



Drawing from the personal account of our cycling enthusiast Tammie- Amal Senan, this story narrates the enthralling expedition from the salty air of Cherai Beach to Munnar's misty peaks - a journey testing endurance, unveiling varied landscapes and creating lasting memories.

FROM COASTAL BREEZE TO MOUNTAIN MIST

Tammie Amal Senan's Cherai to Munnar Cycling Adventure



THE JOURNEY BEGINS

Our cycling group, consisting of 20 members, set out with enthusiasm and determination. The journey, spanning 135kms, promised a unique adventure from sea level to an altitude of 4750 feet above over just two days. With a fully equipped backup van and a support team, including a skilled mechanic, we were ready to conquer the diverse terrain that lay ahead.

Our ride commenced at the crack of dawn, 4:30 a.m. precisely, from the beautiful Cherai Beach, located 35 kilometers north of Kochi city. By 6 a.m. , we made our first pitstop for refreshments, and a second one for breakfast at a charming wayside restaurant at 7:30 a.m.



CLIMBING TO NEW HEIGHTS

As we pedalled through the state highway, crossing the historic Neri Mangalam Bridge, we entered the Idukki district, known as the gateway to the high ranges. The 12-kilometer climb led us to the mesmerizing Cheyappara waterfalls, where a mandatory photo break and coconut water refreshment awaited us.

After a well-deserved lunch at Adimali town, the last major town before Munnar, our pace slowed due to steep climb and increasing altitude. The real beauty of Munnar unfolded before us, and the test of each rider's skills and stamina began in earnest. We reached Munnar by 6 p.m. , completing the 135-kilometer journey in 13 hours and 30 minutes.



EXPLORING MUNNAR'S CHARMS

Our evening in Munnar included a visit to the renovated Hydel Park, a 16-acre oasis illuminated in the evening, offering valley views and featuring a thrilling zipline. The next day, we explored the lesser-known Lockhart Tea Factory, a living museum managed by RPG Group. The guided tour, detailing traditional tea processing methods, concluded with a delightful tea tasting session.

The Lockhart Tea Factory's serene location, away from the bustling crowds, offered a unique perspective on Munnar. We wandered through the manicured gardens of the KDHP Outlet, the largest employee-owned tea company in the world, indulging in high-quality teas and freshly baked delicacies.



A stop at the CGH Earth's Lockhart Bungalow, a heritage gem perched amidst the tea gardens, was a step back in time. This meticulously restored planter's bungalow amidst the 1,500 acres lush tea gardens, with its panoramic views and timeless charm, offered a chance to experience the history and soul of Munnar. With three well-maintained rooms boasting views of rolling hills and tea gardens, it's a chance to step back into the 1940s and experience living history. From sunrise walks and birding tours to the unique "Make Your Own Cuppa" experience, the Lockhart Bungalow is a serene blend of tranquillity and sensory pleasures. Picture yourself sipping a cup of tea on the verandah or relishing a picnic with the emerald slopes stretching like a velvet carpet beneath the endless sky. For the adventurous soul, treks like Letchmi Hills and Chokramudi beckon, promising encounters with the fascinating world of herping - spotting the intricate beauty of snakes and lizards camouflaged in the lush foliage. At the CGH Earth's Lockhart Bungalow, the silence is broken only by the chirp of birds and the rustle of leaves.



THE RETURN JOURNEY

With cherished memories and new experiences, we descended from Munnar, completing the return journey to Kochi in just 7 hours. The entire cycling expedition was an exhilarating blend of adventure, scenic beauty, and cultural exploration.

PLAN YOUR ADVENTURE

For those seeking a unique cycling experience, try the Cherai Beach to Munnar route. With distances ranging from 12 to 17 hours based on cyclists' experience, the best seasons are anytime of the year except monsoons (June to August), with winters (Nov to Feb) being the ideal time. The group size ranges from 5 to 20 participants, ensuring a personalized and memorable experience for all. Come, pedal your way through this extraordinary journey to experience the planter's way of life in the heart of Munnar's tea plantations.

Contact your Tamarind Global Representative to book a Cycling experience!

