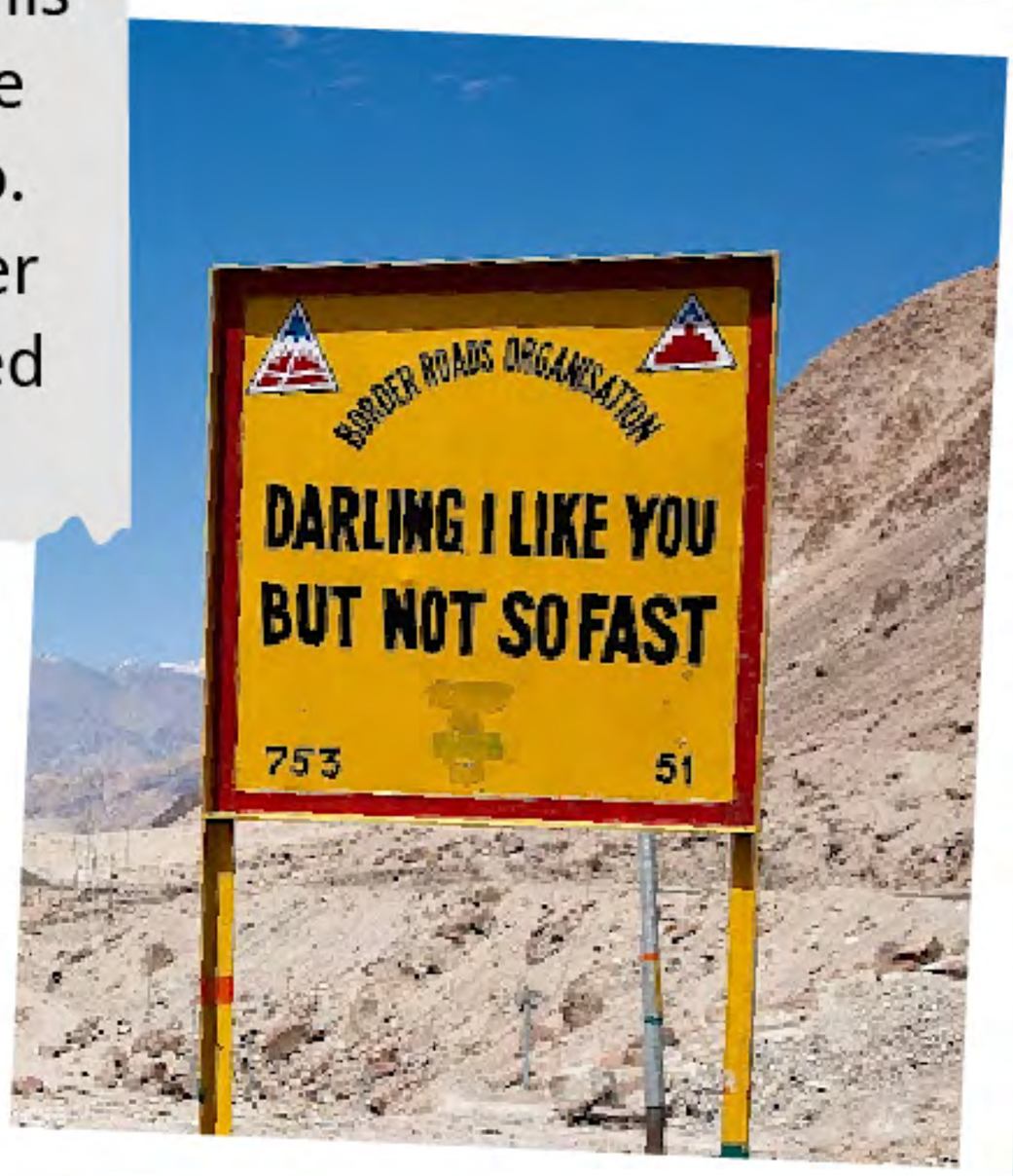
The villagers here are uninfluenced and untouched by the modern world and they are happy to live within the ambit of their own culture and identity which brings them happiness and satisfaction. Kongthong is located 53 km from Shillong and can be reached by driving to Shillong and embarking on a trek to the village. Enjoy the peace and beauty that surround you in Kongthong. You can also indulge in activities such as kite flying, swimming, hiking, and bird watching. Listen to Khasi fables while eating delicious Khasi dishes around a bonfire. The best time to visit Kongthong Village is from October to May as during this time the weather will be pleasant and clear. However, you can also visit the place during monsoon if you are interested to get a glimpse of the greenery of Kongthong Whistling Village.

