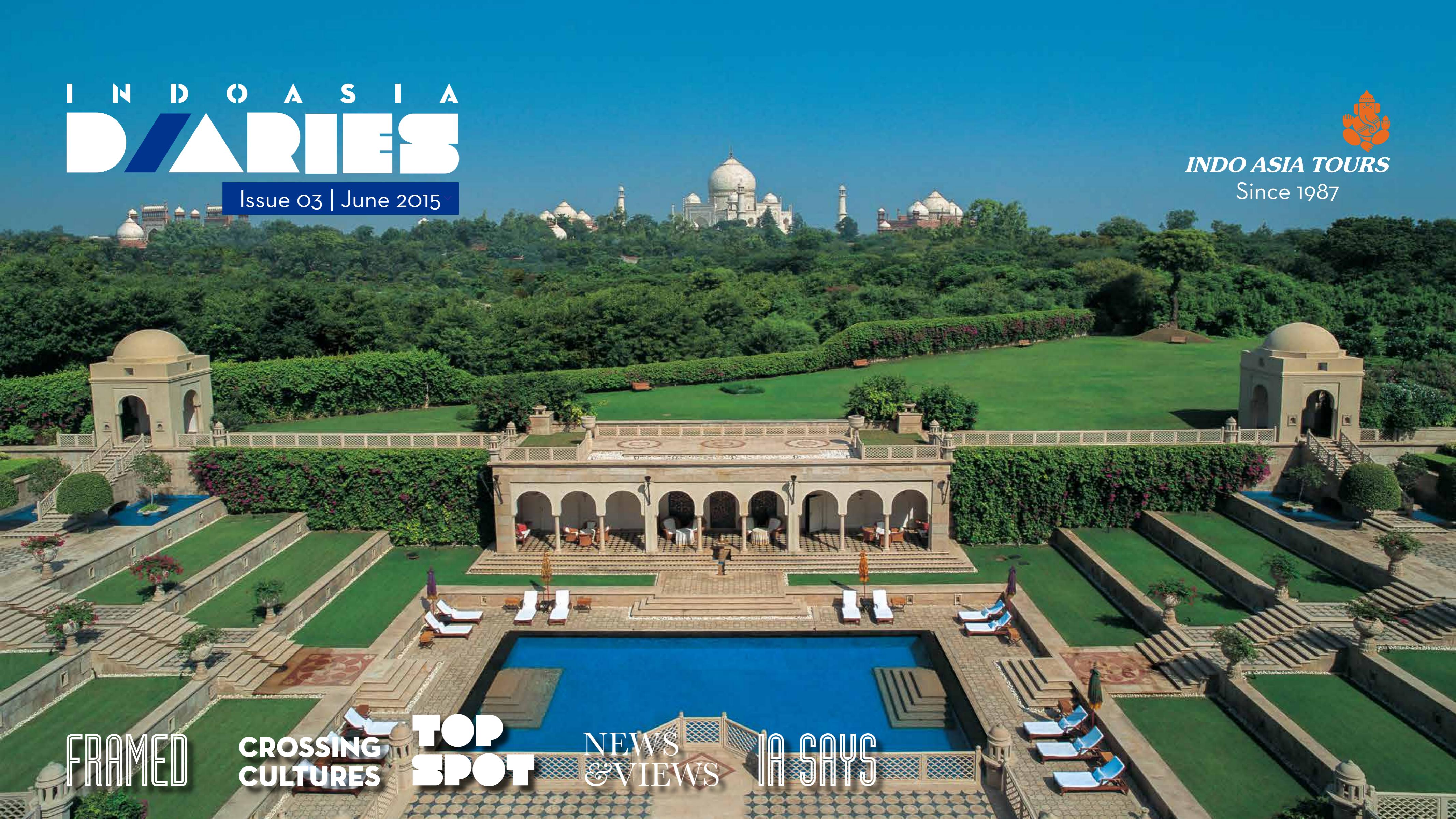


INDO ASIA DIARIES

Issue 03 | June 2015



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Heather Vanderpool

Based in Minnesota, United States, Heather Vanderpool spent two years in India travelling the length and breadth of the country and amassing a hundred unique experiences and stories. While on the road, her camera became the medium of creating a conversation, without the privilege of sharing the same language. Apart from giving her numerous inspiring subjects to shoot, India became a learning ground to immerse in a culture that was so unfamiliar. This helped her immensely in learning about different cultures of India, whether it was the fascinating ancient streets of Varanasi