

TOURIOSITY®

T R A V E L M A G

Adventure
Touriosity



Scuba Diving around the world
Hiking and trekking across Japan
A pre-teen's backpacking adventure
Exploring the 'End of the World'

*In search
of the
Adrenaline
Rush*

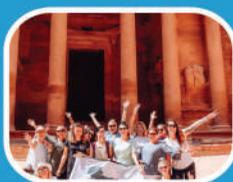
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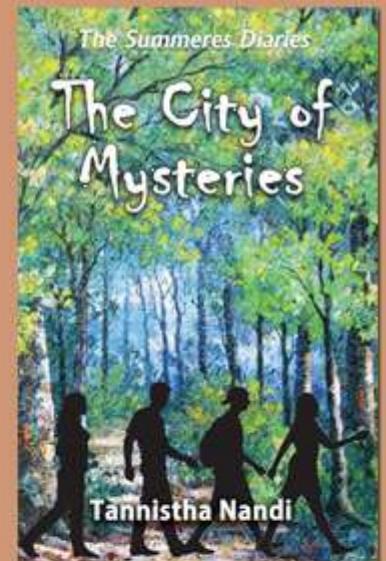
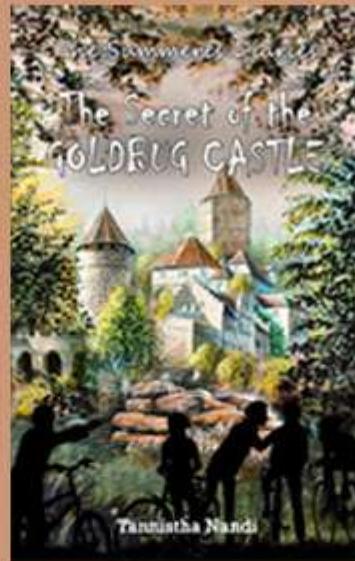


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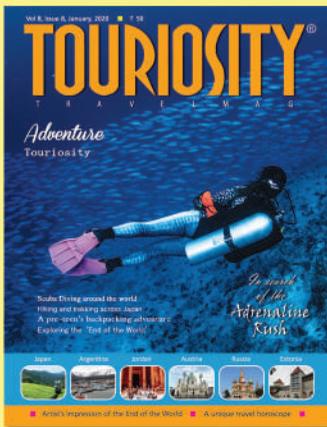
The Summeres Diaries
The Secret of the
Goldbug Castle;
The City of
Mysteries

by *Tannistha Nandi*



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**Touriosity Travelmag
January 2020 Issue**

Dear Reader,

If you would like to share your memorable experiences with us, please feel free to contact us with your write ups, articles, anecdotes, photos and others.

Good pictures will be acknowledged and published in the Reader's Click section. For the Travel Humour section, you can send us any travel related funny photos or sketches.

For more about us, visit our website: www.touriositytravel.com

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Scuba diving in Jordan

Photo:

Girls That Scuba

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The number of travellers preferring to go for adventure sport is on the rise worldwide. More and more tourists are also adding some adrenaline pumping activities to their regular holidays. No wonder, that destinations are adding new adventure activity options and more places are coming up on the map with extreme adventure sports. Over the years Touriosity has promoted adventure tourism and physical activity, and needless to say, these developments make us happy. This is our third issue dedicated to Adventure Tourism and it has interesting stories of scuba diving, hiking, backpacking and travelling to the end of the world.

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Genting Highlands K.S. Chinese Temple Batu Caves Patongjaya



They say adventure begins at the end of the roads you know. That is such an apt definition of adventure! If you have ever taken that decision to travel beyond the roads known, you know you are an adventurer at heart. And our readers would be glad to know that globally the number of travellers preferring to take that road not travelled, is on the rise. As per a United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) report adventure tourism around the world is growing. The love for such kind of tourism transcends barriers of age, gender, income and geographical location.

Adventure tourism can be of different types and can range from soft adventure to extreme adventure. The softer version includes activities like connecting with local communities, exploring lesser known places that are off the beaten path, horse riding, road trips, backpacking, cycling, boating and so on. The extreme adventure activities can include activities like rock climbing, hiking, mountaineering, scuba diving, cross-country paragliding, bungee jumping, river rafting and so on. The type and difficulty level that one chooses for adventure largely varies from person to person. While some people may look exclusively for extreme adventure sports for that rush of adrenaline, for some, setting out on the first solo trip, or the first long drive with a 'chai' on the highway might qualify as an adventure to remember.

We at Touriosity have regularly brought to our readers articles on different types of adventure tourism in our various issues, even apart from the two past issues themed on adventure tourism. This is because the readers of Touriosity identify it as a magazine that promotes solo trips, backpacking and physical activity, thereby motivating them to increase their level of confidence and to strive to explore new and unknown places and attractions.

While I have never been an extreme sports aficionado, I am definitely an adventurer at heart. Keeping in tune with my desire to add new experiences in life, I recently took part in some adventure activities during my recent visit to Brunei. To start with, a solo trip by a female traveller to a country like Brunei raised many eyebrows. But I have always preferred off beat destinations to the more common ones; so I wanted to explore this exotic destination in the Borneo Island. While in Brunei, I discovered the tiny nation to be a paradise for adventure enthusiasts. The virgin rainforests that are home to beautiful waterfalls where you can have a natural fish pedicure and the dense mangroves which are home to the rare long-nosed Proboscis monkeys are things that remain to be explored by the real adventurers at heart. Needless to mention, I loved the narrow longboat rides through the rainforests and the speedboat ride across the mangroves. I also undertook a cross-country road trip there during the course of which I could visit pristine but deserted beaches and quaint towns and countryside as also have a closer look at the lifestyle of the local people. A chance to cook bamboo chicken on wood-fire under the instructions of locals in a tribal village in the interiors of the forests was another experience that I would cherish for a long time to come.

In this adventure issue, for a change, we have not included any Indian destination. Instead we dedicated the entire issue to four other corners of the world. The four articles are quite different from one another, and each one brings a unique adventure to our readers. These are stories of all-women scuba diving in the Middle East, a woman's solo hiking across the forests and mountains of Japan in treacherous weather, an artist's trip to the end of the world and a twelve year old girl's backpacking across Europe. All these stories are right from the heart and fresh from experience. I hope our readers will enjoy reading through them. Do send us your feedback at ttnmag.english@gmail.com

Until then, happy adventuring!

Rupanjana De
Rupanjana De

AN APPEAL TO TOURISTS

Being an adventurer at heart is good, but in an attempt to experience the unthinkable, or to earn accolades in instalife, one must not forget the basic safety issues. While going for an adventure activity it is important to take proper precautions as to personal safety, protection gear, reliability of service providers, weather conditions, health and so on. We must remember that prevention is always better than cure. LET'S BE RESPONSIBLE TOURISTS!

To make your reading through TOURIOSITY TRAVELMAG better, here's presenting a quick glance at the various sections and features in the magazine.



DESTINATION

It introduces the readers to various destinations in India with an emphasis on at least one destination from each region. It provides an in-depth information on the locations. In addition, there is also handy tourist information to help our readers plan ahead of trips.



AN ARTIST'S IMPRESSION

A travelling artist makes it to faraway lands and brings memories in the form of impressive water colour paintings. This section is a visual treat and interesting to read at the same time.



FEATURE

Here we bring to our readers an article based on the theme of the issue not necessarily focusing on travelling or travel information.



MEMOIRS OF A BACKPACKER

A new adventure every time in an entirely new place across the globe by a solo female backpacker. We follow the locals she meets, the unusual things she comes across, the surprises she gets and the problems she faces in her journeys with a backpack across the world.



TRAVELOGUE

In this section we bring travel experiences of one of our readers from popular places around the world.



GLOBETROTTER'S DIARY

This section explores the world of a globetrotter, whose passion is to travel, travel and travel more. It brings to readers unique facts and information from remote corners of the world.



COUNTRYSCAPE / CITYSCAPE

Here we introduce a new country / city each time. We bring to our readers facts and photos of people, culture, locales, tourist places, food and traditions of a country / city. Our aim is to take our readers on a magical journey of an unseen land.



PHOTO TRAVELOGUE

Here we bring to our readers a travelogue in photos.



PHOTO FEATURE

In photo feature, we cover the theme of a particular issue in photographs from one of our readers.



SNAPSHOT

This section is an ideal one for quick browsing. It provides interesting information from across the globe with a focus on the theme of the issue.



AT A GLANCE

A quick look at a destination. Here, we bring to our readers locations from the lesser beaten paths in otherwise popular touristy regions.



POINT OF VIEW

Here we bring to our readers useful articles with offbeat content. The idea is to give you the stimulus for thinking. It covers important issues that are in some way connected to travel and tourism.



ADVENTURE

We present here stories of unique adventures undertaken by our readers in some part of the world with a focus on the issue theme.



MOUNTAINEERING / TREKKING

This section focuses solely on trekking and mountaineering adventures across the world.

CONTENTS

Scuba diving in Jordan



Scuba diving is one of the most favourite adventure sport options around the world. This is not only good as a physical activity, it also increases your concern about the environment, especially those effecting the marine life. Scuba diving is becoming more and more preferred amongst women, of all ages and sizes worldwide.

In this guest article, Sarah Richard, the founder of 700,000 members strong Girls That Scuba shares her story and tells us how this activity has changed the lives of many women.

Backpacking Across Europe

Touriosity has time and again published interesting articles about destinations across Europe. This article is a little different from all those. Written from the perspective of a twelve year old girl who undertook a trip across six countries in Europe with her mother, this article is a narrative of her first backpacking experience. The article brings to readers important information intertwined with witty humour of the young backpacker and author Tannistha Nandi.

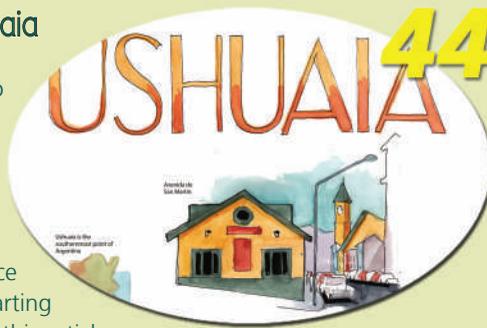


Hiking across Japan

This article by Tamar Valkenier is about her courageous attempt at hiking solo across Japan past forests and mountains along an old hiking trail in the middle of a treacherous weather. In the story she recounts her experience of hiking and trekking a total of 300 kilometers in three weeks across the eroded and 'not so well' maintained hiking trail and her encounters with the local people and culture on the way.

Artist's Impression of Ushuaia

Located on the Tierra del Fuego archipelago on the southernmost tip of South America, Ushuaia is a town in Argentina, which is often referred to as the "End of the World". Surrounded by the Beagle Channel, it is the last piece of land on earth and is the starting point of any trip to Antarctica. In this article Spanish watercolour artist Joaquin Gonzalez Dorao has beautifully captured the place in his bold brush strokes and minutely narrated his trip there.



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Why More Women Should Consider Scuba Diving

Guest Article by Sarah Richard





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It's fair to say that scuba is slowly but surely becoming a decreasingly male dominated activity and I think we can attribute the increasing female interest to numerous factors, which I hope that as awareness of diving and the Girls That Scuba communities continues to grow, will mean that more women will feel encouraged to try and contribute to the industry.

Why More Women Should Consider Scuba Diving?

Empowering females all over the world Sarah Richard, Founder of the world's largest all-female scuba community tells us why more women should consider the sport.

As the bridge between male and female scuba divers tightens, with 32% of the diving industry made up of female 'fun' divers, instructors, underwater photographers, tech divers, activists, marine

conservationists and even those who catalogue and explore shipwrecks, it has been amazing to see more and more women coming together as an ever-expanding community of underwater lovers, supported every step of the way by my passion-project-turned-global-business, Girls That Scuba.

Girls That Scuba is the world's largest all-female community aimed at women passionate about scuba diving. I instigated the community in October 2016 to inspire more women to consider the

sport, when working as a Divemaster (and the only female member of staff!) on a live-aboard in Micronesia. Now our community is 700,000 members-strong, with members in nearly every country in the world; welcoming everyone from experienced scuba instructors and full-time ocean activists, through to the courageous, the curious and those

1. A female diver holds up the banner of Girls that Scuba under water;
2. Rich diversity of marine life experienced during scuba diving.



DESTINATION JORDAN

who have never even put on a scuba mask.

It's fair to say that scuba is slowly but surely becoming a decreasingly male dominated activity and I think we can attribute the increasing female interest to numerous factors, which I hope that as awareness of diving and the Girls That Scuba communities continues to grow, will mean that more women will feel encouraged to try and contribute to the industry.

First and foremost, scuba diving is incredibly empowering for women. Not only does diving push you out of your comfort zone, (and for most of us takes a certain amount of courage to face the fear of breathing under the water!) but there is still the factor of breaking through that proverbial 'boys club' mentality.





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It's fairly recent that brands have even started making diving equipment specifically for women, and that wetsuit companies have begun making wetsuits bigger than a size 12! That's really shocking when you consider that the average UK female is a size 16.

Feeling comfortable in body image, size and shape, along with simply receiving respect from male divers are just some

of the very real challenges that women have to face when considering getting under water; not to mention certain obvious cultural and religious barriers unique to being a female diver, which is part of the reason I set up Girls That Scuba, offering a space for women to come together to discuss challenges and obstacles on being a female in a male-dominated industry – and it's in being part of this movement that is incredibly empowering.

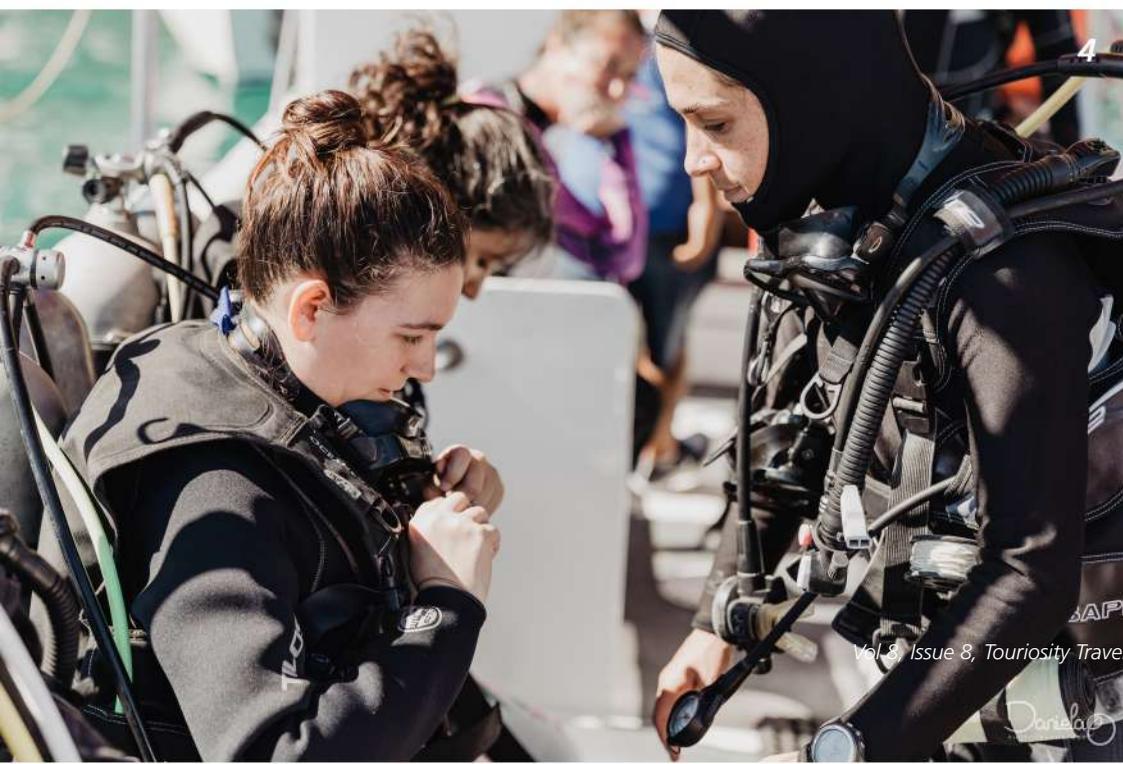
Of course, it's not all negative news. As well as the 700,000-strong Girls That Scuba sisterhood, Dive certification agencies like PADI are also doing their bit, with 2020 marking the sixth annual Women's Dive Day where fearless females all over the world can feel a sense of accomplishment, pride with discounted dives, opportunities to see the world from a new perspective and to make new friendships.

