

Chapter 24
M U M B A I
I t s F u l l O f L i f e

Initially I found my stay in Mumbai very agonizing because the new environment was very disturbing. I had no accommodation, surroundings looked very dirty with slums, roads always with traffic jam and I was always worried to see the rushed nature of the city life; why every body is running and why they can't programme their day in advance, so that they can pace their life and live peacefully. But now I feel very comfortable. I have one Government accommodation facing the sea at Hyderabad Estate Napean Sea, Priyadarshani Park for early morning jogging, good markets for shopping and slum is not that visible. Travelling is not that pain. Buses are well-connected, Taxis are available even in early hours and the place is very secured. In general, Mumbai is very safe, I see ladies travelling alone even in midnight, taxis are very safe, very just in charging the fares, never over charging and local trains are lifeline of Mumbai though over crowded often, but it is a real experience. Mumbai has a night life, very upmarket and budget restaurants are available. Roadside dhabas and fast food places offer quality food at a very affordable price. I have seen tourists are enjoying and time is no barrier. The city is comparable to Damascus, Cairo, Beirut, Tehran, London and our other cities in India should follow the Mumbai style. Best part of Mumbai I like the Sea and specially during monsoon, the cool breeze, Sunrise & Sunset from my room, Sea food restaurants and fashion designers collection in boutiques. Mumbai even with such a huge population maintains a perfect water supply, electricity and transport service and you name the thing you can get it – Crawford Market is the place but Akbarally's was my favorite place. I used to get confused in Link Road or Andheri shopping Malls. But they really are doing roaring business. Millions of holidayers from overseas or from within country visit these shopping malls for collecting their choice of things.

Whereas Delhi, (where I go back after completion of my posting in Mumbai) is very dull, not so much of life, every thing so far flung that you always worry about coming back as soon as you visit your friend or relatives. Transport part is the worst and travelling by taxi after 7 p.m. is the nightmare, over charging and may refuse or may drop you in the half journey, even you can't depend on Police help, every thing is so bureaucratic, people are pretentious and only want to show off. Here even the millionaire do not talk about their wealth and walk with you or travel with you in Bus, Train or Scooter – no showing of their richness. In fact Delhi's rich people are the most uncivilized and their children are real problems for the city life. Power, water supply, transport, infact these basics remain chronic problem. Because I have been brought up, educated, worked in Delhi and I can get some job after my retirement in Delhi, I feel Delhi is the best place to settle. But Mumbai is no doubt, a better place in all respects. It should be kept clean by its people and slum rehabilitation should be done with speed to keep the main areas at least the road between Marine drive to Airport slum free and one clear cut road, so that one can come from airport to city with in a specific time. I often failed to keep my appointments because of traffic jam or reached the place one hour before and wondering around. It was not a bad experience. I saw quite a lot of Mumbai like that and made many local friend while wandering around. Mumbai is the country's image and all tourists like its busy life and open mind of the people.

N.B.: On being transferred from Dubai where Shri Gour Kanjilal was the Regional Director and was responsible for tourism promotion of the country among the Gulf region, Middle East and Africa (over 30 countries). Safari Plus asked him his observations about Mumbai (being posted here) from such place which are very clean, very progressive and he had been to many other parts like U.K., U.S.A., France, Germany, Spain, Portugal, Australia and how Mumbai compares with these places for living or at least the place where he goes back after his tenure here i.e. Delhi. His views as professional in the tourism and hospitality industry about Mumbai should make all Mumbaikars very proud. – Shailendra Kesari Editor Safari Plus.

Chapter 25

GOA

Reach For The Beach

Warm, tropical Goa is with miles of beautiful silver sandy, beaches or pale gold sandy beaches fringed with coconut palms, the cool winds with sun shines in winter months. Goa is the leisure holiday destination. Peak season are between October-March when Goa is at its best with fine weather, fruits, flowers, fish and festivities. Goa offers a wide choice not only for locations but of quality and price. At the Resorts like Taj Aguada, Baga, Vagator in North Goa or South Goa, Leela Majorda, Cidade De Goa, Renaissance to name a few (and there are many more such resorts). One can enjoy luxurious comforts, most of these beach resorts offer water sports, ranging from wind surfing, water skiing, canoeing, sailing, jet scooters. Most hotels offer a fairly wide variety of indoor and out door games. Tennis, squash, Mini-golf, beach-volleyball, badminton, Billiards, Table tennis, Chess, Carom etc. Health clubs with sauna, herbal therapy and beauty saloons, shopping arcades, travel services are also very much part of these resorts. All hotels have their own entertainment and recreational programmes which include cultural shows barbeque by moonlight, exciting band and music groups and always go on adding something new to entertain their guests. Food is the real attraction in Goa. One can take a pick of international cuisine or Goa specialities which has a mix of Portuguese and local ethnic mix. Preparation of exotic fish are loved as fish is available in plenty and Sea food luxury is quite common in Goa experience. Even excursions are organized to visit fishing villages or deep sea fishing trip on a fishing trailer or visit to handicraft centres or weekly bazaar for a different experience. In Goa, the craftsmen produce exquisite handicraft which are unique to Goa. The Speciality of Goa include Candle Stand, Brass work, Coir goods, Lace-crochet work, pottery, wood carving shell products etc. In fact in Goa, one has beaches to choice from north Goa to South Goa; one can move from resort to resort in course of the vacation period.

In cruise Tourism, Goa's seaports Murmagao and Vasco have seen increased number of cruise calls and have great potential to grow. There are lot of tours for the cruise tourists in Goa and around. Now cruise on Mandovi River in the evening 'Sunset cruise' with goan flavour is a must in the holidayers itinerary. Goa is also attracting tourists for casino and many foreign tourists who had been earlier going to casinos in USA/France/Spain or to Nepal, find it nearer to be in Goa and enjoy its offshore casino and have fun. Angling holidayers are also growing in numbers and deep sea fishing is enjoyed a real adventure experience on a fishing boat with local fisherman.

Everywhere in Goa one can see the confluence of the East and the West where past confronts the present. Rich cultural heritage is visible in the churches at old Goa or temples in South Goa.

A colourful and vibrant mix of attire, languages, festivals and gastronomes between Portuguese and Konkans from a vital part of Goa's social fabric. This diverse culture and its beauty, abundance of lush vegetation, waterfalls with animal, bird, aquatic life and friendly people make Goa the right choice for a leisure holiday on the beach experience the genuine Goan Hospitality.

. Chapter 26

A Destination To Explore

Himalayan Splendour In Summer Season

Hill Station of North India

Delhi is the North Indian gateway and starting point for Himachal Pradesh, Uttaranchal, UP Hills, Rajasthan, Aravalli Hills, Jammu & Kashmir and some areas of Madhya Pradesh like Amar Katak and Panchmarhi Hills.

Major International Airlines have links with the airport at Delhi. The National Airlines and large number of privates ones connect the metropolis with all other metros and cities in the domestic circuits. Express trains like Shatabdis and Rajdhans take passengers rapidly and air-conditioned comfort from Delhi and to various destinations on the rail network. From the main gateway at Delhi, the Himalayan foot hill are only five hours drive. A number of secondary airports, rail and road network make the inner most parts of the mountain accessible within two to three days.

Shimla : Shimla is the capital of Himachal Pradesh and was the summer capital of British India. It has well developed tourism infrastructure and its easy accessibility and many attractions make it one of the most popular resorts. In the Himalayan lower ranges, it is surrounded by pine, cedar, oak and deodar forests. Towards the north lie the snow covered high ranges while the valleys below hold streams and swaying fields. Within the town are the splendid colonial offices,

quaint colleges and charming parks. You can go shopping on the fashionable Mall, visit neolithic churches, the grand former vice regal lodge or cemeteries. You take Shimla's delightful walks and go sightseeing in the suburbs - Mashobra, Golf Course at Naldera or Chail Palace which is now a hotel. Sarahan (177kms drive) from Shimla has orchards and usual architecture, forests and fast flowing streams.

Kullu : "Valley of the Gods" Kullu which is connected by air from Shimla and Delhi will be the next stop in Himachal Hills itinerary. With the river Beas flowing through it, Kullu Valley stretching to Manali is a narrow fertile strand 80km long. From Kullu you can trek to Malana Village - the people of which are regarded by anthropologists to be the descendants of Alexander the Great army On the same stretch but start of Manali. Naggar is another fascinating palace. The erstwhile princely state of Kullu is said to have been established in the 1st and 2nd C.B.C and Naggar was its capital for 1400 years. Kullu serves as the access point to numerous ancient temples and palaces off the beaten track. With in Kullu is the Raghunath Temple. Notable Temples around Kullu are Basheshwar Mahadev at Bajaura, Vaishnodevi, Devi Jagganath and Vishnu Temples. Manikuran is 45kms deeper into the valley and famous pilgrimage centre visited by Hindus & Sikhs. It is also known for its Sulphur springs.

Manali : On the way to Manali you cross Rohtang La (3,980 M) where a panorama of bare rock, snow fields and glaciers unfolds. The sacred twin peaks of Gyephant and the Sonapati glacier are visible from here, while at a short distance from the pass lies the lake of Dashir (Sarkund). Past Rohtang pass, toward Manali, visit Rahalla falls, the picturesque village of Kothi and Nehru Kund. Manali is one of the India's prime holiday destination. Placed before a backdrop of high snow-clad mountains are fertile valleys and fast-flowing streams, a variety of wild flowers and dense forests. In and Around Manali are several places of interest. Some are

Manu Temple : This is dedicated to the sage Manu after whom Manali is named.

Vashishth (3km) : Well known for its hot springs the water from where has been piped into baths. There are old temples dedicated to the sage vashishth and Lord Rama.

Monasteries : There are three recently built Tibetan monasteries at Manali. Jagatsukh, the one-time capital of Kullu, has old temples dedicated to Lord Shiva and to Sandhya Gayatri. The Arjun Caves are just ahead.

Sokang Valley (14km) : In a picturesque setting this has good ski slopes and picnic spots, it has the glacier closet to Manali. Manali and its surrounding areas have a wide variety of accommodation to chose from. Winter temperatures can hover around freezing point. In summer the climate is mild.

Jammu : Romantic green meadows, mountains, bewitching lakes and valleys. Jammu has the uncanny ability to surprise you at every turn. Tucked snugly between glittering 'Shikaras' on ancient temples and holy shrines perched a top hillsides, lie the most picturesque scenes you can ever imagine. Jammu is famous for its temples and shrines. Among the temples in the city, the Raghunath Mandir takes pride of the place, being situated right in the heart of Jammu.

The famous temple of 'Bawey Wali Mata' is inside the Bahu Fort where every Tuesday and Sunday, pilgrims throng and jostle one another to worship the Goddess.