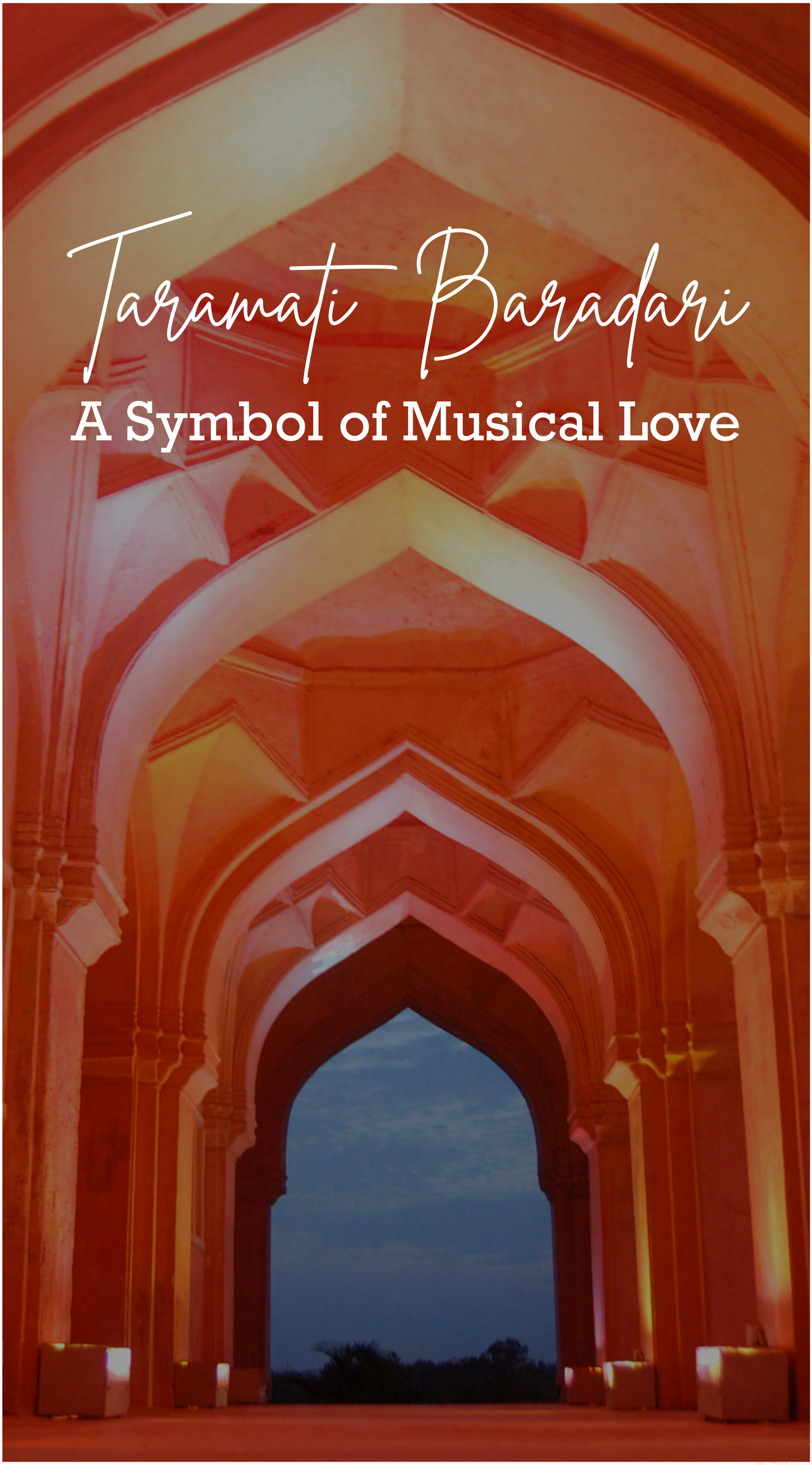
CHASING rura SUMMERS

The rural expanses of Odisha & the hills of Araku Valley have an extraordinary rural charm that serves you with the best that rustic India has to offer. In the summer of 2022, a rural travel enthusiast, Kavya Saxena and chef Rachit took the road less travelled with Savaari, into the treasure trove of tribal markets and the rolling hills of the Eastern Ghats.

Laughter on the road, thanks BRO

When you take the plane or train, you tend to miss experiencing the tiny details along the way, but when you're on the road, you can share a laugh on the go. Be sure to follow these signs by Border Roads Organization (BRO) for increased safety on your future road trips.





Taramati Baradari

A Symbol of Musical Love

A romantic man once said '*Some love stories have no words. Only heartbeats.*' In the case of the tales of romance, some love stories have been immortalised in brick and mortar. It's fascinating to see masterpieces built in the name of love that is still standing strong in the present day. In the North, we find the majestic Taj Mahal in Agra, the symbol of love of a Mughal ruler Shah Jahan for his wife Mumtaz Mahal, and in the south, there's Taramati Baradari in Hyderabad.

Taramati Baradari is a Persian-style edifice erected on the banks of the river Musi (Muchukunda). It is regarded as one of the greatest pieces created by Ibrahim Quli Qutub Shah, the Qutub Shah Dynasty's fourth sultan for his courtesan, Taramati. Baradari, also known as Bara Dari, is a building or pavilion with twelve doors designed to allow the free flow of air. The place sings ballads of the legendary love between the Sultan and Taramati. It is mostly recognised for its acoustics in the middle of the gorgeous and artistic ambience of the Ibrahim Bagh, and it is primarily associated with romantic tales of a prince falling in love.

An architectural wonder built in the name of love

Kings who fell in love with people who were not royal family members always found a place in history, and if it was with a courtesan, it was filled with numerous fables. There are numerous incomparable histories of Hyderabad's past, and this specific construction of Taramati Baradari is no exception.

> *Her voice was well complemented by the building's and fort's excellent acoustics. For instance, even a clap on the Baradari's balcony could be heard in the Golconda fort.*

According to folklore, the emperor used to listen to Taramati's melodies sung for travellers at the Sarai from his fort some distance away. Almost every day, he heard her lovely, calming voice brought to his fort by the soft breeze. The emperor was captivated by her exquisite voice, which was both melodious and mesmerising.

He was so mesmerized by Tamarati's singing that he built a palace where her melodic voice could be carried away by the air and reach the prince's ear who was seated at the fort, a couple of kilometres away in Golconda Fort, without any disruption in the acoustics. The Baradari was created with a specific acoustic construction that ensured that the wind would

