

T.S. Eliot had his reasons, so does the Dalai Lama—and you can bet Oprah Winfrey has spoken about her's. Everyone has their distinct, delicious reason for loving travel. Like grandma's jar of pickles that changes tang and texture over time, but remains a thrilling fix to the oft-mundane meal of life, travel keeps on giving. For our 100th issue, we asked diverse travellers to share experiences that best exemplify their reason for being wayfarers, spread across 14 categories and many bewitching places. Perhaps you will relate to the photographer who found his calm in a seaside Thoothukudi church or being overwhelmed by a stranger's kindness on the road? Read on and let your fellow-travellers remind you of the joys that await you beyond the dark lane of a pandemic.

100

REASONS TO LOVE TRAVEL



1

FOR THE LOVE OF INNER JOURNEYS A BALKAN SABBATICAL

It was the year 2019. Out of nowhere I found pieces of my heart splattered on the floor after cracks emerged in my perfect love story and some well-timed chaos ensued at work. The antidote? A sabbatical that let me disappear into the Balkans—an European region on its journey of self-discovery akin to mine. Letting my hair loose at Belgrade’s floating river clubs, making friends while hitch-hiking along Albania’s untouched coastline, flying above the clouds in Montenegro’s hills, and finding myself a home in Sarajevo—my heart stitched itself back together as my eyes devoured riveting sights. If the Balkans could bury the ghosts of its past, so could I.

—VIKAS PLAKKOT

A DAILY ODYSSEY/SHUTTERSTOCK



2

FOR THE LOVE OF SIMPLE DELIGHTS

BRAZIL’S DRAMATIC STREET ART

Brazilian street art is deeply political, rebellious and a strong voice of the people. One of the most artful murals can be found at The Olympic Boulevard in Rio, which was made in preparation for the 2016 Olympics by the famed Eduardo Kobra. The work depicts a Tapajóboy from Brazil, a Mursi woman from Ethiopia, a Kayan woman (Tibeto-Burman ethnic minority) from Thailand, a Supi man from Northern Europe, and a Huli man from Papua New Guinea. It is a depiction of humanity’s common ancestors, the indigenous people from America, Asia, Europe, Africa and Oceania, all representing the different ethnicities of the world through a united work. Kobra studied the features of people from five continents that represent the black, blue, green, red, and gold rings on the Olympic flag. It’s meant to reflect the core values of the Olympics, specifically the adage “We are One.”

—ANKITA KUMAR

KANOKRATNOV/SHUTTERSTOCK



3

FOR THE LOVE OF EDGY ESCAPES

A SONG OF ICE AND FIRE

In Ethiopia's northeastern badlands, life has often been found frozen in pure acid, yet I had already begun my walk to the gates of hell—the Erta Ale volcano. There was no turning back now. With only a torchlight to guide me, I hiked through lava-cooled rocks for four hours straight to reach the rim of a volcanic crater, one that had erupted as recently as 2017. The edge of the crater froze me to a pulp, even as I was ironically aware that a single misstep could burn me to a crisp. The lava lake down below turned the sky into apocalyptic red, and I just stood there, gasping at this wonder of unforgiving nature.

—VIKAS PLAKKOT

MICHAEL VOROBIEV/SHUTTERSTOCK
FACING PAGE: LASZLO MATES/SHUTTERSTOCK

4

FOR THE LOVE OF SERENDIPITY

BREAKING BARRIERS IN BOLIVIA

I met a Canadian guy on my travels in South America in 2017; we hit it off, and decided to travel together. As it happened, we wound up undertaking a rather intense three-day Amazon Survival Challenge in the Bolivian rainforest. I was informed that I was the first Indian to have ever been to that part of the rainforest. We had to build our own shelter from soggy leaves and branches, catch our own food and source our own water from rivers and water-bearing plants. We also ate live termites from a rotting bark—a great source of protein (and crunchiness!) according to our guide.

—ANKITA KUMAR



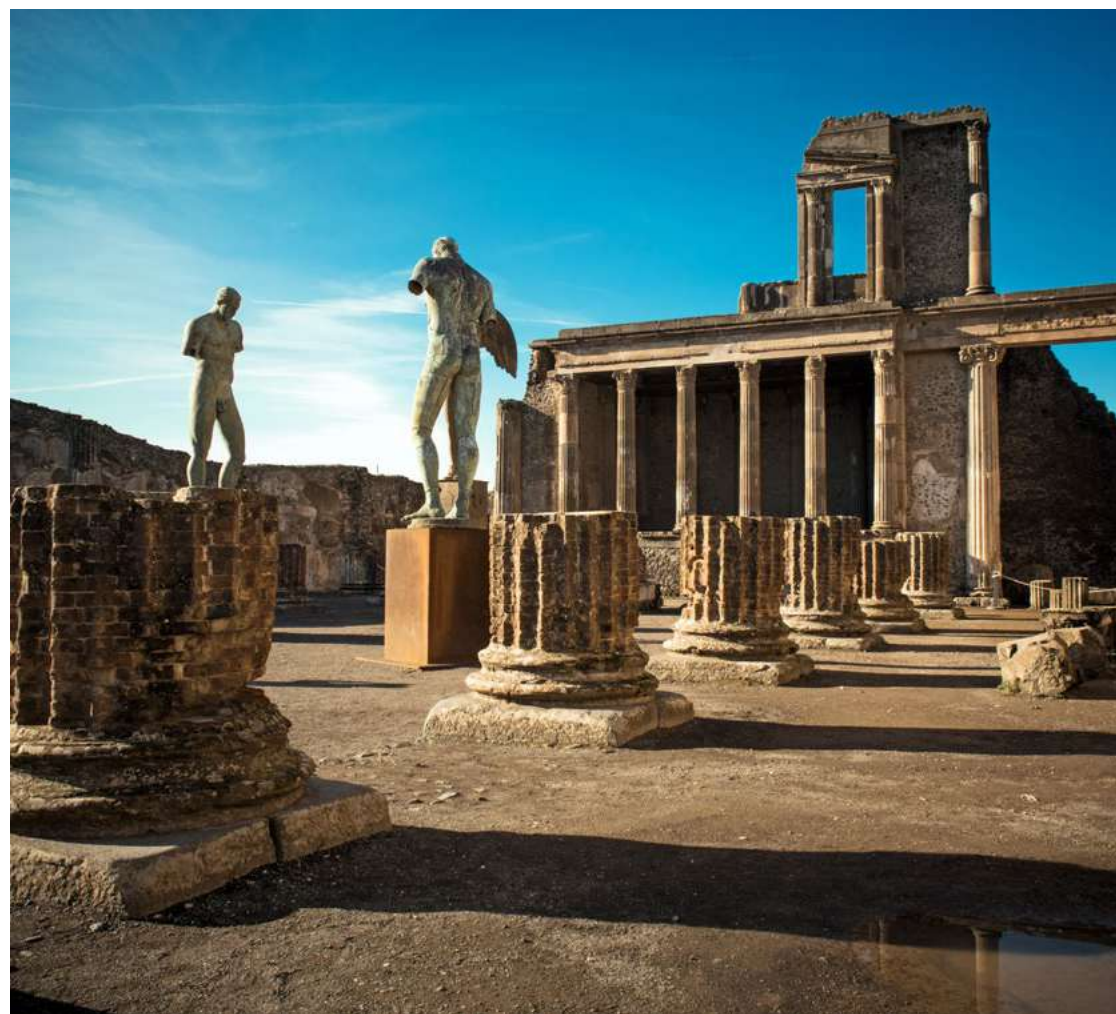
FOR THE LOVE OF FAMILY

A SAFARI TO REMEMBER IN AFRICA

My parents, brother, and 72-year-old grandfather joined me on a rugged romp across east Africa in 2009. We spent two-weeks roving across Maasai Mara National Reserve and Serengeti National Park in a mud-slapped jeep. The landscape was awash with glorious fauna, a kingdom of cheetahs, hippos, elephants, flamingoes, giraffes and zebras. Each new creature spotted brought a genuine dazzle to our eyes, especially to my granddad's. When we first saw a pride of lions napping under a savannah tree, I leant out the jeep to get a better shot with my handycam; the lion I focused on suddenly woke up, his big eyes pierced through the lens, peering into a window of my soul. My hands began to tremble, he lurched forward, circling our jeep, and finally sitting right on top of it. My grandad, now 82, is fuzzy on recent memories, but still remembers that experience as the most terrifying and special moment of his life.

—ANKITA KUMAR





6

FOR THE LOVE OF EPIPHANIES

TIME STOPS IN POMPEII

One morning in the autumn of AD 79, time stopped in Pompeii. Wealthy Campanians were all too familiar with frequent earthquakes in the region, but Mount Vesuvius was akin to God. It was revered, never feared. The devastation lasted two full days, wiping out entire cities and burying people with their most precious belongings—pets, jewellery, grains. Today, the streets of Pompeii defy time. To me, the plaster casts of its fleeing citizens and ruins of palatial *domus*, bathhouses and brothels seemed to stand as a silent reminder to how life as we know it can change beyond recognition in one defining moment.

—SWAGATA GHOSH

A-BABE/SHUTTERSTOCK

7

FOR THE LOVE OF INNER JOURNEYS

HEALING HEARTS IN COLOMBIA

I'd been to quite a few hostels before, but never one floating on the azure Caribbean. Tucked on the edge of Colombia's territorial waters, *Casa en el Agua* or "House on the water" is fittingly named. One evening there was nothing for company except the water sparkling with bio-luminous planktons and a Danish boy. It turned out we were both going through terrible break-ups, so we ended up sharing our stories as we watched the sun come up. It was cathartic to talk to someone who I was probably never going to meet again, a person who came from a place of no judgement and no knowledge of my past.

—ANKITA KUMAR

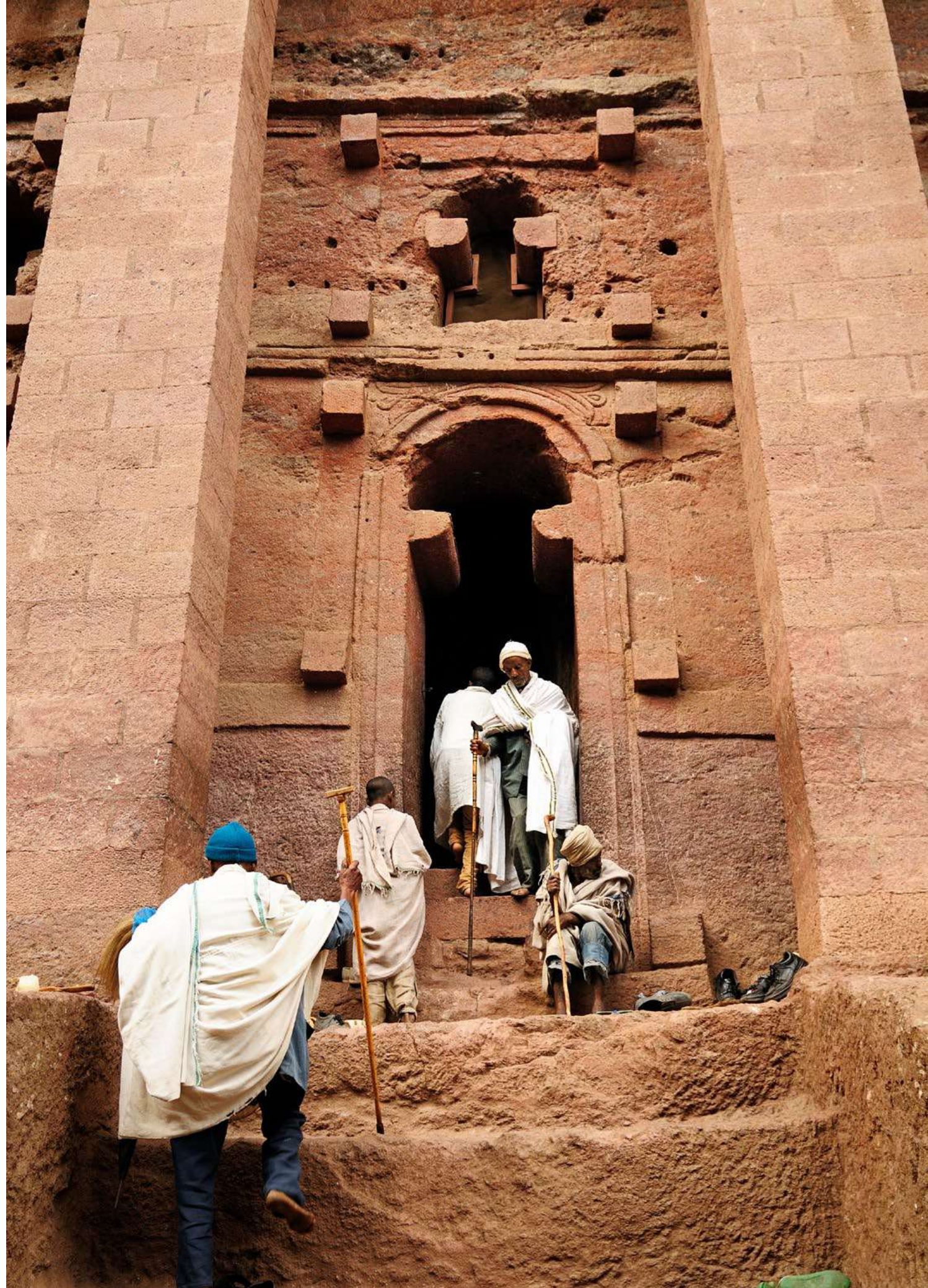
LEMARIE PIERRECK/SHUTTERSTOCK

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FOR THE LOVE OF EPIPHANIES LALIBELA'S SACRED LIGHT

In Lalibela, one is instantly engulfed by a mysticism, especially within the complex maze of eleven monolithic churches carved out of soft volcanic rock and interconnected by tunnels and trenches. It was King Lalibela's dream to create a 'New Jerusalem' in Africa during the 12th century. Getu, our guide, led us into a 200-foot-long tunnel connecting two of the churches. That near-crawl through a pit of absolute darkness, a blackness that makes it difficult to visualise light even in the mind's eyes, symbolises a redemptive journey through hell. As we emerged into the light, surrounded by the stark greenery of the Ethiopian highlands and an air heavy with devotion, it was not difficult to imagine that we had arrived in heaven.