Opposite Bahu Fort is the Mahamaya Temple. Peer Budhan Ali Shah (Peer Baba) is the shrine that protects its people from mishaps and evil spirits. Other well known temples are peer Kho Cave Temple, Panchbakhtar Temple, Ranbireshwar Temple, Laxmi Narayan Temple and Panj Mandir. Peer Mandir is another famous in Jammu. Jama Masjid is located in Talab Khatikan, Ustad Mohalla and Gole Market and Ibrahim Masjid in Wazarat Road. For Sikhs the Sunder Singh Gurudwara, Tali Sahib Gurudwara, Maharani Chand Kaur Gurudwara Singh Sabha, Kalgidhar Gurudwara and Sing Sabha Gurudwara are important attractions and from an important part of their pilgrimage

Forts & Palaces : On the opposite bank of the Tawi River, at an upland plateau, is situated the majestic Bahu Fort. It is surrounded by lush green terraces gardens, waterfalls, and colourful flowers. Amar Singh Palace is a sight to behold. This grand palace reminds one of a dreamy French castle, with sloping roofs and tall towers.

Srinagar is the principal region in the State of Jammu and Kashmir and a favorite destination of the visitors from all over the world. Srinagar is honeymooner's paradise a nature lover's wonderland and shopper's dream come true. The Himalayan walks, the pony treks the cable car rides over Gulmarg Resort, the Shikara rides at sunset on the Dal lake, all these make Srinagar and distinctive tourist destination in the summer mouths. The lush greenery of the valley with its terraced rice field, fruit orchards and snarling/ snoring waterways fresh atmosphere and Mughal Garden, cuisine of its unique taste and visits to Gulmarg, Pahalgam, Wular lake, trout Fishing and many outdoor activity will keep holidayers busy for months and in eco-friendly atmosphere. Houseboat stay have been an integral part of holidays in Srinagar. More adventures are also proceed towards Ladakh.

Ladakh also known as 'Little Tibet' is now one of the most popular summer destinations for foreign tourists. It remains monsoon free due to the great barrier of the Himalayas.

This makes the period from June to October the ideal holiday season. Indian airlines & Jet air flights are available from Delhi. Indian airlines operates from Chandigarh & Jammu also. Among the other North India, Hill Stations, Dehradun - Mussorie - Rishkesh Circuit and Nainital - Ranikhet - Almora - Kausani in the Garhwal Hill / Kumaon Hills offer good summer holiday options. Rajasthan's Mount Abu in the Aravelli Range is mostly popular with domestic tourists. In the East, Darjeeling hold a special charm with lofty Himalayan Peaks and well-known all over the world for its tea with delicatd aroma. It is also good point to go for trekkings. Darjeeling is served by Toy Train of the Darjeeling - Himalayan Railway and is now declared as 'Heritage Property' by the UNESCO. Bagdogra is the nearest Airport connected from Delhi and Kolkata. Once in Darjeeling, tourists do visit Sikkim and mainly stop in Gangtok. In Gangtok one not only enjoys wonderland of forest, rivers, peaks and cultural (Buddhist) monuments but also colourful life styles exotic flora and fauna including hundreds of orchids, butterflies and opportunities for adventure tourism. River Rafting in Teesta is very much challenging to the water sports lovers.

Shillong is the Capital of Meghalaya State and a good holiday destination all year round. Scenic beauty, cheerful people, clouds, tall pines, mountains, valleys, meadows and excellent golf-course make Shillong a great destination. Guwahati is the nearest airport 128km from Shillong. Comfortable accommodation in scenic locations are available.

Mahabaleshwar is the best known and popular of Mumbai's hill stations at Western India, located at an altitude of 1372 meters. Nearest Airport is Pune (120km). Another popular hill resort three hours away from Mumbai is **Lonavala** - it is more a perfect weekend getaway. **Matheran** is really excellent hill stations in the western hills and walking tracks are enjoyable with green trees and specially toy train journey from Neral - two hour journey upto 21km route its cool climate, waterfalls, temples.

Madhya Pradesh Tourism cottages for secluded holidays at Panchmarhi is now getting popular with Western tourists.

In South India, **Ooty** (now call Udhagamandalam) is the most known among the Nilgiri Ranges of Tamil Nadu (2268 meters). It is located at the junction of Kerala, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. For locals of these States, it is must summer resort. It attracts Arab tourist by virtue of its salubrious climate and scenic beauty and great summer escape destination from the Gulf. Kotagiri, Coonoor are also visited from Ooty and generally 10-15days break is enjoyed with narrow gauge Hill Train service from Metupalayam and visit to Tea estates, lakes with water sports, water falls, view point, tribal villages and stroll down winding paths and profession of flowers in bloom. It is also a favourite haunts for the honeymooners.

Kodaikanal is also a beautiful hill station (2133mts above sea level) is known for star shaped lake with greenery all around. Good accommodation facilities are available.

Munnar (1600 m above sea level in Kerala; 150km from Cochin) offers cool holidays with plantation of tea, coffee, rubber, orange and spices. There are vast open grassland line with gurgling rivulets, water falls and mist capped mountains. While on holiday, one may also visit **Thekkady** known for Periyar Wild Life Sanctuary, visit colourful fort and see how tea is being picked. Western Fort Munnar Hotel is strategically located and good place to help for holidaying in Munnar. Budget accommodation are also available. Enroute to Munnar 120km away from Kottayam lies Idukki a small hill town surrounded by a spread of beautiful, wooded valleys and meandering stream. There are though not so known, hill stations in Andhra Pradesh also. Now with Hyderabad well-connected from this part the hill stations like Anantgiri, Aruku Valley, Horsley Hills can also be explored by tourists. These are easily accessible from Visakhapatnam. Bangalore is also good point to visit Nandi Hills and Coorg in Karnataka.

From North to South, East to West India offers hilly getaways that match the best resorts anywhere in the world. take a break and enjoy the luxurious pampering that awaits you in any one of India's hill stations.

Chill on Himachal Hills

The Himachal Hills offers haven of privacy and lush ambience of solitude in right ambience for your type of holidays.

The cool mountain climate of Kullu-Manali, Dalhousie, Dharamsala in the Himachal Pradesh is the real summer escape destinations for the holidayers. The temperature there is an exodus for cool climate destinations.

These destinations are just 3 hrs drive from Delhi. Journey through narrow winding roads, countryside of village huts, wild flowers, pine scented air, streams bubbling over rocks offer a breath taking spectacle of colour and beauty. The local people are working in orchards in their traditional costumes and special head gear, farmers working in their terraced paddy fields, shepherd boys with herds os sheep, jumping from mountain to mountain, village temples, in the village market villagers selling home grown vegetables, all these and more, show pageantry of the style of the Himalayan people. These valleys have special apple orchards to be visited to enjoy the famous golden apple. Himachal Pradesh is known for apple and apple juice. The Kullu woolen shawls, Kullu woolen caps, tribal jewellery are must purchase for the visitors to Shimla-Kullu-Manali. For a journey between Kullu-Manali and the Rohtang pass, steep hair-pin bend over looking narrow mountain gaps, passes cleft in between mountains will increase adrenal flow and your spirit of adventure will be aroused

to meet the challenges of nature. Even water sports, hiking white water rafting, trekking, angling (Trout fishing) are offered in adventure tourism Himachal holiday package. In winter months, Manali welcomes tourists for skiing holidays.

Chapter 27

North East India

Paradise Unexplored

In the Central Tourism Planning since, the last two Five Year Plans, there is a special focus on the North East region of the country for integrated development. Main aim is to develop the North East Region and showcase it to the world with its unique heritage and experience. The emphasis is that it should become the most exotic region in the country, and it should be marketed and promoted as one complete circuit. This region has a unique kind of tourism attraction with its unique tribes, unique cultures and it's the most unique area in South and South East Asia Region. The strategy is to promote this region quite different from the rest of the country. It has to be community based tourism, which should be promoted and the development should also be different from the kind of development generally one see in other parts of the country. These states would predominantly concentrate on the rural settings they are blessed with. Each state has to be seen in its individual light and to be developed in such a manner that the people in the areas gain from it. Also the Government has come up with some world-class co-laterals and CD's, which comprise of the best visuals of the region. Apart from that, consisting efforts are being made for projecting the art and crafts of the region. The idea is to bring the region into prominence so that, to begin with the Indian tourists begin visiting the North East.

As future plan, in Assam there is special effort to open up the Brahmaputra Cruising so that the Brahmaputra River gets opened up entirely for unique river experiences. A partnership with Sikkim Tourism has been formed to open new trekking routes for the foreign tourists who are willing to travel to Sikkim for adventure purposes. Emphasis is to develop rural tourism in each of these states and there are some rural villages, which are a part of this exercise. This is done in order to display the tradition and culture of each state. In fact, the special portfolios have been made for each state, to ensure that unique aspect of each state is highlighted. That is how each state has a different caption, which gives it a different identity in the whole region. Also in the promotional efforts central tourism has developed special interactive multi-media kits and visuals of the region. While developing the infrastructure, it is important to Promote the Destinations in the traffic generating markets as well. However, all these states must realize that tourism is going to be a major source of employment in the region and they must put priority to tourism, allot funds for Tourism in the state sector and train their people to serve better to the visiting tourists.

Ministry of Tourism is the only department that is keeping good outlay in its budget and is fully utilizing its outlay for the North East. In fact, it spent more than 10% of outlay for the same purpose. That is exactly why one can see so much growth in the terms of promotion and publicity and the infrastructure; taken more project and kept Rs.50 crore funding for the North East region. Ministry also sanctioned a lot of money for various hospitality purposes. The role of the center is to sanction projects and release the funds; the rest of the implementation is taken care by the states. The Ministry of Civil Aviation is also doing a lot of work in this regard. Moreover, DONER in collaboration with the Ministry of North East has started short aircraft with the co-operation of Indian Airlines. So the conditions are already improving. And as far as the permission for foreigners is concerned, that is an issue of security and the Ministry of Home Affairs deals with that. They are already looking into the viable possibilities. The main concern for all of us is that the area shall remain absolutely pristine and should not be spoiled by over crowding of tourists. It should have 'quality tourism'. The answer of all problems

lies in domestic tourism; the region must concentrate on good governance and infrastructure implementation for its successful tourism and this is the thinking of Ministry of Tourism, Government of India.

Some Glimpses of NORTH-EAST STATES AND ITS TOURISTIC HERITAGE :

Sikkim : Sikkim is a tourist's paradise offering a collage of green pastures and colourful flowerbeds combined with scintillating waterfalls and serenity. The only unfortunate part about this part is that sometimes tourists are not able to reach here because of weather constraints like landslides etc. The underlying principal of tourism in Sikkim has always been eco-tourism. Plastic has been completely banned in the state for the past five years (the Tourism Trade Act gives strict guidelines about the same). Moreover there is increased emphasis on do's and don'ts in Trekking and Adventure tours through green routes. A variety of medical herbs have been planted around the state that has increased the bio-diversity. State promotes "ORCHID Festival" as orchids are grown in different colours and shapes (between May to Sep period).

