

INDO ASIA DIARIES

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INDO ASIA TOURS

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IA SAYS

Image courtesy: Martin Jernberg



Davor Lovincic

Mulik Ghat in Kolkata is **touted as the largest flower market in the country** and one of the largest in Asia. Established over a century ago, the market is a cornucopia of colors. The market not only caters to the needs of the city but also exports flowers to rest of the country and Europe. **Flowers from this market contribute to about 80% of the flowers sold in world’s biggest flower auctions in Amsterdam, Dubai and Auckland.** It caters to almost 2,000 people every day. Located near the southeast end of the Howrah Bridge, the flower market smells fantastic 24 hours a day. In a way, it does capture the essence of the city — rich, vibrant, colorful.



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AND IT WAS ALL YELLOW...

Photo Location : Flower Market, Kolkata



Hornbill festival, Nagaland

CROSSING CULTURES

GATEWAY TO THE EAST

The picturesque Northeast is almost untouched. Home to the Seven Sisters — Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland and Tripura — the easternmost region of the country is straight out of a postcard. So, it's but natural to jump at the opportunity to explore the area. Guwahati in Assam serves as a great gateway to access the Northeast. Here are ways to take in the sights effectively:

Meghalaya: A three-hour drive from Guwahati, the state's capital Shillong is known as the 'Scotland of the East' and is home to the world's oldest golf course. Meghalaya is known for its cave tourism and is home to some of South Asia's longest caves, one of which is Synrang-Pamiang known for its Titanic Hall that is dotted with thousands of cave pearls. The state also houses Cherrapunji, one of the wettest places on Earth. If this wasn't enough, Meghalaya also won the accolade of having the cleanest village in Asia, Mawlynnong.

Arunachal Pradesh: The Northeast is also known for its music and the Ziro music festival in Arunachal Pradesh is a living testament to that. Featured in the National Geographic Traveller, this festival is a must for all music lovers. If it's wildlife that you crave, you can follow the trails of red pandas at the Namdapha national park, which also houses four big cat species—tiger, leopard, clouded leopard and snow leopard. The giant flying squirrel is also often spotted in the park. After enlightening your eyes and ears, you can visit Tawang, the largest monastery in India, to enlighten your soul. Arunachal Pradesh has the highest concentration of about 20 official scheduled tribes, in the country. Though the origins of the tribes are enveloped in ambiguity, they are widely believed to have come from Myanmar and Tibet. Each tribe can be physically distinguished by their tattoos, headgears or nose plugs. The tribes also have their own distinct customs, language and folklore.

Manipur and Mizoram: From exploring caves in Khuangchera Puk to enjoying a picnic at idyllic Ukhrul, Manipur and Mizoram are the two states that make for a relaxing vacation away from the hustle and bustle of a city. For the lover of fine arts, Manipur is home to a classical dance form, Manipuri, which exemplifies elegance and tradition. While in Manipur, don't miss an opportunity to visit Loktak Lake, which is the world's only floating national park and is the last natural refuge of state animal Sangai, a brow-antlered deer. The state

hosts an annual festival in the state animal's honour in November. Manipur was also an important station for the Indian National Army, which worked tirelessly for India's independence. In Mizoram, head to Vantawang Falls, the highest in the state and one of its prime attractions. The state is also home to Rih Dil, a lake near the Myanmar border that the locals believe to be the passage of souls to the eternal abode.

Nagaland: Known for the exotic Hornbill, Nagaland is rich in culture. Immerse yourself in the Hornbill Festival and experience lip-smacking Naga cuisine. From a vibrant festival, make your way to the peaceful War cemetery and pay your respects to World War II martyrs. You can also live like a Naga at the Tuphema Village in Kohima inside beautiful huts made for tourists. If you still haven't had enough of nature, head on to Triple Falls, one of the best waterfalls in India. It's named so because of how the way the water falls in three branches.

Tripura: Embark on a journey to discover Tripura's past by visiting the Ujjayanta Palace, which also doubles as one of the biggest museums in the Northeast. Almost a stone's throw away from the palace lies the Jagannath Temple. Though it's not as magnificent as the one in Puri, this temple holds its own. If you're a fan of heritage, you can head on to Unakoti to enjoy carvings etched on mountain edges. Travel further back in time at Pilak, a Buddhist site about 100 km from Agartala, which contains remains of the 8th and 9th century rock-cut sculptures.

