

MYSTICAL TRAILS TRAVEL TALES



SAVAARI

Edition 2024

India, a land of innumerable wonders and time-tested traditions, unfurls itself like a tapestry woven with enigmas and tales waiting to be discovered. With each turn of the path, its mystique deepens, tempting the wanderer to delve deeper into its many-layered heart.

The quintessential Indian road trip is not just about reaching a destination; it's an expedition through time, culture, and uncharted terrains. The allure of the open road offers travellers the liberty to curate their journey, making spontaneous detours into unseen villages, soaking in their raw beauty and unscripted narratives.

Enter Savaari, your trusted companion on these adventures. Offering reliability and safety, our chauffeurs are not just drivers, but custodians of authentic travel experiences. Their unparalleled knowledge of hidden gems and local tales enhances the richness of every journey, ensuring it's as enlightening as it is exciting.

In a time-honoured tradition at Savaari, we are pleased to present the travel magazine for 2024. This edition is titled '**Mystical Trails, Travel Tales**', a mesmerizing journey through India's lesser-known paths. Here, we have curated stories from a vast set of narrations by our chauffeurs. From the whispers of ancient ruins to the dance of shadows in hidden valleys, each story unravels the mysteries of a land steeped in wonder.

We hope that this magazine will inspire you to explore India, one roadtrip at a time.



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To the guardian of the cosmos,

In the vastness where Saptarishis etch their tales, there exists a haven where the universe unveils its scales. Amidst constellations, where galaxies trace their trails and meteors leave their fiery streaks, this sanctuary stands, a silent witness to the cosmos. Protected by the towering Himalayas, it offers a view untouched by urban haze, revealing every speck of the cosmic dance. In its tranquil embrace, ancient and modern stories intertwine seamlessly. To this special place, deep within India's embrace, I must ask: Are you a dream? Can such wonder truly exist in our space?

The background of the entire image is a night sky filled with stars and a faint, colorful nebula. At the bottom, there is a silhouette of a cityscape with lights, suggesting a view from a high vantage point.

From India's Astro-legends to an
Astro-village

Many of us have a habit of checking our daily horoscope, curious about what the day might bring. But have you ever stopped to think about why? The answer lies in the stars. Astrology, the study of the movements and relative positions of celestial bodies and their influence on human affairs, has been a part of Indian culture for a very long time.

While Western and Indian astrology may differ in their methods and beliefs, their core purpose remains the same: to provide insights into our lives based on the stars' positions. In India, whether it's seeking advice for marriage compatibility or choosing the right date for a movie release, the stars play a significant role. Let's dive into the world of Indian astrology and see how its profound influence on the cultural fabric of the subcontinent has become a magnet for curious travellers today.

Origins and significance of Indian astrology

Indian astrology, or Jyotisa, originates from the Vedas and is centered on the influence of celestial bodies like the sun, moon, and planets on our lives. Dating back to 1200 BCE, the Vedanga-Jyotisa by Lagadha details lunar and solar cycles, constellations, planets, and zodiac signs. Traditional Hindu astronomy also recognized the seven stars of Ursa Major, linking them with the Saptarshis, or the seven great sages.

According to Hindu mythology, the gods and demons once churned the cosmic ocean to extract divine nectar. During this process, several celestial beings emerged, including the 12 zodiac signs. According to ancient Vedic tales, King Dasharatha of Ayodhya, the father of Lord Rama, once sought the counsel of his royal astrologer, Sage Vashishta, before his son embarked on exile.

The sage, using the wisdom of the stars, advised the king on the most auspicious time to begin his journey, ensuring victory. Just as King Dasharatha relied on the stars, rulers throughout history have turned to celestial insights to shape the destinies of their realms. This symbiotic relationship between stars and statecraft didn't wane with time but found its echoes even in modern historical decisions.



Image Credits: NASA

How astrology influenced the date of India's independence

The choice of August 15 as India's independence day wasn't arbitrary. Lord Mountbatten, the last Viceroy of India, selected this date due to it being the date that the Japanese surrendered Burma while he held the office of Supreme Allied Commander of Southeast Asia. Yet, this decision raised eyebrows among astrologers. For some, August 15 was deemed inauspicious, with India under the Zodiac sign of Capricorn, influenced by Saturn and

dominated by Rahu, leading to floods, famine and massacres.

To reconcile these concerns, a middle ground was found. India would gain independence at midnight between August 14th and 15th, aligning with both Western and Hindu beliefs about the start of a new day. As the nation evolved, this celestial fascination took a new form, drawing both locals and tourists alike.

Astro tourism in India - Benital, the starry retreat

For many city dwellers in India, the night sky is often a muted display, limited to the Moon, Venus, Mars, and a few constellations. Bright stars such as Sirius might occasionally punctuate the sky, but the vast plethora of the universe remains hidden. The primary culprits? Air and light pollution. In fact, according to the Gurgaon-based Science Popularisation Association of Communicators and Educators (SPACE), the visibility of stars has diminished by an average of 5% annually over the past three decades.

However, not all hope is lost for those seeking a pristine view of the cosmos. Nestled away from the blinding city lights and the haze of pollution, certain places in India offer a breathtaking panorama of the night sky. One such place is Benital, which the Uttarakhand government is nurturing into India's premier astro-village. It's a dedicated space that marries people's



fascination with astronomy, the art of night sky photography, milky way spotting and the thrill of exploring pristine locales.

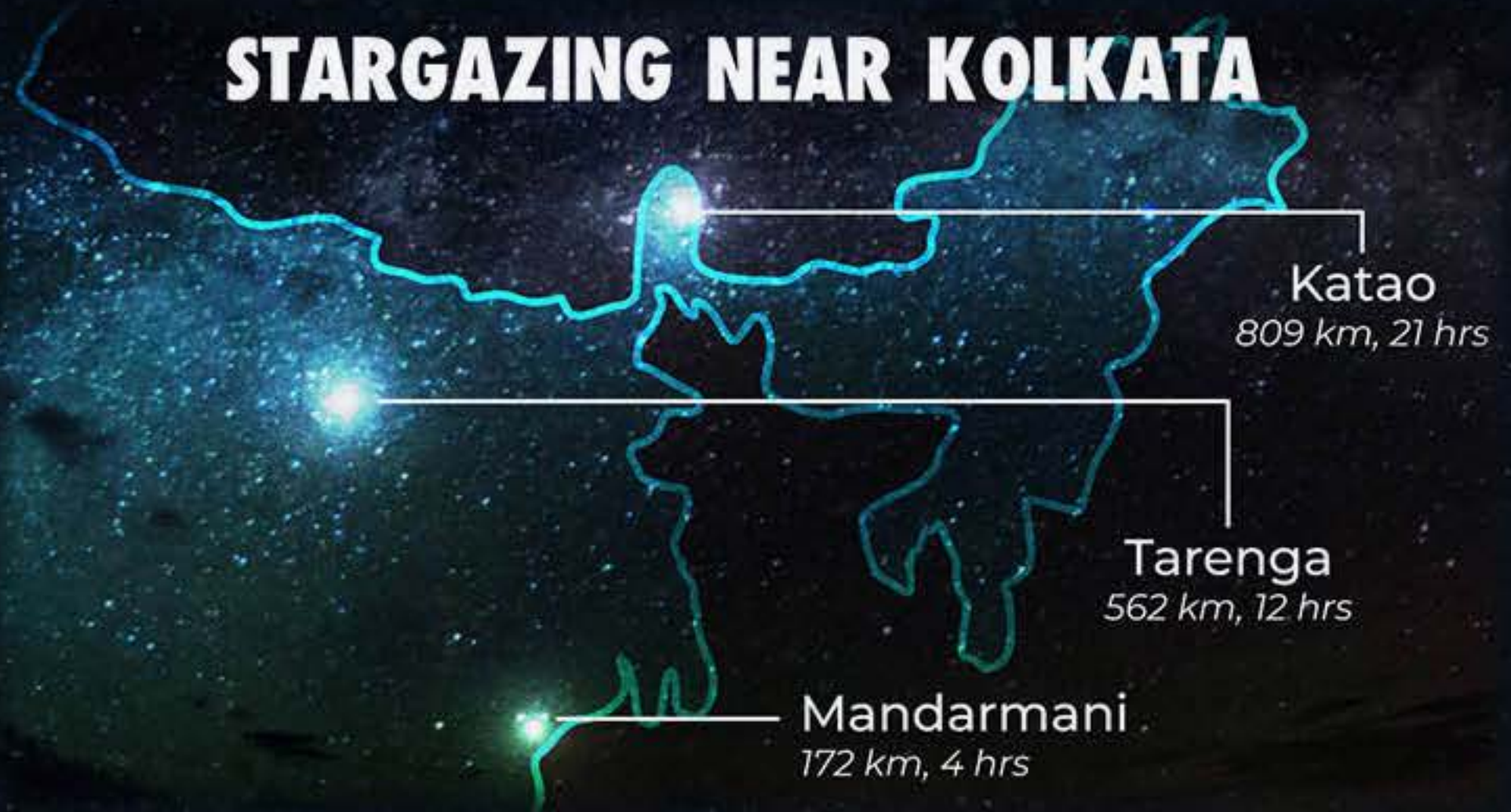
Free from light and air pollution, it's a sanctuary located atop a hill, offering expansive 270-degree views of the majestic Himalayas. The village is strategically placed at least two hours away from the nearest city, ensuring minimal human interference. Moreover, to enhance the stargazing experience, permanent telescopes will be stationed here.

Benital also hosts an Astro Camp that begins with a spectacular 'Astro Party.' The occasion will feature a wide array of activities for attendees, including stargazing, astrophotography, and other astronomy-related engagements facilitated by telescopes and expert astronomers. Participants will have the opportunity to observe constellations, planets, and moons, and even catch a glimpse of the Milky Way galaxy. From the Saptarishis to the distant galaxies, every celestial wonder awaits the keen observer in this unique hamlet. If the universe's mysteries beckon you, Benital is your destination.

