

# PRAVEG'S TOURISM ONE

Published by PRAVEG COMMUNICATIONS LIMITED | [www.praveg.com](http://www.praveg.com)  
(Formerly known as PRAVEG COMMUNICATIONS PVT. LTD.)

December 2021

Vol. : 7 | Issue : 4 | Pages : 60 | ₹ 200 RNI Regd. No. GUJENG/2015/70098

*A high-end monthly magazine*

# *Christmas time in* **Singapore**





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## Pomp and Pageantry

**H**ear those jingle bells in the distance? Those bright and cheerful lights on the streets that lead to church, those melodious tunes of carols, the all-lit up Christmas tree and the scent of oven-fresh pastries on the street! Festivals are amazing. They bring so much positivity in different forms.

Winter festivals like Christmas bring all the more reasons to travel to different places to witness the best of celebrations. If you want to experience the true essence of this festival, Singapore is the place you should be at during Christmas for once in your lifetime. From the shopping districts of Orchard Road and the light spectacles at Marina Bay, Singapore pulls out all the stops and offers plenty of things to do for the holidays.

Thaipusam is a festival for those looking to be a part of a grant spiritual celebration. The Festival takes place in Tamil communities in India and beyond, with particularly large events hosted in Malaysia and Singapore. Fasting, devotion, dancing, piercing, the merriment has many exciting elements for those who like to experience the variety of life.

Read on!







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# Christmas time in Singapore

The gaiety in the air is contagious. You cannot help but be caught up with the revelers, the foot tapping music, the spectacular lights and the colorful buntings on the streets. There is a constant buzz and excitement in the air. There is glitter

and razzmatazz everywhere. The festive mood is all around. It's Christmas time in Singapore.

Singapore is just one-and-a-half degrees north of the equator, the tropical climate notwithstanding, Christmas time here can be a

scintillating experience. With a multicultural population, Singapore celebrates all its festivals with gusto. Christmas is celebrated with enthusiasm and pageantry as any other festivals, be it Diwali, Chinese New Year or Pongal.



Marina Bay Sands





Every year the upscale shopping belt on Orchard Street turns into a festive wonderland. The entire length of Singapore's retail heart is lit up and covered with over hangings that are color coordinated end to end. Grand colorful arches stretch across the width of the street. Swanky Malls along this

street and elsewhere are spectacularly decorated.

Enter any Mall and you are greeted with the delicious odor of food. As you walk along, the relay of odors change from baked confectionery items to Chinese cuisines, to Indian spicy dishes, to Singaporean gourmet foods, to

Christmas spreads and other Yuletide items. Singapore is a country with multiple religions and the traditional Christmas delicacies have distinct Asian flavors. The Christmas dinner has all the oriental flavors. A full roast chicken will have a surprise element with Biryani stuffed in it.

CHRISTMAS  
AT STREET





From Orchard Street, walk or hop on to a metro or MRT as it is locally called, to the Marina Bay Front, where some of the iconic hotels are situated. Many of the exclusive storefronts are located here, each one decorated to the hilt for Christmas. A 12m-tall main arch, featuring red, white and gold poinsettias and a large Christmas tree, would be one of the main showpieces at the junction of Orchard Road and Scotts Road

Cheerfully decked Christmas trees are placed at regular intervals along the wide promenade of the Merlion Park. Even the Merlion, the most recognizable symbol of Singapore, is gaily draped in colorful lights. The sound and light show in the Park is a major attraction. The laser beams shot from the top floors of the Marina Bay Sands are breathtaking.

What's new this year for Christmas? The festive season in the Resorts World will start off from mid-November. Many Christmas-themed events are being planned this year. If you are missing the frigid coolness of Christmas, head towards the first-ever Ice Hotel Gallery, which commenced this November, replicating sub-zero temperatures of a cold wintry day. Drawing inspiration from ice hotels in the Nordic region, the Ice Hotel Gallery would feature sculptures carved out of ice. The iconic symbol of Singapore, the Merlion would be carved out of ice. Furniture like chairs, couches and tables are all carved out of ice. It would be a truly Nordic experience.

Enter the world of whodunit. This festive season brings in an air of mystery and intrigue. You can board the Orient

Express, which rolled into Singapore early this year. The opulently furnished mysterious train, immortalized by Dame Agatha Christie in her riveting novel, *Murder in the Orient Express*, would be a popular attraction. Singapore would be the first country outside France to display this magnificent locomotive from the 19th century. It showcases two original train carriages, along with a fourgon - a long covered wagon used to carry baggage, goods and military supplies. You can feast yourself at the Michelin-starred Orient Express Pop-Up Restaurant.

Another attraction would be the first-ever Magical Pinwheel Tree that rises like a phoenix as a symbol of life and resilience, reaching almost 20 meters high. It is a bracing symbol in times of the pandemic.

Music and Lights Show, Marina Bay Sands





Gardens By The Bay

Spanning eight football fields, Christmas Wonderland, at the Gardens by the Bay, is Singapore's biggest Christmas fair. It is a breathtaking horticultural destination and will feature an 8 meters tall cupcake Ferris wheel, larger-than-life goodies like candy canes, ginger bread decorations in the shape of animals. It will also feature the largest Santa's Grotto.

The Christmas boat light parade will be back this year. It would feature the largest parade of decorated boats - a parade of uber luxury yachts

flamboyantly decorated and lit up. The spectacle can be viewed from the Vivo City Promenade.

A giant outdoor 3D video projection covering an entire wall of the Mandarin Orchard hotel will be the highlight of this year's annual Orchard Road Christmas light up. The digital wall will also be the new site for the countdown clock to Christmas Day and the New Year.

The Christmas in Bloom will see the shopping street set aglow with about 68km of fairy lights and oversized floral decorations, with some parts dressed

with bold neon lights. The modern wonder of the digital world would be visible for all to see.