Nagaland : An intriguing world of ancient rituals and cultural heritage, of proud people and their distinct lifestyles in the bounds of the tribal community, of warm hospitality and smiling faces, Nagaland welcomes all to its rich culture and society woven together with love and warmth. Nagaland in all its colours mainly focuses on Eco-tourism, Adventure tourism, Rural tourism and Cultural tourism. In adventure tourism mountain biking and trekking are promoted. As part of cultural tourism, traditional festivals with typical dress, customs and traditions are focused of different tribes. Rural tourism showcases the close-knit society of the Nagas. In Eco-tourism, the state is promoting the picturesque "Khonoma Village", which offers delightful views of Nagalands's natural beauty and ecological diversity.

Tripura : This second smallest state of the Indian union, tucked away in one corner of the North Eastern region of the country, is undoubtedly the haven of beauty, peace, gardens and temples. And to add icing to the cake, it has some of the most mystifying ancient places and museums. With all this and more in its glorious history, Tripura is an important tourist place in North East. From the myth surrounding its name (Tripura is believed to be named after its presiding deity Tripura Sundari who is famous as one of the 51 peethas important to Hindu pilgrims), to the reality of its splendour of its natural setting and its dazzling heritage, Tripura has a plethora of unmatched attractions for tourists from over the world. A delightful blend of hills, valleys and lush forests, the tapestry of this state compliments the traditions and culture of this simple state, which stands out like beautiful Bonsai with its terrific scenic beauty. The state shares its international borders with Bangladesh and also shares a common boundary with the Indian states of Mizoram and Assam.

The gleaming white Ujjayanta Palace in the capital city of Agartala is a magnificent example of the impeccable architecture of the bygone era, built by Maharaja Radha Kishore Manikya Bahadur in 1901. It is located in the heart of the town and its interiors are embellished with fine tiled floors, crafted doors and beautiful curved wooden ceiling. Its recently been lit up with floodlights which lends an even haunting appeal to this landmark. Apart from that, an excavated site at the Kali Temple on the edge of the lake is also a major attraction for tourists. Moreover, the lovely Lake Palace Neermahal on Lake Rudrasagar is Eastern India's only water palace. All these are mere glimpses of the aesthetic genius of Maharaja Radha Kishore. Besides these architectural wonders, one also gets to experience archeological remains at the famous site of Pilak, which has remains of the 8th - 9th century civilization representing both Hindu and Buddhist linkages. The Jampui hills are a perfect get away for tranquility and Dumboor Lake takes you to the serenity of it's calm waters with over 48 islands dotting its denizens. The Trishna Wildlife Sanctuary is situated about 100kms. from Agartala. It's home to the bison and great residential and migratory birds that are a treat for wildlife lovers. It also houses the Hooloc Gibbon, Golden and Capped Langur. Tripura has a fantastic flora and fauna and is rich in bio-diversity. It also has a wide and flourishing forest cover. Other sanctuaries in the state are Gumti and Rowa.

Assam : The splendour of the river Brahmaputra wending its way from the Mansarovar Lake to the higher reaches of the Tibetan plateau and the rich aroma of fresh tea leaves from the lush green tea-gardens, these are the things that symbolize the beautiful state of Assam. A look at the rivers and the mountains invigorates the senses and brings a smile to one's face as one makes way through the dense tropical forests of the land. The USP of Assam is certainly the grand Brahmaputra River, which has for long dominated the world of this land and its people. In fact, Assam means Brahmaputra and tea gardens to people over the world. Apart from this, the Majuli River Island, which is the largest inhabited riverside island in the world, is also an attractive part of the region, which is why the state is emphasizing on river tourism. Assam is also very popular amongst the Europeans for its tea gardens, which were established by the British in the past. Of course, it's a wonderful experience to view these gardens with women plucking tealeaves and filling their baskets; even special tea festivals in some parts of the state is organized. One more good point about Assam is the wildlife it offers. The Kaziranga National Park, which is famous for its one-horned Rhinoceros and the Manas National Park, which is a World Heritage Site and also a project Tiger Reserve.

Assam has a huge potential for eco-tourism with its dense forests and lush green gardens. State Government is planning to promote the Majuli River Island for heritage and eco-tourism. Apart from that, the state giving more attention to river tourism since that is a unique feature of Assam. It has plans to float a Luxury Tourist Vessel and that will provide the much needed boost to river tourism.

Meghalaya : From orchid-rich trails to the enigmatic limestone caves, from the mountains engulfed in mist to the sparkling streams, from amazing peaks to plunging gorges, Meghalaya offers a never before glimpse of nature's bounty in its lap. Be it their unique sacred forests or their vibrant attire, the traditions and culture of Meghalaya leaves one intrigued and wanting for more. While the gushing waterfalls at Cherrapunji wet one's senses, the scenic beauty streaked with the hues of the colourful lifestyle of the people enralls.

The USP of Meghalaya without a doubt is the abundant nature it has to offer. The wonder of scenic beauty and the charm of the pleasant weather with the lush green backdrop makes it a perfect setting to rejuvenate and revitalize one. The thick forests and variety of orchids have always been a great for tourists from the world over.

Meghalaya is over-flowing with the concepts of Eco-tourism. With its wealth of nature, it does have immense potential for eco-tourism.

Caves here are big attractions. The Limestone area covers about 700 Caves, out of which around 200 are completely unexplored. So its for the tourists to explore themselves. There are some of the longest and Unique Caves in Meghalaya. One Cave in Meghalaya is as long as 21 k.m. Another unique feature in Meghalaya is the 'living wood bridge'. It's a bridge made out of fichus tree and it keeps growing after being tied for connection purpose. It's almost 50 ft. long refer to it as the green bridge quite aptly local people rely on bridges like these, which are completely safe for people to commute easily. Being a pre-dominantly tribal state, the culture of the state is also something which attracted tourists. Furthermore, as a step forward in the direction of eco-tourism state has exploited rich flora and fauna for the purpose of honey-cultivation on a big scale. A wide variety of butterflies include one that is as big as 6 inches. In some parts, entire jungles are covered with loads of butterflies and these again look ravishing in their unique colours and sizes. A museum in Shillong showcase almost 3000 butterflies. Apart from these, the Jungle Birds and the intensity of cave culture draws one and all to Meghalaya. Though state well connected by road and rail, has a chopper service from Guwahati to Shillong to Tura.

Manipur : With Rolling Hills and beautiful rare orchids decorating it's meadows, with Nine Hills surrounding it in a circle, with beautiful lakes, meandering rivers and stunning floating islands, Manipur seems practically embraced by nature in a loving gently grasp. Inviting the tourists of the world to come and behold its charm in the bounds of its serene and heavenly environment, untouched and unspoiled even after the trudge of humanity.

Manipur stands out as an inspiration for Nature Lovers with its lush greenery and blooming orchids across the state. With more than 70% of its land under forest cover and a wondrous balance of flora and fauna in its confines, the rich land of Manipur seems to be blessed with every beauty that the Almighty created. Some of the world's most rare orchids have found life in the fertile soil of this princely state. With pristine and isolated stretches and inhabiting rare species like the Sangi - the dancing deer.

The Sri Govindaji Temple in the heart of the capital city of Imphal is a beautiful example of exceptional architecture. Located just next to the Royal Palace, the temple stands out with its twin domes with a paved courtyard. Apart from this, other places of interest are the Shaheed Minar and the War Cemeteries, beautifully managed by the commonwealth War Graves Commission, commemorating the Indian and British soldiers who lost their lives in World War II. Moreover, one can also enjoy wildlife at the Manipur Zoological Gardens Keibul Lamjao National Park. Other places of tourist interest include the Lohtak Lake and Sendra Islands.

Mizoram : Perhaps it's the vigour and vitality of the Mizo culture or the sweet humming of their lively songs that has brought clouds one to nine to surrender in the lap of its splendour in the Blue Mountains. Though it can be aptly called the Island of Peace for the serene environment of the world, as they somehow strike an affinity with the most attractive features of their land. Mizoram is a very scenic place and its full of natural diversities. A scheme has been undertaken now and under that begin Eco-Tourism. The topography of the land is such that one finds small beautiful places at little distance from each other. It's just like finding oasis in a desert. Moreover, the climate of Mizoram is such that it always remains very pleasant around the state. Greenery has always remains very pleasant around the state. Greenery has always been generous enough to spread its wings here since it is a predominantly agricultural state. What is more interesting is the tribal way of life in the state, which ensures that the ecological balance is maintained and taken care of.

The much-needed awareness about tourism has been created now and paying a lot of attention to it. The people of Mizoram are very happy by nature. They love to sing and dance and it is tradition passed on from one generation to the next. Songs and folk dances mark the main festival celebrated on the second Friday of March called the 'Chapcharkut Festival'. The autumn festival in the end of November is also time for frolic for the fun-loving Mizos. At the time of Christmas, community feasts are organized and everyone dines together to celebrate the season of festivity. Connectivity

is improving quite a lot. A new airport-Lengpui Airport is there. Even apart from flights from Guwahati to Aizwl and Kohima intend to provide connectivity so that tourist can visit all sites at one go. Moreover, the North-East Council is trying give help in connectivity in near future. The National Highway 54, which passes through Assam and has almost 600 km. Border length, is now being improved for tourism purposes.

Arunachal Pradesh : One of the remotest but the loveliest region of the North East, Arunachal Pradesh stands sun-kissed with its stunning scenery and its delightful weather. Being the first one to be touched by dawn, this state is rightly called the 'land of the rising sun'. Being scantily populated, its calm and quiet surroundings have added to its appeal and have acted as a blessing in disguise. With a green cover of over 63% and blessed with an incredible wildlife, Arunachal has huge scope for Eco-Tourism and more. With its diverse terrain and its huge mountains, Arunachal poses quite a challenge in front of the trekker, which is why it is the trekker's delight. More than that, its amazing range of flora and fauna is naturalist's dream. With its snow-fed rivers, Arunachal also becomes the most favourable destination for adventure tourism in the form of rafting, boating and angling. The upper reaches of Dong in Lohit district are ideal for promoting adventures tourism of all kinds. Hoard of tourism activities like rock climbing and high and low altitude trekking to be offered. Fight from sea level to 18000 feet altitude, all varieties are available within close distances. With better air - connectivity from metropolitan cities, this region is given to be the "unexplored paradise" of India for greater experience by tourists.

Chapter 28

ORCHHA

Medieval Legacy In Stone Madhya Pradesh

Set on a bend along the Betwa River, the site of Orchha was chosen by the Bundela Chief Raja Rudra Pratap (1501 – 31) for his capital. Orchha contains three palaces, each built by succeeding Maharajas.

The most popular ruler was Bir Singhju Dev who dedicated the Jehangir Mahal in honour of the great Mughal emperor, on his visit. The extraordinary beauty is in sharp contrast to an earlier building, adorned by colourful murals, known as the Raj Mahal. Orchha was the capital of the Bundela Rajputs between 1531 and 1783. The palaces and temples built by them retain much of their pristine perfection.

Orchha lives in its shrines and memorials. Each memorial and shrine has history of its own; each of them has a story to tell. The temples, shrines and memorials have their unique contribution to the beauty of Orchha. There are all together 14 cenotaphs along the Kanchana Ghat. These memorials are dedicated to rulers or Orchha.