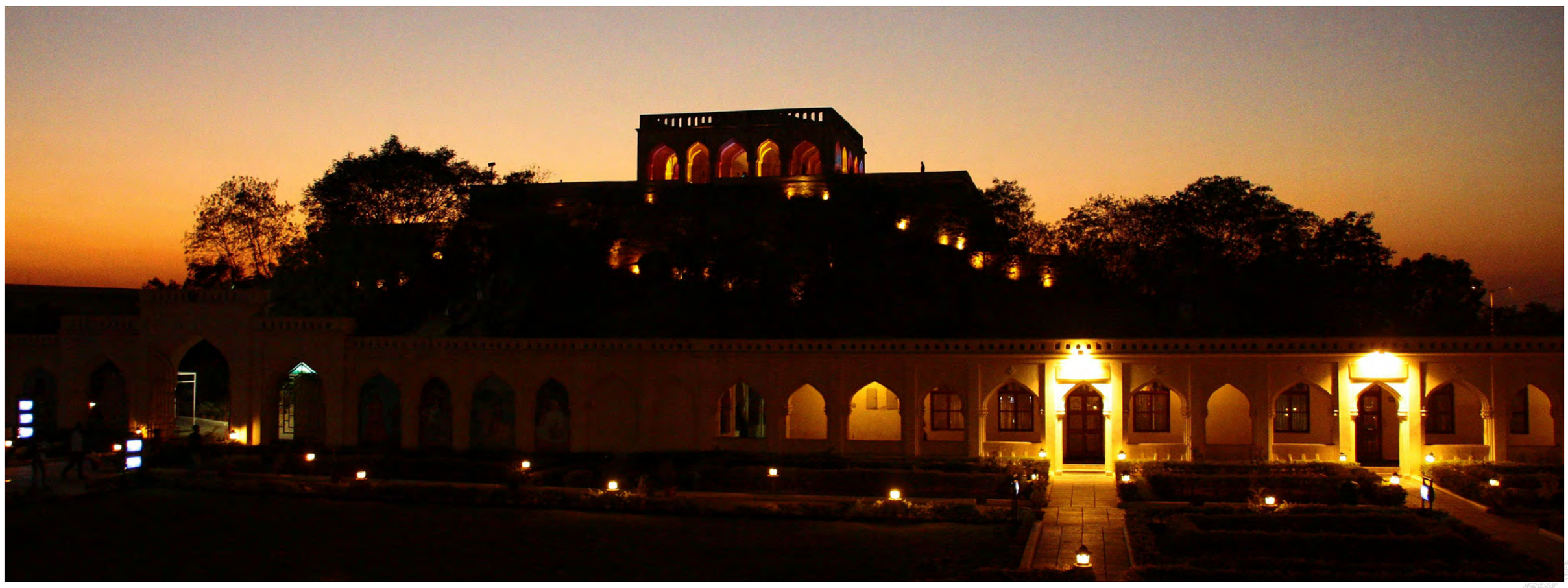
transmit her lovely voice to the Fort. Her voice was well complemented by the building's and fort's excellent acoustics. For instance, even a clap on the Baradari's balcony could be heard in the Golconda fort.

Historians have related another fascinating story in which Taramati, along with her sister, Premamati, used to demonstrate their dance talents on tight ropes that connected her pavilion to the Golconda fort's pavilion. The sisters have also been said to have danced on moonlit nights on ropes connecting the Baradari to the Golconda fort. According to popular belief, Taramati continued to dance even after Emperor Aurangzeb ordered her to cease. The fact that these sisters were buried at the royal cemetery of the Quli Qutub Shahi Kings and Queens demonstrates the king's love and respect for them.

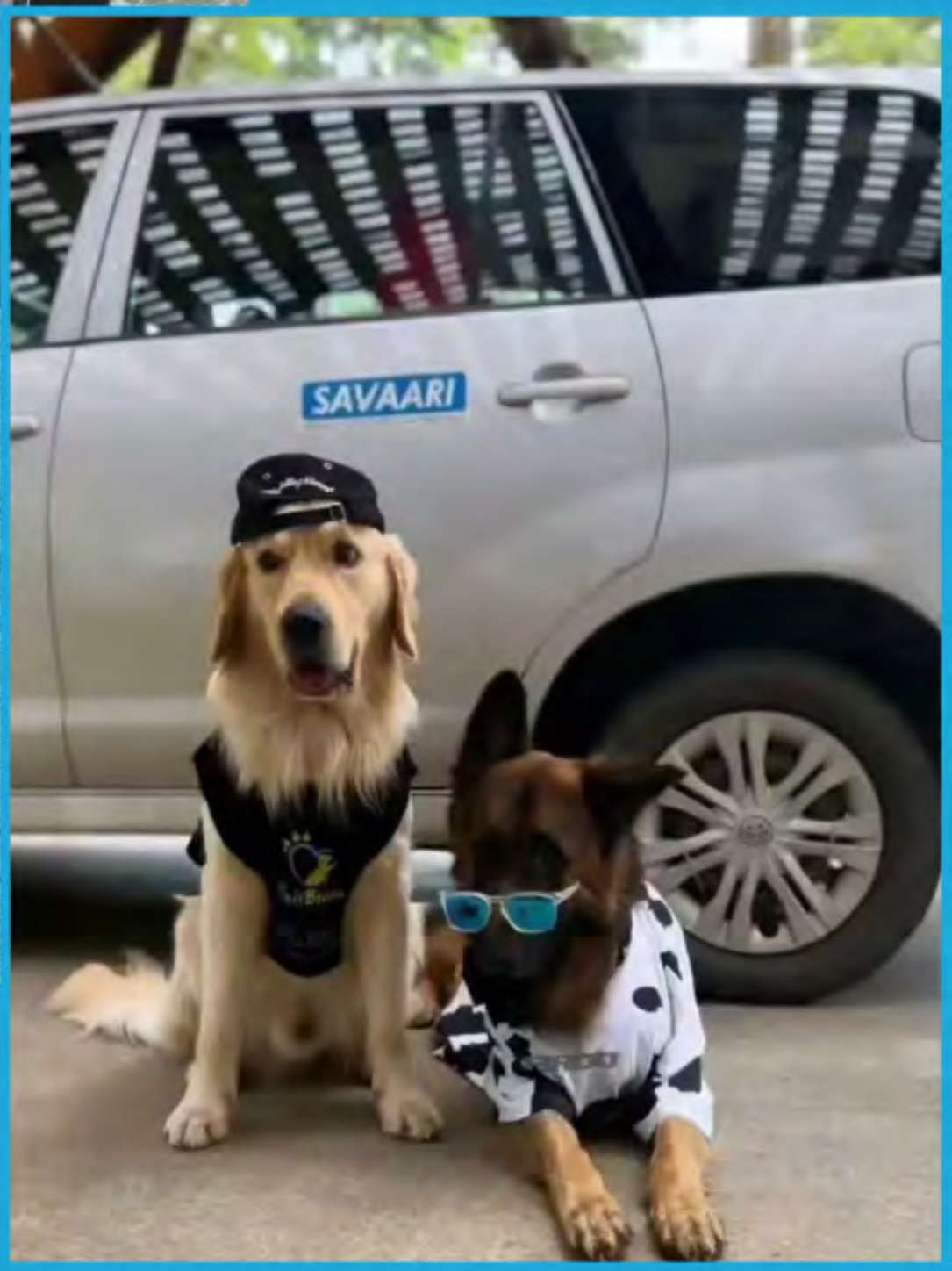
Once a cocoon for romance, now a cobweb of spirits

The most common legend surrounding the fort is that of Taramati's ghost. Many claim to have seen Taramati performing at the Baradari, the royal courtroom's dance stage. Some visitors, such as those described above, claim to have seen ownerless shadows gliding around. Many film crews that stayed beyond late hours have experienced similar incidents. Quite a few publications have also reported the same thing, however, the veracity of such allegations remains questionable.