Slow Down....Breathe, Walk, Feel

LeaderSpeak

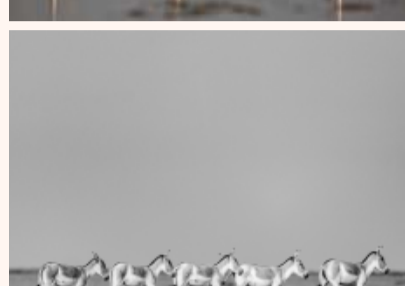


Shoba Rudra gives us her ideal travel trend for 2024 and beyond. Shoba is a storyteller, marketing and communications professional who runs a hospitality marketing platform called RARE India which promotes hotels and experiences which are boutique and experiential. Run by owner / hosts, these hotels and experiences are chosen on the basis of their key ethos – that are community inclusive and planet sensitive.

Remember those long summer vacations? Looking back, they seemed endless. When we constantly mumbled about being bored, the solution offered was to 'stay bored.' So, we found things to do and became what we did repeatedly. We have to go back to a time when travel wasn't as easy as the click of a button. Trains were limited, flights only took you to a few places, often beyond most budgets. There was no last-mile connect, and smartphones didn't distract you from your journey. You actually made friends with your co-passengers, and when you reached the destination, there was so much to do, again and again, that a limited stay was unthinkable.

You literally owned the destination for a few days, be it your grandparents' home in a remote village, a government guest house your parents frequented, or the bungalow of your favourite uncle posted in the Assam tea gardens or in the services elsewhere. This is when you connected with yourself, everything, and everyone around. The journey doesn't seem integral to travel anymore when everyone is intent on reaching.

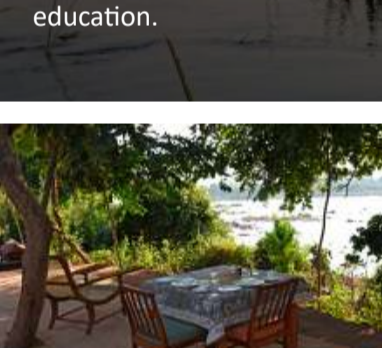
How slow can you travel? Choose your own pace and experience the destination for all it has to offer. This was an idea by Kaafila Camps, which pitched luxury tents in places where premium hotel accommodation was unavailable, and a stay for at least three nights mandated hikes, drives, and excursions to explore forests, cross rivers, meander in ancient towns, look at crafts, and visit heritage forts and temples. Every experience was narrated by your in-house expert and guide who blended heritage, military history, culture, and daily living into one engaging story. Rann Riders by Kaafila today showcases the story of the Little Rann of Kutch, from the conservation of the Khur (wild ass) to extensive wetlands that host a massive population of flamingos and the communities that live off the Rann, crafts, and textiles that are integral to the region. It is then an easy four to five days of immersions, also enjoying local cuisines at the resort and the local landscape.



