

INDIAN *magic*

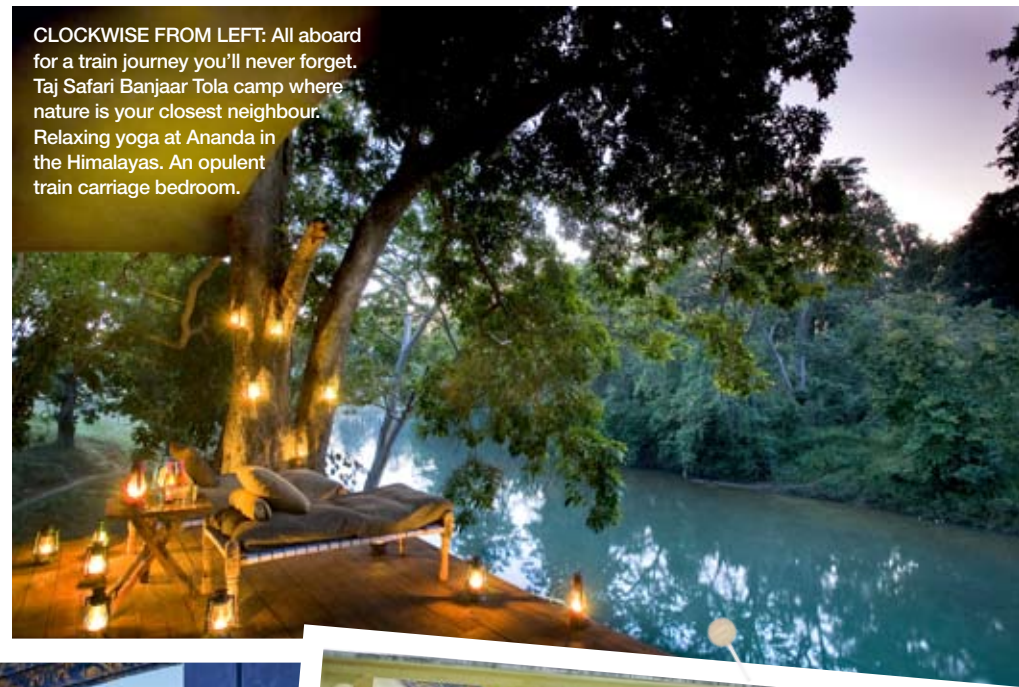
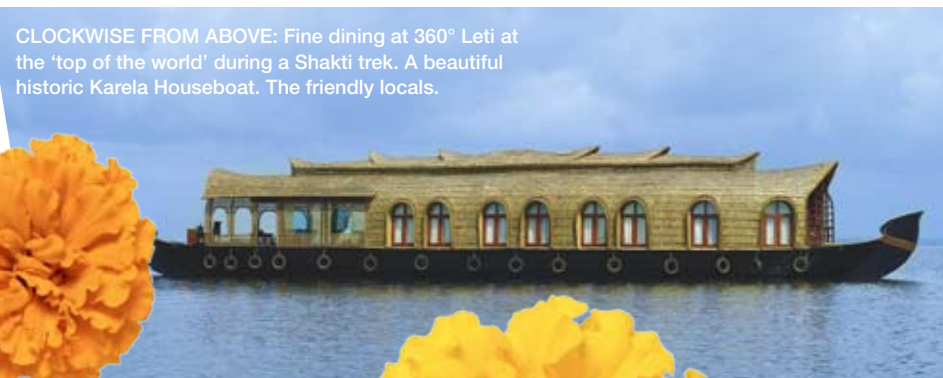
INDIA IS A MESMERISING ENTANGLEMENT OF SPIRIT AND CULTURE, OF EAST AND WEST, THAT AWAITS YOU FOR AN ADVENTUROUS, SERENE OR CITY-STYLE HONEYMOON SERVED UP WITH GRACE AND STYLE, WRITES RACHAEL OAKES-ASH



Live like royalty when you experience the luxe legend that is the Taj Mahal Palace & Tower, perched on the edge of the Arabian Sea in Mumbai.



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Fine dining at 360° Leti at the 'top of the world' during a Shakti trek. A beautiful historic Karella Houseboat. The friendly locals.



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: All aboard for a train journey you'll never forget. Taj Safari Banjaar Tola camp where nature is your closest neighbour. Relaxing yoga at Ananda in the Himalayas. An opulent train carriage bedroom.



