



14

The Allure of
Angkor Wat
CAMBODIA



28

The Pearl of
Indian Ocean
SRI LANKA

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Maldives

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Monsoon 2017

CONTENTS

FEATURES

- 10** Vietnam
Quintessentially Southeast Asia
- 14** Cambodia
The Allure of Angkor Wat
- 18** Maldives
1% Land. 100% Fun.
- 31** Joy of the Open Road
North, South, East & West

RCI Recommends

- 22** Leh, Ladakh
India's Own Private Paradise
- 28** Sri Lanka
The Pearl of the Indian Ocean

Also in this Issue

- 05** The Registry Collection
The Ananta Udaipur
- 07** New Affiliations
- 25** Cruise Holidays
- 26** City Discovery
- 46** Fee Reckoner
- 48** Know Your Guides

PG. 18

MALDIVES:

Get up close and personal with some beautiful creatures underwater.

Editor's Note


“Timeshare Owners are rejuvenated and are able to spend more time with their families.”

Timeshare Owners are more satisfied than non-owners. This is not my opinion; but from a finding fresh out of a recent research RCI conducted with KANTAR IMRB—one of India's leading research agency. Here are some more: *Timeshare Owners are rejuvenated and are able to spend more time with their families given the locales and unique holiday experiences. Convenience of bookings, world-class amenities and affordability* are the other factors that make Timeshare a better choice. Findings like this are encouraging; knowing our members are happy with their vacation delights us more than a customer satisfaction award. What this finding means to you is this: that you should just pat yourself on the back for making one of the best decisions in your life with Timeshare.

As the research shows, *unique holiday experiences* are what today's traveller seek. In this issue we bring you just that. To start with, we have some best less-explored regions in Asia; **Cambodia** is on the path of exciting times with tourism growing leaps and bounds—

thanks to the allure of Angkor Wat (pg.14). **Vietnam's** vibrancy and natural attractions are bringing travellers from around the world (pg.10). **Sri Lanka**, though small in size, packs some big surprises (pg.28). These countries have had a turbulent past. But the conditions have changed for good and the time has come to experience the culture, food and the beautiful places. And is there a better way to discover our great nation than by a road trip? I doubt! We bring you a mix of **Drive-to destinations** from across India (pg.31). Finally, our favourite: featuring for the first time **Leh, Ladakh** (pg.22). Hurry, the roads to this paradise remains open for only six months. We have some good news too. RCI India appoints Sabina Chopra as the new Managing Director; we extend a warm welcome to her (pg.6). Now sit back, relax, enjoy this issue and make plans for your next vacation. Remember, the earlier you plan, the better your holiday experience.

Happy Vacationing!


Aruna Jathar




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TRC Affiliations

New



The Ananta Udaipur - DB39

Set against the breathtaking backdrop of Aravalli Hills, The Ananta Udaipur creates a fairy-tale like experience by offering the best of five-star luxuries.

The resort, perched on the hilltop, gives a panoramic view of the entire city. Spread across 40 acres, The Ananta Udaipur boasts of high-end amenities that are sure to make your visit to Udaipur memorable.



NEW DESTINATIONS, NEW EXPERIENCES

Hill Stream Resort DC85 DEHRADUN

Pure happiness in pure nature

Enclosed by a dense rain forest and fresh water springs flowing alongside the resort's lawns, Hill Stream Resort is a blend of natural beauty and abundant charm. The resort inspired by nature, is a rich source of tranquility and peace. It is a perfect destination offering a memorable staying experience.

How to reach: Conveniently located just 23 km from Dehradun Railway Station and 40 km from Dehradun Airport.

Facilities: Health Club | Multi-cuisine Restaurant | Dance Floor | Pool Table | Adventure Sports | And more



“
I am excited to be
a part of RCI India
and look forward
to delivering
better value for
our members.
”

—Sabina Chopra

Meet RCI India's new Managing Director, Sabina Chopra

RCI is delighted to introduce Sabina Chopra, the new Managing Director for India region. Sabina joins RCI from Yatra.com, one of India's leading online travel agencies, which she co-founded and most recently served as Chief Operating Officer. Prior to Yatra, Sabina held management roles at ebookers, Hewitt Associates, Japan Airlines and Canadian Airlines.

Sabina brings a strong knowledge of all facets of the Indian hospitality and travel industries. She has more than 25 years of diverse experience spanning areas such as travel, business development, sales, operations, client management and customer service. Based out of Bengaluru, she will be responsible for delivering ongoing value to RCI members and affiliates. We believe, under Sabina's able leadership, RCI India will scale new heights in the days to come.



Sterling La Vida Varca DC86 GOA

Live the beach life

Goa La Vida Varca, A Sterling Holidays Resort offers you a fine blend of contemporary living space and traditional Goan hospitality. The resort reflects the breezy mood of the beach with its spacious design and architecture, situated 700 m from the Varca beach. Colva Beach and Froggyland amusement park are easily accessible from here.

How to reach: About 8 km from Madgaon Railway Station, this resort is less than 45 minutes drive from Goa International Airport (28 km).

Facilities: Wi-Fi access | Spa | Gym | Multi-cuisine Restaurant | Swimming Pool | Boardroom | And more

Member Speak

My secret to great vacations: Plan early

“My RCI journey began 20 years back and I have had some wonderful moments. I always wanted to visit new countries and RCI made it all possible. Switzerland, Vegas, Bali, Orlando, London, and in India Orange County Coorg, Club Mahindra Varca and Karma Monterio have been some of my best experiences. I have taken over 100 vacations through RCI. I wish to share a special thought as to how it was all possible. My friends and relatives wonder how I get Gold Crown properties at such exotic locations; though they are RCI members they complain of non-availability of resorts. This is my secret: I always plan my travel 12 to 24 months in advance and that helps me get the choicest resorts. I must add that RCI Guides have always been helpful in coordinating my travel plans.”

— Pankaj Kandelwal
Sterling Holidays

Switzerland

Member Speak

Guides know best.

“I am an avid traveller and I vacation at least four to five times a year. With RCI, I have taken more than 75 vacations—so the Guides there know my preferences and tastes like the back of their hand. They also have a great understanding of the various destinations in India as well as abroad. So each time I call in, they throw in some of the best options, making it easier for me to choose a vacation spot. In other words, they make my vacation booking a breeze. I have experienced RCI's exceptional service for the past 7 years that I have been a member; RCI truly live up to their tagline *Because your vacation means the world to us*. I look forward to exploring more countries with RCI.”