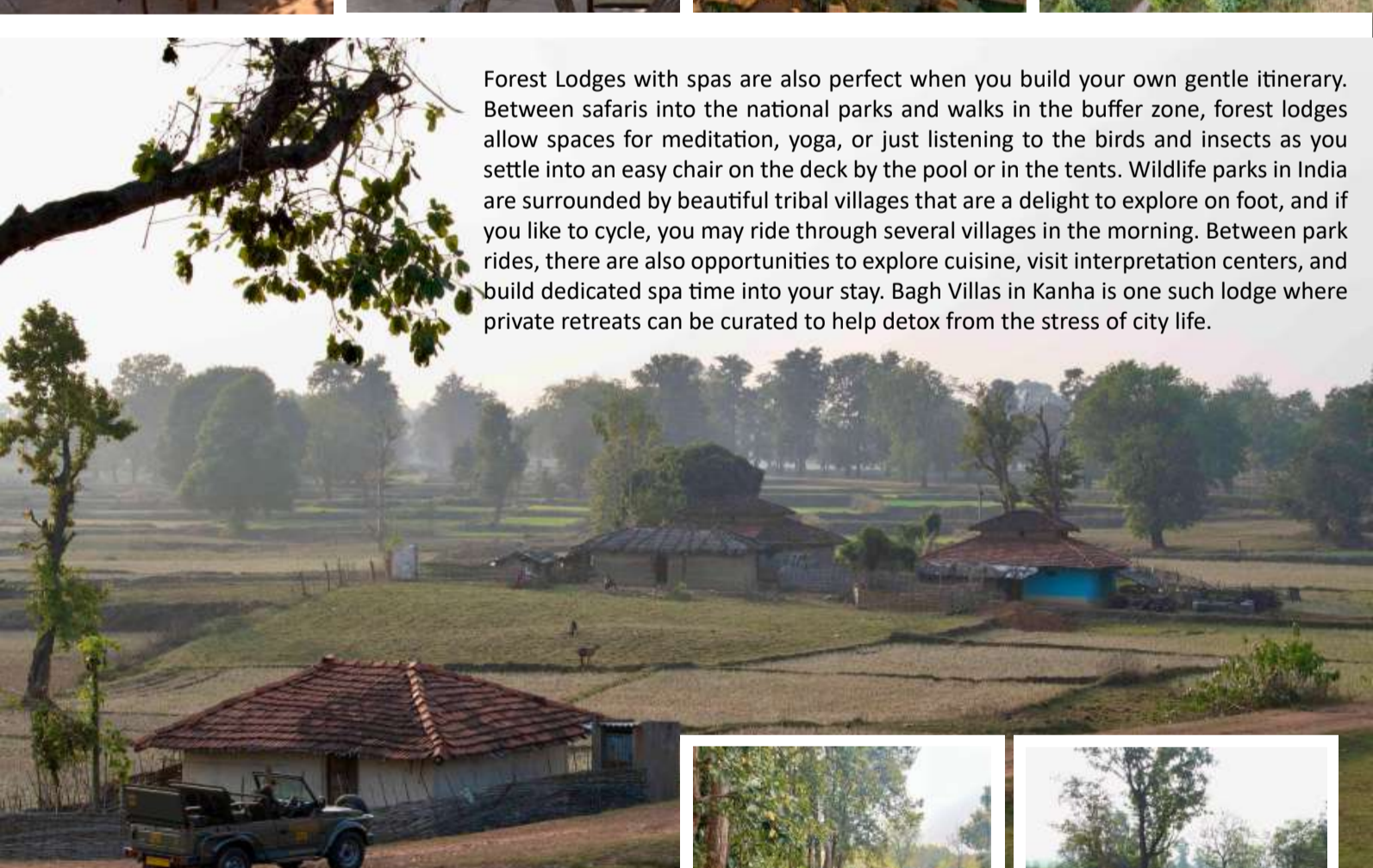
Glenburn Tea Estate in Darjeeling is a popular five-night retreat, easily accessible by flight to Bagdogra Airport. The last three hours are traversed in a car that lays out Glenburn hospitality even as you leave the airport. Nimbu pani, dainty sandwiches, and small cakes keep hunger pangs at bay. Five days in Glenburn Tea Estate allow you a lot of time to relax on the planter's chair with a book and endless cups of Darjeeling tea, leisurely lunches with a view of the beautiful Kanchenjunga ranges, and sit-down dinners often in candlelight. The days are as relaxed or filled as you want them to be, interrupted by spa treatments with tea-infused oils and a daily tea-time ritual. Excursions are within the 1500 acres of Glenburn plantation, from hikes to village walks to nature walks and plantation tours. For those interested, there is fishing on the Rungeet and hikes across the bridge into Sikkim. Like I said, you can do many things in the five days or just do your two favourite activities every day. Such is the magic of slow travel.



The Sarai at Toria, despite its proximity to Panna National Park, fully embraces its retreat status for this reason: spend time and savor slowly. Eight cottages set amidst grasslands and native trees and shrubs, sit on an elevation above the river Ken. From the temples of Khajuraho to forts of Ajaygarh and Kalinjar, to village walks and the boat ride on the river Ken, you have lots to explore, but you can do it all on foot. Panna safaris are without rush, and one can concentrate on birds, smaller mammals, insects, and trees. Sarai encourages you to spend a lot of time on the retreat just relaxing under the winter sun or on the veranda outside your cottage, conversing with the owners - long-time conservationists who work with the community on health and education.



Forest Lodges with spas are also perfect when you build your own gentle itinerary. Between safaris into the national parks and walks in the buffer zone, forest lodges allow spaces for meditation, yoga, or just listening to the birds and insects as you settle into an easy chair on the deck by the pool or in the tents. Wildlife parks in India are surrounded by beautiful tribal villages that are a delight to explore on foot, and if you like to cycle, you may ride through several villages in the morning. Between park rides, there are also opportunities to explore cuisine, visit interpretation centers, and build dedicated spa time into your stay. Bagh Villas in Kanha is one such lodge where private retreats can be curated to help detox from the stress of city life.