Orchha has a series of impressive temples dating back to the 17th century. They are still in use today and are visited regularly by thousand of devotees. The soaring spires of the Ram Raja Temple and the well-preserved murals of the Lakshmi Narayan Temple are especially worth a look. 14 beautiful chhatris (cenotaphs) or memorials are lined up on the Kanchana Ghat of the river Betwa.

From Orchha, the road crosses briefly into Madhya Pradesh to Nowgong and then Chhatapur before leading you into Khajuraho.

What to see

Jehangir Mahal: Within the fort complex, built in the 17th century to commemorate the visit of Emperor Jehangir, its strong lines are counter – balanced by delicate chhatris and trellis work.

Raj Mahal: The interior of the palace is painted with boldly colourful murals on a variety of religious themes.

Ram Raja Temple: With soaring spires, an unusual temple that was once a palace. Here Lord Rama is worshiped as a king.

Chaturbhuj Temple: Built on a massive stone platform, the temple is reached by a steep flight of stairs.

Laxmi Narayan Temple: The interior contains the most exquisite of Orchha's wall paintings. **CENOTAPHS:** Fourteen memorials to Orchha rulers by the banks of the Betwa river.

Rai Praveen Mahal: Set in landscaped gardens, a brick palace for the poetess and musician Rai Praveen, who captivated Raja Indramani in the 17th century.

How to get there

Orchha is around 400 km from Delhi and is easily accessible by roads. The nearest airport is Gwalior, 120 km by road. The nearest railhead is Jhansi 19 km away. Orchha lies on the Jhansi – Khajuraho Road.

Chapter 29

MANDU

A Palace Of Love And Strong Hill Fort

Travellers are always in search of new sites, new experience, dream destinations places laced with timeless history splendour in stone, curative cascades, Hilly one can imagine the State of Madhya Pradesh has a unique blend of the traditional and the contemporary. Here ancient monuments, temples, wildlife parks, cultural tradition exist along with rapidly innovating technology and modern developments.

In Central India, visit to Mandu is splendour in stone, which immortalizes the story of Love and Legend.

Mandu is one of the most beautiful locations. Especially during the rains. Lush, vibrant, greenery carpets the entire terrain. Fragrant mists swirl over lakes and forests. Mandu is a celebration in stone of life and joy, of the love of the poet-prince Baz Bahadur for the beautiful consort, Rani Roopmati. The balladeers of Malwa still sing of the romance of these royal lovers, and high up on the crest of a hill, Roopmati's pavilion still gazes down at Baz Bahadur's palace, a magnificent expression of Afghan architecture.

Perched along the Vindhyan ranges at an altitude of 200 feet, Mandu, with its natural defences was originally the fort capital of the Parmar rulers of Malwa. Towards the end of the 13th century, it came under the away of the Sultana of Malwa, the first of whom renamed it Ahadiabad – the city of Joy, and indeed, the pervading spirit of Mandu was a gaiety; and its rulers built exquisite palaces like the Jahaz and Hindola Mahals, ornamental canals, baths and pavilions as graceful and refined as those times of peace and plenty.

Each of Mandu's structures is an architectural gem; some are outstanding like the massive Jama Masjid and Hosbang Shah's tomb, which provided inspiration for the master builders of the Taj Mahal centuries later. Under Mughal rules Mandu was a pleasure resort, its lakes and palaces the scenes of splendid and extravagant festivities. And the glory of Mandu lives on, in its palaces and mosques, in legends and songs, chronicled for posterity.

Place of Interest

The 45 km parapets of walls that encircle Mandu are punctuated by 12 gateways. Most notable of these is Delhi Darwaza, The Main entrance to the fortress city, for which the approach is through a series of gateway well fortified with walled enclosures and strengthened by bastions such as the Alamgir and Bhangi Darwaza, through which the present road passes. Rampol Darwaza, Jehangir Gate and Tarapur Gate are some of the other main gateways.

The Central Group

Hoshang Shah's Tomb: India's first marble edifice is one of the most refined examples of Afghan architecture. Its unique features are the magnificently proportioned dome, marble lattice work of remarkable delicacy and porticoed courts and towers to mark the four corners of the rectangle. Shah Hahan sent four of his great architects to study the design of and draw inspiration from the tomb. Among them was Ustad Hamid who was also associated with the construction of the Taj Mahal.

J a m i M a s j i d : Inspired by the great mosque of Damascus, the Jami Masjid was conceived on a grand scale, with a big plinth and a huge porch projecting in the centre, the background dominated by innumerable domes.

Ashrafi Mahal: Built by Hoshang Shah's successor, Mahmud Shah Khilji, this palace of gold coins facing the Jami Masjid, was conceived as an academic institution for young boys, and sundry cells still remain in a fair state of preservation. In the same complex he built a seven storeyed tower to celebrate his victory.

Rewa Kund Group

Rewa Kund : A reservoir built by Baz Bahadur with an aqueduct to provide Roopmati's palace with water. Today the pool is reserved as a sacred spot.

Baz Bahadur's Palace: Built by Baz Bahadur in the early 6th century, the palace's unique features are its spacious courtyard surrounded by halls and high terraces which afford a superb view of the surrounding countryside.

Roopmati's Pavilion: The Pavilion was originally built as an army observation post. From its hilltop perch, this graceful structure with its two pavilions was a retreat for the lovely queen, from where she could see Baz Bahadur's Palace and the Narmada flowing through the Nimar plains far below.

Some other monuments are

N i k a n t h : This sacred Shiva shrine is sited in a magnificent setting, at the very edge of a steep gorge. In its tree-shaded courtyard, a sacred pond is fed by a tream, and pilgrims still gather to worship here.

N i k a n t h M a h a l : Belonging to the Mughal era and close to the Nikanth shrine, this palace was constructed by the Mughal governor, Shah Hadgh Khan, for Emperor Akbar's Hindu wife. On the wall are some inscriptions of the time of Akbar, referring to the futility of earthly pomp and glory.

Hathi Mahal, Dary Khan's Tomb, Dai Ka Mahal, Dai ke Chhotti Behan ka Mahal, Malik Mughith's mosque and Jali Mahal are some of the Mandu's other fascinating monuments.

The Royal Enclave

Jahaz Mahal: This 120 metre-long 'ship palace' built between two artificial takes, Munj Talao and Kapur Talao is an elegant two-storied palace, probably built by Sultan Ghiyas-ud-din-K hilji for his large harem. With its open pavilions balconies overhanging the water and open terrace, Jahaz Mahal is an imaginative recreation in stone of a royal pleasure craft.

Hindola Mahal: An audience hall also belonging to Ghiyas-ud-din's reign. It derives the name of 'Swinging palace from its sloping sidewalls.

Other places of interest are Dilwar Khan's mosque, the Nahar Jharokha (tiger balcony), Traveli Mahal, the two large wells called the Ujali and Andheri Baoslis are worth visit.

How to get there

By Air: The nearest airport is at Indore 100 km away, which is well connected to Mumbai, Bhopal, Gwalior and Delhi.

By Rail: The nearest railheads are at Mhow – 63 km, Indore 100km and Ratlam 12 kms away.

By Road: Regular bus services connect Mandu with Dhar 35 km, Indore, Ratlam, Ujjain 152 km and Bhopal 283km. It is however, advisable to have one's own transport. The ideal route to Mandu is from Indore.

CHHATTISGARH

Among the new states in the Indian Republic Chattisgarh is more mystical, mythical & magical and glorious full of natural beauty. Whole new world out there in the vast tracts of unpolluted, tranquil and tribal heritage India, one visit can stimulate one's mind and rejuvenate one's body and soul. Vast tracts of paddy fields, verging forest, a dazzling range of flora and fauna, rivers, waterfalls, ancient caves all these make Chattisgarh a nature lover's paradise, it is one of the first bio-diverse eco-holiday destination not only in India but in the world. Raipur is the capital and has daily connectivity by air from major gateways in the country. Kanker Palace is worth visiting as also Raipur's Mahant Ghasidas Museum. But the main attraction for tourists is to enjoy the best of Bastar. Jagdalpur is the district head quarter (300 km) from Raipur. Tribal people comprise almost three-fourths of Bastar's population each with their own indigenous culture of spirit, deities, dialects customs, food habits and costumes. The tribal groups include Gonds-Marias, Murias as well as non gond like Bhatra etc. whenever one moves around one can always see these elegantly dressed tribals people. The tribal festivals are also big attractions singing and dancing are the main part of the festival. Bastar is also famous for its crafts-specially terracotta and brass. Jagdalpur is also famous for Kosa, silk weaving.

Thus bastar is a good place to meet local people and visit colourful weekly market. Chitrakote waterfall on the Indravati river is the major attraction in Chattisgarh. Kanger valley National Park. It is the home of protected wild buffalo, liger, leopard, macaque, crocodile, other and a great variety of avian life. The valley is also very attractive with its water bodies and ancient caves and waterfalls, Tirathgarh waterfalls from a height of 100 feet are a great draw with holidayers.

Raipur- Kawardha-Kanker-Kondagaon-Narayanpur-Kanker-Jogdalpur-Kangervalley National Park-Jagdalpur-Raipur will be a good itinerary for 8/9 days to explore this unique Chattisgarh.

CHHATTISGARH - FULL OF SURPRISES

Chapter 31

JHARKHAND

Jharkhand is one among the three newly created States in India. In spite of being new born, it is luckily blessed with rich natural and historical splendour. With its verdant, largely untouched landscape, innumerable waterfalls, pleasant weather and its inherent innocence that rich tribal people carry Jharkhand is the eco-friendly destination in India well-sought after by tourists. Ranchi is the capital of Jharkhand and is well connected by air and rail with every corner of the country. The town of Ranchi is surrounded by hills on all sides. The drive from Ranchi to picturesque falls like Hundru, Jonha, Dasaun, Panchghag and Hirni falls meanders through wonderful countryside. Then there is the Tagore Hill where, it is believed, Tagore penned some of his compositions. Splendid view of the city at dusk from the top of Ranchi Hill is breath taking. Kanke Dam, Rock Garden, Jagganath Temple, Ranchi Lake are other beautiful places to explore. The tribal Research Institute and museum is worth visiting place to see the rich collective of stone sculptures, terracottas and many ethnological objects and tribal culture. From Ranchi at a distance of 4hrs. drive Netarhat is termed as the Queen of Jharkhand is the hill station (3700 feet above sea level). It is the place where nature seems to have blessed with green forest, gushing streams, meadows, clusters of Pine trees and sunset from Magnolia point (10kms away from Netarhat) is not to be missed when one can enjoy golden hue that brings change in the landscape with riot of colours – a must for camera freaks. Winding rivers enroute to Koel river view point for sun rise. When one can really enjoy the Sun as it appears as a glowing ball of soft orange and slowly spread the light all over. Betla National Park from Netarhat is very enjoyable journey full of lush green leafy trees of Sal, Teak and Bamboo

with glimpses of distant water falls. The Betla reserve Park is spread over 232 sq. k.m. and is under operation Project Tiger. There are forest Rest Houses and other accommodation for tourists. In the park hundreds of deer, sloth bears, wild bears, mouse deer, porcupines, leopards, tigers, elephants, bisons are available and one can see the wild life on an elephant back. There facilities with trained elephants are available for wild life viewing. Forest authorities to be contacted (Tel. Forest Rest House (06562) 222650 for accommodation and sight seeing). Fort of Chero King will be worth visiting enroute to Hazaribagh. The tribals here preserve the cultural heritage. Their musical instruments, brass crafts, paintings, Jewellery, warmth and hospitality provide magic of rural in sights. Explore Jharkhand during this holiday season. I had been there. It is a beautiful place on earth. You have to be there to believe it. A completely surreal experience and beauty that defines comprehension.