—PALOMA DUTTA



9

FOR THE LOVE OF SUBLIME FOOD NIKKEI CUISINE IN PERU

While bartending at a Peruvian hostel in 2016—preparing local staples such as Pisco Sours and Chilcanos—I was introduced to a new breed of cuisine emerging in the country: Nikkei. In Lima, the restaurant Mido has been a regular on the world's top restaurants lists, showcasing the beautiful lovechild of Peruvian ingredients (diverse varieties of peppers and potatoes) melded with Japanese culinary techniques. It's not simply a 'fusion'. Tiradito is a great example: a dish inspired by sashimi where fish is kept raw, but served with a drizzle of spicy pepper sauce preserving the integrity of both taste and experience—but with a kick.

—VARUD GUPTA





SASIN PARAKSA/SHUTTERSTOCK

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FOR THE LOVE OF KIND STRANGERS

COMPASSION IS THE TICKET

The day before Friday the 13th ought to have been safe for rail travel, but a thief boarded that train from Assam to Delhi in the late 1990s and, while I was engrossed in a novel, said thief grabbed my backpack, which held my passport, VISA card and money, among other items. All I had left was Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* which, as readers know, can make the jolliest man suicidal. But as I reported the crime to the ticket collector, he offered me rice and curry on the house. A co-passenger gifted his pack of bidis that I gratefully chain-smoked to steady my nerves. A student gave me guavas from her family's orchard. Finally getting off in Delhi, at a lodge I'd often stayed in, the manager remembered me and, after I narrated my ordeal, said: "No advance required." That evening, he offered me pegs of whisky while we sat on the roof waiting for the heat to subside, and life felt good again.

—ZAC O'YEAH

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FOR THE LOVE OF INNER JOURNEYS

A TRANS-SIBERIAN SURVIVAL

People will tell you about the dangers of travelling alone. But let me point out the perils of never venturing out solo. Looking back, my Trans-Siberian sojourn spanning 10,000 kilometres between Saint Petersburg and Vladivostok wasn't only a bucket list adventure across Russia, but also a road map to the self-esteem I had lost to an abusive relationship. When you spend that kind of time with nobody but yourself, it recalibrates your confidence. The calm of the Taiga, the depths of Lake Baikal, even the nothingness of Siberia gave me the distance I needed to recognise something I had come to forget: the power of walking away.

—AANCHAL ANAND

12

FOR THE LOVE OF SIMPLE DELIGHTS

MUSEUM-HOPPING IN LONDON

From the stamp seals of Mohenjo-Daro (2600 B.C.) and Tippoo's semi-automaton Tiger (1793) to Darwin's first edition of the *Origin of Species* (1859) and *Warhol's Monroe* (1962), London offers the world within an hour's drive of each other. The Natural History Museum, V&A, National Gallery, National Portrait Gallery, British Museum, Tate Modern and many more strive to keep alive the wonders and truths of our universe. From the ends of earth to the beginning of time, you can hop, skip and jump through entire civilisations in an afternoon. All you need is a Tube ticket and a pocketful of curiosity.

—SWAGATA GHOSH



13

FOR THE LOVE OF KIND STRANGERS

A BUENOS AIRES BARBEQUE

I'd moved to Buenos Aires—my first stop on a culinary tour in 2015—to learn about the fabled *asado*, or Argentinian barbeque. To aid me in this quest, I reached out to my fellow nerds on the internet, Redditors. With their help, I spent weeks learning the techniques and preparations of the trade, which culminated at a local park where fellow travellers and online barbecue fiends ventured to experience a meat feast hosted by yours truly. My first foray into the world of *asado* didn't just teach me about cooking *morcilla* (blood sausage) or *mollejas* (sweetbreads), it helped me understand that sometimes a meal is less about the food, and more about the company that surrounds it.

—VARUD GUPTA

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FOR THE LOVE OF EPIPHANIES

OCEAN'S ALTAR IN MANAPAD

About 60 kilometres from Thoothukudi in Tamil Nadu lies the small fishing village of Manapad, and on a cliff edge of the beach stands the St. Francis Xavier Church, containing what is said to be a piece of the True Cross from Jerusalem. Tuned out of city bustle, the Manapad beach itself feels like a place wedged in time, with the serene white-and-blue church overlooking its sandy arms. Perhaps it was the intersection of nature and faith, perhaps the meditative silence, or perhaps even the awareness that on a clear day my eyes might be able to see as far as Kanyakumari—but standing there some four monsoons ago, I managed to hold hands with some elusive thoughts that usually remain unchallenged.

—SAMBIT DATTACHAUDHURI



15

FOR THE LOVE OF TIME TRAVEL

AT ANNE FRANK'S IN AMSTERDAM

I read *The Diary of Anne Frank* in school and it affected me powerfully, so naturally, when I travelled to Amsterdam in 2017, I had to visit the house where she and her family hid from the Nazis for two years. The diary paints a vivid picture of their life in hiding; once I went past the (original) moveable bookcase into the Secret Annex, I could clearly imagine scenes described in it. Anne's room is restored with the original wallpaper bearing her picture postcards and movie star posters—a poignant reminder that she was a young teen whose life was brutally cut short by hate.

—PRACHI JOSHI



ALEX ALDERIC JERO/SHUTTERSTOCK (CHURCH), © ANNE FRANK HOUSE / PHOTOGRAPHER, CRIS TOALA OLIVARES (DIARY)

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FOR THE LOVE OF NATURAL WONDERS

MOONLIT NIGHT AT JURA HILLS

One night in February 2019, as we drove from Geneva we noticed the moon—full, round and enormous—follow us. Over Lac Léman it hung, eclipsing the city lights, a dual vision of a silver disc reflected in the dark waters of the lake. When we reached the base of La Dôle in the Jura hills to begin hiking, the supermoon had bathed the snowy trail and the hills in light so bright that we could see our shadows. The pine trees stood in a silhouette against the moon. The night was no longer what I had known it to be all along. But an illuminated picture of navy blue and silver meshed together forming an illustrious, enchanting otherworld.

—DEBASHREE MAJUMDAR



ELENARTS/SHUTTERSTOCK (TREE), KAREENA GIANANI (FROZEN CHILD)

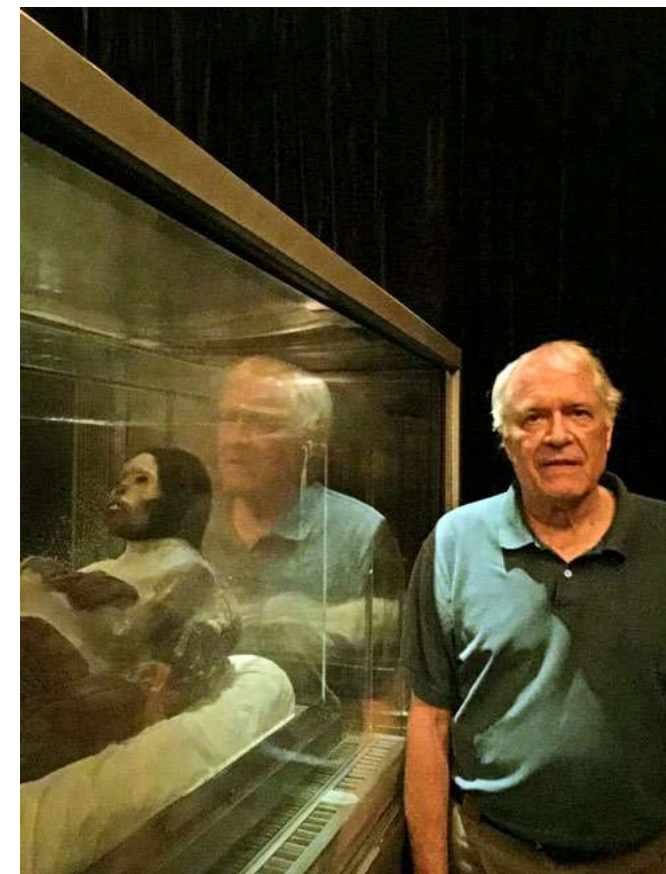
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FOR THE LOVE OF EPIPHANIES

PERU'S FROZEN CHILD

Little prepares you to see the frozen body of a 12-year-old girl who, in a ritual sacrifice, was buried almost 600 years ago in a volcano in Peru. Juanita, as the Inca child is fondly called, was found by Johan Reinhard (in picture) in September 1995 around the summit of Ampato in the city of Arequipa. I saw her sitting in a glass box in the Santuarios Andinos museum, and was stunned to note how intact she was: dark shoulder-length hair, hands folded on her knees, little gaps in her teeth. The starkest detail however was the depression on the right side of her head, from the blow that killed her moments before she was buried, in the mid-1400s. Juanita isn't a mummy: She still has her internal organs, and the remains of coca leaves and corn—her last meal—are still in her stomach.

—KAREENA GIANANI



FOR THE LOVE OF EXTRAVAGANCE

ICELAND'S MISTY INDULGENCE

The Blue Lagoon is an indulgence like no other. Dug out of lava fields and just shy of the Arctic Circle, its milky blue waters take you to *Narnia*-land and leave you there for as long as you may wish. This misty geothermal resort attracts 4,000 visitors a day, yet every experience is unique. Once inside, you can 'walk' the lagoon waters, swim or just float around as little swirls of mist rise around you. We covered our faces in matte silica masks, sipped our cloudy cocktails and played hide-and-seek. Then it started to snow.

—SWAGATA GHOSH



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FOR THE LOVE OF EDGY ESCAPES

WHERE GENGHIS KHAN RODE

Gorkhi Terelj National Park is right near Mongolia's rapidly developing capital Ullanbaator, but it feels like it's worlds away. In the summer of 2015, me and my friends stayed in traditional gers (yurts) on the outskirts of the park, as we packed for a 14-day ride across the same lands Genghis Khan had once crossed on horseback. We rode across lime meadows and through rivers, with surrounding views of the park's distinctive rock structures. Camping outside every night with no other people in sight, this was probably the most relaxed I've ever felt on an adventurous trip, though our horses were feisty and we did find bear tracks on the ground on route.

—MADHURI CHOWDHURY



CW BY SHUTTERSTOCK

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FOR THE LOVE OF SUBLIME FOOD

SALT, FAT, ACID, HEAT IN GEORGIA

Would you buy a plane ticket for bread? I did for *khachapuri*, the delightfully decadent stuffed cheese bread from Georgia. On a binge excursion to Tbilisi in 2013, I picked up essential vocabulary on the streets: *imeruli* (cheese bread), *megruli* (extra cheese bread), and *ajaruli*, the 'cheeseboat' instantly recognisable for the egg yolk cooking in the heat of melted cheese. Imeruli became my takeaway meal for day trips to the historic realms of Mtskheta and Gori, whereas ajaruli remained a cherished restaurant affair. Years later, the memories of these indulgent meals come knocking, with a kiss of Kisi or a touch of Teliani—those unforgettable Georgian white wine pairings.

—AANCHAL ANAND



TAI DUNDUA/SHUTTERSTOCK

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FOR THE LOVE OF SIMPLE DELIGHTS SPOTTING DWARVES IN WROCŁAW

When I visited the place in 2016, I found one casually reclining outside the train station, another in academic garb near the University. More than 400 tiny bronze dwarf statues dot the Polish city of Wrocław: a pair of firemen rushing towards St. Elizabeth's Church, a female apothecary at a pharmacy, drunken party dwarfs outside a vodka bar, and so on. In the 1980s, activists of the Orange Alternative Movement protested the prevailing authoritarian regime by dressing up as dwarfs. In 2001, the movement was honoured with a dwarf statue placed on the corner of Ulica Świdnicka (the high street), after which hundreds popped up all over the city. Find a map online to go dwarf hunting or take a free walking tour, which gives you a deeper historical perspective.

—PRACHI JOSHI



ANDRII ANNA PHOTOGRAPHERS/SHUTTERSTOCK

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FOR THE LOVE OF NATURAL WONDERS IRELAND'S SANDSTONES FROM THE SKY

As the glaciers receded after the last Ice age, huge sandstone boulders got left behind by the melted water, far away from the lakes, rivers and the water bodies where they formed over millennia. On the border of Ireland and Northern Ireland, in Cavan Burren Park, you'll find such ginormous sandstones, seemingly dropped from the sky, alongside ancient stone settlements—some over 4,500 years old!

Amidst a prehistoric forest, the sheer scale of these 'erratics' (as the stones are called) force one to examine their place in the world. Not much else has managed to compare to my awe at the sight, and I suspect not much else will.