or the reticent vibe of faraway Nagaland. Her biggest takeaway from all the travelling in India was the fine nuances of different cultures, deeply rooted traditions and the warm hospitality that India is known for. In this image, she captured the simplicity of rural life, where a woman propped a pan on the woodfire to make a cup of tea for her. The warm of her generosity was akin to the hot cup of tea that was being made. Heather moved back to Minnesota in 2012 and runs her own professional photography venture, Vanderpool Studios.

www.vanderpoolstudios.com



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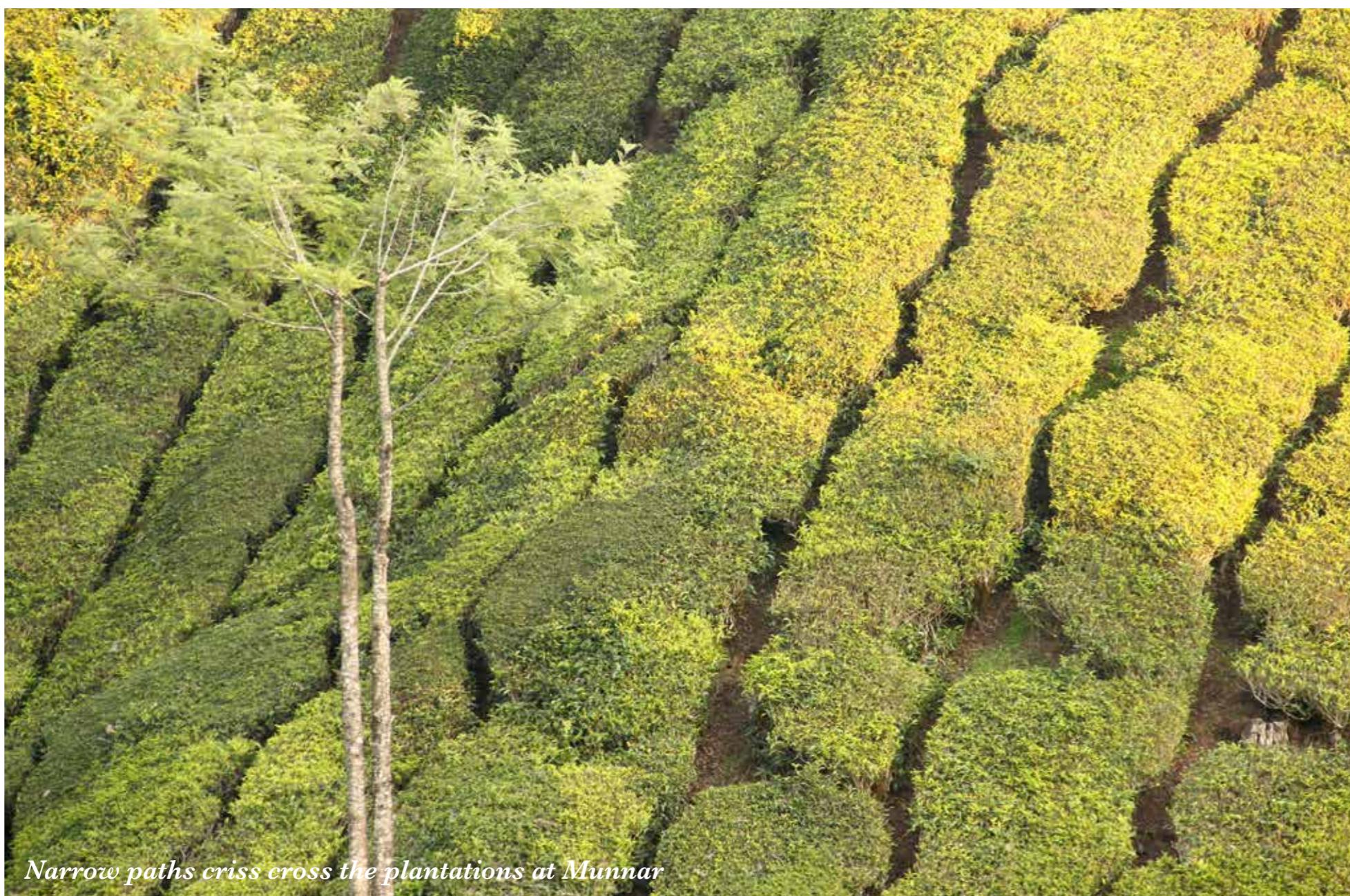
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TEA IN A VILLAGE HOME