Another obvious benefit of diving, is that it tends to take us to beautiful sun-kissed corners of the world, where you can expect to find idyllic beaches and islands, surrounded by crystal clear waters just begging to be explored. And if you are among the many solo female travellers 'wanderlusting' their way around the globe, which is pretty empowering in itself, coming together as part of a diving community is an amazing way to not only see unexplored parts of the world – but to find friends to voyage with in the process.

Scuba diving certainly takes travellers off the beaten path, and over-time will likely govern the types of trips you choose to book – with something for everyone.

For example, holiday makers looking for some luxury are

1. Cheerful scuba divers before going for the dive;
2. Group of female scuba divers under water;
3. Girls That Scuba is a community of 700,000 women scuba diving enthusiasts;
4. Putting on the scuba diving gear before diving.



4



1



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4

...there are also some amazing health benefits associated with diving. While you might enjoy the sensation of feeling weightless as you move through water during a dive, but due to the waters' resistance your muscles work harder than they do out of water; so the more you dive and swim, the more your muscles lengthen, build strength and develop endurance as well as flexibility.

going to love the diving opportunities in The Maldives, while those newer to the sport might even see a scuba dedicated trip as a perfect opportunity to learn.

Every year Girls That Scuba runs numerous dive holidays to the Red Sea Jordan, and this trip in particular is a favourite among newer divers as there is a great balance between land and underwater excursions, the sites we dive at are accessible to all levels – and everything in terms of equipment is taken care of, meaning that the girls on the trip can relax and enjoy the ride.

More experienced divers are likely to take themselves off to places like the Flores, Komodo Island or Raja Ampat during this year – all located in the lesser trodden paths of Indonesia; and those with specialist diving skills will love the likes of diving with sharks in Costa Rica or cave diving in the cenotes of Mexico! In short,

scuba presents wannabe mermaids with an inspiring lifelong bucket list of incredible destinations, which once you give diving a try, you'll likely be itching to tick off.

Something else that I'm passionate about when it comes to diving are the environmental benefits. It's impossible not to want to make a difference to our seas once you've experienced the connection scuba diving gives you to the ocean. Being surrounded by marine life has definitely made me, along with many of the other women in our conscious community, make much better daily decisions which support future of our oceans and seas.

For example, we're becoming increasingly aware of the consequences that single-use plastic has on the ocean, but that awareness is heightened when you're physically collecting plastic from the ocean on a dive so that it can be recycled or disposed of



It's impossible not to want to make a difference to our seas once you've experienced the connection scuba diving gives you to the ocean. Being surrounded by marine life has definitely made me, along with many of the other women in our conscious community, make much better daily decisions which support future of our oceans and seas.

properly. In fact, it was after witnessing first-hand the devastating amount of plastic ending up in our oceans and on our shorelines that inspired me to create A Waste Free World, an online shop with plastic-education blog offering a wide range of plastic-free alternatives to everyday beauty, baby and bathroom brands to simplify sustainable shopping and make going plastic-free a little less daunting – all in a bid to save our planet!

What's more, should you take your div-

ing experience to Advanced Open Water level or beyond, in which case you can further your qualifications by booking ecology focused courses, like Coral Propagation, where you can give back to the ocean by 'planting' new reefs, or the 'Megafauna' Weeks where you can learn how we can support the ecology for the seas' 'gentle giants' such as the whales, the sharks and the manta rays.

Finally, there are also some amazing health benefits associated with diving. While you might enjoy the sensation of

feeling weightless as you move through water during a dive, but due to the waters' resistance your muscles work harder than they do out of water; so the

1. Female scuba divers;
2. Scuba divers posing for photo under water;
3. Another group click under water;
4. Coming close to a group of dolphins during scuba diving;
5. Manta Ray at a distance;
6. A giant manatee;
7. Diving along with a Manta Ray;
8. A crocodile under water.



1



2

more you dive and swim, the more your muscles lengthen, build strength and develop endurance as well as flexibility.

Steady, regular breathing is essential when diving to conserve and optimise your air consumption. This inevitably has a positive impact on your parasympathetic nervous system, thereby reducing the heart rate and calming the mind.

In addition to the above, as mentioned earlier, most dive destinations tend to include traveling to warmer parts of the world. This brings with it a healthy dose of sunshine - which can only do great things for your body, mind and soul.

Whether you're brand new to diving and are in need of advice, looking fellow females to dive with, hoping to take your skill set from recreational diver to studying the likes of biodiversity, or planning the trip of a lifetime by coming with us on dedicated diving retreat, I'd encourage you to join the rest of the women making waves in the industry at Girls That Scuba.

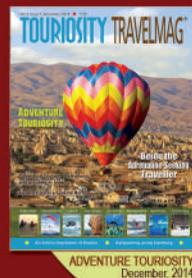
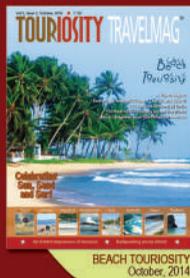
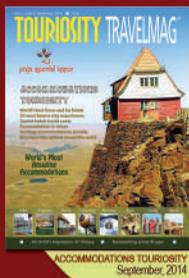
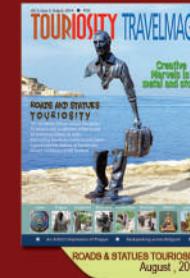
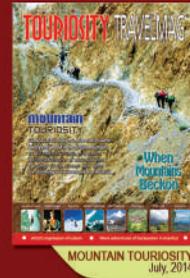
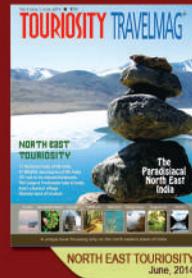
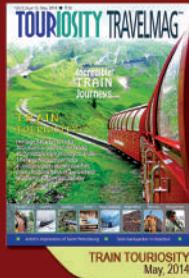
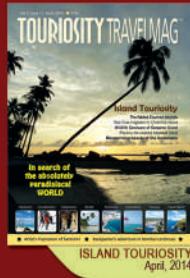
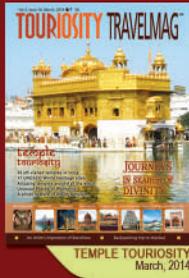
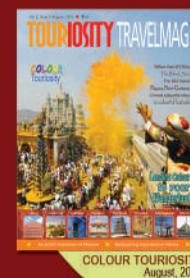
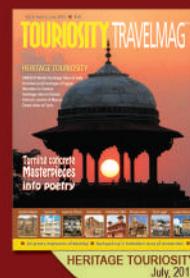
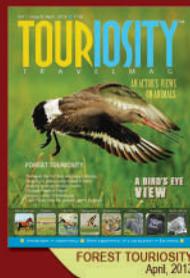
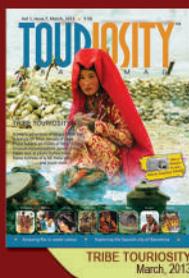
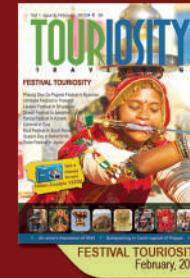
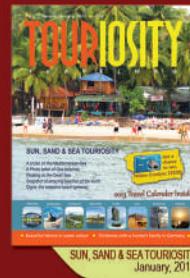
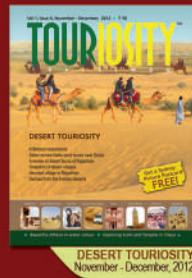
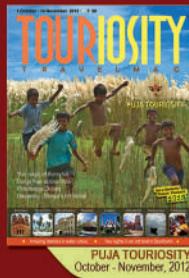
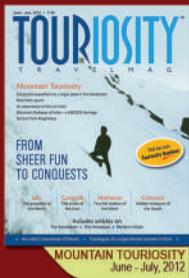
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1. Group of female scuba divers posing in front of the treasury at Petra;
 2. A colourful giant fish;
 3. Sarah Richard, founder of Girls That Scuba.



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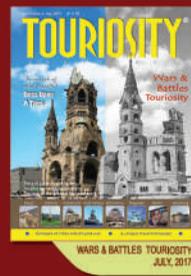
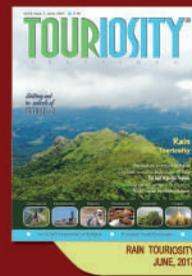
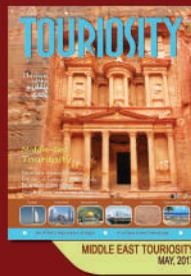
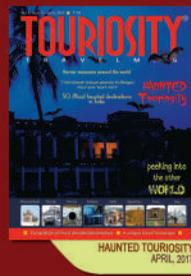
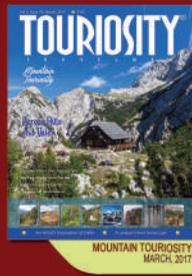
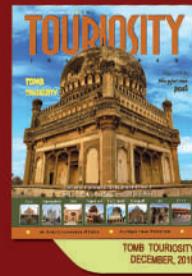
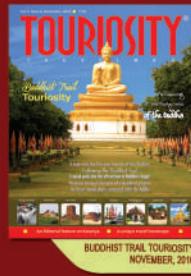
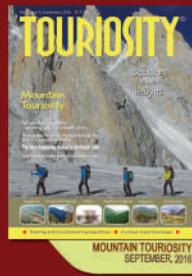
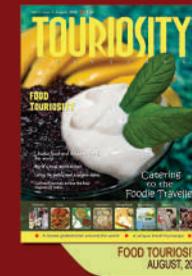
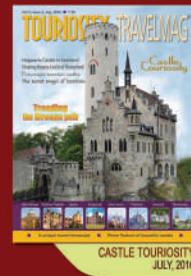
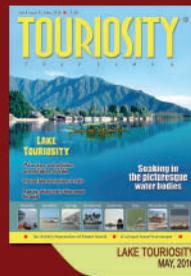
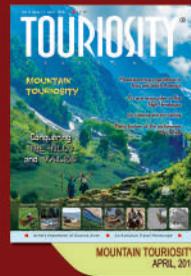
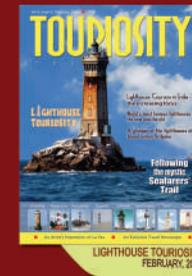
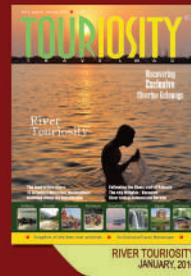
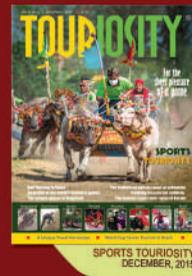
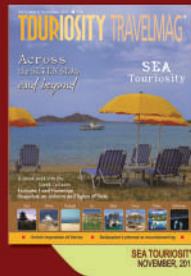
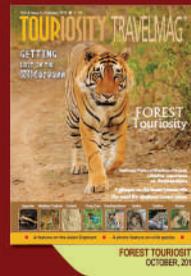
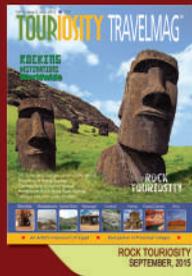
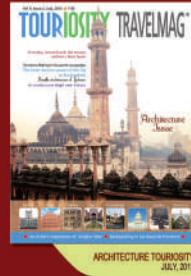
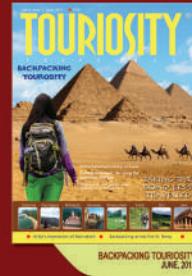
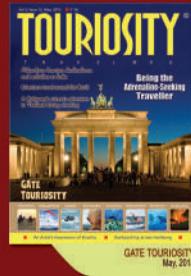


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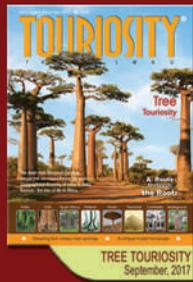


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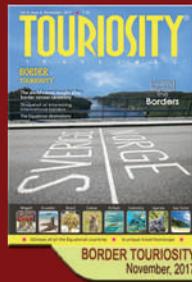
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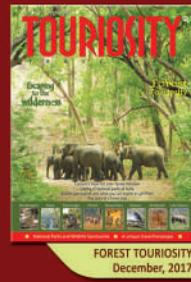
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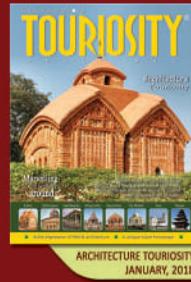
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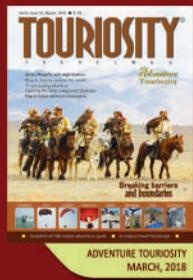
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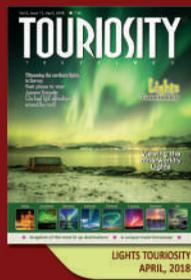
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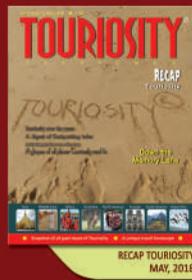
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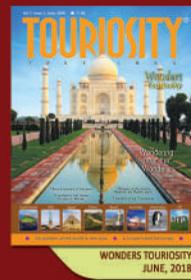
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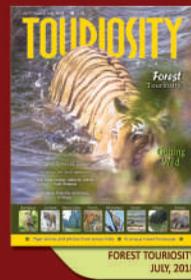
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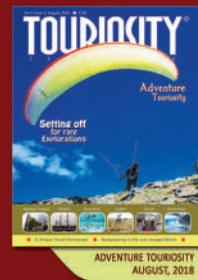
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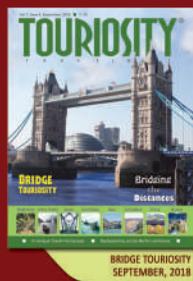
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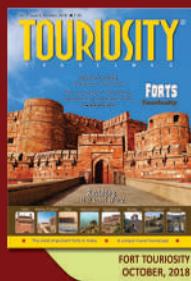
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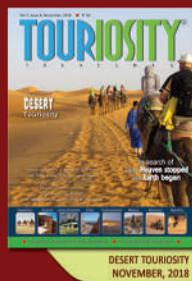
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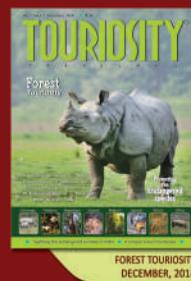
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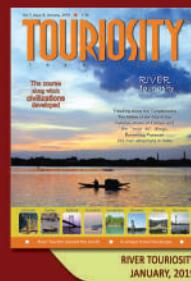
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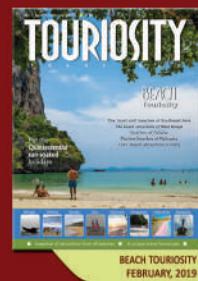
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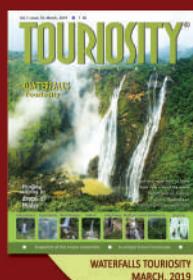
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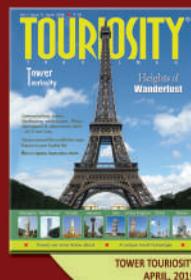
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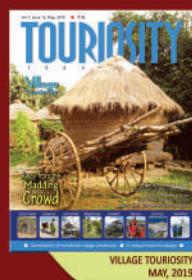
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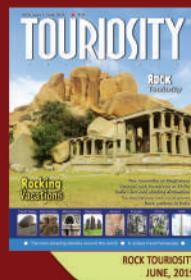
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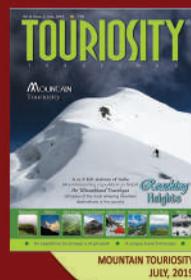
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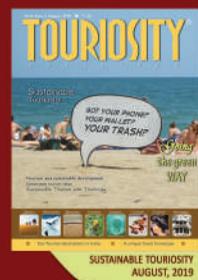
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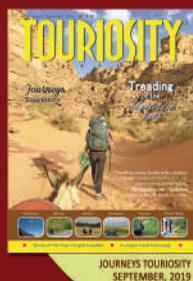
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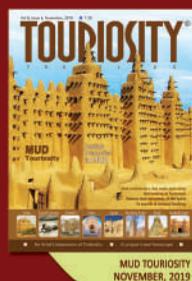
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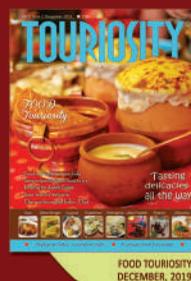
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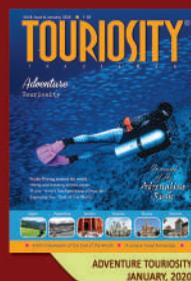
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Backpacking across Europe

by Tannistha Nandi





I think it would be fair to say that it all started with a cancelled wedding. A German friend of my mother was planning to marry his Polish girlfriend, and the wedding was being held in the heart of Warsaw's iconic Old Town. We received an invitation to the grand occasion; and needless to say, we were all thrilled. But as the day drew closer my father decided to stay back due to professional commitments. My mother, being the travel-aholic that she has always been, thought that while we were there in Europe for the wedding, we might as well make the best out of it. So she booked flight tickets, tours and accommodation for the two of us in the four neighbouring countries as well. Since my mother loves backpacking and I on the other hand never got to experience it, she wanted this to be my first backpacking trip. I was very excited because the concept really appealed to me. I love adventures; and for some reason, I was certain that this was the start of a new one. It was a delight to think that we would be visiting five countries in a span of eight days!