— Vinay Kankaria
Club Mahindra Holidays

Bali



vietnam

Quintessentially Southeast Asia

Vietnam is relatively an untouched nation that is slowly gaining popularity. Go there now for the best experiences.

Ha Long Bay

Vietnam is on the list of those who choose to take the road less travelled. Visa on arrival for Indians, improved flight connectivity and overall value for money make this a popular destination.

For the vast majority, Vietnam brings to mind pictures of war and ruin. But that was forty years ago. Fast-forward to now and you see a young and vibrant nation with so much to offer. The country is blessed with a beautiful landscape, breathtaking beaches and boasts of a list of world heritage sites. Leaving its past behind, Vietnam has emerged from its ashes. Today, the country has thrown open its doors welcoming backpackers, culture and nature lovers and even US war veterans. Vietnam's fame has spread far and wide. This narrow country, squeezed in between South China Sea, Laos and Cambodia has become a must-visit for those looking for a quintessential Southeast Asian experience.

HANOI

The capital city of Vietnam is popular for its historic and cultural monuments as well as French architecture. Start your expedition from **Hoan Kiem Lake**, located right in the heart of Hanoi. Make a quick circuit around the lake to get a glimpse of Hanoi's daily life.

Then head to **Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum** in Ba Dinh Square, where the embalmed body of Vietnam's national leader Ho Chi Minh (Or 'Uncle Ho' as locals call him) is preserved. This marble edifice inspired by Lenin's mausoleum in Moscow is one of Hanoi's most visited attractions. Entry is free but visitors are expected to dress with respect. **Open: Tuesday - Sunday 7:30 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.**



Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum



Cai Rang Floating Market



Military History Museum



Notre Dame Cathedral



Noodle Soup

Vietnamese Egg coffee recipe

Ingredients

- 1 egg
- 3 teaspoons of Vietnamese coffee powder
- 2 teaspoons of sweetened condensed milk
- Boiling water

Directions

Brew a small cup of Vietnamese coffee. Crack an egg and discard the whites. Put the yolk and the sweetened condensed milk in a small, deep bowl and whisk vigorously until you end up with a frothy, fluffy mixture like the one below. Add a tablespoon of the brewed coffee and whisk it in. In a clear coffee cup, pour in your brewed coffee, then add the fluffy egg mixture on top. Presto. Egg coffee.



Vietnam **Military History Museum** located in central Hanoi is a place for those interested in learning about Vietnam's struggle for independence. The museum also shows you the other side of the Vietnam War—one that is not covered in books and movies. Damaged tanks, shot down B-52 airplanes and many other collection of war relics can be found here. **Address:** 28 A Dien Bien Phu, Ba Dinh.

HO CHI MINH CITY

Ho Chi Minh City is the young and buzzing city of Vietnam. The city, also called Saigon or simply HCMC, is known for its French colonial style buildings. The most famous ones:

The Notre Dame Cathedral built in late 1880s located in District 1 and The Central Post office designed by Gustave Eiffel (the man who designed Eiffel Tower).

Cu Chi Tunnels, located 70 km to the northwest of HCMC is another highlight of Vietnam vacation. This network of tunnels, stretching 250 km, was used by Viet Congress soldiers during the Vietnam War. Enter the tunnels to get a sense of living underground. You can also try your hand at firing an AK-47 at the Cu Chi firing range.

NATURAL ATTRACTIONS

Ha Long City is a 3-hour drive from Hanoi. This is your transit point to the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Ha

Long Bay. A cluster of 1,900 limestone rocks rising from the aqua green water looks straight out from a fantasy story. The best way to experience this natural wonder is to opt for a day cruise. Sit back and enjoy the majestic views relishing some seafood lunch aboard your cruise. Most cruise services also lets you access the many limestone caves of the Bay. Some of the popular caves are Trinh Nu, Sung Sot, Luon, Thien Cung and Bo Nau.

Mekong Delta, located west of HCMC gives a peek into Vietnam's countryside. The rice fields, wooden houses and the colorful floating market reminiscent of Venice are worth a visit. A boat trip to the famous Cai Rang floating market is a must in your itinerary.

Vietnam is blessed with more than 3,000 km of coastline and is home to some of the most beautiful beaches in the world. Nha Trang, Danang and Doc Let are some of the best beaches here.

FOOD CULTURE

The food culture in Vietnam is world famous. People from all social class become equal in front of the many stalls peppered along the streets of Vietnam. Former US President Barack Obama and celebrity chef Anthony Bourdain made this popular by visiting one such fast food stalls in Hanoi. The country also has a strong coffee culture introduced by the French. Try the famous Egg Coffee. This

heady drink is a concoction of egg yolks, Vietnamese coffee and condensed milk. **Where to get:** *Café Giang, 39 Nguyen huu Huan Street, in the Old Quarter of Hanoi.*

For street food: The *Lunch Lady*—Saigon's celebrity food stall made famous by Anthony Bourdain. The Lunch Lady specializes in serving noodle soups. **Address:** *Phurong Đa Kao, District 1 (Quan 1), Ho Chi Minh.* 📍

STAY

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set,
go

Cambodia | Destination 

CAMBODIA

The allure of Angkor Wat

Lonely Planet voted Angkor Wat as the No.1 sight in its Ultimate Travel list. This massive structure has puzzled and enchanted visitors for centuries and remains Cambodia's biggest crowd puller.





Angkor Wat



Tuk tuk taxi



Phnom Penh



Cambodians are so proud of their heritage that they featured Angkor Wat on the national flag. It is the second country to feature a monument on the national flag after Afghanistan.

Ancient Cambodia went by the name **Khmer Empire**—the largest Empire in Southeast Asia. At its peak, the Empire covered areas that include today's Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and southern Vietnam. Angkor Wat was the brainchild of the Empire's greatest and most powerful king, Suryavarman II. The manpower and logistics used by the king to construct the temple baffles one's mind—a total of three lakh workers and six thousand elephants. Little did they (or the king) know that they were building the largest religious structure on earth. Today, #angkorwat is one of the most hashtagged destinations in the world.

How to reach: Angkor Wat is only a short drive from Siem Reap. Reach early morning to catch the sunrise as it reveals the temple's timeless beauty. The Angkor Thom—the capital city of the Khmer Empire and the famous Buddha face temple—Bayon, also come under this massive complex called Angkor Archeological Park. **Address:** Krong Siem Reap. **Visiting hours:** From 5 a.m. to 6 p.m.