Assam: Assam is perhaps most famous for its tea but there's much more to it. On a visit during Bihu, you can witness the vibrant culture associated with Assam that promotes peace and brotherhood. Don't let the adrenaline rush go to waste and head on to the Nameri National Park for a thrilling session of river rafting. To cool down, you can pay Haflong a visit, known as 'Switzerland of the East' and replete with picturesque views. Or you can even cruise on the majestic Brahmaputra river. Assam is also home to India's first oil refinery in Digboi, which reminds one of the British era. Of course, if you're in Assam, you cannot miss a trip to the Kaziranga Wildlife Sanctuary. Known for the endangered one-horned rhinoceros, the sanctuary boasts of stunning flora and fauna. The state also boasts of world's biggest river island at Majuli. The island consists mostly of tribes that have their own languages and festivals.



Footloose in Kolkata

The City of Joy, or how Kolkata is known, is unique in its own right. It's not fast-paced like Mumbai or prudish like Delhi. It has its own charm, with some of its pockets coming across as sleepy hamlets while others remind you of an era gone by. The city is full of people eager to help and guide you in the right direction, while you take in the sights of the city. Kolkata is a city that has embraced its past and hasn't let go. From food that makes your mouth water to the magnificent Victoria Memorial, which portrays what royalty felt like, Kolkata is a traveller's delight and attacks all five of your senses.

Planned tours are helpful and aid you to take in as many sights as you can in a stipulated period. But walking the off-beaten path has its own charm and splendour and lets you explore the city in a way that would never be mentioned in guidebooks or itineraries. Kolkata with its narrow bylanes has many hidden gems and is a delight for those looking to explore. Here's how to experience Kolkata the local way:

Breakfast in China: No, travelling to China is not part of your itinerary. But you can experience the next best thing — Chinatown. Home to ethnic Chinese Indian nationals, the region boasts of authentic Chinese cuisine. Start your day with a delicious Chinese breakfast comprising dumplings and sausages.

Channel your inner bookworm: Kolkata houses the largest library in India by volume. The National Library of India at Alipore contains over 2.2 million books, 86,000 maps, 3,200 manuscripts and has reading rooms that can accommodate over 550 people. Also, it's touted to be haunted by the ghost of Lady Metcalfe. Another reason to hit the books.

Marvel at artisans: Celebration of goddess Durga is the most important and the biggest festival in not only Kolkata, but also the whole state of West Bengal. Made from clay, the idols of the goddess come in various shapes and sizes. If your Kolkata trip coincides with Durga Puja, you can visit Kumortuli and be awed by the skill and expertise of the artisans. Without the aid of machines or



Kumortoli

high-end technology, these artisans work with clay and hay to sculpt exquisite idols of Durga and other gods and goddesses.

Shop exquisite junk jewellery: New Market was an enclosed market established in 1874 but nowadays the entire shopping area is addressed as New Market. From



Junk Jewellery

electronics to cheese, you can find a variety of wares here. But you can find bright junk jewellery attracting hordes of buyers here. Especially since they are quite affordable with a room left for bargaining. Esplanade is another haunt to satiate your jewellery needs.

Add Rare books at even rarer prices: College Street, also known as boi para (colony of books), is a must haunt for bookworms. Dotted with well-known Indian publishers, the street is known to house first editions, books that are out of print, and rare books available at throwaway prices. College Street enables you to find the perfect gift for the bookworm in you.

Luxurious architecture: The Marble Palace in North Kolkata is a 19th century mansion and one of the best-preserved houses from that era. The mansion gets its

name from the marble floors, walls and sculptures. The entry is free but private residence, photography is prohibited. An entry permit must be obtained 24 hours prior from the West Bengal Tourism Information Bureau.

Weekend getaway: If you need a break from exploring the city, you can head to the Sonajhuri. Touted as one of the cleanest forests of West Bengal, it is ideal for morning strolls. There is also a mini market on Saturdays, which sells loads of handicraft items while you can hear the Bauls, minstrels from Bengal, sing melodious tunes and turn your getaway into a memorable one.