But, apart from the rumours and tell-tales, the Taramati Baradari is a symbol of grandeur. A visit to this place will instantly take you back in time, and leave you wondering how breathtaking the place would have been during its heydays! Taramati Baradari is located 16 km away from Hyderabad. Presently, it is a cultural complex which is run by the Telangana Tourism Government where various events, concerts, performances and exhibitions are conducted. Taramati Baradari visiting hours are from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Entry to the complex is free. It's one of the most stunning spots in Hyderabad that everyone should see.



Tails from the road with SAVAARI



Planning trips with your pets may seem like a daunting task but it can be fun as long as the transportation is arranged, then it’s all about enjoying the journey. When Savaari is your travel partner, 'Anything is pawsible', which is why we ensure that no paw is left behind and your vacation is filled with frolic and adventure.

The Indian Chilli Trail

Can you imagine eating bland food like Dal Kichadi every day of your life? It seems impossible, right? Well, that was the precise nature of Indian Cuisine right up to the 16th century. Chillies are not native to India but are an integral part of the local palette today. But which ingredient was utilized before the arrival of chillies? We cannot fathom an era without savouring chillies in our favourite dishes today.

Most Indians used pepper and dry ginger powder to bring in an essence of heat, spice and flavour, before the arrival of chillies in India. It was introduced by Vasco Da Gama when the Portuguese sailor and his men invaded India. The amalgamation of spice and flavour that chillies bring to every dish cannot be compared to any other ingredient in the world. In spite of the late arrival of chillies to the country, India is one of the largest producers and exporters of chillies in the world currently, ranging from raw chillies, dry chillies, chilli powder and more.

Asians take pride in the level of tolerance they carry to truly relish spicy food. Often in India, one can find chillies in almost every dish and sometimes, raw chillies are even served at restaurants as a snack with your main course. As strange as that seems, Indians really do love their chillies.

Bhut Jolokia - The hottest chilli in the world

It is commonly known as the ghost pepper and is grown only in Assam, Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh. In 2007, it was certified as the Hottest Chilli in the World by the Guinness Book of World Records. It is used in cooking and fermented food like pickles, dry fish and pork.

Kashmiri Chilli - The chilli from great heights

The most extensively used chilli in Indian households is the Kashmiri chilli, which is not as spicy as other varieties of chilli found in India. It gives a deep red colour and adds a rich appeal to the food.

Kashmiri Chilli

Guntur Chilli - The spice of the south

Guntur is a town in Andhra Pradesh and is the main producer and exporter of chillies, globally. Various famous dishes were inspired by this particular chilli like the Guntur Chicken Curry.

Jwala Chilli - The epitome of spice

Grown in the Kheda & Mehsana districts of Gujarat is the Jwala Chilli, one that has a very intense flavour and turns red upon maturation. It is popularly used in most spicy foods in India.

Jwala Chilli

Kanthari Chilli - From God's own country

It is known as the 'Birds Eye' chilli of Kerala and adds a great flavour of heat and spice to every dish. It is popularly used to make sun-dried yoghurt-soaked chilli with salt, a common South-Indian treat.

Byadagi Chilli - A staple in South Indian cuisine

Byadagi chilli is also known for its deep red colour and is not as spicy as the rest. It is used in many food preparations in South India, like sambar, chutney and masala powders. It is named after the town of Byadagi in Karnataka and is popularly known for its flavour and colour.

Ramnad Mundu Chilli - The aromas of Chettinad

It is a small, round chilli with dried orange skin that is native to the Ramnad district of Tamil Nadu. Ramnad chilli is unique as it ensures the natural and authentic flavour of Chettinad cuisine.

Khola Chilli - Fresh from the Konkan Coast

Native to Canacona in Goa, the bright red chilli is famous for its rich taste and flavour. It is the key ingredient for a traditional dish called 'Recheado' and is often used as stuffing for mackerels and other seafood.

Dalle Khursani - Native to the North-east

It is often referred to as the cousin or relative of Bhut Jolokia and is the main chilli used for momos, pickles and sauces. It is found in Sikkim and is one of the most commonly used chillies in Northeastern dishes.

Jwala Chilli

Not just an ingredient but a medicinal marvel

Apart from adding a splash of flavour to Indian Cuisine, they also have medicinal properties such as supporting digestion, healthy cardiovascular health, weight reduction, and other healing properties. As they are rich in vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants, they help in boosting your immunity.

On your future road trips in India, be sure to explore the various types of chillies and the mouth-watering dishes that they are crafted into. Learn about their history, origin stories and any fun anecdotes that the locals will share with you, while you are savouring their cuisines.