—AATISH NATH



PHOTO COURTESY: BRIAN MORRISON/FÁILTE IRELAND / TOURISM IRELAND

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FOR THE LOVE OF SERENDIPITY

WINE AND WOMEN IN ETHIOPIA

On my first day in Ethiopia in 2018, I landed in Dorze, a small village on the edge of the Omo Valley. After a day of exploring villages that wound through green valleys and around an expansive lake, I found myself in the town centre of Dorze. By chance, I wandered into a dimly lit, dirt-floor bar, where I found a group of elderly women drinking orange-tinted honey wine while clapping their hands and stomping their feet to rhythmic tunes. Upon seeing the lone *faranji* in the bar, they pulled me into their circle. Sleep-deprived and bleary eyed, I joined in the cheer. My glass of deceptively strong wine was refilled as each woman took their turn showing me the steps of the traditional Dorze dance. Stumbling out of the bar as the sun was setting, I smiled, trying to remember the last time I had laughed so deeply and danced so freely.

—ALICIA ERICKSON

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FOR THE LOVE OF SIMPLE DELIGHTS

AT THE OPERA IN VIENNA

On my first trip to Vienna in 2013, I wanted to watch an opera at the Wiener Staatsoper but tickets were pricey. Then, I discovered standing-only tickets for as little as €3 (₹260). These become available an hour before the performance, however the queues start much earlier. I managed to snag a ticket and find a spot with a good view; the Staatsoper thoughtfully provides upholstered supports to lean on, plus discreet monitors displaying English subtitles. Remember to dress appropriately—smart casuals will do but if you turn up in shorts or flip-flops you may be denied entry. What did I watch? A particularly flamboyant rendition of *Romeo & Juliet* that made me forget about my aching feet!

—PRACHI JOSHI

POSZTOS/SHUTTERSTOCK



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FOR THE LOVE OF ROAD TRIPS A SOUTH INDIAN ODYSSEY

At 19, I was sure of three things: I was a travel enthusiast, motorcyclist, and I wanted to go to the southernmost tip of India. Routes were studied, bags packed, and the motorbike group assembled; so began the 1,600-kilometre journey south, two full days of hard riding and soft breezes. It was a journey measured out of chai cups, each sip different from the last stall or state—one as sweet as syrup, the next a no-nonsense punch to the system. Still, each glassful was a refreshing, humbling reminder of the vast tastes of our nation. Though, if I talk of India's intrinsic charm, waking up the Triveni Sangam (no, not the rivers of Allahabad, but the oceans of the country's southernmost point) framed by an unabashedly, peachy sunrise, was one of the most beautiful moments I have ever experienced. It didn't need supporting characters like jagged mountains or perfectly placed coconut trees, just the edge of the world in all its mysterious glory.

—AASHISH CHANDRATREYA



PUHAIPADAM FILMS/SHUTTERSTOCK (STATUE), POSZTOS/SHUTTERSTOCK (PETROGLYPH)

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FOR THE LOVE OF NATURAL WONDERS AZERBAIJAN'S ANCIENT TRAILS

Azerbaijan's fire and oil connections are well-documented, but few know it is home to relics from the Upper Paleolithic age, at least 40,000 years old. To discover more, my husband and I landed up at Gobustan preserve, a UNESCO Site near Baku, which houses an impressive collection of more than 6,500 petroglyphs made by our ancestors. We deep-dived into millennia-old history at the interactive museum at the entrance of the reserve, and armed with newfound knowledge on interpreting the petroglyphs, walked ahead. It felt surreal to be amid the dramatic landscape: rocks, boulders, and caves in tumbledown disarray from the earthquakes that rocked the region, all vestiges of past civilisations. On these are drawings of extinct animals, hunting rituals and pregnant women, of boats and warriors, affirming our humanity through the most primordial instincts.

—LUBNA AMIR





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FOR THE LOVE OF SUBLIME FOOD

THE BEST BRISKET, IN TEXAS

It was 10.30 a.m., two-hours since my buddy and I queued outside Franklin's in Austin, Texas. We still had to wait 30 minutes till they opened up, and 40 hungry people stood ahead of us. Franklin's oak-smoked brisket is lauded as the world's best: perhaps why Obama cut the line when he visited, though he graciously picked up everyone's tab. We sure didn't look presidential, especially since we purchased two cans of Shiner Bock— from a waitress far too cheery to be pedalling early morning beer. At the cash register, after ordering a pound of lean brisket, pork ribs, dang pie, potato salad and pinto beans, I was fuming; nobody should ever wait three hours for good brisket in Texas, I thought. Then, the trays came out. The meat's quality didn't need to be over-dressed, as Bourdain put it, "it's the finest brisket I've ever had."

—JULIAN MANNING

PHOTO COURTESY: WYATT MCSPADDEN/FRANKLIN BARBECUE

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FOR THE LOVE OF KIND STRANGERS

TWO WOMEN IN ITALY

In May 2013, I was in the lobby of a backpackers' hostel in Bologna, Italy, when a man asked me if I could guide him into a tight parking spot. In my experience, people helped each other out in hostels regularly, so I didn't hesitate. Once he was parked and I was headed back in, I noticed a lady, following me. Turned out, she'd been worried about this man's intentions, and wanted to make sure that he didn't—as she put it reasonably—bundle me off into the trunk of his car or take me captive. It was one woman looking out for another, even as strangers. Helen and I struck up a friendship and spent the next couple of days together, and remain dear friends to this day. Meeting her taught me so much about the importance of female friendships—on the road and elsewhere.

—VAISHALI DINAKARAN



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FOR THE LOVE OF SIMPLE DELIGHTS LAZING IN ST. JAMES PARK

London's St. James Park is charming and compact, yet I find it is often eclipsed by its illustrious neighbours with better PR: Hyde Park, Green Park, and Kensington Gardens. This, however, adds to its tranquility, as it is often less crowded than the city centre's other famed green spaces. During the day I leaned against the idyllic Blue Bridge, gazing at the lake that frames the park's Duck Island nature reserve. From this vantage point there are also incredible views of the London Eye and Buckingham Palace. Thankfully, I remembered to say hello to the pelicans who are fed every day between 2.30 and 3 p.m. I returned to the park in the evening and it was just as enchanting under the dark sky, the paths lit by kerosene lamps—just as they were in the 19th century—casting a decidedly softer glow on this royal gem.

—SARVESH TALREJA

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FOR THE LOVE OF KIND STRANGERS WARMTH IN A SIBERIAN MUSEUM

The last day of my partner and I's month-long journey around Russia in 2018 was spent in the Siberian capital of Novosibirsk. A couple of hours before our flight we chanced upon the Nicholas Roerich's Museum, a mint-green structure celebrating the 20th century master painter, who spent close to two decades in India. The sudden appearance of the museum featuring one of my favourite painters contained, no doubt, his gorgeous works on the Himalayas, a prospect that made me homesick and happy. Yet we were disappointed to find out that the museum did not accept card payment—we didn't have enough roubles for tickets. When the matronly lady behind the counter found out we were Indians, she let us enter anyway to honour Roerich's India connection. It was a fitting act of kindness from Siberia's first museum of Roerich's works (Indian and others), built entirely on public donations by people who were just as enchanted with his work as we were.

—PALOMA DUTTA

ANASTAS_STYLES/SHUTTERSTOCK



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FOR THE LOVE OF TIME TRAVEL
**PETRA WRIT
IN PINK**

Carved into the pink sandstone cliffs and desert canyons of Jordan, Petra was a city lost to time until it was discovered rather serendipitously in 1812. Today, the erstwhile capital of the Nabatean empire is one of the Seven Wonders of the Modern World.

On my trip to this ancient terrain back in 2017, I may not have stumbled upon any treasure chests, but what my eyes arrested over a two-day hike was no less. Be it the glow of the mystical Al-Khazneh building under a starlit sky, or the intricacy of its rock-cut architecture, the memories, rose-hued like the city, linger to this day.

—VIKAS PLAKKOT



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FOR THE LOVE OF SERENDIPITY

WEDDING BELLS IN VIETNAM

While I was on a motorbike tour through central Vietnam, my guide invited me to his friend's daughter's wedding, which just happened to be on our route. I immediately said yes, when else would I go to an impromptu matrimony in Vietnam's heartland? My crew for the ceremony winded up being an entire table of enthusiastic, Vietnamese uncles. They didn't understand a word of what I was saying, I didn't understand a word of what they were saying; all we knew was that we were unequivocally smashed out of our wits at 11 in the morning. There's nothing like a bit of 'happy water' before you have the honour of dancing with the happy couple.

—ANKITA KUMAR



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FOR THE LOVE OF TESTING YOUR SPIRIT

MYTHICAL CAVE OF INDONESIA

Clutching on to my life jacket, I sat on the edge of the 16-foot-deep natural pool inside Rangko Cave in Gusung Island—part of the larger Flores Island in east Indonesia. A childhood boating accident had put me off swimming lessons forever, and the eerie cave wasn't helping. Rangko felt timeless and wrapped in secrets; a cavern whose waters shine electric blue-green when sunlight hits them. Centuries-old stalactites ring the ceiling, and bats are glued to the roof. I watched wee toddlers splashing below, unable to muster their confidence. Finally, a few failed attempts later, I shed my inhibitions—with the life jacket—and plunged. I circled around the pool's edge in bliss, floating on my back, drowning out every other murmur. Except the one of my own beating heart.

—POOJA NAIK

DUONG HOANG DINH (SHUTTERSTOCK (BEER), THRIFTHOT (SHUTTERSTOCK (CAVE)



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FOR THE LOVE OF PRIVATE PURSUITS

CAFÉ TERRACE AT NIGHT

As a teenager, I'd fallen in love with Vincent van Gogh and made up my mind to someday bask in the presence of "Café Terrace at Night"—his painting that resonated with me the most. The arrival of my 30th birthday along with two strands of grey meant the time was right for booking that ticket to Amsterdam, and to the Kroller Müller Museum, just outside the city. I walked through the rooms only half taking in the other exhibits, until finally my face was a few inches away from van Gogh's energetic brushstrokes imploding into *that* painting, that not even the best of prints can prepare one for. Absorbing that image of a street-side cafe in Arles that van Gogh painstakingly handcrafted on the day I turned 30 remains the most transcendent experience I've ever had.

—VAISHALI DINAKARAN

PHOTO COURTESY: KRÖLLER-MÜLLER MUSEUM/FACEBOOK (PAINTING), CANADASTOCK (SHUTTERSTOCK (BOAT)



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FOR THE LOVE OF SIMPLE DELIGHTS

GROOVE FREE IN GENEVA

Geneva may well be among the most expensive cities in the world, but it's the freebies that are invaluable. The city's free transport card for tourists allows you unlimited rides on trams, buses and water-taxis called *mouettes* (French for seagulls), that run between the left and right banks of Lake Geneva. Have a hot chocolate on this side, grab some ice-cream on the other, and repeat. No major touristy to-dos, no marquee attractions; just you, on a yellow boat sailing on the bluest waters you've ever seen. Like that drawing you made as a child just came to life.

—KUSUMITA DAS

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FOR THE LOVE OF PRIVATE PURSUITS

STAMPING THROUGH THE SOVIET

I was six when the Soviet Union collapsed, throwing my young mind into a panic. Would the map have a hole now; would the globe look like an eaten-out apple? The now-hilarious mental images birthed my lifelong pursuit: a treasure hunt trailing the 15 former

Soviet Republics, which first manifested as a gap-year in Russia. Kicking up dust on horseback in Kyrgyzstan, touring the KGB

building in Latvia, and exploring Silk Road sites in Uzbekistan, the memories stacked up. The deliciousness of my discoveries were also flavoured by succulent kebabs in Azerbaijan, potato pancakes in Belarus, and Armenian cognac. But I'm not done yet; two more stamps to collect before I can rest my obsession.