Go tiger spotting in the mangroves: Sunderbans is a vast forest and considered a natural wonder of the world. It also houses the world's largest coastal mangrove forest. It also holds the title of a UNESCO World Heritage



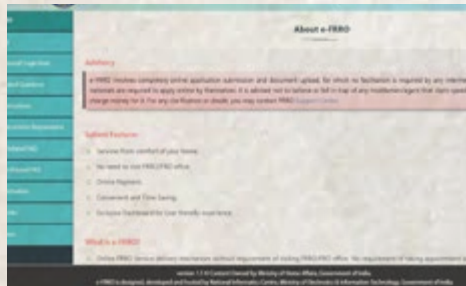
Sunderbans

Site. You can spot the royal Bengal tiger and ganges river dolphins here. The national park consists of about 102 islands, which also includes a crocodile farm. On one of the islands, you can witness Olive Ridley turtle hatchlings make their way to the sea. The national park is about 100 kms from Kolkata and the best time to visit the park is between November and February.

TOP
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Govt Introduces E-Frro Portal for Foreign Nationals Visiting India



The Government of India has digitized the process of FRRO (Foreigners Regional Registration Office) registration, visa extension, etc., for foreign nationals visiting India. The government has now introduced an e-FRRO portal with an aim to provide faceless, cashless and paperless service to foreign nationals. There will be no requirement to visit the FRRO office. Earlier, foreign nationals could book appointments and upload documents online but they had to be physically present on the appointed date at the FRRO office for processing the application. With effect from February 12, 2018, a mandatory visit to the local FRRO office located in Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi and Mumbai has been done away with. Online submission of documents with respect to all visa and immigration related services (such as the Indian FRRO registration, visa extension, change of address/passport, visa conversion, exit permission, etc.) has been enabled. Clients will be informed through e-mail/SMS alerts for service granted or rejected. Registration certificates will be sent by post and on the registered email ID. Alternatively, it can be downloaded from the portal.

Udan reaches Arunachal Pradesh; first commercial flight flagged off



The long-cherished dream of Arunachal Pradesh to have air connectivity finally came true on May 21 with the first fixed-wing commercial aircraft being flagged off from Pasighat to Guwahati. National carrier Air India agreed to start ATR-42 services of Alliance Air to Pasighat from Gopinath Bordoloi airport at Guwahati, connecting the state with the rest of the country. The 42-seat Alliance Air ATR will fly between Guwahati and Pasighat thrice a week. Besides Alliance Air, Zoom Air and Turbo Jet are also set to commence their services soon. In the second round of bidding as part of the regional connectivity scheme, dubbed UDAN, eight locations in Arunachal Pradesh were selected. Of these, Pasighat and Tezu have been selected for fixed-wing commercial aircraft services, while Ziro, Daporijo, Itanagar, Tuting, Wallong and YingKiong have been selected for helicopter services. There are about 120 helipads and 10 Advance Landing Grounds—Ziro, Pasighat, Aalo, Tuting, Mechuka, Vijaynagar, Walong, Tezu, Daporijo and Alinye—in the state.

Cygnett inn, Dibrugarh to open in September



Cygnett Hotels and Resorts has signed a new 50-room property in Dibrugarh, Assam, set to open in September. Sarbendra Sarkar, founder & managing director of Cygnett Hotels Group, said, “We are delighted to announce the signing of a new 50-key hotel in Dibrugarh, a brilliant location with close proximity to the airport. Cygnett Inn Dibrugarh will mark our foray into the region.”

Indigo, Spicejet partially shift operations to Delhi Airport’s T2 from March 25



IndiGo and SpiceJet partially shifted their operations from Terminal 1 to the revamped Terminal 2 of New Delhi’s Indira Gandhi International Airport from March 25. The IndiGo flights, 6E 2000-6E 2999, are for routes to Bengaluru, Chennai, Amritsar, Bhubaneswar, Raipur, Srinagar,

Bagdogra, Udaipur, Vadodara, and Visakhapatnam from T2. SpiceJet shifted seven sectors (flight SG 8000 to SG 8999) to T2. These include flights to Ahmedabad, Kochi, Goa, Gorakhpur, Patna, Pune, and Surat, according to a release by Delhi International Airport Ltd (DIAL). GoAir had decided to shift operations to T2 in October 2017.