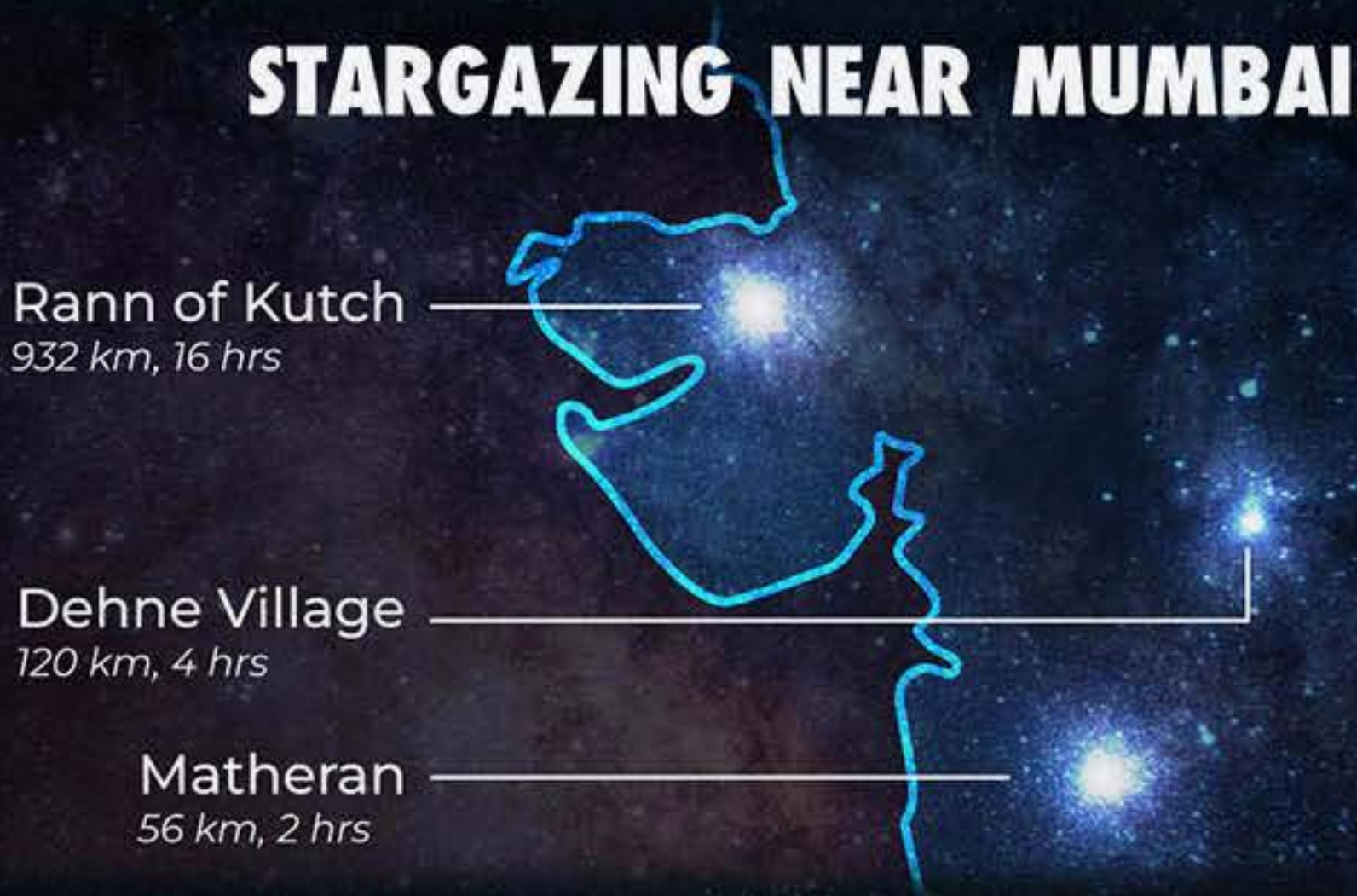
STARGAZING NEAR DELHI



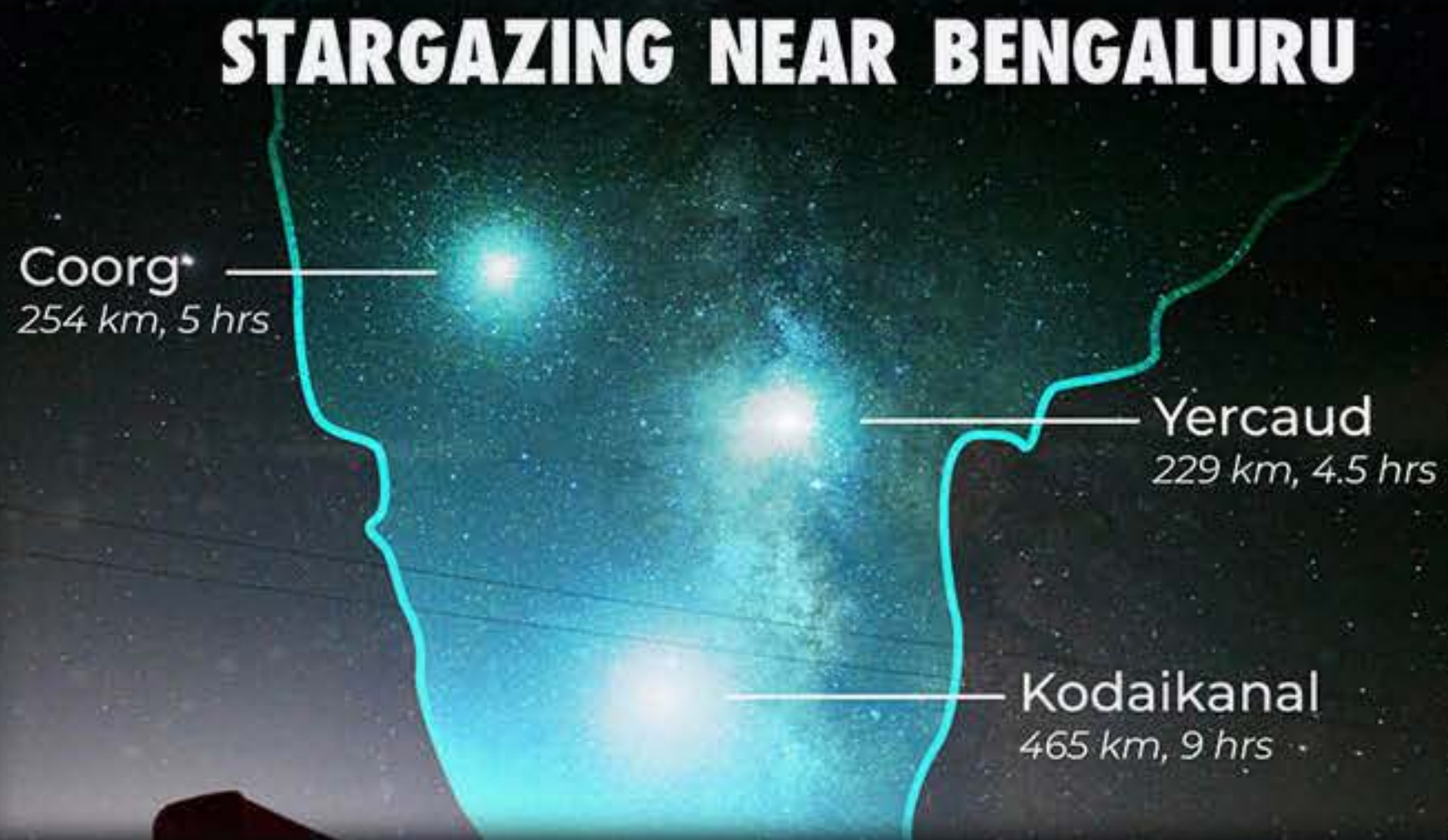
STARGAZING NEAR KOLKATA



STARGAZING NEAR MUMBAI



STARGAZING NEAR BENGALURU





To Dakshina Dwarka,

In the lap of Kerala, you stand, not just as a temple, but as a testament to resilience and spiritual endurance. Your history, marred yet magnificent, speaks of overcoming adversities, yet your divine essence remained unshaken through it all. Amidst the echoes of history, where resilience is etched in stone, love blooms like the lotus at your feet. Here, brides adorned in silk, and grooms in hues of tradition, exchange promises that echo through the ages. The temple is not just a sanctuary for souls, but a celestial witness to unions, where love, like the divine essence within, remains unshaken.



Marriages like nowhere else
Guruvayur's wedding secrets

If you're a Hindu-Malayali or happen to strike up a conversation with a Kerala-based Hindu, chances are high they'll spill the beans on their ultimate dream wedding in a temple that holds a special place in their hearts. But we're not talking about just any temple; it's often referred to as the "Dwarka of the South," a place where the blessings of Lord Krishna resonate deeply.

This temple is so revered and sought-after that it once hosted a staggering 242 weddings in a single day! And the day starts early here, with wedding bells chiming as early as 5 am. So, what's the secret sauce that makes this temple a magnetic pull for lovebirds ready to tie the knot? Unravel the irresistible charm of the iconic Guruvayur Temple, situated in Thrissur, Kerala.



From west to south - The unique connection between Dwarka and Guruvayur

The Guruvayur Temple is dedicated to Guruvayurappan, a form of Vishnu/ Krishna. The geographical distance between Dwarka, the legendary capital of Lord Krishna's kingdom in Gujarat and Guruvayur, is quite vast, so it's natural to wonder how these two distant places are even connected. According to a legend, as Dwarka faced submersion, Lord Krishna commanded the rescue of a sacred Vishnu idol. This idol was carried south by Sage Brihaspati and Vayudev, eventually finding its home in Guruvayur. The temple's establishment in this serene setting, named after 'Guru' (Brihaspati) and 'Vayu' (Vayudev), creates its identity as 'The Dwarka of the South'. Fast forward to the 1950s, and a new chapter begins – the era of weddings at Guruvayur. How did this sacred haven transform into a wedding hotspot?

Divine gateway to eternal union

The custom of getting married in Guruvayur has a fascinating origin. In Hindu mythology, Lord Krishna wed 16,008 wives, and he's affectionately known as Kalyana Krishnan. He's believed to find joy in witnessing countless marriages without ever getting bored. A Guruvayur wedding is a divine blessing that marks the beginning of a new life journey not only for the bride and groom but also for both families. It is believed that a wedding conducted at Guruvayur Temple, often referred to as the Vaikunta on Earth, the highest realm above the fourteen lokas (worlds), where the devotees of Vishnu go upon achieving liberation, would lead to a long marital life.

The unusual garlands of Guruvayur weddings

Across many parts of India, flower garlands are a traditional adornment in weddings. In Guruvayur, however, this tradition takes an intriguing twist. Here, couples exchange garlands made from the sacred basil, or 'Thulasi Malai'. It's believed that beginning their shared journey amidst the sanctity of basil leaves bestows the relationship with spiritual purity, fostering growth and harmony. The creation of these basil leaf garlands is a tradition held by 14 Kazhaka families, who have inherited this privilege over generations. Interestingly, the families responsible for providing garlands for temple worship are also entrusted with crafting wedding garlands on the same day.

Any day, a perfect day - Weddings without Muhurat

Imagine a wedding scenario where the alignment of stars and the involvement of astrologers is not a prerequisite. This is the reality in Guruvayur.

Interestingly, there's no need to consult an astrologer to select a Muhuratam (auspicious timing) for the wedding. Couples can tie the knot on any day before Guruvayurappan, the deity of the temple, without the need for advance calculations. This unique practice eliminates the stress of finding the perfect astrological moment and allows couples to embrace the divine blessings of Guruvayur without delay.



Flash marriages - Guruvayur's express nuptials

In Guruvayur, weddings are often a whirlwind affair. Brides battle through crowded spaces, leading to smudged makeup and wrinkled saris as they make their way to the mandapam. Even on ordinary days, the wedding ceremony rarely exceeds 5 minutes, making it a blink-and-miss experience. The crucial moment of tying the 'thaali', a symbolic necklace, lasts a mere two minutes, and on days with multiple weddings happening simultaneously, it can be quite a challenge to catch every moment.

Bride swap blunders - Wedding confusion galore

The efficiency and frequency of weddings in Guruvayur, however, are not without their own set of challenges, as seen in the instances of bride swap blunders.

On auspicious days, Guruvayur witnesses 50 to 100 weddings, but during peak times, this number can soar to over 200 weddings in a single day. In the chaos of crowded days, mishaps can occur. There have been instances where brides changed into the wrong attire, and grooms found themselves exclaiming, "It's not my bride!" In one memorable incident, a bride even exchanged garlands with the wrong person, leading to a tense situation and legal action.



As a result of these experiences, bride and groom names are no longer recorded in marriage registers. In the post-COVID era, couples can now enjoy a more relaxed 'thaalikettu' or tying of the mangalsutra ceremony, thanks to district authorities capping the number of daily marriages at 60 after the historic temple's reopening. This change allows couples to exchange vows without worrying about getting lost in the crowd.

The Spiritual side of Kerala

Guruvayur Temple is a sacred site not just for people from Kerala but for anyone who wishes to get married or worship there. It's a welcoming place for all visitors, whether they're looking to marry or just seeking a spiritual experience. Guruvayur isn't the only spiritual spot in Kerala. The state is full of beautiful, peaceful places that are worth visiting, each offering its own unique experience. Whether it's the historic temples that dot the landscape, the ancient churches with their storied pasts, or the tranquil mosques resonating with quiet contemplation, each offers a unique glimpse into the soul of Kerala. So, if you're traveling to Kerala, don't miss the chance to explore these spiritual sites.



Exploring the spiritual side of Kerala

Thiruvananthapuram

- Padmanabhaswamy temple
- Pazhavangady Ganesha temple
- Attukal Bhagavathi
- Madre De Deus Church
- Lourdes Syro Malabar Forane Church
- St. Thomas Roman Catholic Latin Church
- Kovalam Juma Masjid
- Beemapally Masjid
- Palayam Juma Mosque

Thrissur

- Guruvayur
- Mammiyur
- Paramekkavu Bhagavathi temple
- Vadakkumnathan Shiva temple
- Our Lady of Dolours Basilica Syro
- Malabar Church
- St. Antony's Forane Syro Malabar Church
- Cheraman Juma Masjid
- Kokkala Juma Masjid

Palakkad

- Sree Mangottukavu Bhagavati Temple
- Parakkat Sree Bhagavathy Temple
- Dhanvanthri temple
- Holy Trinity Syro Catholic Church
- Nithya Sahaya Matha Town Church
- Pattambi Mosque
- Urdu Jamma Masjid

Kochi

- Chottanikkara Amman temple
- Eranakulathappan Shiva temple
- Vallarpadam Church
- Malayattoor Church
- Paradesi Synagogue
- Calvathy Juma Masjid





EXPLORE INDIA, ONE ROADTRIP AT A TIME

SAVAARI

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To the tribal provenance,

In the heart of Odisha, where the tribal beat thrums beneath the sun's fiery arc, you pulsate with the lifeblood of ancient cultures. Within your thronging confines, you blend the earthy scent of spicy ant chutney and the heady aroma of Mahua liquor. You are the canvas where vibrant textiles dance in the breeze beside handicrafts of intricate allure. It is in your embrace that the soul of Odisha truly breathes and dances. Every time you assemble, you become a living museum, a weekly celebration where the past and present of Odisha's diverse tribes gather in a vibrant confluence.

From hearts to haats
Odisha's tribal pulse



As the summer sun cast its golden glow over Odisha, I found myself meandering through the state's coastal beauty and its revered temples. Yet, beyond the grandeur of temples and the allure of landscapes, there was another facet of Odisha I was eager to explore—its tribal heartland. Odisha is a mosaic of cultures, with over 62 tribal communities that make up nearly a third of the state's populace.

These tribes are the soul of rural Odisha, and their weekly haats (markets) are the heartbeats of their communities. With no malls or commercial establishments in sight, these markets are a purely local phenomenon, and I was determined to experience them firsthand.

My journey took me to the Onkadeli haat on the border of Odisha and Andhra Pradesh, held every Thursday. Here, tribespeople, both men and women, assemble from their villages, traversing miles along forested trails to engage in the age-old practice of trade. The haat was a kaleidoscope of colours, sounds, and smells—a sensory feast where each element had a story to tell.



Bugs and bites - Masterchef approved tribal treats

As I was exploring the haat, my curiosity was piqued by a local woman's task. A bystander's comment about waiting for a 'Gordon Ramsay-approved ant chutney' was enough to draw me in. As I watched her mix the

ants with tomatoes, coriander, garlic, ginger, chilli, salt, and a sprinkle of sugar into a smooth paste, the lure was irresistible. Served on Sal leaves, I was hit with a wave of bold, spicy flavours, the ants adding a surprising tang. This red ant chutney, rich in protein and antibacterial properties, is a tribal remedy for common illnesses. While Gordon Ramsay may have popularised it by adding it to his menu, it felt special tasting this chutney in its authentic form.

Boozy tales - Raising the spirits high with tribal tequila

Imagine elephants getting tipsy! That's exactly what happened in Odisha, where the gentle giants got drunk on fermented mahua flowers. At a local market, feeling the day's heat, I was looking for something to cool off with. A local woman called me and served a strange brew in a cup made of leaves. It was Mahua liquor, the same drink that intoxicated the elephants. I then learned that the tribal communities have a profound connection with their environment, and their traditional alcoholic beverages are a part of this bond. Consumed to ease the strain of labour, to celebrate, or to combat the heat, these drinks are a cultural staple. The mild yet heady Mahua liquor, experts say, is potentially India's answer to Tequila. Did I get drunk from it? Not quite. Did I feel a thrill? Absolutely. Sipping on this traditional, homemade beverage, I was enveloped by the warmth of rural simplicity, an homage to age-old practices

that might soon charm the world with their unrefined authenticity.

Cockfights - The feathered gladiators of the rings

The sound of a crowd in the throes of excitement pulled me to a spectacle reminiscent of a scene from the movie 'Gladiator', minus the Hollywood stars. Instead, the stars here were roosters, prepped for battle with blades attached, surrounded by men engrossed in the action. Bets were placed before the fight began. After the showdown, the surviving rooster was named the champion, the winners collected their earnings, and the crowd mingled sharing stories while sipping on the local brews of mahua and Salphi. Despite its controversial nature, this sport draws hundreds weekly, leaving a lasting sense of competitive camaraderie. Moreover, it was just enough to transport me to the Roman empire while in the tribal belts of Odisha.

Tribal trendsetters - The handicrafts of Odisha's Bonda tribe

Finally, I found myself among the Bonda women, the style icons of their tribe. Their metal necklaces, bangles, beaded headgear, and silver earrings were not mere ornaments but symbols of identity. The Ringa, their handwoven skirt, added a splash of colour to their ensemble. Even their shaven heads were adorned with beads! The haat offered grass-woven bracelets and beaded necklaces, each displaying the tribe's

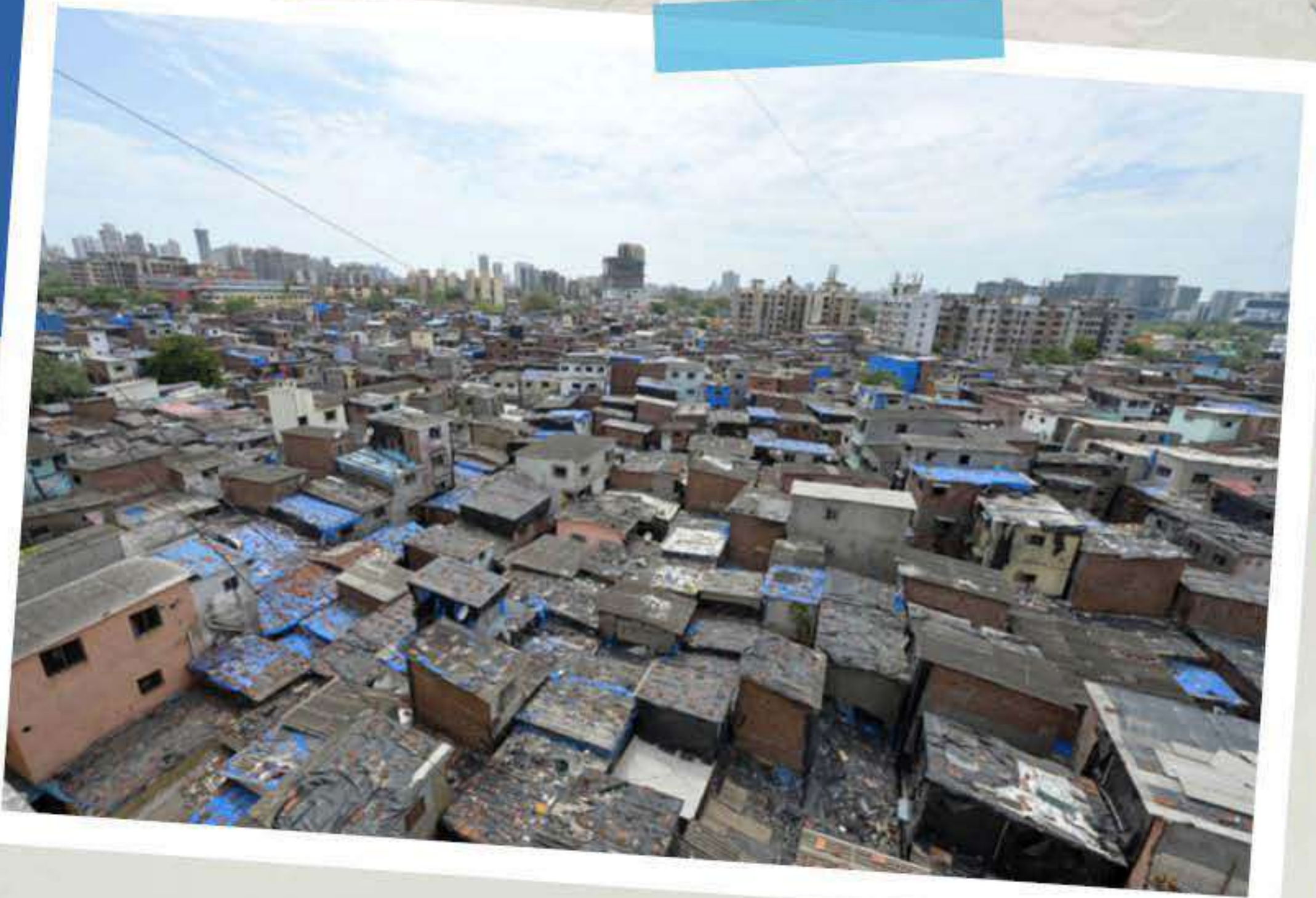
artistry. The Ahali hara, a necklace of strung coins, was particularly striking. As I picked out ten bracelets and three necklaces, I fancied myself quite the emerging fashion icon. Just imagine the impact these statement jewels would have on the international fashion industry.