Chapter 32

Experience the lively ORISSA

Orissa is one of the richest state of India may not be in terms of financial position. But it is rich in its History, Culture, folk and cuisine and natural and man-made attractions. However all those aspects have hitherto been confined to the tourists mostly from West-Bengal and the neighboring states. Now the time has come to ensure that Orissa's rich tourism heritage is savoured by tourists from overseas. Major ingredients for attracting tourists overseas are rich tourist sites, leisure at Beach with eco-friendly environment, pilgrimage, shopping, cuisine, cultural festival and safety. Orissa has all of these and it is a real Kaleidoscope of the mix of all in the holiday package which is combined with hospitable people and all the more affordability. Its competitive edge is especially its cost advantage. A full 7 days package in 4-5 star category hotel may be as low \$ 40 per day where as in any other metropolitan cities in India it may be around \$ 80 per day.

Now the air connectivity is also improved and good hotels are available, Roads are of better quality and more trained manpower for servicing the tourism trade are available thus Orissa is now concoction of the value for money holiday destination with lot of variety in its ambit. Its unspoiled wildlife resorts, (Simlipal National Park) lake resort (Chilka Lake), Hotwater springs (Tapta Pani) Beach Resorts at Gopalpur-on Sea, Temple Resorts at Puri, Konark, are symbols of eco-tourism and heritage holiday hitherto remained unexplored by tourists.

It is not only rich tourist attractions that matters, it is how the products are marketed overseas and packages put on offer and these areas need professional approach. Some of the areas where we should put our brains together and form a strategy to put Orissa in International market.

` NETWORKING

Orissa has many advantages. Its centuries old civilization with focus on Buddhism of Ashokan period, rich and cultural diversity, splendid archeological, monuments, historic sites, culinary traditions have given edge over others. All these have to be focussed through aggressive marketing. All these elements provide a rich canvas for defining a range of special tourism products like Spiritual Tourism, Meetings & Conferences, Wildlife Tourism and Festival Tourism. But these are linked to supporting infrastructure, which is key to improved tourism facilitation and tool for marketing overseas. Here the need to have private sector support. It will be essential to form partnerships among Tour Operators, Travel Agents, Hoteliers and Travel Agents for marketing and continuous promotions by pooling resources as Govt. have many other priorities like Health, Education, Power, and Water Supply etc.

State should create tourism website with exhaustive database on hotels, destinations and other attractive features. Also web based promotions to attract holidayers with Quiz, and holidays on offer. Regular e-mail/ web newsletter to update the travel-trade partners with the latest developments in the tourism scene.

There are good NRI based markets who are keen to come to Orissa for pilgrimage or leisure holidays. There is also good number of tourists in South Asian countries who are keen to come to Orissa on Buddhist pilgrimage. Lot of them are going to other destinations. They can be motivated to come to Orissa. Even our burgeoning middle classes who are going to Singapore, Thailand etc. could be partially reversed to come to Orissa and spend money.

The role of Tourism Media especially international is of utmost importance in tourism awareness in the International market. This segment needs to be cultivated vigorously as they can act as major facilitators for promoting positive image about Orissa in this emerging markets. Prominent travel writers and international travel agents should be invited to Orissa from time to time. State Tourism Department and local trade should look after them when they are in Orissa and showcase Orissa before them so that on return they write or promote Orissa. Our Central Ministry of Tourism invites eminent journalists and some of them can be brought to Orissa also.

Any discussion on tourism marketing is incomplete without emphasizing upon the need to drastically improve and create infrastructure facilities of international standards in respect of Airport, Roads, Hotels, and Security etc. This is an area where the private sector would require the active support and involvement of State Government. Though right steps have already been initiated but here the time factor and cost factor to be kept in mind so that impact of such initiatives any felt by users.

Safety and security is the major concern both of persons and his belongings Orissa does carry a safety image but this has to be encased with proper awareness.

Most important for marketing Orissa overseas will be continuous exposure which will need regular Advertisements, participation in Travel Trade shows, holding Road Shows, Educational workshops and promotional materials- literature, CD Rom, posters, giveaways and be active with Indiatourism offices overseas, Air India and other air lines leading tour operators who could include Orissa packages in the holiday brochures. These are the only ways and there are no other special mantras to boost Orissa destination success.

Chapter 33

HYDERABAD

The Heart Of Andhra Pradesh

Out of all the states of the erstwhile Deccan - Bijapur, Berar, Bidar, Golconda was by far the most powerful. Ruled by the Qutub Shahis, the capital Bhagynagar was named after a royal beloved Bhagmati, who later as the wife of Quli Qutub Shah became Hyder Mahal and thus was born Hyderabad.

Hyderabad, the fifth largest metropolis of India is the state capital of Andhra Pradesh. Built on the banks of the Moosi River, it has a strong flavour of its rich past even today. History speaks not only in Hyderabad's marvelous buildings but also in its language, customs, food and etiquette. Home to one of the wealthiest royal houses of the world, the turn of the century saw Hyderabad firmly ruled by the Asaf Jahi Kings, better known as the legendary Nizams of Hyderabad.

Centrally placed in the Telugu heartland, post independence Hyderabad, is a bustling 400 -year old metropolis. This cosmopolitan city is richly endowed with a variety of cultures. The city presents an attractive amalgam of old world charm and the ebullience of growth and enterprise. Beautiful old edifices built in the medieval, colonial and Indo-Saracenic styles abound along with white marble temples of modern India. This city was gifted with many beautiful monuments by its rulers and even in recent times, following independence, many more remarkable structures have been added. Thirteen kilometers from downtown is the oldest specimen of Hyderabad's glory, the Golconda Fort. The fort, originally a mud structure, was built by the Kakatiyas who ruled from neighboring Warangal. Under the Qutub Shahi rulers, it was

expanded and became a formidable citadel. It is known for the use of complex acoustics in architectural design where in sound signals can be passed from the entry gate to the top of the fort (61m high) without the use of any modern electrical or electronic equipment.

One kilometer from the fort is the resting ground of Qutub Shahi dynasty. A cluster of graceful structure, the tombs, are surrounded by well maintained gardens.

These by no means are all the sights. The twin-cities have much more to interest a visitor. The Falaknuma Palace, The Chowmohalla Palace and the Purani Haveli are an absolute must for any visitor to Hyderabad. Another historical sight that is a must is Charminar - virtually the symbol of Hyderabad. It lies surrounded by narrow lanes and busy markets of the old city. It was built, as the legend goes, by the fifth king of the dynasty, Muhammed Quli Qutub Shah, in honour of his Hindu wife, Bhagmati. Charminar is a beautiful sight when illuminated every evening.

Hyderabad is truly a shopper's paradise. Not with standing the availability of the modern gadgets in plenty, which can be bought anywhere in the Global village these days, the city offers shopping of exclusive traditional items produced only in Hyderabad and around. The shops or more appropriately, the typical Hyderabadi bazaars, are open into late evening hours managed by traditionally hospitable shopkeepers. Bargaining is possible in some bazaars in the 'Old City'. The best buys in Hyderabad include pearls and pearl ornaments in a plethora of exquisite designs and shapes, silverwares of old and new designs, saris, silk and cotton; 'Nirmal and 'Kalamkari' paintings and artifacts; unique 'Bidar' handicraft items; lacquer bangles studded with stones; handloom clothing materials and a variety of other items.

Recently declared as a mega city Hyderabad is now directly connected from Dubai and Doha with bi-weekly flights. Indian Airlines have 3-flights from Dubai and 4-flights from Sharjah every week. Air India has 1-flight every week from Abu Dhabi. Similarly Emirates have 8-flights every week, Qatar Airways w.e.f November, 2002 have introduced bi-weekly flight between Doha and Hyderabad. Thus Hyderabad is well-linked from the Gulf Region. Hyderabad in addition to its own touristic importance will also be a hub to move around to Bangalore-Chennai and Cochin and Jet Airways / Indian Airlines provide convenient connections. Packages can be worked out for extended tours from Hyderabad by tour operators. Indulge in the speciality cuisine of Hyderabad or in a shopping spree or a fun filled water-sports at Hussain Sagar Lake; Relax and discover the joys of sailing in the lake. Rediscover the city which is over 400 years old. Around Hyderabad Vishakhapatnam also known as Vizag on sea coast one can have a romantic stay at Taj Residency, Dolphin or the Park hotels.

Explore Hyderabad in the ensuing summer and come back with sweet memories of your sojourn to

Andhra Pradesh - Destination of the New Millennium.

Chapter 34

On The Divine Trail

Since time immemorial India had been attracting pilgrims from all over the world on its divine trail. The range varies from the holiest of Hindu temples to the Buddhist, Jains, Sikh, Jewish, Bahais, Christians, Parsis, Islam, Sufis, Satnamis, Radhaswamis. All these religious sects co-exist in India with perfect harmony and present an unified symbol of the spirit of secularism. All these religions have their own pilgrimage centres located in cities, mountains, besides rivers, seas, on hill-tops; whatever be their size, wealth and all of them share one thing common and that is the intense faith of the devotees. Some of these places need strenuous efforts to reach at pilgrimage point. Similarly some are known for their architectural splendour. Many of these places have been sanctified by visit of their religious heads. Thus, India is rich spiritual centre for all faith, a Potpourri of varied culture. Each state has some religious place to offer. But the states of Tamilnadu, Karnataka, Kerala, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Punjab, Bihar, Rajasthan, West Bengal, have houses of gods and goddess, Buddhist Monasteries, Sikh shrines, Jain Temples, which attract millions of devotees every year. Infact our domestic tourism is based on pilgrimage tourism. Some of the temples attract over 70 million devotees like Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh, Jaimatadi Temple at Vaishnodevi, Chardham Temples in Uttaranchal and Dwarka-Somnath in Gujarat to name a few Jyotirlingas – (An aspect of Shiva & there are 12 Jyotirlingas) attract good number of devotees.

There are many semi – divine beings who have attained power through meditation and have ashrams in places and attract devotees to their Mutts. Our renewed thrust to promote domestic tourism has special emphasis on promotion of Pilgrimage/ "Spiritual" tourism. This is the segment which is very essential to balance the seasonality of inbound tourism as pilgrims move round the year. As the pilgrimage centres are often located at remote areas, the development of tourism to these centres lead to all round progress of the under developed areas and prosperity of the economy as a whole. Thus pilgrimage tourism contributes for socio-economic development.