—AANCHAL ANAND



KOSORUKOV DMITRY/SHUTTERSTOCK

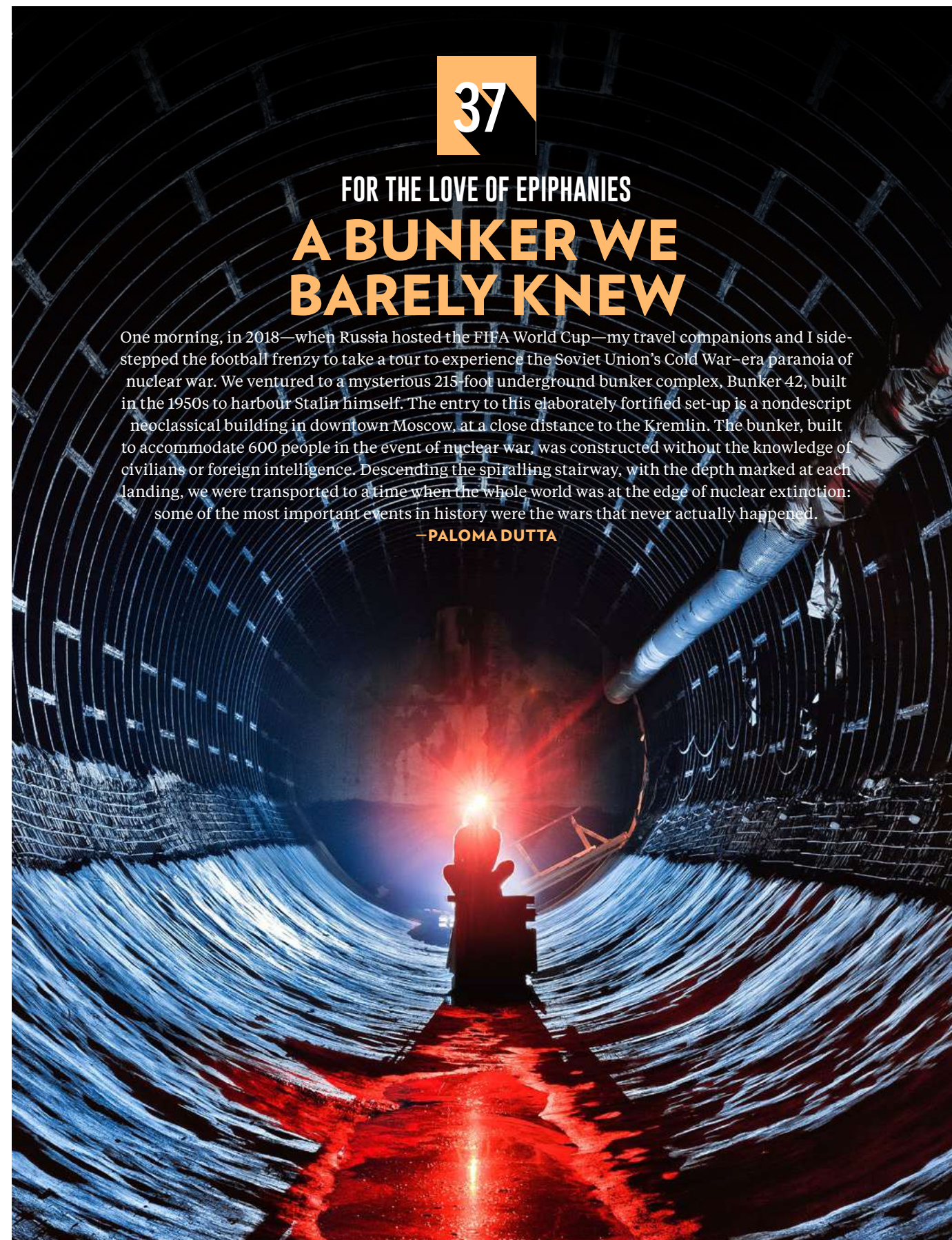
37

FOR THE LOVE OF EPIPHANIES

A BUNKER WE BARELY KNEW

One morning, in 2018—when Russia hosted the FIFA World Cup—my travel companions and I side-stepped the football frenzy to take a tour to experience the Soviet Union's Cold War-era paranoia of nuclear war. We ventured to a mysterious 215-foot underground bunker complex, Bunker 42, built in the 1950s to harbour Stalin himself. The entry to this elaborately fortified set-up is a nondescript neoclassical building in downtown Moscow, at a close distance to the Kremlin. The bunker, built to accommodate 600 people in the event of nuclear war, was constructed without the knowledge of civilians or foreign intelligence. Descending the spiralling stairway, with the depth marked at each landing, we were transported to a time when the whole world was at the edge of nuclear extinction: some of the most important events in history were the wars that never actually happened.

—PALOMA DUTTA



ANNA ARINOVA/SHUTTERSTOCK

38

FOR THE LOVE OF EXTRAVAGANCE

SWANKY JUNGLE DIGS IN KENYA

My bed faced a large picture window overlooking a watering hole that attracted a steady stream of giraffes, elephants, zebras, and impalas. The massive boudoir-like bathroom was done up in white marble laced with 18-karat gold, and came with a Jacuzzi and Hermès amenities. Located on a 58,000-acre conservancy in Laikipia, Kenya, I found Ol Jogi to be hands-down the most luxurious safari experience. The entire ranch (which used to be the private home of a French-American art dealer family) comprises seven residences with exquisite, bespoke décor. It's available for group hire only, so guests have exclusive use of the space, not to mention private safaris in the attached game reserve.

—PRACHI JOSHI



39

FOR THE LOVE OF SIMPLE DELIGHTS

LYON'S MEDIEVAL-ERA PASSAGES

Wandering the narrow cobbled streets of Lyon in 2017 flanked by 15th-17th century townhouses was a delight, especially since many of them house bars, café, and *bouchons* (traditional, homely restaurants). But these townhouses also hold a charming secret—*traboules* or medieval-era covered passages that run between the streets and through building courtyards, and that served as shortcuts down to the riverfront. There are more than 200 *traboules* in Lyon and several of them are open to the public; take a guided tour or find a free map online. Make sure not to miss the *traboule* at 16 Rue de Bœuf where the inner courtyard features an impressive staircase inside a six-storey pink tower.

—PRACHI JOSHI

SANDER VAN DER WERF/SHUTTERSTOCK

40

FOR THE LOVE OF EPIPHANIES FINDING ROOTS IN LAHORE

On a visit to Lahore in 2014, I found myself obsessed with finding the house in which my grandmother grew up before the Partition. Walking through the streets of Anarkali Market, where she lived as a young girl in the 1930s, it was clear that a lot had changed. Yet so much was the same. The streets still coughed up dust, and the older two-story brick buildings still stood alongside new, ACP-and-glass structures. There, narrating my story to near-strangers in a bid to locate the hallowed house, I was met with mouth-watering *paya*, kebabs and the *shammi* burger, and even offers to discuss Bollywood over chai. I chalked up the strange glow in my heart to a warmth that can only come from shared history.

As for the house, I never did find it. Instead I carried home a deep sense of community.

—AATISH NATH



41

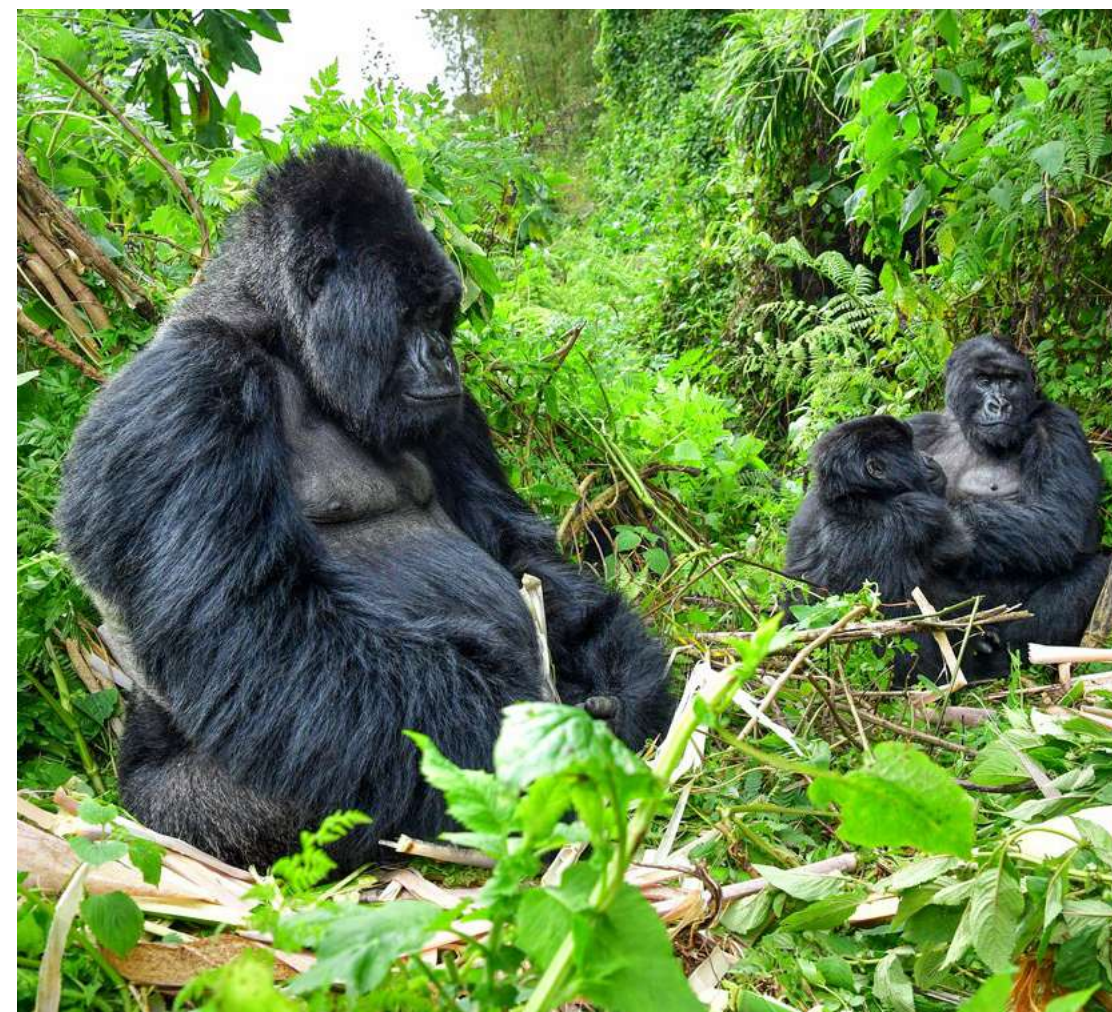
FOR THE LOVE OF ROAD TRIPS

ALL ROADS LEAD TO A CHÂTEAU IN FRANCE

A week or a lifetime, no amount is ever enough for a drive through the Loire Valley. Nicknamed the ‘Cradle of the French,’ this is Europe’s finest châteaux country. Here, at Château d’Amboise, arrived an aged Da Vinci in 1516 and lived out his remaining years. At Château de Chambord, the open double-spiral staircase that resembles the DNA double-helix, bears his unmistakable stamp and a story. And over at Château de Cheverny, Hergé fell in love and immortalised the château as Marlinspike Hall in *The Adventures of Tintin*. This road trip has a plot twist at every turn, and each one is well worth taking.

—SWAGATA GHOSH

WON52/SHUTTERSTOCK



42

FOR THE LOVE OF NATURAL WONDERS

UGANDA’S ENIGMATIC GIANTS

As the rose gold sun peeked over the surrounding hills in 2017, we descended into the shadowy depths of Bwindi Impenetrable Forest. We trekked across a hollow jungle floor laden with layers of rain-soaked leaves and ducked beneath twisted, low-hanging branches. After about two hours of hiking through the dense, green forest, my eyes landed upon what I had been anxiously anticipating: a mighty silverback. The statuesque gorilla stood majestically on the trail, his silver-tinted fur catching the morning sun, while he casually consumed handfuls of leaves. I was mesmerised by the beauty. And then, as if on cue, the bushes behind me began to rustle and a second silverback leapt from the trees. Equally terrified and exhilarated, I darted out of the way and watched as the two silverbacks beat their chests, a display of masculine dominance that capped this unforgettable encounter.

—ALICIA ERICKSON

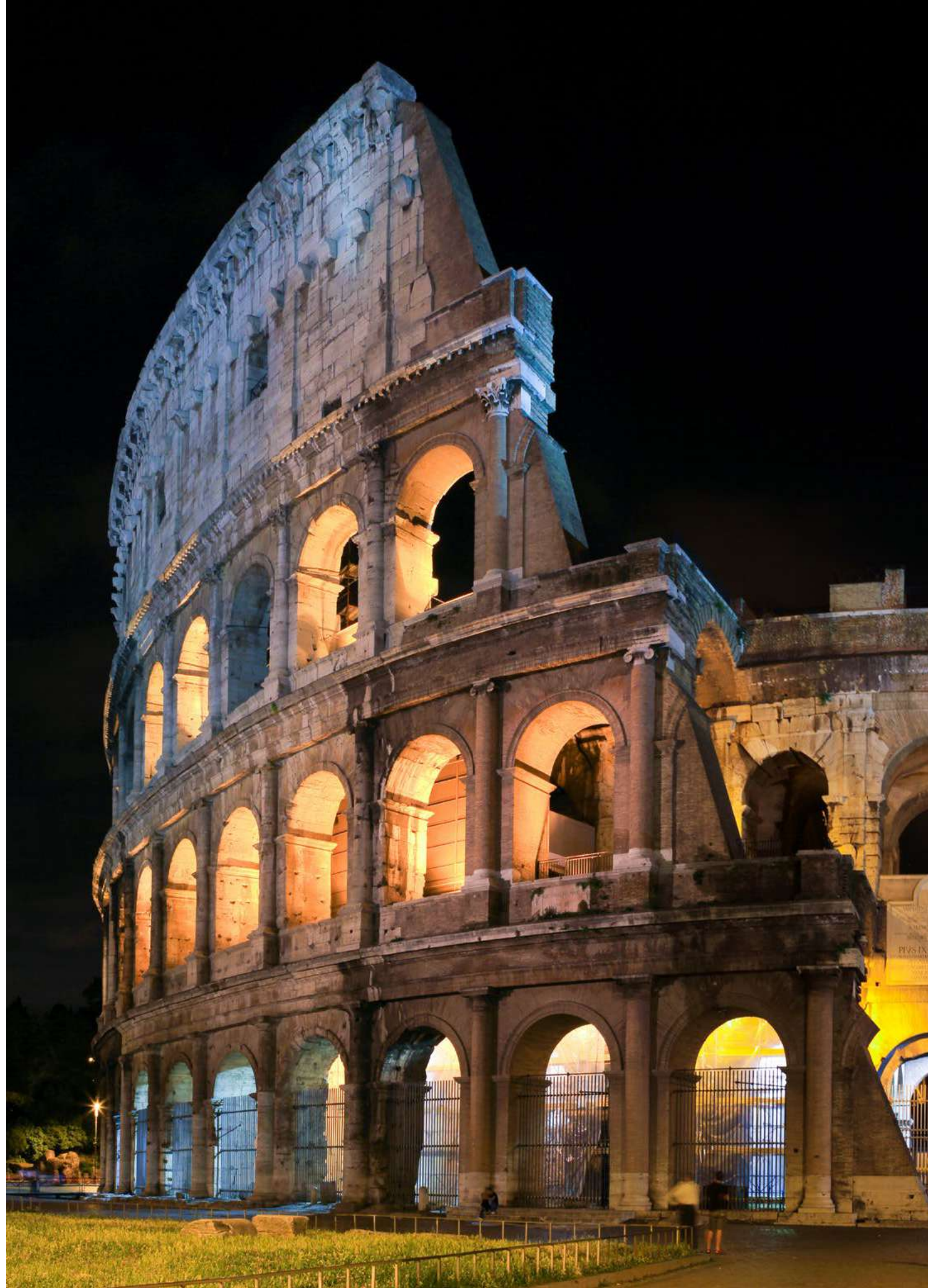
ONYX9/SHUTTERSTOCK

43

FOR THE LOVE OF TIME TRAVEL NIGHT- TIME AT THE COLOSSEUM

“Are you not entertained?” The *Gladiator* quote echoed in my ears as I stepped out into the arena. Bathed in a golden light, the Colosseum stood (nearly) empty at night, a far cry from the daytime when it was packed with tourists. But this was a VIP after-hours tour, back in 2014, providing exclusive access below the arena where the gladiators awaited their turn for gore or glory. If those stones could talk, they would tell gruesome stories of the slaves who toiled here to provide ‘entertainment’ for ancient Romans. Perhaps it was a trick played by the eerie silence or my imagination, but I felt I could ‘hear’ the roar of 50,000 spectators reverberating from gladiator battles that took place lifetimes ago.