Landlocked mysteries - A potpourri of experiences

Tucked away in the wild heartlands of the state, these tribes serve as a vital link to bygone eras. They stand as a poignant reminder that even as the world races ahead, enclaves and communities are marching to a different drumbeat—one that resonates with the rhythms of the natural world and age-old customs. And what I've shared with you is merely a glimpse, a single drop in the vast, uncharted ocean of Odisha's mysteries. For those with a spirit of adventure and a yearning for discovery, Odisha promises a treasure trove of untold stories, unexplored traditions, and unforgettable encounters. If your heart longs for the unknown and your soul thrives on the richness of tradition, let your curiosity guide you to Odisha.





To Dharavi,

In your folds, known to many as Asia's largest slum, there lies a hidden symphony of vibrant life. Your alleys, alive with the spirit of artists and artisans, whisper tales of resilience and hope. Amidst the hum of industrious streets, creativity blossoms, unfurling like a lotus in mud. You are more than a labyrinth of homes; you are a canvas where life's tougher hues blend with strokes of unexpected beauty. In your heartbeat, Dharavi, we find the unsung melodies of hard work and dreams, painting a portrait of strength and enduring grace.

A billion-dollar hub of art & business

Dharavi

Billion-dollar businesses thriving in Dharavi? Sounds almost contradictory? How could Asia's largest slum possibly be home to an economy worth billions? Yet, this is the startling reality of Dharavi, where the mainstream view is drastically different from what lies beneath. In this dense network of alleys, beyond the poverty and daily struggles, runs an economic powerhouse, often overlooked.

Dharavi is not just a cluster of shanties; it's a bustling hub of entrepreneurship and innovation. This story is about looking beyond the obvious, about discovering a Dharavi that defies expectations. It's a place where adversity breeds opportunity, and where the narrow lanes are lined with much more than just homes.

Discovering the roots - The birth of Dharavi

Rewind to over a century ago, and you'd find the seeds of Dharavi being sown. Originally a mangrove swamp, it transformed gradually as people from various walks of life began to settle here. These early settlers, many of whom were fishermen and potters, laid the foundation of what would become one of the most densely populated areas in the world. They came seeking opportunities, building their lives piece by piece in this marshland. Over the decades, this modest beginning blossomed into a bustling community, a melting pot of cultures and dreams. Every corner of Dharavi today whispers tales of these humble origins, of a community that grew from a swamp to a sprawling urban settlement.

Where small spaces foster billion-dollar dreams

Dharavi now stands as a dynamic hub, where creativity and resourcefulness spark countless ventures and ideas. Often misunderstood, this region is not just a typical slum but a bustling economic powerhouse. It houses 5,000 businesses owned by local inhabitants

and 15,000 single-room factories. Impressively, Dharavi has become a key production center for fast fashion giants like Zara, H&M, Giorgio Armani, and more. Yet, the tireless workers of Dharavi, the real heroes behind this thriving economy, often go unrecognized.



Dharavi's vibrant economy contributes significantly to India, injecting 1 billion US dollars annually and employing approximately 2.5 Lakh workers. However, these workers, the backbone of Dharavi's economy, often earn only around \$10 a day. This leaves 40% of the community with even lesser disposable income. The GDP per capita in Dharavi fluctuates with the workforce, ranging from 300,000 to a million workers, including child labor. This labor force manages to generate an astonishing output of 650 to 1 billion US dollars each year. Amidst this economic vibrancy, one ponders: why does India struggle to fully embrace Dharavi, a place so integral to its economic fabric?

Dharavi's melodies of life

In Dharavi, the buzz isn't limited to business alone. This place is a melting pot of billion-dollar music and art as well, pulsating with raw, creative energy. Have you heard about the burgeoning hip-hop and rap culture taking root here? It's not just music; it's a movement, with artists drawing inspiration from the very streets they live in. Movies like 'Gully Boy' and 'Slumdog Millionaire' have thrown a spotlight on this thriving scene, showcasing the talent that emerges from these lanes. What's unique about Dharavi's music? It's crafted from real-life stories, echoing the dreams, struggles, and resilience of its people. This isn't just entertainment; it's a powerful form of expression, giving voice to those often unheard. From catchy beats to profound lyrics, the music of Dharavi is a testament to the community's spirit, a celebration of life in all its complexity. It's not just a tune; it's the heartbeat of Dharavi, reverberating through the world.





A heartbeat of hope and hustle

Dharavi, often viewed through a lens of narrow stereotypes, unfolds a narrative far richer and more complex than perceived. It's a place where billion-dollar businesses and grassroots creativity coexist, where every alley hums with entrepreneurial spirit and artistic vigor. This isn't just a hub of thriving industries; it's a cradle of music, art, and stories, painting a picture of resilience and aspiration. In Dharavi's rhythm, we witness a symphony of hard work and imagination, a testament to the undying spirit of its people. It's a story that reshapes our understanding, connecting and inspiring people globally, proving that from the depths of struggle emerges a beacon of hope and innovation.

A day in **Dharavi**



Malai's Idli Stall

Stop for a quick breakfast and try out the Dal Vada



Kumbharwada Pottery Colony

Marvel at the local artisans molding beautiful pottery



Dharavi Leather Manufacturing Unit

Be a part of the making of the finest leather goods



Dharavi Street Art

Explore the amazing art hidden in Dharavi's streets



India's Largest Plastic Recycling Units

Understand Dharavi's contribution to sustainability

Shree Datta Temple

Pay homage at one of Dharavi's spiritual landmarks



Textile Manufacturing

Witness the vibrant fabric and designs that power India's fashion



Leather Market

Bag exquisite leather products at unbeatable prices



Dharavi Music Studio Tour

Experience the rhythm of Dharavi as you tour local music studios



Sohrab's Chow Mein

End your day relishing noodles with manchurian sauce





To the mysterious Lonar Lake,

In the heart of India, where ancient and modern tales dance, Lonar Lake, you stand as a testament to celestial wonders. Born from a meteor's passion, your beauty inspires tales and dreams. Maharashtra cradles you, blurring myth and science. Your waters hold reflections; a canvas of cosmic mysteries. Whispers suggest tales of extraterrestrial origins within your depths. Gazing upon your hues, particularly the unexpected pink, I'm struck with awe. To you, a stellar gift, what realms beyond do you glimpse? What secrets do you keep in your silent vigil?

Reflecting sky and secrets
Lonar's hidden mirror



Have you ever gazed at the night sky, the vast expanse of stars and galaxies, and wondered about the mysteries that lie beyond our reach? Or have you strolled by a lake and pondered the tales concealed beneath its serene surface? Now, imagine a place where these two realms converge – the cosmic and the earthly.

In the heart of Maharashtra, lies a serene lake renowned for its tranquil beauty. However, one extraordinary morning, the world's attention is captured by an astonishing sight: the lake has undergone a remarkable transformation, turning a mesmerizing shade of pink overnight. But Lonar Lake's story goes beyond this captivating spectacle, as it is a place where the worlds of science and mythology intertwine, crafting an enigmatic narrative that beckons adventurers and dreamers alike.

Myth and Mystery - The Pink Phenomenon



The phenomenon of the lake turning pink has sparked a whirlwind of myths and mysteries. For many, it's nothing short of a miracle, a divine intervention from the heavens above. Local legends have spun tales of celestial blessings, and some see it as a message of hope. The vibrant pink hue, considered a symbol of luck and prosperity, has charmed generations, leaving everyone to ponder - could it be more than just nature's handiwork?

Science's secret - The alkaline enchantment

While myths continue to circulate, science offers an equally captivating explanation. Lonar Lake's striking pink color is attributed to the presence of high alkaline substances in its waters. As these alkaline levels ebb and flow, they interact with the unique microbial life, notably algae, resulting in the captivating pink hue. This delicate balance between chemistry and biology paints the lake with shades that seem magical.

Mythological echoes - The tale of Lonasur

The story of Lonar isn't just about its pink water. In the quiet world of Lonar Lake, there's also the story of Lonasur, still alive in the minds of those who know it. This demon, a figure of ancient myth, is said to have descended from the heavens with such fury that his impact forged the crater we see today. But Lonasur's tale didn't end with his fall; it is said that Lord Vishnu, the preserver of the universe, intervened to restore balance, confronting and ultimately vanquishing the demon. The legend infuses the lake with an aura of the eternal battle between good and evil, giving visitors a glimpse into a past where divine force met demonic power, right here on Earth. This storied clash, etched into the very basin of Lonar Lake, ensures that Lonasur's name - synonymous with chaos yet conquered by divinity - continues to ripple through the lore of this mystical site.

Cosmic impact - Meteoric origins

While Lonasur's tale is captivating, the true story of Lonar Lake lies in the cosmos. Scientists believe that, over 50,000 years ago, a meteor, hurtling through space at incredible speed, crashed into Earth, giving birth to Lonar Lake's unique impact crater. This celestial collision left an indelible mark on the landscape, shaping the lake we see today. The evidence of this cosmic origin adds a profound layer of scientific wonder to the mythological narratives.

Exploring Lonar's enchantment

Lonar Lake is more than a mere natural wonder; it is a living testament to the fascinating interplay between myth and science. The lake's transformation into a sea of pink overnight beckons adventurers, storytellers, and scientists to explore its mysteries. As you step into the realm of Lonar, you'll find yourself immersed in a captivating tapestry where science and myth blend seamlessly. Lonar Lake, with its ever-changing hues and mesmerizing stories, invites you to discover its timeless enchantment, leaving you in awe of the wonder it holds within its depths.



LONAR LAKE EXPEDITION

A traveler's checklist

PLACES TO EXPLORE

- **Gomukh Temple:** A serene spiritual retreat by the lake.
- **Daiya Sudhan Temple:** Dive deep into tales of architectural grandeur.
- **Sita Nahani Temple:** Discover age-old stories etched in stone.

Winter Months: Experience Lonar's beauty from November to January with a pleasant climate.

OPTIMAL TIME TO VISIT

COMFORTABLE ACCOMMODATIONS

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To nature's faithful protectors,

In the sun-drenched expanses of Rajasthan, where history and nature intimately dance, we reach out to you with words woven in admiration. Your lives, a testament to coexistence, paint the desert with hues of reverence and care. In the simplicity of your ethos, the world finds a profound lesson of harmony. Your dedication to preserving the delicate balance of nature, treating every tree and creature as sacred, inspires a ripple of hope across the globe. We write to you, Bishnoi, with hearts full of gratitude, celebrating your unwavering commitment to the earth's song.



Green warriors of the Thar

The tale of the Bishnois

Have you ever heard a tale where 363 individuals laid down their lives, not in battle against other humans, but in a profound act of defiance to protect trees? This is not a fable from a bygone era, but the legacy of the v community in Rajasthan, India. Their extraordinary story, etched into the sands of time over 500 years ago, continues to resonate deeply today.

As we journey into their world, nestled in the stark yet mesmerizing landscape of Rajasthan, we uncover not just a tale of sacrifice, but a living testament to harmony with nature.

In harmony with mother earth

Our journey into the heart of the Bishnoi community deepens, we travel back to the 15th century, to the origin of this remarkable story. It all began with the visionary Guru Jambheshwar, or Jambhoji, in 1485. Set against the harsh, unforgiving landscape of the Thar Desert, Jambhoji established a set of 29 rules, laying the foundation of the Bishnoi faith. These rules, a blend of environmental conservation and spiritual tenets, birthed a community far ahead of its time in ecological awareness. The name 'Bishnoi' itself, a fusion of 'Bish' (twenty) and 'Noi' (nine), is a constant reminder of these principles that guide their every action. From the reverence for green cover to the protection of wildlife, each rule crafted by Jambhoji created a legacy of environmental consciousness that the Bishnoi have upheld for over five centuries, turning their arid surroundings into a testament to sustainable living.



The Bishnoi's stand for nature in Khejarli

What would you do if your deepest beliefs were threatened? This question became a stark reality for the Bishnoi community in the 18th century. In a small village named Khejarli, a story unfolded that would forever symbolize their extraordinary commitment to nature. When royal orders demanded the felling of trees for palace construction, the Bishnoi, led by Amrita Devi, faced a moral dilemma. They responded not just with protest but with a profound act of defiance; they embraced the trees, placing their own bodies between the woodcutters and the bark. In this tragic confrontation, 363 Bishnois, including Amrita Devi, were killed, choosing to sacrifice their lives rather than allow the destruction of their sacred Khejri trees. This momentous act of resistance was not merely a protest but a poignant message of coexistence with nature, shaping the Bishnoi identity and igniting a wider environmental consciousness that resonates to this day.

A legacy of love for the land

After the immense sacrifice of their community members, the Bishnoi did not falter; rather, they continued to uphold their profound legacy of serving nature. For over five centuries, this remarkable community has been a living embodiment of environmental conservation. Their daily practices are a testament to their commitment: from planting and nurturing trees to providing water for wildlife

during arid periods. The Bishnoi women are known to breastfeed orphaned fawns, symbolizing their deep kinship with all life forms. Every Bishnoi household follows a vegetarian diet, and hunting is strictly prohibited in their regions. Their homes and temples are sanctuaries for birds and animals, where all beings coexist in harmony. This dedication of the Bishnoi serves as a powerful reminder of how ancient wisdom can guide sustainable living in our modern world.

A call to environmental action

The Bishnoi's steadfast commitment to environmental harmony has not only preserved their own ecosystem but also ignited a flame of advocacy in hearts worldwide. Their philosophy, deeply rooted in the respect for all living beings, has inspired a myriad of movements and individuals championing ecological conservation. From local efforts in wildlife protection to influencing broader environmental policies, the Bishnoi ethos has sown seeds of change far beyond their community. Their legacy lives on in the growing number of people who, inspired by the Bishnoi, are actively shaping a more sustainable future. As we reflect on their story, let it stir in us a call to environmental action. What are we doing, even in small ways, to protect and nurture our planet? How can each of us, in our daily lives, contribute to a healthier, more sustainable future? The answer lies not in mere admiration of their story, but in our willingness to act, inspired by their example.





To the dazzling city of Surat,

In the mosaic of your streets, the diamond market is more than a stage for brilliance; it's a haven where artisans compose symphonies of existence. Each glimmering gem is a chapter, written not just in stone but in the pulsating rhythm of livelihoods. As the sun kisses these treasures, it whispers tales of resilience, painting the city with hues of ambition. Surat, your marketplace is a clandestine opera, crafting not just diamonds but orchestrating the radiant sonnets of countless lives. In your embrace, a unique crescendo of purpose emerges, echoing the artistry that defines our shared journey.