Photo Location : Pushkar, Rajasthan

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Narrow paths criss cross the plantations at Munnar

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TRACING THE LIFELINE OF INDIA

STORIES FROM THE SUB-CONTINENT

It is no wonder that a good cup of chai forges the strongest bond with strangers. Imagine sitting on the ghats of Varanasi and a local comes and shares the same steps and the sunrise with you, offering you a cup of tea. He lets you into his life's story and anecdotes about the ancient city and its chaos. The conversation goes on for hours, straddling topics from politics to personal life, and before you know it, you have a friend in a strange city, which was just another stop on the itinerary. You would never have to pay for that cup of tea and be forever thankful for a peek into the local life of Varanasi, than orchestrated experiences. The memory of this person and the conversation is likely to stay with you for many more years than the sights of Varanasi. Such, is the bonds that are created over a hot, sweet cup. India's favourite beverage works magic on many levels.

Not only is India known for its dash of hospitality added to a cup of tea, but also the stunning destinations where it is grown.

This magic starts in the many tea plantations that sprawl in different parts of the country. Here are the top five tea scapes for travellers that one should add to the trip. Moss-like hills covering dips and crests of valleys across India, offering a mesmerizing ambience to where it all starts.

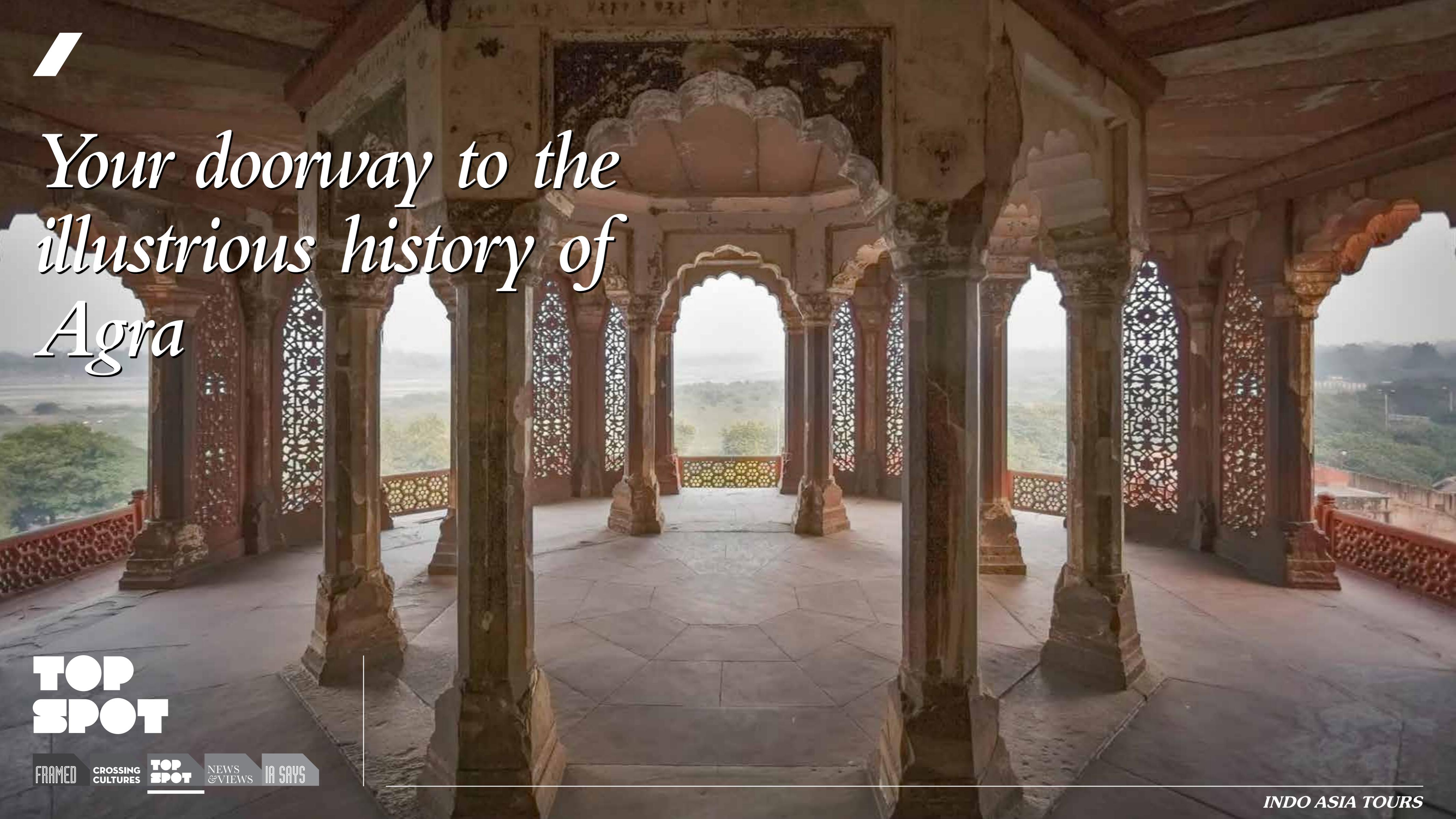