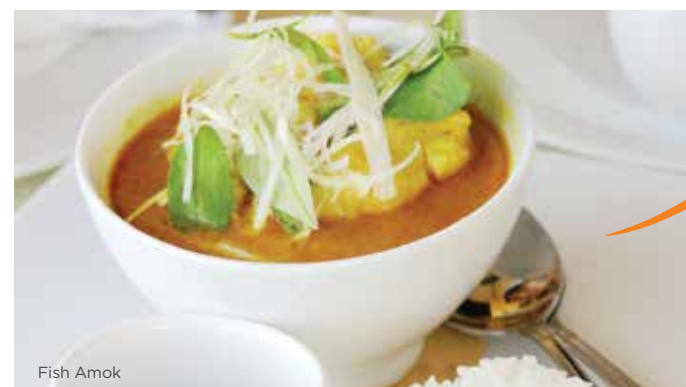
Angkor Wat is not just one site; it is composed of many sites. So walking it out may not be a great idea. Instead, hire a **tuk tuk** (a rickshaw with the front-end of a motorcycle). It is the best and easiest way to get around the temples. Plus, it is a lot of fun, relaxing and frees you up for some great photo ops. For a completely different perspective of Angkor Wat, opt for a helicopter or micro-light flight ride (*Approximate cost for an adult: \$249*). The ride lasts for about 20 minutes and offers magnificent views of this archeological wonder.

ANGKOR NATIONAL MUSEUM

Best visited before your trip to Angkor Wat. The displays and exhibits at the eight galleries here help put the story of Angkor and Khmer in context. Highlight: Watch a simulated sunrise (in case you miss the real one) over Angkor Wat on screen. Also, do check out the museum shop to pick up some genuine Cambodian souvenirs. **Address:** Charles De Gaulle, Krong Siem Reap.

PHNOM PENH

Exploring Angkor Wat and Siem Reap would typically take about two to three days. In case you have time on hand, head to Phnom Penh—the capital city. This emerging city is famous for its café culture and world-class food scene. The ornate Royal Palace, the Silver Pagoda and The Killing Fields just outside the city are some places to see in Phnom Penh.



Fish Amok

Where to shop: The 'Made In Cambodia Market' in Siem Reap is a great place to shop for local handcrafted items made out of recycled materials. The best part: the earnings go to support the local enterprises. **Address:** King's Road Angkor, Krong. *Open from 12 noon to 10 p.m.* The Russian Market in Phnom Penh sells handicrafts and antiques (wood carvings, musical instruments etc.). Here you will also get popular brands like Nike, Calvin Klein, Gap etc. for low prices. **Address:** St. 444, Phnom Penh.

The taste of Cambodia: Cambodian dishes are influenced by the Khmer people, Asian culture and French colonialism. *Fish Amok* is the national dish and favourite among locals and tourists. Amok is a typical Cambodian cooking style and refers both to the process of steam cooking a curry in banana leaves and to the resulting dish. *Chanrey Tree* and *Khmer Kitchen Restaurant* in Siem Reap serve some of the best Cambodian cuisines. 

STAY

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Maldives

1% land. 100% fun.

Maldives is a land with virtually no land. The land to water ratio of just 1:99 makes it the 'go to place' to experience island life at its best.

Maldives, a popular honeymoon destination, is now open for all: families, couples and even backpackers. First timers fall in love with this tropical holiday destination. Old timers fall in love again and again. Maybe it is because, as author Adrian Neville puts it, "it's hard to have a bad holiday in the Maldives."



A place to catch up with yourself

Though you may travel to Maldives with a list of things to do, once you are here, chances are you will do none of them. Your room itself will prove to be an island of pure bliss. Observe fish through glass floors, jump into sea from your private deck, or simply sit back and soak in the sunshine. You might never want to leave your room; but if curiosity gets the better of you to discover what lies beyond the white sandy beaches and

“Despite its size and isolated location in the Indian Ocean, Maldives has a history dating back to several thousands of years.”

turquoise water, Maldives sure packs a punch.

History

Despite its size and isolated location in the Indian Ocean, Maldives has a history dating back to several thousands of years. The nation converted to Islam in the 12th century influenced by Arab traders. The monuments and art galleries here give a sneak

peek into Maldives's past and formative years.

National Museum

To get a glimpse into Maldives's history, pay a visit to the National Museum. The museum holds a vast collection of valuable objects that showcase the country's rich cultural heritage. It is located in the former Sultan's palace and has ornate attires, coins and jewelry of the royalty.

Old Friday Mosque

The oldest mosque in Maldives was built in 1656. It is best known for intricate carvings and inscriptions. The walls of the mosque are built with coral stones with Arabic calligraphy. Prior permission must be obtained to visit this UNESCO World Heritage Site. It's a must-visit during your trip to Malé.

Malé

Malé, the capital city, is a hop, skip and jump away from Hulhule airport—the main airport in Maldives. Quite a contrast to

the serene resort island, Malé is always abuzz with activity; here, you can get a glimpse into the Maldivian daily lives. Do not miss a visit to the local fish market—a Maldivian's major source of income. Pick up some fresh catch and get it cooked at a restaurant for a scrumptious meal.

The Cuisine

Food is the best way to connect with the local life in Maldives. Fish and coconut are two items abundantly available and feature heavily in Maldivian cuisine. The most popular breakfast is

Mas huni. It's a mix of shredded coconut, tuna and onions eaten with *Roshi*—a type of *roti* that you find in India.



All for adventure

While people come to Maldives to rest and relax, there are more things to do here than just that. This tiny nation offers adventure for all.

Sea life

Maldives is all calm and quiet; that is, until you experience its underwater. Get up close and personal with some beautiful creatures underwater. The crystal clear water offers incredible visibility giving you a great view of the thriving marine life. The one experience you ought not to miss is a swim with the majestic Manta Rays. These calm and peaceful sea creatures are great to behold. Hanifaru Bay is said to be the best place for Manta spotting. Dolphin excursion in Maldives is a thrilling experience. The resorts usually arrange excursions. Maldives has



DID YOU KNOW?


Maldives is the world's lowest lying nation with an average of four feet above sea level. And here's a fun fact: Maldives's law states that no building be higher than the tallest palm tree.



one of the most active and playful dolphins you will ever see.

Get set, hop

Island hopping is a great way to explore the different islands. Maldives has about 1190 islands out of which only 200 are inhabitable. It is also the best way to get an insight into the local life. Your resort package will mostly have one included in it.

The beauty of Maldives that you see on screensavers and wallpapers is exactly the same. The turquoise water stretching beyond your eyes can see, the bright sun, blue lagoons and Maldives's active watersports and marine life will make you want to come back year after year. All said and done, whatever you choose to indulge in during your stay, one thing we urge you do is to have fun—or as a Maldivian would say, 'Majaa Kollah Chey'. 