ADVENTURE

Shakti, Himalayas shaktihimalaya.com

Shakti is a tourism group offering high-end treks through the Himalaya Range hamlets in the far away regions of India.

Porters and guides accompany trekkers through hilltop villages that provide an intimate snapshot of cultural life in the Buddhist societies of Ladakh, also known as 'Little Tibet' or the Eastern Himalaya region of Sikkim. Accommodation is in Shakti village lodges with all the creature comforts.

The pinnacle of this trip is the acclaimed 360° Leti in Uttaranchal – a breathtaking retreat nestled in an amphitheatre of soaring peaks and reached by a multi-day trek. Four-poster beds and glass walls in the four cottages allow languid mornings in a postcard setting, plus there's a resident chef providing gourmet dining on local produce. **How much?** From \$3784 for a seven-night trekking experience in Ladakh including meals, rail journeys, chef, guides, porters and more.

Kerala Houseboats, Kumarakom Lake Resort

kumarakomhouseboat.com or slh.com
Picture gliding along glistening waters on Vembanad Lake in southern India with a

soundtrack of singing birds and long stretches of paddy fields filled with tiny islands and coconut trees. This is life on board a Kerala Houseboat at Kumarakom Lake Resort.

Situated on the southern tip of India's peninsula, Kerala is a tiny state of islands that seem to float upon Vembanad Lake and where the locals practice farming below water level and women fish with their bare hands.

The traditional houseboats of Kerala are bound by coir ropes – no nails in sight – and resplendent with shining timber floors and sundecks built for daydreaming. Experienced boatmen navigate through the tranquil backwaters of lakeside life while your personal chef whips up local delicacies. **How much?** From \$410 for one night per couple, including all meals.

Taj Safaris tajsafaris.com

The rugged lands of India provide an ideal backdrop for dramatic safari lodging. The Bengal tiger is India's most famed predator and found in the country's national parks surrounded by large forest deer, woodland

mammals and a plethora of bird life including the national peacock. Africa's elite & Beyond safari company has teamed up with Taj Safaris in India

with four lodge experiences in the Bandhavgarh and Pench National Parks to create safaris that surprise and delight.

Mahua Kothi lodge's 12 stand-alone suites have their own rooftop terrace for stargazing and twice daily safaris in four-wheel-drive vehicles, with optional elephant safaris. Baghvan lodge features sunset cocktails under banyan trees and 12 stand-alone suites with rooftop sleep-outs.

The Banjaar Tola camps sit on the banks of the Banjaar River with mystical ensuite tents in Kahna National Park's prime tiger country. And stone cottages feature at Pashan Garh camp in the Panna National Park's cascading waterfall region. Expect leopards, sloth bears, hyenas, wolves and tigers on daily safaris.

How much? From \$473 per person per night, including meals and daily safaris.

Luxury train tours www.destinationindia.com.au

Luxury trains of India are no ordinary trains. Expect gymnasiums, day spas, fine dining restaurants, martini bars, Wi-Fi, ensuites and plasma TVs on trains such as the Palace on Wheels, the Golden Chariot and Maharaja's Express, plus butlers and a concierge.

Passengers will see a kaleidoscope of Indian vistas from the royal palaces of Rajasthan to the spectacular coastline. A seven-day

itinerary means you stay on the train by night and move on to the next destination by day, alighting to explore the surrounds with personal guides.

Take in the Taj Mahal, the serene lakes and palaces of Udaipur, temple cities, parks and more.

How much? From \$3830 per person in silver class for seven nights, or \$4767 in Gold Class.

RETREAT

Ananda in the Himalayas, Uttaranchal

anandaspa.com or preferredhotels.com
Deep in the foothills of the Himalaya Range, not far from the spiritual town of Rishikesh on the River Ganges, sits Ananda.

Consistently voted the world's number one destination spa by the readers of Condé Nast *Traveler*, the spa attracts the likes of Heidi and Seal, Uma Thurman, Ricky Martin, Bollywood stars and even cabinet ministers.

Set among lush, manicured lawns on the edge of the national forest with sweeping views of Rishikesh and the valley below, the retreat is housed in a Viceregal palace with grand ballrooms and roof terraces. Dotted throughout are meditation pagodas and yoga amphitheatres with the sound of Indian flutes and sitars played by local musicians.