As luck would have it, just a few days

before we were about to set off for the wedding, it was, very unexpectedly, called off. We had such high hopes for the event, that we were despaired. But the tickets had already been booked, and we couldn't do anything about it; so we decided to make the best out of a bad situation. I mean, wedding or no wedding; we were still visiting five countries.

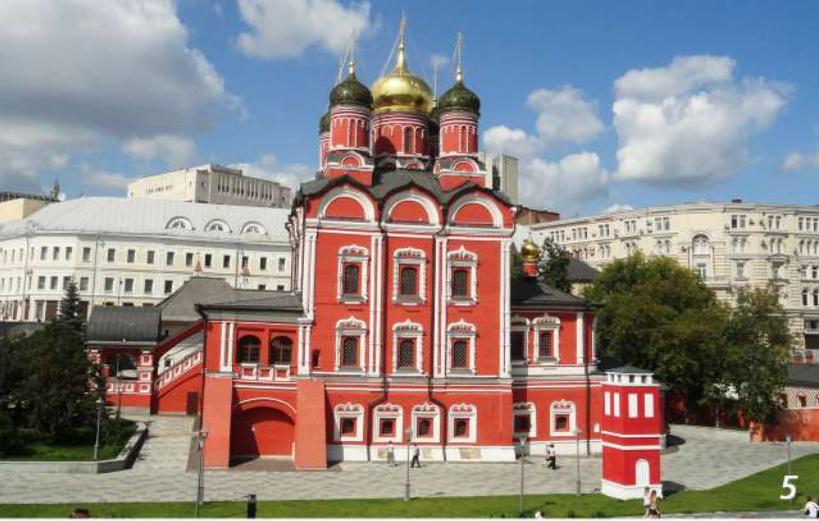
The cheapest airfare deal was from Aeroflot, the Russian airline company. That's how we decided to add a stay at Moscow.

Our trip to Russia was via Delhi. Even at the airport, I could barely stop my excitement from overflowing. It had always been my dream to go on a trip like this, with my mother, my best companion by my side. And because of that, on the trip to Delhi, even though we had initially intended to take a nap because it was late at night; I chatted unstopably with her the whole night. But fortunately, the flight duration from Delhi to Moscow was of a solid eight hours, and we managed to sleep enough. The flight reached

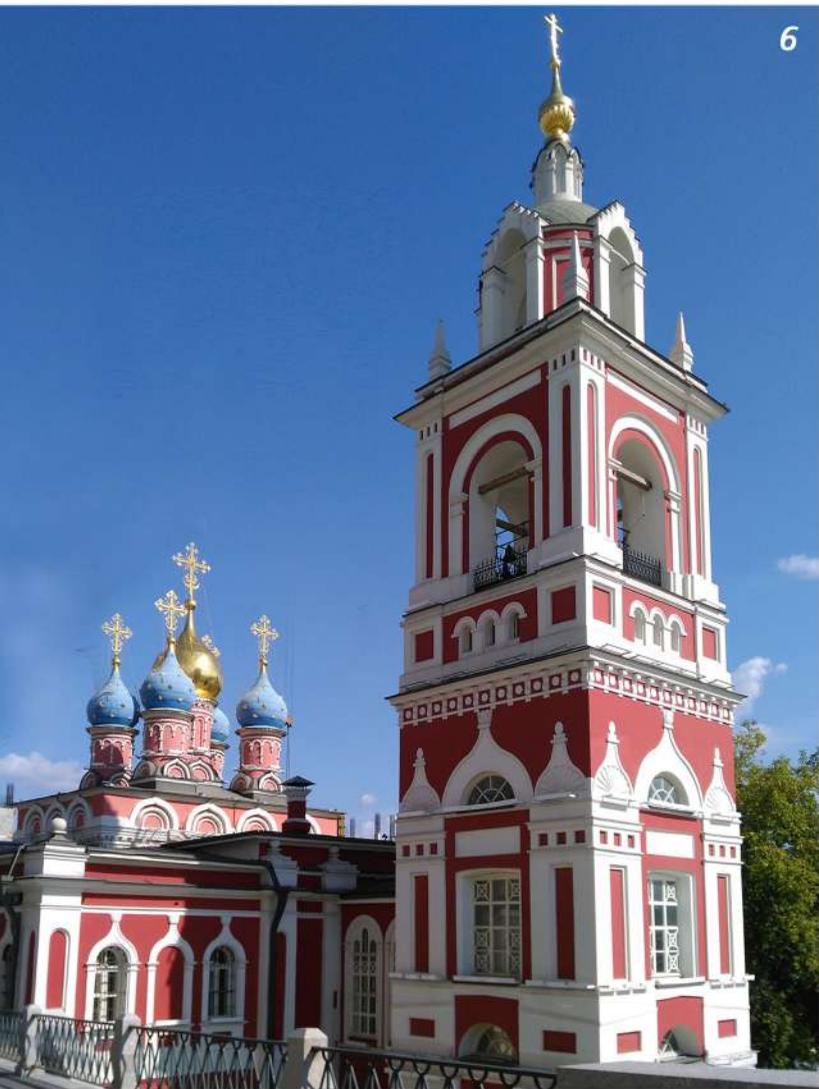
the Moscow airport in the wee hours of the morning, and after collecting our luggage, we set off in the tedious quest of finding the youth hostel where our beds were booked for the next two days.

First we travelled by bus, then by subway, then a long while on foot, and then finally, when we realised we were tired and incapable of walking anymore, took a taxi to our destination. Finding a destination in a foreign country is a hard task, especially when half the pedestrians don't understand your language; but finally, we made it. My mother could understand and speak a little bit of Russian, which was a good help too.

After we reached the hostel, we didn't immediately go up to our beds, because we had a long list of places to visit that day. We kept our luggage in the store room and went to change out of our airport clothes. We entered one of the two restrooms and I started to change inside the small room at one corner. After I had done, I waited patiently outside that small room for my mother to finish. But then, imagine my horror, when I saw a GROWN MAN, emerging from one of the showers. It was then that terror struck me



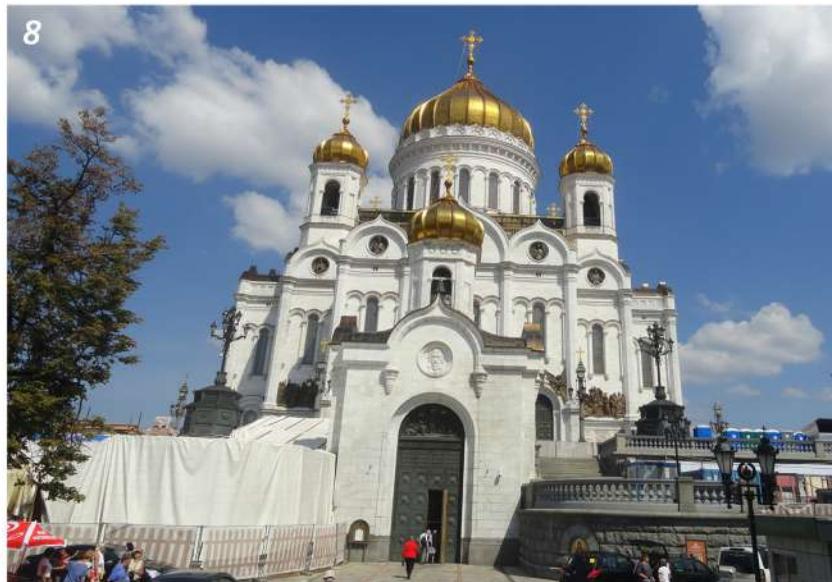
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and I realised that we were in the wrong restroom! The labels were in Russian, and we paid no attention to them whatsoever. Frantically, I tried my best to hide my face, but unfortunately I was wearing a skirt. Poor me, as I panicked, a woman appeared on the door and said something to me in Russian. Me, being the awkward pile of mashed potatoes I am, just shrugged in return. The man, who was now brushing his teeth, exchanged funny

that she, instead of sympathising with me, was enjoying me being awkward as she was safely tucked away in the room.

After exiting the hostel, we set off on another quest; which was to find the St. Basil's Cathedral.

The Cathedral is a beauty. Not only is it a must see for tourists because of its reputation as an architectural wonder, it feels

glances with her and chuckled, but the woman left soon after.

After what seemed like an hour, my lovely mother finally came out, and we stormed out of the Gents restroom into the Ladies one. She later admitted

so magical up close, with the colours and the intricate patterns, that it becomes a need to see. We stayed here for a little while marveling at its beauty and taking pictures. Then we hopped on a 'Hop on Hop off bus' that was to depart from near the Cathedral. It took us around the major attractions in the vicinity.

We were hungry and decided to have lunch. But at the same time we wanted to make it memorable too; so we set off for the Bunker

Cover Photo: Warsaw Cathedral

1. Bolshoi Theatre of Moscow;
2. Change of the Royal Guards ceremony at Kremlin;
3. Inside Bunker 42;
4. Roasted Goose in cranberry sauce at the Food Court in Zaryadye Park in Moscow;
5. The Church of the Icon of the Mother of God at the Zaryadye Park;
6. Church of the Martyr George the Victorious on the Varvarka Street;
7. The iconic St. Basil's Cathedral of Moscow;
8. Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow.



42 res-
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Tagansky district
Moscow.

The bunker was originally built for protection during nuclear tests by the Soviet Union but was never used for the purpose. Rather it was used as an airstrike command base to communicate with aircrafts transporting bombers carrying nuclear weapons for over three decades from 1956 – 1986. After change in political power and disintegration of the Soviet Union, it was made a Cold War Museum and also houses an interesting restaurant. The bunker is 180 feet (equal to the height of 18 floors) under the ground and a lift takes visitors

into the depth. We got to the main area of the bunker after the lift-ride and numerous passageways; it felt like entering a secret lair. Needless to say, it was very cold that underground, but it had good food, great music and lighting, interesting exhibits and was absolutely amazing in every way. Don't even get me started on the washrooms. They were huge.

Next we headed off to see the statue of Peter the Great, a beautiful 98-meter-tall statue located at the confluence of the Moskva River and Vodootvodny Canal. Gifted to the city on the occasion of the completion of 300 years of the Russian Navy, founded by Peter the Great, the statue is phenomenal. After spending some time in the park there, resting our overworked limbs, we decided to return to the hostel.

On the way we picked up some food items for dinner. After having a bath and dining in the common kitchen, we finally confided into the pleasures of a deep slumber.

The next day we got dressed and after breakfast, set off for the iconic Bolshoi theatre, from where our walking tour was to initiate. We met our guide after sometime, and the tour started.

We watched the changing of the guards ceremony outside of the Kremlin, visited the Red Square and explored the historical GUM shopping mall. The traditional GUM ice cream there was my personal favourite.

The tour ended at Zaryadye Park, and we lunched at the food court there. After browsing through the wide array of live food options available there, we settled for four dishes. The food was delicious; especially the



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roasted goose seasoned with a creamy cranberry sauce. My mother loved the salmon and the crab.

Next we headed to the cruise on the Moskva River that we had pre-booked. It was fun; and we got to visit our beloved Peter the Great again.

As the evening was drawing closer, we decided to visit the Ismailovsky market for buying souvenirs from the wide range of stalls there. On our way back, in the Metro station we met a Russian guy named Asad, who came up to us excitedly and asked if we were Indians. Just as my mother nodded in affirmation, much to our surprise, he started singing the marvels of Bollywood's yester-years in perfect tune, and he wouldn't stop. We enjoyed the songs; and even though he couldn't get some of the words right, his tune was melodious and sweet.

Our next visit was to the capital of Latvia, Riga. We were to stay at a youth hostel there too. Following the same routine, we changed, kept our belongings in the hostel and set off on sightseeing. One thing we realised soon after setting foot there was that jewellery made of amber is very popular in the region, and sold almost everywhere.



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Riga is a beautiful city, bustling in colours and patterns. We visited the Rigas Doms (Riga Cathedral) and the House of the Black Heads. We hopped on the Hop On Hop Off bus (where I ALMOST forgot my dear panda magnet), revolving around attractions such as the Freedom Monument, St. Peter's Church and many more.

We had lunch at the restaurant Table 7, and the smell of the mouth-watering food still wafts up my nose when I recollect my memories of Riga. The food was beyond delicious; it was scrumptious.

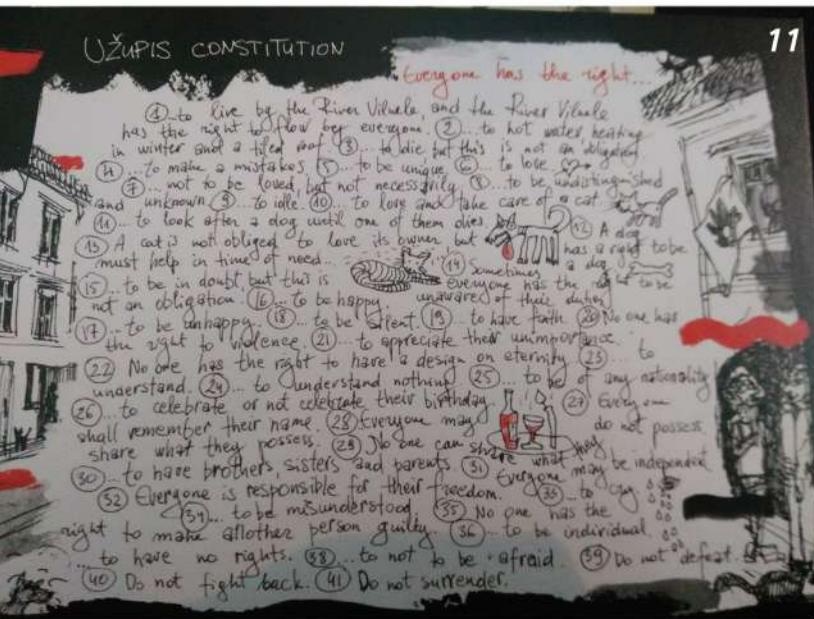
After sightseeing for sometime, and making acquaintances with a local guy who had quit his Police job to become an astrologer while finding our way, we had our dinner on the benches in the old



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1. Canals of Moscow;
2. Statue of Peter the Great on Moskva River;
3. GUM Shopping Mall; 4. GUM's famous ice cream;
5. Inside the Riga Cathedral;
6. Medieval barrels in an underground museum;
7. The House of the Blackheads at Riga;
8. Amber jewellery displayed in a showroom at Riga;
9. The imposing Riga Cathedral.





town. We observed the scenes around us.

The next day, after breakfast at the hotel, we took a taxi to the airport.

Tallinn, Estonia was our next destination. From the airport, we reached the Old town, where our hostel was located. After some navigation, we finally took a rickshaw to our hostel. Yes, a rickshaw. In Estonia.

Being a bit on the north, Estonia was far colder than Moscow and Riga. We knew that from the moment we stepped outside the airport, but it hit us hard when we were travelling by the rickshaw. The freezing wind was blowing in our faces as our driver continued to speed down the cobbled paths of the Old Town. The experience was delightful, really, but it landed me with rashes on both my cheeks that didn't go away till I reached my beloved, humid India.