—PRACHI JOSHI



44

FOR THE LOVE OF SERENDIPITY HEY SOUL SISTER

I’m sitting in a Guatemalan eatery, ready to dig into a plateful of chicken pepián with rice, when I realise I need a fork. I try to catch the waiter’s attention in Spanish, but Russian tumbles out of my mouth—and the girl sitting behind me exclaims, “You speak Russian?!” Enter Yuliya: a Russian national and fellow travel addict. In no time, we are kayaking on Lake Atitlán and downing tequilas. Fast forward six years and you’d find us chugging beer at the 2018 FIFA World Cup Fan Zone in Saint Petersburg, hatching plans of future adventures. Travel buddies are great, but only fate will deliver you a travel soulmate.

—AANCHAL ANAND



DOMINONART/SHUTTERSTOCK (COLOSSEUM), BRESTER IRINA/SHUTTERSTOCK (KAYAKS)

45

FOR THE LOVE OF SUBLIME FOOD A CHILEAN FEAST

Passing north through Chile's Patagonian region in December 2015, I learned about a curious island (the Chiloé Archipelago) off the coast that continues to use a millennia-old, pit-cooking technique known as *curanto*. With the help of a *fogon*, a rustic restaurant in the heartland of this isle, I was able to recreate the ancient preparation style. A healthy fire was started in a crater-like hole in the ground, and flat stones were layered onto the flame, followed by all manner of seafoods and meats. The heat and moisture were then trapped by a final covering of wide leaves and dirt. After a few hours, a feast ensued: juicy clams, fatty sausages, falling-apart-tender pork, and fluffy potato pancakes.

—VARUD GUPTA



LARISA BLINOVA/SHUTTERSTOCK

46

FOR THE LOVE OF NATURAL WONDERS SPELUNKING IN BEIRUT

Forget trekking through impenetrable rainforests to find hidden caves, just 40 minutes out of Beirut, Lebanon, is Jeita Grotto, a subterranean cave system that is easily accessible via a short cable car ride. When we visited in July 2018, we walked past extraordinary stalagmites and stalactites on the structure's upper level, some dating back to the Stone Age and some that are still growing. Eerie shadows shimmered on the cave walls and the temperature dipped further as we descended to the lower level. The real secret though was an ethereal underground river that seemed straight out of a fantasy novel. We got into a small row boat and went deep into the heart of the caves, which were an ammunition warehouse in the 1970s. Now it's the kind of treasure that makes you believe in magic.

—CHAITALI PATEL



PHOTO COURTESY: JEITA GROTTO



47

FOR THE LOVE OF EDGY ESCAPES WHIZZING THROUGH FINNISH LAPLAND

One of the most adrenaline-fuelled adventures I have ever experienced was a decade ago inside the Arctic Circle: deep in Finnish Lapland. Snowmobiling was on the agenda, atop thundering Ski-Doo machines. Ari, a gargantuan Finn in a black snowsuit, showed us the ropes, demonstrating how to handle the throttle and the brakes. I opted to be Ari's pillion rider, which seemed like a smart decision. We moved forward in a convoy, and just as I started to relax on the noisy beast, Ari suddenly revved the Ski-Doo dramatically, and zoomed through the barren, Lappish emptiness like a maniac, whizzing past snow-clad trees that looked like sculptures. I tried to scream at Ari to slow down, but he could not hear me through his helmet! Thankfully, the return ride was more sedate, and I gazed fondly at the twilight casting mysterious shadows on the snow. I will never take Finland's natural beauty or snowmobilers for granted after that.

—KALPANA SUNDER

48

FOR THE LOVE OF NATURAL WONDERS SMOOTH BUSTARD SPOTTED IN THAR

The last of the storm was vanishing as I settled down on a wee hillock overlooking the Thar desert. The sun was melting away into the horizon, and I pivoted my gaze on the vast expanse ahead of me. Binoculars focused, heart pounding, I waited. Suddenly, one of the 200 odd Great Indian bustards populating the Desert National Park of Jaisalmer, Rajasthan, came into view. The critically endangered bird's white gular pouch expanded, and it started calling out for a mate in that characteristic low booming voice I'd heard so much about. Smooth, I thought, cherishing the moment with the world's heaviest flying bird.

—SUTIRTHA LAHIRI

EKATERINA KONDRATOVA/SHUTTERSTOCK

49

FOR THE LOVE OF PRIVATE PURSUITS

MAN AND MACHINE IN LE MANS

Attending my first 24 Hours of Le Mans in 2012 helped confirm what I had long suspected—that if I could pick a single race to attend each year, this would be it. After all, the world’s oldest active car endurance race involves a glorious and gruelling test of man and machine, with 24 hours of non-stop racing on the 13.6-kilometre-long Circuit de la Sarthe, in Le Mans, France. Mad Friday, the day before the big race, allows fans to get close to the teams and drivers in the pit lane, and even walk down a certain length of the circuit! The parade that blazes through the centre of the town sees vintage cars, marching bands, and the who’s who of motorsport royalty. Le Mans’ fans are also famous for turning damp campsites into all-night raves, and French treats for the gastronomes are not uncommon.

—VAISHALI DINAKARAN



FR. LUPHYSHUTTERSTOCK



50

FOR THE LOVE OF NATURAL WONDERS

SALTY WONDERS IN POLAND

The enormous, smoky-grey salt deposits of Poland’s Wieliczka Mines are natural wonders etched out of human ingenuity. Back in the 13th century a monastery was allowed to mine the area, the beginning of an enterprise that continued here until the early 21st century. During the 17th century the miners were such craftsman they began to make underground works of art in their spare time, creating a subterranean kingdom that highlights the inherent beauty of these magnificent crystal-cut caverns: art, statues, and chapels all hewn out of salt. As I walked through the labyrinth in the autumn of 2010, I admired the talent and faith of these miners—the pièce de résistance a ballroom with polished floors and a chandelier made of dangling salt crystals.

—KALPANA SUNDER

KANUMAN/SHUTTERSTOCK

51

FOR THE LOVE OF SIMPLE DELIGHTS

PARKS AND RECREATION IN ZURICH

I was ambling aimlessly after checking out of my hostel in Zurich one chilly October noon, when I chanced upon a park that looked deserted. Soon I lay down on a bench under a maple tree, clutched my coat close, and dozed off without quite meaning to. I woke up when a leaf fell on my face. I had just lived one of those slow-motion, cinematic clichés. But as an Indian woman tuned to being protective of my physical space in public, what felt most surreal was waking up safe after an hour-long nap outdoors, in complete silence. I was still me, and nothing was amiss. I hadn't felt this free in a long time.

—KUSUMITA DAS



52

FOR THE LOVE OF ROAD TRIPS

SIKKIM MONASTERY RUN

For those with a soft spot for serene stops on a roadtrip, the Pemayangtse Monastery, Norbugang Chorten, Rabdentse ruins, Sanga Choeling Monastery, Khecheopalri Lake, and Tashiding Monastery together make up a history-rich Buddhist pilgrimage circuit in Sikkim. Each of these places play an integral role in the history of the beautiful mountain state and its deep relationship with Buddhism. Located in some of the oldest villages of Sikkim, the sights are straight out of *The Lord of the Rings*, with stone thrones in old forests and giant statues and monasteries gleaming from the top of the hills.

—SAMBIT DATTACHAUDHURI



TRABANTOS/SHUTTERSTOCK (MAN), MIHIROSHI/SHUTTERSTOCK (MONUMENT)

53

FOR THE LOVE OF EXTRAVAGANCE

LIFE EXOTIC ALONG THE ADRIATIC

The thing I'll always associate with Croatia is shooting stars. Out on a five-day cruise in July 2017, sailing between islands in the Adriatic Sea, night-times were always special. With an entire yacht to four couples, complete with a captain and an assistant, the ocean was our playground. One night we decided to dock away from the signs of human habitation to enjoy hundreds of shooting stars lighting up the clear night sky. Lying on the deck under a blanket, silent tears rolled down my cheeks. It was a sight that reaffirmed by belief in blessings and magic, and I was grateful for both.

—CHAITALI PATEL



BIETSKIYEVGENIY/COM/SHUTTERSTOCK (YACHT), RADOWITZ/SHUTTERSTOCK (PAPERS)

54

FOR THE LOVE OF TIME TRAVEL

GERMANY'S BIG BROTHER YEARS

The constantly watchful Big Brother was a literary invention coined in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, but 1984 came and went without me feeling particularly surveilled. Decades later, when I visited the post-Wall eastern parts of Berlin (it nowadays lives off Cold War nostalgia) I checked out the rebuilt Checkpoint Charlie, the last bits of wall preserved in Mauerpark, and the Stasi headquarters from where a secret police, employing over 2,90,000 spies, kept an eye on "dissidents". The espionage museum now holds propaganda materials and concealed cameras in coat buttons and tape-recorders in thermos flasks. Citizens were incarcerated for years in the nearby Stasi prison and tortured until ready to confess anything and everything. Suddenly Big Brother seemed less literary fiction than a prophecy fulfilled.

—ZAC O'YEAH



55

FOR THE LOVE OF EXTRAVAGANCE GET, SET, MONACO

Once a year, the world's rich and famous board opulent yachts and set sail for Monte Carlo, to witness the Monaco Grand Prix. The fact that I am neither rich nor famous is just one of the many reasons I never believed I'd make it there. But in 2018 an opportunity presented itself, to visit the Historic Monaco Grand Prix, and I found myself craning over the pit wall at the Monte Carlo Circuit, watching the very Ferrari 312T that Niki Lauda had piloted to victory at the 1975 Monaco Grand Prix being raced! The azure Ligurian Sea with bobbing sailboats and the snazzy city where every second vehicle seemed to be a luxury sports car made for an unforgettable experience.

—VAISHALI DINAKARAN



DROZDIN VLADIMIR SHUTTERSTOCK

56

FOR THE LOVE OF NATURAL WONDERS WWE AT YELLOWSTONE

On the edge of Yellowstone's Hayden Valley, as the sun recedes and the wind speeds up, the bison are rutting. Like military tanks on toothpicks, they are impressive up close and faraway. My binoculars spot a lone male against whom two wolves coordinate an attack. In response, he just gets up, his size intimidating them to retreat. A herd of elk huddle to the same effect. A great day for herbivores! The show isn't over: One wolf sneaks up on a grizzly! My heart races but my binoculars remain fixed on the two spectacular predators in a game of chicken.

—AANCHAL ANAND



BLUEBARRONPHOTO/SHUTTERSTOCK

57

FOR THE LOVE OF SUBLIME FOOD THE GRAND BUDAPEST BAKERY

On a hot summer evening my family and I wandered around the cobblestone lanes of Budapest's Buda district, on a quest to find the oldest confectionery in the city. Ruszwurm Confectionery's *pista*-green exterior felt like a time portal into the 19th century. Dating back to 1827, the quaint bakery had retained the original cherrywood and mahogany display cases which were lined with all sorts of decadent cakes and desserts. We ordered five, including a tart cherry strudel and the Hungarian staple Dobos torte—a layered cake with chocolate buttercream and caramel. But what I still dream about is Ruszwurm's signature cream cake—pillowy, vanilla-scented cream sandwiched between crumbling puff pastry, which melted in the mouth with every bite. Heaven.

—LUBNA AMIR



MOO FILMS/SHUTTERSTOCK



58

FOR THE LOVE OF EPIPHANIES

THE HORRORS OF HIROSHIMA

When I first arrived in Hiroshima in September 2008, the city did not seem like it had been razed to the ground decades ago by an atomic bomb, but then again, what other frame of reference is there aside from Nagasaki? But as I diligently explored the area, evidence of the tragedy that shook this city to the core presented itself with solemn matter-of-factness: the ghostly A-Bomb Dome (a skeletal structure of a 1915 building that miraculously survived the explosion), and Peace Memorial Park's chilling monument dedicated to Sadako Sasaki (an infant who survived the explosion, only to develop radiation-induced leukemia a decade later), and the thousands of other children who were murdered. At the Hiroshima Peace Museum I was moved to tears by the charred lunch-box of a high school student, the imprint of the pattern of a kimono burnt onto a victim's back, and wrist watches that had stopped at 8.15 a.m., the exact time of the explosion.