The plan outlay for tourism is now increased for infrastructural development and State Govts. are being providing support for putting up facilities in the form of Yatri Nivas/ Yatrikas at major pilgrim site with central financial grant. Pilgrimage

tourism is being developed on a circuit concept and each state has finalized one circuit for integrated development. General feeling of the Govt. is that if we expect a substantially larger number of Buddhist traffic to come to these India from overseas, there should be sufficient air capacity to travel to India without hassle and there should be comfortable and clean accommodation. We should be able to extend facilitation in a manner which is tourist friendly. This implies that pilgrim tourism will be successful, if Quality of services can be offered as much as the quantity of products. This brings the need of the hour, Govt. have allowed under its open-sky policy to run Charters to Gaya Airport so that Buddhist traffic can reach Bodhgaya hasslefree. Even facilitation arrangement at airport have been improved. Facilities at Buddhist sites improved and major developmental activities are in progress at all Buddhist sites, even with financial assistance under OECF project from Japan. Similarly our major Hindu Pilgrimage centres have been given financial grant under "Pilgrimage Tourism" for improving facilities for pilgrims. Sincere efforts have been made for care of devotees who visit Vaishnodevi by providing shelters and comfortable walking route to the temple, similar work done at Chardham route (Uttaranchal), Temple at Somnath, Dwarka (Gujarat), Pandharpur (Maharashtra), Amarnath Yatra route Puri Jagannath Pilgrimage and specially for Kumbh Melas when millions of devotees participate (the figure often go over three million devotees). Already with central assistance "Yatrikars" have come up at selected places in each state. Earlier assistance were also given to improve financial the existing Dharmashalas, Choultries, Devasthanam Trust accommodation, Musafirkhanas, sarais under pilgrimage Tourism. Under C.B.S.P. (Capacity Building Programme For Service Providers) special training programmes are in progress. Other service providers at temples are being trained so that they can render tourist friendly services when they are on pilgrimage trail. At many pilgrim centres, temple authorities have also make visitors reception centre/ special Darshan arrangements literature on pilgrim centres, and special assistance religious for performance facilities, to facilitate pilgrims. This segment of tourism is now being packaged in overseas as "Spiritual Tourism" and tourists from overseas are also coming in numbers specially NRIs are coming for pilgrims to Shirdi, Tirupathi, Dwarka, Srilanka and Swami Narayan Temple, Christians Pilgirmage at Goa/ Kerla, Muslim Pilgrimage at Ajmer Dargah. In India Pilgrim Tourism is booming and is round the year affair now.

INDIA: IT IS SPIRITUALLY YOURS.

Chapter 35

TIRUPATI

Pilgrimage To Balaji

Tirupati besides being the town from where one can reach Tirumalai is also one of the most important pilgrim destinations in the country. The town is full of activities from pilgrims as this is the route to reach many other pilgrimage centres in and around of the district Chittoor like Srikalahash (Lord Shiva Temple), Trichanur (Goddess Padmavathi Temple), Kannipakam (Lord Vinayaka Temple), Sri Govindraja temple. One good thing about this place is that all these centres are well connected by motorable road. Good number of buses ply between Tirupati-Tirumalai and from Railway station. Temple trustee buses are also operated with packages on offer. Taxies are also running on this route. Thus mobility is very good for these pilgrimage centres. There are also good numbers of lodging facility in the town. One Unique establishment here is known by the name "TTD- Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam.

This is probably the world's richest religious institution and between Temple Trustee Board looks after the temple and facilities for tourists. Lot of darshans are arranged for which detailed information can be had from website : www.ttdsevaonline.com.

At Tirumalai, various mutts (Religious Sects) are providing accommodation to pilgrims of their cult. Prominent Uttarad Mutt, Hathiruniji Mutt, the Kasi Mutt, Madhavachariya Mutt, and TTD Guest Houses.

The temple has a very old history and according to available data, the temple trace back to 3rd Century AD. The sanctum Sanctorum also known as "Ananda Nilayam" meaning the abode of bliss was renovated in 614 AD. During Pallava dynasty rule temple got lot of renovations followed by Cholas and the Pandays too. It is said that the first Brahmotsavam (Annual festival) to the Lord was celebrated in 1328 AD under the patronage of Pallav King Vijayganga Deverdu. Sri Krishnadevraya of the Vijay Nagar Kingdom, got the Ananda Nilayam gold plated in the 16th Century. The temple was also under Nizam's who had introduced paid sevas followed by Maratha King. Raghuji Bhosale who did lot of improvements in & around the temple. During British time it was left with the Mahatas & Hathijramji Mutt looked after the temple till the mid 19th century. TTD came into existence in the mid 19th century & got the full control of the temple. Now proper development plan has been

envisaged by the Tirupati Urban Development Authority with development in stages. The trust also does lot of social activities like runs hospitals and educational institutions for higher studies. Kalyanotsavam, Dolotsavam, Sahashra Deepalankar Seva, Ekantha Seva are performed to the lord and are well attended by thousands of devotees everyday. It is said that in one's lifetime one must have darshan of Lord Venkateshwar at Tirumalai and that gives a great mental peace and brings prosperity.

52 SHAKTI PEETHS

SNo.	Shakti Peeth Name	Organ	Locality	Shakti	Shiv-Bhairav
1	Sri Mata Vaishno Devi	Left Hand	Near Jammu, J&K	Vaishno devi	Bhairav
2	Sri Sundari Devi Temple	Right Sole	Ladakh, J&K	Sundari	Sunderanand
3	Sri Mahamaya Temple	Throat	Amarnath, J&K	Mahamaya	Trisandeshwar
4	Sri Vajreshwari Devi Temple also Bhisan called Kangra Devi & Vidyeshwari Devi(Jalandhar peeth)		Left Breast	Nagarkot- Kangra, HP	Tripurmalini
5	Jwalaji Temple Unmath Bhairav	Tongue & Flames		Jwalamukhi, HP	Sidhida
6	Sri Bhadrakali Temple	Left Sole	Kurukshetra, Haryana	Savitri	Sthanu
7	*Sri Alopi Devi Temple	Fingers	Allahabad, UP	Lalita	Bhava
8	Sri Pateshwari Devi Temple	Left Shoulder	Devi Patan, Nr. Tulsipur, Gonda dist, UP	Uma	Mahodar
9	Sri Uma Temple (Kalyani Peeth)	Hair	Vrindavan, UP	Uma	Bhuteshwar
10	*Sri Vishalakshi Devi Temple	Lower Portion of Ear	Varanasi, UP	Vishalakshi	Kal Bhairav
11	*Sri Vindhya Vasini Devi Temple Vasini	Punyabhajan	Left Foot Toes	Vindhya, Mizapur, UP	Vindhya
12	Sri Sharda Devi temple	Right Breast	Maihar, MP	Shivani	Chand Bhairav
13	Sri Harsidhi Devi Temple	Left Elbow	Ujjain, MP	Mangal Chandi	Kapilambar
14	*Sri Kalika Devi Temple	Upper Lip	Ujjain, MP	Avanti	Lambkarn
15	Sri Narmada Devi Temple	Buttocks	Amarkantak, MP	Narmada	Bhadrasen
16	Sri Gayatri Devi Temple	Left Wrist	Pushkar, Rajasthan	Gayatri	Sarvanand
17	Sri Devi Temple (Shakti Peeth) Ambika	Amrit	Toe of the left foot	Bairat, Nr. Alwar, Rajasthan	
18	*Sri Ambaji Devi Temple Vakratund	Stomach	Girnar, Junagarh, Gujarat		Chandrabhaga
19	Sri Bhadrakali Temple	Chin	Nasik, Maharashtra	Bhramri	Vikutaksh
20	*Sri Mahalakshmi Devi Temple Mahishmardini	Krodish	Eyes	Kolhapur, Maharashtra	
21	*Sri Bhramrawa Devi Temple Shambaranand	Neck	Srisailam, AP	Mahalakshmi	
22	Sri Vishwa Matrika Temple	Left Cheek	Rajmahendri, AP	Vishwa Matrika	Vishwesh

23	Sri Bhuvaneshwari Devi Temple Maharudra	Lower Teeth	Pampa sarovar, Hampi, Karnataka	Varahi	
24	*Sri Kumari Devi Temple Bhairav	Right Shoulder	KanyaKumari, TN	Kumari	
25	Sri Naraini Devi Temple	Upper Teeth	Suchindram, TN	Naraini	Samhar
26	*Sri Kali Temple	Bones	Kanchipuram, TN	Deogarba	Ruru
27	Sri Bimla Devi Temple	Navel	Puri, Orissa	Bimla	Jagannath
28	Sri Hridayeshwari Temple	Heart	Deogarh, Bihar	Jai Durga	Baidyanath
29	Sri Patneshwari Devi Temple	Right Thigh	Patna, Bihar	Sarvanandkari	Vyomesh
30	*Sri Mangalavati/ Mangalgaury Temple	Middle portion of Body	Gaya, Bihar		
31	*Sri Adi Kali Temple Nakulesh	Four Toes of Right Foot	Kolkata, WB		Kalika
32	Sri Kiriteshwari Devi Temple	Forehead	Kirit, Azimgunj, WB	Bimla	Sambart
33	Sri Mahakali Temple	Intestine	Nalhati, WB	Kalika	Yogesh
34	Sri Mahish Mardini Devi Temple Mardini	Vakranath	Man(Conscience)	Bakreshwar, WB	Mahish
35	Sri Bahula Devi Temple	Left Arm	KetuBrahma, Nr.Katwa, WB	Bahula	Bhiruk
36	Sri Attahas Devi Temple	Lower Lip	KetuBrahma, Nr.Katwa, WB		
37	Sri Yugadda Devi Temple Bhutdhatri	Toe of the Right Foot	Kshirkhandak	Kshirgram, Nr.Burdwan, WB	
38	Sri Bhramri Devi Temple	Left Foot	Jalpaiguri, WB	Bhramri	Bhairmeshwar
39	Sri Kankali Devi Temple	Waist	Kankali, Nr.Shantinika, WB	Kali	Asitang
40	Sri Fullara Devi Temple	Lower Lip	Labhpur, WB	Fullara	Visheash
41	Nand Keshwari Devi Temple	Collarbone	Sainthia, WB	Nandini	Nandkeshwar
42	Sri Kali Kapalini Devi temple	Left Leg	Tamluk, WB	Kapalini	Sarvanand
43	Sri Kamakshi Devi Temple Umanand (Mahakshetra)	Yoni-Female Organ		Guwahati, Assam	Kamakhya
44	Sri Tripurasundari Devi Temple Tripuresh	Right Foot		Agartala, Tripura	Tripur
45	Sri Jayanti Devi Temple Kramadishwar	Left Thigh	Nartiang, Nr. Shillong, Meghalaya	Jayanti	
Shakti Peeths In Neighbouring Countries					
46	Sri Daksha-Yani Manas Peeth	Right Hand	Mansarovar, Tibet,	Dakshayani	Amar
47	Sri Hinglaj Devi Temple Bhimlaihar (Ageya Shakti Peeth)	Brahmarandhara	Pakistan	Hingula, Baluchistan,	Kottvisha
48	Sri Mukteshwari Gandaki Devi Temple Gandaki	Right Cheek		Mukti Nath Temple, Nepal	
49	*Sri Hideshwari Mahamaya Devi Temple	Both Knees	Pasupati Nath Temple, Kathmandu, Nepal		MahamayaKapali