STAY



RCI affiliated resorts in Maldives include:



Filitheyo Island Resort DC70

Great resort for an away from the world, tranquil romantic stay. Great place to enjoy the sea and the sea life, snorkelling and diving.
Faafu Atoll, Maldives 20-119

Member Review: "The water villa has excellent view of sunrise and sunset."



Bathala Island Resort DC71

Bathala is a paradise for scuba divers and snorkellers alike.
North Ari Atoll, Maldives 20-119
Member Review: "Beautiful house reef. Always in company of a White Tip shark."



Medhufushi Island Resort DC72

The sea plane journey to this resort offers some stunning aerial views of the Maldivian islands.
Meemu Atoll, Maldives 20-119
Member Review: "Resort stay was very nice. Would like to recommend the resort to some of my friends"

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Leh LADAKH

India's Own Private Paradise

A road trip from Manali to Leh is on the bucket list of any true adventure seeker. But the fact that the roads are open for only six months tells only one thing: it's time to pack your bags.

"The passes are so high and land so barren; only a dear friend or a serious enemy will reach here." This old Ladakhi saying paints an accurate picture of Ladakh's barren beauty; we couldn't agree more. Leh is cut off from the rest of the world. Here, snow capped peaks form the backdrop to your holiday and civilization is hard to spot—a perfect setting for an adventure.

NUBRA VALLEY

Located 150 km from Leh town is Nubra Valley—a place where Shyok river (a tributary of Indus river) joins Siachen river. The valley offers ultra-wide landscapes, jaw-dropping mountains, ancient Buddhist monasteries and lovely trails for hiking opportunities. The sand dunes of the cold desert here are a view beyond imagination.

KARDUNG LA

The highlight of your trip to Numbra is a drive to Kardung La (5602 m above sea level). Thousands of bikers flock here every year. A selfie in front the signboard that reads, *'Highest Motorable Road in The World'*, is a must. *In Ladakh, you will notice the word 'La' suffixed to the passes in the region names. 'La' simply means 'a pass' in Tibetan.*



PANGONG LAKE

160 km drive from Leh will take you to the famous Pangong Lake. The pristine lake set amidst snow capped mountains will remain etched in your memory. Here's an interesting fact: The lake displays different colours—shades of blue, green and sometimes even red.



At Nubra Valley, take a break from horsepower and try camel power for a change. The double humped camel ride in the cold desert is a must-try during your visit. Trivia: These natives of Mongolia were brought in to the

Nubra Valley during the trade period between India and Tibet.

ADVENTURE APLENTY

For those seeking adventure, Ladakh offers great options. River rafting, Wildlife safaris, Mountain trails, Mountain bike expedition and Nature retreat camps are some of them. Request your resort and they will have them arranged for you.

Leh, Ladakh is not your average vacation spot. Being 10,000 ft above sea level means the oxygen levels are sparse and acclimatizing yourself is vital. So before you step out to explore, make sure you are ready for it.

HOW TO GET THERE:

The journey takes about 2 days from Manali with one stopover for rest and acclimatization. The drive to Ladakh is rated as the best in India. Keep your eyes wide open and set your camera on panoramic mode. The vast expanse and endless blue-sky will surely leave you speechless. 📷



STAY

Leh, Ladakh



Global Family Home DC87

Global Family Home is located in Leh city, approximately 20 minutes from the airport. Global Family Home offers a peaceful base from which to explore the famous sites of Thikse, Shey, Stok etc. and villages and mountains not listed in the guidebooks! It offers a place to rest quietly in clean accommodation and green gardens among the mountains.



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SRI LANKA

The Pearl of the Indian Ocean



● Ella to Kandy Train trip

This is rated as one of the best train journeys in the world. It was originally introduced by the British colonial government to transport tea from the hill country. But now you get an affordable ride that gives an insight into Sri Lanka's local life. Sit back and take in the breathtaking views of tea plantations, many waterfalls and rolling mountains as the train chugs through the clouds and mist. The journey takes about 7 hours. 



● Colombo

Colombo is a vibrant city of the old and the new. The colonial structures such as The National Museum, Old City Hall and The Dutch Fort in Galle give a peek into the country's history. Whereas the fine dining restaurants, flashy malls and designer boutiques cropping up everywhere show where the country is headed.

Galle Face Green, in the heart of Colombo, is a great place to unwind. Take a stroll at this seaside promenade to feel the pulse of the city. This is a popular rendezvous spot for families, kite flyers and food vendors. Don't forget to try the local snack *Isso wade*—spicy lentil flour patties topped with prawns. Seafood

lovers can head to Ministry of Crab—a restaurant co-owned by Kumara Sangakkara and Mahela Jayawardene (yes, the cricketers) with chef Darshan Munidasa. As the name suggests, crab is the star in the menu. **Address:** No 04, Old Dutch Hospital, Colombo 01.

● Sigriya Fortress

Sigriya Fortress is a UNESCO World Heritage Site located 173 km from Colombo. This is one of Sri Lanka's most visited destinations. The fortress will test your fitness level, as the climb to the summit is a 1,200-step challenge. But the view it offers is worth the climb. This rock fortress formed from the magma of volcano, rising 370 m from the surrounding thick forest is quite a sight.



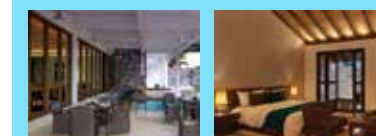
STAY

 **RCI affiliated resorts in Sri Lanka:**



Arie Lagoon DC74

Arie Lagoon, Negombo is located amidst the scenic fishing village of Thalahena. Sandwiched between Negombo Lagoon and the deep blue sea, Arie Lagoon offers a relaxed holiday in comfort and style. *Thalahena, Negombo, Sri Lanka.*