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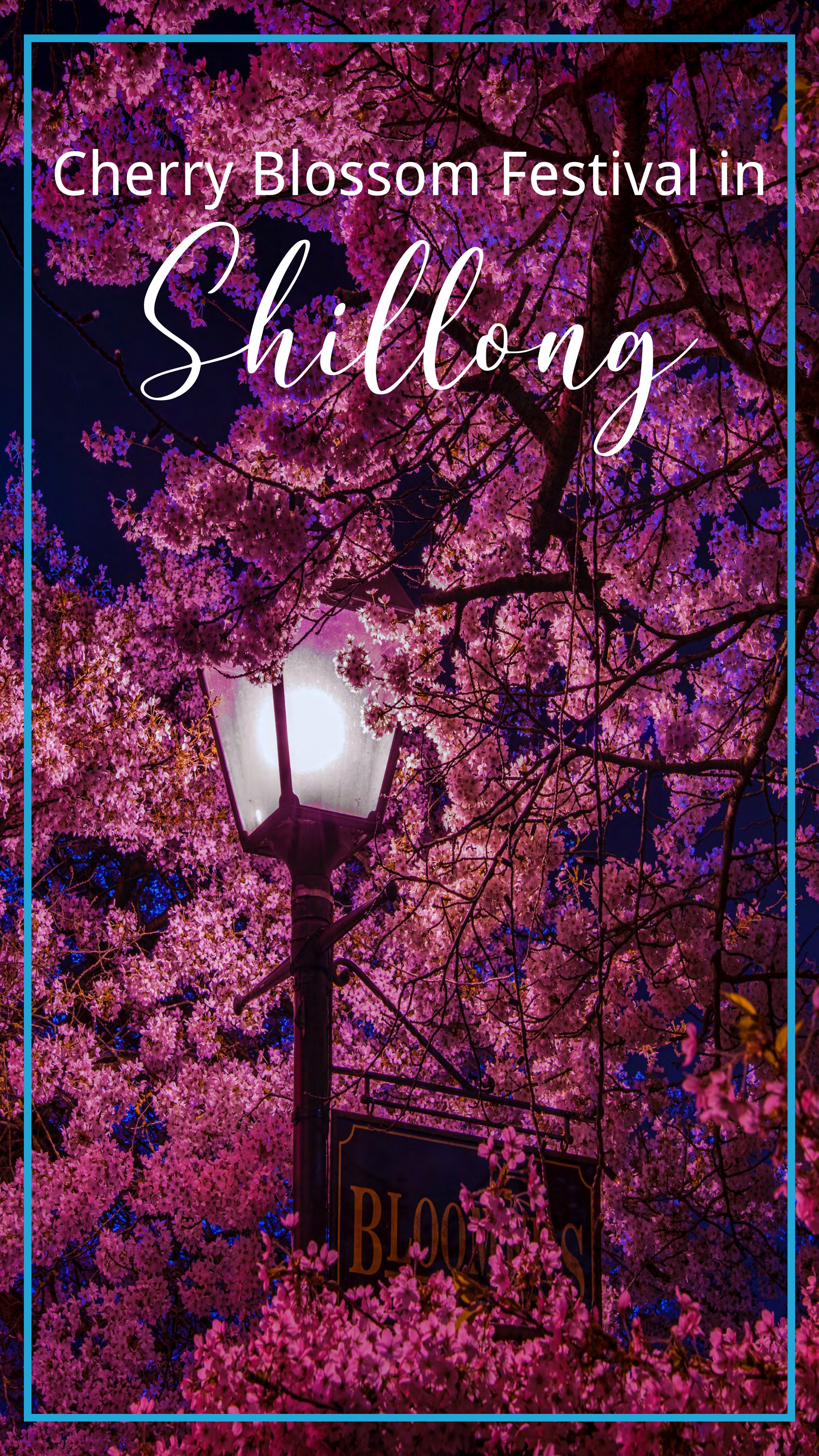
Cherry Blossom Festival in *Shillong*



Imagine travelling along a wonderful fairytale inspired lane lined by a thousand cherry blossom trees, each laden with piles of luscious pink petals, towering tall against the deep blue sky. The sight of an exquisite ocean of pink cherry blossoms is certain to flood your mind. The Japanese cherry blossom festival is famous for the magic that transpires, usually between late March and early April. They are commonly known as Sakura in Japan and herald the arrival of spring by painting the landscape with beautiful hues of pink.

Every year, travellers rush to Japan to witness the marvel of spring at its splendour. What if we told you that you don’t have to travel all the way to Japan to experience this charming sight?

While cherry blossom trees bloom in the spring throughout the world, Meghalaya's capital Shillong wears the dainty colours of cherry blossoms in the fall, transforming the East Khasi Hills into a floral wonderland. Shillong, regarded as the 'Scotland of the East,' is famous throughout the world for its spectacular natural beauty. This northeastern hill station in Meghalaya, India, has been on the bucket list of every nature lover owing to its rolling mountains, rich green vegetation, vivacious streams, terraced plantations, and more. In November, the hillsides of Shillong burst with pink flowers, like a painting with whimsical colours dotting its panoramic landscape.

Samurais, beauty and a season of splendour

In Buddhism, the cherry blossom signifies the fleeting nature of life. Since the cherry tree blooms for a week or two, they symbolise the fragile essence of existence. Cherry blossoms are lovely and vivid, much like life, yet they are ephemeral. The flowers have also been linked to the attractiveness of a young woman. For Japanese Samurais, soldiers, and gangsters, the blooms are a sign of life's transitory splendour. Cherry blossoms are also a sign of good fortune.

During the Heian Period (794–1185), Emperor Saga, Japan's 52nd emperor, established the custom of hanami parties in the Imperial Court in Kyoto, when aristocrats would meet under the trees to admire the beauty of cherry blossoms. This practice is carried on in modern Japan when the entire country gathers for a large outdoor event once the cherry blossoms bloom.

In India, cherry blossom or prunus cerasoides is known as wild Himalayan cherry and sour cherry, also known in Hindi as Padam, pajja, or padmakashtha. It is deemed sacred by Hindus in Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand and is linked with Vishnu and Shiva.