Singapore's vaccination rate has been high. People were better able to handle the Covid-19 situation. The potency has been mitigated and has been less dangerous. However there would be no street activities and performances. For the populace, it is a time to be different - a time to splurge, to eat, to shop. Troubles are far away. Carpe diem! Santa Claus is coming to town! ■



# Thaipusam: A Penitential Homage



Chariot During Thaipusam Festival, Malaysia

Source: Omid News/Golamriza





Devotees Carrying Sacred Pots, Murugan Temple, Tamil Nadu

Source: AP/Shutterstock



Devotee Holding a Decorated Arch, Tamil Nadu

Source: AP/Shutterstock

Some had their cheeks pierced with a thin metallic spear, which extended from both sides of their cheeks. Some had pierced their bodies with hooks on their front and back. They walk in stoic silence, displaying no sign of pain on their faces. Some others were apparently in a deep trance and were completely oblivious of their surroundings while indulging in frenzied dancing. The participants were both men and women. The people were celebrating the Hindu Tamil festival of Thaipusam on the full moon of the Tamil month of Thai.

Good should prevail over evil. It is a universal desire that is sought by everyone. It is seen in North India with Ravana being consigned to flames. In South India, the significance of the Thaipusam festival is just that. The Tamil Hindu community, in the month of January, celebrates the victory of Murugan over Soorapadman, the evil demon. Murugan is the son of Lord Shiva and Parvati.

As per folklore, Soorapadman had grown so powerful that even the Devas, the gods, feared him. They approached Lord Shiva and his wife

Parvati for help. Parvati gave a spear with divine power to Murugan, her son. Murugan was successful in vanquishing the Devil. Thaipusam is thus celebrated to commemorate Murugan's victory over Soorapadman and thereby saving humanity. It is a day of acknowledgement for ridding the world of evil influences.

The deity Murugan has been one of the pantheons of gods, with the Tamilians, from time immemorial. In ancient Tamil literature, Murugan has been depicted as a rural deity, particularly among the hill people of Tamil Nadu. However, over the years Murugan has become one of their principal Gods. Early Murugan worship was characterized by frenzied dancing by his devotees and that tradition continues to date.

One of the features of the Thaipusam procession is Kavadi Attam. Literally translated, it means Burden Dance. Kavadi is a semi-circular wooden structure, gaily decorated and is used by the devotees to carry offerings for Murugan. With the Kavadis balanced on their heads, the devotees dance on their way to the temple.





Madurai

The ritual of dancing while carrying the Kavadi is called Kavadi Attam.

On the days preceding the festival, the devotees maintain a spartan lifestyle. They observe celibacy and consume only vegetarian foods. Some of the participants of the Kavadi Attam undertake mortification of the body. Self-mortification plays a prominent part in this festival. Voluntary attachment of sharp rods and hooks to their bodies, piercing of the tongues and cheeks are expressions of their penance to their lord. The penitential discipline is to strengthen the will and check the desire to indulge in any sin. The devotees are able to transcend the pain during acts of self-mortification. Some slip into a state of trance. In ancient Greece trance was considered to be a form of divine madness, in which it was believed that the frenzied subject was seized by the deity.

The devotees claim to experience no pain when they undergo this form of self-flagellation. It is said that they enter into a trance-like state that elevates them from any physical discomfort. Reportedly the piercing of the cheeks leaves no scars, when

healed.

What is the significance of self-flagellation, which is observed in many religions? Do they endure any pain at all? One form of self-mortification is by piercing their tongue. By this act, the devotee renounces the gift of speech and embraces 'maun vrat' - a practice that was followed by the ancient monks. It is believed that the practice of maun-vrat is essential for spiritual growth, which is only possible if one's speech is pure. The Hindu religious texts prescribe maun-vrat for this purpose.

The Kavadi ritual, including acts of body mortification, is not confined to a particular sect of people, but cuts across socio economic strata of caste, sect class and sex.

The word Thaipusam is the name of the star Pusam in the month of Thai. This star is at its zenith during the festival, which usually falls in the month of January or February. In 2022 the festival will take place on February 8.

This festival is celebrated not only in Tamil Nadu but also in the state of Pondicherry, Kerala and among the Tamil diaspora in Sri Lanka, Singapore, Malaysia and Mauritius.



A Devotee with a Spear Through His Cheeks (called a "vel"), Tamil Nadu





Thaipusam celebration, Malaysia



Kavadi Bearer



A Devotee Carrying a Kavadi, Singapore

In Kuala Lumpur Malaysia, the Thaipusam festival is celebrated with much enthusiasm. The night before Thaipusam Hindus gather at the Sri Mahamariamman Temple for the 8 km procession to the Batu Caves. They depart around midnight and arrive at the caves early next morning.

The festival became firmly established in the Malayan peninsula, when the immigrants from southern India started arriving there in the early 19th-century, to work in rubber plantations.

The procession terminates at the Murugan temple in the Batu caves. The temple was built in 1891 and the first Thaipusam festival was celebrated in 1892. The act of penance here is more intense. The devotees pierce their skins with hooks to which are attached dehusked coconuts.

Sometimes the body is pierced with tiny hooks that hold up peacock feathers, Peacock being Murugan's vahana. Devotees dress in bright orange and yellow dress, the colors that are associated with Murugan.

Festivals are not just another day. For some, it is a day to be different, a day to break the monotony in their lives. Some beseech for expiation of their sins. But for many others, it is a day to express their gratitude to God through penitence and austerity measures, for all the goodness in their lives; a thanksgiving day for a fulfillment of a long cherished dream; gratitude for the manifestation of a miracle that had happened in their lives. Perhaps all festivals bring out this sense of gratefulness in people, an emotion that gives them resilience and hope for a better, happier tomorrow. ■



# Heaven on Earth

Nob Hill, San Francisco

I reached San Francisco late in the evening. I was staying at an iconic hotel on Nob Hill, one of the highest points of the city. The street was at a gradient of almost 25 degrees and overlooked the city cable car service that trundled all the way up from 4 km below with its quaint bell ringing. This ride was truly magical. Being at the highest point, this corner was windy, picturesque and incredibly beautiful. The Golden Gate Bridge was a perfect backdrop to the bay below.