- Munnar – A lush green carpet is spread over the low hills of India's most popular tea destination, Munnar. A popular stop, thanks to Kerala's wide reach to tourists, this is where travellers stop to recuperate and resign themselves to isolated mountain tops, possibly in an old plantation bungalow from the British period.
- Darjeeling – Prized aromatic tea that has reached numerous markets across borders is grown in this hill station on the eastern edge of India. The name



Valparai tea estates form a perfect view over a cup of tea

Darjeeling cannot be separated when talking about tea in India. The most professionally managed estates lie on this region, but for the traveller, it is purely the lure of being surrounded by a million shades of green.

- Coonoor – A trip to Coonoor works like therapy. The undulating hills are covered in a carpet of neat green bushes and dotted with tea pickers dressed in bright clothes. Also, Coonoor evades the explosion of tourists and offers pleasantly isolated spot to unwind.
- Wayanad – The otherwise wild retreat Wayanad has a side to it that ensconce immaculately neat tea plantations as compared to the cluttered coffee-scape that it is known for. Expect to add a serene vibe to your holiday and mix it up with plenty of unruly streams, picnics and walks through nature's bounty.
- Valparai – Skirted by the forested Annamalai Hills of the Western Ghats in Tamil Nadu, Valparai is one of the most well kept secrets of the region. An erstwhile British stronghold, the destination is a reflection of the life of tea planters before 1947. Miles of tea plantations stretch over the hills, offering a tranquil cocoon to travellers.