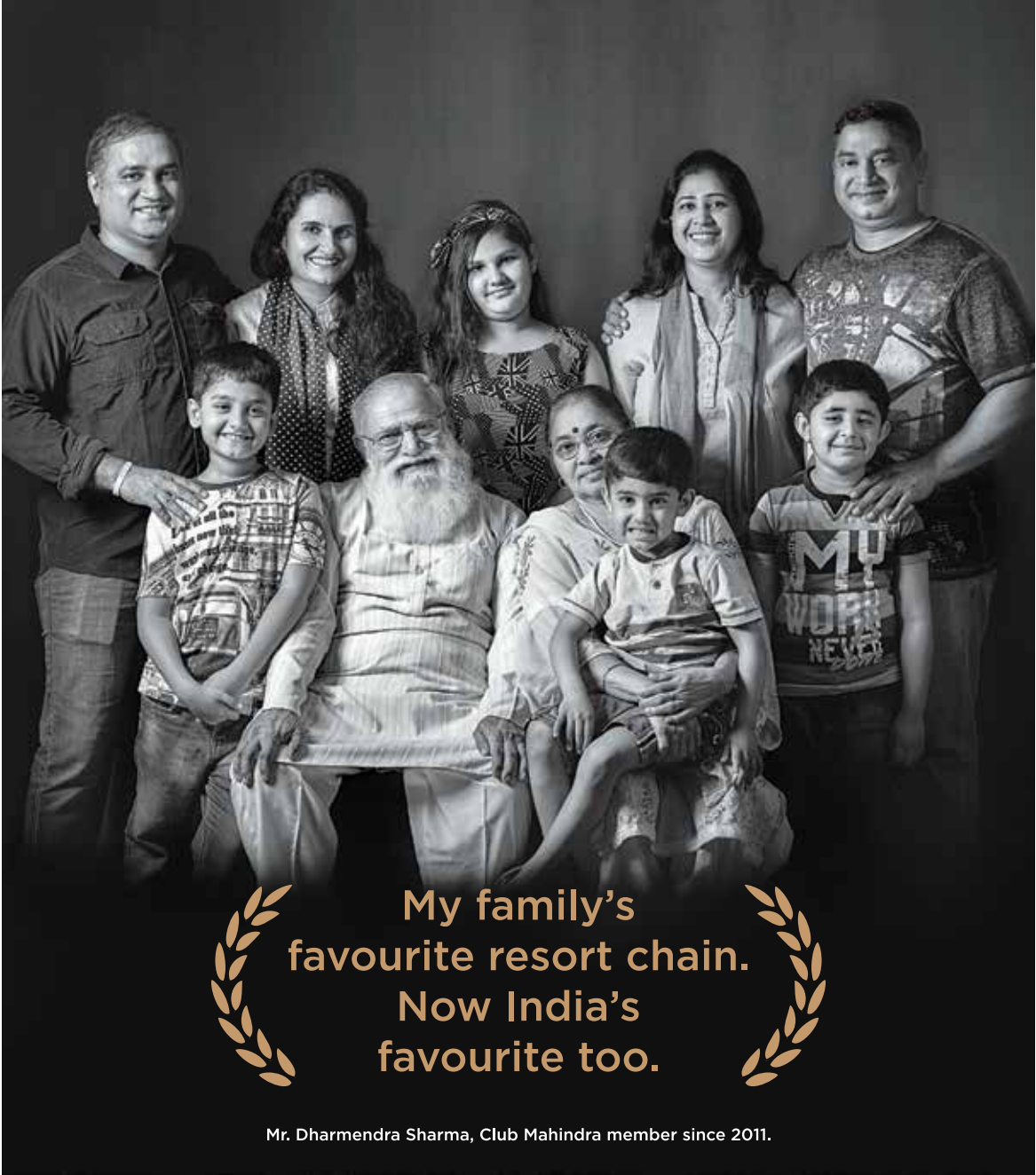


BOOKING STARTS FROM NOVEMBER

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“ White sandy beaches: check. Mountains with mild European weather: check. Historic world heritage sites: check. Sri Lanka may be tiny, but this island nation defies that definition. It packs a perfect mix of all that a traveller seeks. Here are some top attractions. ”



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JOY OF THE OPEN ROAD

A road trip is a perfect way to discover new sights, faces, tastes and sounds of our beautiful nation. It also helps de-stress and immerse yourself and your family in a fun adventure. We have got just the right places for you to explore in this issue. Let's go!





Delhi

Magical North

Delhi, Agra and Jaipur are packed with historic sites and varied experiences. Check in at Agra and check out India's Golden Triangle. There is much to see, do and discover.

Like Rome, Delhi is a land of many ancient ruins and monuments. We bring you a mix of historic and off beaten. But don't stick to this. Maybe you will discover gems that no Blogger, Instagrammer, Youtuber or travel magazines have covered.

Qutub Minar, located in New Delhi, is the world's tallest brick minaret. This towering structure standing 73 m high tells the tale of the power of the Mughal Empire. The spectacular sight can be spotted from different places in the city. The Qutub Minar complex also includes mosques, tombs as well as the famous Iron Pillar.

Humayuns Tomb, said to be the inspiration behind Taj Mahal, can be your next stop. The UNESCO World Heritage Site is the first building to combine white marble and red sandstone. After your visit, take a stroll in the Persian gardens around the property.

Location: Nizamuddin East.



Do Check Out: (clockwise from left) India Gate on Rajpath Marg; Humayun's Tomb; Red Fort; Curios of Hauz Khas Village; Parathe Wali Gali; Rashtrapati Bhavan

Witness the Mughal City's splendor at The Red Fort. Constructed using red sandstone, the fort is a stunning display of Mughal architectural creativity. A sound and light show with a voice over by Amitabh Bachchan happens in the evenings. **Location:** Lahore Gate; **Open:** 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Your trip to Delhi is not complete until you visit the landmark sites of Rajpath. Rashtrapati Bhavan, the citadel of Lutyens' Delhi, is the grandest of them. India Gate, by Lutyens is another must-visit. If art is your thing, we recommend a visit to National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA) at Jaipur House. Here, you can witness India's art

history from the mid-19th century to present day.

The off beaten

Chandni Chowk is popular among foodies. Walk in the busy street to enjoy the real taste of India. *Parathe Wali Gali* is the most famous food street, serving varieties of parathas fresh off the hotplate. Another must-visit: The *Old Famous Jalebi Wala*—famous for its juicy *jalebis* made in homemade ghee. People queue up from 10 a.m. though it opens only an hour later. Celebrities and heads of the State are customers here.

Hauz Khas Village

Perhaps the most happening place in Delhi. The narrow lanes are home to many cafés and some of the city's best boutiques. Do check out the flagship store of the famous Indian fashion label Nappa Dori. The store has a great collection of clothing and housewares.

Kunzum Travel Café: A great place for folks who love travel to exchange travel tales over coffee and free Wi-Fi. Workshops by travellers, photographers and writers take place here. The best part: when you have coffee, you may choose to pay what you like. **Address:** T-49, GF, Hauz Khas Village.

Note: Delhi Metro connects many important sites. It is also the best way to beat the city's traffic congestion. Trains start from 6 a.m. in the morning till 11 p.m. in the night.