50 Sri Ugravara Devi Temple	Nose	Sugandha, Nr. Khulna, Bangladesh	Sunanda Trymbak
51 Sri Chattal Devi Temple Chandrashekhar	Right Arm	Chattgaon, Bangladesh	Bhawani
52 Sri Arpana Devi Temple	Left Sole	Bogra, Bhawanipur, Arpana Bangladesh	Vaman Bhairav

- these Shakti Peeth Devi temples are revered as very important and sacred vigrahs

Chapter 36

KERALA

Backwater Getaway

Rested on the southern tip of India is Kerala. It is home to rich culture and varied traditions. It is also an exotic, vibrant and full of life destination for holidays. No other tourist destination in the world can boast of an option as unique as the backwaters of Kerala. Winding through endless paddy fields, long stretches of coconut trees, away from the bustle of everyday life, ancient waterways once major means of transport, the backwaters form a system of inland lagoons and canals and canals, stretching from the south to the north of Kerala. Movement along which is possible by the traditional 'Kettuvallams' or house boats. Large canoes, steered by poles or sails, the house boats are equipped with all amenities for daily life. Drift away into the calm serene countryside, see wading ducks, cattle grazing on lush green pastures, or simply sit back and enjoy the tranquil backwaters made crimson by the setting sun. Even the most modern boat cruises fall short in comparison to a traditional cruise along with breathtaking backwaters of Kerala.

You can see yourself what makes it much loved and sought after destination. It will be an out of this world experience.

The inviting gateway to Kerala's backwater in Quilon. Set on the banks of the picture perfect lake Ashtamudi. Here lies **Thirumullavaram** - A shallow secluded beach, just 6 km north of the town centre it is a perfect place for sunbathing and swimming.

'The Venice of the East', the acclaimed title of the land of water boats - Alleppey. Interwined with a patchwork of canals, sidelined by lush greenery and nature is the home to the much loved and famed country boats. A mind-blowing boat ride takes you through shimmering green paddy fields and glimmering streams.

August - September every year Alleppey stages the celebrated Snake Boat Races - tourists flock this place to enjoy the water sport extravaganza. No motor power boats, only the sheer might and muscle of more than a 100 oarsmen. It is a grand spectacle not to be missed.

Beckoning the nature enthusiast is Kumarakom. Perched on the shores of the enchanting Vembanad lake, 14 km from the church town of Kottayam. At Kumarakom it's smooth sailing on the backwaters in a rented house boat. Out here it's the easy life. No traffic jams or city smog. Only the uninterrupted bliss of solitude. For the more adventurous amongst you, watersports like windsailing and waterskiing prove perfect. Take a canoe out into the quiet lagoons. Go fishing. Catch your own supper. And if it gets a tad too fun-filled, simply lie back and do nothing. At the Kumarakom Bird Sanctuary you come face to face with a variety of migratory birds. From Himalayas and as far as Siberia. Set in 5 acres of woodland, here you catch glimpse of kingfishers, egrets, night herons or woodpeckers. May be even the antics of the paradise fly-catcher.

A not to be missed destination is Cochin known as the Queen of the Arabian Sea. Reputed to be the finest natural harbour in the world. Cochin is the oldest European settlement in India. Traces of Chinese, Arab Jewish, British, French and Portuguese influence can be found here. At Cochin one can sail away watching the sunlight filter through the giant Chinese fishing net, find the 2000 year old Jew Town. Built in 1568 its synagogue is the oldest in the commonwealth. A treat for ardent art lovers are the hand painted Chinese tiles in blue and white. The great scrolls of the old Testament are preserved here. Definitely something to write home about. Another interesting stop-over is the historic St. Francis Church, the final resting place of the famed explorer Vasco-da-gama. The oldest church in India, it showcases the ancient world in all its glory. Other must-sees include the Dutch Palace, gifted to the Raja of Cochin by foreign settlers.

Chapter 37
ANDAMAN & NICOBAR ISLAND
Islands In The Sun

There exists some of the world's last few unspoiled islands in India that matches the imagination of the holidayer's dream holiday destination in the sun. One such destination is known as the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. For many of us, the idea of a dream holiday conjures up the picture of an island in the sun with pristine white beaches, clear blue seas, gracefully swaying palms and a gentle balmy climate. An idyllic island that is away from it all - unspoiled, unexploited but which still provides all the comforts and facilities of pleasant, leisurely living. The joy of an Andaman holiday is the sheer beauty of nature and the unique opportunity that visitors have to enjoy it in blissful peace and tranquility. Dense rain forests are surrounded by thick mangroves that begin in the sea and surround the coastline. Canopies of luxuriant green branches are alive with a chorus of birds and festooned with brilliant tropical flowers, butterflies and orchids. The jungle undergrowth shelters wild cat, green lizards and many varieties of deer. There are 200 species of birds, varied species of mammals and reptiles. No wonder the islands are a paradise for scientists, ecologists, ornithologists, marine experts and nature lovers. The Andaman & Nicobar Islands still harbour some of the oldest tribal communities in the world. As visits to Nicobar Islands are restricted for tourists, this article mainly takes you to a tour of Andaman Island.

Port Blair is the gateway to the Andamans both by air and sea and connects Andaman Island with the mainland. The sheer scenic beauty of Port Blair and its surrounding, its people, its tropical climate make Port Blair a round the year destination. But the township is just the beginning of greater delights, and visitors use it as the base to explore the wealth of unspoiled uninhabited little tropical islands that make up this magic land. But first, a tour around Port Blair and the sights it has to offer.

The first stop on Andaman Island and Port Blair is the Cellular Jail. This is the largest and oldest building in Port Blair, a grim reminder of British colonial rule when India's freedom fighters were herded together with hardened criminals and transported across what came to be called the "Kala Pani (Black Water)" to be imprisoned, the solitary confinement, in its 698 cells. A three-storied prison constructed by the Britishers in 1906 had row upon row of narrow cells, each cell with only a single small ventilator set 3 metres from the floor so that no prisoner could even look out. Dedicated to the nation as a "National Memorial" the Cellular Jail houses a spectacular Sound & Light show both in Hindi & English daily.

Wandoor - It is an hour's drive from Port Blair town. An ideal spot with a pleasant stretch of beach and crystal clear waters which are popular for snorkeling and diving, offers marvelous opportunity to explore the rich and exotic underwater marine life. Wandoor has been declared a National Marine Park for sea turtles and other marine fauna.

Corbyn's Cove just about 7km from the centre of Port Blair, is the beach of the town, its protected stretch of white sands, green palms and quiet blue bay providing all the advantages of sun, sea and sand within easy reach. There is a well organised Beach Resort at Corbyn's Cove. A twisting road leads up to the top of Mount Harriet not far from Port Blair. This was once the summer resort of the British Chief Commissioners. The drive is pleasant and the views over Port Blair harbour and the surrounding islands.

The topography of the island is best enjoyed on a visit to Chiriyaput or Bird Rock at the southernmost tip of South Andaman Island (128 km from Port Blair). Lush Green mangroves surround Chiriyaput. Walking along the thickly forested coast, one has the feeling of experiencing an unspoiled tropical rain forest.

The Sippighat Farm 14 km from the town, with its 80 cultivated acres brings together both the indigenous vegetation of the islands as well as the exotics that were introduced into the islands. Coconuts, Cloves, Cinnamon, Pepper and Nutmeg flourish here and are being cultivated commercially. One of the oldest industries of the island is, naturally, connected to the amazing wealth and variety of timber. The Chatham Saw Mill is one of the oldest and probably largest in Asia. A visit to Catham, built on a tiny island which is connected to Port Blair by a bridge, is an interesting experience as visitors can see some of the rare species of tropical timber like the paduk and the marble and satin woods. Visit to Viper Island which was earlier prison for convicts is now a picnic spot. Harbour Cruise provides a unique experience of Cruise along the harbour in an ordinary boat leaving from Phoenix Bay Jetty.

One day trip can be organised to uninhabited island like Jolly Buoy, Redskin and Cinque. From Wandoor Boats leave for these islands. Cinque Island is one of the best Dive destinations in the Island. It has clear emerald water with a visibility upto 80ft. It offers a terrific variety of marine life including black coral. Havelock Island is located on the island approx 4 hour from the Port Blair Airport by inter island ferry. The Dive centre located on the island offers a wide range of largely unexplored diver sites rich in underwater marine life. The nearest decompression chamber is at the Naval base in Port Blair. Foreigners are allowed to visit certain islands in the middle, Litter and South Andamans. Long Island about 82 km by sea and connected by boat thrice in a week from Port Blair offers an

enchanted sea, sun and fun for eco-friendly tourists. Mayabunder about 240 km by road and Rangat 90 km by sea at 170 km in Middle Andaman can be reached by bus from Port Blair. It provides an unpolluted environment with scenic beauty. By road also an important place to visit for those who want to enjoy sun-sea-surf.

Chapter 38

BANGALORE

The Garden City

Karnataka, the eighth largest state in the Indian Union, is a veritable treasure trove of tourist delight. Discover a dazzling array of ancient sculpted temples and cities that are a splendid legacy to some of the finest achievements in Indo-Islamic architecture. Friendly people, scenic hill ranges, unexplored forests, sparkling features and breathtaking waterfalls. A kaleidoscope of exciting experience to delight the senses.

A wondrous destination, a land as fragrant as the sandalwood trees grown in abundance here. A place that has all the ingredients for a great holiday- a pleasant “hill station” climate, an incredible choice of shopping delights including silks, spices and handicrafts; a well-established network of hotels, motels and lodges and an environment network where English, Kannada and Hindi are spoken with equal ease. Every place in Karnataka has something to offer.

Ranked among the fastest growing cities in South Asia, Bangalore the capital of Karnataka, is one of India’s most attractive and enjoyable cities, blessed with a salubrious climate and dotted with beautiful parks, avenues and buildings which have earned it the sobriquet, the “Garden City”.

Bangalore is multifaceted : modern marvels, historical monuments, bustling shopping plazas, a race course and golf courses. Called the Silicon Valley of India for its growing software industry, Bangalore harbours a diversity of interests such as the ruins of Vijaynagar, sculptures of Belur and Halebid, the mausoleum Gol Gumbaz at Bijapur, the golden sands of Karavalli, the proud hills of Kodagu, the forests of Bandipur, Nagarhole and Bannerghatta and Chikmagalur with its mountains and coffee plantations, Majestic Mysore and the world’s tallest free-standing monolith, of Bahubali, at Sravanabelagola.