A photograph of the Diwan-i-Khas hall at the Agra Fort. The perspective is from a low angle looking down a long corridor of red sandstone pillars. The pillars have intricate white marble inlay patterns. The floor is made of large, light-colored tiles. The ceiling is high and supported by brackets. In the background, a large, ornate arched window looks out onto a vast landscape of green fields and distant hills under a clear sky.

*Your doorway to the
illustrious history of
Agra*

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SUPRIYA SEHGAL

Footloose in Agra

Journey into the heart of India.

Supriya's first rendezvous with Agra's Taj Mahal happened after years of travelling across the country. It was the proximity syndrome at best – a place relegated to the back of a plan, as it can be visited anytime as it's so close, so you spend time exploring faraway destinations instead. But once she did, the sight of this ethereal structure was wedged in her memory forever. The only though that came to her mind, was that this trip should have been made many years ago! Such is the aura of India's most eminent monument, the one that has placed the country on the world map for decades. Taking a leaf of this stunning architectural draw, the travellers have started exploring the rest of the Mughal lineage with additional gusto. While nothing quite beats the gripping picture of white marble crafted to perfection, there are a number of other things that a trip to Agra resonates in your memory long after you have gone.



An orange sky is the perfect backdrop to the Taj silhouette

But first, the Taj requires ample time for one to soak all its glory. Afterall it is the one structure that is bound to bowl you over, no matter what. It is the pinnacle of elegance, where architecture is concerned. No wonder, eminent poet and writer Rabindranath Tagore called it "a teardrop on the face of eternity". Despite thousands that descend on the city to get a bite of its perfection, it is difficult not to get overwhelmed once you see it with your own eyes. And even though you may have to rub shoulders with hundreds of other tourists, the experience is in no way diminished. This paradisiac monument sits at the edge of the Yamuna River in the Northern state of Uttar Pradesh, a mere 180km from New Delhi. Built by the Mughal King Shah Jahan, it served as a shrine to his beloved wife, Arjumand Bann Begum, better known by her official title, Mumtaz Mahal. A number of statistics, anecdotes and legends surround the white marble mausoleum, but that is something that one must immerse in when you see it. If it can be planned, a full moon night is the most perfect backdrop to visit Taj Mahal when the light from the moon reflects on the white marble, giving it an otherworldly essence. The full moon nights can be traced on the monuments official website.

Once you have recovered from the dreamy, dazzling Taj Mahal, make your way to the other monuments

that fade in the background given the popularity of Taj Mahal, but are exceptional milestones in architecture and craftsmanship of the Mughal period. Akbar's Mausoleum is one such monument that helps one time travel into the rich historic period, which shaped Northern India. Dedicated to Akbar, this is a beautiful structure surrounded with four towers and decorated with bold, swirling geometric and floral designs, typical of the Mughal aesthetics. The interesting part is that the mausoleum was planned in Akbar's lifetime itself and was completed in 1612, 7 years after the emperor passed away. The structure comprises of a vast square building with arches, canopies, decorative panels and multiple storeys. In its centre lies the emperor's tomb, a simple inscribed oblong of marble covering his remains. Nearby are similar, but much smaller tombs for his daughters.

As others, Agra Fort too takes a back seat during the visit but offers a credible reason for you to add it to the itinerary anyway. The construction of this massive red-sandstone fort, on the bank of the Yamuna River, was initiated by Emperor Akbar in 1565. Significant additions were made by his grandson Shah Jahan, using his favourite building material, the white marble. The fort was built primarily as a military structure for security, but was quickly transformed by Shah Jahan it into a palace. Unfortunately, later it became his gilded prison for eight years after his son Aurangzeb seized power in 1658 and confined him to this very fort.