Colorful Buildings Lining a Street



Historic Buildings, Nob Hill

The Nob Hill houses the swankiest mansions today. It was home to the Big Four of the California Railroad in the 1850s. These large houses belonged to the Nabobs (Nob) of the Railroad and housed the mansions of Stanford, Hopkins, Huntington and Crocker. California Street then became Nob Hill. It was part of the seven hills that originally formed San Francisco. The mansions were destroyed in the earthquake and fire of 1906. The renovated mansions have now been converted into massive hotels. The Huntington mansion owner, the widow of Charles Huntington, donated the entire area to a public children's park, which houses several fountains.



Another Hill - the Russian Hill has the famous Lombard Street, the 'crookedest' street in the city. This was not by chance, either. In the 1920s, when the motor car was an aspirational buy, many of the millionaires here wanted to drive safely. One of the residents suggested the 27 degree gradient too great to drive safely. One of the residents suggested breaking the gradient with a series of turns. The quirky hairpin bends, the red paved street and the colorful flowers on the borders, easily makes this one of the great tourist attractions of San Francisco.



Lombard Street

Historic Traditional Cable Cars



San Francisco is clearly a city of climbs. Never mind the huffing and puffing as you walk up and down the beautiful streets, the Lombard Street, or alongside the iconic cable car ride, all these make it a lovely city to explore. There are a host of small and expensive restaurants and cafes to stop at as you explore the hilly part of the city. Located along the Pacific Ocean, with the cold Labrador Current tempering the climate even in summer, the temperate climate and the wind chill makes it perfect weather for a walking tour of the city.





The next halt was the Golden Gate Bridge, the most photographed bridge in the world. Driving across was a wonderful experience. But what took the cake was the view of the city from the telescope on Ocean Beach, across the Golden Gate. In certain times of the year, the red algae bloom on the bay providing more scenic drama.

Golden Gate Bridge





The Bay is a hidden river that connects the peaceful bay waters to the Pacific Ocean through the Golden Gate creek. At Fisherman's Wharf and Pier 39, there is a whole colony of sea lions barking loudly as they sun themselves on the rock. The cafes, bakeries, eateries and crab and clam chowder stalls all make this huge hit with tourists. Don't forget to visit the Ghirardelli square, the site of the former chocolate factory, which is now an integrated retail and restaurant complex.

Ghirardelli Square



Alcatraz Island

The famed Alcatraz Island 1.5 km into the sea, housing the iconic prison, is fascinating. The dreaded prison was once deemed to be so secure that escape from it was impossible. Yet, till it was closed in 1963, 34 men had escaped. Many of whom were subsequently caught. One of the most famous inmates was Al Capone, the American gangster who attained notoriety during the Prohibition era and was the boss of the infamous Chicago Outfit. I also loved my ferry ride to Sausalito Island for the Sausalito Boardwalk with across the bay views of the city and shops and restaurants run by locals.

Walking along the bay area gave me a sense of déjà vu. Though it was my first trip to San Francisco, I had this surreal feeling that I had been here before. Yes, I had seen these places in the movies. Mrs. Doubtfire, Vertigo, The Princess Diaries and of course, the iconic show of the 1990s - Full House.

When I travelled to San Francisco again, I finally moved away from the Bay area and explored the downtown areas with the iconic churches and parks. Just a stone's throw away from the Hilton Hotel, I loved munching on fresh tuna sandwiches procured from the wayside shacks as I relaxed at the park near the churches.





There are over 500 churches in San Francisco. The Grace Cathedral on Nob Hill too was destroyed in the earthquake and fire of 1906 and rebuilt later. The family of William Henry Crocker donated the land on which their mansions stood to build this cathedral.

Finally, I ended up at the Nob Hill Inn on my second visit and enjoyed the quiet comfort of a clean, pleasant, friendly place that brought back memories of my first grand stay at the Nob Hill hotel on the hill. Someone once said, "There may not be Heaven, but there is San Francisco". How true! ■

Grace Cathedral



# AGRICULTURE TOURISM IN INDIA

**T**he growing awareness about niche tourism, experience tourism and sustainable tourism, and the socio-economic benefits that tourism can bring to economically-challenged sections of society, has resulted in the tourism authorities of some states of India adding ecotourism, agri-tourism and rural tourism to their priority list.

Tourism brochures now highlight the living heritage of food, handicrafts, customs and agriculture, not just grand buildings or beautiful scenery. Many states have schemes or policies that are favorable for agri-tourism entrepreneurs. A growing number of domestic and inbound travellers are now going beyond the Golden Triangle and the Temple Trails for culinary, culture, history, shopping and nature experiences. Speciality accommodations like heritage hotels, farmhouses and homestays are now in trend for weekend travel too.



# HORTICULTURE TOURISM IN MAHARASHTRA

When it comes to food and agriculture tourism, Maharashtra is one of the best models. Each region of the state is known for a specific product that becomes a must-have for a visitor whether it is chikoo in Dahanu, chikki and fudge at Lonawala, strawberries at Mahabaleshwar, wines of Nashik bakery products of Pune, mutton and jaggery of Kolhapur, mangos of Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg, seafood dishes and Konkani products of Sindhudurg or oranges at Nagpur.

At Gholvad near Dahanu, Save Farms is one of the pioneering agri-tourism initiatives of Maharashtra. Started by Prabhakar Save and run by his son Aditya and other family members, the tourism facility at the farm is called Tarpa, named for the musical instrument of the Warli tribal group. You can see Warli art on the walls and tribal artefacts displayed in the property. The accommodations here include the Shetkari Niwas, which was built in 1989 as a two-room guesthouse for farmers who traveled long distances to buy plants from their fruit plant nursery and later was refurbished for tourism.