—KALPANA SUNDER

IRYNA MAKUKHA/SHUTTERSTOCK



59

FOR THE LOVE OF PRIVATE PURSUITS

NO CAT LIKE THE SNOW CAT

Living in the cold desert highlands of our country, the 'ghost cat' or snow leopard is elusive to human eyes. Spotting one in its natural habitat is an experience of a lifetime. The journey itself is an expedition; sub-zero temperatures in peak winter is the ideal time to see this near-magical animal. It's hard for all six senses, but the infinitely rewarding possibility is also one I pursue obsessively every winter. My mad zeal paid off this year in February when I was able to spot a mother with three cubs at the Kibber Wildlife Sanctuary in Himachal Pradesh.

—SAMBIT DATTACHAUDHURI

LARISA BLINOVA/SHUTTERSTOCK

60

FOR THE LOVE OF SIMPLE DELIGHTS

FREE, SOLO IN MOROCCO

One morning in 2017, I set off hiking into the Rif mountains in northern Morocco with no planned route. The only intention I had for that day was to wander through the rolling green hills wherever my curiosity led me. I meandered through pastures, stopping to greet farmers at work. I scrambled up cliffs to catch glimpses of the blue-tinted buildings of Chefchaouen cradled in the valleys below. When I tired from hiking, I lounged in fields speckled with chamomile flowers, warmed by the glow of the afternoon sun. I indulged in the sweet juice of ripe oranges and fed them to goats while their young herders napped in the distant fields. My feet continued to carry me through grassy fields and to distant villages as I indulged in the freedom to walk into the silent mountains, penetrated only by the distant echoes of sheep and the call to prayer.

—ALICIA ERICKSON



KATE SPRIDONOV/SHUTTERSTOCK



61

FOR THE LOVE OF FAMILY TIME

BALI BRINGS IT HOME

My family of four touched down at Bali airport armed with three bulging suitcases, two cameras and vastly different ideas of what a family trip should be. One dreamed of beach adventures at Kuta, another of old temples in Ubud. Our stay's hosts, the Maliks—a big fat family of nine—were quick to invite us to the Kuningan Festival (the day ancestral spirits return to heaven after 10 days on Earth). We skipped down to the street outside the stone temple that's been in the Malik family for five generations, decked in sashes, *udengs* (headdresses) and sarongs (my father particularly proud in his). Hundreds of men came in white shirts and green-checked sarongs; women in lime-yellow shirts and pink sashes carrying offerings on their head and beating down on *gamelans*, holding papier-mâché figurines. The streets thrummed in celebration, and for once, me and my little family agreed that we felt right at home.

—SANJANA RAY

DENIS MOSKINOV/SHUTTERSTOCK

62

FOR THE LOVE OF FAMILY TIME HUNTING FOR FOSSILS IN DORSET

Ribhu held a grey pebble in one hand, a hammer in the other. “You see these white lines on the rock, that’s where you strike. This one has possibilities.” His back was arched low, his little fingers flushed from incessant hammering, he raised his hand to strike again. I looked around. Hundreds of Ribhus, grannies, and grandpas dotted the windswept shingle beach, their backs to the sea, hunting fossils. This is Jurassic Coast, a 153-kilometre broken coastline shielding 185 million years of history. Best times to visit are rough mornings when the sea and cliff conspire, leaving an ecstatic Ribhu clasp an ammonite in his bare palms.

—SWAGATA GHOSH



JORDON SHARP/SHUTTERSTOCK

63

FOR THE LOVE OF SERENDIPITY MY FRIEND LEILA, FROM LEBANON

At a tiny border airport in Nepal, I caught a stranger’s smile from across the waiting room. She pulled up an empty chair, and I propped myself next to Leila Turki. Her gesture signalled the start of an unlikely connect and a mutual admiration for each other’s culture. On the short flight and taxi ride we took together to Darjeeling, we discussed all things India and Lebanon. In this decade-long friendship formed in 2008, Leila and I have travelled across the deserts of Kutch and Rajasthan, got swindled in Vietnam, road tripped in Canada, and exchanged Lebanese cinema for Indian cooking classes. Most of all, we’ve kept up with each other despite the distances.

—SHIKHA TRIPATHI



ABIR ROY BARMAN/SHUTTERSTOCK

64

FOR THE LOVE OF SUBLIME FOOD

SILK ROAD TO SATISFACTION

Many venture to Xi'an to visit the glory of the countless terracotta soldiers packed like sardines underground. I went there in 2017 (as with most things in life) for the food. Xi'an once marked the entrance to the legendary Silk Road. Propelled by Arab traders who traversed these routes with fine silks, pungent spices, and blistered feet, the Muslim Quarter today is an ode to the blending of dishes that came about through this proverbial highway of commodified ingredients: cumin-crusted skewers, fragrant lamb broths and pita soups, and chili oil-lathered, flat noodles. Xi'an is as much a feast for the senses as it is for the belly.

—VARUD GUPTA



JINNING LI/SHUTTERSTOCK (LAMB BROTH), RADU BERGAN/SHUTTERSTOCK (MONUMENT)



65

FOR THE LOVE OF EPIPHANIES

TRAILING VASCO DA GAMA IN LISBON

Lisbon is a city I often visited in my head long before I ever set foot in it. Four years ago, I took Tram No. 15 in the morning rush hour and got off at Belém. There, by the river Tagus, rose *Padrão dos Descobrimentos*, marking the very spot from where everyone who was anyone in the Age of Discoveries set sail for the Orient. Nearby, at the Jeronimos Monastery, pilgrims queued at all hours. Inside lies Vasco da Gama, buried a second time. Here, in an earlier chapel, Da Gama and his crew prayed one last time before their first voyage in 1497. Today, it's an UNESCO World Heritage site and immortalised as the resting place of the celebrity explorer.

—SWAGATA GHOSH



66

FOR THE LOVE OF EPIPHANIES
**FLOORED BY
THE RED SEA**

Silence and stillness take on fresh depth when diving off a gently bobbing yacht in the Red Sea. My first live-aboard experience in June 2018 was a mellow, meditative fairytale. Days were spent under the deep blue sea, playing with dolphins and exploring the shipwreck site of the SS Thistlegorm, an English Navy ship sunk in 1941. Evenings were spent reading Faiz, looking up to distant vistas of expansive desert, the soft sound of the ocean melding to the chatter of my Danish roommate, Scottish diving companion, and the friendly group of Belgians on their annual boys' trip. The absence of WiFi perfected the journey, the quiet too rich and complex to be captured on an Instagram story.

—SARVESH TALREJA



67

FOR THE LOVE OF KIND STRANGERS

KISMET CONNECTION IN DALLAS

September 2019: Tropical storm Imelda roared over Dallas Love Field Airport, its eerie skies keen to wreak havoc across Texas. All flights were cancelled; the weather was so intense a local Sheriff said it made Texas's most recent hurricane look like 'a little thunderstorm'. Thankfully, we overheard an older lady, on her cell, talking about driving to Houston, the same city we were headed. Taking a chance, we asked if we could ride along—she immediately agreed! At the Car Rental Center we met her son, John, and soon discovered that he had been adopted from India as an infant. He was now a trucker with a hearty laugh and beautiful eyes. Since his profession was driving, he was able to provide us a smooth and safe ride while Imelda lashed the highway. They dropped us off at the doorstep of our host's home, asking us for nothing except that we stayed safe.

—ABHISHEK HAJELA

ROSCHEITZKY PHOTOGRAPHY/SHUTTERSTOCK (HIGHWAY), MICHEL ARNAULT/SHUTTERSTOCK (COUNTRYSIDE)

68

FOR THE LOVE OF TESTING YOUR SPIRIT

LESSONS FROM MONGOLIA

In the spring of 2019, I found myself in some desolate swathes of Mongolian land, weary of spirit. Skipping a fixed itinerary, I strutted out into the vast Steppes, camping kit in tow—determined to make myself one with the topography populated by none but nomadic tribes. With a stream playing my North Star, I kept walking on like Johnnie Walker asked me to, for a hundred hours. As I plonked down in the middle of nowhere to sleep, and greedily gobbled up tinned tuna, my fears of comfort, or the purported lack of it, wilted away. When rains flooded my tent or goats chased me, my fears of safety vanished. Turns out we only need a free spirit to befriend a place.

—VIKAS PLAKKOT





69

FOR THE LOVE OF ROAD TRIPS

THE CHARMS OF CZECH COUNTRYSIDE

Back in 2011, I took a road trip through the Czech countryside, driving out of Prague, and ambling through pint-sized towns full of intricate churches and thick, nearby forests. The rustic journey allowed me to visit places like Cesky Krumlov, a fairytale town in full regalia, showing off its stunning Gothic castle through which the Vltava River flows. Karlovy Vary was equally as enchanting, where hot springs dot the town, lines of tourists walking from one to the other, eager to bask in the therapeutic water. Each morning held a new adventure, we joined a group of mushroom pickers one day, and the next we chanced upon a small, rural school and played around with the rosy-cheeked children. The highlight reel also included a trip to a wine festival in the beautiful castle town of Karlstejn, where everyone was dressed in medieval costumes, completely enthralled by the revelry, live music, dance, and theatre.

—KALPANA SUNDER

YASONYA/SHUTTERSTOCK

70

FOR THE LOVE OF KIND STRANGERS

BERTH OF A MEMORY

Six months into my first job at a publishing house almost 13 years ago, I knew the cubicle life wasn't for me. A spontaneous resignation and a decisive plunge later, I found myself aboard a train headed to New Jalpaiguri in West Bengal from Mumbai. My last-minute ticket was unconfirmed, and the Ticket Collector couldn't care less about my dream tryst with Northeast India, and I couldn't get a confirmed seat. It was two factory workers headed home to Bihar who gave up their berth and ensured my comfort throughout, and also quelled any apprehensions I had about travelling with migrants. I've been treated to plush dinners by kind strangers, but nothing matches the generosity of those with the least to offer.

—SHIKHA TRIPATHI





71

FOR THE LOVE OF NATURAL WONDERS HIGH AND HOLY

Lying at a staggering altitude of 17,815 feet above sea level, Gurudongmar Lake in North Sikkim is one of the highest in the world. Some would say that the drive to access its enchanted presence is equally hypnotic. Nestled in a valley surrounded by six-thousanders, the landscape will remind you of Kargil, with yaks and Tibetan gazelle dotting the otherwise arid highland. Considered holy by the Buddhists, Hindus, and Sikhs, the lake freezes over in winter, leaving *Narnia*-like visuals in your wake.

—SAMBIT DATTACHAUDHURI

JAYANTA BASU/SHUTTERSTOCK



72

FOR THE LOVE OF SERENDIPITY IT'S A BIRD'S LIFE IN ARUNACHAL

Last year, Day-2 of the Pakke Paga Hornbill Festival dawned bright and sunny. Salil, one of the founders of Earthbeat, an eco-conscious theatre group performing at the festival venue in Seijosa, Arunachal Pradesh, was preparing a motley crew of kids to act as Pakke's denizens. Think costumed tigers, hornbills, monkeys, and all. "Would you like to be the father hornbill?" he asked me out of the blue. "You are kidding? Of course!" Donning a beautifully made hornbill dress, I joined the team of amateur actors, and we pulled off a skit to great success. I was no longer just a spectator at Arunachal Pradesh's famed conservation festival, but truly a part of it. With baby hornbills running helter-skelter across the stage, us 'parents' tried to our best to retain some order while raising awareness about the incredible icon that the Great Hornbill is for Pakke and its people.

—SUTIRTHA LAHIRI

PHOTO COURTESY: PAKKE PAGA HORNBILL FESTIVAL/FACEBOOK

73

FOR THE LOVE OF KIND STRANGERS A NOSH SPEAKS VOLUMES

After hiking for hours in the remote highlands of northern Ethiopia, I spotted some straw-roofed *tukul* huts in the distance. As I approached the village, I was greeted by a tall and slender woman wearing a blue-flowered skirt. “Salam!” she greeted me, welcoming me into her home. I ducked into the dirt-floored tukul home, where I met members of Mariam’s family. We spent the afternoon roasting coffee and cooking injera, two Ethiopian specialties. I sipped on the smooth, earthy liquid as Mariam’s family passed around cups of sorghum beer and a communal plate of stew and injera. We exchanged knowing smiles with one another, limited to a few words of broken English and Amharic, though language proved not to be a barrier. Our smiles, gestures, and sharing food and drink, expressed more than words ever could.

—ALICIA ERICKSON



74

FOR THE LOVE OF EGGY ESCAPES SHOOT OUT IN AÇAÍ SALVADOR

I went out for a late-night in Açaí Salvador, one of the most dangerous cities in Brazil, which unfortunately is saying something. Suddenly, my friend Paulo took my hand and started running across the street. Horns blared from the oncoming two-way traffic, and I was most confused why he had suddenly decided to play Russian roulette with Brazilian vehicles. Perhaps he was being adventurous, I thought—the perils of sometimes not understanding Brazilian humour. But then I saw his face, and it had turned ghostly. He explained there were cops busting drug lords on the street in front of us, and if we got caught in the crossfire, that was it. Simply put, we would be dead and no one would bat an eye. We soon saw two cops standing above a couple guys who were lying face down on the floor. The experience was unforgettable to say the least.