The cursed gem of India

Kohinoor



The desire to see the Kohinoor returned to its homeland is a sentiment many of us share. For Indians it has been a symbol of beauty and prestige, gracing the crowns of rulers and mesmerizing all who gaze upon it.

But are you aware that behind the fame and beauty lies a notorious backstory, with some even considering it a cursed gem? The famous gem of India, also has an infamous history. The Kohinoor's past is layered, its journey far more complex than the pristine image often linked to it. It's a multifaceted tale where allure and controversy are intricately intertwined, a dance as ancient as time itself.

Kohinoor's tale from mine to monarch

Kohinoor has been a perennial topic of discussion, both within our nation and globally. The recent coronation of King Charles III in the United Kingdom has once again brought the Kohinoor diamond into the spotlight, reigniting conversations back in India. The allure of this gem lies not only in its brilliance but also in the mystery surrounding its origins.

Whenever we discuss this diamond, its true beginnings remain elusive, with various stories adding layers to the intrigue. Among the array of narratives, one consistent tale links back to the Kollur Mine in present-day Guntur district, Andhra Pradesh, during the rule of the Kakatiya Dynasty. According to the Odisha State Archives, scholars believe the Kohinoor was mined in this region.

The Kakatiya Dynasty, influential in the eastern Deccan region from 1175 to 1325, had a significant role in the early chapters of the Kohinoor's story. As

history unfolds, the archives' records propose that this diamond found a place of reverence in a temple dedicated to a Hindu goddess during the Kakatiya reign. However, the early 14th century marked a turning point when the army of the Turkic Khilji dynasty, led by Malik Kafur, raided the southern kingdoms. During a successful raid on Warangal in 1310, Malik Kafur might have acquired the Kohinoor diamond, setting it on a course that would traverse through dynasties.



The curse of the Kohinoor diamond

The riveting journey of the Kohinoor from one dynasty to another is a famous tale in India. At the same time, there is an untold story of this famous gem. Even though it is considered as one of the rarest diamonds in the world, some people and communities believe that it is a cursed gem. In the odyssey of the Kohinoor from India to Britain, a shadowy legend adds an enthralling twist. Venture back to 1306, as a Hindu text foretells:

“He who owns this diamond will own the world, but will also know all its misfortunes. Only God, or a woman, can wear it with impunity.”

This ominous prophecy weaves through the history of the Kohinoor, entangling the lives of its possessors in a web of violence, murders, mutilations, torture, and treachery. Whether one embraces the curse as truth or dismisses it as folklore, the historical backdrop of the Koh-i-Noor is undeniable, and the mere specter of its curse prompts caution. Notably, the British Royal families, from the reign of Queen Victoria when the Kohinoor came into their possession, seemed cognizant of the curse. It consistently found its way to the wife of the male heir to the British throne. Thus, the Kohinoor's journey unfolds not just in the annals of history but against the eerie backdrop of an age-old curse, adding a layer of caution to its storied legacy.

Surat - Where world diamonds find its home

When we chat about Indian diamonds, the spotlight often lands on the legendary Kohinoor, stealing the show with its centuries-old saga. Yet, in the heart of modern India, there's another gem - a living, breathing marvel - the Surat Diamond Market. While the Kohinoor remains a symbol of India's rich history, the vibrant Surat Diamond Market embodies the country's present and future in the gem trade. Here, amidst the bustling lanes of Surat, the next legendary diamond could very

well be in the making, symbolizing a new chapter in India's gemmological journey.



Surat, our very own 'Diamond City', is the powerhouse behind an astounding 90% of the world's diamond cutting and polishing. Picture this: 4500 diamond polishing units and about 8 lakh skilled artisans weaving their magic. It's not just a market; it's a bustling symphony of craftsmanship, where every facet of a diamond tells a story of precision and artistry. Surat isn't just about tradition; it's a hotbed of innovation, blending age-old craftsmanship with cutting-edge technology. As we wrap up our journey through the enigma of Kohinoor and the dazzle of Surat, remember—one is a tale etched in history, while the other is a vibrant chapter still being written, casting India as a global diamond maestro. The next time someone brings up the Kohinoor lore, proudly share that we also boast the extraordinary Surat Diamond Market—a contemporary treasure chest of brilliance, adding a new sparkle to India's diamond legacy.







To the village protected by faith,

Enshrined in faith's embrace, where they say faith can move mountains, you redefine what faith truly means. In a world where night brings locks and bolted doors, you slumber in open serenity, a village cradled by the divine. Your streets, a symbol of an unwavering belief, whisper the extraordinary - where others seek security in steel, your guardianship lies in the ethereal arms of faith. You are not just a place, but a living, breathing symbol of trust in the divine, where each home, open and unguarded, echoes the profound truth: in the deepest faith, there lies the greatest protection.

A doorless village in India

Shani Shingnapur



Do you make it a habit to confirm that your door is locked before going to bed? Nestled in the heart of Maharashtra lies a village where the concept of security takes on a different meaning. This is Shani Shingnapur, home to around 4,000 inhabitants, where the notion of locks and doors is virtually non-existent.

Here, houses stand without front doors, shops remain perpetually unlocked, and the idea of theft seems like a distant myth. The residents' belief in Lord Shani, the god of Saturn, whom they consider their protector, shapes this extraordinary way of life. Shani Shingnapur is not just a village; it's a symbol of the power of faith, earning its monikers as the 'zero crime village' and 'the village with no doors'. Here's how faith and fear form the bedrock of their extraordinary community ethos.

Faith as a shield

The origins of this unique tradition date back to the 18th century, following a dramatic natural event. After intense rainfall and flooding, villagers discovered a mysterious black stone slab in the Panasnala River. To their astonishment, when prodded with a stick, the rock bled. That night, Lord Shani appeared in a village Sarpanch's dream, declaring the slab to be his idol. The deity's one stipulation was that his idol should remain unsheltered, allowing him an unobstructed view of the village. Obediently, the villagers placed the idol on an open-air platform, deciding to live their lives without doors, as a sign of their complete trust in Lord Shani's protective powers.



The lockless way of life

This unique tradition has stood the test of time. While modernity has seeped into many aspects of life, the villagers' faith remains unshaken. Locals occasionally lean wooden panels against their front door frames to keep stray dogs out – but they have no permanent doors, and leave their jewelry and money unsecured, firmly believing that their holy guardian will protect them from any mishap. Even the public toilets in the village square just have a thin curtain at the entrance for privacy.



New constructions have to honor these protocols, too. The police station – which only opened in September 2015 and has not yet received a single complaint from the villagers – has no front door; while the United Commercial Bank opened India's first 'lockless' branch in Shani Shingnapur in 2011, installing a glass entrance in the spirit of transparency and a barely visible remote-controlled electromagnetic lock in respect of the villagers' beliefs. This adheres to this tradition, symbolizing the community's enduring faith.

The curse of installing doors

Locals are so nonchalant that they don't even ask their neighbors to watch over their houses while they are out of town. They believe that thieves will immediately be punished with blindness, and anyone dishonest will face seven-and-a-half years of bad luck.

The deep faith of Shani Shingnapur's residents is strengthened by local stories. One such story tells of a villager who went against the village's no-door tradition by putting wooden panels at his house. The next day, he had a car accident. This story is a warning to everyone in the village about the bad luck that can happen if they don't follow their traditional beliefs.



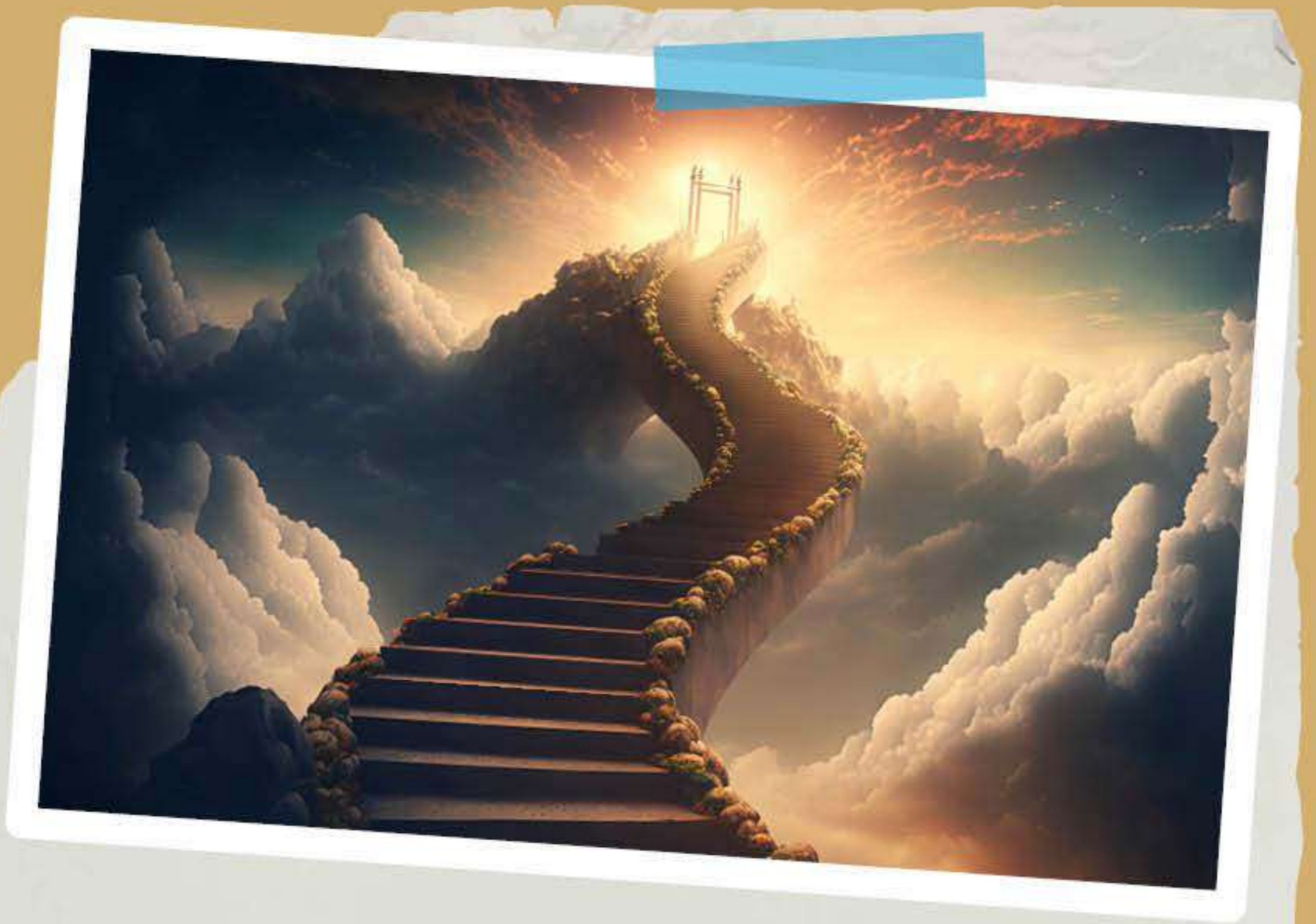
A crime-free oasis?

Despite its reputation, there have been sporadic reports of thefts in recent years. However, these incidents are often dismissed by the villagers, attributing them to occurring outside the village's boundaries. Skeptics suggest that the village's remote location might be a factor in its low crime rate, rather than any supernatural protection.

Nevertheless, Shani Shingnapur stands as a fascinating example of how faith can shape a community's way of life, challenging conventional notions of security and trust. It has become a pilgrimage site, drawing thousands of devotees eager to witness this unique village. This village exemplifies the saying that 'faith can move mountains' – in their case, shaping a unique, trust-filled way of life that defies conventional norms. The village mirrors the villagers' deep spiritual convictions, standing as a testament to the extraordinary things that can be achieved when a community unites in belief.







To the mysterious stairway to heaven,

Your ancient silhouette whispers celestial tales and enigmatic lore. Within your incomplete embrace, echoes of unfinished design and hidden secrets linger, a testament to ambitions halted. Yet, amid the missing steps, remnants reveal a bygone era's celestial pursuits, a monument to cosmic connections and intricate craftsmanship. Within its quiet halls and precise alignment, there are indications of the grandeur that its completion might have revealed: a tale of celestial wonders, an everlasting monument in stone.

India's stairway to heaven

Masroor Rock Cut Temple



If you're a fan of classic rock, you've likely heard Led Zeppelin's iconic track "Stairway to Heaven." The lyrics speak of a mystical mountain that leads to a dreamy place close to heaven. But did you know that India has a real-life location that looks almost like a stairway to heaven? Imagine being in a place without blurred lines between heaven and earth, where spiritual vacations are just a step away.

This place is also known as the Himalayan Pyramid, but it was not built for the pharaohs of Egypt. However, this stairway to heaven has connections to far-off lands even before overseas travel was possible. This mysterious temple is nestled in the heart of Masroor temple in Himachal Pradesh.

The Pandavas and the unfinished stairway

According to the Mahabharata, the five Pandavas lived in the Dhauladhar mountains in Himachal Pradesh during their exile. Locals share tales of a half-finished stone staircase in a temple complex there, believed to have been started by the Pandavas in their quest to reach heaven. However, the king of the gods, Indra, alarmed by this audacious endeavour, tricked them into stopping their work before dawn, leaving the staircase incomplete. Respecting his wishes, the Pandavas ceased construction and built a rock-cut temple around the stairs, now known as the Masroor rock-cut temple.



A mysterious civilisation beyond the temple

The exact origins of the Masroor Rock Cut Temple are shrouded in mystery, with historians and archaeologists debating its construction date. No one knows who built it since the temple has no inscriptions. Beyond the temple's confines, the surrounding area is dotted with caves and ruins, a silent testimony to a once-thriving human settlement in the Masroor region, Kangra Valley. Whether it was a cultural hub, a spiritual ground, or a bustling town is a matter of scholarly pursuit, but the relics of the past reflect the human desire to create a connection with the divine. Beneath the surface of the temple complex, there are believed to be a series of underground chambers, but these chambers remain largely unexplored. It begs the question: how was something built so long ago with such geometric and astronomical details?

Celestial architecture beyond time

The temple complex holds a remarkable secret: its design reflects an intricate knowledge of celestial patterns. Archaeologists have uncovered that the temple's layout was purposefully aligned to allow sunlight to illuminate the central deity on significant astronomical dates, such as the equinoxes and solstices. This precise orientation demonstrates the ancient builders' sophisticated understanding of celestial movements, showcasing their grasp of astronomy and architectural precision.