There are other accommodations like a log hut and a machan. Visitors are

taken on a guided tour of the orchards, nursery, botanically-interesting gardens of medicinal plants and apiary. The guide shows them the rainwater harvesting pond, aquaponics, vermicomposting area, fish farm, solar dehydration techniques and irrigation methods. The meals are made using organic vegetables from the farm and can also include freshly caught fish. Apart from the farm, tourists can also watch mats being woven from coconut fibre, bamboo basket weaving and Warli painting. Tarpa has its own retail space, where vegetables, coconuts, handicrafts and souvenirs are sold. Since chikoo or sapota is Dahanu's top horticultural product, you can buy various food products made using chikoo.

While Dahanu is largely a place for basic farm tourism and educational tours, Nashik has become a luxury destination for wine tourism.



Chikoo Farming, Dahanu



Chikki, Peanuts, Coconut, Cashew Nuts and Jaggery, Lonavala



Jaggery in factory, Kolhapur



Alphonso Mangos, Ratnagiri



Warli Painting



Orange Market, Nagpur



Vineyard at a Winery, Nashik





Sula Vineyards, Nashik

Source: Dr. Anandji Bhargava/Dr. Anandji



Strawberries Farm, Mahabaleshwar



Guests spend on staying in upmarket vineyard properties, tasting wines and buying wines. There are also harvest festivals that draw visitors to come for activities like grape stomping. The Sula Fest is iconic, and taking a leaf from this festival, other vineyards have now designed events to attract tourists. Like the wine festivals of Nashik, the strawberry season in Mahabaleshwar has become a draw for tourists. As you drive from Panchgani to Mahabaleshwar, you can see berry growing areas, where berries are sold or served. The Mapro Gardens near Panchgani has retail outlets selling jams, jellies, ice-creams, crushes, dessert toppings and pickles.

The strawberries, raspberries, mulberries, pineapples, custard apples and oranges grown around Mahabaleshwar are used to make many products. There are also ice-cream and juice retail counters, rose and other flower beds, a cacti hot-house and amusements for children. From February to April, Mahabaleshwar's vendors do brisk business selling fresh strawberries and other fruits, mixed with cream, ice-cream or milkshakes. Even in the big hotels, strawberry ice-creams and fresh fruit desserts are on the menu. Nagpur is known as an orange city. Here, you can buy products made from oranges like Haldiram's Santre ki Barfi.



Orange Barfi, Nagpur



# TEA TOURISM IN THE NORTHEAST



Tea Garden, Assam



Glenburn Tea Estate



A Tea Plantation, Darjeeling

For many years, tea tourism has existed in Darjeeling. Visitors visit the tea plantations and factories like Happy Valley Estate and shop at Nathmul's and other shops for aromatic Darjeeling tea.

By 2005, some of the estate owners began to let out rooms at their properties. One of the finest of these tea resorts, Glenburn Tea Estate offers accommodation in a typical British bungalow with tiled pitch-

roofs, columns, large picture windows and fireplaces. Husna-Tara Prakash told me she was inspired to convert this Burra Bungalow into a deluxe accommodation after a visit to the European vineyards, where families invite guests to see the wine-making process, taste their wines and shop from their little outlets that sell wine and local produce.

Like most heritage restoration initiatives, the conversion of Glenburn into a place that could take guests was a

challenge in ensuring that modernization did not spoil the old-world feel of the estate. Old pieces of furniture had to be restored or junked and replaced, the fireplaces were cleaned and restored, and the bathrooms were modernized keeping the present-day traveller in mind. Each of the four suites has an appropriate name – the Rose Room has floral motifs engraved into rosewood furniture, painted on the drapery, embroidered into bed sheets and

pillowcases, roses in vases, petals in the water, and a view of the Rose Garden. The Planters Suite has old colonial furniture, including an imposing mahogany four-poster bed, a fireplace and a patio. The Butterfly Room is named for its motifs. The Simbong Garden Room overlooks the Simbong Tea division and the forests. The Kanchenjunga Suite has a view of magnificent mountain peaks.

The estate owners grow vegetables, herbs, spices and fruits for the kitchen.

Dinner is a sit-down affair with the old-world ambience of the colonial planters' days. Guests can see the activities at the estate from planting or plucking to tea processing and tea tasting.

Kurseong in Darjeeling district produces some of India's finest teas. The estates here are also part of the tourist map. In the Duars region of West Bengal too, tea tourism has taken root with estates opening accommodations or other facilities for visitors.

A visit to Darjeeling usually combines with Kalimpong, which is a destination for floriculture tourism with nurseries and gardens offering opportunities to view and buy orchids, cacti and seeds. Sikkim is also an excellent destination to visit organic farms and orchid gardens.

In Assam, I stayed at Mancotta Bungalow and Chang Bungalow located within tea estates. During the heritage tea tour, we were introduced to various aspects of tea growing and processing.





Tropical Plants on the Spice Plantations

Like a visit to a tea estate is a quintessential experience of Darjeeling, Goa has become known for its spice gardens that feature in the itinerary of many tourists. Four plantations near Ponda are the most visited. The garden tour begins with an

introductory talk after which you walk through the plantations, which typically have a three-tier terrace system. At the gardens, guides show you the cardamom, vanilla, cinnamon and nutmeg, cashew apples, fruit trees and medicinal plants. Farm workers harvest

areca nuts by swinging Tarzan-style from tree to tree. They can spend hours among the treetops cutting betel nuts with their machetes. The tour usually includes a Goan Hindu lunch. The plantations may also have retail counters, where you can buy ayurvedic

products, herbal medicines, spices and food items.

Further east in the Western Ghats, it is possible to stay in cottages at the 50-acre Dudhsagar plantation. This plantation was started by Ajit Malkarnekar and his wife Doris who is



Spice Farm, Ponda



German by greening 50 acres of barren land, using irrigation, soil building and conservation measures. The land now produces abundant yields of fruits, vegetables, herbs and spices. The cropping pattern is consciously very diverse, the main crops being coconut,

betel nut, cashew and pepper. For tourists, they added a few cottages, a nature trail and a natural water swimming pool. The farm produces ghee, coconut oil, jams, pickles and cashew liquor that can be bought by visitors.