There is a deliberate intent to slow travel that works well when you include activities such as hiking, cruising, and walking. One of the things that changed the way we explore our forests was introduced by the Kaafila Camps with in Satpura as early as 2007. This allowed you to engage with the forest through all your senses as you explored the forest on foot. Touching to feel hirsute leaves and the spongy bark of trees, crushing a leaf to draw its fragrant oils, or sucking nectar from a flower, touching a ripe forest berry that dropped readily into your palm, tapping mushrooms that shot out spores. All this meant seeing the forest at close quarters, signs and tracks that were a part of the forest you couldn't see - insects, snakes, and civets we miss on a jeep drive, scats and scratch marks of a wandering big cat sometimes leaving behind a warning of the vulnerable. Some of this in a forest when you concentrate on walking through trees, hug their energies, make a cup of tea with a few edible leaves or flowers, and sit on a fallen tree trunk to meditate – sums up as forest bathing, completely encompassed in the joy of being an integral part of Nature. At Wild Mahseer in Assam, forest bathing is offered on the premises of the Addabarie Tea Estate rewilded to allow the Eastern Himalayan flora to flourish; small water bodies send up eddies for you to concentrate on while a slow falling leaf is enough to drive you inwards. Despite all the falling, shifting, and moving, the forest is still around you. And when you bathe in the forest, you are invariably in the center of the eddy... still and silent.



Slow travel allows you to miss things, and that is when you relax in your destination, finding time to do things you have never done before. This is why in the design of a resort or hotel, the outdoors are as important as the indoors and how close they are to each other.

Next time when you plan your travel, look for things to miss and spend more time on the few things you can't. You will spend the moments of your holiday and know what it feels like to remember every minute of your holiday.



New Hotel Openings



Where? Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu

What is Unique? O by Tamara, Coimbatore is designed for a blend of comfort and hospitality. Nestled in the Singanallur area, hotel is conveniently situated on Kamaraj Road offering access to Avinashi and Trichy Road and lie at a mere 4 km distance from the airport. With the railway station just 7 kms away and abundance of corporate offices, shopping centers - this hotel offers a prominent location and comfort.



O by Tamara - Coimbatore



Why? Elevate your stay with O by Tamara by selecting from the 141 spacious and meticulously designed rooms and suites, each offering the perfect setting for every need. Whether unwinding after a bustling day or gearing up for the next, the accommodation ensures guests the utmost comfort during the stay. The convenient location near Coimbatore and Podanur junction makes it easily accessible for travelers who would like to have a memorable stay at his centrally located hotel.



Where? Halol, Gujarat

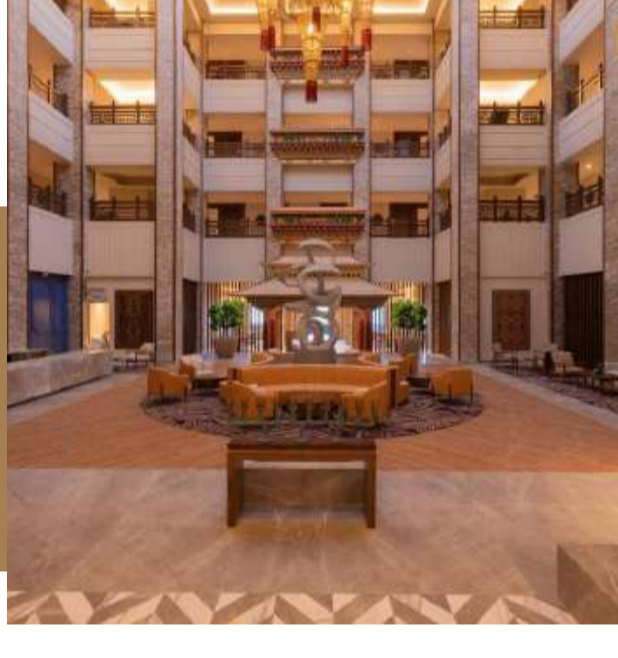
What is Unique? Vikrama Sarovar Portico Pavagadh is a quintessential getaway destination to indulge in the rich and culturally inspired royal experience. The summit of Pavagadh hill, 762 m above sea level, is the temple to Goddess Kali, dating from the 10th-11th centuries. Hindu pilgrims have been coming to visit this temple for a long before the development of Champaner as a major city, and they have continued for hundreds of years after its decline. This temple is approx 5 kms from hotel. Another attraction, The Champaner-Pavagadh Archaeological Park, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site with archaeological remains that date from the 8th to 16th century. The range of ruins is enormous, including agricultural buildings, mosques, and a fortress. This is 5 kms from the hotel.