One interesting highlight about Tallinn was

that the hostel we were staying in was in itself situated in a UNESCO heritage building in the midst of the bustle of the historic Old Town. But with pros come cons. Our room was on the third floor, and lifts weren't there, because of, of course UNESCO's regulation. But, hear me out, the staircases were of the historical, Victorian, antique type. Very similar to the type from which Mughal Emperor Humayun tripped and died tragically. Now, imagine getting two, fat suitcases up and down those dangerous flights of stairs. Ha.

Anyway, we went up to our room, kept our things, changed into much warmer clothes, and went off to explore the Old Town. We walked around sightseeing for a long time before we hopped on a Hop on Hop off bus again. We saw many attractions including parts of the Toompea Castle, Kadriorg area, the waterfront and the Soviet era prison in the Patarei Sea Fortress.

After hopping off and exploring the area around the Viru Gate for a while, we went to Hesburger to eat something, but sat there for a long time even after finishing the food, because of the free Wifi.

On the way back from Hesburger to our hostel on foot, we visited many stores, even managing to get lost once, thus finally reaching the hostel quite late in the evening. We crashed as soon as we got to our beds.

The next day, we joined a walking tour, which

1. View over the Old Town of Tallinn;
2. Evening market at the Town Hall Square in Tallinn;
3. Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Tallinn;
4. Danish King's Garden in Tallinn;
5. St. Nicholas' Church in Tallinn;
6. Town Hall and tower in the Old Town of Tallinn;
7. Viru Gate of Tallinn's Old Town;
8. A lady rickshaw puller in the Old Town of Tallinn;
9. Sign at entry to 'The Republic of Uzupis'
10. Jesus, the backpacker;
11. The bizarre Constitution of Uzupis in a postcard;
12. The Statue of the Angel at Uzupis.



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turned out to be very informative. We saw the Old Town, the St. Mary's Cathedral, St. Nicholas' Church, the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, Kiek in de Kök, the old city walls and tunnels, the Danish King's Garden and the town hall. We also learnt from Helen, our walking tour guide, that petting a stray dog, or a stranger's dog is very unusual there.

After the tour ended, we explored the famous Apteek (the world's oldest still operating pharmacy) that dates back to the medieval times; the small museum inside the pharmacy was very interesting. We then had lunch right next to it in a restaurant called Maharaja. Alas, it was time to say goodbye to Tallinn.

We brought our suitcases down the treacherous stairs with help from Cecilia, a girl who worked in the hostel part-time. After walking around the old town for a little while with our suitcases, we finally took a bus to the airport. But at the airport we got to know that our flight had been delayed by two hours.

We reached Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania at the evening; and after a lot of hustle, finally reached our hostel. Vilnius is a beauty at night.

After having sandwiches for dinner, we

went straight to bed. Next morning we had waffles for breakfast, and then we were out to explore. We visited the Literature Street; and got coffee from the coffee machine in a store and when we messed up, my mother absent-mindedly mixed Bengali with English and told the cashier that 'She *typed* the button'. Tip means 'to press' in Bengali.

Later we joined a walking tour with a very enthusiastic Milda; it was fun, as always and very informative. We explored the Cathedral Square, saw the St. Anne's Church, Gediminas Castle Tower on a hill, climbed up the bell tower of St. John's Cathedral (where I again almost lost my panda magnet), enjoyed the bird's eye view of the Old Town and explored the secluded alleys and roads and learnt a lot about the history of the city.

We also learnt of another disputed country within Vilnius, the Republic of Uzupis. The place is an artist's masterpiece; it even has its own constitution! It had an army of twelve people, but after realising that they couldn't handle wars with this strength, they instead built a statue of an angel symbolising peace.

Milda had insisted that we try local Lithuanian cuisine. So after the walking tour

we had lunch at Etno Dvaras, a restaurant famous for Lithuanian traditional food. We had potato dumplings, potato sausages, and of course, mum had her favourite salmon.

Soon afterwards we got our luggage from the hostel and hurried to the airport, where, little did we know, a huge surprise was waiting for us. We were to fly to Warsaw via Kiev, Ukraine, and since our Visa had only a single entry to Schengen area, and Ukraine was outside the area. The lady at the check in counter suggested that we do not take the flight to

1. A Church in Vilnius;
2. Gediminas Castle Tower atop a hill in Vilnius;
3. Ariel view of the Old Town of Vilnius;
4. Vilnius Cathedral and tower;
5. Literature Street at Vilnius;
6. Menu Card with our choice at Etno Dvaras;
7. Night View of Vilnius;
8. St. Anne's Church at Vilnius;
- 9, 10. Glimpses of Warsaw's Old Town;
11. A Monument in honour of local resident Marie Curie at Warsaw;
12. Lazienki Palace at Warsaw;
13. A delicious Polish Ice Cream;
14. Leaving our footprints at Warsaw.



Kiev, because if we did, we would not be able to enter Warsaw. On her suggestion, we left the airport and headed for the bus station instead.

We waited for several hours at the bus station, and it was then, while finishing my biology project, I realised that I had left half of my laptop's charger in our hostel in Riga. Amazing.

Our bus trip was nine hours-long; but it was bearable because it was time for us to sleep anyway, and the bus stopped by supermarkets for bathroom breaks. I really enjoyed it, because it was way more adventurous than a two-hour flight.

We reached Warsaw, Poland, late at night, and took a car to our hotel. We got a few hours of sleep before it was morning again. First thing in the morning we headed to the rail station. We were planning to visit Krakow, and then take a car to Auschwitz-

Birkenau, where we had booked a trip. But booking the tickets took so long, and the procedure was so slow, that we couldn't book a train to Krakow in time for our onward tour. Cue confusion.

After a lot of worrying, mum finally managed to shift our Auschwitz-Birkenau tour to the next day. So we peacefully ate at KFC and decided to just explore Warsaw that day. We hopped on a Hop on Hop off bus and did some sightseeing. We got off at the Old Town and walked around, soaking in the beauty of the place for a little while. I had an ice cream; it was delicious.

We hopped on a bus again, and saw the rest of the places which we had missed, and came back again to our beloved Old Town. We had a very Polish lunch at the Polka Restaurant, founded by a celebrity restaurateur

Magdalena Gessler. The interior decor was fabulous, and the food was very good too.

We explored the Old Town till it was dark, and then, after buying a few basic necessities of life from a store, took a taxi back to our hotel.

The next day, we took the train to Krakow. It started raining after a little while of sightseeing, but it ceased by the time we got out of the Krakow Cathedral.

We were soon picked up by the tour operator from in front of a hotel. It was a long drive to Auschwitz, and we picked up many other visitors on the way. I slept throughout.

We visited the remnants of what used to be the torturous concentration camp for the Jews during the Second World War. About a million Jews were tortured and killed in the camps of Auschwitz-Birkenau itself. The





tour was very depressing, but eye opening at the same time. To think that so many innocent lives were kept there, captive, devoid of some of the basic necessities of life, and brutally killed, just because of their religion! There is something that I learnt from this experience. That in a world where lives that could have had so much potential were killed off, isn't it our duty, being so privileged as to be born in a different generation, and alive, to make our lives count? If we live and die anonymously, without having done any good to the world, will there be any difference between us and those innocent lives who never even got a *chance* to do any good to the world? We have chances, opportunities; that they didn't. Wouldn't it be disrespectful not to utilise them?

We returned to Krakow and after some sightseeing, took a train back to Warsaw later in the evening.

The next day, our last day of the tour, we had breakfast at the hotel (which made us regret not breakfasting at the hotel the other two days, because it was delicious)

and then set off to the Chopin Airport. But, little did we know, a surprise was waiting for us there too. We were informed there that our Aeroflot flight to Delhi via Moscow had been cancelled. We were instead offered the ticket to an Austrian Airlines flight. And the flight came with a stopover of 7 hours at Vienna. This meant that our Europe trip was not over yet and there was one more country to be ticked off!

Instead of waiting and getting bored at the airport for four hours, my mother decided to tour Warsaw one last time. So we booked a cab, and then visited the Chopin Monument and the Lazienki Park where it is located. At that time a concert was going on there and we were lucky to be able to be part of the audience for a short while. We also made a quick visit to the Ujazdowski Castle and the Lazienki Palace before returning to the airport.

We made the best of the short time we had at Vienna, the capital city of Austria during the stopover. We ran from here to there in the beautiful city.

The Karlskirche, the historic Karlsplatz Metro station, the Soviet War Memorial and the Karlplatz Park were a few of the places we ventured into in the short time. We wanted to eat Wiener Schnitzel, but I ended up having a Turkish pizza, which was amazing.

So, unexpectedly, one more country was added to my list.

Alas, all good things become nothing more than memories. We reached my dear old Kolkata at night, sadly, putting a full stop to another beautiful entry in my travel diary.

1. View of the Old Town of Krakow from the Bell Tower of Krakow Cathedral;
2. Krakow Castle;
3. Gate to the Auschwitz Concentration camp with the infamous sign 'Arbeit Macht Frei' (meaning 'Work sets you free');
4. Inside Auschwitz Concentration Camp;
5. The Karlskirche Church in Vienna;
6. Soviet War Memorial in Vienna;
7. A beautiful building in Vienna;
8. A huge slice of Turkish Pizza in Vienna.



DESTINATION JAPAN



*Backpacking and trekking
across Japan*

Article by Tamar Valkenier, The Netherlands



I had a few weeks to cover between trips in Mongolia and decided it would be a good opportunity to discover Japan. A culture so strange and foreign to me, people so small and polite and nature so wild; I was keen to go and explore. And I found the perfect way to do that! In 1974 a 1700 km long hiking trail, named the Tokai Nature Trail, was completed. It leads from the city of Tokyo to Osaka, through the mountains of 11 prefectures, though also regularly passes through little villages and towns in between.

I went to Japan in August, which is not necessarily the best time for hiking. Spring is celebrated for its cherry blossoms and fall for the autumn colours. Summer, on the other hand, is extremely hot, humid and known for typhoons, thunderstorms and nasty bugs. Together with some minor earthquakes, I experienced it all.

I landed in Tokyo. Despite housing 14 million people, the city has a surprisingly calm and quiet feel about it. Everything is very well organised, people line up

where the signs tell them to; there is no talking in the trains and no eating on the streets. Public toilets are straight out of a science-fiction movie with more buttons to push than I can possibly try out in one visit.

I took the train to Mt. Takao and walked up with quite a few other hikers all of whom politely greeted me, but after an hour or two I was on my own for the rest of my travels through the mountains. An occasional day-hiker sometimes passed me by, but none of them spoke any English and my Japanese was unfortunately still non-existent. I used the camera function of Google translate to read the signs and downloaded a gpx file into Maps.me to navigate. This app had worked well for me during my hiking in Jordan earlier this year.

The trail started with a very steep uphill climb and it quickly became clear that this was going to be my life for the coming weeks: hiking either up or down very steep slopes.

I regularly passed small shrines and

temples, where I prayed to whatever deity I believed was housed there. It was necessary, as the trail is old and many sections have eroded, washed out or the wooden support beams are now rotten. Sometimes the steps are too high to reach, leaving me slaloming around them on the slippery edges. I often had to navigate big boulders, due to vanished bridges, while climbing over fallen trees, trying to find the path. When there was a path it was often carved out of the side of steep slopes and no wider than a foot or two.

Spider webs and fallen branches littered the trail, while occasionally a landslide had taken the trail out altogether. Often I could manage only about one or two kilometres an hour. I was hiking at the edge of my physical abilities but I must admit that it was quite addictive. The

1. Enjoying the view of mountain;
2. Dinner at standup sushi bar the night before departure;
3. Buying food in typical Japanese shop;
4. Warm meetings on the trail;
5. Vending machines along the roadside.





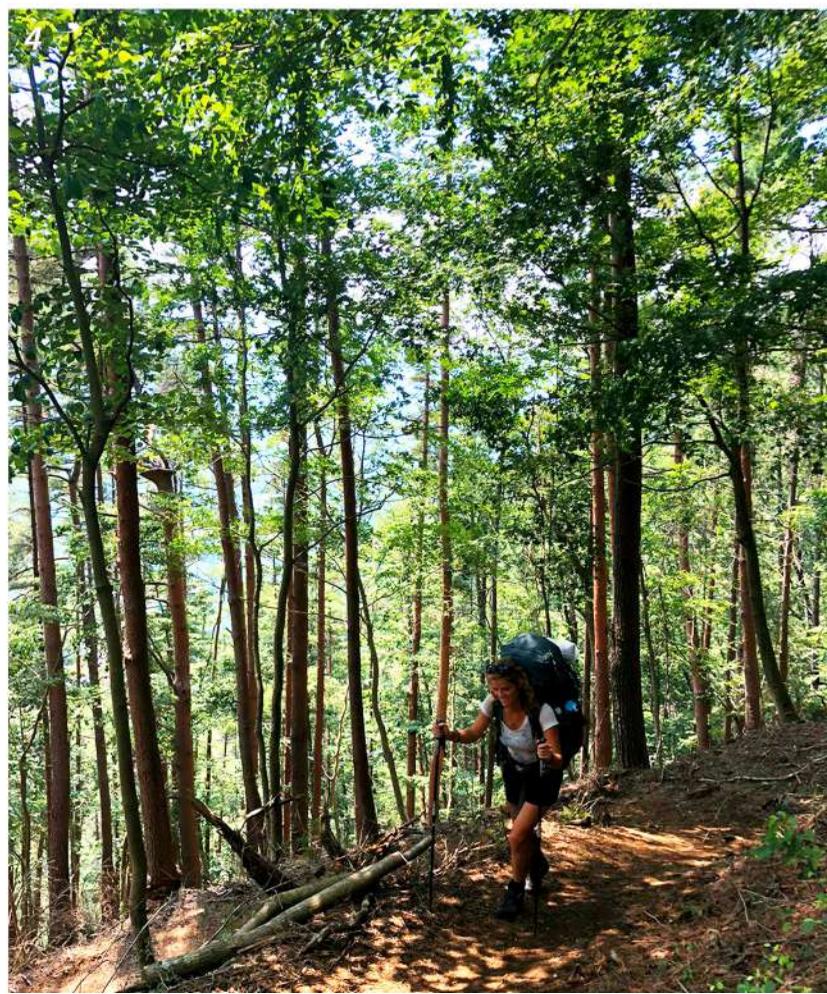
My hiking poles were my best friends to balance me up and over obstacles, as was my tiny towel to wipe the sweat away from my eyes. With temperatures well above 30 degrees Celsius and humidity up to 95% I sweated ferociously, especially while going uphill with my 21-25 kg backpack on.

more I physically exhausted myself, the clearer my mind seemed to become.

My hiking poles were my best friends to balance me up and over obstacles, as was my tiny towel to wipe the sweat away from my eyes. With temperatures well above 30 degrees Celsius and humidity up to 95% I sweated ferociously, especially while going uphill with my 21-25 kg backpack on. Water is not abundant and since I prefer sleeping on top of the mountains with spectacular views I usually carry between two and six litres of water. The heavier my pack, the more I sweat, the more water I needed to carry up: it's a vicious circle I can't escape.

Thankfully most of the trail was in the forest and therefore shaded. Once I had to walk uphill in the full sunlight for about five kilometres. I charted fast, sweated ferociously and got totally overheated. I started to feel weak, dizzy and nauseous and was getting worried as to whether I would make it up the next mountain: it took a long time to cool down.

These, predominantly pine, forests house monkeys and giant flying squirrels, unfortunately both I never saw. The mountains are beaming with wildlife though and I encountered many Sika deer, pheasants, herons, wild boars and a few Japanese serow, a goat-antelope I had never seen before. I found snakes of all sizes and colours on the trail, climbing trees or sliding between the rocks. Some were poisonous but all tended to snake away as soon as they noticed me. Butterflies were abundant, green





We couldn't easily find the path and decided to try another trail, which we did find. It led us to beautiful little shrines, graves and statues of mountain gods with Sake offerings – definitely a hidden local treasure. The path kept going up for quite a while until it finally vanished altogether.

caterpillars with red stripes climbed up trees, little birds walked around them and beautiful mosses grew between interesting mushrooms.