# PLANTATION TOURISM IN KERALA AND TAMIL NADU



Cardamom Hills, Kerala



Tata Tea, Munnar



Tea Plantations, Valparai Forest, Tamil Nadu

**F**rom time immemorial, Kerala is well-known for its spices. The state also has several tea, coffee, rubber, spice, cashew and ayurvedic herb plantations. An increasing number of these plantations are becoming an

integral part of tourism in Kerala. When travelling to the hill destinations of Idukki and Wayanad district, tourists can ask their hotels and resorts to arrange a guided tour of nearby plantations. It is also possible to stay in plantation bungalows at some of these destinations.

75km from Kochi, Philipkutty's farm offers accommodations at their coconut and spice plantation, which is crisscrossed by water channels. Here, you can also have Syrian Christian food prepared by the family. Vanilla County is

a place to stay in a rubber and spice plantation.

One of the most popular destinations for spice tourism is Thekkady in the Cardamom Hills. Since Thekkady and nearby Kumily have an enormous number of hotels, resorts and lodges catering to the tourists visiting the Periyar Tiger Reserve, they have become obvious locations for tours of the plantations that thrive on the slopes of the Western Ghats nearby. The High Range Tea Factory at Puttady, north of Kumily, is a rewarding place to

visit and see the processing of tea from chopping, sifting and fermenting to drying and packing. There are a number of spice plantations near Kumily and also working tea plantations that welcome visitors. Hotels and resorts usually have tie-ups with spice or tea gardens for their guests to visit on a sightseeing tour.

If you want to stay in a plantation, there are many resorts around Kumily that are located in working plantations or have spice gardens. For instance, I visited Shalimar Spice Gardens, which

has accommodations at the edge of a cardamom and pepper estate and stayed at Spice Village, which is a resort with a spice garden.

On the road from Kumily to Munnar, I visited resorts that are set within tea or spice estates. My wife and I had lunch at Carmelia Haven, which has accommodations in the middle of tea and cardamom plantations. Munnar itself is a hill station surrounded by tea-planted slopes. The tea museum here offers an insight into the history and processes of tea planting in the High

Ranges of Munnar. Some of the tea plantations also offer accommodations.

While Munnar is a much-visited hill station, you can take the road north to Valparai in Tamil Nadu, where a few tea estates now offer accommodations. The highlight of these tea estates is the rich wildlife that frequents them.

Valparai is located near Coimbatore, which is also a gateway for visiting the Nilgiris - the hill stations of Ooty and Coonoor are famous for their tea and coffee plantations. You can also visit the cheese factory at Coonoor.



# COFFEE TOURISM IN KARNATAKA



Coffee Plantation,Coorg



Coffee Beans, Chikmagalur

Unlike the hills of Kerala and Tamil Nadu, the Western Ghats of Karnataka are still lesser-known destinations though they offer views of lush green forests, tall mountains, tea

and coffee plantations, and hill destinations with a serene environment. The two main coffee-growing areas are Chikkamagaluru (better-known as Chikmagalur) and Kodagu district also called Coorg. Serai is a luxury resort in a coffee plantation at Chikmagalur.

Flameback Lodges has villas and cottages set in a sprawling coffee estate of Chikkamagaluru. In Kodagu district, one of the success stories is that of the Ramapuram family of Evolve Back. This is a family of planters that grow coffee, rubber,

pepper, cashew and myriad crops. In 1994, the family decided to start a resort at their estate in Chikkana Halli. The resort was earlier named Orange County Coorg with cottage clusters looking out to different agriculture areas growing paddy, coffee or fruits. As the owners

began to develop new properties, Orange County Coorg was rebranded as Evolve Back Coorg. Kodagu district now offers opportunities to stay in plantations, with accommodations ranging from basic homestays in small coffee and cardamom gardens to large resorts.

Tata Group-promoted hospitality major Indian Hotels Company Ltd (IHCL) has entered the farm tourism segment with the brand name Trails and Stays. Their portfolio includes heritage bungalows with Tata Coffee in the coffee plantations of Chikkamagaluru and Kodagu.