Bangalore is also home to several magnificent buildings. The most handsome is the Vidhana Soudha, a four-storeyed, spacious granite structure in the Neo-Dravidian style. For those with an interest in history, the Fort of Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan, the great warrior kings of Karnataka, is the place to visit. Originally a mud and brick structure built by Kempegowda, it was rebuilt in the 18th century by Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan.

Close to the fort is their Summer Palace. From buildings to gardens.. Lalbagh displays a remarkable harmony between nature and history. Laid out more than 200 years ago by Hyder Ali, it is today one of the finest botanical gardens in India. Iskcon Temple is a futuristic temple with a “first of its kind” multimedia presentation on the Bhagvad Gita. The Bull Temple, Sri Gavi Gangadhareshwar Temple. For lovers of water sports, Bangalore has Ulsoor Lake and the Sankey Tank.

Excursions

Bannerghatta (21 kms) Numerous wild animals roam freely in this densely forested hilly area- an ideal picnic spot for wildlife.

Whitefield (16 kms) A popular retreat for Indian and foreign tourists who flock to visit the Ashram set up by philosopher-educationist, Sri Satya Sai Baba.

Nrityagram Dance Village India’s only village for classical dances.

Nanadi Hills (60 kms) This hill station is a paradise located 4,850 feet above sea level.

Chapter 39

MAMALLAPURAM : Tamil Nadu

Explore The World Heritage Site

The seaside town of Mamallapuram, a beautiful beach spanning 20kms has some of the greatest specimens of the Pallava architecture and sculpture. Monolithic rock cut temples and modest sized mandapams, gigantic open air relief carved into the mammoth cropping of granite that cover this charming town.

A world Heritage site this is a quiet unspoilt place which can be covered during a day's outing. But it needs full two days to really enjoy the charming sculptures contained within the ten madapams (temples) and the gigantic sculptural panel on the rock and the shore temple against the backdrop of the lashing waves of the Bay of Bengal.

These ground wealth of the pallavas are attributed to Narasimha Varman I (630-680 AD) and Narasimha Varman II (700-726 AD) - the former also known as 'Mamalla' or the great wrestler that lent the name of this port city as Mamallapuram.

Among the master piece bas - relief the "Arjuna Penance" (9m high and 27m wide canvas) is the site to commence the city sightseeing. It shows Arjuna, the hero of the epic Mahabharata standing in penance to seek Lord Shiva's blessing and a weapon to make him invincible. The majestic pair of elephants with their young ones and many small shrines around unique sculpture on the rock face are very enchanting Mandapams depicts the stories of Lord Krishna, Vishnu, Mahisasuramardini (Durga), Trinity (of Shiva, Vishnu, and Brahma), Pandavas etc. These mandapams are located around this masterpiece of Pallava art.

On the other end South side) there are five chariots in stone called 'Rathas'. These are carved out of a single rocks, and are great artistic creations. These are devoted to Draupadi, Arjuna, Bhima, Dharmraja, Nakula and Shadeva. These are of great delight for lovers of art and pilgrimage for the sculptors. The impressive shore temple is one of the best example of the rock cut temples of Pallava architecture. The wealth of sculptures is educative and reminds the great patronage the Pallavas had offered for the flourishing of art and artist at the time; how artist who made the stone pulsate with life passion. The fascinating carved friezes gracefully portraying different woods, grace, beauty and monuments.

No, doubt, there is a great sanctity about its being declared as world heritage Monument. Mamallapuram is 45kms east of Chennai and easily approachable by car/coach, varied accommodation are available from the Gulf and major countries of the world.

Chapter 40

CELEBRATING FESTIVALS

Every State in India announces one or the other festival in the State and spend good amount of money on its publicity, holding pre-festival press meets, celebration committee meetings with various partners, undertake overseas tours to create wide awareness in the traffic generating markets. Often general public who do not understand the value of such organized festivals negatively criticize the expenses incurred and talk more of schemes which could bring long sustainable projects as better mode of economics of the expenses rather than spending the money on festivals.

No doubt on anything there will be divergent opinions. But one has to judge on its merit. Being a person from tourism and hospitably business, I have always found that these festivals have worked out very well for India specially Festival of India in U.K., France, Germany, USA etc. Main objective behind these festivals was to make the people of these countries understand what an incredibly rich culture. India has in all its dimensions and showcase the rich heritage of India as represented through its crafts, dances, cuisine, performing arts, and many more facets. These festivals also boost tourism as these events are often sold as platform for activity holiday where the tourists and the locals interface with local craft workers, appreciate various dance forms, cuisine and in general there is always better hotel occupancy, use of

transport and buying of products as souvenirs which they carry back. Indian craft people artisans come from villages. In such events there is a close link among designer, craft people and buyers. This indirectly promotes a bigger cause of conservation by linking culture with economies. Many art forms, styles would have lost by this time due to lack of patronage or pressure from livelihood or technological mechanical advancement or rapid changing of the society and old art forms would have disappeared. Such festivals are best ways to revive them. The styles / techniques of various art forms are handed over to the succeeding generations and these survive through practices. But these are disappearing because people are leading a fast life and more interested in and quick money. If these old styles go away no body will know how to revive them as most of the skills are imparted through oral tradition. Festivals are the right initiatives for conservation of these disappearing art forms. These festivals also promote the City and lot of infrastructure developments take place. Road are improved heritage building properly illuminated, lot of cleanliness take place, security, arrangements, and general improvements around the surroundings are visible.

The Best part I have liked about this organized festivals is the public- private partnerships. State Governments/Central Government often provide seed capital and private partners provide sponsorships. Even lot of money is spent by the Government agencies for publicity and bringing out promotional material which are distributed globally. Hotels and Restaurants, Government/private shops offer special discounts and in some places during festival times accommodations are offered in private houses or guest houses which tourists find very affordable and feel a real welcome. Money saved are used in making purchases at the festival boutiques. In general all citizens benefit. Some of the festivals are always in tourist itinerary like Elephant festival, Desert festival, Pushkar Fair in Rajasthan, Khajuraho Dance Festival, Carnival in Goa, Ellora / Elephanta and Banganga Festivals in Maharashtra. Infact a calender of festival has been prepared by the Ministry of Tourism for wider publicity to attract tourists. In the festivals list now Mumbai festival is an important addition. This festival will showcase Mumbai in its all facets and Bollywood, Sundowners Cruise, Nite Bazaar, varied sports to cover the taste of different kinds of people so that there is no stereo type of what the usual festival means in India. It is given a totally new colour and it is going to be the best example of public – private partnerships (The event has been rescheduled from 14th January 2005 to 23rd January 2005 due to tragic tsunami deaths). With more time gained, the festival will be better organized with larger participation and many more new events will be added to add colour to the festival. Very active festival committee is there to supervise each event and Indian Tourism is also one of the partners Hon'ble Minister of Tourism given lot of inputs from her global experience and have been spreading the good words about the festival during visit to overseas on tourism road shows. Mumbai festival is citizens show and there is mood of festivities every where starting with Vishwa Pravashi Divas, Mumbai Marathon, Art & crafts Melas at Bandra-Kurla, Medical Conclave, Sports meet and so on. Join the festivals and help in preserving heritage of the country.

Chapter 41

India : Honeymooners Destination

India has been slowly but steadily making its presence felt as one of the popular honeymoon destination India's scenic locations are sought after places rather than City hotels. As part of on going promotion, Rajasthan tourism is providing Honeymoon Packages and specially arranging actual weddings in selected palace hotels with usual Pomp and show. State has infrastructure; various colourful events like Elephant parade, camels, Palanquins, Royal costumes, and well – equipped marriage facilities at every City like Jaipur, Jodhpur, Udaipur, Jaisalmer which will make the wedding experience that one will remember throughout the life. Some of the new resorts in Rajasthan Viz. Udayvilas, Vanyavilas (The Oberoi group Resorts) are mainly promoted as honeymooners place. On such occasions, these places are illuminated which converts the place into a dream land. This is also an attempt to focus on high yield segment and helps to make round the year destination.

Indian marriage market is very high revenue oriented. Even thousand of NRIs come to India to look for would be brides and arrange marriage receptions in big hotels or farmhouses. In the package there is also marriage shopping which often goes into millions. These clients are coming from U.K., U.S.A., South Africa, and

Middle East. There is always a feeling that marriage work long lasting if solemnised in India in its age-old traditions (which varies from community to community). There are specialised agencies who provide wedding related services like floral arrangement, entertainment, food and beverages, marriage venues, transport, security, shopping etc.

Banqueting is one of the prime jobs they do and special arrangements for honeymoon tours to exclusive destinations viz. Island holidays, forest Resorts or Lake Resorts or cruise tours. This segment is quiet new. Many State Governments have seen Rajasthan's success story and are keen to promote their States as Honeymooners paradise or wedding destination. They are developing facilities with pomp and pageantry a la style Rajasthan.

Kerala is offering luxury House Boats for honeymooners and Karnataka's Jungle lodges are big favourites for honeymooners. Uttanchal, Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, have many places which are termed as place meant for honeymooners only. All these States are working closely with tour operators who promote "Wedding Packages". Now this segment is popular with Japanese tourists and keen to celebrate Marriage anniversaries in India or attend Indian marriage ceremonies as these are very colourful and being keen photographers this is a favorite "Photo safari" subject for them. Globally if this can be packaged with newer tourism products this can also bring in repeat visitors. Renovation and upgrading of facilities, big wedding Halls, professional event organisers, and comfortable transports are essential for success. Indians are spending lot of money in honeymoon packages overseas whereas India has best options and many areas have never been explored. Even luxury trains like Palace-on-Wheels, Deccan Odyssey could be a right honeymoon package for overseas travellers. Goa, Bangalore, Coorg, Gangtok, Munnar Hills, Manali are other areas which are being projected as honeymoon destinations. These have good connectivity and good infrastructure for servicing clients. Honeymoon tourism will make an impact as these have lot of warmth and hospitality and experience lingers in one's mind. With the Wedding experience which NRIs or tourists have) provide them a fascinating insight into our diverse Cultural heritage, our ethnic cuisine, our family traditions all the things that make us unique from others and that are actual part of our daily life and living style. The personal touch in our marriages makes them our friend and that gives us repeat visits. Thus Indian marriages are great platform for developing long lasting friendships, V.F.R. market grows with marriage market specially countries with Indian origin populations. The visitors who come to attend marriages can be converted with leisure travellers as they like to combine elements of relaxation shopping and sightseeing as they have already covered a long journey and would like to see more of India and may like to come back again or may persuade their friend to come. Thus "Honeymoon Tourism" or "Wedding Tourism" could bring more business. Pre-marriage shopping is money spinning business and our Malls; Jewellery shops do roaring business during marriage season. We need to create more awareness about our facilities and our abilities to host big gatherings and get a proper recognition as a leading destination for "Wedding & Honeymoon".