Cherishing hues of pink in India

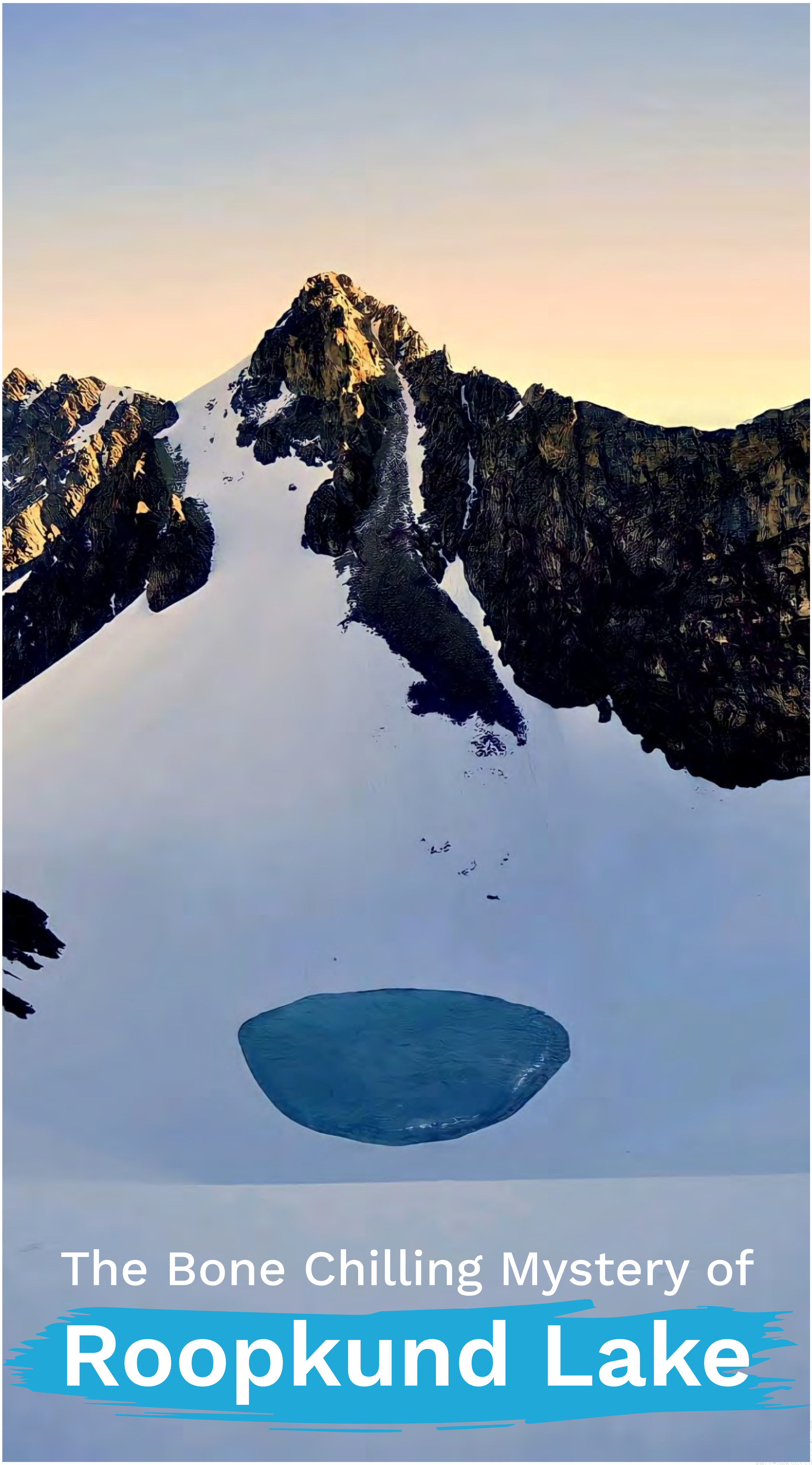
Shillong will be celebrating the Cherry Blossom Festival typically in late November to commemorate seasonal blossoming and indulge in leisure. The annual Shillong Cherry Blossom Festival is recognised as one of the state's most vivid and colourful festivals. This event began in 2016. It is organised annually by the Government of Meghalaya and features live music and a wealth of events, such as dancing contests, pageants, and various kiosks dedicated to representing their area through cuisine, wine, and arts and crafts. One can also witness musical performances, bicycle rallies, and storytelling sessions.

In Shillong, the Cherry Blossom Festival typically takes place in the middle of November and one can witness the spectacular sight of the blooming of Himalayan Cherry Blossoms. The Shillong Cherry Blossom Festival is usually held at Polo Ground, but smaller events are held throughout the city. You can drive to Polo Ground from Shillong Airport and take a short walk to the main festival venue, Shillong Golf Course. The walk is stunning as you will see pine trees and cherry blooms everywhere. Be sure to check the Meghalaya Tourism page for more details, so your trip is better planned and you can avoid the risk of disappointing yourself with closed buds.

If you cannot travel to Shillong, fret not because it is not the only place where you can catch gorgeous cherry blossoms in India. Khangchendzonga National Park in Sikkim, Kohima in Nagaland, Mashobra village in Shimla, Harshil Valley in Uttarakhand, Bangalore in Karnataka, and the Nilgiris in Ooty are some of the places covered in hues of pink as spring begins. Don’t forget to add these locations to your bucket list and enjoy the exquisite splashes of pink.

Exploring the forgotten stepwells of Rajasthan

Stepwells were once constructed for the main purpose of water storage and they also worked as air conditioning systems in palaces and forts. Also known as Baori or Baoli or Vav in local Rajasthani languages, stepwells are unique architectural marvels of India that you will find only in the Indian state of Rajasthan and Gujarat. Savaari went on a road trip exploring the stepwells in Rajasthan with Rararaasta, a collective comprising Ranjani and Raghavan to explore the rich culture and history of these forgotten masterpieces.



The Bone Chilling Mystery of Roopkund Lake

Imagine that you navigate through the mountains with rock-strewn glaciers, and dry air hanging heavy around your shoulders, only to witness a lake surrounded by bones. Long departed souls seem to cast furtive glances at you from around every corner. Set amidst the benevolent mountainous peaks in Uttarakhand lies Roopkund Lake - a lake scattered with bones.

The remains of human skeletons and horses from the Palaeolithic period can be seen here, earning it the nickname ‘Mystery lake of the Himalayas’. Roopkund Lake is located 5000 metres above sea level and the mysteries have long perplexed archaeologists and researchers. However, research reveals that the site has a much more complicated history than we have imagined.

Discovery of the lake & confusion over the corpses

In the winter of 1942, on the shores of a lake high in the Himalayas, a British forest guard came across hundreds of bones and skulls, some with flesh still on them. The melted ice in summer revealed more skeletal remains floating and scattered around the lake's edges. As it was during World War II, Britishers assumed that the skeletons belonged to Japanese soldiers but were proven wrong when they investigated further.

So whose remains can we find at this mysterious lake? What happened to them? Let's take a look at the various perspectives that can help shed some light.

The price paid by a boisterous king

The locals believe the bones belong to royalty. King Jasdhawal embarked on a pilgrimage to Nanda Devi where he wanted to honour the goddess before the birth of his child. Even though his intentions were good, the local priests warned him not to take a noisy troupe to the sacred site. He ignored the advice and embarked on the journey while the queen gave birth.

Remains of jewellery, artefacts, numerous knives and spears, have been discovered among the skeletons, giving credence to this theory.