# ORCHARD TOURISM IN NORTH INDIA



Tree with Apple in Orchard, Himachal Pradesh



Royal Apples, Himachal Pradesh



Litchi Fruits, Uttarakhand

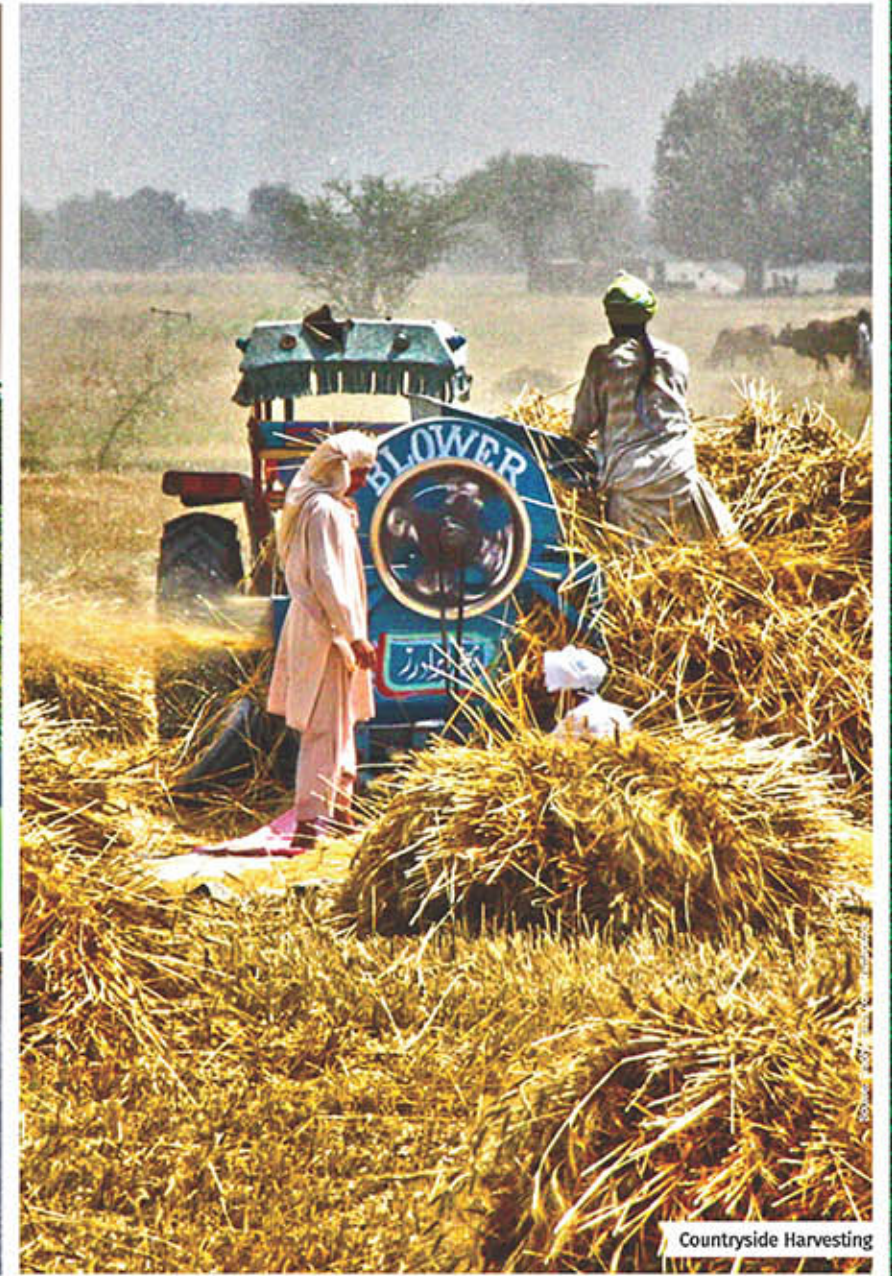
**H**imachal Pradesh offers accommodations in orchards, farms and tea estates. Uttarakhand has also announced its interest in promoting agri-tourism in its hills, where fruits like apple, pear, peach, plum, khumani and walnut are grown in orchards.



# FARM TOURISM IN PUNJAB



Paddy Sowing, Rural Punjab



Countryside Harvesting

**C**itrus County at Hoshiarpur is an agriculture tourism venture with nine luxury tents. Each spacious room within the house features views of either the pool or the lush gar-

den. Each bedroom has a large bed, an attached private bathroom and some sitting space both within the bedrooms and in a lobby immediately outside the rooms. Each of the fully air-conditioned rooms is also equipped with a TV,

wireless broadband internet and oil heaters. The tents are similarly equipped, including attached bathrooms, air conditioning and heating but without television to let guests enjoy the outdoors. The bathrooms are large,

clean and have running hot and cold water as well as rain showers.

Punjab has been traditionally known for delicious home-cooked food, nightly bonfires and hospitality. Guests enjoy fruit plucking, cooking lessons, cycling,

high teas and lunches. An exciting part of the live-in experience is a hands-on exposure to farm life, especially for the city-bred children. Punjab has a very good tourism policy with a farm tourism scheme that gives benefits to farm

accommodation providers.

To promote agriculture tourism in India, there should be a campaign in rural India. This will create engagement and awareness in the world about the rich culture of India. ■



# Shakti Peeth - The Many Forms of Homage to Womanhood



Ambaji Temple, Gujarat

**Y**ou can't travel anywhere in India without stumbling on one or the other ancient Shakti Peeths, temples dedicated with Goddess Shakti, the symbol of woman power. She is associated with wealth, prosperity, good health, anger, love, peace, calm, nurturing and a host of other emotions. In Haridwar's Kankhal Ghat, just off the famous Har ki Pauri on the banks of the mighty Ganges, yagnas or sacrificial offerings in the fire are made at the Sati Ghat.

My efforts to search out the legend of Sati Ghat took me on a mythological trail of mystic proportions.

In Hindu folklore, King Prajapati Daksha, the son of Brahma, had a daughter, Sati, who was in love with the Lord Shiva. Her thoughts were only for the man who led a spartan life in the

remote Himalayas and she wanted to become Lord Shiva's wife.

But her father, King Daksha, was vehemently against any alliance with an uncouth ascetic, residing deep in the bowels of the Himalayas. In desperation, the princess abandoned the palace and the luxurious life of ease and comfort. Instead, she embarked on a mission of penance to the jungle, in an effort to attract the attention of Lord Shiva.

Her penance was sincere and absolute. Lord Shiva became aware of the young princess and of her utter devotion to him. He relented and agreed to marry her.

One day, King Daksha organized a grand Yajna, a ritual performed before a sacred fire. He invited all the gods and sages for the sacred ritual, but snubbed his son-in-law by excluding him from the

invitation. Later, when Sati became aware of her father's action, she was deeply ridden with guilt. On the day of the Yagna, she marched towards the palace to demand an explanation from her father for the insult bestowed on her husband.

But her father's anger was not satiated. When confronted by his daughter, he let loose a volley of vile insults directed at her husband, Lord Shiva. Taken aback by her father's unrepentant belligerence and unable to bear her distress, the mortified young princess threw herself into the blazing Yagna, ending her life.

When the news of his wife's demise reached Lord Shiva, he was apoplectic with rage. Deeply stricken by his wife's death, Lord Shiva tenderly lifted his wife's body from the fire. Overcome with

grief and in blind rage, Lord Shiva started to perform tandav, the dance of destruction to destroy the universe.

Shiva began to perspire with rage. Where his perspiration fell on earth, Virabhadra was born. Shiva then directed Virabhadra to King Daksha's palace to wreak vengeance by destroying his palace and killing King Daksha in the process.

Alarmed at Shiva's path of destruction, and fearing for the future of the earth, Lord Vishnu, the preserver of the universe, using the Sudharshan Chakra, cut Sati's lifeless body into 51 pieces. The parts of the body were then scattered across the earth. All the 51 places, where the body parts fell, is now consecrated as a Shakti Peeth and is a pilgrimage center for believers.