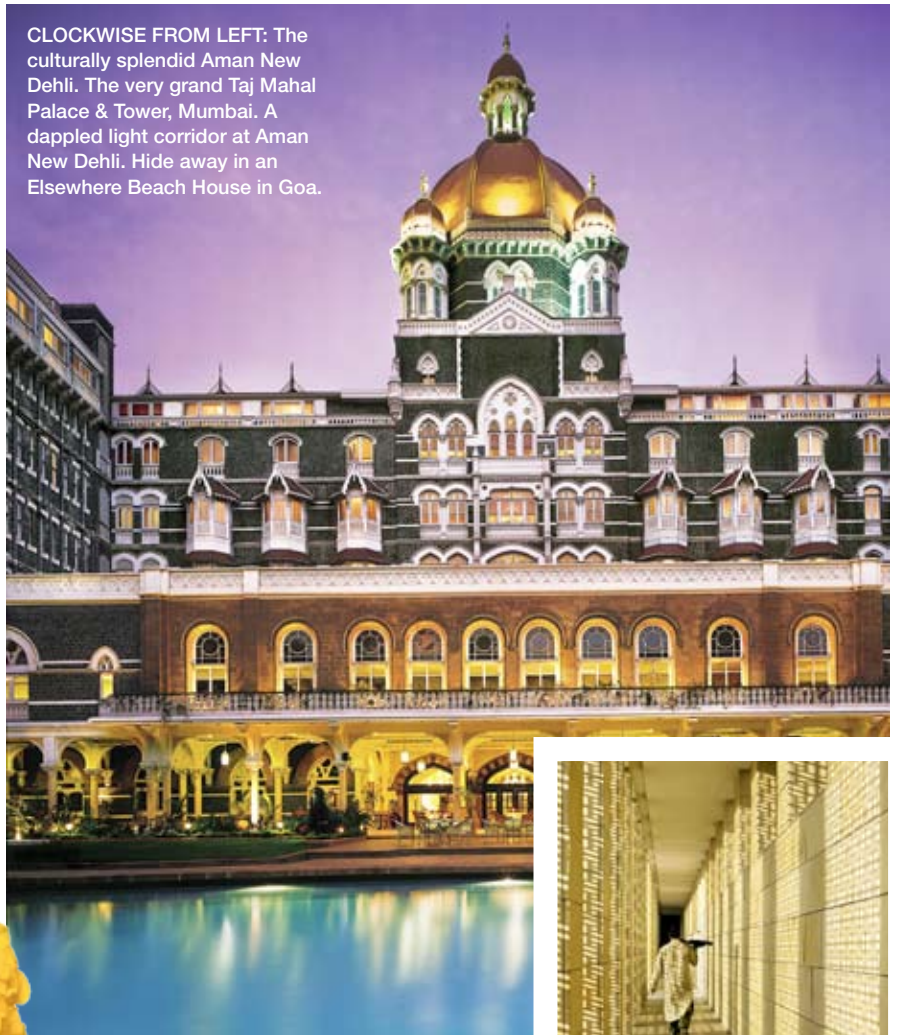
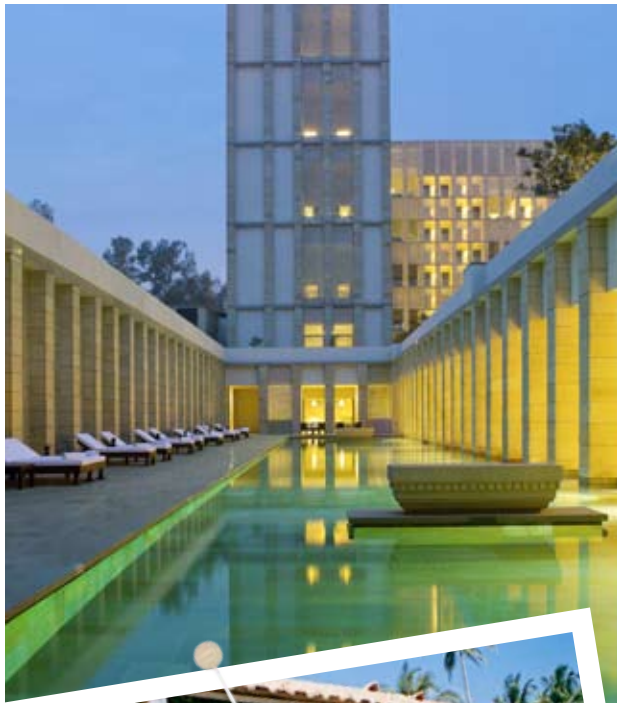
You'll enjoy a truly inspiring day spa with traditional Ayurvedic treatments, Tibetan massage and Western spa treatments. From sun-up to sundown, this spa serves as the central hub for couples drawn to the mystical region. Also, trek the nearby hills with a private guide, lounge around the resort pool, detox, de-stress, rejuvenate or recuperate, play golf on the mini course, work out in the gym and visit the town of

Rishikesh and take in the Aarati ceremony on the river banks every evening. The candle lighting ceremony accompanied by Hindu hymns and chanting is an uplifting experience that feeds the spirit and moves even the hardiest soul.