In the spirit of celebration, the king brought dancers and other luxuries with him which enraged the goddess with the ostentatious display of festivity and pomp. She believed that this was corrupting her holy land and she unleashed a hailstorm and slayed them all. Remains of jewellery, artefacts, numerous knives and spears, have been discovered among the skeletons, giving credence to this theory.

Trek to the Roopkund Lake

Psychedelic fungi, gruesome battles and more

Some people believe that the skeletons belonged to groups of people who came to the valley looking for psychedelic fungi, known locally as 'keeda jadi.' During spring, a search party went to look for the missing people, only to find themselves in the middle of a devastating natural disaster. The journey could have progressed but everyone was trapped, with nowhere to run and hide as disaster struck and a violent torrent of hailstones fell from the skies that battered the group.

Some even believed the skulls belonged to General Zorawar Singh of Kashmir and his men, who got lost in the middle of the Himalayas due to bad weather while returning from the battle of Tibet in 1841.

Over the years, the mystery has piqued the interest of many historians, anthropologists, and archaeologists, who have worked tirelessly to unravel the truth about what happened at Roopkund Lake.

What actually happened to the remains?

Scientists have concluded that the skeletons discovered near the frozen lake belonged to pilgrims and locals who died due to hail storms. In 2004, scientists collected skeletal bone samples and bits of preserved human tissue to conduct DNA tests. The evidence suggested that the skeletons belonged to two distinct groups of people, with different bone features.
The skeletons were divided into two groups: family skeletons and shorter skeletons. The researchers concluded that due to the lack of injuries to other parts of the body, they suggested that hard round objects, possibly cricket ball-sized hailstones or ice balls had fallen from above and caused their deaths.

Even after numerous detailed studies and expeditions, the Roopkund Lake surrounding these skeletons remains unsolved and tangled. Roopkund is accessible between May and June, August, and mid-October.
You can travel to Roopkund from Haridwar, Rishikesh and Srinagar to reach the starting point of the trek in Lohajung, a tiny pass in the Garhwal Himalayas at 16,499 feet above sea level. While all the myths and studies try to fall into place and align in harmony, you can simply enjoy the splendour of this magnificent landscape, which includes the massive Himalayas, snow-capped mountains, a vast blue sky, and a bone-chilling breeze that surrounds the Roopkund Lake.

Madhya Pradesh

An Essential Roadtrip

Gwalior - Orchha - Indore - Mandu - Jabalpur - Khajuraho

You can't beat the feeling of being on the road with your friends and favourite tunes pumping out of the stereo while anticipating where the next exciting stop might be. Travel enthusiast Nidhi Khurana and her posse, along with Savaari explored the history, heritage, and wilderness of Madhya Pradesh by road.

The Forgotten Stepwells

Functional Relics from India's Past

Every great civilisation has made a unique contribution to the pantheon of world architecture. Egypt gave the world pyramids; Greece gave the world Corinthian columns; and India gave the world the stepwell, which elevated the humble act of collecting water into an extravagant piece of public theatre. India's magnificent stepwells, which are astounding feats of water architecture, are mostly found in the towns and villages of the nation's northern and central states. These ancient locations, which number in the thousands and are concentrated in the arid states of Gujarat and Rajasthan, were once used to store water.

Stepwells were the permanent water source in these arid lands, ensuring water availability during times of drought. Normally, a set of stairs leading to a pond at the bottom would be present. A stepwell, however, was much more than just a simple reservoir. Most stepwells were lavishly ornamented and decked out with niches and pavilions where people could swim, bathe, perform religious rituals, and enjoy the natural cooling effect of a stored body of water, reflecting the importance of water in monsoon-dependent India. Here are some of India's most beautiful step-wells, which tell stories from a bygone era.

1. Chand Baori - The stepwell with a spirit

The Chand Baori (stepwell) in Abhaneri village is one of Rajasthan's oldest and most popular attractions. It was built in the 9th century AD by King Chanda of the Nikumbha Dynasty. Chand Baori, one of the world's largest step wells, was built to conserve water and provide relief from the extreme heat. It was a community gathering place for both locals and royals. Chand Baori is an architectural marvel with 3,500 perfectly symmetrical, narrow steps. The Harshat Mata Temple is adjacent to the Chand Baori. The temple is dedicated to Harshat Mata, the village's goddess of joy and happiness.

According to folklore, this massive stepwell, which has 3500 steps and 13 stories, was built in just one night! Because that is an impossible feat for even a superhuman, the locals believe the structure was built by a djinn, a spirit. It is also reported that no human has ever used the same set of stairs to descend and then ascend from the stepwell, so much so that you wouldn't be able to take the same steps twice. While this is still debatable, eyewitness accounts confirm it.