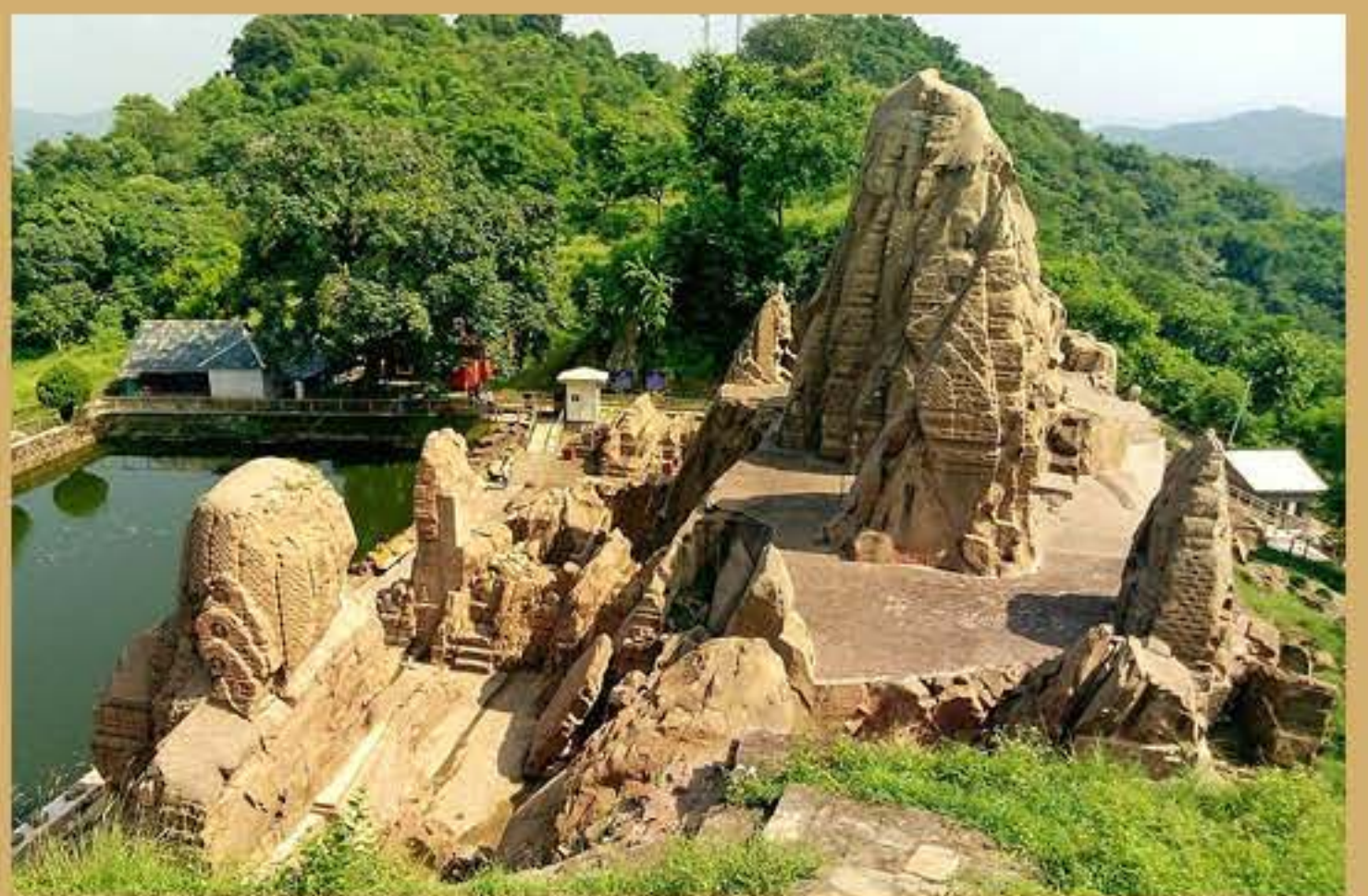
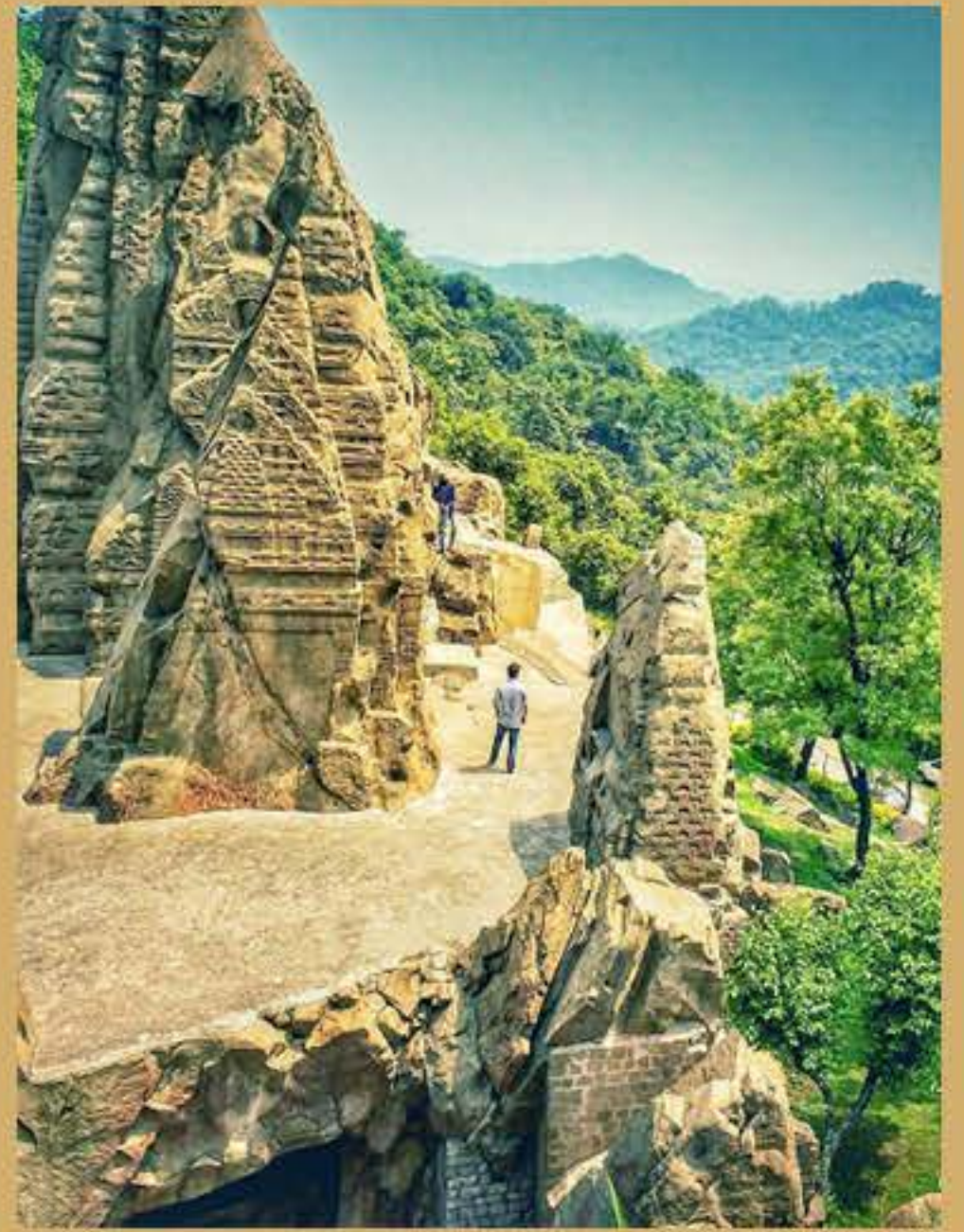
Connections to Thailand and the Middle East

The Masroor temple shares similarities with Cambodia's Angkor Wat. This suggests potential cultural exchanges or regional influences, even when travel overseas was impossible. The parallels in structure and form spark curiosity and demand further historical research to explore how people could seek inspiration from each other despite the distance between the two structures. Even the name 'Masroor' is debatable. Its Arabic meaning *joyful* adds to the mystery of how it became associated with this temple complex.

From ruin to resilience

The Masroor Temple, like many ancient monuments in the region, endured significant damage in the 1905 Kangra earthquake. Despite being in a state of decay before the earthquake, the temple's intrinsic monolithic architecture and stone construction enabled it to withstand the disaster. However, the aftermath left it with evident cracks and damage, a reminder of the power of nature and the importance of preserving ancient monuments for future generations.

The Masroor rock-cut temple may have yet to be completed as a stairway to heaven. Still, it stands as a testament to the human desire to connect with the divine and the resilience of human creations in the face of natural disasters.





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Dear elixir of dawn and dusk,

In the ebb and flow of our Indian lives, you, Chai, are the constant tide, caressing our mornings and cradling our evenings with your rhythmic cadence. Your aroma, like a gentle serenade, ushers us into wakefulness, a faithful ally in moments both bustling and tranquil. Each sip, a symphony of tradition and solace, silently acknowledges your integral place in our existence. They jest that you course through our veins - a whimsical tribute to your omnipresence. Within your earthen embrace, we find not just a drink, but a fragment of our heritage, an unadorned yet profound joy.

A top-down view of a white ceramic cup filled with a golden-brown tea. The cup is surrounded by a dense layer of fresh, vibrant green tea leaves, some of which are partially submerged in the liquid. The background is dark, making the green leaves and the orange tea stand out.

From leaf to legacy

The story of Indian tea

What's your opinion about colonialism? Most of us don't hold it in high regard, considering its impact. But let's pause for a second: we all know the British started many developments in India, like railways, education, and infrastructure. But what if we told you they're also the reason we have one of our most important drinks, one we can't imagine living without?

Yes, you heard it right! Chai, the heart of our daily routine, the morning energizer, and the evening soother, was popularized during the British era. Hard to believe, right? This beloved brew, now a staple in every Indian household, wasn't originally from our own lush fields. When you sip your next cup of chai, think about this unexpected twist in its journey. This daily fixture in Indian life, far from being native to our land, has become deeply rooted in our culture. It's more than just a drink; it's a symbol of hospitality, a testament to resilience, and a celebration of life every day.

From China's cup to India's tea pot

Someone once joked that tea runs through the veins of Indians, and in a way, it's true. Tea holds such a significant place in our daily lives that we can't help but feel a twinge of annoyance when we hear the British call it 'Chai tea' – in our heads, we're screaming, "It's the same thing!" Indeed, the absence of their daily brew turns many into hot teapots of simmering anger. But here's an interesting twist: it was the British who helped us discover the origins of tea in our own country.



Deep in the pages of history, it was in ancient China where the tale of tea first unfolded, initially revered more as a cultural gem than just a simple infusion. A Chinese Emperor, intrigued by the idea of boiling water, serendipitously found a leaf in his pot. Not only did this lead to the birth of tea, but the Emperor also believed that his long life was owed to this very brew, adding to its popularity. Over time, tea's fame spread worldwide. Eventually, tea became a staple in Britain, deeply embedded in their culture. But the British faced a problem: their heavy reliance on Chinese tea was disrupted by the Opium Wars. This conflict halted trade and forced Britain to look elsewhere for their beloved tea. Little did they know, their search would lead them to the lush landscapes of India, marking a new chapter in the tea saga.

From Emperor's pot to Indian plot

When the British couldn't get their beloved tea from China, they looked to India. And guess what? They found a wild tea plant in Assam, of all places. This was a game-changer. Suddenly, Assam started turning into a huge tea-producing area. By 1834, the British were growing loads of tea in Assam. Leveraging their influence in India, they established expansive tea plantations, transforming the landscape and igniting a new chapter in agricultural history. This changed a lot of things in Assam, from the way the land looked to how people worked. The British started giving out

free tea at railway stations all over India. This clever move made tea super popular with everyone. Now, India doesn't just grow a lot of tea - we're one of the biggest tea drinkers in the world. About 70% of the tea we make is enjoyed right here. So, every time you have a cup of chai, remember – it's part of a big, interesting story that started a long time ago.



A cup of chai - Brewing bonds and blending histories

Every time you sip your chai, remember, it's not just a drink – it's a piece of history with a twist of humor. Who would have thought that a British quest for tea would lead to India's national obsession? It's a bit like inviting someone for dinner and they end up becoming part of the family. From the rolling hills of Assam to the bustling streets of Mumbai, chai isn't just a beverage; it's a bond that unites us, a warm hug in a cup that soothes and energizes. So, here's to chai – a symbol of how the most unexpected turns can lead to the most cherished traditions. May its steam continue to rise and its aroma keep mingling with the stories of our lives.

Tea Trip

Northeast India's Plantation Delights

DIBRUGARH

- Halmari Tea Estate
- Chabua Tea Estate
- Achabam Tea Estate
- Naharkatiya Tea Estate



NOGAGHULI

- Manohari Tea Estate
- Tingrai Tea Estate
- Pengrigarh Tea Estate
- Makum Tea Estate
- Borhapjan Tea Estate



SIVASAGAR

- Gatoonga Tea Estate
- Abhoypur Tea Estate
- Bokel Tea Estate
- Meteka Tea Estate
- Disang Tea Estate



UDALGURI

- Orangajuli Tea Garden
- Dimakusi Tea Garden
- Hattigor Tea Garden
- Mazbat Tea Garden
- Bhutiachang Tea Estate



JORHAT

- Gatoonga Tea Estate
- Cinnamara Tea Estate
- Tarajulie Tea Estate
- Borhat Tea Estate
- Seleng Tea Estate



SHILLONG

- Lakysiew Tea Garden



BAKSA

- Fatemabad Tea Estate
- Belsiri Tea Estate
- Kataligaon Tea Estate
- Jakhlabandha Tea Garden
- Tamulpur Tea Garden



Dear tiny guardians,

Under the wide skies of Rajasthan, a place stands where stories whisper through the winds, and where you, little ones, scurry with purpose. Here, in the quiet corners of Karni Mata's temple, my words find a home. With each gentle step you take, pilgrims feel blessed. I write to you, for you are the heart of this sacred space. In a world where your whispers are prayers, and your presence is a blessing, you are held in the highest esteem. Thank you for guarding our faith with your tiny paws, under the watchful eyes of the goddess.

Holy whiskers & divine dinners
The tail-tale of the Rat Temple



In India, where deities commute on mighty elephants and speedy hawks, worshiping animals isn't out of the ordinary. But there's a place where this devotion takes a quirky twist. Welcome to the 'Karni Mata Temple', a sanctuary where rats don't raid pantries but are pampered and prayed to.

Here, these whiskered creatures aren't just crawling critters; they're worship-worthy beings with a tale that tickles the funny bone. What's the story behind these rodents, and how did they earn their sacred status?

Rats in royalty - The quirky tale of 'Deshnoke'

Do you want to know about where our whisker-worshiping saga unfolds? Look no further than Deshnoke, a hop away from the vibrant city of Bikaner, where the Karni Mata Temple stands in all its splendor. This is no ordinary place of worship—it's a palace for the pious that's alive with the scuttling of holy rats beneath its marbled floors. Here, rats are royalty, and spotting a rare white one amidst the bustling brown crowd is like finding a winning lottery ticket. The temple's intricately crafted silver doors and walls that glimmer with gold leaf are not just for the gods above but for the revered rodents scurrying below. It's a place that defies belief, where the smallest of mammals command the mightiest of respect, drawing in throngs of the faithful and the curious alike. So, how did these furry creatures ascend to such lofty heights? The answer is as delightful as it is divine.

The story unfolding

Let's spin the yarn of how Deshnoke's temple became a rat's wonderland. Karni Mata, a lady blessed with divine gifts, was married to Depaji but stuck to her spiritual vows. Her sister stepped in as the traditional spouse,

giving birth to sons, whom Karni Mata adored as her own. The plot thickens with the loss of Lakshman, her cherished stepson. Overwhelmed, she negotiated with Yamaraj, the unyielding god of death, to bring him back. The outcome? A heavenly deal where her descendants would eternally frolic as rats within her temple's confines, living and dying to be reborn in human guise among their kin. Leap to the present, and these honored 'kabas' are the mainstay, in a temple that's grown as a hub for the curious and the faithful, bustling during the biennial Navratri festivals.



Rats supremacy - Rat approved treats at the temple

But the story of Karni Mata and her rat descendants doesn't stop with legend and lore. It continues in the rituals that draw devotees from far and wide, keen to offer their respects and, quite literally, feed the faith. A bustling bazaar at the temple's doorstep, where stalls overflow with rat-approved treats. Visitors come to share a meal with the furry inhabitants, believing that serving these holy rats is akin to making an offering to the goddess herself. In this sacred space, even the most

apprehensive find the heart to part with a morsel or two, marveling at the high life these revered rodents lead—a stark contrast to their city-dwelling cousins who can only dream of such divine treatment. In Deshnoke, it seems, to be a rat is to live a charmed life indeed.