Qutub Minar



Agra comes in the Golden Triangle tourist circuit with Delhi and Jaipur. Agra's star attraction, of course, is the Taj Mahal. This world wonder sure lives up to its reputation and is worth even repeat visits. Here, we bring you the various vantage points from which you can view this marble palace.

Agra Fort

Similar to the Red Fort in Delhi, the Agra Fort is also a walled city with palaces, mosques and garden inside it. Here, you can hire a guide to learn in-depth about the history of the fort. Located across the Taj Mahal, the Agra Fort offers great photo ops of the Taj.

Taj Nature Park

Get unexpected views of the Taj from Taj Nature Park; one of Agra's best-kept secrets. Enjoy a leisurely nature walk here. Mornings are the best time to catch the sunlight hitting the white marble of the Taj. The park is rich in flora and fauna. Bird lovers will enjoy it here.



Taj Mahal



Agra Fort

Location: On Fatehabad Road, 500 m from the east gate of the Taj Mahal.

Get away from the busy lanes of the Taj and head to the rooftop restaurant of *Hotel Saniya Palace*. Barely 150 m from the Taj, this place offers unrivalled views. Enjoy a hearty meal with this awe-inspiring monument as your backdrop.



While in Agra, do try the famous local sweet, Petha. This gooey, translucent sweet made out of white pumpkin is available in many flavours.

The Tomb of I'timād-ud-Daulah nicknamed as Baby Taj is believed to be a first draft of the Taj Mahal. One visit and you will see where the designs of the Taj Mahal came from. This was the first Mughal structure made out of marble.



DID YOU KNOW?



Nahargarh Fort



Hawa Mahal



The Rajasthani capital got its coat of pink paint to impress Prince Edward of Wales and remained ever since as a mark of welcome to the city's visitors. Today the Pink City

has lots in store from ancient monuments to great shopping and adventure.

Hawa Mahal or 'Palace of Winds' is the city's most distinctive landmark. The highlight: the 953 windows through which the royal women got a peek into everyday life. A ten-minute drive from here will take you to the famous Amber Fort—a beautiful structure built with red and white sandstone. The fort is a display of ancient India's architectural marvel. Sheesh Mahal decorated with thousands of mirror tiles and coloured glass pieces is one of the fort's attractions.

If astronomy interests you, head to Jantar Mantar—one of the largest observatories in the world. Trivia: Maharaja Jai Singh II sent his scholars abroad to study how to build the observatory before he began the construction. This UNESCO World Heritage Site also houses the world's biggest sundial. Jal Mahal Palace, an ancient royal retreat located in the middle of Man Sagar Lake, is another must-visit. The palace appears as if it is floating on the lake and offers great photo ops.

Jaipur is a shopper's paradise offering high-end and bargain markets. Johari Bazaar offers a great collection of jewellery of all types. Tripolia Bazaar is a must-visit to pick up brassware, carpets, precious stones and jewellery. For leather products head to Baapu Baazar. Nehru Baazar is the place to go for a good selection of textiles, perfumes and Rajasthani Jootis. **BY**

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Mysore Palace



Channarayana wooden toys



Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary



Chamundi Hills



St. Anne's Church, Virajpet

Scenic South

When long weekends come, Bengalureans are faced with that perennial question—where to holiday. This journey goes through the princely state of Mysuru, laidback town of Virajpet, coffee plantations of Coorg before it concludes in Ooty.



The route is scenic and offers some great stops in between. Get your vehicle ready, pack your bags, and fasten your seat belts. Great times are around the corner.

Start early morning to escape Bengaluru's traffic congestion. Once you hit Mysore Road, it's a pretty straightforward affair—till Coorg the drive is a breeze on NH 275.

Channarayana—a town famous for handcrafted wooden toys can be your first stop. If you love local art, this place has to be on your list. Continue for another 20 km to reach Maddur—best known for its *vadas*. *Maddur Tiffans Restaurant* (Location: Bangalore-Mysuru Road, Shivapura - 571429) serves the best *Maddur vadas* in town. Pair it up with hot filter coffee. Note: The restaurant also serves great South Indian breakfast. Just as you approach Mysuru, 7 km from the town is Srirangapatna, where the famous *Siege of Srirangapatna* took place. For a slice of history, visit the Srirangapatna Fort. It was inside this fort that Tipu Sultan made his last stand against the British; he was slain in the battle. If history is your thing, this 15th century fort is worth exploring. **Open:** 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.

A slight detour from here takes you to Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary. Located on the banks of river Cauvery, this place is a great picnic spot and a paradise for bird watchers. Starting mid-December, birds from Siberia and Latin America make

this their home. The migratory water birds include Painted Stork, Asian Open bill Stork, Common Spoonbill, Woolly-necked Stork, Black-headed Ibis and many more. One of the best ways to get up close and personal with the birds is to take a boat trip.

As you enter Mysuru, you will know why it is called the cultural capital of South Karnataka. There are many magnificent palaces and historical buildings here. The Mysore Palace, a World Heritage Site, is the main attraction. Arrive a little early, position yourself at a vantage point and witness the palace being lit at one stroke rather than seeing it after it is illuminated. *Timings: Sundays & Public Holidays: 7 p.m. to 7:45 p.m.* Note: during the Dussehra festive days, the illumination is done on all the days. If you wish to get an aerial view of Mysuru city, head to the beautiful Chamundi Hills.

While you are in Mysuru, don't forget to try some melt-in-mouth *Mysore Pak*—Mysuru's gift to sweet lovers. *Shree Mahalaxmi Sweets* and *Indras Sweets* sell the best *Mysore Pak* in the city.



VIRAJPET

Virajpet, located in the verdant Coorg district, is another two hour drive from Mysuru. The town is famous for coffee plantations and honey (Virajpet is Asia's largest honey exporter). Chelevara

waterfall near Cheyyandane village is a scenic spot. Water gushing from the rocks amidst coffee plantations is a delightful sight. Tadiandamol, the highest mountain in Kodagu and a trekkers' paradise, is about 25 km from Virajpet. The 8 km uphill trek is a challenging one. But the vistas that await you at the summit are truly mesmerizing. On a clear day, you can even get a glance of the coastline.

The 220 year old St. Anne's Church, is another attraction in Virajpet. The structure is built in beautiful European and Gothic style. Once the church was entirely destroyed in 1811 and later completely reconstructed in 1868. The 180 ft high church resembles a giant candle.