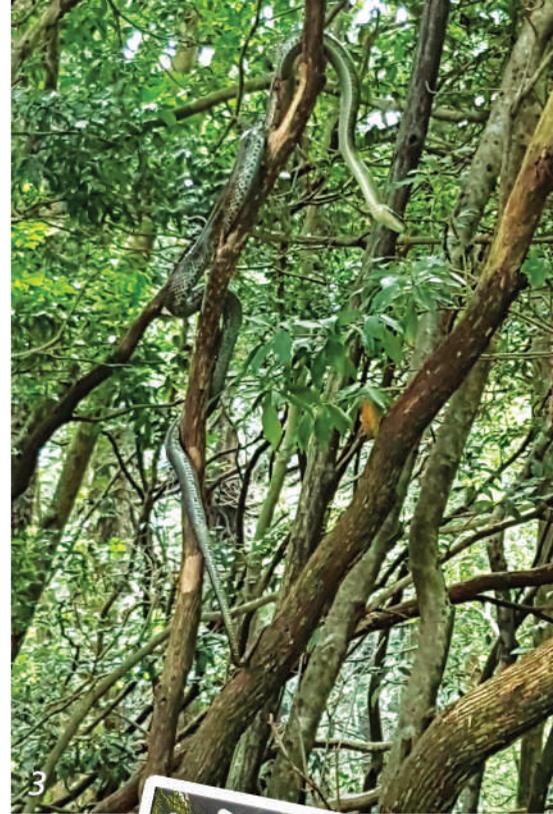
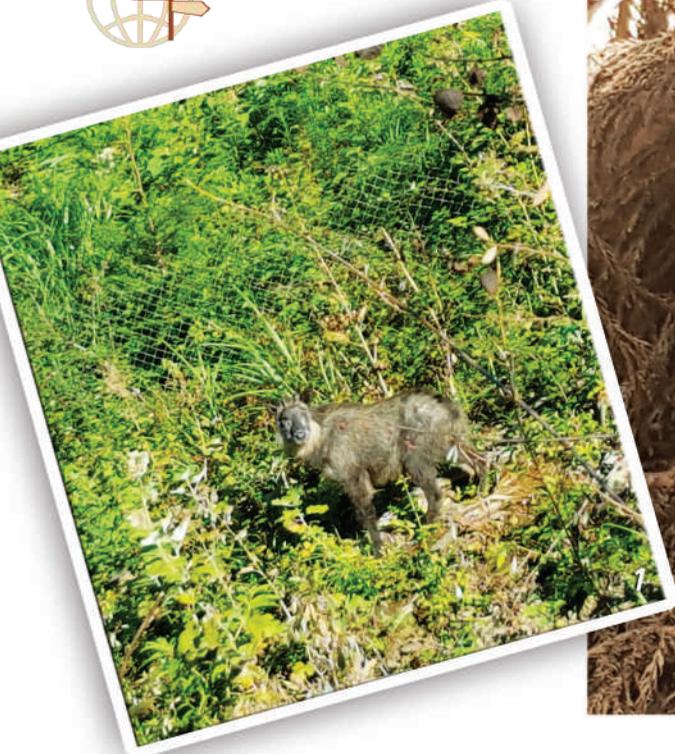
Parts of the trail are home to hundreds of leeches ready to grab onto your boots. I stopped every five meters to pull a dozen of the little bastards off my feet. Their anti-coagulant left my ankles bleeding all day. I dealt with this by reminding myself that since the time of ancient Egypt leeches have been used in medicine, so it must be healthy.

Many a sign warned me of bears in the area; about two to three people a year are killed by bears in Japan, many more are wounded. The fear interfered with my sleep on the first few nights, as the forests were so full of sound that I would sit right up in bed every time a branch

broke. I was not carrying bear spray but I was cooking well away from my campsite and hanging my food from a tree. During the day I would carry a bear bell but tended to put it away as the sound drove me crazy and also scared away the other wildlife that I actually wanted to see.

A typhoon was forecasted to hit one night. I passed by a small campsite and decided to stay there instead of camping on my own on some mountaintop that night. The campsite seemed abandoned but a 70 year old Japanese man welcomed me warmly. He asked me to pitch my tent near the river. Rivers can rise dramatically during heavy rainfall and I asked him for a better spot but

1. Overgrown paths up the hill;
2. Walking through tea plantations;
3. Wild rivers cut through the mountains along the trail;
4. Hiking poles are great on both uphill and downhill;
5. Coming across hidden forest shrines along the trail;
6. Mountain gods on the trail;
7. A mountain temple;
8. Occasional bamboo forest.



he assured me that I'll be safe. He then summoned me to the house: I was the only guest and he wanted to drink Sake (diluted with green tea) and sing karaoke with me. He set up a humongous screen and loud music was blasting through two-meters-high speakers. I sang all the three English songs in the repertoire, but it is impossible to 'win' against the master.

After dark I went to bed but the rain soon started bucketing down. Although my tent was holding up I didn't feel comfortable. At 1 am, in the pouring rain, I started moving my tent to a higher ground. Soon an alarm sounded and the river turned into a raging mud stream, flooding the entire area where I was camping just minutes ago. I was lucky to have avoided a disaster. If I hadn't moved I would surely have drowned.

Though it was another rough night, that next day started normally with climbing up 1200 meters in altitude in just a few hours. Panting, I reached one of the few refuges scattered on the mountaintops. It was a modern-looking wooden building, capable of hosting a few people for an emergency night, though I found that the last person had signed the hut book weeks ago.

The mist was getting thicker as I got

closer and right after moving in, the rain came bucketing down, this time with thunder and lightning striking just meters away from me. I ran outside to quickly construct a rainwater catchment. I would be requiring the extra drinking water as the water source was miles away and I was not going anywhere in this weather. Though it was just one full day's walk from the nearest village I felt very remote and there was something beautifully magical about spending the night all alone in a little hut that resonated with the sound of thunder all around.

The next morning I struggled to find water and hiked straight on for six hours without taking a break. I finally reached a village where I saw a man watering his garden. I asked him if I could use the hose to fill my water bottles. Probably due to the stench coming out of my body, he offered me a shower and directed me to the basement of his apartment to a communal shower area. I gratefully accepted his offer.

Feeling refreshed, I walked into the town. While buying my favourite Japanese snack, Onigiri (rice triangles), I chatted with a retired paediatrician who assured me that the rainy season was over and the rest of the month should be dry.

While the paediatrician's words were still resonating in my head, I got caught in another humongous





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thunderstorm just an hour later. On the mountain there is no place to hide and the narrow trail turned into a raging mud flow in just a matter of minutes. I took my clothes off, covered my pack and kept trekking. On open sections I ran, to minimize the risk of getting hit by lightning. For as long as I kept climbing I wasn't cold.

I finally reached a small shelter with just enough space to stay safe and dry. The storm was intense but fortunately it only lasted for about two hours. The weather slowly cleared up, a double rainbow welcomed me and finally my first view of the sacred Mt. Fuji appeared. I enjoyed the priceless view.



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I would see many different views of the mountain in the next few days, together with my friend Karan who decided to join me on the trail for the next two weeks. I have known Karan for over 15 years and was grateful to be able to share this experience with him.

The mountain is magical in many ways, including the way it seems to appear and disappear with the clouds, leaving us wondering as to how it's possible to not see the entire mountain one moment and then it is summoning above everything else the next.

The following days the weather as well as the mountains, both were a lot more gentle as we passed the five lakes surrounding Mt. Fuji. We swam and camped with a few hundred Japanese to watch one of the many impressive fireworks shows summer has to offer.

A bit hung-over, the next day we hiked a whopping 25 kilometres, passing through at least six different ecosystems. The scenery was con-

stantly changing: pine forests, bamboo forests, tea plantations, long green grass, canyons and so on. At some point Karan spotted a deer and upon closer inspection it seemed to be stuck in the fence with his antlers wrapped up in the netting. We decided to start a rescue mission. The closer we approached the more the poor deer was panting loudly, foam on the lips and wildly running back and forth, only wrapping himself up even worse. We pulled out our knives and started cutting the fence around his antlers, while trying to keep a safe distance. We finally succeeded and happily watched the deer run free.

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1. A Japanese Serow;
 2. One of the many snakes on the trail;
 3. We watched this snake climb a tree;
 4. Many signs warned us against bears but I never saw one;
 5. The result of hundreds of leeches along the trail;
 6. A welcome sight of the sun shining through the trees;
 7. Wild camping in bear country;
 8. View of the bridge that we were about to cross;
 9. Rescuing a deer stuck in the fence.



We camped at the last of the five lakes, getting up early to see an amazingly colourful sunrise over Mt. Fuji before starting our ascent up the next mountain. We couldn't easily find the path and decided to try another trail, which we did find. It led us to beautiful little shrines, graves and statues of mountain gods with Sake offerings - definitely a hidden local treasure.

The path kept going up for quite a while until it finally vanished altogether. Stranded halfway up we decided to bush bash our way to the top, which was easier said than done. Steep mountain slopes had us sliding down with every step, giving us the fear of dropping down into the abyss beneath

it. Slippery boulders and wet trees didn't give us much grip and Karan's experience in dangerous situations kept him from enjoying the challenge which I loved so much.

We sweated out a record but victoriously made it to the top. Charging back down into the valley and up another mountain, we exhausted ourselves completely and pitched camp at a little parking space with spectacular views over endless forested mountains.

Joined by a lovely Japanese couple that was there to photograph Mt. Fuji, the next morning we ate our last calorie bar, topped with our last peanut butter and drank our last coffee.

The trail was getting more worn and extremely slippery. It was rerouted but we decided to try anyways; I fell three times. We took turns waving our hiking poles in front of us for hours to clear the hundreds of spider webs on our path. Finally we reached a somewhat bigger village and there we were bathed in the warm hospitality that Japanese countryside has to offer. A lovely lady offered us some of her refreshing local green tea, refusing to accept our money. We greeted a man passing by us cycling up the mountain and later down again. When he passed a third time he stopped his bike and handed us a plastic bag with two red bean pastries in it. Without a word he took off again. Oishi! (delicious!).



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Parts of the trail are home to hundreds of leeches ready to grab onto your boots. I stopped every five meters to pull a dozen of the little bastards off my feet. Their anti-coagulant left my ankles bleeding all day. I dealt with this by reminding myself that since the time of ancient Egypt leeches have been used in medicine, so it must be healthy.

Ever since I left Tokyo I hadn't seen any cafe or restaurant and when we found a little place that sold homemade fresh food, we went for it, indulging in Japanese hotpot, dumplings and noodles. We hung out our gear to dry from the wet night before and ended up talking to a few Japanese couples. They all insisted to give us a ride up the mountain to the shrine we had planned to visit. Many questions were asked and pictures taken before we finally parted ways. They lifted our spirits up just as we were about to start the hardest climb of our entire trek.

The mountain was steep, slippery and long, challenged by leeches and spider webs, monster flies biting through our cloths and Karan's favourite - the little flies going for our eyes. We still managed to climb on in silence only to collapse from exhaustion the moment we finally reached the top.

Next we walked through many tea plantations, where we met a beautiful old lady hardly half my size. Karan believed she gave us her blessings for the trail ahead and I think it helped! What happened was as follows: we had run out of food four hours earlier and we were aiming for a restaurant we had seen on the map.

Arriving at "restaurant" "Private Time", we found a pagoda on the riverside with facilities to cook your own meal, but no restaurant attached to it. A few adolescents, chaperoned by an older man, were spear-fishing in the river. They immediately made place for us and offered us their rice curry and ice tea. We witnessed strange interactions and couldn't quite figure out the situation. When we finished doing the dishes, the older man suddenly tried to hand us some yens. We told them that we really appreciate the shared food but would not accept any money. The



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1. Incredible views of endless green mountains;
2. Magnificent views of mountains from my tent;
3. Watching sunset on the Mt. Fuji from my tent;
4. Camping near pagoda and ancient Ginkgo tree;
5. Spotting a gorgeous waterfall on the route;
6. Passing by hidden treasures in the forest;
7. An old, worn out structure in the forest.





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A few adolescents, chaperoned by an older man, were spear-fishing in the river. They immediately made place for us and offered us their rice curry and ice tea. We witnessed strange interactions and couldn't quite figure out the situation. When we finished doing the dishes, the older man suddenly tried to hand us some yens. We told them that we really appreciate the shared food but would not accept any money. The man insisted, put the money in my pocket and took off. Flabbergasted, we moved on as well. A few kilometres further I decided to have a look and found out that it was not just a small tips to buy an ice-cream but the man actually gave us 250 euros worth of Japanese Yen!

man insisted, put the money in my pocket and took off. Flabbergasted, we moved on as well. A few kilometres further I decided to have a look and found out that it was not just a small tips to buy an ice-cream but the man actually gave us 250 euros worth of Japanese Yen! We were confused as to what was going on! Karan told me that he had noticed tattoos shining through the swimming gear and we started to realize we might have had a rare encounter with the mafia of Japan, Yakuza!

That day, for the first time in three weeks, we passed by an actual café where we could buy an actual cup of coffee and we happily spent our, what we now called, 'blood money' there. Everybody in the cafe was so kind and both owners and customers chatted with us and took our pictures. We managed to find out from the locals here the names of the snakes we had seen.

A lady at the café, Mihoko Ikeda, showed us the actual maps of the trail. She recommended us to pass by her friend Mr. Kakidaira, further up the road, who apparently made the most delicious tea and loved to chat with foreigners. She wrote us a note and we took it up to him. He welcomed us warmly, shared his tea and stories and his wife even came out to give us her homemade pudding, which was more delicious than anything we had eaten in Japan so far.

From there we continued on to a beautiful old Gingko tree with a small pagoda and shrine where we pitched the camp.

The next day was to be our last day of hiking. We had lunch at a 100+ meters-tall waterfall where we tried to make our own Onigiris, but failed miserably and turned them into delicious sushi rolls instead. We were lucky, as it was the "Mountain Day". Since the last few years it is being celebrated as an official

public holiday dedicated to enjoying Japan's mountains. It was wonderful to be able to end almost three weeks of hiking approximately 300 kilometres on this special day.

The adventure of hiking the old trail was tough, it was wild and challenging but beautiful too. It nonetheless, it was a very interesting way to explore the nature and culture of such a unique country like Japan. It was such a privilege to be so warmly welcomed by the lovely Japanese people we met all throughout the way.

-
1. A friend, Karan, joined me for two weeks on the trail;
 2. Hiking dense wet forests;
 3. The trail is minimally maintained and was non-existent at some places;
 4. The trail is challenging;
 5. Teaching survival skills to Japanese along the way;
 6. The Japanese that fed us and gave us 250 euros worth of Japanese yen.



Aries
(21 March – 19 April)

This can be a beneficial period but do take it slowly. It presents more opportunity for insight into the demands of your situation. Matters of business and money may start to flex their muscle and begin to grow and expand. You will do well in matters that require good concentration, especially esoteric and philosophical studies.

Places to visit: Sydney - Sydney Harbour with its iconic Sydney Harbour Bridge and Sydney Opera House. The city has no shortage of lazy bays and legendary surf beaches.

Tirupati - Tirupati is regarded as the richest Hindu temple in the world and is known for its remarkable Dravidian architecture.

Favorable Dates: Feb 4, 5, 13, 14, 22, 23 Favorable Colors: Red & Green

This is a month of mixed blessings. A series of events will affect your self-image and your major relationships, sparking off events and touching deep personal issues for you in terms of self and partnership.

Places to visit: Paris – Paris is the world’s most visited tourist sight the Eiffel Tower, the Arc de Triomphe, the Notre-Dame Cathedral, the Louvre Museum, Moulin Rouge, Lido etc, making it the most popular tourist destination in the world with tourists.

City Palace - The City palace in Udaipur is one of the most visited monuments in India and is known for its opulent Hindu Rajput Architecture.

Favorable Dates: Feb 2, 6, 11, 15, 20, 24 Favorable Colors: Yellow & Blue



Taurus
(20 April – 20 May)



Gemini
(21 May – 20 June)

You will find success through personal effort, along with honours and dignities. You can achieve high ambitions, especially those connected with government, institutions and the law. Ride your own luck and enthusiasm with opportunities that present themselves for growth, expansion and diversity.

Places to visit: Venice - Venice was built upon a series of islands, sand-banks and land reclaimed from the lagoon.

The Khajuraho Group of Temples - The construction of the temples is a remarkable example of the Hindu Nagara style of architecture and is also famous for its sculptures depicting various deities, animals, mythical creatures and erotica.

Favorable Dates: Feb 3, 7, 12, 16, 21, 25 Favorable Colors: White & Blue

Life is keeping a firm grip on where you go and what you do. This month may find you counting the costs of the formidable efforts you have had to make to keep going.