Before you embark on this one-of-a-kind pilgrimage to the Karni Mata Temple, here's how to navigate the divine rat-race with ease. Remember, shoes off at the door—it's barefoot or socks if you want to keep the temple grime at bay. And tread lightly, for the price of a misstep could be a shiny silver rat, available for purchase, should you accidentally crown a 'kabba' king of the underworld. Nearby, restaurants bustle as much with patrons as with the temple's whiskered celebrities; if dining with rats isn't quite your taste, a short walk can lead you to more conventional settings. As you consider joining this festivity of faith, we wonder: Are you ready to step into a world where the tiny paws of rats touch not just the floors but also the hearts of many?





Dear Illustrious Khasi Keepers,

In Meghalaya's valleys, a legacy of 56,000 years unfolds - a drapery woven with wisdom, resilience, and cultural opulence. Amidst a world in fervent pursuit of progress, your daily rites unveil the soul of sustainable coexistence. Your traditions stand as constellations in the cosmic expanse of human heritage. Our gratitude flows like sacred rivers, thanking you for bequeathing the world the treasures of your folklore, sustainable wisdom, and timeless traditions. Your community's achievements outshine modern endeavors, and we humbly appreciate your custodianship of a culture that enchants and enriches the human spirit.

The 56,000-year old tribe led by women

Khasi Tribe

Enter the vibrant world of the Khasi tribe in Meghalaya, where tradition takes a captivating turn. In a society where last names bear more significance than mere labels, women don't just play a role - they lead the narrative. Ladies, have you ever thought about your family name being the town's talk?

For the Khasi tribe, it's not a whimsical notion; it's a living cultural wonder wandering with us through a world where women set the rhythm, and family legacies are intricately woven with matrilineal finesse. The tale of the Khasi tribe dances with tradition, where every family name whispers a story.

The roots and the legacy of Khasis

The Khasi tribe's rich mythology opens the origins of their abode, traced back to 'The Seven Huts'. According to Khasi mythology, God initially divided the human race into 16 heavenly families, with seven remaining on earth and the other nine residing in the heavens. The sacred 'Lum Sohpetbneng Peak' in the present-day Ri-Bhoi district served as a celestial gateway, allowing free passage between earth and heaven. However, a fateful event unfolded when members of the earthly families mistakenly cut a divine tree, severing their access to the heavens. The Khasi tribe constitutes a substantial portion of Meghalaya's population and is believed to have been present in the state for approximately 56,000 years. Scholars unanimously attribute their origins to nearly 60,000 years ago, when they diverged from the main branch of the Austro-Asiatic people. Over the years, the Khasi community has proliferated, currently inhabiting the eastern region of Meghalaya, which borders Assam and extends into certain areas of Bangladesh.

The Indian community where girls rule

The Khasi tribe of Meghalaya shares many commonalities with other tribes in India—living close to nature, venerating trees, and preserving their cultural heritage. Yet, what sets them aglow is their exceptional matrilineal society - a rare gem in the global lists of communities. Putting it simply, in this society, the women call all the shots.



Originally, the Khasi tribe operated within a patriarchal framework. However, the tide began to turn as the community faced the harsh realities of war. With more men losing their lives, widows compelled to remarry, and children unfairly labeled as illegitimate, the Khasi people decided they could no longer tolerate such discrimination. In response, a pivotal shift occurred - the decision that children would proudly bear their mother's last name. In a world where patriarchal norms

often prevail, stumbling upon a community grounded in matriarchy is a remarkable anomaly. For the Khasi tribe, this concept is not alien; it's an integral part of their identity. The matrilineal tradition they've established places women in key roles, influencing inheritance and the adoption of family names after marriage. The youngest daughter inherits family treasures, children proudly carrying maternal surnames, and men transitioning into their wives' households post-marriage. These societal norms paint a clear picture of the Khasi tribe's culture - a rich connection woven with egalitarian values and a matrilineal framework that defies convention.

'Ka Shad Suk Mynsiem' - The cultural symbol

Ever wondered what makes the Khasi tribe truly stand out? Well, aside from their unique matrilineal society, they boast a rare cultural jewel known as Ka Shad Suk Mynsiem. Held each April, this festival is a heartfelt tribute to Mother Nature, expressing gratitude for a fruitful harvest and seeking blessings for the upcoming sowing season. What makes Ka Shad Suk Mynsiem truly special is not just the ritualistic dance performed by unmarried women and men, but the way the entire community comes alive in vibrant colors and traditional attire, a visual spectacle that mirrors the profound connection the Khasi people share with nature. And when October or November rolls around, Ka Pom-Blang Nongkrem takes center stage, a harvest festival

where fervent prayers weave prosperity and peace into the very fabric of the sect. This vibrant veil of culture, including the spiritual reverence for Krem Chympe Cave, reflects the tribe's deep connection with their mystical and natural surroundings.



So, whether you're drawn to the beat of matrilineal traditions or captivated by the whispers of kind spirits in the mystical caves, Meghalaya's Khasi tribe invites you to dance in the rhythm of their vibrant culture - a tale where every step echoes the resilience of tradition and the harmony between humanity and nature. Step into their world, where the past, present, and future waltz together, inviting you to join the timeless celebration of Khasi heritage. After all, in this extraordinary corner of the world, every story, every cave, every hill and every heartbeat is an invitation to become part of a living, breathing legacy.





To the architects of a burgeoning empire,

In the sacred shadows of Tirupati, devotion cascades like silken strands, sheared in reverence, yet destined for the dazzle of distant Hollywood lights. Here, in this ancient ritual of tonsuring, faith is measured in locks of hair, each a humble offering to the divine. These tresses, woven from piety and sacrifice, journey far beyond temple walls, morphing into crowns for the stars. Thus, in every lustrous weave seen on red carpets, lingers a silent hymn of devotion, a piece of a devotee's soul, transcending realms, marrying the celestial with the worldly in a singular act of faith.

Hair tonsuring to a billion-dollar industry

Tirupati to Hollywood



Ever marvelled at the lustrous locks of Hollywood celebrities like Angelina Jolie or Kylie Jenner as they dazzle on the red carpet? Next time you admire their stunning hairstyles, think twice before you feel envious. Their glamorous hair could be a wig sourced from an unexpected place – a temple in India. And it's not just about wigs; this hair also plays a role in various pharmaceutical products and even in the flavours of the foods we eat.

From sacred ritual to global fashion

Tirupati is a renowned pilgrimage spot in South India's Chittoor district. The tradition of hair donation here dates back to the 12th century. In 2022, India's hair exports soared to 6300 crores, largely contributed by this temple. Around 35,000 devotees donate their hair daily, adding up to 500 kg per day. This hair, cherished for its natural strength and chemical-free care, is auctioned monthly, bringing in ₹15 crores for the Balaji Trust. This isn't just any hair; it's a symbol of devotion that becomes a sought-after fashion accessory across continents.

Hair journey from devotion to auction

After donation, the hair undergoes a rigorous process to ensure its hygiene and quality. It is boiled, rinsed, dried, and stored in climate-controlled godowns. The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams then conduct an e-auction, where this valuable hair is sold to the highest bidders, generating substantial revenue. This hair then embarks on a global journey, reaching markets in Europe, America, China, and Africa, where it's highly sought after for its natural quality. This isn't the end but the beginning of a journey that sees this hair crisscrossing continents, coveted for its pristine quality.

When Tirupati meets Tinseltown

Internationally, women's long hair from Tirupati is in high demand for wigs and hair extensions. Favoured in Paris for being organically treated with oils by Indian women, this hair meets various needs in fashion, cosmetics, and even medical fields. Recognised for its superior quality and spiritual significance, it's also popular among Hollywood stars. Indian hair's natural strength and versatility, allowing it to be coloured and styled without damage, makes it highly valuable, with final products selling for between \$1000 to \$3000. Here, spirituality and style intertwine, creating a unique narrative in fashion and beauty.



Tirupati tresses turned to food flavours

Men's tonsured hair from Tirupati finds its use in coat linings and is mixed with local hair in China to produce affordable wigs. Extracted Cysteine from this hair is vital in food, pharmaceutical, and personal care industries, particularly in flavour production. Remy hair, long and

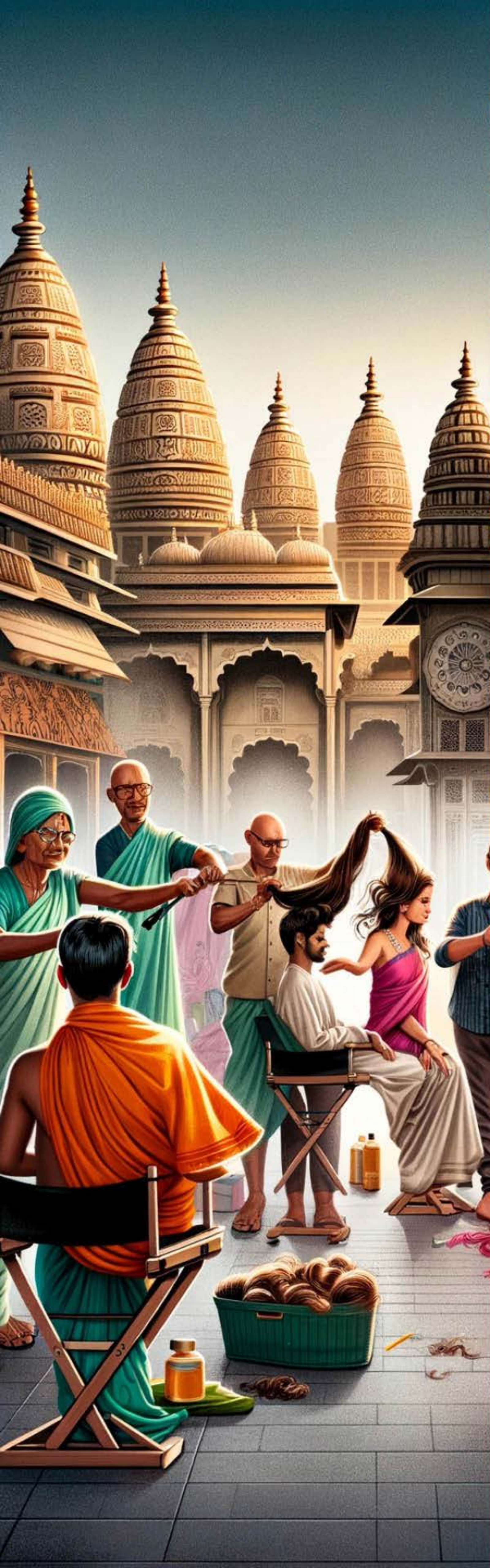
uniformly trimmed, is a big hit in Europe and the US for wig making. From luxury wigs in the West to affordable extensions in China, these strands fulfil a spectrum of purposes, proving their value.

The future of the multi-billion-dollar hair industry

Tirupati's hair industry witnessed a meteoric rise in revenue from ₹15 crores to an astonishing ₹33 crores in just a few years. As the global demand for human hair continues to surge, the industry is poised to shatter all its past financial milestones.



This remarkable journey, from a revered temple to the glitzy avenues of global fashion and beyond, highlights the extraordinary ways diverse cultures and industries intersect. It's a vivid illustration of how a deeply-rooted spiritual practice can intertwine with and significantly impact the global economy, setting a precedent for the future of the multi-billion-dollar human hair industry.





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To the mystical stewards of time,

Whispering waters of Chandratat, you mirror the heavens where Yudhishtira's virtues are reflected. Mighty plains of Kurukshetra, your soil, saturated with the valor of warriors, still echoes the conch's call. Indraprastha, you rose from barren lands, a citadel of aspirations, cradling tales of triumph and deceit. And tranquil Vrindavan, in your groves, the flute's melody lingers narrating love's eternal dance. These are not just coordinates on a map but the pulsing veins of a narrative that shaped a culture, a compass that continues to guide countless souls seeking the eternal truths within the folds of an enduring epic.



The less trodden trail of
Pandavas through India

The Mahabharata, a Sanskrit epic, is considered the longest poem and scholars hail it as the largest single literary work. It consists of 1.8 million words and scholars believe that it took over 600 years to write. However, the significance of the Mahabharata extends beyond being a historical tale.

Within the vast expanse of the Indian subcontinent, numerous ancient sites bear witness to the legacy of the Mahabharata.

Mathura, Uttar Pradesh – The birth of Krishna

Mathura resonates with the echoes of the divine birth of Lord Krishna, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu. It was here, in the confines of a dark dungeon, that Krishna was born to Vasudeva and Devaki, amidst the turmoil and oppression of King Kansa. Krishna's birth was miraculous and marked by celestial omens. Immediately after his birth, Vasudeva carried him across the Yamuna to Gokul, to ensure his safety from Kansa, who was destined to be killed by Krishna. Mathura thus marks the beginning of a divine saga that would shape the course of Dharma in the age of the Mahabharata.



Kashi, Uttar Pradesh – The abduction by Bhishma

Kashi, now Varanasi, was significant in the Mahabharata as the kingdom whose princesses Amba, Ambika, and Ambalika, were abducted by Bhishma for his half-brother Vichitravirya. Amba's subsequent release and vow for revenge against Bhishma set a series of events in motion, leading to the birth of Shikhandi, who played a crucial role in Bhishma's fall in the war. Kashi thus became a pivotal location for its role in the lineage of the Kauravas and Pandavas.

Indraprastha, Delhi – The Pandavas' kingdom

Indraprastha, the magnificent city established by the Pandavas upon the clearing of Khandav Forest, represents the zenith of Pandava glory. It was here that Yudhishtira ruled with dharma, and the Pandavas lived their most prosperous years. Indraprastha also stands as a symbol of rivalry, as Duryodhana's envy of the Pandavas' palace sparked the fateful game of dice, leading to the Pandavas' downfall and eventual exile. People believe that Purana Qila stands on the grounds where the ancient city of Indraprastha once thrived.

Panchal Pradesh – The birthplace of Draupadi

Panchal Pradesh, the land between the Himalayas and the river Chambha, was the kingdom of King Drupada. This location became renowned as the birthplace of the central female figure of Mahabharata, Draupadi, commonly known as Panchali, owing to the importance

of the site. Draupadi's Swayamvara, her marriage to the five Pandavas, and her role in the epic's narrative make Panchal a significant location.

Lakshagraha Varnavat, Uttar Pradesh – The Pandavas' great escape

Lakshagraha in Varnavat is infamous for the treacherous plot by Duryodhana to eliminate the Pandavas. The lacquer house, built to be set ablaze, was a cunning ploy to kill the Pandavas and their mother Kunti. However, warned by their wise uncle Vidura, the Pandavas constructed a tunnel escape route. The successful escape of the Pandavas from the flaming trap marked their survival against the odds and foreshadowed the resilience they would need for the challenges ahead, including the eventual battle for their rightful kingdom.



Hastinapur, Uttar Pradesh – Seat of Kuru Power

Hastinapur was the seat of the Kuru dynasty, where the blind King Dhritarashtra ruled. This location was where the notorious dice game took place, in which Yudhishtira gambled away his kingdom and his brothers. The game also led to Draupadi's disrobing, after which she vowed severe revenge. The city was the backdrop for much of the political intrigue and familial strife that culminated in the Mahabharata war.



Arvalem, Goa – The refuge of the Pandavas

In the serene village of Arvalem in North Goa, there exists a collection of six small caves carved out of native laterite stone, popularly known as the Pandava Caves. It is believed that each of the five caves was inhabited by one of the Pandava brothers, and Shivalingas are now enshrined within them. The sixth cave, Draupadi's Kitchen, presents an intriguing feature. It features a kitchen-like platform with carved depressions resembling utensils, possibly used for holding food.