Spicejet to connect Assam’s Lakhimpur and Jorhat



SpiceJet will soon connect Assam’s northern district of Lakhimpur to Jorhat in the southern part of the state. SpiceJet Chairman and Managing Director Ajay Singh announced the airline’s plan at Advantage Assam: Global Investors Summit ’18. If it comes through, the move will form part of the government’s UDAN or Regional Connectivity Scheme, an initiative taken to make air travel to India’s tier-II and –III cities affordable and put remote regions on the country’s aviation map at the same time. “For India to grow, it is critical that the Northeast grows. And, the region cannot grow without connectivity. SpiceJet connects cities of Guwahati, Silchar and Dibrugarh to other parts of the country and under UDAN, we will soon be connecting Lakhimpur and Jorhat,” Singh said.



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- ILTM North America, Riviera Maya, Mexico: 24 – 27 Sep 2018

IA SAYS



(box lane) leads you to Brabourne Road, dotted with Portuguese Church, Jewish Synagogues, Parsi Church and, gradually, to the oldest road of Kolkata—Chitpore Road. The cinematic change in architecture, road patterns and distinct characters of old shops define a different Kolkata predominated by non-Bengali Muslim culture, which dramatically coexists with the country’s first and only Chinatown.

Kolkata Anecdotes

Adda: Addas are informal gatherings where you may hear many a passionate discussion about price rise, a comparative discourse regarding similarities between different religions, or an analysis of strategies in the Iraq war, which would put a military commander to shame. Addas are free-flowing in nature with no agendas, but politics usually takes centre-stage. Bengalis have an opinion on how a country should be run and they don’t shy away from voicing it. A typical adda will surely revolve around the current state of politics and how it can be improved. To the uninitiated, an adda session may look (or sound) as if the participants are going to kill each other, but that’s what makes these sessions so lively.

Bengali Sweets: Bengali sweets, especially Rashogollas, are world famous. Soft, spongy dumplings made of cottage cheese and dipped in sugar syrup, a Rashogolla leaves you yearning for more. Shandesh is another favourite, made again out of cottage cheese, but comes in a mind-boggling variety of shapes, sizes, consistency and taste. Kolkata has got an incredible range of sweets to offer. Within the city limits, one can find at least 100 varieties of sweets of indigenous variety.

Global Kolkata: Kolkata has for long been the melting pot of Indian and international communities. The capital of British India from 1772 to 1911, Kolkata was the most important city in Imperial Britain, second only to London. This attracted people from all over the world in search of fortune. The first church here was built by the Armenians. There was a sizable Greek community, the last of whom migrated as late as the 1960s. The Jewish community of the city still runs a synagogue. The Chinese dominate the city’s landscape with their China Town. This trend still continues as people from all over India come to Kolkata to make a living.

Sunirmol Ghosh

An overwhelming sea of humanity jostles as the continuous blowing of horns, shouts of street vendors and other city noises create a cacophonous atmosphere. Amidst all this chaos, a man sleeps peacefully, sprawled on a pavement. Tucked around a busy street corner, a small historic church exudes peace and tranquillity. In the heart of the city, lies a huge green expanse, a maidan (field), with 100-year-old trees and thick undergrowth, creating an illusion of a tropical forest from distance. No, you’re not in a Dickensian novel, you’re in the city of joy—Kolkata.

While grand mansions of the erstwhile British Raj speak about the imperialist dream of a lost empire, modern high-rise buildings define the present skyline. The oldest intruders of Kolkata—Portuguese, Armenian and Dutch traders no more rule the narrow lanes of Burrabazar—evaporated eventually leaving their reminiscences behind. The slender ‘Baksa Gali’

With inputs from Mr. Suddhabrata Deb

EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH!



Urvashi Baghel | Executive - Presales

Urvashi Baghel personifies proficiency and hard work, two essential qualities in a model employee. Having spent three years at Indo Asia, she has always been optimistic not only about the task at hand but also the organisation. She has provided her support to her colleagues and has never missed an opportunity to learn. Urvashi likes to unwind with a good book and is a bookworm in the truest sense of the word. With her unending optimism, she is an integral part of the IA family.