—ANKITA KUMAR



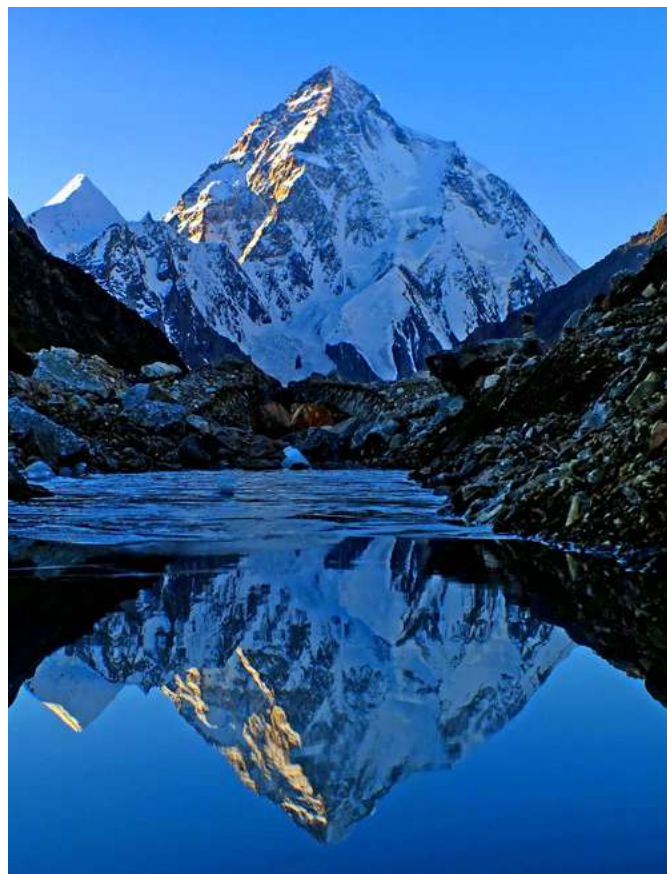
ARTUSH/SHUTTERSTOCK (DESERT), LEOKLEEMANN/SHUTTERSTOCK (BUILDING)

75

FOR THE LOVE OF EPIPHANIES A BORDERLESS DAWN, LADAKH

After nearly five hours of climbing slowly to the top in the dark, dawn broke over the Ladakh Himalayas. It was the summer of 2015, we were still a bit short of reaching the summit of Mount Golap Kangri, but climbing a 100-foot ice wall had drained us. We stopped for water, checking our crampons and gear. The rising sun lit up the expanse of the valley we had left far below, and the void of the crimson horizon was streaked by a line of silver that was the Karakoram range across the frontier in Pakistan. I stood transfixed watching the stunning massif, full of gratitude for this moment at 19,000-odd feet where no borders exist.

—SHIKHA TRIPATHI



PORNCHALAR/SHUTTERSTOCK (MOUNTAIN), PHOTO COURTESY: KIRSTEN SIMCOX PHOTOGRAPHY/TOURISM NEW ZEALAND

76

FOR THE LOVE OF SUBLIME FOOD A MAORI MENU FOR THE AGES

In 2017, I met Hinewai and her husband Cameron, a Māori couple who run eco-cultural tours in Napier, New Zealand, and we headed to the protected Ahuriri Estuary. After a warm *pōwhiri* (Maori welcome ceremony featuring singing, dancing, and *hongi* or pressing of noses), we fished in the lagoon’s shallow waters. Cameron grilled the catch of the day while Hinewai laid the table with lobster, clams, sea urchins, and vegetables—all either grilled or cooked in a *hāngi*, a pit oven with heated rocks that is a traditional Maori method of cooking. In rapidly changing times, it was wonderful to see a young couple be the *kaitiaki* (guardians) of their natural world, proudly following ancestral practices.

—PRACHI JOSHI



77

FOR THE LOVE OF TESTING YOUR SPIRIT
**NO VERTICAL
LIMIT IN JAPAN**

'A wise man climbs Mt. Fuji once, only a fool climbs it twice', goes an old saying. I have to say I disagree. An active volcano, and Japan's tallest peak at 12,390 feet, Fuji has intrigued the world for centuries, drawing admirers of all cultures and ages. Climbing it, however, is not for the faint of heart. With gradual walks through forests near its base to a near-vertical climb close to the summit, the mountain throws a delicious challenge to 'fools' like me. Would I do it again? For that sunrise, yes!

—SAMBIT DATTA CHAUDHURI



78

FOR THE LOVE OF EDGY ESCAPES

USHUAIA TO ANTARCTICA

On the southernmost tip of Argentina, in an archipelago known as Tierra Del Fuego, or the Land of Fire, rests Ushuaia. It is a sleepy town marked by dramatic cliff sides, rocky plains, and counter to the name, lots of ice. By happenstance, my proximity to the almost literal edge of the world led me to hop onto a mini-cruise ship as part of a last minute budget package across the Drake Passage to Antarctica in 2015. When I wasn't shivering, the experience brought forth a surreal landscape, the delicate, blue hues of imposing glaciers, the constant mischief of penguins, the majesty of whales, and the tear-inducing beauty of the solitude found in this kingdom of ice.

—VARUD GUPTA

79

FOR THE LOVE OF TIME TRAVEL

A SOLITARY PORT IN EGYPT

It took a bit of searching to find, because the Egyptian desert has few landmarks—every sand dune looks much the same—but Google satellite images indicated that Myos Hormos was somewhere outside the tiny Red Sea port of El Quseir. The harbour peaked during the Roman era, when 120 ships crossed to India each year to fetch pepper, a favourite condiment in Rome, and other exotic produce such as tigers, coconuts, yogis and ivory. So, this is where globalisation reached its ancient apex, I think as I eventually stumbled upon ruins on the banks of a dried-up lagoon in the spring of 2011. The most breathtaking moment followed when I climbed down to the lake-bed to inspect heaps of rubbish that turn out to be thousands of broken amphorae—in which wine would have been exported to India—that belonged in museums. But here they lie, right where they were discarded two millennia ago.

—ZAC O'YEAH

TETIANA DOTSENKO/SHUTTERSTOCK

80

FOR THE LOVE OF FAMILY TIME
**DUSTY ROADS IN
A MARUTI 800**

As my father, my grandmother, my help and I, squashed bits of our home and ourselves into our Maruti 800 in 1990 and began the 1,450km road trip from West Bengal to New Delhi, little did we know that 21 flat tyres would be just one of the highlights. The lush Dooars made way for dusty Bihar and Uttar Pradesh villages. Mosquitoes the size of locusts nearly had us for dinner at a government guest house in Muzaffarpur where we got to stay because my dad's flourishing moustache led them to believe he was an army man. Near Ayodhya, we stopped to check for a flat. It was dark, and within minutes a police jeep approached, shouting and telling us to quickly move and only stop at the next town, lest we were jumped by robbers. Delhi came soon enough but this was a family trip for the memory books.

—GEETIKA SASAN BHANDARI



SONNATH C/SHUTTERSTOCK

81

FOR THE LOVE OF TESTING YOUR SPIRIT
**FINDING COLOMBIA'S
LOST CITY**

There's nothing like a four-day trek in the Colombian jungle to *Ciudad Perdida* or "The Lost City"—600 years older than Machu Picchu—to stretch the mind and challenge the spirit. It poured hard, so the muddy paths became waterfalls. We had to wade through rivers, sleep in hammocks and use all our limbs to climb up slippery escarpments. Lots of rain came in tow with loads of injuries: a guy broke a finger, someone else a hand, a girl cut her chin on a slick rock face and a guy got bitten by a snake. I was just glad to make it back alive and in one piece.

—ANKITA KUMAR



MATEO RUDD/SHUTTERSTOCK

82

FOR THE LOVE OF SUBLIME FOOD DESERT DELICACIES IN WADI RUM

Under the scowling afternoon sun in the desert valley of Wadi Rum, Jordan, the chefs from my tour camp dug a hole in the ground, and lowered a giant aluminium container filled with chopped lamb and potatoes, marinated in lush spices. Buried in the sand, it remained there for the next six hours. Close to dinner time, I saw them dig out the container, and our travelling troupe was served the most tender lamb in the whole wide world. The sand is so hot, that the meat gets slow pressure-cooked. No Michelin techniques here. Just zero fuel, and maximum taste.

—KUSUMITA DAS



ALEXANDER PYATILETOV/SHUTTERSTOCK (KETTLE), JAREK PAWLAK/SHUTTERSTOCK (LANDSCAPE)



83

FOR THE LOVE OF INNER JOURNEYS ALL YOU NEED IS ITALY

Two months after my husband's heart attack in December 2017, we decided to go ahead with our holiday to Rome, Florence and Tuscany. We were skeptical of travelling so soon, but Italy was just the balm we needed as a family to bounce back. As we got a crash course on the exploits of the formidable Roman empire and discovered some of the gems of the Renaissance, each of us healed. I don't know if it was the toasty winter sun, the extraordinarily charming local people, the sweeping Tuscan countryside or the soul arousing aroma of coffee that filtered out of cafés and onto street corners, but life seemed alright. Gradually, we releart to live, laugh and savour being together.

—CHAITALI PATEL

FOR THE LOVE OF INNER JOURNEYS

SWEETHEARTS IN RAJASTHAN

When my wife and I whisked away on our honeymoon, we ditched our prior notions of a decadent five-star carousal for a more modest road trip in my favourite state, Rajasthan, where I had spent my early years. It was our first official holiday together as man and woman, and unlike the elaborate ruses concocted for my mysterious disappearances previously, this one had the blessings of both families. And we cherished that time with each other even more because of that freedom. My wife saw glimpses of my childhood, places that were formative; we shared an evening outside Jaipur's Hawa Mahal and dined in candlelight at Udaipur's Lake Pichola. Ten years have passed, and more exotic vacations have come true, but nothing will sandpaper the tenderness of our Rajasthan journey.

—NITIN CHAUDHURY



85

FOR THE LOVE OF EPIPHANIES

HOW WORLD WAR I BEGAN, IN SARAJEVO

The Latin Bridge in Sarajevo looks like any other bridge, and the shallow waters of the Miljacka like any other river. But a spot at one end of this bridge changed the course of the history—precipitating events that led to WWI. It was here that Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sofia were assassinated by Gavrilo Princip on June 28, 1914.

I visited the bridge on a sunny morning, not unlike the actual day of the murder. My guide told me pulse-racing stories—how not one but seven men stood on the route to kill. The first lobbed a grenade towards Ferdinand's car but it hit the wrong vehicle. To avoid capture, the killer gulped cyanide and threw himself in the river, but it was just four feet deep and the cyanide was way past its sell-by date to have an effect. He was arrested and Ferdinand was hurried away.

Princip, a weakly fellow, was the seventh killer in line because he was believed to be least successful. He walked over to a delicatessen near the bridge after the commotion died down. After some time, against all advice, Ferdinand stepped out again to visit the grenade blast's victims. As fate would have it, his chauffeur took a wrong turn, bringing him right to the spot where Princip stood. The Bosnian Serb found his moment, fired the shots, and set in motion the war that killed 20 million people.

—KAREENA GIANANI



86

FOR THE LOVE OF NATURAL WONDERS

KAYAKING THROUGH CAMBODIAN RAINFORESTS

After a month of backpacking across Cambodia in April 2011, we had been 'cultured out,' and even the grand sunrise at Angkor Wat couldn't save our souls. Down the Tatai river that cuts through Koh Kong's Cardamom rainforest, we struck gold when we found out about a floating lodge approachable only by boat. The highlight of this nocturnal adventure, we were told, was a glowing tree. In the middle of the night, we strapped on our headlamps and set off on kayaks, following our guide closely through mangrove infested waters. After a thrilling bout of fear and confusion in the dark, we found our El Dorado—home to thousands of fireflies, a glowing tree that mirrored the night sky above.

—SHIKHA TRIPATHI

87

FOR THE LOVE OF TIME TRAVEL SPITI'S RARE RELIC

Deep in the heart of Himachal Pradesh's Spiti Valley, close to the Indo-China border, lies Gue, a tiny hamlet perched at an altitude of 10,500 feet. Gue is famous for the 450-year-old naturally preserved mummy of Sangha Tenzin, a monk who was said to be meditating in a cave to rid his village of an infestation of locusts.

At least that's how the story goes. The mummy itself is one of the most well-preserved in the world, with teeth, hair, and fingernails intact. Standing there outside the small shrine dedicated to this mummified monk of yore, it can be hard not to surrender your skepticism.

—SAMBIT DATTACHAUDHURI



DHAVAL R PRAJAPATI/SHUTTERSTOCK

88

FOR THE LOVE OF EXTRAVAGANCE PALACE STAYS IN ISTANBUL

My most memorable stay in Istanbul was in 2017 at the Çırağan Palace Kempinski, the grand structure is the only Ottoman-era palace on the Bosphorus that is a hotel. Think polished marble, Turkish carpets, exotic flower arrangements, elegant tapestries, and a manicured garden framed by palm trees. The stay offered a barrage of exclusive experiences, be it a cruise on a private yacht bubbling with champagne, a Turkish coffee and baklava master class, fine dining galore, or an indulgent, traditional Turkish hamaam. If that isn't the life of a princess, I don't know what is.