Kurukshetra, Haryana – The sacred battlefield

The plains of Kurukshetra served as the grand stage for the eighteen-day battle between the Pandavas and the Kauravas. It was here that the Kauravas and Pandavas assembled their armies, drawing warriors from across the land. Kurukshetra stands as a symbol of the struggle between good and evil, where Lord Krishna imparted the timeless wisdom of the Bhagavad Gita to a hesitant Arjuna, emphasizing duty and righteousness.

Banganga, Kurukshetra – Bhishma's bed of arrows

Near the battlefield of Kurukshetra lies Banganga, where the patriarch Bhishma lay on a bed of arrows, his body pierced during the war. In his thirst, Arjuna, at Krishna's behest, shot an arrow into the ground, summoning the waters of the sacred river Ganga to rise and quench his great-grandfather's thirst.

Prabhas, Gujarat – The final journey of Krishna

Prabhas is a sacred region where Krishna decided to relinquish his earthly form after the Great War. The narrative recounts the tragic demise of Krishna's kin, foreshadowing the decline of Dwaraka and the end of an era. Krishna's death by an arrow that struck his heel - the only vulnerable part of his divine form - marked the conclusion of his divine play on earth and the beginning of the Kali Yuga, the age of darkness.

Mana, Uttarakhand – The portal to heaven

Mana, often recognized as the last Indian village before the Mana Pass, is steeped in legend as the gateway from which the Pandavas ascended to the heavens. After renouncing their kingdom and embarking on a great journey, the Pandavas reached Mana. Here, they climbed the slopes of Mount Meru, with each brother falling away one by one, save for Yudhishtira, who remained steadfast in his righteousness.

Chandratal, Himachal Pradesh – Yudhishtira's ascent to heaven



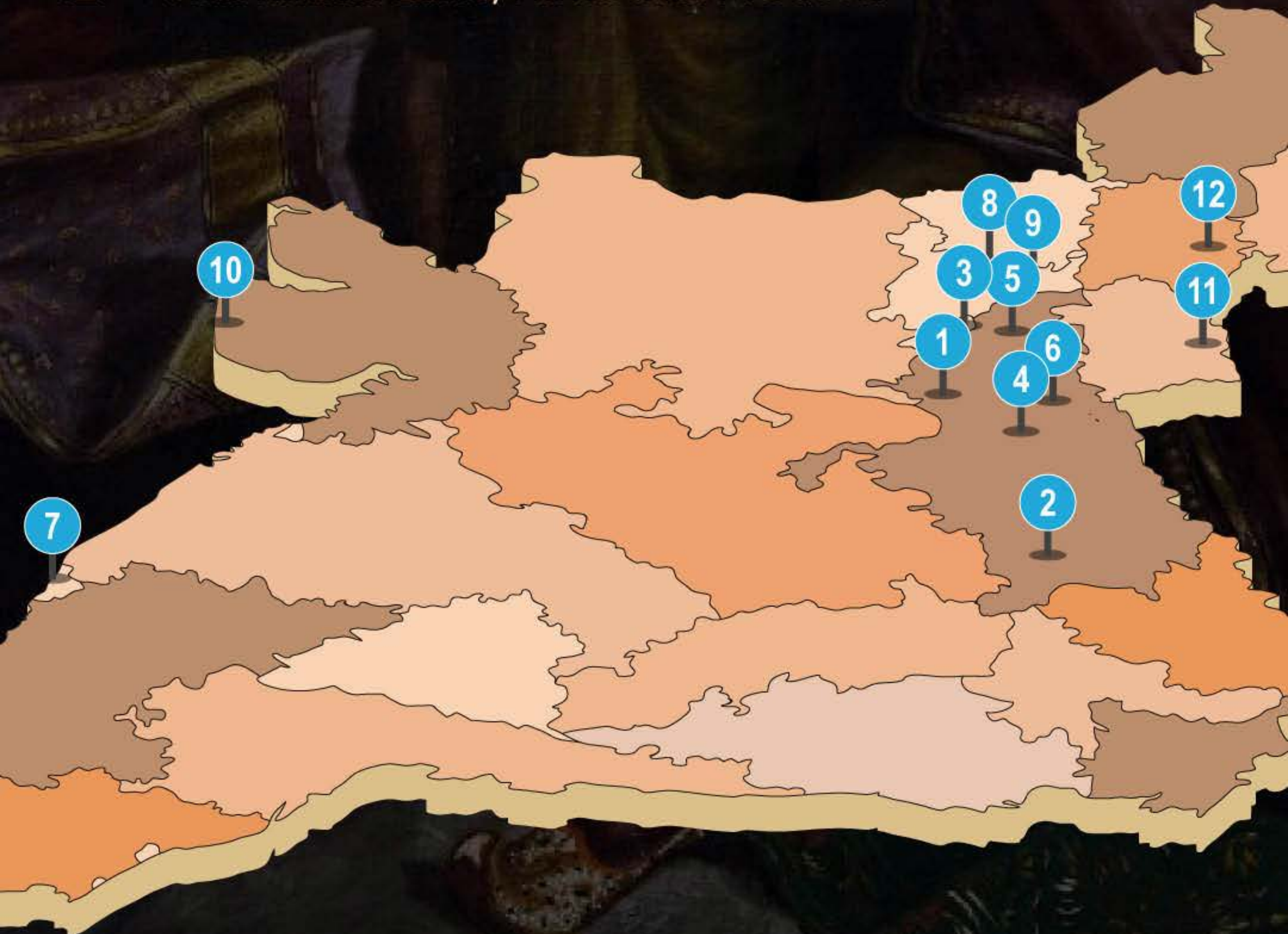
Chandratal Lake, with its serene and untouched beauty, is linked to the celestial ascent of Yudhishtira, the eldest Pandava. After the fall of his siblings, Yudhishtira reached this high-altitude lake. Here, he was tested one final time for his adherence to Dharma. Yudhishtira demonstrated his unwavering commitment to righteousness by refusing to enter heaven without his faithful dog, who was none other than the god Dharma in disguise. The gods, pleased with his virtues, welcomed him into heaven, thus concluding the earthly journey of the Pandavas.

These destinations provide glimpses into the epic tale and offer a profound spiritual connection. It is important to note that these are just a few examples of the many places in India with ties to the Mahabharata, highlighting the rich mythological heritage of the country. India, with its diverse and spiritually woven fabric, offers a plethora of locations waiting to be explored and discovered. Embarking on a Mahabharata trail is an ideal way to immerse oneself in this ancient epic and experience the cultural and historical marvels of India. It's a journey that connects past and present, offering profound insights into the values, beliefs, and spirituality that continue to shape the nation.



लक्ष्मणवतुल्य Indian Landmarks

01. Mathura, Uttar Pradesh
02. Kashi, Uttar Pradesh
03. Indraprastha, Delhi
04. Panchal Pradesh
05. Lakshagraha Varnavat, Uttar Pradesh
06. Hastinapur, Uttar Pradesh
07. Arvalem, Goa
08. Kurukshetra, Haryana
09. Banganga, Kurukshetra
10. Prabhas, Gujarat
11. Mana, Uttarakhand
12. Chandratul Lake, Himachal Pradesh





To the rain gods,

Beneath India's wide and watchful sky, where myths breathe and live, we, your tillers of soil and keepers of green, pen this note on the wings of faith. In the heart of our land, where frogs are more than mere creatures, we've spun a rite, old as the hills, young as the morning dew. They wed, not for love but for life—to beckon you, Rain Gods, in your vast blue halls. With each knot tied, with every rite whispered, we ask not for torrents, but for tender mercy. Let their union be the harbinger of your bounteous dance, the monsoon's lifeblood, upon which our hopes, like seeds, do patiently wait.

A close-up photograph of a dark brown frog with lighter brown spots, sitting on a wet, reflective surface. The frog is facing right, and its skin appears moist and glistening. The background is a blurred, dark teal color with light reflections, suggesting a wet pavement or a similar surface. The overall mood is mysterious and atmospheric.

Wedding bells are ringing
The froggy fairytale of India

You know that old bedtime tale, where a princess plants a kiss on a frog and - poof - he turns into a prince? Well, in some corners of India, people throw actual weddings for frogs. It's like the fairy tales, but with a twist that's stranger than fiction.

Imagine a whole village coming together, not just to watch two frogs sit on a tiny, decorated altar, but to celebrate like it's the event of the season. There are no royal commands or magical spells here, just real people, real frogs, and rituals that'll make you question everything you knew about weddings. So, why do they do it? Jump right into this curious tale that's all about hoping for the best with a little help from our web-footed friends.

Frogs tie the knot for monsoon magic

We Indians, familiar with a vast array of traditions, are hardly baffled by unusual rituals. Yet, the idea of marrying off frogs might still raise eyebrows. Well, it's linked to something that affects us all – the weather. India's reliance on the monsoon is no secret, with rains being the lifeblood of our agriculture. Now, you might wonder, why not just build canals everywhere? It's not that simple. Many regions lack such infrastructure, leaving farmers at the mercy of the skies. And when monsoons falter, it's not just the crops that suffer; it's the whole country. To coax the clouds, communities turn to age-old solutions. Enter the frog wedding, a quirky ritual aimed at pleasing the rain gods.

Frogs wed to please the rain Gods

What's with the frogs getting married and not, say, the parrots or the peacocks? The answer hops back to ancient tales and deep-rooted beliefs. In Assam, for

instance, there's a legend that farmers once questioned the clouds about their stinginess with rain. The clouds replied they were waiting to hear the frogs' croaking—music to their ears that signals the monsoon's arrival. This chorus of croaks is believed to herald the much-needed rains.



Down south, the plot thickens with a ritual called 'Mandooka Parinaya'—a formal wedding for frogs that locals believe sweet-talks the rain god Indra into generosity, ensuring a downpour. Different places, different stories, but they all echo a common theme: a reverence for nature's rhythms. These traditions aren't just about the frogs; they're a celebration of life's natural ebb and flow and the hope of living in sync with the earth's beat. The exact origins of these frog weddings are shrouded in mystery, but they may reflect the Hindu belief in Lord Vishnu's amphibian avatar—perhaps a divine nod to the significance of frogs in sustaining life. The custom of marrying frogs is prevalent in various regions of India, including Varanasi, Sonbhadra, certain areas of Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and also in the Himalayan region.

A typical Indian wedding - Except the bride & groom

It's a typical Indian wedding - minus the bride and groom are frogs. The whole process is quite the spectacle, reflecting the pomp of traditional Indian nuptials. The bride, a female frog, gets a luxurious spa treatment with oils before being bathed and decked out in wedding finery. Her groom makes an entrance with all the celebratory buzz you'd expect at a wedding, complete with dancing villagers and a feast to come. As the frogs are united in matrimony and then released into their watery honeymoon suite, the pond, prayers are sent skyward, hoping for a symphony of croaks to summon the rains. The festivities wrap up with a feast, as the village revels not just in food and dance, but in the shared hope for a bountiful monsoon.

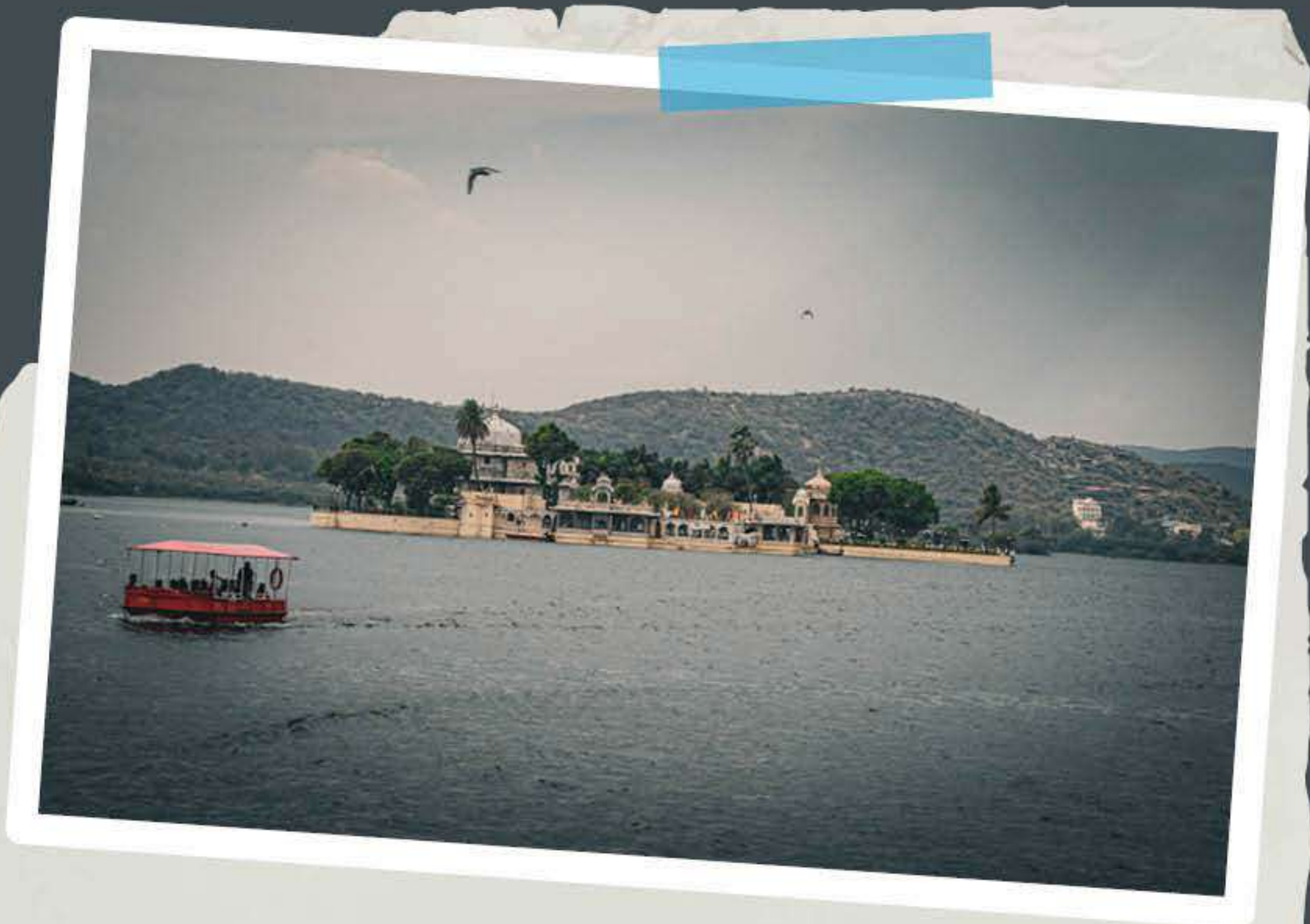
In the southern parts of India, the custom has its own local color. Here, the froggy bride and groom, often named after the deities of water and rain, Varuna and Varsha, are given a turmeric bath, decked in handmade outfits, and the bride is even presented with a toe ring and sometimes a Mangalsutra, drawing parallels with human Hindu weddings. With prayers sung and a lavish spread of delicacies, the ceremony is a blend of devotion and high spirits, leaving the community in anticipation of the rain god's favor following the joyous leap of faith.



When frog marriages lead to a rainy divorce

And like all good tales that twist and turn, our story of froggy matrimony has an unexpected chapter: the leap to divorce. It seems that even in the amphibian world, too much of a good thing calls for a split. In Madhya Pradesh, a frog couple found themselves facing separation, when their marriage, initially celebrated to bring rain, worked a tad too well, inviting a monsoon that overstayed its welcome. The deluge that followed their wedding was so intense that it swept into a flood, prompting the villagers to enact a 'separation ceremony' at the Turant Mahadev temple. In a hope to appease the elements, two clay frogs were floated away with mantras, hoping to dial back the rains. In this unique cycle of marriage and divorce, nature, belief, and a touch of the whimsical intertwine, leaving us to ponder the fascinating ways in which humans interact with the forces of nature.