The details are what make the difference at Ananda, from the greeting in the morning at a time of your choosing by a knock from the butler on the door, delivering freshly brewed ginger, honey and lemon tea, to the complimentary freshly laundered Kurta pyjamas presented in guests' rooms twice a day. Deleriously happy spa goers wander the grounds in the cotton-cloth PJs, free from the restraints of Western attire and the dilemmas of what to wear to dinner.

Generosity and warmth is encouraged by the keepers of Ananda from the restaurant waiting staff who remember your name and favourite tea to the spa hostess who serves a soothing refreshment after your steam treatment. Prepare to be positively impacted by a kindness that has guests booking a return visit by the time the farewell ceremony of incense and blessings is completed at check out.

How much? From \$525 for a Deluxe Palace View room.



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: The culturally splendid Aman New Dehli. The very grand Taj Mahal Palace & Tower, Mumbai. A dappled light corridor at Aman New Dehli. Hide away in an Elsewhere Beach House in Goa.

Elsewhere, Goa

aseascape.com

We have Anjelo Zeferino Sequeira to thank for the heavenly retreat of Elsewhere on the southern coast of India. In 1886 he bought a patch of pristine beachside peninsula. And today this 'patch' of land has been converted by his great grandson, fashion photographer Denzil Sequeira, into one of the world's best kept hideaway retreats, good enough for the likes of Brad and Angelina.

The retreat keeps things simple with discretely chic Beach Houses and three colourful creekside Tent Retreats with decks and four-poster beds. Marine turtles nest on the beach, otters play in the creek and the catch of the day from resident fisherman, Simon, can be cooked by you or the chef.

A car and a driver can be provided to explore nearby Goa, but chances are you won't want to leave as everything you need or want is here. Nature provides all the relaxation elements with blue skies and sand between the toes leading to an Arabian Sea likely to greet you with dolphins at sunrise. All this on a spit of land jutting into the sea cut off from the mainland by a creek. It doesn't get more private than this. **How much?** From \$445 per week for an Otter Creek Tent.

Aman New Delhi, New Dehli

amanresorts.com

When you're done getting down and dirty in the spice markets of Old Delhi, the Aman New Dehli provides the perfect respite from the summer heat or the winter traffic.

Sixty-seven guest suites are spread over nine floors – every room has its own private plunge pool for serious lounging and every floor a butler for every need.

The resort offers yoga classes in the Lodhi Gardens and rickshaw tours of Old Delhi. Even take an Aman Ambassador car and smiling driver to show you the insiders view of Delhi.

Hungry? Aman has five restaurants from a fusion of French and Japanese at the Naoki counter to Spanish tapas and fine dining at the Lodhi Restaurant, or order room service and relax on the spacious balcony.

How much? \$589 per night for an Aman Room with complimentary airport transfers.

Taj Mahal Palace & Tower, Mumbai

tajhotels.com

Standing proud on the edge of the Arabian Sea in Mumbai and frequented by Maharajas, princes, presidents and Hollywood elite since it opened in 1903, this is a cultural landmark of Moorish, oriental and Florentine

styles, capped off by a famous tower.

The 565 guest rooms, lobbies and dining areas feature vaulted alabaster ceilings, onyx columns, silk carpet, chandeliers and art worthy of the Louvre. The hotel even has a yacht with three bedrooms, salon and bar to whisk guests to the Elephanta Island medieval caves. Dining is an all-day international affair, from Indian and French to Japanese, in relaxed poolside or fine-dining style.

How much? From \$473 for a standard room in the Tower wing of the hotel.

Getting to India

Thai Airways (thaiairways.com.au) fly to Delhi from Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne and Perth via Bangkok. Honeymooners may fancy a weekend shopover in the Thai capital on the way there or back, before the short flight to New Delhi.

Kingfisher Airlines (flykingfisher.com) fly domestically within India. The modern airline offers a comprehensive timetable between most Indian destinations.

Book your flights on the above airlines on the Zuji travel website for no-booking-fee travel. zuji.com.au