A monicker of 'baby Taj' hangs on the head of this exquisite tomb of Mizra Ghiyas Beg, a Persian nobleman who was Mumtaz Mahal's grandfather and Emperor Jehangir's chief minister. The formal name of the structure is Itimad-ud-Daulah. It pales in front of the beauty of Taj, but is arguably more delicate in appearance. The finely carved marble lattice screens and extensive use of pietra dura make it marvelous. This was the first Mughal structure built completely from marble.



Tomb of I'timād-ud-Daula, better known as 'Baby Taj'

Once you've had your fill of monuments on the trip, steer your plan towards the bustling markets. Spices, clothes, sarees, jewelry, shoes, carpets and souvenirs sprawl in the old city market, known as Kinari Bazaar. It is here that you can step away from history and get a feel of Agra's contemporary and authentic vibe. It is an excellent place for photography enthusiasts, where every occasion morphs itself into a stunning image that encaptures the mood of the city. Add to this a walk through the Kachhpura village, on the opposite bank of the Taj and you can suffuse yourself into the simple village life, away from the touristy din of the city. It is here, that you will get some time to absorb the delicate juxtaposition of eons of history and modern India, buttressed against each other in an unfathomable harmony.

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The Oberoi

AMARVILĀS

AGRA, INDIA

The Oberoi Amarvilas enjoys an unrivalled position, just 600 metres from the iconic Taj Mahal. Each of our rooms affords uninterrupted views of this ancient monument to love, while elements of the layout and design pay homage to its Mughal splendour.

- An unrivalled vantage spot to view the Taj Mahal
- Lavish rooms, reminiscent of the Mughal period
- Exquisite dining options
- A meal under the starlit night
- A delightful spa experience to help you unwind
- Pamper your senses with the 'Noor-e-Taj' therapy
- Swimming pool encircled by comfortable loungers
- A fitness centre with high end equipment
- Romantic private dinner with a view of the Taj Mahal
- Children don the chef's hat
- Brilliant access to Agra's sightseeing gems
- Travel assistance and guidance on India's incredible experiences

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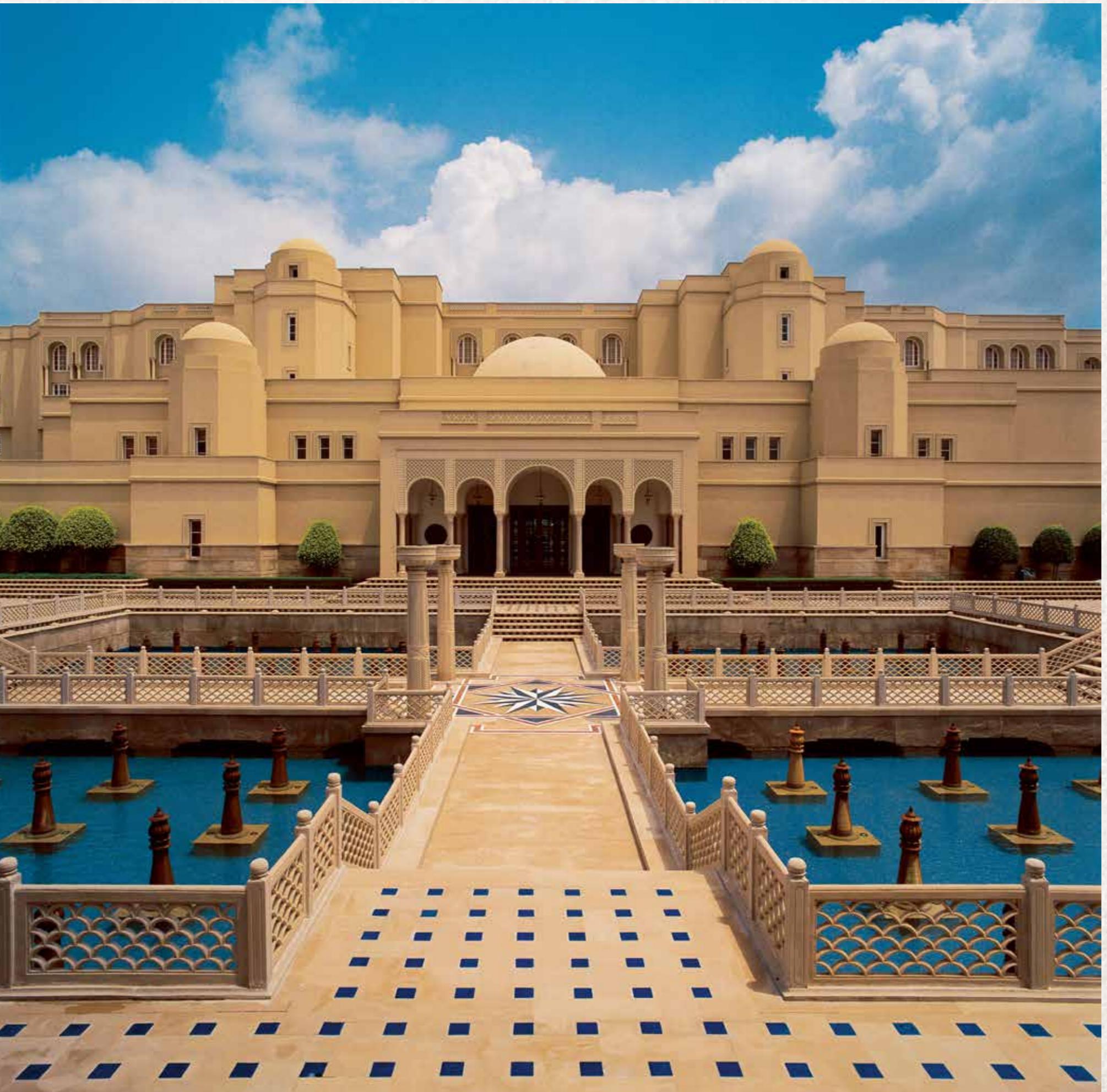
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Goa launches its first seaplane experience