To the crown of Lake Pichola,

You captivate hearts with your timeless beauty. Adorned in pages of renown and whispered about in the hallowed halls of celebrity gatherings, your grandeur is celebrated far and wide. Within your walls, kings, and queens once reveled, and now, stars flock to bask in your splendor. Beyond your majestic presence, you inspire greatness, having kindled the vision for one of the world's wonders. Your elegance, both historic and contemporary, resonates with the soul of India, making you not just a palace, but a poetic emblem of beauty and inspiration.

A glimpse into the grand parties of the past

Jagmandir



In the heart of Rajasthan, amidst the tranquil waters of Lake Pichola, lies a mysterious palace on an island. This palace, once the hidden realm of kings and queens, now echoes with the laughter and celebration of today's global celebrities. This is where high-profile weddings and spectacular concerts with stars like Akon and Priyanka Chopra light up the stage.

This palace's story isn't just one of recent opulence and splendor. Constructed nearly 400 years ago, it has been a witness to the ebb and flow of time, holding secrets of a bygone era.

Even the world of cinema has not remained untouched by its charm, with the palace featuring prominently in the 1983 James Bond film 'Octopussy', bringing its splendor to audiences worldwide. Here's how the iconic Jagmandir palace, often seen in today's tabloids, has undergone its remarkable transformation from the erstwhile times to the modern era.

Jag Mandir from tribal waters to royal splendor

Nestled on one of Pichola Lake's two natural islands, near the village of Picholi, sits the resplendent Jag Mandir. The lake itself dates back to the 15th century, originally devised by a Banjara tribal leader for grain transportation. Jag Mandir's construction began in 1551 under Maharana Amar Singh, continued by Maharana Karan Singh, and was completed by Maharana Jagat Singh I. Named in honor of Maharana Jagat Singh, this majestic palace served as a summer getaway and entertainment hub for the royal family. Here, in this lavish setting, the kings and queens indulged in grand feasts, hosted elaborate musical and dance performances, and enjoyed leisurely boat rides on the serene lake.

A sanctuary for a future Mughal emperor

Jagmandir's most notable past resident was none other than Prince Khurram, who was famously known as Emperor Shah Jahan. Before ascending to the Mughal throne, he sought refuge at Jagmandir, known then as 'Gul Mahal', during his rebellion against his father, Emperor Jahangir. Maharana Karan Singh of Mewar offered asylum to Prince Khurram, largely because of his Rajput maternal lineage. This act of generosity by Maharana Karan Singh, despite the longstanding Mewar-Mughal rivalries, paved the way for future peace, even amidst intermittent threats from Aurangzeb.



How Jagmandir inspired the Taj Mahal

One of the most fascinating aspects of Jagmandir's history is its influence on Emperor Shah Jahan, particularly in his architectural vision. Staying in Jagmandir during his youth, Shah Jahan drew inspiration from its design. This experience would later be instrumental in conceiving the Taj Mahal, his most iconic creation. The architectural elements of marble and the aesthetic appeal of Jagmandir left an indelible mark on his imagination, sparking the genesis of one of the world's most admired wonders.

Jagmandir's role in the Sepoy Mutiny

In the turbulent year of 1857, as the winds of the Sepoy Mutiny – India's first major uprising against British rule – swept across the nation, Jagmandir Palace emerged as a beacon of refuge and humanity. Maharana Swaroop Singh, upholding the traditions of sanctuary and protection inherent in Rajput culture, opened the gates of this grand palace to European women and children seeking safety. They came from Neemuch, a region caught in the throes of the rebellion. This act of shelter by Maharana Swaroop Singh not only exemplified compassion during a time of conflict but also marked Jagmandir as a place of historical significance beyond its royal heritage.

A modern marvel - Jagmandir's transformation

Though the palace was once a regal summer retreat and royal festivities, it has gracefully transitioned into a modern sanctuary for luxury and history. Managed by the HRH Hotel Groups, this heritage hotel not only continues to host glittering gatherings for today's celebrities but also warmly welcomes all who wish to immerse themselves in its grandeur. Here, every visitor can live a slice of royal life, basking in the same opulence that once entertained kings and queens, now accessible to all who seek its splendour.

The Palaces of Udaipur



1. City Palace
2. Sajjangarh Palace
3. Jagmandir
4. Bada Mahal
5. Shiv Niwas Palace
6. Rangniwas Palace
7. Gogunda Palace
8. Chunda Palace
9. The Oberoi Udaivilas
10. Bhairavgarh Palace
11. Raas Devigarh
12. The Leela Palace



In India's embrace, where legends dwell, fire stands sacred, a divine spell. Agni, the fire god, silent and strong, bears prayers skyward, where they belong. The sacred blaze, a dance of fate, purifies souls, through ancient gates. This flame, fierce yet somehow kind, reflects life's change, in the collective mind. In this timeless rite, the faithful dare, on Thimithis coals, a fiery prayer, threading life's fabric with stories bold, where pain meets grace, and tales unfold.

A walk across the fire
A journey of devotion



Walk in the footsteps of legends on a path that seems impossible: a stretch of fiery coals laid out under the open night sky. Here, the brave face the heat in a test of faith and endurance that echoes a timeless tale. A woman's strength and purity are celebrated through this fiery walk, an event that might sound like a fable, yet it unfolds each year with intense devotion. Could there truly be a place where such an ancient practice is alive and well?

Believe it, for this isn't mere legend. In this tradition, every glowing coal is not just a spark but a vibrant narrative waiting to unfold. This isn't a story from ancient scriptures; it's happening here and now, inviting those who hear of it to question the limits of their faith.

Draupadi's promise and triumph

In the folds of history, Thimithi originates from the Mahabharata's epic narrative. The word 'Thimithi' combines 'Thi,' meaning fire, and 'mithi,' meaning stamp. This name vividly encapsulates the essence of the fire-walking ritual it represents. The Pandavas, in a high-stakes game of chance, gambled away their kingdom and their queen, Draupadi. Humiliated in the Kaurava court, her honor was shielded by the miraculous intervention of Krishna. From this act of divine protection sprouted Draupadi's vow of vengeance, culminating in the war's aftermath as she ritually cleansed her hair with the blood of her enemy, Duryodhana. Her journey of retribution closed with her courageous walk across scorching coals, a true affirmation of her purity. This defining act gave rise to the revered ritual of Thimithi, a living emblem of steadfast faith and endurance. It was the devout from Tamil Nadu who first brought this legendary episode to life, starting the tradition of fire-walking as a homage to Draupadi's virtue. This ancient custom, begun centuries ago by unnamed believers, has since woven itself into the fabric of annual spiritual observances across India.

Devotees path of purification for Thimithi

The journey towards the ritual of fire is as much about internal purification as it is about the external display of devotion. Those who choose to walk the fiery path engage in a transformative process, embodying discipline and spiritual cleansing. Their preparations are meticulous and reflective, involving not just abstaining from certain foods but also engaging in meditative practices that align them with the divine energy they seek. It's a silent pilgrimage that begins far from the glow of the embers, in the quiet corners of their everyday lives, and culminates in the shared experience of the sacred flames. And it is with reverence and a sense of communion that, after these solemn preparations, they step into the sacred festival, ready to walk the path that has been blessed by tradition.

The Mahabharata comes alive for Thimithi

The festivities officially start a week before Diwali when a flag adorned with Arjuna and Lord Hanuman's likenesses is raised, signaling the onset of the celebration. From this day, the epic Mahabharata is narrated each evening, culminating two days post Thimithi. Performances depicting significant episodes from the Mahabharata, including the defeat of Keesaka and the marriage of Arjuna and Draupadi, bring the ancient text to vivid life. A silver chariot procession, symbolizing the Pandavas' victory, weaves through the streets, and the ritual of 'Kumbuduthandam', where

devotees roll around the temple grounds, marks a display of devotion and humility, all building up to the climactic moment of fire-walking.

Dawn of devotion - The sacred fire-walk

On Thimithi day, well before the sun peeks over the horizon, the ritual begins. A pit, 2.7 meters long, is set ablaze the previous night, its flames kept alive until the ceremony concludes. With the break of dawn, devotees adorned with a yellow thread, turmeric, and neem, symbols of purity and health, gather in solemn anticipation. The chief priest leads, a 'Karakam' poised upon his head, stepping across the fire in a silent prayer of devotion. One by one, followers emulate this sacred dance across the coals, seeking blessings and testing faith. At the pit's end, they soothe their feet in cow milk, an elixir as sacred in Hinduism as the ritual itself. As the ceremony draws to a close, milk and water douse the flames, and the festival reaches its quietus with the final verses of the Mahabharata and the lowering of the flag, signaling the end of a profound act of collective faith, observed for centuries in Tamil Nadu's 'Kanni Amman Kovil' temple.



The legacy beyond the borders

Can you believe this grand festival traveled beyond the borders of India? In Singapore, Thimithi unfolds with a 4 km procession led by the Chief Priest, starting from Sri Srinivasa Perumal Temple and culminating at Sri Mariamman Temple for the fire walking ceremony. The celebration continues into the evening with a chariot procession and concludes with the reverent reading of the Mahabharata's final chapter, two days after the embers have cooled, bringing a piece of India's spiritual heritage to the streets of Singapore.



As the tale of Thimithi's flames endures, it ignites curiosity about the timeless appeal of such traditions. They beckon us across ages and borders, but why do they resonate so deeply? Imagine yourself at the edge of the glowing coals - would your belief carry you across? These rituals challenge us, compelling us to explore the depths of our own faith. The answers may be as personal as the journey itself, yet they are answers worth seeking in the dance between the embers and the echo of our steps.





To the artist's creation,

In the hushed dunes of Rajasthan, where time treads softly, you are born of bone and horn, a legacy etched by ancient hands. Crafted by Neanderthal kin, yet kindred in the art of survival, reshaped by the will of kings. Oh, sculpture of the desert's heart, in your silhouette, the whispers of the Mughal and the Rajput courts entwine. An artifact of artistry, you are not merely crafted; you are conjured from the very essence of Rajasthan, a sonnet sculpted in bone, a history held within the hollows of time's embrace.

Neanderthal roots in Rajasthani art

Bone-afide craft



Imagine Rajasthan and your mind might wander through its sprawling deserts, echo with the strains of its folk music, and marvel at its majestic palaces. But look closer, on the bustling streets or in the colorful frames of Bollywood hits like “Choli ke peeche kya hai,” and you’ll notice something else—a tradition adorning the full arms of Rajasthani women: ivory bangles.

You'll also find a wide array of articles including sword and dagger handles and miniature monuments being sold in the bustling streets. The common link between these articles? They're crafted by the horns and bones of animals.

They are also a nod to an ancient form of expression that predates human beings, with roots going back 51,000 years. Today, the art behind creating these pieces has evolved into a variety of keepsakes that continue to tell the story of this age-old craft. So wondering why and how you can take home a statement piece from pre-historic times? Here's all you need to know about Rajasthan's horn and bone craft.

An ancient legacy of Neanderthals

The art of bone carving was not exclusive to our homo sapien ancestors. Recent discoveries suggest that Neanderthals, too, had a flair for creativity, leaving behind bone carvings as early as 51,000 years ago, with radiocarbon dating backing up these claims. It's unlikely that these early history, with evidence of bone jewellery accompanying the dead in their final resting places during the Mesolithic period. But how did a craft from the dawn of humanity find its home in Rajasthan?

From Neanderthal hands to Rajasthani artisans

The answer to this mystery lies in the sands of time. Horn and bone carving in Rajasthan is a time-honoured

tradition, with roots that may not be precisely dated but are deeply entrenched in the region's history. Passed down through generations and tribes, the craft has been shaped by Rajasthan's cultural tapestry. The environment of Rajasthan, with its pastoral and nomadic roots, has long necessitated the wise use of all resources, including the remains of livestock which are central to their way of life. Local artisans utilized every part of the animals integral to their way of life, from domesticated cows and buffaloes to the camels that are emblematic of the region. The bones, collected respectfully from animals that have died naturally, are transformed through a series of intricate procedures, to make it a fixture of grandeur through the ages.

A fashion statement of the ages

The tradition of bone carving in Rajasthan was not only a matter of practicality but also evolved to a symbol of status and luxury. In the days of old, the Mughals and Rajputs, known for their magnificent palaces and rich cultural influences, were great patrons of this



art form. They commissioned elaborate pieces, from chess sets to furniture inlays, showcasing a high level of craftsmanship. While ivory was a material coveted by the elite, bone provided a more accessible medium for artisans, allowing them to express their creativity across the social spectrum. The influence of Mughal architecture and design is evident in the intricate patterns and the use of colored dyes to enhance the natural beauty of the bone. These royals often saw the act of hunting as a mark of nobility. The bones of the hunted game became trophies of these expeditions, further adding to the narrative of victory and power. Carving these bones into luxurious items, therefore, served as a dual testament to their success in battle and their patronage of the arts.

Bangles that bind marriages and fertility

The craft of bone carving in Rajasthan extends beyond decorative items and enters the realm of personal adornment, intertwining with the social customs of the region. An example of this is the tradition of ivory bangles in many Rajasthani tribes. For married women, these bangles are not mere ornaments but are imbued with cultural significance. A full set comprises of 52 bangles, symbolizing a fortification of the marital bond, and they are worn continuously as a protective charm against the evil eye and to aid in childbirth. These bangles made from ivory, reflect the same artistry and attention to detail that is characteristic of bone carving.

Horn and bone craft in contemporary times

Today, the horn and bone carving tradition in Rajasthan continues to thrive, albeit with a modern twist. Artisans now focus on sustainable practices, mindful of the ethical and legal aspects of their craft. From jewellery to carved boxes and even beer mugs, the products appeal to a global audience, bringing a piece of Rajasthan to the world. Sambhal, a hub for bone and horn handicrafts, has become a lifeline for nearly 100,000 people, with an impressive annual turnover that speaks volumes of the craft's success and sustainability. So the next time you see a bangle or a carved box made of horn or bone in Rajasthan, remember, it's not just a thing of beauty – it's a piece of a story that has been told for over 50,000 years. Every corner of India offers its unique keepsake, a tangible piece of its regional tapestry to take with you. So, while Rajasthan bestows the splendour of horn and bone carvings, each state invites you to hold a part of its heritage in your hands, a memento of the diverse and rich cultural landscape to cherish upon your return home.





1. Magic singing bowl - Ladakh
2. Pashmina Shawls - Jammu & Kashmir
3. Kullu Shawls - Himachal Pradesh
4. Phulkari - Punjab
5. Sikoli Topi - Uttarakhand
6. Cricket bats - Haryana
7. Horn and bone art- Rajasthan
8. Marble Showpieces - Uttar Pradesh
9. Bandhani Dupatta - Gujarat
10. Kolhapuri Chappals - Maharashtra
11. Azulejos Tiles - Goa
12. Chanderi Silk Saree - Madhya Pradesh
13. Terracotta Pottery - Chhattisgarh
14. Madhubani paintings - Bihar
15. Dhokra Art - Jharkhand
16. Pattachitra Art - Odisha
17. Laal Paar Saree - West Bengal
18. Thangka - Sikkim
19. Mekhela Chador - Assam
20. Apatani Jackets - Arunachal Pradesh
21. Naga Shawls - Nagaland
22. Kauna Grass Craft - Manipur
23. Bamboo Craft - Mizoram
24. Bamboo Lampshades - Tripura
25. Ryndiah Silk Shawl - Meghalaya
26. Hyderabad Peals - Telangana
27. Budithi Brassware - Andhra Pradesh
28. Channapatna toys - Karnataka
29. Kathakali Mask - Kerala
30. Thanjavur Painting - Tamil Nadu

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