Sr. No.	Shakti Peeth	Place	Body Part
1	Amarnath: Shakti Mayamaya	Jammu & Kashmir	Throat
2	Attahasa : Shakti Phullara	West Bengal	Lips
3	Bahula: Shakti Bahula	West Bengal	Left arm
4	Bakreshwar : Shakti Mahishardini	West Bengal	Centre portion between eyebrows
5	Bhairavparvat: Shakti Avanti	Ujjain	Elbow
6	Bhavanipur: Shakti Aparna	Bangladesh	Left ankle
7	Gandaki: Shakti Gandaki Chandi	Nepal	Forehead
8	Janasthaan: Shakti Bhramari	Nasik	Chin
9	Hinglaj: Shakti Kottari	Balochistan, Pakistan	Top of the head
10	Jayanti: Shakti Jayanti	Bourbhag village, Bangladesh	Left Thigh
11	Yogeshwari: Shakti Yogeshwari	Khulna District, Bangladesh	Palms & Soles
12	Jwala: Shakti Ambika/Siddhida	Kangra Valley, Himachal Pradesh	Tongue
13	Kalighat: Shakti Kalika	Kolkata, West Bengal	Right Toes
14	Kalmadhav: Shakti Kali	Kalmadhav, Amarkantak	Left Buttock
15	Kamakhya: Shakti Kamakhya	Guwahati, Assam	Genitals
16	Kankalitala: Shakti Devgarbha	Birbhum District, West Bengal	Pelvis
17	Kanyashram: Shakti Sravani	Kanyakumari, Tamil Nadu	Spine
18	Chamudeswari: Shakti Jaya Durga	Chamundi Hills, Mysuru	Both Ears
19	Kireet: Shakti Vimla	Murshabad district, West Bengal	Crown
20	Ratnavali: Shakti Kumari	Khanakul, West Bengal	Right Shoulder
21	Trisrota: Shakti Bhraamari	Jalpaiguri, West Bengal	Left Leg
22	Manasa: Shakti Dakshayani	Tibet, China	Right Hand
23	Manibandh: Shakti Gayatri	Ajmer, Rajasthan	Wrists
24	Mithila: Shakti Uma	Bihar	Left shoulder
25	Nainativu: Shakti Indrakshi	Nallur, Sri Lanka	Anklets
26	Guhyeshwari: Shakti- Mahashira	Kathmandu, Nepal	Both Knees
27	Chandranath: Shakti Bhawani	Chittagong, Bangladesh	Right Arm
28	Panch Sagar: Shakti Varahi	Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh	Lower Teeth
29	Prabhas: Shakti Chandrabhaga	Junagarh, Gujarat	Stomach
30	Prayag: Shakti Lalita	Prayag, Uttar Pradesh	Finger
31	Kurukshetra: Shakti Savitri	Kurukshetra, Haryana	Ankle Bone
32	Maihar: Shakti Shivani	Satna district, Madhya Pradesh	Right Breast
33	Nandikeshwari: Shakti Nandini	Birbhum district West Bengal,	Necklace
34	Vishweshwari: Shakti Rakini	Rajamundry, Andhra Pradesh	Cheeks
35	Shivaharkaray: Shakti Mahisha-Mardini	Karachi, Pakistan	Eyes
36	Shondesh: Shakti Narmada	Amarkantak, Madhya Pradesh	Right Buttock
37	Sri Sailam: Shakti Sundari	Tripurantakam, Andhra Pradesh	Right Anklet
38	Sri Shail: Shakti Maha-Lakshmi	Jaunpur Village, Bangladesh	Neck
39	Shuchi: Shakti Narayani	Suchindram, Tamil Nadu	Upper Teeth
40	Shikarpur: Shakti Sugandha	Barisal town, Bangladesh	Nose
41	Shakti Tripur Sundari	Tripura	Right Foot
42	Ujjani: Shakti Mangal Chandika	Burdwan district, West Bengal	Right Wrist
43	Shakti Vishalakshi	Varanasi	Earrings
44	Vibash: Shakti Kapalini	Medinipur district, West Bengal	Left Ankle
45	Shakti Ambika	Bharatpur, Rajasthan	Left Toes
46	Vrindavan: Shakti Uma	Uttar Pradesh	Ringlets of Hair
47	Shakti Tripurmalini	Jalandhar, Punjab	Left Breast
48	Ambaji: Shakti Amba	Gujarat	One part of the Heart
49	Shakti Jai Durga	Jharkhand	Second part of the Heart
50	Danteshwari: Shakti Danteshwari	Chhattisgarh	Tooth
51	Biraj: Shakti Vimla	Bhubaneswar	Navel





Tara Tarini Temple, Berhampur



Kamakhya Temple, Guwahati

Thus each Shakti Peeth has a part of the body associated with it. Legend recognizes four major Shakti Peeths - Tara Tarini near Berhampur, Bimala inside the Jagannath Temple in Puri, Kamakhya near Guwahati and Dakshina Kalika in Kolkata.

Amarnath Shakti Peeth, located in Jammu & Kashmir, is associated with the throat. The Shakti Peeth located in Bhairav Pparvat is associated with the upper lip. The Shakti Peeth near the

bank of Gandaki River in Nepal is associated with the forehead. The site where Sati had died is today known as Satikund. It is situated in Kankhal, Haridwar.

Of the 51 Shakti Peeths, 38 are in India, 5 in Bangladesh, 3 in Nepal, 2 in Pakistan, 1 in Bhutan, 1 in Sri Lanka and 1 in Tibet.

As a result of this worship of the many forms of womanhood and emotions associated with it, women

have always been held in high esteem in the Indian subcontinent. A woman's role has been seen as supporting family life.

The Vedas had always referred to women as dharma patni - one who promotes and preserves the rightful conduct of life. Reverence to women was manifested in festivals such as Navratri, Durga Puja and Kali Puja. It was the mother who stayed with the children. It was the wife who cooked food and awaited her husband's return. It was the

mother who held the fabric of family life together. And also the one who fought against injustice.