Chand Baori

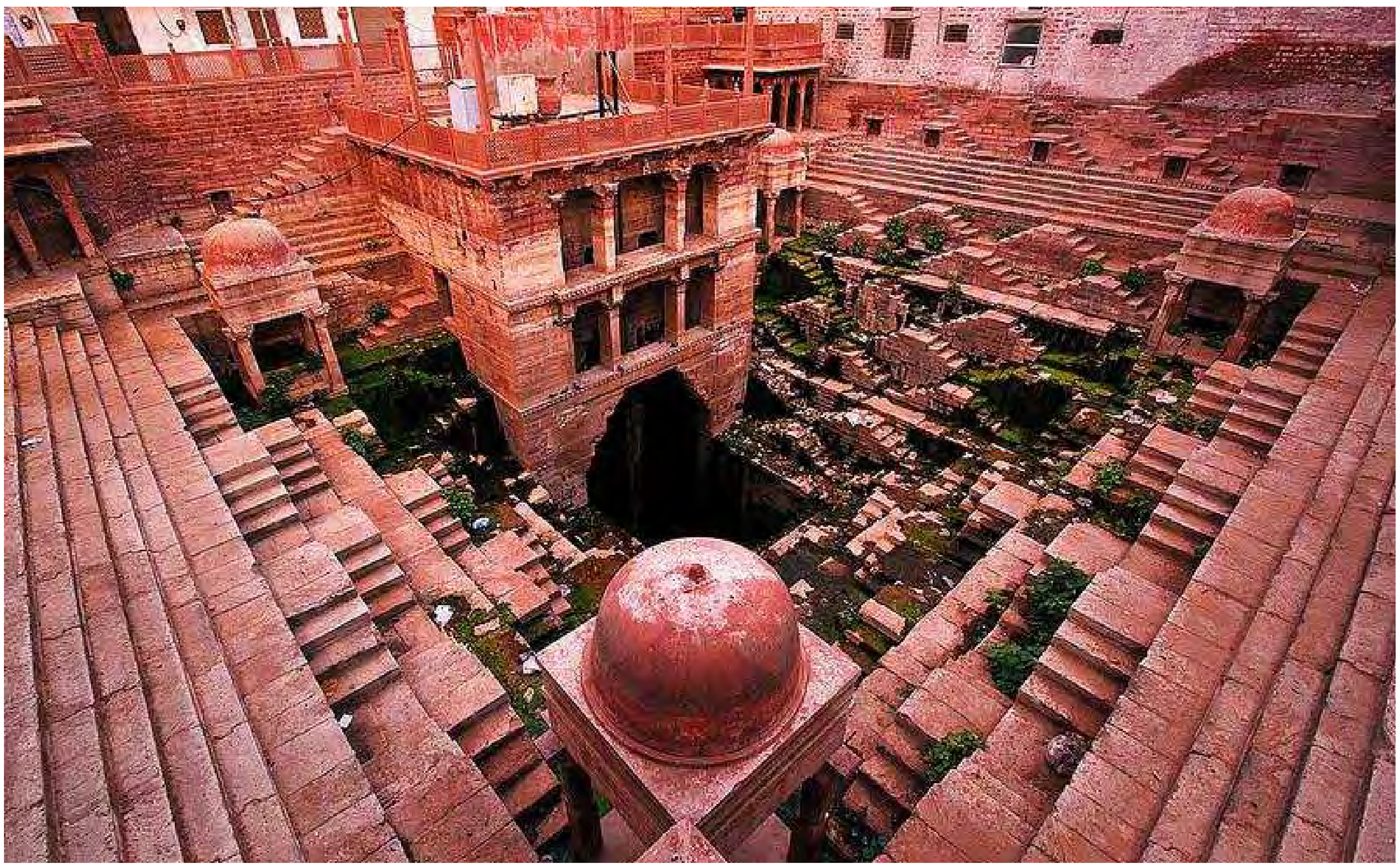
2. Rani Ki Vav - A testimony to love

Rani Ki Vav, located on the banks of the Saraswati River, is one of Gujarat's oldest and finest step-wells, and it has been beautifully preserved. Also known as the queen's stepwell, Rani Ki Vav is the only stepwell to be declared a UNESCO World Heritage site. Rani Udayamati of the Chalukya Dynasty built the stepwell in 1063 to commemorate her husband, Bhimdev I. Steps descend through multiple levels of carved pillars and over 800 sculptures, mostly on Vishnu-avatar themes, as well as striking geometric patterns. Apparently, there was even an escape route for the royal family on the bottom level of the step well, said to connect to the Sun Temple in Modhera. Many years ago, the Rani Ki Vav was flooded by the Sabarmati river. It remained submerged in water, and it was only around 1980 that it was evacuated by the Archaeological Survey of India. The recently introduced lavender one hundred rupee note features this stepwell that has suddenly brought attention to this once unknown site.

Rani Ki Vav

3. Toorji Ka Jhalra Bavdi - An ode to a queen's hometown

Toorji ka Jhalra, a three-hundred-year-old stepwell, is located in the heart of the old walled city, nestled between narrow winding streets and centuries-old havelis. An ancient stepwell modelled after the 'Bawris' of Gujarat, it holds water 300 feet deep and is accessible via steps. The stepwell was built in 1740 AD by a queen of Marwar, Raani Tawarji, consort of Maharaja Abhay Singh of Jodhpur. The Maharani or Queen was originally from the Patan Region of Gujarat where one of the world's most marvelous stepwell exists even today- Rani Ki Vav. And thus the Queen brought a part of her matriarchal tradition to Rajasthan and built Toorji ka Jhalra in Jodhpur. The stepwell, which had been submerged for over a century, was painstakingly restored to its former glory by RAAS through the JDH foundation.



Toorji Ka Jhalra Bavdi

4. Adalaj Stepwell - A tale of love and sacrifice

Adalaj Step Well, an important part of Ahmedabad's history, was commissioned in 1498 by queen Rudabai, the wife of Vaghela dynasty ruler Rana Veer Singh. He ruled over a small kingdom known as Dandai Desh. According to legend, the kingdom was suffering from a severe water shortage, so King Rana Veer Singh decided to construct a large stepwell. The king began construction but died in a battle with the Sultan of Gujarat, Mahmud Begada, before it could be completed. Mahmud Begada fell in love with Queen Rudabai and desired to marry her. However, the queen agreed to the proposal on the condition that Mahmud finish building the stepwell. Following the completion of the vav, Queen Rudabai invited a few saints to bathe in the water, converting it into a holy well. She then fell into the vav and died, ending the queen's saga in tragedy.

Mahmud Begada was impressed by the stepwell's architectural brilliance, and he did not want any replica of the stepwell to be built. He, therefore, ordered the killing of the masons involved in its construction, whose tombs can be found near the stepwell. Although it's now over 500 years old, it's been beautifully preserved underground. The motifs of flowers and graphics of Islamic architecture blend seamlessly with the symbols of Hindu and Jain gods carved at various levels of the well. The deeper you go, the better you appreciate the architecture and the grandness of these stepwells.

5. Dada Harir Stepwell - A harem keeper's legacy

Dada Harir Vav is a stepwell in Ahmedabad's Aswara neighbourhood, 2.5 km from Ahmedabad Junction. According to the Persian inscription in the stepwell, Dhai Harir, a household lady of Mahmud Begada, built the Dada Harir Stepwell in 1485. She was the royal harem's superintendent. The well has two inscriptions, one in Sanskrit on the south wall of the first gallery and one in Arabic on the north wall. This vav, like most stepwells, is intended to store water and serve as a resting place for travellers.

Dada Harir Stepwell

While there are many stepwells in India today, a number of them have been forgotten and left to decay. Embark on a road trip through the western part of India and explore the rich culture and history of these forgotten masterpieces.

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