Places to visit: Cape Town - The city has several well-known natural features that attract tourists, most notably Table Mountain, which forms a large part of the Table Mountain National Park and is the back end of the City Bowl.

The Mahabodhi Temple, Bodhgaya, Bihar - It is one of the major pilgrim site for the Buddhists as it the place where Lord Buddha received enlightenment.

Favorable Dates: Feb 1, 4, 10, 13, 19, 22 Favorable Colors: White & Red



Cancer
(21 June – 22 July)



Leo
(23 July – 22 August)

You would be fostering connections, affirming efforts and bringing a note of the hard won achievement that you can celebrate. It will be important for you to redefine yourself, to see yourself in different ways, almost as a different person.

Places to visit: Rio de Janeiro, which encompasses most of Brazil’s major tourist attractions like spectacular location, beaches, views and its world-famous carnival is a great place to visit. The city throbs to the infectious beat of Brazilian music and is the main source of Brazil’s national culture.

The Charminar - The structure is known for the signature 4 minarets, which are built in a marvellous Indo-Islamic style.

Favorable Dates: Feb 5, 8, 14, 17, 23, 26 Favorable Colors: Blue & Yellow

You are more in touch with friends and dreaming up new goals. This is a period where you can grow and expand on a very personal level through opportunities for advancement through study or promotion.

Places to visit: Sri Lanka - A small percentage of the islands are inhabited and 87 are exclusively resorts, boasting tropical landscapes hugged by picture-perfect beaches and palm trees.

Ajanta and Ellora Caves in Aurangabad - The Ajanta Caves mainly consist of rock cut monuments dedicated to the ancient Buddhist traditions, while Ellora cave contain Hindu, Buddhist and Jain monuments built during the Rashtrakuta Empire.

Favorable Dates: Feb 3, 8, 12, 17, 21, 26 Favorable Colors: Red & Yellow



Virgo
(23 August – 22 Sept)

Manish Kumar Arora is a renowned KP Astrologer, Numerologist, Tarot Reader and Vastu Consultant. He will be with Touriosity Travelmag to bring to our readers monthly predictions based on zodiac signs with special emphasis on travel predictions. Our readers can plan their tours accordingly. He can be reached at manish@manishastrologer.com



This could be a good time to avoid tying up any money with other people's business or investments, as such ties may lead to losses, uncertainties and even outright deception.

Places to visit: Christchurch - It is the gateway to the South Island, which has some of New Zealand's most stunning scenery. The Canterbury region includes a large central portion of the east coast of the South Island, centered around the city of Christchurch.

Old Goa - It is the historic town that served as the seat of the Portuguese in India till the 18th century. The city is also a UNESCO World Heritage Site due to its unique Baroque style architecture and various churches.

Favorable Dates: Feb 1, 6, 10, 15, 19, 24 Favorable Colors: Purple & Yellow

Your energy levels run high and your pioneering instincts are strong. This is a fabulous period for charm and attractiveness. Stress could build up in the last week or just plain old-fashioned exhaustion could set in.

Places to visit: Hawaii - The natural beauty of the islands continues to be one of Hawaii's greatest assets and is the location of some of the finest beaches in the United States, each unique in its dimensions and shapes.

Varanasi - The city is also known for its Ghats located on the banks of the Ganges River and were mostly built during the 18th century.

Favorable Dates: Feb 3, 9, 12, 18, 21, 27 Favorable Colors: Red & White



The month ahead is strong for networking, friendships, and new approaches in your career.. The first ten days can find you streamlining your routines, heavily involved in research and highly motivated in work and health matters.

Places to visit: Singapore - Singapore is a land of stark contrast, from one of the sleekest cleanest cities in the world you can also find authentic asian foods and goods for a very reasonable price.

Hampi: Hampi is a UNESCO World Heritage Site famous for its stone carved structures, built in marvellous Dravidian style architecture, temples and monuments.

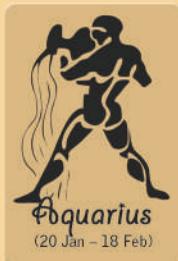
Favorable Dates: Feb 2, 7, 12, 16, 20, 27 Favorable Colors: White & Red

You are especially companionable and open to new experiences, although perhaps starry-eyed at times. There can be a surprising or sudden show of support, emotional or financial. Romantic illusions or self-deceptions should be watched for.

Places to visit: Dubai - The area of Dubai consists of flat desert surrounds; a great expanse of sand dunes stretches away to the S, and the rugged Hajar Mountains rise to the E.

Jaisalmer Fort - Located amidst the golden sands of the Thar Desert, it remained an important trade center during the medieval era and now is known for its exquisite Rajput Architecture and scenic beauty.

Favorable Dates: Feb 2, 6, 11, 15, 20, 24 Favorable Colors: Yellow & Blue



You are bolder than usual and motivated to pursue what you want and to prove your value. It's about positive new beginnings, turning over a new leaf, and expressing yourself without apology.

Places to visit: Cairns is located in the NE of Australia, is a holiday maker's paradise, bursting at the seams as an attractive 'hub' destination for nearby attractions.

Taj Mahal - It translates to the 'Crown Palace' and is one of the most famous and marvellous buildings in India. Located in Agra, the building is known for its extensive use of white marble and was completed in the mid-17th century.

Favorable Dates: Feb 3, 5, 12, 14, 21, 23 Favorable Colors: Blue & Yellow

This period heightens your optimism and generosity, and has the potential for being a relaxed, fortunate and hopeful time in your life.

Places to visit: Barbados - Barbados suits anyone seeking a relaxed and mellow holiday. Main clientele are fairly comfortably off couples, with more mature guests favouring the peak winter season.

Rishikesh - Also known as the 'Yoganagari' or the 'Yoga Capital of the Country' and the 'Gateway to the Garhwal Himalayas', this quaint city is known for its bountiful beauty, sanctity, adventure options and the magnificent places to visit in Rishikesh.

Favorable Dates: Feb 3, 6, 12, 15, 21, 24 Favorable Colors: Red & Blue





Women Travel Network

ADVERTORIAL

Women have many roles to play in various arenas. Her place in society is punctuated with many tasks. While accomplishing such tasks she compromises with her love to explore the unknown. Kayaking through seas, relishing exquisite delicacies of various countries, experiencing deep water snorkelling or just seeing the world can be any woman's dream waiting to be fulfilled. Making such dreams come true for many women are the new era all-women travel services.

Why Women Travel Network?

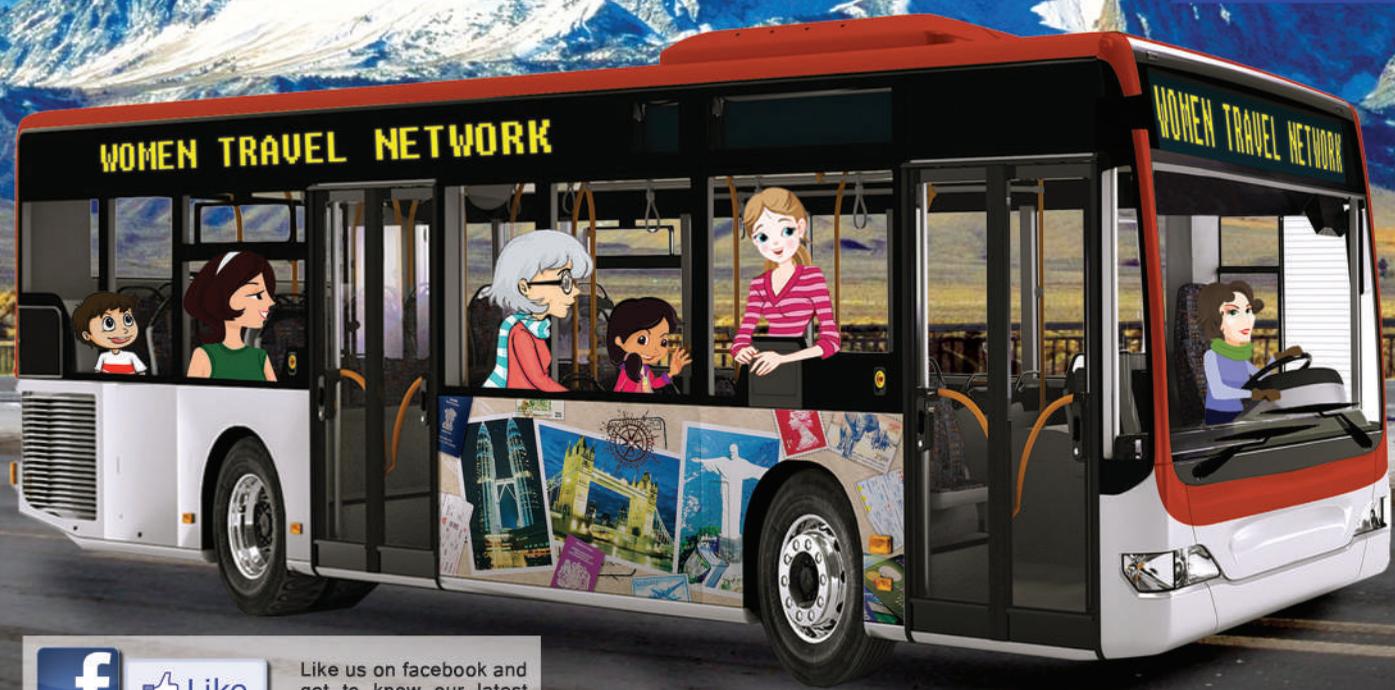
Many a times, when your skin thirsts for a touch of mist or dew drops and your heart yearns for an escape far from the daily life routine or the load of work in your respective jobs, you start seeking for people eager to accompany you. You try convincing your husband or children to take some time out of their busy schedules, but many times in vain. At those difficult times, the Women Travel Network (WTN) gives you the grand idea to set out alone to evaluate the passion of you. Personal safety is of great concern to some of these women, maybe fearing to set sail for your

maiden venture all by yourselves. WTN takes this into account and enables you to indulge in thrilling vacations with a group of spirited women tourists of all ages all geared with the same vigour. Things can be made easy and trouble-free yet well organised by WTN as it reduces the prime inconveniences like buying tickets, booking for lodging and drawing up itinerary.

What exactly WTN does?

With WTN you have the option of getting the best possible accommodation that would not harm your budget and the discretion of staying alone in rooms or sharing with someone. WTN also ensures that a suitable poise is maintained between seeing around and resting not making someone too fatigued with consistent tours. This network looks after all the formalities giving you a chance to pack your belongings without any hesitation. The organised travel plans will help gather fruitful travelling experiences in the company of like-minded women. WTN gives you the scope of bonding, and at the same time helps you make new friends. So if you are looking for a getaway, an escapade and your husband's/son's/father's/boyfriend's/friend's dates are bothering, Woman Travel





Like us on facebook and get to know our latest exciting trip details.

Network is the best solution for you.

So what's so special about WTN?

Imagine meeting college friends after a huge gap of time, or getting chance to spend some quality time with kids or elders or just escaping the daily hustle and bustle of life in the company of colleagues or friends.

WTN offers to make those unfulfilled travel wishes come true for many women. With a number of national and international tour packages of WTN you can travel the world, alone, with your son (below 8 years) or your daughter (no age bar) and make unforgettable journeys. Whether you travel alone, or with a kid, friends, neighbours or relations, Women Travel Network can give you memorable trips. Absolutely hassle-free and comfortable, yet adventurous and safe fun trips are what this Network has in bag for you. A real boon for a n y woman!

If you have your own group of women

It is also possible to make your own preferred groups and Women Travel Network will take care of all the formalities of booking, ticketing and managing the tour. You just need to enjoy your trip and forget about everything else. So get geared up ladies and make your dream come true.

How to go about it?

Email us your requirements and plans. You will hear from us soon.

Contact

Email:

womentravelnetwork@gmail.com;

Call: +91-8420108693



USHUAIA

Avenida de San Martín



Ushuaia is the southernmost point of Argentina

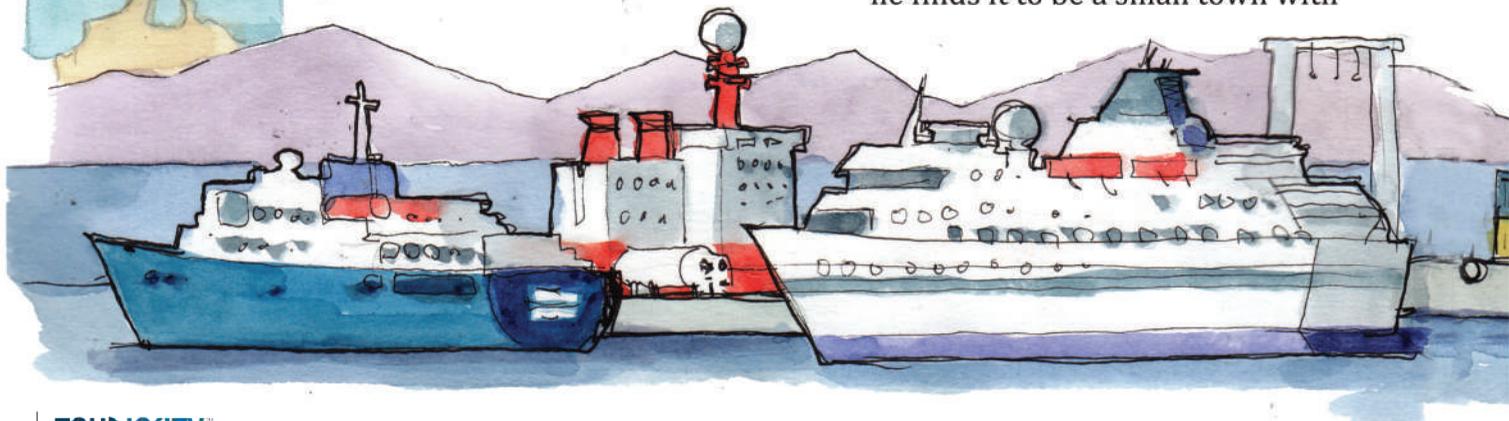


TRAVEL JOURNAL

This is the journal of the trip I did to Ushuaia (Argentina). It doesn't intend to be a complete guide of the place, but an extract of my personal impressions in this unique place.

Text & illustrations:
Joaquín Dorao

When a traveller thinks of the southernmost place on earth, near Antarctica, he imagines a moor covered with snow and desolation, but when he arrives in Ushuaia in Argentina, the southernmost city on the planet, or the 'End of the World' as they announce in its tourist brochures, he finds it to be a small town with

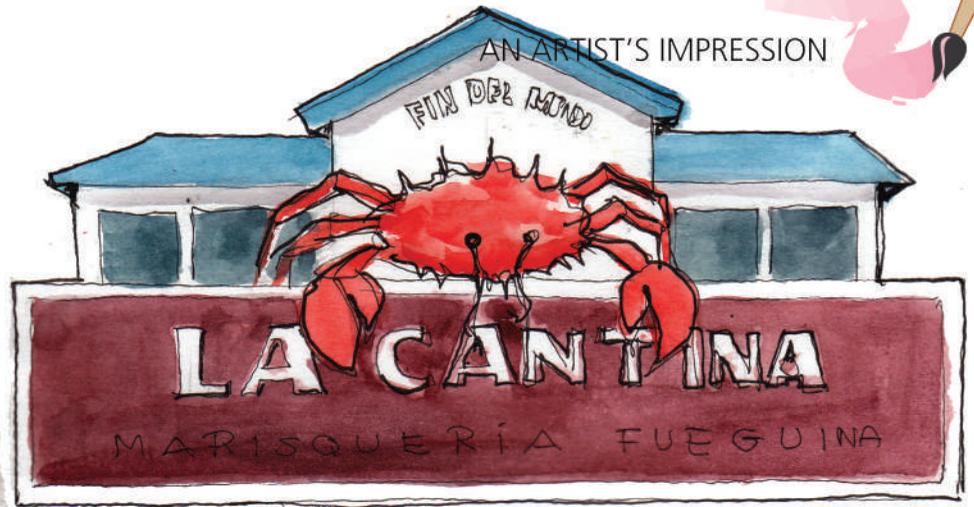




AN ARTIST'S IMPRESSION

FIN DEL MUNDO

Restaurant "La Cantina", where they serve great seafood and fish from the area



colourful houses, parks of green landscapes and wild nature. Located on the Tierra del Fuego archipelago, Ushuaia lies on the southernmost tip of South America. The arrival by plane is impressive; it flies between huge mountains and lands on the edge of the sea - a sea that is cold, hostile. The best time to come here is in the southern summer (winter in the northern hemisphere), as the days are longer and the roads are not cut by snow during the time.

center, which is only a few streets away from the pier. The main street is the Avenida de San Martín, which is where all the shops, bars, post-office etc. are located. After walking for a while and seeing some shops I went to the dock to book a boat trip for the next day through the Beagle Channel, which separates Argentina from Chile, whose islands are further south.