—KALPANA SUNDER

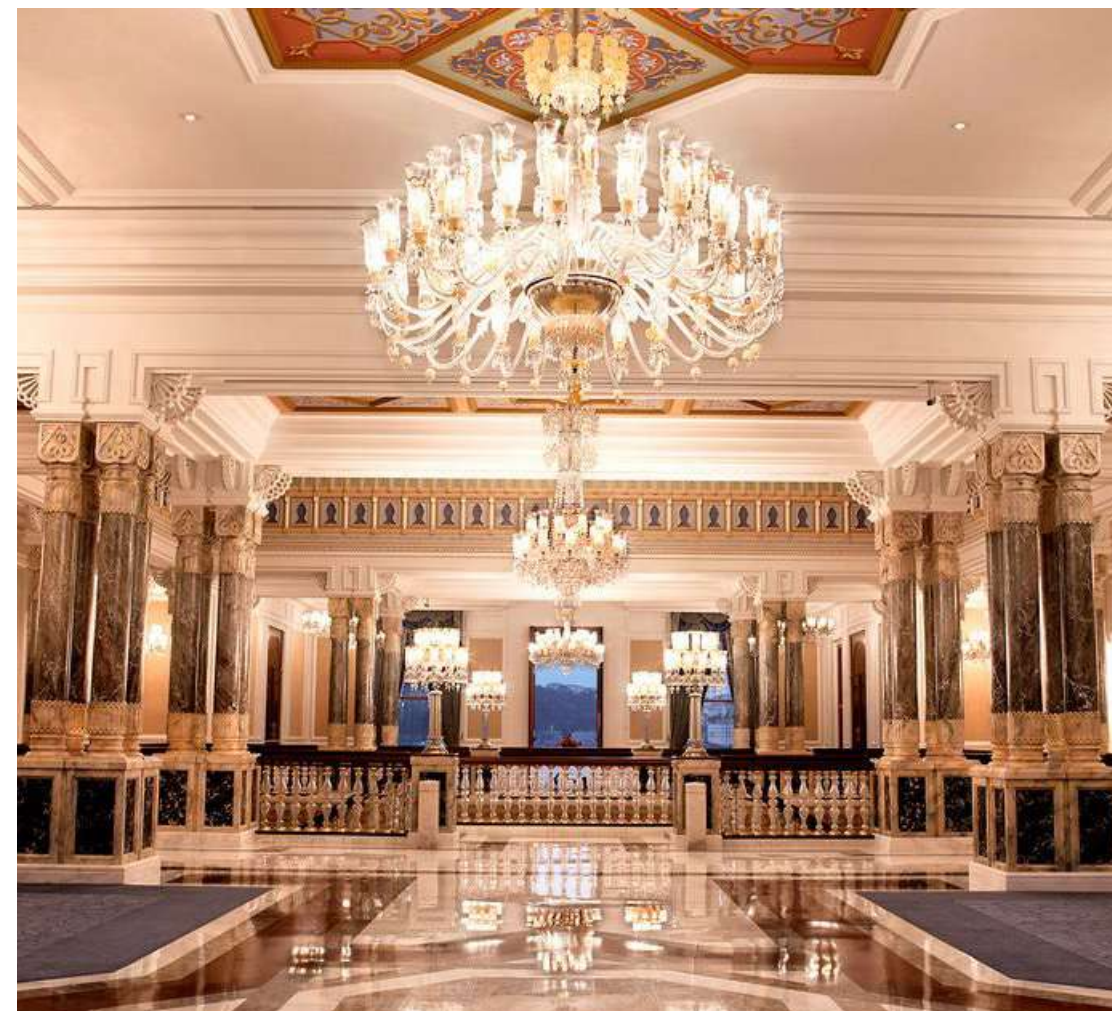


PHOTO COURTESY: ÇIRAĞAN PALACE KEMPINSKI ISTANBUL



89

FOR THE LOVE OF EDGY ESCAPES ROADBLOCKS IN SPITI

We were in Spiti's Pin valley in the monsoon of 2013, when news of a massive landslide close to where we were reached us, blocking our way forward. The morbid thought of being stuck in a tiny village with no clarity of exit and endless potato meals was disheartening, so we decided to risk the three-hour crossing. Moving across the rubble, the trickiest part was hauling oneself across in a metal basket strung by a pulley. Taking cue from the locals, I followed suit, breathless as the still-moving debris came gushing down. When I was scooped up by the earthmover on the other side I was still shaken, but the PWD engineers I hitched a ride back with to Kaza were visibly impressed.

—SHIKHA TRIPATHI

90

FOR THE LOVE OF EIPHANIES A BENGALURU CHAPTER

The lodge I checked into wasn't the best, but at ₹85 a night I wasn't complaining. I decided to break journey for a bit but ended up spending months in Majestic in 1991. I dwelt in bookshops and when browsing left my throat parched, the nearest pub was rarely more than steps away. I also discovered a thriving migrant food culture—the alleys featured anything from Kerala eateries to Bengali canteens. Only after settling down in the city in 2000, I learnt that Majestic is considered a bad place: reading the memoir *My Days in the Underworld* by Agni Sreedhar, I found out that gangsters planned gang wars over vada-sambar in the very Kamat Hotel that I habitually breakfasted at. One day, I sat in my favourite seedy bar Talk of the Town and penned the first lines of the 'Majestic Trilogy' which, unexpectedly, made me a famous writer.

—ZAC O'YEAH

HARENDRA HARSHI/SHUTTERSTOCK (MOUNTAIN ROAD), LAKSHMIPRASADA S/SHUTTERSTOCK (TOWN)



91

FOR THE LOVE OF SUBLIME FOOD ALCHEMY IN MAURITIUS

The best meal of my life was plated before me in the middle of a sun-kissed sugar plantation, at L'Alchimiste, in La Rhumerie de Chamarel, a rum distillery in Mauritius. First up was the pan-fried foie gras, whose light-as-cloud escalope melted in my mouth like butter. The sautéed mushrooms, scented with truffles and soft boiled eggs, were a lesson in delicate flavouring. I could barely wait for the restaurant's star dish—pork braised with the classic Chamarel rum and a drizzle of pineapple puree. It did a real number on my palate. The meat: succulent. The rum: boozy and fine. The puree: tart with the taste of the tropics. At last, a warm tiramisu slice came topped with coconut ice cream, bubbling with a faint fizzing sound as I poured coffee liqueur on it. It may as well have been the sound of my satisfaction.

—POOJA NAIK

URTIMUD PRODUCTION/SHUTTERSTOCK (BOTTLED), DAPHNUSIA/SHUTTERSTOCK (HOLE)

92

FOR THE LOVE OF TIME TRAVEL AMAZED BY A VIETNAM MAZE

I entered the tunnel—dingy, dark and claustrophobic—but when I realised I needed to go further below to experience what life was like for the Vietnamese guerillas who dug and lived in the Cu Chi tunnels on the outskirts of Ho Chi Minh City, I chickened out. To crouch in complete darkness, through a 660-foot tunnel was scary. During American air strikes in the Vietnam War, this place was a lifeline—what the rebels couldn't match in resources, they countered with ingenuity. They dug narrow tunnels (so the American soldiers couldn't get in), and developed a complicated labyrinth covering 250 km. The tunnels were an ecosystem unto themselves—I saw rooms, kitchens, hospitals, even recreation areas when I visited early this year. Vietnam's defiance still echoes through this complex and clever labyrinth.

—GEETIKA SASAN BHANDARI

FOR THE LOVE OF PRIVATE PURSUITS

OFF-GRID OBSESSION

When a class on fragile states introduced me to the concept of ‘ghost states’—unrecognised territories that are difficult to find on most maps—I became obsessed. Mere slivers of earth, they tend to be breakaway regions of countries. So when the chance presented itself to hop on a bus to Nagorno-Karabakh or jump into a taxi to Transnistria, I didn’t resist. What ensued was a surreal experience. The crisp mountain air of Karabakh or the reflections in Transnistria’s Dniester river almost tricked me into a sense of normalcy, even as the reality of hyper-charged politics crept into conversations with locals, or made its presence felt in the flutter unrecognised flags. Once I left, there were no visa stamps to look back on, just that feeling of having been entirely ‘off the map.’

—AANCHAL ANAND



94

FOR THE LOVE OF EXTRAVAGANCE

A TASTE OF SCOTLAND'S ARISTOCRATIC SWAG

I once lived the aristocratic country life at the luxurious Gleneagles Hotel, an Art Deco classic that dates back to 1924, spread over 850 lush Scottish acres. My cozy double room boasted large bay windows looking over the pastoral landscape. The accommodation was charming, complete with a coal hearth, bound novels on the mantelpiece, and heated bathroom floors. I tried my hand at old-fashioned country pursuits—clad in Wellingtons and a waterproof Barbour jacket—taking on aristocratic pastimes such as falconry, skeet shooting, fly fishing, horse riding, and gun-dog training. Dinners at the Strathearn restaurant were the epitome of royal treatment, with a trolley of freshly baked bread wheeled in with dramatic élan, the steak flambéed right before my eyes, and a traditional pudding called Clootie Dumpling prepared tableside with a dollop of plum purée and a dash of whiskey. Yet nothing oozed luxury as much as the spa, which offered saunas, steam baths, a warm vitality pool, and an outdoor jacuzzi, all best followed with a heavenly massage.

—KALPANA SUNDER

PHOTO COURTESY: THE GLENEAGLES HOTEL



95

FOR THE LOVE OF TESTING YOUR SPIRIT

THE MANTRA FOR ALL SEASONS

Having ridden from Mumbai to Ladakh twice on my motorcycle during the summertime, I always wondered what it would be like in the winter. I had to return to sate my curiosity, and I was totally astonished by its changed appearance. It wasn't the same place, just a bit cold: the terrain, in its entirety, was laden with snow, and the Pangong lake, frozen. Each day felt like an endurance test, to be out there when -15° C temperatures would be the warmest of the day, and at night the weather plunged into a frigid abyss as low as -33° C. While exploring Leh City, Merak Village, Hanle, and Chumathang in these extreme conditions, I realised that if we set our mind to it, we can adapt and survive in even the harshest of circumstances, a life lesson I cherish to this day.

—AASHISH CHANDRATREYA

HAPPY TOGETHERSHUTTERSTOCK



96

FOR THE LOVE OF AN EDGY ESCAPES UŽUPIS, A BOHO REPUBLIC

Just a stone's throw from Lithuania's medieval town square of Vilnius lies one of the world's smallest, quirkiest and unrecognised republics, Užupis. This self-declared utopia, covering less than one square kilometre, has its 'own' flag, currency, president and 500 ambassadors worldwide. However, the bohemian philosophy upheld by this vibrant artist-colony best shines through in its constitution, with clauses such as 'A dog has the right to be a dog', and—not to disappoint cat lovers—'A cat is not obliged to love its owner, but must help in time of need.' The marvelous document is displayed in mirror boards along Paupio Street in several languages, including Hindi and Sanskrit. Užupis's residents celebrate April 1 as their Independence Day (a celebration on which beer flows from the main square's fountain) and Frank Zappa just happens to be their patron saint!

—PALOMA DUTTA

97

FOR THE LOVE OF SUBLIME FOOD RUSTIC FARE IN PORTUGAL

Adega O Fumerio in Portugal's Montalegre town is a low-ceilinged establishment, with a fixed menu, and hams and smoked codfish hanging above the bar. My husband Ronny and I chanced upon it hoping for sustenance after a long journey, but ended up enjoying a bountiful meal: Melon wrapped in ham, sautéed mushrooms with ham, fried green peppers and ham, whole potatoes with ham (yes, that's a lot of ham), stewed rice, *feijoada*, and thick cut potato wafers—all made with local produce. As a dish piled high with perfectly cooked pork steak arrived, I discreetly undid a button to give my stomach more room. Our bill, for such abundance, was the princely sum of €30 (₹2,500), including wine and dessert!

—VAISHALI DINAKARAN

ELENA ROSTUNOVA/SHUTTERSTOCK



98

FOR THE LOVE OF EPIPHANIES

BRAZIL'S HOSTEL PARADISE

I ended up living in a Brazilian community hostel—snuggled in a small, northeastern beach town called Pipa, on a chance recommendation by a fellow traveller. I went for two days, and ended up staying for 10, a similar trait shared by the other globetrotting internationals that had become transfixed by the brilliance of the space. Every morning we would have breakfast together, feed small monkeys fruit from our hands, spend the day at the beach and come back in the evening for amazing workshops. The workshops ranged from quantum physics and finding-your-inner-child sessions to moon meditations and salsa.

It was so truly transformative I hope to create a space like that in India, someday.

—ANKITA KUMAR

PHOTO COURTESY: LAGARTO NA BANANA HOSTEL/FACEBOOK

99

FOR THE LOVE OF FAMILY TIME

BONDING EN ROUTE TO BHUTAN

Embarking on a road trip with my parents was always at the top of my travel bucket list, and in 2016—for my parent's wedding anniversary—it finally happened. We weren't going to take it easy, instead we set out to Bhutan from Mumbai: a three-day, one-way journey of over 2,000 kilometres. A flat tyre, perilous highway fog, and several other hurdles later, we entered the border town of Phuentsholing and everything felt worth the trouble. With limited time in our hands, we only made it to Thimpu, the Royal Palace, and the grand Buddha Dordenma; but the essence of our journey wasn't just a few sights in a foreign land, it was about quality time with my folks, long chai breaks set to the soundtrack of Kishore Kumar hits. Sharing this experience with my parents ensured that this endeavour will always be my most memorable trip.

—AASHISH CHANDRATREYA



SHAY KARNISH/ISTOCK

100

FOR THE LOVE OF EPIPHANIES

TIBET: A MOMENT OF ZEN

Dhamo nunnery is perched 10,000 feet high on a mountain in the rugged eastern reaches of Tibet. Around 40 nuns live there, in modest homes with extraordinary views. Wispy cloud cover and the surrounding green hills make the nunnery feel like a haven away from the fast paced world I'm used to. The sense of community and the generosity at this sanctum sanctuary is palpable.

Looking back on my week-long stay there in 2018, I realise I learnt so much from the friendly nuns—who live without cell phones, truly believe in world peace, and welcome strangers into their homes with steaming momos and tea. ■

—MADHURI CHOWDHURY