COORG

Coorg or Madikeri, as it's also known, is a popular holiday spot nestled in the Western Ghats. The picturesque setting of the place adds to the charm of the town, a world filled with coffee estates, greenery and forest slopes. Coorg offers a range of experiences to enjoy the great outdoors, be it white water rafting, trekking, kayaking, canoeing or even biking. The quaint town is approximately 160 km from Mysuru. Coorg boasts of a number of tasty dishes. *Koli curry* (chicken curry), *Kadambuttu* (rice dumplings), *Akki rotti* (rice flatbread) and *Noolputtu* (rice noodles) and *Bambale* or (bamboo shoot curry) are some must-try Coorgi dishes. Kodava cuisine is usually rich in spices, coconut and curry leaves.



OOTY

Ooty is about 225 km from Coorg. On the way, stop at Bandipur National Park—famous for its tiger and elephant safari. There is no guarantee of spotting the big cats, but the drive deep inside the jungle's winding roads is a great experience. The safari can be booked online at www.bandipurtigerreserve.in. From here, Ooty is a two hour scenic drive. For some adventure, take the Masinagudi route where you have to negotiate 36 hair-pin bends. Be warned: the narrow road and the steep climb is not for the fainthearted. The drive is best suited for four-wheel drive capable vehicles. As you climb higher and as the freshness starts to fill your lungs, you know you are getting closer to Ooty.

Ooty has lots to offer: Botanical Gardens, tea plantations, Ooty Lake, the magnificent Doddabetta

(highest peak of the Nilgiris), and miles of eucalyptus and pine forests. But the best way to experience Nilgiris is getting on-board the toy train. The journey covering 26 km, travels through 16 tunnels, 208 curves and 250 bridges. The train starts from Mettupalayam at 7 in the morning. The demand for the train journey is so high that you have to book at least two months in advance. The booking can be done on the Indian Railways website. This UNESCO World Heritage Site is an experience you should not miss.

Carry home something more than sweet memories. Get some sweet *Varkey* also, a regional speciality of Nilgiris. This biscuit-type snack goes best with milk, tea or coffee. Introduced during the British rule, *Varkey* is now available in almost any bakery in Nilgiris. *Impala Bakery* (a few shops away from the Ooty Coffee House) serves the best *Varkey* in Ooty. 🍪



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Exotic East

Get set to explore the grandeur of Northeast India. While Darjeeling and Gangtok are ideal long drives from Kolkata, Raichak on the banks of river Hoogly offers a quieter retreat.



DARJEELING

Located on the foothills of the Himalayas, Darjeeling is the premier attraction of West Bengal. This summer resort of the British Raj elite is best known for its pleasant climate, distinctive black tea and the famous toy train. The numerous colonial-era architecture and British-style Public Schools here will take you back in time.

Tiger Hill, located 13 km from Darjeeling, is the city's highlight and the highest point. From the Observatory Tower located here, you can catch all the majestic views of Himalayas. Reach the Observatory early morning to get the best views of Kanchenjunga. Tickets to the top floor of the Observatory costs approx. ₹40. But the fact that you can spot Mount Everest from here on a clear day makes the whole deal a bang for your buck. Tiger Hill is located just above the Ghoom area—the highest point of the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway.

To see Darjeeling from never-before angles, take to the sky. The ropeway that passes over dense forest, mountain ridges, waterfalls and tea gardens is a must-try. **Location:** Singamari, 3 km away from the Chowk Bazaar.

The Japanese Peace Pagoda—the tallest structure in Darjeeling is another great spot for tourists. Visit Happy Valley Tea estate—one of the oldest tea factories in the region. Take a tour of the tea making process and even get to taste the world-famous tea at the Happy Golden Café right next to the factory. A cup of black tea costs approx. ₹25.

Where to eat:

If you are visiting Darjeeling, a meal at Kunga Restaurant is a must. This family-run restaurant has been serving delicious food for almost two decades. What the chef recommends: *Chicken Thenthuk Soup*, a delicious *Tibetan noodle soup*. *Tibetan vegetarian soups* are also available here. **Address:** 51 Gandhi Road, (below the Dekeling Hotel).

Note: The approximate distance from Kolkata to Darjeeling is 637 km. Siliguri, located about 606 km from Kolkata serves as the base to explore Darjeeling, Gangtok and the exotic Northeast.



Darjeeling Himalayan Railway



Darjeeling Ropeway



Darjeeling Tea is internationally recognised and ranks among the most popular black teas in the world.



GANGTOK

This capital city of Sikkim is a perfect combination to go with your trip to Darjeeling—a short 98 km drive away. Gangtok is located at an altitude of 5,410 ft in East-Sikkim and is one of the most beautiful hill stations in the country. With the right mix of tradition, scenery and modernity, Gangtok is Sikkim's gift to India.


Nathula, the Indo-Chine border, located 52 km from Gangtok, is on every tourist's must-visit places. Thousands flock every year to trek in the valley and enjoy the views. Permit must be obtained before visiting this restricted area. The area experiences heavy snow falls. Do carry boots and warm clothing.

The ethereally beautiful Tsomgo Lake, about 16 km from Nathula, should not be missed. The lake gets its water from the melting snows of the surrounding mountains. During winter, the lake remains frozen, which is a view in itself. Spend a while taking in the serene beauty of the lake or better still, go for a round on a colourfully decorated Yak.

Gangtok Ropeway is another must-try. Experience the city and also get good views of Kanchenjunga. The Ropeway operates daily between 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Where to shop: MG Road is the place to shop and eat in Gangtok. This one kilometer vehicle-free zone is an ideal hangout. Pick up some Sikkimese cups from one of the shops here; these porcelain cups with traditional Sikkimese designs make for a great gift.

RAICHAK

Raichak is a quiet town south of Kolkata. The river Hoogly remains the centre of attraction for Raichak as the town is located on the banks of the river. Cruise on the Hoogly river is a great way to unwind. You can also take a ferry ride from Raichak Jetty to Kukrahati or Gadiara which is quite an enjoyable experience. The ancient remains of a British constructed fort is another highlight of the town; the fort stands as a testimony to the bygone era. Diamond Harbour, an ancient stronghold of Portuguese pirates is close to Raichak—this is where Hooghly river meets the Bay of Bengal. The breathtakingly beautiful beach of Bakkhali, further away from the Diamond Harbour, makes for an excellent excursion option from Raichak. 



Views of Kanchenjunga



Raichak

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The Best of West

How to pack three holidays into one? Look out for the next long weekend; find a comfy stay; mark your calendars and drive to Panchgani-Mahabaleshwar and Lonavala—all in one go.



PANCHGANI

The British deserves credit for gifting us many prime summer escapes. Panchgani is one such great find. Located in the Sahyadri Ranges, this hill station was discovered by John Cesson—a British superintendent, who found it difficult to access Mahabaleshwar during the monsoon. Panchgani derives its name from the five fascinating hills surrounding it. This picturesque hill station takes about 100 km from Pune and 280 km from Mumbai.