Colorful painted wooden houses

Day 1

From the airport I took a bus that takes travellers to their accommodations. I chose the hostel '5 brother' because of its very central location. After leaving the backpack I went for a walk around the



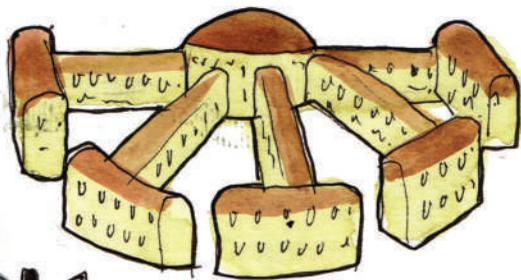
Ushuaia harbour. In front you can see Chile





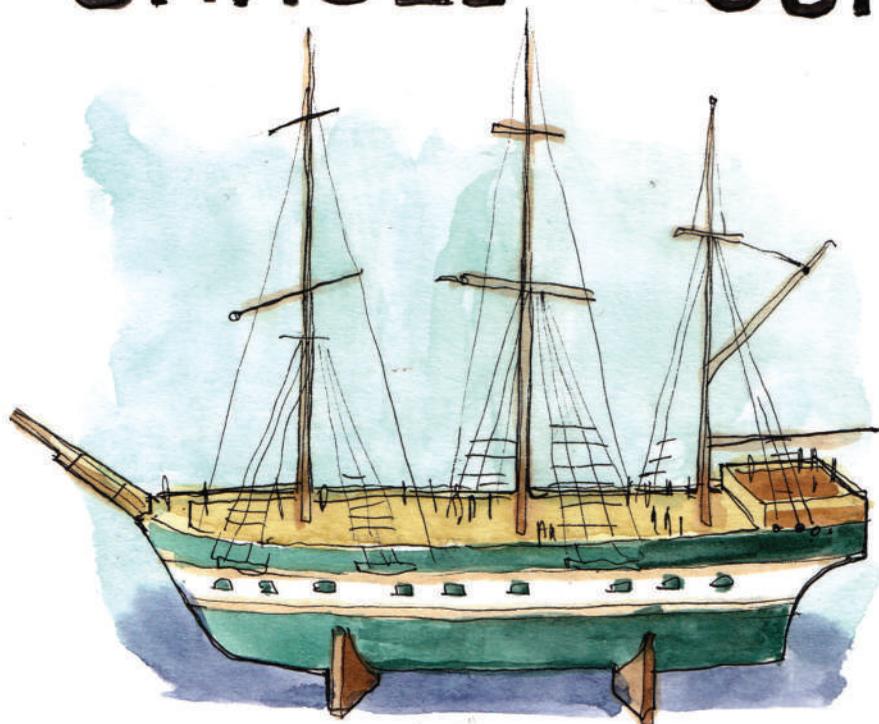
Reconstruction of a cell where you can see the conditions in which the prisoners lived

In the afternoon I decided to visit the Ushuaia jail, called 'the end of the world prison'. It was one of the most inhospitable and isolated prisons in the world. The prison was open until the middle of the 20th century, but currently it houses a museum where you can see the prison cells and visit an interest-



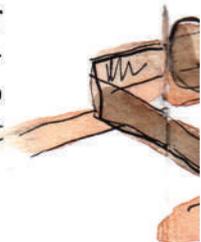
The jail main building, with 5 galleries

CÁRCEL DE USHUAIA



Model of the Beagle ship, in which the naturalist Charles Darwin traveled

ing naval museum and the scientific explorations that were made from this place, which was, and remains to be a starting point towards Antarctica. At the Museum you can see a model of the Beagle ship, by which naturalist Charles Darwin had travelled, stopping for a few days in Ushuaia for collecting supplies. You can also see the utensils and equipment





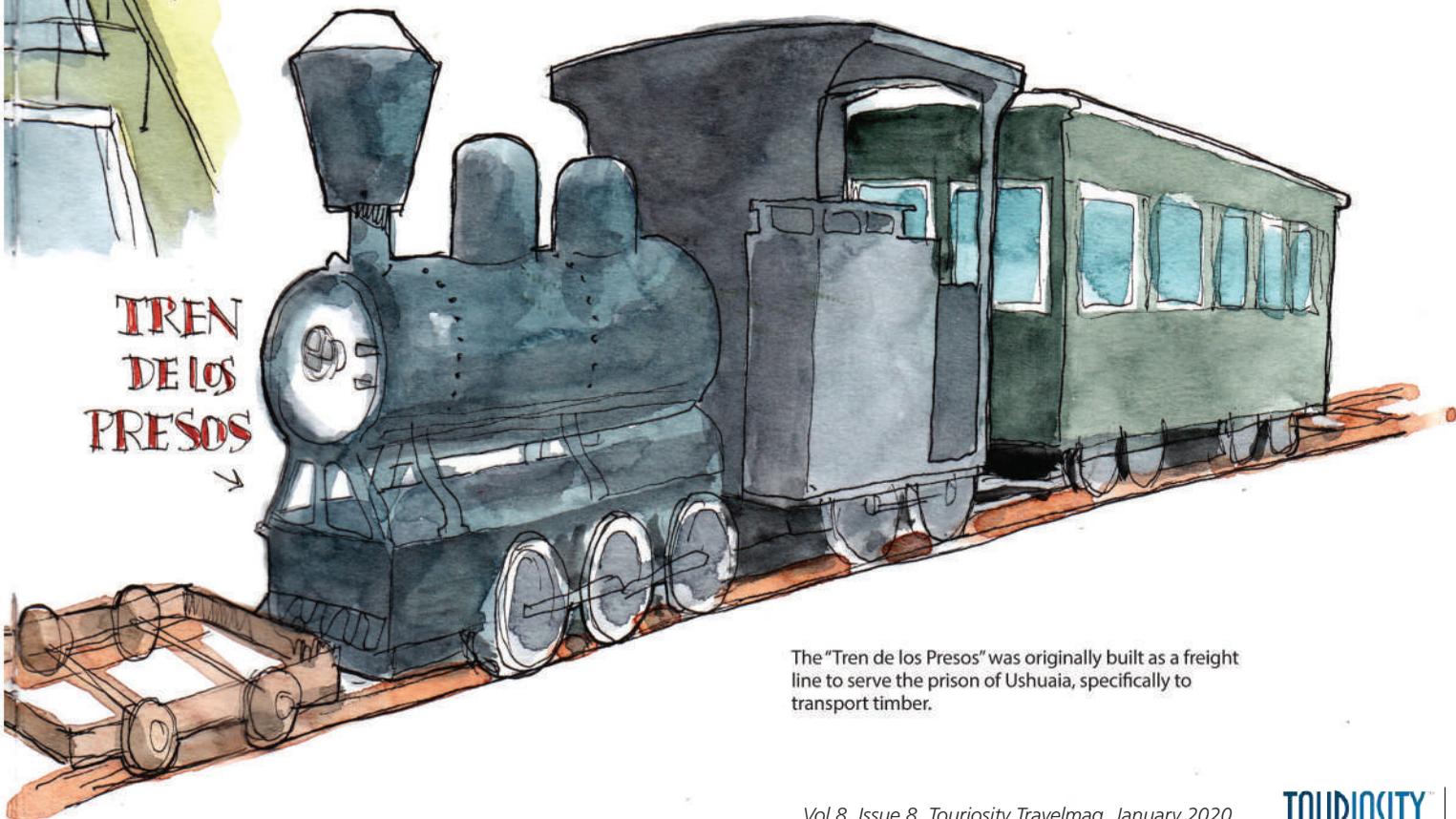
AN ARTIST'S IMPRESSION of whaling ships leaving this port, on the way to the Pacific Ocean. In the museum garden you can see the original train called the 'Train of the End of the World', which was used for transporting the prisoners of this jail to the Austral forests where they would undergo forced labour. The escape from this prison was useless, since there was no place to go for the prisoner who fled, and if he took refuge in the woods, it was most likely that he would die from the cold there.



Day 2

The next day I went early to the tourist dock to take the catamaran that would take me to the Beagle Channel, visiting along the way several islands that are a refuge for cormorants, seals, penguins, walruses and other endemic

TREN DE LOS PRESOS

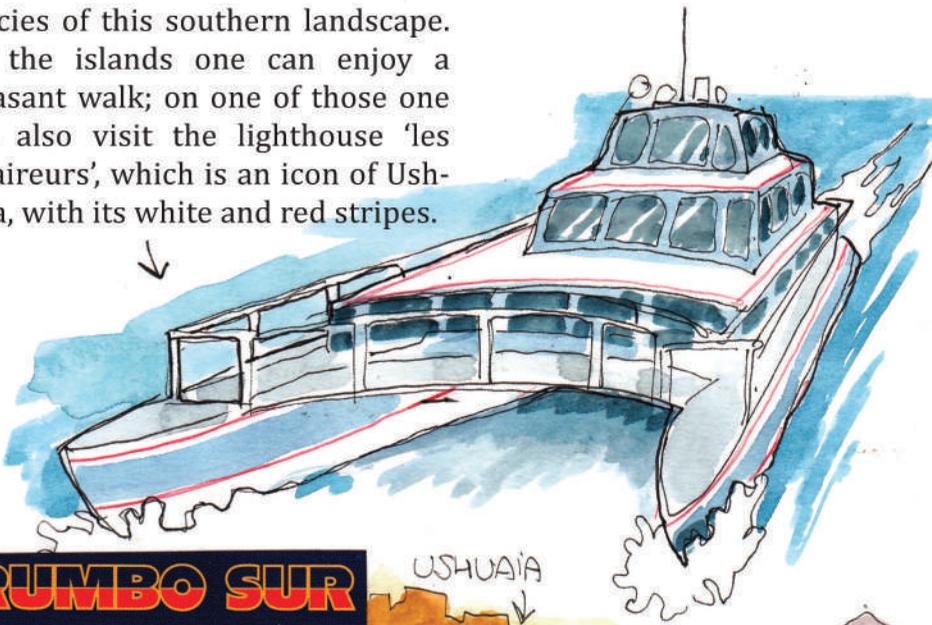
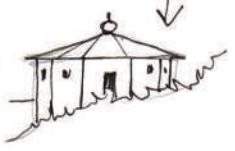


The "Tren de los Presos" was originally built as a freight line to serve the prison of Ushuaia, specifically to transport timber.

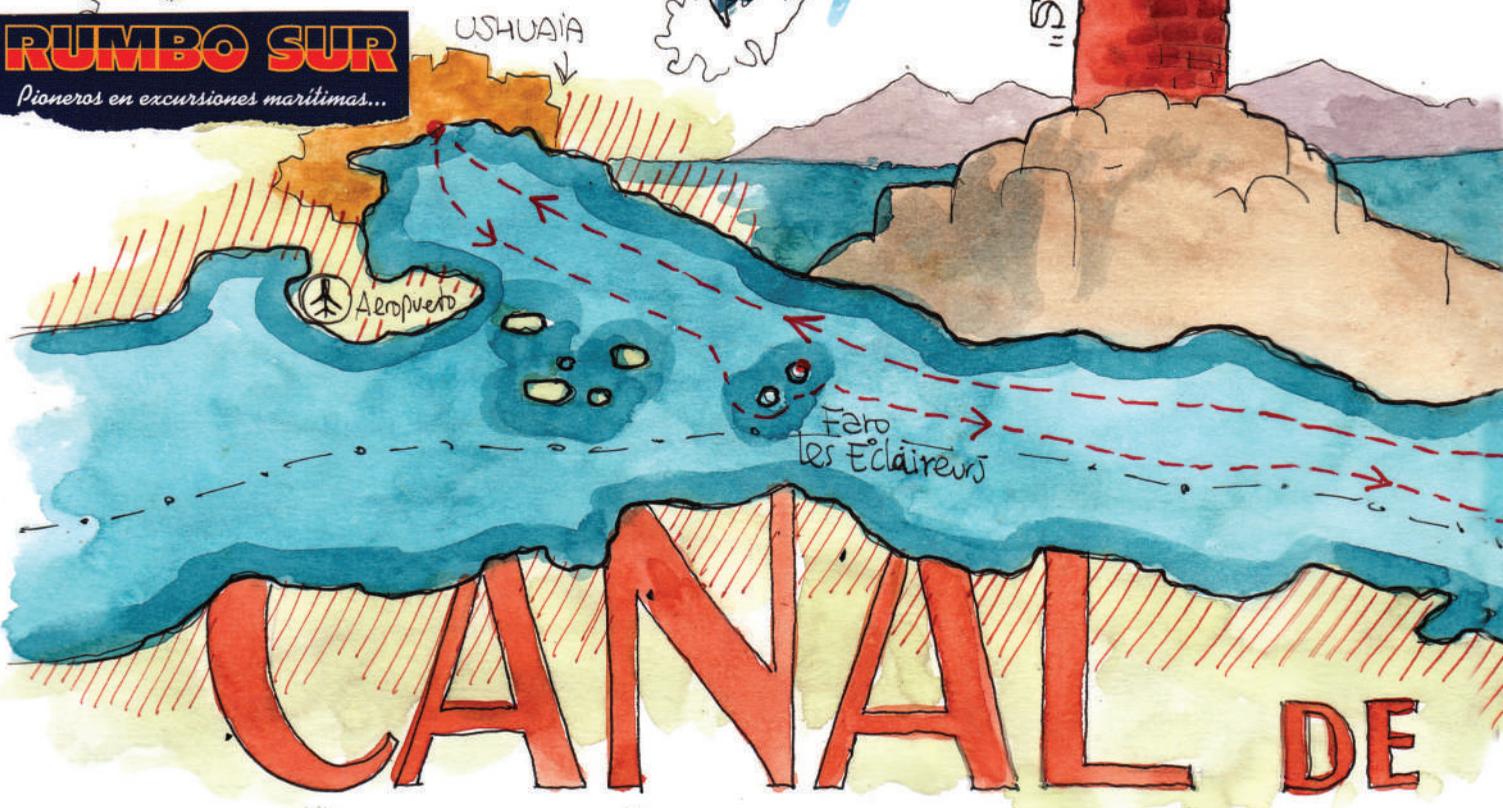
species of this southern landscape. On the islands one can enjoy a pleasant walk; on one of those one can also visit the lighthouse 'les Eclaireurs', which is an icon of Ushuaia, with its white and red stripes.