Goa has pioneered some of the most unique experiences for travellers in the Indian tourism industry. It holds the baton and leads the industry yet another time by introducing the concept of seaplanes, Heli-tourism and amphibious buses in the state. Though Maharashtra has already introduced the concept, Goa is likely to gather momentum with its robust tourist footfall. Dilip Parulekar, the Tourism Minister of Goa expects a boost of 14 percent in the tourist inflow due this infusion. The first successful

trial was held on the waters of the Mandovi River, off Panaji, preparing the states tourism body to mitigate any problems and roll out the plan smoothly. Given that seaplanes are a novel concept in India, it is bound to intrigue both local and foreign travellers. It also increases the spread of experiences that are currently offered in the state, apart from the golden brown beaches, laid back atmosphere and countless dining options that skirt the beaches. Apart from the beach experience Goa is well known for spice plantation trails and nature immersion as birding destination. Backed by the state government, the initiative is not directly owned or operated by Goa Tourism. The reins will lie in the able hands of MEHAIR, a private aviation company. "We are only providing them support to facilitate smooth operations," said Parulekar at the occasion of the maiden seaplane landing. The seaplane routes start from Goa's Dabolim airport to the meandering Mandovi and Chapora rivers and the popular Coco beach, a beautiful bay off Panaji.

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Chennai adds fortune select grand to its hospitality scape

FORTUNE

Member ITC's hotel group

Fortune's foray into the Chennai market is not old – it makes a third addition under the brand umbrella with the Fortune Select Grand. This is the group's 47th hotel in the country, offering superior services

and a wide range of facilities to the guests. Styled in a contemporary fashion, the hotel is rich on comfort. The latest address for the Fortune hotel is on GST Road, with easy access to Mahindra World City, a Special Economic Zone and Integrated Business City providing. The hotel is also close to Oragadam Industrial Area, Maraimalai Nagar and Ford Supplier Park, making it a preferred destination for the business traveller.