Table Land

This is Panchgani's highest point and top attraction. The Table Land is second longest mountain plateau in Asia. Get a bird's eye view of the entire town and the nearby valleys from here. Table Land also offers enough entertainment with horse rides, merry-go-rounds and mini trains.

Mapro Garden, located 6 km from Panchgani is a must-visit. The garden is best known for its strawberry produce. Mapro Garden also plays host to the annual Panchgani Strawberry festival. While here, gorge on strawberry in its various forms:

fruit, ice cream, punch, crushes, jellies and squashes. A counter for jams and crushes of different flavours is available for sampling. If you can't get enough of the fruit, head out for a strawberry-field visit. Enjoy the stroll and pick some fresh strawberries and relish them. Here, you can also get a peek into how this delectable fruit is cultivated. The garden also houses a few retail sales counters and two cosy restaurants.





Paragliding



Bhilar, Khinger and Tapola are areas in Panchgani for Paragliding. So if you love flying, head to one of these places and get a birds eye view of the hills. Panchgani's clear sky, favourable wind and great views make it a great paragliding paradise.

Sydney Point is sure to mesmerize nature lovers. The view of Dhom Dam and Krishna Valley is truly captivating. Get your cameras out and snap away the stunning sunset. Parsi Point, located on the way to Mahabaleshwar, is another must-visit owing to the scenic views.

At Panchgani you will spot many old buildings, Parsi Houses and Schools, which are more than a century old. One of them is the Old Church Bakery run by Ignatius D'Souza. The bakery is a stone's throw away from St Joseph's Church and serves the best buns and breads in Panchgani. Trivia: This bakery was originally a Church building, which was later abandoned. After construction they realised the size was too small to fit in the congregation. Now people in Panchgani town come to Ignatius to pick up fresh-baked bread and buns.



Dhom Dam



Arthur's Seat Point

MAHABALESHWAR

Drive about 19 km from Panchgani and you reach Mahabaleshwar—once the Summer Capital of the Bombay Province. Mahabaleshwar is the source of Krishna River that flows across various states of Maharashtra, Karnataka, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. The climate, natural beauty, the old-world charm and its history draw crowd to this hill station.

Breathtaking views

Mahabaleshwar offers breathtaking views. Head to Arthur's Seat Point from where you can view the beautiful Savitri gorge. Popularly known as the queen of the Points, Arthur's Seat Point is named after Sir Arthur Mallet who was the first person to build a house here. It is one of the popular viewpoints offering majestic Grand Canyon-like views. Sir Arthur used to sit at the seat and stare at the Savitri River, in which his wife and child had drowned. The seat is also known for floating of light objects in air. Try throwing a bottle cap to see the magic; the cap will come up again due to air pressure.

For a good time of boating, head to Venna Lake. Surrounded by tress, this unspoiled lake is a great place to unwind. For some fun-time take your children to the mini-amusement park right across the lake.



Venna lake

A 7 km drive from Mahabaleshwar bus stand will take you to Kate's Point and Elephant's Head Point—perhaps the most picturesque viewpoints of Mahabaleshwar. Dhom Dam as well as peaks of Kamalgad, Pandavgad and Mandhardeo can be seen from Kate's Point. The overhanging cliffs of Elephant's Head Point resemble the head of an elephant and its trunk, thus earning the place its name.

Lingmala Waterfalls tucked away from the city's bustle is another major attraction. The waterfall hidden away amidst lush greenery is a must-visit for its sheer beauty. The water launching from approximately 600 ft high is quite a sight. The best time to visit is between July and December. It is located 6 km from Mahabaleshwar.

Shopping

Mahabaleshwar market stretches for about a kilometer. The most obvious thing to buy is fresh strawberry. You will find shops selling wooden items such as toys, combs and ladles. From the leather goods shops, pick up a pair of the famous Kolhapuri chappals.



Lonavala



LONAVALA

Lonavala presents an infinite expanse of greenery. The drive to this hill station offers many white gushing waterfalls; you will definitely want to lower your windows to take in these views. Explore the caves of Karla and Bhaja dating back to 2nd century BC. This place is also a treat for history buffs with a fort tour to Lohagad, Visapur and Tikona. Head to Bhushi dam to enjoy a bath and have a splash with your family. Lonavala can be approached from both Pune and Mumbai and is a favourite place for trekkers. **Distance:** 64 km from Pune and 96 km from Mumbai.



Lohagad Fort

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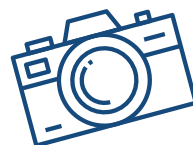
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Khasim

Nickname: Ashfaq
Been there, done that: Goa, Nice, Morocco, Malaga, London, French Riviera
If you could time travel, where would you go right now: Ireland
One place you never get bored of: Nice, France
Why travel: To see new sights
Years with RCI: 9.5 years
What RCI means to you: Made vacation a big part of me



Mohan

Nickname: Vini
Been there, done that: New York, Chicago, Indianapolis, Corbett, Nainital, Bhimtal, Kerala
If you could time travel, where would you go right now: Ladakh
One place you never get bored of: Las Vegas
Why travel: It broadens my outlook towards life
Years with RCI: 5
What RCI means to you: A fun place to work



Sujata

Nickname: I don't have one
Been there, done that: New York, Mexico, Goa, Pondicherry, Coorg
If you could time travel, where would you go right now: Andaman Islands
One place you never get bored of: Goa
Why travel: It helps me better appreciate the world we live in
Years with RCI: 9
What RCI means to you: Family



Nazia

Nickname: Naz
Been there, done that: Qatar, Gujarat, Shimla, Manali, Goa
If you could time travel, where would you go right now: New York
One place you never get bored of: Dubai
Why travel: To see new places, meet new people and taste new cuisines
Years with RCI: 10
What RCI means to you: Second home



Prashanth

Nickname: Amit
Been there, done that: Thailand, Goa, Coorg, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Delhi
If you could time travel, where would you go right now: Malaga, Spain
One place you never get bored of: Goa
Why travel: Travel gives me the freedom to be myself
Years with RCI: 10
What RCI means to you: Dream come true



Suneetha

Nickname: Suni
Been there, done that: Coorg, Yercaud, Ooty, Goa, Manali, Kodai
If you could time travel, where would you go right now: Mauritius
One place you never get bored of: Coorg
Why travel: To explore new cuisine
Years with RCI: 10
What RCI means to you: The best place to be



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