Women were always held in high regard in India from ancient times. Even today, in the states of Meghalaya, Assam, Kerala and Karnataka, the matrilineal systems of society prevail. Of the matrilineal system in Kerala Manu S. Pillai in his brilliantly written book, The Ivory Throne, writes "..... Kerala women enjoyed a position of singular

importance, not least due to its matrilineal system of inheritance....." It is a practice that comes down from times immemorial.

Clearly, the grief of Goddess Sati, and

the rage of Lord Shiva translated into the 51 Shakti Peeths scattered across the length and breadth of the Indian subcontinent, in a reverential recognition of the strength of womanhood. ■

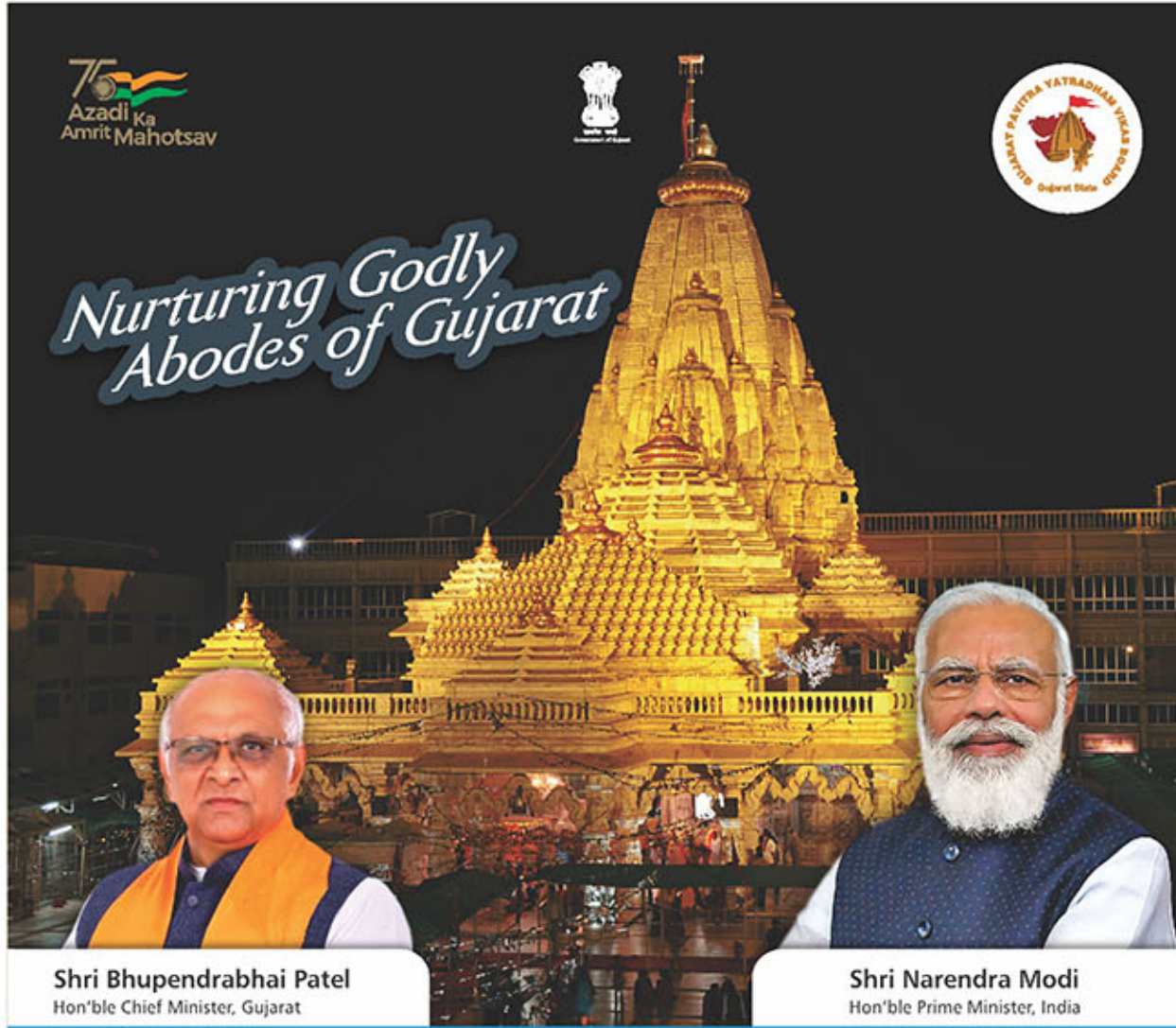


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Gujarat Pavitra Yatradham Vikas Board works towards promotion of pilgrimage destinations of Gujarat. The Board carries out activities for the development of basic infrastructure and tourist facility at the godly destinations of Gujarat.

Words by: VISHAY KALP





75  
Azadi Ka  
Amrit Mahotsav



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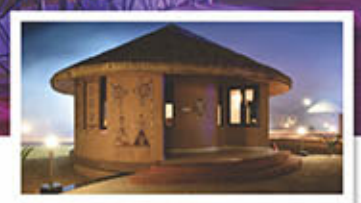
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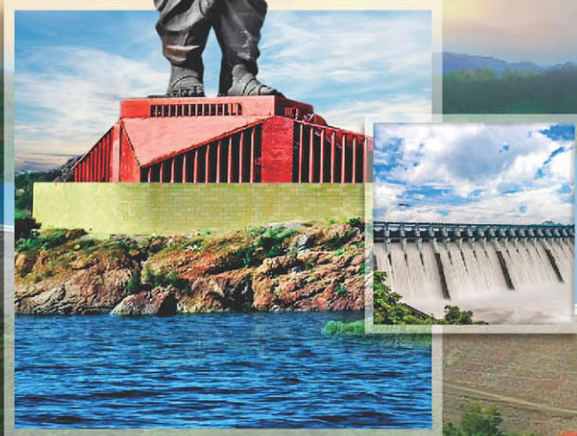
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