Vikrama Sarovar Portico Pavagadh - Gujarat



Why? Vadodara Railway Station is 47 km from the accommodation, while Lakshmi Vilas Palace is 48 km from the property. The nearest airport is Vadodara Airport, 41 km from Vikrama Sarovar Portico Pavagadh. Jambughoda Wildlife Sanctuary hosts 17 mammalian species including but not limited to large colonies of Indian flying fox. It is a home to carnivores such the hyenas, wolves and jackals; in addition to the occasional sighting of the Indian sloth bear from the area and is 32 kms from the hotel.



Where? Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh

What is Unique? In the words of the 14th Dalai Lama, Tawang is "a piece of heaven on earth, where the soul finds solace in the serenity of the mountains". Nestled in the Eastern Himalayas, Tawang's rugged topography encompasses towering snow-clad peaks, pristine lakes and meandering valleys that create picturesque landscapes across the region. Drive through Vivanta gates, and you will be greeted by vibrant motifs and colors, a kaleidoscope of tradition and luxury. A terraced landscape unfolds to your right, and on your left, a striking hardscape wall, a testament to the toil and artistry of local artisans, emerges from the hillside.



Vivanta Arunachal Pradesh, Tawang



Why? This hotel boasts of 78 rooms and 02 Suites and 03 F&B outlets with global and traditional cuisine. The nearest airport is Tezpur Airport which is 330 km from Vivanta Tawang. The hotel has drawn inspiration from the local materials and the unique design styles that define Tawang. With its unique central atrium design, 80 well-appointed rooms and suites that offer mountain and valley views, and the cozy ambience of heated wooden floors and walnut veneer-adorned walls, Vivanta Arunachal Pradesh, Tawang immerses you in the beauty of the surroundings.



Where? Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh

What is Unique? Courtyard by Marriott Gorakhpur seamlessly blends modern elegance with cultural charm, offering a haven of comfort in the heart of Gorakhpur. The hotel's contemporary design, coupled with warm hospitality, creates an inviting atmosphere for both business and leisure travelers. With well-appointed rooms featuring modern amenities, a fitness center for wellness enthusiasts, and a rooftop pool offering panoramic views of the city, Courtyard by Marriott Gorakhpur ensures a comfortable stay. Guests can savor delectable cuisine at the on-site restaurant, while the central location provides easy access to local attractions, making it an ideal choice for a memorable stay in this vibrant city.



Courtyard by Marriott - Gorakhpur



Why? Nestled in Gorakhpur's city center and conveniently situated a short 30-minute drive from Mahayogi Gorakhnath Airport, the 97-room hotel is well-connected to the Gorakhpur Junction Railway Station and The Gorakhpur Bus Stand, boasting captivating views of Ramgarh Tal Lake as a serene backdrop. Gorakhpur, rich in historical and cultural significance, invites guests to explore its extensive list of iconic destinations. Guests can pay homage at the revered Gorakhnath Temple, explore the profound teachings of the Geeta Press, and venture to Lumbini, the UNESCO world heritage site and birthplace of Lord Buddha. A stay at Courtyard by Marriott Gorakhpur promises an unforgettable journey through the heart of diverse and enriching experiences in this vibrant city.



Where? Bojoghari, East Sikkim, Gangtok

What is Unique? Embark on a captivating journey at Ginger Gangtok, Bojoghari, offering vibrant, high – end energy stays that allows guests to a seamless switch between work and play. Check-in to lean luxe 89 well-appointed rooms. Qmin – their signature all day diner, and a state-of-the-art fitness center. Hotel also features vibrant meeting spaces for up to 30 people and an inviting bar to unwind.



Ginger Gangtok, Bojoghari



Why? Ginger Gangtok invites you to immerse yourself in a world where relaxation and adventures intertwine seamlessly. The hotel is most stylish and vibrant one and is strategically located on the Indra bypass with easy access to Gangtok's major attractions such as: - Nathula Pass, Hanuman Tok, Yumthang Valley, Rumtek Monastery and Tsomgo Lake.

India offices:

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Marketing offices: Canada, Russia, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom

Mumbai: 401, AJ House Marolli Road, Andheri East, Mumbai 400 059, India

Tel: +91-22-66802500 | **Fax:** +91-22-67102876

Gurgaon: 5th Floor, Building No 91, Sector – 44, Gurgaon 122003, India Tel: +91-124-4565454 | Fax: +91-124-2570337

Website: www.tamarindglobal.com | **Online:** www.tamarindglobalonline.com | info@tamarindglobal.com