China and India forge new bonds on tourism



News of the Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on its approval to enter into an agreement between India and China for strengthening cooperation in the field of tourism, has come after the

Prime Minister's successful visit to China. The agreement was signed during this visit, where both countries agreed on creating a fair and institutional structure for boosting

tourism across borders for both countries and enhancing co-operation in this sector. For the agreement to see any success, it is imperative to have bilateral cooperation in the tourism sector. This includes transparent exchange of information and data related to tourism, encouraging cooperation between tourism stakeholders, including hotels and tour operators, establishing fruitful exchange programmes for cooperation in Human Resource Development, investing in the tourism and hospitality sectors, participating in travel fairs and trade exhibitions in each other's country, and to promoting safe and sustainable tourism on both ends. The agreement is a milestone for a longstanding relationship with China, one that is sure to advance tourism in both countries. Chinese tourists to India, in a pie of total foreign tourist arrivals, is 2.5 per cent in 2014. This accounts for only 0.18 per cent of the total outbound Chinese tourists. There is hope that this number will expand substantially. On the other hand, talks of increasing flights to China from India are on the cards.

Dates for the Uttar Pradesh Travel Mart announced

The Uttar Pradesh Tourism has been consistently looking for more than just the Taj Mahal to create travel footprint in the state. In an effort to highlight the many striking experiences of Uttar Pradesh, the second UP Travel Mart will be held in Lucknow from February 22-24 in 2016. This was revealed by Om Prakash Singh, the Tourism Minister of Uttar Pradesh. Lucknow seems to be the veritable choice, not only because it is the capital of the state, but it is also a characterful destination. The tourism body has also sealed a five-year agreement with FICCI for this.

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Indo Asia Tours is participating in the below mentioned upcoming trade fairs. You can schedule an appointment at marketing@indoasiatours.com to meet us in person at these fairs :

- **BIRD FAIR, U.K. : 21-23 Aug 2015**
- **Top Resa, Paris : 29 Sep -02 Oct 2015**
- **PATA, Bangalore : 06-09 Sep 2015**

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Gajendra Singh

Amongst world travellers, names like Ibn Batuta, Marco Polo, Hieun Tsang and Fa-Hein resonate with the history of India. These adventurous men scaled high mountains and maneuvered rough seas to reach the Indian borders, only to find an amalgam of unmatchable culture, immersive traditions, a legion of wealth in architecture and stunning landscapes that made way into their travelogues for the world to read for centuries ahead. Content with its place on the world map as one of the most mystical and historically rich nations, India has always preserved the sanctity of its mythos, revealing itself to those willing to lose themselves in its charm. Be it thousands of years ago or now, India remains a coveted destination for world travellers.

Imbibing the message of collaboration and sustainable tourism, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has travelled far and wide in the first one year of his tenure. With close to 18 countries visited, the Prime Minister has made definitive foray into creating longstanding bonds with countries, in hope of boosting tourism across borders. Infact, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between China and India to advance efforts towards tourism for both countries. Actions like enabling e-visa facility are a bold step taken by the Government.

Not only did Prime Minister Modi reach out to the authorities of these countries, but also showcased the vision for a new India to the Non Resident Indians living in those countries. A resounding reaction of interest and enthusiasm followed, with the NRI community feeling impassioned about their land. With the government's efforts towards voicing the need for NRIs to take a slice of the pie of successful India, who else is a better advocate than them for increased footfalls to India.

In the hope of augmented spirit of camaraderie between countries, and taking steps to create a sustainable tourism industry, Indo Asia brings the third edition of the Indo Asia Diaries. Come experience the phenomena called India.

EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH!



Manoj Mehta | Transfer Representative

Manoj's mantra 'service with a smile' resonates deeply with Indo Asia. No wonder, the dynamic Transfers Representative and Assistant Operations has struck a chord with all that we stand for. He loves being in a dynamic environment, exploring new destinations and meeting people from across the globe. Manoj's positive energy is contagious.