FARO "LES ÉCLAIREURS"

The lighthouse of Ushuaia should not be confused with the "Lighthouse at the End of the World", from the novel by Jules Verne, which is much further east, in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean



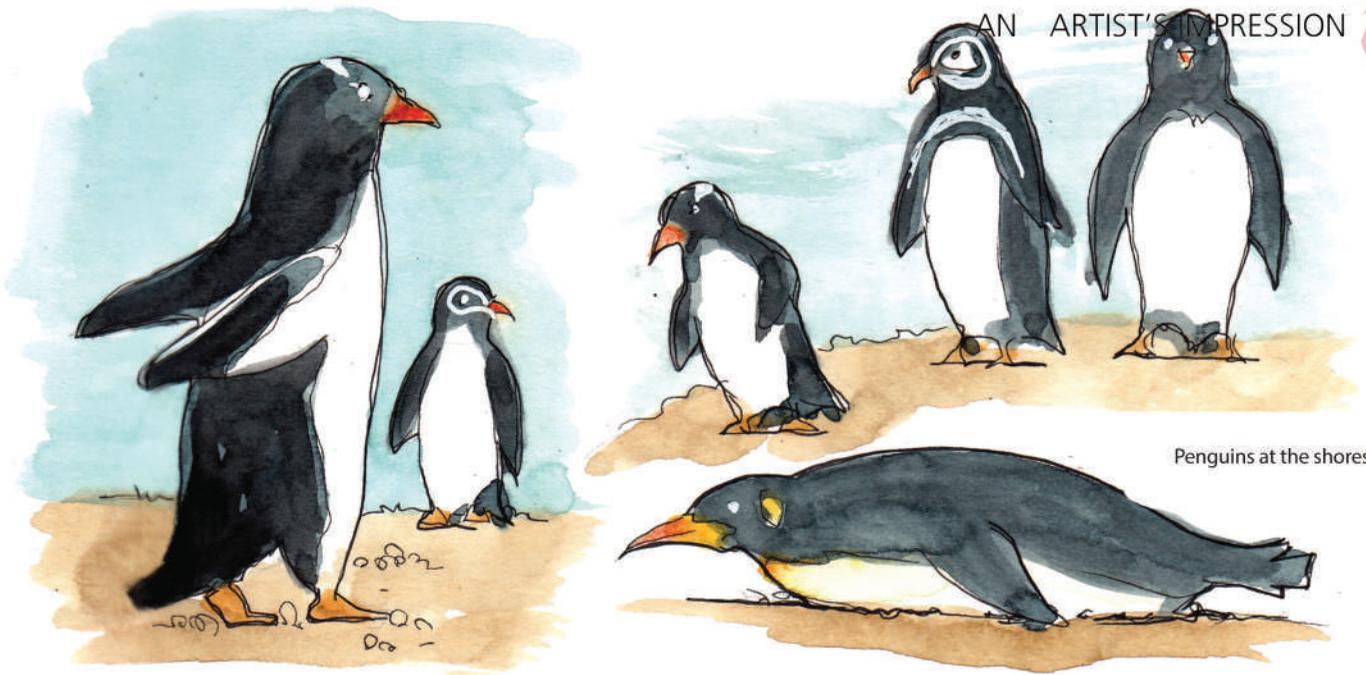
RUMBO SUR
Pioneros en excursiones marítimas...



CANAL DE



Walruses and cormorants



Penguins at the shores

REAGLE



Isla Marbillo (pinguiner)

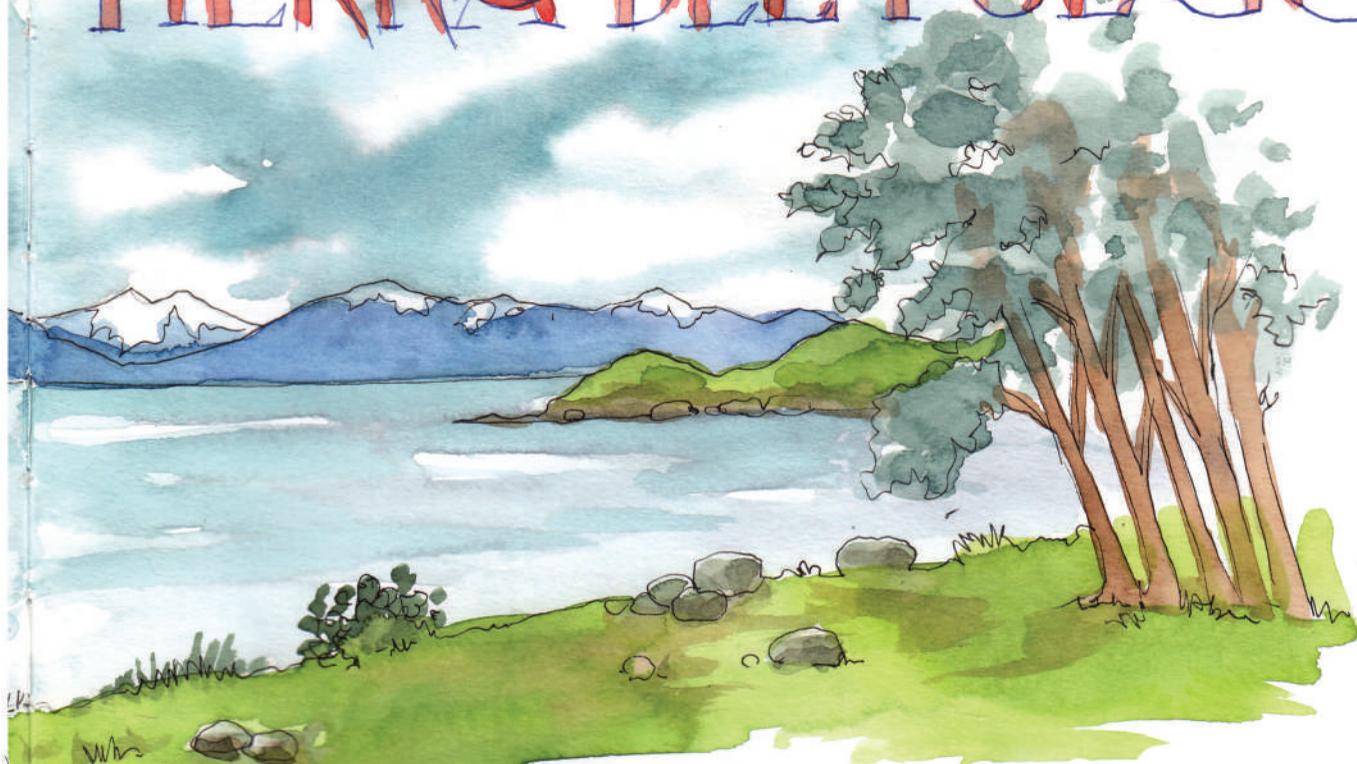


PARQUE NACIONAL



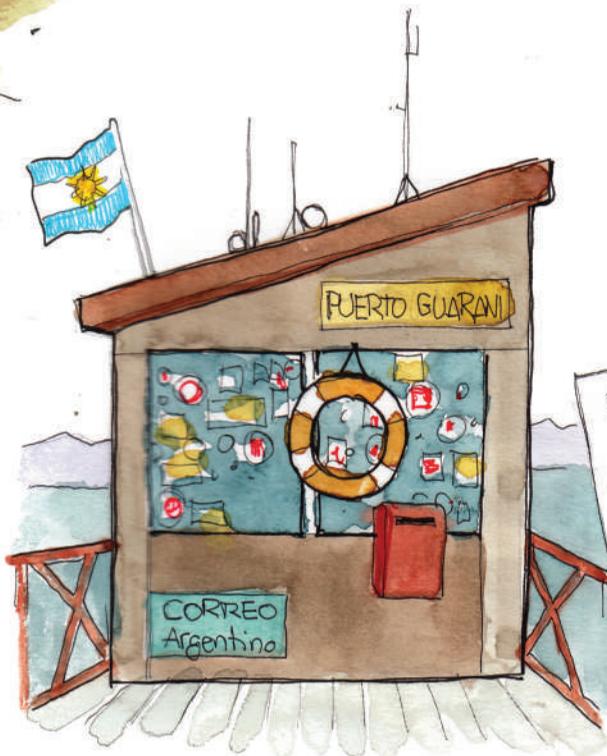


TIERRA DEL FUEGO



We returned to Ushuaia at noon and I took a bus there to go to the Tierra del Fuego National Park, which is some 12 km away from the city. In addition to enjoying the breathtaking landscapes of this beautiful park, one can also visit the 'Es-

tafeta del Fin del Mundo', a post office from where one can send a postcard to friends 'from the end of the World'. The landscapes remained in my retina as a memory of a place of wild beauty and, quite literally, the end of the world.



You can send from here postcards stamped as sent "from the end of the world"



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BRUNEI

ABODE OF PEACE



ASEAN Tourism Forum (ATF) 2020

2020 BRUNEI BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN

The ATF 2020 was recently concluded amidst much pomp and fanfare at Bandar Seri Begawan in Brunei. It marked the 39th edition of the annual ASEAN Tourism Forum. The ASEAN Tourism Forum is a platform for the region's Tourism Ministers, Government Officials and travel industry players to come together and discuss ways to grow and enhance tourism opportunities.

The event was formally inaugurated by His Royal Highness the Crown Prince of Brunei Haji Al-Muhtadee Billah, Senior Minister at the Prime Minister's Office, on 14th January 2020 at the Indera Samudra Grand Hall, at Empire Hotel Brunei. He also launched the new ASEAN Tourism website during the inaugural ceremony. Addressing the delegates and dignitaries during the inaugural ceremony Dato Seri Setia Awang Haji Ali bin Apong, the Minister of Primary Resources and Tourism, Brunei, stated that "This 2020, with Brunei Darussalam hosting the ATF, we welcome you to explore a country where you can trek into unspoilt rainforests and experience the tranquil beauty of our lush greenery, as well as dive amongst abundant coral reefs and historic shipwrecks. Your Bruneian adventure awaits!"

Talking about the increased growth in tourist arrivals to ASEAN region he said that the ASEAN Tourism industry has seen significant growth in the last decade and continues to be an important contributor to socio-economic development in ASEAN. ASEAN welcomed over 133 Million international arrivals in 2019, an increase by 7 percent from 2018, with intra-ASEAN travel comprising 36.7 percent of international arrivals in 2018.



As for Sustainable Tourism Development he pointed out that the increased number of visitor arrivals into ASEAN presents itself with opportunities, in terms of generating economic activities, investment and employment. While the tourism industry has shown significant growth in the number of tourist arrivals, it also faces challenges including, among others, in terms of the carrying capacity of tourist sites, as well as in providing tourism facilities and services expected by different sets of visitor groups in each of the ASEAN Member State.



This year's theme was 'ASEAN – Together Towards a Next Generation of Travel' which Dato Apong said, "reflects the way in which the tourism industry is rapidly progressing. ASEAN Tourism greatly recognizes that innovation and technology brings benefits to the tourism industry, and shapes the way in which governments, key stakeholders and communities embrace the current trend of digital transformation." In this regard he also mentioned that technological





advancements have provided endless possibilities for businesses to grow into new areas, such as offering augmented and virtual reality experiences, mobile applications that can customize to tourists' personal preferences, and providing smart, as well as easy access in making online reservation and purchases at tourist destinations. This has prompted the ASEAN Tourism to revamp its website to be more user friendly, incorporating the modern needs of rising demand for digital tourism experiences and availability of information whilst reflecting the current trends of today's generation.

TRAVEX is the official Travel Exchange programme organised by ATF every year. Held side by side with official meetings by ASEAN NTO, all of which began on 12th January 2020, the ATF 2020 TRAVEX was a 3-day event that saw the participation of Tourism departments of all the 10 ASEAN countries, sellers and buyers from about 45 countries including the US, Australia, Germany, France, Greece, China, India, South Korea, Sweden, Poland, Russia, Macedonia, Latvia, Azerbaijan and Bangladesh. There was about 100 national and international media that covered the event. Also present were the Tourism Ministers of ASEAN countries, the Deputy-Secretary General of ASEAN, High Commissioners, Ambassadors and Distinguished Heads of National Tourism Organisations (NTOs).

About ASEAN Tourism Forum

ASEAN Tourism Forum (ATF) is a cooperative regional effort to promote the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region as one tourist destination. ATF TRAVEX is the longest-running annual ASEAN leisure travel trade event, showcasing the largest contingent of ASEAN sellers. This annual event involves all the tourism industry sectors of the 10 ASEAN Member Nations: Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam.

Each year, the hosting of ATF is rotated among the member countries. Brunei Darussalam hosted the ATF 2020, which was the 39th edition of this event since its inauguration in Malaysia in 1981. The event was held from 12th to 16th January 2020 at the capital city Bandar Seri Begawan. The ATF 2021 edition will be held in Cambodia.



1. His Royal Highness the Crown Prince of Brunei inaugurating the new ASEAN website at the Opening ceremony of ATF 2020 Brunei; 2,3. Cultural performances at the Opening ceremony of ATF 2020 Brunei; 4. Brunei Pavilion at ATF2020 Travex; 5. Bridex International Conference Centre at Jerudong, Brunei all decked up for ATF 2020; 6. Press Conference by Tourism Ministers of all ASEAN NTOs; 7,8,9. Cultural shows and Closing ceremony; 10. Rupanjana De, Editor of Touriosity with Dato Seri Apong, Minister of Primary Resources and Tourism, Brunei at the event.

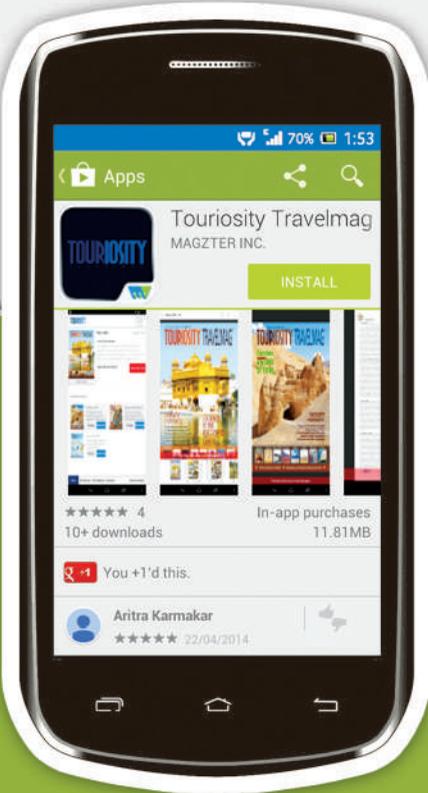


BRUNEI – CHINA YEAR OF TOURISM 2020

Her Royal Highness Princess Hajah Masha, Ambassador at Large, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on 17th January 2020 officiated the launch of Brunei Darussalam – The People's Republic of China Year of Tourism 2020 at Jerudong International School, Arts Centre. Also present on the occasion was Dato Seri Setia Awang Haji Ali bin Apong, Minister of Primary Resources and Tourism of Brunei, Aminuddin Ihsan, Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports of Brunei, His Excellency Mr. Zhang Xu, Vice Minister of Culture and Tourism of People's Republic of China and Her Excellency Madam Yu Hong, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the People's Republic of China.

Prior to the launch, Dato Seri Apong, in his welcoming remarks read the Royal Congratulatory Message from His Majesty Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah, Sultan of Negara Brunei Darussalam to His Excellency Xi Jinping, President of the People's Republic of China on the Brunei Darussalam and the People's Republic of China Year of Tourism 2020. His Excellency Mr Zhang Xu also delivered a Welcoming Speech and read the congratulatory message from His Excellency Xi Jinping, President of the People's Republic of China. Her Excellency Madam Yu Hong also delivered her speech. The opening event also showcased a variety of cultural performances from the two countries.

The launch of Brunei Darussalam – The People's of China Year of Tourism 2020 marks the start of a one year event in tourism cooperation between Brunei Darussalam and the People's Republic of China. It aims to provide a platform to strengthen tourism cooperation through people-to-people and cultural exchanges, enhance bilateral cooperation, capacity building and furthering collaboration and partnership between both countries. The year-long event is also an opportunity to build wider business and trade connections in other areas beyond tourism. With this event, and with the two countries' strong network initiatives, coupled with joint Year of Tourism 2020, both countries could further enhance cooperation with a view to increasing two-way tourist visits and promoting greater people-to-people exchanges between Brunei and China.



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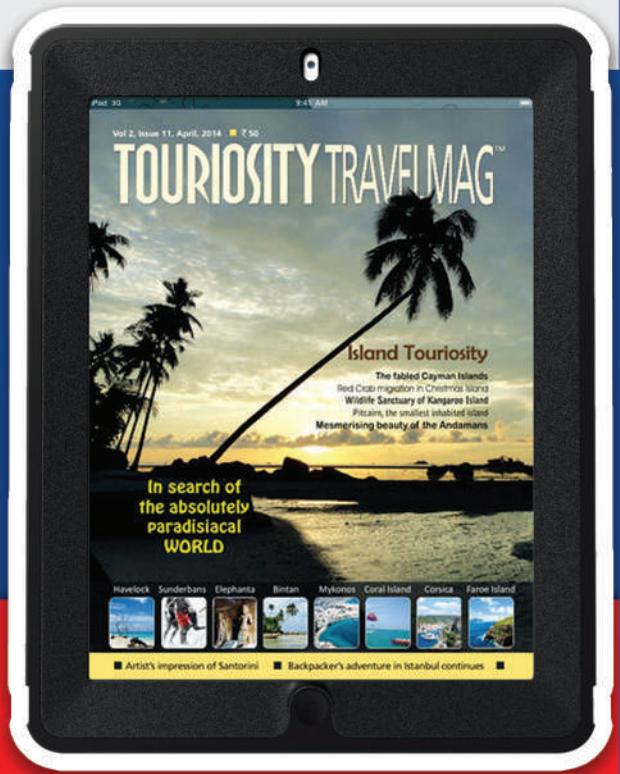
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